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Gator Times

CHANGE OF COMMAND

USS NASSAU (LHA 4) — THE NAVY'S "TOP GATOR"

Gator Times

LHA 4

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GatorTimes

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Capt. Ronald Reis assumes command of USS NASSAU.
Photo By Jonathan Pankau

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Captain's Call

Capt. Ronald Reis
Commanding Officer
USS Nassau (LHA 4)

This is my first Captain's Call in the Gator Times, and I'd like to take the opportunity to say "there is no place I would rather be than aboard the Navy's Top Gator!"

This ship has a stellar reputation and unending string of awards, such as the 2007 and 2008 Battle Efficiency Award, 2008 Retention Excellence, 2008 Green "H" and the 2009 Ney Award. Proof positive that the Sailors and Marines aboard this capital warship are at the top of their game. We all recognize it's not the steel and equipment that make a great ship, it's the crew!

I am pleased to announce that the CNO Availability is entering its final phase. The ship is coming together as we wrap up our work at BAE Systems Norfolk Ship Repair's Titan drydock. Soon Nassau will be in the water and getting ready for sea trials.

After spending the winter in the shipyard, spring will be a refreshingly busy time for us. We'll be running our semi-annual Physical Readiness Test in April. Following sea trials, Nassau will begin working up toward our late summer deployment. Also, we will celebrate the ship's 30th year in commission this July. Congratulations to all former NASSAU sailors.

Until next month, keep up the good work and I look forward to meeting and getting to know each and everyone of you.

CMC Corner

Nassau Family and Friends,

It's been a busy month aboard Nassau. First we bid farewell to Capt. Boorujy and welcomed Capt. Reis as Commanding Officer with a traditional change of command ceremony here at BAE Systems Norfolk Ship Repair.

Work continues here in the shipyard. As we get closer to moving the ship back into the water and bringing her back to life, our focus needs to turn toward space ownership and pride. Our goal is to have Nassau looking as sharp leaving the shipyard as she did when we brought her here.

Now is also the time start preparing for our deployment later this year. Of course, our focus on the ship is going to be on training and gaining qualifications as we certify various systems throughout the ship. But don't forget that we have to make preparations at home as well. Start getting yourself and your families ready with Powers of Attorney and Wills, financial planning and any vehicle, or home maintenance that will come due while we're deployed.

Finally, we highly encourage our spouses to get involved with Nassau's Family Support Group. These folks are valuable resources your family can turn to for support while we're away. The NFRG meets the first Monday of the month, 6:45 p.m. at the Armed Forces YMCA. Please contact our FRG President at nfrgpresident@yahoo.com for more details.

Capt. Ronald Reis assumes command

By MC1 Mary Popejoy
USS Nassau Public Affairs

Capt. Ronald Reis speaks with USS Nassau (LHA 4) Command Master Chief CMDCM(AW/SW) Stan Kopiczak after assuming command.
Photo by MC2 Amanda Clayton

Capt. Ronald Reis assumed command of USS Nassau (LHA 4) from Capt. James R. Boorujy during a traditional change of command ceremony held at BAE Systems Norfolk Ship Repair here Feb. 26.

Boorujy, who's next assignment will be as director of fleet training at U.S. Fleet Forces Command, assumed command of Nassau in August 2007. Under his command Nassau was awarded the Battle Effectiveness "E" award in 2007 and 2008, completed a successful deployment to the Navy's 5th and 6th Fleet areas of responsibility as the flagship of the Nassau Expeditionary Strike Group and participated in Exercise Phoenix Express 08, Expeditionary Strike Force Operations, and Exercise Goalkeeper III, while making 11 port visits in seven different countries.

In addition, Nassau hosted the Expeditionary Strike Group Three Change of Command and high profile visits from the U.S. Ambassador to Malta and Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Europe.

Nassau continued to meet an aggressive schedule upon return from deployment, including serving as the hub of Navy Task Group Ike, which responded to hurricane damage in Galveston, Texas, in September 2008. The ship anchored off the Texas Gulf Coast and provided much needed support - sending more than 400 Sailors to participate in relief operations ashore. Those Sailors distributed food, water, and ice to disaster victims, made critical repairs to the city's water pumping station, and helped clear debris and restore Galveston's Scholes International Airport and Port Facility.

In October 2008, Nassau served as the centerpiece of the Great White Fleet Centennial Celebration in New York City, as well as celebrating the Navy's 233rd birthday and taking part in the city's Columbus Day celebration. Nassau hosted more than 700 distinguished visitors Oct. 12, for Secretary of the Navy Donald C. Winter's luncheon commemorating the Great White Fleet and opened for general public visitation on Columbus Day with 1,600 New Yorkers touring the ship.

Nassau entered BAE Systems Norfolk Ship Repair for a planned maintenance availability in December 2008.

Boorujy said that none of those accomplishments would have been possible without the outstanding effort of Nassau's crew.

"Nassau has so many talented Sailors, who put their shoulder into whatever is asked of them," said Boorujy. "They just seem to be in the right places at the right times - whether it is a fireman working on an AFFF station, a master chief on the quarterdeck in an overseas liberty port, or a duty officer on the scene of a complex evolution. It has been great to be the captain presiding over such an outstanding group of Sailors."

He went on to say that even though his time as Nassau commanding officer is over, he will miss the crew, the Nassau camaraderie and energy.

"To the crew of USS Nassau, you have made this tour the best ever," said Boorujy. "You have given this ship a shine, a pride, even a swagger, that will make her remaining years, her best. You put the top in Top Gator. I would be delighted to serve with any of you anywhere."

The ceremony's guest speaker was Rear Adm. Mark Buzby, deputy chief of staff for Global Forces Management and Joint Operations at U.S. Fleet Forces Command. He highlighted some of Nassau's accomplishments under Boorujy's leadership, which included developing a command climate based on procedural compliance, collaboration, and risk management that yielded outstanding results in every inspection and certification evolution.

Buzby went on to say that Boorujy's dedication, detailed operational planning, and focused execution produced a well trained crew capable of sustained operations in a wartime environment. He then awarded Boorujy the Legion of Merit for his exceptional meritorious conduct in the performance of his duties as Nassau's commanding officer.

The color guard stands by to parade the colors.
Photo by MC3 Jonathan Pankau

Reis spoke after formally assuming command with the reading of his orders, saying that he's ready to command the mighty warship Nassau and get it back in the water to support the Navy's mission.

"Nassau and its crew will remain vigilant and stand ready to support our nation when called upon, whenever and wherever. That I promise you," said Reis.

Reis graduated from the University of California, Davis, with a degree in Mathematics, emphasis mechanical engineering and qualified as a Naval Aviator in December 1987.

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The official party makes their way to USS Nassau (LHA 4) for the Change of Command ceremony.
Photo by MC3 Jonathan Pankau

USS NASSAU

Change of Command

Capt. Ronald Reis speaks to guests and the assembled crew of USS Nassau (LHA 4) after assuming command of the amphibious assault ship from Capt. James R. Boorujy.
Photo By MC2 Michael Arrington

The crew of USS NASSAU stands by as the ceremony begins.
Photo By MC2 Michael Cortez

Capt. Ronald Reis salutes the side boys as he arrives at the change of command ceremony.
Photo By MC3 Jonathan Pankau

Commanding Officer Capt. Ronald Reis (right) bids farewell to Capt. James R. Boorujy
Photo By MC2 Michael Cortez

Nassau chaplain presides over baptism on ship

By MC3 Jonathan Pankau
USS Nassau Public Affairs

A USS Nassau (LHA 4) chaplain presided over his first baptism on a U.S. Navy ship following the Nassau's change of command Feb. 26.

Lt. Thomas O' Flanagan, Nassau's Roman Catholic Priest, baptized Nassau Commanding Officer Capt. Ronald Reis' niece and nephew in the ship's bell, a nautical tradition that goes to back to colonial times.

The tradition began when American colonists, who were legally British subjects but not citizens, would bring their children aboard British merchant vessels to be baptized. Ship's carrying the British Flag are sovereign territory, thus baptizing the children in the ship's bell would gain them British citizenship. Though citizenship can no longer be obtained this way, the tradition still holds today for many Navy families.

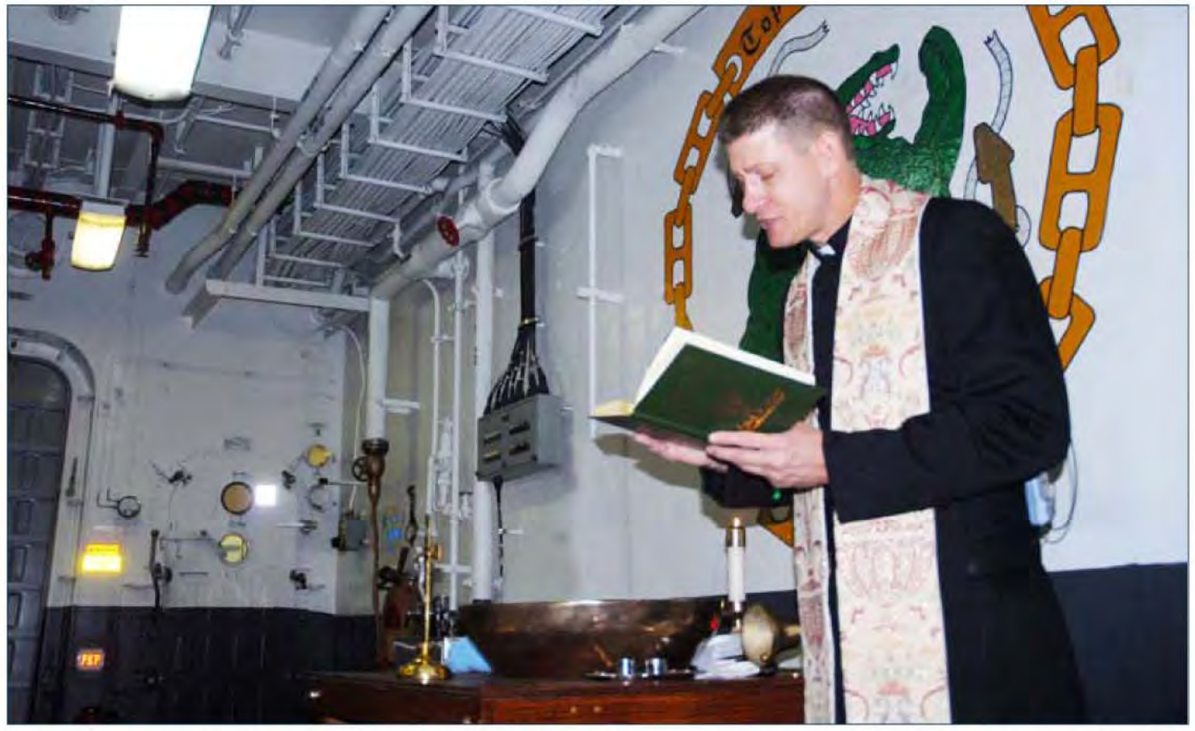
The ceremony took place in Nassau's Flight Deck Triage space, adjacent to the Flight Deck, where the ships bell was set in a special stand built by Boatswain's Mate Seaman Bradley Pope from the Deck Department's 2nd Division.

"It was an honor to baptize the family of Nassau's commanding officer for my first shipboard baptism," O'Flanagan said. "It was a unique experience to baptize these children in the ship's bell, but I am always willing to serve wherever my faith takes me.

"I'd like to thank Nassau's crew for their assistance in this," O'Flanagan continued. "The baptism was an evolution involving many departments and I could not thank them all enough for their assistance."

Reis said that the job requirements of being in the Navy make it very important to receive love and support from family.

"Families are the foundation of who and what we are," said Reis. "It's extremely important to nurture our families in a productive way, whether it's through religion or not. We need to maintain that family connection, especially in our line of work."



Lt. Thomas O' Flanagan, Nassau's Roman Catholic Priest, baptized Nassau Commanding Officer Capt. Ronald Reis' niece and nephew in the ship's bell, a nautical tradition that goes to back to colonial times.
Photo by MC3 Jonathan Pankau

Nassau wins coveted Ney Award

By MC2 Shane Arrington
USS Nassau Public Affairs

Secretary of the Navy Donald C. Winter announced USS Nassau (LHA 4) as winner of the 2009 Capt. Edward F. Ney Memorial Award for food service excellence Feb. 23.

The award is named for Capt. Edward F. Ney, head of the subsistence division of the Bureau of Supplies and Accounts from 1940 to 1945, and recognizes outstanding food service teams in numerous categories throughout the Navy's warfare enterprises.

Nassau won in the Large Afloat category, beating out every other Tarawa Class and Wasp Class amphibious assault ship in the Navy.

Chief Warrant Officer Bernice Williamson, Nassau's food service officer, said she's proud to be a part of this accomplishment.

"This is a big deal," said Williamson. "You're talking about food service throughout the Navy. This is the first time Nassau has won this award and it's truly a testament to our excellence in food service and the use of teamwork to complete our mission."

Williamson wanted to make it clear that the teamwork between the Culinary Specialists (CS) and augmentation of Food Service Attendants (FSA) played a vital role in winning the award and making the Top Gator Bistro one of the top galleys in the Navy.

CMDCM(SW/AW) Kevin Goodrich, Nassau's C5I Leading Chief Petty Officer, wrote a letter of congratulations to the Top Gator Bistro thanking them for a job well done.

"While some might consider the augmentation of our specialists with food service attendants from every department of the ship as a limitation, we exploit this diversity as our greatest strength," said Goodrich. "The positive attitude, genuine smiles and tireless work ethic combine to serve as positive examples to our Sailors and contribute immeasurably to the crew's morale."

Besides the CSs and FSAs, Williamson said there are others who deserve special mention for helping the Nassau win the award.

"The engineers play a large part because they make sure all of our equipment is properly calibrated and maintained," she said. "Also the medical staff, for making sure everything is up to sanitation standards."

"Nassau's CSs and FSAs go above and beyond," Williamson concluded. "We can't pat their backs all the time and say good job, but awards like this let them know that even though there are rough days, they are appreciated."

CSSN Somatie Martinez prepares the salad bar for lunch.
Photo by MC3 Jonathan Pankau

CS3 James Frazier prepares bread to serve on the line.
Photo by MC3 Jonathan Pankau

Nassau helps former chairman celebrate birthday

By MC3 Jonathan Pankau
USS Nassau Public Affairs

USS Nassau (LHA 4) helped a former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff celebrate his birthday March 2.

Nassau Commanding Officer Capt. Ronald Reis asked the amphibious assault ship's award winning foodservice division to deliver a hand-crafted birthday cake to retired Air Force Gen. Richard Myers, who served as the United States' highest ranking military officer from Oct. 1, 2001 to Sept. 30, 2005.

Reis served as Myers' Aide-de-Camp when he commanded United States Space Command, then served as his Aide-de-Camp when Myers was appointed Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in March 2000.

"General Myers is a stand up example of what it means to be a leader in the military," Reis said. "He represented the entire military for four years and did an excellent job.

"During his term as the chairman, he took the time to fly out and visit the Truman Expeditionary Strike Group while they were deployed to the Persian Gulf. The fact that he took time from his busy schedule to visit his fellow service members sets an example for leaders everywhere."

CS2 Stan Allen with the Joint Chiefs of Staff command coin.
Photo by MC3 Jonathan Pankau

Culinary Specialist 2nd Class Stan Allen and Culinary Specialist 2nd Class (SW) Eddie Harding made and decorated the cake. The cake was made from white cake

See "Cake," page 10

Nassau receives third consecutive Green "H"

By MCSA Chris Williamson
USS Nassau Public Affairs

The USS Nassau (LHA 4) Medical Department won its third-consecutive Green "H" Unit Wellness Award for Calendar Year 2008.

The award highlights medical departments that enhance their battle readiness by promoting the health and wellness of their Sailors. The diversity of Nassau's well-run and well-received medical and morale programs raised the physical, mental and spiritual wellness of Sailors and Marines onboard Nassau. These programs are credited for the ship taking top honors.

"It was a culmination of not only Medical Department's work. Morale, Welfare and Recreation, the Chaplain Department, Safety, and Drug and Alcohol Prevention and Awareness were a big part of it as well," said Lt. Patrick Chapman, Nassau's Health Promotions program director.

The primary goal of the program is to provide education and hands-on training to enhance the fitness, nutrition, and spiritual well-being of the crew.

"All of our programs are focused toward health and wellness," said Chapman. "In order to receive the Green 'H' Award, a ship must score 90 percent or higher in the allotted criteria. Not only did Nassau score more than 90 percent, but we were recognized as having one of the best scores fleet-wide, going above and beyond other commands."

HM2 (SW) Jokina Aziz and Lt. Brian Guerrieri attend to their patient, AOAA Durand Somsavath, onboard USS Nassau (LHA 4).
Photo by MCSA Chris Williamson

Hospital Corpsman First Class (SW/AW) Marshall Davis, Nassau's alcohol awareness counselor, said it's not only about exceeding the score - it's about all the crewmembers and corpsmen as a whole.

See "Green H," page 10

Cake, from page 9

with red, white and blue icing, with Nassau's crest and a birthday message to Myers on top.

"I had a lot of help from the entire Nassau Top Gator Bistro Culinary Specialist crew to complete the cake. I couldn't have done it without them," Allen said.

When Allen delivered it to Myers' home, the former chairman presented him with a Joint Chiefs of Staff command coin and spoke to with him about Nassau.

"He wanted to thank Nassau's entire crew for a job well done and to make sure we take good care of Captain Reis," Allen said. "He wished us luck on our deployment in the fall as well."

Myers called Reis to personally thank him for the cake and to give him a message for the crew.

"I wanted this to be a thank you from the U.S. Navy and the entire crew of Nassau," Reis said. "Your daily support keeps the ship mission ready. Bravo Zulu from me and General Myers on a job well done."

CS2 Stan Allen with the cake he helped make and decorate.
Photo by MC3 Jonathan Pankau

GREEN H, from page 9

"The crew really makes the job easier for us," said Davis. "Everyone works extremely hard to keep the ship in award-winning condition. Without them, there would be no Green "H."

Davis, who organizes Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meetings twice a week, said that he feels he's a voice of counseling to those who could relapse and it even helps keep him on track.

"We all counsel each other. But it's not all about me. The AA meetings are just a small part to the Green 'H' package," said Davis.

"We have several corpsmen keeping an eye on individual medical readiness, immunization records and periodic health assessments. If someone needs a shot, we do everything in our power to ensure the crewmember gets the required medical attention they need to maintain mission readiness. That is how hard each and every one of us is willing to work. Receiving the Green 'H' illustrates that fact."

Command, from page 4

With more than 3,600 flight hours and 640 arrested landings, Reis' operational flying assignments include Electronic Attack Squadrons (VAQ) 132, 134, and 137, with deployments aboard USS Kitty Hawk (CV 63), USS John F. Kennedy (CV 67) and USS George Washington (CVN 73). He served as commanding officer of VAQ-132 during its 2004 Operation Iraqi Freedom combat deployment.

Shore assignments include Aide-de-Camp to the Commander-in-Chief United States Space Command, Aide-de-Camp to the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Branch Chief of the Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Western Hemisphere Division.

He completed the Air Force's Air Command and Staff College graduate level Joint Professional Military Education Program while graduating from Auburn University with highest honors, receiving a Masters of Science in Public Administration in 1996.

Reis is a graduate of the Navy's Nuclear Power School and his previous assignment was as Executive Officer of USS Harry S. Truman (CVN 75).

The crew of USS Nassau (LHA 4) stands by as the depatment heads sheathe their swords after honoring the colors.
Photo by MC3 Jonathan Pankau