

SOME ACCOUNT OF AN OPERATION IN THE MALAYAN JUNGLE

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In April 1949 an operation was mounted with the object of surrounding and destroying a substantial force of bandits believed to have moved into the relatively inaccessible jungle area approximately midway between the Cameron Highlands and Kuala Lipis.

The whole operation was named Ramillies and the troops taking part were from the 2nd Bn. Coldstream Guards, with whom this account deals, and from 2/2 Gurkha Rifles and 2nd Bn. Malay Regt.

TOPOGRAPHY

The area in which the operation took place is crossed from west to east by three rivers, the Sungei Telom, Sungei Bertam and Sungei Lemoi which rise to the west of the Cameron Highlands, join in the centre of the area and continue as the Sungei Telom to Kuala Lipis.

The routes taken by the troops engaged were dictated by the terrain of high hills and river valleys and by the fact that the jungle paths commonly follow the courses of streams and rivers.

The two companies of 2nd Bn. Coldstream Guards had the most difficult routes to follow which were for most of the way along the S. Lemoi, Bertam and Telom from near their sources.

Between the rivers were mountains up to 5,815 ft., the highest point actually crossed by one party "Hermes" being 4,500 ft. and the lowest, near the confluence of the three rivers, about 800 ft. above sea-level.

The country was largely dense jungle with high trees and thick undergrowth of which the worst feature was the bamboo thickets. Occasionally there were small clearings in the jungle, either occupied, or at some time abandoned by the Sakai, the aboriginal jungle inhabitants. From the air, at a certain height, the country, typical of much of Malaya, looks extremely like an area of irregular pieces of the green sorbo sponge often used on cloth models.

As a whole the jungle is much more dense than encountered in Burma.

CLIMATE AND DISCOMFORTS

The terrain is difficult enough, but add to it a day temperature of about 92° F. maximum, and a night temperature of about 70° F. minimum, a humidity of about 90°, an unpredictable amount of rain, mosquitoes and midges, leeches

and biting ants, give the imagination some latitude, and an idea of the conditions under which this operation took place will have been visualized.

SOME ADMINISTRATIVE PROBLEMS

Many new administrative problems had to be faced, not the least of which was how to deal with any casualties which might occur after the first one or two days' march.

It will be appreciated that only absolutely fit men were permitted to set out on an operation of this nature, after a very thorough examination by the R.M.O.

Every ounce of weight counts when it has to be carried under these conditions. Hence only the minimum essential was carried, but even then, the weight carried per man amounted to about 62 lb. for a man armed with a sten, and even more for a man carrying a Number 68 wireless set or bren gun. The remarks of the orderly, who received a Winchester quart of tinea paint in an airdrop, concerning its disposal, can be imagined.

The Medical Officer was faced with a very big problem in choosing between what medical equipment must be carried, what he would like to carry, and what could be carried, even though he knew that he could probably obtain anything he required within a few hours by special airdrop.

Standard pattern stretchers in these conditions are weighty and cumbersome things and are not normally carried. Reliance is placed on improvised stretchers, or the airborne type is dropped to a patrol if a more rigid structure is essential. Stretcher carriage is an arduous undertaking and only in extremely favourable conditions is a four bearer carry possible.

The whole operation depended on maintenance by air supply. Unfortunately, evacuation of any sick or wounded by air was impossible. Helicopters may be the answer to this problem, as in most of the jungle there are clearings at intervals, which it is thought can be used by helicopters. There may be technical difficulties which the footslogger doesn't appreciate, but it is hoped that in due course helicopters will be available for trial as a method of evacuation.

In view of the total number of troops likely to be in the neighbourhood of the confluence of the three rivers, the unknown quantity and quality of the opposition, and the uncertainty of the length of the operation, the R.M.O. of the Coldstream Guards, Lieutenant M. M. F. Coigley, R.A.M.C., and Sjt. J. H. Watts, R.A.M.C., moved with the most southerly party along the S. Lemoi prepared to establish an aid post with six R.A.M.C. other ranks, if and when they met.

The S. Lemoi route was the longest and proved to be the most difficult. It was fortunate that the R.M.O. moved with this party as will be seen later.

HERMES

To face these conditions the two companies of 2nd Bn. Coldstream Guards divided into three parties of two platoons, each party having two R.A.M.C. other ranks from a Field Ambulance, moved eastwards from the Cameron

Highlands area on various dates in April, each party following generally one of the three rivers previously mentioned.

The party which included the R.M.O., total strength 52, was known as "Hermes" and left the 28th milestone on the Cameron Highlands road on April 12, all personnel being armed. They reached the same road near Ringlet on May 4 having travelled a distance computed at 55 miles, by the time jeep head in the Bertam Valley was reached, this distance excluding side patrols.

The general plan of movement was to march for three days, and to rest, "wash and brush up," and replenish on the fourth day. This permits airdrops at suitable intervals with replenishment up to the maximum that can be carried.

On a marching day the column moved for seven hours, in which time 10,000 yards (6 miles) on a good track, down to as little as 1,500 yards under very bad conditions was covered, though the distance on a good day was only in the region of 4-5,000 yards, as the crow flies.

It is believed that much of the route followed by "Hermes" had not previously been trodden by Europeans.

The jungle paths followed were very tortuous, sometimes steep, always undulating, commonly having a side-to-side slope. At certain points mutual assistance in movement was required, and bedding ropes or rifles were used.

DAILY ROUTINE

The daily routine followed was reveille at first light at 0700 hrs., move off at 0800 hrs. until about 1600 hrs. with appropriate short halts, and an hour's halt at mid-day.

The making of camp was started at about 1600 hrs., lean to shelters were put up made from suitable branches or bamboo and broad banana-type leaves, followed by the evening meal and thorough ablutions.

When camping near a stream it is inexcusable for anyone to fail to have a thorough wash. Fires were lit and wet clothes dried. On a replenishment day, clothes were washed. It was found to be most important that everyone slept clean and as far as possible a spare clean suit was kept for this purpose.

The fires also kept down the mosquito and midge population. The most depressing days, fortunately few, were those when it rained from the time of making camp to turning in, then it was impossible to dry wet clothes or to turn in dry.

Everything possible was done before turning in at 1900 hrs. to ensure an unhurried but early start on the following day.

AIR SUPPLY

"Hermes" lasted for twenty-three days and during that time major replenishment took place on five occasions. Medical supplies were dropped on the tenth and sixteenth days. In addition there was a free drop from an Auster, specially called for, later on the sixteenth day.

MEDICAL EQUIPMENT

The equipment carried on Hermes was "extensive" for that party, but

was taken to establish a reasonably equipped aid post in a suitable position for the whole force, if the necessity arose.

The alternative routes for the evacuation of any sick or wounded were (1) to carry back during the early days ; (2) to carry on and perhaps raft down the main stream of the Telóm to Kuala Lipis during the middle period ; and (3) to carry forward. The actual decision could only be made in each individual case after taking into consideration the nature and severity of the casualty, the location at the time, and the past and probable future "going."

In the event, the only serious casualty was rested for two nights and then carried forward.

The main worry of the R.M.O. was the possibility of a penetrating abdominal wound.

A MAJOR CASUALTY

On April 27 a side patrol was out and the leading scout was shot by bandits and hit in the chest. It was late in the afternoon and too far to carry him to base during daylight. Morphia was given by the Officer Commanding the patrol and a first field dressing applied to the entry wound.

First thing on the following morning the R.M.O. and escort set out and met the patrol bringing in the casualty on an improvised stretcher.

On examination the R.M.O. found an entry wound on the left side of the chest in the sixth intercostal space in the nipple line. Very little bleeding had occurred and there appeared to be no penetration of the thoracic or abdominal cavities.

The Guardsman was brought back to base arriving at about 1530 hrs. and rested there for the following two nights. Treatment with adequate dosage of penicillin parenterally and sulphamezathine by mouth was instituted.

As the Guardsman's condition did not show signs of deterioration and the position of the bullet was unknown, neither probing nor an attempt to remove the bullet was made.

While the casualty was being brought in Sjt. Watts, R.A.M.C., with admirable initiative, prepared a bed made from twigs, leaves and the tow packing from that day's airdrop and sheets from the parachute silk, the whole being protected by a lean-to shelter.

An airborne pattern stretcher, medical supplies and plasma had been specially called for and arrived by Auster and were free-dropped.

The stretcher and medical supplies were undamaged but the plasma was a mixture of glass and globulin—fortunately not required.

The Guardsman recovered from his initial shock, and as his condition was extremely good, Hermes moved off again on the third morning after the incident.

The casualty was carried but got off the stretcher at the tortuous parts of the track or where the advance clearing party could not be expected to make the route passable for a stretcher.

The procedure which least exhausted the patrol, was for two men to carry for four minutes, then to change ends and carry for another four minutes.

At the end of this time the bearers were changed. This indicates just how exhausting the stretcher-carry was. Stretcher slings were found to be extremely useful and allowed the bearers to use their hands when necessary.

On reaching the S. Bertam and after a day's rest and replenishment, "Hermes" started off on the return journey via the Bertam Valley, the shortest route.

The casualty had now recovered considerably and was able to walk for increasing periods during the remaining few days and in fact walked through the worst part of the return journey, the whole party reaching jeep head in the Bertam Valley on May 4.

INCIDENCE OF DISABILITIES

A few cases of jungle boot sores occurred. These are shallow flat ulcers of an impetiginous nature limited to that part of the leg covered by the jungle boot, but particularly marked over the ankle. They are probably due to continued friction by the jungle boot and grains of sand, moisture, and a very low grade infection.

Treatment consists of cleaning the ulcers with a mild oxidizing agent, and "Attend B 14 days excused jungle boots."

The party "Hermes" had the lowest incidence of fresh tinea with only three cases (6 per cent) of tinea cruris, this was undoubtedly due to the higher standard of personal cleanliness, the result of the watchfulness of the R.M.O. His party had in addition 1 case of mild heat exhaustion, several cases of superficial sepsis of which 3 were deemed to require penicillin.

The party "Furious" had an incidence of 20 per cent of tinea and one "NYD Fever." The patrol "Neptune" for some reason had 35 per cent of fresh tinea cases and two cases of "NYD Fever."

The tinea figures are accurate because every man was carefully inspected before and after the operation.

Fortunately there were no sprained ankles or fractures. However, several severe cuts occurred while cutting bamboo, the R.M.O. was himself a victim and sutures were inserted in cold blood by Sjt. Watts, quite calmly, in spite of copious instructions in words of one and two syllables.

Cpl. Alberry, R.A.M.C., in one of the other patrols, sutured most excellently a nasty gash of 7 inches long, situated obliquely over the right scapula.

The question of suturing cuts by the R.A.M.C. other ranks particularly of the hands and fingers, gave rise to some discussion before the operation, but all cuts requiring suture were so treated and not one gave rise to any trouble. It is regretted that no note was made of whether sulphonamides and/or penicillin were used in these cases. An unsutured cut in the jungle is a great nuisance and handicap and is bound to become infected after a time, however carefully dressed.

MISCELLANEOUS POINTS

Several miscellaneous points are given here which were learnt during the operation or brought out more forcibly than before.

- (1) All men must wash completely once a day wherever possible.
- (2) Great attention must be paid to foot hygiene.
- (3) All water sterilizing tablets must be checked before an operation for their physical condition and sampled for efficiency of sterilization.
- (4) Zinc oxide and oil of cloves should be carried for toothache.
- (5) Footpowder of high quality must be used the whole time.
- (6) Smaller curved cutting needles and finer silkworm gut would be an improvement.
- (7) Treatment of tinea must be regularly carried out on patrol.
- (8) Insect repellent when properly applied is effective against mosquitoes.
- (9) Medical supplies by air must be packed in containers of small size. Bottles must be screw-capped as stoppers and corks are dislodged on impact with the ground.
- (10) Antimalaria clothing was found effective by those who wore it.
- (11) Lemonade crystals and fresh fruit are a welcome change in the ration.
- (12) Remove jungle boots at the end of each day's march.
- (13) Stretcher slings are extremely valuable.
- (14) On rest days, during daylight hours, only shorts and light footwear should be worn.
- (15) New replenishment clothing should be pre-washed and treated with D.B.P.

EXTRACTS FROM THE OFFICIAL REPORT

An extract from the official report is given: "The difficulties of dealing with any but minor casualties in the jungle cannot be over-emphasized.

"It is practically impossible to evacuate a seriously wounded man and to expect him to stand the jolting of the stretcher and the unpleasantness of the climate.

"To have carried the casualty referred to the whole way out would have taken one platoon from three to four weeks."

Two further extracts from the official report are given: "It is not considered that elephants would be any use for casualty evacuation. Many of the tracks are too steep for them to negotiate, they are very slow, and the narrowness of the tracks would mean that the casualty would be rubbed by branches and liable to be swept off."

"As was found during the war, one of the greatest morale raisers was the knowledge that if wounded, a man would be assured of speedy evacuation. This is not so in this area. . . ."

That helicopters may be the answer to these problems has already been mentioned.

CONCLUSION

Many lessons, which have proved of great value were learned from this operation, the largest and longest known to the writer at that time. In particular, a standard medical patrol pack for orderlies was devised and later amended from time to time, and a practical, improvised light-weight stretcher, made from bamboo and a groundsheet, has been introduced.

The need for a high standard of first-aid training for regimental personnel is self-evident.

To support long or large scale jungle operations, physically fit and well-trained R.A.M.C. other ranks are required. They must possess initiative and be capable of assuming considerable responsibility. They must be of a calibre which will gain the confidence of the combatant soldier. These requirements can only be found in men of a high selection group rating.

LIST OF CONTENTS OF R.M.O.'s MEDICAL PACK

Instrument roll (from Regimental Medical Pannier) complete	.. .. .	1
2 c.c. syringe in spirit tight case	.. .. .	1
10 c.c. syringe in spirit tight case	.. .. .	1
2 c.c. metal syringe in case	.. .. .	1
Ryle's Tube	.. .. .	1
Tourniquet—Samways	.. .. .	1
Upper universal dental forceps	.. .. .	1
Lower universal dental forceps	.. .. .	1
Injection soluble phenobarbitone	.. .. . ampoules	6
Chloroform 2 oz. tubes	.. .. .	3
Pentothal 1 gramme tubes	.. .. .	4
Anti-gas-gangrene—bottle	.. .. .	1
Anti-tetanus serum—bottles	.. .. .	5
Anti-snake venom polyvalent lytholized sets	.. .. .	1
Cases hypodermic and ophthalmic	.. .. .	1
Injection coramine ampoules	.. .. .	4
Novutox 2 per cent 4 oz. bottle	.. .. .	1
Thermometer	.. .. .	1
Penicillin crystalline	.. .. . mega units	1

Also gauze, Doctor's set, elastoplast dressings and zinc oxide plaster.

LIST OF CONTENTS OF R.A.M.C. S.J.T.'S MEDICAL PACK

Dressings No. 11 and No. 14 of each	.. .. .	6
Tabs aspirin	.. .. .	100
Tabs Codeine Co.	.. .. .	100
Tabs sulphaguanidine	.. .. .	100
Tabs sulphamezathine	.. .. .	200
Tabs laxative	.. .. .	100
Penicillin crystalline	.. .. . mega units	1
Pulv. penicillin and sulphathiazole	.. .. . grammes	50
Liquor iodi mitis	.. .. . oz.	4
Lysol tablets	.. .. . tins	1
Elastoplast doctors' sets	.. .. . tins	1
Forceps artery	.. .. . prs.	6
Forceps tongue	.. .. . prs.	1
Forceps sinus	.. .. . prs.	1
Forceps Dunhills	.. .. . prs.	1
Schimmelbusch inhaler	.. .. .	1
Airway—waters	.. .. .	1
Catheters assorted	.. .. .	4
Fig. Castellani	.. .. . oz.	4
Ung. Whitfield	.. .. . oz.	4
Tourniquet—Samways	.. .. .	1

LIST OF CONTENTS OF AN R.A.M.C. ORDERLY'S MEDICAL PATROL PACK

Liquor iodi mitis	.. .. .	oz.	2
Morphia Syrettes gr. $\frac{1}{2}$	.. .. .	..	6
Paraffin molle flav. 4 oz. tubes	.. .. .	..	4
Tablets solution lysol tins	.. .. .	..	1
Bandages compressed 1 in.	.. .. .	..	24
Bandages compressed 3 in.	.. .. .	..	24
Bandages compressed triangular	.. .. .	..	6
Lint 1 oz. packets	.. .. .	..	6
Gauze compressed $2\frac{1}{2}$ yards pkts.	.. .. .	..	12
Shell dressings	.. .. .	..	4
Tourniquet—Samways	.. .. .	..	1
Knives Bard Parker	.. .. .	..	1
Knives Bard Parker blades	.. .. .	..	6
Forceps artery	.. .. .	..	1
Scissors, stretcher bearers	.. .. .	prs.	1
Pins, safety	.. .. .	doz.	2
Silkworm gut	.. .. .	hanks	1
Needles, suture, triangular, curved	} Sterile in methylated spirit container		6
Thermometer, clinical	.. .. .	..	1
<i>Tablets</i>			
Potassium permanganate tabs.	.. .. .	..	100
Aspirin tabs.	.. .. .	..	100
Cathartic tabs.	.. .. .	..	50
Sodium chloride tabs.	.. .. .	..	200
Eufflavine tabs.	.. .. .	..	50
Cough tabs.	.. .. .	..	50
Sulphaguanidine tabs.	.. .. .	..	150
Paludrine tabs.	.. .. .	..	50
Tinea paint	.. .. .	oz.	4
Whitfield's ointment	.. .. .	oz.	4
Pulv. penicillin and sulphathiazole	.. .. .	grammes	50

RATIONS

(1) *Maximum Carried Per Man*

1/10 of 2 Composite Ration Packs (10 men) av. weight (incl. tins)	=	$\frac{36 \times 2}{10}$	=	7.2 lb.
2 Marching Ration av. weight (incl. tins)	.. .. .	$2\frac{1}{8} \times 2$	=	4.25 lb.
1 Marching Ration Reserve av. weight (incl. tins)	.. .. .		=	2 lb.
				Approx. max. weight
				= 13 lb.

(2) *Contents of Composite Ration Pack (10 Men)*

These are standard packings and therefore details are not given.

(3) *Marching Ration*

Contents: Preserved meat	.. .. .	4 oz.
Tea	.. .. .	1 oz.
Sugar	.. .. .	4 oz.
Milk	.. .. .	3 oz.
Dried fruit	.. .. .	4 oz.
Margarine	.. .. .	$1\frac{1}{2}$ oz.

Biscuits	..	..	..	..	..	6 oz.
Veal loaf or tinned bacon	..	..	..	..	..	1 oz.
Onions	..	..	..	..	..	$\frac{1}{2}$ oz.
Rice	..	..	..	..	..	5 oz. (or rice 3 oz. oatmeal 2 oz.)
Chocolate	..	..	..	..	..	1 oz.
Salt	..	..	..	..	..	$\frac{1}{2}$ oz.
Salt tablets	..	..	..	..	..	As required
Cheese	..	..	..	..	..	2 oz.
Weight						2 lb. $1\frac{1}{2}$ oz.

CLOTHING AND EQUIPMENT CARRIED

Clothing Necessaries and Equipment

(1) *Worn.*—Hat Jungle ; Shirt Cellular O.G. ; Vest Tropical ; Trousers Drill O.G. ; Drawers Cotton ; Socks Worsted ; Boots Jungle.

(2) *Carried.*—First Field Dressing ; Belt Waist ; Straps Shoulder ; Straps Supporting ; Pack W.E. '37 Pattern ; Bottles Water (full) ; Matchet and Sheath ; Cape, Monsoon (or Poncho), Sheet Ground, Lines Bedding, rolled and carried on pack.

(3) *Contents of Pack. W.E.*—Tins Mess ; Shirt Cellular O.G., 1 ; Trousers O.G., prs. 1 ; Vests Tropical, 2 ; Drawers Cotton, prs. 1 ; Shorts Drill O.G., prs. 1 ; Socks Worsted, prs. 2 ; Towels Hand, 2 ; Shoes Canvas, prs. 1 ; Washing Kit ; Outfits Water Sterilizing Individual, 1 ; D.M.P., containers 1 ; D.B.P., oz. 2 ; Salt Tablets, q.s. ; Paludrine Tablets, q.s. ; Footpowder, q.s. ; Rations, Variable.

Weight of above articles (Less Rations) = 36 lb.

(4) *Arms and Extra Equipment Carried according to Employment :*

						lb.	oz.
Pistol Revolver .38 and 18 rds., holster and pouch	..	..	..	..	..	3	4
Machine Carbine Sten and three magazines Sten full..	..	..	..	..	..	12	0
LMG (Bren)	..	..	..	..	..	25	0
Medical Pack	..	..	..	..	..	8	0
Bottle Water Medical (full)	..	..	..	..	..	6	10
Wrks 68 Set	..	..	..	..	..	34	0
Stretcher Airborne	..	..	..	..	..	15	0