

OPERATION ODYSSEY DAWN



MEDITERRANEAN SEA (Mar. 19, 2011) Seen through night-vision lenses aboard the Proud Lion, guided missile destroyer USS Barry (DDG 52) fires Tomahawk cruise missiles at the beginning of air strikes in support of Operation Odyssey Dawn, the coalition effort to bring humanitarian relief to the Libyan people. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Nathanael Miller)



The doldrums are a belt of low pressure extending 5 to 10 degrees either side of the equator known as the Intertropical Convergence Zone. The doldrums were notorious in the days of sail, because ships often became “becalmed” for days, or weeks. Trapped, unable to move forward, unable to go back.

This equatorial belt of windlessness and calm is often hot and muggy. It can also be subject to violent thunderstorms and heavy rain. Taking its meaning from the age of sail, “being in the doldrums” has now come to mean being listless, depressed and generally stuck in a rut. Recently, many members of the PONCE family find themselves without the emotional wind to make reasonable speed.

We are ready to answer the call. Ready for any mission provided. However, just as in the doldrums, potential schedule changes bring storms of activity, preparations and planning to support world events. Yet, as plans take shape, the winds of need pass and we are put back at ease. Standing by to support, still.

Perhaps it is the right time to consider the Practice of Gratitude. Each day, simply find SOMETHING for which to be grateful. It needn't be profound. It could be as simple as, “I am grateful I've had indoor plumbing during this entire deployment.” It could be as complex as being grateful for the opportunity for military service in an uncertain time, having the ability to respond if called upon.

Each of us has an opportunity to provide the wind to a mate throughout the day. While we move through the doldrums of April, my personal goals are to remember to say thank you to no fewer than a dozen Sailors and Marines each day and to PT for 20 minutes. I'll admit, not a lofty set of goals. But, if each of us provides just a bit of wind, we can move PONCE along at best speed.



Ponce's Commanding Officer Cmdr. Etta "C.J." Jones, stands covered in whipped pie filling March 27th. She took a few in the face in the name of fund raising for the Navy Marine Corps Relief Society.

FROM THE DECKPLATE



*CMDCM(SW) Yves Raynaud
Command Master Chief*

As I started to mentally write my monthly submission, our world changed rapidly and drastically. As in the case of our departure, as in the case of every tasking we have been issued throughout our deployment. We once again answered the bell when it was tolled.

A few nights ago, I, as well as the majority of TEAM PONCE, watched as the evening sky was illuminated like the 4th of July. We observed missile after missile launched by our sister ships in our Area of Operation. In a matter of 90 minutes we were witnesses to over 20+ missiles launched by one ship. In a matter of 90 minutes they were done.

A few months ago, I recalled the events of a fire fight that lasted a few minutes. Prior to the fire fight that took the lives of those young Marines, thousands of hours were spent training and preparing for such an event, just as in the hours our sister ships spent training and preparing to launch those missiles. Just as we do, countless hour upon hour, preparing to defend our ship, launch our boats, and to transport our Marines to the fight.

I promise every one reading this article that PONCE will continue to train on a daily basis to ensure our action are the correct actions in time of need. I promise to every one reading this article that PONCE will continue to train to ensure that we all return safely.

To our brothers of KILO Company that have been injured while fighting in another Area of Operation, "Our thoughts and prayers ALWAYS and FOREVER will be with you, your family and your loved ones.

SEMPER FIDELIS SHIPMATES

May the Lord forever hold you in the palm of his hands.

Till next month.

THE LION'S DEN

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF USS PONCE (LPD 15)

COMMANDING OFFICER - CMDR. ETTA "C.J." JONES

EXECUTIVE OFFICER - LT. CMDR. KURT BOENISCH

COMMAND MASTER CHIEF - CMDCM YVES RAYNAUD

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MARCH 2011

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CORRECTION!

On behalf of our crack Lion's Den staff (meaning, of course, me) I'd like to apologize for bollixing MMFR Jeffery Vasquez's name in last month's "CMC Bravo Zulu" section. MMFR Vasquez was being recognized for outstanding work, and I sincerely regret the error in what should have been a spotlight moment for him!



MMFR Jeffery Vasquez

CHAPLAIN'S CORNER



*Lt. Jason Weatherwax
Chaplain*

THE HOME STRETCH

“How is your day?” I asked one of the Ponce sailors in passing. “Pretty fantastic, Sir,” was his response. I replied, “Fantastic, I haven’t heard that about someone’s day in while. Why is your day fantastic?” His reply was, “I just found out I’m taking first leave and my entire family is coming to Norfolk to see me when we pull in.”

‘Wow’ I thought to myself. He was not the first person to speak about when we get home in the last couple of days. I had overheard or spoke with a few of our Marines who had been thinking about the same thing. While homecoming may seem like a lifetime away to some, it is really just around the corner.

It is during these last couple of months that our emotions begin to prepare us for the exciting and challenging time of homecoming. We begin to daydream, plan, and even worry about what our homecoming will be like. Some of us are coming home to a new child, some to drastically changed relationships, and for some nothing will have seemed to change. Believe it or not, now is the time to start preparing.

The salty dogs among us are usually aware of two things:

First, no two deployments are the same. Second, homecoming is never what you expect it to be. Here are some vital tips you can begin to think through now:

1. Begin to think through your expectations. You will have them. Identifying them, thinking through whether they are realistic or not, and then communicating them will help avoid unnecessary arguments.
2. Keep it simple. Trying to do too much can be overwhelming for everyone involved. As you begin to plan for your homecoming try to maintain a flexible schedule.
3. Get to know one another again. Take your time to get to know your loved one again. You both have changed in the past several months. Start thinking of questions to ask or write down some stories to share of things that occurred during the deployment.

These are just a couple of things to stay course while transitioning to homeport.

God is always faithful!

MARCH REENLISTMENTS

CONGRATULATIONS, AND THANKS FOR STAYING NAVY!



QM1 JAMES GUESS

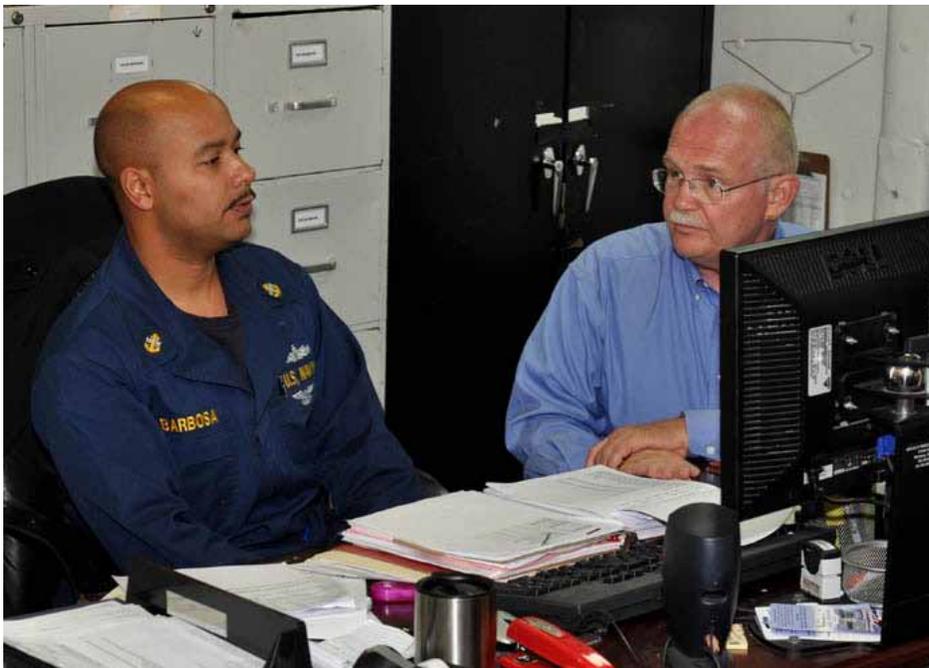


EM2 NICHOLAS BRUMMER



CS3 WALTER J. REEVES

RANDOM PHOTO



NPACE IN THE HOUSE!

ARABIAN SEA (Mar. 1, 2011) A day before Ponce slid north through the Suez Canal, Dr. Karl Winton was checked aboard Ponce by PSC Tomas Barbosa. Dr. Winton is aboard to teach the third term NPACE college course - Public Speaking.

Dr. Winton is also an avid amateur photographer who is excited by a change to see a bit of Europe again. He hasn't been in this part of the world since retiring from his own military career.

(Photo by MCI Nathanael Miller)

SAILOR SPOTLIGHT



ABH3 Marion can be found on the flight deck ensuring the safety of the aircraft and his shipmates.

**AVIATION BOATSWAIN'S MATE
(HANDLER) 3RD CLASS
ANTHONY A. MARION**

Reported to Ponce: May 20, 2005

Department/Division: Air/V101

Hometown: Cortland, NY

Years in the Navy: 6 years

Favorite thing about being a Sailor: I get to travel and see the world, and I get to learn a lot about the history and the heritage of the Navy.

Favorite port of call: Malta, during the 2005 deployment

Best sea story: We had a CH-53 on deck and the helicopter started rolling back and forth from the nose wheel. It just shows how fast stuff can get serious on the flight deck!

Hobbies: I love going ghost hunting and Greco-Roman wrestling

Future plans: I hope to pick up 2nd Class and then go to one of the best schools that the Navy has to offer: 7012 school.

Words of wisdom: Life is to short so live everyday to your fullest...and Aviation Boatswain's Mate (Handler) is the best rate!

THE SUEZ CANAL



FC2 Collin Reed and CMT2 William Vogel photograph the sites such as the AK-47 monument along "The Ditch" as Ponce heads back north.



Built in 1917, the Canal Defense Monument commemorates Egypt's successful defense of the Suez from the Turks during WWI.

Story and photos by MC1 Nathanael Miller

The Proud Lion left the Middle East behind on March 2 as two-thirds of the Kearsarge ARG headed back up to the Med.

Unlike *Ponce's* September transit south, the weather on this March 2nd journey was clear, bright, and pretty dern cold!

The Proud Lion and *Kearsarge* were on their way to join the U.S. 6th Fleet as the unrest spreading across the Middle East from Tunisia to Egypt to Bahrain began rocking the next domino in the chain: Libya.

The two ships of CPR 4 were shaping course to Souda Bay, Crete, to pick up a group of Marines from the 1st Battalion, 2nd Regiment to be on deck in case some naval support was needed for the humanitarian relief operations the might be in the offing for the Libyan people.



ET3 Bradon Goodwin watches the sides of the canal slide by.

Even though the waters of the Middle East do get kind of cool during the winter months, the transition to the Med was positively harsh as the sharp winter winds chilled the decks.



Seen from the 03 Level in this multi-image panorama, Ponce approaches the Friendship Bridge at the northern end of the canal.

SOUDA BAY

Photos by MCI Nathanael Miller



The Proud Lion hit its first Mediterranean port of the deployment when she pulled into Souda Bay, Crete, on March 4. Passing by the 16th century Venetian fortifications on Souda Island (above), the ship tied up one pier over from USS Kearsarge and began to take on supplies almost immediately (right--BMSN Christopher Widmar mans a steady line as the ship's B&A crane lifts some cargo aboard). Ponce was only in port overnight, just long enough to embark elements of the 1st Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment.



Marines from the 1st Battalion, 2nd Regiment out of Camp Lejeune, N.C., embark Ponce.

“DOC” ORTIZ WINS ESG-5 SENIOR SAILOR OF THE QUARTER

Story and photo by MCI Nathanael Miller

MEDITERRANEAN SEA (Mar. 26, 2011) HM1 Ramiro Ortiz, leading petty officer of Ponce’s Medical Department, has been named the Expeditionary Strike Group (ESG) 5’s Senior Sailor of the Quarter, Fourth Quarter 2010.

Ponce operated as part of ESG-5 while the ship was deployed to 5th Fleet’s area of responsibility from September 2010 through March 2011.

“I was nominated to represent my department and competed against four other Sailors,” “Doc” Ortiz said. Once he won the Ponce SSOQ award, Ortiz’s package was sent to compete against the other Senior Sailors of the Quarter in ESG-5.

“I really only had to stand one board,” Ortiz said,

referring to Ponce’s selection board. Once at the ESG-5 level, Ortiz and his competitors were judged on their submission packages alone. “My package was good enough to stand on its own,” Ortiz said.

The results were announced over the 1MC by Command Master Chief Yves Raynaud. “I was excited and proud,” Ortiz said when he heard his name announced. “I know I would never have been able to accomplish all the things that I have if it were not for the group of Sailors I have working for me and the support I have from my chain of command.”

“Just thinking about how many Sailors made up ESG-5 and to be nominated was a good feeling, but to be selected the ESG-5 SSOQ is pretty great,” Ortiz said. “I was competing against other Sailors that are hard working and just as deserving.”



“Doc” Ortiz talks with PSC Tomas Barbosa during a Mar. 26 General Quarters drill. Not content to merely act as LPO of Medical, Ortiz also invests his time in diverse collateral duties such as the Damage Control Training Team and MWR Committee.

ANOTHER RANDOM PHOTO

REACHING FOR NEW HEIGHTS

MEDITERRANEAN SEA (Mar. 17, 2011) The Sailors of USS Ponce prove their ability to pull off engineering feats that are normally reserved for full-fledged shipyards.

The weapons elevator was down hard, but that didn’t stop the A Gang from tackling the problem. Here, ENFR Sean Markus lubricates part of the mechanism as the “fix” approaches completion.

Thanks to the innovative, out-of-the-proverbial-box thinking, the ship regained the use of a significant piece of equipment.

(Photo by MCI Nathanael Miller)



THAT TIME OF YEAR AGAIN!

Story and photo by MCI Nathanael Miller

It's that time of year again - the Navy advancement cycle was upon the Proud Lion. The ship's Sailors were hard at work whittling down their pencil points as they slogged through the jungle of questions in their quest to reach the holy grail of advancement in grade.

Mixed metaphors aside, one of the benefits to being a Sailor is that, unlike the other services, Sailors working to advance to Third, Second, or First class have the opportunity to test for advancement twice a year.

But it is a test, and a mule-choker of a test at that! Two hundred questions that cover everything from rating-specific professional knowledge to the Sailor's grasp of history, basic military requirements, and even the UCMJ. It's a three hour session full of furled brows, rapid-fire pencil work, deep concentration, and copious amounts of caffeine-fueled confidence as the candidates strive to reach that next rate, perhaps most importantly, that higher pay check! After all, who among us can't put a pay raise to good use?



The Third Class Petty Officers aboard Ponce concentrate hard as they take the test for 2nd Class on Mar. 10.

YET ANOTHER RANDOM PHOTO

MEDITERRANEAN SEA (Mar. 1, 2011) In a tradition that is probably even older than the tradition of scraping and painting, an all-hands working party moves soda between store rooms.

These evolutions can be tedious and bone-wearying...unless one knows how to stick a bit of fun into the proceedings. Music piped over the IMC can lighten the mood. A good sense of humor can also go a long way to passing the time as well as the stores.

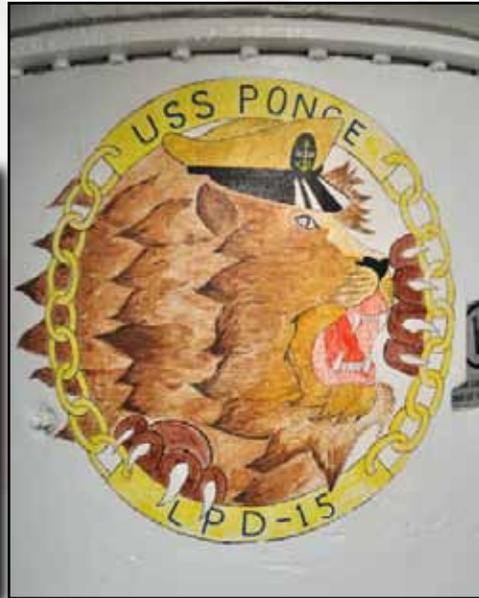
SN Andrew Myers is apparently having just such a good time as he passes a case of ginger ale to FA Justin Ringo. Sailors are known for being able to McGyver innovative solutions to complex problems, but they are also just as well known for taking the mundane and making it fun. (Photo by MCI N. T. Miller)



THE *Art* OF B



An unknown artist left a Caduceus on the Dental Department's door.



Although his name got erased during a recent repainting, MM3 Qiu put this lion up near DC Central on the 2nd Deck.



MM3 Sunny Qiu mans the main control board, one of the most famous pieces of Sailor art aboard the ship. Photo by Navy Times.

MM1 Michael Wilson, MM3 Stephan Piper, and MM3 John Scherder spent October of 2010 repainting the front of #2 boiler to look like a cozy brick oven (right).

(Below) The #2 boiler control board bears the name of the Pit snipes inside the silhouettes of their rating badges, while boiler fire rages across the panel front.



The 40th anniversary and final years of the ship. For four decades this grand old dame has served the Navy. Sailors have been leaving their mark on the ship. Now it's time to get ready to head for homeport and begin the final voyage. Let's take a moment and roam the steel plating and art that will remain behind after all the ship passes into retirement. Next month...

The background image is the #1 boiler control panel, painted by MM3 Sunny Qiu. It will be shown next month.

BEING PONCE



board down in MP 1. This is probably one of
rd Ponce, having even been featured in *The*

the Proud Lion's service life are upon us.
s answered the nation's call. For 40 years
the ship ... sometimes quite literally! As we
n the epilogue to the story of USS Ponce,
passageways, seeking out some of the Sailor
ights are shut off, the fires pulled, and the
we'll see some more!

-MC1 "Sparky" Miller

Also done



A former Proud Lion put up some traditional art on the door to the lighting shop back when he was a Third Class.



MM2 David Smith (left) & MM3 David Murphy (above) decorated MP 2.



The Hull Techs show their pride with some industrial art on the door to their shop (above). Sometime past a talented Boatswain's Mate put his art on display on the Deck Office door (left).



The Cathedral of St. Agatha dominates the Piazza Duomo. (Photo by MCI Nathanael Miller)

LIBERTY CALL, CATANIA

Story by MCI Nathanael Miller

AUGUSTA BAY, SICILY (Mar. 17, 2011) The Proud Lions had a chance to explore ancient European history during a port call to Sicily.

Founded in 729 B.C. by Greek settlers, Catania has thrived for more than two millennia despite being destroyed six times by earthquakes and eruptions from nearby Mount Etna. The resilient city became one of the most powerful cities of the Medieval world and remains one of Sicily's most prominent communities.

“It was definitely different,” said Culinary Specialist 3rd Class Leonard Cornelius. “We got to see the town and see this history.”

The chance to tour such places is one of the highlights of Navy life for Cornelius. The young Sailor said he found that getting off the ship and taking advantage of MWR tours enhances his

experience and opens new worlds to him.

The chance to travel was one of the incentives that also drew Electrician's Mate 3rd Class Salvador RonquilloEscobar to the Navy. Touring Catania took his breath away. “It was quite the magnificent area,” RonquilloEscobar said. “This was my first big European stop. It was cool.”

During the evening, the group attended a Sicilian wine tasting. Visiting a small wine shop, they found bottles of Italian wines spread out on the table, surrounded by serving dishes of traditional finger foods. The shop keeper gave the group a brief explanation on the finer points of wine tasting as various vintages were uncorked and tried.

“The wine tasting was great,” RonquilloEscobar said. It was nice to interact with the Italians. We all had fun.”

Gunner's Mate 2nd Class Joshua Leach ranked Sicily as his favorite port of call so far.

"It's definitely the best one yet," Leach said. "I got to see the history, the culture, the architecture."

Urisino Castle ended up being the favorite stop on a tour filled with multiple destinations that filled the Proud Lions with wonder.

First built in 1239, and has seen use as a fortress, a prison, and today as a museum. During the 1669 eruption of Mount Etna, a 30-foot deep lava flow buried more than half the castle as well as extended the coastline several thousand feet from the base of the hill. Now almost fully excavated, Urisino Castle serves as one of Catania's most famous museums.

Inside are paintings and priceless artifacts that had been collected in Catania for centuries from all over the Mediterranean world. The items demonstrate how the Catania was one of the dominant centers of the commerce in the Mediterranean Sea for centuries.

"It was definitely a lot different a lot different that you think castles would be like," RonquilloEscobar said after seeing a real life castle as opposed to the versions made famous by Hollywood. "They had their underground boat ramp, they had where they stored their food. It was nice; it definitely gives you a different point of view."

"The castle was the highlight," Cornelius agreed with his two shipmates. "The castle went through so many changes throughout the centuries. It was a castle, it was a jail ... it was all these historical things put into one building."



Raising a toast to adventures in ancient lands, some of the Proud Lions partake of a traditional Sicilian wine tasting. (Photo by MCI N. T. Miller)

Leach and his shipmates recommend taking MWR tours whenever possible. A Sailor's life is a busy one, and tours are a good way to experience the culture, food, and history of the far off ports Navy ships visit without the added stress of trying to navigate your way around an unfamiliar nation.

"You know, points like this, it makes being in the Navy worth it," Cornelius said.



EM3 Salvador RonquilloEscobar, FC2 Collin Reed, and SN Myles Stratton explore the excavated ruins of Urisino Castle's outer walls. (Photo by OSSA Earl Trammell)

YET STILL ANOTHER RANDOM PHOTO



LICENSED TO D R I V E

MEDITERRANEAN SEA (Mar. 22, 2011) Manning the helm, SA Jacob Gibson keeps Ponce on course as AA Andrew J. Meade stands watch over the lee helm.

Only in the military can young men and women, some barely out of high school, find themselves entrusted with control of billions of dollars' worth of public property. More, they will be doing business in great waters far, far from home.

(Photo by MCI N. T. Miller)

THE THANKLESS JOB

by MCI Nathanael Miller

You might not think that giving weapons training to the underway duty sections is a Thankless Job, but take a second and reflect (no, not in a mirror--I meant think about it). How many of us complain and grouse when all-hands training is mandated, and we have to adjust our inhumanly packed schedules to add One More Thing to a day in which we are already guaranteed to *not* get everything done? (In all honesty--I will plead guilty myself!)



So how many of us actually stop to realize that GM2 Joshua Leach (shown here with the inevitable M16) and his 3rd Division Sailors have to adjust *their* schedules to accommodate teaching us these skills...*and* have to deal with us being cranky about it too? It's not much, but it does wear on them over time. It's a classic, hidden-in-plain-sight Thankless Job, but one that they do their best to do well!

Each month The Lion's Den will feature a Thankless Job that is usually ignored, but critical to the safe and efficient operation of our ship. If you have a Sailor who does a Thankless Job, let PAO know and we'll be all over it like a bug on a windshield!

RANDOM PHOTO COMPOSITE



MEDITERRANEAN SEA (Mar. 29, 2011) Composited together from about 19 separate exposures, the Proud Lion is resupplied by dry cargo ship USNS Robert E. Peary (T-AKE 5). It was a short UNREP, but the weather was gorgeous, the seas calm, and, perhaps most importantly, one of the loads of cargo ferried over contained mail for Ponce's crew. (Photo by MCI N. Miller)

PONCE SATURDAY NIGHT

MARCH 12TH: A WARSHIP RELAXES AFTER A LONG WEEK

By MCI Nathanael Miller

The Proud Lions of Ponce have many ways of relaxing on a Saturday night. It might be a little bit tricky to pop out to the local pub while out at sea, but there are still many ways to pass the time. From bingo to the gym to the barber shop, there's usually something to do.



MWR Bingo was hosted from the SITE TV studio by YN3 Shaun Eye and HM3 Kerry Conkle.



MM3 Houa Ziong and BM2 Fred Skilling do a few miles in the treadmill room by Cargo Door 3.



Holding a hand-held mirror, MR2 Byron Hernandez watches SHSN Otis Larry give him a haircut.

OPERATION ODYSSEY

COALITION BEGINS STRIKES TO IMPLEMENT NO-FLY ZONE

By Jim Garamone, American Forces Press Service



USS Barry (DDG 52) launches a Tomahawk missile in support of Operation Odyssey Dawn on March 19, 2011. This was one of about 110 cruise missiles fired from U.S. and British ships and submarines that targeted about 20 radar and anti-aircraft sites along Libya's Mediterranean coast. (U.S. Navy photo by MC3 Jonathan Sunderman)

U.S. military forces are on the leading edge of the coalition operation, taking out Libya's integrated air and missile defense system, Defense Department officials

WASHINGTON (NNS) -- Coalition forces launched "Operation Odyssey Dawn" today to enforce U.N. Security Council Resolution 1973 to protect the Libyan people from the country's ruler.

The goal of the military coalition is to prevent further attacks by regime forces on Libyan citizens, officials said, adding that the coalition also wants to degrade the ability of Moammar Gadhafi's regime to resist a no-fly zone being implemented.

Operation Odyssey Dawn is commanded by U.S. Navy Adm. Samuel J. Locklear aboard the command said. The ordnance is aimed at radars and anti-aircraft sites around the capital of Tripoli and other facilities along the Mediterranean coast.

Operation Odyssey Dawn is commanded by U.S. Navy Adm. Samuel J. Locklear aboard ship USS Mount Whitney. The Mount Whitney joins 24 other ships from Italy, Canada, the United Kingdom and France in launching the operation.

Cruise missiles from U.S. submarines and frigates began the attack on the anti-aircraft system. A senior defense official speaking on background said the attacks will "open up the environment so we could enforce the no-fly zone from east to west throughout Libya.

In addition to the cruise missiles, the United States will provide command and control and logistics. American airmen and sailors also will launch electronic attacks against the systems.

The United Kingdom, France, Italy and Canada already have announced that they are part of the coalition. Officials expect Arab countries will publicly announce their participation soon.

ATION Y DAWN

THE PROUD LION SHINES AS IT HOSTS INTERNATIONAL MEDIA

Story and photos by MCI Nathanael Miller, USS Ponce (LPD 15) Public Affairs

MEDITERRANEAN SEA (Mar. 21, 2011) A group of international media reporters spent a day aboard USS Ponce (LPD 15) as part of the coverage of coalition support of the humanitarian efforts in Libya.

The visiting reporters represented media outlets CNN, Reuters, Al Jazeera International, Defense News Rome/The Observer, Rai TV, and the Daily Telegraph. They were given a tour of Ponce, spent time observing flight operations and talking with Ponce Sailors.

After two days aboard Ponce, the media were flown over to amphibious assault ship USS Kearsarge (LHD 3).



Diana Christina Magnay from CNN's Rome Bureau tapes a report on the flight deck Ponce.



ABHAN David Singh talks with Guglielmo Troina of Rai TV, the Italian public broadcast service.



Giovanni Marano of Rai TV films flight helicopter flight operations on the flight deck of Ponce.



Staff Sgt. Garrett Fillingham prepares to wash salt spray from one of the main rotor assembly of one of the two USAF Pave Hawk helicopters Mar. 27.

U.S. AIR FORCE ON DECK!

Story and photos by MCI Nathanael Miller

MEDITERRANEAN SEA (Mar. 27, 2011) The joint operational capabilities of the United States armed forces are on display in the middle of “the Med” as amphibious transport dock USS Ponce (LPD 15) acts as the staging platform for a detachment of HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopters from the U.S. Air Force’s 56th Rescue Squadron.

Based out of RAF Lakenheath, England, the two “helos” and their support personnel have been forward deployed aboard Ponce in support of Operation Odyssey Dawn, the coalition effort to bring humanitarian relief to the Libyan people.

The 56th’s mission is as simple as its name. Should any coalition aircrew go down for any reason, the Airmen of the 56th will bring them home. “They sent us out to sit combat search and rescue alert for the guys who are flying over Libya,” explained Lt. Col. Mark Ahrens, a pilot flying with the 56th. “We’re covering U.S. and other coalition forces as this is a big joint endeavour,” Ahrens added.

So far the 56th’s Ponce detachment has not been called upon to go rescue anyone.

“Luckily, not too many bad things have happened because a busy day for us is a bad day for somebody else,” Ahrens commented, “so we’re glad when we don’t have a busy day.”



Tech. Sgt. Patrick Ledbetter pre-flights the engine on an HH-60G Pave Hawk to ensure it is ready to fly on a moment’s notice March 27.

The 56th came close to being called on Mar. 21, the day they embarked Ponce. HH-60G pilot Capt. John Frederick said a U.S. Air Force F-15E Strike Eagle went down over Libya due to mechanical problems.

“It was on the news when that F-15E went down,” Frederick said, “but we had just gotten out here so it ended up being a better solution to send somebody else to go

get them.” Frederick added that both aircrew had been rescued.

While waiting for a call that they hope will not come, the men of the 56th are adjusting to their sudden transition to life at sea.

“This is my first time to be stationed on a ship,” Frederick explained. “We’re just getting used to the ship and trying not to step on the toes of the guys who live here.”

ODYSSEY

Tech. Sgt. Ben Ward, an aircrew life support equipment technician, finds the isolation of being part of a sea-borne detachment an interesting challenge. Ward said that, at sea, he doesn't have access to the same resources he would ashore.

"We can't just go down to the supply store to get the supplies we need," Ward said. This isolation from a supply center meant that he and his fellow Airmen had to plan carefully when packing their gear into the limited space afforded by the HH-60Gs.

Staff Sgt. Garrett Filingham, a helicopter crew chief, said another factor that Sailors have contended with for years is creating problems for him and his fellow Airmen—salt spray. "The salt is one of the worst things I've seen. The corrosion—you can really start to see how bad it's affecting the aircraft."

The environment has required the 56th's maintainers to step up the frequency of aircraft wash downs. While aboard Ponce they have to clean the aircraft almost daily to keep the salt corrosion under control. On a land base they would not have to wash the aircraft so often to keep them in a high state of readiness.

Of course life at sea also presents one the unique experience of a living on a deck that seems to move on its own. So far, the Airmen of the 56th have experienced good weather while aboard Ponce, but every now and then the sea throws an unexpected swell at the ship that can catch one off guard, Filingham added with a smile.

Chief Master Sgt. Dino Thanos, the senior Chief Master Sergeant with the 56th's overall command, the 48th Operations Group, is flying with the 56th as an aerial gunner. He agreed that getting one's "sea legs" was an interesting experience for the Airmen.



Unusual sight: the U.S. Air Force operates from a U.S. Navy ship during evening training flights Mar. 25.

"The physiological aspect is one of the big challenges," Thanos said. "You've got to find your sea legs. There's no sea legs on land; everything stays in one spot. But out here, you work all those peripheral muscles you don't work when you walk on land."

Thanos said he doesn't find the confined space aboard ship different from other deployments he's made. No matter where he's been, his aircraft have always been parked in a relatively small area, and the maintenance spaces are minimal. As far as the ship itself, Thanos said Ponce's crew are some of the easiest professionals to work with that he has encountered in his career.

"It's been a pleasure to be aboard," Thanos said. "This has been a great naval experience for me and what I call my 'A' team."

As the 56th stands by, hoping not to be called but ready to fly if needed, Lt. Col. Ahrens also said the combined 56th Rescue Squadron/USS Ponce team has been one of the highlights of his professional experience.

"I think living on the ship has been great," Ahrens said, "Everybody's been fantastic and very courteous, and we've melded together pretty well."

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Photos by MCI Nathanael Miller



As we complete our super award-winning coverage of the Proud Lion's involvement in the early stages of Odyssey Dawn, we take a quick look at Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron (HSC) 22 off USS *Kearsarge*.

HSC-22 flew missions supporting coalition efforts to establish the no-fly zone over Libya. Ponce provided a "lilly pad" for them to land on for a quick refueling, or else spending hours on the Proud Lion's deck in a short-fused alert status in case their services were needed.

ODYSSEY DAWN

MONSTER MASH 2



SA Douglas Taylor burns up the flight deck doing sprints.



SN Andrew Mattson gets a leg up on the opposition as he belts out "burpees" during the Monster Mash.

The Monster Mash of January was such a rousing success that a sequel was commissioned. Like all good sequels some of the original cast members returned while new faces were introduced. With the backdrop of a steel beach picnic and an HSC-22 MH-60S Sea Hawk on alert to fly any fast-trigger Odyssey Dawn missions, the Proud Lions pushed their limits with burpees, sprints, and overhead presses (among other events) Monster Mash 2's first day narrowed the field. Soon, the flight deck steel will ring with the concluding showdown will determine the ultimate Monster Mash champions...



LTJG Alda Vanleeuwen put down her duties as Disbursing Officer for a few hours so she could pick up a pair of tongs. FA Justin Ringo stops by to get a piece of corn-on-the-cob during the steal beach picnic.

DAMN EXEC!

The Norfolk wind was streaking the water of Hampton Roads as Commander Martin K. Speaks, U.S. Navy, Commanding Officer of the USS Bowens (DD-891), stepped from his car, slammed the door, and straightened his cap. As he approached the pier head, a sailor stepped from the sentry hut and saluted.

“Good morning, Captain.”

“Good morning, Kowalski,” answered Commander Speaks. He took pleasure in the fact that he knew the sailor’s name. Kowalski was a good sailor. He had served his entire first cruise in the Bowens and did his work well.

The Captain noticed that, over his blues, Kowalski wore a deck force foul weather jacket, faded, frayed, dirty, and spotted with red lead. “Little chilly this morning,” said the Captain as he walked by. “Yes sir, sure is,” replied the sailor with his usual grin.

As the Captain approached his quarterdeck, there was the usual scurrying of people, and four gongs sounded. “Bowens arriving,” spoke the loudspeaker system, and Lieutenant (j.g.) Henry Graven, U.S. Naval Reserve, gunnery officer and the days command duty officer, came running to the quarterdeck. Salutes and cheerful good mornings were exchanged, and the Captain continued to his cabin.

Lieutenant Graven looked over the quarterdeck and frowned. “Let’s get this brightwork polished, Chief.”

“It’s already been done once this morning, sir,” replied the OOD.

“Well, better do it again. The Exec will have a fit if he sees it this way,” said Graven.

“Yes sir,” answered the OOD.

As soon as Graven had left, the OOD turned to his messenger, “Go tell the duty boatswain’s mate that Mr. Graven wants the brightwork done over again on the brightwork done over again on the quarterdeck.”

Later that morning, Captain Speaks was going over some charts with the ship’s executive officer, LCDR Steven A. Lassiter, U.S. Navy.

The Captain had just finished his coffee and lighted his cigarette. “Steve, I noticed our pier sentry in an odd outfit this morning. He had a foul weather jacket on over his blues; it looked pretty bad.”



“Yes sir. Well it gets cold out there, and these deck force boys have mighty bad-looking jackets,” the Exec said.

The Captain felt the Exec had missed his point and said, “Oh, I realize they have to wear a jacket, but for a military watch like that, I’d like to see them wear pea coats when it’s cold.”

Lieutenant Graven was talking with a third-class boatswain’s mate on the fantail when the quarterdeck messenger found him. When told that the executive officer wanted to see him, Graven ended his discussion with, “There, hear that? He probably wants to see me about the brightwork. I don’t care how many men it takes to do it, the Exec told me to be sure to get that brightwork polished every morning.”

The executive officer indicated a chair to Graven and asked: “How’s it going these days?”

Lassiter had always liked Graven, but in the past few months, since he had taken over as senior watch officer, Graven seemed to have more problems than usual.

“Okay I guess,” Graven replied with a forced grin. He knew that things were not as they used to be.

It seemed strange, too, because everyone on the ship had been so glad to be rid of the previous senior watch officer, that damn Lieutenant Dumphy. The junior officers even had a special little beer bust at the club to celebrate Dumphy’s leaving and Graven’s fleeting up to senior watch officer. Now the Exec was always after him. The junior officers didn’t help much either, always complaining

about the Exec. Maybe the Exec was taking over as the heel now that Dumphy was gone.

“That’s good,” said the Exec. “Here’s a little thing you might look into. These men who stand pier watches have to wear a jacket, but the foul weather jacket doesn’t look good for a watch. I’d like to see them wear their pea coats when it’s cold.” Graven had expected something like this, more of the Execs picking on him. He responded properly, got up, and left.

Graven told his first lieutenant: “The Exec says the pier head sentries can’t wear foul weather jackets anymore. If its cold they can wear pea coats,” he added.

“But the pea coats will get dirty, and then what about personnel inspections?” asked the first lieutenant.

“I don’t know,” Graven shook his head, “but if the Exec wants pea coats, we give him pea coats!”

“Pea coats!” said the chief boatswain’s mate, “Who says so?”

“That’s what the Exec wants,” said the first lieutenant, “so let’s give him pea coats.”

“The Exec says pea coats for the pier sentries when its cold,” announced the chief to the boatswain’s mate.

A third-class boatswain’s mate walked away from the group with a buddy, turned and said, “That damn Exec. First I got to have all my men polish brightwork on the quarterdeck, now they got to wear pea coats on sentry duty instead of foul weather jackets!”

Seaman Kowalski’s relief showed up at the sentry booth at 1150. “Roast beef today,” constituted the relieving ceremony.

“Good, I like roast beef,” was the reply. “Hey, how come the pea coat?”

“Damn Exec’s idea,” said the relief. “We cant wear foul weather gear no more out here, only pea coats.”

“Damn Exec,” agreed Kowalski. “Captain didn’t say nothin when he came by.”

“That Captain’s okay, its the just that Damn Exec. He’s the guy who fouls up everything,” complained the new sentry.

Seaman Kowalski had just gone aboard the ship when Captain Speaks stepped out on deck to look over his ship. The quarterdeck awning shielded the Captain from the view of those on the quarterdeck, but he could clearly hear the conversation.

“Roast beef today, Ski”

“Yeah, I know, and we wear pea coats from now on.”

“Whaddaya mean, pea coats?”



“Yeah, pea coats on the pier, Damn Exec says no more foul weather jackets.”

“Well that ain’t all, we got to polish this here brightwork ‘til it shines every morning before quarters. Damn Exec says that too.”

Damn Exec.

Captain Speaks was shocked. Why “Damn Exec” from these seamen, he thought. It was easy to

see that the Executive Officer had passed the order along in proper military manner. It was easy to see that the junior officers, leading petty officers, and lower petty officers were passing it along saying, “The Exec wants...” That’s the way orders are passed along. Why? Because it is easy.

“All ship’s officers assemble in the wardroom,” the boatswain’s mate announced on the loudspeaker system. Lieutenant Commander Lassiter escorted in the Captain. The junior officers took their seats when the Captain was seated. The Executive Officer remained standing. “Gentlemen, the Captain has a few words to say to us today.”

The Captain rose and looked around slowly. “Gentlemen, we are continually exposed to words like administration, leadership, management, capabilities, organization, responsibilities, authority, discipline, and cooperation. You use these words everyday. You give lectures to your men and use them, but if I were to ask each of you for a definition of any of these words I would get such a wide variety of answers that an expert couldn’t tell what words we were defining. Some we probably couldn’t define at all. We still use them,

and will continue to use them as they are used in the continually mounting number of articles, instructions, and books we must read.

“If I were to ask any of how we can improve leadership I would get answers filled with these words - undefined and meaningless.

“If we listed all the nicely worded theories of leadership, studied them, memorized them, and took a test in them, we would all pass. But this would not improve our ability as leaders one bit. I can tell a story, containing none of these meaningless words that will improve your leadership.

“In 1943, I was secondary battery officer in a cruiser in the South Pacific. In my second battle, gun control was hit and I lost communications with everyone except my 5-inch mounts. I could see that the after main battery turret was badly damaged and two enemy destroyers were closing us from astern. At the time, my 5-inch mounts were shooting at airplanes. I ordered my two after 5-inch mounts to use high capacity ammunition and shift targets to the two destroyers closing from astern. ‘But Mr. Speaks, 5-inch mounts are supposed to handle the air targets; who said to shift targets?’ my mount captain asked.



“There were noise and smoke and explosions that day, but the explosion that I heard and felt was not from a shell, but from those words of the mount captain.

“Those attacking destroyers got a few shots in at us before we beat them off. Maybe those shots found a target and some of my shipmates died. I never found out. There was too much other damage.

“I thought over the battle afterward and realized that this entire situation was my fault, not the mount captain’s. I may have been responsible for the death of some of my shipmates because up to that day I always gave orders to my subordinates by attaching the originators name to it.

“What does that mean? It means that it was the easy thing to do, to say, the gunnery officer wants us to shift targets.

“In this peacetime world you may say that we no

longer have this struggle on a life or death basis. Quick response does not mean life or death now, but it might tomorrow, or sometime after we’ve all been transferred elsewhere and this ship is being fought by people we don’t know. Whether you’re cleaning boilers, standing bridge watch, or administering your training program, it’s easy to say ‘The Exec wants’ or ‘Mr. Jones says.’ It’s the easy, lazy way; not the right way. You can sometimes discuss or even argue with an order, but when you give it to a subordinate, make him think it is coming from you.

“Giving orders the lazy way is like a drug. Once you start saying ‘The Ops Officer wants’ you will find yourself doing it more and more until you can’t get a thing done any other way. Your men will pass along orders that way, too,

and it will become a part of your organization right down to the lowest level. When some problem arises and you want action, you’ll get ‘Who wants this?’ or ‘Why should we?’

“Each of you—ask yourself if you have given an order today or yesterday in the lazy manner. I think almost all of us have. Now ask yourself if that order really originated with the person who gave it to you, or did he receive it from a higher

level? We never really know, do we, but why should we even care?

“In almost every unit the lazy ordering starts on a particular level. From personal experience I can tell you that this can be an exact measure of a unit’s effectiveness. If it starts at the department head level or higher, it’s a relatively bad outfit, and if it starts at the chiefs’ level, it’s a relatively good outfit. You can find the level below which it starts by hearing a new title preceding a primary billet. ‘Damn Exec’ means that the executive officer is the lowest level giving orders properly. ‘Damn Division Officer’ means that the division officers are taking responsibility for that order.

“Here I am using some of those words—responsibility and authority, those undefined terms we want to avoid, but perhaps we have helped to define them.

“To be more specific, every officer does some lazy ordering, but we need to do it less and less. We must try to push the ‘damn’ title down as far as it will go.

“Let’s push the damn officer down all the way to the chiefs and below, then we will have a Damn Good Ship.”

MAKE YOUR MOVE!

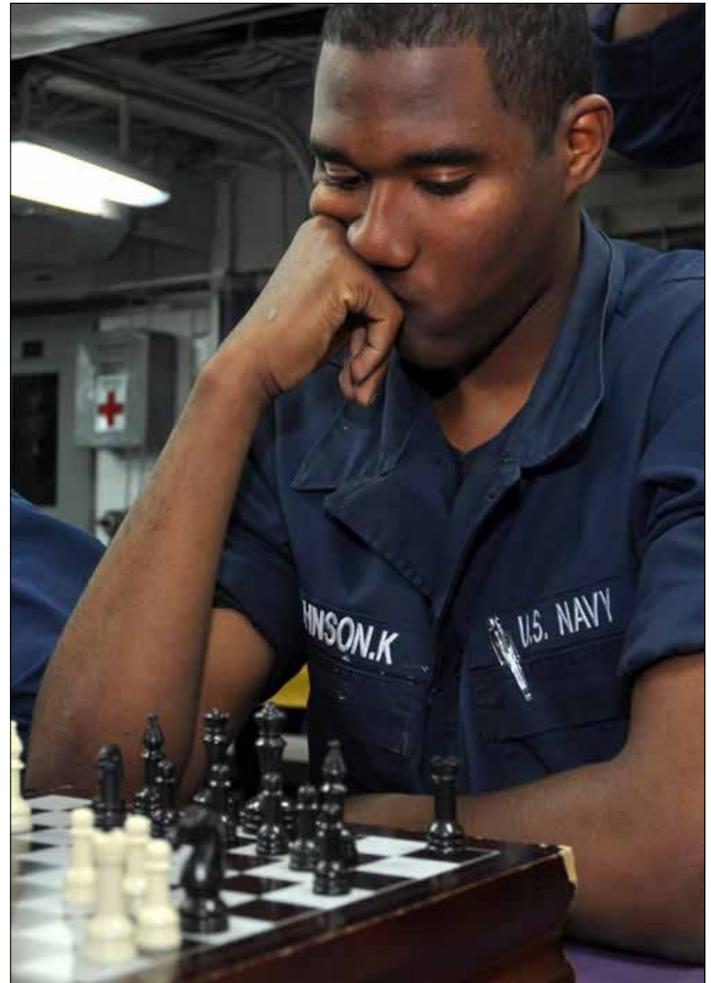
by MCI N. Miller

If you know BMSN Nathaniel Bracewell at all, then you know that chess is one of his passions. His skill is legendary among Ponce's crew.

In order to share that passion, he helped organize the first chess tournament of the deployment. Held the evening of March 11th on the mess deck, the challenge appealed to a large number of Sailors and Marines. The quiet was fierce as the competitors struck, counter-struck, and struck again, each aiming to capture the other's king.



MMFN Christopher Garcia watches for any signs of surprise or distress on Lance Cpl. Brandon Washington's face as the two match wits over a chess board.



AN Kyle Johnson is deep in thought as he does mental battle during Ponce's chess tournament.

YET EVEN ONE MORE RANDOM PHOTO

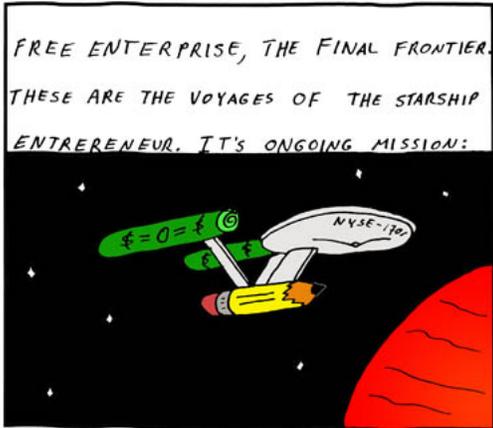
MEDITERRANEAN SEA (Mar. 26, 2011) - DC2 Kyle Lobb peers through a view port in a quick-acting water tight door during a GQ drill. Lobb and his fellow Proud Lions were practicing fire fighting procedures for dealing with a fire in one of main spaces.

Regular GQ drills like these help ensure the Sailors aboard Ponce are ready to confront any emergency with confidence and the greatest chance of success.

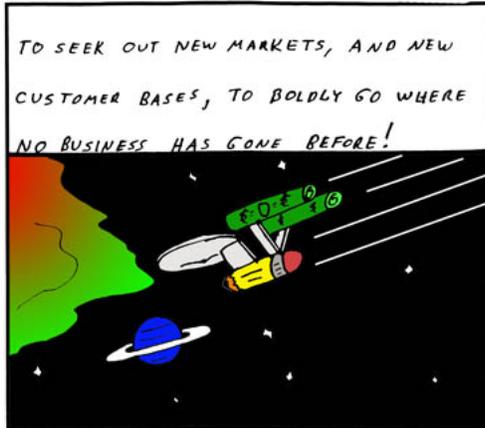
(Photo by MCI Nathanael Miller)



FULTON'S FOLLIES



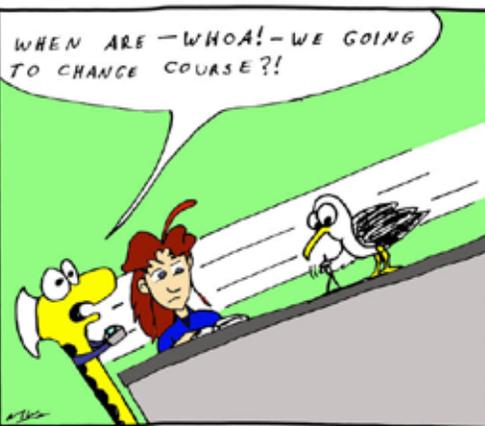
MCI "SPARKYPOULOS" MILLER



FULTON'S FOLLIES

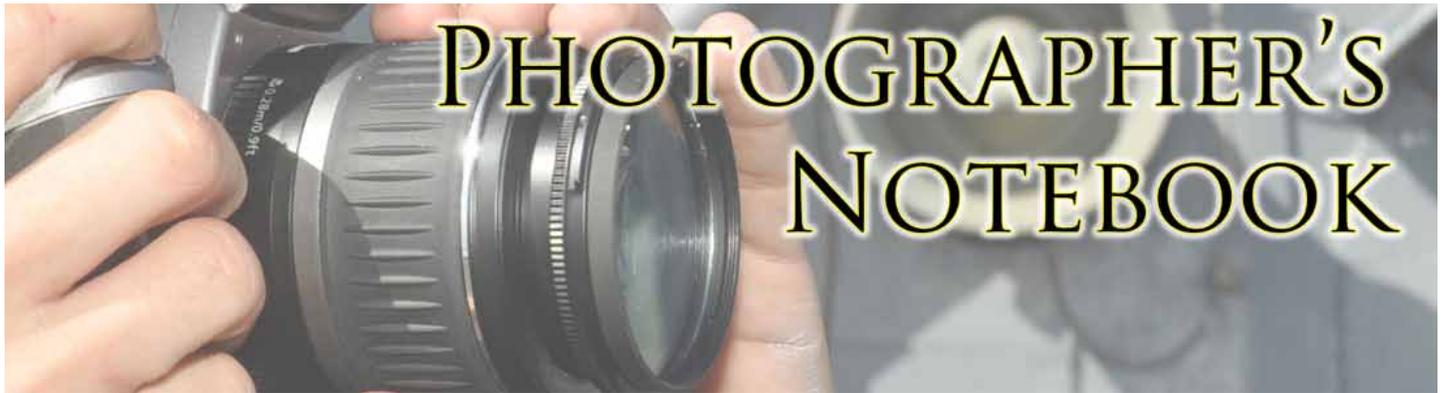


MCI "SPARKYPOULOS" MILLER



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FLIGHT OF THE PONCE

*MCI Nathanael Miller
Public Affairs Officer*

I sat with a somewhat heavy heart in my hand and a vaguely disturbed liver on my shoulder as I read the CO's email that Ponce is finally and definitively on track to be stricken from the list of active ships.

Granted I'm not a "typical" Sailor. As was pointed out to me quite recently, people who gravitate toward career fields like "MC" tend to be a bit ... unique. I mean, who else on this ship has a secretary camel on his desk?

But that doesn't mean I'm looking forward to turning out the lights on Ponce. I was one of the last of the "PHs" to work on F-14 Tomcats. When I was attached to the VF-213 Fighting Black Lions, I helped start the mothballing the Tomcats' recon cameras.

I was "lucky" enough to turn out the lights at the Fleet

Imaging Center Pacific, Guam (the photo lab) in 2005. I made First Class while in transit from Guam, and missed the regular frocking. On June 26, 2006, I was frocked to Photographer's Mate 1st Class--the very last Sailor in the Navy ever to make PH1. July 1st of that year saw the four media rates squarshed into "MC."

I've lost an airplane, a photo lab, an entire rate, and soon a ship. But that means it's near time to begin a new story, a new adventure.

Still, the first time I was deployed it was as a Black Lion; now as a Proud Lion. I hope my next sea-going command will be a "Lion." I've gotten used to it.

Oh--if you're wondering about the camel, stop by the Training/PA office. I'll introduce you to Manny.

FULTON'S FOLLIES

CHARACTER SKETCHES



QM2

Sandy Piper

Working hard to earn his golden sextant, Piper enlisted right out of high school. He came to Ponce following a successful stint in qualifying to drive a destroyer in

New York City. Setting a speed record by taking a DDG through Battery Park and tying up to Castle Clinton in under four minutes, he has proven his navigational skills beyond all doubt. Small in stature but great in ability, Piper is the bird to get the ship home.

LT

Marion Miller

The ship's Navigator, Miller is a hard, grizzled, externally crusty young officer who doesn't suffer fools gladly...or at all. Always having a shovel at the ready to administer some hard-hitting common sense, Miller is

more than she seems. An amazing woman who can predict a rainstorm by watching butterflies dance a tango and determine sea states from a simple mayonnaise test, she is also a poet at heart and possesses the spirit of a feisty wood nymph.





**INFORMATION SYSTEMS TECHNICIAN
SEAMAN APPRENTICE**

NATHAN ALJETS

Reported to Ponce: Oct. 3, 2010

Department/Division: OPS/OC

Hometown: Houston, TX

Years in the Navy: 1 year, 6 months

Favorite thing about being a Sailor: Being able to travel the world.

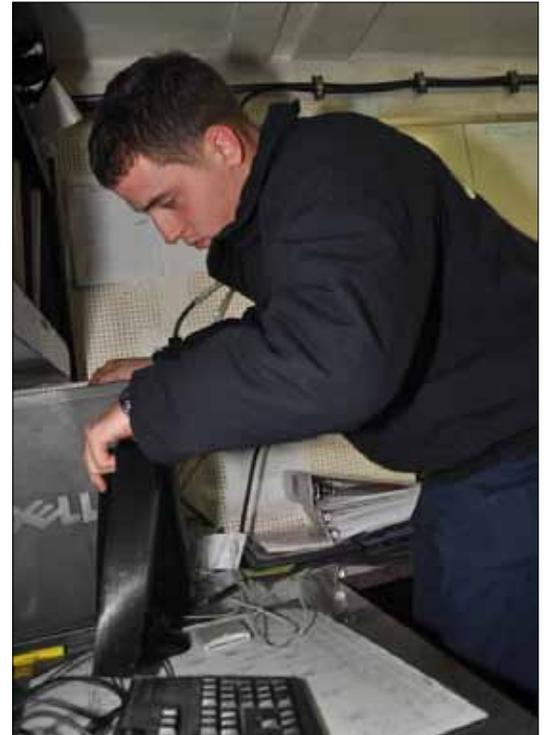
Favorite port of call: Seychelles

Best sea story: Fishing off the coast of Seychelles

Hobbies: Playing guitar, fishing, skiing, video games

Future plans: Get out of the Navy and go to college for a degree in mechanical engineering.

Words of wisdom: Keep you head up! Less than 60 days left!



ITSA Aljets secures a computer back to a desk after performing maintenance.

MARCH 2011



March 15th - 17th
-Augusta Bay, Sicily-

March 4th - 5th
-Souda Bay, Crete-

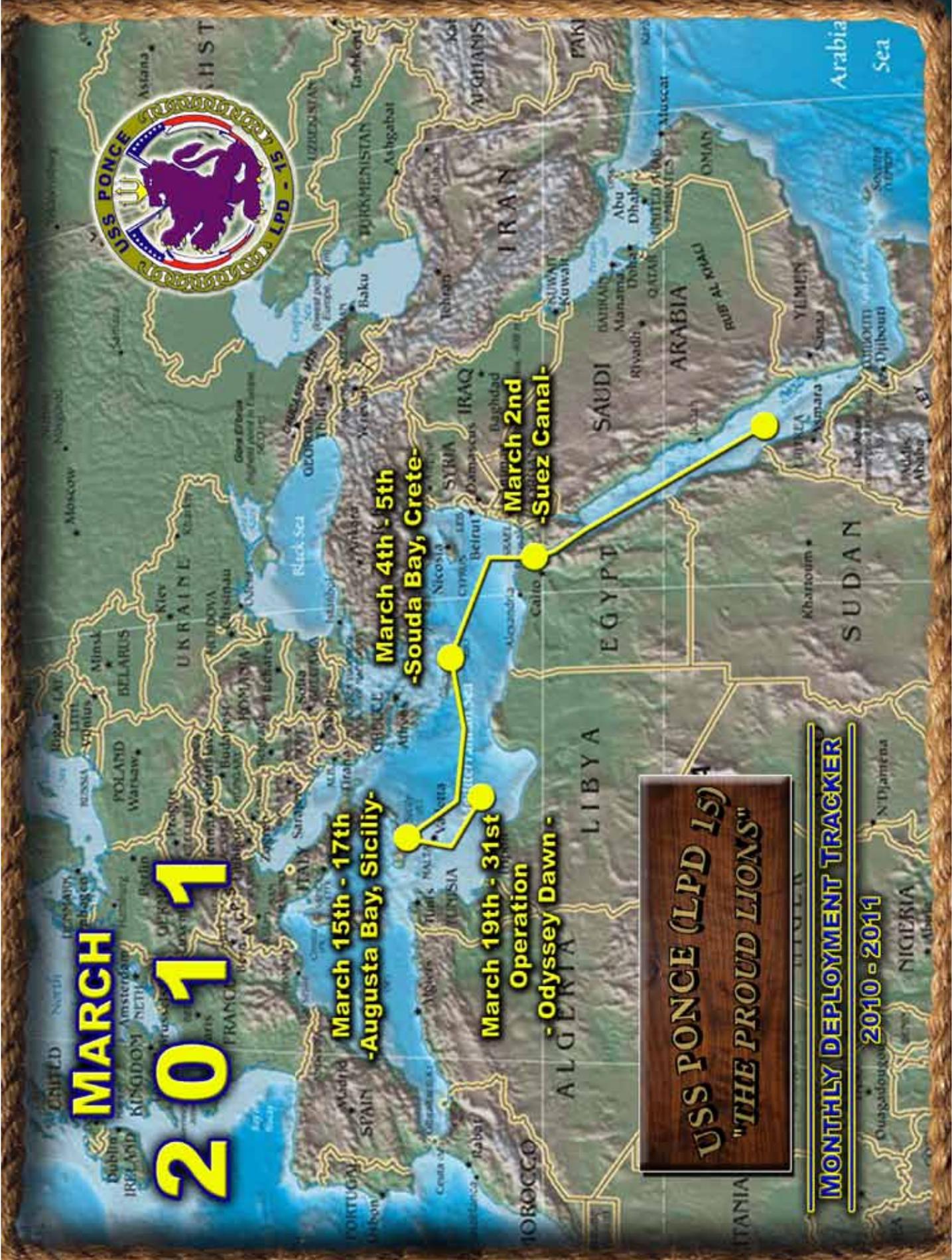
March 19th - 31st
Operation
-Odyssey Dawn -

March 2nd
-Suez Canal-

USS PONCE (LPD 15)
"THE PROUD LIONS"

MONTHLY DEPLOYMENT TRACKER

2010 - 2011



DARKEN SHIP



Ens. Timothy Paul stands a late watch in the pilot house March 21. (Photo by MC1 Nathanael Miller)