



### **Winchester College CCF - 3 RIFLES Summer Camp 2009**

It's 0145hrs and finally all is quiet. Our hour-long advance up the river towards the Final RV at the base of the valley seems to have taken place unnoticed. The sound of the stream drowns out any sound of riflemen crawling into their final positions. The enemy can be heard not 20 yards away from the riverbed which we currently inhabit. Tension rises as the platoon commander signals the attack, and five parachute flares streak into the night sky to the accompaniment of the fire support group opening up from high ground to the right of the position. The two leading sections move out of cover towards the first enemy threats and as shots crack from positions further up the valley we hear the first shout of 'casualty' and know it's going to be a long morning.

Six days earlier when our coach arrived at Redford Barracks, Edinburgh, we had no idea what was in store for us in what would turn out to be one of the most intense weeks of our lives.

Quartered in the squash courts of the barracks we started off with a tour of the imposing building. There was a good degree of apprehension, not helped by posters around the corridors featuring mines and weaponry that the Taliban would be employing against 3 RIFLES when they deploy to Afghanistan this year. However, we soon managed to settle in and when we were introduced to our weapons for the week everything else was forgotten as we got to grips with the SA80 A2 rifle. With a view to the latter part of the week we were briefed on how to organise a platoon harbour and other full platoon level manoeuvres before donning our webbing and heading out on to the football pitch for a full throttle PT 'warm up' session. Within minutes we were sweating through our combat jackets as we practised casevac techniques such as fireman's lift, shoulder drag and, interestingly, wheelbarrow which necessitates carrying your partner an ever increasing distance as we raced 'pyramid' style against other pairs. The losing pair had to repeat the exercise, of course.

As we lined up the next morning in the drill square and squinted out of the corners of our eyes to see the CSM striding towards us out of the mist, I know I wasn't the only one to feel a twinge of nervousness in the pit of my stomach.



Soon he had us marching 125 to the minute and making a mess of everything that was shouted our way. However, an hour later we were at least on the way to resembling a comprehensive

marching unit and we were all feeling infinitely more confident about our drill than we had done before.



After a dash to get our webbing we were loaded on to the minibuses and driven down to the ranges where we zeroed our personal weapons and live fired our SA80 rifles at different ranges. Also down on the ranges was the whole array of fire support weaponry that an infantry platoon has at its disposal: from sniper rifles to 40mm grenade launchers, mortars to Javelin anti-tank rockets, and every calibre of machine-gun imaginable. We were shown around every weapon in intricate detail. Finally to top it all off we fired the FN MINIMI 5.56mm machine-gun on the range with every single one of us walking off the firing point, smiling.

The next day brought a 'skills and drills' mini-exercise in order to practise section level attacks and casualty evacuation as well as some two man close quarter battle drills in wooded areas.



Our three sections rotated through the three stands throughout the day and after a succession of four section attacks and an intense casevac we finished up with a much greater understanding between section commanders, their 2ICs, and everyone in the section. This was vitally important as it helped us pull together during our exercise over the next three days and made it possible for us to operate on a platoon level instead of having to worry about section level problems.



As we conducted battle preparation in some woodland on the fringe of our exercise area there was a feeling in the air of optimism and determination that had permeated through us during the week. We had had the training, we knew the skills, and now it was up to us to perform.



Once we had recce'd our platoon harbour location, the real work began; digging shellscrapes, putting up a track plan, preparing sentry positions, making sure every section had a functioning stag rotation system and, most importantly, ensuring that once the harbour was functioning people were getting some sleep in between duties. That night all three sections conducted three separate recce patrols of the immediate area and possible enemy locations. One recce group found a strong contingent of the enemy established around a pump-house to the north of our harbour location. The other two recce'd possible ambush sites for operations to take place over the next few days. Rouse at four in the morning reminded everyone that they had only had a couple of hours sleep the night before. Bleary-eyed cadets sat around the HQ map listening to orders for the clearance patrols to head out that morning.



By the time the midday sun was beating down most of us had already sweated the mosquito repellent applied during the night into our eyes on the section-level clearance patrols, and everyone felt tired, but we all knew we had to be fully awake for the next stage, a platoon ambush. After Platoon Commander Herbert and Platoon Sergeant Thomas had given the orders, the platoon moved out towards the ambush location. We were met along the way by two GPMG machine-gun gunners, who completed our platoon's armoury. After a gruelling hour long march through the summer heat we finally hit the ground and set out our ambush. Lying still whilst being eaten alive by midges, it felt like an eternity before we finally heard footsteps heading in our direction. As soon as the platoon commander's hand hit the back of the GPMG machine gunner to his side, the whole woodland lit up as every single weapon opened up. The enemy deployed smoke, but it was too late. Search parties were deployed and then the platoon bugged out back to the Final RV before patrolling back to the harbour.

Once orders had been given for the platoon attack which was to take place that evening and sentry duty had been arranged for the night, tired riflemen began to nod off in their shellscrapes. 'CONTACT!' was cried by the northern sentry point, followed by 'STAND TO' from the HQ

shellscape. What followed was a series of attacks on the harbour location by ever increasing enemy forces. When we were forced to bug-out we retreated to our Emergency RV to the South. As the two sections not facing the enemy peeled out and left, it was up to the platoon sergeant, the platoon commander, and the remaining section commander to conduct the battle and safely evacuate the rest of the troops from the harbour. Peeling off with heavy bergens whilst being covered by smoke and GPMG machine gun support, the last section fell into buddy pairs and pepper-potted back to the Emergency RV. Exhausted, everyone settled down to one hour of well earned sleep before the final attack on the Pump-house.

At 0030hrs we set off up the river that was our route into the Final RV for the platoon attack. Guided by glow-sticks planted by our recce team we moved over the obstacles with surprisingly little noise and arrived at the Final RV unnoticed. As the morning progressed the platoon took position after position up the valley until finally, at 0430hrs, just as the sun was rising the last position was taken.

We arrived back at the barracks: exhausted, dirty, hungry, and tired. But to a man, we were euphoric.



Written By Cdt Sergeant Ed Thomas and Cdt Sergeant Tom Herbert. With especial thanks to: Lt Col N J Kitson, CO 3 RIFLES and Old Wykehamist who organised the whole venture, and 2 Lt Tom Vila Pl Cdr B Company 5 Platoon 3 RIFLES for doing his best to turn a ragged bunch of public schoolboys into a vague semblance of a platoon. Thanks also to all our CCF officers, Maj Hart (recently of the AAC) for writing the programme and to Lt Col M D Wallis for his help in getting Lt Col Kitson to where he is (by teaching of course). However, we would not have got anywhere without all of the soldiers from B Company who were with us at every step and a constant source of knowledge and encouragement. Our thoughts are with them as they deploy to Afghanistan this year. We wish them all the best.