

CJTF 635: Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands

AN AUSTRALIAN ARMY UNIT'S QUICK RESPONSE

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"May this memorial endure the ravages of time until the wind, rain and tropical storms wear away its face, but never its memories."

Guadalcanal American Memorial, in Honiara, Solomon Islands

In the early hours of 22 December 2004, an Australian Federal Police Protective Services officer was murdered by sniper fire in Honiara, Guadalcanal, while conducting a vehicle patrol with the Australian-led Regional Assistance Mission in the Solomon Islands (RAMSI). In response, the 1st Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment, A Company Ready Company Group (1 RAR RCG), was alerted that same day. Within 18 hours of the Australian government's decision to support RAMSI, about 100 men, vehicles, and equipment arrived by three Royal Australian Air Force C130 aircraft in the Solomon Islands to reinforce the Australian Defence Force's (ADF) portion of RAMSI known as Operation Anode.

The A Company 1 RAR RCG rapid deployment demonstrated the inherent utility and flexibility of light infantry by:

- Rapidly deploying forces into an unfamiliar and complex environment;
- Assuming command of a five-nation coalition joint task force;
- Working in support of an 11-nation participating police force (PPF); and
- Quickly demonstrating the Australian government's resolve to support the continued success of RAMSI.

This article aims to provide a brief background to RAMSI and Operation Anode; discuss high readiness as a culture within the Townsville-based Ready Deployment Force; and describe operations conducted by the 1 RAR RCG between 22 December 2004 and 25 January 2005 while deployed to the Solomon Islands.

Background to the Regional Assistance Mission in the Solomon Islands (RAMSI)

The Solomon Islands are located almost 1,900 kilometers northeast of Australia, and consist of a chain of mountainous



Photos courtesy of the Australian Department of Defence

Privates Chris Harris and Kris Buck from the 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, prepare to go on a patrol through the streets of Honiara on Christmas Eve 2004 in the Solomon Islands.

islands and hundreds of coral atolls. The nation stretches almost 1,500 kilometers from the northwest, where it borders the Papua New Guinea province of Bougainville, to the southwest, where the Coral Sea meets the Pacific Ocean.

The Solomon Islands have an essentially Christian population of approximately 500,000. English is widely spoken in the main population centers. The government is democratically elected and the country is divided into nine provinces. The main population centers are found on the island of Guadalcanal, where the capital Honiara is located, and on the island of Malaita. The two key ethnic groupings, the Guadalcanal people, known as Gwales, and the Malaitans hail from these islands.

Europeans had visited the Solomon Islands sporadically since the 16th century, until Britain assumed a protectorate over the islands in the 1890s.



In May 1942, Admiral Yamamoto had hoped to bring the United States carrier force to a decisive battle in the central Pacific, but instead, agreed to support an assault on Port Moresby, New Guinea. The port would be a launch site for Japan's thrust into Australia. The United States Navy, thanks to American code-breaking efforts, had been warned of the approaching Japanese landing forces, and attacked first. The ensuing Battle of the Coral Sea, on 7 and 8 May 1942, marked the first Japanese naval defeat of the war.

Frustrated in their attempts to capture Port Moresby, and suffering the loss of the light carrier *Shoho* and damage to two larger carriers, the Japanese took a different approach to the capture of Port Moresby. Troops were landed on the Solomon Islands of Guadalcanal and Tulagi to establish airfield and seaplane bases.

The Allies responded to these Japanese moves and, in what was the first amphibious operation undertaken by the United States forces in World War II, the Americans landed at Guadalcanal and Tulagi in order to commence the six-month struggle for a foothold in the Solomon Islands, which was dubbed Operation Watchtower. As a consequence of World War II operations, the prewar Solomon Islands administrative center at Tulagi was destroyed, and the capital shifted to Honiara — following the establishment of a large American base nearby on Guadalcanal.

The Solomon Islands were granted independence from Britain in 1978, and remained largely peaceful until significant ethnic-based violence erupted in late 1998. The underlying cause of ethnic unrest between the Gwales and the Malaitans emerged during World War II when a large number of Malaitans moved to the new capital. Honiara became Malaitan dominated and the southern coast of Guadalcanal, the Weathercoast, became the cultural heartland of the Gwales. Consequently, although Malaitans comprised only a quarter of the total Solomon Island population, they dominated political and ethnic affairs, which led to strong resentment among the Gwales.

By late 1998, this resentment had erupted into armed conflict as Gwales militants forced approximately 20,000 Malaitans from their homes in



Guadalcanal. A rival Malaitan militant force emerged in early 2000, which raided police armories and staged an armed coup in mid-2000. At that time, Australia and New Zealand assisted a cease-fire that led to the signing of the Townsville Peace Accords, or TPA, in October 2000 and the deployment of an unarmed International Peace Monitoring Team until June 2002. Although the TPA stemmed high level violence, some former militants continued to operate personal fiefdoms with armed followers, and others engaged in internecine conflict and criminal activity. Notably, the Solomon Islands do not have a defense force, and the Solomon Island's government relies on the Royal Solomon Islands Police (RSIP) force for law and order tasks.

In 2003, the RSIP were unable to contain rising lawlessness, which was underscored when the former Police Commissioner and National Peace Councillor, Sir Fred Soaki, was assassinated in February 2003. In July 2003, the Solomon Islands Prime Minister requested assistance from the Australian Prime Minister and a 'strengthened assistance' mission was planned.

On 24 July 2003, Coalition Joint Task Force 635 (CJTF 635) was established in the Solomon Islands, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel J.J. Frewen, commanding officer of the 2nd Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment. CJTF 635

was established as the Australian Defence Force Operation Anode and was Australia's commitment to the regional 'strengthened assistance' mission Operation Helpem Fren. The overall force of civilians, police, and military was named RAMSI. This represented a new and unique model of regional intervention using the full complement of diplomatic, informational, economic, and military assets in a coordinated 'whole-of-government' approach. The aim of RAMSI was to prevent the Solomon Islands from descending into a 'failed state' without appearing neocolonialist.

At the height of RAMSI, there were nearly 1,800 joint and coalition military members from five nations (Australia, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, New Zealand, and Tonga) deployed. Significantly, although military members made up the largest contingent, they were only the supporting agency to the 11-nation PPF.

By December 2004, Operation Anode had been reduced in size, and CJTF 635 consisted of the CJTF headquarters and a platoon of infantry soldiers from New Zealand.

High Readiness as a Culture within the Townsville-based Ready Deployment Force

The 1 RAR RCG deployment in December 2004, represented the

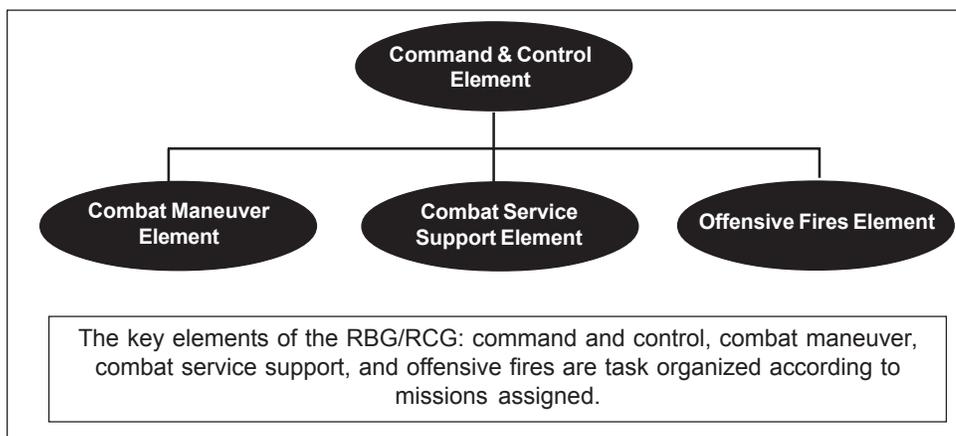


Figure 1 — The Key Elements of the Ready Battalion Group/Ready Company Group

culmination of almost 25 years of training, development, rehearsals, and sweat from thousands of soldiers who have served in the Townsville-based 3rd Brigade, home of the ADF's Ready Deployment Force (RDF). It was the vision of the Australian government, in 1981, when the 3rd Brigade was designated the Operational Deployment Force (the name was changed to Ready Deployment Force in 1995) that the Australian Army should maintain a high readiness formation. For a quarter of a century, the 3rd Brigade has fostered a culture of high readiness for the brigade's soldiers. Such a culture enabled the rapid deployment of the 1 RAR RCG to the Solomon Islands on 23 December 2004.

High readiness units in the 3rd Brigade must be:

- Agile in command relationships being able to quickly task organize in combined arms, joint, or coalition environments;
- Flexible in deployment options from the land, air, or sea;
- Highly competent in warfighting skills required in complex environments from the jungle, the littorals, open country, and the urban battlespace; and
- 'Spartan' in ethos, through training within resource constraints, and maintaining combat equipment that is light and air-portable.

These high readiness skills and attributes are maintained and rehearsed through an extensive 3rd Brigade training program that includes combined arms, joint, and coalition exercises, as well as jungle, urban, amphibious, air-mobile, and parachute training. Integral to the 3rd Brigade training program is annual training with the Australian Army's Combat Training Center, Combined Arms Battle Wing and Jungle Training Wing, Tully, which provide mission rehearsal exercises for the Ready Battalion Group (RBG).

The RBG, comprises soldiers from all but two of the Australian Army's corps (aviation and education corps), and is responsible for providing two capabilities for the ADF. Firstly, the RBG, at a permanently short notice to move, conducts infantry battalion group land operations in order to defeat the enemy in close combat, through maintaining high level proficiencies in complex terrain operations, peacemaking, peacekeeping, and evacuation operations. Secondly, the RBG provides a sub-element of combat power, in the form of the Ready Company Group (RCG), at a notice to move that is significantly less than the RBG, again to conduct infantry company group/combat team land operations in

order to defeat the enemy in close combat. The key elements of the RBG/RCG, command and control, combat maneuver, combat service support, and offensive fire support (Figure 1), are task organized according to missions assigned.

In December 2004, the 1 RAR Battalion Group was providing the ADF's RBG capability, and A Company, 1 RAR Group was providing the core of the RCG. For A Company, 1 RAR RCG to deploy to the Solomon Islands within 18 hours of the Australian government's decision to support RAMSI, significant training was required during 2004. This training included: 1 RAR's assumption of Ready

Battalion Group status in April 2004; RBG call-out and assessment, Exercise Eveready Blue, August 2004; 3rd Brigade amphibious and airborne, Exercise Swift Eagle, September 2004; and, the A Company RCG call-out and embarking on HMAS Kanimbla in early December 2004. The A Company RCG continued to train during the Christmas 2004 3rd Brigade reduced tempo period, enabling rapid recall and readiness currency, especially with regards to shooting skills.

High readiness is expensive in terms of maintaining Soldier individual competencies, fitness, health, family support, and conditions of service. The baseline readiness within the 3rd Brigade is monitored closely by all elements of the chain of command, from corporal to brigadier, to ensure that the RCG, and the larger RBG, are supported through logistic, resource, and personnel policies that ensure these groups are always ready to deploy within designated notice to move.

Operations conducted by the 1 RAR RCG between 22 December 2004 and 25 January 2005

The mission of the 1 RAR RCG was to provide military security support to the PPF in order to reinforce the maintenance of law and order in the Solomon Islands.

Three Interrelated Premises

Operations by the 1 RAR RCG in the Solomon Islands between 22 December 2004 and 25 January 2005 were based on three interrelated premises:

- (1) The existing Operation Anode CJTF 635 was to be reinforced in order to strengthen the ADF's support to RAMSI;
- (2) The security environment in the Solomon Islands was to be rapidly and professionally enhanced; and
- (3) The 1 RAR RCG deployment was to be effects-based, and measures were to be immediately developed in order to assess the impact the deployment was having in the Solomon Islands.

Premise One: Reinforcement of RAMSI

The three interrelated premises required two comprehensive actions by the 1 RAR RCG. First, the command and control of CJTF 635 needed to be firmly arranged to account for a triple



Private Shaun Dwyer from the 1st Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment, conducts a patrol with a Royal Solomon Islands police officer on December 24, 2004.

increase of in-theatre troop numbers. Secondly, the 1 RAR RCG required the amendment of CJTF 635 procedures with regards to: intelligence targeting and collection; methods of movement and maneuver throughout the Solomon Islands; logistics arrangements within the CJTF and between the CJTF and RAMSI; and, significant enhancements to CJTF force protection.

CJTF 635 had been commanded, prior to the arrival of the 1 RAR RCG, by an Australian Army major, who was the CJTF commander and military adviser to the special coordinator of RAMSI, James Batley. Upon the arrival in the Solomon Islands of the commanding officer of the 1RAR (CO 1 RAR), a lieutenant colonel, the Australian major assumed the sole role of military adviser to RAMSI, while CO 1 RAR assumed command of CJTF 635.

CJTF 635 has, from the inception of RAMSI, developed a *supporting/supported* relationship with the participating police force, which in addition to Australia was comprised of Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. In December 2004, the chief of the PPF was Australian Federal Police Commissioner Sandi Peisley. Fortunately, during 2004 1RAR had extensively rehearsed the operation of *supporting/supported* command and control relationships with the Royal Australian Navy's Amphibious Task Group, during numerous amphibious training exercises. In essence, *supporting/supported* command and control relationships require "special emphasis ... to task grouping, economy, and coordination between parallel chains of command," according to the Australian Defence Force doctrine publication *Operations Series, Amphibious Operations*. The 1 RAR RCG quickly understood the requirement to be the *supporting* element of RAMSI in order to ensure that the PPF produced the most credible effect in the Solomon Islands in the wake of the murder of an Australian police officer.

The deputy commander of CJTF 635 was a New Zealand

captain, who remained as the deputy CJTF commander upon assumption of command by CO 1 RAR. The CJTF 635 staff who were serving in the Solomon Islands upon the arrival of the 1 RAR RCG, continued to be commanded directly by the New Zealand captain, while being responsive to the operational requirements of the 1 RAR RCG. The CJTF 635 staff included personnel from the Defence Forces of Fiji, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, and Tongan, as well as personnel from the Australian Army and Royal Australian Air Force.

CJTF 635's maneuver and security element prior to the arrival of the 1 RAR RCG was a platoon from 2nd/1st Battalion, The Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment (2/1 RNZIR). This platoon was assigned under operational control to the 1 RAR RCG upon arrival of the 1 RAR RCG in the Solomon Islands. This command relationship provided the 1 RAR RCG

company commander, an Australian Army major, with 12 sections, each of approximately nine men, to support RAMSI operations throughout the Solomon Islands. This increase in CJTF 635 sections enabled the development of a broad, and immediately successful, patrolling program in support of RAMSI throughout the islands of Malaita and Guadalcanal.

Premise Two: Rapid and Professional Enhancement of the Security Environment

With command and control measures in place the 1 RAR RCG, combined with the New Zealand platoon from 2/1 RNZIR, commenced increasing the tempo of patrolling in the Solomon Islands.

This was a corporal's operation and the 12 section commanders, with their well-trained soldiers, displayed their calm professionalism and superb patrolling skills during the 34-day deployment. It were the corporals from Australia and New Zealand who commanded all of the patrols in support of the RAMSI PPF. The corporals performed more than 300 tasks in support of the PPF including: foot and mobile patrols; supporting special response and investigative operations; conducting provincial patrols; and providing a quick response to assist any high value search operations. The corporals allowed the CJTF to accurately target intelligence and collection assets. The corporals used their warfighting patrolling skills in a peace supporting manner in order to dominate the battle space so that criminal elements in the Solomon Islands either went to ground, or were arrested. The corporals made the logistics arrangements, which have always been complicated by the harsh terrain and climate of the Solomon Islands, work every day, with few complaints, and zero failures. The corporals continued to train their soldiers, especially in shooting skills, in order to maintain the operational edge for the 1 RAR RCG. It

were the corporals who integrated new ADF technologies, such as the outstanding Personal Role Radio into a new, complex, and demanding operating environment. It were the corporals who ensured that previous failures in CJTF 635 force protection methods were not repeated. The corporals supported and shepherded their PPF charges in accordance with the police patrolling needs in an absolutely professional and faultless manner.

The section commanders of CJTF 635 assumed their tasks in support of RAMSI with gusto. Around 70 percent of the 1 RAR RCG had previous operational experience, mostly from East Timor, although experience from Somalia, Rwanda, Bosnia, and Northern Ireland was also present amongst the RCG members. Supporting RAMSI was not a mission for which the 1 RAR RCG had specifically trained. On the contrary, the 1 RAR RCG had trained for complex warfighting throughout 2004, particularly warfighting in littoral, jungle, and urban environments. However, the foundation of the 1 RAR RCG's success in

the Solomon Islands was based on:

- ❑ Leadership, not only from personnel with rank, but from every senior soldier in the RCG;

- ❑ Exceptional soldier skills;

- ❑ Comprehensive training and evaluation in complex environments, particularly the littoral, jungle and urban battlespaces;

- ❑ A culture of high readiness that allowed soldiers to concentrate on operations and not be distracted by getting ready for operations; and,

- ❑ A huge pool of operational experience for soldiers from multiple theatres inherent in the RCG, and indeed in the RBG.

The 1 RAR RCG's exceptional leadership was not limited to personnel with rank, but also from every senior soldier in the RCG. This fact is of significance when thinking about future war within complex environments. Within 1 RAR, the average length of service in the Army for Private soldiers is five years. That means

the soldiers joined the Australian Army in approximately mid-2000. In most cases such soldiers have deployed, with 1 RAR, to East Timor in 2003. Now many have also deployed to the Solomon Islands. Most importantly, 1 RAR's soldiers have only ever served in an Australian Defence Force that is constantly deployed on operations.

In between operational deployments, the soldiers have undertaken Combat Training Centre, Combined Arms Battle Wing and Jungle Training Wing, Tully, exercises plus they have participated in numerous military skills competitions, and Company, Battalion, Brigade, and Multi-National Exercises. Such experience creates a warfighter who is battle smart, battle fit, a battle shot, and a battle leader. Such a warfighter stands, within the high readiness culture of the RBG, ready to deploy in order to seek out and close with the enemy, to kill or capture him, to seize and hold ground and repel attack, by day or night, into complex environments regardless of season, weather, or terrain.



Premise Three: The 1 RAR RCG deployment as an Effects-Based Operation

Effects-based operations for the 1 RAR RCG and CJTF 635, were supported by a daily Joint Targeting Board (JTB) which was implemented by CO 1 RAR upon arrival in the Solomon Islands. The daily JTB fused intelligence gained by the CJTF with PPF intelligence in order to target areas for CJTF/PPF patrolling. Upon arrival of the 1 RAR RCG, every CJTF patrol was in support of the PPF, and every CJTF patrol was against targets developed by the JTB. The CJTF's 12 sections were not sufficient to allow wasted, or misdirected, patrol efforts. As a result activities such as "shopping" and "tourist" patrols and patrols not in support of the PPF were immediately banned by CO 1 RAR.

The daily JTB allowed CJTF 635 to synchronize operations in support of the PPF. The PPF campaign plan, following the deployment of the RCG, was to quickly eliminate the need for additional military support to RAMSI, and return RAMSI to pre-22 December 2004 levels of force protection. In addition, the PPF had the longer term goal of turning police operations in the Solomon Islands over to the Royal Solomon Island Police (RSIP) in order to ensure that law and order in the Solomon Islands was controlled by the Solomon Island people. The daily JTB allowed CJTF 635 to quickly tailor tactical operations to support PPF campaign goals. The daily JTB ensured excellent communications between the PPF tactical operators and the CJTF tactical operators, particularly the police and soldiers on patrol. Special mention is given to Superintendent Tony Donne who, as a key member of the daily JTB, provided an outstanding contribution the success of the 1 RAR RCG, and RAMSI, mission.

Most importantly the daily JTB enabled the following tactics, techniques, and procedures to be developed between the PPF and CJTF 635: developing a joint-patrol roster; pairing CJTF 635 Section Commanders with PPF Shift Supervisors; aligning the CJTF 635 patrol timings with PPF patrol shifts; supporting all RAMSI patrolling with intelligence assets; and, aligning PPF/CJTF community relations tasks with the operational need.

The daily JTB soon paid dividends with the capture of three significant anti-RAMSI personnel in support of the RSIP. Apart from the aforementioned results the JTB and the 1 RAR RCG developed other measures of effectiveness (MOE) for the 1 RAR RCG in order to assess the impact the deployment was having in the Solomon Islands in support of RAMSI. These MOE were a challenge for the 1 RAR RCG and the JTB to develop. The existing CJTF 635 was without MOE, and therefore an inaugural set was developed, using the Joint Military Appreciation Process, and presented to the Chief of Joint Operations, Vice Admiral R.E. Shalders, on 26 December 2004, less than 48-hours after the arrival of the RCG in the Solomon Islands.

Conclusion

The A Company 1 RAR, Ready Company Group (RCG), deployment in support of the Regional Mission to the Solomon Islands, represented a significant achievement for the Australian Defence Force. The RCG was directed to reinforce Australia's and the Pacific Region's efforts, in support of the government of the Solomon Islands, and this reinforcement occurred with speed,



The rapid deployment of A Company, 1 RAR, represented a significant achievement for the Australian Defence Force.

professional acumen, supported by an effects-based campaign plan. As this article is written, RAMSI is continuing as a most successful regional peacekeeping effort.

A Company, 1 RAR RCG returned to Australia on 25 January 2005. 2005 marks two significant milestones for 1 RAR, The Big Blue One. These milestones include 1 RAR's 60th Birthday, 12 October 1945, and 1 RAR's deployment as the lead Australian infantry Battalion in Vietnam in June 1965. There is no doubt, that when 1 RAR Soldiers deploy on operations they do so with the weight of 1 RAR expectations on their shoulders; both from soldiers serving and soldiers past. The A Company 1 RAR RCG deployment to reinforce Operation Anode in the Solomon Islands, once again proved that 1 RAR is the force of choice in operations that involve rapid deployment, complex environments, and professional execution.

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