

NAS Jax P-3s join Pacific live-fire exercise



Posted Aug 6, 2010 at 8:56 AM

By Lt. j. g. Evita Salles

CPRW-2 Public Affairs Officer

Aircrews from NAS Jacksonville-based VP-5 and VP-62, along with VP-4 and the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF), 11 Patrol Squadron from Edinburgh, Australia, participated in a live-fire exercise (SINKEX) July 10 as part of the Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) 2010 exercise.

Flying from MCAS Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii, each squadron fired AGM-84D Harpoon missiles at the decommissioned Iwo Jima-class amphibious assault ship ex-USS New Orleans (LPH-11) in the Hawaiian operating area.

The purpose of the SINKEX is to provide P-3C Orion aircrew valuable training in Harpoon missile proficiency. Aircrews train extensively on the simulated usage of the Harpoon missile but rarely get the chance to fire the live weapon.

"It was an outstanding opportunity for our junior officers and air crew to gain valuable experience shooting a forward-firing weapon," said Cmdr. Jason Jorgensen, commanding officer of VP-5 and deputy of Combined Task Group 172.2.

Each aircraft launched an on-target hit on the New Orleans. The SINKEX provided the first opportunity for most of the participating aircrew to fire a live weapon.

"Flying with a live weapon always heightens aircrew and maintenance awareness of tactics, techniques and procedures. The SINKEX serial provided 11 Squadron with a great opportunity to test our individual and collective warfighting skills in a complex coalition environment. It does not get too much better than that," said Wing Commander Phil Champion, commanding officer of 11 Squadron, RAAF.

It was the first time in eight years the RAAF shot a Harpoon missile.

The AGM -84D Harpoon is an all-weather, over-the-horizon, anti-ship missile system. The Harpoon's active radar guidance, warhead design, low-level cruise trajectory and sea-skim or pop-up maneuvers assure high survivability and effectiveness. The missile is capable of being launched from surface ships, submarines, shore batteries or aircraft such as the P-3C Orion.

Commissioned in 1968, New Orleans was the third U.S. ship named for the War of 1812 Battle of New Orleans. Throughout its 30 years of service, the ship took part in various amphibious exercises and contingency operations during the Vietnam War, carrying Sailors and Marine ground forces, helicopters and landing craft. The ship was decommissioned in 1997.

VP-4 and VP-47 flew another SINKEX on the ex-USS Monticello (LSD 35) on July 14 using Harpoons and AGM-65 Mavericks to destroy the target. VP-5 and VP-40 conducted the last of the sinking exercises on July 17 using Harpoons and Mavericks against the ex-USS Anchorage (LSD-36). Each crew scored a direct hit, on time.

The AGM-65 Maverick is a tactical, air-to-surface guided missile designed for close air support, interdiction and defense suppression mission. It provides stand-off capability and high probability of strike against a wide range of tactical targets, including ships, air defenses, transportation equipment and fuel storage facilities.

RIMPAC is a biennial, multinational exercise designed to strengthen regional partnerships and improve interoperability. This marks the 22nd exercise in the series since the RIMPAC exercise began in 1971. P-3C Orion aircrews will conduct similar exercises throughout the course of RIMPAC.