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Ford Sailors train to trap with Advanced Arresting Gear

Aviation Boatswain's Mate (Equipment) (ABE) 1st Class Andrew Holcomb, at left, shows ABE 3rd Class Kyle Boltik and ABE 2nd Class Michael Shores how to read a depth micrometer, which is used to take measurements of sheaves, during Adanced Arresting Gear operator and maintainainer training at Lakehurst, N.J., in August. (U.S. Navy Photo)

NAVAL AIR SYSTEMS COMMAND, PATUXENT RIVER, Md. – Nineteen Sailors from Pre-Commissioning Unit (PCU) Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78) recently graduated from Advanced Arresting Gear (AAG) operator and maintainer initial training conducted at the test sites in Lakehurst, New Jersey.

This is the second six-week course completed by Ford Sailors, with 20 having graduated in April, and additional crew members having completed a senior leadership training course in August 2015.

Many recent graduates expressed excitement about the opportunity to be among the first to work with the Navy's newest aircraft recovery equipment and the advantages it will bring to the fleet and their daily lives at sea.

"AAG cuts down manning below deck during flight operations; we went from 22 people to three people, and that's a huge change for us," said Aviation Boatswain's Mate (Equipment) (ABE) 1st Class Andrew Holcomb. "There's also less maintenance needed, so

we don't have to take apart as much greasy equipment and walk around the ship in dirty uniforms."

Another crewmember, ABE2 Carlos Rodriguez, said he thinks AAG will be safer for those working directly with it as well as all personnel. He said he will be responsible for upkeep of the system aboard the Ford and valued the in-depth training because "topside, it's pretty much the same; but below decks, it's a completely different animal."

While anticipation for the system's benefits grows, many Sailors with previous experience working on legacy arresting gear (MK-7) said they were initially intimidated to work with AAG. The new system transitions from linear hydraulic to rotary hydroelectric, plus a friction brake system. A couple weeks into the course, many reported those anxieties were relieved.

"The intent of the training is to provide students with the most shipboard-representative, hands-on, and job-related training possible in order to prepare them for system turnover on board CVN 78," said AAG Training Lead Dan Andreoli.

Andreoli explained the training, which combines classroom instruction with operation and maintenance labs, as well as extensive walk-throughs, at two active test sites, has been in development since late 2013. The CVN 78 PCU crew has been involved, providing valuable input, since early 2015.

"We have a very bright group of Sailors who will be operating and maintaining AAG, and I'm very proud to be a part of ensuring they have the proper foundation of knowledge and skills to safely and effectively operate and maintain the system," Andreoli stated.

Aircraft Launch and Recovery Maintenance Chief (ABEC) Christopher Boone said in addition to the younger Sailors being able to work directly with the system during their time at Lakehurst, building a relationship with Naval Air Systems Command (NAVAIR) engineers and AAG subject matter experts is incredibly important.

The crew had ample opportunity for interaction with a flurry of preparations and tests ongoing at both the Jet Car Track Site and the Runway Arrested Landing Site.

The dedicated training division will soon begin developing formal schoolhouse training for AAG, with efforts to integrate cost-saving Multipurpose Reconfigurable Training System (MRTS 3D) simulations.

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Sailors from Pre-Commissioning Unit Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78) use a test-site specific tool to lower the Cable Shock Absorber Thru-Deck Sheave Assembly into place while participating in hands-on maintenance labs as part of a six-week Advanced Arresting Gear training course at Lakehurst, N.J., in August. (U.S. Navy Photo)