

USS CLEVELAND (LPD-7)
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From: Commanding Officer, USS CLEVELAND (LPD-7)
To: Director of Naval History (OP-09B9)
Washington Navy Yard
Washington, D.C. 20374

Subj: Command History, 1973

Ref: (a) OPNAVINST 5750.12B dtd 20 MAY 71

Encl: (1) Command History of USS CLEVELAND (LPD-7) for CY 1973

1. Enclosure (1) is submitted in accordance with the provisions of reference (a).


H. A. ZOEHRER

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I. COMMAND HISTORY, USS CLEVELAND (LPD-7), 1973

Commanding Officers:

CAPTAIN Robert E. KIRKSEY, USN, 01 JAN - 11 OCT 73
CAPTAIN Herbert A. ZOEHRER, USN, 11 OCT - 31 DEC 73

Executive Officers:

COMMANDER Thomas R. LANGLEY, JR., USN, 01 JAN - 27 JUL 73
LIEUTENANT COMMANDER William A. HERMAN, USN, 27 JUL - 31 DEC 73

II. SHIP'S HISTORY, USS CLEVELAND (LPD-7), 1973

CLEVELAND began the new year 1973 operating off the coast of South Vietnam, in the area nicknamed the Gator Box, an amphibious holding area off Da Nang. As 1973 began, CLEVELAND was serving as flagship for CAPT E. C. MAUPIN, USN, the Commander of Amphibious Ready Group BRAVO and the Commander of Amphibious Squadron SEVEN. Steaming with her were other units of the Ready Group -- USS TULARE (LKA-112), USS INCHON (LPH-12), and USS FRESNO (LST-1182). Besides serving as Commodore MAUPIN's flagship, CLEVELAND was also carrying the Commanding Officer of the 33rd Marine Amphibious Unit, along with several Marine troop detachments.

In January, 1973, the Vietnam War was drawing to a close and the talk of peace was in the air. Repeated word of negotiation breakthroughs had reached the task group, but until an actual ceasefire agreement could be achieved, it was business as usual. The ready group and its Marines provided a deterrent force in the Gulf of Tonkin, and, while troops were not in fact sent ashore, the task group was required to maintain the highest degree of readiness possible. Underway replenishments, such as those conducted on 2 January with USS WACCAMAW and on 4 January with USS SAN JOSE, enabled the ready group to remain on station for long periods.

On 7 January, the ready group proceeded toward Subic for an upkeep period. This was the crew's first in-port period since a Christmas visit to Singapore. The task group remained in Subic until 16 January, having arrived on the 9th. On 12 January in Subic Bay, Commodore MAUPIN was relieved as Commander of Amphibious Ready Group BRAVO by CAPT R. A. PADDOCK, USN, the Commander of Amphibious Squadron ONE. CLEVELAND remained the task group flagship.

Commencing 17 January, CLEVELAND spent three days underway in the local operating areas around Subic Bay providing carrier qualification services for helicopters of two locally-based Marine Helo squadrons. Then, on 20 January, the ready group re-formed and proceeded once again toward the Tonkin Gulf and the familiar Gator Box. Although no one in the ready group was aware of the fact, this would be our last trek westward into the Gulf before the signing of the Vietnam Cease-fire Agreement on 26 January.

The word of the cease-fire brought tremendous relief to the men of Ready Group BRAVO; the ships were immediately ordered to leave the Gator Box for the last time and head for Okinawa. TULARE and INCHON proceeded ahead, while CLEVELAND and FRESNO followed at a slightly slower speed. The ready group arrived in Okinawa on 30 January, and, after a fast off-load of the Marine troops, CLEVELAND was underway again, heading for Subic Bay and a new and novel assignment with Task Force 78, the Task Force ordered to clear mines from North Vietnamese waterways.

CLEVELAND arrived in Subic on 1 February and officially joined Task Force 78. (Flagship duties for the Ready Group were assumed by TULARE). For the first seventeen days of February, the ship enjoyed a concentrated upkeep period in Subic as more and more ships entered the harbor following the cease-fire. During this period, CLEVELAND was visited by RADM W. C. TOOLE, the Commander of Amphibious Force, U. S. Seventh Fleet, and by Commander, Amphibious Forces, Pacific, VADM R. S. SALZER. On 8 February, Commodore PADDOCK shifted his pennant to USS DUBUQUE (LPD-8) and assumed duties as Commander Task Group 78.0.

Finally on 17 February, pilots and helos of Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 463 (HMH-463), Detachment DELTA were loaded, and CLEVELAND was ready to commence training for Operation End Sweep with Task Force 78. Shifting to an anchorage in Subic Bay, CLEVELAND spent one week conducting mine clearing training evolutions, until she and the other ships of the force had prepared themselves for the historic End Sweep operation. On 26 February, Task Force 78 under command of RADM B. MC CAULEY steamed toward the port of Haiphong.

CLEVELAND commenced mine clearing operations on 4 March, flying the helos daily. Channels had been pre-swept for the ships to enter and leave the operating area, and all replenishments were conducted at night to maximize the time available for helicopter mine-clearing flights. Units of the Task Force left the operating area several times for food and fuel, replenishing with SAN JOSE on 4 March, NIAGARA FALLS on the 13th, MARIAS on the 14th, PONCHATOULA on the 23rd and with WHITE PLAINS when two LPD's and two LPH's (CLEVELAND, DUBUQUE, INCHON, AND NEW ORLEANS) replenished simultaneously in the early morning darkness.

Among CLEVELAND's other duties while in End Sweep, she became flagship on 13 March for CAPT W. F. LINDSEY, Commander of Mine Flotilla ONE. At the same time, CLEVELAND became "Mother Ship" for five Mine Sweepers operating with the Task Force. USS WESTCHESTER COUNTY (LST-1167) departed the area temporarily on 13 March, and, in her absence, CLEVELAND provided the tiny MSO's with fuel, water, and "hotel" luxuries such as laundry and barber services. At least one MSO would come alongside every evening to anchor and refuel.

Tragedy was averted through quick action by rescue personnel on 18 March, when a Marine helicopter crashed after take-off from CLEVELAND's flight deck. Boats from NEW ORLEANS and CLEVELAND were on the scene in barely two minutes, pulling the six crew men from the water (three of the men were unconscious). CLEVELAND medical personnel provided first aid, and helicopters from NEW ORLEANS were on CLEVELAND's deck in minutes to medevac the Marines to NEW ORLEANS' sick bay. None of the crewmen was seriously injured, thanks to teamwork and fast action.

After the crash, CLEVELAND was placed in charge of salvaging the wreckage of YH-11 (the helo's side number). Working with divers from USS SAFEGUARD (ARS-25), CLEVELAND deck personnel utilized the Boat and Aircraft crane to haul the wreckage into a landing craft on 25 March. The boat with the wrecked aircraft entered CLEVELAND's well deck for transport back to Subic Bay. Salvage operations were viewed by RADM MC CAULEY on 23 March; and on 27 March MAJGEN L. E. BROWN, Commanding General of the First Air Wing, arrived onboard to inspect YH-11. The next day, Mr. Kuhrt, President of Sikorsky Aircraft, also came aboard to view the wrecked helo.

CLEVELAND completed her part of Operation End Sweep on April first and headed for Subic and, later, for San Diego. CLEVELAND had been the first of the large End Sweep ships to enter the Haiphong area, and now she would be the first to be heading for home after a ten-month-long deployment.

On 4 April in Subic, CLEVELAND offloaded her helos and began six days of upkeep. On 9 April, USS VANCOUVER (LPD-2) arrived in Subic and assumed CLEVELAND's duties with Task Force 78. The next day, 10 April, CLEVELAND was homeward bound.

The trip home was marked by three stopovers: on 14 April, CLEVELAND tied up at Guam; on the 16th (which had been repeated due to crossing of the International Date Line), CLEVELAND stopped at tiny Eniwetok Atoll to pick up a landing craft for transport to San Diego; and, on 22 April, Easter Sunday, the ship touched the U.S., docking at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii to clear Customs and embark six civilian guests of crew members for the transit to San Diego.

The biggest day of all came on 28 April 1973, when CLEVELAND returned home. The cruise which had commenced 10 July 1972 was completed. Taking a well-deserved rest, CLEVELAND's crew members commenced a thirty day period of leave, liberty and general stand-down.

During the stand-down period, on 19 May, CAPT W. H. ELLIS was relieved as Commander, Amphibious Squadron THREE by CAPT K. J. CHRISTOPH in ceremonies held onboard.

The crew came back to work and routine resumed on 30 May. The ship got underway the next day for local operations, returning that evening to Broadway Pier downtown. The next morning, relatives and friends of crew members came aboard for a Dependents' Cruise in the local operating area. Following this Friday at sea, CLEVELAND spent the weekend of 2-3 June moored at Broadway Pier as the local "visit ship", hosting about three thousand visitors over the two-day period.

The remainder of June was spent preparing the ship for a regular overhaul scheduled to begin in July. All ammunition was offloaded at Seal Beach, California on 4-5 June.

CLEVELAND hosted a distinguished visitor on 26 June when Ambassador THAJEB of Indonesia visited the ship for a luncheon with Commodore CHRISTOPH and with the Commander, Amphibious Group Eastern Pacific. And, over the weekend of 7-8 July, young Sea Cadets from Phoenix, Arizona, came aboard for training in ship-board operations.

Repair overhaul began officially on 16 July under the cognizance of Campbell Industries and the Superintendent of Ships, ELEVENTH Naval District. Extensive habitability improvements were made, notably in the crew's quarters and in the mess decks and galley area. On 8 August, CLEVELAND entered drydock at the Naval Station. Until 25 September, the crew and officers onboard during the day were treated to a cacophony of sand blasting, drilling, needle gunning, wrenching, and spraying. Fortunately, quarters for most of the crew had been shifted to barracks at the Amphibious Base, Coronado, when the overhaul began. And the

results were worth it, as CLEVELAND left drydock with a bright new paint job. Overhaul was not completed, however, until 14 December.

(Commodore CHRISTOPH and his staff, although officially embarked in CLEVELAND commencing 8 August, remained in offices ashore on the Naval Station.)

On 11 October 1973, CAPT H. A. ZOEHRER relieved CAPT R. E. KIRKSEY as Commanding Officer in ceremonies held onboard.

On 29 November, for the first time since June, CLEVELAND was underway again. The ship went to sea for a day as part of acceptance trials following her overhaul. The first extended shakedown came 17-20 December, immediately following the official termination of overhaul, during which period CLEVELAND conducted numerous operational tests, including a gun shoot, full power trial, measured mile, ULM-4 range, flight operations, and the reloading of ammunition at Seal Beach. All this was part of resuming full duties and "getting the kinks out" after the long summer and fall alongside the pier and in drydock.

On 20 December back in port San Diego, CLEVELAND commenced her holiday leave period -- a quiet end to a busy year.