

URBAN WARFARE SKILLS ENHANCED BY VENOM STRIKE

By Lieutenant Brady Cutting

Trentham Camp became an urban combat zone when members of the Army's High Readiness Task Unit (HRTU) swarmed over its buildings recently.



Operation Venom Strike was a Company level training exercise conducted around the camp, with the main focus being the development of urban skills in complex terrain. It also involved training alongside No.3 Squadron and its NH90 helicopters to become adept at insertion and clearance of objectives in the Upper Hutt area.

The build up to Venom Strike involved the HRTU conducting refresher training on the High Descent Tower in Linton to re-familiarise fast roping techniques, before progressing to live descents from the NH90. With rehearsals complete, the Company moved to Trentham Camp to begin the tactical phase of the exercise.

CONPLAN WASP was the exercise's first task and was a cordon and strike operation conducted on a five story building. It involved setting a cordon and then conducting a simultaneous strike, with an airmobile platoon clearing down through the building while the ground assault force cleared from the bottom up. By the end of the clearance we learned the cost of fighting in a complex urban environment: eight enemy killed in action, nine Friendly Force KIA and six casualties.

The highlight of the task was the airmobile platoon fast roping onto the roof from the NH90. It wasn't for the faint of heart with such a large drop below, but the soldiers kept a cool head and they were able to successfully insert onto the rooftop.

The key lesson learned from this activity was that fighting in buildings can create different light profiles in different areas of the building. As a result, clearing an enemy position can be even more challenging when transitioning from light to dark areas.

CONPLAN HORNET was the second task and was conducted at the AG Research building in Upper Hutt. It was another cordon and strike – similar to the first, however on the first attempt to fast rope onto the building it became evident that the airmobile platoon would be unable to descend. Thanks to a good contingency plan and with some quick thinking by the Air Force crew and commanders on the ground, the platoon was able to land at an alternate landing zone and move into a simultaneous clearance from the ground level with the ground assault force. With the clearance complete the toll was: seven enemy KIA, eight Friendly

Force KIA and seven casualties. The key lesson learned from this task was to limit the amount of soldiers in confined spaces close to the enemy and utilise dispersion. There were a few instances where enemy grenades dropped from elevated locations causing multiple Friendly Force casualties below.

OP DANTE INFERNO: The final task was a block and sweep operation designed to clear the remaining enemy at a warehouse on the Trentham Golf Course. This involved the ground assault force moving into a form up point in the dark where they waited for the airmobile platoon to insert at first light as part of a feint. The ground assault force then assaulted the building from the south with the airmobile platoon providing fire support for the clearance of the building. The warehouse had limited entrances and the large firing corridors in an industrial complex made it difficult to clear, resulting in seven enemy KIA, 10 Friendly Force KIA and five casualties.

The key lesson learned from this task was the need to create alternate entrances when clearing a building in order to be able to out-maneuvre the enemy and not reinforce an unsuccessful breach point.

Overall Operation Venom Strike was a good test of our ability to operate alongside No.3 Squadron and conduct operations with the NH-90. The use of the Tactical Engagement Simulation System during all tasks provided immediate feedback to the soldier and reinforced the benefit of good practises: future use is encouraged for all units. OP Venom Strike was a good learning experience for everyone involved and allowed the HRTU to refine its tactics and procedures. As a result, everyone improved their understanding of operating in an urban environment.



Left: HRTU soldiers fast-rope from an NH90.

Right: Fighting in a complex urban environment.