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BRIGADIER GENERAL RICHARD GIBBS

U.S AIR FORCE
OGDEN AIR LOGISTICS COMPLEX (ALC)
HILL AIR FORCE BASE, UTAH

MOVERS & SHAKERS

EXCEPTIONAL PEOPLE HELPING TO SHAPE THE FUTURE

By Hank Hogan

SPOTLIGHT ON

BRIGADIER GENERAL RICHARD GIBBS

U.S AIR FORCE, OGDEN AIR LOGISTICS COMPLEX, HILL AIR FORCE BASE, UTAH

Hill Air Force Base in northern Utah is home to the Ogden Air Logistics Complex (ALC), where a team of 8,500 personnel performs depot repair, overhaul, and modification of the A-10, C-130, F-16, F-22, F-35, and T-38 aircraft, along with the Minuteman inter-continental ballistic missile system. Brigadier General Richard Gibbs assumed command of the ALC in July 2021, the latest stop in a 29-year U.S. Air Force career that has included numerous logistics and maintenance related assignments. He sat down to discuss with us his time in the Air Force, as well as some insights on current challenges in military aircraft maintenance. His lightly edited answers follow.

AAD: What lessons from your postings and assignments apply to your current position?

“There are lessons I take away from every single assignment,” he responds. “One of the lessons is to appreciate where you are and who you are with.”

Applying this concept to his latest posting, he notes, “I’m around airplanes every day. I get to talk to people from every walk of life. This is probably the dream job for me.”

AAD: What are the biggest challenges facing the Ogden ALC? What are some solutions?

“Hiring and retention, I’ll say that’s number one,” Gibbs replies. “If you look at our [U.S. Air Force] logistics complexes,

our three depots, we, Ogden, are in the area with the lowest unemployment rate. So, it makes competition tough.”

It helps to offer such personnel benefits as generous leave allowances, he says. Gibbs and his team also are working together on developing ways to attract highly skilled and sought-after civilian software professionals.

“The second challenge is delivering readiness on time, on budget. We have a measure called AA, aircraft availability. If you want to be prepared for combat tonight, you want to have the highest aircraft availability possible. If we’re not delivering on time, then warfighters are not getting their airplanes when they need them.”

Major Philip “Stonewall” Johnson, 514th Flight Test Squadron F-22 test pilot, departs Hill Air Force Base, Utah, in November 2020, on a functional check flight in the last F-22 Raptor to complete the F-22 Structural Repair Program. The 574th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron processed 135 F-22s through the program, performing structural modifications to increase total flying hour serviceability on the aircraft by 8,000 hours. (Image courtesy of U.S. Air Force. Photo by Alex R. Lloyd.)





▲ 1st Lt. David Whitfield, 605th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron Air Mobility Unit officer in charge, showcases the flight line layout to Brig. Gen. Richard W. Gibbs, Air Mobility Command, Logistics, Engineering and Force Protection director, at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, N.J., Oct. 31, 2019. (Image courtesy of U.S. Air Force. Photo by Airman 1st Class Ariel Owings.)

After acknowledging some recent aircraft delivery issues, he continues, “We’re figuring out, ‘How do you get back on track?’ We look a lot at the things that slow us down.”

The third hurdle he lists is effectively meeting readiness goals in the context of an organic industrial base. “It’s really about the facilities and the equipment of the depots,” Gibbs explains. “We’ve got aging facilities.” He identifies funding from the U.S. Congress, along with prudent use of those dollars, as one of the keys to overcoming this issue.

AAD: What have been some surprises in your first year of this job?

“I was surprised by how complex and dynamic it is,” he quickly answers.

As an example, he outlines the complications of bringing on additional work at the ALC. Central to the success of supporting any new program is having effective personnel in place, and that process generally takes time due to training.

“I wind up having to do what I call investment hiring. But it’s a little bit of a gamble,” Gibbs reflects, citing budget uncertainty. “So, we have to figure out the right balance of risk for hiring versus risk for not hiring.”

AAD: What about the problems, and solutions to those problems, of supporting aging aircraft?

“Aging aircraft. We’ve heard that for a number of years. That’s just the reality,” he responds.

◀ Brig. Gen. Richard W. Gibbs, Air Mobility Command Logistics, Engineering and Force Protection director, steps onto a train at Joint Base Charleston, S.C., Jan. 28, 2020. (Image courtesy of U.S. Air Force. Photo by Senior Airman Allison Payne.)



▲ U.S. Air Force Brig. Gen. Richard W. Gibbs, Air Mobility Command Logistics, Engineering and Force Protection director, speaks with Lt. Col. Michael Stefanovic, 19th Civil Engineer Squadron commander, left, and Col. Will Clark, 19th Airlift Wing vice commander, right, at Little Rock Air Force Base, Arkansas, Dec. 3, 2019. Gibbs toured the base to observe how the 19th AW successfully accomplishes combat airlift. (Image courtesy of U.S. Air Force. Photo by Airman 1st Class Aaron Irvin.)

◀ Brig. Gen. Richard W. Gibbs, Air Mobility Command Logistics, Engineering and Force Protection director, examines the underside of a C-17 Globemaster III at Joint Base Charleston, S.C., Jan. 28, 2020. (Image courtesy of U.S. Air Force. Photo by Senior Airman Allison Payne.)

As he points out, “Regarding aging aircraft systems, when you bend a piece of metal a lot, eventually that metal can break.”

Gibbs adds that work is underway to automate time-consuming manual tasks, such as drilling out bulkheads on the F-16. Coding software to handle this task is complicated, due to visual irregularities. But once finished, such projects benefit sustainment.

He observes, “As we incorporate such technology, a task like the bulkhead example is going to go from taking weeks to a couple of hours.”

AAD: Speaking of aging airplanes, how do you deal with parts or processes that no longer exist, or institutional maintenance knowledge that disappears?

“We have to find alternate means,” Gibbs states.

“First, we have to go to systems engineers to find ways to create old parts using new technology.”

“Second, we have found—with an evolving workforce and no longer necessarily being able to call on as many years of experience—we are having to be a little bit more explicit in our technical data, for instance, on the work control cards. We just don’t assume people have the experience and the knowledge. We have to write more down on those cards to make sure we don’t induce errors.”

AAD: You originally were commissioned through the Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (ROTC). How has that impacted your career?

“I had a great experience,” he recalls. “I was working, I was going to classes full time. On the weekends, I was doing ROTC. Thinking back, ROTC gave me a pretty solid foundation in figuring out how to do all these competing things and do them well.”

“But there was the perpetual dilemma of figuring out that work/life balance, which I’m admittedly still working on. I

haven’t quite figured it out. I think most of us have that challenge.”

Discussing the paths taken by his fellow officers, Gibbs comments, “I love the fact that we come from different commissioning sources.” He notes that some of his colleagues come to the ALC via the ROTC route, while others come through officer training school or the U.S. Air Force Academy.

He adds that in his U.S. Air Force career, he has interacted with thousands of remarkably capable and intelligent enlisted personnel. That experience, in turn, has built upon something he learned to value back in those early days at the ROTC, which informs his successful approach to his current command.

“We all come from different walks of life, and we all have something to contribute,” he says.

In his closing comments, Gibbs notes that his time at the Ogden ALC likely will last only a few years, based on the usual duration of U.S. Air Force posting for such roles. His stint at Ogden, though, brings with it a personal benefit that has nothing to do with logistics or airplanes.

“You cannot complain about being here at Hill Air Force Base, at the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. I love to ski. I grew up skiing. So, when I have some time, that’s where you’re going to find me, up on the ski slopes—if there’s snow.”

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