

# Fighter support

The journey is the reward for this F-15J employee in Japan

By Rob Henderson



Fumiko Uchida works at the Boeing F-15J office inside Mitsubishi Heavy Industries in Nagoya, Japan. In this *Frontiers* series that profiles employees talking about their jobs, Uchida offers an inside look at working across cultures, borders and languages to flawlessly satisfy customers. PHOTO: ASSOCIATED PRESS

I joined the company in April 1978, so I've seen a lot of changes. Of course, back then it was Boeing heritage company McDonnell Douglas and the office was buzzing with people, mostly engineers, here to help Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, or MHI, set up its licensed F-15 production line.

Now it's much quieter—in fact, I'm here on my own. You could say I'm in the “stealth” office! We have lots of visitors, though, who come to support MHI. And lots of teleconferences and videoconferences. So it's never lonely.

A lot of my work is coordinating between Boeing in St. Louis and MHI. From time to time I also deal with the Japan Air Self-Defense Force. For example, we visit bases to present certificates recognizing the achievements of its pilots, such as 4,000 flying hours on the F-15. That's an incredible feat for Japanese fighter pilots whose sorties are much shorter than those in the United States, where pilots regularly fly on longer missions, say, up to Alaska.

I was there for the first flight of the Japanese-produced

F-15 and it was amazing. I was so proud to see it lift off in 1981. It was the latest and greatest at the time and had been put together by the very people I saw every day. Thirty years later, I'm still impressed to see it fly. Of course it's not the same airplane—it has been continually upgraded and modernized.

Mitsubishi Heavy Industries made around 200 F-15Js, and I was sad to see the last one roll off the production line 10 years ago. Now we assist MHI, which provides overhaul and upgrade services, with spares procurement and technical matters.

Did I ever think I'd end up working on such a historic and important program? Life is full of surprises! At university I studied Russian, as I really love Russian literature. And I've spent the past 32 years using mainly English for an American company building airplanes with its Japanese partner!

It has been a great journey, and the motivation and enthusiasm of the Boeing and MHI teams are catching. I feel really lucky to be working here. ■

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