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Seahawk 海鷹 Umitaka

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Thousands observe *Obon* season at Negishi *Bon Odori* Festival

By Dan Bowen, CFAY Public Affairs

Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka (CFAY) Negishi Housing Detachment celebrated the *Obon* season at their 44th annual *Bon Odori* Festival held in the parking lots adjacent to the community center Aug. 22. The event featured vendors offering various Japanese and American foods, entertainment by the 7th Fleet Band and other musical acts as well as a variety of traditional Japanese entertainers, including Taiko drummers and a *shishimai* (lion dance) performance.

The hot summer day provided the more than 4,400 CFAY and local Yokohama residents the opportunity to get together and share each other's cultures. Hiroyasu Ata, a local resident who just returned from two years of working in Austin, Texas, was especially appreciative of the chance to attend the festivities on the base.

"We miss a lot about the U.S. and we are pretty happy to be here," said Ata. "It's a great opportunity to see inside the base; it's pretty interesting for us because there is a lot of American stuff around here and we enjoy it a lot. It's also a great chance to [develop] mutual understanding."

Developing that understanding is exactly why events like the *Bon Odori* are so vital. "We try to ensure that we are respecting the traditions of the Japanese culture," said Negishi Housing Detachment Officer in Charge Cmdr. Rome de las Alas. "The key word is 'respect,' it's an understanding that as visitors, or for that matter, neighbors, that we are respecting that so we can live in harmony with our Japanese neighbors."

Obon is one of Japan's three major holiday seasons. Throughout the country, Obon is celebrated at different times and in slightly different ways depending on the region. The purpose, however, is the same wherever you go. It is a time to remember and honor one's ancestors whose spirits are believed to return to this world to visit their relatives.

Traditionally, lanterns are hung in front of houses to guide the spirits home, *obon* dances, or *bon odori*, are performed, and offerings of the deceased's favorite foods are made at grave sites and house alters. At the end of *Obon*, floating lanterns are put into rivers, lakes and the ocean to help guide the spirits back to the spirit world.

For those in the community that missed the Negishi *Bon Odori* Festival, there will be plenty of opportunities to join in other intercultural activities. Throughout the year, CFAY hosts several events where Japanese and American residents have the chance to enjoy learning about each other. The next big cultural event is the *Mikoshi* Parade which is held every October. For more information on base events, pick up the Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) magazine, "Focus."

Vendor booths provide traditional American and Japanese food to the more than 4,400 CFAY and local Yokohama residents attending the Negishi Housing Detachment 44th annual *Bon Odori* Festival Aug. 22. The event included entertainment provided by the 7th Fleet Band as well as a variety of traditional Japanese entertainers, including Taiko drummers and a *shishimai* (lion dance) performance.

Photo by John Sullivan

Sept. 11 survivor to speak at CFAY Remembrance Day ceremony

By Mark Elrod, CFAY Public Affairs

Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka (CFAY) will have a very special guest for the 10 a.m., Sept. 11 Remembrance Day ceremony at the Chapel of Hope.

New York City Fire Department (FDNY) Capt. (Ret.) Alfredo Fuentes, who served as acting battalion chief for the FDNY Marine Division, which operated in response to the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks on the New York World Trade Center, will be guest speaker for the base event.

What some people may not know about Fuentes is that he nearly lost his life due to his heroic response to the tragic event. When the north tower collapsed, Fuentes was buried and trapped underneath the wreckage.

"When buried, I had severe almost fatal injuries to my head; fracture of the skull, left lung was collapsed, both lungs were chemically burned, nine broken ribs, etc.," said Fuentes. "Due to these injuries, I was in and out of consciousness. I do not remember much of those (buried) moments, as my mind would not go to that place in time."

Although severely injured, Fuentes fell back on his training to try to get help for himself and the others that were trapped.

"When conscious, I would give my mayday radio transmissions to the Manhattan 911 dispatcher that we were trapped and that we needed assistance," he said. "I was concerned about the numerous people, uniformed and civilian, that I was working with, and trying to evacuate those that were now injured and also trapped under the debris. I was trying to give them our location.

"One of my proudest moments is that I was able under these situations to maintain radio discipline. As time lapsed, my transmissions were slower and a little more apprehensive realizing, that possibly we would not be found, I do believe that I was thinking of my family and wished that I might have had a few words with my wife."

Eventually he was rescued, and transported to a hospital where he suffered from his near fatal injuries and remained in a coma for weeks.

The events of Sept. 11 are not the only terrorist acts that Fuentes experienced during his career, which spanned more than 26 years.

He also operated at the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995.

"I have seen the effects of terrorism from operating at quite a few events, said Fuentes. "I am extremely concerned, first because of the massive damage that they inflict, with mass casualties not only to civilians but in first responders as well.

FDNY Capt. (Ret.) Alfredo Fuentes will be guest speaker for the CFAY Sept. 11 Remembrance Day Ceremony at the Chapel of Hope. A hero and survivor of the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks on the New York World Trade Center, Fuentes served as acting battalion chief for the FDNY Marine Division during the tragic events.

Photo courtesy of Alfredo Fuentes

See ***9-11 GUEST SPEAKER***, pg. 9