

LAA LTD BOEING AUSTRALIA LIMITED FEBRUARY 28 2008 SITE VISIT

Report by LAA Committee member, SQNLDR George Hodgson

On Thursday 28th February, Boeing Australia Ltd hosted a very informative visit for 13 LAA members at their Amberley site in Brisbane.

I was looking forward to the Boeing site visit, as the mention of Boeing brings to mind an organisation that has produced some of the most well known commercial and military aircraft in the western world. Just think 747 jumbo for starters. Further to this, Boeing at Amberley service the F-111 and are building the Airborne Early Warning & Control (AEW&C) aircraft for the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) - this was going to be a good site visit ... and it was! Paul Harkins, the Boeing Supply Manager at Amberley along with Max and Melanie provided a site visit to remember.

LAA members were provided a detailed presentation on the role Boeing play at Amberley, in performing deeper level servicing for F-111 aircraft, as well as assembling the new AEW&C aircraft. Most participants were keen to learn the capabilities of the F-111 and seeing one up close.

After the presentation we were provided a tour of the Boeing tool store by Max (A certified F-111 enthusiast) and how essential it is that all tools used to perform maintenance on aircraft are accounted for at all times. The example provided was if a tool is unaccounted for, it may still be on the aircraft and could cause significant damage to the aircraft in flight. Boeing is looking at implementing an RFID solution for management of tools in the future.

From the tool store, the group had an opportunity to closely inspect an F-111 undergoing a deeper level servicing. Max described the four different levels of services (minor/major) and explained that for an R4 service (major) the F-111 is stripped back to bare metal and all components inspected for wear and replaced if required. It is almost a brand new aircraft when completed. This process takes one year to complete and generally lasts for up to eight years before it requires another major service.

From the maintenance hangar floor we were provided a walkthrough of Boeing Amberley's warehouse. Most of the line items were for support of the F-111 with the warehouse based on a standard layout with bulk and mini-bulk sections and no automation. Boeing is looking at future options such as RFID to improve the picking process.

Our last stop was at the Boeing air life support section that repair and maintain the F-111 crew capsule parachute. Due to the whole cockpit being jettisoned in an emergency, as opposed to ejection seats, the parachute required to bring the capsule down to the ground safely is ... big! The fact that they compress it into a square less than 1m cubed is amazing. The personnel in this section take their job very seriously as there is no leeway if a parachute fails.

The main aspect that impressed me and fellow LAA members was the level of skill, knowledge and passion that Boeing personnel have for the F-111. This certainly helps ensure that a quality product is delivered at the end of a service to the RAAF.

The visit ended with a very nice lunch provided by Boeing and a history of the F-111 by Max (did I mention passionate). The tour concluded with the presentation of the LAA plaque to Paul Harkins, to thank Boeing for providing the opportunity to visit. I wonder how much an F-111 will cost to buy when they retire. I think it would look good in the front of my garden.



L-R: Paul Harkins, Amberley Supply Manager, Boeing with LAA Committee member, SQNLDR George Hodgson.