

Gerald R. Ford Carrier Strike Group Returns to Homeport Concluding Inaugural Deployment



The USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78) returns to Naval Station Norfolk after completing their inaugural deployment to the Atlantic Ocean with the Gerald R. Ford Carrier Strike Group Nov. 26. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist First Class Nathan T. Beard*

NORFOLK – The first-in-class aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78), flagship of the Gerald R. Ford Carrier Strike Group (GRFCSG), returned to Naval Station Norfolk, after successfully completing its inaugural deployment throughout the Atlantic while conducting exercises and port visits with allies and partners, Nov. 26, the U.S. 2nd Fleet said in a release

The flagship set sail from Norfolk, Virginia, Oct. 4, and traveled more than 9,275 nautical miles with GRFCSG.

During the scheduled deployment, Ford operated with eight allies and partners – Canada, Denmark, Spain, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Finland and Sweden – to strengthen interoperability, while conducting a range of maritime operations and exercises.

“This deployment brought together an incredible group of Allies and partners with one single focus – to contribute to a peaceful, stable and conflict-free Atlantic region through our combined naval power,” said Vice Adm. Dan Dwyer, commander, U.S. 2nd Fleet and Joint Force Command Norfolk. “Opportunities to interoperate and integrate make our nations, our navies, and the NATO Alliance stronger.”

While deployed, GRFCSG participated in Exercise Silent Wolverine, demonstrating high-end naval warfare and integrated NATO interoperability in the maritime approaches to Europe. Silent Wolverine was an opportunity for Ford to train and test capabilities while demonstrating the U.S. commitment to Allies and partners through seamless integration.

“We sailed with our Allies and partners and trained together, tirelessly, day and night, and we are stronger for it,” said Capt. Paul Lanzilotta, Ford’s commanding officer. “Through integrated and combined operations such as live and inert ordnance expenditure by Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 8, anti-submarine warfare, anti-surface warfare, and air defense, we set the stage for operating with Ford-class technologies in a deployed environment. We completed more than 1,250 sorties, expended 78.3 tons of ordnance, and completed 13 underway replenishments – and we accomplished this because of what Ford-class aircraft carriers bring to the fight.”

The Sailors participating in Ford’s first deployment integrated multiple foreign nations’ ships into the strike

group to operate together efficiently.

“Leading the men and women of the Gerald R. Ford Strike Group has been awe-inspiring. Every day these Sailors committed themselves 100% to a safe and successful inaugural deployment of Ford and the strike group,” said Rear Adm. Greg Huffman, commander, Carrier Strike Group (CSG) 12. “This deployment laid a strong foundation for the strike group, created momentum to carry us forward for future operations, and has prepared us to answer our nation’s call when needed.”

Ford made their first international port visit in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and their first European port visit in Portsmouth, U.K. For Ford Sailors, these port visits offered a long-awaited opportunity to explore and learn from different cultures.

Boatswain’s Mate 3rd Class Selena Penaloza, from Orlando, Florida, assigned to Ford’s deck department, has been stationed aboard Ford for three years before deploying for the first time.

“It was amazing getting to see the [ship’s] first deployment and my first port visit. This deployment has been a new experience for everyone onboard”, said Penaloza. “We’ve been working more than on other underways and standing more watch, and it’s all for a great cause.”

Ford is the first new U.S. aircraft carrier designed in more than 40 years, introducing 23 new technologies that offer impressive advances to its aircraft launch system, propulsion, power generation, ordnance handling and more. Ford’s advanced technologies reduce the amount of personnel required to maintain and operate the ship’s systems compared to Nimitz-class carriers.

“On our ship, you don’t hear Sailors saying, ‘that’s the way we’ve always done it’ because we’re using new gear, new technologies,” said Lanzilotta. “Our Sailors are the ones who

make all of these new technologies real. The Sailors make it come to life. I am so proud of all their hard work and dedication that made Ford operational and allowed the Gerald R. Ford Carrier Strike Group to conduct a successful first deployment.”

While operating in the Atlantic, Ford hosted 215 distinguished visitors, 175 foreign dignitaries, 46 NATO flag officers and senior enlisted leaders and more than 60 U.S. and international reporters aboard.

The U.S. commands and units that participated in the GRFCSG deployment include; CSG 12, CVW 8, Destroyer Squadron 2, Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruiser USS Normandy (CG 60), Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyers USS McFaul (DDG 74) and USS Ramage (DDG 61) stationed at Naval Station Norfolk in Norfolk, Virginia, and USS Thomas Hudner (DDG 116) stationed at Naval Station Mayport in Mayport, Florida.

The nine U.S. aircraft squadrons assigned to CVW-8 that embarked Ford for this deployment were Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 213, Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 31, Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 37 and Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 87 stationed at Naval Air Station Oceana in Virginia Beach, Virginia; Electric Attack Squadron (VAQ) 142 stationed at Naval Air Station Whidbey Island in Whidbey Island, Washington; Airborne Command and Control Squadron (VAW) 124; Fleet Logistics Support Squadron (VRC) 40; Helicopter Maritime Strike Squadron (HSM) 70; and Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron (HSC) 9, stationed at Naval Station Norfolk in Norfolk, Virginia.