

Exercise Desert Rat a dry run for bomb disposal

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The cry of "firing, firing, firing" rings out through the damp air of the Albert Head training area as a team of explosives ordnance disposal (EOD) operators take cover beside their Bison armoured personnel carrier.

Moments later a loud bang echoes through the trees and a simulated improvised explosive device (IED) lies destroyed.

"The concept behind Exercise Desert Rat is to prepare army personnel and clearance divers for deployment to Afghanistan," said Lt(N) Clay Cochrane, Operations Officer of Fleet Diving Unit (Pacific). "They will be performing a variety of duties; specifically, they'll

be conducting EOD work, as well as IED disposal."

The exercise, held May 27 to June 2, brought together navy clearance divers from Fleet Diving Units Pacific and Atlantic, army EOD/IED disposal operators from 1 and 2 Combat Engineer Regiments, and air force EOD disposal personnel from 19 Wing Comox.

The operators used a wide variety of specialized equipment, from remotely operated robots to mine clearance suit 4, for destroying simulated explosive devices.

"We're training to practise our skills as IED operators," said one army engineer. "They're starting to deploy the clearance divers and air force personnel to

Afghanistan, just because the number of tours coming up is starting to tax the [army] engineers. We're trying to gather all the elements in one place so we can start training as a team."

The EOD and IED disposal scenarios were all based on real life situations from Afghanistan and Iraq.

As they dealt with the IEDs, the teams were also challenged to deal with actors playing police or locals in the area.

"They're learning real world lessons and they learn them here so they can apply them in Afghanistan," said Lt(N) Cochrane. "We mean to do real-time, operational training to defeat the improvised explosive device and we're doing it well."



LEFT: An army explosive ordnance disposal operator wearing the Mine Clearance Suit 4 works to dispose of a simulated improvised explosive device during Exercise Desert Rat.

ABOVE: A remote manipulator investigator approaches a car to inspect a simulated improvised explosive device.

Sgt Donald Clark, DND