

Dept. of Military Affairs: Tamiok Strike strengthens bonds between Wisconsin Guard, Papua New Guinea

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Capt. Michael Cuevas, commander of the Wisconsin Army National Guard's Troop C, 1st Squadron, 105th Cavalry Regiment, reflected on the historic nature of his unit's participation in Tamiok Strike 2023 — a two-week joint military exercise in Papua New Guinea.

"Tamiok Strike was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the Troopers of the 105th Cavalry," Cuevas said. "I'm proud to say the exercise was the first time a Wisconsin Army National Guard and 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team company has been on the ground in Papua New Guinea since World War II, which is incredible given the lineage of Charlie Troop serving in the Papua Campaign."

One hundred and six years ago, what is today's 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team began as the 32nd Division, formed from the Wisconsin National Guard and part of the Michigan National Guard to fight in World War I. In World War II, the division fought in the South Pacific, beginning with the bloody Buna Campaign on the northern coast of Papua New Guinea. The 105th Cavalry has been part of the 32nd since its division days.

But this was more than a trip down memory lane — the Wisconsin National Guard and Papua New Guinea are engaged in the State Partnership Program, which builds a cooperative and mutually beneficial relationship between the partners' military, security and disaster response organizations.

Last year, several Soldiers from the 32nd Brigade observed Tamiok Strike — a bilateral training exercise to improve the integrated capabilities, readiness and

response by the Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF) and U.S. forces to existing and potential incidents in the Indo-Pacific region — to prepare for this year's exercise.

This year, 105th Cavalry members worked with infantry soldiers from the 1st and 2nd Royal Pacific Infantry Regiments in two locations on tasks including infantry maneuvers, urban operations, stability operations, medical training, and noncommissioned officer professional development.

“The sheer amount of time and effort spent planning and preparing for an exercise on the other side of the world is amazing, but worth it,” Cuevas said. “We had multiple planning conferences, weekly sync calls, countless emails and phone calls. The exercise had nearly 200 Soldiers from 10 different active Army units participating in three different locations.”

The U.S. Army shared basic security operations and medical training experience with the PNGDF, and the PNGDF shared its expertise in jungle operations. The U.S. Army and PNGDF also collaborated on engineering projects during this year's exercise.

“The Papua New Guinea Defence Force was extremely motivated and willing to learn from our Soldiers in our training tasks, just as our Soldiers took part in jungle operations and survival training provided by the PNGDF,” Cuevas said. “The PNGDF proved to be extremely hospitable and welcoming to the Wisconsin Army National Guard, and their soldiers really spent the time to get to know ours professionally and personally. When the training was over, it was common to see [service members from] both countries hanging out, playing cards or dart games, and exchanging cultural history and knowledge.”

As part of the exercise, combat medics from the 105th Cavalry — as well as the 728th Military Police Battalion based at Schofield Barracks in Hawaii — worked with soldiers from the PNGDF's 2nd Battalion, Royal Pacific Infantry Regiment to demonstrate different care strategies for wounded troops. The immersive experience focused on treating chest wounds and other simulated battlefield injuries by applying bandages and tourniquets.

Immediately following Tamiok Strike, 105th Cavalry Soldiers trained PNGDF companies assigned to conduct stability operations in the mountainous highlands and remote islands, and to conduct border security tasks.

“[The] PNGDF had just been issued brand new protective gear and armor from the U.S. government, and our Soldiers helped fit and teach their soldiers how to properly wear the equipment,” Cuevas said. “It was a great opportunity to work together.”