RECORD VERSION

STATEMENT BY

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DEPUTY COMMANDING GENERAL,
U.S. ARMY TRAINING AND DOCTRINE COMMAND

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Chairman Wittman, Ranking Member Bordallo, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee on Readiness, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you to discuss the state of Army Aviation readiness. I am pleased to represent the Army leadership, the military and civilian professionals, and the courageous men and women in uniform who serve our great Nation.

Army Aviation provides an asymmetric advantage for our Nation, without peer in scale and capability, focused on ensuring the joint air-ground team and Combatant Commanders have required reach, protection, lethality and situational understanding to win in an increasingly complex world, regardless of conditions. Army Aviation's asymmetric advantage is underpinned by our most important assets—agile, adaptive and professional aviation leaders and Soldiers.

To maintain this asymmetric advantage, our number one priority must be combat readiness. Army Aviation combat readiness is a function of fully trained and proficient units, led by trained leaders, with sufficient aircraft, in quantity and quality, to win in a complex world as an integral member of the combined arms air-ground maneuver team. Your Army's Aviation force has performed magnificently during the current distributed counterinsurgency fight, but is at risk for the higher end force on force fight we must be prepared to face in the future.

The United States Army retains the largest, most modern, and best-trained aviation force in the world. Over the past 15 years, Army Aviation was tested in a variety of operational environments and as always, Soldiers, Non-Commissioned Officers and officers met the task. Nevertheless, recent force structure reductions, a steady demand for Aviation forces throughout the world, budget uncertainty and greater emphasis on collective readiness raised some areas of concern. Among them, Army leaders expressed concern about the number of catastrophic Class A accidents in the first

quarter of Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 that could be an indicator of readiness issues within the Aviation force. The combination of these operational, strategic, and budgetary challenges resulted in Army Chief of Staff, General Mark Milley directing a Holistic Aviation Assessment Task Force to conduct a comprehensive review of Army Aviation to ensure its readiness for the future. The Task Force was charged to review all aspects of Army Aviation, with an initial focus on leadership, readiness, training, maintenance and sustainment, policy, and resources. As the Task Force Director, I recently briefed General Milley on the Task Force's recommendations to improve aviation readiness across the Total Force. On behalf of our Secretary, the Honorable Eric Fanning, and General Milley, I look forward to discussing Army Aviation readiness with you.

Organization/Facilities

Army Aviation plays an increasingly important role in support of the Army's missions and activities. Across the force on any given day, Army Aviation organizations, airframes, and personnel are simultaneously engaging in combat operations, training with other Army forces or international partners, and supporting civil authorities in the homeland. Indeed, it is hard to find any major Army activity that does not require Aviation. Army Aviation faces a number of challenges in meeting this high demand and fulfilling its missions.

The Total Army Force consisting of the Regular Army, the Army National Guard (ARNG), and the Army Reserve (USAR) maintains approximately 5,000 total aircraft in its inventory, including both fixed- and rotary-wing. About 3,750 of these aircraft are in Modified Table of Organization and Equipment (MTOE) units—tactical units that can be deployed around the world to carry out Army operations from combat to disaster response to forward presence in important regions of the world. Currently 30% of the Aviation Force is committed globally; 30 Active Component (AC) battalions and 5 Reserve Component (RC) battalions are deployed of 116 total battalions (55 AC / 61 RC). Since 2003, active component and many reserve component aviation units have deployed at or near frequency limitations set by Department leadership. The remaining fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft are in Table of Distribution and Allowances units—Army

organizations that do not deploy, such as the Army's Aviation training center at Fort Rucker, Alabama, or elements of Army Aviation that support the Total Force.

Currently, the Army operates aircraft at 164 locations around the world. Most locations require facilities to support flight operations, training and maintenance. Aviation maintenance facilities are essential to provide a climate controlled, weather-protected environment to conduct maintenance twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week in order to build combat power essential for training and operations. The quality of these facilities varies from installation to installation and each has a direct impact on unit readiness. Outdated facilities and hangars do not enable optimal or efficient maintenance operations resulting in longer repair times and fewer aircraft available for training. Although units with aging facilities are less efficient, our commanders take every precaution to ensure safe maintenance practices. In the current fiscal environment, the Army has assumed risk in modernizing our infrastructure to build the readiness required to meet global commitments. This is also true with the quality of our ranges and training areas. Continued risk in the out years would increase infrastructure deficiencies, which would negatively and significantly impact the overall readiness of our organizations.

Flying Hour Program Resourcing

A 20 percent reduction to the Army Aviation Home Station Flying Hour Program since the start of OEF/OIF has resulted in resourcing at approximately 11.5 hours/crew/month for the Regular Army. Although adequate for the current fight, given the complexity of aviation maneuver in Unified Land Operations at platoon, company and battalion level, 14.5 hours/crew/month of live flight time and the time to execute the training are required to achieve and maintain foundational flight skills at each echelon to support the collective maneuver proficiency required to effectively operate in a higher threat environment. The additional flight hours would also allow junior leaders to develop the foundational flight skills required to lead their formations and our future force. In essence, in the current training environment, we expect battalion level proficiency for our Combat Aviation Brigades, but in the best case are only able to

resource them to company level proficiency and, based on global requirements, we are often only able to allot the training time for them to reach platoon level proficiency.

We are already starting to see the impacts: Aviation Captains Career Course Officers with low flight hour totals who have not attained Pilot in Command; less experienced Warrant Officers in graduate courses (Instructor Pilot and Maintenance Test Pilot Courses) who require additional training; and Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) at Professional Military Education who do not have the foundational technical and leader skills required of their grade. Additionally, recent U.S. Army Aviation Center of Excellence Directorate of Evaluation and Standardization inspections and Combat Training Center Observer/Controller observations validate the lower proficiency (platoon or less) across the aviation force. This level of readiness is sufficient for counterinsurgency-based missions, but is not sufficient to build and maintain battalion level collective readiness required to meet the challenges of emerging and future threats.

If we do not correct these trends, our formations will not meet the demands of the future environment, and our leaders will not have the requisite experience to effectively lead their formations in combat. Realistic training, resourced with time and dollars, and Leader Development are the primary ways to reverse these trends and ensure the readiness of the current and future force.

Maintenance

The inherently dangerous nature of flight operations and the complexity of modern aircraft systems require highly skilled professionals and standardized maintenance processes to ensure the airworthiness of Army aircraft. Poor maintenance practices can lead to, at best, a failed mission and, at worst, a catastrophe involving loss of life and destruction of equipment. For a variety of reasons, Army Aviation has not been able to meet equipment readiness goals. In spite of Fully Mission Capable (FMC) rates below Department of the Army goals over the last 15 years, Aviation units maintained mission capable rates that enabled units to meet the demands of training and combat operations in the current environment, but this mission capability will fall

short of the expected pace of operations in higher intensity conflict. We must, therefore, fully leverage trained and ready Soldiers to maintain our aircraft in order to meet current and future demand. However, in order to maximize combat capability to the Combatant Commander, aviation maintenance personnel have not been deploying with their aircrews, which requires reliance on contract maintenance in a deployed environment.

The greatest readiness effect of this practice is on our Soldiers' long-term ability to maintain aircraft. We are seeing an erosion in our Soldiers and NCOs ability to maintain combat power. For example, in FY15, the 101st Combat Aviation Brigade deployed to Afghanistan with just over 800 Soldiers of the brigade's authorized strength of more than 2,800 personnel. The limited number of the brigade's maintainers that deployed only performed minimal tasks required for launch and recovery of aircraft and did not conduct any scheduled or unscheduled maintenance. As a result, contractors provided all maintenance support throughout the deployment. This trend continues today with the current aviation brigade in theater.

When aircrews and aircraft deploy without organic Soldier-provided maintenance capabilities, maintenance Soldiers do not have an opportunity to gain experience or maintain proficiency in their Military Occupational Specialty. As the aircrews and aircraft return to home station, those Soldiers are no longer capable of maintaining their own aircraft without significant contractor augmentation, further degrading the ability of an Aviation unit to regain readiness. Many aviation brigade commanders state that deploying without organic maintenance capability greatly inhibits building and sustaining future readiness. It also impacts the unit's ability to deploy to an austere environment, which is critical to overall readiness.

Evidence of reduced maintenance proficiency is clear. Combat Aviation Brigades are not meeting readiness rates (not a parts issue or resource issue); they are struggling to maintain adequate combat power to meet training requirements and our NCOs who are attending Professional Military Education have significantly less knowledge and experience in maintenance management than we previously saw 2-3 years ago. This is causing increased operating costs due to a lack of troubleshooting

skills (failing to properly identify malfunctioning components and/or replacing functioning components) and is increasing the risk of maintaining fully airworthy aircraft.

Safety

Army Aviation activities, even those in peacetime, are inherently dangerous. Although Aviation personnel are experienced and safety and maintenance standards are high, accidents do occur and are sometimes catastrophic. However, since the 1970s, the Army has demonstrated an overall reduction in major aviation accident rates. Major accidents involving injuries, loss of life, and significant aircraft damage dropped from an all-time high in the 1970s to a five-decade low in the 2010s thus far. However, after achieving an all-time low in FY13, Manned/Rotary Wing Class A through C accident rates (Class A - permanent disability, loss of life or cost greater than $2 Million; Class B - cost less than $2 Million but greater than $500,000; Class C - cost less than $500,000 but greater than $50,000) have increased in the last two years across all components. Additionally, Army Aviation experienced six Class A accidents during the first two quarters of FY16 that resulted in the destruction of six aircraft and loss of eight aircrew members. The investigations for those accidents are complete and the findings indicate that five of the six were a result of human error.

As in the civilian aviation sector, human error contributes to approximately 80 percent of all Army Aviation accidents and remains the leading causal factor in mishaps today. Class A human error accidents made up 77 percent of FY15's totals and 73 percent during FY14. For both Class A and B accidents, FY15's human error rate was 80 percent and 74 percent for FY14. Common themes during FY15 were overconfidence, complacency, inadequate mission planning, aircrew coordination errors and direct violations of mission approval criteria. Lack of power and degraded visual environments were also noted as contributing factors in a significant number of these accidents. While we will never completely eliminate human error accidents, they can be mitigated and reduced. The most effective means of reducing human error is aggressive and realistic training that increases repetition and grows confidence and competence in the individual and the collective team.

Conclusion

Army Aviation is an integral member of the joint combined arms team with a history of providing capability in a variety of ways across the full range of military operations. Throughout history, the Army modified policies and force structure to shape the force for the anticipated challenges it will face. As we focus on the future, the Army is taking steps to optimize the force and build readiness to meet any challenge. Your continued oversight and support is greatly appreciated. We can assure you that the Army's senior leaders are working to address current readiness challenges, as well as the needs of the Army now and in the future.

Mr. Chairman and distinguished Members of this Subcommittee, thank you for your steadfast and strong support of the outstanding men and women in uniform, our Army Civilians, and their Families.