FLIGHT LIEUTENANT BELINDA PAVLOVIC HAS EMBRACED CHALLENGE THROUGHOUT HER CAREER. BEGINNING HER PROFESSIONAL LIFE AS AN AIRCRAFT MAINTENANCE TECHNICIAN, SHE HAS CONTINUED ONWARDS AND UPWARDS TO COMPLETE AN ENGINEERING DEGREE AND COMMISSION AS AN OFFICER IN THE RAAF. SHE NOW HAS HER SIGHTS SET ON BECOMING A FLIGHT TEST ENGINEER — A ROLE THAT WOULD SEE HER LITERALLY TAKING TO THE AIR.

WORDS BAZ BAROCE

AIMING HIGH

FLTLT Pavlovic joined the Air Force at 19 years of age as an aircraft maintenance technician, pursuing a childhood curiosity of aircraft and how they fly, but it was not an easy path, proving to be a stern test of resilience. “I don’t know what prompted my interest in aviation except that I like to know how things work and I wanted to find out about how these huge, heavy chunks of metal fly”, she says.

“I attempted University twice”, she said. “Once for a business degree, and then next with an IT degree, but I left after a semester of each”. She then turned her sights on Air Force but was initially rejected for pilot. Her high maths results pointed her towards the navigator category but she was also rejected for that and then again initially rejected for aviation technician.

“I got myself fully ready - mentally and physically fit - so that I was able to be picked up at short notice when a spot became available”. While she was happy as a technician, FLTLT Pavlovic still wanted to attend university and felt it a natural progression to undertake aeronautical engineering. “I thoroughly enjoyed the work and will always appreciate the invaluable skills my time in maintenance provided me. I was determined to finally complete a Bachelor degree. This led me to the University of Newcastle, where I studied mechanical engineering, gaining the momentum and distinctions needed to apply for a commission through the Airman’s Access to the Academy (AAAA) Scheme,” she said.

“I was commissioned in 2010, and realised a lifelong ambition and became an officer of the Royal Australian Air Force. I began studying at ADFA, and after a long, isolating and challenging four years, I finally earned my Bachelor of Aeronautical Engineering - with First Class Honours, thanks to the unwavering support from my family and friends.”

FLTLT Pavlovic soon found herself in a leadership role, and her technician background proved invaluable. “On graduation, I was posted to a team-leader position within Capability Acquisition and Sustainment Group”, she says. “I managed a team of eight experienced tradesmen - both Australian Public Servants (APS) and Senior NCOs. I found that being able to apply my experiences and an insight as a technician was a great help towards earning the respect of my peers and team alike.”

In 2016, FLTLT Pavlovic joined the Defence Aviation Safety Authority (DASA), where she found herself surrounded by like-minded and motivated ADF engineers, in a progressive and supportive environment. Alongside a steep learning curve on engine structural integrity, DASA provided constant opportunity for personal development and collaborative training that is fully supported by the chain of command.

The cultural reforms within Defence also led FLTLT Pavlovic to opportunities to participate in, and also conduct forums on New Horizon, Pathway to Change, and Women in Aviation/Aerospace Australia. FLTLT Pavlovic is motivated by a desire for continuous self-improvement, and said she “never wants to stop learning”. “DASA has given me a unique insight into aviation engineering from the regulator’s perspective. I consider myself fortunate to be a part of the organisation during the introduction of the new Defence Aviation Safety Regulations (DASR), and the inaugural International Military Airworthiness Regulation Conference (IMARC). I feel supported by my peers and my organisation. This is by far the best posting I have had,” she said.

FLTLT Pavlovic is upbeat about what lies ahead. “The future offers many opportunities and with them, their own unique challenges.” “I’ve always been my own worst enemy but I’ve learnt so much personality and professionalism over the years, that I have much better understanding of how to handle difficult situations. I spent the first few years of my career trying to fit in with the boys, rather than understanding how I can contribute with my own skillset that may differ from theirs.”

“That’s the whole point of diversity which I never really understood”. For those seeking to build a fulfilling and challenging career she has some straight forward advice. “Find a mentor or a coach that you can trust and talk to.”