



USS BLUE RIDGE (LCC-19)

FLEET POST OFFICE
SAN FRANCISCO 96601

LCC19/16:ht
5720
Ser 206

13 MAR 1974

From: Commanding Officer, USS BLUE RIDGE (LCC19)
To: Director of Naval History (OP-09B9)
Subj: Command History (OPNAV Report 5750-1); submission of
Ref: (a) OPNAVINST 5750.12B 1973
Encl: (1) BLUE RIDGE "Family Grams" for months of JAN-DEC 73

1. In accordance with reference (a), subject report is submitted for the period 1 January 1973 to 31 December 1973.

a. Command Organization. Commanding Officer: (1) Captain Paul H. Speer, U. S. Navy, 1 January 1973 - 20 March 1973; (2) Captain James D. Butler, U. S. Navy, 20 March 1973 - 31 December 1973.

b. Summary of Operations. BLUE RIDGE spent the first three weeks of 1973 at the U. S. Naval Station in San Diego, California. She got underway 24 January for eight days of independent steaming and participation in a Marine/Navy amphibious exercise. The ship returned to the Naval Station 2 February and remained there until 24 February at which time she set sail for the Western Pacific and her second deployment. Making the customary transit via Hawaii, BLUE RIDGE reached Pearl Harbor on 2 March. She left the next day and remained at sea until 15 March when she arrived at White Beach, Okinawa. Upon arrival she relieved the USS PAUL REVERE (LPA248) as flagship for Commander Amphibious Group ONE, Rear Admiral W. D. TOOLE.

BLUE RIDGE stayed inport White Beach until the end of the month. During that period in Okinawa Captain J. D. BUTLER became the ship's third commanding officer, relieving Captain P. H. SPEER in main deck ceremonies on 20 March.

BLUE RIDGE left Okinawa on 31 March en route to South Korean waters where she and other elements of a U. S. task force linked with South Korean forces in Operation GOLDEN DRAGON, one of the largest amphibious exercises witnessed in those waters in several years.

Returning to White Beach 11 April, BLUE RIDGE opened its brows to all military personnel and their dependents. Some 2600 people toured the ship in the two-day Open House.

The ship followed its Okinawa stay with stops in Subic Bay, Philippines (26 April - 5 May) and Hong Kong (7-12 May). From Hong Kong it was on to Manila Bay where BLUE RIDGE embarked several high-ranking members of the Philippine Navy who were to ride the ship during Operation PAGASA I, a joint United States-Philippine Naval exercise.

Following the maneuver, BLUE RIDGE spent the last week of May inport Okinawa. Then came stays in Keelung, Taiwan (1-5 June) and Sasebo, Japan (7-14 June). The final half of June and the first nine days of July were once again spent in Okinawa. During that juncture Rear Admiral TOOLE was relieved as Commander Amphibious Group ONE by Rear Admiral A. W. PRICE, Jr. The change of command ceremony occurred on 22 June on the ship's main deck.

The ship finally left White Beach again on 10 July headed for the Gulf of Tonkin. She carried equipment that was needed by U. S. helicopters that were involved in clearing mined North Vietnamese waters. BLUE RIDGE spent two nights in north Vietnamese waters off the coast of Vinh and Hon Matt before departing for Manila in the Philippines.

The Manila stay was short-lived, however, as heavy seas and high winds made it impossible to remain moored in Manila Bay. The ship moved down to Subic Bay for a couple of days and then transited to Yokosuka, Japan for an upkeep period (26 July - 5 August). Bad weather again plagued the ship after she left Yokosuka. A typhoon caused BLUE RIDGE to take evasive action for four days rather than pull back into White Beach. The ship finally moored in Okinawa 16 August. From there it was on to Singapore where BLUE RIDGE spent an enjoyable six days (24-29 August). Leaving Singapore early the morning of the 29th, BLUE RIDGE proceeded to cross the equator at Longitude 105°26'.

Proceeding back to Okinawa, she became the first SEVENTH Fleet combatant ship to refuel at sea with a commercial tanker, taking on some 158,000 gallons of Navy distillate from the FALCON PRINCESS.

The period 4-19 September was spent inport Okinawa and 22-26 September inport Subic Bay. The Subic period was preparation for PAGASA II, another joint United States - Philippine Naval exercise.

After leaving Subic to start the exercise, it was learned that one of our junior officers, Ensign [REDACTED], was missing. An extensive search was made of the ship and after long hours it appeared that the ship had lost a man. As Operation PAGASA II continued ships in the exercise kept an eye out in hopes of spotting Ensign [REDACTED]. Shortly thereafter good news was received. A Russian AGI, the KURSOGRAF, had been in the area and come across an American "sailor" in the sea and had rescued him. The sailor turned out to be Ensign [REDACTED].

With high-level messages flying back and forth from Washington, D. C., a rendezvous was set up between the Russians and BLUE RIDGE. A boat crew was sent to the Russian ship to get Ensign [REDACTED] and as a gesture of good will Captain BUTLER sent along ice cream, cigarettes and other souvenir items to the Russian ship. The Russians reciprocated in kind.

The troublesome tropical storms in the Western Pacific continued to hamper BLUE RIDGE as PAGASA II came to a close 5 October. The ship was to return to Subic and commence the staff turnover with the USS DENVER (LPD9). Another storm, however, allowed for only a brief stop in Subic and then it was back to White Beach. We arrived there 7 October and transferred Rear Admiral PRICE and his staff to the DENVER.

BLUE RIDGE set sail for her home port of San Diego on 8 October with a guest. The guest was in the form of a fast patrol craft, the type used in the back waters of Vietnam. The boat was in need of transportation back to the states and BLUE RIDGE offered that chance on her helo deck.

BLUE RIDGE arrived in San Diego 23 October.

A post deployment stand down period lasted until 26 November at which time four days were spent in local operations off the coast of Southern California.

BLUE RIDGE returned to port after that and remained berthed at Pier 6, U. S. Naval Station for the remainder of 1973.

c. Documentary Annexes. Enclosure (1).


J. D. BUTLER

Copy to: (w/o encls)
CINCPACFLT
COMPHIBPAC
COMPHIBFORSEVENTHFLT