

THE GREAT 1963 BIVOUAC CAPER

by

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The Cadet Corps always held an annual Bivouac in the foothills of the Sierra during the Easter Recess in the Spring of the school year. I was in the Cadet Corps from 1959 through 1963. For three of those years we had the Bivouac at Meadow Vista, California and the fourth year it was outside of Grass Valley above the North San Juan River.

Meadow Vista is now quite a community, with houses scattered all over the foothills. That is the main reason we had to go to Grass Valley above the North San Juan River for the 1963 Bivouac. The National Guard would always bring up some .30 caliber M-1 Garands, a Browning Automatic Rifle or two, and a .50 caliber machine gun. We had a gay old time at Meadow Vista on a makeshift range and managed to chop down a couple of trees with all the lead we were throwing around. I guess the local population didn't like the war sounds and declared us *persona non grata* by 1963.

It always rained on Bivouac, which, as I mentioned, was on the Easter Vacation for school. The advance team would leave on Friday evening and get set up for the rest of the troops coming in on Saturday morning. The rain was always of monsoon proportions. I could never figure out just why but it always was. The advance team got to the Grass Valley site about 5 P.M. and it was already starting to get dark. We stumbled around looking for good places for the Command Tent, Supply Tent, and First Aid Station. We were right on a small stream. With my Boy Scout training I looked at the terrain (rugged, hilly, and foreboding) and figured if we didn't locate on the hills, no matter how steep, we were going to be in deep trouble with the continuing rain. There was a flat spot about ten feet from the stream and it was about a foot higher than the water. I tried to convince our first aid officer that was not the place for the First Aid Tent. That was his bailiwick and that is where it went. I've got pictures that are not very good that show some of the conditions that we met but they show some of the conditions we ran into; mud and more mud and hills and more hills.

Anyway, I got the Command Tent set up and Lt. Uribe got the Supply Tent set up and by that time it is dark. I had brought along two Boy Scout pup tents that were waterproofed (supposedly) and had floors in them. Those were set up and we managed to get to bed. About three in the morning I wake up. I turn on the flashlight and it looks like it is drizzling inside the tent. It is raining like somebody turned on a faucet outside and I can hear the stream below on the rampage. I look over at Sgt. Weber, my assistant, and his nose is about ½" from the two or three inches of water in the bottom of the tent. I wake Frank up and we get dressed and stumble over to the Command Tent.

About this time, Lt. Uribe and his assistant, Sgt. Nygren, have decided to quit their pup tent for better quarters, also. The Command Tent and the Supply Tent are across from each other and connected by the comm system that Lt. Uribe set up. We can see each other but we can only talk on the comm line because it is raining so hard. We both shine our flashlights down the hill and all we can see is water. Good Lord! Where did the First Aid Station go to? Being a Captain, and in command, I suggested that we all get as dressed up as possible against the rain and go down and find our fearless First Aid Officer. We go down the hill and all we can see is water. The main stream is about 50 feet away and rampaging down the hill. On the sandbar where the First Aid Station was set up is a sea of water. Thank goodness it was relatively calm. What now? I shucked off my pants and waded out to the waterlogged tent and I find Lt. B. soundly asleep. Waking the good lieutenant and explaining that he was in danger of floating down the creek, we decided to move the First Aid tent. After a considerable amount of time we got the tent struck, the supplies up the bank, Lt. B. and his assistant up on the bank, and we all retreated to the Command Tent.

First light is around 5:30 or 6 A.M. and we begin to see just what is going on. It is raining like you wouldn't believe. It was like you were in a shower with the water on full blast. By this time the crick is now at least three feet deep where the First Aid Station had been. We pick out a new site on the side of the mountain and get it set up. We all manage to get into some dry clothes and set out up to the top of the mountain, about 1,000 feet up a dirt road. The National Guard, bless their souls, had given us a truck that had a kitchen mounted on the bed. There were two bars running down the sides over which was stretched a canvas cover. There had been so much rain, and their waterproofing so good, that the water gathered in the middle in huge amounts. All that weight bent the support poles into a V shape with the canvas top now on the bed or floor of the truck and all this water in the middle, overflowing the sides as the rain continued to pour down.

I'm in command and everybody looks at me. What now? First of all we try pushing up and nothing is moving. Then we try dipping out the water but it is raining so hard that that is not working either. Finally, in desperation, myself and Sgt. Weber crawl and push our way into the truck and up to the front. I yell at everybody to push while we attack it from that end. Nothing! I mean absolutely nothing moves! The assistant cook, a Sergeant who shall ever after be nameless, who is a Senior like the rest of us decides on drastic action. Before I can even object he takes out a pocket knife and proceeds to poke holes in the canvas to let the water out. Dumb! With a capital D. This had consequences I never even foresaw in my wildest nightmares.

When most of the water drains out we start pushing up again to empty the rest and stretch the canvas tight again. Those holes are matched up just right and drench Sgt. Weber and myself. The water goes out the holes, down my neck, and out my pants. There are no more dry clothes. Oh well, what the hay! We get some stuff out and eat a meal that can only be described as makeshift but it was filling. Good 'ole Boy Scout training to the rescue again. At least it was edible, not like some of the stuff a certain Cadet mess sergeant served us at the 1962 Summer Encampment. That stuff caused ptomaine.

About 11 A.M. the bus pulls up and the troops disembark. Along with them is M/Sgt. Luna of the National Guard who has volunteered to cook for us. At this point I am glad that we didn't have any girls in the Cadets at that time as he proceeds to chew us a new back side. Two hours later we got all the stuff cleaned up and the canvas taut. The poles were still bent in a V and that is the only thing that mitigated Sgt. Luna's wrath. He couldn't believe it. We chopped down some small trees with the trusty 'ole Boy Scout ax and managed to make the kitchen ready and Sgt. Luna fixes us the best meal that I have ever tasted.

At this point the Battalion Staff gets together to start planning the day's maneuvers. There were several problems that we had war-gamed back at Headquarters. There was to be a daylight raid on the camp while the troops were still setting up, a first aid problem that they had to solve, an infiltration maneuver against an opposing force, and a mass attack on the enemy force (the Battalion Staff and a few assistants). Since I had been very proficient in first aid, it was Lt. B. and I on the first aid problem. I had procured some mortician's putty and made up some really gory looking wounds; a broken leg, a broken arm, a singed face, and a couple of minor things that I was to complain of to make the troops think and get them to use their training.

The National Guard had loaned us some M-1's and a lot of blanks. We attacked the camp and managed to create a real melee and then we withdrew up the hill. The company commanders were then supposed to organize resistance and come after us and capture us if possible. We let ourselves be run off after a token resistance just to make sure they gained a little confidence. You have to remember that there were some kids that were barely 13 and 14 and some of them had never been on a camp-out in their lives. They were trying to put up tents in the pouring down rain and then they are attacked in the middle of this. We succeeded in causing some consternation but were gratified to see that the commanders got things under control and started devising a plan to come after us.

In the meantime, Lt. B., myself, and Sgt. Weber set about creating some really gory wounds for the troop to stumble on when they came after us. The idea was that Sgt. Weber and Lt. B. would play "victim" and try and throw a real monkey wrench into their maneuvers. I was to go a little further up the hill and get made up with some really hairy wounds that I had used with the Boy Scouts. The troops came charging up the hill and promptly stopped with the victims. In the meantime, the rest of us are shooting blanks and yelling like crazy. Halfway up the hill, I trip over some of the bandages, and fall and roll most of the way down the hill. This was not in the plan. I felt like I had some real wounds after that situation.

What caused the most trouble was the M-1's. The advance team was running around shooting off blanks and having a gay old time. The trouble was that there was something in the blanks that started to foul the mechanisms and they began to jam. I am sure that the Commandant, Lt. Col. Cassidy, and the Asst. Commandant, Capt. Jerry Oates, never had in mind the stunts that we pulled next. The material from the blanks started fouling the M-1's so bad that you couldn't open the breech. If nothing else works, we were taught, and the going gets really tough, you put the butt on the ground and gingerly take your foot and shove against the bolt to open the mechanism and clear the breech. You can imagine what happened. We are trying to get out of the way and not get captured. Everyone with an M-1, about 10 of us, has a jammed weapon. Everyone puts the butt on the ground and stomps on the bolt. Everyone but me had a relatively easy time and everything went relatively according to plan. Everyone but me. Since I was made up as a first aid "victim" I had all these bandages on and am made up with the mortician's putty and plenty of gooey "blood." The M-1 fouls and jams. I put the butt down and stomp on the bolt like we were taught. The breech opens up and promptly closes back down on bandages, putty, and anything else that was in the way. At least no M-1 thumb!! I am quickly surrounded and "captured." I was

never so glad to be captured in my life. It took quite a while to get disentangled from all the treatment of the wounds and get the M-1 and me disentangled and disengaged from each other.

That takes care of the day. Night maneuvers are set up and I am to stand by in the Command Tent while all this takes place in the rain and the mud and the dark. The mud is so bad inside the Command Tent that I have had volunteers all afternoon throwing rocks and pine branches into the lower portion of the tent to try and get a good footing. Needless to say we didn't have a very good time in stanching the flow of mud nor did we ever find out how deep that hole in the nether regions of the tent was. Everything we threw in just kept getting swallowed up in the mud. It had to be a quicksand pit or something.

Dark falls, I haul the comm equipment up to the high side of the tent along with my sleeping bag, unwrap some National Guard blankets and try to get some sleep. Now these National Guard blankets were wool, which is O.K., except that they had been in storage since Robert E. Lee's time and were saturated in some kind of moth repellent. They stunk so bad that you gagged. At this time, I could have cared less. I was tired, wet, didn't feel good, and flat didn't care. Now the water drenching at the cook truck caught up with me with a vengeance. During the night maneuvers of approximately four or five hours I am getting sicker and sicker. I'm not quite sure just how sick, but I am getting there real quick. Somebody, (probably my buddy and co-hort Lt. Uribe) comes by and lets loose a couple of blanks in the tent. I am so far under the blankets, sleeping bag, and all the clothes that I can get on, that I was completely unfazed. I try and get on the comm system and nothing works. It keeps ringing and ringing and ringing and driving me crazy. I know it got shorted out somewhere but I can't figure out where and I can't figure out how to keep it from going off continually. I try every circuit and I get nothing. I try and yell and find that my voice has deserted me and my throat is so sore I can hardly breathe. Finally, I ripped out all the wires and turned the comm set upside down to get it to stop ringing. I knew the National Guard was going to kill me as well as the Battalion Commander but at this point I could have cared less.

Around midnight, Sgt. Weber comes back from the night maneuvers and is going to sack out when he realizes that I'm not in the best of shape. He manages to run down Lt. B., our intrepid First Aid Officer. B. takes one look at me and gets the Colonel. The Colonel takes one look at me and yells for a stretcher. It was steep and everyone was slipping and sliding around so much that they finally had to tie me down to the stretcher to keep me from falling off. It takes practically the entire contingent to haul me out of the tent, up the mountain, into the bus, tie me down over the seats in the bus, and head for the hospital in Grass Valley, some 30 miles down and then back up the canyon. Why they didn't just get me under the arms or just drag me up the hill I will never know but they had to use the stretcher. Later on I found out that it was indeed the whole contingent that accomplished this task because one of the guys said that they were covered with mud and slipping and sliding all over the place on the way up the mountain. They really didn't think I was going to make it to the bus.

The bus driver had volunteered to come along. He is now pressed into service and we drive down, still raining like crazy, to the emergency room at the Grass Valley Hospital. They drag me in (no stretchers this time) and the nurse takes one look (and sniff) at me and flees. The doctor comes in to check me out and says I have to strip to the waist before he can really assess things. The Colonel and the bus driver start helping me get undressed. Off comes the stinky blanket, the plastic raincoat, the big winter jacket, the little summer jacket, the long-sleeved sweatshirt, the short-sleeved sweatshirt, the two outer shirts, the two under shirts, and the one other outer shirt I had on and never discarded when I started adding layers after I got wet in the kitchen truck fiasco. The doctor comes back in and examines me and pronounces that I need to be hospitalized, the Colonel signs all the forms, my parents are called, and I am bundled off to a room next to the nurse's station and pass out.

Now I am a normal, healthy (usually), male in my teens. But I come unglued when in walks a nurse, a very, pretty young nurse, and says she is going to give me a bed bath. I fall out of bed, make for the bathroom, slam the door and sink to the floor. The head nurse comes in and says that I have to be cleaned up and to get out of the head or she is sending in the orderlies. I stagger into the shower, hospital gown and all, grab the shower head, turn on the water, and yell to her that everything is fine. I guess she figured she had lost that particular battle and told me to pull the bell if I felt faint. I managed to get myself half way cleaned up and back into, what I swear, had to be the cleanest bed I have ever been in and pass out again. About five hours later my mother shows up to sign all the forms and haul me back to Roseville to recuperate.

When I arrived at school the next week, everything I had brought up to the Bivouac, including the soggy Boy Scout tents, were in this huge pile on the floor moldering away and stinking so bad that everyone was giving this pile a big berth. Lt. Uribe (who's first name is Robert) and Sgt. Nygren (also another Robert) - we are known as the Terrible Three R's in the Corps, assist me in hauling everything down to the laundromat with the big commercial machines and proceed to use up \$10 worth of quarters and at least a half dozen machines to cram everything in. There is this incredible stink emanating from the machines and we all proceed to try and disappear into the woodwork as everyone is looking around like

someone dumped over a Boy Scout KYBO (Keep Your Bowels Open) pit toilet. I thought for sure that we were going to be in big, big trouble over that mess. Luckily, we got everything done and cleared out before the owner showed up. I was told later that it stunk in there for a week or more.

When everything is finally cleaned up and we haul everything home I finally collapse for another day before I return to school. By this time I have finally got my voice back again and am in some semblance of health. Being the Chief Clerk as well as the Executive Officer of the Battalion I now have the duty of giving out all the awards and ribbon attachments and so forth. At this point I really don't know if it was really worth a Staff Star and a number "4" attachment to my Bivouac ribbon. All I know is, is that I am so glad that I am a Senior and that I won't have to go on any more Bivouac's.

Now there may be doubter's among those that read this story, but I will swear on a stack of Bibles that this whole thing is true. Looking back I can truthfully say that if it hadn't been for some of the things that Capt. Oates taught us I probably would have been a whole lot worse off than I was. The only other time I have been as sick as I was then was at the 1962 Summer Encampment and that is another whole story by itself.

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