NAVAIR Commander: Readiness Initiatives Extend to Multiple Aircraft Types

Sailors maneuver an F/A-18E Super Hornet attached to the Royal Maces of Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 27 on the flight deck of the USS Ronald Reagan (CVN 76). The initiatives that increased the mission-capable rates of Super Hornets are being expanded to other types of aircraft. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Quinton A. Lee*

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy has been heralded for the significant progress in increasing the mission-capable rates of its F/A-18E/F Super Hornet strike fighter fleet, but the initiatives that made it possible are not being limited to strike fighters, the admiral in charge of the Naval Air Systems Command (NAVAIR) said.

"It was never meant to be just for Super Hornets," said Vice Adm. Dean Peters, commander, Naval Air Systems Command, speaking May 24 at a webinar preview – sponsored by SAIC and Government Matters – of the Navy League's upcoming 2021 Sea-Air-Space Exposition. "The plan all along was we were going to replicate those across all of our aircraft, so that's every shop within every shop within every depot, all of our intermediate-level maintenance sites, and all of our organizational-level sites at the squadron level."

The admiral said that one of the key elements of the Super Hornet's readiness recovery was the establishment of a Super Hornet maintenance operations center in Norfolk, Virginia, which was able to manage all of the maintenance and resources for the Super Hornet enterprise.

The same effort is being established for the EA-18G Growler electronic combat aircraft, P-8 Poseidon maritime patrol

reconnaissance aircraft, the H-60Seahawk helicopter and the V-22 Osprey tiltrotor transport aircraft, he said.

“Over the last couple of years – from about October 2018, that’s when we had broad efficacy for a number of these sustainment initiatives – we have been able to increase our mission-capable rates by 14%,” Peters said. “That’s 330 additional mission-capable aircraft for our aircrews to train in. So, I see this absolutely trending in the right direction. The readiness is always going to be a concern. Once you get to those readiness levels, you want to be able to sustain it.”

Peters said there were two key aspects of the success.

“The first is establishing the supported and supporting alignment that’s required,” he said. “The air boss at the time, [commander, Naval Air Forces Vice Adm. Dewolfe Miller III], [had a] requirement of 341 Super Hornets,” which Peters said was the metric that mattered and all else was to support that.

Peters also said he “elevated the role of the program managers to be the quarterbacks of the sustainment effort and that’s something we had not done in the past. And the program executive officers are also stepping up to be the sustainment leads for those platforms that are under their purview.

The second key was the use of commercial best practices, Peters said.

“For the last 20 years we missed out on all of the improvements that were going on in commercial aviation,” he said, noting the focus on the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. “Now we have the chance to incorporate some of these associated with how we do maintenance. It’s all about the workflow, the work content and velocity.”

NAVAIR has established the Reliability Control Board, Peters

said, “an all-encompassing effort that identifies improvements in reliability [and] in the maintenance plan, so that’s continually being revised. What we need going forward is just to continue to prioritize. If we can do that, then we will not only sustain readiness levels that we have achieved, but we will also continue to make incremental improvements. We’ll continue to improve lethality and survivability in addition to just the basic mission capability.”