Naval Air Station Patuxent River

By Carrie Munn
PMA-265 Communications Support

The U.S. Navy’s F/A-18 Super Hornet Block III test jet flies near the control tower during the aircraft’s first flight in St. Louis, in May 2020, shortly before transitioning to the service for a test and evaluation period to ensure it is ready for fleet use.

Navy’s test squadrons receive next-gen Super Hornet

The Navy is welcoming its next generation multi-mission tactical fighter by taking delivery of the first Block III F/A-18 Super Hornet test jets this month, as part of its continuing effort to improve aircraft lethality, survivability, interoperability and sustainability in an ever-evolving threat environment.

Like every aircraft slated for the fleet, The Boeing Company-produced two-seat model (F287) and single-seat (E123) will undergo comprehensive testing. At Naval Air Station (NAS) Patuxent River, Maryland, Air Test and Evaluation Squadron (VX-23) will perform shore-based carrier testing and focus mainly on the hardware and aeromechanical aspects of test with the F model. At VX-31, located at Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake, California, teams will examine software functionality and network architecture, explained Capt. Mike Burks, F/A-18 E/F deputy program manager.

He added that once testing is complete at VX-23, the two-seated model will ferry to VX-31 to complete Block III flight testing.

‘Now it’s up to our test squadrons and our integration team to verify requirements are met and ensure the engineering behind the Block III is validated prior to full-scale production and delivery of the Block III to the fleet,’ said Burks.

While the jet’s exterior appearance is largely unchanged, Block III’s increased service life of 10,000 flight hours and reduced radar signature are accompanied by a new avionics suite that brings the Common Tactical Picture into the cockpit. Aircrew will also find an Advanced Cockpit System, with large touchscreens displaying for improved user interface and more powerful computing through the Distributed Targeting Processor Network and Tactical Targeting Network Technology.

The F/A-18 & EA-1G Program Manager (PMA-265) Capt. Jason Denney recalled Block III started as an unconventional acquisition program in support of maintaining improved aviation readiness and speed to the fleet initiatives as the Navy revamped its roadmap.

After leveraging nearly two decades worth of cost and production data, the award-winning NAVAIR contracts team was able to expediently award a roughly $4 billion multiyear procurement contract to Boeing in March 2019. For taxpayers, this provides significant cost savings in the form of bulk purchasing and long range planning that capitalizes on existing production lines that will allow the Navy to acquire a minimum of 24 strike fighters each year through fiscal year 2021.

In addition to the Block III delivery, Boeing will also perform Service Life Modification (SLM) to hundreds of Block II Super Hornets that extend their service lives and integrate Block III capabilities. SLM is key in building both the capacity and capability to ensure the Navy has jets ready to fight out into the mid-2040s.

“These new capabilities are essential for ensuring we maintain the tactical advantage in the Great Power Competition. Block III production and SLM for our Block IIs also demonstrate contracting efficiency and solid partnerships with industry,” said Denney. “An all-around win for the Navy, for Boeing, and for the warfighter.”

The first squadron deployment of Block III Super Hornet is anticipated in mid-2023, with a plan in place to have two Block III squadrons, composed of new production and Block IIs that have undergone SLM, accompanying each Carrier Air Wing by 2027.

“It’s been an outstanding effort by thousands of people throughout the Navy and industry across America to reach this milestone, and their work is far from done,” said Denney.

“I have no doubt that the test squadrons and flight test engineers are eager to put these jets through their paces and make sure we’re bringing a highly capable and adaptable platform to the fleet with Block III.”

Pax MWR offers Summer Reading Program for all ages

By Donna Cipolloni
NAS Pax River Public Affairs

If ever there was a year to escape from our routines and stresses, it’s 2020; and while we may not be able to do that physically, we can do it through the pages of a book by signing up with MWR Community Recreation’s Summer Reading Program.

Open through Aug. 31 for individuals of all ages, the program allows participants to accumulate minutes read and earn badges and prizes along the way. Anyone interested can register at https://NASPaxRiver.beanstack.org and click “Register an Individual or Family.”

‘Once you’re registered, you’ll be able to start logging your minutes read,” said Jen Beavers, NAS Pax River community recreation director. “Once you’ve earned a badge, it’ll tell you what prize you have won and how to collect it. If you’ve participated in past reading programs, you just need to click the ‘Sign In’ button.”

Ther more participants read, the more badges they’ll earn and the better the prizes will be.

There are also activity badges with different items listed to be checked off,” Beavers noted. “The more participants read, the more badges they’ll earn and the better the prizes will be. The more participants read, the more badges they’ll earn and the better the prizes will be.”

Prizes vary depending on age groups but badges and toddlers can win items such as blankets and wooden puzzles; slime makers, growing crystals, and water bottles for 5-12 years; wireless speakers, pop sockets, portable phone chargers for teens; and boat tote bags, coffee mugs or a tool set keychain for adults.

 Normally, prizes would be collected at the Ticket and Travel Office, but with COVID-19 restrictions, there will be designated dates and times announced on the MWR Facebook page where winners can drive up to Tickets and Travel for curbside pickup.

“The more participants we have, the more funding we’ll receive for next year’s Summer Reading Program,” Beavers said. Normally we have kick off and end of summer reading events, but we’re having to do things differently this year. We’re hoping our numbers will be high, though, so we can go all out next year.”

CNC is also sponsoring a separate “DoD MWR Virtual Summer Reading Program,” running through Aug. 31, and anyone eligible for MWR services can also participate in that one by registering at https://DoDVirtualSRP.beanstack.org.

To keep up to date with all of MWR’s ongoing activities and entertainment, follow them on Facebook at navymwrxriver.org.