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**DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY**  
USS HIGGINS (DDG 76)  
FPO AP 96667-1291

5750  
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12 Jun 01

From: Commanding Officer, USS HIGGINS (DDG 76)  
To: Director, Naval Historical Center

Subj: USS HIGGINS (DDG 76) COMMAND HISTORY FOR 2000

Ref: (a) OPNAVINST 5750.12G

Encl: (1) Command Composition and Organization  
(2) 2000 Chronology  
(3) 2000 Narrative  
(4) 3 ½" Disk Containing Encl (1) through (3)

1. Enclosures (1) through (3) detail USS HIGGINS' command history for 2000. Enclosure (4) is included per reference (a).

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "W. R. Ault".  
W. R. AULT

Command Composition and Organization

Command Short Title: USS HIGGINS DDG 76

Unit Identification Code:. 21950

Mission: Anti-Air Warfare, Anti-Surface Warfare,  
Anti-Submarine Warfare and Strike Warfare  
Platform

Immediate Senior In Command: Destroyer Squadron Two One

Name of Commander: Commander William R. Ault

Permanent Duty Station: San Diego, California

Chronology  
**Important Shipboard Events in 2000**

January

1-23: Inport San Diego.  
1: Ship experiences no Y2K computer-related problems as calendar year 2000 begins.  
10: All Hands Return to Work after Holiday Stand Down.  
15: Colonel Higgins' Birthday.  
10-14: Aeronautical Shipboard Installation Representative's Inspection.  
18: Aviation Assist Visit upgraded to Aviation Readiness Evaluation-Complete.  
21: HIGGINS visits Oregon State University to begin sister-ship relationship.  
24-28: Underway Training -- SOCAL OPAREA.  
29-31: Inport San Diego.

February

1-7: Inport San Diego.  
7-11: Underway for CART II Training-- transit to San Francisco, CA.  
11-13: Inport San Francisco. Public tours allowed during the weekend.  
14-17: Underway for CART II Training-- transit to Port Hueneme, CA.  
17-20: Inport Port Hueneme, CA. Naval Surface Warfare Center Combat Systems and Underway Replenishment Equipment Grooms.  
21: Underway-- transit to San Diego.  
22-27: Inport San Diego.  
28: Underway SOCAL OPAREA-- CART II.

March

1-3: Underway SOCAL OPAREA-- CART II.  
4-26: Inport San Diego-- Intermediate Maintenance Availability.  
17: Ship goes to 18 section duty and four day work-weeks.  
27-31: Underway for TSTA A-- transit to Vancouver, British Columbia.  
31: Inport Vancouver, British Columbia.

April

1-2: Inport Vancouver, British Columbia. Public tours allowed during the weekend.  
3-7: Underway for TSTA A-- transit to San Diego.  
4: Completed Cruise Missile Tactical Qualification.  
8-26: Inport San Diego.  
27-28: Underway SOCAL OPAREA-- TSTA B.  
29-30: Inport San Diego.

May

1-5: Underway SOCAL OPAREA-- TSTA B.  
 6-8: Inport San Diego.  
 9-12: Underway SOCAL OPAREA-- TSTA B.  
 13-14: Inport San Diego.  
 15: Underway for Ammunition Onload-- transit to Seal Beach.  
 16-17: Inport Seal Beach-- Ammunition Onload.  
 18: Underway-- transit to San Diego.  
 19-21: Inport San Diego.  
 22-24: Underway SOCAL OPAREA-- Final Evaluation Problem.  
 25-31: Inport San Diego-- Preparations for Change of Command.

June

1-5: Inport San Diego.  
 2: Change of Command. CDR William R. Ault relieves CDR James L. T. Smith.  
 6-9: Underway SOCAL OPAREA-- NGFS Spotter Services.  
 10-30: Inport San Diego-- Training in RHIB Operations, General Quarters, and ACTS Scenarios.

July

1-27: Inport San Diego-- Preparations for the CDS 23 Embarkation and Seattle Sea Fair.  
 17-21: Surface Line Week-- HIGGINS finishes third in the Professional Events category.  
 21: Embarkation of COMDESRON TWO THREE.  
 27-31: Underway for Seattle Sea Fair-- transit to Everett, Washington. Flagship for CDS 23.

August

1: Inport Everett, Washington.  
 2: Underway for Seattle, Washington. Embarked 250 civilian guests for day cruise.  
 2-6: Inport Seattle, Washington for Sea Fair. Public tours allowed during the weekend.  
 7-11: Underway-- transit to San Diego. Conducted operations with USS CONSTELLATION.  
 12-31: Inport San Diego-- preparations for MEFEX Phases I, II, and III.

September

1-4: Inport San Diego-- preparations for deperming pier visit.  
 5-8: Underway SOCAL OPAREA-- ASW exercises.  
 8-10: Inport Deperming Facility, Point Loma, California.  
 11: Underway SOCAL OPAREA-- Family Day Cruise. Conducted operations with USS CONSTELLATION.  
 12-24: Inport San Diego-- preparations for Ammunition Onload.  
 25: Underway for Deployment Ammunition Onload-- transit to Seal Beach.  
 26-27: Inport Seal Beach-- Deployment Ammunition Onload.  
 28: Underway-- transit to San Diego.  
 29-30: Inport San Diego.  
 29: Ship's Picnic-- Admiral Baker Park.

October

1: Inport San Diego.  
2-11: Underway SOCAL OPAREA-- MEFEX Phase II.  
12-23: Inport San Diego-- first Pre-Overseas Movement leave period.  
24: POM Leave Period Turnover Day.  
24-31: Inport San Diego-- second Pre-Overseas Movement leave period.

November

1-8: Inport San Diego-- second Pre-Overseas Movement leave period.  
9: Underway-- deployed with USS HEWITT and USS FITZGERALD (PACMEF 00-04).  
9-14: Underway-- transit to Pearl Harbor, Hawaii (MEFEX Phase III training).  
15-17: Inport Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.  
18-28: Underway-- transit to Sydney, Australia.  
21: HIGGINS crosses the equator-- Crossing the Line Ceremony.  
22: HIGGINS crosses the International Date Line.  
29-30: Inport Sydney, Australia.

December

1-3: Inport Sydney, Australia.  
4-11: Underway-- transit to Bunbury, Australia.  
12-16: Inport Bunbury, Australia.  
17-30: Underway-- transit to Bahrain.  
27: Inchop to Fifth Fleet.  
31: Inport Bahrain.

Narration

The year Two-Thousand was the first full year in commission for USS HIGGINS (DDG 76). It began with extra precautions to protect against Y2K computer system complications, was constantly busy with preparations for deployment and ended with the ship on her maiden cruise in Fifth Fleet enforcing United Nations sanctions against Iraq.

The year began with the ship occupied with the potential problem that much of the rest of the world was guarding against- protecting computer systems against possible complications arising from the Y2K computer bug. Thanks to the outstanding efforts of the Information Technicians onboard, HIGGINS had no difficulties ringing in the new year.

In early January, the ship's Command Master Chief, Master Chief Electrician's Mate (Surface Warfare) Douglas Healey, was selected to become the Master Chief for Naval Surface Forces in the United States Pacific Fleet. This great honor allowed him to become the Master Chief for all of the enlisted Sailors stationed onboard ships in the Pacific Fleet. HIGGINS was sad to see her plankowner Command Master Chief leave, but he was moving on to tackle bigger responsibilities in the Navy.

On 10 January, the entire crew returned to work following the well-deserved holiday leave period. HIGGINS' Sailors had to quickly get back into the routine, as the ship's first inspection of the new century took place that week. The Aeronautical Shipboard Installation Representative's Inspection looked at all of the aviation facilities on the ship and certified HIGGINS ready to continue unrestricted flight operations. Within days, the flight deck fire-fighting team was also inspected. They passed with flying colors, as the inspectors stated HIGGINS set the waterfront standard for aviation training proficiency.

A new relationship began on 21 January between HIGGINS and Oregon State University. The Surface Warfare community leadership matched each ship in the Navy with a Naval Reserve Officer Training Corps unit to allow interaction between midshipmen and fleet Surface Warriors. The goal was to begin a dialogue between the ship and midshipmen in order to enhance knowledge of Surface Warfare lifestyles and day-to-day routines for individuals who were still in the process of service selection. Commander Red Smith, Master Chief [REDACTED], and LTJG [REDACTED] traveled to OSU along with Vice Admiral Edward Moore, Jr., Commander Naval Surface Forces Pacific. HIGGINS is distinguished as the first ship in the Navy to visit its adopted university. Team HIGGINS made several presentations, answered questions and socialized with the midshipmen at a reception following the briefs. The day was a huge success and the ship looks forward to many interactions with the OSU midshipmen.

The month of February found HIGGINS underway frequently, training for the first major phase of the ship's initial Interdeployment Training Cycle. To prepare successfully for the Command Assessment of Readiness and Training II (CART II), HIGGINS had to prepare for many engineering,

seamanship, combat systems, and medical evolutions that often took place concurrently. The training was interspersed with a fantastic port visit, as the ship enjoyed a weekend stop in San Francisco, California on 11-13 February. The weather was rainy, but that did not stop HIGGINS' Sailors from having a great time socializing at the ship's party at the Whitehall Tavern and visiting wonderful sites throughout the city.

The ship departed San Francisco on 14 February and headed south to Port Hueneme, California for a Combat Systems Groom. This working port allowed technicians from various defense contractors to adjust many of the computer software programs onboard. New software was uploaded, old problems with systems were eliminated and testing was completed to ensure that HIGGINS had all of the latest and greatest software and hardware with which to train in the months that followed.

The week of 21 February brought all of the final inport preparations for CART II. The ship added finishing touches to drill packages, planned the final impositions for combat training scenarios and conducted further engineering damage control training. CART II took place the week of 28 February-3 March, with the inport phase of CART II being the Engineering Department's opportunity to impress the assessment team from the Afloat Training Group, Pacific. The Sailors performed admirably, as the inspectors gave all areas "A" grades. They set the tone for the rest of the week, as the ship executed the rest of the drills flawlessly during the at-sea phase of the inspection. This was only the beginning of the training phase leading up to deployment, but it was a fantastic start.

For three weeks following CART II, HIGGINS was in a maintenance availability, where material discrepancies were corrected and significant repairs to degraded equipment were completed. This would be one of the final periods during this busy year that the ship would be inport for an extended period of time. Many workcenters took advantage of the opportunity to fix their gear. The ship also took this time to evaluate the results of CART II and decide on the areas of training that needed to be the focus of the remaining periods at sea.

The month of March could not pass without another significant departmental review. The Supply Management Assessment inspected every aspect of HIGGINS' Supply Department. Sailors were busy daily preparing for this important milestone. Again, HIGGINS rose to the occasion, as Food Service earned a 96%, Stores Material was graded at 95%, and the Ship's Store received a mark of 94%. The Ship's Store portion of the inspection earned a Ships Service Excellence Award for being the best in class of DDGs. The cumulatively successful SMA earned the ship the "Blue E" for excellence in logistics management.

As a result of hard work and initiative in qualifications, the ship went to 18 duty sections, setting another waterfront standard, on 17 March. In addition, the ship established Friday as a duty-section only work day, enabling the Sailors to use Friday to take care of personal issues and other necessities. These innovative policies were

implemented to reward the crew but also to push for greater productivity while the crew was onboard Monday through Thursday.

The ship was underway at the end of March, using the assessors' comments from CART II and self-assessment to train on the areas needing improvement. This included embarking several training experts from various commands to help HIGGINS on Small Craft Action Teams, Anti-Submarine Warfare, Naval Gunfire Support, and engineering casualty control. In addition, author Richard Henrick, who authored books that were adapted into screenplays for popular movies such as Crimson Tide, was on the ship to observe how the Surface Navy functions on a day-to-day basis. He was writing another book about the Navy and it is planned to be made into a movie. He will incorporate many of his experiences on HIGGINS into his work. The ship sailed from San Diego to Vancouver, Canada the last week of March and HIGGINS was inport British Columbia on the first weekend in April.

Sailors onboard HIGGINS enjoyed the port visit and the citizens of Vancouver appreciated the opportunity to tour the newest, most technologically advanced ship in the United States Pacific Fleet. Opportunities for fun were numerous with the ship moored in the heart of downtown. Sailors explored the many outdoor recreational activities the area had to offer in Stanley Park, Queen Elizabeth Gardens and Whistler Mountain. The ship was proud to host over 3,000 visitors who came aboard during the two days of public tours offered to the friendly people of Vancouver.

On 4 April, HIGGINS completed another significant milestone in her pre-deployment preparations as she finished the Cruise Missile Tactical Qualification. The ship demonstrated proficiency in the utilization of the Advanced Tomahawk and Harpoon missile systems. This important qualification was finished two months earlier than scheduled as a result of the hard work of CX and OI Divisions.

The middle two weeks of April were utilized with personnel going to mission-critical schools, making further preparations for the Final Evaluation Problem of the Basic Training Phase and beginning preparatory steps for the ship's first change of command. Sailors were busy attending important courses such as Visit Board Search and Seizure (VBSS) school to learn the proper techniques on how to enforce United Nations sanctions against Iraq. In addition, training teams were rewriting combat and engineering scenarios to improve the training sessions the ship had remaining before FEP. Also, planning for the turnover process with the new Commanding Officer was initiated.

The ship was underway for further training from 27-28 April. The crew practiced several General Quarters drills, Combat Systems Training Team evolutions, and Engineering Casualty Control sets to hone warfighting skills. HIGGINS steamed in the Southern California Operating Area for this underway period and the underway periods from 1-5 May and 9-12 May. This busy month of extensive at-sea operations included an ammunition onload at Seal Beach from 15-18 May. The last underway week in May took place from 22 through 24 May, with the Final Evaluation Problem. The culmination of the Basic Training Phase was a resounding



success, as the ship received various accolades from all evaluators for its ability to train within the lifelines. HIGGINS' Immediate Superior In Command, Destroyer Squadron Twenty-One, congratulated the ship for its successful graduation from the basic phase of training and wished us luck as we entered the Intermediate, and more challenging, phase of preparations for deployment.

The completion of the basic phase of training coincided with the ship's first change of command. The entire ship was involved, as the Prospective Commanding Officer, CDR William R. Ault, native of [REDACTED] familiarized himself with the ship, crew and all of her capabilities during turnover with CDR James L. T. Smith. In addition, Deck Division spent many hours painting the sides and main deck of the ship to ensure that she looked as good as she did on her commissioning day. On 2 June, Vice Admiral Edward Moore, Jr., Commander, Naval Surface Forces Pacific, was the principal speaker for the occasion. He congratulated the crew for all of the fine work they had completed together, while also challenging the Sailors to continue to strive for perfection in all areas of maritime proficiency. The ship's sponsor, Lieutenant Colonel Robin Higgins, USMC (Ret.) was also present for the ceremony and made poignant remarks to the crowd. At 1000, the officers and crew said goodbye to Commander James L. T. Smith and welcomed the new Commanding Officer, Commander Bill Ault.

The Monday after the change of command, CDR Ault took HIGGINS to sea to provide Naval Gunfire Support services to train Marine Corps spotters. The ship was underway from 6-9 June, and the Captain exercised the crew through many engineering drills, shiphandling training for the contingent of Midshipmen onboard for summer cruise and an underway replenishment. The ship returned to San Diego with CDR Ault impressed with his crew's proficiency at sea.

The inport time in June was utilized to conduct training for small boat operations in the San Diego Harbor, run ACTS scenarios in combat and revisit the training subjects addressing areas of maritime proficiency which needed to be improved. In addition, extensive preparations were made for the transit to and from the Seattle Sea Fair. There was also the opportunity for many of the Sailors to take some much deserved leave. July would prove to be another busy month for HIGGINS.

HIGGINS competed vigorously in the nineteenth annual Surface Line Week from 17-21 July. 38 commands participated in various professional and athletic events. In the professional categories, HIGGINS overall finish was third place, with all departments contributing to the ship's outstanding performance. The results included first place in valve packing, second place in seamanship and in the chili cook-off, and third place in medical diagnosis and the small boat competition. The athletic events also produced many HIGGINS Heroes, as the Tug-o-War and physical excellence teams finished in first place, the golf team came in second place and the bowling team took third. HIGGINS displayed her trademarks of teamwork and competition to achieve outstanding results.

The teamwork spirit was carried on through the next week in July, as HIGGINS embarked Destroyer Squadron Twenty-Three for the upcoming exercises during the transit to and from Seattle. This was the first time that HIGGINS embarked a staff, and the transition was seamless. Commodore Richie and his staff were moved aboard without any problems, as they easily settled into their new accommodations with all of the 21<sup>st</sup> century technology of the newest warship in San Diego at their fingertips. They were able to receive all of their message traffic, make schedule changes and communicate as if sitting ashore. The outstanding work of the Information Technicians was a foreshadowing of the resounding success that characterized HIGGINS' Seattle Sea Fair.

On 27 July, HIGGINS got underway to conduct various exercises enroute to Everett, Washington. For the first time, the ship conducted multiship maneuvering drills with fellow U.S. Navy warships, providing excellent shiphandling opportunities for the junior officers onboard.

HIGGINS moored in Everett, Washington on 1 August, and prepared to receive over 250 civilian guests who would arrive the next morning for the transit to downtown Seattle. The sojourn to the Emerald City was full of exciting demonstrations for the riders. The ship was the lead platform for the Parade of Ships near the skyline of Seattle, and she moored at Pier 66 in the middle of downtown Seattle. The weekend was full of fun events throughout the city, including the hydroplane racing boat festival. Sailors also took the opportunity to see a baseball game at the newly opened Safeco Field, visit the Space Needle, and take a trip to Mount Rainer. The ship was opened for public tours for three days during the weekend port visit, welcoming over 9000 people onboard. In addition, media interest was keen, as a weatherman from a television station in Seattle conducted his broadcast with HIGGINS as the backdrop. In addition, there were several radio stations and newspapers reporting on the festivities throughout the fun-filled weekend.

The return transit to San Diego was also operationally challenging, as HIGGINS conducted various evolutions with an aircraft carrier for the first time. The ship conducted an underway replenishment and served as plane guard for USS CONSTELLATION. These significant events flexed all watchstanders' capabilities and were effective tests on the level of proficiency for the entire crew. Evolutions were conducted flawlessly and enabled the ship to add another item to the growing list of HIGGINS' Firsts.

HIGGINS returned to San Diego on 11 August and had three weeks inport to make repairs on equipment, finalize plans with DESRON TWO THREE, USS HEWITT, and USS FITZGERALD for the advanced stage of training, and load on more supplies for deployment. On 5 September, the ship got underway for the Southern California Operating Area to complete some final items for the Battle E competition. The ship completed the at sea exercises on 8 September and moored at the deperming facility in San Diego for the weekend to conduct testing and calibration of the ship's advanced degaussing system.

HIGGINS departed the deperming facility on 11 September for a Family Day Cruise. Over 200 friends and family of the crew embarked for an interesting day at sea. The ship coordinated with the USS CONSTELLATION's Family Day Cruise, so both groups could watch the warships operate together. Participants onboard HIGGINS were able to observe extensive flight operations of FA-18s, F-14s and S-3s, and the families on CONSTELLATION were able to see the newest San Diego ship conduct various high speed maneuvers. HIGGINS returned to the 32<sup>nd</sup> Street piers the evening of 11 September to make final preparations for the ammunition onload at Seal Beach and the Middle East Force Phase II Exercises (MEFEX Phase II) that were scheduled to take place over the last week of September and first week of October.

The ship went out to sea on 25 September for the transit to Seal Beach to onload the deployment complement of 5" 54-caliber rounds, Tomahawk, Harpoon and Standard missiles, and all other ammunition needs. The process of taking on the missiles, testing, and completing the custody turnover took a few days, and the ship was underway for San Diego on 28 September for a return to port in the early evening.

On 29 September, the ship held an all-hands picnic at the Admiral Baker Recreation Center. The event was filled with various athletic activities, a dunk machine fundraiser, and prize giveaways that included a large-screen television. Friends and family enjoyed the festive atmosphere, delicious food, and fantastic weather.

On 2 October, HIGGINS went out to sea with USS HEWITT and USS FITZGERALD for MEFEX Phase II, the final underway period before deployment. This phase of training was created with the intention of simulating operations in the Arabian Gulf as closely as possible. Thus, the ships had no known schedule of events, and they had to be ready to perform any tasking that DESRON TWO THREE assigned to them. During these intense nine days, HIGGINS conducted a successful standard missile firing exercise against two drones that were simulating anti-ship cruise missiles. In addition, the ships performed boardings on vessels simulating Iraqi oil smugglers, successfully completed a rescue and assistance drill for a ship simulating distress, queried vessels who were simulating suspect cargo carriers, and conducted over-the-horizon targeting of simulated enemy surface ships. The busy period of operations severely tested the PACMEF 00-04 deployers, but they impressed the DESRON TWO THREE staff with their proficiency. This was the best training that HIGGINS had in the entire training cycle, as there were plenty of lessons learned that the crew would carry with them when they departed for the Arabian Gulf.

Before leaving their families and friends for deployment, the Sailors onboard HIGGINS had the opportunity to take pre-overseas movement leave. Most of the crew took advantage of the final chance to relax before experiencing the strenuous operational tempo during the cruise. The members of the crew that remained on the ship during the stand down period finished up final preparations for the deployment. Equipment was being repaired, stores were onloaded, and final preparations were

made right up until the day that HIGGINS departed San Diego and began the transit towards Hawaii.

A rainy day on 9 November matched the spirits of many of HIGGINS Sailors' families, as they came out to wave goodbye to their loved ones. There was extensive local media coverage of the departure, as this was the first group of San Diego ships to depart for a deployment since the USS COLE bombing in Aden, Yemen on 12 October 2000. The crew manned the rails in dress blues, and headed towards Hawaii with USS HEWITT and USS FITZGERALD.

The transit to Hawaii afforded the final training preparations before the PACMEF 00-04 deployers entered Seventh and Fifth Fleets. MEFEX Phase III built on the preceding exercises, and the ships continued to improve their performances. The trip took six days, and the ships pulled into Pearl Harbor on 15 November.

The stop in Hawaii was a working port, as voyage repairs were completed and emergent work was finished. Nevertheless, Sailors still enjoyed their off hours in Wakiki and other fun areas in Honolulu. The ship departed Pearl Harbor on 18 November and rendered honors to USS MISSOURI and USS ARIZONA in the harbor before leaving and heading towards Sydney, Australia.

There were several exciting events for the ship on the transit to the Land Down Under. On 21 November, the ship crossed the equator and celebrated the transformation of over 50 slimy Wogs into crusty Shellbacks with a tastefully done Crossing the Line Ceremony. The crew crossed the International Date Line the following day, and enjoyed a delicious Thanksgiving dinner on 24 November. In addition, the ship conducted operations with an Australian oiler, HMAS WESTRALIA, conducting an underway replenishment and other exercises with them. The cultural exchanges that were set to take place throughout HIGGINS' Australian port visits began at sea, as HIGGINS sent several Sailors to the WESTRALIA, while the Australians also sent crew members to visit the American destroyer.

On the 29 November, HIGGINS pulled into Sydney Harbor for an outstanding port visit to Australia's largest city. Sailors enjoyed visiting the world-famous Opera House, Kings Cross nightlife district, and other attractions. There was also a reception onboard USS HEWITT for the American and Australian Sailors to meet with one another, and each United States ship was sponsored by an Australian counterpart to aid in fully enjoying all that Sydney had to offer. The crew was impressed by the wonderful hospitality that their new "mates" had displayed over the five day visit, and they were looking forward to the next stop in Western Australia.

The PACMEF 00-04 deployers transited along the southern waters of Australia for eight days, and HIGGINS headed into the small town of Bunbury on 12 December for another fun-filled five day port visit. Here, the officers and chief petty officers were heartily welcomed to the city by the mayor and city council with a reception at city hall.

The following evening, the ship returned the hospitality with a reception for some of the citizens of Bunbury onboard the flight deck. The liberty opportunities in Bunbury and the surrounding areas were varied, as many Sailors went scuba diving, hiking, explored the Margaret River wine country, and enjoyed the many delicious eating establishments in the town. The visit was the final stop for the ship before transiting to the Arabian Gulf and beginning the most arduous period of operations.

The ship departed Bunbury on 17 December for the journey to the Fifth Fleet area of operations. The crew enjoyed another major holiday at sea, as the Mess Specialists prepared another delectable feast. HIGGINS inchooped to Fifth Fleet on 27 December, and transited to Bahrain for an inbrief with DESRON 50 and the other major commands in Fifth Fleet Headquarters on 31 December. The crew was able to celebrate the New Year inport Bahrain, but the parties were restricted to the Naval Support Activity in Bahrain due to a heightened level of concern over terrorist threats.

The year was extremely busy for USS HIGGINS, but full of successes on many different levels. Advancement rates on the ship again exceeded fleet averages, many Sailors were awarded commissions, and the ship enjoyed many operational firsts that were all completed in a professional manner. Ending the year in the most dynamic area of operations standing by to complete national tasking was fitting, as the ship has always lived up to its motto, "First to Fight."