

CITATION FOR AWARD OF JOINT COMMANDER'S COMMENDATION TO ROYAL AIR FORCE FIRE SECTION AT MOUNT PLEASANT

The RAF Fire and Rescue Section at Mount Pleasant Airfield, Falkland Islands, is a unit of 29 fire-fighters led by a Warrant Officer and tasked with providing continuous crash cover for the airfield in support of the QRA Typhoons and VC10 based at the airfield. This is routine business for the RAF Fire and Rescue Service. However, what is not standard is the provision of domestic fire cover to the Mount Pleasant Complex, which accommodates some 2000 personnel in a wide variety of living and working accommodation - much of which is ageing, constructed of timber and highly susceptible to fire. Thus to a greater extent than on most RAF units, the role of the Fire and Rescue Section in ensuring the safety of all personnel is absolutely critical. The Mount Pleasant Complex also incorporates the East Cove Military Port which sits within the RAF Fire and Rescue Section's Area of Responsibility. Furthermore, the Fire and Rescue Section provide, when requested, fire fighting and rescue assistance and advice to the Falkland Islands' Government and wider community. This can - and does - include responding to complex road traffic accidents in remote locations, often involving deployment by helicopter.

There are two instances of particular note which demonstrate the RAF Fire and Rescue Section's professionalism, flexibility and proactive approach to delivering operationally focused fire-fighting. Both involved peat fires outwith the bounds of the Mount Pleasant Complex. The first was a fire 12 miles north west of Mount Pleasant which covered some 10 square miles. Firefighters were deployed on the ground for two weeks with each individual working approximately 18 hours per day, within a 36 hours on/12 hours off shift pattern. In total, the Fire and Rescue Section contributed 870 man-hours towards fighting the fire. The second incident was a fire on West Falkland which encompassed an area of some 2 square miles. A three week period saw the RAF Fire and Rescue Section providing direct support to the Falklands Fire Service, with at times 30% of Section strength on-scene and due to the distance from Mount Pleasant this entailed frequent overnight deployments under field conditions. The complexity and longevity of peat-based fires meant the fire-fighters had to sustain long periods of vigilance and use multiple techniques to contain and extinguish these fires, skills rarely practised by RAF fire-fighters.

Impressively, none of the non-standard activities or off-Complex deployments by members of the Fire and Rescue Section resulted in any reduction in airfield crash or domestic fire cover. This was despite the fact that, over the past 6 months, the Section had been operating with 3 posts gapped. To maintain the requisite level of cover individual fire fighters have often had to work with the minimum of crew rest time, frequently switching between airfield and domestic duties in a single shift.

The RAF Mount Pleasant Fire and Rescue Section is an exemplary Unit, which consistently exceeds expectations: its members are resolutely professional, operationally focused, never allowing their personal or professional standards to slip, persistently performing to an exceptional level. They are proactive, inspirational and exemplify all that is good about their Branch and are outstanding ambassadors for their Service in a Joint environment.