



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY

USS GUNSTON HALL (LSD 44)
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From: Commanding Officer, USS GUNSTON HALL (LSD-44)
To: Director Of Naval History (OP-09BH)

Subj: 2003 COMMAND HISTORY FOR USS GUNSTON HALL (LSD-44)

Ref: (a) OPNAVINST 5750.12F

Encl: (1) List Of Abbreviations
(2) Command Composition And Organization
(3) Chronology For 2003
(4) Narrative

1. In accordance with reference (a), enclosures (1) through (4) are submitted.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. G. Walker", is positioned above the printed name.

J. G. WALKER

LISTS OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAV	- Amphibious Assault Vehicle
CASREP	- Casualty Report
CONREP	- Connected Replenishment
LCAC	- Landing Craft, Air Cushion
MEDEVAC	- Medical Evacuation of Personnel
UNREP	- Underway Replenishment
VERTREP	- Vertical Replenishment
RAS	- Replenishment at Sea
NSCT-1	- Naval Special Clearance Team-One
UMCM	- Underwater Mine Clearance Measures
KAA	- Kwhar Abd'Allah
OPAREA	- Operating Area
KNB	- Kuwait Naval Base
PUBEX	- Publication Exercise
BECCES	- Basic Engineering Casualty Control Exercises
PACFIRES	- Munitions Firing Exercise
DIVTACS	- Tactical Maneuvering Exercise
NAB	- Naval Amphibious Base
FMAV	- Fleet Maintenance Availability
MWR	- Morale Welfare and Recreation

COMMAND COMPOSITION AND ORGANIZATION

1. USS GUNSTON HALL (LSD-44) is the fourth ship of the Whidbey Island class Landing Ship Dock Amphibious ships. The ship's mission is to provide functional support in three areas: amphibious warfare, mobility, and command and control. This mission is accomplished through the transportation of elements of a landing force, landing craft, and support equipment to an amphibious objective area and to launch preloaded assault craft in support of an amphibious assault operation.

2. USS GUNSTON HALL is permanently assigned to Commander, Amphibious Group TWO. The ship's type commander is Commander, Naval Surface Force Atlantic Fleet.

3. The ship's commanding officer, Commander John Walker

Commander Walker assumed command of GUNSTON HALL in May 2002. His personal awards include the Bronze Star, the Meritorious Service Medal (two gold stars), the Navy Commendation Medal (three gold stars), and the Navy Achievement Medal.

4. USS GUNSTON HALL (LSD-44) is homeported at Naval Amphibious Base, Little Creek, Norfolk, Virginia.

CHRONOLOGY FOR 2003

1. JANUARY - At the start of the year, USS GUNSTON HALL (LSD 44) was moored inport at Little Creek, VA, in a shortened workup schedule. The month before, the ship had received orders to deploy in January with ATF East to the Persian Gulf. On the 10th, USS GUNSTON HALL got underway with two LCACs (hoppers 68 and 71) from ACU-4 en route to Morehead City and Onslow Bay for the on load of Marine Element B, Company Alpha 1/10 and 16 AAVs. After RAS and VERTREP with USNS LARAMIE AND USNS SATURN, USS GUNSTON HALL began its Atlantic Transit. Following the 10-day transit, ATF EAST entered the Mediterranean Sea. Next, they conducted another RAS with USNS JOHN LENTHAL, then continued east towards the Suez Canal.

2. FEBRUARY - The ship continued its transit in the Mediterranean and started down the Suez Canal on the 4th. After another VERTREP and RAS, the ship entered the Persian Gulf through the straits of Hormuz on the 14th. On The morning of the 15th, GUNSTON HALL began to debark its AAV's and the embarked Marine Component at KNB and then proceeded to Anchorage just off the coast. On the 20th, Tactical Command changed from CTF 51 to CTF 55 (CTG 55.4). USS GUNSTON HALL then got underway and proceeded to Manama, Bahrain for a port visit and to embark TU55.4.3. On the 24th, the ship arrived in Bahrain and unloaded 176 Members of TU55.4.3 including NSCT-1, Royal Australian Navy Clearance Dive Team THREE, and Royal Navy Fleet Dive Group. On the 26th, NSCT-1's gear arrived, including 9 Mark VII and Mark VIII Dolphins for UCMC operations. USS GUNSTON HALL set the Sea and Anchor detail at 1230 on the 27th to get underway for training in the North Arabian Gulf. On the way, the ship rendezvoused with USNS RAINIER for UNREP.

3. MARCH - At the beginning of the month, NSCT-1 conducted shipboard operations and training approximately 30 miles southeast of the KAA waterway. On the 1st, one Mark VIII dolphin "Jeffe" strayed from the operating area, not an uncommon occurrence when the dolphins are in an unfamiliar area. Jeffe returned on the 8th while the ship was beginning its transit back to Bahrain. On the 9th, GUNSTON HALL attempted to enter port, but was unable to do so due to high winds. The next morning the port was opened and the ship unloaded the remainder of NSCT-1. ADML Keating visited the ship for a tour of the well deck area and brief. That evening, GUNSTON HALL got underway headed for the North Arabian Sea to continue NSCT-1 training. On the 17th, President Bush gave Saddam Hussein the final ultimatum. The next day, Secretary of State Colin Powell issued the statement,

"diplomacy has passed" and hostilities began. On the 21st, during a routine search of tugs, 50 contact mines were found. During this month, GUNSTON HALL began diving operations in Umm Qasr, clearing the harbor of mines, which continued into April.

4. APRIL - Through the first half of the month, USS GUNSTON HALL continued mine clearing operations at the Umm Qasr port. While supporting these operations, the ship continued to train its own crew in preparation for the return trip home. On the 16th, the ship was off the coast of KNB, preparing to off-load NSCT-1. After a VERTREP and RAS, GUNSTON HALL began the transit by starting south, for a port visit in Bahrain. On the 27th, USS GUNSTON HALL held a "Steel Beach Picnic" for its crew. The next day, after arrival in Bahrain, the ship began off-loading NSCT-1.

5. MAY - On the 1st, USS GUNSTON HALL was anchored just outside the port of Bahrain waiting for the winds to die down before entering port. The next day, the ship entered port and finished offloading NSCT-1. The ship left port the same day for the KNB OPAREA to await the onload of Marines for the trip back home. On the 10th, USS GUNSTON HALL onloaded the same element of Marines that the ship brought over. On the 18th, the onload was complete with a total of 386 personnel on board. The next day, GUNSTON HALL, with ATF East, began to steam out of the Persian Gulf in formation. On the 24th, Brigadier General Natonski arrived onboard to visit with the crew. On the 27th, ATF East transited the Bab El Mandeb and began its transit through the red Sea towards the Suez Canal. While in the Red Sea, the ship continued to train its watch standers in weapons qualification to ensure enough qualified watch standers to meet force protection requirements. On the 31st, ATF East began its transit of the Suez Canal.

6. JUNE - USS GUNSTON HALL began the month steaming on an easterly course in the Mediterranean making ready for a port call in Tarragona Spain on the 5th of the month. Standard wash downs of vehicles and the ship were completed prior to entering port. Morale of the crew was high, awaiting the port visit to experience some much needed liberty. On the 9th, GUNSTON HALL got underway from Tarragona, headed for a redezvous with ATF EAST. On the 11th, the ship transited through the Straights of Gibraltar into the Atlantic for the final transit home. During the transit across the Atlantic, the ship began its preparations for the INSURV material inspection coming in November. They also continued training to be ready for a surge deployment if needed. Training consisted of PUBEX, stationary DIVTACS, PACFIRES, Helo crash drills, BEECES, General Quarters, and 9mm

qualifications. On the 20th, a final RAS was completed before offloading the Marines in Morehead city. GUNSTON HALL arrived in the vicinity of Morehead City on the 22nd and immediately began to offload Marines and the vehicles. On the 24th, tigers were taken onboard for a one day tiger Cruise to NAB LITTLE CREEK. The next day, the ship is moored at Pier 17N at NAB LITTLE CREEK. Post Deployment Stand-down begins.

7. JULY - For the majority of the month, GUNSTON HALL was in a post deployment stand down. During the days, the duty sections were working hard as INSURV preps were in full swing. On the 23rd, the crew returned from stand down and continued to work in full force towards INSURV.

8. AUGUST - The ship continued to work hard towards INUSRV. GUNSTON HALL conducted multiple training exercises in order to prepare the crew for the inspection. On the 12th, the ship got underway for 3 days off of the coast of Virginia for training. This training included Junior Officer ship handling, and INSURV preparations that could only be completed underway. Two weeks later, on the 27th, GUNSTON HALL got underway again; this time for a long rehearsal of the underway portion of the INSURV inspection.

9. SEPTEMBER - GUNSTON HALL continued its preparations for INSURV with an increased fervor. During the first week of the month, the ship passed its PRE-INSURV inspection. This inspection evaluated GUNSTON HALL's preparation and readiness for the actual inspection. On the 8th, the ship entered an FMAV that would last until October.

10. OCTOBER - USS GUNSTON HALL was in port at Little Creek on the 1st, continuing INSURV preparations and the FMAV. On the 10th of October, the FMAV ended with an impressive 352 jobs completed. Working hours were extended until 1700 to help facilitate the final preparations for INSURV. On the week of the 20th, GUNSTON HALL conducted the final dress rehearsal before the actual inspection. The first part of the week was spent pier side, conducting inspections as if INSURV was actually aboard prior to a three day underway dress rehearsal.

11 NOVEMBER - The first major event of the month was the long anticipated INSURV inspection. The INSURV team arrived on board, on the 3rd, and the inspections began immediately. The next day, GUNSTON HALL achieved minimum equipment to get underway. On the 5th, the ship went to sea for the underway portion of the inspection. The final result of the INSURV

exceeded the fleet average for the LSD 41 Class of ship. A port visit to Pensacola, Florida the following week was previously scheduled to celebrate the ship's success and unwind after the months of preparation for the inspection. The ship was scheduled to depart Little Creek, Virginia on the morning of the 9th. However, rather than getting underway, GUNSTON HALL submitted a "Fail to Sail" report due to problems in the diesel generators. Immediate loss of two generators due to oil in the gears, and hot bearings caused the casualties. Due to safety and quality of life concerns, the Captain decided not to get underway with only one generator working.

12. DECEMBER - During, the first week of December GUNSTON HALL got underway for training just off the coast of Virginia. During this underway, the ship conducted multiple flight operations with the SH-60S helicopter in order to expand the wind envelope for the LSD 41 Class of ships. The test pilots were able to take a large number of readings with high wind speeds, allowing for a larger launch and recovery envelope. When the ship returned on the 5th, the crew enjoyed a Holiday Party at the Sheraton Ocean Front hotel, hosted by the ship's MWR. The following Monday, GUNSTON HALL was underway again, this time en route to Onslow Bay, North Carolina. As the ship departed the Chesapeake Bay, 2 LCACs from ACU-4 came aboard for the operation. Once in Onslow Bay, the ship unloaded a portion of the 3rd Marines, 10th division for Amphibious exercises off the coast of North Carolina. This included AAV, LCAC and Flight Ops. The return trip back to Little Creek was completed on the 12th. The next week, Holiday stand down began for the crew.

NARRATIVE

FIRST QUARTER

The first quarter of FY 03 was spent in the work ups for an August deployment, and preparing for a February INSURV. After a lackluster Pre-INSURV, the ship started ramping up efforts. Then in December, orders were issued to shorten the training cycle and deploy at the beginning of January. On January 10th, GUNSTON HALL deployed with ATF EAST in support of Operations Enduring Freedom/Iraqi Freedom. In February, the ship arrived in the Persian Gulf, and was assigned in the Mine Sweeping duties with NCST-1. The only significant port visit was 3 days to Bahrain.

SECOND QUARTER

The second quarter continued with GUNSTON HALL in the Persian Gulf. With the start of the Iraqi war in the middle of March, GUNSTON HALL continued its support of mine clearing operations for the port of Umm Qasr.

THIRD QUARTER

The third quarter saw a major change for the crew of GUNSTON HALL. After months at sea in the Persian Gulf, the order finally came to prepare to head home. During the months of May and June, GUNSTON HALL prepared to return home with a scheduled homecoming for the 25th of June.

FOURTH QUARTER

During the last quarter, after a well deserved post deployment stand down, USS GUNSTON HALL kicked INSURV preparations into high gear for the November Inspection. This included a smooth PRE-INSURV and several dress rehearsals that resulted in a far above average grade for the LSD 41 class of ships.