

## PIEDMONT HISTORY

By Ret. Vice-Adm. Ted Parker (Former CO)

In the summer of 1973, PIEDMONT began his final deployment to the Western Pacific and after arrival, tended destroyers in Kaohsiung, Taiwan and Subic Bay, Philippines. In September, message instructions were received to prepare for transfer to the Atlantic Fleet because of a shortage there of competent tenders. Soon thereafter, the instructions were modified and plans were laid to convert PIEDMONT's fuel system from black oil to distillate fuel, following which he was to proceed to the Mediterranean Sea and a new home port of Naples, Italy. This was also a period when large ships were having significant problems dealing with drug use and racial friction. PIEDMONT had no such problems.

During this last Westpac deployment, a question arose as to whether PIEDMONT might have made errors in overhauling of Mk 46 Exercise Torpedoes that caused them to actually hit the target submarines rather than pass nearby. After a review by the Commander of the 7th Fleet, PIEDMONT's torpedo overhaul procedures were found to be significantly better than the minimum necessary and in no way deficient. The problem was caused by defective parts purchased by the Naval Sea System Command.

PIEDMONT tended ships at Yokosuka over the Christmas period, and in the early spring, began the eastward transit to Long Beach, the home port. Shortly after sailing from Japan, PIEDMONT was diverted on a rescue mission in support of destroyers on station east of Vladivostok awaiting the opportunity to observe and record data on an anticipated Soviet ICBM test. The test had been delayed, and the ships were getting very low on fuel. There was no one remaining on board PIEDMONT who had ever refueled ships underway, so there was a steep learning curve. As it happened, the seas were rough, nevertheless, PIEDMONT successfully refueled all the ships, permitting them to remain on station, and earning a commendation from CINCPACFLT.

Upon return to Long Beach in late spring of 1974, PIEDMONT offloaded ammunition and then entered the Todd Shipyard for several months of work necessary to clean, blast and paint with epoxy material all twenty one fuel tanks. Since this work was to extend beyond the date for the dependent schools to begin the Fall term in Italy, plans were made for many of the families to travel to Italy so as to arrive in time for the beginning of school. Major effort was made to acquaint the entire crew and dependents with the rudiments of the Italian language. TAD money was obtained to send a team of crewmembers on a week's trip to Naples to observe, photograph and report on conditions the crew could anticipate. The team included white and black junior and senior enlisted men, an officer and a photographer. They made a wonderful report, Greatly increasing the crew's eagerness to get to Italy.

Departing Long Beach in early October 1974, PIEDMONT sailed south to the Panama Canal, and returned to Atlantic waters for the first time since 1944. From the canal, he sailed directly to the Mediterranean, arriving in Naples in the latter half of October 1974. Sixth Fleet destroyers were in great need of tender assistance, so Doc was busy right from the start.

In early 1975, after the end of the war between Greece and Turkey, PIEDMONT was ordered to Izmir Turkey to repair Turkish ships. This work went

so well, that several years later, in 1982, when PIEDMONT was decommissioned, Turkey asked if the ship could be leased to the Turkish Navy.

PIEDMONT continued to tend ships in the Mediterranean until about 1978 when the home port was again changed — this time to Norfolk, Virginia.

The Navy began decommissioning Tenders in the late seventies because it was thought that manpower costs could be saved by more use of SIMAs. In 1981, when PIEDMONT was inspected by RAdm J.D. Bulkeley, the President of the Board of Inspection and Survey, Navy headquarters was astonished when he reported that PIEDMONT was in good condition and he saw no reason for decommissioning. Nevertheless, the decision to decommission was made.

Within a few weeks after PIEDMONT had been moved to the Reserve Fleet piers at Portsmouth, Virginia, the Turkish government approached the U.S. Navy asking to lease PIEDMONT, the ship they had inspected and observed in action in Izmir several years earlier. (They had been offered DIXIE previously, but found her condition to be very poor and declined to lease her.) No budgeted funds were available to reactivate the ship, so Commander Senzce Group TWO (a former skipper of PIEDMONT) and the CO who had been in command when PIEDMONT was decommissioned, located a group of former PIEDMONT crewmembers in the Norfolk area and reactivated the ship. Later, when the Turkish crew arrived, they were trained in operation of the ship's systems and demonstrated their readiness to receive the ship in operations underway. The Turkish Navy took command of PIEDMONT in October 1982.

Later, when serving the Turkish Navy as the tender DERYA at the Golchuk Shipyard, there was a terrific earthquake that disabled electrical utilities in the region around Golchuk for several weeks. Crewmembers will be proud to know that the ship's generators were used to feed the emergency power lines that were run to shore facilities and hospitals to permit food deliveries and medical care until normal service could be restored