

USS George H.W. Bush (CVN 77)

THE AVENGER

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From the Commanding Officer

Hello, friends and families!



I would like to thank all of our Sailors and their families for making this past holiday season a safe and memorable one. Our holiday stand down was a great success and as we close the door on 2010 I look ahead to what will no doubt be a historical year for all of us.

We recently hosted several pre-deployment briefs filled with useful information and I hope all of you had an opportunity to attend. It is vital that we provide our families with the necessary tools for success and the information contained in these briefs will help all of us better prepare ourselves for the year to come.

We're halfway through our COMPTUEX evolution and things could not be going any better. The USS GEORGE H.W. BUSH (CVN 77) Strike Group has had a stellar performance thus far, and I expect more of the same as we complete the remainder of this underway.

This is a critical time for the Strike Group as it sets the tone for our upcoming deployment and I could not be more proud of our Sailors. They have truly gone above and beyond.

As we inch closer to deployment, I encourage you to remind your Sailors just how important they are to the success of our mission. Family support is a key factor in maintaining a happy and healthy crew.

Furthermore, I would like to remind all of our families about our command Family Readiness Group, which includes multiple Ombudsmen standing by to assist you at any time.

With your Sailors leading the way, the future has never looked brighter. I am confident that they will all continue to work hard and hold true to the Navy core values that make our Sailors the best in the fleet.

I'd like to say thank you to all of our families back home that provide comfort and inspiration to our GEORGE H.W. BUSH Sailors. With your help, there is no task that we cannot accomplish.

Sincerely,

Capt. Chip Miller
Commanding Officer

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USS George H.W. Bush (CVN 77) is underway in the Atlantic Ocean, Jan. 29. (U.S. Navy Photo by Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class (SW) Nicholas Hall).

COMPTUEX/JTFEX

COMPOSITE TRAINING UNIT EXERCISE JOINT TASK FORCE EXERCISE

G A R N E T A M B E R C O R A L S A P P H I R E T O P A Z A M B E R L A N D M I C A P Y R O P E O N Y X R U B Y

Story and layout by MC3 Joshua K. Horton

USS GEORGE H.W. BUSH (CVN 77) is currently underway conducting its final training exercise in preparation for deployment later this year.

Composite Training Unit Exercise/Joint Task Force Exercise (COMPTUEX/JTFEX) is a two-part training exercise that includes not only CVN 77, but the entire GEORGE H.W. BUSH Strike Group as well. The exercise tests the Strike Group's ability to properly react to critical situations that might arise during an actual deployment by simulating real-world events.

"This Strike Group is all about capability, experience and professionalism. We have a fantastic opportunity to hone these skills over the next few weeks," said Rear Adm. Nora Tyson, George H.W. Bush Strike Group Commander.

As part of the exercise, the GHWB Strike Group will be traversing waters controlled by potentially hostile nations. Although fictional, all scenarios are modeled after realistic threats such as small boat attacks, mine warfare, aircraft and submarine assaults, and should be treated as if they are real.

"The first phase of the exercise, COMPTUEX, focuses on how the GHWB Strike Group performs together as a unit and is designed to determine whether or not the Strike Group is ready to deploy," said Lt. Cmdr. Catherine Boulware, Assistant Strike Operations Officer.

Instead of learning new techniques, the GHWB Strike Group is expected to build on lessons learned from previous training exercises and incorporate them into the final evaluation phase.

After completing COMPTUEX, the second phase of the exercise begins. During JTFEX, the GHWB Strike Group will be integrated into a joint task force and will be expected to operate effectively with assets from other military forces.

"Whereas COMPTUEX was all about us as a Strike Group and a Navy, JTFEX

takes it a step up. It assumes we are a cohesive Strike Group. Now, can you take that cohesive Strike Group and plug it into a joint task force, which is the way we operate as a military in general," said Lt. Cmdr. David Kliemann, Strike Operations Officer.

In order to realistically simulate the integration of the GHWB Strike Group into a full-scale joint task force, multiple nations will be taking part in the COMPTUEX/JTFEX exercises.

"We will be working extensively with Coalition ships from Spain, France and Canada during this exercise," said Tyson. "They are an integral part of our team, and we look forward to working with them now and during our first combat deployment later this year."

Among the many different scenarios included in COMPTUEX/JTFEX are maritime patrol, counter piracy and close-air support.

"What Strike Force Training Atlantic tries to do is think of possible scenarios we will encounter on deployment and then let us go through it," said Kliemann.

Unlike previous exercises, however, COMPTUEX/JTFEX is less structured and is intended to evaluate how the Strike Group actually responds to real-world scenarios. In this instance, the Strike Group is tested on how it handles situations with little to no assistance.

Upon completion of COMPTUEX/JTFEX, the GHWB Strike Group will have demonstrated its ability to operate independently and as a part of a much larger military force.

"This is a great moment for this Strike Group and USS GEORGE H.W. BUSH" said Tyson. "COMPTUEX is a critical step in our journey toward deployment and I could not be more proud to be going to sea with these talented and dedicated Sailors."

Participating alongside GEORGE H.W. BUSH (CVN 77) during COMPTUEX/JTFEX are USS MITSCHER (DDG 57), USS GETTYSBURG (CG 64), USS TRUXTUN (DDG 103), USS ANZIO (CG 68), the squadrons of Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 8, and the Spanish frigate ESPS Almirante Juan de Borbón.



Did You Know?

USS George H.W. Bush was constructed out of 47,000 tons of steel and about 500 tons of aluminum.

Navy Trivia

How long can a Nimitz-class aircraft carrier operate without refueling?

Answer: More than 20 years.

COMPTUEX



Photo by MCSN Dustin Good

1



2

Photo by MC3 Kevin J. Steinberg



Photo by MCSN Deven B. King

3



4

Photo by MCSN Billy Ho



5

Photo by MC3 Richard J. Stevens



8

Photo by MCSN Deven B. King

COMPOSITE TRAINING UNIT EXERCISE

1. Aviation Boatswain's Mate (Equipment) Airman Jericho Mendez, of USS GEORGE H.W. BUSH (CVN 77) Air Department's V-2 Division, moves into position after securing an F/A-18E Super Hornet to a catapult, Jan. 21.
2. Naval Air Crewman 2nd Class (NAC/AW) Nathaniel Sniff, from Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron (HSC) 9 embarked aboard USS GEORGE H.W. BUSH (CVN 77), lowers a rescue basket as part of a Search and Rescue (SAR) training exercise, Jan. 25.
3. Hospital Corpsman 2nd Class Zach Montanaro climbs down a ladder from the guided missile destroyer USS MITSCHER (DDG 57) into a rigid hull inflatable boat to accompany the ship's visit, board, search and seizure (VBSS) team on an exercise mission, Jan. 24.
4. An MH-60S Seahawk from Helicopter Maritime Strike Squadron (HSM) 70, attached to USS GEORGE H.W. BUSH (CVN 77), sets on the flight deck, Jan. 20.
5. Sailors heave a line during an underway replenishment aboard the Arleigh-Burke Class guided missile destroyer USS TRUXTUN (DDG 103), Jan. 20.
6. Sailors aboard the guided missile destroyer USS MITSCHER (DDG 57) stand by as the fleet replenishment oiler USNS LEROY GRUMMAN (T-AO 195) pulls alongside to conduct an underway replenishment, Jan. 20.
7. A Sailor assigned to USS GEORGE H.W. BUSH (CVN 77) Weapons Department fires a .50-caliber machine gun during a live-fire exercise on the ship's fantail, Jan. 23.
8. USS MITSCHER (DDG 57) fires its 5-inch gun during a gun exercise, Jan. 22.

Layout by MC3 Timothy Walter



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Photo by MCSN Deven B. King



Photo by MCSN Billy Ho

STORY AND LAYOUT BY MC3 TIMOTHY WALTER

THE HANDLER'S BANK

Few people would willingly set down a single dollar on a table and simply walk away, let alone leave a bill with Benjamin Franklin's face on it. But at the desk of the aircraft handling officer of USS GEORGE H.W. BUSH (CVN 77), crew and visitors have been doing exactly that since June 2010.

The aircraft handling officer, or "handler," is an unlikely banker. He has a difficult enough job coordinating maintenance, scheduling flights, and monitoring the movement of all of the aircraft and helicopters that occupy the flight deck and hangar bay, let alone handling money.

In his case, a lot of money.

When Lt. Cmdr. Ron Rancourt arrived on board USS GEORGE H.W. BUSH to serve as the aircraft handling officer, in June 2010, he brought with him a tradition that now causes his workspace to become richer every week.

Denominations of all types, including several bearing the face of Benjamin Franklin, Ulysses S. Grant, and George Washington, line his table, known as the Ouija board.

As a scale drawing of the flight deck covered in plastic, Rancourt's Ouija board normally presents a visual picture of real time aircraft movements, status, and maintenance needs so that he can offer quick and accurate information to the aircraft directors as well as provide details for operational readiness to those in command.

To represent this information, the Ouija board employs off-the-shelf items such as colored push-pins, tiny wooden blocks, wing nuts, washers, and even re-painted nuts from float coat actuators.

Interestingly enough, the bills lining the board serve no purpose in showing the location or status of the aircraft. Rather the bills accumulated due to fines that Sailors incurred for knocking, bumping, touching, or otherwise invading the handler's space.

"When I have 45 aircraft up here and people lean all over the Ouija board and knock stuff around, we can lose situational awareness of what's going on out there. And that's very critical. We can lose valuable time," Rancourt said. When this happened in the past, "grumpy old handlers" charged a fine for the inconvenience, usually a dollar.

Rancourt followed suit during his last tour on USS THEODORE ROOSEVELT (CVN 71) and collected a dollar for any sort of table-touching. Not to be confused with the grumpy handlers before him, Rancourt gave the money back to the aircraft directors, or yellow shirts, who were the Sailors most affected by a misplaced push-pin, so that they could have a social.

"When you mess up the Ouija board, it affects the yellow shirts' ability to do their jobs. The yellow shirts have to park and move those aircraft. So if an aircraft is out of its spot or some pins are missing, they are missing a large piece of information," Rancourt said. "Then the squadron can't do their maintenance. We can miss the ability to launch an aircraft to drop a bomb and save our troops. That's how important these pins are."

He brought this mentality to USS GEORGE H.W. BUSH, but then the dollar bill tradition took an unexpected turn, as the Ouija board seemed to have a destiny of its own.

"As we started putting money under the Ouija board, all the visitors and dignitaries starting asking what the money was for," Rancourt said.

One such visitor was the Vice Chairman of the Boston Red Sox, Phillip H. Morse, who upon seeing the money, signed his name on a \$100 bill and offered it for the fund.

"From the day he contributed the \$100 bill. It has grown and grown and grown and grown. Most anyone that has visited this ship has donated," Rancourt said, adding that the board is a constant conversation piece during ship tours.

Visitors "will come in here and the first question is, 'What's up with the money?'" Rancourt said.

What started out as a punishment now "brings a smile to everyone's face," Rancourt said.

Among those who have contributed are Medal of Honor Recipient Retired Army Col. Jack Jacobs, the CEO of Pratt and Whitney, Boy Scout Troop 982, and even Santa Claus, if the bill bearing his face is to be believed.

All those donations have added up, changing not only the main source of money but also its destination.

"It's to the point now where there is just too much money to say we're going to have a party," Rancourt said.

Instead, the money will now be donated to the Aviation Boatswain's Mate Association's (ABMA) Scholarship Fund, which helps dependents of its members receive tuition assistance for college.

"It's not my money. It will be a gift from USS GEORGE H.W. BUSH to the ABMA," Rancourt said.

Aviation Boatswain's Mate (Handling) Airman Robert Farley contributed a dollar himself and appreciated that the money would now be used for a worthy cause.

"It's a really good tradition, because it's honestly donated money for people who need it," Farley said.

The only issue now is making sure that money doesn't disappear from the board. But Rancourt isn't losing any sleep over the issue when he isn't at his desk.

"I'm not worried. If we show people that we trust them and we stick with the Navy's Honor, Courage, Commitment, I think people grasp that and respect that," he said.

"It's a really good tradition, because it's honestly donated money for people who need it."

--ABHAN Robert Farley

Did You Know?

USS George H.W. Bush has enough food on board to prepare 18,150 meals per day for 90 days.

Navy Trivia

Who was the only Admiral of the Navy ever appointed by the U.S. Congress?

THE KING OF THE THRONE

A TALE OF AN HT

STORY AND LAYOUT BY MC3 KEVIN J. STEINBERG

Not every job is desirable, but every job is important, whether it's a CEO working long hours keeping the company running or the janitor keeping the building maintained. Many may not mind their job at all, but then there are the lucky few who love their job. One of those lucky few is Hull Maintenance Technician Fireman Kristopher White.

"I'm a Hull Maintenance Technician. If there's a problem that goes down with the forward and aft VCHT (Vacuum Collecting Holding and Transfer) systems, they call in the HTs to fix it," said White.

White works on everything from cleaning clogs to vacuum leaks and replacing toilets.

Like most Sailors, White has a story about why he does what he does in the Navy. And just like all Sailors, his story is unique.

White fell on hard times after a divorce. "I was living on the streets for a while because I lost my place," he said. His father offered for White to come live with him and ended up influencing White's decision to join the Navy. On June 14, 2009, White enlisted to be an HT.

He originally chose to be an HT to work as a welder. It wasn't until a few days later that he learned he would be working as a plumber too. White said he thought learning plumbing would help him find a job if he ever left the Navy.

While he has not done as much welding as some of the other HTs, he says that welding is one of the things he loves about his job. "It's a great job. I have fun doing it," White said. He explained welding takes a lot of practice, precision and knowledge, and gaining this knowledge was not easy.

For HTs, the first part of their 'A' school is 37 days long and goes through a number

of different training environments. Their training covers everything from firefighting to welding. They learn how the vacuum system for the heads work, how to repair it, and even learn to work with other engineering rates like Machinist's Mates and Machinery Repairmen, White said.

"I met a lot of great people that I had to leave. I made a lot of friends, and 'A' school, overall, was a great experience for me."

Being an HT has its great days and its, well, not-so-great. Just have him tell you about the worst fix they've had to do. White explained that the heads work on the

same principle as the toilets on the space shuttle. Instead of using the vacuum of space to suck out waste and clean the toilets, it's a vacuum that is created within the ship. So when there is a problem, they have to search through miles of pipes to find it. Sometimes it can be a clog or sometimes a valve comes loose causing the vacuum system to lose pressure.

White said the worst fix he had to do was clear a clog that had caused all the forward heads to back up. And just when things were already bad, they found another problem. The aft vacuum system went out without warning or reason.

Both systems were down at the same time and they worked on the problem continually, with no sleep, for two straight days, said White. He said his division worked around the clock for 30 to 35 hours trying to diagnose and fix the problem.

"A lot of pipe shop guys were just pretty much running on fumes trying to deal with this problem," said White. "It's just a part of our job. Sometimes you have to make sacrifices to get the system fixed."

In the midst of all that he has to deal with, White still maintains a good sense of humor about things. To keep his morale up he makes jokes to keep everyone alert and happy and also thinks about family and home. "I remember that what I got back home is worth fighting for," he said.

"I enjoy working with my shipmates, my fellow HTs, my divisional LPOs, LCPOs and all of the friends that I've made on the ship," said White. "It makes me happy to be able to help others."

"I love my time on the Bush. It's been a great experience," said White. "Honestly, the people I've met on board this ship, I consider my second family. They would do anything. They would go out of their way to help me out if I needed it."

White could complain about his job, but as the old saying goes, "Find a job you enjoy and you'll never work a day in your life."

"If I was to make a choice to go back and join the Navy again, I would choose the same rate because I don't see any problem with my job. I love it!"

Perhaps all of us can have to never work a day in our life either.

Did You Know?

USS George H.W. Bush has over 1,300,000 feet, or almost 250 miles of pipe on board.

Navy Trivia

Name the largest flying boat ever built for the U.S. Navy.

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