



# TALISMAN SABER TESTS KIWI, AUSTRALIAN AND US TROOPS

**Almost 400 hundred 1(NZ) Bde soldiers formed Task Group Black for Exercise Talisman Saber in Australia last month.**



**By Corporal Mark Doran**

Task Group Black was assigned as a force element to 3 Bde during the exercise at the Shoalwater Bay Training Area.

Overall there were more than 500 New Zealand Defence Force personnel, two NH90 helicopters, the combined arms task group and HMNZS Canterbury taking to the sea, air and land as part of the international war-fighting exercise.

Task Group Black embedded with and fought alongside Australian and United States soldiers and provided intelligence, medical, communication, engineering and transport support throughout the exercise.

The Task Group Black Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel Hamish Gibbons, of QAMR, said his task group was the lead for the avenue of advance through the eastern corridor.

“The light armoured combat team consisted of 20 NZLAVs and their echelon totalling about 160 personnel,” he said.

“We also had a combat services support team of about 140 troops who provided our logistics support with about 30 medium heavy operational vehicles and 20 light operational vehicles as well as the headquarters element.

# 16 ARMY EXERCISE

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“We were the brigade’s supporting effort and our role was to draw the enemy to the east.”

LTCOL Gibbons said 3 Bde was a fantastic host.

“Everyone had a ‘can do’ attitude and planned well to ensure our integration was seamless,” he said.

“We were conscious of not being a burden on the brigade so we brought everything we needed to add value to the combat capability.

“During the exercise there were Australian Army signallers and engineers attached to the New Zealand task group along with a 3RAR combat team.

“It was an interoperable, if not interchangeable mix of troops.”

LTCOL Gibbons said the task group also integrated well with the US soldiers who formed Battlegroup Gimlet.

“They were also operating on the eastern corridor and we linked-up with them through an air mobile insertion before

we did a coordinated activity on an objective,” he said.

“As they were a light infantry organisation our trucks provided transport around the battlespace as required.”

LTCOL Gibbons said the complexity and scale of Exercise Talisman Saber was not able to be replicated within the NZ Army.

“There were more troops on the exercise than are in our army,” he said.

“The involvement of so many different capabilities such as attack helicopters and tanks was a fantastic experience for our younger troops, while our senior commanders were able to request those assets to complete our tasks.

“Being a part of the activity during the centenary of Anzac demonstrates our bonds are still strong. Australians and New Zealanders can still work closely together. We have similar cultures and any issues are quickly solved – we just get on with it and get the job done.”





**‘Every task is an opportunity’ is one of the phrases often quoted by the Commanding Officer of 2 Engineer Regiment (2 ER). Exercise Talisman Saber 2017 (TS17) provided a great opportunity for a small engineer team to integrate into a Combined Arms Task Group (CATG) within a joint, multinational land warfighting exercise.**

This was the certification exercise for 3 (AS) Brigade (reinforced) as they transitioned from the ‘readying’ to ‘ready’ brigade and involved more than 30,000 soldiers from Australia, New Zealand and the United States.

The 2 ER engineer team was tested on its ability to operate within, alongside and in support of all other New Zealand Corps within Task Group Black (the CATG) and across nations with several elements embedded within 3 Combat Engineer Regiment (3 CER), 3 (AS) Bde. This tested interoperability as well as the application of engineer effects within a mid-to-high intensity joint, multinational land warfighting setting.

2 ER deployed two specialist engineer vehicles and 11 sappers on the exercise. This included one Engineer Reconnaissance and Liaison Team consisting of a Captain and a Recon Sergeant; one mobility Support Detachment consisting of a High Mobility Engineer Excavator (HMEE), a Gap Crossing System (GCS), a Forward Repair Team (FRT) and a command team; and one Task Group Engineer Officer.

The RNZE engineers were integrated with Royal Australian Engineers (RAE) from 3 CER.

Talisman Saber saw 3 (AS) Bde (reinforced) advance south on two axis, with TG Black as a supporting effort on the east axis. It quickly became apparent that this was the enemy’s main effort for their defence operations as they had weighted their force to the east. This included the enemy Brigade Reserve.

For the Australian and New Zealand engineers attached to TG Black this resulted in providing mobility support to a high tempo advance. Tasks included clearance of minefields, reducing crater obstacles, rendering safe simple booby traps, and conducting route and vulnerable point searches for improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

The decentralised employment of engineers in a combined arms setting shielded TG Black motorised and mechanised forces from the threat of both IED and minefields, and helped in TG Black’s successful exploits on the eastern axis.

In addition to mobility support, engineers also conducted route reconnaissance reports to help 3 (AS) Bde HQ planning, route maintenance and survivability works with plant machinery.



A soldier orientates a 81 mm mortar barrel in preparation for firing.

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Conducting sentry from a vehicle cupola.



Land Component Commander Brigadier Mike Shapland visits the Kiwi troops during a rest period.



Talisman Saber proved a good opportunity to rehearse combined arms effects in the lead up to Southern Katipo 2017.

### Mobility Support Detachment

The Mobility Support Detachment (MSD) was integrated into the exercise as two separate capabilities, geographically separated from all other RNZE elements. The HMEE was attached to TG Black to provide mobility support both on and off routes; and the GCS, FRT and command team were attached to the Royal Australian Engineers (RAE) as part of BG Phantom. As the GCS was not used during Talisman Saber the GCS operators were employed as plant operators and integrated into the Plant Troop of 3 CER, the FRT was integrated into the Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers Troop, and the command team was employed in BG Phantom HQ. This provided all personnel with the opportunity to fully integrate with their Australian counterparts and develop an understanding of troop and battlegroup operations. The MSD gained exposure to the difference in resources, assets, and standard operating procedures

and achieved the intent of interoperability between Australia and New Zealand.

### Engineer Recon Team

In keeping with the exercise aims of integration and interoperability, the RNZE Recon Officer, Captain Jacob Corlett, was assigned to an RAE recon team as part of BG Eagle, made up of mechanised elements from 2 Cavalry Regiment. This Anzac engineer recon team also operated apart from other engineer elements, exemplifying the RNZE motto: UBIQUE. Operating with an ASLAV Sqn, M113 Sqn and Abrams Tank Sqn afforded the unique opportunity to reconnoitre routes and trafficking points for assets not available in New Zealand. While it was challenging to provide engineering advice to enhance friendly tank movement, and to shield against enemy tanks through obstacle emplacement, the experience was invaluable. It is reassuring that while NZDF may not operate the same assets as our allies, our professional knowledge and standards of training allow us to add value in planning and coordinating these assets nonetheless.