EA-18G Growler Returns to the Skies Five Years After a Mid-Air Collision



EA-18G Growler 515, assigned to Electronic Attack Squadron (VAQ) 129, is refurbished at Naval Air Station Whidbey Island (NASWI). The aircraft flew its functional check flight on Oct. 17, 2022 at NASWI and will be reentered into service with a forward-deployable squadron in the near future. *U.S. NAVY*

WHIDBEY ISLAND, Wash. – An EA-18G Growler attached to Electronic Attack Squadron (VAQ) 129, successfully completed a functional check flight at Naval Air Station (NAS) Whidbey Island, Oct. 17, marking the end of a complex transformation process for an aircraft thought to be beyond repair, Commander Naval Air Forces Public Affairs said in an Oct. 2 release. This five-year effort demonstrates large-scale teamwork

between multiple organizations over an extended timeline.

The aircraft, then attached to the “Wizards” of VAQ-133, was involved in a mid-air collision with another aircraft attached to Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 2 at NAS Fallon during a training event on Sept. 14, 2017. Both aircraft landed safely and the aircrew were uninjured. The Growler remained at NAS Fallon for several years, as refurbishment of this nature had never been done before and there were no processes or procedures on exactly how the repairs could be completed.

Upon initial inspection, there was little hope the aircraft would be fit to fly due to the complexity of the repairs required following the mishap, as well as weather damage from years of sitting in a desert environment. However, after thorough analysis and continued coordination, the Growler’s road to recovery began when clearance for repair was granted in 2021. In February of that year, the aircraft was loaded onto a flatbed truck and transferred to the Fleet Replacement Squadron, VAQ-129, at NAS Whidbey Island.

Classified as a “special rework,” funding was approved and a long-term hangar space was identified for the unprecedented project. For more than a year, engineers, maintainers and artisans from facilities across the United States collaborated to develop processes, complete repairs and thoroughly inspect the recovered aircraft – more than 2,000 man hours in total.

“This was a team effort by personnel from Fleet Readiness Center (FRC) Southeast, FRC Southwest Engineering and my team from FRC Northwest,” said Tommy Moore, depot lead for FRC Northwest. “We reassembled the aircraft by replacing all major components and turned the aircraft back over to VAQ-129 as a ‘special rework’ complete on April 24, 2022.”

The Growler will soon be transferred to an operational squadron in order to deploy around the globe and be ready to

conduct flight operations for decades to come. Capt. David Harris, commodore, Electronic Attack Wing Pacific, commended the efforts of the entire Naval Aviation Enterprise in the accomplishment of this first-of-its-kind mission.

“It was truly amazing to watch the entire Naval Aviation Enterprise team come together to get this much-needed asset back up to flight status,” said Harris. “From the engineers who developed the needed repair designs, to the artisans who accomplished the complex repairs, to the VAQ-129 Sailors who ultimately rebuilt the aircraft to a flight status; it was a true team effort.”