DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
USS NASSAU (LHA 4)
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From: Commanding Officer, USS NASSAU (LHA 4)
To: Director of Naval History (N09BH), Naval Historical Center, Washington Navy Yard, 901 M Street SE, Bldg. 57, Washington, D.C. 20374-5060

Subj: 2003 COMMAND HISTORY

Ref: (a) OPNAVINST 5750.12F

Encl: (1) 2003 Command History
(2) Organizational Chart
(3) Information Pamphlet
(4) 24 MEU Information Pamphlet
(5) Commanding Officer Biography
(6) Unit Photo

1. Per reference (a), enclosures (1) through (6) are forwarded.

J. L. Green
J. L. GREEN

COMMAND COMPOSITION AND ORGANIZATION

1. The Ship's Mission: The mission of USS NASSAU (LHA 4) is to embark, deploy and land elements of a Marine landing force in an assault by helicopters, landing craft, amphibious vehicles or by a combination of these methods; thus possessing the combined capabilities of the LPH, LSD and LPD class ships. NASSAU can operate independently or in conjunction with other ships conducting heliborne and surface amphibious operations. The TARAWA class multi-purpose Amphibious Assault Ship was designed to maintain "Tactical Integrity" or to get a balanced force to the same point at the same time.

a. NASSAU carries a complete Marine Battalion Landing Team (approximately 1,800 personnel), supplies and equipment required for an assault and vehicles to land the team ashore either by helicopter and/or small amphibious craft.

b. A secondary mission of NASSAU is evacuation and civilian disaster relief. Hundreds of tons of relief materials can be carried onboard and delivered to disaster victims within hours of the ship's arrival on the scene. Additionally, NASSAU is capable of providing fresh water and electricity from the ship's engineering plant until restoration of domestic services. NASSAU's medical facilities provide hospitalization for up to 300 patients (including intensive care) and outpatient treatment.

c. 24 Marine Expeditionary Unit, including the battalion's supporting elements, Battalion Landing Team 2/2, Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 263 and MEU Service Support Group 24, were embarked onboard NASSAU for the ship's 2002-2003 deployment. Aircraft flown by Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 263 (Rein) included 10 CH-46E Sea Knights (Tailcodes 00, 02, 04, 05, 07, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14), six AH-1W Super Cobras (Tailcodes 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35), two UH-1B Huey Iroquois (Tailcodes 40, 41), six CH-53E Sea Stallions (Tailcodes 21, 24, 26, 27, 28, 29), and six AV-8B Harriers (Tailcodes 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55). Also embarked was Helicopter Combat Support Squadron SIX, Detachment SEVEN with two HH 46D helicopters (Tailcodes 74 and 75) to primarily provide Search and Rescue, Logisitics and Force Protection operations. Beach Master Unit TWO provided Landing Craft Unit support.

d. NASSAU was attached to Commander, Amphibious Squadron TWO, commanded by Commodore Terry O'Brien until Tuesday, 1 July, when he was relieved by Commodore Christopher B. Chace. USS NASSAU was commanded by CAPT Russell P. Tjepkema throughout the ship's deployment. CAPT John L. Green assumed command of USS NASSAU upon the ship's return to Norfolk on Thursday, 29 May 2003. CAPT Green had previously served as USS NASSAU's Executive

Officer until March 2003, when he was relieved by Commander Andrew A. King. An organizational chart is attached as enclosure (2).

2. Chronology of significant events January - December 2003

01 JAN - 02 FEB	INPORT MANAMA, BAHRAIN
02 JAN - 01 FEB	UNDERWAY, MANAMA BAHRAIN
04 JAN - 24 JAN	OPERATION IRON MAGIC
02 FEB - 04 FEB	INPORT MANAMA, BAHRAIN
06 FEB	STRAIT OF HORMUZ (SOH) TRANSIT TO GULF OF ADEN (GOA)
06 FEB - 09 MAR	UNDERWAY OPS, GULF OF ADEN
06 FEB - 08 FEB	COMMANDER, TASK FORCE FIVE ONE EMBARKS
12 FEB	COMMANDER, AMPHIBIOUS GROUP TWO VISIT
10 MAR	SOH TRANSIT TO SOUTHERN ARABIAN GULF (SAG)
11 MAR - 30 APR	UNDERWAY OPS, PERSIAN GULF
19 MAR	OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM
28 MAR - 31 MAR	24 MEU (SOC)OFFLOAD KUWAIT NAVAL BASE (KNB)
31 MAR - 18 APR	UNDERWAY OPS, PERSIAN GULF
14 APR	COMMANDER, FIFTH FLEET VISIT
15 APR	MCPON VISIT
19 APR - 23 APR	INPORT MANAMA, BAHRAIN
23 APR	UNDERWAY, MANAMA, BAHRAIN ENROUTE KNB
24 APR - 30 APR	24 MEU (SOC) BACKLOAD KNB
30 APR	ENROUTE SOH
02 MAY	TRANSIT STRAIT OF HORMUZ
03 MAY - 6 MAY	UNDERWAY ENROUTE BAB EL MANDEB STRAIT
07 MAY	TRANSIT BAB EL MANDEB STRAIT
08 MAY - 10 MAY	TRANSIT RED SEA
11 MAY	TRANSIT SUEZ CANAL
11 MAY	OUTCHOP FIFTH FLEET, INCHOP SIXTH FLEET
11 MAY - 16 MAY	TRANSIT MEDITERRANEAN SEA
17 MAY	TRANSIT STRAIT OF GIBRALTAR
18 MAY - 25 MAY	UNDERWAY TRANSLANT
22 MAY	OUTCHOP SIXTH FLEET, INCHOP SECOND FLEET
22 MAY - 25 MAY	AMMO CROSS DECK USNS DETROIT
26 MAY - 28 MAY	24 MEU (SOC) OFFLOAD MOREHEAD CITY, NC
26 MAY	ACTING SECRETARY OF THE NAVY VISIT
28 MAY	UNDERWAY ENROUTE NORFOLK VA, TIGER CRUISE
29 MAY	RETURNED TO NORFOLK, VA. COMPLETING 9 MONTH, 4 DAY DEPLOYMENT. CHANGE OF COMMAND
29 MAY - 29 JUN	POST DEPLOYMENT LEAVE PERIOD
29 MAY - 10 JUL	INPORT NORFOLK, VA.
30 JUN - 04 JUL	DEFUEL SHIP
01 JUL	COMPHIBRON TWO CHANGE OF COMMAND
02 JUL	COMPHIBRON TWO DISEMBARKS
07 JUL - 08 JUL	RAM REMOVAL
08 JUL	SAFETY STANDOWN
10 JUL	TRANSIT TO NORFOLK NAVAL SHIPYARD, PORTSMOUTH

10 JUL - 31 DEC	INPORT NNSY DRYDOCK 8
21 NOV - 01 DEC	NIPRNET OUTAGE FOR UPGRADE
12 DEC - 31 DEC	INPORT NNSY HOLIDAY STANDOWN/LEAVE

3. Narrative. USS NASSAU rang in the New Year inport Manama, Bahrain. It was the last day of a four-day port visit, which provided the crew with a much-needed break after an arduous 73 days underway. The following day, Thursday, 2 January, the ship again got underway to continue her eventual and busy deployment in support of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. The Sailors and Marines of USS NASSAU and 24 Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) transited from Bahrain south to the United Arab Emirates, where they participated in Operation Iron Magic with the military forces of that country from 4-24 January.

After completing the training exercise, the ship remained underway in the Persian Gulf until 2 February, when she returned to Manama, Bahrain, for a second port visit to the island nation from 2-4 February. Departing Bahrain, the ship transited the Strait of Hormuz on 6 February and returned to conducting operations in the Gulf of Aden, as she had in November and December 2002.

After departing Bahrain, USS NASSAU hosted Commander, Task Force FIVE ONE, RADM W. C. Marsh, who embarked onboard from 6-8 February. USS NASSAU also received a visit from Commander, Amphibious Group TWO, RADM M. P. Nowakowski, on 12 February.

USS NASSAU celebrated African-American Heritage Month throughout the month of February. RADM Marsh served as the keynote speaker for the opening ceremony, which was held on the Mess Decks on Friday, 7 February. Events were held throughout the month including Heritage Exchange Forums, where crewmembers were given the opportunity to learn about the various cultural backgrounds of fellow crewmembers during panel discussions, and a Culture Bowl, a Jeopardy-style competition with topics related to African American History. The celebration ended with a presentation held in the Hangar Bay on Friday, 28 February, highlighting events of African-American history and featuring songs and dramatic readings by NASSAU crewmembers.

Originally scheduled to return to Norfolk in March, USS NASSAU received word in mid-February that the deployment would be extended an additional six weeks until 30 April, as tensions between the United States and Saddam Hussein's government in Iraqi continued to escalate. USS NASSAU continued to operate in the Gulf of Aden until receiving operational orders to again transit the Strait of Hormuz into the Southern Arabian Gulf on 10 March.

On Thursday 20 March, U.S. Forces, joined by British troops began military operations in Iraq in an effort to end the regime of Saddam Hussein. Two days before USS NASSAU was to begin her return transit, the ship received word of a second, indefinite extension. Instead of beginning the transit home, she was ordered to proceed north to Kuwait City where the Marines of 24 MEU (SOC) were off-loaded enroute to join U.S. and Coalition Forces already fighting in Iraq. The pilots of 24 MEU's Air Combat Element also contributed to the combat operations by flying Harrier missions over Iraq.

The contributions of USS NASSAU's Sailors and Marines were recognized when VADM Keating, Commander, FIFTH FLEET, visited the ship on 14 April. This visit was followed by a stop onboard by MCPON Terry Scott the following day.

The Marines of 24 MEU (SOC) remained in Iraq for one month before receiving orders to return to the ship. As the Marines prepared their equipment for onload, USS NASSAU made her third and final port visit to Manama, Bahrain, from 19-23 April. The Marines all safely returned to USS NASSAU from 24-29 April and on 30 April, with the onload of the Marines complete, USS NASSAU got underway to begin the long awaited transit back to home port.

The ship transited the Strait of Hormuz for the final time on 2 May, making her way through the Gulf of Oman and the Red Sea to the Suez Canal by 11 May. Transiting the canal into the Mediterranean Sea, the ship inchopped to the U.S. SIXTH FLEET, after serving over six-months as part of U.S. FIFTH FLEET in support of Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom.

USS NASSAU continued through the Mediterranean Sea without delay, transiting the Strait of Gibraltar on 17 May. The ship outchopped from SIXTH FLEET on 19 May and returned to SECOND FLEET operational control.

The ship's transit across the Atlantic Ocean was marked by the tragic loss of two crewmembers. On Friday, 23 May, a NASSAU crewmember was lost when he fell overboard. Enjoying a break topside on a "no fly" day, ABF3 Dwane Williams fell over the side while chasing a football. The ship immediately reversed course in an effort to save him, but despite an extensive search by small boats, other ships in company and the ship's Search and Rescue helicopters which lasted until almost dark, he was never found. Two days later, HM1 Shaun Dale was reported missing after he failed to report for a departmental muster. The ship reversed course to retrace her route, from the time Petty Officer Dale was last seen earlier that morning until the time he was reported

missing. Several space-by-space searches of the ship were also conducted throughout the day, but he was never found.

Despite the tragic loss of two crewmates, USS NASSAU still received a triumphant welcome upon their arrival on Monday, 26 May to Morehead City, NC. As the Marines of 24 MEU (SOC), the first Marine Battalion to participate in Operation Iraqi Freedom to return home, prepared to begin their offload, the Sailors and Marines of USS NASSAU were welcomed home by a visit by the Honorable Hansford Johnson, Acting Secretary of the Navy.

After completing the Marine offload, USS NASSAU greeted family and friends aboard on Wednesday, 25 May, during the ship's Tiger Cruise. Family members joined the Sailors of USS NASSAU for the overnight transit from Morehead City to the ship's homeport of Norfolk. Crewmembers were given the opportunity to show off the ship and provide guests with a chance to see their ship in action. Guests joined their crewmembers topside on Thursday, 29 May as the ship made its triumphant return to homeport.

Having been underway for a total of 277 days, USS NASSAU earned the right to display a Homeward Bound Pennant upon entering port. The three ships of the NASSAU Amphibious Ready Group were the only East Coast ships to be deployed from homeport longer than 270 days since the first Persian Gulf War. The aircraft carrier, USS ABRAHAM LINCOLN, homeported on the west coast in Bremerton, WA., also earned the right to display the pennant by being deployed a total of 290 days, although it should be noted that USS NASSAU actually had fewer days in port and more time underway. USS NASSAU's red, white and blue pennant measured 400 feet long. In keeping with tradition, the pennant was cut into pieces after begin displayed. The blue field with its one white star was presented to the ship's Commanding Officer, CAPT R. P. Tjepkema, and each crewmember that completed the entire deployment was presented with a section of the pennant's red and white stripes.

USS NASSAU's homecoming had special meaning for the crew, for it was also the day that they bid farewell to their Commanding Officer who led them throughout the deployment. CAPT R. P. Tjepkema was relieved by CAPT J. L. Green, who previously served as the ship's Executive Officer, in a short informal ceremony on the ship's flight deck only hours after the ship moored at Norfolk Naval Base.

After completing the ship's long and eventful deployment, the crew began a much-needed month-long post deployment leave period from 29 May until 29 June. Once this short break was over, the

crew again returned to work to prepare for the ship's drydocking availability.

On Tuesday, 1 July, USS NASSAU hosted the Change of Command for Commander, Amphibious Squadron TWO. Commodore Terry O'Brien was relieved by Commodore Christopher B. Chace in a ceremony held in the Hangar Bay.

NASSAU transited on 10 July 2003 from Norfolk Naval Station to Norfolk Naval Shipyard in Portsmouth, VA. The ship entered Drydock Number 8 on the same day, commencing an eight month Drydocking Planned Maintenance Availability (DPMA).

The DPMA provided an opportunity to complete required depot level repairs as well as several new installations and equipment upgrades. Norfolk Naval Shipyard assumed duties as the Naval Supervising Activity (NSA) for this availability, while Supervisor of Shipbuilding (SUPSHIP) Portsmouth managed the prime civilian contractor.

NNSY major work items included the following: #1 and 2 Boiler Inspections, Removal and Repair of #1 and 2 Propulsion Shafts, Overhaul of #1B and 2B Main Feed Pumps, Overhaul of #1 and 2 SSTGs, Port and Starboard Rudder Repairs, Shipalt 500K - AIMD Maintenance and Supply Facility Modifications, Overhaul of all vehicle deck ramps, and Repairs to #9 and 10 Cargo Weapons Elevators.

SUPSHIP Portsmouth managed the following significant repair items: Shipalt 941K - Stability Modifications, Seawater Compensating Fuel System, Underwater Hull Inspection and Repair Underwater Hull Preservation, Well Deck Modifications, and all Non-Skid throughout the ship.

The Shore Intermediate Maintenance Activity (SIMA) provided a concurrent maintenance availability in conjunction with the DPMA and worked 477 jobs. SIMA work included the replacement of the heads and turbos for both #1 and 2 Ship's Service Emergency Diesel Generators (SSEDGs).

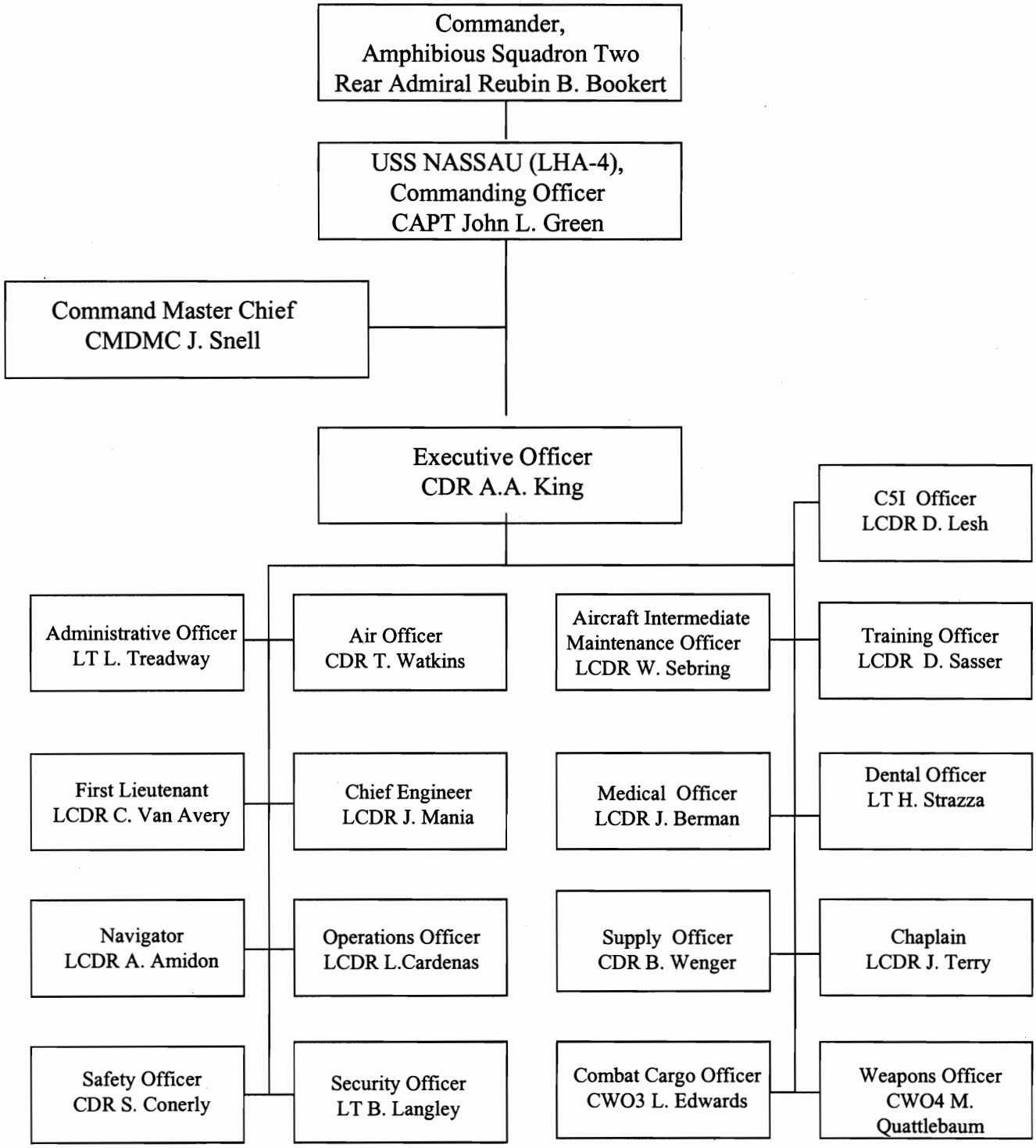
Additionally, Alteration Installation Teams (AITs) provided support for new equipment and upgrades to include: Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA); SPS-73 Radar Installation, DDRT Installation, WSC 6 Antenna Replacement, Fiber-optic Tram Line Lighting Installation, and ISNS LAN Modifications.

8 August 2003, thirteen USS NASSAU crewmembers became naturalized American citizens in a ceremony held onboard USS THEODORE ROOSEVELT at Naval Station Norfolk.

Hurricane Isabel came through the region 18 September. USS NASSAU was able to secure the ship and suffered no damage as a result of the hurricane. The DPMA end date was extended two weeks as a result of the interruption in work caused by hurricane preparations and clean-up.

Commander Amphibious Group TWO Rear Admiral Reubin B. Bookert made a special visit to USS NASSAU 1 October to assist CAPT Green in promoting CWO2 Timothy Ray to the rank of Lieutenant (junior grade). Admiral Bookert returned to NASSAU 17 December to present USS NASSAU's first graduates of the Academic Skills program.

USS NASSAU Sailors were able to celebrate the holidays with their families from 12 December 2003 to 12 Janurary 2004.

AE1 (AW/SW) Matthew Cooper was selected as NASSAU's Sailor of the Year for 2003. EM3 (SW/AW) Jose Colon was selected as NASSAU's Junior Sailor of the Year for 2003.

USS NASSAU (LHA-4) ORGANIZATIONAL CHART