

*OP-09BH
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From: Public Affairs Officer, USS Austin (LPD-4)
FPO New York, N.Y. 09501
To: Director of Naval History (OP-09B9)
Washington Navy Yard, Washington, D.C. 20390

Subj: Command History

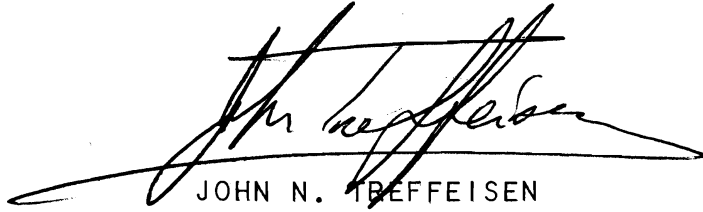
Ref: (a) OPNAVINST 5750.12B

1963-1979

Encl: (1) Current Command History, USS Austin (LPD-4)

1. In accordance with reference (a) have enclosed most recent command history (encl(1)).

2. Request that a copy of command history of USS Austin (LPD-4) in your possession be returned.



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COMMAND HISTORY

United States Ship AUSTIN (LPD-4) an Amphibious Transport Dock, is the fourth of her type, the first of her class and the third of the Fleet to bear the name. She is named for the city of Austin, Texas, which commemorates Stephen Fuller Austin, American colonizer and statesman. The keel was laid at the New York Naval Shipyard, Brooklyn, on 4 February 1963. AUSTIN was launched and christened 27 June 1964. Her sponsor was Miss Lynda Bird Johnson, the daughter of the 36th president of the United States, representing the city of Austin, Texas. Miss Luci Baines Johnson was her lady in waiting. Commissioning as a unit of the Fleet followed on 6 February 1965. The Honorable Ralph W. Yarborough, Senior Senator from Texas delivered the commissioning address and Captain William H. Shaw assumed command. Final trials and inspections at the New York Naval Shipyard, until August 1965, were followed by outfitting at the Norfolk Naval Shipyard, until August 1965. During September and October 1965, post-commissioning training and shakedown at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, brought the ship to a state of readiness to become a full-fledged unit of the Fleet.

After leaving Cuba, AUSTIN made a port of call at Corpus Christi, Texas, where several thousand citizens of Corpus Christi and surrounding area visited the ship. During this visit AUSTIN was presented the beautiful Silver Punch Service by the citizens of Austin, Texas which is now in display in the Wardroom.

From November 1965 through April 1966, AUSTIN engaged in amphibious exercises in the Norfolk area to maintain her operational readiness. On 5 May 1966, the ship entered the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard for a period of two months to undergo repairs and alterations found necessary during the shakedown period. When these were completed, and after brief stops in Norfolk and Port Everglades, Florida, AUSTIN spent two weeks at Vieques Island in the Caribbean conducting trials to determine the maneuvering characteristics of the AUSTIN class LPD. Following these trials the crew enjoyed liberty port calls at St. Thomas and San Juan. The high point of this trip was participation in the withdrawal from the Dominican Republic of units of the Inter-American Peace Force which had helped restore stability during a severe political crisis. Scheduled for a two and one-half day loading period at Port Haina, AUSTIN demonstrated LPD flexibility by completing the task in a little over five hours by using a Mediterranean moor and loading over the lowered stern gate. After disembarking the units of IAPF at Sunny Point, North Carolina on 9 August, AUSTIN returned to her homeport at Norfolk before again proceeding to the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard on 21 August for further adjustments to the main propulsion plant. This repair period was completed, and on 3 Novem-

ber 1966, AUSTIN returned to the homeport of Norfolk for resumption of operations with the Fleet,

On 25 November 1966, Captain Robert W. Stecher relieved Captain William H. Shaw as the AUSTIN's Commanding Officer.

On 27 November 1966, COMCRUDESFLT 10, RADM L. H. O'BRIEN, Jr., in his role as Commander of the "enemy" forces, broke his flag in AUSTIN for Exercise LANTFLEX 66. AUSTIN again displayed the versatility of the LPD during this operation. Although not designed as a flagship, the additional tasks involved were well within AUSTIN's capability and RADM O'Brien extended his commendation for a job well done at the completion of the exercise.

From December 1966 to April 1967 AUSTIN prepared for an extended deployment to the Caribbean and conducted operations at Onslow Bay, N.C. and in the Virginia Capes Area. During this time AUSTIN was the host ship for several cruises in which naval reservists participated in active duty training. On 24 February 1967, AUSTIN had the honor to serve as host ship for the 25th Anniversary of the Amphibious Force, U.S. Atlantic Fleet. During this occasion Miss Anita Bryant, popular vocalist, visited the ship.

AUSTIN departed Norfolk for Morehead City, North Carolina on 15 April 1967 to embark units of Marine Battalion Landing Team 2/2. Thus commenced the ship's first long deployment as a unit of the Caribbean Amphibious Ready Group. The ensuing four months were active ones for the ship, with participation in numerous amphibious training exercises. The most noteworthy of these was CLOVEHITCH III, a large-scale amphibious operation involving the combined efforts of the Navy, Marine Corps, Army, and Air Force which took place in late April 1967. Another highlight of the deployment was port visits to Ponce and San Juan, Puerto Rico; Willemstad, Curacao; St. Thomas, Virgin Islands; Colon, Panama; and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. This first highly successful deployment ended on 17 and 18 August 1967 at Morehead City where AUSTIN's combat load of Marine helicopters, vehicles, and nearly 500 troops were debarked. The ship arrived in Norfolk, the homeport for a well deserved upkeep and leave period on 19 August 1967.

On 27 October 1967, Captain William H. Hoover relieved Captain Robert W. Stecher to become AUSTIN's third Commanding Officer.

On 4 November 1967 AUSTIN, assisted by a detachment of Navy helicopters, members of Underwater Demolition Team 21, and NASA representatives became part of the recovery force for the Apollo 4 space mission. The actual recovery of the spacecraft was, as planned, in another ship's assigned area; however, AUSTIN provided valuable service by recovering two camera cassettes carried by the first stage booster which had taken excellent pictures of the flight during liftoff and first stage flight.

From 13 to 16 November 1967 AUSTIN conducted the first of what was to be many experimental/developmental high speed underway launches of Marine Amphibious Tractors (LVTs). This tactic, now an accepted and valuable addition to amphibious warfare, involves fast approach (up to 20 knots) to a hostile beach and debarkation of the LVTs, loaded with up to 35 troops each, directly from the ship's well deck while the ship remains underway at high speed. The LVTs then move to the beach with the troops while the ship retires to seaward.

After a Christmas and New Year leave period, AUSTIN transported Underwater Demolition Team 21 to Key West, Florida in January 1968 for unit training, then visited San Juan and Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico and Port Everglades, Florida. This was followed by a visit to Bridgeport, Connecticut 12 through 23 February 1968 to participate in tests of the CH-53 helicopter with the Sikorsky Aircraft plant. Part of the test included AUSTIN being towed by a CH-53 helicopter.

From 30 April through 3 May 1968 more high-speed underway launch tests of amphibious tractors were conducted by AUSTIN on Onslow Beach, North Carolina.

Vice Admiral L. M. MUSTIN, Commander Amphibious Force Atlantic, and his staff embarked in AUSTIN on 13 May 1968 for an inspection trip to the South Atlantic and Caribbean area. Visits were made to Bermuda, Nassau, San Juan, and Key West, Florida. COMPHIBLANT debarked from AUSTIN in Norfolk on 3 June 1968. AUSTIN was again underway on 17 June 1968 to participate in the large-scale amphibious operation RACER RUN which took place at Vieques Island, Puerto Rico. After D-Day on 20 June 1968.

19 July 1968 AUSTIN entered Norfolk Naval Shipyard at Portsmouth, Virginia for a shipyard overhaul period which ended on 19 December 1968.

Captain John M. MATHEWS became AUSTIN's fourth Commanding Officer when he relieved Captain HOOVER on 16 December 1968.

Departing Norfolk in late January, AUSTIN underwent a rigorous refresher training period in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Following this was two weeks of amphibious warfare training in the Onslow Beach, N.C. and Little Creek, Virginia areas. These periods of training rapidly brought the ship to a high state of training following the shipyard overhaul and the associated large personnel rotation which had taken place while the ship underwent repairs.

In April 1969 AUSTIN participated in the spring special amphibious exercise for students of several of the United States Service Colleges and other American and foreign dignitaries at Onslow Beach, N.C.

On 18 May 1969, AUSTIN departed Norfolk for a four-month Caribbean deployment as part of the Caribbean Amphibious Ready Group. Early in the deployment AUSTIN took part in Operation EXOTIC CANCER II, a joint Army, Navy, Marine, and Air Force exercise which involved amphibious and airborne troop operations in Puerto Rico and Vieques. Following the EXOTIC CANCER II exercise, AUSTIN participated in several smaller-scale amphibious exercises and visited the following ports: San Juan, P.R.; La Guaira, Venezuela; Colon, Panama Canal Zone; Guantanamo Bay, Cuba; Roosevelt Roads, P.R.; Bridgetown, Barbados; and Charlotte Amalie, Virgin Islands. The deployment ended on 10 September 1969 when Golf Company, Marine Battalion Landing Team 2/2, which had been embarked, departed the ship at Morehead City.

In August 1971, USS AUSTIN embarked CH-53 helicopters from Helicopter Mine Countermeasures Squadron TWELVE and the Staff of Commander Mobile Mine Countermeasures Command for a two week helicopter mine sweeping exercise in the Charleston OpArea.

From 21 through 24 September, AUSTIN embarked LVTs for high speed and at-anchor launch exercises off Onslow Beach, North Carolina.

On 20 October, USS AUSTIN embarked 221 marine officers from the Corps Basic School for a landing exercise called BASCOLEX 6-71 at Onslow Beach, North Carolina.

During the first two weeks in November, the ship again embarked CH-53 helicopters from HM-12 and the staff of Commander Mine Flottilla TWO for helicopter mine sweeping exercises in the Charleston, OpArea.

After holiday upkeep in Norfolk, AUSTIN became an unexpected participant in Exercise Snowy Beach where another LPD encountered last minute mechanical problems. The exercise lasted from 17 January to 29 January during which time AUSTIN landed over 600 marines and their equipment at Reid State Park in Sheepscot Bay, Maine. This operation was designed to test both men and ships in a cold weather environment. AUSTIN departed for the Caribbean in February 1972 for Operations FIREX and SPRINGBOARD before entering the shipyard in April 1972.

Following an eight month overhaul at Baltimore Shipbuilding and Norfolk Naval Shipyard, AUSTIN underwent refresher training at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba and later deployed for over six months to the Mediterranean as an element of the Amphibious Readiness Group of the U.S. Sixth Fleet on 4 June 1973.

On 3 August, Captain J. Richard Powell, Jr. relieved Captain Guthrie in ceremonies aboard while anchored in Athens, Greece.

AUSTIN subsequently participated in five major amphibious exercises the largest of which, DEEP FURROW, saw the participation of over 50 ships from five NATO nations. Immediately following this exercise, AUSTIN joined other U.S. Forces in a condition of general alert in reaction to the Yom Kippur War and ultimately spent some 75 days at sea without liberty for the crew.

Following return to Norfolk, Va. on 20 December, AUSTIN again deployed with the Caribbean Amphibious Readiness Group 1-74 on 6 February 1974, returned to Norfolk with the Group briefly from 18 March to 18 April and ultimately completed this deployment on 5 June. During this time AUSTIN participated in amphibious operations with the Brazilian and Venezuelan Navies as well as conducting training with its own embarked Marine Battalion elements. The final operation of this deployment was the tri-service exercise, SOLID SHIELD 74, which saw AUSTIN operating a Helicopter Anti-Submarine Squadron from its flight deck in company with almost thirty other ships and 60,000 sailors, marines, soldiers, and airmen.

During the year of 1974 the Austin continued to achieve awards for excellenct, in some cases the fifth consecutive award. The Austin was the most deployed ship in the Atlantic Fleet with only 83 days in its' homeport of Norfolk, Va., during that year. The Austij continued its' tradition of readiness by replacing it-self in the Caribbean Amphibious Readiness Group in August,

On December 17, 1974 Captain Joseph G. Kamrad relieved Captain J.R. Powell as Austins' Commanding Officer.

Captain J.R. Powell was relieved by Captain Curtis W. Miller as the Austin's Commanding Officer on January 16, 1976.

On July 4th 1976 the Austin had the honor of participating in "Operation Sail" held in New York harbor. This ceremony was part of the nation's Bicentennial Celebration and consisted of tall sailing ships and modern warships from nations around the world. That autumn the Austin headed for the North Atlantic to participate in Northern Wedding "76".

Due for a major overhaul the Austin sailed into Maryland Shipbuilding and Drydock in Baltimore, Maryland. During this year-long yard period, the ship received a thorough overhaul.

On April 13, 1977 Captain Curtis W. Miller was relieved by Captain Robert B. Rogers, as Austins' Commanding Officer.

Ready to get back into action the Austin sailed out of the yards on February 16, 1978 and headed back to Norfolk. The ship was not in Norfolk for long before she was off to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba for shakedown.

Captain Charles L. Fries relieved Captain Robert B. Rogers on August 4, 1978.

The Austin was again underway on August 22, 1978 as she steamed for the North Atlantic. There the Austin participated in Northern Wedding "78" along with other NATO nations. The ship returned to Norfolk in October.

After a short rest the Austin was steaming again on January 10, 1979 this time for the Mediterranean Sea. During this five month deployment the Austin participated in a number of different amphibious exercises, that involved not only ships from Phibron Two but ships from Spain, France, and Turkey as well. The ship returned to her homeport on June 19, 1979.

On October 12, 1979 Captain Charles L. Fries was relieved by Captain Ervin E. White as the Austins' Commanding Officer.