**RNZSIGS Corps Speech**

**House and Grounds**

The corps badge features Mercury (Hermes), the messenger god. For over 75 years this figure has been known as “Jimmy”. Why? Who knows. According to one explanation, the badge is referred to as "Jimmy" because the image of Mercury was based on the late mediaeval bronze statue by the Italian sculptor [Giambologna](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giambologna), and shortening his name over time reduced it to "Jimmy". The most widely accepted origin is a Royal Signals boxer, Jimmy Emblen, who was the British Army Champion in 1924 and represented the Royal Corps of Signals from 1921 to 1924.

Jimmy wears a patasus (travelling hat) with a broad brim and two small wings. He carries a caduceus (staff) which signifies his office of herald, as delegated by Apollo. He stands upon the globe, wearing winged sandals, which carried him at great speed across land and sea. The Sigs badge includes the corps motto, certa cito, which means swift and sure.

The RNZSIGS corps patron is the Archangel Gabriel, chosen by vote in the 60s by the Army Chaplain’s department. Pope Benedict XV declared Gabriel the patron of post office, telephone and telegraphy workers in 1921, which makes him a pretty logical choice. Gabriel’s feast day, 24 March, is thus the RNZSIGS corps day. Of note, RNZSIGS is the only commonwealth signal corps to have a patron.

**Corps colours:** land, sea and sky

**Colonel in Chief:** HRH Princess Anne

**Signalling through the ages**

Military signalling has existed since the dawn of warfare. Commanders have always needed a way to communicate their instructions to large, sometimes distributed groups of soldiers with weather, distance and noise constant companions.

The bible mentions horned trumpets and smoke. Sun Tzu details the use of drums, gongs, banners, fires and flags. Cyrus the Great, Alexander the Great and the Roman’s all used horse mounted signal dispatch riders supported by staging posts with food and fresh horses to carry messages long distances quickly. Torches at night and smoke by day: communications never stopped. As the years passed by, the need for commanders to communicate remained, and the means didn’t vary much, but as technology changed, the means and effectiveness of communications were affected. The 15th and 16th centuries saw the advent of gunpowder. The noise of cannon made vocal commands more difficult and the smoke made visual signalling difficult. Drummers beat the charge and regulated the pace of advancing infantry, trumpeters commanded squadrons of cavalry, but overall communication between a general and his commanders was limited, slow and hazardous. In 1815, at the battle of Waterloo, the only signals given were by officers waving their hats. Wellington had to send his orders verbally or in writing by mounted aide-de-camp who at best took a long time to pass these on, and at worst would be unhorsed, wounded, killed or lost.

Revolutionary France saw realised a major advancement in visual communication with the radiated telegraph machine. This was a mechanical semaphore system placed on roads with hilltop relay stations 5-10km apart and enabled plain and cipher communications to reach their destination 90 times faster than the time taken by mounted courier. Napoleon saw the obvious benefits and erected telegraph stations in all his conquered territories, using them for the summoning of reinforcements, relaying his logistics requirements and news of his victories.

Then, in 1837, optical telegraphy received a challenge that would eventually replace it when American Samuel B Morse invented electric telegraphy. He invented a code of dots and dashes that we now know as morse code. It required stations and branch lines but was speedier and more certain than optical signalling and could carry messages over vast distances. It was first used  for military purposes by the British in the Crimean War in 1854 with a 340 mile long submarine cable connecting London and Paris with the battlefield. It was then used extensively during the American civil war, and only increased in use henceforth.

The Māori also established their own means of communication in Aotearoa New Zealand. The he kotaha (sling) was used with darts that had either fire bundles or feathers. Shot into the air they signalled advance to the left or right or withdrawal. They also used the tewha tewha (axe-like-weapon) to indicate a change of direction and taiaha were used to signal over distance. Māori could also communicate over long distances: a pahu (large wooden gong) was located in the one tree hill area and its signal was reputed to have audible over much of Auckland. They also used the pukaea (a form of alpine horn). Fire and smoke were used. Cow horns came into use when the pakeha arrived. Another iconic form of communication was the putara (conch) used by iwi to issue a challenge out to a potential enemy. If the challenge was answered, then war would ensue. Abel Tasman unwittingly accepted the call of battle when he first heard the challenge by ordering his sailors to trumpet a reply. You can see two forms of traditional Māori communications here in use by he toa purongorongo - the signaller, features prominently at 2 Sig Sqn.

With the large-scale arrival of the English came the military and military communications. Drum and bugle were commonplace. The British also routinely used flags, despatch riders, and vessels to relay orders. The Māori watched and learned and adapted, later effectively using flags to signal troop movement, and cow horns to mimic British bugle calls, which created great confusion and could keep British soldiers awake day and night through copying the alert signal. SGT William Marjouram, Royal Artillery, created a simple but effective semaphore communication network in Taranaki using a ball system that could warn of Māori warrior movements and enabled the British commanders to effectively organise their limited troop resources. The arrival of LTGEN Sir Duncan Cameron in 1861 saw the introduction of more modern communications. Cameron brought with him lessons learnt in the Crimean War and from his readings of accounts of the American Civil War and his influence saw New Zealand become one of the first countries to use the electric telegraph as a major line of communications tool in war. With LTGEN Cameron also came two Royal Engineer telegraphists: CPL Alexander Brodie and 2nd Corporal William Butcher. Brodie is considered the founding father of New Zealand military signals: at just 21 years of age he oversaw the erection of the North Island’s first telegraph line from Auckland through Otahuhu to Drury. It consisted of some 300 kauri telegraph poles linked with number 8 galvanised wire. From there the network extended south, in ever more haphazard fashion, using whatever material was available locally, stores manhandled and work parties often up to their waists in clinging smelling swamp. Swift, reliable communications were always important to LTGEN Cameron: when he invaded the Waikato in 1863 he had local militia guard the telegraph lines to ensure it wasn’t cut. The technology was simple: electric currents were employed to transmit intermittent signals along the line, coded with dots and dashes to convey meaning. And it was effective: the electric telegraph gave warning of enemy attacks, reported enemy warrior band movements, assured HQ that garrisons were safe, and allowed for an efficient movement of supplies and reinforcements. By 1865 the head station in Auckland was linked with stations in Otahuhu, Onehunga, Papakura, Ngāruawāhia, Te Awamutu and Cambridge. The colonial government was quick to use this military communications system for civilian and government use and its use spread throughout the mōtu.

From the mid 1870’s-WW1 the advance and development of military communications in Aotearoa New Zealand came through a series of different bodies that adapted themselves to provide colonial defence.

Royal Artillery, had a cadre of permanent staff who were experienced in field and garrison signalling.

The Torpedo Corps was formed as part of the nation’s coastal defence, used in support of coastal batteries to repel would-be raiders or invaders by a combination of gunfire, torpedo boaters and mobile land forces. The batteries were linked with telegraphic lines, and telegraphy became a part of the torpedo corps training regime.

The haphazard system of volunteer units mainly used semaphore and signal despatch riders, but the Army’s permanent staff effectively used telegraph and then telephone to progressively tighten control over these disparate, geographical dispersed units. Within the volunteer movement, the volunteer cycle corps was the most versatile exponent of non-telegraphic signalling. In 1898, just pre-Boer war, five volunteer cycle corps were formed: in Auckland, Wellington, Nelson, Christchurch and Dunedin. They were trained in rudimentary signalling and used their bikes for effective communication linkage. They were willing, but pretty ordinary to be fair, and in the early 1900s there was increasing pressure to focus more on professionalising communications.

In 1902 MAJGEN Babington, Commandant of the NZ Land Forces, advocated for the establishment and development of support arms. The government refused to fund this, but Babington persisted. LTCOL Clayton, a contemporary of Babington’s, recorded that *Babington, by clever manipulation of existing corps, was able to establish a de facto signalling corps. Babington argued vainly that a property organised signalling corps was essential if an army in the field was to be effectively controlled without unnecessary waste of time or horse flesh. In an attempt to solve the complex problem of training signalling specialists, Babington suggested that they be recruited from the trained signallers employed in the Post and Telegraph Department. Babington’s argument for a separate signal corps did not win the necessary political approval, however he was able to obtain approval for the reorganisation of both the cycle and engineer corps. Approval was granted for selected members of the cycle corps to be trained as signallers, and engineer units were reorganised into three sections: field engineers, telegraphic and signallers.*

In addition to this, Babington’s other major accomplishment was to begin the association of Army with the Post and Telegraph Department. This association stood the Defence Department well in two world wars. The Post and Telegraph Department cooperated by allowing selected personnel time for military duties. These trained telegraph operators and linemen, and later telephone operators, provided the army with key signals personnel and with trainers to prepare a large body of troops for signals duties.

The first dedicated signal unit in the NZ Army came from the College Rifle Volunteers: and institution originating from three Auckland school rifle corps. An Auckland solicitor, T.H. Dawson, a signals enthusiast, transformed the College Rifle Volunteers (Auckland) into a Cycle and Signalling Company in 1909. This was the first time the word ‘Signalling’ had appeared in a unit title.

The Post and Telegraph signallers were the service elite. The social arrangement between the army and their department freed them from most of the military chores that technical troops endured with impatience. They were required to keep fit and to be able to defend their bases, but apart from that it was BAU. They took their civilian expertise to war. Workers within the Post and Telegraph Department could not opt to serve in any other Corps.

**WW1**

NZ was only a minor player in WW1, but over 40% of the 1914 population served overseas, and of these 104K troops, 58% were casualties.

The Divisional Signal Company served overseas in WW1 in Egypt, Gallipoli and Europe. Sub-units within the Company were a HQ Section (admin pers, visual Sigs, operators, instrument repaired, blacksmiths, saddlers, a carpenter and Waggoner, buglers and two medical orderlies), No. 1 Section comprised cable wagon drivers, telephonists, and linemen, No. 2 Section remained with Infantry Bde HQ and was responsible for comms from 1 NZ Bde to the four battalions.

In Feb 1916 the Company doubled in strength and reorganised. No.2 Section remained with Infantry Bde HQ, No. 3 Section served the Rifle Bde, and No. 4 Section was attached so 2 NZ Infantry Bde. A 5th Section was formed in 1918 to provide comms for the Machine Gun Battalion. Operators were trained in wireless procedures, but this means of comms didn’t come into its own until 1918.

The kiwi signallers at Gallipoli were relentless in their bravery and dedication to the job doing all they could to keep the communications lines intact. At times the signallers were in advance of the infantry, as was the case in July 1915 when CPL Hinton and his team reached an objective before the storming party and signalled to BDE HQ that ‘the Signal Troop occupied “x” position’. In another incident two linemen, armed with a pair of pliers only, captured a party of Turks. After that linemen were armed with revolvers and/or rifles.

CPL Cyril Royston Guyton Bassett VC won his VC for conspicuous bravery on Chunuk Bair ridge in the Dardanelles on 7 August 1915. In full daylight and an under continuous and heavy fire he laid a telephone line from an old position to the new position on the ridge. Bassett as the only NZ soldier to be awarded a VC at Gallipoli, and is the only RNZSIGS per ever to win one.’

After the successful evacuation from Gallipoli, NZ Army’s signallers returned to Egypt with the rest of the force. The Mounted Bde SignalCompany was posted to the NZ Mounted Rifles, to serve in Palestine against the Turks, and the Divisional Signal Company accompanied the bulk of the Expeditionary Force in the trenches in Belgium and France.

Communications in the desert were assured by a combination of wireless, heliograph and newly acquired Triumph motorcycles. Telephone lines were built in established positions, but these were often disrupted by camels. The glare of the sun and dust clouds made communicating via heliograph problematic.

The war against the Turks in Sinai and Palestine was mobile and reliant on wireless Comms. LTCOL C.G. Powles recorded many instances where wireless signals made the difference between victory and failure. One such took place in 1916: *on the 19th July at a quarter past four an aeroplane reconnaissance with BRIG Chaytor observing, discovered long lines of Turks advancing westward over the desert in the vicinity of Bir Salmana, Bir Jamie’s and Bir Baynd - on approximately a frontage of 8 miles. This startling information - for no suspicious has been heard of any expected advance of the Turks - was sent into Divisional HQ by six o’clock and by wireless immediately to the 2nd Light Horse Brigade, who had already left Romani on a reconnaissance and were to go as far as Bir El Abd.*Wireless provided the warning that allowed the Turks to be challenged and defeated at the Battle of Romani.

Motorcycle despatch riders came into their own when the Brigade left the desert and reached the coast, and really won their spurs at the Battle of Gaza in 1917. The Mounted Bde Signal Tp ended WW1 in the Jordan Valley servicing and augmented and now cosmopolitan Bde. 32 signallers now maintained 110 miles of cable, operated a 30 line exchange, ran a wireless station, commanded visual stations, provided carrier pigeons and motorcycle despatch riders.

The signallers who accompanied the 1st NZ Division to France in 1916 experienced a very different war. The Divisional Signal Company was doubled in strength, with three Bde Signal sections to support war in all the horrors of the trenches. Disruption of the line was the foremost issue with enemy bombardment playing havoc with line communications. Linemen routinely risked their lives to maintain the line: some were gassed as they crawled through bomb craters and trenches, pulling their D5 wire with them, and any advance was quickly followed by signallers laying hundreds of yards of new line all around the trenches. And line was routinely buried 6-8 feet deep near the frontline. The Germans proved adept at intercepting allied communications: mostly buzzer Comms where simple morse codes sent via poorly insulated circuits too close to enemy listening posts carried through conductive soil. The Fuller phone helped reduce the threat of interception, but other means of Comms were used too. Pigeons again - prone to disorientation by the noise of battle or shot down. Lamp signalling was used as a subsidiary aid. Despatch riders. Messenger dogs - their effectiveness was reduced by the tendency of frontline soldiers to interrupt their passage by patting them and offering them biscuits and water. Most signalling in France relied on line and runners. Wireless was used considerably on the Western Front in 1918 following the release of skilled men from Mesopotamia.

By the end of the war the need for an independent Signals Corps had become increasingly obvious, and just three years after the armistice the NZ Corps of Signals was born on 1 June 1921. This saw three depots formed: the Northern depot was HQ’d in Auckland, the Central Depot was HQ in Wellington, and the Southern Depot was HQ’d in Christchurch.

**Interwar**

The interwar period was characterised by rationalisation of military numbers and funding, with the economic and social impacts of the great depression further reducing the numbers of people actively participating in Territorial training, the range of equipment available and the quality of training. Soldiers weren’t paid, and even funded their own transport and rationing for training periods.

Thankfully for the NZ Corps of Signals, the Post and Telegraph Department’s enthusiasm and cooperation enabled a better outcome: they agreed to grant leave with pay to all employees who were required to carry out training. They also guaranteed that all officers and NCOs required for annual refresher courses could be freed, with pay, to attend these courses.

Training and equipment were simple and rudimentary. MAJGEN Nalder, Royal Signals comment sums up the situation perfectly: the invention of the thermionic valve in 1906 lead to a remarkable series of innovation in civil telecommunication practices, which made their appearance from about 1914 onwards. These included long-range telephony, modern wireless technique, radio telephony, multi-channel carrier telephone systems and television. All these innovations had a profound effect on military intercommunication methods, but nonetheless, owing chiefly to financial stringency, their application had not been fully developed by 1939.

The Northern Depot practiced line drills with a horse-drawn cable wagon, and had basic wireless sets to train on. In addition, there were flags of various sizes, heliograph, and shutter lamps – all surplus from WW1. The wirelesses were all recalled in the mid 1920’s, so the Northern Depot held a raffle and bought the parts to construct sets with the proceeds.

In addition to the paucity of antiquated equipment, and an outdated instructional syllabus, the Corps directors found that the Territorial system allowed too little time to train recruits to any level of proficiency. They recommended to General HQ that 129hrs of training was a minimum requirement for signal pers. The formal response was that all other Territorial units performed their training in 78 hours, and this was all the Act required.

**WW2**

WW2 marked a huge step up in the way war was waged, including the advent of complex signals intelligence that enabled the allies to penetrate German and Japanese codes allowing warning of German movements and the repositioning of the US Navy’s limited resources to hold the Japanese navy at the Coral Sea and defeat it at Midway.

WW2 was very much a wireless war, and NZ’s Signal Corps had to learn and upskill it’s people very quickly.

The 202 men in the main draft for Divisional Signals in 1939 received a welcome boost in equipment from the British Army when they arrived in Egypt, including wireless trucks and Norton motorcycles for despatch riders. The motorbikes were particularly prized because there was no army issue back in NZ, so they could finally practice their craft. I like the story of SIG Helm, who arrived with despatches at HQ NZ Div Signals in Daba perched cross-legged on the high saddle of a camel, rode up to the Colonel, gave the Arabic word to make the camel fold up its legs, jumped off and handed the messages over.

Divisional signals made good use of their time in Egypt to train, but several Corps members also jumped at opportunities to get stuck in quicker, including volunteering for the Long Range Desert Group. I also like the story of LCPL Don Cambridge, who was seconded to the Sudan Defence Force as Officer Commanding Sudan Defence Force Signals with the rank of LTCOL.

On 9 June 1940, seven officers and 140 OR of the NZ Signals took over the Signals office at Mersa Matruh in Egypt. It was meant to be a three week secondment, but became nine months. From June-October 1940 these ‘borrowed’ NZ Signallers maintained comms links with the 5th British Infantry Bde, the Egypt Mobile Troop, and the HQ British Troops in Egypt. By the second day of their secondment Italy had entered the war and they processed some 450 messages in one night. In December they were then used in a mobile support role in Operation Compass, an offensive that lead to the capture of Sidi Barrani and 20K Italian prisoners.

In March 1941 the 2nd NZ Division arrived in Greece as part of a 56K strong British Empire Force to counter Germany’s impending arrival. The German invasion began on 6 April 1941 with Luftwaffe air control and the quantity and speed of German armour soon pushing the Allies back. The 2nd NZ Division began a fighting withdrawal with its signallers responding with makeshift temporary communications arrangements: patching cable into civil circuits, laying cable along defence lines abandoned within days, and attempting to maintain comms with inadequate wireless equipment. The withdrawal soon became a rout. As part of the rapid evacuation all Signals equipment was instructed to be destroyed; some unit commanders tried to preserve their sets, but given a choice between evacuating soldiers and signals equipment, most was destroyed. After the withdrawal from Greece, MAJGEN Freyberg, the commander of 2nd NZ Div, became the commander of creforce, charged with defending the island from invasion. As we all know, Freyberg, his kiwis and other allied forces were unsuccessful. Of note, paucity of signals equipment was later cited as a key element in the loss of Crete. There were some 100 NZ Signallers on Crete, working with telephone and cable, but too few wirelesses. The fierceness and strength of the German air attacks prior to and during the invasion disrupted the largely line communications link. Lack of signal equipment and lack of transport were key problems with Crete’s defence. When the Germans destroyed the line circuits, wireless and runners were the only means of communication. Despatch riders tried to bridge the gap, but soon became targets for German paratroops. Ultimately, the lack of an adequate communications plan fundamentally undermined GEN Freyberg’s defence of Malame Airfield, which allowed the Germans to establish a bridgehead and subsequently take all of Crete.

Another corps anecdote: When the Galatos road was threatened by German paratroops during the airborne invasion of Crete, ‘J’ Section of Divisional Signals was ordered to a defensive position overlooking the road. The Signal officer had little knowledge of infantry tactics and was disposing his men to best advantage when he was joined by another party under an officer junior in rank. The Signal Officer suggested to the newly arrived subaltern that he would surely know more about this sort of job then he did, and he would place the section under his command. The subaltern looked mystified and asked the Signal Officer who he was. On hearing the reply ‘oh, I’m only the Signal Officer’, the other officer replied, ‘only the signal officer? – good lord, I’m only the bandmaster’.

It was clear the standard of comms had to improve. A school of signals was established and soon ran 12 week courses to corps pers and then regimental signallers. The content was initially pretty dated: too much emphasis on flags, semaphore and morse. All this changed in the war in Libya in 1941. The Divisional Signals, now under a new commander (LTCOL Agar), were soon using vehicle dispersal, and separate frequencies by day and night in an attempt to keep up with the hard, mobile form of desert warfare. The army’s communicators consistently contributed with rifles as well as signals doing whatever was required on the ground.

During 1942 German direction finding improved, as well as their attempts to use the location of wireless sets to relate Signals callsigns to areas. To counter this, callsigns were changed daily, frequency of transmissions and strength of signals were also altered. Sound principles that endure to this day. In preparation for that Alamein offensive, three armoured command vehicles were allocated to the Division, copying the German approach. The vehicles were fitted with wireless sets, driven by Signals divers and providing GEN Freyberg with a mobile communication network and command and control over his Brigades, his artillery, engineers, armour and reconnaissance – all at the flick of a switch. Before El Alamein Freyberg had maintained a static HQ and moved about in his staff car, chased by a staff officer in a wireless rover. Communication was haphazard and unreliable, bde commanders often made decisions in the absence of consultation with the General that they later regretted. After the success of his mobile C2 approach at El Alamein, Freyberg maintained a mobile tactical HQ approach throughout the remainder of the North African Campaign and right through to the Italian Campaign.

**Minqar Qaim:** on 27 June 1942 the NZ Div at Minqar Qaim found itself isolated and out of contact with its HQ. Wireless contact was lost with HQ XIII Corps due to local propagation difficulties, not uncommon in the desert. Unfortunately, a vital message was not received: the signal to withdraw. The situation deteriorated with the German 21st Panzer Division started to attack them. Captain Ken Collett recalled how he and his OC A Section, Divisional HQ Signals, looked for a way to communicate with XIII Corps after searching for alternative channels. With some clear thinking, they located some earlier Army Signal Plans and found a reference to a special frequency set aside for emergency use. This was a longshot, but they put the Corps Link set onto this frequency in Cairo and to their surprise an immediate reply came back asking for details and how they could help. In short order contact was established with XIII Corps using the emergency link as a relay station. A break out was planned and successfully put into operation. This showed how lonely it can be when contacts go bad: the fate of perhaps 10K men rested on lateral thinking of Signals personal and their ability to re-establish comms.

From El Alamein 2nd NZ Div embarked on an 1800 km drive to Tripoli. Wireless provided most tactical communication during this move, with line comms being laid for overnight stops. In May 1943 NZ Div Signals established wireless links with the Italians, who made surrender overtures in North Africa, using the Q Code, an international signals formula that uses morse. By October 1943, after new wireless sets, re-training and a little leave, Divisional Signals was in Italy. Jeeps were employed to mount signals sets, but it was a less mobile and less flexible war with shorter distances between HQ. There was no longer the problem to provide comms to distant mobile groups, and thus a return to stable line comms and a reduction in the use of wireless. This changed with the Cassino battles in 1944 where a reliance on wireless were a hallmark.

**Back in the Pacific:** the few Signals pers left in NZ were responsible for helping guard Aotearoa NZ and the Pacific from Japanese invasion. In August 1941 four army wireless operators established an outstation of the Pacific Coast Watching Service on Fanning island and were soon connected with Suva, Wellington, Washington and Christmas island maintaining 24/7 listening watches using 100 watt transmitters and 70 ft high telescopic masts. The coastwatchers on the Gilbert and Ellice Islands had wireless stations manned by telegraphists from the NZ Post and Telegraph department. There’s was a lonely war, and they faced execution if caught by the Japanese, as was experienced by those 22 allies caught at Tarawa. In April 1942, when asked if they wanted to be relieved, all the wireless operators in the Southern Gilberts except one elected to remain in their posts, despite the precarious condition they were living in. They were unarmed and some gave themselves up to Japanese forces to prevent reprisals on the native population. Their memorial at Tarawa states that “standing unarmed at their posts they matched brutality with gallantry and met death with fortitude”. Seven wireless operators were executed there by the Japanese.

The hard work done by NZ’s Signals Corps up to and including WW2 was formally recognised on 12 July 1947 when HM King George VI issued the command that the prefix “Royal” was added to the corps. It was also seen a mark of faith in the Corps’ future, and some 75 years later, we still carry that Royal prefix with pride.

This honour was toasted with sake by the now RNZSIGS pers posted to NZ’s military contribution to the army of occupation in Japan: J-Force. The Signal Company’s responsibilities were the provision of communications by wireless, line and despatch rider to all units. A number of civilian telephone lines were used with local operators, sometimes with difficulty. There were queues for toll calls, and sometimes rings didn’t show up on the switchboard. One Kiwi Signals telephones, manning the Yamaguchi exchange, became agitated and yelled into the phone: “and who the hell do you think you are?” The voice at the other end responded, “do you know who you are talking to? This is Air Vice Marshall Bladen!’. The exchange operator responded, “do you know who you are talking to?” To which the Air Vice Marshall replied, “no!”. The kiwi signalman said, “thank God for that”, and he quickly pulled the plug out of the telephone. By October 1948 the last of the J-Force had returned to NZ and were demobilised. Overall that left the NZ Army with some 4000 regular force soldiers to face the beginning of what we all know as the Cold War. Concern about the possible spread of communism throughout asia, NZ voted in Compulsory Military Training in 1950 and RNZSIGS was faced with the herculean task of providing signals training on a huge scale. Cue the re-raising of a Signal School, firstly in Trentham, then moving to Waiouru.

**Korean War**

When North Korea invaded its South Korean neighbours in 1950, NZ raised a volunteer force to contribute to the United Nations Police Action Force. This kiwi contingent was known as K-Force. The Signals component started with 2:62, mostly from the Post and Telegraph Department. They were formed into two troops: a Base Signal Troop (attached to K-Force HQ) and “G” Troop (attached to 16 Fd Regt. Before long G Troop was soon involved in artillery live firing drills and trial deployments with 16 Fd Regt in Waiouru. Korea was freezing cold with daunting topography that was likened to Italy, but worse. The Korean Campaign was quick-moving, with sudden reversals of fortunes, with battles fought in hard, cold and mountainous terrain. VHF formed the backbone of America’s communications network, providing links over rivers, across mountains, and from ship to shore. It was a real advancement in communications. Naturally, the kiwis didn’t have VHF radios. They had to make do with WW2 era wireless, line and despatch riders on motorbikes. The roads and tracks were covered with ice, snow and slush, so Jeeps soon replaced the motorbikes. These despatch riders rushed messages up to 30-40 miles.

It’s hard to overstate the cold that greeted K-Force – one of the worse winters in Korean history. LT Clarke relates, at ties the batteries operating the telephone systems freeze overnight in the sub-zero temperatures rendering the exchanges useless, and the damp cold corrodes contact points on the wireless sets used as secondary lines of communication.

K-Force didn’t have enough cold clothing, and they didn’t have enough wireless equipment. The 16 Fd Regt Signal Troop had been issued with No. 19 Mark III wireless sets built by the Canadians for the Russians during WW2. They still had Cyrillic script painted on them. Luckily kiwi ingenuity saved the day: the US 2nd Marine Division was in the vicinity, a unit that had served in NZ. LT Clarke and his signals SGT were aware that the Americans were only issued with a small ration of whiskey. So, they loaded a trailer of whiskey, took it over to the US Marines, and returned with a trailer loaded with ground-to-air radios, the latest American telephones, and reels of beautiful lightweight assault cable. The communication support to 16 Fd Regt improved overnight. RNZSIGS were there with 16 Fd Regt when they fought against overwhelming odds (20:1) at Kapyong. After this battle, the RNZSIGS pers were rolled into 1 Commonwealth Divisional Signal Regiment with Canadians and Royal Signals Corps pers. They served there until November 1954, but the final RNZSIGS pers didn’t leave until 1957.

**Malaya**

In 1955 133 newly minted NZ SAS soldiers deployed to Malaya as part of the 40K strong british and commonwealth troop force. The SAS were sent out into the jungle, working under UK’s 22 SAS. The conditions in the deep Malayan jungle were terrible for communications – especially given the kiwis had WW2 62 sets that required 12v batters and a pedal generator, and they regularly experienced significant problems with their sensitive wireless equipment. In early 1957 the NZ Government expanded its contribution to Malaya and despatched a RF infantry bn. RNZSIGS volunteers were seconded to the infantry to provide the necessary communications link. They undertook a concentrated period of pre-deployment to get themselves ready for their challenging task in the jungle. Naturally this included advanced training in Waiouru with snow clinging to their tents.

The comms problem ahead of them was significant, as detailed in the British Army’s handbook, entitled Malaya in the emergency: 4/5 of the land is trackless evergreen forest and undergrowth. A hundred feet above the ground the trees make a solid roof of green, shutting out the sky. From their branches curtains of vine creeper join the undergrowth to make a jungle so dense that standing man is invisible at 25 yards. The average room temperature is 90o and torrential rains fall almost every day.

Jungle training en route soon made it clear that physical fitness, attitude and endurance were now key requirements for the signallers, in addition to their technical expertise. They worked longer hours than anyone else on patrol and only the machine gunner had a heavier pack. The jungle was no joke: one operator, SIG Frank Burdet, was attacked by a tiger while asleep. Fortunately his mosquito net cocooned him for long enough for his yells to wake his comrades and a sub machine gun burst saw the tiger run away. SIG Burdet was naturally in shock and mauled around the head. He was also the only signaller, so had to pull himself together to send his own CASEVAC request. In addition to being attached to infantry patrols, RNZSIGS pers also served with various british units, maintaining large nets over huge distances with the same highly problematic terrain and vegetation.

By the time NZ’s soldiers had finished serving in Malaya and then Borneo, they’d moved to VHF radios, and learnt how to best communicate in the difficult terrain: each and every situation called for a specialist antenna or means of mounting.

RSO CAPT Bryan Wells recalls: we experimented and discarded, we manufactured and hung some weird contraptions under the wings and fuselages of aircraft and the skids of a variety of helicopters. We struggled with the Army bureaucrats who insisted on written proposals, trials and steering committees, and we were forced to resort to ingratiating grovels and bottles of whiskey to get attachments or connectors made up in the workshops. CAPT Well’s bn commander was demanding, but supportive. He clearly realised the value of communications and was prepared to use his light fixed wing and rotary aircraft for signals reconnaissance, aerial rebroadcast and signals resupply.

In 1975 NZ Force South East Asia Communication Centre was established in Singapore. They were tasked with providing static communication facilities for their HQ during the final phases of the ANZUK Brigade. It initially had 8 RNZSIGS, 8 RNZAF and 3 RNZN, and provided links to helicopters deployed outside Singapore, long-range fixed-wing flights, naval ships and army units on exercise in Malaysia. Some of the radios they used were still in use when I joined the Army 25 years later.

31 Medium Radio Sub Troop (formed in late 1963 as part of 249 Signal Sqn): radio comms from a theatre of conflict to government. After 1971 it became on the spot mobile comms capable of moving quickly and establishing rear link comms from a formation HQ by voice radio or radio teleprinter.

**Vietnam War**

No RNZSIGS detachment deployed to Vietnam, but a number of corps pers were detached to the combat arms and worked with higher HQ. Regimental Signallers were trained by RNZSIGS pers and some entered the corps at the cessation of the war, bringing their hard-won experience and expertise with them. 16 RNZSIGS pers served in Vietnam with 161 Rd Battery. Once deployed, the two signals officers attached to 161 Bty served as forward observers, and were often exposed in jungle observation posts. One of these officers, Mike Gillooly, epitomises the corps. As a signals officer, he found himself directing fire against the Viet Cong before the close of his third day in country. Throughout his 1 year and 1 day tour of duty he saw his task as the provision of whatever artillery support I was able to rustle up in time to support and infantry company engaged in patrols, ambushes and observation intelligence. Mike Gillooly wonderfully represented the highly trained competence of the RNZSIGS pers in Vietnam. His Signals training began before his army days in the Post and Telegraph department telegraph school when he was 16. He entered the Regular Force immediately after he completed compulsory military training in 1953. By 1959 he was a four star operator, a three star lineman, and a one star technician. His subsequent training as an NCO, and after 1967 as an officer, brought an awareness that without a knowledge of the capabilities and tactics of other military arms, the signals officer could not be effective. Outside the RNZSIGS attached to 161 Bty others supported 1 RNZIR as regimental signallers when they arrived in 1967-1970. They provided vital communication links to call for air strikes, evacuate wounded soldiers, enable resupply and to relay intelligence.

**Cambodia**

1992 saw the largest force of armed troops that had left NZ since the Vietnam war. Their task was with the UN to assist in the stabilising of a land riven by decades of civil war and tyranny. Initially RNZSIGS sent 40 soldiers: an OC, 2 tp commanders, a WO and 36 ORs. First they undertook PDT in NZ: fitness, intelligence briefings, weapon training (including infantry support weapons, foreign weapons and mine awareness), and first aid. Five soldiers also spent three days honing their motorcycle skills. Everyone participated in helicopter drills. From here they went to Watsonia, the home of Australian signals in Melbourne, to complete combined training with their Aussie brethren. The situation on the ground in Cambodia speaks volumes of the quality of the soldiers we sent. LT Paul Dragicevich (now a currently serving COL) recalled: initial communication support during the earlier states of United Nations Transitional Authority (UNTAC) was based on the need to provide a communications link between the four factions. This ws provided by RATT link and SATPAC, voice and fax. The fax was vital for passage of Khmer script. During this period there was a deployment of radio operators, with Australian HF manpack equipment in support of UN Military Observer teams. A team would normally consist of 4-5 persons and a radio operator to provide communications. During the early stages, these teams were sent to the borders in attempts to prevent illegal entry of weapons. Teams would disappear for weeks, with their only link to the outside world a tenuous HF radio schedule to Phnom Penh.

In addition to providing communication from the remote teams, RNZSIGS pers provided a communications centre with radio and courier facilities to UNTAC personnel in their sectors. Most of the RNZSIGS were sepearated and scattered to various nodes and border posts, with numerous changes to location to fit the changing tactical situation. There were two major and eleven minor communication nodes. And although the kiwis soon realised how much more the aussies were paid than them, the RNZSIGS pers also learnt that they were highly efficient by international standards. With 2-3 signallers they provided the communications support to an area equivalent to that covered by much larger signals units. Cambodia was a very challenging technical mission in an extremely challenging setting, but it provided RNZSIGS pers with a real opportunity to test their communication skills in an operational environment. A total 70 RNZSIGS pers served during the two rotations in Cambodia.

**Now**

What we provide has evolved as the way our army fights evolves to maximise the advantages technology provide

* From RF circuits – VHF/HF
* Servers, laptops, applications at different classifications, globally and OTM via satellite, mobile technology, meshed UHF radios, dots on maps, video chat, all blacks games

Trades evolved:

* CS Op/RF Tech – radio operators
* Information Systems Operators
* System Engineers
* EW Op
* Operation Support Information Specialist (OpSIS) – IM Spec
* Cyber