Yokosuka instructors conduct training at Sasebo JMSDF facility

Story and photo by MC1 Johnie Hickmon, Navy Public Affairs Support Element Japan

In an effort to save both time and money, Training Support Detachment WESTPAC (TSD WESTPAC), based in Yokosuka, Japan, held firefighting-wet training in Sasebo Nov. 9, at the new Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) firefighting facility.

According to TSD Director Rand Lee, this is the first time in many years TSD has held firefighting training in Sasebo.

"This is the first TSD training held at the new JMSDF firefighting facility," he said. "Years ago, we provided firefighting training for U.S. Navy ships in Sasebo in the same location, but this is the first training in the new training building, and under the new memorandum of understanding (MOU)."

In order to use the new JMSDF facility, the Navy had to receive permission to use the facilities from the government of Japan. There are several benefits to be gained from using the JMSDF facilities. One of the biggest benefits is the money the Navy can save by having Sasebo-based Sailors complete their training in their forward-deployed facility. Lee said the move will save "millions of Navy dollars."

"Ships from Sasebo have had to transit to Yokosuka for required firefighting and damage control training," Lee said. "The capability gained by use of the JMSDF facility saves hundreds of thousands of dollars by making the training available locally. As an example, it costs approximately $45,000 to send 24 sailors from Sasebo to Yokosuka for a one-day firefighting class. Additionally, if the ships from Sasebo must transit to Yokosuka and back just for firefighting and damage control training; it can cost as much as $250,000 for just fuel."

According to Information Systems Technician Chief (SW) Benjamin Tomlin, Afloat Training Group Western Pacific (ATGWP) public affairs officer, the training is a requirement for all Sailors assigned to duty aboard ships, and is supposed to be completed once a tour and within eight months of reporting on board.

"All forward-deployed naval forces Sailors should attend Shipboard Fire Fighting courses," Tomlin said.

CNE LSY instructor DC1 Christopher Juanfollowell explains how to seal check a mask during fire fighting training at the JMSDF Recruit Training Center Nov. 9. This was the first U.S. Navy Training Support Detachment training held at the new JMSDF facility. The Navy will save money by granting Sasebo-based Sailors training in the area rather than sending them to Yokosuka.

Tomlin went on to explain that funding for the training is provided by the Center for Navy Engineering, Learning Site Yokosuka (CNE LSY).

"Right now, the week-long training will be held for two weeks in the beginning of the year and two weeks at the end of the year" said Tomlin. "TSD is bringing all of the training tools and equipment down from Yokosuka and will conduct all of the training with ATG/TSD trainers."

"This firefighting and damage control training is a permanent training effort for the ships home ported in Sasebo," said Lee. "The hope is to conduct training each day for two weeks, twice a year. The Navy is only authorized by the MOU to conduct the training on a space available basis only, since it is located in the JMSDF Recruit Training Center. Consequently, the schedule has to be married up with the ships' operational schedules, the JMSDF availability, and the course schedules of the CNE LSY instructors."

As of now, in order to perform the training in Sasebo, the school house in Yokosuka has to be closed down. If things work out right, the benefits of having a training facility in both Yokosuka and Sasebo will be beneficial to both the Navy and Sailors.

"Hopefully, sometime in the future, we will have the ability to provide training in both locations simultaneously," Lee said. "The advantage of making this firefighting and damage control training available in Sasebo can not be overstated. In just the dollar savings alone, the benefit to the Sasebo-based ships is tremendous. If you also consider the benefit to the Sailors to be able to stay home for required training and the relationship established between the U.S. Navy and JMSDF by joint use of the facility, the impact of this training begins to expand greatly. It has been over a year in planning, and there are observers from Naval Education and Training Command in Pensacola, Fla., Training Support Center West and Commander Naval Surface Forces both in San Diego, ATGWP and TSD WESTPAC from Yokosuka, all anticipating a very successful training evolution, benefitting Sailors from Sasebo."

USNS Kiska departs 7th Fleet, heads to Pearl Harbor for deactivation

By MSC Public Affairs

The Military Sealift Command (MSC) ammunition ship USNS Kiska (T-AE 35) crossed the international date line Nov. 18, leaving the U.S. 7th Fleet area of responsibility (AOR) for the last time as the ship heads to Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, to begin preparations for deactivation.

Kiska has served the fleet for more than 38 years; 10 of which were spent as the 7th Fleet principal vessel for moving ordnance around the 48 million square miles of the Pacific and Indian Oceans. The 9,340-ton Kilauea-class Kiska provided underway replenishment of all types of ammunition, from missiles to bullets, for U.S. Navy ships.

"Through the tremendous efforts of her countless Sailors through the years, Kiska enabled our fleet to stay at sea and effectively perform our missions of power projections and sea control in the most challenging operational environment, thousands of miles from U.S. soil," said Commander U.S. 7th Fleet Vice Adm. Scott Van Buskirk.

MSC fleet of Kilauea-class and Mars-class combat stores ships are being replaced by a new fleet of Lewis and Clark-class, T-AKE dry cargo/ammunition ships, which consolidates both ship missions by providing multi-product, combat logistic support to U.S. Navy ships at sea.

USNS Matthew Perry (T-AKE 9) relieved Kiska of 7th Fleet AOR duties Oct. 30.

The primary goal of the T-AKE program, which calls for up to 14 ships at a budget of more than $6 billion, is to provide effective fleet underway replenishment capability at the lowest life cycle cost.

"Kiska's tradition of service to the fleet has remained consistent throughout the years," said retired Capt. Robert T. Collins, who served as Kiska commanding officer from 1992-1994. "I feel very fortunate to have been a part of her proud legacy and tradition of excellence."

Kiska was commissioned into the active U.S. Navy force as USS Kiska (AE 35) in 1972. The ship served during the Vietnam conflict and deployed to the Arabian Gulf in support of operation Desert Storm from 1990-1991.

"Kiska is a legend in Seventh Fleet, and has truly epitomized our motto — ready power for peace," Van Buskirk said.

Kiska was decommissioned and transferred to the service of the Navy's MSC in 1996. Kiska also deployed in support Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003.

"Kiska is the finest ship and crew that I have commanded in my 21 years as a ship captain with MSC," said Kiska civil service master Capt. Jeff Cook.

Kiska, with a crew of 133 civil service mariners employed by MSC, is scheduled to be deactivated January of next year.

MSC operates approximately 110 noncombatant, merchant mariner-crewed ships that replenish U.S. Navy ships, conduct specialized missions, strategically preposition combat cargo at sea around the world and move military cargo and supplies used by deployed U.S. forces and coalition partners.