

# "Newseyletter" Decatur Chapter No. 4, USCS

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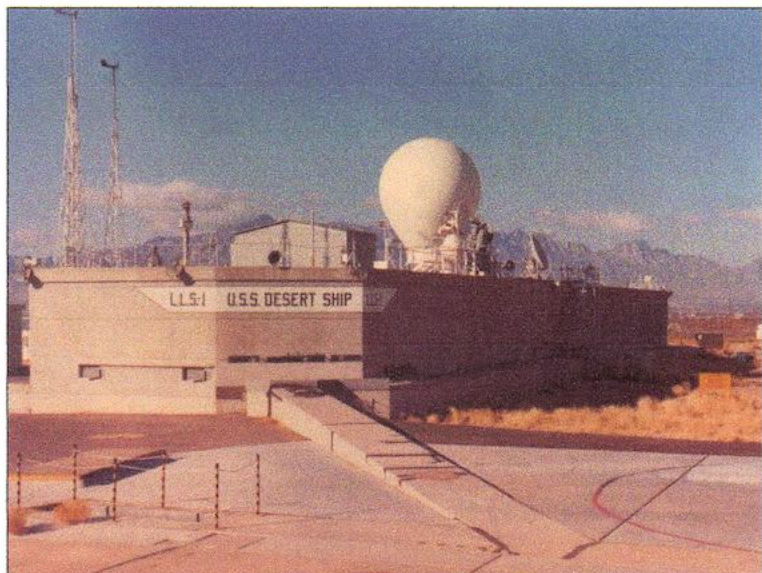
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Deposit Balance \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Have you sent your covers yet?



USS DESERT SHIP LLS-1

USS *Desert Ship* (LLS-1) is a concrete blockhouse providing assembly and launch facilities simulating shipboard conditions for Navy surface-to-air weapons testing at the Naval Air Warfare Center (NAWC) Weapons Division - White Sands. And no, I do not know her FPO address!

## Philippine Navy South China Sea Outpost



BRP *Sierra Madre* LT-57 manned by a contingent of Philippines Marines on Second Thomas Shoal in the Spratley islands

U S Naval Institute Daily Update July 21, 2015

The Philippines government has begun efforts to reinforce the tiny outpost of BRP *Sierra Madre*, a dilapidated World War II-era landing ship deliberately beached on Second Thomas Shoal in 1999. Due in no small part to extensive media coverage, the vessel is a well-known symbol of the ongoing territorial dispute over the mineral- and resource-

rich Spratleys Island group. Since the grounding, the Philippines has rotated a small group of marines to occupy and report on the shoal; seen as vital to the Philippines activity since China began ramping up their island expansion in the region. In a bit of political subterfuge, BRP *Sierra Madre* remains a commissioned vessel in the navy, making it an official extension of Philippine sovereign territory, despite the fact the hull is no longer seaworthy. The conditions aboard are harsh—the corrosive effects of the saltwater environment have eaten away at the vessel; there are safety and habitability concerns everywhere. Planks cover enormous holes in the decks, and makeshift shelters are built into what's left of the superstructure. The marines rely upon a limited supply of consumables; lightly armed, the outpost would not be able to resist a determined attack. At least two China coast guard cutters hover nearby, eager to interdict any resupply attempts to the beleaguered outpost. The acceleration of Chinese encroachment has changed the situation again. With Mischief Reef only 15 miles away from Second Thomas Shoal, the Philippine navy has quietly begun "maintenance" of the *Sierra Madre*. Reportedly, cement, welding tools and other reinforcing materials were brought in via several shipments that made it past the Chinese blockade. The effort, which the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs considers to be legal, has garnered China's ire. Improvements to shelter aside, the outpost still has to deal with habitability challenges, including a lack of organic ability to generate electricity and fresh water. In order to continue sustaining the outpost, some recent and forthcoming defense acquisitions could help. Former Australian landing craft and a brand new support vessel arriving in 2016 would bring much needed faster, far-ranging and heavier lift to sustain the blockade runs. Air drops, currently executed by aging Philippine air force Norman-Britten Islander transports, could be relieved by newer NC-212s under construction in Indonesia.

From Wikipedia: The USS LST-821 (Keel Laid 1944), renamed the USS Harnett County (LST-821) (1955), USS Harnett County (AGP-821) (1970), My Tho HQ-800 (Vietnam 1970)) and finally LT 57 *Sierra Madre* (Philippine Navy 1976) where she presently serves.

## USPS Has Revised U S Coast Guard Pictorial in the July 23, 2015 Postal Bulletin

The proposed revised cancellation was released very late so it will be interesting to see what cities actually order it.



Editors Note: I have changed the format of the "Newseyletter" to two columns so that photographs can be shown that are easier to view.