

GQ in Port: Getting

By JO2 Stacy Young,
USS Nimitz (CVN 68)

An alarm blares over the 1MC aboard USS *Nimitz*, and the petty officer of the watch barks a call to action: “General quarters, general quarters; all hands man your battle stations!”

But wait, *Nimitz* is moored pierside for an overhaul. Why must the crew go to their battle stations? The answer is simple: to shake off some of the “rust” that has been accumulating since the overhaul began in 1998. When the ship shifts colors and heads back to sea, these Sailors have to be ready to meet all challenges.

“The crew needs to start getting back in the damage-control, haze-gray mindset,” said DC2 Alan Hildan, who runs the ship’s basic damage-control training. “We need to get the crew ready for operational status.”

General-quarters drills are held every Friday so *Nimitz* Sailors can reacquaint themselves with their roles in actual emergencies. The drills will help them know their assigned responsibilities and make sure they are qualified for their roles. These requirements are tracked officially through Personnel Qualifications Standards, or PQS, which supervisors sign off as the Sailors demonstrate proficiency in their tasks. The mock GQs tell the supervisors when a Sailor is ready to have his PQS signed off.

It’s important that all hands get qualified. As DC2 Hildan noted, quoting his chief, “Either you save a life, or you take a life. In the Marine Corps, they say every Marine is a rifleman. In the Navy, every Sailor is a firefighter.”

For many *Nimitz* Sailors, manning up the ship’s repair lockers for GQ is a major departure from their daily routine. “It’s especially different for the admin types,” said Ens. Robin Suntheimer, repair locker officer for One Bravo. “As paper pushers, we don’t get many chances to play firefighter and damage

controlmen, or DC-men. With people’s lives at stake, though, we must take these roles seriously.”

DC-men like DC2 Hildan are the experts. They are trained to be the best in the Navy at keeping ships from sinking. They are tasked to train other Sailors how to handle every emergency situation.

With *Nimitz* two and a half years into its overhaul, much of the crew has changed since the ship’s last deployment. Many younger hands have not had to work through an emergency scenario aboard a ship at sea. In most cases, their only

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encounter with firefighting came during boot camp, when they tackled an emergency scenario aboard a mock-up of a ship.

As noted by Ens. Suntheimer, the GQ drills that have started aboard *Nimitz* soon will reveal what qualifications are lacking. “The first GQ was only a paperwork drill,” she said. “From here on, the training will build on itself. We’ll hold the drills at a pace that will make sure everybody knows what to do. Eventually, we’ll have people respond-

a Crew Ready for Sea

ing to a scene and actually handling mock casualties. When we roll out to sea, all hands will be ready to go.”

Analysts in the Afloat Safety Programs Directorate agree there are many basic skills that repair-party teams must be able to execute by instinct. To get those skills back up to par after a long industrial period, you have to practice, and that's where the five principles of operational risk management (ORM) come in handy. Use ORM to reacquaint everyone with the operating procedures and precautions to follow when donning an SCBA or EEBD. Also use it to make sure that the electrical connections in your submersible pumps are in good working order, and that Sailors can maneuver charged fire hoses up and down ladders or through spaces. The goal is to get your whole team up to speed without losing anyone, and with ORM, your chances of success are much greater.

Navy photo by PH3 Jill Takasawa



A Nimitz Sailor responds to an in-port fire drill.