

## THE LONG RANGE PATROL GROUP



### A different way to patrol Africa's conservation front-line



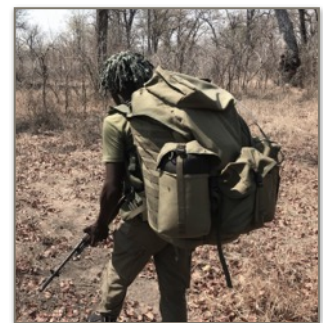
During the Malaya Emergency and Borneo Confrontation, the Special Air Service had evolved to operate deep in tropical jungles, far from road networks or logistical backups. They carried what they needed and then relied on resupply. In this case it was usually food, ammunition, radio batteries, clothes and boots by parachute. It was a simple enough concept. In order for the patrols to be effective, they had to be detached from the conventional



operational front line, far forward, where the enemy - communist insurgents in this case - were least expecting them to be. In concert with this, there was a 'Hearts and Minds' campaign to entice the indigenous people to be onside and pass information on enemy movement. Similar tactics were equally successful in the Middle East conflicts and skirmishes of the same era.

This approach was successful during a time when conventional warfare in the Far East was dominating the headlines and was failing, at huge cost.

In Africa the situation is not dissimilar. Poaching is still an insurgency war and in most cases there are not nearly enough rangers to effectively police the operational front line. The conventional methods of dropping off with huge and heavy packs, forming a base camp and operating out from it has limitations. It is always frustrating to witness the inefficiency of the often accepted methods of deployment. Persuading managers to consider an alternative can be difficult because when someone doesn't fully understand or have experience of an alternate method, then making that leap of faith can be a difficult one.



An additional hurdle is to incentivise rangers to operate in what would seem to them to be longer harder days with no apparent reward.

Rangers who are unhappy with their lot, will not perform and there is a credible risk that loyalties to the cause will be lost.



## **A DIFFERENT APPROACH...**

It was necessary to take a few steps back and refocus on the issues concerning the increase of poaching, remoteness of park boundaries and limited infrastructure.

Traditional methods of selecting and training anti-poaching rangers have been based on what trainers know, very often influenced by their own military backgrounds.

We established at an early stage that the different approach would involve the selection of the best and most motivated rangers followed by training that would be focussed on alternate equipment, feeding, sleeping and deployment methods. To get buy-in the approach to training would need to be right, but most of all, the sense of belonging to a specialised unit that looks and feels different and is admired and respected by others, would be key to motivation and therefore success.

## **THE EQUIPMENT...**

### **CONCEPT:**

Travel light, Travel far. Take only what you need. As the seasons change a ranger needs to prioritise what is needed. In the rainy season, waterproofing and shelter are key. It is warm at night, no need for a sleeping bag and water is plentiful. Dry season, zero rain, no waterproofing or shelter needed. It can be freezing at night so lightweight sleeping bags and extra warm clothing. Extra water needs to be carried. The carriage equipment, therefore needs to be configured according to the seasons.

### **THE PACK**

A key component of the LRPG equipment. The pack was inspired by an Australian jungle pack dating back to the middle of the last century.

It is divided into top and bottom halves. The top, in three compartments is for everything to do with cooking and feeding whilst the bottom half is everything to do with sleeping. In the top flap is a pocket for storing map sheets with each 1:50 000 A3 size map folded into A4 plastic ziplock bags.



The pack has the 'molle' system of straps stitched to the outside for the attachment of additional pouches if required.

## BELT KIT WEBBING

A wide belt with 'molle' straps that enable a variety of pouches to be fitted. Any of the pouches can be fitted to the pack if required but only if there is justification as the pack needs to be kept as light as possible. The shoulder straps are deliberately thin and lightweight.

A standard configuration has two water bottle pouches, two small utility and one large rear pouch. The rear pouch can carry a jungle sleeping bag if needed or a 2ltr water bag or items of warm clothing, all depending on the seasonal weather conditions.

Ammunition pouches are not required for most rangers, however these can easily be designed and fitted



## SLEEPING SYSTEM

A ground mat which can either be in the form of a stretcher or foldable lightweight foam mat is stored neatly in the back of the pack.

The sleeping bag is a lightweight jungle bag with built in mosquito net at the opening



A military lightweight shelter-sheet or 'basha' provides shelter during the wetter months. To

aid fast construction, a three-piece pole can prop one end whilst the other is secured to a tree or bush. The poles are short enough to be stored inside the pack or on the outside pushed down the molle straps

Where rangers have been accustomed to living in tents it can be a difficult conversion to living under a basha with the assumption that water or wildlife (snakes apparently) will flood in. Once they get proficient at the construction and used to the idea, these beliefs are dispelled. Tent pegs



can be used but locally made iron pegs which can be knocked into hard packed ground have proved better. There is potential to add a waterproof bivvi bag for the wetter months.

## COOKING

Making a central fire and communal cooking is another difficult change. It generally means most of the productive part of the day being wasted with the process and goes against the concept of mobile patrols able to react and move responsively.

Twig burning stoves are small, lightweight and burn very efficiently. Fuel is always plentiful and it doesn't take rangers long to become proficient in their use.



The cookers break down into three component pieces fitting inside each other and the whole fits neatly inside the stainless steel cooking pot with lid. The pot can then be carried in one of the side pockets of the upper half of the pack.

An alternate, where available would be lightweight foldable gas cookers but gas canisters can be difficult to come by throughout Africa. One useful advantage of gas is use during the wettest months when wood fuel maybe harder to light.



Fire-lighters broken down into small pieces speed up the lighting process but a good alternative is cotton wool dipped in melted candle wax and formed into marble size balls. These can be cut in half or a whole one will burn long enough to boil a pot of water.

## FOOD

Another contentious issue where foods such as maize flour (mealy pap/sadza) has been the dominant food since early years and rangers truly believe it is the only food they can eat.

However, the drive and desire to be part of a Long Range Patrol unit will overcome these beliefs and the introduction of alternate foods is achievable. There is a strict discipline involved, but it has been proven to work.

The diet can vary but based on dried food such as soya mince mixed with rice or pasta. Dried meat 'biltong' is an alternative. When mixed with plenty of water and heated with constant stirring, a small measured amount expands into a pot full which is both filling and nutritious.



Flavoured powdered porridge made with ingredients such as soya and sorghum flour and packed with nutrients makes a meal in itself and is a good way to start the day as it can be mixed with cold water. These products are becoming increasingly more popular and can be found in most supermarkets. They are generally flavoured with banana, strawberry, vanilla or chocolate to add variety. These have been a great hit with rangers because it's not food that they could generally afford to buy for personal consumption.



Adding to the diet can be rusk biscuits, nuts or instant foods such as cheese and pasta.

The key with the rations is to carefully measure out each portion and store in individual sealable bags. These bags are then stored in tupperware containers which fit into the remaining space in the top of the pack. Each container houses the two main meals of the day plus an extra for sundries like the biscuits and tea, coffee or chocolate drinks.



The picture to the left shows 4 days rations ready to stow in the top of the pack. An extra day or two's rations can easily be taken in an additional pouch on the webbing or pack.

A thermos mug is issued so hot drinks can be made and saved for later in the evenings. Cooking is done once a day, this may be mid afternoon when the sun is hottest and movement/tracking operations most difficult, or more traditionally in the evening.

## DEPLOYMENT AND SUPPORT...

LRPG units must operate outside of the general operations' control bubble. This can be a difficult concept to accept but the stark reality is that leaks to the outside communities are commonplace and the level of interest in this new unit will be high and therefore information on LRP patrol activities will have value.

There should be a separate control room with mapping on the wall that can be covered by a curtain if there is a need for anyone else to enter the room. Everyone must be conditioned to know that the LRP deployments and operations are secretive and not for general discussion. All operations are on a 'need to know' basis i.e. if you don't need to know, don't ask!

## RESUPPLY

The success of the LRP method is very much dependant on the ability of resupplying patrols on the move in a way that minimises their need to divert from the task. 'Dead' and 'Live' letterboxes is the terminology used. The dead letterbox is an unmanned resupply, left in a location, to be picked up when convenient to the patrol and a live letterbox is an RV with a person to receive whats required and may include instructions for the next tasking.

A system may need to be developed in parks whereby water or food can be cached in secure containers, with lockable or tamperproof lids.

Water filtration systems can be issued and carried. These are now very compact but allow static water, considered too unclean to drink to be filtered for use.

## SUPPORT VEHICLE

A dedicated support vehicle is very desirable but not essential. Ideally, two members of the LRPG should deploy with the support vehicle and stay out for the duration of the task, even remaining out during the changeover of personnel. A trailer with roof tent is ideal. The trailer and tent can be placed in a static location close enough for patrols to return to for resupply and the vehicle used to quickly re-deploy to new areas. If suspects are captured the vehicle can respond and likewise if there is a casualty the mobile base will have medical equipment.



## COMMUNICATIONS & SECURITY...

This is also key to the success of LRP units. To mitigate the issue of security in the parks and the problem of internal informers, patrols must be deployed without the knowledge of anyone else in the park. Even the patrols themselves need not know exactly where they are operating until they are dropped off and briefed. From the drop off the patrols should expect to move up to 20km to their operational area.

Mobile phones must not be taken, however it is accepted that phones are needed as a back up where park radios have no reception. It is therefor necessary to have dedicated phones with limitations to who can be called, to prevent security breeches. Thereafter spot searches should be carried out to ensure phones are not smuggled out, but could be carried with a support vehicle to give individuals the opportunity to contact family prior to redeployment and before they are briefed on new patrol areas.

If park radios are used for communications, it is desirable to have a separate and secure channel that cannot be accessed by anyone outside of the LRP unit. A simplex channel should also be available for inter-patrol chatting to co-ordinate patrol movement and actions.

## ADDITIONAL KIT...

Depending on the operational requirement, the additional kit should be available in the LRP stores:

### PANGA KNIFE

A very useful item to carry is a panga knife but not the standard length, as these are unnecessarily long. These are really useful for clearing the vegetation prior to erecting a basha or for constructing an OP. A cheap and quick solution is to source standard length pangas and cut them down to a shorter length to enable carriage on the side of the pack. A local tailor can make sheathes that enable the knives to strap to the side of the pack. These could be carried 1 between two.

### OBSERVATION POST (OP) CONSTRUCTION KIT

LRP patrols will excel in all reconnaissance roles. The construction of OP's requires secateurs and pruning saws plus chicken wire for weaving grasses and vegetation.



### TECHNICAL

The units should be proficient in the deployment and use of detection devices, camera systems and night viewing optics.

**The training and operational deployment of the LRPG is subject to a separate document.**

