
IN SUPPORT OF OLD EQUIPMENT:
WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT FOR SECURITY
ASSISTANCE ORGANIZATIONS (SAOs)

By

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"This weapon system is no longer supportable" -- how frequently SAOs hear (and lament) this phrase. Worse yet, we sometimes hear it escaping from our very own throats. Despair not, ye SAOs of waning faith. There may well be ample support for your country's vintage equipment. All you need is a good araci.

Araci -- pronounced "ah-rah-jik" -- is a Turkish word meaning "searcher." In the context of supply support of older military equipment we would translate araci as "scrounger," or less colloquially (and perhaps more euphemistically) as "expediter."

A good araci can be a member of your SAO, a security assistance desk officer at one of the military departments (MILDEPs), a host-country national with extensive contacts in the international commercial and military arenas, or perhaps a salty-but-sage, retired serviceman with some 20 years of U.S. supply experience. Whatever his background, a good araci will tap all possible sources in and out of the United States to find the parts your host nation needs to keep its M-48, F-104, or DD-710 fleet operational.

Not that it's going to be cheap -- the supply-and-demand equation for vintage parts often yields a premium price tag. Although they may not be cheap, the parts can be found, and expeditiously too. It may cost money, but vintage U.S. military equipment is, in most cases, supportable.

Let us briefly examine a specific case -- the Grumman S-2 Tracker. The Tracker was built for the Navy in the late 1950's as a carrier anti-submarine warfare (ASW) airplane. The Navy replaced the Tracker with the S-3 Viking in the mid-1970's. Still, nearly ten years later, the Tracker is flying all over the world. Allied armed forces, local and state agencies, and private enterprises may well fly the Tracker for another 25 years. How do they support it?

First, go to the source. Grumman publishes a yearly updated catalog of over 5,000 parts for the S-2 (and HU-16). These are primarily airframe and electrical system items. Major manufacturers like Grumman tend to provide continuing support for their older products, since their support reputation plays a lead role in the success or failure in marketing new products. Quality costs, so be sure your host country considers all aspects when comparing prices. Grumman's parts, for instance, are all certified MILSPEC, validated and ready for issue (RFI). Accordingly, they are sometimes more expensive than rebuilt, reworked and salvaged parts from other vendors.

After exploring the source, locate the "mouth" of the support "river" for your equipment -- the MILDEP weapon system manager (WSM). Your country desk officer can help in tracking down this often little-known, gnome-like, but vastly-knowledgeable character. Typically hidden somewhere in the fifth echelon of a systems command organizational chart, about 60 years old with a history of heart trouble, the WSM carries in his/her head an unabridged history of everything that has ever happened in the life of your tank, gun, plane, portable latrine or other equipment.

The Tracker WSM is at the Naval Air Rework Facility, Jacksonville, Florida. He knows almost everything about the Tracker. He found over 5,500 line-items of Tracker parts that could be serviceable with only minor refurbishment. He knows all the countries and companies that deal in Tracker supply.

Find your WSM. He is a vital link in the support chain.

Next, find out how the other guys do it. Surprisingly, 13 countries have operated the Tracker in the past. Seven countries, plus the California Department of Forestry, still operate the Tracker and plan to continue for some years to come. Then call the country foreign liaison officers (FLO) at the U.S. Army Security Assistance Center (USASAC), Navy International Logistics Control Office (NAVILCO), or the Air Force Logistics Command International Logistics Center (AFLC/ILC). If they don't know, they'll refer you to their in-CONUS representative who does know. Ask how they are supporting your host country's problem equipment. You may be amazed at the answers.

In the case of the Tracker, Australia and Canada perform complete MILSPEC rework in Sydney and Montreal. Turkish Navy Trackers are reworked at the Turkish Air Force depot at Kayseri. Taiwan and Korea indigenously manufacture a number of Tracker parts. Peru recently had its Trackers rework at Grumman St. Augustine.

Your last, but certainly not least, source is the commercial vendor. Ask the FLOs and WSMs what commercial aviation salvage and refurbishment outfits deal in parts for your country's dated equipment. There are, for example, no fewer (and probably more) than 22 U.S. firms alone that deal in Tracker parts.

True, parts peculiar to the Tracker are no longer listed in U.S. national stocks; but, like other older U.S. military equipment, the Tracker can be supported. It may require the long suffering of a sleuth, the sixth sense of a true scrounger (an araci), and a lot of money -- still, the Tracker is supportable.

SAOs, don't let people tell you that your Military Assistance Program (MAP) or other vintage U.S. military equipment is no long supportable. Train your lips to deny passage of the words "not supportable" until you've done your araci work. If it requires a trip to the United States, then so be it. More often than not, the prospecting SAO will find: "There's support in them thar hills!"

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