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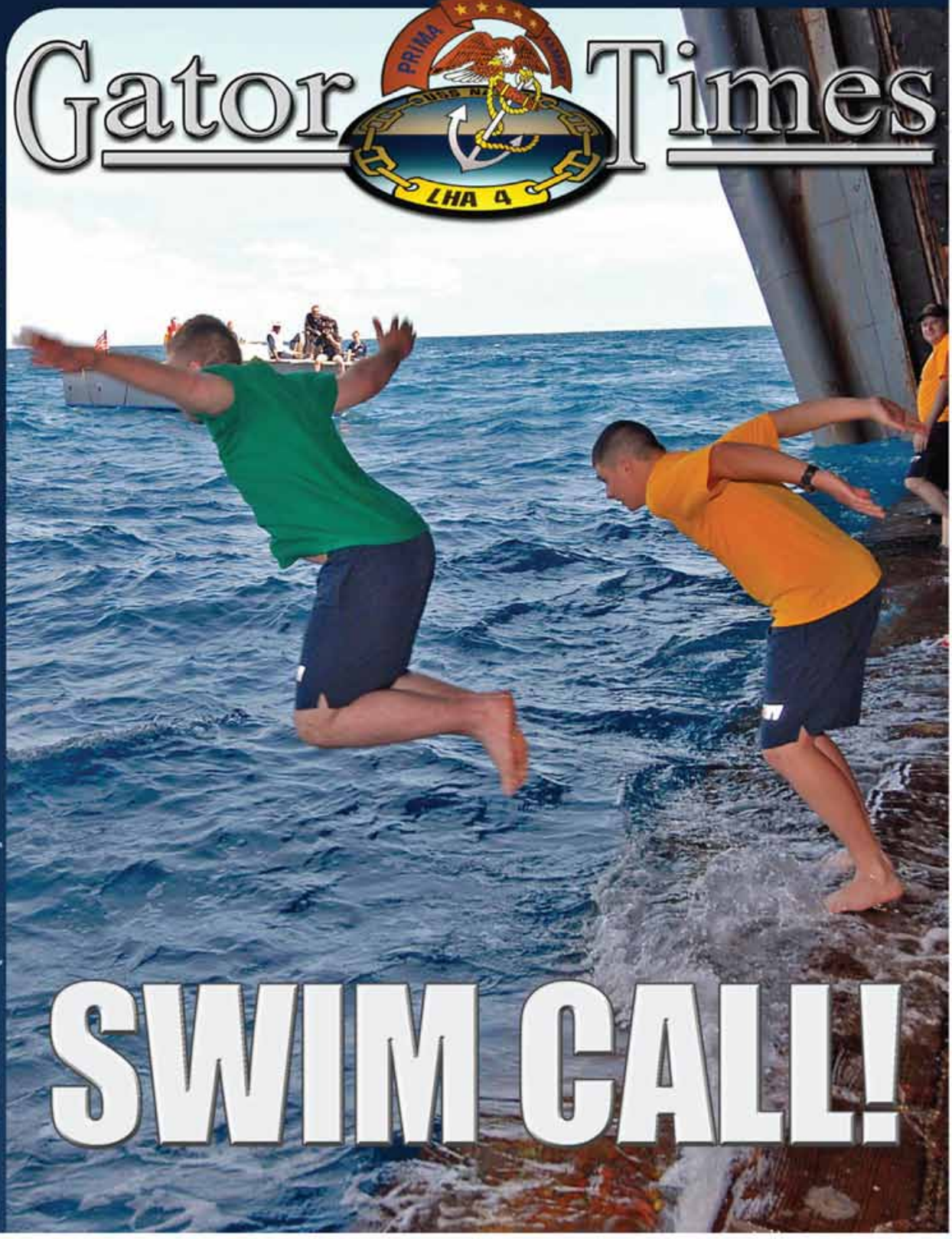
Gator Times

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



SWIM CALL!

Gator Times

30 years LHA 4

Contents

FEATURES

3 Nassau welcomes new Chiefs

4 Friends & family have fun aboard Nassau

5-6 Friends & family day

7 Nassau Sailors take a dip

8 Health fair

9 Nassau & COMREL a success in New Jersey

10 Liberty with a purpose

DEPARTMENTS

2 Captain's Call
CMC Corner

11 Command Achievements

On the Cover:
Nassau Sailors get a chance to take part in a rare but well deserved swim call.
Photo by MCSN Chris Williamson

GatorTimes

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Captain's Call

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

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

Nassau's port visit to Earle, N.J. was highly successful. Community relations projects, "liberty with a purpose," and an outstanding effort by Weapons Department combine to keep Nassau's standard of excellence at it's peak. The community relations projects organized by the chaplains sent a positive message to the residents of Highlands, N.J., all of whom now have a revamped baseball diamond, skate park, and community center. Sailors on liberty also had a positive impact on New Jersey and New York.

Weapons Department deserves a special mention. Not only did they finish the ammunitions on load expeditiously, enabling us to leave port two days early, but they did so safely as well. When you have the opportunity, congratulate those Top Gator Aviation Ordnancemen and Gunner's Mates walking around the ship. They deserve it!

COMPTUEX is our next objective and I am fully confident that we can efficiently complete this exercise. COMPTUEX, or the Comprehensive Training Unit Exercise, is an integrated at sea event focusing on strike group staff and warfare commander integration, bringing all of the elements of Nassau Amphibious Readiness Group together. This exercise is assessed to see how well we can perform as one combat team. This event is followed by a CERTEX for the US Marine Corps Special Operations Training Group, which must also be completed to certify the Marine Expeditionary Unit.

Until next time Top Gator, remember to motivate yourself and those around you!

CMC Corner

Nassau Family and Friends,

It's been a busy month so far, beginning with a very successful Friends and Family Day. The event drew a large crowd and included our friends from the Richmond Chapter of the Navy League and from the Veterans of Foreign Wars. As usual, Nassau's Sailors and Marines impressed everyone with their pride and professionalism.

Our next event was a trip to Naval Weapons Station Earle, N.J., a port visit which Nassau used as a practice run for port visits during our upcoming deployment.

Called Liberty with a Purpose, the program included community relations projects and other events designed to provide both worthwhile liberty for the crew and leave a lasting impact on the community. Nassau Sailors spent two days in Highland, N.J., painting over graffiti at the town's skate park, repairing and painting picnic tables and expertly landscaping the community center.

Many Sailors enjoyed trips to New York City. It was a year since our last visit, when we visited Manhattan to celebrate the Great White Fleet Centennial. Once again New Yorkers welcomed us with open arms. I heard numerous stories from our Sailors about the hospitality they enjoyed, including free meals and shows all around town.

Nassau Sailors made an appearance at NBC's Today Show on Oct. 13 to celebrate the Navy's Birthday, and also visited our friends at New York Fire Department Engine Company 235/ Battalion 56 in Brooklyn.

I'd like to welcome our new Family Readiness Group President Melissa Mosher and Vice President Danielle Whitacre to the Nassau Family Support team. I encourage family members to attend the group's next meeting on Tuesday, Nov. 3 at 6:45 p.m. at the Armed Services YMCA, 1465 Lakeside Road in Virginia Beach.

Until next issue, thanks and God bless.

Nassau Welcomes New Chief Petty Officers

By MC3 Jonathan Pankau
USS Nassau Public Affairs

USS Nassau (LHA 4) Sailors were greeted by 11 Chief Petty Officer selectees and one Gunnery Sergeant in formation singing 'Anchors Aweigh' as they marched into the hangar bay Sept. 16.

"When you join the Navy, the one goal that you work so hard for is to make Chief," said Chief Hospital Corpsman (SW/AW) Tara Geuy. "The moment I was inducted was indescribable and will be a moment that I will never forget."

Nassau's Command Master Chief (AW/SW) Stan Kopiczak offered words of advice and the expectations that come with the anchors of a Chief Petty Officer.

"As the Chief, each of you will have additional responsibilities and you will be entrusted with more than you have ever been in your career. Along with these responsibilities will also be expectations," said Kopiczak. "Expectations from the commanding officer, the executive officer, departments and your divisions. But there is a group of people that will expect more from you than all of us combined, and that group is your Sailors."

During the ceremonial pinning and cover placement, the new Chiefs chose two people to pin their anchors in place and their sponsor placed the cover on their head. Chief Mass Communication Specialist (SW) Mary Popejoy chose Personnel Specialist 1st Class (SW/AW) Rhonda Payne.

"I admire Chief Popejoy and was happy to pin one of her anchors on today," said Payne. "I got really emotional when I was up there because it was a happy moment for her that I hope to experience in the near future."

After the announcement of the Chief Petty Officer selections Aug. 1, the selectees participated in a six-week long induction process.

"The process really underlined the term 'take care of your Sailors,'" said Chief Operations Specialist (SW/AW) Antwan Lewis. "This was something I always believed in but it was intensified throughout the induction, along with being the best leader and mentor that I could possibly be."

This induction was a rare one because Gunnery Sergeant Michael Van Horn participated in this year's induction, to become an honorary Chief Petty Officer.

"Many of you have already noticed we have one Marine within the ranks of our new Chief Petty Officers. Although not a Chief, the Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy grants authorization to any sister service Chief Petty Officer equivalents serving with the Navy the opportunity to go through induction with our Chief selectees," said Kopiczak. "In turn this allows them the experience and to better understand the true meaning of what being the Chief is all about."

Since the establishment of the rank in 1893, select Sailors over the years have had the privilege of being part of an induction ceremony that is part of a naval tradition.

"Chiefs, this is the happiest day of your career," said Kopiczak. "Enjoy it, because tomorrow the hard work starts. You will be the chief, the person with all the answers."

The Chief Petty Officer selectees and one Gunnery Sergeant march into the hangar bay at the beginning of the pinning ceremony.
Photo by MCSN Chris Williamson

Friends and Family Have Fun Aboard Nassau

By MC3 Jonathan Pankau
USS Nassau Public Affairs

Friends and family members of USS Nassau (LHA 4) Sailors came aboard Saturday for Family Day.

Each of the 250 guests had their picture taken with their Sailor when they crossed the quarterdeck. They then toured the ship and enjoyed several different static displays and demonstrations. Nassau's Damage Controlmen allowed the visitors to get their hands on a live fire hose in the ship's well deck.

"I really like the foc'sle and how clean and bright it looks," said Portia Christian, wife of Chief Boatswain's Mate (SW) Donald Christian. "My husband takes pride in his job and I like to see all the Boatswain's Mates have accomplished."

Family Day had a special event in store for the guests. An MH-60S Knighthawk from the "Dragonwhales" of Helicopter Combat Squadron 28 landed on Nassau's flight deck in port with the aid of the ships own Aviation Boatswain's Mate Handlers.

"Nothing feels better than to do my job and see everyone's family clapping and cheering for me," said Aviation Boatswain's Mate 3rd Class (AW) John Zapata, the Landing Signal Enlisted who directed the landing of the helicopter.

"We enjoy being able to visit my husband's work," said Jennifer Barnhart, the wife of Master-At-Arms 1st Class (SW/AW) Melvin Barnhart. "Our kids love daddy's office."

The Top Gator Bistro barbecued chicken and ribs and prepared other culinary delights for the steel beach picnic in the hangar bay, where everyone came after touring the ship to rest and enjoy the food.

"Family Day is an opportunity not only to have fun, but also for our guests to learn more about what their family members or friends do on a daily basis," said CMDCM (AW/SW) Stan Kopiczak. "While Nassau's on deployment, it is important for our supporters back home to be able to speak intelligently about what their Sailor does for their country. This increases awareness and support for the United States Navy."

Members of the Richmond Chapter of The Navy League stayed aboard Friday night and were able to enjoy Family Day on Saturday. Kopiczak spoke with the Navy League guests, and they told him that they really enjoyed the professionalism of the crew and their willingness to show them around the ship.

"The Navy League is a strong supporter of Nassau, donating around $3,000 for different functions sponsored by the ship. They've been supporting us for seven years," Kopiczak said.

Lt. Cmdr. David Michalak, the officer in charge of planning the Family Day, began planning for it late September. Despite only having two weeks to set up for the event, Michalak said he felt that Family Day was a success.

"I feel that more events like these should be scheduled, especially before big underways," Michalak said. "The look of enjoyment on the guests' faces motivates the crew and reminds Sailors that we see Nassau everyday, but our friends and families do not. What we do amazes civilians. Their sense of pride in their Sailors and our country is expressed in the excitement in their eyes."

Damage Controlmen give a fire hose demonstration in the well decks.
Photo by MCSN Chris Williamson

USS NASSAU

FAMILY DAY

OCTOBER 10TH

2009

FAMILY DAY 09

Nassau Sailors take a dip

By MCSN Chris Williamson
USS Nassau Public Affairs

Sailors aboard USS Nassau (LHA 4) enjoyed some well-deserved leisure time during a swim call and steel beach picnic in the Atlantic Ocean Saturday.

Nassau departed Norfolk Sept. 15 on a regularly scheduled underway to conduct the Quadrennial Defense Review.

During the underway, approximately 130 Sailors took part in a swim call, and for some, it was the opportunity of a lifetime. Jumping first into the water was Nassau's Executive Officer, Cmdr. David Stracener, who was welcomed by a gauntlet of Sailors in the well deck.

"In my 20 years of being in the Navy, this was my first time ever," said Stracener. "Not many people get to do these in their career. It provided the crew with an opportunity to enjoy themselves at sea and I believe it was a great success."

After Stracener dove in, he welcomed everyone to jump in with him. One of those swimmers was Aviation Boatswain's Mate Handling Airman Kalli McCrary.

"This is something I had to experience in my Navy career," said McCrary. "I worked all night and stayed up all day just to be able to jump in the ocean. Who else in the world gets to do this?"

Also enjoying the unique occasion was Nassau's Command Master Chief (AW/SW) Stanley Kopiczak.

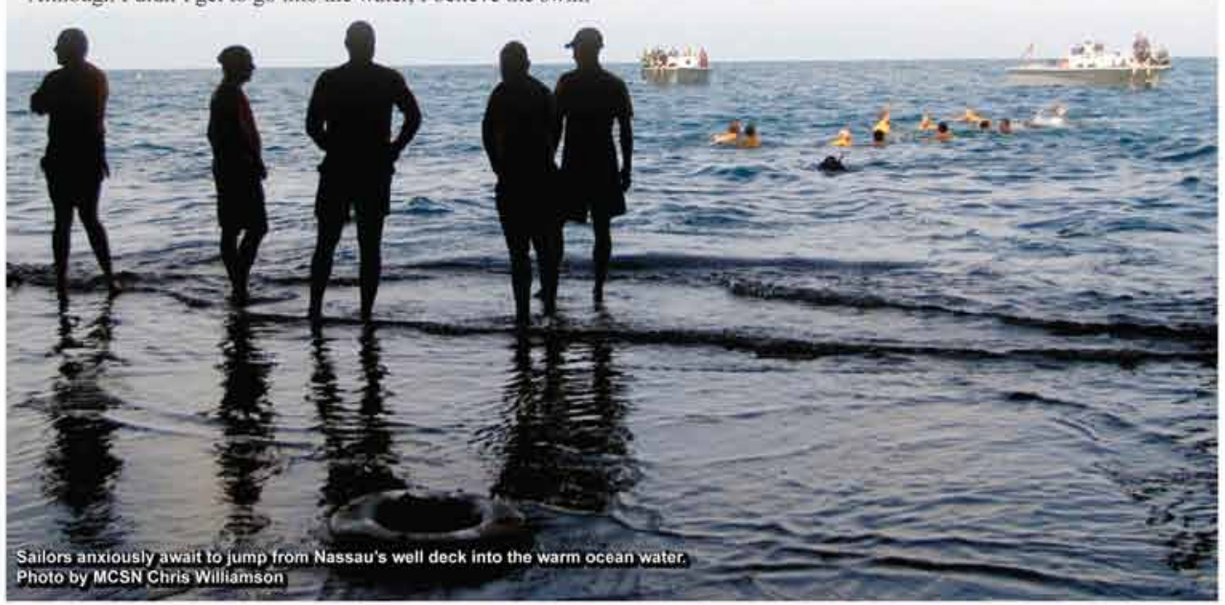
"Although I didn't get to go into the water, I believe the swim call was still a great Morale, Welfare and Recreation event," said Kopiczak. "It's been a tradition since the Navy's inception, and will continue to be a success for years to come."

Safety observers, small boats with shark watch personnel and Search and Rescue (SAR) swimmers were also there to provide safety procedures and rescue assistance, said Aviation Ordnanceman 3rd Class Jonathan Flemming.

"Even though the people in and out of the water were listening and following our safety directions, we still had to rescue some sailors due to the strong current," said Flemming, one of the certified SAR swimmers aboard Nassau. "Other than that, everyone had a good time and things went smoothly."

Following swim call, crewmembers lined up for hamburgers, hot dogs, wings and all the fixings during a steel beach picnic on the hangar bay. The crew also enjoyed an afternoon in the hangar bay filled with music, basketball and the 'American Gladiator' event of joust.

"These events create lasting memories," said Culinary Specialist 3rd Class Nicholas Roby, who participated in the swim call. "Doing the same thing over and over again at work tends to get tedious. I'm glad everyone, including myself, got to take time out of their busy schedules to do this once in a lifetime event."



Sailors anxiously await to jump from Nassau's well deck into the warm ocean water.
Photo by MCSN Chris Williamson

Health Fair aboard USS Nassau (LHA 4)

By MC2(SW) Amanda Clayton
USS Nassau Public Affairs

The USS Nassau (LHA 4) Medical Department hosted a health fair Sept. 30 to encourage healthy lifestyles among the ship's Sailors.

"We want to promote health and wellness and give information to our Sailors about where they can go to find resources and programs that can help them if they need it," said Hospital Corpsman 1st Class (SW/AW) Jennifer Tillard.

Displays and experts were on hand in Nassau's hangar bay to inform Sailors on tobacco cessation, shipboard safety, healthy eating, and the dangers of binge drinking.

"This is a good fair to have aboard because it promotes healthy lifestyles to better the well being of our Sailors, making them happier and more productive," said Nassau Command Chaplain Cmdr. William Stallard.

"With operational commitments Sailors don't realize they aren't living as healthy as they could be," said Tillard. "This fair informs them about the types of food that increase high cholesterol and the effects of tobacco on the body."

Tillard said the health fair is done every year and requires participation from a variety groups.

"The good thing about this fair is that there is so much diversity," said Nancy VonTesch, health fair coordinator from Preventive Medicine Unit 2. "You see junior enlisted Sailors, Chiefs and Officers who come to the ships to inform Sailor's throughout the fleet about the dangers of unhealthy lifestyles. Once I get the request from a ship that they want us to come aboard I call all of my contacts and set up an ideal date."

Many Sailors who attended the fair learned something new.

"This fair taught me things I didn't know before," said Aviation Ordnanceman Airman Cedric Nole. "I would have to say the stand that showed me how much fat was in the different kinds of food was my favorite. It definitely made me more conscious of what I'm going to eat from now on."

LS3 Rohane Hendrickson, LS2 Adam Baxter and IS1 Charles Clark look at the amount of fats in food.
Photo by MC3(SW) Amanda Clayton

Nassau & COMREL a success in New Jersey

By MC2(SW) Michael Cortez
USS Nassau Public Affairs

ABH3 Efaund Hill Jr. paints the roof of a baseball dugout.
Photo by MC3 Jonathan Pankau

HT1 Roberto Diesta cuts vines off of a fence.
Photo by MC2(SW) Michael Cortez

Volunteers from USS Nassau (LHA 4) pulled together to clean up two recreational areas in the Borough of Highlands, N.J. Oct. 13 & 14.

"Community relations projects (COMRELS) are the Navy's way of helping people and communities throughout the world," said Nassau's Command Chaplain Cmdr. Dan Stallard. "These volunteer projects build crew morale by doing good and helping others."

The first day, 37 Sailors visited the Kavookjian War Memorial Baseball Field. The Sailors split up into groups for cleaning, landscaping, and painting. One group built an entirely new set of bleachers, giving the park a new look and feel. Capt. Ronald Reis, the commanding officer of USS Nassau, offered his time as well to help out with the day's important event.

"Working together gets the job done a lot easier and faster," said Operations Specialist Seaman Apprentice Joseph Guilas. "We always work together. One team, one fight."

The next day Sailors went to the Robert D. Wilson Memorial Community Center, a multi-purpose facility that provides recreational, social, educational and other human service programs to the community. Thirty Nassau volunteers split up again and in one day they completed a project that would have taken the Public Works Department close to a week. The Sailors did landscaping, rebuilt picnic benches, and even painted all the ramps on an entire skate park.

Wayne O'Neil from Highlands' Public Works Department greeted the Sailors and thanked them in advance for devoting their time.

ABH1 Tyrone Powell and OSSN Joshua Cotto paints a skate park ramp.
Photo by MC2(SW) Cortez

"Liberty With A Purpose"

Today show correspondent Ann Curry speaks with Sailors from USS Nassau (LHA 4) in Rockefeller Center during a commercial break.
Photo by MC2(SW) Michael Cortez

A fire truck depicting a painting of a fire fighter raising a flag after 9/11 sits in the garage at Engine Company 10 next to Ground Zero in New York.
Photo by MC1 James Stilipec

YNSN William Hugg gets a view of the city below from the observation deck of the Empire State Building.
Photo by MC2(SW) Cortez