

Last Call for PB MK III

By LT. CMDR JEFFREY P. STRATTON, USN
Commanding Officer, Special Boat Unit 24

As most of you know by now, Special Boat Unit TWENTY FOUR at NAB Little Creek, VA, and Special Boat Unit THIRTEEN at NAB Coronado, CA, were disestablished on September 30, 1993. When the disestablishment rumors were made official late last year, we realized that OCEAN VENTURE 93 would be SBU-24's last major exercise - and the last call for LANTCOM Mark III Patrol

Boats.

Unlike the west coast Special Boat Units, SBU-20 and SBU-24 were realigned in 1991 to be craft-specific: Rigid-hull Inflatable Boats (RIBs) were assigned to SBU-20, and seven 65' Mark III Patrol Boats were assigned to SBU-24. Two patrol boats were turned over to NSWC Dahlgren and one was transferred to SBU-26 in 1992. Although our four remaining patrol boats look virtually identical, there is a considerable difference in their engineering plants. PB731 and

Unscheduled underway replenishment with USS Boone (FFG 28).



PB778 are outfitted with three conventional 8V71 diesel engines. PB735 and PB758 were modified in 1989 to accept the larger and more efficient 8V92 diesels. Training focus for our patrol boats was tailored toward anticipated exercise requirements.

OCEAN VENTURE is a JCS-directed, USCINCLANT-sponsored exercise which includes formation and activation of a quick-reaction Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF) at a simulated deployment location. At the exercise mid-planning conference, it was decided that four patrol boats would participate in OCEAN VENTURE 93. Two patrol boats would provide operational support to SOCLANT's JSOTF in St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands. The other two boats would act as surface opposition forces (OPFOR) in support of the Joint Exercise Control Group (JECG) in Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico. Advance planning was initiated in preparation for the first-ever four boat deployment to the Caribbean.

Long range transits are nothing new for SBU-24. Over the past two years, we have executed round-trip and one-way transits to Panama for training and to transfer custody of a patrol boat to SBU-26. Last year, a two-boat detachment conducted a 5000 nautical mile round trip transit to Trinidad and Tobago for Foreign Internal Defense (FID) operations in support of OCEAN VENTURE 92. However, a four-boat deployment would present additional logistical and maintenance challenges and requirements, especially for craft that ranged from one to five years beyond their intended fifteen-year service life.

As a Naval Reserve Force (NRF) command, SBU-24 has 86 reservists assigned along with the 76 active duty personnel. Because the reserve component has no assigned craft, they routinely train on our patrol boats during drill weekends. OCEAN VENTURE 93 offered an outstanding Active Duty for Training (ADT) opportunity for our reserve boat crews.

To validate our readiness to deploy, Op-

erational Readiness Evaluations (ORE) were successfully completed in February and March by Detachments ALFA (8V92 crews), BRAVO (8V71 crews) and CHARLIE (reserve crews). Logistics Requirements (LOG-REQ) for fuel, pier space and fresh water were submitted to the appropriate agencies and a Plan of Intended Movement (PIM) was drawn up. For the transits between Norfolk, VA, and Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico, refueling/logistics stops would be made at Moorehead City, NC; Mayport, FL; Freeport, Grand Bahamas; Crooked Island, Bahamas; Grand Turk, Turks and Caicos Islands; Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic; and San Juan, Puerto Rico. The PIM dictated a fourteen-day transit, and was adjustable to allow for weather delays. Because the length of the transit lent itself to a seventeen-day reserve ADT period, we decided that two reserve crews and two active duty crews would man the boats during deployment and redeployment, and four active duty crews would man the boats during the exercise itself. Primary objectives during each transit were to conduct underway training aimed toward qualification of personnel as Boat Captain, Chief Engineer, Patrol Officer and Combat Craft Crewman (SNEC 9533); inport and underway FXP-6 NSW exercise sustainment training; and underway weapons training and gunnery exercises.

On the evening of 13 April, Det ALFA and Det CHARLIE departed SBU-24 for the 2000 nautical mile transit. The weather and sea state cooperated all the way to Florida, where a recent storm had left 10-12 foot seas offshore south of Mayport along their track. An extra day spent in Mayport allowed the seas to calm and enabled the boats to receive an overnight express package from SBU-24 with repair parts for a critical piece of equipment on PB778 - the toilet! The remainder of the transit went smoothly and the boats arrived at Naval Special Warfare Unit FOUR (NSWU-4) ahead of schedule on the morning of 27 April. They were greeted by Det BRAVO and Maintenance Support Team

