

EX "WALLABY HOP" — WEIPA 11 - 24 September 1981

By Major F.R. Edwards

Exercise Wallaby Hop was heralded as something different, but highly orientated towards our role as the ODF Battalion, and it certainly lived up to all expectations.

The exercise began with a road convoy making the rugged overland trip to Weipa followed by the bulk of the Battalion in Hercules aircraft.



"Now how can we tow this one up?"

"Orangelanders" replaced "Mussorian" as the enemy and had evil intent upon the Comalco mining operation in Weipa, so 2/4 RARL deployed to secure the mine operation and ensure it's ability to remain operating.



The symbol of the military dictatorship of Weipa

Activities commenced almost immediately for each Company as they arrived. 'W' Company secured the airfield, 'B' Company the Ardoom Mine, 'C' Company the Lorin Point storage, processing and export area

and 'D' Company wandered off somewhere mummbling about bridges and mangroves. These first few days gave most people some idea of the massive size of the mining operation and the organization and administration of Comalco which controls all aspects of Weipa.



Will they never come?

Enemy action built up slowly over the first few days with reconnaissance by the "Orangeland" commandos building up to harassing raids at the mine and airfield by their popular forces and a sabotage against the mining equipment and facilities. The task of preventing this involved guarding and patrolling by night, and bashing the scrub by day to look for the enemy "lying up places." This all became fairly intensive with the Companies working all night (as BHQ slept), then BHQ would work furiously all day to keep everyone busy until beer and prawn time at the "House on the Hill".



"The House on the Hill"



Still looking!

The enemy picture unfolded slowly with increased activity against Andoom Mine, the airfield and the bridge. The highlight of this phase was the search to capture a "commando", reputed to be worth up to two cartons of beer! A steady flow of prisoners filtered through to the intelligence section for their gentle persuasive information extraction. Reports indicate that an innovative new method of capture has been found in preference to the "stick 'em up" tactics, called the "low flying rugby tackle and arm lock."



2 1/4 RAR Transport Ford Military Colony Weipa



"Well, at least we look the part"

During this period the Echelon and the Pipes and Drums spent considerable time winning the hearts and minds of the people of Weipa with guided tours, Pipes and Drums demonstrations at the schools, and the overnight sponsoring of a group of schoolboys in the Echelon.



The P & D staying cool



Is there anything except beauty around here?

Meanwhile, back at the war the "Pie-ladies" were considering a holiday in RIO, the RP's were rebuilding their Land Rover and OC and CSM 'A' Coy. were paying their fourteenth visit to the prawn trawlers (prawns or deckhands?). At this point tragedy struck and the dart board slipped on the wall so 'A' Coy. swapped areas with 'C' Coy. moved to 'B' Coy. area and 'B' Coy. moved to part of 'C' and 'D' Coy's. old areas (?).



Anything could just come along

Each company now had the opportunity to indulge in beer and hamburgers at the Weipa Lions Club park for a night off and to meet some of the local population. This proved to be an enjoyable event and a much needed break.

The 20th of September saw the first Weipa military spectacular with a demonstration by the Army Aviation Corps and the RAAF with the finale of the Pipes and Drums resplendent in full dress uniform marching from the back of the Chincock. This was followed by Cricket, Athletics and Rugby League against the civilians (Cricket - lost, Rugby League - lost, Athletics - still arguing). At this time the first commando's were seen, unfortunately they were parachuting into the football field as a demonstration. Two "firsts" were created, the Pipes and Drums played at 10,000 feet in the Chincock and the Weipa

Rugby League Club was drunk dry for the first time in history.



Aviation showing off again.



A new pilot?



A friendly match