By Dr Carlo Kopp

By condemning the F-111, Defence has thrown away opportunities to improve RAAF capabilities at low incremental cost.

One blunder was to fail to ‘weaponise’ the 15 F-111Gs acquired during the early 1990s. They did not have Pave Tack to support laser-guided bombs.

The F-111C was then getting the new digital AUP upgrade package on a production line at Amberley. An adaptation of the AUP design, using common software, could have been installed in the F-111Gs largely for the cost of the hardware and physical installation, using the then active production line.

Instead, AIR 5404, intended to weaponise the F-111Gs, resulted in a proposal which would have cost almost as much as the AUP program and would have introduced unique hardware. The F-111G remains largely in the configuration it was delivered in and the AUP line shut down.

BAES snaffles Alvis armour

LONDON – BAE Systems snatched the UK tank maker Alvis for £355 million, in a last-minute bid that trumped a rival bid from US competitor General Dynamics. Alvis withdrew its earlier recommendation for a bid from GD.

BAES wants to play a key role in a new £3 billion UK armoured vehicle contract called Future Rapid Effects System (FRES).

It also comes at a time when European industry executives and politicians have expressed fears of US domination, fuelled by rising US defence spending, which at over $200 billion a year dwarfs what Europe spends collectively.

Alvis started as a car manufacturer in 1919 and now has operations in the UK, Scandinavia and South Africa. Apart from tanks, Alvis makes armoured infantry fighting vehicles, and APCs.

Palace-saviour Hurricane found

LONDON – Archaeologists have unearthed parts of a World War II Hurricane that crashed after downing a German Dornier near Buckingham Palace on September 15, 1940, now commemorated as Battle of Britain Day.

Historians believe the German plane may have been on a mission to destroy Buckingham Palace.

Pilot Ray Holmes had run out of ammunition so he flew his Hurricane into the German plane. He managed to slice off the bomber’s tail and parachuted out of his plane before it hit Buckingham Palace Road. The Dornier plunged into part of Victoria Station.

Holmes’s plane, which hit the ground at around 350 miles an hour, was buried under a water main and never recovered. The road was later paved over.

Archaeologist Christopher Bennett said the plane’s engine and control panel were located late Sunday during excavations in Buckingham Palace Road in the centre of the capital.

Holmes, 89, was present as the engine was lifted out.

Myanmar jounro snatched in KL

KUALA LUMPUR – Unknown men abducted a Myanmar journalist and political activist in Malaysia last week as he tried to cover a visit by Myanmar Prime Minister Khin Nyunt.

Minn Khaw, 26, a supporter of the country’s main opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, was on his way to Kuala Lumpur International Airport when his car was forced to the side of the road.

The kidnappers said they were police but police HQ denies any knowledge of the lift.
SLAM-ER’s slam-dunk

ST. LOUIS – The Boeing standoff land attack missile expanded response (SLAM-ER) successfully demonstrated its new retargeting capability at Point Mugu, California.

A F/A-18C Hornet, assigned to Strike Fighter Squadron 25 (VFA-25), launched a SLAM-ER to destroy a simulated radar site on San Nicolas Island, used by the US Navy for test and training.

The SLAM-ER changed direction when the Hornet pilot identified a new target on the island and sent a midcourse update.

In addition to retargeting, a series of USN tests used the SLAM-ER to attack land targets moving at highway speeds. The capability will make SLAM-ER the first operational standoff weapon that can attack moving land targets.

- Picture: The diverted bomb steers from building to tower (left)

Hornet fleet from four to three squadrons and aggregate flying hours by 25 percent – adding 25 percent more to the life of the remaining fleet.

- Improved F-111 availability since the ageing aircraft engineering program at Amberley minimised incremental F-111 buy numbers.

For eight to nine F-111s per active squadron and remaining spares to cover deeper maintenance and upgrade downtime, the pool of airframes in Australia is arguably large enough.

If a higher ratio of spare tails is sought, further F-111Gs could be acquired, or alternately a block replacement of F-111Gs with about 20 or so younger F-111Fs would be viable.

- The proposal to kill off the F-111 and rebarrel 15 up to 43 further F/A-18ABs is more expensive in the short, medium and long term, if you do the sums properly.

It also reduces overall capability and involves pouring resources into the F/A-18A, which is becoming less competitive in the regional environment.

US fire tankers will fly again

WASHINGTON – Big airtankers, grounded the 33-plane fleet last month because it had no way to tell if the aging planes were safe, has now, with the Federal Aviation Administration, developed guidelines to assess airworthiness.

The companies that operate the military surplus planes will supply flight history, maintenance and other information, said Mark Rey, the Agriculture undersecretary.

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