

ARMY ENGINEERS IN THE SINAI



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The 34 New Zealand Defence Force engineers sent to the Sinai Peninsula in early January have reinforced the positive reputation built by the NZDF over the years amongst members of a multinational peacekeeping force.

The engineers, from the New Zealand Army's 2 Engineer Regiment, are building a 3.3-kilometre security fence around the Multinational Force & Observers' (MFO) South Camp.

"The sappers have a reputation in South Camp of being extremely hard workers. I have had comments from

numerous people about how hard they've been working," Lieutenant Tom Gilbert, the Troop Commander of the engineering team, said.

The MFO is an international organisation with peacekeeping responsibilities in the Sinai Peninsula. After operating at North Camp for over 30 years, the mission's headquarters and a number of troops from 11 other contributing nations that make up the MFO's Force moved to South Camp in mid-2016 due to the deteriorating security situation in North Sinai.

To accommodate the influx into South Camp, the MFO is building new facilities and had requested assistance from New Zealand and other countries with some of the infrastructure projects.

Lieutenant Gilbert said the progress on the fence had been steady.

"The mood of the troops is very positive. We have made visible progress that the guys can be proud of. Everyone is looking forward to the remaining time here and finishing our tasks."

Deployed to the Sinai for up to six months, the engineering team includes combat engineers, carpenters, electricians, plant operators, welders and a supply technician.

"We have a range of experience levels in the engineering

contingent, with sappers who have recently joined the Army and very experienced senior non-commissioned officers who have deployed to the Middle East and other countries in the past. This has been an asset to us as the experienced members are able to mentor the junior ones. This will also benefit the respective trades as they will be able to pass their experience to their peers when we return home," Lieutenant Gilbert said.

Corporal Thomas Roy, one of two Section Commanders for the combat engineers, said their experience so far had been "hugely rewarding".

"We've been able to see the benefits of our work and the role we play here. It has been an amazing opportunity to visit this part of the world, see the local sights and interact with the people," Corporal Roy said.

Members of the engineering contingent seem to have taken the hot and dry weather and the diverse cultural environment within the MFO in their stride.

"The temperatures at the moment are still manageable but for someone coming from Waiouru, it is very challenging working in such heat. Nevertheless, I was very keen to get stuck into the work that was waiting for us upon arrival. It is great to be doing the job overseas that we spend so much time training for at home," Sapper Benjamin Kerr, a plant operator, said.

Lieutenant Gilbert said the New Zealanders' friendly nature made it easy for the engineering team to adapt to the diverse cultures within the MFO.

"We are working with people from all over the world, both military and civilian. Everyone must work together to achieve a common goal. The Kiwis are naturally good at getting along with people from other nations and this has been proven once again in this deployment," he said.

The NZDF has been contributing a transport section, a training and advisory team, and a number of key staff positions to the MFO since it was established in 1982. At present, 26 NZDF members form part of the MFO Force of about 1700 personnel from 11 other countries.

"The role of the MFO is a vital one for the maintenance of peace in this area of the Middle East and being a part of it is hugely satisfying. The team can be proud of what they have achieved so far and are looking forward to the second half of the deployment," Lieutenant Gilbert said.

At present, there are 42 Army engineers deployed on missions overseas, particularly in Iraq, the Sinai Peninsula and Antarctica.

"Kiwi sappers are trusted professionals in their trades and their skills are actively sought by both the NZDF and external partners," Lieutenant Colonel Terry McDonald, Commanding Officer of 2 Engineer Regiment, said.

"They approach every task as an opportunity and continue to serve across the globe, representing themselves, the NZDF and wider New Zealand to the best of their ability."



The Army engineers at work on the security fence around the Multinational Force & Observers' South Camp.

