

HISTORY OF USS BELKNAP DLG/CG 26

The USS BELKNAP the first of a new class of guided missile frigates, was the second ship of the U. S. Navy to bear this name. She was named after RADM George Eugene Belknap, USN 1832-1903, and his son Reginald Rowan Belknap, USN 1871 - 1959. She was christened by Mrs. Leonard B. Cresswell, the granddaughter and daughter of the RADMs Belknap and was launched by the Bath Iron Works, Bath, Maine on 20 July, 1963.

Belknap was Commissioned on 7 November 1964 at Boston Naval Shipyard, Boston, Massachusetts, at which time Captain John T. Law USN, took command as her first Commanding Officer. After spending more than a year conducting special trials, tests, and undergoing a brief shipyard availability, Belknap commenced her pre-deployment shakedown training at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Completing a successful training period she joined the U. S. Second Fleet.

In July 1966 Captain Ernest C. Hipp Jr. relieved Captain Law as Commanding Officer. In August Belknap joined U. S., U. K., Norwegian and other units for a combined NATO operation off the coast of Norway. This carried her north of the Arctic Circle and she became a member of the select Blue Nose Society.

After returning to Norfolk in September 1966, with only three weeks of preparation, Belknap departed for her first extended deployment and duty with the U. S. Sixth Fleet. She returned to Norfolk in February 1967. Belknap departed Norfolk on 5 September 1967 for a tour of duty with the U. S. Seventh Fleet, and Task Force 77.

Passing through the U. S. First Fleet on her way to her assignment, Belknap has the distinction of being one of, if not the only U. S. Navy ship to serve in all four major numbered fleets in a nine month period. During deployment Belknap had the task of PIRAZ (POSITIVE IDENTIFICATION RADAR ADVISORY ZONE) STATION. It was her job to keep track of all aircraft over the entire Tonkin Gulf, which often numbered well over a hundred at a time.

She also acted as refueling and rest station for SAR (SEARCH AND RESCUE) helicopter crews which saved the lives of numerous, downed pilots and aircrew. On December 8 1967, Captain J. H. Aldrich, relieved Captain Hipp as Commanding Officer. During this deployment Belknap visited Hawaii, Japan, Hong Kong, and the Philippines. Returning to Norfolk in April 1968, via Port Calls in Perth and Melbourne, Australia and Tahiti. Belknap spent the rest of 1968 through April 1969, preparing for and undergoing the ships first major overhaul.

After undergoing underway training at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, BELKNAP departed Norfolk on 23 October for her second tour of duty with the U. S. Seventh Fleet, doing essentially the same tasks as in her previous tour off Vietnam. She returned to Norfolk in May 1970 via Sydney Australia, Wellington New Zealand and Pago Pago, American Samoa. Within 4 months she left for duty in the Mediterranean with the U. S. Sixth Fleet. Once again, Belknap has the distinction of being one of, if not the only U. S. Navy ship to serve in all four major numbered fleets in a nine month period for a second time. This demonstrated her reliability and the superb quality of the maintenance provided by her crew.

The BELKNAP embarked the first operational SH-2D/LAMPS helicopter in December 1971. Originally classified as a guided missile frigate (DLG) she was reclassified as CG on June 30, 1975.

During the night of November 22, 1975 the USS BELKNAP collided with the USS JOHN F. KENNEDY in

the Ionian Sea. Seven crew members were killed and 47 injured. The cruiser was towed back to the US for rebuilding at Philadelphia Naval Shipyard. The repairs included a new, improved 5-inch gun, updated missile armament, sonar, communications, and radar suites.

Re-commissioned in May 1980, BELKNAP was modified as Fleet Flagship May, 1985 to March, 1986, stationed at Gaeta, Italy for Sixth Fleet Commander.

December 1989, BELKNAP served as US Flagship at the Malta Summit when President George Bush met with Russian President Mikhail Gorbachev.

February 15, 1995, BELKNAP was decommissioned and stricken from the Naval Registry.

On September 24, 1998, she was sunk as a target.