

## AUSTRALIAN OPERATION RENDERS SAFE AMMUNITION

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Canada and Australia share an impressive military history. Both countries fought together during the Great Wars of the 20th century and several UN missions. On November 5, 2013 both countries extended their outstanding military history when ten Canadian Armed Forces members joined Operation RENDER SAFE, a bi-annual Australian Defence Force-led operation to dispose of explosive remnants of war in the south pacific.

Op RENDER SAFE 13 took place in the Solomon Islands, a country that saw heavy air bombardment and naval gunfire during the Second World War. As a result, unexploded ordnance (UXO) – ammunition that has been fired but failed to explode – can still be found on many of the islands, posing a potential safety hazard to the area.

CAF operators were divided into two teams: four clearance divers from the Royal Canadian Navy operated near the Russell Islands with an underwater Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) team, while two combat engineers from the Canadian Army and two specialists from the Royal Canadian Air Force joined a land EOD team, which focused on the tropical island of Guadalcanal.

“The operators selected were all very experienced and skilled specialists who brought a large breadth of knowledge to the mission,” said Task Force Solomon Islands Commander, Captain John Natynczyk. During the Second World War, Guadalcanal saw heavy fighting between the US and Japan, while the Russell Islands were primarily used as a support and ammunition base by the US Forces. Following the war, the ammunition bases were abandoned and munitions were disposed at sea. Both the heavy fighting and disposal has made explosive hazards a risk to local populations today.

“The most rewarding experience has been helping the people of the Solomon Islands,” said Capt Natynczyk. “Our EOD operators cleared approximately 1,200 pieces of ordnance from one family’s farm. The family was extremely relieved that specialists were there to rid their land of these explosive hazards.”

The process for clearing ordnance varies greatly based on type, fuze, state, orientation and condition. While some ordnance may be safe to pick up and move manually, others may be deemed too unstable and need to be blown in place. In this case, precautions are taken to minimize damage to the surrounding area.

“The pieces of ordnance that were encountered on this operation have been deteriorating under the elements for over 70 years,” said Capt Natynczyk. “This creates a more challenging task for our operators, then when dealing with brand new ordnance.” The demanding environment gave CAF personnel the opportunity to test and develop their munitions disposal skills in a scenario that is not easily replicated at home. Each EOD operator learned a lot said Capt Natynczyk. “As well, we found that our EOD operators are on par with those of our allies,” he added. “Backed by a strong technical background and enforced with flexible problem-solving skills our EOD operators cleared some of the most challenging pieces of ordnance of the mission.” This is the first time CAF members participate in Op RENDER SAFE. They worked alongside more than 200 personnel from the ADF, New Zealand Defence Force, US Navy and the Royal Solomon Island Police Force. “The Australian forces have been great hosts to our contingent and we look forward to conducting any future operations with them,” said Capt Natynczyk. “It’s always great to work with other nations’ armed forces and learn from one another.”

In total Op RENDER SAFE 13 was successful in clearing 12,164 pieces of ordnance, and the Canadian Task Force was responsible for the disposal of more than 2,800 items.



Royal Canadian Navy Clearance Diver, MS Shawn West (centre) calculates demolition charges required to clear unexploded ordnance in Russell Islands during Op RENDER SAFE 2013 in Solomon Islands.