
The Aerospace Maintenance and Regeneration Center

A P-3 Supermarket

By David Reade

Located in the desert heat of Arizona, row upon row of P-3 Orion aircraft bake in the blistering sun. This is the scene at the AMARC facility located at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base in Tucson, the aircraft depository for Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine and Coast Guard aircraft that are no longer in use by these services. The Aerospace Maintenance and Regeneration Center provides for the long-time storage of aircraft, the reclamation of parts and components for inventory replenishment, and the regeneration of aircraft for continued service with government agencies, commercial contractors and for operational use with foreign military forces.

In service with the U.S. Navy for over thirty years now, P-3 Orions have only been residing at AMARC for a few years, but have seen an increase in activity recently. One of the first P3A Orions assigned to AMARC in 1983, never really had a chance to collect dust. It was immediately transferred to the U.S. Customs Service as the initial P-3 Orion "Slick" long-range interceptor aircraft used to fight the war on drugs.

In 1990, eight AMARC Orion airframes were offered at auction and sold to a local Tucson scrap-metals dealer. Kotz Metals Co. (now renamed K-Tech



BUNO 150528 - "Loon" a former VXN-8 logistic UP-3A now in the Foreign Military Sales Section. (Reade)

Aviation) bought the aircraft for their scrap-metal value, to be cut up and smelted down into aluminum ingots, but the Orion's true value as a valuable source of airframe replacement parts was realized. The company now offers airframe spares for sale to all Orion operators.

Between 1990 and 1991, approximately twelve P-3A Orions were provided to several airborne-fire-fighting contractor's via and U.S. Forest Service. Aero Union, the major recipient of the aircraft, operates eight Orions that are modified as "Aerostar" air tankers. These

aircraft drop water or chemical retardants for forest fire suppression throughout the southwest regions of the United States.

For years, surplus P-3 Orions have been provided to several foreign military services through AMARC's FMS office. In the past, Spain, Norway and Australia have all bought or leased U.S. Navy P-3A or P-3B Orions. Currently, several new Orion operators have acquired FMS Orions for operational use. Thailand received five P-3 Alphas last year. Two are scheduled for Maritime Patrol ocean-surveillance missions, with two others serving as ground trainers and spare-parts birds. The fifth aircraft is expected to be modified later as a VIP transport aircraft. Chile also recently acquired surplus Orions. Eight UP-3A Orions were chosen by the Chilean Navy for coastal patrol missions which include search and rescue, and drug and fisheries surveillance operations. Greece is currently in the process of selecting upwards of thirteen P-3A's for Maritime Patrol with several to be utilized as spare part birds. The operational aircraft are to be modified with TACNAVMOD packages, and are scheduled for a 1994-95 delivery. There is a current proposal (pending approval) for Greece to lease several U.S.



BUNO 150608 - a former VP69 P-3A now in reclamation. (Reade)



BUNO 152184 - a P-3A chosen by Thailand to be modified as a P-3T. (Reade)

Navy TACNAVMOD P-3 Bravos as an interim measure until the delivery of the Alphas. Turkey, in a similar program to that of Greece, is also planning to acquire an equal number of P-3A Orions from the AMARC. Other potential customers are now negotiating with the FMS office at AMARC for surplus Orions; Brazil, Argentina and Morocco have all expressed interest in P-3 Orions and are currently pursuing acquisition.

Australia, operating a fleet of nineteen P-3C Orions, is now looking at three ex-Navy P-3 Bravos for logistics and pilot-training duties. This is part of an effort to increase the fatigue life of their Charlies. The RAAF members have travelled to AMARC several times and that service is about to choose three Bravos.

One strange sight at AMARC is the brand-new P-3C Orions. Built by

Lockheed for the Pakistan Navy, the three aircraft were to be delivered under an FMS case to Pakistan, but the US congress enacted the "Pressler Amendment" in 1990, prohibiting the sale. Under the sanction, it is stated that before any FMS sale to Pakistan takes place, it must be accompanied by a certification from the current administration that Pakistan "does not possess a nuclear explosive device." To date, no certification has come forth. As a result, the U.S. Navy (guardians of the aircraft) was directed by Congress to fly the three aircraft to AMARC on January 22, 1992, for long-term storage pending resolution of the Pressler Sanctions.

Currently, there are approximately 68 P-3 Orions located at the AMARC, with additions every week. This does not include the numerous Orion SARDIP air-

frames located at other sites. The volume of interest shown, from the amount of FMS cases and requests from government agencies as well as the Navy itself, assures that the P-3 Orions won't be baking in the desert sun at AMARC for long. →



About the Author

David Reade is a full-time, free-lance aviation journalist who formed "P-3 Publications" in 1989 as a means to write about P-3 Orions, and has produced numerous, published articles on the subject. Mr. Reade has also researched, compiled and written an authoritative P-3 Bureau Number (buNo) list, noting current location of all foreign and domestic Orion aircraft. The list also includes miscellaneous information about particular airframes not normally found in aircraft listings. Updated quarterly, this list is utilized by several Navy departments and Navy contractors as "An Outstanding P-3 Reference" where no single Orion reference guide was available before.



BUNO149677 a UP-3A chosen by the Chilean Navy for coastal-patrol missions which include search and rescue, and drug and fisheries surveillance missions. (Reade)

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