

EXERCISE HARD LUNGE

Some of us have read the post exercise report and deemed it unsuitable for this classy publication. We have turned, therefore to two sources of impressions — one a platoon commander and the other a civilian and reckon that somewhere in the middle we might find the truth!

A PLATOON COMMANDER'S VIEWPOINT

by 2LT E. TURNOUR

There is no better way to introduce a newly commissioned officer of the Royal Australian Infantry to his profession and the men he is to lead, than by sending him 'post haste' into the field for a Battalion Exercise. This is done so that he is unable to confirm what he has been taught in training and must, like a drowning man, grab at every bit of straw that passes his way.

'OK, you now have 24 hours to get settled into the Battalion, get your equipment and stores packed away, oh one other thing, you're in the advance party for the Exercise called HARD LUNGE. Have you been told about it? No, well stiff, you'll find out!'

So began HARD LUNGE — it seems more of 'Hefty push'. 'What stores do you need? Yeah, OK, one of those, right. How about one of these? What is it? An M24,-6,-58,-1-5. What does it do? I dunno, but you'll need one.' 'OK.' One Day later: 'When are we going?' 'In an hour's time.' 'You're joking.' Two hours later: 'OK fellas time to go? Who's that funny looking fellow who talks like an Irishman?' 'The RSM.' 'Oh.' So began Exercise HARD LUNGE.

After several hours of dust and bone jarring bumps came the destination. A quick discussion on where we were and more probably where we should be, led to help being needed from high quarters. Finally in the form of a six figure grid reference came salvation. We had actually made it. So as we lay down beneath the stars and listened to the pleasant drone of mosquitoes and scratched at ant bites, came the thought what is going on tomorrow. ZZZ

Next day brought a TV breakfast. Why it is called TV breakfast I'll never know, probably associated with the visual effects of the food on the container and a television set. Both tend to blur your vision. We're moving, the battalion defensive position, beauty. Positions were sited interlock, counter interlocked and sited again. Then began the most health physical work a soldier ever is required to do, digging.

That night we broke for the evening meal and watched the Hercs come into land and guessed how long it would be before the rest of the company appeared. It wasn't long before, 'Wake up, they are here.' 'Which platoon are you? Right follow him, not him you idiot, him.' 'Who are you? PTE ??? who's that in front of you.' 'I don't know.' 'Have we got them all SGT.' 'Yes sir.' OK follow me, and so blind lead the blind to the platoon position. '1 sect there 2 sect there

3 sect there. Hey boss, we're missing two fellows. Half an hour later time for bed but better check the perimeter first. After a quick look around and several extinguished cigarette butts later I decided that the perimeter was secure.

Next day brought a recon and for the rest of the platoon digging. The recon proved uneventful with the exception of the RAAF holiday resort in the form of an 11' x 11' tent plus TV, fridge and other assorted luxuries. The next morning was occupied by digging, rest and orders for the battalion assault river crossing. Gear was secured, pits filled in and then came the soldiers near and dear friend the rain. Morale took a bath but spirits were maintained, especially those with the Johnnie Walker label on them. The APCs drove across the Burdekin and formed up. Bang!, the wars started, where is he, what is he and how many. Can anybody see them. A general consensus of no and so the day progressed.

Navigation from APCs is similar to navigation from the stars, it puts you in an area that is generally 10 km x 10 km. Therefore orders group were a free for all on what was our position. Who was right us or the armour 'wackas'. It was usually us but every so often they managed to fluke one.

As the exercise progressed the general complaint became apparent. The enemy weren't playing fair. They were sneaking off as soon as we deployed. The result became apparent, a platoon would scout ahead, get behind the enemy and cut off their means of retreat. Our platoon was selected and we managed to skirt the enemy and capture their getaway vehicle just as they were disengaging from the rest of the company. From the enemy's slack jaws as they saw their vehicle depart I would say that the manoeuvre was successful. Apart from the fact that the enemy were all out for 23 and the fielding company still going strong.

We left the now resurrected enemy to work out what happened to their supposed escape route and proceeded to clear our axis, and so the exercise progressed. A little victory here a long walk to there. The smiling faces of the mortar platoon when we carried their mortars for them. The long faces when they had to carry them. One more day and we would be in a position to assault the enemy. Only 11 km to objective not far at all and should prove to be uneventful. Well uneventful turned into headache and 11 km turned closer to 20 km. What happened to

the other section. Hurry back SGT and move them along. Ten minutes later 'Zero this is one er, ah, I think we have lost a sub call sign.' '1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 ... what?!' Everybody halts. Belated looks are passed then we find they're linked up with mortars. Whew. Where's the SGT, he's still looking. 1 hour later we have our SGT back and continue on our uneventful day.



The Company stops and starts, stops and moves again. Finally we have made it. A day of rest is taken.

Orders are given for the Battalion attack. Will B Coy take out the A Coy fire support again, bets are placed, even money no one's game for odds. We proceed on our preliminary moves and set up for the night. The attack is to begin at first light.

We awake, no mumbling, everybody's ready, into the APCs and wait. A Coy attacks their objective. Then it's our turn. Go! and so the attack begins. A harsh shaking, a few busted fences and then we dismount. Everybody right, 'let's go, no not that way you fool that way.' We're off, contact and the ball game gets under way, we push through but some 1 RAR guys just don't die easily so they get told to die or else. A machine gun opens up on our right, take it out 2 section. Ah !! That's the fire support, another bet lost. We keep going and interrupt the cav having breakfast. They don't want to play but we brass them up anyway. A Coy refuses to let up and seeing that there are no more enemy to shoot, decide that the B Coy assault force needs more action and so they brass us up. We decide to reorg and under the 'protective fire' that A Coy is trying not to provide we count our losses.

Well we had won, the bad guys had been given another hiding. All that remained was an accounting for lost equipment and the walk back to the transport. The walk back to the transport proved uneventful with no ambushes and not even a contact. Apparently the enemy had had enough. The Salvo arrived and issued out brew and bickies to the victorious. The trip home was quiet with heads being raised at Charters Towers when the word girls was heard.

Home. Stores were handed in, the troops sent home to clean up and then began the best part of the exercise. Seeing who could tell the biggest lies of the war, recounting the humorous part the hard parts and starting rumours that you heard out bush and seeing who believes you.

Another battle on the Burdekin

from staff reporter **MARK FAZEL**

By kind permission of the
Townsville Daily Bulletin

While politicians argue whether or not to dam the Burdekin, men of the 2nd/4th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, this morning crossed the Burdekin at two points, as part of "Exercise Hard Lunge".

The exercise, the biggest infantry exercise held this year, is a culmination of platoon and company training for the year and has four major aims.

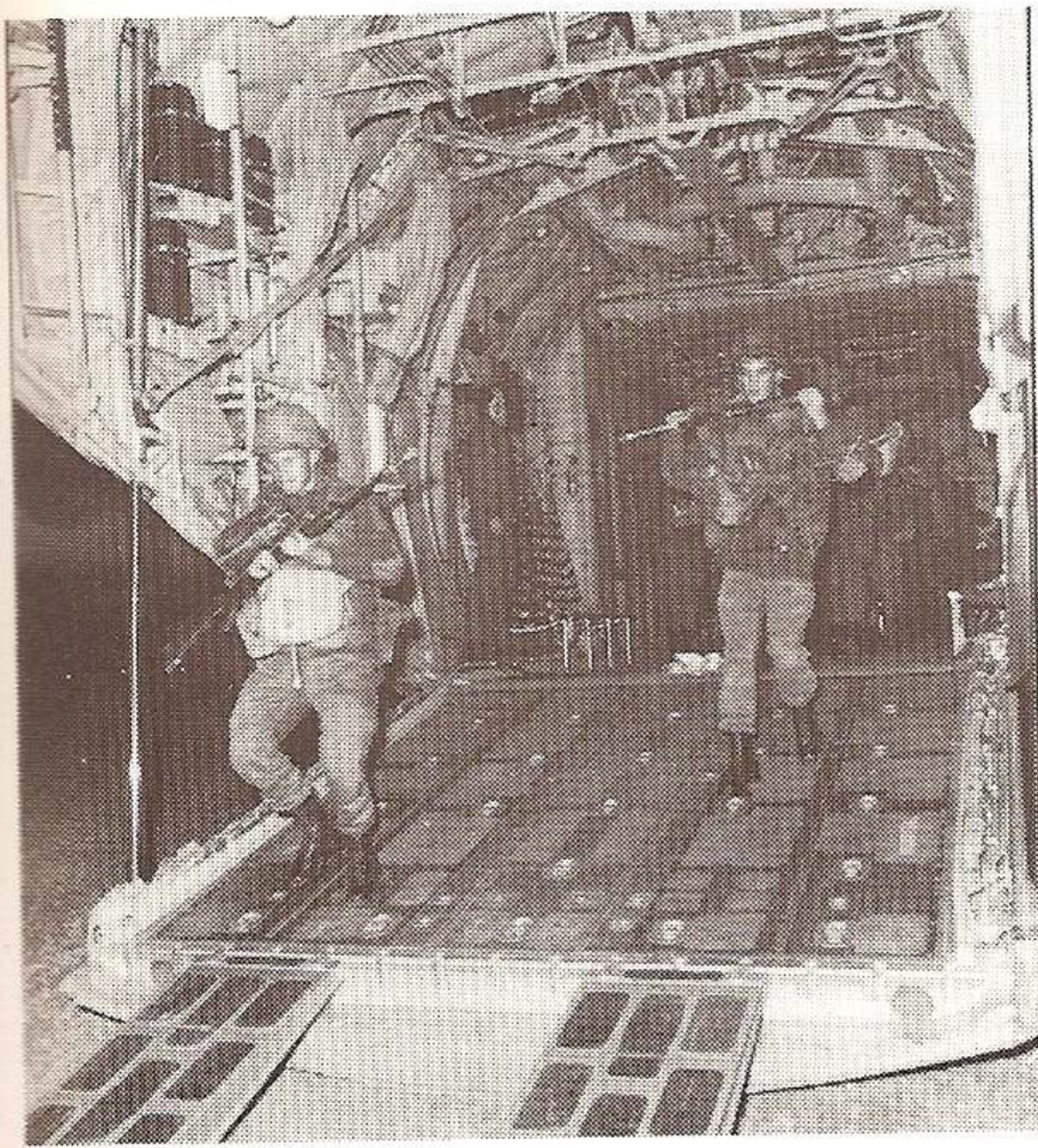
It is designed to give the troops experience in tactical air movement using a variety of aircraft to prepare, plan and execute an assault across an obstacle, practice in offensive and defensive operations on foot, using aircraft and mounted in armoured personnel carriers and to resupply the battalion using both road and air delivery.

The exercise started on Wednesday night, when the 450 men of 2/4 RAR were flown into the area at the Mt Ravenswood airstrip about 40 km south of Ravenswood.

The infantry is being supported during the exercise by a bridge-building troop of the 3rd Field Engineering Regiment. Army helicopters of 162 Reconnaissance Squadron, more than 60 armoured personnel carriers from B Squadron, 3rd Cavalry Regiment and an artillery battery.

The object of the operation started on July 3, when a regimental-sized enemy force theoretically invaded Townsville.

The group was forced out of Townsville by July 18 by 3 Task Force and withdrew to an area around Charters Towers with a major defensive position at Selheim.



While Australian troops prepared to mount an attack, the 2/4 RAR was flown in to out-flank the enemy and interrupt its withdrawal routes out of Charters Towers.

Because the enemy had cut all rail links and bridges the 2/4 RAR had to cross the Burdekin in APCs and make a 50 km advance through the Mt Cooper Station area to Mt Ross. At the same time they were to destroy any enemy encountered of a company-sized group that intelligence reports said were centred around Mt Cooper.

The 'enemy' company actually consists of members of the 1st Battalion RAR.

RAAF Hercules flew in the APCs on Thursday night, while the 2/4 RAR had dug in 6 km from the crossing points in a light defensive position and sent out reconnaissance patrols in preparation for today's crossing.

Any suggestion that the exercise was being treated lightly were soon dispelled after surveying the battleground-like atmosphere at the defensive position.

Vigilant

APCs sat in carefully-constructed hides and weapons pits bristled with firepower as the men kept a vigilant eye out for the 'enemy'.

As the 'enemy' is identified by wearing any non-regulation issue, one soldier who had swapped his jungle greens for my jeans and shoes was captured by B Company, but later released.

The change was so I could take part in one of the last reconnaissance patrols to the crossing points,

ARMY and AIR FORCE CANTEEN SERVICE

*The Management and Staff of
2/4 RAR Canteen*

wish all our customers

A Very Merry Christmas

and

A Safe Holiday Season

BEFORE GOING ON LEAVE, BE SURE TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF AAFCANS CHRISTMAS WINE AND SPIRIT SPECIALS. PRICES GREATLY REDUCED. AVAILABLE AT ALL AAFCANS OUTLETS IN LAVARACK BARRACKS AND RAAF BASE CANTEEN, GARBUTT.

under the command of Major John Burrows, Officer Commanding A Company.

Also on patrol was Captain Rob Joske, forward observer with the 4th Field Regiment, Royal Australian Artillery whose job was to check possible targets if heavy firepower was needed to protect troops crossing the Burdekin.

As he said, it dispelled the idea that artillery-men are always miles behind the front line.

The patrol reached one crossing point with no enemy contact except for two herds of cows who are neutral throughout the exercise.

Enemy sighted

On the eve of returning to base Major Burrows sighted 'enemy' on the far bank and without being observed noted their position and strength before returning to the defensive position.

Information gained from these patrols is invaluable in insuring an operation of this size goes according to plan.

Major Burrows' Company last night moved into secure the crossing points and to give covering fire to B and C Company, which were to move through his positions this morning and cross the Burdekin at first light.

After the crossing the troops will advance until they reach Mt Ross on about August 5.

Experience gained from the exercise will be important for the coming Kangaroo III exercise in October, when the three Australian services conduct joint operations with troops from several allied nations.

Bridgehead secured

From staff reporter MARK FAZEL

(By kind permission of the Townsville Daily Bulletin)

Most people would think it crazy to swim the Burdekin River at midnight in pouring rain. But for 2nd Lieutenant Mark Webb and the men of the 2/4 Battalion Royal Australian Regiment's Assault Pioneer Platoon it is just another job.

The men were taking part in Operation Hard Lunge south of Ravenswood and it was their job to prepare and mark out the two entry and exit points for armoured personnel carriers which crossed the river at first light on Saturday morning.

Rain and cloud cover made the job even more difficult and it was not until 4.30 a.m. that the second exit point had been located and marked.

Lieutenant Webb said that although there was an enemy position about 200 m away, his men were not spotted.

They found no mines at the crossing points but believed there was one further on, and once all the APCs were safely across the river it was his men's unenviable task to clear and mark a safe path through it.

While Lieutenant Webb was marking the enemy bank, men of A Company, 2/4 RAR secured the entry points and marked a route from the 2/4 RAR's main defensive position to the riverbank.

One route was marked with orange lights, the other with green so the APC's knew which crossing point they were to take.



The first wave of about 20 APCs each carrying 10 men from B Company, roared over the crossing points as if it were daylight and moved forward through gullies and creek beds towards suspected enemy positions in assault formation.

With the forward troops were artillery observers who could call in heavy fire if it were needed.

On schedule, at 6.15 a.m., carriers moved down the bank, roared through about 4 ft of water and clambered up the far bank, which two day's rain had turned into a bog, to make contact with the enemy, members of the 1st Royal Australian Regiment.

While troops from B Company dismounted from the APCs to deal with the enemy position, more APCs carrying C Company, marshalled at the crossing points waiting until the bridgehead had been secured before moving across the river to join the advance.

The operation should continue until August 5, when it is anticipated the advance will have moved 50 km to Mt Ross. During the advance troops will be re-supplied by air and land with ammunition, food and other necessities.