

**BLUE RIDGE WINNER OF THE  
BATTLE “E” AWARD!**

**SUPPLY BRINGS HOME “NEY” AWARD FOR  
SERVICE!**

**WHAT BLUE RIDGE AND AMERICAN IDOL  
HAVE IN COMMON**





# BLUE RIDGE LCC-19

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BLUE RIDGE family and friends,

Welcome to the first “E” version of the BLUE RIDGE newsletter. I hope this finds you in good spirits and that you have had the opportunity to spend quality family time with your Sailor since our last underway period.



I wanted to take a few moments to touch base with you and share my sincere feelings of pride and gratitude for YOUR Sailor’s service and sacrifice. The infectious motivation, dynamic personalities and total dedication to our team displayed by every one of our crewmembers ensure BLUE RIDGE is and will always remain the finest warship in the fleet.

As we approach the hot and humid Japanese summer, the ship is more than one-third of the way finished with a very intense and arduous Dry Dock Selected Restricted Availability (DSRA). More than \$30 million worth of repairs and upgrades are in progress...changes that will make BLUE RIDGE even better and more capable to proudly serve as the Seventh Fleet flagship and answer the call to fight when needed. Although the work is dirty and extremely challenging, every Sailor here is rising to the challenge and contributing to the team.

As a crew, we’ve really come together in the unfamiliar setting of a dry dock. We’ve set our standards high and have a burning desire to not only achieve, but also surpass our goals while in the shipyard. By working and staying together as ONE team, we’ve made significant



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progress. I'm confident that a continued spark of pride and ownership will sustain a sense of commitment within the ranks, resulting in complete success.

We've already revamped many officer and enlisted living quarters and facilities, cleaned out two boilers and have made a good turnaround on mooring stations and topside preservation of the ship. We're also in the process of completely overhauling 11 fan rooms, replacing the ship's air-conditioning system and two diesel engines and a diesel generator are also scheduled for installation.

As you can tell by the list of jobs and accomplishments, the task at hand isn't undemanding. But all things are difficult before they become easy. By keeping our minds focused on our goals here, we're guaranteed to achieve them. All of the hard work will pay off in the long run and the results of everybody's hard work will be felt and appreciated once your Sailors get back to doing what they do best...serving Seventh Fleet, our Navy and our country on the high seas.

I believe that determination and teamwork are often the first chapter in the book of excellence. Everyday, your Sailor writes the book and I'm humbled and proud to serve as his or her commanding officer.

Warmest regards,

Captain J. Stephen Maynard



## Blue Ridge Earns Second Consecutive Battle 'E'

By JOSA Marc C. Rockwell-Pate

USS Blue Ridge (LCC 19) earned the Battle Efficiency Award for the second year in a row March 31. The award recognizes a ship for superior performance and a day-to-day demonstration of excellence. "Winning the Battle 'E' during my major sea command (tour) is one (award) I will always remember, even after I retire," said CAPT. Steve Maynard, Blue Ridge Commanding Officer. Blue Ridge, the command ship for the U.S. 7th Fleet, earned the award for large deck amphibious ships through overall teamwork and excelling in each department, said LCDR. Brad Juhl, the ship's operations officer. "The fact that we also won four command excellence awards really played a big part in winning the Battle 'E,' too," said Juhl, an Oak Hill, VA., native. Blue Ridge won Command Excellence awards in maritime warfare for combat systems, engineering/survivability for engineering department, logistics management for supply department and the Type Command Safety Award for 2003. These awards were given based on sustained superior operational excellence over a 12-month period. Blue Ridge also won the CAPT. Edward Ney Excellence in Food Service Award for 2003. Blue Ridge received this award for the best food service in the large deck amphibious ship class. LCDR. Allan Walters, the ship's Combat Systems Officer, emphasized that earning all these awards demonstrated that leadership from officers and the entire crew really makes the ship work so well together. "Every sailor on the





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deckplates of this ship was critical to us winning the Battle 'E' award," Walters said. Boatswain's Mate 2nd Class Edgardo Bauzon said, "It feels good to be able to contribute to the ship's success for both certifications and inspections. "Our overall great effort on the deck was rewarded by high appreciation from not only the chain of command, but also the Navy by the winning the Battle 'E'," added Bauzon. Senior Chief Machinist's Mate (SW) Jose Espenida, Engineering's Leading



Chief Petty Officer, said he feels that leadership and communication definitely play big roles on the ship. "The relay system that we have from the Chief of Engineering all the way down to the enlisted personnel is what allows us to do our jobs well and

get down to the smallest details of a problem," said Espenida, a native of Mililani, Hawaii. "USS Blue Ridge has not only set new standards for ships in the Pacific Fleet, but also for command and control ships throughout the Navy," said RADM. Gary Jones, Commander, Amphibious Forces U.S. 7th Fleet. "This (award) really belongs to my crew; each and every one of them contributed in every way and should all be proud of their accomplishments," said Maynard. Although the ship is going into an extended dry dock maintenance period, Blue Ridge is in the competitive Battle "E" cycle for 2004. "I am sure the ship will be at its peak readiness when it gets out and will continue with the tradition it has established," Maynard concluded.



## USS Blue Ridge Wins Ney Award for Food Service Excellence

By JO2 Luke D. Johnson

ABOARD USS BLUE RIDGE, at Sea- USS Blue Ridge (LCC 19) won the annual CAPT. Edward Ney award for large afloat ships in the Pacific Fleet for food service excellence Feb. 24. The award is sponsored by Naval Supply Systems Command and the International Food Service Executives Association (IFSEA), and is based on a series of inspections conducted throughout the year. According to the ship's food service officer, LT. Elisha E. Singleton, lots of hard work and long term planning went into preparing for the Ney award. "We improved the look of the galley, and we also got some new equipment. We also added some more food choices on the mess decks," said Singleton, a Marshall, Texas, native. "We also made sure all of our supply records were accurate." Master Chief Culinary Specialist (SW) Steve Francisco, Blue Ridge's Assistant Food Services Officer, said that grueling hours of work went in to making sure every aspect of the Blue Ridge food services division was squared away. "We spent many hours going through all of the checkpoints that the inspectors look at, the checkpoints cover everything from food preparation to financial accountability," said Francisco. "The inspectors had a check list and then made sure that we followed all of the rules. They scrutinized all our records, inventory, and sanitation. They also made sure that our food was presented properly," said Singleton. Francisco said first impressions are important when competing for prestigious awards. "We made sure that our spaces were well prepared before the inspectors came through, and also that our personnel were squared away and had a positive attitude when presenting their work centers," said Francisco. Singleton believes that an important aspect in winning the award was the appearance of the Culinary Specialists (CS's). "I made sure that the CS's looked good



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and felt good about the work they were doing on the mess decks, and if they felt good about what they did they would naturally provide the best service for the crew,” said Singleton. This is the first time Blue Ridge has competed for the Ney award in its 32-year history. “We became eligible for the Ney award after we scored a 99.2 percent on a supply inspection in November, explained Singleton. Singleton credits the senior enlisted leadership in the supply department for maintaining a continuous level of excellence in food services. “I really listened to the



Master Chief and Chiefs to learn from them and to follow their guidance. I really learned a lot from their years of experience on the mess decks and in supply,” said Singleton. The

entire crew was a great help to the CS’s, said Singleton. The crew gave both praise and feedback, essential for the supply department to learn and improve. “One of the items that impressed the inspectors the most was the tremendous support of the crew, and especially the engineers who fixed all of our equipment in a timely manner.” said Francisco. “The winner of this award is not only the CS’s, but the entire Blue Ridge crew.” As a reward for winning the NEY award, three CS’s will attend the culinary institute of America in Hyde Park, N.Y.

## **Blue Ridge Sailor's Daughter Vies for Fame on 'American Idol'**

By JO2 Luke D. Johnson,

ABOARD USS BLUE RIDGE, At Sea — A Sailor assigned to the amphibious command and control ship USS Blue Ridge (LCC 19) had the honor of watching his daughter perform on “American Idol” Feb. 18. Machinist’s Mate 1st Class (SW) William Velasco, assigned to the ship’s engineering department, found out his daughter would appear on FOX Network’s popular talent search program as one of 32 finalists on the show’s Feb. 17 telecast. “I never told anyone that my daughter was going to be on ‘American Idol,’” said Velasco, 43, “until they put it on the night engineering orders, and everyone came to congratulate me on my daughter’s success.” Velasco said his daughter’s singing career began at age 16. Her first performances were at the Philippine community centers in Hawaii. Now Camile, an 18-year-old waitress from Haiku, Maui in Hawaii, had the opportunity of a lifetime to boost her singing career on “American Idol.” The winner from each season gets a recording contract. His daughter currently lives in Hawaii, while he is stationed aboard Blue Ridge, forward deployed to Yokosuka, Japan. “American Idol came to Hawaii, and she participated in the tryouts,” said Velasco. The Batanes, Philippines, native waited nervously on the mess decks for his daughter to make her appearance. He sat quietly by himself as sailors around him erupted in a loud ovation when Camile appeared on screen to perform Brian McKnight’s song “One Last Cry.” “I think that this is truly fantastic that Velasco’s daughter is on American Idol. It almost makes me cry,” said Personnelman 2nd Class (SW) Christopher Hydron, from Las Vegas. The television appearance was also the first time Velasco had seen his daughter sing. “I have not had a chance to see her perform yet, and I am very excited to see how



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she will do on the show,” said Velasco. “My daughter enjoys singing hip hop and R&B songs. She also loves to perform in front of a crowd.” Velasco said his daughter’s goal is to attend a music college in Sacramento, CA. But he admits that what she really wants to do is be a famous singer. “I will always support her no matter what career choice



she chooses,” he said. After Camile’s performance, Sailors erupted in a roar of cheers, and everyone on the mess decks congratulated Velasco. Culinary Specialist 1st Class (SW) Froilan Santabarbara, from Manila, Philippines, said it’s easy to see how proud Velasco was to see his daughter on the small screen. “I am very glad for her. I have a daughter myself, and I can only imagine how proud Velasco must feel. I know he was proud, because I would be, too, if my daughter was up there singing,” said Santabarbara. Velasco was especially happy to learn that his daughter’s performance was good enough to get her into the next round, bringing her one step closer to possibly being the next winner. He said that he has high hopes for his daughter. “I really hope that she gets to go all the way,” he added.



## ENGINEERING

Teamwork! Undoubtedly, engineers have mastered this concept. From a successful Initial Assessment and Underway Demonstration resulting from many hours of combined hard work and determination, to the accomplishment of emergent repairs, numerous trouble calls, and a plethora of equipment maintenance, BLUE RIDGE engineers have set the standard for excellence throughout the fleet. In anticipation of the Initial Assessment, my engineers were focused and dedicated to achieving the maximum level of material and safety readiness. Countless hours were devoted to space preservation and equipment maintenance. Flexing their muscles and demonstrating their dexterity, their preparations for the Initial Assessment were in conjunction with ship-wide preparation for the joint exercise, *Terminal Fury*. Always resourceful and professional, my engineers were able to maintain steady progress while also manning a 24-hour trouble call team to address any crew concerns. Unquestionably, their efforts greatly enhanced the comfort and quality of life of embarked personnel. A multi-faceted group, they not only improved habitability but also successfully completed the Initial Assessment.



Upon the completion of the Post-Initial Assessment, the focus was placed on obtaining a Main Space Fire Doctrine certification. The ship certified in one day, which is a testament to the hard work and determination of the crew. After certifying, all efforts were focused on preparing for the Underway Demonstration. While keeping a steady strain repairing material and equipment discrepancies and maintaining a superior plant status, an intensive and aggressive training schedule was implemented. In addition to classroom training, drills were conducted daily and nightly. Effective training in casualty control response and procedures greatly increased watch stander proficiency in their current stations, while also enabling them to advance to the next watch station. Long hours and



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dedication were rewarded by a successful completion of the Underway Demonstration.

The success of my engineers can only be attributed to their hard work and commitment to excellence. Is it any wonder they are the best on the waterfront?

## Communications

The last several months have been busy: Communications Department went into the holiday leave period on a high note by providing unparalleled C4I support to CJTF-519 in Exercise Terminal Fury 04. We provided LAN and numerous C4I links supporting over 400 emarkees in a joint warfighting scenario. After celebrating the holiday season, it was back to business! In January and February, we deployed to various ports in the Western Pacific. We made port calls to Malaysia, Thailand, China, and Nagoya, where we were able to have fun and appreciate the local cultures. During the deployment, BLUE RIDGE conducted Underway Demonstration, which challenged all engineering watch standers in evolutions and drill sets. Comm Department was involved as well. Numerous IT's man the repair lockers, and our communicators contributed greatly to the effectiveness of combating a main space fire. However, as we were busy walking beautiful beaches and sampling exotic food, time had to be made to plan the Seventh Fleet Staff move-off and make drydock (DSRA) preparations. Upon mooring back in Yokosuka, we rolled directly into the mammoth project of migrating all information and services for C7F onto USS Coronado and moving everyone else onto a berthing barge.

With an extended underway period and a critical move-off of Seventh Fleet Staff in preparation for DSRA, the sailors of the Communications Department have been keeping themselves busy, but they have still found time to reach individual pinnacles of professional success. Between combating all of the daily problems that can arise on the Navy's most extensive communications suite and taking time out to practice their firefighting skills, a number of sailors have been able to achieve their Enlisted Surface Warfare Specialist (ESWS) qualification. The mighty conquerors of professional success over the last several months are: IT1(SW) Smith, IT2(SW) Davis, IT2(SW) West, IT3 (SW)Zavala, IT3(SW) McDonald, IT2(SW) Murphy, IT2(SW) L. Brown, IT3(SW) Sutton. Congratulations on your achievement!!!



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The individual accomplishments such as ESWS qualification are 'par for the course' for the sailors of Communications Department, as exemplified by a few exceptionally motivated sailors: IT2(SW) Mark Porcelli recently received the Navy-wide C4I Copernicus Award for his initiative and knowledge as the lead technician in the administration and maintenance of the USS Blue Ridge's Satellite Communications System; IT1(SW) Eric Stowe was selected as the COMPHIBGRUONE Sailor of the Year for 2003 and IT3(SW) Richard Kendle was selected as the USS Blue Ridg Sailor of the Quarter in March.

The upcoming summer months hold a myriad of challenges and changes as we enter the heart of DSRA, and we're more than prepared to meet those challenges, particularly with the support of our friends and family!

## COMBAT SYSTEMS



The past few months have been some of the most intense in Combat Systems Department history. Last year we were busy getting ready for INSURV, C5RA and training certification inspections. This year Combat Systems has exercised its maximum capabilities in supporting COMSEVENTHFLT staff operational requirements.

2004 kicked off when BLUE

RIDGE received its underway schedule for the spring deployment. Combat Systems immediately began preparing for the underway period by writing detailed ship Force Protection plans for each port. LTJG Stamberger began his deployment early, flying out ahead of the ship to ensure final preparations and security measures were in place prior to BLUE RIDGE's arrival. The ET's continued to provide excellent maintenance support on all shipboard communications and computer systems (C4I), allowing COMSEVENTHFLT to quickly communicate with the rest of Pacific Fleet and run operations while underway. The IC's worked hard to ensure all interior communication equipment was on par for the successful underway demonstration. GM's and FC's performed countless gun shoots while underway, increasing the ship's combat readiness while qualifying numerous personnel in shipboard small arms weapons. The Force



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Protection Cadre did an outstanding job ensuring the welfare and security of the ship in dangerous ports such as Port Kelang, Malaysia; Sattahip, Thailand; Shanghai, China; and Manila Bay, Philippines.

The Master-at-Arms office is an ever-changing organization due to recent TAD's and transfers. Despite many changes, leadership is strong and all have been able to keep up with the fast pace. During the Shanghai visit, the entire MA force performed flawlessly when tasked with providing roving security and counter-intelligence watches. In recent months, BLUE RIDGE's Masters-at-Arms have augmented security for the visit of Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and have embarked over 300 personnel in support of Seventh Fleet exercises.

While CSS division was busy providing security, CSF division worked together to get the ship weapons qualifications completed. Conducting over 20 live fire events in a 6-week period, CSF GM's and FC's were constantly putting rounds out the barrel. GM's strove to constantly improve their magazine and armory spaces while at the same time performing continuing maintenance on all shipboard small arm weapons. FC's performed numerous live fires with their highly effective Close-In Weapons System (CIWS). CSF division played a key role in supporting the Force Protection Cadre, which resulted in BLUE RIDGE being prepared for any situation in all the foreign ports we visited. The Force Protection Cadre was rewarded for their efforts by being selected as the best operational unit in the Pacific Fleet for 2003. Well done! Congratulations to FC3 Stark, who received his ESWS pin after months of hard studying.

CSI division's main contribution to the spring underway period was their meticulous attention to detail in preparation for the ship's engineering inspection; Underway Demonstration. Bringing their long list of trouble calls down to zero, Combat Systems IC's had enough time to repair numerous communication equipment casualties to support engineering evolutions.





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Additionally, IC3 Herr was selected as Combat System's Sailor of the Quarter for the first quarter of 2004.

CSE division added to their always busy schedule by maintaining and improving their massive inventory of computer equipment. USPACOM directly thanked CSE's proud ET's for providing excellent C4I support during recent Seventh Fleet exercises. Most exercises are entirely satellite communications dependent, placing CSE at the forefront of BLUE RIDGE operations. In preparation for Dry Docking Availability (DSRA), CSE division coordinating the storing and transfer of hundreds of computer assets as Seventh Fleet moved off of BLUE RIDGE and onto USS CORONADO. ET1 Gideon, ET3 Chu, M., ET3 Scally, ET3 Jefferson, and ET3 Caguin recently received their ESWS pins after lots of hard studying.

Congratulations to ET2 Hines, ET2 Felmlee and ET1 Gideon on their recent promotions. Recent weddings within CSE division include ET3 Mehringer and Ms. Yoko Miura, ET2(SW) Cassin and Ms. Noriko Shiga, and ET3(SW) Jefferson and Dr. Niall Jefferson. And last, but certainly not least, ET3(SW) Hebenstreit and his wife Abigale are the proud parents of Taylor Hebenstreit. Congratulations.

Needless to say there have been a lot of changes in Combat Systems Department; however, the commitment to success and quality of work remain the same. Combat Systems spends long hours doing a lot of hard work, but it never goes without recognition. Congratulations to all on running a tight watch and keeping BLUE RIDGE ready for anything.

## SUPPLY

Supply Department had an extremely successful 2003 and continued the New Year in the same fashion. For the 10<sup>th</sup> time and consecutively in the last two years, the department earned the Blue "E" for logistical excellence, a factor that played a major role in the ship earning a back-to-back Battle "E" this spring. Looking back, Supply Department's successes began to blossom late last year - the Blue E is the result of careful long-term planning and hard work by the entire department.

In September, Supply Department held their IDTC-required Supply Management Assessment, just prior to the Fall Deployment, and came through with flying colors. So highly successful was the result that the assessment was upgraded to an inspection certification with an overall grade of "OUTSTANDING." Individually, S1 General Stores scored a 98.35%, S2 Food Service a 99.20%, and S3 Retail Ops 97.59%. These scores were the highest ever achieved in Blue Ridge



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history. The outstanding scores reflect the hard work and dedication to service excellence of the entire department.

Following the SMI, Blue Ridge enjoyed an exciting underway period that included visits to Hakodate, Hong Kong, Okinawa, and Guam. During this deployment, the Department received yet another success when the Sales/Service Division received the Ship's Store Retail and Service Excellence Award (Pacific Fleet Best of Class designation). This award was given to the ship that presented the "highest commitment to enhancing the quality of shipboard life through and



outstanding ship's store operation." Furthermore, the ship's servicemen were able to contribute \$22,000 in profits to MWR, keeping on pace with previous remarkable results. To break up the daily routine, the Sales division held a Midnight Madness Sale and Raffle before our return to homeport, raffling off a camcorder, digital camera, Xbox, and a MP3 Player. It was widely acclaimed and turned out to be a huge success! On our journey home from Guam, the ship held a special Tiger Cruise for family and friends, who had the opportunity to see our ship in operation. A special steel beach picnic on the main deck was organized for the tigers by the Food service division, and the S-5 Wardroom Division held a special dinner for the wardroom's tigers/guests as well.

December brought around another successful major embarkation for Blue Ridge in the Terminal Fury Fleet Exercise. The S-5 Billeting/Wardroom Division was the big player in this, maintaining its flexibility and providing its trademark 5-Star service to accommodate and feed 300 joint officers, including 25 Flag Officers, and S-2 provided its highest quality food service to hundreds



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of enlisted personnel during this exercise. Supply's performance was exceptional and was given great accolades for a job well done.

After the much needed holiday stand down, the ship busily prepared for an upcoming spring deployment. During this period, the department experienced a significant change as LT Sonny Alinio took the reins of the department, and CDR Chris Rodrigues moved on. Nearly two weeks later, the ship was underway and Supply was performing as flawlessly as ever. This year's Spring deployment included exciting port visits to Port Kelang, Sattahip, Okinawa, Shanghai, an anchorage in Manila, and Nagoya. During the deployment, The Supply Team, specifically our Culinary Specialists' dream of winning the Captain Edward F. Ney Memorial Award was realized. This prestigious award for service excellence, which is awarded for "an innovative approach to food service, technical and fiscal expertise, and diligence in providing the highest customer service" was officially awarded to Blue Ridge in February, after a keen final competition with the USS Essex for the award in the large afloat Pacific Fleet Ships category. Most remarkably, it was the first time the Blue Ridge competed for the award in her 32-year history. Furthermore, the food service division demonstrated its culinary specialty by providing a special meal for African American Heritage Month and a Tiger Cruise Ice Cream Social. During this same underway, Ships Servicemen's hard work contributed \$30,000 in profits to MWR. As a continued manifestation of the commitment to providing excellent service to the crew and MWR, the Sales division held two raffles, during mid and final legs of the deployment, which presented 2 big screen TVs, a laptop PC, a DVD player, an Xbox, a Game Cube, a Play Station 2, digital cameras, digital camcorders, a \$300 cash prize and ship's mugs to lucky winners.

S-1 continuously provided top-notch logistics service to the crew and Postal has hit the mark with four consecutive grades of "outstanding" on quarterly postal assessments, and an outstanding on its 18-month major assessment. Disbursing has continued to set the pace with outstanding service to crew, including 12 consecutive grades of outstanding on monthly COMNAVSURFPAC DJMS report cards and all Quarterly Cash Verification Audits have been outstanding across the board. The efforts of the entire department have been superb, and all have contributed significantly in the achievement of our 10<sup>th</sup> Blue "E" and second in a row.

Congratulations go to the following personnel who earned the warfare qualification: CS1(SW) Santa Barbara, CS1(SW) Swenson, CS1(SW) Cabacungan, CS2(SW) Gozon, CS3(SW) Lisser, CS3(SW) Yoder, CS3(SW) Davis, SH1(SW) Mamaril, SH1(SW) Amberger, SH1(SW) Mandal, SH3(SW) Rouse, SH3(SW) Clay, SHSN(SW) Frias.



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Another notable achievement within Supply Department was its 100% Reenlistment rate. This helped the ship earn its golden anchors for retention. Additionally, DK3 Wu and SH1Mamaril were advanced to their current rates via the Command Advancement Program (CAP), CSSN Buhs advanced to CS3, and CSC(SW/AW) Najera, SKC(SW) Bautista, and PC2 Ray were all awarded the Navy Achievement Medal.

The following personnel were selected as the MS and FSA of the month:

MSSA John Converse – OCT 03

IT3Angelica Demasi – OCT 03

MSSN James Nelson – NOV 03

MM3 Amber McCoy – NOV 03

MSSN Jason Mortis – DEC 03

CTASN Eric James – DEC 03

{ Effective January 15, 2004, NAVADMIN was released and the Mess Specialist (MS) rating was changed to Culinary Specialist (CS). }

The following personnel were selected as the CS and FSA of the month:

CS3 Jason Sikes – JAN 04

FC3 David Riggs – JAN 04

CSSN James Nelson – FEB 04

EM3 Anthony Rantayo – FEB 04

CS3 Michael Johnson – MAR 04



LI3 Brian Dunbar – MAR 04

S-5 has a lot to be proud of, as they did a superb job accommodating the wardroom and several of its tigers over the last 2 major deployments. The division organized five special meals.



The Supply department may have just won its 10th Blue “E” but it is already eyeing for the next one. Our philosophy is and will always be customer service excellence through respect, honesty and teamwork. I could not be much grateful and humbled that I lead the Finest Supply Department in the Fleet.



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## DECK

Now that 2003 came to a close and we are approaching the midpoint of 2004, it is clear that Deck Department remains a top-performer on USS Blue Ridge. Despite a large turnover of personnel recently within the department, we haven't missed a beat, and are riding a wave of success into our challenging DSRA period.

During last summer's SRA 42, Deck once again did an outstanding job of preserving and enhancing the material condition of the ship. The long hours put in by the department and the work accomplished during this availability period helped to ease the strain during our current DSRA.

Deck had several highly motivated sailors who put in the hard work and sustained the motivation necessary to earn their Enlisted Surface Warfare Specialty (ESWS) pins. Several others are on the cusp of qualifying. Among the proud recipients were BM2(SW) Lusk, BM2(SW) Rounds, and BM3(SW) Austin. Congratulations to them, and for everyone else still working on that pin – keep pressing!

In preparation for the Commander, Naval Forces Japan change of command ceremony, a much-anticipated event, Deck Department once again outdid itself. Working long hours, the people of Deck ensured that every intricate detail was attended to. During the week leading up to the ceremony, Deck performed all of the final painting, preservation, and upkeep of the main deck, quarterdecks, and ship's sides. These efforts did not go unnoticed, and the ship received great praise from all in attendance for its superb appearance.

In November, BM1(SW) Townsend and BM2(SW) Lusk led the charge for Deck Department in readying the ship for its Aviation





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Readiness Qualification (ARQ). ARQ is an assessment of the flight deck and damage control equipment's condition, as well as the training/readiness of the crew with regard to flight deck operations. It required the crew to conduct several drills, including firefighting on the flight deck and in the fuel pump rooms located below decks. Everyone in Deck was involved with fixing up and cleaning all the flight deck equipment and ensuring proper PMS was conducted. Deck's long hours, hard work and dedication paid off as ATG was overwhelmed with the ship's performance. As a result, Blue Ridge earned an outstanding ARQ score of 98%, the highest in 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet.

Deck department truly shines when the ship is underway. All of the focus on training and safety paid off, as the department had zero major incidents at sea during the 3 major underway deployments in the last year. Deck department conducted five UNREPs flawlessly and qualified many newly reported personnel in vital positions, which hold the ship in good stead for future operations. It was Deck that most directly contributed to COMSEVENTHFLT's diplomatic mission during the 2003 Southern Pacific Forward Presence Deployment and Southern Swing in early 2004. Maintaining the ship's excellent material condition and constructing the Big Top for diplomatic gatherings made a strong first impression. Deck has been very successful in the last year, but there is much work to be done during our current DSRA period. Already great progress has been made in the complete rehabilitation of all mooring stations and the preservation of the handrails on the main deck. A lot of change and fresh challenges await Deck Department while in Dry Dock. The department is ready for the task and is sure to excel in the months to come.





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USS Blue Ridge has just finished a very successful annual Southern Presence Deployment with various exciting ports of call that included Malaysia, Thailand, Okinawa, and Shanghai China. There were 4 lucky Operation Specialist's (OS2 Kimura, OS3 Rodriguez, OS3 An and OS3 Moraza) who got to take a tour to Beijing and see the "Great Wall of China" up close and personal. Our deployment finished with a port visit to Nagoya Japan, in which we embarked family members and friends and allowed them to ride the ship for a one day "TIGER" cruise back to our home port of Yokosuka Japan. The seas were calm and everyone had a great time with the crew of the USS Blue Ridge, learning about everyday life at sea.

While underway, watch standing for the Operations Specialist's allowed for time to enhance personnel growth in various in-rate qualifications as well as qualifications required for shipboard duties. I would like to congratulate the following personnel for achieving the Enlisted Surface Warfare Specialist qualification, which earns them recognition as a surface warrior: OS1 Mcnair, OS2 Edora, OS2 Johnson, OS2 Upshaw, OS3 Moraza, OS3 Latimore, OS3 An and OS3 Martin. I would also like to congratulate the following personnel for their Combat Information Center Watch Supervisor qualification: OS1 Mcnair, OS2 Tucker, OS2 Johnson, OS2 Kimura, OS2 Elosegui and OS3 Rodriguez. WELL DONE ALL! You continue to be a leader in the division and we are lucky to have you.

Twice a year the Navy has holds its advancement examinations in which sailors have the opportunity to be advanced to the next higher pay grade. With this advancement comes added responsibility as well as money! I want to say well done to the following personnel for achieving their advancement to the next higher pay grade in these past few months: OS1 Mcnair, OS2 Austin, OS2 Edora, OS2 Johnson, OS2 Upshaw, OS3 Barbee, OS3 Garcia, OS3 Green, OS3 Martin, OS3 Sessions, OS3 Latimore, OS3 Lyle and OS3 Towles.

We have added a few new sailors to our division since our last newsletter, welcome: OSC Still, OS2 Elosegui, OS3 Latimore, OS3 Barbee, OSSN Brown, OSSN Incerto and OSSN Crawford. You all are quickly becoming an invaluable part of the division and a vital member of the Combat Information Center team.

Unfortunately as time passes we have to bid farewell to a few sailors who have already transferred to various other commands to continue their careers in the Navy: OS2 Curry, OS2 Amado and OS2 Rodriguez. We also bid farewell to OS2 Buford and OS2 Veasey who served their country proudly and decided to start a new career

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outside of the Navy. Good luck in your future endeavors.

I'd like to close by telling you how proud I am of each and every one of your sailor's. It's an honor and privilege to serve with and lead them in our nations challenges that lie ahead with regards to our global war on terrorism. They are the best group of people I have ever worked with and I am very fortunate to be their Leading Chief Petty Officer.

## Administration



Administration department welcomed new members to the admin team, Chief Stadelman from Fleet Imaging Center Pacific Hawaii, YN1 Shambley from Destroyer Squadron FIFTEEN recently, YNSA Latimer, YNSA Hoskie, YNSN Valdez and YNSA Russ from YN "A" School, in Meridian, MS. Recently PH3 Chavez and her

family reported to the Blue Ridge from Whidbey Island, WA. Our new team members arrived just in time to join us moving offices from the ship to our berthing barge, APL 40. The move went well and with the help of our friends, the IT's, our computer systems are up and running after only a few days of downtime. Now, it's business as usual! For our customers – we appreciate your patience due to the limited space we have on the barge.

The highly anticipated advancement examination result were finally released and we are proud of our new selectees, YN2 Seward, PN3 Mizuhara, PN3 Myles and LI3 Dunbar. BZ!!! These four sailors proved that advancement in ranks is possible. Studying is the key to pass the test and being competitive at all times. Admin will continue its training program for the benefit of those who will take the exams in September.