

# EXERCISE OPEN SEASON

11th-15th JUNE, '79

by MAJ. J.D. GUY

The night sky over High Range Training Area was suddenly lit with an unnatural glow. Soon came a dull roar of small arms and the heavy thump of claymores. It was the last of three company level ambushes near Poison Waterhole and it heralded the end to the Battalion live firing exercise, OPEN SEASON.

We had resented the title of the exercise but were stuck with it. The name represented the antithesis of what in fact was to take place. I sat in the company defence position and pondered the signature of the company ambush eight kilometres away and was relieved that the Company dawn attack to follow in a few hours would bring to a conclusion four days of hectic activity.

The exercise concept was relatively simple. There were three aspects, first a fire power demonstration by Spt Coy for the assembled Battalion, second dispersal to three company stands and thirdly a platoon level competition which moved the companies from one stand to the next. The aim of the rifle company live firing activities was to exercise individual soldiers in shooting under team stress situations approximating to those found in actual combat in section to company level settings by day and night.



Following a very interesting support Coy fire power demonstration, Support and Log Coy personnel dispersed to run the various stands. The rifle companies had lunch and prepared for the first activity on the 'Round Robin'. A Coy went to Stand 5 which was company in defence. Here they were briefed by the OIC Practice Capt. Dougall McMillan and then took over an already prepared position. That afternoon they sent patrols of section strength out to take part in a live fire and movement exercise involving grenade throwing. This activity proved very popular as it required fire control and co-ordination of movement for realistic grenade throwing. This was needed to extricate the section from a position of facing a dug in enemy of superior force. During the

night the company was probed by some very sneaky DART equipment and, finally, at some 'ungodly' hour was assaulted! This tested fire control from company to section and many valuable lessons were learned.

If we now follow A Coy we will get an idea of what the other companies were doing.



Early next morning A Coy was debriefed and prepared to move out by platoons to the ambush stand. The platoon move involved an eight kilometre march across country over hilly terrain, a time limit and an M203 and ER gun stand. Once all the platoons were in, 2 LT Mark Webb briefed the OC Maj. John Burrows, and the battle procedure for A Coy ambush began. The afternoon was spent in reconnaissance, orders, rehearsals and a move into position.

2 LT Mark Webb and the Pioneer Platoon had really put their hearts into the ambush stand and had rigged an ingenious raft system on the river-like billabong. This represented an enemy resupply system and was duly shot up three times every night as platoons were rotated through the 'killer group' task. By the end of the exercise there was much raft debris over the waterhole!

As dawn broke the company prepared to move tactically from the ambush sight to an RV three kilometres away. Having arrived there they were debriefed, breakfasted and rotated through anti armoured stands firing LAW and MAW while the NCOs directed mortar fire. Capt. Chris Lee and Lt Tom Magee ran a very busy stand to get all this done before the platoon march got under way again at 1030.

The platoons then took off again at fifteen minute intervals to meet Maj. Graham Kells and Capt. Ray Dukamp at the platoon attack stand after four kilometres across hilly terrain. Once this was complete the company went into battle procedure for A Coy dawn attack. This meant a busy afternoon and an early start the next day.



After a debrief, platoons prepared to move out on their last leg over five kilometres of the roughest country so far. Before the finishing point they were put through a first aid stand where sections were split to care for three casualties, gun shot, broken leg and snake bite.

A very tired but happy company then assembled at the point where they had started — they had done a complete circle and after a hearty lunch were ready to go home. The other two rifle companies were likewise back where they had started having joined the circle at a different point. Every man had had the same experience though in a differing sequence.

The platoon march points were totalled by summing demerit points for kit checks and late arrivals at finishing points and combining these with the scores achieved on the medical, platoon attack, ER gun and M203 stands. 7 Platoon came first with a

score of 85, 9 Platoon second with 73 and 4 Platoon third with 57.

Perhaps the busiest group were the caterers who prepared 'TV dinners' for all three meals of each day. Their professionalism in producing hot tasty meals for a Battalion split and mobile over a large area earned them respect from every quarter.

The second 'busiest' were probably the staff at the various stands who for lack of numbers had to double up on a number of tasks and phases of activities. These personnel were more appreciated by the exercise director and safety officer than any one else.

Not an open season but a deliberate effort to practice the task of closing with and destroying the enemy with live ammunition and explosives as members of teams by day and night over rough terrain and varying weather conditions. A very noisy business!

