Centrepiece

The first two Airborne Early Warning and Control (AEW&C) aircraft have now been formally accepted by Air Force. As Jaimie Abbott reports, it's been a long journey.

new chapter has begun for Surveillance and Response Group (SRG), with the first wo Wedgetails now officially accepted into service at RAAF Base Williamtown. The aircraft will be a key part of Australia's air combat capability into the future.

Thousands of hands have made the project work – from contractors to military members in Boeing and its partners, Defence Materiel Organisation, 2SQN and Headquarters 42WG. All have committed to delivering a world-class AEW&C system that meets our warfighting resource requirements from day one until final acceptance.

Headquarters 42WG Logistics Officer FLTLT Nick Willers has been a part of that process for the past four years, and said it's been among the most allenging highlights of his career.

"There has been no manual on how we needed to piece together this project. The Wedgetail aircraft is a 'first of type' development and extremely complex," FLTLT Willers said.

That complexity is a result of the cutting-edge radar technology and sensors that have been incorporated into each aircraft. Three more Wedgetails are expected to be delivered to Williamtown later this year and the final one by early next year

There have been many hoops to ump through along the way, particularly with respect to radar and integrated system performance.

For 2SON maintenance crews, the biggest hurdle has been the process of ceiving the Authorised Maintenance nisation (AMO), which means they now have the authority to do maintenance work on the Wedgetail aircraft. Squadron Senior Engineering Officer

SONLDR David Johnstone said the staff had put in long hours to meet the reguions and implement the appropriate support systems

'Establishing an initial AMO for a new aircraft type was always going to be a challenge and we've had to wait for spares, procedures

and publications to be completed before we could pass the test," he said. Williamtow

craft.

42WG

Officer

Administration

FLTLT Nicole

Strvbosch said

contractors

has undergone a ignificant and structure upgrade to accommodate and support the Wedgetail air-

42WG Clerk SGT Lisa Swan said Headquarters Wedgetail at Williamtown.

out the window and watching the new aircraft take off and land," SGT Swan

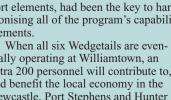
engaging regular stakeholders, including with community leaders, and base sup-



aircraft.

Barrett

Photo: LAC Craic



tually operating at Williamtown, an extra 200 personnel will contribute to, and benefit the local economy in the Newcastle, Port Stephens and Hunter Already in location, Headquarters

it was exciting to finally see the "I'm still getting used to looking

The introduction of Wedgetail changes the face of Air Battle Management (ABM) in the Air Force. Previously, air combat officers (ACOs)







of the Wedgetail

NEW REACH: **2SQN B Flight** Commander SQNLDR David Martin at work on board the aircraft. Photo: LAC Craig Barrett



port elements, had been the key to har- Known as air defence officers since nising all of the program's capability the early '90s, they've been purposely exposed to and given AEW&C experience through liaison roles and exchanges. Those operating with the Royal and United States air forces have trained on the E3 AWACS and others on the US Navy E2C Hawkeye.

Former 2SQN CO and now HQSRG Chief of Staff GPCAPT Tracey Friend said this had helped in gaining insight into large-scale AEW&C operations and enhanced understanding of their training framework and employment procedures.

Operators (mission crew and pilots) and technicians have embedded with the AEW&C Project Resident Project Team in Seattle, and within the Boeing Company itself

SRG's WGCDR Rob Saxton spent in the ABM stream have worked from a an extended period of time in Seattle static ground location as part of 41WG. as the Wedgetail Test and Operations

Manager. "Over there we regularly flew the Wedgetail aircraft using the same systems we expected to operate with, when the aircraft was eventually delivered to the RAAF," WGCDR Saxton said.

"We supported the improvement of tactical and interface procedures with other agencies as well as developed an understanding of some of the Wedgetail's capabilities in a broad battle scenario.

Working in 42WG and on the Wedgetail, the ACOs can talk to external assets including in the Army and Navy using the comprehensive commu-

nications system while airborne. The Navy will provide one fighter controller per mission crew, which will add to the operational experience and

understanding of maritime operations for everyone in 2SQN. The Army has also established 14

Ground Liaison Section within the Wing to provide special land expertise.

ENGAGING: HQ 42WG

Strybosch liaises with a staff

member. Photo: CPL David Gibbs

ADMINO FLTLT Nicole

Number 2SQN B Flight Commander SQNLDR David Martin said: "We now have a further reach and can influence a lot more of the decisions by providing a clearer picture to ground, sea and other air forces."

Training has been essential for all aircrew in preparation for the acceptance of Wedgetail. Next door to the 42WG and 2SQN Headquarters is the AEW&C Systems Program Office (AEW&C SPO), where modified Boeing 737 simulators have been the foundation for initial and on-going training requirements for operators. The back-end simulator is a reflection of the real-time environment for ACOs.

Pilot SONLDR James Pearson said the modifications to the simulator had resulted in Wedgetail having one of the best air-to-air refuelling training devices.

INSIGHT: SQNLDR Amool Prasad and his son Carter in front of an F/A-18 at the open day. Photo: CPL

David Gibbs

FAMILY

Several of the squadron's pilots have also been attached to Virgin Airlines in Brisbane to fly on their Boeing 737 aircraft to gain further experience leading up to the delivery of the Wedgetail aircraft.

The celebrations continued with an open day organised by the AEW&C SPO, 2SON and 42WG, where family members were invited to attend.

Up to 400 people turned out to the family day on May 16. There were static displays of a Hornet, Wedgetail aircraft tours, and children's activities.

One of the attendees was SONLDR Amool Prasad who said: "It was really exciting for my family to get an insight into the work I've been doing for the pas four years, and my son Carter was excited to see the Wedgetail aircraft up close."

The Wedgetail aircraft will have five broad roles: surveillance, air defence maritime support, force coordination. and support to civil agencies.



