

The delight is hours

The Royal Air Force uses the C-17 for strategic air transport of personnel and support equipment over long distances. RAF representatives said the service has been utilizing the aircraft at about 120 percent of the originally planned flight hours per year.

ROYAL AIR FORCE PHOTO

Field Services team keeps C-17s in the air—a lot—for the UK

By MADONNA WALSH

Since 2001, Boeing has delivered four C-17s to the United Kingdom's Ministry of Defence. A fifth aircraft is due to be delivered this month, and another delivery is scheduled for June.

As a sign of the aircraft's durability—and as a testament to the support Boeing teams are providing on-site to the customer—the first two aircraft to date have clocked more than 10,000 flight hours, and the second two are following close behind.

"To say the C-17 is a workhorse is a massive understatement," said Wing Commander John Gladston, Officer Commanding 99 Squadron at the air base RAF Brize Norton, U.K. "The C-17 has filled an enormous need for the Royal Air Force in terms of supporting the operational air bridge to both Afghanistan and Iraq."

Key to the aircraft's success is the Boeing C-17 Field Services team at RAF Brize Norton. The team is on call 24/7 as part of the Globemaster Sustainment Partnership contract with the UK Ministry of Defence. Fully integrated with RAF

maintainers, the Boeing team works to ensure outstanding dispatch reliability of the UK's C-17s.

"Having the Boeing team next door is vital," said Sgt. Baron Baker, avionics technician for the 99 Squadron. "If they weren't here, jets wouldn't fly. We know we can contact them any time of day or night, and they'll be there. Usually they have the part or the answer we need; but if not, they find a way to get it."

The Field Services team primarily provides engineering, supply support and support-equipment maintenance services. Field Service engineers located at main operating bases and forward operating stations hold post-production product review authority, which allows engineering disposition on-site.

"After the appropriate analysis, structural and mechanical repairs can take place on-site instead of having to return the aircraft to manufacturing or depot maintenance facilities," said Bob Rabbitt, Boeing engineering manager for the C-17 Field Services International Hub. "This gets C-17s back in the air in the least amount of time."

Field Services reps at Brize Norton communicate with counterparts at other C-17 bases regularly, providing input and updates on situations that might arise. "Once in a while, a rep at another base may identify an unusual problem," said Mike Joyce, a Boeing avionics engineer at the

Brize Norton International Hub. "But because the problem is shared promptly with the rest of the team, we all know what to look out for."

Along with available engineering, consistent maintenance is key to keeping the UK C-17 aircraft flying. "We stock, store and issue everything needed for constant maintenance of the C-17," said Danny Rose, Boeing supply chain specialist. "We utilize an automatic requisition for replenishment to maintain a continuous inventory system of 7,300 parts and provide consistent maintenance." Added Tom Murray, senior aircraftsman and avionics mechanic: "This is crucial with less than six hours to turn an aircraft around."

"The Boeing field service team is an integral part of my squadron," said Wing Commander John Gladston.

Since making its RAF operational debut in Afghanistan in 2001, the UK C-17 has seen action in many areas of the world, providing strategic transport and airlift capability. More than 9,500 sorties have been flown, thousands of troops transported, countless supplies shipped, and 39,700 hours clocked.

"It's an amazing aircraft," said Flight Lieutenant Steff Marsh, C-17 captain at RAF Brize Norton. "Flying the C-17 and working with the Boeing team has made this assignment better than I could have ever dreamed." ■