

# Navy Secretary Embarks Gerald R. Ford for First Carrier Visit



Capt. Rick Burgess, commanding officer of USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78), welcomes Secretary of the Navy John C. Phelan in the captain's in-port cabin. (MC2 Jacob Mattingly)  
15 April 2025

ATLANTIC OCEAN – Secretary of the Navy John Phelan embarked USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78), the flagship of Carrier Strike Group (CSG) 12, to observe the strike group's Composite Training Unit Exercise (COMPTUEX), Apr. 10-11. The visit was the Secretary's first visit to an operational carrier strike group since becoming the 79th Secretary of the Navy on March 25, 2025.

"There is nothing that compares to the strategic influence that the Gerald R. Ford Carrier Strike Group delivers to the Commander-in-Chief," said Phelan. "All Americans should be

proud of these men and women, whose grit and determination keeps our seas open and our nation safe.”

The Secretary joined the strike group during Composite Training Unit Exercise (COMPTUEX). The training environment delivers opportunities for carrier strike group commanders to integrate highly-capable, multi-mission teams through live, virtual, and constructive presentations of threats. CSG-12 coordinates and directs the actions of USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78), USS Winston S. Churchill (DDG 81), Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 8 with its nine accompanying squadrons, and Destroyer Squadron (DESRON) 2 and its four guided-missile destroyers.

“I can’t think of a better time, place, or team to introduce Secretary Phelan to strike group operations at sea,” said Rear Adm. Paul Lanzilotta. “It’s an honor and a privilege to lead this team, and I am grateful for the opportunity to highlight the team’s hard work, tactical acumen, and warfighting spirit to the Secretary.”

COMPTUEX is the Joint Force’s most complex training event which underscores the Navy’s commitment to deliver naval task forces for sustained high-end Joint and combined combat. The visit was also an opportunity for the crew of USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78) to present the ship to senior leadership.

“It is a great honor to host Secretary Phelan during his first trip to a ready aircraft carrier,” said Capt. Rick Burgess, commanding officer of Gerald R. Ford. “The crew demonstrated Ford’s ability to project power on demand anywhere across the globe.”

Following its return from its maiden deployment in January 2024, Ford completed a maintenance and training cycle.

“As the first aircraft carrier to deter aggression during the Israel-Hamas conflict, you stood tall in support of Israel’s

right to defend itself, and you made America proud. But you didn't just deter. You made a difference. and you showed the world what American naval power and strength looks like." said Phelan.

The Gerald R. Ford Carrier Strike Group delivers the Joint force and Commander-in-Chief the combat capability to deter, and if necessary, defeat America's adversaries in support of national security and economic prosperity. The strike group is comprised of its flagship, the world's largest and most capable aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78), USS Winston S. Churchill (DDG 81), Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 8 with nine accompanying squadrons, and Destroyer Squadron (DESRON) 2 and its four guided-missile destroyers.

For more information about the USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78), visit its official webpage at <https://www.airlant.usff.navy.mil/cvn78/>, or its Defense Visual Information Distribution site at [www.dvids.net/ CVN78](http://www.dvids.net/ CVN78). Follow the ship's operations and upcoming deployment on Facebook at @USSGeraldRFord or on Instagram at @cvn78\_grford.