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## Yokosuka Middle School Students Connect with Rafael Peralta Family

Story by Garrett Cole, CFAY Public Affairs

At Yokosuka Middle School, 100 seventh-graders proudly call themselves “Team Rafael Peralta,” sharing their team name with the USS Rafael Peralta (DDG 115), a naval destroyer. But many students did not know the history behind their team’s name – until now.

Barbara S. Hertz, the Information Specialist at Yokosuka Middle School, saw an opportunity for students to engage in meaningful research. “I started this because I like to have kids do research,” she said. “This is true, meaningful research to learn why their team is named after a ship while tracing back to the origin of the ship’s name. That’s authentic research right there.”

As students began researching the ship and its namesake Hertz soon discovered a deeper connection. “I realized in a light bulb moment that this is current, still happening, and this family is here. So let’s see if we can connect with the family,” she noted.

Barbara contacted the School Liaison Officer, who then put her in touch with Command Master Chief Markus Gallegos, Command Master Chief, USS Rafael Peralta (DDG 115), who was on it right away and put me in touch with the family,” Hertz said.

Karen Peralta, Rafael’s sister, shared her family’s story. “My brother was actually born in Mexico City,” Karen recounted. “He was 16 when he came to the United States. He went to high school in San Diego. He joined the Marines, partly influenced by a commercial he saw.”

The students had much to learn from the information shared by the Peralta family. Karen’s account detailed Rafael’s journey from Mexico to the United States, ultimately obtaining citizenship to serve in the U.S. Marines.

For students like Hunter Kim, the experience was transformative. “I felt excited to learn about Rafael Peralta from his family,” Hunter said. “It’s sad hearing their stories. He had prepared his family in case he died. I was amazed by the story and excited to speak with his mom, especially after

reading all the articles and doing the research.”

During the video call, students asked questions. They listened intently as the Peralta family shared stories and insights about Rafael, creating a personal and emotional connection between the students and their team’s namesake.

“This is the first time in my memory that we’ve been able to make a personal connection with family members associated with the ship,” Barbara emphasized. “To be able to make that connection with the family and learn history firsthand, that was important.”

The initiative by Barbara S. Hertz, coupled with the cooperation of various naval personnel and the Peralta family, transformed an ordinary research project into a deeply meaningful experience for these young students. It brought history to life, connected a community, and illuminated the story of a man who became a hero – showing the impact of what truly “authentic research” can achieve.

For more than 75 years, CFAY has provided, maintained, and operated base facilities and services in support of the U.S. 7th Fleet’s forward-deployed naval forces, tenant commands, and thousands of military and civilian personnel and their families.



**YOKOHAMA**  
**FOREIGN GENERAL**  
**CEMETERY CLEANUP**  
**WEDNESDAY, 08 NOVEMBER**  
**7:30 A.M. - 11:00 A.M.**  
Rain Date: Thursday, 09 Nov  
**\* NEW EVENT DATE \***  
Uniform: NWU  
Meeting Location: CFAY Galley parking lot  
Meeting Time: 0700 (Buses will depart the Galley at 0730)  
Summary of event: Volunteers will clean the grounds of the cemetery and memorials to honor and remember U.S. military service members laid to rest and others who died while serving their country.  
\*Only 40 volunteer slots available! Sign up NOW!  
To sign-up to volunteer, contact:  
EM1 (SW/AW) Valera: ruel.b.valera.mil@us.navy.mil  
OS3 Keomany: lly.a.keomany.mil@us.navy.mil  
MM3 Peralta: khristynkassand.a.peralta.mil@us.navy.mil  
Phone: 246-8042 / 0468-06-8042.