

Why We Do What We Do



PH3 Joseph Hendricks

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Recent events in the Arabian Gulf have once again underscored Naval Aviation's critical role in national security and the key role the Navy-Marine Corps team plays in shaping world events and enabling effective diplomacy. As all of you in the fleet go through the daily challenges and hard work that come with the cycle of workups, deployment and returning home, it's important to remember just how critical what we do in Naval Aviation is to our country's national strategy. This most recent gulf crisis is yet another vivid reminder of the importance of our forward-deployed naval forces. Make no mistake: our unique, unconstrained forward presence in international waters and the overwhelming air power the aircraft carrier brings—from the sea—is absolutely irreplaceable. The situation in the gulf would not have been resolved without you—and I mean all of you: ships and squadrons forward in the gulf, and everyone working hard preparing and

supporting our forward-deployed forces. (See "Action in the Gulf," pp. 4-5.)

As all of us have closely monitored events in the region, it is clear that forward basing rights are once again a major issue; access to these bases has become more and more restrictive. Host nations are becoming increasingly reluctant to permit many types of air operations from their sovereign territory. Fortunately, our nation has its own sovereign territory from which any type and amount of air operations can be flown—the aircraft carrier, large-deck amphibs and a large variety of air-capable surface combatants and logistics ships. These Naval Aviation platforms, highly mobile and flexible portions of sovereign American territory, are completely unencumbered by host nation restrictions. Particularly with the four and one-half acres of an aircraft carrier, visible, tenable and unconstrained air power from the sea gives diplomacy

unmistakable credibility and effectiveness.

However, as with everything that is truly valuable, there is a cost. Even as our forces have been reduced, the demand for our service has continued to increase. The result is that in today's uncertain world, we often find ourselves too much in demand for the size of our force structure. To illustrate this point, as senior leadership considered all options for maintaining adequate forces in the gulf region, extending *Nimitz* (CVN 68) on station in order to maintain two carriers in the gulf was considered. As you know, our Navy's policy has been to keep deployments to a maximum of six months except in the most extraordinary circumstances. The Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) remained firmly committed to keeping faith with our people and not exceeding personnel tempo. As a result of that commitment and the great flexibility of our Naval Aviation team, our 12-carrier force structure was barely suf-



Sailors and Marines conduct a foreign object damage walkdown aboard *Guam* (LPH 9).

PHAN Rich Williams

ficient and *Independence* (CV 62) was able to relieve *Nimitz*. *Indy's* last deployment will be one of her most memorable, and *Nimitz* was able to return on time. Meanwhile, the *George Washington* (CVN 73) battle group kept on operating, a visible symbol of U.S. power and commitment.

Clearly, the world has significantly changed over recent years. In many ways, the past eight years have been among the most tumultuous that Naval Aviation has ever experienced: the end of the cold war; Desert Storm victory; force structure downsizing; aircraft carrier decommissionings; squadron disestablishments; Base Closure and Realignment Commission moves that have closed such wonderful centers of Naval Aviation history as Naval Air Stations Alameda and Miramar, Calif., and, soon, Cecil Field, Fla.; the post-Tailhook cultural and social issues; cancellation or realignment of major aircraft programs; budget squeezes on all fronts; the amazing progress of information technology; and the realignment of major aviation communities and the loss of others (the A-6 *Intruder*).

To some considering the turbulence created by those changes, it may seem amazing that we in Naval Aviation are even surviving. But based on what I see here and around the fleet, I am absolutely convinced we are not just surviving, we are pressing ahead and flourishing. And I am convinced of that despite all of our challenges and the changes that we continue to go through on practically a daily basis. I attribute

this to the very nature of Naval Aviation and the kind of great people who make it the wonderful institution it is. One of the core characteristics of our profession is flexibility—our ability to recognize and adapt to change, holding fast to our essential traits and values. At the same time, our people are using good old common sense and ingenuity to deal with new circumstances. Their talented dedication and great performance will see us through to an even brighter future. The history and progress of Naval Aviation safety is a good example.

We are truly blessed with a tremendous legacy, embodied in the heroes of our retired ranks as well as with bright, clear-thinking and hard-working leaders, aircrews and Sailors in the fleet who take on the daily challenges of more missions than resources and somehow make it all work in an environment of uncertainty. And you make it work using unprecedented standards of performance.

As you read this, during a well-deserved break from the demands of launching aircraft, flying missions, troubleshooting and repairing equipment, and supporting our forces, consider the importance of your contributions to world events. Many of you have read and understand the naval strategy: "Forward . . . from the Sea." You understand the "big picture," but let me give you the bottom line: There is absolutely no replacement for Naval Aviation. What's the proof? Your efforts in the gulf. They were the key

to finding a diplomatic solution to this latest, but surely not last, standoff.

The world is enjoying never-before-seen economic growth. The number and stability of democratic governments is growing. International trade, facilitated by the free flow of commerce, is advancing the standard of living in nations throughout the world. We are clearly in a period of what the CNO calls "chaotic peace." It is therefore in our nation's, and the world's, best interest to keep flexible forces deployed and fully capable of responding to situations which threaten peace and stability.

You dedicated, selfless professionals of Naval Aviation are out there everyday. If you're not deployed, most of you are either working up to go, returning home or taking some well-deserved time off. Many of you on shore duty are training or supporting those who deploy. Regardless of your job in Naval Aviation, rest assured that you play a key role in serving America. I realize that in this era of incredible opportunities, you freely chose to serve your country. Some of you may be coming up on a decision to either stay Navy or pursue opportunities in the civilian sector. Whatever factors you may be weighing always remember: There is a clear need and great value to our nation for what we do in Naval Aviation—day in and day out. The forces of Naval Aviation are more relevant and critical today than they have ever been. They remain the nation's "Force of Choice"!

FLY SAFE! BE THE BEST!