

EXERCISE IRON FIST

Major P.M. Gumbley

"Sir Edmund Hillary would be proud of us..."

"Who said it couldn't be climbed..."

I thought you needed oxygen masks at this altitude ...

These were not the comments of battalion members on Adventure Training in the Himalayas but the comments of the soldiers of A and C Companies during the first hours of Exercise Iron Fist.

Exercise Iron Fist aimed to practise companies in operations in close country against a conventional enemy within a Battalion setting. It was conducted in the Cardwell Ranges, west of Tully, between 20-25 June 1982.

Clyde the Musorian, clad in his easily recognized 'Cardwell Range Reds', had withdrawn to the Cardwell Ranges to lick his wounds after a severe beating inflicted by 3 Brigade at High Range during "Operation" Swift Eagle. Clyde had stooped to the low depths of robbing neighbourhood stores at Cardwell, terrorising young school children and poaching from the Battalion's favourite water ski site at Koombooloomba Dam. So it was bestowed upon 2/4 RAR to oust Clyde and his sabre-rattling mates once and for all and return calm to the icy waters of Koombooloomba Dam.

The Battalion enjoyed a comfortable coach ride to Kareeya Power Station, at the base of the Tully Falls, and debused in preparation for a four company



The chaps at work

insertion by way of a very steep jungle-clad spur, leading to the top of the Cardwell Range.

The CO was on an air recon looking for another approach after it was reported by the Pioneers, who were to "blaze" the trail, that an attempt to climb the cliff-like feature would be both dangerous and time consuming.

Undaunted the CO ordered A and C Companies to "give it a bash" while B and D Companies were driven into their AO by truck, a rough, cold and dusty trip of eight hours.

After four hours of dodging the Gympie, Wait-a-while and the odd rock face, A and C Companies appeared at the top of what appeared to be Mt. Everest and moved into the "J" for a well earned rest on night one.

The next four days were spent chasing Clydes bank of warriors in his famous 'red greens' through some very inhospitable jungle. C Company spent two days reaching their AO, operating in the thickest imaginable jungle without so much as a wiff of Clyde, and then spent two days conducting a platoon attack.

A Company cleared its AO by day three and then spent the last day following "a determined lone enemy rifleman" conducting a fighting withdrawal to his main camp. This very "friendly enemy" led A Company straight to a perfect FUP for the attack on the main camp. This "rapport" between friend and foe was evident on several occasions. D Company were progressing a little too quickly in their AO and a captured enemy NCO told them that they should stay put for the night as they were a little too close to the next position.

The pioneers spent four days cutting an LZ, to "RAAF" specifications, near the enemy camp and then it was never used. This was compensated by the suspense-filled tasks of exfiltrating various patrols from the shores of Koombalooomba Dam using the Gemini and assault boats. Snags proved to be a real problem with the dam being littered by dead trees and Sgt. Smalles paid for his keenness as a 'snag-looker' with a swim in the icy water on the last night.

Throughout all this the Battalion JIC and Captain Martin at Exercise Control HQ had everyone's head swimming with Gold Fever after a find in the local



Intrepid pioneers running for more fishing tackle?

creek. It was only a matter of time before they found the "big stuff". Just to be sure Major Jucha had the samples tested by our well known metallurgist — the dentist — who announced with a smile, "it seems to have a high percentage of gold in it". I wonder how mica would go as a dental repair compound?

At the conclusion of the exercise OC Admin Company was forced to leave A Echelon and the lovely grove of Avocados to set up the bar-b-que lunch at the midway point of our return journey. It has been asked, "what happens if you have a bar-b-que

and nobody comes?" In this case A and C Companies managed to find the secluded BBQ site, tucked neatly under the bridge at Liverpool Creek and enjoyed the snags, steaks and salad and more steaks and more snags.

Overall Exercise Iron Fist would have to go down as the shortest Battalion Exercise in history but one which gave every company ample opportunity to rediscover the problems of battalion operations in close country.



Brig. Deighton and Lt. Col. Rowe during tactical discussion (EX IRON FIST)



Amazing what they can do to a 10 man radio post! (CR #1016 P057)