

AIR FORCE NEWS

Combat flying
training

Special delivery
in the ranges

Rescue
on the ice

#271
AUG|24



European Air Forces' flying visit

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Photo of the Month



OUR MISSION

The RNZAF will provide New Zealand with relevant, responsive and effective Air Power to meet its security interests.

OUR VISION

An agile and adaptive Air Force with the versatility essential for NZDF operations.

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Combat flying training

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First Word



B | BASE COMMANDER BASE OHAKEA
Y | GROUP CAPTAIN PETE GIBSON

“Make sure you are supporting a positive environment where everyone can succeed, and if you see the chance to encourage and reward leadership in your team then go for it.”

Taking over the command of Base Ohakea in December was one of the highlights of my career – as well as one of the most challenging.

Having not served on a base for 10 years I wondered what had changed, and how well I would be able to adapt to leading our aviators, Defence civilians and contractors in delivering Ohakea’s mission: *Prepare, protect and project aerospace power in support of New Zealand’s security interests.*

It turns out that I needn’t have worried as much as I did. Not because I had become any smarter since I last was posted to a base, but because of the team that supports me every day. I know I can rely on their leadership and professionalism to safely deliver the Chief of Air Force’s (CAF) priorities with pragmatism and positivity.

That leadership and professionalism is not unique to Ohakea; it exists throughout our Air Force, at all rank levels. Real leadership does not require a certain number of chevrons or stripes on your shoulder.

Real leadership is about the way we behave, the way we communicate, the expectations we put on ourselves and the expectations we put on others. It’s about being honest and open, it’s about looking after yourself as much as you look after others, and it’s about putting in extra effort when things get tough.

Real leadership needs to be given room to grow from the bottom up. It needs to be nurtured and fed and encouraged. Everyone in our organisation is a leader and should have the opportunity to show what they are capable of.

Being as busy as we all are it can be hard to know what to tackle next. At times like that it can be useful to fall back on some simple questions that will get us pointing in the right direction. I have three that I keep in mind when I’m not sure what the right way forward is:

1. What can I do today that supports CAF’s priorities with the resources I have?
2. How can I ensure I am doing those things as safely as reasonably practicable?
3. How can I ensure my boss understands the consequences of #1 and #2?

CAF has been clear that we face an uncertain future and that more may be required of us. Supporting each other, displaying and encouraging leadership, and keeping things simple - that sounds like a recipe for success that we can all relate to, regardless of the challenges we face.

That is how we will succeed together.

RESCUE ON THE ICE

WORDS | SUE EDEN & REBECCA QUILLIAM
PHOTOS | STEPHEN ALLINGER

A C-130 Hercules crew has carried out a rare medical evacuation of a patient from Antarctica, taking advantage of a narrowing gap in the weather to fly the night-time operation. It's a hell of a trip with the most challenging flying conditions outside a combat mission.





“I have been the only doctor in an isolated area when the Americans came and kindly evacuated our badly injured soldiers. It was good to be able to return the favour.”

– *Squadron Leader Kit Boyes*

The patient was an American from McMurdo Station. Their life was not at risk, but they needed treatment that couldn't be provided in Antarctica, and the longer they stayed the worse it would be.

Air Component Commander Air Commodore (AIRCDRE) Andy Scott said flights to Antarctica during winter were very challenging due to the extreme Antarctic environment, changeable weather conditions and because there was no daylight.

The Hercules crew flew into Phoenix Airfield using night vision goggles. The first time this technology was used by the Air Force to fly into Antarctica was in July 2021 for another medical evacuation.

The aircraft was “hot-fuelled” on the ice, where the engines were kept running to protect them in the extreme cold. The temperature in Antarctica was -33°C with a wind chill bringing temperatures down to -40°C.

“With a narrow gap of acceptable weather, the crew deployed early in the morning. The weather had deteriorated on arrival and so they threaded the needle to get in when they did.”

At each stage of the journey the crew had to make “go, no go” decisions on whether to proceed, AIRCDRE Scott said.

“Our highly trained crew analysed the conditions every step of the way to ensure they could continue. Fortunately the weather conditions were suitable, which enabled them to proceed in the early hours of the morning.

“The pilots have a point of safe return when they make the decision to continue or turn around, known as a ‘boomerang’,” AIRCDRE Scott said.

“We’re very pleased we have been able to successfully carry out this Antarctica flight and get the patient to New Zealand to receive further medical treatment.”

One of the pilots, Flight Lieutenant (FLTLT) Seth Fagan, said flying into Antarctica in winter carried a risk-level similar to a combat environment.

“In a non-combat environment, it’s the most challenging flying we could do,” he said.

“The challenge is it’s dark 24/7, so we have to use night vision goggles to augment our approach. The runway does have lighting, but we have the goggles as a back-up in case there are any lighting failures and to give us situational awareness of our surroundings and descent profile.”

Another challenge was the extreme weather when the crew landed.

“We have some quite strict weather criteria that we need to follow. In the winter, for us to get down there safely and finding a window to do that, is quite challenging.

“For us to continue through our point of safe return, we need to have good visibility and no chance of low-level moisture or low-level clouds,” FLTLT Fagan said.

The crew chosen were the most qualified and experienced for the mission. Of the crew involved two had flown in the 2021 Antarctica winter medical evacuation, the aircraft captain Squadron Leader (SQNLDR) Kendall Dooley and then co-pilot FLTLT Fagan.

“This is the second time I’ve gone down in the winter. On this flight I was acting as the relief pilot and I flew the leg north, so there were a lot of experienced people on the flight in order to mitigate the risks of heading down in winter,” he said.

It took about an hour for the patient to be transported into the Hercules and for the aircraft to be refuelled. During that time the aircrew were gathering the latest weather information from the forecasters and detailing a plan to depart the airfield.





“We managed to pick a decent window to get in and out. We were lucky because the week earlier and the days following, there was quite horrendous weather that came through. So the window we had was the only one available.”

Taking off in darkness on a runway made from ice also carries risks with slowing down being difficult if the take-off needs to be aborted, FLTLT Fagan said.

“Luckily down there the runway is really long – you can’t really utilise the brakes if you did need to stop, you need to put the plane into reverse.”

The team was also considering contingency plans if there was a malfunction, and they needed to decide whether to return to Antarctica or if they could continue to New Zealand.

“We were weighing up the risks each way. But in this case we didn’t have any problems, so it all went smoothly. We knew on take-off that we had enough gas to get back to New Zealand should we suffer an emergency that would require us to remain low for the flight north, which was a good feeling for us,” he said.

“I was proud we accomplished what we did. It sounds like the patient was stoked to be flown to New Zealand, so it was good to be part of the mission where we could help them. I was so proud to work with a team of absolute professionals who can do something like this safely.”

With a return flight of 14 hours, an hour on the ice and a couple of hours before the flight for preparations, it made for a long day, he said.

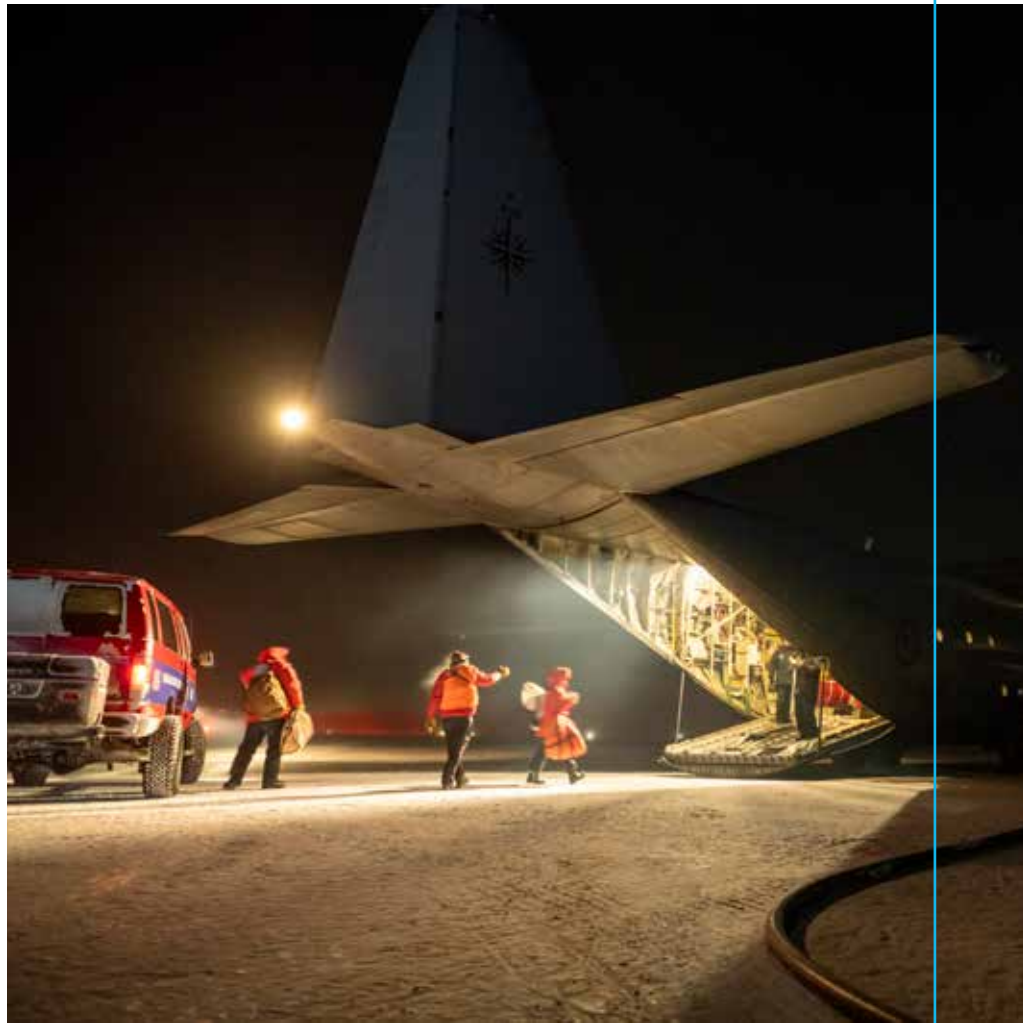
Medical Officer SQDLDR Kit Boyes was also on the flight and said everyone pulled together to prepare quickly.

“We had equipment to prepare, a cold weather survival training refresh and be issued appropriate clothing. Then we worked through worst case scenarios, given the patient’s medical condition, and what we would need in those situations.

“There is just one doctor at McMurdo Station and she is highly trained but she can’t do everything and doesn’t have access to all the equipment for all medical situations. She and the patient were in an isolated position, so I felt for her having to provide medical care under those circumstances,” he said.

In order to catch the best weather conditions, the aircraft left Christchurch airport at 2am.

“When we arrived and the back opened I was met with a wall of cold and an American who flicked flecks of ice out of his beard and pointed me in the direction of the doctor and patient in a waiting ambulance.



“Phoenix Airfield has quite good approach lighting and so the biggest challenge we faced was landing on a large, white sheet of ice at night where we don’t have very good depth perception. It can almost feel like you’re floating in space as you bring it down to land on the ice.”

- Flight Lieutenant Seth Fagan

“My concerns were getting the stretcher up the ramp and doing the patient transfer both out of the ambulance and into the stretcher on board the aircraft. But it was made easy by everybody. It helped the patient was in good spirits and pleased to be going,” he said.

“It was great how everyone came together as a team, the aircrew, pilots, maintainers and refuellers, and also those in Christchurch, Whenuapai and Wellington behind the scenes. This was a mission where there were a lot of people doing their roles who were necessary to make it work and who did a great job.”

The Air Force has the ability to move people for medical reasons and has done so reasonably frequently since World War II. It has the capability to get into places that New Zealand’s civilian air ambulances cannot, SGNLDR Boyes said.

“While the C-130 Hercules might be old, it has a number of advantages over other platforms for this mission.

“We offer a longer range than most and the Hercules has a very large space, so has the ability to carry many people if need be. Civilian providers can’t deal with a mass casualty event from say a natural disaster in the same way, and they have difficulty going into places where there is risk associated; a disaster or conflict or, in this case, climatic extremes.”



Heavy lifting for Department of Conservation

WORDS | REBECCA QUILLIAM
PHOTOS | CPL RACHEL PUGH

The Royal New Zealand Air Force has delivered nearly five tonnes of supplies to Department of Conservation (DOC) huts in the Ruahine Ranges.

An NH90 helicopter from RNZAF Base Ohakea flew six loads of wood to Sunrise and Longview huts recently.

DOC Senior Ranger Demelza Low said it was helpful to be able to use the Air Force helicopters for the job.

“This was a really great opportunity to get the wood in there, especially since Defence Force helping out like this allows DOC’s team to focus on other priority work. We’ve got 60 huts in the Ruahines and it’s quite challenging to do everything we need to do with them,” she said.

The huts are situated in remote areas, meaning delivery by helicopter was the only way to get the job done, she said.

“It was amazing for us. The personnel were really helpful. The first time we went there we had a lot of challenges with the weather and they weren’t able to land. But the weather this time was perfect.

“It was excellent being able to use the Air Force’s capabilities - it’s a great partnership between the Department of Conservation and the Defence Force.”

Helicopter pilot Flight Lieutenant (FLTLT) Paul Van Der Meulen said each bag of cargo weighed about 400kg and the helicopter lifted two bags at a time.

“There were a few moving pieces in the mission, we had a team on the ground at the pick-up point readying the bags for underslung loads and then we had a team at the huts who were ready to receive them once we had brought them up.”

Each load was attached to a 100ft strop, which also made the flight challenging, he said.

“The length gives options in terms of high weights at high altitude in case we need to abort the approach.

“But the length of the strop does make it a bit more challenging, especially for the crew being further away from the terrain and needing to judge heights under the load.”

The crews were operating up to 4500ft, which meant the fuel load and the cargo loads needed to be carefully managed with the helicopter’s performance, FLTLT Van Der Meulen said.

“There was a careful balance between how much fuel we had to take to get the job done.”

The job was a good test of the crews’ skills working with underslung loads, he said.

“At the same time we are helping out a group which does good work around the country. I feel like we’re achieving something more than just lifting a training load in our own training area.”



“It’s a great benefit for our flying skills and is easily transferable for underslinging supplies for the Army.”

- Flight Lieutenant Paul Van Der Meulen





EUROPEAN AIR FORCES' FLYING VISIT TO NEW ZEALAND

Aircraft belonging to the Air Forces of France, Germany and Spain arrived at Base Ohakea recently for crew and personnel to make a goodwill visit to the Royal New Zealand Air Force. This is the first time operational German and Spanish military aircraft have visited here.



The three aircraft were A400M military turboprop transporters, which carry out a range of air mobility tasks similar to those performed by New Zealand's C-130 Hercules.

Deputy Chief of Air Force Air Commodore (AIRCDRE) DJ Hunt said that the Air Force rarely had the opportunity to host European aircraft and colleagues.

"This is a visit from three like-minded nations with whom New Zealand has established and friendly relations. We operate, at times, in Europe and we have great working relationships with our fellow aviators in these countries, so it was a real pleasure to welcome them to New Zealand and engage with them in our own country.

"It is especially timely in that they are all fellow members of the Movements Coordination Center Europe, which New Zealand joined earlier this year," AIRCDRE Hunt said.

"This organisation provides its members access to the air transport of other nations, and has broadened the scope of the air transport options available to the Defence Force, for moving personnel and freight around the world, within Europe, and in the Pacific.

"We have been warmly welcomed as a country that has strong relationships with the south-west Pacific nations, and the visit helped build those links."

The opportunity to visit arose under the banner of the multi-national exercise Pacific Skies 24, the deployment of elements of the French, German, and Spanish Air Forces to the Indo-Pacific.

The European Air Forces were in the region to engage with their partners and participate in exercises such as RIMPAC in Hawaii and Pitch Black in Australia's Northern Territory amongst others.

"The visit gave us a chance to further build connections and develop interoperability with those countries – this is key to building a solid foundation for when we work together in the future."

– Air Commodore DJ Hunt



COMBAT FLYING TRAINING

WORDS | JO PRIESTLEY
PHOTOS | CPL NAOMI JAMES

Relocating a 105mm Howitzer “light gun” from one area of battle to another was just one of the many logistical tasks carried out by No. 3 Squadron at recent exercises held at Waiouru Military Training Area.



No. 3 Squadron provided NH90 helicopters in support of three recent exercises – Brimstone 2, Active Edge 2, and Vengeance – that saw the aircrews flying in challenging conditions.

Helicopter pilot Flight Lieutenant (FLTLT) George Bellamy said flying in a tactical combat environment was a learning opportunity for both pilots and soldiers particularly in the planning and execution of challenging tasks.

“Operating in the tactical environment and at higher altitudes such as Waiouru we were operating near the limit of the NH90 helicopter’s performance.

“The heavier the underslung load is the less fuel we can take, and the less time we have on station. The 105mm Howitzer ‘light gun’ weighed about 2200kgs on the hook, and with the windy weather conditions we experienced we were using high powers for the uplift of the battery.”

Such manoeuvres during Brimstone required substantial planning and relied on the ground crew operating safely and using correct loading procedures, FLTLT Bellamy said.

“The threat picture Brimstone was working off included a simulated surface-to-air threat in an electronic warfare environment. The priority when operating in an electronic threat environment is to avoid being detected.

“For the aerial observation post, we utilised a small gully to provide cover from the target and threat areas. As the 105mm battery fired, we popped up for the observers to see the impact area. Once observed, we dropped back down behind the terrain for the observers to do their calculations while remaining concealed from any threat.”

For the Active Edge section, helicopter infiltration was in support of the observation post clearance.

“We flew a concealed approach where they utilised dead ground where the enemy would be unable to see us, and dropped the troops in an area where they could approach the enemy unseen,” FLTLT Bellamy said.

“Being a battlefield support helicopter, the NZ Army is our traditional customer, so these exercises where we are able to work closely during the planning and execution phases with junior officers is good with forming working relationships for when these jobs are required.”

FLTLT Brandon Marr was an NH90 pilot during Exercise Vengeance.

One of the benefits of taking part in Vengeance during the planning stage was seeing the Army’s point of view and learning what they were thinking about and using that information to formulate a plan that worked for both parties, he said.

“For the crew on Vengeance it was a real-world example of fuel planning and how to adapt to changing circumstances. We also took the opportunity to conduct practical drills with Victor Company with the NH90 before inserting them into the field.”





School to Skies camp draws high praise from Canada

B | SENIOR COMMUNICATIONS ADVISOR
Y | SIMONE MILLAR

The School to Skies Wāhine camp continues to lead the way in supporting young women into Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (STEM) and aviation careers.

The course has also drawn high praise from counterparts at the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) who attended the recent programme.

RCAF avionics technician Master Corporal Sarah Getz made the trip from Nova Scotia to Base Auckland.

Master Corporal Getz works in Canadian Forces Recruiting Centre Halifax and is involved in Diversity Recruiting initiatives within the RCAF Air Maintenance Branch. She jumped at the chance to learn how the camp can support women, with intentions of implementing something similar back home in Canada.

“A former Air Force engineer told me about the programme and so I’ve come here to learn and model the lessons back home with the Canadian Armed Forces,” she said.

School to Skies Wāhine camp is a technical- and aviation-focussed experience for Year 13 female students, with the aim of promoting, encouraging and attracting more young women into STEM and aviation careers.

The students learn about the technical components of keeping aircraft flying, military skills and personal development during the free six-day learning camp.

School to Skies Project Lead Squadron Leader (SQNLDR) Matthew Pitts says the programme is designed to show young women what’s possible in the STEM space.

“About 42 per cent of all our current serving female aircraft technicians have gone through the School to Skies programme. The students saw our female technicians at work and realised it’s an achievable pathway.”

Master Corporal Getz was impressed with the programme and the Air Force personnel involved.

“The level of professionalism, kindness and compassion the military members show when interacting with the students is impressive. They guide them and explain complex, technical concepts to students who may have never even seen a spanner before.”

Beyond just the School to Skies programme, Master Corporal Getz said the week also offered an opportunity to exchange ideas, values and traditions.

“It’s been great to share knowledge about trades, equipment, positive experiences and challenges we all face operating in a modern military environment. I’ve also spent time with the cultural advisor, recruiters, and the mentoring programme director learning about how diversity is encouraged and supported in the New Zealand Defence Force, which has been so valuable.”

SQNLDR Pitts said it was an equally worthwhile exchange for Air Force personnel.

“It is really promising that other nations are recognising the value of our programme and showing interest in it,” he said.

“Hosting Master Corporal Getz has been a positive experience, as partnerships and relationships related to School to Skies will prove mutually beneficial, involving the exchange of ideas and resources.

“Hopefully these will continue to develop over time and form a broader network of partnerships with the Air Force as the central hub.”



Student reaches new heights

July was an exciting month for 18-year-old Amber Collishaw. She's gone from attending the School to Skies Wāhine camp at Base Auckland to landing a coveted spot on a month-long study trip with NASA in Houston.

“The big question is, ‘are you a dinosaur or a space kid?’ I’m definitely a space kid,” she says.

“I hope to get into the space industry either as an astronaut or aeronautical engineer, but the School to Skies camp has really helped me to figure out a path to get there.”

This edition of the course introduced a new workshop so that students could learn more about space systems, which School to Skies Project Lead, Squadron Leader (SQNLDR) Matthew Pitts, calls a success.

“We know that a modern and contemporary Air Force will be adapting to emerging technologies, and these young women could be a part of that.

“So, for the first time on camp, we’ve showcased what our New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) Space Program and drones can do.”

Amber says the workshop was a definite highlight of her week.

“I loved the avionics workshops, but the workshop on space was the most interesting part for me, and is the future of where we are heading,” she said.

Warrant Officer (W/O) John Drummond, Training and Development Lead for the NZDF Space Program, led the workshop and hopes it inspired the students to think big.

“It’s about engaging the students and encouraging them to ‘get after space’. It’s great to see their eagerness and drive to learn,” W/O Drummond said.

The Defence Force has been running its space programme for more than two years and is leading the Pacific Cell of the US-funded Joint Commercial Operations, a co-operation of 15 countries around the world which helps monitor satellite activity.

“We talk to the students about the history of technological advancements in space, our reliance on space-based capabilities in everyday life, satellite communication, international treaties, anti-satellite capabilities and how we monitor activity in space,” he said.

The experience laid the groundwork for the Christchurch teen’s month-long trip to study at NASA.

She was one of more than 1000 applicants for the NASA programme.

“I’m off to study in Houston which is so exciting. We’ll be mocking up a manned mission to Mars and attending university lectures,” Amber said.

Once Amber returns from Houston and finishes her school year, she plans to apply to become a Royal New Zealand Navy Reserve. After that, she says there’s no limit to her future.



Air cadet step closer to Air Force career

At 17 years of age, Whanganui Girls' College prefect Abbie Hurlimann already knows a fair bit about the Air Force, having spent the majority of her teenage years as an Air Cadet.

But she's now one step closer to her ambition of joining the service after attending the School to Skies Wāhine Camp.

"I've been an air cadet for four years now and I've learnt a lot about leadership and resilience, but the camp will help me decide what trade I want to follow when I join the Air Force," she said.

Squadron Leader (SQNLDR) Matthew Pitts, says the programme is designed to show young women what's possible in the STEM field.

"The students get to observe various pathways they may not be aware of and rub shoulders with relatable roles within those workplaces," he said.

Abbie was inspired to apply for the camp after her former teacher attended the School to Skies Teachers' Edition Camp earlier this year, which provided teachers with new educational tools and ideas, as well as introducing them to the Defence Force career opportunities available to their students.

"I had the privilege of attending the School to Skies Teachers' Edition Camp, and since then I haven't stopped talking about it to my students," Whanganui Girls' teacher Robyn Gorton said.

"I was so inspired to take my experience back to the classroom and teach my students how to apply real-world examples of chemistry and physics. I'm trained in biology and I've been a medic, but if I was 30 years younger I'd be signing up."

Abbie says she had a blast on the camp and it helped to broaden her horizons.

"The highlights were all the new people I met, getting to tour the Hercules and Boeing aircraft, and seeing so many trades I didn't know about."

From Australia to Woodbourne

WORDS | LAURA JARVIS
PHOTO | LAC ANDY JENKINS

Royal Australian Air Force Military Skills Instructor Corporal Kelly Jeffery has brought her experience across the ditch, joining the Command Recruit Training School (CRTS) for the 02/24 recruit course.

Corporal (CPL) Jeffery is here as part of a collaboration between the two forces' training wings, sharing tips and tricks to optimise the training that budding aviators get.

"A call was put out to see if anyone wanted to come over to gain exposure to how it is done here and if there is anything that we can take back to implement and vice versa," said CPL Jeffery.

One of the first things to stick out was the leadership model used by the instructors.

"Some of the recruits come in quite young so they haven't had much life experience yet," she said.

"At CRTS, the self-lead model is facilitated from the sergeants to the recruits from the get-go.

"It is applied to everything from bed space to the drill square to weapons and sets foundational leadership skills for the way forward in the Air Force."

She also enjoyed watching the recruits go through Exercise Wero, or the Longest Day; an opportunity for recruits to build resilience and strength as they complete demanding activities on limited sleep.

"I like challenging the recruits, making them think for themselves and seeing that shift in their mindset; it's where you see the most growth," CPL Jeffery said.

"Instead of relying on us to give them an answer, we encourage them to figure out what to do."

Slotting in with the instructors, she has been impressed with the unit's dynamic and cohesive training abilities.

"You have to be a jack of all trades here. One minute, they are teaching drill then next they are teaching how to put up a hootchie. They can fit into any role and it's been amazing to watch."

CPL Jeffery is also getting an understanding of the different format that CRTS runs.

"At home, we can start courses every two weeks so there is more overlap. Here there are three courses a year, running independently from each other," she said.

"For us, it means the recruits can see their end goal and what they will look like in a few weeks or a month.

"Having been with them from start to finish, I am really looking forward to seeing the final product and if there are notable differences from the Royal Australian Air Force recruits, given we also run a shorter programme."

Back home, she was previously posted to the recruit school as a personal capability specialist, focussed on administration. CPL Jeffery wanted to challenge herself to see if she had what it took to become an instructor.

"Considering one of my biggest fears was public speaking it's been good to grow in that space and become more confident as a leader."

CPL Jeffery will be with the recruits until they graduate in mid-August.





Modification a satisfying challenge

B | NO. 6 SQUADRON
Y | AVIONICS TEAM.

The month of June brought on a big job for the Avionics team at No. 6 Squadron. A first-of-type radio modification was needed on the seagoing aircraft to allow full operational capability while it was away.

Installing a modification in just a few short weeks is no easy task and this was amplified by time pressure and limited resource availability.

The story began for No. 6 Squadron a few months ago when testing of the new radios was being carried out on existing frames to determine the ins and outs of what would be needed to fully implement the new system. We spent days testing the new radios, finding a difference in operation, making breakout cables and re-testing until Defence contractor Beca knew everything that was needed to implement the radios.

This turned out to be multiple new cables that ran half the length of the frame and other equipment.

Finally we received the modification documents and permission to begin just one week before the frame was due at sea. At first it seemed like a simple enough job, but soon after beginning we remembered how much labour goes into manufacturing all your own wiring and that this would be a challenge.

We had to redirect the entire avionics team for extended days to make it work as we had a deadline to meet. The aircraft was needed on HMNZS Aotearoa for the upcoming RIMPAC exercise and overseas deployment. We had approximately one week from grounding the aircraft for laying the cables to deploying the aircraft on ship.

Since it was the first aircraft to get the modifications, we had to make sure we accounted for everything we did, including weighing wires for a weight and balance, and editing procedures and parts lists to better reflect the work. This could be meticulous at times, but it ended in satisfaction when everything started to fit perfectly into place.

At the last minute we managed to have the new components fitted so the helicopter could deploy: however, the job was still not done. The time restraint was so tight that the seagoing avionics team would have to continue work under way.

“I really enjoyed the tedious and sometimes repetitive intricate work of cable making, pinning connectors and routing cables so they all fitted perfectly. It’s so satisfying practising these hand skills and getting a good result that is specific to the aircraft.”

- Corporal Helen Knight

They had their work cut out for them on the journey to Hawaii. Finishing the installation and testing the new system still had to be done.

The avionics team at sea consists of only two people, who had a lot of work to do between them. This paired with the ship rocking about can make even the simplest jobs quite a challenge.

To help them out with finishing up the modifications Corporal (CPL) Thomas Evans was sent to meet them in Hawaii.

CPL Evans was needed by the ship's flight as an extra pair of hands to tidy up all the loose ends. This was gruelling work in the 30° C island heat.

Testing turned out to be a difficult task – the team waited three days for permission to test the radios over air. In the meantime they carried out all other testing that didn't require transmitting.

At the end of it all, we managed to get the first-of-type installation ready to fly. The knowledge gained along the way will be useful for adjusting the modifications and working through future implementations on the rest of the fleet. It was a great opportunity for the team to practise skills that can sometimes go months without use. After exercising our trade skills and working as a team to meet deadlines we get to reflect on our hard work and prepare to do it all again on the rest of the fleet.



CPL Sam Forsyth said the job was good experience and the knowledge gained from his trade training will be used in the future.

“There were times where problems came up but I was able to work through them by bouncing different ideas between the other members of the team I was working with, allowing all of us to learn and gain new knowledge around cable manufacturing and shielding.

“A lot of work carried out when working on aircraft as an avionics technician is replacing LRUs (line replacement units), so this was a refreshing experience by doing something our training prepares us for.”

CPL Helen Knight said she was excited to take part in the job as the type of work was one of her favourite parts of the avionics trade.

“It was also a great opportunity to share experience across the avionics team as a few hadn't been exposed to a job like this before.”

Remembering Timor-Leste

B | MILITARY HISTORIAN
Y | DR ANDREW MCDONALD



Six aged Iroquois helicopters were the backbone of the New Zealand daily air support in modern-day Timor-Leste, and it was Tauranga-raised Warner Cowin's job to keep the Vietnam-era fleet airworthy and airborne.

Mr Cowin, aged 27 in 1999 and today 51, was the maintenance flight commander for No. 3 Squadron. The team's job was to ensure the Hueys – shorthand for the helicopters – were ready to go at a moment's notice.

"It felt like we were busy from dawn to dusk, and all our crews worked very long days," he recalled.

His 16-person team usually spent up to 14 hours a day working on the Hueys, in hot and humid conditions. They provided "all the maintenance, technical, weapons, safety equipment and logistical support to ensure we had those helicopters and their crews ready to go when needed".

This was vital maintenance work, given the chaos reigning in the nation then known as East Timor.

The south-east Asian nation occupying half the island of Timor was plunged into violence in 1999 when a referendum supported a breakaway from Indonesia.

Between 1999 and 2002, the Defence Force deployed more than 5000 personnel there as part of Interfet, or, in full, the International Force East Timor.

Overall, about 1400 civilians were killed, an unknown number tortured and women were subjected to sexual violence. Some 500,000 people were displaced.

Interfet was a multi-national non-United Nations peace-making task force to address the security and humanitarian crisis in the country.

Mr Cowin remembered the climate as seasonally revolving between hot and dry, and rainy and humid. He described the terrain as one of extremes: a spine of mountains yielding to braided river plains.

"It is ... kind of like a very mini-version of the South Island, with smaller mountains and a lot warmer."

No. 3 Squadron's Hueys were crewed by two pilots, a crew member and a gunner, and were armed with two M60 machine guns. They laboured with the added weight of side and floor armour, as well as armoured pilots' seats.

It was these tin workhorses that resupplied troops in the field, facilitated tactical insertions of infantry and undertook medical evacuations of personnel and local people.



“When the bad guys [eg militia] were detected, our helicopters would drop the Army Quick Reaction Force teams into the field to set up blocks to address the situation.”

In July, Mr Cowin, (Ngati Porou with strong whakapapa links to 28th (Māori) Battalion), is returning to Timor-Leste with the Back to Timor group, which is a veteran-led tour of the places, outposts, villages, jungles and roads they knew well as service personnel 25 years ago.

“I am so curious about what I will see 25 years on,” said Mr Cowin, curious to observe the mood of the people and the place, as well as the culmination of that period of change.

“I feel that I am emotionally and spiritually connected to Timor-Leste and that I have a vested interest in the success of its people. I hope that I find a nation that is optimistic about the future and is the best version of itself!”

Mr Cowin was based at Suai Airfield, on the southwest coast of Timor-Leste, for seven months.

The hard graft was occasionally studded with some rest and relaxation in the form of a ginger beer, a pizza cheekily piggybacked in on a flight from Australia, and a spot of surfing.

He also spent time at the village of Holbelis, helping with the rebuilding of the school there.

“We connected with the local people. We became very close to them, supported the school, and provided supplies and medical aid.”

It was while out in the community that Mr Cowin – who left the Air Force as a Flight Lieutenant in 2001, after more than six years’ service – saw the Suai Cathedral, also known as Suai Church.

On 6 September 1999, Indonesia militia killed up to 200 people at the religious site, two days after the results of the East Timor independence referendum were issued.

The haunting sight remains with Mr Cowin more than two decades later.

“The cathedral was still burnt out, and the ground was still black with soot; I couldn’t get my head around how the Indonesian Militia had done that to so many innocent people.”

Looking back, Mr Cowin reckoned he was “excited and curious” about learning he would be deployed to Timor-Leste.

“Maybe I was a little naive about what I was going into, but I think with youth, you have confidence that you are bulletproof and on top of all this.”

But history records that father-of-three Mr Cowin did make it back to New Zealand. In addition to his East Timor and other service medals, he wears a Chief of Air Staff Commendation and a scarce Australian Meritorious Unit Citation.

Now he is anticipating his return to Timor-Leste.

“I am trying to manage my expectations around [democratic and development] progress and, to be honest, what that really means to the people in East Timor,” says Mr Cowin.

“I go with an open mind and heart.”

Queen's Colour retires to the Air Force Museum

B | AIR FORCE MUSEUM OF NEW ZEALAND
Y | DAVID KING, COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER



The third Queen's Colour, the last to be presented to the Air Force by Queen Elizabeth II, has arrived at the Air Force Museum Te Whakairinga Mutu to rest for all time as a reminder of duty well done.

The original Queen's Colour was first presented to the Air Force by Her Majesty in December 1953, and is regarded as the service's most precious treasure.

"The assets of an Air Force, being primarily airmen and machines, are constantly changing," wrote Air Force biographer Geoffrey Bentley in 1969.

"The permanent possessions are few. The most treasured of these is the Queen's Colour and the fact Her Majesty presented it in person adds another dimension to its value.

"It is a beautiful thing. While its intrinsic value can be assessed and will be known to a few, its value as a symbol is beyond price."

That first Colour from 1953 was retired and laid up in 1976 at the Wellington Cathedral of St Paul. The second Colour is laid up at the Chapel of St Mark at Base Woodbourne.

And the third now resides with the Air Force Museum for lodging, safe-keeping and display.

The bearer party included Squadron Leader Dan Garnett, the last bearer to carry this Colour on parade, Warrant Officer Chris Wilson, previous Queen's Colour Warrant Officer, and Warrant Officer Phil Wansbrough, a previous Queen's Colour Escort.



The party was called into the Atrium by Kaikaranga Flight Sergeant Wai Paenga, accompanied by our Air Force piper Sergeant Murray Mansfield.

The Colour was received by Museum Director Wing Commander Brett Marshall who said it would be going into the museum's collection until a suitable display area could be developed.

One option is to display it alongside NZ3551, the Queen's C-47 Dakota which has been preserved as it was when she flew aboard it on her 1953 tour.

"It's a privilege for us to be able to look after this taonga," he said.

After the ceremony, the colour party offered a traditional toast to Queen Elizabeth after a verse from poet and soldier Sir Edward Hamley about the significance of the Colours was read out. The verse goes:

"A moth-eaten rag on a worm-eaten pole,
it doesn't look likely to stir a man's soul;
'Tis the deeds that were done 'neath the
moth-eaten rag; 'When that pole was a
staff and the rag was a flag."

“We’re looking forward to displaying it so that as many people as possible can get to enjoy it and learn about its history and traditions.”

- Wing Commander Brett Marshall



Are you for reo?!

B | TŪRANGAWAEWAE MANAGER
Y | WAL WALLACE

Learning te reo Māori is no easy feat. I take my hat off to anyone, regardless of ethnicity, who has ever taken up this formidable but very gratifying challenge.

As many can attest, sometimes the most challenging part is finding another reo speaker or learner to practise with. Base Ohakea has taken a bold step toward making that easier. Recently Ohakea started a base-wide Reo Pin trial.

Personnel with enough reo capability to converse in te reo were invited to participate. The trial involved these volunteer “Reo Champions” committing to two things. One: when two Reo Champions encounter each other they must converse in te reo Māori to the best of their ability. Two: they must allow any te reo learner that wishes to, to practise their reo on them.

The intent of the Reo Pin is to encourage more te reo being spoken in the workplace. In doing so, those with te reo can become more proficient and those still learning can hear it around them and use the more proficient speakers to help them on their own reo journey. Having someone to practise with in a non-judgemental and supportive manner will go a long way to gaining more confidence and competence.

How do we identify who these Reo Champions are? They’re the people wearing the trial Reo Pin.

To demonstrate Ohakea’s commitment to encouraging more use of te reo in the workplace, Base Commander Group Captain Peter Gibson agreed to trialling the Reo Pin being worn with uniform.

The trial is not an Air Force-wide initiative (yet) and applies to Ohakea only. The trial is set to conclude at the end of Māori Language Week, September 22.

At the time that this was written, Ohakea had issued Reo Pins to 16 volunteer Reo Champions. Who knows how many in total we will have by the time this goes to print! The pins used in the trial came from Te Taura Whiri (Māori Language Commission) and were part of a previous Māori Language Week promotion.

You do not have to be Māori to wear the Ohakea Reo pin. You only have to have the desire to participate, have met the capability criteria and are posted to Ohakea.

There is currently a project to possibly introduce an NZDF Reo Pin. If this does eventuate, the principle will be the same as the Ohakea Reo Pin but the pin itself will be quite different incorporating an NZDF design.



**CORPORAL
NIKITA HOOK**

The Ohakea te reo Māori pin creates a safe environment where I can fully embrace my language, allowing me to take part in its revitalisation through each interaction. It serves as a channel for me to reconnect with my culture and community and in doing so, expedites a process that may have otherwise taken longer had I not known others who share our tāonga of te reo.



**FLIGHT LIEUTENANT
KERI TĀMATI**

Although small it is eye-catching, a conversation starter and is a tip of the hat to our commitment and willingness to use te reo Māori (me ona tikanga) in our everyday lives including mahi (workplace). Kōrero mai! E poho korerū ana au ki te mau taku pine reo Māori – I’m proud to wear my reo Māori pin.



**CORPORAL
ELLIE MULLIN**

Nōku te waimarie! I feel very lucky to wear a Reo Pin. Generally while on this journey of learning te reo Māori, once you leave the classroom it is automatic and easy to revert back to speaking English in your daily environment. Wearing the pin welcomes an acknowledgement of that learning from one another and then often into kōrero Māori, which is slowly breaking down barriers I have had in the past.



**FLIGHT SERGEANT
HENRY WHITTAKER**

The Reo Pin for me is a visible tohu (sign) of something I’m passionate about – reo Māori. Being able to wear it as part of my uniform to let others know if they’d like to talk, greet, converse in Māori then they can. Trying to normalise using Māori anywhere and everywhere – like they say, “Ahakoa ko wai, ahakoa ki hea.” No matter who, no matter where.



“To our current Reo Champions - karawhiua, give it heaps! To our prospective Reo Champions out there - piki ake, step up! To our non-reo speaking supporters - ngā mihi, thank you! Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā tātou katoa.”



Base Ohakea taps into more resilient water supply

WORDS | JO PRIESTLEY
PHOTOS | CPL NAOMI JAMES

Base Ohakea has connected to the Manawātū District Council (MDC) potable water scheme – meaning the base now has a far more resilient supply of drinking water.

ABOVE
Ohakea Construction Project Manager Ross Cockburn, left, Base Commander Group Captain Peter Gibson and Ohakea Infrastructure Programme Director Lynn Ward toast the base's new water supply

Thanks to the new connection, the base no longer has to rely on bore water.

Base Commander Group Captain (GPCAPT) Peter Gibson says it is a significant milestone for the base, which is undergoing major upgrade works and expansion.

“The base is now the new home of No. 5 Squadron and the Air Force’s new fleet of Boeing P-8As and we now have about 1200 people working here.

“It is crucial we have access to a secure, modern and fit-for-purpose water supply that meets health and safety requirements. I am delighted we are now on the scheme,” GPCAPT Gibson said.

The Ōhakea Rural Water Scheme opened in 2022 as a collaboration between the New Zealand Defence Force, MDC, Ministry of Health and iwi Ngāti Parewahawaha.

The scheme – with a 650m-deep bore at Sanson - cost about \$14.6 million and supplies water to community properties and businesses around Ohakea.

The Defence Force, which is the biggest customer, has contributed \$5 million.

The Sanson Water Treatment Plant and Pump Station – 10km from the base – is expected to provide the base with up to 700 cubic metres of water per day.

Ohakea Infrastructure Programme Director Lynn Ward says the milestone is the culmination of a huge amount of work by the Defence Estate and Infrastructure team, supported by a number of contractors.

“The new connection will provide a safe, reliable, and clean source of drinking water to Ohakea and the community. Users won’t notice any significant change during the transition – the quality of the water will be the same if not better,” she said.

Notices

COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION SYSTEMS REUNION

A reunion for past and current serving Communications staff is to be held in Palmerston North and Base Ohakea on September 25 and 26, 2024.

Those of you who served pre-2003 in the former RNZAF Telecommunications Branch trade mustering of Telephone Operator, Comm Asst, Teleg, COM OPR/TC/STC OPR, or post-2003 as CISMECH or CISTECH in the Communication and Information Systems (CIS) trade are invited to request event and registration information.

Send an email to Q85988@gmail.com with "Please send me Information" in the subject line.

NO. 75 SQUADRON ASSOCIATION OF NEW ZEALAND BIENNIAL REUNION

October 18-20, 2024

Celebrating the history of the squadron from:

- 75 (Home) RFC, 1916-1919
- 75 (Bomber) RAF, 1937-1940
- 75 (NZ) RAF, 1940-1945
- 75 (RNZAF), 1946-2001

The itinerary includes a weekend at Classic Flyers in Tauranga.

For more information, email the secretary: reunions@75squadron-raf-rnzaf.com.

NO. 23 ACS/5 CET 60TH ANNIVERSARY REUNION

**Wigram and Surrounds
9/10 January 2026**

Less than 18 months to go now, and this will probably be the last hurrah.

Contact any of the following for more information:

Gary Danvers: garydanvers@gmail.com

Dave Bryant: davebryant4@icloud.com

Barry Lennox : btr.lennox@gmail.com

See <https://sites.google.com/view/23-intake-airman-cadet-school/home/60th-anniversary-reunion>



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B | CORPORAL
Y | RACHEL PUGH

The New Zealand contingent turned out alongside the entire city of Darwin to watch some incredible flying one sunny evening during Exercise Pitch Black. To keep these jets going, the Kiwis have helped by patrolling kilometres of flight line, organising tonnes of freight, transferring millions of litres of fuel between road trucks and aircraft, and generally bringing those famous Kiwi vibes that every country looks forward to experiencing.







NZDF SAFETY AWARDS 2024

Let's recognise those who have improved health and safety in the NZDF this year.

Nominations close 6 September.
Visit the Safety page on the ILP,
or email NZDFSafety@nzdf.mil.nz