

Operating Forward From the Sea

Legalmen Support Carrier Strike Group Operations

By the John C. Stennis Carrier Strike Group Legal Department

The John C. Stennis Carrier Strike Group Three (CSG 3) completed a seven-month deployment in the U.S. 5th and 7th Fleet areas of operations in support of *Operation Enduring Freedom* and *Operation New Dawn*. With the strike group is a legal team comprised of seven legalmen, three judge advocates and a Naval Criminal Investigative Service agent. Each of these men and women is providing expert and essential legal advice to clients ranging from the admiral to the newly reported seaman recruit.

The legal team provides mission-essential support to the strike group to ensure they operate in accordance with international law and maintain good order and discipline

aboard their ships and squadrons. The team also contributes to personnel readiness by providing legal services to over 6,700 Sailors throughout 18 individual commands.

To allow personnel to experience operations aboard different ship platforms, the CSG 3 Commander, Rear Adm. Craig Faller, implemented a ‘cross-deck’ program to exchange personnel between strike group units. An added benefit of this program is that it allows the legal staff to assist Sailors aboard other ships in the strike group and provide legal assistance to crew members who do not have a permanent legal staff on board.

“Legalmen can either provide direct legal support and recommended solutions or seek ‘reach-back’ assistance from other legal personnel at shore commands,” said Legalman 1st Class Erin Crusan.



Members of the Navy JAG Corps John C. Stennis Carrier Strike Group (JCSSG) and USS John C. Stennis (CVN 74) Legal Departments pose for a group photo on the flight deck. Pictured: Lt. Cmdr. David Lee, Legalman 1st Class (SW) Lakisha Baldwin, Chief Legalman (SW/AW) Donald Osborne, Cmdr. Shane Cooper, Legalman 2nd Class Giannina Gutierrez, Lt. Matthew Schultz, Legalman 1st Class (SW/AW) Erin Crusan, Legalman 3rd Class (SW/AW) Melissa Ball, Legalman 3rd Class Kaedi Hunter and Legalman 3rd Class (AW) Gregorio Villalba. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Chablis Torrence)

During the work-up cycle and throughout the deployment, there has been significant reach-back support from shore-based legal personnel to keep the strike group's legal readiness intact. Naval Legal Service Offices in San Diego, Bahrain and Sigonella, as well as Region Legal Service Office Southwest, Transient Personnel Unit San Diego, and Naval Hospital San Diego, have been invaluable resources for the CSG 3 legal team.

Being stationed as a legalman on an aircraft carrier or as part of a strike group staff presents myriad career enhancing opportunities. Many use this time to earn enlisted surface warfare specialist and enlisted air warfare specialist qualifications. Additionally, legalmen can make a difference and have a significant impact, not only by providing Sailors with legal support on a larger scale but by seeking out collateral duties such as a Damage Control Training Team member, Command Career Counselor, Command Fitness Leader, Volunteer Income Tax Advisor and Command Sponsor Coordinator.

There are also opportunities to serve as mentors for junior Sailors seeking guidance and advice.

“One of the perks of an operational deployment is getting an opportunity to experience new cultures by making port calls around the world,” said Crusan. “We have had the opportunity to visit Malaysia, Bahrain and Jebel Ali, with other exciting ports of call still to come.”

In addition to the chance for some rest and relaxation, though, liberty in foreign ports is approached as a mission with a purpose. “As ambassadors of the U.S., our legalmen help to ensure Sailors are educated on, and adhere to, the governing policies in the given area

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The Arleigh Burke-class destroyers USS Kidd (DDG 100), USS Dewey (DDG 105), and USS Pinckney (DDG 91) are underway in the Pacific Ocean with the John C. Stennis Carrier Strike Group. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Benjamin Crossley)

of operation,” said Cmdr. Shane Cooper, staff judge advocate, CSG 3.

Before each port visit, legalmen research reference material needed to draft senior officer present afloat guidance, liberty policies and port briefs.

Legalmen also have the responsibility of assisting the chain of command to identify potential liberty risk personnel

and ensuring the member's chain of command is properly informed of their status.

The current deployment of the CSG 3 included some historic milestones. On Dec. 18, 2011, an E-2C Hawkeye from Carrier Airborne Early Warning Squadron One One Two, operating from USS John C. Stennis, flew the final Navy aviation mission into Iraqi airspace, effectively ending naval aircraft support to *Operation New Dawn*.

“This day was a particularly unique book-end experience to close out support to military operations

in Iraq (from the sea) as four of the CSG 3 legal team members have previously served ‘boots on ground’ individual augmentee deployments to Iraq,” said Cooper.

The mission of the Navy legalmen ranges from direct support to personnel to operational support to deployed units and is an essential element of the overall effectiveness of the Fleet. As U.S. Carrier Strike Groups continue to deploy around the world to protect our freedom and support our coalition partners, Navy legalmen will continue to play an essential role in that process.

CSG 3 is composed of USS John C. Stennis (CVN 74), Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 9 (consisting of eight aviation squadrons), Destroyer Squadron 21 (consisting of four destroyers), and Ticonderoga-class cruisers USS Antietam (CG 54) and USS Mobile Bay (CG 53). 🌟

At the time the story was written, the John C. Stennis Strike Group and USS John C. Stennis (CVN 74) legal department included: Lt. Cmdr. David Lee, Legalman 1st Class Lakisha Baldwin, Legalman Chief Donald Osborne, Cmdr. Shane Cooper, Legalman 2nd Class Giannina Gutierrez, Lt. Matthew Schultz, Legalman 1st Class Erin Crusan, Legalman 3rd Class Melissa Ball, Legalman 3rd Class Kaedi Hunter and Legalman 3rd Class Gregorio Villalba.