

Super Hornet Success Story— Only the Beginning



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As this edition of *Naval Aviation News* goes to press, the report of the operational evaluation (OPEVAL) of the F/A-18E/F *Super Hornet* has just been released. After more than three and a half years of flight testing and six months of rigorous operational evaluation, the Commander, Operational Test and Evaluation Force has declared the F/A-18E/F to be operationally effective and operationally suitable, the highest endorsement a program can receive. The *Super Hornet* program has been called the most successful acquisition program in recent history, remaining within every fiscal requirement directed by Congress and delivering aircraft on time.

The *Super Hornet* places Naval Aviation in the vanguard of both the revolution in strike warfare and the implementation of network centric warfare it is a key element to transforming naval expeditionary forces to be truly decisive in the 21st century. Both in a maritime dominance role and, particularly, when projecting power landward from the littoral, the F/A-18E/F's ability to penetrate, deliver and survive will be critical to battlespace shaping and dominance. From build-

ing a common tactical picture to triumph in air combat, from deep strike to close air support, the *Super Hornet* is a first-day-of-the-war as well as a level-of-effort strike fighter. Its presence on our flight decks will also enhance the capability and effectiveness of existing platforms and truly complement Navy tactical air concepts of operation.

Also announced recently was receipt by the Boeing Company, Hornet Industry Team, and U.S. Navy of the prestigious Robert J. Collier Trophy for 1999, presented by the National Aeronautics Association. Established in 1911, the trophy is awarded each year in recognition of the greatest achievement in aeronautics and astronautics in America. The trophy, on permanent display at the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C., is considered the greatest and most prized of aeronautical honors in America. That this award only occasionally recognizes achievement in a military-related aircraft development program indicates just how significant the *Super Hornet* program's success is.

From an operator's perspective, the true importance of

the OPEVAL report, though, is that it marks the beginning of the *Super Hornet* story for the fleet. Today, VFA-122, the F/A-18E/F fleet replacement squadron, is hard at work training the trainers as the squadron's instructor pilots prepare for the first two CAT I (first-tour) students slated to start training on 29 May. In just over two years, the first operational cruise of the *Super Hornet* will take place when VFA-115 embarks with Carrier Air Wing 14 aboard *Abraham Lincoln* (CVN 72).

The *Super Hornet* delivers key warfighting capabilities into the hands of the fleet aviators who sit at the controls. They will be able to destroy targets up to 40 percent farther from the aircraft carrier and deliver weapons to these targets with far greater accuracy, deepening the littoral battlespace and increasing our lethality. Payload flexibility includes two additional stations to carry new-generation precision weaponry, fuel tanks and tactical pods, and the *Super Hornet* can return to the carrier with three times the weapons payload, saving precious and costly ordnance for future use. Incorporation of stealth technology and other techniques into the *Super Hornet* provides a five-fold improvement in survivability compared with our current strike-fighter forces. The bottom line is that these characteristics combine to allow the destruction of targets at over twice the rate of our current fleet, giving our warfighters a decisive tactical edge.



Capt. Dana

Opposite, an F/A-18F prepares to trap aboard Harry S. Truman. Above, Super Hornets wait on the ramp during operational evaluation.

Additional internal volume, electrical power and cooling allows the incorporation of new technologies to keep ahead of future threats. Several of these technologies are already funded for development and early inclusion. They include the Active Electronically Scanned Array radar, Integrated Defensive Electronic Countermeasures, Advanced Tactical Forward-Looking Infrared, Shared Reconnaissance Pod, and the Multi-functional Information Distribution System, which provides connectivity for and display of LINK-16 information. And these represent only the first generation of upgrades to this versatile airframe.

The capabilities the *Super Hornet* brings to the fight are at the very heart of the effort to redefine the ability to project power from the sea. The successful completion of OPEVAL means that these capabilities will soon be entrusted to the men and women of Naval Aviation, who will ultimately be the ones to write the real story of *Super Hornet* success.



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