

WORDS AND PICS BRIAN HARTIGAN
WITH ADDED PERSPECTIVES FROM
VARIOUS OFFICIAL SOURCES

I visited Australian troops in the Middle East Area of Operations in September. While I anticipated patrols outside the wire with our soldiers, circumstances prevented it [more on that in my editorial]. Instead, what I did was talk to as many people as I could to get a better background understanding of the day-to-day life of our soldiers, especially in Afghanistan. What follows are some of those chats, offering different threads around the same conversation.



Harassing fire

Sergeant Craig Rohse, 17 Alpha Team Leader, 3RAR

When we got here, we pretty much got stuck in straight away. The Tangi Valley itself is quite narrow. It's dominated by high ground on both the northern and southern sides. The green zone is maybe about 600m – a little bit wider in places.

From the start, 8/9RAR were supposed to take us on a nursing patrol, but when we got there, the ANA informed us that there were sharpshooters up in the hills and they were engaging the base – Patrol Base Karib.

We believed it was up to four persons up on the high ground about 2km away from us and they were just using AKs to harass the base.

The nursing patrol didn't go ahead for a few reasons – ANA, as well as our own, so we came back to Hadrian for a while and went back out to Karib a few weeks later.

The shooters were still there, still engaging the base. So we started to use our sniper callsign to try to engage the enemy. But because of the distance it was quite hard.

The snipers did an excellent job identifying where the enemy were and that they were using different firing positions. Over the course of a day, they identified that they were essentially using four different firing positions and every time we shot at them, they just moved to a different position and shot back at us.

Then we tried mortars. First ANA mortars then our own. At that stage, one exposed himself and the snipers took him out. Then we reckon the mortar callsign took care of another one.

The enemy actually hit a window in the mortars' car – that's how close they came. We kept that as a nice souvenir for our museum.

We also called in artillery from back at Hadrian and because we were here to call fall of shot, HQ was able to build a good picture on where the enemy were.



A MORTARMAN'S PERSPECTIVE

Sergeant Adrian Down, 3RAR Task Group, Mortar Support

The dude was shooting at us for a couple of days and after a while we got the shits with him and started bombing him.

Obviously we had to call it in and the JFO [joint fires officer] actually called the mission.

He [the enemy] had three or four different positions he used. They were pretty good positions too – natural overhanging rocks and stuff like that where he could get in underneath, where he could see us but was protected.

So we fired a whole bunch of rounds trying to get him – and the snipers were trying to get him as well. But he kept ducking to a position over the back of the hill.

Then CTU [Combined Team Uruzgan] put up a UAV and it sat there watching.

What the shooters did was lay under a blanket or something to try and fool the thermal, making the ground around him the same temp as the rocks. But eventually, one of them got up to take a piss and the UAV was able to see the movement.

So they called in the F16 and dropped two 500 pounders on him, just on last light.

Then some other dudes came the next day to see what had happened, and the snipers knocked one of them over too. They didn't use that hill again after that.

When they sent a patrol up to check the hill out, they recon there was a lot of naan bread and stuff up there. They figured they were being resupplied by donkey from over the other side of the hill.