

A Briefing Paper on the USS Conyngham's Armament and History

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Conyngham's Nuclear Armament

The USS Conyngham (DDG 17) is a Charles F. Adams (DDG 2) class guided missile destroyer. It is a nuclear-capable ship, being able to carry and fire nuclear-armed ASROC anti-submarine rockets.

The ASROC missile is a ship-launched anti-submarine rocket fired from a directable eight cell launcher (or on some ships from launching rails that also can fire anti-ship or surface-to-air missiles). The 0.9 - 5 nautical mile (1.8 - 9 kilometer) range missile can be armed with either a one kiloton W44 nuclear warhead or a conventional Mk-46 acoustic homing torpedo. It has been operational since 1961, and 575 W44 ASROC warheads are in the U.S. stockpile as of December 1987. More ASROC missiles than nuclear ASROC warheads exist since the missile is dual-capable and widely deployed on surface ships, and "extra" missiles are used for training, testing, maintenance, etc. The ASROC arms 159 U.S. surface ships: 32 cruisers, 62 destroyers (including the Conyngham), and 65 frigates.

As a nuclear-capable ship, the Conyngham must receive regular inspections by the Navy and the Defense Nuclear Agency of the U.S. Department of Defense to certify the ship is prepared to conduct its nuclear weapons missions. Since 1973 the following inspections have been officially reported: on May 8th-9th, 1973, the Conyngham received a Navy Technical Proficiency Inspection (NTPI). It was the Conyngham's second NTPI in eight months and the second inspection was passed with outstanding results. In 1976, the ship had a Nuclear Weapons Acceptance Inspection (Nwai) on March 2nd-3rd. During the Nwai the "crew demonstrated their proficiency at handling weapons and maintaining security to the satisfaction of the inspection team." In 1977, the ship successfully completed a NTPI on March 3rd-4th. In 1978, another NTPI was successfully conducted on August 24th-25th. In 1981, a Nwai was held on June 7th. And, finally, the ship had a Defense Nuclear Surety Inspection conducted by the Defense Nuclear Agency in January 1987.

The Conyngham is a guided missile destroyer (DDG). DDGs and other destroyers are multi-mission ships that can perform anti-air, anti-surface, and anti-submarine warfare, as well as provide support to amphibious operations. They can operate as escort ships in carrier or battleship battlegroups, or independently in escorting convoys of logistic ships. They also can operate together or with cruisers to form their own surface action groups. The U.S. Navy operates 68 active destroyers and 23 of these belong to the Charles F. Adams (DDG 2) class.

The Conyngham is 437 feet long, displaces 4,500 tons at full load and has a crew of over 380. Four boilers allow the ship to achieve a top speed of about 30 knots. The ship is approaching its 25th year of operational service as it was commissioned on

July 13th, 1963. Conventional Harpoon anti-ship missiles, Standard anti-air missiles, two 5" inch guns and torpedo tubes as well as conventional ASROCs also arm the ship.

Conyngham's History of Operations

The ship is homeported in Norfolk, Virginia and is part of the U.S. Atlantic Fleet. As a member of the Atlantic Fleet, it makes regular deployments to the Northern Atlantic, Mediterranean, Caribbean and Persian Gulf. Prior to and after these deployments the ship generally onloads and offloads ammunition at Yorktown Naval Weapons Station, Virginia, though occasionally it takes on ammunition at Earl Naval Weapons Station in New Jersey. During these deployments the ship participates in U.S. and NATO exercises, U.S. shows of force and naval operations, and makes port visits. Some of the more significant deployments and events since 1973 are reported here.

Northern Atlantic Operations

In 1973, the Conyngham left the Mediterranean to take part in NATO's SWIFT MOVE exercise held on October 1st-8th. During the exercise the ship "saw a number of Soviet men-of-war including a KRIVAK class DLG." After SWIFTMOVE (and five months after its last nuclear-certification inspection) Conyngham made a port visit to Copenhagen on October 11th-15th. The next week, October 15th-20th, Conyngham joined in Baltic Operations '73 which involved "fast patrol boat strikes, air strikes and anti-submarine warfare exercises." At the end of the Baltic Operations, the Conyngham accompanied by another U.S. destroyer, the New (DD 818) made a port visit to Helsinki, Finland. The ship left Helsinki on October 22nd and returned to the Mediterranean.

In 1977, the Conyngham left the United States in June to make a series of port calls in Northern Europe as member of the U.S. Navy's contingent to the United Kingdom's Silver Jubilee Celebration. On June 25th, the ship arrived in Hamburg for a three day visit. After Hamburg, the ship visited Aalborg, Denmark on June 30th - July 5th (this visit took place about four months after its last nuclear-certification inspection). Its final port call was to Portsmouth, England on July 7th-10th.

In 1982, the Conyngham participated in the NORTHERN WEDDING '82 exercises in August and September. During the exercise, the ship operated with elements of the Danish, German, Dutch, Canadian, British, French, and Belgian navies. After the exercise the ship visited Edinburgh, Scotland on September 16th-23rd.

In 1984, on February 16th the Conyngham deployed to the North Atlantic to take part in UNITED EFFORT '84 exercise. On March 8th, while north of the British Isles the ship participated in TEAMWORK '84, an exercise which involved over 100 ships from all NATO navies. The Conyngham crossed the Arctic Circle and entered an anchorage in

a fjord on the North Coast of Norway on March 17th, after which the ship started a four day port visit at Stravanger, Norway on March 24th. On March 27th the ship left for Copenhagen and remained there until April 4th. The ship then sailed for Rosyth, Scotland, and rested there for four days.

The Mediterranean and Persian Gulf Operations

The Conyngham has deployed to the Mediterranean region almost annually since 1973 for periods of 4-7 months. As the U.S. interest in the Persian Gulf increased after 1979, the Conyngham has also spent time in the Persian Gulf. During these deployments the ship engaged in U.S. operations, NATO exercises, intelligence surveillance of Soviet Mediterranean ship anchorages, and goodwill port visits.

In 1979, on January 10th, the Conyngham commenced five days of operations in the Black Sea accompanied by USS Spruance (DD 963). In June 1983, the ship was tasked to provide gunfire support for the U.S. Marines stationed in Beirut. And, in 1987, while in the Persian Gulf, the Conyngham went to the aid of the USS Stark which was damaged by an Iraqi missile attack and towed the Stark to port on May 18th-19th.

Several ports are made during each of these deployments and over the years the Conyngham has visited: Gibraltar, Lisbon, Portugal; Rota, Barcelona, Almeria, Valencia, Malaga, and Palma, Majorca and Port Mahon, Menorca, in Spain; Toulon, Cannes, Villefranche, Theole in France; Naples, Genoa, Gaeta, Venice, Livorno, and Augusta Bay, Sicily and Cagliari, Sardinia in Italy; Athens, and Soudha Bay, and Sitia, Crete in Greece; Izmir, Turkey; Haifa, Israel; Bizerte and Tunis, Tunisia; Alexandria, Egypt; Tangier Morocco; Djibouti; Bahrain; Jidda, Saudi Arabia; Karachi, Pakistan; Dubai, UAE.

Central America and the Caribbean Operations

The Caribbean is a frequent exercise area for U.S. Atlantic Fleet ships. Ships conduct training exercises off the Atlantic Coast of the U.S., Puerto Rico, and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba prior to extended forward deployments. The Reagan Administration's focus on Central America and the Caribbean has meant some Atlantic Fleet ships have participated in operations closer to U.S. shores. The Conyngham has been part of these three times since 1983.

On August 16th, 1983, according to U.S. Navy documents, the Conyngham arrived "on station off Nicaragua to participate in the Central American Presence Operations. CONYNGHAM patrolled Nicaraguan waters from 16 AUG to 8 SEP, monitoring marine vessel activity and making the presence of the United States Navy felt. During this period, CONYNGHAM was prepared to hail and search any vessel suspected of transporting illegal arms in the vicinity of Central American hostilities."

After leaving Nicaraguan waters, on September 8th, 1983, the ship returned to the United States. But on October 27th, the Conyngham "received no-notice orders to deploy for an unspecified period beginning November 2nd." And, "On 2 NOV, CONYNGHAM sailed for the Caribbean as part of the USS AMERICA (CV-66) Battle Group in strategic support of the U.S. Intervention Forces in Grenada," remaining on station until November 11th.

The Conyngham returned to Central America in 1984. On July 30th the ship sailed from Norfolk, Virginia to commence its Central American Operations. First the ship participated in Surface Action Group Operations (SAG OPS) as an anti-submarine warfare screen for the battleship USS Iowa (BB 61). Next, on August 5th, the Conyngham passed through the Panama Canal for the first time and from August 8th-17th operated in the Pacific Ocean "off the coast of Costa Rica, Honduras, El Salvador and Panama."

The ship has suffered some accidents and incidents in the course of its operations. In 1976, on August 25th, amidst intense and fast Western Mediterranean operations, the ship had a minor collision with the cruiser USS Josephus Daniels (CG 27). In 1978, two fires were set on board the ship during the month of July, but the damage was minor and the arsonist was apprehended. In 1983, the ship made a port call to Taormina, Sicily, on July 2nd because a "previously scheduled visit to Athens, Greece had been cancelled upon refusal of diplomatic clearance." In the 1970s the ship had visited Greece without any incidents.

Glossary

Defense Nuclear Surety Inspections (DNSI): are conducted by the U.S. Defense Nuclear Agency (DNA) to certify a nuclear-capable unit is prepared to conduct its nuclear mission. A nuclear-capable unit must be inspected and certified once every 18 months by DNA. DNSIs include an examination of a nuclear capable unit's "nuclear weapons technical assembly, maintenance, storage functions, logistic movement, handling, and safety and security directly associated with these functions." [US Defense Nuclear Agency, Technical Manual: Department of Defense Nuclear Weapons Technical Inspection System (DNA TP 25-1/ARMY TM 39-25-1/NAVY SWOP 25-1/Air Force T.O. 11N-25-1), change number 7-3, 28 October 1983, (U), p. 3.]

Nuclear Weapons Certification Inspections: A nuclear-capable ship must be officially inspected and certified before it is allowed to execute its nuclear mission (i.e. stow and deliver nuclear weapons). These nuclear-certification inspections are conducted by the U.S. Defense Nuclear Agency or the U.S. Navy, and determine whether a ship "is capable of performing its assigned nuclear mission" [DNA, TP 25-1, p. 2]. These inspections are routinely given to ships that have ongoing nuclear weapons missions. According to the Department of Defense, nuclear-capable units must be certified at least once every 18 months [DNA, TP 25-1, p. 4]. Naval regulations state that ships and shore activities should be inspected once at least every 12 months, although extensions of up to six months can be authorized [Chief of Naval Operations, Nuclear Weapons Technical Inspections, (OPNAVINST 5040.6E) 17 June 1975 (FOUO), p. 3]. There are two primary types of inspections used by the U.S. Navy to certify nuclear capable ships. The first is a Nuclear Weapons Acceptance Inspection (NWAI) and the second is a Navy Technical Proficiency Inspection (NTPI, often referred to as a Nuclear Weapons Technical or Proficiency Inspection).

Navy Technical Proficiency Inspections (NTPI): are conducted by the U.S. Navy to certify a Navy nuclear-capable unit is prepared to conduct its nuclear mission. NTPIs are conducted after a ship passes its initial NWAI and are "A technical inspection of a nuclear capable certified unit conducted by Navy and/or Marine Corps inspectors to determine their ability to accomplish their technical mission. The scope of the inspection will include examination of technical assembly, maintenance, logistic movement, storage functions, handling and safety, and security directly associated with these functions. In addition, drills will be conducted to determine the unit's ability to respond to a nuclear weapons accident or incident, and to determine whether security forces respond within the required time limit" [OPNAVINST 5040.6E, p. 1].

Nuclear Weapons Acceptance Inspections (NWAI): are conducted by the U.S. Navy to certify a Navy nuclear-capable unit is prepared to conduct its nuclear mission. They are "technical inspections of a prospective Navy or Marine Corps nuclear capable unit, conducted by Navy and/or Marine Corps inspectors, to determine its readiness to

perform technical assembly operations, maintenance, storage functions, logistic movement, handling and safety, and security directly associated with those functions. Drills are conducted to determine the units's ability to respond to a nuclear weapons accident or incident, and to determine whether security forces respond within required time limits. An NWAJ will be conducted prior to assignment of a new weapons capability, and on all afloat units upon completion of shipyard overhauls and prior to receipt of weapons" [OPNAVINST 5040.6E, p. 1].