

EXERCISE OVERLORD II (21-29 JULY 80)

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Australia's relationship with Musoria had, once again, deteriorated to the stage that military sword rattling had to get underway in earnest. Intelligence suspected that reconnaissance elements of one invasion group would be landing in the Cooktown area in the period 22-24 July 80. And so it was that on 21 July 80 we moved by Hercules, helicopter and foot to our area of operations just north of Cooktown.

We deployed in company areas of operation along the coast and commenced our searches. The country was very hilly and so, for good communications, command posts had to be on high ground. This got a bit close to being like hard work but in A Company's case was well worth it; what a view! We stood transfixed on Barnett Hill and watched some capitalist civilian sail his yacht into Cooktown. Our reverie was broken — 3 Platoon had sighted enemy! Details were sought. 3 Platoon from a new base near the west had seen about a section of enemy on the high ground to their south. Not so good — that meant that we had "baddies" between ourselves and 3 Platoon. Further details came to hand — the enemy were moving about on Barnett Hill. The enemy was company headquarters!

A fairly intense patrol program ensued and exciting things were found like an old hot box lid, some tracks, and two enemy who kept coming back to life much to the consternation of the sniper team. Enemy were watched landing by night. Soon all companies had cleared their coastal areas and the time had come to go further inland to find and destroy established enemy installations. Most of the redeployment was done by helicopter but A Company proved that the Mark I foot is still the infantry man's best friend and covered 10 kilometres over a very varied piece of terrain. As we were advancing through some fairly thick scrub the order came to send company commanders to battalion headquarters for orders. A Company had no landing zone but in 30 minutes we had one cleared and in doing so thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. Observations were made on OC 2 Platoon's innate ability at hanging out of trees and trimming branches. Then the fun was over and it was back to scrub bashing, falling into swamps and helping a group of lost enemy to navigate. Our new orders meant the establishment of company size block positions on all enemy routes and detailed patrolling to find installations. C Company stared at solid rock and pondered the problem of defence to Stage 3. A Company smugly dug into sand and was down to Stage 3 in no time only to find a water table which was cheeky enough to encroach on the CP floor. The company 2IC showing, no doubt, the effects of working in the heat, immediately sank wells everywhere and at long last our millbank water bags were used to effect.



Members of A Company using the millbank filter bag.

The dreaded Musorians had been found in platoon groups and destroyed before the defensive phase and the intelligence boys believed that a large installation was not too far away. The search narrowed and a company sized base was found in the thick jungle on the creek line near the boundary between A and C Company. As the reconnaissance continued B Company closed in to join in the kill.



Time out for a drink and issue of radio orders.

A battalion attack was planned and A Company had the task of securing the forming up place and providing fire support. B Company was the lead assaulting company. On the way in A Company had trouble locating an adequate creek crossing. Eventually one was found but its adequacy was seriously questioned by the CO who arrived in the forming up place well soaked. The enemy position turned out to be a bag of worms and C Company had to fight through B Company and then both companies had to redeploy to meet new surprises sited in depth. After a very long afternoon the position was ours and the exercise ended.

Well the tactical phase was over but the move out following the refurbishment of defensive positions was still to follow. The move back was like the move up and taught valuable lessons on air deployment — one Chinook crew even got a navigation lesson when they landed a platoon on an abandoned strip miles away from their proper destination at Lakeland Downs.



Emplaning for deployment.

As we flew back from Lakeland Downs by Hercules we thought back and smiled at the little incidences which, because of their humour, are the ones which remain as memories. Like the time when, on our way to the exercise, a young authoritative voice shouted at us as we took our seats aboard a Hercules. "Right you blokes — no swearing — there's RAAF on board." Then another time when the RAAF revenge set in as the Hercules crews enjoyed their "tactical" flying causing one young soldier to be air sick to the wild cheering of the remainder of the passengers. There were many instances but one I will never forget was when I had just returned from CO's orders and sat down to enjoy my evening meal when the medic, Doc Musik, came round with my rum ration. I poured it into my coffee and joined my 2IC who had just done the same. We were quietly yarning, drinking coffee and breathing rum on each other when the Brigadier decided to pay a social call. "And how is it all going?" asked the Brigadier politely. "Very well thankyou, Sir" came the answer from two red faced officers sitting under two black boy bushes and breathing alcohol up at him. The Commander 3 Task Force did not have to ask why everything was going so bloody well. We decided to extend the rum ration to give OC B Company a tot before leading his troops into the

assault. Our troops securing the forming up place got the task and were also instructed to give a tot to the CO. OC B Company obviously needed the prescribed medicine as he drank both his share and the CO's.



Lakeland Downs airstrip.

And so after a bit over a week away we came home. What had we achieved — well we had planned and executed an air move of the Battalion group by Hercules; we had run an airhead for the transfer of personnel and stores from MRT aircraft to helicopters; we had conducted low intensity offensive and defensive operations in close country (some parts were a lot closer than others!); we had redeployed the whole battalion using airmobile techniques; and we had conducted resupply using Army Aviation fixed wing air drops and rotary wing (Army and RAAF) landing on landing zones. But all that was quickly put aside as we reached home and ate real food and re-hydrated ourselves with a little of the amber coloured liquid.

After all that we can say we have been to Cooktown but we can't say we have seen it!