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PHIBRON 11 Connects Australian, American Personnel to Form Dynamic Command Staff

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ABOARD USS ESSEX, at sea – Australian and U.S. forces have formed into a single, cohesive force in Exercise Talisman Saber 2007, performing everything from amphibious landings ashore to maintaining tactical circuits to ensuring the Australian environment is protected.

At the center of the command and control spectrum is the Amphibious Squadron (PHIBRON) 11 staff, which has integrated with the Royal Australian Navy's Commander, Australian Amphibious Task Group (COMAUSATG); the flag staff from Expeditionary Strike Group 7; and liaison officers from in-chopped fire-support ships USS Paul Hamilton (DDG 60), USS John Paul Jones (DDG 53) and USS Lake Erie (CG-70).

This integration has created a dynamic, centralized command post that has successfully landed forces ashore and protected the combined amphibious task force during exercises.

Such results reflect the combined nature and intent of the biennial exercise, which strengthens U.S.-Australian interoperability and combat readiness while bolstering the military alliance between the two countries.

"This is a truly graduate-level exercise that requires an equal partnership in managing the combined battle space," said Capt. Eric C. Young, Chief Staff Officer for PHIBRON 11. "From communication circuits to tactical maneuvering to demonstrating warfare proficiency, the capabilities of our combined force are continually being tested.

At the combined operations space known as flagplot aboard USS Essex (LHD 2), the staffs and representatives have worked to coordinate movements of up to six Australian ships, six U.S. ships and multiple aircraft and landing craft.

Responsibilities included overseeing water and air space management, logistics, and maintaining command tactical picture and communication circuits, to name a few.

Although PHIBRON 11 has integrated with other commands in similar exercises, Talisman Saber posed a unique challenge because so many units participated in highly sophisticated exercise scenarios.

The miles separating the planners in early June 2006 was reduced to mere yards once the exercise began. Watchstanders set up station near one another to help communication.

"We did not want our key planners to be operating in a 'bubble', working independently of each other", said Capt. Anthony J. Pachuta, Commodore of PHIBRON 11 and the exercise's commander of the combined amphibious task force.

"We are *one* team. The level of integration and coordination between planners as the exercise progressed ensured that we were all operating with the same level of understanding," Pachuta said. "I am extremely proud of how all players rose to the occasion."

Among other things, the PHIBRON team monitored the movements of all vessels to ensure they were optimally positioned to move troops ashore, transfer cargo and handle small boat transfers and operations between Australian and U.S. amphibious ships.

"I'm amazed by the sheer number of planners and assets involved — and our ability to work together," said Chief Warrant Officer Jon Stacy, who stood as one of the staff tactical watch officers for PHIBRON 11.

"We've got destroyers, a cruiser, frigates, our amphibious ships, helicopters, Maritime Patrol Aircraft, submarines, replenishment ships — the list goes on. It's exhilarating to see the pieces come together."

Royal Australian Navy Warrant Officer Kevin Hooper was one of several COMAUSATG staff members working round the clock in the flagplot.

"We have relied on each other to get the job done," Hooper said. "I am impressed by the professionalism that I observed on the watch floor and by the energy and spirit of our combined watch team. We got along excellently."

Commander, Expeditionary Strike Group (ESG) 7 / Task Force (CTF) 76 is the Navy's only forward-deployed amphibious force. Task Force 76 is headquartered at White Beach Naval Facility, Okinawa, Japan, with an operating detachment in Sasebo, Japan.

For more information, please visit www.ctf76.navy.mil