

# EXERCISE TROPIC LIGHTNING

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This brief report was designed to enlighten you on Exercise TROPIC LIGHTNING held in Hawaii in June 80. I was going to write it from a mortarmans point of view but as the Platoon only fired 20 rounds in the war, I will instead try to give a view of the war from the 2/4 RAR Command Post. As Mortar Platoon Commander, my job in conjunction with Major Ben Lans, Battery Commander 108 Battery, is to advise the CO on the available indirect fire support and its best application.

Exercise TROPIC LIGHTNING was a computer assisted, map manouvre command post exercise. It is not like chess though — all the computer does is produce results from given statistics. The computer is located on the mainland of America. At Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, inside an old picture theatre, a huge map of the exercise area was set up on large tables. Around this table were the controllers. The system worked as follows: If the CO decided to move A Company he would come up on the net and order it. A controller, acting as OC A Company would answer and then move the A Company flag on the table. If an enemy company or platoon was there and there was the likelihood of a clash the figures of strengths, weapons etc. are fed into the computer. An answer would then come back with the determination, e.g. A Company 1 WIA, enemy 2 KIA and 15 WIA.

The war was fought in a tropical jungle environment against an army fully equipped with divisions of tanks and Mounted Infantry. We were on the defensive and once our dispositions had been laid out the war commenced.

The CO appeared to be enjoying himself...He had use of unlimited TOW missiles mounted on jeeps and used these so efficiently that 2/4 RAR only moved once and that was back to our main defensive position. Due to the employment and use of these missiles and our good administrative system to keep resupplying the forward companies, we had a successful battle wiping out tank Battalions and Battalions of motorised Infantry by the score.



*A captured enemy armoured car with crew.*

Maximum use of all available artillery enabled us to do pretty well. In fact on a map it looked like the Australians were the only ones left as the US Battalions were either wiped out or had withdrew.

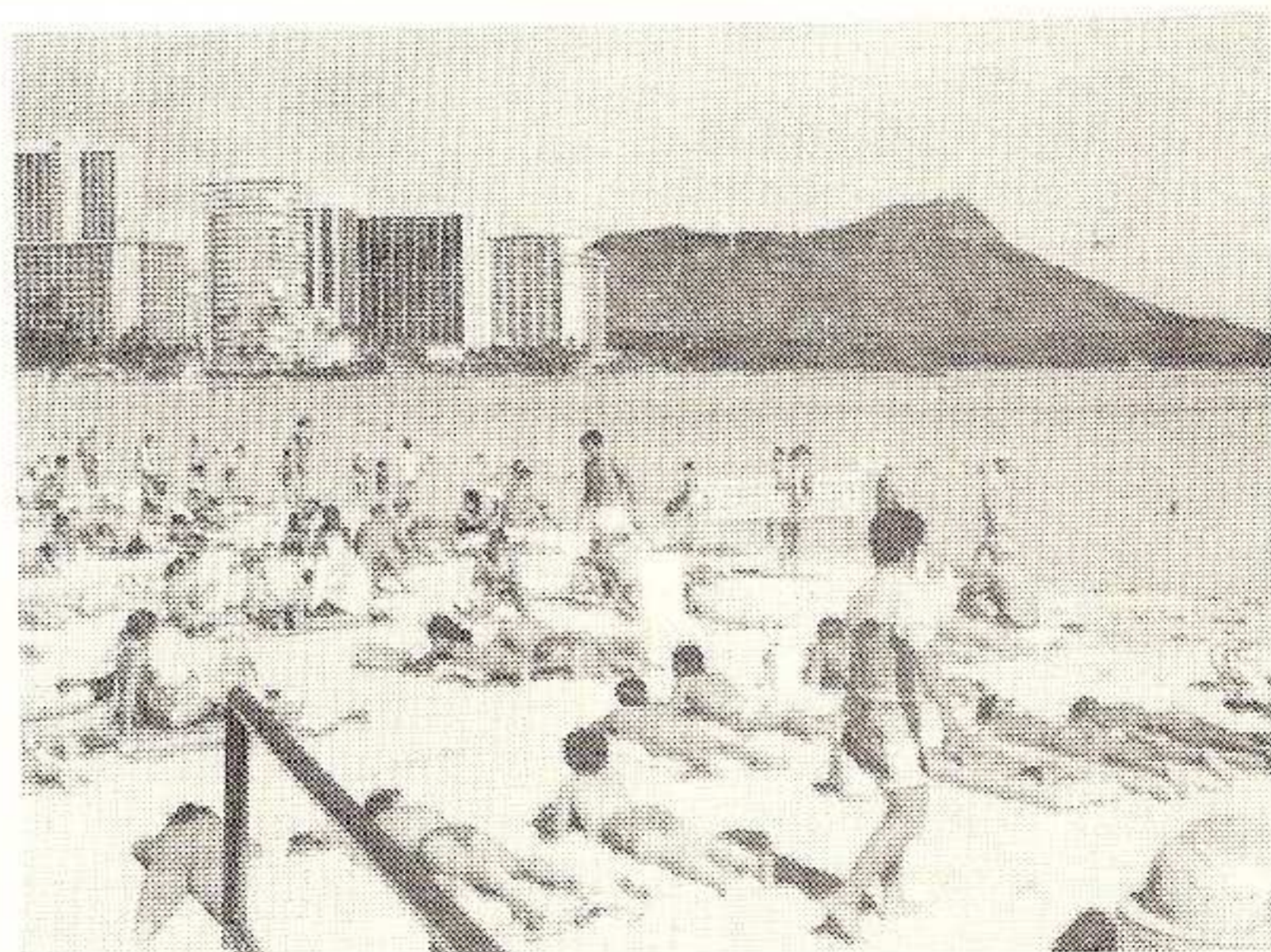
The exercise finished rather decisively at 2 a.m. on the third day when the use of "tac nukes" made all other weapon systems rather superfluous.

Out of the debris 2/4 RAR emerged far ahead of the others. the CO's ability to reach the battle and to employ all the available resources enabled us to virtually remain intact against a mechanised enemy. The pace of the battle was fairly constant until 2/4 RAR started hooking in and this almost blew the computer. It took 4 hours to get a result after that.

Overall it was extremely interesting to be able to 'play' with TOW missiles, regiments of guns etc. and I think everyone who participated learnt a lot and was impressed by Hawaii as I was.



*TOW Missile.*



*Enemy objective.*