

Navy's Carrier Air Wings Will Train as a Joint Fighting Force in Simulators at Sea

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Aviators across USS Abraham Lincoln's (CVN 72) carrier air wing now train as a joint fighting force using advanced simulators developed and installed by the Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division (NAWCAD).

The first-of-its-kind training capability, called Simulators at Sea, features connected desktop trainers that enable aviators to practice missions together while deployed—a historically limited capability.

“Simulators at Sea brings American aviators a level of readiness our carrier air wing has never experienced while deployed,” said NAWCAD Commander Rear Adm. John Dougherty IV. “This training is a game changing advantage that keeps our forces the most dominant in the skies.”

Aviators with Lincoln's Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 9 flying F-35C Lightning II, F/A-18 E/F Super Hornets, EA-18G Growlers, and E-2D Hawkeyes are the first to deploy and rehearse naval missions including wartime scenarios with the Navy's new Simulators at Sea. Previously, joint mission training on this scale has been significantly limited as practicing wartime scenarios holds risk, flight operations can be expensive, and open-air rehearsal puts Navy tactics on display for adversaries.

“Naval aviators train extensively working up to deployment, but those skills begin to atrophy the day they pull out of port,” said NAWCAD Joint Simulation Environment Director

Blaine Summers, whose team delivered the Simulators at Sea capability. "This was a capability gap we had to plug with a fully integrated carrier air wing solution—one we're ready to scale across the Navy's fleet of carriers."

CVW-9 aviators have trained in its new simulators daily since its July 2024 deployment.

Simulators at Sea came together for Abraham Lincoln in less than 12 months following lessons learned from NAWCAD's 2023 deployment of F-35 simulators onboard USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70). The Simulators at Sea effort was more complex, requiring significant integration efforts that stretched across the Naval Aviation Enterprise's Naval Air Warfare Center Training Systems Division, NAWCAD's Webster Outlying Field, and the Naval Aviation Training Systems and Ranges Program, as well as industry partners Boeing, Collins Aerospace, and General Dynamics Information Technology.

The warfare center plans to expand Simulators at Sea to other carriers in the future.

The Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division employs more than 17,000 military, civilian and contract personnel. It operates test ranges, laboratories, and aircraft in support of test, evaluation, research, development and sustainment of everything flown by the Navy and Marine Corps. Based in Patuxent River, Maryland, the command also has major sites in St. Inigoes, Maryland, Lakehurst, New Jersey, and Orlando, Florida.