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Carrier Sailing to Eastern End of the Mediterranean

By NEIL SHEEHAN
Special to The New York Times

ABOARD U.S.S. AMERICA, in the Eastern Mediterranean, June 6 — The aircraft carrier America of the Sixth Fleet steamed today at about 20 knots toward the eastern end of the Mediterranean.

The carrier and its twin, the Saratoga, were ordered yesterday to an advanced state of alert, known as readiness condition three, after the outbreak of fighting between Israel and the Arab nations. The vessels had been in position near Crete. Readiness condition is an alert two steps below a call to battle stations, or general quarters.

News correspondents aboard the America were denied the use of the ship's communications yesterday, but it was possible at times to have dispatches carried to Athens by persons leaving the America by air and transmitted from there to their offices.

It was not disclosed how long the America would continue to move east, and what her mission was. At 11 A.M. local time she was about 100 miles east of Crete. There has been some speculation among officers aboard the ship that the carrier and her six accompanying destroyers might be used to evacuate American civilians in Israel and in the Arab states of Egypt, Syria and Lebanon. The carrier is less than a day's steaming from any of those countries.

No Orders to Intervene

The America is being accompanied by the light cruiser Little Rock, the flagship of Adm. William I. Martin, the fleet commander.

It was understood that the fleet had received no orders to intervene in the conflict, and officers said they did not expect any such orders for the immediate future in view of the State Department's declaration yesterday that the United States intended to maintain a neutral stance.

It was not disclosed whether the Saratoga, the other carrier of the fleet, was also steaming east with the cruiser Galveston and the four destroyers accompanying her. The Saratoga and the America and their destroyers and cruisers constitute the long-range striking force of the fleet.

At 9:30 last night, correspondents were told that their dispatches, handed in earlier in the day, had not been transmitted. A naval spokesman told the newsmen that, in view of the State Department's declaration yesterday that the United States sought to maintain a neutral stance in the Arab-Israeli conflict, Admiral Martin has instructed the fleet to reply in response to all inquiries about an advance state of readiness that "the Sixth Fleet is conducting business as usual." He read the correspondents a message from the Admiral's headquarters to that effect.

Reporting Is Curbed

He said the correspondents would thus be allowed to report only that the fleet was "conducting business as usual" and not to write about what they had seen actually occurring about the ship because this might conflict with the official statement.

"This [the statement] conditioned much of what you have seen on the ship," he said. "We cannot talk about it [the increased alert] and it cannot go out in press stories because it is now classified information." At this point he erased from a blackboard behind him the statement explaining what readiness condition three meant.

The F-4 Phantom jet fighter bombers and A-4 Skyhawk attack jets aboard the America had been scheduled to carry out a number of navigation and interception exercises yesterday and to make practice dive-bombing runs against the deserted Greek island of Avgonisis to the north of Crete.

After the initial flights had been launched and recovered early in the afternoon, however, flights were suspended for the rest of the afternoon, and only a small number were renewed in the evening. These were reconnaisance missions by Skyhawks, Phantoms and RA-5C vigilante twin-engine photo-reconnaisance jets to maintain surveillance over the movements of Soviet warships in the Mediterranean.

Number on Alert Doubled

The number of F-4 Phantoms on normal alert to defend the carrier against a surprise attack was doubled. The exact number of aircraft now on alert cannot be disclosed for security reasons, but it is small.

The Phantoms, armed with Sparrow radar-guided, air-to-air missiles and heat-seeking Sidewinders, were lined up near the two waist catapults on the flight deck, with the pilots standing beside them ready for launching at a moment's notice.

Alert time for some of the other pilots aboard the carrier was also reduced from the normal 30 minutes to 15 minutes.

Last night the America began steaming toward the east, and this morning similar conditions prevailed aboard the carrier. The Phantoms were still beside the catapults, with pilots standing nearby.

No flights were made, and so far the only flight scheduled is a normal supply run by one of the twin-engined propeller-driven Cods. It is expected that the carrier will launch reconnaissance missions this afternoon and this evening, however, to keep watch on the Soviet vessels.

The Soviet guided-missile destroyer, No. 381 of the new Kashin class, followed the America toward the east today, maintaining a position a few miles to the stern of the carrier.

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