



MAKING A DIFFERENCE: THE MEN AND WOMEN OF NAVAL AVIATION

By RAdm. John Nathman
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In the fall of 1908, naval observers witness the first Army demonstration trials of the Wright flying machine at Fort Myer, Va., and watched at the Wright brothers' invention thrust military visionaries into the vertical plane of aviation. Later, Assistant Secretary of the Navy Theodore Roosevelt codified the vision of Naval Aviation when he first recommended the official study of the war-making potential of flying machines. Over the course of 88 years, Roosevelt's understanding of the value of

It takes more than technology to maintain Naval Aviation's powerful presence around the world—it takes the pride and dedication of professionals like Lt. Aaron Brodsky, foreground, and Ltjg. Brad Sparks of Carrier Airborne Early Warning Squadron 117.

aviation has proven prophetic.

Naval Aviation rapidly developed from its earliest days of wood, canvas and wire into today's dominant, decisive expeditionary force whose centerpiece is the modern aircraft carrier. For more than 50 years, the carrier—

and its associated battle group—has proven that it has the capacity to turn the tide of conflict by its mere presence or, when necessary, through the projection of dominant power from the sea. The challenges of a post-cold war world have only served to reinforce the value and need for naval expeditionary capabilities. "Where are the carriers?" is still the first question asked in time of conflict, but the more important answer to that question is "Here are the Sailors and Marines who man those carriers."

Because the history of Naval

Aviation is replete with challenges and successes that involve invention, innovation and technological achievement, we often focus on the hardware capability of our force. While this focus may be appropriate to the Information Age where the digital netting of sensors, shooters and decision makers promises to dramatically enhance the effectiveness of our already highly capable forces, it is important to remember that the success of Naval Aviation still depends upon its human software, *the people*.

Our people are the "glue" of Naval Aviation, and I want to highlight their importance in this last *Naval Aviation News* edition of the twentieth century.

The story of Naval Aviation is one of courage, patriotism, selflessness and sacrifice. From the commitment that is routinely displayed by the men and women of our deployed forces to the dedication of our Sailors supporting those deployed forces, we have never enjoyed a more talented, enthusiastic or dedicated force. The young men and women of today are driven not by the bottom line, but by the proud traditions of our past and the thirst to make their own niche in America's esteemed history.

There are three consistent themes that surface when discussing Naval Aviation's most valued asset, *its people*: legacy, leadership and professionalism. A legacy of men and women who are passionate about what they do because they are pursuing personal challenges that far surpass the expected norms of society. The rewards of leadership, mentoring and having a profound impact as part of a team. And answering a higher calling of service to our country. These themes are what set Naval Aviation's people apart, keep them engaged and make them special. Without question, it is the people, not the hardware, who enable our overall operational success.

We have just completed the safest year in Naval Aviation history, and we accomplished that feat not solely through improved technology but primarily through individuals accepting ownership and responsibility for the mission and the safety of their shipmates. The fact that this accomplishment came amidst significant operational challenges, including an incredibly high operational tempo that involved five carrier battle groups and two amphibious ready groups in combat operations, is testament to personal efforts and the value and pertinence of operational risk management.

All of us in Naval Aviation are heir to a history of success from the past. Those of us in Naval Aviation today have now set a new standard of success. We can all be proud of the operational and safety milestone established in 1999, the last year of this century. It is a benchmark for those who follow in our wake that will set an enviable standard and a challenging goal for which to strive. It also serves as an indelible measure of the truly outstanding caliber of the Sailors and Marines who make up our force today.

Yes, the hardware has changed significantly in more than eight decades as aircraft transitioned from canvas to modern epoxy and fiber. But Naval Aviation's backbone, *its people*, has remained steadfastly committed to country, the warrior ethos and the challenges of serving this great nation.

To all in Naval Aviation who have made us the decisive force that we are today, and to all who will keep our future force the best that it can possibly be: BRAVO ZULU!



NAVAL AVIATION news

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