

Oversight around the globe: DCMA employees provide multi-national support to AWACS

Matthew Montgomery | DCMA Public Affairs

One Team in a Global Partnership” — This is the motto of the Airborne Warning and Control System suite of programs unifying multiple countries using surveillance aircraft around the world. Providing oversight for

this multi-national program is the role of Defense Contract Management Agency personnel at the Boeing Seattle office.

“We have delegations all over the world supporting this program,” said Gayla Alfredson, AWACS program integrator. “The vision is to keep these planes flying

until at least 2035.”

The first contract was awarded in 1970. Over the years, production of AWACS diminished but the DCMA mission remained robust. Production oversight was replaced with monitoring upgrades and modifications to the existing fleet



Eric Eckman, Defense Contract Management Agency quality assurance specialist, inspects the landing gear of a Japanese Airborne Warning and Control System during a final inspection. DCMA personnel are responsible for monitoring upgrades and modifications to the AWACS for U.S. and NATO allies. (Photos by Matthew Montgomery, DCMA Public Affairs)

of aircraft.

“The work we are doing now is bringing the AWACS up to current configurations by changing out analog instrumentation for digital, and making other necessary upgrades,” said Lynda Fitzstephens, chief of the DCMA Manufacturing and Program Integration Team. “We do this not only for the U.S., but also for our NATO allies.”

The AWACS is a Boeing 707/767 commercial airframe with a rotating radar dome used for surveillance. The dome is 30 feet across, six feet tall and contains the system the aircraft uses to monitor air and ground space. Combined with an identification friend or foe subsystem, the radar can detect, identify and track enemy and friendly low-flying aircraft by eliminating ground clutter returns.

Since the initial delivery, AWACS aircraft have supported countries around the world with numerous operations.

In 2010, the U.S. fleet alone flew 66 missions during the Winter Olympics in Vancouver and nine humanitarian missions over Haiti. The aircraft have also flown

more than 550 missions in Iraq and Afghanistan and continue to provide constant battlefield information for the military. These, along with similar missions around the world, are why the AWACS is such a valuable instrument for global defense.

Alfredson said the continued success of the program would not be possible without the extremely qualified DCMA team overseeing six major AWACS programs, each in different phases with unique requirements. The program managers and delegated offices around the globe provide oversight to hundreds of contracts that support the mission.

“We are out there on the flightline monitoring what is going on with the aircraft, managing the contract actions and providing quality assurance oversight. We constantly inspect the work being done and ensure it is being done to contract specifications,” said Eric Eckman, AWACS quality assurance specialist.

This level of oversight is a valuable tool to the customer and something our international partners appreciate, said Fitzstephens. “We work with partner countries and provide them the same level of oversight

we would provide to any American customer.”

Regardless of where the upgrades are being made, either at the Boeing Seattle office or locations around the globe, Eckman said DCMA employees are making sure the work is being done correctly.

“We are here and available to the customer to be their eyes and ears, to ensure they are getting what they pay for and that a quality product is getting out to the field,” said Eckman. “Our ultimate goal is to make sure the operators are provided equipment that performs and operates the way it is supposed to.”



Defense Contract Management Agency Quality Assurance Specialist Eric Eckman (left) discusses the frame integrity of a Japanese Airborne Warning and Control System with a Boeing employee during a final inspection.



Eric Eckman, Defense Contract Management Agency quality assurance specialist, (right) inspects the landing gear of a Japanese Airborne Warning and Control System during a final inspection. DCMA personnel are responsible for monitoring upgrades and modifications to the AWACS for U.S. and NATO allies.