Fleet Activities, Yokosuka, Japan

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First CFAY *Mochi* Pounding broadens cultural exchange

CS1(SW) Matthew Able uses a *kine* (mallet) to pound rice into a thick paste called *mochi* during the first CFAY *Mochi* Pounding Ceremony held in the CFAY headquarters building C-2 auditorium Jan. 29. The event was held to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the signing of the U.S. - Japan strategic alliance and to help broaden cultural exchanges between the two countries.

Story and photo by Mark Elrod, CFAY Public Affairs

Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka (CFAY) started a new tradition when it kicked off its first *Mochi* Pounding Ceremony in the CFAY headquarters building C-2 auditorium Jan. 29.

"It was important to start the *mochi* pounding ceremony, because *mochi* pounding is a traditional facet of Japanese culture. And today, more so than ever before with this year being the 50th anniversary of the U.S. - Japan strategic alliance, it helps cement our friendship for the next 50 years to come," said CFAY Commanding Officer Capt. Daniel Weed.

Mochi pounding ceremonies, called *mochitsuki*, are a common tradition throughout Japan and are usually held in December and January. *Mochi* is rice pounded into a thick paste that is generally eaten at the start of the New Year. There are many ways of eating *mochi*, with soy sauce, wrapped in dried seaweed or in soups. As a dessert, soybean powder mixed with sugar is sprinkled on the *mochi* or the center of the *mochi* is filled with sweet bean paste.

"*Mochi* is a traditional holiday fair that is enjoyed by the Japanese, and it is believed to bring good luck," said Weed. The Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force has a *mochi* pounding [event] every December, and regrettably, no American organization has this type of public event. So, I'm pleased that we were able to have another [historical] first, after 65 years of history here at CFAY."

The first ever CFAY *Mochi* Pounding included traditional Japanese *koto* music and a variety of Japanese foods during the festive ceremony.

"The sweet bean *mochi* is good," said Culinary Specialist 1st Class (SW) Matthew Able, who is the leading petty officer of CFAY Bachelor Housing. "There is one restaurant that we go to and they serve, what we call, 'bacon *mochi*.'"

"It's like bacon wrapped around *mochi*," explained Able. "You can't go wrong with bacon wrapped around *mochi* on a stick."

The idea for the ceremony was the brainchild of Weed, who stated that he always saw the Japanese celebrating the event and always thought it would be a good idea to bring that experience to U.S. service members.

"I always look for great events that are easy and fun to do to help broaden our cultural exchange between the United States and Japan," said Weed.

According to Weed, all it takes is for someone to take the initiative to get something going.

"With many things in the world, the thousand mile journey starts with the first step and so I'm sure this is the first step," he said. "I'm sure it will be incorporated into our holiday routine and I look forward to coming back in the future to a *mochi* pounding event which we started here today."

7th Fleet Band becomes Navy's most warfare-qualified musicians

Story and photo by MC2 Greg Mitchell, U.S. 7th Fleet Public Affairs

Members of the U.S. 7th Fleet Band were praised for being the most warfare-qualified band in the Navy following a ceremony Jan. 29, on board Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka, to present new Enlisted Surface Warfare Specialist (ESWS) pins.

Fifteen band members received their pins at the impromptu ceremony, bringing the number of 7th Fleet Band members, who qualified ESWS in the past 12 months, to 27. The ESWS qualification designation signifies that a Sailor has achieved a level of proficiency in surface ships.

"This is truly a remarkable and unprecedented accomplishment," said Commander U.S. 7th Fleet Chief of Staff Capt. Fredrick W. Pfirrmann, who officiated at the pinning ceremony. "This is the most operational band in the world, and one that is fully aligned and integrated with the mission of our fleet."

Eight members of the 7th Fleet Band "Orient Express" studied and worked for their ESWS pins during their summer 2009 deployment on *USS Harpers Ferry* (LSD 49) during exercise Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT). The remaining members in the "Far East Edition" worked towards their qualification during the fall deployment on the 7th Fleet flagship *USS Blue Ridge* (LCC 19).

"To gain this type of knowledge is definitely an achievement for me," said Musician 2nd Class (SW) Dirk Denton. "The process was a little grueling and required long hours of studying, but at least now if a guest or family member asks me a question, I feel that I have enough adequate knowledge to fill them in on what exactly takes place on board the ship."

Once all written requirements have been signed off by subject area specialists and a written exam is completed, Sailors must complete a "walk-through" with warfare qualified department experts.

The final steps to earning an ESWS pin consists of two oral boards. The first board is given by authorized first class petty officers and a final examination is administered by the chief petty officers onboard. At these boards, Sailors must display a general knowledge of the ship's overall mission, engineering plant capabilities, combat systems, and basic Navy history among other areas.

U.S. 7th Fleet Chief of Staff Capt. Fredrick W. Pfirrmann, speaks to the crowd on behalf of the U.S. 7th Fleet Band after designating 15 Navy musicians as being Enlisted Surface Warfare Specialist (ESWS) qualified Jan. 29. 7th Fleet Band members took approximately three months while aboard *USS Blue Ridge* (LCC 19) to fully complete their qualifications.

"This accomplishment for these Sailors is awesome," said 7th Fleet Bandmaster Lt. Jeff Wrenn. "These musicians devoted their spare time between rehearsals to complete their qualifications, I could not be more proud of them."

The 7th Fleet Band performed in more than 235 engagements in 2009, to audiences totaling 1,040,605 throughout 14 countries.

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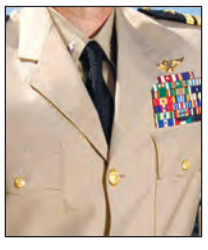

CNO approves Service Dress Khaki uniform design

Service Dress Khaki , featuring a contemporary design, was approved by the CNO for development as an optional uniform for E-7 and above.

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VITA Center makes dollars and sense for CFAY community

The Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Center program opened for business in the Community Readiness Center Feb. 5. The program will continue through April 15.

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