

Interview with SECNAV:

On Glide Slope

The Honorable John H. Dalton, Secretary of the Navy (SECNAV), provided Naval Aviation News his thoughts on issues important to the Naval Aviation community.

NANews: You recently had an opportunity to visit both contractor teams building prototypes of the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF). What's your assessment of the program? What does the schedule look like for JSF development, both near and long term?

SECNAV: The government-industry teams are working extremely well. I was impressed by both Boeing and Lockheed Martin's efforts to



Joint Strike Fighter/Boeing Co.



Joint Strike Fighter/
Lockheed Martin

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The Honorable John H. Dalton, Secretary of the Navy

leverage their current commercial technology into the tri-service JSF program. Reducing costs and gaining greater efficiencies in manufacturing processes are a way of life today; these processes would have been unthinkable just a few years ago. The manufacturing technology maturity is very impressive. For example, high-speed machining and composite manufacturing are allowing the manufacture of one part or many parts without retooling. This saves tremendous overhead costs. New technologies are permitting us to build aircraft that are better, cost less and weigh less.

Engine testing is scheduled to begin in April for both the Boeing X-32 and Lockheed Martin X-35. Aircraft rollout is scheduled for spring 1999. The first flight will be in March 2000, and a contractor/design selection is scheduled for March 2001. Our current plan calls for the JSF to enter the fleet in 2008 to 2010.

Where do the F/A-18E/F *Super Hornet* and JSF fit into the Naval Aviation Master Plan?

Simply, the F/A-18E will replace the F/A-18C and the F/A-18F will replace the F-14 *Tomcat*. However, the importance of the *Super Hornet's* role in the Naval Aviation Master Plan is more complicated.

The Revolution in Military Affairs has been of great benefit to us, but its down side is that our potential adversaries may be able to obtain advanced capabilities that would have a disproportionate effect against our forces. By building the F/A-18E/F, which takes a balanced approach to both survivability and lethality, we will do more than replace old design with new. We will build a capabilities-based weapons system. The *Super Hornet* embodies this approach and also has room for growth to meet future threats. The F/A-18E/F, our highest priority pro-

gram, is our "day one" strike fighter. It is fully capable against all expected threats well into the 21st century, and will complement the JSF when it enters the fleet.

The JSF is a continuation of the capabilities-based design. It will keep Naval Aviation ahead of the threat in the 21st century.

For the Marine Corps, the JSF will replace both the F/A-18C/D and the AV-8B *Harrier*.

Describe the composition of the 21st century flight deck.

The deck of our new carriers needs to be comparable in size to the *Nimitz*-class flight deck for both peacetime and combat flight operations. I can easily envision many scenarios where a carrier battle group may have to take the fight to the enemy by itself. The large flight deck will give the battle group commander the option of adding extra

strike aircraft to the deployed air wing.

The “flexible air wing” of the 21st century will consist of a mix of multimission aircraft, with three squadrons of F/A-18E/Fs and one squadron with the Joint Strike Fighter. We are still in the process of evaluating the Common Support Aircraft (CSA), the follow-on for the E-2 *Hawkeye*/C-2 *Greyhound* and the S-3 *Viking*/ES-3 *Shadow*. The CSA will combine four aircraft types into one. This is a balanced approach to make the program more affordable, while increasing per-unit lethality. The EA-6B *Prowler* will serve as the joint electronic warfare platform until approximately 2010–2015. We are currently studying alternatives for the EA-6B follow-on. Our Helicopter Master Plan will reduce our helicopter force from seven types/models/series to two: the SH-60R *Seahawk* and CH-60. Our carriers will see a squadron of multimission SH-60R “armed helos” with robust antisubmarine warfare, anti-surface warfare and combat search and rescue capabilities.

How is the F/A-18E/F testing going? Specifically, what is your assessment of the wing drop problem?

The program is on schedule, below cost and, most importantly, on performance. We will complete engineering manufacturing development testing in November of this year. To date, we have achieved 2,100 flight hours and 1,350 flights. We are on schedule to enter operational evaluation in May 1999.

There has been a lot said recently about challenges with the *Super Hornet* test program, but I’m confident that the team we have in place will meet all those challenges and deliver a first-rate airplane—well tested and ready to go—to the fleet. The F/A-18E/F carrier qualified almost a year ago and is in the process of completing weapons carriage and release tests. The program passed the phase of operational testing that verified the effectiveness and operational suitability of the

Super Hornet. We are still on track for fleet introduction in 2001.

There are no show stoppers in the F/A-18E/F program. Much has been made of issues that are pretty typical for the development of a new aircraft. The *Super Hornet* has overcome much larger challenges than the wing drop problem. On a scale of 1 to 10—with 10 being the worst—wing drop is a 2 or 3; we have already resolved issues in the 4 to 5 range. This is precisely why we conduct engineering, manufacturing and development programs!

The National Defense Panel report recommended acceleration of the next-generation carrier (CVX) program. Would you comment on CVN-77 and CVX?

Every day we are seeing the utility of unconstrained forward air power from the sea. We currently are able to keep two carriers in the Persian Gulf to respond to short-fused situations. Not keeping a total force of 12 carriers would severely strain our force structure and would require us to gap global commitments. Our nation needs to keep its carrier force robust, relevant and affordable. CVN-77 is our technology stepping stone to CVX. For a program as large as an aircraft carrier, we need to make a smart transition to a new generation of carriers. We need to know what is going to work and not work before we incorporate innovations and new technologies into CVX. CVN-77 is the first carrier of the 21st century and is the low-risk way to transition to the next-generation carrier. CVX will incorporate innovations and new technologies that will reduce the total cost of ownership and make us more lethal.

Turning to the Marine Corps side of the house, can you give us your thoughts on the MV-22 *Osprey* program and its future role?

The MV-22 is the key enabler of the Marine Corps’ “Operational Maneuver from the Sea” strategy, and will give the Marines a quantum leap forward in combat and logisti-

cal capabilities. The Quadrennial Defense Review recommended that we increase by 11 the MV-22 buy over the future year defense plan. The MV-22 is performing well, and low-rate initial production for the first fleet aircraft has begun. To date, MV-22s have completed 1,150 hours and logged over 1,378 flights.

Please discuss the current aviator retention climate.

As with all such concerns, we are going to the deck plates to determine the right answer for our people *and* for our combat readiness. Though measurement methods did not show a major decline in retention last year, we had anecdotal indicators that we were on the edge of a retention challenge. The Aviation Retention Working Group was formed last year to look into some of the statistical and anecdotal retention issues. The group visited all of the major continental U.S. shore installations to pulse the fleet and let them know what we were doing to address their concerns. Indicators this year are showing a decreased bonus take rate and increased resignation rate. The booming economy and airline hiring coupled with the end of the Cold War makes it tempting for an aviator to leave the service. We also realize that there are some professional and quality-of-life issues we can address to make staying in the Navy easier. Last year, we increased funding for readiness accounts, increased the bonus, increased flight pay at year 14, and we are currently exploring a Thrift Savings Plan. These are just a few of the issues we are working to improve professional and personal quality of life. We are committed to working these issues to improve retention. We’ll make it better!

What is the long-term prognosis for Aviation Continuation Pay (ACP), and the Selective Reenlistment Bonus (SRB) for enlisted aviation ratings?

The last four years have seen a decrease in the take rate for ACP, especially among tactical air

(TACAIR) pilots. So far this year, our total take rate of those eligible is about 19 percent; for TACAIR pilots, the take rate is about 11 percent. Though ACP has been around for a while, we are currently studying other ways to improve retention. As yet, we've made no decision on the future of ACP.

As for SRB, it is targeted at those ratings experiencing serious undermanning or which have high replacement costs and a reasonable prospect of improvement in retention to justify the cost of the bonus. Aviation ratings compete with the rest of the enlisted ratings for their share of available funds. Currently, 11 of 20 aviation ratings and selected Naval Enlisted Classifications receive some form of SRB. In the future, we expect to increase the percentage of those personnel reenlisting who receive some level of SRB. Currently at 28 percent in FY 98 (\$80M), we are increasing to 32 percent in FY 99 (\$82.1M) and intend to increase that percentage nearer to the pre-drawdown level of 41 percent for FY 00 and beyond. Aviation ratings will receive a portion of the increase. SRB is an important tool in improving retention, a must as we transition to a steady state Navy.

How can Naval Aviation recruit and retain the best and brightest when the airlines are hiring?

In officer recruiting, we made our pilot goal but missed our Naval Flight Officer mark by 45 last year. As I mentioned previously, we are seeing a decrease in the bonus take rate, which is an indicator of potential future retention shortfalls. Though current retention is within

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F/A-18F photo by AR Adam Planz

manageable levels, we are taking proactive measures NOW to improve retention. The airlines and industry are currently in a hiring boom, and we can never hope to compete with them on a dollar-for-dollar basis. I still firmly believe, however, that we offer a more exciting, challenging life for someone who wants to fly. It is Naval Aviation's unique challenges combined with the quality-of-life improvements we are constantly working that will keep the best and brightest involved in Naval Air.

In enlisted recruiting, Naval Aviation has been very successful in reaching the target goals. Aviation is a popular field to enter, and we are able to achieve both the quantity and quality of Sailors we require. Enlisted aviation retention is above Navy average, with SRB targeted at those areas needing improvement. Though airlines have drawn away



PHCS(SW) Terry Cosgrove

some enlisted personnel, we do not forecast the same shortages seen on the officer side.

What are your thoughts on the Navy's current readiness position?

Our forward-deployed forces are on station and ready. There is no question that our forces can and will be able to respond and prevail when called upon today. The post-Cold War era has forced us to refocus on warfare areas that are relevant to today's environment. Post-Cold War "rightsizing" has caused some turbulence in funding our readiness accounts. Last year, we made a major decision to beef up our readiness accounts to keep our forward deployers ready. We have experienced some decrease in nondeployed readiness, but have tried to keep our forces at the tip of the spear ready.

As we emerge from this adjustment period, I am absolutely confident that our people, mission, equipment and overall capability are exactly what we need for the challenges of the 21st century. Naval Aviation is blessed with talented and dedicated people to answer the call of our great Navy and nation. I am extremely proud of them.

