



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, D.C.

Subj: 1998 COMMAND HISTORY FOR USS AUSTIN (LPD-4)

Ref: (a) OPNAVINST 5750.12E

Encl: (1) Command History 1998 Chronology  
(2) Command History 1998 Narrative  
(3) Current Ship's Photo  
(4) Commanding Officer's Biography and Photo

1998

1. In accordance with reference (a), the 1998 Command History for USS AUSTIN (LPD-4) is forwarded.

  
R. S. CALLAS

Copy to:  
COMPHIBGRU TWO

## 1998 COMMAND HISTORY - CHRONOLOGY

1-30 JAN Inport, Norfolk, VA  
1-5 JAN Holiday Leave and Upkeep period continues  
06-09 JAN SAIPAN Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) Commander's Conference  
12-16 JAN ARG/MEU (SOC) Workshop  
12-30 JAN Intermediate Maintenance Availability (IMAV) with SIMA Norfolk  
01-05 FEB Inport Norfolk, VA  
06-09 FEB Pre-TARGET Steam Review  
06-12 FEB Underway for Air Combat Element Amphibious Squadron/ Marine Expeditionary Unit integrated training ( ACE PMINT) in Cherry Point OPAREA (CPOA)  
13 FEB - 1 MAR Inport Norfolk, VA  
17-27 FEB TARGET/Combat Systems Readiness Review (CSRR) Phase I  
26 FEB Postal Inspection  
27 FEB Navigation Checkride  
02-08 MAR Underway for PMINT in CPOA  
09-22 MAR Inport, Norfolk, VA  
23-27 MAR Underway for training services in the Virginia Capes OPAREA (VCOA)  
28 MAR - 26 APR Inport Norfolk, VA  
07-26 APR IMAV with SIMA Norfolk  
13 APR Safety Standdown  
13-24 APR PARSE Visit  
21-23 APR Command Inspection (Amphibious Group TWO)  
27 APR - 19 MAY Underway for Joint Task Force Exercise (JTFEX)/Marine Expeditionary Unit Exercise (MEUEX)/Supporting Arms Coordination Exercise (SACEX) in CPOA and the Puerto Rican OPAREA (PROA)  
08 MAY Transit Virgin Passage en route to PROA  
12-14 MAY Inport Naval Station Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico  
15-18 MAY Underway en route to Norfolk, VA  
19-27 MAY Inport Norfolk, VA  
21-22 MAY Ammunition crossdeck with USS SHREVEPORT (LPD-12)  
28 MAY - 05 JUN Underway for Special Operations Capable certification (SOCEX) in CPOA  
6-30 JUN Inport Norfolk, VA  
6-30 JUN Pre-Overseas Movement (POM) Leave Period  
01 JUL Underway for Mediterranean ARG (MARG 3-98) deployment  
02 JUL Inport Morehead City, NC for onload of elements of 22 MEU  
03-13 JUL Underway for Atlantic Ocean transit (TRANSLANT)  
14-16 JUL Inport Rota, Spain for turnover with USS WASP ARG  
17-20 JUL Underway en route Central Mediterranean for Exercise MATADOR 98  
20 JUL Transit Strait of Messina  
21-26 JUL Underway in vicinity of Augusta Bay, Sicily in support of MATADOR 98

Enclosure (1)

23-24 JUL USS AUSTIN hosts TODAY Show crew onboard  
 27-28 JUL Underway en route to Rhodes, Greece  
 29 JUL-04 AUG Inport Rhodes, Greece  
 05 AUG Underway en route to Antalya, Turkey  
 06-11 AUG Inport Antalya, Turkey  
 12-13 AUG Underway en route to the Adriatic Sea  
 14-22 AUG Underway operating in Lone Star Station off Durres, Albania conducting Operation Resolute Response and Exercise Cooperative Assembly 98  
 23-26 AUG Underway en route to Rota, Spain  
 27 AUG-03 SEP Inport Rota, Spain, conducting FMAV with USS SIMON LAKE (AS-33)  
 04-06 SEP Underway en route Thessaloniki, Greece  
 07 SEP Diverted to Lone Star Station (Adriatic Sea)  
 08 SEP-16 OCT Underway operating in Lone Star Station in support of Marines ashore in Albania as part of Operation Silver Knight  
 17-19 OCT Inport Brindisi, Italy  
 20-22 OCT Underway en route to the Black Sea  
 23 OCT Transit (northbound) Turkish Straits  
 24 OCT Transit Black Sea en route to Odessa, Ukraine  
 25-26 OCT Inport Odessa  
 27 OCT-03 NOV Underway for Exercise Sea Breeze 98  
 29 OCT-01 NOV At anchor off Pivdenyy, Ukraine, in support of Marines ashore  
 02-03 NOV Inport Odessa  
 04 NOV Underway en route to Constanta, Romania  
 04-06 NOV COMDESRON FOURTEEN embarked in USS AUSTIN  
 05 NOV Inport Constanta  
 05 NOV VIP Reception on board USS AUSTIN  
 05-10 NOV Underway for Exercise Rescue Eagle 98  
 10-11 NOV Inport Constanta  
 11 Underway transit Black Sea en route to Turkish Straits  
 12 NOV Transit (southbound) Turkish Straits  
 13 NOV Transit Aegean Sea and Central Mediterranean en route to Malta  
 14-17 NOV Inport Valletta, Malta  
 16 NOV VIP Reception on board USS AUSTIN for US Ambassador to Malta  
 18-20 NOV Underway transiting the Western Mediterranean en route to Rota, Spain  
 21-25 NOV Inport Rota, Spain for turnover with USS NASSAU ARG  
 26 NOV-6 DEC Transit Atlantic Ocean (TRANSLANT)  
 7-8 DEC Inport Morehead City, NC for offload of 22 MEU; embark Tiger Cruise guests  
 8 DEC Underway en route to Norfolk, VA  
 9 DEC Homecoming Norfolk, VA; complete MARG 3-98 deployment  
 9-21 DEC Inport Norfolk, VA  
 10-31 DEC Holiday Leave and Upkeep period/Post- Deployment Leave period

## 1998 COMMAND HISTORY - NARRATIVE

January 1998 commenced with the USS AUSTIN moored at the Norfolk Naval Base, observing the last days of the holiday leave and upkeep period that ended on 11 January. From 12 to 30 January, the ship conducted an Intermediate Maintenance Availability (IMAV) with SIMA Norfolk. January also marked the beginning of the pre-deployment work-up period with the USS SAIPAN Amphibious Ready Group (ARG). The SAIPAN ARG, commanded by Commander, Amphibious Group (COMPHIBRON) EIGHT, Captain Richard H. Enderly USN, included USS SAIPAN (LHA-2) and USS TORTUGA (LSD-46) with elements of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit (22 MEU), commanded by Colonel Sam Helland USMC. Work-Up events included the ARG Commander's Conference, held 5-9 January, and the ARG/MEU Special Operations Capable (SOC) Workshop, held 12-16 January.

On 6 February, the ship marked her 33<sup>rd</sup> year of commissioned service with a cake cutting ceremony on the mess decks. From 06 to 12 February, AUSTIN was underway in the Cherry Point Oparea in support of aviation combat element (ACE) PMINT which consisted of several days of intense training for HMM-162 USMC aircraft Deck Landing Qualifications (DLQs). While in company with USS SAIPAN (LHA-2) and USS TORTUGA (LSD-46), the ship conducted several man overboard and general quarters drills. Amphibious evolutions included anchoring in Onslow Bay, NC and launch/recovery of embarked landing craft, LCU-1650, and SEAL Team TWO rigid hull inflatable boat (RHIB). Air Department also executed several successful launches of the Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) from VC-6. Back in Norfolk, the ship began preparations for TARGET, conducted in conjunction with the Combat Systems Readiness Review (CSRR) Phase One from 17-27 February. A postal inspection and navigation checkride were also successfully completed during this month. Regretfully, on 05 February, the ship lost a valued shipmate when Ships Servicemen Second Class Darren Collins passed away from a sudden illness.

Getting underway on 2 March, AUSTIN transited to Onslow Bay in company with SAIPAN and TORTUGA to conduct a second work-up period (PMINT) which focused on integrated amphibious training with the embarked Marines. After embarking various elements of MEU Service Support Group 22 (MSSG-22), commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Charles Herndon USMC, in Morehead City on 03 March. AUSTIN anchored in Onslow Bay 3-5 March and conducted numerous amphibious evolutions. LCU-1650 was launched numerous times, as were the marines' Combat Rubber Raiding Craft (CRRCs). The ship simultaneously conducted DLQs and general quarters drills. On Sunday, 08 March, AUSTIN returned to homeport.

The underway period from 23-26 March was filled with many shipboard training evolutions, including the firing of the ship's close-in weapons system (CIWS). During the first underway day, 23 March, the ship conducted a series of precision anchoring exercises in

Lynnhaven Anchorage. Underway the following morning, the ship flexed the engineering plant with a full power run out to the Virginia Capes Operating Area. A myriad of man overboard, general quarters, and mass casualty drills. The ship remained at anchorage overnight 25 March and returned to Norfolk on 26 March. The ship commenced an IMAV period on 29 March that continued through 26 April.

The ship conducted a Safety Standdown on 13 April to emphasize safety for all hands. CSRR Phase Two occurred from 13-17 April. A PARSE elevator inspection and Command Inspection were also held this month, both with satisfactory results. AUSTIN got underway with the SAIPAN ARG on 27 April to conduct Joint Task Force Exercise (JTFEX) 2-98 in the Cherry Point and Puerto Rico Operating Areas. JTFEX was combined with the MEU Exercise (MEUEX) and Supporting Arms Coordination Exercise (SACEX), making for a rigorous training period that lasted into May. A challenging scenario integrated ships of the SAIPAN ARG and USS DWIGHT D EISENHOWER (CVN-69) Battle Group (IKEBATGRU), commanded by RADM Scott Fry USN. While conducting wet well operations prior to entering Morehead City on 28 April, the ship suffered a casualty to the sterngate starboard carriage pin. AUSTIN remained inport Morehead City for 96 hours while workers from Norfolk Shipbuilding and Drydock (NORSHIPCO) conducted repairs to the sterngate ram carriage pin. The ship got underway as planned on Saturday, 01 May, and rejoined the ARG off Onslow Bay.

As hostilities escalated in a fictitious country, the ARG and CVBG transited south through the Virgin Passage to PROA and conducted a live-fire amphibious assault on the Island of Vieques, off Puerto Rico. AUSTIN practiced her Air Warfare (AW) and Surface Warfare (SUW) defense tactics and conducted .50 cal and CIWS firings. Short-notice tasking called upon AUSTIN to embark Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) personnel and get underway from anchorage immediately, which the ship did in just 37 minutes. The ship located several simulated mines that were then destroyed or disarmed by the EOD team. With the MEUEX/SACEX complete, AUSTIN joined SAIPAN and TORTUGA in port Naval Station Roosevelt Roads for the washdown and backload of the Marines from 14-16 May. AUSTIN returned to homeport on 18 May, first anchoring in Lynnhaven Anchorage to pick-up nearly 100 family members and friends for a Family Day Cruise. Guests were brought out to the ship aboard LCU-1650 and enjoyed a flight deck picnic as the ship transited the channel into port.

Following the completion of the JTFEX on 18 May, the ship spent a brief 10 day inport period before getting underway for the Special Operations Certification Exercise (SOCEX) on 28 May. During the inport period, AUSTIN crossdecked ammunition from USS SHREVEPORT (LPD-12) 21-22 May. The first of three Midshipmen Training Periods commenced on 26 May with AUSTIN hosting several midshipmen from various universities.

The final stage of pre-deployment work-ups began on 28 May as AUSTIN and TORTUGA got underway to conduct the SOCEX. Due to a major casualty to SAIPAN's force draft blower and main circ pump, both 22 MEU and COMPHIBRON EIGHT relocated to Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) New River along with their staffs. While AUSTIN, TORTUGA, and embarked Marine Corps units remained at sea for the exercise, the majority of units and staffs operated from the beach. On Saturday, 30 May, AUSTIN was directed to proceed 240 NM south to the vicinity of Beaufort, South Carolina to conduct a short-notice Non-Combatant Evacuation Operation (NEO) from Parris Island. The ship, with embarked HMM-162 aircraft, single-handedly evacuated and processed 89 civilians. With the NEO mission successfully completed, the ship conducted another high-speed transit north to position herself for contingency operations in Onslow Bay. Just after transporting the evacuees ashore to MCAS New River via LCU, the ship received word of mass casualties on the beach and responded promptly. 29 casualties were expeditiously received and treated aboard the ship.

Shortly after anchoring in Onslow Bay on 02 June, an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) crashed into the water approximately 1,000 yards astern of the ship. The ship rapidly launched the motor whale boat with rescue team personnel and secured the aircraft. Towing the craft to the starboard side of the ship, the ship's two SAR swimmers, BM2 [REDACTED] and BM3 [REDACTED], managed to secure the UAV to the hook of the Boat and Aircraft (B&A) crane before the craft began to sink. As a result of their prompt action, the UAV was recovered intact, preventing the loss of the one million dollar aircraft. A control signal failure was determined to be the cause of the crash. The ship scheduled plenty of in-house drills and training in addition to the SOCEX events. AUSTIN truly carried the load during SOCEX, performing a majority of the major tasks and passing all requirements. With the end of SOCEX, AUSTIN Navy-Marine Corps Team was now ready to deploy. After offloading the Marines, AUSTIN returned to homeport on 05 June and commenced a Pre-Overseas Movement (POM) leave period and final pre-deployment preparations.

On 01 July, AUSTIN departed Norfolk, VA in company with USS SAIPAN (LHA-2) and USS TORTUGA (LSD-46) as part of MARG 3-98. Embarked on board AUSTIN were Seal Team TWO (BRAVO Platoon), Special Boat Unit TWENTY, Fleet Composite Squadron SIX (VC-6) Detachment FOUR, Beach Master Unit TWO (Detachment FOUR), and LCU 1650 from Assault Craft Unit TWO. The following morning, the ship arrived in Morehead City, NC and embarked elements of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable). Aboard AUSTIN were 156 marines of MSSG-22 and 226 marines from Battalion Landing Team 2/2 (Golf Company), commanded by Major Bo Coulcombe USMC. On the afternoon of 02 July, the ARG departed Onslow Bay and commenced a 3,600 mile trans-Atlantic (TRANSLANT) crossing en route to Naval Station Rota, Spain.

The Atlantic crossing was packed with flight operations, main space fire drills, man overboard exercises and unit training. Highlights included a practice ship takedown of AUSTIN by SEAL Team TWO in preparation for the Maritime Intercept Operations (MIO)/helicopter-borne visit, boarding search and seizure (HVBSS) operation slated for Exercise MATADOR 98. AUSTIN's Independence Day festivities included a steel beach picnic and cake cutting ceremony, capped off with a magnificent evening "fireworks" display put on by SEAL Team TWO. This fire power demonstration highlighted the impressive capabilities of the embarked SEALs.

During the TRANSLANT, USS TORTUGA experienced a casualty to the ship's evaporators and requested to come alongside AUSTIN to UNREP fresh and feed water. AUSTIN's Deck Department personnel manufactured a close-in rig attaching over 300 feet of 1.5 inch hose to the ship's B&A crane. With this rig, the ship was able to transfer over 7,000 gallons of feed and fresh water to the LSD. However, after approximately 2,000 gallons of feed water had been transferred, AUSTIN suddenly lost fires in #2 boiler, necessitating an emergency breakaway. The breakaway was flawlessly executed and the engineers promptly recovered from the casualty, determining that a fuel oil service pump had inadvertently tripped off the line. Within 2 hours, fires were lit in #2 boiler and TORTUGA was alongside receiving water.

AUSTIN arrived in Rota, Spain on 14 July for turnover with the USS WASP ARG, which included USS TRENTON and USS PORTLAND, and commanded by Commander, Amphibious Squadron SIX. With turnover complete, the ARG officially INCHOP to Commander, Sixth Fleet, and transited through the Straits of Gibraltar.

Exercise MATADOR '98 was conducted off the coast of Sicily in conjunction with the EISENHOWER Battle Group, which had deployed from CONUS on 11 June 1998. AUSTIN had the unique opportunity to host the TODAY SHOW Crew 22-23 July as they observed the SEALs conducting a MIO in support of the exercise. Six helicopters from HMM-162 were cross-decked from SAIPAN for the duration of the exercise. Following an initial query by USS MITSCHER (DDG-57), AUSTIN's SEALs were called into action to conduct HVBSS operations on a vessel suspected of illegal weapons smuggling. The SEALs fastroped onto the deck of USNS BIG HORN with the TODAY SHOW cameras rolling, giving America an up-close look at AUSTIN's multi-mission capabilities and the potency of a well-trained SEAL Team. AUSTIN left the Central Mediterranean on 27 July en route to Rhodes, Greece. The ship conducted a port visit in Rhodes from 29 July to 04 August and then sailed for a 6-day port visit in Antalya, Turkey.

Just prior to getting underway from Antalya, Turkey on 12 August, AUSTIN received word that the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DROC) was deteriorating and that both SAIPAN and TORTUGA were directed to sail to the coast of West Africa to stand by for a

possible noncombatant evacuation operation. AUSTIN was first directed to sail to Rota to pick up a detachment of HMM-162 aircraft, but then two days later, was redirected to steam to up the Adriatic Sea to standby for possible contingency operations. Working through the night, ship's personnel, embarked Marines, and SEALs formulated plans for the insertion of security forces into the American Embassy in Tirana, which later became known as Operation RESOLUTE RESPONSE. On 15 August, two MH-53 heavy-lift helicopters from HC-4 arrived with an embarked maintenance detachment and within two hours, approximately 200 combat-equipped Marines and SEALs were inserted into the Rilindja Ridge Housing Complex to establish protection for Americans living in Tirana, Albania.

Simultaneously with Operation RESOLUTE RESPONSE, USS AUSTIN supported the NATO Exercise COOPERATIVE ASSEMBLY 98, providing the heavy lift transport of more than 1,500 exercise participants. Because of the concern for security ashore, the ship embarked approximately 50 members of the STRIKEFOR-SOUTH staff onboard each night, then transported the staff members back to the JFACC at Rinas airfield. In addition to providing force protection for the opening and closing ceremonies on 16 and 22 August respectively, AUSTIN's marines, SEALs, and sailors participated in all of the scheduled events. On 19 August, two HH-60 helicopters arrived from HS-15 on USS EISENHOWER (CVN-69). This aviation package totally supported all of the exercise and real-world lift requirements. During the exercise, AUSTIN sailors and marines distributed Project Handclasp materials to needy Albanians in Kruje. In addition, AUSTIN SEALs provided personal security for the U.S. Ambassador to Albania, Ambassador Lino, CINCUSNAVEUR, ADM Lopez, COMSIXTHFLT, VADM Murphy, and Deputy COMSTRIKEFOR-SOUTH, BGEN Amos. On 22 August, VADM Hank Giffin, Commander, Naval Surface Force, U.S. Atlantic Fleet, visited the ship.

AUSTIN departed Durres, Albania on 22 August after the marine security forces were relieved by elements of BLT 2/2 Fox Company. HC-4 and HS-15 aircraft were flown off on 23 August as the ship proceeded out of the Adriatic and onward to Rota, Spain. AUSTIN, along with TORTUGA and SAIPAN conducted a maintenance period while in Rota, Spain with USS SIMON LAKE (AS-33) from 27 August to 03 September.

Underway from Rota on 04 September, the ARG proceeded eastward to Thessaloniki, Greece. However, on 07 September, AUSTIN was again diverted to the Adriatic Sea to support continued USMC security force operations in Tirana, Albania. For the next 43 days, from 08 September to 20 October, the ship conducted split-ARG operations in the southern Adriatic off Durres, Albania in support of Operation SILVER KNIGHT. Six helicopters (four CH-46 and two UH-1) and 70 personnel from HMM-162 were embarked the ship while in port Rota to provide a split-ARG capability.



On 09 October, she conducted a Full Power Run achieving 228 rpm on the starboard shaft and 234 rpm on the port shaft for a combined speed of 231 rpm, just 4 revolutions shy of the ship's 1965 design maximum speed of 235 rpm. The following day, RADM Gordon S. Holder, Commander Amphibious Group TWO visited the ship and addressed the crew at Admiral's Call. Not long after sunset on 11 October, an AUSTIN sailor jumped over the side from the flight deck. Vigilant lookouts and an alert watch team quickly maneuvered the ship and dispatched the motor whale boat to recover the man. He was recovered onboard having suffered no major injuries after being in the water approximately 19 minutes. After 43 days on-station, AUSTIN's familiar square of the Adriatic Sea had by now become "Lone Star Station" in honor of her Texan heritage. AUSTIN was relieved on-station by USS SAIPAN, after which she spent two days (18-19 October) in port Brindisi, Italy.

En route out of the Adriatic, a UAV crashed on 21 October. Shortly after banking into a starboard turn, guidance to the craft was lost and it plunged into the Ionian Sea approximately 20 miles off the coast of Greece. The UAV immediately broke apart upon impact. The motor whale boat was launched for recovery operations, but only a small amount of debris was recovered.

AUSTIN transited north through the Turkish Straits 23 October and moored in Odessa, Ukraine on 25 October for two days. Exercise SEA BREEZE 98, a Humanitarian Relief Exercise, was conducted 27 October to 3 November. SEA BREEZE 98, hosted by the Ukrainian Navy in the spirit of Partnership for Peace, included participants from Russia, Romania, Georgia, Bulgaria, Turkey, Greece, Italy, France, and the United Kingdom. All operations were conducted in the Black Sea in the vicinity of Odessa, Ukraine and at the Shiroky Lan training site. Over 1,100 sailors and Marines from COMDESRON FOURTEEN, USS AUSTIN, and USS STUMP (DD-978) took part. During the exercise, over \$2,000 worth of Project Handclasp supplies were distributed to the Odessa Tuberculosis Orphanage. In addition, sailors and Marines did a complete paint-out and rehabilitation of 3 rooms each at the Regional Burn Clinic and Tuberculosis Orphanage. While at anchor off Pivdenny, the ship hosted an impromptu dinner for the Russian Commander of the Black Sea Amphibious Forces and the Commanding Officer of the Ukrainian LST, Konstantin Olshansky on 31 October. After backloading the Marines at Pivdenny on 01 November, the ship conducted a night sea detail into Odessa harbor.

After closing ceremonies during a second visit to Odessa, Ukraine, AUSTIN began the short transit to Constanta, Romania in support of Exercise RESCUE EAGLE 98. Due to unexpected tasking, COMDESRON FOURTEEN, Commodore Curtis, hauled down his flag in USS STUMP and broke it in AUSTIN for the transit to Constanta where he and his staff departed for Mayport, Florida. Exercise RESCUE EAGLE 98 was conducted 5-10 November. The event was U.S. led but hosted by Romania in the spirit of Partnership for Peace. This live fire Exercise consisted of peacekeeping operations training by U.S. and

Romanian forces, and a serialized search and surveillance training program with full participation of Romanian naval units. A Romanian Navy exchange officer was hosted onboard as part of the Joint Contact Training Program. Additionally, AUSTIN hosted a reception on 05 November for 50 Romanian naval officers, including the Chief of Staff, Romanian Navy (CNO-equivalent).

When getting underway from Constanta on 6 November, the after tug suffered a casualty and lost all propulsion just as the ship cleared the pier. Unable to trip the tow line, the tug was dragged sideways at a speed of 3 knots until AUSTIN was able to clear a moored ship. The ship went to "all-stop" allowing the tug to detension the after tow line and trip it. Once the tug was able to release the tow line, the ship was able to increase speed and safely clear the pier area. The ship returned to Constanta on 10 November to backload elements of MSSG-22, and got underway on 11 November. With her Black Sea operations complete, AUSTIN conducted a southbound transit of the Turkish Straits on 12 November.

From 14 to 17 November, the ship conducted a port visit to Valletta, Malta. This island in the Central Mediterranean proved to be an outstanding end to AUSTIN's MARG deployment. The ship had last visited Malta 28 years ago in June of 1970. AUSTIN hosted several VIP tours and conducted general visitation. A highlight of the visit was the VIP reception of 16 November attended by 200 guests including the Commander, Maltese Armed Forces (CNO-equivalent), U.S. Ambassador to Malta, Katherine Proffitt, and several Maltese cabinet officials. On 17 November, 16 AUSTIN sailors and marines completed a rehabilitation project for the Freche Orphanage for Abandoned Children in Sliema, Malta. There was extensive press coverage which included personal interviews by Maltese television crews. Driving in Malta can be treacherous; two AUSTIN sailors were slightly injured in an auto accident and treated at a local hospital. The ship departed Malta on 17 November and transited to Rota, Spain.

From 21 to 25 November, the ship and the SAIPAN ARG conducted the washdown and backload of 22 MEU and turned over with the USS NASSAU ARG. On 26 November, the SAIPAN ARG transferred back to Commander, Second Fleet and successfully transited the Atlantic Ocean, arriving in Morehead City on 07 December. AUSTIN offloaded all embarked units in Morehead City, NC on 7 December and embarked over 100 family and friends for a "Tiger Cruise". AUSTIN left Morehead City on 8 December en route Norfolk, VA.

Despite 40 knot winds, heavy rain, and severe cold (the worst weather experienced during the entire deployment, USS AUSTIN safely moored starboard side to, bow in, to pier 25, berth 5, Norfolk Naval Base. After a few remarks by the Captain and the chaplain's benediction, all cheered as MARG 3-98 was officially ended. AUSTIN

commenced a post-deployment leave and standdown for the remainder of 1998.

Year's end saw AUSTIN awarded the Armed Forces Service Medal, Sea Service Deployment Ribbon, the TYCOM Safety Award (4<sup>th</sup> consecutive award) and named runner-up for the COMNAVSURFLANT Self-Sufficient Ship of the Quarter Award for fourth-quarter FY-98. Nominations were pending for the NATO Medal and Meritorious Unit Commendation. This brought a very successful 1998 to a close.