

1980



**USS SAIPAN (LHA-2)
FPO NEW YORK 09549**

LHA2/01Q:rd

5750

Ser 310

17 APR 1981

From: Commanding Officer, USS SAIPAN (LHA-2)
To: Chief of Naval Operations (OP-05D2)
Subj: Command History, 1980 (OPNAV Report 5750-1)
Ref: (a) OPNAVINST 5750.12C
Encl: (1) Command History, 1980, USS SAIPAN (LHA-2)
(2) Exercise "ANORAK EXPRESS" Narrative
(3) Cuban Refugee Operations Narrative
(4) Exercise "TEAMWORK 80" Narrative
(5) USS SAIPAN Intercept Narrative
(6) USS SAIPAN OV-10 Launch Narrative
(7) Deployment 80-81 Narrative

1. In accordance with reference (a), enclosures (1) through (7) are submitted.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. G. Murphy".

R. G. MURPHY

Copy to: (w/o encl)
COMPHIBGRU TWO
COMPHIBRON EIGHT

COMMAND HISTORY
USS SAIPAN (LHA-2)
1 JAN 80 - 31 DEC 80

1. Command Organization.

a. Commanding Officer: Captain R. G. MURPHY.

b. Mission.

(1) To embark, deploy and land elements of a Marine Landing Force in an assault by helicopters, landing craft, amphibious vehicles or by a combination of all three.

(2) Evacuation and disaster relief.

c. Composition of Command. The crew of USS SAIPAN consists of 54 officers and 827 enlisted men. Additional units include a Marine Amphibious Unit consisting of a Battalion Landing Team and a composite helicopter squadron.

d. Homeport: Naval Station, Norfolk, Virginia.

2. Summary of Operations.

a. 1-8 JAN - Restricted Availability, Norfolk Naval Shipyard.

b. 8-10 JAN - Ammunition Onload Hampton Roads Anchorage.

c. 10-15 JAN - Inport Naval Station, Norfolk, VA.

d. 15-18 JAN - Underway for Virginia Capes, Anorak Express workup.

e. 18-21 JAN - Inport Naval Station, Norfolk, VA.

f. 21-22 JAN - Enroute Morehead City, NC, and Anorak Express workup. Onload 36th Marine Amphibious Unit, HMM 461.

g. 22-24 JAN - Amphibious Landing Rehearsal at Onslow Beach, NC.

h. 24-26 JAN - Enroute Cape Cod, MA.

i. 24-29 JAN - Amphibious Landing Exercise Scusset Beach, Cape Cod, MA.

j. 29 JAN-1 FEB - Backload 36th MAU, underway enroute Morehead City, NC.

k. 1-2 FEB - Enroute Norfolk, VA.

l. 2-4 FEB - Inport Naval Station, Norfolk, VA.

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- m. 4-8 FEB - Ammunition Onload at Hampton Roads Anchorage.
- n. 8-15 FEB - Inport Naval Station, Norfolk, VA.
- o. 15-16 FEB - Underway, enroute Morehead City, NC.
- p. 16-17 FEB - Embark 36th MAU, HMM 461.
- q. 17 FEB-1 MAR - Underway, enroute Portsmouth, UK.
- r. 1-5 MAR - Inport Portsmouth, UK.
- s. 5-8 MAR - Underway, enroute Tromso, Norway, for Anorak Express '80 Exercise.
- t. 8-22 MAR - Participation in Anorak Express '80 (Enclosure (2)).
- u. 22-25 MAR - Underway, enroute Rotterdam, Netherlands.
- v. 25-31 MAR - Inport Rotterdam, Netherlands.
- w. 31 MAR-1 APR - Underway, enroute Southampton, UK.
- x. 1-4 APR - Inport, Southampton, UK.
- y. 4-16 APR - Underway, enroute Morehead City, NC.
- z. 16-17 APR - Offload 36th MAU, HMM 461 Morehead City, NC.
- aa. 17-18 APR - Underway, enroute Norfolk, VA.
- bb. 18 APR-2 MAY - Restricted Availability Naval Station, Norfolk, VA.
- cc. 2-4 MAY - Underway, enroute Straits of Florida for Cuban Refugee Search and Rescue Operations (Enclosure (3)).
- dd. 4-22 MAY - Search and Rescue Operations Straits of Florida.
- ee. 22-26 MAY - Operational Propulsion Plant Examination, enroute Norfolk, VA.
- ff. 26 MAY-8 JUL - Intermediate Maintenance Availability Naval Station, Norfolk, VA.
- gg. 8-10 JUL - Enroute Morehead City, NC, embark 34th MAU and HMM 162.
- hh. 10-16 JUL - Enroute Caribbean for "Readex '80".
- ii. 16-22 JUL - "Readex '80" Vieques, Puerto Rico.
- jj. 22-24 JUL - Enroute Morehead City, NC.

kk. 24-28 JUL - Male Dependents/guest cruise enroute Norfolk, VA.

ll. 28-30 JUL - Ammunition Onload at Hampton Roads Anchorage.

mm. 30 JUL-27 AUG - Preparation for Overseas Movement inport Naval Station, Norfolk, VA.

nn. 27-29 AUG - Underway, enroute Morehead City, NC.

oo. 29 AUG-10 SEP - Enroute Norway for Exercise United Effort '80, and Teamwork '80.

pp. 10 SEP-3 OCT - Exercise Teamwork '80 (Enclosures (4), (5) and (6)).

qq. 3-4 OCT - Underway, enroute Portsmouth, UK.

rr. 4-10 OCT - Inport Portsmouth, UK.

ss. 10-13 OCT - Underway, enroute Lisbon, Portugal.

tt. 13-19 OCT - Inport Lisbon, Portugal.

uu. 19-20 OCT - Underway, enroute Rota, Spain.

vv. 20-22 OCT - Anchorage Rota, Spain, Inchoop SIXTH Fleet.

ww. 22-27 OCT - Underway, enroute Port Said, Egypt.

xx. 27-28 OCT - Anchorage Port Said, Egypt, transit Suez Canal to Red Sea.

yy. 28 OCT-6 NOV - Enroute Mombassa, Kenya.

zz. 6-10 NOV - Port visit Mombassa, Kenya.

aaa. 10-16 NOV - Underway, enroute Diego Garcia.

bbb. 16-20 NOV - Diego Garcia, British Indian Ocean Territory (Enclosure (7)).

ccc. 20-27 NOV - Enroute CV MOD LOC, Gonzo Station, Indian Ocean.

ddd. 27 NOV-4 DEC - Red Sea Operations.

eee. 4-7 DEC - Enroute Suez Canal.

fff. 7-8 DEC - Transit Suez Canal.

ggg. 8-11 DEC - Enroute Naples, Italy.

hhh. 11-15 DEC - Port Visit, Naples, Italy.

iii. 15-23 DEC - Amphibious Exercise, Capo Tuelada, Sardinia.

jjj. 23-24 DEC - Underway, enroute Barcelona, Spain.

kkk. 24-31 DEC - Port Visit Barcelona, Spain.

3. Special Topics.

a. Miles Steamed: 35,000.

b. Aircraft Landings: 7073 Helicopter, 110 AV-8.

c. Ammunition expended: 303 Rds 5"/54, 2 Seasparrow.

d. Underway Replenishments: 16.

e. Aircraft Embarked:

(1) Exercise "ANORAK EXPRESS" (February):

9 CH-53
5 CH-46
7 UH-1N
4 AH-1T

(2) Cuban Refugee Operations (May):

3 HH-46
8 CH-46
4 CH-53
1 UH-1N

(3) Exercise "TEAMWORK 80" (September):

4 OV-10
6 AV-8
4 CH-53
12 CH-46
2 HH-46
4 AH-1T
5 UH-1N

EXERCISE ANORAK EXPRESS NARRATIVE

In January of the next year, 1980, SAIPAN was out to sea again to an amphibious landing at Cape Code in preparation for the NATO Exercise ANORAK EXPRESS. Sailing February 14th for Northern Norway, SAIPAN was entering into her first operational deployment.

Operating with military units from throughout the North Atlantic Treaty Organization SAIPAN was to play a key role in the mock invasion which would place over 1700 U. S. Marines on the beaches of Norway, some 200 miles north of the Arctic Circle.

ANORAK EXPRESS was an exercise planned as an extreme cold weather exercise to test and further develop NATO's response capability under the most demanding combat conditions the harsh climate of Northern Norway could provide. The exercise employed F-15, F-4, F-5, AV-8 and F-104 aircraft, numerous surface craft including USS PONCE and the USS NEWPORT, the United Kingdom's helicopter ship HMS INTREPID, Norwegian frigates, guided missile patrol boats and even elements of Norway's submarine force.

After completion of the exercise SAIPAN retired from the picturesque fjords of Norway to the prized liberty ports offered by the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

Veterans of not only Arctic amphibious operations and liberty in Northern Europe, the crew of SAIPAN returned from ANORAK EXPRESS as world travelers. As a lasting testimonial of their participation every man was also welcomed as a member of the "Order of the Bluenose". This is a sacred order made up entirely of those Navy men and women whose duties have taken them north of the Arctic Circle.

ANORAK EXPRESS was an impressive success for a new ship and an untried concept in amphibious operations. It was also an adventure in which SAIPAN and her sister ships combined efforts with the Marine Corps to place over 1700 fully equipped Marines ashore in minutes. It was an impressive beginning for a team so newly formed.

CUBAN REFUGEE OPERATIONS NARRATIVE

Arriving on board the USS SAIPAN was the first step toward freedom for hundreds of Cuban refugees in May 1980. They were exhausted, probably lonely, but thankful...you could see it all in their eyes.

Thousands of Cuban evacuees were braving the unpredictable waters of the Florida Straits daily, their increasing numbers dangerously limiting U.S. escort and rescue efforts. The Coast Guard needed help, something bigger, more capable.

By Presidential direction, the giant Norfolk-based amphibious assault ship USS SAIPAN (LHA-2) was diverted from the joint forces exercise "SOLID SHIELD 80". She deployed six days earlier than scheduled to the Florida Straits, May 2, 1980, to aid the Seventh Coast Guard District and save human lives.

So sudden was President Carter's decision to augment the Coast Guard with Navy assistance, that most SAIPAN crewmen were caught a little off guard. "I first guessed of our participation after hearing a radio news bulletin", one crewman recalled, "They didn't have to mention the ship's name though, I knew they'd choose the SAIPAN for this one."

After the official message arrived directing SAIPAN to the Gulf of Mexico off the Florida Keys, a week's supply on-load was taken on board the ship in 24 hours. Working 36 straight hours, the engineers quickly prepared SAIPAN for the unexpected early departure. Engine rooms roaring, steam impatiently flowing from the boilers, the amphibious "super-gator", as she was called departed Norfolk May 2.

SAIPAN arrived in the Florida Straits early May 5 and immediately launched air and surface rescue units to patrol her assigned 2,125 square mile sector. Landing craft and boat crews absorbed a full day's sun, spending more than 12 hours in the sub-tropical waters before returning to the ship's well deck. Flight deck crewmen labored diligently 14 hours per day launching, recovering and refueling aircraft. Pilots logged an average of 40 flight-hours per day. A search and rescue control center, manned around the clock, was established in SAIPAN's landing force operations center monitoring the entire Navy and Coast Guard mission, alerting the bridge of all surface vessels in the area in distress.

And it wasn't long before the first distress signal reached the bridge...Just 12 hours after her arrival on station, 29 Cuban refugees were taken on board SAIPAN from a small drifting boat out of fuel. During the ship's first week 419 refugees boarded the SAIPAN and more than 100 remained overnight.

They were greeted in SAIPAN's hangar bay by a red, white and blue American flag draped above a 25-foot-wide banner reading "Bienvenidos a los Estados Unidos"; welcome to the United States.

They were tired and hungry. "This is the first apple I've had in 21 years", a woman said, cherishing the bright red, cool snack. Another couldn't get enough milk. "Where I come from, it is illegal to drink milk after the age of seven", he explained.

One by one they described their plights...small crowded boats drifting at the whim of the ocean, no food or drink sometimes for as long as six days, some lost, some uncertain, all searching for freedom.

Between tears of thankfulness, one pregnant woman cried, "Now I know my child will be born free..."

And a new sound greeted sailors during breakfast one morning on the mess decks, a sound many thought they had left at home...a crying baby.

As more evacuees were brought on board, short interviews were conducted in a roped-off processing station set up within the hangar bay. They were medically examined, fed in the enlisted dining facility, then airlifted to Key West. Those who remained overnight were flown in early the next morning.

Embarked in SAIPAN's well deck were Assault Craft Unit TWO LCU's 1653 and 1659. During her southern transit, she picked up three night-hover capable Navy HH-46 helicopters from Composite Helicopter Squadron 16 from NAS Pensacola, Fl., eight Marine CH-46's, four CH-53's and two UH-1N helicopters from Second Marine Airwing at New River, NC, and a 200 troop Marine reinforced rifle company from Second Marine Division at Camp Lejeune, NC.

A medical team from Second Force Support Group also embarked to assist in refugee medical care.

The on scene commander for the Navy in the Florida Straits, flying his flag on board SAIPAN, was Commander Amphibious Group TWO, Rear Admiral W. C. HAMM, Jr. Commanding the SAIPAN was Captain Richard G. MURPHY.

It was SAIPAN's second humanitarian mission, after the 1979 Nicaraguan evacuee contingency operation, and she is the first of five new LHA's to operate directly with the U.S. Coast Guard successfully saving hundreds of lives.

They couldn't have chosen a more capable vessel. SAIPAN's primary mission, that of simultaneously launching a full air and surface Marine amphibious landing force, qualified her as one of the most effective disaster relief ships ever designed. She can quickly embark and safely transport up to 2,000 evacuees to safety.

SAIPAN's medical facilities include a full surgical complex, 17 bed intensive care ward, 48 bed primary ward and overflow capability for 300 other sick or injured refugees, easily rivaling most small city hospitals and making her the largest Navy warship hospital afloat today.

EXERCISE "TEAMWORK 80" NARRATIVE

More than 60,000 personnel, 170 ships, and 400 aircraft from eight NATO nations participated in the large-scale maritime exercise "TEAMWORK 80". The exercise, the largest of a series of NATO maritime exercises, is scheduled every four years. It took place in the North Atlantic, the English Channel, the North Sea and the Norwegian sea from 10 to 24 September 1980. "TEAMWORK 80" is designed to demonstrate and improve the capability of the alliance to protect amphibious forces and to reinforce and resupply shipping in maritime support of Europe in time of crises or war. The three major NATO commanders, Admiral Harry D. TRAIN II, U.S. Navy, Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic, Admiral Sir James Eberle, KCB, Royal Navy, Allied Commander-in-Chief Channel; and General Bernard Rogers, U.S. Army, Supreme Allied Commander Europe, scheduled the exercise from their respective headquarters in Norfolk, Virginia; Northwood, Middlesix, United Kingdom; and Brussels, Belgium. Norfolk based ships participating in the exercise include: USS MOUNT WHITNEY (LCC-20), USS NIMITZ (CVN-68), USS CARON (DD-970), USS TEXAS (CGN-39), USS AINSWORTH (FF-1090), USS SAVANNAH (AOR-4), USS IWO JIMA (LPH-2), USS SAIPAN (LHA-2), USS PONCE (LPD-15), USS EL PASO (LKA-117), USS HERMITAGE (LSD-34), USS SPIEGEL GROVE (LSD-32), USS BOULDER (LST-1190), USS HARLAN COUNTY (LST-1196), USS NEWPORT (LST 1179), USS VULCAN (AR-5), USS TRENTON (LPD-14), USS CHARLESTON (LKA-113), USS SAGINAW (LST-1188), and USS HAMMERHEAD (SSN-663). Other U.S. ships participating include USS WAINWRIGHT (CG-28) and USS SEMMES (DDG-18), Charleston, SC; USS VALDEZ (FF-1096) and USS CAPODANNO (FF-1093), Newport, RI; USS NITRO (AE-23), Earle, NJ; USS SAMPSON (DDG-10), Mayport, FL; and USS SCULPIN (SSN-590) and USS SHARK (SSN-591), Groton, CT. Also participating in the exercise was the 4th Marine Amphibious Brigade (4th MAB), Headquartered in Norfolk, Virginia, and commanded by Brigadier General E. C. CHEATHAM, Jr. The 4th MAB is composed of regimental landing team two (RLT 2) from Camp Lejeune, NC; Marine Aircraft Group 40 (MAG 40) from the Marine Air Stations at Cherry Point, NC, and Beaufort, SC; and Brigade Service Support Group FOUR (SSG 4) from Camp Lejeune.

USS SAIPAN INTERCEPT NARRATIVE

While crossing the Atlantic to participate in Exercise "TEAMWORK 80", NATO's largest maritime exercise this year, Norfolk-based ships USS SAIPAN (LHA-2) and USS NIMITZ (CVN-68) teamed-up to intercept a Soviet TU-95 "Bear" reconnaissance aircraft as it moved in to observe the deployed U.S. amphibious task force.

Intercepting foreign fixed wing aircraft is nothing new for today's aircraft carrier and its airwing, but, until recently, it wasn't the common capability for amphibious vessels.

Just minutes after the assault ship SAIPAN's radars displayed a foreign contact, four Marine AV-8 Harriers of VMA-231, Cherry Point, NC, scrambled from her flight deck to greet the Soviet "Bear" before it reached the task force.

SAIPAN introduced the Soviet pilots to a U.S. intercept aircraft they had never before seen operating with U.S. amphibious forces in the Atlantic. It was also a first for the Norfolk ship.

Already tailing the Bear during the intercept was the F-14 Tomcat of VF-41 embarked onboard NIMITZ.

VF-41 and USS NIMITZ, recently recognized world-wide during Hollywood's release of "The Final Countdown", introduced countless audiences to the F-14 Tomcat's exceptional intercept and attack capabilities...capabilities not shared by amphibious warships.

SAIPAN changed all that, however, and added a few pages to the changing history of modern amphibious warfare, as the first amphibious assault ship to launch an AV-8 in the Atlantic to intercept and escort Soviet surveillance aircraft.

Because of the Harrier's unique vertical and short take-off and landing capabilities, launching catapults and recovery cables aren't required for their operation onboard ship.

USS SAIPAN and USS NIMITZ were just two of 20 Norfolk-based ships and 150 other NATO nation ships participating in exercise "TEAMWORK 80", designed to demonstrate and improve the capability of the alliance to protect amphibious forces and reinforcement and resupply shipping in maritime support to Europe in time of crisis or war.

USS SAIPAN OV-10 LAUNCH NARRATIVE

It looked like a scene from World War II as the green planes rolled along SAIPAN's flight deck, like those first Navy fighters on the early flat-tops with only their propellers pulling them off the flight deck and into the air.

But a closer look reveals that the Navy is actually extending the capabilities of its modern amphibious forces.

During NATO's "TEAMWORK 80", the Norfolk-based USS SAIPAN (LHA-2) launched four dual-prop OV-10's of Marine Fixed Wing Observation Squadron ONE (VMO-1) from Jacksonville, NC, another first in the Navy's efforts to upgrade amphibious warfare.

The OV-10, a dual prop, short take-off and landing aircraft, can launch with less than 450 feet of floating runway without the use of aircraft catapults found on aircraft carriers. SAIPAN's flight deck is over 800 feet long, providing more than enough room to support the OV-10.

During their role in "TEAMWORK 80", the SAIPAN-launched OV-10's "loitered" over the mountainous regions of Norway performing as mobile communications links and forward air controllers for allied forces in the mountains.

Again, SAIPAN's motto, "We do it all", is helping the Navy forge ahead in its efforts to advance the capabilities of its amphibious forces afloat.

DEPLOYMENT 80-81 NARRATIVE

If he's not too busy enjoying the homecoming, ask any returning SAIPAN sailor where he's been. After a sigh of relief, he'll gladly tell you that he just finished traveling a distance equal to sailing around the world one and a half times.

The 32,000 mile, 183-day trip was the first Mediterranean Cruise ever accomplished by an LHA class amphibious assault ship. It was also SAIPAN's longest deployment.

You could almost call her unique deployment a "look me over" cruise. USS SAIPAN (LHA-2) departed Norfolk August 27, and first sailed to Scotland and Norway at the top of the world to participate in NATO Exercise "TEAMWORK 80". Then, less than a month later, she sailed south, passed through the Mediterranean Sea, the Suez Canal and on to the Indian Ocean. She was 12 time zones and almost 10,000 miles from her homeport. That is, while SAIPAN's crew was waking up in the morning over there, counterparts around the world in Norfolk were probably just finishing the previous night's meal.

During her deployment, SAIPAN introduced the unique capabilities of an LHA to nine European, Middle Eastern and African nations. Although her third visit to the United Kingdom, her other port visits were all new for SAIPAN and her crew. She paid port calls to Portugal, Spain, Italy, and Kenya. And, while in the Indian Ocean, the ship took a weekend off to load stores, conduct preventative maintenance and provide a little liberty for crewmen on the ship's first visit to the tiny but strategic island of Diego Garcia.

Now, provided that SAIPAN sailor is still around, ask him how he and his shipmates passed the time. Considering the statistics, eating might be one of his surprising answers. The enlisted dining facility alone served the crew and embarked Marines more than 25,000 gallons of milk, 21,000 pounds of apples and oranges, 18,400 pounds of lettuce, 10,000 pounds of steak, 29,000 pounds of hamburgers and some 300,000 eggs. And to help wash all that down, more than 11 million 600 thousand gallons of fresh water was distilled from the sea in SAIPAN's evaporators.

Writing letters is always a favorite pastime for sea going men, often they're only ties with home. While SAIPAN cruised right through Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's, sailors and marines alike wrote home. They mailed a combined total of 74,900 pounds of mail from their ship. Families, friends and loved ones returned more than 47,000 pounds of greetings back to their sailors on the other side of the world.

And to improve his strength and stamina during SAIPAN's patrol in the Indian Ocean, that sailor and hundreds of other shipmates

Enclosure (7)

participated in the USS SAIPAN Indian Ocean Big 10 Competition. It included such events as track, weight lifting, Ping-Pong, chess, and yes, of course, pinochle...while at Diego Garcia others ran in the first 10,000 meter SAIPAN Invitational Race.

If he wasn't eating, writing letters or playing athlete, the sailor was left with one last inescapable and historical event. Over 2,000 sailors and marines were initiated into the ranks of the "Shellback" during a day-long ceremony on November 4, as SAIPAN slipped south across the Equator while enroute to Mombassa, Kenya.

SAIPAN explored three of the seven seas and two of the Earth's oceans. She visited six foreign ports. The ship's Overseas Diplomacy Team sold over 30,000 tickets for organized tours that offered to take a SAIPAN sailor almost anywhere in Europe, from a day in London or a weekend in Rome, to ski trips in the mountains of Germany and countless sight-seeing and shopping tours all over England, Portugal, Italy, and Spain. In Kenya, the Overseas Diplomacy Team organized a two-day safari to the famous game preserve, Tsavo Park.

The ship also developed a Civic Action Team. Volunteers worked in Kenya, building houses for the disabled; and in Barcelona, Spain, painting homes for the elderly, donating blood, and, over the holidays, sponsoring a shipboard Christmas party for over 100 children from a local orphanage.

As the ship's propellers pushed 32,000 miles under her hull. More significant statistics were adding up on SAIPAN's flight deck as the embarked airwing, HMM 162 from Marine Corps Air Station, New River, NC, doubled the number of safe landings on board SAIPAN since her commissioning three years ago. SAIPAN's aircraft made a combined total of 5,311 safe landings during this cruise, logging over 3,000 flying hours.

The flight deck crew learned that their performance and safety awareness in bringing in over 10,000 safe landings was recognized by the winning of the coveted Admiral Flatley Aviation Safety Award. The air department also received the departmental excellence "E" award.

Also sharing in the departmental "E" awards on SAIPAN were her Electronic Warfare Technicians, the Aircraft Intermediate Maintenance Department, Radiomen, Assault Division, Weapons Department, and Combat Information Center.

Was sailing three-quarters of the world worth it? Ask the returning SAIPAN sailor, he'll tell you that it was. But don't forget his sigh of relief; a symbol that after all he's seen and cultures he's experienced, he's glad to be back in the United States.