Norfolk Naval Shipyard Welcomes USS Gerald R. Ford for First Planned Incremental Availability

Ushering in a new era of aircraft carrier maintenance at America's Shipyard, Norfolk Naval Shipyard welcomed USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78) July 7 in advance of its Planned Incremental Availability.

Following the carrier's historic 326-day deployment, including operations in the Mediterranean, Caribbean, and Red Seas, this marks Gerald R. Ford's first regularly scheduled availability at a public shipyard as well as the first time a Ford-class aircraft carrier has been serviced at NNSY.

A PIA is a scheduled period for an aircraft carrier to undergo extensive maintenance, repairs and modernization to meet future operational demands, spanning a wide array of overhauls

and inspections. Additionally, a concurrent availability will be conducted to restore spaces damaged during a fire aboard the then-deployed carrier in March 2026.

Gerald R. Ford’s availability plays an important role in the Navy’s integration of operations and overhauls into a maintenance continuum using smaller, more frequent availabilities to accomplish needed work while also increasing operational availability. Getting carriers delivered back to the fleet on time is critical to improving warfighting readiness.

This continuum has already supported the shipyard team to accomplish advance work on the carrier while at Naval Station Norfolk— including early testing, preparations for temporary service installation, and jet blast deflector overhaul. The continuum also provides an opportunity to resolve any additional work following completion of the availability.

“The team is heavily leveraging the lessons of the new maintenance continuum,” said Project Superintendent George “BJ” Baker. “Specifically, we are utilizing pre- and post-Window of Opportunity (WOO) periods to manage new work budgets. If late-stage new work poses a risk to our completion date, we have the framework to work those items post-availability. Capitalizing on these WOO periods is the single most important key to returning carriers to their strict [maintenance] timelines.”

To further support timely completion, Baker said the team has been undergoing “rigorous and highly collaborative” preparations conducting quarterly project planning reviews, undergoing specialized training on the new carrier class at Newport News Shipbuilding’s (NNS) Virginia Advanced Shipbuilding and Carrier Integration Center and engaging in peer reviews with the PCU John F. Kennedy (CVN 79) team as the next carrier in class completes construction at NNS.

To drive a pressing timeline while overhauling a new type of carrier, the project team will incorporate NNSY’s Focus and Finish initiative by starting availability jobs and urgently working them to completion to minimize interruptions and delays.

“We are actively implementing theFocus and Finishexecution model to minimize multitasking, drive scheduling discipline, and rapidly close out work areas,” said Baker. “Every single shift matters. Our leadership team is focused on ensuring the entire shipyard and ship’s force community are completely bought into this ‘every day counts’ mindset.”

Gerald R. Ford’s arrival at NNSY follows the early PIA completions for Nimitz-class aircraft carriers USS Dwight D. Eisenhower (CVN 69) in April 2026, and USS George H.W. Bush (CVN 77) in November 2024.

“USS Gerald R. Ford is positioned to become the third consecutive early finish of an aircraft carrier availability at America’s Shipyard,” said Shipyard Commander Rear Adm. Kavon Hakimzadeh. “Our project team is answering the call, and I look forward to many great successes over the next several months as we drive to completing the availability and maximizing Gerald R. Ford’s ability to meet its critical mission.”

Gerald R. Ford is the lead ship in the first newly designed aircraft carrier class in more than 40 years, beginning the phased replacement of Nimitz-class carriers. As one of the largest, most historic and multifaceted shipyards in the nation, NNSY’s mission is to repair, modernize and inactivate Navy warships and training platforms to maximize readiness and availability for fleet tasking.