DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY

USS FLORIDA (SSBN 728)
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From: Commanding Officer, USS FLORIDA (SSBN 728) (BLUE)
To: Director, Naval Historical Center (NO9BN), Washington Navy Yard, Washington DC 20374-0571

Subj: 1997 COMMAND HISTORY

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Encl: (1) Command History and Narrative
(2) USS FLORIDA (SSBN 728) (BLUE) Sailing List
(3) USS FLORIDA (SSBN 728) (GOLD) Sailing List
(4) Biography of CDR Gregory M. Billy, USN
(5) Biography of CDR Michael E. Neller, USN

1. Enclosures (1) through (5) are forwarded per reference (a).

2. Point of contact is LT Truitt, DSN 744-7915 or commercial (360) 396-7915.

G. M. BILLY

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1. Command Composition and Organization. The ship's mission is to remain undetected as a strategic nuclear deterrent. The ship's parent command is Submarine Squadron 17 and the ship is homeported at Naval Submarine Base, Bangor, WA. Two crews, Blue and Gold, alternate manning the ship in cycles of varying length. When not manning the ship, the "off-crew" falls under the administrative command of Submarine Group 9 and maintains proficiency though the conduct of intensive training at Trident Training Facility. The Blue crew is commanded by CDR Gregory M. Billy and the Gold crew is commanded by CDR Michael E. Neller.

2. Chronology

1 JAN - 6 JAN	FLORIDA moored at NSB Bangor under the command of CDR M.J. Alfonso, USN. Conducted Nuclear Weapons Acceptance Inspection
7 JAN	Blue crew relieved by Gold crew.
8 - 11 JAN	Independent Steaming Operations and Refresher Training.
12 JAN - 7 FEB	Moored at NSB Bangor. Conducted strategic onload.
08 - 27 FEB	Underway for Strategic Deterrent Patrol 42. Completed Operational Reactor Safeguards Examination.
28 FEB - 26 MAR	Moored at NSB Bangor. Gold crew relieved by Blue crew. Conducted Refit 47 including Drydock period.
27 MAR - 16 MAY	Underway for Strategic Deterrent Patrol 43, Tactical Weapons/Torpedo Certification Proficiency (TWP/TCP) and Tactical Readiness Examination.
17 - 19 MAY	In port at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.
20 MAY - 05 JUN	Underway for Strategic Deterrent Patrol 43.
06 JUN - 09 JUL	Moored at NSB Bangor. Blue crew relieved by Gold crew. Conducted Refit 48.
10 JUL - 14 AUG	Underway for Refresher Training and Strategic Deterrent Patrol 44, Tactical Weapons Proficiency Inspection, and Tactical Readiness Examination.
12 AUG	CDR G. M. Billy relieves as Commanding Officer of USS FLORIDA(BLUE)
15 - 20 AUG	In Port at San Diego.
21 AUG - 02 SEP	Underway for Strategic Deterrent Patrol 44.
03 SEP - 21 OCT	Moored at NSB Bangor. Gold crew relieved by Blue crew. Conducted Refit 49 (drydock).

22 OCT - 22 DEC	Underway for Refresher Training, Strategic Deterrent 45, and Operational Reactor Safeguards Examination.
23 DEC	Moored at NSB Bangor. Ship retained by Blue crew in preparation for Defense Nuclear Surety Inspection and Augmenting Navy Technical Proficiency Inspection.

3. Narrative

The FLORIDA Blue crew ushered in the new year in classic Navy fashion: preparing for inspection. Following her 1995-1996 Engineered Overhaul and follow on certification, the time had arrived for FLORIDA to rejoin the nation's strategic deterrence force. On January 3-4, an inspection board under the direction of Commander Submarine Force, US Pacific Fleet and composed of technical, security, and administrative inspectors conducted a Nuclear Weapons Acceptance Inspection to evaluate the ability of FLORIDA to perform her assigned mission. The crew's tireless efforts resulted in 12 subject grades of OUTSTANDING and 2 EXCELLENTs, with a SATISFACTORY rating overall.

The ship was then turned over to the Gold crew, allowing them to refresh their tactical skills while the Blue crew enjoyed a well-deserved liberty period. Following an intense 4 days at sea, the ship returned to port to conduct strategic onload, assisted by the Weapons Department of the Blue crew.

Departing Bangor on February 8, the FLORIDA disappeared in the great Pacific to conduct her 42nd strategic deterrent patrol. At the end of this abbreviated but important patrol, the Engineering Department demonstrated their superb technical and operational skills in an Operational Reactor Safeguards Examination. Returning on this positive note, Captain Neller and his crew moored at Bangor on February 28.

After taking charge of the ship, the first task of the Blue crew was to conduct an unscheduled drydocking. The main purpose of the drydocking was to effect repairs to the port vertical stabilizer, which had been damaged during the west-to-east navigation of the Panama Canal the year before.

Having completed Refit 47 successfully by all measures, the Blue crew returned to sea on March 27 for Strategic Deterrent Patrol 43. This period was distinguished by an intensive drill schedule designed to maintain the crew at maximum readiness. Following completion of a Tactical Weapons/Torpedo Certification Proficiency (TWP/TCP) and Tactical Readiness Examination, the crew enjoyed a 4-day liberty period in Pearl Harbor. Striving to retain the Gold and Silver Dolphin Flags, the ship focused on personnel qualification during the 16-day return trip to Bangor.

On June 6, the Gold crew relieved the Blue crew and began Refit 48. The maintenance period was completed without incident, and on July 10, Captain Neller and his crew departed for their second strategic deterrent patrol of the year. On a sad note, the patrol was briefly interrupted by a tragic medical casualty onboard the ship.

Meanwhile, back in Bangor, an important event occurred. Concerned about CDR Alfonso's leadership style and the low morale displayed by his crew, Rear Admiral Sullivan (Commander, Submarine Group Nine) took the extraordinary step of relieving the Blue crew captain of his command. On Aug 12 , CDR Gregory M. Billy, USN, assumed command of FLORIDA (Blue)in a brief ceremony.

The tactical skills of the Gold crew shone brilliantly as they hosted a Tactical Weapons Proficiency Inspection and Tactical Readiness Evaluation. Following these successful inspections, they rested in San Diego for 6 days, and then started the two-week leg back to Bangor. Prior to crew turnover, the Gold crew hosted a Defense Nuclear Surety Inspection (DNSI) and Augmenting Navy Technical Proficiency Inspection (ANTPI). The strong inspection results included certification for the crew to continue to operate the Trident I (C4) missile.

On September 3, the Blue crew relieved the Gold crew and shortly thereafter took the ship back into drydock for Refit 49. Important jobs of this intensive maintenance period included battery replacement, shaft replacement, superstructure repair, and major hull inspections.

Showing consistently superior teamwork and planning, CDR Billy and his crew completed Refit 48 and departed Bangor on October 22 for refresher training and Strategic Deterrent Patrol 45. Important events of this patrol included the MEDEVAC and HUMEVAC of two FLORIDA sailors and an Operational Reactor Safeguards Examination. Returning to Bangor just in time for holiday turkey, the ship moored at Bangor on December 22.

Good news greeted the ship portside: capping an extraordinary year, it was learned that the Weapons Department of FLORIDA (Blue) had been selected as the best on the waterfront and therefore entitled to display the Strategic "S" on the sail of the ship. Additionally, both crews received Honorable Mentions in the Fleet Recreation competition, reflecting the tremendous effort exerted by both commands at maintaining crew morale.

The ship was retained by the Blue crew in preparation for the upcoming Defense Nuclear Surety Inspection and Augmenting Navy Technical Proficiency Inspection.