

# LET'S TALK ABOUT TILLY

STORY AND LAYOUT BY MC3 SAMANTHA ALAMAN

The Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Dwight D. Eisenhower (CVN 69) has begun its final steps to return to sea. One of these steps is unloading the crash and salvage crane, "Tilly."

The crane is affectionately nicknamed Tilly due to the tillable movement of her boom. The boom is the outreach of the crane that moves the arm. As Tilly's boom moves up and down, the arm moves it inward and outward.

She returned home to Mighty IKE's flight deck on August 29, 2022, nestled comfortably between the island and the radio tower. Despite the unassuming name, Tilly's purpose is as a last resort to recover salvageable aircraft in the event of a mechanical or flight deck error.

Painted across the left door of her power box, are the names of seven sailors. Three of these sailors from crash and salvage division, Aviation Boatswain's Mate (Handling) (ABH) 3rd Class Connor Schieffer, ABH3 Bryson Torbeck, ABH3 Seth Passmore, are qualified to drive Tilly.

"Without her? We aren't going anywhere," replied Torbeck, when asked about the significance of Tilly. In the absence of Tilly, aircraft aren't allowed aboard the ship and this would inhibit IKE from performing flight operations.

"She's the most important piece of equipment we hope we never have to use," said Schieffer.

Schieffer was first to finish the qualification and completed

the process after being selected to receive the crane operator qualification when he was an airman.

"It's a great feeling to be fully qualified now, I put a lot of effort into learning Tilly, because of how important she is to our job," said Passmore after recently receiving the qualification.

This 133,500-pound machine was offloaded shortly after IKE's 2021 deployment, and sent to V88, which is the only crane yard that does rework maintenance for cranes like Tilly.

The four Aviation Support Equipment Technician (AS) sailors, whose names are proudly displayed upon Tilly, began to execute the necessary steps needed to fix her. AS1 Ryan Cockrell, AS2 Caleb Shealor, AS2 Ning Zhao, and AS3 Rhuan Marques, are the sailors from the command that went to V88 to work, and rework on Tilly.

"We were at the forefront of most of the work," said Shealor. "I was the work center supervisor at V88, and AS1 Cockrell was the guy that myself, and Zhao, and Marques would report to and let him know about our progress from day to day."

After being at V88 for almost a year, the team of AS's were able to get Tilly running smoothly enough to be brought back to IKE. With maintenance complete, it was time to drive.

There is a two man rule in effect when Tilly is being operated. Meaning while she is in use,

two qualified drivers must be present inside her control room. Becoming a qualified operator involves an extensive process.

"It's the highest qualification you can receive as an E-5 or below [in crash and salvage], and the process requires a lot of time and dedication," said the crash and salvage leading petty officer, Aviation Boatswain's Mate (Handling) 1st Class Nicole Gonzalez.

The process of obtaining the crane operator qualification includes a week-long course to receive a ground support equipment license, a personnel qualification standard that takes a minimum of four weeks to complete, and a series of solo lifts where the qualifying member operates the crane without guidance or help to ensure comfortability and knowledge.

"Comfortability is key," said Gonzalez "Tilly, she's ... touchy. She's sensitive.

You have to make sure you know when to hit what switch, and which part of her to move.

I'd say it takes about five lifts to really become comfortable with her; could be more, could be less."

Tilly's return brings our crew one step closer to getting into warfighting shape. Having her up, running, and properly maintained gives IKE the green light to move forward with upcoming evolutions such as unloading aircraft, flight deck certifications, and being all clear to return out to sea.



**"SHE'S THE MOST IMPORTANT PIECE  
OF EQUIPMENT WE HOPE WE NEVER  
HAVE TO USE."**

