New initiative leads the way for future war fighting

Story and photo by MC1 Greg Mitchell, U.S. 7th Fleet Public Affairs

CORAL SEA – Australian and American Armed Forces used new communications abilities while embarked on board the U.S. 7th Fleet flagship *USS Blue Ridge* (LCC 19) for Exercise Talisman Sabre 2011 (TS-11) July 9 – 25.

The Improved Connectivity Initiative (ICI) program changed the way two military forces communicated without compromising secret information during the exercise.

Watchstanders from the Royal Australian Navy, U.S. Army and U.S. Navy discuss training scenarios in the Joint Operations Command Center (JOCC) aboard the *USS Blue Ridge* (LCC 19), July 26, as a part of Exercise Talisman Sabre 2011. The exercise combines U.S. and Australian air, land and maritime forces, providing opportunities to conduct operations in a combined and joint environment that will increase both countries' bilateral war-fighting capabilities to respond to crises and provide humanitarian assistance.

"The collaboration is endless," said Royal Australian Air Force Flying Officer Alex Barbaro, a communications watch officer during TS-11. "It enhances situational awareness, no matter where you are, from troops on the ground, at sea, and also from the lowest-ranking Seaman all the way up to Admiral."

The ICI is an agreement between the United States, Canada, Great Britain and Australia to improve connectivity amongst each other.

This is done through a classified information technician system that provides real-time collaboration, command and control and information sharing to the war fighter directly from their national desktop, as opposed to a standalone coalition system.

"In an instant, we have gone from being one-dimensional to multi-dimensional, multi-service and multi-national," said Royal Australian Army Lt. Col. Andrew Butler, assistant communication officer during TS-11.

Australia is the first country to fully participate in the ICI initiative, and TS-11 was the first time the program had been used.

ICI allows the service members to use web browsing, interactive chat, interactive persistent chat and classified voice conferencing throughout the exercise. The interactive tools allowed the two countries to communicate in a joint environment without the requirement of having to use each country's standalone Command and Control equipment.

"The Initiative exceeded nearly all expectations and was extremely effective in enabling increased information sharing across all mission areas," said Capt. John Holmes, 7th Fleet's communications information systems officer. "The Fleet Systems Engineering Team (FSET) reps worked around the clock to enable the numerous capabilities associated with ICI."

Holmes also said that while there were a few shortfalls with some collaborative tools, there was always an alternative means of sharing information that allowed collaboration to continue. He also sees a bright future for the program.

"I have no doubt coalition personnel will develop new ways to improve command and control mission effectiveness as we increase our familiarity and understanding of the architecture as this Initiative moves forward," he said.

TS-11 was a biennial exercise which combined U.S. and Australian air, land and maritime forces. The exercise provided an opportunity to conduct operations in a combined and joint environment that increased both countries' bilateral war-fighting capabilities to respond to crises and provide humanitarian assistance.

Learning English on the job, one word at a time

Story by MC3 Mikey Mulcare, USS McCampbell Public Affairs

PACIFIC OCEAN – English can be a difficult language to learn and for one *USS McCampbell* (DDG 85) Sailor, who is fluent in both Mandarin and Cantonese, it has been a challenge.

Culinary Specialist 3rd Class Jian Xu was born and raised in Xunan, China.

He enlisted in the Navy in 2008 after being recruited in Los Angeles.

"When I came into the Navy I spoke very broken English and I had only been living in America for three years before enlisting," said Xu. "My first three weeks in the Navy they put me in a program where they taught me English before I even went to regular boot camp."

Lacking the ability to speak English fluently, Xu was faced with a number of challenges most Sailors never face.

"It was confusing at boot camp for me," said Xu. "I didn't start understanding English well until afterwards and when they instructed me to do certain things like fold my clothes; I'd have to ask my bunk mate for help because I couldn't understand what my RDC (recruit division commander) was saying."

CS3 Jian Xu places fried catfish into a serving container before dinner aboard USS McCampbell (DDG 85) July 27.

Even after arriving at his first ship, his challenge with learning English continued.

"I learned a lot of my English from working in the galley," said Xu. "The people I work with and everyone on the *McCampbell* have taught me a lot and I appreciate it. When I don't understand certain words that they say, they always explain them to me."

For Xu's coworkers, it was difficult as well.

"When I first met Xu, I really had a hard time understanding him," said Culinary Specialist 3rd Class Michael Sadler, a close friend of Xu. "His English was very broken and when he got frustrated, a lot of times he'd revert back to Mandarin. One thing I will say is he's come a long way and every time he sees a word he doesn't understand, everyone in the galley including me, is there to teach him."

Xu became a U.S. citizen last year and with the ability to speak English with greater ease, he has been able to spend time setting his mind to other goals including advancement.

"Right now, I'm actually working on becoming a 2nd Class Petty Officer because I want to go back to boot camp to be an RDC and help someone who was like me," said Xu.