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Change of Command



Special Edition Our Strongest Issue Yet

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A special thank you to all those who let us tell your stories to the crew and to the fleet.

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SAYING FAREWELL TO CAPT. STRONG

Story by MCSN Dakota Nack

On September 5, 2019, Capt. Kenneth A. Strong became the 14th commanding officer of the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS George Washington (CVN 73). When Strong assumed the role and responsibilities as commanding officer of George Washington, the ship was entering the second half of Refueling and Complex Overhaul (RCOH), a multi-year project performed only once during a carrier's 50-year service life that includes refueling the ship's two nuclear reactors, as well as significant repairs, upgrades, and modernization.

This was not Strong's first time serving aboard the ship. In September of 2014, Strong reported as the executive officer of George Washington, while the ship was in a vastly different operating environment. During Strong's time as executive officer, George Washington was the Navy's forward deployed aircraft carrier in U.S. 7th Fleet. Strong led the crew through two



Strong is acutely cognizant of the difficult atmosphere of RCOH. Sailors aboard George Washington are tasked with arduous endeavors like restoring entire spaces, working out of rate, and coordinating with off-ship entities, but all of it has a purpose. That purpose is to build the Spirit of Freedom and return the ship to the fleet as the world's premier operational nuclear-powered aircraft carrier overseeing an area

deployment patrol cycles, two crew swaps, an "Around the Horn" deployment, and a homeport shift from Japan to Norfolk.

"When they tear your ship apart, don't let them tear down your culture, too."
- Capt. Strong

of operations that spans more than 124 million square kilometers.

Strong realizes the challenges many Sailors are faced with. Due to RCOH and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the pattern and quality of life was interrupted for many Sailors.

"This availability is so long; so many first tour Sailors have never taken a ship underway," Strong said. "Learning the rates, learning what it means to own a ship, the responsibilities,

juggling production, finishing the availability work and then assuming the role of sustaining the readiness; the cleanliness, the operational capability of ownership is not easy for a first [tour of duty]. It is also not easy working out of rate."

Since Strong took the helm, George Washington has achieved some considerable milestones. Some of the notable accomplishments achieved during Strong's time as commanding officer include: exiting the dry dock and mooring to the pier, lighting the island, restoring air conditioning, bringing the Consolidated Afloat Networks and Enterprise Services (CANES) system online, rebuilding and reinstalling the catapult, installing the Rolling Airframe Missile (RAM) system, opening the barber shop, coffee shop, and ship store, restoring ship's laundry, reestablishing functional galleys, crew mess, Chief's Mess, and Wardroom, restoring medical and dental onboard, bringing Shipboard Information Training and Entertainment (SITE TV) online, and many other milestones to get George Washington closer to being an operational warship.

Strong is elated with how Sailors from all 20 departments were able to work together to help build the ship.

"Sailors make it look easy, and there's nothing easy about it," says Strong. "There is a lot of sacrifice, there is a lot of pain, we all took

a lot of risk and we worked in a difficult environment; we still do. But we got it done together."

Strong acknowledges George Washington has more work that must be completed before the ship will be able to get back to sea, but during his time as commanding officer, his favorite thing to

"Sailors make it look easy, and there's nothing easy about it."

-Capt. Strong

witness was the growth and unity of the Sailors working aboard. It has been a great satisfaction for Strong to watch the ship come together. The ship is better, materially and culturally, than when he arrived.

"Seeing our culture change, how we respond to casualties and how we deal with day to day issues, managing people and the things that pop up, we look and sound like an operational crew," says Strong. "It is awesome to see. When they tear your ship apart, don't let them tear down your culture, too."

Strong believes one of the contributing factors to the crew's success is their vision. It is hard to have that vision when a solid

portion of Sailors do not know how an operational carrier looks and sounds. Achieving the smaller accomplishments along the way has helped perpetuate a vision that there is a finish line that will be crossed.

Strong acknowledges that the Navy is certainly a difficult career.

It is inevitable that there will be rough times. There will also be wonderfully fun times. Strong has spent over 29 years in the Navy and there were many moments throughout where he thought about doing other things. Strong believes those thoughts are healthy and proper.

"Follow your bliss, your dreams, goals and desires," says Strong. "It is important for the individual and for

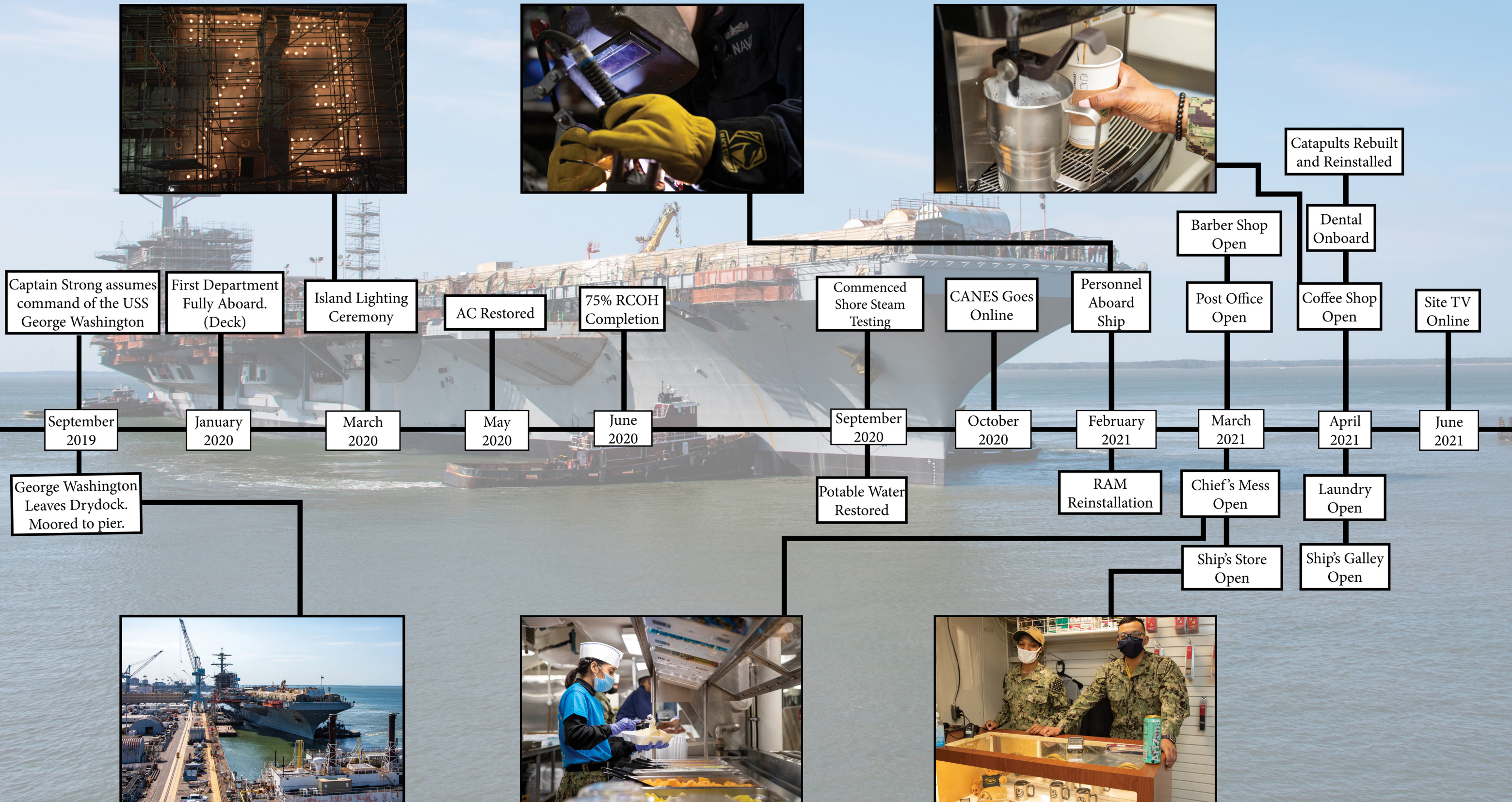
the family, too. This profession does take a toll on families. Follow your bliss and open your heart."

One gift the Navy has given to Strong was his love for flying. He has flown in at least 17 different aircraft platforms. Despite the fact that it is an Army helicopter, Strong has an affinity for the OH-6 Littlebird because of its agility. However, Strong also loves flying the F/A-18 and the MH-60R. Hopefully soon, he can get back to getting some regular flight hours.

Thank you so much for everything you have done, Capt. Strong. Fair winds and following seas.

Timeline of Achievement

Graphic by MCSN Joshua Cabal





GET TO KNOW THE NEW CO CAPT. GAUT

Interview by MC3 Robert Stamer

Where do you hail from?

I was born in Stockton, California. When I was nine years old, my family moved to Hawaii. It's an incredible experience for a young person, but I took it for granted. I didn't realize that living there was unlike any other place. When I was 14, I moved to Dana Point, California and attended Dana Hills High School.

Why did you join the Navy? Why did you choose the Naval Academy?

There are two significant events that shaped my desire to be in the Navy and to pursue becoming a Naval Aviator. The first: there was a gentleman that worked at my high school as a groundskeeper. Everybody called him "Chief" because he had been a Chief Petty Officer in the Navy. When I was fourteen years old, he said to me that I was exactly the type of young person that the Navy needs. He was a mentor to me in high school and that got me thinking about it. The second thing was the movie Top Gun came out when I was a freshman in high school. Seeing how cool those guys looked in the movie, flying jets and being aviators, got me interested in pursuing this career.

Is there any history of military service in your family? Did anyone inspire you to join?

In addition to my high school mentor, my uncle was an aircrewman. He flew in P3s and has been an inspiration for me. He continues to be a mentor of mine, even today. He is very proud of what I've done. I am proud of him for his service, and grateful for his influence on my life.

How do you maintain a healthy work/life balance?

It is challenging. We talk about it a lot in our business, but we don't do a good job of adhering to that mindset of having a good work/life balance. My wife helps me remember the importance of setting work aside, when able, and focusing on my family. I know there are precious moments missed with my family that I won't get back, so I need to, and more importantly want to, focus on spending time with them. Having been in the Navy for 28 years, work is always going to be there, so you have to really fight to preserve and maintain the time you have with your family and friends.

Was there a specific command where you learned the most about leadership?

A couple commands come to mind. I've been blessed to have had command twice at the O-5 level, and then in major command. I was the executive officer for Capt. Kenneth Strong while he was the commanding officer of Helicopter Maritime Strike Squadron (HSM) 77. I learned a lot, and he taught me a great deal about leadership, about having a high standard, and about expectations in command; not just expecting the best from the people you are blessed to work with, but also from myself. I got to observe what I consider not just a great friend, but a great professional.

Aboard the USS San Antonio (LPD 17), not only was it a blessing to command that ship, but it was very challenging to go through a very difficult phase of the ship's life through the completion of a yard period, then jumping into basic phase, advanced phase, and the final preps for the deployment that warship is on right now.



What have been some of your proudest career accomplishments?

The proudest accomplishment or feeling that I have is the relationships that I have developed throughout my 28 years in the Navy. I think that we, as a country, have the greatest ships, aircraft, submarines, and technology in the world. But this is, and will ALWAYS be, a people business. It really comes down to the people you get to work with. What I love about the Navy is that we have so much diversity. We have so many people who come from different backgrounds and we come together, live together, to accomplish a mission and to do our nation's bidding when our nation needs it. That is what I am most grateful for: the chance to work for and with so many incredible people who want to be part of something bigger than themselves, and truly want to make that sacrifice and commit to our country and the Navy.

What do you uniquely bring to the George Washington as CO?

I think my message is hopefully going to be fairly simple and straight forward. We know that we are in a challenging environment right now. The ship's role in the Navy's future is vital. There is no doubt that our Navy and nation needs this ship to be operational, so that we can go do what the nation needs us to do. But it's not going to get fixed tomorrow. It's a marathon. We have to be patient. We have to be vigilant in staying on course to get the ship back to sea. Understand there are going to be some setbacks, and we just have to be able to adapt to whatever comes our way to get the ship back underway again. The team, our ship, is going to hear a lot of me saying "we", "us", "our", not "I", "me", or "my". *This is not my ship. It is OUR ship. We are a team and a family, so we are going to do this together.* It is going to take every single person we have onboard, working hard every single day, either in a small way, or a potentially big way, depending on the job that's at hand, to make us better.

Are there lessons you have learned that you think will help junior Sailors?

What I've learned is this: It's not so much the destination; it's about the journey. As a younger person, I always used to look for the shortcut. I've found that anything worthwhile has taken time and sacrifice. There are going to be setbacks. It's going to be hard, but at the end of the day, it will be worthwhile.

What do you hope to accomplish while in command of George Washington?

I hope to continue to build the team: a group of people who care about each other, care about our ship, and care about the mission that we are going to be asked to execute. And in the short term, to do everything we can right now to get our ship off of this pier. To get back to getting out to sea on a regular basis, executing sea trials and the basic phase. To prepare her to go and do whatever the nation asks us to do in defense of our nation and our Navy.

