RAAF IN NORWAY

International exercise for the Hercules

A contingent of 15 Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) personnel journeyed to the Arctic Circle for an international exercise focused on the C-130J Hercules transport aircraft. Exercise COMBINED STRENGTH 2011 was conducted at Bodø Air Force Base in Norway from 19th to 25th March. The exercise was open to countries that operate C-130J aircraft and this year featured participants from Denmark, Australia and the host nation, Norway.

Air Commodore Gary Martin, Commander Air Lift Group, said the Hercules supports Australian Defence Force tasks across the globe. “In 2010, our C-130s flew from Australia to as far as continental United States, Sweden, throughout South East Asia, and the Pacific. At the same time, we remain committed to operations in the Middle East, where our C-130J crews face conditions that run from below freezing in Afghanistan to above 50 degrees Celsius in United Arab Emirates.”

As evidenced with Australian C-17A Globemasters recently operating in Japan in support of Operation Pacific Assist, the operating environment for the RAAF’s Air Lift Group varies significantly. At the commencement of the exercise Air Commodore Martin added, “The diversity in our operating environment makes participating in Exercise Combined Strength 11 all the more important.”

The Australian contingent delivered presentations on its training structure such as how it develops and prepares aircrew and maintenance professionals. They participated in flying exercises included search and rescue practice, day and night-time operations, airdrop missions and cold weather survival.

Australia’s No. 37 Squadron operates 12 C-130J Hercules at RAAF Base Richmond, alongside a fleet of seven older C-130Hs. The C-130J is the latest generation of the Hercules design and has been in Australian service since 1999 and is continuing to be developed in service. Today’s C-130J is similar in external appearance to the C-130Hs, but has more powerful engines, modern avionics and navigation systems.

Future developments include defence programmes to upgrade the C-130J with new hardware and software under a block-upgrade scheme, and installation of additional electronic warfare self-protection equipment.