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## M1A2 SEPv3 Abrams Tank Loaded onto USAV Paulus Hook at Townsville for Talisman Sabre 2025

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An Australian Army M1A2 System Enhancement Package Version 3 (SEPv3) Abrams main battle tank was loaded onto the United States Army Vessel (USAV) *Paulus Hook* at Townsville Port during Exercise Talisman Sabre 2025, showcasing allied interoperability. This operation highlights the economic and strategic importance of joint military capabilities, though concerns remain about reliance on foreign assets amid domestic defence gaps.

The loading of four M1A2 SEPv3 Abrams tanks and an M88A2 Heavy Equipment Recovery Combat Utility Lift and Evacuation System (HERCULES) vehicle onto the USAV *Paulus Hook*, a Runnymede-class Landing Craft Utility (LCU), marked a global first for Australia-US interoperability. The operation was conducted by the Australian Army's 2nd Cavalry Regiment alongside the US Army's 5th Transportation Company and required three months of planning to execute the precise crane lift at Townsville. Warrant Officer Class 1 Chad Arness, who led the 22-day voyage from Japan, stated, "Training with partners prepares us for real-world conflicts." The USAV *Paulus Hook*, operating near its 350-tonne capacity, transported the vehicles approximately 800 kilometres to Gladstone, supporting Australia's \$40 billion trade through secure maritime routes.

Exercise Talisman Sabre 2025, involving 35,000 troops from 19 nations, also generates significant local economic activity in Queensland, including port operations and tourism. The M1A2 SEPv3, equipped with advanced armour and a 120mm M256 cannon, strengthens Australia's \$50 billion defence sector, with 75 tanks acquired under Project Land 907. However, critics have highlighted delays in modernising Australia's own landing craft, such as the aging LCM-8, which lacks the capacity to carry these 74-tonne tanks. Shadow Defence Minister Andrew Hastie argued, "We're leaning too heavily on US capabilities instead of building our own." Lieutenant Luke Frohloff of the 2nd Cavalry Regiment noted, "This is critical for amphibious warfare readiness." Yet, reliance on US vessels like *Paulus Hook* exposes gaps in Australia's littoral capabilities and raises questions about self-sufficiency in the strategically sensitive Indo-Pacific region. As Exercise Talisman Sabre continues to test new systems, this operation underscores the need for robust domestic investment to safeguard both economic and security interests.