



ABRAHAM LINCOLN CARRIER STRIKE GROUP PENNY PRESS

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Controlled chaos

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PACIFIC OCEAN — Flight deck control aboard the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN 72) is the center of all decision-making that tracks and enforces the incredible level of work that takes place on the flight deck each and every day.

The flight deck of an aircraft carrier is controlled chaos, this is safely executed by a delicate balance of machinery, equipment and personnel uniting to work in the most dynamic and dangerous environment on the ship, all to execute the day's air plan with pinpoint precision.

"Flight deck control is the nucleus of the flight deck," said Lt. Julian Molinar, the flight deck officer aboard Abraham Lincoln. "All the planning, communication, visualization and audibles between the aircraft handling officer, the air wing coordinator, fueling and squadron personnel— all audibles during air operations come from flight deck control."

The flight deck officer is responsible for managing all the evolutions on the flight deck to include transporting aircraft, the safety of all personnel and air operations within flight deck control. Flight deck control consists of many different jobs and roles including the aircraft handling officer who is responsible for the safe movement of aircraft on the flight deck, elevator operators, fuel representatives, maintenance coordinators and aviation ordnanceman.

“In flight operations, our job is to execute the day’s air plan as smoothly as possible,” said Molinar. “Between all the aircraft we have on flight deck and in the hangar bay, we have to ensure aircraft are launched and recovered on time to make the mission work.”

The division uses a detailed diagram nicknamed the “Ouija board” inside of flight deck control to maintain order and track aircraft movements and availability throughout a mission. Aircraft elevator operators monitor and update the “Ouija board,” which has an electronic and a manual version that are changed in tandem for safety purposes and continuity.

“It’s a helpful tool to visualize all the moving parts on the flight deck,” said Aviation Boatswain’s Mate (Handling) Airman Nathan Rodriguez, an aircraft elevator operator in flight deck control. “Being able to see the whole picture, from fuel requests to aircraft maintenance, we are able to establish the best course of action with ease.”

While Sailors within flight deck control ensure the mission runs smoothly, they also ensure that the mission is accomplished safely. Launching and recovering aircraft, ordnance on deck and transporting aircraft to and from different parts of the deck can be dangerous, if not deadly when not taken seriously. Additionally, personnel are required to wear personal protective equipment such as cranial helmets that can limit a Sailors vision and hearing, presenting even more challenges for basic tasks, making safety on the flight deck incredibly important. On the flight deck, there are Sailors who wear blue jerseys or “blue-shirts” in charge of chocking, chaining and securing aircraft on the flight deck after they’ve been parked.

“Communication is probably the hardest part of our job,” said Aviation Boatswain’s Mate (Handling) Airman Benjamin McClintock, the “blue-shirt” trainee overseer. “With hearing

protection and all the aircraft on deck the environment is incredibly loud; sometimes you can't talk to someone only 10 feet away from you."

To resolve this, all flight deck personnel are taught to utilize over 40 unique hand signals to communicate nonverbally across the flight deck and wear different colored jerseys to organize different jobs. Some Sailors can earn leading positions and are distinguished by the yellow jersey they wear. These "yellow-shirts" are in charge of directing and parking aircraft and wear a headset that they use to speak with Primary Flight Control (Pri-Fly). Located seven stories above the flight deck, Pri-Fly sees the big picture and can communicate with the yellow-shirt below to instruct Sailors on the flight deck.

During their recent underway, the Abraham Lincoln flight deck crew launched and recovered approximately 320 jets and 35 helicopters in support of crew flight deck certifications and pilot carrier qualifications. What's more, this underway was the first time Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 9 has been embarked on the ship since Abraham Lincoln's SUSTEX exercise in December 2022. This underway provided Abraham Lincoln and CVW-9 the opportunity to reintegrate, train and develop the teamwork necessary to safely and effectively accomplish mission objectives.

"I'm proud of the team that we have onboard and how we all work together," said Molinar. "We're excited for what comes next."