

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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<https://oversight.house.gov>

February 6, 2025

Mr. Terence Emmert
Acting Secretary of the United States Navy
1200 Navy Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Acting Secretary Emmert:

The Committee on Oversight and Government Reform is investigating the U.S. Navy's (Navy) efforts to mitigate possible physiological and psychological effects inflicted on certain naval aviators and flight officers, including those within the United States Navy Strike Fighter Tactics Instructor Program (TOPGUN). Additionally, the Committee is investigating an internal Navy project aimed at evaluating these issues, code-named "Project Odin's Eye."¹ While elite and highly trained naval aviators and flight officers understand the high-stress, high-stakes missions they will undergo to safeguard American national security, it is imperative to ensure the warfighter has full and accurate information about health risks and the tools, both mental and physical, to safeguard their health.

Recent public reporting revealed concerns among current and former Navy personnel about the possible prevalence of brain injuries among naval aviators and flight officers.² Further, public reporting reveals that three F-18 Super Hornet pilots died by suicide following symptoms of traumatic brain injuries (TBI) that are possibly connected to their time as naval aviators.³ Additional reported symptoms for aviators and flight officers include confusion, anxiety, depression, memory loss, and mood swings.

Project Odin's Eye, reportedly initiated without formal approval from Navy Medical and Air Commands, raises additional questions about the Navy's knowledge of potential issues and whether it is acting to mitigate these issues in a comprehensive and effective manner. While the Project's aim is to better understand the impacts of high-speed flight operations on the human brain, it is concerning that Navy command may not be fully aware of its existence.⁴

To better understand to what extent the Navy has, or has not, evaluated and addressed concerning physiological and psychological injuries for naval aviators and flight officers, please

¹ Dave Phillips, *Top-Gun Navy Pilots Fly at the Extremes. Their Brains May Suffer*, THE N.Y. TIMES (Dec. 8, 2024).

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Id.*

make arrangements to schedule a briefing with Committee staff on this matter as soon as possible, but no later than February 13, 2025.

Additionally, please provide the following documents and information as soon as possible, but no later than, February 20, 2025:

1. A list of current policies, procedures, and handbooks for identifying, documenting, and treating TBIs and other psychological and physiological conditions among naval aviators and flight officers;
2. A list of all current mental health resources made available to naval aviators and flight officers;
3. The total number of mental health professionals assigned to evaluate aviators and flight officers;
4. All official and unofficial studies performed by the Navy or the Department of Defense (DoD) on the mental and physical impacts of flight operations on all naval aviators and flight officers;
5. All studies performed by any third-party contractor and/or organization on the mental and physical impacts of flight operations on all naval aviators and flight officers;
6. A copy of Project Odin's Eye – including all documents, communications, and drafts of Project Odin's Eye including but not limited to any research protocols, funding information, and a list of DoD officials overseeing the project;
7. All command and safety investigations from the last ten years related to TBIs of all naval aviators and flight officers – including all documents and communications between Navy Medical and Air Commands and/or any communications involving Navy Special Warfare Command and/or higher-level DoD offices regarding Project Odin's Eye;
8. All data on reported neurological injuries or related symptoms among all naval aviators and flight officers in the past ten years;
9. An estimated cost incurred by the Navy to fully train each TOPGUN aviator.

To schedule the briefing, arrange to deliver requested documents, or to ask any related follow-up questions, please contact the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform Majority staff at 202-225-5074.

The Committee on Oversight and Government Reform is the principal oversight committee of the U.S. House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate, “any matter” at “any time” under House Rule X. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Mr. Terence Emmert
February 6, 2025
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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Comer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping "J" and "C".

James Comer
Chairman
Committee on Oversight and Accountability

cc: The Honorable Gerald Connolly, Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform