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DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY

USS PONCE (LPD-15)
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From: Commanding Officer, USS PONCE (LPD 15)
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Subj: 1995 COMMAND HISTORY

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Encl: (1) Command Composition and Organization
(2) Chronology
(3) Narrative

1. Pursuant to reference (a), enclosures (1) through (3) are submitted.


L. F. MAHONEY

COMMAND COMPOSITION AND ORGANIZATION

USS PONCE (LPD 15) is commanded by Captain Leon F. Mahoney, United States navy, and is homeported in Norfolk, Virginia. USS PONCE's immediate unit commander is Rear Admiral Wirt R. Fladd, Commander, Amphibious Group TWO.

PONCE's mission as an amphibious transport dock is to embark United States Marine Corps and Navy support elements and, by both water and airborne means, conduct amphibious landings to obtain beach heads, prosecute further operations ashore or deny areas or facilities to the enemy.

PONCE's crew consists of 26 Officers, (including one U.S. Marine Corps Combat Cargo Officer), 26 Chief Petty Officers and 368 enlisted personnel with a wide variety of skills to execute the multi-mission role of a major amphibious ship.

USS PONCE COMMAND CHRONOLOGY 1995

01 JAN - 11 JAN OPERATIONS DENY FLIGHT/PROVIDE PROMISE
(ADRIATIC, SEA)

11 JAN - 15 JAN UNDERWAY, ENROUTE ATLANTIC

15 JAN - 21 JAN SPANISH PHIBLEX 95 (SIERRA DE RETIN, SPAIN)

21 JAN - 25 JAN UNDERWAY, ENROUTE ADRIATIC

26 JAN - 31 JAN SAREX 95 (DURRES, ALBANIA)

01 FEB - 05 FEB UNDERWAY, ENROUTE TYHRENNIAN SEA

06 FEB - 09 FEB PORT VISIT, NAPLES, ITALY

10 FEB - 11 FEB UNDERWAY, ENROUTE SARDINIA

11 FEB - 15 FEB ITALIAN PHIBLEX 95 (CAPO TEULADA, SARDINIA)

14 FEB CAPT MAHONEY, USN, RELIEVES CAPT SHERRANGE,
USN, AS COMMANDING OFFICER

15 FEB - 20 FEB UNDERWAY, ENROUTE BLACK SEA

21 FEB - 26 FEB PORT VISIT, ODESSA, UKRAINE

27 FEB - 02 MAR UNDERWAY, ENROUTE AEGEAN SEA

03 MAR - 04 MAR PORT VISIT, RHODES, GREECE

05 MAR - 06 MAR UNDERWAY, ENROUTE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

07 MAR - 22 MAR PORT VISIT, HAIFA, ISRAEL

23 MAR - 28 MAR UNDERWAY, ENROUTE ATLANTIC OCEAN

29 MAR - 02 APR PORT VISIT, ROTA, SPAIN

03 APR - 12 APR UNDERWAY, ENROUTE UNITED STATES

13 APR OFFLOADED 22ND MARINE EXPEDITIONARY UNIT,
MOREHEAD CITY, NC

14 APR UNDERWAY, ENROUTE VIRGINIA FOR DEPENDENTS
CRUISE

15 APR - 15 MAY LEAVE AND STAND DOWN, NORFOLK, VA

16 MAY - 19 MAY	UNDERWAY, JOINT SPECIAL OPERATIONS TASK FORCE SERVICES, VIRGINIA CAPES
20 MAY - 29 MAY	UPKEEP, NAVAL STATION NORFOLK
30 MAY - 01 JUN	UNDERWAY, DECK LANDING QUALIFICATIONS AND MIDSHIPMEN TRAINING, VIRGINIA CAPES
02 JUN - 04 JUN	UPKEEP, NAVAL STATION NORFOLK
05 JUN - 08 JUN	UNDERWAY, AMPHIBIOUS AND MIDSHIPMEN TRAINING, VIRGINIA CAPES
09 JUN - 11 JUN	UPKEEP, NAVAL STATION NORFOLK
12 JUN - 14 JUN	TYPE TRAINING, LYNNHAVEN ANCHORAGE
15 JUN - 05 JUL	UPKEEP, NAVAL STATION NORFOLK
06 JUL - 21 JUL	AIRBORNE MINE COUNTER MEASURES (ON SLOW BAY, NC) WITH HM-14, COMCMRON TWO; JTFEX 95-3 (USS AMERICA)
22 JUL - 23 JUL	UPKEEP, NAVAL STATION NORFOLK
24 JUL - 25 JUL	UNDERWAY, ENROUTE HALIFAX
26 JUL - 30 JUL	PORT VISIT, HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA
31 JUL	UNDERWAY, ENROUTE BOSTON
01 AUG - 04 AUG	PORT VISIT, BOSTON, MA
05 AUG - 06 AUG	UNDERWAY, ENROUTE VIRGINIA
07 AUG - 11 AUG	AMMUNITION OFFLOAD, NAVAL WEAPONS STATION YORKTOWN, VA
12 AUG - 14 AUG	UPKEEP, NAVAL STATION NORFOLK
15 AUG - 20 AUG	UNDERWAY, HURRICANE FELIX EVASION
21 AUG - 27 NOV	PHASED MAINTENANCE AVAILABILITY (METRO MACHINE SHIPYARD)
28 NOV - 29 NOV	UNDERWAY, SEA TRIALS, VIRGINIA CAPES
30 NOV - 11 DEC	UPKEEP, NAVAL STATION NORFOLK
12 DEC - 31 DEC	LEAVE AND UPKEEP, NAVAL STATION NORFOLK

USS PONCE COMMAND HISTORY 1995

PONCE began 1995 conducting presence operations in the Adriatic Sea as a part of Operations DENY FLIGHT and PROVIDE PROMISE. Assigned to Task Force SIX ONE, PONCE was in company with USS NASSAU (LHA 4) and USS GUNSTON HALL (LSD 44) under the tactical command of Commander, Amphibious Squadron SIX.

Embarked on board were elements of the 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit, including B and C Companies, Battalion Landing Team 1/8, Amphibious Assault Vehicle Platoon, and Reconnaissance Platoon. Embarked Naval Special Warfare Units included SEAL Team TWO Platoon E and Special Boat Unit TWENTY Detachment I.

PONCE's mission in the Adriatic as a part of TF 61 was to be ready to conduct a Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR) or Tactical Recovery of Aircraft and Personnel (TRAP) mission in the case of a downed NATO aircraft.

On 11 January, TF 61 departed the Adriatic enroute to Sierra de Retin, northwest of Gibraltar, to participate in SPANISH PHIBLEX 95. Arriving off of Sierra de Retin on 15 January, the exercise lasted until 21 January, during which PONCE conducted amphibious operations in cooperation with the Spanish Armed Forces.

PONCE weighed anchor 21 January, passed through the Straits of Gibraltar and proceeded east arriving back in the Adriatic 26 January along with the remainder of TF 61 to continue NATO presence operations.

Encl (3)

In support of the U.S. Partnership for Peace program, PONCE was detached, along with a two helicopter detachment of CH-46's from NASSAU, and proceeded to Durres, Albania to participate in SAREX 95, the first bilateral naval exercise conducted by the U.S. with Albania. The exercise consisted of American and Albanian forces conducting coordinated searches on both land and sea to recover a simulated downed NATO pilot. During the following port visit, several receptions were hosted by both PONCE and the Albanian military.

These events were overshadowed, however, by the 27 January shooting of two enlisted Marines on liberty in Durres by an Albanian civilian. The first Marine received a slight wound in the arm. However, the second Marine was critically injured and had to be operated on by Albanian surgeons who, by Western standards, performed surgery under primitive conditions.

After the surgery, his condition stabilized but was still serious. The ship's doctor deemed it imperative that he be taken to a modern hospital. The only airport capable of handling a MEDEVAC plane was in the capital of Tirane, almost an hour away over treacherous Albanian roads. The only solution was to create a make-shift landing zone out of a small empty lot covered with medical waste and garbage next to the Durres hospital and fly the Marine by helicopter to Tirane. The field was painstakingly cleared by men from the wounded Marine's unit, making the daring night landing that followed possible. Upon reaching Tirane, the Marine was put on board an Air Force MEDEVAC plane and flown to

the Army hospital in Landstuhl, Germany. By the year's end, he was fully recovered.

PONCE departed from Durres 1 February and rejoined the remainder of TF 61 in the Adriatic. On 3 February, PONCE departed the Adriatic enroute to a port visit in Naples, Italy. PONCE arrived 6 February and departed 10 February.

11 February, PONCE arrived off Capo Teulada on the southern coast of Sardinia to participate in ITALIAN PHIBLEX 95. During the exercise, PONCE conducted amphibious operations in cooperation with the Italian Armed Forces.

On 14 February, CAPT Leon F. Mahoney, USN relieved CAPT Daniel T. Sherrange, USN as Commanding Officer. The change of command ceremony was held on the flight deck while anchored off Capo Teulada. Commander, Amphibious Squadron SIX, and the Commanding Officers of USS GUNSTON HALL, USS NASSAU and USS SHENANDOAH were in attendance.

PONCE weighed anchor 15 February and proceeded independently east enroute Odessa, Ukraine. PONCE passed through the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus 20 February and entered the Black Sea. 21 February, PONCE arrived in Odessa, only the second U.S. warship to do so since World War Two.

The port visit was well received by the people of Odessa. During three days of tours, over ten thousand people came aboard the ship. A reception for members of the local Ukrainian government and military was held on board 24 February. PONCE officers and crew were also invited to various functions hosted

by the Ukrainians.

27 February PONCE departed Odessa enroute a port visit in Rhodes, Greece. Anchored from 3-5 March, the crew had limited liberty due to poor weather.

PONCE weighed anchor 5 March enroute Haifa, Israel. PONCE arrived off the Israeli coast 6 March to debark her Amphibious Assault Vehicles and then pulled into Haifa the next day. PONCE nested outboard of USS SHENANDOAH (AD 44) for a two week Intermediate Maintenance Availability.

TF 61 sortied from Haifa 23 March and headed west enroute Rota, Spain. Arriving 29 March, PONCE offloaded her Marine vehicles for wash down. PONCE departed Rota 03 April and out chopped from Sixth Fleet.

Amphibious Squadron SIX arrived at Morehead City, North Carolina 13 April and offloaded personnel, cargo and vehicles of the 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit. The following day, PONCE, NASSAU and GUNSTON HALL got underway from Morehead City with "tigers" embarked for a dependent's cruise back to Norfolk, Virginia. PONCE was pierside at Naval Station Norfolk on 15 April.

After a thirty day stand down and leave period, PONCE got underway to provide flight deck services for Joint Special Operations Task Force helicopters and returned to port 19 May. PONCE was underway again 30 May through 1 June to conduct Deck Landing Qualifications for Helicopter Mine Squadron FOURTEEN. 5-8 June and 12-14 June PONCE was underway to provide well deck

services for the Landing Craft, Utility of Assault Craft Unit TWO and the Landing Craft, Air Cushion of Assault Craft Unit FOUR. Also embarked were several Naval Academy and NROTC midshipmen and NJROTC cadets for familiarization training.

From 6-21 July, PONCE participated in JTFEX 95-3. The first phase of this exercise consisted of PONCE embarking elements of Helicopter Mine Squadron FOURTEEN and Commander, Mine Counter-Measure Squadron TWO, to conduct Airborne Mine Counter Measures in Onslow Bay, North Carolina. For the second phase the Joint Special Operations Task Force was embarked. PONCE carried out the Special Operations missions for the USS AMERICA battle group.

Following JTFEX 95-3, PONCE conducted a pair of port visits. The first was to Halifax, Nova Scotia from 26 July to 30 August. The second to Boston, Massachusetts from 1 to 4 August.

Shortly after returning to Norfolk, Hurricane Felix began to threaten the U.S. Atlantic coast. To avoid possible damage, the Atlantic Fleet sortied from Norfolk to evade the storm at sea. PONCE spent 15 to 20 August underway until Hurricane Felix turned away from Virginia.

On 21 August, PONCE entered Metro Machine Shipyard to begin a three month Phased Maintenance Availability. Extensive work was done on PONCE including a the rehabilitation of seven crew heads and one troop berthing.

PONCE departed Metro Machine Shipyard and conducted Sea Trials on 28 November and returned to Norfolk upon completion.

On 12 December, PONCE commenced a leave and upkeep period for the Christmas and New Year holidays.