

The F-111 has become a mechanic's nightmare, but Lakenheath kept its mission-capable rate above command standard anyway.

Team Jaeger

BY JAMES W. CANAN, SENIOR EDITOR

AFTER a rocky start in the 1960s, the F-111 has served the Air Force well in strategic and tactical roles for more than twenty years. F-111s performed handsomely in Vietnam and carried out Operation Eldorado Canyon, the demanding long-distance raid on Libya from England in April 1986.

But the F-111 has become a mechanic's nightmare. It is "an old airplane with too many moving parts—the whole wing moves, of course, and it has lots of flaps, slats, false spoilers, and what have you. The airplane is very maintenance-intensive."

That description comes from Col. Richard L. Jaeger. He knows from experience how hard it is to keep F-111s in shape for flying and fighting, and his extraordinary success at that task is all the more impressive in view of the difficulties involved.

Colonel Jaeger won the Air Force Association's 1989 Thomas P. Gerity Memorial Award for Logistics Management for having "led a maintenance team that achieved unprecedented levels of readiness" with its wing of F-111s at RAF

Lakenheath, United Kingdom. The award was presented at AFA's forty-third national convention last September in Washington, D. C. Colonel Jaeger received AFA's highest honor in the logistics field "for his unparalleled professionalism in leadership of the largest F-111 maintenance complex in the Air Force. His mission accomplishment and logistics management have set standards for years to come."

In nominating Colonel Jaeger for the award, Gen. William L. Kirk, then Commander in Chief of US Air Forces in Europe, commended him for "achieving superior results with the hardest-to-maintain, most complex aircraft in the inventory at an overseas location where logistical support is a constant challenge."

Colonel Jaeger, now stationed at Tinker AFB, Okla., earned the Gerity award while serving as Deputy Commander for Maintenance of the 48th Tactical Fighter Wing. The "Statue of Liberty Wing" is made up of eighty-two F-111s, including those used on the Libyan mission in 1986. Colonel Jaeger was responsible for the operations, training, and

well-being of the wing's 2,300 maintenance personnel.

Never Below Seventy

He got results that were, by all accounts, hard to believe. For example, the wing's fully mission-capable (FMC) rate—the number of F-111s with all systems functioning as they should—averaged seventy-four percent for the year. This was an eye-popping twelve percent higher than the USAFE standard and a dramatic 10.6 percent improvement on the wing's previous all-time high.

The FMC rate for the 48th's F-111s was a model of consistency, too. Not once during 1988 did it drop below seventy percent. Twice, during June and July, it topped eighty percent.

In recommending Colonel Jaeger for the AFA award, USAFE noted that "it was his ability to clearly define goals, put the right people in key leadership positions, enforce strict compliance with technical-order and tool-control procedures, and insist on supply discipline that made this superb achievement possible with aircraft over twenty years old."

Colonel Jaeger augmented his leadership and managerial abilities with an inventive turn of mind. He was cited by USAFE for his "personal work with Air Force Logistics Command to solve a flux-valve problem" that had plagued his wing's F-111s. Working closely with AFLC's Sacramento Air Logistics Center, the colonel and members of

Jaeger' created a new yardstick for others to measure themselves by."

The wing's extremely high readiness rates made Colonel Jaeger proud but also somewhat skeptical. He questioned their validity.

Work, Practice, and Luck

"The numbers were so good," he recalls, "that I began personally in-

[wing's] deputy commanders for operations and for resource management," the colonel says. He also notes that he received "absolutely superior support from Third Air Force, USAFE, Sacramento ALC, and British Aerospace," which runs the maintenance overhaul depot that serves RAF Lakenheath.

It seems that Colonel Jaeger gave as much support as he received. As the USAFE recommendation notes, "in the face of constant mission demands, Colonel Jaeger expertly maintained a balanced, people-oriented leadership style. He was constantly aware of and responsive to his people. . . . He created an atmosphere in which they felt free to think creatively, and his encouragement of innovation resulted in extraordinary ideas for saving time and money, many of which were adopted at the command and Air Force levels."

Demands on the maintenance team were heavy at Lakenheath. According to USAFE, the team was taxed in 1988 by such difficulties as "extremely poor weather [and] a depot call-back of twenty-two engines . . . with suspected turbine side-plate cracks." In addition, it had to cope with the effects of Air Force budget cuts and take care of large numbers of transient aircraft.

But the maintenance team's toughest challenges lay in seeing its F-111s successfully through the annual USAFE bombing competition and twenty-seven operational exercises, an average of more than two a month. It met those challenges and more, breaking USAFE records in the generation and regeneration of aircraft.

In one exercise, enough F-111s were generated to meet the wing's twelve-hour goal in less than half that time, or five hours, eighteen minutes.

"Our generation rates were astounding," Colonel Jaeger recalls, "but we worked for them. We also practiced covert generation of aircraft, because we never knew when we might have to go do the real thing. Not everyone would know about those exercises. I'd use just enough people to get the job done. I'd say to them, 'I need you to do this, but I can't tell you why.' And they always went out and did what they had to do." ■



More than twenty years old, the F-111 has become a mechanic's nightmare. Nevertheless, Col. Richard L. Jaeger, Deputy Commander for Maintenance of the 48th Tactical Fighter Wing at RAF Lakenheath, United Kingdom, kept the wing's F-111s' fully mission-capable rate twelve percent higher than the USAFE standard.

his maintenance force developed "a new machine to swing flux valves more quickly and precisely."

The flux-valve problem was the main reason why the partially mission-capable (PMC) rate of the wing's F-111s had been far too high. Once the problem was solved, the PMC rate came down dramatically to a level much lower, and thus much better, than the USAFE norm.

As a result, the 48th TFW's mission-capable (MC) rate, which takes into consideration both the FMC and PMC rates, climbed to "a superb 78.9 percent, far surpassing the USAFE standard of seventy-one percent," said the USAFE citation. "So high did the numbers climb that in 1989, USAFE leaders were obliged to raise standards—and not just by a little bit. 'Team

specting the airplanes and keeping track of things to make sure they were accurate. And they were.

"We worked for those numbers. We had good people, and we practiced a lot and we practiced hard. That's a big part of my management philosophy. It comes down to telling people what you want, giving them the resources to do it, and giving them plenty of opportunity to practice."

Colonel Jaeger, who piloted RF-4C tactical reconnaissance aircraft on 196 combat missions in Southeast Asia, says he owes his success as a maintenance commander to "a little bit of luck" as well.

"I was fortunate in having a wing commander whose style was not to micromanage, and I enjoyed very close working relationships with the