

BATTLE BLOCK in TIN CAN BAY

At the back end of 18 months at the Royal Military College, Duntroon, tomorrow's army officers are put through two final field exercises before graduation – the largest of which is designed to test and hone their skills and push their mental and physical boundaries to the limit.

Known as Battle Block One Alpha, the penultimate exercise is primarily a stability-activities shakeout for 1st Class RMC cadets, exposing them to a wide range of army operations, from green-role war fighting to civil/military operations in a complex environment.

The exercise also provides insight and exposure to as many army capabilities as can be sourced.

Captain Nick Whitehead, RMC instructor, said that during the most recent exercise, from 4 to 31 March, supporting assets included protected mobility vehicles, armed

reconnaissance and utility helicopters, military police working dogs, cavalry elements and engineers.

"All of these assets added to the complexity of the exercise, the aim of which is to further set up these future officers for success when they lead Australian soldiers on operations," Captain Whitehead said.

"Our objectives here are to place our future officers in complex training situations that we've based on recent operational experience from places like the Solomon Islands and East Timor.

"Today, for example, in the second-last bush exercise before graduation, we really want to be able to put our hands on our hearts and say these people are ready to lead soldiers on operations."

Part of the training, which took place in the small Queensland hamlets of Tin Can Bay and Cooloola Cove,

Our objectives here are to place our future officers in complex training situations that we've based on recent operational experience from places like the Solomon Islands and East Timor.

consisted of a range of activities including liaison with local authorities, protection and clearance operations, and support to local police and non-government organisations.

These activities were designed to test the cadets in the types of leadership and decision-making challenges they could face soon after they graduate from the college in June.

Blank ammunition, pyrotechnics, military vehicles and aircraft were used during the activity in accordance with relevant civil and military legislation.

Importantly, all activities were scripted and closely controlled to avoid or minimise the impact on real-life community and business activities.

However, members of the public were very welcoming to the cadets and understood the benefits gained by the Defence Force through such training.

This is particularly true in light of the recent flood and cyclone assistance provided by Army in Queensland and the fact that many of the junior officers leading clean-up operations would have participated in similar training activities at Tin Can Bay over recent years.

Many members of the public also participated in the exercise by being – well, themselves – members of a local community interacting with an assistance force in their back (and often front) yards.

Naturally, this added an element of realism that the cadets appreciated.

Staff Cadet Timothy Glover said the exercise had been a very different experience to any of his earlier training.

"Being so involved in the community and having so many assets has been a big challenge, but I think it should set us up well for our future careers," Staff Cadet Glover said.

