

Promoting a Positive Image of the Air Force

By Brett Katz

'If ever there was a time to fly in Western Australia, this is it!' remarked Squadron Leader Richman holding up some wind forecasts and terrain charts.

I admit these were unusual words when you consider that the most predominant Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) activity in Western Australia (WA) is pilot training at RAAF Base Pearce. This was my first day on the job as one of the few Defence Graduates assigned an Air Force rotation. My task, Public Relations Officer for the RAAF Hot-Air Balloon.



School kids present arms!

Yes, the RAAF has a Hot-Air Balloons and no, it is not a capability but rather a



very effective marketing and branding tool. We have been using the Balloon in such a capacity since 1990, and we have been on to a good thing ever since. Our objective is quite simple; 'to promote a positive image of the Air Force'. The RAAF Balloons are operated by 28 Air Force Reserve Squadron, based in Canberra, and conduct

regular training flights in the Canberra region in addition to our touring program.

In June, the RAAF Balloon was deployed to regional WA for the first time, focussing on inland towns with a population of 4,000 or more. This was a

monumental deployment and our first tour to WA in that it took the Balloon Crew four days to drive across the Nullarbor Plain.



The WA tour was extremely successful despite the weather conspiring against us. Out of character rain, wind and fog, the three enemies of ballooning had us grounded for some of the morning flights; however we were able to persist with and complete all other duties.

As part of a tour we conduct presentations and demonstrations of the RAAF Balloon at local primary schools. Students are informed that hot-air ballooning was the birth of

human aviation as well as other interesting facts. Can you believe that a sheep, a duck and a rooster were the first to fly a balloon? These school visits provide an opportunity for the Air Force to engage local communities and make a positive impression on students, staff and parents. It is a rewarding experience watching the awe and excitement amongst the children as the balloon inflates. Later, stickers depicting the RAAF Roundel and Crest are handed out to students with which they promptly mimic the Balloon Crew by placing them on their shirt fronts and shoulder sleeves.

Later in the year, the Balloon Crew deployed to North Queensland as part of the July Tour program. It has been ten years since the Balloon last visited Townsville. As a result of fantastic weather conditions and the participation of approximately 3000 school students, the July tour was a highlight of the year.

'Our primary role in the Air Force is to provide Public Relations support; to participate in events such as the North Queensland Tour is a wonderful opportunity for the balloon crew to interact with the community, something they really look forward to,' said Squadron Leader Jenkins, Commanding Officer 28SQN.

For more information about the RAAF Balloon and its activities see the following website

RAAF Balloons: www.raaf.gov.au/balloons

Editor's Note: This article was intended for the 2007/2008 Summer edition.