

## CHAPTER 14 - Tamaki

Vicki and I moved into 21 Corella Road, Belmont and I posted to HMNZS Tamaki 1 April 1986 as Communications Training Officer. This was to be a temporary appointment as a fill-in whilst Bob Cook underwent officer training.

CPOCS(W) Anne Hine was the School's Administrator and there was an excellent bunch of Instructors up the school. Shortly after I posted in, I was selected to be the Radio Frequency Manager for Exercise Joint Venture to be held in the Cook Islands for six weeks during July and August. Late April, I was seconded to 4 Signal Group, Hopu Hopu Camp, Ngaurawahia, whilst still retaining my position as CTO. We had been allocated a large pool of frequencies by the Defence Frequency Manager and the eight weeks at Hopu Hopu were spent working out the parameters for the required radio circuits and a draft communications plan. This was followed by three to four weeks at HQ Land Forces, Takapuna, putting together the final communications plan to be included in the Joint Force Operations Order.

The Communications School was in good hands, well looked after by Anne Hine during my absence and we kept in contact by phone as required.

Having completed the Radio Frequency Managers course held at Keesler Airforce Base, Biloxi, Mississippi two years earlier, I was able to call upon everything that I had been taught. Radio systems were required for the following circuits:

Rarotonga – Iirangi HF Duplex RATT using 300 foot terminated vee antennas terminated with 600 ohm resistors at the leading ends.

Rarotonga HF SSB Ground to air – for military transport and passenger aircraft en route from NZ.

Rarotonga – Apia HF Simplex RATT Long Range Maritime Patrol. An Orion P3 was based at Apia, along with a RNZAF Communications Unit who also had a circuit back to Whenuapai.

Rarotonga – LRMP HF SSB.

Rarotonga HF Simplex RATT shore-ship to HMNZ Ships Canterbury and Tui.

Rarotonga – Aitutaki HF Simplex RATT for the assault phase.

Rarotonga VHF FM ground to air – controlling NZ military aircraft.

Rarotonga UHF Radio Relay from Hospital Hill to JFCU at the International Airport.

The JV Comms Unit gathered at Hopu Hopu for a 10 day period prior to deploying for familiarisation of equipment and procedures.

Joint Force Units included the following:

JFHQ – Only one senior RNZN Officer on the staff.

JFCU – 72 personnel consisting of:

1 Major – Officer Commanding

2 I/C - RNZAF Flt Lt

2 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenants – one was I/C EW Unit

1 Communications WO – myself

1 WO1 Logistics – Wally Bilton – some of you may remember his brother who was in the navy, Len Bilton (CEA)

1 WO2 Senior Tech – I/C maintenance at JFCU

1 WO RNZAF I/C Transmitter site

1 PORM RNZN – ex-RN – can't remember his name Transmitter site

1 S/Sgt Army – Transmitter site

3 watchkeeping Supervisors – 1 RNZN (Murray (Wings) Kingham), 1 each army and air force. Rest of the unit were mainly Army with some Air Force and the only RNZN reps in the watchkeepers were ACO(W) Dearne Ross and ARO(W)Vicky Reti.

JF Engineers – RNZEME. The WO1 in charge was also the camp RSM.

JF Infantry – One platoon (I think)

JF SAS – One troop

Two Unimogs

One Forklift

One Landrover

Naval Assets

HMNZS Canterbury

HMNZS Tui

Airforce assets:

2 A4 Skyhawks

1 Iroquois Helicopter

Cargo and passenger transports as required.

1 P3 Orion based at Apia

The engineers and infantry went ahead first and sent up all the accommodation tents, showers, latrines, all ranks Mess, JFHQ and Commcen tents. The JFCU followed a few days later. All the shelters had to be loaded on to the unimogs by forklift and driven to the Transmitter site. The forklift had to follow to unload. Down at the JF site, the Commcen, EW unit and telephone exchange were set up. We had 10 days to get everything operational. There was a satellite link set up between JFHQ through Cook Islands Telecom to Whenuapai. We had voice and orderwire channels. Setting up the HF frequency predictions whilst at Hopu Hopu, it was evident that we were going to lose communications for approximately two to three hours every morning just before dawn, so it was handy having the orderwire to engineer the HF circuit to Irirangi through Whenuapai.

The Exercise required all of the Communications shelters that were held by the Army and Air Force and each shelter contained two AN/GRC-106 HF Transmitter/Receivers 2-30 MHz 400W PEP.

Two each UHF radio relay equipment AN/GRC-103(V). 220-404.5MHz 25W. One at Hospital Hill and the other down at JFCU at the airport. Some of you who have served at Irirangi may remember the Army School of Signals setting up their radio relay links between NR2 and NT1. Normally our circuits at Receivers and down in Wellington, keyed the transmitters using landline with 691/CUHs as a back up for whenever the local farmers dug up the landlines. The Army used to test their equipment to key our transmitters about every two years.

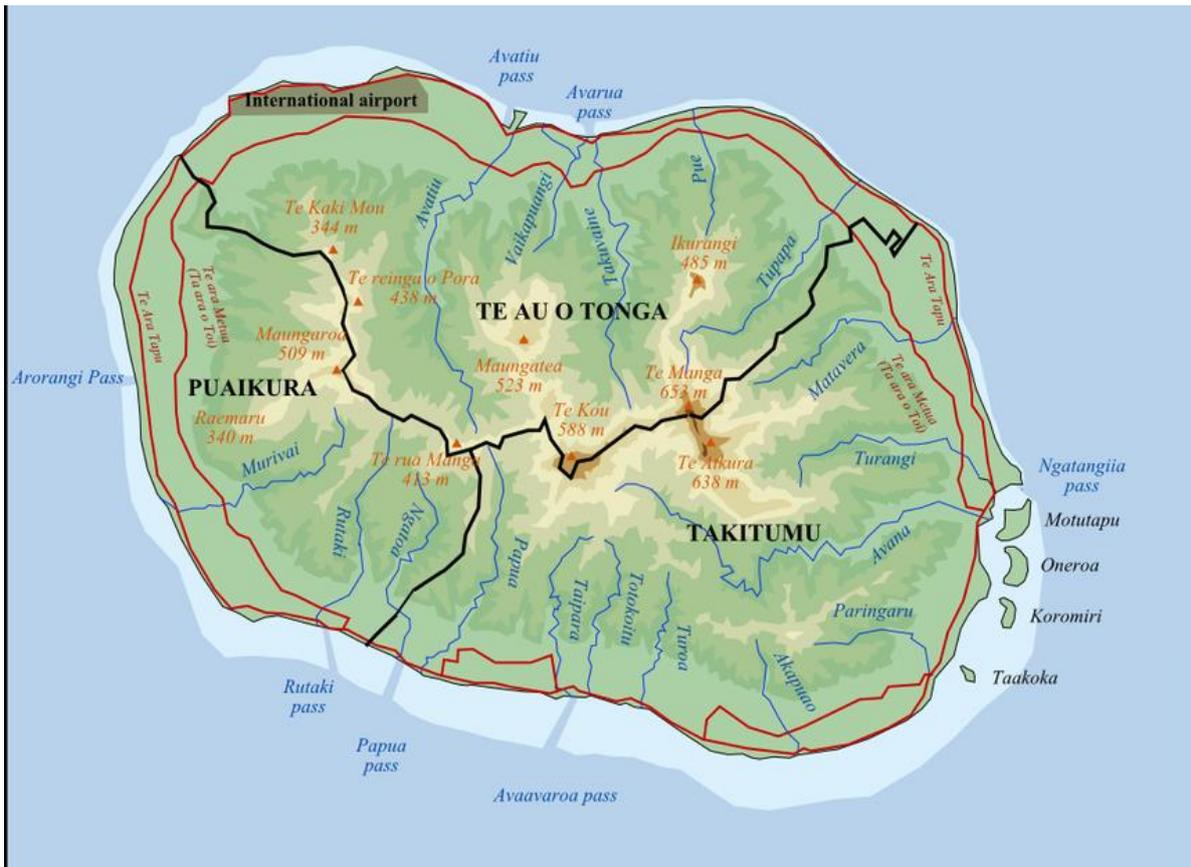


The transmitter/receiver site was on the hill 120 metres above sea level, up behind the Hospital. The Joint Force site was to the right of the apron.

One AN/GRC-142 Simplex HF Ratt – mounted in a Landrover.

Can't remember what the VHF FM Ground to air set was, other than it belonged to the air force.

The VHF FM Relay equipment had to be set up on Rarotonga's highest peak, Te Munga, 653 metres above sea level. Led by one of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Lts and voluntarily assisted by PO Kingham and a couple of others. The intrepid group set off in the landrover and drove as far as they could before they had to get out and “walk”.



Western end of the runway

It rained for the first two weeks – in fact, it bucketed down. The airport is built on reclaimed land and it wasn't long before those of us who were encamped closest to the runway discovered that the water table was rising. I awoke one morning, with rain pelting down on the roof of the tent and my best white shoes floating out of the entrance. My No6's (whites) turned green and I developed a hacking cough. Probably because I was wearing my regulation plastic sandals and my feet were constantly wet. "Wings" had managed to procure “you can't see me” uniform and a pair of boots.

I attended the morning meeting in the OCs tent and he was a bit perturbed by my cough and told me to report to the Medical Officer – a RNZAF Flt Lt. He diagnosed that I had bronchitis - I was told to go to bed for several days and drink plenty of fluid. I had to oversee the setting up of the circuits, couldn't afford all that time off and I didn't relish the thought of lying on my stretcher in that damp tent for too long. I had some medicinal liquid in my kit and took some of that. The following morning I awoke, drenched in sweat and found that my cough had gone. I then reported to the MO who couldn't believe that I had had a miraculous recovery and asked what I had done. Bed rest and plenty of fluids was my response. I never fully got over that bronchitis attack and coupled with being a victim of passive smoking in the first few years of the navy and possibly long term effects from smoke inhalation during the fire onboard Waikato, has resulted in bronchial asthma and chronic obstructive airways disease.



Joyriding on the Iroquois

Joint Venture 86 was in three phases:

Phase I was the setting up.

Phase II was the attack on Aitutaki. The infantry went in first to be the enemy and then SAS backed up by our comms landrover would go in for the assault. The SAS were dropped in covertly and our landrover was to be reversed out of the back of the hercules cargo ramp while the herc was still moving. The herc would then take off and return to Rarotonga. This was practised a couple of times at the airport and went off very well. Canterbury was to supply Naval Gunfire Support. A lot of the JF personnel went back to NZ after this phase leaving a few of us to finish off.

There was also an airshow put on for the locals using the Skyhawks, Iroquois and the Hercules, which was very well received.

Phase III was low key involving Tui and we only had the comms landrover for communications.

The RSM didn't like the idea of the communicators having time off when off watch and insisted they clean out the latrines every day. We got around this by having the Middle Watch do the latrines whilst on watch. We also had to supply hands for communal duties – washing dishes, etc. Using an army latrine was an experience in itself. The Senior NCOs had their own, of course, and the toilets were placed in a horseshoe pattern, so that we could look at each other and grunt in unison. Interestingly enough, although sexual equality was rearing its ugly head, the females didn't have to rough it and were allowed to use the toilets and bathrooms in the Air NZ Hangar!



Wings and Rolly Rolleston (Army) at the THC Rarotonga  
THC Rarotonga was built and managed by the NZ Tourist Hotel Corporation and at some stage transferred to the Cook Island Government and re-named The Rarotongan Resort.

An eventful six weeks

In September/October, the Royal Malaysian Navy Advanced Radio course went on an expedition to the middle of the North Island. Instructors were Chris Bond and Greg Hartley. I went along as support party. We had a navy transit van and drove down to Ohakune via Taumauranui and the western side of the mountains. We were staying at the Navy Ski Lodge, Ohakune, and were greeted by the caretaker, Pete Coffey. I was staying for two nights but the Exped team were leaving in the morning to take the Ruapehu walk to Tokaanu, staying overnight in a hut.

On the morning of the third day, I took off for the rendezvous point and got there early. I locked the van and walked along the track to meet up with the party. It was about an hour before I met up with them and it was pouring with rain, cold and I was starting to feel the effects of a bad head cold. We got back to the van and I drove to the hot pools at Tokaanu. I was feeling pretty crook by now from the flu and got Greg to drive to the army motels in Acacia Bay, Taupo, where we were staying for the night. When we got there, I took a couple of dispirins and went to bed. The others went into Taupo to have something to eat.

The following morning we went back to Devonport and I had to get Greg to drive again. I wondered if this was a follow on effect from the bronchitis that I had developed in Rarotonga. I went to RNZNH the following day to see a doctor and he gave me antibiotics and told to go home to bed for a couple of days.

Lt Bob Cook, RNZN, (ex-LSig RAN) took over as CTO in December and I remained at Tamaki to undertake a special project to organise and instruct the first Radio Frequency Managers course to be conducted in NZ. I felt that there was a need for a joint course and the hierarchy agreed. I developed a course based upon my experiences on the US course, modifying it as necessary to meet New Zealand's particular requirements. The course was developed in the objectivised style and three copies were made for the Army, RNZN and RNZAF Communications Schools. I was given instructional assistance from the Army School of Signals in the guise of S/Sgt Bell (can't remember his first name - very remiss of me). We took over the empty Port Wireless Station and used that for preparing the course. The course was undertaken at the Comms Training School from 13 March - 8 May 1987.

I was unable to get accreditation for the course, so I made up and issued Certificates that stated "...has successfully completed the Radio Frequency Managers Course 1/77."

The certificates were issued out at a farewell dinner held in a restaurant in Takapuna.

I posted out of Tamaki on the 1 June 1987 and into Philomel the following day to the Staff of the Commodore Auckland as Staff Officer (Communications).



Back Row – ?, Gary Rzepecky, ?, Chris Simmons, Laurie French, Neville Lockwood, Jeff Crawford, ?, George Randall, Chris Bond, Tony Johnson  
Front Row – ?, Jim Dell, Bob Cook, S/Sgt Bell, Gary Hine.