

Hundreds lay dead, billions of dollars worth of property lies wasted and a huge chemical spill threatens thousands when Hawaii State Governor Linda Lingle gives the instruction to 'call in the National Guard'.



HAWAII'S AIR NATIONAL GUARD WEATHERS STRONG WINDS

WORDS KIWII MAC PICS KIWII MAC AND HAWAII AIR NATIONAL GUARD

There I was, lying back on Waikiki Beach sipping a 'Bud' in early June, thinking this was the perfect tourist mecca – while just down the road, things were taking a decidedly different turn for hundreds of military reservists taking part in a civil-emergency exercise.

Known as Makani Pahili (Strong Wind) '09 the exercise focused on what would happen if a category-4 hurricane involving winds of over 131mph with gusts up to 200mph, struck the Hawaiian island of Oahu?

The scenario estimated 134 fatalities, 70 per cent of the island's homes damaged, 150,000 people needing shelter, a need for 1 million emergency meals a day, an electricity blackout expected to last 30 days and no cell-phone coverage.

Seems pretty straight forward – I guess. I mean, given the large US population, this should mean a corresponding large response capability, right? Try chucking 70,000 displaced tourists (including Mr & Mrs Mac), and the odd chemical, biological or nuclear leak into the equation and it makes for sleepless nights for whoever's in charge! Arriving at Kahuku on Oahu's north shore, my host, Hawaii Air National Guard (HIANG) public affairs officer Lieutenant Colonel Charles Anthony explains the exercise is simulating actual procedures that would be used should the area be hit by a real hurricane.

"It's a case of preparing for when, not if," Lieutenant Colonel Anthony says.

"In 1992, a big storm hit the island of Kauai killing two people and injuring dozens more – not to mention causing over \$1 billion worth of damage.

"The Air Guard flew relief workers and supplies in and tourists out."

He tells me the scenario being played out here involves setting up a triage centre



around the existing Kahuku Medical Centre and carrying out a mass-casualty evacuation using CH47 Chinook helicopters.

To add a sense of realism, communicators from the California Air National Guard flew in to help re-establish civilian phone and other communication services.

Around 300 personnel were involved in the exercise, which also saw state Civil Defence staff working with Federal Emergency Management Agency and defence staff on table-top exercises as part of the build-up.

"Though this is an annual event, we've not done anything on this scale before, and this is the first time the Kahuku Medical Centre has been part of the exercise," Lieutenant Colonel Anthony says.

The involvement of the medical centre in the exercise makes perfect sense to the centre's administrator, Lance Segawa, who says that if a real emergency happened the centre would be at the forefront of any emergency response.

The Honolulu police and fire departments are also involved, as well as the Polynesian Cultural Centre and Brigham Young University, Hawaii.

Unlike Australia and New Zealand where

full-time as well as reserve units could be used to respond to civil emergencies, in the US, this responsibility falls to the part-time National Guard.

Lieutenant Colonel Anthony says the Air and Army National Guards have two missions. Their federal mission being to provide operationally ready combat and combat-support units and qualified personnel for active duty in time of war, national emergency or operational contingency.

"The Guards' state mission is to organise and train units to protect Hawaii's citizens and property, preserve peace and ensure public safety in response to natural or human-caused disasters," he says.

"Which means, if the governor declares a disaster, then it's the Guard that is mobilised for the mission."

Lieutenant Colonel Anthony says that the two missions often dovetailed well.

"Lessons learned on active-duty operations in the Middle East have provided invaluable experience that we're then readily able to apply in managing natural-disaster events back home – it's a seamless transition."

The Hawaii Air National Guard is the only unit in the Air Force flying fighter, tanker and transport aircraft – those being the F15 Eagle,

the KC 135 Stratotanker and the C-17 Globemaster.

With the conversion from the F15 to the F22 Raptor about to commence, HIANG will also be the only Air Guard unit in the US to own F22s.

In fact, in what must be a major role reversal for a reserve unit, HIANG will actually have active units flying their airframes! Try suggesting that back home in Oz or NZ!

Many CONTACT readers with recent ADF service will recall F15 Eagles from the HIANG 199th Fighter Squadron taking part in Exercise Sentry Down Under at Williamtown in September last year, while in May 2006, Hawaiian-based C17 Globemasters from the 15th Airlift Wing assisted the ADF realignment in East Timor, in the days before Australia acquired its own Globemasters.

Meanwhile, back on the ground, things look pretty much like you'd expect to find in similar exercises in Australia or New Zealand – straight forward. That is, until I saw what looked like a Geiger counter being used on a fireman and encountered a Hawaii Army National Guard (HIARNG) CERFP team.

HIARNG's Lieutenant Colonel Tray Johnson says CERFP is a much-needed military acronym for the National Guard's chemical, biological, radiological/nuclear and explosive (CBRNE) enhanced response force package.

There are 17 US states with CERFP teams, aligned to FEMA regions. Each consists of a command and control team, a search and extraction team, a decontamination team and a medical team.

These teams operate in conjunction with weapons of mass destruction civil support teams (CSTs) and provide an immediate response capability to a state governor during a CBRNE incident.

Lieutenant Colonel Johnson says the two provide a phased capability with the CSTs detecting and identifying CBRNE agents or substances and carrying out an analysis and assessment of the threat while the CERFPs locate and extract victims from a contaminated environment, perform mass patient/casualty decontamination and provide treatment as necessary to stabilise patients for evacuation.

Taking a look at their hub of gadgetry, I found myself likening the CST/CERFP teams to a uniformed CSI – and my hosts say I'm not too far off the mark, with the unit's capabilities including nuclear PhD-level analysis.

"We're at the tip of the spear and are the operational arm of homeland defence," Lieutenant Colonel Johnson says.

"And one of our real strengths is the jointness of our role, with a mixture of Army and Air Guardsmen making up our ranks.

"We're an operational reserve component as opposed to a strategic reserve and we'll be out there tomorrow, protecting the community, which we're part of."



By this stage I am beginning to feel decidedly out of my depth and wishing chemistry and science had been more of a priority at school than rugby, when my inadequacies are masked by the unmistakable throb of rotor blades cutting the air.

Coming in on final approach is a CH-47 from the Army Aviation Support Facility #1 (AASF #1) from Wheeler Army Airfield.

AASF #1 comes under the 103rd Troop Command – the parent unit for all Hawaii Army National Guard aviation units.

Behind the stick is facility commander and instructor-pilot Lieutenant Colonel Roger Pukahi, who lands just long enough for the military and civilian medical crews to load and stabilise their 'casualties'.

With an increase of throttle, the Chinook lifts off, signaling the final stages of the exercise and the pack-up phase.

Catching up with Lieutenant Colonel Pukahi back at Wheeler Field, the aviator takes time out to explain that Makani Pahili '09 was just one element of the unit's activities.

"We're currently readying aircraft for overseas deployment. The aircraft used in this exercise – #284 – is the first of 10 airframes being prepared.



"The Chinook is ideal for mountain flying. It can carry 30 troops in the back, or a Humvee or, alternatively, two Humvees or a howitzer can be underslung."

The part-time aviators and maintenance crews are no strangers to overseas deployments with an all-Guard deployment to Kandahar completed in 2004.

Given the part-time nature of the unit, aviators individually manage their flight time, and late-afternoon flights are common, with aircraft in the air usually four days of the week.

"We run continuous training. The number of flights are dependent on the pilot's level of training and, once they reach a high level such as readiness level one, the demand reduces and they come in periodically," Lieutenant Colonel Pukahi says.

"But it's not just flight crews who are highly motivated. Several of the maintainers you see here in uniform today work for the civilian contractors who maintain the aircraft, so we're a truly integrated family.

"That's the thing about the Guard – we're part of the community we serve. It's our strength."

Recent offshore conflicts have shown Hawaii has every reason to be proud of her uniformed sons and daughters' endeavours. Makani Pahili '09 suggests that should a pandemic or a natural or man-made disaster occur at home, her part-time warriors are more than equal to that challenge too.

