



USS NASSAU (LHA-4)
FPO NEW YORK 09557

IN REPLY REFER TO:

9 May 1981

Dear Families and Friends of Nassau,

We are now past the mid-point of our Mediterranean deployment, both in terms of time away from Norfolk and in terms of the what we intended to accomplish while at sea. It's been a busy month--full of flight operations, drills, demanding exercises with other ships and other nations, and constant steaming. Our incoming mail deliveries have not been as frequent as we'd hoped they would be, not through any fault of yours but rather due to our schedule. Outgoing mail has fared better, and I expect you know more about us than we do about you.

As I write this we are steaming toward our long awaited and well-deserved liberty port of Malaga, Spain. We expect to arrive on schedule during the afternoon of May 13, and we still expect to arrive home on the 29th or 30th. The exact date and time for that arrival depends on the weather in the North Atlantic and whether we go first to Morehead City, N.C. to offload our Marines. We'll see to it that the word is put out on the NASSAU information number well in advance of the day.

To bring you up to date since my letter of April 20th, we passed near Rota, Spain on the 22nd as scheduled. We didn't pull in to Rota or even anchor there, but several helo trips were made to pick up some supplies and mail. We dropped off our outgoing mail including my last letter to you, as well as two helicopters which we had ferried across the Atlantic. Late that afternoon we passed through the Straits of Gibraltar. It was a cloudy, hazy day and while the Moroccan city of Tangier was visible (and well photographed, from what I saw) the northern coast, including the Rock of Gibraltar, was barely visible. (We're hoping for better visibility on our homeward passage.)

By April 28th we had joined the FORRESTAL and AMERICA Battle Groups east of Sicily in the Ionian Sea and having had several days now as a unit of the SIXTH Fleet felt like old timers. NATO Exercise "Daily Double" began that day with participation by Italian and Greek naval forces. NASSAU started in the approaches to the Adriatic Sea with the launching of air strikes against Italian targets and before the four day operation was finished we had moved over to Greek waters, had repelled attacks by Greek torpedo boats, had flown missions against targets in Greece and had reversed roles several times to launch air attacks against both the USS AMERICA and USS FORRESTAL. Most of us came away from these encounters with no doubt but what we had won!

Following the excitement of the NATO exercise we joined with the Amphibious Task Force currently deployed to the SIXTH Fleet (IWO JIMA, TRENTON, MANITOWAC and SPARTANBURG COUNTY) and steamed further east to the waters around Crete and into the Aegean Sea. Our participation in the training was cut short, however, when the situation in the Middle East took a turn for worse. For a few days our schedule was in limbo.

Letters written during that brief period probably made the possibility of our returning home on schedule sound pretty remote. The schedule uncertainty was short lived, however. Late on the 5th of May we received instructions to head westward for previously scheduled bombing practice at some special ranges set aside for this purpose both in Sicily and Tunisia.

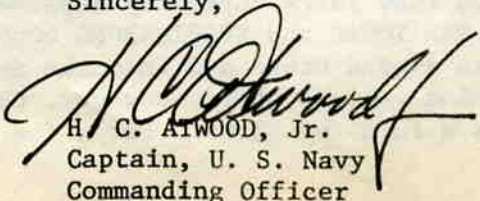
That brings you up to date. We're steaming along the coast of North Africa tonight and both sailors and marines are starting to feel the excitement as Spain draws nearer. Malaga promises to be a good place to relax and to get a taste of the Spanish way of life. The USO, in conjunction with our own Special Services Office is setting up a wide range of tours of the Malaga and southern Spain area. From the number of sign-ups already made, the tours promise to be well attended.

In spite of the demands made on NASSAU these last weeks, there have been as many moments of good-natured humor and companionship as there have been hours of work. The 1400 men aboard (both Navy and Marine Corps) have the good feeling of knowing that they can handle almost anything now. Lots of friendships have been made and a lot of good memories stored away. There's been time for letter writing (generally only late at night) and even time for studying. Our PACE program (Program for Afloat College Education) has been in session throughout this period with a number of students working to complete elementary and intermediate mathematics college-level courses. Our newly-renovated library has reopened, providing a quiet, spacious and well equiped space for NASSAU men to get away for an hour or two. It's here, too, that Chaplain Young and our lay leaders hold church services and where our Bible Study group meets.

I know that separation is never easy, but while you're waiting for us to come home, I hope you can feel some of the same sense of pride that we're feeling. A job had to be done--and we did it well. And we wouldn't have been able to do it half so well if we hadn't had your support. While there have been a few instances of families that had to call for help and a handful of emergency leaves granted, I've been very much impressed at how well you loved ones at home have been carrying on. A lot of credit goes, I'm sure, to our two Ombudsmen--Anita Williams and Linda Louk--but most of the credit just plain goes to you. You obviously must realize that the role you play is just as important as the role played by your man in uniform. Separations aren't fun--but sometimes service to our country asks for a little bit extra from all of us.

Keep those letters coming--and God bless you all.

Sincerely,



H. C. Atwood, Jr.
Captain, U. S. Navy
Commanding Officer