

A deployment chaser: Sergeant Renee Rangiahua

Sergeant Renee Rangiahua (Ngāi Tūhoe, Ngāti Raukawa) joined the New Zealand Army in 1999 because she wanted to travel. She got her wish, serving on deployments as a supply technician during her service in Timor-Leste, the Sinai, Afghanistan twice and the Pacific multiple times.

“I’ve made sure that I stayed deployable during my younger years. Throughout my career I chased the trips, so I went to units that had trips.”

A self-described Army brat, Renee was born in Singapore and has lived on practically every base in New Zealand. It was this upbringing, along with the influence of her dad, which drew her to service.



Sergeant Renee Rangiahua in uniform

She started as a Limited Service Volunteer and then entered basic training. Her first posting was to 1st Battalion, Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment (1RNZIR), where her dad was also posted. Her brother joined them at 1RNZIR a few years later and her other siblings, a sister and brother, joined the Army too.

In 2012, Renee deployed to Afghanistan with a theatre extraction team. Her deployment was the first rotation after New Zealand soldiers had been killed in two separate incidents.

“It was pretty sombre when I showed up, but that’s because people were still getting over stuff.”

Renee and her team had to clean and repatriate equipment to New Zealand, including the Light-Armoured Vehicles (LAVs) that were attacked during the Battle of Baghak.

“Looking at the state the LAVs were in, you didn’t want to ask any questions. That probably wasn’t my best tour.”

Renee is a fluent reo Māori speaker, which she learned at home and at school. She joined the Army kapa haka group during her deployment to Timor-Leste and during her first deployment to Afghanistan she and a friend set up a kapa haka group.

Kapa haka provided Renee with an outlet outside of work and also gave her a sense of normalcy.

“Because I kept moving from camp to camp to camp, I didn’t have a stable life. Kapa haka resembled some kind of norm away from work while overseas.”

Renee is proud of the way that the Army has incorporated te ao Māori into the organisation.

“We’ve done really well, putting it into our workplace. Recently we had a British soldier and he said what amazed him was how we’ve embedded Māori into our workplace – the reo as well as the culture.”

She agrees that incorporating reo Māori and culture into the workplace helps equip the New Zealand Defence Force for overseas deployments.

“A lot of nations know that we’re pretty multicultural, that we’re easy to relate to and we break down barriers really easily.”

Renee’s focus now is less on chasing deployments and more about making sure younger supply technicians get those opportunities. This means encouraging them to post to the “hard-out” units that most often deploy.

“Make your mark there, and if they’ve got the trips on, they’ll take you. The experiences that you have overseas are valuable, because we don’t get those opportunities in New Zealand.”

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