

WUOTC Bag Medals at Exercise Cambrian Patrol

Contributed by Tom Onion

In early November, I was one of 16 Young Officers and Officer Cadets from Wales UOTC who took on a challenge regarded internationally as "one of the toughest patrolling tests facing the modern soldier" – Exercise Cambrian Patrol.

Wales UOTC was the only unit to enter the exercise and gain 2 medals – a Silver and Bronze. A two day exercise held annually by 160 Brigade in South Wales, the Cambrian Patrol tests the ability of soldiers to cover long distances over rough terrain with heavy loads. It also puts the patrol in a variety of situations varying from tactical river crossings and CBRN drills to weapons recognition and prisoner of war procedures. For this exercise, specialist training was required, and Captain Evans and Sergeant Major Painter provided an intense and challenging package during Summer Camp and the beginning of the academic year which fully prepared us for the physical and mental strains of the exercise.

WUOTC Blue Team – Silver Medal Winners (L-R) Evans, Hughes, Pomfrett, Coutier, Evans, Perks, Hicketts, West.

Day 1.
Having stayed at Maindy Barracks in Cardiff for two days to prepare prior to the exercise, the teams were up at 0300 ready to travel out to the launch location of the exercise. The teams were divided up into a "Red" and "Blue" team, led by 2Lt Birtwistle and 2Lt Evans respectively. I was in the Red team, and this is my account of the exercise. Upon arrival at the launching area, we had a kit inspection and then moved to a harbour location to be given our orders and to prepare for the patrol. This was a great opportunity to get some food down our necks and dig a bloody big hole for the model. After being given our orders we moved from this location via troop carrying vehicle (TCV) to a drop off point (DOP) and began the patrol. Everything was going swimmingly for us in the Red team until Birty decided that to save time we would be using firebreaks in the woodland which were practically vertical and covered by felled trees... This made the going interesting to say the least. After tabbing what seemed like a less than ideal distance over some pretty awful terrain, we reached our first objective – a close target reconnaissance (CTR) on a farm complex complete with enemy and tanks. Having completed the CTR, we continued tabbing to meet a friendly agent and received directions to "Camp Vodka". The route to Camp Vodka was the worst tabbing of the whole patrol – over heather and gorse up to the waist on the biggest hills South Wales has to offer. It did seem rather unreasonable, but laughing at the guy in front of you falling over and getting annoyed when you fell over yourself somehow seemed to motivate us to keep going. At 0400 we finally arrived at Camp Vodka which was a friendly forces camp where we would get several hours rest. However, between wrestling with fatigue, Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) tests and writing a Patrol Report, we were lucky to get about 2 hours of sleep... probably less than that for the Radio Operators without sleeping bags (unlucky Timmy and Stappers).

WUOTC Red Team – Bronze Medal Winners – (L-R) Squirrel, Birtwistle, Brown, Stapley, Onion, Pates, Dew.
(Taylor was taking the picture).

Day 2.
Reveille was at a comfortable 0730 on the second day of the exercise, ready for us to move out at 0830 and on to our new taskings. The first of these was to conduct a brief reconnaissance of a cross roads, and then proceed to a mine field crossing cleared by friendly forces. During this, we had 2 friendly casualties which meant that we had to clear a route to them through the mine field and conduct casualty evacuation and helicopter drills. As the patrol medic, I was fairly surprised to find that the casualty was in fact a genuine amputee... and I was also fairly gutted to get fake blood all over my kit, even though it did make me look like an extra from a Rambo film. After a great deal more tabbing, we reached the river crossing stand. By this time it was getting dark, and this coupled with the team becoming increasingly fatigued meant that this stand ended up being a bit of a mess. We arrived and for safety reasons were told to perform the crossing in a manner dictated to us by the directing staff rather than our own standard operating procedures. One member of the patrol – who shall remain nameless – fell asleep, and once onto the opposite bank there was confusion as to what kit we had to have on us to get up the bank, which was coincidentally the steepest and most slippery terrain any of us had encountered. After reorganising ourselves on the far bank, we again tabbed out to an agent meet, where we were briefed that we would be moved by TCV to another point with a view to tabbing to a friendly harbour area and then onto a friendly Army base.

Members of Red Team – (L-R) Taylor, Onion (kneeling), Brown, Stapley and Pates.

Day 3.
Upon arrival at the Army base, Tom Brown was taken away to perform a mine recognition task and Birty had to perform a display of calling in Artillery fire. Meanwhile, the rest of us were stripped of our bergens (at last!!!) and instead given body armour and told to bus a 4 tonne truck. Of course, we all expected a vehicle ambush, but 40 minutes later we had reached our destination and tabbed out to meet a friendly agent who would guide us through a mine field to a

village. Upon entering the village all hell broke loose as we were ambushed. Muzzle flashes seemed to be coming from everywhere and General Purpose Machine Gun tracer lit the sky above our heads and ripped up the tree line behind us as the sky was illuminated by flares. The noise was immense. We instinctively split into our two fire-teams and Delta took up covering fire positions as Charlie moved along the bun-line/ditch to assault the enemy positions, with Birty and Dave Dew barking out fire control orders and so on. By this point we were physically and mentally fatigued and were running off adrenaline, and we were all grateful of the preparation we had received from during our intensive training package directed by Sergeant Major Painter. After the Re-Org was called, our friendly agent led us off at a sprint down the valley to meet a local mortar fire controller whose vehicle had broken down. He informed us that he needed us to take 8 mortars (mortar tubes filled with sand) 2km up hill to a nearby village within the next 20 minutes. We did it in 16 minutes. It was at this point that we were all hanging, particularly the two guys who'd just done all of the above carrying the notorious Clansman 352 signals equipment. And then we got told we had to crawl about 250 metres through a sewer. We were thrilled. Thankfully when we resurfaced it was all but over, we were given our bergens back and taken into a barn to have another kit check. They gave us tea – this was certainly our favourite stand. After this we moved into a patrol debrief where the whole patrol was questioned by two officers on what we had seen, who we had met and so on. During this time, Tom Brown came out with the most impressive display of bullshitting that any of us had ever seen.

And that was it, home for tea and medals… after we cleaned our weapons and handed the kit back in. You like that don’t you.