

The Lady of the Seas: Amy Bauernschmidt's Rise and Command of USS Abraham Lincoln

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Taking command of a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier in the United States Navy represents one of the most complex and exclusive pinnacles of contemporary military leadership. It involves not merely commanding a warship, but leading a true **floating city**, a high-tempo strike airfield, and a strategic asset capable of projecting power on a global scale.

In August 2021, then-Captain **Amy N. Bauernschmidt** marked a historic turning point for the U.S. Navy by becoming the **first woman to command a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier**, the *USS Abraham Lincoln* (CVN-72). This achievement was not the result of an exception, but of a rigorous professional path built over nearly thirty years of operational service, technical-nuclear training, and progressively senior commands.

Amy Bauernschmidt's profile and career

Born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in 1972, Amy Bauernschmidt graduated in **1994 from the United States Naval Academy** in Annapolis with a Bachelor of Science in *Ocean Engineering*,

in the very year the U.S. Congress lifted the ban on women serving aboard combat ships and aircraft.

Immediately after the Academy, she began the naval aviation pipeline, earning her **Naval Aviator wings in 1996**. Assigned to the helicopter community, she logged more than **3,000 flight hours** in operational embarked platforms and also served as a flight instructor.

Her record shows steady progression through operational command assignments, strategic education, and technical qualifications:

- **Early operational commands:** She commanded Helicopter Maritime Strike Squadron 70 (HSM-70), deployed aboard the aircraft carrier *USS George H.W.Bush*, taking part in air support and maritime security operations.

- **Strategic and institutional education:** She earned a Master's degree in *National Security and Strategic Studies* from the **Naval War College** and served at the U.S. Department of State's Office of Global Women's Issues.
- **The nuclear milestone and major naval commands:** To be eligible to command a *Nimitz*-class aircraft carrier, every U.S. Navy aviation officer must complete the demanding *Naval Nuclear Power School* program. After completing the qualification, Bauernschmidt set a first record in September **2016**, becoming the first woman to serve as **Executive Officer (Second-in-Command)** of a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, aboard the *USS Abraham Lincoln* (a position she held until 2019).
- **Amphibious command and return to the Lincoln:** In August **2019**, she assumed command of the amphibious transport dock *USS San Diego* (LPD-22), demonstrating complete mastery in managing complex naval units.

On **August 19, 2021**, she returned aboard the *USS Abraham Lincoln* to assume permanent command, subsequently leading it on a demanding operational deployment in the Indo-Pacific from 2022 through May 2023.

Her career continued at the highest levels of the naval hierarchy: promoted to the rank of **Rear Admiral (Contrammiraglio)**, she served as Deputy Commander of the U.S. Seventh Fleet, led **Carrier Strike Group 1** in 2025 and, since November 2025, has served as **Director of Maritime Operations** at the headquarters of the **U.S. Pacific Fleet**.



USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN-72): power and engineering at sea

Commanding the *USS Abraham Lincoln* means bearing direct responsibility for one of the most sophisticated weapons systems ever built. Commissioned on November 11, 1989, as the fifth unit of the **Nimitz** class, CVN-72 underwent a complete nuclear refueling and midlife

modernization process (*Refueling and Complex Overhaul - RCOH*) between 2013 and 2017, extending its service life by another 25 years and equipping it with next-generation sensors and combat systems.

From a technical standpoint, the ship boasts impressive figures:

- **Dimensions and displacement:** It is **332.8 meters** long (just under three soccer fields), has a maximum flight-deck width of **76.8 meters** (covering an area of approximately 18,000 square meters), and a full-load displacement exceeding **100,000 tons**.
- **Nuclear propulsion:** The ship's beating heart consists of **two Westinghouse A4W nuclear reactors**, which power four steam turbines and four propellers, generating a total output of **260,000 horsepower**. This system provides a speed in excess of **30 knots** (more than 56 km/h) and virtually unlimited range, allowing the ship to sail for more than 20 years without needing to refuel its nuclear reactors.
- **Crew and air wing:** Up to **5,680 personnel** serve aboard, divided between approximately **3,200 ship's company members** (responsible for ship operations, reactors, logistics, and weapons systems) and approximately **2,480 Carrier Air Wing personnel** (pilots, maintenance specialists, and support personnel).
- **Air capability and defense:** The hangar and flight deck (equipped with four steam catapults and arresting wires) can accommodate up to **90 aircraft**, including F/A-18E/F Super Hornet multirole fighters, F-35C Lightning II stealth fighters, EA-18G Growler electronic warfare aircraft, E-2D Hawkeye airborne early warning aircraft, and MH-60R/S Seahawk helicopters.For close-in self-defense, it is equipped with RIM-162 ESSM missile launchers, RIM-116 RAM systems, and Phalanx CIWS automated guns, supported by long-range 3D radars and advanced electronic countermeasure suites.

The operational significance of the command

Beyond the symbolic value associated with being the first woman, Amy Bauernschmidt's experience highlights the stringent selection criteria of the US Navy. Commanding a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier requires simultaneous mastery of three areas: **nuclear safety**, **navigation** in contested waters, and **air operations management** at an exceptionally high tempo, often conducted around the clock.
Admiral Bauernschmidt's professional trajectory confirms that, in modern armed forces, access to top operational positions rests on uncompromising technical expertise and the ability to lead

complex organizations, where every decision directly affects national security and the international strategic balance.