U.S. 7th Fleet ships engage in synthetic training

Story and photo by MC3 Andrew Ryan Smith,
Navy Public Affairs Support Element Japan

Sailors aboard *USS Stethem* (DDG 63) engage in training with Navy assets from U.S. 3rd Fleet and Japan Maritime Self-Defense Forces; without ever leaving the pier at Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka's berth eight.

Fleet Synthetic Training (FST) is an inter-linked digital training program allowing ships underway or pier side to conduct realistic combat training scenarios.

"FST training can cover ballistic missile defense, anti-surface, anti-submarine or anti-air warfare," said Chief Warrant Officer Chris McKenzie, *Stethem*'s FST coordinator.

"We can also incorporate ships at sea, aircraft and land-based missile batteries, as well as Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force units."

FST was introduced in 2009 with the goal of reducing at-sea training time for ships, thus reducing operating costs. It also allows ships and units that are separated over great geographic distances to conduct integrated training with allied forces near and far. With the wide range of options available with FST, is has become one of the best options for forward deployed ships to conduct training.

"My mission as ballistic missile defense officer (BMDO) is to alert other elements out of radar range of a missile headed their direction," said Lt. j.g. Jhon Alseide, *Stethem*'s BMDO. "This training is one of the best tools we have to prepare for real world scenarios."

FST gives each command access to low cost training that can be tailored to the individual unit's needs. It also allows greater flexibility in training schedules, and allows ships to be better prepared for whatever challenges they may have to meet.

"This is some of the best preparation for real world missions," said McKenzie. We not only get hands on training with the equipment, but we also coordinate with ships from other countries and other areas of operation."

OS1 Lionel Mahoney, training supervisor aboard the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer *USS Stethem* (DDG 63), records enemy locations during a Fleet Synthetic Training (FST) scenario Feb. 14. FST senarios allow the U.S. Navy to increase the quality of training, expand connectivity and improve efficiency of training.

Vice chief of naval operations concludes Australia trip

Story and photo by Lt. Cmdr. Chris Servello,
Vice Chief of Naval Operations Public Affairs

DARWIN, Australia – The vice chief of naval operations (VCNO) concluded a three-day engagement visit to Canberra and Darwin, Australia Feb. 21.

Adm. Mark Ferguson met with Chief of the Australian navy Vice Adm. Ray Griggs and U.S. Ambassador Hon. Jeffrey L. Bleich, toured naval facilities, and delivered remarks to students, faculty and staff at the Australian Defence College (ADC).

"This was a productive and enjoyable visit," said Ferguson. "I came here on behalf of the secretary of the Navy and chief of naval operations to discuss our enduring presence and engagement in the Pacific."

Meetings with VCNO and the Australian navy staff focused on the recent U.S. force posture review, the status of the two respective navies, and plans for continued military to military exercises and engagement.

"Our long-term economic and security interests are linked to developments in the Asia-Pacific; we place a high premium on our presence and support to allies and partners in the region," said Ferguson. "This visit further solidified the strong relationship we enjoy with the Australian navy."

In remarks to the ADC in Canberra, Ferguson talked about the U.S. Navy's longstanding presence in the Pacific, the free flow of commerce, maritime security, and the U.S. defense strategy.

The ADC was established in 1999 to meet the strategic needs of the Australian Defence Force for joint professional military education and to prepare Australian and foreign military and government officials for joint and combined assignments. More than 160 military and civilian students, faculty and staff from 20 different countries turned out for Ferguson's presentation.

"The U.S. is a Pacific maritime nation, and our strategy underscores our commitment to our allies and partners in this region," said Ferguson. "Our interests demand enduring presence; we are here to stay."

In Darwin, Ferguson visited *HMAS Coonawarra* to meet with the Australian navy staff before touring the harbor to get a first-hand view of available support facilities for the planned rotational deployment of U.S. Marines to the region.

Ferguson is traveling throughout the U.S. Pacific fleet to meet with regional partners and U.S. personnel to discuss U.S. Navy Pacific engagement. He will visit Singapore and Guam next.

(Right) Vice Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mark Ferguson addresses Australian Defence College students, faculty and staff while visiting the campus in Camberra Feb. 20. Ferguson is traveling to meet with regional partners and U.S. personnel to discuss U.S. Navy engagement in the Pacific in support of the new defense strategy.

CFAY VITA Center
Tip of the Week

Thrift Savings Plan: If you received a TSP distribution, you must include that distribution in your taxable income. If your TSP contributions stemmed from income earned in a Combat Zone, that portion of the distribution is tax-exempt. However, the earnings on that tax-exempt contribution are taxable. TSP can provide you with a statement showing the portions of your distribution that are taxable.