

USS NEWPORT NEWS (CA-148)
c/o Fleet Post Office
New York, New York

February 19, 1966

Dear Families and Friends of Newport Newsmen,

As I write this letter to you, the Newport News is anchored in the beautiful harbor of Bermuda--Great Britain's loveliest island colony. We just completed two weeks of training in the Caribbean and are visiting here for a few days before returning to Norfolk.

Before recounting the highlights of this cruise, let me bring you up to date on our activities during the last six months.

In mid-June 1965, Newport News entered the Norfolk Naval Shipyard, Portsmouth, Virginia for an extensive overhaul. During our shipyard period many changes were made to modernize and improve the ship. Communications facilities, which are vital to our mission as flagship of Commander Second Fleet, were up-dated by adding newer and more sophisticated units. We acquired four 3-inch, 50 caliber anti-aircraft guns to replace older models. This of course, is in addition to our nine rapid-firing automatic 8-inch guns and our twelve 5-inch, double-purpose weapons. Our helicopter platform and hangar, located on the ship's "fan-tail", were enlarged to accommodate an HU-2 jet "bird". Additionally, improvements were made in our boat handling and fueling equipment. Down below, in the engineering plant, boilers, generators, pumps, and auxiliary machinery received an extensive overhaul, satisfying, to a high degree, members of our engineering department.

Living conditions on board were not neglected. The galley, laundry and tailor shop were given a new lease on life with more modern equipment. The messhall and crew's lounge were completely redecorated.

Much of the work accomplished in the shipyard was done by the crew of the ship. All hands worked long and hard to make the ship ready for sea again.

On November 2nd, Newport News steamed out of the Norfolk Naval Shipyard into Chesapeake Bay and out into the Atlantic on her sea trials for the first time in her four and one-half months of being mauled and overhauled, feeling the heavy footsteps and busy hands of hundreds of shipyard workers, and the constant noise, both day and night, of automatic chipping hammers, scrapers and sandblasters. Our return to the ship's natural habitat--the sea--was certainly a welcome relief. With sea trials a complete success, we spent the remainder of November making ready for our first training cruise to the Caribbean.

All departments worked long hours loading all required items needed to make our warship self-sufficient. We took on supplies which included everything from ice cream to ammunition.

Our radar and gunfire equipment was calibrated, new men who were making Newport News their "home" were being indoctrinated and orientated to shipboard life.

On November 29th, we departed Norfolk and proceeded south for six weeks of refresher training at the U.S. Naval Base, Guantanamo (Gitmo) Bay, Cuba. This base, and adjacent waters, with good year-round weather and protected harbor, have long been used by the Navy as a training area for ships of the Atlantic Fleet. Unfortunately, Castro's "Cactus Curtain" surrounds the area, but the base is self-supporting with its own water supply and is well protected from any hostile forces. In addition to training, Newport News also was on hand to provide vital gunfire support protection in the event she was called upon.

While at "GITMO", our schedule was a busy one. The long days very often began at 4:30 or 5:30 a.m., and many times we were underway for training by 6:30 a.m. Apathy and boredom were not in our crew's vocabulary. We fired our guns---all of them! We refueled at sea, held battle problems, and conducted every sort of shipboard drill. "Man your battle stations" were our by-words.

The intense training paid off. Each day we became more proficient and more polished at our assigned and required tasks, both individually and as a team.

Being away from our families over Christmas and the New Year was, of course, the low ebb of our cruise. The holidays have traditionally been reserved for gatherings of families and friends and loved ones. But, our operational requirements and our role in the nation's defense posture demanded Newport News' participation and training at that time.

During Newport News' visit to Guantanamo the USO treated us in their usual kindly and friendly manner. They presented two shows on the fantail on successive Sunday afternoons much to the enjoyment of all Newport Newsmen. Bud Logan and the "Blue Boys", a country and western group, and a group of college youngsters--"the Youngstown (Ohio) University Penguins" were the featured entertainers. Just prior to Christmas, the local Naval Base community choir joined us on the ship for the traditional Christmas carols. It was very heart-warming to sing out these traditional songs of Christmas, and we all thought of our homes and dear ones.

All these diversions were most welcomed, to say the least, but the bright spot in any day was receiving mail from home.

It was the vital link in the chain of high morale.

Our six weeks of hard work, by a dedicated crew, culminated in an important Operational Readiness Inspection (ORI). I am proud to announce that we passed with flying colors! Shortly after our ORI, the following message was received from Admiral Bulkeley, Commander of the Naval Base, Guantanamo:

"During the holiday season this base was privileged to have as support ship the USS Newport News during her refresher training. I rode this ship for gunnery exercises and a shore bombardment drill. From the onset, the spirit of the crew and officers while away from homefires, to give vital support to this base was outstanding. The conduct of the crew ashore was without incident of any kind. The appearance of the ship was outstanding. Further, her officers and crew joined with the base community in the spirit of the holidays and added much to the close relationship of the fleet ships and their base. We were proud to have her at Guantanamo."

With refresher training behind us, we pointed the ship's bow northward and we were homeward bound.

Our arrival in Norfolk, our homeport, on January 8th, was in the dead of winter. However, despite the rain and coldness of the day, the warm greetings received from our loved ones and families certainly compensated for the lack of cooperation from the weatherman.

On January 10th, we welcomed back aboard Vice Admiral Kieber S. Masterson, Commander of the U.S. Second Fleet and NATO's Striking Fleet Atlantic, and his staff. Newport News was once again proudly flying Admiral Masterson's flag as permanent flagship of the Second Fleet. Before returning to USS Newport News, Admiral Masterson had flown his flag from his temporary flagship, the guided missile cruiser USS Little Rock (CLG-4), while we were in the shipyard and in the Caribbean.

For those of you new to the Newport News family, the U.S. Second Fleet is a vast military power. It is comprised of ships, aircraft and men ready at a moments notice to deploy anywhere in the realm of the Second Fleet's domain. Its geographical responsibilities extend from the Atlantic seaboard east to Gibraltar, and from the North to the South poles - an area covering more than 40-million square miles of ocean. For this vast area, Second Fleet is tailored as a fast, offensive striking force prepared for the entire spectrum of warfare, whether it be a show of force, limited war or a total war.

After three weeks in our Norfolk homeport, we again departed for the Caribbean on January 31st. This time it was Exercise High Time, a major Atlantic Fleet exercise involving 34 ships, including the Newport News, and more than 10,000 men. Newport News' primary role was shore bombardment, and our 8-inch and 5-inch guns received a real workout.

We fired into the training areas on the islands of Culebra and Vieques, both day and night. In one ten minute period, our world-famous rapid-fire guns delivered more than 15 tons of high explosives into the target area. The exercise was a fine experience and great training ground for all hands concerned.

On the lighter side of the ledger, we all had an opportunity to visit the famed ports of San Juan, Puerto Rico; St. Thomas, Virgin Islands; and Bermuda, British West Indies; on successive weekends. These three picturesque ports, totally different in their way of life, provided a very welcome recreation.

While we were berthed in beautiful San Juan, Newport News participated in Project Handclasp. Project Handclasp is an official Navy program evolved from the desire of naval personnel to assist people of foreign lands to help themselves to improve the conditions under which they live. Our public information officer represented me in presenting vitamins, medical supplies, dry goods and many other much-needed items to Our Lady of Providence Dispensary there.

In St. Thomas, a plaque with the insignia of USS Newport News was presented to the USO by our Navigator. The plaque was in commemoration of the organization's silver anniversary.

While we were in San Juan, and here in Bermuda, we opened our ship to visitors. More than 7000 persons viewed the Second Fleet Flagship. We were certainly proud to put Newport News on display once again and show her off, and she was a very impressive sight!

Of course, turnabout is fair play, and while Newport News was crowded with visitors, our crew was able to visit many of the historic and tourist attractions in all three ports. I'm sure several of these have been captured on film, and the souvenir hunter had a field day in his own right.

Looking ahead, our schedule, although not firm at this writing, indicates that we will get underway again around March 28th for more operational training. Later, visits to West Palm Beach and Fort Lauderdale, Florida; Newport, Rhode Island; and New York City are in our plans until the middle of June.

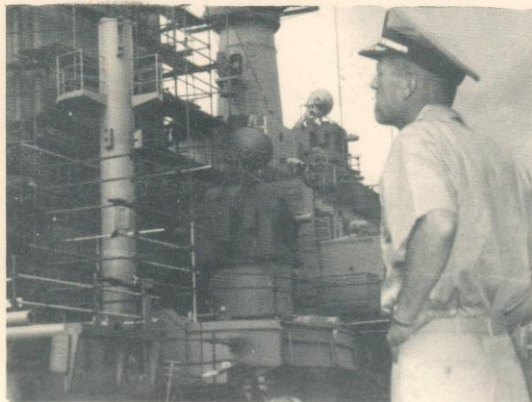
Let me say, in closing, that it is a pleasure to serve with the officers and men of the Newport News. You may be proud, as I am, of the role your loved ones have played in the often demanding duties of this fine ship.

I will be writing to you again to keep you informed of what is happening on the world's largest cruiser. With warm personal regards, I remain,

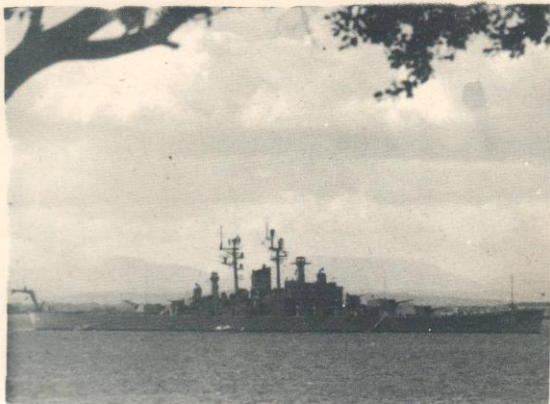
Sincerely,



T. L. Balis
Captain, USN
Commanding Officer



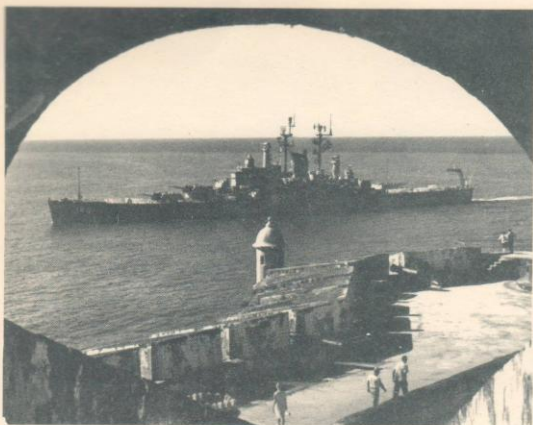
Captain Balis looks over his new command at the Norfolk Naval Shipyard



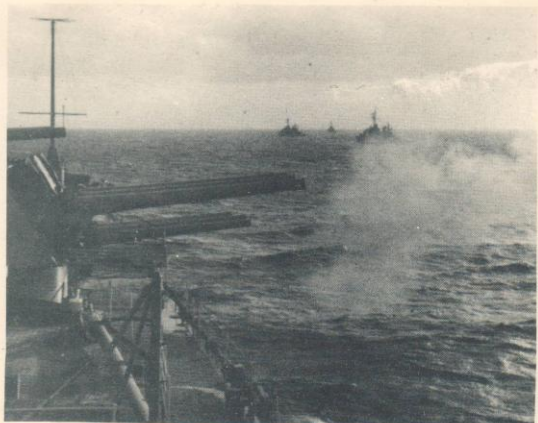
Newport News anchored in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba



Admiral Kleber S. Masterson, ComSecondFleet returns, 10 January 1966



Newport News seen from El Morro Castle, San Juan, Puerto Rico



Firex '66, off Vieques Island, Puerto Rico