

Netting Naval Aviation for the Information Age

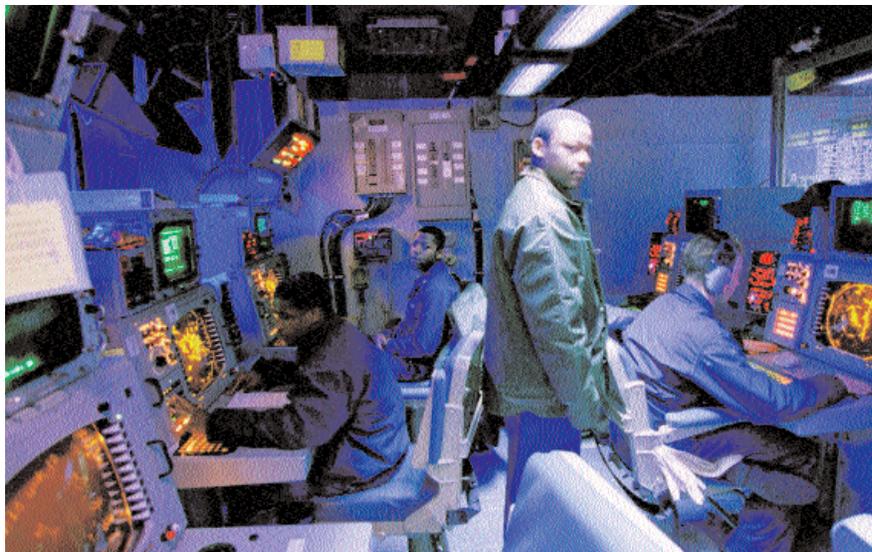
By RAdm. John Nathman
Director, Air Warfare

As this article goes to press, we have just concluded an OPNAV-sponsored conference focused on how to “net” naval expeditionary forces for decisive power projection in the information age. As we begin the year 2000, few of our goals hold greater promise for future warfighting capability for Sailors and Marines than implementing network centric warfare (NCW) in the fleet. We have made great progress toward achieving this revolution in combat effects, which, in combination with the ongoing revolution in strike capabilities, will form the foundation of decisive naval power in the 21st century.

Where’s the fight and how will we fight?

It is clear that we will fight from the world’s littorals through maritime dominance and landward power projection, namely, by exploiting two warfighting revolutions that are currently underway. First, the revolution in strike warfare combines advances in the capability, reliability and maintainability of our tactical platforms with the increased accuracy and efficiency of new-generation precision weaponry to increase air wing striking power. Second, the revolution of network centric warfare will build on our increased striking capabilities. A fully netted naval force will allow increased tempo of operations, responsiveness and combat effectiveness with lower risks and costs.

Recent milestones show our progress toward completing the revolution in strike warfare in the first decade of the new century. For



PH3 Donne McKissic

OS2 Terrjon R. Faison, center, monitors information systems in the Combat Direction Center aboard *Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN 71). Network centric warfare will ensure that information gets to the right place at the right time.

example, in Operation Allied Force armed P-3 *Orions*, many of which were equipped with the Antisurface Warfare Improvement Program upgrade, provided continuous battle force defense. This allowed unrestricted employment of other naval strike platforms for landward power projection.

Other examples include the declaration in October 1999 of early operational capability for the Joint Direct Attack Munition, followed shortly by its successful employment in Operation Southern Watch. Full initial operational capability of this tremendous weapon is expected by April 2000. In November 1999 the F/A-18E/F *Super Hornet*, the centerpiece of the strike warfare revolution, completed its operational evaluation with the expectation of a superb final report in mid-February. November

also saw the operational debut of the Standoff Land Attack Missile, Expanded Response, which provides significant improvements in range, lethality, survivability, mission planning and accuracy, including man-in-the-loop control. Finally, the SH-60R flew for the first time in early December 1999, ahead of schedule, and is progressing smoothly toward a low rate initial production decision scheduled for March 2000.

Why net Naval Aviation?

Network centric warfare is based on the ability of a widely distributed, self-synchronizing force to mass effects when and where desired. Netting our sensors, decision-makers and shooters will leverage our enhanced striking capability by allowing naval expeditionary forces to operate inside the enemy’s

decision cycle. It will enable us to observe, orient, decide and act with great precision and speed to rapidly defeat an adversary's scheme of maneuver and foreclose potential enemy courses of action. In its simplest form, netted warfare is all about getting the right information to the right place at the right time.

Due to the number, range and reach of Naval Aviation's dispersed sensors and weapons platforms, we are in a unique position not only to benefit tremendously from the implementation of network centric warfare, but to actually enable much of this revolution for naval expeditionary forces as a whole. The role of the aircraft carrier as a command and control enabler for battle group operational commanders is arguably as important as our ability to populate sensor and shooter grids with highly capable aircraft or provide critical connectivity to surface-based forces. It is particularly appropriate, therefore, for Naval Aviation to help lead the effort to operationalize the NCW concept.

Implementing Network Centric Warfare

In an August 1999 conference, Naval Aviation's senior warfighters validated network centric warfare as an organizing principle for naval forces and the key to achieving dominant effects. The next step was the Naval Aviation NCW day held in September 1999, in which key organizations defined their responsibilities and the elements needed to fulfill the netted force vision. The consensus was that, above all, we must start moving, beginning with defining an organizational approach, then identifying and tackling an achievable mid-point goal.

The recent OPNAV Network Centric Warfare conference, co-hosted by the directorates for air warfare and surface warfare, built on the momentum of the Naval Aviation NCW day. Participants included representatives from a wide range of resources sponsors and claimancies, including OPNAV and three systems commands. Through Flag-level briefings, shaping discussions and working group deliberations, we developed a strategy to adopt a continuum approach—looking at warfighting functions end-to-end, from planning and coordination to force control to engagement—with particular emphasis on facilitating rapid decision-making by the operational commander. Further, it was recommended to focus our efforts on enabling time critical strike (TCS) as an achievable mid-point goal. TCS engages every resource sponsor and has warfighting impact for all naval expeditionary forces, and involves processes and capabilities along the continuum from planning to engagement. Solving TCS within the context of netted warfare will “pressurize the system”—OPNAV, systems commands, doctrine commands and the fleet—and will be a potential catalyst for broad implementation of NCW.

Recent messages from battle group and numbered fleet commanders highlight the success of early initiatives to more fully leverage information technology to enhance speed of command and combat effects. Many of our Sailors and Marines have glimpsed the promise of a fully netted force in these initiatives during real-world operations and fleet battle experiments. The watchwords for network centric warfare in 2000 are “move out” as we focus our efforts on time critical strike and develop a deployable prototype system for near-term testing through the fleet battle experiment process.



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