

TACAMO and Boeing by Pam (Vaughn) Valdez

In 1983, the Boeing Company won the contract to replace the EC-130 aircraft with the 707 E-6 aircraft. The program presented an opportunity for a few TACAMO sailors to consider employment with the Boeing Company and many migrated to Seattle. The program was initially located in one building, the 2-01 building on the northwest end of Boeing Field. The building, which has since been demolished, was a throw back to the old method of designing Boeing aircraft. It consisted of one long room with hundreds of employees working in close proximity, where you could stand on a chair and see every employee.

In the early 1980's there were very few computers, the E-6 aircraft was designed with paper and pencil on drafting tables. The drafter, engineers, schedulers, finance analysts and logisticians were side by side. When our first program manager, Ken Russell, wanted to have an All-Hands meeting, there was no memo or notice. He would don a black top-hat, come out on the floor and stand on top of a deck. Everyone would instantly stop what they would doing and Mr. Russell would conduct the All-Hands without the use of a microphone. He gave out awards and a photographer took pictures of every award winner. It was simple, efficient and personal. This folky approach was the essence of the E-6 program.

The E-6 program was on a very tight schedule. In my first month on the program in March 1984, I saw my first Boeing Tier 1 Program Schedule and was struck by the detail on the schedule - with every event identifying the month, day and year for each completion date. When I mentioned my shock that the company would identify the exact day of the roll out and first flight of the E-6 to my USN customer, Doug Hammje, Doug reminded me that I worked for the Boeing Company. He said "you would rather miss your wedding date than miss a milestone date in the Boeing Company". When your customer carries your corporate reputation, you learn real quick that you stand on the shoulder of giants who have come before you. The E-6 met milestones on time.



The people on the E-6 program were a true family. It was, and remains, a team like no other team. We worked together and played together for decades. The Boeing E-6 team continues to meet at least once a year for lunch right before Christmas at an infamous Spot Tavern in Renton. Thirty to forty Boeing E-6 teammates, from secretaries to program managers, meet to remember the relatively few years from contract award to last delivery. This family was at the E-6 roll-out at the Renton plant, we were on the taxiways of Boeing Field for the first flight of the E-6, we remember horror of the tail

breaking twice during flight test, we wrote the pubs, provisioned the spares, designed the support equipment, and trained the aircrew and maintainers. The final delivery of the E-6 was also the bitter sweet closing of the entire 707 production line which had been running since the late 1950's and delivered over 1000 707's. Our company continues to support the E-6 during day to day operations in its third decade of E-6 sustainment.

For a few of us at Boeing, we had the unique opportunity to know the TACAMO mission from the vantage point of a TACAMO sailor who flew and maintained our beloved EC-130 in VQ-3 and VQ-4. We felt a deep obligation to keep the new E-6 design true to the TACAMO mission and to the USN concept of operations. In my continuing career at Boeing, there was no deeper pleasure than the E-6 program. I love the E-6 aircraft and I love the Boeing people who made it a great aircraft.

The Boeing E-6 family is overjoyed that the next TACAMO reunion will be in Seattle. We look forward to seeing old friends and sharing our E-6 history with the TACAMO community.