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From: Commanding Officer, USS GUNSTON HALL (LSD 44)  
To: Director, Naval Historical Center  
  
Subj: 2004 COMMAND HISTORY FOR USS GUNSTON HALL (LSD 44)  
  
Ref: (a) OPNAVINST 5750.12H  
  
Encl: (1) Command Composition and Organization  
(2) Chronology for 2004  
(3) Narrative  
(4) Welcome Aboard Pamphlet

1. Per reference (a), enclosures (1) through (4) are submitted.

/s/

T. M. NEGUS

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## 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. GUNSTON HALL is permanently assigned to Commander, Amphibious Group TWO (COMPHIBGRU TWO). The ship's type commander is Commander, Naval Surface Force Atlantic Fleet.

3. The ship's commanding officer (CO), Commander Thomas Negus.

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

Enclosure (1)

## CHRONOLOGY FOR 2004

1. JANUARY - At the start of the year, GUNSTON HALL was moored inport at Naval Amphibious Base Little Creek (NAB Little Creek), VA in the second part of the Holiday Standdown period. On the 20<sup>th</sup>, GUNSTON HALL got underway for CO's Time in the Virginia Capes Operating Area (VACAPES OPAREA). These operations included basic engineering casualty control exercises, flight operations with Helicopter Support Squadron SIX (HC 6), the burial at sea of 5 deceased Naval Personnel and a return to NAB Little Creek on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. On the 29<sup>th</sup> GUNSTON HALL got underway and transited to Naval Weapons Station Yorktown for an ammunition offload. She remained overnight and returned to NAB Little Creek on the 30<sup>th</sup>.

2. FEBRUARY - On the 2<sup>nd</sup>, GUNSTON HALL got underway this time enroute to Onslow Bay, North Carolina. As the ship departed the Chesapeake Bay, two Landing Craft Air Cushion's (LCAC) (hoppers 55 and 71) from Assault Craft Unit FOUR came aboard for the operation. Once in Onslow Bay, the ship unloaded a portion of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 10<sup>th</sup> Marine Division for Type Commander's Amphibious Training Exercises. During these exercises the ship conducted numerous Amphibious Assault Vehicle, Landing Craft Utility, LCAC, and flight operations while underway and at anchorage. Additionally, Commander Amphibious Group SIX and the CO of 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 10<sup>th</sup> Marines visited GUNSTON HALL during this time. The return trip back to NAB Little Creek was completed on the 12<sup>th</sup>.

3. MARCH - On the 1<sup>st</sup> of March, the ship entered a Continuous Maintenance Availability in preparation for the upcoming Phased Maintenance Availability (PMA) in April. Additionally, at 1035 on 19 March 2004, Commander John G. Walker was relieved by Commander Thomas M. Negus as the Commanding Officer of GUNSTON HALL. The ceremony was attended by COMPHIBGRU TWO, Commander Cruiser-Destroyer Group TWO, Commander Amphibious Squadron SIX, and the Commanding Officers of USS OAK HILL (LSD 51) and USS TORTUGA (LSD 46).

4. APRIL - The ship remained inport until the 14<sup>th</sup> when it was moved to the Norfolk Shipbuilding and Drydock Corporation (NORSHIPCO) repair facility located in Norfolk, VA to complete its PMA. During this maintenance period the ship was scheduled to undergo repairs to its main propulsion diesel engines (MPDE), ship's service diesel generators (SSDG), installation of a new boat davit with the replacement of the ship's boats for 11 and 7

meter Rigid Hull Inflatable Boats, preservation of numerous ballast tanks, upgrades to the ship's laundry facilities and replacement of the well deck wooden decking with synthetic decking. Ship's force personnel added to the activity on the ship with the refurbishment of Auxiliary and Electrical Division berthing and preservation of countless divisional spaces. The ship also established its path for success to the Inter-Deployment Training Cycle (IDTC) by scheduling two main space fire drills per week and weekly update meetings to determine the status of readiness and training. On the 22<sup>nd</sup>, the crew celebrated the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ship's commissioning at a command picnic held at the Scott Center Annex of Norfolk Naval Shipyard.

5. MAY - During this month, GUNSTON HALL continued its maintenance and training phase. Daily discussions were taking place in order to determine the correct course of action for the replacement of Number 3 SSDG's crankshaft and repairs to 2A MPDE's crankshaft. Numerous members of the ship's wardroom attended Bridge Resource Management and Advanced Ship Handling training conducted by Marine Safety International at their Naval Base Norfolk Facility.

6. JUNE - As GUNSTON HALL pushed through its maintenance period, the additional task of non-skidding the flight deck was started by contractors. With the successful completion of Antiterrorism Force Protection (ATFP) Tailored Ships Training Availability I (TSTA I), Visit, Board, Search and Seizure (VBSS) Phase I, and a Search and Rescue (SAR) Limited Team Training, GUNSTON HALL completed the first of many assist, training, and assessment visits in continuing preparation for the upcoming IDTC.

7. JULY - The month of July was especially busy for GUNSTON HALL with preparations to complete the PMA and get underway to conduct sea trials. However, material issues plagued the lube oil flush of 2A MPDE by contractors and installation efforts of a new crankshaft in Number 3 SSDG. Additionally, the ship completed a Light Off Assessment. The ship successfully completed SAR Certification Phases I and II and Crew Certification. On the 20<sup>th</sup>, the crew enjoyed a break at a Norfolk Tides Baseball game played in Harbor Park. Late in the month the ship completed refueling via barge.

8. AUGUST - On the 8<sup>th</sup>, at 1811, GUNSTON HALL emerged from the NORSHIPCO repair facility and transited to sea to conduct sea

trials. Returning to NAB Little Creek on the 13<sup>th</sup>, the ship entered another Continuous Maintenance Availability period. The ship continued to work towards Command Assessment of Readiness and Training (CART) II and on the 27<sup>th</sup> Aviation Certification (AVCERT) was successfully completed. The ship got underway for the VACAPES OPAREA on the 30<sup>th</sup> to conduct training for the upcoming CART II.

9. SEPTEMBER - GUNSTON HALL continued its preparations for CART II while underway with a daytime precision anchorage and a Replenishment at Sea (RAS) with USNS LARAMIE. Returning to NAB Little Creek on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, the ship spent the weekend making final preparations for CART II. On the 7<sup>th</sup>, inspectors from Afloat Training Group Norfolk started the administrative and material inspection of CART II. On the 8<sup>th</sup>, GUNSTON HALL got underway to demonstrate its Navigation and Seamanship skills. GUNSTON HALL conducted a nighttime RAS, day and night precision anchorages, swept channel, loss of gyrocompass, low visibility, and man overboard evolutions. In conjunction with the CART II assessment the ship also successfully completed the COMPHIBGRU TWO Navigation Check Ride. GUNSTON HALL returned to homeport on the 10<sup>th</sup> having victoriously completed CART II and certifying early in the Medical area. The following week the ship continued the IDTC with the completion of ATFP Phase II, Supply Management Assessment, and Maintenance and Material Management (3M) Assessment, during which Deck and Navigation/Administration Departments certified 3M early. On the 20<sup>th</sup>, the ship started the Engineering portion of the IDTC with Initial Assessment (IA) and followed that the next week with MOB-D-1.

10. OCTOBER - GUNSTON HALL was in port moored at NAB Little Creek on the 1<sup>st</sup>, continuing the IDTC with an Engineering LTT, Combat System Training-1, and MOB-D-2. On the 25<sup>th</sup> ATFP Phase III commenced, with 3 days of ATFP drills involving the entire crew and culminating with a highly successfully night small boat attack while GUNSTON HALL was at anchor. GUNSTON HALL earned a Training Level 1 Assessment, the first by an Amphibious platform in the Atlantic Fleet. Additionally, during MOB-D-2 GUNSTON HALL validated their Main Space Fire Drill with an impressive score of 185 out of 192.

NOVEMBER - The first week of the month was spent underway in the VACAPES OPAREA. On the 2<sup>nd</sup>, the ship conducted a day/night RAS with USNS JOHN LENTHALL. Then, on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, day and night helicopter operations were conducted and resulted in another level 1 certification in the Air Operations Area. On the 4<sup>th</sup>,

the ship anchored in Lynnhaven Anchorage and conducted a VBSS LTT with an LCU from Assault Craft Unit TWO. The above average skills demonstrated by GUNSTON HALL's VBSS team and Force Protection Training Team resulted in a 4 week early certification in the VBSS warfare area. Returning to NAB Little Creek on the 4<sup>th</sup>, the ship continued with its IDTC training and on the 8<sup>th</sup> during MOB-D-3 the ship certified 4 weeks early in the Damage Control area. During the week of the 22<sup>nd</sup> the GUNSTON HALL went through the Supply Management Inspection (SMI) and 3M Inspection (3MI), both of which resulted in above average marks for GUNSTON HALL. The remainder of the month was spent conducting Combat Systems TSTA's 2 and 3 training evolutions for the pending Final Evaluation Problem (FEP).

12. DECEMBER - The first 2 weeks were spent training and making final preparations for FEP. On the 14<sup>th</sup> the ship commenced its FEP and it concluded in a spectacular fashion on the 16<sup>th</sup> with GUNSTON HALL earning a total of six level 1 certifications. On the 17<sup>th</sup> the crew commenced a well deserved holiday standdown, which was kicked off with a Christmas Party held at the Ramada Plaza Resort on the Virginia Beach Oceanfront.

## NARRATIVE

### FIRST QUARTER

The first quarter of 2004 was a dynamic period of operational commitments, leading to a transitional phase that was punctuated by the change of command. Beginning with the second half of the Holiday Standdown Period, the pace rapidly accelerated with Deck Landing Qualifications in the VACAPES OPAREA. This was quickly followed by an ammunition off-load at Naval Weapons Station Yorktown and a Type Commanders Amphibious Training Exercise at Onslow Bay, North Carolina. With a deft change of focus, GUNSTON HALL entered into a Continuous Maintenance Availability and organized one of the most symbol laden traditions of the United States Navy, an Afloat Change of Command. At 1035 on 19 March 2004, Commander John G. Walker was relieved by Commander Thomas M. Negus as the Commanding Officer of USS GUNSTON HALL (LSD 44).

### SECOND QUARTER

The second quarter saw GUNSTON HALL enter into two major evolutions that ran concurrently towards the same goal of combat readiness. With her shift to NORSHIPCO, the ship began an intensive maintenance period that saw extensive work done to Number 3 Ship's Service Diesel Generator (SSDG) and 2A Main Propulsion Diesel Engine's (MPDE) crankshafts, the flight deck non-skid surface, Auxiliary and Electrical Division berthing, and innumerable divisional spaces. Additionally, the crew began a twice-weekly drilling regime with the focus concentrated on the main spaces. These efforts coupled with crew-wide assignment to additional schooling and weekly update meetings regarding maintenance and training progress, blazed the path towards a successful conclusion to the Inter-Deployment Training Cycle (IDTC).

### THIRD QUARTER

The third quarter began with preparations to end the PMA and enter into the major certifications signifying combat readiness. In rapid succession, GUNSTON HALL successfully completed Sea Trials, AVCERT, CART II preparations, COMPHIBGRU TWO Navigation Check Ride, 3M and Supply Management Assessments, and Medical certification. With this string of achievements flowing in her wake, GUNSTON HALL began IA in Engineering.

#### FOURTH QUARTER

The final quarter started in eye-watering fashion for GUNSTON HALL, and never relented. She became the first amphibious platform to certify with a Level 1 in ATFP and shattered expectations with an impressive score of 185 out of 192 for the Main Space Fire Drill. The crew demonstrated operational proficiency while conducting helicopter operations and a RAS with USNS JOHN LENTHALL in the VACAPES OPAREA. The bookend to a spectacular year came in the form of certifications from the SMI and 3MI and early certification by the VBSS teams. On December 16<sup>th</sup> GUNSTON HALL continued its victory cycle by completing a highly successful FEP, earning a total of six level 1 certifications. In recognition of the crew's extraordinary efforts, a Christmas Party was held at the Ramada Plaza Resort to kick off the Holiday Standdown period.