



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY

USS NITRO (AE-23)
FLEET POST OFFICE
NEW YORK, N.Y. 09579

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Ser 022
25 January 1984


From: Commanding Officer, USS NITRO (AE 23)
To: Director of Naval History (OP-09BH), Washington Navy Yard,
Washington D.C. 20374

Subj: Command History for Calendar Year 1983; forwarding of

Ref: (a) OPNAVINST 5750.1C

Encl: (1) Basic History Narrative

1. USS NITRO command history for calendar year 1983 is forwarded as enclosure (1), in accordance with reference (a).


A.E. MILLIS

COMSERVRON TWO
COMSERVGRU TWO
COMNAVSURFLANT NORFOLK VA
CINCLANTFLT NORFOLK VA

USS NITRO AE-23
COMMAND HISTORY
1983

The commencement of Nitro's 24th year of commissioned service found her in homeport at Naval Weapons Station Earle, Leonardo Pier, New Jersey preparing for a Supply Management Inspection and a Nuclear Weapons Acceptance Inspection (Nwai). After satisfactory completion of these two major shipwide inspections Nitro completed a Departure Material Status Review (DMSR) to check final readiness for Refresher Training. The ship departed for Refresher Training (REFTRA) in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba on 20 January 1983. REFTRA challenged all crewmembers as Nitro participated in a vigorous regimen designed to test every mission area. Nitro Engineers excelled in their satisfactory completion of the Operational Propulsion Plant Examination (OPPE) during REFTRA. Nitro returned to homeport 5 March 1983 having successfully completed REFTRA and COMNAVSURFLANT notified Commander Second Fleet of Nitro's Operational Certification on 8 March 1983. This milestone enabled Nitro to compete once again in the 1 April 1982 - 10 October 1983 Battle Efficiency Award Competition for mission excellence.

From March 7th through the 9th 1983 Nitro completed a Command Inspection (IUC) conducted by Commander Service Squadron TWO. Essential repairs were completed during a March Restricted Availability and the ammunition loadout was adjusted in preparation for NITRO to participate in her first Composite Task Unit Exercise (COMTUEX) in over two years.

The exercise began with NITRO providing ammunition and heavy lift services to deliver aircraft engines to USS JOHN F. KENNEDY (CV 67) on 7 and 8 April 1983, after which NITRO joined units under COMDESRON 14 for COMTUEX (2-83). Upon completion of COMTUEX (2-83) exercises and services NITRO, was given the title "honorary greyhound" by COMDESRON 14 for services to COMTUEX units and performance as COMORANGE.

Following a brief liberty port visit in Bermuda (U.K.) from 20-22 April NITRO returned to homeport and conducted an ammunition load adjust which emptied most magazines aboard in preparation for the down-loading of USS NIMITZ (CVN 68) during her return transit from deployment. Nitro was underway for USS Nimitz download from 11-21 May 1983.

NITRO joined Nimitz CVN68 one day early and when interrogated by flashing light on whether ammunition download could begin early responded "We are ready now". Thus began the most intensive mission assignment to date for Nitro, lasting from 15-18 May.

NITRO provided Nimitz STREAM rigs from Stations 2A and 8A and a Burton rig at Station 4. Simultaneously, the flight deck crew kept pace with two CH-46 helicopters delivering ammunition at a rate often above 50 lifts per hour. During one fifteen hour period alongside Nimitz, Nitro received approximately 1440 lifts on 16 May 1983 prompting CO NIMITZ to send a ship's plaque with the inscription "USS NITRO (AE-23) Professionalism Exemplified".

Nitro returned to Earle, New Jersey to offload USS NIMITZ (CVN 68) ammunition and onload ammunition to deliver to USS INDEPENDENCE (CV 62) to upload her from a shipyard repair period. Nitro crewmembers participated in a Human Resource Management Availability that was conducted during our inport time from May to July.

Nitro was underway from 8-13 June providing services to USS INDEPENDENCE (CV 62), the aircraft carrier it would operate extensively with through READEX 2-83 and Mediterranean (1-84) deployment. Upon return to homeport, repairs were scheduled, Nitro's cargo ammunition load was taken aboard and preparation for overseas movement (POM) intensified.

On 6 July 1983 Nitro was underway with USS SURIBACHI (AE-21) conducting STREAM system qualification tests of all underway replenishment rigs in Narragansett Bay Op Areas. Nitro anchored off Prudence, Island in Narragansett Bay from 8-11 July for a summer liberty port visit in Newport, R.I.

On 11 July 1983 crewmembers welcomed their dependents who had been bussed to Newport for a Dependent's Cruise from Newport, R.I. to Earle, N.J.

Following an upkeep period, a Navy Safety Center Shipboard Survey, 3M Inspection and additional ammunition loadout at homeport NITRO journeyed south to Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico for a liberty port visit prior to READEX (2-83) in which NITRO was an active participant. Nitro provided ammunition services to USS JOHN F. KENNEDY (CV 67) and units of two CVBG's during READEX. On 1-2 September NITRO had a port visit to beautiful St. Thomas, US VI, and once more returned to NWS Earle, NJ. A combination Nitro Pre-deployment Picnic and Dependents Briefing was held at the Weapons Station Pavillion 14 September 1983. With the exception of an underway replenishment STREAM SQT 28-30 September 1983 with USS DETROIT (AOE 4), NITRO spent the rest of her time in homeport preparing for the Mediterranean deployment.

NITRO was underway from homeport the final time for 1983 on 20 October for her deployment to join the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean. There were no unauthorized absences upon sailing and the crew seemed eager to reestablish NITRO's quarter century history of service to deployed units in the U.S. Sixth Fleet.

On 30 October 1983 NITRO sailed past the Pillars of Hercules and joined the Sixth Fleet. After inchoption to the United States Sixth Fleet and completion of a blue water turnover with USS BUTTE (AE 27), NITRO began to serve as the "Augusta Bay to Beirut Shuttle".

Ammunition, stores, food and mail were loaded and taken from Augusta Bay, Sicily to other Sixth Fleet units off the coast of Lebanon, stationed in the Eastern Mediterranean to protect U.S. Multinational Peacekeeping Forces ashore in Beirut. NITRO was notified of selection for mission area excellence awards for the competitive cycle ending 1 October 1983. NITRO received the Fleet Support Excellence Award for Logistics and Fleet Support Operations (LOG/FSO) and the Navigation/Deck Seamanship Excellence Award (MOBILITY (N)). In addition, NITRO received COMSERVGRU TWO quarterly most improved retention award for the Fourth Quarter FY-83 and attained the COMNAVSURFLANT Force Retention Superstar List in November 1983. NITRO's only port visit to a port other than Augusta Bay was from 6-8 December when she was anchored off Naples, Italy. From 20 October until 19 December during four shuttle runs to the Eastern Mediterranean NITRO participated in 34 alongside replenishments and 39 vertical replenishments with 25 different ships including conventional replenishment of USS DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER (CVN 69), USS JOHN F. KENNEDY (CV 67), USS INDEPENDENCE (CV 62) and USS NEW JERSEY (BB 62). It was an especially exciting day on 16 December 1983 when NITRO was tasked to deliver to the Battleship New Jersey 16 inch/50 powders and projectiles from both STREAM Stations 2A and 8A less than 40 hours after USS New Jersey (BB 62) had responded to a call for fire to protect reconnaissance aircraft from hostile AA Batteries in Lebanon. This marked the first rearming at sea of New Jersey's 16 inch/50 ammunition by an Atlantic Fleet MLSF unit since her recommissioning. The fact that NITRO was homeported in New Jersey made this RAS more significant for the crew. In recognition of NITRO's excursions to the Eastern Mediterranean, the ship was awarded the Navy/Marine Corp Expeditionary Medal (Lebanon). On 19 December, 83 USS NITRO moored pierside in the Hellenic Shipyard, Skaramangas, Greece, for a Restricted Availability until the end of the year. A USO Show Tour Troupe of Los Angeles Rams Cheerleaders performed on the NITRO flight Deck the day after Christmas 1983.



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY

USS NITRO (AE-23)
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5 Apr 85


From: Commanding Officer, USS NITRO (AE 23)
To: Director of Naval History (OP-09BH), Washington Navy Yard
Washington, D.C. 20374

Subj: FORWARDING OF COMMAND HISTORY FOR CALENDAR YEAR 1984

Ref: (a) OPNAVINST 5750.12C

Encl: (1) Basic History Narrative

1. USS NITRO command history for calendar year 1984 is forwarded as enclosure (1), as per reference (a).


A. E. MILLIS

Copy to:
COMSERVRON TWO

COMMAND HISTORY
USS NITRO (AE 23)
CALENDAR YEAR 1984

Calendar year 1984 found USS Nitro (AE-23) moored in Skaramangas, Greece completing a maintenance availability. During Nitro's visit in Greece, the First Class Association completed extensive work on the "Agia Trias" girls orphanage in Athens. On January 6th, several of the girls visited Nitro to extend their appreciation and tour the ship. Nitro sailed from Skaramangas later that day after almost a month in port.

Nitro's first tasking was to onload mines in La Maddalena, Sardinia. While there, three officers, Ensigns (b) (6) (b) (6) and (b) (6) reported aboard from USS Orion (AS 18) for underway training. They remained aboard until 25 January completing much of their Surface Warfare Personnel Qualification Standards (PQS) requirements..

Upon completion of shuttle services to the NATO Peace Keeping Force off the coast of Lebanon, Nitro proceeded to a port visit in Antalya, Turkey. Nitro anchored in Antalya Bay on 7 February. At approximately 2200, 8 February, Nitro received an emergency sortie message from Commander Task Force Six Three directing her to the coast of Lebanon for services. During a heavy rainstorm, all of Nitro's liberty party was recalled and she was underway within two hours. Nitro was immediately tasked to accompany USS John F. Kennedy (CV 67) and rearm USS CARON (DD 970).

During this period, heavy fighting had begun in Lebanon. USS New Jersey (BB 62) had fired her massive guns in support of Marines ashore. On 11 February, while enroute to Augusta Bay, Sicily for 16 inch ammunition to rearm New Jersey, Nitro spotted, tracked and reported a surfaced Libyan Foxtrot class submarine until relieved by a P-3C Orion aircraft. Subsequently, a "Bravo Zulu" message was received from Commander, U.S. Forces Sixth Fleet. Nitro was called upon once again while enroute to Haifa, Israel to supplement the Marine withdrawal from Beirut. Numerous pallets of ammunition were received from the Marines stationed ashore via vertical replenishment. Afterward, she proceeded to her port visit in Israel.

Upon leaving Israel, Nitro continued her high tempo operations towards the western Mediterranean and the end of the cruise. During the Blue Water Turnover with USS Seattle (AOE 3), Nitro received several pallets of books onboard destined for Casablanca, Morocco as part of a CNO Special Project. The books were given as a gesture of goodwill with the hope they might promote a higher level of education in Morocco. The project was aptly named "Handclasp". On April 19, 1984, Nitro delivered the books to Casablanca as the U.S. Ambassador to Morrocco extended his appreciation for Nitro's participation in this program of international goodwill.

Nitro proceeded from Morocco to Rota, Spain, her final port visit of the cruise. While making preparations for the transit home, the ship's new Executive Officer, LCDR James D. Baker, reported aboard and began his relieving process.

During the seven day transit of the Atlantic Ocean with USS John F. Kennedy Battle Group, Nitro participated in several Selected Exercises and Type Commander Exercises with a high degree of success. These exercises ranged from underway replenishment (UNREP) proficiency to Tactical Maneuvering. In addition, Nitro had the opportunity to cross-deck junior officers to combatants of the battle group for practical combat systems training.

On 2 May 1984, just one day after her 25th anniversary, Nitro moored at pier two, Naval Weapons Station, Earle, Leonardo, New Jersey. Hundreds of Nitro wives, family members and friends greeted her. Among the distinguished guests was the Mayor of Nitro, West Virginia (Nitro's namesake town). The days events included two reenlistments and CDR Millis' frocking to Captain. In addition to homecoming, the month of May was completed with a load adjust, post-deployment leave and several inspections. The latter included an ordnance handling equipment inspection, Ordnance Handling Safety Assist Team (OHSAT), Supply Management Inspection (SMI) assist visit and a Training Readiness Evaluation Assist Visit. On May 25th, the Commanding Officer and approximately thirty sailors travelled to Nitro, West Virginia to attend the official adoption ceremony of the ship by the city.

June was a continuation of May in terms of inspections. Nitro completed the Training Readiness Evaluation (TRE) designed to groom her for Refresher Training and ultimately, deployment. Nitro's nuclear weapons handling facilities and administration were inspected for suitability by Nuclear Weapons Acceptance Inspection (NWAI) and Nuclear Weapons Assist Team (NWAT). In addition, the aviation facilities received an assist visit designed to prepare Nitro for her upcoming Aviation Facilities Certification Inspection. In conjunction with an already busy schedule, USS Vulcan (AR 5) arrived on 18 June to commence an Intermediate Maintenance Availability (IMAV) concurrent with a Restricted Availability (RAV) which was already in progress.

Nitro's IMAV continued into July until Vulcan's departure on the 18th. The Shipboard Elevator Improvement Program was conducted from 9-13 July and again from 23-27 July. Six midshipmen from various ROTC units reported aboard for summer training on the 14th of July. Nuclear Technical Proficiency Inspection (NTPI)/Defense Nuclear Surety Inspection (DNSI) continued to evaluate Nitro's capability to handle nuclear weapons on July 16th and 17th. Nitro was certified for flight operations at the completion of her inspection which took place from July 23rd to the 25th. Commander Service Group TWO, Rear Admiral Morton E. Toole, toured Nitro during a brief visit designed to appraise the condition of his units stationed at Earle. The month was completed by a welcome visit/tour by several residents of Nitro, West Virginia on the 27th and finally a short harbor dependents cruise on the 30th.

On 2 August, Nitro shifted colors and was underway for Guantanamo Bay, Cuba for Interim Refresher Training. This was one of the training environments Nitro was being groomed for since her return to homeport. Upon arrival, the crew began a non-stop, fast paced rigor of training with evolutions designed to test and upgrade the material and personnel readiness of the ship from engineering casualties to wartime UNREP scenarios. The six midshipmen debarked on August 7th for return to their respective ROTC units. Nitro completed her training scoring well in all respects. She received several acclamations from Fleet Training Group at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Nitro departed from Cuba on 17 August and returned home on the 21st.

In September from the 17th to the 20th, Nitro began an ammunition download of USS Nimitz (CVN 68), and completed the task during a second underway period from the 27th to the 30th. Nitro's Supply Management Inspection was conducted in the interim between the underway dates.

On October 9th, Nitro was nominated for a CNO Special Project and sailed in an effort to aid in the testing of equipment onboard the space shuttle, Columbia. Nitro's services were again called upon to upload ammunition to USS Saratoga (CV 60) on the 15th returning to Earle on the 20th. USS Shenandoah (AD 44) arrived later the following day to begin a second IMAV for Nitro. On 30 October, Nitro got underway for her transit to the Caribbean for her participation in Composite Task Unit Exercise (COMPTUEX) 1-85. While participating with other units to test their abilities to operate together in simulated wartime environments, Nitro distinguished herself by becoming the first ammunition ship to upload both New Jersey (BB 62) and Iowa (BB 61) since the Korean War era during a transfer of 16 inch ammunition to Iowa. Nitro also had the rare opportunity to conduct an alongside transfer with USS Hercules (PHM 2). 12-14 November saw Nitro moored for liberty in Bridgetown, Barbados. Upon returning to the task group, Nitro completed her participation in COMPTUEX 1-85. Her final grades for the exercise were excellent. Nitro arrived at Earle on 20 November and crew members spent Thanksgiving with their families.

Nitro's activities did not draw to a close as 1984 was about to in December. A Command Inspection was conducted from the 3rd to the 11th. The pre-deployment RAV began in order to accomplish jobs prior to departing on Nitro's next scheduled Mediterranean deployment.



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY

USS NITRO (AE-23) ✓
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18 NOV 1986

From: Commanding Officer, USS NITRO (AE-23)
To: Director of Naval History (OP-09BH), Washington Navy Yard,
Washington, DC 20374

Subj: COMMAND HISTORY FOR USS NITRO (AE-23) FOR CALENDAR YEAR 1985

Ref: (a) OPNAVINST 5750.12C

Encl: (1) Basic History Narrative

1. Per reference (a), USS NITRO command history for calendar year 1985 is forwarded as enclosure (1).

(b) (6)

By direction

Copy to:
COMSERVRON TWO

COMMAND HISTORY
USS NITRO (AE-23)
CALENDAR YEAR 1985

The nineteen eighty-five calendar year for the NITRO began with the ship spending the first week of the new year in port before getting underway for the upcoming series of tests and drills. The week-long drills consisted of 'BDCE' drills (Basic Damage Control Exercises), BECCE drills (Basic Engineering Casualty Control Exercises) and General Quarters.

On the fifteenth, a quick download was conducted and the following day began our one month 'RAV' (Repair Availability) period (during which time, EMTT inspectors came aboard periodically) in homeport, Earle, New Jersey.

The Nitro was underway for three days following the RAV period, (February tenth through the thirteenth) during which time, selected crew members conducted a burial-at-sea and later, a rendezvous was made with the USS CORAL SEA (CV-43). Preparations were made on the return trip home for the scheduled 'Materials Handling Equipment Inspection', which took place on the twentieth of February in homeport, Earle.

Load adjusts were begun in the holds and preparations were made for sea in anticipation of the first phase of the Mediterranean cruise, known as 'Readex'.

Many Nitro families assembled on the pier to see the ship off for her departure on the twelfth of March. Two days later, the Nitro rendezvoused with the aircraft carrier, USS NIMITZ (CVN-68) and proceeded to upload her with over one thousand lifts of cargo. Upon 'breaking away', the Nitro made for the southern Puerto Rican port of Viequez, where she stayed until she left the Carribean Basin for the Mediterranean. This began the second phase of the voyage. After the ten-day crossing, the Nitro made a brief stop at Rota, Spain before proceeding into the western Mediterranean to make her 'Blue Water Turn-over', with the USS Butte (AE-27) on the twenty-third of March. Having relieved the Butte, the Nitro was now officially attached to the Sixth Fleet Carrier Task Force (Service Squadron Two) which was led by the aircraft carrier Nimitz. Two days after the Blue Water Turn-over, the Nitro pulled into the Spanish port of Almeria. One day following the ship's twenty-sixth anniversary, the Nitro pulled out to sea on the second of May. Shortly thereafter, the shaft bearing over-heated and all propulsion units were brought to an abrupt halt.

Having answered the call for assistance from the Nitro, the USS Concord arrived on the seventh to give a tow. The Concord swung in so close, no shot line was necessary, therefore the towing and heaving line were tossed over to the Concord's deck by hand.

Upon arrival to the southern French naval port of Toulon, repairs commenced immediately to bring the Nitro into fleet readiness. During the stay, many sailors explored the surrounding countryside, visited the famous cities of the Riviera and others chose to see Paris.

It was noted that French and American sailors got along together quite well. Several sailors of nearby French vessels came aboard and toured the ship, as did some of Nitro's crewmembers aboard the French Warships.

While in Toulon, the Nitro received several midshipmen aboard. During their six-week stay, the midshipmen received 'hands-on' training in the ship's basic layout, propulsion, command systems and navigational techniques.

The ship was made ready for sea and was underway for Palma de Mallorca, where she arrived on the morning of the third of June. The following day, Captain A. E. Millis, USN, was relieved by Commander W. J. Stillmaker as commanding officer of the USS Nitro. The 'Change-of-Command' ceremony took place on the flight deck with the entire ship's company in attendance and was also witnessed by several of the Nitro families.

Several first class petty officers who made up the ship's "First Class Organization", donated much of their liberty and money for supplies to bring goodwill to Palma. As a group, they repainted and recovered a shelter for the homeless and aged. They were recognized for their caring efforts by the citizens of Palma and their respective hometown newspapers. They were very successful at promoting goodwill and diplomacy overseas.

On the tenth, the colors were shifted and the Nitro cruised south along the western coast of Italy. Two days later, the USNS Neosho (TAO-143) came alongside and a 'burton' rig was utilized for the transfer of cargo. A 'burton' rig incorporates a non-tensioned rig and the tricky application of gravity to send a load from ship to ship. The unusual factor involved in this rig, is that it had never been used before by the crew, never-the-less, the operation was carried out successfully.

The Nitro rejoined the carrier task force of the Sixth Fleet on the nineteenth of June, and proceeded in great haste towards the eastern Mediterranean in response to the TWA hijacking. For the next forty-five days, the fleet remained on station at peak readiness until the resolution of the hijacking crisis. During this time, crewmembers of the Nitro completed thirty conventional underway replenishments and forty-seven 'VERTREPS' (helicopter transfer replenishments) which amounted to the accumulated total of over ten tons of ammunition to the fleet.

When the TWA crisis was brought to a close, the Nitro departed the Nimitz Battle Group and arrived on July nineteenth in Golcuk, Turkey for an 'RAV'. The stay in the Golcuk Turkish Naval Yards lasted approximately three weeks, during which time, many improvements were made in engineering and deck departments. Liberty time was consumed shopping in the cities of Golcuk and Istanbul. The three week visit to the historic country of Turkey, allowed the crew to observe the traditions of the Islamic way of life.

The latter half of August and the first week of September were spent in transit back to the western Mediterranean, picking-up return ammunition from various ships and shore installations.

The USS Seattle (AOE-3) came to rendezvous with the Nitro on the eighth of September for the "Blue Water Turn-over". At this time, the Commander of Atlantic Naval Surface Forces, sent his congratulations to the Nitro and awarded her the following departmental awards: mobility, navigation, deck seamanship and fleet support. It was also acknowledged that during this cruise, the Nitro had accumulated approximately one-hundred and seventeen days at sea and only eighty-six days inport.

During the transit back to the States the USS Nimitz pulled alongside and stayed there for approximately thirteen hours. During this down-load, approximately five thousand, seven-hundred lifts of ammunition were received from the Nimitz by both 'VERTREP' and 'CONREP'.

Under cloudy morning skies and cold rain, the Nitro rounded Sandy Hook and moored to her pier at NWS Earle, Leonardo Piers, on October the third. Families waiting on the pier were extremely cheerful, regardless of the frigid weather, and what followed was truly a happy reunion.

On the thirtieth of that month, colors were shifted again, and the Nitro was underway for Vieques, Puerto Rico. Immediately upon arrival, the booms were swung-out and the SEABEES brought over their fork trucks and portable cranes, and the process of loading ammunition was begun. All the ammo was becoming outdated and was destined for storage and deactivation in the U.S. All hands worked in shifts starting at 0600 and worked until sometimes past 2000. The first shipment consisted of roughly three thousand lifts, which were delivered to the Naval Weapons Station, Charleston, South Carolina. After three days of off-loading, the Nitro returned to Vieques and took on approximately two thousand, two-hundred lifts, which were returned to homeport Earle on the twenty-fifth of November. This accounted for over five thousand, two-hundred lifts taken from the island of Puerto Rico. The down-load was met by all hands as a challenge and completed the labor in record time.

The crew's spirits were at an all-time high as everyone anticipated the forthcoming Christmas leave period, which commenced in mid-December and was due to end in mid-January.

The calendar year of nineteen eighty-five concluded with the ship's company at three-hundred and ten men assigned on board (twenty officers and two hundred and ninety enlisted), some of which were absent on Christmas leave while the majority of the crew prepared for the upcoming PMA (Phased Maintenance Availability) period which is to be conducted at Coastal Drydock, Brooklyn Naval Shipyard, New York.



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY

USS NITRO (AE-23) ✓
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NEW YORK, N.Y. 09579-3002

5750

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1 APR 1987

From: Commanding Officer, USS NITRO (AE-23)
To: Director of Naval History, (OP-09BH), Washington Navy Yard,
Washington, DC 20374-0571

Subj: COMMAND HISTORY, USS NITRO (AE-23)

Ref: OPNAVINST 5750.12D

Encl: (1) COMMAND HISTORY, USS NITRO (AE-23), 1986

1. In accordance with reference (a), enclosure (1) is forwarded.



W. J. STILLMAKER

COMMAND HISTORY
USS NITRO (AE 23)

New Year 1986 found the USS NITRO (AE 23) in her homeport, Earle, N.J. during a holiday leave and stand down period. After completion of the leave period on 5 January, preparations were made for the upcoming Phased Maintenance Availability shipyard period. On 14 January NITRO departed Earle for the Transit to Coastal Dry Dock & Ship Repair Corp in Brooklyn, NY. The yard period was a four month availability in which repairs were made to engineering, operations, deck, and habitability spaces and equipment.

During the availability the ship received essential repairs and maintenance upkeep while the crew was afforded the opportunity to attend various Navy schools and classes ranging from formal officer and senior enlisted training to basic firefighting for junior personnel. On 30 April NITRO was underway, two days earlier than the scheduled departure date, after a successful Phased Maintenance Availability shipyard period.

Upon completion of the yard period NITRO conducted several "shakedown" underway periods during the month of May in which the propulsion plant and other ship's machinery were extensively operated and tested. On 1 May 1986, USS NITRO (AE 23) celebrated her 27th year of commissioned service.

NITRO got underway from Earle, NJ on 9 June for transit to Norfolk, Virginia, for training and preparation for various inspections. Also during the June underway period NITRO conducted several underway replenishments with the USS KALAMAZOO (AOR 6) and USS NIMITZ (CVN 68) in the Virginia Capes Operating Area. On 30 June NITRO returned to her homeport, Earle, NJ after successful completion of the Operating Propulsion Plant Examination (OPPE) and the Nuclear Weapons Acceptance Inspection (NWAI).

After returning from Norfolk, the month of July was spent preparing for the Inspection and Survey (INSURV) Underway Material Inspection and the upcoming "Northern Wedding" NATO exercise. After a careful and thorough INSURV the week of 25 July, preparations continued for the August deployment for Northern Wedding. On 17 August NITRO was again underway for a two month NATO cruise to the North Atlantic. During the exercise NITRO had the opportunity to operate with the aircraft carrier NIMITZ (CVN 68) and British, Dutch, French, Norwegian, and German units. NITRO and her crew also crossed the Arctic Circle of "Boreas Rex" and her crew was purged of neophytes as they earned the sought after title of Bluenose.

USS NITRO also had the opportunity of making port calls in Glenn Douglas, Scotland; Portsmouth, England and Dublin, Ireland. NITRO was the first US naval vessel to visit Ireland since 1981, and she spent a most enjoyable and rewarding week anchored in Dublin Bay as many of her crew enjoyed the sights of the Emerald Isle.

After a successful and adventurous cruise, NITRO returned to Earle, NJ on 16 October and began making preparations for her upcoming Mediterranean deployment in late December. NITRO successfully completed her Command

Inspection in mid November and was awarded the red "DC" for excellence in Damage Control material condition and training for the ending competitive cycle. As the holidays approached, the ship had several short leave periods in order to allow crewmembers to take holiday and pre-deployment leave while allowing pre-deployment preparations and last minute details to be completed.

On 30 December 1986 USS NITRO (AE 23) deployed for a six-month cruise to the Mediterranean as a unit of the Sixth Fleet.