

Exercise Evaluation Report

Operation Symes

Location: Tauranga - Katikati

Date: 18th and 19th of May 2019

Report version: Final

Evaluator(s): *Sunny Peeters, Regional Manager, Coastguard Eastern Region.*

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Executive Summary

Operation SYMES was held at the Tauranga Police Station on the 19th of May 2019. It was a land SAR based exercise simulating a downed light aircraft in the area of bush between Katikati and Tauranga at the base of the Kaimai ranges.

The organisers also invited Waihi Land SAR personnel who lived in the area and AREC for support to boost radio communication capability.

The objectives were designed to test various aspects of the operations including IMT, communication, field skills and some follow up administration of data obtained in the field.

There is strong evidence that the team is strategic in their approach to improvement taking into consideration past learnings to help form their objectives. This demonstrates maturity and professionalism and the results will speak for themselves.

There are good opportunities to learn from this exercise and the short list of recommendations will only add to the strengths that were displayed.

1. Recommendations

- Consider how the ops room could be made larger.
- Erect a primary IAP board in addition to the whiteboards that are already present
- Obtain Vests that are colour coded and labelled in line with the CIMS model
- Drill deeper into the separate roles of the IMT

2. Introduction

The Tauranga Land Search and Rescue SAREX 2019 was run on May the 18th from the Police Station in Tauranga.

The scope of the exercises was focused around learnings that came out of the SAREX in 2018. Management had also recognised a number of areas that they wanted to improve in and areas that needed to be tests to gauge improvement from previous years.

The group of volunteers possess a wide range of relevant skills which is complemented by the depth of experienced Police staff at leadership level.

The exercise required an overnight stay in the bush by the search teams and the use of AREC resources to address communications skills.

3. Background

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3.1 Background to the Exercise

In 2018, Op MOTUTAPERÉ, an exercise, was conducted in which recommendations were made for this SAR team to consider. Some of those recommendations have been used to form some of the objectives of Op SYMES. These recommendations included a focus on Health and Safety, Use of an IPA and other points.

3.2 Dates, location, organising agency(s), key people

The exercise was organised by Police and run from the Tauranga Police Station SAR OP's room.

Craig Madden- OC- TGA Police SAR

Kurt Waugh- TGA Police SAR- Exercise Planner

Andy McCathy- TGA Police SAR

Justin Rishton TGA Police SAR

Jenny Wright TGA Police SAR

Tina Zabern Whakatane Police SAR

Russell Owen Whakatane Police SAR

Tauranga Land SAR Volunteers

Waihi Land SAR Volunteers

AREC volunteers

3.3 Participating organisations

Tauranga Police

Whakatane Police

Tauranga Land SAR

Waihi Land SAR

AREC

3.4 Exercise aim

To test the existing Police and Land SAR procedures and the systems for dealing with such an event and gain learning from the exercise to improve future operations.

3.5 Exercise objectives

1) Assess the effectiveness of the IMT Planning and Intel working in a separate room at the Tauranga Police Station.

2) IMT to create and task smart tasking's in an efficient time frame

3) Ensure that all OSH safety briefs, hazard ID and extraction plans are discussed with Field teams and IMT and appropriate paperwork completed

- 4) Extract patient using stretcher and steep terrain techniques to place of extraction
 - 4a) Navigate and conduct search techniques in difficult terrain and vegetation
 - 4b) Deploy a repeater into the search area by way of ground
- 5) All team members to use their GPS tracks on function while on task and download on return to station base.

3.6 Exercise Scenario

At 1500Hrs on Friday the 17th of May a single seat light aircraft has taken off from Thames Aerodrome with the pilot's intention to fly to Tauranga.

The pilot did not file a flight plan with Airways New Zealand but advised his partner that he was flying to Tauranga where his aircraft would be getting some maintenance completed

At about 1525Hrs as the aircraft was about to enter the Tauranga Airspace Control Zone the pilot has put out a mayday call stating he had engine failure.

The pilot stated that he was crossing the Kaimai's west of Katikati and was heading South East and attempting to clear the bush and land on farmland.

There is no further communication from the pilot.

At 1530Hrs a Hunter on a track North of Wahine Rock has called Police stating he saw an aircraft fly over him low with the engine cutting out, He stated it was descending in the direction of Katikati

He lost sight of the aircraft due to the bush canopy but called Police as he believed it was going to crash.

RCCNZ were advised and co-ordinated an aerial search of the area using the Tauranga TECT rescue helicopter however as at 0700Hrs on Saturday the 18th of May nothing has been located.

RCCNZ have requested Tauranga Police to be the on scene co-ordinator for a ground search of the area on Saturday the 18th of May.

4. Evaluation Methodology

4.1 The agreed outcomes of the evaluation activity

To implement recommendations of a previous evaluation

To exercise the CIMS platform and highlight opportunities for improvement

Explore strengths and weaknesses of space and separation of IMT elements within the Police Station

To assess the value of AREC in overcoming past technical radio communication issues

To test the skills on field teams specifically: navigation, stretcher carry and information downloading on completion of the exercise

4.2 Evaluation scope

The evaluation was limited to the basic functions of the IMT, core field skills, technical communications support and key administrative requirements around the use of GPS as outlined above.

4.3 Aspects of the exercise observed, what was not observed

During the exercise observations were made of the IMT throughout the entire operation. The evaluator was able to visit the repeater site where AREC assets were deployed in order to assess the effectiveness of repeaters. This was based on past experience where communications issues had been experienced.

The navigation and stretcher carry was observed by an assistant in the field with advanced training, practical and technical skills in land based SAR, Nick Hume.

4.4 The process followed in preparing and submitting the report

Initial consultation with key planners and the hosting agency, Tauranga Police, regarding desired outcomes and appropriate scenarios

This was then followed up with documents and agreed Objectives and KPI's

The exercise was then carried out with close observations being made by the evaluator specific to the agreed objectives

Interviews with appropriate participants to gauge relevant knowledge, skill and confidence.

Attending the debrief and collecting field reports and other information

Drafting the report

Consultation over findings

Final report completed and submitted

4.5 Other information

The evaluator was not able to observe the stretcher carry or the navigation phase of the exercise. The assistance of a trainer and qualified evaluator was called on to ensure the integrity of the information and feedback.

AREC assets were deployed prior to the event but the evaluator was able to visit the site and observe the intended benefit.

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5. Findings

1) Assess the effectiveness of the IMT Planning and Intel working in a separate room at the Tauranga Police Station.

The Tauranga Police station has an operations room that is purpose built to deal with SAR and other special operations as and when they might come up. While the room serves as a good base in the initial stages of establishing an IMT for a SAR job, the room is very small and is not suitable for the purpose of running an operation with a full IMT.

In the early stages of the exercise the IMT was set up in two different rooms resulting in the Intel and Planning elements working from a conference room located about 20meters away from the operations room where Logistics, Operations, Incident controller and Communications were located.

There were technical issues experienced in establishing strong communication and transfer of information between the two rooms and therefore short circuits were created where information coming into the operations rooms went directly to Operations and Logistics, leaving Intel and Planning out of the loop.

This was not conducive to providing strong support for the Incident Controller who quickly noticed the issue and opted to move the team into one room regardless of the space shortage.

2) IMT to create and task smart tasking's in an efficient time frame

The IMT got to work effectively from the very beginning of the task. The CIMS platform was used and the roles assigned accordingly. However it was difficult to see who was in each role as the vests that were used were all the same colour with the title printed on the back. The team were very well known to each other so there was no noticeable confusion generated by this.

Regardless of the separation issues mentioned above, the initial taskings were generated, documented and ready to be communicated with a high degree of efficiency and professionalism. The tasking sheets are well thought out and clearly worded. They are produced out of an electronic printer so they were legible and tidy. Once the team found their rhythm these sheets were put through the proper process and signed by the IC prior to being communicated to the field teams.

All documents were numbered and kept in an orderly manner during the exercise. Near the end they were checked thoroughly and compiled methodically in a large ring binder.

The IMT created the IAP and documented this on an A3 sheet of paper. This was taped to a whiteboard and referred to regularly at meetings held every hour to 90 minutes. There could be benefits achieved if an IAP template was permanently marked on an additional whiteboard in the Ops room. This would make it easier for everyone to read it from anywhere in the room. Moving close enough to the A3 sheet was restricted due to the size of the room. This also reduced the available working space on the whiteboards for additional roles like logistics that could have provided the IC with better visibility of the assets that were needed and available. It would also assist greatly in providing briefs for commanding officers and relieving shifts etc.

3) Ensure that all Health and Safety briefs, hazard ID and extraction plans are discussed with Field teams and IMT and appropriate paperwork completed.

The IMT were well aware of their responsibilities around Health and Safety. During the early stages of forming the planning team, creating the plan and briefings this featured highly and

all appropriate hazards were identified and correct equipment was available to ensure the safety of the teams.

4) Extract patient using stretcher and steep terrain techniques to place of extraction

The patient was in an area that was difficult to access and on a slope of around 30 degrees, the route out required lowering down a slope of approximately 50m into a river before transporting the patient through thick bush to an extraction point.

The teams worked well on site to establish any injuries the patient had then the equipment that would be needed to undertake a safe extraction.

Team members were tasked to recce the area and find the safest and easiest route out to an extraction point while the patient was being packed into the stretcher.

The teams did well finding the best route then clearing any obstacles in the way prior to transporting the patient.

Good stretcher rope management techniques were used to maintain safe control on the stretcher at all times while moving over difficult terrain, including steep vegetation and rocky river beds.



The patient felt comfortable and safe throughout the exercise.

The stretcher carry took approximately 1 hour and covered around 150m of difficult terrain.

The only areas for improvement noted during this was that more communications to the patient throughout the extraction could make them feel more at ease and the use of a helmet for added safety. It should be noted that efforts were made to protect the head wrapping it with clothing.

4a) Navigate and conduct search techniques in difficult terrain and vegetation

Around half the tasking that were given to teams were conducting search techniques, mostly sound, in difficult off track terrain. The teams handled these well and the lost party was located due to these techniques being deployed well.

One of the teams was observed taking rescue equipment into the lost party location and good use of GPS navigation and route selection while traveling off track and in difficult terrain was witnessed. The skill and capability of the team members was impressive, they had good team communication to make sure everyone was comfortable with where they were going.

4b) Deploy a repeater into the search area by way of ground

Two portable repeaters were deployed during the operation both were used at different times and good communications were maintained between field teams and IMT during both the search phase and the following rescue phase of the exercise.

The repeaters deployed in the field were approximately 30km from Tauranga Police station and allowed good communications between field teams and IMT without the need for a forward base.

5) All team members to use their GPS tracks on function while on task and download on return to station base.

Generally one primary unit and one back up unit is issued to each team. These were activated by the team members at the assembly point and prior to deployment into the bush with their assigned taskings. The radios used also have a tracking function that is automatically demonstrated in the Ops room each time the radio transmits if the signal allows.

This helped the IMT view almost real time progress as the teams moved into position and progressed to taskings.

At the conclusion of the exercise the GPS units were all returned to the base in a “quarter master” style signing in, labeling and put aside for downloading data.

This was one of the KPIs that were tested. It is clear that since the last exercise the team have focused on this procedure and have produced a result to a high standard.

On downloading of the information contained in the GPS unit a clearer picture can be developed of the area that was covered by the team as they moved through the bush in their search patterns and not in single file. This is then held on file for future review if needed.

6. Conclusions

Overall the exercise was a success. The management of the IMT presented a good learning opportunity for all those involved but also demonstrated the talent possessed by the group. The IC demonstrated confidence and was eager to take on guidance from senior persons who were on hand if needed. This technique allowed the exercise to continue to run smoothly, put the IC in a realistic environment and provided an environment where learning and success could be achieved.

The issues around the segmentation of the IMT demonstrates the importance of having the team located together. The current operations room is too small. While the CIMS model is modular and scalable, it was evident that even a medium operation would render the room no longer fit for purpose, particularly over a period of time where a hand over would be required. Breaking out into the general office area provided slight relief but this may not have been an option during a normal working day. All reasonable options to include a larger percentage of the immediate area into the ops room should be considered.

In the meantime the implementation of a whiteboard permanently marked out to contain the required information of an IAP would be cheap and effective and should be considered a mandatory permanent fixture in the Ops room.

The current use of orange and green vests to differentiate between field elements and headquarters elements is a good idea. However, under the circumstances there is little likelihood that from what the evaluator observed this would deliver any great benefit. The acquisition of CIMS vests that can be worn by the lead member of each role of the IMT should be adopted at the earliest opportunity.

In this exercise the aim was to target the recommendations of the previous exercise held in 2018. This approach should be applauded as it now yields an increased benefit from 2018 and has sharpened the performance of the team in 2019. The next step to be considered is to dig deeper into each role and further consolidate the learnings. For example, the logistics role could benefit from running accounts and ensuring expenditure has been signed off etc. This is just one of the functions of just one of the roles. This would add to the activity of the Logistics leader and also to the IC. It would also add realism where all leads are feeding back to the IC for various approvals and sign offs etc.

It is clear that the team and leadership take great pride in the work they do and strive to ensure they are as ready as possible to produce good results.

A very satisfying event to be involved with.

7. Appendix

Example of tasking sheet front page.

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SEARCH & RESCUE
LAND SAR
LandSAR Team Tasking & Safety Assessment Form Version 2.0 1 of 2

This form is for use whenever written task assignments are prepared at LandSAR events (eg, SAROPs and SAREXs). Incident managers (IMTs) should complete page 1 and task leaders should then complete page 2, with input from their teams.

Operation name:	EX180519	Today's date/time:	18 May 05:15
Prepared by:	Karl Ruby	Task ID:	020
Team Leader/Person in Control of Task:	Paul Ranke (5604)	Team name:	Tauranga Five
		Team type:	Sound

Team members
Jenna Pictor Robin Douglas

Map

Tasking assignment:
Tasking for 19/05/19 proceed to E1849248 N5837905, push east along ridge, sound & sight search to uretara stream junction E1851382 N5837619

Current and Expected Environmental Conditions:
Fire

Hazards and Risk Controls—List which LandSAR Safety Guides apply to this task and list any other hazards and controls, applicable to this task, that have been noted at a management level.
On Road Driving, Off Road Driving, Off-Track Operations, River Crossing and Water,

Communications (Ref: Comms Plan for additional information)

ICP Phase:	VHF Rptr(s):	VHF Simplex:	Ground to Air:
HF Channel:	Day	Night	Police 7
Times:			

Additional information including transport and decision points:

Tasked by: *Judith Lisa* Approved by: *[Signature]* Date/Time: *18/05/19 05:15*

Providing search and rescue support for the lost, missing and injured.

GPS Logs

