Patriot's Landing first officer in charge bids farewell to Japan

By MCSN Michael Mulcare, *USS George Washington* Public Affairs

Aviation Intermediate Maintenance Department (AIMD) Quality Assurance Officer and former Patriot's Landing Officer in Charge Lt. Manny Aranda is departing Japan in December. Aranda and his minutemen are responsible for the start up of Patriot's Landing and the transition of roughly 400 Sailors and their families to Yokosuka.

"I called my staff minutemen because they were always ready to help shipmates at any time day or night," said Aranda.

(Left) Patriot's Landing OIC Lt. Manny Aranda welcomes new families to the Patriot's Landing Father's Day barbecue June 13, 2008. Aranda and his minutemen are responsible for the start up of Patriot's Landing and the transition of roughly 400 Sailors and their families to Yokosuka. Aranda departs Japan at the end of December. U.S. Navy file photo by PSC Ferdinand Quinto

The transition for some Sailors from the United States to Japan could be a stressful task according to Aranda.

"When Sailors first got here most of the families had nothing," said Aranda, "We got them furniture, plates, pots and pans, utensils, TVs, and bedding from base supplies, our sponsors, and The New Sanno hotel.

"We basically made it so when they walked into their new housing they had everything they needed and wouldn't have to start completely over. Then, when they got their own things, they'd return the items and we'd loan the items to another family," said Aranda. "I'd say 80 percent of the time we'd have new families settled into their homes and out of the Navy Lodge in five days or less."

The minutemen staff even had a person dedicated to helping families purchase affordable cars from quality sources.

"MR1 (Machinery Repairman 1st Class) Guillermo Acenas was helping families purchase cars," Aranda said. "He'd talk to people out in town, go to auctions and talk to the dealership on base about getting a good price for his shipmates.

"We once had a lady call us crying and telling us the car she had just purchased from a gentleman on base broke down. We had someone drive over and get her to her appointment with Rental Partnership Program (RPP). Later down the road we eventually got her a full refund for the car," he said.

Patriot's Landing now has its own challenge coin that has eight stars on the back for each minuteman who helped Sailors transition.

"We took the worry away from our shipmates so they could concentrate on the tasking at hand," said Chief Personnel Specialist (SW/AW) Ferdinand Quinto, Personnel Office leading chief petty officer. "Lt. Aranda was very caring for his shipmates and wanted to make sure their families were cared for. He did not want his shipmates out at sea to feel pressured about not being there when their family made their transition to Japan without them."

"I'm going to miss my shipmates," Aranda said. "It was a pleasure to serve them and their families. I couldn't have done it without my staff and a great chief like Chief Quinto."

Embarked Golden Dragons head home after final *GW* departure

By MC2(SW) John J. Mike, *USS George Washington* Public Affairs

Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 192 departed *USS George Washington* (*GW*) (CVN 73) for the last time as a member of embarked Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 5 Nov. 18.

After having been forward-deployed to Naval Air Facility Atsugi since 1986, the "World Famous Golden Dragons," are scheduled to transfer to Naval Air Station (NAS) Lemoore, Calif., in December for an upgrade to the F/A-18 Super Hornet.

"Leaving Japan is the end of a long chapter in our squadron's history and we're sad to be going," said VFA 192 Commanding Officer Cmdr. Keith Henry.

Commander CVW 5 Capt. Ross Myers said the departure of VFA 192 is tough, but in the long-run beneficial for the Navy and the air wing's host nation.

"The Golden Dragon's have relished their time here, but they realize they have to go home," said Myers. "It is a bittersweet moment, but rotating the Dragons stateside for upgrades will bring them and CVW 5 greater capability to carry out the Navy's mission of global maritime security."

As their last F/A-18C Hornet cleared the *GW* flight deck into haze-gray weather, the Golden Dragons began their journey, which will eventually take them back to their roots in sunny Southern California.

An F/A-18C Hornet from VFA 192 launches off the flight deck of *USS George Washington* (CVN 73). After having been a member of embarked CVW 5, the "World Famous Golden Dragons" are scheduled to transfer to Naval Air Station Lemoore, Calif., in December for an upgrade to the F/A-18 Super Hornet. U.S. Navy photo by MC1 John M. Hageman

"I keep telling the Dragons they're heading home," said Henry. "Lemoore has been home to the Golden Dragons for longer than any other and we're looking forward to our return."

Over the past 24 years, the Golden Dragons have flown roughly 52,000 hours, launched and recovered roughly 33,000 aircraft and embarked on each of the permanently forward-deployed aircraft carriers *USS Midway* (CV 41), *USS Independence* (CV 62), *USS Kitty Hawk* (CV 63) and *GW*.

As a member of CVW 5, the Golden Dragons carried on their legacy of excellence by playing key roles in important military operations in the 5th and 7th Fleet areas of responsibility.

In 1990, VFA 192 made multiple strikes on Iraqi missile batteries during the first night of Operation Desert Storm. They helped spearhead Operation Southern Watch in 1992, which established the Iraqi no-fly zone. In response to the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, the Golden Dragons participated in Operation Enduring Freedom. The squadron also flew the most CVW 5 combat missions during its 2003 involvement in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The "World Famous Golden Dragons" of VFA 192 are scheduled to be replaced by the "Eagles" of VFA 115, which fly the F/A-18E Super Hornet.