

SK17

NZDF STAGES SOUTHERN KATIPO 2017

by Luz Baguioro, Public Affairs Manager – Joint Forces New Zealand

For about six weeks from mid-October, the top of the South Island will again be recast as the fictional South Pacific country of Becara as the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) mounts its major military exercise Southern Katipo.

As in its previous two iterations, Southern Katipo 2017 (SK17) will be run as a four-phase military exercise by Headquarters Joint Forces New Zealand to test and evaluate the NZDF's expeditionary capability.

"Southern Katipo is not a set-piece military campaign," Major General Tim Gall, the Commander Joint Forces New Zealand, said.

"To keep the activity as a real test, participants will be presented with problems and constraints at every stage. They would have to solve these as they would in a real operation to achieve the mission. Only Exercise Control has the script."

Major General Gall said SK17 would cover the whole spectrum of operations, from ISR (intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance), evacuation of civilians, delivery of humanitarian aid and maritime patrols through to peacekeeping and conventional warfighting.

"There is something to challenge every specialist NZDF function. We do not often deploy at such a large scale. This is a good opportunity to exercise our various capabilities so that we are ready to respond before a crisis demands it."

He noted that through several operations in the South Pacific, the NZDF has demonstrated that it could establish its forces offshore and conduct stability, support and humanitarian operations.

"But we have to keep on working at it. We have to keep on enhancing our ability to conduct joint operations involving maritime, land and air assets and to work alongside our international defence partners."

The narrative for SK17 continues the unfinished business in Becara, Exercise Director Lieutenant Colonel Martin Dransfield said.

Two years after a multinational coalition led by the NZDF came to help restore peace and stability, unresolved ethnic rivalries have exploded into a new wave of violence. Tensions between the Wesso majority and the Havo minority boiled over again recently, sparking renewed bloodshed and causing large numbers of the population to flee their homes. Unable to quell the fast-spreading unrest, the government of Becara has again sought international assistance.

New Zealand has come to the aid of its South Pacific neighbour and is deploying a contingent to lead the multinational Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) 656.

Brigadier Mike Shapland, the Land Component Commander, has been appointed to lead the deployed forces for the exercise.

As Commander of CJTF 656, Brigadier Shapland has about 3000 troops, 11 ships, 18 aircraft and hundreds of military vehicles under his command. His mission: to restore law and order in Becara, conduct stability, support and humanitarian operations, including the evacuation of internally displaced persons, and set the conditions for the government of Becara to regain control.



"We know what the mission is and what needs to be done to achieve it but actually carrying out the operation is the real test.

"We know that operations do not unfold in a linear way. A lot of factors can delay or entirely block progress towards your objective," Brigadier Shapland said.

The first phase of SK17 will see the CJTF deploying to Becara and establishing its presence there, while Phase 2 will focus on the delivery of humanitarian aid. Phase 3 is about defeating hostile militia groups, with the final phase paving the way for the government of Becara to again manage its own governance and security.

"The players can better challenge themselves if they approach the problems as they would for real instead of thinking of them as an exercise," Lieutenant Colonel Dransfield said.

About 900 troops from 13 countries, including Australia, Fiji, France, Papua New Guinea, Singapore and the United States, will be taking part in the NZDF's biennial military exercise. Hundreds of residents from the surrounding areas of Westport, Greymouth, Kaikoura and Havelock have also been tapped to play as protesters, displaced Becarans and foreign nationals in need of evacuation.

HOW THE BACKSTORY TO SOUTHERN KATIPO WAS CREATED

by Luz Baguioro, Public Affairs Manager – Joint Forces New Zealand

It is said that wars begin in the minds of men. That is certainly true for Southern Katipo.

Army Lieutenant Brendan Stanbury reprises his role as scenario planner in Southern Katipo 2017 (SK17), forming part of a duo that has created the backstory to the New Zealand Defence Force's biennial military exercise.

Their 'war room' is a tiny office at Headquarters Joint Forces New Zealand. Pinned on one wall is a web of characters plotted against a map of Becara, the fictional South West Pacific country torn apart by ethnic-fuelled violence.

Visits to the nerve centre of Southern Katipo are restricted, to avoid information leaking out prematurely to participants. Only the broad outlines of the exercise scenario, which has evolved steadily since 2014, have been released to keep the activity a real test.

"We have produced a range of scenario-related information feeds to date, most of which are targeted at the strategic and operational levels to help the players conduct their planning," Lieutenant Stanbury said.

"The idea is to build multiple hooks or storylines from

which each of the specialist NZDF functions can exercise."

The narrative for SK17 continues the unfinished business at Becara, where unresolved ethnic tensions have exploded into a new wave of violence two years after a multinational coalition led by the NZDF came to help restore peace and stability.

Although the multinational force defeated hostile militia groups in 2015, ethnic rivalries underlying the conflict were merely set aside and continued to fester in the background. Tensions between the Wesso majority and the Havo minority boiled over again recently, sparking renewed ethnic strife and causing large numbers of the population to flee their homes. Unable to quell the fast-spreading unrest, the government of Becara has again sought international assistance.

If the scenario sounds familiar, it is because 70 per cent is drawn from real-life events, Lieutenant Stanbury said. The rest is the product of creative imagination.

"I model most of the significant events, threat groups and individual characters on actual occurrences or people I have met. It makes me smile when some players complain that the scenario is unrealistic as most of the events are a straightforward replication of incidents from the contemporary history of Africa, Asia and Europe."

Weaving the SK narrative into a plausible story is more complex than it sounds, according to Lieutenant Stanbury.

"I want to present the problems in a realistic way as possible and that requires a good understanding of the likely triggers at the strategic, operational and tactical levels," he said.

ALPHA COMPANY 2/1ST BATTALION: FTX ALPHA TOWN

In order to further prepare for the upcoming FTX Southern Katipo 17, Alpha Company 2/1RNZIR conducted FTX Alpha Town, an exercise focusing on enhancing our skills within complex Stability and Support Operations (SASO) and Mid-High Intensity Urban Operations.

FTX Alpha Town was a two-phase exercise with Phase One conducted in the South Island township of Waimate focusing on SASO within Urban and Rural environments. This phase of the exercise also incorporated members from throughout 2/1st Battalion, 3CSS Bn and 3Fd Sqn

to create a combined arms Combat Team. Phase Two of the exercise was a shift to Mid-High Intensity Combat Operations, moving the Combat Team via RNZAF assets to Ardmore Military Training Area.

Overall both phases of the exercise were hugely beneficial for enhancing our skills and refining our procedures. Alpha Company, 2/1 RNZIR is now prepared for the challenges ahead within FTX Southern Katipo 17 as well as future operations or tasks at home or abroad.

FTX Alpha Town Phase 1

By Lt Mark Whitaker, 2/1 RNZIR

Field Training Exercise (FTX) Alpha Town Phase 1 was a six-day-long combined arms field exercise for members of Alpha Company, Bravo Company and Support Company, 2/1 Battalion as well as a number of other units from Burnham.

The FTX was one of the biggest exercises in the South Island for 2017 with approximately 150 personnel involved and was conducted in and around the South Island township of Waimate. The skills exercised were a direct build up for Southern Katipo 17, including stability and support operations (SASO), supporting local population through patrolling, key leadership engagement (KLE) and security operations. The tasks given to the platoons varied from visiting local schools to conducting a complex simultaneous Company attack at night on two enemy positions.

Phase 1 of the operation began with Combat Team Alpha (CTA) deploying reconnaissance assets and a rifle platoon ahead of the main body in order to secure the local racecourse. This location would be used as the Assembly Area for CTA's cordon and strike on an abandoned saw mill. This would become the Combat Teams Forward Operation Base (FOB) for the duration of the exercise.

The main body occupied the assembly area the next morning, confirmatory orders were given, recon and snipers deployed to observe the target and once the enemy was confirmed the attack commenced.

Once the saw mill was secured all call signs moved in and set up the FOB. Each platoon rotated tasks daily, with two platoons operating out of the main FOB and the other occupying and patrolling from a CMA house at the Waimate racecourse. The platoon commanders received their patrol tasks nightly, which involved dismounted and mounted patrol operations around the town and surrounding areas of Waimate. During their patrols the platoons would face various scenarios that they would have to react to. Other tasks assigned to platoons involved KLEs, vehicle checkpoints and key point protection.

The culminating activity for the FTX was the complex simultaneous company attack. The platoon from Bravo Company was tasked with an ambush on a known enemy weapon exchange point, utilising members from the Battalion's Fire Support Group (FSG) to support this attack. While the ambush was being set the protected mobility troop provided a drop off and fire support, and the remainder of Alpha Company moved to their form up point on foot up an icy cold river. Once all call signs were in place and the enemy was confirmed the order was given to conduct the simultaneous attacks. The attacks were conducted under the cover of darkness, which added to the complexity of the missions.

Overall Alpha Town Phase 1 was a successful exercise with everybody learning valuable lessons that will be worked into training in the coming months in order to prepare for Southern Katipo 17.



FTX Alpha Town Phase 2

By LT Ed Clapham, 2/1 RNZIR

After returning from a successful phase one in the Waimate area Alpha Company and attached elements prepared to depart for Auckland to conduct phase two of FTX Alpha Town. This consisted of a three-day tactical phase followed by a five-day training phase within the Ardmore Training Area, including live-fire training in the new Battle Training Facility.

The departure was smooth with the Platoon Headquarters given their planning information for the first tactical task while en route to the Ardmore Training Area. Accommodation was set up, along with a command post and planning area.

Alpha Company stepped off in the early hours of the morning to conduct our Company Attack on the Container Village. This had One Platoon achieving simultaneous break-ins in the village with Two Platoon establishing a cut-off and Support by Fire Line. Some valuable lessons were learnt with this attack, specifically the importance of marking that Forward Line of Troops for the coordination with the Fire Support, and the use of command and control by night under NVG.

The next tactical task consisted of two simultaneous raids, with One Platoon attacking the Method of Entry House and Two Platoon attacking the Close Quarter Battle House. Again

this was an early morning start with both assaults completed just as the sun was beginning to rise. Both platoons then returned to the accommodation area for debriefing and rest before kicking into some afternoon training.

The training phase of the exercise was conducted throughout the Ardmore Training area. Alpha Company utilised several of the different compounds, further developing our urban skills, particularly focusing on methods of entry and the subsequent room combat.

One of the highlights of the exercise was being able to use the BTF and receive wise words from several operators from 1NZSAS Regt. Within the BTF Alpha Company was able to conduct live firing multi-storey room clearances. This was a great opportunity coupled with operational advice and guidance from the 1NZSAS Regt operators which lead to Alpha Company soldiers making significant improvements within their urban combat skills and drills.

Overall FTX Alpha Town Phase Two was a big success with Alpha Company soldiers and officers significantly improving their skills and understanding within the Urban operating environment. A huge thank you to 1NZSAS Regt for their assistance and support throughout our training. Alpha Company was the first Regular Force unit to train in the BTF. Seeing what an awesome facility it is, I am sure that more units will make the most of the facility in future.

