

Ford Prepares to Integrate Carrier Air Wing



A Sailor on the aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford signals an F/A-18F Super Hornet to land on the Ford's flight deck during flight operations May 15. Ford is underway in the Atlantic Ocean conducting carrier qualifications and is set to welcome its air wing, CVW-8, next month. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Ryan Seelbach

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy's newest aircraft carrier is progressing through its post-shakedown workload and is preparing to integrate its assigned air wing, Carrier Air Wing 8 (CVW-8).

Although the Ford has conducted more than 3,000 catapult launches and arrested landings, those have been performed by test units, training squadrons, fleet replacement squadrons and other fleet squadrons. When CVW-8 comes aboard in early June, the ship and its air wing will be integrated as a warfighting team for the first time.

The Navy and its industry partners have been working to ready the Ford to embark the 1,200 personnel and prepare for flight operations with CVW-8.

James. F. Geurts, assistant secretary of the Navy for research, development and acquisition, said in a May 20 teleconference with reporters that "the next thing with [Ford] will be embarking the air wing and going to cyclic ops."

On May 18, the carrier completed 167 launches and arrested landings – far greater than the ship's previous record of 135, Geurts said.

The Ford, built by Huntington Ingalls' Newport News Shipbuilding, is equipped with the Electromagnetic Aircraft Launch System (EMALS) and Advanced Arresting Gear (AAG),

both built by General Atomics. Both, plus the Advanced Weapon Elevators (AWEs) designed for the Ford class, are key to achieving the sortie rate that will increase the carrier's striking power over Nimitz-class carriers.

The AWEs, 11 of which the Ford is to be equipped, are necessary to speed ordnance to the flight deck for arming of aircraft. The "bomb farm" that the Nimitz class had on the narrow part of flight deck on the starboard side of the island superstructure to temporarily park weapons carts is not a feature of the Ford class. The difficulties with equipping the Ford with the AWEs has played a significant part in the delays of the aircraft carrier becoming deployable.

Geurts said the Navy/industry team has been steadily working through the AWE issues and recently certified the aft Lower Stage 5 AWE that lifts ordnance from the aft magazine to the flight deck. With this AWE operational, the carrier air wing can conduct some at-sea training with inert ordnance.

Geurts also said that the forward lower AWE, Lower Stage 1, which "will give access to the forward ammo bay," is set to be operational by the end of fiscal 2021. "The remaining elevators are really more about getting additional capacity and redundancy," he said.

Capt. Joshua Sager assumed command of CVW-8 on March 5. He has accumulated more than 3,600 flight hours and has completed more than 900 carrier arrested landings.

"It is an absolute honor and privilege to stand before you as the newest commander of Carrier Air Wing Eight," Sager said at his change-of-command ceremony, as reported by the Navy News Service. "I look forward to continued service with the more than 1,700 outstanding men and women who comprise one of the finest organizations in this great Navy. We look forward to our upcoming integration with the USS Gerald R. Ford as we expand the capabilities of our service's newest and most

advanced nuclear-powered aircraft carrier.”

CVW-8 consists of seven aircraft squadrons flying F/A-18E/F Super Hornets, E-2C Hawkeyes, and MH-60S/R Seahawks. A squadron of EA-18G Growler electronic attack aircraft is expected to join the wing later.