

4 ESR Ready to Deploy After Ex NIHILO SAPPER

The recent Exercise NIHILO SAPPER, designed to allow military engineers to practice their skills, was conducted in Northern New Brunswick over a 20-day period. The exercise set a new training precedent for 4 Engineer Support Regiment (4 ESR), as members conquered challenging engineering feats, expanded the regiment's operational capabilities, and strengthened community relations throughout the region.

For the first time in NIHILO SAPPER history, the entire 450-person unit deployed from 5th Canadian Division Support Base Gagetown Range and Training Area to Bathurst, built a 500-person camp, completed three large construction tasks in support of community initiatives, and successfully redeployed home.

“The Baie-des-Chaleurs region was an ideal place to prove our theatre activation capabilities,” said Lieutenant-Colonel Chris Cotton, Commanding Officer, 4 ESR. “It is a considerable distance from our home base in Gagetown; it provided us with ready access to an airport, seaport, and railway; and most importantly, we were able to leave behind a few legacy projects for the community.”

After building the camp, the unit embarked on three major construction projects: a 45-metre, off-road vehicle bridge across the Tetagouche River; clearing more than three kilometres of trail systems; and a major renovation to a local snowmobile club.



Members of 4 ESR, Gagetown push the Acrow bridge spanning the Tetagouche River outside Bathurst, N.B., during Ex NIHILO SAPPER 16.

Photo: WO Jerry Kean

In addition to these community-based initiatives, 4 ESR—the Canadian Army’s highest readiness combat engineering unit—conducted explosive ordnance training and joint training with Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) and Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) units.

Combat divers from 4 ESR and port-inspection divers from the RCN’s Fleet Diving Unit (Atlantic) conducted joint training in the waterways surrounding the Port of Belledune to secure port facilities. Once the port was deemed safe, HMCS *Summerside* arrived with a fictitious load of supplies and equipment for theatre activation operations.



Fleet Diving Unit (Atlantic) clearance divers and 4 ESR members search the waters off the Port of Belledune, N.B., during Ex NIHILO SAPPER 16.

Photo: WO Jerry Kean

“We thoroughly enjoyed working with the 4 ESR team,” said Lieutenant-Commander Paul Smith, Commanding Officer of HMCS *Summerside*. “The experience helped us identify ways that we can support one another in various operating environments.”

Near the end of the exercise, an RCAF CH-146 Griffon helicopter supported reconnaissance operations and the insertion of fictitious explosive ordnance disposal teams.

“On completion of this exercise, I am proud to declare that 4 ESR, the CA’s highest readiness unit, is ready to deploy in support of CAF operations at short notice,” concluded LCol Cotton.