

United States Ship Thomas C. Hart

Destroyer Escort 1092



FAMILYGRAM



VOLUME

III

December, 1975

NUMBER 3

Dear Members of the HART family,

GREETINGS FROM THE COMMANDING OFFICER

HART has accomplished much and has been involved in many activities since the last FAMILYGRAM, but space permits only a broad-brush look at these events of the past six weeks. The basic message, of course, is the the HART has completed her mission in the SIXTH FLEET and everyone aboard looks forward to the reward -- to be home with our families once again.

THE TRAGEDY

Since we left you last time during a return port visit to Naples, we have visited and much enjoyed port visits to Athens, Greece and Bizerte, Tunisia. The unexpected and tragic event which occurred during operations between these visits tested and proved to everyone that THOMAS C. HART was ready. That event, of course, was the collision between USS JOHN F. KENNEDY (CV 67) and USS BELKNAP (CG 26) on the night of November 22. In the aftermath of the tragedy, every man on HART acted quickly and professionally to save lives and help save the BELKNAP from the all-consuming fires which raged for nearly four hours after the collision.

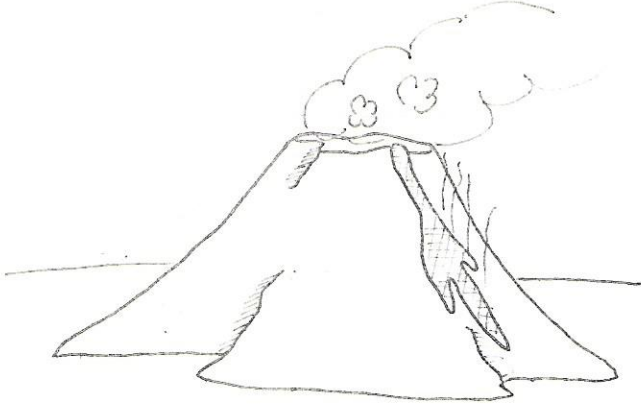
The rescue efforts, detailed in the attached press release, were instrumental in evacuating 26 men and in providing the courageous men of BELKNAP with emergency supplies and equipment to control the fires and save their ship. We grieve at the loss of life of eight shipmates that night on BELKNAP and KENNEDY, but believe that the swift efforts of sister ships present, coupled with the heroic actions of BELKNAP's and KENNEDY's crews, kept the death toll far lower that it might have been.

The Commanding Officer of BELKNAP, Captain W. R. SHAFER took time out after the crippled ship was towed into port to express his appreciation to us with the following message:

"You have won the everlasting admiration and gratitude of the men of BELKNAP. Your heroic and unselfish actions and outstanding professional abilities in our hour of tragedy were a major factor in the survival of BELKNAP and her crew. Thank you and God bless you."

CHRONOLOGY: NAPLES TO ATHENS

The last FAMILYGRAM was sent from Naples in late October. We had a pleasant stay from October 27 to November 10 leaving early in the afternoon on November 11. The dependent's charter flight, which took men from HART back home and brought some wives to Naples for the inport period proved to be a definite morale booster. The rest of us who did not participate in the flight enjoyed the relatively quiet two weeks working and observing the local sights. Several HART men found the time to take a two-day tour to Rome, but independent leave-taking and local restaurant sampling were the most common off-duty pastimes.

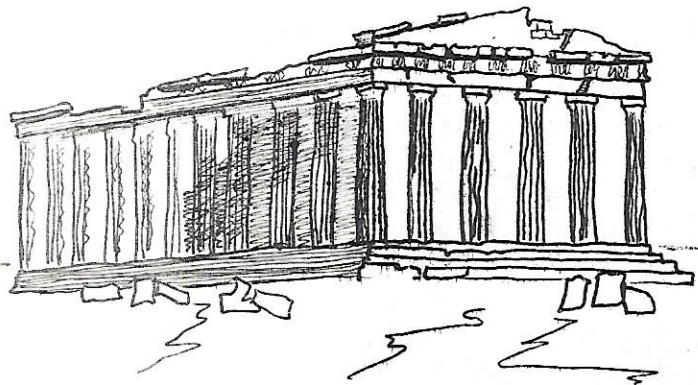


We left Naples on November 11, rested and ready for six days of underway operations prior to arriving in Greece on November 17. The first night out we saw an unusual sight - a volcanic eruption on the small island of Stromboli, northwest of the Straits of Messina. We had read about it a week before but were no less excited to see the molten lava flowing down the mountain into the sea. The

sights of the next few days were somewhat more familiar -- operations with the KENNEDY, refuelings, vertical replenishments, general quarters and engineering casualty control drills and an ammunition transfer. On November 14, the Greek government allowed us to use the tiny, desolate island of Avgo Nisi, northeast of Crete, for Naval Gunfire Support Exercises with USS Sarsfield (DD 837). We utilized our LAMPS helicopter for spotting and bombarded the target with over 100 rounds from our 5"/54 caliber gun mount in the three hour exercise.

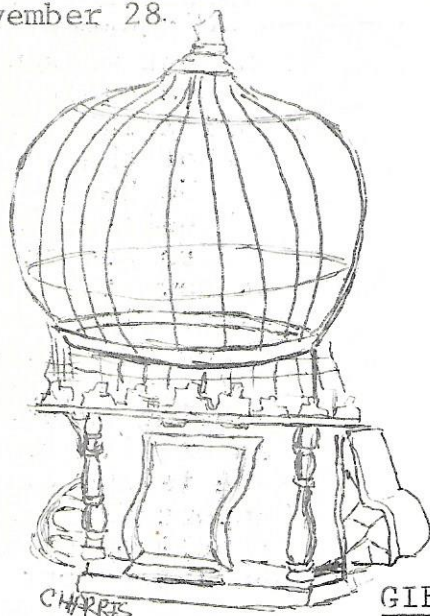
ATHENS, BIZERTE

Then, on November 17, we tied up at the Navy pier at Elefsis, Greece for four days of good liberty and outstanding touring. From the outset, the crew was aware of the need to make this port visit a particularly positive influence on American-Greek relations. We found the Greek people very friendly and the Greek culture very interesting. Nearly three quarters of the crew took tours to Athens and the cities of Corinth/Mycenae/Epidauros. For those



who preferred American-style athletics, movies and refreshment, the Navy provided a pierside snack bar, open-air movie theater and recreation area. It was with genuine reluctance that we got underway from Athens on November 21.

I have already discussed the most significant event of the operational period from Athens to Bizerte -- the JFK/BELKNAP collision -- so I will not dwell on it. My feelings towards the HART crew as a result of their efforts that night are well known. The KENNEDY remained fully operational after the collision with the remainder of the task group as BELKNAP was towed to Augusta Bay by USS BORDELON (DD 881). We saw the charred hulk of BELKNAP again at Augusta Bay, Sicily, on November 26 when we put in to debark ten of her crewmembers who were still on HART, then departed for Bizerte, Tunisia on the north African coast, arriving on November 28.



For five days we enjoyed the sights of Bizerte and Tunis, the national capitol, as we entertained local dignitaries, bargained for bird cages and rugs at the "souk" (market-place) in Tunis and sampled the wine and French cuisine in both cities. We left in the morning on December 4 for Gibraltar (The Rock!), had our final underway replenishment with USS CONCORD (AFS 5) on December 6, and arrived in Gibraltar on December 7.

GIBRALTAR AND BEYOND

We are presently enjoying the small but important port of Gibraltar with its Barbary Apes and British colonial atmosphere. I can assure you that "channel fever" -- the desire to get home and the sooner the better -- has set in and even the genteelness of Gibraltar is not affecting it.



We begin the transit back with USS BASILONE (DD 824) on December 12. With the exception of two brief fueling stops enroute, the next port is HOME. After over six months, the sight of our loved ones waiting on the pier or back home will be the most enjoyable experience of an enjoyable cruise.

PROMOTIONS

I want to recognize the significant achievements of the following people who have been or shortly will be advanced in rate as a result of proven excellence in their work, and high scores on advancement tests. Personnel selected but not yet advanced to their noted rate are indicated with an asterisk(*):

*BT1 Michael G. STEFFERS	*IC2 Wesley J. BINGENHEIMER
HT2 Mark R. COOK	EM2 Bradford B. CORNELL
*STG2 William N. CULLIFER	*SH2 Daniel R. EASTER
*STG2 Randolph G. GROEN	*MM2 William H. HAGENSICK
*HT2 Willis E. KNIGHT	*EW2 Ronald E. KOSHKO
*AW2 James E. LERETT	*STG2 William E. LEZZER
HT2 Carey E. NORRIS	SH2 Eduardo B. PORTUGUES
STG2 Robert P. RUSSELL	*MM2 Robert A. SCHARDING
STG2 Kenneth J. SCHNEIDER	*EW3 Michael P. EMMONS
AE3 Robert W. HARLESS	EM3 Gary J. HILTNER
*MM3 Frederick V. HOLTZ	*MS3 Rhea D. JERRELL
SH3 James M. JOHNSON	*HT3 Travis A. LIVERETT
*GMG3 George A. RUETSCHI, Jr.	*MM3 Gary D. SMITH
*PC3 David L. WILLIAMS	HTFN Gregory D. BODKINS
SN Rickey L. DANIELS	SHSN Douglas J. HILTNER
SN Brian Y. IWAKI	SN Michael W. PARDERLIKES
SN David RODRIGUEZ	BTFA Kenneth M. CROOK
SA James M. SAPP	

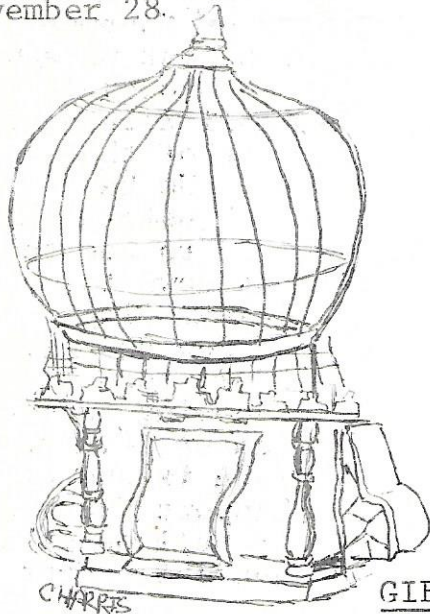
Special congratulations to MS3-designate JERRELL who recently reenlisted onboard.

AFTER NORFOLK

Although at this time most of us cannot think too far beyond December 23 and the holiday leave period, the ship's schedule is firming up for the first quarter of 1976. We will be inport Norfolk from arrival through January 18 in post-deployment holiday status, then will remain inport for a tender availability with USS PUGET SOUND (AD 38) from January 19 to February 13. Later in February we will receive a weapons systems inspection. Beginning in March we are scheduled for several short at-sea periods leading up to the Propulsion Examining Board Inspection plus a short period with one of the carriers. The schedule beyond March is not firm, and I will pass along any information of value as soon as possible.

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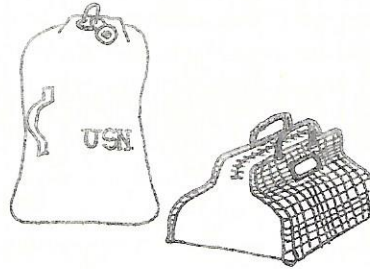
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NEW ARRIVALS

I bid a warm welcome to the following new members of the HART crew and their families. I am very impressed with the skill each man brings to his duties and wish you all a rewarding tour onboard.



<u>NAME</u>	<u>DATE ARRIVED</u>	<u>LAST DUTY STATION</u>
SM3 James C. GLENN	27 OCT 75	SSC, NTC, Orlando, Florida
FTGSA Mark J. SIMPSON	30 OCT 75	SSC, NTC Great Lakes, Ill.
SA James M. SAPP	04 NOV 75	RTC, NTC, Orlando, Florida
MS2 Curtis R. GOREE, Jr.	04 NOV 75	NAS, Meridian, Miss.
HT2 Robert M. MC DOUGAL	08 NOV 75	FLTMAG, Norfolk, Va.
BTFA James A. GOWAN, Jr.	08 NOV 75	SSC, NTC, Great Lakes, Ill.
QMSA Gregory C. MAY	08 NOV 75	SSC, NTC, Orlando, Florida
BTFA Kenneth M. CROOK	17 NOV 75	SSC, NTC, Great Lakes, Ill.
MS2 Gerald P. GRENIER	17 NOV 75	Correction Fac., Quantico, Va.
SR Kenneth L. KESSLER	17 NOV 75	RTC, NTC, Great Lakes, Ill.
GMGSA Martin A. LETITIA	17 NOV 75	SSC, NTC, Great Lakes, Ill.

CAGNEY

On a long deployment, one of the best morale boosters on a day-to-day basis is the evening movie. With movies supplied by the Navy Motion Picture Exchange (NMPX), Brooklyn, New York, the showings provide a welcome relief from work at sea and inport. Movie exchanges occurred primarily inport Naples (where we once had four showings of JAWS in a six hour period), or during underway replenishments, but there just don't seem to be enough movies to keep us interested.



However, Ensign J. Hobart CHIVERS, HART's Damage Control Assistant, found a better way. Taking advantage of a special program offered by the NMPX, he has acquired a series of "Golden Oldie" movies to complement the normal contemporary fare. His efforts have allowed us to screen such old favorites as "Sergeant York" with Gary Cooper; "The Bank Dick" and "Never Give A Sucker An Even Break" with W. C. Fields; "Yankee Doodle Dandy" with James Cagney, Walter Huston, Rosemary DeCamp and Joan Leslie; "Casablanca" with Humphrey Bogart, Peter Lorre, Ingrid Bergman, Sidney Greenstreet and Claude Rains; and "Kid Galahad" with Edward G. Robinson and Humphrey Bogart. Judging by the number of other ships who have borrowed our movies, we're one of the few in the Mediterranean who utilized the service. Thank you, Mr. Chivers.

AWARDS


I recently had the pleasure of awarding Good Conduct Awards to the following men. My warm congratulations and appreciation for four years of exemplary behavior (for RM1 ANTAYA a total of 20 years!):

RM1 Robert A. ANTAYA (fifth award)
STG2 David G. COLEMAN
STG3 William N. CULLIFER
BM2 Chester HEANEY (second award)
STG2 Kenneth A. SCHNEIDER
STG2 Leonard E. RAUSCH

Petty Officer RAUSCH deserves special recognition as well for being selected as Sailor of the Quarter. An outstanding petty officer and technician, he continues to be a great asset to his ship and the naval service. We are privileged to recognize him for his abilities with this award.

IN SUM

Looking back over the past six months I am proud of the HART's many accomplishments. Looking ahead I wish each of you a Merry Christmas and the Happiest of New Years. The return home will provide these to each of us.


JOHN D. ROHRBOUGH
Commander, U. S. Navy
Commanding Officer

P. S.

I expect the HART will arrive at BERTH 201, Destroyer-Submarine Pier, Norfolk, midday Monday, 22 December weather and other conditions permitting. Those of you who will be coming from out of town and want the latest arrival information feel free to call after 1 PM, Sunday, 21 December the following people:

Mrs. Sylvia ROHRBOUGH (my wife)
Area Code 804-486-4097 (Norfolk, Virginia)

Mrs. Pat BALTOZER (Wife's OMBUDSWOMAN and wife of Senior Chief BALTOZER)
Area Code 804-461-2493 (Norfolk, Virginia)

Mrs. Donna REDD (Executive Officer's wife)
Area Code 804-420-9524 (Norfolk, Virginia)

Chief Jack MCKINZIE (Ship's Chief Radioman who is flying home early)
Area Code 804-855-2366 (Norfolk, Virginia)

Hope to see you all on the pier for the big homecoming.

to see you


Text of news story prepared for Fleet Hometown News Center for release to and possible use by the crew's hometown newspapers:

"The Navy Frigate USS THOMAS C. HART, was one of the first ships on the scene to provide rescue and assistance to the stricken cruiser BELKNAP following its collision with the carrier JOHN F. KENNEDY on 22 November 1975.

"In the aftermath of the tragedy, the crew of HART responded rapidly and effectively to assist the crew of BELKNAP in their efforts to save the burning ship. HART maneuvered to assist in fire fighting while launching both of the ship's power boats to evacuate injured. HART's boats were the first to reach the damaged cruiser and, in a six hour ordeal made hazardous by rough seas, darkness and raging fire, rescued a total of 26 sailors. Onboard HART, the crew quickly improvised a large emergency room for treatment of the wounded. Ten of the most critical cases were evacuated to the KENNEDY by helicopter during flight operations which lasted throughout the night. While the injured were being cared for the HART boats transported emergency supplies, medical stores and fire fighting equipment to the crippled BELKNAP and were the last ship's boats to leave the scene.

"HART's Commanding Officer, Commander John D. ROHRBOUGH, expressed great pride in the performance of his entire crew: It was a team effort. Each man responded rapidly to aid a sister ship during her hour of tragedy.

"The ship, deployed to the Mediterranean Sea with the U. S. SIXTH Fleet, is expected to complete her six month deployment with a return to Norfolk, Virginia, in late December."