

K86

*"Where were you in
the Coal Pits in 86?"*

In the middle of the day, with an ambient temperature of 33°; the relief watches from DELTA and ALPHA laboured to the top of their respective washing plants, sweating profusely whilst inhaling the fine black dust. Another day at the coal face.

At German Creek, the BRAVO COY CP was a hive of activity. The background noise of the air-conditioning supplemented the cackle of the HF as Dolly, looking tired and drawn demolished his third icy coke of the morning.

In Oaky Creek the noise of the BN CP was often drowned out by the incessant drip of the showers, the flushing of the porcelain toilets and the muffled roar of a 5 engined, 120 wagon coal train heading for the coast.

This was all in Phase 1 of the years training extravaganza, K86. The deployment to the Bowen Coal Basin was as per ODF SOP, the lads being impressed by the short transit time on the ground in Emerald. The occupation of the BN AO was characteristically smooth.

With the exercise planner not expecting us to commence offensive operations until D + 6; the Companies started on D + 1. By D + 5 it was all over bar the shouting. We were non expert in all of the high profile aspects of low level operations which included picqueting, vehicle patrolling, VCP-ing, hot wiring, breaking in, ambushing, being polite to the locals, being less than polite to the Raiders, fast driving, slow sitting and flying. Meanwhile BRAVO COY were still up at the Creek. There were so many prisoners and enemy vehicles being processed through the Battalion that, for the first time in recent history, the RMO advised the CO that the RP section was suffering from combat fatigue.

It was with a sigh of relief that we extracted from the Basin, leaving our task to 42 RQR, and headed EAST to the quaint little hamlet of South Maryborough. From there the cordon and search of the Ogmoores metropolis was planned and executed with speed. C/S 63 had been in the town for so long that OA had forgotten about them.

This was the first time that the Army had conducted such an operation in a civilian town. Charlie and Delta went on foot, sealing the town at first light, whilst the remainder of the Battalion (who were blessed with common sense) inserted in style. Delta's nocturnal fracas with an irate bull was not a result of Molestation by CHQ.



With the town in a grip of steel and the ladies washing the breakfast dishes whilst the CH47 blow dried their washing, the Raiders withdrew to the Styx River Hotel and refused to move until forcibly ejected by an unusually aggressive BRAVO COY. The gentle, comforting voice of C/S 9 on the airwaves was a continual source of inspiration for the men on the ground.

Task completed, our wanderings took us to the friendly environs of Williamson Airfield where we established a FSB and with the Rock Firing 106 in Direct Support, commenced a search for a mystically reinforced enemy. Some started to wonder if it was the Exercise planners intent to practice the resupply of the ODF in Shoalwater Bay right through the Christmas leave period.

Alas no. HQ Australian Defence Force in Canberra were relieved when BRAVO COY finally finished their company attack so that the whole thing could be terminated. There was plenty of time for reflection in the shade of the gums whilst the Townsville shuttle was programmed and we returned home on the 10th November, combat laden, much to the relief of the Townsville Bulletin.

We had enjoyed the Direct Support Air Force, the scenery, the cowboy enemy, the ladies of Tieri and the hospitality of the locals from Ogmoores to Clermont but we found that the lack of action made the extravaganza somewhat tedious.