Cowpens Sailors enjoy rich culture of Saipan during port visit

By Ensign Christopher Lowe,
USS Cowpens Public Affairs

SAIPAN, U.S. Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands – Sailors of *USS Cowpens* (CG 63) were treated with a taste of home as they pulled in to port in Saipan May 27. Saipan is the largest island in the U.S. Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

Sailors from *USS Cowpens* (CG 63) volunteer their time at the Dioceses of Chalan Kanoa, Saipan, during the *Cowpens* port visit to the U.S. Commonwealth island May 27. More than 35 Sailors worked with local volunteers to restore and beautify one of Saipan's two local cemeteries.

U.S. Navy photo by FC3 Tamala Baker

The people of Saipan greeted the Sailors warmly with the Taste of the Marianas Island Festival. The festival shared many aspects of the Mariana Islands culture. The island council received *Cowpens* Commanding Officer Capt. Robert Marin, on stage with an official welcome and a ball cap trading ceremony. From dancing to the many different kinds of food found on the islands, *Cowpens* Sailors found the festival quite enjoyable.

"There was a lot of good food, and the people here are very pretty," said Ensign D'Juan Wilcher. "I enjoy the culture very much."

Many Sailors took the time to relax and enjoy the many historical sites and dive opportunities provided during the visit.

"This is definitely in my top three dive spots in the world," said Seaman Ryan Comtois. "I also like that there's so much military history on this island and that it's also a U.S. territory."

Even while *Cowpens* crew were enjoying a relaxing port visit, some Sailors were also giving back to the island. More thant 35 Sailors from *Cowpens* volunteered with the Dioceses of Chalan Kanoa, Saipan. They spent the day working with local volunteers in a beautification and restoration project for one of two public cemeteries on Saipan.

"I always enjoy helping people out," said Boatswains Mate 3rd Class Mercedes Logan. "And this was an especially moving project, cleaning the cemetery so that their loved ones have a nice place to go and pay their respects."

Saipan is famous for the Battle of Saipan, which took place during World War II. From June 15, 1944 to July 9, 1944, U.S. Marines and Army soldiers fought the Japanese Army for the island. Upon securing the island, the airfields provided the United States the ability to launch air raids on the Japanese main islands using the new B-29 bombers. During the campaign for the islands, many Japanese civilians and soldiers committed suicide rather than be captured by U.S. forces.

Cowpens is a Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruiser assigned to the *USS George Washington* (CVN 73) Strike Group and currently undergoing unit level training.

Yokosuka ships assigned to 7th Fleet sortie for Typhoon Songda

From U.S. 7th Fleet Public Affairs

U.S. Navy ships forward-deployed to Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka (CFAY) were ordered to sortie Saturday, May 28, to avoid Typhoon Songda.

In anticipation of the storm's projected arrival on early Monday morning May 30, *USS Blue Ridge* (LCC 19), *USS Fitzgerald* (DDG 62), *USS John S. McCain* (DDG 56), *USS Mustin* (DDG 89) and *USS Curtis Wilbur* (DDG 54) departed from Yokosuka.

At the time, Typhoon Songda was southwest of Okinawa with winds of 105 knots gusting to 130 knots, according to the Joint Typhoon Warning Center.

The aircraft carrier *USS George Washington* (CVN 73) and the guided-missile destroyer *USS Stethem* (DDG 63) are both undergoing maintenance in Yokosuka and remained in port.

Commander Task Force 72 repositioned three P-3 Orion aircraft from Kadena Air Base in Okinawa to Misawa Air Base in northern Honshu after Tropical Cyclone Condition of Readiness (TCCOR) 1 was declared. Commander Task Force 76, usually headquartered at White Beach in Okinawa, temporarily shifted its operations to Kadena Air Base.

Ships in Sasebo, Japan, were closely monitored, but did not sortie as sustained winds were forecasted to remain below gale force.

Several ships at sea also adjusted their tracks to remain clear of the storm.

There are 60-70 ships, 200-300 aircraft and more than 40,000 Navy and Marine Corps personnel assigned to the 7th Fleet. This includes forces operating from bases in Japan and Guam and rotationally-deployed forces based in the United States. Commander, U.S. 7th Fleet, is embarked aboard the command flagship *USS Blue Ridge* (LCC 19), forward deployed to Yokosuka, Japan.

Waves crash over the bow of the U.S. 7th Fleet command flagship *USS Blue Ridge* (LCC 19) May 30. *Blue Ridge*, along with *USS Fitzgerald* (DDG 62), *USS John S. McCain* (DDG 56), *USS Mustin* (DDG 89) and *USS Curtis Wilbur* (DDG 54), sortied from Yokosuka base May 29, in order to avoid Typhoon Songda.

U.S. Navy photo by Cmdr. Richard Keltner