

U.S. Air Force Further Extends Phase Maintenance Interval On Lockheed Martin F-16s

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The U.S. Air Force recently further extended the phase maintenance interval for its Block 40/42/50/52 F-16C/Ds to 400 flight hours. This is a strong indicator of the F-16's inherent reliability and maintainability.

The F-16 is produced and supported by Lockheed Martin Aeronautics, a business area of Lockheed Martin Corp. .

The F-16 phase maintenance for this group of aircraft was extended from a single-phase inspection every 300 flight hours to one every 400 flight hours. This latest change is expected to cut the inspection workload nearly 20 percent. It also increases the number of aircraft available on the flight line for operational training or combat missions.

"The F-16 is widely known as the most reliable and maintainable fighter in the U.S. inventory," said John L. Bean, vice president of F-16 programs. "The USAF extension to 400 flight hours could have application for the international Block 40/50/52 operators, since many often follow the U.S. Air Force's lead in maintenance matters, and several are pursuing extensions of their particular F-16 phase intervals."

This change could potentially reduce the total base-level maintenance man- hours required to support these aircraft by five percent. These savings could equate to more than \$1 million per year for the USAF fleet of Block 40/42/50/52 F-16s. Five major commands in USAF will be affected by this improvement.

The F-16 was originally fielded with an inspection cycle of four phases, one every 50 flight hours. The interval has been progressively increased to 100 hours, 150 hours, 200 hours, 300 hours and, currently, 400 hours. These increases were based on an extensive and recurring Reliability Centered Maintenance Analysis of USAF fleet aircraft maintenance data by Lockheed Martin engineers in a close teamwork approach with the customer.

"Two facts of maturity have permitted these increases -- increasing knowledge and confidence in the aircraft, and reliability improvements that have been incorporated over the years," Bean said.

The F-16 airframe is designed so that no depot-level inspections are required during the 8,000-flight hour service life of the aircraft. Phase inspections are conducted at the base level, either at home base or while deployed. Actions include inspecting the airframe and aircraft systems, replacing certain consumable items and fixing any discrepancies discovered. For convenience, special one-time, base-level inspections and parts changes are performed at this time. For active duty operations, a normal F-16 phase inspection takes about one week using a 10-person crew on two shifts.

"With the heavy flying we do in contingency operations, such as the recent operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Homeland Air Defense, phase inspections come around quickly," said Chief Master Sergeant Steve Thompson, F-16 Maintenance Functional Manager, Headquarters, Air Combat Command. "Expanding the phase interval is very important to our scheduling flexibility and providing reliable, mission-ready aircraft. It will be a significant contributor to the maintainer's bottom line -- maximizing the number of available aircraft on the ramp."

The 400 flight-hour interval ties the F-16 with the A-10 as the longest phase maintenance interval among all USAF combat aircraft.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The F-16 is the choice of 24 countries. More than 4,000 aircraft have been delivered worldwide from

assembly lines in five countries. The F-16 program recently marked 25 years of continuous production deliveries and has forged relationships leading to unprecedented international cooperation. Hundreds more aircraft are on order, and production is expected to continue beyond 2010. Major upgrades for all F-16 versions are being incorporated to keep the fleet modern and fully supportable over the aircraft's long service life.

Lockheed Martin Aeronautics Co., a business area of Lockheed Martin, is a leader in the design, development, systems integration, production and support of advanced military aircraft and related technologies. Its customers include the military services of the United States and allied countries throughout the world. Products include the F-16, F/A-22, F-35 JSF, F-117, T-50, C-5, C-27J, C-130, C-130J, P-3, S-3 and U-2.

Headquartered in Bethesda, Md., Lockheed Martin Corp. employs about 125,000 people worldwide and is principally engaged in the research, design, development, manufacture and integration of advanced technology systems, products and services. The corporation reported 2002 sales of \$26.6 billion.

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