

From: Commanding Officer, USS FORT MCHENRY (LSD 43)
To: Director, Naval Historical Center
Attn: Ship's History

Subj: USS FORT MCHENRY (LSD 43) COMMAND HISTORY 2004

Ref (a) OPNAV INSTRUCTION 5750.12H (Command History)

1. In accordance with ref (a), the following information is provided.

2. Command Composition and Organization:

- a. Command Short Title and UIC: USS FORT MCHENRY (LSD 43) 21400
- b. Immediate Superior in Command: Commander Task Force Seventy Six
- c. Units under OPCON/ADCON: None
- d. Name of Commander: CDR Mark E. Weber, USN 08/04/03 – 05/06/05
- e. Permanent Duty Station: Combined Fleet Activities Sasebo, Sasebo, Japan
- f. Type/Number Aircraft Assigned: None

3. Chronology

01/01/04 – 01/03/04 – Inport Sasebo, Japan
01/03/04 – 01/11/04 – Transit Yokosuka, Japan
01/11/04 – 01/24/04 – Inport Yokosuka, Japan
01/24/04 – 01/30/04 – Transit Sasebo, Japan
01/30/04 – 02/16/04 – Inport Sasebo, Japan
02/16/04 – 02/18/04 – Underway Okinawa, Japan
02/18/04 – 02/19/04 – Inport Okinawa, Japan
02/19/04 – 02/23/04 – Transit Manila, Philippines
02/23/04 – 03/01/04 – Underway IVO Ternate, Philippines (Balikatan)
03/01/04 – 03/03/04 – Transit Dingalam Bay, Philippines
03/03/04 – 03/11/04 – Underway IVO Iwo Jima, Japan
03/10/04 – 03/12/04 – Iwo Jima Commemoration Ceremonies
03/12/04 – 03/14/04 – Underway Okinawa, Japan
03/14/04 – 03/15/04 – Inport Okinawa, Japan (Offload)
03/15/04 – 03/20/04 – Transit Pohang, Korea
03/17/04 – 03/20/04 – Anchored Pohang, Korea (Amphibious Operations)
03/17/04 – 03/20/04 – Underway IVO Pohang, Korea
03/20/04 – 03/21/04 – Inport Pusan, Korea
03/21/04 – 03/22/04 – Transit Pohang, Korea
03/22/04 – 03/23/04 – Inport Pohang, Korea

03/23/04 – 03/29/04 – Transit Pohang, Korea
03/29/04 – 04/03/04 – Transit Okinawa, Japan
04/03/04 – 04/05/04 – Inport Okinawa, Japan
04/05/04 – 04/09/04 – Transit Sasebo, Japan
04/09/04 – 05/14/04 – Inport Sasebo, Japan
05/14/04 Underway IVO Sasebo, Japan
05/14/04 – 05/19/04 – Inport Sasebo, Japan
05/19/04 Transit to Anchorage Sasebo, Japan Harbor
05/19/04 – 05/20/04 – Anchored Sasebo, Japan Harbor
05/20/04 Transit Sasebo, Japan
05/20/04 – 05/22/04 – Inport Sasebo, Japan
05/22/04 – 05/24/04 – Transit Okinawa, Japan
05/24/04 Inport Okinawa, Japan
05/24/04 – 05/31/04 – Transit Singapore
05/31/04 – 06/06/04 – Inport Singapore
06/06/04 – 06/10/04 – Underway IVO Singapore
06/10/04 – 06/19/04 – Inport Singapore
06/19/04 – 06/21/04 – Transit Brunei
06/21/04 – 06/23/04 – Inport Brunei
06/23/04 – 06/24/04 – Underway IVO Brunei
06/24/04 – 06/27/04 – Inport Brunei
06/27/04 – 06/30/04 – Transit Thailand
06/30/04 – 07/06/04 – Inport Thailand
07/06/04 – 07/08/04 – Underway IVO Thailand
07/08/04 – 07/10/04 – Inport Thailand
07/10/04 – 07/11/04 – Transit Malaysia
07/11/04 – 07/18/04 – Inport Malaysia
07/18/04 – 07/20/04 – Underway IVO Malaysia
07/20/04 – 07/23/04 – Anchored Malaysia
07/23/04 – 07/27/04 – Transit Subic Bay, Philippines
07/27/04 – 08/01/04 – Inport Subic Bay, Philippines
08/01/04 – 08/04/04 – Underway IVO Ternate, Philippines
08/05/04 – 08/06/04 – Inport Subic Bay, Philippines
08/06/04 – 08/10/04 – Transit Pallah
08/10/04 – 08/13/04 – Transit Okinawa, Japan
08/13/04 – 08/16/04 – Inport Okinawa, Japan
08/16/04 – 08/17/04 – Transit Sasebo, Japan
08/17/04 – 08/18/04 – Anchored Sasebo, Japan Harbor
08/18/04 – 12/06/04 – Inport Sasebo, Japan
12/06/04 – 12/17/04 – Transit Subic Bay
12/17/04 – 12/18/04 – Inport Subic Bay
12/18/04 – 12/20/04 – Transit Okinawa, Japan
12/20/04 – 12/21/04 – Inport Okinawa, Japan
12/21/04 – 12/22/04 – Transit Sasebo, Japan
12/22/04 – 12/31/04 – Inport Sasebo, Japan

4. Narrative

After a holiday upkeep period that lasted into late December, FORT MCHENRY headed northbound en route to Yokosuka, Japan for her annual Training Availability (TRAV) visit. The new year saw training as the only means of keeping the ship always ready at a moments notice. Two weeks of Damage Control and Firefighting training in Yokosuka, Japan proved beneficial in January.

The training cycle kept the crew busy throughout the beginning of the year. FORT MCHENRY conducted the Underway Demonstration 08 Jan 2004. The crew completed Tailored Ship's Training Availability (TSTA) 09-13 Feb 2004 and Final Evaluation Problem (FEP) 16-18 Feb 2004.

Meanwhile, the ship made arrangements to participate in the Exercise Balikatan 2004. The Balikatan brief was conducted 18 Feb 2004 in Okinawa, Japan. Exercise Balikatan 2004 is an annual exercise that runs through March 7, 2004 and is designed to improve combined planning, combat readiness and interoperability of the U.S. and Republic of the Philippines military forces. The Bi-lateral exercise between the US and the Philippines successfully strengthened the fighting bond between the two countries.

Upon completion of her involvement with Balikatan 2004 in early March, FORT MCHENRY transited to Iwo Jima to participate in the Iwo Jima Commemoration Ceremonies. Nearly 60 years ago an American landing force of over 110,000 Marines stormed the beaches of volcanic Iwo Jima in what would result in a 36-day struggle to gain control of the island from the Japanese. Nearly all of the Japanese defenders and 25,000 Americans were killed or wounded there. From 10 – 12 Mar 2004, the forward deployed Sailors and Marines of the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit revisited the island with veterans to pay tribute in the 59th Commemoration of the battle. The visits and ceremonies at Iwo Jima brought a new sense of understanding to the Sailors of FORT MCHENRY and Marines with the 31st MEU.

Immediately following the Commemoration in Iwo Jima, FORT MCHENRY and her crew offloaded in Okinawa before heading off to Korea in support of Reception, Staging, Onward Movement, and Integration (RSOI) and Foal Eagle. 21 -28 Mar 2004 saw the efforts of exercises RSOI and Foal Eagle, where Republic of Korea and U.S. Forces on board FORT MCHENRY took part in annual combined training exercises. The exercises enhanced the training opportunities designed to help teach, coach, and mentor service members while exercising the senior leaders' decision-making capabilities. Enhancing combat readiness, the exercises demonstrated the U.S.'s commitment to the U.S. and Korean alliance, as well as exercising the ability to defend the Republic of Korea against external aggression. The overall mission built interoperability between the Korean and the U.S. Forces specifically in such areas as amphibious planning and operations, naval surface and sub-surface operations, mine-warfare, and air operations.

But training didn't stop there. FORT MCHENRY headed to Okinawa, Japan in order to offer her support of the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) and the 31st MEU Support

Group (MSSG). FORT MCHENRY supported the MEU from 29 Mar 2004 – 02 Apr 2004 while conducting Special Operations Exercise (SOCEX). The 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) trained for seven days off the coast of Okinawa, Japan to better their tactical training skills. The exercise known as SOCEX is a certification exercise that a MEU has to certify in order to be Special Operations qualified. Based off the coast of Okinawa, SOCEX was a simulation that depicted a terrorist threat on the Philippines. As part of the simulation, a full raid brief was given. Special Operations training involved Tactical Recovery of Aircraft and Personnel (TRAP) and fast roping, a method of quickly disembarking a Helo via a rope dropped from the aircraft.

Upon completion of SOCEX, FORT MCHENRY conducted Afloat Specialty Training (AST) exercises in April. The exercises certified the ship to officially conduct Amphibious Warfare (AMW) operations. The deck crew demonstrated their interoperability with Landing Craft Air Cushions (LCAC), Lighter, Amphibious, Re-supply, Cargo (LARC), Landing Craft, Utility (LCU), and the Amphibious Assault Vehicles (AAV). Additionally, the deck crew demonstrated their ability to lower and hoist the small boats.

When FORT MCHENRY returned to her home port of Sasebo, Japan, the crew got a well deserved two month break from military life to take a little leave, head off to school, or do a little Force Protection training with the Sasebo branch of the Afloat Training Group (ATG).

When the crew was well rested, FORT MCHENRY departed in mid-May for three months to participate in what is known as Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) 2004. CARAT is an annual series of bilateral military exercises between the United States and various Southeast Asia nations. The individual exercise phases generally focus on exercises with participating nations' sea services. The purpose of the exercise series was to improve military readiness and interoperability with each CARAT partner in a variety of mission areas of mutual benefit. Participants included Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei, the Philippines. FORT MCHENRY conducted exercises with all of the countries and spent a port visit at each. Medical, dental, veterinary, and engineering civic action projects were also conducted there. Sailors participated in a variety of community service projects during each phase of the exercise. In Singapore, for example, FORT MCHENRY Sailors volunteered their efforts and time at the Singapore Children's Society. Sailors also refurbished school classrooms and shared fun and time at various orphanages.

FORT MCHENRY offloaded in Okinawa, Japan 13 -16 Aug 2004 before returning home to Sasebo, Japan 17 Aug 2004. In Sasebo, the ship was placed under the scrutiny of a three-month long face lift during the Selected Restricted Availability (SRA). Meanwhile, crewmembers moved to one of the various berthing barges. The SRA lasted from 25 Aug 04 – 10 Nov 04. Specific maintenance included repairs to the Main Propulsion Diesel Engines (MPDE), overhauls and inspections of the Ship Service Diesel Generators (SSDG), pneumatic work on the Close-In Weapon System (CIWS), the offload of Rolling

Airframe Missiles (RAM), anchor and anchor chain overhaul, boiler inspections, the resurfacing of mess decks, and the resurfacing of non-skid on the flight deck.

Upon completion of the three-month long maintenance period, FORT MCHENRY then participated in a week long Sea Trial that extended from 15 -19 Nov 2004. The purpose of the Sea Trials was to demonstrate if the ship was indeed Ready for Sea (RSF). The ship and her crew delivered outstanding results.

Proving themselves as sea-worthy could not have come at a better time. In December, an earthquake rocked the Philippine islands. After completion of maintenance, FORT MCHENRY received emergent tasking to provide Humanitarian Assistance to the Philippines following multiple natural disasters.

Soon after that, another worldly blow was delivered when on December 26, 2004 an undersea earthquake off the coast of Indonesia caused a massive tsunami to strike the area killing thousands and leaving many others homeless. Again, FORT MCHENRY delivered what has been viewed around the world as a gracious and much needed response. FORT MCHENRY would later deliver over one million pounds of humanitarian relief aid to those devastated by the world's most tragic national disaster it has ever seen.

Now USS FORT MCHENRY says fair well, fair winds and following seas to one and says welcome aboard to another as she makes preparations for the upcoming Change of Command in May 2005.

5. Supporting Documents (see attachments)

1. Photo and Biography of Commander Mark E. Weber
2. USS Fort McHenry Press Releases 2004

6. My main point of contact for any further information regarding command history is LTJG [REDACTED], Navigator. He can be reached at [REDACTED]@fort-mchenry.navy.mil.

M. T. TALAGA
Commanding Officer
USS FORT MCHENRY (LSD 43)