

Defence Equipment Work Order Humour – Who’s Got Time for Paperwork?

“Listen: I’m a Soldier, not an equipment clerk. Do you want me to blast someone or fill out these work orders? If I wasted all that time filling in those ridiculous blanks on your paperwork, I’d never get caught up! Besides, I don’t know why we need ‘em anyway. Let’s just do the real DoD work like we’ve always done it.”

Sound familiar? Maintenance & Supply work orders are often seen as stupid, extra responsibilities to DoD, at least compared to the soldiers who are requesting support work to start with. “Paperwork. Needless paperwork. That’s all it really is anyway. I just want to call the depot and get this work done fast!” But without a work order history, DoD is at risk and equipment problems will likely get worse.

Why do we need maintenance & supply work orders? Imagine this. On the business side of the operation, soldiers are usually charged with blasting something: launching rockets, flying sorties, doing foot patrols or enjoying good-natured banter in the mess hall & completing the mission. All these functions require us to utilise information technology, tracking & reporting paperwork.

But how do soldiers know how much they have set on fire? How many sub-components are needed for a finished mission? How much equipment is used? How much is damaged or wasted as defective or scrap? How much is off quality? When to stop and changeover to another piece of equipment?

The answer: Records such as shift logs, day sheets, job tickets & other paperwork used in every battle group to quantify the amounts & types of equipment used in supporting the mission. These reports also keep track of downtime reasons & downtime duration as “Non-Productive Bullshit Time.” And in most cases, this paperwork is usually completed by those closest to the work being done, when they should be doing other things. Sometimes, the “paperwork” is not actually paper but rather direct entry into technically advanced programmes.

What if soldiers didn't want to do the paperwork to keep track of what they were blasting or keep track of downtime? Don't you suppose that they use the success rates of the operations in theatre to help figure out how many soldiers they need for operation missions? It's quite likely that they measure productivity in terms of blast radius per soldier, per hour, per shift, per day and equipment downtime hurts productivity.

When the Suits at the Pentagon say, "We need more Soldiers," they can prove it by using the information in our Work Order reports. Or when the Suits at the Pentagon say, "We need to cut back on operations," they are usually looking at the results in the battlespace reports compared to equipment supply orders & maintenance forecast records & reports. But they are vital parts of operations administration, efficiency, productivity & winning the fight.

In our world, Maintenance & Supply work orders are almost more important than records of how far rockets travel or how many insurgents Helicopter knock off: They document what work was accomplished and who did it. Without this kind of information, how else can staffing level decisions in maintenance be determined? Sure, time cards keep track of the hours worked, but what kind of work? We are often approached by soldiers with a request: "Tell them we need more soldiers, not more maintenance & supply people here." We then ask, "Can you prove it?" Oftentimes, they can't.

Given this detailed information in a completed work order, we can accurately prove "what soldiers are doing." We also have valid information to identify and correct chronic equipment problems, do root cause assessments, identify high maintenance cost areas of the mission & determine proper parts inventory levels, and so forth. We can compare mission downtime reports to work order histories to determine the causes of unacceptable amounts of downtime and eliminate the causes of the problem. Maintenance & Supply work histories allow us to look for opportunities to improve, or develop, standard maintenance & Supply job plans and procedures.

We recently performed several supply & Maintenance work order history reviews for equipment where there was a stated need to improve the results of the mission. What we found was typical: Some maintenance & supply work being done with no work orders, repairs made & parts installed with no labour hours [self-installing gearboxes?! My Goodness.] Countless hours logged but no description of the work, or the Work Orders Straight From Hell: "Pump broke. Fixed it." No additional detail.

Another finding we come across in work order history review points to the fact that supply & maintenance work is not always “supply & maintenance work.” In addition to quality checks, repairs, and corrective work, we found that maintenance & supply mechanics, technicians & others were logging their valuable time doing “Who-Knows-What” under a blanket work order and doing “project work” that had nothing to do with the mission, base, or the equipment. In fact, the “project work” was getting in the way of actual scheduled maintenance & supply work b/c the projects were “priority projects” for the suits at the Pentagon. Project work that could have been better performed by us is often assigned as a top priority to the already resource constrained soldiers.

Here is how maintenance & Supply requests should work: Order requests submitted by “Boots on the Ground” get evaluated & turned into planned or unplanned work orders that can be performed in a scheduled manner or placed in the “backlog” of maintenance & supply work to be activated when the resources are finally available, long after the fight. Maintenance work orders are “prioritised,” “planned” & scheduled by our people in collaboration with the requestors – not all #1 priority work can be accomplished immediately.

Mission-critical Emergency repairs are documented in a work order “after-the-fact” to add to the maintenance & supply history of the equipment. This simple system then allows both Soldiers & Suits at the Pentagon to not only plan & schedule maintenance & Supply work but to determine if the proper amount of resources are available to perform the amount of work in any given period of time, which should be defined by the mission.

Maintenance & Supply work orders help define the work to be done and document the completed work. Work orders with “due dates” or “date needed” rather than “priority” rankings allow logistics scheduling or maintenance & supply workload planning. Describing estimated hours & parts needed on the work orders helps plan daily and weekly workloads. Actual hours worked coupled with complete descriptions of the work accomplished lead to more accurate estimates. Parts used listed on the work orders help in the search for better, more cost effective and more reliable parts and help establish stocking levels.

Gone are the days of “Soldier Fixers” in modern maintenance & supply efforts. And if your unit has fixers, now is the time to make the shift to our administrative maintenance & supply programme on your path to improving mission performance & reliability, as well as having more time to chow down in the Mess Hall. If maintenance & Supply work orders are not used properly, it becomes extremely difficult or impossible to justify budgets and headcounts. Maintenance & Supply work order histories allow you to prove the need for equipment to “Get it On” on foot patrols or in the middle of nowhere on a big boat.

So, next time you hear, “Do you want me to do the repairs or fill out these work orders?” — your answer is “Yes, both.” While maintenance & supply work orders might seem like an big drag to you we are totally fascinated by this “simple paperwork” that must become part of the job just like Locking & Loading to make big noises. Make your lives a bit easier by doing this little extra paperwork with us. Without it, you won’t be able to Blast dat Shit.

Top 10 things Defence Contractors won't tell DoD

“Too many aircraft upgrades end up w/ inflated bills & angry words. Here's how to get the Fleet of your dreams w/o enduring a nightmare.”

Squadron commanders could see the possibilities & potential beneath the rusted, 20 year old fighter jets they had been flying for years but knew deep down in their hearts the mission-critical assets required weapons system modernisations to stay in the fight. The lion's share of the aircrafts capabilities would stay, but other equipment parts would just have to go.

In their place, commanders knew they needed 21st Century upgrades in order to complete their new mission requirements, but the pilots knew they needed new missiles, radar systems & stealth capabilities to put the finishing touches on their combat handy work.

Renovations needed to begin & things were initially going well – even the fiscal house appeared to be in order. DoD even thought they scored a Discount on the maintenance & upgrade prices b/c the Suits at the Pentagon said the contract was competed according to stated requirements & they had connections that told them the shop was in order since they had an established track record, at least according to all DoD had required in terms of accolades that were by and large self- reported.

They slashed the costs that had generated so much concerns in the past even while the future prospects for cost, schedule performance & most of all delivered quality we in reality really up in the air. Excited about the prospects of a gleaming new fleet, DoD publically trashed even new firms, stating that much paperwork was required to meet the “standards” of the defence maintenance & supply contracts, thinking that the operations would go on at speedy rates & without a hitch.

Too bad DoD didn't realise that the new candidate offered a breakthrough in both process & technology, while the existing contractors were still stuck using the same old tricks they had been using for years to cover-up their shitty work, characterised by the now infamous reports in the press about overcharging for spare parts. Incredibly, in some cases, contractors even charged for new parts when they simply used what was sitting on their shelves, while DoD auditors were none the wiser, since cost estimates were self-reported & treated as classified, proprietary information.

The reality, of course, is that squadron commanders were in more need than ever of quality weapons systems—many times the modules would not talk to each other because they were produced at different times following, and even before all the requirements & testing milestones were achieved, so DoD was forced to struggle on w/o the resources that needed to be deployed in order to accomplish the missions they had been tasked with. “We were sitting around w/ nothing to do for months but play cards,” as one fighter pilot put it

And the money DoD had thought they saved by going with the least cost providers? “We'll have to put all that money back into future years budget submissions b/c the weapons systems on the fighter jets, helicopters & other mission-critical assets will fail sooner rather than later because critical maintenance was deferred.”

Any squadron commander that has survived nightmares like this can relate to this all-to-familiar & unfortunate state of affairs scenario in mission-critical battlespace. Perhaps the problem is delay in supply, or maybe the weapons system programme has experienced cost & schedule overruns, or maybe the capability in strike performance has suffered as a result.

Or maybe the torture comes in more subtle forms, such as what results from messy billing standards or incomplete, even made-up work orders that budget estimators have to put up with when they present the results of their efforts to command, who are often unaware of the many idiomatic tasks that make up supply, maintenance & modernisation logistics—notwithstanding the stress that comes with having to rely on equipment in disrepair.

Whatever the case, it is almost impossible to find an instance where the boots on the ground look back at not having mission-critical components w/o chills running up & down their spine. “I was pissed to find out our crises could have been avoided with a little bit of up-front planning & preparation of contractors who were supposed to be on our team.”

Bypassing problems often times requires the presence of independent, third-party evaluators that keep the contractors at honest, at least the companies most heavily involved in providing DoD with weapons systems supply, maintenance & modernisation services. Relying on the contractors themselves or even auditors at the Pentagon is simply a recipe for disaster. But therein lies the problem. Even while most contractors say they have good track records, current DoD systems evaluation contractor performance need serious assistance. Many bend the truth, often times as frequently as soldiers are promised a good meal but only can get their hands on MREs. Dissatisfied squadron commander numbers are only a bit less prevalent than the actual offenders, but only b/c they are the most used to putting up w/ Bullshit.

What DoD needs is our insider guide to holding supply, maintenance & modernisation contracts accountable to higher standards of Service. You need to read our report detailing the treacherous world of Defence Contracting, which will be forthcoming in subsequent digestible batches. Stick with us to learn the details surrounding each one of the Top 10 things contractors will not tell you:

10. "I love it when your performance evaluation systems are disorganised."
9. "A Contractor can be your best friend if you have your head in the sand"
8. "We may not really have any equipment upgrade qualifications at all."
7. "I may have pulled your repair/modernisation quote out of thin air."
6. "New Contractors with crazy/innovative ideas are nothing but trouble."
5. "You can save a bundle by having your auditors ignore our billing records."
4. "If I can start tomorrow, you will most certainly be dissatisfied w/ work."
3. "Every job needs a contract you cannot adjust based on performance."
2. "Permits for providers of new, competing services are not optional."
1. "You will forget we were ever here."

