

Navy Rethinking 'Full-Mission Capability' Definition with F-35s in Distributed Ops, Whitesell Says



An F-35C Lightning II, assigned to the "Argonauts" of Strike Fighter Squadron 147 prepares to land on the flight deck of Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70) on June 17, 2021. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Caden Richmond*

ARLINGTON Va. – The Navy's "Air Boss" said fifth-generation strike fighters are redefining the concept of full mission capability and changing the way a four-plane division operates in distributed maritime operations.

Vice Adm. Kenneth Whitesell, commander, Naval Air Forces and commander, Naval Air Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet (the Air Boss), addressed the concept while speaking July 13 at a naval aviation seminar hosted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies and the U.S. Naval Institute and sponsored by HII.

Responding to a question from moderator Ward Carroll about the full-mission-capable rates of Navy F-35Cs during the 2021 deployment on board USS Carl Vinson, Whitesell said taking a "30,000-foot view of the way the [carrier] air wing is going to be employed is going to be completely different."

"The air wing's not going to be employed the same way [as before]," Whitesell said. "The F-35 is the perfect exemplar of that. The way we employ that platform. ... There is no defensive and offensive combat spread [where] you break out into some of the traditional missions that we would have done five or 10 years ago. Employing the Joint Strike Fighter as they employed

it as a [four-plane] division [was] definitely more spread out. The way information is shared amongst the platforms makes up for any deficits that an individual aircraft may have.

“The way we think of mission capability and full mission capability – we have to think about it in a distributed and in this case in a full division or greater employment mode through Distributed Maritime Ops,” the admiral said. “Fitting into the bigger vision of Distributed Maritime Ops, a single platform can have degradations, but because of the information sharing between the platforms, we have to think about how we’re going to define full mission capability, not platform-specific, but truly mission specific. It’s a different way of looking at things.”