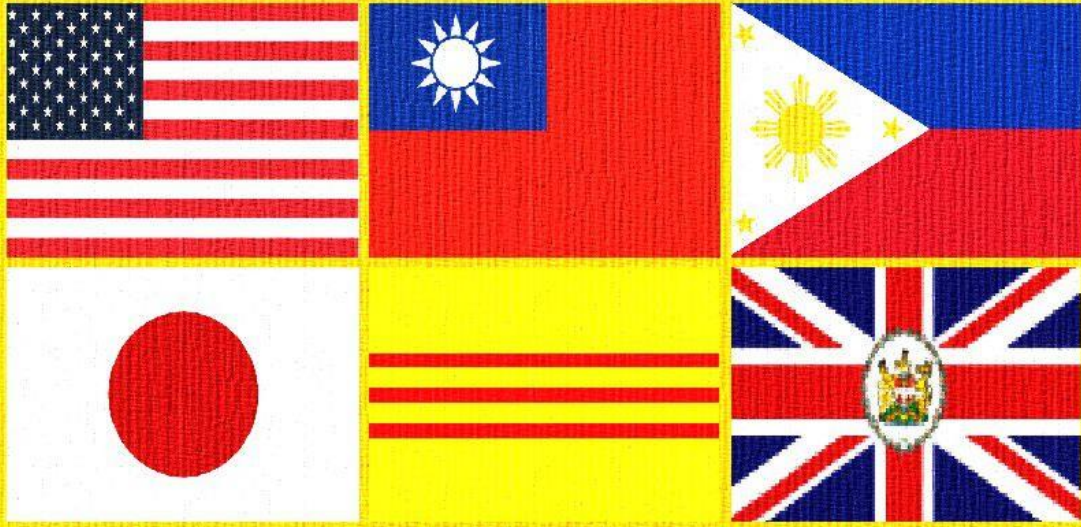


USS PRINCETON LPH-5 WESTPAC



FAR EAST CRUISE 1962 - 1963

An electric feeling was cycling through the ship as we were underway for our Home Port at the Long Beach Naval Shipyard in California, and approximately two days out. Just about everyone was busy getting ready for entering port by getting their overseas purchases assembled and making ready for leave and others for in port liberty. The remainder of the crew who had the misfortune of having the first in port duty section watches were still another day further away from Liberty Call and there, of course, were some rumblings'n'grumbings about having to stay on board for duty, as can be expected.

Somewhat out of the ordinary there was an announcement of the IMC ship's general announcing system by the Boatswains Mate of the Watch who piped and called for all department heads and division officers to assemble in the Wardroom. Wondering what was going on regarding that word, we looked at each other in the compartment, shrugged, then continued with what we were doing to "get ready". We had no idea that all our "Big Plans" were about to change in a big way. You know, like the ancient saying goes: "You want to hear God laugh, tell him your plans." We didn't know it at that moment in time, but at that very moment, all the Deck Department was going to be tested to the extreme.

Awhile later Third Division's Officer arrived at the division's office on the fantail to have an in-depth discussion with our Leading Petty Officer.

Directly after that meeting the Leading Petty Officer sent the division yeoman down to where we were in our compartment "getting ready" and relayed to us that the Leading Petty Officer wanted the division to assemble on the fantail for muster, NOW.

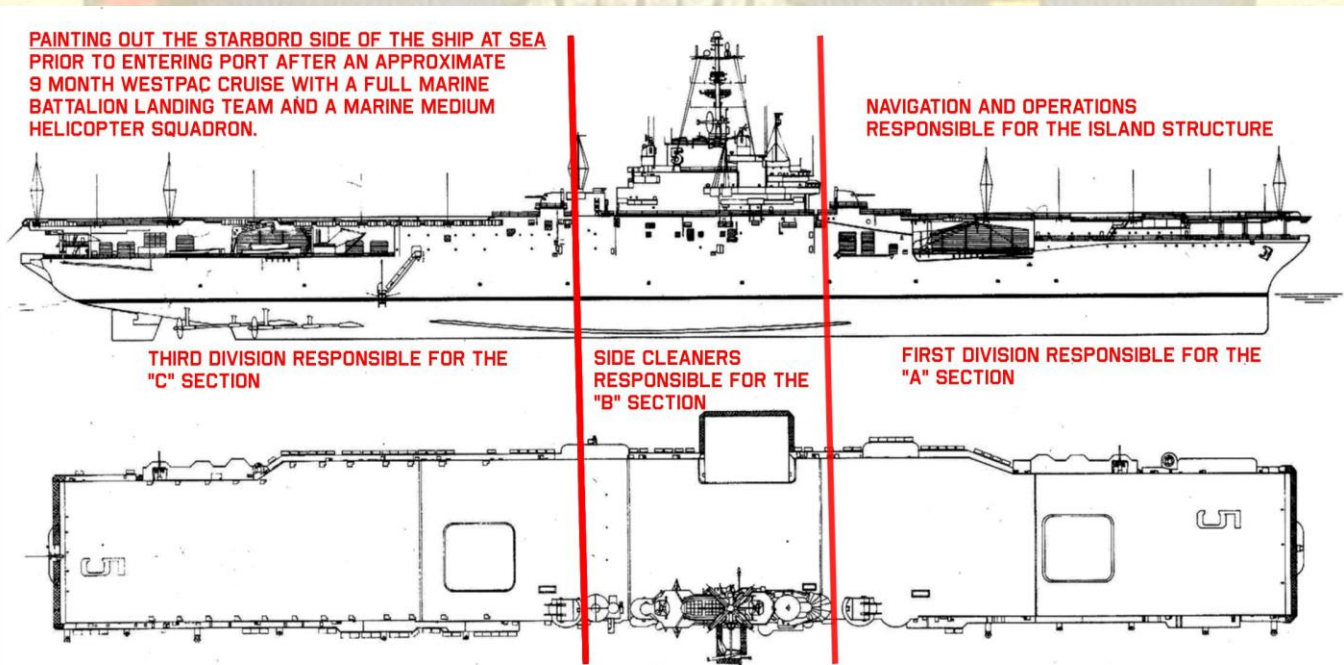
Once assembled and muster was completed, we were notified in no uncertain terms that we were going to completely paint out the starboard side of the ship prior to entering port. Trying to let that sink in we, seemingly, all of us seamen, were thinking how do we paint out an 888-foot-long Essex Class aircraft carrier, in one day, and while at sea?

While pondering that the order was given to immediately start assembling all stages, Bos'n's Chairs, blocks and tackles to include gun tackles, two folds and even double luffs, and to re-reave any tackles that needed repair or new lines.

We were dismissed by our Divisional Section Leader, a BM-3 in charge of the section I was in, to carry out our new orders and instructions.

It seemed to me that no one on board had ever been tasked with painting out a ship while at sea, let alone an 888-foot-long Essex Class carrier. Also, there was an almost tangible feeling of dread. We'd rather be in our 5" 38 Caliber gun mount facing off the Russian Badger bombers whose provocations caused us to be at General Quarters for extended periods early in this cruise, than painting the whole entire starboard side from flight deck down to the waterline comprising the Armored Torpedo Belt, in one day, which seemed to us seamen to be somewhat daunting.

After several hours of assembling all the stages, Bos'n's Chairs, tackles, 5-gallon Haze Grey paint pails from the Paint Storeroom, brushes, rollers and every available man-helper, the painting plan was revealed.



The Essex-class carrier *Princeton* (CV 37) as a helicopter carrier, LPH 5, in 1965. She retained six 5-in/38s as well as two Mark 37 and two Mark 56 directors, the latter on her port side. Radars were the SPS-10, SPS-12, SPS-30, Mark 25, and Mark 35. ECM was ULQ-6 (lattice outriggers). TACAN was URN-20. Note her twin funnel caps.

The next morning after breakfast and divisional muster we noticed the ship was slowing down and the headway diminished to dead-in-the-water. At that condition, the wind and swells takeover and now we're rolling in the troughs of medium to large swells.

The word was passed to rig-up the stages and boatswain's chairs and commence painting out our assigned areas.

The seaman I was assigned to were on the first stage hanging from catwalk directly under Mount 53 which was the starting point for Third Division to start painting and work aft.

We climbed onto the staging; each of us securing a 5-gallon bucket of Haze Grey paint directly underneath our positions on the stage; then taking a long man-helper with a roller attached we immediately started painting approximately six feet above, six feet below, overlapping in the center and six feet to each side. Each of us sitting at the extreme edge of the stage.

After a couple of seconds of this we both simultaneously looked at each other with the statement that this is about as wrong as wrong could be as we were painting over running rust, rust blisters and most surprising to me, a measurable thickness of salt cake sticking to the side. The salt, from being underway for a long period, was caused by wind directed sea spray on the ship's sides and structures. More salt than I've ever seen or known to exist, especially in huge area covering cakes. So, shaking our heads we started back painting. Putting the rollers directly into the paint buckets strung below us and literally slopping paint on the side.

With the ship dead-in-the-water rolling in the swells added to the painting technique we had to employ. That is directly under the gun mount, being near the flight deck, with the falls being somewhat short, the pendulum effect in the rolling to starboard was about six feet out at that time. We'd swing out and when the ship rolled back heading in the opposite direction, we'd SLAM into the side of the ship, along with our 5-gallon paint buckets and the next thing we knew we were baptized with Haze Grey paint sloshing clear up our backs. During the initial event our backsides, seats, stage and almost everything else was dripping Haze Grey. The only things that saved our knees was the stage sling outriggers on each side where the stage's slings attached to the falls.

The only good thing, if it could be classified as a "good thing," was the seamen up on deck were tending the tackle lines for us, which did in effect help us out a great deal. One less thing to contend with while being a pendulum. Which is to say when we were lowered to our next position the pendulum effect was much greater when the ship rolled to starboard, even with the man-helpers reaching out as far as possible, as we couldn't come close to the ship's side. Then the ship would roll back, as we gathered collision speed almost immediately, which included nearly banging our knees if we didn't sit a little side-saddle at the moment of collision. The 5-gallon pail smashed into the side burping Haze Grey paint up into the air and onto the ship, the stage, and us, and all the while we're painting as fast as we can before the next roll takes us away from being able to touch the side of the ship. The man-helpers were not that long!

To my left, out of the corner of my eye, I caught a quick motion and quickly looked over just in time to see Seaman Stoler, in a Bos'n's Chair, slam back-first into his fresh paint. He also was covered head to toe in Haze Grey paint. We were glad to see his tending crew were pulling him up because there was no way to control a Bos'n's Chair acting like a giant pendulum. Fortunately, they got him on the flight deck catwalk before the next heavy roll cycle.

After several drops (being lowered) we "successfully" managed getting coverage by our slopping paint, we were now at the waterline. The waterline which was actually the top of the Armored Torpedo Belt and was around 4" thick armor plating. Pausing there we realized that we had to go back up which would definitely mess up our "Paint-Job" if we were hauled back up the way we came down.

Yelling back and forth with the topside seamen we decided to get off the stage and stand on the Armored Torpedo Belt, looping our fingers in the Hogging-In-Padeyes, then the top side seamen would flip the stage around, with our one-armed help, since we had to hang onto the side of the ship, so we could paint a fresh area from the Armored Torpedo Belt. With the stage flipped we started painting. This time sloshing paint making our way back up to the flight deck.

Standing on the Armored Torpedo Belt was an adventure in and of itself while the ship was rolling in the swells with the stage in the process of being flipped. Not trying to guess the angle of the ship, while the ship rolled to starboard, all I could do when looking up was to see just the starboard side above me. Then with my fingers, locked into the Hogging-In-Padeyes, and my feet as firmly as possible planted on the Armored Torpedo Belt I hung on for dear life until the ship started her roll back to port. Then we could get a few moments of rest by actually laying on the starboard side. Again, while rolling to starboard and looking up all I could see was the side of the ship and the sensation of the ice-cold Pacific Ocean saturating my backside from my feet nearly up to my belt and lower back, with my feet and knees underwater. However, being young, I have to admit, it was sort of fun walking on Armored Torpedo Belt out in the Pacific Ocean.

During this "process" we learned we were approximately 150 miles from Long Beach, California and we should enter port and rendezvous with a Civil Service Harbor Pilot and Navy Tugs on time. So that was relieving to know that we were making progress and would meet our scheduled arrival time the next day.

The next lift was exactly the same as all the rest, however we were going back up now and knew we were making good progress. With that, as we reached the flight deck for the final time, taking care of our assigned area, we started to break down our wire rope straps, portable pad-eyes, tackles, and the paint-soaked stage. We started carrying everything down to our starboard side line locker, making sure not to make a big mess since nearly everything was coated in fresh Haze Grey paint. Scrubbing Haze Grey paint out of Black Non-Skid Flight Deck Coating would be a bad thing.

Next it was off to the paint locker to turn in what paint was left, the rollers and man-helpers, then the prolonged task of taking turns getting the soaked-on Haze Grey paint off our skin and hair, then trashing our dungarees, boon dockers and tee shirts.

Now off to the "Rain-Locker" (shower) to get as clean as possible.

The next morning reveille went down at 0600 as well as Breakfast. The crew mustered On-Station and all preparations were made for entering port.

On schedule the Civil Service Harbor Pilot and Naval Shipyard tugs were on station to pilot us to Echo Pier.



Long Beach Naval Shipyard Harbor Tug Medium (YTM) with Pilot on Board ready to make our side.

Civil Service Harbor Pilot boarding our “Salmon Board” to be lifted on board by the ship’s Boat and Airplane Crane.

Mooring to Echo Pier it looked to me like everyone and their brother, plus a Navy Band, and all the associated line handlers were there. Echo Pier was loaded with dignitaries and high-ranking officials. The crowd of family and friends were giving off lots of hoots and hollers, anticipating greetings, handshakes and kisses.

All of which went on for quite some time. The Quarter Deck and After Brows were put in place allowing a select few to depart the ship first, then a thundering herd running onto the ship.

Finally, when all the guests had left the word was passed for the Side Cleaners to muster on the pier to wash down the side of the ship. The Side Cleaners used several 2 ½” fire hoses with “Suicide Nozzles,” for a good straight stream of water with a very good pier pressure, and, almost as soon as the strong stream of water hit our “Paint Job”, which was over the rust and salt, the Haze Grey paint came off in huge sheets! Some of these large sheets of paint came off way too easily and sailed all the way down like large sheets of paper, some to the pier next to the Side Cleaners. There might even be some of those sheets still airborne, as they were very large and wind driven.

Glad we painted out the starboard side to look good for entering port.



—Staff Photos by Curt Johnson

'DADDY'S BACK!' . . . and 3,000 relatives and friends gathered Saturday morning in Long Beach Harbor to make the homecoming a joyous reunion as the USS Princeton returned from a nine-month tour of the Pacific.

3,000 Relatives Hail USS Princeton Crew

By CHARLES SUTTON

A stubborn, soupy fog caused an hour-and-a-half delay in the arrival here Saturday of the USS Princeton, spoiling an otherwise perfect homecoming for the 1,200-man crew of the big flattop.

But no one seemed to mind much—least of all the 3,000 relatives and friends who gathered on Pier E in Long Beach Harbor to greet the arriving servicemen, just back from a nine-month tour of duty in the Pacific.

"What's ninety minutes when you've already waited nine months?" asked a pretty young woman as she scanned the fog-shrouded horizon for a first glimpse of the gray lady.

SCHEDULED to dock at 9:30 a.m., the Princeton finally put in at 11 o'clock. Several minutes later, the crowd was scrambling up her gangplanks.

First aboard was Mrs. Jacqueline Boyum, whose husband, Capt. J. H. Boyum, commands the 18-year-old carrier.

She was followed by her daughter, Mimi, 19, her two sons, Mike, 17, and Bill, 12, and her niece Lorraine Van Meter, 20.

The 888-foot flattop, designated an amphibious assault carrier by the Navy, left Long Beach last February for an extended tour of the Western Pacific.

She carries a complement of 400 Marines as part of her crew and is employed by the Navy for a novel form of amphibious warfare



REUNION
On the Pier

known as "vertical envelopment."

As the Navy explains, the term applies to a system of landing Marines on enemy-held beaches in carrier-based helicopters.

It puts the enemy in a rather uncertain position, since he never can be sure

whether the mobile troops will land behind him, in front of him or to the side.

The Princeton operated mostly from Subic Bay in the Philippine Islands the last time out. Now that she's back, she's due for an extended rest—something like four or five months—and some repairs in dry dock, a Navy spokesman said.

Among those on hand to greet her Saturday were Mrs. Alice Turner and her two children, Herbert, 10, and Teresa, 6.

The Turners, of 1043 Channel St., San Pedro, were among the earliest to arrive at the dock, getting there at 8 a.m.

BUT THEY almost didn't make it, said Mrs. Turner, whose husband, Herbert, 31, is a Marine staff sergeant.

"We nearly hit another car on our way here in the fog," she explained. "The kids got quite a fright, but none of us was hurt, thank goodness!"

Mrs. Turner was all "butterflies" as she waited for the big ship to moor.

"We haven't slept in a week, we've been so excited," she said. "Teresa's so anxious to see her daddy her hands are cold."

Teresa's hands may have been cold, but her heart warmed to the sight of her father a short time later.

And that's the way it was for most of the others who met their fathers or sons or husbands Saturday. Heartwarming!



Photograph: navsource.org

USS PRINCETON
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