FIRST RAAF FEMALE FAST JET PILOTS ON TRACK TO FLY THE JSF

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The RAAF is on track to have as many as half a dozen female fast jet fighter pilots in time to fly the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter when it enters service early next decade, Chief of Air Force Air Marshal Leo Davies has said.

Currently there is one woman training to become a fast jet pilot in the RAAF on the Hawk lead-in fighter jet trainer with 76 Squadron, with a second due to begin fast jet training (with 79 Squadron on Hawks) mid-year, AIRMSHL Davies told a recent media roundtable, the March issue of *Australian Aviation* reports.

And more women are expected to begin fast jet pilot training in coming years as more see a career as an Air Force pilot an achievable goal.

“In that 2020-21-22 timeframe [when the JSF is entering service], I reckon we’ll have three, four, five, six, somewhere in that number, of female fighter pilots,” CAF said.

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To date over 60 women have commenced pilot training with the RAAF, and 42 have graduated from pilots' courses, earning their wings. However, just five women have begun fast jet training, and none has yet successfully completed operational conversion onto a frontline fighter. But a small number of women have served as air combat officers on the F-111 and Super Hornet fast jets.

In previous years the RAAF may have had "one woman on pilots' course on CT-4s at Tamworth, who might have [had the potential to be] a fighter pilot and then four courses later, one more woman on CT?4s. And what I'm seeing now is five women on CT-4s, three of which have potential for [fast jets]. So that number, that basis, is starting to grow, and I think that really is … positive," AIRMSHL Davies explained.

"So I think now, rather than having one female fighter pilot in a year or two years, I reckon we'll have five or six in five or six years' time. It's a more positive picture than two women on a pilots' course."

Women have been able to serve as pilots in the RAAF since the late 1980s and have been able to apply to be fast jet pilots since the early 1990s.

"I think we have had a real, strong drive to try and get young women to understand that they might include being a fighter pilot as one of their vocational options," said CAF.

"I think that's what's happening here, that there are a couple of young women, who are 17, 18, leaving school going; 'we do have two women on Hawk, I'll start that. That's all right if someone else is doing it. I'm not the first. It is an OK thing. Maybe their big, blokey fighter pilot attitude is starting to, sort of, dilute a little'.

"And so it bloody should."

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