

## LHD TRAINING IN FULL SWING

Long before our newest and biggest-ever naval vessel sets sail for acceptance trials, her designated crew is already hard at work learning as much as they can about the behemoth before that fast-approaching magnificent day when they get to take the real thing for a drive.

### Planes in Spain

Words Royal Australian Navy  
Pics Commander Paul Moggach

As part of their preparations, 20 personnel posted to Canberra recently travelled to Spain and embarked on the Spanish Armada ship Juan Carlos I to gain experience in operating the lead ship of the class.

Personnel were selected from all departments of Canberra's future crew to make the trip to Spain to ensure all aspects of the LHD's operation could be observed.

Commanding Officer NUSHIP Canberra Captain Jonathan Sadleir said the experience was invaluable.

"The introduction of this class of ship into the ADF will dramatically change the way we do business," Captain Sadleir said.

"Being a brand new class of ship for our navy, this was a unique opportunity for us to observe the way the Spanish operate this type of capability.

"While each defence force operates according to its own doctrine, sea riding in Juan Carlos I gave Canberra's personnel a close insight into how the major elements of the ship, including the embarked forces, aircraft and landing craft, all operate together."

During their embarkation, the Canberra personnel maximised every opportunity to discuss, and in some cases test, draft Royal Australian Navy LHD standard operating procedures (SOPs) with their Spanish counterparts.

This process was made all the more meaningful by being onboard the platform itself and, most importantly, underway at sea during an amphibious exercise.



CO NUSHIP Canberra Captain Jonathan Sadleir and Spanish Navy Captain Antonio Piñero Sánchez on board the Juan Carlos I (flight deck at left).

The crew observed Exercise Marfibex, a five-day, low-level, non-combatant evacuation operation that involved the Spanish amphibious task group consisting of the LHD, two LPDs, a frigate escort and more than 800 Spanish marines.

Conducted within the Armada training areas south of Cadiz, it was an impressive sight to observe the landing and recovery of the embarked forces via watercraft and helicopter, with close air support provided by embarked AV-8 Harriers.

With the ship's company, a full air wing and several hundred Marines embarked, as well as midshipman sea-riders from the Spanish Naval Academy onboard for a training cruise, there were well over

1000 people onboard to fully test the ship's accommodations.

Under these circumstances, it allowed the Canberra personnel to view all manner of evolutions ranging from slipping and close-quarter manoeuvring in harbour using the LHD's inbuilt azipod manoeuvring system, through to observing the movement and securing of vehicles onto landing craft in the dock.

But, of equal importance was the need to observe the more mundane routines that support higher-end activities, such as how the garbage compactor handled the copious waste generated by more than 1000 hard-working souls.

In summing up how the visit to Spain went, Canberra's XO Commander Jon Earley said the crew of the Juan Carlos I were extremely accommodating in allowing maximum access to all parts of the ship.

"Their honest and frank discussions with us about how they operate their LHD were greatly appreciated and none of our questions were left unanswered," Commander Earley said.

"We have indeed learned a substantial amount about our own new ship that will certainly help inform the development of our routines and processes."

Juan Carlos I is the flagship of the Spanish Armada, the largest warship Spain has ever had and the first of class for the 'strategic projection ship' - to be classed 'landing helicopter dock' or LHD in Australian service.

Based at Rota Naval Base in southern Spain, it has been in commission with the Spanish Armada for three years.



## Bonhomme Richard's big puzzle

Words Lieutenant Emily Kennedy  
Pics Able Seaman Jesse Rhynard

Looking down the well deck and vehicle deck of USS Bonhomme Richard is an awesome sight - landing craft and rigid-hulled inflatable boats, followed by countless Humvee's, amphibious assault vehicles, trailers, ambulances and 4x4s lined up from one end of the ship to the other.

To load all this equipment can take days, and the United States Navy personnel onboard USS Bonhomme Richard liken the activity to playing a giant game of Jenga.

The decks must be loaded carefully like puzzle pieces to not only ensure that unloading can take place efficiently and effectively, but that the immediated needs of the next mission are carefully considered.

NUSHIP Canberra's Amphibious Department took the opportunity to tour USS Bonhomme Richard during a mid-year port visit to Sydney to learn as much as they could about coordinating large-scale amphibious operations onboard such a ship.

This is what Canberra's Amphibious Department will be doing very soon as both Navy crew and the ship's Army detachment work together to develop the team and procedures to ensure Australia's biggest-ever ship can be used to maximum effect.

The Amphibious Department is one of the fundamental links between the ship and its embarked forces - responsible during operations for coordinating everything between the ship and the back-of-the-beach in support of landing forces.

Canberra's Amphibious Department regulator and the ship's sergeant major and load master Warrant Officer Pete Woodham said that to form Canberra's Amphibious Department, around 60 personnel from Navy and Army were being brought together.

"The services operate differently in their single-service environment and, working in a way that we understand each other and work as one, will be hugely important," he said.

"Luckily, I'm proficient in 'Narmy' - the language everyone will quickly learn to use so that our department can communicate seamlessly."



NUSHIP Canberra's Dock Manager Petty Officer Catrena Skinner said the tour of Bonhomme Richard was very worthwhile.

"Going onboard Bonhomme Richard reinforced what we've got coming in terms of the huge leap in size and scale of the ship," Petty Officer Skinner said.

"Having worked in an amphibious environment for most of my naval career, this posting to Canberra is without a doubt the pinnacle - and going onboard USS Bonhomme Richard and getting a glimpse of what an operational LHD looks like was a brilliant opportunity for all of us."



Chief Select Operations Specialist 1 Adam Smoller explains aircraft load considerations onboard USS Bonhomme Richard to NUSHIP Canberra crewmembers.

