

5TH/7TH BATTALION (MECHANIZED), THE ROYAL AUSTRALIAN REGIMENT

A BRIEF HISTORY

At Tobruk Lines, Holsworthy on 3 Dec 73, 5 RAR and 7 RAR linked to form the new battalion, 5/7 RAR. Soldiers, non-commissioned officers and officers were drawn from both battalions to form the new battalion. The 5 RAR mascot, then SGT Quintus, and the 7 RAR Pipes and Drums were adopted by 5/7 RAR.

Throughout 1974, the Battalion was involved in individual and company training. C Coy spent the period Mar - Jun 74 in Malaysia supporting the RAAF at Butterworth. The Rifle Company Butterworth commitment continues to provide valuable training with a company being detached almost every year.

On 13 Jan 75, the Battalion received a warning order from 1 TF to form the major part of Field Force Group Darwin (FFGD). The task of FFGD was to assist the civilian population of Darwin in the clearing of houses damaged by Cyclone Tracy, which had struck Darwin on Christmas Day 1974. The Commanding Officer, LTCOL E.J. O'Donnell, MC was appointed Commander of FFGD. The reconnaissance group arrived in Darwin on 15 Jan 75 and the main body arrived from 18 Jan 75.

On 8 Mar 75, CO 5/7 RAR handed over command of FFGD to CO 6 RAR, and the Battalion returned to Holsworthy. During the 5/7 RAR's tour, it cleared 3288 blocks of land, 26 schools, two warehouses, one recreational ground, four shops, one hospital and re-roofed 136 houses.

For the remainder of 1975, the Battalion was engaged in sub-unit and unit training which included two major unit exercises, a Task Force exercise and the Divisional Exercise 'IRON MAN' at Singleton. This training continued into 1976 and in May 76, reinforced by a company of 1st Battalion, Royal Welch Fusiliers, the Battalion Conducted Exercise 'LOOK OUT' in the Dubbo region of NSW.

In 1976, 5/7 RAR began a mechanized infantry trial. The trial was sponsored by Field Force Command and directed by 1 TF. 5/7 RAR accepted its first armoured personnel carriers from 2 Cav Regt at a parade on 17 Sep 76. The trial continued for just under two years until Jul 78. The highlight of the trial was the deployment of the Task Force, including the Battalion in its APCs, to secure the route to Bowral for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Feb 78. This security was necessary as a result of the Hilton Hotel bombing incident in which a bomb was planted in a garbage bin as part of a failed assassination attempt. The quick reaction of the Battalion convincingly demonstrated the advantages of mechanization.

At the completion of the trial, the Battalion returned the majority of its APCs. A company allocation and a limited number of headquarters and specialist vehicles remained and these were rotated annually between companies to keep alive the skills learnt during the trial. Exercises during the following years often included the use of carriers from the Divisional Pool at Puckapunyal. Major activities in this period included Exercise DROUGHT

MASTER in western NSW in 1980, umpiring and exercise control tasks during KANGAROO 81, a deployment of the Battalion (minus) to Tasmania in early 1982 to assist with bush fire fighting and participation in the overload trial of HMAS Tobruk in 1982.

In 1983, it was decided to equip a second mechanized company. The Battalion was authorised to re-equip to its full peace time establishment of APCs in June 1984 and the Battalion adopted the suffix '(Mechanized)' from that date. APCs continued to arrive to complete the new establishment until November 1984. The first Battalion level mechanized exercise was TASMAN WARRIOR conducted at Shoalwater Bay in late 1985. In 1986, it was decided to hold the corporal mechanized infantry instructors permanently posted in A (Training) Company to provide more continuity for mechanized training.

The Battalion's training continued with large numbers of drivers and vehicle commanders being qualified in order to develop a pool of expertise and to provide a reserve of crewmen. Exercises were conducted regularly with 1 Armd Regt at Puckapunyal to develop cooperation with RAAC. Mechanized training was temporarily halted in June 1988 when a company (plus) group including the Pipes and Drums, participated in the Bicentennial Military Tattoo. The Battalion contingent formed a precision drill team and performed other tasks.

WO2 Quintus, the original mascot, having taken discharge on 2 Dec 85, died in 1988. His replacement, Quintus Secundus, a Bengal Tiger, is housed at Bullens' Animal World. Enlisted on 3 Dec 85 and promoted to CPL on 9 Sep 88, Quintus Secundus continues to take an active part in major Battalion ceremonial activities.

Training recommenced in early 1989 in preparation for KANGAROO 89. In addition to providing exercise control and umpiring support, the Battalion detached D Company to 1 Armd Regt to form a company/squadron group within Blue Force. The creditable performance of this formation emphasised the usefulness of the mechanized force in low level conflict. 1989 concluded with a fully mechanized parade to celebrate the Battalion birthday further emphasising the role of the Battalion.

The 1990s began with a return to a more normal training cycle and concentration on developing skills at all levels progressively. Highlights of 1990 included the 25th reunions of 5 and 7 RAR conducted at Holsworthy, each attracting over 500 visitors and the Brigade exercise, PREDATOR'S ADVANCE 90, conducted in and around Puckapunyal which was the biggest Brigade deployment since DROUGHT MASTER ten years before.

1992 saw the Battalion participate in Exercise TIGERS STEALTH in July, followed in October and November, by Exercise SUMAN WARRIOR in New Zealand.

Sending two Companies to Butterworth Malaysia back to back dominated 1993. Earlier, the Battalion had conducted three exercises in Puckapunyal. In October, the headquarters participated in Exercise SUMAN WARRIOR 93 in Malaysia. During the tour of B Coy at Butterworth, five soldiers were killed in a vehicle accident at Pulada. The Battalion was severely shocked by the sudden loss, but continued with a high rate of training into 1994.

Due to the large commitment to Butterworth in 93/94, the Battalion was incomplete until Apr 94, after which the Battle Group Exercise DESERT TIGER was held in Woomera. This exercise incorporated extensive rapid manoeuvre, and demonstrated effectively the mechanized applicability in short warning conflict.

The 1990's continued on with majors Exercises and courses being the Battalions lot till

1994 when the Battalion commenced Exercise 'Alam Halfa' at Puckapunyal then on to Exercise 'Desert Tiger' at Woomera then finally in that year Exercise 'Asian Dawn'.

In 1995 six men from the Battalion deployed to Rwanda as part of a UN contingent. In providing crews for the M113 of the Australian contingent Quick Response Force, they marked the first operational deployment requiring mechanised skills.

The Battalion had several activities in 1996 with Delta Company deploying to Butterworth, Charlie Company providing support to Project Wundurra. Bravo Company conducted Exercise 'Bulldog Strike11'. The Battalion then carried on with training throughout the year. In September the Battalion provided support to the Brigade Exercise 'Rolling Thunder'.

On the 21 July 1998, 106 U.S. soldiers from Alpha Company (A CO, 1/14 Infantry Regiment, 25 Infantry Division (ID)) made the half day journey from Scofield Barracks, Hawaii to New South Wales. Charlie Company left to take A CO place at the Joint Readiness Centre (JRTC) in Fort Polk, Louisiana.

Meanwhile the Battalion was involved in two major exercises the first being Exercise 'Tiger Charge'; this was the major commitment for the Battalion during 1998. The exercise was conducted at Puckapunyal over the period 28 Apr 98 - 14 May 98.

Exercise 'Phoenix 98' was the major RTA TF Trial activity for 1998. The exercise was conducted in the vicinity of Darwin, Tindal and Tennant Creek from 25 Jul-30 Sep 98. The exercise aim was to field trial those aspects of the A21/RTA TF, including sustainability aspects, against the spectrum of on-shore DAA threat scenarios across a representative A21 TR TAOR.

The beginning of 1999 saw the Battalion and all its families start the move to our new home in Darwin, or to be more precise Robertson Barracks Palmerston which is 30 kms south of Darwin.

A key aspect of the Battalion's remarkable two years was the achievement of the reduced readiness notice. The Battalion was put through several exercises to test

our deployment capability which we succeeded in very well. All this training cumulated in preparation for Exercise 'Tiger Charge and Crocodile West 99'.

On the 10 Oct 99 after 25 years the Battalion left Stokes Hill wharf on our first operation as a Battalion. The Battalion arrived at Dili Wharf with out much ado. We then took over our AO's, Delta and Charlie in Dili and Patrols and Bravo toward the Border.

During our stay in Dili the Companies patrolled constantly and were successful in arresting several Militia and capturing contraband in a around Dili. The Battalion also hosted COMDINTERFET and Mr Gusimao as well as Bishop Bela. The Battalion was then in Dili for the Christmas Concert, which saw a great day for the Troops.

The Battalion was again out in the streets with our APC for the new year's celebration after Int became aware of a possible attack on Mr Gusimao and other CNRT members. The attack failed to materialise due to the large presence of 5/7 in the streets of Dili.

The Battalion as a whole moved to the border region and commenced operations immediately and again found success in stopping across border trading for a little while at least.

Members of Patrols Company came under grenade and rifle fire whilst they were at Memo and thankfully there were now casualties. The Battalion maintain a high profile for the rest of the tour maintaining 95% availability of the APC s which proved itself time and time again as a versatile and effective vehicle in all terrain carry in out many recover jobs during the wet season.

The Battalion finally left East Timor on the 5 May 2000, the battalion had mixed emotions about leaving but were content with the knowledge that we had done a great job for Australia and for the East Timorese people.

During the rest of 2000 the Battalion received reinforcements to again bring us back to strength after some discharges from our return from East Timor. The major activity for the rest of the year was leave, courses and re- building the Battalion. Again we concentrated on our 28 day readiness and finalising some AQIS issues. The CO was well pleased with the Battalion on how quickly we came back on line after the deployment.

2001 again saw the Battalion receiving reinforcements and constant running of courses. During May and June of this year the Battalion participated in two major activities 'Ex Tandem Thrust and Ex Predators Gallop' the Battalion used these activities for finishing of training for the huge number of replacements and newly qualified drivers and crew commanders to gain valuable experience.

In October and November of 2001 the Battalion again was involve in 'Operation Reflex' which was the boarding and guarding of illegal boat people.

These people were using Indonesia as a stepping of point to gain entry to Australia. Again the Battalion proved its flexibility by taking female soldiers into the Battalions ranks to conduct this sensitive and humanitarian task. The Battalion brought great credit to itself and the Australian Army by providing support and professionalism to this difficult task. The Battalion is looking forward to a well earn break over Christmas but after our 26 th Birthday parade and party.

Appendixes:

1. 5th/7th Battalion (Mechanized), The Royal Australian Regiment
- Commanding Officers
2. 5th/7th Battalion (Mechanized), The Royal Australian Regiment - Regimental Sergeants Major
3. 5th/7th Battalion (Mechanized), The Royal Australian Regiment
- Miscellaneous Information.

5TH/7TH BATTALION, THE ROYAL AUSTRALIAN REGIMENT

COMMANDING OFFICERS

3 Dec 73 - 12 Jan 75	LTCOL P.N. Greenhalgh
13 Jan 75 - 10 Jan 77	LTCOL E.J. O'Donnell, MC
11 Jan 77 - 7 Nov 78	LTCOL M.P. Blake, MC
8 Nov 78 - 11 Dec 80	LTCOL G.C. Skardon
12 Dec 80 - 9 Dec 82	LTCOL P.M. Arnison
10 Dec 82 - 13 Dec 84	LTCOL P.L. McGuinness
14 Dec 84 - 12 Jan 87	LTCOL J.A. Jones
13 Jan 87 - 15 Jan 89	LTCOL J.R. James
16 Jan 89 - 14 Dec 90	LTCOL R.J. Margetts
15 Dec 90 - Dec 93	LTCOL P.A. Pedersen
Jan 93 - Dec 94	LTCOL G. Byles
Jan 95 -	LTCOL C.G. Appleton

APPENDIX 2 TO
ANNEX K TO
CHAPTER 6

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REGIMENTAL SERGEANTS MAJOR

3 DEC 73 - 21 JAN 76	WO1 D.M. Palmer
22 JAN 76 - 23 MAY 78	WO1 B. G. Burnett, OAM
24 MAY 78 - 11 DEC 78	WO1 J. H. Chisolm
12 DEC 78 - 11 DEC 80	WO1 B.A.J. Hassall, OAM
12 DEC 80 - 12 DEC 82	WO1 D. G. Holmes (Deceased)
13 DEC 82 - 13 DEC 84	WO1 G. W. Mason, OAM
14 DEC 84 - 6 JAN 87	WO1 W. T. Wills
7 JAN 87 - 16 JAN 89	WO1 P. A. Hill
17 JAN 89 - 8 DEC 90	WO1 B. T. Boughton, OAM
6 DEC 90 - 20 JAN 93	WO1 R. D. Campbell, OAM
21 JAN 93 -	WO1 B. S. Burton

5TH/7TH BATTALION (MECHANIZED), THE ROYAL AUSTRALIAN REGIMENT

MISCELLANEOUS INFORMATION

Allied Regiments - The Welsh Guards and The Gordon Highlanders. 5/7 RAR (Mech) has maintained the alliances between 5 RAR and the Welsh Guards and 7 RAR and the Gordon Highlanders.

Battalion Associations. 5/7 RAR (Mech) maintains close links with the 5 and 7 RAR Associations. Members of these associations regularly attend Battalion functions and the Battalion sends representatives to annual church services and similar functions.

'Gabby Hayes'. CPL J.F. 'Gabby' Hayes was a section commander in A Coy, 7 RAR. He was killed in action in South Vietnam on 6 Aug 67. He left a sum of money in his will to be used to drink a toast each year on the 7 RAR birthday. To provide a lasting memorial to Gabby, the Sergeants' Mess purchased silver in his name with the money. Each year on 'Gabby Hayes Night', the corporals of the Battalion visit the Sergeants' Mess and join its members in drinking a toast to the 'Australian Infantryman'. The toast is funded by the mess in memory of CPL Hayes.

Affiliated Army Reserve Battalion. 5/7 RAR (Mech) maintains an affiliation with 8th/7th Battalion, The Royal Victoria Regiment. Soldiers from 8/7 RVR have participated in a number of RCB tours and several have served on full time duty with the Battalion.