



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY

COMMANDING OFFICER
USS ASHLAND (LSD 48)
FPO AE 09564-1736

IN REPLY REFER TO:

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09 MAR 1998

"DECLASSIFIED" Unclassified upon removal of enclosure (2)

From: Commanding Officer, USS ASHLAND (LSD 48)
To: Director of Naval History (OP-09BH), Washington Navy
Yard, Washington, D.C. 20374-0571

Subj: 1997 COMMAND HISTORY

Ref: (a) OPVAVINST 5720.12E

Encl: (1) Command History
(2) Supporting Documentation
(3) Press Releases

1. In accordance with reference (a), enclosures (1) through (3) are forwarded.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "A. O. Heimer".

A. O. HEIMER

"DECLASSIFIED"

USS ASHLAND (LSD 48) COMMAND HISTORY FOR 1997

1. Command Composition and Organization:

a. Mission: Amphibious warfare; designed to transport Marines and their combat equipment to designated areas throughout the world, and then to launch and support assault landing craft and helicopters during amphibious operations ashore.

b. Organizational Structure: Assigned to Commander, Amphibious Group TWO, Little Creek, Virginia.

c. Commanding Officer: Commander Antony O. Heimer, USN

d. Homeport: Naval Amphibious Base, Little Creek, Norfolk, Virginia

2. Chronology:

HOLIDAY LEAVE AND UPKEEP	1 JAN - 17 JAN
TRANSIT TO MAYPORT	18 JAN - 20 JAN
REFTRA, MAYPORT	20 JAN - 7 FEB
TRANSIT TO NAB LITTLE CREEK	7 FEB - 9 FEB
INPORT LITTLE CREEK	9 FEB - 13 FEB ---
TRANSIT TO BALTIMORE, MD	13 FEB
INPORT BALTIMORE, MD	13 FEB - 16 FEB
TRANSIT TO LITTLE CREEK	16 FEB
INPORT LITTLE CREEK	16 FEB - 25 FEB ---
SSDS/LCAC OPS, VCOA	25 FEB - 28 FEB
INPORT LITTLE CREEK	28 FEB - 4 MAR ---
ERAT, VCOA	4 MAR - 13 MAR
INPORT LITTLE CREEK	14 MAR - 24 MAR ---
SSDS EXERCISES, VCOA	24 MAR - 28 MAR
INPORT LITTLE CREEK	28 MAR - 31 MAR ---
TSTA III	31 MAR - 3 APR
OPEVAL PHASE I	1 APR - 4 APR ^{U/P}
INPORT LITTLE CREEK	4 APR - 7 APR ---
FEP, VCOA	7 APR - 11 APR

INPORT LITTLE CREEK	11 APR - 28 APR
INSURV	28 APR - 2 MAY
INPORT LITTLE CREEK	2 MAY - 12 MAY
PMINT, Onslow Bay	12 MAY - 17 MAY
INPORT LITTLE CREEK	17 MAY - 19 MAY
CSRR PHASE I	19 MAY - 30 MAY
INPORT LITTLE CREEK	31 MAY - 2 JUN
OPEVAL PHASE II	2 JUN - 6 JUN
INPORT LITTLE CREEK	6 JUN - 23 JUN
CSRR PHASE II	16 JUN - 20 JUN
COMTUEX, Onslow Bay	20 JUN - 26 JUN
SSDS EXERCISES, VCOA	26 JUN - 27 JUN
INPORT LITTLE CREEK	27 JUN - 1 JUL
IMAV	1 JUL - 21 JUL
MEUEX, Onslow Bay	21 JUL - 30 JUL
INPORT LITTLE CREEK	31 JUL - 4 AUG
TRANSIT TO YORKTOWN, DEPENDENT'S CRUISE	4 AUG
WEAPONS ONLOAD, YORKTOWN	4 AUG - 7 AUG
TRANSIT TO LITTLE CREEK	7 AUG
INPORT LITTLE CREEK	7 AUG - 18 AUG
JTFEX, Onslow Bay	18 AUG - 05 SEP
POM	5 SEP - 2 OCT
ENROUTE ONSLOW BAY	3 OCT - 4 OCT
24 MEU ONLOAD, ONSLOW BAY	4 OCT
TRANSIT ATLANTIC OCEAN	4 OCT - 15 OCT
ARG TURNOVER, ROTA, SPAIN	15 OCT
TRANSIT STRAIGHT OF GIBRALTAR	16 OCT
INCHOP COMSIXTHFLT	16 OCT
TRANSIT EASTERN MED	16 OCT - 22 OCT
EXERCISE BRIGHT STAR, EGYPT	22 OCT - 4 NOV
TRANSIT EASTERN MED	5 NOV - 7 NOV
PORT VISIT: IZMIR, TURKEY	7 NOV - 13 NOV
TRANSIT EASTERN MED	13 NOV - 16 NOV
PORT VISIT/EXERCISE: HAIFA, ISRAEL	16 NOV - 1 DEC
TRANSIT EASTERN MED	1 DEC - 3 DEC
PORT VISIT: RHODES, GREECE	3 DEC - 10 DEC

TRANSIT MED	10 DEC - 12 DEC
OFFLOAD MARINES/EXERCISE: TARANTO, ITALY	12 DEC
TRANSIT MED	12 DEC - 14 DEC
PORT VISIT: CORFU, GREECE	14 DEC - 18 DEC
TRANSIT MED	18 DEC - 19 DEC
ONLOAD MARINES: TARANTO, ITALY	19 DEC
TRANSIT MED	19 DEC - 22 DEC
PORT VISIT: NAPLES, ITALY	22 DEC - 31 DEC

After an intense training cycle/Ship's Self Defense System (SSDS) developmental stage in the fall of 1996, ASHLAND's crew began 1997, half way through a well deserved holiday leave and upkeep period. They could not sit on their laurels though, for they were in store for three weeks of intensive refresher training (REFTRA).

Mid-January ASHLAND departed Little Creek, Virginia in route to sunny Mayport, Florida. While inport at the Naval Station Mayport, ASHLAND was omni-present, dominating the skyline and towering over the homeported cruisers and destroyers. ASHLAND's crew was focused and prepared to show the Atlantic Training Group what she could do. During her three weeks stay in Mayport, ASHLAND participated in a myriad of training evolutions ranging from precision anchorages and mooring to a buoy to engineering and combat systems evolutions. Excelling in all evolutions, ASHLAND was lauded by ATG time and time again.

After returning from Mayport, ASHLAND said good-bye to LCDR Edward Delaney, who was relieved as Executive Officer by LCDR Roy Geberth.

Upon completion of REFTRA, ASHLAND returned to Little Creek, for a short stop before heading north to host the Society of Black Engineers Dance in Baltimore, Maryland. It was during this event that the ASHLAND's welldeck was turned into a ballroom. ASHLAND's crew weather proofed the welldeck, set up a huge tent covering one-third of the welldeck, brought in a disc jockey and hosted a party for 1,200 prospective engineers who danced the night away in the Baltimore Harbor.

After the tent came down and the party lights dimmed, it was back to business as usual. The last week in February and well into March ASHLAND found herself off the shores of Wallops Island, Virginia to continue the testing and developing of the Navy's first SSDS. In

addition to the numerous daily SSDS evolutions, the crew was preparing around the clock for Engineering Readiness Assessment (ERAT), TSTA III, OPEVAL Phase I and the pinnacle of the training cycle, the Final Evaluation Problem (FEP).

As of 4 April, the basic training cycle was complete. ASHLAND was now ready for operational training. Before ASHLAND joined the other three ships of the Amphibious Ready Group (ARG), she was to be evaluated by the Board of Inspection and Survey (INSURV). ASHLAND fared well once again during INSURV.

The first week of May, ASHLAND was joined by the rest of the ARG, USS SHREVEPORT (LPD 12), USS OAK HILL (LSD 51) and the flagship of COMPHIBRON TWO, USS GUAM (LPH 9). The first integrated training exercise was PHIBRON MEU Integrated Training (PMINT). PMINT consisted of five days of driver familiarization for elements of the 24th MEU and ACU Four LCAC Detachment Alpha. It also presented the ships in company the opportunity to establish a working relationship. Shipboard training ranged from flashing light communications drills on the signal bridge to basic engineering casualties control exercises (BECCES) in the main spaces.

Upon completion of PMINT, ASHLAND returned to Little Creek to begin Combat Systems Readiness Review (CSRR). CSRR consisted of a team of civilians who evaluated every aspect of ASHLAND's ability to be self-sustaining in a combat environment. By the end of CSRR, ASHLAND was in her top material condition since commissioning.

Nearing the end of June, the GUAM ARG proceeded back to Onslow Bay, North Carolina for more training with 24 MEU. This time the exercise was COMTUEX. After five days of joint training exercises, ASHLAND departed from the ARG to complete some additional SSDS training on her own.

ASHLAND kicked off July tied up to the Quay wall east. For three weeks ASHLAND was involved in Intermediate Maintenance Activity (IMAV). IMAV was a chance for the crew to get a breather from a very intense underway schedule. At the same time, the crew was determined to have the ship in the utmost state of readiness as they continued with their pre-deployment work ups, the next which was MEUEX.

MEUEX was ten days of intense ship to shore movement, drills and exercises off the coast of Onslow Bay. Condition 1A for LCAC operations was a daily occurrence. This exercise gave Deck Department the opportunity to perfect their skills in wet well operations.

The next milestone in preparing for deployment was a trip to Yorktown, Virginia for the ammunition onload. The transit to Yorktown gave the crew an opportunity to show friends and family just what it's like to be underway. Over 150 people sailed with ASHLAND on 4 August, for the dependents day cruise. Upon arrival in Yorktown, the dependents debarked and the crew was back to work unloading ammunition for the next two days. Upon completion of the onload, ASHLAND was back in Little Creek gearing up for her last exercise of the pre-deployment workups, JTFEX.

During JTFEX, ships from Mayport, Earle, Norfolk and Little Creek converged in the Cherry Point, North Carolina Operating Area for the final pre-deployment exercise. This was the first time ASHLAND and her crew were given the opportunity to operate with the elements of DESRON 14 and ships of the GEORGE WASHINGTON Battle Group. This three week period involved intensive training for all parties involved, but the climax of the event was spearheaded by the ARG and elements of 24 MEU during the Non-Combatant Evacuation Operation (NEO). NEO featured ASHLAND and her embarked LCACs evacuating the US Embassy of a fictional country called Korona. JTFEX was a huge success with ASHLAND and her Sailors being a huge contributing factor. With ASHLAND's assistance, 24 MEU earned her MEU Special Operations Capable (SOC) designation and COMPHIBRON TWO was ready to deploy.

Upon returning from JTFEX, on 5 September, ASHLAND began her Pre-Overseas Movement (POM) maintenance period. Divided into two sections, her crew was set free for their last bit of rest and relaxation prior to "the big deployment".

On 3 October, at 0930 ASHLAND took in all lines from the quay wall at NAB Little Creek for the last time in 1997. The crew manned the rails in summer whites as they waved good-bye to loved ones on the pier. This was the first day of her six month deployment.

That night ASHLAND joined the rest of the ARG and steamed south to Onslow Bay. On the morning of 4 October, ASHLAND arrived and anchored

at Onslow Bay, North Carolina. All day long, the four embarked LCACs worked expeditiously to onload over 325 Marines and their equipment from the 24th MEU. Shortly after sunset, ASHLAND weighed anchor and began her transit across the Atlantic Ocean.

After an eleven day transit, on 15 October, ASHLAND arrived in Rota, Spain. She anchored in the inner harbor for one day while major players of the ship were receiving a turnover from the USS CARTER HALL (LSD 50). The GUAM ARG and GEORGE WASHINGTON Battle Group were relieving the KERSARGE ARG and JOHN F. KENNEDY Battle Group. Again, just after sunset, ASHLAND weighed anchor and made her way for the Strait of Gibraltar. On 16 October, she passed through the Strait and Inchopped to SIXTHFLT.

From 16-21 October, ASHLAND made her way across the Western and Central Mediterranean, to the Eastern Mediterranean. On 22 October, she arrived off the coast of Egypt to participate in Exercise BRIGHT STAR. Through numerous onloads, offloads, amphibious rehearsals and assaults, the embarked Marines worked with the Egyptians ashore. While the Marines were ashore, ASHLAND increased her training proficiency. ASHLAND would anchor off the coast during the day to work with the LCAC's, then weigh anchor and steam throughout the night. Exercise BRIGHT STAR was a huge success. Marines of 24 MEU received invaluable training.

By 4 November, ASHLAND was completely backloaded and on her way to her next destination.

After being at sea for over a month, on 7 November, ASHLAND made her first port visit of the deployment: Izmir, Turkey. On 12 November, ASHLAND's third Commanding Officer CDR Timothy R. Hanley was relieved by ASHLAND's fourth Commanding Officer, CDR Antony O. Heimer. On 13 November, ASHLAND was again off and sailing.

On 16 November, ASHLAND arrived in Haifa, Israel, along with USS GUAM, USS OAK HILL and USS SHREVEPORT. For the Marines, Haifa was more work than play. On the 16th, the embarked Marines offloaded all of their equipment and headed to the hills of Israel.

On 27 November, the Supply Department prepared an excellent and most enjoyable Thanksgiving dinner.

After leaving Haifa, Israel on 1 December, ASHLAND continued to "port hop". From 3-10 December, she visited Rhodes, Greece. Despite, visiting in the winter, the "off season", Rhodes was still quite enjoyable. Excitement broke out on ASHLAND when a storm rolled in on 6 December. Strong winds in excess of 50 knots and high seas with waves crashing over the quay wall where ASHLAND was moored caused liberty to be secured.

On 10 December, ASHLAND got underway, and made her way to Taranto, Italy. Arriving on the morning of 12 December, ASHLAND anchored for approximately five hours to offload 150 of the embarked Marines and their equipment for yet another exercise. By mid-afternoon, the offload was complete. ASHLAND weighed anchor and continued on to Corfu, Greece.

From 14-18 December, ASHLAND visited Corfu, Greece. Again, she anchored in the inner harbor, using water taxis to take the crew ashore. Kerkira (Corfu) was extremely quiet, yet it was a nice place for the Sailors to relax for a few days.

On 19 December, ASHLAND was back, anchored in the inner harbor of Taranto, Italy. Within four hours the onload was complete. Her next port visit would be to Naples, Italy for the holidays.

ASHLAND finished 1997 inport Naples, Italy. Arriving on 22 December, her holiday standdown period lasted through the new year. ASHLAND shared her visit in Naples with USS GUAM, USS SOUTH CAROLINA (CGN 36), USNS APACHE (ATF 172) and USS ELROD (FFG 55). Christmas Eve was highlighted by two significant events. First, the Secretary of Defense, the Honorable Mr. William S. Cohen, along with Mary Chapin Carpenter addressed the crews of the visiting ships onboard GUAM. The evening was also highlighted by a tour to the Vatican for Midnight Mass. Over 150 Sailors and embarked Marines took advantage of this once in a lifetime opportunity. Christmas day was highlighted by a magnificent dinner prepared by the Supply Department. For most Sailors and Marines, the new year was rung in with a New Year's party on the pier.

Officers Assigned to ASHLAND as of 31 DEC 97

CDR Heimer	Commanding Officer
LCDR Geberth	Executive Officer
LCDR [REDACTED]	Chief Engineer
LT [REDACTED]	Operations Officer
LT [REDACTED]	1st Lieutenant
LT [REDACTED]	Supply Officer
LT [REDACTED]	Medical Officer
LT [REDACTED]	Dentist
LTJG [REDACTED]	Navigator/Admin Officer
LTJG [REDACTED]	Electronic Warfare Officer
LTJG [REDACTED]	Ast 1st Lieutenant
LTJG [REDACTED]	Auxiliaries Officer
LTJG [REDACTED]	MPA
LTJG [REDACTED]	Communications Officer
LTJG [REDACTED]	CIC Officer
LTJG [REDACTED]	Disbursing Officer
LTJG [REDACTED]	Engineering Admin Officer
LTJG [REDACTED]	Electrical Officer
ENS [REDACTED]	3rd Division Officer
ENS [REDACTED]	1st Division Officer
ENS [REDACTED]	2nd Division Officer
CWO3 [REDACTED]	BOSN
CWO2 [REDACTED]	DCA