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

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From: Commanding Officer, USS PONCE (LPD 15)
To: Director of Naval History (OP-09B9)
Subj: CommandiHistory (Report Symbol 5750-1)
Ref: (a) OPNAVINST 5730.12B
Encl: (1) USS PONCE (LPD 15) Command History 1976.

1. In accordance with reference (a), enclosure (1) is submitted.


J. R. ALLINGHAM

Copy to:
COMNAVSURFLANT

I. Command Organization

(a) Commanding Officer: Captain Paul J. MULLOY, 11 July 1975 to 16 September 1976. Captain James R. ALLINGHAM, 16 September 1976 to present.

(b) Amphibious Squadron assignment: Amphibious Squadron FOUR. 1 October 1975 to present.

III Chronological Summary of Operations for 1976: Nineteen Seventy six opened with USS PONCE (LPD15) in her home port of Norfolk, Virginia, in a leave and upkeep status. Following completion of the holiday period, PONCE commenced preparations for a Modified Operational Propulsion Plant Examination (MOPPE).

On the 30th of January, the ship was visited by the Honorable J. William MIDDENDORF II, Secretary of the Navy. During the course of his visit to the ship, the Secretary presented the Engineering Department with the Order of the Golden Snipe. The Secretary, in making the Golden Snipe presentation, paid special recognition to the engineers vital role in ~~maintaining~~ the operational readiness of the ship. On his visit to the PONCE, Secretary MIDDENDORF was accompanied by Vice Admiral Robert E. ADAMSON, U.S. NAVY, Commander Naval Surface Force, U.S. Atlantic fleet.

In February, PONCE continued preparations for the propulsion plant inspection. Operationally, the ship participated in the Naval Reserve training program as a training platform for two Fleet Expansion Units, LSD-513 and LPH-1314. Each unit was assigned to the PONCE for a two week period. Enlisted personnel of both units ^{were} integrated directly into the ship's company for their active duty for training and assigned to divisions based on their rating. Professional training requirements determined the assignment of reserve officers to billets in the ship's various departments.

On 4 March, PONCE entered AFDM-7, a floating drydock, located at the Destroyer and Submarine Piers, Norfolk Naval Station, to have her bottom scraped and painted. PONCE was the first amphibious transport dock and largest ship ever to be lifted by AFDM-7. PONCE'S first paved the way for other large Norfolk based ships to have underwater hull maintenance performed without the requirement to enter a shipyard.

Leaving AFDM-7 on the 26th of March, PONCE returned to the Norfolk Naval Station piers for an additional month to continue propulsion plant maintenance and training and to prepare for her forthcoming deployment to the Sixth Fleet. On 26 April, PONCE sailed from Norfolk to conduct underway training and the MOPPE in the Virginia Capes Operation Area. The ship returned to Norfolk on the 30th of April and completed the Propulsion Plant Examination on 3 May. The Propulsion Examining Board found that PONCE was satisfactory in both propulsion plant material condition and watchstander training. Additionally, the ship was certified ready for unrestricted operations.

From 3 May through 7 May 1976, PONCE was again underway for sea training. During this period, she was committed to a tactical test for the Marine units assigned for the Mediterranean deployment in June. Following the ship's return to Norfolk, the Atlantic Fleet Nuclear Weapons Training

Group conducted a Nuclear Weapons Technical Proficiency Inspection (NTPI) aboard PONCE on the 12th and 13th of May. The Commander in Chief, U.S. Atlantic Fleet, commended PONCE by official message for receiving a grade of outstanding in all areas of the inspection. In his message, the Fleet Commander noted that 1976 was the second year in a row that PONCE had performed so well during an NTPI. Similar recognition was received from the Commander Naval Surface Force, U.S. Atlantic Fleet, via official letter.

On 7 June 1976, USS PONCE sailed from Norfolk for Morehead City, North Carolina, to embark elements of the Third Battalion, Second Marines. Departing Morehead City as a part of Mediterranean Amphibious Ready Group 2-76 (MARG 2-76) in company with USS IWO JIMA, USS CORONADO, USS PORTLAND and USS NEWPORT, PONCE transited the North Atlantic and arrived at Rota, Spain, on the 18th of June. Remaining in Rota less than 72 hours, PONCE and MARG 2-76 sailed for Carboneras, Spain, to conduct amphibious assault training. After a day's operations off Carboneras, the ships of MARG 2-76 sailed for the eastward movement toward Kithira, Greece.

Arriving at Kithira anchorage on 26 June, MARG 2-76 relieved the units comprising MARG 1-76 of their duties as Task Force 61 of the Sixth Fleet. Assuming the role of Task Force 61 immediately thrust PONCE into a contingency operation. Task Force 61 was directed to prepare for the Evacuation of American citizens and third party nationals from war-ravaged Lebanon.

After spending nearly a month on station at Kithira, Task Force 61 was ordered to proceed eastward and take station off the coast of Lebanon to conduct an evacuation of noncombatant civilians. PONCE was designated alternate evacuee transport and prepared to receive up to three hundred evacuees. PONCE'S services, however, were not directly utilized. All evacuees were removed from Beirut on 27 July by the USS CORONADO and transported by that ship to Athens, Greece. For their participation in the second non-combatant evacuation from Beirut, the units of Task Force 61 were commended by the President, the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Chief of Naval Operations.

Departing Lebanese waters, the ships of Task Force 61 stopped briefly at Souda Bay, Crete, before proceeding to assigned liberty ports. PONCE called at Siracuse, Sicily, for a routine port visit from 31 July to 13 August.

Sortieing from Sicily, Task Force 61 returned to Greek waters to conduct amphibious training exercises at Vatika on the south coast from 19 to 22 August. Departing Vatika, PONCE made her way to Naples, Italy for a tender availability with USS PUGET SOUND from 24 August through 10 September. Sailing from Naples on the 10th, PONCE was ordered to Toulon, France, to continue her maintenance and upkeep at the Naval shipyard located in that port. Toulon was also the setting for a change of command ceremony in which Captain James R. ALLINGHAM, U.S. Navy, relieved Captain Paul J. MULLOY, U.S. Navy, as Commanding Officer of USS PONCE on 16 September.

Leaving Toulon on the 21st of September, PONCE returned to Naples arriving there on the 23rd to participate in the planning phase of Display Determination, a major NATO Naval exercise spanning the entire Mediterranean. Task Force 61 departed Naples on the 25th of September for Capo Teulada, Sardinia, to conduct a rehearsal of the amphibious assault phase of Display

Determination. Upon completion of the rehearsal on 27 September, the force continued west to Rota, Spain, where the exercise was to begin.

On 2 October, Task Force 61 left Rota for a rendezvous with a convoy of merchant ships east of the Strait of Gibraltar. Escort across the Mediterranean was provided by U.S., British, French and Italian Naval Forces. Portuguese ships participated as escorts in the western approaches to the Strait of Gibraltar.

Detaching from the main force, Task Force 61, with Italian amphibious forces in company, steamed up the west coast of Italy to execute the amphibious assault portion of Display Determination. Arriving at Pian di Spille, Italy, on 8 October, a landing was conducted under the observation of General Alexander Haig, U.S. Army, Supreme Allied Commander Europe, and other dignitaries both ashore and afloat. Among the NATO officials embarked in USS PONCE at this time were the Commander Naval Forces Southern Europe, Admiral Luigi Tamasuolo, Italian Navy; Vice Admiral Silva Horta, Vice Chief, Naval Staff, Portuguese Navy; and Ambassador Catalano ~~di~~ Melilli, Italian Permanent Representative to NATO.

Completion of Exercise Display Determination found PONCE in Naples once more for another tender availability with the PUGET SOUND. PONCE departed Naples on 20 October to carry out the last amphibious exercise of the deployment at Vatika, Greece. Weighing anchor at Vatika on 27 October, PONCE was routed to Genoa, Italy, for a two week port visit. While in Genoa, major propulsion plant repairs ~~were~~ conducted with the assistance of U.S. contractor personnel and the C.N.R. shipyard. The last port call of the deployment was made at Rota, Spain, where turnover was conducted with the units of ~~MARG~~ 1-77. Upon completion of the turnover and desrail operations, PONCE and the other ships that had constituted task force 61 from June to November 1976 departed Rota for the return transit to the United States as Task Unit 22.2.8.

In conjunction with the transit home, PONCE was assigned the mission of transporting two Puma helicopters and their crews from Lagos Bay, Portugal, to Lajes Field in the Azores. The two helicopters deck loaded on PONCE were the first Portuguese Air Force aircraft ever deployed to the Azores. They comprised the nucleus of a newly established unit, the 42nd Squadron, Portuguese Air Force.

Another task assigned the ships of Task Unit 22.2.8 on their North Atlantic transit was a Polymode Survey for the Office of Naval Research. The objective of this oceanographic research was to collect sea temperature data along a specified swath of ocean to confirm the existence of cold water eddies that affect sound propagation in the ocean.

Completion of the North Atlantic transit and the offloading of embarked Marine Units at Morehead City, North Carolina, was followed by PONCE'S return to her homeport of Norfolk. The remainder of the year was spent in a leave and upkeep status at Norfolk Naval Station.