

THREE HORNETS

The first airdrop of this operation was a perfect drop, except for the fact the mail was not ours it was mail for one of our platoons further in the jungle. And after a call to them to let them know about the mix up they confirmed that they had out mail. The area they were in was CT free, they were sending patrols into a black area about a mile away, so it was decided to send a little patrol to them for our mail, one officer, a Sergeant, a wireless operator, and a Malay Aboe tracker. The following morning we all set out, the four of us, I went along for the experience of going on patrol, really it was just a bloody long walk in the jungle, the only good thing was that I did not have to carry the radio, as one was not needed. I was only there to carry the mail back; you can't expect an Officer or a Sergeant to carry a bag of letters can you? Arms oh yes I was armed with a Browning 9mm automatic this operation with a spare mag full of ammunition. Equipment, water bottles, two filled with water, a pouch with enough food in it to last me about ten hours, plus my native Machete. We left about 0900hrs, ETA about 1300hrs, have a chat and a cuppa with them for about an hour. ETA back at our camp 1800hrs.

The weather was fine, the journey would be along tracks mainly so the going was easy, we did not hurry along and I had time to take in the colours of the plants, sometimes the smells of the different flowers drifted along the trails. The hills were just as steep though and they still took the breath out of your lungs. Stops were every twenty minutes for a smoke and a drink or both, then off again. Once or twice it was decided to venture off the worn track and go through some virgin jungle, this I think was for the Officer to show us that he was in charge, anyway it was a good chance for me to experience what it was like for the other chaps who went out every day on similar treks, in perhaps more dangerous areas. When we arrived at the other camp we were greeted with a warm welcome and a quick request for their letters, I gave them the letters and stuffed out unit letters in the bag and promptly had a brew up with their wireless operator, we had quite a chat and eventually the time came for us to leave and head for our camp.

The weather now was warming up and there was no wind of breeze at all, it was rather sticky. As the journey went along I dropped further and further back, I did not know why I was getting slower and slower, a stop was called and the others in front stopped for a rest, when they were half way through their rest I turned up for my rest, when they started again then I had to start as well so I was only having half a stop time, I lit up a fag and had a slurp of water, then off again. Needless to say after about an hour and a half travelling I was well behind them. I had been asked by the Officer if I would be able to follow them back to the camp, so off they marched leaving me to follow them. I carried on, I felt quite confident about myself and what I was doing knowing that I was on the right trail, and knowing that they knew I was all right. I carried on and was miles away in my thoughts, thinking of home, Sheila my wife who was all those miles away, and my little son who I had not yet seen, when I brushed against a bush, a noise I dreaded came screaming to my ears, BUZZING, man I ran and ran. I felt a pain behind my right knee, also pain in the inside of my right elbow, just below my arm muscle. I was still running when the final bite of the third hornet got me right on the back of my neck. I was still running thennothing. I woke up and found myself lying in long grass near a fallen tree and it seemed a lot darker than it was when I was walking along the jungle track, how long ago? I laid there and I hurt, my leg, arm and neck, is there anything broken? No good. Where the hell am I? I looked for broken grass or plants to indicate where I had entered this place of rest; I couldn't see any signs of anything. I checked that I had all of my equipment and had a drink, then checked my gun; I was happy, well as happy as one can be when you are all alone and lost in the jungle.

At least I knew that they knew I was missing and would send the Aboe to find me, "I hope", and that it would be soon. I knew that if I panicked and tried to find my way back to the track I could well get in a worse position than I was already in. So I laid there behind the fallen tree and waited for the Aboe to arrive. A noise, a grunt, a moan, a click, a whisper, a crack of a twig, an animal, a CT, or the Aboe? I cocked by Browning, safe on, another crack, a grunt, then it came into sight a black grinning face of the Aboe, he had found me and was I pleased. I told him what had happened and how far had I run from the hornets, when he told me and showed me the way I had arrived at my resting place, it was unbelievable that I had run at full pelt between two monkey puzzle trees no more than two feet apart, if I had been six inches or so to one side or the other I would have impaled myself on the thorns on the trunk of the monkey tree. I had run about seventy-five yards or so to get away from the little monsters. Still I was alive and I was going back with the Aboe to meet up with the other members of the patrol. When it was explained to the Officer what had happened everybody was glad I was all right. It certainly was an experience I will always remember. The scar of the bite to my right arm is still visible after nearly forty years. I feel I had luck on that day.

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