



**DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY**  
USS WHIDBEY ISLAND (LSD 41)  
FPO AE 09591-1729

IN REPLY REFER TO:

1000  
Ser LSD41/056  
22 FEB 04

From: COMMANDING OFFICER, USS WHIDBEY ISLAND (LSD 41)  
To: Director, Naval Historical Center, 805 Kidder Breese  
Street SE Washington Navy Yard, DC 20374-5059

Subj: USS WHIDBEY ISLAND (LSD-41) 2003 COMMAND HISTORY

Ref: (a) OPNAVINST 5750.12H

1. Enclosed is the command history for USS WHIDBEY ISLAND (LSD-41), prepared and submitted in accordance with reference (a).

  
A. L. WOODS

**2003  
COMMAND HISTORY**

**FOR**

**USS WHIDBEY ISLAND  
(LSD-41)**

**Commander Alphonso L. Woods, Commanding Officer**

**Submitted February 23, 2003**

## COMMAND COMPOSITION AND ORGANIZATION

USS WHIDBEY ISLAND (LSD 41) carries out its mission conducting prompt and sustained combat operations at sea, worldwide, in support of national policy.

Designed, built and manned to carry maneuver-warfare vehicles and “over-the-horizon” amphibious assault vehicles, WHIDBEY ISLAND – home ported at Little Creek Amphibious Base, Va., and under the command of Commander, Amphibious Group TWO – can carry four landing craft air cushions (LCAC) or thirty-six amphibious assault vehicles (AAV) in its floodable well.

During assaults, WHIDBEY ISLAND serves as primary control ship and provides a boat haven with docking, repair and refueling services to landing craft and boats, thereby making it ideally suited to support our Navy’s foremost strike asset, the U.S. Marine.

The WHIDBEY ISLAND-class introduces to the Fleet significant improvements in communications, combat systems, 20- and 60-ton cranes, expanded repair shops, two helicopter landing spots, complete medical facilities, automated computer-based logistics support and an impressive engineering plant, making it capable of self-sufficient operations. Equally as effective in peacetime as in wartime, the well-suited WHIDBEY ISLAND can carry out a variety of humanitarian missions to effect of evacuations and disaster relief.

Designed with the primary missions of amphibious warfare, mobility, command and control and anti-air warfare in mind, WHIDBEY ISLAND supports special warfare, fleet-support operations (refueling other ships), non-combatant operations, ocean surveillance and electronic warfare. Clearly a multi-mission capable ship, WHIDBEY ISLAND’s crew, embarked Marines and detachments must be and are multi-talented. Representing almost every state in the Union, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands and the Philippines, everyone aboard is privileged and proud to serve aboard USS WHIDBEY ISLAND (LSD 41).

## CHRONOLOGY

1 January	Moored at NORSHIPCO, Norfolk, VA
4 April	Berth-shift from NORSHIPCO to NAB Little Creek
9 – 12 May	Sea Trials
4 – 8 June	Main Propulsion Diesel Engine Run-ins
12 – 15 June	Main Propulsion Diesel Engine Run-ins
11 – 15 August	Command Assessment of Readiness and Training (CART)II
18 – 21 August	Engineering / Deck Tailored Ship's Training Availability (TSTA)
2 – 4 September	Engineering TSTA
15 – 16 September	Berth-shift to Norfolk Naval Shipyard
22 September	Berth-shift to NAB Little Creek
5 October	Berth-shift to Naval Station Norfolk
8 – 17 October	Amphibious Squadron/Marine Expeditionary Unit Integration (PMINT)
20 – 24 October	Engineering TSTA
27 – 31 October	Engineering TSTA
3 – 7 November	Engineering/Combat Systems/Deck TSTA
17 – 23 November	Engineering TSTA
1 – 23 December	Expeditionary Strike Group Exercise (ESGEX)
15 December	Engineering Underway Demonstration (UD)
22 December	Final Evaluation Problem (FEP)

## NARRATIVE

Whidbey Island brought in 2003 pier-side at Norfolk Shipbuilding and Dry-dock Corporation (NorShipCo) in the middle of what would be a nine-month planned maintenance availability period. During this time all four main propulsion diesel engines, all four ships service diesel engines, twenty ballast tanks, and both boilers were overhauled. Repairs were effected to the ship's stern-gate, boat davit, and 60-ton crane. The majority of the well deck was re-planked, and the entire flight deck was stripped and recovered with non-skid. Several communications upgrades were completed, including HYDRA, an internal communications system that would prove to be extremely useful in coordinating the ship's day-to-day evolutions.

In a ceremony at NorShipCo on February 7<sup>th</sup>, Commander Mark R. Hoyle was relieved by Commander Alphonso Woods as Commanding Officer of USS Whidbey Island. Commander Woods continued preparing the crew and the ship for the inevitable time Whidbey Island would once again put Marines on the beach. With the majority of the repairs and upgrades complete, Whidbey Island was towed down the Elizabeth River on April 4<sup>th</sup> and docked in her homeport, Naval Amphibious Base, Little Creek (NABLC). Here, repairs and upgrades continued until the ship was ready for Sea Trials and further training. A total of 33 million dollars was spent making Whidbey Island ready for continued operations at sea.

On May 9<sup>th</sup>, Whidbey Island was towed out to sea for sea trials. Host to many NorShipCo workers and subject matter experts in a variety of fields, Whidbey Island was underway on her own power for the first time in nine months. After a short shakedown to determine what was left to repair, she returned to port on the 12<sup>th</sup> of May. For the next few weeks, improvements continued.

From June 4<sup>th</sup> to June 8<sup>th</sup> and from June 12<sup>th</sup> to June 15<sup>th</sup>, Whidbey Island was once again at sea. This time, the mission was to accomplish engine run-ins, a controlled process of breaking in the newly rebuilt diesel engines to maximize economy and reliability.

The remainder of June and the month of July were spent continuing maintenance and training the crew for the many upcoming inspections and certifications. The Damage Control Training Team (DCTT), Combat Systems Training Team (CSTT), Engineering Training Team (ETT), Seamanship Training Team (STT), and Medical Training Team (MTT) continued training during this time.

From the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> of August, Whidbey Island's officers and crew proved that their training had not been in vain. Successfully completing CART II, a significant milestone in the ship's inter-deployment training cycle, the Whidbey Island team proved that it was ready for more challenging and advanced training. The following week, from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup>, Whidbey Island was underway for completion of her first Tailored Ship Training Availability (TSTA). During these TSTAs, the engineering, seamanship, damage control, combat system, and medical training teams would be trained and evaluated in respect to their ability to train the crew. The focus this week was ETT, DCTT, and STT. As a part of the STT training, Whidbey Island performed a "dry hook-up" with USNS John Lenthall Jr. (T-AO 189) on the 19<sup>th</sup>. This consisted of making an approach and connecting all lines and hoses with the fleet oiler to practice underway replenishment. Although no fuel was transferred, this evolution proved to be outstanding training for both deck department and bridge watch standers.

USS Whidbey Island was once again underway on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of September for another Engineering TSTA. She stayed underway until the 4<sup>th</sup>, when she returned to Little Creek, VA. With work having been done on Whidbey Island's main engines, she was unable to get underway

in avoidance of an oncoming tropical storm, which would later that month be known as Hurricane Isabel. On the 15<sup>th</sup>, Whidbey Island was towed to Naval Station, Norfolk, and on the 16<sup>th</sup>, she was towed further up the Elizabeth River to Norfolk Naval Shipyard in Portsmouth, Virginia. Here, the ship weathered out the storm and remained until the 22<sup>nd</sup>, when tugs towed Whidbey Island back to her homeport, NABLC.

October proved to be the beginning of an intense period of training as the ship spent a significant period of time at sea in pre-deployment preparations. On the 5<sup>th</sup>, Whidbey Island transited to Naval Station, Norfolk and began a security exercise. As part of the exercise, the simulated Force Protection Level increased, and Whidbey Island was forced to get underway. The 8<sup>th</sup> of September saw USS Whidbey Island transiting outbound to sea for an Amphibious Squadron (PHIBRON)/Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) Integration (PMINT) exercise. This underway proved to be an excellent opportunity for both the Navy and the Marine Corps elements of the newly formed Expeditionary Strike Group (ESG) to familiarize themselves with the other's respective needs and abilities. This gave both the "blue" and "green" teams the opportunity to work together for the first time as an ESG. USS Whidbey Island returned to homeport on the 17<sup>th</sup> and was once again underway on the 20<sup>th</sup> for another Engineering TSTA. She returned on the 24<sup>th</sup>. Yet another Engineering TSTA was completed underway from the 27<sup>th</sup> to the 31<sup>st</sup>.

From November 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup>, another TSTA would take place, but this would include CSTT, STT, and ETT. Further engineering training was accomplished from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

On December 1<sup>st</sup>, Whidbey Island was underway from NABLC in support of the East Coast's first Expeditionary Strike Group Exercise (ESGEX). The following day, Whidbey Island moored in Morehead City, NC to on-load Marines from the 22<sup>nd</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU). Whidbey Island left port that same day and arrived on station in nearby Onslow Bay to conduct amphibious operations until the 6<sup>th</sup>, when she began her transit to the Gulf of Mexico. En-route, the ship conducted an underway replenishment with USNS Arctic (AOE-8) on the 7<sup>th</sup>. In the company of USS Wasp (LHD-1), USS Yorktown (CG-48), USS Leyte Gulf (CG-55), and USS McFaul (DDG-74), Whidbey Island arrived on station in the vicinity of Eglin Air Force Base on the 10<sup>th</sup> of December. This would be the first time such an exercise would be conducted at Eglin AFB, as the previous location, Vieques Island, Puerto Rico was no longer available for such training. Consisting of multiple amphibious raids and assaults, this exercise was a success, as all of the units involved received outstanding training, both as individual units and as an ESG.

In transit to Onslow Bay, Whidbey Island successfully completed the Underway Demonstration, a significant engineering milestone, on the 15<sup>th</sup>. Whidbey Island returned to Morehead City on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December and was underway that afternoon. That same evening, the final milestone of the inter-deployment training cycle, the Final Evaluation Problem (FEP) was completed. Having passed FEP, Whidbey Island proceeded to Little Creek on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. This would begin a short holiday period, which would give the crew a brief respite before continuing the advanced phase training in support of the rapidly approaching deployment, the next calendar year.