

U.S.S. AUSTIN (LPD-4)
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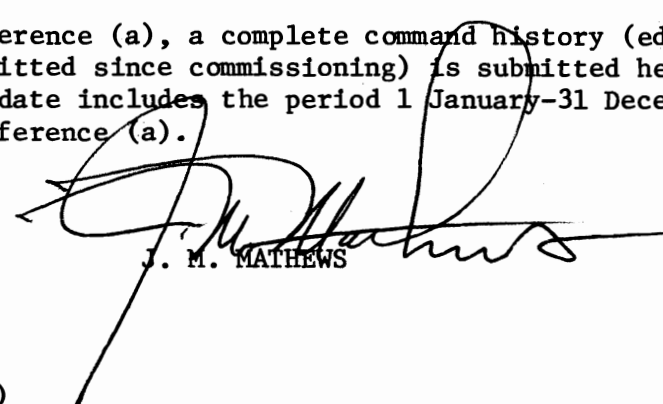
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From: Commanding Officer, USS AUSTIN (LPD-4)
To: Chief of Naval Operations (OP-09B9)
Subj: Command History 1 January - 31 December 1969
Ref: (a) OPNAVINST 5750.12
Encl: (1) Command History

1969

1. In accordance with reference (a), a complete command history (edited from annual histories submitted since commissioning) is submitted herewith as enclosure (1). This update includes the period 1 January-31 December 1969 in accordance with Reference (a).



J. M. MATHEWS

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COMPHIBLANT (w/encl (1))
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USS AUSTIN HISTORY

United States Ship AUSTIN (LPD 4) an Amphibious transport Dock, is the fourth ship 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 May 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 high 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 areas visited the ship. During this visit AUSTIN was presented the beautiful Silver Punch Service, which is now on display in the Wardroom, by the citizens of Austin, Texas.

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 of units of the Inter-American Peace Force, which had helped restore stability during a severe political crisis, from the Dominican Republic. 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 November 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. J. 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 Isles; 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, Virginia, 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 at 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 10 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, AUSTIN visited San Juan and returned to Norfolk, arriving on 30 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 Guantamano 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 DANCER 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 DANCER II exercise, AUSTIN participated in several smaller scale amphibious exercises and visited the following ports: San Juan, P.R.; LaGuaira, 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.

Following a leave and upkeep period in Norfolk, AUSTIN commenced training and preparations for assignment as the Atlantic recovery ship for the second U.S. Moon exploration mission, APOLLO 12. Departing Norfolk on 4 November, AUSTIN took station on the equator for the launch on 14 November 1969, and remained in the South Atlantic in readiness for recovery of the astronauts and the command module until 24 November 1969 when APOLLO 12 splashdown occurred in the Mid-Pacific as had been planned.

During this trip, on 15 November at the equator, AUSTIN was honored by a visit from his excellency, Neptunus Rex and his court. Time honored traditions were observed and upon Neptune's departure, all members of AUSTIN's crew were members of the Royal Order of Shellbacks. Enroute home, AUSTIN made a brief stop at Port of Spain, Trinidad for fuel on 29-30 November and arrived in Norfolk on 6 December 1969 for a holiday leave and upkeep period.