VCNO Bullish on Strike Fighter Readiness Goal

Cmdr. Brandon M. Scott, commanding officer of the “Gladiators” of Strike Fighter Wing, VFA-106, (right) discusses hangar conditions with Vice Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Robert P. Burke during a hangar tour at Naval Air Station Oceana. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Mark Thomas Mahmod

ARLINGTON, Va. – The vice chief of naval operations has praised the progress made by the naval aviation F/A-18 Super Hornet strike fighter community in improving its readiness and is optimistic that a readiness goal of 80% will be reached by Oct. 1.

In a blog post Aug. 12 on the Navy Live blog, VCNO Adm. Robert Burke wrote of his recent visit to the commander of Strike Fighter Wing Atlantic and Strike Fighter Squadron 106 (VFA-106) at Naval Air Station Oceana, Virginia, “to get a firsthand look at the changes to aviation maintenance practices and to gain insight on the challenges and priorities of aviators and maintainers,” he said. VFA-106 is the East Coast fleet replacement squadron for the F/A-18 community.

“It has been less than a year since the Navy set out to restore strike fighter readiness rates to 80%, and the one-year deadline of Oct. 1 is

approaching," Burke said. "For the aviation community, the endeavor to increase the mission-capable rate of F/A-18E/F Super Hornets posed a challenge that naval aviation leadership attacked with fervor."

Burke was referring to the directive from then-Defense Secretary Jim Mattis to the U.S. Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force to increase the readiness rates of its fighter communities to 80% by Oct. 1. The services had been experiencing readiness rates lower that 50% that had negatively affected numbers of mission-capable aircraft, flight hours for pilots and pilot morale and retention.

Burke said that VFA-106 was the most recent squadron "to initiate reforms under the Naval Sustainment System (NSS), starting in April of this year. VFA-106 has the largest inventory of Super Hornets on the flight line, as they are responsible for training newly winged aviators for the fleet.

"In short, this squadron is the largest contributor to the strike fighter readiness recovery," he said. "Since VFA-106 maintenance performance impacts overall Super Hornet readiness status more than any other squadron, the recent implementation of NSS procedures had a significant impact on the overall goal. … VFA-106 learned from the FRS squadron [VFA-125] at NAS Lemoore

who completed early iterations of NSS changes. This rapid learning and improvement drove VFA-106 to reduce maintenance turnover timeframes, raise the average mission capable (MC) aircraft numbers, and return several long-term down aircraft to a flying status."

Burke said he spoke with two junior Sailors who were plane crew chiefs to ask their opinion of the NSS process.

"With pride, they both spoke of ownership, of learning the whole aircraft, well outside of their rating expertise, and of true teamwork," he said. "This is a great example of U.S. Navy Sailors being given tremendous responsibility – and running with it!"

Burke said that VFA-106 "is reaching the point where lack of MC aircraft is no longer a limiting factor to pilot production, even when supporting operations in multiple locations or underway on the aircraft carrier.

"These are powerful results that will ensure we have enough instructors and pilots in the future," he said. "Success at VFA-106 is one example of how the Naval Aviation Enterprise is working together to achieve our 80% readiness goal," Burke said.

"Because NSS addresses all elements of aviation maintenance – people, parts and processes – to make permanent changes that

increase aviation readiness and lethality, we are seeing improvements that are sustainable for the future. Through collaboration and a whole-of-aviation approach, the Naval Aviation Enterprise is on its way to achieve and sustain its readiness goal.”