

## Naval Aviation: Today and Tomorrow

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Today's naval aviation force is comprised of more than 100,000 officers and Sailors assigned to 11 aircraft carriers, 10 carrier air wings, 25 naval air stations and 168 fleet, reserve and training squadrons. From pilots to aircraft maintainers, naval aviation professionals are supporting our nation's Maritime Strategy around the globe.

Aircraft carriers and embarked carrier air wings conduct a myriad of missions vital to America's security, from combat operations, close-air support and maritime interdiction, to countering piracy and providing humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. Around the world and at home, they significantly contribute to cooperative security operations through forward presence and sustained, routine engagement with foreign partners and allies.

USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN 72) is operating in the U.S. 5<sup>th</sup> Fleet area of responsibility (AOR) in support of maritime security operations and theater security cooperation efforts. On New Year's Day, they launched their 1,000th sortie in support of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and their air wing has flown more than 5,884 hours for OEF in just under four months.

USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70) departed San Diego Nov. 30 for its Western Pacific deployment. The ship is currently operating in the U.S. 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet AOR and recently conducted a port visit in the Republic of Korea.

USS Ronald Reagan (CVN 76), which recently deployed for its own western Pacific deployment, participated in the biennial Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) exercise near the Hawaiian islands in the summer of 2010. RIMPAC, the world's largest maritime event, is comprised of 14 navies, 34 ships, five submarines, more than 100 aircraft and 20,000 personnel, and designed to strengthen maritime skills and capabilities among participating nations. In addition, naval aviation professionals can be found in the "Gator Navy" supporting Marine Corps operations. Naval aviators, flight deck personnel and aircraft maintainers aboard the amphibious assault ships USS Bonhomme Richard (LHD 6) and USS Peleliu (LHA 5) supported embarked

Marine Expeditionary Unit Air Combat Elements during their recent deployments to the 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet AORs, while embarked Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron (HSC) detachments provided search and rescue support to the ship.

As part of the Navy's "Global Force for Good," naval aviation has been on the forefront of recent humanitarian assistance and disaster relief efforts. USS Carl Vinson and Carrier Air Wing 17 were among the first responders following the major earthquake in Haiti in January 2010. Carl Vinson delivered more than 1.1 million pounds of aid to the disaster-stricken nation, while her embarked helicopters flew more than 1,000 hours and evacuated more than 500 patients. Navy P-3 "Orion" aircraft conducted aerial surveys over Haiti, providing valuable information for assessment, rescue and relief support.

Furthermore, helicopter detachments from HSC-22, HSC-9, HSC-26, and Helicopter Mine Countermeasures Squadron 14, embarked aboard the amphibious assault ship USS Bataan (LHD 5), transported hundreds of thousands of pounds of food, water and supplies throughout Haiti.

More recently, helicopters from USS Peleliu and the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit conducted relief efforts in support of the Government of Pakistan following historic floods, contributing to the rescue of 10,051 people and overall delivery of 1,895,038 pounds of relief supplies to citizens affected by the severe flooding.

Closer to home, helicopters from Helicopter Anti-Submarine Squadron 4 aboard USS Ronald Reagan delivered more than 47,000 pounds of supplies to the Carnival cruise ship C/V Splendor after an engine casualty disabled the ship in the waters off Mexico last December. Fleet Logistics Support Squadron 30, based here on Naval Air Station North Island, transported the supplies to the Reagan.

The future of carrier aviation looks strong. The first of at least three Ford-class aircraft carriers, USS Gerald H. Ford (CVN 78) is scheduled for commissioning in 2015. This new class of carrier will increase sortie generation rates and significantly improve the Navy's warfighting capability and flexibility.

Over the next 20 years, nearly every platform in the carrier's air wing will transition to a newer, more capable model. Manned fighters and patrol aircraft will be complemented by unmanned tactical aircraft; rotary-wing aircraft will make up a majority of the Navy's future air force, performing critical anti-surface and anti-submarine warfare, mine countermeasures, and humanitarian assistance missions.

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