

F-35 countdown: Industrial collaboration key to success



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COMMENTS

As a global project, the F-35 is dependent upon industrial collaboration and coordination. RUAG Australia has built on past success with the Air Force's F-111s and F-18s to integrate as part of the global supply chain supporting the F-35.

Precision manufacturing has transformed the way that modern aerospace engineering and manufacturing takes place. For RUAG Australia, its acquisition in 2013 of a privately-owned Australian company, Rosebank Engineering, led to a transition from supporting the RAAF's F-111 and F/A-18 Hornets to playing a critical role in supporting the global F-35 program.

RUAG Australia's precision manufacturing capabilities date back to the latter days of the F-111, when Australia was the sole-operator of the aircraft and access to spare parts became an increasing issue. In response, RUAG Australia established the ability to combine problem solving, engineering and manufacture of complex flight control and actuation components to provide the RAAF with the

affordable solutions for the F-111 air frames.



at/RUAG, the recent ramp up in global production of the F-35 has been a decade in the making and we can't wait to contribute to the program when it enters full rate production. As it stands we have provided approximately 3,000 actuators for the program since first getting involved in 2004," said Simon Hack, senior manager, customer programs at RUAG Australia.

Beginning in 2003, RUAG Australia's involvement with the F-35 program was the early manufacturing of high-precision actuation systems. Five years later, this manufacturing broadened to include landing gear systems and components for the F-35.

"Our GM at the time actually hand delivered the first three of our actuators for the first prototype of the F-35 in 2004," Hack said.

By 2018, RUAG has built on these early successes to establish long-term manufacturing contracts for key components for all three variants of the F-35 and has established itself as the global sole source supplier for some of these key components.

Hack expanded on the company's growing global success, following the initial success in the UK, "As a company, RUAG Australia is the global sole source supplier of Landing Gear Retract actuators for the entire fleet of 'C' [aircraft carrier based] variant [for an approx fleet of 340] of the F-35, we also supply about 35% of the actuators for the F-35 'A' and 'B' variants, our initial success with the UK paved the way for us to engage with the US branch of our initial partner Goodrich (now UTC Aerospace Systems)."

RUAG Australia's operating sites across Victoria, Queensland, South Australia and NSW are equipped with a suite of modern and highly capable manufacturing machines and support equipment and, combined with the company's passionate workforce, have supported manufacturing's rise to prominence within the company's core capabilities.

Maintenance, repair and overhaul for the RAAF's fleet of Hornets has been a core capability that has helped build upon the successes of the F-111 to transition the company to supporting the F-35.

The company's position as a preferred provider of maintenance, sustainment and repair capabilities for the RAAF's Hornet fleet is serving as the basis for its positioning itself as the preferred F-35 sustainment, maintenance and repair support provider for key components.

RUAG Australia aims to secure additional arrangements supporting the F-35 as additional contracts are announced by the Joint Project Office for the early establishment of regional repair capability in Australia.

"We have secured long-term manufacturing contracts with the US out until 2020 and the UK out until 2022, which has meant that we could invest \$7 million in Bayswater our facility, which is the largest investment in our facility. RUAG's investment in our production capacity reflects our commitment to maintaining our customer's confidence in our ability to deliver our actuators on time and to the quality standards expected," Hack said.

In the meantime, while RUAG aims to continue F-35 manufacturing endeavours and extend its support to include, maintenance and repair support the aircraft, it will continue to support other ADF platforms and, especially, the Classic Hornet fleet, helping to ensure it retains its full capability up until the point of its final withdrawal from service.

RUAG Australia said it welcomes the opportunities to collaborate work together that the F-35 program has provided. It has allowed the company to build on longstanding service centre and manufacturing partnerships with the component OEMs, such as the ones with Honeywell, Parker, UTAS and Eaton, and to establish new ones, both at home and abroad, that have the potential to extend well beyond the scope of the F-35.

"As for the future, RUAG is looking forward to expanding its participation with the F-35 program from 2025, we have been down selected as a Tier One option for supporting the maintenance, repair, overhaul and upgrade (MRO&U) for the undercarriage of the global F-35 fleet," he said.

RUAG Australia said it is hugely appreciative of what is currently being done at all levels within government and Defence to promote and support Australian industry, and the role the F-35 has played in supporting the development of Australia's own defence industrial base.