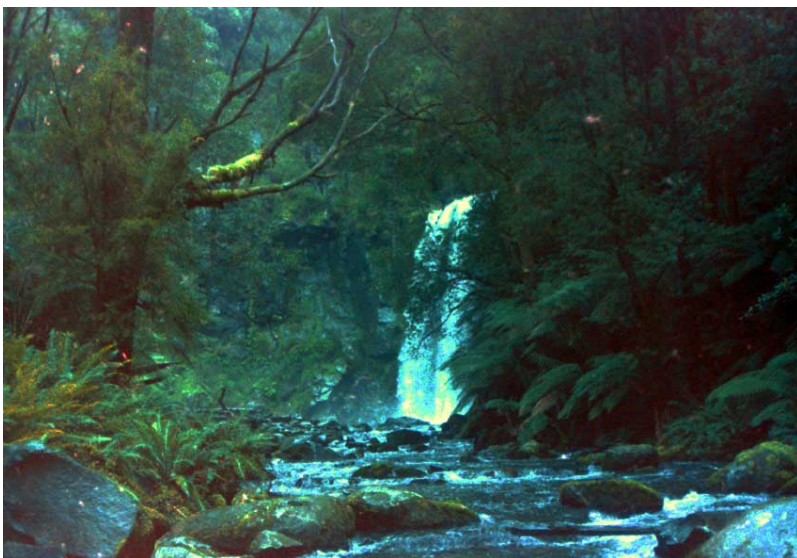


SURVIVAL TRAINING 1987

Abalinx - Peter Adamis 9 November 2015

It was still daylight when the men began to filter in through the archways of Glastonbury. They were either driven or made their own way from home or directly from work. Policemen, truck drivers, public servants, self employed, council workers, office workers, unemployed and other walks of life had come together to partake in Deakin University Unit Survival Training. They all made their way up to the training room where they were briefed by the Training Officer, Captain Peter Hatherley and equipment checked by the Survival Instructor Warrant Officer Peter Adamis, both being members of the Regular Army Cadre staff posted to the unit.

After names were checked, next of kin details, medical kits, rations and all other related administrative and logistical matters were conducted; a truck capable of carrying about twenty two men plus driver and co-driver took the men and their equipment on board, making their way towards the training area. The drive from the outskirts of Geelong took them towards Colac where they made a left turn into the high country known for its forests, logging and spectacular scenery. The journey itself would take about four hours to Beech Forest where the landscape alternated between heavily wooded areas, deep jungle and patches of open fields, a reminder when pioneers of a bygone era once lived eking out a living.



Beech Forest and the surrounding area were now under the care of the Department of the environment and within Beech Forest were planted as an experiment, the 'Californian Giants'.

Originally Beech Forest housed some of the world's tallest trees but they were logged out in the previous century by loggers seeking material for the mills.

There exact location was only known to a few of us who had the privilege to be shown by the local ranger. It also had a marvellous array of waterfalls of which one was indeed worth visiting just for the sake of its pure raw and majestic beauty. I for one would take my four sons down there whenever we had the opportunity and at times waded through the rapids to feel one with nature.

It was dark when we reached the turning off point that would lead use to the training area. The lads wanted to relieve and refresh themselves, prior to succumbing to the rigors of the survival training and the elements, which were rather harsh indeed. We stopped off at the last township located high on the ridge of the mountain and obtained additional materials as one saw fit.

Whatever the soldiers had purchased did not go unnoticed by the Training Officer and the Survival Instructor who both chuckled as they knew what was in store for them.



The road was strewn with broken trees, branches, churned up road from the logging trucks that frequented the area, deep ruts in the road made the men in the back of the truck wish they had stayed at home and occasionally we would be greeted by a shower of rain. Mind you, the Peter Hatherley and I were ok, sitting in the front of the truck while I drove and he navigated.

While we were making our way towards the training area, we concocted some devious plans to ensure the lads would be challenged by the tasks we believed would be of benefit to them as soldiers. Resilience, endurance, character building, leadership skills, survival skills and additional skills that would enable them to work under any stressful conditions were incorporated into the training. Life for these young men was not meant to be easy over the next two days.

The truck came to a halt above and to the left of the waterfall and a few metres from the end of the road which was blocked by a huge man made obstacle to stop vehicles careering over the edge. On stepping down from the truck one could hear the roar of the waterfall and the torrent of water cascading down the steep granite walls that held it up. It was not wise to veer off to far as one tended to fall down the abyss so to speak and into oblivion, making recovery difficult especially at night. Webbing, rifles, big packs plus a weapon of great surprise known only to Peter Hatherley and to myself were brought down slowly we made our way down the heavily snagged and crooked path to the training area.

The climb itself took about 40 minutes as bodies became separated like an accordion, feet entangled in the undergrowth, stinging nettles in the face, thorny slivers of vines slashing at the faces, bush hats being lost and found, curses being muttered, rifles dropped in the mud, and equipment somehow became undone. Not a good start for the men, but Peter Hatherley and I were just enjoying ourselves. We had already had our fair share of jungle training and this was nothing unusual for either of us. Finally down at the bottom we all huddled like a mob of sheep that had their wool drenched by rain, making noises of dissent and regretting that they had even ventured out for the weekend.

That night, we showed the lads a patch where they could sleep, advising them to keep quiet and not move around in the dark as finding them again would be difficult and that there were hidden ravines and rapids that could not easily be seen. Furthermore they were briefed as what to expect in the morning and that safety was at all times to be paramount and to take priority above all else. The men mingled about until they had sorted themselves out and eventually somehow paired off sharing their hootchies which they strung together under a moonless but cold February night. Soon all one could hear was them snoring and Peter and I wondered and chuckled what they would be like if they were on patrol on exercise in the jungles of Far North Queensland against the 'exercise enemy'.



In the mean time, Peter Hatherley and I put up our hootchies, chatted quietly for a bit before deciding which one of us would greet the local ranger in the morning and bring him down to the clearing where the initial training lectures would be conducted. Once the umbrella of night has covered the night sky, is also the signal to herald in the opera for the evening.

Mosquitoes buzzing incessantly around ones face, bugs galore, snakes slithering on the ground floor in search of field mice and other delicacies, the night owl with its hooting and deadly swoop upon the unknown, numerous bats flying in unison and coming out of nowhere, the occasional fish being heard to jump from the nearby stream and making a splash after it has lunged out to catch flies above the water. These and many other flying insects such as the dragon fly and moths, let alone crickets and beetles all adding to the cacophonous sounds of jungle opera. It was amidst the evening opera that we fell asleep.

The next morning, the mist had dropped down to its lowest level and as such movement was kept to a minimum. Hootchies down, weapons cleaned, fires lit, brews made, equipment packed, and breakfast made by each group using rations provided prior to their departure. The men were assembled in the clearing and provided with lectures with emphasis on safety. Lectures and presentations were conducted in two groups by Peter Hatherley and me to ensure that each group received the same training.

During the morning lectures and the live practices the men were required to prepare, provide medical aid, carry 'wounded' men through the dense jungle, slippery tracks, river rapids, up and down the hillsides and then make their way back to base camp. They were to use their skills and knowledge that they had been previously taught as well as using their initiative throughout the

day. Peter Hatherley and I accompanied each group for reasons of safety and to provide encouragement and to take notes on each member's performance.

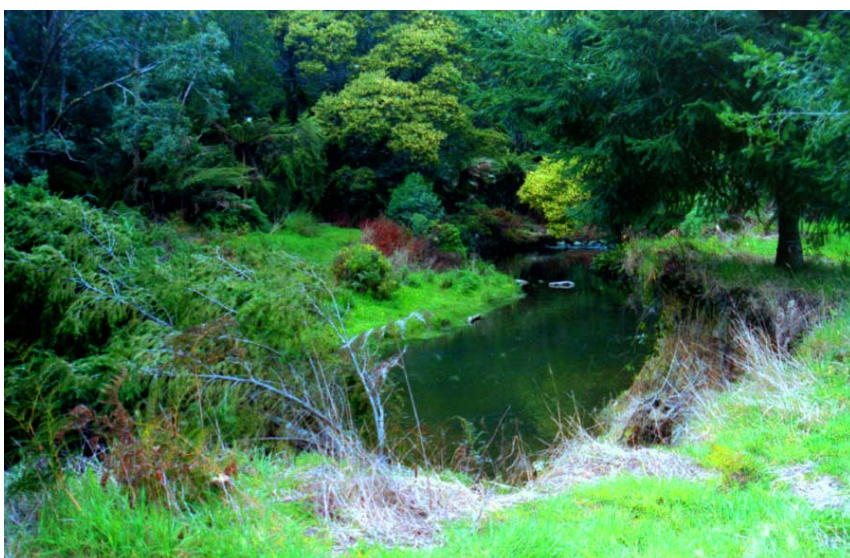


Mid morning the men were surprised to see a civilian ranger in our midst and wondered what his role was to be.

The ranger had been selected by me long before leaving the unit and had requested his support to lecture on the botany, flora and edible plants in the region.

The ranger was an admirable addition to our instructing team and was well worth the time and effort in obtaining his service for the afternoon. I must admit that I thought I knew a bit about finding, preparing, cooking and eating edible plants, but this ranger blew out my mind with some of the plants he had identified to be edible and those that were not. A lesson is learnt every day.

After the rangers lectures were over and he had left the training area, the men were shown how to prepare fish nets to catch fish and frogs, collect water using plastic, off the plants and bushes, start a fire without matches, lay snares using the local environment to catch fish, small animals like rabbits, hares and birds. Large tree falls were also used to capture larger animals such as pigs and 'enemy'. Snakes were not out of the question and were also on the menu (a taste between a chicken and fish), if they could be caught and not that one went looking for them.



The men were lectured on how to use night vision effectively, not to be afraid of the environment and to embrace it before the environment negatively embraced them and created fear in their minds. To understand the stars, the signs to look out for when tracking animals, birds and other edible items that could be placed on the menu.

One could say that under such circumstances, not even grubs, ants, beetles, cockroaches and other flying insects would be off the menu. Everything was edible and on the table. Frogs legs when fried over a fire have a distinct flavour akin to many Asian spices and well worth eating.

Witchetty grubs if one had the patience to dig amongst the rotted wood of a tree fall or beneath soft earth near dead trees. Yabbies were also to be found amongst the river banks, but it time and much patience when other edible items were available. Once the men had been shown and lectured on how to trap and/or find food to sustain them, the fear of not eating dissipated.



Late that afternoon long before sundown (long daylight hours) and lectures had been completed; the men were led like a 'mob of dissenting sheep' to the 'killing ground' so to speak. They were advised that they had four hours of daylight in which to find food, prepare it, cook it and eat it. How they found their food, was up to them, (famous last words on my part - read below) remembering safety at all times.

Safety was drilled into every officer and soldier from day one and would remain embedded into our psyche long after we left the Army. They were being tested for all of the above survival characteristics and initiative was a by product of that training.

The men were also showed them where they could sleep for the night, an area close to our main camp and safety station. They were in for another shock for we took all the refreshments, goodies they had purchased, additional foodstuffs they had brought along with them and then and only then did we let them find themselves a patch to put up their 'hootchie' (military tent) and find the time to sleep. They were told not to light any fires, smoke, make a noise or even move around after sunset. It may sound harsh to some but the whole exercise was designed to prepare them for the next few days.



Peter Hatherley and I turned on our battery electric lights, opened up our secret weapon, disguised as a Webber BBQ, had a couple of 'tinnies', relaxed, put the music on, made noises, moved about and put a couple of snags on the BBQ, laughed, joked and had a good old time. We cooked our evening meal on the BBQ and waited for a reaction from the men.

It is of interesting to note that the men did not utter even one word the whole night but we were not to know that they were plotting their own revenge of which I was to find out some time later. As night took its toll and the fire in the BBQ lingered for a while, Peter asked me what was my new posting to Ballarat was like and whether it was what I expected it to be. I told him that it was full of challenges and that one had to be on ones toes if they were to survive, especially when the commanding officer was ex Special Air Service (SAS) and expected nothing less than excellence from his regular Army Cadre staff.

We drifted off to sleep happy in the knowledge that the men had certainly benefited from the training and that it was well worth the research time and planning to see it through. In the meantime the men had nothing to eat or so we thought. We would not find out until some two weeks later and I for one had to admire the men for using their imitative and resourcefulness.



The next morning Peter and I woke up to the smell of meat being cooked on the BBQ. I looked d at Peter and asked him whether he had put on any meat. He said no and thought that I had put something on the BBQ for us to eat. We both dragged ourselves out of our sleeping bags and opened up the lid to the BBQ, wondering what that wonderful smell all about was.

On top of the BBQ grill was a small piece of meat that had now been overcooked but still looked delicious. We both scratched our heads and looked at each other wondering whether we were dreaming. We looked over to the men who happened to be getting up and gathering their equipment. We asked if they knew anything about the meat on the BBQ. Well what can I say but that all of them to a man denied any knowledge of it? Perplexed we packed everything up and made our way back to the unit thoroughly perplexed and scratching our heads for a solution to this perplexing turn of events.

It so happened that some weeks later I happened to be invited to one of the men's dinner at his home. He was the local policeman who had enlisted in the Army reserves as a means of obtaining further experience and for a change from his normal Police duties. He was an extraordinary big bloke but a very easy going and likeable bloke, hence my not hesitating going for dinner. At the dinner table his wife brought in his meal and hers and placed them on the table. Next she went into the kitchen and returned with a huge bowl of leaves, grass, dandelion, dock weed, and other wild grasses commonly found in parkways and river banks. My host looked at me and said enjoy. What could I do but laugh as I suddenly realised the joke was on me and that he was paying me back for the survival training.

After the 'survival bowel' was returned to the kitchen and its contents thrown in the bin, I received the same food as my host and his wife. My host went onto to tell me what had happened the weekend away during the survival training. He said that after we had taken away all their rations, goods and refreshments, they thought of ways to replenish their bare larder. They had discussed it amongst themselves that their instructors, Peter and I were looking to see whether they would use their initiative under such circumstances. It would appear that during the night the whole group of men somehow found their way during the night using night vision and their own sense of direction back to the last known town we had visited the day before.

At the township they had 'light refreshments' purchased more rations and bought a big leg of beef. All of these items were carried down to our base camp which mind you was about twelve kilometres from the township as the crow flies. In my mind the distance was probably longer given the many twists and turns it need to get to and from the town. Once the men had reached the base camp, they silently pinched the BBQ from our location (good jungle training if you ask me) and took it deeper into the forest where they cooked the leg of lamb along with other goodies they had purchased while we slept like angels.

On reflection what can one say but to admire their resourcefulness and initiative for taking such action. It just goes to show that as far as I am concerned our diggers are not only resourceful but not afraid to take the risks when the occasion arises. I am not sure if Peter can remember me ever telling him but I am sure those years after the event he will be laughing along with me.

Those same men were the same who formed the units rifle shooting team and the same men who would go running (with webbing and rifle) with me on the Melbourne to Geelong highway after a day out rifle shooting and they would be the same group of young men that would go on to bigger and better things in life. Some would enlist in the Regular Army and made a career of it, others went onto transfer to commandoes and Special Air Service, a couple made to becoming officers and the remainder stayed on in the Reserves rising higher up the rank scale. One can truly say that Peter Hatherley and I can for that brief time we had with these young men can be proud of their personal achievements.

Therefore this article is dedicated to them, the unit as a whole and to my three good friends, Ron Lunt, Maurice Barwick and Peter Hatherley who had faith me during a difficult time of my life on a professional and personal level. You are not forgotten.

Personal note. It was 1987 and I had just been promoted to Warrant Officer. I had been seconded back to my old unit to complete the survival training that we had planned the year before. It was a heart-warming return to a unit that helped me stabilise my professional and personal life and for that I could thank all of the unit members with particular emphasis on Ron Lunt, Maurice Barwick and Peter Hatherley. Without them, my professional and personal life would have been in tatters.

I was sorry to have left Deakin University Company as the unit had embraced me after my first marriage had broken up and provided me with the stability I needed. The first Adjutant I encountered was Ron Lunt, a really great bloke who looked after me and brought me back from despair. Ron also happened to be SAS and he was responsible for re-instilling into me my lost resilience, strength and the will to keep going despite the enormous challenges I had then faced in my first year.

I spoke about my respect for Maurice Barwick who was our Officer Commanding and his lovely wife Thelma, both of whom I would always be indebted to for their compassion, good will and support throughout my time at the unit and for the many years that followed. Thelma (Auntie Thelma to the men and I) sadly passed away on my birthday, but she has never been forgotten by my sons and I. Thelma's heritage is from Sparta Laconia Greece, with her grandfather arriving in Australia, working on the goldfields and now buried in Castlemaine Victoria along with Thelma and her other relatives.

As for Maurice, he has been 'adopted' by the Adamis family and is always close to their heart. Maurice now lives in Beaufort Victoria with his brother Bill and jointly run a homestead named 'Mureybet', (worth looking up on Google for what it means) and caters for local, interstate and international visitors.

As for Peter Hatherley, he followed on from Ron Lunt and from day one a friendship was formed. A friendship that would remain unbroken and continue throughout the years that and one that did not involve rank, status, academia or position. Whenever we spoke or met, I would always be greeted with 'G'Day Pedro'.

Now I was no bloody Mexican and dont know why he called me Pedro other than the obvious, but I am of the belief that because I had decided to live in Victoria, (considered by many of my military mates as the 'Mexico' of Australia) that 'Pedro' was an appropriate name. Pete is a lovely bloke, straight as die, cheeky bastard and full of beans, when he was a young Captain in the Royal Australian Regiment. He was also an extremely fit bloke whom I just could not catch when we ran from Geelong to Barwon Heads nonstop with 'Blue' the Company Sargeant Major running behind us.

As always, I apologise to the purists for the grammar and punctuation. It's all on memory alone.



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