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From: Commanding Officer, USS KEARSARGE (LHD 3)  
To: Chief of Naval Operations (N09BH)

Subj: COMMAND HISTORY FOR 1997

Ref: (a) OPNAVINST 5750.12F

- Encl:
- (1) 1997 Command History
  - (2) USS KEARSARGE 1997 Competitive Cycle Award Nomination Submission
  - (3) COMPHIBRON Four 311005Z May 97
  - (4) AMEMBASSY Conakry 011700Z Jun 97
  - (5) CINCLANTFLT 020805Z Jun 97
  - (6) COMMARFOREUR 060002Z Jun 97
  - (7) CINCUSNAVEUR 060533Z Jun 97
  - (8) USS KEARSARGE 121010Z Jun 97
  - (9) AMEMBASSY CONAKRY 121343Z Jun 97
  - (10) USS KEARSARGE 252201Z Jun 97
  - (11) CTF SIX ONE 262020Z Jul 97
  - (12) AMEMBASSY BANJUL 161521Z Sep 97
  - (13) USS KEARSARGE 011420Z Oct 97
  - (14) Video Compilation of Non-combatant Evacuation
  - (15) USS KEARSARGE Change of Command Program
  - (16) USS KEARSARGE Welcome Aboard Brochure

1. As required by reference (a), the following enclosures are submitted.

P. A. MASCIANGELO

# USS KEARSARGE (LHD 3) COMMAND HISTORY CALENDAR YEAR 1997

## *Command Composition and Organization*

**Mission:** To load, transport and land troops and their equipment.

**Organizational Structure:**  
Commander Amphibious Group Two

**Commanding Officer**  
Captain Thomas M. Wittkamp

**Executive Officer**  
Captain Peter A. Masciangelo

**Command Master Chief**  
OSCM (SW) Timothy Minor

**Ship's Homeport:** Naval Station Norfolk, Virginia

**Ship's Awards for 1997:** TYCOM Safety Award

## ***Chronology:***

### **January**

- 1 – 12 Inport Norfolk, Virginia
- 13 – 17 Underway Virginia VACAPES. LCAC, DLQ, AV-8B Night Project Services Acoustic Trials.
- 18 – 26 Inport Norfolk, Virginia.
- 27 – 31 Inport Norfolk, Virginia. CSRR Phase II, PATG.

### **February**

- 1 – 3 Inport Norfolk, Virginia.
- 4 – 13 Underway COMPUTEX Phase II, ARGSIT, SACEX. JFK Battle Group, KEARSARGE ARG.
- 14 – 28 Inport Norfolk, Virginia.

### **March**

- 1 – 5 Inport Norfolk, Virginia.
- 6 – 24 Underway JTFEX 97-2. JFK Battle Group, KEARSARGE ARG.
- 25 – 31 Inport Norfolk, Virginia. POM, IMAV, Safety Stand Down.

## April

- 1 – 14 Inport Norfolk, Virginia. POM
- 15 – 30 Enroute Eastern Atlantic, Operation Guardian Retrieval.

## May

- 1 Enroute Eastern Atlantic.
- 2 Turnover with USS Nassau, JTF Guardian Retrieval.
- 3 – 26 Operation Guardian Retrieval, assigned to CJTF Guardian Retrieval.
- 26 CJTF Guardian Retrieval, Brig. Gen. Guy Vanderlinden visits KEARSARGE.
- 27 – 31 Operation Noble Obelisk, assigned to CJTF Noble Obelisk.
- 30 First evacuation of Freetown, Sierra Leone.  
Anne Wright, Deputy Chief of Mission, Sierra Leone embarks on KEARSARGE.

## June

- 1 – 5 Operation Noble Obelisk, assigned CJTF Noble Obelisk.
  - 1 Second evacuation of Freetown, Sierra Leone.
  - 2 John Hirsch, US Ambassador to Sierra Leone embarks on board KEARSARGE.
  - 3 Third evacuation of Freetown, Sierra Leone.
- 6 – 9 Operations Eastern Atlantic, enroute Las Palmas, Canary Islands.  
Assigned to Task Force 61.
- 10 – 13 Port Visit Las Palmas.
- 14 – 15 Enroute Rota, Spain.
- 16 – 18 Port Visit Rota, Spain.
- 19 – 25 Mediterranean Operations, enroute Naples, Italy.
- 26 – 29 Port Visit, Naples.
  - 27 Host platform, USO Gala.  
VADM Steve Abbot, Commander Sixth Fleet; Clarke Ellis, American Counsel General to Naples, Italy; and RADM John J. Grossenbacher, Commander Submarine Group Eight on board during the USO Gala.
  - 28 Congressman Paul Mchale (D-Penn) on board overnight.
  - 30 Underway, RAS, Central Mediterranean.

## July

- 1 – 6 Port Visit Naples.
- 3 ADM T. Joseph Lopez, Commander in Chief US Naval Forces Europe visits KEARSARGE.
- 5 USO Tour for Baseball Legends visits KEARSARGE. University of Laverne Professors and Students visits KEARSARGE.
- 6 USO Tour for Singing Artist MC Lyte visits KEARSARGE. Crew and passengers from German Cruise Ship AIDA visit KEARSARGE.
- 7 – 9 Underway, Operations Central Mediterranean.
- 7 Italian Media embark KEARSARGE for underway coverage.
- 10 – 18 Underway, INVITEX, Ionian Sea.
- 10 MCAI
- 21 – 28 Exercisè Atlas Hinge, Tunisia.
- 24 ARMY GEN Wesley K. Clark, Commander in Chief European Command; VADM Abbot, Commander Sixth Fleet; BRIG GEN Vanderlinden, Deputy Commander Naval Striking and Support Forces Southern Europe; and BRIG GEN Soligan, Executive Officer, Southern Allied Command Europe visit KEARSARGE.
- 28 – 31 Port Visit Palma, Spain.

## August

- 1 – 3 Port Visit Palma.
- 4 – 10 Underway Mediterranean Operations.
- 11 – 20 Port Visit Rota, Spain.
- 14 MAJ GEN Nyland, Deputy Commanding General, 2nd MEF visits KEARSARGE.
- 21 – 28 Underway, Central Mediterranean Operations.
- 29 – 31 Port Visit Barcelona, Spain.

## September

- 1 – 4 Port Visit Barcelona, Spain.
- 5 Underway, Central Mediterranean Operations.
- 6 – 12 Port Visit Valencia, Spain.
- 13 – 23 Underway, Western Mediterranean Operations.
- 15 ADM Jay L. Johnson, Chief of Naval Operations and ETCM John Hagan, Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy visit KEARSARGE.
- 24 – 30 Port Visit and Washdown Rota, Spain.

## **October**

- 1 Port Visit Rota, Spain.
- 2 Chop to Commander Second Fleet.
- 2 – 12 Enroute Moorehead City, North Carolina.
- 13 – 14 Offload Moorehead City.
- 14 RADM Holder, Commander Amphibious Group Two visits KEARSARGE.
- 14 Tiger Cruise.
- 15 Arrive Norfolk, Virginia.
- 15 – 31 Post Deployment Upkeep Norfolk, Virginia.

## **November**

- 1 – 12 Post Deployment Upkeep Norfolk, Virginia.
- 13 – 16 Inport Norfolk, Virginia.
- 14 Captain Peter A. Masciangelo relieves Captain Thomas M. Wittkamp as Commanding USS KEARSARGE. Guest Speaker RADM Holder.
- 17 Enroute Earl, New Jersey.
- 18 – 20 Ammunition Offload Earl, New Jersey.
- 21 Enroute Norfolk, Virginia.
- 22 – 30 Inport Norfolk, Virginia.
- 25 KEARSARGE host platform for Commander Amphibious Squadron Four Change of Command.
- 25 KEARSARGE hosts Dr. Edward Martin, Assistant Secretary of Defense (Health Affairs).

## **December**

- 1 – 8 Inport Norfolk, Virginia.
- 4 KEARSARGE hosts ADM Jacoby, Chief of Naval Operations N2.  
KEARSARGE hosts thirty Staff College foreign students.
- 9 – 18 Underway TCAT 98-1.
- 9 Navigation Check ride.
- 19 – 31 Holiday Upkeep Norfolk, Virginia.

***Narrative:***

*USS Kearsarge* (LHD 3) began the reporting period by preparing for its second Mediterranean Sea deployment. The ship completed COMPUTEX Phase II, ARGSIT, SACEX and JTFEX 97-2 with the *USS John F. Kennedy* battle group and its amphibious ready group – *USS Ponce* (LPD 15) and *USS Carter Hall* (LSD 50). *Kearsarge* departed Norfolk, Va., two weeks prior to its scheduled deployment date, to relieve *USS Nassau* on station in the Eastern Atlantic, in anticipation of a noncombatant evacuation from the unstable country of Zaire.

Embarked on board *Kearsarge* were: Commander Amphibious Squadron FOUR, Marine Expeditionary Unit TWENTY-TWO, Tactical Air Control Squadron TWENTY TWO Detachment One, Fleet Surgical Team EIGHT, Commander Naval Beach Group TWO Detachment Charlie, Naval Special Warfare Task Unit, Seal Team TWO Platoon Delta Squad ONE, Explosive Ordnance Disposal Mobile Unit TWO Detachment SIX, Assault Craft Unit TWO Detachment Charlie, Assault Craft Unit FOUR Detachment Charlie, Beach Master Unit TWO Detachment Charlie, and Helicopter Support Squadron EIGHT Detachment TWO.

*Kearsarge* arrived on station on 2 May 1997. Upon arriving off the coast of Zaire, *Kearsarge* relieved *USS Nassau* and reported for duty to Brig. Gen. Guy Vanderlinden, Commander, Joint Task Force Guardian Retrieval. After 25 days on station, *Kearsarge* was ordered to make best speed to Sierra Leone where the elected government in power had been overthrown by rebel soldiers. *Kearsarge* arrived on station off the coast of Freetown, Sierra Leone on 28 May 1997. Marine Col. Sam Helland, 22 MEU (SOC) embarked onboard, was appointed Commander, Joint Task Force Noble Obelisk. Once the decision was made to close down the American Embassy in Freetown, Sierra Leone, Operation Noble Obelisk was executed. Deputy Chief of Mission Anne Wright was the first evacuee to embark onboard *Kearsarge*. By dusk, approximately 908 evacuees from the United States, European, Middle East and South African countries were transported onboard the ship. The ship sailed for Conakry, Guinea where the evacuees were off-loaded and met by their respective country representatives. During a six-day period, *Kearsarge* conducted two more evacuations of Americans and third-country nationals from Freetown. U.S. Ambassador to Sierra Leone, John Hirsch, embarked onboard *Kearsarge* on 2 June and was present for the ship's third and final evacuation on 3 June. The total number of evacuees transported from Freetown during the six-day evolution was 2,500. Operation Noble Obelisk was officially disestablished on 6 June.

Following the evacuation, *Kearsarge* sailors enjoyed a well-deserved four-day port visit to Las Palmas, Grand Canary Island before proceeding to Rota, Spain. The ship entered the Mediterranean Sea on 18 June enroute to Naples, Italy. Arriving in Naples on 26 June, the *Kearsarge* crew made preparations to host the 1997 USO Gala. The fundraising event hosted more than 800 visitors onboard *Kearsarge* which included Vice Adm. Steve Abbot, Commander Sixth Fleet; the Honorable Clarke Ellis, American Counsel General to Naples, Italy; and Rear Adm. John J. Grossenbacher, Commander Submarine Group Eight. The ship also hosted Congressman Paul McHale (D-Penn). *Kearsarge* returned to Naples, Italy for the July 4<sup>th</sup> holiday. During this port visit, Adm. T. Joseph Lopez, Commander in Chief U.S. Naval Forces Europe, visited the *Kearsarge* and addressed the officers and crew on the flight deck. *Kearsarge* departed Naples on 10 July to participate in Sixth Fleet's Invitex 97-2 exercise in the Ionian Sea. The exercise involved carrier battle group and amphibious operations with ships and units from the United States, Italy, Greece, France, Great Britain, the

Netherlands and Germany. This was the first time during the deployment *Kearsarge* joined together with its Amphibious Ready Group which included *USS Ponce* and *USS Carter Hall*. The ship also completed Atlas Hinge, an exercise in interoperability between United States and Tunisian forces. The six-day exercise covered joint/combined training in amphibious operations and subsequent actions ashore for Marine Amphibious Ready Group (MARG) and Marine Expeditionary Units (MEU), and the Southern European Task Force (SETAF) and designated Tunisian forces. One element of the exercise is the joint U.S.-Tunisian hydrographic survey. Navy divers and their Tunisian counterparts practiced this important element of peacekeeping operations. The importance of hydrographic surveys was demonstrated in operations in West Africa, Bosnia and Somalia. Four thousand U.S. Sailors, Marines and Soldiers from *USS Kearsarge* (LHD 3), *USS Ponce* (LPD 15), *USS Carter Hall* (LSD 50), *USS Tempest* (PC 2), 22nd MEU and Company 3/325 Airborne Battalion SETAF participated during this exercise.

General Wesley K. Clark, Commander in Chief European Command visited *Kearsarge* on 24 July. He was accompanied by Vice Adm. Steve Abbot, Commander Sixth Fleet; Marine Brig. Gen. Guy Vanderlinden, Deputy Commander Naval Striking and Support Forces Southern Europe; and Air Force Brig. Gen. Soligan, Executive Officer, Southern Allied Command Europe. The ship proceeded to Palma de Mallorca, Spain for a weeklong port visit.

During the month of August, *Kearsarge* returned to Rota, Spain. There she hosted a visit by Marine Major Gen. Nyland, Deputy Commanding General, 2<sup>nd</sup> MEF, on 14 August. Following a weeklong underway period in the Central Mediterranean, *Kearsarge* arrived in Barcelona, Spain on 29 August. The ship departed Barcelona on 4 September. It arrived in Valencia, Spain after a one-day transit in the Central Mediterranean. The ship departed Valencia on 12 September to conduct operations in the Western Mediterranean. *Kearsarge* hosted a visit by Chief of Naval Operations, Adm. Jay Johnson and then Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy, ETCM John Hagan. The entourage also visited the other ships in the *Kearsarge* ARG. The ship returned to Rota, Spain for a final washdown of troop equipment prior to returning to Conus.

*Kearsarge* chopped to Commander Second Fleet on 02 October and proceeded to Moorehead City, N.C. for troop and equipment off-load. Prior to returning to Norfolk, Rear Adm. Holder, Commander Second Fleet, personally congratulated the *Kearsarge* crew for a successful deployment. The ship conducted post deployment upkeep in port in Norfolk, Va., during the end of October and early November.

Captain Peter A. Masciangelo, *Kearsarge*'s executive officer, relieved Captain T. Michael Wittkamp and became the ship's fourth commanding officer during a change of command ceremony onboard 14 November. The ship conducted ammunition off-load in Earle, N.J. *Kearsarge* also served as the host platform for Commander Amphibious Squadron FOUR's change of command ceremony on 25 November. Dr. Edward Martin, Assistant Secretary of Defense(Health Affairs) also visited *Kearsarge* on 25 November.

During the month of December, *Kearsarge* hosted a visit by Adm. Jacoby, Chief of Naval Operations N2 and approximately thirty multinational military officers from the Staff College. Before celebrating the holidays, *Kearsarge*'s crew completed the Type Commander's Amphibious Test 98-1 and made preparations for a scheduled four-month Selective Restricted Availability in January.