USO Japan gala honors service members' volunteerism

Story and photo by Jeffrey C. Doepp, CFAY Public Affairs

The fourth annual United Services Organization (USO) Japan Service Salute Gala was held at the New Sanno Hotel in Tokyo Sept. 17.

The fund-raising gala is held to honor 12 U.S. service members and three Japan Self-Defense Force (JSDF) members for their extraordinary professional development, volunteerism, leadership qualities and exceptional performance on and off duty, and to recognize the winner of the USO Japan Volunteer of the Year award, according to USO Japan Programs and Marketing Director Jewell Willett, in a USO Japan Media Information release.

"Since we are a volunteer organization, we find immense value in honoring individuals that seek out volunteer work in their personal and professional lives," Willett said. "And since this is USO Japan's premier fund-raising event, funds gained through ticket sales and donor support directly benefit USO programs tailored to meet the needs of our forward-deployed troops and their families here on mainland Japan."

Commander U.S. 7th Fleet Vice Adm. Scott H. Swift, who was keynote speaker for the event, said it was a real honor to be representing all of the U.S. military services in Japan and praised the honorees for their accomplishments and volunteerism.

"The individual efforts of each of our honorees have resulted in them being singled out as people who can get things done. What we in the Navy call deck-plate leaders," said Swift. "Through your efforts and service you have come to be trusted by your seniors, peers and juniors. This is the highest accolade you can receive - the trust and confidence of your follow soldiers, Sailors, airmen and Marines. Tonight we can only recognize and congratulate each of you, but the stature that you have gained in the eyes of your follow service members and your families is the truest measure of what you have accomplished."

After acknowledging the sponsors and volunteers, the evening's 15 guests of honor took to the stage. One of them, Master-at-Arms 2nd Class Robert Duker, was there representing Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka (CFAY) and his department, CFAY Security.

Duker has volunteered nearly 450 hours of his personal time to the American Red Cross, CFAY Security Association, Junior Sailor Association and to CFAY Morale, Welfare and Recreation Youth Sports as a coach to a variety of sports such as basketball, flag football, baseball and soccer.

"I would like to thank God because without him, nothing is possible," Duker said. "My selection would not have been possible if I did not have such an outstanding chain of command. This selection is for all the master-at-arms who stand the watch day in and day out. My family is extremely proud of me and my mother always reminds me to thank God because he gives me my temperance and fortitude."

CFAY Commanding Officer Capt. David Owen, Security Officer Lt. Antoine Thornton and Command Master Chief Gregory Vidaurri, part of the chain of command Duker refers to, was in attendance showing their support.

"This is my second time attending a USO gala event," said Thornton. "It definitely is a great event. The USO has these events to recognize good people and they just did that by recognizing MA2 Duker."

The USO has been serving America's armed forces since being formed at the request of President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1941. The USO merged support operations provided to military personnel by the Salvation Army, YMCA, YWCA, National Catholic Community Services, National Jewish Welfare Board and the National Travelers Aid Association. Chartered by Congress, the USO operates as a nonprofit charitable organization fulfilling its mission of lifting the spirits of America's troops and their families.

(Left) MA2 Robert Duker of CFAY Security poses for a photo with C7F Vice Admiral Scott H. Swift after receiving his award during the USO Service Salute Gala at the New Sanno Hotel in Tokyo Sept. 17. Duker, along with 14 other U.S. Navy and JSDF service members were honored for their extraordinary professional development, volunteerism and leadership qualities during the event.

Navy Legal Services Office Japan offers legal guidance

From Regional Legal Services Office, Japan

Napoleon Bonaparte famously said that "the secret of war lies in the communications." In today's Navy, we can update this quotation to "the secret of successful Naval operations lies in the communications." This sentiment remains the same as when he first spoke the words. This is particularly true when considering the legal responsibilities of commands ashore and afloat throughout Japan. Facilitating communication among all those involved in the legal process is a mission requirement to ensure success in this particular Naval operation.

From Regional Legal Services Office (RLSO) Japan works closely with individual commands and Commander, Naval Forces Japan/Navy Region Japan (CNFJ/CNRJ), to meet commands' legal needs across the entire area of operations (AOR). RLSO Japan Command Services Department is a one stop shop and triage for all things legal. This broad scope includes administrative separation proceedings for enlisted service members, Boards of Inquiry, Non-Judicial Punishment, investigations under the Manual of the Judge Advocate General, liberty risk programs, and military justice prosecution services. Commands can reach out to Command Services to ask questions, receive guidance, and coordinate information sharing. Command Services not only reacts to inquires, but aggressively pushes out to the fleet information about legal duties and obligations.

RLSO Japan and CNFJ/CNRJ are focused on ensuring criminal justice matters receive adequate attention and support. Coordinating and facilitating communication among all involved in the military justice system is an extremely sensitive and high priority for RLSO Japan and CNFJ/CNRJ. No one is more directly impacted by crime than victims and witnesses.

When a crime occurs, the world stops for victims and witnesses. Whether the crime in question is slightly impersonal, like identity theft, or deeply invasive, as in sexual assault, witnesses and victims suffer the full brunt of physical, emotional, and financial affects.

The Victim and Witness Assistance Program (VWAP) has a multi-disciplinary approach focused on communication and information sharing. The program was created to ensure that victims and witnesses receive appropriate assistance, to protect victims from additional harm and hardship, and to ensure that all victims and witnesses are accorded their rights.

The Department of the Navy (DON) policy is to treat all crime victims and witnesses with dignity and respect. Service members and DON employees must make their best effort to ensure crime victims and witnesses are informed of their rights and provided assistance as appropriate. Navy activities and personnel will mitigate the physical, psychological, and financial hardship suffered by crime victims and witnesses. While all crime victims and witnesses require prompt targeted services and support, particular attention is paid to victims of serious violent crime, including child abuse, domestic violence, and sexual misconduct.

While it may seem obvious what terms like "victim" and "witness" mean in the context of a crime, Navy policies and regulations take care to be specific. A "victim" is a person who has suffered direct physical, emotional, or pecuniary harm as a result of the commission of a crime in violation of the Uniform Code of Military Justice. Here in Japan, this includes any military member, Department of Defense (DoD) civilian employees, DoD contractors, and their family members. A "witness" is a person who has information or evidence about a criminal offense that meets jurisdictional requirements and is providing information about that crime to the proper authorities within DoD.

VWAP seeks to minimize the effects of crime and help victims and witnesses participate in the military justice system. Those within the military justice process are responsible for ensuring a smooth transition of victim and witness assistance during each state of the criminal process. Service providers are responsible for providing available services and referrals to crime victims and witnesses as needed. Naval Criminal Investigative Services (NCIS) agents, military lawyers acting as prosecutors and advisors to commanding officers, medical professionals who collect evidence from victims and provide health services, family support professionals who provide support services to victims and witnesses, chaplains, military police both ashore and afloat, all must work together. Crime victims and witnesses receive services and information from them all. Clearly, coordination and communication are essential. VWAP steps in to ensure these services are delivered to crime victims and witnesses effectively and promptly.

Responsibility for oversight and administration of VWAP is delegated to Navy Personnel Command, Office of Legal Counsel, and pushed out to the Regions. CNFJ/CNRJ specifically delegates a Victim Witness Liaison Officer (VWLO) to coordinate VWAP within the region and supervise program implementation. Each command is required to delegate a Victim and Witness Assistance Coordinator (VWAC) to further implement programs at the local level. The VWLO maintains a directory of military and civilian programs and services within the AOR and distributes that list to each VWAC. If there are any cases where gaps exist, the onus falls on the VWLO and VWAC to find the necessary information and provide it to those who need it. Here in Yokosuka, the VWLO chairs quarterly meetings attended by command VWACs, service providers, and those within the military justice process to ensure lines of communication remain open.

Communication is the key. Command Services reaches out to commands ashore and afloat. CNFJ/CNRJ is engaged at the region level to ensure interaction among crime victims and witnesses, those involved in the military justice process, and service providers. By facilitating communication among all, Command Services and CNFJ/CNRJ ensure the success of this particular Naval operation. Napoleon would be proud. To learn more about RLSO Japan's Command Services Department, contact Lt. David Hammond, Command Services Department Head, at 243-7673. To learn more about the VLWO, contact Commander Naval Forces Japan Deputy Force Judge Advocate Lt. Tracy L. Reynolds at 243-7410.