Squadrons of the Night

Story by Mc3 Grant G. Grady

The howl of jet engines echoes across the darkened decks of the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS John C. Stennis (CVN 74). The aroma of JP-5 jet fuel permeates inside the skin of the ship. While most of the crew nestles in their racks, the night shift has taken the watch. Thump after thump reverberates across the bulkheads as flight deck personnel and pilots orchestrate night flight operations. Beneath the growl of the aircraft, the hangar bay begins to buzz with clicks and clacks from metal-to-metal contact. Sailors work with tools in hand under the radiance of orange lights as they prepare aircraft for flight. Their efforts allow John C. Stennis and Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 9 to conduct their mission during the day.

Upper left photo: Sailors prepare an MH-60R Knight Hawk, with Helicopter Maritime Strike Squadron (HSM) 71, for overnight storage on the flight deck aboard the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS John C. Stennis (CVN 74) (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Joshua L. Leonard)

Page 5 photos : Aviation Structural Mechanic 3rd Class Justin Blasavage, from Litchfield, Connecticut, sands a tail fin on an F/A-18E Super Hornet, with Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 14, in the hangar bay aboard John C. Stennis. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Grant G. Grady)

An aircraft carrier at sea requires work around-the-clock, especially on the aircraft. As the day ends for the majority of the squadrons of CVW 9, the night shift goes to work.

"The ship needs to have people working 24 hours a day," said Aviation Electronics Technician 3rd Class Payton Wells, who works the night shift for Electronic Attack Squadron (VAQ) 133. "One shift focuses on flight operations, and the other focuses on upkeeping the aircraft."

"The night shift is just as important as the day shift. It makes sense that we focus on maintenance. With less people around at night, we can move about freely to conduct our maintenance to help keep the operation running during the day."

The night shift mostly concentrates its efforts on maintaining aircraft. They turn wrenches and screws, so the aircraft are mission ready for flight operations during the day.

"We work on avionic reconfiguration, transmitter swaps, communications, and the overall upkeep of the aircraft," said Wells. "Without us, the aircraft would not be ready for flight."

While some on the night shift focus on the interior systems of the aircraft, others work through the night to maintain the exterior.

"We paint the jets and treat them for corrosion," said Aviation Structural Mechanic 3rd Class Justin Blasavage, who works the night shift for Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 14. "Our job is to make the aircraft look good and operationally ready."

The night shift expertise expands beyond maintenance in the hangar bay. If night flight operations are scheduled, the squadrons' night shifts work above deck.

"If we do night flight operations then everything switches," said Wells. "Days takes over the maintenance, and we make the flight operations happen." Neither the day shift or night shift for any of the squadrons is more essential than the other, but together they operate as an integrated team keeping John C. Stennis and CVW 9 ready for any mission.

"The night shift is just as important as the day shift," said Blasavage. "It makes sense that we focus on maintenance. With less people around at night, we can move about freely to conduct our maintenance to help keep the operation running during the day." After a long night's work, reveille sounds, the sun rises, and the squadrons' night crew gets a rest.

WHAT DO THEY MEAN???

The Jerseys of the Flight Deck

GREEN

CATAPULT
ARRESTING GEAR PERSONNEL
SQUADRONS AIRCRAFT MAINTENANCE
HELICOPTER LANDING SIGNAL ENLISTED
PHOTOGRAPHERS

RED

CRASH AND SALVAGE
EOD
ORDNANCE
HANDLING PERSONNEL

BROWN

PLANE CAPTAINS

YELLOW

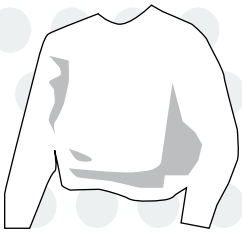
AIRCRAFT HANDLING OFFICER
DECK OFFICER
CAT OFFICER
AIR BOS'N
ARRESTING GEAR OFFICER
PLANE DIRECTOR

PURPLE

AVIATION FUEL CREW

BLUE

AIRCRAFT HANDLING
CHOCK CREWMAN
ELEVATOR OPERATOR



WHITE

SAFETY DEPT
ATO
LSO
SQUADRON PLANE INSPECTORS
MEDICAL