



ABRAHAM LINCOLN CARRIER STRIKE GROUP PENNY PRESS

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Carrier qualifications

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PACIFIC OCEAN — Jets are launching across the flight deck, pilots are studying in classrooms and maintenance is being conducted around the clock. Onboard USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN 72), all hands are working together to support the embarked squadrons' mission — qualify their pilots from 21 Sep. to 1 Oct.

Fleet replacement squadrons (FRS) got underway with Abraham Lincoln 20 Sep. to receive or renew their carrier qualifications (CQ), while Chief of Naval Air Training (CNATRA) pilots came aboard 25 Sep. to earn their wings.

Shortly after returning from a seven-month deployment and participating in the month-long Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) exercise 2022, Abraham Lincoln went underway once again to further fleet mission readiness.

“Although such a quick turnaround can be incredibly hard on Sailors and our families, I strongly believe many of us love our job and are proud to be back out at sea executing such a significant mission set,” said Cmdr. Dylan Porter, Air Officer or “Air Boss” aboard Abraham Lincoln. “As far as Air Department goes, ‘pushing tin,’ as we call it, is what we do best, and it was definitely on display during both CNATRA and FRS CQ.”

44 pilots from the “Rough Raiders” of Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 125, the “Flying Eagle” of Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 122 and the “Vikings” of Electronic Attack Squadron (VAQ) 129, trained to earn their CQ by launching and recovering their aircraft on the flight deck of an aircraft carrier.

Lt. Cody Brown, a pilot assigned to the “Vikings” of Electronic Attack Squadron (VAQ) 129, is the assistant phase head and landing signal officer (LSO) within the squadron. LSO’s, also called “paddles”, are in charge of guiding pilots and their aircraft safely onto the flight deck. Brown’s primary duties are assisting the instruction of pilots who need to get their first CQ during their training and aiding aircraft landing on the flight deck. “It’s a difficult qualification,” said Brown. “It’s scary flying and landing on a carrier for the first time. Everything happens at a fast pace, but we train our pilots extensively to be fully prepared to tackle any issue they encounter in the air or on the ship.”

Every class of Navy aircraft has training squadrons for aircrewmembers to learn how to work as a team and familiarize themselves with their aircraft. VAQ-129 conducted their CQ training phase with Abraham Lincoln, the final phase the pilots go through before they go out to the fleet. Pilots from each of the three squadrons are working closely with Abraham Lincoln to get each naval aviator qualified.

“In order to receive a valid qualification, you’re going to need a carrier to train on first,” said Brown. “Abraham Lincoln gives us the same environment to launch and recover aircraft that our pilots will eventually be working with once they go on a real deployment.”

Porter, is in charge of ensuring the safety and welfare for all of Air Department as well as the safe and expeditious launch and recovery of aircraft aboard the carrier. He is proud of the ability and of the dedication his Sailors demonstrated during this evolution.

“It took an all hands effort from every department on the ship to get her underway, back out to sea and up to speed to ensure the safe and expeditious launch and recovery of these future combat aviators,” said Porter. “This is an extremely important mission and crucial to the security of this nation and its interests. The fleet is in need of aviators, and carrier qualifying these young pilots and replenishing the squadrons on the front lines is imperative.”

CQs are how aircraft carriers assist with maintaining a steady flow of naval aviators being sent to the fleet.

“VAQ-129 contributes to mission readiness by training the highest level of electronic attack replacement naval aviators and then sending them to the U.S. Navy fleet, both aboard carriers and to our expeditionary forces,” said Brown. “Making sure our squadron has as many pilots mission ready as possible is in the best interest of everyone.”

Lt. Sam Laythrop, LSO and instructor pilot assigned to the “Eagles” of Advanced Jet Training Squadron (VT) 7, is responsible for assessing and guiding pilots their first time coming to a carrier.

“It’s extremely difficult for students on their first time,” said Laythrop. “It’s their first time coming aboard, they get nervous because they’ve spent all their time training to land on the Earth and now they’re landing on a very small, moving ship.”

Before they can be assigned to an FRS, pilots must qualify with CNATRA. Two training airwings consisting of four individual squadrons, the “Golden Eagles” of Advanced Jet-Training Squadron (VT) 22, the “Eagles” of Advanced Jet Training Squadron (VT) 7, the “Tigers” of Advanced Jet-Training Squadron (VT) 9 and the “Redhawks” of Advanced Jet-Training Squadron (VT) 21, came onboard Abraham Lincoln as their first time launching and landing on the flight deck of an aircraft carrier.

Pilots are qualified by embarking aboard an aircraft carrier with the T-45C Goshawk training jet and performing four touch-and-goes and 10 successful traps. Once these requirements are met, students are awarded their “Wings,” concluding their training. After they receive their “Wings”, naval aviators are eventually assigned to an FRS, and prepare themselves to join the fleet and go out on deployment.

“Just as we did on deployment, Abraham Lincoln performed at a high level and absolutely crushed this CQ evolution,” said Porter. “I couldn’t be prouder of our Air Department and Abraham Lincoln as a whole. Job well done by all.”

Training squadrons are responsible for readying the next generation of naval aviators. Completing CQ marks the end of a pilot’s training cycle and gives them the experience required to join a fleet squadron on deployment and ready to answer the nation’s call.