

Ike Enters the Void

By Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Nathan T. Beard, USS Dwight D. Eisenhower (CVN 69) Public Affairs

A flashlight shines into the dark, as the sound of boots hitting the deckplate echo throughout the void. Faint sounds of the ship can be heard above. The smell of rust and stale air fills the nostrils as light flicks from corner to corner checking for damage or rust. Time seems to slow until a voice calls out asking if everything is ok. Another yells back "Everything is ok down here!" Then a realization sets in, they are in a 40-foot-deep, pitch-black abyss. This is just a portion of what the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower's (CVN 69) (Ike) tank and void team experience every day.

The team is made up of seven Sailors from Air, Reactor, and Engineering departments whose sole job, day in and day out, is to inspect every tank and void on Ike and file reports on their inspections.

"The whole purpose of the tank and void team is to go into the spaces that no one really knows exist, and no one ever goes into to; to inspect and see how these voids and tanks are holding up," said Chief Warrant Officer Richard Armstrong, Ike's Fire Marshal.

During Ike's Planned Incremental Availability (PIA) period, these Sailors, mostly unseen by the crew, play a critical role in maintaining the ship's operability and mission readiness.

"We inspect the tanks and voids for holes, damages, corrosion and rust that we may not have known about beforehand," said Aviation Boatswain's Mate (Fuels) 3rd Class Victoria Leos, a tank and void inspector. "What we find we log into a report and file it to the contractors who will then verify our findings and commence repairs."

Their working environment takes them everywhere aboard Ike, from the third level down to the eighth deck.

"Voids and tanks can be found all over the ship," said Machinist's Mate (Nuclear) 3rd Class Brian Carney, a tank and void inspector. "They can be found in the ship's brig, beneath living spaces, under the flight deck and below heads; any space can have a tank and void."

Inspecting the spaces can be dangerous with corrosion, rusted areas and even toxic gases.

"There is an honest chance of injury with every tank we go into," said Carney. "Some tanks have ladders to get into the spaces and some have hand grips that you use to climb into, so falling is a big risk. Some of these spaces haven't been opened in years so built up gases or toxins are a risk, which is why we have the gas-free engineers check the areas first."

Because of this, safety is a major daily focus for the tank and void team. No Sailor proceeds in these inspections alone.

“Any time there is someone inside a tank or void, I sit at the entrance and call out to them several times while they are in there, to ensure they are coherent and are not hurt during their inspection,” said Airman Herman Samples, a tank and void safety observer. “If something were to happen to the Sailors during their inspection, I would contact medical and tell them where the tank is, what is wrong with the person, and once they understand where the injury is, I would go back to the tank to keep communication with the Sailor until the medical personnel arrive.”

The team was given the deadline of having 90 percent of the tanks and voids inspected and reported on prior to exiting Norfolk Naval Shipyard in Portsmouth, Virginia.

“We have now officially met and exceeded that 90 percent and inspected every tank that we are required to,” said Armstrong.

With all of the tanks and voids being completed by the team, all that’s left is closing out the spaces and helping the ship with other repairs.

“I wouldn’t trade this tank and void team for anything,” said Armstrong. “Commander, Naval Air Force Atlantic has come aboard and stated that this team has set the standard for all aircraft carriers with how fast they are getting the inspections done.”