Common ammo for artillery

MINNEAPOLIS – United Defense, in a recent piece in the Fairfax broadsheets, ASPI Director Hugh White pointed out that while Defense remains on track to buy four Wedgetail AEW&C air craft and two additional mission packages for $3.6 billion, it has not yet taken up the option to add two air frames at an additional 7 per cent cost to get six complete systems (see Hill report, page 1). As White ob served, a 50 per cent increase in capability for a 7 per cent increase in price is hard to ar gue with.

Is such irrational re source man age ment in be com ing well es tab lished in De fence? Readers might con template other bar gains ig nored, re jected or ac tively de mol ished.

Aerial Refuelling: Defense plans to acquire four or five shiny new, or nearly new, twin-engine tanker air craft, with the Boeing 767 and EADS A330 bids the de fac to winner, the 105mm V2 C2 can use all three types are vi able for retro fits.

Mil i tary tanker-transports fly a frac tion of the hours flown by com mercial air craft and 10-year-old airliners of ten re tain 20 to 30 years of vi a ble ser vice life. Given that the orig inal AIR 5402 en vis age the use of ex-airline air frames, one can only won der – given it could now be much cheaper than in 1999.

Caribou: the venerable DHC-4 re mains the best STOL airlifter in its size-class, a sim ple, rugged and dura ble air frame. None of the re place ments pro posed over the years can match its short/rough soft field per for mance. With a flight test proven dual cer ti fied (FAA, Can ada) and very re cent PT6 tur bo prop con ver sion and an abun dant pool of used air frames over seas, why has De fence in vested heav ily in spare pis ton en gines and re jected in dustry pro posals to retro fit tur bo props – a low-cost, low-main tenance, high-reliability, high-performance solu tion which frees the RA AF from main taining an Av gas fuel supply infrastructure?

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US hangs on to landmines

WASHINGTON – The US military will continue using land mines but, after 2010, will ensure they deactivate after a set period, claiming the new “standard of detectability for land mines” will save civilian lives.

The Defence Department makes the astounding claim that “the US will become the first major military power to adopt a policy ending use of all persistent landmines and maintaining the international standard of detectability for land mines of any kind.” Which all depends on “what you mean by ‘major’.”

Australia, Canada and other countries signed the to tal land mine ban some time ago.

Future American land mines will be engineered to self-deactivate after a specific time to “save civilian lives with out tak ing away a key defensive weapon”.

A spokesman said the new pol icy does n’t ban con tact land mines used on the Korean Peninsula to deter possible North Korean aggression against South Korea.

The new policy requires DoD to develop and use more sophisticated land mines in the future but land mines will remain a component of the US military inventory.

Raptor bomber plan in 2006

WASHINGTON – The US Air Force is considering modifying Lockheed Martin’s F/A-22 fighter into an interdiction bomber.

Air Force Secretary James Roche and his chief of staff General John Jumper told the House Armed Services Committee the plans are to increase the size of the F/A-22, equipping it to drop precision small-diameter bombs, persist behind enemy lines and maintain some supercruise capability.

“‘That is one of the distinct pos si bil i ties,’” Jumper told the panel, noting that such a decision would take advantage of billions of dol lars already spent to de velop the plane.

The Air Force plans to buy a total of 275 F/A-22s at a cost of about US$250 million each, with the first squadron of F/A-22s to be in operation by 2005.

Air Force planning for the fiscal year 2006 budget, now underway, will include initial de cisions on how to achieve long-range strike capability.

BAES holds head up

LONDON – BAE Systems reported a 2.2 percent fall in year operating profits and a deep cut in debt. Operating profit will forego amortisation, impairment costs and other items to total £980 million last year.

Performance was helped by higher income from its role as primary contractor in Britain’s longstanding Al Yamamah military supply and support deal with Saudi Arabia, which is paid for with oil.

Chief Executive Mike Turner says BAES is determined to avoid any repeat of the Astute attack class submarine and Nimrod MRA4 maritime patrol aircraft program cost disasters.

BAES posted a better-than-expected 3.5 percent rise in sales to £12.57 billion and net debt stood at £870 million at December 31, down 33 percent.