USS Blue Ridge celebrates 39th birthday while at sea

By MCSN Cale J. Hatch, *USS Blue Ridge* Public Affairs

Sailors and Marines aboard *USS Blue Ridge* (LCC 19) celebrated the ship's 39th birthday Nov. 14 with a ceremonial cake-cutting, a special meal and a rendition of "Happy Birthday" sung by the crew.

"It took a lot of planning, knowing we'd be celebrating at sea," said Chief Culinary Specialist Paul Arboleda, who helped organize the celebration. "And that's a fitting place to celebrate the 39th birthday of the Navy's oldest and longest standing forward-deployed ship."

The third Navy vessel to bear the name, *Blue Ridge* was commissioned Nov. 14, 1970, at the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard as the most sophisticated command and control platform in the Navy.

"It's something to be proud of," said *Blue Ridge* Commanding Officer Capt. Thom W. Burke. "After 39 years, *Blue Ridge* retains the title of being the finest flagship in the fleet and still the most advanced command and control ship in the Navy."

The high technology communications systems that made the ship so valuable to the Navy at its commission, though upgraded many times since, continues to give *Blue Ridge* a unique and vital role in the fleet.

The maintenance and excellent condition of the ship have also led to an extension on the decommission date to 2019, giving *Blue Ridge* the chance to see many more birthdays before retiring.

Originally home ported in San Diego, *Blue Ridge* was forward-deployed to Yokosuka, Japan, to serve as the flagship for Commander, 7th Fleet July 17, 1979. *Blue Ridge* recently celebrated its 30th anniversary of being forward-deployed to Yokosuka, Japan, giving it the longest forward-deployed presence in the Navy.

Blue Ridge participated in the evacuation of Saigon, Vietnam, in 1975 and Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm from August 1990 through May 1991, serving as the flagship for U.S. Central Command.

Blue Ridge was underway on a scheduled fall 2009 deployment that included port visits to Guam, New Caledonia, Australia, Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam before returning to Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka, Japan Nov. 19.

Blue Ridge serves under Commander, Expeditionary Strike Group 7/Task Force 76, the Navy's only forward-deployed amphibious force. Task Force 76 is headquartered at White Beach Naval Facility, Okinawa, Japan, with an operating detachment in Sasebo, Japan.

Sailors assigned to the 7th Fleet command ship *USS Blue Ridge* (LCC 19) offload boxes of humanitarian supplies donated from Project Handclasp. *Blue Ridge* brought the supplies for the people of Da Nang, Vietnam affected by Typhoon Ketsana during a recent port visit.

U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Cynthia Griggs

Navy exceeds 2009 reenlistment goals

By Chief of Naval Personnel Public Affairs

The U.S. Navy achieved 108 percent of its reenlistment goals for fiscal year (FY) 2009, in addition to decreasing attrition rates due to "strong command and deckplate leadership," according to a Navy administrative message (NAVADMIN) released Nov. 2.

More than 30,000 Sailors serving in the first 14 years of their naval career, reenlisted - surpassing the Navy's overall reenlistment goal by 2,175 personnel. Reenlistment success in each zone contributed to the overall number.

In addition, attrition rates in each zone declined each year for the time period captured in the NAVADMIN. The largest decrease was in Zone A Sailors, whose attrition rate dropped by more than one percent.

On the heels of last year's success, the NAVADMIN also delineates FY10 retention goals, which have shifted in each zone to align community needs with the appropriate experience required to maintain a healthy force. Goals include:

• 55 percent retention for Zone A Sailors, those with up to six years of service;

• 60 percent retention for Zone B Sailors, those with six to 10 years of service;

• 71 percent retention for Zone C Sailors, those with 10 to 14 years of service.

"Command understanding of these individual goals is essential in influencing the desired reenlistment behavior for our most critical ratings," said Chief of Naval Personnel Vice Adm. Mark Ferguson, in the message. "Proper tracking of first-term Sailors and timely submission of Perform to Serve applications are essential to maintaining a high-quality force."

***USS George Washington* (CVN 73) Sailors reenlist in the forecastle of the carrier May 8. The Navy achieved 108 percent of its reenlistment goals for fiscal year 2009, in addition to decreasing attrition rates due to strong command and deckplate leadership.**

U.S. Navy photo by MCSA Rachel N. Clayton

The Navy has a variety of programs to encourage top performing Sailors to remain on active duty, including Navy Credentialing On-line (COOL) which allows achievement of civilian equivalent occupational certifications and the Assignment Incentive Pay Program, which allows Sailors to bid on critical, hard-to-fill billets, allowing individuals more control over their own career path.

Information on objectives for each rating can be found on the enlisted retention dashboard at www.bol.navy.mil.

Sailors moving despite lack of 2010 budget

By MCC(SW) Maria Yager, NPC Public Affairs

Navy Personnel Command (NPC) has released Permanent Change of Station (PCS) orders to keep the fleet moving, despite the lack of a fiscal year (FY) 2010 budget, Navy officials announced Nov. 16.

"Until the National Defense Appropriations Bill has been signed by the President, the entire Defense Department is operating under a continuing resolution authority (CRA). This means that PCS funding is allocated in small increments," said NPC Rear Adm. Don Quinn.

NPC spends more than $600 million annually on PCS moves, but has only received a fraction of the funds requested in its FY 2010 budget. The command has had to prioritize which moves can be funded. While operating under the CRA, PCS orders are released as funding becomes available each month.

NPC has been able to release orders for Sailors transferring in November and most of December using CRA funds received in October. New funds received in November should allow NPC to release orders for Sailors detaching through March.

The goal is to minimize impacts to fleet readiness, career timing and families. The priority moves are global war on terrorism support assignments, career milestone billets, critical readiness fills (those that minimize gaps at sea for deployed units and those working up to deploy) and moves that keep the training pipelines moving.