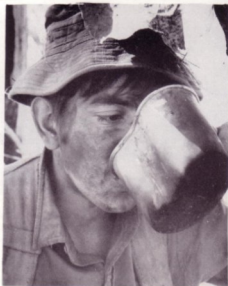


THE BIG A



25. R.G.T.—Happiness is.
26. R.J.—Happiness ain't.
27. Thommo—the Mt. Elliott river rat.
28. Boney—creeping Moses.
29. Pinzone—karate kid.
30. Twidale—bullets galore.

PART OF THE COMPANY STORES.



HIGHLIGHTS of the year :-

1. APC Training—taken for a ride.
2. High Range—pleasant strolls back.
3. Happy Swinger—digging in under water.
4. Orienteering at Mt. Elliott—what a picnic.
5. Survival Training—Watching and waiting for weight to waist from waists.
6. Big Country—Frisivolous fighters.
Dining In nights.
Navex—that foreign tribe.
grey haired Sam.
Watermanship—"sailing".
tree boats.
at last a use for Candy Creamy fudge.
- Little Country—Big Effort.
7. Dauntless Defender—"Doubtless . . .?"
8. Roping—"A" on the rocks.
9. Colours—well done 2/4 RAR.
10. No work—No pay.
11. High Range—Live firing.
12. Kangaroo II—things are hopping.
visitors.
13. Stubbsie—Fun overseas (R.R.).
14. Butch—Bush fever.
15. Jane M—sinking with the ship.
16. Symo—master gunner.
17. Synn—Hit man—want a contract.
18. Fancy N—"Uniforms, what for?"
19. Fittler—golden gloves.
20. Col—the new look pullover.
21. Murph—the ring of confidence.
22. Geiger—exit stage left.
23. Fielding and Carr—indoor sports.
24. Nige (Boorie)—true to colour.

1 Platoon

The year 1976 started with a real sense of foreboding with all the bush work the CO promised us in 1975.

February provided a brief 26 mile route march to Ravenswood and the local delights for those who could hack it. Commanders at all levels found it hard to retire for the night, particularly as a result of the local hospitality. Fanta orange drink cans were noted along the route from Mingela and the cry "I can't hack it" was heard more than once.

"Happy Swinger" was the first real exercise. All soldiers passed their battle efficiency swimming tests with flying colours. NUFFSAID.

The departure of Sgt "J.B." Bryce occurred soon after this exercise. For all members of the platoon it was a sad occasion, as he had been with us for eighteen months. He left in a blaze of glory, as the Newmarket and Royal Oak Hotels and the Mandarin Club will testify. Also the platoon commander's neck was glad to see him go as the old Sarge had a pretty good repertoire of wrestling holds.

The weeks seemed to drain away. Sgt "Pinky" arrived to replace Sgt Bryce. "Ace", "Thommo", "Cockroach", "Symo", "Defa", "Johnno", etc., gave,

as always, immaculate performances under the leadership of Jock Yule in the many taverns in the town, acquitting themselves well on all occasions.

However, all the pressure centred on "Big Country". From all the ranks in the platoon, this exercise was genuinely worthwhile. We all learnt how to navigate and sweat on the navex and every individual, perhaps for the first time, learnt what it is to work hard.

All members voted watermanship the best part of "Big Country", in particular "Smalsey", who learnt to swim the hard way. The two platoon boats performed creditably although on occasions our efforts to paddle amongst large overhangs and mangrove branches were quite funny.

Once the five to six weeks of "Big Country" were gone, we realised that half the year had slipped by without any trouble at all. Townsville never appeared so great on return. Soon the Newmarket, Royal Oak and Mandarin Club were back up to full quota.

Militarily, the only other notable event was "Doubtless Disaster" . . . THANK YOU . . . "NUFFSAID."

Pte Fittler, the platoon commander's batman proved that fighting in "high places of eating" was not good for the health, although three other members of Townsville society accepted the prone position very easily.

The platoon has remained fairly stable this year, Mac went on three months L.W.O.P. back to the farm, Douglas and Bert remained their quiet selves. The drinking and revelling fraternity guided by Blue Bowtell and coached and handled by Jock Yule kept all spirits up with tall tales and true.

To wind off, a pretty good year, 1 Pl of A Coy looked forward to a fruitful Skippy II. There was no fruit and not much else either, so let's have a Happy Christmas instead.

A CRITICAL LOOK AT THREE PLATOON BY ITS PLATOON COMMANDER

It is always advisable for a person to sometimes have a good look at themselves. This also applies to a platoon. Take 3 platoon for example. 3 Pl is not really a bad platoon but we have a number of faults that are painfully obvious. These problems stem directly from the members of the platoon. In the following paragraphs, I, the platoon commander, will show you some of the problems I have.



"WHAT'S SO FUNNY?"

My platoon sergeant for example. In what other platoon does the platoon commander have to race his sergeant to the enemy position during an assault. I don't really mind this but it is a bit upsetting when Sgt Mansfield beats me to the top of the hill, especially when there are PR camera crews up there. My sergeant is not really bad when you consider my corporals.

Cpl R. G. T. Smith, after seven days in the bush, begins to swear a lot and when angry, tends to destroy things . . . like trees, rocks, and platoon commanders.

Cpl Torney, on the other hand, is the opposite. He adopts a very low profile and is extremely difficult to find when I am looking for someone for a patrol.

Lcpl R. J. Smith, an acting section commander, gets his kicks out of finding ways of intimidating his platoon commander. Like dropping an M203 round in front of him with the intention of wounding him, which he did most effectively.

Lcpl "Blue" Little's only problem is that he can't handle Townsville's weather. I do believe he finds it very cold here, just watching the way he walks around shivering. I think he is getting acclimatised, if only we can stop him sipping anti-mite on exercise.

Lcpl Sutton has a personal problem. He is constantly turning up for work with one of his legs shaven. Now, I try to explain to the rest of the platoon that some types of people regard this as quite normal, but I still see them giving him funny looks. He tells me he is having trouble with his knee, but one never knows.

2 PLATOON

2 Platoon had an enjoyable year overall.

The year started off with a new platoon commander, 2Lt Ray Smith. Things went well for the first couple of months.

In March, 2Lt Smith was re-posted to Sydney and replaced by 2Lt Mark Gallagher, just in time to go on Survival Training at St Paul's Station near Charters Towers, an enjoyable time was had by all.

The high point of the year was exercise "Big Country". Highlights of this exercise were :-

The memorable nights in Town,
PHO outwalking everyone on the navex.
And the water fights on the river.

Following this there was exercise "Dauntless Defender". Very little needs to be said about this as all feelings were the same.

At present, the platoon is preparing for "Kangaroo II" and then leave.

Notable events of the year were :-

- Sgt Col Ross—taking a holiday but claiming he is on an Education Course.
- Anon—was bitten by a snake and didn't know it.
- Pte Twidale—the fastest batman around.
- Pte Fielding—falling in love.
- Pte Hogbin—falling out of love.
- The boss—walking home from Katherine.

Lcpl Fikerle's problem is that he wants to assault enemy positions in open file. Now I believe section commanders should be given freedom, but it is a bit odd when the rest of the platoon is in assault formation and the right forward section is in open file.

Now for the diggers generally. They are a pretty switched on lot. They tolerate the power group very well, seeing that everyone knows that those who hold rank have the most faults. But in what other platoon does one of the forward scouts wear cotton wool in his ears because he does not like the noise of blanks. God help me, Pte Harvey. In what other platoon does one of the forward scouts hate spiders to such a degree that he carries out the basic IA, that is Mag off, pack off, and so on every time he walks into a spider web. I don't feel that Pte Hilder can really help it but he must learn not to throw away his rifle while doing it.

If you think my scouts are bad, you should see my machine gunners. Now, I won't go into details, but those who know diggers like Thompson, our liaison officer with the blacks; Pinzone who gives me strange looks when he draws his bayonet; and Wardle who spends his spare time fighting and going to hospital (in that order), will know what I am talking about.

The platoon HQ has the most problems, mainly Price and Panton, not that there is anything very wrong with their sig work but they do have a number of bad habits such as sleeping on picquet and pushing the K phone over near my hoochie at night.

Of course, we have the platoon Romeo and I dread the day Pte Bettiens comes up to me and says . . . "Sir, I have a personal problem".

When I received my IETs I really started asking questions about who hates me. Diggers like Synons, who did it then told everybody about it; Whittingham who believes roping is a good sport for the mentally retarded; and Wozniak whom I'm having difficulty in preventing from hanging around primary schools with bags full of lollies, are obviously part of a plot to intimidate me.

On the other side of the spectrum I have the trained riflemen. What can a platoon commander do when one of his diggers thinks it is good public relations to alter the looks of some civilians by changing their profile rather abruptly. I can in a way forgive Pte McAuliffe for this, being the understanding person that I am, but I'm not really confident that I can speak for his long haired mates.

One person in the platoon who really worries me is Pte Nager. Pte Nager is just happy, that really worries me.

Pte Packham is just as bad but he really burns me up when he turns up for work in riding boots.

Pte Byrne is in a group of his own. He has this bad habit of making me believe that he is lying to me when in fact he is telling the truth. This really annoys me, especially when I try and catch him out.

Finally I have Pte Curr, who has the habit of spending more time in making excuses for what he didn't do than doing what he should be doing.

For all their problems and faults, 3 PI is a good platoon. I confess that when I see them marching around I get a funny feeling in my stomach, and I'm not sure whether I am proud or feel like throwing up.

2Lt N. S. MORRIS. 6



With a little help from our friends

WE REALLY GOT BY

The year's success would not have been possible without the assistance of the other units of the Task Force.

108 BATTERY 4 FD REGT RAA—Accompanied us on every exercise, the survival training, and even played a part in the presentation of the new 2 RAR Colours Parade. All gunners are born equal; but these gunners must have been born more than equal.

103 SIG SQN—With us on all the exercises, including a mammoth effort on "Big Country". Thanks to you all . . . Over.

3 FD ENG REGT—Our thanks to the Engineers, as they also assisted on "Big Country", "Dauntless Defender", "Kangaroo II" and some company training.

B SQN 3 CAV REGT—Not just a taxi service, but a great friend to everyone who normally travels by GP Transport.

9 TPT COY (INC 29 SUP PL)—They drove us hither, thither and yon, and even though we all didn't get in the front seat, we got there with a minimum of fuss. Special thanks to the transport and supply detachments who went to Katherine with us.

121 SUP COY—Suffice to say that without them, and their ability to quickly adjust to our occasional change of plan, we would have been in bother (particularly at range shoots).

DEFENCE PLATOON HQ 3TF—2Lt Tom Moylan's band has been with us on just about everything we have done, and their presence has been invaluable.

Our thanks also goes to 4 Camp Hospital, 16 Dental Unit, and 3 Fd Eng Regt Wksp for their constant support throughout the year.

Last, but not least, a very "Big Country" thank you to 9 Sqn RAAF, in particular, Flying Officer Ian Taylor, Flying Officer Keith Morgan, Sqn Ldr Terry Wilson (the only sane one), and their crews.

"BIG COUNTRY"

Most exercises have meaningless names, such as "Rapid Rifles" or "Kangaroo II", but exercise "Big Country" was a true description of both the vastness of the land and the ambitiousness of the concept of the exercise at Katherine in the Northern Territory. For a Battalion exercise, it was a monster. Everything about it requires superlatives. The distance from Townsville (1200 miles), the complexity of the logistics system, the diversity of personal taking part, and the distances covered on foot or paddling assault boats, were enormous.

Major John Sullivan took his advance party of clerks, cooks, electricians, engineers, storemen, signallers and medical orderlies to the battalion base, RAAF Tindal, in the week prior to 24 May 76 to prepare the base for the main body's insertion. Drivers met LCHs in Darwin and drove the Battalion's vehicles to Katherine, about 250 miles away.

The battalion arrived over a period of three days in twelve sorties of C130 aircraft to find a most sophisticated camp with hot and cold running water (if you were lucky), huge buildings capable of housing at least our 600 personnel, flush toilets, immense hangars for workshop areas, ice cream for three meals a day and an unlimited beer supply. The transformation of this disused camp achieved by the advance party in a very short time was nothing short of incredible.



THE 2IC FINALLY MADE IT, AFTER
R & R IN MT. ISA.

After a day or two of settling in, the battalion embarked, by companies, on Phase 2 of the exercise. Each company undertook a five day company exercise, four day navigation march, and five day watermanship exercise. It was with some trepidation that those companies set off because there were many unknowns which threatened to jeopardise the whole exercise. For example, no one had ever paddled sixty miles down a river blocked by rapids and receding water before; and navigation by sections over fifty-five miles of almost featureless terrain with a tenuous supply line was daunting, to say the least. Well, the results of Phase 2 are history. The companies came through with flying colours, sun burn, and sore feet.

The company exercise proved itself to be an excellent opportunity for companies to shake out and validate their training. It was long and hard and testing and it is significant that not one funny incident occurred (to the author's knowledge).

The navigation march was a different kettle of fish. It was hard also, to the point of nausea, with bleeding feet, aching backs and parched lips. Not content to suffer in silence alone, Major Tony Jensen put a cat amongst the pigeons so to speak with his indent for chocolate milk in a Malanda Milk truck, and ninety-eight sets of GP boots, various sizes, filled (to scale of course). As "Niner" and "Hawkeye's" navigation was suspect, they both took a course in the use of the heliograph.

Watermanship was just plain good fun. The aim was to paddle assault craft down the Katherine River for sixty miles and then down the Daly River for a further fourteen miles. There are a whole host of notable incidents that can be recounted. Some of these are below.

- A Company found that there is more to sailing than just putting a hoochie on a pole and a paddle out the back as a rudder.
- The RAAF flew a helicopter sortie to resupply an assault boat. On reaching the given grid reference, they reported that there was no river in sight and asked whether the assault boat should be left on the hill below them. They were only about fifty miles from their true objective in another sector. They won the "Where the Farquarwe" award for their efforts.
- Considerable embarrassment was caused by reports in the national press of the illegal catching of a crocodile.
- How could the Legislative Council of the Northern Territory believe for one moment that soldiers of Her Majesty's Forces could possibly "blow" fish with "expanding bait".

EVEN BRIDGES II



Phase 3, the Battalion exercise, retraced the route of the company exercises (much to everyone's horror). That same hot, dusty and featureless terrain, broken only by a few steep, exposed and rocky outcrops where the enemy were always found, tested the endurance and sense of humour of all. The defensive position was the



TINDAL

most challenging we had ever experienced. One night, when returning by Land Rover from Tindal, "Niner" reported by radio that he was five hundred metres out; a considerable period of time (and about one thousand metres) elapsed; and "Niner" again reported that he was five hundred metres out; some time later there was a further message to say that he was five hundred metres out and an interjection from an unknown call sign "Where the F— are you?"

The RAAF helicopter crew took much pleasure in simulating enemy bombers. A most unfortunate and "accidental" direct hit was "Niner's" tent, with flour and eggs.

Whilst the Battalion was doing its thing, IET was in progress at Tindal, the Engineers were blowing big holes in the ground for no apparent reason and the Artillery detachment went on safari. Without the dedication of the RA Sigs detachment, the dishevelled band of RAEME craftsmen and those dauntless drivers of 9 Coy, exercise "Big Country" would have ground to a halt.

Three aspects of the exercise which could not possibly be omitted are Mess and Canteen life, Town, and those marvellous movies.



LOCALS EXAMINE OUR OPERATIONS DURING THE OPEN DAY AT KATHERINE.

The Officers/Sergeants Mess was well frequented, especially by the residents of Tindal. Much business and some heavy "briefing" took place, and Spiers held up one wall whilst "Shorty" occupied his high chair. The Soldiers' Club brought the unlikely combination of "Bluey" and "Corbes" together but they proved to be equal to the task and had their own Caribou aircraft to help achieve the impossible task of keeping up the beer supply.

Not much can be printed about the movies. Suffice it is to say that "The Coming of Seymour" remains as a high point in the minds of all and never before have repeat performances received such acclamation.

The town was the downfall of many, both financially and health wise. All sorts staggered out of the Katherine and Crossways Hotels but the locals and police were kind and forgiving.

It was with satisfaction and little sorrow that the Battalion left Tindal for home on the 28th June. Most were satisfied with what they had seen and had no ambition to see more.

