

Corporal Rhys Mitchell, 24, joined the Royal Australian Air Force in 2002 to travel and meet new people.

Rhys now works as an Avionics Supervisor at Number 77 Squadron RAAF Base Williamtown, Newcastle.

Rhys was promoted to Corporal in November 2006 and with that came new responsibilities as an Avionics Supervisor on the F/A-18 Hornet fighter jets.

“I love that every day is different and you never know what to expect when you turn up for work,” Rhys said.

“The work ethic and team environment at 77 Squadron make it the premier jet fighter squadron in the Air Force,” Rhys said.

“It is great to be working on the jets, both in Australia and overseas. They are the tip of the sword in the Air Force”.

Rhys has been on several high complexity air combat training exercises, including Pitch Black; Bersama Shield in Singapore; and Operation Acolyte, the Australian Defence Force contribution to providing security to the 2006 Melbourne Commonwealth Games.

But, Rhys is enjoying many new challenges during his first time on Exercise Talisman Sabre at RAAF Base Townsville.

“It is great to be able to get away with a really good bunch of guys from 77 Squadron and get the jets in the air for the exercise,” CPL Mitchell said.

“Being on exercise Talisman Sabre 2007 means we get to put our skills into practice in an operational environment and experience the different challenges that being on an exercise entails,” Rhys said.

Talisman Sabre is a biennial exercise that provides the Royal Australian Air Force with the opportunity to train with some 20 000 United States Air Force, Navy and Marines, while focusing on the operational level planning and conduct of high end warfighting.

About 7500 Australian military personnel participate in the intensive training period of sea, air and land battles that run from 10 June to 2 July this year.

The maintenance tempo has stepped up from 12 to about 30 flying hours per day during the exercise.

“This means more time is committed to servicing for the jets than what we would normally experience back at Williamtown,” CPL Mitchell said.

About 110 maintenance members from 77 SQN are working shifts around the clock to ensure aircraft are maintained and airworthy for Talisman Sabre missions.

Members from 81 Wing Headquarters have deployed along with 77 Squadron to provide essential administrative, logistical, operations and intelligence support for the exercise.

The exercise aircraft will be primarily operating in the over water airspace to the south-east of Townsville down to the Shoalwater Bay Training Area near Rockhampton.

77 SQN will also be co-ordinating with a United States Navy aircraft carrier based force, including F/A-18 E/F aircraft.

As well as the aircraft operating out of Townsville, there are also a range of aircraft in Rockhampton, Amberley, Brisbane and Williamtown, along with aircraft carriers and soldiers in a variety of locations around Australia.

Rhys has aspirations to become a Flight Test Engineer and work on the Joint Strike Fighter aircraft in the future.

“I enjoy maintaining the complex electronic and weapons systems on the jets, so a transition to the Joint Strike Fighter would be great when Australia receive the new platform,” Rhys said.

Story by Flying Officer Skye Smith

Clearance	Name	Appointment	DTG
<i>Drafted by:</i>	FLGOFF Skye Smith	SRG PAO	21 Jun 07
<i>Cleared by:</i>	WGCDR Tim Churchill	CO 77SQN	22 Jun 07
<i>Cleared by:</i>	WGCDR Michael Gray	TUHQ DCDR	23 Jun 07