



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY

USS GRAPPLE (ARS 53)
C/O FPO AE NEW YORK 09570-3223

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From: Commanding Officer, USS GRAPPLE (ARS 53)
To: Director of Naval History (N09BH), Naval Historical
Center, Washington Navy Yard, Washington, DC 20374-5060

Subj: COMMAND HISTORY

Ref: (a) OPNAVINST 5750.12F

Encl: (1) Command Composition and Organization
(2) Chronology
(3) Narrative

1. In accordance with reference (a), enclosures (1) through (3)
are submitted.



R. W. AGUILERA
By direction

COMMAND COMPOSITION AND ORGANIZATION

Commanding Officer: William J. Robertson, LCDR, USN

ISIC: Commander, Combat Logistics Group TWO

Mission: GRAPPLE's mission is to provide rescue and salvage service to the fleet. Her capabilities include:

TOWING: GRAPPLE is capable of rescue and open ocean towing. The ship can develop a bollard pull of 131,000 lbs with an installed double drum towing machine with 3000 feet of 2 1/4 inch wire rope on each drum.

SALVAGE: GRAPPLE carries transportable cutting and welding equipment, hydraulic and electric power sources, dewatering equipment and hull repair materials to effect temporary hull repairs on stranded or otherwise damaged ships. GRAPPLE also has a 5 ton boom forward and a 40 ton boom aft to off-load a disabled ship and handle heavy equipment during salvage operations.

BEACH GEAR: A stranded vessel may be extracted from the beach using six sets of beach gear carried by GRAPPLE. Two beach gear ground legs can be rigged on GRAPPLE and four beach gear ground legs can be rigged on the stranded vessel.

OFF SHIP FIRE FIGHTING: There are three fire monitors mounted on board GRAPPLE. These fire monitors are supplied with up to 1000 gallons of sea water or aqueous film forming foam (AFFF) to fight fires on other ships.

HEAVY LIFT: A dynamic lift of 300 tons can be made using the main bow rollers and the stern rollers simultaneously.

DIVING: The MK21 air diving system on board GRAPPLE provides divers with capability of tethered dives to 190 feet of seawater. GRAPPLE has a recompression chamber for treatment of decompression sickness or for routine surface decompression.

SHIP'S SCHEDULE

01 JAN-28 JAN	UPKEEP
29-31 JAN	TOW PUGET SO UND/PORT VISIT PHILADELPHIA, PA
01 FEB-06 FEB	PORT VISIT ANNAPOLIS, MD
07 FEB	U/W LCRK/TSTA II ETG
15 MAR	CHANGE OF COMMAND
18 MAR-20 MAR	EXER UNIFIED SPIRIT
21 MAR-03 APR	SEARCH FOR DOWNED F/A-18
29 APR-15 MAY	TOW OF EX-USS OMAHA FROM PORTSMOUTH, NH TO CRISTOBAL, PANAMA
16 MAY-22 MAY	XSIT FROM CRISTOBAL, PANAMA TO NORFOLK, VA
28 MAY-05 JUN	HURRICANE EX 96 (HURREX 96)
20 JUN	COMPLETED OPPE
27 JUN-30 JUN	PORT VISIT ST. PETER'S FIESTA GLOUCESTER, MA
08 JUL-19 JUL	TARGET/CSRR
27 JUL-02 NOV	SALVAGE OF TWA FLIGHT 800
03 NOV-17 NOV	POST DEPLOYMENT STANDDOWN, LCRK, VA
06 DEC	ADMIN NAVCERT
12 DEC	TYCOMEX
13 DEC-05 JAN	CHRISTMAS STANDDOWN

During 1996, USS GRAPPLE faced a year of diverse, yet fulfilling tasking that fully demonstrated the myriad capabilities of the ship and the boundless talents of her crew. These special skills were particularly evident during a year marked by continued fiscal and personnel cuts as well as the usual high operational tempo the salvage navy has become known for.

USS GRAPPLE started off the new year with the highly successful tow of the ex-USS PUGET SOUND from Norfolk, Virginia to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. This particular tow involved a 10 hour Sea and Anchor Detail as USS GRAPPLE and tow transited the Delaware River.

On March 15th, LCDR W. J. Robertson relieved LCDR P. W. Lewis as Commanding Officer of the USS GRAPPLE. Along with a Change of Command, March brought the opportunity for the USS GRAPPLE to participate in the joint mine warfare exercise UNIFIED SPIRIT 96. The exercise was conducted off the coast of South Carolina during which USS GRAPPLE served as the Navy's ready salvage asset. The exercise included the search and salvage of an aircraft in deep water, which unknowingly would become a reality for the USS GRAPPLE only days later.

Upon completing their role in UNIFIED SPIRIT 96, USS GRAPPLE was tasked with the search and recovery of a downed Marine Corps F/A-18D off the coast of Charleston, South Carolina. With NAVSEA's contracted Oceaneering Technologies technicians aboard, USS GRAPPLE conducted a side scan sonar search utilizing a tow pinger locator system. This intense search lasted for nearly two weeks with USS GRAPPLE sailors working around the clock.

USS GRAPPLE returned to homeport and immediately commenced preparations for the open ocean tow of the ex-USS OMAHA from Portsmouth, New Hampshire to Cristobal, Panama. The tow was unique in that it covered 2,300 miles of open ocean and lasted over 25 days. The tow was conducted flawlessly, and the submarine was delivered ahead of schedule.

In June USS GRAPPLE conducted a highly successful OPPE resulting in an adjective grade of "Good". Particularly noteworthy were 9 out of 14 program reviews were evaluated as "EXCELLENT".

On July 17th, 1996, TWA Flight 800 left JFK Airport in New York headed for Paris, France. Minutes after take-off, the plane exploded and plummeted into the waters off the coast of Long Island. The Navy immediately offered salvage services to the National Transportation Safety Board. On July 27th, USS GRAPPLE commenced surfaced supplied diving and Deep Drone operations that continued for 98 days. This mission was to become the largest salvage effort conducted by the Navy since World War II. While conducting recovery and salvage efforts, USS GRAPPLE accomplished the following:

--Completed over 600 surface supplied and scuba dives in debris fields full of razor-sharp wreckage and debris with no injuries.

--USS GRAPPLE and other diving assets recovered 215 of the 230 victims onboard the aircraft.

--Recovered over 95% of the Boeing 747 aircraft.

--Completed over 80 anchorages involving precision navigation.

--Completed heavy lift operations involving large pieces of aircraft debris.

--Evaded 4 hurricanes and 2 Northeaster storms.

Upon returning pierside, Little Creek and after completing a couple of administrative inspections, the crew of the GRAPPLE was allowed to close out 1996 with 30 days of well deserved leave and upkeep time.