



## Tinker Squadron Extends Service Life of First Aircraft in Navy E-6 Fleet

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TINKER AIR FORCE BASE, OKLAHOMA. (AFNS) -- Airmen from the 566th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron completed work on extending the service life of the first of 16 Navy E-6B Mercury aircraft June 15.

The E-6Bs are flown by members of the Strategic Communications Wing ONE, whose primary mission is airborne communication with Navy submarines. It also serves as an airborne command post for U.S. Strategic Command.

Officials said the maintenance process had its share of ups and downs as the first aircraft warranted more attention than usual, but mechanics don't anticipate that to be the case for the remaining 15 aircraft.

"We really aggressively pursued and accomplished success on the first SLEP aircraft," said Bill Cain, 566 AMXS deputy director for E-3 services. "Although this airplane scheduled maintenance went longer than anticipated, everyone agrees that we have been able to hammer out a lot of the learning-curve issues, the bugs of doing this for the first time."

While the workload is new, members of the 566th AMXS have had a long-standing relationship with the Navy.

"We are extremely pleased with the overall work performance and are particularly impressed with the partnership our Fleet Support Team is developing with the 566th (AMXS) leadership and artisans," said Lt. Cmdr. Greg Kayser, the logistics deputy for the STRATCOMM WING ONE. "Their support is critical to both current and future readiness."

The relationship began roughly 16 years ago when the Navy commissioned the squadron to perform enhanced phase maintenance, which requires inspection and repair tasks similar to those required during the Air Force's E-3 programmed depot maintenance. Both aircraft have the same foundation, the airframe of a Boeing 707. Approximately six years ago, the squadron started repainting the aircraft.

"Normally, we (maintain) E-3s, but the E-3s are very similar to E-6s in the airframe structure," Mr. Cain said. "So our ability to support the Navy was created by that relationship and our ability to say, 'Hey, we can do that modification to extend the life of your airplane.'"

The Service Life Extension Program for the E-6 primarily consists of "beefing up" the tail and under surfaces of the wing. Mechanics examine and replace up to 15,000 structural fasteners on the aircraft's wings. Additionally, fastener holes are being widened and strengthened to extend the aircraft's life to 2038.

"The wing skins carry the greatest load of the airplane, and that's where the majority of the fasteners reside," Mr. Cain said. "We're replacing 75 percent of the fasteners on the E-6 aircraft, which is what holds the airplane together. It's a pretty significant amount of work."

Two shifts of aircraft maintenance squadron mechanics are working on the aircraft approximately 20 hours a day. Each aircraft is programmed to take roughly 28,000 hours of work. When an aircraft is finished, mechanics review work plans and try to streamline the existing process.

The final E-6 is planned to roll out of the 566th hangar in 2013.



Sheet metal mechanics from the 566th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron work to strengthen the wings on a Navy E-6. These repairs will help the aircraft better withstand stress during missions. (U.S. Air Force photo/Margo Wright)



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