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From: Commanding Officer, USS OKINAWA (LPH-3)
To: Chief of Naval Operations (OP-0502)

Subj: Command History 1975: forwarding of

Ref: (a) OPNAVINST 5750.12B
(b) CINCPACFLTINST 5750.2C

Encl: (1) Subject History

1. Enclosure (1) is forwarded in accordance with references (a) and (b).

C. J. MOORE

Copy to:
CINCPACFLT
COMNAVSUREPAC
Director of Naval History
COMPHIBRON ONE

OKINAWA'S COMMANDING OFFICERS

W. E. LEMOS	APRIL 1962 - MARCH 1963
J. R. SWEENEY	MARCH 1963 - MARCH 1964
M. D. McDONALD	MARCH 1964 - MARCH 1965
J. L. EVANS	MARCH 1965 - FEBRUARY 1966
E. L. FREIGHTNER	FEBRUARY 1966 - MARCH 1967
W. H. ALEXANDER	MARCH 1967 - FEBRUARY 1968
W. A. MACKEY	FEBRUARY 1968 - FEBRUARY 1969
H. D. WILLIAMS	FEBRUARY 1969 - APRIL 1970
A. F. HUFF	APRIL 1970 - NOVEMBER 1971
W. A. SCOTT	NOVEMBER 1971 - JULY 1973
R. S. SALIN	JULY 1973 - NOVEMBER 1974
C. J. MOORE	NOVEMBER 1974 -

USS OKINAWA (LPH-3)
Command History

Command Organization and Relation

The USS OKINAWA (LPH-3) has been under the command of Captain C. J. Moore, USN, since November 1974. There has been no change in the OKINAWA's mission or home port in Calendar Year 1975.

The year 1975 commenced with OKINAWA as part of the 3rd Fleet, administratively attached to Amphibious Squadron Seven. Final preparation for departure to the Western Pacific for a scheduled six month cruise were underway. Upon arrival in the Western Pacific, OKINAWA became part of the 7th Fleet and served as the flag ship for the Commanders of Amphibious Squadrons One and Five, and as a unit of Amphibious Ready Group Alpha. Amphibious Ready Group Alpha consisted of USS OKINAWA (LPH-3), USS VANCOUVER (LPD-2), USS PEORIA (LST-1183), and USS THOMASTON (LSD-28) until 5 May 1975.

Units embarked onboard OKINAWA were as follows, 31st Marine Amphibious Unit and Staff, Battalion Landing Team 2/4, Battalion Landing Team 1/4, Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron (HMH)-462 and Commander and Staff of Amphibious Squadrons One and Five.

Operations and Activities

8 January 1975 - USS OKINAWA departed for the Western Pacific. One week after departure, orders were received extending the projected return date from 3 July 1975 to 20 August 1975. This extension was made necessary because of an expected delay in the arrival of OKINAWA's relief, the USS NEW ORLEANS (LPH-11). NEW ORLEANS had been assigned as the primary pick up vessel for the recovery of Apollo-Soyuz joint U.S./Russian space shot. The recovery operation required postponement of the NEW ORLEANS' deployment to the 7th Fleet.

On 24 January 1975, OKINAWA arrived in Subic Bay, Republic of the Philippines. On 31 January, OKINAWA now assigned to ARG "Alpha", departed for Singapore with the following embarked units: Commander and Staff, Amphibious Squadron One, 31st Marine Amphibious Unit, Battalion Landing Team 2/4 and HMH 462.

On 12 February, OKINAWA departed Singapore and joined other ARG Alpha units in the South China Sea. ARG Alpha was assigned a MODLOC (Modified Location) in readiness condition III with orders to prepare to execute "Eagle Pull" when directed.

OKINAWA remained on station until 23 February.

From 25-28 February, OKINAWA was inport in Subic Bay. On 1 March, OKINAWA was placed on 24 hour alert and departed for MODLOC in the Gulf of Siam. From 3 March until 11 April, OKINAWA remained at MODLOC and continued training for "Eagle Pull".

On 12 April 1975, United States Ambassador to Cambodia, John Gunther Dean, called on OKINAWA and ARG Alpha to evacuate U.S. Citizens and foreign nationals from Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

The evacuation was conducted by elements of the 31st Marine Amphibious Unit comprised of 350 Marines of Battalion Landing Team 2/4 and 12 CH-53 helicopters of HMH 462. The helicopters were launched from the deck of the OKINAWA.

The task group was now comprised of ARG Alpha units which had been joined on 11 April by destroyers HENRY B. WILSON, EDSON, KIRK and KNOX and the attack carrier HANCOCK with HMH 463 embarked.

The helicopters of HMH 462, launched from OKINAWA, landed in a soccer field near the U.S. Embassy. The embarked Marines from BLT 2/4 established a perimeter around the landing zone while 287 evacuees were ushered aboard the helicopters for the return flight to USS OKINAWA.

After all evacuees had departed, helicopters of HMH 463 from USS HANCOCK picked up the Marines.

The 287 evacuees taken to OKINAWA included Ambassador Dean, Cambodian President Saukham Khoy and 36 civilian newsmen and women. The evacuees also included citizens of the United States, Cambodia, France, The United Kingdom, Nationalist China, Spain, Switzerland, Canada, Thailand, Australia, Italy, Sweden and the Republic of the Philippines.

All evacuees were flown to U' Tapao, Thailand by the morning of 13 April.

OKINAWA arrived in Subic Bay on 17 April. Within hours, orders were received to proceed to MODLOC off the coast of South Viet Nam in preparation for "Frequent Wind", the evacuation of Saigon. OKINAWA departed Subic Bay early the morning of 18 April.

From 21 April through 28 April, OKINAWA remained on station. Alert Status varied from 12 hours to 1 hour.

At 2217H 22 April, SN Paul Isaac Vegas was seen to fall over the side of the ship. A search was conducted until noon of the following day with no success.

SN Vegas' death was a singularly sad episode during a year in which no significant injuries were suffered by any crewmember of the OKINAWA.

At 0500, 29 April, OKINAWA was put on 15 minute alert, but by 0900 alert status was again 1 hour. Flight Quarters had been set at 0400 and limited air operations commenced at 0500. Individual aircraft were launched and recovered throughout the morning of the 29th for transfer of mail and passengers. At 1215, 29 April, orders were received to launch aircraft for the evacuation. OKINAWA commenced a launch of all aircraft about 1330 and within a few minutes all assigned aircraft were launched including 17 H-53s, 4 AH-1Js and 4 UH-1Es. The first wave of helicopters landed in Saigon at 1500. Evacuation operations continued until 0740, 30 April.

Flight deck personnel were at flight quarter stations from 0400, 29 April until 1000, 30 April. During this thirty hour period, more than 1000 takeoffs and landings were conducted from OKINAWA's deck.

In addition to continued launch and recovery operations of OKINAWA based aircraft, aircraft from other ships, Republic of Viet Nam Air Force helos and commercial helos belonging to Air America used OKINAWA's deck for refueling and final recovery.

The need to maintain space on the flight deck for emergencies and final recovery operations necessitated the jettisoning of 6 RVN aircraft including 5 UH-1s and 1 CH-47.

Long hours were also spent in the cockpits of Marine helicopters with some pilots logging 17 hours of flight time without a break.

Only two U.S. helicopters were lost in the operation despite the long hours in the air and high tempo of operations. An H-46 from the HANCOCK crashed from unknown causes and an AH-1J from the OKINAWA was lost due to fuel starvation. Both AH-1J crewmen were rescued within minutes by a nearby destroyer. The pilot of the AH-1J was later awarded a Silver Star for remaining on station and providing vital assistance in coordinating arrivals and departures of evacuation helos.

The last U.S. helicopter left the Saigon landing zone at 0740 on 30 April. At 1000 flight quarters were secured only to be reset periodically throughout the day for the transfer of evacuees among the ships, movement of injured refugees from recovery ships to medical facilities and

recovery of more Air America and RVN helos. Throughout the period from 29 April to 1 May, evacuees were being brought onboard OKINAWA. All hands were taxed to their maximum endurance in carrying out their duties as well as accommodating evacuees.

By morning of 1 May, more than 1200 evacuated personnel were onboard. Some of them were familiar faces from "Eagle Pull", especially the newsmen and women who were beginning to think of the OKINAWA as "home". Of the evacuees brought aboard OKINAWA, one hundred fifty eight were Americans, 825 were Vietnamese, and the rest were third country nationals. All who did not hold passports were transferred to MSC ships on 2 May.

On 4 May, OKINAWA arrived in Subic Bay and completed the transfer of evacuees to processing areas already prepared, both in Subic Bay and Clark AFB.

COMPHIBRON ONE was relieved by COMPHIBRON FIVE and on 5 May OKINAWA arrived in Manila for a much needed liberty.

On 10 May, USS OKINAWA departed Manila underway to the island of Okinawa with a stop in Subic to HMM 462 and pick up aircraft for transfer back to Okinawa. The morning of 13 May found OKINAWA prepared to launch aircraft to Marine bases on the island of Okinawa. Moments before the first launch, orders were received to return immediately to Subic. The SS MAYAGUEZ had been hijacked by Cambodian Communist.

The MAYAGUEZ incident was resolved before OKINAWA could participate. OKINAWA arrived in Subic on 15 May.

The rest of May was devoted to much needed upkeep in Subic Bay, and on 9 June, OKINAWA departed for a Hong Kong visit.

On 19 June OKINAWA returned to Subic and commenced further upkeep.

Departure for CONUS via Keelung, Republic of China, White Beach, Okinawa and Hawaii commenced on 23 July. After a three day visit to Keelung and a 36 hour stop at White Beach, the long transpac began. A stop in Honolulu on 12 August was welcomed by 81 friends and relatives of the crew who embarked for a "Tiger Cruise" and the final leg to San Diego. "Liberty Call" in San Diego commenced on the morning of 20 August. September provided the only break in a routine maintenance and restricted availability until the end of 1975.

1975 was truly The Year of the OKINAWA. The evacuations of Phnom Penh and Saigon, more than 5,500 landings and take-offs, Excellence ("E") awards for Air and Supply Departments, the Amphibious Assault Award for the ship, and more than 100 individual awards, ranging from the Meritorious Service Medal to letters of commendation, are testimony to one of the most successful years in the history of the USS OKINAWA.

Documentary Annex

Attached is a booklet comprised of congratulatory messages received for USS OKINAWA operations.