Yokosuka Middle School students take field trip aboard *USS Blue Ridge*

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

When you call a U.S. Navy ship your office and often, your home, it is easy to forget not only how massive ships can be but also how exciting it was to walk onto a ship the first time you did it.

Those memories came back for several Sailors stationed on U.S. Seventh Fleet command ship, *USS Blue Ridge* (LCC 19), Feb. 17. As part of a community service event organized by Lt. Donald Baker, ship's chaplain, the Sailors volunteered to provide tours, presentations and bake cookies for sixth-grade students from Yokosuka Middle School visiting the ship.

Baker said the students are known as the 'Blue Ridge Team,' and adopted the ship earlier in the school year. "They think highly of *Blue Ridge*. To help them see and understand what it is they are supporting was the most crucial thing for me. It's clear they are excited to be here. It goes beyond what they anticipated because they had no idea what we do and what it is like on a ship."

Sixth-grade students from Yokosuka Middle School take a group picture with *Blue Ridge* Sailors on the pier Feb. 17. The students toured the ship's main deck, foc'sle, bridge, damage control central, library and the enlisted galley.

More than 120 students, teachers and chaperones toured the ship's main deck, pilot house, miser tower, enlisted galley, library, foc'sle and damage control central. First class petty officers and junior Sailors in each of these areas gave presentations, answered the students' questions and engaged them with demonstrations. Though the students may have ended their tour with snacks, the Sailors were fed off the enthusiasm from the sixth-graders.

"Today has been a lot of fun," said Damage Control Fireman Allison Lance. "I work with this equipment every day. Having the students see it for the first time and trying it on was a blast. I miss field trips and I can tell they had fun."

During their tour, several students were able to try on fire fighting equipment, look through the ship's binoculars and wear the hat of a food service officer. Chief Warrant Officer Brian 'Chow Boss' Ware, the ship's food service officer, designated some students 'honorary chow boss' when they toured the enlisted galley.

"Making young kids mini chow bosses was great," said Ware. "They are going to remember this day for a long time. In about 10 or 15 years, one of the students may be my replacement. I made a statement to them that we are overseas upholding democracy, trying to keep the world safe. For them to see the groundwork where it starts at makes it a great event for every one."