

Ford Air Wing Ready to Arm Up for Training From Carrier



Sailors assigned to USS Gerald R. Ford's weapons department transport MK-82 inert bombs in one of Ford's weapon transfer areas on May 30. Ford is underway in the Atlantic Ocean conducting integrated air wing operations. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Ryan Seelbach

ARLINGTON, Va. – The carrier air wing assigned to the USS Gerald R. Ford is working up on its flight deck and conducting air operations with inert ordnance, the wing commander said.

Speaking June 1 to reporters by teleconference while operating off the Virginia Capes, Capt. Joshua Sager said his seven squadrons assigned to Carrier Air Wing 8 (CVW-8) are on board the carrier for the first time, beginning a lengthy training cycle of catapult launches and arrested landings and working up to ordnance loads and dropping inert ordnance on targets.

The Ford's commanding officer, Capt. J.J. Cummings, also speaking in the teleconference, said the ship has unloaded 40,000 pounds of inert ordnance for CVW-8 to expend during its training. He said the newly operational aft lower Advanced Weapons Elevator (AWE) is getting a workout servicing the air wing.

Sager said the AWE “gives us a lot of flexibility to access what is normally deeper in the magazine” – especially to make changes to ordnance loads in real time, as the mission set might change before aircraft are launched.

“We’re actually testing that out while we’re out here,” he said. “We’re actually taking the carrier qualification mission to a mission that focuses on combat operations and executing that capability. It’s been an absolute an honor to be a part of that trajectory that we’re on.”

The Ford has achieved 167 arrested landings in one day so far with the Advanced Arresting Gear, and Sager plans to show that the ship/air wing team can beat that number.

Cummings said the reliability of the Electromagnetic Aircraft Launch System is climbing.

James F. Geurts, assistant secretary of the Navy for research, development and acquisition, also in the teleconference, said the Ford’s current at-sea period is serving to “exercise the equipment hard.”

Sager said the air wing would not need recovery tanking during this at-sea period because of the availability of divert airfields within easy range. Mission tanking would be conducted for practice strikes into North Carolina.

With more than 1,000 air wing personnel embarked, the ship’s galleys all are fully operating, Cummings said. The ship and air wing are free of any cases of COVID-19 among the personnel embarked, he said.

CVW-8 includes four strike fighter squadrons flying F/A-18E/F Super Hornets, one carrier airborne early warning squadron flying E-2 Hawkeyes, one helicopter maritime strike squadron operating MH-60R Seahawks and one helicopter sea combat squadron flying MH-60S Seahawks.

Sager declined to comment on plans for an electronic attack (VAQ) squadron flying EA-18G Growlers to join the air wing in the future. The VAQ squadron formerly assigned to the wing is assigned an expeditionary role.