2001 Secretary of Defense Maintenance Awards

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The phoenix is a mythical bird that is consumed in flames but then rises from its own ashes. It symbolizes immortality, resurrection, and life after death—a fitting symbol for how superlative maintenance gives new, sustained life to equipment and weapon systems.

The Secretary of Defense Maintenance Awards, established in 1985, annually honor six military maintenance organizations for outstanding performance. The awardees—two each in the small, medium, and large categories—are chosen from active and reserve units that perform maintenance at the intermediate or unit level (below the depot level). One of them is singled out as the very best and receives the Phoenix Award.

2001 Phoenix Award Winner: USS DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER (CVN 69)

Outstanding units shoulder arduous operational burdens but meet the demand with perseverance and innovation. No finer example can be found than the carrier USS DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER (CVN 69).

"Ike" spent nearly two-thirds of the year away from its Norfolk, VA, homeport on missions in the Mediterranean Sea, Adriatic Sea, and Arabian Gulf. It sailed more than 24,000 miles, navigating through more than a dozen international ports, three international straits, and twice through the Suez Canal.

During this strenuous tempo, maintenance teams overcame continual challenges ranging from aging ship components to limited supply support. Success hinged on coming up with self-help solutions: performing many onboard repairs that normally would be handled by a repair depot; cannibalizing and substituting parts when possible; and improvising work-arounds, many of them now fleet standards. They shortened resupply times for hard-to-get parts, enabling quick repair of the propulsion plant and other critical systems. This resourcefulness not only kept Ike mission-ready but also avoided hundreds of thousands of dollars in operating costs.

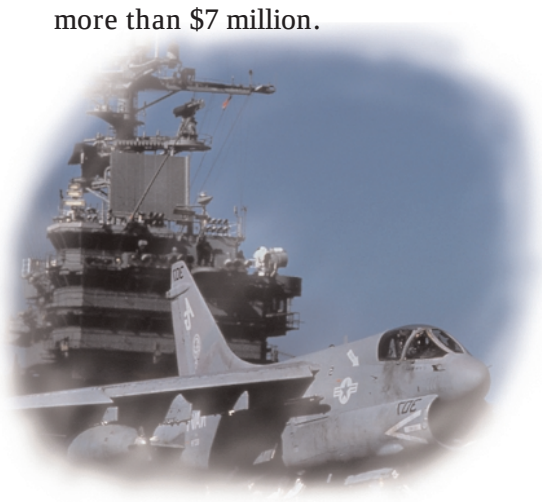
Meanwhile, Ike's Carrier Air Wing 7 (CVW-7) put aircraft maintainers to the test. The nine squadrons—comprising seven types of aircraft—flew 8,522 sorties, a completion rate of better than 97 percent. The maintenance crews repaired nearly 23,000 components and provided 100 percent engine availability, ensuring that replacements were always ready when aircraft needed them.

The exceptional feats and professionalism of the USS DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER have earned it the 2001 Phoenix Award, representing the highest standards of maintenance excellence.

Always Aloft

Mix keen maintenance with a drive for perfection, and bake it in the highest operational tempo since Operation Desert Storm. That is the recipe for the 20th Fighter Wing at Shaw Air Force Base, SC, an award winner in the large category. Its four F-16 squadrons sustained a demanding pace of combat missions over Iraq for Operations Southern Watch and Northern Watch along with other deployments, exercises, and home station flying programs. These endeavors generated a total of 16,409 sorties and 26,720 flight hours.

With the help of sterling support from the 20th's equipment maintenance and repair crews, the unit achieved F-16 fleet-wide highs in 9 of 11 key maintenance indicators. These teams repaired engines in an average of 10 days, nearly 50 percent better than the Air Combat Command's standard, and increased the unit's spare level by 18 engines in less than 3 months. By enhancing equipment maintainability and their own repair capabilities, maintainers saved the Air Force more than $7 million.



One of a Kind

Marine Aviation Logistics Squadron 36 (MALS 36) in Okinawa, Japan, is a winner in the medium category. Its maintenance mission is daunting. The "Blade Runners" are the only Marine aviation logistics unit with both fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft (six types). They include 40-year-old KC-130 transports and 33-year-old CH-46 helicopters, some of the oldest airframes in the inventory today. It is also the only such unit performing first-degree engine repairs (on eight engine varieties). These duties require the unit to maintain 12,000 technical publications.

Nonetheless, the unit supported 13 operations, exercises, and real-world contingencies in seven countries involving more than 17,000 flight hours, while maintaining an exceptional mission-capable rate. It performed more than 14,000 maintenance actions, with an average turnaround of 8.3 days for component repairs.

The Blade Runners saved more than $2.5 million by aggressively tracking and researching equipment not ready for issue; minimizing hazardous wastes; contracting out aircraft washing to mitigate corrosion; and emphasizing instrument repair instead of replacement.

Airlifts to Everywhere

The 62d/446th Aircraft Generation Squadrons (active and reserve units) at McChord AFB near Seattle, WA, are winners in the medium category. They are the only Air Force squadrons that maintain both C-17 and C-141B aircraft—and in the past year did so with unsurpassed maintenance effectiveness, completing 6,600 missions over the entire globe. Their most crucial efforts supported Presidential travel; airlifted strategic nuclear weapons; resupplied scientific research facilities in Antarctica; repatriated the remains of military personnel lost in the Korean and Vietnam conflicts; and participated in humanitarian relief.

The units carried 58 percent of the Air Mobility Command's C-141B operational commitment with less than 25 percent of the aircraft fleet. Literally, they needed to be everywhere, all the time. Despite fewer aircraft and a transfer of 30 percent of personnel to the C-17 program, maintainers increased the C-141B mission capability rate by 14 percent and won accolades for their nuclear airlift maintenance program.

At the same time, they orchestrated an extraordinary buildup of the C-17 fleet, with a 25-fold increase in flight hours. To do this they accelerated training programs and devised hundreds of fleet-wide improvements in design, engineering, and maintainability.

Everything in Place

A fighter squadron with such attention to quality that it parks its aircraft on the flight line in numerical order—that is an indication of the maintenance excellence of U.S. Navy Fighter Squadron One Zero Three (VF-103), at Naval Air Station Oceana in Virginia Beach, VA.

The "Jolly Rogers" of VF-103, a winner in the small category, distinguished themselves as the premier maintenance organization for the F-14 Tomcat. The unit was deployed for more than 8 months of the year, supporting missions in the Mediterranean Sea and Arabian Gulf, including Operation Southern Watch in Iraq. Despite an average aircraft age of 18 years and a grueling program of major system modifications, diligent work by maintainers enabled 98 percent of sorties to be completed. They kept the Tomcats 92 percent fully mission-capable, an unprecedented level of readiness.

The squadron partnered with the aircraft manufacturer and Navy engineers to hone maintainers' equipment knowledge and troubleshooting techniques. It also conducted an aggressive campaign to preserve its know-how by promoting professional development and retaining personnel through reenlistment.

Uplinks with No Down Time

For military operations to succeed, they need communications support that is mobile, completely reliable, and ready right now.

That is why the U.S. Army calls so often on the 58th Signal Company in Mannheim, Germany, a winner in the small category. The mission of the "Renegades" is to supply tactical satellite communications—and supply it they did. It was the most deployed signal unit in the Army, with 100 percent of its systems and 94 percent of its personnel deployed. They traveled more 60,000 miles and delivered over 160,000 hours of communications support for dozens of missions and operational exercises throughout Europe and the Balkans.

Among the unit's defining qualities is its ability to respond to contingency missions with almost no notice—the kind of quick, reliable support that comes from dedicated maintenance and original thinking. Maintenance crews used commercial off-the-shelf equipment when possible, stayed focused on upgrading systems, developed critical spares kits that travel with satellite vans, and conducted stringent spot checks and preventive maintenance inspections. Through such efforts they kept mission-critical equipment online and fully functioning better than 99 percent of the time.

Our Environment of Excellence

U.S. warfighters have been sustained by unsurpassed support from highly motivated and extremely competent professional maintainers. The general superiority of the maintenance teams throughout the armed forces makes it difficult to select just six to represent the others. These six exemplify the way our maintenance personnel use innovative thinking, a drive for excellence, and round-the-clock dedication to keep the armed forces deployed and mission-ready.

2001 Winners

SMALL CATEGORY

Fighter Squadron One Zero Three (VF-103)
NAS Oceana, VA
U.S. Navy

58th Signal Company
Mannheim, Germany
U.S. Army

MEDIUM CATEGORY

62d/446th Aircraft Generation Squadrons
McChord AFB, WA
U.S. Air Force

Marine Aviation Logistics Squadron 36 (MALS 36)
Okinawa, Japan
U.S. Marine Corps

LARGE CATEGORY

PHOENIX AWARD
USS DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER (CVN 69)
Norfolk, VA
U.S. Navy

20th Fighter Wing
Shaw AFB, SC
U.S. Air Force

2001 Secretary of Defense Maintenance Awards presented by
The Honorable Paul D. Wolfowitz, Deputy Secretary of Defense, and
The Honorable Diane K. Morales,
Deputy Under Secretary of Defense (Logistics and Materiel Readiness)