USS Blue Ridge arrives in Hong Kong for visit

Story by MC3 Fidel C. Hart, *USS Blue Ridge* Public Affairs

HONG KONG – U.S. 7th Fleet flagship *USS Blue Ridge* (LCC 19) and embarked 7th Fleet staff arrived in Hong Kong for a port visit March 15.

The visit gives the crew the opportunity to experience Hong Kong's unique culture. During their off-duty time, Sailors and Marines will have the opportunity to visit several landmarks, amusement parks and restaurants.

Blue Ridge's administration department leading chief petty officer, Senior Chief Yeoman Steven Borba, said the crew is looking forward to visiting Hong Kong.

"Hong Kong is a city-state steeped in 7th Fleet's history," said Borba. "Our Sailors and Marines have been enjoying this port for many decades. They look forward to experiencing the richness and diversity of the culture here. It is also my favorite city in the world."

In addition to touring Hong Kong on their own, several Sailors and Marines will participate in the American Women's Association of Hong Kong's Meals In the Home events. Meals In the Home (known in other countries as Adopt A Sailor) is a program which offers hospitality and support for U.S. service members visiting Hong Kong.

"The American Women's Association supports large ship visits with the Fenwick Pier volunteers," said Jennifer Cox, American Women's Association of Hong Kong president. "Fenwick Pier volunteers staff a desk at the pier to assists Sailors and Marines find their way around Hong Kong. We also staff a free library at the pier, allowing service members to take donated books, DVDs and magazines with them. They may also donate their own."

Whether this will be their first time or eleventh time in Hong Kong, the port visit here is one crew members will remember fondly.

"Hong Kong is a favorite port of many Sailors," said *Blue Ridge*'s administrative officer, Lt. Jason Kaplan. "During this port visit, our crew will enjoy the warm hospitality and vibrant city landscapes this international city proudly embraces. New and lasting friendships will be made here while our crew participates in Meals In the Home and on liberty."

QMSN Korey Booker points out to OS2 Angel Aquino potential contacts from the bridge of U.S. 7th Fleet flagship *USS Blue Ridge* (LCC 19) during a sea-and-anchor detail March 14. *Blue Ridge* and embarked 7th Fleet staff are anchored in Hong Kong for a port visit.

U.S. Navy photo by MCSR Ben Larscheid

Safety tips for Sailors with 'spring fever'

By April Phillips,
Naval Safety Center Public Affairs

NORFOLK, Va. – The Naval Safety Center (NAVSAFECEN) offers tips for Sailors in advance of spring vacations.

The biggest stereotypes about spring break revolve around alcohol abuse. While movies and television may glamorize binge drinking, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) report that this behavior can be deadly.

They define binge drinking as a male consuming five or more alcoholic beverages or a woman consuming four or more alcoholic beverages within a two-hour period. They report findings that have alarming implications for Sailors:

• The prevalence of drinking among men is higher than the prevalence among women.

• About 90 percent of the alcohol consumed by those under the age of 21 is in the form of binge drinks.

• Binge drinkers are 14 times more likely to report alcohol-impaired driving than non-binge drinkers.

Given that there are a large number of males and younger adults in the Navy, these statistics show there is reason for concern. Nonetheless, Sailors have plenty of smart options, according to Dan Dray, a traffic and recreation safety specialist at NAVSAFECEN.

"We know that the young Sailors and Marines are going to go out and have fun, but the biggest asset they have in terms of safety is their peers. Everyone carries a cell phone these days, so if you've had too much to drink, call a friend to come pick you up or take advantage of the safe ride programs that many ships offer," Dray said.

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> -- Dan Dray,
> traffic and recreation safety specialist,
> Naval Safety Center

Training and awareness appear to be paying off. The Naval Safety Center tracks whether alcohol was a factor in fatal mishaps.

The recently completed winter safety campaign ran from Dec. 1, 2011, through Feb. 29, 2012. This season there were two fatalities where alcohol was a contributing factor.

Both were motor vehicle mishaps. While those are two too many, when compared to winter 2010-2011 when there were six alcohol-related fatalities and winter 2009-2010 when there were nine, it's an obvious improvement and a trend consistently moving in the right direction.

While impaired driving is an obvious danger associated with over-consumption of alcohol, there are other problems as well.

Aside from health risks such as high blood pressure, stroke, neurological damage and liver disease, the CDC reports that alcohol abuse is a major factor in sexual assaults.

Eliminating this criminal behavior is a major goal in the Navy and Marine Corps according to a recent blog post detailing Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus' 21st Century Sailor and Marine initiative.

The safety portion of this initiative states in part that the naval services will "aggressively prevent sexual assaults from occurring, support sexual assault victims, and hold offenders accountable."

Using alcohol responsibly and maintaining situational awareness are important steps toward achieving this goal, Dray said.

Safety is one of the five areas of the 21st Century Sailor and Marine initiative which consolidates a set of objectives and policies, new and existing, to maximize Sailor and Marine personal readiness, build resiliency and hone the most combat-effective force in the history of the Department of the Navy.

For more information about responsible use of alcohol, visit www.public.navy.mil/navsafecen.

CFAY VITA Center Tip of the Week

BAH and Mortgage Interest:

You can still deduct mortgage interest and real estate taxes paid on your home, even if you paid for these expenses with your Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH).

This is not considered to be a "reimbursable" expense.

For more information, visit the Naval Legal Service Office or the CFAY Tax Center.