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DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY

USS TARAWA (LHA-1)

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From: Commanding Officer, USS TARAWA (LHA-1)
To: Director of Naval History (OP-09B9), Washington Navy Yard, Washington, DC 20390

Subj: Command History - 1976

Ref: (a) OPNAVINST 5750.12B

Encl: (1) Basic History
(2) Documentary Annex

1. Enclosures (1) and (2) are submitted in accordance with reference (a).

G. A. CHURCH

COMMAND HISTORY, 1976

USS TARAWA (LHA-1)

Tarawa, scene of a bloody 76-hour battle for the strategic atoll opening the path to the Central Pacific's Gilbert and Mariana Islands during World War II, is one of the proudest testaments to valor in U.S. Marine Corps history.

When the fury of combat was finally stilled over tiny Betio (south-western-most of 47 islands in the atoll) on November 23, 1943, the awful price of victory became clear - 1020 Marines killed, 2296 wounded. Only 146 of the 4836 Japanese defenders of the island remained.

This was the first storming of an atoll by American forces. And this battle is appropriately commemorated for all time in the naming of the USS TARAWA (LHA-1), the first of five general purpose amphibious assault ships built for the U.S. Navy by the Ingalls Shipbuilding division of Litton Industries in Pascagoula, Mississippi.

The TARAWA was commissioned on 29 May 1976 at Ingalls Shipbuilding, Pascagoula, Mississippi. Her first Captain was Captain James H. MORRIS, USN. The mayor of the TARAWA's sponsoring city, the Honorable Tom MOODY, Columbus, Ohio, was present. Principal speaker at the ceremonies was General Samuel H. JASKILKA, USMC, Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps. Also present was the Honorable John C. STENNIS, Senator from Mississippi. The Ship's Sponsor was Mrs. Audrey B. CUSHMAN, wife of the former Commandant of the Marine Corps.

Before leaving Pascagoula, command of the TARAWA was changed. Captain George A. CHURCH, USN, relieved Captain James H. MORRIS on 2 July 1976. Captain MORRIS was immediately promoted to Rear Admiral.

On 7 July 1976 the TARAWA left Pascagoula and set course for Panama. She arrived 13 July and began preparations for transiting the Panama Canal. Many preparations had to be completed prior to the canal transit including the folding of the starboard flight deck cat walk.

TARAWA was one of the largest warships to transit the Panama Canal when she passed through the locks on 16 July 1976. The transit took about ten hours with over 500 visitors aboard TARAWA for the trip.

After Panama, the TARAWA visited Acapulco, Mexico, where the crew enjoyed the tourist attractions. In addition, senior officials of the Mexican Navy were shown TARAWA's capabilities during a short demonstration cruise.

TARAWA arrived at her home port of San Diego on 6 August 1976. A hearty welcome was extended by relatives, friends and dignitaries.

TARAWA concluded the year by undergoing qualification trials, standardization tests, and shakedown training in Southern California waters.

USS TARAWA

FACT SHEET

* TARAWA was commissioned on 29 May 1976.

* TARAWA is 820 feet long, 20 stories high and has a full displacement of 39,300 tons.

* Her flight deck is nearly the length of three football fields.

* She has a beam of 106 feet -- four feet narrower than the Panama Canal lock chambers.

* Her journey from Pascagoula, MS, through the Panama Canal and on to her homeport of San Diego, CA was over 4500 miles.

* She transitted the Panama Canal on 16 July 1976 -- It took 10 hours and 10 minutes.

* Her tallest mast, 221 feet above the keel, is too tall to permit the ship to pass under the Brooklyn Bridge. Ship designers solved the problem for Brooklyn fans by equipping TARAWA with a tiltable mast which, when folded, cuts the length of the mast by 18 feet.

* As TARAWA began her transit through the Canal she came within a mile of where Chistopher Columbus docked his ship, Santa Maria, in 1502. To undertand the comparison of the LHA-1 and the size of Columbus' flagship, he could have had a fleet of 27 Santa Marias and all would fit on the deck of TARAWA without touching one another.

* TARAWA will be powered by only two boilers -- but they're the largest ever manufactured in the United States as well as the largest of any in current Navy service. They will generate 400 tons of steam per hour and develop 140,000 horsepower, or the equivalent of about 700 automobiles -- if all that energy were converted to electrical power it could supply a city of about 160,000 population.

* The ship is equipped with 1200 tons of air-conditioning -- enough to cool many of the equipment areas as well as the crew. This means in other words, air-conditioning systems sufficient to environmentally control an office building of 800,000 square feet.

* Just in case the Marines get too comfortable, the TARAWA is also equipped with a special 5000 square foot troop training and acclimatization room where landing forces can be "exercised" in a controlled environment simulating that on which they will land.

Enclosure (2)

USS TARAWA

FACT SHEET

(2)

* The Interior Voice Communication System, or IVCS, includes 558 dial phones and 132 net phones tied into two switching centers (equipped with emergency switchover capabilities).

* The Closed Circuit TV System, or CCTV, is used for: (1) surveillance of sensitive spaces (nine cameras, eight monitors, two video recorders); (2) briefings (five cameras, 14 monitors, 14 audio stations); and (3) entertainment and training purposes -- for which there are 48 receivers, 120 outlets, and a complete TV studio with 16mm film, slide display, and video recorder equipment.

* TARAWA has a ballast system big enough to hold 12,000 tons of sea water, a fuel transfer system capable of transferring 360,000 gallons of oil per hour, a virtually 100 percent do-it-yourself industrial repair capability (among the ship's 1400 compartments are 50 mechanical and electrical shops), and a pollution prevention/abatement system which includes three sewage treatment plants.

* 30 helicopters can be carried on TARAWA. Transfer of the aircraft from the hangar deck to the flight deck can be accomplished in 1½ hours.

* The laundry area has five washers, four dryers and the team is capable of cleaning 3000 pounds of clothes per day.

* TARAWA's mess deck division carries over $400,000 worth of provisions.

* TARAWA's annual payroll is over $2½ million dollars.

* Medical and dental facilities aboard LHA-1 are capable of providing intensive medical care to 300 casualties. The medical facilities aboard TARAWA include four emergency operating rooms, three dental operating rooms, two X-ray rooms, a blood bank, laboratories, pharmacy and post-operative, recuperation and isolation wards. This is equivalent to the facilities you might find in a town of 5000-6000 people.

* First ship built with a humanitarian mission in mind. Whether it's a typhoon in the Republic of the Philippines, earthquakes in Nicaragua or a hurricane along a U.S. coast, the LHA will have the capacity of providing transportation, food, water, clothing, shelter, medical care and communications to victims of disasters.

Enclosure (2)

USS TARAWA

FACT SHEET

(3)

* TARAWA is the largest ship made by man on land then launched as a completed hull.

* The longitudinal conveyor is comprised of 19 sections. The forward 12 sections have a speed of 60 feet per minute -- the remaining seven sections have a speed of 90 feet per minute.

* On the island, the monorail system picks up pallets from the conveyor for loading in the boats. The monorail system will deliver 10 pallets per minute during boat loading cycle with a sustained delivery rate of 8½ pallets per minute. The average cycle time per individual monorail car between pick up and loading point is 2½ minutes.

* Average cycle time for cargo elevators between pick up and delivery is 88 seconds.

* LHA-1 has five (5) cargo elevators.

* LHA-1 has two aircraft elevators--one located at port deck edge--the other center line aft.

* Average cycle time is 90 seconds from hangar deck to flight deck--off load--and back to hangar deck.

* LHA-1 can carry approximately 2600 pallets--each could carry 2000-3000 lbs.

* The pallet transporter carries four (4) pallets at one time--travels at a speed of 10 miles per hour leveled deck--three (3) miles per hour on ramps.

* Normal load cycle time is 7½ minutes--cycle is from third deck up to flight deck and back to the third deck.

* There is 30,000 square feet of vehicle storage space aboard LHA-1.

* Hangar deck has 18,519 square feet.

* Well deck has 18,565 square feet--that's 78 feet wide and 268 feet long.

Enclosure (2)

USS TARAWA

FACT SHEET

(4)

* The LHA combines the features of four ships--the amphibious assault ship (LPH), the amphibious transport dock (LPD), the amphibious cargo ship (LKA), and the landing ship dock (LSD).

* TARAWA is designed to embark, deploy and land elements of Marine battalion landing team in an amphibious assault either by helicopter, amphibious track vehicle or landing craft or by a combination of all three.

* The LHA carries three five inch rapid fire guns, two point defense surface missile systems, and six 20mm machine guns.

* TARAWA can carry 1903 embarked Marines, 30 helicopters, and her crew consists of 50 officers and 709 men.

* Captain George A. CHURCH, (Hometown-Winston-Salem, N.C.) is Commanding Officer of LHA-1. Captain S. Peter HUHN is Executive Officer. Both presently reside in Coronado, California.

* TARAWA is the first of five LHAs. Her sister ships will include: SAIPAN, (her CO will be TARAWA's first Executive Officer, Captain Bill JOHNSTON), BELLEAU WOOD, NASSAU and DANANG.