



# AIR NATIONAL GUARD

## Acquisition's Undiscovered Resource

### The Air National Guard

*Todd M. Johnson*

If you are a program manager involved in acquisition and implementation of aircraft modifications, you already know that acquiring the parts for your weapons platform is only half of the battle. When your kits are stacked up in the warehouse, you still need touch labor to put that capability into the warfighter's hands. Just like the acquisition of the parts needed, fiscal and logistical constraints will also

hamper your installation efforts. Those constraints can often drive the installation schedule years into the future. That increases program cost through inflation, and as fast as technology changes, you might end up installing outdated and unwanted technology. Once your modification has become overcome by events, you are faced with wasting tax dollars no matter what course of action you take. The government has to honor the contract or pay an early termination fee, or you can continue installing an outdated system. Adding insult to injury, choosing that direction leads to a decrease in aircraft availability with nothing gained.

#### **The Options**

In that situation, the program manager currently has three common installation options:

Option one: Let the field install your modification by way of a field-level time compliance technical order. That's a great option if your modification meets the criteria of taking less than 25 manhours from start to finish. If it does not, the regulations say you need to find another way. You might be able to get a waiver from your major command if it exceeds 25 hours, but with active-duty units already stretched thin, it will be very difficult to get the commanding organization to agree.

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**KC - 135 Stratotanker under maintenance**

Option two: Designate your time compliance technical order as a depot-level installation. That means that your modification would be installed at a depot facility, usually during the course of programmed depot maintenance. The problem with that method is programmed depot maintenance labor rates are usually expensive and will destroy your schedule due to the standard aircraft cycle time. An example would be the KC-135 Stratotanker platform, which undergoes programmed depot maintenance on a five-year cycle. That means completing all the aircraft in your fleet will take five years. Your program then risks facing inflation and obsolescence. The method also does nothing to help the warfighters, who may desperately need that particular capability in their weapons system right away.

Option three: Improve the programmed depot maintenance timeline by using a contractor or depot-level field team. The field team can either travel from base to base installing the modification or induct aircraft into a centralized location(s) for the effort. Once again, the authority is by depot-level time compliance technical order. Using contractors means labor rates are subject to source selection and the best-negotiated rate. Even if you find a labor rate that your program can afford, you still need a support infrastructure. Aircraft command a lot of support in paperwork, quality control, ground handling, unscheduled maintenance, and a myriad of other items required for safe flight operations. All of those items must be addressed and may be outside the scope of contractor support—or your budget.

### **Another Option**

That leads me to the reason for this article, which is another option for program managers. The Air National Guard (ANG) is a valuable resource that is probably based some-

where close to your area of operation. Even if it is not close to home, it does not mean that you cannot tap into this remarkable resource.

I originally learned about the ANG from my work as an equipment specialist and later as the program manager for a modification to the KC-135 Stratotanker. The modification was, and is, the number one priority for Air Mobility Command. In the beginning, active-duty members could not support the program modification due to mission requirements. Programmed depot maintenance was not a viable option because of the cost and length of time it would take to complete the effort. The modification, known as the control column actuated brake, needed to be installed as soon as reasonably possible because of its safety implications.

They say that necessity is the mother of all invention, and so it was with our search to find a way to get the program into the installation phase. In our quest to find support that met our budget and timeline, we turned to the ANG to host and support our modification, even though the actual installation would be accomplished by contractor technicians. Not only did we need the facilities from which to operate, but we needed ground handlers, functional check flight pilots, quality inspectors, supply and technical orders specialists, and even a government flight representative.

We were able to tap into ANG resources at Meridian, Miss.; Spokane, Wash.; and Columbus, Ohio. The ANG's willingness to help allowed us to run three simultaneous installation lines, all within our budget and time constraints. The ANG is a large part of why the control column actuated brake program met its goals for cost, schedule, and performance throughout my tenure with the program. The abilities of

the ANG should not be ignored by anyone contemplating a modification effort.

### How You Can Benefit

The ANG can offer talented professionals with years of aircraft experience. They know the Air Force system and have the infrastructure to support almost any type of effort from small to large. Another highly desirable asset the ANG maintains is backshop facilities for manufacturing parts, which the active-duty side of the Air Force no longer has. In one instance, we needed gust locks that were not part of the Air Force inventory. The guard was able to help our engineers with a design, and then built enough of them on location to supply all three of our installation sites.

The ANG can do more than just provide facilities and touch labor. The next logical step for me as a program manager was to try to utilize their backshop capabilities for other modifications. As they had the means to produce certain products such as sheet metal items, I engaged them about another project I was involved in. I asked the ANG to provide me with an estimate for building a sheet metal shield to protect expensive black boxes from damage by hydraulic fluid. In no time, they were able to produce the prototype, fit test it, and aid in the design fit problems encountered. The

estimate given to me included building and shipping all of the kits direct to the users. As a result, I could move my whole schedule to the left and free up an already overburdened stock system.

Funding an ANG project is also less complex because no contract is required; you can use a memorandum of agreement (MOA) and pay for services via an AF Form 616 or DD Form 448, Military Interdepartmental Purchase Request. Removing contracting from the process also reduces the time to complete a modification and frees up contracting resources to work on larger projects instead of minor modifications. You might ask the question, "What about the 50/50 rule?" The answer is that the ANG is considered an organic source and thus retains core capability.

### Planning to Use ANG

If you are in the aircraft modification business, you need to consider the ANG option as a legitimate method to save money and time. For program managers, that is what it is all about.

Take some time to learn and understand the capabilities of the ANG, then you can determine if your modification is a good match. In my experience, mechanical and sheet metal



type modifications work out just fine. That is not to say that an avionics or more complex modification is out of the question; it just requires more planning to work out all of the details.

If things look like a good match, it is time to get down to business and get the cost figured out, along with developing a schedule and the details you want to put into your MOA. Build your MOA in conjunction with all the stakeholders. That will ensure that it sails through coordination with a minimum number of changes. Your MOA does not have to be a huge document, but depending on your requirements, you need to make sure that all of the basics are covered. A basic checklist should include the responsibilities of each stakeholder. An example would be that the major command furnishes the funding and how it is going to be distributed. Other important items would include services provided, cost, and a schedule.

### **How ANG Benefits**

In the course of reading this article, you might have asked yourself, "What's in it for the guard?" The answer would include many things. The funds the guard receives help bolster their capabilities and workforce. That translates to a stronger unit, which in time of need, can better support the local community in case of natural disaster or national emergency.

**The Air National Guard can offer talented professionals with years of aircraft experience.**

In the case of installing the control column actuated brake, the contractor doing the actual installation hired local personnel, which created jobs in that location. That is another benefit to using the ANG.

I am not familiar with the other branches of the Service, but the possibility exists that their National Guard contingents could be also called upon for help. It deserves some consideration in these times of financial and labor constraints that all programs and program managers face.

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**KC - 135 Stratotankers ready for takeoff**

