

# Women, children first

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## The Good Oil with Barry Doyle

**T**HANK you, Defence, for advising us of the pending evacuation of homes at Darwin's RAAF base.

Such early recognition of a potential threat to the personnel and families of our fighting forces obviously signals that the corporals have taken charge while the colonels work on their golf handicaps.

Hey, I'm an old Digger. I know how these things work.

Meagan Dillon, a third-year journalism student at Melbourne's Monash University, is doing a work experience gig at the Northern Territory News and dug up the evacuation story this week.

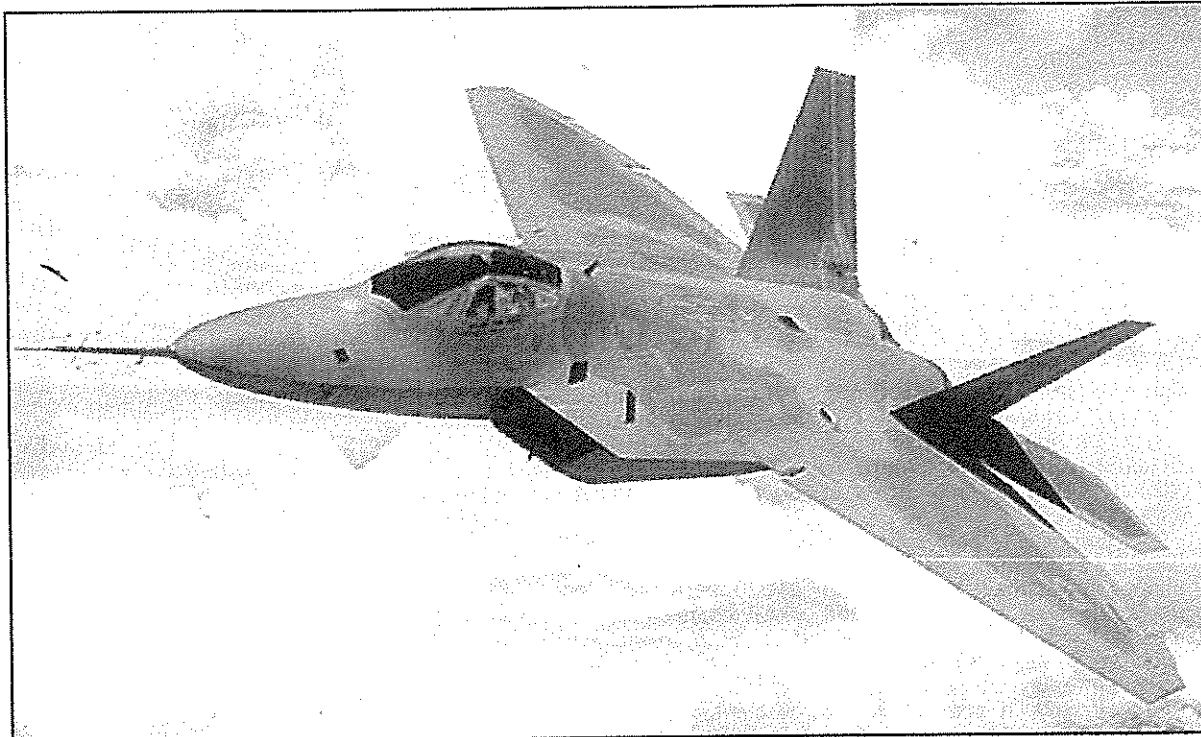
Now, a dreary spokesman for some government department or other may say the news was hardly secret and had been made public in some form or other, but let's just say that it was hardly common knowledge among most of us jelly-spined, whingeing, civilian plebs.

The gist of the story is this: 395 houses on Darwin RAAF base land will be vacated; 105 are already empty. The schedule for the remainder of the evacuations is over a period of four years.

Such drastic action must be in recognition of a very serious threat.

In my day, when Australia was involved in that "crazy Asian war", any potential or perceived threat was always from "the north".

This was fortunate and a marvellous indicator of "military intelligence" to rule out the possibility of invading hordes hitting us from, say, Antarctica. (However, I do recall an army "war games" scenario in the 1970s that cited the



**LISTEN UP:** An F-35 Joint Strike Force Fighter — at a cost of \$3.5 billion for 14 of them — is loud and proud

dangers of Tasmanian insurgents.)

But, this time, it seems, we must beware the enemy within. In four years' time, about 400 Defence families must be gone from the RAAF Darwin base because of the arrival of an invader.

This is when the first of the F-35 Joint Strike Force Fighters (JSF) are due for delivery.

At a cost of \$3.2 billion for 14 of them, these are very serious aircraft. Unfortunately, the budget didn't stretch to fitting them with efficient mufflers, so they are VERY NOISY.

They are even MORE NOISY (sorry, you'll have to speak up) than those aircraft involved in the regular Operation Pitch Black manoeuvres

over the Top End that draw some pretty impressive fighting machines from air forces around the world.

It is little wonder, then, that the RAAF doesn't want any of its personnel or their families subjected to potentially damaging noise.

Good thinking — and the sign of a caring, sharing attitude within a culture often criticised for having its head up a dark, dank place.

And I'm sure the neighbours — you know, places like Ludmilla, The Narrows, Coconut Grove, Bagot Community and even Bayview — will be grateful to have been given plenty of notice about noise problems.

Residents of these areas and others nearby — like Rapid Creek,

Nightcliff, Jingili and others — can now confidently make contingency plans for the arrival of the F-35s.

These could include double-glazing the louvres, ordering ear protection gear, putting down the howling dog next door, drug abuse, suicide — or moving.

A couple of years ago, I had a drink with an old mate who's a spook (government-employed protector of the people's interests, or "spy" if you're a cynic).

We were both moaning about how things weren't the same as they used to be in our respective trades.

Mate, grab Ms Dillon before we do. She's a cracker at winking out a story to make 'em squirm.