Exchange of ideas on secondment

FLTLT Barrie Bardoe

AVIATION accident investigator LCDR Darryl Whitehead is making the most of a six-month secondment to the Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB). LCDR Whitehead, of the Defence Aviation Safety Authority’s Directorate of Defence Aviation and Air Force Safety (DDAAFS), said he was finding the experience invaluable. LCDR Whitehead was recently deployed to the field as part of a two-man team dealing with a helicopter accident. “As sad as the circumstances were, it proved to be illuminating, educational and thoroughly thought-provoking,” he said. “As an [accident] investigator, you hope not to be called into action but if and when you are, the experience and process is an absorbing, intriguing and compelling adventure into human factors.” There is a close relationship between the two organisations, with a Memorandum of Understanding providing a framework for Defence and the ATSB to cooperate in the investigation of transport safety matters. Both organisations are committed to investigating accidents and analysing occurrence data, with the sole aim of preventing recurrence. Initially, it was an exchange of safety data, which developed into sharing training methods and techniques and the use of each other’s reports to develop recommendations after accidents and incidents. More recently ATSB and DDAAFS have tried to ensure investigators from both organisations attend certain accidents to maintain knowledge of the latest techniques and methodologies. “One of the tenets of this MoU is to encourage mutual assistance and the sharing of expertise, training opportunities, experience and equipment in safety investigations,” LCDR Whitehead said. “Because of the scales of economics between the organisations, this loan of a serving DDAAFS officer into the ATSB framework has facilitated an accelerated learning and experiential process, benefiting both the member and ultimately Defence.” LCDR Whitehead said his time with the ATSB highlighted the shared goal of keeping aviation as safe as reasonably practicable. “There are numerous subtle differences between the two agencies but they are united in the common goal to improve transport safety,” he said. “In a perfect world and with a frank-and-fearless exchange of ideas and protocols, there is much that could benefit both sides. “As a military member with 38
years of military aviation service, I have access to a deep well of knowledge, experiences, techniques and processes from my colleagues within DDAAFS, which has helped me immeasurably during my loan to the ATSB. “Underneath the different uniforms, we are essentially all cut from the same cloth.” ATSB Chief Commissioner Greg Hood said there was a lot to be gained from the relationship. “It has been a great learning opportunity for all of us having LCDR Whitehead join our team on secondment from DDAAFS,” Mr Hood said. “Darryl deployed as part of an investigation team to a fatal helicopter accident in August and he is now the investigator-in-charge of the investigation until he leaves us in December. He is making an invaluable contribution to transport safety.” DDAAFS Deputy Director Safety Investigation WGCGR Philip Trigge said there was much to be gained from the relationship between the two organisations. “Darryl’s secondment to the ATSB is already yielding benefits,” he said. “Our strong relationship with the ATSB has improved further, and Darryl is gaining valuable experience which will be reinvested in DDAAFS when he returns.”