

SURVIVAL? NOT AGAIN!

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28 February 1966

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Now that's a catchy title, but I'll bet if you are like most other people you won't get passed the first word. "Hell," you say, "I've heard it all before and I'm fed up with being treated like a child with all this preaching; doesn't this guy realize I'm a leader of men, I'm bored with this 'fasten seat belt' routine." Well, fellow leader, that's just why I'm on this subject, because I do realize you are a leader and therefore owe it to your men to see that they get proper and sufficient training above the present "lip service" survival education.

If you weren't there yourself, you can still read in today's magazines about the poor show our troops made in the Korean War. We know thousands of American soldiers were cut off behind enemy lines, but few tried to avoid capture or escape after capture primarily because of fear that they could not escape and survive on their own. This can be illustrated by the fact that not one American successfully escaped from a permanent Communist prison camp and returned to friendly lines. A few more hair-raising facts just to refresh your mind:

1. One out of every three American prisoners in Korea was guilty of some sort of collaboration with the enemy.
2. Ten percent of the prisoners informed on a fellow prisoner at least once during their internment.
3. Thirty-nine percent of the returned prisoners had signed Communist propaganda petitions.

4. Nearly seventy percent of the Army prisoners had contributed in some degree to the Communist's psychological warfare efforts.

5. The high death rate was not a direct result of Communistic maltreatment but from malnutrition which was caused or worsened by the prisoners' inability or disinclination to eat unfamiliar foods.

6. Organization in some of the camps became an every-man-for-himself type situation. Many men died from lack of leadership and discipline.¹

So now I hear you saying, "Yea, but that happened over a decade ago, what's it got to do with my present situation?" Well, I intend to show you just that; but let's face some truths.

Each day shows us the ever increasing use of air-mobility on the battlefield. This, along with the ever present nuclear threat, demands independent action and isolation of units, thus increasing the need for being able to survive, evade and escape the enemy. Every soldier must realize his chance of being isolated and captured has greatly increased.

Prisoners returned from Korean camps consistently agreed that one of the best defenses against Communist tactics in the prison camps would be to become mentally prepared for such treatment.¹ This can only be achieved through training that is realistic and taxes the individual's endurance and abilities to their limits.

The Army possesses an abundance of well qualified and experienced personnel for survival, evasion and escape training in its various service schools. However, the

¹Segal, Julius, Dr., "Factors Related to the Collaboration and Resistance Behavior of US Army Prisoners of War in Korea."

average combat soldier does not receive the benefit of this experience in the normal combat training program. He receives only two hours of instruction with the remainder coming under the heading of "integrated training." The Army does have several survival programs of short duration in its various schools but has no established, formal survival program. In comparison, the Air Force has recognized the need for training all its personnel, exposed to possible enemy capture, in survival techniques and has established an outstanding survival training program at Stead AFB, Reno, Nevada. This three week training program is extremely realistic and each student must go through each phase of training. The first week is mainly classroom type instruction where the student learns the basic techniques of survival. The second week starts the practical work where he experiences POW life to include camp organization, methods of interrogation and resistance. The last phase consists of a week long field exercise where the student has no alternative but to put to use the skills learned in previous instruction. He is turned loose to navigate, evade, survive off the land, provide his own shelter and pass through a complete evasion net system. In contrast, time alone limits the benefits an individual obtains from the Army's short survival programs. If a student is subjected to interrogation and POW camp life, time does not permit his running the evasion net and vice versa. It is evident that in modern warfare all phases of this survival, evasion and escape training are necessary and no one phase can be overlooked at the expense of the other or of the individual. Since our methods of warfare are rapidly changing it appears evident that our training programs should be changed to coincide with mobile warfare.

So now I can hear you saying, "Ah, you've got a couple of good points there buddy, but I'm going to Vietnam and is all this really necessary there?" Well, I posed about that very question to a buddy who is presently an advisor in Vietnam. I asked Captain Bill Lehner if our training in survival, E&E was sufficient for conditions in Vietnam and I'd like to share his reply with you:

"That's a damn good question! On first thought I was tempted to say no, a very definite NO. And upon second thought, I concur with my first. On the average, the Army does not provide sufficient training in survival (living off the land - no ice cream, PX goodies, canned goods, etc.) and E&E.

Of all the US personnel in the Republic of Vietnam, the only personnel who are "living off the land" are the battalion advisory teams and some Special Forces teams. Until you learn to eat the food of the geographic area of operation you can't expect to survive if cut off from US support. The food in the field - in Vietnam - is quite a change from the standard US diet. Rice, nuoc mom, fish, dog, goat, rat, sparrow, bean weed and chicken are the main staples. The manner of preparation, this is something else again. There have been many US battalion advisors (I know several by name) that have been unable to eat the local food and have requested transfer or have had to be transferred due to near starvation.

In Vietnam, there is a survival challenge when you simply go on an operation, in that water - potable - is extremely hard to come by in the delta region during the dry season. Knowing what fruits contain water is a big help as you can't always light a fire to boil water and the purification tablets aren't strong enough to handle rice paddy water normally.

Heat, insects, leeches, snakes, all present a problem. Until I had been here several months I didn't know as much as I needed to. Experience was my only teacher. Common sense helps a hell of a lot.

Escape from the VC is a pretty difficult proposition based on the intelligence reports I've had access to. It isn't impossible but many "E's" have been recaptured because they passed too close to water buffalo (they don't like the smell of a white man and go ape when approached by one) or because they were afraid to hole up in a mangrove swamp.

The basic precepts of the US Army E&E program are sound and apply to just about all areas - however, they aren't practiced enough.

In my opinion, survival is the one thing that will cause an escape or evasion to fail; provided several days are required to reach "home base."

Personally, I don't know what the solution (Army wide) is. One possible solution is to have an annual block of instruction for all combat and forward support units, stressing the basic principles (first aid (self-aid), various methods of navigation, night movement, minimum essential equipment, construction of a hide-out, expedient booby traps, covering trail). Units available foods AND EAT SAME."

I guess you'll agree some of the old Korean tendencies are beginning to rear their ugly head again. I'll agree as individuals we can't go out and start a program of instruction similar to that of the Air Force - that would be the ideal we can only hope and look forward to - but as commanders at all echelons we can give more than "lip service" to survival and E&E training. We can see to it that the men under our command get as realistic, complete and rugged a survival training program as possible - who knows, the man you conscientiously train today may competently save you tomorrow!