

Change of Command

There are currently ten active aircraft carriers in the U.S. Navy. My son, Captain John Ring, is the new Commanding Officer (CO) of one them, the USS Nimitz. On July 8th, Pat and I attended a very impressive Change of Command ceremony, held aboard the Nimitz, at its home port in Everett, Washington, just north of Seattle.

The ceremony was held inside the huge ship, below the flight deck, on the hangar deck where aircraft are normally garaged and made ready for action during deployment. The full ship's crew of over 2,700 participated. Officers and sailors, standing in their dress "whites," surrounded several hundred seated guests – all facing a large podium. The audience included family and friends of both the departing CO and the "relieving" CO.

This joyous event drew family members from across the country. Pat and I were joined by John's two brothers David and Steven, Pat's son David, and my brother Al – with their spouses. John's Aunt, sister of his deceased Mother Ann, and her husband, traveled all the way from the Midwest by train to attend.

As a testament to friendship and respect for John, others attending included John's current naval officer peers, and classmates, neighbors, navy co-workers, and friends from high school through, college, flight school, and a 25-year navy career.

John's wife Cathleen's family was well represented too – including her parents Paul and Bobbi O'Connor, formerly from Tucson, and her sister and brother with their families. "Cat" as she is known to one and all is a retired Navy Commander and a U of A graduate.

The COC ceremony was very formal – based on many years of Navy tradition – and recognized the awesome responsibility of commanding an aircraft carrier. The official party, including the departing CO and John, were "piped" in to the podium through a pathway of flags held by ship's personnel.

The colors were paraded, the National Anthem sung, and an invocation given. Orders for the departing CO and John were read. Remarks were given by each plus an inspirational message from Rear Admiral Dee Mewbourne, Commander Strike Group Eleven and John's new boss.

John's remarks brought a tear to my eye as he remembered his mother's interest in Naval Aviation being the inspiration for his career.

Following the official program, all adjourned to a reception where the ship's mess crew provided lots of good food, including three special cakes that celebrated John as the new CO, the Nimitz's new battle flag, and an unbelievable seven-foot long replica of the Nimitz aircraft carrier.

During the reception, Nimitz officers provided tours of the ship. (It's truly amazing to see how up to 6,000 people live and operate in an aircraft carrier for extended periods.)

John was commissioned via the Naval Reserve Officer Training Corps here at the University of Arizona and was designated as a naval flight officer in 1990 following completion of flight training in Pensacola.

He immediately entered the airborne tactical battle management community, rising to command a squadron of E-2C Hawkeyes, supporting ground convoys in the Iraq War. Along the way he had broadening assignments in Surface Warfare Air Defense, Ballistic Missile Defense, and Joint Theater Air and Missile Defense.

More recent leadership positions include Executive Officer (second in command) of the USS Nimitz and CO of the USS Comstock amphibious dock landing ship. In his last assignment before becoming CO of the Nimitz, he was responsible for establishing Aircraft Carrier Requirements for the Commander, Naval Air Forces, Atlantic. Sprinkled among all these professional jobs was a challenging variety of training courses that among other things resulted in a couple of Masters degrees and proficiency in aircraft carrier nuclear power management.

Before this trip, I was warned by friends not to wear any tight fitting clothes with buttons to the ceremony because I would be so proud of John that I'd surely pop the buttons. So true, so true.

If anybody sees me around town, I'll be the one wearing a Nimitz polo-shirt and/or a Nimitz jacket, and a Nimitz CO cap with the name "Bob Ring" embroidered on the back.

USS Nimitz mission is to project U.S. air power worldwide. The ship normally deploys in a Carrier Strike Group, including a guided missile cruiser and several guided missile destroyers.

USS Nimitz was named for World War II Pacific Fleet commander Chester W. Nimitz. The nuclear-powered super carrier (CVN 68) was commissioned in 1975 as the lead ship in the "Nimitz class" of aircraft carriers. The enormous ship has a flight deck a fifth of a mile in length and a top speed over 30 knots. USS Nimitz air wing consists of about 80 aircraft including F/A-18 strike fighters, E-2C battle management aircraft, and an assortment of other fixed wing aircraft and helicopters. USS Nimitz is like a floating city, accommodating up to 3,200 ship personnel and another 2,800 aircrew for a total of 6,000 people. (Source: Nimitz Class Aircraft Carrier – Naval Technology)



Captain John Ring, new CO of the USS Nimitz, addresses the Change of Command audience.
(Courtesy of Bob Ring)



USS Nimitz returns to Everett, Washington from a June 2014 cruise - Mount Baker in the background.
(Courtesy of USS Nimitz)



USS Nimitz sailors are ready to serve pieces of the special cakes at the Change of Command reception.
(Courtesy of Pat Wood)