

# OPERATION TAMAR

All readers are aware that A Company 2/4RAR is providing the Rifle Company of the Australian Medical Support Force (AUSMED). This article covers the roles played by the other 34 members of the Battalion who make up an important part of AUSMED.

At 6am on Sunday 19 June 94 at the Royal Military College, Kingston, Canada (whilst loading on a bus to come home from Exercise Northern Lights) the CO came up to me and said "They are looking to send a rifle company, a medical group and a logistic company to Rwanda and I've been asked to command it. Have a think about who should come with us as we will need a small headquarters."

This came as a complete shock as the Battalion had considered the rifle company elements, as part of other options being suggested, but not losing the CO and others to Africa. It started a hectic period for all, including the normal Battalion training programme of the Military Skills Competition and Exercise Maxi Beagle together with the enormous amount of work to raise, man and equip a medical unit for overseas service.

The manning of the force was a source of frustration for everyone, as people from all over Australia tried to get their soldiers on the deployment ahead of others. After some hard fought battles, 2/4RAR was fortunate to provide 34 personnel, in addition to the Rifle Company group.

The advance party commanded by the Operations Officer, left Townsville on Sat 6 Aug 94 to arrive in Rwanda via Diago Garcia at midnight 7/8 Aug 94. The party of 74 included the bulk of 3 Platoon and six other members of 2/4 RAR. The advance party had two weeks to clean up the hospital that was to be the focus of the AUSMED operations, as well as the former Military College which would be our home for the next six months.

These areas were the scene of the last and most ferocious battle of the war, so there was a huge amount of work to be done. Everyone contributed tirelessly to the tasks at hand and quickly established a reputation for first rate medical care and a thoroughly professional approach to security and protection.

3 Platoon took on a lot of the unpleasant tasks including burying bodies, disposing of war debris and keeping the Rwandan Patriotic Army away. They also managed to host a brilliant 'Dinner Night' to celebrate the 21st birthday of the Battalion. MAJ

McCall set about establishing a resupply link with the United Nations (UN), while the drivers learnt their way around the then shattered streets of Kigali. It was a great two weeks and at the end of it, we were all very proud of our achievements and ready for the main body's arrival.

The main body arrived over a hectic week from 20-26 Aug 94 and its members began to settle into their new life styles. The movement of personnel and stores was a large undertaking in a country that had very limited vehicles and medium handling equipment; but in true Aussie style, it was made to work!

Two months later, everyone has settled into the routine and AUSMED is treating around 5000 patients per week! Surprisingly, all the 2/4RAR people are doing the same jobs they would do in Townsville or on exercise. The environment is obviously different from Shoalwater Bay, but there has been no real need for retraining. CO Commands, as ever! Although a medical unit is a lot different to an infantry battalion.

## Operations Cell

OPSO and SGT Galloway control all the deployments on a day to day basis. For AUSMED that includes issuing warning orders and verbal orders for the operations of the various sub units or specialist groups and all vehicle moves outside Kigali (about 10 per week). Operations also produces the myriad of situation reports for Headquarters UNAMIE and Land Headquarters. The Operations cell often has the added support of SGT Grimes when he is in town!

## PTE Hazell

Continues to drive the CO everywhere and tries to keep up with the CO on his daily joggette.

## Padre

Takes on an expanded role as some of the other contingents do not have a padre. CHAP Peacock conducts a church service each Sunday and is the focal point for all unit tales!

## Chief Clerk

Not sure if he has recovered from the West Coast Eagles victory yet! Still spends his days on the AUSMIS computer and helping keep the company clerks under control.

## CPL Tam

Is the contingent auto teller machine and on that basis is kept very busy dealing in US\$, Rwandan Franc and Kenyan Shillings.

## Logistical Support Company

Have taken to visiting all parts of Africa, just in case there is a need to provide logistic support in the

future! Our contingent continues to enjoy relatively good conditions thanks to their good work in organizing second line logistic support and dealing with civilian contractor, Canadian Logistic Companies and UN staff from all over the world. OC and CSM have also been driving forces behind the provision of humanitarian support to the orphanages in Kigali and the east of the country.

#### **Quartermaster Store**

After working like trojans to get all the stores assembled and out of Australia, WO1 Tilker and the lads have been working 24hr shifts to get the main account and sub accounts established. SGT Mason and PTEs McKenzie and Neilson have all developed square eyes from staring at Microfiche screens. Despite the long hours they are happy enough. They have a nice store full of nice things and they get a chance to be grumpy if someone tries to get something out of the store!

#### **Caterer**

WO2 Coventry and the chefs are putting in big hours to supply quality meals despite the limited ration break. Their kitchen is a meeting place for all those who like a brew and a chat with the local kitchen hands. Timmsy is still looking solid so Catering Section must be eating well too.

#### **Tech Support**

The workshop has set itself up in a large tent and are happily pulling things apart and making a mess. They have proven to be very adaptable and are in great demand, i.e. when a gen set or vehicle decides to stop.

#### **Transport**

Reyno, Titts, Ado and Blissy are also proving to be great workers and always seem to maintain their sense of humour. They are out on tasks everyday and have seen most of the country. They are also getting to drive very big trucks and forklifts so appear to be enjoying themselves immensely.

#### **Regimental Aid Post/Evacuation Section**

SGT Swann, the medics and drivers have all been around the country and have become involved in work that they would never get a chance to do in Australia. The Ambo drivers are getting used to the blood boxes and whilst there is a lot of time waiting around, they are learning new skills.

#### **Preventative Medic**

JJ has been having a ball with his 'blowfly', 'toilet sniffer' and 'rat catcher' mates. The work he does in the Battalion, that we all take for granted, has taken a new profile over here. JJ's work has covered water testing, spraying for all sorts of vectors, construction of toilets and showers, advice on food at the markets and inspections of kitchens and the hospital. Apart from his UN work he has been keenly involved in providing support to local clinics. You can imagine that he has made a swag of friends on these jobs.

For those at 2/4RAR that we left behind, we wish you all the best and look forward to seeing you again soon. We think of you constantly and very much appreciate your support to get us over here and your continued efforts in 'covering' for us in our absence. For those who may be lucky enough to be part of a ASC II, start taking a few French lessons.



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*Day 2 in Kigali. LCPL Morton, PTE Vanderhee and "Plugger" search through the rubble of the central Hospital store*