

# where eagles are

## EXERCISE TALISMAN SABER '09

Exercise Talisman Saber 2009, conducted from 6 to 25 July, was the third in a series of biennial combined-training activities designed to practice Australian and US forces in planning and conducting Combined Task Force operations.

It was a major undertaking, bringing together air, land and sea assets and more than 20,000 participants across an exercise area that stretched across most of Australia's north – and, in fact, much further afield, with much of the action controlled, coordinated and overseen by the 613<sup>th</sup> Air and Space Operations Center at Hickham Air Force Base, Hawaii.

One of five such weapon systems worldwide through which an air-component commander can control air, space and information forces, the 613<sup>th</sup> AOC is responsible for operations across much of the Asia-Pacific region. During Talisman Saber '09, the Hawaii-based AOC was the nerve centre for air operations ranging from Guam to Sydney.

Deputy director of the 613<sup>th</sup> AOC for Talisman Saber, Royal Australian Air Force Group Captain Glenn Natrass said that despite the vast battlespace and diversity of participating forces, the exercise provided an excellent opportunity to integrate his AOC staff with US forces and bring back a raft of experiences and lessons on how to run a campaign from an AOC.

More than 7500km away, in Shoalwater Bay, Queensland, it was – "CONTACT! Wait out!" as soldiers from Charlie Company, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (3RAR), inserted via US Marine Corps and Australian Army helicopters into Sam Hill Airfield, aggressively taking and securing an area from which to mount future operations.



USS Essex – a landing helicopter dock amphibious assault ship of similar size and type to the two Canberra-class vessels recently ordered for the Australian Navy – stood off the coast with its CH-53E Sea Stallions, CH-46E Sea Knights, MH-60S Sea Hawks, AH-1Z Super Cobras and UH-1N Huey helicopters, as well as AV-8B Harrier jump-jets ready in support.

A full complement of US Marines and their vehicles also disembarked from Essex's well deck via three landing craft air cushion (LCACs) for the ground campaign.

LCACs, with their capacity for high-speed, over-the-beach insertions with up to 75-tonne payloads, made light work of the landings.

Off Cowley Beach, south of Cairns, more than five hundred service personnel from the Australian Navy, Army and Air Force, as well as US Marines were embarked on HMAS Kanimbla for her role in the exercise.

The ship had already become a hive of activity as the crew were prepared for a number of amphibious activities.

Commanding officer Commander Tim Byles said that after spending many months preparing for Talisman Saber, his crew was looking forward to the challenges the exercise would bring.

This training was promptly put to the test when Kanimbla was asked on day two of the exercise to conduct a stern-door marriage with a landing craft from USS Denver.

Commander Byles said he was proud of the way his crew handled the challenge, as it was the first time Kanimbla had undertaken this manoeuvre with a ship from the US Navy.

"Our successful evolutions demonstrate Kanimbla's ability to work safely and efficiently with members of the US Navy," he said.

"As a result of this type of exercise, Australian and US forces will be better able to cooperate in a variety of military operations including conventional conflict, peacekeeping and humanitarian aid missions.

"Australian and US Forces have a long and successful track record in assisting each other and I am confident that Talisman Saber will build upon these past achievements."

Another spectacular rotation for Kanimbla came later in the exercise when sailors and members of the ship's Army department used the ship's crane to lift an amphibious LARC onboard after sea conditions made it difficult to employ the usual method of loading through the stern door.

LARCs and LCM8 landing craft played an essential role in transporting land forces to shore.

Other key centres of activity for TS09 included the Townsville Field Training Area, Delamere Range near Tindal in the Northern Territory, Bradshaw Field Training Area (600km south-east of Darwin), Mount Bunday Training Area (120km south-east of Darwin), much of the air space over the northern part of the Northern Territory, port facilities in Brisbane, Gladstone and Alma Ports, Queensland, and designated marine areas within the Coral, Timor and Arafura Seas.

