

FLEET FOCUS

HSL-37 Sailors deploy to support fleet

By HSL-37 Public Affairs

The "Easyriders" of Helicopter Anti-Submarine Squadron Light Thirty-Seven (HSL 37) sent three detachments to sea in January one on long cruise and two on work-ups. Detachment One left Marine Corps Base Hawaii, Kaneohe Bay with the USS John C. Stennis Battle Group enroute to the Arabian Gulf in early January.

The "Flying Circus", a two plane detachment, is lead by Officer-In-Charge Lt. Cmdr. John McLain. The other five officers and sixteen maintainers have already made port calls in Hong Kong and Singapore with plans to pull into Bahrain soon.

Detachments Three and Seven returned home at the end of February from their work-up periods on board USS Crommelin (FFG 37) and USS Fletcher (DD 992). The dets were supporting exercises with the Abraham Lincoln Battle Group (ALBG). The short cruise allowed the pilots and aircraft maintainers to hone their skills for the upcoming deployment in August.

Det Three flew more than 170 hours during the deployment participating in a number of Under Sea Warfare (USW), Maritime Interdiction Operation (MIO) and Anti-Ship Surveillance and Targeting (ASST) exercise events. Chief Petty Officer Frederick Albios lead an outstanding maintenance support team allowing the Easyrider 55 to stay in the air, where it quickly earned a name for itself as the "go to" bird in the Battle Group. Lt. Cmdr. Chris "Fitz" Fitzgerald detachment OIC led the Detachment's tactical charge. Det Three scored excellent on its only torpedo drop in addition to attaining several other simulated kills for its scorecard. The det was also called upon to perform several medical evacuations and logistics support missions for the battle group. By the end of the five weeks the Det was well trained and ready for anything especially some liberty in San Diego.

Det Seven, also in the ALBG, experienced an especially productive work-up period. With Lt. Cmdr. Woody Danielson at the helm and Senior Chief Petty Officer Robin Noe leading the maintenance effort, aircrew and maintainers alike either received their first taste of the ship or again made the adjustment to life at sea. All the while, training opportunities abounded.

As Danielson so rightly stated, "This stuff is hard."

The press at home guard now continues as Det Seven ramps up for future work-ups.

While being at sea is what makes a Sailor a Sailor the deployed Easyriders were happy to be back in paradise, at least for a couple of months. Det Three and Seven are scheduled to



AW1 Rich Parson photo

An HSL 37 helicopter hosts up some equipment of the deck of the USS Crommelin (FFG 37). HSL 37 sent three detachments to sea in January, one on a long cruise and two on work-ups.

return to battle off the California Coast in May on additional work-ups then again in Hawaii for RIMPAC 2000, a multinational maritime exercise.

USS Port Royal visits Asian ports, enters Arabian Gulf

By Lt. j.g. Robinson

USS PORT ROYAL

USS Port Royal (CG 73) is underway in the Arabian Gulf, having entered the Fifth Fleet Area of Responsibility early morning Saturday, February 26. Port Royal and other John C. Stennis Battlegroup Sailors have just completed three great port visits to South Korea, Hong Kong, and Singapore.

In Pusan, South Korea, Port Royal hosted an important reception for Admiral Kim, Commander Republic of Korea Third Fleet, and Admiral Hoewing, Commander Carrier Group Seven. "I think the reception in Pusan was quite a good experience for both countries involved because it helped us learn a lot about each other's cultures," remarked HSL 37 pilot Lt. j.g. Dave Laspisa.

While in Pusan, twenty-three Port Royal sailors participated in a Community Relations project at Bak-Ae Won Orphanage. From special correspondent Sonar Technician 3rd

Class Sheila Dall: The group headed by Religious Specialist 2nd Class (AW/SW) B.J. Thomas brought bags of clothes and toys. The 87 children immediately scattered and began playing with their toys, some of which they had never seen before. CWO2 (AW/SW) Clifford Jenkins showed a group of kids how to throw a Frisbee. While others rolled down a hill on the skateboards that were donated. Then, most of the volunteers and almost all the children started playing soccer.

Operations Specialist 2nd Class James A Grier said, "I learned a lot about soccer from the kids, their love of the game was evident."

After the game, which the kids won, everyone ate lunch. Port Royal brought bag lunches that were shared. Then the children put on a traditional Korean show playing drums and cymbals. In total Port Royal Sailors spent 8 hours at the orphanage and learned a lot from the kids even with the language barrier.

It was definitely an experience that we will not soon forget. In Hong Kong the Community Relations Volunteers went to Crossroads International and moved pallets of emergency

relief supplies sent throughout the world.

"Hong Kong was a beautiful port," commented OS1(SW) Jay Magers. While in Singapore, Port Royal Sailors did an outstanding job giving a ship tour to the President of the Singapore Chapter of the United States Navy League.

Port Royal Sailors have been really busy this past month training and conducting battlegroup exercises. However, three Sailors achieved significant personal milestones. Hull Technician 2nd Class (SW) Kyle Simmons, Fire Controlman 2nd Class (SW) Cyrinthia Olson, and Electronics Technician 2nd Class (SW) Laura Wood all earned their Enlisted Surface Warfare Specialist qualification. They are the first three to qualify ESWS during WESTPAC 2000.

At present, the air is filled with excitement for Port Royal and the Stennis Battlegroup. The battlegroup will operate in the Arabian Gulf for the next few months.

As OS2 Will Akridge noted, "Everything boils down to the point we're at now; this is what we train for. In the Navy, this is a situation we always need to be ready for."

Thresher-Scorpion disasters results in safer Submarine Navy

By JOCS(SW/AW) Darrell D. Ames

SUBPAC PUBLIC AFFAIRS

The decade from 1960 to 1969, more affectionately referred to as "the 60's," lives on in our psyche, and will go down in memory, as one of the most turbulent eras in our nation's history. "It was an era of change," said folk and pop singer Bob Dylan.

The "times were changing" indeed. It was a decade that included a Presidential assassination, race riots, violent peace demonstrations, war in Southeast Asia, high-profile murders and the height of the Cold War with the Soviet Union. It was also a decade of tragedy for the U.S. Navy's submarine force as two nuclear subs were lost.

April 10, 2000, marks the 37th anniversary of the loss of USS Thresher (SSN 593). On the morning of April 10, 1963, the ship proceeded to conduct sea trials about 200 miles off the coast of Cape Cod. At 9:13 a.m., the USS Skylark (a surface vessel assigned to assist Thresher) received a signal, via underwater telephone, indicating that the submarine was experiencing "minor difficulties, have positive up-angle, attempting to blow."

Shortly afterward, the Skylark received a series of garbled, undecipherable message fragments from the Thresher. At 9:18 a.m., the Skylark's sonar picked up the sounds of the submarine breaking apart. All 129 hands were lost—112 military and 17 civilian technicians.

The submarine community, the Navy and the nation were stunned. Thresher was the best of the newest. The ship was built at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery, Maine and was the first of a new class of submarine, designed for optimum performance of sonar and weapons systems.

Thresher was able to dive deeper and run quieter than other submarine at that time. She was launched on July 9, 1960, and was commissioned by the Navy on August 3, 1961. Two days after the disaster President Kennedy issued Executive Order 11104, ordering U.S. Flags to "be flown at half-staff on all buildings, grounds and naval vessels of the Federal Government in the District of Columbia and throughout the United States and its Territories and possessions," from April 12th to 15th.

To the Navy, the disaster meant more than the loss of 129 crewmembers and civilians. Thresher had been the most advanced submarine in the world, capable of reaching depths and speeds unimaginable a decade before. The

Navy's investigation concluded that while the Thresher was operating at test depth, a leak had developed at a silver-brazed joint in an engine room seawater system, and water from the leak may have short-circuited electrical equipment, causing cascading casualties. The submarine was unable to surface.

Navy officials swore Thresher crewmembers would not die in vain. After the investigation, the Navy embarked on an extensive review of practices and procedures in effect during the Thresher's overhaul. The reviewers determined that existing standards at the time were not followed throughout the re-fit to ensure safe operation of the submarine. Four issues were of particular concern: design, construction, quality assurance and procurement. The lessons learned by the Navy from the Thresher tragedy were to ensure a safer submarine force, but tragedy would strike again on May 22, 1968.

The Scorpion sank in the mid-Atlantic, six months after it received the briefest and cheapest nuclear-powered submarine overhaul in Navy history. The Scorpion departed Norfolk, Va., on Feb. 15, 1968, and was lost at sea 97 days later. Its destruction occurred only five days before its scheduled return to Norfolk. The crew left behind 64 widows and 99 children. Some wives, pregnant at the time, later gave birth, adding to the number of children who lost fathers. The Sailors represented 25 states, Puerto Rico and the Philippines. Of the 12 officers and 87 enlisted men who perished, most were younger than 25. The agony of the families began on May 27, 1968, as they waited dockside in Norfolk, Va., for the Scorpion's scheduled return. When it didn't arrive the families were sent home, only to learn from inquiring news reporters that the submarine was missing.

"I was completely stunned," said Theresa Bishop, wife of Chief Petty Officer Walter Bishop, Scorpion's Chief of the Boat. "It was a cold and rainy day and when the ship was late getting home we were told to go home and wait. I was in the kitchen when my son John came in to tell me there was something on the TV about the Scorpion missing. I went totally numb," she added. Countless night-long vigils ensued at the Bishop house and other crewmembers' families homes until the ship was officially declared "presumed lost at sea" on June 5. The submarine would later be found in mid-October.

After two investigations, the U.S. Navy says it still does not conclusively know what led to the Scorpion's destruction. Scorpion and Thresher are the only two American nuclear-



photo

April 10 marks the 37th anniversary of the loss of USS Thresher (SSN 593). The ship was conducting sea trials about 200 miles off the coast of Cape Cod, Mass. when USS Skylark, a surface vessel assigned to assist Thresher, picked up the sounds of the Thresher breaking apart. All 129 men aboard were lost with the ship.

powered submarines lost in 40 years of nuclear-powered submarine operations and the only submarine mishaps since World War II that caused the loss of all hands.

Heavily publicized by the Navy when the sleek warships were built at the end of the 1950s, the two were launched within seven months of each other. The two boats will forever remain technically linked as casualties of the Cold War.

Thirty-one years have passed since the Scorpion disaster. Because of improvement in submarine design, construction and repair, further disasters have been avoided. Perhaps the most appropriate legacy for Thresher and Scorpion is the fact that being a submariner in the U.S. Navy today is a lot safer than it used to be.

"Some good came out of those tragedies," said Neal Collier, son of Thresher's Engineering Officer, LT Merrill Collier. "My father died on Thresher," added Collier, "but the tragedy had

a positive effect in the submarine program, nuclear power and national defense."

At a memorial ceremony in 1988 in Norfolk, VA., marking the 25th anniversary of the loss of Thresher, Vice Admiral Bruce Demars, the Navy's Chief submarine officer at the time, drew parallels between the loss of both submarines and the lessons learned from both disasters.

"The losses of Thresher and Scorpion initiated fundamental changes in the way we do business...changes in design, construction, inspections, safety checks, tests, and more," said the Admiral. "We have not forgotten the lessons learned. It's a much safer submarine force today. The loss of these two boats and the changes that resulted are part of the history of the submarine force and I think it's important that we keep track of our heritage," he added.

In step with Bob Dylan, "the times were a-changing" in the U.S. submarine force in the 1960s. Changing for the better.