Curtis Wilbur shines during ULTRA-E

Ens. John Scott Shaffer,
USS Curtis Wilbur **Public Affairs**

With deployment around the corner, *USS Curtis Wilbur* (DDG 54) Sailors recently completed Unit Level Training Evaluation, Engineering (ULTRA-E) with a recommendation for full certification. Through the hard work and dedication of the engineering department and crew, Engineering Assessment Pacific (EAP) inspectors completed material safety checks within the first day and one half of the inspection allowing the ship to get underway promptly to conduct drills and evolutions.

Curtis Wilbur's high material standards and advanced preparations shined as they met all available material checks in the early stages of the certification.

"Every check was accomplished about six to seven times prior to the inspectors arrival, ensuring our Sailors were proficient and familiar with them," said *Curtis Wilbur* Chief Engineer Lt. Richard Smith.

Cmdr. Don Nuckols, EAP Senior Assessor stated in the final report, "The proficiency of both watch teams led to meeting certification criteria for both [routine] evolutions and [casualty control] drills. *Curtis Wilbur* is only the fourth ship in several dozen assessments to achieve this performance benchmark at ULTRA-E."

The success of the *Curtis Wilbur* occurred despite operational constraints. To help mitigate these challenges, the ship received a wide range of support in preparation to the certification. Commanding Officer Cmdr. Christopher Monroe stated, "*Curtis Wilbur*'s recent certification during ULTRA-E was a spectacular team effort that showcased the exceptional teamwork among Yokosuka waterfront ships, Afloat Training Group Western Pacific, Ship Repair Facility Yokosuka, and Destroyer Squadron 15 N4 department."

The long working hours paid off as the crew earned their engineering certification maintaining eligibility to display the red "E" that is painted on the skin of the ship.

"The work was tough and the days were long, but we have a lot of pride in the work we do and it showed during Ultra," said Damage Controlman 3rd Class Christopher Thibodeau.

Ultra-E was a ship wide event with departments contributing to the efforts by supplying "tiger teams," allowing the engineers to focus on maintenance and training. As explained by *Curtis Wilbur* Command Master Chief Curtis Blunt, "*Curtis Wilbur* worked together as a team from success in the main space fire drills to providing the engineers the necessary support to accomplish the mission."

Curtis Wilbur, commanded by Cmdr. Christopher Monroe, is assigned to Destroyer Squadron 15, a key element to Commander, U.S. 7th Fleet. U.S. 7th Fleet is the largest of the forward-deployed U.S. fleets, with approximately 60-70 ships, 200-300 aircraft and 40,000 Sailors and Marines assigned at any given time.

USS Blue Ridge arrives in Brisbane

By MCSN Mel Orr, *USS Blue Ridge* Public Affairs

BRISBANE, Australia (NNS) – The U.S. 7th Fleet command ship *USS Blue Ridge* (LCC 19) arrived in Brisbane, Australia July 8 in support of exercise Talisman Sabre 2011 (TS11).

Talisman Sabre 2011 is a bilateral exercise designed to train Australian and U.S. forces in planning and conducting Combined Task Force operations in order to improve Australian/U.S. combat readiness and interoperability.

Commander U.S. 7th Fleet Vice Adm. Scott Van Buskirk, right, meets and greets soldiers of the Royal Australian Army at the opening ceremony for the exercise Talisman Sabre 2011, July 9, north of Brisbane, Austrailia in the town of Rockhampton. Talisman Sabre 2011 is a bilateral exercise designed to train Australian and U.S. Forces in planning and conducting Combined Task Force operations in order to improve Australian/U.S. combat readiness and interoperability. The exercise reflects the closeness, alliance and strength of the ongoing military-military relationship between the U.S. and Australia.
U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Kenneth R. Hendrix

The exercise enhances joint combat readiness and interoperability between U.S. and Australian air, land and maritime forces and will focus on crisis action planning and execution of emergency response operations.

TS11 is jointly sponsored by U.S. Pacific Command and Australian Defense Force (ADF) Joint Operations Command and is designed to support and strengthen ADF's capability to defend Australia and its national interests.

"The U.S. and Australia have a proud, longstanding history of working together," said Blue Ridge Commanding Officer Capt. Daniel Grieco. "This exercise will further strengthen ties between our two nations and enhance our ability to cooperatively operate our military force to further peace and stability in the region."

While in Brisbane, some Blue Ridge and embarked U.S. 7th Fleet staff Sailors will visit Putrell Park and Karingal Campsite to help with cleaning, painting and planting, while other Sailors will visit children at Mater Children's Hospital as part of community service projects.

Sailors will take in the sights during the numerous scheduled tours and meet local Brisbane residents, all in the spirit of friendship and camaraderie.

Blue Ridge serves under Commander, Expeditionary Strike Group 7/Commander, Task Force (CTF) 76, the Navy's only forward-deployed amphibious force.

Blue Ridge is the command ship for Commander, U.S. 7th Fleet. CTF 76 is headquartered aboard White Beach Naval Facility, Okinawa, Japan, with an operating detachment in Sasebo, Japan.

GW crew safely navigates Sunda strait

By MC2 William Pittman,
***USS George Washington* Public Affairs**

USS *George Washington*, At Sea (NNS) – Sailors aboard forward-deployed, nuclear-powered aircraft carrier *USS George Washington* (CVN 73) successfully navigated the ship through the Sunda Strait July 6.

The strait links the Java Sea to the Indian Ocean.

"There is a lot that can go wrong during this evolution. The narrowest point in the straits is just two miles wide and the water is only 18 meters deep," said Cmdr. Wes McCall, *George Washington*'s navigator. "If the ship's keel was sitting on the sea floor right now, the mast would be sticking out of the waters - it's that shallow."

To assist *George Washington*, ships from the Australian and Indonesian navies escorted the carrier through the tricky waterway.

The Sunda Strait, which separates Java from Sumatra, is also busy with hundreds of smaller commercial ships moving commerce around the globe.

"The trickiest part is contact avoidance, making sure that we all get through here safely. That's the only thing on my mind right now," said McCall.

To mitigate that danger, *George Washington*'s lookouts were out in full force, armed with binoculars and sound powered phones to instantly report any hazards.

"We had our work cut out for us today," said Chief Quartermaster (SW/EXW) Jarrod Collins of *George Washington*'s Navigation Department. "For transits like this, it sometimes takes a couple of days to prepare - sometimes a couple of weeks. We research the area we're traveling through, make sure we are aware of the restrictions and that we are adhering to them."

While it is easy to be swept away by the beauty of the clear blue water and passing islands, the crew of *George Washington* was reminded that the Sunda Strait is also a graveyard for U.S. and Allied Sailors from World War II. In 1942, cruiser *USS Houston* (CA 30) and *HMAS Perth* (D 29) were sunk in the Sunda Strait by Imperial Japanese forces.

"All the waters of the 7th Fleet area of responsibility are steeped in history," said Capt. David Lausman, *George Washington*'s commanding officer. "Our crew gains valuable insight, professionalism and understanding in all waters that we navigate."

The average age of the crew aboard *George Washington* is just 26 years old. To successfully navigate a massive 1,092 foot-long carrier for nearly 12 hours through a busy and tricky waterway is a credit to the skill of these young Sailors.

"We have some young quartermasters aboard, as well as Sailors who have only been doing the job for a few months. To see them navigating these waters is very impressive," said McCall. "These guys are the best that we have, and I'm very proud of them."