History of USS LAKE ERIE:

USS LALKE ERIE was built by Bath Iron Works in Bath, Maine. Her keel was laid on 6 March 1990 and she was launched on 13 July 1991. Upon completion of her sea-trials after construction, LAKE ERIE transferred to the Pacific Fleet and was commisioned on 24 July 1993 as the twenty-fourth TICONDEROGA-class Guided Missile Cruiser in her homeport of Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

As part of a seven ship battle group, led by the aircraft carrier USS CONSTELLATION (CV 64), USS LAKE ERIE entered the Arabian Gulf, on January 11, 1995. The CONSTELLATION Battle Group deployed on November 10, 1994, and spent most of December in the western Pacific. The battle group's arrival strengthened U.S. presence in the gulf and supports U.N. initiatives in the region, including Operation Southern Watch. In March, USS LAKE ERIE took part in a two-week, anti-submarine warfare (ASW) exercise in the Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman (February 5 through 19). The purpose of Exercise Sharem 110 was to gather data and evaluate tactics to counter the growing third-world diesel submarine threat. Throughout the exercise, USS TOPEKA (SSN 754) simulated a diesel submarine, while USS LAKE ERIE and USS VANDEGRIFT (FFG 48) rounded out the surface forces. The first week of the exercises took place in the southern Persian Gulf. The second week was held outside the Strait of Hormuz in the Gulf of Oman. The ships of the CONSTELLATION Battle Group returned to their home ports in May.

USS LAKE ERIE took part in Pacific Joint Task Force Exercise (PACJTFEX) 97-1, from February 10 through 21, 1997 off the Southern California coast. PAC JTFEX 97-1 is part of a series of exercises previously named "FLEETEX." The new name reflects the increasing focus on preparing naval forces for joint operations with other U.S. military services.

During a deployment with the CONSTELLATION Battle Group, USS CHOSIN (CG 65) turned over the duties of being regional Air Defense Commander to USS LAKE ERIE in July 1997. In early August 1997, USS LAKE ERIE was involved in two major Theater Ballistic Missile Defense (TBMD) exercises in the Arabian Gulf named ARABIAN SKIES. During the exercises, the CONSTELLATION Battle Group demonstrated a viable TBMD capability using the existing command and control architecture. USS LAKE ERIE, with the USS CONSTELLATION (CV 64) Battle Group, then departed 5th Fleet's Area of Responsibility (AOR) on August 17, 1997 on schedule to continue its routine six-month deployment in the waters of the Indian and Pacific Oceans. The CONSTELLATION Battle Group entered the Arabian Sea on May 16. After departing the Arabian Gulf, the CONSTELLATION Battle Group concluded its tour in the 5th Fleet with a joint-combined exercise with military forces from Pakistan. Dubbed Inspired Siren 97-2 and Inspired Alert 97-2, the exercises incorporated both surface combatants and air components, respectively. The purpose of this four-day training mission was to exercise the joint-combined naval and air capabilities of both countries, improve their respective levels of readiness and interoperability, and enhance military relations between the two nations.

In August 1998, modifications were made aboard USS LAKE ERIE and USS PORT ROYAL, which consisted of modifications to the Aegis weapons system on board TICONDEROGA-class cruisers; a modification, known as linebacker, and which uses specialized computing and radar software and

hardware to provide improved tracking and reporting capabilities, and when coupled with the STANDARD Missile-2 Block IVA, intercept Tactical Ballistic Missiles (TBM). Ballistic missile testing afforded Port Royal and other participants an opportunity to flex the capabilities of the current Aegis weapon system against a live ballistic missile target and gave a representation of how the modified system tracks and destroys TBMs.

USS LAKE ERIE and USS PORT ROYAL were then to conduct at sea testing, develop core doctrine and tactics, and serve as focal points for putting the TBMD technology in the hands of the warfighters in the rest of the fleet. Sailors on board both ships were also to provide early feedback to the technical community and influence the final design of the TBMD system. Successful LINEBACKER sea trials at the Pacific Missile Range, Kauai, Hawaii took place in the fall of 1998.

On December 17, 1999, USS LAKE ERIE returned to its homeport at Pearl Harbor Naval Station after completing a six-month deployment to the western Pacific and Arabian Gulf. The guided missile cruiser had deployed with the USS CONSTELLATION (CV 64) Battle Group.

In March 2000, the US Navy began ALI live fire tests and had successfully conducted the first Controlled Test Vehicle. USS SHILOH (CG 67) had conducted the first ALI live firing test in September 1999 and had successfully demonstrated the launch and flight sequence through third stage separation as well as verified flight stability at extreme altitude. Though the original plan had been to conduct all Flight Test Round shots from USS SHILOH, the need for further testing conflicted with that ship's operational schedule. Therefore, it was decided by the CNO to shift to USS LAKE ERIE to conduct the next firings in the ALI testing program. LAKE ERIE, already equipped with Area Linebacker modifications, was, as of March 2, 2000, receiving ALI equipment modifications in Pearl Harbor and was to conduct system checks and training to support the planned test firings.

In early July 2000, the US Navy announced that USS LAKE ERIE had been designated the Navy's theater-wide test ship for the AEGIS Lightweight Exoatmospheric Projectile intercept flight-test series. For the next two years, USS LAKE ERIE would be dedicated to conducting these critical tests. USS LAKE ERIE's homeport in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, made the ship's participation in tests at the Pacific Missile Range Facility off Kauai cost-effective with the Navy anticipating that the ship would not deploy operationally again for about two years.

In January 2001, USS LAKE ERIE conducted the Aegis Light Exo-Atmospheric Projectile (LEAP) Intercept Flight Test Round (FTR-1A) mission in the mid-Pacific using the Pacific Missile Range Facility, Kauai, Hawaii. Equipped with Aegis LEAP Intercept (ALI) computer programs and hardware, LAKE ERIE launched an SM-3 missile demonstrating third stage airframe stability and control through nominal kinetic warhead fourth stage separation. The SM-3 is the Navy's new exo-atmospheric missile developed to counter theater ballistic missile (TBM) threats outside the atmosphere.

On February 9, 2001, USS LAKE ERIE sortied from Pearl Harbor to assist along with Coast Guard boats and cutters with rescue efforts after a surfacing U.S. submarine, the USS GREENEVILLE (SSN 772), struck a Japanese fishing vessel at approximately 1:45 p.m. (HST) about nine miles south of the Diamond Head crater off Honolulu, Hawaii. The fishing vessel, named EHIME

MARU, rapidly flooded and sank within 10 minutes in 1,800 feet of water. Twenty-six of 35 aboard were rescued. The EHIME MARU had been on a fishing and research mission when the USS GREENEVILLE (SSN 772) rapidly surfaced and collided with its stern. The fast-attack submarine was, at the time, conducting an "emergency ballast tank blow," a procedure used to bring subs to the surface in the event of an emergency, although in this case it was used for training, on a one-day cruise with 16 military and civilian guests.

On January 25, 2002, the Missile Defense Agency and the Navy conducted a successful flight test in the continuing development of a Sea-Based Midcourse (SMD) Ballistic Missile Defense System (BMDS). Flight Mission-2 (FM-2) involved the launch of a developmental Standard Missile 3 (SM-3) and kinetic warhead (KW) interceptor from USS LAKE ERIE and an Aries target missile launched from the Pacific Missile Range Facility (PMRF) on the island of Kauai, Hawaii. The target was launched at 9 p.m., EST, January 26. About eight minutes later, LAKE ERIE, equipped with Aegis Lightweight Exo-tmospheric Projectile (LEAP) computer programs and equipment, and having tracked the target with the Aegis SPY-1 radar and developed a fire-control solution, launched the newly-developed SM-3. The SM-3 acquired, tracked and diverted toward the target, demonstrating SM-3 fourth-stage Kinetic Warhead (KW) guidance, navigation and control. Although not a primary objective, during this early developmental test, the KW was aimed at the target, resulting in a hit-to-kill intercept at approximately 9:18 p.m., EST.

The primary objective of this test was to evaluate SM-3 fourth-stage Kinetic Warhead guidance, navigation and control, with extensive engineering evaluation data collected for analyses in preparation for future flight tests. It was the fourth in a planned series of nine developmental test flights for the SMD program. The mission also included the first fully operational SM-3 with a live Solid Divert and Attitude Control System to steer the KW into the target.

As of mid-2002, USS LAKE ERIE was the Chief of Naval Operations Test Ship for the following programs:

- Aegis Light Exo-Atmospheric Projectile (LEAP) Intercept (ALI)
- SM-3 Standard Missilie
- Navy Theater Wide (NTW)
- Theater Ballistic Missile Defense (TBMD).

Joint Rescue On The High Seas

From Navy Region Hawaii Public Affairs

June 26, 2002, PEARL HARBOR, Hawaii (NNS) - Two Pearl Harbor-based Navy ships, two Kaneohe-based Navy SH-60B helicopters, two Army doctors from Tripler Army Medical Center, and a C-130 from Coast Guard Air Station Barber's Point Hawaii joined forces to rescue an injured merchant mariner aboard the Motor Vessel Pequen nearly 700 miles west of Oahu, Hawaii.

Recently, the MV Pequen, an ocean-going tug, contacted its parent company offices in the Netherlands requesting emergency medical support for a crew member suffering from a serious head injury.

Dutch officials contacted the Joint Rescue Command Center in Honolulu, which in turn contacted the Pacific Fleet Headquarters to provide support.

Two Pearl Harbor-based ships, USS Lake Erie (CG 70) and USS O'Kane (DDG 77), were already underway off the coast of the island of Kauai, and began transiting toward the tug.

For Lake Erie, the emergency call came within hours of the ship's historic launch of an SM-3 missile that intercepted a ballistic missile with a kinetic warhead above the Earth's atmosphere.

Lake Erie's executive officer, Lt. Cmdr. Mike Fulkerson, summed it up best when reflecting on quick change in mission for the cruiser. "In all honesty, it was pretty amazing watching these guys jump from one of the Navy's newest mission areas to one of the oldest missions Sailors have . . . without skipping a beat."

Due to the extreme distances involved, logistics played a critical role in the rescue operations. No helicopter could make the entire transit without refueling, so Lake Erie continued making best speed toward the tug while O'Kane took station between Kauai and the Lake Erie to serve as a refueling location for the helicopters.

While the ships were getting into station, the two Seahawk helicopters assigned to Helicopter Anti Submarine Squadron-Light (HSL) 37 at Marine Corps Base Hawaii, Kaneohe Bay, were launched with Army medical personnel -- a neurosurgeon and an anesthesiologist from Tripler Army Medical Center on board.

The helicopters first flew to the Pacific Missile Range Facility (PMRF) on the island of Kauai for fuel. Then they flew to O'Kane, and then continued out to Lake Erie. A Coast Guard C-130 flew overhead throughout the mission, providing critical communications and coordination support. Additionally, neither of the ships could accommodate more than one helicopter at once, so the helicopters never shut down during the entire mission. One helicopter would land on deck, refuel and then take off to allow the second helicopter to do the same.

In the mean time, despite 6- to 8-foot seas and significant swells, Lake Erie crew members successfully transferred the injured man from Pequen to Lake Erie. Lt. Russ Corpron, Lake Erie's weapons officer, led the rescue team that braved the seas state in one of the ship's Rigid Hull Inflatable Boats (RHIBs). Hours before, Corpron served as the tactical action officer (TAO) during the SM-3 missile shoot.

Chief Hospital Corpsman (SW) James Brown -- Lake Erie's independent duty corpsman, skillfully guided his medical team throughout the rescue. The team immediately began stabilizing the 43-year-old patient when they got to the tug, and they carefully monitored his transfer to the Lake Erie. The tug crew member who had fallen and was initially rendered unconscious, was diagnosed with a serious head injury.

The helicopters from the "Easy Riders" of HSL-37 arrived at Lake Erie more than five hours after taking off from Kaneohe. Army neurologist Maj. Dan Donovan, and anesthesiologist Maj. Darren Gray, made the determination to transport the patient back to Tripler Army Medical Center's Trauma Center on Oahu for further medical tests.

After taking off from Lake Erie, the helicopters retraced their track to Oahu. However, the helicopter with the patient on board was able to skip the stop at PMRF and flew directly from O'Kane to Tripler.

Just after the sun settled below the horizon, the two helicopters made their approach to the helipad at Tripler. With Easy Rider 61 still turning on the helipad in the background, and local television cameras filming every action, the doctors and crew members transported the injured mariner to an awaiting ambulance.

More than 11 hours after taking off from Kaneohe, Lt. Cmdr. Andy Quett, one of the pilots of Easy Rider 61, had reporters from local television stations asking him about his role in the rescue. Quett said with a proud smile "although search and rescue is normally a small part of our mission, it is definitely the most rewarding."

Some of the remarkable statistics of the joint rescue mission include:

- The plan for this mission required middle of the night coordination between two ships at sea, the Coast Guard Rescue Center, the Pacific Missile Range Facility, and HSL-37, in addition to the consultations between Lake Erie's medical corpsman and doctors at Tripler Army Medical Center.
- Lake Erie steamed more than 700 nautical miles at maximum speed during this mission.
- O'Kane steamed approximately 400 nautical miles during the rescue.
- O'Kane pumped more than 1,200 gallons of JP-5 aviation fuel to the SH-60Bs.

- Army neurologist Maj. Dan Donovan's brother is Lt. Cmdr. John Donovan -- the maintenance officer at HSL-37. It was the Army doctor's first trip on "one of his brother's aircraft."
- Each helicopter from HSL-37 flew more than nine hours straight during this mission, and covered nearly 1,000 nautical miles by day's end.