

Operation Yeti '89



Who said this trip was going to be easy?

OPYETI '89 was an exercise in survival in the Snowy Mountains, which got underway on 21 Sep '89. Considering the airline's strike, it was an achievement in itself to get to Canberra at all. After RV with covert advance parties, a change into warm clothing and a quick trip into Paddy Pallins to pick up or skis, three UH1H lifted off into what could be described as \$X*++ weather. 5 Sqn did well (this time) to get us into the base camp. The boys were rapt, gale force winds, pouring rain and having to move about 1/2 ton of extra rats and fuel etc. from the LZ to the base camp. All the time in waist deep soft snow!! Their eyes were saying, what have you got us into here??

The base camp set-up and the first night passed, the next day was great. For the next four days we practised skiing and some survival training. The instructors came from the SASR, Commando Regt and civilians from the SES. Some nights we conducted civil liaison in the nearby resort, the only problem was coming home, that is skiing at night, minus 5°C, over unfamiliar terrain, on these long wooden things called skis, with a few Guinness under the belt. With a bit of determination, luck, and not following Simon Frieta's lead, we made it back (we avoided a big hill, which was fine going up, but on day 2 and dark, Les Kronk developed the now famous 2/4 RAF Yeti technique — a description will follow).

By the end of 5 days intense training, we were ready, or were we, Baby Cook? The aircraft were due in at 1000 hrs. We had arranged for them to land near the resort for some good photos, 1200 hrs still no aircraft, a telephone call said 1345. At 1400 only 2 aircraft landed. The expensive training in helicopter

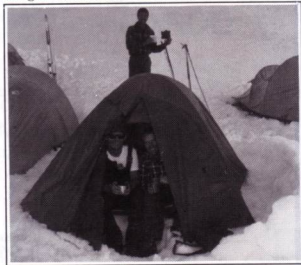
pilots proved that, they too can get it wrong and dropped us all together, but 10km from the planned LZ, luckily it was closer to our first night loc. First night in a hut we battled not weather, but some greenies. They were quite anti army at the start, but next morning at the end of 2 bottles of stones, some cans of guinness and VB between about 20 people and a successful casvac of one of their party the army had showed them how it is done. That day we also climbed the 3rd highest mountain in the country. We also saw a Swedish Hugglund oversnow vehicle the St John's were using to pick up the casualty. During the climb up the Granite Peaks, our "wilderness experience" was destroyed by the National Parks Helicopter also helping out in the casvac we initiated. We camped at Consett Stephens Pass and after that the 2/4 RAR Giant Slalom team perfected the Yeti technique — just ask Greg Shinnars what it is like to kiss a ski tip, while the tip is still on the snow and you are travelling at 30kph — good one Scarface!

The next day was the hardest going along the "Main Range" Mt Tait, Twynan to name a few. By 3.00 p.m. white out stopped our progress so we dug some platforms on a slope and stayed the night. During the night we were entertained by a fireworks display on the horizon at Perisher.

The last day we planned to climb Kosciusko, but when we climbed back up into the saddle we discovered 50 knot winds would waste our time, so we headed out of the wind to the ski on Blue Lake, a frozen high altitude lake. That night we stayed in a lodge, which is owned by a 71 year old. He came with us on the trek and while we were showering and resting after our ordeal — he went ski racing and his team won. Rex we salute you.

Last morning Simon (James Bond) Frieta left some broken hearts at the resort, but he didn't care, he was heading for Richmond!!

The RAAF in their normal courteous, caring manner conducted us back to Townsville with a scenic detour of Brisbane for a day. Oh yes I think some of our gear has been found in Singapore.



Home at last!