

THE AVENGER

MARCH 2023



REINTEGRATION
EDITION





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THANK YOU, AVENGERS



Avenger Family,

Thank you for your sacrifices for our great nation, promoting peace, stability, and security across the U.S. 6th Fleet Area of operations. Your efforts ensured liberty and freedom for our generation and our children. Be proud of your accomplishments, ensuring prosperity in the face of an unjust war in Ukraine. You are difference makers!

Without challenge, we do not change. In the face of adversity, we can choose to learn and grow, or we can choose to be negative and take a victim's mentality. I have seen you choose defiant joy time and time again, learning, growing, adapting, and becoming the leaders and difference makers that inspired each and every one of us as children and young adults. I am incredibly proud you.

You are thriving on this deployment. During the past seven months, our Sailors have delivered time-and-time again in the European theater as the warriors, teachers, leaders, and ambassadors of the United States Navy States. On the home front, our families have come together to serve one another, creating a tight knit community that looks out for one another and celebrates the highs and the challenges of deployment together. This is the definition of Defiant Joy!

This arduous journey is a challenge few can say they met with the same tenacity and humility that you have. Without realizing it, you created bonds with one another that you will share for the rest of your lives, whether you stay in the Navy for one more year, or stick around for another twenty-five. You have grown your capacity and capability, building a foundation for future success that is without measure.

Serving as your commanding officer during our deployment, surrounded by people that showcase what service truly means, has been an incredible bright spot in my life and the Pollard family's. Thank you for this gift.

While we will run with perseverance through the finish line, we must all now begin facing what life will be like when we return home. After 11 deployments, Jen and I still have to work diligently during our period of reintegration as a family to grow together and learn to live together again. Sometimes this reintegration period can be filled with uncertainty, sometimes great joy, and sometimes challenges. Unquestionably, you grew as a person through your experiences on deployment, and similarly your loved ones have done the same. Bringing these two similar but different experiences together can be tough, so we must focus on reintegration. It is our responsibility. We must meet this challenge head on. I know the Avengers are up to this task.

To ensure we are ready for life at home again, all of the Sailors aboard will be required to participate in reintegration workshops after our upcoming port visit. The workshops are tailored to different levels of Navy experience and family dynamics, so there will be many workshops that speak directly to you and your life. I know we will benefit from the wisdom of these classes, which are built on the experience of generations of Sailors before us.

I also encourage you to find trusted mentors who can help guide you through reintegration. Similarly, our families need to do the same. The FRG is conducting reintegration training at each meeting. Please make sure family gets this word, so they can attend. Do not rest idly by. I want you to take advantage of the formal and informal resources and networks available in the Hampton Roads area, too. Use guides like the one in your hand now to prepare and help you be at peak readiness when the George Herbert Walker Bush is relieved of the watch. Above all, remember to give yourself and your loved ones the gift of time and understanding.

You have proven beyond a doubt you are the best crew and family team in the Fleet. I know you will continue to demonstrate what it means to be a warrior, a teacher, a leader, and an ambassador when we return home. You will raise the bar for warfighting excellence from the shore just like you did forward deployed. Thank you for the opportunity to lead the Avenger FAMILY on deployment. CAVU!

All the best,

D. T. M. Pollard
Commanding Officer
USS George H.W. Bush (CVN 77)



Reintegration ★

The post-deployment reintegration of a Sailor to their family lives requires adjustment for all people involved—the Sailor, their spouses, and children. Returning from deployment may result in changing roles, responsibilities and daily routines. There are two phases of this process: **return and renegotiation** and **reintegration and stabilization**.

★ Return & Renegotiation ★

During this stage, people have to make major adjustments in roles and responsibilities; relationships may not be the same as before the deployment. As homecoming day approaches, it is important to remember that everyone in the family has changed during the deployment. All family members will need to make adjustments and allow for the changes that have taken place. Encourage everyone to be flexible during this time. Save yourselves time and hardship by having a conversation about realistic expectations. When it comes to homecoming expectations, here are some points to consider: do not expect this reunion to be just like others you have experienced, do not expect everyone to acclimate at the same rate, expect there to be an adjustment period for just about everything, expect that some things about your partner and your home will be different.

The excitement and joy of reuniting with loved ones is like no other, but with it comes other, more difficult to deal with emotions. The Sailor may feel like a stranger in their own home for a while, and frustrated that they cannot step into their old role immediately. The loved ones may feel anxious over the thought of losing their independence.



Balancing Time

After homecoming, additional time demands are placed on both service member and spouses. You will need to recognize the need for:

Quality time vs. quantity time: There will be times when you and your partner will need time alone. When needing alone time, reassure each other that the relationship is safe and still intact.

Couple time vs. family time: This can be especially challenging when you have children and other relatives who are eager to be a part of your homecoming. Just remember, a loving marriage is one of the greatest gifts you can give to your children and extended families.

★ Reintegration & Stabilization ★

Once the excitement of homecoming ends, service members begin to reintegrate into their normal lives. This is an adjustment for all members of the family, including spouses, parents and children. Be prepared for change. People and situations may have changed while you were away.

Avoid drinking excessively or turning to drugs. Seek professional help if you are having difficulty sleeping or experiencing unusual anger or feelings of anxiety. Do not be afraid to seek help if you need it. Contact the nearest military family support center, a chaplain, or Military OneSource if you need assistance.

Building Trust

Part of reintegration for couples is establishing trust after a long time apart. Be sure to:

Pay attention to your partner's needs. If you are attentive to your partner's needs, they will be attentive to yours.

Be a person of your word. Following through tells your partner that you value them and the relationship.

Take responsibility for your actions. Acknowledge when you misstep and how it affects your partner.

Agree to forgive and forgo. Learn how to give and receive a sincere apology.

Homecoming Suggestions

- Be careful not to get caught in the “Who Had It Worse” game.
- Plan time together as a couple.
- Share your feelings. It's natural to have mixed emotions at this time.
- Be realistic. The perfect reunion fantasy is just that — a fantasy.
- Expect to be more exhausted than you think; fatigue is a common homecoming reaction for everyone.
- Intimacy involves emotional, as well as physical closeness. Talk about each other's expectations for reconnecting physically.
- Communicating openly and honestly with your partner is a sure way to help make this homecoming the best it can be!
- If homecoming day is also a duty day, plan to make the best of it. Have dinner together!

Chaps says:

“Families love each other, but even people that love each other have to adjust when getting back together after a deployment. We change when we are separated. Families being reunited must be patient. Don't pretend that you were never separated at all. It takes time and patience to adjust.”

- Chaplain
Michael Kennedy



Reuniting ★ with ★ Children

Service members need to recognize that their children have changed during deployment; they have made new friends and acquired new skills. Children may also be feeling stress from the changes to their household after the service member's return. Your kids will have varying reactions to your homecoming and may be slow to warm up. Take your time. Ask your partner how to best assist in parenting.

10 Reintegration Tips:

1. Honor developmental ages and stages
2. Ask the at-home parent about changes
3. Appreciate your child's contribution
4. Maintain routines & ask your child for help
5. Ask your partner for suggestions
6. Celebrate growth and normalize change
7. Encourage the sharing of feelings
8. Discuss changes as a family
9. Be patient
10. Focus on loving your child



Children & Stress

The textbooks all say the same thing: kids are just as nervous and excited as you are about homecoming day. But what happens next? Reintegration affects the whole family, so take a moment to consider how your child handles stress. Children tend to show stress differently (or maybe not so differently) than the Sailors you spent an entire deployment getting to know. Common signs of stress include challenging authority, changes in eating, changes in sleeping, nightmares, or poor school habits.

If you have any questions or need support, you can always reach out to your pediatrician and local Military and Family Support Centers.



Administration

After a deployment, you should review some of the administrative details you arranged before the deployment. You may need to make changes to keep your information current.

Finances

When you return from deployment, your income is likely to change. This may be an excellent time to create a new spending plan based on current income. Your Command Financial Specialist or the Personal Financial Management staff at the FFSC can help you create a new plan.

If you need assistance creating a spending plan or managing your finances, help is available through the Personal Financial Management Program at your military family support center or by contacting the financial counselors at [MilitaryOneSource.mil](https://www.militaryonesource.mil) or 800-342-9647.

Leave & Earnings Statement (LES)

When you return from deployment, take time to carefully review your LES to be sure it is correct. Check for changes in special pays and allowances, your tax status, and Service members Civil Relief Act (SCRA). Be sure to also check for any changes you would like to be made to allotments and emergency assistance pre-authorizations. You can check your LES at mypay.dfas.mil.



Legal Documents

You may also need to review the legal documents you created before deploying, including powers of attorney, a living will, and last will and testament. Some of these may need to be revoked or rewritten to reflect your current situation. Contact your Legal Service Office for help. You can find the nearest office through the Armed Forces Legal Assistance (AFLA) Office locator at legalassistance.law.af.mil.

Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS)

You may need to make changes to your information upon your return from deployment. Complete instructions for updating DEERS can be found on the [MilConnect.dmdc.osd.mil](https://milconnect.dmdc.osd.mil) website.



Mental Health

Family and friends may notice changes in mood or behavior in their service members. Some of these may be warning signs for service members at risk for suicide or suffering from combat and operational stress or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Here are potential warning signs, ways family and friends can help, and organizations that offer support and counseling for service members and their families.

Over the history of the United States Navy, one thing is clear: it is our people that make us great.



Operational Stress Continuum

READY	REACTING	INJURED	ILL
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Good to Go• Well Trained• Fit and Focused• Cohesive Unit• Ready Families	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Distressed or Impaired• Mild & Temporarily Anxious, Irritable, or Sad• Physical or Behavioral Changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More Severe or Persistent Stress or Impairment due to Life Threat, Wear and Tear, Loss or Inner Conflict• May Leave Lasting Memories, Reactions and Impressions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stress Injuries that Don't Heal Without Help• Symptoms Persis, Get Worse, or Initially Better then Return to Worse

Stress Injuries

Combat and operational stress is not an illness; it may be the result of stressful conditions during training, deployment, humanitarian missions, government support missions and other assignments. **All service members are at risk for stress injuries.** For more information, go to the Naval Center for Combat and Operational Stress Control at [Med.Navy.mil](https://www.mdnavy.mil).

Stress Injury Contributing Factors Include:

- Losing a close friend or valued leader
- Being physically injured, especially if seriously
- Sustaining a traumatic brain injury
- History of previous stress injuries, whether sustained during or before service



Warrior Tough

Beginning in 2018 for enlisted and 2022 for officers, every Sailor is taught to develop a Warrior Tough mindset at boot camp, their college, or officer candidate school. It is important to keep the four pillars of this concept in your mind to help care for yourself and those around you. Living the Warrior Tough mindset is the foundation of the mental health of the Navy.

1. Understand their “why”
2. Prepare and develop their body, mind, and soul through rigorous training
3. Execute at the highest level, showing a mindful response instead of an emotional reaction, taking actions in alignment with Navy values
4. Reflect at the individual and organizational level on how to get better, creating a continuous cycle of improvement



What is Your Role?

Going home is hard. It will take leadership and care from all levels to ensure the reintegration process after deployment is as smooth as possible and to care for those whose transitions may be more difficult than others.

Encompassing all levels of leadership below the Command Triad, Deckplate Leaders hold significant influence on climate and prevention because they have more engagement with key personnel.

While Deckplate Leadership is often built upon professional, technical, or warfighting competence, it is incumbent upon every leader to develop great competence in how best to take care of their people: the minds, bodies, and spirits entrusted to their care. Doing so involves becoming confident in having conversations with their people, understanding their own personal biases, practicing empathy, and using active listening techniques. This will help them identify stressors and other risk factors so that action can be taken as early as possible.

Conversations That Matter

Take time out of your day to ask someone how they are doing, then stick around and actually listen to their answer. It shows what type of person you are, and can go a long way in creating a strong culture of trust and care at all levels.

Every Navy leader needs to become comfortable talking about the mental health of Sailors and their familie. Remember: any conversation can shift into a conversation about mental health.

Be Engaged

To show respect for the other person, avoid having furniture or a desk between each other as that may communicate the use of power, an interpersonal distance or barrier. Preplan and be sure to hold phone calls until after the conversation so you won't be interrupted. When interruptions are unavoidable, briefly assess if the current conversation should be rescheduled. If you must reschedule, express that you want to respect what is being said and you will reach out soon to set up another time to talk.



Reaching out to the people around you can lead to some difficult and uncomfortable conversations, especially at the end of a deployment. Reintegration is a difficult time, but it doesn't have to be done alone. Talk to your friends, family, and shipmates about the things that matter most to them and things that could be the most challenging to navigate. No two people are going to experience homecoming and reintegration in the same way.

Use Empathy

Sympathy is feeling for other people, while empathy feels with other people. Empathy is necessary for healthy relationships and conversations that matter - when we are talking with someone in need it is better to engage them empathetically.

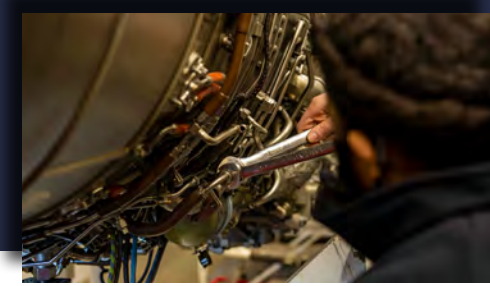


Active listening

Active listening requires intentionality—directing our eyes, ears, and conscious awareness toward the person you are talking with. Active listening allows individuals to express themselves freely without feeling judged and includes paying attention to non-verbal clues and cues people make. Up to 70% of interpersonal communication is non-verbal. Active listening means giving the speaker your undivided attention.

I Can Fix That

Avoid the “fix-it” reflex and focus on the message by reflecting what you heard rather than your recommendation of how to “fix it.”





Suicide Prevention

Family members and friends can help service members get the support they need by knowing the warning signs of suicide, how to intervene and where to get professional help.

If someone you know is at risk for suicide, call 911 immediately.

Below are two mnemonics of best practices for suicide prevention.
Remember: if the PATH IS WARM, it's time to ACT!

IF

I - IDEATION

S - SUBSTANCE ABUSE

P - PURPOSELESSNESS

A - ANXIETY

T - TRAPPED

H - HOPELESSNESS

W - WITHDRAWAL

A - ANGER

R - RECKLESSNESS

M - MOOD CHANGES

THEN

A - ASK

If you believe someone is thinking about committing suicide, ask them directly.

C - CARE

Let the individual know you care about them and understand them.

T - TREAT

Seek professional help and inform chain of command.



MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES



- **Military Crisis Line:** You can go to their website or call 1-800-273-TALK (8255, Option 1) or 988.
- **Navy Chaplain Care:** Communications are confidential unless the service member decides otherwise.
- **Navy Safe Harbor:** Providers tailor support to each enrolled service member's recovery, rehabilitation and reintegration needs. The program allows service members and their families to focus on recovery without distractions.
- **Department of Veterans Affairs Vet Centers:** Contact Vet Centers by phone at 1-800-905-4675 (Eastern) and 1-866-496-8838 (Pacific) or through the Vet Center website.
- **Military Family Support Centers:** You can find the family service center nearest you through the Military Installations website.
- **Military Treatment Facilities:** The nearest MTF can be found through the TRICARE MTF locator.
- **Naval Center for Combat and Operational Stress Control:** The website includes information on building resilience and how to manage stress.
- **TRICARE Mental Health:** More information on TRICARE-covered outpatient behavioral health counseling is available on the TRICARE Mental Health website.
- **Military OneSource:** Military OneSource can be contacted through their website or by phone stateside at 1-800-342-9647.
- **Real Warriors Live Chat:** Communicate at any time
- **VA Caregiver Support:** Call the Caregiver Support Line at 1-855-260-3274.
- **Vet Center Combat Call Center:** 1-877-WAR-VETS
- **Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program:** The Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program (YRRP) supports National Guard and Reserve members and their families by connecting them with information and resources through Yellow Ribbon events.

Command Ombudsman & Family Readiness Group (FRG)

"Our #1 goal is to provide support at home so the Sailors can focus on the mission."

*-Sarah Wagner,
CVN 77
Ombudsman*

Avengers,

Hello from the home front! My name is Mackenzi Leggett, your FRG President, and I was honored to be asked to write to you on behalf of your spouses and families back home. Can you believe we are preparing for homecoming and reintegration already? We have been keeping busy to pass the time, and now are in the most exciting phase of deployment. But it can also be a little stressful and scary, especially for some of our sailors and families who are going through this for the first time! I assure you; you aren't alone!

I've been asked to speak a little on reintegration, and what that may look like. It is absolutely one of the best feelings in the world, knowing someone you love is on their way home after such an extended period of time. But your return could also bring some struggles, for both you and your family. It's important to remember, there is no normal. Communication is key, and it's best to start now. Try discussing everyone's expectations for the day, and weeks following your return. Do you want your whole extended family at the pier? Or maybe you want something a little more intimate with just your spouse and children. It's best to let your loved ones know this ahead of time, so there aren't any surprises when you walk off the ship.

Another worry may be how to fit into your family's routine. By this time, they've likely established a schedule and new normal that works during your absence. This WILL change when you return, and your family will have to find another new normal that includes their sailor again. This can be wonderful, but also stressful for everyone involved. Remember to have patience as you work together to find what works for the family. Try not to be frustrated when your spouse gets mad you messed up the bedtime routine, or maybe you forgot to communicate plans you made, didn't load the dishwasher correctly etc. It works the other way around also, maybe you don't want to go to the neighbors bbq, or still have your sea legs and are uncomfortable driving the kids to school. It's okay to communicate that to your partner, and it's important to remember you are a team.

At the end of the day, your family is ready to have you home, and excited to put you back into their everyday life. Take advantage of the classes that will be offered aboard the ship discussing reintegration and homecoming. They are a great resource, and we will be providing resources back home for your families.

We are so proud of Team Jackpot and are anxiously awaiting the ship to be pulled into homeport once more. Thank you for your continued sacrifices for your families and your country.

Wishing all a safe and happy return!

Mackenzi



Contact your Ombudsman & Family Readiness Group:

OMBUDSMAN

Facebook: CVN 77 Ombudsman Family Page

Email: GHWBOMBUDSMAN@GMAIL.COM

Cell Phone: (757) 869-0015 or (757) 869-4848

Family Readiness Group

Facebook: CVN 77 FRG

Email: CVN77FRG@gmail.com



Additional Resources

Robert Searles, *Deployed Resiliency Educator*



I provide life skills training such as basic core skills, to manage stress, increase personal communication and share tools and resources to successfully navigate shipboard and family life. The best way to get in contact with me is through my Navy email: dre@cvn77.navy.mil

Richard Gauvin, *Deployed Resiliency Counselor*

I provide short term counseling for up to 12 sessions for Sailors who may be struggling with anxiety, depression and adjustments to the military lifestyle. If someone needs to get ahold of me, usually the best way to schedule with me is through email, drc@cvn77.navy.mil, or stopping by my office, 2-103-2-Q, and if we're in port, through cell, (757)-870-9618.



Sexual Assault Prevention and Response

The Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) program's mission is to prevent and respond to sexual assault and to eliminate it from the military through a balance of focused education, comprehensive response, compassionate advocacy, and just adjudication. Visit them at **SAFEHELPLINE.ORG/**

Military OneSource

Military One Source is designed to help Sailors and their families deal with life's issues. Their consultants are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Speak to a master's level consultant or you can go online to access information or email a consultant. Visit them at **MilitaryOneSource.mil** or call at **1-800-342-9647**.

Legal/RLSO

Email: judge@cvn77.navy.mil

Morale, Welfare, Recreation Center (MWR)

Email: reagan.olsen@cvn77.navy.mil

Navigator's Military Ministry

Email: taylorallan1@gmail.com

American Red Cross

Cell: 1-800-733-2767 / (757)-446-7700

Website: www.redcross.org

Tidewater AA

Phone: (757)-490-3980

Email: info@tidewaterintergroup.org

Jewish Soldiers Project

Email: jewishsoldierproject@gmail.com

Facebook: Jewish Soldiers Project

CR Welcome Home for Military

Email: erink@gracebible.church

Chaplain Religious Enrichment Development Organization (CREDO)

Cell: (904)-270-6958

CRU Military

Email: fred.butterfield@crumilitary.org

Fleet & Family Support Center (FFCS)

Cell: (757)-444-NAVY / (757)-444-2102

Website: www.cnic.navy.navy.mil/norfolk

Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society (NMCRS)

Naval Station Norfolk

Cell: (757)-322-1171 (757)-322-3134

Website: www.nmcrs.org

Tricare (Hampton Roads)

Cell: 1-866-645-4584

Website: www.tricare.mil

The Warriors Journey

Website: www.thewarriorsjourney.org

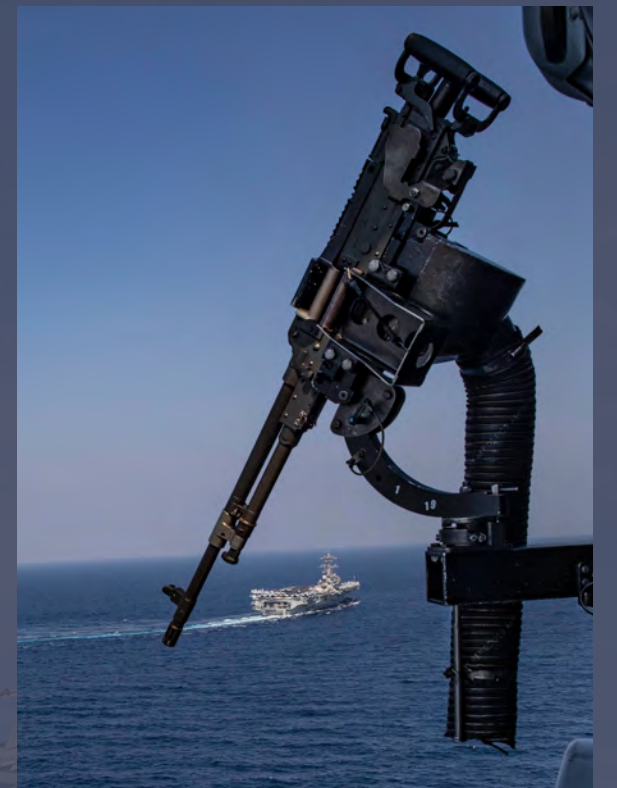
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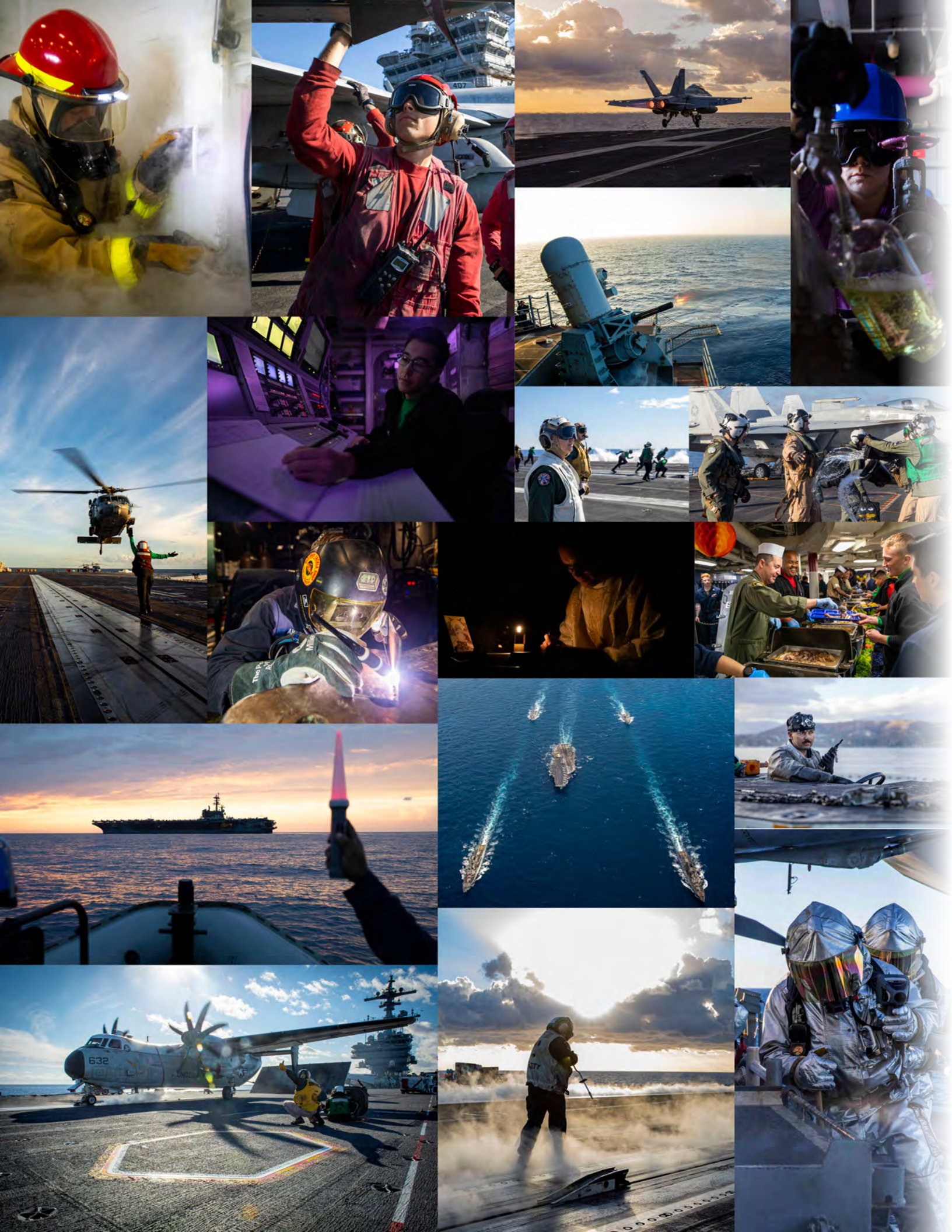
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ALL ABOUT THE

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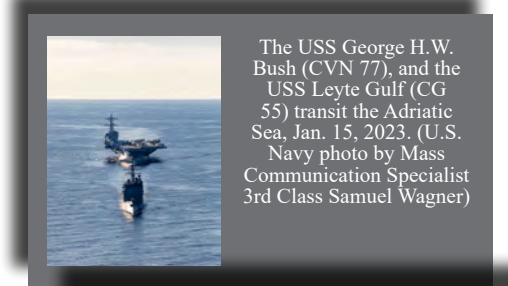
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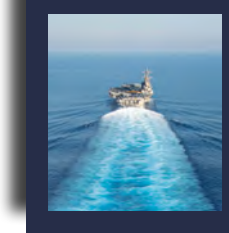
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The USS George H.W. Bush (CVN 77), and the USS Leyte Gulf (CG 55) transit the Adriatic Sea, Jan. 15, 2023. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Samuel Wagner)



The aircraft carrier USS George H.W. Bush (CVN 77) transits the Mediterranean Sea, July 22, 2017. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Daniel Gaither/Released)

