

# HERMITAGE LOG

HERMITAGE reported for duty in the Amphibious Force, U.S. Atlantic Fleet on 29 January 1957, after being commissioned 14 December 1956. During the period 1957 to 1964 she engaged in numerous Fleet operations and had eight commanding officers.

Between February and April of 1964 the ship was assigned to the Caribbean Ready Squadron based in Panama, operating with other units of Amphibious Squadron Twelve. Early in May she undertook a logistics lift to Bermuda, Sidney and Halifax, Nova Scotia. Maintaining a high record of performance, HERMITAGE won the Battle Efficiency White "E" Award for 1964.

In the fall of 1964 she was one of many amphibious ships to take part in STEEL PIKE I, the largest peacetime Navy-Marine Corps exercise to take place on a foreign shore. This exercise consisted of an amphibious movement of 60 ships from the United States to Spain. More than 25,000 men participated.

For the first two months of 1965 HERMITAGE engaged in independent ship's exercises, upkeep and training. In March she went to the Caribbean for three weeks, visiting St. Thomas, San Juan, Mayport, Florida and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

She departed Little Creek 22 June for the Caribbean in company with Amphibious Squadron SIX. During the Dominican uprising she spent a week and a half steaming off the coast of the Dominican Republic, and for the remainder of the summer she participated in various amphibious landings and exercises off the coast of Vieques Island, Puerto Rico. Her crew visited St. Thomas, San Juan and Barbados, British West Indies. During the deployment HERMITAGE received word she had once again won the prized Battle Efficiency White "E" Award for 1965.

In October 1965 HERMITAGE steamed to Philadelphia and entered the U.S. Naval Shipyard for a three-month yard period.

In February, upon completion of overhaul, HERMITAGE steamed to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, for Underway Refresher Training. The ship transported a Marine Battalion to the Caribbean for a three-week training period in May, and returned again to Little Creek for upkeep and maintenance. Then in late June she steamed north for three weeks, visiting Philadelphia, New York and Halifax, Nova Scotia. She returned to Little Creek July 14.

During August, September and October the ship made three trips to Santo Domingo, the Dominican Republic, returning each time with a full load of U.S. Army equipment and personnel. In late November she joined four ships of Amphibious Squadron EIGHT for two months of participation in CARIB 4-66. She returned January 27, 1967, and began a two-month availability period at the Little Creek base.

On 25 April 1967, HERMITAGE departed Little Creek for her first cruise in the Western Pacific. Upon leaving we were filled with mixed emotions - those of happiness and those of sorrow. We never like to leave our loved ones but at the same time were looking forward to seeing new places and putting all of our training into actual practice in the defense of freedom.

On 26 April, we stopped in Charleston, S.C. to take aboard 9 mine sweeper boats destined for the west coast. We left Charleston on the same day and continued to the Panama Canal.

The first few days were uneventful, but on the night of 29 April we were steaming in the Caribbean about 200 miles north of Columbia, South America when we received an emergency message that a 50-foot motor launch was without power and in immediate danger of sinking about 160 miles at sea, east of Cristobal, Panama Canal Zone. HERMITAGE immediately changed course and proceeded at maximum speed to the last known position of the motor launch Billy H. About three o'clock in the morning we established radar contact with the stricken vessel. In a matter of minutes the nine souls, including three children, aboard were transferred to the HERMITAGE and the craft was taken in tow.