



Continuity thru Chaos: Sustaining Explosive Ordnance Disposal operational readiness

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Every organization, team, and individual are often faced with challenges. The last two years have been no exception for the Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) robot repair and Battlefield Airmen Rapid Repair and Replace (BARS) warehouse team.

First, in October 2018, Hurricane Michael destroyed our warehouse on Tyndall and more than \$42 million dollars in robotics and individual protective gear. This drove the Readiness Directorate to lease an off-base warehouse and re-build the capability from the ground up, re-establishing an initial operational capability in July 2019. When things were starting to normalize, the COVID-19 pandemic arrived and created an unprecedented set of challenges for the team.

Due to the critical nature of the service performed, telework was not an option. Life-saving robots required repair, and warfighters still needed personal protective equipment to perform the mission.

The Air Force Civil Engineer Center's Readiness Directorate, EOD Division, in collaboration with the Air Force Life Cycle Management Center (AFLCMC), Armament Directorate, Munitions Division, maintains an inventory of 591 critical life-saving robotics for global contingency and homeland security operations. Ensuring an operational inventory is critical to providing 1,600 Total Force EOD operators the capability to address hazards remotely.

The Air Force has collaborated with the Army's Robotic Logistic Support Center (RLSC) as the designated source of repair.

Co-located with the RLSC is the EOD Division managed procurement and distribution of EOD specific personal protective equipment (PPE) as part of the BARS program. EOD technical school graduates receive a standardized set of PPE when reporting to their first duty station -- allowing them to begin upgrade training and participate in operational responses, range clearances, and other EOD missions.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Michael and throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic, our warehouse team continues to demonstrate exceptional resilience. Post Hurricane Michael, they gained access to the base within days and sifted through debris, salvaging as many robotic parts and PPE as possible.

The EOD Division established a temporary alternate repair process within 14 days, leveraging an Army RLSC operating location at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. Concurrently, the Air Force Installation and Mission Support Center secured interim funding to procure PPE for Airmen graduating Naval School EOD, and \$20 million dollars in hurricane relief funds for robotic part replenishment. Within months, Tyndall PMO leased a warehouse in Panama City to re-establish full capabilities.

John McHugh, the Army RLSC team lead, worked AFLCMC and the Army RLSC Headquarters at Selfridge ANGB, Michigan, to rebuild the inventory of lost parts and robotic platforms. The warehouse team continued to provide virtual technical support and began repairing robots with salvaged parts from damaged systems.

Brett Bennett, BARS program manager initiated temporary acquisition procedures, salvaged shelving units from storm-ravaged warehouses, and rapidly re-established the BARS inventory in the leased facility.

In October, 2019, the RLSC and BARS operations re-established full operational capability. Then as COVID-19 arrived, McHugh and Bennett again demonstrated the team's resilience by adjusting operations while maintaining critical support to our installations.

The team continues to receive and repair robotics and ship out PPE. The new normal with masks, social distancing and transportation constraints is a new and different challenge -- another opportunity to restore readiness and lethality.