

A New Zealand soldier makes friends with a young local



Tribesmen at a gun handing over ceremony



RAMSI CLOSES

The Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) has come to an end.

RAMSI was established in 2003 at the request of the Solomon Islands Government, following five years of internal conflict and security challenges.

Its mission was to work with the people and the Solomon Islands Government to build a secure, well-governed and prosperous nation.

The Solomon Islands had endured years of upheaval before RAMSI was established. The mission was preceded by other peace agreements designed to end two years of fighting between militia groups Isatabu Freedom Movement, which represented indigenous Guadalcanal people, and the Malaita Eagle Force, comprising settlers from neighbouring Malaita.

The tension between the two factions had been simmering for several decades, but fighting began in earnest in the late-1990s when Guadalcanal people, irked by their perception that Malaitan settlers in Guadalcanal had the best land and jobs, ran thousands of Malaitan settlers off the island. Malaitan combatants in turn formed the Malaita Eagle Force, and the shootings and mayhem began.

RAMSI's military contingent comprised military personnel from Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, and Tonga. The military presence supported RAMSI by acting as a deterrent to destabilising events and providing support to the Participating Police Force (PPF) and the Royal Solomon

Islands Police Force (RSIPF).

New Zealand contributed to RAMSI from its inception in 2003 until 2013. New Zealand Army platoons deployed to the Solomon Islands for four-month rotations, working alongside military personnel from Australia, Tonga and Papua New Guinea.

Military forces were committed to enhancing the safety and security of all Solomon Islanders, not just the police and other RAMSI personnel.

Military patrols and presence reduced the threat of violence by providing extra security to enable the PPF and the RSIPF to work in a safe and secure environment.

Patrols were conducted in Honiara in conjunction with the PPF and the RSIPF. The military also helped with provincial patrolling and visited every province in the Solomon Islands, making contact with as many people as possible.

The NZDF's contribution evolved continuously because of the changing security situation. Initially, a company of about 120 personnel, support staff, an Engineer Section and four Royal New Zealand Air Force UH-1H Iroquois helicopters were deployed to support the Australian Defence Force-led Combined Task Force.

In August 2004, as the political and security situation

stabilised, the NZDF commitment was reduced to a headquarters element of eight personnel and an infantry platoon of about 35 soldiers, rotated with the Australian Defence Force every eight months.

However, after renewed civil disturbance in the Solomon Islands in early 2006, the NZDF increased its contribution to RAMSI to one company group of 125 personnel, up from the previous commitment of a platoon of 35 soldiers.

In July 2010, the NZDF also deployed an "Election Force" – a platoon of about 35 Regular Force soldiers from the New Zealand Army's High Readiness Company – to the Solomons for three months to supplement the security presence during the country's elections.

An improved security environment allowed RAMSI's military component, the Combined Task Force, to be withdrawn from mid-2013. Responsibility for the maintenance of security and law and order was passed to the Royal Solomon Islands Police and RAMSI's police component, the Participating Police Force.

Since then, RAMSI has been solely a policing mission, working with the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force to build its capabilities and develop it as a modern, effective and self-reliant police force.



NZ troops with local children



A militia member makes an appearance in Honiara