

# RIMPAC 2004



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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Tarawa Sailors, Marines Evacuate Embassy Staff in “Green”  
During Rim of the Pacific 2004

By Tarawa Public Affairs

ABOARD USS TARAWA OFF THE COAST OF KAUAI – The crew of USS Tarawa (LHA-1) recently helped embarked Marines rescue an embassy staff under siege in the notional country of “Green,” evacuating 160 people after unruly protesters began lobbing tennis balls, sticks and water balloons. Six days later, on July 20, the “Big T’s” crew launched a Marine landing force ashore in “Green” (Bellows Beach in Kauai) to repel a hostile group of extremists from the nearby and equally notional country of “Orange.” Not bad for several days work!

These exercise scenarios, known respectively as a non-combatant evacuation operation (NEO) and an amphibious assault operation, highlighted Tarawa’s participation in the 2004 Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) exercises off the Hawaiian island of Kauai.

“The NEO exercise is an increasingly important mission, given the security threats in overseas countries,” said Cmdr. Dan Granados, who coordinated Tarawa’s role in the NEO exercise. “Although not a direct military mission, it involves both the Marines and Navy to ensure it is accomplished effectively and efficiently.”

During the non-combatant evacuation operation July 14, *Tarawa* Sailors received, processed and provided food and water for the “evacuees” after they were flown to the ship. Once aboard, the role players dressed as civilian evacuees moved through a line in the hangar bay, where Personnelman 2<sup>nd</sup> Class Lanelle Hawthorne and five of her *Tarawa* shipmates assisted them.

“We checked them in and helped them get settled on the ship,” said Hawthorne, a 27-year-old native of Kauai, who was a short helicopter ride away from her hometown of Koala as she worked in *Tarawa*’s hangar bay. “This helped me to get better prepared. If we ever had a real emergency, I would know what to expect.”

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## MEDIA ADVISORY



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Meanwhile, another *Tarawa* NEO participant, Gunner's Mate 3<sup>rd</sup> Class Pat Egan, helped provide security for the check-in process, making sure that no one had brought weapons.

“We checked the evacuees out when they got aboard, frisked them, and made sure they had no weapons,” said Egan. “This was good training to make sure that if we took on evacuees that there would be no ‘sleeper’ terrorists.”

Just one part of the overall RIMPAC 2004 exercises, the NEO prepares all participants for similar real-world situations. Occasionally, the experience gained during the NEOs will be used during a major deployment. For example, in the early summer of 1998, *Tarawa* and the embarked 11<sup>th</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit evacuated 250 people from Asmara, the capital of Eritrea.

The exercises also helped build relations between the participating nations, a predominant theme of RIMPAC, according to *Tarawa* Commanding Officer John Riley.

“We had the opportunity on the “Big T” to host several observers from Singapore, Mexico and Australia during the NEO,” said *Tarawa* Commanding Officer Capt. John Riley. “It was a good chance for them to see an amphibious assault ship in action from our perspective.”

“It was a very informative experience to see how you operate and how you do business. This was very systematic,” said Singaporean naval officer Lt Col. Joe Cheong, one of two Singaporean observers who watched the exercise inside *Tarawa*'s hangar bay.

“We are observing right now, but in the future, this is something in which we would like to participate,” said Mexican Commander Jose Barradas, one of two Mexican naval officers who also observed the NEO in *Tarawa*'s hangar bay.

This year's RIMPAC, conducted from June 29 to July 27 off the coast of Hawaii, is the 19th of a series of Pacific naval exercises that began in 1971. Among the countries participating this year are: Australia, Canada, Chile, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the United Kingdom and the United States.