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Maintainers overcome challenges to keep B-1Bs flying

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Oklahoma City Air Logistics Center Public Affairs

03/29/02 - **TINKER AIR FORCE BASE, Okla. (AFPN)** --

People here recently teamed with Ogden Air Logistics Center maintainers from Hill Air Force Base, Utah, to overcome 1,400 miles of logistical challenges that were keeping portions of the B-1B Lancer fleet grounded.

The logistical struggles began several years ago when defense officials decided to close McClellan Air Force Base, Calif. This was home to the Sacramento Air Logistics Center, which served as the source of supply and repair for the B-1 bomber's electrical generator.

Following the base closure, Oklahoma City Air Logistics Center experts here inherited the parts supply responsibility for generator, a system Air Combat Command officials called critical to its bomber fleet, while Ogden maintainers were given the generator's repair responsibility.

"This division (of responsibility) was set up as part of the (base realignment and closure) process," said Robert Valdez, airborne generator and instrument branch chief.

"For the generator workload within the Air Force, we became the source of supply and Ogden became the source of repair, which presented a challenge right off the bat. Before BRAC, both the source of supply and source of repair were within a few hundred feet of each other. Now, they're 1,400 miles apart."

When the repair source responsibility transferred to Ogden in August 1999, generators accumulated more than 8,000 mission capable hours. In other words, the B-1 fleet was experiencing 8,000 "grounded" hours, and some aircraft were unable to perform their mission, Valdez said.

Officials said minimal numbers of generators being repaired during the BRAC transfer caused the MICAP hour increase.

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Generators accumulated more than 22,000 hours in January 2001, which translated into about one-third of the entire B-1 fleet being grounded.

ALC experts here initially faced many obstacles. The generators were in short supply because of repair shortfalls the BRAC workload transfer caused, plus needed critical component parts had long acquisition lead times. But despite the obstacles, Valdez said his team managed to go from a high of 44 MICAP incidents and 23,406 hours to zero back orders in less than a year.

Valdez said Ogden people experienced their own problems because only about 10 percent of the generator work force transferred from McClellan, resulting in a big learning curve and the need for source of supply people's technical assistance.

To overcome these obstacles, a team was assembled to primarily focus on three areas -- technical orders, repair production and new parts manufacturing.

Valdez said as a result of the team's diligence, dedication and ingenuity, fleet readiness was significantly increased when MICAP hours reduced to 1,794 in July 2001, a 92 percent decrease in just six months. What is more, both MICAP hours and backorders had been eliminated, and serviceable generators were available on the shelf by in February.

Officials created the teams of Tinker and Ogden experts to rewrite outdated depot repair manuals, making sure current parts would be available and procedures for depot overhaul personnel would be easily understood.

Valdez said ALC workers here may also have set a precedent when they terminated a repair contract with the contractor and hired a new one that could meet production needs.

"The government has a history of honoring contracts with vendors, so it's extremely unusual to terminate a contract for nonperformance, which is basically what we did in this case," Valdez said. "They simply weren't able to meet our demands."

The team also developed partnerships with original equipment manufacturers, who produced key generator

components which had lead times of two to three years because they had not been produced in the past 15 to 20 years, Valdez said.

Face-to-face discussions with the maintainers allowed the parts to be delivered eight months ahead of schedule, Valdez said.

The team credits top management support, effective communication and partnerships for their success.

"Because we're geographically separated from our suppliers, our communications are done via weekly teleconferences, e-mail and temporary deployments," Valdez said. "We just try to make sure everyone is on the same page.

"Communication is the key," he said. "We partnered with Ogden, we partnered with repair contractors and we partnered with the OEM. This was definitely a team effort." (Courtesy of Air Force Materiel Command News Service)

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