

F/A-18E/F Super Hornet and EA-18G Growler



Left: F/A-18E Super Hornet | Right: EA-18G Growler

In FY25, the F/A-18E/F Super Hornet and EA-18G Growler programs tested two different system configuration set (SCS) builds. SCS H18 Release 3 FOT&E began in FY24 and extended into FY25, with events added to address problems discovered during operational test (OT). In March 2025, DOT&E published an early fielding report on F/A-18E/F and EA-18G SCS H18 Release 3 (versions 23.2.1 – 23.2.3). The Navy also began FOT&E of the FY25 Continuous Integration, Delivery, and Deployment (CID&D25) SCS build. CID&D25 testing is ongoing. DOT&E will publish a classified FOT&E report following the completion of the CID&D25 testing. DOT&E is awaiting final test data from the H18 Release 3 and the CID&D25 OT events, which is needed to evaluate operational effectiveness, suitability, and survivability.

SYSTEM DESCRIPTION

The F/A-18E/F Super Hornet is a twin-engine, supersonic, all-weather, carrier-capable, multirole combat aircraft performing a variety of roles, including air superiority, fighter escort, suppression of enemy air defenses, reconnaissance, forward air control, close and deep air support, day and night strike, and aerial refueling. The F/A-18E/F Super Hornet is the replacement for the F/A-18A through D and the F-14, and it complements the F-35C in a carrier environment.

The F/A-18E/F Block III Super Hornet aircraft leverages ongoing production of the Kuwaiti Super Hornet and is also available as a Block II aircraft retrofit. The F/A-18E/F Block III Super Hornet, includes upgraded hardware, advanced cockpit displays, and improved networking capability.

The EA-18G Growler is a two-seat, electronic attack variant of the F/A-18F Super Hornet that can provide standoff, escort, and self-protection jamming using both noise and deception techniques against land- or surface-based and airborne radar systems. The EA-18G Growler

carries up to five AN/ALQ-99 tactical jamming system pods mounted under the wings and fuselage, which integrate with its internal AN/ALQ-218 electronic warfare system for detection and jamming. The EA-18G Growler also employs the AGM-88 High-Speed Anti-Radiation Missile/Advanced Anti-Radiation Guided Missile for suppression of enemy air defenses and the AIM-120 Advanced Medium-Range Air-to-Air Missile for self-protection. The Navy is currently testing the AN/ALQ-249 Next Generation Jammer Mid-Band on the EA-18G Growler to eventually replace the AN/ALQ-99.

MISSION

Combatant commanders use the F/A-18E/F Super Hornet to conduct offensive and defensive counter-air combat missions and attack both ground-based and maritime targets with precision and non-precision weapons. The F/A-18E/F Super Hornet can also carry a pod that provides organic aerial refueling capability to a carrier strike group.

The EA-18G Growler can operate forward deployed from expeditionary land bases or as part of a carrier air wing. It is employed as an embedded airborne electronic attack platform, organic to the carrier strike group or integrated into the joint force. It can also be used in a tactical reconnaissance role.

PROGRAM

The F/A-18 Super Hornet and EA-18G Growler are Acquisition IC programs that share an acquisition strategy for SCS updates. Urgent fleet capability needs are driving the Navy's acquisition strategy for tactical aircraft SCS releases.

In 2023, DOT&E approved the F/A-18E/F and EA-18G SCS H18 TEMP, and in 2024 DOT&E approved the H18 Release 3 FOT&E plan. The F/A-18 Super Hornet and EA-18G Growler SCS programs have completed H18 FOT&E, officially ending the H-series development strategy. In March 2025, DOT&E published an early fielding report on SCS H18 Release 3 (versions 23.2.1 – 23.2.3).

In FY25, the F/A-18E/F and EA-18G Program Office (PMA-265)

completed the transition from the H-series development strategy to the more agile CID&D strategy for the F/A-18E/F and EA-18G platforms. The Navy's CID&D strategy prioritizes capabilities for annual releases and enables early releases to address urgent fleet needs. Each year the Navy will conduct developmental testing, integrated testing, and OT, leading to a fleet release. The Navy will also conduct a maintenance update period and, if needed, release an additional build after the fleet release to correct any severe problems discovered.

The Navy is currently conducting FOT&E of the CID&D25 build, which is focused on correcting existing issues. In September 2025, DOT&E approved the CID&D25 FOT&E plan and FY25 – 27 CID&D TEMP. DOT&E will report on the CID&D25 SCS performance once all FOT&E data are received and analyzed.

The Navy is developing the CID&D26 build, which will introduce new capabilities, some of which were originally planned for CID&D25. Open-Air Battle Shaping test instrumentation, which is essential for adequate mission-level evaluations, is built into SCS CID&D25 and expected to expand with CID&D26.

» MAJOR CONTRACTORS

- Boeing Defense, Space & Security – St. Louis, Missouri
- Raytheon, a subsidiary of RTX – Arlington, Virginia
- GE Aerospace, a subsidiary of General Electric – Evendale, Ohio
- Northrop Grumman Aeronautics Systems – Bethpage, New York

- Lockheed Martin Missiles and Fire Control – Orlando, Florida

TEST ADEQUACY

In April 2024, the Navy began conducting FOT&E events (e.g., RIM OF THE PACIFIC and GRAY FLAG 2024), in accordance with the DOT&E-approved test plan for H18 Release 3 into FY25. During OT, the Navy identified several problems that required further software development, and released SCS versions 23.2.4, 23.2.5, and 23.2.6 to address them. The Navy planned to use BLACK FLAG 2025 and several standalone events to assess version 23.2.6. VX-9 – the operational test squadron for both platforms – attended BLACK FLAG 2025 with the F/A-18E/F and EA-18G platforms. VX-9 completed all the standalone events for the F/A-18E/F, but due to funding constraints, could not conduct the final standalone events for the EA-18G platform. Consequently, the Navy will not execute all testing planned for the EA-18G. DOT&E is still waiting to receive the version 23.2.6 test data and is unable to assess the build's performance or determine the effect of the missed events on EA-18G OT adequacy.

The Navy delivered the CID&D25 FOT&E plan to DOT&E in June 2025 and began CID&D25 FOT&E events in July 2025. DOT&E issued a memorandum approving data collection for several CID&D25 test events in July 2025 due to not receiving the FY25 – 27 CID&D TEMP prior to the beginning of OT. Because testing is ongoing, DOT&E is unable to assess test adequacy. The draft FY25 – 27 CID&D TEMP was sent out to all stakeholders in July 2025, and the final version

was delivered to and approved by DOT&E in September 2025.

PERFORMANCE

» EFFECTIVENESS, SUITABILITY, AND SURVIVABILITY

As testing is ongoing, insufficient data are available to assess the operational effectiveness, suitability, and survivability of F/A-18E/F and EA-18G with the CID&D25 SCS build. DOT&E will provide an assessment of the CID&D25 SCS build at the conclusion of FOT&E.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Navy should:

1. Complete dedicated OT of CID&D25 to assess operational effectiveness, suitability, and survivability prior to fielding subsequent versions.
2. Continue to incorporate Open-Air Battle Shaping, high-fidelity active electronically scanned array threat radar emulators, and other new test assets (as they become available) into SCS FOT&E to improve data collection, integrity, and thoroughness, as recommended in the FY24 Annual Report.
3. Continue refining the CID&D strategy so that its implementation will ensure the Navy can deliver new capabilities to the F/A-18E/F and EA-18G platforms after adequate OT and efficiently addressing deficiencies.