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### **Gunner's Mates Lead Reagan's Small Arms Qualification**

By Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Cameron C. Edy

Sailors aboard the Navy's only forward-deployed aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan (CVN 76) completed small arms qualifications, June 17.

While primarily an air-power platform, Reagan utilizes a variety of weapons systems to project power at sea, while protecting its crew from any potential external threat. One of these weapons systems is its security forces, whether they are personnel posted on pier-side watches preventing intrusion, boat-officers strafing the Reagan as the carrier maneuvers contested waters, or anti-terrorism tactical watch officers (ATTWO), ensuring ship safety from potential external threats when transiting straits or performing other complex evolutions. The common thread in these critical roles is up-to-date qualifications in small arms.

The gunner's mates (GM) are subject matter experts in weaponry and responsible for all small arms aboard the ship. They conduct training on the weapons, ensure personnel are practically and medically qualified to carry them, and are responsible for issuing and maintaining these weapons and their ammunition. Gunner's Mate 1st Class Anthony Jaramillo explains the importance of qualification in small arms as a final step in a comprehensive evaluation.

"This evolution was incredibly important for the ship as a whole," said Jaramillo. "We qualified everybody from security watch standers to the ATTWO, and a lot of factors go into qualifying a Sailor. On top of knowing about the weapon, how to load it, and fire it safely, we also have to make sure they are mature enough to handle the weapon. They have to know the procedures when handling a weapon, as well as all the instructions that come with dealing with the weapon. They also have to be mentally fit enough to

be trusted with the responsibility that comes with a weapon. Our job is to make sure that all takes place before issuing any ordinance.”

Sailors are qualified by showing competent handling of the weapon; equipping the belt, drawing the weapon with cautious confidence and firing stably on command. Step by step commands are issued by the range safety officer (RSO) and enforced by line coaches stationed next to each shooter. Line coaches guide the shooter, ensuring their safety and advise shooters throughout their qualification on trigger control and shooter tactics.

All personnel, from the line coaches to those qualifying, receive training from Reagan’s GMs.

“The subject matter experts onboard Reagan are the Gunner’s Mates,” said Jaramillo. “Every day we’re training with weapons, taking them apart and putting them back together, we know the ins and outs of our equipment. Days before the gun shoot we bring participants in and go through dry-fire training, familiarizing them with the weapon, showing them how to do the stances and how to properly hold the weapon so on the day of the gun shoot, when they’re standing on-the-line, they already know what they’re doing.”

Being a forward-deployed carrier brings greater challenges to all personnel onboard, but proper training ensures mission operations are always met and exceeded. Though their forte is small arms, Reagan’s GMs contribute in other ways, using their diverse skillset to boost mission readiness and lethality across a variety of weapons platforms and systems.

“We’re all well-rounded Sailors,” said Jaramillo. “We train each other so that if someone was to become unavailable, we still have personnel that can complete the mission. Being forward deployed often means we can have two or three evolutions going on at once. Out here we might have a gun shoot that would roll into sprinkler operations, which would roll into banding torpedoes. The Gunner’s Mates onboard, and the ship as a whole, are always thinking ahead, ready for any challenge.”

Ronald Reagan, the flagship of Carrier Strike Group 5, provides a combat-ready force that protects and defends the collective maritime interests of its allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific region.

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