



Wingspan

VOLUME 64

Season's Greetings

THE GIFTS



COVER PHOTO ILLUSTRATION | MC2 ANALICE BAKER



Boxing

Inside the gold eagle boxing club and the impact on mental health this sport has on Sailors.

MC2 CLAIRE BENNETT



Night Flight Operations

We get it - it's dark outside. But how does that affect our flight operations at night?

MC2 ISAIAH GOESSL



A Lottery Worth Living

HM1 Kusi beat the odds in this unlikely story on his journey joining the U.S. Navy.

MCSN AMBER RIVETTE



Captain Rudder, Arriving

It's no secret that Captain Rudder is the goodest boy - but he's also got a special purpose on Vinson.

MCSN AMBER RIVETTE



The Magic of Gathering

You might want to crack open a monster - and not necessarily the drink - for this old card game.

MC3 NATE JORDAN

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A NOTE FROM THE COMMAND CHAPLAIN

'TIS THE HOLIDAY Season

On June 19, 1944, Admiral Chester W. Nimitz said, "Even the finest weapons and the skill to use them, the stamina to keep them in sustained use, are not enough. There must be added to these things a spiritual armament."

This is precisely where the spheres of the warfighter and the chaplain intersect. Every warfighter needs to have a strength of spirit that invigorates through life's darkest moments and propels toward the completion of a mission that is greater than the individual. Without a deep sense of purpose and beliefs worthy of sacrifice, the warfighter will lack the spiritual fuel needed to endure the fight.

Everyone has a spirit that needs to be fed. And so, spiritual readiness is not a hollow platitude. It is a reality that has huge implications not only for an individual's quality of life but also for our effectiveness as a freedom fighting Strike Group. Spiritual readiness is composed largely of the intangibles that we can't touch or see, but that we certainly feel and experience. The fact that the spirit is not material is the reason it is so often neglected and deemed immaterial.

Let us not neglect our spirits. Let us formulate and pursue lofty goals. Let us allow our beliefs to seep into our spirits so that we live as people of conviction. Let us not settle for the mundane but rather embody a purpose greater than ourselves. Let us seek self-improvement not just for our own sake but also for the sake of improving the lives of others and the world in which we live. Let us commit to spiritual readiness.

Our chaplains aboard CVN-70 care about you and your well-being and are always available to assist you on your journey toward spiritual readiness. You can stop by CRMD (2-126-4-L) or the USO (03-118-10-L) or give us a call at 6438/5925 to set up a time to meet.

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Navy Uses First-of-Their Kind Simulators to Train Carrier Air Wings at Sea

Aviators across USS Abraham Lincoln's (CVN 72) carrier air wing have now been trained as a joint fighting force while deployed at sea in advanced simulators, thanks to aviation pros across the Naval Air Systems Command (NAVAIR) enterprise.

The new training capability was made possible through extensive partnership between Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division's (NAWCAD) Joint Simulation Environment (JSE); NAWCAD's Webster Outlying Field (WOLF); the Naval Air Warfare Center Training Systems Division (NAWCTSD); and the Naval Aviation Training Systems and Ranges Program Office, with support from industry partners Boeing, Collins Aerospace and General Dynamics Information Technology.

The system, known as Simulators at Sea, increased readiness for aviators flying the F-35C Lightning II, F/A-18 E/F Super Hornets, EA-18G Growlers and E-2D Hawkeyes attached to Abraham Lincoln's Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 9. It is the first integrated training capability for an air wing to deploy on a Navy carrier.

The training system featured a suite of connected virtual desktop trainers that enables CVW-9 aviators to rehearse missions — including wartime scenarios — together while at sea, an exercise not possible before this program. Historically, joint mission training on this scale was limited significantly because practicing wartime scenarios can be risky, flight operations can be expensive, and real-life rehearsal puts Navy tactics on display for adversaries.

After the team learned squadrons were deploying on Navy carriers with a limited ability to train together consistently, they ensured Navy fighting forces maintain

proficiency while deployed at sea.

"Naval aviators train extensively working up to deployment, but those skills begin to atrophy when they pull out of port," said NAWCAD JSE Director Blaine Summers, whose team delivered the Simulators at Sea capability. "This was a capability gap we had to plug with a fully integrated carrier air wing solution — one we are ready to scale across the Navy's Fleet of carriers."

With no formal requirement or funding, the team made it happen. Their success was thanks to an abundance mindset by the joint team, who recognized our NAVAIR enterprise has the talent and technology to make Simulators at Sea possible; all it took was bringing it together. After mapping out a plan, the joint team brought the new trainers to CVN 72 in less than 12 months.

"Coordinating the engineering, logistics and ship modifications for these classified programs was daunting — these were things we never really tried," said Mark McKinnis, IPT lead for Virtual Integrated Training. "Getting this moving quickly sometimes required elevating things to senior leaders, including U.S. Pacific Fleet, the Naval Aviation Enterprise, and ship and air wing commanders."

The Simulators at Sea effort was complex, requiring multiple technical disciplines from across the enterprise to put their expertise onto the same project. When the team hit challenges — cyber and security, for example — they elevated issues quickly to leaders who could remove barriers to stay on timeline.

"The challenges we were up against included tight timelines, the scope of the ship modification, and the unknowns along the way — our relationships were key to navigating all

three of these areas," said A.J. Lawrence, NAWCAD's Ship Alteration Installation manager at WOLF.

CVW-9 has trained in its new simulators daily since its July 2024 deployment. The team plans to expand Simulators at Sea to other aircraft carriers through partnerships with OPNAV and the Naval Aviation Training Systems and Ranges Program Office.

"The best part of this project was hearing an E-2 aviator describe the new training to Pacific Fleet Commander Adm. Stephen Koehler," McKinnis said. "He called it 'better than the training they get ashore' because in Sims at Sea, they can train for things they can't anywhere else — that was an exciting breakthrough."

From the Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division

NAVAIR Issues V-22 Bulletin and Interim Flight Clearance

Based on engineering analysis, on December 20, 2024 NAVAIR issued a fleet bulletin directing the inspection of V-22 Osprey to verify the flight hours on each Proprotor Gearbox (PRGB) prior to an aircraft's next flight.

Aircraft with PRGBs that currently meet or exceed a predetermined flight-hour threshold will resume flights in accordance with controls instituted in the March 2024 interim flight clearance (IFC).

A new IFC, containing additional risk mitigation controls, has been issued to address aircraft with PRGBs below the flight-hour threshold. These controls will remain in place until the aircraft's PRGBs are upgraded, or the predetermined threshold is exceeded.

NAVAIR collaborated with the Navy, Air Force Special Operations Command and the Marine Corps to implement the bulletin and IFC.

Due to operational security concerns, the specifics of the V-22 flight-hour threshold, number of aircraft affected and additional flight controls will not be released.

NAVAIR remains committed to transparency and safety regarding all V-22 operations. The V-22 plays an integral role in supporting our nation's defense. Returning these vital assets to flight is critical to supporting our nation's interests.

NAVAIR continuously monitors data and trends from all aircraft platforms to provide service members the safest, most reliable aircraft possible.

From Naval Air Systems Command



Navy Uses First-of-Their Kind Simulators to Train Carrier Air Wings at Sea



NAVAIR Issues V-22 Bulletin and Interim Flight Clearance



U.S. Navy completes final testing milestone for Unmanned Surface Vessel Program

U.S. Navy completes final testing milestone for Unmanned Surface Vessel Program

The U.S. Navy recently achieved its final key milestone in the development of Unmanned Surface Vessel (USV) integrated capabilities by successfully completing a continuous 720-hour power demonstration on an engine system for use aboard future USVs. This demonstration is part of a larger USV testing effort to assess the capability and resilience of engine systems to operate autonomously for extended periods. The latest test marked the final system to be evaluated. Engine development and operation is critical for the expansion of unmanned naval operations and for realizing the future vision of a manned-unmanned Hybrid Fleet.

The 2021 National Defense Authorization Act directed the Navy to complete the 720-hour test milestone before initiating development on large USVs. In the final engine test, Precise Power Systems conducted testing on behalf of Austal USA. Testing took place at Daimler Trucks North America Aftermarket Solutions in Tooele, Utah, from June 19 to September 5. The Navy's Program Executive Office Unmanned and Small Combatants (PEO USC) and the Unmanned Maritime Systems program office (PMS 406) oversaw the demonstration.

"This milestone marks a pivotal advancement in our naval strategy, as it enhances our capabilities in unmanned operations," said Rear. Adm. Kevin Smith, head of PEO USC. "Successfully demonstrating a power system that can sustain autonomous operations for 30 days without maintenance not only bolsters

our readiness but also sets the stage for a truly integrated manned-unmanned Fleet, ensuring we remain at the forefront of maritime innovation."

During the 720-hour test, no human intervention, corrective, or preventative maintenance was allowed on the equipment. Successfully completing this milestone means the tested model engine, MTU 8V4000M24S, is eligible for future use aboard USV platforms. It indicates that propulsion systems are mature enough to power an unmanned ship for 30 days without requiring maintenance. The team developing the engine will apply lessons learned during the test to enhance future models to increase reliability even more than demonstrated.

Prior to this test, five teams successfully completed their separate 720-hour testing milestones. The successful teams include:

- Bollinger and Carter Machinery on behalf of Caterpillar in Chesapeake, Virginia was the first team to achieve this milestone in December of 2023. They demonstrated sufficient mechanical reliability of the 1550 kW Caterpillar 3512C model engine.

- Fincantieri Marinette Marine (FMM) and Carter Machinery on behalf of Caterpillar in Chesapeake, VA demonstrated mechanical durability of the Caterpillar 2300 kW rated 3516 main propulsion diesel, lube oil and fuel system.

- Gibbs & Cox and Southwest Research Institute in San Antonio, Texas on behalf of Cummins also validated the reliability of the QSK95 diesel engine paired with an ABB

AMG 0560M04 LAE generator.

- Huntington Ingalls Incorporated (HII), in partnership with the U.S. Coast Guard, conducted a successful 720-hour demonstration on behalf of the MTU 20V 4000 M93L, a Main Propulsion Diesel Engine configuration.

- L3 Harris, on behalf of Cummins, validated the reliability of the QSK60 diesel engine, a Main Propulsion Diesel Engine configuration, and the QSM11, a Marine Diesel Generator Set in Camden, New Jersey.

"This milestone is a significant step forward in the continued development of integrated unmanned surface capabilities. The successful execution of these tests highlights our commitment to deliver cutting edge solutions that can meet the evolving needs of our Fleet," said Capt. Matthew Lewis, program manager of the Unmanned Maritime Systems program office.

The Navy's Unmanned Maritime Systems program office is a part of the Program Executive Office Unmanned and Small Combatants portfolio, which designs, develops, builds, and delivers the Navy's unmanned maritime systems; mine warfare systems; special warfare systems; expeditionary warfare systems; and small surface combatants.

From Program Executive Office Unmanned and Small Combatants (PEO USC) Public Affairs



The U.S. Navy's Cybersecurity Program Office (PMW 130) Leads the Charge in Implementing Zero Trust Architecture in Unmanned Systems



Harry S. Truman Strike Group Enters U.S. Central Command Area of Responsibility



For First Time, Australian Submariner Earns U.S. Dolphins

The U.S. Navy's Cybersecurity Program Office (PMW 130) Leads the Charge in Implementing Zero Trust Architecture in Unmanned Systems

The U.S. Navy's Cybersecurity Office, Program Management Warfare (PMW) 130, worked alongside the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS), Program Executive Office for Digital and Enterprise Services, U.S. Fleet Cyber Command, Naval Information Warfare Center Pacific, Naval Sea Systems Command, and the Department of Defense Chief Information Office, to support 760/406 Unmanned Surface Vessel Squadron (USVRON) One in being the tip of the spear on leading achievement of zero trust control afloat small form factor and remote cyber operations. Dr. Scott Jasper, Principal Investigator, highlighted that Trident Warrior 24 provided the opportunity for NPS students to conduct applied research in the operating environment.

"The achievement of a ZTA in Trident Warrior 24 was important to demonstrate the viability of the selected cyber defense solutions," said Dr. Jasper.

From Lt. Cmdr. Janice Leister, zero trust, a security model that operates on the principle of "never trust, always verify," mandates rigorous identity verification and continuous validation of every entity accessing a system. Unlike traditional security models that rely on perimeter defenses, ZTA assumes that threats can originate from both outside and inside the network, necessitating constant vigilance.

The adoption of zero trust in unmanned systems addresses several critical vulnerabilities. With the growing reliance on unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) for

surveillance, delivery and monitoring, ensuring the integrity and security of these systems is paramount. Zero trust ensures that every access request to the system, whether from an operator, sensor, or data feed, is authenticated, authorized and encrypted.

The integration of ZTA in unmanned systems also offers significant benefits for military applications. The defense sector, which increasingly relies on autonomous systems for reconnaissance and combat operations, stands to gain from the enhanced security that zero trust provides. Ensuring that only verified and authorized entities can access or control these systems is crucial for maintaining operational security and mission success.

However, the transition to zero trust is not without challenges. Implementing ZTA requires significant changes to existing information technology infrastructure and ongoing management to maintain its effectiveness. Organizations must invest in robust identity and access management solutions, continuous monitoring systems, and training for personnel to adapt to this new security paradigm.

"Collaboration among Navy commands and industry partners, Microsoft and Dell, in Trident Warrior 24 was paramount in overcoming these technical challenges," said Dr. Jasper.

Despite these hurdles, the consensus among experts is clear: the benefits of zero trust far outweigh the costs. As unmanned systems continue to evolve and their

applications expand, ensuring their security through ZTA will be critical in protecting sensitive data, maintaining operational integrity, and fostering trust in these innovative technologies.

With cyber threats becoming more sophisticated and pervasive, the move toward zero trust represents a proactive and necessary step in the evolution of cybersecurity for unmanned systems. As the industry continues to embrace this model, the future of unmanned operations looks to be more secure and resilient than ever before.

PMW 130 is the Navy's cybersecurity acquisition agent delivering cybersecurity products, capabilities, and services that protect and defend against cyber threats. The mission of PMW 130 is to enable information warfare by providing confidentiality, integrity, and availability of capabilities through innovative acquisition of maritime cybersecurity products.

Trident Warrior is an annual large-scale, at-sea field experiment where the Navy selects potential initiatives that address capability gaps and provide inventive solutions in an operational environment. Fleet experimentation allows the Navy and its partners to incorporate real-world warfighter feedback early in the acquisition process by exposing the fleet to emerging capabilities.

By Lt. Cmdr. Janice Leister

Harry S. Truman Strike Group Enters U.S. Central Command Area of Responsibility

For First Time, Australian Submariner Earns U.S. Dolphins

The Harry S. Truman Carrier Strike Group (HSTCSG) entered the U.S. Central command area of responsibility, Dec. 14.

The carrier strike group consists of the flagship Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Harry S. Truman (CVN 75); Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 1 with nine embarked aviation squadrons; staffs from Carrier Strike Group (CSG) 8, CVW-1, and Destroyer Squadron (DESRON) 28; the Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruiser USS Gettysburg (CG 64); and two Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyers, USS Stout (DDG 55) and USS Jason Dunham (DDG 109).

The HSTCSG last deployed in the U.S. Central command area of responsibility in March 2020.

The Harry S. Truman Carrier Strike Group is ready, if called upon, to execute the full spectrum of carrier operations essential to U.S. national security, including the defense of U.S. and partner forces and personnel and freedom of navigation to ensure maritime security and stability in the U.S. Central command area of responsibility.

The U.S. 5th Fleet area of operations encompasses approximately 2.5 million square miles of water space and includes the Arabian Gulf, Gulf of Oman, Red Sea, parts of the Indian Ocean and three critical choke points at the Strait of Hormuz, Suez Canal and Strait of Bab al-Mandeb.

From Commander U.S. Naval Air Forced
Command Public Affairs

James earned the warfare device, or "dolphins" while embarked aboard the Virginia-class fast-attack submarine USS Vermont (SSN 792) during a deployment to the U.S. 7th Fleet area of operations, demonstrating another significant milestone for the Australia, United Kingdom, United States (AUKUS) trilateral security partnership.

"It is always an honor to pin dolphins on a Sailor's uniform and welcome them into an elite community of undersea warfighters," said Cavanaugh. "Today's pinning represents the strength of the alliance and our continued progress under the AUKUS agreement. This was an historic pinning, but it is only the first of many to come."

In order to qualify, a Sailor must exhibit a strong understanding of all submarines systems, compartments, and equipment. James had already qualified on a diesel electric Collins-class submarine but was the first Royal Australian Navy submariner to qualify on a nuclear-powered Virginia-class submarine.

"All of the extra sensors that the boat has, and the fact that we can remain deployed for so long at such high speeds will be game changing for Australia," said James. "[Qualifying] is a culmination of a lot of hard work and a lot of support from the crew. I'm incredibly thankful to everybody that has supported me through this adventure. And it makes me incredibly proud to

serve both my navy and your navy."

There are currently more than 100 Royal Australian Navy Officers in the U.S. Navy submarine training pipeline or assigned to U.S. Virginia-class SSNs. Military training efforts under the AUKUS Pillar 1 effort are designed to enable Australia to operate, maintain, and support a sovereign fleet of conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarines to deter aggression and enhance stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

Vermont, part of Submarine Squadron 1, has been on deployment since it departed its homeport of Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii, Aug. 8, and arrived in Yokosuka, Japan, Dec. 9, for a port visit.

Submarine Group 7 directs forward-deployed, combat capable forces across the full spectrum of undersea warfare throughout the Western Pacific, Indian Ocean, and Arabian Sea.

U.S. 7th Fleet is the U.S. Navy's largest forward-deployed numbered fleet, and routinely interacts and operates with allies and partners in preserving a free and open Indo-Pacific region.

*Per Royal Australian Navy protocols, submariners' last names are not publicly released.

By Lt. Cmdr. Samuel Boyle, Submarine Group
7 Public Affairs

Hard Lessons: Pitfalls, blunders and shortfalls . . .



During the course of our lives, we naturally make mistakes and sometimes make bad choices. As a junior Sailor, a few times I found myself in a predicament and wondered, "How did I get here, and what was I thinking?" We've all been there before, but how do we recover from our mistakes?

In September 2006, I went to Captain's Mast for a DUI on Naval Air Station North Island. I was awarded reduction in rank from a frocked E-4 to E-2, 45 days restriction and 45 days extra duty.

At the time, I felt embarrassed and that I let myself, my family and my friends down. Soon after, I received my next surprise – a significant problems evaluation report. I remember being debriefed by my division officer and asking him how it was possible that just a few weeks ago I was an EP with a 4.0+ average and now I'm a 2.0. It was difficult to accept. I noticed that people seemed to look and treat me differently after I was disciplined and I began to sink further.

Going forward, many Chiefs and Officers encouraged me to keep going, but I had it in my head that I was going to get out of the Navy

when my enlistment was up. When I received tasking I didn't agree with, I would list a random reason number and say something like, "Reason 102 why I'm not reenlisting."

One day, my Chief heard me say it. He told me I was better than that, and all I needed was a fresh start. Luckily for me, I was forced to transfer due to the MC rating merger and was fortunate enough to discover he was right. For most, transferring is not an immediate option, although in my case, it saved my career.

This is my view on overcoming mistakes: the past does not dictate the future, however, without a course correction, you're likely to repeat the mistake and continue the pattern. Think about what it means to truly accept consequences and move forward. Just know that every leader in the Navy wants every Sailor in their charge to succeed. Work with purpose and show others what you're made of. Until the next time, I'll see you on the deckplates.

By MCCS John Scorza

STORY & PHOTOS BY MC2 CLAIRE BENNETT



CS2 Jair Murguia, of Atlanta, boxes in anchor windlass aboard Vinson.



VINING



“To start, you just need to have heart, and everything else will follow,” said Causey.

In anchor windlass of the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70), a punching bag sways – not from the rolling waters of the Philippine Sea, but from fists connecting leather to leather, their rhythmic thudding simultaneously pushing away the ever-present hum of the ship.

A right hook. A left jab.

The punching bag rocks as sweat drips onto the red painted floor. Culinary Specialist 2nd Class Jair Murguia breathes heavily and switches his stance, then fakes a right hook and throws a right upper cut.

Sailors begin to fill the anchor windlass as the boom-bap

cadence of Hip Hop energizes the scene.

Vinson is deployed in the 7th Fleet area of operations – and while some Sailors are boxing up holiday gifts for their loved ones back home, the members of the Gold Eagle Boxing Club (GEBC) are doing a different kind of boxing.

GEBC started with Aviation Boatswain’s Mate (Handling) 2nd Class Michael Causey, who arrived aboard the ship with a plan to bring the gift of boxing into the lives of more Sailors. With its relatively low need for space and equipment, boxing is a more feasible candidate for recreational fun aboard Vinson, especially when compared to other sports.



"Combat sports are my life," said Molina.

TECHNIQUE IS KEY

Sailors learn boxing drills in the anchor windlass aboard Vinson.

Now sponsored by the Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) team, the Gold Eagle Boxing Club has a punching bag and more than 10 pairs of gloves and pad sets for Sailors to use. They fill the anchor windlass every Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday like clockwork.

"I go to get activity in and blow steam off," said Murguia. "It's good to keep going and be active out here."

Murguia started boxing with a friend in San Diego, so when he heard about boxing on Vinson, he was ready to try it out. After his work days, the pink hand wraps and boxing gloves are put on.

"To start, you just need to have heart, and everything else will follow," said Causey. "I highly encourage coming out for the class, especially for those who have never boxed before. It's the perfect opportunity to learn the fundamentals of boxing for free."

Experience levels vary among club members, but Causey has assigned four coaches to help with training. Some of the coaches have competed professionally or had prior experience from the Navy Boxing Team.

"We go over the fundamentals of boxing footwork, jab and head movement," said Causey. "We do partner drills practicing on different combinations both defensively and offensively. We also do conditioning like pro fighters would do to stay in shape and give Sailors the best workout."

Causey's voice carries across the room, explaining to Sailors

blow off steam."

Causey is eager to teach at all levels, and his passion for the sport has spread through the club. Each Sailor is assigned a boxer to research and train like.

Causey's method is, "study them and fight like them," and the Sailors love it.

"I have been assigned Amanda Serrano for her offense approach in the ring, which is what I often take up in a match," said Molina. "Her ability to not give up despite taking critical hits is what the coaches want to translate onto me."

According to the National Institutes of Health, non-contact boxing can give a cathartic release of anger and stress and has positive effects on mood, self-esteem, confidence and more. For Sailors who are far away from home and their families during the holiday season, boxing could be just the healthy coping mechanism they need.

"It is a great mental outlet for Sailors," said Causey. "I highly encourage them to focus on safely releasing their frustration without endangering themselves or those around them."

The class gathers 15-34 people regularly. According to Causey, they leave exhausted but content and satisfied with the training they receive. 🥊

NIGHT FLIGHT OPERATIONS

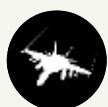
STORY & PHOTOS BY MC2 ISAIAH GOESSL

A Sailor prepares to launch an F/A-18E Super Hornet, assigned to the "Stingers" of Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 113, from the flight deck aboard Vinson.





A look into the art of nighttime flight operations



Observing nighttime flight operations aboard the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70) is like watching a meticulously choreographed ballet unfold under the cover of darkness. The flight deck, illuminated by the glow of red, yellow, blue and green wands wielded by Sailors in color-coded jerseys, bustles with purpose and precision. Each movement is deliberate; every action essential. Yet beneath the captivating sights and sounds lies an ever-present danger that becomes even more palpable at night. The air is charged with an intensity unique to operations conducted in the dark.

Vinson, the flagship of Carrier Strike Group ONE, operates as a visible symbol of U.S. naval power in the Indo-Pacific. Alongside Carrier Air Wing TWO, it executes relentless flight operations day and night, in clear skies or inclement weather, demonstrating our commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific. This tireless capability serves as a deterrent, signaling to the world that U.S. allies and interests are safeguarded.

“Not many other countries can conduct night operations like us,” said Aviation Machinist’s Mate Airman Joseph Lorenzo, a plane captain assigned to the “Stingers” of Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 113. “Along with everything else the U.S. is capable of, for me, night operations are what really drive the nail in.”

Lorenzo, a 25-year-old from Berkeley Springs, W. Va., recalls working construction with his father before joining the Navy. Now, he oversees the maintenance of an F/A-18E Super Hornet on the flight deck, ensuring mission readiness before and after each flight. Like many of his peers on the flight deck, with an average age of just 22 years, he takes pride in his work, keeping his head on a swivel as he tackles one of the world’s most dangerous jobs.



A Sailor assigned to the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70) prepares to launch an F-35C Lightning II assigned to the “Warhawks” of Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 97 on the flight deck aboard Vinson.





***"NOT MANY OTHER COUNTRIES
CAN CONDUCT NIGHT OPERATIONS
LIKE US," SAID AMAN LORENZO.***

"The way I work is, I imagine my dad is working with me," said Lorenzo. "I imagine it like when we worked construction. I always want to set up the next person I turnover with for success. Before I joined the Navy, I used to say time is money. Out here, time is sleep. The sooner we get the job done right, the more time I have to nap."


Aircraft carriers, housing about 5,000 personnel, are the centerpiece of America's naval forces. They are adaptable, fast and survivable airfields, capable of conducting a wide range of missions at any time. Aboard Vinson, Sailors and aviators are constantly trained and ready to deploy their expertise, day or night.

Vinson's Operations Department includes Sailors who serve as air traffic controllers (AC). They play a pivotal role to ensure the safe, orderly and expeditious flow of air traffic, whether ashore or afloat. At night, they serve as the pilots' eyes, guiding them safely back to the ship.

"Carrier air traffic control during case three is significantly more complex and demanding compared to case one," said Air Traffic Controller 1st Class Keelie Sirhalt, of Boise, Idaho. "While case one involves clear weather and visual flight rules, case three operations occur in adverse weather or at night. This requires precision instrument approaches and heightened coordination between pilots and controllers to ensure safety and efficiency."

While ACs facilitate the safe return of aircraft, the final moments of a landing are managed by Landing Signal Officers (LSO). LSOs act as coaches, evaluating a pilot's approach and issuing precise verbal commands until touchdown. If an approach looks unsafe, they direct a wave-off, requiring the pilot to circle back for another attempt. It's no small feat for a pilot to land on a moving carrier deck in pitch-black conditions, relying only on the glow of a visual system displaying glide slope information. Success demands extraordinary skill and trust between professionals.

"I would equate daytime aircraft carrier operations to driving down the autobahn in a Shelby GT500 going 180mph with a cougar in the backseat. The only difference between daytime and nighttime carrier operations is that now you are blindfolded and the cougar hasn't eaten in three days," said Lt. Hunter Koltes, of Lubbock, Texas, an F-35C Lightning II pilot assigned to the "Warhawks" of Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 97. "There's that little bit of fear that creeps in, and before you can really do any sort of night flying, you've got to make friends with that fear. Before you know it, it's just you and a cougar cruising around enjoying the sights."

Every Sailor on the flight deck will tell you that their job is among the most hazardous in the world, but they take pride in knowing that no one does it better than the U.S. Navy — day or night. For those working the graveyard shift, there's an added privilege: the chance to witness the serenity of a clear night sky. The moon and stars cast their light across the vast, infinite expanse of the ocean, a tranquil reminder of the unique and demanding environment in which they serve. 

- ✦ *Maintenance is conducted on an F/A-18E Super Hornet assigned to the "Golden Dragons" of Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 192 on the flight deck aboard Vinson.*

▲
A Sailor assigned to the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70) prepares to launch an E-2D Advanced Hawkeye assigned to the "Black Eagles" of Carrier Airborne Early Warning Squadron (VAW) 113 on the flight deck aboard Vinson.



F-35C

INTEGRATION



*Six F-35C Lightning II aircraft assigned to the "Argonauts" of Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 147 prepare to launch from the flight deck of Vinson.
U.S. Navy Photo by MC2 Claire Bennett*

*Vinson trans
U.S. Navy Photo*

*An F-35C Lightning II assigned to the “Argonauts” of Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 147 recovers on the flight deck aboard Vinson.
U.S. Navy Photo by MC3 Nate Jordan*



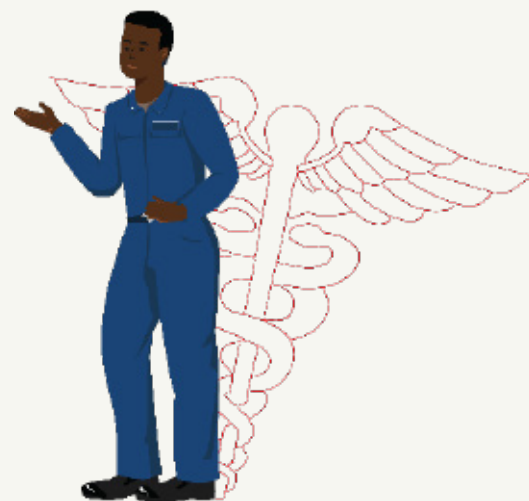
*...sits the Philippine Sea.
...o by MCSA Pablo Chavez*

*An F-35C Lightning II assigned to the “Argonauts” of Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 147 launches from the flight deck aboard Vinson.
U.S. Navy Photo by MCSA Pablo Chavez*

A LOTTERY

WORLD

THE WINNING



WITH LESS THAN A 2% CHANCE, HE WON A DIVERSITY VISA

STORY & PHOTOS BY MCSN AMBER RIVETTE

With a persistent smile on his face and eyes that gleam like freshly brewed coffee, Hospital Corpsman 1st Class Kwasi Kusi brings 18 years of experience, wisdom and resilience to USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70). His presence, adorned with combat ribbons and a wealth of knowledge, stands out among his shipmates. Many are surprised to learn that Kusi has been in the Navy longer than some of them have been adults.

But Kusi's journey to Carl Vinson is far more remarkable than his tenure. Born in Kumasi, Ghana, Kusi was one of the lucky 50,000 recipients of the U.S. Diversity Visa Lottery, commonly known as the Green Card Lottery. With over 10 million annual applicants, the odds of winning are slim, averaging between 1.25% and 1.75%. Yet, this small chance set the foundation for Kusi's American dream.

After winning the Green Card Lottery as a teenager, Kusi moved to Hawthorne, California, with hopes of becoming a doctor, inspired by his paternal family's tradition of pursuing careers in medical care. But he quickly realized the road ahead would not be easy.

"Imagine finishing high school and finding out, 'Hey, you won the DV lottery,'" said Kusi. "The next thing you know, you're packing up your life and heading to a new country to start over."

“I could say I’m an American citizen because I’ve served my country.”

Supported by uncles in the pharmaceutical field, Kusi studied while working long hours to make ends meet. Seeing the toll it was taking on him, his friends suggested he consider the military as a path to education, healthcare and stability.

“So that’s what started it,” said Kusi. “The military could provide free education, housing and a pathway to citizenship. It seemed like the perfect solution.”

Yet for Kusi, joining the Navy was about more than just financial security.

“There was a part of me that wanted to give back to the country that gave me this opportunity,” said Kusi. “I wanted

to feel like I’d earned my place as an American citizen.”

This sense of service and gratitude became the driving force behind Kusi’s decision to enlist.

“When I say I’m an American citizen, I can proudly say I’ve served my country,” said Kusi. “No one can dispute that.”

Kusi’s Navy career has been a story of growth and achievement. After eight years of service, he began pursuing higher education. He earned an Associate of Applied Science degree in 2015 and a Bachelor of Science in Technical Studies in 2017 from Thomas Edison State University, before earning a Master of Health Administration from the University of Texas at Tyler in 2020. Along the way, he also received certifications in biomedical equipment maintenance and network security.

“The military paid for everything,” said Kusi. “Every single thing.”

But of all his accomplishments, Kusi considers his family his greatest achievement. He and his wife built their life near Virginia, where he was stationed for much of his career, raising a daughter, 16, and a son, 14.

“To me, my children are my biggest success,” said Kusi. “They’re kind, talented and full of potential.”

As Kusi transitions to life aboard Carl Vinson in San Diego, his children are eager to embrace city life, while his wife plans to set up their home during his deployment. His children, already pursuing artistic passions, reflect the family’s drive for success. 🏆



HM1 Kwasi Kusi performs maintenance on a surgical light in the battle dressing station aboard Vinson.



HM1 Kwasi Kusi posing for a photo with his children in Japan.

*DO YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES?
NOW YOU CAN BECOME A*



MASTER HELMSMAN

GET QUALIFIED NOW

PREREQUISITES:

QUALIFIED TO PAYGRADE

DAY CHECK

E-4 AND ABOVE

POC: AT₂ BLAKE SUMMERS

A brown dog, likely a Weimaraner, is the central focus of the image. It is standing on a bright red carpet. The dog is wearing a grey tactical harness with several patches, including one that says "NAVY". It also wears large, red-rimmed goggles with clear lenses. A GoPro camera is mounted on its back. The dog is wearing blue crocs on its hind legs. A person's hand is visible, petting the dog's head. In the foreground, the back of a person's head with glasses is visible. The overall scene suggests a formal arrival or a special event.

Captain Rudder, Arriving

STORY BY MCSN AMBER RIVETTE

PHOTOS BY MC3 NATE JORDAN





The goodest boy with a mission

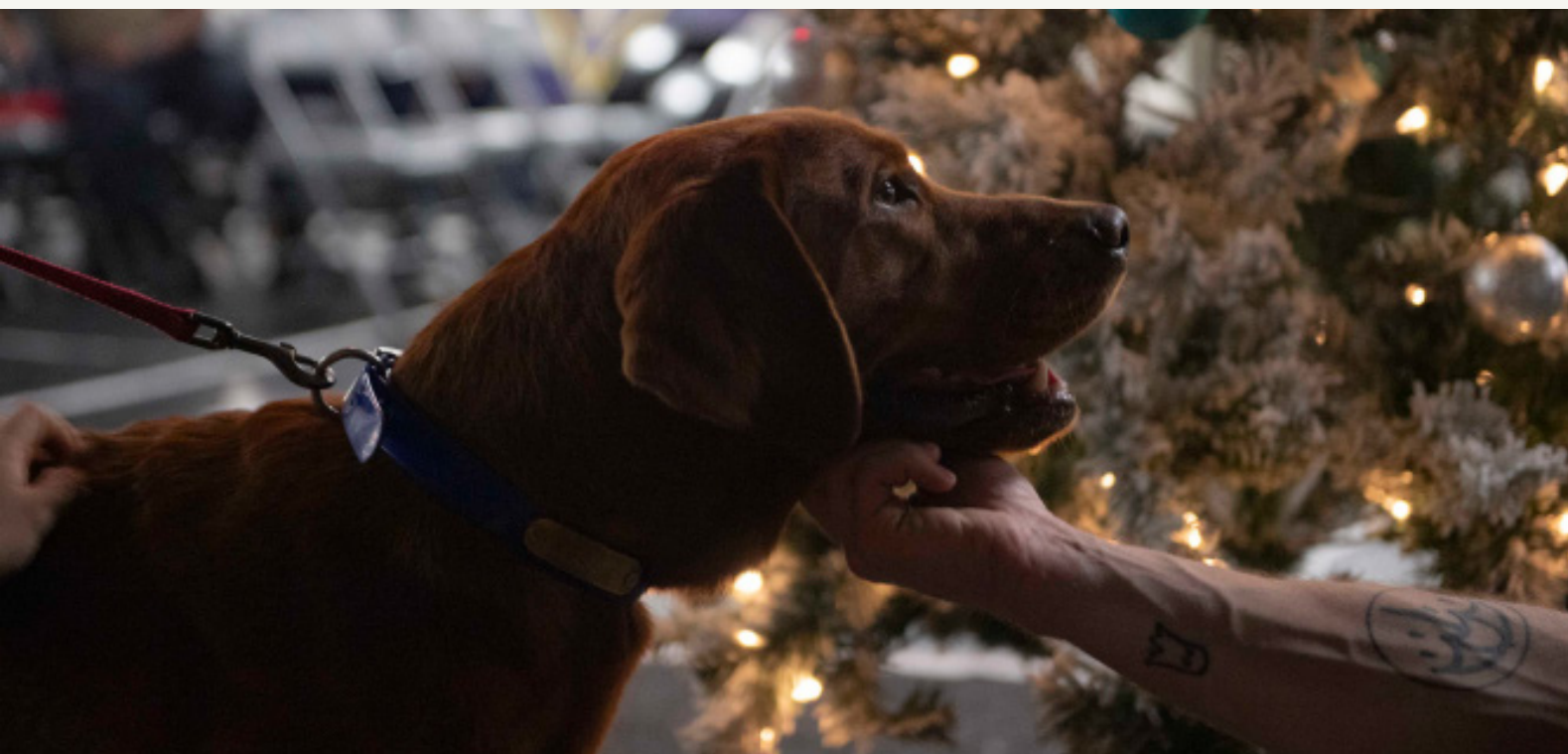
Beneath the humid, gray skies of the Philippine Sea, a helicopter descended onto the flight deck of the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70). From the cabin of the aircraft emerged a new shipmate – not a Sailor, but a lively, copper-furred figure outfitted in a safety harness, aquamarine leash, red safety goggles, and Croc-like paw booties. This was no ordinary arrival; it was the debut of Capt. Rudder, a two-year-old “Fox Red” yellow Labrador retriever, the ship’s first Expeditionary Facility Dog (EFD).

Panting with excitement, Rudder trotted confidently off the helicopter, accompanied by his handler, Brooke Corson, the ship’s executive officer, Capt. Ryan Mattson, and Command Master Chief Chaddrake Lavallais. His arrival on Dec. 18, 2024, marked a new chapter for Vinson – one that promised to bring warmth, comfort, and a touch of home to a crew of 5,000 Sailors.



DEPLOYMENT READY

Rear Adm. Michael Wosje, left, commander, Carrier Strike Group ONE, and Capt. Matthew Thomas, commanding officer of Vinson, welcome Rudder, a mental health facility dog, aboard the ship.



HERE TO STAY: *Rudder from Mutts with a Mission receives chin scratches in the forecabin aboard Vinson.*

The journey to bringing Rudder aboard began months earlier, with Mattson's vision of enhancing mental health resources on Vinson. Mattson, inspired by his brother's success introducing an EFD on an East Coast ship, worked tirelessly to navigate the logistical and operational challenges of deploying a dog aboard a carrier at sea.

"Capt. Mattson has been the key person for getting Carl Vinson an expeditionary facility dog," said Corson. "He met several times with the staff of 'Mutts with a Mission' to make sure that all the program requirements are met aboard."

Mutts with a Mission (MWAM), an Assistance Dogs International accredited program, pioneered the Navy's EFD initiative in 2023, training dogs like Rudder to provide therapeutic support in high-stress environments. Unlike therapy dogs, EFDs undergo specialized training to adapt to shipboard life, including mastering ladder wells, Porch Potties, and aircraft transport.

"Rudder was selected specifically for his temperament and ability to thrive in dynamic environments," Corson explained. "He's not just a morale booster; he's a trained professional ready to provide mental health support to Sailors in need."

Unlike most EFDs, who meet their crews while the ship is docked, Rudder's arrival required extraordinary coordination. His journey by helicopter was a logistical feat, made possible by the collective efforts of Vinson's leadership and MWAM's dedication.

"When he arrived and put all four paws on the deck, there was an immediate sense of joy and relief, like an early Christmas present," said Mattson. "I knew the impact he was going to have on the crew."

Sailors aboard Vinson couldn't contain their excitement as Rudder made his rounds through the ship.

"I screamed," said Mass Communication Specialist Seaman

Apprentice Rocio Zavala. "I was just so happy."

Rudder's timing couldn't have been more perfect. His arrival just days before Christmas Eve, which was also his second birthday, added an extra layer of cheer to the holiday season.

Rudder's role aboard Vinson extends far beyond companionship.

"Rudder is a specialized tool to assist with mental health aboard the ship," said Corson. "He provides alerts to anxiety, deep pressure therapy, and many extra tasks."

Corson also highlighted the rigorous training Rudder underwent to prepare for his mission.

"All MWAM dogs grow up making ship visits with ships and commands so they are well versed with the sights, smells, and sounds of ships," said Corson.

Vinson is committed to making Rudder a part of its family and sharing the joys of having him on board with embarked commands.

"We are the first West Coast carrier to get a dog on deployment," said Mattson. "There is definitely interest now with every West Coast carrier wanting to have the same opportunity, so we are going to pass all of our lessons learned on to them. That way, we can continue that work for all the West Coast carriers."

For now, the Vinson crew is focused on ensuring Rudder's time on board is as joyful and fulfilling as possible.

"I know Capt. Rudder is going to be busy," said Seaman Recruit Augustus Sipp. "This is a carrier, after all. He's always going to have something to do."

Although there is no true way to understand Rudder's thoughts and feelings upon meeting his new family aboard Vinson, the wagging of his tail and his confident stroll around the ship has provided encouragement to the crew. 🐾

The Magic of Gathering

70



America's Favorite Enchantment



Fluorescent lights cast a dim glow, humming softly over the forward mess decks of the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70). It's 1930, and the space, typically bustling with the clatter of trays and camaraderie of meal hours, is now host to a different kind of ritual. Sailors gather in quiet anticipation, backpacks slung over shoulders, leather-bound cases clutched in hand, and small cardboard boxes tucked under arms. A wave of excitement rolls through as backpacks are unzipped, energy drinks cracked open, and vivid play mats unfurled across tables. The air grows charged with strategy and imagination — the gathering for Magic: The Gathering (MTG) has begun.

"MTG is like playing a game of chess, but you get to pick your own pieces, and you try to choose the pieces based on

what you think the other player will choose for their side," said retired Chief Electronics Technician Randy Belknap, now a contractor aboard Carl Vinson. "The game starts before you even sit down across from an opponent — you have to collect cards and construct a set of game pieces to play, all while taking in what others are playing."

Since its creation in 1993 by mathematician Richard Garfield, MTG has grown into a cultural phenomenon. What began as a small innovation is now a multi-billion-dollar franchise, grossing \$7 billion in 2023 under Hasbro's ownership. Its popularity extends far beyond game shops and conventions, finding a home aboard naval vessels, where downtime is precious and connections are vital.

STORY & PHOTOS BY MC3 NATE JORDAN



AO3 Chase Holyoak, of Salt Lake City, showcases his Magic: the Gathering collection aboard Vinson.

"I first became interested in MTG my freshman year of high school," said Capt. Ryan Mattson, executive officer aboard Carl Vinson. "It was a relatively new game at the time, and some of my friends found out about it and we started getting into it. While playing the game itself was fun, we enjoyed trading and collecting the cards just as much."

For many, MTG is more than just a game; it's a blend of art, strategy and community. Aboard Vinson, the game of choice is "Commander," a multiplayer format where players wield 100-card decks led by a legendary creature, their commander. With games lasting anywhere from 20 minutes to eight hours, victory hinges on a mix of luck, tactical prowess and knowing when to strike.

"The game is very challenging, and some of the complexities are enjoyable, but they can also be annoying to work through and explain," said Belknap. "But the fact that you can have people who have been playing for 30 years or 30 days, they still both equally enjoy Magic, and playing it in most cases with complete strangers is always a fun aspect."

Understanding the basics of MTG can feel like learning a new language. Players start with seven cards, drawing on "mana," a type of currency in the game, to summon creatures, cast spells and outmaneuver opponents.

Each land card, be it Mountain, Forest, Island, Swamp, or Plains, provides a specific type of mana, fueling strategies as diverse as the players themselves.

Every card holds power, from creatures with attack and defense stats to legendary artifacts capable of turning the tide of battle.

Cryptologic Warfare Technician 1st Class Eliasam Sosa finds joy in both the gameplay and the community. "I love the challenge of building new decks and having a battle of wits with other more experienced players," he said. "Ask anyone down on the mess decks – I love the art of the deal, and I'm always looking to trade cards."

For some players, the game's appeal extends beyond the battlefield to the value of their collections. Iconic cards like Black Lotus and The One Ring, a one-of-a-kind card from the Lord of the Rings crossover, fetch astronomical prices.

"I own an Unlimited Mox Sapphire and an Unlimited Ancestral Recall worth about \$4,000 each," said Belknap.





Sailors play a Magic: the Gathering game on the mess decks aboard Vinson.



AO3 Chase Holyoak, of Salt Lake City, holds a Magic: the Gathering card aboard Vinson.

His entire collection, valued between \$150,000 and \$175,000, includes rare gems like a complete set of Original Dual Lands, and is all stored safely in a fireproof safe.

Mattson, too, treasures his early collection. “I had grown up already being an avid collector of baseball cards, and when I realized the MTG cards also had monetary value, like many young kids, I wanted to collect and keep them to see how much they would go up in value over time,” he said. Mattson’s original – or “Alpha” – cards have not seen a game since 1996 and have since skyrocketed in value.

Aboard Carl Vinson, MTG serves as more than just a pastime – it’s a bridge for camaraderie. For Sailors new to the ship, finding a community can be daunting, but discovering a group of players rolling out play mats on the mess decks can be a lifeline.

“I first found out there were MTG communities on the ship when I rode the

Ronald Reagan,” said Sosa. “Since then, I have always felt at home playing Magic and making friends on the mess decks.”

With over 50 Sailors participating, the MTG community fosters connections that transcend rank and background.

“Just like any hobby,” Belknap said, “being able to find people with a shared hobby helps breaks down walls for people with different ideologies.”

As the game unfolds on the mess decks, time seems to slow. For those immersed in a battle of strategy and creativity, the stresses of life aboard an aircraft carrier fade into the background.

“I think it’s a great hobby for Sailors to have,” said Mattson. “Card games are fun, keep your mind creatively engaged, and help pass the time. Whether it’s Magic: The Gathering or something else, it’s nice to have that personal interaction with other people.”

From the mess decks to makeshift tables in the reactor berthing, MTG continues to cast its spell, bringing together players with new decks, bold strategies, and enduring hope. For the Sailors aboard Carl Vinson, this magical gathering is not just a game, it is a reminder that even in the vast expanse of the sea, connections forged over a battlefield of cards can be the most powerful magic of all. 🗡️





Carl's ~~Gr~~ives

MEET AMERICA'S FAVORITES



**LTJG
PEYTON
SOMMER**

AGE | 25
HOMETOWN | Kailua, Hawaii
FAVORITE HOLIDAY FOOD | Christmas Cookies
FAVORITE HOLIDAY MOVIE | Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire
FAVORITE HOLIDAY SONG | White Christmas



**YNSR
JOSIAH HOOD**

AGE | 22
HOMETOWN | Clayton County, Georgia
FAVORITE HOLIDAY FOOD | Dump Cake
FAVORITE HOLIDAY MOVIE | How the Grinch Stole Christmas
FAVORITE HOLIDAY SONG | The Twelve Days of Christmas



**LSSA
KIMBERLY
HERNANDEZ**

AGE | 19
HOMETOWN | Hilmar, California
FAVORITE HOLIDAY FOOD | Tamales
FAVORITE HOLIDAY MOVIE | Home Alone 2: Lost in New York
FAVORITE HOLIDAY SONG | Last Christmas



**ENS
KIRSTA
WHELOCK**

AGE | 27
HOMETOWN | Fredonia, New York
FAVORITE HOLIDAY FOOD | Cookies
FAVORITE HOLIDAY MOVIE | Home Alone
FAVORITE HOLIDAY SONG | Last Christmas



**AMAN
KAYLEE BURDICK**

AGE | 19
HOMETOWN | Monticello, Florida
FAVORITE HOLIDAY FOOD | Chocolate Chip Cookies
FAVORITE HOLIDAY MOVIE | How the Grinch Stole Christmas
FAVORITE HOLIDAY SONG | Mary, Did You Know?

CALL SIGNS

GHANDI

LT GERARDO CHARLES

HELICOPTER MARITIME STRIKE SQUADRON (HSM) 78

HOMETOWN: HOUSTON, TEXAS

UNDERWAY FOR THE FIRST TIME ON USS PRINCETON, UNSUPERVISED, I HAD A DIFFICULT TIME FINDING THE WARDROOM HAVING NEVER BEEN ON A CRUISER BEFORE. BEING A BIT SHY AND HARDHEADED, I DIDN'T BOTHER ASKING WHERE IT WAS. AFTER A COUPLE OF DAYS, MY OIC FINALLY ASKED IF I'D LIKE TO JOIN HIM FOR DINNER - "I'D LOVE TO," I RESPONDED. "I'VE BEEN LIVING OFF OF GOLDFISH AND DANISHES." WHEN NEWS GOT BACK TO THE CARRIER, THE CALL SIGN NATURALLY STUCK. GERARDO "GHANDI" CHARLES FOR HAVING GONE ON HUNGER STRIKE ON PRINCETON.



PHOTO | MC3 NATE JORDAN

