



TOM POBEREZNÝ
COMMENTARY / POSITION REPORT

Two Lifetime Experiences

A carrier adventure and Oshkosh

WHAT EXPERIENCES HAVE IMPACTED your life? I'd like to share two "experiences of a lifetime" that have been important to me. The first is something that was on my "bucket list"—to land and take off from an aircraft carrier. The second is EAA AirVenture Oshkosh, which for me has become an annual "lifetime experience."

USS RONALD REAGAN

Recently I hosted 15 EAA supporters on board the U.S. Navy aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan. I experienced my first carrier landing and catapult launch, both of which were unique and exciting. As a result of living onboard the Reagan for 30 hours, I was able to observe the intense energy and commitment of the young men and women who represent our country around the world.

We departed in a COD (carrier onboard delivery) from Naval Air Station North Island in San Diego. The flight to the USS Ronald Reagan was less than an hour. I found out quickly that sitting backward with no outside windows makes you wonder where you are. It built anticipation for what was to follow. When we landed, the immediate deceleration quickly told me we had arrived!

As the aircraft door lowered, you could see a flight deck alive with activity, surrounded by the Pacific Ocean.

On board a carrier, you must be prepared for extensive walking, while climbing hundreds of stairs. More than 5,000 people live and work on the Reagan, making the logistics mind-boggling. Imagine this: The flight deck and below-deck hangar are approximately 6-1/2 acres. That relatively small space accommodates more than 70 airplanes plus launch and recovery operations. In addition, aircraft maintenance is performed in that area. The efficiency, planning, and execution are beyond comprehension.

I was able to stand on the deck less than 50 feet from an F/A-18 taking off. The thrust and noise from a full afterburner departure is indescribable! Night operations were some of the most exciting parts of our experience. Out of the black of night, fighters approach for landing. Upon touchdown they go to full

afterburner, should they miss the "wire." A few did, executing a go-around that was a visual experience of power. The deck crews were an example of teamwork at its best—something we all should strive for. (It should be noted that the USS Ronald Reagan was one of the first U.S. warships to arrive in Japan after the recent earthquake disaster—a prime example of the humanitarian role of our military.)

Each of us noted the young age of the men and women on the flight deck, performing important and risky tasks in a professional manner. Their enthusiasm, focus, and pride were evident.

My "life experience" on the USS Ronald Reagan has deepened my pride and respect for the men and women who serve in the military. I salute each and every naval and Marine pilot who is "carrier qualified." Your skills are outstanding!

IT'S THAT TIME OF YEAR

EAA AirVenture Oshkosh 2011 is approaching. Excitement is building as we finalize our plans. I've been chairman since 1975. During those 35-plus years, my anticipation has never diminished.

My goal each year is to make Oshkosh the best ever. I can say that EAA AirVenture 2011 is shaping up to be just that. Our major theme is recognizing the Centennial of Naval Aviation. In addition, we will be honoring aviation legends such as Burt Rutan and Bob Hoover. The evening programs, forums, workshops, and variety of activities will make Oshkosh your aviation home during the last week of July.

EAA members can be proud that they annually create and present the world's premier aviation event. For those who have been to Oshkosh, you know what I mean, and you return year after year. For those who have never been to AirVenture, make your dream a reality.

Oshkosh is a shot in the arm for aviation enthusiasts, as well as the industry each year. It's the home of innovation and inspiration, and it has become the greatest reunion of aviation enthusiasts in the world. See you in July. **EAA**

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