

Carrier Air Wing 8 Returns from Historic 11-Month Deployment



Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 213, the “Blacklions,” returned to Naval Air Station Oceana, Virginia, May 11, 2026, following a historic eleven-month deployment to U.S. 2nd, 4th, 5th and 6th Fleets as part of the Gerald R. Ford Carrier Strike Group assigned to Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 8. CVW-8 logged more than 5,500 flight hours in support of Operation Epic Fury alone, and more than 11,800 launches throughout the 11-month deployment. (U.S. Navy photo by Zachary Wickline)

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Aircraft of the Gerald R. Ford Carrier Strike Group’s Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 8 returned to their home naval air stations May 11, following an historic and successful 11-month deployment to the U.S. Central Command, U.S. European Command and U.S. Southern Command areas of operations.

Before returning after 322 days, breaking the post-Vietnam War record for days deployed, CVW-8 conducted more than 11,500 aircraft events launched from the Electromagnetic Aircraft Launching System (EMALS) and recovered with Advanced Arresting Gear aboard the world's largest aircraft carrier, USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78).

"The officers and Sailors of Carrier Air Wing 8 have served their nation with distinction," said Rear Adm. Rich Brophy, commander, Naval Air Force Atlantic. "Throughout their record-breaking deployment, these aviators successfully conducted worldwide operations, embodying the highest ideals of resilience, courage, and selfless service to the nation."

The Gerald R. Ford Carrier Strike Group deployed as an integrated naval force in support of economic prosperity, national security, and national defense. The force conducted combat operations in support of Operation Southern Spear and Operation Absolute Resolve from the Caribbean Sea in U.S. Southern Command, and Operation Epic Fury from the Mediterranean Sea in U.S. European Command and the Red Sea in U.S. Central Command.

"The men and women of Carrier Air Wing 8 performed admirably and projected power on a global scale," said Adm. Karl Thomas, commander, U.S. Fleet Forces Command. "From major combat operations to exercising alongside our allies and partners in multiple regions, Carrier Air Wing 8 demonstrated to the world that they have the technical expertise, work ethic, and grit to accomplish the mission anywhere it is needed. I couldn't be more proud of the team."

The Gerald R. Ford Carrier Strike Group operated with 20 ally and partner nations throughout deployment, conducting interoperability exercises to increase combined air power projection with Norway, United Kingdom, Germany, Finland, Italy, France, and Tunisia. The flagship conducted port visits in France, Norway, Spain, Croatia, Greece, and the U.S. Virgin

Islands.

CVW-8 includes Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 31, VFA-37, VFA-87, all flying the F/A-18E Super Hornet aircraft and based out of Naval Air Station (NAS) Oceana, Virginia; VFA-213 that flies the F/A-18F Super Hornet aircraft based out of NAS Oceana, Virginia; Electronic Attack Squadron (VAQ) 142 that flies the E/A-18G Growler aircraft based out of NAS Whidbey Island, Washington; Airborne Command & Control Squadron (VAW) 124 that flies the E-2D Advanced Hawkeye aircraft based out of Naval Station (NS) Norfolk, Virginia; Fleet Logistics Support Squadron (VRC) 40 that flies the C-2A Greyhound aircraft based out of NS Norfolk, Virginia; Helicopter Maritime Strike Squadron (HSM) 70 that flies the MH-60R Seahawk helicopter based out of NAS Jacksonville, Florida; and Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron (HSC) 9 that flies the MH-60S Knighthawk helicopter based out of NS Norfolk, Virginia.

Gerald R. Ford, a first-in-class aircraft carrier and deployed flagship of Carrier Strike Group (CSG) 12, incorporates modern technology, innovative shipbuilding designs, and best practices from legacy aircraft carriers to increase the U.S. Navy's capacity to underpin American security and economic prosperity, deter adversaries, and project power on a global scale through sustained operations at sea.