
OPERATION SOLACE

(53 members of 2/4 RAR reinforced 1 RAR for Op Solace. This article written by PTE C.M. Brown (Recon PL) is a glimpse of their life in Somalia).

1 RAR Bn Gp was warned for service in Somalia on 16 December 1992 as part of the UN sanctioned, US led, multinational peace making force, OP RESTORE HOPE. Australian participation was named OP SOLACE. The Bn Gp commenced operations in the Humanitarian Relief Sector Baidoa, in Somalia on 19 January 1993 and ceased operations on 14 May 1993. The last elements of the Bn Gp departed the theatre on 20 May 93.

From the outset, it was understood that the task confronting the task force would be an arduous one. Pre-deployment training was conducted in earnest, though our actual duties could only be speculated upon. The members from 2/4 RAR fitted into the sections and platoons of 1 RAR, combining expertise of both ODF Battalions.

Arrival at Mogadishu brought home the reality of the situation to us all. Surrounding us was the military hardware of over a dozen nations. It was difficult to comprehend the "peace keeping" ethos with Cobra gunships swooping over the rubble of what must have once been a beautiful city.

Gradually troops were moved out of the dust blown transit camp at Mogadishu to the harsher landscape of Baidoa, "The City of Death". Work began at once, consolidating positions around the airfield, whilst the UN troops began to withdraw. Platoons were given the "tour" of the town. From the rear of the Unimog, Baidoa looked worse than I had expected. It was interesting to note the dramatic change that took place during our 4 month tour of duty there.

A cycle of taskings was quickly established, consisting of convoy protection and food distribution, rural and urban patrols, small occupying forces in outer lying towns and immediate security of the airfield. Days were long, the workload initially intense. Conditions were poor, many men not having the opportunity to shower more than once a fortnight. Of course things were a little different at BHQ.

Despite the hardships the soldiers worked hard and showed excellent professionalism. The enemy proved not to be just the local gangsters armed with AK-47s, but also the oppressive heat and dust, fatigue and fear.

As our initial aims slowly became reality, the Battalion moved on to a more aggressive footing to counter the serious bandit problem in the area. It was obvious that the people were now getting food and blankets, but the cause for their famine was more than a prolonged drought. Patrolling activities in Baidoa itself were stepped up, utilising the aid agencies as primitive patrol bases, providing a 24hr Australian presence in town.

The infantry worked closely in all tasks with supporting elements, most notably the crews of 3/4 Cav Regt. In addition, we made good use of American support, including both Blackhawk, CH-53 helicopters and Cobra gunships.

The soldiers were, for the most part, well received by the people of Baidoa and the aid organisations. There were of course exceptions to this, as many soldiers will agree. Without our support it is doubtful that the agencies would have been able to carry out their operations as well as they did.

Change was occurring rapidly, most notably in the town itself. A sense of normality was returning. People could move about freely, markets appeared from nowhere. The people were now free to live as they pleased.

Our operations continued regardless. Cordon and search techniques were employed in outer villages to net more weapons and deny any armed militants their "safe areas".

Even as we left Baidoa, the job was far from finished, and I am sure many wondered if the French troops could continue the excellent work we had initiated and maintained. Our "Modus Operandi" was actually adopted as standard by the commander of the overall operations, much to the credit of the troops of 1 RAR.

Every soldier has his own recollection of memorable incidents, and his own perception of the operation as a whole. No value can be placed on this experience, it is something that each man can take with him throughout his army career.

There is no doubt that the soldiers from 2/4 RAR worked to a very high standard in all phases of the operation, proving to be capable soldiers even whilst serving with another unit.

Hopefully next time it will be us that are deployed.

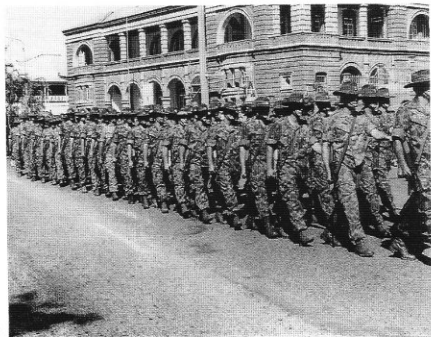


A mounted infantry section patrols the streets of Baidoa.

PTE Elliott patrolling through town.



A portion of the weapons captured during Op Solace.



The welcome home parade.