



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
USS PONCE (LPD-15) ✓
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From: Commanding Officer, USS PONCE (LPD 15)
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Encl: (1) Command History 1984

1. In accordance with reference (a), enclosure (1) is the 1984 Command History for USS PONCE (LPD 15).

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USS PONCE (LPD 15) COMMAND HISTORY 1984

USS PONCE began 1984 in her home port of Norfolk, Virginia at Pier Two. Under the operational command of Amphibious Squadron SIX, PONCE participated in Green Water workups with the 24th Marine Amphibious Unit at Onslow Beach, Camp Lejeune, North Carolina after loading at Morehead City, North Carolina. Following a brief preparations for overseas movement period, PONCE returned to Morehead City on 14 February. During attempts to move assault craft to Radio Island in a heavy sea state, PONCE suffered a major casualty when her sterngate was damaged and eventually lost. PONCE was ordered into the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard for voyage repairs where she was repaired and fitted with the sterngate from the USS CORONADO (AGF 11) in a herculean effort by the ship yard and ship's force. PONCE was able to return to Morehead City on 7 March to onload the waiting elements of MAU Service Support Group 26 after a brief stop at Lynnhaven anchorage off Virginia Beach, Virginia where she loaded two LCM-8 Assault Craft and equipment for Seal Team TWO and Beachmaster Unit TWO.

PONCE transited the Atlantic in remarkably calm seas, arriving in Portsmouth, United Kingdom for refueling on 18 March. From Portsmouth, she steamed to Finnsness Fjord, Norway for backloading and reconfiguration in preparation for Mediterranean Amphibious Readiness Group 2-84 commitments. With the embarkation of Company "L" Battalion Landing Team 3/8 and LCU 1564 preloaded with the MARG BMU Detachment and the return of the Seal Team Detachment and Reconnaissance Platoon BLT 3/8, PONCE was ready for action. Typically, PONCE carried 28 officers and 480 men among her embarked units.

PONCE steamed to Rota, Spain for refueling and resupply on 30 March, departing for the eastern Mediterranean on 1 April, and chopping to COMSIXTHFLT. Assuming Condition Three watches on 4 April, PONCE arrived off the coast of Beirut, Lebanon on 7 April. Following a brief turnover with MARG 1-84, which included the addition of MK19 40mm automatic grenade launchers and Stinger anti-air missiles to the PONCE battery, MARG 2-84 assumed duties as the Naval "presence" protecting the American Embassy.

PONCE's experience off Beirut involved many varied activities. On 14 April PONCE provided 500 gallons of MOGAS in the form of a fuel bladder flown from the embassy and fueled by the Air Department. This was also a historic day as PONCE recorded her 20,000th safe landing when a UH-1N Huey from HMM-263 touched down on the flight deck. Following an underway replenishment with USNS MISSISINEWA (TAO-144) on 17 April, PONCE cross-decked personnel from USS NASSAU (LHA-4) in preparation for a port visit to Alexandria, Egypt. Prior to departing, a requirement arose to provide security to American shipping in the harbor at Juniya and PONCE closed the beach to accomplish it. On 21 April, PONCE departed for Alexandria. A WALKAMERICA for the March of Dimes was organized onboard and undertaken by all hands. The participants walked or ran 150 laps around the flight deck and raised \$2242 in pledges for the March of Dimes. Arriving off Alexandria on 22 April, PONCE was forced to suspend boating due to heavy ground swells. A flight deck picnic and field meet provided entertainment for all hands. PONCE returned off Beirut on 26 April without being able to put a liberty party ashore in Alexandria. On 27 April LARC 20 of BMU Detachment threw a shaft and sank in 900 fathoms of water. Luckily there were no personnel casualties. On that day PONCE also embarked a helicopter detachment of three CH-46 Sea Knight aircraft from HMM-263 for training purposes. CTF-61 and CTF-62 embarked shortly thereafter, as did an additional helicopter augment of two AH-1T (TOW) Cobra aircraft. PONCE assumed

duties as the only flight deck in support of the American Embassy Beirut and the Marine Security Force ashore while USS NASSAU (LHA-4) made a port call at Haifa, Israel. On 2 May, PONCE arrived in Haifa for the first time after returning the previously embarked helicopters and staff to NASSAU. Returning to Beirut on 6 May, PONCE provided engineering supplies from her Landing Force Organizational Reserve Material. This was the first use of PONCE's LFORM in support of activities ashore. On 9 May, the DOD Shows group Windsong gave a concert on the flight deck for all hands. A variety of evolutions followed including underway replenishments and special warfare training. A unique training evolution took place when the Reconnaissance Platoon demonstrated the Special Purpose Insertion and Extraction (SPIE) rig on 17 May. Aboard again were the CATF and CLF and their staffs and the helicopter detachment. On 18 May, the American Ambassador to Lebanon, Mister Bartholomew visited PONCE. On 21 May PONCE embarked the first of four groups of midshipmen for their summer training. On 23 May PONCE provided the movie "Snow White" to the British Embassy in Beirut. This mission developed into a full combat evolution as the CATF dispatched two fully armed UH-1N aircraft to transport the movie to the beach past hostile, anti-Disney elements. On 4 June PONCE arrived at Antaylya, Turkey for a port visit that ended on 9 June. After a two week tour off Beirut, PONCE returned to Haifa, Israel for another port visit.

On 28 June, PONCE returned to Beirut. Again embarking the CATF and CLF staffs and the helicopter detachment, PONCE assumed the duty as flight deck in support of operations ashore. This status was to remain in effect until 23 July. During this period, PONCE flew her five aircraft on daily routine missions in addition to providing support to HC-4 CH53E Super Stallion operations between Haifa and Larnaca, Cyprus and refueling British courier aircraft enroute to their embassy. PONCE was also instrumental in the planning and initial execution of the final withdrawal of Marines from Beirut. On 23 July, PONCE departed for a maintenance availability period in Haifa, Israel.

During her stay in Haifa, PONCE accomplished numerous maintenance goals and completed the washdown of the embarked equipment. PONCE departed Haifa enroute to Rota, Spain on 2 August. During the transit, the crew and embarked troops accomplished a variety of tasks including an underway replenishment and familiarization firing. PONCE also provided emergency flight deck services to a CH-46 of HC-10 when it lost hydraulic pressure while resupplying another ship. PONCE arrived in Rota on 9 August.

PONCE departed Rota on 11 August after providing assistance in the washdown of 24th MAU equipment in Spain. PONCE also embarked supplies from USS NASSAU (LHA-4) to speed offload in Morehead City. Arriving in that city on 23 August, the ship offloaded her Marine personnel, supplies and equipment in record time, departing for Norfolk that afternoon with a dependents' "Tiger Cruise" embarked. The ship's arrival in Norfolk was marked by aircraft towing banners, hot air balloons bearing messages and a huge yellow lei on the forecastle. PONCE's new home was Pier 3, NOB. Following a period of reduced activity during which PONCE sortied to avoid Hurricane Diana, PONCE undertook numerous inport maintenance availabilities and public affairs visits that saw her visited by the Defense Minister of the Netherlands and the Adjutant General for the Marine Corps Operational Testing and Evaluation activity's M1E1 Abrams Tank tests. From 14 to 16 November PONCE conducted anti-mine training with RH53E and RH53D aircraft from Helicopter Mine Squadrons 14 and 16. From 18 to 20 December PONCE acted as support ship for the Senior Officer Ship Material Readiness Course in the Virginia Capes operating area. 1984 ended with PONCE pierside, Pier 3, NOB, Norfolk, Virginia.

Throughout 1984 USS PONCE was commanded by Captain Emory P. Zimmer. Commander D. D. Harry served as Executive Officer. Her immediate administrative commander was COMPHIBRON TWELVE.

USS PONCE earned the Sea Service Ribbon and Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal during 1984 and was recommended for the Navy Unit Commendation.