

June 21st, 2017

Twenty three subscribers from five states, ship friends and family participated in the invitation from the Theodore Roosevelt Association (TRA) for the USS TR Family and Friends Cruise in San Diego Monday . . .an invitation that I had further extended to Commstock Report subscribers. The nuclear aircraft carrier is the USS Theodore Roosevelt CVN 71, one of 11 nuclear carriers in the US fleet. It was bigger than I remember it. When at one end of the ship you cannot see the other end, it is large.

I was not the only one who wanted to experience what it was like on a nuclear aircraft carrier. 3000 crew and 2200 family and friends of the ship spent a day at sea off the coast of California. I am told that 45 members of the Roosevelt family and about 200 other TRA members were included in the group. The event started the evening before when TRA members had the opportunity to enjoy a banquet with crew members of the USS Roosevelt. We shared a table with Operations Specialist Morgan Johnson from Charlotte NC. She was a radar operator on the Roosevelt. She was excited about her up-coming new assignment at the Naval Air Station in Naples, Italy.

I brought up the recent USS Fitzgerald accident losing 7 crew members and asked her how the Fitzgerald radar technician missed the containership closing on them. She had no explanation other than that someone(s) did not do their jobs. She joined the Navy out of high school, and had traveled the world on her last deployment. Gunnery Master Becker (also female) hailed from Cleveland, OH. She loved to shoot 50 caliber and M42 machine guns and planned on going to culinary school when her enlistment was up. We were also joined by Jr ROTC Cadet Joey Collon from San Diego. He was hoping for a Naval ROTC scholarship after high school. I scanned the personal information of the 7 sailors who died on the Fitzgerald and one of them had come from San Diego and had participated in the Jr ROTC program same as Joey.

This was my second USS TR Family and Friends Cruise having participated in 2009 when the ship was stationed at Norfolk, Virginia. We loaded the

buses at 4:30 a.m. and made it through base security which included disembarking to have the buses checked by guard dogs. We were then dropped off at the ship where we boarded, joining a few thousand people for a great breakfast on the hanger deck. The carrier disembarks the air wing off shore when in home port so the hanger deck was fully open for the event. They served food on this deck all day long. The crew has the opportunity to show their families what they do on board ship. The visitors broke up into small groups and were given tours of everything below decks. I admit to getting lost a couple times attempting to get from the hanger deck to the flight deck.

Our tour guide was also a woman and her job was to fuel the planes. She was from Texas. She said that the enlisted crew was almost evenly split in number between women and men with the officers being more men than women. The highest ranking officer on board, however, was a 3-star Admiral who was reportedly the highest ranking woman in the Navy. There was also a one-star Admiral on board who went down the line greeting crew members and their families.

My sons made it up to the bridge where the Captain was in his chair and the Executive Officer addressed their tour group. He was asked about the new class of carrier becoming operational. . .the first being the Gerald R. Ford CVN-78. He said one of the main differences between the Ford and the Roosevelt was that the Roosevelt used a steam driven catapult system and the Ford's catapult system was electromagnetic. The Roosevelt has four catapults. He said the difference in catapults is like the click-click-click of an old roller-coaster compared to the zoom-zoom-glide of a new one. There are 80,000 other differences too between them as the Roosevelt was designed in the early 1980s and has had at least two major overhauls since. The ship looked to be in top working order. We were given a live fire exercise from the machine guns ringing the ship. They put flares and a large orange flotation target in the water and when the ship came into range all of the guns on board let loose. A 50 caliber machine gun is loud. The water spouts danced.

It was what happened next that surprised me the most. You know how they say things "turn like an aircraft carrier" with a wide berth? They turned the

Roosevelt on a quarter spinning around with the deck tilting and went right back at the targets with guns blasting almost like an oversize speedboat. The Executive Officer said that they could turn even sharper than that (on a dime) but that was the most they decided was safe with so many guests on board. They do have nets to catch you if falling overboard. I literally had to brace myself during the turn on my son-in-law.

The big disappointment was that the air-show that we were really looking forward to had to be cancelled for safety reasons because of low ceiling visibility. Two hours later the haze had burned off and there was a sunny sky. Instead we got to watch dolphins chase along-side the ship. That was not quite the same. I believe that the Commstock group would do this again in a heartbeat. I think that I will have to join the Gerald R. Ford Foundation so not to miss the opportunity for a USS Ford Family and Friends Cruise if offered. Actually I told my 16 year old son that we would come and visit him on the family Cruise if he joined the Navy. The USS JFK CVN 79 is supposed to deploy in 2020. The experience did spark his consideration.

I was very glad to see that many Commstock Report subscribers participate. On all of our behalf. . .Thank You to all the men and women in the US Navy for your service!!!