



# A Message From Jack's Collar

PCU BOUGAINVILLE (LHA 8) ISSUE 4 - January 2025

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Care For Sailors - Care For Families - Build Warfighters



## Captain's Corner



**Capt. Harry Marsh**  
**Commanding Officer**

Fighting EIGHT,

2024 was a stellar year for BOUGAINVILLE, and 2025 promises to be even better. We started 2024 with a crew of 80, and ended with a crew of 320. This past year, BOUGAINVILLE Sailors have been in high demand. You have operated across the globe, supporting operational commands. Your teamwork and professional excellence ensure that we are always ready to preserve the peace, respond in crisis, and if needed, go into harm's way.

Looking ahead, let's approach the New Year with the same energy and excitement you brought to 2024. You are smart, resourceful, committed Americans who want to be part of something special - to serve our country and to be part of a high-performing team. You are rightly proud of what you do and you are a formidable force. It is a privilege to work with, and especially to lead, such a capable and creative team. Despite growing challenges and significant strains, you continue to go to sea to do what must be done today, and you create and innovate in order to prevail tomorrow. As you look around the command, take the time to observe and interact with those around you and look for those who might need a friend. Remind those with whom you serve that we are one family.

Thank you again for your service and sacrifice. What you do every day matters. I am extremely proud to be part of this amazing team. I will give everything I have to honor and strengthen the bonds of trust and confidence we share, and make BOUGAINVILLE the strongest CREW has ever sailed the seas.

Very Respectfully,  
CAPT Harry Marsh

## DH of the Month



**Cmdr. Quentin Cooper**  
**Chief Engineer**

I want to take a moment to express my deepest gratitude for your unwavering dedication, resilience and commitment during my tenure. Shipbuilding is no easy task—it demands long hours, precision, and an unbreakable spirit. It is a process filled with obstacles, setbacks, and moments of uncertainty, yet through it all, you continue to push forward with determination and pride. You are laying the foundation for future crews who will one day sail aboard her, ensuring they have a vessel built with the highest standards of excellence. It is a responsibility that requires both skill and sacrifice, and you rise to meet that challenge every single day.

To the families who stand behind our Sailors—you, too, deserve our deepest appreciation. Your unwavering support, patience, and love provide the strength that fuels this mission. From PCU to PCD, TAD, and time spent away from home are not just burdens carried by the crew, but by each of you. Your sacrifices do not go unnoticed. Sustaining positivity in the face of such a demanding undertaking is no small feat. Yet, it is in these moments of adversity that the true spirit of the USS Bougainville family shines through. Your teamwork, your perseverance, and your shared commitment to this mission make all the difference.

As I move on to my next tour of duty, I want to sincerely thank you for all that you do. I am honored to have stood beside you in this journey, and I have "no doubt" that the USS Bougainville will be LOYAL, FIERCE, and BRAVE with the dedication that each of you has poured into her.

With the utmost respect and gratitude,  
CDR Cooper

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Do you have a story to tell? We would love to feature you or your department in a future edition. Contact the Jack's Collar editorial staff by email at: [LHA8\\_Media@us.navy.mil](mailto:LHA8_Media@us.navy.mil)

## On The Front Cover



Sailors assigned to Precommissioning Detachment (PCD) Bougainville in Norfolk, Va. fill their plates with food at a holiday potluck December 19, 2024.

Both PCD and the Precommissioning Unit (PCU) in Pascagoula, Miss. hosted potluck events where Sailors took some time to get to know each other better and enjoyed some great holiday food.

For more photos of the Holiday potluck event, see page 3.



# Visiting the National WWII Museum in New Orleans

Photos by MC2 Nicholas Skyles

While many Bougainville Sailors are stationed in Norfolk where they can train and interact with ships and systems to keep their skills sharp, it is also important for them to visit their own ship at Ingalls Shipbuilding in Pascagoula during ship familiarization tours.

These visits typically last several weeks, and allow Sailors to secure their security credentials and personal protective equipment, explore their ship, learn more about the Gulf Coast

area where they will be living in the months leading up to commissioning, and spend time working with and getting to know their shipmates who are stationed in Mississippi.

The most recent visit in December 2024 included a great bonus opportunity: a visit to the National WWII Museum in New Orleans to learn more about the USS Bougainville heritage and namesake.

Capturing Bougainville Island, located in the Northern Solomons in the

South Pacific, was a key victory for the Allies as they fought to secure territory held by the Japanese, allowing them to establish air superiority in the area and minimize the threat posed by the nearby Japanese stronghold of Rabaul.

The National WWII Museum features several exhibits that document this period in history and allowed Bougainville Sailors to learn more about the rich heritage and legacy left by the Soldiers, Sailors and Marines of the Bougainville Campaign.



## Bougainville Sailors Celebrate Holiday Potlucks

Photos by MC2 Nicholas Skyles and MC2 Dylan Kinee





# Marine Corps Commandant Tours Bougainville

Story and photo by MCC Nathan Carpenter

The 39th Commandant of the Marine Corps, Gen. Eric M. Smith, and the 20th Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps, Sgt. Maj. Carlos A. Ruiz, toured PCU Harrisburg (LPD 30) and PCU Bougainville (LHA 8) while visiting Ingalls Shipyard in Pascagoula, Mississippi Nov. 20, 2024.

"These are the Swiss Army knife of the fleet. They can do anything," said Smith.

"They can do power projection, they can do humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, command and control -- they can do just about anything, just like a U.S. Marine. There's nothing else like them."

During his visit to Bougainville, Smith took some time to meet with the ship's crew, answering questions and offering the Sailors a better understanding of the strategic value amphibious assault ships

offer to the fleet and to the Marine Corps.

"This is one big deck and one LPD," said Smith. "This represents two thirds of an amphibious ready group that is ready to go off of any shore, any coast, doesn't need anybody's permission to be there, to stay there, it can evacuate Americans, respond to crises, or deliver critical strike capabilities against our adversaries. It does my heart good."



Marine Corps Commandant Gen. Eric Smith and his staff pose for a photo with members of the USS Bougainville crew on the ship's mess deck.

## Bougainville History - Beginning the Invasion

by Stephen J. Lofgren

from *The Campaigns of World War II Series*

In early October the Japanese had approximately 37,500 troops on Bougainville and nearby islands. There were 25,000 soldiers in southern Bougainville and the Shortland Islands, 5,000 on the east coast, 5,000 on Bougainville's northern end and on Buka Island, and a small number around Empress Augusta Bay on the west coast. After deliberation, Adm. William Frederick "Bull" Halsey Jr., commander of the South Pacific Area, targeted Torokina in the Empress Augusta Bay area. Despite the heavy surf at Empress Augusta Bay and its proximity to Japanese airfields on southern Bougainville (65 miles) and Rabaul (215 miles), Halsey surmised that the imposing mountain range surrounding the bay's coastal plain would delay the Japanese counterattack three to four months.

As invasion preparations proceeded, Lt. Gen. George C. Kenney's Fifth Air Force flying from New Guinea conducted major air attacks against Rabaul during October and November, while the Air Command, Solomons, kept the five Japanese fields on Bougainville under such pressure that they were useless by invasion day. Meanwhile, on 27 October, New Zealand and American troops captured the Treasury Islands, south of Bougainville. That same

day the 2d Marine Parachute Battalion landed on Choiseul, a large island in the Solomons near Bougainville. As part of a deception plan to mislead the Japanese as to where the main invasion would occur, the marines harassed the Japanese on the northern half of the island for twelve days before withdrawing. Perceiving threats everywhere except in the west, the Japanese concentrated their defenses accordingly, largely ignoring the western shore.

The Empress Augusta Bay invasion on 1 November, under the command of Admiral Wilkinson, showcased the growth of American skill in conducting and supporting amphibious assaults. Despite a heavy surf that caused one transport to run aground and eighty-six landing craft to swamp and that rendered some beaches too dangerous to use, most supply ships were emptied within eight hours and 14,000 marines landed before nightfall. By the end of D-day, the marines had established a shallow, 4,000-yard beachhead.

For the next two months, as the marines expanded their beachhead, the Japanese continued to believe that the main assault on Bougainville would come elsewhere. By March 1944 the Japanese had realized their error and assembled a counterattack force. This force, some 15,000 to 19,000 strong, moved across the mountains to



Troops pass ammunition from an LCPV to the beach during the landing of U.S. Marines on the island. Photo courtesy of the National Archives

attack what Japanese intelligence had reported to be 30,000 Americans and their airfields within the beachhead. The movement of Japanese troops and supplies from all over Bougainville toward Empress Augusta Bay had been detected, however, and attack plans learned from decrypted Japanese Army messages and captured documents. There would be no surprise.