



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY

**USS ESSEX (LHD-2)
FPO AP 96643-1661**

5750
Ser 00/

From: Commanding Officer, USS ESSEX (LHD 2)
To: Director, Naval Historical Center

Subj: COMMAND HISTORY 2003

Ref: (a) OPNAVINST 5750.12H

Encl: (1) Command Composition and Organization
(2) Command Chronology 2003
(3) Command Narrative 2003
(4) Supporting Documents

1. Enclosures (1) through (4) are forwarded per reference (a).

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. M. Van Tol".

J. M. VAN TOL

COMMAND COMPOSITION AND ORGANIZATION

COMMAND SHORT TITLE AND UIC: USS ESSEX (LHD 2)/21533

MISSION:

- The mission of USS ESSEX (LHD 2) is to embark, deploy and land elements of a Marine landing force in an amphibious assault by aircraft, landing craft and amphibious vehicles. USS ESSEX' primary role is the flagship of an amphibious task group. USS ESSEX is the second ship of the WASP (LHD 1) class of multipurpose amphibious assault ships.
- USS ESSEX is specifically designed to operate Landing Craft, Air Cushioned (LCAC) for waterborne assaults, carry Harrier II (AV-8B) jump jets for close-in air support of the assault force and a full range of helicopters for the deployment of troops and cargo. USS ESSEX' load-out consists of troops, tanks, trucks, armored vehicles, artillery, ammunition and supplies necessary to fully support an amphibious assault.
- USS ESSEX is 844 feet long, with a beam of 106 feet. Two steam propulsion plants, capable of developing a combined 70,000 shaft horsepower, give the 40,500-ton ship the ability to sustain speeds in excess of 20 knots. USS ESSEX has more than 22,000 square feet of vehicle storage space and 100,000 cubic feet of cargo space. Living areas accommodate the 1,300 crewmembers and nearly 2,000 embarked troops and aircrews. To support combat as well as humanitarian missions, ESSEX has six fully equipped operating rooms, four dental operating rooms and hospital facilities capable of caring for 600 patients. The ship is the largest forward-deployed medical platform. USS ESSEX is forward-deployed to Sasebo, Japan.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE:

- ISIC: COMPHIBGRU ONE

COMMANDING OFFICER: CAPT J. M. VAN TOL, USN

PERMANENT DUTY STATION: SASEBO, JAPAN

Enclosure (1)

COMMAND CHRONOLOGY 2003

January 1	Inport Sasebo
January 8	Command Master Chief Conference
January 13	Safety Stand-down
January 14	Fast Cruise
January 16	Underway for Okinawa
January 17-19	Embark 31 st MEU Okinawa
January 20-30	TRUEX
January 31-	Disembark 31 st MEU Okinawa
February 2	
February 3	Enroute Sasebo
February 5	Inport Sasebo
February 18	Embarkation Planning Brief
February 21	Commanders' Leadership Conference
February 23-27	ESG Training
February 25	Enroute Okinawa
February 27-	Embark 31 st MEU Okinawa
March 1	
March 2-5	Sustainment Training IVO Okinawa
March 6	Enroute Iwo Jima
March 10-13	58th Iwo Jima Commemoration
March 10	31 st MEU Offload Iwo Jima
March 11	Landing Force rehearsals Iwo Jima
March 12	Landing Force Demonstration Iwo Jima
March 14	Enroute Pohang
March 18-20	Inport Pohang
	Exercise FOAL EAGLE Coordination Pohang
March 19	Republic of Korea Navy DV visit
March 20-26	Exercise FOAL EAGLE
March 26	Enroute Okinawa
March 28	31 st MEU Sustainment Training Okinawa
April 7	Enroute Sasebo
April 9	Inport Sasebo
April 13	Commandant of the Marine Corps visit
April 15	COMPHIBRON 11 Change of Command
April 17	Enroute Guam
April 22-	Exercise Tandem Thrust 03
May 4	
May 5-8	Inport Guam
May 9	Enroute Okinawa
May 13-16	Disembark 31 st MEU Okinawa
May 16	Enroute Sasebo
May 16-18	Engineering UD
May 18	Ammo offload Sasebo

Enclosure (2)

May 20	Inport Sasebo
May 27	SRA Sasebo
July 14	ASIR Tech Visit
July 18	Executive Officer Turnover
August 4-8	ASIR
August 12-13	Dock Trials/Fast Cruise
August 14	Sea Trials
August 15	Inport Sasebo
August 22	ESSEX Change of Command
August 25	CART II
	Engineering IA
August 26	Enroute Yokosuka Oparea
August 31	TACAN certification
September 1-3	Enroute Okinawa
September 4-6	Embark 31 st MEU Okinawa
September 7-9	JTF WARNET Testing
September 10	Enroute Philippine Islands
September 14	Inport Subic Bay
September 15-17	Blue-Green Exercise
September 17	Philippine DV Visit
September 18-20	ARGEX
September 21	Inport Subic Bay
September 22	Enroute Okinawa
September 25-29	SOCEX
September 30-	Inport Okinawa
October 2	
October 3	Enroute Sasebo
October 5-9	Inport Sasebo
October 10	Enroute Bali
October 17-22	POTUS Operation
October 20	Bali DV Visit
October 23	Enroute Darwin
October 25-28	Inport Darwin
October 28	Presented FY2002 SECNAV Energy Award (Large Ship)
October 29	Enroute East Timor
October 31-	CMO East Timor
November 3	
November 1-2	East Timor DV Visit
November 4	Enroute Hong Kong
November 12-15	Inport Hong Kong
November 16	Enroute Okinawa
November 20-21	Disembark 31 st MEU Okinawa
November 22	Enroute Sasebo
November 24-	Inport Sasebo
December 31	

Command Narrative 2003

January

On 11 January, Essex crewmembers distributed Christmas presents to a local Japanese children's home. The Ko Yo Ryo is home year round to approximately 70 children ages two to 18. Sailors from Sasebo have adopted the orphanage for years, and Essex Sailors have been instrumental in keeping the relationship strong. Essex continued the holiday tradition by giving their time and goodwill to the 'Angel Tree' program. The ship continued community relation events throughout the year at Ko Yo Ryo home. The Essex also continued their relationship with the Department of Defense Dependent Schools (DoDDS) in their Adopt-a-School-Program.

The Nagasaki Prefecture Police Academy Cadets visited Essex for a ship tour on 14 January. Essex got underway for Okinawa on 16 January, the first underway for 2003, and was moored in Okinawa on 17 January. Marines of the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit/Special Operations Capable (MEU/SOC) arrived and the Essex got underway on 20 January. Operation TRUEX (Training in an Urban Environment Exercise) was conducted with the Marines from the 31st MEU/SOC. Part of the exercise required Essex to send approximately 800 Marines and their equipment to a designated training area by air and sea.

A Dr. Martin Luther King Celebration was held on the mess decks on 21 January. The Essex Superbowl Tailgator was held 27 January. COMPHIBGRU 1 RADM Rick Ruehe met with Junior Officers in the wardroom, 28 January and discussed his expectations for the upcoming year. Essex was moored in Okinawa on January 31 in support of the 31st MEU/SOC off-load.

February

On 1 February, the International Ladies Club of Okinawa was given a tour of Essex. The ship was moored at Indian Basin, Sasebo allowing for a short maintenance availability period.

6 February "Under My Wing" training was held for new mentors. The "Under My Wing" program redefined and expanded the role of Essex sponsors. On 20 February, the Essex crew celebrated Black History Month on the mess decks. The festivity included crewmembers' reflections of Dr Martin Luther King along with a cultural perspective from the Commanding Officer. On 25 February, Essex got underway for Okinawa mooring at White Beach on 26 February for 31st MEU/SOC onload.

March

On 11 March Essex conducted the Iwo Jima Landing Force rehearsal and demonstration, an annual tradition recognizing the sacrifice of American and Japanese forces. On 12 March, Essex held an Iwo Jima Commemoration Ceremony. Hundreds of Sailors and Marines gathered on the Essex hangar deck and stood at attention to remember the men who fought and died in the historic World War II battle. With Mt. Suribachi providing

Enclosure (3)

a backdrop in the distance, designated crewmembers read the poem, "Old Glory" and closed the ceremony with a haunting rendition of, "Taps".

On 18 March Essex moored in Pohang, Korea. Republic of Korea Navy (ROKN) Distinguished Visitors (DVs) toured Essex on 19 March, and later that evening there was an Exercise FOAL EAGLE Commanding Officer Social at the ROKMC Club on Dogo Beach.

On 20 March, Essex got underway for Operation FOAL EAGLE. FOAL EAGLE is a combined field training exercise that focuses on rear area security and stability operations, onward movement of critical assets, and select defensive training events across Republic of Korea and U.S. service components. The exercise involved ROK forces and a number of U.S. military units assigned on the Korean peninsula, as well as U.S. forces deployed to Korea from U.S. based units. FOAL EAGLE included reconnaissance; Special Forces; and air, land and sea units. The units involved in the exercise used technological equipment to monitor force on force battles to create a realistic environment.

April

On 13 April, Commandant of the Marine Corps GEN Michael W. Hagee; LGEN Wallace Gregson, Commander, U.S. Marine Forces Pacific/Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force Pacific/Commander, U.S. Marine Corps Bases, Pacific; BGEN Timothy Larsen, Deputy Commander, U.S. Forces Japan; and Sgt. Major MC Alford L. McMichael, Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps, addressed the Marines and Sailors of the Essex on the flight deck. The Commandant articulated the vital role Essex played in the global war on terrorism and offered his appreciation to the crew for their yearlong sacrifices. RADM Ruehe and BGEN Ghormley embarked Essex later that evening in support of Expeditionary Strike Group exercises.

Commander, Amphibious Squadron 11 (COMPHIBRON 11) held their Change of Command ceremony on 15 April in the Essex Hangar Bay. The permanently forward deployed amphibious force received new leadership when CAPT Richard Landolt relieved CAPT Andrew Karakos as COMPHIBRON 11 while the ship was pier-side in Sasebo.

On 17 April, Essex got underway to Guam for Operation TANDEM THRUST 2003 (TT-03). The purpose of Tandem Thrust 03 was to train a U.S. Joint Task Force staff in crisis action planning for execution of contingency operations. TT-03 provided U.S. forces an opportunity to practice working together in a joint environment while refining procedures and doctrine. More Than 8,000 personnel participated. The following major forces and units were designated to participate in TT-03: Commander, Pacific Fleet, Commander, U.S. Seventh Fleet, Commander, Task Force 70, Commander, Task Force 72, Commander, Task Force 73, Commander, Task Force 74, Commander, Task Force 76, Commander, Destroyer Squadron 9, Carrier Air Wing 9, USS Blue Ridge, USS Carl Vinson, USS Ingraham, USS Curtis Wilbur, USS Essex (with 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit embarked), USS Juneau, USS Fort McHenry, USS Harpers Ferry, USS Antietam, USS Vincennes, USS O'Brien, USS City of Corpus Christi, USS Olympia, USS San Francisco, USS Bremerton, USS Sacramento, research vessel Cory Chouest, 13th Air Force, 56th AOS, 44th FS, 961th ACS, 909th ARS, 613th CRS, 96th AS, 731st AS, Marine Forces Pacific, 25th Infantry Division, 4th POG, 55th Signal Company. A

small number of Australian and Canadian personnel are supporting the exercise, particularly in maritime air patrol operations.

May

The Expeditionary Strike Group (ESG) Forward-Deployed Naval Force (FDFNF) concluded the biennial joint exercise TT-03 off the Mariana Islands 5 May. Essex was in port Guam from 5 to 9 May. The ESG was part of a 17-ship force, including the USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70) Strike Group during TT-03. As part of this exercise, the ESG-FDFNF was in the unique situation of having two flag-level officers split command during the exercise. During half the exercise, Marine Corps BGEN Timothy Ghormley was in command of the ESG, and during the other half, RADM Rick Ruehe was ESG commander. Marine Corps, Army and Air Force units also participated in this joint force exercise. The TT-03 Joint Task Force was commanded by VADM Robert Willard, Commander of the U.S. 7th Fleet. The Essex Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) and 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit served as the core of the ESG-FDFNF. The 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) (Special Operations Capable), Essex, USS Fort McHenry and USS Juneau, were joined by USS Antietam, USS O'Brien, USS Curtis Wilbur and USS City Of Corpus Christi to form the ESG-FDFNF.

On 9 May, Essex got underway to Okinawa, and on 13 May moored in Okinawa for 31st MEU/SOC offload. RADM Ruehe and BGEN Ghormley disembarked. Essex got underway to Sasebo on 14 May, anchoring on 18 May for ammo offload. On 20 May, Essex moored at India Basin for an extended maintenance availability period. On 28 May, Essex' crew moved off the ship for maintenance of the ship and an underwater hull cleaning evolution.

June

*The June/July timeframe covered a Selected Restricted Availability (SRA) for Essex.

On 3 June, crewmembers participated in the annual Essex vs. Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) softball game. The game provided a traditional friendly spirit of competition between Essex crewmembers and members of the local JMSDF.

July

On 15 July, the Commanding Officer addressed issues of concern during a Safety Stand down for E-4 and below at CFAS's Showboat Theater. On 18 July, CAPT Martin J. Keaney relieved CAPT J.W. Riley III as USS Essex Executive Officer.

August

The flight deck and related flight support infrastructure was re-certificated by a NAVAIR ASIR inspection team on 8 August.

On 12 August, the Nagasaki Riot Police toured the ship. On 13 August, Essex conducted a Fast Cruise, and on 14 August, Essex got underway for sea trials signifying the completion of the summer maintenance period. Work accomplished included laying

new non-skid on the flight deck, completing a major boiler overhaul, and installing a multi-circuit digital patch panel for enhanced communications. A significant part of the work was a habitability project involving the overhaul of a 232-person berthing area and refurbishing crew lounges in other berthing areas. Computer desks, book shelves and tailored entertainment centers were also installed. Other improvements, like polyurethane rubber coating for the decks, helped reduce the crew's workload by reducing the amount of deck upkeep maintenance. Following sea trials, the Essex crew moved forward to fill their role as the premier forward-deployed expeditionary strike group leader.

CAPT Jan M. van Tol relieved CAPT Ronald R. Evans as Commanding Officer of Essex during a Change of Command ceremony in Sasebo on 22 August. CAPT Evans reported as Executive Officer of Essex in February 2001 and assumed command in April 2002. His follow-on assignment was with the Joint Staff in Washington, D.C. as the Asst. Deputy Director for Information Operations. CAPT van Tol arrived from the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Washington, D.C., having served as the Senior Military Assistant to the Director of Net Assessment. RADM Anthony L. Winns, Commander, Patrol and Reconnaissance Force, Pacific/ Commander, Task Force 32, and a long-time friend of CAPT Evan's, was the guest speaker at the event.

"Even though we're all gathered here today in this peaceful, serene setting, the images we see on TV, depicting the many random attacks in Iraq facing our military and civilian forces, and the ongoing war on terrorism, tell us that we are indeed living in a dangerous world, and that we, as members of the finest armed forces in the world, are coming face to face with the enemy," said Winns. "Men and women of Team Essex, you have done an absolutely magnificent job in enforcing force protection measures and protecting our nation's freedom, as well as making the world a safer place."

During his speech, RADM Winns also highlighted some of the crew's accomplishments, ranging from major evaluations and certifications to real-world operations. "When you combine the unique leadership talents of a man like Capt. Evans with the talent, dedication and motivation of a group of men and women like Team Essex, you end up with a very efficient, very capable ship that can accomplish any tasking asked of them," Winns said.

On 26 August, Essex was underway from Sasebo to commence another MEU training and exercise cycle. The first evolution of the underway period was the recertification of the TACAN at an evaluation range near Yokosuka Naval Base.

September

Essex was enroute to Okinawa from 1 to 3 September and moored at White Beach from 4 to 6 September for MEU/SOC onload. Once underway Essex was to host extensive test and evaluation of JTF WARNET. JTF WARNET is a multi-service net-centric system designed to provide greater conductivity and responsiveness between war fighters and battle commanders. The evaluation and testing processes were truncated in response to a typhoon whose path lay over the Essex' Okinawa operations area. In an effort to avoid the storm Essex transported over 100 JTF WARNET contractors to Okinawa then commenced an early transit to the Philippine Islands. On 14 September Essex moored Subic Bay to offload Marines, supplies, and support equipment in support

of Blue-Green and ARGEX exercises. On 17 September, Essex hosted Philippines dignitaries for lunch and a ship tour. Essex once again moored Subic Bay on 21 September completing the back load of the 31st MEU/SOC. Essex departed the Philippine Islands 22 September for Okinawa's SOCEX which re-certified the 31st MEU Special Operations Capable.

October

Essex enjoyed a multi-day port visit in their second home, Okinawa, from 30 September to 3 October then got underway enroute to Sasebo with USS Ft. McHenry. Mooring in Sasebo from 5 to 9 October, Essex underwent a brief period of upkeep maintenance.

On 10 October Essex was enroute Bali for the most high profile mission of the year. From 17 -22 October Essex provided support for the United States' President's 22 October visit to Bali. In addition to providing force protection assistance, Essex hosted one VH-60 and aircrew from HMX-1. After completing POTUS support, Essex proceeded to Darwin, Australia for an October 25-28 port visit with Ft McHenry.

From 27 to 30 October, Essex conducted CMO operations in and around East Timor. One aspect of the operation consisted of erecting temporary medical facilities, which facilitated medical and dental treatment of East Timor citizens. Essex' crewmembers conducted various community relations (COMREL) projects in East Timor, including four days of repairing and painting an East Timor high school.

November

On 1 November the East Timor President with other East Timor dignitaries visited Essex to tour the ship. The East Timor President extended his gratitude to Essex for its strong regional presence. From 12 to 15 November, Essex visited Hong Kong. Essex moored at Okinawa's White Beach from 20 to 21 November disembarking the 31st MEU/SOC. On 24 November moored Sasebo for inport upkeep and holiday leave period.

December

On 6 December, Essex celebrated its annual Christmas Party at the Harbor View Club. Later, Essex experienced a family celebration with 20 December's Children's Christmas Party at the Hario Village Community Center.