

So you're posted into CASG – An Aviation Engineers and Logistics Perspective

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Warrant Officer (WOFF) David Turnbull provided his insight and point of view ([Turnbull, 2023](#)) on the struggle of getting the best people into Capability Acquisition and Sustainment Group (CASG). Whilst it is a great read and the scene is set for further nail-biting episodes, the one standout observable from my point of view is that his theme is focussed on the ability or struggle of encouraging Enlisted Aviators to seek employment within CASG. This is different from the point of view of commissioned aviator ranks. Aviators within the aviation Engineers and Logistics (ENGLOG) categories, posting into various CASG System Program Offices (SPO) is inevitable. Unlike the Enlisted Aviators, aviation ENGLOG can expect a posting into a SPO at each rank band in between the 'fun' postings; Junior Officer (JO), Squadron Leader (SQNLDR), Wing Commander (WGCDR) and Group Captain. But the SPO 'fun' doesn't stop there because then there are CASG Branch level postings for Air Commodore and Air Vice Marshal.

I would argue that getting an SPO gig as the first posting better prepares aviation ENGLOG for their first 'fun' posting to a squadron (SQN) and allows them to shine when compared to their compatriots posted direct to the 'fun' SQN. The time in the SPO allows the aviation ENGLOG to develop a firm understanding of the aviation ENGLOG foundations in a controlled and ably supported manner. It allows the aviator time to mature and develop their understanding of the sustainment activities (SPO talk for support) that is actually required to keep the Beer and (red) Skittles flowing and what measures need to be put in place or maintained/sustained to ensure they arrive at the rate required, when required and where required. These supportive development opportunities may not exist in the 'fun' but high-pressure SQN posting.

SPOs have mix workforce (Australian Defence Force (ADF), Australian Public Service (APS), and Prime Contractors) to support the 'fun' SQN platform/s. This exposes the aviation ENGLOG to a range of complexities/experiences/methods that all the different entities have to navigate through or comply with in their everyday life that you do not get in any other place. You may well be exposed to or engage with Air Force Headquarters, Future series (F-series) SPOs, other SPOs, Defence Aviation Safety Authority (DASA), operational units on a regular basis. Each of these engagements broadens your experience base beyond the ADF and expands your professional network and we all need to have an expansive network of contacts because you never know what you will need in the future and who might help you get it.

It also provides an awareness of the issues that SPOs have to resolve/navigate so that when the SQN Aviator complains that the Beer and Skittles are late (...again), the SPO's experienced JO can then advise the reasons/struggles the SPO goes through just to get any

Skittles — let alone the colour preferred (let's not kid ourselves there is only one colour, red).

When the aviation ENGLOG is next posted to the SPO (as a senior Flight Lieutenant (FLTLT) or SQNLDR), the extra experience obtained during the 'fun' SQN posting provides additional skills and knowledge to provide enhanced support to the SPO and mentorship to new graduates. Each time you are posted into a SPO there will be new things to learn: the platform has matured or is approaching disposal; new capabilities are being introduced (spiral modification projects); new technologies and processes have been introduced; there has been a change in government direction; and the list of reasons/causes is endless. All of which means that new skills/knowledge need to be acquired, previous acquired skills/knowledge need to be re-learnt, polished or improved.

So whilst the Enlisted technical aviator can expect a 15 to 25 year 'sometimes' continuous lifetime in the 'fun' SQN topping out at WOFF, the aviation Engineer may only experience two postings to the same 'fun' SQN, topping out at SQNLDR. But, believe it or not the SPO has 'fun' postings as well for the ENGLOG categories.

To have an extended ADF ENGLOG career, the expectation of multiple SPO postings should be understood, accepted and embraced. As such these should be included in the Commissioned (Aviation ENGLOG especially) Aviator Career Development Plan (CDP) and should be discussed with your ADF Supervisor/mentor to ensure that it is achievable and plans/processes can be put in place to support your career objectives and ongoing discussions with the Directorate of Personnel – Air Force (DP-AF).

Postings to SPOs at each rank level is not a certainty or a given for your career, ADF has a requirement to fill other employment varieties, such as Defence Force Recruiting or as Directing Staff at training establishments and these need to be considered as viable employment options.

DP-AF expectation is that aviation Engineers will career broaden and gain exposure and experience the raft of SPO sustainment and acquisition experiences: Project management; Contractor engagement; Contract management; Sustainment; Compliance (Defence Aviation Safety Authority and Work Health & Safety); and Finance. Obtaining these SPO career 'ticks' are not necessary to become a SQN Senior Engineering Officer, a SPO Chief Engineer (WGCDR) or undertake an overseas (SPO 'fun') Technical Liaison Officer (TLO) at FLTLT/SQNLDR or Senior TLO (STLO) at WGCDR postings (more SPO 'fun'). Not having this SPO exposure and experiences means you will not be as competitive as those that do.

So reflecting on 'So you are posted to CASG - Part 1' the reader needs to appreciate the different requirements and expectation of Enlisted (tactical technical experts) and Commissioned (developing strategic practitioners) Aviators to understand the need for Aviation ENGLOG to undergo multiple SPO postings to enable the ADF to meet the Australian Government direction.

Consider these following logistics quotes to appreciate the importance of the SPO:

VADM Oscar C. Badger, United States Navy: *"Logistics considerations belong not only in the highest echelons of military planning during the process of preparation for war and for specific wartime operations, but may well become the controlling element with relation to timing and successful operation (Badger, n.d.)."*

Major General Julian Thompson, Royal Marines: *"Only a commander who understands logistics can push the military machine to the limits without risking a total breakdown. (Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre, 2015)"*

Tom Peters: *"Leaders win through logistics. Vision, sure. Strategy, yes. But when you go to war, you need to have both toilet paper and bullets at the right place at the right time. In other words, you must win through superior logistics (Peters, 2001)."*

A reminder of the important stuff: Defence's mission and purpose is to defend Australia and its national interests in order to advance Australia's security and prosperity. Defence strategic objectives of Shape, Deter, Respond.

"The success of that important stuff in the 'fun' SQN doesn't happen by itself. Military operations are made or broken by a successful logistics (sustainment) system, and this is what CASG provides us. It is imperative that we, as professional military officers know, appreciate, understand how we do it – and as engineers and Logisticians, that is why Defence has employed us (Personal Communication with WGCDR Damien Hare)."

References

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