

Iranian boats provoke 'serious incident' in Strait of Hormuz

Jim Garamone

American Forces Press Service

Three U.S. Navy vessels took evasive actions after five Iranian boats buzzed the ships transiting the Strait of Hormuz on Jan. 6, Pentagon spokesman Bryan Whitman said Jan. 7.

Speaking to Pentagon reporters, Whitman called the Iranian provocation "a serious incident." The fast Iranian boats approached at "distances and speed that showed reckless, dangerous and potentially hostile intent," he said.

The incident lasted about 15 to 20 minutes, he said. The Navy ships were going into the Persian Gulf when the Iranian boats confronted them.

"Small, Iranian fast boats made some aggressive maneuvers against our vessels and indicated some hostile intent," Whitman said. "This required our vessels to issue warnings and conduct some evasive maneuvers. The U.S. Navy vessels were prepared to take appropriate actions, but there was no engagement of the vessels."

He said the speed of the Iranian boats and their distance from the U.S. Navy vessels demonstrated potentially hostile intent. Bridge-to-bridge radio communications between the Iranian vessels and the U.S. Navy ships reinforced this impression, he said. The U.S. ships were operat-



U.S. Navy video frame



U.S. Navy video frame

"we're coming at you and you'll explode in a couple minutes."

-radio transmission from Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps



U.S. Navy photo

Small craft suspected to be from the Islamic Republic of Iran Revolutionary Guard Navy (IRGCN), maneuver aggressively in close proximity of the U.S. Navy Aegis-class cruiser USS Port Royal (CG 73), Aegis-class destroyer, and USS Hopper (DDG 70) homeported at Pearl Harbor and frigate USS Ingraham (FFG 61). All three ships were steaming in formation and had just completed a routine Strait of Hormuz transit. Coalition vessels, including U.S. Navy ships, routinely operate in the vicinity of both Islamic Republic of Iran Navy and IRGCN vessels and aircraft, without incident.

ing in international waters within the Strait of Hormuz and followed all appropriate protocols, Whitman said. The U.S. Navy ships are USS Port Royal (CG 73), USS Hopper (DDG 70), homeported at Pearl Harbor and USS Ingraham (FFG 61).

U.S. warships will take all the precautions needed to safely transit the open waters of the strait, the Pentagon spokesman said.

"This is reckless and dangerous behavior on the part of the Iranian vessels, and it should cease immediately," Whitman added.

Typically, small boats such as these are under command of Iranian Revolutionary Guards, U.S. Navy officials said.

All U.S. warships transiting the open seas are prepared to take action should their ship or crews be threatened, Whitman noted. The U.S. ships "did take appropriate action in terms of maneuvering and communicating, and were prepared to take further action if necessary," he said.

The Defense Department will work with White House and State Department officials to come up with the appropriate way to address the incident with the Iranian government, Whitman said.

Iranian boats took 15 British sailors engaged in United Nations-sanctioned operations in the northern Persian Gulf on March 23.

DESRON 31 holds change of command

Story and photo by MC2 Michael A. Lantron

Commander, Navy Region Hawai'i Public Affairs

Capt. Robert B. Stewart, commodore, Destroyer Squadron (DESRON) 31 was relieved by Capt. William Kearns III during a change of command ceremony Jan. 4 held on board Naval Station Pearl Harbor.

"I've been extremely

blessed to command this squad and I will cherish the days spent with all these ships and Sailors," said Stewart. "I couldn't think of someone better to turn over to, he [Kearns] will do things with this squadron I could only dream of."

Stewart assumed command of DESRON 31 in April 2007. Under his command, DESRON 31 participated in the 2007 Peleliu Pacific Partnership (P3) humanitari-

an assistance deployment, providing assistance to six southeastern Asian countries in need.

"P3 was an excellent deployment," said Stewart. "I owe the Sailors involved more than they could ever imagine for what they did."

Rear Adm. T.G. Alexander, commander, Navy Region Hawaii and commander, Naval Surface Group Middle Pacific, was on hand at the event to thank Stewart for his leadership and formally recognize him for his accomplishments as commodore, DESRON 31.

"Your leadership and hard work, combined with the untiring efforts of your staff, has made a lasting contribution to every ship and Sailor with whom you have served," said Alexander.

During the ceremony, Alexander presented Stewart with the Legion of Merit. Stewart received the award for the squadron's operational achievement and mission success.

Stewart will be reporting to Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet (PACFLT) as the deputy director of operations.

Kearns, who is reporting from Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet, where he served as special assistant to Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet, takes command of Sailors and DoD employees whose mission is to direct oversight of the training, maintenance and readiness of the Pearl Harbor-based ships USS Crommelin, USS Chung-Hoon (DDG 93), USS Paul Hamilton (DDG 60), USS O'Kane (DDG 77), USS Reuben James (FFG 57), USS Russell (DDG 59), USS Chafee (DDG 90) and USS Hopper (DDG 70).



2007...A year in review

Blair Martin

Contributing Writer

For many, the new year can bring a time of reflection along with the need to look back at the wisdom and experience gained from the previous year.

As Hawai'i Navy News looks back on the past 12 months of features and stories, we remember 2007 as a year full of memorable events, leisure activities and entertainment that have touched Naval Station Pearl Harbor, its Sailors and the military community.

One of the biggest events of the year for Pearl Harbor was the Pearl Harbor Memorial Ceremony, commemorating the 66th anniversary of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941.

On Dec. 7, more than 2,500 guests and media were in attendance for the 66th anniversary ceremony. Also in attendance were 50 Pearl Harbor survivors who retold stories about their valiant efforts during one of

America's darkest days. The solemn two-hour ceremony included a special Hawaiian blessing, 21-gun salute and impressive missing-man fly-over executed by a formation of CH-47D Chinook helicopters from the Hawai'i Air National Guard Company B, 1st Battalion, 171st Aviation Regiment stationed at Wheeler Army Airfield.

The grand opening and dedication of the USS Oklahoma Memorial was held on the same day as the Pearl Harbor USS Arizona Memorial service. The memorial, located on Ford Island, honored the 429 Sailors and Marines onboard the USS Oklahoma (BB 37) who lost their lives Dec. 7, 1941 after the ship was hit by five torpedoes and capsized at Pearl Harbor.

Throughout the year, we applauded many of our naval leaders, ships and Sailors as they received top honors for their work and leadership in 2007. But it was their charitable work within the community that really shined this past year. During 2007, we saw many

of our Sailors and families roll up their sleeves and give back to the environment and community through clean-up efforts and other charitable activities.

During Earth Month, many volunteered for clean-up duties throughout Pearl Harbor, including the Ahua Reef cleanup, Kapakahi Stream and Pouhala Marsh restoration.

At Thanksgiving, Sailors and their families volunteered their time to help with Operation Aloha, a community event that serves Thanksgiving meals to more than 380 of Hawai'i's homeless. Another charitable fundraiser, Hawaii-Pacific Area Combined Federal Campaign, was a big success, thanks to many charitable donations from Navy men and women.

Although 2007 brought a bevy of memorable events, charitable work and fun leisure activities with Navy families at Pearl Harbor, we now look forward to the future in anticipation of what 2008 will bring to our pages.



Rear Adm. T. G. Alexander, commander, Navy Region Hawai'i and commander, Naval Surface Group Middle Pacific, reads the accompanying letter for the Legion of Merit award to Capt. Robert Stewart during a change of command ceremony for Destroyer Squadron 31 (DESRON 31) held on board Naval Station Pearl Harbor on Jan. 4. Stewart relinquished command of DESRON 31 to Capt. William Kearns III following a nine-month tour as commodore.



Pacific Fleet submarines selected for Battle 'E' awards See page A-2



ATG MIDPAC receives 2007 CNO Good Neighbor Award See page A-2



DISA-PAC opens new facility on Ford Island See page A-6



Looking back at 2007 See page B-1

ATG MIDPAC receives 2006 CNO Project Good Neighbor Flagship Award

Story and photo by
Lt. Charles Becker

Afloat Training Group
Middle Pacific Public Affairs

Last year Afloat Training Group Middle Pacific (ATG MIDPAC) was named the 2006 CNO Project Good Neighbor Flagship award winner (small shore command) and the 2006 Navy Environmental Stewardship Flagship Award recipient (small shore command). In addition to these awards, ATG MIDPAC was also named the winner of the Navy Region Hawai'i and Naval Surface Group Middle Pacific winner for two similar awards.

Not resting on their laurels this year, ATG MIDPAC continued their service to the community and was awarded honorable mention for the 2007 CNO Project Good Neighbor award and the 2007 Navy



(Left to right) Chief Culinary Specialist (SW) Ben Alejo, Fire Controlman 1st Class (SW) Shaun Morse, Lt. Cmdr. Rick Otlowski and Senior Chief Fire Controlman (SW) Brian Rieger, assigned to Afloat Training Group Middle Pacific, help to rejuvenate the pool at the Honolulu Chapter of the YWCA.

Environmental Stewardship Flagship Award (small shore command). Additionally, ATG MIDPAC was named the 2007 Navy Region Hawai'i's Community Service Award

winner (small shore command), the Project Good Neighbor Award winner (small shore command) and the winner of the Environmental Stewardship

award (small shore command).

The Project Good Neighbor award recognizes commands for outstanding community service projects. The environmental stewardship award commends commands for their outreach efforts both on and off base to enhance their communities, making them a better place to live for everyone.

"The warriors at ATG MIDPAC continue to exceed all of my expectations," commented Capt. Dell Epperson, commanding officer of ATG MIDPAC. "We carried our momentum from 2006 into this year with increased motivation, taking on more projects to benefit the community. The members of ATG are never short on ideas and their hard work and dedication are reflected in these awards," he said.

Epperson gives much of the credit for the organiza-

tion of these efforts to Chief Personnel Specialist (PSC) (SW) Michael Baines. "He has taken a willing and eager group of people and focused their energy toward the benefit the community," the CO said. PSC (SW) Baines claims his job was easy, "When you have so many people selflessly giving their time back to the community, it's easy to accomplish great things. My favorite has always been the upkeep of our workplace, Ford Island. With all of its history and being adjacent to Battle Ship Row, it draws thousands of visitors each year. Keeping Ford Island well maintained and beautiful shows the public our commitment to the environment and for our history."

As part of its good neighbor efforts, ATG MIDPAC participated in a Ford Island beach clean-up, YMCA pool renovation, Earth Day, provided volunteers for the Fields Open Tournament,

and cleaned up the Pearl Harbor bike path. They also have a continuing relationship with Iroquois Point Elementary, providing both tutors and volunteers for projects around the campus.

In 2008, Baines plans to make more volunteer opportunities available for the members of ATG. "We continuously increased our efforts over the last two years and have made a lot of progress in bettering our community," said Baines. He plans to continue this trend well into the future.

"We must do our part to make our community a better place to live," stressed Epperson. "It is the responsibility of each member of a community to treat his or her neighbors with respect and be conscientious about the environment. Our only hope is that these efforts can make a positive impact on both the environment and the community in which we live."

Department of Defense identifies Navy casualty

Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Central Command/ 5th Fleet Public Affairs

The Department of Defense announced Jan. 8 the death of

a Sailor who was supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Information System Technician 2nd Class Menelek M. Brown, 24 of Roswell, N.M. was declared dead Jan. 4 after apparently going overboard

from USS Hopper (DDG 70) in the Arabian Sea on Jan. 3.

Navy aircraft and ships conducted an extensive search, but did not locate him. Hopper is homeported at Pearl Harbor.

Pacific Fleet submarines selected for Battle "E" awards

Story and photo by
MCSA Luciano Marano

Commander, Submarine Force Pacific Fleet

Rear Adm. Joe Walsh, Commander, Submarine Force U.S. Pacific Fleet, announced the winners of the 2007 Battle Efficiency Awards (Battle "E") for the Pacific Fleet Submarine Force on Jan. 1.

Three Pearl Harbor-based, nuclear-powered attack submarines were selected for the award, including USS Cheyenne (SSN 773) from Submarine Squadron Seven, USS Los Angeles (SSN 688) and USS Key West (SSN 722) from Submarine Squadrons One and Three respectively, were the other Pearl Harbor-

based winners this year.

Capt. Jeffrey Powers, Commodore, Submarine Squadron Seven, presented Cheyenne's Battle "E" on Jan. 4, to Cmdr. Mike Tesar, commanding officer.

"I'm super proud of all of you," said Powers. "We'll continue to expect great things from Cheyenne in the future."

According to Walsh, the competition for this year's awards was extremely tough.

"Each crew member of an award winner can be justifiably proud of their contribution to improve Pacific submarine force readiness," Walsh said. "I am extremely proud of your outstanding performance."

Other Pacific Fleet ships and submarines receiving the Battle "E" were USS Topeka

(SSN 754), the floating dry dock Arco (ARDM 5) and torpedo retriever Porpoise (TWR 823), homeported at San Diego; USS Houston (SSN 713) and USS Frank Cable (AS 40), homeported at Guam; and USS Jimmy Carter (SSN 23), USS Maine (SSBN 741) and USS Louisiana (SSBN 743), homeported at Bangor, Wash.

The Battle "E" award recognizes sustained superior performance in all areas of combat readiness. As part of the competition, ships compete for command excellence in four combat areas: maritime warfare, engineering/survivability, command and control, and logistics management. To receive the nod for battle efficiency, a ship must excel in all four areas.

Capt. Jeffrey Powers (right), commodore, Submarine Squadron Seven, presents the Battle Efficiency (Battle "E") pennant to Cmdr. Mike Tesar (left), commanding officer of the Los Angeles class, fast-attack submarine USS Cheyenne (SSN 773) on Jan. 4 at Naval Station Pearl Harbor.



Hawai'i Navy News Editorial

Prepare for new goals, new resolutions in 2008

FORCM Jeff Garrison

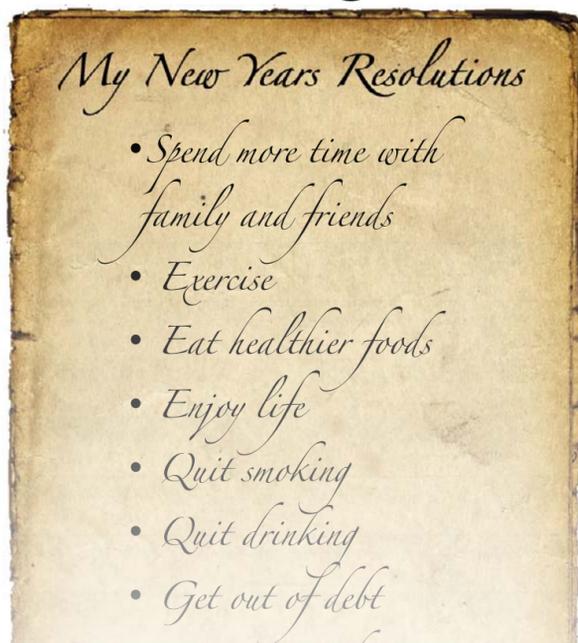
Commander Submarine Force

Welcome back from the holidays, shipmates. I trust that each one of you had a joyous and safe holiday standdown with family, friends and shipmates. Just as each one of you are preparing for new goals and resolutions in your personal lives for 2008, our great Navy will be no different.

We enjoyed many successes, overcame obstacles, and faced new challenges on a daily basis in 2007. We should expect no different from 2008. We did it with highly-trained and highly-motivated Sailors on carrier flight decks, engine rooms and on the ground in some of the world's most dangerous places.

I am continually amazed and inspired by the quality of men and women serving in uniform today. Your dedication to our country and the selfless sacrifices you make each day are what makes us the greatest Navy in the world.

We had an outstanding year in 2007. Our retention efforts have paid off. The deckplate leadership applied, in our effort to retain talent, has clearly made a difference. We continue working toward a steady state-force of approxi-



mately 322,000 active duty and 67,000 selected reserve component Sailors by the end of fiscal year '09. We will be a much different looking type of Navy with higher demands and ever changing missions. We must now focus on retention of the right Sailors, at the right place and time. NAVADMIN 332/07 discusses our fiscal year '08 retention goals and how we will craft our Navy to achieve our future.

Our leadership teams must continue to engage at all levels. Semi-annual professional development boards are not the only way to reach our Sailors, nor should they be. Nothing takes the place of deckplate leadership. From the moment you receive orders on that new Sailor, even before he/she crosses your quarterdeck, the professional development board begins. LPOs and LCPOs should be mentoring

their Sailors daily on the numerous opportunities the Navy can provide them. Medical, dental, thrift savings plan and education don't even scratch the surface of the many opportunities for our Sailors and their families.

Let's face it, most of us don't come to work every day because we get outstanding pay, or we get three square meals a day, or we have the opportunity to go to sea and fight the ship. What keeps us coming back is our job satisfaction. We must ensure that our men and women understand the purpose of what they do for our country every day. From the signalman to the machinery room watch to the food service attendant, we all play a critical role in the mission of that unit. We owe it to our Sailors to promote and create a work environment that treats each Sailor with dignity and respect.

Another area we will closely monitor in 2008 will be our attrition. Each year, our Navy loses talented personnel. Some of these Sailors have the training, knowledge and capabilities that make them a valued member of our team. Command involvement is the key to preventing our young Sailors from making career ending actions or decisions. There is no greater impact on

our Sailors then our chief petty officers. As chief petty officers, we must never forget that our focus should always be centered around the personal and professional development of our Sailors we are entrusted to lead every day.

A welcome aboard letter, Fleet and Family Support Center relocation information packet, and a phone call from the sponsor sure go a long way in preparing that young Sailor for his first duty station. Recruit Training Center, Great Lakes does a remarkable job instilling pride, professionalism and a sense of purpose in our new Sailors.

Initiatives like the report card system that the submarine school in Groton, Conn. uses not only allows a gaining command to look at the academic accomplishments of their new Sailor, but also allows them to identify early any potential personnel concerns that might place them in a high risk category.

Alcohol-related incidents remained constant in 2007 with an average of 126 DUIs each month Navy-wide. I think we can do much better. These incidents not only place additional burdens on your fellow shipmates and command leadership, they degrade mission readiness. I challenge each command to have one

less DUI/ARI in 2008.

It is important that all hands remain focused throughout 2008 on suicide prevention. This is not just a command leadership issue. It is about being a shipmate. According to Navy statistics, suicide is the third leading cause of death among our active duty Sailors. Remember the warning signs which include, but are not limited to depression, substance abuse, talk of suicide, relationship difficulties, isolation and impulsive behavior. Every Sailor should know these warning signs and be ready to take action immediately. COMPACFLT message DTG 111819Z DEC 07 refers to the acronym AID LIFE which can help every Sailor remember the actions to take if you suspect a shipmate may be in danger.

Each one of you make up the greatest Navy the world has ever known. We rely upon one another day in and day out and we share a common bond as shipmates that no one can break. No one else in the world has the same amount of camaraderie, trust or concern for one another than United States Sailors. Our priorities should be ship, shipmate and self.

Stay safe and have a great year.

Obey speed limit signs... especially in housing areas

Karen S. Spangler

Editor

There is a reason that there are posted speed limits...for your safety and the safety of others. This is especially true in housing areas and near schools.

There are always complaints about drivers who speed through housing areas. But stop to think about what could result for drivers who ignore the posted speed limit signs.

At any time, a child could dart out into the street to catch a ball, or might ride a bicycle or skateboard into the street in front of your car. Children usually don't stop to think when they are playing and having fun - it's up to us to take the responsibility as drivers to obey the posted speed limits and drive with extra caution through housing areas and in the vicinity of schools.

Sometimes the slower speed limit might be inconvenient. Perhaps a driver is in a hurry and wants to save time by going just a little over the posted speed limit. But the tragedy that could happen by ignoring the speed limits just isn't worth the little time saved.

The speed limits in all housing areas are 15 mph. While some may argue that traveling at the slow rate of 15 mph is difficult, it is much more difficult - and



dangerous - if you can't stop to avoid a child or pet in the road if you are exceeding the speed limits. The slower speed limit is necessary to give drivers a better opportunity to stop their vehicles.

If there is no other way that you can accept responsibility for obeying the posted speed limits, just take a few minutes and try to imagine how you would feel if you were speeding and struck a child - seriously injuring or killing a keiki. Then try to imagine how you would feel if your child was the victim of a speeding driver. You might be able to see the situation in a totally different perspective.

If you notice drivers speeding through the neighborhood, please obtain the license plate number and a description of the car. Report it to base security.

The life you save may be that of your child or a neighbor's child.

Bob Hope receives Distinguished Public Service Award



Photo by PH1 William B. Fair. Official U.S. Navy photograph, from the collections of the Naval Historical Center. Entertainer Bob Hope (center) and other platform guests render honors as the "Star Spangled Banner" is played during ceremonies held to present the Distinguished Public Service Award to Hope on Jan. 11, 1971. The ceremony took place at Naval Air Station North Island, San Diego, Calif. on the pier beside the First Fleet flagship, USS Providence (CLG-6). Secretary of the Navy John Chafee is second from left.



Adjust that thermostat and save \$\$\$

Naval Facilities Engineering Command Hawai'i Energy Team

While Hawai'i does not experience the drastic winter weather encountered in other areas of the country, we do get some relief from the summer heat with slightly cooler winter temperatures.

This cooler weather gives each of us the oppor-

tunity to save energy. One simple way is by raising the temperature on your thermostat.

Set the thermostat on your air conditioning system at the highest comfortable setting (78-80 degrees Fahrenheit is recommended). It is estimated that for each degree the thermostat is raised, three percent is saved on the cooling bill.

Hawai'i Navy News

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Marine Corps Col. Kirk Bruno, Commander, Defense Information Systems Agency Pacific Command (DISA-PAC), Air Force Lt. Gen. Charles Croom, Director, DISA, Commander, Joint Task Force, Global Network Operations, and Brig. Gen. Ronald Bouchard, Director, Communications System, U.S. Pacific Command untie a maile lei during a grand opening ceremony for the new DISA-PAC facility on Ford Island.

DISA-PAC opens new facility on Ford Island

Story and photo by
MC2 Michael A. Lantron

Commander, Navy Region
Hawaii Public Affairs

Defense Information Systems Agency Pacific Command (DISA-PAC) hosted a grand opening ceremony Jan. 9 for its new facility on Ford Island.

The new facility will provide DISA-PAC a larger space with state-of-the-art technology for a greater communications management network throughout the Pacific theatre in a closer proximity to its customers.

"This will serve the warfighter as the networks are now an important part of the fight," said Air Force Lt. Gen. Charles Croom, director, Defense Systems Agency Pacific, commander, Joint Task Force, Global Network Operations. "This facility will allow information to be available when the warfighter needs it, which is critical to the fight."

The facility is open for administrative purposes and is scheduled to be fully operational in two to three years, upon completion of a state-of-

the-art communications network center, costing more than \$9 million dollars.

"This location provides us with enough space for a professional workforce and the infrastructure to conduct reliable 24/7 operations," said Croom.

A key feature of the new facility is a new theatre network operations center, which will operate and manage the networks across the Pacific theatre.

"The fact that we have a single location where we can view joint branch circuits and manage it to support fighting the war in real time is key for this organization," said Croom.

Another new aspect to the facility is the increased size will allow operational analysts from U.S. Pacific Command (USPACOM) to cooperate with DISA-PAC in the command center.

"The facility will improve our ability to provide support to the USPACOM and its subordinate commands in terms of engagement and warfighting," Croom concluded.

DISA-PAC is moving from its current facility on Wheeler Army Air Field, Hawaii,

where it was located for 32 years. The new facility will allow DISA-PAC to operate within close proximity of regional commanders.

"It's important for DISA-PAC to be in the area because they support USPACOM and it's good for the combatant commander to have his main communicator located near him," said Capt. Taylor Skardon, commanding officer, Naval Station Pearl Harbor.

Croom stated that the move would help remind the members of DISA-PAC of the importance of their jobs.

"We're in the neighborhood now, and we are the local global net-centric solution provider," said Croom. "Being able to be on Ford Island and seeing a ship, submarine or aircraft every day will remind us who we are supporting, which is the warfighter."

DISA-PAC is a combat support field command responsible for planning, fielding and supporting Global Net-Centric Solutions and operating the Pacific portion of the global information grid to serve the needs of the USPACOM combatant commander and other Department of Defense components in the theater.

High school basketball team visits 'hometown ship'

Lt. j.g. Tommy Buck

USS Lake Erie (CG 70)
Public Affairs

For seven of the last eight years, the small town of Put-in-Bay, Ohio has generously hosted Sailors from USS Lake Erie (CG 70) for its annual Battle of Lake Erie commemoration.

On Dec. 31, 2007, Lake Erie had the opportunity to return the favor to a small contingent from the island near where the famous naval battle was fought 194 years ago.

The Put-in-Bay High School Panthers basketball team took a day away from the Big Island, where it was competing in a national tournament, to come visit Pearl Harbor. Once onboard Lake Erie, the 10-member squad along with managers and teachers, was treated to a VIP tour of the guided-missile cruiser named for Put-in-Bay's most famous historical event.

"The people of Put-in-Bay go out of their way to welcome us every time we have the pleasure to go visit," said Capt. Randy Hendrickson, Lake Erie commanding officer. "We were thrilled to play host to the town's fine group of young people."

Hendrickson and Command Master Chief Mack Ellis met the students when he spoke to Put-in-Bay School in September just prior to the town's historical weekend, its annual commemoration of Oliver Hazard Perry's 1813 victory over the British fleet at Lake Erie. "Glenn Cooper [Put-in-Bay township



U.S. Navy photo by YNC (SW) Jason Bradford

Lt. j.g. Tommy Buck and Chief Ship's Serviceman Elmer Medina lead a tour group of high school students from Put-in-Bay School in Ohio when the students visited Pearl Harbor on Dec. 31.

trustee and liaison between the ship and Put-in-Bay] mentioned to us that the team was raising money to play a tournament in Hawaii," said Ellis. "Even though they were playing on the Big Island, we knew that we had to get them over to Pearl Harbor to visit Lake Erie. It was too good of an opportunity to miss."

Several Lake Erie Sailors offered knowledge of their specialties to the students and teachers, and the ship's Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Committee provided ship T-shirts for the entire team. "I thought the VLS [vertical launching system] was really cool," said Put-in-Bay senior Oliver Thwaite, referring to the shipboard system that launches Tomahawk missiles, anti-submarine rock-

ets, the Standard Missile-2 and the Standard Missile-3, the primary weapon of ballistic missile defense. "I couldn't believe how much technology and effort goes into shooting those missiles," he added.

"Our trip to Hawaii was a life-changing experience," said senior Nikolai Blumensaadt. "Lake Erie was the first Navy ship I have ever been on. It was interesting to compare it to the Coast Guard ships I've been on, which are much smaller."

While on Oahu, the team also had the opportunity to visit Hickam Air Force Base and the USS Arizona Memorial Museum. "It was a very educational day," recalled Blumensaadt. He added, "Waikiki was fun, too."

Pearl Harbor Highlights



U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Michael A. Lantron

Capt. William Kearns III, commodore, Destroyer Squadron 31 (DESRON 31), salutes Capt. Robert Stewart as he officially takes command during a change of command ceremony for DESRON 31 held on board Naval Station Pearl Harbor on Jan. 4. Stewart relinquished command of DESRON 31 to Kearns following a nine-month tour as commodore. Under Stewart's command, DESRON 31 participated in the 2007 Peleliu Pacific Partnership humanitarian assistance deployment, providing assistance to six southeastern Asian countries in need.

(Right) Aviation ordnancemen from Helicopter Anti-Submarine Squadron Light (HSL-37) and Marine Corps Base Hawai'i - Kaneohe (MCBH) gather with Medal of Honor recipient Lt. John Finn during his visit to MCBH on Dec. 13, 2007. During the events of Dec. 7, 1941, Finn left the safety of hangar 103 to combat attacking Japanese aircraft. Finn returned to the site onboard MCBH to film a documentary about Medal of Honor recipients.

U.S. Navy photo by Lt. j.g. Chris Robison



(left) Even though Singapore offered Sailors some much-deserved liberty, there was still work to be done. Sailors worked over the four-day port visit to repair one of USS Port Royal's (DDG 59) weapon systems prior to entering the Fifth Fleet area of responsibility (AOR).

U.S. Navy photo by BM2 Anthony Alvarado

(Right) Sailors onboard guided missile destroyer USS Russell (DDG 59) string Christmas lights over the lifelines located at the aft end of the ship. Crew members were preparing for the Naval Station Pearl Harbor's annual light decorating contest. The ship came in first place for the fourth year in a row. The ship is assigned to the USS Abraham Lincoln Strike Group and will deploy with the carrier early next year.

U.S. Navy photo by Ensign Theresa Donnelly



Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) Khost executive officer, U.S. Navy Lt. Rob Holt, an individual augmentee (IA) from Hawai'i, surveys security set by an Arizona National Guard platoon attached to PRT Khost. The team secured Khost University for a 'shura' (Islamic principle for the debate and exchange of views) between Afghan Army General Kaliq and university faculty and students.

U.S. Navy photo by Ensign Christopher Weis

Russell 'three-peats' in holiday lighting contest

Story and photo by
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USS Russell (DDG 59)
Public Affairs



For the third consecutive year, the guided missile destroyer USS Russell (DDG 59) took top honors during the annual Pearl Harbor holiday light decorating contest.

The contest gave the crew members an opportunity to showcase their holiday pride and decorate Russell for the Christmas and New Year's season. The ship's crew focused on creative and innovative approaches to the design process.

"I feel excited that we got to do this and go the extra mile to make this such a special event," said Operations Specialist Seaman Jonathon Dallas. "This is a great reflection of the crew and how we go about doing things."

The contest was hosted by Rear Adm. T. G. Alexander, commander, Navy Region Hawai'i and commander, Naval Surface Group Middle Pacific, and was judged by flag officers assigned throughout the Oahu area.

Russell started preparing for the contest immediately following return from a "friends and family" cruise to Maui in early December. At that time, a special work detail was set up which included representatives from every division onboard. Sailors started taking holiday leave in mid-December so the duty section, run by the command duty officer and section leader, took the project over from the light detail. This demonstrated the collaborative teamwork that it took for such a concentrated effort.

The admiral's barge approaches guided missile destroyer USS Russell (DDG-59) during the base's annual holiday light decorating contest. Russell placed first in the contest for the fourth year in a row.

The ship's crew came up with creative approaches to decorate the ship. Using multi-colored lights, the ship spelled out "Mele Kalikamaka" (Merry Christmas in Hawaiian).

The engineering department took the lead with the light project. Electrician's Mate 1st Class Arcelito Tomacder came up with several of the decorating ideas and estimated that thousands of lights were strung around the warship.

"I had to have an initial design planned," said Tomacder. "I wanted lights on the yardarms, on all the lifelines, and candy canes everywhere. It was a lot of work, but it looked so nice when it was finished."

Sailors went aloft daily to ensure that each area of the ship received some Christmas cheer. White lights were carefully

wrapped around each yardarm, creating a stunning appearance. Vertical lights hung from each side of the mast and going up and over lengthwise of the ship was a string of lights that included the reindeer and Santa.

On the ship's bow, a colorful combination of lights formed a huge Christmas tree wrapping around the five-inch inch gun. Various floats decorated the ship, including a life-sized float of Santa in a motorcycle located on the port midship's quarterdeck.

Prior to the judges' departure in the barges, Russell's junior officers, appearing in Christmas costumes, greeted the judges at Merry Point. While dining on appetizers, the admirals and their family members took pictures with ship's elves, Mrs. Claus and even a Christmas bunny.

During the judging, the ship also played Christmas carols that could be heard up and down the Pearl Harbor waterfront. Russell invited members of the nearby Japanese ships JDS Kongo and JDS Atago, to take part in the Christmas festivities with a reception on a paint float attached to the ship.

"The Sailors put a lot of hard work into this," said Lt. Courtney Minetree, Russell's chief engineer. "They did an outstanding job and should be very proud of their accomplishments. It really is the most gorgeous lighting display I have ever seen on a ship in my career."

Russell is currently moored at Naval Station Pearl Harbor and is making preparations to deploy with the USS Abraham Lincoln Strike Group early next year.



U.S. Navy photo by BM2 Anthony Alvarado

Cmdr. Steven Okun, executive officer aboard Port Royal, Ensign Charles Diebler and Ensign Mikela Rodkin serve the crew Christmas dinner. Traditionally, officers and chiefs work the "mess line" on special occasions as a gift to the enlisted Sailors who work hard every day to keep the crew fed.

USS Port Royal spends Christmas in Singapore

Ensign Cassidy A.
Rasmussen

USS Port Royal (CG 73)
Public Affairs

Literally half way around the world from their families and friends, USS Port Royal (CG 73) Sailors enjoyed the Christmas spirit this year in every way they could.

"[Singapore] is a beautiful city," said Ensign Reagan Balsamo. "With all the lights and decorations, it still feels very Christmas-y."

On Christmas Day, many Sailors took advantage of the sightseeing and shopping opportunities in downtown Singapore. A few signed up for the "home hospitality" program, in which

Americans living abroad opened their homes to host a holiday meal. Also, a handful of Sailors volunteered at a local Salvation Army to sing carols, play games, and share a meal with children separated from their parents.

"It was one of the best Christmases ever," said Seaman Chris Brown, who was one of the Salvation Army volunteers. "Those kids were so funny and smart. I had so much fun playing with them."

Back on the ship, members of the duty section celebrated Christmas with a special meal.

"It was delicious, one of the best meals I've had onboard," said Lt. j.g.

Tabitha Booth. "The CSs did a really great job cooking this year."

Operational requirements often separate Sailors from their families during Christmas and other special days – missed birthdays, anniversaries, births and graduations are simply "part of the deal."

"In the past five years, I've spent three Christmases away from home on deployment," said Lt. Chad Saner. "It's tough, but someone's got to do it."

"It's really hard being away from my family this time of year," said Sonar Technician (Surface) Seaman Jack McDaniel. "But my shipmates are like my family, too."