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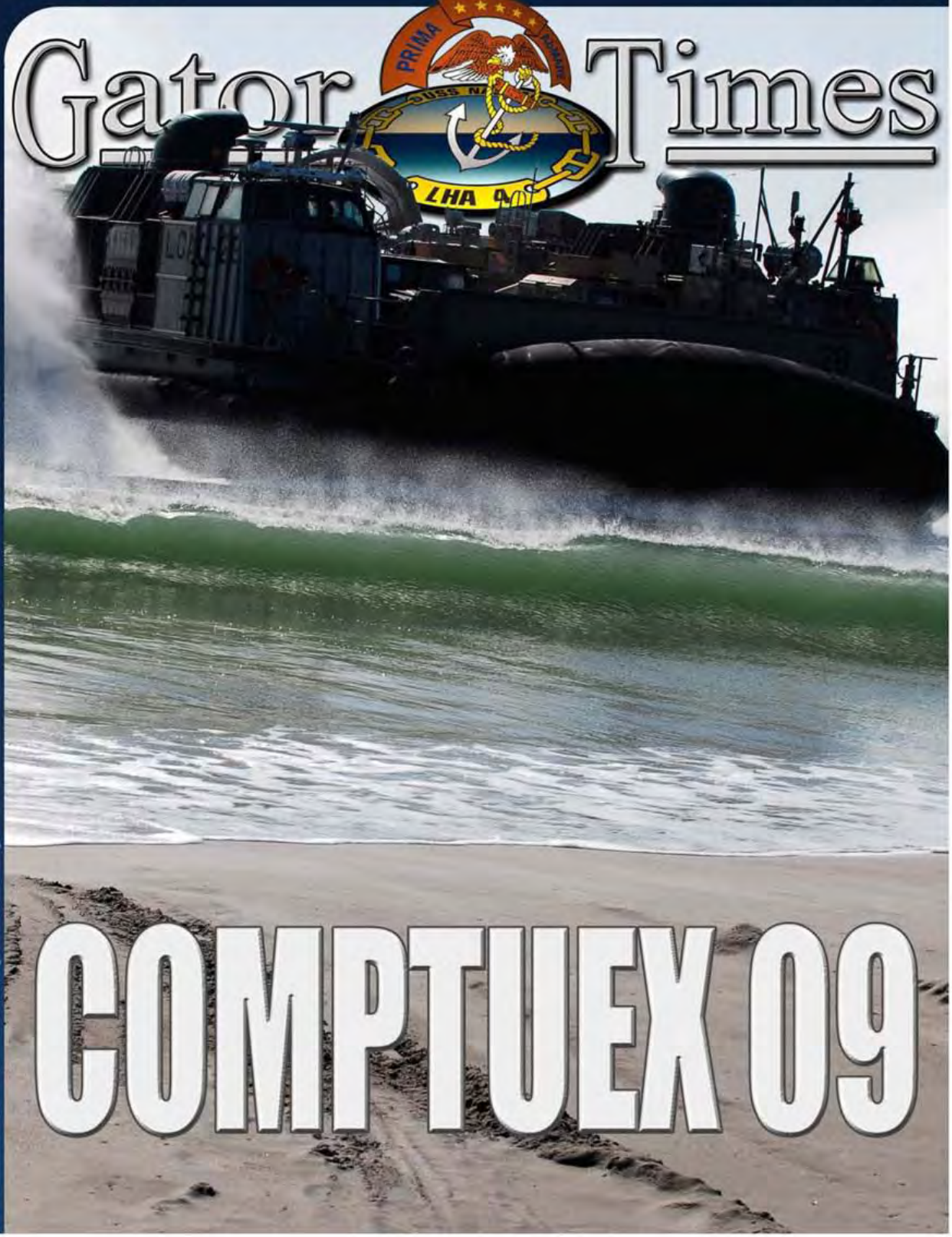
# Gator Times




## COMPTUEX 09

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

# Gator Times

30 years LHA 4

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**On The Cover:**
A landing craft air cushion (LCAC) lands on the beach of North Carolina en route to Camp Lejeune after the completion of an assault exercise.
Photo by MCSN Desiree Green.



# Captain's Call

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

Greetings shipmates, and thank you for reading the November edition of the Gator Times Captain's Call.

November has been an active month aboard Nassau. The Nassau Amphibious Readiness Group (NAS ARG) is now certified to conduct combat operations. Rear Adm. Garry White, the Commanding Officer of Strike Force Training Atlantic, is confident in Nassau's combat capabilities. His approval means that after we complete the CERTEX in December, NAS ARG will be qualified to deploy overseas. Our warfighting skills have significantly improved. Every Sailor and Marine from the well deck to the island made the Composite Unit Training Exercise (COMPTUEX) a successful display of NAS ARG's ability to project power at a moments notice. Bravo zulu to all ships company.

With the completion of COMPTUEX and the early mooring comes a long inport period. Thanksgiving is around the corner and spending time with family and friends is important, especially with the upcoming deployment. There will be many days off in the next few weeks to give everyone the time they need to nurture those relationships with their loved ones.

Letters, care packages, and the support from back home will be a big morale booster during deployment. Prepare yourself and your family physically, emotionally, and financially for the long trip. Don't forget about the pre-deployment briefs Nov. 19 and 24. They are a great ways to receive information which will help you and your family cope during the upcoming deployment. I encourage you and your spouse to attend.

I would like to wish all of the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit's Marines a happy 234th Marine Corps birthday. The ceremony in the Hangar Bay was a moving display of Marine Corps pride and I am proud to have them aboard the ship.

In closing, I'd just like to once again say how proud I am to be in the United States Navy and serving with the finest crew on the waterfront!

Happy Thanksgiving, Nassau.

# CMC Corner

CMDCM (AW/SW) Stan Kopiczak

Nassau Family and Friends,

Nassau's Sailors and Marines have had a busy November. After our returned from New Jersey we had a brief period in Norfolk, which we spent preparing for the Nassau Amphibious Ready Group's (NAS ARG) Composite Training Unit Exercise (COMPTUEX).

Not only did we embark Commander, Amphibious Squadron Eight's (CPR8) Commodore and staff, but also the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit. NAS ARG consists of these units, along with Nassau, USS Mesa Verde (LPD 19) and USS Ashland (LSD 48).

COMPTUEX was a critical part of NAS ARG's pre-deployment training, designed to forge the ARG's components into a fully functional fighting team. It normally takes two to three weeks to complete a COMPTUEX. NAS ARG completed the exercise a week early.

Part of that extra time was devoted to a couple of Pre-Deployment briefs to help the Nassau Family prepare for deployment. The Nassau Family Readiness Group (FRG) was there to support as always, providing free childcare.

The FRG had a very successful November meeting with 30 spouses in attendance. The group is still looking to fill the Secretary and Treasurer positions. If you're interested please contact Melissa at nfrgpresidnet@yahoo.com.

The next FRG meeting will be Dec. 1 at 6:30 p.m. at First Baptist Church of Norfolk (312 Kempsville Road, Norfolk, VA 23502). Child care is free and there will be a silent auction that night. I encourage family members to attend and see for themselves what the FRG is all about.

Until next issue, thanks and God bless.

# LCU Crew Rescues Fisherman

**By MC1 James Stilipec**
**USS Nassau Public Affairs**

There's something to be said for being in the right place at the right time. Landing Craft Utility (LCU) 1655 responded to a distress call off the coast of North Carolina Nov. 7, aiding an injured fisherman who'd apparently fallen out of his boat.

LCU 1655 was embarked with USS Nassau during Composite Unit Training Exercise (COMPTUEX) with the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit and Team 3 from Seabee Beach Master Unit (BMU) 2. COMPTUEX which was scheduled by Commander, Strike Force Training Atlantic (CSFTL), is a joint/combined exercise conducted from Oct. 23 to Nov.11, 2009 of the East Coast of the United States.

The LCU had just dropped off approximately 100 Marines on the beach and was returning to the ship with the BMU team when they intercepted a distress call to the U.S. Coast Guard. Quartermaster 1st Class (SW) Andre Lewis, the boat's navigator, determined that they were close enough to respond to the call, and Craftmaster Chief Boatswain's Mate (SW) Spencer Wheeler made the decision to change course.

"We found two craft tied together and an injured man in the back one," said Wheeler. "We lowered our bow ramp and pulled up to the boat to help out."

Hospital Corpsman (SW) Adam Warrix with BMU Team 3 attended the 32-year-old man as he was brought aboard the LCU.

"He had a few golf ball-sized bumps on his head and I think he broke his upper arm and dislocated his shoulder," said Warrix. "He said the last thing remembered was setting down his fishing pole and slipping over the side."

Warrix immobilized the man's arm and stabilized him on a padded spine board before transferring him to the LCU. The Coast Guard showed up and took command of the boat.

The LCU transported the patient to Swans Point Marina, N.C. where an emergency medical team was standing by to take him to a nearby hospital.

"We train to work together and think on our feet," said Wheeler. "We're a small crew but we know how to take care of ourselves and help others when needed."

including CSFTL, who until now, have worked exclusively with Carrier Strike Groups.

"Typically for carrier strike groups, we have done this process for decades where we run simulated mishaps and drills on carriers," said Kasiski. "Our goal is to make sure that the ship and air-wing team work well together and coordinate efforts with each other through emergency situations, whether combat induced or mishap."

CSFTL is confident that their presence, support, and expertise during COMPTUEX with the NAS ARG will open the door to better joint execution of operations Navy-wide.

"We have never done this exercise with an ARG," said Kasiski. "We are in the inaugural stages. This will be the very first time that we do it and talk through it."

Kasiski said the drill successfully opened the lines of communication and proper execution during flight operations.

"We started out with just an innocently small drill and in the future it will compound itself, grow and get everyone involved, we are looking forward to making the next drill even more robust," said Kasiski.

COMPTUEX, a routine training exercise taking place off the East Coast of the United States, from Va. to Fla., was scheduled by Commander, U.S. Second Fleet and is being conducted by a training team led by CSFTL.

The crew from Landing Craft Utility 1655 and Beach Masters Unit 2, Team 3 remove an injured fisherman from his boat off the coast of North Carolina. Photo by BMSN Michael King.



# NASARG completes COMPTUEX

**By MC2 Coleman Thompson**
**Amphibious Squadron Eight Public Affairs**

Ships from the Nassau Amphibious Ready Group (NAS ARG) returned to their homeport of Norfolk, Va., Nov. 11, 2009 after successfully completing the Composite Unit Training Exercise (COMPTUEX).

From Oct. 17 to Nov. 11 the group was tested in various training exercises that simulate different scenarios that the NAS ARG may face during their upcoming deployment. The exercise provided a realistic training environment that ensured effective, intense training, and further ensured that the joint forces of the NAS ARG are interoperable, capable and ready to deploy.

The ships of the NAS ARG are the amphibious assault ship USS Nassau (LHA 4), amphibious transport dock ship USS Mesa Verde (LPD 19) and amphibious dock landing ship USS Ashland (LSD 48). Working together with the ship is a Marine Landing Force from the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (24 MEU).

COMPTUEX was scheduled by Commander, U.S. Second Fleet (C2F) and conducted by a training team led by Commander, Strike Force Training Atlantic (CSFTL).

The exercise emphasized the teamwork between the Navy and Marine Corps forces and their ability to perform together to achieve the goals that will be set for them.

"The key to the NAS ARG's success has been the teamwork between the 'blue' and 'green' team," said Rear Adm. Garry White, commanding officer, CSFTL. "Without that teamwork the group will fail, but this ship, this MEU, this team is doing a wonderful job of integrating with one another and that has been the one thing that has allowed them to be so successful."

"I find it's most important that when we work with the 24 MEU, we view things as one team, one fight," said Capt. Mark Scovill, deputy commodore, NAS ARG. "Our ability to interoperate with them seamlessly is what makes the Navy/Marine Corps combat team different from anything else in the world."

COMPTUEX serves as an important step to the group becoming certified to deploy in 2010. The difficult training that the team will go through will make them able to get through the rigorous challenges they may face.

"We want to push ourselves to the very limits of our ability," said White. "We want to push ourselves to the edge of the envelope so we get the maximum output from training that we can possibly get. The more you sweat in peacetime, the less you bleed in wartime; so we want to push very hard, to the absolute limits of our ability, while we're out here training."

The exercise was originally scheduled to take place from Oct. 23 to Nov. 17, but due to extreme weather conditions was completed early.

A landing craft air cushion (LCAC) carrying Marines from the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (24 MEU)disembarked from the USS NASSAU Nov. 5 landing on the beaches of North Carolina en route to Camp Lejeune after the completion of an assault exercise. Photo by MCSN Desiree Green.

# COMPTUEX

# 2009

# Life aboard a LCU

**By MCSN Chris Williamson**
**USS Nassau Public Affairs**

Imagine an amphibious vessel only being ran by ten Sailors. Sound impossible? It's not for the crewmembers of Landing Craft Utility 1645 (LCU 1645). In fact, they enjoy doing it, every day.

LCU 1645 is a part of Assault Craft Unit Two (ACU 2) based out of Naval Amphibious Base Little Creek, Va., and is aboard USS Nassau (LHA 4) during Composite Unit Exercise (COMPUTEX). COMPUTEX, which was scheduled by Commander, U.S. Second Fleet (C2F) and conducted by a training team led by Commander, Strike Force Training Atlantic (CSFTL), is a joint/combined exercise conducted from Oct. 23 to Nov. 17, 2009 off the East Coast of the United States.

The LCU's onboard Nassau reside deep within the well deck of the ship. However, a man-made maze of hummers, chains, and a few Marines makes for an interesting path to the amphibious vessel. A few dull, yet noticeably blue-green lights shine from the well deck's overhead and showers the LCU in aquamarine highlights and shadows.

Upon stepping onboard the welcome mat, or ramp as its more commonly called, one can't help but notice what resembles a gray monster's face with beady eyes and a large red mouth full of sharp white teeth on the bulkheads of the craft.

"Enter the belly of the beast seems to come to a lot of people's minds," said Engineman Fireman Don Pascalli, a native from West Palm Beach, Fl.

Pascalli, who has been onboard for six months, said that even though the crew is small, it's easier to get to know people and get along with them.

"If someone's got a problem with another person onboard, it gets solved almost immediately," said Pascalli. "We're all one big family, sort of speaking. We've always got each other's backs."

Most families in the U.S. go on long trips from time to time, and this family is no different. According to Pascalli, however, the journeys his shipmates and him are going on won't consist of Disneyland or the zoo.

"That's part of the job," said Pascalli. "Since we're deploying with Nassau, we're going to be spending a lot of our time out in the ocean at the dead of night with heavy, cold waves crashing into us."

Moving past the ramp will lead to a hatch on the starboard side of the craft. Upon entering, one will more than likely find the craft master on the bridge - Boatswain's Mate First Class (SW) Robert "Captain" Dillard.

"My job is to manage my craft," said Dillard, who has been a Sailor for ten years. "My crew makes that job very easy. Besides the hours and weather we have to deal with at times, I'd have to say that life is pretty sweet."

Dillard went on to say that when he was negotiating for orders, he specifically asked for an LCU on the East Coast.

"I'm really glad that I got this command," said Dillard. "We've really come together and formed a tight knit community here on our little boat. We always eat together at the same time. We always work together, no matter how long the work day is; and we'll always stay together as a team."

Electrician's Mate Third Class (SW) Shawn Gordy, who spends a lot of time working on all the electronics on the bridge, said that working together as a team is a necessity aboard an LCU.

CS3 Che'Lon Gibson prepares breakfast for the 1645 crew. Photo by MCSN Chris Williamson



"It's just us on board," said Gordy, a Detroit native. "When we're out at sea transporting whoever or whatever, it's up to the crew to fix everything. If something goes wrong in the engineering department, everyone from deck, navigation and even supply will drop whatever they're doing just to come help."

Gordy said most of the crew's day consists of preventive maintenance and assisting the other departments on the LCU with their work load.

But aside from work, Gordy also said that on their down time, the crew enjoys getting together in the lounge downstairs. The lounge is just to the right and one level below the bridge, just before the galley. Red, blue, and green pipes twist and turn all around the compartment. Maintenance manuals line the bulkheads complete with a flat screen television and a Playstation 3 game system.

"I'm the only loadmaster onboard," said Boatswain's Mate Seaman Franz Gayle. "So at the end of the day, I like to come down to the lounge and watch movies and hang out with the guys. It's one of the only places onboard I can really unwind in."

Gayle, a Dallas Cowboys fan, also said that he encourages any new Sailors to try for an LCU because he believes it's one of the best commands any Sailor can get.

Just aft of the lounge, is a series of engine and generator rooms consisting of even more colorful pipes and low hanging overheads. Quartermaster First Class J.J. Clark, the craft's only navigator, actually spends most of his time away from his maps doing preventative maintenance checks.

"This command is completely different from all the other ships I've been on," said Clark, a first time LCU crewmember. "Since I don't do any navigating in port, I do PMS on my equipment and my shipmate's as well. We all know each other's jobs which makes life a whole lot easier."

Of course, a tour isn't complete without the fridge. Just aft of the bridge is the galley, and Culinary Specialist Third Class Che'Lon Gibson, the only cook onboard, said that he's always available to cook anything for his crewmembers.

"Every breakfast I make them eggs any way they like it," said Gibson. "I have fresh juice and fruit available between meal times. I try to keep us as healthy as possible so that we can get the job done better."

Gibson also said that as the only cook, he provides a sense of morale for the crew.

"Food is always comforting," said Gibson. "If they've had a long day, I'm always up to the task to make them feel better. Besides, that's what family's all about."

BM1 (SW/AW) Bill Mowrey and BM1 (SW) Robert Dillard, Craftmasters on LCU 1645 await the on load of approximately 400 Marines from the 24th MEU. Photo by MCSN Williamson

# USMAP offered aboard USS Nassau

**By MC2(SW) Amanda Clayton**
**USS Nassau Public Affairs**

USS Nassau (LHA 4) offers Sailors the opportunity to enroll in the United States Military Apprenticeship Program (USMAP) to gain civilian qualifications during their everyday military jobs.

USMAP is a formal military training program that provides active duty Coast Guard, Marine Corps and Navy service members the opportunity to improve their job skills and to complete their civilian apprenticeship requirements while they are on active duty.

"In the civilian world it's all about credentials and certifications. It takes about three to four years to complete an apprenticeship when a person is a civilian, but when you're enrolled into USMAP a Sailor is already working in that job field and can log in the hours since they're meeting those hours anyway," said Senior Chief Navy Counselor (SW/AW) Harold Gibbs.

"You can enroll by going online to the website or coming to see me in person," said Nassau's command USMAP coordinator Chief Aviation Boatswain's Mate Handler (AW/SW) Jerry Pryuer. "Once you've enrolled there are two different ways to log hours, online or by paper. Each program varies in hours needed to be completed. Senior service members are even given pre-registered credits because of their years in service. 90% of the Navy's rates have a program; "A" schools that give NEC's upon graduation may not give one unfortunately."

Completing an apprenticeship has many benefits. Sailors get documented proof of work experience and registered apprentices are often sought out by the Department of Labor. The program is free and requires no off duty hours.

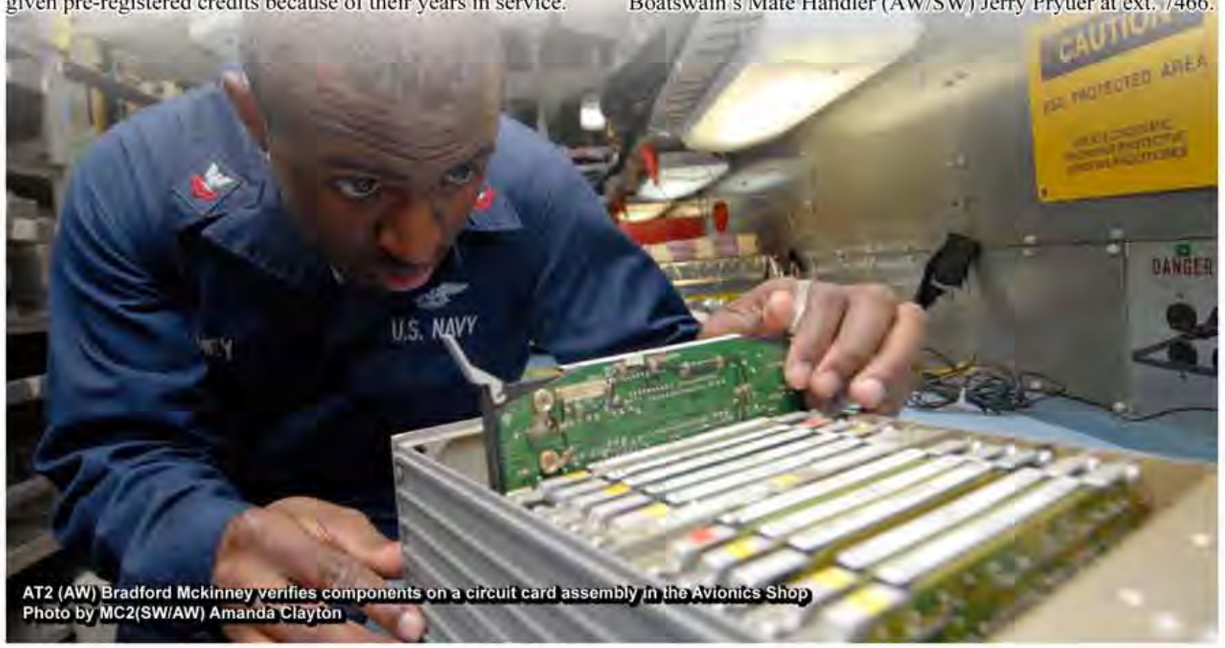
"I push USMAP as much as I can. It's an under utilized program that helps a Sailor when they get out of the Navy," said Gibbs. "A Sailor can get a degree but it can't help them get the job and money like the certification can."

After the required hours are logged in, a printout will be routed through the chain of command to be verified, signed and then mailed off.

"If you want to enroll, I recommend going through the command USMAP coordinators. They will help you keep up with the hours and be a good point of contact if you should have questions," said Gibbs.

Sailors are personally responsible for tracking their hours on the USMAP website. If someone goes more than a year without logging in, their account will be suspended.

For more information about USMAP visit https://usmap.cnet.navy.mil/usmapss/static/usmap.jsp or contact Chief Aviation Boatswain's Mate Handler (AW/SW) Jerry Pryuer at ext. 7466.



AT2 (AW) Bradford Mckinney verifies components on a circuit card assembly in the Avionics Shop
Photo by MC2(SW/AW) Amanda Clayton



# Nassau's haunted passageway a scream

**By MC3(SW) Jonathan Pankau**
**USS Nassau Public Affairs**

USS Nassau (LHA 4) celebrated Halloween Saturday with a Haunted Passageway event put together by Sailors and Marines.

Nassau is currently underway for the Composite Unit Training Exercise (COMPTUEX), a necessary requirement for the Nassau Amphibious Ready Group (NAS ARG) to make their scheduled deployment next year. The Haunted Passageway event was an opportunity for the whole ship to celebrate Halloween, even though the ship is not in port.

"The event was a great example of Sailors and Marines working together towards a common goal, which was to increase ships morale on Halloween," said Ensign Marie Cadice, Haunted Passageway coordinator.

Volunteers gathered on Halloween morning in the command passageway, usually reserved for officers and chiefs, and spent eight hours setting up the event. Lance Cpl. Jacob Moog said that it was an all day evolution, but the end result was worth it.

"The Haunted Passageway was very creative," said Information Systems Technician 1st Class (SW) Melisa Hickenbottom. "They did a lot with very little time or materials and I was impressed by the quality outcome."

Information Systems Technician 1st Class (SW) Reva Stout added that she felt like a grown woman standing in line to enter the passageway, but she left feeling like a kid again.

"I was not expecting to be scared at all," said Stout. "I probably screamed the loudest out of anyone."

Cadice said everyone helped until the end and saw it through; adding that the effort put into it was the vital key to the event's success.

"I am grateful to everyone, but Senior Chief Radke deserves a special shout out for his efforts doing the makeup for the actors, the supplies medical department donated, and the time he took from his busy schedule to help with the event," Cadice said.

Senior Chief Hospital Corpsman (SW/AW/FMF) Scott Radke said escaping from the vigorous training schedule of COMPTUEX was a relief for him.

"It was fun tapping into the primal fears of everyone and watching them let out their stress through activity," Radke said.

Some of the Marines and Sailors aboard Nassau are not used to being on ships for long periods of time and finding things to occupy their time is a challenge after working hours. Lance Cpl. Jerry Thayil commented that the Haunted Passageway helped him deal with the distance between him and his family.

"It's good to have different options to occupy your time during the underway to take your mind off of everything and have fun," Lance Cpl. Christopher Tuttle said. "This underway gave me a small taste of what deployment is going to be like and I feel better now that I've seen everyone working together to improve the ship's morale. With events like the Haunted Passageway, staying motivated and completing our mission will be much easier."

Lt. Cmdr. Michelle Layne and IT1 (SW/AW) Melissa Rivera jump back in fright from the zombie hiding in a box during Nassau's Haunted P-way.
Photo by MCSN Jonathan Pankau