

# 3SQN



## Tip of the spear

*by Gerard Frawley*

**Nearly two dozen Hornets and Hawks launch from Williamtown into the gathering darkness, the noise and the Hornets' glowing afterburners piercing the sky as the final wave of flying in ECADEX 09 gets underway.**

This night wave of flying sees Hornets from 77 Squadron and 76 Squadron Hawks fly out over NSW's east coast to meet up with 6 Squadron F-111s flying down from Amberley. They form the attacking 'Red' force, and will fly simulated strike missions against targets which are to be defended by 'Blue' force, comprising

3SQN and some 75SQN Hornets (visiting from RAAF Tindal).

The simulated battles that follow are the culmination of the three week long ECADEX, the biennial RAAF exercise focused on exercising air combat and air defence skills. By the end of ECADEX participating aircrews' air combat skills will be finely honed and developed, a state much of the Air Force is dedicated to achieving.

Much of the efforts of the RAAF's extensive pilot training system (BFTS, 2FTS, 79 and 76SQNs, 2OCU), its technical training for maintainers at Wagga, the acquisition activities of DMO, the strategic planning at Air Force HQ, Air Command and Air Combat Group headquarters level, not to mention the contractor provided

heavy maintenance, is directed to providing the RAAF's three Hornet fast jet squadrons (along with the F-111s/arriving Super Hornets of 82WG) with the personnel, aircraft and weapons they need to deliver air combat capability – in effect putting the 'Force' in Air Force.

So RAAF Williamtown based 3 Squadron, along with sister squadrons 77SQN (also at Williamtown) and 75SQN (Tindal), sits at the tip of that Air Force 'spear', or system, to use its dozen or so F/A-18 Hornets to undertake its mission of providing the "effective delivery of air combat capability – on target, on time".

"There's a very big system behind us, it's huge," 3 Squadron Commanding Officer Wing Commander Terry van Haren said



during a recent visit to the squadron by *Australian Aviation*. “We’re in the privileged position to be at the end of our training, in many areas, for experienced guys to be the experts in the trade, and ultimately they are guys that deliver that capability by pushing that button or pulling that trigger.”

And in many ways today’s 3SQN, like the other RAAF ‘classic’ Hornet squadrons, is at peak effectiveness in its ability to deliver air combat capability, thanks to its continual training cycles, its more than two decades of experience in operating the Hornet, and the advances in capabilities brought to the jet by the ongoing Hornet Upgrade (HUG) program.

“As a team, with the capabilities of this aircraft, and the things we’ve learnt in

operating the aeroplane for over 20 years, we are much more effective,” said WGCDR van Haren. “I can see that in every exercise we participate in, our kill ratios are higher, we are more accurate with our weaponry, and our survival rates in training combat are a lot higher. It all means that we know we’ll be a lot more effective if we go into operations.”

Conversely, the fact that the RAAF has been operating the Hornet for 25 years now means the aircraft is suffering from some ageing aircraft issues which is affecting aircraft availability rates and increasing work for 3SQN’s maintenance personnel.

“It’s a very complex game, trying to manage aircraft and component maintenance, the people we need to do that, adapt for changes as aircraft become un-

serviceable and new problems are uncovered, and to do all that and still maintain the rate of effort that we need to,” said 3SQN SENGCO (senior engineering officer) SQNLDR Jim Xinos, whose main mission is to deliver serviceable aircraft to meet the flying program.

These are perhaps the key tasks and challenges facing 3SQN today – running an effective training program to ensure peak proficiencies in its assigned roles against the backdrop of aircraft availability issues driven by aircraft being off line for upgrade programs and growing ageing aircraft maintenance issues. That combination of aircrew training and proficiency and aircraft availability is the key to 3SQN’s ability to deliver effective air combat capability.



**BATTLE HONOURS** 3SQN battle honours on the nose of Hornet A21-13, specially painted for the Squadron's 90th anniversary in 2006. (Paul Sadler)

## BATTLE RHYTHM

Of the three classic Hornet units 3SQN is arguably the most famous, with its World War 1 Australian Flying Corps origins and its World War 2 record of shooting down more enemy aircraft than any other RAAF fighter squadron. Today it remains one of the world's pre-eminent fighter units, with the awarding of the 2007 and 2008 Kittyhawk Trophy for the most proficient RAAF Hornet squadron and its consistently high kill ratios in exercises recognition of its professionalism, a result of the continual training cycle to extract the full potential of its aircraft, aircrew, and personnel who support them.

ECADEX 09, which wound up in early December, marked the culmination of a four month long training block for 3SQN focused on air-to-air combat. That four month block is one of three 3SQN (and the other Hornet squadrons) rotate through, with the other two blocks focused on air-to-ground and ADF support (close air support for the Army and fleet support for the Navy). Together, the three blocks make up 3SQN's 'battle rhythm', the unit's training cycle to allow it to meet its mission.

"The whole unit is in a cycle to achieve its readiness," explained WGCDR van Haren. "We go through a cycle of training which allows us to concentrate for a period

**3SQN CO** WGCDR Terry van Haren has over 5000 flying hours, including around 3500 hours on fast jets. A qualified FCI, he was awarded the DSM for leading 75SQN combat operations in Iraq in 2003. (Paul Sadler)



on air-to-air, a period on air-to-surface and the other specialist roles. And we continually train in that cycle. Our aircrew are multirole and our people are multirole."

The ADF training block – which can include fleet support, close air support, JTAC training courses, and mission rehearsal exercises for Army forces about to deploy on operations overseas – rotates between the three Hornet squadrons during the course of the year, so that at any one time one Hornet squadron is providing that support flying. When the units perform their air-to-air and air-to-ground training is in part dictated by the timing of major training exercises.

"Those blocks typically have a crescendo activity. So for 3SQN in 2009, we chose to do our air-to-surface block training period from May to August because we did Talisman Saber during that period, and that was an offensive counter air, strike, close air support type program."

The unit reaches its highest level of skills readiness once it has completed both the air-to-air and air-to-surface blocks. Many of those skills are then used in the ADF support block, but as aircrew currency falls over time in certain areas and new pilots are posted into the squadron, continuing the block training program is key to continuing to reach high levels of proficiency.

That battle rhythm means that at any one time different squadrons are slightly more proficient than others in certain aspects of air combat. So at any one time, while all three Hornet squadrons have the ability to undertake basic air defence operations if called upon, if a higher threat mission or situation arose, "you would pick your most current unit, and by the cycle that is built into our training scheme, there is a unit that is typically hitting the crescendo of its air-to-air training, and there's also a unit that is hitting the crescendo of its air-to-surface training."

Overall, the three Hornet squadrons share the same missions and the same standards and procedures under the oversight of 81WG, which is responsible for developing those standards, as well as resource allocation of aircraft and personnel and tactics development for the classic Hornet community.

"One of the reasons we have three operational squadrons is so that we can share the burden, or we can work together and build force and build size," explained WGCDR van Haren. "We do a lot of cooperation nowadays to help each other out as we do different programs. If one unit takes on the burden of a major activity or exercise, you usually find the other units are helping as well."

Indeed, at the time of *AA's* visit 3SQN was hosting about 40 75SQN maintainers and some of 75SQN's aircraft were integrated into 3SQN for ECADEX flying.



**FIGHTER FLEET** 3SQN will typically have around 12 to 14 Hornets on strength at any one time, dependent on its flying program, the requirements of the other Hornet units, and maintenance and upgrade programs. (Paul Sadler)

## ALWAYS TRAINING

At squadron level the key task is managing ongoing pilot training and professional development such that pilots attain and maintain the necessary skills, and the different skill levels within the squadron are balanced so that the training burden is as even as possible.

"It really is about having a match of enough experienced pilots to train the inexperienced pilots," said WGCDR van Haren. "In fighter operations we always fly at least as a pair, and usually in more complicated missions in a four ship, so we typically have the experienced pilots fly with the inexperienced pilots, and then we have what I call the middle order, the experienced but not yet senior pilots who are also developing skills and leadership."

Thankfully RAAF pilot retention rates have improved somewhat in recent times, in part due to renewed Air Force efforts to improve pay and conditions, and in part due to airlines slowing pilot recruitment in the wake of the international recession.

"That's helped us to regain a more balanced ratio between the experienced and inexperienced pilots," WGCDR van Haren said. "It's really about getting the balance right, then you've got a healthy squadron – a healthy environment for the young guys to learn in, and not too much burden on the senior guys in providing those experiences to the younger pilots."

At any one time 3SQN will have about 18 pilots on strength, comprising the CO, XO (executive officer), half a dozen or so experienced pilots, and eight junior pilots.

Junior pilots, who can expect to fly about 200 hours a year, will join 3SQN (or 75 or 77) direct from completing OPCON, the six month long Hornet operational conver-

sion course with 20CU at Williamtown, qualified as a D-Cat pilot trained in the basics of using the Hornet in air-to-air and air-to-ground combat. Once at the squadron they will spend the next few months consolidating their basic fighter pilot skills before being graded as D-Cat mission ready, which means they can be employed on missions as a wingman.

"So they're a reliable wingman who can fly good formation, provide a good lookout, operate the radar and the weapon system correctly, and value-add to the team."

With experience a pilot can then be expected to be qualified as a C-Cat pairs, or element, lead.

"Then about the two, two and a half year point we start to develop them as four ship leads in both the air-to-air and air-to-surface roles."

Once qualified as a four ship lead they're qualified as a B-Cat. "That means we can

rely on them now as a four ship lead to effectively operate a four ship."

It's an ongoing cycle.

"You are always training," said WGCDR van Haren. "To be an operational squadron we don't want a full squadron of four ship leads, we would struggle with that because it's not needed. The ideal squadron has the right number of four ship leads, or higher categories, the right number of element leads, and the right number of wingmen."

A junior pilot would typically be posted to the squadron for two and half or three years, during which time he (as yet there have been no female RAAF fast jet pilots) would be expected to progress from D to C-Cat and hopefully be B-Cat rated before their next posting, typically a stint as an instructor at one of the Hawk squadrons or 2FTS.

The middle ranking experienced pilots will include QFIs (qualified flying instructors), Fighter Combat Instructors (FCIs) and exchange officers. 3SQN currently has two exchange pilots on strength, RAF FLTLT Kev Terrett, previously a Tornado F.3 pilot, and USAF MAJ Aaron Lapp, who has a F-15E Strike Eagle background.

"The guys who come here on exchange obviously have got some experience on flying jets, and you can bring that experience into the squadron and ... strengthen that bit of experience where there are younger guys," said FLTLT Terrett. "Your exchange officers coming in are going to be in their 30s, late 20s, so you get that little bit of cement in the middle of the squadron."

Until the start of 2010 MAJ Lapp was 3SQN's weapons officer, as he held the USAF equivalent qualification to the RAAF's FCI, and as such was 3SQN's in-house specialist in tactics, the employment of weapons and use of the aircraft's systems, until a RAAF FCI posted into the unit.





**SIGNING ON** 3SQN aircrew, including USAF exchange officer MAJ Aaron Lapp, sign for their aircraft before their sortie. (Paul Sadler)

"In terms of what we do in the position it's really mentoring and instructing on weapons and tactics," said MAJ Lapp.

"The FCI/weapons officer is a very important part of the fighter pilot community, it standardises the way we do business, it helps us instruct our junior pilots and develops our tactics and procedures," said WGCDR van Haren. "Add to that the experienced pilots, the qualified flying instructors and night vision system instructors – we have then a community of pilots which basically helps us regenerate ourselves and develop."

## DEPLOYMENTS & EXERCISES

The squadron can generally expect to deploy on two major exercises a year, typically one that would be the focus of the air-to-air block, another the focus of the air-to-surface block. Then there are a number of

smaller deployments, especially when supporting the Army during the ADF support block, perhaps comprising four aircraft.

Today most of the squadron's equipment for a deployment could be carried by a C-17, while 'stager' C-130s carry most of the spares that might be required if a Hornet breaks down en route, and the squadron's maintenance personnel would fly on a charter civilian aircraft or a C-17.

How much of the squadron that would deploy on an exercise depends on the planned rate of effort, and whether or not weapons work is to be undertaken, but would typically number between 120 and 150 personnel.

"Regular deployments to South East Asia make sure that we are deployable to the region, and give us all the experience of packing up, moving and operating in that environment," said WGCDR van Haren.

Preplanning for a major exercise begins six months in advance, while more detailed

final preparations begin three-to-four weeks out, followed by packing and then finalising aircraft maintenance about a week ahead.

"That's in a preplanned sense," noted WGCDR van Haren. "How quickly could we do it? Well we could start moving tomorrow if the government told us we had to go tomorrow. It depends on the move, but the biggest variable is getting airlift support. Most of the tooling is deployable, all our tool kits are designed to be packed up and moved, pretty much most of our stuff is designed to be taken on the road, it's very much a matter of manpower."

Deployments provide invaluable experience, as does live weapons usage. 3SQN pilots will routinely use practice weaponry such as BDUs plus the Hornet's 20mm gun, then typically will drop heavier bombs, including LGBs and JDAMs, once a year during a 'bomb camp', which would be the focus of a major exercise or deployment in the squadron's air-to-surface training block.

"When we do that it's not only a training evolution for the pilot, it's a validation of the whole weapon system. So when we do that my armament technicians are getting trained to build bombs, to load bombs, to make sure the weapon system works. Then we go out and employ the weaponry so it is a regular test of the system, it's not just the pilot that gets the training, there's quite a large team involved in employing live weaponry."

Firing live air-to-air weapons is a less frequent event, particularly in recent times due to modern missiles' longer shelf lives, the lack of a target towing drone in the ADF currently, and changes in RAAF practices, but it remains an invaluable experience.

"Typically our live air-to-air missile shoots are preceded by a large amount of academics to understand the missile's capabilities. We usually use the shots as well to look at the different edges of the envelope, and validate that it works, and gain a better understanding of the missile system, its capabilities and its limitations. The act of pulling the trigger and seeing the missile go off is also an experience, it's also very short lived as these missiles go very quick."

Combat operations over Iraq in 2003 also added to the experience within 3 and the other RAAF Hornet squadrons. WGCDR van Haren was in fact the XO of 75SQN in 2003 and led, under then CO WGCDR Mel Hupfield (now Commander Air Combat Group) 75SQN operations during Operation Falconer, where 14 75SQN Hornets based out of Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar flew 350 combat sorties over Iraq between mid February and mid May 2003. Indeed, for his "exceptional leadership in warlike efforts" the





**ON THE WING** 3SQN's A21-13 with 6SQN F-111C A8-135 during ECADEX 09. (SQNLDR Simon Ashworth/Dept of Defence)

then SQNLDR van Haren was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal.

"Two things out of Iraq, one is we proved ourselves in an operational setting working with US and UK forces, and it also showed us the true value of multirole operations because it was an environment where we started off with air-to-air operations, and ended up very quickly doing air-to-surfaces missions," WGCDR van Haren noted.

"That changed very quickly, within a week. We were prepared for that, but it shows that you have to be truly multirole, and you can't afford to concentrate on any one discipline, otherwise you will not be relevant in an operational context."

Certainly, FLTLT Terrett observed that the 3SQN Hornet pilots are "really versatile. That would be my observation, we do a lot, but the guys are really good at it."

## IMPROVED SA

While training is critical to that multirole ability, so too are the capabilities of the aircraft itself. The Hornets the RAAF took to the Middle East had undergone initial components of the HUG program, including Phase 1 comms/nav upgrades and the Phase 2.1 upgrade to the Raytheon APG-73 radar. Those and subsequent sub-phases, including HUG 2.2 which introduced colour cockpit displays, the JHMCS helmet mounted site, the Link 16 datalink capability, and a new countermeasures dispensing system; HUG 2.4 which saw the Northrop Grumman Litening-AT FLIR targeting pod replace the old AAS-38 NITE Hawk pod; and HUG 2.3 which is currently seeing the Raytheon ALR-67(v)3 radar warning receiver added; have transformed the classic Hornet's capabilities.

"The aeroplane now is fundamentally different in its avionics and weapon system," said WGCDR van Haren, who first

converted to the Hornet in 1993. "I spent a good 10 years flying the aeroplane and using the systems at that time to develop situational awareness in my head to fight. I can now sit in the aeroplane and I'm now delivered a lot of that information through the systems that have been brought into the aircraft. I've got a much better visual system with the helmet mounted sight, a better weapon system with the more capable radar and the AMRAAM and ASRAAM combination for air-to-air, and then in air-to-surface employment having the Litening-AT plus the JDAM and LGB combination makes it a truly wonderful weapon system. It's changed quite considerably."

About half 3SQN's Hornets have completed the HUG 2.3 electronic warfare upgrade, and the unit has gained experience with ALR-67(v)3 fitted aircraft during 2009 while participating in Talisman Saber, Bersama Lima in Malaysia, and most recently ECADEX. "It is one of those very important capability increases that have come into

the aeroplane. It is a fantastic bit of kit."

The overall effect of all the HUG upgrades is the pilot's much improved situational awareness, or SA.

"Great SA means going into a fight with more knowledge of where the enemy is and what they're doing, it means be able to be more offensive in an entry into a fight. Most fights are BVR (beyond visual range), so you're typically able to engage at range with full knowledge of what an adversary is doing and where they're going, which makes targeting and shooting easier."

And the upgraded Hornet's new capabilities mean pilots more quickly become effective at employing it as a weapon. "What I can really see is young guys getting a lot more out of it, and being able to operate at a much higher level, quicker, because of the systems and the capability of the aircraft," said WGCDR van Haren.

FLTLT Terrett offers a good perspective on the Hornet, having previously flown the Tornado F.3.





**NIGHT MOVES** A 3SQN Hornet takes off for the final night wave of flying for ECADEX 09. (Paul Sadler)

"It's a lot more powerful, it's nice having the turning performance you don't get in an F.3," he observed. "As BVR air-to-air platforms they're very similar with the same missiles and Link 16. (But) the nice thing about the Hornet is you can push into that merge and you're more aware that you've got that performance to get out of trouble or get that quick kill."

## FLEET MANAGEMENT

While aspects of HUG have been directed at improving the Hornet's capabilities, Phase 3 of the program has focused on addressing airframe fatigue and extending the aircraft's service life until it is replaced by the F-35 JSF late this decade. (HUG 3.1 saw aircraft undergo minor structural mods and discreet patching or blending of key structural areas, while under HUG 3.2 11 Hornets have had their centre barrel fuselage sections replaced.)

"The key thing with HUG, right throughout the program at a tactical level, is we've been managing a mixed fleet," said SQNLDR Xinos, not only in terms of aircraft tail numbers shifting around between the four Hornet units, but in terms of aircraft being at different standards of the upgrade program as well.

Traditionally, a squadron was allocated its own aircraft, and they didn't move between squadrons very much. However, the HUG process has seen a shift to manage aircraft at a wing level, with all the jets now dubbed 'grey tails'.

"Each aircraft has its own idiosyncrasies, and if you get to know the history of that

aircraft it makes it far easier to diagnose a problem," remarked SQNLDR Xinos. "If you get new aircraft with similar symptoms, but you don't know the history as well, you can tend to misdiagnose, particularly when you have complex systems such as the environmental control system, there's so many things that can go wrong in that, and the symptoms can indicate a variety of unserviceabilities.

"You've always got dogs and gems in any fleet of vehicles, and it's nice to know your own dogs, and keep your own gems! It's nice to be able to manage them."

While 81WG and ACG are keen that once the major elements of HUG are completed the aircraft return to being allocated to specific units, no final decision has yet been taken on that.

"We've tried very hard at a wing level to manage having as many aircraft of a certain mod state at a particular squadron so the training can be tailored to that, but that hasn't been achievable, so we've had some restrictions on our ability to produce aircraft to meet the training requirements."

But, "it's a little bit of pain for a hell of a lot of gain" for the increased capabilities HUG has brought.

HUG has also brought improvements in maintainability. "In terms of avionics it is so much easier now to maintain," said SQNLDR Xinos. This has come through a greater digitisation of the aircraft's systems, with more automated fault finding. "The fault finding can be occasionally inaccurate, but fault codes are generally pretty good at isolating where the faults are, and technology has gotten better in the way we com-

partmentalise the avionics, and it's easier to fault find to block level."

But while HUG's improvements have brought benefits to 3SQN's maintainers, ageing aircraft issues with the Hornets (which were delivered between 1986 and 1991) are becoming more problematic. Generating sufficient aircraft to meet training and operational requirements will be an important challenge, not just for 3SQN and the other Hornet units, but 81WG and the TFSPO, the DMO's Tactical Fighter System Program Office which oversees Hornet maintenance and support.

At the squadron level particular areas of concern on the Hornet include the wing leading and trailing edges, the undercarriage, which is susceptible to corrosion, areas on the upper surface of the wing, and the wing root. Wiring is another area requiring more attention, both due to the aircraft's age, which is seeing insulation deteriorate, but also wear and tear as electrical cables and conduits flex when the aircraft is manoeuvring.

Known trouble spots are covered by Special Technical Instructions, or STIs, which are inspection, monitoring, and if necessary repair regimes.

"The workload on our 'black handers', the aircraft structural fitters and aircraft technicians, has grown quiet considerably, having to detect, monitor and repair structural issues," said SQNLDR Xinos.

That rising workload issue had been compounded by the retention and recruitment issues that impacted 3SQN's maintenance as it did much of the Air Force. Aviation structural fitters, or ASTFITTs,

were in particular demand with the airlines, at least until the Global Financial Crisis induced economic slowdown, which has seen retention rates improve significantly. Also, noted SQNLDR Xinos, improved recruiting has been helping to increase the numbers of AVTECHs, or avionics technicians.

"My squadron is manned to its required level right now, plus or minus a little bit. So manpower wise we're adequately resourced for the rate of effort we're supposed to produce with an aircraft that doesn't break every day. It's that last bit that is giving us a few problems ... the aircraft is old, and like any old vehicle it needs TLC."

So manpower management, not just manning numbers but high quality training for the maintenance troops, will be central to 3SQN's success in being able to meet aircraft availability targets as the Hornet ages.

"It's a really, really complex game, we need really smart guys and girls out there managing maintenance – not so much the technical side of it, we've always had good technicians, we train the guys really well, and we use them well – but we've discovered over the years our maintenance management knowledge and ability had deteriorated. We've had to build that up over the last X number of years, and we're really only starting to get on top of that now."

Noted the 3SQN SENG0, "It's fortunate that at the time ageing aircraft issues are really starting to bite us, as well as some of the other complexities we face, that we've also developed the maintenance workforce to a point where it is resilient enough to be able to adapt and overcome these challenges. That's clearly evident in 3SQN in our results in the last couple of years, if you have a look at the exercises we've participated in and the ad hoc tasks we've picked up. I'm proud to say this squadron has become the 'go-to' squadron for 81WG, and that's because of our workforce."

Part of that resilience has come from entrusting more junior personnel with greater responsibilities, said SQNLDR Xinos, who used the example of elements of 3SQN transiting to Exercise Bersama Lima in Malaysia last year, where aircraft unserviceabilities left some Hornets stuck in Surabaya in Indonesia for a number of days after the C-130s that had been tasked to carry 3SQN's equipment and spare parts were diverted to the Padang Assist relief effort.

"I had a very junior engineer running that show, a couple of experienced senior NCOs and some good troops, and they were stuck in the middle of nowhere, on a civvy airfield, both guarding and trying to repair Hornets while they had no spares support, they didn't know when that was coming, and they pulled that off really well."



**IN THE SHOP** The classic Hornet is now more capable than ever, thanks to the HUG program upgrades, but is becoming more maintenance intensive as it ages. (Paul Sadler)

That resilience means that "I'm quite confident that if we were told this afternoon that we had to deploy somewhere, we'd be there tomorrow, no problem at all, and we could sustain that for a period of time, I've that much confidence in my workforce."

That confidence has come as SQNLDR Xinos and his Warrant Officer, Dave Tuite, have focused on building 3SQN maintenance personnel's leadership and management skills, to add to their technical skills.

"What we at 3SQN have done, with the support of other agencies including DGTA (the Directorate General Technical Airworthiness) and DDAAFS (the Directorate Defence Aviation and Air

**SENG0** 3SQN SENG0 SQNLDR Jim Xinos. (Paul Sadler)



Force Safety), we've used a lot of their human factors knowledge to broaden the understanding of our maintenance managers, at the corporal and sergeant level, of human factors uses and limitations, so they can better understand their people and get more out of them, and we've also empowered them to make decisions.

"They've thrived on that, from what I saw when I came to the squadron two years ago when it seemed nobody wanted to make decisions, because they didn't feel empowered to do so. These guys have no problem coming forward and telling me what their solution would be."

"Together we pushed our workforce to change. It was very uncomfortable, there was a lot of resistance," said SQNLDR Xinos. "The guys we have in now are excellent leaders and managers, and that's why I've got the confidence in them."

## PART OF THE TEAM

"Squadrons are teams, so you have a team mentality going on," noted WGCDR van Haren. In all, the 3SQN 'team' has about 300 personnel on strength, from pilots and headquarters staff, to squadron maintenance personnel, to maintenance personnel in 3SQN's workshops who perform maintenance work on specific systems for all the Hornet squadrons, items such as refurbishing hydraulics, wheels and brakes, fuel tanks, maintaining ejection seats and survival equipment.

"I've got a great team of people working for me," WGCDR van Haren said. "Everyone's very enthusiastic to be here, they enjoy working on the aeroplane, they enjoy the teams they work in, and we enjoy operating the aircraft."