RECORD VERSION

STATEMENT BY
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COMMANDING GENERAL,
U.S. ARMY AVIATION CENTER OF EXCELLENCE

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Chairman Wilson, Ranking Member Bordallo and fellow distinguished Members of the Subcommittee on Readiness, I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to appear before you to discuss the state of Army Aviation readiness. I am honored 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 unparalleled advantage to our Nation as a fundamental element of the Joint Force, providing Combatant Commanders with the reach, protection, and lethality to fight and win against increasingly capable opponents in complex environments. The foundation of Army Aviation's advantage is our professional, agile, and adaptive aviation leaders and Soldiers. Army Aviation's number one priority is maintaining combat readiness which provides our Soldiers and Commanders with a decisive advantage while fulfilling the Nation's commitments. Army Aviation combat readiness is comprised of fully trained and proficient units led by competent leaders, equipped with modern and capable aviation platforms at the appropriate capacity. These factors enable Army Aviation to thrive as an integral member of the Joint Force.

Army Aviation units and Soldiers have been routinely tested in a variety of harsh operational environments over the past 16 years and through it all, have performed magnificently. However, force structure reductions, increased global requirements for Aviation forces, funding uncertainty, and an increased emphasis on collective level preparedness have raised concerns about the overall readiness of Army Aviation. Last year, LTG Mangum informed this committee about GEN Milley's guidance to form a Holistic Aviation Assessment Task Force (HAATF) to conduct a comprehensive review of Army Aviation to ensure its readiness for the future. The Task Force examined leadership, readiness, training, maintenance and sustainment, policy, and resources

within Army Aviation. The Task Force submitted 63 recommendations for improvements, 30 of which have either been implemented or have approved plans of action to address the given issue. We intend to have an approved way-ahead for all 63 recommendations by the end of FY 18. There is no doubt that Army Aviation will be more effective, efficient, and safe as result of this study and applied solutions. On behalf of our Acting Secretary, the Honorable Ryan McCarthy, and Chief of Staff General Milley, I am honored to discuss the state of Army Aviation readiness with you.

Maintaining Readiness

Army Aviation's number one priority is building and maintaining readiness. Readiness is the capacity of our forces to conduct the full range of military operations to defeat all enemies regardless of the threats they pose or the environments in which we meet them. Army Aviation generates readiness through manning, training, and equipping forces and developing leaders to fulfill the requirements of Combatant Commanders. Today, Army Aviation units are highly committed globally; our Soldiers are currently operating in numerous countries around the world, executing combat and theater security cooperation missions. However, we continue to contend with reduced and unpredictable funding, increased demands on a reduced force structure, and aging equipment, three factors that loom large at a time when threats to U.S. interests continue to rise.

<u>Manning</u>

Recent force structure adjustments and fiscal constraints caused the Army to make difficult resourcing decisions. We prioritized short-term readiness over long-term recruitment and training required to secure and maintain a strong force. In response to a changing fiscal environment and as a direct result of the implementation of the Budget Control Act of 2011, programmed training allocations were reduced below the minimum requirement, which resulted in a significant under-accession of Regular Army Aviation Warrant Officers. We are compensating for the shortfall by retaining an increased number of senior Aviation Warrant Officers. Although our current aggregate manning levels are healthy, over twenty-five percent of Aviation Warrant Officers are now

retirement eligible. Additionally, we are experiencing unprecedented recruitment of Army Aviators by the commercial airline industry. This may affect the Army's ability to retain highly-skilled aviators in all components.

The Army is actively addressing these manning concerns through three lines of effort: accessions, increasing training throughput, and retention. The Army began increasing accessions from 350 Regular Army Aviation Warrant Officers in FY 17 and will continue increases to reach 475 annually over the next 2 to 3 years. The Army is also increasing its institutional capacity to train new pilots to ensure a sufficient warrant officer inventory in the future. Lastly, the Army recently offered a graduated incentives program to qualified aviators to target two warrant officer populations: pilots nearing the end of their initial six year Active Duty Service Obligation and retirement eligible warrant officers. This targeted and graduated incentives program seeks to extend the service of junior warrant officers and retain sufficient senior warrant officers to ensure adequate capacity and experience throughout the force. With these efforts in place, the Army witnessed a reduction in the projected shortfall of junior grade Regular Army Warrant Officers from 731 in March of this year to 387 in September. Looking ahead, Army Aviation anticipates adequate and sustainable manning, retention, and experience to ensure for a strong force.

Training

A 2012 Rand study assessed that 13 Active Component Combat Aviation Brigades were required to execute mission requirements in support of the Army's ongoing global commitments. Since then, we reduced the number of Active Component Combat Aviation Brigades to 11. As a result, Army Aviation has lost strategic depth which critically tests our ability to modernize the force without impacting readiness and our ability to meet emerging requirements. In FY 18 and 19, we will commit an overwhelming percentage of Aviation Forces to combat deployments or rotational requirements, Homeland Support requirements, Combat Training Center training requirements, and aircraft modernization efforts. Army Aviation's reduced capacity and the subsequent stress on the force has additional ramifications. In FY 17, the total flight

hours executed by Army Aviation were among the lowest totals of any annual period over the past 30 years. There are a number of variables that caused this result: unpredictable funding, aircraft fielding, transfers, modernization efforts, unforecasted or adjusted deployments, and training time lost due to trans-Atlantic movements of Combat Aviation Brigade equipment sets. Leaders at all levels are rolling up their sleeves to rapidly and effectively work through these challenges to build the most capable Army Aviation force possible.

Currently, Army Aviation is funded at a monthly rate of 10.8 hours per aircrew, an amount that produces proficiency at the platoon level; proficiency that is sufficient for counterinsurgency operations in permissive operational environments. This level of funding is in line with what we have been able to execute in recent years. However, to fight and win in Unified Land Operations against near-peer or peer adversaries, aviation units must be proficient at the company and battalion level. We must acknowledge that numerous future challenges and threats will require Army Aviation to operate in what will likely be the most complex, hazardous, and lethal environment we have faced to date. Training for this environment – terrain flight altitudes, large formations, complex operations against highly capable opponents – presents its own hazards. As the aforementioned organizational turbulence subsides, Army Aviation will need your support to assure it has the resources to achieve higher levels of readiness.

Maintenance:

Army Aviation flight operations are inherently dangerous and the sophistication of modern aircraft systems requires highly skilled professionals and standardized maintenance procedures to ensure the airworthiness of Army Aircraft. Insufficient maintenance practices can lead to, at best, a failed mission and, at worst, a catastrophe involving loss of life and destruction of equipment. Last year, LTG Mangum testified to this committee about the importance of leveraging trained and ready Soldiers to maintain aircraft to meet current and future demands. He highlighted the detrimental impact that years of contract-provided maintenance have had on aviation maintainers. Without adequate opportunities to gain experience or maintain expertise in their Military

Occupational Specialty, these Soldiers were not proficient in maintaining aircraft without significant contractor augmentation. Failure of units to meet aviation readiness rates is evidence of reduced maintenance proficiency in the force. Today's mid-grade aviation maintainers have less knowledge and experience which results in increased operating costs due to insufficient trouble-shooting skills (inability to properly identify malfunctioning components and/or replacing functioning components). Aviation units have since decreased their dependency on contract maintenance, particularly in deployed environments. Furthermore, the Army Aviation Enterprise is actively rectifying maintenance training deficiencies in the institution and across the force consistent with recommendations made by the HAATF. However, it is important to note that these changes will take time to propagate throughout and become sustainable in the force.

Fiscal uncertainty also poses a challenge to maintaining aircraft, resulting in detrimental impacts to readiness. Inconsistent funding results in highly variable and unpredictable parts demands across the Aviation Enterprise which challenges appropriate inventory. Furthermore, aspects of our logistics systems are designed to deliver efficiencies during periods of normal demand. These systems, however, are not designed to provide strategic depth and are not well-postured to accommodate surge requirements. At a lower level, units can be constrained to delay the purchase of repair parts until funds become available. This practice results in deferred maintenance which reduces the amount of aviation assets available for training and impacts mission capable rates across the force. While we do not assess a direct relationship between deferred maintenance and increased risks to safe flight operations, we do see fiscal uncertainty manifest as increased risk to readiness which degrades our preparedness to fight tonight. In practice, many units are making readiness decisions and delaying parts ordering based on limited funds available. This has some impact on readiness reporting, maintainer proficiency, and aircraft available to train.

Aviation Safety

Army Aviation operations are inherently dangerous, whether conducted in peacetime or during combat operations. Training aviation operations is a complex and

resource-intensive effort that requires careful oversight, management, and leadership to sufficiently mitigate risk. Its effective execution provides ready and relevant capability to the Joint Force. Over the past four decades, the Army dramatically reduced major aviation accident rates. While we regrettably experienced nine Class A rotary wing aviation mishaps during FY 17, the number of incidents remains below the five and ten-year averages ((1.11 accidents per every 100,000 flight hours in FY 17, five-year average – 1.14, ten-year average – 1.33). *(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)).* The Army's nine Class A rotary wing accidents during FY 17 resulted in the loss of ten aircrew members and the destruction of 6 aircraft. The investigations for 5 of those accidents are complete, but initial and completed findings indicate that 6 of the 9 were a result of human error. While one accident is too many, we have not seen an appreciable change to recent accident rates in comparison to historical norms.

Human error contributes to the majority of all Army Aviation accidents, which consistent with the causes for accidents throughout the broader aviation community. In fact, in 67% of all Class A accidents in FY 16 and FY 17, human error was determined to be the causal factor. The recent Class A accidents involved a mixture of both experienced and inexperienced pilots, so we cannot accurately draw a direct causal connection between these accidents and individual flight time. We are confident, however, that aviators are more optimally prepared to handle the complexities of aviation operations through adequate repetitions in training, which is currently being challenged by reduced flight hour resourcing. While even perfect practice will never completely eliminate human error, the improved confidence and proficiency that our aviators gain through increased flight time not only enhances mission effectiveness, but also mitigates risk to aviation operations.

It is important to emphasize that the focus of training in today's Army Aviation units has expanded significantly beyond preparing for counterinsurgency operations in the relatively permissive environments of Iraq and Afghanistan. The current global security environment demands a shift in emphasis to support Joint operations against a

much broader range of threats. We use the most demanding challenge – decisive action in support of Unified Land Operations – as our benchmark for training. Army Aviation simulates the decisive action challenge by recreating conditions in training that prepare units to face peer competitors in high threat environments. Elevated risk levels accompany this training, however, due to low altitudes required to defeat radar threats, increased complexities that these missions require, and training conducted at echelons above the team and platoon level – the opposite of what has been the norm over the past sixteen years of conflict. One method that Army Aviation will use to reduce risk in the future is through incorporating Supervised Autonomy into both existing platforms, and Future Vertical Lift. The concept of Supervised Autonomy will leverage technology to incorporate cognitive aiding into aircraft and aircraft systems to lessen or in some cases, eliminate human stressors that currently cause accidents, as well as to increase the survivability of the aircraft and aircrews. In the near term, Army Aviation units will mitigate these increased risks as we have always done, through engaged and decisive leadership.

Balancing Readiness and Modernization

Army Aviation initiatives to regain and sustain readiness have come at a cost to modernization. Over the past decade and a half, military operations largely focused on low-tech enemies in semi-permissive environments. Force structure and organizational constructs were developed under modularity to generate efficiency and meet the demands of the Army force generating cycles. The coupling of these decisions with a fiscal environment that has reduced the Aviation modernization budget challenges Army Aviation's ability to modernize and close key operational capability gaps. Modernization efforts have been delayed and strategic depth in the force has been largely eliminated, leaving reduced capacity to meet emerging requirements. As a result, Army Aviation is optimized for a semi-permissive, counter-insurgency fight and is in critical need of new capabilities and capacity that provide overmatch against enemies in more lethal and contested environments.

Army Aviation requires modernized equipment and sufficiently trained manpower to win decisively. Today, we risk being outmanned, outgunned, and outdated. In order to modernize Aviation formations to compete with powers that possess advanced military forces, Army Aviation must make tough choices on key capability development efforts that would be unaffordable if programmed for the entire force. The result is insufficient depth to equip units with updated equipment such as Aviation Survivability Equipment, where limited equipment sets are prioritized to deploying units only, and often delivered and installed immediately prior to deployment.

The current aviation fleet will continue to serve us well for the next several decades. However, these legacy platforms are reaching their engineering design limitations, requiring expensive, incremental improvements to maintain a competitive edge in future operating environments. In the near term, the Aviation Enterprise is working hard to develop capabilities at scale that can bridge gaps with potential adversaries in reach, protection, and lethality. In the mid-term, we need to make difficult choices now about the legacy fleet and invest in future vertical lift to ensure that Army Aviation provides the capability that ground commanders need to dominate the future battlefield.

Conclusion

Army Aviation is and will remain an essential member of the Joint Force and will extend its distinguished record of providing unparalleled capability to Combatant Commanders across the full range of military operations. Despite increasing demand for forces and budgetary pressure, Aviation Soldiers, leaders, and civilians are working tirelessly to build and maintain readiness while refocusing on the threat posed by peer competitors. However, we have paid for this readiness by assuming risk in meeting contingency requirements and deferring investments in equipment modernization. We can assure you that the Army's senior leaders are working to address these concerns, as well as the needs of the Army now and in the future. We ask for your help in alleviating these constraints to get back on a path of sustained readiness and

modernization investment as we move forward into an increasingly complex future. Your continued oversight and support is greatly appreciated.

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.