



May 2017

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### **Rough Rider Distinguished Visitor**

Last month I had the privilege of participating in the Distinguished Visitor Program run by the United States Navy. The essence of the program is to invite civilians to experience life aboard a Navy vessel and thereby offer that visitor a glimpse of the complexity and danger inherent in life aboard such a craft, as well as exposure to the intellect, leadership, and pride of the officers and crew that run these ships in the defense of our great nation.

We were flown from the San Diego Naval Base approximately 125 miles out to sea in a cargo plane nicknamed a "COD." A flight in the COD required me to wear safety gear including a life vest, helmet, goggles, and two sets of ear protection. It had no passenger windows, no bathrooms, no flight attendants, no noise insulation and, rather ominously, you sat facing the rear of the plane.



They flew us to the active nuclear powered aircraft carrier, USS Theodore Roosevelt, whose call sign is "Rough Rider." On arrival we experienced an "arrested landing" where a tail hook on the COD snagged a 2" cable on the deck of the carrier to immediately "arrest" our forward motion, which pressed me deep into the back of that rear facing seat and thus kept the aircraft on the deck of the ship.

Exiting the COD, I was immediately exposed to the organized chaos that was the flight deck of the carrier. Crew were moving everywhere wearing a rainbow of colors and distinguishing markings. The noise of the machinery and constant movement of both the personnel and aircraft was difficult to absorb. As I learned during my stay, each person on the flight deck had a specific job function, and the various colors to their clothing identified them with the function that they were entrusted to perform. I was mere yards away from flight operations, including the launching and recovery of fighter planes and helicopters whose sheer power, noise, and thrust vibrated through my entire body.



The USS Theodore Roosevelt is a floating city. It reaches 20 stories above the water, is longer than three football fields, has more than 80 aircraft and close to 5,000 people aboard, and serves more than 18,000 meals a day. The functions of the officers and crew of the ship included serving as attorneys, dentists, doctors, chefs, clergy, computer technicians, electricians, firemen, mechanics, media relations, nuclear engineers, pilots, police, and photographers, to name a few. According to the officers, it is this sheer size, power, and broad base of talent that allows the US Navy to take its combat and defense capability anywhere in the world.



Despite the amazing machinery on display, it was the officers and the crew that provided me with the most lasting impression of my 24-hour visit. The sense of duty, commitment, and pride was evident in each and every officer and crewperson I met. The commanding officers of the ship were impressive, not only in their leadership abilities but their obvious intellect, poise, ease in public speaking, and willingness to sacrifice for our nation. However, it was the enlisted crew who

surprised me the most. The average age of the crew on the carrier was 22 years old! I spoke with a 19 year old helmsman while he was steering this \$4.5 billion dollar ship. When he returns to his community I don't expect he will meet another person of similar age with an experience that can trump the opportunity he had. During my stay I had a common question for each crewmember that I met: "What brought you here?" The nearly unanimous response that filled my heart with pride was, "The desire to serve my country." A career in the Navy also offers other benefits, such as a potential college education through the GI bill, a path to citizenship, or the opportunity to learn one of many trade skills while serving one's country.

My glimpse into life on a nuclear powered aircraft carrier concluded with the same treatment that all naval aviators experience: a catapult launch off the ship, where a hydraulic ram pushed the aircraft across the deck and up to flight speed in seconds. Despite the physical force that launched me from the ship, it is the sense of purpose, pride, maturity, and commitment of the men and women on the ship, each of whom have volunteered to dedicate this portion of their lives to our nation's defense, which I will forever remember. I thank them all for their service and thank the US Navy and all those who offered me the opportunity to become a "Distinguished Visitor."

*Attorney Stephen F. Sutton is an attorney in the Estate Planning and Probate department at KKC. Attorney William E. Breslau had a similar experience aboard the USS Nimitz last year. If you would like to contact either Attorney Sutton or Attorney Breslau to discuss their naval embark on the carriers, you may reach them at 860-646-1974 or by email at: [ssutton@kkc-law.com](mailto:ssutton@kkc-law.com) or [wbreslau@kkc-law.com](mailto:wbreslau@kkc-law.com).*

