



AVIATION

Crash training for bargain price

Air Force pilots are about to be taught in New Zealand how to avoid crashing a P3 Orion aircraft — without taking off.

The Air Force has bought an \$8 million aircraft simulator which will be installed at Whenuapai air base in Auckland next year.

The custom-made simulator will expose new pilots to every emergency and in-flight scenario they are likely to encounter in the Orion P3 surveillance aircraft.

Until now pilots have either gone to Australia to use an Australian Air Force simulator in Adelaide or spent air time in the Air Force's own Orions at a cost of \$8000 an hour.

Group Captain Mike Yardley, assistant chief of Air Force capability, said the new simulator would replicate the cabin in the upgraded Orion fleet.

The first of the Air Force's six Orions went to Texas last year as part of a \$350 million fleet upgrade, which would see the fleet fitted with new missions systems, communications and navigation systems.

It is due back in the middle of next year but the rest of the fleet will be upgraded at Safe Air in Blenheim, with the last being returned to the Air Force late in 2010.

The Orions are mainly surveillance aircraft used to protect one of the world's largest exclusive economic zones and one of the largest search and rescue zones. At least one must be available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for search and rescue missions.

The aircraft are nearly 40 years old and the Air Force has been having increasing dif-



PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT: The Air Force has bought an \$8 million simulator to train its Orion pilots in coping with all sorts of in-flight emergencies.

ficulty keeping them airborne because of the lack of spare parts for obsolete systems.

But Group Captain Yardley said sending pilots to Australia — either new pilots or pilots needing to brush up on their skills — stretched Air Force resources.

“It takes them out of the loop for a significant period of time.”

The Air Force had worked closely with a small Pittsburgh company, Fidelity Flight Simulation, to produce a unique simulator at a fraction of the cost of the Australian simula-

tor, which cost \$54 million. “It has all the motion with very good visuals. We are very pleased with what we have got.”

The New Zealand simulator would also be linked with the “back end trainer” which taught Air Force personnel how to use the complex surveillance and mission systems and sensors, something the more expensive Australian system could not do.

“We went out and found a small company who wanted to get into the market.”

— NZPA