

Hawai'i News

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U.S. Navy photo by MC1 (AW/SW) James E. Foehl

USNS Mercy visits Hawai'i

U.S. Pacific Fleet Public Affairs

The U.S. hospital ship USNS Mercy arrived at Naval Station Pearl Harbor on Wednesday after delivering months of humanitarian assistance to Southeast Asia that demonstrated America's commitment to the region.

The crew, non-governmental organizations (NGO), regional military medical personnel and host nations spent 72 days delivering health care in medically underserved regions of the Philippines, Bangladesh, Indonesia and East Timor. The ship, and some of the same crew and civilian volunteers, visited some of the same areas in years past to help people affected by the devastating Dec. 26, 2004 tsunami off Indonesia and one of the most powerful earthquakes ever recorded there in March 2005.

"It was a truly extraordinary voyage of teamwork and cooperation ... but most importantly it was a voyage of service, hope and compassion," U.S.

Pacific Fleet Commander Adm. Gary Roughead told the ship's crew, medical team and NGOs. "Many groups came together ... bringing care and compassion to places where people would never in their lives expect to see the type of medical care provided. You changed many lives out there."

During an awards ceremony on board, Roughead presented Mercy's crew with a Meritorious Unit Commendation and recognized the commitment of NGOs by presenting certificates of appreciation to those in attendance. He also presented six Meritorious Service Medals, five Navy Commendation Medals, six Navy Achievement Medals, two Civilian Service Awards and 21 Flag Letters of Commendation.

Mercy's crew not only treated thousands of patients, but they also brought medical education, civil engineering, culture exchange, and most of all friendship to the people of the region, said Capt. Bradley Martin, Mercy's mission commander.

"We've achieved a tremendous amount," Martin said. "We've delivered care to almost 200,000 people. We've done lifesaving surgeries for people and we've altered people's lives in a lot of positive ways."

The medical, dental and civic action programs provided local communities with a wide range of medical services including surgery, basic medical treatment, dental treatment and public health training.

From May 20 to Sept. 1, Mercy's medical team visited 10 locations in the four countries, performing more than 1,000 surgeries, repairing nearly 250 pieces of biomedical equipment, conducting more than 300 preventative medicine surveys and training more than 6,000 people in a variety of medical topics.

To carry out the medical side of its mission, Mercy tied together the skills of U.S. and foreign military medical specialists with doctors and nurses of nonprofit, charitable medical organizations, most of which

operate independently in the region. "Another thing that has been very important with this mission is that we have achieved a high level of interoperability with the NGOs (non-governmental organizations) and allied militaries," Martin said. "We've gotten a lot done, and I hope to foster and continue relationships with all these countries and their people."

The organizations working aboard Mercy included Project HOPE, Operation Smile, Aloha Medical Mission, Tzu Chi Foundation, International Relief Teams, the UCSD Pre-Dental Society and a number of host nation NGOs. Mercy's military medical team consisted of U.S. Navy, Air Force and Army members along with foreign military medical personnel from Canada, India, Australia, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Bangladesh and the Philippines.

"I thought it was an amazing experience," said Project Hope's Michelle Okamoto, who was aboard for the

duration of the ship's deployment. "We visited a lot of countries and helped a lot of people and we did it as a big team."

In complement to the health-based services, Mercy's crew of Seabees also helped out local communities by building and repairing infrastructure and hospital facilities as well as installing various pieces of equipment. Mercy's 15 Seabees are from Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 40, based out of Port Hueneme, Calif. The Military Sealift Command's civil service mariners who operate and navigate the ship worked closely with the Seabees on many community relations projects ashore.

U.S. Navy construction forces performed nearly 200 infrastructure repairs and 35 construction projects to improve basic health and living conditions.

After the ship's port call in Hawai'i, Mercy will return to its homeport of San Diego in late September.



'Historical Weekend' ceremony

Lake Erie Sailors share pride with namesake area
See page A-2



Australian submarine bids 'hooroo'

Australian sailors homebound
See page A-4



USS Salvor visits Fiji

Salvor crew experiences the atmosphere of the archipelago
See page A-4



Anchors aweigh

CPO pinning ceremonies
See page B-1

USS Hopper returns home from CARAT 2006 deployment

USS Hopper (DDG 70) Public Affairs

The Pearl Harbor, Hawai'i-based, Arleigh Burke-class destroyer USS Hopper (DDG 70), returned home on Sept. 15 after a four-and-a-half month deployment to Seventh Fleet in support of the 13th annual Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) exercise.

CARAT is a sequential series of bilateral military exercises between the U.S. Navy and the armed forces of Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. The overarching goals of CARAT are the enhancement of regional cooperation, the promotion of understanding between participating military forces, and the continued development of the operational readiness of the participating forces.

With these objectives in mind, Hopper sailed from Pearl Harbor on May 5 in company with USS Crommelin (FFG 37), homeported at Pearl Harbor, and USCGC Sherman (WMEC 720). After a brief stop in Okinawa, Japan, the task group officially formed up under the command of Commodore Alfred Collins (Commander Destroyer Squadron One), embarked onboard USS Tortuga (LSD 46) and got underway for Southeast Asian Cooperation



U.S. Navy photo by MC1 (AW/SW) James E. Foehl

Friends and family members gather on the pier of Naval Station Pearl Harbor to welcome home Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer USS Hopper (DDG 70) following a four-month deployment.

Against Terrorism (SEACAT) – a bi-lateral exercise focused on maritime interceptions. USS Salvor (ARS 52), also a Pearl Harbor-based ship, joined the CARAT Task Group in Singapore, after conducting a tow enroute.

Hopper worked with five different navies during CARAT 2006. Although the individual phases of CARAT varied greatly depending on the desires of

the host nation, a common thread throughout the exercise was the development of maritime interception capabilities, as well as developing interoperability between the U.S. Navy and the host nation. Each phase of CARAT 2006 culminated in an at sea phase, where inport training was put to the test during rigorous at-sea exercises, including visit/board/search and seizure

(VBSS) activities. According to Damage Controlman 3rd Class Aaron Solomona, a member of Hopper's VBSS training team, the training conducted by the team during deployment "created a great foundation for our boarding team, while at the same allowing us the opportunity to work with and train other navies. We developed a strong team with great cam-

raderie."

"The deployment afforded Hopper the opportunity to not only train with foreign navies, but also a chance to exercise her own capabilities," said Cmdr. Peter Driscoll, commanding officer of USS Hopper. Detaching from the CARAT task group for a period of 10 days, Hopper conducted escort duties for USS Enterprise (CVN-65) as she transited from the Indian Ocean into the Pacific Ocean through the Strait of Malacca. Hopper was additionally on call to support Seventh Fleet's missile defense and strike warfare areas and participated in these operations throughout the deployment.

CARAT was more than an exercise devoted to developing tactical proficiency. An equally important goal was to strengthen and build enduring relationships with the participating nations. According to Lt. Cmdr. Eric Rasch, Hopper's combat systems officer, "CARAT afforded all of us the opportunity to not only work with our foreign counterparts in a professional setting, but it also allowed us the chance to get to know them in a social setting as well. The friendships we developed in port helped us to develop joint-interoperability at sea."

In addition to the tactical training scenarios, Hopper Sailors volunteered to repaint

local schools, refurbish orphanages and provide medical care to more than 3,500 children and elderly from the local civilian population during seven different community relations and medical civic action projects. After learning that many students were unable to afford the newly instituted fees (driven by rising costs and decreasing budgets) at the Lok Yuk School in Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia, Hopper Sailors raised enough funds to provide full annual tuition for 150 of 260 students.

When Sailors were not actively involved in inport training, at sea exercises or numerous community relation projects, they were excited to experience a little local culture while on liberty. Food options were diverse and for many young Sailors, this was their first time away from home. The chance to visit a foreign country and to interact with the local population is a memory many of them will cherish for a lifetime.

According to Seaman John Tetreau, "It was neat getting to see all the different cultures and just having a chance to see the world." Driscoll agreed, commenting that, "CARAT has been a great adventure which has provided my Sailors with the unique opportunity to visit new ports, experience culture

▼ See HOPPER, A-2



U.S. Navy photo by Ensign Thomas Buck

The honor guard of USS Lake Erie marches through downtown Put-in-Bay, Ohio during the town's annual "Historical Weekend." The ship visited the town Sept. 8-9 for the annual observance commemorating the Battle of Lake Erie.

USS Lake Erie helps celebrate anniversary of Battle of Lake Erie

Ensign Thomas Buck

USS Lake Erie (CG 70) Public Affairs

For the sixth time in the last seven years, USS Lake Erie (CG 70) traveled to Put-in-Bay, Ohio to participate in festivities surrounding the anniversary of Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry's 1813 victory over the British in the Battle of Lake Erie.

On Sept. 8-9, dubbed "Historical Weekend" at Put-in-Bay, the nine-Sailor honor guard contingent from Lake Erie connected with the community by performing volunteer work at the local senior center, conducted a flag-raising ceremony, met with Boy Scouts from Ohio and Michigan, and marched in the town's annual Historical Weekend parade.

Each trip has provided a valuable opportunity for personal interaction between American citizens from a state with minimal naval presence and the Sailors representing the namesake of their residence in the fleet. "Including this year, we've had six of the eight COs [commanding officers] of the Lake Erie come visit us," said Glenn Cooper, a Put-in-Bay township trustee and a ferry boat operator. "We look forward to this every year," he noted.

But one event in particular surrounding this year's excursion held special meaning for several of the people involved. On Sept. 3 of last year, vandals set fire to an American flag owned by Put-in-Bay resident and hotel owner Fred Berry that had been given to him by a close friend and that he had flown prominently for two years at a local home. When the Lake Erie honor guard arrived one week later, Berry, whose hotel housed the honor guard, requested that the honor guard properly retire the defaced flag. The honor guard obliged and, upon the Sailors' return to Pearl Harbor, Lake Erie mailed to Berry one of the battle ensigns that Lake Erie had flown on a previous

deployment as a replacement for the retired flag.

This year a flag-raising ceremony with that battle ensign was conducted at Berry's Bay Lodging House on a flagpole installed just one day prior to the event. It marked the first time the new Lake Erie battle ensign had flown at Put-in-Bay. "Last year we had the somber duty of retiring a flag that was destroyed by vandals," said Chief Gunner's Mate (SW) Joseph Cassista, the leader of Lake Erie's honor guard. "This year we restored a flag to its rightful place, flying proudly over grateful citizens. I have never been prouder of my Sailors, my Navy, or my flag as I was that day."

Adding another layer of meaning to the event was the attendance of some of the surviving members of the Army's 95th Infantry Division from World War II. The "Iron Men of Metz," as the German defenders of occupied France had dubbed them, have been holding annual reunions at different locations for more than 50 years. Following the flag-raising ceremony, the aging group of Soldiers was presented with a letter from President George W. Bush expressing the nation's gratitude for their service.

"Being able to participate in this ceremony before these veterans symbolized the pride that has surrounded our nation's emblem for many generations," reflected honor guard member Electronics Technician 2nd Class Crispin Hill. "Even though we are serving 60 years apart, we are joined by a common love for our country."

"The opportunity to raise our battle ensign on the hotel grounds in front of the men and widows of the 95th Infantry Division, who gave so much during WWII, was a fitting conclusion to the desecration of Mr. Berry's flag last year," added Cassista.

In addition to affording time for ceremonial and civic activities, the

visit also allowed Lake Erie's current commanding officer, Capt. Randall Hendrickson, an opportunity to relay to the citizens of Put-in-Bay the past year's accomplishments of the "People's Ship." "Being able to convey the sense of pride we have in the accomplishments of Lake Erie Sailors to the people living in the area of the Battle of Lake Erie is important - both for us and for them," said Hendrickson. "It enriches our Sailor's idea of whom they are serving and offers the community a chance to reconnect with their ship."

Also on hand to participate in the Historical Weekend festivities were Navy Inspector General, Vice Adm. Ronald Route, a previous commanding officer of Lake Erie; the "father of Aegis" retired Rear Adm. Wayne Meyer, and Ohio Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur. Representatives from Canada were also on hand at the local Perry's Victory and International Peace Memorial. In addition to commemorating Oliver Hazard Perry's victory over the British in 1813, the monument celebrates the long-lasting peace between Britain, Canada and the United States. It is located only five miles from the U.S.-Canadian border, the longest undefended border in the world, and is the third tallest monument in United States.

"This year's event was very special because, on top of having the Lake Erie Sailors, we had Vice Admiral Route, who had been here once before," said Cooper, who has been largely responsible for planning and coordinating Lake Erie honor guard visits over the years. "We also had Admiral Meyer here once again. He's been coming now for quite a few years."

"It was amazing to see the pride within the community, along with the respect and appreciation that they had for us," said honor guard member Fire Controlman 2nd Class David Anderson. "It was an honor to represent the Navy and our ship."

Hawai'i Navy News Briefs

Ford Island bridge closure

All lanes of the Admiral Clarey Bridge to Ford Island will be closed from 8:30-8:40 a.m. Sept. 27 for routine preventive maintenance. In the event of an emergency on the day of the closure, call the Federal Fire Department by calling 911 for immediate assistance. For more information, call Lt. j.g. Rob Porro at 474-9019.

An uplifting aloha for dad



Photo by Denise Ullery

CMDCM John Ullery received an "uplifting" greeting from his son when USS Crommelin (FFG 37) arrived home from deployment on Sept. 15. The younger Ullery is a football player for a local high school. Dad arrived home just in time for the school's homecoming game which was also on Friday.

Hopper: CARAT certified

Continued from A-1

and foods from across Southeast Asia, and interact with counterparts from regional navies. They have done a truly superb job representing our Navy and our country over the last five months and I am a very fortunate man to have had the opportunity to sail with them and wake up each day, walking among heroes."

As Hopper transited back home to Pearl Harbor, there were many numbers used to measure her success, including 23,000 nautical miles traveled to seven different countries, the 2.4 million gallons of fuel burned, the 32 sea and anchor details and eight transits of the Singapore Strait, the 25 new enlist-

ed surface warfare specialists, the 113 new 'Shellbacks,' the seven new fathers, or even the 25,560 eggs consumed on deployment.

However, the real measure of success is the number of new friendships and professional relationships established with the people and navies of the many places Hopper visited. From Singapore to Kota Kinabalu and Kemaman Malaysia, Satttahir Thailand to Maura Brunei and Subic Bay Philippines, Hopper Sailors have established trust and confidence in our Navy, strengthened relations between the United States and friends and allies in Southeast Asia, and enhanced the ability of each nation to provide regional maritime security.

Hawaii Navy News Editorial

Voting season: Your chance to be heard

Pacific Fleet Master Chief (SS/SW) R. D. West

Hoo-yah, Warriors! I've been all over the Pacific visiting Sailors in Japan, Guam and then California, talking with our Navy's newest chiefs and our junior Sailors. I'm still very proud to see the enthusiasm, the professionalism and, most of all, the dedication that you are displaying daily as Sailors in our great Navy.

And that brings me to my topic this week.

We all work very hard for the paychecks we get. But let me ask you this: Would you let some stranger decide how you spend it?

I'm fairly certain I know your answer. But shipmates, too many of us are doing just that when we don't let our voices be heard.

As part of the nation's armed forces, we are all sworn to protect the Constitution. As citizens, we get to enjoy the rights, responsibilities and privileges that document



FLTCM (SS/SW) R.D. West

country is being run. We have a lot of great people in our Navy with great ideas and opinions to voice. I've never known a Sailor not to stop me and give me his or her two cents on some issue or topic.

So I ask myself - why do so many of our fellow Warriors not exercise the right to vote?

I've heard many reasons and some are excuses: too busy, too complicated.

First off, no one is so busy that they cannot fill out a quick registration post card and drop it in the

mail. If you are so busy you can't do that, then we should talk to your supervisor.

Just get off your stern cheeks and get the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) from your voting officer and mail it in. It'll take maybe 10 minutes - tops.

Second, the FPCA is not that hard. If I can figure it out, anyone can. But if you can't, that helpful voting officer you got it from will help you out, I promise. So that excuse is out the door.

Some say they don't like any of the candidates, so they aren't voting. I've found that many people don't even have a clue as to their candidates' positions on many of the issues.

There's more to it than a 60-second commercial on TV. If you really have your personal reasons why you don't want to vote, that is your choice and your right. Just make an informed, well-thought-out decision when it comes to voting or not voting.

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There's more to it than a 60-second commercial on TV. If you really have your personal reasons why you don't want to vote, that is your choice and your right. Just make an informed, well-thought-out decision when it comes to voting or not voting.

If your plan to not vote is really because you don't know anything about the candidates, you can do something about that.

I know we're all busy and learning more about political issues can be time-consuming. But there are lots of publications and Web sites out there that can quickly bring you up to speed. Heck, just reading the newspaper for a few minutes each day at breakfast or dinner can really help give you worlds of information.

So where do you start? First off, you can find loads of information on applying for absentee registration and a ballot in the Voting Assistance Guide (<http://www.fvap.gov/pubs/vag.html>).

The U.S. Department of Defense Federal Voting Assistance Program has a great Web site (<http://www.fvap.gov/index.html>) you can visit that will hook you up with everything you could possibly want to know about register-

ing to vote, no matter what state you are from.

You can do this.

Warriors, I can't express enough how seriously we should look at our right to vote. There are still countries in this world where the citizens have no say in their government. So take the time - make the time - to make sure your opinion matters.

'Nuff said.

Keep charging, Warriors. I hit the road again in a week or so, so I'll be looking for you. Take care of yourselves and each other. I'll see you on the deckplates.

Fleet Tip: Have you said thanks to your command ombudsman lately? Well, you should. Sept. 14 was Navy Ombudsman and Volunteer Appreciation Day, and I don't think we can ever say thanks enough to all the folks who step up to help our families while we are away. We all need to give a big "HOO-YAH" to our Navy ombudsmen and volunteers!

This day in History at

PEARL HARBOR

From the Pearl Harbor Banner - Sept. 22, 1944:

- The Army-Navy World Series Classic opened to a crowd of about 20,000 fans at Furlong Field in CHA3. Adm. Chester W. Nimitz, commander-in-chief of the Pacific Fleet and Pacific Ocean areas, fired the first pitch and offered a brief message before start of the game. The Navy swept three of the four games in the series, but the Army's homerun hitters made a comeback to beat their Navy rivals in game four.

- "Tender Comrade" starring Ginger Rogers and Robert Ryan was showing at the outdoor theater.

- It was announced that the ensign which flew from the USS Oklahoma during the Dec. 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor would be presented to the Oklahoma state club of CHA3 and would eventually be given to the Oklahoma State Historical Society.



U.S. Navy historical photo

USS Oklahoma (BB-37) search for Japanese forces at sea, days before the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Batter up... Navy beats Army



U.S. Navy historical photo



Army-Navy World's Baseball Championship Series officially opened on Sept. 22, 1944 at Furlong Field in CHA3 at Pearl Harbor. Impressive pre-game ceremonies were highlighted by a brief message by Adm. Chester W. Nimitz, commander in chief of the Pacific Fleet. To the left of Nimitz is Rear Adm. William R. Furlong, commandant of the Pearl Harbor Navy Yard, who introduced Nimitz. Bottom photo: Phil "Scooter" Rizzuto, former Yankee sensation, displays his batting prowess by slamming out three hits in four trips to lead the hitters on the opening day. The Navy won 5-0 that day.

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Hawaii Navy News

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Australian submarine bids 'hooroo' to Hawai'i

MC2 Corwin Colbert

Commander, Submarine Force Pacific Fleet Public Affairs

After three months operating in Hawaiian waters, the Australian submarine HMAS Rankin departed Pearl Harbor on Sept. 13 to head home to the 'land down under.'

The diesel-electric submarine arrived in Hawai'i on June 28, just before the start of the 2006 Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) exercises. During its three months operating from Pearl Harbor, the crew participated in RIMPAC, completed a maintenance period and assisted with training prospective commanding officers.

Cmdr. Gary Lawton, Rankin's commanding officer,



U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Corwin Colbert

The Australian diesel submarine HMAS Rankin departed from Naval Station Pearl Harbor on Sept. 13. During its three-month stay, the crew participated in the 2006 Rim of the Pacific exercise, completed a maintenance period and assisted in the Submarine Command Course.

cer, said that the experience operating in Hawaiian waters gave his crew the opportunity to hone their warfighting skills.

"Besides RIMPAC, we

were able to train our junior guys in the Australian Navy Warfare Officer's Course," said Lawton. "Also with the Submarine Command Course, we gave three

groups of United States Navy prospective commanding officers the chance to experience being a diesel submarine captain," he said.

Lawton and his crew were

particularly grateful for the support of their sponsor ship, USS Key West (SSN 722).

"Everything went wonderfully and we had great support," said Lawton. "It was like being home away from home."

"Our relationship with the United States Navy and Key West has been brilliant," said Chief Petty Officer Geoff Taffe. "If you needed something or a job done quickly, they were always there to lend a hand."

Able Seaman Verina Telling said she particularly enjoyed interacting with Sailors from the other nations participating in RIMPAC.

"There was tons of interaction with the USN submariners as well as the other RIMPAC partici-

pants," said Telling. "We had bowling days with the crew of USS Key West and we had a nice little barbecue with the Korean navy."

The U.S. and Australian submarine forces have a history of strong cooperation, which includes participation in combined exercises, personnel exchanges, and use of each other's training ranges. In 2001 and 2004, the two navies signed agreements to further enhance interoperability, including exchanging data and experiences about operating submarines.

HMAS Rankin is the last in a class of six Australian built submarines that started with HMAS Collins. It displaces 3,350 tons submerged and has a crew of 45. Rankin is based at Fleet Base West in western Australia.

USS Salvor (ARS 52) makes port visit to Fiji



U.S. Navy photo by MC2 John L. Beeman

The rescue and salvage ship USS Salvor (ARS 52), homeported at Naval Station Pearl Harbor, at anchor off the coast of Indonesia to conduct familiarization dives with Indonesian Navy divers. Salvor recently participated in the third phase of exercise Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT). Salvor made a port visit to Fiji before heading home to Pearl Harbor.

Lt. j.g. Shannon Revell

USS Salvor (ARS 52) Public Affairs

USS Salvor (ARS 52), homeported at Naval Station Pearl Harbor, arrived Sept. 14 at the island of Viti Levu, Fiji, for a period of morale and welfare following the conclusion of the Southeast Asia exercise series Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) 2006.

While in Fiji, the 100-person Salvor crew had the opportunity to relax in the island atmosphere of the archipelago, which hosts more than 300 islands scattered over 42,000 square miles of ocean.

Trips were scheduled predominantly around Suva, the capital and economic center of Fiji, whose islands are fringed with coral reefs and filled

with some of the most diverse fish populations on earth, which makes diving and snorkeling renowned, according to most tour guide periodicals of the area.

Salvor Sailors said they were excited to have the rare opportunity to explore Suva's natural beauty and exotic culture.

Before heading out, Quartermaster 2nd Class (DSW/SW) Jason Tangalin had his perfect Fiji day already planned.

"A group of us are going to hit the beaches, play volleyball and find the solid swells the island boasts," he said.

For the crew, the port visit marked a unique opportunity and was a perfect example of how the Navy affords its Sailors a chance to see the world and experience other cultures, said Lt. Raul Santospieve, the ship's chief

engineer. Sailors said they enjoyed surfing the waves, diving the reefs, tasting local cuisines, shopping and recreational tours in Suva.

Commanded by Lt. Cmdr. Colby Howard, Salvor sailed into Suva after conducting a week of operations in the South Pacific after the ship's recent port visit to Cairns, Australia. The ship-focused training was in addition to the numerous bilateral exercises conducted during CARAT.

"Our crew has been working hard at sea in support of Salvor's continual readiness and we are excited to explore the islands of Fiji before returning home," said Howard.

Senior Chief Navy Diver (MOV/OSW/SW) Michael Moser, Salvor's senior enlisted advisor, said he was excited that the Navy took him some-

where his long career has never taken him before.

"Fiji is a place that I never thought I would go, but now the Navy is providing our ship with this wonderful opportunity," he said. "Fiji will be paradise to scuba divers and beach lovers alike. I hear it is beautiful from the reefs to the rainforests."

While in port, the ship hosted a reception for government and business leaders from Fiji, allowing Sailors and visitors the opportunity to interact and share their different experiences and cultures. The crew participated in a community service project, conduct ship tours for invited guests, and enjoy visiting historical and cultural sites around Suva.

Salvor is returning from a four-month deployment to Southeast Asia as part of CARAT 2006.

Pearl Harbor Highlights



Sailors man the rails aboard USS Crommelin (FFG 37) as the ship returns following a Western Pacific deployment. Crommelin participated in the Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) 2006 exercise with Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, Brunei and the Philippines. U.S. Navy photo by MCC (SW/AW) David Rush



The Military Sealift Command (MSC) hospital ship USNS Mercy (T-AH 19) being moored at Pearl Harbor, Hawai'i for a brief port visit before returning to its homeport in San Diego. Mercy is returning from a humanitarian and civic assistance deployment to South and Southeast Asia where her crew treated thousands of people. Mercy's mission is being carried out by volunteers from Project HOPE and Aloha Medical Mission, along with a contingent of military medical specialists from the United States, India, Malaysia, and Canada. Mercy's U.S. military crew consists of medical teams from the Navy, Air Force and Army. U.S. Navy photo by MC1 Dennis C. Cantrell



A family member dressed in crackerjacks waits pier side at Naval Station Pearl Harbor as the Arleigh Burke-class, guided missile destroyer USS Hopper (DDG 70) moors following a four-month deployment. Hopper departed in May to participate in the Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) 2006 exercise with Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, Brunei and the Philippines. U.S. Navy photo by MC1 (AW/SW) James E. Foehl



The Navy's Commander Pacific Fleet Band marches down Ala Moana Boulevard during the Aloha Festivals Floral Parade on Sept. 16. Photo by Millie Perera

Two SEALs receive posthumous Navy Cross Awards

Jim Garamone

American Forces Press Service

Washington (NNS) — Special operations forces personnel, so accustomed to operating in the shadows, stepped sadly into the light Sept. 13 as the Navy presented the widows of two SEALs (Sea, Air, Land) killed in Afghanistan with the nation's second-highest military award for valor.

Navy Secretary Donald C. Winter presented the Navy Cross to the widow of Sonar Technician 2nd Class Matthew G. Axelson and to the widow of Gunners Mate 2nd Class Danny P. Dietz.

The ceremony was fittingly held here at the U.S. Navy Memorial. "These were our men," said Rear Adm. Joseph Maguire, commander of the Naval Special Warfare Command, at the start of the ceremony.

Axelson and Dietz were part of a four-man team inserted behind enemy lines June 27, 2005, east of Asadabad, Afghanistan, to find and kill or capture a key local militia leader.

Anti-coalition forces spotted them the following day and promptly alerted the militia forces. The SEALs fought



U.S. Navy photo by MC1 Chad J. McNeeley

The Navy honor guard presents the colors during the presentation ceremony of the Navy Cross for Sonar Technician 2nd Class (SEAL) Matthew G. Axelson and Gunners Mate 2nd Class (SEAL) Danny P. Dietz at the Navy Memorial in Washington, D.C. on Sept. 13. Axelson and Dietz were killed during a mission to locate a high value anti-coalition militia leader in Asadabad, Afghanistan in June 2005.

valiantly against "the numerically superior and positionally advantaged enemy force," according to the citation that accompanied the awards. Three of the four SEALs were wounded and forced into a ravine, where they radioed for

help. An MH-47 Chinook helicopter with eight more SEALs and eight Army troops aboard went to the rescue, but was hit with a rocket-propelled grenade and crashed, killing all aboard.

Dietz and Axelson, though

wounded, provided cover for their partner to escape. The teammate, whose name is being withheld to protect his identity, evaded the enemy for days before being rescued. He, too, received the Navy Cross at an earlier ceremony.

More than 300 family members, teammates and friends attended the evening ceremony. A large contingent of Sailors from SEAL Team 2 in Norfolk also journeyed to Washington to pay their respects.

SEAL teammates spoke about their friends during the ceremony. "These men are heroes, not because of the way they died, but how they lived as well," said Lt. Brad Geary, who served with Dietz. He spoke of Dietz's quiet professionalism and sense of responsibility to the team, the Navy and his country.

Petty Officer 1st Class Dave Albritton spoke about Axelson, his SEAL teammate, much the same way. Albritton, who went through SEAL training with Axelson, said it became obvious early in the training that Axelson was a born leader - a man all his classmates looked up to.

Winter said the two men "embodied the values of the Navy's elite SEAL community: courage, daring, ability and esprit de corps."

He said their combat service to the country deserves "special recognition and a special place in the heart of every American."

The nature of special operations missions means that the

service members who carry them out do not receive the public recognition for their exploits, Winter said. He called the ceremony a rare opportunity for the American people to learn of the heroism and commitment of the special warriors, and the debt Americans owe them.

"In this war, special forces have been used in new ways and unprecedented numbers," Winter said. "They are precision weapons that are defeating a ruthless enemy."

Winter said the two SEALs honored served on the frontlines of freedom in operations around the world. "Their insertion into an enemy-held area, surrounded by risk and danger, is typical of the kinds of missions that are routinely assigned to SEALs," he said.

Even after being wounded, both men "continued to fight the enemy with undiminished zeal, covering the extraction of the rest of their team while they stayed and fought," Winters said. "Putting the safety of their teammates ahead of their own, they displayed extraordinary heroism in combat."

Winters uttered two words - "extraordinary heroism" - that he said "perfectly capture their last selfless acts on this earth."

Wounded Marines welcome home Sailors, Marines

Story and photo by
Lance Cpl. Edward C.
deBree

Combat Correspondent

Friends and family members gathered at hangar 105 at Marine Corps Base Hawai'i - Kaneohe on Sept. 16 to welcome home Sailors and Marines with Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 463 (HMH-463) and 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment (3/3).

Among the crowd was a special group of Marines who were also waiting for the battalion's return. Some held themselves up with crutches, while others whose injuries were not openly visible also stood waiting for their fellow Marines to return.

The injured Marines had fought along side the returning Leathernecks and Sailors who were returning from Iraq where they had served in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The obvious difference was that the injured 3/3 Marines had been sent home after sustaining injuries that left them unfit for battle.

"These Marines were hit by IEDs (improvised explosive device), RPGs (rocket-propelled grenades), and shot at," said Gunnery Sgt. Jason Jerome, command family liaison officer. "My job is to handle any admin issues for the families, act as the liaison between the regiment and the battalion, and arrange for the families to come over here to visit their loved one if they are sent back from Iraq."

As time for the plane's arrival grew closer, the wounded Marines reflected on their tour of duty in Iraq.

Lance Corporals Chaim Kozak and James L. Roebeck, mortar men assigned to Weapons Company, sat and remi-



Lance Cpl. Skipper L. Tony, helicopter mechanic, Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 463, holds his five-month-old son for the first time at a homecoming ceremony Sept. 16, at hangar 105 Marine Corps Base Hawai'i - Kaneohe. Approximately 100 Marines and Sailors returned home from a six month deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

nised about the time they were together in Iraq. Both injured, Roebeck was sent back a few weeks before Kozak.

"I was hit by a roadside bomb that sent me flying over the turret during a patrol," explained Roebeck, a Drummonds, Tenn. native. "I got what is called partial paralysis in my left leg and a shattered back."

Kozak sustained a similar injury a few weeks later when a roadside bomb detonated and sent him flying out of his Humvee, over the turret.

"That was a really bad blast," said the Westland, Mich. native. "It killed our driver and left me on the ground coughing up blood."

In another area of the country, a fellow Marine assigned to Kilo Company was manning the turret of a seven-ton truck when an IED went off, flipping the

truck over and causing the truck to land on him.

"We were doing mounted vehicle patrols and came up to this intersection where I proceeded to wave a flag to make sure all Iraqi vehicles stopped," said Lance Cpl. Arden M. Wright, a squad automatic weapon gunner and Teaneck, N.J. native. "The IED went off and the seven-ton flipped, throwing me out of the turret, and landing on my leg, breaking it into seven pieces."

Wright said that when he realized that he was airborne after the explosion, he "tucked and ducked" to brace for the landing.

After the vehicle flipped and landed on his leg, Wright heard shots being fired at the Marines by insurgents. Not wanting to get shot in his predicament, Wright forced his way from underneath the vehicle and limped away to a safer loca-

tion.

"When all was said and done, the people on that patrol thought I was able to walk, because they saw me get up and take cover," said Wright. "Then they looked at my leg and realized that it didn't look right because it looked like my knee was facing the other way, so they medevaced me out of there."

While it's a common occurrence for Marines on patrol to encounter IEDs, Lance Cpl. Jesse P. Stecklein, team leader, 3rd Platoon, Kilo Company, was hit by two while clearing a hotel to set up security for another squad.

When he headed up the stairs from the first floor to the second, two IEDs went off simultaneously, resulting in the Columbus, Ohio native receiving a dislocated shoulder, second-degree burns to the face, and shrapnel in his left hip, leg and

lower abdominal area.

Stecklein sustained multiple injuries, but the real concern to him at the time of the explosions was whether or not his fellow Marine was safe.

"The first thing that went through my mind was whether or not my buddy was OK and not killed," said the 21-year-old. "Another Marine grabbed me and the other guy and carried us to safety and took care of us while the other Marines provided security."

Although at times it can be hard for Marines to identify an IED, Cpl. Jesse Torres said he and his fellow Marines uncovered what they thought looked like one.

On their way back from the forward operating base in Haditha, Marines assigned to Jump Platoon, Weapons Company, spotted a blue bag on the side of the road that was not there before, so they got out to investigate.

Torres said they had the gunner look through binoculars to scan for wires coming from the bag. After confirming there were no wires, the Marines did an IED sweep up to the bag to get a closer look.

As the Marines approached the bag, Torres said his platoon commander, Staff Sgt. Jason C. Ramseyer, told him to stay back while he went to look for himself. The bag turned out to be a decoy for an IED that was buried in between rocks across the road.

"At first, when the blast went off, everything was in slow motion," said the Long Beach, Calif. native. "When I first got hit, I didn't feel a thing. But about five seconds later, the pain came rushing in. A lot of emotions went through my head at that moment. There was a lot of anger, anxiety, sadness ... wondering who pulled the

trigger ... just a lot of mixed emotions. The only thing that I worried about when it went off was whether or not my staff sergeant was all right.

"He saved my life. He was the one that told me to go back 10 to 15 feet. If he didn't tell me that, I would have died," continued Torres as his voice began to tremble. "I have never known a staff noncommissioned officer who motivated me so much. Whenever I saw him and talked to him - I wanted to be like him."

Ramseyer is Torres' hero. Other Marines attribute their survival to other fellow Marines who have pulled them from a tight spot or saved their lives.

For Kozak, it was Lance Cpl. Harry A. Joe.

"When we were attacked, Joe was the first one to come help us and get the 'Doc,'" said Kozak. "When they took me back to the FOB (forward operating base), he sat with me the whole time and took care of me."

Roebeck attributes his survival to the hospital corpsman assigned to his unit. It was the 'Doc's' quick response and dedication to making sure Roebeck was recovering properly.

"He stayed with me and took care of me up to the point where they finally put me on the helicopter to medevac me," he said. "That was true dedication."

"I'm happy they're coming home," said Stecklein. "I only wish that I was coming back with them."

Kelbaugh echoed Stecklein's sentiments, saying he wished he were returning with his unit instead of welcoming them home.

"It just doesn't seem fair that I'm here and they're not," said Kelbaugh. "They're the ones who saved my life, and I'm here and not with them."