



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY

USS MASON (DDG 87)
FPO AE 09578-1302

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Ser DDG 87-ADM/169

5 Jun 2005

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

Subj: COMMAND HISTORY FOR CY04

Ref: (a) OPNAVINST 5750.12G, Command Histories

Encl: (1) Chronology
(2) Narrative
(3) Commanding Officer's Biography

1. In accordance with reference (a), USS MASON command history for calendar year 2004 is submitted.


EUGENE H. BLACK, III

**USS MASON (DDG 87)
CHRONOLOGY
1 JANUARY 2004-31 DECEMBER 2004**

JANUARY 2004:

01

-Inport: Norfolk, VA for Holiday stand-down.

12

-UNDERWAY: Virginia Capes Operations Area (VCOA) for Damage Control, ASW, and AW Tailored Ship Training Availability (TSTA).

15

-INPORT: Norfolk, Virginia

19

-Upkeep and FMAV started inport Norfolk.

19-23

-Successfully completed Engineering TSTA I, Search and Rescue (SAR) exercise, Cruise Missile Tactical Qualification (CMTQ) TSTA II.

26-30

-Successfully completed AAV, Search and Rescue LTT, and Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) TSTA.

FEBRUARY 2004

2-6

-Completed a very aggressive week to include: HARRY S TRUMAN Carrier Strike Group (HSTCSG) Air Defense Commander Course, Task Group ASW course of instruction, Electronic Warfare TSTA and Communications TSTA.

9-13

-Completed SAR Certification I and II, Naval Surface Fire Support Team Trainer, and Damage Control TSTA.

17

-UNDERWAY/INPORT: Berth shift from Norfolk Naval Base to Yorktown for Ammo Onload.

20

-UNDERWAY: VCOA for ASW TSTA and CMTQ TST

24

-INPORT: NAUTICUS pier Norfolk, VA for the premier of the movie "Proud" for African American History Month.

27

-UNDERWAY/INPORT: Berth shift from NAUTICUS pier to Norfolk Naval base.

MARCH 2004

1

-UNDERWAY: Enroute to Jacksonville Operations Area (JAXOA). Conducted Deck, Navigation, and CMTQ TSTAs.

5

-INPORT: Mayport, Florida.

8

-UNDERWAY: Transit to Gulf of Mexico for JOHN F KENNEDY Strike Group (JFKSTRKGRU) Combined Engagement Capabilities (CEC) Operations Evaluation.

11

-Rendezvous with JFKSTRKGRU and start CEC operations evaluation (OPEVAL).

15

-Successfully completed the CEC OPEVAL.

16

-Enroute VCOA.

19

-Inport: Norfolk, Virginia

22-26

-Antiterrorism/Force Protection Phase II TSTA conducted inport.

29

-Combat Information Center Team Trainer CICTT conducted by Aegis Training Readiness Command (ATRC).

APRIL 2004

5

-Underway from Norfolk, Virginia for Group Sail with CDS 26 & CCDG-2. Conducted ISIS NAV checkride, TSTA EW/Chaff, helo fly-on.

7

- Underway: NSFS FIREX I

15

- Underway: NSFS FIREX II

27-28

- Underway: Anti-Terrorism Exercise (ATEX)

29-30

- Underway in the VACAPES OPAREA for the Final Evaluation Problem (FEP) and completed first ISIC Navigation check ride.

30

-Inport: Norfolk, Virginia

MAY 2004

01-09

-Upkeep Norfolk: Completed CMTQ (Cruise Missile Tactical Qualification), torpedo onload, VLA Firing Training.

10

-Tigers arrive for two-day trip to Mayport, Florida.

10-12

-Underway: Norfolk to Mayport, Florida with Tigers onboard.

12

-Arrive Mayport, Florida. Debark Tigers.

13

-Underway: Mayport, Florida to Andros Island, Bahamas for MASON's USW SQT at the AUTEK range.

14-17

- MASON completes USW SQT, firing a VLA while at AUTEK. CDR Gale's relief, CDR Eugene H. Black III, reports aboard.

18-20

-Return transit to Norfolk, Virginia from the AUTEK. Enroute, MASON anchors at ATG #1 off the coast of Mayport to complete AT/FP Phase III by performing a defense against a small boat attack.

21

-Change of Command Ceremony conducted late morning at sea in the VACAPES. CDR Eugene H. Black III relieved CDR David J. Gale as Commanding Officer, USS MASON (DDG 87). Proceed into port, Norfolk, VA.

JUNE 2004

01-03

-Inport: Norfolk, Virginia for upkeep and training prior to getting underway in support of COMPTUEX with the HSTCSG and JTFEX with the JFKCSG.

04

-Underway: COMPTUEX with the HSTCSG. Participated in numerous MIO events with the M/V PREVAIL and the USNS LEROY GRUMMAN in Cherry Point OPAREA (CPOA).

11

-HARRY S TRUMAN CSG proceeded south to JAXOA to continue C2X. MASON stayed in the Cherry Point OPAREA and met up with JFK to participate in JTFEX. Also participating were various ships from the United Kingdom's Royal Navy.

18

-Commenced C2X final battle problem with HST and strike group ships.

21

-Transit to Mediterranean Sea for OPERATION MAJESTIC EAGLE; HST, MASON, LEROY GRUMMAN & MONTEREY in company.

28

-MASON & company transit the Straits of Gibraltar. MASON detached in Mediterranean to proceed to station off the coast of Bizerte, Tunisia in support of OPERATION MINI-NADOR, Tunisian PASSEX.

JULY 2004

01

-Anchored off the coast of Bizerte, Tunisia. Received Tunisian Naval Officers onboard for Operational Planning Meeting (OPM) in AM. Commenced PASSEX. PASSEX included DIVTACs with two Tunisian naval vessels, man overboard drills, highline transfer, leapfrogs and LNO exchange and gunnery exercises.

01-02

-Conducted Tunisian PASSEX, OPERATION MINI-NADOR.

03-04

-Transit Mediterranean enroute Tarragona, Spain.

05

-Arrive Tarragona, Spain with USS BARRY.

05-09

-Inport: Tarragona, Spain.

09

-Underway from Tarragona, Spain with USS BARRY enroute to the Strait of Gibraltar to rendezvous with HSTCSG and participate in OPERATION MAJESTIC EAGLE.

12-15

-Participated in MAJESTIC EAGLE along with 10 other nations off the coast of Morocco. Included the first ever use of the Moroccan CAP DRAA NSFS range. MASON and Moroccan ships successfully completed FIREX III. This event was successful and great multinational naval integration was experienced.

16

-Commenced transit back to Norfolk with USS HARRY S TRUMAN, BARRY, MONTEREY & USNS LEROY GRUMMAN. Conducted ULT to include night MOB, flashing light drills.

16-24

-Transit Eastern and Western Atlantic enroute Norfolk, VA.

21

-Outchop from Six Fleet to Second Fleet.

24

-HSTCSG and MASON arrive back in the VACAPES OPAREA.

25

-Return to homeport.

AUGUST 2004

01-31

-Inport. Predeployment leave and stand down for the crew.

23

-Berth shift from NOB, Norfolk, to deperming facility.

23-27

-Deperming in progress.

27

-Berth shift from deperming facility to NOB, Norfolk.

SEPTEMBER 2004

01-30

-Inport. Predeployment leave and stand down for the crew.

21-23

-Underway from NOB, Norfolk to VACAPES for 25mm gun testing and shiphandling practice.

27

-Underway from NOB Norfolk to Yorktown, VA.

27-30

-Deployment ammo onload at Naval Weapons Station (NAVWPNSTA) Yorktown, VA.

30

-Underway from NAVWPNSTA Yorktown to NOB Norfolk.

OCTOBER 2004

13

-Underway from Norfolk, VA. Commence six-month deployment to the Arabian Gulf in support of OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM AND SEA DRAGON II. HSL Detachment 46.1 from Mayport, FL embarked with two LAMPS HS-60B helicopters.

13-21

-Transit to Faslane, Scotland. Continue ULT and CSG training enroute.

22

-Arrive Faslane, Scotland.

22-24

-Inport Faslane Scotland for Joint Maritime Course (JMC) 04-3 conference.

24

-Underway from Faslane, Scotland. Conducted small boat attack during transit as part of JMC 04-3.

24-30

-Participated in JMC 04-3.

NOVEMBER 2004

03

-Escort USNS ARCTIC eastbound and USNS SPICA westbound through the Strait of Gibraltar. Returned westbound enroute to Rota, Spain. Arrive Rota, Spain, late night.

03-06

-Inport Rota, Spain.

06

-Underway from Rota, Spain. Enroute Strait of Gibraltar.

07

-Escort M/V INDEPENDENCE and USNS POMEROY eastbound through Strait of Gibraltar.

08-10

-Transit Mediterranean to rendezvous with USS HARRY S TRUMAN, MONTEREY AND BARRY at Port Said.

11

-Night transit Suez Canal. Chop to Fifth Fleet.

12-17

Transit Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, Gulf of Oman enroute Arabian Gulf.

18

-Transit the Strait of Hormuz (SOH) and entered the Southern Arabian Gulf.

19-30

-Operations in the CAG/SAG in support of OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF) and SEA DRAGON II (SDII).

22

-Conducted two VBSS approach and visits.

DECEMBER 2004

1

-Arrive Jebel Ali, UAE.

1-5

-Inport Jebel Ali, UAE for upkeep.

5

-Underway from Jebel Ali, UAE.

5-22

-Underway CAG/SAG in support of OIF and SDII.

7

-Conducted four VBSS approach and visits.

8

-Conducted two VBSS approach and visits.

23

-Arrive Mina Sulman, Bahrain.

23-27

-Inport Mina Sulman, Bahrain for upkeep.

27

-Underway from Mina Sulman, Bahrain

28-31

-Underway CAG/SAG in support of OIF and SDII.

30

-Conducted two VBSS approach and visits.

USS MASON (DDG 87)
NARRATIVE
01 JANUARY 2004 - 31 DECEMBER 2004

1. Four years after her keel was laid and a less than two years after commissioning, USS MASON, the third ship to bear that honorable name, set course on an unforgettable year that would take her from her first work-up cycle to her first voyage across the Atlantic Ocean, and finally into her maiden deployment.

2. January 2004 found Ship's company returning from some much-needed holiday rest and relaxation to begin the busiest schedule MASON had seen yet. Her voyages began in the Virginia Capes (VACAPES) for the Tailored Ship Training Availability (TSTA). The Damage Control Training Team, the largest training team onboard, faced intense evaluation while conducting numerous drills and evolutions. In addition to proving her Engineering readiness, MASON also demonstrated her combat readiness as her air warfare teams were tested with a myriad of simulated air engagements and the SONAR teams tested their mettle as they conducted multiple anti-submarine exercises to include streaming NIXIE.

3. Though back in port, MASON's combat readiness was kept to high standards as her air watchstanders participated in the HARRY S TRUMAN STRIKE GROUP Air Defense Commander Course at Dam Neck Naval Base in late February. The different Combat Information Center (CIC) watch teams maintained a 24-hour watch in the computer-run trainers. MASON completed her Search-and-Rescue (SAR) Certifications I and II and readied her Fire Control teams to hone their skills at the Naval Surface Fire Support Team Trainer. In February MASON also conducted an ammunitions onload in preparation for her upcoming summer cruise. To continue training, MASON once again set sail for the VACAPES to conduct TSTAs for both ASW and Cruise Missile Tactical Qualification (CMTQ).

4. On her way back to homeport, MASON sailed up the Elizabeth River, past Norfolk Naval Station and moored at Nauticus, the Naval museum in downtown Norfolk.

This was a special occasion to celebrate the premier of "Proud," a movie based on the book written by author Mary Pat Kelly, and based on the true story of the previous USS MASON (DE 529) that fought in World War II. From February 24th to February 27th, MASON, at the time the Navy's newest destroyer, was the center showcase for the premier of the movie, which told the history of the brave men who served on the Navy's first ship manned by an African-American crew.

5. Building on MASON's training tradition, the crew completed TSTAs evaluations in Deck, Navigation, and CMTQ, which was a critical test for MASON to pass in order to be allowed to deploy. Deserving of some rest, the crew enjoyed liberty in Mayport, Florida, from March 5th through the 8th before setting a course to the Gulf of Mexico to meet up with the JOHN F KENNEDY STRIKE GROUP. This was MASON's first major participation in a battle group and presented the rare opportunity to test and evaluate her Cooperative Engagement Capability (CEC), which proved successful.

6. After a short time back in her homeport of Norfolk, Virginia, MASON once again set out to sea on April 5th for an ISIC Navigation Check Ride and to participate in Group Sail, her first opportunity to work at sea with the aircraft carrier, USS HARRY S TRUMAN, CDS 26, CCDG-2, and the rest of the HARRY S TRUMAN CARRIER STRIKE GROUP. Group Sail also included two NSFS live-fire exercises at the G-10 range at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina on April 7th and 15th. Shooting at a buoy pattern at sea, MASON scored a 97.7% for FIREX I, the highest score in the Atlantic Fleet. At the second live fire event, MASON accurately placed more than 50 rounds ashore, earning her FIREX III qualification. MASON also participated in the successful sinking exercise (SINKEX) of the ex-USS PORTLAND. Returning again to homeport on April 30th, MASON and her crew completed the Final Evaluation Problem (FEP), marking the end of the basic phase of the Inter-Deployment Readiness Cycle (IDRC).

7. In the first week of May, The Completed final CMTQ Certification, a torpedo onload, and VLA firing training. Next, she picked up guests of the crew in preparation for participating in a two-day Tiger Cruise to Mayport, Florida.

MASON debarked her guests in Mayport, and moved on to complete the Under Sea Warfare Systems Qualification Trial (USW SQT) in the AUTEK range by Andros Island in the Bahamas. During their three days on the range, MASON's ASW warriors conducted 6 live firing exercises. Those exercises included 6 Surface Vessel Torpedo Tube Shots, a VECTAC with a SH-60B Helicopter from HSL-46 in Mayport, FL, and the East Coast's only Vertically Launched Anti-Submarine Rocket (VLA) firing for the year. The three-day exercise demonstrated MASON's prowess in Under Sea Warfare as the team amassed 7 hits out of 8 attempts, including setting a range record on their VLA shot by placing the torpedo 191 yards from the target.

8. On May 18th, MASON anchored off of Mayport for a successful AT/FP phase III small boat attack defense exercise. On the morning of May 21st, as MASON was returning to homeport, her first Change of Command ceremony took place. In a short and simple ceremony on the aft missile deck, the ship's company assembled to witness Commander Eugene H. Black III relieve Commander David J. Gale. The return to port was a challenge to the new Captain as the ship sailed home through heavy fog.

9. The ship spent June 4th to July 25th underway again. This cruise involved more exercises, farther from home than she had previously been. The crew's task was to prove MASON's abilities in operations with not one, but two carrier battle groups. The underway began with the participation in COMPTUEX with the HARRY S TRUMAN STRIKE GROUP. Then MASON broke away and sailed south to meet up with the JOHN F KENNEDY STRIKE GROUP so that she could participate in their JTFEX. This gave the crewmembers the opportunity to test their training in boarding operations through Maritime Interdiction Operations (MIO) events and Visit, Boarding, Search and Seizure (VBSS) practice with the M/V PREVAIL and USNS LEROY GRUMMAN off of Cherry Point, North Carolina. It also gave MASON the chance to operate with Allied ships, as the British Royal Navy was participating in JTFEX. On June 19th, MASON made her rendezvoused once again with the HARRY S TRUMAN and with the STRIKE GROUP company cross the Atlantic Ocean to participate in PULSEX '04 and Operation Majestic Eagle.

10. On June 28th, MASON made her transit, the first of many, through the Strait of Gibraltar in company with USS BARRY (DDG 52). Now in the Mediterranean Sea, MASON's first tasking was to drop anchor off the coast of Bizerte, Tunisia. This evolution was the first part of a PASSEX that lasted several days. This exercise gave MASON the chance to interact with another foreign Navy and, more importantly, to help the United States further political and military ties with Tunisia. Among the events carried out were a 5" gun and Crew-Served Weapons gun shoot, an Air Control exercise, a MIO boarding demonstration, a SUW scenario, DIVTACS, Man Overboard (MOB) drills, leapfrogs, and a highline transfer.

11. From the coast of Tunisia, MASON joined with USS BARRY to head in to Tarragona, Spain, MASON's first foreign port visit. After enjoying several days of liberty, the crew took the ship back through the Straits of Gibraltar and then turned south toward Morocco, where she participated with the navies of ten other nations in Operation Majestic Eagle from July 12th through 15th, enhancing our multinational naval integration. One of the highlights of Majestic Eagle was MASON's participation in an NSFS live-fire event at the TAN TAN Range near Cap Draa, Morocco. The event was a success, and marked the first NATO use of the TAN TAN range for NSFS. Another first for MASON was the embarking of a foreign exchange Midshipman from Portugal. The summer cruise proved MASON's readiness and also gave her crew the chance to learn new skills, both administrative and tactical. She used the return trip as an opportunity to practice night Man Overboard (MOB) drills and flashing light drills. On July 25th, MASON returned to Norfolk with the USS BARRY, USS MONTEREY, and USNS LEROY GRUMMAN.

12. Between her return from summer cruise and her quickly approaching fall deployment, it was a relatively quiet time for the ship. Throughout August and September, members of the crew were allowed some pre-deployment leave. The ship did, however, participate in a few major evolutions. MASON conducted her first deperming from August 23rd-27th at the Deperming Station just a few miles from the Naval base. MASON sailed to the VACAPES to test her newly installed 25mm guns as well as to ensure the crew's proficiency in ship handling from September 1st through third.

She also visited Yorktown again from September 27th through 30th to conduct her ammunitions onload in preparation for deployment.

13. On October 13th there was excitement in the air, in anticipation of the start of MASON's maiden deployment. There were many sad faces on the pier and on the ship as one prolonged blast was sounded, signaling that the ship was now underway for her six-month deployment as part of OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM and Operation SEA DRAGON II. Family, friends, and loved ones bid farewell to their sailors, grateful for the service MASON was setting out to perform for her country but also eager for the day when she would return. HSL-46 detachment 1 from Mayport joined MASON for the deployment.

14. It was a smooth transition for the crew to return to the familiarity of the daily underway routine. First on the agenda was the Joint Maritime Course (JMC), an exercise led by the British Navy and involving several other coalition navies. After several days of delays due to engine trouble with one of the SH-60B helicopters that was to embark with her, MASON left the VACAPES by herself to cross the Atlantic Ocean and catch up with USS BARRY and USS MONTEREY. To start JMC, MASON tied up alongside USS BARRY in Faslane, Scotland, to attend the JMC Conference, which laid the ground work for the exercise and gave US commanders the chance to discuss tactics and make connections with commanders of other European navies. JMC also included a live-fire NSFS event for MASON at Cape Wrath, Scotland on October 26, 2004. With calls-for-fire from American, British, and Norwegian spotters, MASON successfully fired rounds ashore, earning a FIREX II qualification.

15. The transit to JMC was anything but easy. As MASON traveled up the Irish Sea towards Scotland, she plowed through a large storm for several days in sea reaching over fifteen feet. As waves continuously crashed over the deck, MASON stayed on course, taking some minor damage to several topside areas. This, however, did not keep MASON and her crew from continuing with her assigned tasking. Thankfully, there were no personnel injuries incurred during the storm. Upon arrival in Faslane, one of the priorities besides the JMC Conference was repairing the damage.

16. The US Navy's participation in JMC was not limited to the HARRY S TRUMAN STRIKE GROUP. Other east coast ships such as the cruiser USS ANZIO and the destroyer USS PORTER also joined the Course. MASON's first taste of the operation started with a simulated small boat attack shortly after getting underway from Faslane, and then the exercises gradually increased in difficulty over the course of a few days, to include simulated air and surface engagements simultaneously. At one point, MASON's crew was engaged in a two-RHIB boarding operation while conducting flight quarters, all while in restricted waters.

17. After a week's participation in JMC, the crew turned their ship toward the familiar Straits of Gibraltar. The destination was a port visit in Rota, Spain, but before going pierside, the ship was given the task of escorting USNS SPICA and USNS ARCTIC through the Strait. From the Atlantic to the Mediterranean then from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic it was a long day as MASON ensured the safety of our Naval support ships. This escort duty was a landmark event, as the previous USS MASON (DE 529) is most famous for heroically conducting escort duties during a raging storm in WWII despite heavy damage. MASON's crew was proud to be upholding the escorting tradition. The crew enjoyed liberty in Rota from November 3rd through the 6th, then set out seaward again to begin her transit to Port Said, enroute to the Arabian Gulf. On the way to Port Said, MASON once again acted as an escort, this time for M/V INDEPENDENCE and USNS POMEROY, going Eastbound through the Straits of Gibraltar on November 7th.

18. On November 11th, MASON finally made her long and stressful night transit through the Suez Canal after experiencing many delays throughout the day due to a ship running aground in the canal. From there it was a quick transit through the Red Sea, around Bab el Mandeb, past the Gulf of Aden, and through the Straits of Hormuz. MASON arrived on station in the Arabian Gulf on the 19th of November. Upon arriving in the area, MASON rendezvoused with the British Frigate HMS CAMPBELLTOWN as she was departing for home in order to gain valuable "lessons learned" from her.

19. Since reporting in the Arabian Gulf, MASON has patrolled many of the various OPAREAS in the region, querying merchant ships and boarding suspicious vessels, all as part of her mission to protect the maritime infrastructure and deter terrorism, while also conducting continuous training. In between taskings throughout the Central Arabian Gulf (CAG) and South Arabian Gulf (SAG), MASON made a stop in Jebel Ali, UAE from December 1st through 5th for upkeep. After another few weeks on patrols, MASON's crew spent Christmas liberty in Bahrain from the 23rd through the 27th, when MASON got underway once again to ring in 2005.