

NAVAIR Admiral: System Reliability Key to Aircraft Readiness

WASHINGTON – The admiral in charge of Naval Air Systems Command said that aircraft readiness hinges on reliability of the systems and the maintenance that keeps them mission-capable.

“Reliability is just as critical as lethality,” said NAVAIR’s commander, Vice Adm. Dean Peters, speaking Oct. 1 at a luncheon of the Greater Washington Council of the U.S. Naval Academy Alumni Association in Washington, noting that the Navy had to take a different view of how to achieve more reliability as it endeavors to improve aircraft readiness.

Peters said he would like to turn all 10,000 engineers in the Naval Aviation Enterprise into reliability engineers.

One challenge to achieving high readiness is the lagging provision of things like vital spare parts, technical manuals and ground support equipment. Peters cited the 2003 introduction of the Marine Corps’ UH-1Y Venom helicopter to replace the UH-1N in Afghanistan and Iraq. He said the UH-1Y deployed with inadequate spare parts, manuals and ground support equipment as the Navy continued to buy the aircraft while shorting the necessary support.

“We are mesmerized by quantities,” Peters said, explaining that Congress often is focused more on the aircraft – the “above-line costs” – rather than the supporting items – the “below-line” costs.

“This is just not the way to align our fleet,” he said.

The admiral said the Navy is establishing a new program

executive office for common parts, such as radios and other systems used in multiple platforms, with a civilian program executive officer, to raise the procurement of such systems to a higher visibility.

He pointed out that throwing money and spare parts at the Navy is not going to solve the readiness problem, but that the sea service needed to change its way of fostering reliability and maintenance, balancing sustainment with new capability.

Peters praised fleet readiness centers for their progress in improving the readiness of Navy and Marine Corps aircraft. The Navy consulted with airlines to see what they did to sustain high aircraft availability. He said that every supporting function had to own the outcome.

"It's really about bringing accountability to everyone involved," the admiral said.

One factor in improvement was bringing the management, planning, logistics and maintenance all at the same site.

Peters said the Navy established a reliability control board to identify the factors that degrade aircraft readiness.

For one example, the Navy found that a component of the E-2D's APY-9 radar was lasting only 600 hours rather than 6,000 hours.

In another example, an F/A-18 that had been inducted into a fleet readiness center had not flown a single hour since it emerged from its last induction six years prior.

Peters said the fleet readiness centers at Naval Air Station (NAS) Lemoore, California, and NAS Oceana, Virginia, delivered 36 F/A-18 strike fighters in fiscal 2019, each of which was completed in 60 days and flown within seven days after delivery.

The 80% readiness goal for the F/A-18 fleet that then-Defense

Secretary Jim Mattis set was met and exceeded by the Navy. The goal of 341 of 550 aircraft to be mission-capable was exceeded, reaching 379 aircraft on Oct. 1.

“People are starting to believe we can do it,” Peters said. “It’s not all about efficiency.”