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DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
USS COWPENS (CG 63)
FPO AP 96662-1183

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and (3)

From: Commanding Officer, USS COWPENS (CG 63)
To: Chief of Naval Operations (N09BH)


Subj: COMMAND HISTORY FOR 1996 (U)

Ref: (a) CNO(N009BH) ltr 5757 Ser 09BH/SH/7U505482 of 23 Jan 98

Encl: (1) USS COWPENS (CG 63) Command History for 1996 (U)

1. Per reference (a), enclosure (1) is provided.

2. Regret any inconvenience this may have caused and if you have any questions or need further assistance, please do not hesitate to write or contact me at Commercial: [REDACTED] or DSN: [REDACTED].


T. E. CULTON
By direction

Copy to:
COMCRUDESGRU FIVE

DECLASSIFIED BY: CNO (N09N2)
OPNAVINST 5513.16 SERIES
DATE: 10 Nov 2005

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COMMAND COMPOSITION and ORGANIZATION

Mission:

Ticonderoga Class AEGIS Cruisers are multimission surface combatants with primary capabilities in air warfare (AW), undersea warfare (USW), surface warfare (SUW), strike warfare (STW), and electronic warfare (EW).

Organizational Structure:

Type Commander: Commander Naval Surface Forces, Pacific (COMNAVSURFPAC)
Immediate Senior in Command: Commander Cruiser-Destroyer Group FIVE (CCDG-5)

Commanding Officer of USS COWPENS:

Captain William L. Snyder, USN

Permanent Duty Station:

Naval Station, San Diego, California

Type and number of aircraft currently assigned:

Two (2) Seahawk helicopters (SH-60B) Light Airborne Multipurpose System III (LAMPS III)
from Helicopter Squadron 49 Detachment 6 (HSL 49 Det 6)
Tail codes: Red Stinger 108 and Red Stinger 109

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CHRONOLOGY

January 1996

01-07 Leave/Upkeep, Inport San Diego
08-15 Upkeep, Inport San Diego
16-18 Anti Surface Warfare Team Trainer (ASUW WTT),
Underway (U/W) Southern California waters (SoCal)
17 Missile Shoot, Pacific Missile Test Center (PMTTC)
18-22 Inport San Diego
23-26 Anti Submarine Warfare Team Trainer, (ASW WTT)
Cruise Missile Tactical Qualification Assist Visit (CMTQ)
27-30 Inport San Diego
31-02 CMTQ

February

03-04 Inport San Diego
05-16 Intermediate Availability (I-Avail) with
Shore Intermediate Maintenance Activity (SIMA), San Diego
05-07 Acoustic Deceptive Countermeasure Warfare Team Trainer (ADC WTT)
12-16 Naval Surface Fire Support Team Trainer (NSFS)
17-19 Inport San Diego
20-23 U/W SoCal
21 Firing Exercise (FIREX) I, San Clemente (92.5)
22 FIREX II (99.5), NSFS Spotter Services
24-25 Inport San Diego
26-29 Inspection Survey (INSURV) Preps, U/W SoCal
26 Torpedo Exercise (TORPEX)
26-27 Air Intercept Control (AIC) Services

March

01-11 Inport San Diego
06-07 Environmental Health Survey
11-15 INSURV
12 U/W SoCal
13-24 Inport San Diego
18-22 Ship's Explosive Safety Inspection (SESI)
25-26 Transit to San Francisco, CA
27-31 Port visit San Francisco, CA

April

01-02 Transit to San Diego
03-30 Inport San Diego
03-24 I-Avail
08-12 Battle Group Combat Team Trainer/Amphibious Readiness Group Combat Team Trainer
(BGCTT/ARGCTT)

May

01-15 Upkeep, Inport San Diego
16 Missile onload, Naval Air Station, North Island
17-24 Composite Training Unit Exercise (COMPTUEX) 96-3A, U/W SoCal
24-29 Transit to Hawaii for Rim of the Pacific Fleet Exercise (RIMPAC/FLEETEX)
30-07 RIMPAC 96/FLEETEX 96-2

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June

04-05 Missile Exercise (MISSILEX)
08-16 RIMPAC 96
13-16 Intermediate Threat Assessment (ITA)
17-20 Port visit Pearl Harbor
21-26 Transit to San Diego/FLEETEX 96-2
27-30 Upkeep, Inport San Diego

July

01-15 I-Avail, Inport San Diego
09-11 Battle Force Tactical Trainer (BFTT)
15-19 Amphibious Readiness Group Supporting Arms Coordination Exercise (ARG SACCEX)
20-31 I-Avail, Inport San Diego
30-02 Battle Group Integrated Trainer (BGIT) 96-2/ARGIT

August

01-06 I-Avail, Inport San Diego
07-19 Joint Task Force Exercise (JTFEX) 96-2, U/W SoCal
08 Embark Helicopter Squadron 49 Detachment 6 (HSL 49 DET 6)
20-21 Missile onload, Seal Beach, CA
22 Transit to Santa Barbara, CA
22-25 Port visit Santa Barbara, CA
26 Transit to San Diego, CA
26-31 I-Avail, Inport San Diego

September

01-10 I-Avail, Inport San Diego
11-30 I-Avail, Pre Overseas Movement (POM) Leave

October

01-07 I-Avail, POM
07-10 POM
11 Deploy, WestPac 1997
12-13 U/W SoCal
12 Gunnery Exercise (GUNEX)
14-02 Transit to Hong Kong
18-21 ASWEX 97-1
27 Chop to SEVENTH Fleet (C7F)

November

03-07 Port visit Hong Kong
08-11 Transit to Singapore
17-27 Inport Singapore
25 Chop to FIFTH Fleet (C5F)
28 Transit Strait of Hormuz
29-10 U/W Arabian Gulf

December

11-13 Port visit Bahrain
14 Transit Strait of Hormuz
14-22 U/W Arabian Sea
23 Transit Strait of Hormuz
24-27 Port visit Dubai, United Arab Emirates
28-31 U/W Arabian Gulf

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NARRATIVE

USS COWPENS (CG 63) closed out 1995 with several milestones already complete in preparation for her upcoming 1996-1997 WestPac/Arabian Gulf Deployment. The Command Assessment of Readiness and Training (CART) as well as the Tailored Ship's Training Availability (TSTA) phases of her pre-deployment workups were complete. In fact, COWPENS had recently successfully completed the Final Evaluated Problem (FEP) phase and was ready to tackle the battle group level scenarios and challenges.

The first part of January was occupied by the traditional Leave and Upkeep period carried over from the holiday season of last year. Many Sailors chose to remain in the San Diego area while others spent the leave period in other regions of the country with their families. The leave period officially ended on the seventh of the month, when the entire ship's crew assembled for the first time in 1996 and geared up for the operations ahead.

On the 16th of January, COWPENS made for sea, taking in her lines from Pier 8, Naval Station, San Diego. The next three days were spent underway in the Southern California (SOCAL) Operating Area (OPAREA), brushing up on skills and tactics before once again commencing the extensive workups for deployment. The 17th marked the date of the first of three live missile firings that year. Conducted at Naval Air Warfare Center Weapons Division, Pt. Mugu, the missile shoot involving a Standard Missile (SM-2) with a special flight information radio transmitter (telemetry) in its nose section, was performed successfully without incident.

Upon returning to port on the 19th, COWPENS prepared for her first inspection/certification of the year and remained inport for the rest of January. The Cruise Missile Tactical Qualification (CMTQ) Team from Afloat Training Group (ATG), Pacific visited on two separate occasions toward the end of the month. The first was from the 23rd to the 26th when the CMTQ team came aboard for an assist visit in preparation for the final cruise missile qualification conducted during the period of January 31st to February 2nd. Over that time frame, COWPENS' cruise missile teams were subjected to complex scenarios designed to flex their knowledge and tactical employment of Harpoon and Tomahawk cruise missiles. Both Harpoon and Tomahawk Blue and Gold teams performed well above average, and contributed to an excellent qualification overall. After numerous months of training, COWPENS' was certified in her tactical employment of cruise missiles.

As February rolled around, COWPENS shifted her focus toward Gunnery Division and the Naval Surface Fire Support (NSFS) teams that normally manned Combat Information Central (CIC) during those evolutions. This was in preparation for phase I and II of the Gunnery Fire Exercises (FIREX). FIREX I and II were designed to evaluate the overall ability and effectiveness of COWPENS' NSFS and gunnery teams to deliver gun ordnance support ashore. Remaining inport until the 19th of February, COWPENS prepared for FIREX between the 12th and the 16th, when an assist team from

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Expeditionary Warfare Training Group Pacific visited and trained the NGFS teams while pier side. Four days later, on the 20th, COWPENS was once again underway.

San Clemente Island, just a few miles off the west coast of San Diego, serves as an excellent training location for surface ships which normally operate in the SOCAL OPAREA. COWPENS commenced FIREX I on the morning of the 21st, while she was steaming five miles west of the southwest corner of San Clemente Island. During this time the ship tested its accuracy by firing upon targets of opportunity on the shores of the island. FIREX II was completed a day later in a similar fashion. Both exercises were successes. COWPENS' gun systems performed exceptionally well. The final scores for both exercises were 92.5 and 99.5, out of a possible 100, for FIREXes I and II, respectively.

After spending the weekend inport, COWPENS was back out to sea on the 26th preparing for the Board of Inspection and Survey's (INSURV) evaluation of the material condition of the ship. Every facet of the ship's operation and readiness would be closely examined during this critical inspection. COWPENS' Engineering Department performed numerous evolutions, drills, and procedures, while Combat Systems and Weapons Departments did likewise in their areas of expertise, such as Detect to Engage sequences, Electronic Warfare (EW) threat evaluations, and various Combat Systems operability tests.

There was one special evolution accomplished on the 26th, a Torpedo Firing Exercise (TORPEX), again to be accomplished in an area west of San Clemente Island. The ship's Undersea Warfare (USW) teams actively tracked a submersible drone and once it was engageable, fired a Recoverable Exercise Torpedo (REXTORP). The tracking problem proved extremely challenging, but provided a valuable training opportunity for COWPENS' USW personnel.

After the INSURV rehearsal was complete, COWPENS' headed back into port for some final preparations before the actual inspection. Between the 1st and the 10th of March, while pier side San Diego, an Environmental Health Survey was conducted. This survey evaluated the Occupational Safety and Health facilities and practices on board the ship. The inspection was passed with a well "above average" assessment.

INSURV commenced on the 11th of March and lasted five days. During the inspection, one day, the 12th, was spent at sea to accommodate the engineering trials and other evolutions which required an underway environment. COWPENS was ready in terms of material condition and operation. The Head of the INSURV Board stated that COWPENS "was the finest inspection he's done on the Pacific Fleet."

The Ship's Explosive Safety Inspection (SESI) was conducted during the inport period which started just after INSURV and lasted until the 25th, when COWPENS was planning to visit the port of San Francisco, California. Between March 18th and March 22nd, an inspection team paid a close look at the storage, handling, and transfer of ordnance on the ship. Instructions, facilities, and personnel were all inspected. The inspection team proved to be an enormous benefit. In the end, the inspection team presented the debrief to the Weapons Officer and departed, both pleased and impressed. During SESI, an AEGIS software upgrade was simultaneously installed. AEGIS Baseline 3.3.0 added several user-interface improvements and operational changes in

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COWPENS' Combat System. The Baseline upgrade lasted three days, being complete on the 20th of March.

San Francisco was the first port that COWPENS visited away from San Diego in 1996. Two days, March 25th and 26th, were spent transiting north along the western coast of California. COWPENS moored at Pier 37, San Francisco, from the 27th through the 31st. The crew spent five days enjoying the scenery, social life, and recreation of a completely different, but somewhat similar, California city.

The first two days of April were spent at sea for the transit home, back to San Diego. The month of April would see COWPENS inport for the entire duration. At this time, over three weeks starting on the 3rd, COWPENS commenced an Intermediate Maintenance Availability (I-Avail) with Shore Intermediate Maintenance Activity (SIMA), San Diego. During the availability, an extensive modification to the ship's air conditioning system was performed, upgrading the components and piping to handle Freon-134. The availability ended on the 24th.

May 1st through the 15th were inport days for the officers and crew of COWPENS. On the 10th of May, Rear Admiral Peter A. C. Long assumed the duties as Commander, Cruiser-Destroyer Group Five, COWPENS' Immediate Superior in Command (ISIC), following a Change of Command ceremony held on the 10th.

COWPENS made preparations to get underway on the morning of the 16th of May, this time the stop was only across the bay at Naval Air Station, North Island, before making for the open sea. After mooring at Bravo Pier, NAS North Island, COWPENS loaded a telemetry SM-2, a REXTORP, and several other ordnance items. These were in preparation for the upcoming RIMPAC exercise.

Once the onload was complete, COWPENS again got underway and transited to the SOCAL OPAREA to participate in COMPTUEX 96-3A with the KITTY HAWK Battle Group. In COMPTUEX, the entire ship's crew would be exercised in several major drills and training evolutions. General Quarters drills, tactical ship maneuvering, plane guard stationing on USS KITTY HAWK (CV 63), and air warfare exercises were all conducted during that short period. Once the 25th of May rolled around, COWPENS was turned west, toward Hawaii, the final destination being just south of Pearl Harbor Naval Station, or the Hawaiian Operating Area. The transit lasted five days, and on the 30th of that month, RIMPAC 1996 and FLEETEX 96-2 commenced.

RIMPAC 1996, a joint multinational exercise, was designed to enhance and promote interoperability between branches of the armed services and between different nations of the Pacific Rim Countries. During the course of RIMPAC, COWPENS would participate in military exercises with naval units from Australia, Canada, Chile, Japan, and the Republic of Korea. During the majority of the time, COWPENS was the command platform of Australian Commodore Tim Cox, Commodore Flotillas, Australian Naval Forces. As Surface Warfare Commander, Commodore Cox utilized COWPENS' excellent array of warfighting capabilities to flex and train all ships participating in several surface warfare exercises.

The highlight of RIMPAC was the Missile Exercise (MISSILEX) conducted on the 4th and 5th of June, at Pacific Missile Range Facility, Barking Sands, Hawaii, just northwest of the island of Kauai. COWPENS, being the Officer-in-Charge of the Exercise (OCE), directed a group of ships comprised of COWPENS, USS ANTIETAM

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(CG 54), USS REID (FFG 30), and the Australian vessels HMAS PERTH (DD 38), HMAS NEWCASTLE (FFG 06), and HMAS SYDNEY (FFG 03). The first day, on the 4th, each ship would test fire a telemetry SM-2 at a high altitude, medium velocity target drone. COWPENS, being the first to fire an SM-2, ended up completely destroying the target drone. The next day, on the fifth, a similar exercise was conducted, this time the target was a flying, high speed drone. Toward the critical terminal phases of the exercise, however, the missile range controllers lost communication with the drone, resulting in its self destruction. COWPENS has already launched its SM-2, and once again, the ship's Fire Control and Missile Systems guided the SM-2 missile to impact a few of the drone's fragments and pieces.

The remainder of RIMPAC proved to be an extremely compressed, hectic schedule of exercises which continued to flex and train COWPENS' watchstanders until the ship's eventual visit to Pearl Harbor. Members of Discovery Channel came on board for several days to videotape the RIMPAC exercises and COWPENS' missile shoot for an upcoming channel documentary. The visit to Pearl Harbor proved to be an excellent reprieve to the hustle and bustle of RIMPAC 1996, which had just closed to an end. In Pearl Harbor, Sailors enjoyed the scenery and activities of the island paradise from the 17th of June to the 20th.

On June 21st, COWPENS bid farewell to the islands of Hawaii, and set sail for San Diego. During the transit she participated in the JMSDF PASSEX/TEAMWORK NORTH 96 with several ships of the Japanese Navy under the command of Commander, Escort Flotilla Four, Rear Admiral Hideaki Kaneda. The Japan Maritime Self Defense Force consisted of the JDS ships HIEI (DD 142), KIRISHIMA (DD 174), TACHIKAZE (DD 168), YUUGIRI (DD 153), SETOGIRI (DD 156), UMIGIRI (DD 158), YAMAGIRI (DD 152), SAWAGIRI (DD 157) AND HAMANA (AOE 124). In company also were the Chilean ship PFG LYNCH (PFG 07), ANTIETAM, RIED, and USS RANIER (AOE 7). During the transit, the international force engaged in air defense exercises, multi-ship tactical maneuvering drills, underway replenishments, and communication drills. This proved to be an enormous success and served to strengthen naval coordination among the three countries.

After six weeks at sea, COWPENS Sailors arrived back in San Diego on June 26th in time for the long July 4th weekend. RIMPAC was the longest time COWPENS had spent away from its home port since its last deployment, and with three weeks of inport time, most members spent summer vacation time with their families while others received further training for the upcoming Amphibious Readiness Group (ARG) Supporting Arms Coordination Exercise (SACCEX).

During this same inport time, the ship's tracking and surveillance capabilities were upgraded. COWPENS was made a test platform for the Force Threat Evaluation Weapons Assignment (FTEWA) System. Installed in the ship's Combat Information Center (CIC), this sophisticated tracking system and visual aid enhanced the three dimensional picture by using color and shadows. The system received its information through a passive tap into the ship's Command and Decision (C&D) interface and converted it to an accurate, detailed depiction of surface and air contacts. Other test equipment concurrently installed were the Specific Emitter Identifier (SEI) and Tactical Information Broadcast System (TIBS). Both computers served as additional sensors for

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COWPENS' electronic surveillance capabilities. The SEI provided detailed analysis of electromagnetic emissions from commercial navigation radars while TIBS served as an inter-service instrument which utilized Air Force satellites to gain global tracks and passed information to Naval ships and Army Patriot Missiles.

On July 16th, the crew was ready to storm the Southern California Operating Areas for four days to support the Marines. During this period, the KITTY HAWK Battle Group and ESSEX Amphibious Readiness Group were integrated in their training. With simulated littoral warfare on hand at nearby San Clemente, COWPENS conducted Naval Surface Fire Support for the Marines on the beach, accurately shooting 405 rounds and successfully accomplished its mission of shore bombardment.

Fresh from the ARG exercise, the crew demonstrated its quick adaptability by changing from Naval warriors to US ambassadors in preparation for the Chilean Defense Minister visit on July 19th. Once moored, the ship and crew warmly received Mr. Edmundo Perez-Yuma and his distinguished entourage including the Chilean Ambassador to the US and Chilean Vice Chief of Naval Operations. With a formal luncheon and tour of the Ticonderoga-Class Cruiser, the dignitaries left with a better understanding of Aegis Weapons systems capabilities and US Navy professionalism.

The remainder of July and beginning of August were spent inport, allowing the crew to update their medical checkups necessary for deployment. July 30th through August 2nd was spent conducting the last major sea exercise before the six-month voyage. COWPENS sailed with the KITTY HAWK Battle Group to perform the final test of readiness for the Arabian Gulf. The Joint Task Force Fleet Exercise (JTFEX) started on August 8th, and COWPENS' performance was spectacular. The high point for COWPENS was the stellar execution of its three assignments to launch and accurately direct Tomahawk missiles during SLAMEX TEXAS THUNDER. Helicopter Squadron LAMPS (Light Airborne Multipurpose System) HSL-49, Detachment 6 also received ample landing qualifications and air time for its helicopters and pilots which will deploy with COWPENS. Providing on-the-scene news coverage, KOAT-TV, an ABC affiliate in Albuquerque, New Mexico, sent a news reporter on August 11th to videotape footage of the exercise as well as to interview COWPENS' Sailors with New Mexico connections.

After the KITTY HAWK Battle Group's successful performance, COWPENS commenced its ammunition onload at Seal Beach, California on August 20th. Among the major armaments, the cruiser brought on 32 Tomahawk missiles, 922 five-inch rounds, and 8000 small arms rounds. After two days of careful loading and enjoying the beach community just outside Los Angeles, COWPENS sailed to its last pre-deployment port visit in Santa Barbara, California, for a four-day weekend. Crew members explored the sights and beauty of this relaxed, wealthy, coastal city while distinguished visitors and old-time friends had receptions both on board COWPENS and ashore.

COWPENS returned to its home port on August 26th and had its Medical Readiness Evaluation to ensure the ship's medical facilities, corpsmen and overall health of the crew were ready for the long haul. The crew also flooded the appointments at the Dental clinic to receive their regular checkup. As September rolled around, the Pre Overseas Movement (POM) leave began with the two halves of the crew rotating through two-week vacations to enjoy time with their loved ones before the big deployment date.

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During POM, the ship was assigned as the Visit Ship for Naval Station San Diego several times, allowing the general public to take a glance at the warship before it heads to the Arabian Gulf. The "Navy Times" also featured COWPENS on the front cover and printed an article with numerous pictures and interviews with the crew. In keeping with COWPENS' reputation as the display ship on the waterfront, COWPENS was chosen as one of two ships to be visited by Vice Admiral Volodymyr Bezkorovainiy, Ukrainian Chief of Naval Operations on September 13th. In a landmark meeting of "East meets West" on board COWPENS, the Vice Admiral and two Senior Naval Staff Officers of the former Soviet Union were treated to a formal luncheon and tour of COWPENS. Like the Chilean dignitaries, the Ukrainian guests were impressed with the technology, machinery and crew of COWPENS, and the meeting made a positive impact on diplomatic relations between the two countries.

With last-minute topping off of supplies going on throughout the last POM period, COWPENS was ready to charge westward to its 4th WestPac/Arabian Gulf deployment. At 0700 on October 11th, the crew bid farewell to their loved ones on the pier for six months and slowly disappeared into the morning fog of San Diego harbor and eventually out to the vast Pacific. To make the separation from home easier, the email program was implemented for the first time on board, and the one-day flower delivery service was offered by the Ship's Store.

The first few days of deployment were actually spent in Southern California waters, acting as plane guard for KITTY HAWK as it performed carrier qualifications. During COWPENS westward transit, the Aegis Cruiser successfully passed three Group 5-level Tomahawk Land Attack Missile Exercises (TLAMEX) 97-1, 97-2, and 97-3 on October 14th, 17th, and 23rd respectively. To maintain underwater detection proficiency, anti Submarine Warfare Exercises with the Red Stinger helicopters from COWPENS' helicopter detachment were conducted north of Hawaii from October 17th-21st. As part of a Passive Exercise (PASSEX), the COWPENS' team helped to successfully protect the carrier from acting Orange Force submarine, USS COLUMBUS.

On October 26th, COWPENS exited Third Fleet and chopped into Seventh Fleet. While sailing the Western Pacific, COWPENS was visited by Vice Admiral Natter, Commander Seventh Fleet (COMSEVENTHFLT). After three weeks of travel time and numerous General Quarters drills, the ship arrived in Hong Kong with the Battle Group on November 3rd and anchored in the harbor. With a five-day stay, COWPENS Sailors ventured the orient by foot or organized MWR tours, shopped for inexpensive silk and electronic software, or just relaxed in a hotel. A few members had passports to explore mysterious China, while others chose to spend their time participating in a community relations project to help landscape and clean the Salvation Army's Lai King Orphanage and Training Center – the home of 100 disabled children and adults in the New Territories, Hong Kong.

On November 8th, it was time to sail southward to the island nation of Singapore. During the four-day transit, COWPENS passed TLAMEX 97-5, Fortress Raptor, and observed Veterans Day on November 11th by performing several burials at sea. On November 12th, COWPENS was pier side at Sembawang Terminal along with ANTIETAM and CUSHING. Like in Hong Kong, the visit to Singapore was five days, and COWPENS' Sailors enjoyed the exotic mixture of the island's beauty, people and

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array of cultures while adhering to the strict rules and laws of the land. COWPENS' Sailors still found time to enjoy the recreational facilities at the terminal as well as participate in a community relations project repairing and cleaning the Singapore Boys Town.

Continuing its journey to the Arabian Gulf, COWPENS swerved around Typhoon Carlo and successfully passed yet another TLAMEX, 96-18, this time conducted by Fifth Fleet on November 27th. At this time, COMCRUDESGRU FIVE also awarded COWPENS for having the Best Ship Handler of the Year. On Thanksgiving, COWPENS finally reached its home for the next three months as it entered the Straits of Hormuz and chopped into Fifth Fleet. With festive decorations and the traditional Thanksgiving feast, the crew enjoyed a hearty meal to build energy for the upcoming tasks in the Gulf. On November 29th, Vice Admiral Fargo, Commander Fifth Fleet (COMFIFTHFLT), flew on board COWPENS and spoke to the crew about the fleet's goals and intentions as well as COWPENS' critical role.

The arrival of December brought about COWPENS revised daily schedule for increased readiness in the Gulf. With daily 0445 reveilles, 0600 General Quarters and knocking off at 1400, the crew was at its height of readiness. As the Air Warfare Commander (XW), COWPENS maintained the critical air picture and air defense of Task Group 50. The newly installed FTEWA proved to be a tremendous asset by providing clear pictures of tracks in the Arabian Gulf. The Tactical Actions Officer's (TAO) situational awareness was improved with such life-like images.

While coming along side USNS Sirius (T-AFS 8) for fuel and a stores onload on December 8th, the delivery ship lost steering and had a near collision with COWPENS. With swift action by a seasoned bridge watch, COWPENS quickly diverted from the impact. The helmsman and lee helmsman were subsequently awarded on-the-spot Navy Achievement Medals.

On December 10th, COWPENS made its first Middle Eastern port visit to the island of Bahrain. Anchored out in the bay, the crew took 40 minute ferry rides to Administrative Support Unit (ASU) Bahrain and enjoyed western-style entertainment. For some, it was the first time to visit a gold souk, to shop and buy gold at bargains. Spearheaded by COWPENS' Chaplain, another COWPENS' precedence was set as the first ever community relations project by a US ship was conducted in Bahrain to help clean and paint a local church.

One incident occurred while in Bahrain. In the morning of December 11th, COWPENS' Rigid Hull Inflatable Boat (RHIB) was overturned by the wake of a passing boat as the RHIB ferried four crew members from COWPENS to the International Port of Manama. Seven members went in the water and were rescued by one of the ship's hired commercial shuttle boats. Only one member sustained injuries to the head and was treated by the local hospital.

The four-day port visit was cut short due to high activity and movement of ballistic missiles, C-802's, at the Iranian port city of Jask. COWPENS was tasked to observe the missile firing at Jask for intelligence gathering. However, after 10 day

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time. Throughout deployment, COWPENS would designate an average of 3 members as ESWS qualified per week. COWPENS also conducted and passed Babylon Express, another Tomahawk exercise held on December 19th.

In the last of week of 1996, COWPENS arrived in Dubai, United Arab Emirates at Port Rashid on Christmas Eve where Sailors took the opportunity to call home for the holidays, enjoyed a festive Christmas meal and gift giving, and had the chance to go on desert safaris. Some even dined with local foreigners at their respective houses as part of United Services Organization (USO) Sponsor Family program. In company on the pier was the USS O'BRIEN (DD 975). For the Christmas celebrations, a non denominational sermon was preached on board COWPENS while members of the crew revealed their talent of beautiful voices by singing carols in the COWPENS choir. After four days of rest, the ship left Dubai on December 28th and spent New Year's Eve and Day in the middle of the Arabian Gulf. COWPENS celebrated the completion of another successful year as the crew later found out in January, 1997, that COWPENS was awarded its fifth consecutive Battle "E" for best overall performance in the KITTY HAWK Battle Group for 1996.

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