FRCSW Bids Farewell to Its Last Legacy Aircraft



FRCSW completes the final maintenance on its last legacy F/A-18 Hornet, marking the end of an era in naval aviation. This milestone celebrates decades of dedication by artisans who kept these aircraft mission-ready.
By: Janina Lamoglia, Oct. 31, 2024

NAVAL AIR STATION NORTH ISLAND, Calif. – Fleet Readiness Center Southwest (FRCSW) has been a pillar of naval aviation maintenance since its establishment in 1919. Over the decades, the facility has supported the U.S. Navy's mission readiness, ensuring iconic aircraft like the F-14 Tomcat, A-6 Intruder, and S-3 Viking remained airworthy. Now, FRCSW signifies a major shift with the final maintenance of its last legacy aircraft – an F/A-18 Hornet.

Introduced in the 1980s, the F/A-18 Hornet has been a versatile and essential asset in naval aviation, serving in major conflicts such as Operation Desert Storm and the Kosovo War. This particular Hornet, designated AQ-99, carries a rich

operational history, symbolizing both the aircraft's role in naval conflicts and the legacy of FRCSW's aircraft maintenance program. "This is monumental for the depot," said Ehren Terbeek, FRCSW Tactical Air Program Manager. "Many artisans here began their careers working on these aircraft, and it's a milestone for everyone involved."

The facility's role in maintaining these legacy aircraft has been extraordinary. Through innovations like the center barrel replacement, FRCSW extended the operational life of the F/A-18 far beyond its original limit of 6000 flight hours, with some Hornets surpassing 9,000 hours. "The aircraft is old so parts were hard to source, and structural repairs were challenging, but our team's skills and knowledge ensured these aircraft kept flying," Terbeek emphasized. These efforts have been crucial in keeping naval aviation mission-ready for decades.

FRCSW's artisans, many of whom are veterans, take immense pride in their work. The departure of the second-to-last Hornet to Fort Worth, Texas and now the final Hornet returning to Miramar, marks a bittersweet moment for those who spent their careers ensuring these aircraft remained battle-ready. For many, working on the F/A-18 has been a career-defining experience. "It was bittersweet knowing we were saying goodbye to an aircraft that defined our work for decades," Terbeek reflected.

As FRCSW transitions to newer aircraft models like the F-35 and an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle like the MQ-8, the experience and expertise gained from decades of maintaining legacy aircraft will continue to inform its evolving role. The final maintenance effort on this F/A-18 Hornet is both the end of a chapter and a tribute to FRCSW's historical contributions and the skilled workforce that has upheld the highest standards of aircraft maintenance. The legacy of excellence remains, as the facility prepares to support the next generation of naval aviation.

Fleet Readiness Center Southwest is the Navy’s premier West Coast aircraft repair, maintenance, and overhaul organization specializing in the Navy and Marine Corps aircraft and their related systems.