Boeing Super Hornet Enters Operational Evaluation

ST. LOUIS, May 28, 1999 The nation's newest strike fighter, the F/A-18E/F Super Hornet, entered operational evaluation (OPEVAL) with the U.S. Navy yesterday. OPEVAL is scheduled to last six months and will be conducted by an all-Navy independent test team from Air Test and Evaluation Squadron Nine (VX-9). VX-9 is under the command of Navy Capt. John Stivers at Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake, Calif.

"We evaluate the aircraft to determine how it fits into real-world operations," said VX-9 OPEVAL Test Director Cmdr. Jeff Penfield. "Operational pilots look at things differently than flight test pilots. If I take the Super Hornet into battle tomorrow, how would the aircraft perform?"

When testing is complete, a full evaluation will be forwarded to Navy leadership with recommendations as to whether the Super Hornet is operationally effective and operationally suitable. "The final report is much like a report card," explained Penfield. "You can expect a variety of grades on it."

VX-9 is beginning a rigorous series of tests to assess the aircraft's performance in all mission areas with five production model Super Hornets. The next two production aircraft Boeing delivers to the Navy also will ferry to China Lake, bringing the total number of OPEVAL aircraft to seven -- three single-seat E-models and four two-seat

F-models. During testing, a 22-member air crew contingent consisting of 14 pilots and eight weapon systems officers will fly about 700 sorties in the F/A-18E/F. Another 70 Navy personnel are responsible for maintaining the OPEVAL aircraft.

The Super Hornet is the newest version of the combat-proven F/A-18 Hornet. Both the E and F models offer longer range, greater endurance, more payload-carrying ability, more powerful engines, increased carrier bringback capability, enhanced survivability and the growth potential to incorporate future systems and technologies to meet emerging threats.

An industry team led by Boeing builds the Super Hornet. Boeing builds the forward fuselage and wings, and conducts final assembly. Northrop Grumman Corp. is the principal airframe subcontractor, building the center and aft fuselage. General Electric Co. manufactures the F414 engines, and Raytheon Co. produces the APG-73 radar.

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