

A Few Good Tools

In the Battle of the Buck, Score One For The Military

BY PAT JENKINS

Score one for the military in the Battle of the Buck. Amid a constant barrage of criticism from taxpayers and government budget watchdogs for spending too much money, the U.S. armed forces can fire back with a salvo of its own: A Marine Corps air base that has saved about \$1 million in computer expenses and achieved other cost-cutting with Pick's help.

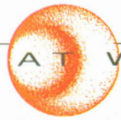
Okay, it's not enough to make the fed-

eral deficit go AWOL. But the Marine Aviation Depot at Cherry Point, N.C., the largest Marine air base in the world, is so good at pinching pennies that even President Clinton, aka Mr. Reinvent Government, has noticed. Clinton presented the base last year with the Quality Improvement Prototype Award. Three military installations per year receive the federal award for high-quality work and saving money. Cherry Point has won it twice.

The catalyst for all this recognition is the Pick-based Automated Tool Inventory Control and Tracking System (ATICTS). Brace yourselves, government spending critics. Tool control and management is one application where government is normally far ahead of private industry, said Denny Brown, president of Data Enterprises of the Northwest, developer of ATICTS. We've installed ATICTS in more than 20 Fortune 100 companies and in the

Military helicopters and jets some worth \$75 million apiece come to the Marine base at Cherry Point for repairs and overhauls.





vast majority of cases, we replaced a manual system.

In the case of the Marine Corps, however, ATICTS is a third-generation computerized system. The same is true of the Navy, which uses ATICTS in its shipyards. Commercial users of the bar code-driven system include General Dynamics, Electric Boat, Northwest Airlines, Rockwell, Raytheon and Westinghouse. But there is no better example of ATICTS effectiveness than the Cherry Point Marine base, regarded as one of the most sophisticated users of tools on the planet.

Nearly 1,500 mechanics in the base's predominantly civilian workforce overhaul and repair aircraft worth as much as \$75 million apiece, including C-130 transports, A-4 attack jets, F-4 fighter jets, AV8-B vertical-takeoff jets and V-22 vertical-takeoff

planes and CH-46 cargo helicopters. The base also makes house calls, sending its mechanics to other bases in peacetime and to battle fronts during conflicts.

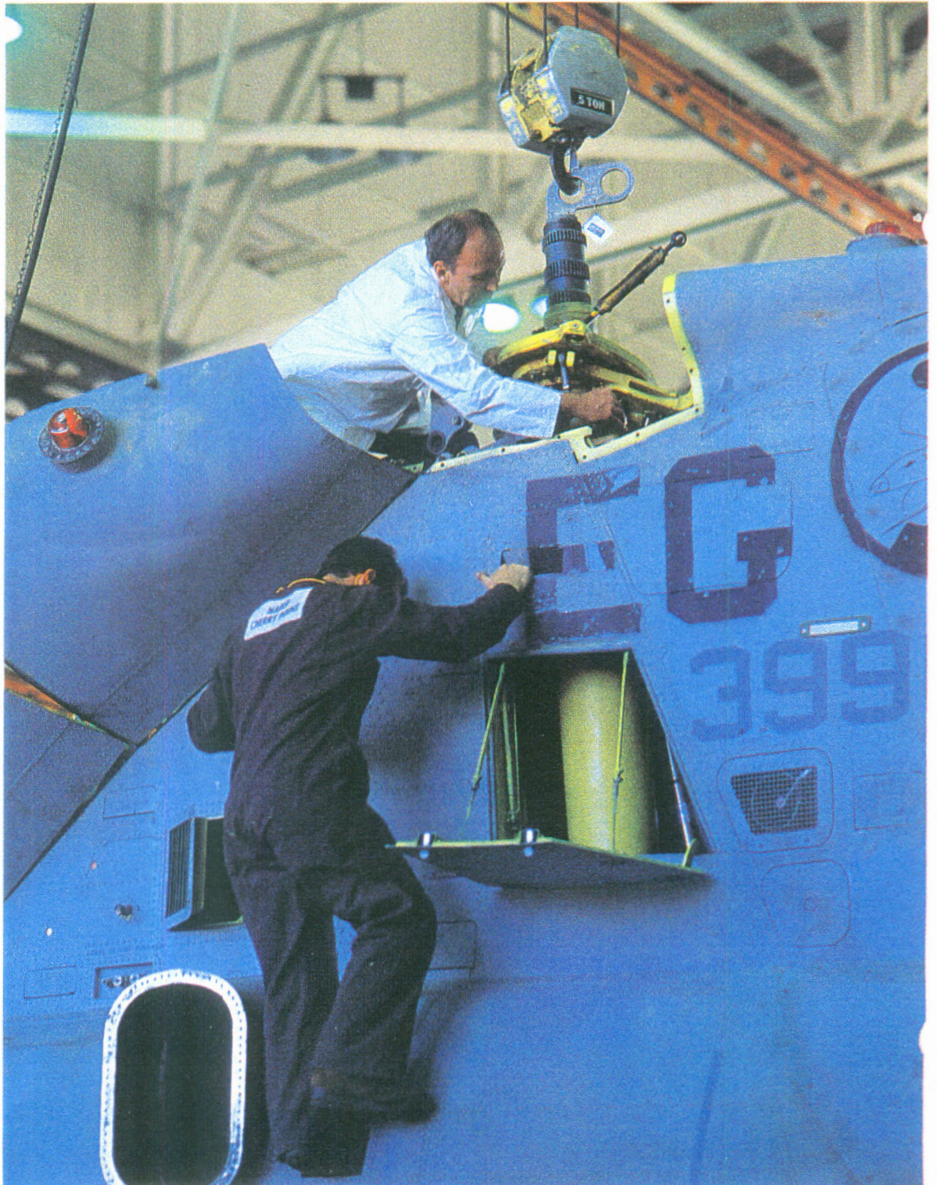
The mechanics have a \$20 million inventory of 30,000 different tools to use in their duties. The Corps not only issues the tools, it wants to know who used them and where, their condition and it wants them to be returned. That's the essence of tool control and it's especially important in repairs of the planes at Cherry Point. Before a plane can take off again, every tool that was used on it must be accounted for. Otherwise, a tool could have the ironic fate of bringing down a plane it helped make airworthy.

It could be catastrophic to leave a tool laying loose in a plane. It could jam a hydraulic system or cause an en-

gine to fail during flight, said Bruce LaViolet, head of planning and scheduling at Cherry Point.

In addition to safety, there are financial and efficiency gains to be won by any kind of manufacturer or heavy industrial organization through computerized tool control. The objective is to have the right tool at the right place at the right time. For example, Brown said, many repair sites have several tool rooms with separate inventories. Without good controls, the typical solution to making sure tools are available where needed is to have an excess inventory in each room. But if a craftsman knows he needs a particular tool once a week and he obtains a good one from a tool room, he simply doesn't return it. Such tool-hoarding can be virtually eliminated by ATICTS, making the

PICK-aided, cost saving work of the aircraft mechanics and managers has caught the eye of President Clinton.





clude tool check-in and check-out, maintenance and test equipment tracking, call-
 bration scheduling and purchase orders. It also monitors tool inventory levels. The tool check-in and check-out function relies heavily on the capture of bar code data. Personnel using the tools have their own bar code identification and each tool is identified by bar code labels. We follow a tool from cradle to grave, LaViolet said. When a tool wears out or we discard it, we retire its serial number. We never have to worry about how many tools we actually have or where they are. Here, Brown said, is a case of the military saving taxpayers money and being ahead of industry in computer automation. Such efficiency could give military and government waste a bad name. ■

system pay for itself almost overnight, according to Brown. At Cherry Point, the payback took less than two months, LaViolet related. Before we started using ATICTS, some of our people were losing 50 percent to 300 percent of their time each day looking for tools, he said. Another way it has helped us is in the process of competing with private industry for contracts to repair military aircraft. Controlling costs for tools has helped us hold down our bids. ATICTS also has saved Cherry Point approximately \$1 million in computer time. The base previously operated on a mainframe. When that system became outmoded, the base searched for a new one, settling on ATICTS when we saw it in operation at the Navy shipyards. That was its biggest selling point, the fact it was being used successfully in military installations, LaViolet said. ATICTS was installed at Cherry Point on an Everex DX-386 PC. LaViolet said data from the mainframe was easily converted to the PC running Advanced Pick. ATICTS runs on a variety of Pick platforms. Most of the time, it's installed on PCs under Advanced Pick on IBM RS/6000s and SCO/Unix, but it also runs with Pick R83. Since tools often must be tracked from multiple tool cribs, Pick is a fundamental requirement. For that reason, ATICTS has no DOS-based competition, Brown said. ATICTS modules in-

From the moment they're issued to mechanics, Cherry Point's \$20 million tools of the trade are tracked for safety and financial reasons.



Pick prevents the control of tools from being a wrenching experience.

