Italian Aircraft Carrier ITS Cavour Departs Norfolk, Completing F-35B Certification



U.S. Sailors, assigned to the aircraft carrier USS John C. Stennis (CVN 74), greet the Italian navy flagship, aircraft carrier ITS Cavour (CVH 550), as it arrives at Naval Station Norfolk, Virginia, Feb. 13, 2021. The Cavour's visit is part of a series of operations alongside U.S. military assets to attain the Italian navy's "ready for operations" certification to safely land and launch F-35B aircraft, U.S. 2nd Fleet exercises operational authorities over assigned ships, and landing forces on the East Coast and the Atlantic. *U.S. NAVY*

NORFOLK, Va. – The Italian navy flagship, the aircraft carrier ITS Cavour (CVH 550), departed Naval Station Norfolk April 16 after Joint Force operations with U.S. military forces in the Atlantic Ocean, the U.S. 2nd Fleet Public Affairs said in an April 21 release.

ITS Cavour participated in a sequence of operations with U.S. assets and the F-35 Joint Program Office has delivered a flight clearance recommendation to the Italian navy for the safe operation of fifth generation F-35B fighter aircraft.

“I am very proud for the success of ITS Cavour’s ‘Ready for Operations’ campaign,” said Italian navy Capt. Giancarlo Ciappina, commanding officer of ITS Cavour. “Our allies will soon perceive the Italian navy and the Italian armed forces as a whole, as enhanced cooperative partners thanks to the strategic enabler that the fifth-generation aircraft carrier capability would represent, in either specific maritime or wider joint operations.”

An F-35 Joint Program Office (JPO) test team embarked on ITS Cavour to conduct sea trials, a series of tests and functional activities to create a safe flight operating envelope for the short-takeoff-and-vertical-landing (STOVL) variant of the aircraft aboard the recently upgraded ship.

The F-35 Pax River Integrated Test Force (ITF) team from Naval Air Station Patuxent River, Maryland, includes almost 200 people with the engineering and test pilot expertise and experience to conduct F-35B envelope expansion flight test, two specially instrumented developmental flight test aircraft, and support equipment.

During the sea trials, two F-35Bs of the ITF were embarked aboard Cavour and carried out more than 50 flight missions in challenging weather conditions sea states, a night session, around 120 vertical landings, 115 short takeoffs with the aid of the ski jump, and two vertical takeoffs. These activities were followed by a sufficient amount of data analysis, yielding the information telling the U.S. Marine Corps and the Italian navy how to safely conduct F-35B flight operations on Cavour.

“It was a privilege to work alongside our Italian counterparts while they certified their flagship to launch and recover the cutting-edge F-35B,” said Vice Adm. Andrew Lewis, commander, U.S. 2nd Fleet. “I look forward to continuing to build upon our trans-Atlantic bridge, enhancing our collective capabilities and strengthening partnerships with our NATO allies.”

In coordination with the Italian navy, U.S. Marine Corps MV-22s conducted shipboard landing qualifications on the deck of the Italian Carrier ITS Cavour.

Also while operating in the western Atlantic, ITS Cavour collaborated with the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Stout (DDG 55). They conducted a three-day interoperability exercise with support from Carrier Air Wing Seven and Patrol and Reconnaissance Wing 11. ITS Cavour also conducted dual-carrier operations alongside USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78), marking the first time a Gerald R. Ford-class and Italian carrier operated jointly.

ITS Cavour departed Norfolk after disembarking the ITF personnel prior to completing the necessary preparation to undertake the last phases of the ready for operations campaign before returning to Italy. Cavour was also greeted by a performance by the U.S. Fleet Forces band as an expression of goodwill between the U.S. and Italian navies.

For decades, the bond between Europe and North America has made NATO the strongest alliance in history. Conducting training and exercises alongside allies and partners increases our collective capacity and capabilities as well as increased interoperability with the U.S. forces.