

EX NORTHERN EXPLORER

PATROL REPORT

Ptl: 9A
Unit: A SQN 8/13 VICTORIAN MOUNTED RIFLES
AO: GOANNA

Maps: Name: KATHERINE SPECIAL
Number: Part of 1 : 100,000 Maps - 5369 KATHERINE & 5368 MANBULLOO
Series: SERIES R772 EDITION 1-AAS
Scale: 1 : 50,000

1. Size and Composition of Patrol:

Ptl Comd	CAPT C J CARRINGTON	MEDIC
2IC	SGT J C KOSCHEL	ATT
SIG	L/CPL C R VAN DE VELDE	ATT
Scout	TPR D J PRATT	ATT

2. Mission: TO CONDUCT GROUND RECON OF PATROL ROUTE

3. Brief Summary of Operation:

A one day foot patrol during daylight hours.

All pers in marching order with SLR, 3 mags and CES.

Additional equipment carried:

1 x tools entrenching, 1 x machette, 1 x first aid kit.

each individual carried their own first aid kit and survival kit;

and 2 x 24 hr CRP each.

Patrol leader carried 10 rounds live ammunition 7.62mm.

Other members shared 20 rounds of blank 7.62mm.

3105.908

4. DTG of Infil: 160630 SEP 88 arrived infil point 160705 SEP 88

Insertion Route and Method: via Stuart Hwy, to Victoria Hwy
by Unimog.

5. DTG of Exfil: 170600 SEP 88

6. Ptl Route: See Annex A.

7. Terrain: a. From infil point up to GR 090937, mostly flat and
relatively easy going due to recent bush fires. Creek line running ES to
NW is clearly defined.

b. From GR090937 to 120 feature and then NE to GR 095936 extremely
rugged terrain with grey basalt/volcanic jagged rocks consistently
existing from any ground 110 metres or higher. Rocks in lower creek
beds are predominantly flat with iron ore type pea gravel abounding.

c. The area within a 1 to 1.5 klm radius of the 136 feature at
GR 117949 is similar as described in para b., but considerably worse
in that the rocky outcrops are higher and even more jagged.

d. From 136 feature to 138 feature at GR 128945, is entirely as
described in para c.

e. From 138 feature to the road running N to S, through eastings
14 and 15, the initial 600m is as described in para c. The remainder
is relatively flat, with the N S creekline being clearly defined
on the ground.

Conduct:

The patrol was planned to be conducted as per the trace at Annex A.

Patrol commenced at 160715 SEP 88. Due to issue of an F2 HF radio, it
was not possible to fit the radio into the top of a large field pack.
The F2 was placed in its harness and initially carried on chest/shoulders
by Tpr Pratt, a fit strongly built 186 cm tall 21 year old.

Initial going was good due to recent fires having burnt out most grass
and undergrowth.

Prismatic compass proved accurate as first check point reached at 0805,
without any difficulty.

The dam at GR 049942 was approximately 75M X 75M and had been completely dry for some time.



THE DAM AT GR 049942

Photo taken from western bank. Note Tpr Pratt standing in centre of the eastern bank.

Patrol rested until 0815, all had been drinking water regularly and were feeling in good spirits. The plan was to cover the first 7.5 klm of the patrol as quickly as possible to enable sufficient time to complete the remaining 10 klms, which was over much more difficult going, by 1730 hrs.

0830 reached a locked gate in N S fence at GR 051946.

Moved out 0835 heading due E along track as marked on map. The fence line which runs E to W is on the Nthrn side of the track. There is an unmarked good dirt road running E to W on the Nthrn side of fence. Stopped at 0857 for rest and water. Decided we would walk off the track to take advantage of shade provided by medium to large trees.

There is a gate in the fence at GR 063946, also locked.

Noted that there was an area about 200M wide and possibly 400M or even further in depth, about 150 to 200M south of the above GR. This area would make an excellent hide for an APC Section or a Recon Tp.

All members had been sweating profusely.

Temperature in shade 28° C, and warming up fast.



THE TRACK RUNNING EAST TO WEST (Looking to the West)

From GR 051946 to GR 083947

Dust from civilian B veh using unmarked road 50M to N of fence.

1005 stopped in creek line GR086946, all pers removed boots and socks to check for blisters. None so far!! Light snack.

Decision made to carry radio by 2 pers using a stick tied through the harness. Machette proved useful.

1100 first experienced the grey basalt/volcanic type rock, see photo below.

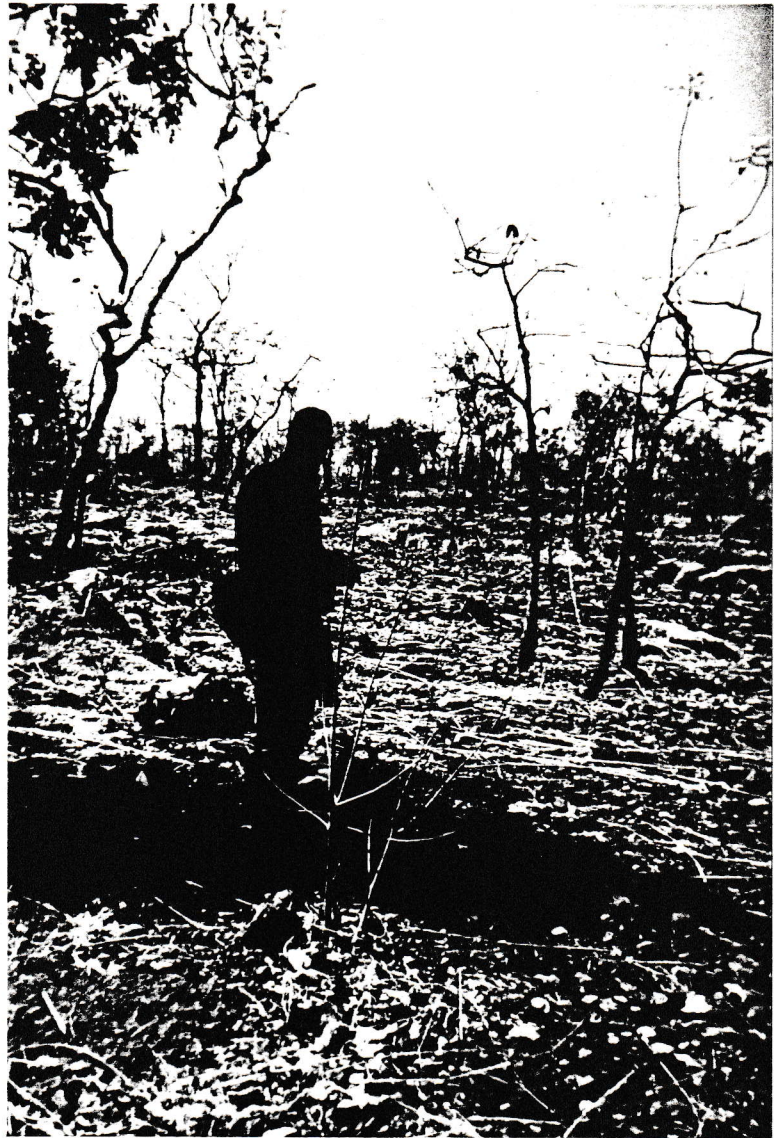


Tpr Dave Pratt enjoying a rest break in one of the better shade spots located.

Due to the sparse foliage on virtually all trees it is impossible to be fully shaded from the fierce sun.

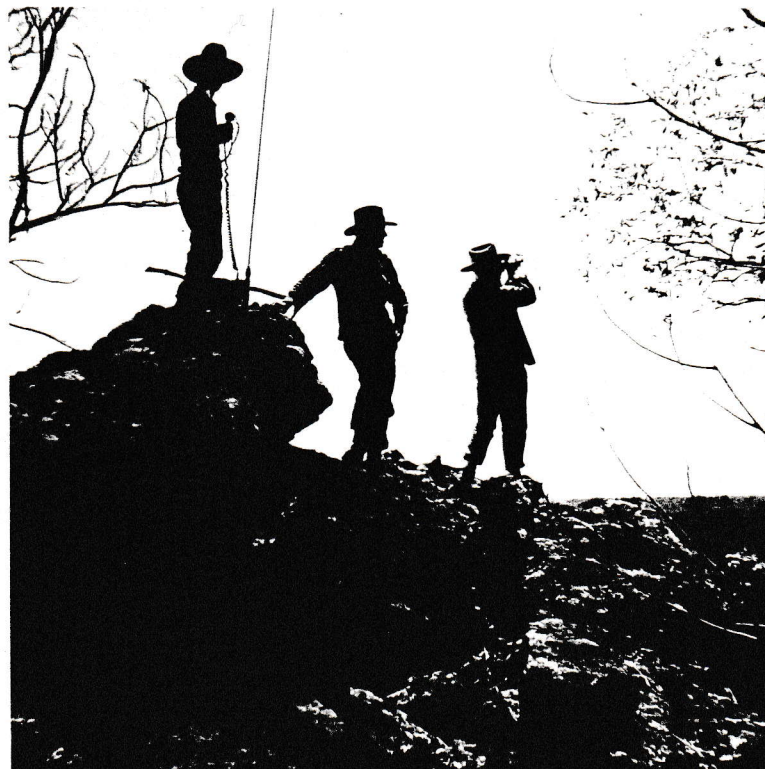
Tpr Pratt had carried the F2 radio for the first $7\frac{1}{2}$ klms of the patrol.

The going is good in this area, due to limited grass and the basalt rocks being well separated over mostly flat terrain.



1120 reached the 120 feature, highest point at GR 092935.

1145 established comms to ØA using whip antenna.



COMMS ESTABLISHED AT GR 092935



The large sinkhole/rock depression at GR 092935, which would collect some water after rain. Complete shade afforded in part for up to 1200 hrs.

1155 Locstat sent. Temperature 41° C in shade.

1210 proceeded towards the 136 feature, very rugged going initially.

1223 found best shade location so far, 3 tree trunks close together. We did not waste it!! Empty water bottles put in carriers on our large field packs to reduce weight on shoulders.

Discussed need for regular rest breaks, suggested by 1 member that it would be ideal if we could do 20 " walking and only have a 5 " break. Agreed - mostly our breaks have been of 10 to 15 " duration so far.

1233 Moved off, only lasted 10". Agreed it is hard to remember to keep count of paces, all were supposed to be doing this but each had had some lapses of concentration. Temperature 40° C, all thankful for light breeze blowing.

1250 moved off. 1300 rested - even the birds had stopped chirping. All applied more sunscreen protection.

1310 moved off. Only lasted 5 ". After several stops and starts we commenced climbing higher ground that was made difficult by the thickest and highest grass we had encountered so far, combined with many jagged volcanic rocks. Spear grass up to our heads and straw grass up to our chests. Because of grass it was not possible to determine if the rock you put your foot on was firmly fixed in the ground, or loose and likely to move which could easily cause a fall onto the jagged rocks.

All members becoming fatigued at this stage.

1330 L/Cpl Van De Velde and Tpr Pratt went forward 100M to crest and reported that we were on the highest feature of the ridge line which was running from E to W. Further recon by platoon leader and 2IC who climbed a large tree, confirmed our location as the 136 feature at GR 117948.

Sgt Koschel climbing up a tree on the 136 feature.

Note the jagged edge of large rock in foreground.

Photos of the grey basalt/volcanic type rock do not give a true indication of their severity.



Sgt Koschel obtained excellent all round observation from this tree.

The 136 feature is at GR 117949.



Our Ptl SOP for members moving ahead to recon from a feature crest, was to remove large field pack and webbing for ease of movement. For safety no member was to move any further than 100m from the "base" resting point which would be placed at a prominent tree.

All enjoyed a light lunch and rested for about 45 minutes. This was our longest rest period of the ptl.

1430 moved off SE towards the 138 feature. Only lasted 13 " before all needed res

1450, moving slowly along a ridge line running EW, extremely difficult going as heavy grass between rocks and many rocks are loose and balanced on other rocks. It was obvious to all that we were going to have to traverse considerable distance over the rugged jagged rocks and this would sorely test our endurance.

At the next rest, time not recorded, we could not find a tree with sufficient shade to reasonably cover the 4 of us. Sgt Koschel recced fwd and reported further ridges to the ESE.

1520 established comms with OA using the whip antenna, sent Locstat GR 123947.

1530 Ptl Comdr decided to move to the south of the intended bearing to get below the level of jagged rocks. This decision proved sound as 5" later we were back on relatively flat ground mostly free of rocks.

However as there had been no fires in this area we then struck thick "straw" type grass up to chest height which made it difficult going for the lead man. Also the highest spear grass which we were to encounter, 2½ metres high and stalks as thick as a mans little finger. Movement in single file a must in these circumstances.

1559 Capt Carrington recced a feature that revealed further high ground to NE. We remained on low ground skirting a little to south of intended route. Then marched NE and had to cross the 138 feature at GR 128945, which proved very difficult due to the steepest approach yet encountered, very thick grass and extremely jagged rocks.

1635 reached the top of 138 feature, all were too exhausted to go another 25m for shade - we just dropped and settled for resting in the sun for 8 ".

It had taken us 2 hrs to traverse what had intended to be a direct distance of 1,300 metres. There were many unrecorded rests during the move. It is hard to maintain a ptl diary under these conditions. Also difficult to concentrate on counting paces and remembering them. (We should have had a hand held pace counter, in retrospect).

Decision made by Ptl Comdr to bypass the 5th planned leg of our ptl route, which was the 124 feature at Gr 143928, due to time and space limitations. Commenced marching on a bearing to the exfil point, over what appeared from the map to be the flattest ground, after resting until 1705.

A difficult descent from the 138 feature was followed by yet another 2 ridge lines to be traversed, which although both rocky were considerably smaller. Several unrecorded rests during this period. Reaching the exfil point prior to last light was foremost on everyones mind. The day was slipping away from us. Finally reached flat ground in vicinity of the 13 easting at 1800 hrs.

1910 hrs, just on dark we reached the Nth - Sth track at Gr 153930.

All pers agreed this had been the most physical demanding and trying day of their life. However, morale was high, as we had completed what we believed to be the longest of any 1 day foot ptl, over the most difficult country allocated to any ptl.

11. Miscellaneous Information:

Considerable areas of the ptl route are unsuitable for A veh ops.

Refer to trace at Annex A.

HF comms can be maintained by whip antenna from high ground to Tindal base

The vegetation can be described as medium. The sparseness of foliage has to be experienced to appreciate the difficulty in gaining shelter from the sun.

A Visibility Report is at Annex B.

12. Condition of Patrol:

The condition of members has been accurately and honestly reported during the conduct section. All members had passed PTT tests prior

to the exercise and could therefore be classified as "reasonably fit".

Considering this was the first foot ptl, in marching order, with 8 water bottles, 2 days rations each, and a F2 radio that had to be carried members stood up well. Minor blisters experienced. No indications that any member reached near stages of heatstroke due to commonsense approach.

13. Conclusions and Recommendations:

I consider that a ptl route of 17 klms, with some 7 klms over very difficult rocky country, was the extreme maximum that any ptl could be expected cover, given that they were neither fully prepared by recent route marching/patrolling, nor acclimatised.

(It is acknowledged that the extent of the going was largely unknown to the ptl master, and instructions were received that it was in order to bypass difficult legs of the ptl if justified.)

I recommend that future foot ptls be limited to a maximum of 13 klms on their first day of operations in the AO, unless they are either fully acclimatised, proven patrollers in marching order, and/or the route is mostly flat and easy going.

The foot ptl was an excellent means of having members of our unit experience first hand the difficulty of operating, on foot, in the Tindal AO, and was extremely worthwhile and rewarding for all.

Bearing in mind that a foot ptl from 4/19 PWLH aborted their ptl over the same route, after reaching the difficult going, we would have been interested to see how the RAINF ptl, that considered their foot ptl to be "the highlight" of the exercise, would have handled our route.

Date: Ptl Conducted 16 Sep 88.

Report completed 30 Sep 88.

C. J. Carrington
.....
(C. J. CARRINGTON)
Ptl Comd

14. Additional Remarks by Debriefing Officer:

Date:

()

Debriefing Officer

Annexes: A. Ptl Trace.

Distribution:

Copy No:

VISIBILITY REPORT PATROL 9A 16 SEP 88DAM AT GR 092933

1. Flat well vegetated country.
Through bush (burnt out) upto 150m west of track.
Through bush (not burnt) east of track 50 - 100m.
North along track 200m to bend.
South along track 300m.

Feature 120 GR 092933 (Rocky outcrop above gully)

2. Observed Radar Dome at GR 234906 to east. Portion of southern outskirts of Katherine Town to NW.
South to feature in GS 0884.
North to Horizons, ridge line in middle distance is 136 feature.
Could not observe anything below tree level, due to type of vegetation and denseness of country.
At ground level off feature, through bush upto 100m.

136 Feature GR 117948 (Rocky outcrop).

3. Had to climb tree to be able to get better observation over tree canopy.
Observed Communications Mast at GR 065982.
Feature would make a good O.P., as can see to horizon in all directions.

138 Feature GR 128945

4. Unable to observe above tree canopy.
Observation through bush 50-100m due to vegetation.
High grass and trees.

Summary

5. Features 120 GR 092933 and Feature 136 GR 117948.

Where observation above tree canopy is possible, it would be unlikely to observe any ground movement unless detected by dust trail. Although visibility is generally possible to horizon in all direction. Roads and tracks not visible at all. In one case had to climb tree to be able to observe above tree canopy.

6. 138 Feature GR 128945

It was not possible to observe above tree canopy at either of these features even by climbing trees. The visibility through the bush was at a maximum of 100m due to the height (upto 2m) of grass and density of trees, however, where the undergrowth has been burnt off by bush fires, the range of visibility increases by 50 - 75m.

7. It was often not possible to identify tracks, fence lines, or small creek beds further than 25m in unburnt out areas. The RAAF Base Tindal was not able to be observed at any point of the foot patrol. Main features to which accurate bearings could be taken was the Radar Dome at GR 234906 and a tall radio tower at GR 065982.