

Feeding the crowds: Burnham chefs at work



BURNHAM CAMP TURNS OUT TO HELP AS FIRES RAZE CHRISTCHURCH HILLS

When a devastating fire raced through the Port Hills in Christchurch last month a large team of personnel from Burnham Military Camp, in particular the 3rd Combat Service Support Battalion (3 CSS Bn), were among the first to assist.



Soldiers from Burnham Military Camp helped police talk to locals and explain what was happening





Flames reach up through the Port Hills Photo: Constable Kurt Davison



By Lieutenant Melissa Mardon

While Army fire fighters helped get the bush fires under control, 3 CSS Bn's help involved transport, catering and mobilising the Civil Defence Response Group (CDRG). A Southern Response Task Group (SRTG) HQ was established in the 3 CSS Bn HQ building, where the Officers and SNCOs of 3 CSS Bn were called on to assist, along with support from the 4th Signal Squadron.

3 Transport Company split into day and night shifts so they could carry out the tasks required. Company drivers moved the fire fighters from the camp and Lincoln University to the Incident Control Point at Halswell Quarry morning and evening. The shifts also moved the CDRG to the Police headquarters every eight hours.

Drivers moved stores and food to the cordon locations and completed any other tasks which were required from the SRTG HQ.

The Company provided drivers who waited at certain cordon locations to help St John Ambulance staff in case anything happened on the hills.

The civil defence tasks included reassurance patrols, security on the cordons and assistance at the Incident Control Point at Halswell Quarry. The group was made up of soldiers from 2/1 Battalion and 3 CSS Bn, and rotated every eight hours.

"Working with the NZ Police, the Navy Reservists, and the American Coastguard was a unique experience. Getting to know them personally and the way they worked professionally was interesting, and adapting to suit the response tested our ability to plan and execute tasks on short notice on many occasions," said Lieutenant Ted Duncker, 3CSC, CDRG Commander. "I'm looking forward to working with them again in future, as building relationships between our organisations is essential to improving our response to another crisis."

The role of the CDRG Commander was primarily providing a link between the Police and the Burnham Camp headquarters. LT Duncker was part of a team of CDRG Commanders who came from all units around Burnham Military Camp and rotated in and out of the Police headquarters.

The emergency response troop from Burnham was in the thick of the action with up to five fire appliances and a number of liaison and planning staff actively engaged in

the response from the outset.

As soon as the southern response task group was stood up liaison staff were despatched to both the Selwyn and Christchurch emergency operations centres where alongside their colleagues from the police, ambulance and fire services they actively supported the emergency efforts; co-ordinating the military response for everything including arranging for a RNZAF C-130 to collect essential fire retardant chemicals from Australia and deliver them to the Port Hills.

Some soldiers from 3 CSS Bn are volunteer fire fighters, and they helped their colleagues from the Burnham Fire Station, conducting shifts and clearing hot spots on the Port Hills. Along with supporting the CDRG, 3 CSC ran a semi-permanent field kitchen at the Incident Control Point. The section fed about 250 fire fighters, emergency service personal, Red Cross, local government and council workers associated with the co-ordination and response to the Civil Defence call-out.

They received a cooked or continental breakfast, high-energy cut lunch and a buffet style dinner. Eight members of the 3 CSC Field Catering Section ran the kitchen for several weeks, finally withdrawing on 4 March.

3 Workshops Company personnel were involved in a vehicle recovery, along with supporting the CDRG. A recovery team was deployed in the second week, recovering a fire truck stuck on a farm track in the Port Hills. Additionally, 3 Workshops Company also completed mechanical repairs on the Unimog fire appliances many times throughout the response.

The Commanding Officer of 3 CSS Bn, Lieutenant Colonel Rob Loftus said the NZDF lost no time in going to the aid of the community in Christchurch as soon as the fires broke out. "They supported both the police, St John Ambulance and of course the fire fighters. The NZDF team based out of Burnham has demonstrated once again that we are capable, agile and a force that New Zealanders can rely on."

