



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY

USS MASON (DDG 87)
FPO AE 09578-1302

5750

Ser DDG 87-EXE/015

JAN 21 2004

From: Commanding Officer, USS MASON (DDG 87)
To: Chief of Naval Operations (N09BH)

Subj: COMMAND HISTORY FOR CY03

Ref: (a) OPNAVINST 5750.12G, Command Histories

Encl: (1) Command Composition and Organization
(2) Chronology
(3) Narrative
(4) Commanding Officer's Biography
(5) USS MASON (DDG 87) Photograph
(6) Commissioning Articles
(7) Commissioning Video

1. In accordance with reference (a), USS MASON command history for calendar year 2003 is submitted.


DAVID J. GALE

USS MASON(DDG 87)
COMMAND COMPOSITION AND ORGANIZATION
1 JAN 2003-31 DEC 2003

Command Title: USS MASON (DDG 87)

UIC: 22995

Missions: Anti-Air Warfare, Anti-Submarine Warfare, Anti-Surface Warfare, Strike Warfare, and Maritime Interdiction Operations

ISIC: Commander, Destroyer Squadron Twenty-Six (COMDESRON 26)

Commanding Officer: Commander David J. Gale, USN

Homeport: Norfolk, Virginia

Aircraft Assigned: None

USS MASON (DDG 87)
CHRONOLOGY
1 JAN 2003-31 DEC 2003

Background: MASON was a pre-commissioning unit until her commissioning on April 11, 2003.

6 JAN 2003

-MASON's crew first moveaboard started.

9

-The Crew was served the first meal onboard.

10

-Crew began living onboard.

15

-Maine State Legislators were given a tour the MASON.

24

-Aegis Readiness and Training Center finished a long week onboard MASON conducting Light Off Assessment preparations.

31

-MASON successfully completed the final Vertical Launch System Certification.

12 FEB 2003

-United States Congressman John Marth from 12th Pennsylvania District visited the ship and met with five MASON sailors from his district.

13

-Search and Rescue Certification completed.

14

-Conducted first Fast Cruise onboard MASON, with great success.

24

-Light Off Assessment and Crew Certification Phase II commenced.

28

-MASON cleared for underway operations by passing Light Off Assessment and Crew Certification Phase II with flying colors.

7 MAR 2003

-UNDERWAY: MASON's sailway from Bath Iron Works (BIW) down the Kennebec River enroute Boston MA, MASON's first port call.

10

-INPORT: MASON arrives in downtown Boston, MA.

13

-UNDERWAY: Enroute to Naval Education and Training Center, Newport, Rhode Island.

14

-INPORT: Newport, Rhode Island.

17

-UNDERWAY: Enroute to Naval Station Mayport, Mayport, Florida.

24

-INPORT: Mayport, Florida.

31

-UNDERWAY: Enroute to Port Canaveral, Florida.

4 APR 2003

-INPORT: MASON arrives in Port Canaveral, where her Commissioning Ceremony will be held.

11

-Commanding Officer's Reception was held at the NASA Cape Canaveral's DeBus center.

12

-COMMISSIONING DAY. USS MASON joins the United States Atlantic Fleet. The principal speaker is Assistant Secretary to the Navy for Finance Management, Dionel Aviles. Honored guests include: United States Senator Olympia Snowe, the ship's sponsor, United States Congressman Dave Weldon, Vice Admiral David Brewer, Commander Military Sea Lift Command, and Rear Admiral William Cobb Jr., Program Executive Office for Ships, Rear Admiral Etnyre, Commander Naval Surface Force Atlantic, Rear Admiral Ulrich, Director Surface Warfare OPNAV N76, and Rear Admiral Sestak, Commander, Cruiser Destroyer Group Two, Commander, George Washington Battle Group.

14

-UNDERWAY/INPORT: USS MASON's first underway as a commissioned ship was a VIP cruise for the local volunteers who contributed greatly to the wonderful commissioning ceremony.

15

-UNDERWAY: Enroute to homeport, Norfolk, Virginia.

18

-INPORT: USS MASON (DDG 87) is given a warm welcome in her homeport of Norfolk, Virginia.

21

-UNDERWAY/INPORT: MASON transits the upstream in the Elisabeth River to the NAUTICUS museum pier for the 2003 Azalea Festival.

28

-UNDERWAY/INPORT: MASON returns to Norfolk Naval Base.

2 MAY 2003

-MASON completed Single Ship Anti-Submarine Warfare team trainer with an above average score.

5

-UNDERWAY: Virginia Capes Operations Area (VCOA) to conduct Engineering Limited Team Trainer (LTT) and Air Defense training.

10

-INPORT: Norfolk, Virginia.

23

-UNDERWAY: VCOA conducting Week One Work-Ups (WOWU) with the Light Airborne Multi-purpose System (LAMPS) helicopter. After helicopter operations, MASON met the Spanish Frigate, Alvaro de Baza F101, halfway between the United States and Spain for group sail to New York, New York.

5 JUN 2003

-INPORT: New York, New York.

6

-CDR David J. Gale, Tommy Hilfiger, and Mary Pat Kelly hosted a party celebrating the rich history of USS MASON, DE 529 onboard USS MASON (DDG 87). Former President Bill Clinton was the honored guest.

8

-UNDERWAY: Enroute to Norfolk, Virginia.

10

-INPORT: Norfolk, Virginia.

16

-UNDERWAY: For Midshipmen Summer Training and Pre-Commissioning Unit (PCU) CHAFFEE (DDG 90) builder's trials.

19

-INPORT: For Combat Systems Ship Qualification Trials (CSSQT) maintenance and training.

30

-UNDERWAY: Enroute to Yorktown Naval Weapons Station.

2 JUL 2003

-UNDERWAY/INPORT: Norfolk, Virginia.

7

-UNDERWAY: Virginia Capes Operating Area (VCOA) for Combat System Ship Qualification and Trial (CSSQT).

15

-INPORT: Norfolk, Virginia CSSQT maintenance and administration.

16

-UNDERWAY: VCOA for CSSQT, enroute Florida for ASW portion of CSSQT.

30

-INPORT: Port Canaveral, Florida to prepare for Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) portion of CSSQT.

4 AUG 2003

-UNDERWAY: Jacksonville Operating Area (JAXOA).

15

-INPORT: Naval Station Mayport, Mayport, Florida for Engineering Initial Assessment (IA) and Command Assessment Readiness and Training (CART) Phase II.

19

-UNDERWAY: Jacksonville Operating Area (JAXOA) for Underway Demonstration.

20

-INPORT: Mayport, Florida. Completed Underway Demonstration.

21

-UNDERWAY: JAXOA for CART II.

22

-INPORT: Mayport, Florida.

25

-UNDERWAY: Enroute to Yorktown, Virginia.

27

-INPORT: Yorktown, Virginia for CSSQT ammo offload.

29

-UNDERWAY/INPORT: Transit from Naval Weapons Station Yorktown to Naval Station Norfolk, Norfolk Virginia.

8 Sept 2003

-Final Contract Trials commence.

12

-Successfully completed Final Contract Trials.

16

-UNDERWAY: VCOA for hurricane evasion ico Hurricane Isabel.

21

-INPORT: Norfolk, Virginia.

22

-UNDERWAY/INPORT: Transit from Naval Station Norfolk to Norfolk Ship Building Company (NORSHIPCO) shipyard to commence Post Shakedown Availability (PSA).

23

-Post Shakedown Availability (PSA) begins at NORSHIPCO shipyard.

26

-MASON's crew moves off the ship and onto the berthing barge for the duration of PSA.

01 OCT 03

-Berth shift to drydock within NORSHIPCO shipyard.

21

-MASON finished drydock period and shifts back to pier 3 within NORSHIPCO shipyard.

24 NOV 2003

-AEGIS Light off completed.

26

-MASON started the Thanksgiving holiday weekend with their families and friends. Crew move aboard from the barge was completed prior to start of the weekend.

6 DEC 2003

-MASON Aviation Certification (AVCERT) completed.

11

-The first kids Christmas party was held at Chucky "E" Cheese in Virginia Beach.

12

-Completed Dock Trials. MASON's annual crew Christmas Party held at the Virginia Beach DoubleTree Hotel.

16

-UNDERWAY: MASON conducted Sea Trials in the VCOA.

17

-INPORT: Naval Station, Norfolk Virginia.

19

-MASON commenced holiday leave and standdown period.

USS MASON (DDG 87)
NARRATIVE
1 JAN 2003-31 DEC 2003

Background: MASON is a pre-commissioning unit, but the ship is in service through a Special Commission - without ceremony. MASON's Commissioning Ceremony is April 12, 2003.

2003

MASON's crew started the New Year with their families because 24-hour duty was not a requirement until crew moveaboard. MASON's crew returned on the 4th of January to prepare for the big week ahead of them. Early Monday morning, MASON's crew took possession of the ship. Crew moveaboard took the entire week. All the frozen and chilled food was moved aboard in the beginning of the week to prepare for the first meal to be served onboard. Commander Gale, Command Master Chief Heath, and Mess Management Specialist Chief [REDACTED] cut the ribbon to mark the opening of Blackford Grill, MASON's crew dining facility. The mess decks are named after the DE 529's Commanding Officer Bill Blackford. Seaman Apprentice [REDACTED], MASON's youngest sailor, was Blackford Grill's first customer. Master Chief Heath received the first MASON haircut from SHSA [REDACTED] in the Barbershop. In an effort to make the ship more like home for the young sailors, MASON had a Super Bowl party using a newly purchased 10X10 foot projection TV.

During the month of January, every sailor was working diligently with their Bath Iron Works (BIW), or Aegis Test Team counterpart to learn more about their systems. MASON certified the Identification Friend or Foe (IFF) and Vertical Launch System (VLS). The Information Technicians and Electronic Technicians were also working very hard to get MASON's computer LAN online. During a turnover period, Bath Iron Works and MASON's crew completed an Overall Combat Systems Operational Test (OCSOT) and Sonar Combat Operational Test (SCOT).

MASON continued with an aggressive training and maintenance schedule to get the ship ready to sail down the Kennebec River. MASON's crew was instructed by the Commanding Officer to test everything as much as required to determine if Bath Iron Works, Lockheed Martin and a number of other contractors built MASON to the

specifications they advertised. During the last week of January, MASON's helicopter fire fighting team completed an intense week of training lead by DC1 (SW) [REDACTED]. The Engineers completed numerous drills and evolutions with the assistance of the Aegis Test and Readiness Center (ATRC). ATRC was in Maine to assist in preparations for MASON's Light Off Assessment. During the end of January and the early parts of February, main space fire drills were conducted three days a week and fast cruise once a week.

During the early days of February, 2M (Micro Miniature) Certification and onload was complete. The Tomahawks ILS safety crew certification, Search and Rescue Phase I and II certification, and SQQ-89 intermediate maintenance review were completed successfully.

A lot of planning, training and just plain hard work lead up to the Light Off Assessment (LOA) and Crew Certification Phase II. On Monday, February 24, the Light Off Assessment inbrief was conducted by the key players to include: MASON's Captain, CDR Gale, LT [REDACTED] her Engineer Officer and LTJG [REDACTED] her Main Propulsion Assistant (MPA). MASON demonstrated numerous evolutions and material checks but the main space fire drill (MSFD) was the deciding factor in the assessment. Most of MASON's crew didn't know when the MSFD would be executed, but they had worked really hard up to that point and knew they were ready. The last day of Light Off Assessment, a main space fire was called away, every sailor moved like lightening to close every hatch in order to set modified Zebra and fight the fire the way they were trained. MASON passed the Light Off Assessment with flying colors. An email from Commander, Cruiser Destroyer Group Two Rear Admiral Joe Sestak stated, "Dave, congratulations on passing your LOA with flying colors. I look forward to you being "officially" part of the battle group. W/R Joe"

Later in the week, Destroyer Squadron Twenty Six staff conducted the Crew Cert Phase II inspection and again MASON passed with flying colors. MASON was now officially ready to go to sea. In just seven short days, MASON would be steaming down the Kennebec River.

During the early days of March, the crew was making certain that everything MASON needed to get underway was being attended to properly and safely. On a cold afternoon, at 1500, 7 March 2003, the whistle blew and MASON was

underway down the Kennebec River headed out to sea. LT [REDACTED] was the first Officer of the Deck and LT [REDACTED] was the first Conning Officer. For about fifty percent of the crew this was the first time they had been to sea.

On the 10th of March, MASON tied up to the Black Falcon Cruise Terminal Pier in downtown Boston, for a much needed liberty port. After enjoying a couple days enjoying New England hospitality in Boston, MASON got underway for an overnight trip to Newport, Rhode Island. MASON tied up to Pier 2, at Naval Station Newport Rhode Island and the crew was able to spend a great St. Patrick's Day in one of New England's best small town hot spots.

MASON arrived at Naval Station Mayport, Florida on 24 March 2003. The crew's focus changed drastically from intense drilling and training for the past month to getting the ship ready for Commissioning. The entire ship was painting, cleaning, and shining; trying to make the ship look perfect for the big ceremony the following month. Just like getting ready for the Light Off Assessment and Crew Certification Phase II, the job was a team effort, including everyone from the officers down to the seaman.

During the last day of March, MASON got underway for a few days of helicopter operations and a transit to Port Canaveral, her Commissioning site. On the morning of April 3rd, MASON conducted small boat operations, transferring four news crews from ABC, NBC, CBS, and FOX, who were responsible for covering the Port Canaveral and Orlando Area. The crews were assigned escorts and briefed by LT [REDACTED], MASON's Public Affairs Officer, and LCDR [REDACTED], the Public Affairs Officer temporarily assigned to the ship for Commissioning. The crews were given free reign of the ship as seen in enclosure (4).

On April 4th, MASON received the warmest welcome any navy ship could ask for with hundreds of MASON supporters waving flags and banners at Jetty Park and three tugs spurting water in all directions surrounding the ship. MASON tied up at the Trident pier at Naval Ordnance Station Port Canaveral. An excerpt from the Florida Today said it best;

"Aboard the USS MASON-A patriotic crowd of flag-waving spectators lined the shores at Jetty Park to welcome the guided missile destroyer USS MASON, the Navy's newest vessel. The crowd of more than 2,000

people, more than for shuttle launches by some estimates, waited Friday morning to see the 510-foot ship. Sailors in their white dress uniforms lined the decks of spotless MASON while the ship entered the port amid tight security at the Trident Pier. Two sheriff's helicopters circled and Coast Guard vessels and smaller Navy boats, with gunners at their posts, escorts, escorted the destroyer."

MASON used the first weekend in Port Canaveral to enjoy the nice Florida weather and visit the local sites such as Disney World and Cape Canaveral NASA Base. Due to hard work by MASON's Supply Officer, LT Neville, and the patriotic nature of the Disney Company, MASON's crew and family were given free passes to Disney World.

During the early part of the week MASON was able to host many USS MASON DE 529 veterans. An excerpt from the Miami Herald says it best;

"A year before the end of World War II, the newly launched destroyer USS MASON prowled Atlantic with an unusual crew: Nearly all the sailors were black, and for the first time they were serving as something other than cooks or stewards.

Allowing black men to serve aboard the MASON performing the same tasks as white sailors was done at the behest of then-first lady Eleanor Roosevelt. "Eleanor's Folly," some sneered of the ship and crew. The crew served with distinction, escorting supply ships and troop carriers and hunting German submarines.

Wednesday (April 9), three veterans of the MASON, all in there 80's, toured a new MASON about to be commissioned here. They brought to the decks of the new ship a legacy, telling stories about the fight for equality and desegregation in the Navy's ranks.

"We got a chance to be pioneers, so to speak," said Horace Banks, 85, a machinist's mate during World War II and a long-distance truck driver for most of the rest of his civilian life. "Now you have choices in the Navy." Desegregation didn't seem so important as winning the war at the time, he said. All Banks and his shipmates wanted, he said, was the right to serve their country the way other men did.

The Navy is better for their service, young sailors said Wednesday.

The new MASON is part of an effort to preserve the legacy of men like Banks, Winfrey Roberts and Benjamin Garrison, both 80, who visited the ship Wednesday in preparation for MASON's official commissioning on Saturday."

MASON's crew was working diligently to prepare for the commissioning. During the week leading up to the Commissioning, MASON practiced the ceremony every morning. John Porter, the chairman of the Port Canaveral Commissioning Committee, hosted a wardroom party at his house on Wednesday Night. John Porter is one of the main reasons why MASON was able to have a successful commissioning. The Chief's Mess had a similar party at Patrick Air Force base. On Thursday afternoon, MASON had a crew and family beach party at the Jetty Park. Friday night was the beginning of the formal commissioning festivities with the Commanding Officer's Reception. The reception was held at the NASA's DeBus Center on Cape Canaveral Base.

With the final commissioning meeting being held at 0630 on Commissioning day, it was an early start to an emotional but proud day for the ship. With the help of Brevard County Police mobile command post, MASON was able to provide sufficient protection to MASON's guests and crew. The mobile unit arrived at 0700. From 0800 to 1030, the Platform breakfast was held at the Coco Beach Raddisson Hotel convention center. At 1100 the Commissioning ceremony began.

An excerpt from the *Florida Today* said it best,

PORT CANAVERAL—About 4,000 invited guests turned out Saturday to pay tribute to America's fighting forces and the Navy's newest ship; a \$1 billion guided-missile destroyer. With cool breezes flapping through signal flags, dignitaries, military personnel and the ship's crew packed the Trident Pier to witness the commissioning of the ship.

The featured speaker of event was Assistant Secretary to the Navy for Finance Management, Dionel Aviles. Brought here for the event by the Cape Canaveral Chapter of the Navy League, more than \$100,000 was raised from local businesses and personal

donations to sponsor the event. Volunteers - including about 20 members of the Sea Cadets, a naval club for teenagers. Rear Admiral William W. Cobb Jr. handed control of the ship over to Commander David J. Gale, commending the young crew of the ship. I don't know where the idea comes from that our young people are not dedicated to this country that they are not as patriotic as we were.

United States Senator Olympia Snowe, the ship's sponsor, brought the ship to life. The young crew, with average age of 19, ran from the stands and boarded the ship and brought her to life. MASON is now called USS MASON (DDG 87), the newest ship of the Atlantic Fleet. Following the ceremony, the crew and guests had a good old cook out. The crew spent the rest of the weekend with their families and friends.

Monday morning, USS MASON got underway for a one day cruise for the Navy League, Commissioning Committee, and all the local contributors who without their effort and money the Commissioning would not have been successful.

Shortly after arriving in Norfolk, MASON transited down to the NAUTICUS pier in downtown Norfolk. MASON was the honorary ship for the Azalea Festival. The Azalea Festival began in 1953, just one year after the establishment of NATO's Allied Command Atlantic (ACLANT) in Norfolk, VA. In that year, the citizens of Norfolk organized the Azalea Festival as a salute to these allied forces in order to create new friendships, provide a basis for cultural exchange, recognize the military's role in maintaining peace in the world and pursue new lines of trade between Norfolk and the world. MASON gave numerous tours for the citizens of Norfolk as well as hosting numerous NATO Officers at a cocktail party held onboard. On the following Monday morning, MASON left downtown Norfolk and transited back down the river to Naval Station Norfolk.

The focus now changes again for the crew, who has started preparing for MASON's Combat Systems Ship Qualification Trials (CSSQT) and the Inter-Deployment Training Cycle (IDTC). MASON's Anti-Submarine Warfare team completed the Single Ship ASW School, which was led by Sonar Technician Chief [REDACTED] and LT [REDACTED] as part of the preparations for CSSQT and to complete IDTC requirements.

During the early days of May, MASON got underway for CSSQT Air Defense training and engineering evolutions and drills. Upon completion, MASON returned to Norfolk for the majority of May. MASON was underway at the end of May for Week One Work-ups (WOWU) with a SH-60B helicopter and Group Sail with the Spanish Frigate, Alvaro De Bazan F101.

MASON had the great opportunity to do a combined CSSQT with the Spanish. The Spanish just finishing building their first Aegis Frigate, and as part of the Military and Civilian contract they were permitted to complete a CSSQT on the American test ranges. Captain (Select) Juan Rodriquez, the Commanding Officer of the Alvaro De Bazan, and Commander Gale developed a good friendship which started when Commander Gale visited Spain in December 2002 for a CSSQT planning conference. MASON met Alvaro De Bazan F101 half way between Spain and the United States. After MASON met up with F101 they headed towards New York, New York. MASON and F101 completed numerous joint exercises and inoperability tests enroute. MASON and F101 arrive in New York City at the INTREPID Pier, Borough of Manhattan. New York City was great liberty port.

In June, during MASON's stay in New York, Tommy Hilfiger threw a party for the crew and the veterans of USS MASON DE 529. Mr. Hilfiger funded, and his daughter produced, a movie called PROUD about the rich African American history based on the USS MASON DE 529 story. MASON had the pleasure of hosting Former President Bill Clinton, Kim Cattrall, Jamie-Lynn Sigler and number of other celebrities. Every night the crew had a social get together with the Spanish, consisting of beer and hotdogs to help build camaraderie. MASON headed home to Norfolk after a great port visit in New York.

After a week of inport CSSQT maintenance and training, MASON embarked about thirty Midshipmen (Naval Academy and college students from around the country who will soon be Naval Officers). MASON got underway for three nights to show the midshipmen what life is like on a U.S. Navy ship. MASON was also assisting PCU CHAFFEE (DDG 90) with their Builders Trials and tested the Cooperative Engagement Capability (CEC) of each ship.

Upon returning to Norfolk, MASON was tied up to the same pier as Alvaro De Bazan and hosted the ship during her

entire stay in the United States while continuing to prepare for CSSQT during another inport maintenance and training period. During this time, MASON also completed a 3M Assist visit, and a Naval Surface Fire Support (NSFS) team trainer lead by Ensign [REDACTED] and Fire Control Senior Chief [REDACTED].

During the end of June and the first couple days of July, MASON and F101 transited to Naval Weapons Station Yorktown, Virginia. There, MASON unloaded Standard Missiles, 5" shells and powders, exercise torpedoes, chaff, and sonobuoys, to be expended during CSSQT. The F101 unloaded standard missiles for CSSQT in addition to their inventory.

After departing Yorktown with all the ammunition needed for CSSQT, MASON returned to homeport to spend the 4th of July weekend with their families and friends. Alvaro De Bazan F101, made a liberty port stop in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and moored at Penn's Landing, one of the America's richest historical areas for Independence Day.

After the holiday, MASON and Alvaro De Bazan got underway and officially commenced their Combat System Ship Qualifications Trials (CSSQT). MASON and F101 conducted an underway replenishment as soon as they got underway to fill-up on fuel. Electronic Warfare was the first combat area to be tested. LT [REDACTED] Electronic Warfare Chief Taber, and Electronic Warfare Petty Officer First Class [REDACTED] lead numerous and successful chaff firings against various air targets. After completing the Electronic Warfare portion of CSSQT, MASON quickly transitioned to the combined F101 and MASON Air Warfare portion of CSSQT.

MASON's air warfare team was lead by LT [REDACTED] LT [REDACTED] Fire Controlmen Master Chief [REDACTED] and FC1 [REDACTED]. They were responsible for five very successful Standard Missile engagements. The Vertical Launch System Gunners Mates were responsible for the Standard Missile launches and they were lead by LT [REDACTED] GMC [REDACTED] and GM1 [REDACTED]. During majority of these engagements MASON was also able to engage the air targets with its 5" gun. F101 was also completed five successful engagements.

After the Air Defense exercise, Alvaro De Bazan's CSSQT was complete and they detached to return to Spain. An

excerpt from Naval Sea Systems Command Public Affairs release explained the magnitude of the event;

WASHINGTON (NNS) -- The Naval Sea Systems Command program executive office for integrated warfare systems (PEO IWS) and the Spanish F-100 program office are conducting the air defense portion of a combined Combat Systems Ship Qualification Trials (CSSQT) with the Spanish navy July 17-22 off the coast of Wallops Island, Va.

USS MASON (DDG 87) and the Spanish frigate Alvaro De Bazan (F101) are participating in the CSSQT, a series of at-sea exercises and tests to verify shipboard systems have been installed correctly, and can be operated and maintained safely and effectively. The CSSQT includes interoperability testing, simulated and live gun firings, and will culminate in standard missile firing exercises.

This is the first combined Aegis CSSQT with an allied Navy, according to Dean Kimelheim, head of PEO IWS' test and evaluation division. The trials will allow both MASON and Alvaro De Bazan to jointly test their Aegis weapon systems, and command, control, communications, computers, and intelligence systems.

"Alvaro De Bazan is the first European naval ship with the Aegis weapon system," explained Kimelheim. "This combined CSSQT is a big deal for both navies, because it allows us to test our capabilities together, and enhance our interoperability with our European allies." In addition to improving interoperability, the CSSQT's objectives are to enhance coalition warfare and identify potential areas for improvements in systems performance.

After F101 detached, MASON continued the CSSQT with the Naval Surface Fire Support (NSFS) and surface exercises. Towards the end of July, and after the last surface exercise, MASON headed south towards Port Canaveral to prepare for the Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) portion of CSSQT.

MASON's ASW team prepared for the ASW CSSQT by shooting six exercise torpedoes in Port Canaveral. The Commanding Officer decided to delay the ASW CSSQT until

spring 2004 because of the need for a new software load to make the system more stable. MASON was still able to finish the acoustic trials portion of the ASW CSSQT however, despite system instabilities. After the acoustic trials were completed, MASON headed to Mayport, Florida.

MASON changed once again changed her focus, this time towards the start of the Inter-Deployment Training Cycle (IDTC) beginning with Command Assessment and Readiness for Training Phase II (CART II) for the whole ship and Initial Assessment (IA) for the Engineers. During the little time left over after a full month of CSSQT, MASON's crew had been practicing a two-day CART II scenario. The Engineers had been conducting engineering evolutions and drills every night and into the wee hours of the morning since MASON sailed down the Kennebec River. The Engineers worked so hard to prepare for the Initial Assessment that Commander Gale decided they would try and complete the Underway Demonstration (UD) during the Initial Assessment.

During a sleepless one night underway, MASON's engineering training teams and watchstanders did what they have been doing for the last 6 months. The feeling in Chief's Mess, Wardroom and Mess decks was that MASON's Engineering Department was impressing the inspectors. The lead inspector met with the Captain, and the word got out that MASON had been successful and met the requirements to upgrade the Initial Assessment to an Underway Demonstration Certification.

The next day, MASON had to demonstrate every aspect of the ship's capabilities starting with Force Protection. After the force protection drills, MASON got underway to demonstrate the CART II exercise. MASON demonstrated a superb exercise, flexing all divisions and warfare areas to include Anti-Submarine Warfare, Air Warfare, Surface Warfare and Electronic Warfare. MASON's success was best described in this message from Rear Admiral Etnyre, Commander, Naval Surface Force Atlantic to the Commanding Officer:

ADMINISTRATIVE MESSAGE

ROUTINE

R 262129Z AUG 03 ZYB PSN 482234I23

FM COMNAVSURFLANT NORFOLK VA//00//

TO USS MASON

INFO COMLANTFLT NORFOLK VA//N00/N01/N7//

Enclosure (3)

NAVSURFLANT SHIPS
COMCRUDESGRU TWO
COMDESRON TWO SIX
COMAFLOATRAGRU ATLANTIC NORFOLK VA

UNCLAS //N01650//

MSGID/GENADMIN/CNSL//

SUBJ/INITIAL ASSESSMENT BZ//

RMKS/1. CAPTAIN, WELL DONE TO YOU AND YOUR CREW ON MASON'S STELLAR INITIAL ASSESSMENT. AS A RESULT OF YOUR PERFORMANCE, MASON'S UNDERWAY DEMONSTRATION HAS BEEN VALIDATED. MASON IS THE FIRST SHIP THAT HAS MET MOB-E CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS AT IA SINCE I HAVE BEEN IN COMMAND OF SURFLANT.

2. THE HARD WORK, ATTENTION TO DETAIL, AND COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE THAT RESULTED IN AN ADJECTIVE GRADE OF ABOVE AVERAGE HAS SET A STANDARD FOR THE REST OF LANTFLT TO FOLLOW. I WAS PARTICULARLY PLEASED THAT THE FOUNDATION OF MASON'S SUCCESS WAS AN EXTREMELY EFFECTIVE ENGINEERING TRAINING PROGRAM AND THE BEST SEEN BY ATGL IN OVER TWO YEARS.

3. PLEASE EXTEND MY PERSONAL WELL DONE TO YOUR ENGINEERS

4. RADM ETNYRE SENDS.//

After MASON completed CART II and Initial Assessment, they headed home. With Final Contract Trials two weeks away, MASON's crew couldn't let down their guard. When MASON arrived in Norfolk, the crew off loaded all the remaining CSSQT ammunition at Yorktown Weapons Station then transited to Norfolk Naval Station to prepare for Final Contract Trials.

Final Contract Trials is an inspection of the material readiness of the ship. Normally half of the inspection is conducted underway, but due to poor weather, the Commanding Officer decided not to get underway and decided MASON would complete the inspection inport. MASON did extremely well during the Final Contract Trials as noted by an email from the Senior Inspector. Captain John Wilson comments:

"The ship was generally well-presented by ship's force... Many of the material issues were of a simple nature. CDR Gale (the ship's C.O.) is an experienced engineer and I'm sure that he will focus the requisite resources the "get a stopper" around this issue...Fit and finish of this

Enclosure (3)

ship was very good, and it was pleasing to see that the ship was being well-maintained by the crew and very clean (numerous inspectors commented on the cleanliness)."

MASON finished the last of many major inspections this year and ready for a little down time in homeport. Just when the last of many inspectors and assessment teams were gone, Hurricane Isabel started heading towards Norfolk. MASON, along with the rest of the Atlantic Fleet homeported in Norfolk, got underway for hurricane evasion. MASON was underway for five days.

After returning, MASON started preparing the ship for the transit from Naval Station Norfolk to Norfolk Ship Building Company (NORSHIPCO) shipyard. On September 23, MASON was pierside at NORSHIPCO. While MASON was in the shipyard, the majority of the crew attended schools necessary for them perform their jobs as well as to operate and maintain MASON's equipment. The normal routine for newly commissioned ships is to conduct their PSA in the shipyard where they were built. For MASON, this would have been in Bath, Maine. Instead, Commander Gale was able to negotiate to have it in Norfolk, VA, MASON's homeport. MASON was the first newly commissioned ship to have her PSA in Norfolk. This not only saved the Navy money it also gave the MASON's crew more time in homeport.

In October, MASON spent the majority of the time making sure the NORSHIPCO and Bath Irons Work completed all the PSA work. LT [REDACTED] was in charge of the daily coordination between the shipyard and the ship, while MASON's crew concentrated on maintaining their training levels during the yard period. With six duty sections established and three months inport, MASON's crew was given more time to spend with their loved ones and take much needed leave.

MASON's original production schedule planned for an early drydock exit. An investigation into recent CPP Hub leaks on other ships resulted in late-breaking direction to install CRES SHIMS between the blade seal base ring and bearing ring of each CPP blade. The emergent CPP HUB modification work was accomplished in time to keep the original undocking date.

In November, MASON saw an old tenure end and new one begin with the pre-commissioning Executive Officer LCDR Ted

Zobel departing and LCDR Lynn Acheson arriving. Towards the end of November MASON started to see the following important PSA items completed: Bolted Intake Louvers, Video Data Distribution System, NULKA, MK46 CDU REPLACEMENT W/MODIFIED AN/UYQ-7, ICAS, sea water piping replacement, corrosion control, painted hull below waterline, resurfacing of most of the weather decks, installed Passive Counter Measures System (PCMS) tiles, replacement of the starboard main reduction gear second reduction pinion and replaced hub cross head bolt. MASON's crew ended the month of November with a ninety-six hour break from work for the Thanksgiving holiday.

During the early days of December, MASON was tying up all the loose ends from PSA and preparing for Sea Trials. CDR David Gale, Commanding Officer, USS MASON (DDG 87), prepared the following comments for the final PSA sitrep:

"The completion of Post Shakedown Availabilities brings to a close a huge success story in ship availabilities. From the initial proposal in mid 2001 to closing with this final sitrep, the MASON "HOMEPORT" PSA has been superbly planned, managed and executed. The result is a ship that is newer than the day it was delivered and a PSA that is characterized by quality workmanship, teamwork and superb schedule performance. This PSA also permitted the MASON crew to remain in homeport for the duration of the availability. The reduced PERS tempo and vastly increased access to local training resources have had a profoundly positive impact on crew quality of life and MASON's current and futures operational readiness. There are no words that can completely capture all that has been achieved. The MASON, Bath Iron Works, Supervisor of Shipbuilding Bath, PEO Ships team together set another new standard for performance. I could not be more pleased with the outcome."

After a two day underway, MASON successfully completed PSA Sea Trails on 17 December 2003. While on holiday stand down, MASON spent the remainder of the year with their family and friends. MASON finished its first year as a United States of America Navy Ship in the Atlantic Fleet with flying colors.

"PROUDLY WE SERVE"