



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Defence**

## **Building the capability to save lives in the Pacific**

**Australian military personnel and civilian volunteers were at the centre of action during Exercise Pacific Partnership 2016, as they continued their mission to help improve the disaster preparedness of our Asian neighbours, on board the United States Navy hospital ship USNS *Mercy*.**

Born from the inspiring response to the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, the multination Pacific Partnership initiative is now an annual effort that draws on the experiences and the relationships formed in the aftermath of that disaster.

The Australian contingent commander for Exercise Pacific Partnership 2016, Lieutenant Colonel Michael Abrahams, said the US Pacific Fleet-led initiative is aimed at strengthening alliances and promoting multilateral disaster management resilience.

'Australians should be proud of their countrymen and women's performances as they strove to meet their goals,' Lieutenant Colonel Abrahams said.

'Our military and civilian specialists worked with host nations to conduct medical, engineering, dental and veterinary clinics.

'The Pacific Partnership series is held in alternating years in the South-West Pacific and South-East Asia regions. This last year saw our specialists travel to Vietnam, the Philippines, Timor-Leste, Malaysia, Indonesia and Palau.

'Their dedication, professionalism and skill-sharing has helped to improve the capacities of the host nations and their emergency organisations. They can now respond to disasters more effectively by drawing on the recurring opportunities for cooperation and training that we help deliver.

'The ADF also benefits from the exercise. Just as our regional neighbours benefit from increased capability, it's also a great chance for us to enhance our experience and expertise.



Australian Army Environmental Health Officer Lieutenant Matthew La Macchia conducts heat stress monitoring of a high-risk work zone, the laundry, onboard hospital ship USNS *Mercy* during Exercise Pacific Partnership 2016.

'Our personnel work closely with partner militaries, intergovernmental agencies, host nation civilian agencies and non-government organisations.

'The result is a much improved and refined collective ability to provide humanitarian assistance and disaster relief wherever it is needed,' Lieutenant Colonel Abrahams said.

An important feature of Exercise Pacific Partnership 2016 was the humanitarian assistance disaster relief symposium held on board the *Mercy* while moored at Dili, Timor-Leste.

The Australian contingent on board formed an integral part of symposium discussions by working through a variety of support elements that could be used to support and assist a host nation in any given humanitarian or disaster relief effort in the region.

'The ADF and our civilian volunteers were again great ambassadors, and were prominent in leading knowledge-sharing tasks,' Lieutenant Colonel Abrahams said.

'Their leadership and preparedness to roll up their sleeves during Exercise Pacific Partnership 2016 will benefit Australia's relationships with a number of countries.

'During the exercise, Australians combined their employment and capabilities with personnel from Japan, New Zealand, Canada, Indonesia and, of course, the United States.

'A Japanese vessel joined the USNS *Mercy* for the Philippine and Vietnam mission stops. An Indonesian vessel joined the exercise for the mission stop in their own waters.

'The 2004 tsunami was a tragedy. However, the concept and delivery of a recurring mission is genuinely a positive to emerge from it. Preparations in times of calm now mean we can help the US and its partners to deliver high-quality humanitarian assistance in the region if disaster relief efforts are ever needed again.

'Relationships and expertise are strengthened now, but people's lives will be saved in the future,' Lieutenant Colonel Abrahams said.