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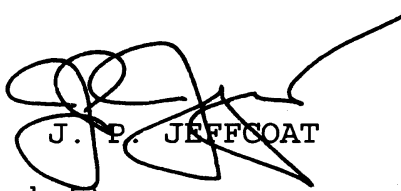
From: Commanding Officer, USS SAIPAN (LHA 2)  
To: Director of Naval History (N09BH), Naval Historical Center  
Washington Navy Yard, 901 M Street SE, Bldg. 57,  
Washington, D.C. 20374-5060

Subj: COMMAND HISTORY OF USS SAIPAN (LHA 2) FOR 1996

Ref: (a) OPNAVINST 5750.12F

Encl: (1) Command History 1996  
(2) Change of Command Program  
(3) Officer Billet Listing - 1996  
(4) Public Affairs Articles  
(5) USS SAIPAN Ombudsman SITREPS 1-24

1. In accordance with reference (a), enclosures (1) through (5) are forwarded.



J. P. JEFFCOAT

Copy to: (w/o encls 2 through 5)  
COMNAVSURFLANT  
COMPHIBGRU TWO

USS SAIPAN (LHA-2)  
Command History - 1996

1. Command Composition and Organization.

a. Mission. To embark, deploy, and land elements of a Marine amphibious landing force able to conduct opposed assault operations from the sea. Elements of the landing force may include AV-8 Harrier attack jets, CH-46, CH-53, and UH-1 helicopters, conventional landing craft, air cushion or tracked amphibious vehicles or a combination of these elements. SAIPAN serves as the flagship for Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) operations. Evacuation, disaster relief, and hospital ship duties are secondary missions of USS SAIPAN.

b. Organizational Structure.

1. Immediate Senior Command  
Commander Amphibious Group Two, Norfolk, Virginia

2. Units under operational/administrative control  
Helicopter Combat Support Squadron Six  
Detachment 3; 2 HH-46's; HW 04, HW 11

Assault Craft Unit Two Detachment Delta; 4  
LCU's; LCU 1650, LCU 1653, LCU 1657, LCU 1662

3. Command Organization

Commanding Officer  
Captain Ralph K. Zia, USN  
(1 January 1996 - 1 February 1996)  
Captain John P. Jeffcoat, USN  
(2 February 1996 - 31 December 1996)

Executive Officer  
Captain Joseph S. Gershon, USN

Command Master Chief  
MMCM(SS/SW) Thomas M. Barnhart, USN

4. Composition. SAIPAN's crew is composed of  
65 officers and 976 enlisted personnel.

2. Chronology.

1 JAN-8 JAN Holiday Leave and Upkeep, Naval Station,  
Norfolk, VA.

8 JAN-12 JAN Amphibious Readiness Group (ARG)/Marine  
Expeditionary Unit (MEU) Workshop,  
Little Creek, VA.  
Disbursing Assist Visit.

12 JAN Commander Cruiser Destroyer Group Eight (CCDG-8)  
Change of Command held aboard SAIPAN.

15 JAN Chop to Commander Task Group Two Two point Three  
(CTG 22.3).

16 JAN Departed Homeport Naval Station, Norfolk, VA  
enroute port visit Boston, MA.

16 JAN-12 FEB Assigned Ready Duty ARG responsibility for the  
Western Atlantic.

18 JAN Arrived Boston, MA.

18 JAN-22 JAN Port visit Boston, MA, National Hockey League  
All Star Weekend. SAIPAN provided the venue for  
the post All Star game party. The ship was  
honored to have aboard many celebrities, and  
distinguished guests of the National Hockey  
League.

19 JAN CAPT Zia reenlisted 7 SAIPAN Sailors aboard  
USS Constitution Boston, MA.

22 JAN Departed Boston, MA, enroute Naval Weapons  
Station, Earle, NJ.

23 JAN Arrived Naval Weapons Station, Earle, NJ.

23 JAN-25 JAN Inport Earle, NJ. Onloaded 210 pallets in  
support of deployment ammunition top off.

25 JAN Departed Naval Weapons Station Earle, NJ enroute  
Virginia Capes Operating Area (VCOA).

26 JAN Conducted Burial at Sea for SD1 Harold Williams,  
USN, Retired, MM2 Carey L. Schoch, USN Retired and  
Josephine M. Wade.  
Arrived Homeport, Naval Station, Norfolk, VA.

29 JAN-9 FEB Combat Systems Readiness Review (CSRR) PHASE I.

1 FEB USS SAIPAN Change of Command; CAPT Ralph K. Zia  
relieved by CAPT John P. Jeffcoat.

17 FEB-18 FEB Visit ship Norfolk Naval Station, Norfolk VA  
SAIPAN open for general visiting by the local  
population.

19 FEB-31 MAR Assigned Ready Duty ARG responsibility for the  
Western Atlantic.

21 FEB Departed Homeport Naval Station, Norfolk, VA  
enroute VCOA.

21 FEB-23 FEB Tailored Ships Training Availability (TSTA) III, VCOA.

22 FEB Conducted Burial at Sea for CWO3 John R. Hoffman, USN, Retired. Ms Ann Mittermyer, Assistant General Council, Senate Armed Services Committee visited SAIPAN to review requirements for proper trash and garbage disposal for U.S. Naval vessels at sea to meet environmental requirements.

23 FEB Arrived Homeport, Naval Station, Norfolk, VA.

23 FEB ARG Pre-Sail Conference for Amphibious Squadron (PHIBRON) - MEU Integration (PMINT) held aboard SAIPAN.

24 FEB Completed the following system installations:  
 Super High Frequency (SHF): high speed, wideband communications trunk.  
 Quad DAMA: trunked data system providing Demand Multi-Access Digital trunks via Ultra High Frequency (UHF), SHF, or Extremely High Frequency (EHF).  
 Battle Group Cellular: allowing inter-battle group telephone service.

26 FEB Departed Homeport Naval Station, Norfolk, VA enroute Onslow Bay, NC. and Cherry Point Operating Area (CPOA).

26 FEB-1 MAR PMINT, Onslow Bay, NC. and CPOA. PMINT is intended to provide the ARG and MEU time to conduct basic integration, qualification and orientation evolutions, thus increasing both the quantity and quality of pre-deployment training. Safety considerations are the primary reason for the establishment of PMINT.

2 MAR Arrived Homeport, Naval Station, Norfolk, VA.

3 MAR-14 MAR Exercise Boastful Labor 2-96. Communications Exercise between SAIPAN and embarked Army personnel with Commander Joint Communications Unit Fort Bragg, NC.

5 MAR Completed installation and training of the Navy Aviation Logistics Command Management Information System (NALCOMIS).

6 MAR Departed Homeport, Naval Station, Norfolk, VA enroute VCOA.

6 MAR-8 MAR Deck launch Qualifications (DLQ's), VCOA. Cooperative Communication Research Demonstration, a SPAWAR/COMNAVSECGRU Information Warfare (IW) initiative.

8 MAR Arrived Homeport, Naval Station Norfolk, VA.

12 MAR-14 MAR Command Inspection conducted by Commander Amphibious Group Two (COMPHIBGRU 2).

13 MAR-15 MAR Commander Naval Air Force, U.S. Atlantic Fleet (COMNAVAIRLANT) Pre-Consolidated Aviation Maintenance Supply Effectiveness Evaluation (PRE-CAMSEE) Inspection.

17 MAR Chop to Task Group Twenty Nine point Seven/Task Unit Twenty Nine point Seven point Five (TG 29.7/TU 29.7.5)

18 MAR-22 MAR Motor Gasoline (MOGAS) Inspection.

20 MAR Completed the following systems installations:  
 Internal Cellular Communication System (ICCS): an experimental interior Cellular phone system allowing ten portable Internal Voice Communications System (IVCS) drops throughout the ship.  
 Single Channel Ground/Airborne Radio (SINGARS) Remote: allows remote control of SINGARS Very High Frequency (VHF) Radios from Landing Force Operations Center (LFOC).  
 Radar Digital Data Switchboard (RADDS): digital data distribution of radar video. Included in this installation was an upgrade to AN/SPA-25 G Radar Repeater Point Position Indicator (PPI) Displays.  
 Contingency Theater Air Planning System (CTAPS): provides a means of transmitting the Air Tasking Order (ATO).

21 MAR Communications Security Material System (CMS) Assist Visit.

22 MAR Completed installation of the Electronic Intelligence (ELINT) Correlator.

24 MAR Completed installation and testing of NIPRNET and SIPRNET electronic communications systems.

25 MAR Completed installation of World Wide Military Command and Control System (WWMCCS).

27 MAR Departed Homeport Norfolk, VA enroute CPOA.

28 MAR-31 MAR MEU Exercise (MEUEX). Exercise designed to train the MEU in the operations the MEU is required to be proficient on prior to deployment.

1 APR-3 APR Commander Second Fleet Exercise (C2X) Phase II and DLQ's. C2X is designed to exercise ships in next deploying Battle Group and ARG in integrated operations.

1 APR Chop to Task Force Two Two, Task Group Two Two point six (TF 22 and TG 22.6) and Task Force Four point Eight and Task Unit Four point Eight point Six (TF 40.8 AND TU 40.8.6).

2 APR Consolidated Engineering, Combat Systems, Air and Aircraft Intermediate Maintenance Department (AIMD) Calibration Laboratories into one SAIPAN Calibration Laboratory.

4 APR Arrived Homeport Naval Station, Norfolk, VA.

8 APR-23 APR CSRR Phase II

15 Apr AIMD set up special facilities for an INFRA-RED and LASER operations work center.

15 APR-19 APR Completed installation and testing of US/UK Joint Deployable Intelligence Support System (JDISS). System installed for use during the Combined Joint Task Force Exercise (CJTFFEX) Purple Star.

17 APR Ammunition onload in support of deployment ammunition top off.

18 APR Added to Task Force Nine Five Five, Task Group Nine Five Five point One, Task Group Nine Five Five point Two, Task Unit Nine Five Five point Two point One (TF 955, TG 955.1, TG 955.2, TU 955.2.1)

18 APR-24 APR Completed Battle Force E-Mail installation and testing.

23 APR Completed Shipboard Crane Improvement Program.

24 APR ARG Pre-Sail Conference for Joint Task Force Exercise (JTFFEX) and CJTFFEX Purple Star held aboard SAIPAN.  
Completed the installation of Global Command Communication System (GCCS): which is a netted WMCCS terminal.

25 APR Departed Homeport Naval Station, Norfolk, VA enroute CPOA.

25 APR-14 MAY JTFEX and CJTFEX PURPLE STAR. JTFEX is designed to exercise the Battle Group and ARG in advance training prior to deployment. CTJFEX PURPLE STAR was the largest exercise of U.S. and U.K. troops since World War II.

29 APR Conducted Burial at Sea for LCDR Raymond H. Becker, USN, Retired.

1 MAY-5 MAY Special Operations Capable Exercise (SOCEX). USMC exercise which qualifies the deploying MEU in the seven areas of special operations capabilities. Once completed the MEU receives the designation SOC for Special Operations Capable.

5 MAY Non-Combatant Evacuation Operation (NEO) exercise conducted as part of JTFEX. A total of 55 personnel were evacuated from Camp LeJeune in a mock NEO to complete the SAIPAN's qualification to deploy in support of the ARG.

6 MAY Conducted Refueling at Sea (RAS) with RAF (Royal Fleet Auxiliary) Fort George. This was SAIPAN's first RAS in over 3 years.

9 MAY Media embark. Thirty three civilians and 4 military personnel from various types of media embarked to observe JTFEX AND EXERCISE PURPLE STAR operations.

10 MAY SAIPAN's embarked MEU lost a CH-46 Sea Knight helicopter and a AH-1 Cobra helicopter in a airborne accident.

11 MAY A Remembrance ceremony was held aboard SAIPAN for the personnel killed and injured in the 10 May helicopter accident. DR John White, Deputy Secretary of Defense was aboard for the ceremony.

15 MAY Arrived Homeport Naval Station, Norfolk, VA.

15 MAY-17 May Battle Force Intermediate Maintenance Activity (BFIMA)/Amphibious Readiness Group Intermediate Maintenance Activity (ARGIMA) Assessment Team Visit.

17 MAY COMNAVAIRLANT Consolidated Aviation Maintenance Supply Effectiveness Evaluation (CAMSEE).

20 MAY-31 MAY Completed installation of Sailor Phone: a Navy Exchange Command (NEXCOM) personal communications initiative to allow low cost stateside phone calls for the crew.

22 MAY Completed Naval Modular Automated Communications System (NAVMACS) II UPGRADE TO VER 2.1.12.9. NAVMACS II is an automated message processing and distribution system.

23 MAY Added to Task Group Two Four point Seven/Task Force One Eight Three (TG 24.7/TF 183). Completed Dental Readiness Evaluation.

27 MAY Commenced Prior to Overseas Movement Period (POM).

27 MAY-19 JUN POM

31 MAY Completed the installation of 3 Demineralizers.

1 JUN-6 JUN Completed installation and testing of the Joint Broadcast System (JBS)/Global Broadcast System (GBS): A Data Transfer Computer (DTC) technology television system providing the ship news and information broadcasts as well as remote Predator and Pioneer Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) video and secure mission narration.

1 JUN-5 JUN Completed testing of SAILOR PHONE.

4 JUN Rear Admiral Tobin the Oceanographer of the Navy visited. Completed GCCS testing.

4 JUN-14 JUN Completed installation and testing of the following systems:  
 Scaleable Transportable Intelligence Communication System (STICS) and Tributary: Intelligence systems for communications at the theater and national level.  
 NOW: Navy Order Wire, which introduced Central Processing Unit (CPU) automation to the High Frequency (HF) point to point order wire.  
 AN/KSQ-1: temporary Position Locating Information (PLI)/Position Locating and Reporting System (PLARS) system for tracking and locating of amphibious forces.  
 IFF: Updated equipment to UPX-27/UPA-59 versions.  
 VTC: Video Teleconferencing System via SHF.  
 SNAP III: ported distribution of logistic data and administrative information via a fiber network.

10 JUN Completed installation and testing of Battle Group Information Exchange System (BGIXS) II: a Ultra High Frequency (UHF) system used to transmit both data and video between Battle Group elements.

13 JUN Completed installation and testing of Pioneer UAV Video Rebroadcast System (VRS).



19 JUN Fast Cruise in preparation for Mediterranean Amphibious Ready Group (MARG) 96-2 deployment.

20 JUN Departed Homeport Naval Station, Norfolk, VA enroute VCOA for one day of pre-deployment Sea Trials. Anchored G-3 anchorage Norfolk, VA.

21 JUN Underway G-3 anchorage Norfolk, VA. Arrived Homeport, Naval Station, Norfolk, VA. Family Day Picnic on SAIPAN flight deck. The picnic included clowns, music, BBQ and a raffle.

24 JUN ARG Pre-Sail conference for MARG 96-2 deployment held aboard SAIPAN.

27 JUN Rear Admiral Fladd, Commander Amphibious Group TWO visited the ship to wish us well on our deployment.

28 JUN Departed Homeport Naval Station, Norfolk, VA commencing MARG 96-2 deployment. Enroute Onslow Bay, NC. to embark 24 MEU(SOC).

30 JUN-2 JUL On load 24 MEU(SOC) Onslow Bay, NC.

1 JUL Ammo onload in support of deployment ammunition top off.

2 JUL-11 JUL Transited the Atlantic to Rota, Spain.

3 JUL Conducted a Gunnery exercise 5"/54 Gun Mounts 51 and 52.

4 JUL Ship's Picnic celebrating the nations 220th birthday. Due to inclement weather the picnic was held in the individual messes with a cake cutting ceremony held on the mess decks. The Commanding Officer, CAPT J. P. Jeffcoat, CAPT R.L. Peterson Commander PHIBRON 6 and COL R.F. Natonski Commander 24 MEU (SOC) participated in the cake cutting ceremony. CWO "Boats" Stephens graced the event with a solo rendition of "God Bless America".

6 JUL Uploaded 21 Missiles Forward and 21 Missiles Aft in the Rolling Airframe Missile (RAM) Launchers.

11 JUL Spanish Passing Exercise conducted with vessels of the Spanish Navy prior to entering Spanish territorial waters.

12 JUL Anchored Naval Station, Rota, Spain to conduct ARG turnover with USS GUAM ARG.

13 JUL Departed Naval Station, Rota, Spain enroute Palma, De Mallorca, Spain.  
Conducted transit of the Strait of Gibraltar.

15 JUL Arrived Palma De Mallorca, Spain.  
Commander Sixth Fleet In-Brief.

15 JUL-18 JUL Port Visit Palma De Mallorca, Spain.  
Private tours were conducted for local dignitaries to include J. B. Besle, of the U.S. Consulate; Ms Ursula Bethe, and Mr Heiner Schmalkuche both of Germany.

17 JUL The Commanding Officer hosted a luncheon for Juan Huavez Rotger, President of Parliament, John L. Blakemore, Her Majesty's CONSUL; CAPT Eveclio F. Degede, the Captain De Savio; Fransisco J. Fontan, the Port Director of Palma; and Jaime De Pena, Consul General of the Republic of Silenei.

19 JUL Departed Palma De Mallorca, Spain enroute the Tunisian Coast of North Africa.

21 JUL-27 JUL Conducted Exercise Atlas Hinge. A Bilateral exercise with the Tunisian military. The exercise included an Amphibious Assault and Tactical Recovery of Aircraft/Personnel (TRAP) mission.

28 JUL Departed the Tunisian coast enroute Genoa, Italy.

29 JUL Arrived Genoa, Italy.

29 JUL-1 AUG Port visit Genoa, Italy.  
Private tours for local dignitaries were conducted.  
Conducted Community Relations (COMREL) Project of assisting in renovations at the Centro Di Dolidarieta Di Genova, a local drug rehabilitation Center and Shelter for the homeless.

1 AUG SAIPAN provided the venue for a reception hosted by Mr George Griffin, the U.S. Consulate to Italy. The guests included approximately 150 Italian Dignitaries and American Consulate officials. The visit included a tour of the ship, static displays of aircraft and USMC/Navy equipment as well as observance of the Colors ceremony at sunset.

2 AUG Departed Genoa, Italy enroute Corfu, Greece.

3 AUG Conducted transit of the Strait of Messina.

4 AUG Conducted a Gunnery Exercise 5"/54 Gun Mount 52. Arrived Corfu, Greece.

4 AUG-8 AUG Port Visit Corfu, Greece. The ship was at anchor; no official functions, visits or tours were conducted.

9 AUG Departed Corfu, Greece enroute the Albanian coast.

12 AUG-20 AUG Conducted Exercise Rescue Eagle with Albania. A bilateral training exercise with selected units from the Albanian military included an amphibious rehearsal, amphibious landing, a TRAP mission, and a mass casualty exercise.

9 AUG-21 AUG Operation Joint Endeavor SAIPAN and 24 MEU assigned Adriatic TRAP ALERT support mission.

12 AUG Vice Admiral Abbott; Commander Sixth Fleet visit.

14 AUG Conducted Close-in Weapons System (CIWS) Exercise with both the Forward and Aft CIWS firing 300 rounds each. British Broadcast Corporation (BBC) visited SAIPAN to film 24 MEU(SOC) for a documentary on TRAP missions.

18 AUG-20 AUG Albanian Officers visit SAIPAN to witness first hand the mission of the ARG.

22 AUG Arrived Trieste, Italy.

22 AUG-25 AUG Port Visit Trieste, Italy. Conducted a COMREL project of renovations at the sanctuary of Monte Grisa.

26 AUG Departed Trieste, Italy enroute Toulon France.

26 AUG-27 AUG Operation Joint Endeavor SAIPAN and 24 MEU assigned Adriatic TRAP ALERT support mission.

28 AUG Conducted transit of the Strait of Messina. Conducted offload Air Combat Element (ACE) at Augusta Bay, France.

29 AUG Conducted transit of the Strait of Bonifacio.

30 AUG Arrived Toulon, France.

30 AUG-12 SEP Port Visit Toulon, France. Mid-deployment Maintenance/Upkeep. Hosted luncheons for Officers, Chief Petty Officers, and enlisted members of the crew of the French Ship Clemenceau R-98.

30 AUG-12 SEP Conducted a COMREL project that included helping special children from a local hospital enjoy a day in the country at "la ferme"; the farm. The day included pony rides, and excursions on the river boats for the children. SAIPAN Sailors also painted buildings, and worked in the fields. The day ended by planting a tree dedicated to SAIPAN at the farm.

13 SEP Departed Toulon, France.

11 SEP-25 SEP Commander Sixth Fleet Jewish Chaplain, LCDR [REDACTED] (Rabbi) visited and conducted services for the High Holy Days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

14 SEP Conducted a gunnery Exercise 5"/54 Mount 51 and Mount 52 and a CIWS exercise firing 300 rounds each from the forward and aft CIWS mounts. Conducted transit of the Strait of Messina.

15 SEP Conducted backload of the ACE, Augusta Bay France.

16 SEP-17 SEP Operation Joint Endeavor SAIPAN and 24 MEU assigned Adriatic TRAP ALERT support mission and conducted presence operations.

19 SEP Arrived Izmir, Turkey.

19 SEP-21 SEP Port Visit Izmir, Turkey.

20 SEP A POW/MIA Recognition Day Ceremony held aboard SAIPAN.

21 SEP Hosted a visit of 30 Turkish Naval Officers for a tour of the ship.

22 SEP Departed Izmir, Turkey.

22 SEP-6 OCT Conducted Exercise Dynamic Mix. Dynamic Mix was the largest NATO exercise in 1996. It included forces from Italy, France, the United States and Turkey. The exercise included Amphibious Rehearsals, Landings, Assaults and Opposed Transits of the Aegean Sea.

30 SEP Celebrated the end of Hispanic American Heritage month with a special dinner and Latin music on the mess decks.

7 OCT-12 OCT Conducted Turkish Bilateral exercises with selected elements of the Turkish military.

- 11 OCT-12 OCT Atlantic Training Group(ATG)/Engineering Training Group(ETG) assist visit in the form of a Mid-Cycle Assessment (MCA) Pre-look. The pre-look entailed thorough inspection of all Engineering Administrative Programs. The assist visit was a very useful management tool. The Pre-look results dictated the focus of the Ship's final preparations and planning for ATG/ETG Mid-Cycle Assessment.
- 13 OCT Navy Birthday/SAIPAN Birthday picnic. Events included a BBQ, talent show, cake cutting ceremony by the oldest and youngest sailors, civilian clothes day and music on the flight deck.
- 14 OCT Arrived Souda Bay, Crete.
- 14 OCT-18 OCT Port Visit Souda Bay, Crete.
- 17 OCT COMREL Project included the cleaning and painting of a Hania Senior Citizens Center and the Church located on the grounds.
- 17 OCT CAPT Rich Black, Commanding Officer Naval Support Activity Souda Bay, Crete visited and welcomed SAIPAN to Souda Bay, Crete.
- 19 OCT Departed Souda Bay, Crete enroute Adriatic operations.
- 20 OCT- 21 OCT MCA. The assessment team revisited areas determined to require a second look during the MCA Pre-look as well as any areas not previously assessed. Major areas assessed included: Drill sets for both Forward and After Main Machinery Rooms, Main Space Fire Drill, Material History, Space Cleanliness and Preservation, Lube Oil Quality Management, Fuel Oil Quality Management, Quality Assurance, Boiler Water/Feedwater Chemical Treatment and Testing, Heat Stress and Hearing conservation.
- 21 OCT-30 OCT Operation Joint Endeavor SAIPAN and 24 MEU assigned Adriatic TRAP ALERT support mission and conducted presence operations.
- 21 OCT-26 OCT SAIPAN assigned responsibilities as ADRIATIC REDCROWN; REDCROWN is the code word for the Battle Group Air Corridor Controller.
- 28 OCT CAPT Edward F. Ney Memorial Award Inspection. The NEY award is presented for excellence in Food Service.

26 OCT Lieutenant General Wilhelm; Commander Marine Forces Atlantic visited SAIPAN.

31 OCT Departed Adriatic enroute Naples Italy. Conducted transit of the Strait of Messina.

1 NOV Arrived Naples Italy.

1 NOV-5 NOV Port visit Naples Italy. Hosted visit by U.S. Consul General to Naples.

4 NOV Major General Ryan; Commander Second Marine Air Wing visited SAIPAN.

5 NOV Conducted COMREL Project included cleaning and painting the interior of the United Services Organization (USO) Building.

6 NOV Departed Naples, Italy enroute Haifa, Israel. Conducted transit of the Strait of Messina.

9 NOV Celebrated the Marine Corps Birthday. The celebration included a special meal on the mess decks and a cake cutting ceremony by the oldest and youngest Marines embarked SAIPAN.

10 NOV Arrived Haifa, Israel.

10 NOV-25 NOV Port Visit Haifa, Israel. Second Deployment Maintenance/Upkeep period.

15 NOV COMREL Project included cleaning and painting the Sisters' Charity Convent which houses severely handicapped children.

17 NOV SAIPAN Sailors planted trees in Lavi forest as a memento of our visit in Israel. The tree planting is offered through the Jewish National Fund.

19 NOV COMREL Project included cleaning, painting and making minor repairs to Achiezer's Home, a boys orphanage predominantly for Jewish children of Russian descent.

25 NOV Departed Haifa, Israel enroute Rota, Spain.

1 DEC Conducted transit of the Strait of Gibraltar.

3 DEC Downloaded 21 Missiles Forward and 21 Missiles Aft in the Rolling Airframe Missile (RAM) Launchers. Arrived Naval Station, Rota, Spain.

3 DEC- 7 DEC Port Visit Naval Station, Rota, Spain. Conducted Wash Down of all MEU equipment and SAIPAN Well and Vehicle Decks.

3 DEC CAPT Bruce Stuckert, Commanding Officer Naval Station Rota, Spain visited and welcomed SAIPAN to Rota, Spain.

5 DEC-6 DEC SAIPAN Revival. Held at Naval Station Rota Chapel. Planned and run by a team of six members from SAIPAN Bible study group. The revival was held to set the tone for taking back to our families some of the spiritual growth experienced during the deployment.

7 DEC Departed Naval Station, Rota, Spain enroute United States East Coast.

7 DEC-14 DEC Family Service Center Representatives embarked to conduct Return and Reunion Briefings.

8 DEC - 18 DEC Transited the Atlantic Ocean to Onslow Bay, NC.

9 DEC Conducted underway turnover with USS NASSAU ARG. Chop to Task Force Two Zero (TF 20).

11 DEC Ship-Wide Safety Training Seminar. Subjects included winter driving, cold weather safety, driving safety, home safety and holiday decoration safety.

18 DEC A special photo shoot was organized for all SAIPAN Sailors who were advanced, received individual awards or completed Enlisted Surface Warfare or Enlisted Aviation Warfare Qualifications. It was the largest photo shoot of the cruise and was designed to motivate SAIPAN Sailors to continue to work hard to increase their upward mobility in the U.S. NAVY.

19 DEC Arrived vicinity Onslow Bay, NC. Rear Admiral Fladd visited SAIPAN to congratulate the crew for an outstanding deployment and to welcome the ship home.

21 DEC Arrived Homeport, Norfolk Naval Base, Norfolk, VA completing MARG 96-2 deployment. The ship was deployed for 178 days, traveled a total of 26,142 nautical miles, conducted 1427 hours of mishap free flight deck operations, transferred 1.5 million pounds of cargo, 1600 passengers, 200,000 pounds of mail, conducted 24 special sea and anchor details, 8 underway replenishments, consumed 287,640 eggs, 69,534 loaves of bread, 37,824 pounds of ground beef, 27,014 pounds of potatoes and 21,368 gallons of milk, qualified 118 Enlisted Surface Warfare Specialists, 51 Enlisted Aviation Warfare Specialists, 12 Surface Warfare Officers, awarded the Sea Service

Deployment Ribbon, the Armed Forces Service Medal and nominated for the NATO medal. LCDR [REDACTED] family displayed the largest Welcome Home sign on the pier.

21 DEC-31 DEC Post Cruise/Holiday Leave and Upkeep Period.

### 3. Narrative.

As 1996 came to a close, the officers and crew of SAIPAN could look back with great pride on one of the most successful periods in her almost 20 years of commissioned service. SAIPAN exemplified professionalism and excellence throughout a year which began with a grueling schedule of system installations and training, and culminated in an enormously demanding but flawlessly executed Mediterranean deployment.

The action started immediately upon the end of our holiday leave period on January 8th, with SAIPAN participating as a key player in an important ARG/MEU Workshop. At the same time, the Supply Department conducted an intensive Disbursing Assist Visit, and on the 12th, SAIPAN was the site of the COMCRUDESGRU EIGHT Change of Command Ceremony. On 16 January, the ship sailed from Norfolk for a well-deserved port visit to Boston. SAIPAN generated an immense amount of positive press from this visit, which coincided with the National Hockey League All-Star Game weekend. The ship provided the venue for the post-game party, which was attended by a large contingent of celebrities, athletes, and other distinguished guests of the NHL. For both crew morale and Navy public relations, this visit was a resounding success.

Upon returning to Norfolk after a brief weapons onload in Earle, NJ, SAIPAN again got quickly on with business, with the first item being my relief of CAPT Ralph Zia as Commanding Officer on February 1st. The ship then commenced Combat Systems Readiness Review (CSRR) Phase I, an in-depth groom and test period for the ship's electronics suites. CSRR requires extremely close coordination between departments in every area of the ship, and the crew's professionalism and technical expertise paid great dividends in making this complex evolution go smoothly. Concurrent with CSRR was the installation of several major new communications systems, including SHF, Quad DAMA, and BG Cellular. Toward the end of the month, we were underway for TSTA III and PHIBRON/MEU Integration Exercise (PMINT), both of which were highly successful.

March commenced with Exercise BOASTFUL LABOR, a communications exercise between SAIPAN and Commander, Joint Communications Unit Fort Bragg, NC. On the 6th, SAIPAN got underway in support of a high-visibility joint SPAWAR/COMNAVSECGRU project, the Cooperative Communications Research Demonstration/Information Warfare Initiative. At mid-month, we completed a Command Inspection by COMPHIBGRU TWO, receiving a superb evaluation in all areas, and CNAL Pre-Consolidated Aviation Maintenance Supply Effectiveness Evaluation. In late March, SAIPAN completed a number of important equipment installations which greatly increased our C4I



capabilities and effectiveness. These included the experimental Internal Cellular Communication System; CTAPS Air Tasking Order generating/transmitting system; ELINT Correlator; NIPRNET and SIPRNET intelligence communications networks; and a shipboard WWMCCS site. SAIPAN also received an evaluation of outstanding on her Motor Gasoline Inspection during this period. At the end of the month, we departed Norfolk enroute the Cherry Point OPAREA for MEUEX and COMPTUEX Phase II. These exercises were invaluable in honing our war fighting skills and preparing SAIPAN and the rest of the ARG/ENTBATGRU for the "graduation exercise" of JTFEX.

Most of April was occupied with CSRR Phase II, during which SAIPAN's combat systems suite and electronics received their final large-scale groom prior to deployment. Once again, the crew's expertise made this extremely important evolution highly successful. AIMD also established new facilities for infrared and LASER avionics maintenance, a great step in improving SAIPAN's self-sufficiency and warfighting readiness while deployed. On the 25th, SAIPAN sailed from Norfolk for Exercise PURPLE STAR, the largest Naval/Amphibious warfare exercise since the Korean war. This joint, multinational exercise, conducted with units of the British fleet, was a great success. The SAIPAN ARG qualified in its Special Operations Capabilities Exercise (SOCEX), and conducted an exercise Non-Combatant Evacuation of 55 personnel from Camp Lejeune. The exercise received thorough media coverage from a contingent of 37 civilian and military personnel who embarked SAIPAN to cover the events. The otherwise sterling success of PURPLE STAR was marred on May 10th, when a CH-46 Sea Knight and an AH-1 Cobra helicopter participating in the exercise collided, killing all, but one Marine Aviator onboard both aircraft. The lost servicemen were honored the next day by a Remembrance Ceremony onboard SAIPAN, which was attended by Deputy Secretary of Defense John White as the senior U.S. representative.

Upon return to homeport in May, a new round of inspections and installations commenced, as did our Pre-Overseas Movement (POM) period. SAIPAN was able to successfully balance the needs of our sailors for time with their families prior to deployment with the ship's need for concentrated work to complete pre-deployment preps. During May and June, SAIPAN installed the Sailor Phone system, an SHF videoteleconference system, BGIXS, the KSQ-1 system for tracking and controlling amphibious craft, the PIONEER UAV Video Rebroadcast System, and numerous communications suite upgrades.

On June 21st, we held a highly popular and well-attended Family Day Picnic on the flight deck, with clowns, music, BBQ, entertainment and prizes for crewmembers and their families. Then, after a few more last-minute meetings and material preparations, SAIPAN sailed for the Mediterranean on the 28th of June.

After onloading 24 MEU (SOC) in Morehead City, NC, the SAIPAN ARG commenced transit of the Atlantic enroute the Straits of Gibraltar. We continued to drill and train around the clock, sharpening and improving the skills we had developed during the previous months of training, and flexing and improving our expertise on the myriad new systems which had been installed.

The 4th of July was observed underway with a ship's picnic to celebrate our nation's 220th birthday. COMPHIBRON SIX, CAPT R.L. Peterson, COMMANDER 24 MEU (SOC), COL R.F. Natonski, and I participated in the cake cutting ceremony. On 11 July, we conducted a PASSEX with units of the Spanish Navy prior to entering Spain's territorial waters. This was just the first of several opportunities to work with the armed forces of other nations during MARG 96-2.

Turnover with USS GUAM ARG was conducted on July 12th at anchor off Rota, Spain. Upon completion of turnover, SAIPAN weighed anchor and transited the Straits of Gibraltar enroute our first port visit, to Palma De Mallorca, Spain. During this visit, SAIPAN conducted visits and tours for several Spanish dignitaries, and hosted a luncheon for Mr. Juan Huavez Rotger, President of Parliament, and Her Majesty's Consul, Mr. John L. Blakemore.

After the enjoyable visit to Palma, SAIPAN embarked on Exercise ATLAS HINGE, a bilateral exercise with the Tunisian military off the coast of North Africa. This exercise, which included an amphibious assault and TRAP training mission, provided a valuable opportunity to work with the forces of a nation other than the major NATO countries with whom we usually operate. We then sailed to our next port of call, Genoa, Italy, where we held several high-visibility functions, chief among them a reception hosted by the U.S. General Consul to Italy, Mr. George Griffin. Guests included approximately 150 Italian dignitaries and U.S. Consulate officials. SAIPAN was praised by all for her outstanding performance in preparing for and conducting the event. Further positive coverage for the Navy and SAIPAN came with a Community Relations (COMREL) project, during which several SAIPAN sailors assisted in renovations at the Centro di Dolidarieta di Genova, a drug rehabilitation center and homeless shelter.

On August 2nd, SAIPAN departed Genoa enroute Corfu, Greece via the Straits of Messina. As the ship was at anchor, no official functions or visits were conducted, but the crew greatly enjoyed the visit to this historic Greek city and were warmly received by the townspeople. After getting underway on the 9th, SAIPAN transited to the Albanian coast for Exercise RESCUE EAGLE, a bilateral exercise with the Albanian military. Once again, SAIPAN was afforded a unique opportunity, this time to operate with the forces of a former Communist country. RESCUE EAGLE centered around an amphibious rehearsal, landing, a TRAP mission, and a mass casualty exercise. The exercise was viewed as extremely successful by participants of both nations. During the same period, SAIPAN and 24 MEU were assigned the Adriatic TRAP ALERT support mission as part of Operation JOINT ENDEAVOR. SAIPAN's contributions to both JOINT ENDEAVOR and RESCUE EAGLE were recognized by COMSIXTHFLT, VADM Abbott, during a 12 August visit. Other visitors included a film crew from the BBC, who filmed part of SAIPAN's operations for a documentary on TRAP missions, and several Albanian officers who came to experience amphibious operations from the American point of view.

SAIPAN's next visit was to the picturesque city of Trieste, Italy. Her crewmembers again conducted a well-received COMREL

project, renovating the historic Sanctuary of Monte Grisa. On 26 August, SAIPAN got underway for Toulon, France, again assuming TRAP ALERT duties during her transit. SAIPAN's first mid-deployment maintenance/upkeep period was conducted during this two-week visit, providing dedicated time for maintenance of crucial ship systems. The visit also provided time for SAIPAN sailors to conduct several COMREL projects, including one that touched the hearts of a large number of the crew, at La Ferme, "The Farm". La Ferme provides recreation for patients at a local children's hospital, including pony rides and boat excursions on the river. Crewmembers participated in these events as well as conducting maintenance on the buildings and grounds.

SAIPAN returned to JOINT ENDEAVOR TRAP ALERT duties after departing Toulon, enroute Izmir, Turkey. We moored in Izmir on 19 September; among the notable events of this visit were a POW/MIA Recognition Day ceremony held onboard, and a visit and tour by 30 Turkish Naval officers. On 22 September we got underway for Exercise DYNAMIC MIX, the largest NATO exercise of 1996, comprising forces from the U.S., Italy, France, and Turkey. This fast-paced and demanding exercise consisted of amphibious rehearsals, assaults, landings, and opposed transits of the Aegean. The experience of operating in this dynamic environment with so many of our NATO allies was invaluable. DYNAMIC MIX was closely followed by bilateral exercises with selected elements of the Turkish military. The engineering department then had its turn in the spotlight for the ATG/ETG Mid-Cycle Assessment (MCA) Pre-Look, which entailed close inspection of all engineering administrative programs and provided a focus for MCA preparations. The crew was able to take a break after the demanding operations of the previous days on 13 October, when we celebrated the birthdays of both the Navy and SAIPAN with a crew's picnic. The festivities included a BBQ, Talent show, "civvies" day, and a cake cutting ceremony featuring the ship's oldest and youngest crewmembers.

The next day we arrived for a visit to Souda Bay, Crete, one of the crew's favorite ports of the cruise. While in Souda Bay, SAIPAN sailors painted and renovated the Hania Senior Citizens' Center and a church located on its grounds. After this visit, SAIPAN headed out to spend the remainder of October in the Adriatic, where she conducted a thorough MCA. This "mini-OPPE" thoroughly flexed the engineering crew and plant, and SAIPAN came through with flying colors. SAIPAN's operational commitments in the Adriatic also increased as she was assigned Adriatic REDCROWN in addition to her previous duties as JOINT ENDEAVOR TRAP ALERT. Other notable events during this period included a visit by LTGEN Wilhelm, COMMARFORLANT, and conduct of the demanding NEY award inspection. On 31 October, SAIPAN bade her last farewell to the Adriatic as she sailed for Naples, Italy.

The visit to Naples was a great success, as a number of crewmembers were able to take tours and see for the first time the magnificent sights of Rome, Vatican City, and Pompeii. VIP functions included visits by the U.S. Consul General to Naples and Major General Ryan, Commander of the 2nd Marine Air Wing. SAIPAN crewmembers also cleaned and painted the interior of the Naples USO facility.

On November 6th, SAIPAN departed Naples for a visit to Haifa, Israel. During the transit we celebrated the Marine Corps birthday with a special meal on the mess decks and a cake cutting ceremony featuring SAIPAN's oldest and youngest embarked Marines.

During her visit to Haifa, SAIPAN conducted her second maintenance and upkeep period. This was an excellent opportunity to correct any remaining discrepancies found during MCA, as well as groom other equipment for the voyage home in December. In addition to enjoying tours of the Holy Land, SAIPAN's sailors and marines conducted renovations at the Sisters' Charity Convent, which houses and cares for severely handicapped children, and to Achiezer's Home, a boys orphanage primarily for Jewish children of Russian descent. The visit culminated in a tree planting ceremony to commemorate our visit to Israel, which was sponsored by the Jewish National Fund. On the 25th of November, SAIPAN embarked on her last Mediterranean transit of MARG 96-2, enroute Rota, Spain. After a four day visit to Rota, during which members of SAIPAN's Bible Study Group held a highly successful revival at NAVSTA Rota Chapel, SAIPAN ARG headed "west" for a pre-Christmas homecoming on 21 December.

The trans-Atlantic crossing was filled with preparations for reuniting sailors and families, including embarkation of Family Service Center representatives to conduct seminars on readjustment to family life after deployment, and a shipwide Safety Training Seminar which concentrated on winter driving and holiday safety. On December 18th, a photo shoot was held for all SAIPAN crewmembers who were advanced or received warfare qualifications during the cruise. This was one of the largest shipwide evolutions of the deployment, as a significant portion of the crew qualified in their respective warfare areas during the cruise.

On 19 December, SAIPAN arrived at Onslow Bay, NC, to offload 24 MEU (SOC), receiving congratulations from RADM Fladd, COMPHIBGRU TWO, for her superb performance during deployment and to welcome her back to the U.S. MARG 96-2 finally came to a close on December 21st, when SAIPAN pulled back in to Norfolk and her crew experienced the sailor's time-honored, joyous event of reuniting with family and friends after returning from sea. During MARG 96-2, she was deployed for 178 days, steamed 26,142 nautical miles, conducted 1,427 hours of mishap-free flight operations, qualified 12 officers and 169 enlisted for warfare pins, and was awarded the Sea Service Deployment Ribbon, Armed Forces Service Medal, and nominated for the NATO medal.

As Commanding Officer, I had the honor and great good fortune of taking command of SAIPAN at what I feel was a unique confluence of the best people, on the best ship, at the best time. SAIPAN worked hard, played hard, and stayed safe, and met every commitment with the flair and tenacity that only comes with a group of exceptionally talented people working as a team. SAIPAN's record of performance in 1996, both in preparation for and during her deployment, was without question a remarkable achievement by every measure, and should be remembered with great pride by every crewmember who sailed in her this year. Besides performing their duties in a superb manner, SAIPAN's crew were outstanding ambassadors of the U.S. and the Navy to the people of

the Mediterranean, touching the hearts of people in every port with their friendliness and hard work in support of worthy causes in their communities. 1996 will always stand as one of the finest years of one of the U.S. Navy's finest ships