

EXERCISE WET SEASON

In February '85 Mortar Platoon 2/4 RAR conducted Ex Wet Season 170 km north of Chillagoe in the gulf coast of far North Queensland. The exercise was designed to test the mobility of the Mortar Platoon in the wet and to collect data on operations in the wet.

The Platoon, led by Captain Justin Dwyer, headed off with six Landrovers and one Unimog which carried all the POL requirements for the ten day period. One of the Land Rovers was RAEME fitted to cater for vehicle breakdowns. The area of operations is subject to inundation at this time of the year so reaching the destination was not assured. The return journey could also be quite precarious if heavy rains fell.

As it turned out the platoon made the Lynd and Mitchell River junction with little effort and an overnight stop at Irvine Bank. Whilst stopping for lunch on the banks of the Walsh River Private "Parky" Parker, of 9 Transport Sqn, hand caught a small shark as it struggled through a shallow part of the river. The find was quite remarkable as the shark was 200-250 km from the coast.

The first two days were spent patrolling, and the extreme humidity certainly cut the work rate in half. Crocodile prints along the river beds made every step a cautious one. Corporal "Harro" Harrison's Sect, with some quick first aid treatment managed to revive Private John Graham from heat exhaustion.



Typical Blacksoil BOG — Now What!

Corporal Wall, the Medic, had to travel 100 km, via the nearest crossing of the Mitchell River, to get to the patient.

Sergeant "Obie" O'Brien led a vehicle convoy north into some of the wettest and muddiest stretches of road around. The Land Rovers managed to negotiate the slush fairly well except for one particular stretch. The Mortarmen were able to practice their debogging drills. Pushing, pulling, digging, towing and winching all proved successful methods. Mobility in the Gulf Coast was certainly shown to be restricted by the wet season.

The final phase was the preparation of a Mortar position. The platoon experienced heavy rain,

sunshine and humidity whilst digging their mortar pits. Cpl 'Daisy' Burnett completed his pit first but not without excessive loss of perspiration. LCpl Hansen, the signal platoon representative maintained communications with 103 Signal Sqn Townsville, with HF radios until the exercise was aborted.

The platoon packed up and headed for home four days early because heavy rains threatened to cut off the participants for weeks if not months.

A lot of lessons were learnt on the exercise, however the major lessons are that wet weather and humidity seriously hamper the operations of mortars which rely heavily on vehicle transport for movement and ammunition resupply.



"Push!"