

17th FIELD REGIMENT R.A.A.

WAR DIARIES

MONTHLY SUMMARIES

FEBRUARY 1942

to

SEPTEMBER 1943

WAR DIARY or INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY

Army Form C.2116
(adapted.)

(Erase heading not required).

Unit 17 Aust Fd Regt (AIF)

Date and Time.—From 1 Dec 42

To 14 Dec 42.

Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks and references to Appendices, Diaries, &c.
BLACK RIVER	1		By GRO No G.543 dated 13 Nov the Regt was classified as an AIF Unit having a strength of 75% or more of AIF personnel	
			Btys having occupied bivouac areas in vicinity of PALUMA (map ref eq 2316 ROLLINGSTONE 1" to 1 m) under comd of 29 Aust Inf Bdr (Brig MONAGHAN) commence training of exercises in infantry tactics and jungle warfare in the surrounding mountainous tropical rain forest. <i>HA</i>	
PALUMA	2		Lt-Col E.K.H.KLOSE, CO, returns from Combined Ops Course and resumes comd of Regt from actg C.O. Maj H.S.CANTOR.	
"	3 & 4		Jungle training with Bns of 29 Bde continued.	
"	5		Continuation of training in Jungle warfare	
"			Rest day for all personnel	17 Aust Fd Regt OO (Special) No. 1
"	6 to 14		Between these dates the Regt (with, under comd 3 Bty 101 Aust A/Tk Regt) carried out successfully the arduous task of opening a track from the vicinity of PALUMA village to the bottom of the range at a point on OLLERA CR (ref 252612 PALUMA RANGE 1" to 1 m) and hauling by manpower along this track an 18 Pr Mk IV field gun and a 2 pr A/Tk gun. The total distance thus covered is estimated at present to be about 10 miles. Method adopted was by division of personnel into five groups to each of which the tasks of cutting and clearing, hauling 18 pr, hauling 2 pr and carrying rations etc were allotted on daily rotation as shown in Operation Order attached. The fifth group was permanently established at OLLERA CK as a supply and admin base. An <u>intermediate ration dump</u> was established at a point about halfway along the track and some of the heavy transport of rations etc was done by mule team. The track followed for the first 6 miles was an old pack track which had to be extensively widened and improved to allow of passage of guns and thereafter an entirely new track through a WOLFRAM FIELD to OLLERA CK was recced by the CO <i>HA</i>	162 RA

WAR DIARY or INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY

Army Form C.2118
(adapted.)

(Erase heading not required).

Unit 17 Aust Fd Regt (AIF) Date and Time.—From 6 Dec 42 To 14 Dec 42.

Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks and references to Appendices, Diaries, &c.
PALUMA (6 to 14 Dec continued)			<p>In one case a down grade of over a mile was almost constantly at about 1 in 2 and grades throughout were rather severe. A det of 11 Aust Fd Coy RAE carried out blasting and track making in some of the excessively rocky portions of the track and a stretch of approximately 1 mile of track at the lower end was improved by a det from 5 Aust Fd Regt. A director traverse of the entire track with gradients will be prepared by Survey Section of this Regt and sketch of result will be available to this diary later.</p> <p>On the second day, an attempt was made to haul the 18 Pr with the aid of a caterpillar timber tractor but the terrain proved too rocky and the tractor threw a track. Otherwise the guns were entirely manhandled with 20 to 50 men on dragropes according to the nature of the track. On the steepest pinches block and tackle was used both for uphill and downhill pulls. No serious damage was done to either gun.</p> <p>For three days personnel lived on emergency dehydrated rations only. A little rice was also issued to bolster up the gruel made by soaking and boiling the emergency ration but these rations were NOT sufficient to keep up the strength of men doing hard physical labour. For the remainder of the trek various tinned rations were issued with biscuits tea and cocoa and the position much improved as far as the physical condition of the men was concerned.</p> <p>For the first five days of the trek the rain was practically incessant and mud and soaked clothing and blankets added to the discomfort. No tentage of any kind was carried and tps constructed bough shelters at the end of each days work.</p> <p>Considering the weather and ground conditions and the arduous nature of the work, the casualty rate was not high, about 10% being evacuated from the area at various stages. Most of these were minor complaints such as foot trouble and some rejoined the Unit before completion of the trek.</p>	

WAR DIARY or INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY

Army Form C.2116
(adapted.)

(Erase heading not required).

Unit 17 Aust Fd Regt (AIF)

Date and Time:—From 14 Dec 42

To 25 Dec 42.

Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks and references to Appendices, Diaries, &c.
PALUMA	6 to 14 continued		During the work, visits were made by GOC 5 Aust Div GEM Maj Gen MILFORD and CRA 5 Aust Div Brig MORIARTY each of whom expressed appreciation of the work. Both guns reached the base camp at OLLERA CK about midday on 14 Dec and tps bathed and rested for the remainder of the day being in excellent spirits and morale very high. On 12 Dec Unit ceased to be under comd 29 Aust Inf Bde. <i>KA</i>	
BLACK RIVER	15		Regt returned to bivouac area at BLACK R and carried out personal maintenance. Survey party commences direct traverse of track PALUMA -OLLERA CK.	
Do	16		Recce of wet weather bivouac site vicinity BOHLE RIVER (078051 TOWNSVILLE 4 m to 1") by 2 i/c and B/Cs - allocation of Bty <i>KA</i>	
do	17		Working parties on preparation of new Bivouac area.	
do	18		do	
do	19		do	
do	20		Lieuts J.PITT and J.T.MacFARLANE join Regt ex 2/2 Aust Fd Regt and First Aust Army Trg Regt respectively - posted 56 Bty and 52 Bty respectively. Further preparation work at wet weather bivouac area. <i>KA</i>	
do	21		52 and 56 Btys move to and occupy new bivouac area.	
BOHLE RIVER	22		57 Bty and RHQ move to and occupy new bivouac area. Road making and general construction work in area.	
do	23		Visit by CRA (Brig MORIARTY) to new area - construction work and general maintenance continued. <i>KA</i>	
do	24		Each gun positions (eight in all) from BOHLE RIVER mouth to ROLLINGSTONE CK (map refs and allocation to Btys as Appx A attached) become responsibility of Regt. Adjt (Capt H.L.HIGGS) is detached to HQ 5 Aust Div as Arty Liaison Officer.	
	25		Rest day for all ranks - special rationing for Xmas Dinner for tps. Community concert, swimming parades and free picture shows organized. <i>KA</i>	

WAR DIARY or INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY

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(adapted.)

(Erase heading not required).

Unit 17 Aust Fd Regt (AIF)

Date and Time.—From 26 Dec 42

To 31 Dec 42

Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks and references to Appendices, Diaries, &c.
BOHLE RIVER	26 Dec 42		Maintenance work in preparation for tp manoeuvres	N/A
	27 Dec 42		One tp of each Bty leaves on four day manoeuvre on following circuits:- A Tp 52 Bty. BOHLE RIVER - THORNTON GAP - MINGELA - TOWNSVILLE - BOHLE R. D Tp 56 Bty BOHLE RIVER - THORNTON GAP - STAR VALLEY - PALUMA - BOHLE R. @ Tp 57 Bty BOHLE R - MINGELA - RAVENSWOOD - AYR - TOWNSVILLE - BOHLE RIVER.	
			Remaining practising tps receive instruction in mortar and grenade drill by instructors supplied by 29 Aust Ing Bde.-also rifle practice at CLUDEN RANGE.	N/A
	28 Dec 42		Heavy thunder storm night 28/29.	N/A
	29 Dec 42		GOC visits camp and enquiries re condition of camp and the tps. Further heavy rain.	N/A
	30 Dec 42		A Tp 52 Bty returns to camp. Other Tps in difficulties because of bad weather and boggy conditions.	N/A
	31 Dec 42		Rest day. D and E Tps not yet returned to camp. Message received from " Tp stating that all vehicles are bogged in vicinity of HILLSBOROUGH STA - 7 miles NE. of Ravenswood on ROAD RAVENSWOOD - AYR. Lieut FITZGERALD leaves with rescue party equipped with block and tackle, rope, etc.	N/A


 Lt.-Col.
 Commanding 17th. Field Regt. R.A.A.

SECRET
O.O.No (Special) 1
Copy No: 15
Date: 5 Dec 42.

17 AUST FD REGT (AIF).

Ref maps: ROLLINGSTON 1" to 1 mile
PALUMA 1" to 1 mile.

1. INFORMATION:

Indications are that considerable organised subversive activity is centralised in ROLLINGSTONE AREA. It is estimated that ROAD PALUMA MAIN NORTHERN HIGHWAY will be impassable for 14 days.

29 Aust Inf Bde Gp are to move from present area to ROLLINGSTONE to attack the enemy in this area on 12 Dec 42.

2. INTENTION:

17 Aust Fd Regt with under comd 3 Bty 101 Aust A/Tk Regt and Det 11 Aust Fd Coy will support the attack.

3. METHOD:

- (1) Route PALUMA RD - ROLLINGSTONE - WOLFRAM FIELD - COLLERA CK.
- (2) 17 Aust Fd Regt, 3 Bty 101 Aust A/Tk Regt plus det 11 Aust Fd Coy will be grouped for this purpose as under:-
 - A. RHQ 17 Aust Fd Regt, 3 Bty 101 Aust A/Tk Regt.
 - B. 52 Bty 17 Aust Fd Regt.
 - C. 56 Bty 17 Aust Fd Regt.
 - D. 57 Bty 17 Aust Fd Regt.
 - E. Det 11 Aust Fd Coy.
- (3) Tasks will be performed by gps A to D incl as per appendix A. Gp E tasks as recce demands.
- (4) Gps E & A with eqpt as per appendix B to be collected from RHQ at 1000 hrs 6 Dec 42, will report to OLD PACK TRACK (map ref 252162) at 1200 hrs 6 Dec 42 and will commence preparation of track immediately Bde Pack Train is clear.
- (5) Gp D with one 18 Pr & tractor will report to OLD PACK TRACK (map ref 252162) at 1300 hrs 6 Dec 42.
- (6) Gp B with one 2 Pr on Portee will report to OLD PACK TRACK (map ref 252162) at 1315 hrs.
- (7) Gp C will report to same point at 1330 hrs 6 Dec 42 with thirty 2-gal empty water tins, these to be collected by 1200 hrs 6 Dec 42 from RHQ.
- (8) MT:(i) The following will be order of march of vehs of which Capt C.L. CHRISTOPHERSON will be offr i/c and will pass PALUMA LOOP map ref 245164 at times indicated and move to map ref 368192:-
 - 1400 hrs X2 (52 Bty) Z, Z2, A2, A3, S1, S2, S3, A/Tk X, 04 (RHQ).
 - 1405 hrs (56 Bty) X2, H, 05, 2 Guns & tractors, A/Tk RB SB Portee & gun, M/C.
 - 1407 hrs (52 Bty) H, 05, 2 guns & tractors, A/Tk RC, SC Portee & gun, M/C.
 - 1409 hrs (57 Bty) X2, H, 2 guns & tractors, A/Tk RA, SA, 1 Portee & gun, 1 M/C.(ii) The following vehs will pass PALUMA LOOP map ref 245164 at 1430 hrs 6 Dec 42 and report to RHQ at OLD PACK TRACK entrance map ref 252162:-
 - 01 (56 Bty), 01 (52 Bty), 01 & 05 (57 Bty).
- (9) FOO's: Each Bty will detail 1 Lieut as FOO to report at 1600 hrs 5 Dec 42 to Bns as under:-

52 Bty	to	15 Br
56 "	"	42 "
57 "	"	47 "
- (10) Tools eqpt water tins etc: Lieut F.J. CAMERON will be responsible for collection distributor and daily handover of all tools eqpt water tins etc and for their final return to Btys.

(2)
(iii) Mules & Donkeys: 52 Bty will detail 1 offr to take delivery of 5 mules & 2 donkeys with personnel for use by Engineers & sigs from Bde Pack Train at 0800 hrs 6 Dec 42 and there await instrns.

4. ADMINISTRATION:

- (1) Dress: Hat, shirt, slacks & gaiters (or shorts & leggings); socks, boots, change of shirt, shorts & socks, 1 blanket, 1 ground sheet, towel, shaving gear, haversack, water bottle, rations as issued, field dressing, water sterilising tablets.
- (2) Medical: RMO & Orderlies will travel with gun parties.
- (3) Rations: Rations will be delivered daily by carrying parties.

5. INTERCOMM:

- (1) F Sec sigs will supply and operate 1 No. 11 Hst.
- (2) 2 mules will be made available for tpt.
- (3) 52 Bty will make available to F sec sigs 2 DV telephones by 1000 hrs 6 Dec 42.
- (4) Hours of comm will be:-
 - (i) L/T 1200-1300 hrs
1500-0800 "
 - (ii) W/T 1530-1630 hrs, thence at 10 minutes to the hour until 0800 hrs.
- (5) Wireless will NOT otherwise be used.
- (6) All comm will be through 29 Aust Inf Bde.
- (7) Gp C under F Sec sigs will lay line in accordance with sig plan handed to Lieut L.A. JOHNSON.
- (8) Adv RHO will be established on track daily by MAJ H.S. CANTOR. Office van A2 will be in vicinity map ref 367192.

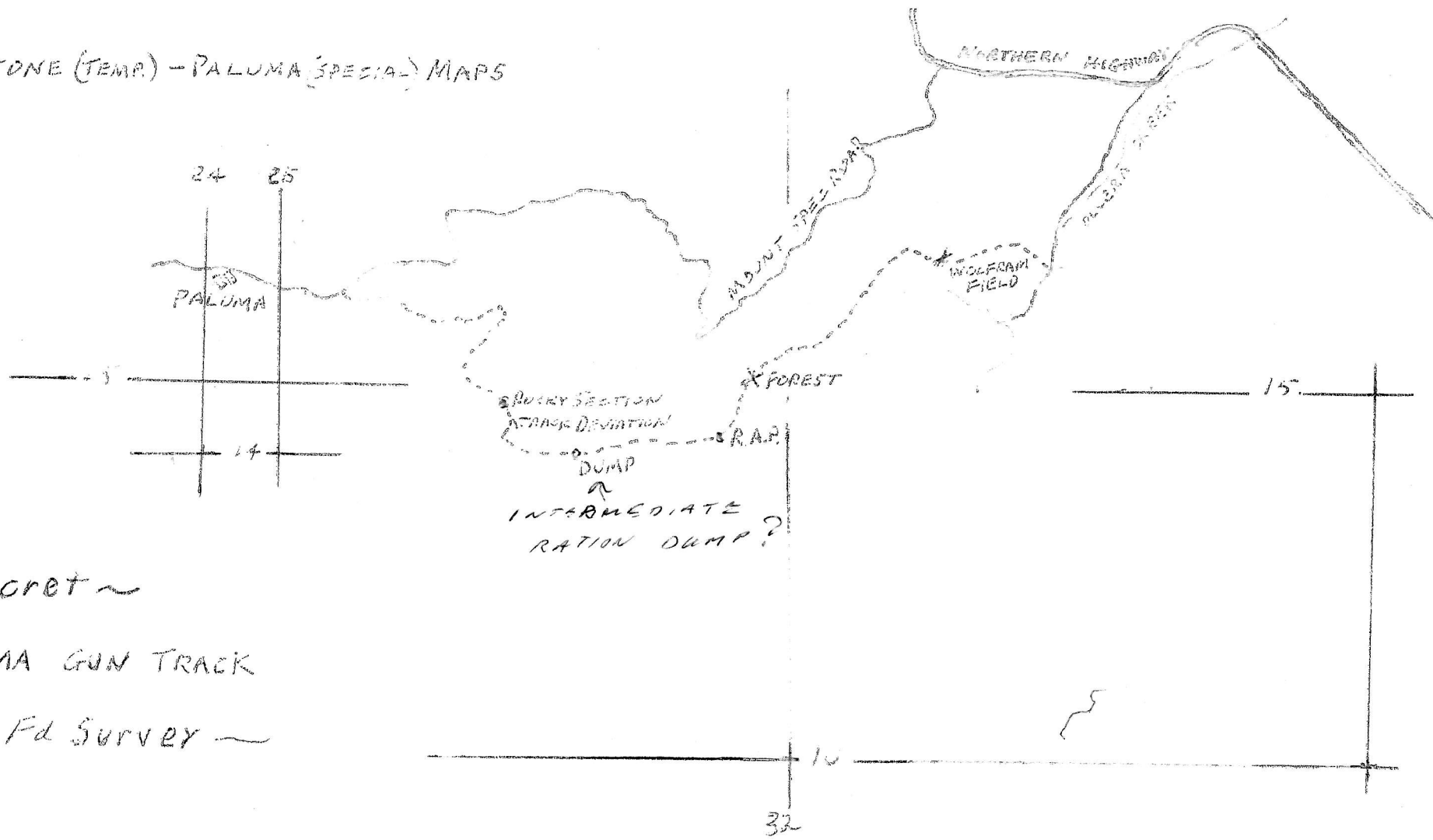
W.L. G. G. Capt
Adjnt 17 Aust Fd Regt (AIF)

ISSUED BY D/R.
Time signed: 11/15 hrs 5 Dec 42.

DISTRIBUTION.

Copy No. 1	52 Bty 17 Aust Fd Regt	10.	RMO
2	56 Bty 17 Aust Fd Regt	11.	Lieut Cameron
3	57 Bty 17 Aust Fd Regt	12	adjt
4	73 Bty 101 Aust L/Tk Regt	13	RSM
8	Det 11 Aust Fd Coy	14-15	War Diary
9	Capt Christopherson	16	File.

ROLLINGSTONE (TEMP) - PALUMA (SPECIAL) MAPS



~ Secret ~

PALUMA GUN TRACK

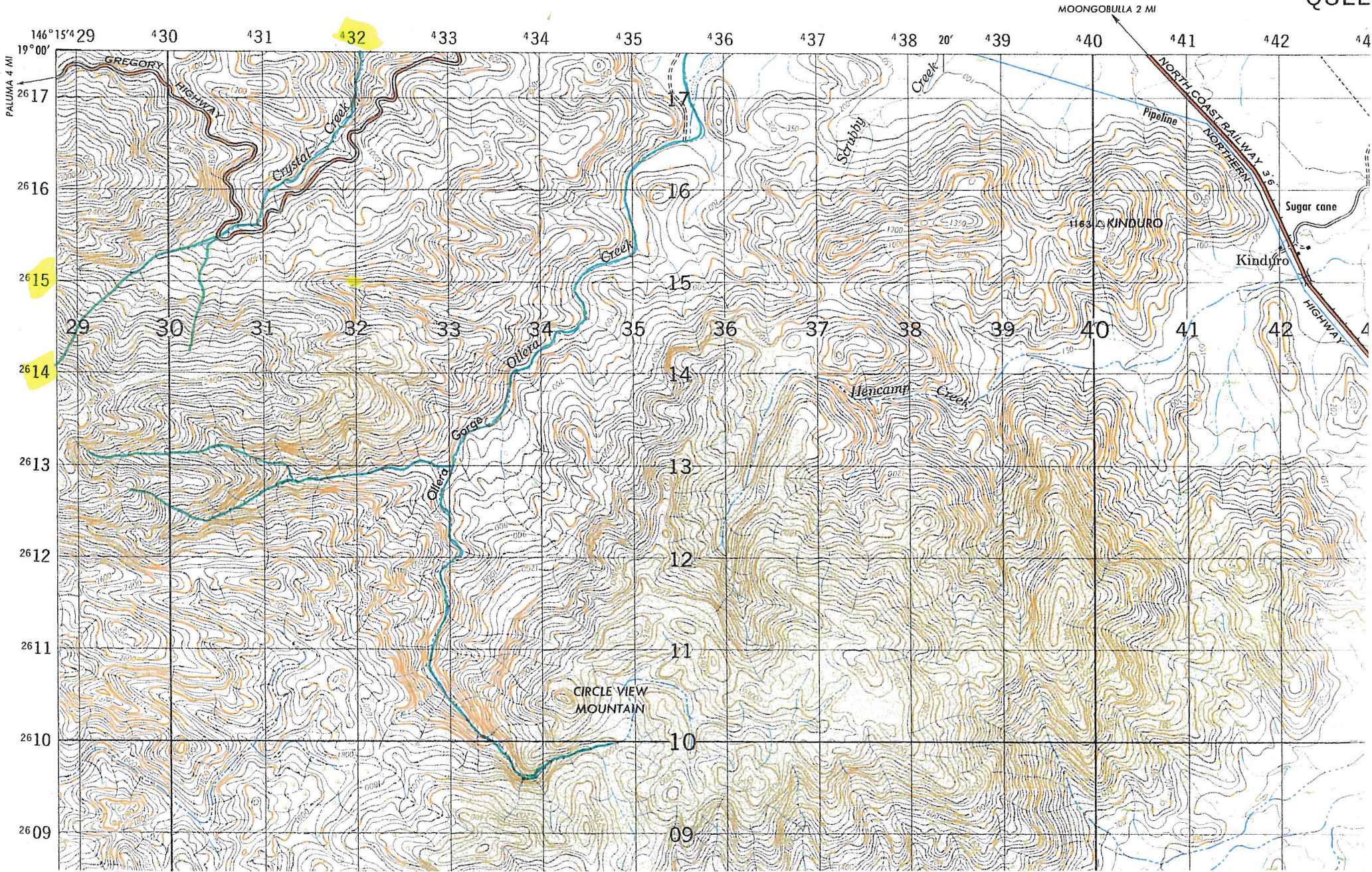
~ 17 Fd SURVEY ~

AUSTRALIA 1:50,000

Ref 320150 = near RAP. ?

1" = 1 MILE
1000 YD GRID
50' CONTOURS?

ROLLIN
QUEE



JUNGLE MARCHES WITH FD ARTY.

The following report on certain aspects of jungle marches with fd pieces is based on observations made during a trek by 17 Aust Fd Regt (AIF) from PALUMA to OLLERA CK during the period 6 Dec - 14 Dec 42.

DISTANCE: Approx $9\frac{1}{2}$ miles.

TERRAIN: Majority of country covered was moderate to dense rain forest having thick undergrowth for short scattered tracts. Remaining portion of track was through open forest slopes thickly grassed but stony. Grades were severe - up to 1 in 3 for long stretches with one short length of 1 in 14. Rocky outcrops up to $\frac{1}{2}$ mile across were met. Terrain was generally typical of parts of NEW GUINEA.

WEATHER: Uniformly wet. For the first six days of the trek the rain was practically incessant.

GUNS HAULED: One 18 pr Mk IV gun and one 2-pr A/Tk gun.

RATE OF MARCH: (a) On flat jungle covered country with track cleared - 1 mile in 3 hrs.

(b) On down hill slopes of 1 in 3 to 1 in 5 with same crew, not using block and tackle - 150 yds per hour horizontal

(c) On uphill slopes as in (b) using block and tackle 150 yds per hour.

ORGANISATION OF PARTIES: Suggested division of personnel is as follows:-

1. Cutting party
2. Hauling Party
3. Carrying Party

1. Cutting Party should consist of four groups:-

- (a) A recce group of three or four carrying cane knives to blaze the track;
- (b) A gp carrying axes and cane knives to do the actual cutting;
- (c) A gp for clearing fallen timber carrying two axes, a cane knife and two drag ropes;
- (d) A gp carrying two axes, a cane knife, two picks and two shovels for final improvements to the track.

A cutting party of 30 men can cut and clear 1 mile in 6 hrs.

2. Hauling Party: The main point to stress is that NO more men than is strictly necessary should man the drag ropes, otherwise it is difficult to exercise control of the movement and obtain proper co-ordination of effort.

It is suggested that the most satisfactory numbers are from 30 to 40 on the dragropes, two men on the traversing handle and two men on each of two short dragropes attached to the lifting handles. One man must be detailed to man the brake. The pulling and control of the gun should be under the command of one offr or NCO.

3. Carrying Party: To consist of the remainder of men available. After rations, cooking gear etc have been carried fwd to site of night's bivouac, this party can be utilised to establish bivouac areas and sleeping quarters.

METHOD OF HAULING: Dragropes should be attached to the cross-bar and saplings of about 2 ft in length fastened at intervals along the ropes... This makes for easier hauling as the ropes quickly become muddy and greasy. When block and tackle is used, a rope bridle should be interposed between the tackle hook and the gun cross-bar to ensure an even pull.

The gun is best moved muzzle first except on steep declines when it is probably safer to lower it trail first.

GUN STORES ETC: Each gun should carry normal minimum fighting equipment (less the platform) and be provided with five 25 pr dragropes and two 18 pr type dragropes. It is very essential that at least one man should be detailed for sharpening of implements and that at least one emery wheel be provided.

A detachment of engineers with cross cut saw, crowbars and rock blasting equipment should work in close liaison with the recce gp.

It is considered that triple blocks are too slow to manipulate and that double blocks with approximately 200x working length of as light a rope as possible (say 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ ") are adequate for any work on steep grades.

CLOTHING PER MAN: Each man should carry spare pair of shorts, spare shirt and singlet, two spare pairs of socks, towel, blanket, toilet gear and ground sheet, in addition to the outfit he is wearing. Spare pair of boots would be an asset but sufficient room cannot reasonably be found for them.

EQUIPMENT PER MAN: One mess tin, jackknife or long bladed sheath knife (or even a sharpened bayonet) and water bottle properly packed, all the above clothing will fit in the webbing pack and has a good chance of keeping reasonably dry. The pack is also a balanced load. The webbing haversack is too small.

SHELTER: There are two serviceable types:-

(1) Men can work in pairs to construct a sleeping platform raised a few inches off the ground on logs or forks, above which are placed their joined ground sheets (laced with string or vines) forming, in end cross section, a blunt wedge shaped roof, the lower edges of the roof being held clear of the platform by saplings or vines running lengthways along and six to eight inches above the platform. Leaves of palm, fern or lawyer are spread over the platform for a mattress and across gaps to form walls. The men sleep with one blanket above and one below them.

(2) Attd hereto Appex "A" is sketch of another type of shelter for 6 men which proved quite efficacious.

RATIONS: Detailed report on rationing is NOT within the scope of this summary but it is sufficient to say that a diet of dehydrated rations alone was found insufficient to keep up the strength of the tps under these conditions. This was so even when dehydrated rations were pooled and made into a stew with 2 ozs of rice per head per day added.

Reserve rations with biscuits in hot stew form, were found just sufficient. Cocoa and Meat Extract provided by Comfort Fund proved invaluable.

WEAPONS: These rust very quickly and require oiling and maintenance every day. Sufficient oil and maintenance gear must be carried.

RETURNS AND ADMIN ARRANGEMENTS: These present much difficulty owing to the ever present damp. Until some form of water proof satchel or container is devised for stationery, this will remain a problem.

COMMUNICATION: Apart from communication by runner, this also presents some difficulty. Line communications require incessant maintenance and even then their efficiency is NOT guaranteed owing to the damp.

101 Wireless sets did NOT prove efficient in the thick timber.

MEDICAL & HYGIENE. In view of conditions under which trek was performed, the sick rate was moderate at all times. Complaints were mainly coughs and colds, blistered feet cuts and abrasions. These were, however, three cases of clinical dysentery and one of severe strain of the back. Most patients were able to be evacuated on foot and those unable to walk were carried on mules.

In cases where even this was NOT possible, a stretcher was constructed by slipping two saplings through a paliasse and fitting short spreader poles. A bearer party of 6 men, 4 on the stretcher and 2 carrying patient's kit proved ample, the two men carrying kit providing relief on the stretcher at intervals.

Boots were badly affected by the conditions and became worse and ripped in a very short time. Many of the casualties were thus due to blistered feet from misshapen boots. These blisters became infected quickly by the mud unless promptly treated.

At each bivouac site shallow latrines were dug

Water from mountain streams was available but had to be used sparingly owing to difficulty of carriage. It was always chlorinated before use.

GENERAL: (1) It is most important that as thorough a recce as time permits be made of the projected route before operations commence. On this occasion time was wasted while routes by-passing impossible sections of foot-track were found.

(2) The recce gp of the cutting party should take care that the track does NOT take unnecessary bends. More time is wasted easing the gun around difficult corners and the necessary straight pull of all hands on the ropes cannot be obtained.

(3) It is imperative that the cutting party cut all timber as close to the ground as possible. If the hauling party have to stop to further cut a stump, more time is wasted.

(4) The recce and selection of bivouac sites can often be directed towards using the same site for two consecutive nights and so eliminate unnecessary work and conserve the strength of the men.

(5) An alternative to the working of the various parties detailed above, in rotation and in shifts, would be for a permanent recce party incl Engineer personnel

and members of the Survey party to be detailed, whose sole duty would be to recce and blaze a trail. They should work about 12 hrs ahead of the cutting party.

(6) It is considered that work should commence as soon after daylight as the provision of a meal will allow. From 1½ to 2 hrs must be allowed before darkness falls for personnel to build shelters.

(7) The wearing of waterproof capes, even when raining is NOT recommended. It is considered that these should be utilised to keep the remainder of the equipment dry to ensure a dry change. Heavy work when wearing a cape in such humid atmosphere soon saturates clothing with perspiration as effectively as rain. It is suggested that the cape or ground sheet could be made 1 foot longer and 1 foot wider.

(8) All tps should be made familiar with the procedure of lighting fires in wet weather (splitting open of dead and rotten logs to obtain dry tinder etc) as the value of a good fire for drying clothing, personal warmth and general cheering propensities, cannot be overemphasised. This, of course, assumes that the situation will allow fires to be lit.

SUMMARY: Possibly the most important lessons learnt were:-

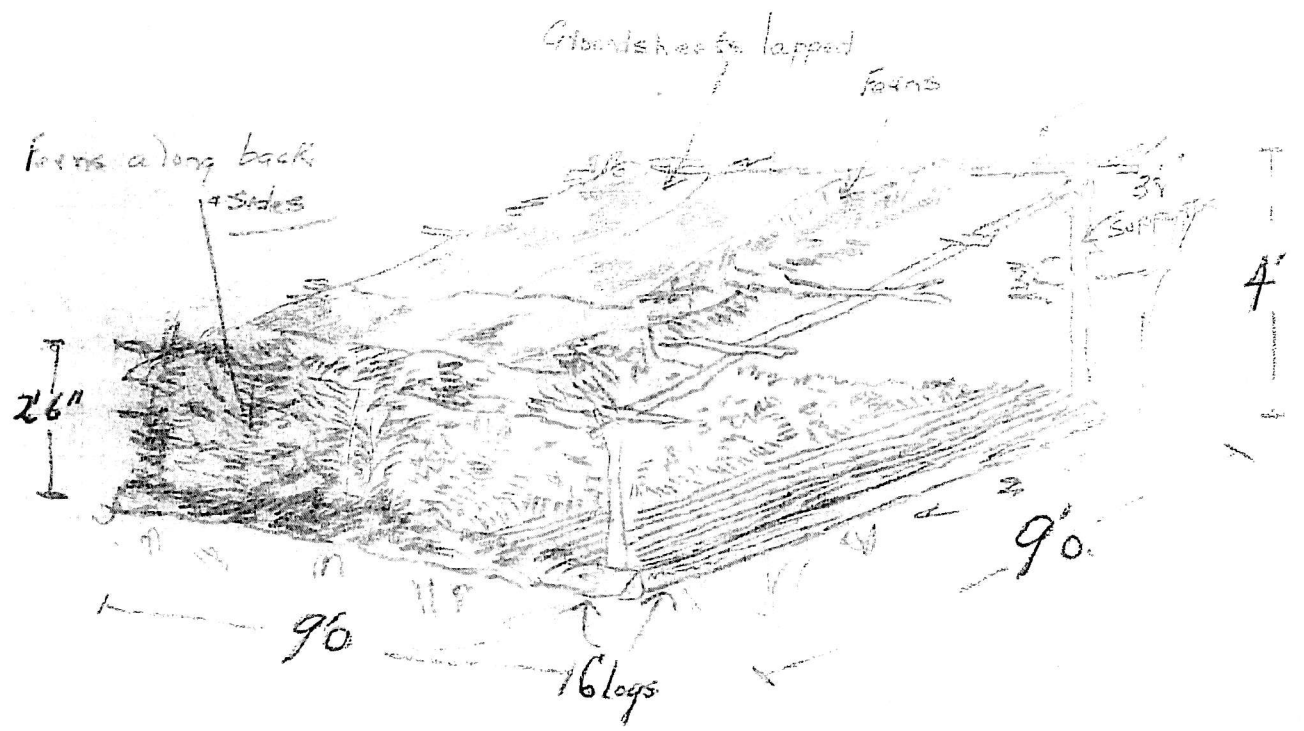
- (1) It is possible to haul field pieces through country such as that traversed using man power alone, and, in certain positions, with the aid of block and tackle.
- (2) Thorough recce of the route is essential to obviate unnecessary detours. The track should be kept as straight as possible, even if steep.
- (3) Too many men should NOT attempt to haul a gun at once - 30 to 40 should be ample.
- (4) Emergency dehydrated rations alone are insufficient to maintain strength of the tps under these conditions.
- (5) It is imperative that sufficient time be allowed personnel to construct shelters before darkness falls and that sufficient cutting tools be available for this purpose. These tools should not be regimented, but under control of Btys or tps.
- (6) Sharpening tools must be provided on an adequate scale and one or more men detailed permanently for the work.
- (7) When hauling guns, 3 hr shifts obtained best results.
- (8) The division of available personnel into Cutting, Hauling and Carrying parties as shown above worked well enough but a permanent recce and trail blazing party would be an improvement.

ATTACHED:-

Appendix "A" Jungle Shelter suitable for six personnel

Appendix "B" Report on rationing under Jungle conditions.

Fire at top
side of
shelter



6m. Shelter only completed