

Operation Hawkesbury

12-24 September 1968

Operation Hawkesbury, a reconnaissance in force carried out in three stages, was one of the battalion's most successful operations.

The operation was conducted, initially, in AO Tuggerah. The battalion moved into blocking positions east of Route Two on the western edge of the enemy zone known as the Thua Tich. 1RAR then swept west.

Two companies, V and W companies, then moved north to the area of the Don Dien de Courtenay rubber plantation, as a result of intelligence, to intercept a consignment of rockets believed to be moving from east to west.

The battalion, less these two companies who joined it later, was then moved to the area of the Blackstone Trail to carry out a reconnaissance in force in AO Canowindra.

Two fire support bases were used — FSPB Gabo, situated on the site of an old ARVN post north of the village of Ap Ngai Giao, and FSPB Wattle, on the Firestone Trail near the junction with the Blackstone Trail.

The companies flew to their AOs from Operation Innamincka on the morning of September 12.

104 Field Battery moved by road to Gabo after it had been secured by Support Company.

V Company flew to a company base near the perimeter of the fire support base. C Company, with the battalion headquarters reconnaissance group, secured a feature known as Trentham for the fly-in of the remainder of battalion headquarters.

W Company and B Company moved into AOs to the east and south of battalion headquarters.

Remember....?

Three companies in contact at once while the fourth was air assaulting.

Start of the red soil theory.

The magnificent RAAF Dustoff and the successful move of Nine Platoon C Company's casualties, organised by the 2IC B Company.

Message from 2Lt Reidy: "Tell the OC I've been hit in the backside and if I were him I'd really be in pain.

W and V companies completely equipped with torches from the caches.

Only five cans of beer, W Company?

Companies' reluctance to report elephant tracks.

Dustoff of C Company soldiers following the strafing. Malaria.

Attack on FSPB Wattle.

CSM Sp Company and the RSM floating in their weapon pits.

Seven minutes for Pte Tilmouth to get to Blackhorse and on to the operating table.

Congestion in slit trenches during peak hour.

Companies carried out patrolling and on September 13 — a Friday — Seven Platoon, C Company, came into heavy contact with enemy in bunkers. It suffered two killed in action, one soldier died of his wounds, and seven soldiers, including the platoon commander and platoon sergeant, were wounded.

The platoon commander, 2Lt T. G. Reidy was later awarded the Military Cross and the platoon sergeant, Sgt M. R. Carroll, the Distinguished Conduct Medal.

After three days of the operation V and W companies moved to the de Courtenay rubber plantation, V Company by APC and W Company by Iroquois helicopter.

V Company moved to blocking positions on the western edge of the rubber and W Company started sweeping west. They located a large cache of food and medical supplies after several small contacts with the enemy, resulting in the death of one New Zealander.

On September 16 V and W companies flew to their new AOs in AO Canowindra, the remainder of the battalion having flown in the day before. C and B companies had moved to their own AOs, while Support Company had secured and patrolled in the area of Wattle.

All companies had productive contacts. V Company killed 10 enemy in two days. A platoon from V Company ambushed and killed three enemy and the next day a company-sized ambush killed seven VC.

C Company moved into a stop position following a B Company contact with the enemy in bunkers. Four VC were killed as they withdrew into the C Company ambush.

The withdrawal route indicated a larger bunker complex in the area. This was heavily engaged with artillery prior to C Company moving in and securing a 150-bunker complex.

Two VC were killed in the action and a large amount of equipment, including two 122mm rockets and detailed maps of all major installations throughout South Vietnam, were captured. Documents indicated this was the headquarters of 84 Rocket Regiment.

The following day two US F100 Super Sabres bombed a ridge near the C Company position. By error they then strafed the enemy bunkers while C Company was still in the camp.

Fourteen men were wounded and speedily evacuated by Dustoff without loss of life.

W Company reported seeing elephant footprints on a VC track, leading to a lot of speculation.

The battalion flew back to Nui Dat on September 24, well satisfied with results from Operation Hawkesbury.

RESULTS — Own troops: Four killed, 21 wounded.
Enemy: 25 killed, five wounded, one captured.

OPERATION HAWKESBURY 1



OPERATION HAWKESBURY 2

AO Canowindra 15-24 Sep 68

