

NOTE: This document is reproduced from Aubrey W. Isaac's Web site. His USS Colonial LSD-18 page has a link named "History of the USS Colonial" which is a series of 10 pages, including a page listing all of the Commanding Officers who served aboard the USS Colonial. The URL of for the document is <http://usscolonial.net/lsd18.htm>. (Later communication from Steve Hartman (EM3, 1968-1970) indicates that he scanned it from the last Colonial Cruise Book).

FPO SAN FRANCISCO 96601

HISTORY OF USS COLONIAL (LSD 18)

USS COLONIAL was named after Colonial National Historical Park in Virginia and Jamestown Island, the site of the first permanent English settlement in North America. COLONIAL was built by the Newport News Shipbuilding and Drydock Company in Virginia and was launched on 28 February 1945. Upon completion and fitting out at the Norfolk Navy Yard, COLONIAL was commissioned on 15 March 1945 with Commander John A. PATERSON as the first Commanding Officer. After a shakedown cruise on Chesapeake Bay, COLONIAL reported to the Chief of Naval Operations for duty on 16 June 1945.

By orders of Commander Service Force, Atlantic Fleet COLONIAL was ordered to New York for loading and onward routing to the Pacific. Although VJ Day was declared before COLONIAL reached the Far East, she continued her trip westward and visited Guadalcanal, the Philippines, Okinawa, and the Marianas Islands before returning to Norfolk, Virginia, via Hawaii and the Panama Canal. Through 1947, 1948 and 1949, COLONIAL participated in several amphibious training exercises, operating along the East Coast from Cuba and Puerto Rico northward to Newfoundland.

When the Korean War broke out in June 1950 COLONIAL was dispatched immediately to the West Coast for further routing to the Far East. COLONIAL initiated her Korean service by landing tank elements of the First Marine Division during support operations of the now memorable "Inchon Landings" in September 1950. Later mechanized and troop elements were landed at Wonsan and in December of 1950, COLONIAL was one of the last ships to leave Hungnam in the brilliant evacuation of that area. On Completion of a month of mine sweeping duty along the eastern coast of Korea, COLONIAL started home having spent a full year of duty in the Far East.

During September and October 1951, COLONIAL completed a shipyard overhaul at Mare Island Naval Shipyard, Vallejo, California after which she returned to San Diego, California for underway training. In January 1952 COLONIAL was dispatched once more to the Far East for duty. During this tour COLONIAL participated in mine sweeping operations off Wonsan Harbor and amphibious training exercises in the WestPac area. Upon completion of this tour COLONIAL returned home, arriving in San Diego in November 1952.

From 1 January to May 1953 COLONIAL participated in various training exercises in the San Diego area. After a two month yard overhaul, COLONIAL transported Marine elements to Korea in August and arrived back in the United States the following month.

In October 1953 COLONIAL once more was underway for a tour in the Far East and returned to San Diego in June 1954 having participated in training operations with Marines in WescPac. June through December 1954 was spent conducting experimental amphibious operations involving heavier equipment and helicopters.

In January 1955 COLONIAL departed for WestPac via Hawaii and the Philippines. While in the Philippines special orders were received to proceed to Formosa to load Chinese Nationalist LCM's and to prepare for the evacuation of the Tachen Islands. During the evacuation operations COLONIAL was a boat haven for small craft and completed several trips between Tachens and Formosa. With a hard earned "Well Done" from COMSEVENTHHFLT for its part in the Tachen evacuation, COLONIAL sailed from Keelung, Formosa enroute Yokosuka, Japan and reported for duty with Task Force NINETY in March 1955. Because of extensive damage as a result of bad weather during the Pacific crossing, COLONIAL was dry docked in Yokosuka for repairs. In May 1955 COLONIAL sailed for Sasebo for duty as tender for the MSB's and MINERON ONE and engaged in several mine sweeping operations between Sasebo Japan and Koje Do, Korea. In June COLONIAL returned to Yokosuka and rejoined Task Force NINETY for amphibious operations enroute Hong Kong. After a Fourth of July visit to this British Crown Colony the ship returned to Sasebo for duty with MINERON ONE. During this duty the gig crew was instrumental in the successful rescue of the pilot and crewman of a helicopter which crashed in Sasebo Harbor. After participating in mine sweeping operations in the Korea area COLONIAL received long awaited orders for home and departed Sasebo enroute San Diego on 5 August 1955 arriving in the United States on 31 August 1955.

In January 1956 COLONIAL left San Diego enroute Seattle, Washington for overhaul and returned to San Diego in March. Following a short training period for which COLONIAL received a "GOOD", the ship reported to COMPHIBPAC for duty. May and June were spent conducting local operations and upkeep.

During July COLONIAL participated in "Operation Rockoon" about 400 Miles southwest of San Diego. Several scientists were embarked from the Naval Research Laboratory, who were studying the effect of solar storms on electromagnetic radiation. Experiments were conducted by launching balloon supported rockets from the flight deck. COLONIAL received a "'WELL DONE" from COMFIRSTFLT and COIMPHIBPAC for her service during this operation. The remainder of the year was devoted to upkeep and repairs with the exception of refresher training during August for which COLONIAL received a grade of excellent.

In February 1957 COLONIAL was underway for another tour of duty in WESTPAC. During this tour three full scale amphibious exercises were completed. OPERATION BEACON HILL was the largest amphibious exercise conducted in the Far East since World War II. OPERATION LUCKY TIGER successfully demonstrated the readiness of the Republic of Korea Marine Corps for amphibious warfare. OPERATION OSDEZ proved the Navy's capability, to resupply a forward base by amphibious methods. COLONIAL worked with Mine Division III off Korea clearing mines from areas unswept since the Korean War. On 30 May 1957 COLONIAL took part in the rescue operations to save the Chinese Freighter PING TUNG which had gone aground on Yikoate China, a

small volcanic island south of Japan. COLONIAL then returned to San Diego for upkeep and local operations.

In March 1958 COLONIAL left San Diego to report to Commander Western Sea Frontier in San Francisco to conduct special operations which included a short visit to Seattle. In June COLONIAL sailed for Long Beach Naval Shipyard for a two month yard period.

In October 1958 COLONIAL deployed to WESTPAC and arrived in Sasebo, Japan in November. After a five day voyage repair, COLONIAL departed Sasebo for Yokosuka for a two day stop and then sailed for Okinawa where she conducted operations until December.

New Years Day 1959 found COLONIAL getting underway for Hong Kong for seven days rest and relaxation. The next stop was Kaoshiung, Formosa for an overnight stay to load two jet fighters and other associated equipment for a Marine Air Group. COLONIAL was again underway for Okinawa, where a warping tug was added to the cargo. COLONIAL departed for Iwakuni, Japan from Okinawa.

After two days steaming an interesting trip through the Inland Sea of Japan, COLONIAL arrived in Iwakuni. While transiting this body of water with its many small islands and twisting channel, four hours were spent steaming through a blinding snow storm. During this transit an American merchant tanker, SS WANG BUCANEER, was sighted flying a distress signal. Both its boilers were out of commission, and the ship had been without power since the preceeding day. COLONIAL provided repair parts, equipment and manpower for necessary repairs, and the disabled ship was able to get underway for Bombay, India the next morning. The rescue of the WANG BUCANEER brought COLONIAL "WELL DONE" messages from all commands concerned, including COMPHIBPAC and COMNAVFORJAPAN. After seeing the WANG BUCANEER safely on her way, COLONIAL proceeded to Yokosuka, arriving on 28 January.

After a ten day upkeep period there COLONIAL was ready to leave for home. In February COLONIAL left for Eniwetok, Marshall Island, Kwaialin, and Pearl Harbor. In Hawaii COLONIAL rejoined other units of Amphibious Squadron THREE, and sailed for San Diego on March 11th.

COLONIAL as well as most other amphibious units of the Pacific Fleet participated in a large fleet exercise, TWIN PEAKS during May and June 1959. Later COLONIAL served as target vessel for submarine exercises and conducted operations off San Diego, training Reserve Officers and assisting USS NORTON SOUND off Point Mugu in guided missile research. In August 1960 COLONIAL earned the Amphibious Assault Award and in September had an availability alongside USS KLONDIKE. On 23 September 1960 she departed for San Francisco to commence a FRAM program. On 15 February 1961 COLONIAL completed her FRAM overhaul and returned to San Diego with new wood in her well deck, new communications equipment in her radio shack, and a remodeled mess deck.

Refresher and amphibious underway training prepared the ship for another WESTPAC Cruise which commenced in June 1961. COLONIAL was assigned the job of Station Ship Hong Kong during August, and in October

participated in Operation WARMUP off Okinawa. COLONIAL returned in December 1961 to San Diego for leave and upkeep. On 19 March 1962 COLONIAL went to San Francisco for an interim overhaul at Pacific Repair in San Francisco and later received praise for this overhaul by saving the Navy approximately \$200,000.00 through use of her own personnel and equipment.

In May COLONIAL returned to San Diego and completed interim refresher training. In June for Amphibious Refresher training, COLONIAL received a grade of EXCELLENT. The highlight of the summer came when the Admiral's Personnel Excellence Award was presented by VADM YEAGER to COLONIAL on 2 August.

From 8 September to 18 September COLONIAL teamed up with Mine Squadron Seven and Canadian Mine Squadron Two for MINEX 2-62. COLONIAL was flagship for Commander, Mine Squadron Seven and also transporter of MSL's and mine sweeping gear.

On 16 October 1962 COLONIAL departed San Diego for WESTPAC. While enroute, she received diversionary orders directing her to embark units of the FIFTH MEB and to join the amphibious task force operating in the Caribbean. She returned to San Diego on 16 December and on 27 December departed for WESTPAC where she completed her scheduled five month tour. Todd Shipyard, San Pedro gave COLONIAL a regular shipyard overhaul which encompassed the months of September, October, and November, permitting her to return to her homeport of San Diego for Christmas and New Years.

In March 1964 COLONIAL participated in Exercise WESTWING off Hawaii which was conducted with the Army's 25th Infantry Division. Upon returning to San Diego she participated in Exercise PINE TREE conducted off Camp Pendleton with the First Marine Division.

On June 18th PHIBRON THREE stood out of San Diego for Hawaii, and WESTPAC. While in Hawaii, COLONIAL participated in an amphibious exercise, "TOOL BOX" with the Third Marines and then proceeded to join the Seventh Fleet. After a fifteen day trip the ship arrived at Buckner Bay, Okinawa for operations with Task Force 76. While in Buckner Bay, the Task Force rode out typhoon "FLOSSIE", at anchor, but then to evade more threatening typhoons the entire force got underway for the next seven days.

On 5 August 1964 COLONIAL returned to Buckner Bay, the day of the first Tonkin Gulf incident and in response, COLONIAL and the other amphibious ships of the Seventh Fleet immediately loaded marines to attain an increased readiness posture in support of the Seventh Fleet in the South China Sea. In a three day around the clock operation, COLONIAL completed her load-out and set out to rendezvous with the Amphibious Force Seventh Fleet.

After rejoining Task Force 76 in the South China Sea, COLONIAL began a long wait that was to stretch into 67 successive days underway. These sustained days at sea taxed the resources of COLONIAL and her crew. They were filled with underway highline transfers replenishments and refuelings as well as necessary maintenance of major proportions in order to maintain the ship on station and ready. Upon being relieved COLONIAL headed for Japan and a short, 10 day upkeep period at Yokosuka, her only upkeep period during six months.

Most of the month of November COLONIAL was again on station off Viet Nam with Marines embarked, until relieved on 28 November, when she sailed to rendezvous with PHIBRON THREE in the mid-Pacific. After 21 days of steaming, on December 18 COLONIAL arrived in San Diego to spend the holiday season in her homeport.

COLONIAL, participated in operation "SILVER LANCE" which took place off the "Silver Strand", California and was coordinated with Marine Corps and beach masters on the beach. As the posture in the Far East became more tense and the demand for men and equipment became more critical, COLONIAL made herself ready for a possible unscheduled deployment. As was foreseen, COLONIAL was called to aid in the conflict, and on 24 May 1965, she was underway for Hawaii, the first leg in an unscheduled WESTPAC deployment. She arrived on 1 June 1965 in Pearl Harbor for refueling. On 3 June 1965, the ship was again underway for Buckner Bay carrying combat loaded Marines, LCU'S and LVT'S. On 17 June, COLONIAL anchored in Buckner Bay, Okinawa and off-loaded and embarked LCU'S.

On 18 June 1965, COLONIAL departed Buckner Bay for Yokosuka Japan arriving on 21 June 1965. The LCU'S were off-loaded and after embarking LCH'S and other equipment, COLONIAL commenced a 5 day period of rest and recreation. COLONIAL departed for Buckner Bay, Okinawa, arriving 29 June 1965 . On 3 July 1965 after off-loading equipment, combat Marines and equipment were loaded and COLONIAL got underway for DaNang, South Vietnam where a landing would take place. COLONIAL anchored in DaNang harbor on 7 July and conducted a landing on 8 July, after which she got underway for Chu Lai, South Vietnam to complete the off-load. On 14 July 1965 she proceeded to Yokosuka, Japan to make ready for the trip back to the United States. On 27 July 1965, COLONIAL proceeded non-stop to the United States arriving in San Diego, California on 11 August 1965.

A leave and upkeep period ended 9 September 1965 when she sailed for Mare Island Naval Shipyard, in Vallejo, California, arriving on 11 September 1965. The purpose of the trip was to transport the bathyscaph, TRIESTE II for repairs to be accomplished at Mare Island. On 13 September 1965 COLONIAL got underway for Portland, Oregon to transport Marine engineer equipment also loaded in San Diego. After navigating the Columbia River, the COLONIAL arrived at Swan Island, Portland, Oregon on 15 September 1965. After off-loading equipment and a two day visit, COLONIAL departed for San Diego, California, arriving in San Diego on 21 September 1965. On 7 October 1965, COLONIAL commenced interim

refresher training and for the next two weeks steamed in operating areas off the coast of California. Refresher Training was successfully concluded on 21 October 1965 at which time COLONIAL returned to San Diego.

On 1 November 1965, after providing services to Naval Beach Group ONE, COLONIAL commenced Amphibious Refresher Training, which was completed on 10 November 1965. COLONIAL received a grade of Outstanding, the first PHIBPAC ship in three years to achieve such a record!! The following week COLONIAL commenced a restricted availability to correct all material deficiencies for a February deployment to WESTPAC. A holiday leave period rounded out the year.

The month of January 1966 was spent in making preparations for deployment to the Western Pacific. On 11 February the ship departed San Diego for the Seventh Fleet with a company of Marines embarked and three LCU's in her well deck. After a stop in Pearl Harbor, COLONIAL reached Buckner Bay, Okinawa on 8 March. During the period from 19 March to 25 March, COLONIAL made lifts of various Marine units and their landing craft between Buckner Bay, Chu Lai, and DaNang, RVN. From 5 April to 8 April COLONIAL became a unit of Task Group 76.6 for an amphibious landing exercise at Okinawa. Commander Amphibious Squadron THREE was CTG 76.6 and was embarked in USS GEORGE CLYMER. On 12 April COLONIAL was back at Chu Lai, having lifted elements of BLT 2/5 and two landing craft from Buckner Bay. Another lift of a dredge from Chu Lai to Nha Be, was followed by two round trips to Subic Bay, P.I. for ten PCF's and their crews. On 15 May COLONIAL set course for Hong Kong, B.C.C. for a rest and relaxation visit.

From 10 June to 21 June COLONIAL made the first of two trips from Subic Bay to Guam and lifted auxiliary equipment of the dredge NORFOLK (YM 22) to Subic Bay. Another short lift of landing craft with their crews to DaNang was followed by an upkeep period at Subic Bay. During this time, the flight deck was removed to make room for the dredge NORFOLK. 21 to 26 July COLONIAL carried the NORFOLK from Guam to Subic Bay. The 1500 ton dredge completely filled the well deck. From 31 July to 4 August one LCU and two PTF's were lifted from Subic Bay to DaNang and on the return trip, from 4 August to 6 August, one LCU and one YTL with crews were lifted to DaNang and three LCH 6 conversions to Vung Tau. This was followed by a six day visit to Hong Kong and stops at Yokosuka and Sasebo, Japan for upkeep prior to return to San Diego on 1 October. The next three months were spent in preparation for yard overhaul.

In January 1967, COLONIAL lifted two ammunition barges from San Diego to Naval Ammunition Depot, Bangor, Washington. Upon return to San Diego COLONIAL underwent refresher training. The final overall average was 74.75 for a grade of "Good". During August while under the operational control of CONPHIBPAC, COLONIAL underwent Amphibious Refresher Training, completing it with an overall of "Good".

After off-loading ammunition at Seal Beach on 3 September, COLONIAL proceeded to Craig Shipbuilding Company of Long Beach for pre-deployment Restricted Availability. While in Long Beach, COLONIAL received her annual Administrative Inspection and a grade of 90.18 an Excellent was assigned. Returning to San Diego on 18 October COLONIAL made a brief trip to San Francisco and Long Beach to pick up a WESTPAC loadout, which consisted of three Patrol Air Cushion Vehicles (PACV'S), one YFU, and the repair barge section of a Mobile Support Base. COLONIAL departed for WESTPAC on 31 October in company with USS WHETSTONE (LSD

27). Following a stop over at Pearl Harbor on 9-10 November, COLONIAL chopped to the operational control of Commander Seventh Fleet on 19 November. Upon delivering her cargo at DaNang and Vung Tau, RVN, COLONIAL proceeded to Subic Bay for a restricted availability from 9 to 13 December. While at Subic Bay she was directed to replace USS ALAMO (LSD 33) as a part of Amphibious Ready Group Bravo under CTG 76.5 and participated in landing exercise BLTLEX 1-68. With the ALAMO back on the line., COLONIAL was released to make a lift to DaNang and Vung Tau.

Christmas at Vung Tau saw COLONIAL giving medical assistance to an injured Chinese crewman from a Taiwan fishing vessel, the YAI LONG, out of Kaoshiung. After a brief stop at DaNang, COLONIAL ended the year underway for Subic Bay.

In March, while enroute from Subic Bay to Kaoshiung, COLONIAL came to the assistance of a fishing vessel from Formosa that had lost all power and had been adrift for several days without food or water. The vessel was embarked in the well deck and medical assistance was rendered to its crew. The boat was then made seaworthy by emergency repairs effected by COLONIAL's crewmen.

The first week of May was spent in Hong Kong for rest and recreation. From Hong Kong COLONIAL proceeded to Yokosuka, Japan for an upkeep period of nine days to prepare for return to San Diego. COLONIAL departed ahead of Amphibious Squadron THREE on 25 May to arrive in Pearl Harbor early enough to provide well deck services and transportation of an experimental howitzer-equipped Monitor. After Pearl Harbor COLONIAL proceeded to San Diego in company with USS COMSTOCK, USS WHETSTONE, and USS CAVALIER and arrived 15 June 1968.

A leave and upkeep period was followed by a RAV in July and August. COLONIAL was then selected to participate in the Astoria, Oregon annual Regatta and Fish Festival. After a two day visit in San Francisco while enroute, the ship arrived in Astoria for a four day celebration during which COLONIAL sailors participated in a parade and boarded over 800 visitors aboard including the Honorable Mark O. HATFIELD, United States Senator from Oregon. The ship made a brief stop in Bremerton, Washington to deliver a fuel barge picked up in San Francisco and then proceeded directly to San Diego.

In September COLONIAL was selected by COMPHIBPAC to assist the U. S. Olympic Committee by- transporting the United States Sailing craft and support Vehicles from San Diego to Acapulco, Mexico. The lift consisted of nine sail boats and an assortment of vehicles including a large house trailer.

While visiting Acapulco, COLONIAL hosted, for an official visit, the Mexican Admiral in charge of the Naval Force Base there.

In October COLONIAL was selected to participate in testing an experimental Landing Craft (LCA-X2) by providing well deck service at Coronado Roads.

An availability commenced in November 1968 and continued through January 1969. The major job was repair of the serious deterioration of well deck bulkheads.

COLONIAL closed the year 1968 while in port during a leave and upkeep period which was highlighted by a successful holiday season.

COLONIAL began 1969 in her homeport making preparations for two major inspections to be completed prior to her scheduled May deployment to WESTPAC. COMPHIBRON conducted both an Administrative and a Material Inspection of COLONIAL in January and February with highly successful grades resulting in each. Amphibious Refresher Training was next and COLONIAL was awarded a high excellent for her performance during this period. Mid-March found COLONIAL again at sea for two intensive weeks of Interim Refresher Training. Upon completion she returned to San Diego for a well earned rest and continued to make plans/preparations to meet the 1 May deployment sailing date. COLONIAL however was nominated to participate in a large scale April joint Navy/Marine amphibious assault exercise. COLONIAL as the Primary Control Ship for the over-the-beach assault landing further enhanced the high level operational readiness for her principal amphibious warfare mission.

COLONIAL departed San Diego on 1 May enroute to WESTPAC in company with other units of Amphibious Squadron THREE. COLONIAL became a straggler to convoy exercising units due to a major engineering casualty. Rapid and expert repairs were made underway and she proceeded independently on to Pearl Harbor arriving with the squadron on schedule.

From Pearl Harbor COLONIAL proceeded independently, to Johnston Island, one of many stops in an island hopping trip West. The stay, at Johnston was only long enough to off-load priority cargo and load out another priority lift destined for Bikini Atoll. After a brief stop at Bikini it was onward to Guam for a logistics reprovisioning.

While at the fuel pier in Guam in late May, COLONIAL's extensive damage control training paid high dividends when the crew called on to extinguish a dangerous and rapidly spreading fuel fire adjacent to the ship. The damage, though minimal, might have been very, severe had it not been so quickly extinguished. For their initiative, quick thinking, and courage in fighting the blaze one COLONIAL Officer and two crew members were subsequently awarded the Navy, Achievement Medal.

From Guam COLONIAL sailed north to Yokosuka, Japan for one week of upkeep. While in Yokosuka her next employment called for administratively lifting a passenger ferry boat to Malakal Harbor, Palau. Palau, an island group to the east of the Philippines, and infrequently visited by U. S. Navy Ships, provided a fascinating glimpse of a remote tropic isle. The passenger ferry lifted by COLONIAL now provides a vital link in the island group's transportation system.

Departing Palau the trip west was resumed with an extremely interesting and scenic transit through the San Bernardino Straits enroute to Poro Point and Sangley Point in the Philippines.

COLONIAL's initial 1969 Viet Nam call marked the beginning of participation in several amphibious operations, the first of which was "Operation Sea Float".

COLONIAL's mission was to transport several ammi pontoons from Nha Be to the Cau Mau peninsula, the Southern tip of Viet Nam, to help reestablish a United States presence there.

In addition to "Sea Float" and numerous administrative logistic lifts in support of U. S. efforts in Viet Nam, COLONIAL played a large part in the first phase of U. S. Marine drawdown in RVN "Operation Keystone Eagle. Two lifts of Marines and their heavy equipment were successfully accomplished from Cua Viet, RVN to Buckner Bay, Okinawa.

The last part of July and early August found COLONIAL in Subic Bay for a needed upkeep period.

From Subic Bay COLONIAL was scheduled to sail for exotic Singapore to transport a small craft for further delivery to Vung Tau. While enroute COLONIAL dipped below the equator. In fine nautical tradition, the majority of the crew being "pollywogs" were duly initiated into the Neptune's Silent Order of the Deep" by the few but enthusiastic, hardened "shellbacks." The former pollywogs were properly "seasoned" shellbacks upon arrival in Singapore.

Departing Singapore 23 August, administrative support lifts were made to Vung Tau and DaNang.

In September, COLONIAL was assigned to TG 76.4, Amphibious Group ALFA, to carry out her primary mission in the amphibious warfare concept. "Operation Defiant Stand" (Victory Dragon 15-1), a combined U. S. Republic of Korea operation was an effort to dislodge the Viet Cong from Barrier Island located along the South China Sea coastline 20 miles south of DaNang. The successful twelve day operation was the South Korean Marine Corps' first combat landing since Inchon during the Korean war 19 years prior. This unique operation for the U. S. as well as the Koreans marked the first time in the Vietnamese conflict that an Amphibious Ready Group had landed one battalion of troops, taken on another, landed it, and supported both throughout the operation. COLONIAL played the key role of Primary Control Ship for the assault landings over the hostile beach phase and continued support of both ROK and U. S. Marines ashore.

Planning on a long-awaited R&R visit to Hong Kong in late September, COLONIAL was urgently tasked to provide amphibious lift support for priority offensive operations against the VC/VVA forces in the lower Ca Mau peninsula of the Mekong Delta. Foregoing the well earned Hong Kong port visit, "Operation Breezy Cove" required COLORMIS versatile wet-well lift capabilities to transport assault craft and equipment necessary to establish an advance tactical support base in the Song Ong Doc of RVN.

With COLONIAL's "Breezy Cove" commitment completed, the ship along with other units of PHIBRON THREE was assigned to provide the amphibious lift of the USMC Regimental Landing Team Three from Vietnam to CONUS. This internationally significant "Keystone Cardinal" operation was in response to the President's order to have a portion of the withdrawn troops back home by 1 November 1969.

Loading out troops, vehicles, and equipment at Cua Viet, COLONIAL sailed for Del Mar, California, with a brief intermediate- refueling stop at Buckner Bay, Okinawa. Rendezvousing with USS COMSTOCK (LSD 19) and USS WHEATSTONE (LSD 27) in Okinawa, the three-ship task unit commenced the long trans-Pacific transit on 10 October. Successfully avoiding two typhoons enroute, the ship arrived at Del Mar on 30 October. After an expeditious and efficient debarkation of embarked personnel and cargo, COLONIAL arrived in San Diego to a glorious homecoming on 31 October.

Devoting the month of November to a well deserved leave and upkeep period, the ship simultaneously prepared for an INSURV inspection scheduled for the first week of December. This thorough and all-encompassing material inspection was preparatory to the previously announced Project 703 inactivation of many of the Navy's older men-of-war. Being found "fit for further service" by the INSURV board, the remaining weeks of December were devoted to preparation for inactivation at Vallejo, California, along with granting holiday leave and liberty.

On 27 December, COLONIAL bid a fond farewell to her longstanding home port of San Diego and sailed for Vallejo. Arriving at the U. S. Naval Inactivation Ship Maintenance Facility, Vallejo, on 29 December, the aged but proud COLONIAL chipped to an "In Commission, In Reserve" status on 30 December 1969, and shifted her homeport to Vallejo, California.

In the LSD inactivation scheme, COLONIAL was designated as lead ship to pursue the inactivation of USS TORTUGA after TORTUGA's 26 January-1970 decommissioning. The crew of COLONIAL along with a 20 man augmented TORTUGA caretaker crew worked long and tedious hours towards the preservation of TORTUGA in the months of February and March, with the CO, INACTSHIPMAINTFAC, Vallejo accepting the inactivated TORTUGA on 3 April 1970.

The remaining three months of April through June 1970 were devoted to the exhaustive inactivation of COLONIAL. On 30 June 1970, COLONIAL is to be decommissioned after twenty five years, one month and fifteen days of continuous proud and valiant commissioned service in the U. S. Navy,. COLONIAL will be assigned to the custody of the Inactive Ship Maintenance Facility, Vallejo upon decommissioning.