

Keeping the “Super” in *Super Hornet*

These remarks by the Honorable John Douglass, Assistant Secretary of the Navy (Research, Development and Acquisition) were delivered before the F/A-18E/F Integrated Test Team and Naval Air Systems Command personnel at NAS Patuxent River, Md., on 27 January. Mr. Douglass was introduced by Rear Admiral Jeffrey Cook, Program Executive Officer, Tactical Aircraft Programs, who is responsible for Super Hornet development. RAdm. Cook noted that Mr. Douglass has participated in the reenactment of several Civil War battles in the role of an enlisted man on the front lines.

Being a Civil War reenactor as a private gives you a certain perspective: you're on the bottom of the food chain, instead of the top, and that is really important. I'm probably the first person in this job who came up the ranks, so I have a different outlook than some people in Washington.

I have no prepared remarks. I just want to talk from my heart, because there are some things that are important for me to transmit to you as the leader of the Navy's acquisition program. The first is to tell you how proud I am of you for a lot of reasons. Here are a couple of things to remember when the going gets tough: we are buying fewer ships for our Navy than at any time since 1932, fewer ships than when



Photo by Kevin Flynn

Above, ATC Jeffrey Woell and test pilot Mike Wallace are two members of the testing team working toward the *Super Hornet's* fleet introduction. Opposite, an F/A-18E *Super Hornet* in flight over NAS Patuxent River, Md., is a common sight.

America had 20 to 25 percent of its workforce on welfare during the Great Depression; we also have the smallest fleet since 1917. The difference between that Navy and today's Navy is Naval Aviation.

Naval Aviation is what gives us the fighting punch to do what we have to do everywhere in the world.

It gives us the mobility, the sustainability, the ability to project power throughout the globe based on the freedom of the seas. And when you ask yourself, as a historian or as a person interested in the national security, what is the most

important thing that is happening in Naval Aviation today? The answer is: the people in this room. It's you. It's the F/A-18E/F program.

One thing we all see today is lots of criticism in the media about things like the wing drop and other issues on the *Super Hornet* program. Let me tell you a little bit about that criticism.

First, don't get mad at the press. They're trying to tell it like it is, and when you really read the articles, they aren't treating us that unfairly. The real issue is that this is the first fighter program to go through test and evaluation since the late 1970s. The last one was the F/A-18A/B, and that program did have some problems. The wing had to be completely redesigned in the middle of the test program, the landing gear had to be changed, the ejection seat needed work, and the contract was overrun by more than 60 percent.

The *Super Hornet* program is



John Douglass, Assistant SECNAV.

under cost, on schedule and the airplane is performing the way we want it to. And that's because of you. In 1979 I was a lieutenant colonel in the Air Force, trying to learn how to put cruise missiles

together. Some of the members of the press covering the wing drop were probably in grade school then. They've never covered an issue like this—there are no benchmarks.

The people who have gone through this process before are largely us—the Navy. I was around when the F-117 went through testing. We crashed one of those airplanes. We had some serious problems—the tail broke off in flight on one of the aircraft. Thank God the pilot made it back with only half of the vertical stabilizer. We had to completely redesign the tail. But all of you know what that

airplane did in Desert Storm. I predict that if we hold the course, you'll pick up the paper some morning and see the *Super Hornet* laying ordnance somewhere around the world, defending the United States. The people and the press will be talking about what a superb weapon system it is.

So, the message I want to leave with you is from an old guy who has been there, and I have faith in what you're doing. I believe in you, I'm proud of you, and I know the stress that comes to a team when you read things in a newspaper that seem to be saying you're not doing your job right. Always remember in your hearts, we're the good guys. We're telling the truth. We're doing it right. We're working hard. As long as we are open to questions and analysis, we're going to come through this situation okay with our heads held high. I've been where you are and know how you feel.

Keep your spirits up. Believe in each other. Help each other. Have faith that you're doing the right thing. ✈

Mr. Douglass's remarks were edited for *Naval Aviation News*.



Photo by Erik Hildebrandt