

Technology—and people

Japan Apache team demonstrates benefits of respect for differences

By LISA DUNBAR

People do business not with corporations, institutions or governments—but with people. And with people come differences in language, communication style and culture.

Boeing's Japan Apache team knows how beneficial it's been to recognize and respect those differences and to overcome the social barriers that inevitably exist when cultures

come together. Boeing has had a long-standing cooperative relationship with Japan. But to the members of the Apache team based in the dry, hot desert city of Mesa, Ariz., it seemed a daunting task to sell AH-64D Apache Longbow helicopters to a country with a culture so different than their own.

"In terms of language differences alone, it was challenging," said John Lewis, manager of the Boeing Japan Technical Assistance Team. "But, in the end, both sides got their points across."

The Japan Apache program has become another bright spot for Boeing—with an agreement for up to 13 Apache Longbows. Fuji Heavy Industries, Boeing's teammate on the program, delivered the first two helicopters to Japan early this year, signaling

a new era in capabilities for the Japanese Ground Self Defense Force.

The Japan Defense Agency selected FHI to produce the AH-64D Apache Longbows, which include unique requirements for Japan. FHI is producing the aircraft under license from Boeing, which is supporting systems integration and aircraft production.

But beyond the delivery of metal, there were intangible benefits to merging the culturally diverse teams. Members of the Japan Apache team forged relationships that will

Japan Apache Program Manager Patricia Carson meets with Capt. Seiji Saho, a pilot with the Japan Ground Self Defense Force.

benefit the program for years to come. And effective communications efforts by Boeing and FHI leaders have resulted in Japanese acquisition reform.

"The bonds created when Boeing and Japanese engineers and test pilots worked together were fundamental to the program's success, particularly in the area of training and information transfer," said Patricia Carson, Japan Apache program manager.

Nine Japanese engineers worked alongside 19 Boeing engineers in Mesa for nearly two years. Their task was to learn from and work with Boeing avionics and software mentors to integrate a radio, as well as implement changes to the Japan Apache using Boeing processes so they could maintain the software when they returned to Japan.

To foster positive relationships and teamwork, Boeing employees included their Japanese counterparts and their families in as many after-hours activities as possible.

"Japanese people do not readily express themselves in public," said Ryoichi Horikawa, branch manager of FHI's Mesa office. "I think the after-hours socializing helped Japanese engineers feel comfortable enough to frankly ask questions about their work, make suggestions and express opinions without any worry of embarrassment."

"Both sides got their points across."

—John Lewis, Boeing Japan Technical Assistance Team manager, about language differences among Japan Apache members

Challenges also emerged on the flight line, where Rich Lee, chief engineering test pilot in Mesa, had less than two months to train Japanese pilots on the Apache. Carson's idea for a solution: Bring in Japanese pilot Yoshi Hirano early and have him fly as a Boeing-authorized test pilot on many flights that would normally be Boeing-only crew. Lee said Hirano trained for an entire year, as opposed to the normal two-month block, and gained a much deeper understanding of the aircraft. "When a second Japanese pilot came on board for training, Yoshi was then able to help train him," Lee said.

The teamwork went beyond Mesa. Carson said Boeing program leaders were working closely with the Japanese government and the U.S. embassy in Japan. "We kept the embassy continually apprised so when the two governments spoke, everyone was on the same page," she said. ■

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