

Port Royal flies battle flag

Lt. j.g. Eric C. Grimes
USS Port Royal Public Affairs

In Support of Operation Enduring Freedom - USS Port Royal (CG 73) is deployed with the John C. Stennis Battle Group in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. At dawn's early light, the morning routine begins onboard Pearl Harbor's newest cruiser.

Watch turnover, showers, breakfast, muster and meetings all herald the upcoming workday. As of Dec. 4, however, a new daily event has begun onboard. Each morning at sunrise, the ship's battle flag is briskly raised on the forward mast. No band plays, but the event is full of meaning for the 400 men and women of this powerful Aegis warship.

"I wanted to make a clear and strong statement about our mission," said the ship's

supply officer, Lt. Cmdr. Tom Dailey, who designed Port Royal's battle flag. The flag presents a field of navy blue with white lettering clearly and simply stating "Sept. 11." It bears no other symbol, word, or crest; only the date now burned into the nation's memory.

On Dec. 4, as Port Royal steamed with her battle group through the South China Sea, the cruiser's officers and crew assembled up on the third deck below the forward mast to watch the battle flag closed-up for the first time.

There was a respectful and introspective mood that seemed to be shared by all present as the commanding officer, Capt. Lee Geanuleas, presented the flag to the crew.

"This battle flag honors the memory of our fellow citizens who died that day. It's a constant reminder of our duty and an inspiration in this

fight for freedom," said Geanuleas.

Information Systems Technician 1st Class Yvette Ellis and Ship's Serviceman 3rd Class Cheron Middleton, both from New York, raised the battle flag.

"As long as the United States is at war against terrorism and we are underway in support of it, this battle flag will fly," said Ellis. The flag holds a particularly special meaning for IT1 Ellis; her brother worked in World Trade Center 2. "It was only by good fortune that he was delayed getting into Manhattan on the day of the tragedy," said Ellis.

Now, as the Navy's last Aegis cruiser patrols the North Arabian Sea and Persian Gulf, the simple blue and white flag flies above her. It serves as a silent but powerful reminder that America has been attacked and innocent people have died. It



US Navy photo

Port Royal sailors, both from New York, raised USS Port Royal's battle flag.

serves also to remind the men and women who departed Pearl Harbor two months before their scheduled deployment date that this cruise is different.

Unlike others before Sept. 11, this one is not just about forward presence and being

prepared to respond, it is about winning a war.

Embarked in Port Royal are 16 Sailors and six officers of the helicopter squadron HSL-37 Detachment 1 of Kaneohe NMCAS. The Aegis cruiser departed Pearl Harbor on Nov. 17.

Sea-shore rotations revised; most sea-tour lengths reduced

Chief Naval Personnel Public Affairs

Revised sea-shore rotation (SSR) tour lengths have been announced and Sailors from 87 rates will see their sea-tour lengths reduced while Sailors from 29 other rates will see their sea-tour lengths increased.

The revised SSR tour lengths are designed to better match the projected number of Sailors available with funded billet requirements at sea and ashore. An aim with revising SSR tour lengths is to limit significant changes so Sailors and their families have maximum stability in planning their careers.

"The CNO's goal for the career rates (E-5 to E-9) is 36 months of sea duty and 36 months of shore duty," said

Cmdr. Thomas McGovern, aviation enlisted community manager.

Working toward this goal, the number of career rates (E5-E9) with an SSR above 48 months at sea and 36 months ashore has dropped from 37 to 30.

"We are trying to make that goal for as many rates as possible," said McGovern. "However, we can't always do that. It's based on the rating structure because of certain Navy requirements that some ratings are at sea more than others and we have to work with that and balance the sea-shore rotations."

Projected rotation dates (PRD) will be adjusted by Navy Personnel Command (NAVPERSCOM) based on length of a Sailor's remaining tour.

Sailors with PRDs of October 2002 or earlier will not be adjusted. Additionally, if a Sailor is advanced in grade during their current tour, NAVPERSCOM is authorized to adjust the Sailor's PRD to that of the senior pay grade.

Sea-shore tour lengths are primarily determined by the ratio of sea billets to shore billets for each rate; this ratio is used to determine the length for each assignment.

Over time, some rates will become more sea intensive or shore intensive if the billet base is not adjusted.

The office of the Chief of Naval Personnel is currently working to realign general duty shore - and some sea - billets between shore and sea intensive rates in an effort to further bal-

ance SSR to the greatest extent possible.

The eventual goal is to reduce the maximum sea tour for all career rates (E5-E9) to not more than 48 months.

"A larger portion of the force are careerists now versus years and years ago. We have more junior Sailors with spouses at younger ages and they want to spend more time with their family and we recognize that," said Capt. Stephen Conn, director of enlisted plans and policy. "I think everybody in the Navy certainly understands that going to sea is central to the naval service and is what the Navy is all about.

"We do strive not to burden Sailors any more than necessary. Sea-shore rotation, generally, is better than it was decades ago," Conn added.