Cowpens pollywogs become shellbacks after crossing the line

GMSN Chantall Knibb, a "slimy pollywog," takes a break from blowing water out of a padeye on the flight deck during a "Crossing the Line" ceremony aboard the Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruiser USS Cowpens (CG 63) July 27. Crossing the Line is a Navy tradition where Sailors that have crossed the equator, known as "Trusty Shellbacks," help cleanse those Sailors who have not yet crossed, known as "slimy pollywogs," when the ship crosses the "line."

Story and photo by MC1 (SW/AW) N. Ross Taylor, *USS Cowpens* Public Affairs

INDIAN OCEAN – Sailors aboard the Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruiser *USS Cowpens* (CG 63), which is nick-named the "Mighty Moo," took part in an historical Navy tradition when the ship conducted a crossing the line ceremony while on deployment in the U.S. 7th Fleet area of operations, July 27.

Due to operational commitments, the traditional Shellback Ceremony, more typically celebrated that moment when a ship crosses the equator from the Northern Hemisphere to the Southern Hemisphere, known as "crossing the line," took place when *Cowpens* returned to the Northern Hemisphere. The ceremony commemorates a Sailor's first crossing of the equator.

A traditional rite of passage ceremony carried out to appease King Neptune, the mythological god of the seas; the ceremony was originally created as a test for seasoned Sailors to ensure their new shipmates were capable of handling long, rough times at sea. Those who have already crossed the equator at a previous time during their Navy career are deemed "trusty shellbacks," sons and daughters of Neptune. Those who have not are called "pollywogs."

Chief Operations Specialist (SW) Vergel Amado, the ceremony's coordinator, said he knows how important this ceremony can be to a Sailor and was determined to make this one that would honor the long-standing Navy tradition.

"Becoming a shellback is a significant milestone in a Sailor's career," said Amado. "Although, we held the ceremony just last year, I wanted to make sure this year's event still reflected our great naval traditions, the history of why we do the ceremony and the privilege of saying 'I'm a shellback.'"

To the new shellbacks of "The Mighty Moo," this landmark in their career will stay with them long after the completion of the ceremony.

"This ceremony will be such a memorable part of my naval career and I am honored that my fellow shipmates entrust me with continuing this time honored tradition," said Ensign Blaine Shipley, communications officer and a brand new shellback.

Concerned with the welfare of *Cowpens* Sailors, the ship's leadership ensured the events were in keeping with good order and discipline.

Cowpens was commissioned March 9, 1991, and is the 17th ship of the Navy's Ticonderoga-class ships. CG 63 is the second ship to bear the name *Cowpens* and is forward deployed to Yokosuka, Japan.

USS Fitzgerald conducts change-of-command Ceremony

By Ens. Carissa Guthrie, *USS Fitzgerald* Public Affairs

PACIFIC OCEAN – With the South Pacific Ocean as a backdrop, the officers and crew of the guided missile destroyer *USS Fitzgerald* (DDG 62) stood in formation for a change of command ceremony, July 26. During the ceremony, Cmdr. Brian Mutty relieved Cmdr. Dennis Velez as commanding officer of *Fitzgerald*.

"I am extremely honored and humbled to have had the opportunity to serve as commanding officer of such an incredible crew, something I have dreamed of since I was young," said Velez. "I am inspired and impressed by the perseverance, enthusiasm and expert skill the crew demonstrates on a daily basis – the credit for each success this ship has earned goes to each one of you. This tour has been the pinnacle of my Naval career and I will carry my experiences from the last year with me for the rest of my life."

Velez's command tour was cut short a few months as he received orders to serve as Deputy Commodore of Destroyer Squadron 15. However, during his fourteen months in command, *Fitzgerald* displayed superior performance, remaining fully qualified, certified and mission ready.

Also under Velez's command, the ship earned the 2010 Anti-Submarine Warfare Bloodhound Award as well as the 2010 Retention Excellence Award. *Fitzgerald* excelled in all warfare areas while participating in multiple joint maritime exercises to include ASW operations with South Korea and a recent biennial exercise, Talisman Sabre 2011, with our Australian allies. Additionally, *Fitzgerald* got underway in four hours following the devastating earthquake that struck the Japanese nation in March 2011, providing support and conducting search and rescue operations less than one mile from land.

A graduate of the United States Naval Academy, Class of 1992, Velez earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Aerospace Engineering, later earning a Masters in Information Technology Management. On his previous five ships he deployed to numerous regions including Western Africa, the Mediterranean Sea, Adriatic Sea, Red Sea, Indian Ocean, and Persian Gulf. Ashore, Velez has worked as Officer in Charge of Western Hemisphere Group Caribbean Area Coordinator as well as Deputy Director of Surface Warfare Distribution for the Naval Personnel Command.

Cmdr. Dennis Velez give his final remarks to the crew as commanding officer of the guided missile destroyer *USS Fitzgerald* during the change of command ceremony. Velez was relieved by Cmdr. Brian Mutty During the ceremony.
U.S. Navy photo by ET3 Daniel Dickens

"Through Cmdr. Velez's exceptional leadership, discipline and dedication, *Fitzgerald* has set the standard across the waterfront," said Mutty. "I can only hope to be half as good a commanding officer, and if so, *Fitzgerald* will remain the first ship 7th Fleet requests for difficult missions."

Mutty is the eleventh commanding officer of *USS Fitzgerald*. He completed his undergraduate education at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, later attending the Naval Postgraduate School and earning a Master of Arts degree in National Security Affairs. Previous ships include *USS Bainbridge* (CGN 25), *USS Laboon* (DDG 58), *USS Austin* (LPD 4), *USS Cole* (DDG 67) and *USS Ross* (DDG 71). Throughout his career he deployed to the Mediterranean, Persian Gulf, North and South Atlantic and Caribbean. Additional career highlights include serving at OPNAV N86 as Requirements Officer for the Littoral Combat Ship, an Individual Augmentation assignment to support Joint CREW Composite Squadron One in Mosul, Iraq and assignment as the Chief Plans Policy Branch on the Joint Staff, J-7, Operational War Plans Division.

Mutty arrived in Japan in June 2010 to serve as the executive officer and following tour as commanding officer, taking part in the first Executive Officer-Commanding Officer "fleet-up" onboard *USS Fitzgerald*.

"You have truly impressed me during my time as executive officer," Mutty addressed the crew. "I cannot thank you enough for your support over the last year and I am honored to have the chance to serve with the best crew in the Navy."