

Remarks by Donald C. Winter  
Secretary of the Navy  
EA-18G GROWLER Acceptance Ceremony  
Naval Air Station Whidbey Island  
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Congressman Larsen, Mr. Albaugh, Commodore Russell, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for inviting me to witness this landmark event in aviation history.

Today marks a culmination point in a largely untold success story that began more than 17 years ago.

In February 1991, as the first Gulf War was unfolding in its early stages, the Russians were watching Allied air operations very closely.

And with alarm.

The air defense system around Baghdad—built with Soviet help—was reputed to be seven times more lethal than the one deployed around Hanoi at the height of the Vietnam War, and twice as capable as the one found in Eastern Europe in the waning days of the Cold War.

And yet, U.S. air power seemed to have completely neutralized Iraq's air defense, achieving air supremacy unlike any that had ever been achieved before.

Looking on in February 1991, Soviet Colonel Mikhail Ponomarev wrote the following classic example of understatement:

“The use of radio-electronic combat is, for the first time in the history of warfare, being used in such a wide scale that it has seriously complicated the conduct of air defense.”

Complicated indeed.

The conduct of air defense has just gotten a bit more complicated again today with our fleet's acceptance of the first EA-18-G GROWLER.

The truth is, warfighters in the VAQ community were unsung heroes during the first Gulf War, and they continue to provide combat leverage to a degree that is mostly unknown to those outside the professional defense circle.

The Electronic Attack community has been heavily engaged in the Global War on Terror from the very beginning.

In addition to its continuous support for afloat carrier forces, it maintains three EA—6B squadrons deployed to the Central Command AOR, providing electronic attack to support our ground forces in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

This community has also provided critical Electronic Warfare expertise on the ground, and EW's are universally considered by our commanders to be worth their weight in gold.

They are indispensable to what we do, and I salute all of the Electronic Warfare Individual Augmentees who have been star performers throughout this war.

This community has been at the forefront of the critical changes taking place fleet-wide as we transition to 21<sup>st</sup> century warfighting methods across the board.

It is highly illustrative—although perhaps not surprising—that right after the first Gulf War, the EA-6B community changed its mission focus from electronic counter-measures to electronic attack.

After blazing an electronic path to the target, EA-6 pilots have prepared the airspace for their aviation brethren to put bombs on target.

Their engagement is the key to successful air attack, and because of their indispensable role, demand for their services routinely exceeds what can be provided.

Indeed, the feeling of most F-18 pilots is that there is no such thing as having too many Prowlers—and their eagerness for the GROWLER to come online is a telling indicator of this new aircraft's capabilities.

Seven years after the Navy selected the EA-18G to replace the EA-6B Prowler, the Growler has arrived—on cost and ahead of schedule.

At a time when most acquisition news focuses on problems and setbacks, I am pleased to note that this has been a success story, and an excellent example of Navy-contractor teamwork and collaboration.

By leveraging and evolving legacy programs—the F-18 as a platform and significant payload components from the EA-6B, this program now stands as a model case of what can be achieved.

Furthermore, because we have used the F-18 as a platform, we have enhanced the flexibility and responsiveness of this aircraft.

Its multi-mission profile is unique in the field, and the value of that innovation is

much anticipated in the fleet.

The full extent of the Growler's extraordinary capabilities cannot be disclosed, but we can say that this next generation aircraft is in a class by itself, combining Airborne Electronic Attack with the newest technologies that belong to the Super Hornet Block II.

The electronic attack community came of age over Iraqi skies 17 years ago, and today, with the GROWLER, it is poised to once again forge a game-changing path in the history of air warfare.

This platform is a direct threat to current and potential enemies, and it represents a quantum advance in warfare capability in the electronic domain.

The flexibility and capability of the Growler meets the challenges of today's threat environment, and it will serve us well far into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Today we are fighting a war against an enemy that actually celebrates the deaths of innocents, and that works to destroy the achievements of civilization that has taken centuries to build.

The cost is high, and touches all of us.

Just last month, Lieutenant Jeffrey Ammon of Bangor was killed in an attack in Afghanistan by just such an enemy.

A submariner with tremendous engineering expertise, Lieutenant Ammon was serving at the Provincial Reconstruction Team in Ghazni when he was killed by a roadside bomb.

He died while serving heroically in a noble cause.

We mourn his loss and we honor his sacrifice.

The successful delivery of the Growler today is part of the answer to the terrible losses and suffering of this war and every war, and this aircraft will play a key role in providing us with a decisive advantage against our adversaries.

All of those involved in making this day possible deserve our gratitude for a job well done—from the contractors to the program managers to all the hard-working members of the electronic warfare community.

While today's event is a celebration of an impressive achievement in hardware, it is the people who fly and maintain our systems who really make the difference.

The superior skills of our Sailors and Marines are the greatest qualitative

differentiator we have over our adversaries.

And it is the Sailors and Marines' dedication to duty, their service, and their professionalism that keeps us safe and defends a great Nation.

Thank you, and may God continue to bless America.