Marine Corps Acquisition Leaders Strengthen Partnerships with Australia



QUANTICO, VIRGINIA, UNITED STATES –Portfolio Acquisition Executive Marine Corps (PAE MC) officials traveled Sept. 28 to Oct. 10 to strengthen military partnerships and explore how Australia's industrial capacity could help sustain U.S. Marines operating across the Pacific theater.

Led by Col. Paul Gillikin, program manager for Combat Support Systems (PM CSS), the visit focused on assessing Australian production capabilities, identifying prospective industry partners, and strengthening military-to-military cooperation in support of shared modernization and expeditionary sustainment priorities.

For Australian Diggers and American Leathernecks, decades of military cooperation provide a foundation for closer collaboration in developing, fielding, and sustaining the capabilities both forces need to meet shared challenges in the Pacific. The 2026 U.S. National Defense Strategy (NDS) and Australia's 2026 National Defence Strategy both emphasize deterrence by denial, stronger defense industrial capabilities, and closer cooperation among regional allies and partners.

"Our partnership with Australia is built on decades of shared service and mutual trust," said Gillikin. "Meeting the challenges of the Pacific theater requires us to build on that foundation. Industry is critical to our ability to sustain forces forward. If the capabilities and support networks we need aren't already positioned in the region when hostilities begin, we cannot assume we'll be able to get them there."

These challenges were the subject of a three-part series Gillikin published through the Australian Army Research Centre in September, ahead of his visit. The series, Mateship Under Pressure, Modernizing for Denial, and Diggers and Leathernecks, examined the longstanding military partnership, shared modernization challenges, and the need to move beyond interoperability toward greater interchangeability—the ability of allied forces to share and employ one another's capabilities and sustainment resources.

Across Perth, Brisbane and Sydney, Gillikin and Lt. Col. Aaron Viana, product manager for Combat Service Support Equipment, carried those discussions directly to industry representatives and military counterparts. At Land Forces 2026 and the Australian Army's Chief of Army Symposium in Perth, the delegation engaged Australian defense leaders, manufacturers, and research organizations to discuss emerging capabilities, shared requirements, and opportunities for collaboration.

"These engagements gave us an opportunity to exchange ideas

with some of our closest partners and gain a better understanding of the challenges we share," said Viana. "We discussed lessons learned from Marine Corps acquisition and Force Design while learning from the Australian Army's approach to modernization and capability development."

Industry engagement extended beyond the exhibition floor. During a visit to an Australian munitions manufacturing facility, the delegation toured the production floor and met with industry representatives to discuss domestic production capabilities and opportunities for industrial cooperation, including existing manufacturing relationships with the U.S. Army.

The engagements reflected priorities outlined in the Pentagon's 2026 NDS, which calls on the United States to "leverage allied and partner production" to meet defense requirements and strengthen military partnerships.

Gillikin participated in a roundtable Oct. 7 hosted by the Perth USAsia Centre titled "Australia–US Defence Cooperation: From Interoperability to Interchangeability." Moderated by retired Royal Australian Air Force Air Vice-Marshal Andrew Dowse, Officer of the Order of Australia and principal research adviser for defense and security strategy at the centre, the discussion brought together military, industry, government, and academic representatives to examine opportunities for closer defense-industrial cooperation, forward positioning, and resilient sustainment networks.

In a parallel effort, PM CSS representatives Cmdr. Christopher Washington, Expeditionary Medical Systems team lead, and Ascia Boothroyd, Expeditionary Medical Systems project officer, engaged Australian military medical and logistics organizations to strengthen regional cooperation and assess opportunities to support expeditionary medical operations. Building on earlier engagements in Okinawa, Japan, the team met with Marine Rotational Force–Darwin personnel, Australian

Defence Force Joint Health Command, and other military logistics counterparts to explore how both nations could better integrate their medical support networks to sustain forces operating across the Pacific.

The engagements come as PM CSS continues fielding advanced expeditionary medical capabilities designed to support prolonged casualty care in contested environments, where medical evacuation may be delayed. These capabilities include free-dried plasma, portable blood storage and thermal regulating container, point-of-care ultrasound devices, and expeditionary power solutions. Ensuring these systems can be maintained and supported forward remains an important consideration for the Marine Corps and its Navy medical partners.

“Partnering with nations along the First and Second Island Chains directly enables bilateral logistics interoperability,” said Washington. “It establishes a network of rapid-resupply channels, localized equipment maintenance, and reciprocal regulatory arrangements that ensure sustained combat medical readiness at the tactical edge.”

The visit reinforced the longstanding partnership between Australian Diggers and American Leathernecks while identifying opportunities to deepen military and industrial cooperation in support of shared modernization and expeditionary sustainment priorities across the Pacific. As both nations prepare for the challenges of great-power conflict along the First Island Chain, translating these relationships into practical cooperation will be essential to developing, fielding, and sustaining the capabilities their forces need.

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