EXERCISE BERSAMA SHIELD

It was reported from the Australian Defence Force Media Centre in Canberra on 9th May that F/A-18F Super Hornets were taking part on their first mission during Exercise Bersama Shield 2011 over Malaysia.

The Super Hornets, also known as Rhinos, commenced the Force Integration Training phase which saw aircrew practise basic fighter manoeuvres alongside military aircraft from the Malaysian and Singaporean defence forces.

Six of the Rhinos from No 1 Squadron touched down at the Royal Malaysian Air Force Base in Butterworth, on 29th April to participate in their first overseas deployment since delivery of the multi-role fighter jets in March last year.

Commanding Officer No 1 Squadron, Wing-Commander Glen Braz, said this is a significant milestone for the ADF and more specifically the Super Hornet capability, especially it recognises 40 years of the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) this year.

He commented, “Participating in Exercise Bersama Shield provides our air and ground crews, as well as support staff, the valuable opportunity to train alongside our regional partners. This level of training also aims to enhance and further develop air combat capability and high-end warfighting skills in a complex multi-national environment. The inclusion of the highly capable, multi-role Super Hornet in Bersama Shield is another example of the technological evolution and enhanced support Australia provides to the region. This exercise also provides the vital opportunity to train alongside our regional partners, as well as the planning and execution of new tactics and procedures for combined air operations with the FPDA nations.”

The Australian contribution for Bersama Shield was spearheaded by the Super Hornets, along with the Navy’s Collins class submarine HMAS Dechaineux and two Anzac class guided missile frigates, Ballarat and Parramatta.

Commander of the Australian Contingent for the exercise, Wing-Commander Ken Robinson, said the aim of Bersama Shield is to cultivate regional ties and seeks to enhance Australia’s interoperability with the armed forces of Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, and the United Kingdom and strengthen the professional relationships between those nation’s forces.

He said, “Australia’s membership of FPDA is a strong affirmation of our commitment to regional security. It provides Australia with a strategically
important presence in Southeast Asia, augmenting our bilateral engagement activities and helping to promote greater levels of interoperability in the region.”

Bersama Shield is an annual field training exercise hosted by HQ Integrated Area Defence System (HQIADS) on the Malaysian peninsula and the South China Sea. It is a tactical exercise focused on providing quality training in integrated air defence, air operations and maritime operations.

Opportunities for the five nations to work closely together are undertaken during other FPDA activities, including Bersama Lima, Bersama Padu, Suman Protector and Suman Warrior.

Training in exercises such as Bersama Shield 2011 is important for Air Force personnel to hone key skills, work as a combined force and build regional relationships with participating nations.

Exercise Bersama Shield 11 represents the first overseas deployment for the F/A-18F Super Hornets and brought the project another step closer to declaring Final Operational Capability anticipated in 2012.

Exercise Bersama Shield was due to conclude on 13th May 2011.