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KC-10 Maintenance, keeping the mission flowing

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380 EAMXS/KC-10 Officer in Charge

The KC-10 maintainers work long hot days on the flightline with temperatures reaching nearly 135 degrees on the scorching concrete, and it’s even hotter in the non-air conditioned KC-10s parked on the ramp. These conditions, along with the 12-hour day and night shifts, are endured by the men and women of the 380th Expeditionary Aircraft Maintenance Squadron.

The maintenance specialties are almost as varied as the men and women who maintain the aircraft.

The areas of maintenance that keep the KC-10s flying include communications and navigation, guidance and control, hydraulics, jet engines, fuels, electrical and environmental systems, aero repair and the crew chiefs who ensure the general operability of the aircraft.

“The work ethic and dedication of these young men and women is outstanding,” said Master Sgt. William Dorety, 380 EAMXS Maintenance Production Supervisor, deployed from Travis AFB, Calif. “I’ve been deployed 19 times during the 20 and a half years I’ve been in the Air Force. I’ve never seen the same level of commitment as I’ve seen out of these young maintainers.”

The crew chiefs are responsible for the overall maintenance of the KC-10. “We have to ensure quick turnaround of the aircraft that return from a refueling mission,” said Airman 1st Class Andy Ward, 380 EAMXS Crew Chief, also deployed from Travis. “We usually have to have an aircraft mission-ready in four hours.”

“No other job compares to changing tires, maintaining the brake systems, engine maintenance and changing the drogues, booms and light bulbs in the desert heat,” said Staff Sgt. Jason J. Fitch, 380 EAMXS KC-10 Crew Chief. “I would describe my team’s typical day here as long, hot and sweaty.”

At any given moment on the flightline, maintainers with different specialties are working on mechanical or electronic systems on the aircraft.

A KC-10 lands, then the pilots debrief the crew chiefs on the performance of the aircraft. The aircraft is refueled, engine oil is added, and the tires on the landing gear are changed.

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A KC-10 Extender is towed to the main ramp by KC-10 crew chiefs in preparation for an engine run to verify correct operation.

(Photo by Staff Sgt. Jason Webb)
The Air Force has selected 13,298 of 37,071 eligible senior airmen for promotion to staff sergeant, a 35.87 percent selection rate.

Nichole Smith, 380 EAMXS Guidance and Control Specialist, pre-flights KC-10.  "The pre-flight inspection is very thorough," said Sergeant Dorety.  "The aircraft is inspected for flight safety and assurance of operations. The quality of training of our maintainers enables them to do the job without question."

The various technical schools range from several weeks to several months with on-the-job training to follow.  "My job takes a lot of patience and perseverance in learning all the systems I'm required to work with," said Staff Sgt. Nichole Smith, 380 EAMXS Guidance and Control specialist, deployed from Travis.

"There are so many systems you have to deal with. It can be overwhelming for someone new to the job."

"It is a challenge to troubleshoot in-flight problems with the guidance and control system that cannot be duplicated on the ground," said Airmen Lucia Mendoza, 380 EAMXS Guidance and Control Specialist deployed from McGuire AFB, N.J.  "You have to keep working to resolve any problems to get the aircraft back in the air."

"There are maintainers who have worked on jets for 20 years and haven't seen everything," said Airman 1st Class Charles Mawson, 380 EAMXS Hydraulics Specialist deployed from Travis.  "There is something different to fix everyday."

"The KC-10 mission keeps flowing.  (Clockwise) Tech. Sgt. Francis Leslie and Airman Nicholas Shoenhair, crew chiefs, prepare to service the jet engines on the KC-10 with oil.  Staff Sgt. Nichole Smith, guidance and control specialist ensures the computer system in the avionics bay of the KC-10 is working properly.  Airman 1st Class Michael Pianella, hydraulics specialist, prepares drogue for maintenance."

To enhance customer service, beginning with this promotion release eligible Airmen who tested will find their Weighted Airman Promotion System score notices posted on their Air Force Portal personal page and on the Virtual Military Personnel Flight. The WAPS score notices will be available by 5 p.m. CDT on Aug. 9.

Upon accessing the Air Force Portal, eligible Airmen will see a WAPS score notice link that will direct them to their 2006 score notice. The score notice will be posted on the Portal for 10 days; after the 10 days the score notice will only be located on vMPF.

"The Air Force is making a conscious effort to direct Airmen through the Air Force Portal to view their scores," said Chief Master Sgt. Rusty Nicholson, enlisted promotion and military testing chief at the Air Force Personnel Center here.  "During the last promotion announcement the Air Force realized more than half the people accessing their scores were going through the portal, so we decided to make the process easier by providing the Web site upfront."

Score notices allow Airmen to see how their Promotion Fitness Examination and Specialty Knowledge Test scores rank against those they’re directly competing with for promotion within their Air Force Specialty Code.

The average score for those selected was 273.15 points, with the following averages:

— 131.59 points for Enlisted Performance Reports
— 59.76 for Promotion Fitness Exam
— 53.82 for Specialty Knowledge Test
— 17.90 for time in grade
— 11.28 for time in service
— 0.83 for decorations

The average selectee has 2.02 years time in grade and 4.59 years in service. Those selected will be promoted to staff sergeant from September to August 2007.