

NAVAIR Commander: With Readiness Improved, a Shift to High-End Lethality



Vice Adm. Dean Peters, commander of Naval Air Systems Command (NAVAIR), shown visiting Naval Surface Warfare Center Corona in this 2019 photo, says NAVAIR is changing its focus to improving the warfighting capabilities of its aircraft. U.S. Navy

ARLINGTON, Va.— With the Navy and Marine Corps aircraft readiness in much better shape than recently of note, the Naval Air Systems Command (NAVAIR) is changing focus to improving the warfighting capabilities of its aircraft for a high-end fight.

“We’re shifting that to lethality,” said Vice Adm. Dean Peters, speaking Dec. 3 in a Defense Forum 2020 webinar sponsored by the U.S. Naval Institute. “We want to build on that. We want to make sure getting after all of those mission systems that are critical to the high-end fight. That’s a deliberate focus of the Air Boss [Vice Adm. Kenneth Whitesell, commander, Naval Air Forces] and of DCA [Deputy Commandant for Aviation Lt. Gen. Mark R. Wise]: lethality, survivability, all of those things we need for the high-end fight.”

Peters said that NAVAIR has been restructured to a mission-aligned organization from a functionally aligned organization.

“A lot of things that you do in a functionally aligned organization are institutional, and you are very focused on maintaining the sanctity of your technical responsibilities,” he said, “But that doesn’t necessarily translate into being able to maneuver quickly to attack problems.

"We've had a very significant and a very deliberate pivot towards readiness," he said. We lost focus as resources did become constrained and we had to re-cultivate this sense of health of naval aviation. We've done that over the last couple of years and we're not where we need to be by any measure. We do have some challenges but, starting at the beginning of the fiscal year '19 and ending at the end of fiscal year '20, we really increased the mission capability of our platforms dramatically."

The Navy and Marine Corps have 300 more aircraft that are mission-capable today than they did at the start of fiscal 2018, after then-Defense Secretary James Mattis ordered the services to bring their strike fighter fleet to an 80% mission-capable rate.

Peters said the Naval Aviation Enterprise is "maturing those cutting-edge technologies at our warfare centers. All of this enabled by the structural changes that we made, but it's more than that. It's our work force, really dedicated and talented."