

SERE

Jim Carlson (*Bill Swiderek totally unnerved his interrogators during SERE by telling them he grew up lonely on a farm, had no female interaction, had a strange uncle, and really, really liked the family goats . . .*)

Charlie Beadling (*That story about Swiderek and the goats is true. And why do you think little "Billy Goats" are called kids?*)

John Howard (*SERE Travel Team 47 - my team - was caught the most times during my SERE period. 4 times I think. We were quite pitiful. The team included Mark K. Holmes (the one who went to Group). We were also the team that "liberated" several cases of long range patrol rations, LRPs, from the supply depot one of the first nights (along with Paul Hansen from a different team). The next morning we were all in the bleachers when our exploits were told to everyone - and also told that if we did not confess it would be an "honor violation". We confessed, negotiated a return of the meals, and then had no food left for the rest of the time -- because we had eaten most of what we had "stolen" in a party that night.*)

Jim Carlson (*Although John Howard's team got caught more times, my team (Carlson, Carter, and Caskey) still had the misfortune of being caught twice, taken back to the beginning the first time to do the trek over; and forced to handwash trucks from a beaver pond the second time. The first capture was about a day into the trek. When we were spotted from a ridgeline by an aggressor, we bolted straight down a creek bed. Dennis Carter did the right thing and split off to the right on a trajectory away from us. I panicked and stuck close to Bill Caskey. Bill tried to shake me off and kept yelling over his shoulder, "Carlson, get away from me!" By the time I realized I should've been running in another direction, it was all over. When Caskey and I were taken back to where we were first spotted, Carter was there doing pushups with his backpack and gear still on his back under the direction of the aggressor who caught him. Bill and I were made to do the same thing. When we were done, the aggressors made Bill eat all his cornflake and pemmican bars. He came close to puking. I don't know why he was singled out. After we were released, Dennis and I split the rest of our rations with him.*

The second capture was one bright sunny morning, the second day I think, smack atop a ridgeline (rather than the military crest, two-thirds of the way up, where we were supposed to be). We slept past sunrise, snoozing in our sleeping bags. We woke up suddenly when the shadows of a band of aggressors loomed over us. One had this expression, like, "What are you guys THINKING?" since we were out in the open, no trees, no cover. We'd staked out on a huge bare patch late the night before, and I guess we were just too tired and hungry. We quickly packed up our gear as we followed our captors down a jeep trail. It was strangely calm, no shouting, no shooting of blanks from M1s -- just a few bird sounds. It was actually a beautiful morning otherwise. I guess at that point, it would've been pointless for them to take us back to the beginning, again -- so we washed the supply trucks, given a stern lecture heavy with veiled threat, felt stupid, and then sent off to try and make the final checkpoint south of us. By our calculations, we were so far behind, we figured it would take a miracle to get us to finish on time. I don't know if it was true, but we had this idea that if we didn't make the last checkpoint on schedule, we'd have to re-do the trek! From that moment on, we traveled without sleep all

the next night and the next day, traveling southeast on an angle (hoping it would take us out of aggressor territory), then turning back southwest to the final checkpoint. Not very imaginative or evasive. We somehow made it, in blistering time, thanks to Caskey's lead and Carter's amazing map reading. I carried the pemmican and cornflake bars that I managed to eat only a little of and fed those great trek partners of mine. -- At some period during that last 30 hours, we took part in a great, massive conglomeration of foolhardy survival teams marching down the middle of a well-used jeep trail (by the aggressors to re-supply their base camps) under a barely cloud-covered full moon. Every time a set of headlights came around a bend, we'd scramble to either side of the trail, like cockroaches when the kitchen lights come on, to hide in any shallow depression and hope the jeeps kept going. Somehow, none of us were discovered for that hour or so that the strange ghostly parade of travel teams tramped on that road.)

Jim Burling (SERE interrogation: The cadre had a rattle off the tail of a real rattlesnake. They shook the rattle and then threw a garter snake inside Brian Barnes' laundry bag covering his head. Brian calmly stuck the head of the snake in his mouth as he had done numerous times as a child (snakes like warm, moist, dark places). After about a minute, when the cadre lifted the bag off Brian's head, they accused him of eating their snake!)

Dan Chapman (Not during our SERE, but the following year, in 1973, when '76 was getting theirs. I was on the reactionary crew to interrogate and torture the baddest of the John Waynes of the class of '76. We got mostly everyone to sign confessions by trips to the Mud Pit, the Pinecone Bed and, if necessary, some harmless slapping around, especially on a buddy of theirs. But for the truly recalcitrant, we had the "Meat Locker!" – a box with cow dung, human piss, garter snakes, a rattler (dead) and a few mostly-dead rats. It only took a few sniffs in a few minutes head-down in the meat locker to get the desired confessions of "crimes to humanity." Until Dave Tuttle. He was reactionary to the end. Head down in the meat locker, the bag was taken off enough for him to savor the smells and get kissing close to "Comrade No-shoulders" (the snakes). After a long pause, someone raised Piggy Tuttle up to sign his confession, and he popped up with a dead rat in his teeth, whereupon our whole crew recoiled, lost our poise and finally, someone put his bag back on Tuttle's head and escorted him back to his fellow piggies.)

Dean Cox (Knowing we wouldn't have a lot of food during the POW camp training, I smuggled in a Hershey's candy bar, with almonds, of course. I put it inside my undershorts (Hey, it is double wrapped!) and kept it there (the search upon capture wasn't very thorough) until I was put into the little gray square boxes. After the door to the cubicle was closed, I pulled the candy bar out and started to open it when a fellow classmate was put into the box next to mine. I waited until I heard the bad guys walk away, then tapped on the shared wall and asked: Are you hungry? Want some candy?" Of course the response was a surprised "Yes!" so I broke the candy bar in half, pushed open the door enough to slip the piece out, and told the guy to push open his door and reach for it. He did and he told me thanks. Never did find out who he was. -- I came back from the survival/trek portion weighing one pound more than I weighed when I started. After SERE, about 1/3 of the class and I went to Airborne training at Ft Benning, GA. While there, I was one of a group of '75ers who climbed the 250-foot towers and strung a "USFA" banner between the towers. (I climbed out on the limb of the tower, at night). We had to wait the next morning to do the training on the towers -- while instructors climbed up to remove the banner. We weren't punished at all, probably because we set the completion records

for the program -- if you got there healthy and uninjured from SERE, you completed the program.)

Ric Lewallen (Piggy 173. Dean talked about the taking candy in with you during the interrogation phase of SERE. I had heard that story also. I had also heard (incorrectly, I might add) that during the interrogation phase, they did not make you take your underpants off during the strip search. My bright idea was to sew bit-o'-honey bars into the waistline of my underpants. Jockey shorts waistlines were too small. I had a pair of boxer shorts (yellow or red . . . can't remember which, but notable, unfortunately) that my girlfriend had given me. Waistband was the right width. The color of my shorts immediately caught the attention of the cadre, so I was already in their sights when they forced me to take them off. The bit-o'-honey bars all came out, and I was the first of our class to find out about the Reactionary Tent. That first trip was very intimidating. I had to walk naked (except for bag over head) over a bed of pinecones, then over to a chain-link fence where I had to crawl up it for about a foot and hang on, at which point the cadre hit you with a rubber hose. My hands and toes hurt so much hanging on to that fence that I really did not notice or mind the hose. Then back to the tent. Since I guess they figured out I was the most likely to break, I was the piggy who went to the reactionary tent every time our tent did not "cooperate." I did the pole lean one time. When I did, and they put a wet towel on your face and then poured water on it, I was fairly sure I could not do that a second time without doing whatever they wanted me to do. Interestingly, they DID do it a second time. The next trip to the Reactionary Tent, I was sent to the snake pit. They would put a dead rattler head under your laundry bag and then put you in a pit with a bunch of harmless snakes. A lot of things bother me, but snakes do not. So, I did the bre'r rabbit thing. I pretended to cry, told them I would do anything, and just sat in this closed pit and relaxed! They yanked me out and sent me back to the tent where again I wouldn't do what they wanted me to do. I was really surprised, but the bre'r rabbit trick worked. I went back to the Reactionary Tent about 5 times after that, and got the snake pit (to relax in) each time. I don't know if they were really fooled, or thought I had done it "right" or what. I was just grateful that it worked.)

Dean Cox (Another SERE story: Michael Cox escaped, twice, during the POW camp phase. He was allowed to rest a bit, given an 'attaboy -- then told he had to go back and complete the experience. When I first reported in to the Academy, I was sent to my BCT squadron. When I got to the dorm room door, I saw "Cox, M.E." on the door tag. I thought, "They got my name tag wrong. I'm Cox, M.D." Then I went in and met Michael E. Cox. I figured I was sent to the wrong squadron (I was) and had to find someone to point me in the right direction. I did and found I was really in Cougars and my roommate was Eddie Albright. Michael and I eventually discovered there was another Cox in the class -- Gary Cox (big guy). We were always in separate squadrons, but kept our eyes out for each other as we went through the zoo. Mike later died in active duty in an F-4 crash.)

Dean Cox (Still another SERE story: Ric Lewallen had a girlfriend in COS and, during the trek portion of SERE, had her drive down Rampart Range road one evening, where he met her. They went into town, had a nice steak dinner, and she took him back close to his next checkpoint the next morning.)