At all costs we must draw the flower of our youth into piloting of aeroplanes.


By Dr Carlo Kopp

The RAAF’s bad news on aircrew retention and recruiting raises questions about how a downsized and less capable RAAF will re-cruit future aircrew – in a community which has high levels of ac cess to overseas and domestic information on military aviation issues.

The Defence leadership is unhappy about Australian media focusing on JSF issues like the Joint Strike Fighter selection and the retirement of the F-111. But the absence of local media coverage has not diminished the impact of such policy decisions upon the community age groups targeted in re-cruit ment.

The ideal “wannabe fighter pilot” in 13 to 17 years; an individual who is highly intelligent, good at thinking on his feet, physically fit, highly motivated, competitive and intensely interested in military aviation and flying. While Australia is large enough to supply the numbers required, persuading a big enough fraction that an air force fast-jet career is worth pursuing is another matter.

Over the last 25 years, this analyst has received count less let ters,
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Up to now changing the engine in involved many sys tem changes, in cluding re-engineering the flight deck. But in the case of the 7E7 these changes will be in soft ware.

The other in no va tion is that the 7E7 will be the first com mer cial air craft with the pri mary struc ture in com pos ites – a move which ben e fits Boeing sub sid iary Hawker de Havilland, a leader in com pos ites.

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emails and tele phone calls from am bitious young men and boys who want to wear Nomex and punch holes in the sky.

• Nearly all are highly intelligent, focussed, with an obsessive interest in fast-jet technology, operations. They have the “aura of in vincibility” which co mes with driv ing a top tier combat air craft.

• Most are confident. They form their own judg ments, of ten with an ob ses sive in ter est in fast-jet tech nol ogy, op er a tions.

• 15 to 25 years ago such indi vid uals Dr Kopp de scribes above will still be our fu ture war riors.

• Self-promoting foot note: The indi vid uals Dr Kopp de scribes above are prom i nent among HeadsUp downloaders, as are young men and women deeply in ter ested in ground en gi neer ing ca reers. Yet ADF re cruiting has never been in ter ested in ad ver tis ing in this jour nal, even at our low rates.

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“One of the con cerns is how to deal with ‘ramp rush’,” Bair said.

“Our air planes get hit by ground ser vice equip ment all the time. Does it get dam aged? How easy is it to re pair?”

“With one cus to mer we took a large piece of com pos ite to their main te nance fac il i ties. It was the same thick ness as the belly skins of the air plane. They took 16-pound sledge hammers and metal punches and beat on it for over an hour with out be ing able to dam age it.

“‘This ma te rial will be far more dam age-resistant than aluminium. If it does get dam aged – and it will, some body will run into it with a fork lift – we have two re pair meth ods. One takes about 40 min utes to ap ply on the ramp and al low the rest of the day. And we have a two-hour re pair that will let you fly un til the air plane goes into a hang gar for more a per ma nent re pair. That can be up to five years.’"

The bot tom line is that the RAAF does not exist sepa rate ly from the community. It must be capable of ful fill ing the ex pec tations of the inter ested community. Cred i bil ity – dam age-resistant com pos ites are not the way to build community enth usiasm for future RAAF careers.

Whether the Defence leadership can sell an idea to Cab i net is ir re lev ant – the com mu nity groups the fu ture RAAF de pends on are much more lit er ate in con tem po rary mil i tary avi a tion issues than many in the Defence com mu nity and the polit i cal lead ership.

Fu ture RAAF re cruits will know that a JSF is not an F/A-22A and they will know that an F-111 is faster and car ries more fire power fur ther than an F/A-18A or JSF. What might sell in the mass me dia and Can berra po litical circles will not sell where it counts – in the minds and hearts of the young Aus tra lians who are to be come our future war riors.

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