FRCSW Produces First Organic Super Hornet to Undergo Block III Modifications

From Fleet Readiness Center Southwest, April 21, 2026

SAN DIEGO – At Fleet Readiness Center Southwest (FRCSW), innovation is not a buzzword, it's a daily commitment to the warfighter. That commitment reached an historic milestone with the command's completion of its first fully organic F/A-18 Super Hornet Block III modification. For the first time, U.S. military artisans and engineers executed the complete upgrade in-house, marking a pivotal step forward in naval aviation readiness.

This achievement represents more than technical success. It is the culmination of deliberate planning, disciplined execution, and the relentless professionalism of FRCSW's workforce and

partners.

The Block III modification is the third and most advanced phase of the Service Life Modification (SLM) effort for the Super Hornet fleet. FRCSW and its partners approached this modernization in three phases:

- Structural Service Life Extension – Expanding aircraft life from 6,000 to 10,000 flight hours.

- Block III upgrades to deliver network and mission enhancements.

- Block III Advanced Cockpit System (ACS) and comprehensive avionics modernization.

This phased approach allowed FRCSW artisans and engineers to refine processes, sequence work efficiently, and reduce cost and turnaround time (TAT).

The Block III effort is embedded within the broader SLM program pioneered by FRCSW and Boeing.

The Block III configuration includes significant upgrades including:

- Advanced Cockpit System (ACS) installation

- A new large-area cockpit display

- Comprehensive avionics suite upgrades

- Enhanced aircraft networking capability

- Electrical system modernization to support upgraded systems

The ACS fundamentally transforms the cockpit. Aircraft that once relied on older display technology are now equipped with modern, user-friendly large screen interfaces. This upgrade allows pilots to fully leverage the aircraft’s enhanced capabilities, bringing this fourth-generation platform significantly closer to fifth-generation performance at a fraction of the cost.

The modification does not extend the physical life of the aircraft, that is the purpose of the structural SLM, but it ensures the avionics and mission systems remain tactically relevant for the aircraft’s service life. Together, structural SLM and Block III modernization form a comprehensive life-extension and capability-enhancement strategy that ensure the Super Hornet will remain a key component of the Navy’s carrier air wing well into the 2040s.

The Block III modification is one of the most complex avionics upgrades undertaken at FRCSW in over a decade.

The process essentially guts the cockpit:

- Removal and replacement of structural components

- Extraction and reinstallation of wiring and fiber optics

- Installation of new displays and interface systems

- Electrical upgrades to support modern avionics

The governing Technical Directive (TD) is more than 350 pages long and provides extremely specific instructions, down to how wiring and fiber optics must be routed and secured. FRCSW artisans and engineers work closely with Boeing engineers to ensure every step meets current safety and quality standards.

As aircraft are disassembled, teams frequently discover unplanned issues, corrosion, worn wiring, or legacy damage that must be corrected before modernization can proceed. This adds layers of complexity to an already intricate effort and highlights the need for, and success of, the command partnerships with Boeing and F/A-18 and EA-18G Program Office (PMA-265).

One hurdle the team had to overcome in this effort was that multiple trades must operate in tight cockpit spaces:

- Avionics technicians
- Sheet metal mechanics
- Ordnance specialists
- Engineers and quality assurance personnel

Thus, sequencing becomes a carefully choreographed process. One team’s delay affects all others. Planning is everything.

Any new process at FRCSW must meet the same uncompromising safety and quality standards as legacy programs. The command’s award-winning safety culture underpins every evolution. That culture was recently recognized with the CNO Aviation Safety Award:

https://www.dvidshub.net/news/495142/frcsw-wins-cno-aviation-safety-award

For 3 years, FRCSW has successfully executed structural SLM repairs. Now, with full Block III capability added to its portfolio, the command has evolved into a complete modernization hub for the Super Hornet fleet.

With a current turnaround time of approximately 365 days, reduced from an originally projected 15 months, the command has already exceeded expectations and cost performance has been equally impressive coming in well under budget, all while maintaining strict adherence to safety and quality standards.

Looking ahead, all fleet squadrons are transitioning to full Block III configuration thus this workload will continue well into the 2030's.

While this milestone represents the first fully organic execution of the modification, it is not accomplished in isolation. FRCSW collaborates closely with PMA-265, which oversees F/A-18 programs, and maintains coordination with Boeing during TD validation and engineering alignment.

The true strength of this program lies in integration, engineering, logistics, supply, manufacturing, quality assurance, and production operating as a unified team across the command and the COMFRC enterprise.

This is not simply maintenance. It is modernization. It is capability generation. It is combat readiness built by American hands. FRCSW employees have supported naval aviation for more than a century. From early aviation maintenance efforts to today's advanced Super Hornet and Growler modernization programs, the workforce has consistently delivered.

Integrating structural life extension with full avionics

transformation, FRCSW has ensured that the F/A-18 Super Hornet remains lethal, relevant, and deployable well into the future.