



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY

USS SAIPAN (LHA 2)  
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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 1997

Ref: (a) OPNAVINST 5750.12F

Encl: (1) Command History 1997  
(2) Change of Command Program with Commanding Officer  
Biography  
(3) Letter to Mrs. Middendorf  
(4) POW/MIA Program  
(5) Public Affairs News/Message Release, 032246Z MAR 97  
(6) Two Articles that appeared in FLAGSHIP  
(7) GATOR BITES  
(8) SAIPAN Safety Grams  
(9) NNSY/Team SAIPAN SRA-97 Administrative Brief

1. Per reference (a), enclosures (1) through (9) are forwarded.

*J. B. Gershon*  
J. B. GERSHON

Copy to: (w/o encls 2 thru 9)  
COMNAVSURFLANT  
COMPHIBGRU TWO

USS SAIPAN (LHA-2)  
Command History - 1997

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, AH-1W 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 the Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) operations. Evacuation, disaster relief, and hospital ship duties are secondary missions of USS SAIPAN.

b. Organizational Structure.

- (1) Immediate Senior in Command:  
Commander Amphibious Group TWO, Norfolk, Virginia
- (2) Units under operational/administrative control: None
- (3) Command Organization:

Commanding Officer  
Captain John P. Jeffcoat, USN  
(1 January 1997 - 14 July 1997)  
Captain Joseph S. Gershon, USN  
(14 July 1997 - 31 December 1997)

Executive Officer  
Captain Joseph S. Gershon, USN  
(1 January 1997 - 20 May 1997)  
Commander Michael W. Brannon, USN  
(20 May 1997 - 31 December 1997)

Command Master Chief  
MMCM(SS/SW) Thomas M. Barnhart, USN  
(1 January 1997 - 07 November 1997)  
BMCM(SW) C. H. Lovett, USN  
(7 November 1997 - 31 December 1997)

(4) Composition. SAIPAN's crew is composed of 68 officers and 871 enlisted personnel.

## 2. Chronology

- 1 JAN Assigned to Task Group Four Zero point Eight and Task Group Two Two point Six.
- 1 JAN - 24 JAN Post Deployment Leave and Upkeep, Naval Station, Norfolk, VA.
- 23 JAN Post Deployment ENTERPRISE Battle Group (BG) and SAIPAN Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) Intelligence Debrief, Navy Marine Corps Training Center, Dam Neck, VA.
- 23 JAN - 27 JAN Removed cross decked Scaleable Transportable Intelligence Communication System (STICS) and Tributary (TRIB) from the Joint Intelligence Center. Removed cross decked Linked Operations And Intelligence Centers Europe (LOCE) equipment.
- 24 JAN SAIPAN observance of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr's Birthday. The observance included a speech by LT [REDACTED], the ship's Stock Control Officer. The theme of the observance was "Where Do We Go From Here." The ceremony was followed by a cake cutting Ceremony and a special luncheon in the Gator Diner.
- 28 JAN Visits by Commodore Amphibious Warfare, Commodore Paul D. Stone, Royal Navy. The visit began with a briefing of SAIPAN Command, Control, Communications, Computer and Intelligence (C4I) capabilities, Followed by a tour of the C4I spaces.
- 31 JAN Final Planning Conference for Type Commanders Amphibious Training (TCAT) 97-1 and CAPSTONE Capabilities Exercise (CAPEX), Amphibious Base Little Creek, VA.
- Safety Stand Down. The focus of this Safety Stand-Down was ammunition handling safety for the scheduled ammunition offload. AVCERT assist.
- 3 FEB - 4 FEB Pre-Sail Conference for TCAT 97-1 and CAPSTONE CAPEX, Amphibious Base, Little Creek, VA.

4 FEB Visit by Hungarian Ambassador to NATO, Dr. Andras Simonyi. The visit began with the command brief followed by a tour of the ship.

5 FEB - 7 FEB Removed cross decked Standard Tactical Receive Equipment Display (S-TRED) from the Joint Intelligence Center, EW Module, Flag Plot, and Radio.

7 FEB Fast Cruise in preparation for upcoming underway period.

10 FEB Departed Homeport Naval Station, Norfolk, VA enroute Cherry Point Operation Area (CPOA) for TCAT 97-1 and CAPSTONE CAPEX. Chop to Task Group Two Two point Three for Planning and Execution of TCAT 97-1.

10 FEB - 18 FEB TCAT 97-1, CPOA. TCAT is integrated ARG training conducted at the intermediate level for ARG post deployment training.

11 FEB - 13 FEB CAPSTONE CAPEX. CAPEX is designed to demonstrate the interoperability of the Blue/Green team to a select audience centered on the CAPSTONE Flag Officers, but can also be provided for other distinguished visitors. SAIPAN recovered and launched a Landing Craft Cushion (LCAC) for the first time in over 10 years during this exercise.

18 FEB Conducted Burial At-Sea for MMC George Richard Cole II, USN (Ret)

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

20 FEB Outchop Task Group Two Two Point Three.

21 FEB SAIPAN awarded Type Commander Ship Safety Award for excellence in shipboard surface ship safety programs and innovative efforts in mishap prevention and command contributions to force readiness through safety.

24 FEB Departed Homeport, Naval Station, Norfolk, VA enroute Earle, NJ to conduct Ammunition offload.

25 FEB Arrived Earle, NJ

25 FEB - 28 FEB Ammunition offload Earle, NJ. Offloaded 21,998 rounds of small arms and 25mm ammunition, 534 powders and 709 projectiles.

24 FEB - 27 FEB Engineering Training Group (ETG) Mobile Training Team (MTT) Pre-Light Off Training Phase I (Plot I). Plot I provides an initial Assessment of the engineering plant and watchstander qualifications.

28 FEB Departed Earle, NJ enroute Virginia Capes Operation Area (VCOA) to conduct Dynamic Interface Testing.

1 MAR SAIPAN provided emergency medical assistance to a crewmember of the commercial fishing vessel "ONIEL'S PRIDE." SAIPAN responded to calls from "ONIEL'S PRIDE," closed the vessel and transferred the crewmember to SAIPAN via small boat. The crewmember had suffered a crushing injury to his left hand. After providing first aid the crewmember was medically evacuated from the SAIPAN by U.S. Coast Guard Helicopter to a nearby hospital.

1 MAR - 2 MAR Dynamic Interface Testing. Dynamic Interface Testing in support of expanding the wind envelopes for the SH-60F, UH-1N, and AH-1W aircraft aboard LHA class ships.

3 MAR - 4 MAR Training Services CPOA. Services provided to CH-46E and AV-8B aircraft. Twenty-six AV-8B pilots were qualified during this period.

5 MAR Safety Stand Down. Subjects included Shipyard Safety, mishap prevention, hearing conservation, and back safety.

SAIPAN received the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) Goal Buster Plaque from the South Hampton Roads Combined Federal Campaign Headquarters. During the period of October - December 1996, SAIPAN was the TOP contributor from the Surface Forces Atlantic with contributions over \$48,700.

Arrived Homeport, Naval Station, Norfolk, VA. Commenced removal of Naval Tactical Data System (NTDS) from CIC for upgrade to Advance Combat Direction System (ACDS).

- 7 MAR - 31 MAR      Removed the MK-86 5"/.54 cal Light Weight gun mounts, SPG-60/SPQ-9 Gun Fire Control System, weapons control switchboards and the Integrated Tactical Amphibious Warfare Data System (ITAWDS).
- 10 MAR              Commenced removal of Navy Tactical Command System Afloat (NTCSA) DTC-2 system from the Joint Intelligence Center (JIC) for upgrade to Joint Maritime Command Information System (JMCIS).
- 14 MAR              SAIPAN awarded Battle Efficiency and Command Excellence Awards for the award cycle 1 JAN 96 - 31 DEC 96. SAIPAN received awards in the following areas: Battle "E," Maritime Warfare, Engineering/Survivability, Command and Control, and Logistics Management - a "Clean Sweep."
- SAIPAN begins operations as the test platform for a new Naval Supply (NAVSUP) requisitioning program, the Automated Non-Standard Requisitioning System (ANSRS).
- 17 MAR              Commander in Chief, U. S. Atlantic Fleet (CINCLANTFLT) Field Examination Group conducted a surprise disbursing/personnel audit.
- 18 MAR              Family Support Group Cookout and workshop aboard SAIPAN. The cookout and workshop were envisioned to provide SAIPAN families with information concerning the upcoming Selective Restricted Availability/Yard Period and the types of changes to expect in work aboard SAIPAN. The Navy Family Services Center provided a lecture and answered questions concerning what to expect when SAIPAN enters the Norfolk Naval Shipyard.
- 22 MAR              SAIPAN Children's Easter Party. Easter Egg Hunt sponsored by the First Class Mess held at Mount Trashmore.
- 25 MAR              SAIPAN Night at Admirals Hockey. MWR sponsored SAIPAN night at the Hampton Roads Admirals Hockey game. There were a block of tickets at reduced prices to give members of the crew and their families the opportunity to see the Admirals in action.

26 MAR Admirals night aboard SAIPAN. The Hampton Roads Hockey Team, the Admirals arrived onboard SAIPAN for a tour of the ship and dinner with the crew and family members. The players signed autographs and answered questions about the sport of ice hockey.

27 MAR Change of Command for Commander Amphibious Squadron SIX held aboard SAIPAN.

SAIPAN Fitness and Nutrition Awareness Day. Workshops were conducted on stress management, proper nutrition, and the Command Physical Readiness Training program.

28 MAR Command, Control, Communications and Information (C4I) Department launched aboard SAIPAN. The new department is made up of the former Communications Division (Radiomen), the Combat Systems Electronics Division (Electronic Technicians), Automated Data Processing Division (Data Processing Technicians), the Interior Communications personnel from Electrical Division (Interior Communication Technicians), and the Public Affairs Division (Journalists). C4I Department was designed to make the flow of information quicker and easier between all facilities of the C4I world including those who both use and maintain the equipment.

28 MAR The Signalmen, formerly part of the Communications Department, joined Navigation Department, forming the Signals Division work center (NC01).

31 MAR SAIPAN Wardroom celebrated Women's History Month with a luncheon. The guest speaker was LCDR [REDACTED], USN. The theme of the speech was "A Fine and Long Tradition of Community Leadership, focused on the United States Navy Community."

SAIPAN awarded fourth consecutive Blue "E" for supply excellence.

31 MAR - 3 APR AIMD safely offloaded over 230 pieces of support equipment for overhaul at St. Julien's Creek Annex, Portsmouth, VA.

1 APR - 2 MAY Conducted U. S. Savings Bond Campaign.

3 APR - 20 JUL Completed self help Habitability Project for CPO/SNCO berthing upgrade.

4 APR Departed Homeport, Naval Station, Norfolk, VA arrived Norfolk Naval Shipyard.

7 APR - 1 AUG Selective Restricted Availability (SRA) 97, Norfolk Naval Shipyard.

5 APR - 8 APR Aviation Stores (S-6) Division transferred 115 repairable components and 850 consumable line items valued at 1.7 million dollars to USS KEARSARGE (LHD 3) and USS PONCE (LPD 15) in support of their Mediterranean Deployment.

8 APR Mr. Robert Macchia, U. S. Treasury department, Norfolk representative, conducted Site TV training on the benefits of U. S. Savings bonds.

19 APR Cerebral Palsy Walkathon.

21 APR Port side deck edge Aircraft Elevator removed for maintenance and rehabilitation.

24 APR The Honorable Charles Monfort, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (Health Affairs for Policy and Planning Coordination) visited SAIPAN. The purpose of the visit was to provide an understanding of the medical capabilities of an LHA class ship. The visit began with a greeting by the Commanding Officer followed by a tour of the medical spaces and a briefing by LT [REDACTED], the ship's Medical Officer.

7 MAY NATO SECRET Inspection. Recognized by COMNAVSURFLANT as Top Ship Financial Manager FY96 Large Combatant Ship Category.

10 MAY Completed installation of a second SLQ-25 NIXIE torpedo decoy system, as well as an upgrade to SAIPAN's electronic warfare suite encompassing two additional Super RBOC chaff launchers.

13 MAY Selected as the Second Runner-up for the 1996 Ogden Award for Afloat crash and salvage efforts in the large amphibious category.



27 MAY Selected as runner-up for 1996 Admiral Flatley Memorial Award for LHA/LHD/LPH ships which surpass all competitors in overall contributions to aviation safety.

28 JUN SAIPAN celebrated the grand re-opening of the Gator Diner after completion of \$1.0 million dollar renovation.

11 JUL Bravo Zulu from USS DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER to the SAIPAN crash crew for their performance during the 1997 COMNAVAIRLANT Crash and Salvage Olympics. Recognized as the best amphib in the competition.

14 JUL CAPT Joseph S. Gershon relieved CAPT John P. Jeffcoat as Commanding Officer, USS SAIPAN.

18 JUL Safety Training Day conducted by all hands. Divisional training emphasized underway operations and safety conducted within divisional spaces.

19 JUL Completed hardware installation of ACDS, which gives SAIPAN enhanced Command and Control capabilities. Improvements include, color large screen displays, advanced operator console design with touch screen technology, improved track loads and processing capability, and user-friendly additions such as map and battle area overlays. Significant additional equipment installed included Battle Force Tactical Team Trainer (BFTT) which allows pierside simulation between several ships with full realism and accuracy to maximize watchstander performance.

21 JUL Onload SE/MHE from St Julien's Creek Annex, Portsmouth, VA.

23 JUL ARE Assist for single spot air operations qualified.

25 JUL Conducted Fast Cruise in preparation for upcoming Sea Trials, 28 JUL - 30 JUL.

SAIPAN celebrated the grand opening of the Snack Shack, A walk-up after hours convenience type store. Additionally, the Crew's game room was remodeled to allow better atmosphere for playing amusement machines.

28 JUL - 30 JUL Departed Norfolk Naval Shipyard enroute VCOA to conduct Sea trials. Conducted first "live" testing of ACDS using aircraft and surface assets. Several tracking exercises were conducted to test SAIPAN's new Block I Close in Weapon System.

30 JUL Arrived Norfolk Naval Station, Norfolk, VA.

14 AUG Completed installation of new Accommodation Ladders on both port and starboard sides of the ship. This enables the crew and visitors to embark and debark both pierside or at anchor. The significance of this modification is that the new ladders are state of the art and much easier for ship's personnel to rig out and safer for crew/visitors to embark/debark while at anchor.

29 AUG Command Picnic conducted at NAS Oceana picnic grounds.

8 SEP Conducted Fast Cruise in preparation for upcoming underway period.

SAIPAN completes Aviation Readiness Evaluation and Aviation Certification and designated fully qualified for fixed wing/rotary wing operations.

SAIPAN commences both fixed wing and rotary wing operations for the first time in six months following SRA.

9 SEP Departed Homeport of Norfolk Naval Station enroute Earle, NJ for ammunition onload.

9 SEP - 14 SEP Conducted three day ACDS combat systems operability demonstration enroute to Earle, NJ. Testing involved several aircraft tracking and engagement exercises and was capped off with a successful live firing of SAIPAN's two Block One upgraded CIWS guns.

Technical representatives for the testing were transported via an LCU landing in SAIPAN's well deck, the first operational test since SRA.

15 SEP - 19 SEP Ammunition onload at Earle, NJ. Completed the safe and efficient onload of over one million pounds of ordinance for embarked Marine detachment and self defense armaments.

20 SEP Arrive Norfolk Naval Station, Norfolk, VA.

25 SEP Bravo Zulu from SWOSCOLCOM Newport RI for superb effort to support Prospective Commanding Officer (PCO) underway training 8-12 SEP. The trip was the highlight of the PCO Course and the superior Support provided by SAIPAN greatly enhanced the training of Prospective Commanding Officers.

14 OCT Depart Norfolk Naval Station, Norfolk, VA enroute VCOA for TSTA I.

17 OCT Arrived Norfolk Naval Station, Norfolk, VA.

21 OCT Departed Norfolk Naval Station, Norfolk, VA enroute VCOA for TSTA I

24 OCT Arrived Norfolk Naval Station, Norfolk, VA.

31 OCT SAIPAN laundry installed with ECOLAN automatic laundry detergent system.

7 NOV Electrical Safety Standdown conducted.

21 NOV Bravo Zulu from SOPA ADMIN Norfolk Subarea VA as TOP DOG on the waterfront for outstanding performance as Pier SOPA.

15 DEC Departed Norfolk Naval Station, Norfolk, VA enroute VCOA for preparations for engineering certification (ECERT).

Conducted two burials-at-sea: RMCS Edward R. Orr, USN (Retired) and ENC John Zywczk, USN (Retired)

20 DEC Arrived Norfolk Naval Station, Norfolk, VA.

21 - 31 DEC Holiday Leave and Upkeep period.

### 3. Basic Historic Narrative.

SAIPAN returned from MARG 96-2 on 21 December 1996. After the post-deployment leave period, the crew began preparations for Type Commander's Amphibious Training (TCAT) and CAPSTONE Capabilities Exercise (CAPEX). During this time, SAIPAN also hosted the British Commander Amphibious Warfare, Commodore Paul Stone, Royal Navy, for a C4I brief and tour. TCAT and CAPEX, which were conducted between 10 and 18 February, were highly successful and proved extremely beneficial to all involved. SAIPAN hosted a visit and tour for over 50 flag and flag-select officers, and also recovered and launched an LCAC for the first time in ten years.

Upon return to Norfolk, SAIPAN was awarded the Type Commander's Surface Ship Safety award for excellence in shipboard safety programs and innovative efforts in mishap prevention. On 24 February, SAIPAN departed Norfolk enroute Earle, NJ for weapons offload. A concurrent Engineering Training Group visit was conducted for Pre-Light Off Training Phase I. After departing Earle, SAIPAN headed for the VACAPES operations area to conduct Dynamic Interface Testing with technicians from Naval Rotary Wing Test Directorate Pax River, Maryland. This testing contributed greatly to research geared toward the revision of LHA class wind envelopes for five different Naval helicopters. While conducting this testing, SAIPAN provided emergency medical assistance to a crewmember from the commercial fishing vessel "ONIEL'S PRIDE." SAIPAN closed her in response to distress calls, and transferred the injured crewmember via small boat. The crewmember had suffered a crushing injury to his left hand. After being provided with first aid, he was medically evacuated via Coast Guard helicopter to a nearby hospital. SAIPAN also provided training services for CH-46E and AV-8 Aircraft during this underway, qualifying twenty-six AV-8 pilots.

March was a hectic month, starting with a safety standdown on 5 March geared toward equipment and personnel safety during the upcoming SRA. Also on the 5th, SAIPAN was awarded the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) Goal Buster plaque from the South Hampton Roads CFC Headquarters for being the top contributor from Surface Force Atlantic, with total contributions of over \$48,700.00. The remainder of the month was dedicated to preparations for entering Norfolk Naval Shipyard. Preparations included removal of the ship's 5" 54 guns and related installation. On 14 March, SAIPAN was awarded the Battle "E", sweeping all categories for command excellence awards, and on the 17th, CINCLANTFLT Field Examination Group arrived to conduct a surprise disbursing/personnel audit with outstanding results.