



Japan's first KC-767 Tanker arrives in Gifu, Japan, after a 12-hour flight from Integrated Defense Systems facilities in Wichita, Kan.

BOEING PHOTO

Plain and

simple

Old-school process spurs team toward delivery of Japan's 1st refueling tankers

By FELIX SANCHEZ

The clock was ticking. Pressure was mounting. The KC-767 tanker team faced a mid-February deadline for delivering Japan's first-ever aerial refueling tanker. "Miles" of Excel spreadsheets outlined myriad critical tasks to solve lingering problems on the program.

But spreadsheets weren't getting the job done. Team members needed to visualize the enormity of the situation and feel individual ownership and responsibility for the challenge.

So Cliff Hall, International Tanker program director, and his leadership team went "old school." They developed a "war room" in Wichita, Kan. There, they plastered a wall with color-coded Post-it notes—each listing a specific task that remained to be done on Japan One as well as the name of the person assigned to the task. On another wall, labeled "Help Needed," team members posted requests for any and all aid they needed to accomplish their mission for the day or week.

"It worked," Hall said. "It's one thing to see an unfinished task coldly noted on a spreadsheet, but when it's written on a note stuck on the wall for all to see—and the name of the person who's responsible for seeing that task completed is on the note as well—something clicks."

"It was definitely not high-tech, but the visualization it provided really spurred the team," added Randy Eno, Japan program aircraft delivery team leader. "Visually, it kept everyone on the same page."

For weeks, team members packed the war room for daily meetings. As a job was finished or a problem fixed, corresponding Post-it notes were peeled off the wall and sent to the "graveyard of retired tasks."

"Again, it was an effective measurement tool, because the team could instantly visualize progress," Hall said. "It was such an incredibly simple process for an incredibly daunting task, and there was certainly some initial skepticism about it. Who would think Post-it notes on a wall could create such a dynamic forum?"

The results spoke for themselves. In mid-February, Boeing completed Federal Aviation Administration certification requirements for Japan's KC-767 Tanker, receiving the FAA stamp of approval in the form of a Supplemental Type Certificate.

That cleared the way for Japan to receive its first two of four KC-767s. Japan One was ferried and delivered to the Japan Air Self-Defense Force in late February. Japan Two was ferried on March 3.

Following the delivery, Hall said, "The team was walking this high off the ground, an indication of how well we work as a team when we're all synced up."

And what of those scores and scores of Post-it notes in the "graveyard of retired tasks?"

"Who knows?" Eno quipped. "Maybe we'll have a celebration and shred 'em." ■

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About Japan's tankers

Japan has ordered four convertible freighter 767s, providing the Japan Air Self-Defense Force the flexibility to carry cargo or passengers while maintaining its primary role as an aerial refueling tanker. The aircraft features Boeing's advanced aerial refueling boom and Remote Aerial Refueling Operator II system. Additionally, Boeing is building four tankers for Italy with delivery of the first two aircraft planned for this year. The KC-767 also was Boeing's offering in the U.S. Air Force's KC-X competition for its next-generation tanker aircraft. Since the 1930s, Boeing has built and delivered more than 2,000 tankers that feature the world's most advanced aerial refueling method with the highest fuel-transfer rate available.