

JUNGLE SURVIVAL AT BLOOMFIELD — AUG. 79

by LT M. HINDMARSH

With the knowledge that there is proposed a Battalion Jungle Survival exercise to be held next year, it was decided that a small party should be taught the skills beforehand so as to provide an instructional team for the exercise. This team, while actually attempting to survive themselves, would also be given the task of determining just what the best method of conducting such an exercise would be. The team essentially would, by its experiences, formulate tentative survival instruction upon which future unit survival courses could be based. The area selected in which to conduct the experimental survival training was on the coast south of Cooktown at a place called Bloomfield.

The team consisted of six officers and a junior NCO. A notable member was CAPT Les Hiddins, a very experienced and learned bushman who has spent much time on the subject of survival on the Australian Continent. He was to prove a very welcome asset to the team. LC PL David Sim was included to look at the subject from the aspect of the private soldier and what equipment he should take. David proved to be very proficient in the art of survival and taught us quite a deal.

However, our appointed instructor was to be a resident of the Bloomfield area by the name of Harry Dick. A hardy and extremely agile middle-aged man, Harry, with his charming wife Angie and two young boys, has become a permanent fixture of the rain forest at Bloomfield. He has a wealth of knowledge on the subject we were studying and he proved to us beyond doubt that experience makes the best teacher. We were greatly indebted to Harry and

Angie for their willingness to share their knowledge of the rain forest with us.

To make the most of the five days we had at our disposal it was decided by the group leader, MAJ Guy that we split into two groups of three. This left Les Hiddins and Harry Dick as a type of floating 'pool of knowledge' who could keep an eye on both groups. Group One would spend the first 2½ days on the coast while Group Two roamed the forest. Groups would then swap around. This way the broadest aspect of tropical survival could be experienced.

This method was highly successful as each group had quite different ways of attacking problems. The knowledge gained when we pooled our experiences at the post exercise debrief was quite substantial. All our experiences and findings were documented for future reference. There were many conclusions made and all contributed to our formulation of a basic format for the running of a large scale jungle survival exercise.

The lessons learnt during the exercise are too numerous to list here and no doubt will appear in a future instruction. However, if there is one lesson which we would put at the top of the list it would be teamwork. Jungle Survival is extremely difficult under the best circumstances. Without teamwork it would be well-nigh impossible.

Our week at Bloomfield was highly profitable and it should provide a firm foundation for any future unit survival exercise within the next year. From a personal viewpoint it was an enjoyable week made more so by the warmth of the Dick family.



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