

HADR exercise brings China closer

PIC: SERGEANT ROB MYFENEGGER

Military personnel from Australia and China came together late last year in a spirit of cooperation to conduct a mutually beneficial and enlightening humanitarian and disaster-relief (HADR) exercise.

While Exercise Cooperation Spirit 2011 involved just 15 members of the Australian Defence Force and similarly small numbers from the Chinese People's Liberation Army, the exercise was a significant development in relations between the two countries.

Disaster-relief planning specialists from the ADF were involved in the four-day exercise, which commenced on 28 November at the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Comprehensive Emergency Response Training Base at Chongyi in Sichuan Province.

Mainly a table-top exercise, it also included static displays, a field exercise and a visit to an area of the province devastated by an earthquake on 12 May 2008 in which an estimated 68,000 people lost their lives.

Participants' visit to the now-deserted town of Bei Chuan on 30 November was a poignant reminder of the human tragedy and complex situation confronting rescuers in the aftermath of an earthquake, and the challenges to HADR operations globally.

Cooperation Spirit aimed to enhance cooperation and coordination between Australia and China in the event they are required to respond to future natural disasters in the Asia-Pacific.

Air Commodore Dave Steele, Director General Joint Exercises and Evaluation at Australia's Joint Operations Command said the exercise was a significant milestone in our Defence relationship.

"It was a valuable opportunity to enhance the complexity of our engagement in this area of shared interest, which has broader implications for the region," Air Commodore Steele said.

"This exercise was a practical example of deepening cooperation between our two countries and a valuable opportunity to exchange lessons learned on responding to natural disasters which the region is prone to.

"Next year marks the 40th anniversary of Australian diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China and we look forward to more opportunities to develop cooperative and constructive relations between our two nations."

Major General Zhang Peiming, Chief of Staff of the Sichuan Military District PLA said that bilateral relations between China and Australia had been progressing smoothly and the mutual understanding and trust between the militaries was deepening.

"This joint exercise is a concrete measure taken by both sides to expand cooperation and exchange, as well as to enhance our mutual understanding and trust," he said.

In recent years Australia/China Defence engagement has occurred mainly through senior-level dialogue and working-level exchanges in other areas such as maritime engagement, but this on-the-ground exercise opens new levels of possibilities.

Exercise Cooperation Spirit 2011 followed the 14th annual Australia-China Defence Strategic dialogue co-chaired by Vice Chief of Defence Air Marshal Mark Binskin, Deputy Secretary Strategy Peter Jennings and General Ma Xiaotian, Deputy Chief of Staff of the People's Liberation Army, held at HMAS Watson in Sydney in October.



Flight Lieutenant Julianne Schliebs and a Chinese counterpart treat a simulated victim injured in an earthquake during Exercise Cooperation Spirit.



Flying Officer Jeffrey Davie (right) and Leading Aircraftman Phil Beggs, assist exercise casualties into an ambulance.



Flying Officer Jeffrey Davie (right), Flight Lieutenant Julianne Schliebs and their Chinese counterparts treat simulated victims injured in an earthquake during Exercise Cooperation Spirit.



A Chinese helicopter evacuates 'seriously injured' casualties during a field phase of Exercise Cooperation Spirit 2011.



People's Liberation Army soldiers discuss details of Exercise Cooperation Spirit 2011 with Australian medical personnel.



Lieutenant Colonel Peter Turner, Head of Multi-lateral Exercises, Joint Operations Command, briefs participants in Exercise Cooperation Spirit.



Chinese rescue personnel rush to extract a victim buried in earthquake rubble.



Leading Aircraftman Phil Beggs displays the medical equipment carried by an Australian primary health team to soldiers of the People's Liberation Army.