DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
USS SAIPAN (LHA 2)
FPO AE 09549-1605

Rec'd 5/21/01
w/ disk

5750
Ser 30/107
07 May 01

From: Commanding Officer, USS SAIPAN (LHA 2)
To: Director of Naval History (H09BH), Naval Historical Center
Washington Navy Yard, 805 Kidder Breese SE,
Washington, DC 20374-5060

Subj: COMMAND HISTORY OF USS SAIPAN (LHA 2) FOR CY2000

Ref: (a) OPNAVINST 5750.12G

Encl: (1) 3¼ Floppy Disk
(2) Command History 2000
(3) 14 April 2000 Change of Command
(4) Deployment 2000 Press Kit
(5) Command Event 5050 Notices and Brochures
(6) SAIPAN/ARG Turnover Booklet
(7) SAIPAN Express Familygram
(8) Press Clippings
(9) The Deckplate

1. Per reference (a), enclosures (1) through (9) are forwarded.

R. T. WILLIAMS

USS SAIPAN (LHA-2)
Command History – Calendar Year 2000

1. Command Composition and Organization.

a. Mission. To embark, deploy, and land elements of a Marine amphibious landing force able to conduct opposed assault operations from the sea. Elements of the landing force may include AV-8 Harrier attack jets, CH-46, CH-53, AH-1W and UH-1 helicopters, conventional landing craft, air cushion or tracked amphibious vehicles or a combination of these elements. USS SAIPAN serves as the flagship for the Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) operations. Evacuation, disaster relief, and hospital ship are secondary missions of USS SAIPAN.

b. Organizational Structure.

(1) Immediate Senior Command: Commander, Amphibious Group TWO, Norfolk, Virginia

(2) Units under operational/administrative control: None

(3) Command Organization:

Commanding Officer
Captain Michael P. Nowakowski, USN
(01 January 2000 - 14 April 2000)

Commanding Officer
Captain Russell T. Williams, USN
(14 April 2000 – 31 December 2000)

Executive Officer
Captain Russell T. Williams, USN
(01 January 2000 – 01 March 2000)

Executive Officer
Captain Christopher B. Chace, USN
(01 March 2000 – 31 December 2000)

Command Master Chief
BMCM(SW) C. H. Lovett, USN
(01 January 2000 – 31 December 2000)

(4) Composition. USS SAIPAN's crew is composed of 65 officers and 961 enlisted personnel.

2. Chronology (CY 2000).

01 – 18 Jan
Inport Naval Station Norfolk Pier 7. Holiday Leave Period.

13 Jan
SAIPAN ARG stood-up. Commander, Amphibious Squadron FOUR, commanding USS SAIPAN (LHA 2), USS ASHLAND (LPH 4), USS AUSTIN (LPD 41).

19 Jan
Underway from Norfolk Naval Station, VA (NOB) to Naval Weapons Station (NWS) Earle, NJ for weapons on-load.

20 Jan
Arrived NWS Earle and commenced weapons on-load.

21 Jan
SAIPAN ARG assumed duties as Ready Duty ARG.

25 Jan
Completed weapons on-load in record 4 days. Extended two days in-port for weather avoidance.

26 Jan
Underway from NWS Earle enroute NOB.

27 Jan
Arrived NOB.

31 Jan
Visited by Lieutenant General Tom Burnette, U.S. Army.

14 Feb
Completed Information Technology for the 21st Century installation (which started in November 99) and signed the System Operation and Verification Testing (SOVT).

17 Feb
Visited by 47 students and five faculty members from the U.S. Army War College. Entourage included Major General Johannes Kert from the Baltic nation of Estonia.

21 Feb
Completed installation of the Advanced Digital Networking System (ADNS).

22 Feb
Visited by 44 (O-4/O-5) students from the Armed Forces Staff College (located in Norfolk, VA.).

29 Mar
Visited by French Air Force Brigadier General Porchier, his four guests, and COMSECONDFLT escort Commander Livezey.

10 Apr
Visited by 250 members of the Alleghany High School Marching Band from Alleghany, PA. The Band performed in both the Macy's and Rose Bowl parades.

13 Apr
Completed installation of the AN/WSC-6(V)5 and AN/WSC-8(V)2.

14 Apr
USS SAIPAN (LHA 2) Change of Command Ceremony at Naval Station Norfolk, Pier 7, on the Hangar Bay. Captain Russell T. Williams relieved Captain Michael P. Nowakowski.

16 Apr
Completed installation of the Wireless Internal Communications System (WICS).

18 Apr
Completed installation of the Afloat Personal Telephone System (APTS) Sailor phones.

24 Apr
Visited by 37 members of the Icelandic Choir (5 adult chaperones, 32 youngsters ages 11-16). The group, which hailed from Iceland, was in the Norfolk area participating in NATO's annual Azalea Festival celebration (24-30 April).

27 Apr
Completed installation of the Digital Wideband Transmission System (DWTS).

28 Apr
Visited by 65 U.S. Marine Corps students and faculty (O-1 to O-4) from the Command and Control Systems School in Quantico, VA. Visit was in conjunction with Communication's Information Systems Officers Course.

30 Apr
Visited by Major General Mario F. Montero, Jr., U.S. Army, Assistant Deputy Chief of Staff Logistics at Headquarters, U.S. Army in Washington D.C. and 15 others.

02 May
Underway from NOB en route CPOA and Virginia Capes (VACAPES) for MEU Exercise (MEUEX), Joint Task Force Exercise (JTFEX) 00-2, Supporting Arms Coordination Exercise (SACEX).

03 May
Arrived CPOA, commenced 26 MEU on-load. Two-person video team from the Discovery Channel embarked aboard for production of "Tip of the Spear."

05 May
Completed installation of Navy Service (NSIPS) / Electronic Field Service Record.

06 May
Commenced MEUEX. Discovery Channel video team disembarked.

08 May
Troop crossdeck conducted with Netherlands amphibious warship (HNLMS) ROTTERDAM.

08 May
Supply Department S-2 Division hosted a week-long embark of Culinary Executive Chef (CEC) Samuel Glass as part of the joint Navy and American Culinary Federation's (ACF) Adopt-a-Ship program.

08 May
Completed installation of the Tactical Switching System.

09 May
At-sea visit by Major General Emil R. "Buck" Bedard, Commanding General, 2nd Marine Expeditionary Force (II MEF), who met with MEU CO, PHIBRON Commander, and 26 MEU Marines.

10 May
Completed installation of the Direct-to-Sailor (DTS) Satellite System. DTS brought enhanced satellite television and audio radio programming for ship's Closed-Circuit TV (CCTV) system.

11 May
At-sea visit by 20 members from the Office of Military Affairs Special Operations Training Group.

14 May
Six person video team from Discovery Channel embarked to obtain follow-on background video.

15 May
Completed MEUEX.

16 May
Commenced JTFEX.

18 May
Commenced SACEX. Embarked by Rear Admiral William G. Sutton, Commander, Amphibious Group TWO. Discovery Channel video team disembarked.

19 May
At-sea visit by Vice Admiral William J. Fallon, Commander, SECOND Fleet/Striking Fleet.

20 May
Completed JTFEX, SACEX, commenced MEU off-load. Commander, Amphibious Group TWO disembarked.

21 May
En route NOB.

22 May
Arrived NOB.

23 May
Chaplain's Office hosted Singles and Couples' Pre-Deployment Briefs.

28 May
Chaplain's Office hosted Singles and Couples' Pre-Deployment Briefs.

01 June
Command-sponsored "Family Day" aboard ship (inport Norfolk Naval Station Pier 7).

04 Jun
Underway en route to CPOA and MEU Special Operations Capable Exercise (SOCEX).

5 Jun
Arrived CPOA and commenced MEU On-load.

6 Jun
Commenced SOCEX. Rear Admiral (Select) Michael P. Nowakowski, who assumed the title Commander, Amphibious Group TWO embarked.

8 Jun
At-sea visit by Brigadier General Robert M. Flanagan, USMC, Commanding General, II Marine Expeditionary Brigade. Commander, Amphibious Group TWO disembarked.

10 Jun
Commenced MEU off-load in CPOA.

11 Jun
Conducted Petty Officer Frocking ceremony. Departed en route NOB.

12 Jun
Arrived NOB.

14 Jun
Commenced Pre-Operational Movement (POM) stand-down.

29 June
Chaplain's Office hosted Children's Pre-Deployment Brief onboard SAIPAN.

01 Jul
Completed installation of the NATO Initial Data Transfer System (NIDTS).

07 July
Visited by Vice Admiral Henry Giffin, Commander, Naval Surface Force, U.S. Atlantic Fleet (COMNAVSURFLANT). VADM Giffin met with CO and addressed Officers and enlisted crewmembers.

10 Jul
Command Chaplain hosted embark of CDR McCain, CHC, USNR, from 10 July – 28 July.

11 Jul
Underway from NOB, en route CPOA (for Mediterranean Deployment 00-3), trans-Atlantic (TRANSLANT) crossing, and duty as Commander, SIXTH Fleet, (Mediterranean) Amphibious Ready Group (ARG).

12 Jul
Arrived CPOA, commenced MEU on-load.

13 Jul
Commenced TRANSLANT.

24 Jul
Arrived anchorage Rota, Spain. Commenced turn-over from USS WASP ARG.

25 Jul
Assumed duties as Mediterranean ARG (MARG 00-3), transited Strait of Gibraltar, inchop Mediterranean Sea.

27 Jul
Arrived Palma, Spain for port visit. Two Royal Navy Officers embarked through 12 August as part of the United Kingdom's (UK) Royal Navy "Thunderer Squadron" educational sponsorship program.

30 Jul
Conducted Community Relations (COMREL) Project in Palma (Drug Rehab Centers).

01 Aug
Underway from Palma, Spain.

03 Aug
Arrived Tarragona, Spain for port visit.

05 Aug
Conducted COMREL Project in Tarragona (Disabled Home for Adults). Performed landscaping at the home.

07 Aug
Underway from Tarragona, Spain.

11 Aug
Arrived anchorage La Spezia, Italy.

12 Aug
USS SAIPAN Soccer team played Italian soccer team.

13 Aug
Visited by German Television (ZDF) media.

14 Aug
Underway from La Spezia, Italy.

17 Aug
Commander, U.S. SIXTH Fleet visited.

18 Aug
Inchop Adriatic Sea.

19 Aug
Arrived Dubrovnik, Croatia for port visit. USS SAIPAN was the first large deck U.S. warship to pull pier side Dubrovnik port. Visited by Croatian VIPs and media.

20 Aug
USS SAIPAN conducted general visiting. More than 1,450 visitors (mostly host nation Croatians) thoroughly enjoyed ship, MEU tours, and static displays.

21 Aug
USS SAIPAN conducted general visiting. More than 1,745 visitors (mostly host nation Croatians) thoroughly enjoyed ship, MEU tours, and static displays.

23 Aug
Conducted Croatia COMREL Projects: Elementary School and Orphanage Painting/Landscaping. USS SAIPAN Soccer/Basketball teams played Croatian teams.

24 Aug
Underway from Dubrovnik, Croatia.

24 Aug - 26 Aug
Conducted Adriatic Presence Operations.

26 Aug
Arrived Trieste, Italy for port visit, commenced MEU vehicle maintenance.

29 Aug – 03 Sep
U.S. SIXTH Fleet Rabbi Panitz visited.

31 Aug
Command Master Chiefs, Naval Forces Europe and U.S. SIXTH Fleet visited.

02 Sep
Visited by Trieste VIPs.

06 Sep
Visited by 14 U.S. Army, Air Force, and Slovenian military members from the U.S. Defense Attaché Slovenia. Purpose of visit was to receive ship's general orientation tour.

07 Sep
Conducted Trieste COMREL Project (Monte Grisa Church). USS SAIPAN Soccer/Basketball teams played Italian teams.

09 Sep
Underway from Trieste, Italy.

14 Sep
Arrived in vicinity of Cap Serrat, Tunisia and commenced Exercise ATLAS HINGE.

14 Sep - 19 Sep
Conducted Exercise ATLAS HINGE.

16 Sep
Conducted Chief Petty Officer's Initiation and Pinning Ceremony.

18 Sep
Visit by UDAO Tunisia Attache and 21 international Distinguished Guests.

19 Sep
En route Adriatic for Adriatic Presence Operations.

21 Sep
Inchop Adriatic Sea, commenced support for JSOTF Operation AURORA LIGHTNING during the Fall 2000 federal elections in the Former Yugoslavia.

21 Sep - 9 Oct
Conducted Adriatic Presence Operations.

27 Sep
Conducted successful man-overboard recovery. HC-8 aircraft conducted night-SAR operations and successfully rescued SAIPAN Sailor from the Adriatic Sea.

03 Oct
At-sea visit by Vice Admiral Gregory G. Johnson, Commander, U.S. SIXTH Fleet.

11 Oct
SAIPAN ordered to conduct high-speed transit en route eastern Mediterranean in support of potential short-notice President of the United States visit to the Middle East due to increasing hostilities. As a result of the deteriorating situation between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, Exercise NOBLE SHIRLEY and Haifa port visit were cancelled.

12 Oct
USS COLE attacked in port Yemen.

13 Oct - 15 Oct
Conducted East Mediterranean Presence Operations.

16 Oct
En route Aegean Sea in support of Exercise DESTINED GLORY.

16 Oct
Command Chaplain's office commenced USS COLE Memorial Fund.

17 Oct
Inchop Aegean Sea.

17 Oct - 25 Oct
Conducted NATO Exercise DESTINED GLORY 00 in vicinity of Izmir, Turkey.

20 Oct
Concluded USS COLE Memorial Fund drive. Raised $6479.85.

26 Oct
En route Valletta, Malta.

27 Oct
Arrived Valletta, Malta for port visit. Completed 48 consecutive days at sea.

27 Oct
Visited by U.S. Ambassador to Malta, Mrs. Kathryn L. Proffitt.

30 Oct
COMREL Projects in Malta (painting/clean-up at children's home, youth center, and elderly resident's care home). U.S. Ambassador to Malta visited COMREL sites. USS SAIPAN Soccer/Rugby team played native area teams.

31 Oct
Underway from Valletta, Malta.

02 Nov
Arrived Naples, Italy for port visit.

06 Nov
Underway from Naples, Italy.

8 Nov
Inchopped Adriatic Sea.

9 Nov
Arrived in vicinity of Rijeka, Croatia and commenced MEU off-load in support of first-ever US-Croatian Exercise SLUNJ 2000.

10 Nov
Arrived Rijeka, Croatia for port visit, support for MEU Exercise SLUNJ 2000, and commenced Fleet Maintenance Availability (FMAV) with USS SUPPLY. As USS SAIPAN (LHA 2) was the largest U.S. naval vessel and longest ship ever to visit this Croatian port, Croatian VIP's and media came aboard for official visits and ship tour.

10 Nov - 21 Nov
Conducted FMAV, Rijeka, Croatia and Exercise SLUNJ 2000.

22 Nov
Hosted American Embassy (AMEMBASSY) - Croatian VIP Reception in Hangar Bay. Over 100 Croatian national and local government, military, and business VIPs were hosted onboard including the Croatian Military Chief of Naval Operations.

23 Nov
Underway from Rijeka port to Rijeka anchorage, commenced MEU back-load.

24 Nov
Underway from Rijeka, Croatia.

27 Nov
Port visit to Brindisi, Italy cancelled due to high seas.

01 Dec
Commenced transit to Rota, Spain for post-deployment wash-down and turnover with USS NASSAU (LHA-4).

03 Dec
Out-chopped Mediterranean.

4 Dec
Arrived Rota, Spain for MEU vehicle and equipment wash-down

8 Dec
Underway from Rota, Spain

9 Dec
Out-chopped COMSIXTHFLT, completed turn-over with USS NASSAU (LHA-4), and commenced TRANSLANT.

18 Dec
Arrived anchorage in vicinity of Morehead City, North Carolina, commenced 26 MEU off-load, ACE fly-off.

19 Dec
Visited by COMPHIBGRU TWO, Rear Admiral J. Kevin Moran and Colonel James W. Davis, Chief of Staff, 2nd Marine Division. Purpose of visit was to receive post-deployment briefs and meet with CPR4, 26 MEU, SAIPAN, AUSTIN, and ASHLAND.

20 Dec
Completed MEU off-load, conduced LCU on-load for approximately 300 TIGERs, commenced TIGER Cruise, and transit to NOB.

21 Dec
Arrived NOB and completed Mediterranean deployment. Returned to homeport, Naval Station Norfolk Pier 7 for homecoming ceremony. Greeted on pier by spouses, families and local media.

22 Dec-31 Dec
Commenced Holiday Leave stand-down period.

3. Basic Historic Narrative.

USS SAIPAN (LHA 2) began the millennium year at its Norfolk Naval Station homeport gearing up for a series of work-up exercises and operations in preparation for its summer 2000 Mediterranean deployment.

Just following the traditional holiday stand-down period, on 13 January the SAIPAN Amphibious Ready Group (SAIPAN ARG) stood up. The SAIPAN ARG, lead by the Commander, Amphibious Squadron FOUR, took on responsibilities for operational control of USS SAIPAN (LHA-2), USS ASHLAND (LPH-4), USS AUSTIN (LPD-41).

On 19 January, USS SAIPAN departed Norfolk Naval Station (NOB) en route to Naval Weapons Station (NWS) Earle, NJ for a weapons on-load that commenced the following day. During its stay at NWS Earle on 21 January, the SAIPAN ARG assumed duties as the Ready Duty ARG. USS SAIPAN completed the weapons on-load in a record 4 days on 25 January. It extended two days inport for weather avoidance, and returned to homeport on 27 January.

On 14 February, Information Technology for the 21st Century installation (which started in November 99) was completed and SOVT signed. The installation consisted of new hardware and software for the Non-Tactical Command Support System II (NTCSS II) in support of SNAP legacy systems SUADPS, OMMS and SNAP Admin. SNAP Admin was replaced by Relational Admin (R-ADM). In addition to its record keeping capabilities (personnel database, PQS qualifications, etc) it also served as the primary server for the ship's SMART CARD system. Another entity of this major installation was the replacement of the Novell 3.0 Local Area Network with the IT21 Microsoft WINDOWS NT LAN and the installation and configuration of 100 IT21 workstations.

Also in February on the 24th, USS SAIPAN got underway from NOB en route to the Puerto Rican Operating Area (PROA) for a series of evolutions -- CIWS/RAM Missile Shoot, port visit at Naval Station Roosevelt Road (NSRR), Puerto Rico, and the PHIBRON MEU Integration (PMINT) in Cherry Point Operating Area (CPOA). On 29 February, USS SAIPAN conducted a live fire surface-to-air missile exercise at the Puerto Rico AFWTF range. SAIPAN successfully fired two RAM missiles at AFWTF drones, achieving direct hits on both targets. The successful completion of this exercise resulted in SAIPAN receiving an M-1 rating in Air Warfare and confirmed SAIPAN's eligibility for the Maritime Excellence Award.

On 08 March, USS SAIPAN arrived in the CPOA to commence PMINT, and embarked 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit (26 MEU). The arrival of 26 MEU units received coverage from North Carolina news media that came to visit on 11 March.

Following the MEU off-load, USS SAIPAN returned to homeport on 16 March and commenced a Fleet Maintenance Availability on 20 March.

USS SAIPAN held its change of command ceremony on 14 April at Naval Station Norfolk, Pier 7, on the Hangar Bay. Captain Russell T. Williams, who had previously served as the command's Executive Officer (17 January 1999 to 01 March 2000), relived Captain Michael P. Nowakowski.

The following month, on 02 May, USS SAIPAN departed on a 20-day underway en route to the CPOA and Virginia Capes (VACAPES) for another series of exercises -- MEU Exercise (MEUEX), Joint Task Force Exercise (JTFEX) 00-2, Supporting Arms

Coordination Exercise (SACEX). Upon arrival in the CPOA on 03 May, a two-person video team from the Discovery Channel embarked aboard for a production about U.S. Marine Corps readiness titled "Tip of the Spear." The video team departed on 6 May, however returned aboard again with more members on 14-18 May to obtain additional video and interviews.

During the exercises on 08 May, 46 members with the Royal Netherlands Marine Corps attached to the 42nd Infantry Company aboard the Royal Netherlands ship HNLMS Rotterdam (L 800) cross-decked aboard USS SAIPAN via LCU and met with 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit's Fox Company. That same day (08 May) Supply Department S-2 Division hosted the embark of Culinary Executive Chef (CEC) Samuel Glass, a culinary instructor from Humber College in Toronto, Ontario. The embark was part of the joint Navy and American Culinary Federation's (ACF) Adopt-a-Ship program. During his week-long stay through 16 May, Chef Glass spent many hours providing training and sharing recipes with the ship's Mess Management Specialists.

On 11 May, SAIPAN hosted an at-sea visit by 20 members from the Office of Military Affairs Special Operations Training Group. Purpose of visit was to receive a familiarization of Amphibious Ready Group (ARG)/Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) activities during the Marine Expeditionary Unit Exercise (MEUEX), tour ship's spaces, and observe Navy/Marine Corps personnel conducting daily routine.

On 15 May, USS SAIPAN ARG completed MEUEX, and commenced JTFEX the following day. With the commencement of SACEX on 18 May, the ship hosed a two-day embark by Commander, Amphibious Group TWO, Rear Admiral William G. Sutton, who came to receive briefs and to observe training evolutions. On 19 May, SAIPAN also hosted a visit by Vice Admiral William J. Fallon, the Commander, SECOND Fleet / Striking Fleet Atlantic, who came to observe the last phase of JTFEX. On 20 May, USS SAIPAN ARG completed JTFEX, SACEX, and commenced the MEU off-load. USS SAIPAN returned to homeport on 22 May.

The first day of June, USS SAIPAN hosted a pierside Family Day Visit. Among the activities were static displays, refreshments and movies on the hangar bay. Command Chaplain's Office handed out Pre-Deployment Preparation packages to the arriving familymembers.

On 4-12 June, USS SAIPAN departed underway en route CPOA to participate in Marine Expeditionary Unit's Special Operations Capable Exercise (MEU SOCEX). After the MEU onload on 5 June, SOCEX began the following day. Embarking aboard USS SAIPAN from 6-8 June to observe the exercise play was the ship's former Commanding Officer, Rear Admiral (Select) Michael P. Nowakowski, who now had the title as Commander, Amphibious Group TWO. On 8 June, USS SAIPAN hosted a visit by Brigadier General Robert M. Flanagan, USMC, Commanding General, II Marine Expeditionary Brigade, who came to receive briefs and observe SOCEX evolutions. On 10 Jun, SAIPAN ARG commenced the MEU off-load, and returned to homeport on 12 June. The ship then commenced a Pre-Operational Movement (POM) stand-down on 14 June.

On 07 July, the Commander, Naval Surface Force, U.S. Atlantic Fleet, Vice Admiral Henry Giffin, paid a visit aboard USS SAIPAN to address the crew about its upcoming deployment.

Leaving their friends and family members on the pier 11 July, crewmembers aboard USS SAIPAN and the other SAIPAN ARG units got underway for its summer 2000 deployment. Heading en route to CPOA for the 12 July MEU on-load, USS SAIPAN commenced the trans-Atlantic crossing (13 July) as part of Mediterranean Deployment 00-3. Embarked aboard USS SAIPAN were Captain Ronald L. Chapman, Commander Amphibious Squadron FOUR, the USS SAIPAN Amphibious Ready Group (SAIPAN ARG) Commander; and Colonel Kenneth J. Glueck, Jr, Commander 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable). Of the 2300 personnel (includes Ship's Company and Marines) aboard for the deployment were specialized units used to conduct diverse amphibious operations. Those units included: Tactical Air Control Squadron Two Two, Fleet Surgical Team Eight, Naval Special Warfare Task Unit, Explosive Ordnance Disposal Mobile Unit Two, Naval Beach Group Two, And The Fleet Information Warfare Command Detachment.

USS SAIPAN arrived anchorage, Rota, Spain and commenced turn-over from USS WASP ARG on 24 July. The following day, SAIPAN assumed the duties as Mediterranean ARG (MARG 00-3) and began the transit through the Strait of Gibraltar and inchopped into Mediterranean Sea.

USS SAIPAN had its first port visit 27 July-01 August pierside on the isle of Palma de Malljorca, Spain. Upon arrival inport, Two Royal Navy Officers, Lieutenant Fred Trueman and Sub-Lieutenant Richie Welsh, embarked the ship through 12 August as part of the United Kingdom's (UK) Royal Navy "Thunderer Squadron" educational sponsorship program.

On 3-7 August, the ship made another port visit, this time to at the heavily industrialized port of Tarragona, Spain. Following another short underway transit, USS SAIPAN arrived anchorage La Spezia, Italy on 11 August. During its three-day stay, the ship hosted a visit by German Television (ZDF) media that came to obtain background video and interviews from Sailors and Marines in support of a story on the U.S. SIXTH Fleet in the Mediterranean.

Departing underway on 14 August, USS SAIPAN hosted an at-sea visit by Vice Admiral Daniel J. Murphy, Jr., Commander, U.S. SIXTH Fleet on 17 August. During the visit, VADM Murphy received briefs and provided an "Admiral's Call" to ship's company and embarked unit personnel.

SAIPAN's 19-23 August port visit to Dubrovnik, Croatia generated high public interest and media coverage as it was the largest amphibious and Fleet Marine presence ever to visit a Croatian port. This is the first visit of an LHA, ARG Staff or MEU Command to the region. Due to its unique nature, SAIPAN's visit was treated as an "event". Ship hosted special tours on 19 August for the Senior Area Military Commander, the U.S. Embassy MSG Marines, and Croatian Media. On 20 and 21 August from 1500-1900, USS SAIPAN conducted "Ship's General Visiting" with Navy and Marine Corps static displays and hands-on exhibits. Tour routes were limited to Upper V, Hangar Bay, and Flight Deck.

On 31 August, the ship was visited by U.S. Naval Forces Europe Fleet Master Chief, MMCM(SW/AW) Robert R. Hallstien, who met with COMPHIBRON FOUR, SAIPAN CO, SAIPAN CMC and provided an enlisted "All Hands" call. Accompanying CMC Hallstien was the U.S. SIXTH Fleet Master Chief.

On 02 September, USS SAIPAN hosted a visit by several Trieste VIPs. Guests included Dr. & Mrs. Vincenzo Grimaldi, Prefect Of Trieste; General & Mrs. Sabino Gervasio, Regional Commander, Guardia Di Finanza (Minister Of Finance); General Lucio Nobili, Regional Commander, Carabinieri; Colonel Mario Basile, Provincial Commander, Carabinieri; Captain & Mrs. Paolo Castellani, Trieste Port Captain; Dr. Antonio Pezzano, Deputy Chief Of Police; Colonel Piergiorgio Da Corte, Provincial Commander, Traffic Police; Colonel Antonio Bufano,Regional Commander, Traffic Police; and Mr. & Mrs. Paolo Bearz,U.S. Consular Agent.

On18 September off the coast of Cap Serrat, Tunisia, SAIPAN hosted a visit by 21 international military distinguished visitors sponsored by the USDAO Tunis Attache. Purpose of visit was to receive briefs, tour of ship and observe Exercise ATLAS HINGE. The following day, USS SAIPAN headed en route to the Adriatic. for Adriatic Presence Operations. Upon inchop to the Adriatic Sea on 21 September, USS SAIPAN commenced support for JSOTF Operation AURORA LIGHTNING during the Fall 2000 federal elections in the Former Yugoslavia. The Adriatic Presence operations last from 21 September through 9 October.

The evening of 27 September, USS SAIPAN conducted successful man-overboard recovery. Seaman Matthew S. Griffin assigned to the Food Service Division was standing watch at solid waste pulper/shredder room (located adjacent to the underway replenishement station. Taking a break from his duties, SN Griffin leaned against the removable life-lines which came unloosed, causing him to momentarily lose balance and fall overboard in the 73 degree waters. SAIPAN's Search and Rescue Helo (HC-8 aircraft) was airborne at time of incident and immediately vectored to the datum for recovery. Witnesses immediately reported member overboard – SN Griffin was safely recovered by HC-8 helo in a little over 30 minutes, and transported to medical for observation. Member suffered no injuries.

On 03 October, USS SAIPAN hosted an at-sea visit by Vice Admiral Gregory G. Johnson, the new Commander, U.S. SIXTH Fleet, whom had just taken command within hours of the ship's visit.

On 11 October, USS SAIPAN was ordered to conduct high-speed transit en route eastern Mediterranean in support of potential short-notice President of the United States visit to the Middle East due to increasing hostilities. As a result of the deteriorating situation between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, Exercise NOBLE SHIRLEY and the Haifa port visit were cancelled. A day after the terrorist attack on USS COLE (12 October), USS SAIPAN conducted East Mediterranean Presence Operations from 13 – 15 October. The following day, USS SAIPAN was en route to the Aegean Sea in support of NATO Exercise DESTINED GLORY (conducted 17-25 October) in the vicinity of Izmir, Turkey.

After serving 48 consecutive days at sea, USS SAIPAN made a port visit to Valletta, Malta on 27-31 October. During the port visit, the ship hosted a visit by the U.S. Ambassador to Malta, Mrs. Kathryn L. Proffitt and participated in several community relations project and cultural sporting events.

Following a short transit, USS SAIPAN made a port visit to Naples, Italy on 02-06 November. It then inchopped to the Adriatic Sea on 8 November, and arrived in vicinity of Rijeka, Croatia the following day, commencing a MEU off-load in support of first-ever US-Croatian Exercise "SLUNJ 2000".

USS SAIPAN's working port visit to Rijeka, Croatia (10-24 November) for a Fleet Maintenance Availability (FMAV) was considered "an event" in Rijeka. USS SAIPAN (LHA 2) was the largest U.S. naval vessel and longest ship visit ever to this Croatian port. On the first day upon arrival, approximately 18 VIP's came aboard to make official calls with the COMPHIBRON FOUR Commodore, 26 MEU CO and SAIPAN CO, and to receive a ship tour. Members of the media also attended to obtain photographs and a ship's tour.

On 22 November, USS SAIPAN hosted a reception on the ship's Hangar Bay for the American Embassy and Croatian VIPs. Over 100 Croatian national and local government, military, and business VIPs were hosted onboard including the Croatian Military Chief of Naval Operations. The following day, USS SAIPAN left the Rijeka port, made anchorage off the Rijekan coast and commenced the MEU back-load.

Departing underway from Rijeka, Croatia on 24 November, the ship encounter high seas, forcing the cancellation of the 27 November Brindisi, Italy port visit and commenced transit westward across the Mediterranean Sea. On 03 December, USS SAIPAN out-chopped from the Mediterranean, and arrived Rota, Spain the next day for post-deployment and MEU vehicle/equipment wash-down.

Underway from Rota, Spain on 08 December, the next morning USS SAIPAN out-chopped from COMSIXTHFLT AOR, completed turn-over with USS NASSAU (LHA-4), and commenced TRANSLANT. During the first few days transit, USS SAIPAN was buffeted with high winds and rough seas causing slight course deviation, however, transit was not hindered. Nearing the continental U.S., unfavorable weather conditions on 17 December forced the maximum packing of aircraft onto the Hangar Bay. On 18 December, USS SAIPAN arrived in vicinity of Morehead City, North Carolina, and began the 26 MEU troop off-load and Air Combat Element (ACE) fly-off. During the off-load evolutions on 19 December, the ship hosted an at-anchor visit by COMPHIBGRU TWO, Rear Admiral J. Kevin Moran, and Colonel James W. Davis, Chief of Staff, 2nd Marine Division. Both met with CPR4, 26 MEU, SAIPAN, AUSTIN, and ASHLAND and received post-deployment briefs.

On 20 December, USS SAIPAN completed the MEU off-load. LCU's involved with operations then commenced the on-load of approximately 300 TIGERs. By mid-day, all TIGERs were aboard. USS SAIPAN then began Operation TIGER Cruise and the transit to NOB.

At approximately 0930, 21 December, USS SAIPAN returned to homeport, Naval Station Norfolk Pier 7 for homecoming ceremony, formally completing its SAIPAN ARG 00-3 Deployment. Ship's company and Tiger guests were greeted on the pier by spouses, families and local media. From 22-31 December, USS SAIPAN commenced a Holiday Leave stand-down period.

In early February 2001, the Commander, Naval Surface Force, U.S. Atlantic Fleet (COMNAVSURFLANT) awarded USS SAIPAN with the prestigious Battle Efficiency Award (a.k.a. Battle "E") for its performance during Calendar Year 2000. Additionally, USS SAIPAN also won all four categories in the COMNAVSURFLANT Command Excellence Awards competition, which were: Maritime Warfare Excellence Award (12th consecutive award), Logistical Management Excellence Award (8th consecutive award), Command and Control Excellence Award (5th consecutive award) and the Engineering Survivability Excellence Award (3rd consecutive award).

In early April 2001, USS SAIPAN was selected as runner-up in the for the Calendar Year 2000 Admiral Flatley Memorial Award for operations readiness and excellence in aviation safety (CNO message 126200Z APR 01).

Deployment Summary:

SAIPAN's deck load for MARG 00-3 consisted of 29 aircraft. The 26 MEU Air Combat Element (ACE) comprised of HMM-264 (Rein), MALS-14, and MALS-26, embarked with 12 CH-46E, four CH-53-E, four AH-1W, two UN-1N helicopters and five AV-8B day attack Harrier jets. HC-8 embarked with two HH-46D's for SAR/VERTREP.

During workups and deployment, SAIPAN provided a mishap free, and FOD free flight environment. It achieved a 100% on-time-availability of aircraft. Combined 3,039 flight hours for the start of deployment in July through mid-November. SAIPAN completed 7 Vertical Replenishment (VERTREPS) moving over One-Million Five Hundred Thousand pounds of supplies and mail. Mediterranean Cruise 2000 also marked the first time USS SAIPAN used Super Pumas as part of the VERTREP effort.

AIRCRAFT HOURS FLOWN (Total)

Rotary Wing Flight Hours:
Day - 1157.9
Night / (Night Vision Goggle) – 404 / (323.3)
Total Rotary Wing Flight Hours - 1561.9

AV-8B V/STOL Flight Hours:
Day - 39.7
Night – 4
Total AV-8B Flight Hours – 43.7

Total Aircraft Evolutions Launch and Recovery - 12,634