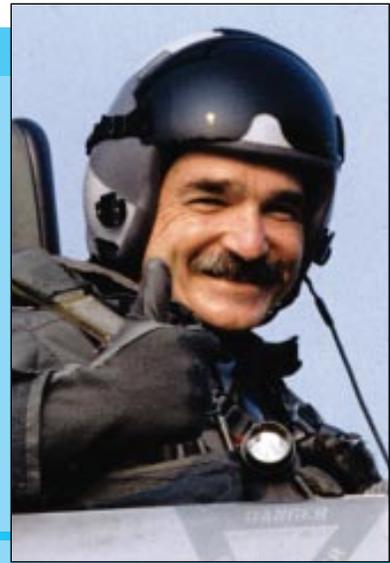


## Four and One-Half Acres of America

### The Aircraft Carrier and United States Sovereignty at Sea

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**T**his nation's ability to take a self-sustained, combat-ready, four and one-half acre airfield anywhere in international waters is awesome.

U.S. Navy aircraft carriers are a powerful and highly

visible manifestation of our willingness to protect U.S. global interests and maintain stability in a world that is uncertain and often dangerous. Our national military strategy requires that our armed forces are forward and engaged in peacetime, able to prevent and deter conflicts and, when necessary, fully able to fight and win our nation's wars. In the 21st century, Naval Aviation will be even more crucial to our national military strategy. Highly capable forward-deployed aircraft carriers will be essential in ensuring the success of that strategy.

U.S. Navy aircraft carriers are unique, indispensable tools of national military power. There is no other weapon system or group of weapon systems that can replace or duplicate the awesome capabilities of a forward-deployed aircraft carrier. A carrier battle group gives our National Command Authority and war-fighting commanders in chief (CINCs) the kind of flexibility needed to respond to a wide variety of challenges in order to protect our national interests. Rapid, visible, credible and sustained power projection is what we provide. It is what permits the United States to prevent conflicts and to carefully control the escalation of a crisis. No other service or weapon system is capable of projecting American

power in such a flexible way.

It has often been said that an aircraft carrier is like a "city at sea." It is more accurate to say that an aircraft carrier is four and one-half acres and 100,000 tons of sovereign American territory at sea. This highly mobile sovereign territory is not constrained by local host nation problems, such as flight and weapons restrictions, logistics and infrastructure limitations or terrorism. Likewise, a carrier battle group does not impose upon another nation's sovereignty as a large U.S. military presence ashore would.

Currently, with a minimum of 12 carriers, we can maintain forward presence in most of the world's regions. Through careful scheduling using the Global Naval Presence Policy, we are able to keep a carrier in the Mediterranean, one in the Arabian Gulf and one in the western Pacific, with some gaps in coverage. When a crisis erupts or U.S. interests are threatened, we are able to surge two to three carriers within two weeks and, if needed, up to five carriers to the scene within 40 days. It is this kind of responsiveness and flexibility that the National Command Authority and our unified CINCs have come to rely upon. Once on scene, carrier battle groups provide a wide spectrum of options, from over-the-horizon pres-

ence to visible surveillance, to combat striking power.

This issue of *Naval Aviation News* is devoted to the carrier: its past, present and future. We owe our heritage to the bold visionary leaders who bet on the preeminence of aircraft, based from ships, dominating war at sea and greatly influencing land battle. In the 1920s and 1930s, our country was truly fortunate to have civilian and Navy leaders who had the vision to realize the pivotal role that the aircraft carrier would play in the next war.

In the years leading up to WW II, we started making modest investments in carriers and carrier-based aviation. Imagine the war in the Pacific after Pearl Harbor if we had not had any carriers. WW II established the aircraft carrier as the decisive weapon platform that made victory possible in the largest geographical region of the world. With the advent of nuclear weapons, many military and civilian leaders mistakenly thought that the global reach of our nuclear and bomber force could replace the aircraft carrier.

Another war, this time in Korea, proved once again the importance of mobile air power from the sea as it played a key role in deciding the outcome of the battle on land. As technology in jet aircraft and weapon systems advanced, the aircraft carrier was able to advance with it and thus Navy aircraft were equal, and in many cases superior, to their land-based counterparts. The angled deck, steam catapults and the optical landing system were just a few of the

ways the versatile aircraft carrier was able to evolve to increase its effectiveness and firepower.

Many crises, almost too numerous to mention, would also demonstrate time and again the benefits of flexible, available carrier air power: Taiwan Straits, 1950s; Dominican Republic, 1961; Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962; Uganda, 1977; Libya, 1981 and 1985; Iran-Iraq War and Lebanon, 1980s; and Desert Shield/Desert Storm, Bosnia and Haiti, 1990s. The Vietnam War was a defining event for carrier-based aviation, which was the first force to project power over the skies of North Vietnam and the last force on scene to cover the withdrawal from South Vietnam in 1975. During the Gulf War, the carrier battle group was the first force on scene and the only credible, visible deterrent keeping Saddam Hussein from rolling southeast toward critical Saudi Arabian oil fields.

The aircraft carrier's utility is not limited to combat conflicts and regional crises. Its ability to respond and protect American lives and interests overseas was dramatically demonstrated by the intercept of the *Achille Lauro* hijackers in 1985. This operation

would not have been possible with land-based air power. History shows us, time and again, that the aircraft carrier battle group—forward-deployed, on station and able to sustain itself for the long haul—gives our president and National Command Authority the full spectrum of options needed to prevail when and where American lives and interests are at stake.

Though our history is rich with success we cannot afford to look back for too long. Being the centerpiece of naval strategy and a key enabler of our national strategy, Naval Aviation must look to the future in order to keep the aircraft carrier and all of our key capabilities relevant. We have well-developed plans to build CVN 77, a transitional *Nimitz*-class carrier which will incorporate new technologies and serve as a bridge for our future carrier program. The CVX class of carriers will embody our innovative vision of future Naval Aviation, and we are currently studying a wide range of alternative designs.

To stay on the cutting edge, our vision for Naval Aviation's future also includes: new ideas for domi-

nant maneuver (the ability to out-maneuver your opponent in the battle space); technological improvements that take advantage of scientific and commercial innovation; and, of course, the concept of being the key joint warfare enabler. Reducing costs of ownership and maximizing the efficiency of personnel aboard will also be a major priority for our future carrier design.

At the heart of any aircraft carrier, you will find dedicated and talented Sailors and Marines working and excelling in a very demanding and difficult environment. On oceans around the world, some of America's finest young men and women make the dangerous and synchronized flight deck "ballet" play out flawlessly every day. Whether they serve as engineers in the main spaces, signalmen at the top of the island or anywhere in between, it is our *people* who bring these four and one-half acres of America to life and take it wherever our leaders ask them to go. It is to each of the members of our great Naval Aviation/carrier team—past, present and future—that we dedicate this issue. Fly 'em safe!

**Dwight D. Eisenhower's (CVN 69) four and one-half acre airfield, ready to deliver air power . . . from the sea.**

