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Serving the Marine Air Community at Cherry Point

ATC tops 1,000,000 operations

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The Air Traffic Control Facility aboard the air station reached 1,000,000 aircraft operations since the beginning of a new training program initiated in May 1998.

The program has tripled the number of position qualifications and significantly reduced the occurrence of operational errors.

"Before the new training program, almost all the training was passed on from instructor to student in an unorganized fashion; there was no standardization at all," said Joseph Hendrickson, training support specialist, and a native of Pontiac, Mich. "We adopted a training curriculum from the Federal Aviation Association, and now all the instructors are on the same sheet of music."

In March 1995 the four Marine Corps Air Stations that make up Marine Corps Air Bases East were brought together to discuss how to solve the problems in ATC.

"The most obvious areas of concern were the number of errors and deviations, equipment conditions, and the excessive amount of time it took to train Marine controllers,"

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Hendrickson said. "We completely rewrote the Airfield Operations Manual, the Facility Manual, and Position Training Syllabi, and then implemented our current on the job training program. The new program included an OJT Instructor course that the FAA presented to the air station in September 1997."

The new steps helped define responsibilities and placed an emphasis on team position accountability in each branch.

"It is the Team Concept that helped recognize potential conflicts between several different positions and recommended new procedures to build a safer environment for the flying community here at Cherry Point," Hendrickson said. "During the first year of the changes, the Marines and civilians broke practically every record associated with ATC training."

Thanks to a healthy increase in students and seasoned

instructors, 16 of the past 65 months have exceeded 1,000 hours of OJT training.

"Its hard to remember that prior to 1998, this facility was qualifying Marines on its six main positions at an annual rate of 47," Hendrickson said. "Since then, the annual qualification rate has averaged 150, and the number of hours to qualify has been reduced on all positions, some as much as 50 percent."

The ATC Facility is made up of two branches, Tower and Radar that provide sequencing and separation services within

approximately 2,800 square miles of airspace up to 18,000 feet.

"All the credit goes to the OJT instructors, branch chiefs and supervisors," Hendrickson said. "They have really mentored these young Marines and brought ATC together as a team."