

From Operational to Industrial—**Safely**

By JO2(SW) Ahron Arendes,
USS *Nimitz* (CVN-68)

The nuclear-powered aircraft carrier USS *Nimitz* (CVN-68) completed an eight-month combat deployment, safely flying more than 6,500 missions in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The outstanding safety record of both the ship and its assigned air wing, Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 11, earned them the Admiral H. Flatley Memorial Award for excellence in aviation safety.

Once back from deployment, the *Nimitz* crew faced the challenge of transitioning from an operational environment to the industrial environment.

They started a six-month maintenance period known as a planned incremental availability or PIA, one that has been billed as the largest of its kind (pier-side) on the West Coast. The *Nimitz* PIA involved more than 300,000 man-days (2.4 million man-hours) of work, all of which was completed with only 10 recordable injuries, resulting in 23 lost workdays. There were no recorded Class C mishaps (those resulting in five or more lost workdays). “The major mishap-free record speaks for itself,” said Cdr. Chris Lapacik, the ship’s safety officer at the time.

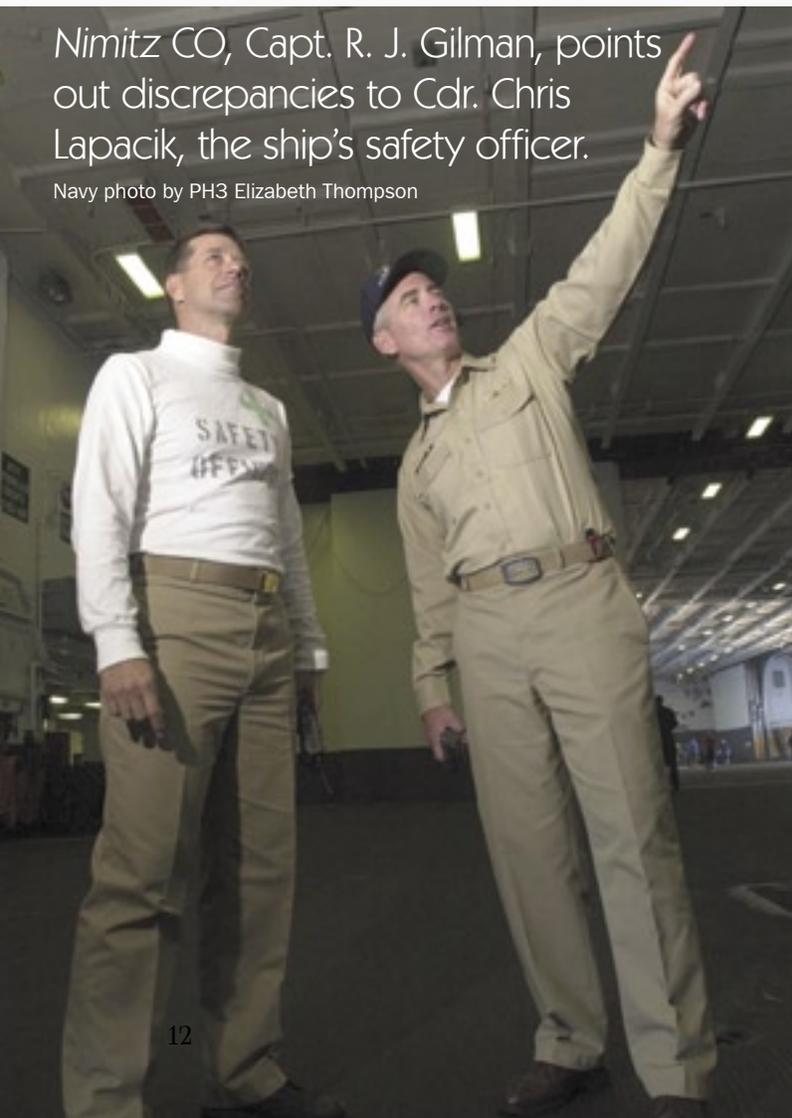
During the PIA, 10 ship’s-force teams worked with approximately 1,200 personnel from Puget Sound Naval Shipyard (PSNS), various “find-fix-train” teams from Southwest Regional Maintenance Center, and more than 30 local contractors.

“I couldn’t be happier with the performance of the *Nimitz* team,” said then-Commanding Officer, Capt. Robert J. Gilman. “It was quite rewarding to see our Sailors safely working side by side each day with their shipyard counterparts. Best of all, we were able to enjoy a good quality of life during the summer and keep everyone safe.”

The crew’s concerns during deployment normally ranged from safe handling of JP-5 to avoiding jet blasts and spinning rotors. During the PIA, concerns turned to the potential hazards of doing tagouts, gas-freeing spaces, welding, handling hazardous materials, and removing asbestos.

Lapacik said that a big part of the crew’s focus on safety during the maintenance period was a result of the level of importance the commanding officer put on it. “The captain rarely addressed the crew without stressing the importance of safety,” he said. “Because the crew wasn’t used to dealing with the hazards of an industrial environment, we began briefing all hands on safety precautions and risk avoidance daily,” he said.

The ship’s safety department helped equip *Nimitz* Sailors with the tools they needed to make the PIA



Nimitz CO, Capt. R. J. Gilman, points out discrepancies to Cdr. Chris Lapacik, the ship’s safety officer.

Navy photo by PH3 Elizabeth Thompson



A civilian contractor drills in catapult alignments.

Navy photo by AN Maebel Tinoko



A USS Nimitz Sailor paints impact pads for corrosion control on the flight deck.

Navy photo by AN Maebel Tinoko

a smooth transition. They used TV, the ship's intranet website, and enlisted safety-committee meetings to train the crew on operational risk management and the proper use of personal protective equipment.

Puget Sound Naval Shipyard also provided safety-training support. As noted by Petronilla Dickerson, the environmental, safety and health manager for PSNS, the shipyard provided *Nimitz* with safety and environmental briefings and video presentations that covered trip hazards and fall prevention, proper ventilation in confined spaces, waste and material segregation, equipment-tagout procedures, and proper use of respirators.

"I was very impressed with the level of our employee involvement when it came to identifying safety concerns," said Dickerson. "Our employees were willing to report issues and help correct deficiencies on the spot. Potential risks, such as fires, flooding, and personal injury, involved with a project this large were mitigated by all."

Respiratory health also was a major concern. "During PIA, we had 1,950 new respirator users and more than 3,000 total respirator wearers," acknowledged Lt. Jerry Graven, *Nimitz*' industrial hygiene officer at the time. "The safety petty officers did a lot to make sure their departments and divisions were trained and doing things safely. Going into a PIA, safety is the No. 1 concern."

Aside from the training and emphasis from the CO, daily safety walkthroughs were key elements in keeping everyone safe from harm and helping foster an atmosphere of teamwork. "The ever-present role of *Nimitz*' khaki leadership from each department was vital to our success," said Lapacik. "Our safety folks walked around the ship with the shipyard contractors, recording all discrepancies and compiling them onto a master list."

Graven applauded the safety walkthroughs as vital to the success of the PIA. "When we did them, we recorded the hits and got them corrected quickly," he said, adding, "it kept our Sailors, and their civilian counterparts working efficiently and effectively while on board."

Coordination among the different teams (e.g. such as the tile, safety, and paint teams) were a boost to eliminating discrepancies. Said Lapacik, "Awareness on this ship was higher than what I've ever seen before." ■

Nimitz is the flagship for Carrier Strike Group 11. For more info about this story, address e-mail to pao@nimitz.navy.mil.

For more references on shipyard safety, go to <http://safetycenter.navy.mil/afloat/surface/downloads/availabilityguide.doc> and <http://safetycenter.navy.mil/media/seashore/issues/summer05/pdf/wholemag.pdf>.