

STATEMENT OF
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BEFORE THE
READINESS AND MANAGEMENT SUPPORT SUBCOMMITTEE
OF THE
SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

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Senator Ensign, Senator Akaka, and distinguished members of this subcommittee, I am extremely pleased to have the opportunity to testify before you on the readiness of JOHN F. KENNEDY STRIKE GROUP (JFKSG) prior to and during its 2004 deployment (07 June-13 December 2004), and on the state of the group's readiness upon return to the Continental United States (CONUS).

JFKSG returned from a six and a half month deployment to the U.S. CENTRAL COMMMAND AREA OF OPERATIONS (CENTCOM AO) on 13 December 2004. The JFKSG consisted of Carrier Air Wing 17 (CVW 17), USS JOHN F. KENNEDY, COMDESRON 24, USS VICKSBURG, USS SEATTLE, USS SPRUANCE, USS ROOSEVELT and USS TOLEDO. The 69 aircraft of CVW 17 consisted of a mix of fixed and rotary wing aircraft, including 44 strike aircraft (34 F/A 18C's and 10 F14 B+), representing nearly 40 percent of the strike and 47 percent of the electronic warfare assets in the CENTCOM AO last summer and fall. Additionally, CVW 17 deployed with some of the most advanced capabilities in the fleet including HAWKEYE 2000 with Cooperative Engagement Capability (CEC), F/A 18C Hornets with Advanced Technology Forward Looking Infra-Red (ATFLIR) and Multifunction Information Display System (MIDS), and EA-6B Prowlers with Single Channel Ground and Air Radio System (SINCGARS) radios and USQ-113 communications jamming in the EA-6B Prowlers.

The Cruiser/Destroyer ships completed their scheduled maintenance availabilities prior to November 2003 and USS JOHN F. KENNEDY completed an extensive predeployment maintenance availability in November 2003. The carrier's work included

repairs to main steam piping, flight deck catapults, main boilers, critical C4I equipment, and ship's air conditioning. An important factor is that the Target Configuration Date (lockdown date for system baseline) for all Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (C4ISR) equipment upgrades in JFKSG was before the Intermediate Phase of predeployment training, allowing us to identify and correct any potential problems that arose with these systems prior to the advanced phase of training and deployment. It also allowed us to train with the equipment, with which we deployed. CVW 17 received the majority of its planes and associated equipment by February 2004. The Band 2/3 Pods that provided required EA-6B jamming capability were received as a turnover item in theater from the GEORGE WASHINGTON STRIKE GROUP in July 2004. The F/A-18C Advanced Technology Forward Looking Infrared (ATFLIR) capability was received just prior to deployment. This was problematic from a training perspective and is being worked hard by the OPNAV staff and the technical community. There are currently 14 Band 2/3 Pods in the Navy inventory, three more will be procured this year. These will be replaced by the Low Band Transmitter that will be installed in the EA-6B's and the follow on F/A-18G. Initial Operational Capability for the Low Band Transmitter is in 2007. Inventory objective for this capability is 195. ATFLIR pods are now being produced at the rate of about one a week and entering the fleet in a steady stream. 34 will enter service this fiscal year.

Anytime a Carrier Strike Group (CSG) deploys, we work to prepare our dependents for this lengthy separation period. Fleet and Family Service Center and representatives from the Family Advocacy Program conduct seminars for our service

members and their families to discuss issues associated with lengthy deployments (e.g. Money Management, Navy and Marine Corps Relief Society, American Red Cross, Chaplain Services, Suicide Prevention, Anger Management, Single Sailors, Operational Security, Hurricane Preparedness, and Wills and Powers of Attorney). JFKSG completed this predeployment preparation in April and May 2004.

From a training perspective, leading up to the 2004 deployment (originally scheduled for July of 2004) we knew from extensive Navy commitments to Operations Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Iraqi Freedom (OIF) that we could be required to deploy earlier. As such, we structured the predeployment training schedule to be ready to go as early as April 2004. Central to this commitment was the theme of bringing forward in the schedule as many key training evolutions as possible. Our goal was to complete the equivalent of all intermediate phase training requirements in the January 2004 CSG underway period and leverage off of every resource and service we could obtain. The JFKSG coupled all Carrier Unit Level Training (ULT) events (Tailored Ships Training Availability (TSTA) Phases I, II, and III and the Final Evaluated Problem (FEP)) into one at sea period for the first time. CVW 17 embarked and completed Pilot/Flight Deck Crew Carrier Qualification prior to these ULT evaluations. In the same underway period JFKSG conducted a self-designed, integrated, joint and combined exercise we called SURGE EXERCISE. We used 47 opposition force aircraft and two submarines, gained joint experience with U.S. Air Force tactical aircraft and in-flight refueling capability, and coalition exposure operating with a Canadian Task Group. This enabled the CSG to enter the actual intermediate level training period at a higher than average proficiency level in most warfare areas (e.g. Air Warfare, Strike Warfare, Anti Submarine Warfare).

Our success in preparing for deployment was built on early integration of the team as often as possible AT SEA, weapons delivery repetitions, and training to standardized tactics. Our focus on flexibility, adaptability, and disciplined adherence to Rules Of Engagement (ROE) proved critical in combat. Early exposure to coalition forces in the training cycle meant our force was comfortable in a coalition environment on arrival in theater. The CSG completed what we now call Fleet Response Plan (FRP) sustainment training in the 84 days between completion of Intermediate Level Training and Deployment, and conducted Coalition Joint Task Force Exercise (CJTTFEX), our deployment certification event, enroute to the CENTCOM AO. Effective sustainment training, especially during the period following the Intermediate Training Phase prior to deployment, was critical to success. While no in-theater mission ever replicates exactly what we experience during our predeployment training phases, this training taught all Warfare Commanders to think through potential missions and develop plans to execute operations. Through these efforts, JFKSG deployed to the CENTCOM AO fully manned, trained, and equipped to accomplish our mission.

During deployment, JFKSG aircraft flew a total of 1,985 OIF combat sorties, including 67 strike events in which there were 74 ordnance deliveries. JFK/CVW 17 conducted flight operations for 16 - 18 hours per day for 16 straight days during Operation AL FAJR (Liberation of Fallujah), flying up to 84 extended sorties per day (160 sortie equivalents) and missing only one combat sortie. At any given time during Operation AL FAJR, CVW 17 aircraft were simultaneously over Fallujah, patrolling the Syrian border area, and flying cover for coalition forces in Mosul. Insurgent activity was prevalent all over Iraq, and U.S. Navy Forces were called upon as part of the Joint Force

to terminate this activity. Navy Carrier Aviation was required in the CENTCOM AO to execute the Air Tasking Order (ATO) produced by the Coalition Force Air Component Commander (CFACC) at the Combined Air Operations Center (CAOC).

In addition to the air mission over IRAQ, JFKSG provided a visible presence in vicinity of the Central and Southern Arabian Gulf oil infrastructure to deter, and if necessary, destroy International Terrorist Organizations, enabling unhindered commerce throughout the Arabian Gulf and contributing to Theater Security Cooperation efforts. Additionally, JFKSG assumed the North Arabian Gulf Maritime Security Operations mission following the departure of the Expeditionary Strike Group Three (ESG-3) staff in early November. This mission protects the Iraqi Oil Infrastructure around Al Basra Oil Terminal (ABOT) and Khor Al Amaya Oil Terminals (KAAOT) in the Gulf, and oil distribution systems from Al Basra, down the Al Faw Peninsula, south to the Gulf.

I would now like to discuss logistics and maintenance while deployed to the CENTCOM AO.

There were no mission-impacting equipment casualties during JFKSG's deployment. Although the high Operational Tempo in support of OIF and OEF placed normal wear and tear on our equipment, we achieved 100 percent operational availability utilizing our own maintenance capabilities and superb Sailors.

The Strike Group Intermediate Maintenance Activity concept provided organic maintenance and technical support for 13 aircraft squadrons, 11 ships, and Naval Support Activity Bahrain. JFKSG Sailors conducted depot level voyage repairs that in the past would have been contracted out to the private sector. USS JOHN F. KENNEDY alone saved an estimated 10 million dollars in repair costs by stressing self-sufficiency. JFK

Sailors expended 41 thousand man-hours making these repairs. The payoff was extraordinary flexibility in meeting mission requirements.

Improvements made to JFK's avionics maintenance facility (Consolidated Automated Support System – CASS) prior to deployment increased repair success rate to 84.8%. This represents a 9.2% increase from JFK's 2002 deployment average. JFK was the first aircraft carrier to successfully deploy with these improved processes, paving the way for future CSG deployments.

In addition to using our organic experts, Distance Support (daily e-mail and chat access to the CONUS technical community) assisted our Sailors in technical investigation of and repairing malfunctioning critical systems. Years ago we would have immediately flown these technical experts from CONUS into the forward theater to assist in repairs. Technology has enabled us to be better stewards of the funds that taxpayers provide, by applying maximum effort to fix material casualties without the added cost of moving a technician into a forward theater. While we must continue to balance length of time for repairs, criticality of the system, mission impact, and overall cost, JFKSG's measure of success was zero mission impacting material casualties during deployment.

The results from our aggressive self-sufficiency and the superb technical support from CONUS experts, mostly via Information Technology (IT) reach-back, enabled us to return from deployment in outstanding material condition. There were no immediate maintenance requirements upon our arrival in CONUS following our deployment that would have precluded our ability to deploy again, to go forward to any Regional Combatant Commander's Area of Operations to conduct the full spectrum of Naval Operations, under the Fleet Response Plan.

Logistic support in theater was very good. While heavy lift capability can be adequately provided by Logistics Task Force (CTF 53) ships, using ships alone lengthens resupply time and delays getting critical equipment to the fight. To expedite heavy repair part delivery, CSG's deployed to the Gulf use in-theater Sea Stallion Helicopters (MH-53) to move oversized material (e.g. aircraft engines). This enables Non Mission Capable (NMC) aircraft to be returned to Fully Mission Capable (FMC) status as soon as practical. MH-53's were also used to deliver similar materials to our helicopter detachments ashore and for repair of CVW 17 aircraft diverted ashore.

However, MH-53's in the Fifth Fleet Area of Operations are deployed as Mine Warfare assets and they must balance supporting CTF 53 logistic missions with maintaining training and readiness for their Mine Warfare mission. Additionally, the aging MH-53 airframe resulted in some periods of non-availability due to maintenance and repairs, which delayed delivery of critical parts. Procurement of MH-60S helicopters and the Navy's Helicopter Master Plan will address this in the future. In the near term MH 53's and CLF ships will continue to have to provide this capability.

I would now like to talk about Intra-Strike Group Logistics and Helicopter Flight Hours. Our varied missions in CENTCOM AO require our ships to be dispersed over a large area – The entire Arabian Gulf, the Horn of Africa, and the Red Sea. Only a small number are in close proximity to the aircraft carrier. A surface combatant may only rendezvous with a CLF ship every 10 days, which significantly lengthens the supply lines for critical support. For those surface combatants in close proximity to the aircraft carrier, utilization of organic helicopters for logistics alleviates this support problem.

There are restraints on our ability to use helicopters for logistics missions. First, the helicopter squadron embarked on the aircraft carrier and the helicopter detachments embarked on our surface combatants are essential warfighting assets and must use the allocated flight hours primarily for warfighting missions. Secondly, the Fatigue Life Maintenance Program limits quarterly airframe flight hours. The only sea-based helicopter squadrons dedicated for logistics missions are those onboard our CLF ships. As a result, intra-Strike Group movement of critical parts and supplies to support our ships and squadrons is problematic. Again, the Navy's Helicopter Master Plan will address this issue in the future.

The only fixed wing organic logistics asset is our Carrier Onboard Delivery (COD) detachment. However, the C-2 Greyhound is an older airframe and maintaining both the planes in our detachment in a FMC status for extended periods is difficult due to the high OPTEMPO and the extreme summer temperatures. While we often used them for logistics delivery, including some heavy lift, we always had contingency plans to move high priority parts/personnel via non-organic assets (MH-53's) in the event of primary aircraft malfunction.

I would now like to discuss a couple aircraft equipping issues while we were in the Arabian Gulf. The limited number of ATFLIR pods presents a significant challenge in the CENTCOM AO. While there is an expectation that every strike aircraft flying over IRAQ will have a third generation FLIR pod, CVW 17 was only able to provide one pod per section of strike aircraft. As ATFLIR capability is just now being fielded for operational use, we were required to turn our four pods over to USS HARRY S. TRUMAN (HST) upon our departure from the Arabian Gulf. While our ATFLIR pods

performed exceptionally well, maintaining them required 100% technical representative (TECH REP onboard entire deployment) support to sustain readiness levels. This TECH REP was also transferred to HST on our departure. ATFLIR capability is essential in limiting collateral damage while executing Urban Close Air Support (CAS) missions, especially at night.

Additionally, the three Electronic Attack Band 2/3 Pods for the EA-6B Prowler were turned over to us on our arrival in theater. This capability is used in critical STOPLIGHT (a specific jamming technique in support of ground forces) missions. Our EA-6B aircrew and maintainers had no experience with these pods prior to actual combat operations.

Finally, regarding Airwing flight hours, we were augmented to meet all operational tasking without any major maintenance requirements above those directly associated with routine flight hour based maintenance. Operational flight hours were augmented to specifically meet air coverage requirements.

Turning now to personnel, morale was high and remained high during JFKSG's deployment. The JFKSG enjoyed record setting advancements this deployment due to an aggressive mentorship and training program. Additionally, JFKSG Sailors achieved superb numbers for Warfare Qualifications; a testament to the professionalism of today's Sailors. Due to the highly successful deployment, the high September 2004 advancement rate, strong warfare qualification numbers, Zone A retention (0-6 years of service), while slightly below average in FY04, improved significantly in FY05 and is currently above

Navy average. Our Sailors were fully trained, properly equipped, and fully believed in the mission they were executing, and it showed.

As I previously mentioned, due to its routine deployment cycle, the Navy has established an outstanding support network for its Sailors and families, both ashore and at sea. While deployed the Navy Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Organization provided services to both the Sailors at sea and the family members at home (e.g. reduced Entertainment Ticketing Prices, reduced Tour Prices, USO Services). Each Sailor also has his own internet email account and access to telephones through the Sailor Phone Program. These paths allow communications between sailors and their families at unprecedented levels. On a not to interfere basis, Video Teleconferencing was made available to Sailors for special events, like the birth of a child. Additionally, Navy and Marine Corps Relief Society provided a financial and psychological safety net for the Sailors and families at home. In the weeks prior to our return from deployment, Fleet and Family Support Center sent four members to JFKSG and conducted Return and Reunion Training on board each ship (e.g. New Parents, Reunion and Intimacy, Automotive Purchase, Anger Management, Suicide Prevention, Domestic Violence Prevention). Similar training was conducted for the family members back home. Additionally, a Virginia State Trooper augmented JFKSG individual unit safety standdowns prior to return to CONUS.

Following deployment, JFKSG completed a comprehensive training package to ensure readiness was maintained. This training included a week long Multi-Battle Group Inport Exercise (MBGIE) that included ships and staffs in Norfolk, VA, Mayport, FL, and the UK, plus a week of underway sustainment training during which JFK/CVW 17

maintained certification for Blue Water Operations and the ships completed required ULT. This additional underway time proved critical in maintaining JFK's flight deck readiness at deployment levels of proficiency.

Following our post deployment sustainment period, our ships will enter routine, scheduled maintenance availabilities. The ships do not require these maintenance periods to redeploy on short notice; they are simply part of the Navy's continuous maintenance approach, ensuring our ships remain surge ready under FRP.

Mr. Chairman, on behalf of the United States Navy and the JOHN F. KENNEDY Strike Group, I appreciate your continued support and I thank you for this opportunity to testify. I stand ready to answer any questions you may have.