JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (Sept. 11, 2018) Aviation Electrician’s Mate 2nd Class Antonio Garcia, left, and Aviation Machinist’s Mate 2nd Class Taylor Moan, right, operate the control room during the final testing of a T-56 engine at Fleet Readiness Center Southeast Detachment Jacksonville. (U.S. Navy photo by Clifford Davis/Released)

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. – Though it may lack the pizzazz of the GTO’s 389 from The Beach Boys’ famous song, the T-56 turbo-prop engine that powered the venerable P-3 Orion for decades was a stalwart of the U.S. Navy for more than half a century.

As the P-3 gives way to the new P-8A Poseidon, Fleet Readiness Center Southeast Detachment Jacksonville marked a milestone Sept. 11 as the unit tested its last T-56 engine.

“With a four-engine plane, you can imagine how many engines we were running in its heyday,” said Chief Aviation Machinist’s Mate Danger Escobar. “We received the test cells in 2002 and, in the last 16 years, we’ve run more than 640 engines.”

At the test cell, Sailors in their 20s gave the safety brief and went through the paces of turning up the engine. As the T-56 roared to life in its test stand on a point just off the St. Johns River, the propeller began to turn. In moments, it was blowing with such force that tree limbs 50 yards behind it bent as though a hurricane was afoot.
Fleet Readiness Center Southeast Sailors mark end of era with last P-3 engine test run

“We take the engines that we build back at the hangar, we bring them out here, we install them on the test stands and we run them up and verify they are in ready for issue so we can send them off to the fleet,” said Aviation Machinist’s Mate 2nd Class Taylor Moan. “It allows the leadership to know it’s good to go, all operational checks are good and done, and we can send it to a squadron and be comfortable with it on a wing.”

While running the engine, a Sailor checked for signs of oil, fuel or air leaks. Once the engine was found to be running properly, it was delivered back to the detachment. There the engine will be one of the last T-56 power plants to be stored, awaiting the needs of one of the remaining Navy patrol squadrons still flying the P-3C.

For years, the detachment’s work has largely been focused on the P-3C Orion, and supporting the Navy’s patrol squadrons at Naval Air Station Jacksonville and beyond. However, after the P-8A Poseidon began replacing the aircraft, the workload had to shift.

“The last test cell run for the T-56 engine marks a milestone event that symbolically captures the tipping point for the transition from the P-3 Orion aircraft maintenance capabilities at FRCSE Detachment Jacksonville,” said the detachment’s officer in charge, Cmdr. Mike Polito. “Now it’s time to focus on the future, to shift gears to gaining additional P-8A Poseidon and H-60R Seahawk capabilities.”
Fleet Readiness Center Southeast Sailors mark end of era with last P-3 engine test run

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (Sept. 11, 2018) Sailors of Fleet Readiness Center Southeast Detachment Jacksonville conduct a foreign object debris walk-down to ensure safety during the unit’s final test run of a T-56 engine. The remaining testing of the P-3C Orion aircraft engines will be done at Fleet Readiness Center Northwest at Naval Air Station Whidbey Island. (U.S. Navy photo by Clifford Davis/Released)