

EXERCISE BLAZING PADDLES

10 - 20 NOVEMBER 1981

As the name implies it had all the makings of a comic opera. Detractors in the Battalion soon christened our endeavour 'Blazing Muddles'.



Nonetheless it seemed a worthwhile venture so canoes were built albeit slowly from July onwards. After KBI the last three of nine were completed in a weekend of frenzied activity. The varnish still wet on one or two as the trucks were loaded on the Monday.

Tuesday saw us on our way to the Mitchell river. Hopes fading for plenty of water in the river as we crossed dry creekbeds of the upper tributaries past Mareeba. Arriving on the river just on-dark we caught a rare glimpse of the more than single double breasted Mitchell River Wader. Needless to say she leapt for a towel and later graciously accepted our apologies for invading the privacy of her bush bathroom.

Sergeant Harvey headed off with the shore party next morning to 'The Prawn Farm', his mission to trade a few beers and yarns for a few prawns. The canoeists meanwhile took to the water to battle the rapids and scrape across the shallows.



The river line was most attractive, often breaking up into several small shady streams. If you picked the wrong stream it meant a short walk dragging the canoe, cursing sharp or slippery stones until you rejoined the main channel.

The first three days passed quickly as we canoed the upper Mitchell, those with little experience soon became adept with their paddles. We quickly fell into the routine of reveille at six, off at seven thirty morning tea for half an hour, an hour for lunch and stop by three to set up camp.



During the late afternoon some would fish others sporadically tried pig shooting with singular lack of success, for lack of pigs, and the rest would simply collapse in the river and laze about. As night the more energetic tried catching freshwater prawns. The method used was to leave a piece of meat in the water on a string. After a while you checked it out with a spotlight and with any luck speared the inevitable prawn found feasting.



EX BLAZING LADDLES Living up to its name.



And yet again.

As in any successful exercise an immense amount of support and co-operation is required between all participants and agencies involved. This ensures that people and communication arrive on time, troops are fed, safety is adhered to and contingency plans were ready for unforeseen problems or accidents.



Pvt. Baxter, A Coy.

Due to good planning and the efforts of those involved Exercise 'Blazing Saddles' was a marked success. Then there were the memorable moments never to be forgotten.

- The fire started by the gunships on day 1.
- The soldier seen attempting to "blow" his bayonet out of a figure 11 Musorian.
- The FO who after observing a 2.75 inch rocket pass harmlessly over the target requested the pilot to drop 300.
- The cooks feeding the control staff of 160 with rations for 128.
- The platoon that on losing the axis of assault over corrected and assaulted at right angles to the remainder of the company.
- The fire started by the gunships on Day 5 that make the return of the final company so hazardous.
- The same fire that required the gun battery to move so that they would not lose 'FACE' again.



Cpl. Dore at the live firing.



EX BLAZING SADDLES. Pte. Noble laying out cord for the Bangalore Torpedoes with L/Cpl. Logan at the rear.



Sgt. Brough, A Coy and Pte. Fotheringham.