Formidable Armada Conducts Drills in East China Sea



San Antonio-class amphibious transport dock USS New Orleans (LPD 18), joined by the Royal Australian Navy's Anzac-class frigate HMAS Parramatta (FFH 154), the French navy's amphibious assault helicopter carrier FS Tonnerre (L9014), and Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force's Ōsumi class tank landing ship JS Ōsumi, transit together during exercise Jeanne D'Arc 21 (ARC-21), off the coast of Kagoshima, Japan, May 14, 2021. *U.S. MARINE CORPS / Lance Cpl. Justin J. Marty*

U.S. and allied navies took part in the multi-national exercise Jeanne D'Arc (ARC) 21 in and around Japan, exercises that began May 11 and wrapped up May 16.

The Sasebo, Japan-based USS New Orleans (LPD 18) joined with the Royal Australian Navy, French armed forces, Japan self-defense forces and other U.S. forces for ARC 21.

"This exercise brings together service members from each nation's military in a combined effort to enhance interoperability in pursuit of common regional security goals," said Navy spokesperson Lt. Cmdr. Sherrie Flippin. "Service members from participating units planned, coordinated and conducted operations over land and at sea."

The 684-foot New Orleans, a San Antonio-class amphibious transport dock assigned to Amphibious Squadron 11, along with elements of the Okinawa-based III Marine Expeditionary Force and the 3rd Marine Logistics Group, have been engaged in amphibious landings and air assaults while also conducting formation maneuvers, air defense exercises and communication drills with the other units in the exercise. MV-22 Osprey tilt rotor aircraft and P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft also took part.

“On the New Orleans we are prepared to flex our amphibious skills with each of the teams here and strengthen our joint operational capabilities,” Capt. Brian Schrum, New Orleans’ commanding officer, said in the release. “Each event affords us the opportunity to collaborate across staffs developing deeper personal bonds, fostering trust between all our nations and in turn growing as a cohesive naval and Marine force.”

ARC 21 also included the 387-foot Anzac-class frigate HMAS Parramatta (FFH 154) from the Royal Australian Navy, as well as the French navy’s 653-foot Mistral-class LHD FS Tonnerre (L9014) and 410-foor La Fayette-class Frigate FS Surcouf (F 711).

Participating ships from the Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force included the 646-foot Hyūga-class helicopter destroyer JS Ise (DDH-182); 528-foot Kongō-class guided missile destroyer JS Kongō (DDG-173); 541-foot Atago-class guided missile destroyer JS Ashigara (DDG-178); 495-foot Asahi-class ASW destroyer JS Asahi (DD-119); 584-foot Ōsumi-class landing ship tank JS Ōsumi (LST 4001); and a pair of 164-foot Hayabusa-class patrol boats, JS Ōtaka (PG-826) and JS Shirataka (PG-829); along with other host nation air and ground forces.

The field training portion of the exercise began at the JSDF Kirishima maneuver area with a combat engineer subject matter expertise exchange, casualty evacuation and combat service support training, and simulated fire support coordination training between Japan Air Self Defense Forces and U.S. military personnel.

“This exercise, by bringing together our air, land, and maritime forces to increase our ability to jointly respond to crises across the range of military operations, is yet another demonstration of our rapidly growing constellation of partners, all united by the common goal of a free and open Indo-Pacific,” said Lt. Col. Jeremy Nelson, commander of the

3rd Landing Support Battalion. “It is commonly said that we train alongside our partners and allies in peace to be ready to fight alongside them in war, and exercises like ARC-21 are the best example of this.”

Forward deployed to Okinawa, Japan, the 3rd Marine Logistics Group provides responsive combat logistics support to III Marine Expeditionary Force and other Marine units within the U.S. 7th Fleet area of operations through expeditionary means, forward basing and global sourcing during exercises and contingency operations.

Nelson, who was also the commander of the Marine Forces in the exercise, said the U.S. Marines were represented by an Air Naval Gunfire Liaison Company, an Explosive Ordnance Disposal unit and a reconnaissance team detachment.

The culminating events included surveillance and insertion of forces via JSDF CH-47 Chinook helicopters from Tonnerre, followed by a helicopter-borne assault via U.S. Marine Corps MV-22 Ospreys from USS New Orleans, Flippin said.

Flippin said the exercise was conducted in adherence to strict COVID mitigation measures to protect participating forces as well as local communities.

Capabilities and Limitations

Speaking to reporters, Schrum and Nelson commented on the amount of effort involved in the staff planning process for exercises like ARC 21.

Nelson said the staff planning process is a way to understand the capabilities and limitations of the participating units, and how each of the forces conducts their planning – including who they bring to the table, and why.

“We were able to familiarize ourselves with tactics, techniques and procedures – how they conduct themselves on

patrolling and in urban combat, how they use their own gear, equipment and communications and how they use their weapon systems," Nelson said.

Schrum said communications is a key attribute to "achieving interoperability with partners and allies, and understanding their capabilities and what they can bring to the fight, and how we can all work together to achieve a common goal."

Schrum noted one of the more interesting events in the exercise involved the approaches and dockings by Japanese LCACs (landing craft air cushion) in the well deck of the New Orleans.

"To see another county's ship-to-shore connector come into our well deck and land was an amazing thing for our crew in the well deck, as well as our junior officers and watchstanders. They got a chance to see what it's like to work with partners and allies here in this region."

Nelson said there was a lot more commonality than differences among the different units. "They had very good gear and they take care of it," he said. "They're very disciplined, perform to standard and are eager to train. We worked through bad weather; the common understood COVID mitigation measures; and the language barrier, and were still able – through deliberate planning – execute a safe exercise that everyone mutually benefited from.

"Sharing experiences, tactics and best practices makes us all better. Anytime you train together, you're better together," Nelson said.

ARC21 is the first large-scale joint exercise involving the U.S. and France on Japanese soil, and is taking place at a time of growing Chinese assertiveness in the region.

Japanese Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi said the exercise is a way to deepen defense cooperation with the U.S. and "like-

minded countries” that shares Japan’s vision of “a free and open Indo-Pacific.”