



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY  
USS PONCE (LPD-15)  
FPO NEW YORK 09501

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30 MAY 1972

From: Commanding Officer, USS PONCE (LPD 15)  
To: Director of Naval History (OP-09B9), Washington Navy Yard,  
Washington, D.C. 20390

Subj: Command History (OPNAV Report 5750-1); submission of

Ref: (a) OPNAVINST 5750.12B

Encl: (1) Command History Report for calendar year 1971 (initial report)

1. In accordance with reference (a) enclosure (1) is forwarded.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "G. W. Farris". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

G. W. FARRIS

Copy to: (complete)  
COMPHIBLANT  
COMPHIBGRU TWO  
COMPHIBRON SIX

COMMAND HISTORY  
(OPNAV REPORT 5750-1 INITIAL REPORT)

UNITED STATES SHIP PONCE (LPD 15)

A. BASIC HISTORY.

1. Command Organization.

a. Officer in Charge, Pre-Commissioning Unit: Captain George W. FARRIS, USN, [REDACTED]/1100. Captain FARRIS reported to Commandant, THIRTEENTH Naval District, Seattle, Washington on 11 March 1971 to serve as Officer in Charge, Pre-Commissioning Unit, PONCE (LPD 15) and, when commissioned, as Commanding Officer.

b. Commanding Officer, USS PONCE (LPD 15): 10 July 1971 - 31 December 1971: Captain George W. FARRIS, USN,

c. USS PONCE (LPD 15) is assigned to the Operating Forces of the United States Atlantic Fleet. Type Commander: Commander Amphibious Force, U. S. Atlantic Fleet. Group Commander: Amphibious Group TWO. Squadron Commander: Amphibious Squadron FOUR.

d. Homeport: U. S. Naval Operating Base, Norfolk, Virginia 23511

2. Mission.

a. USS PONCE (LPD 15) was the final LPD (Amphibious Transport Dock) of fifteen authorized to be constructed. Her mission is to provide combat integrity of assault forces during extended deployments by combining troop carrying capability, floodable well deck, landing craft capability and helicopter operating deck.

3. Summary of Operations.

a. Prior to Commissioning.

(1) USS PONCE (LPD 15) was built by Lockheed Shipbuilding and Construction Company, Seattle, Washington, under the supervision of the Supervisor of Shipbuilding, THIRTEENTH Naval District. The keel was laid on 31 October 1966; PONCE was christened and launched 20 May 1970. Sponsor for the ship was Mrs. John J. HYLAND of Kailua, Hawaii, wife of Admiral John J. HYLAND, USN, former Commander in Chief, U. S. Pacific Fleet.

(2) Pre-Commissioning Unit was established for PONCE (LPD 15) by the Chief of Naval Personnel in Seattle, Washington at the construction site. Remainder of the crew (Balance Crew) was ordered to the Fleet Training Center, Norfolk. Authorized personnel allowance was established at 25 officers and 411 enlisted personnel. Two Marines were also assigned as members of the crew, one Marine Captain to act in the capacity of Combat Cargo Officer and one Staff Sergeant assigned as his assistant. The Nucleus Crew assigned to the Pre-Commissioning Unit totaled 121 officers and men, responsible for the organization of departmental functions for this new-construction ship and to assist in the supervision of the final stages of construction. Balance crew personnel ordered to the Fleet

Training Center, Norfolk were under the direct supervision of the Prospective Executive Officer, CDR W. D. DANIELS, USNR. During the period 19 March - 20 June over 315 officers and men assigned to this Balance Crew received extensive training, both review of standard training concepts and training in their technical vocations.

(3) Commandant, THIRTEENTH Naval District accepted delivery of the PONCE (LPD 15) from Lockheed Shipbuilding and Construction Company on 25 June 1971. PONCE departed Lockheed dead plant under tow at 1230 for Puget Sound Naval Shipyard, Bremerton, Washington to prepare for commissioning and commence Fitting Out Availability Period. Captain FARRIS, on behalf of the Commandant, signed the acceptance papers on arrival of PONCE in Bremerton.

b. Commissioning of USS PONCE (LPD 15).

(1) Commissioning of USS PONCE (LPD 15) was held at 1430, 10 July 1971 at Puget Sound Naval Shipyard, Bremerton, Washington. (Annex A)

(a) Invocation was offered by LT [REDACTED], CHC, USN, Chaplain, Naval Torpedo Station, Keyport, Washington.

(b) RADM W. F. PETROVIC, USN, Commander Puget Sound Naval Shipyard conducted the welcoming remarks and introduced various distinguished guests.

(c) Mr. M. L. INGWERSEN, Executive Vice President - Operations, Lockheed Shipbuilding and Construction Company, representing the builder of USS PONCE (LPD 15), addressed the guests and crew.

(d) Introduction of the guest speaker was made by RADM P. J. HANNIFIN, USN, Commandant THIRTEENTH Naval District.

(e) The Honorable Jorge Luis CORDOVA, Resident Commissioner, Commonwealth of Puerto Rico delivered the Commissioning Address. (Annex B)

(f) RADM P. J. HANNIFIN, Commandant THIRTEENTH Naval District read the Navy Department Orders to Commission USS PONCE (LPD 15). The Ensign, Jack and Commission Pennant were hoisted, hereby placing USS PONCE (LPD 15) "in commission special". (Navy ships are placed "in commission special" until such time as the entire ship is outfitted and ready for full combat operations, at which time they are then placed "in commission".)

(g) Captain George W. FARRIS, USN read his Commanding Officer's Orders and assumed command of USS PONCE (LPD 15).

(h) Commander William D. DANIELS, USNR, Executive Officer of USS PONCE set the first watch for the ship.

(i) The Honorable Juan Cintron, Mayor of Ponce, Puerto Rico (namesake city of USS PONCE (LPD 15)) presented his City Flag and the Flag of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico to the Commanding Officer.

(j) Captain George W. FARRIS, USN addressed the crew and guests.

(k) LCDR [REDACTED], CHC, USN, Ship's Chaplain, offered the Benediction for the Commissioning Ceremony.

(2) Approximately 250 distinguished civilian and military guests attended the commissioning ceremony and reception following.

c. Fitting Out Availability.

(1) USS PONCE (LPD 15) commenced her Fitting Out Availability (the period utilized for on-load of all consumable type items each ship must

carry in order to become a self-sustaining unit ready for combat operations). Commander Puget Sound Naval Shipyard and Commanding Officer, Naval Supply Center, Bremerton were responsible for the Fitting Out of USS PONCE (LPD 15). FOA was completed on 21 August 1971 and the ship was then placed "in commission" and considered ready for operations. USS PONCE (LPD 15), after on-load of ammunition, departed Bremerton, Washington 23 August 1971 for her assigned homeport of Norfolk, Virginia.

d. Maiden Voyage to Homeport.

(1) Ports of Call/Special Guests.

(a) Just prior to departure on homeport transit Mr. Lance Wright, special guest of the Secretary of the Navy boarded to observe the ammunition on-load. He debarked the ship prior to departure from the Puget Sound area.

(b) Lady PONCE departed Puget Sound Naval Shipyard 23 August with her entire crew and eight guests of the Secretary of the Navy on board. These guests were:

Mr. Bud Walgren, Oak Harbor, Washington  
Mr. David E. Crawford, Bremerton, Washington  
Mr. Fred Haight, Seattle, Washington  
Mr. Calvin Wilson, Kent, Washington  
Mr. Lawrence Woodworth, Kent, Washington  
Mr. William J. Rutledge, Eugene, Washington  
Mr. Thomas U. Marlow, Eugene, Washington  
Mr. James E. Shaw, Eugene, Washington

These guests debarked on arrival at San Francisco, California.

(c) USS PONCE visited San Francisco 25-29 August. Prior to departure, Mr. Henry M. Plymire, San Jose, California and Mr. A. M. Olsen, San Francisco, California embarked as SECNAV guests for the voyage to Long Beach and San Diego, California. While in San Francisco over 400 guests visited the ship.

(d) Following San Francisco, USS PONCE made a brief stop at Long Beach, California on 30 August to on-load two MSB's for transport to Charleston, South Carolina. PONCE then visited San Diego until 2 September 1971.

(e) A goodwill port-of-call was made to Mazatlan, Mexico during 4-6 September. Over 300 guests toured the ship. (Annex C)

(f) USS PONCE visited Acapulco, Mexico 8-10 September 1971. (Annex D)

(g) Upon departure from Acapulco, Mexico USS PONCE refueled three Spanish MSO's recently acquired from the United States, DMS GUADALMEDINA (M42), DMS GUADAQUIVIR (M43), and DMS GUADALETE (M41) who were enroute to Cadiz, Spain via Panama Canal. As the first refueling exercise for PONCE, the evolution developed into an all-day affair due to inexact position reports of the storm separated MSO's. Refueling of the third and last MSO was completed about 0200 the following morning without mishap. Souvenirs and goodwill messages were exchanged between all ships in a Spirit of Comraderie.

(h) USS PONCE transited the Panama Canal on 15 September and then proceeded to Ponce, Puerto Rico arriving 18 September 1971. Full report of the visit to PONCE's namesake city is contained in Annex E.

(i) PONCE arrived in San Juan, Puerto Rico 22 September 1971 and was welcomed by representatives of the Navy League. Mr. Bob Schafer, President of the 10th Region of the Navy League, presented the crew with five color television sets on their behalf.

(j) On 26 September 1971, a brief stop was made in Charleston, South Carolina to off-load two MSB's.

(k) After gala arrival ceremonies in her homeport of Norfolk, Virginia on 28 September, PONCE departed 13 October for Refresher Training at Fleet Training Group, Guantanamo Bay. Enroute to Guantanamo, Lady PONCE transported "A" Company, 2nd AMTRACK Battalion to Vieques, P.R. Arrival date at Guantanamo Bay was 19 October 1971.

e. Refresher Training.

(1) USS PONCE (LPD 15) participated in a new training program at Guantanamo, wherein the Commander of the Fleet Training Group is allowed to set the time frame of the ship's Operational Training based on progress rate. PONCE successfully passed her REFTRA ORI in less than five weeks, attaining one of the highest scores ever achieved by an amphibious ship undergoing training at Guantanamo.

(2) During the period 5-8 November, USS PONCE transported 250 military personnel and dependents and civilian workers from Guantanamo Bay to Montego Bay, Jamaica for a liberty weekend. The ship entertained many local citizens during open house visiting.

(3) USS PONCE returned to Guantanamo 8 November for completion of training. While underway for Norfolk, Virginia USS PONCE transported SEABEE equipment and YFU 50 to Andros Island. The ship arrived in Norfolk, Virginia 23 November 1971.

f. Final Contract Trials/Leave and Upkeep.

(1) USS PONCE was depermed at Crib #3, Deperming Station, Norfolk during 30 November - 1 December 1971.

(2) Final Contract Trials were conducted in Chesapeake Bay lasting through 17 December and conducted by Sub-Board, Inspection and Survey, Norfolk.

(3) USS PONCE (LPD 15) was placed in upkeep status at Naval Station, Norfolk 17-31 December, at which time holiday leave period commenced.