

Operation Sceptre

WHEN NOT on operations with the battalion, elements of 4RAR/NZ(Anzac)Bn carried out tasks independently or under the command of other units.

A continuous task was the maintaining of a rifle company on the Horseshoe, a 200ft high feature north of Dat Do which was of considerable tactical importance. Companies rotated at six-weekly intervals. While on the Horseshoe a company was responsible for its own AO, which covered a large area stretching south to include the western part of the Long Green, but excluding Dat Do. Constant patrolling was carried out, but seldom was contact made.

The biggest contact occurred on 22 June 1968 when V Company was manning the feature. A nine-man patrol tracked, located and killed three VC in the Long Green. Immediately the patrol found itself on the perimeter of a well-prepared camp occupied by about 70-80 VC who reacted to the killing of three of their members with unexpected ferocity.

The patrol was pinned down in open paddy by heavy automatic small arms and RPG fire. The first man to be killed in the battalion, Pte M.J. Wickman, fell in one of the first volleys. The patrol fought off two assaults on its position. Mortar and light fire team support saved the patrol from possible annihilation.

Three awards came from this contact — Lt M.F. Dodson was awarded an immediate Military Cross, Lance-corporal A.L. Ropeta was later awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal and assault pioneer Sapper W. Kahika was Mentioned in Dispatches. The battalion was credited with three kills although it is certain many more were killed, but were dragged away by their comrades. The battalion was to see this demonstrated by the enemy many times during its tour.

C Company took over the Horseshoe from V Company and suffered its first fatal casualty when a soldier was shot dead while manning a checkpoint.

Operation Sceptre was a company-sized reconnaissance in force carried out by the first W Company in AO Mustang, situated to the west of Route 2 and north of Ap Sui Nghe.

A section of mortars deployed with the company, along with elements of the anti-tank/tracker platoon.

The operation lasted nine days and in that time the company killed eight enemy, wounded four and captured one. It also captured 14 weapons and 1000lb of salt.

The second W Company, manning the Horseshoe in December 1968, mounted a successful ambush on the outskirts of Dat Do, following some good reconnaissance work by a platoon patrol. The platoon saw several VC congregating near a large tree. They were too far away to engage, but the platoon commander felt the area was an important

rendezvous for the VC. The next night a different platoon ambushed the area and killed four VC.

In August 1968 V Company established a fire support base in support of 3RAR, although the company remained under command of 4RAR/NZ(Anzac)Bn. On August 1 the company moved by APCs to a site about four kilometres north of Ap Ngai Giau on the western side of Route 2. The company established FSPB Avenger in which were 161 Field Battery and the 155mm guns of B Battery, 2/35th US Artillery. The company patrolled in the vicinity of the fire support base without contact, returning to Nui Dat on August 13.

Two days later the same company deployed to the Ap Sui Nghe feature to patrol and establish observation posts. It stayed there until August 26, being replaced by C Company.

At the same time D Company carried out operations in the Nui Dinh mountains. The anti-tank/tracker platoon deployed into the same area, operating in two six-man teams. The company returned to Nui Dat, leaving the two teams in the area. Several small contacts resulted in one VC being killed.

On 20 January 1969 the second W Company moved into the Long Green to carry out an operation in conjunction with 2/48th ARVN Battalion and 586 RF Company. The operation, in AO Hannibal (see opposite page), lasted three days and the company returned to Nui Dat on January 23, no contact having been made.

To soldiers just back off operations, TAOR patrols were a curse which cut into their time back in base. To rear details personnel they were, at least, a welcome break from the humdrum life of Nui Dat. But seldom was contact made or any degree of interest sighted.

However, one of the first TAOR patrols sent out by the battalion contacted three or four VC, killing one. The patrol was led by Sgt D.E. Pedgen, B Company.

Day-to-day tasks included cavmobile runs up Route 15 (Clearing the road and escorting convoys), standing by as task force reaction company (Required to react at 30 minutes notice. C Company, 1RAR, were reacted in this manner to support the battalion attack during Operation Merino), roadrunner operations (A show of force in APCs), rice denial operations and engineer protection parties.

Shortly before the battalion was due to leave the theatre the second W Company was deployed north to Bear Cat, the home base of 11 Armoured Cavalry Regiment (US). The company was task force reaction company and was to link up with elements of the American armour to operate against an enemy force which threatened the base.

In two days the combined force killed 20 enemy and captured numerous weapons. Of this number, W Company killed four enemy and captured four weapons.

OPERATION TOAN HANG 2

AD Hannibal

20-23 Jan 69

Caesar

Troy

Portia

Brutus

NORTH

