



## MAPPING INTERNATIONAL

## RELATIONS



WORDS: JANE MORTLOCK PHOTOS: NZDF

**In September, 65 New Zealand troops, mainly from Burnham Military Camp's 2/1 Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment, took part in Exercise Suman Warrior, a week-long command-post exercise in Malaysia, working alongside four of our closest neighbours and partners, to overcome a simulated threat.**

Commanding officer 2/1RNZIR Lieutenant Colonel Hugh McAslan explained that Exercise Suman Warrior '09 involved 500 troops from the Five Power Defence Agreement (FPDA) nations, focusing on developing interoperability among the participating armies.

The FPDA began in 1971 and is one of the longest-running in the region.

"Suman Warrior is an annual map-based activity that is conducted between the FPDA nations – they being New Zealand, Australia, Britain, Singapore and Malaysia," Lieutenant Colonel McAslan said.

"It essentially puts the command and control functions of each nation to the test in a simulated environment.

"Each year, a command-post planning exercise is conducted in order to improve and maintain working practices between the multinational forces involved.

"This year it was Malaysia's turn, and the exercise focused on the defence of the Malayan Peninsula.

"A number of scenarios were used in order to get the best possible training value as well

as providing the ability to learn best practice from other nations."

While the actual command-post-exercise part of the trip involved three days of planning and three days of actual 'on the map' exercising, Suman Warrior more importantly provided an opportunity for the nations involved to test their deployability and interoperability with partner nations in an unfamiliar environment.

"Exercises like this provide significant opportunities for our soldiers to train with other countries," Lieutenant Colonel McAslan said.

"It tests the planning skills used by infantry, armour, artillery, logistics, communication and medical staff, and

allows us to test our processes and improve our skills."

As the token New Zealand civilian and PR advisor on the trip I was privileged to see the many different sides of the exercise and how each individual who participated had an important role to play.

I spent time talking with the Movement Operator about the planning that goes into such a large trip to a foreign country, including the pick up and drop off of the Australian troops.

I went out with the medics to visit the local hospital to ensure that if anything did go wrong we could smoothly access assistance for our people.

I 'hung' with the admin cell, set up specifically for the exercise, and watched them complete a flurry of behind-the-scenes admin.

I learnt all about the work that goes into setting up computers for the exercise by the Sigs, and I watched the exercise participants plan and then participate in Suman Warrior, sometimes working through the night to get everything achieved.

I also was lucky enough to spend time talking with members of the other armies that were there. An Australian soldier explained the close ties he felt to those who serve in the New Zealand Army. He told me that they work alongside each other overseas in quite pressurised situations. For him, the term ANZAC had a very important and incredibly relevant meaning today, and an exercise like Suman Warrior helped to strengthen that bond and provide learnings that would be crucial out in the field.

Throughout the two weeks we were in Malaysia I was incredibly impressed with the professionalism and integrity that our people displayed. They represented the New Zealand Defence Force with pride and participated in the exercise with the gusto and enthusiasm it deserved. As one young soldier pointed out to me, it is exercises like this that help our people learn exactly what makes other countries and our armies 'tick'. It provides an environment where they can interact with soldiers and officers from four other nations and learn how they operate and how they think.

I was proud of the relaxed and friendly approach from our soldiers towards the other contingents, keen to share a little bit of kiwiana with all who were interested, and keen to learn more about the other contingents' cultures and way of life.

