

All Hands on Deck

First All-Women Catapult Team

by Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Alex Corona, USS Theodore Roosevelt (CVN-71) Public Affairs



I could to help them make it happen,” said LT Grider.

According to LT Grider, Sailors like ABE2 Rivera played a much bigger role in this event than they give themselves credit for. “It was up to the Sailors at that point to go out and get their qualifications so that we could make this thing happen,” said ABE2 Rivera. “They went out there, did exactly what they needed to do and got the qualifications they were supposed to get.”

ABE2 Rivera said leaders like ABE2 Esperanza Romero, who helped her Sailors along the way, made

this possible. “I wanted to help get the other female Sailors qualified to make this happen,” said ABE2 Romero. “I would help in training them, sit in on their boards and just make sure no one got left out.” ABE2 Romero said that although the flight deck has historically been dominated by men, women should take pride in becoming qualified Sailors and mastering their jobs on the flight deck. While administrative work has primarily been the job of women in aviation ratings in the past, times are changing. “Yeah, we get dirty,” said ABE2 Romero. “Yeah, we work long hours, but you have got to believe you can do it.”

She knew events like this had occurred on other aircraft carriers, and she also knew the positive impact it could have on her shipmates. “We know this isn’t the first time that an all-woman flight deck team has come together to make flight operations happen,” said ABE2 Rivera. “This is

LT Elizabeth Grider, Catapult Officer onboard USS Theodore Roosevelt (CVN-71) (U.S. Navy photo)

February 28th, 2018. On deployment in the Arabian Gulf. The day started off overcast and rainy on the flight deck of the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt (CVN-71). The sky cleared in the late morning and rays of sunshine beamed through the clouds. Reflections of Sailors scurrying across the flight deck appeared on puddles left from the morning’s rain. As a Sailor hurried to her safety observer position on the catapult, her boot splashed the watery reflection. Teams of Sailors prepared to man up their stations for Flight Quarters, both outside and inside the skin of the ship.

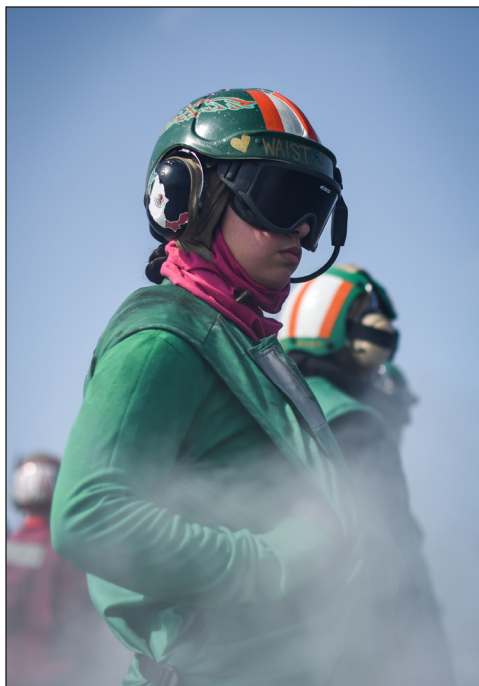
Something was different about waist catapult operations today. No one was “manning” up these stations. Today, an all-female team of Sailors would control movement of aircraft and operation of the waist catapults.

Steam bellowed from the catapults as ABE2 Mariani Rivera observed safety on the flight deck from her post.

Her tinted goggles, pink face cover, gold hearts, and writing on her cranial read “Waist Safety” and made her stand out. Flight operations were about to begin.

It takes more than 50 Sailors to launch aircraft on the waist, including Pilots, Directors, Catapult Teams, and the Shooter. That day, according to LT Elizabeth Grider, a Shooter aboard TR, more than 35 of those Sailors were women. “The flight deck is a big place and takes a lot of bodies to make everything run smoothly,” said LT Grider.

The process to make this all come together took about four months to plan. Shortly after reporting aboard in September 2017, LT Grider was approached by a group of female Sailors assigned to the catapults of Air Department’s V2 division. “They were all so excited to have a female Shooter and when they brought the idea to my attention, I knew I would do anything



ABE2 Mariani Rivera (U.S. Navy photo)

something to motivate female Sailors out there and for women who participated that day to remember.”

Events like an all-female flight deck crew inspired younger Sailors like ABEAA Kyra Jones-Jackson, who sees this as an opportunity to help change

the perception of women on the flight deck. “It’s exciting to see a majority of females be a part of running the show on the flight deck. It was motivation for me to become a Chief one day,” said ABEAA Jones-Jackson. “As women, we can do everything that the men do. We can succeed not only at the administration level, but below decks and topside.”

ABEAA Jones-Jackson credited her involvement in this event to her mentor, ABE2 Rivera, who had her own inspiration for wanting to make this happen. “It’s an exciting feeling when I see a bun sticking out of the back of a pilot’s helmet,” she said, adding; “I always challenge the Sailors that work for me to go out there and do twice as much as the men. Every individual, male or female, works hard out there on the flight deck, but to get recognized as a woman who is working hard, you really have to push yourself.”

Petty Officers Rivera, Romero and Jones-Jackson all played critical roles in the event, but they all credit LT Grider as the catalyst who made it happen. “I just want to take a moment to thank LT

Grider,” said ABE2 Rivera. “Without her, none of this would have happened. I would also like to thank all of the women who participated. This will be a memory that we all share forever.” As for LT Grider, she said she was amazed by the amount of support they received from the chains of commands involved, both male and female.

The first launch went off without a hitch and the women continued as they normally would, working together as a team. Launch after launch happened throughout the day, totaling over 35 aircraft. The women worked tirelessly, both above and below decks.

As sunset approached, everyone from the various Air Departments and Air Wing Squadrons gathered on the flight deck for foreign object debris (FOD) walkdown. When completed, the women all gathered in front of the hull number on the island for a group photo. Some were smiling, some not, others posed with props, others posed with friends, many were tired and dirty. One thing they all had in common was another successful day of flight operations.



Waist Catapult Crew, USS Theodore Roosevelt (CVN-71), 28 February 2018 (U.S. Navy photo)