NAWCAD engineers expedite KC-46 refueling clearance for Super Hornets

By Paul Lagasse
Naval Test Wing Atlantic Communications

A group of Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division engineers recently expedited a flight clearance for F/A-18 E/F Super Hornets to conduct aerial refueling from Air Force KC-46A Pegasus tanker aircraft in response to an urgent request from a West Coast Navy fighter squadron. Thanks to their collective efforts, the clearance was approved in just five days and is now available to the entire fleet.

May 30, a Saturday, had been a quiet day for Naval Test Wing Atlantic flight test technical specialist Chris Nickell until he received an email from an officer in Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 136 “Knighthawks.” The squadron had been on an extended deployment aboard the USS Harry S. Truman (CVN 75) in the Atlantic, the email said, and were preparing to rotate home to Naval Air Station Lemoore, California. If the squadron could refuel in the air, they would not have to quarantine upon their arrival home. The Knighthawks had identified an Air Force KC-46A tanker squadron that would be able to rendezvous with them. But were Super Hornets cleared to refuel off the tankers’ Centerline Drogue System, or CDS?

“At the time, the testing had already been completed and the Aircraft Systems & Aerial Refueling team was writing reports, but our final report hadn’t been approved and accepted by the flight clearance authorities yet,” Nickell recalled. “I asked him when the squadron would be returning and he said June 5, which was less than a week away.”

With no time to waste, Nickell began corralling Navy F/A-18 subject matter experts and Air Force engineers who specialized in all aspects done. Mitigations are also applied to public areas and spaces with potentially high-risk patrons like the Commissary and the Child Development Centers.”

Keeping people safe through continued restrictions

Although the health protection condition is now at Bravo and some Pax River facilities have reopened, there are still restrictions and guidelines in place to minimize contact between individuals.

“The biggest restriction for most people is that the Trusted Traveler Program is still suspended. The whole reason that was suspended was to minimize people sharing a confined space — a car — from coming onto the installation,” Paulsen noted. “You can still bring visitors on base, but you have to go through the Visitor Control Center to get a pass and there are limitations. And there are still requirements for social distancing and wearing masks — and wearing masks onboard Pax River is non-negotiable.”

Bray agrees that wearing a face covering is the simplest, most effective way to reduce the transmission of COVID-19.

“There is overwhelming evidence from population studies that wearing a mask is effective; it’s the single best intervention for interfering with transmission,” the doctor stated. “Wearing the mask protects others from our breath particles and it’s enormously effective if you look at the evidence, so it’s amazing to me how controversial it is. It’s a difficult behavioral change for some people, but we’re fortunate to have a controlled environment on base where it can be mandated.”

In addition to pushing the message of wearing masks, washing hands and physically distancing, another important component in battling the virus is contact tracing.

“Whenever there’s a positive case identified, we’ll do a case contact investigation, which is an evaluation of who was in close contact with that person,” Bray said. “We do it so those people can be separated from everyone else. We think up to 50% of cases come from people who are

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Behind the scenes of Pax River’s ongoing COVID-19 response

Emergency and public health personnel advise, assist leadership

By Donna Cipolloni
NAS Patuxent River Public Affairs

With most NAS Patuxent River personnel currently teleworking, it may appear quiet, but there are many people whose jobs have ramped up onboard the installation during the COVID-19 crisis; two of those individuals being Pat Paulsen, the Emergency Management Officer, and Dr. Patricia Bray, the Public Health Emergency Officer.

Directing the Pax River Emergency Operations Center (EOC), it is Paulsen’s job to oversee the management and dissemination of information, which involves meeting frequently with NAS leadership and other core partners like security, fire and emergency services, public affairs, and public works, to name a few.

“We have update briefings which include lots of commanders from our tenant commands,” Paulsen explained. “It started out daily, then three times a week, now we meet twice a week. We mirror the frequency of the same meetings Naval District Washington is having. On the side, the [NAS] commanding officer, executive officer, and command master chief also meet with their counterparts almost as frequently — some of it is formal, some informal. There are a lot of emails and phone conversations going on to make sure we’re all communicating and have the same understanding of the situation and what we’re trying to do.”

Also involved in the EOC meetings, Bray serves to medically advise NAS Commanding Officer Capt. Christopher Cox whenever there’s a public health emergency, and COVID-19 definitely fits that description.

“I look for ways to help mitigate and implement the guidance that has come from the Navy and public health experts on how we can reduce our risk in the workplace,” said Bray, whose “day job” is an Occupational Health doctor with Naval Health Clinic Patuxent River. “I take that guidance and apply it to our unique workplaces like the radar room, cockpits and machine shops — places where it’s not easy to physically distance and still get the job done. Mitigations are also applied to public areas and spaces with potentially high risk patrons like the Commissary and the Child Development Centers.”

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