



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY

USS ESSEX (LHD 2)
FLEET POST OFFICE
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IN REPLY REFER TO:

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From: Commanding Officer, USS ESSEX (LHD 2)
To: Director of Naval History (OP 09BH)

Subj: COMMAND HISTORY 1996

Ref: (a) OPNAVINST 5750.12E

Encl: (1) Command Composition and Organization
(2) Chronology
(3) Narrative
(4) Supporting Documents

1. In accordance with reference (a), enclosures (1) through (4) are forwarded.


T. F. RADICH

COMMAND COMPOSITION AND ORGANIZATION

MISSION: The mission of the USS ESSEX (LHD 2) is to embark, deploy and land elements of a Marine landing force in an assault by aircraft, landing craft and amphibious vehicles. The USS ESSEX role is the primary flag ship of an amphibious task group. The USS ESSEX is the second ship of the Wasp (LHD 1) class multipurpose amphibious assault ships.

USS ESSEX is specifically designed to operate Landing Craft, Air Cushioned (LCAC) for a waterborne assault, carry Harrier II (AV-8B) Jump Jets for close in air support of the assault force and Helicopters for the deployment of troops and cargo. USS ESSEX operates with a full range of Navy and Marine Corps helicopters, conventional landing craft and amphibious vehicles. The USS ESSEX load out consists of troops, tanks, trucks, armored vehicles, artillery, ammunition and supplies necessary to fully support an amphibious assault.

USS ESSEX is 844 feet long, with a beam of 106 feet. Two steam propulsion plants, capable of developing a combined 70,000 shaft horsepower, to give the 40,500 ton ship the ability to sustain speeds in excess of 25 knots. USS ESSEX has more than 22,000 square feet of vehicle storage space and 100,000 cubic feet of cargo space. Living areas accommodate the 1099 crewmembers and 1961 embarked troops and air crews. For combat support, as well as humanitarian missions, ESSEX has six fully equipped operating rooms, four dental operating rooms and hospital facilities capable of caring for 600 patients. USS ESSEX is home ported in San Diego, California. In a moments notice she could easily become the largest hospital in San Diego county.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE: COMPHIBRON FIVE
 COMPHIBGRU THREE

COMMANDING OFFICER: CAPT THOMAS F. RADICH, USN
 01 January 1996 - 31 December 1996

Enclosure (1)

ENCLOSURE (1)

CHRONOLOGY

JANUARY 1996

- 01 Holiday Routine. Inport San Diego. Holiday Leave period (16 DEC 95 - 8 Jan 96).
- 02 RAV with SIMA 2-15 Jan.
- 03 DFM onload 400,000 gals.
- 04 100 man working party to onload food stores.
- 05 Reenlistments for OS2 Labounty and ABH2(AW) McKissick. Staff Congressional Delagation visit and luncheon.
- 06 Light fires #2 boiler.
- 08 End holiday leave period. Light fires #1 boiler. Commence TSTA II (Inport) with ATGPAC. Reenlistment MS2 Periquet and YN3 Haws.
- 09 Reenlistment ABF3 Roque. CDO board for Lt Henderson and LCDR Waskow. Shifted Legal Office to Master-at-Arms Office (1-51-1-Q) and CMEO office to the Legal Office (02-118-2-Q). Return to six section duty.
- 10 100 man working party to onload stores. ECCTT Drills and Evolutions #1 and #2 MMR.
- 11 100 man working party to onload stores. ECCTT Drills and Evolutions #1 and #2 MMR. WDC for SIMA March Avail.
- 12 Complete TSTA II (Inport). Fast Cruise. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration. Reenlistment DK3 Hayes and ABFC(AW) Pistole.

ENCLOSURE (2)

- 15 Holiday routine for MLK. Light fires #2 boiler. Onload Lockheed Simulators.
- 16 Commence TSTA II (underway). Commence I-Division 16-26 Jan. Embark Guest of the Navy (61-19 Jan). Underway 0800. Frocking Ceremony. Flight Ops 1230-1930 DLQs. Condition 1A for LCAC Ops to recover LC33 (Sea Dragon movie filming crew and equip). GQ for MSFD walk-through. Engineering evolutions 20-24. Night Drill package with USS Antietam 22-04.
- 17 ECC Drills and evolutions. GQ/MSFD walk-through. LCAC Ops 14-16. Flight Ops 14-21 NVGs. ESSEX nominated for the CINCPACFLT NEY Award.
- 18 Flight Ops 14-21. GQ/MSFD #1 MMR. E-7 exam.
- 19 ECCTT Drills. Moor Pier Two SDGO Navsta. Inport steaming #2 Blr. Complete TSTA II (underway).
- 20 Habitat for Humanity Projects.
- 21 Embark NJROTC 22-26 Jan.
- 22 Commence TSTA II (underway). 50 man working party. ECCTT drills and evolutions. Underway 1300. Flight Ops 15-20. GQ/Zebra.
- 23 GQ. OOD Pre-board LT Delgado and LTjg Bonner. Unrep with USNS Tippecanoe. ECCTT drills and evolutions. Night drill package with USS Jarrett 22-04.
- 24 Provide Unrep services to USS George Philip. GQ. CIWS Pacfire, 25mm, .50 cal, and FAMFIRE. SWSCO Board for LTjg Gartrell. OOD board for LCDR Alfaro, LCDR Deehr, and LCDR Outlaw. ECCTT drills and evolutions. Night drill package with USS Lewis B. Puller 22-04.
- 25 GQ/CBR drill walk-through. Flight Ops 14-20 DLQs. CICWO board LT Ross and LTjg Hidalgo. ECCTT drills and evolutions. Night drill package with USS Vandegrift 22-04.

ENCLOSURE (2)

- 26 GQ/TSSE. ECCTT evolutions. Moor Pier Two. Complete TSTA II (underway).
- 27 Gator Ball Sherton Hotel.
- 28 Light fires #2 boiler.
- 29 Commence TSTA II (underway). 50 man working party. Load USMC vehicles. Underway 1300. GQ. OOD pre-board LTjg Hidalgo and LTjg Bonner.
- 30 ECCTT drills and evolutions. CICWO board LT Ross and LTjg Hidalgo. Night drill package with USS Jarrett 22-04. Flight Ops.
- 31 GQ. ECCTT drills and evolutions. Night drill package with USS Vandegrift 22-04.

ENCLOSURE (2)

FEBRUARY 1996

- 01 African American Month. CIWS PACFIRE. Killer Tomato exercise. CIWS TDU firing. NATO Sea Sparrow TDU firing.
- 02 Command Annual Physical Security survey. Reenlistment EM2 Grosselin. Moor Pier 2.
- 04 Light Fires #1 Boiler. 50 man working party to onload stores. Embark SOSMRC.
- 05 Light fires #2 boiler. Embark CPG 3 OPPE prep riders. Underway 1500.
- 07 GQ. Reenlistment ABF3 Earles.
- 08 High power/Maneuvering demonstration.
- 09 GQ TSSE. Moor Pier 2. Reenlistment BM3 Emerson and BM3 Gentry.
- 12 50 man working party. Commence RAV with SIMA. Reenlistment MS1 Moses. Commence SISCAL (engineering align.)
- 13 Ammo onload via LCM 8.
- 14 Environmental Health Survey. Commence Hull Cleaning. Set up three pay phones on the Quarterdeck for the crew. MEU tour of the ship.
- 15 75 man working party to onload stores. Continue Hull cleaning. Reenlistment MS3 Austin. CDO board LT Misciewicz. Safety Council meeting. Commence VSTOL Optical Landing System installation.
- 16 Continue Hull Cleaning. MCLAN Upgrade and Installation. LFORM onload. Reenlistment MS3 Sganga, EN1 Kuhnhausen, and ABH2 Young.
- 17 Embark NJROTC (17-18). Continue Hull Cleaning. LT Charles Denny, 249-08-1981, ship's safety officer crashed and died

ENCLOSURE (2)

in an experimental aircraft at Brown Field, San Diego, California.

- 18 Continue Hull Cleaning.
- 19 Presidents Day. Holiday Routine. Full Dress Ship. Ship Check for Sailor Phone. Continue Hull Cleaning. 21 Gun Salute in support of Presidents Day.
- 20 Complete Hull Cleaning. 150 man working party to load provisions. Commence Indoctrination Division. School Tour for Muir Alternative School. Commence ARG/MEU staff planning.
- 21 50 man working party to onload store stock. 150 man working party to onload provisions. Refuel 400K gallons DFM.
- 22 Guest Ship. LT Denny Memorial Service.
- 23 Reenlistment MS2 Peard. Ship tour for CSSD 11, MCAS El Torro. Congressional Staff Delegation visit and luncheon in wardroom.
- 24 Engineering Department OPPE exams.
- 25 Light fires #1 and #2 boilers.
- 26 Awards Ceremony.
- 27 Underway for OPPE preps at 1200.
- 28 CDO board for LCDR Hunter.

MARCH 1996

- 01 MSFD GQ. Moor pier two.
- 04 Commence high pressure wash and scrub of the hanger bay. Embark pre-oppe inspection team. Underway.
- 05 Anchor in anchorage 171 off Coronado Rhodes. OOD board for Ltjg Bonner. MSFD GQ.
- 06 Underway. High power demo and maneuvering transient. Small Arms fire. Flight quarters for a Helo passenger transfer. Hanger bay fire GQ.
- 07 Anchor in anchorage 171. E-5 Navy wide exams. Underway at 1200. Small Arms qualification.
- 08 MSFD GQ. Moor pier two.
- 11 Commence C4I upgrade period. Commence IMAV with SIMA. 100 man working party for food stores.
- 12 E-6 Navy wide exam. PEB OPPE. Underway 1500. ECC drills and evolutions.
- 13 ECC drills and evolutions. MSFD GQ.
- 14 Complete OPPE. High power demonstration. Moor Pier two.
- 15 Reenlistment for ABH2 Grisham. Awarded the COMNAVSURFPAC Surface Ship Safety Award for 1995.
- 18 Commence aviation Maintenance Program Assist visit for AIMD. Radiation health inspection. Commence Indoctrination visit.
- 19 100 man working party for food stores. 50 man working party for ship's store and soda. Marine ROTC ship tour. Reenlistment for SH1 Knowles and AOC Marks.

ENCLOSURE (2)

- 20 100 man working party for dry stores. Engine load. Reenlistment for ABH3 Vaughn. Flight Deck fire drill. Hanger Bay fire drill.
- 21 Hull inspection by divers. Intelligence school tour. Retirement ceremony for ASC Vandersommen. World War II veterans tour. Hanger Bay fire drill.
- 22 Reenlistment EM3 Pumphrey and ABH2 Sanchez. Personnel Inspection. Ship's picnic.
- 23 Medical Navy Recruiting Tour.
- 24 Light fires #1 and #2 boilers.
- 25 Embark Scientists at Sea. Commence TSTA III. Conduct Total Ship Survivability Exercise (TSSE). Underway 1330. Awarded 1995 Battle Efficiency "E". Departmental E's in Maritime Warfare (Power projection/ Sea Control), Engineering Survivability, Command and Control, and Logistics Management.
- 26 Underway replenishment of the USS John A Moore for fueling. Hanger Bay fire drill. CIWS pacfire and TDU shoot. Flight quarters for Helo embark.
- 27 Stream NIXIE. CBR GQ drill. Flight Deck fire drill. Flight quarters. Set 1A for LCAC's and recover three LCAC's. TSSE.
- 28 Set condition 1A for LCAC's. Flight quarters. 0800 H-hour on white beach. GQ for missile hit. Unrep with the USNS Rappahannock.
- 29 Flight quarters. TSSE. Reenlistment for MR2 Reyes. Moor pier two.
- 31 Light fires #2 boiler.

APRIL 1996

- 01 Commence FEP. Onload troops and vehicles. 100 man working party for provisions. Light fires #1 boiler.
- 02 Embark ATG. Underway. Flight Ops.
- 03 REW's range live chaff fire. Flight ops. Set 1A for LCAC recovery. Embark Capt Eddingfield (ATG Commodore) and CDR Burnell (CPG-3 CSO) for FEP observation.
- 04 Set 1A for LCAC ops. 0600 L/H hour at white beach using a constructive LZ. Flight ops. Conduct Total Ship Survivability exercise (TSSE). Moor Pier two.
- 05 CDO board LCDR Grossmann. Ship-wide zone inspection. Hail and Fairwell LCDR Arleth and LT McLean.
- 08 Elevator ILS review. Commence IMAV with SIMA (8-19 APR).
- 09 TCO/JMCIS Installation Site Survey. 50 hand working party for ship's store. CDO board LT Schueler.
- 10 LFORM onload. 150 hand working party for dry, frozen, and fresh food. Light fires #2 boiler.
- 11 NAVSUP 05 visit. Enlisted detailer visit. PRT swim makeup.
- 12 Ship personnel inspection.
- 15 100 man working party for provisions.. EOOW board LTjg Etz (First female EOOW on ESSEX).
- 16 Deadstick move from pier two to pier Juliet NASNI for CNSP change of command. Flight ops for static display helos. OOD board LTjg Bonner.
- 17 OOD board for LCDR Grossmann and LT Schueler.

ENCLOSURE (2)

- 18 E-8/E-9 frocking ceremony. 100 man working party for the CNSP change of command set up. Flag/general officer ship tour. CNSP COC rehearsal.
- 19 Reenlistment for ABF2 Pena. COMNAVSURFPAC Change of Command for VADM Robison and VADM Krekich. CINCPACFLT ADM Zlatoper guest speaker. Deadstick move back to pier two. Flight ops to fly off static display.
- 22 Commence solid waste stream survey (22-26 APR). Embark Las Vegas NJROTC. Embark IMAX film crew. Embark 150 Marines, 6 HMMWV's and 3 AV-8 cargo pallets. Underway 1000 for AV-8 CQ's and ammo unrep. Flight ops. OOD board LTjg Bonner.
- 23 Unrep with the USNS Rappahannock. Lear jet services for AIC training. OOD board for LCDR Grossmann and LT Schueler. Flight ops. EHF SOVT.
- 24 Ship's brig noise survey. Ammo onload via vertrep. Flight ops. Embark 11th MEU CO.
- 25 Anchor vicinity of cal site 20 Camp Pendleton for ammo onload. Underway.
- 26 Flight ops. Complete ammo onload. Moor pier thirteen. Off-load 150 marines, 6 HMMWV's, and 3 cargo pallets.
- 29 Holiday routine. Commence C4I Alteration (29 APR - 10 MAY). Divers inspect the main scoop injection. Commence IMAV with SIMA (29 APR - 8 MAY).
- 30 25 man working party for ship's store stock. 150 man working party for provisions. Onload 3 AV-8 vans, 1 ACU-5 van, and 2 EOD CONEX boxes.

MAY 1996

- 01 Commence CPG-3 pre-deployment Troop Space Habitability Inspection. Ship's platoon arrives. Onload 39 pallets of War Reserve Medical Supplies.
- 02 Weight Load testing of the bridge crane. Retirement ceremony for ABF1 Fisher. Family day pre-deployment fair.
- 03 Complete CPG-3 pre-deployment Troop Space Habitability Inspection. Reenlistment for MS3 Murphey and RM3 Mallory. Commence RIMPAC Cargo and Vehicle onload, 4 VIDSMAR and 1 CONEX box from HC-11.
- 08 Commence Combat Systems Assessment Management Program. OOD board LTjg Hidalgo. International SWOS tour. Retirement ceremony CW04 Wallace.
- 09 Advanced Party arrives. Light off #2 boiler. Retirement ceremonies for AOC O'Roarke and SH1 Robertson. Flight ops for the ACE fly on.
- 10 Family Day Picnic at ADM Baker field. CINCPACFLT Brig inspection. Commence 11th MEU main body personnel onload. Light off #1 boiler.
- 11 Underway 0900 for RIMPAC '96. Flight ops for ACE AV-8/stragler fly-on and ammo transfer to the USS Harpers Ferry. Set 1A for LCAC ops onload off Camp Pendleton. Commence transit to Pearl Harbor.
- 12 Stream Nixie. Burial at Sea ceremony. Aircrew and Pilot safety standdown. Embark Midshipmen.
- 13 Small arms live fire. Flight ops. Retard clocks one hour.
- 14 Flight ops to launch photoex helo. Division officer tactical ship maneuvering. NEO walk-thru.
- 15 CIWS/25mm/.50 cal pacfires. Small arms live fire.

ENCLOSURE (2)

- 16 Stream Nixie. Flight ops.
- 17 Flight ops. FAS unrep with the USNS Walter S. Diehl
- 18 Set condition 1A for LCAC ops. Offload the BLT to the PTA on the Island of Hawaii. Flight ops.
- 19 Flight ops. Offload the MEU ACE at Kaneohe Bay, Oahu. SESEF Range ops in support of CSRR.
- 20 Flight ops. Man the rails. Moor pier M3 Pearl Harbor. 150 man working party. Ship tours for the multi-national forces.
- 21 ADM J. M. Boorda memorial service. EOW board MMC Douglas.
- 22 NEY final evaluation. Embark Midshipmen. Light fires #2 boiler.
- 23 GSK onload. Underway ATF sortie port breakout.
- 24 Silent unrep with the USNS Walter S. Diehl. Flight ops.
- 25 Set condition 1A for LCAC ops. RADM Long brief visit. GQ for MSFD. Flight ops.
- 26 Steel beach picnic. Division officer tactical maneuvering exercise.
- 27 Flight ops. Memorial day. Set condition for LCAC ops. Silent unrep with the USNS Walter S. Diehl.
- 28 Flight ops. Set condition 1A for LCAC ops. GQ for Integrated Training.
- 29 Flight ops. Commence the BLT 3/1 backload in the vicinity of K-dock on Hawaii. Set condition 1A for LCAC ops.
- 30 Set 1A for LCAC ops. Flight ops. Division officer tactical maneuvering.
- 31 Flight ops in support of photoex. Division officer tactical maneuvering. Reenlistment for OS3 Kitchen and OS3 Clark.

ENCLOSURE (2)

JUNE 1996

- 01 Flight ops. LCAC ops.
- 02 LCAC ops. Commence backload from PMRF. Secure #1 boiler. Transit to Bellows Beach.
- 03 Flight ops. Amphib ops in the vicinity of Bellows Beach. All hands awards ceremony.
- 04 Flight ops. GQ. Commence Petty Officer indoctrination for one week. EOOW board ENS McClelland.
- 05 Flight ops. Reenlistment for HM2 Stone.
- 06 Flight ops. Flooding in the forward compressor room.
- 07 Flight ops. Small arms quals on port elevator.
- 08 Flight ops. 250 man working party for provisions. 100 man working party for ship's store stock. Unrep with the USS Rainier. Conduct In Extremis Hostage Rescue.
- 09 Flight quarters. COMTHIRDFLT VADM Lautenbacher arrives for a brief visit.
- 10 Flight ops. Embark Discovery Channel Film Crew. Conduct long range helo raid.
- 11 Flight ops. LCAC ops. Reenlistment for OS2 Jarvis. Conduct a NEO off Kaneohe Bay.
- 12 Flight ops. Small arms quals on port elevator.
- 13 Flight ops. Embark combat camera and USA today. Commodore Holden visit.
- 14 Flight ops. Unrep with the USS Rainier for fuel. Embark Mr. Johnathan Rodgers (DSC CHN President)
- 15 Flight ops. LCAC ops.

ENCLOSURE (2)

- 16 Flight ops. LCAC ops. Man the rails. Moor pier M3 Pearl Harbor.
- 17 Inport Pearl Harbor. 100 man working party for FFV.
- 18 Inport Pearl Harbor. Man aloft.
- 19 Inport Pearl Harbor. Man aloft. Tripler Medical Personnel Tour. Light fires #1 boiler.
- 20 Inport Pearl Harbor. Embark midshipman. Small boat ops. Light fires #2 boiler.
- 21 Underway. LCAC ops for onload.
- 22 Flight ops. Vertrep with the USS Rainier. Advance clocks 1hr to +9V. Stream NIXIE. CIWS, 25MM, and .50 cal pacfire.
- 23 Holiday routine. Man aloft for antenna replacement. Burial at sea ceremony. Steel beach picnic.
- 24 Flight ops. Advance clocks 1hr to +8U. Small arms qual. MIO on Harpers Ferry. EOOW board for LTjg Lozada.
- 25 Flight ops. GQ. Unrep for fuel with USS Rainier. Small arms fire port elevator.
- 26 Flight ops. Advance clocks 1hr to +7T. Small arms fire.
- 27 Flight ops. Awards ceremony. LCAC ops. Commence offload at Camp Pendleton.
- 28 Flight ops. LCAC ops. Offload marines at Camp Pendleton. Moor pier 13 Naval station San Diego. Secure boilers.

JULY 1996

- 01 Commence Combat System Readiness Review. CH-53 offload. Commence RIMPAC cargo offload. MMC Robinson retirement ceremony.
- 02 Offload COMNAVAIRPAC support equipment. 150 man working party for provisions. LIMPET drill on ESSEX.
- 03 Quarters on the flight deck for all hands. AIMD calibration work center earned #1 ranking in AIRPAC for LHA/LHD/LPH class for 0% calibration equipment overdue.
- 04 Full dress ship. Independence day rining of the bell 13 times.
- 08 Commence AMMT inspection and Logistics Management Assessment. Commence TCAC installation. Ship's platoon arrives. Reenlistment for ACC Lozeau.
- 09 Communications Assist Team/ DMS Visit. Commence NAVSEA test of ABT's shipwide.
- 10 Commence Cargo and HAZMAT onload. Commence Medical Readiness Evaluation. Commence vehicle onload. COMNAVBASE postal inspection. Reenlistment for MS3 Cedenó.
- 11 Pre-deployment Seminar Family Support Group. Reenlistment for CTR1 Morrow.
- 12 150 man working party for provisions. Operation Stand Down. Reenlistment for ABH1 Fuller, DS2 Borden, and ETC Case.
- 13 Operation Stand Down. Light fires #2 boiler.
- 14 Light fires #1 boiler. USMC main body onload.
- 15 Retirement ceremony for ABHC Gaba. Underway for SACCEX. Flight ops. LCAC ops. Reenlistment for MM2 Scott. Commence Indoctrination division for two weeks.

ENCLOSURE (2)

- 16 Small arms fire on the port elevator. Flight ops. GQ.
- 17 Chaffex live fire. Small boat transfer between Cleveland and Essex. M203 shoot. Flight ops.
- 18 Unrep for fuel with USNS Rappahannock. Flight ops.
- 19 Swing ship. Small arms live fire port elevator. GQ for MSFD. Flight ops.
- 20 Small arms live fire port elevator. Flight ops. GQ for MSFD.
- 21 Small boat transfer using the LCPL in the vicinity of buoy 1SD in support of Surface Line week. Flight ops.
- 22 Small arms live fire port elevator. VBSS boarding tactical training with Coast Guard. Amphibious assault at Camp Pendleton. Flight ops.
- 23 Board Midshipmen via LCAC. Flight ops. Conduct CORTRAMID Divtacs. CORTRAMID GQ for TSSE/Hangar Bay fire drill/.50 cal shoot. Moor pier 13. CPO indoctrination.
- 24 Commence SIMA 6I-4 and valve maintenance available. 150 man working party for provisions. Amphibious Orientation Tour.
- 25 Crash Crane Weight Test. MR Block onload. Reenlistment for EM2 Tagulao. 100 man working party for provisions. GAO audit of ship's self defense systems. COMPHIBGRU THREE Ship handler of the year competition.
- 26 Load GSK and 50 man working party for retail provisions. 300 devil pup assault on ESSEX for tour. Surface Line Week picnic. ESSEX swept the overall competition in sports and professional categories. Reenlistment for AO3 Rivera.
- 27 Christmas in July. COMNAVSURFPAC Ball.
- 29 100 man working party for provisions. Commence ARGIT 96-2. Commence SESI/AOSS inspection. Ship's Cancellation Society tour.

ENCLOSURE (2)

- 30 Commence MCIXS training. Underway for pier two in preparation for CJCS visit.
- 31 Flight ops for CJCS visit static display onload. CJCS cancelled his visit.

AUGUST 1996

- 01 Commence incinerator bore scope inspection. 50 man working party. Retirement ceremony for OS1 Lewis. RADM Combs C4I tour. Ship's platoon arrives. Violent crime prevention standdown. ESSEX Christmas party at the Sheraton Harbor Island.
- 02 Commence marine onload.
- 05 Crash crane onload. 100 man working party for provisions. 50 man working party for retail goods. Light fires #1 boiler. VADM Cebrowski (J6) C4I visit and lunch.
- 06 50 man working party for retail. Light fires #2 boiler. Main body onload.
- 07 Underway for SOCEX and JTFEX. Man over board drill. GQ for Zebra and admin. Flight ops for ACE fly on and CQ's.
- 08 Flight ops. LCAC ops. Small arms qual port elevator. Conduct ammo onload via helo.
- 09 Flight ops to embark senior SOOT. Embark TECG BGEN Bolden CO 15th MEU.
- 10 Rendezvous with the Kitty Hawk Task Group. Flight ops. Rig deceptive lighting for Strait of Catalina transit. LCAC ops. Anchor at anchorage 171.
- 11 Flight ops. Stream NIXIE.
- 12 Command indoctrination 12-21 Aug. Gen Brown and Gen Broderick visit. Unannounced GQ for training.
- 13 Flight ops in support of IHR and AFS. Reenlistment for SM1 Manus.
- 14 Flight ops. Unrep of opportunity with the USS Ranier. Unrep with USS Reid as the supply ship for training.

ENCLOSURE (2)

- 15 Flight ops. Anchor in the vicinity of anchorage 158.
- 16 Flight ops. COMPHIBGRU THREE RADM Suffel and COMTHIRDFLT VADM Lautenbacher arrive.
- 17 LCAC ops. Sailor fone operational test pegs out at about 8 miles from Cleveland base station.
- 18 Flight ops.
- 19 Test Counter measure wash down system. Moor pier two. Reenlistment for AO1 Deardorff. Shift to four section duty from six section duty in preparation for POM and deployment. Secure boilers.
- 20 Commence Heat Stress and Ventilation survey. Commence corrosion control availability. Commence I and FVMF availability with SIMA. Commence underwater hull cleaning. 100 man working party for provisions. Wind tunnel secured for four days to resurface. Dental readiness TAV. Mess decks secured for three weeks to reseal. Retirement ceremony for HT1 Nevin.
- 21 Commence Cargo Weapons elevator assessment. X-ray survey for medical. Weight test the port boat davit. 50 man working party for retail. Laundry secured until 9 Sep. OOD board for LTjg Jung and LTjg Ross.
- 22 CNO ADM Johnson visit. ADM's call on the flight deck. Dead stick shift to starboard side same berth. 100 man working party for electrical shore power cables.
- 23 Reenlistment for MM3 Voncords, EM2 Basta, SKC Casillas, MS1 Marcellino, and AO2 Rico. Quarters for awards and adopt a school. Navy League cake cutting ceremony and ship tour. Complete underwater hull cleaning.
- 26 Fleet communications package installed. 50 man working party for retail.
- 27 50 man working party for retail. Air craft crash crane onload. Reenlistment for CTRCM Hogue.

ENCLOSURE (2)

- 28 RADM Stevens NAVSECGRU visit. EOD diver training. Divers for WQN-1 PMS.
- 29 Commence Career Information Program assessment. Reenlistment for RM1 Jones.
- 30 End POM Leave period #1 and commence POM leave period #2. Reenlistment for EM2 Montgomery. Retirement ceremony for SH2 Gossin and DCC Brown. Weight test the port davit.

SEPTEMBER 1996

- 01 Labor Day weekend.
- 02 Holiday routine.
- 03 Commence underwater hull cleaning. Reenlistment for BT2 Sherfield.
- 04 50 man working party for provisions. COMLOGWESTPAC N41 visit with the supply officer.
- 05 Navy wide E-4 exam.
- 06 Complete underwater hull cleaning. 20 man working party for ship's store stock.
- 08 Family support group meeting at Murphy Canyon.
- 09 Cargo Weapons elevator assesment. Detailer visit. 150 man working party for provisions. Dental readiness exam. Mess decks reopened. Project Handclasp delivery.
- 10 Cargo Weapons elevator assesment. Detailer visit. Navy wide E-5 exam.
- 11 150 man working party for retail. Detailer visit. Light fires #1. Surface Navy Association Golf Tournament.
- 12 ACE fly on inport. Light fires #2 boiler. 100 man working party for provisions. E-6 Navy wide exam. POM leave period II ends. Retirement ceremony for MMCS Jarnot. Vehicle onload.
- 13 Ombudsman appreciation day. RADM Saffell and guests visit. Family day cruise. CPG-3 Navigation Check ride. ACE fly off.
- 16 150 man working party. Light fires #2 boiler. Launch the utility boat.
- 17 150 man working party. Light fires #1 boiler.

ENCLOSURE (2)

- 18 Underway for Mazatlan. Man over board/GQ. Flight ops.
- 19 GQ for Main Space Fire Drill and CIWS PAC fire / 25MM / .50cal shoot.
- 20 National POW recognition day. GQ. Anchor Mazatlan, Mexico.
- 21 VIP reception for Mexican dignataries. Visit ship.
- 22 Hail and Fairwell for the Air boss, LTjg Hidalgo, and LTjg Bonner.
- 23 AIMD ventilation cleaning.
- 24 AIMD ventilation cleaning. Underway. Man overboard drill. Commence command indoctrination (24 Sep - 04 Oct).
- 25 AIMD ventilation cleaning. Full power Trial run... 26.5 knots made good. GQ for MSFD. Customs inspection.
- 26 Man condition III watches. Flight ops. Test the Counter measure washdown system.
- 27 Unrep for fuel from the USNS Rappahannock. Moor pier 13.
- 28 Sea cadet small boat training.
- 30 150 man working party for provisions. 50 man working party for CPO mess. Commence fireside cleaning and inspection #2 boiler. Commence engineering ventilation cleaning.

OCTOBER 1996

- 01 Commence fireside cleaning on #1 boiler. Engineering vent cleaning. Reenlistment for MACM O'Donovan. Retirement ceremony for MSCM Reyes.
- 02 150 man working party for provisions. 50 man working party for CPO mess. Ship's platoon arrives.
- 03 150 man working party for provisions. Ammo onload via small boat transfer.
- 04 150 man working party for provisions. USMC cargo and vehicle onload. Retirement ceremony for ABHC Alignay.
- 05 Vehicle onload.
- 06 Complete vehicle onload. Light fires #2 boiler.
- 07 150 man working party for provisions. 50 man working party for CPO mess. COMNAVSURFPAC visit. Light fires #1 boiler. MEU main body onload.
- 08 Underway for ready for sea. Flight ops. LCAC ops. Moor pier five.
- 09 50 man working party for provisions. Complete #5 ac unit repairs. Retirement ceremony for SM1 Bennent. ACE main body arrives. Remove sideport ramp.
- 10 Underway for Westpac 96-97 in company with the Cleveland and Harpers Ferry. Comphibron Five is CATF adn Eleventh MEU is CLF. Man the rails. GQ and man overboard. Flight ops. Safety standdown. Retard clocks (+8U).
- 11 Flight ops. Small arms fire off the port elevator. GQ, Abandon ship, and emergency destruction drills.
- 12 Flight ops. Retard clocks (+9V).
- 13 Holiday routine. Navy birthday.
- 14 Flight ops. Small arms shoot. Indoctrination division (14 - 25 Oct). Stream NIXIE.
- 15 Flight ops. CIWS / 25MM / .50 cal shoot. Retard clocks (+10W). GQ for MSFD.
- 16 Flight ops. Unrep for fuel with the USS Cimmarron. In the evening, ditch one HMM-166 CH-46 (Rocky 607) off of Oahu

ENCLOSURE (2)

near Kaneohe Bay. HC-11 responded to the rescue. All four personnel safely recovered. Stream NIXIE.

- 17 Flight ops. LCAC ops. Amphibex PMRF. ESSEX birthday.
- 18 Flight ops. Continue Amphibex. LCAC ops.
- 19 Flight ops. Unrep for fuel and provisions with the USS Cimmarron. ATG depart PMRF. Retard clocks (+11X). Harpers Ferry reports missing member and suspects he fell overboard. All units are ordered to reverse course and commence a SAR operation. SAR lasted 27 hours.
- 20 Flight ops. Burial at Sea.
- 21 Flight ops. Upload CIWS and NSSMS for ship defense for deployment preparations. Retard clocks (+12Y). Reenlistment for ABF2 Renaut.
- 22 Flight ops. Continue NSSMS upload. Small arms live fire.
- 23 Advance clocks 24 hours.
- 24 Flight ops. CHOP to Seventh Fleet. Continue NSSMS upload. Small arms live fire. GQ for MSFD. CIWS shoot for Mt 23 only. Set the EDATF (Emergency Defense of the Amphibious Task Force).
- 25 Flight ops. Small arms live fire. Retard clocks (-11L).
- 26 Flight ops. Awards ceremony on the flight deck. Deviate south of transit track to promote unrep with Camden.
- 27 Holiday routine in support of Steel Beach Picnic.
- 28 Flight ops. Unrep with the USS Camden for provisions and fuel. 200 man working party for provisions. 100 man working party for retail.
- 29 Flight ops. GQ for MSFD.
- 30 Flight ops. Retard clocks (-10K). Small arms fire.
- 31 Flight ops. Small arms fire. GQ. Halloween costume party on the hangar bay. Seventh Fleet directs all units into threatcon Alpha.
- 31 GQ for integrated training.

NOVEMBER 1996

- 01 Flight ops. Small arms shoot. Awards ceremony.
- 02 Flight ops. Small arms shoot. GQ for MSFD. Retard clocks 1hr (-9I).
- 03 Flight ops. Unrep for stores and fuel with USNS Tippecanoe. 100 man working party for GSK. Secure #2 boiler for bottom blow.
- 04 Flight ops. Small arms fire. Secure #1 boiler for bottom blows. Flight deck scrub down. Retard clocks (-8H).
- 05 Flight ops. Moor berth seven Sembawang, Singapore.
- 06 Inport Singapore. EATG sports fest.
- 07 Inport Singapore. EATG sports fest. Clean firesides #1 boiler. Reenlistment for MM1 Gonzales. Tour for fourth graders.
- 08 Inport Singapore. EATG sports fest. 150 man working party. USS Cleveland change of command. Cancel threatcon alpha.
- 09 Inport Singapore. Singapore Army brief on capabilities of MEU/ATG. EATG sports fest. Light fires #1 boiler.
- 10 Inport Singapore. VADM Natter (COMSEVENTHFLT) visit in company with RADM Chaplin (CTF-76) and RADM Bepko (COMLOGWESTPAC). Underway 1600. Flight ops. Transit Straits of Malaca.
- 11 Moor Northport pier 15 Port Kelang, Malaysia. Press/TV interviews and tours.
- 12 Press/TV interviews. Visit by the Indian Navy. USN Hosted operational intelligence training for Malaysian Armed Forces Intell Officers. Briefing and Tour for Senior Malaysian Armed forces officers. Official luncheon hosted by CPR-5. Official reception in the Hangar Bay.

ENCLOSURE (2)

- 13 Underway. Retard clocks 1 hour (-7G).
- 14 Anchor Penang Harbor, Phuket. Flight ops.
- 15 Inport Penang Harbor, Phuket. NEY inspection.
- 16 Inport Penang Harbor, Phuket.
- 17 Inport Penang Harbor, Phuket. SRA work definition conference.
- 18 Underway. Commence Command Indoctrination classes (18 Nov). Retard clocks (-6F). Unrep for fuel with USNS Tippecanoe.
- 19 Flight ops. GQ. CIWS PACFIRE. Small arms shoot. Retard clocks (-5E).
- 20 Flight ops. Small arms shoot.
- 21 Flight ops. GQ. Small arms shoot. 25MM / .50 CAL shoot. Retard clocks (-4D).
- 22 Flight ops. LCAC ops. Small arms shoot. Secure #1 boiler for bottom blow.
- 23 Flight ops. CIWS PACFIRE MT 22.
- 24 Flight ops. Chop to Fifth fleet. Small arms shoot.
- 25 Flight ops. Small arms shoot. Unrep with the USS Rainier. Chaff exercise.
- 26 Flight ops. Small arms shoot. Unrep with the USNS Sirius. 375 man working party. GQ. Secure #2 boiler for bottom blow. Reenlistment for AO1 Brown.
- 27 Flight ops. Small arms shoot.
- 28 Flight ops. Thanksgiving 1996. GQ for integrated training.
- 29 Flight ops. Small arms shoot. Reenlistment for AS2 Benzes.

ENCLOSURE (2)

30 Flight ops. Unrep with the USS Rainier. Reenlistment for
EW2 Mann. Operation Sea Soldier 96-97.

ENCLOSURE (2)

DECEMBER 1996

- 01 Flight ops. Commence SEA SOLDIER 97 off Oman Coast. Reenlistment for RM3 Saucedo.
- 02 Flight ops. SEA SOLDIER 97. Small arms shoot.
- 03 Flight ops. SEA SOLDIER 97. GQ for MSF drill. Small arms shoot.
- 04 Flight ops. SEA SOLDIER 97. Small arms shoot.
- 05 Flight ops. SEA SOLDIER 97. GQ for MSFD. LCAC ops.
- 06 Flight ops. SEA SOLDIER 97. Unrep with the USS Rainier.
- 07 Flight ops. SEA SOLDIER 97. Reenlistment for BMC Diaz. Small arms shoot.
- 08 Flight ops. SEA SOLDIER 97. Commence transit to Muscat, Oman.
- 09 Flight ops. Commence Indoctrination division (9-20 Dec). Complete firesides #2 boiler and light fires #2 boiler. EDATF drill.
- 10 Moor berth 2, Muscat, Oman. Secure #1 boiler. No manning the rails nor shipboard visiting.
- 11 Inport Muscat, Oman. Light fires #1 boiler.
- 12 Flight ops. RADM Saffell, COMPHIBGRU THREE, breaks his flag in ESSEX. 100 man working party for stores. Underway 1600. Command presentation for CPG-3.
- 13 Flight ops. Rendezvous with the USS Antietam. Transit Strait of Hormuz. Awards ceremony. Retard clocks (-3C). Friday the 13th.
- 14 Arrive off the east coast of Qatar. Eastern Maverick. Flight ops. Unrep with the USNS Pecos and USNS Sirius. 250 man working party. Sailor phone repairs complete.

ENCLOSURE (2)

- 15 Eastern Maverick. Flight ops. Hammad Ben Jasseem Al Thani, Crown Prince of Qatar and also Foreign Minister for Qatar, and U.S. Ambassador to Qatar visit, tour, and luncheon.
- 16 Eastern Maverick. Flight ops. Awards and frocking ceremony. Reenlistment for DK1 Lim. OOD board LTjg Spaulding and LTjg Barboa. LCAC ops.
- 17 Eastern Maverick. Flight ops. OOD board LTjg Etz (First female OOD of ESSEX) and LTjg Slafter (Second female OOD of ESSEX).
- 18 Eastern Maverick. Flight ops. Reenlistment for MS2 Bacereza and SMC Pullins. GQ for MSFD.
- 19 Flight ops. Unrep with the USS Rainier. GQ for MSFD. Seals offload to Kuwait.
- 20 Eager Mace. Flight ops. Anchor Kuwait Bay Anchorage "C". LCAC ops.
- 21 Eager Mace. Flight ops. VADM Fargo, COMFIFTHFLT, arrives for visit, tour, and luncheon. LCAC and LCU ops.
- 22 Eager Mace. Flight ops. LCAC ops. Commence ATG Mid Cycle Assessment.
- 23 Eager Mace. Flight ops. Reenlistment for ABH1 Martinez. Secure #2 boiler for bottom blow. GQ for MCA MSFD. Christmas play in the hangar bay.
- 24 Eager Mace. Flight ops. GQ for MSFD.
- 25 Eager Mace. Christmas. No fly day.
- 26 Eager Mace. Flight ops. GQ. Underway.
- 27 Eager Mace. Flight ops. Unrep USNS Sirius and USNS Pecos. 250 man working party.
- 28 Eager Mace. Flight ops. Reenlistment for BT2 Barrera. Anchor.

29 Eager Mace. Flight ops.

30 Eager Mace. Flight ops.

31 Eager Mace. Flight ops. GQ.

ENCLOSURE (2)

1996 Narrative

JANUARY

The year started out with the ship on holiday leave and upkeep until the 8th. Even so, the ship was in a RAV period and there was a fuel and stores onload as well as individual department preps for TSTA II. TSTA II began on 8 Jan and with it an intensive workup to deployment in October. During the underway portion of TSTA II from the 16th through the end of the month, the movie crew for a documentary called Sea Dragon embarked. The training for TSTA II went as scheduled and the crew worked very hard. At the end of the month, COMPHIBGRU THREE hosted the Gator Ball at the Sheraton Hotel on Harbor Island. The ship was underway for twelve of the thirty one days.

FEBRUARY

This month continued with an intense training period. Concurrent with the main focus of training were five or six stores onloads, an Annual Physical Security survey, an Environmental Health survey, Sailor Phone installation, MCLAN upgrade and installation, Indoctrination division, an RAV with SIMA, and a hull cleaning. The ship was underway for the first week and a half of the month and the last two days of the month.

On a sad note, the ship's safety officer, Lt Denny, was killed in an airplane crash at Brown airfield near the Mexican Border. He was an avid pilot flying in an experimental plane and crashed and died on 17 February 1996. Memorial services were held on the 22nd.

MARCH

March was just as busy as the first two months of the year. In addition to OPPE and TSTA III, the ship had several minor inspections including the Radiation Health Inspection and a Hull inspection. ESSEX also commenced C4I upgrade window.

Building on a string of successes, the engineers aced the OPPE inspection. CNSP also awarded the Surface Ship Safety Award for 1996 and the group awarded the Battle 'E' for 1995. Departmental E's were won in Maritime Warfare

ENCLOSURE (3)

(Power projection / Sea Control), Engineering, Survivability, Command and Control, and Logistics Management.

As always, ESSEX was visited by several different organizations for tours. The intelligence school and Medical Navy Recruiting Tour both visited and Scientists at Sea embarked for a week's underway time.

APRIL

April started out busy with the Final Evaluation Period (FEP). ESSEX set a new standard for excellence earning some of the highest praise from Capt Eddingfield, Commanding Officer, Afloat Training Group Pacific who embarked for the Total Ship Survivability Exercise (TSSE). Upon her return from FEP, the wardroom said farewell to LCDR Arleth, the navigator, and LT McLean, the V1 officer.

Since the basic phase of the training cycle was now complete, ESSEX commenced a two week IMAV with SIMA and an elevator ILS review. On the 11th, NAVSUP 05 visited and a day later the ship conducted a personnel inspection. Another key first in the ship's history was the qualification of LTjg Melanie Etz as EOW, the first female EOW on ESSEX.

By far the biggest event of the month surpassing even the importance of FEP was the COMNAVSURFPAC Change of Command. On the 16th, ESSEX deadsticked from pier two to pier Juliet at North Island Naval Air Station. On the 19th, VADM Robison, VADM Kreckich, and ADM Zlatoper, CINCPACFLT, embarked with numerous other VIP's for an outstanding change of command ceremony. Everything from the arrival, ceremony, reception to the departure was perfect. That same day, ESSEX deadsticked back to pier two.

For the last week of the month, ESSEX got underway with an IMAV film crew and some LAS VEGAS NJROTC to conduct CQ's and an ammo offload. During all this, the supply department participated in Solid waste stream survey where all trash was retained onboard. On the 23rd, ESSEX unreped with the USNS Rappahannock and qualified LCDR Grossmann and LT Schueler OOD's. Also, the ship conducted a brig noise survey. The ammo onload went smoothly.

ENCLOSURE (3)

Once back in port, Combat Systems commenced C4I Installation and the ship an IMAV with SIMA for two weeks. The 29th was a holiday.

MAY

The main event for May was RIMPAC '96. Prior to getting underway for RIMPAC, the ship loaded the platoon and completed several important inspections. The bridge crane in the hangar bay was weight tested while the ship was loading out with marines- an event that required some coordination. In addition, Combat Systems went through a Combat Systems Assessment Management Program. Finally, before leaving, the ship held a family day picnic.

The ship was underway for Hawaii on the morning of the 11th. She sailed up near Camp Pendleton to onload aircraft, ammo, and LCAC's then headed west. ESSEX arrived off the big island on the 18th to offload the BLT to the PTA at K-docks on the northwest shore. Then she sailed to Pearl Harbor offloading the ACE and running the SESEF range on the way. The rails were manned when entering port on the 20th. The next day, ESSEX hosted a port wide memorial service for ADM Boorda who had just committed suicide.

ESSEX and the rest of the ships broke out of port on the 23 to commence the primary phase of RIMPAC. She then sailed back to the PTA on Hawaii to backload the BLT. Along the way, she conducted two unreps with the USNS W.S. Diehl. Overall, ESSEX had a great month. All the work and effort was showing in the quality of performance.

JUNE

For the first half of June, ESSEX conducted operations in support of RIMPAC '96 off Kauai and off Kaneohe Bay. On the 9th, COMTHIRDFLT, RADM Lautenbacher, visited for a few hours. A day later, a film crew from the Discovery Channel embarked to commence filming a documentary about the Battle Group - ARG concept of operations. On the 16th, the ARG sailed into Pearl Harbor for some much deserved liberty getting underway to return home on the 21st. The sail back to conus was uneventful and the MEU was offloaded at Pendleton and the ship returned to port on the 28th.

JULY

Upon the ship's return from RIMPAC, the last of Marine gear was offloaded and preps were made for the Fourth of July weekend. Combat Systems conducted a readiness review and supply conducted an AMMT inspection and LMA. Medical also conducted a readiness review.

On the 15th, the ship was underway again for SACCEX for about a week until the 23rd. CORTRAMID midshipman embarked at Pendleton for the last few days. The rest of the month was spent loading stores, conducting various weight certification tests, giving tours, and preparing for a visit by the CJCS. He never showed being called away at the last second to Washington. Of note, ESSEX participated in full in Surface Line Week sweeping the overall in both professional and sports categories.

AUGUST

The first week of August found ESSEX ramping up for the next underway period for SOCEX and JTFEX. The preps included onloading the crash crane and various stores. As always, several dignitaries visited. On the 5th, VADM Cebrowski (J6) C4I toured the combat systems spaces.

SOCEX took ESSEX north off the coast of central California in company with USS Reid, USS Cleveland, and USS Harpers Ferry. Several exercises were conducted in support of the 11th MEU qualification as Special Operations Capable (SOC). Our transit back into SOCAL was routine and TECG BGEN Bolden (CO 15th MEU) visited as well as Gen Brown and Gen Broderick. The republican convention was ongoing in San Diego and ESSEX anchored off Coronado to watch the fireworks the last night of the convention. VADM Lautenbacher and RADM Saffell visited. Sailor Phone was optested with a range of only eight miles from the base station on Cleveland.

Upon ESSEX's return to port on the 19th, the ship shifted to four section duty for the duration of Westpac and to commence POM. There was a flurry of activity including an availability with SIMA, several NAVOSH surveys, and weight tests. The new CNO ADM J. Johnson visited as well as RADM Stevens of NAVSECGRU. On the 26th, the Fleet Comms Package was installed.

ENCLOSURE (3)

It was in August that ESSEX first learned that the deployment date of 20 September might slip. The New Orleans was slated to participate in Exercise Tandem Thrust '97 in March with the Australians. Her SRA was not going well and Seventh Fleet/CTF 76 wanted a much more capable ship. The revised deployment date would be 10 October. There was much discussion about how to prepare or plan for the possible shift in schedule dates. Everyone just kept planning for the original deployment date.

SEPTEMBER

ESSEX was finally directed to deploy twenty days later to depart on 10 October. Since the crew was ready and in order to keep everyone focussed and proficient, it was decided to sail to Mazatlan, Mexico as a reward. The reaction was mixed: some wanted to go and others didn't, but in the long run it was a successful trip and everyone had a good time.

In addition to the continued preps, ESSEX had a family day cruise on the 13th. RADM Suffel embarked for the day with guests and the event was a success. On the 18th, ESSEX departed for the Mazatlan trip and returned on the 27th.

OCTOBER

The first ten days of October were spent in anxious anticipation of deploying on the 10th. There were working parties to load last minute stores and the vehicle onload. COMNAVSURFPAC visited on the 7th for a brief farewell. On the tenth, the ESSEX ARG consisting of ESSEX, Cleveland, and Harpers Ferry sailed as planned. Flight ops were conducted everyday for the rest of the month except for three.

On the evening of the 16th, as we sailed by Oahu, Rocky 607, a CH-46 of HMM-166, caught fire and set down about a mile off shore. It sank but all the crew were recovered safely with no injuries. Then on the 19th, after a brief Amphibious exercise off of Barking Sands, Kauai, the Harpers Ferry reported a possible man over board. The ARG was turned around and spent over a day and a half searching the waters north of Kauai and Niihau with no success. Unconfirmed reports were that the man jumped overboard, swam ashore, and was later picked up in San Diego.

ENCLOSURE (3)

ESSEX chopped to Seventh Fleet on 24th. After the delay caused by the man over board search, the track was altered south to pass near enough to Guam to make a supply run by helo and to enable an unrep with the Camden. The Marines, staff and crew were all adjusting to each other. The ACE was very inflexible about the scheduling of the flight deck and because of that, the schedule of events drove the ship's schedule. The planning horizon at PBFT shortened to about two weeks at most. It was not an easy relationship.

NOVEMBER

After passing through the Phillipine Archipelago and South of the Spratly Islands, the track was again altered south for a more direct route to Singapore. While passing through the Natuna Palau at flight ops, the ESSEX was accused of violating air space and had to provide a reconstructed track to the USDAO rep for the seventh fleet. ESSEX made port in Singapore on the fourth mooring at Sembawang. While inport, the Cleveland had her change of command. Also, on the tenth, VADM Natter, C7F; RADM Chaplin, CTF 76; and RADM Bepko, CLWP visited. That same day ESSEX sailed for Malaysia.

On the 11th, ESSEX moored at Northport, Kelang, Malaysia to show the flag. Cleveland and Harpers Ferry detached and sailed further north. The 12th was a day of public relations and tours, and that evening, ESSEX hosted an official reception in the Hangar Bay. ESSEX sailed from Port Kelang on the 13th.

On the 14th, ESSEX let go anchor in Penang Harbor in Phuket, Thailand for a four day port visit. ESSEX weighed anchor on the 18th to rendezvous with the Harpers Ferry. (The Cleveland suffered a major engineering casualty the day before and was unable to sail on time.) ESSEX and Harpers Ferry chopped to the Fifth fleet on the 24th and transited the remainder of the distance across the Indian Ocean to Oman without incident flying every possible day including Thanksgiving.

DECEMBER

December started off with the eight day SEA SOLDIER '97, the first of four major exercises. SS97 was conducted off the coast of Oman. After the exercise which went well, ESSEX moored in Muscat for three days. Harpers Ferry and Cleveland

ENCLOSURE (3)

anchored out. COMPHIBGRU THREE, RADM Suffell embarked for the transit through the Strait of Hormuz on the 12th, the day ESSEX got underway. ESSEX rendezvoused with the Antietam to have her escort the ARG through the Strait. The transit was uneventful.

On the 14th, ESSEX and company arrived off of Qatar for the five day EASTERN MAVERICK exercise during which the Crown Prince and US Ambassador to Kuwait visited, toured, and dined aboard. On the 18th, ESSEX sailed north for Kuwait arriving in anchorage C on the 20th. From that day until the end of the year and beyond, ESSEX remained in support of EAGER MACE. The 11th MEU went ashore but most of the ACE was still embarked. On weekends, ESSEX would get underway to resupply and refuel and then return.