

AIR FORCE NEWS

Giving kiwi
a boost with
trap drop

Gabrielle
anniversary:
koha flight

Meet our
C-130J team
at Little Rock

#266

MAR|24

A man with a mustache, wearing a dark blue New Zealand Air Force uniform, stands against a dark background. He is holding a traditional Māori taiaha, a ceremonial staff with a carved wooden head and a white feather tuft. He has several medals on his chest and a dark shawl with a feathered border draped over his shoulders. A patch on his uniform reads "NEW ZEALAND AIR FORCE".

Ngā mihi ki te Kai Tohutohu O Te Tauaarangi O Aotearoa

Meeting our new Māori Cultural Advisor

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OUR MISSION

The RNZAF will provide New Zealand with relevant, responsive and effective Air Power to meet its security interests.

OUR VISION

An agile and adaptive Air Force with the versatility essential for NZDF operations.

COVER:

Māori Cultural Advisor

PHOTOGRAPHER:

CPL Naomi James



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First Word



B | CO FLYING TRAINING WING
Y | WING COMMANDER HAYDEN SHEARD

“On Flying Training Wing, we combine both the defence and business contexts to achieve our mission of preparing junior Defence Force aircrew for the fight ahead.”

It is a real pleasure to be able to open this issue of *Air Force News* with the First Word.

Collaborative relationships are often referenced in the military context as being a key component to us winning on operations. Combined Joint Task Groups, the Joint Military Appreciation Process and the Deployable Joint Inter-Agency Task Force all feature in the lexicon of the Defence Force and Air Force. It is widely known that collaboration can achieve great things not only in the defence and security context, but also in business.

In 1 Hangar Ohakea we are engaged in a multi-decade strategic relationship with the manufacturer of the T-6C Texan – Textron Aviation Defense, based in Wichita, USA. We are supported by a dedicated and knowledgeable team of professionals in Wichita, who provide advice and direct supply chain support to our operations.

Back at home, Beechcraft New Zealand provides the direct link to Textron Aviation Defense along with key advice to the Air Force. Even deeper, Airbus New Zealand is the team that physically maintains, dispatch and receipt our aeroplanes on a daily basis. As we close in on 10 years of operations with the Texan, many in that talented group of technicians have been with our programme since the start.

Our Airbus New Zealand technicians are highly regarded in the international Texan community, with the team often being approached for their solutions to particular issues that crop up on the global fleet.

Alongside the hangar and flight line teams are our effective simulator technicians from CAE Australia who continually achieve 100% availability of our two T-6C Texan Operational Training Devices (simulators) to support our synthetic training programmes.

A short walk away in 2 Hangar Ohakea, we are equally well supported by Jet Aviation New Zealand, which provides us with our versatile King Air 350 aircraft. Jet Aviation Australia gives us the top level support from across the Tasman Sea, with an equally talented cadre of technicians back here in the hangar, servicing the aircraft.

The role fit on our KA350s is unique and in addition to the primary training role the aeroplane provides, No. 42 Squadron is also able to execute domestic transport and surveillance tasks in support of our defence and security requirements – often at short notice. Like their counterparts in 1 Hangar, the technicians at Jet Aviation use their experience and deep understanding of the KA350 to ensure we have the aircraft available at all hours of the day and night to achieve the No. 42 Squadron mission – whatever that may be at the time.

Surrounding all of this is the small but dedicated group of people and organisations that continues to directly support both aircraft types. Defence Commercial Services, the Directorate of Operating Airworthiness and Continuing Airworthiness Management offices at Ohakea, along with the Ohakea Military Air Base, all collaborate with me and my people to produce the aircrew our country needs now and into the future.

Through collaborative and human relationships we are not only achieving a joint military effect, but a joint commercial one as well.

I hope you enjoy seeing what trained and motivated people, irrespective of their core trade, can do for our country in this month's edition of *Air Force News*.



Giving kiwi a boost with trap drop

BY PHOTOS
CPL RACHEL PUGH

No. 3 Squadron was recently involved in a successful joint operation led by the Department of Conservation (DoC) to deliver pest traps into remote areas of Kaweka Forest Park, where the North Island brown kiwi is seriously endangered in the park.

The trapping network within Kaweka Forest Park was established in 2008 for the purpose of protecting kiwi from predators such as stoats and ferrets. Since then, it has grown to provide wide-scale protection over 9,000 hectares, providing additional protection to species such as whio, kākā and snails.

With some traps outdated, part of the network is being upgraded with new and improved traps, and the Air Force was asked to lend a hand to deliver them into the park.

The project was a collaboration between DoC, the Air Force, Mana Ahuriri Trust, Te Ngahere (Jobs for Nature), Environment, Conservation and Outdoor Education Trust (ECOED) and the Puketitiri community.

Helicopter pilot Flight Lieutenant (FLTLT) Paul Robinson said an NH90 helicopter crew ferried two teams from Te Ngahere and Mana Ahuriri Trust, track marker poles and 89 traps into remote areas in Kaweka Forest Park, before another crew finished the task with more trap drops later that evening.



“Everything was very well organised by the collective,” FLTLT Robinson said.

“We had perfect flying conditions on the day.”

The traps were packed inside the helicopter, rather than transported as an underslung load.

In total, approximately 130 traps were flown into Kaweka Forest Park, a task which was made significantly easier and faster with the use of the NH90s.

The New Zealand Defence Force provides support to DoC for various tasks when heavy loads are required to be flown into remote areas.

This joint operation also proved an opportunity to support mana whenua, Jobs For Nature and voluntary groups that dedicate their time to look after taiao (nature) alongside DoC.

Previous DoC tasks that FLTLT Robinson has flown on include delivering track marker poles to the Robert Ridge route on the Travers Range, delivering gravel for Paddy's Track near St Arnaud, and he has also flown an A109 helicopter carrying out reconnaissance of huts in Kahurangi National Park.

“The small landing sites enclosed by forest also made for a nice flying challenge for the crew.”

- Flight Lieutenant Paul Robinson

Gabrielle anniversary: **Flying in the koha**

Exactly one year after Tropical Cyclone Gabrielle smashed into the East Coast, causing millions of dollars of damage and tragically leading to the deaths of 11 people, No. 3 Squadron returned to some of the worst hit areas. And they brought koha with them.



WORDS | REBECCA QUILLIAM
PHOTOS | CPL RACHEL PUGH





Tropical Cyclone Gabrielle was one of the Defence Force's largest-ever domestic responses, in particular for the Air Force.

To mark the first anniversary of the devastating weather event, an NH90 helicopter aircrew flew from Base Ohakea and visited a number of schools in Hawke's Bay to facilitate koha exchanges, and give students a chance to meet the crew and board the helicopter.

Flight Lieutenant (FLTLT) Lachie Huddleston, who grew up in Hawke's Bay, was part of the Air Force's immediate response team following the cyclone. This time last year he was flying over Hawke's Bay and the scenes of devastation.

"Today is so different – you can see the blue sky. It has a much calmer and more relaxed feeling than a year ago.

"On day two they dropped me into the Hawke's Bay Emergency Operations Centre in Hastings and I acted as the liaison officer for the next two weeks. I co-ordinated all the military air response to Gabrielle."

Flying to those wrecked areas a year on from Gabrielle was heart-warming for all the crew, he said.

"It's really cool for us to check in on these communities and see how they are going. They are all positive and thriving. They're still affected, but they are getting on with their lives."

Havelock North Primary School students were the first to greet No. 3 Squadron, where an army of students helped load up the NH90 with dozens of gift boxes filled with food and supplies to be delivered to Kererū Primary School.

Kererū School principal Kelsie Allen was "overwhelmed" by the generosity and the kindness of the school community. She had never met Havelock North Primary School teacher Annie Boyd who organised the event.

"Annie said she wanted to do this and I'm still shocked – it will take a while to unpack," she said.

"This will affect the community in such a positive way. Our community has come together following the cyclone really

closely. This is just another way to bring us together. I know so many other people are doing it tough out there in other communities, not just ours, so we are just so appreciative."

For nine weeks following the cyclone Ms Allen and some of the school's pupils could only get to school by hitching a ride on a tractor-trailer.

"I went for a walk this morning and watched the sun come up and I thought how a year can change things. It's made me so much more appreciative of bridges and culverts."

But despite progress in the region, the Kererū Gorge remains out of action and one of the school's teachers still has to ride a bike across farmland to get to work.

A second koha exchange was then facilitated between Hastings Boys' High School and Eskdale Primary School.

The NH90 landed on the school's front lawn and was welcomed with a pōwhiri and rousing haka.



The school's head boy Osiris White Munro and deputy head boy Brayden Reeve were chosen to fly to Eskdale School where they met fellow pupils to present their koha to the school.

Neither Osiris nor Brayden had ever been in a helicopter before and were "truly stoked" to have been given the opportunity.

"You wouldn't even realise we had a cyclone a year ago with all the progress we've made. But there are still communities out there that are hard hit," Osiris said.

Brayden said he felt privileged to be part of the day's events.

"It's a true honour and we both appreciate this opportunity. It's hard to put into words how far we've come as a community and as individuals."

Eskdale School principal Tristan Cheer said the koha and helicopter visit were overwhelming.

"Some days it feels like it was only yesterday we had the cyclone and sometimes it feels like it was a lifetime

ago. As the trauma fades for our children and our families, what will stick with us is being part of a real community spirit. The resilience being shown by this community and around the region is outstanding."

The school field was buried under tonnes of silt as the nearby Esk River, which swelled and spilled its banks during the storm.

"Our septic system was damaged and had to be replaced and we were without power for a long period of time. Absolutely heart-breaking. But now the mahi has been done to get the school back to where it needed to be.

"We had an assembly earlier this week and it was worth taking time to remember the strength and resilience of the community, but the thing they were really looking forward to today was that chopper coming in.

"It's such a thrill and some of them are genuinely looking to join the Defence Force, so this is a huge thing for them," Mr Cheer said.

"It's great for us to see, because all we ever see is the emergency response - we only get involved when things are really bad. So we like to touch base with them a year on, particularly when the sun is out."

- Flight Lieutenant Lachie Huddleston

Our team at Little Rock, Arkansas

B | CONTRIBUTING REPORTER
Y | **NICK DAVIES**



This year will see the Air Force welcome the first of the new fleet of C-130J Hercules, a highly advanced, multi-purpose tactical airlift aircraft. It comes equipped for a multitude of mission capabilities, from humanitarian aid and disaster relief and search and rescue, to combat support and special operations. In the words of its creators Lockheed Martin, it is the aircraft designed to go where others “can’t, don’t, and won’t”. But who are our aviators tasked with flying and maintaining this multi-million dollar militarised bird?



In 2020 the Future Air Mobility Capability (FAMC) C-130J Integrated Project Team (IPT) reached an agreement with the United States Air Force (USAF) for selected personnel to undertake extensive training on the new Hercules.

This meant that a small group of Air Force aviators packed their bags and flew to the United States to set up a new life in Little Rock, Arkansas, for 12-18 months.

Currently, there are 12 maintainers and 12 aircrew stationed at Little Rock Air Force Base who train alongside USAF personnel.

Avionics technician Sergeant (SGT) Brett Simpkin calls his time on the base a “once-in-a-career opportunity” to not only advance his skillset but also experience the USAF culture.

“The scale of Little Rock Air Force Base is impressive. Dozens of Hercules are based here giving many opportunities to get hands-on with the C-130J and test our knowledge during different exercises,” he said.

“A highlight has been working on the Hercules in Hawaii during an air mobility exercise with the USAF, Marines, and Army personnel.”

Corporal (CPL) Dalton Blatch echoes SGT Simpkin’s sentiment. He sees a significant difference between the current C-130H model and the incoming C-130J model and considers this training “invaluable”.

“One benefit of the new C-130J model is its modernised avionics system. Part of this is on-board diagnostics, which enables us to quickly find and diagnose aircraft faults,” he said.

“There’s also improved communications systems, new engines, and an added MX-20 imaging turret to learn about.”

SGT Tom Cowan has faced a steep learning curve in Little Rock, having previously worked on the P-3K2 Orion.

One of the most impressive aspects of what these aviators do is the sheer absorption of technical knowledge from the USAF specialists.

CPL Liam Sole said the New Zealand crew has been welcomed into USAF squadrons where seven different trades contribute to aircraft maintenance – an eye-opening insight given these specialisations are covered by only two trades back at home.

“As an example, they have specialists for engines, hydraulics, and fuel, while one of our trades will perform all of those jobs.”



The experience gained working alongside the USAF specialists has strengthened the Kiwi team's specialist knowledge and will stand them in good stead as a small but versatile maintenance team.

For co-pilots Cody Hughes and Mick Wansink, both Flight Lieutenants (FLTLTs), the road to Little Rock has been a longer journey. Their training started in Georgia, where they completed four months of classroom and simulator training at the Lockheed Martin training facility. From there, they moved to Rhode Island for two months to fly with an Air National Guard unit that operates Hercules to gain an aircraft certification allowing them to fly with the USAF.

"Each flight gives us a deeper understanding of the aircraft and the capabilities on offer," said FLTFT Wansink.

"Our training has recently focussed on tactical formation flying, which is not what we generally do in New Zealand, but we still gain invaluable experience."

FLTLT Hughes adds they've adopted a new "philosophy of flying", noting that the crew on the C-130J drops from the six on the C-130H to four – two pilots and two air loadmasters.

"The experience we are gaining with the USAF is preparing us well to operate without the engineer and navigator who flew on the previous H model, but it is a steep learning curve."

But for most of our aviators, the biggest challenge has been less about the job and more about the impact on their lives.

For Maintenance Coordinator Flight Sergeant (F/S) Andy Fieldes, the decision to move to Arkansas for 18 months not only affected him, but also his family.

"I'm joined by my wife and two kids here in Little Rock, so we had a lot to consider when we made our decision to move here. We have rented out our house in Auckland, we sold our vehicles, my wife resigned from her previous role, and we also had to arrange child care here on base. I'm really glad we made the decision to accept the posting and we have been enjoying making the most of our time here."



F/S Fieldes' wife Squadron Leader (SQNLDR) Mel Fieldes, says she has adjusted to life on base. She finds balance in taking care of the kids, while also putting her expertise to use, now working as a publication and training support officer.

"I'd previously been to Little Rock on training exercises but it's different being here as a family. The kids have adapted well to their new home and have made lots of friends."

FLTLT Hughes also brought his wife and child with him to the United States, and they now have another child on the way. The family has enjoyed spending time in Georgia and Rhode Island but were eager to settle into their house in Little Rock.

All in all, our aviators occupy 20 of the roughly 900 houses on base. This has allowed the team to establish a Kiwi community, formed as much by the partners and families as the military personnel themselves. In total, there are currently 61 New Zealanders at Little Rock.

"We spend a lot of time together," said SQNLDR Fieldes. "We've developed a tight-knit group. We keep in touch all the time to make sure that everyone is okay – and well supplied with Marmite."

She highlights the Kiwi-American style BBQ crossovers enjoyed by the families, when the weather has allowed for it.

"Most guys have honed their charcoal barbecuing skills, so we're having a lot of ribs, a lot of brisket."

F/S Fieldes also speaks highly of the southern hospitality they have received.



“We have had a lot of social events and sporting competitions with our USAF friends, and one event that stands out to me was our Anzac service that our USAF colleagues attended. It was a very humbling experience having USAF pay their respects to the ANZACs, and they were quite impressed with our long-standing tradition of rum and milk to start the day.”

Overall, it seems the team have adjusted to life at Little Rock, which sounds more comparable to a large township than an Air Force base. With a total population of 13,000, the base boasts a supermarket, two petrol stations, a Burger King, and even a bowling alley.

They have also enjoyed the experience of the numerous on-base events such as family dinners and activities, and a Christmas tree lighting ceremony.

In their free time, the aviators have made the most of their geography in different ways. Many have taken the time to explore the surrounding states and nations, taking road trips on weekends and during their leave entitlements.

For now, the Kiwis seem well-adjusted to the Little Rock routine, content to enjoy the learning experience for as long as it lasts. But SQNLDR Fieldes seems to speak for all of them when she mentions home.

“It’ll be nice just to see the beach again.”

Until then, our personnel will continue to advance their skillsets, deepen their knowledge, and uphold the elite standard of the Air Force, making us proud as always.

And the next time they do see the shoreline of an Aotearoa beach, it might just be from the window of a descending C-130J Hercules, cleared for landing into its new home at Base Auckland.

Introducing Air Force's new Māori Cultural Advisor

WORDS | REBECCA QUILLIAM
PHOTOS | CPL NAOMI JAMES



Flight Lieutenant Thomas “Cookie” Cookson says the New Zealand Defence Force is on a pathway of positive change in incorporating te ao Māori into its culture. The Air Force’s new Māori Cultural Advisor is undaunted about the job ahead of him and is excited to build on the foundations of work laid by his predecessors.

“They have put a lot of things in place to allow this position to really fly. We are now positioned to make further positive change,” Flight Lieutenant (FLTLT) Cookson said.

FLTLT Cookson’s whānau on his father’s side came from the Rotorua area and he didn’t stray far, growing up in Ōpōtiki, where the local iwi is te Whakatōhea. His mother is European and her whānau emigrated to Aotearoa from Britain in the 1960s.

Looking ahead to his new role, FLTLT Cookson said the key aspect would be to “get our strategy for the next five to 10 years right”.

“When I say that I mean to make sure the key players within te ao Māori and command within the Air Force all agree on that point in the future that we are aiming for.

“I don’t think I’m going to bring anything too special, good communication will be key, and I’ll be putting more focus on our strategic level documents and helping lead us to that future point.”

That future point would be around resourcing the Māori cultural element within the Air Force to deliver what was needed to the required standard, FLTLT Cookson said.

“It will be uplifting the cultural competency of the organisation – that’s one of the lines of effort. The other one is around supporting our specialist functions to deliver their outputs – like pōwhiri and wero [a challenge to guests and dignitaries].”

The Māori Cultural Advisor role will be aided by having a close relationship with the command chain and those within te ao Māori, who are the subject matter experts, he said.



FLTLT Cookson's career in the Air Force has incorporated a wide variety of opportunities, including deploying overseas with the Māori Cultural Group, with rugby league and rugby tournaments, and with No. 40 Squadron as an aircraft technician.

"Some of my most notable trips were with the Māori Cultural Group when we travelled to the United States and deploying with No. 40 Squadron to the Middle East."

He joined the Air Force straight from high school, mostly because he wanted to learn a trade but not be burdened with a student loan.

"At the time I didn't really know what I wanted to do, but I knew it needed to be something. I didn't think I'd last this long, but here I am 17 years later."

FLTLT Cookson's advice to young people looking at a career in the Air Force would be to just give it a crack.

"One of the best things about the Air Force and wider Defence Force is the relationships you make with people that last a lifetime."

From a cultural perspective, the Defence Force was heading in a positive direction, he said.

"New Zealand's society and demographics are constantly changing and the NZDF has to change with it to remain attractive. I have a lot of faith in the leadership and the professionalism of senior leaders to ensure the Defence Force adapts and changes to keep attracting that young talent that we so desperately need."

"We're really looking to adopt a more te ao Māori foundation and there is a good acknowledgement of te Tiriti o Waitangi - the Treaty of Waitangi - and that's going to flow throughout the whole organisation."

- Flight Lieutenant Thomas Cookson

Worst case scenario

WORDS | REBECCA QUILLIAM
PHOTOS | CPL NAOMI JAMES



What if the worst happened and there was a fatal aircraft crash? Base Ohakea recently ran Exercise Pahu Ra to test how the base would respond in just that tragic scenario and how its people reacted.

The base alarm was sounded just after 9am on a Thursday last month. An emergency was declared, but many on the base didn't know the details. The Emergency Operations Centre was activated and the base's Chief of Staff Wing Commander Chris Andrew told those gathered the sobering news.

A T-6C Texan aircraft with two on board had crashed. One pilot ejected safely but the other was critically injured and sadly later died of his injuries. The crash was spread over two sites, on the flight line and on the sports field. Ohakea's first responders, firefighters and medics, rushed to the scene. Fire and Emergency New Zealand, NZ Police and Hato Hone St John were also called to the base.

Complicating the matter was a rogue reporter, who was already on the base for legitimate reasons, but was able to get close to the scene and report about the crash before being stopped and escorted from the base by NZ Police and Military Police.

Looking back on how the base personnel and outside agencies responded to the scenario, Base Commander Group Captain (GPCAPT) Peter Gibson said the results were a bit of a mixed bag.

"And that's not surprising because we haven't done it for a while. Our first responders and the other agencies did a great job dealing with the crash scene and triaging the patients and taking care of them.

"Where we need to do some more work is in the wider base co-ordination area, so everyone on the base who isn't directly involved understands how they need to contribute in dealing with the emergency."

For many of the personnel this was the first time they had participated in an exercise like this in their current role on the base. GPCAPT Gibson said that lack of recent experience showed in some areas and meant discovering where there was a lack of awareness was a priority, so they could now focus on providing the necessary training to fix it.



“That was the whole point of the exercise, to uncover where we’ve got some gaps in our knowledge. What we now need to do is schedule follow-up activities and training to make sure we get everyone back up to speed.”

The most challenging aspect was around co-ordination and communication between the multitudes of people involved in the exercise, he said.

Working with outside agencies was a really important aspect because there could be an incident similar in scale and scenario, which those agencies would need to be involved with.

“Having them being able to come onto the base and be familiar with the base layout, be familiar with our capabilities and our people, is really important. It’s good for them to understand our aircraft and the scale of accidents that might occur at Ohakea.

“Depending on what’s happened NZ Police, Civil Aviation Authority and even WorkSafe might need to be involved – they often have a legal responsibility they need to carry out and we need to make sure we can support them in whatever they are doing,” GPCAPT Gibson said.

“My biggest concern was to make sure I wasn’t getting in the way of the Chief of Staff because as the Emergency Operations Centre controller, he was responsible for managing our response under the Ohakea Base Incident Management Plan. I wanted to be there because I needed to understand what was happening, but I had to take care I didn’t detract from the Chief of Staff and the rest of his team doing their role.”

However, as the exercise progressed and news from exercise control filtered through that one of the simulated pilots had died, GPCAPT Gibson said he found himself getting emotionally involved.

“While it was just an exercise, it was a sobering thought thinking about one of our own involved in a fatal crash.”

– Group Captain Peter Gibson

At the time we were able to process that information quickly and continue to carry out the tasks that needed to be done, however in reality, that would be something we would be supporting our own people and family members with for the long term.

Life down south



Two of our personnel are spending their summer in Antarctica, but having very different experiences as one settles into the American-run McMurdo Station and the other closer to home at New Zealand's Scott Base.

**LOGISTICS SPECIALIST,
LEADING AIRCRAFTMAN
ALEX TWEEDY**

Antarctica has been an amazing experience in just the short time I have been here. I arrived at McMurdo Station via a United States Air Force C-17 and with the weather being on our side, we made it down on our first attempt.

There have been numerous recreational activities outside of the job and so far, I have taken a small walk down the hill to Hut Point and had a tour inside Scott's Hut followed by trekking right to the end of the point to see a seal and her pup lying on the ice.

We have also walked to the top of Observation Hill, where you can get a great 360° view, which included being able to see our friends at Scott Base in the distance.

McMurdo Station has a lot to offer in the evenings with lots of different clubs, lectures, sports, and functions.

I have been lucky enough to find a group of people who enjoy photography and we have created a club to help teach and inspire others about the basics of photography so they can get the most out of their images in this stunning place.

Most Friday evenings I will head down to the gym for three-a-side football. Everybody brings their competitive spirit especially the guy who recently broke his leg playing.

Late October the Halloween party was held, of course we got stuck in and dressed up. On 11 November, all New Zealand Defence Force personnel at McMurdo attended a Veterans Day service at the chapel.

With about four months to go I look forward to what will come next.



LEADING AIRCRAFTMAN REECE NOORWALLA, COMMUNICATIONS OPERATOR

After many delays and 26 total flying hours, our summer team finally landed in Antarctica! Deploying to the ice for six months was a goal of mine and I am very lucky to have this bucket list opportunity!

Between base familiarisations, equipment and vehicle inductions, firefighter training and the handover from the winter team, we weren't short of things to do.

One of the highlights so far is the opportunity to spend the night out on the ice shelf with a stunning view of Mt Erebus for Antarctic field training. The important reason for the training is to allow us to do our jobs, to support and enable the world leading science and traverse events taking place over the summer period.

One of my jobs as a communications operator is to keep in regular contact with all the field teams, ensuring they are adequately supported to carry out their job. As part of the Defence Force contingent I was also given the opportunity to assist in the changeover from the winter flag to the summer flag, symbolising the handover of the base from winter crew to summer crew – a tradition that has happened every year since Scott Base was established in 1957.

Although Scott Base is a small crew, there are regular opportunities to interact with our American neighbours over the hill (Covid permitting) whether it be Interbase sport competitions or the annual Icestock festival. Life on ice is pretty amazing, and I cannot wait to gain more experiences as the season continues.

“The weather and daylight hours have been tricky to navigate, and are constantly changing. After only six weeks here, we have seen a couple of serious storms locking us down inside the base, -40°C degree temperatures and having to live with the sun constantly shining.”

**- Leading Aircraftman
Reece Noorwalla**

Aviator chalks up air miles in career



Leading Aircraftman Nikara “Neeks” Ross has visited 10 countries in her short Air Force career and marshalling a massive Australian C-17 military transport plane in the heat of Honiara gives her another reason to love her job.

Working in Air Movements as a logistics specialist, her primary role is to assist in facilitating the movement of people and goods. She recently deployed to Honiara in the Solomon Islands with the New Zealand Defence Force contingent supporting the Pacific Games.

Leading Aircraftman (LAC) Ross, Ngāti (Pāhauwera iwi) joined the Air Force in 2019 after growing up in the small Hawke’s Bay town of Kotemaori. Her childhood dream was always to join the military, and the dream received a boost when she attended a Youth Development Unit (YDU) programme while she was at Wairoa College.

Travel was always a part of the attraction of joining the Air Force, she said.

After joining, thanks to her YDU experience, LAC Ross found basic training to be “unsurprising and fairly straightforward”.

While it was tough at times, she made lifelong friends. They have all gone on to different roles within the Air Force, but she catches up with them regularly and often bumps into them in the course of her work.

She relishes the opportunities that the service provides. So far she has been to 10 countries, and once visited five countries in a week.

As a result of her Air Force service her confidence had grown in leaps and bounds, and she exceeded her own expectations of what she was capable of.

She hoped eventually to train for an aircrew role, as either a steward or loadmaster. She also wants to give back to her community and assist other Māori, perhaps by posting to YDU and then Defence Recruiting.

An integral part of her team, LAC Ross said she was thriving in the challenging environment of her day-to-day routine. She believed everyone had something to teach and that her team achieved their best by “thriving on each other’s strengths and working on each other’s weaknesses”.

Working with the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) at the Pacific Games was a career highlight, especially when she marshalled an arriving RAAF C-17 with RNZAF NH90 helicopters on board.

“Everyone has a different career and I bloody love mine.”

- Leading Aircraftman Nikara Ross

Trading exotic vet clinic for the medical frontline



Aircraftman Nicole Fraser's used to operating outside the norm. A trained veterinary nurse, she's spent the past year working in Aotearoa New Zealand's only exotic vet clinic in Auckland's Mount Albert.

“I specialised in nursing exotic animals. This meant that I dealt with everything weird and wonderful - from syringe feeding giant koi fish, to looking after sick penguins, to monitoring surgery on lizards,” she said.

But now, Aircraftman (AC) Fraser is switching out her four-legged patients for a new career altogether, training to be an Air Force medic.

“I know that I will continue to be challenged, but I'm extremely excited for it,” she said.

The Taranaki-born recruit completed her Air Force training in December and has recently joined the Defence Health School at Burnham Military Camp, where she will complete three years of study in paramedicine, the longest trade course offered in the Defence Force.

“After completing qualifications and working full-time as a vet nurse, I realised that I really wanted to work in an environment that could allow me to

grow and challenge myself more, which has aligned well with the Defence Force, and especially the RNZAF.

“I have a real drive to do something bigger than myself. I want to get stuck in and make a difference,” she said.

When she was little, she loved the idea of joining the Defence Force and “being brave and doing cool activities”.

Now she's able to do just that, while combining it with her love of medicine.

She spent 14 weeks at Base Woodbourne completing basic training, which all new recruits go through.

“I have loved learning an array of new, extremely useful skills. We've been taught things like comprehensive weapons training, navigation, field skills, and radio communications. All of this knowledge is something that you would never learn in civilian life, which is why it's so awesome to experience it,” she said.

It wasn't all smooth sailing though. A stand-out challenge for her was something most people would overlook.

“I was the only left-handed recruit on the course. Although our standard issue rifle is considered ambidextrous, I still struggled with drills and such due to everything being flipped.

“In general, I find that being left-handed on a course that is highly skills-based is hard, as I am always that one recruit who does it backwards, or there simply isn't a left-handed version.”

She hoped this latest step in her career would allow her to continue learning and growing and she recommended a career in the Defence Force to others.

“Be ready to feel tired, stretched mentally, and challenged like never before. It's going to feel hard and like a long time, but once it's over you will be immensely proud of who you've become.”

End of an era

WORDS | REBECCA QUILLIAM
PHOTO | LAC ANDY JENKINS

Doug Reidy joined the Air Force when he was just 17. Now, the 81-year-old reckons it's time to try something different and has retired after influencing and guiding generations of avionics technicians in both his military and civilian career, spanning more than six decades.

In 1961 the Berlin Wall was built, apartheid in South Africa was being condemned by the UN General Assembly and Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin completed the first orbit of Earth by a human.

It was against a backdrop of tumultuous international upheaval that the young Cantabrian from the rural town of Southbridge enlisted in the Air Force as a radar mechanic.

"When I left school I started an electrical apprenticeship in Christchurch. I had to board and I was paying about 70% of my salary on the board, so I talked with my uncle who thought I could find something a bit better than that."

After taking the exam to enlist at the local recruitment office, Mr Reidy said he'd like to join the Navy, but the recruiter suggested a career in the Air Force instead.

"I thought, why not? It provided a uniform, accommodation, medical and dental, which sounded good to me."

After initial training, he, along with a handful of others, travelled by railcar to Base Woodbourne to begin his radar fitter training.

In 1966 the young aviator was posted to No. 41 Squadron, which was stationed at Singapore, maintaining Bristol Freighter aircraft around the South-East Asia region including during the Indonesia-Malaysia Confrontation which saw him earn the General Service Medal 1962 with Borneo Clasp.

"That was really an education. Every morning we would do a supply drop to our Army people in their camps. In the afternoon we would swim in the lake up the road.

"Quite often after finishing the air drops, the Royal Air Force would plan to do a drop in the afternoon – and sometimes their aircraft would break down, so we would do their drop for them."

During this deployment, Mr Reidy's fiancé, who he had met during initial training, travelled to Singapore where the pair married. They adopted three children who were lucky enough to travel with their parents on overseas deployments and to bases around Aotearoa.

On his return home from Singapore, Mr Reidy was posted to Woodbourne, before advancing his training back in Wigram. In 1977 he moved to Ohakea, where he worked on Andovers and DC-3s.

"We did a few interesting trips including trips with the King and Queen of Tonga – we had to remove some seats to install a bed for them.

"One morning they couldn't find the Queen and they couldn't work out what had happened, but she was down at the beach in the water up to her knees collecting paua. Another trip while I was working at No. 42 Squadron was to fly Princess Margaret from Fiji to Vanuatu – that was something different."

After a short stint posted to Wellington, Mr Reidy's avionics expertise saw him seconded to the United States, so in 1981 he and his family packed up and deployed to Baltimore for two years to consolidate his skills.

On his return, Mr Reidy was posted to Base Auckland where he began a long affiliation with the new P-3 Orion fleet. He designed and produced programming sets for the Automatic Test Equipment that supported fault confirmation of P-3 avionics components.

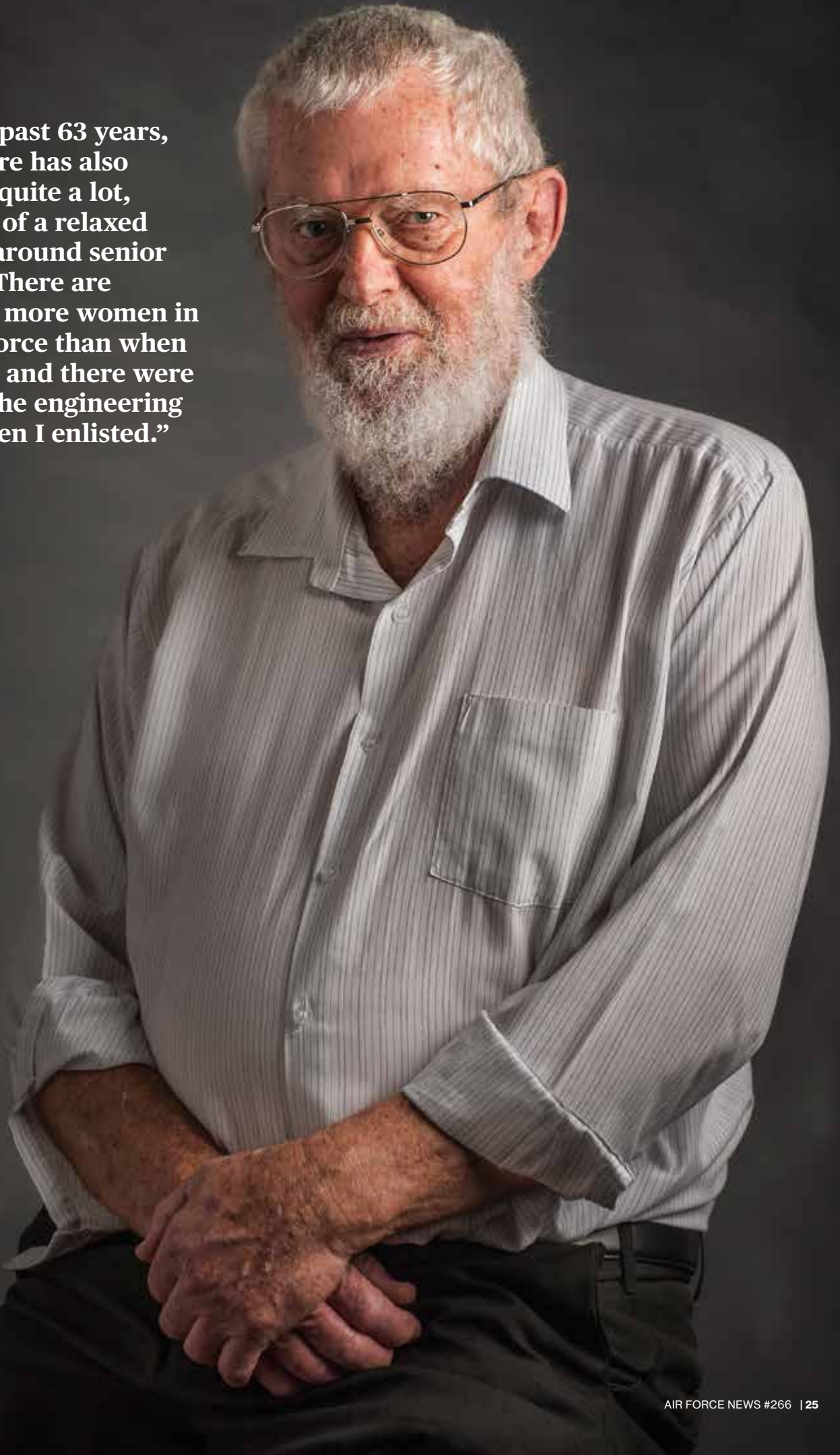
In 1989, after reaching the rank of Warrant Officer, it was suggested the avionics technician might want to swap the workshop for an office. It was a suggestion that didn't sit well with him.

"So I resigned from the Air Force and applied for a civilian role in the avionics workshop. I've seen a lot of changes in software over the years.

Mr Reidy looks back on his career fondly and was especially pleased to have been able to take part in numerous sporting codes over the years.

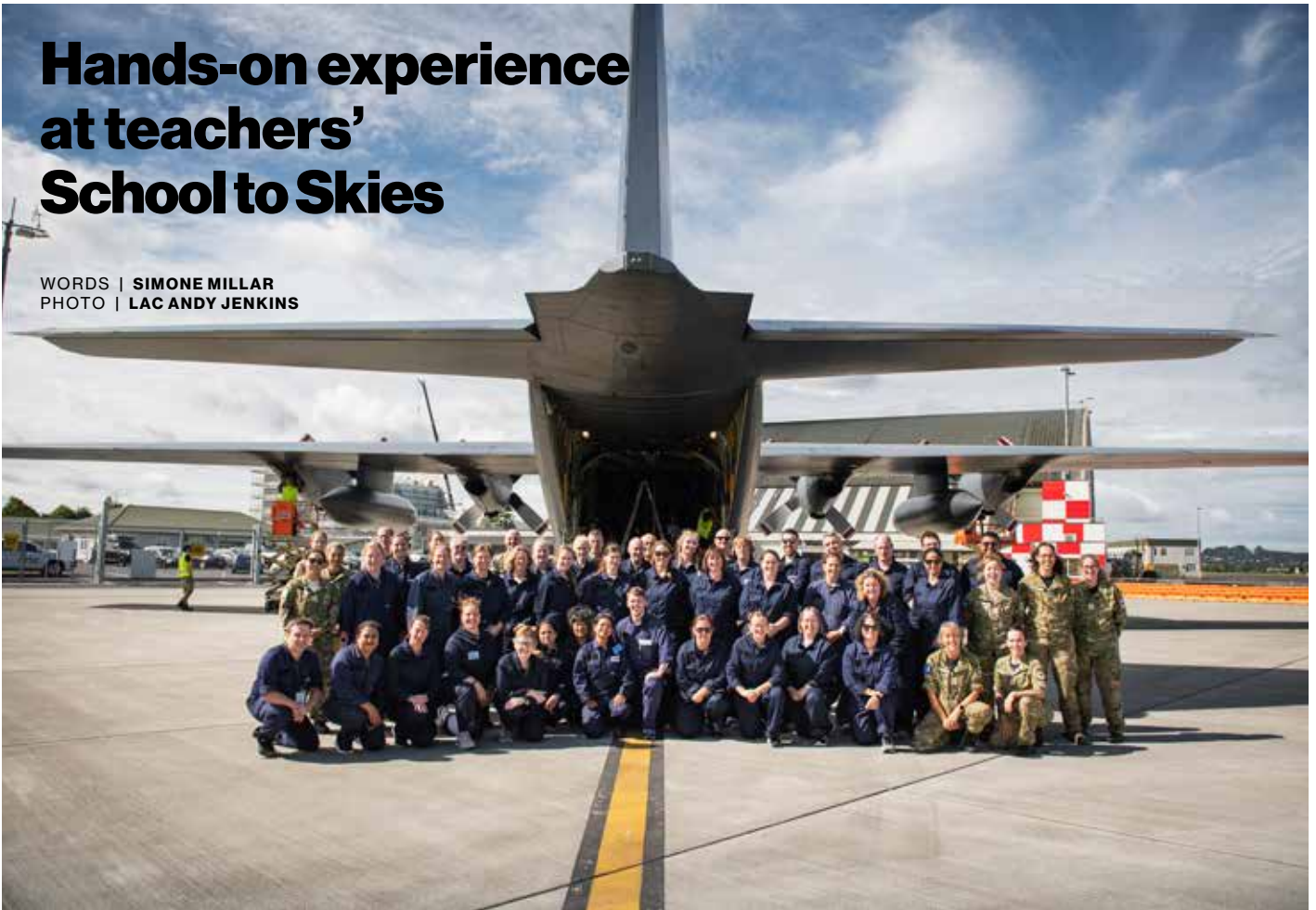
"It builds comradeship with people other than those you work with. And if you are good enough, you can go away and represent your country."

“Over the past 63 years, the culture has also changed quite a lot, it’s more of a relaxed attitude around senior officers. There are certainly more women in the Air Force than when I joined - and there were none in the engineering trade when I enlisted.”



Hands-on experience at teachers' School to Skies

WORDS | SIMONE MILLAR
PHOTO | LAC ANDY JENKINS



The Air Force is supporting teachers to encourage more young people into Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) careers.

Forty teachers from throughout the country attended the teachers' edition of the combined School to Skies and School to Seas Camp, held at Base Auckland and Devonport Naval Base.

The camp aims to empower teachers to arm their students with confidence and curiosity, and inspire a potential career in STEM.

School to Skies programme lead, Squadron Leader (SQNLDR) Matthew Pitts, said the teachers gained hands-on experience in the aviation and maritime industries, and the camp provided them with new educational tools and ideas, as well as introducing them to the inspirational career opportunities available to their students.

"School to Skies forms part of the RNZAF's commitment to the New Zealand Defence Force Wāhine Toa programme.

"The aim is for participants to develop a learning experience which will inspire their students to pursue STEM career pathways and in turn help to increase diversity in RNZAF technical and aviation based roles," SQNLDR Pitts said.

At Base Auckland, the teachers were introduced to military skills, the principles of flight and aviation mission planning. They also boarded a C-130 Hercules for a flight over Auckland with No. 40 Squadron.

Whangārei Boys' High School teacher Tony "Haggis" Henderson said he believed his role as a teacher should include being a learner as well.

"The more knowledge I have, the better I am able to help my kids."

It was vitally important to combine hands-on application with the classroom theory, he said.



“The camp is about how we as teachers can translate lessons from the classroom into real-world use. So instead of teaching bland theory, we do things like find cracks in an aircraft part which could cause injury or death, by looking at Alpha, Beta and Gamma radiation.

“Avionics is really interesting, because you use a combination of electricity, magnetism and programming in order to make a mission happen and keep people alive,” he said.

“The Air Force offers the chance to use knowledge and skills in an interesting, engaging and productive way. I’ve found applications for the use of algebra, the physics of motion, electricity, magnetism, nuclear physics and the behaviour of radio and light waves.”

Liva Ozola teaches Year 7 and 8 students woodwork and STEM subjects at schools around the central North Island.

“You can build a rocket, but as teachers you need to know where the young person can use it, get jobs and identify opportunities. So I’m exploring this and personally I think the camp is amazing,” she said.

“We make wind turbines and rockets at school, but young people don’t really know about the maintenance and engineering side of things. They know about pilots, but you need to have the aircraft serviceable which all comes down to the maintenance and engineering crew.

“In my area, most of my students want to be farmers because that’s what they know, so to bring this knowledge back to them will really broaden their horizons,” she said.

St Joseph’s Kaikōura School teacher Breanna Moller said her school was focussed on increasing the quality of science teaching.

“It’s about looking at how we can incorporate STEM into our maths programme and also providing the students with realistic scenarios to apply those skills.

“On the camp we learnt about things like planning a response to a Search and Rescue mission. It showed how students need to use problem solving and applying maths to a real-life situation.”

The flight over Auckland with No. 40 Squadron on a C-130H Hercules was a particular highlight for Miss Moller and her fellow teachers.

“Oh my gosh, the flight on the Hercules was one of the best things I’ve ever done in my life. We flew with the ramp down over the Hauraki Gulf and I got to sit up in the flight deck with the pilots.”

Swapping sky for the sea

WORDS | REBECCA QUILLIAM
PHOTO | JAMES SOMERSET, EMIRATES TEAM NEW ZEALAND



Aircraft technician Corporal Michael Johnston is taking a year's leave from working on Seasprite helicopters to turn his skills to an Emirates Team New Zealand high performance racing yacht that will be competing in this year's America's Cup.

“My role is within a team that is responsible for the upkeep and day-to-day maintenance and running of the hydraulics system of the team's AC40 race yacht. Everything that moves on the boat is through a hydraulic ram and it's not too alien in terms of aircraft hydraulics. There are different systems, but the physics is all the same.”

After starting the role late last year, Corporal (CPL) Johnston's secondment with Emirates Team New Zealand will finish a couple of weeks after the end of the America's Cup competition, which will be held in Spain.

Working with the prestigious sailing team has been a challenging experience that has been really beneficial, he said.

“It's a hectic but dynamic place to work, with big hours, but it's cool and there's a big team. We're all working towards a goal and we all help each other out.

“Day to day is pretty varied, but when they go sailing I do checks in the morning and then I'll go out on a chase boat behind the yacht while it's sailing, monitoring pressures and temperatures. When they stop I go on board and look to see if anything needs to be fixed.

“And similar once it returns – I work with the rest of the shore team to complete departmental checks and maintain systems. In that way the boat is similar to our aircraft, everything needs to be well looked after,” he said.



At the end of June CPL Johnston will travel with the team to Barcelona for about four months, ahead of the Louis Vuitton Cup and the America's Cup, which start in August and finish in October.

His Air Force career has meant CPL Johnston was able to bring with him transferable skills that suited working on a complex yacht.

"A big thing is just general mechanical skills. I came in and worked straight away with rams, pipes, nuts and bolts. Those skills are bread and butter in the Air Force," he said.

"Also being able to perform thorough inspections and paying attention to details were skills I brought with me.

In terms of maintenance I was able to bring across a fair amount of discipline that I developed in the Air Force. Especially with Emirates Team New Zealand where there is high pressure and low tolerance for mistakes. With the aircraft there is no room for error and it's a similar situation here."

The fast pace of working with Emirates Team New Zealand has also provided CPL Johnston with some valuable skills that he will be able to bring back to No. 6 Squadron, he said.



"It's a really unique job and it's great to work on equipment that's used in the yacht that performs at the pinnacle of the sport."

Pan Asian Network launched

The New Zealand Defence Force's new Pan Asian Network (PAN), has launched at Base Auckland and is a support platform for the Defence Asian community and a connection for Defence Force leaders who want to better support staff and colleagues of Asian ethnicity.

The launch, timed with the start of the Lunar New Year, attracted sailors, soldiers, aviators and civilians for a meet-and-greet and morning tea, with speakers sharing personal journeys and senior leaders voicing their support.

The network's creator and lead, Squadron Leader (SQNLDR) Nash Alur, shared his passion for creating a safe space for Pan Asian personnel and civilians. He was inspired by his own journey of fitting into New Zealand as an Asian and joining the Defence Force.

"As much of a New Zealander as I feel, there are differences," he says. "We come from completely different cultures and upbringings and I needed support around me to make the most of those differences."

When SQNLDR Alur joined the Air Force, there were times when he wanted someone to talk to about the subtle things that only another Asian might understand.

"But there were very few of us around to begin with and I also did not feel comfortable to have those conversations, preferring to just try and fit in as best as I could. So I carried on and thought I would figure it out on my own.

"Years later I asked myself: if I as a leader found this a challenge, how would a soldier, aviator, sailor or a civilian feel they could have those conversations or bring their whole identity to work? That was what got me thinking about forming this initiative. I talked to others and realised there was a need."

It was not about people expressing concerns to him, but they were appreciative and grateful that such a network now exists, he said.

"It's about being proactive and having a representative voice to ensure Asian members within the Defence Force can have the best lived experience. This in turn should benefit the Defence Force through retention, recruitment and community awareness."

This network could develop in many directions, but it had to start with honest conversation, SQNLDR Alur said.

"This is a safe community for Asians to have that conversation."

Base Commander Auckland, Group Captain Mike Cannon, gave his support at the event, highlighting the power of networks like PAN to unite individuals.

Director of Diversity and Inclusion Nina Russell emphasised the importance of employee-led networks in enriching positive employee experiences.

In a video message, Mervin Singham, the Chief Executive of the Ministry of Ethnic Communities, conveyed his congratulations to SQNLDR Alur on his leadership and to the Defence Force on the launch of the network.

He spoke of his personal insights and experiences of the importance of employee networks such as this.

"Diversity of any workforce is just a fact – but making diverse employees feel genuinely included, that's a choice every organisation has to make," he said.

Another supporter, Vai Kavthekar from the Pan Asian Public Service Network's senior advisory committee, explained the support available for Asian members in the wider public service sector and congratulated the NZDF on forming their own chapter, suited to the Defence Force's unique environment.

SQNLDR Alur is supported by Lieutenant Commander Prasad Chavan and Staff Sergeant Lanka Ge as the Royal New Zealand Navy and NZ Army representatives.

A wider group of volunteers, mostly Base Auckland-based, have also been instrumental in getting the network up. However, SQNLDR Alur said by the end of this year they want to have a formal committee and representation across the camps and bases, with future on-line and off-line events, and plenty of celebration around cultural events.





Kiwi veterans eligible for British Nuclear Test Medal

New Zealand veterans involved in UK atmospheric nuclear testing in the fifties and sixties can now apply for the British Nuclear Test Medal.

The British Nuclear Test Medal was announced by the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom in November 2022, 70 years after the first British test of a nuclear weapon. It recognises military, civilian, and overseas staff and personnel who participated in Britain's nuclear testing programme in the 1950s and 1960s.

The Medal is awarded to UK and Commonwealth service and civilian personnel who served at the locations where the UK atmospheric nuclear tests were conducted, including the preparatory and clear-up phases, between 1952 and 1967.

It includes Operation Hurricane (Christmas Island); Operation Totem (Emu Field, Australia); Operation Mosaic (Montebello Islands, Australia); Operation Buffalo (Maralinga Island, Australia); Operation Grapple (Malden Island, Christmas Island, Kiribati) and Operation Antler (South Australia, Western Australia).

Full eligibility criteria for the Nuclear Test Medal can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nuclear-test-medal-eligibility-criteria>

Applications are now open for eligible veterans, civilians and their next of kin. For more information go to: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/applying-for-medals>

For any questions, please email the British High Commission at Defence.Wellington@fcdo.gov.uk.

For New Zealand veterans, the order of wear is immediately after the NZ Defence Service Medal.

R2/84 RECRUIT COURSE 40TH REUNION

When: 26-28 April 2024

Where: Mt Maunganui

What: Meet and greet Friday with activities and dinner on Saturday night. Brunch on Sunday then farewells.

For more details visit our FB page, R2/84 Airforce Reunion or contact Craig Downes, 021754127 or craig.downes@airbus.com

Notices



Tohu Awards 2024

Nominations Open Tohu Awards

An event in support of part-time personnel and the organisations who support them.



CATEGORIES

Reservist of the Year

Reserve Employer of the Year
(Small and Large Employer Categories)

New Zealand Cadet Force Officer
Employer of the Year

Limited Service Volunteers (LSV)
Employer Recognition Award

Outstanding Contribution to the
Limited Service Volunteers (LSV)
Programme

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SUBMIT NOMINATIONS:
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CLOSING DATES:
Reservist of the Year: 19 August 2024
All other Categories: 17 May 2024

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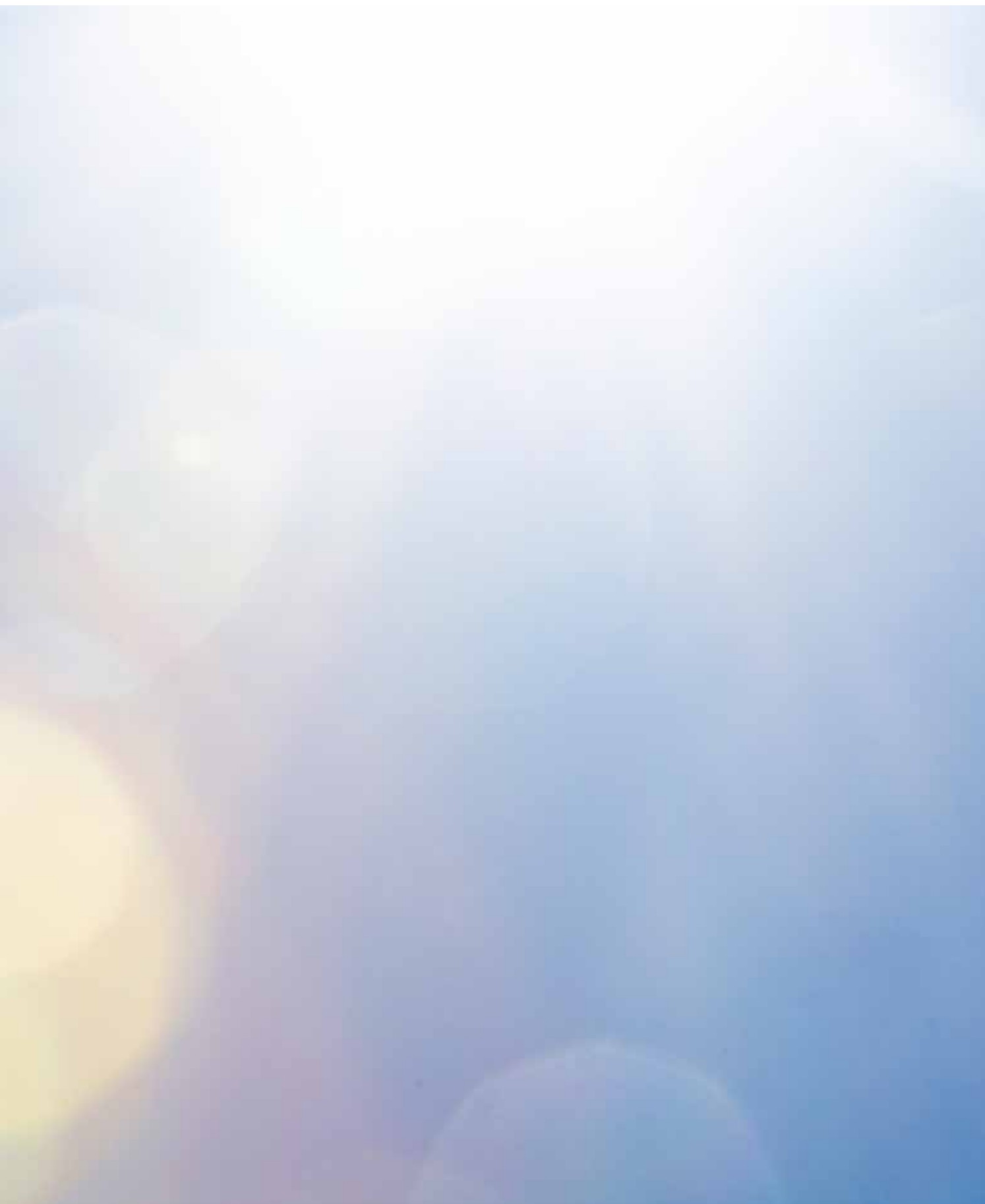
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It's not often now that I'm surprised by a photo, but every so often a little bit of magic sneaks up on you.

My personal challenge during the Black Falcons' 23-24 season was to create images that were artistically challenging and brought a fresh perspective to the job. This meant that I failed a lot; I was taking risks with new techniques and strange equipment, which was nerve-racking when there's such a big audience watching. It was scary not knowing at the end of a display if I had anything deliverable to the team.

But on one of my final trips with the Falcons, strapped to a boat in the harbour and shooting directly up into the sun, light and colour flared in a way that has sealed this as one of my favourite photos of my career to date, and made all those risks worth taking!





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