

USS George H.W. Bush (CVN 77)

# THE AVENGER

Volume 2, Issue 7

August 2011



THIS MONTH: 20,000th trap | First all-female arresting gear crew | Chief Selects

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### From the Commanding Officer



Greetings families and friends,

August was a month for major milestones and celebration here on the GHWB.

On Aug. 1, Rear Adm. Nora Tyson, Commander, Carrier Strike Group (CSG) 2, was promoted to rear admiral (upper half). She had the honor of having her oath of office administered by our namesake, President George H.W. Bush, via video teleconference from his

home in Kennebunkport, Maine. On the same day, Capt. Jeff Davis, Commander, Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 8, completed his 1,000th career landing on our flight deck. For any naval aviator, that is a lifetime achievement and one I was proud to share with him.

A few hours after our Air Department helped Capt. Davis achieve his milestone, 51 First Class Petty Officers received the news that they were the Navy's newest Chief Petty Officer selectees. For each one of them, I am certain it was a moment that changed his or her life. They have worked toward this goal for many years and were selected from among so many fine Sailors. I look forward to their pinning on Sept. 16.

Two weeks later, our junior Sailors had a reason to celebrate. Seven female Sailors from Air Department made history Aug. 15 when they formed the first all-female arresting gear team in the Navy. During their historic day, they helped recover 70 aircraft and showed just how talented all of our Sailors are.

And I can't forget the milestone that I know many of you have been waiting for – the halfway point of this deployment. It is always a huge boost to morale when there are more days behind us than there are in front of us. Reaching this point also gives perspective on both what we have done and what we have yet to accomplish. We

are looking forward to having an even better second-half of deployment. Know that we'll be counting off the days with you.

The crew is excited to have come this far and represent the country they serve so well. Even though they are anxious about our impending return, they remain focused and resolved to complete the tasks our country has set before us.

The mission is always on our minds. Every day, I have the honor of updating our crew on how the air wing has supported Operation Enduring Freedom and the troops on the ground. Each member of this crew helps achieve this mission and you should be proud of everyone's contribution thus far.

I also want to thank all of you who continue to support our crew through your letters and care packages. You are certainly keeping the ship's post office busy. You should see the excitement on our crewmembers' faces when "mail call" is announced over the IMC. Keep those packages coming! I know your Sailors appreciate the letters, pictures, and snacks.

Finally, I hope that each of you has a memorable and safe Labor Day weekend with your families, neighbors, and friends. Labor Day weekend is the symbolic end of the summer and the beginning of the best time of the year – football season. Go Pack! †

Sincerely,

Capt. Brian "Lex" Luther  
Commanding Officer

#### ACCOMPLISHMENTS FROM AUGUST:

- Rear Adm. Nora Tyson, Commander, Carrier Strike Group (CSG) 2, promoted to rear admiral (upper half)
- 51 First Class Petty Officers selected for advancement to Chief Petty Officer
- Capt. Jeff Davis, Commander, Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 8, completed 1,000th career trap
- Completed ship's 20,000th successful trap
- Fielded first all-female arresting gear crew in Navy history



#### On the cover:

Aviation Boatswain's Mate (Handling) Airman Jose A. Dominguez-Rodriguez prepares to throw a football on the flight deck of the aircraft carrier USS George H.W. Bush (CVN 77) during a no-fly day. Photo by MC3 Joshua D. Sheppard.

# A view of home

Story, photo and layout by MC3 Michael Smevog



Machinist's Mate 3rd Class Luke I. Chapman communicates with his wife, Camille, via video teleconference Aug. 1.

Rapid communication over long distances first became a possibility when the telephone was introduced in 1876. Nearly a century later, e-mail revolutionized the possibilities for data transfer. Now, with the growth of satellites and streaming technology, people are able to communicate in real-time with another person a world away through video conferencing (VTC), a system of communication now available on board USS George H.W. Bush (CVN 77).

Sailors on the ship are now able to supplement e-mail and telephone conversations with loved ones back home through 20-minute VTC sessions, for occasions such as births, anniversaries and birthdays.

VTC is interactive telecommunication, which digitally compresses audio and video streams in real time. It allows two or more locations to simultaneously transmit video and audio, as well as share documents and other computer-displayed information.

Shortly after Commanding Officer Capt. Brian E. Luther took command in March, he suggested that the ship's Command Religious Ministries Department (CRMD) implement the family VTC program. Luther had seen the great benefit to crew morale and family well-being from the program at previous commands,

particularly during his tour as executive officer aboard USS Nimitz (CVN 68), explained Chief Religious Program Specialist (SW/AW/FMF) David M. Aguirre, VTC coordinator and CRMD Leading Chief Petty Officer.

"With e-mail, you can type a smiley face, but that doesn't cut it," said Aviation Boatswain's Mate 3rd Class (AW) William K. Ward, of George H.W. Bush Air Department's V-2 Division, as he finished a VTC session with his wife. "[On VTC] you can see a real smile and real tears."

One of the ship's Ombudsmen, Sandy K. Barker, is the Homefront Coordinator working with Aguirre to operate the program in Norfolk, Va. Barker schedules appointments for and interacts with spouses to facilitate the program. Both Aguirre and Barker agreed that the users' emotions from just the first session were enough to justify their efforts.

"Families can see their Sailors are alive and well, and they are able to interact during the long periods of separation," Barker said. "It is much more personal than an e-mail."

VTC operates between the ship's Flag B & A conference room and Naval Support Activity Norfolk, Naval Air Station (NAS) Oceana, NAS Whidbey Island, and NAS Jacksonville.

# Trap: 20,000

Story and layout by MC2(SW) Timothy Walter



ABE3 Santiago Garcia checks the monitor on arresting gear engine one just prior to the ship's 20,000th arrested landing. Photo by MC2(SW) Timothy Walter.

USS George H.W. Bush (CVN 77) reached an aviation milestone Aug. 23, successfully completing the 20,000th arrested landing since the ship's commissioning in 2009.

The event occurred in the Arabian Sea while conducting flight operations in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. Lt. Cmdr. Chris R. Swanson, from Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 8, landed an E-2C Hawkeye assigned to Carrier Airborne Early Warning Squadron (VAW) 124 at 7:42 p.m. (local time) to reach the milestone.

Swanson made the historic trap just one month before he

transfers to instructor duty.

"For it to happen was really a surprise," said Swanson. "I was just the the right guy at the right place at the right time."

Swanson added that the credit for the accomplishment starts with the many Sailors on and beneath the flight deck who make each trap possible.

"They've done 20,000 safe arrestments and I'm pretty sure this ship is going to do 200,000 more," he said. "It's just a small step in where the ship is going."

Aviation Boatswain's Mate (Equipment) 3rd Class Santiago Garcia, from Air Department's V-2 Division, was one of the Sailors from the arresting gear crew who stood the engine room operator watch, monitoring the arresting gear engine below the flight deck. For Garcia, a native of Bogota, Columbia, who gained his citizenship through the Navy, being a part of the 20,000th trap was a unique experience.

"I have been here since the first trap and to be here for the 20,000th trap is something incredible," Garcia said. "It has been a long three years, hard work and countless maintenances to get here."

Chief Aviation Boatswain's Mate (Equipment) (AW/SW) Antonio A. Blanco, leading chief petty officer for V-2 Division's Arresting Gear workcenter, said teamwork and commitment contributed to quickly and safely achieving the milestone.

"There is something unique about this crew," Blanco said. "I've never seen one gel this fast. Twenty-thousand traps is definitely something to be proud of."



An E-2C Hawkeye, assigned to Carrier Airborne Early Warning Squadron (VAW) 124, makes an arrested landing on the flight deck of the aircraft carrier USS George H.W. Bush (CVN 77), marking the ship's 20,000th trap. Photo by MC3 Joshua Sheppard.

# TWO STARS ONE NAMESAKE

CSG2 Commander gets pinned, Namesake administers Oath

Story by MC2(SW) Timothy Walter  
Layout by MCSN Molly Treece  
Photos by MCSA Brian Read Castillo



Former President George H.W. Bush promotes Rear Adm. Nora W. Tyson, Commander, Carrier Strike Group (CSG) 2, to rear admiral (upper half) aboard the aircraft carrier USS George H.W. Bush (CVN 77).

Commander, Carrier Strike Group (CSG) 2 Rear Adm. Nora W. Tyson was promoted Aug. 1 to rear admiral (upper half) while deployed aboard USS George H.W. Bush (CVN 77), the Navy's newest aircraft carrier. Former President George H.W. Bush surprised Tyson when he administered the Oath of Office via video teleconference from his summer home in Kennebunkport, Maine, July 31.

Tyson, the first woman to command a U.S. Navy carrier strike group, recited her Oath of Office in front of nearly 50 of her Sailors who packed the room to congratulate Tyson on her achievement.

"That is something that, obviously, I will never forget as long as I live," said Tyson.

George H.W. Bush Commanding Officer Capt. Brian E. Luther; Commander, Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 8 Capt. Jeff Davis; and CSG2 Chief of Staff Capt. William Seaman placed the second stars on her shoulders.

Tyson said that she owed a debt of gratitude to all the Sailors she had the honor to work with over the last 30 years.

"It has been a phenomenal experience," she said. "I wouldn't trade it for anything."

GHWB CSG consists of the aircraft carrier

USS George H.W. Bush (CVN 77), Carrier Strike Group (CSG) 2 staff, Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 8, Destroyer Squadron 22 staff, guided-missile cruisers USS Gettysburg (CG 64) and USS Anzio (CG 68), and guided-missile destroyers USS Truxtun (DDG 103) and USS Mitscher (DDG 57).



Rear Adm. Nora W. Tyson, Commander, Carrier Strike Group (CSG) 2, is pinned to rear admiral (upper half) by Capt. Jeff Davis, Commander, Carrier Air Wing 8, left, and Capt. Brian E. Luther, Commanding Officer, USS George H.W. Bush.



# To be Chief

Photos by MCC(AW/EXW) James Davis Layout by MC2(SW) Timothy Walter

- ABFC (Sel) Frankie Alvarado - Air Dept.
- EMC (Sel) Norberto Arqueza - Engineering Dept.
- AEC (Sel) Christopher Backus - VFA-213
- MCC (Sel) Matthew Bash - Media Dept.
- HTC (Sel) Thomas Behl - Engineering Dept.
- EMC (Sel) Eric Brideau - Engineering Dept.
- FCC (Sel) Landis Britton - Combat Systems Dept.
- AMC (Sel) Conor Brodie - HSC-9
- AOC (Sel) Geoffrey Carlson - VFA-15
- AZC (Sel) Issarapong Chanavanno - VFA-213
- NCC (Sel) Deborah Cohn - VAW-124
- GMC (Sel) Kenneth Coley - Weapons Dept.
- AZC (Sel) Dawn Collier - VAW-124
- AMC (Sel) Mitchell Connell - VAQ-141
- AOC (Sel) Jessica Cook - VFA-87
- AMC (Sel) Charles Cutlip - VFA-31
- LSC (Sel) Nisa Daniel - Supply Dept.
- AOC (Sel) William Doyle - Weapons Dept.
- OSC (Sel) Trevor Edwards - CVW-8
- ATC (Sel) James Ewing - HSM-70
- AEC (Sel) Scott Fowler - HSC-9
- LSC (Sel) Aneta Fusilero - HSM-70
- PRC (Sel) Roberto Garza - HSM-70
- ABHC (Sel) Enrique Gerald - Air Dept.
- AZC (Sel) Rayfield Gordon - Air Dept.
- ABFC (Sel) Shalmicheal Hampton - Air Dept.
- ABHC (Sel) Ramone Harris - Air Dept.
- AZC (Sel) Brandi Heath - AIMD
- AOC (Sel) Alphonso Hicks - Weapons Dept.
- MMC (Sel) Miguel Hutchinson - Engineering Dept.
- ETC (Sel) Eric Jones - Combat Systems Dept.
- AOC (Sel) James Kenney - HSM-70
- LSC (Sel) John Laureda - Operations Dept.
- ABHC (Sel) Frederick Martin - Air Dept.
- AMC (Sel) Eric McDermott - HSM-70
- ATC (Sel) Nicholas Mueller - VFA-15
- ADC (Sel) Jason Pappas - VFA-87
- ATC (Sel) Jason Pitts - AIMD
- AEC (Sel) William Quillin - VFA-87
- MMC (Sel) David Regal - Reactor Dept.
- ABEC (Sel) McKenzie Rhymer - Air Dept.
- ABHC (Sel) Shawn Riley - Air Dept.
- ETC (Sel) Joshua Satre - Combat Systems Dept.
- AMC (Sel) Kerry Staniford - VAW-124
- CTRC (Sel) Samuel Stone - Operations Dept.
- AMC (Sel) Brent Taylor - VFA-15
- PRC (Sel) John Tracy - VAQ-141
- AMC (Sel) Ramon Vinas - HSC-9
- ETC (Sel) Joseph Weissman - Reactor Dept.
- MMC (Sel) Geoffrey Wellons - Reactor Dept.
- MMC (Sel) Randy Wiggins - Reactor Dept.



Chief (Select) Logistics Specialist (SW/AW) John Laureda shakes hands with USS George H.W. Bush Command Master Chief (SW/AW) David R. Colton during the introduction ceremony of the Chief selectees, Aug. 1.



Chief (Select) Navy Counselor (AW/SW) Deborah Cohn introduces herself in the Chiefs' Mess, Aug. 1.



Chief (Select) Mass Communication Specialist (AW/EXW) Matthew Bash, right, laughs with Colton during the introduction ceremony of the Chief selectees, Aug. 1.



# ON TARGET

1. Aviation Ordnanceman Airman Chris J. Hastings fires an M16 rifle during a live fire exercise. 2. Hastings reloads his weapon while shooting from the kneeling position. 3. Aviation Ordnanceman Airman (AW) Cornelia R. Keeton, a line coach, scores her shooter's target. 4. Shooters gather shells after their exercise. 5. Gunner's Mate 1st Class (SW) Kenneth A. Coley, range safety officer, ensures Sailors are properly prepared to shoot. 6. A Sailor sends the bolt forward on her weapon after loading a magazine. 7. Line coaches score and replace targets before the next round. 8. Sailors fire from the prone position. 9. M16 rifles and personal protective equipment lay on the deck as the next round of Sailors prepare to shoot. Photos and layout by MC3 Michael Smevog.



# Ghosts on the move:

## Two nights with Ghost Team One

Story, layout and photos by MC2 Joshua K. Horton

Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, the security teams of USS George H.W. Bush (CVN 77) patrol the halls of the ship, casting a watchful eye in every direction. It is their duty to enforce the rules of the ship and to protect the crew.

Ghost Team One is one of the eight roving security teams on board George H.W. Bush. As they roam the narrow corridors of the ship, their minds must be alert, their actions assertive, and their attitudes vigilant. Hoping for the best, each member is always prepared for the worst.

### Business as Usual

The time is 12:30 a.m. Ghost Team One is making its usual security rove along the passage ways of the ship's mess decks. As they enter a dark corridor somewhere near mid ship, a member of the team removes a flashlight from a pouch on his belt and begins scanning the corners for anything out of the ordinary. All is clear and the team moves on. So far, tonight has been relatively quiet for the two-man team.

Together, Aviation Support Equipment Technician Airman Val Omondi and Electronics Technician 2nd Class Adam Ward make up Ghost Team One and are a part of the ship's Secondary Response Force (SRF). Each member of

the team is armed with a 9 mm Berretta, flashlight, OC spray, handcuffs and a collapsible baton. As a result, they are easily recognized in the passageways of the ship, and for good reason. Omondi said Sailors are more likely to adhere to the rules and regulations of the ship if they know security is nearby. Since the team will roam the ship for eight hours a night before being relieved, there is always a security watch just around the corner.

"Generally, the only place we don't go is somewhere that a thermoluminescent dosimeter (TLD) is required," said Omondi.

As night continues on, Omondi and Ward pass through a lounge area on the starboard side of the ship. The white

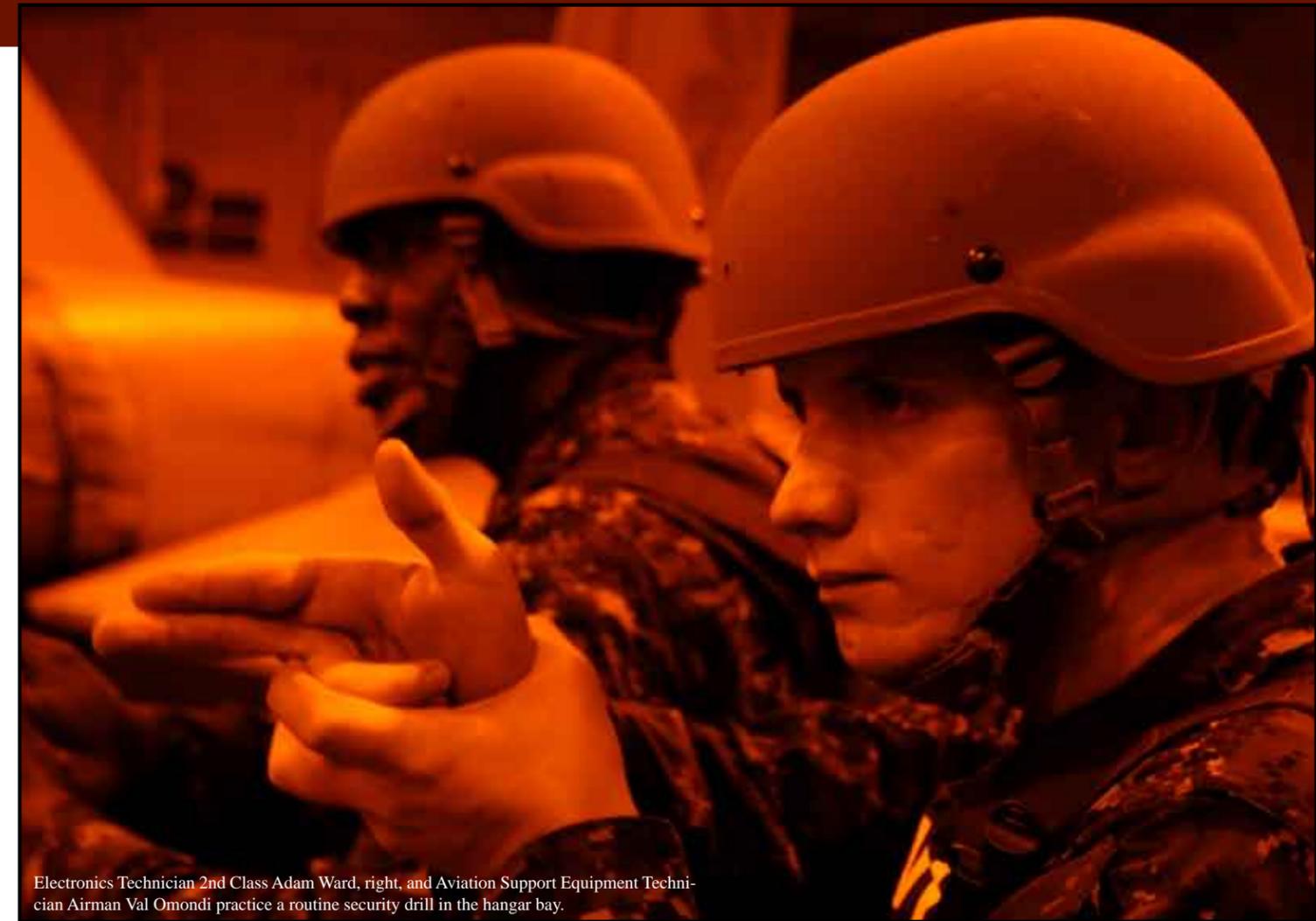
light of day has been substituted for a glowing red and many Sailors are relaxing nearby. Once again, all clear.

As Ghost Team One continues marching forward towards the bow of the ship, they comment on minor safety infractions that they've noticed on their stroll. This is yet another aspect of their job, and sometime later, they will return to these infractions and document them with the proper forms.

Soon after, Ward and Omondi point out a loose wire hanging high in the corner of a bulkhead.

"This is part of our job too," said Omondi. "We try to help out Safety Department as much as we can."

By 1:30 a.m., the team nears the ship's main security complex and the

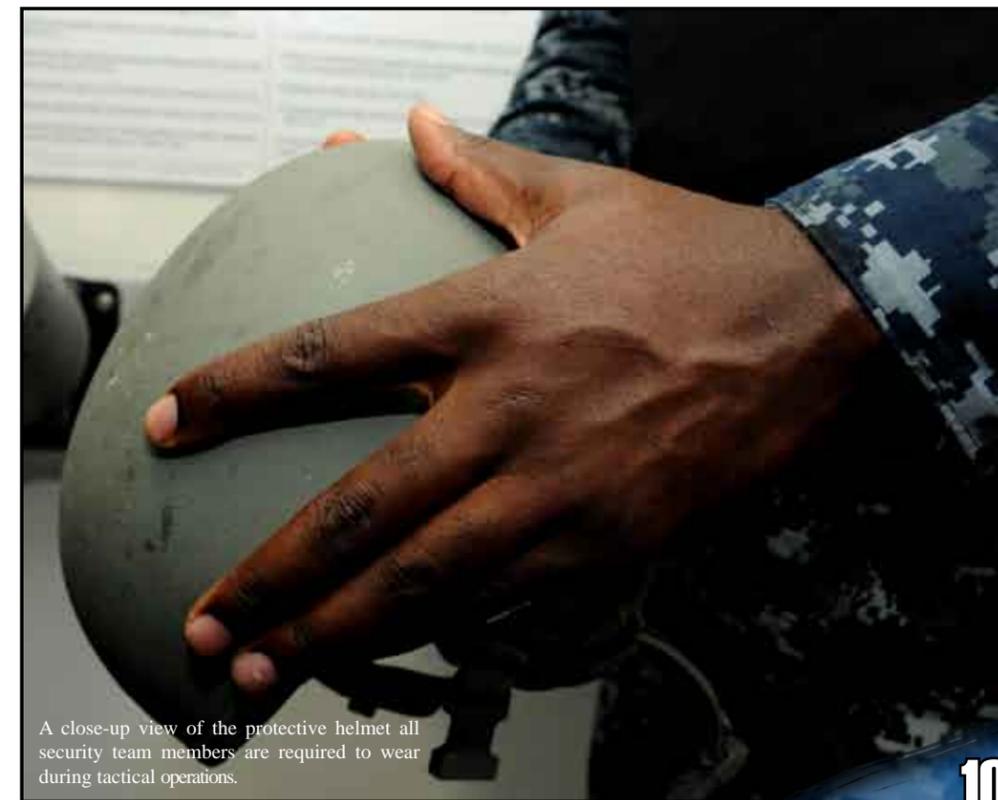


Electronics Technician 2nd Class Adam Ward, right, and Aviation Support Equipment Technician Airman Val Omondi practice a routine security drill in the hangar bay.

rove has come to an end. Another member of the security force steps out of the office door carrying a large set of bolt cutters. Someone on the ship needs a lock removed. Omondi smiles and says, "We also do that."

### Training Day

At 2:30 a.m. the following day, the members of Ghost Team One have one thing on their mind — training. The security teams on board the ship do more than just enforce the rules and assist the Safety Department with minor violations. As part of SRF, Ghost Team One is responsible for the safety of the crew if an unexpected incident should occur. For example, in the case of an



A close-up view of the protective helmet all security team members are required to wear during tactical operations.

After Party



Aviation Boatswain's Mate (Equipment) Airman Bang Nguyen, left, and Aviation Boatswain's Mate (Handling) Airman Peter Schuster participate in tactical training exercise with Ghost Team One in the hangar bay.

**“We try to utilize the lowest level of force necessary to get someone to comply if we have to take them into custody.” - ET2 Adam Ward**

active shooter, the SRF is responsible for gaining custody of the suspect.

“We actually have to go into the space and take down the suspect,” said Ward.

Their scenario involves clearing a space of a possible threat, or “Tango” as the suspect is often called. Omondi demonstrates the proper way to search the suspect for weapons. In addition, the training also includes a brief demonstration of how to immobilize the suspect in the event that he or she does not go quietly.

If such an incident did occur, the security forces are properly armed and have been trained in various hand-to-hand takedown techniques to assist them in the process.

“We try to utilize the lowest level of force necessary to get someone to comply if we have to take them into custody,” said Ward.

By 2:45 a.m., Ghost Team One and several other members of security are preparing to storm a space located one deck above them. They begin by organizing themselves into a formation known as “stacking up.” They form a line, one behind the other, and move to the base of a ladderwell. The team leader gives the order to move up to the next

deck and into the space where a possible suspect is thought to be. One by one, they crouch and move smartly up the ladderwell. As each member of the formation approaches the top, they assume a post adjacent to the bulkhead.

Once the room has been cleared, Omondi, the team leader, gives the order to proceed into the next space. With a blast of energy the team storms the space, each filing in a different direction. In this scenario, it is imperative that each one covers a certain area to ensure that no one gets blind-sided by the suspect, who could be lurking in the room. During the training, they advance with simulated “hand guns” to ensure safety. If this were a real-life situation, each member of the team would advance into the space with their 9 mm handguns ready to fire.

Just as quickly as the scenario began, it concludes. The security team has successfully apprehended the suspect and no one was injured, but this was just a training exercise. The team repeats this same scenario several times throughout the night, each time honing in on the small errors that could cost someone’s life if it were a real situation.

At 3:30 a.m., the training has come to an end. High fives and smiles are tossed around the room as the team celebrates a successful night. Each one knows that these scenarios are vital to the safety of the team and the crew of the ship. Without it, they may be taken by surprise, a mistake they cannot afford to make.

Soon after, Ghost Team One and other members of security who were involved in the training drills reconvene in front of the main security complex and discuss the learning points of the night’s scenarios. The constant training keeps each member prepared for events that each hope will never occur.

Once the meeting is over, the team members are free to go about their normal routine of roving the passageways and documenting minor safety infractions, but the night has taken its toll on the team. The heavy tactical gear accompanied by the high temperatures that come along with the ship’s location have the team low on energy and sweating. However, the team knows that their night is not over yet. So they carry on — back into the shadows and dark corners of the ship.†



Fire Controlman 2nd Class Christopher Cody issues tactical equipment to Ghost Team One from the security armory.



Aviation Support Equipment Technician Airman Val Omondi uses a flashlight to check a dark space during one of his routine roves around the ship.



Aviation Support Equipment Technician Airman Val Omondi prepares to inspect a landing aboard the ship.

# Sparks. Heat. Welds. And a whole lot of pride.

The group of hull technicians in Engineering Department's Repair Division keep the ship together, one weld at a time.

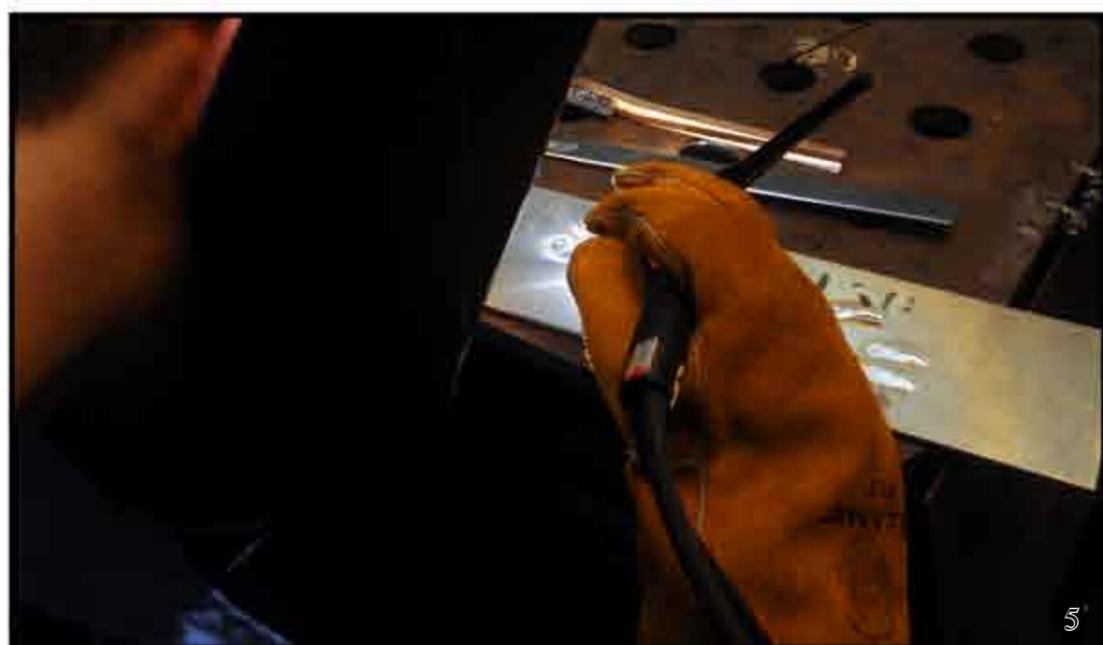


Hull Maintenance Technician Fireman Kurtis M. Beckerle welds a piece of equipment in the ship's machine shop July 22. Photo by MC3 Billy Ho.

# Repair Division



“There is not an area of this ship that is not affected by us.”  
*HT2(SW) Trevor Shaw*



For some Sailors on board USS George H.W. Bush (CVN 77), the recent port visit to Cartagena, Spain, meant long nights spent at fleet landing waiting to return to the ship after a long day of sight-seeing. For other Sailors, it meant not being able to get off the ship at all. For one group of Sailors, it meant getting to work to make sure every crewmember came back to the ship safely.

Partly due to bad weather and choppy waters, chocks broke off of the dock while the ship was in the harbor, making it impossible to tie up the liberty boats. These unsafe conditions kept Sailors from safely embarking or disembarking from the ship. To solve the problem, six hull technicians from Engineering Department's Repair Division spent about four hours of nearly nonstop work to fix the stern dock.

“We were out there welding all the

parts back together while the ship and barge were rocking back and forth,” said Hull Technician 3rd Class (SW/AW) Gerard Wilson.

Working under flood lights in the hours after taps, Wilson and other hull technicians answered the call to help the ship and the crew. For each hull technician, it was another day on the job providing repair services to ensure the crew is comfortable and, more importantly, the ship's mission is completed.

Repair Division Sailors are the first ones called upon to fix any structural equipment or vacuum system on the ship. When any head on the ship is secured, they are hard at work making sure it is fixed as soon as possible. Hull Technician 2nd Class (SW) Trevor Shaw, who works in the division's metal shop, said that Repair Division's work extends to every corner of the ship.

“There is not an area on this ship that is not affected by us, from the O-10 to the 7th deck,” Shaw said.

On a ship made of steel, examples of Repair Division's work are plentiful. They weld and repair most metal on the ship. They make and repair television brackets, showerheads, hatches, pipes, the boat davit, the commanding officer's chair on the bridge, and countless other pieces of equipment.

“I've welded together JP-5 fuel pipes so they can keep pumping fuel to the planes,” Shaw said.

At the end of each work day, Wilson said he feels like his shop contributes to the mission readiness of the ship. Whether it is welding a critical pipe or just fixing a broken door, he said that the hull technicians make a difference.

“Every day, it's what we do,” Wilson said. †



Story, photos and layout by MCSN(SW) Jessica Echerri

1. Hull Technician Fireman Aaron Sample selects a metal rod out of a heated container to use for a welding job in the metal shop's workspace Aug. 9.
2. Sample prepares his tools to weld.
3. Hull Technician Fireman Jessica Whitman uses a grinder to smooth a metal bar.
4. Sample heats up a sheet of aluminum while completing a welding job.
5. Sample welds a sheet of aluminum.

# THE FIRST SEVEN

In a deployment of firsts, seven female Sailors aimed for one of their own and made history

Story and layout by MC2(SW) Timothy Walter

From left: ABEAN(AW) Aquia A. Lunsford, ABEAN Carissa M. Smith, ABEAN Megan E. Walker and ABE3 Alison R. Pint head toward the flight deck. Photo by MC2(SW) Timothy Walter.

Seven female Sailors assigned to USS George H.W. Bush (CVN 77) Air Department formed the first all-female arresting gear crew in Navy history, Aug. 15.

Five Aviation Boatswain's Mates (Equipment) from George H.W. Bush and two temporarily assigned duty Sailors from USS Nimitz (CVN 68) and USS Theodore Roosevelt (CVN 71) worked in the seven positions necessary to operate and maintain the arresting gear wires on the flight deck.

"This is a deployment of many firsts," said Chief Aviation Boatswain's Mate (Equipment) (AW/SW) Antonio A. Blanco, leading chief petty officer for George H.W. Bush Air Department V-2 Division's Arresting Gear workcenter. "We have the personnel to do it and we might as well be the first to have an all-female arresting gear crew."

Topside Petty Officer Aviation Boatswain's Mate (Equipment) 3rd Class (AW/SW) Beatrice

A. Williamson was a leading force in making the all-female crew a reality after nearly four years aboard the ship.

The positions of the crew include the deck edge operator who retracts the arresting wire remotely; the hook runner who signals the operator; two push bar personnel who physically move the arresting wire away from starboard side of the flight deck; two deck checkers, one who inspects the wire and the other who acts as a spotter; and the topside petty officer who oversees the operation.

"I kept saying to myself that when I get topside, I am going to have an all-female crew before the end of deployment," Williamson said. "Chief Blanco made it happen by helping everyone to get qualified."

For Williamson, making history was just as important as showing the abilities of the female Sailors who wear the Aviation Boatswain's Mate (Equipment) green shirt. Air De-

partment's V-2 Division has 161 male and 43 female Sailors. Only 10 female Sailors are assigned to the arresting gear workcenter.

"Nobody has ever done it and we wanted to be the first," she said. "It means a lot."

Shortly after 9 a.m., the seven Sailors helped recover their first aircraft of the day – an F/A-18E Super Hornet from Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 31. Aviation Boatswain's Mate (Equipment) Airman Kapri D. Ragin, a temporarily assigned duty Sailor from USS Theodore Roosevelt (CVN 71), discovered broken strands in the one of the three arresting wires during her post-landing inspection and rushed to fix it until a replacement could be installed.

Following the first round of successful landings, the arresting gear crew quickly replaced the affected wire in an operation that required all seven Sailors to work in unison to switch out the 125-pound arresting wire.

After a long 14-hour day, the all-female crew helped successfully recover more than 60 aircraft.

"They are a great group of young women and I have all the confidence in the world in them," said Blanco. "This is something memorable for them and they deserve it."

Additional members of the first all-female arresting gear crew were Aviation Boatswain's Mate (Equipment) 3rd Class Alison R. Pint, Aviation Boatswain's Mate (Equipment) 3rd Class (AW) Deanne Craig, Aviation Boatswain's Mate (Equipment) Airman (AW) Aquia A. Lunsford, Aviation Boatswain's Mate (Equipment) Airman Carissa M. Smith, and Aviation Boatswain's Mate (Equipment) Airman Megan E. Walker, who is temporarily assigned duty from USS Nimitz (CVN 68). †



ABEAN(AW) Aquia A. Lunsford attaches her cranial in the barricade store room. Photo by MC2(SW) Timothy Walter.



ABEAN Megan E. Walker, left, and ABEAN Kapri D. Ragin prepare to move a length of arresting gear wire on the flight deck. Photo by MCSN Brian Read Castillo.

# Gun Mount Captain

Story, layout and photos by  
MCSN(SW) Jessica Echerrri

Ten gun mounts stand around the USS George H.W. Bush (CVN 77) ready to fight. However, even with a crate of ammunition, the gun mounts are simply blocks of metal. A team of watchstanders are needed to man each mount. And you can't have a team without a leader – in this case – the gun mount captain.

Anytime quick draw, full bore or half bore is set throughout the ship, 10 teams respond by manning their assigned gun mount. The gun mount captains assemble and load their weapons and instruct their phone talkers to make manned-and-ready reports to the bridge or armory. Once manned, the 10 gun mounts are the ship's primary self-defense against surface and air contacts. The gun mount captain must ensure that the team and the weapon will be ready to defend the ship.

"It shows a lot of confidence in us," said Aviation Ordnanceman Airman Matthew Howe, who has been a gun mount captain for about a year. "I wouldn't be out there on the mount if I didn't know exactly what I was doing."

On the gun mount, loaders fill the .50-caliber machine gun with rounds from the ammunition box, and phone talkers man the sound-powered telephones to relay messages between the mount and the bridge or armory. Gun mount captains are expected to know how to stand the loader and phone talker watches as well as their own watch.

"When a new Sailor is assigned to my mount, I need to make sure everything he's doing is right," Howe said. "If it's not right, I need to correct it."

Chief Gunner's Mate (SW/AW) Barry Cramer, the lead-



Aviation Ordnanceman Airman Matthew Howe stands next to the .50-caliber machine gun on mount 54. As gun mount captain, Howe is expected to know how to operate and maintain this weapon.

ing chief petty officer of G-2 division, said his junior enlisted Sailors must show good leadership and maturity before they can earn the title of gun mount captain.

"I look at how they function in high-pressure situations," Cramer said. "They need to be able to pull out a 96-pound weapon and set it up on the mount in under five minutes."

Part of getting qualified to handle the weapon is having a firm understanding of how it functions and how it goes through each of the conditions: round chambered and the safety off, ammo in tray and safety on, and clear and safe. Knowing the gun inside and out makes the gun mount safer for the watchstanders and other Sailors nearby.

"If I get a misfire, I

**"I wouldn't be out there on the mount if I didn't know exactly what I was doing."**

AOAN Matthew Howe  
Gun mount captain

know how to clear it," Howe said. "I know how to make sure the chamber is clear and safe after each shoot. Accidents on the mount can't happen, so I do

everything I can to be safe."

Once qualified and given a mount, each gun mount captain takes ownership of the .50-caliber machine gun. This means maintaining the weapon so it can always perform reliably when needed. The captain completes preventative maintenance before and after every shoot as well as weekly maintenance. The most extensive maintenance is done after the weapon is fired. The gun mount captain completely takes apart every piece of the gun to clean and inspect it for damage.

"It's my gun, so it's my responsibility to take care of it," Howe said, "When my weapon is loaded and firing on time, I know I did my job. It feels good to know I had something to do with that."+

# Sailors of Excellence

Story and layout by MCSN Greg Wilhelmi



Photo by MCSN(SW) Molly Treece

## Blue Jacket of the Quarter

**Aviation Boatswain's Mate (Fuel) (AW) Airman Jikel M. Sambrano**, a native of Bronx, N.Y., has served in the Navy for three years and reported aboard George H.W. Bush in November 2008.

Sambrano, assigned to Air Department's V-4 Division, is currently enrolled in college classes, and is working on his ESWS qualification. He also helped train new-comers on how to be a repairman for V-4 division.

"Each accomplishment is a baby step towards the big picture, for me," said Sambrano. "Whether I stay in or not, my time here will not be wasted."

Sambrano's most memorable moment aboard George H.W. Bush was when he completed his year-long Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults program.

"Sambrano is dedicated to improving himself and helping his shipmates improve," said Aviation Boatswain's Mate 2nd Class (AW/SW) Woodson Dagobert, V-4 Repair Division Work Center Supervisor.



Photo by MCSN Greg Wilhelmi

## Petty Officer of the Quarter

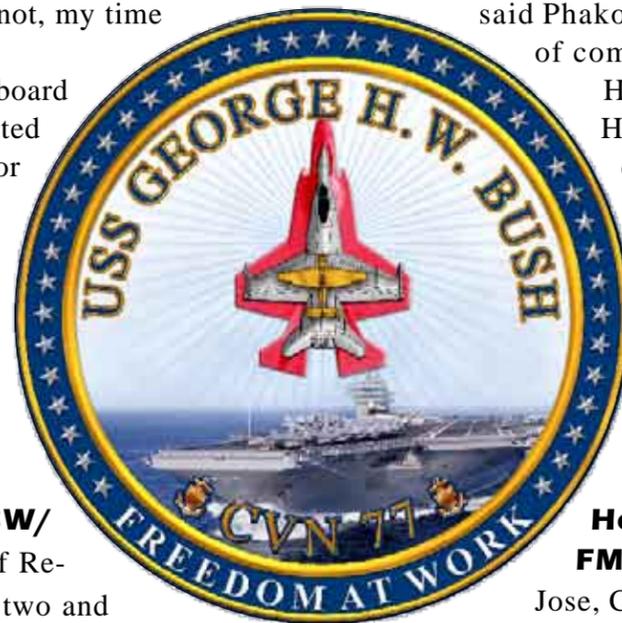
**Personnel Specialist 3rd Class (SW/AW) Matthew M. Hobson**, a native of Rehoboth, Mass., has served in the Navy for two and a half years and reported to George H.W. Bush in March 2009.

Hobson, assigned to Administration Department, single-handedly runs the separation section of X-3 Division — a section which was originally run by four different Sailors.

"I've been doing it for a while, so a lot of it is second nature," said Hobson.

His most memorable moment aboard George H.W. Bush was when he was frocked as a third class petty officer.

"Hobson just jumped right into a job normally handled by a second class or above," said Senior Chief Personnel Specialist (AW/SW) Alfredo Grafil, X-3 Leading Chief Petty Officer. "He can do it, and he can do it better than most. That's one of his best selling points."



## Junior Sailor of the Quarter

**Aviation Boatswain's Mate (Handling) 2nd Class (AW) Steven Phakonkham**, a native of Hampton, Ga., has served in the Navy for 12 years and reported to George H.W. Bush in July 2007.

Phakonkham, assigned to Air Department's V-3 Division, is the training petty officer, overseeing 95 personnel training jackets, and also performs the duties of a command fitness leader.

"You have to have a good environment in order to excel," said Phakonkham. "That's what I have — a good chain of command."

His most memorable moment aboard George H.W. Bush was the ship's commissioning ceremony.

"He has shown command and divisional leadership skills," said Aviation Boatswain's Mate (Handling) 1st Class (AW/SW) Gregory Piazza, V-3 Leading Petty Officer. "He's very active in command programs."

## Senior Sailor of the Quarter

**Hospital Corpsman 1st Class (SW/AW/FMF) Mark S. Gornitzka**, a native of San Jose, Calif., has served in the Navy for 14 years and reported to George H.W. Bush in July 2010.

Gornitzka, assigned to Medical Department, mentored 26 Hospital Corpsmen in providing healthcare to 4,200 Sailors. As the leading petty officer, he facilitated a 99 percent smallpox and anthrax compliance rate and the highest level of medical readiness — 95 percent — of any carrier in the fleet.

"They're not my accomplishments," said Gornitzka. "They're the accomplishments of the entire department."

His most memorable moment aboard George H.W. Bush is when he was afforded the opportunity to become the leading petty officer.

"Gornitzka was chosen as Senior Sailor of the Quarter because he puts the Sailors and the mission first," said Chief Hospital Corpsman (SW/FMF) Matthew Snider, Medical Divisional Leading Chief Petty Officer.

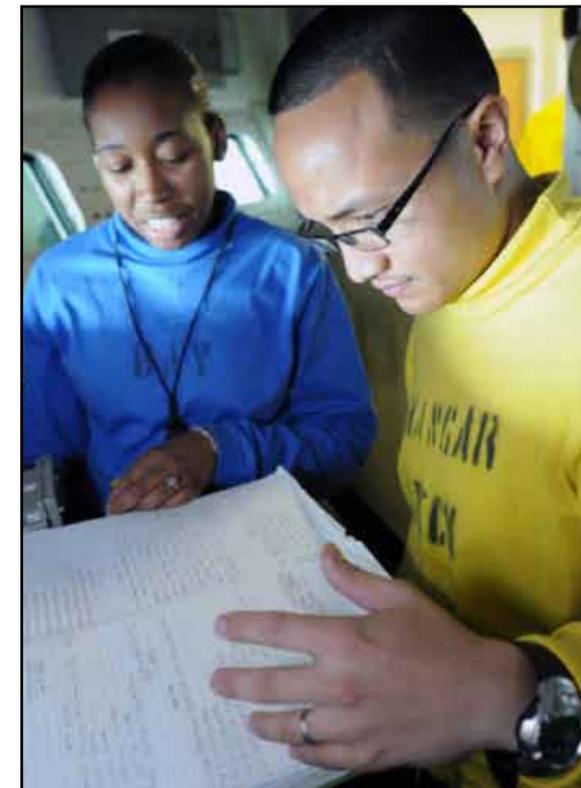


Photo by MCSN Greg Wilhelmi



Photo by MCSN Greg Wilhelmi

# What is a Shooter?

Story, photos and layout by MC2(SW/AW) Tony D. Curtis

Lt. Michael Minervini visually inspects the flight deck. He signals a pilot to increase the aircraft's amount of thrust. He looks to his team of Aviation Boatswain's Mates and checks the shot line. Everything looks good. The pilot gives a salute that he's ready to go. Then the seconds begin to slow down for Minervini. He drops to the iconic Shooter launching crouch and points his fingers forward. Boom. Another aircraft rockets off the flight deck. (Continued on next page)



Minervini is one of ten aircraft launch and recovery officers, or “shooters,” aboard USS George H.W. Bush (CVN 77) who act as the final checkpoint before an aircraft launches off the flight deck and later when it stops at full thrust. They spend long hours on the flight deck but their job often comes down to seconds between launches.

Once a shooter gives the signal – a knee on the deck with his hand in the shape of a pistol pointed toward the bow – the catapult operator in the catwalk presses the “fire” button and the aircraft, weighing up to 30 tons, accelerates from zero to more than 150 knots in a two-second shot down a steam-powered catapult.

“The end result is a very powerful aircraft getting slung off the deck at a ridiculous speed,” said Thien, shooter and waist catapult branch officer. “It really doesn’t get much better than that.”

While on the flight deck, shooters depend on their catapult teams, comprised of up to 14 Aviation Boatswain’s Mates (Equipment)(ABEs). The catapult team is responsible for reporting aircraft weight, ensuring proper lock-in to the catapult shuttle, and keeping a safe and ready deck. The shooter relies on all this information before going through the motions to launch the fixed-wing aircraft.

Once the shooter’s team has worked topside for two days, they switch up the configuration, putting one ABE

(Left) Lt. John Mullen signals to an Aviation Boatswain’s Mate (Equipment) on the flight deck. (Right) Mullen presses the fire button, launching the aircraft.



and the shooter into a compact space known as the bubble for three days of launches. From here, the shooter has a deck-level view of everything going on near the catapults. He has the same responsibilities but it’s more hands-off. He directs Sailors on the flight deck through the senior ABE next to him in the bubble. By working together with the ABEs, the shooter brings the aircraft to its final checkpoint quickly and safely.

Once launching is complete, shooters go aft to the fantail for recovery operations. They will keep an eye on the red and white foul lines to ensure no one accidentally puts his or her life in danger by entering the landing area when an aircraft is on its final approach. Shooters also have an ABE at their sides to set the arresting gear wires to provide the right amount of resistance for different types of aircraft.

Whether shooting from the deck or the bubble, or recovering aircraft, shooters work with more than 175



ABEs to launch and recover more than 60 aircraft day and night. It is a task that Thien never takes for granted.

“You have to respect the fact that you’re responsible for the entire launching crew, the pilots in the airplane and all things encompassing everyone’s safety,” said Thien. “When you sit back, think about and watch what is going on to launch and recover aircraft, you can’t help but be in awe and inspired.”

When not topside or running their divisions, shooters spend much of their free time in their own private part of the ship known as “Shooter Alley.” All ten shooters live in this area which is segregated by custom-sewn curtains with the words, “Shooter Alley. Restricted Access.” Behind the curtains is a hallway with custom artwork, such as a shooter-themed mural with matching bullet holes on the bulkheads.

However, prior to becoming a resident of shooter alley, prospective shooters learn the job during a three-week training course in Lakehurst, N.J. Aviators who are preparing to serve their disassociated sea tour – a two-year sea tour, not flying their primary aircraft – or Limited Duty Officers (LDOs) are able to take the course. Once completed, the newly trained shooters are sent out to one of the Navy’s 11 aircraft carriers.

“When I was a really young junior officer my department heads would tell their shooter stories and I knew that’s what I wanted to do on my disassociated sea tour,” said Thien. “And here I am, loving every minute!”

There are other disassociated sea tours an aviator could choose, but Lt. Michael

Minervini knew he wanted to be a shooter.

“There is a saying that as kids grow up, they just get bigger, more expensive toys,” said Minervini. “Every day we get to load a 60,000-pound aircraft into a big slingshot and I think that’s pretty cool.” †



Lt. Matt Thien goes over launch power charts with Aviation Boatswain’s Mate (Equipment) Airman Andrew K. Sullivan during a launch from the bow catapults.



Lt. Clinton Stonewall ensures a clear landing area on the flight deck during aircraft recovery operations.

# September 2011 Fleet and Family Support Center Calendar

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

			<b>1</b> <b>Changes</b> Norfolk 1:30-3:30p.m. <b>Career Planning</b> Norfolk 1-4p.m.	<b>Resume Writing</b> Oceana 9a.m.-noon	<b>2</b>			
<b>5</b>	<b>6</b> <b>Career Planning</b> Little Creek 1-4p.m. <b>Interview Techniques</b> Norfolk 8:30-11:30a.m.	<b>Job Search Strategies</b> Yorktown 9a.m.-noon Little Creek 9a.m.-noon	<b>7</b> <b>Retirement Planning</b> Norfolk 1-2:30p.m. <b>Savings and Investments</b> Norfolk 8:30-10a.m.	<b>TSP</b> Norfolk 10-11:30a.m.  <b>Resume Writing</b> Little Creek 9a.m.-noon	<b>8</b> <b>Changes</b> Norfolk 1:30-3:30p.m. <b>Couples Workshop</b> Newport News 4-6:30p.m.	<b>Resume Writing</b> Oceana 9a.m.-noon <b>Federal Employment System</b> Yorktown 9a.m.-noon	<b>9</b> <b>Money Management</b> Norfolk 8a.m.-4p.m. <b>Survive the Holidays</b> Little Creek 9-10:30a.m.	<b>Interview Techniques</b> Newport News 8:30-11:30a.m.
<b>12</b> <b>Money Management</b> Newport News Oceana 8a.m.-4p.m. <b>Couples Workshop</b> Little Creek 4:30-7p.m.	<b>Resume Writing</b> Northwest 1-4p.m. <b>Job Search Strategies</b> Northwest 9a.m.-noon	<b>13</b> <b>Finances for Newlyweds</b> Oceana 6-7:30p.m.	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b> <b>Credit Management</b> Oceana 2:30-4p.m. <b>Savings and Investments</b> Oceana 1-2:30p.m.	<b>Changes</b> Norfolk 1:30-3:30p.m.  <b>Couples Workshop</b> Newport News 4-6:30p.m.	<b>16</b>		
<b>19</b> <b>Couples Workshop</b> Little Creek 4:30-7p.m. <b>Career Planning</b> Oceana 9a.m.-noon	<b>Interview Techniques</b> Northwest 9a.m.-noon	<b>20</b> <b>Credit Management</b> Northwest 2:30-4p.m. <b>Survive the Holidays</b> Northwest 1-2:30p.m.	<b>Resume Writing</b> Oceana 9a.m.-noon Norfolk 1-4p.m.	<b>21</b> <b>Consumer Awareness</b> Norfolk 8:30-10a.m. <b>Survive the Holidays</b> Norfolk 10-11:30a.m.	<b>Federal Employment System</b> Norfolk 1-4p.m. <b>Interview Techniques</b> Oceana 9a.m.-noon	<b>22</b> <b>Home Ownership</b> Little Creek 8:30a.m.-2:30p.m. <b>Changes</b> Norfolk 1:30-3:30p.m.	<b>Couples Workshop</b> Norfolk 6-8:30p.m. <b>Job Search Strategies</b> Oceana 9a.m.-noon	<b>23</b>
<b>26</b> <b>Federal Employment System</b> Northwest 9a.m.-noon	<b>27</b> <b>Home Ownership</b> Newport News 8:30a.m.-2:30p.m. <b>Retirement Planning</b> Little Creek 1-2:30p.m.	<b>Savings and Investments</b> Little Creek 8:30-10a.m. <b>TSP</b> Little Creek 10-11:30a.m.	<b>28</b> <b>Credit Management</b> Norfolk 1-2:30p.m.	<b>29</b> <b>Car Buying Strategies</b> Yorktown 1-2:30 p.m. <b>Consumer Awareness</b> Yorktown 8-9:30a.m.	<b>Credit Management</b> Yorktown 9:30-11a.m. <b>Changes</b> Norfolk 1:30-3:30p.m.	<b>30</b> <b>Money Management</b> Little Creek 8a.m.-4p.m.		

To Register, contact: FFSC Oceana: 443-2923, FFSC Norfolk: 444-2102,  
FFSC Yorktown: 887-4606, FFSC Northwest: 421-8770, FFSC Little Creek: 462-7563