

NOT FOR PUBLICATION UNTIL RELEASED BY THE  
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON READINESS

**STATEMENT OF**

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**ON**

**AVIATION READINESS**

**BEFORE THE**

**HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON**

**READINESS**

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Chairman Wilson, Ranking Member Bordallo, and distinguished members of the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Readiness, I appreciate the opportunity to testify on the current state of Naval Aviation readiness and the challenges we face in generating fleet readiness today and in the future.

Today's Navy faces a multitude of challenges around the world. The increased proliferation of threats from nation-state actors and terrorist organizations against our nation and its allies requires a level of global presence not seen in the past twenty-five years. Continued aggression and recent activity from North Korea, provocation from Iranian forces in the Middle East, increased tension over territorial disputes in the South China Sea, and armed-conflict with ISIS in several geographic locations from Syria to Indonesia require our forces to be present and prepared to "fight tonight." Yet, this deterrent presence and capability to quickly respond is demanded under a continually resource-constrained environment that impacts aircraft availability, retention and safety. The necessity to support Global Force Management requirements, coupled with the high operational tempo of deployed forces, has put a strain on Naval Aviation's ability to generate the required readiness needed to support our nation and recover the readiness we've lost over the last six years. General Joseph Dunford, USMC, our Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, recently testified to the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) stating, "We realize that what we've been doing in the past is unsustainable moving forward, the demand does exceed the supply, and we need to make an adjustment to the demand as well as the supply." The demand for Naval Aviation forces greatly exceeds our ability to supply those forces. We are meeting forward deployed requirements, but the risk we incur with our forces at home has been steadily increasing. Simply put, chronic

underfunding has limited Naval Aviation's ability to sufficiently generate the readiness that Combatant Commanders continue to consume.

As the Air Boss, I have the distinct pleasure today of leading and supporting our nation's greatest asset, the Sailors and civilians who work tirelessly inside Naval Aviation to ensure we remain the world's pre-eminent sea power. In my recent site visits, I've been humbled and impressed by their "can do" attitude to succeed in the face of adversity. Their professionalism and commitment is the force-multiplier that makes our Navy the world's premier maritime force. However, due to eight years of Continuing Resolutions and the 2011 Budget Control Act, our Sailors have not been resourced adequately to perform their jobs. Over-utilization of our forces to support combat operations since September 11, 2001 without the proper funding has eroded our ability to continue to generate the readiness required to respond to crises, and jeopardizes our nation's future maritime supremacy. Success of our Navy is not measured solely by the deployment of Carrier Strike Groups. Success should be measured by how well we fully resource the readiness generation machine. We will always answer the bell to put combat ready forces forward, however, we have been forced do so for years at the expense of our long-term ability to train and prepare the future force.

#### Sustainment of the Current Force

On June 12, 2017, Secretary of Defense James Mattis succinctly described the effects of sequestration to the House Armed Services Committee:

"I retired from military service three months after sequestration took effect. Four years later, I returned to the Department and I have been shocked by what I've seen with our readiness to fight. For all the

heartache caused by the loss of our troops during these wars, no enemy in the field has done more to harm the readiness of our military than sequestration.”

Naval Aviation, the Navy and the Nation need your help to raise the budget caps and to return to sustainable, predictable funding levels - our Sailors are paying the price and it's time we gave them the resources to execute their missions.

Budgetary uncertainties and the continued reduction in the aforementioned funding have reduced the overall size of the Navy, down 41 ships and 90,000 Sailors since September 11, 2001, yet we are continually asked to do more with less. In September of this year, CNO Admiral Richardson testified about the “triple whammy” affecting our Navy – the corrosive confluence of high operational tempo, constrained funding levels, and budget uncertainty that are impeding our ability to maintain and modernize our current force. The resultant smaller fleet, working at a higher pace, is wearing out our equipment and our people. This year, we deployed four Carrier Strike Groups to support combat operations and provide strategic deterrence around the world. Consistent with the Navy's policy of supporting deployed and next to deploy forces, we were forced to cannibalize aircraft, parts and people to ensure those leaving on deployment had what they needed to be safe and effective while operating forward. To continue to provide credible maritime forces around the world, we've made sacrifices at home. Naval Aviation utilizes a “tiered readiness” construct to ensure our resources are focused on deployed and soon to deploy squadrons. When a squadron returns from deployment, we are forced to take many of their aircraft, parts, and people and give them to the next squadrons preparing for work-ups and deployment. To put this in perspective,

in order to properly man the required Carrier Air Wings either on deployment or preparing to deploy at mandated levels of 95%, we do not have enough Sailors left to fill the two remaining Air Wings in their maintenance phase. Due to these shortfalls, we have some squadrons only able to operate a single shift of maintenance (when they should be able to safely run two). We've been forced to take risks in maintenance and production and, as a result, our ability to fix and produce up aircraft and therefore train aviators has suffered.

The hardest hit community within Naval Aviation is the Strike Fighter community. To take action on immediate readiness issues, such as low manning, long-term down aircraft, parts shortages and lack of facilities, we established a "Rhino Readiness Recovery" team to identify and address long-term impacts caused by a lack of consistent readiness resourcing. The team is a combination of subject matter experts from across the Navy and our industry partners who are tasked with solving systemic supply, maintenance, manning and facilities shortfalls that resulted from years of over-utilization and underfunding. What is happening at Naval Air Station (NAS) Lemoore, California is a microcosm for the rest of the fleet. The impacts may be acutely felt at NAS Lemoore, but the systemic issues will impact more broadly. We will use the lessons learned from the Strike Fighter community to enhance our ability to repair aircraft, predict future challenges across the aviation force, and support the warfighter in each of our aviation communities. Key to the success of this effort is consistent, healthy levels of aviation readiness account funding across the Future Years Defense Plan (FYDP), to include investment in our aging infrastructure (military construction) and needed support equipment replacement.

The \$2.8B in additional funding you approved for the Navy in Fiscal Year 2017 was used to address immediate readiness shortfalls in the fleet. Thank you for this support. In FY2018, we look to continue funding accounts which sustain our plans for readiness recovery and generation, programs to support our Sailors, modernize current platforms, and purchase next generation aircraft and weapons to maintain the advantage over our adversaries. As mentioned previously, that support must continue throughout the FYDP. At the beginning of October, in our Super Hornet community alone, only half of our total inventory of 542 aircraft were flyable, or mission capable, and only 170 or 31% of the total inventory were fully mission capable and ready to “fight tonight.” The readiness level for this community has been on a declining trend for the last few years. While we must prioritize maintenance and readiness dollars to support the fleet, change will not happen overnight. It will take time to see the positive results of more healthy and consistent resourcing. When Budget Control Act limitations took effect several years ago, there was a delay of 2-3 years until readiness impacts were felt across the force. We survived by pooling resources, borrowing parts and people, and using every last item on the shelf to get the job done. It will take some time to replenish what we’ve consumed, but with your help, we will get ourselves healthy again. We must maintain above 90% funding of the requirement for readiness enabler accounts to see a real impact in the fleet, yet like the lag in BCA impacts, recovery will not manifest itself for two or so years because of the deep and long standing aviation readiness divot created. Succinctly, Naval Aviation needs a multifaceted approach to readiness recovery that includes aircraft procurement, consistent funding of the readiness accounts, and MILCON and infrastructure investments.

Similarly, high operational tempo, constrained funding levels, manpower challenges, and budget uncertainty in our Naval Shipyards have impeded our ability to consistently deliver aircraft carriers out of depot maintenance on time with cascading impacts to carrier strike group training plans. To meet Global Force Management deployment dates, carrier strike groups have been forced to shorten their basic phase and unit level training timelines to meet commitments. Compressing time to train reduces the level of proficiency, effectiveness, safety and lethality of our carrier and air wing teams. This is especially true when we face our near peer competitors. Simply put, we need to get our carrier force into and out of maintenance availabilities on time. It is vital to our training plans and necessary for us to meet the Combatant Commander's demand signal for carrier strike groups. Our record of on time delivery from 2008 to 2016 was mixed. A third of our carrier maintenance availabilities had completion delays exceeding two weeks, some much longer than that. Since December of 2015, our performance has improved, with our four most recent availabilities completing on time. We must continue this trend, and to do so requires us to maintain full capacity, manning, and throughput at our public shipyards with consistent full funding across the FYDP of the ship maintenance readiness accounts. Our shipyards must be able to continue a hiring and employee development plan that will enable them to meet the demand signal.

#### Challenges With Modernizing the Force

Along with addressing processes and efficiencies to maximize the readiness of our current force, we are quickly moving to modernize Naval Aviation through divestiture of aging aircraft platforms. Procuring fourth and fifth generation aircraft is required for a successful transition. While divestment of legacy capability puts a strain

on an already pressurized aircraft inventory, it is the right choice as we balance current readiness against the need for future capability. Your support of the Department's aircraft procurement requests is essential to managing the risk associated with this trade-off. We are also investing in fifth generation aircraft such as the F-35C and introducing new unmanned aircraft systems such as the MQ-25 and MQ-4 Triton into the fleet to join the already operational MQ-8 Fire Scout. With the introduction of newer technology and more complicated subsystems and components, we must continue to support our Sailors and civilians with adequate schools, technical publications, tools and parts. We can't simply procure more new aircraft; we must also buy the foundational sustainment and training that accompanies those aircraft through their entire life cycle.

### Physiological Episodes

The Naval Aviation Enterprise remains laser focused on Naval Aviation's number one safety priority, reducing the risks and effects of physiological episodes (PEs) for our aircrew. We have pooled knowledge, resources, and expertise from within the Department of Defense (DoD), industry and National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), along with aeromedical experts and foreign military partners to tackle the greatest risk to our aviators today. The Physiological Episode Action Team (PEAT) has stood up under the leadership of RDML (sel) Sara Joyner. She is charged with directing all actions to combat PEs and serves as our single point of contact for Navy leadership, Congress and the fleet. She will serve as the central authority for communicating all PE efforts to fleet and training command operators.



I am optimistic about the efforts and progress made so far, and I'm pleased to report our T-45 Goshawks are back in the air training our future Navy and Marine Corps aviators and should be back to flying at pre-operational pause production levels by late November. Engineering updates and changes to the aircraft and some of its components have significantly reduced the occurrence of PEs in the T-45. For the F/A-18 Hornet and Super Hornet, we continue to utilize the highly-effective and methodical Root Cause and Corrective Analysis approach (RCCA) to identify and mitigate the causes of physiological episodes. We have identified cockpit pressurization as a contributing factor in the FA-18 physiological events; however, the relationship between pressure fluctuations and the resultant effects on aircrew is complex and likely has other factors influencing the PE occurrences. To address the pressure issues, we are applying hardware and software changes for all Hornets and Growlers.

The Navy's efforts to resolve the types of PEs experienced by both T-45 and F/A-18 aircrews remain focused on ensuring the safety of our aircrews and restoring our aviator's confidence in the platforms they fly. We will not stop until we fully understand and have corrected the causes of these physiological episodes in our tactical aircraft, while working diligently to better understand the human-machine interface.

### The Human Toll

As mentioned earlier, the resourced-constrained environment we have been operating in has not only taken its toll on aircraft and ships, it has also impacted our people. Retention of our talented Sailors is critical to our success. Retention and readiness are interdependent and impact one another. It is paramount that both readiness

and retention issues be viewed holistically to gain an understanding of the struggles in maintaining the proper numbers and skillsets of aviators and Sailors. Consequently, readiness problems affect quality of service and negatively impact retention.

Additionally, last minute personnel moves (churn for Sailors and families) that we've had to make to ensure next deployers are manned to appropriate levels, is taking its toll on retention as well. We must work diligently to retain our highly qualified technicians that maintain these sophisticated, complex aircraft and aircraft systems.

The Navy is also challenged to retain aviators, largely due to quality of service concerns, or stated differently, job satisfaction. The lack of flight hours, tactical training and progression of qualifications, coupled with a broadening pay gap when compared to private industry, combine to create a deficit in mid-grade and senior aviators (between 10-20 years of service.) Although accessions have remained relatively stable since 2012, the loss of mid-grade and senior officers directly impacts squadron readiness through a shortage of qualified and experienced aviators. Increasing aviator accessions does not solve the problem since a surplus of junior aviators in squadrons will further exacerbate low flight hours. Several initiatives, both monetary and non-monetary are in development to address retention shortfalls. The Fiscal Year 2017 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) authorized increasing the aviation bonus and career incentive pay programs, and we are in the process of significantly reshaping these programs for aviator Department Head and Commanding Officer bonuses to better target and retain talent. Additionally, other career-enhancing opportunities, such as the Career Intermission Program and Tours with Industry are being implemented to improve retention , but the largest hurdle to Aviator retention in most communities will still be

low flight hours due to aircraft availability. We will continue to explore creative ways to retain our best and brightest; however, job satisfaction, work-life imbalance and quality of service issues will remain challenges.

### Conclusion

I have spoken today largely about our Carrier Air Wings and Strike Fighters because they are the most acutely affected communities in Naval Aviation. Whether carrier-based or land-based, manned or unmanned, our leading edge technologies present new opportunities to fly the world's most advanced and capable aircraft, while providing an expanded range of military options to our nation's decision-makers. However, the cracks and fissures are clearly showing across the force. We need Congress' urgent and continued support in order to arrest the erosion of readiness force-wide and rebuild wholeness in Naval Aviation.

Although we face many readiness challenges, I can assure you our Naval Aviation team remains the finest in the world. We owe our Sailors sustained, predictable budgets that ensure resources are prioritized to generate and recover current readiness, sustain our aircraft and aircraft carriers, modernize the fleet and invest in next generation technology that provides the tactical advantage over any adversary. Mr. Chairman and distinguished committee members it has been my distinct honor and privilege to serve as Naval Aviation's Air Boss for the last three years and I remain fully committed to working with you and Navy leadership to address our most pressing readiness challenges. Thank you for your continued commitment and support to do the same.