Navy Strategic Systems Official: Hypersonics 'Coming to a Theater Near You'

WASHINGTON – The Navy's Strategic Systems Program (SSP) office is planning two more test flights to demonstrate conventional prompt strike (CPS) capability, a program official said, to capitalize on the first test conducted a year ago.

"Hypersonics is coming to a theater near you," Capt. Doug Williams, the SSP's technical director, said at the third annual Triad conference.

"As part of a program of record within the Office of the Secretary of Defense, we [SSP] have been working a hypersonic glide technology demonstration," Williams said. "We called it Flight Experiment No. 1. FE-1 flew about a year ago, Oct. 31. We took an old A3 [Polaris] rocket motor built in the late '80s, made it a stack, and launched it off of Hawaii, flew it a couple thousand miles. It landed at Kwaj [Kwajalein Atoll].

"It was brilliant. The whole time we had telemetry pumping down. We saw everything in a virtual model, real time, and it was one of those things that makes your hair on the back of your neck stand up. And you stand up as you see the body do what the body did and the body land exactly where it was supposed to land. It was awesome," he said.

Williams said that hypersonics is the No. 1 priority of Michael D. Griffin, undersecretary of defense for research and engineering.

"We're leaning forward," Williams said. "We have two more experiments to fly. We are working with the Office of the Secretary of Defense and with ASNRD&A [assistant secretary of the Navy for research, development and acquisition] staff to

understand conventional prompt strike. For the Navy it is going to be indeed a program."

Williams noted that even with the potential of conventional prompt strike, the primary mission of SSP is to provide a nuclear deterrence capability with the Strategic Weapon System. He cautioned that "if we don't do that right, no one is going to care about CPS. We are on a path to ensure that we firewall this conventional capability. That, no doubt, will be a heavy lift. We cannot have CPS drain Trident [the Navy's submarine-launched ballistic missile program]."