



**DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY**

USS WHIDBEY ISLAND (LSD 41) ✓  
FPO NEW YORK 09591-1729

IN REPLY REFER TO:

5720

Ser LSD41/503  
09 Nov 87

From: Commanding Officer, USS WHIDBEY ISLAND (LSD 41)  
To: Director, Naval History (OP-09BH)

Subj: 1986 SHIP'S HISTORY

Ref: (a) OPNAVINST 5720.12C

Encl: (1) Command History for 1986

1. In accordance with requirements set forth in reference (a), enclosure (1) is submitted for the period 1 Jan 1986 to 31 December 1986.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "G. S. Holder".

G. S. HOLDER

## COMMAND HISTORY 1986

### JANUARY

USS WHIDBEY ISLAND (LSD-41) started 1986 moored to N.E. Floating Pier, Metro Machine Shipyard, Norfolk, VA in company with USS Charleston, USS Sylvania, USS Spartanburg County and USS Truett. The first two weeks of January were spent in Metro Machine Shipyard conducting PSA work and crew training. The crew conducted extensive training in preparation for drydocking that commenced on the 15th of January. The days prior to the 15th were spent catching up with crew medical needs including audiograms and dental appointments. Training specialized in electrical safety, General DC, drydock safety and in-rate training. At 0730, 15 January, USS Whidbey Island was underway for drydocking for an underwater hull inspection and repairs following Shock Trials. The movement from N.E. Floating Pier to Metro floating drydock was conducted with only the ship's generators running; motive power being supplied by tugboats. Once in drydock, the hull inspection commenced. The hull inspection confirmed various damage from the Shock Test: Dishing was discovered in the bulbous bow, the most serious damage. The 16th and 17th of January were filled with training and progress meetings. 17 January marked 50% completion for all Metro jobs. Whidbey Island spent the remainder of the month of January in dry dock. Major jobs accomplished during dry dock were hull inspection, sand blasting, shafting and propeller inspection and hull painting. Daily work in dry dock was complicated due to low temperatures which formed ice on the drydock and caused loss of firemain pressure on numerous occasions. Painting of the hull was also postponed due to low temperatures and high humidity. On 27 January, a Technical Aviation Assist Team arrived for a week long visit to inspect and assess the aviation readiness of the ship. Areas covered in the inspection included flight deck material condition, fueling system integrity, crew training and PSA progress. The month of January came to a close amid a haze of sand blasting grit and a crew working hard to finish PSA on time.

## FEBRUARY

February commenced with USS Whidbey Island in drydock at Metro Machine Shipyard. Undocking of the ship was in question due to weather conditions precluding the painting of the hull. FCCS(SW) [REDACTED] became the first person on USS Whidbey Island to become ESWS qualified. The first four days of February were spent speculating about hull painting in order to undock. On 5 February a Communications Assistance Team arrived for intensive RM training; plans also commenced for PHIBREFTRA agendas. February 6 was composed of meetings on combat systems progress and fast cruise agendas. Ballast and Fuel tanks were completed and closed out on February 7. On 10 February the ship marked its first birthday and completed one year in commissioned service; ceremonies were conducted on the messdecks including cutting a birthday cake. HTC [REDACTED] became the second member of Whidbey Island crew to be ESWS qualified. The remainder of the week of 10-17 February was spent training, loading stores and keeping an eye on the weather to allow painting of the hull. Painting of the hull was completed over the weekend in order to allow undocking on the morning of 17 February. The ship was floated and towed by tugs to the west slip of Metro Machine Shipyard. With the ship back in the water, the Aviation Certification commenced. Aviation Certification continued through the week of 17-21 February with the crew also making preparations for dock trials, fast cruise and general quarters on 21 February. The weekend of 22-23 February was spent making final equipment checks and secure for sea reports. On Sunday, 23 February, the underway check sheet was started. Monday morning, 24 February, USS Whidbey Island was underway from Metro Machine Shipyard under her own power to commence sea trials after a Post Shakedown Availability with 42 civilian technical representatives embarked. Whidbey Island proceeded directly from Metro to sea to commence main engine break-in on the 24th. The 25th of February was spent calibrating radars, CIWS tracking, countermeasure washdown checks, abandon ship drills and daily GTMO training. Tuesday, February 26 marked the first underway general quarters for the crew in 3 months. On the night of February 26, Engineering commenced a four hour full power run. Underway training continued on the 27th; however, problems developed during the final hour of the full power run with reduction bearing temperatures rising. The full power run was discontinued on the 27th to be re-evaluated by Colt, Lockheed and Metro Technical representatives. On the afternoon of February 27, Whidbey Island anchored at LA-1 and tested the ballast gear and anchoring equipment. Upon getting underway from anchorage Whidbey Island moored at Quaywall East, NAB Little Creek VA on the afternoon of 27 February 1986. The last day of February was spent reviewing sea trials data and retrieving vehicles from Metro Shipyard.

## MARCH

The first two days in March were spent conducting basic house cleaning aboard Whidbey Island. Monday, March 3rd started with EOSS Configuration Checks to verify changes made by the shipyard to various pieces of machinery. EOSS Checks continued all week. Deck force commenced a week long ship paint out. The inport period of 3-9 March was highlighted by a Postal Assist Visit, JP5 fuel onload, lube oil onload, berth shifting, ammo onload, Medical Assist Visit and a fuel demonstration for the final section of Aviation Certification. COMPHIBGRU TWO visited the ship on Thursday, March 6. Following the inport week, 10 March marked the start of more underway time for Whidbey Island. Monday's underway period in the VACAPES OPAREA was filled with training which included low visibility runs, radar calibration, CIWS tracking exercises, general quarters, ESWS training and a NBC/NUDET exercise. Tuesday, March 11th moved into Engineering BECCES, UNREP with USS Savannah and Casualty Power training. Wednesday, March 12, Whidbey Island performed an UNREP evolution with USS Dahlgren and conducted BECCES. 13 March, Whidbey Island conducted well deck and helo operations in the vicinity of LA-4. 14 March, Whidbey Island concluded BECCES and well deck operations and proceeded into port at Little Creek, VA. Saturday and Sunday (March 15-16) were days spent giving the crew a well-deserved rest. March 17-21 was spent inport Little Creek planning to deperm, receive a Food Service Assist, refuel, and conduct TRE-Review and shipboard training. 22-23 March were days used to make last minute plans for deperming. Monday, 24 March, Whidbey Island was underway for the Deperming Crib. Deperming was a very delicate operation conducted from 24-28 March involving the whole crew to pull very heavy electrical cables up and around the ship. The ship was then charged with electricity in order to reduce the ship's magnetic signature. Later, there was general agreement that the job was "professionally done". 28 March, the ship left the Deperming Crib on the Elizabeth River and returned to NAB Little Creek. Friday, March 29, was spent retrieving cars from the Scope Center and reenlisting EMI [REDACTED]. March 29-30 were spent as well-deserved days of rest for Easter. March came to a close with the SMI Visit, ammo onload and security overview.

## APRIL

The first week of April began with a busy workload with the Training Readiness Examination, Postal Inspection continuing and audiograms. The TRE only lasted two days. April 1-2 attested to the ship's outstanding material and administrative condition of readiness. PHIBTRE commenced on 3-4 April with outstanding results. Whidbey Island's weight room was officially opened for crew usage on 4 April following a Metro Shipyard overhaul of the ship's Brig. The week of 7-10 April was spent preparing for Panama City which involved the following: LCAC instrumentation onload, onload Marine vehicles and mass casualty briefs. GTMO preps were also conducted by the CPR-10 ERAT reviewing ECCTT and DCTT members. With all instrumentation and Marine vehicles aboard, Whidbey Island left NAB Little Creek on 11 April in transit to Panama City for LCAC Operations. 11 April was also used to train in piloting by gyro, low visibility and flight operations for personnel transfer. Whidbey Island transited from Little Creek to Panama City from 11 April to 15 April and conducted numerous drills and training to include: general quarters, man overboard, abandon ship, emergency destruction, communication drills, at sea fire drills, PUBEXS, BECCES, EMCON and in-rate training. COLT Tech Reps worked round the clock in balancing 1A and 1B main propulsion diesel engines. 15 April brought Whidbey Island navigating the tortuous channel in St. Andrews Bay to arrive at the Port of Panama City south end West Quaywall. 15 April also commenced CRAMLL loadout. Whidbey Island spent 15-20 April inport Panama City conducting numerous LCAC/LSD41 interface meetings, fire and security alert drills and refueled 16 April. The crew enjoyed very good liberty during this port period. On 21 April, Whidbey Island got underway and went to anchorage in St. Andrews Bay. While at anchorage, the following exercises were conducted: LCAC alongside moored portside/starboard, LCAC crew training, alongside refueling starboard and Class B fire drills. The morning of 22 April was spent shifting anchorages in the vicinity of "SA" buoy to conduct LCAC operations. Following anchorage, the ship and LCAC proceeded to sea for day and night LCAC operations. On the night of 22 April and the morning of 23 April, the time was used to continue balancing 2A and 2B main propulsion diesel engines. LCAC operations on 23 April included two craft multi-leg missions associated with loading and unloading combat cargo serials. The ship conducted load balancing, BECCES, GTMO lectures, and navigational drills in the vicinity of Santa Rosa Island. On 24 April, an LCAC conducted one positive control double pump and two multi-LCAC sorties. LCACs were refueled both hot and cold. LCAC missions continued through 26 April with the ship training for GTMO. The ship proceeded into port on the afternoon of 26 April to conduct drills at anchorage (St. Andrews Bay). Whidbey Island on the morning of 28 April transited to sea in order to conduct LCAC missions. LCAC missions included both positive control and EMCON runs, while the ship continued to prepare for GTMO. LCAC-1 suffered damage to its

starboard bow thruster. LCAC operations on 29 April had to be conducted with only LCAC-2; however, LCAC-2 suffered a similar casualty to its port bow thruster and secured from missions. LCAC-1 continued operations after repairs on the afternoon of 29 April. LCAC-1 and LCAC-2 were both operational for multi-run missions on 30 April. Both positive control and EMCON runs were accomplished.

April came to a close with LSD-41 and LCAC-1 and LCAC-2 making naval history establishing new tactics in amphibious warfare.

## MAY

The month of May opens with Whidbey Island and LCACs embarked steaming in the Gulf of Mexico in the vicinity of Santa Rosa Island. Thursday morning (May 1) was spent conducting double LCAC operations while the afternoon was used for LCAC maintenance and ship training. Boiler problems began to plague the ship causing fresh water shortages to the crew. LCAC operations and ship training continued at a hectic pace through 8 May. The LCAC was being evaluated as part of the third phase of operational test and the ship was constantly gearing up for REFTRA in GTMO. Part of the OT-III for LCAC involved a dignitary visit on 5 May by VADM Rowden, RADM Parker, RADM Fiske and associated staffs. While most of the attention was focused on the LCAC at this time, the ship was continuing to borescope and balance the main engines and trying to fix finicky boilers. On the morning of May 9th, Whidbey Island pulled back into St. Andrews Bay and anchored to take on fuel; both LCACs returned to NCSC. Whidbey Island stayed at anchorage through May 11 to conduct a DMSR and took on stores. On Monday, May 12, Whidbey Island shifted anchorages and continued training. May 13 brought Whidbey Island back to sea to continue the full power run and load balancing of engines, which lasted two days upon which time Whidbey Island returned to port for two days. May 16, Whidbey Island was underway for GTMO Cuba. The transit lasted three days and was filled with training and well deck softball. May 19, Whidbey Island arrived at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba for a month long refresher training. The first 5 days of REFTRA were packed with exercises including: engineering, communications, damage control, operations and maneuvering. After an arduous week Whidbey Island departed Cuba with 300 dependents for a port call to Ocho Rios, Jamaica on 23 May 1986. On the morning of May 24, Whidbey Island approached the "Pearl of the Caribbean": Ocho Rios, Jamaica. With a crew excited at the first "real" liberty port in the history of the ship, Whidbey Island made a grand approach to James Bond pier at the bauxite terminal of Ocho Rios. Two and a half days of luscious liberty all but dispoiled any notion of a bad time in Ocho Rios. However, the afternoon of the 26th was business as usual for Whidbey Island getting underway to return to Cuba and continuing REFTRA. The last days of May were spent continuing REFTRA and training heavily.

## JUNE

The first two days of June were spent in port GTMO. Monday morning (June 3) - Whidbey Island commenced turning to while underway in the West OPAREA conducting general quarters. In the afternoon the crew conducted D.C. inport drills. Drills on the 4th consisted of towing and being towed, CIWS PAC-firing and precision anchorings and moorings. Thursday (June 5) was a full day of underway BECCES in the morning and afternoon followed by CON-1-EX on Friday. The weekend was used as a planning and inport training period. Following a short rest, Monday rolled around for another week of BECCES, general quarters, navigation and D.C. inport drills. The highlights of the week of 10-15 June included 100% for CIC on low visibility, 96 ORE grade for at sea fire party and a grade of 97 for the flightdeck crash and rescue team. Throughout the week Engineering's three sections were accomplishing many casualty control drills. On the island of Cuba, heavy rainfall was being experienced canceling outside recreational events. The weekend of 14-15 June was mostly rainy and dreary; casualty power drills were conducted. The week of 16-20 June marked the final and most intense week of exercises for the crew. GTMO important events included: final battle problems, final Yoke and Zebra checks, final BECCES session and, most of all, a crew that has been "to hell and back pulling together as a truly professional and fighting team". June 21-22, Whidbey Island transited back to Panama City and moored alongside Dyer's Pier where the crew enjoyed a much deserved week of liberty.



## JULY

The beginning of July saw USS WHIDBEY ISLAND transiting back to its homeport for the holiday weekend. After temporarily anchoring off Morehead City and offloading the LCAC Support Equipment on July 2, and offloading the LCU contingent onboard on July 3 in Little Creek, Whidbey Island arrived pierside at the Quaywall East in NAB Little Creek, VA. Liberty call went down shortly thereafter and two days of holiday routine were enjoyed by all. The visions of a spectacular fireworks show celebrating the 200th birthday of the Statue of Liberty faded quickly away as Monday appeared bringing with it a COMPHIBRON TEN awards ceremony and all the work associated with Pre-OPPE training and PHIBREFTRA workups. On July 10, Whidbey Island got underway to anchorage LA-1 to concentrate on OPPE training and PHIBREFTRA training. The majority of the training for OPPE consisted of repeated drills such as BECCES, main space fire drills, Engineering Operative Procedures, Class Charlie fire drills in SSDGs, SSDG Governor failure and more. Workups for Amphibious Refresher Training (PHIBREFTRA) consisted of wet well operations, handling of the boats with the sixty ton crane and helo operations which, on July 14, included sixty touch-and-go's and forty simulated vertical replenishments resulting in a Selex grade of 91%. Rehearsals for OPPE were conducted on July 16-17 while LSD-41 was still at anchor. On July 18, the crew received a welcomed break as the ship pulled along pierside once again to enjoy the weekend. A court martial trial on 25 July resulted in YN3 [REDACTED] being sentenced to reduction to E-1, forfeiture of two-thirds of total payment for three months and three months hard labor for three counts of unauthorized absences. After a week in port to onload stores and some last minute maintenance and preparations, the ship left for Onslow Bay on July 29. On July 30 PHIBREFTRA commenced while anchored in the vicinity of Onslow Bay. A day of helicopter operations including six drills graded as 100% proved to be a very positive start for Whidbey Island. On 31 July, Whidbey Island anchored at LA-7 to continue PHIBREFTRA. July came to an end in the blurr of a myriad of PHIBREFTRA drills testing every aspect of the amphibious assault-from piloting by gyro and CIC assisting in piloting to precision anchorage, wet well operations and helicopter operations.

## AUGUST

The month of August began continuing PHIBREFTRA at anchorage LA-7. After one more day of ship to shore movements, an LCU sterngate marriage on August 1 aided an underway launch and recovery of LCU's on August 2. PHIBREFTRA came to a close on August 3, and later on that afternoon, Whidbey Island was home once more in Little Creek, moored at Quaywall East after an outstanding display of its amphibious abilities. Whidbey Island now began the final preparations for a two month NATO Northern Europe Amphibious Exercise, code name "Northern Wedding '86". Her preparations included a degaussing run on 4 August and an ammunition onload on 6 August. Friday, 8 August saw the families of the crew onboard for a one day dependents cruise. The one day cruise was also used to test antenna radiation patterns off Chesapeake Bay. On 13 August, Whidbey Island departed for Northern Wedding '86 enroute to temporarily anchor at LA-5 to onload ACU Two's, two LCU's and two LCM-8's. Whidbey Island then transited to Morehead City to embark Marines. The crew more than doubled from 300 to almost 700 personnel. On 14 August, two LARC's and 13 LVT's were embarked. With the onload of the men and materials necessary for "Northern Wedding '86" completed, the ship began her transit across the Atlantic heading north. The transit began with the indoctrination of the Whidbey Island Marines and sailors with man overboard drills and abandon ship drills in order to familiarize the newly embarked crew with the ship. For the Engineering Department, BECCES, often two a day, were conducted throughout the transit across the Atlantic. On August 16, the ship had to temporarily head closer to the coastline off Cape Cod in range of a Coast Guard helo as SK1 [REDACTED] had to be medevaced off. The ship had to spend the next two days at speeds in excess of twenty knots in order to catch up with the formation. As Whidbey Island steamed fiercely towards Lofotens, Norway, Boreas Rex, Ruler of the Northwind, patiently awaited her arrival into the Arctic Circle. King Rex's waiting was over on the morning of August 29 as Whidbey Island sailed into the Arctic Circle - longitude 009 27'E with her crew standing proudly on her deck in their skivies and boots. Not only did the entire crew get their noses painted blue by either the oldest or youngest Marine or Navy personnel onboard, but also the bullnose of the ship was painted blue to signify its first entrance into the Arctic Circle and its first participation in the "Bluenose Ceremony". Later on in the afternoon, the ship rendezvoused with USS SAIPAN, USS SUMTER and USS RALEIGH. Two days of helicopter operations brought to close another month that started in steamy Little Creek and ended somewhere just south of the frigid Arctic Circle near Norway.

## SEPTEMBER

The month of September not only showed how well the Blue and Green team on Whidbey Island worked together, but also how well the team onboard worked with over seventy different ships from six countries including England, Italy, Norway, West Germany and others. The operation strengthened NATO alliances and gave all countries involved confidence in the ability of the NATO organized amphibious assault. A practice assault with LVT's on 1 September got the month off to a good amphibious start. After a same day launch and recovery, Whidbey Island was underway for Cape Wrath, Scotland. While steaming through beautiful fjords and the like, there was a Norwegian officer tour and an unrep on September 6. In addition, there were BECCes and other preparations for Bold Guard '86, which was the actual main assault. As a result, the entire crew stayed very busy. A pre-assault SEMPER FI surf-n-turf dinner on 7 September and a pre-assault brief on 8 September finalized preparations for the NATO attack. 9 September started early as the ballast detail and special sea and anchor detail were stationed at 0345 and 0400 respectively to prepare for wet well operations. H-hour was soon at hand as southern Norway was assaulted utilizing 13 LVT's, 2 LCM8's, 2 LCU's, 2 LARC's from Whidbey Island and countless amphibious crafts from several other ships. On September 12, the ship went to general quarters and set Circle William as an "enemy" helicopter dropped gas; the crew donned their MK V gas masks to defend themselves. Everyone survived the attack and the CBR drill was considered a success. There were several other drills including "collision ECHO- ZULU drill" and well deck operations for backload purposes. On 15-16 September, RADM Fogarty, COMPHIBGRU TWO, was onboard and participated in the anchor pinning ceremony for the four newly initiated Chief Petty Officers onboard: ENC [REDACTED], SMC [REDACTED], EMC [REDACTED] and OSC [REDACTED]. Backload was completed on 16 September and Whidbey Island transited to Jutland and launched the final assault on 18 September. On 19 September, Northern Wedding '86 came to a close with the exception of men and materials still needed to be backloaded. After over a month of being underway, the crew was ready for her first European liberty port while the Marines were ashore conducting Bold Guard '86. From 20 September to 27 September, Kiel, West Germany hosted the crew with friendliness, tours, good prices and great times. COMNAVBASE at Kiel hosted a beer call at the Officers Club in addition to the reception given by the Town Hall. The good times could not last forever and the ship continued backloading from 26-30 September in the Eckernfjord, Putlos and Kiel. The Whidbey Island Team performed superbly and demonstrated her motto: "First in Her Class, First Always" and received much recognition including a WELL DONE from VADM J. P. RASMUSSEN, Commander, Naval Forces BALTIC. Whidbey Island was soon on her way to her second port visit in Copenhagen.

## OCTOBER

With Northern Wedding over and all the backloading completed, Whidbey Island pulled into Copenhagen, Denmark on 1 October for six more days of another fabulous liberty port. Copenhagen combines the characteristics of both Scandinavian and Northern European cities and the people were as friendly as the city was beautiful. Many of the crewmembers took advantage of the opportunities to ride their bicycles or stroll through the gardens and parks. Southern Wedding '86, the trip home, began on the morning of 6 October as Whidbey Island left the capital city of Denmark on October 8. The ship rendezvoused with six other ships in Task Unit 22.1.2 for the trip home. The transit home provided time for DIVTACS, BECCES and BDCE'S. On 10 October, Whidbey Island's new Executive Officer, LCDR W. J. Ungvarsky arrived by helicopter. Later on that evening, LT [REDACTED] became the first officer to be SWO qualified onboard Whidbey Island. COMPHIBRON FOUR, Commodore Quartermaster, visited the ship on 14 and 16 October. On 16 October, LCDR Ungvarsky, a 1973 graduate of the Navy Academy from Norvelt, PA, assumed his position relieving LCDR D. C. Rollins as Executive Officer. The same helicopter that brought Commodore Conklin (COMPHIBRON TEN) and the ERAT team on the following day left with Whidbey Island's original Executive Officer, LCDR D. C. Rollins. The ship was anchored in Onslow Bay, NC on October 19 as the LCU's, LCM-8's and LVT's were launched, offloading embarked Marines and equipment. Later on that day, pierside in Morehead City, Tigers and Ney Inspectors embarked. RADM Bennett flew out by helicopter to visit and observed the boat operations on the morning of October 20 as Whidbey Island disembarked ACU TWO and BMU TWO as the ship steamed into Chesapeake Bay. Later on the same day, the ship was pierside at Quaywall East and shortly thereafter liberty commenced. Three days of "duty section only" began as crewmembers caught up on two months of being away from their family and friends. The rest of the month was filled with preparations for the many inspections following Whidbey Island's first major deployment. The days were long as Pre-SMI Assist Teams and Aviation Assist Teams were onboard. The Conveyor Improvement Program also took place from October 28-31. October closed out with much preparation for OPPE scheduled in November.

## NOVEMBER

While the month of November saw USS WHIDBEY ISLAND inport the majority of the time, the days were by no means easy. The first week of November from the 3rd to the 7th was the week for CSRR, COMBAT SYSTEMS READINESS REVIEW, with MOBILE TECHNICAL UNIT 2 onboard. On Monday, HT2 [REDACTED] earned his ESWs qualification. On Wednesday, Fleet Inspector General RADM Butts and Deputy COMNAVSURFLANT RADM Bennett paid a visit to USS WHIDBEY ISLAND to check out her readiness for OPPE preparation. Work with CSRR was completed; the following week included the final preparations for the SMI, with the SMI taking place 12-13 November. The Supply Department did very well in the inspection and made the entire crew proud. Even though 11 November was a holiday in order to celebrate Veterans Day, the Engineering Department did not slow down and had a Main Space Fire Drill preparing for OPPE. On Monday, 17 November, the Mobile Training Team, (MTT), and Commodore Conklin, COMPHIBRON TEN, and his Engineering Readiness Assistance Team were onboard as the Whidbey Island Team got underway for four days of OPPE Preps at sea. The four days at sea also gave the Medical Department a chance to immunize the crew. After a Thursday return and the departure of the two Pre-OPPE Assist Teams, RADM Fogarty, COMPHIBGRU TWO visited the ship as OPPE appeared to be around the corner. During the remainder of the month, the Chief Engineer, LT [REDACTED] was relieved because the ship was still not ready for OPPE. As a result, the Ship's Executive Officer, LCDR W. J. Ungvarsky, took over as Chief Engineer while Commander J. J. Adams, COMPHIBRON TEN CSO, arrived onboard and assumed the position as Executive Officer. This did not, however, dampen the Thanksgiving Day break including the 25 November "Miller Time - Pizza and Beverage Party" held on the Quay Wall. On 28 November an onload commenced including Seals equipment for their special boat for an upcoming MARG 2-87. The month ended with two days of weekend Holiday routine, visions of Turkey and dressing and of getting underway on Monday, December 1.

## DECEMBER

The month of December may be viewed by many as a month filled with Yuletide spirits, New Year's resolutions and relaxing pleasures of Christmas/New Year vacations. For Whidbey Island, December was more than just a month filled with thirty-one days, December meant many demanding operations, a strenuous OPPE and a great deal of preparation for the six month MED deployment promulgated for the upcoming year. Although the holiday spirit was in the air around the ship, there was plenty of work to do. The first week of December began with initial evolutions of MARG Workups. On 2 December, Whidbey Island scheduled to get underway to Naval Weapons Station, Yorktown, Virginia for an ammunition onload for MARG 2-87 was delayed due to high winds in the vicinity of Coleman Bridge which prevented the bridge from being opened. Thus, the ammunition onload was rescheduled for 9 January 1987. On 3 December, the ship got underway to LA-1 to embark 2-LCM8's, 2-LCU's and 2-CWTB's. As a result of excellent communications during this embarkation evolution, the Radio/CIC personnel received a BZ from COMPHIBRON FOUR. Whidbey Island conducted OPPE preps while steaming independently to Morehead City to commence embarkation of the Marines. After arriving in Morehead City on 5 December, Whidbey Island started a craft launch evolution which included launches of all boats, LARC's, LCPL's, the SEAL Team and Force RECON. Meanwhile, the Engineering Department continued preparation for the upcoming OPPE. The ship's schedule was clustered with OPPE preparations, mainly BECCES from 8 December until OPPE which occurred 18-19 December. The MTT and COMPHIBRON TEN embarked in order to inspect the Engineers on 13 December. While the Engineering Department scrambled to the normal high anxieties created by the OPPE, the remainder of the crew concentrated most of its efforts to the amphibious mission of Whidbey Island. The ship executed a night assault on 8 December and backloading on 9 December. There was also a large emphasis on normal training such as damage control, JINTACCS and ESWS. A break in the heavy schedule came on 14 December - payday. Payday was highlighted by Pizza Night on the Messdecks. The 15th meant back to work and marked the beginning of SOCEX. On 18 December, OPPE commenced. To carry out the OPPE, the ship embarked COMPHIBGRU TWO and the PROPULSION EXAMINATING BOARD. And on 19 December with the leadership of Whidbey Island's CHENG, LCDR Ungvarsky, and MPA, LT [REDACTED], the Whidbey Island successfully passed OPPE. After completing OPPE to the examining teams' satisfaction, the crew, especially the engineers, enjoyed a well deserved Christmas/New Years holiday. 1986 ended with a strong commitment to the ship's engineering readiness and mission capability; January 1987 and the New Year would mean a six month deployment in the Mediterranean. Thus, the hard work of December 1986 only marked the end of the beginning.