



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY  
USS AUSTIN (LPD-4)  
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From: Commanding Officer, USS AUSTIN (LPD-4)  
To: Chief of Naval Operations (N09BH), Washington, DC 20370

Subj: 1996 COMMAND HISTORY FOR USS AUSTIN (LPD-4)

Ref: (a) OPNAVINST 5750.12E

Encl: (1) Command History 1996 Chronology  
(2) Command History 1996 Narrative  
(3) Current Ship's Photo

1. In accordance with reference (a), the 1996 Command History for USS AUSTIN (LPD-4) is forwarded. Due to an administrative oversight, this Command History was not submitted previously in 1996 as required.

  
R. S. CALLAS

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COMPHIBGRU TWO

## 1996 COMMAND HISTORY - CHRONOLOGY

01-28 JAN Inport Norfolk, VA  
01-07 JAN Holiday Leave and Upkeep Period continues  
16-26 JAN TARGET/Combat Systems Readiness Review (CSRR) Phase I  
17 JAN OHSAT Visit  
29 JAN-19 FEB Underway for Air Combat Element Amphibious Squadron/Marine Expeditionary Unit Integrated Training (ACE PMINT) in Cherry Point Oparea (CPOA) and Amphibious Exercise (AMPHIBEX) 1-96 in the Puerto Rican OPAREA (PROA)  
30 JAN Inport Morehead City, NC to onload elements of Marine Corps Artillery Battalion  
30-31 JAN Underway in Onslow Bay for ACE PMINT  
31 JAN-02 FEB Underway en route to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba  
02 FEB Assisted motor vessel Marie Jeanne  
03 FEB Anchored Guantanamo Bay, Cuba  
04 FEB Underway en route to PROA  
05 FEB Transit Virgin Passage  
05-07 FEB Underway in vicinity of Vieques Island, PR in support of AMPHIBEX 1-96  
08-10 FEB Inport NAVSTA Roosevelt Roads, PR for washdown  
11 FEB Underway en route to Pointe a Pitre, Guadeloupe  
12-14 FEB Anchored for Port Visit at Pointe a Pitre, Guadeloupe  
15-19 FEB Underway en route Morehead City, NC  
20 FEB Inport Morehead City, NC to offload elements of Marine Corps Artillery Battalion. Underway late afternoon en route Norfolk, VA  
21-25 FEB Inport Norfolk, VA  
26 FEB Underway for PMINT in CPOA. SBU-20, SEAL Team 2 (PLT BRAVO), LCU-1649 embarked.  
27-29 FEB Anchored in CPOA for PMINT  
01 MAR Underway en route Norfolk, VA  
02-24 MAR Inport Norfolk, VA  
11-18 MAR CSRR Phase II  
25 MAR Underway en route CPOA for COMPTUEX  
26 MAR Anchored in Onslow Bay for AAV operations, then moored Morehead City, NC  
27 MAR-02 APR Underway in CPOA  
03-24 APR Inport Norfolk, VA  
18 APR Ammunition Crossdeck with USS SAIPAN  
25 APR Underway for Special Operations Certification Exercise (SOCEX) 96  
26 APR Inport Morehead City, NC to onload elements of 24 MEU  
27 APR-13 MAY Underway in Onslow Bay, NC for SOCEX 96  
14 MAY-18 JUN Inport Norfolk, VA  
24 MAY Change of Command inport Norfolk, VA  
28 MAY-21 JUN IMAV with SIMA Norfolk  
19-20 JUN Sea Trials in VCOA

Enclosure (1)

21-27 JUN Inport Norfolk, VA  
 21-27 JUN Pre-Overseas Movement (POM) Leave Period  
 28 JUN Underway For Mediterranean Amphibious Ready Group  
 (MARG) 2-96 Deployment  
 29 JUN Inport Morehead City, NC for onload of elements of  
 24 MEU  
 29 JUN-10 JUL Underway for Atlantic Ocean Transit (TRANSLANT)  
 10 JUL Inport Rota, Spain For ARG Turnover  
 11-19 JUL Transit Mediterranean Sea en route to the Black Sea  
 20 JUL Northbound Turkish Strait transit  
 21-24 JUL Port Visit Constanta, Romania  
 21-27 JUL Exercise Cooperative Partner 96  
 28 JUL Underway Enroute Odessa, Ukraine  
 29-31 JUL Port Visit Odessa, Ukraine  
 01-03 AUG Underway Enroute Rhodes, Greece  
 01 AUG Southbound Turkish Strait transit  
 04-08 AUG Port Visit Rhodes, Greece  
 08-19 AUG Exercise Rescue Eagle 1996  
 20 AUG Underway en route Bari, Italy  
 21-26 AUG Port Visit Bari, Italy  
 27-29 AUG Underway en route Toulon, France  
 30 AUG-11 SEP Port Visit Toulon, France  
 12-18 SEP Underway en route Izmir, Turkey  
 19-22 SEP Port Visit Izmir, Turkey  
 22 SEP-12 OCT Exercise Dynamic Mix 1996  
 13-14 OCT Underway en route Catania, Italy  
 15-18 OCT Port Visit Catania, Italy  
 19 OCT-03 NOV Underway en route Patras, Greece  
 04-07 NOV Port Visit Patras, Greece  
 08-09 NOV Underway en route Haifa Haifa, Israel  
 10-25 NOV Port Visit Haifa, Israel as part of Exercise Noble  
 Shirley 1996  
 03-07 DEC Inport Rota, Spain for ARG Turnover/Outchop  
 Sixth Fleet  
 08-18 DEC Underway - Atlantic Ocean Transit  
 19-20 DEC Inport Morehead City, NC for offload of 24 MEU  
 21 DEC Homecoming from MARG 2-96 Deployment  
 21-31 DEC Inport Norfolk, VA for Holiday Leave/Upkeep Period

## 1996 COMMAND HISTORY - NARRATIVE

The year 1996 commenced with AUSTIN moored at the Norfolk Naval Base, with the crew enjoying a well-deserved holiday leave period that ended on 7 January. The ship conducted an Intermediate Maintenance Availability (IMAV) with SIMA Norfolk for the rest of January and then began the pre-deployment work-up period with the USS SAIPAN ARG. The SAIPAN ARG, commanded by Commander, Amphibious Squadron (COMPHIBRON) SIX, Captain Peterson, USN, included USS SAIPAN (LHA-2) and USS GUNSTON HALL (LSD-44) with with elements of the 24<sup>TH</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit (24 MEU).

The ship got underway in February for its first underway period of the pre-deployment work-up cycle. The period of 29 January to 19 February was full of drills and amphibious evolutions. Air Combat Element Amphibious Squadron/Marine Expeditionary Unit Integrated Training (ACE PMINT) consisted of several days of marine helicopter Deck Landing Qualifications (DLQs), anchoring in Onslow Bay, NC, and launch and recovery of the embarked landing craft and SEAL Team TWO's rigid hull inflatable boats (RHIBs). While en route to the Puerto Rican Operating Area (PROA) on 02 February, the ship responded to a distress call received on bridge-to-bridge radio. The small pleasure craft *Marie Jeanne* was adrift with a broken compass, stalled engine, little water, and no food. The 7 people aboard the craft had been underway for several days before realizing their compass was faulty and that their captain was unable to determine their position or chart a course to their destination. AUSTIN's motor whaleboat made several trips to the stricken vessel to deliver food, water, medical supplies, and a new compass. AUSTIN took one of *Marie Jeanne's* injured crewmembers aboard and then escorted *Marie Jeanne* halfway to the nearest land, Great Inagua. AUSTIN anchored off Guantanamo Bay, Cuba and transported the stricken *Marie Jeanne* crewmember ashore via LCU. AUSTIN then continued on to the PROA to complete AMPHIBEX 1-96 in company with GUNSTON HALL and SAIPAN.

AUSTIN was again underway from 26 February through 02 March for PMINT in company with GUNSTON HALL and SAIPAN. The ship operated in the Cherry Point Operating Area (CPOA) and conducted numerous DLQs, and Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) launches. LCU 1649 was launched and recovered, along with the Marines' Combat Rubber Raiding Craft (CRRCs), UAVs, and RHIBs. COMPTUEX saw AUSTIN anchored at Onslow Bay, NC on 26 March. Fourteen AAVs were recovered and LCU-1649 was launched to make her way into Radio Island. The ship then got underway and moored in Morehead City, NC overnight. The ship returned to her Onslow Bay anchorage on 27 March and conducted simultaneous LCU operations and DLQs. Several general quarters drills were also conducted.

The final phase of work-ups saw AUSTIN tasked to participate in SOCEX. On 18 April, the ship shifted berths from pier 4 to pier 5 and back in order to crossdeck ammunition from SAIPAN. AUSTIN got underway on 25 April and embarked LCU 1649 en route to CPOA. The ship moored inport Morehead City, NC on 26 April. AUSTIN got underway from Morehead City on 27 April with the CO of MSSG-24 and COMPHIBRON SIX embarked. During SOCEX the ship operated with USS KLAKRING, USS SAIPAN, USS GUNSTON HALL, and USS PHILIPPINE SEA. On 12 May, AUSTIN lost a UAV in the water due to sudden engine failure. The ship rapidly launched the motor whale boat with a rescue team, but the aircraft sank rapidly and was not recovered. CO, MSSG-24 and COMPHIBRON SIX disembarked on 12 May, along with the remaining elements of MSSG-24 via LCU 1649. On 14 May AUSTIN was again inport Norfolk.

With the end of SOCEX, AUSTIN was ready to deploy. A final IMAV with SIMA Norfolk took the ship right up to the Pre-Overseas Movement (POM) leave period and final preparations.

On 24 May, CDR William D. Valentine, Jr. USN relieved CAPT Andrew M. Petruska III as Commanding Officer, USS AUSTIN.

On 28 June, AUSTIN departed Norfolk, VA in company with USS SAIPAN and USS GUNSTON HALL as part of MARG 2-96. SAIPAN ARG was under the command of COMPHIBRON SIX, Commodore Peterson, embarked on board USS SAIPAN. Embarked on board AUSTIN were SEAL Team TWO (BRAVO Platoon), Special Boat Unit TWENTY, Fleet Composite Squadron SIX Detachment FOUR, Beach Master Unit TWO (Detachment FOUR), and LCU 1649 from Assault Craft Unit TWO. Elements of the 24<sup>TH</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) embarked the following morning in Morehead City, NC. MSSG 24 marines and their gear were loaded aboard AUSTIN, and Commander, MSSG 24 embarked aboard the ship. The ARG departed Onslow Bay on 29 June and commenced the trans-Atlantic (TRANSLANT) crossing en route to Naval Station Rota, Spain. Training during the Atlantic crossing consisted of general quarters drills, flight operations, weapons firings, and various other unit training. The ARG arrived in Rota, Spain on 10 July and began the turnover process. Once turnover was complete, the ARG was under the control of Commander, Sixth Fleet, and transited through the Straits of Gibraltar. AUSTIN detached from the ARG and began the journey through the Turkish Straits and into the Black Sea.

The ship moored in Constanta, Romania on 21 July for the first stop in her Black Sea tour. Exercise Cooperative Partner 1996, a Partnership for Peace exercise, focused on a plethora of activities which culminated in the simulated evacuation from hostile environments of noncombatant participants. MSSG 24 troops trained fellow Romanian and Italian marines on civil countermeasures, detainee handling and

urban military operations. Sixty Romanians were evacuated to AUSTIN, where they received a medical check-up, hot meal, and a tour of the ship. The exercise concluded with an impressive Sunset Parade on the ship's flight deck that was attended by the Romanian Minister of Defense and a number of other dignitaries.

Cooperative Partner 96 was followed by a port visit to Odessa, Ukraine. The ship was greeted by a very festive atmosphere as crowds of dignitaries, military officials, press people, and local townsfolk rolled out the welcome mat. The visit ended with another spectacular Sunset Parade on the flight deck, this time highlighted by local artists performing traditional Ukrainian song and dance routines.

After transiting south through the Turkish Straits, AUSTIN made Rhodes, Greece her next port of call on 4 August. It was a welcome respite from the fast-paced Black Sea operations, and the crew took full advantage of the bright sun and warm temperatures. AUSTIN participated in Exercise Rescue Eagle 96 from 8-19 August and then made her way to Bari, Italy for a port visit. Many AUSTIN sailors and marines sampled local Italian culture and took in the sights. Overnight trips to Rome and tours of the ancient city of Pompeii were highlights of the port visit.

AUSTIN departed Bari on 26 August en route to Toulon, France. After mooring on 30 August, AUSTIN sailors and marines spent their days in Cannes, Avignon, St. Remy, and LeBaux. Some ventured as far as Monaco to try their hand at games of chance in the casinos of Monte Carlo. Several crewmembers even braved the long bullet train ride to the fabled city of Paris for an overnight stay. AUSTIN got underway on 18 September to head for Izmir, Turkey.

From 19-22 September the ship was moored in Turkey's second largest port, Izmir. Local bazaars and stores sold leather, sportswear, and clothing, as well as inexpensive jewelry and other items. It was back to business from 22 September to 12 October as the ship participated in Exercise Dynamic Mix 96. This multinational exercise provided valuable training with our allies, as well as the opportunity for many shipboard drills.

The busy pace of Dynamic Mix gave way to the easy times of Catania, Italy from 15-18 October. Mount Etna, the highest volcano in all of Europe, beckoned to the crew as they hiked the scenic countryside. Crewmembers were constantly on the move as they toured, shopped, danced, and sampled local culinary delights. AUSTIN got underway on 19 October for another short port visit in Patras, Greece.

The crew enjoyed the visit to Patras from 4-7 November; many jumping at the opportunity to visit Athens, Greece. Underway on 8 November, AUSTIN transited southeast to the city of Haifa, Israel.

Many sailors and marines felt spiritually fulfilled as they visited the many holy sites in Israel. A cherished moment came as AUSTIN's Chaplain [REDACTED] baptised and renewed baptismal vows in the holy waters of the River Jordan. Shopping, dancing, sightseeing, and sports were also popular pastimes during the visit. Exercise Noble Shirley 96 was conducted on the heels of the visit to Haifa, involving forces from several nations. With Noble Shirley successfully concluded, the ship began the transit back through the Straits of Gibraltar to Rota, Spain for turnover.

From 3-7 December, the ship and the SAIPAN ARG conducted washdown and backload of 24 MEU and turned over with the incoming USS NASSAU ARG. The SAIPAN ARG got underway from Rota, Spain on 8 December and began the long TRANSLANT journey home. Back under the operational control of Commander, Second Fleet, the ARG successfully executed the crossing from 8-18 December. The crew kept busy with a myriad of drills and evolutions to help take the edge off the building excitement of homecoming. The ship moored in Morehead City, NC on 19 December and offloaded all embarked units. AUSTIN left Morehead City on 20 December en route Norfolk, VA.

After a long and arduous deployment, AUSTIN moored to Pier 5, Berth 2 at Norfolk Naval Base. After the first kiss with TV news coverage and a few remarks by the Captain, all let out a jubilant cheer as MARG 2-96 was officially ended. AUSTIN then commenced a post-deployment leave and standdown period for the remainder of 1996.