



Cougars after attack: ACTIVE EDGE 2004

A Cougar troop pauses after carrying out an attack exercise. Left to right are: Corporal Byers in turret; Warrant Officer Bergt on Cougar; Lieutenant Greg Yanda; Lieutenant Peeling; and Corporal Stock.



“Her Majesty’s Cowboys”: Battle squadron, Wainwright, 2004

On the last day of Exercise ACTIVE EDGE 04, the battle squadron poses for their picture. In the back row from left to right are Captain Watt, Lieutenant Yanda, Corporal Byers, Corporal Duffield, Corporal Osborne, Sergeant Rosendal, Master-Corporal Rosadiuk, Corporal Critchley, Corporal Burrows, Trooper Lojkowski, Corporal Hildebrandt, Sergeant Petr, Warrant Officer Moore and Lieutenant Hisdal. In the front from left to right are Corporal Adby, Corporal Gutowski, Lieutenant Peeling, Warrant Officer Bergt, Warrant Officer Walton, Major Lockhart, Corporal O’Callaghan, Corporal Markwell, Corporal Rolls, Corporal Buntain. BOTH COURTESY, BRETT WALTON

EPILOGUE

“No Matter How Much B.S. ...
Today Made It All Worthwhile.”

WAINWRIGHT, ALBERTA, AUGUST 2004

It rained throughout the night but it began to tail off on Tuesday morning. The Light Horse were up and about by 5.30 A.M. and after breakfast (blueberry apple cereal, cinnamon-flavoured oatmeal, or crunchie cereal, and lots of coffee) they performed routine maintenance and communications checks before moving out of their “hides” to take up the day’s work. The squadron’s task that Tuesday was to provide covering fire for the regular sappers of 1st Combat Engineer Regiment and the militia sappers of 8th Field Engineer Regiment while they dealt with an anti-tank ditch and a minefield. Once that job was done, the squadron would make a tactical move through these obstacles.

Everybody was in place, on time, and better still, it had stopped raining by the time the fun began. While the Cougar troops laid down suppressing fire and smoke using rounds from their 76 mm guns, the sappers moved in and blew a path through the minefield with C-4 charges, a very dangerous task in peace or war. Once the minefield was gapped, the engineers brought in their big Badger AEVs (Armoured Engineer Vehicles) equipped with ploughs and buckets, and began constructing an earth bridge over the anti-tank ditch on the far side of the field, their activities being covered by the squadron. When the sappers were finished, the squadron moved through the field and over the ditch, troop by troop, the first troop to cross establishing a fire base to protect the next troop, and so on until everyone was in position on the far side of the obstacle. The whole business went smoothly and one Light Horse troop leader confessed to being “so happy about it that I nearly couldn’t breathe.”

The remainder of Tuesday was spent preparing targets for the three days of range work that were to follow – the main event in the minds of the Light Horse. Many of these targets, to add a touch of realism, were high-technology “pop up” items activated by the Lockheed-Martin company whose representatives, most former soldiers, were on the ground to control them. The Light Horse worked hard on this preparatory job and that evening they were rewarded by being permitted to go back to the main camp to get hot showers and clean uniforms – a great morale booster after three days of rain – before returning, squeaky clean, to their “hide” to get some sleep.

Unfortunately, things did not go as smoothly on Wednesday, 25 August 2004, a bright but cool day. In the morning the squadron continued working on the targeting of the range with the hope that firing would commence at 1 P.M. but there was some confusion resulting in delays caused by what Clausewitz terms “friction” or unforeseen eventualities but soldiers call “another screw-up by the staff.” The Military Police company, who were training in the second block of the “Three Block War” (security operations, if the reader has forgotten after all this time), became so enthusiastic about conducting vehicle searches that they hampered movement to and from the range. Next, a strange vehicle was observed entering the live fire area which, on investigation, turned out to be truck full of Ghurkhas (a not uncommon sight at Wainwright as the British army uses this base to train) who had to be put on the correct path. All this, however, is about normal for any military operation, training or active – and after things got sorted out, range practice commenced at 3 P.M.

The firing continued until 6.30 P.M. after which the squadron wrapped up and went into their “hide” for the night. After a meal, the crews carried out routine maintenance while troop leaders attended the squadron O Group (a nightly occurrence it should be noted). ACTIVE EDGE being the first big exercise in years and one involving many different arms and services, everybody wanted to have their say, and these squadron O Groups tended to stretch out a bit. While the armoured officers listened to the gunners, engineers, flatfeet – and just about everyone else – drone on, the crews, having finished the daily chores, got in a few hands of Euchre while they waited for the troop leaders to return. When they did, the troop leaders held their own O Groups for the crews and, by the time these were finished, it was nearly 11 P.M.

Thursday, Day 5, 26 August 2004, was a good day. The squadron carried out a controlled advance-to-contact exercise (“keep moving until you run into the enemy”) using live ammunition, mainly SHPRAC (Squashed Head, Practice Round). Each troop practised firing on the move – actually since the main gun of the Cougar is not stabilized, they moved, stopped, fired, moved – which can be fatiguing given the constant jolting of the vehicle, but was certainly interesting. Before making a move to