

EXERCISE ARNHEM DRIFTER



One of the Royal Australian Air Force's largest aircraft carried the Air Force recruiting and careers message to Indigenous and other Australians across Arnhem Land in August and September, stopping at schools in Nhulunbuy, Yirrkala and Gapuwiyak among other places.

In fact, when word got out about the strange and exciting visitor, people drove for hours across dusty, rutted roads, from all across the region to get a closer look at the monster.

The hot-air balloon, operated by a Canberra-based detachment of the Air Force Central Flying School (CFS), travelled to Arnhem Land for Exercise Arnhem Drifter from 24 August to 4 September.

The exercise was organised under the auspices of the ADF's Indigenous Employment Program, aimed at building community awareness and understanding of the range and diversity of career opportunities the ADF – and particularly the Air Force – has to offer.

Stopping at several primary schools during the two-week exercise, students, teachers and parents got a first-hand look at the large but unusually serene aircraft and very inquisitive kids and adults alike learned what the balloon does, how it works and it's history.

Air Force balloons are operated by the Central Flying School, located at RAAF Base East Sale, Victoria, but are based in Canberra where they can often be seen floating over the capital.

Exercise Arnhem Drifter was an opportunity to get out among the communities that often feel left out of things – and the enthusiasm of the welcome the balloon and its crew received was testament to how appreciative the communities were for the considerable effort.

Of course, those lucky enough – and there were many – who got to ride in the balloon were even more ecstatic about the visit that will be remembered and talked about in the communities for a long time.

