A SIXTEEN-DAY OPERATION IN THE JUNGLE

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APPRECIATION OF THE TASK AND THE PLAN

While serving with the 2/Battalion Malay Regt. in Kelantan news was received that a Dakota aircraft had crashed close to Kampong Jendera, about one day’s journey from the H.Q. at Gua Musang. The task was to get there quickly in the hope that there would be survivors.

Within about an hour a Police jungle squad, myself and batman with a Malay signaller set off with two days’ rations in trucks which took us 20 miles along the rough railway track to Bertam.

A Company from our Battalion at Bertam had made ready two boats. The river was fast flowing and in parts there were rapids. The boats were powered by an outboard motor and had a shallow draught.

Next day after camping in a deserted bamboo hut we arrived at Kampong Jendera and there learnt by wireless that the crash was at least a further 12 miles up river.

At this point “D” Company Commander arrived with two platoons, also his second in command with a further platoon which was returning to Coy. base after a two weeks’ operation.

The officer Commanding the Company had had experience in the Burma jungle while the second in command had experience in the Malayan jungle and they assured me that our task was not easy since the jungle was very thick, there were no known tracks while the maps were inaccurate and had not the detail to be of much value. To reach the crash would take four days at least.

Overhead aircraft could see the crash and gave the map reference, also the information that if we followed the river until we came to a fork, then we would find the crash above a waterfall on the left fork.

The Company Commander decided to cross the river and follow it till we came to the fork. A start was to be made next morning. Meanwhile the jungle squad returned to base.

MEDICAL SUPPLIES

Medical haversacks were carried by the three medical orderlies containing, shell dressings, omnopon, sulphathiazole, penicillin powder, sulphaguanadine, mepacrine, paludrine, aspirin, flavine, bandages, gauze, adhesive tape, gentian violet, a small set of instruments and other small items. These drugs were all
packed in tins with adhesive tape to keep them waterproof. My own haversack contained a small set of surgical instruments, penicillin, chloromycetin, local anesthetic, syringe, omnopon syrettes and shell dressings all packed in a waterproof ration bag. Further supplies could be obtained by air-drop.

RATIONS

Rations were received every three days by air-drop and included one day’s fresh supplies. The Malays each have a twenty-four hours ration tin containing rice, curried fish, curried meat, nuts and chocolate. They do not tire of a rice diet whereas Europeans prefer British rations.

COMMUNICATIONS AND MAINTENANCE OF THE PARTY

Communications with H.Q., overhead aircraft and between platoons was by wireless. During the midday halt smoke bombs were set off and communication made with overhead aircraft to fix our position. On the day we reached the crash smoke bombs were used several times in order to guide the party the last few hundred yards. Every evening our progress was reported to H.Q. and demands for air-drop supplies made every third day.

During the evening halts, arms had to be oiled, cleaned and inspected, also jungle boots and uniforms replaced from air drop supplies, since the former frequently split and the latter became torn. I remember one M.O.R. who after several days had no shirt at all, it had been torn away little by little.

Kit was carried in large packs; three days’ rations, mess tins, ground sheet and toilet equipment also. I noticed several Malays had 1 lb. jars of Brylcreem.

DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED

The great difficulty proved to be the fact that there were no tracks. We marched on the left side of the river on ground that was sloping and wet. The leading scout aided by Sakais* used Parangs to cut a path through the undergrowth. During halts in the morning and early afternoon, cutting parties went ahead. We had to cross many small valleys and it was an energetic job pulling oneself up the steep slopes. A thicket of bamboos on several occasions caused us to halt for half an hour while a gap was made. At one point I saw bamboos a foot in diameter. Several times we came upon streams which we followed to make more rapid progress; feet were wet during the day as a consequence.

Air-drops caused some delay because there were no open spaces and we often had to recover containers from the river or from tops of trees.

We reached a point when it was no longer to our advantage to follow the general direction of the river, we obtained a compass bearing from the overhead aircraft and the N.C.O. holding the compass directed the cutting party in

*The Sakai are one of the aboriginal peoples of the jungle; small of stature, but of beautiful and magnificent physique and intelligent; their chief weapon the blow-pipe. [Ed.].
front. Progress became more difficult and during one eight-hour march we covered only $\frac{1}{2}$ mile.

Each day we started at 0730, halted at 1030 for half an hour and then at 1330 for an hour. At 1600 hours we halted, made shelters and made a meal since darkness fell at 1900 hours.

A number of Sakais, jungle people, accompanied us, and acted as carriers. They are small in stature and do not look to be a strong race, but they are able to carry heavy loads and they appear to eat and drink very little. Each night they made our shelters and later, on our return, made bamboo rafts for us to go down the river.

On one day we struck a small bandit camp; two Chinese bandits were seen, one injured by the second in command while two Sakai bandits were killed. One patched pack was found containing a bottle of salt, a bag of Indian corn, several rounds of .303, a fork, a spoon and some empty tins.

On the seventh day after leaving Kampong Jendera we found the crash, there were no survivors. The bodies were buried with full military honours and we returned to base.

**Effect of the Task on the Men from a Physical and Psychological Angle**

On returning to base I had been out over two weeks, 1 platoon, however, had had four weeks in the jungle. Physically there was no change in the Malays, some were very tired and had lost weight, a few had sore feet but a few days' rest found them fit again.

Mentally the Malays are cheerful and my batman made no comments to me about the patrol, in fact he just accepted it as being just another operation, however this can be disadvantageous in that there is no warning in the case of a man who is near breaking point. He collapses and is moved on with difficulty.

**Lessons to be Learnt**

There was no new lesson to be learnt but there were many lessons re-learnt. I learned by experience the value of Salt Tablets in drinking water. Also the value of an adequate and varied diet and plenty of hot sweet tea.