Cowpens crew celebrates Battle Effectiveness award

By Ensign Kara Herman, *USS Cowpens* Public Affairs Officer

The Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruiser *USS Cowpens* (CG 63) hosted a barbecue on the pier March 16, to celebrate painting the Battle Effectiveness award on the starboard bridge wing.

Sailors of the *USS Cowpens* (CG 63) celebrate the freshly painted Battle Effectiveness Awards during a command picnic March 16.
U.S. Navy photo by YN2 Chris Lassiter

"It was a fun Friday event," said Information Systems Technician Seaman Steven Tallent. "The food was great and it was really nice to see last year's hard work rewarded."

The event began with a ceremony in which Rear Adm. J. R. Haley, Commander Task Force 70, gave awards to *Cowpens* Sailors for excellence during the summer and fall 2011 deployments. *Cowpens*' Commanding Officer Capt. Paul J. Lyons and Rear Adm. Haley said a few words about the strength of the *Cowpens* crew and the well deserved Battle Effectiveness award.

At the conclusion of the award ceremony, the crew moved to watch the painting of the Battle "E" and other warfare area excellence awards on the starboard bridge wing. Then, the crew enjoyed a barbecue on the pier consisting of hot dogs, hamburgers and ribs. The barbecue was organized by the 1st Class Petty Officer Association and *Cowpens*' Morale, Welfare and Recreation team.

"This is a great opportunity to show appreciation to the crew," said Cryptologic technician Technical 1st Class Vincent Wenzel, President of the 1st Class Petty Officer association on *Cowpens*. "It was great to know that the hard work and dedication that was shown no only by the crew but also by the families, has led to this honor."

Cowpens was awarded the Battle "E" award for the year 2011, which is the first award for *Cowpens* since 1998. The Battle Effectiveness award is a yearly award for Navy units that indicate superior performance in an assessment of the command's readiness to carry out its primary mission Areas.

"I'm so proud of this crew," said Lt. Cmdr. Will Chambers, *Cowpens*' executive officer. "They really deserve this recognition for all that they accomplished in 2011 and I look forward to seeing the continuation of this course of excellence in 2012."

Sailors, Marines participate in Iwo Jima Reunion of Honor Ceremony

Story and photo by MC1 Johnie Hickmon, *USS Germantown* Public Affairs

IWO TO, Japan – Thirty-two Sailors from the forward-deployed amphibious dock landing ship *USS Germantown* (LSD 42), along with elements of the III Marine Expeditionary Force (III MEF) attended the Reunion of Honor ceremony on Iwo To, formerly known as Iwo Jima, on March 14.

The ceremony commemorated the 67th anniversary of the Battle of Iwo Jima during WWII.

Almost 28,600 American Marines and Japanese soldiers lost their lives defending the 8-square mile island, which saw some of the fiercest fighting of the war.

On this day, veterans, their family members and dignitaries from both sides came together to honor the men who gave the ultimate sacrifice for their countries.

Before the start of the ceremony, Sailors had the opportunity to walk around the beach the Marines stormed almost 70 years ago.

They had the chance to view remnants that have stood the test of time, such as an old bunker and various ships that lined the shore.

They also spoke with several veterans of that long ago battle and heard first hand about their experiences.

During the ceremony, various speakers discussed the war and how both nations have become close allies over the years and how each side remembers the brave men who sacrificed their lives for their respective countries.

"The battle of Iwo Jima was a fierce battle, rarely seen in the history of war," said Yasunori Nishi, president of the Japanese Iwo Jima Association. "Here, I would like to pray for the repose of the souls of the heroes of Japan and the United States and to offer consolation to their families, whose deep sorrow will never disappear."

Ichiro Aisawa, a member of the House of Representatives of Japan and president of the Parliamentary League for Iwo Jima, said since that time, both nations have enjoyed a successful relationship with each other.

"The world today is faced with new threats," he said. "Japan and the U.S. are now working hand in hand to achieve international peace and stability. I believe such cooperation console the souls of soldiers from both countries who fought and died on this island. We should never forget that the peace and prosperity we enjoy today is built on the sacrifice of these soldiers."

Kurt Tong, the Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. Embassy, Tokyo, thanked the surviving warriors of Iwo Jima for the sacrifices they made for their country, reminding everyone of the purpose of the ceremony.

"We gather here today to pay our respects to the young American and Japanese who made the ultimate sacrifice for their countries on this very ground on which we stand exactly 67 years ago," he said. "We are proud to also honor the veterans of this battle who are here with us today, as well as veteran's family members, and all who have born the burden of the memories of this battle over the years that have passed, and those who have felt the memories and echoes of the sacrifices of war. To you all, we owe a great debt for our ability to stand here together today."

After the ceremony, Sailors and Marines once again mingled with the veterans, taking photos and listening to them reminisce about their experiences on the island. For those in attendance, the experience of visiting the island and talking with the veterans who personally witnessed and participated in the battle was a humbling event.

"I think this ceremony was really wonderful," said Information Technician 3rd Class Valerie Hadley. "It was humbling to be here where so many people died defending their respective countries."

Marine Lt. Gen. Lawrence Snowden (Ret.) bows in respect after laying a wreath in honor of the men who died during the battle of Iwo Jima during the Reunion of Honor Ceremony March 12. The forward-deployed amphibious dock landing ship *USS Germantown* (LSD 42) and elements of the III Marine Expeditionary Force participated in the ceremony commemorating the 67th anniversary of the battle of Iwo Jima.

Additionally, Hadley commented she especially enjoyed talking to the veterans and getting a real understanding of what they experienced during the battle.

"There was one veteran who told me a story about how he went into one of the caves and found maps with all the enemies' position," she said. "It was amazing how many things were still fresh in his mind after so many years. I'm very glad I had the chance to experience this today."

Germantown is commanded by Cmdr. Carol McKenzie, was commissioned Feb. 8, 1986 and is capable of carrying more than 721 Sailors and Marines.

Germantown recently completed CG12, along with *USS Tortuga* (LSD 46), and reports to Commander, Amphibious Force Seventh Fleet, Rear Adm. J. Scott Jones, who is headquartered in Okinawa, Japan.