

SIGNALS

'From ashes to ashes,
from dust to dust,
from Main Q-Store back to Main Q-Store.'

Unique in the history of 4RAR, Signals Platoon was created, used and abused, and disbanded within the very same year. Raised in the halcyon days of 'phased build up on rifle companies' using a management technique perfected by Bn HQ known as 'methodology and milestones', it built from nothing to the dizzy heights of 'tenuous comms' on that supreme test of comms known as Ex Swift Eagle, strutted its stuff by building antenna farms at any opportunity, and achieved the ultimate accolade of being replaced by an entire RASigs signals squadron in the Commando battalion of the future. All within the very same year.

The raising and disbanding of Signals Pl was a carefully thought out process based on staff selection, techniques known only to the military - - - never employ someone with prior knowledge or experience! And if they have it, post them...anywhere but Signals! Ours was the only Sig platoon in living memory to have more RSO qualified NCOs outside the platoon than in it. Any NCO who thought that they knew something about comms was soon moved on!

Reluctant and not-so-reluctant members of Signals platoon in 1996 were:

RSO	CAPT 'Wilko' Wilkinson CAPT 'Dodge' Phoenix	ex Mortars, posted 2RAR Mortars ex QM and our very own Commando!
RSS	SGT McMillan	ex Sigs 5/7RAR, now Int SGT
RSS	CPL Middlemas	ex Sigs 3RAR but on course all year
Storeman	CPL Ernie Baker	ex R and I Store. Main Q, 4RAR
Signallers	LCPL 'Smurf' Hewitt LCPL Colin Reaves LCPL 'Mac' McKay LCPL Kemp PTE Forsyth PTE Parrington PTE Toffield	ex DFSW ex RECON ex Assault Pioneer ex Sigs - what will we do with him? ex Assault Pioneer ex Sigs - there must be another job? ex rifleman extraordinaire

Each one a memorable member of the Battalion and the Platoon, each making significant contributions to the Battalion role and tasks in their own unique way. It all began with SGT McMillan's unique approach to leadership: his first words to we four sigs were: 'When I get back (from a three month detachment to 1 RTB at Kapooka), if I hear any bad words about you'se, then you're all f@#\$!'. Never seen him again! And, where are you now, MAC?

This was closely followed by 'Smurf' Hewitt introducing the platoon to the art of having as many applications for transfer and discharge in the system as possible at any one time. It all changed when he received a well-earned stripe and moved on to Charlie Company...sucker!

Wilko was very helpful and laid the groundwork for the new RSO by introducing him as 'some old bloke, he's bald and he's got grey hair'. Mids came, saw and took the easy way out and went on course ALL year.

As is the way, Signals Pl made their presence felt on many Battalion and company activities. From Gan Gan in support of Sydney University Regiment's annual exercise...Reeverie and Mac are still trying to work out what it was that they actually did to earn a letter of thanks for their 'outstanding contribution', through to Ex Swift Eagle where we gave new meaning to the word 'curfew' and its unique application in Townsville.

A Ech deployments were an educational experience for us, as well as for Admin Coy. Yes, yes, yes...we all agree...trained signallers would make such a difference, wouldn't they? Do you know any?

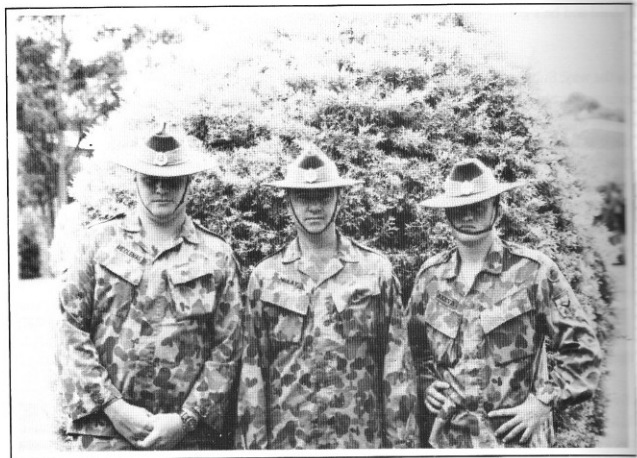
Ex Four Play was supported in principle...our fearless leader and RSO ('Dodge') heard the CO's callout, listened to what the CO was saying with immense interest, and then calmly announced that he was going on his RSO course to become a real RSO: CPL Hermann was promoted from Section Commander to RSO in less than one hour, and he was not even in Sig Pl. But then, some people will do anything to get out of a rifle company!

Ex Swift Eagle was memorable in many ways: antennas...never have so many been set up by so few for so little. And another thing...every time we set up an antenna, some other unit (usually RASigs) would sneak out and build another one. Show offs! Anyway,...mine's bigger than yours! And then, just when we thought we could talk to someone, who was it who thrust us into the age of technology and introduced the concept of mobile telephones as the primary means of communications in the Battalion?...Tell me again, how secure are they? Of course, no one would be listening-in because the comms plan for the Exercise said that mobile phones were not to be used. And then EW set up in the room next door! Amazing what one learns about one's own unit! An RSO can only say 'No, we don't use mobile phones' so many times. But, we got our own back by providing enemy groups for attacks on Blue Force logistics areas and fuel farms; but never again will we use the callsign Bravo 2-0. The jinx remains. Still, we met interesting people, and some of them still visit us, don't they, Parro! Could that be why comms were so difficult to achieve in Atherton?

We spent much of the rest of our time in the pursuit of excellence of stores management, and perfected the simple art of moving the signals store from one location to another: first, out of the Main Q into a building, then into a better building, then an even better building, and now back to the Main Q from where it all began...so now you know how to do it, Ernie. By the way, has anyone told the CO? To say nothing of the art of hand over stocktakes when no-one understands the CES, no-one knows what item is what and the advice of the Main Q is to find a sig who really knows what he is talking about. Thanks alot!

A big congratulations to the proud fathers...CPL 'Mids' Middlemas ('no more' says Linda) and LCPL Dale Kemp (King of the ante-natal classes).

Good luck to you all, as EVERY member of Sigs Pl moves on to their new life in the Commando battalion. We'll always remember the good old days. Ahhh, its been an interesting year.



CAPT PHOENIX