

USS Essex Change of Command



(L-R) Commander Jeffery Parks, Chaplain; Capt./ Aaron J. Taylor; RADM Randall W. Peck; and Capt. Wayne P. Liebold (at podium on right)



Commander Jeffery Parks, Chaplain; Capt. Wayne P. Liebold; Capt. Aaron J. Taylor; RADM Randall W. Peck

By: Irv Cuevas

Change of Command (COC's) are not uncommon in the Navy, and are frequently held on ships whether at sea, in port, or at shore stations around the world.

But how many such tradition-bound ceremonies are staged beneath the hull of a vessel while in dry-dock? That's exactly what happened August 10 under the more than 800 foot hull of the USS *Essex* LHD-2, undergoing upgrades and maintenance at BAE Systems in San Diego, Calif.

Staged in a colorful setting under the giant propellers and hulls, Captain Aaron J. Taylor relinquished command to Captain Wayne P. Liebold. Rear Admiral Randall W. Peck conducted the pomp and circumstance and as is customary; crew members in dress whites prominently observed as they got a new Skipper.

The heart of the ceremony was the formal reading of official orders by Captain Liebold, formerly *Essex's* XO, and those by Captain Taylor next headed to a Pacific Fleet position based in Pearl Harbor.

Command passed by the time-honored utterance by the relieving officer, "I relieve you, Sir." The officer being relieved responded, "I stand relieved."

Thus, a new chapter begins for the *Essex*, known as the "Iron Gator." She was soon to "return to the water" and resume fleet operations when fully shipshape once again.

The *Essex* is a *Wasp*-class assault vessel commissioned in October 1992, with a crew compliment of 1,200 sailors and 2,200 Marines. *Essex*'s aerial capabilities include F35's, Harriers, Ospreys, heavy-lift helicopters, and can handle LCAC's for troop movements.

During her long service, *Essex* embarked on a wide range of Naval operations with USN and foreign vessels and assisted in a number of humanitarian assistance/disaster relief service.