

The following are excerpts from notes on survival training that I used while an instructor at the Special Forces School (1983-1985) where I was fortunate enough to serve under LTC James N. (Nick) Rowe, and the US Army Ranger School (1986-1988). They reflect my opinions and understandings of survival techniques and in no way should they be accepted as "gospel." If you have a need or interest in wilderness survival, I suggest you research the subject by reading any of the many excellent sources on the market to include: FM 21-76: Survival, The Boy Scout Handbook, Outdoor Survival Skills by Larry Dean Olsen, Bushcraft by Richard Graves, or Bernard Shanks' Wilderness Survival.

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Key Word "SURVIVAL"

The key word "SURVIVAL" is an acronym to be used as an "immediate action drill" to be performed at the outset of a wilderness survival situation. Use this simple phrase to plan measures that will assist you in surviving in the wilderness and returning to civilization. The Key Word "SURVIVAL" will provide you with two of the most important survival skills--the ability to organize yourself and the ability to stay calm.

A. "S" stands for "Size up the situation."

- (1) Consider your physical condition and perform any first aid required.
- (2) Concentrate your senses on getting a feel for the area.
- (3) Conduct an inventory of the equipment you have.
- (4) Begin planning.

B. "U" stands for "Undue haste makes waste."

(1) Reacting without thinking or planning can result in faulty decisions and could result in your death.

(2) Acting in haste, just for the sake of action, will make you careless. The natural tendency in a stressful situation is to run. You must overcome this tendency and think of your objectives.

(3) If you act in haste, you may lose or forget equipment, you may not make a survival plan, and you may become disoriented and not know your location. As a cultural group. Americans have little patience. Know this weakness if it is your own particular Achilles' heel.

C. "R" stands for "Remember where you are."

(1) Always knowing where you are on the map and how it relates to the surrounding terrain is a principle no outdoorsman should violate.

(2) If in a group, always know the location of the maps and compasses.

(3) Guard against the natural tendency of allowing someone else to be responsible for navigation. Always be aware of your route, regardless of the mode of travel.

(4) Whether you are in a base camp or on the move, you should always know the following things:

(a) Direction or location of the nearest populated area.

(b) Direction or location to the nearest major transportation artery (river, highway, railroad track, etc.)

(c) Location of local water sources.

D. "V" stands for "Vanquish fear and panic."

(1) Fear and panic are two of the greatest enemies in a survival situation. These are not unusual emotions. The secret is to recognize them and control them.

(2) Fear, panic, and anxiety take their toll on the body. They divert needed energy.

(3) Many people have never been alone and without diversion. This could subject them to anxiety.

(4) The best way to control fear in a survival situation is preparation, prior planning, and training.

E. "I" stands for "Improvise."

(1) Make the wrong tool and do the right job.

(2) Make an object do more than one job.

F. "V" stands for "Value living."

(1) A man's will to survive, to endure, to live, is the key to survival. Maintaining a positive mental outlook and a desire to live will allow an individual to overcome tremendous odds.

G. "A" stands for "Act like the natives."

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(1) Many situations we would consider to be "survival situations" are dealt with on a daily basis by primitive peoples all over the world. To them, these situations are a way of life and hold no specific danger. Read about these people and our own ancestors. They survived in a world without electricity, stores, or fast food; you can too.

H. "L" stands for "Learn basic skills."

(1) Learn to put together a survival kit that will meet your specific needs and probable survival situations. Learn to use your survival kit.

(2) Learn to make fire in different environments with different materials.

(3) Learn to build shelter from natural materials.

(4) Learn to find and purify water.

(5) Learn first aid and the treatment of most common survival dangers such as insect stings, snake bites, climatic injuries, etc.

(6) Concentrate on "doing" as opposed to "knowing". Many people know how to build a fire, but cannot build a fire in a rain storm with damp tinder. That is the fine line between surviving or dying.

The physiological and psychological aspects of survival and their significance on an individual in a wilderness survival situation is very subjective. Know your mental, emotional, and physical limitations and prepare for their impact on your ability to survive.

A. Fear is a normal reaction to a threatening situation. Acceptance of this fear will lead to purposeful rather than random behavior. This way will greatly increase chances for survival.

B. How a person will react to fear depends more on himself than on the situation. Timid and anxious persons may respond more coolly to fear than the physically strong or happy-go-lucky.

C. Two factors frequently reported to decrease or help control fear are:

- (1) Having confidence in your abilities and your equipment.
- (2) Concentrating on the situation at hand and the job to be done.

D. The seven "enemies" of survival are pain, cold, thirst, hunger, fatigue, boredom, and loneliness. They are mental distractors and difficult to overcome.

- (1) Pain is uncomfortable but in itself is not harmful or dangerous. It is a symptom of underlying problems and should be monitored. It can be controlled and can become subordinate to efforts to carry on.
- (2) Cold numbs the mind, the body, and the will.
- (3) Thirst dulls the mind. Serious dehydration may occur in a survival situation even when there is plenty of water available.
- (4) Hunger lessens your ability to think rationally.

(5) Even a moderate amount of fatigue can materially reduce mental ability. Fatigue can make you careless and promote the feeling of hopelessness.

(6) Boredom and loneliness are two of the toughest enemies of survival to overcome.

E. Everyone has experienced pain, cold, thirst, hunger, fatigue, boredom, and loneliness, but not to the extent that their survival has been threatened. The more you know about these and their effects on you, the better you will be able to control them, rather than letting them control you.

F. One of the most important psychological requirements for survival is the ability to accept immediately the reality of a new emergency and react appropriately to it.

G. Much of the available evidence demonstrates the importance of having a "preparatory attitude" for whatever emergency may occur. Knowledge and rehearsal of survival and emergency procedures bring about a feeling of confidence and preparation for survival. While you can't prepare for every situation, you can prepare for the most probable situation.

H. Survival may depend more on personality than upon danger, weather, terrain, or nature of the emergency. A person is more prone to survive if he can make up his mind; can improvise; can live with himself; can adapt to the situation; can remain cool, calm, and collected; hopes for the best, but prepares for the worst; has patience; can take it; and knows where his special

fears and worries comes from. The will to survive, along with a positive mental attitude, are key ingredients to surviving.

I. In summary, development of self-sufficiency is the primary means of

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protecting yourself against the physiological and psychological stress that could affect you in a survival situation. If you have not learned self-sufficiency, it is not too late to begin.

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Survival Planning and Kits

Preparedness for a survival situation is the cornerstone of success. You should build a personal survival kit based on your own needs and the probable situations you will encounter. This kit should be carried whenever you could be placed in a wilderness survival situation.

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- A. Survival planning begins with realizing that you may be placed into a survival situation at any time. Realizing this, you must take steps to enhance your ability to survive. Be aware of your environment, whether you are entering a strange building or leaving your camp for a short hike.
- B. A person's ability to survive cannot be fully judged prior to actually being involved in a survival situation. Training, practice, and preparation may mean the difference between life and death.
- C. Become familiar with the contents of any survival kit you have access to. Practice using the contents of your personal survival kit under differing conditions.
- D. Carry some forms of survival kit with you at all times. This could range from spare cash on a trip to the city; extra identification, credit cards, and medicine on a trip overseas; or a wilderness survival kit that you carry on a backpacking trip.
- E. Before constructing a survival kit, consider your skills, the environment you are working in, and where the kit will be carried.
- F. When selecting items for your kit, avoid redundancy and look for items that will perform more than one function. Build flexibility into your kit.
- G. The container for your kit should be water repellent, accept components of varying shapes and sizes, and be durable. Your kit should be small enough to fit comfortably in a pocket. A survival kit doesn't do any good if you don't carry it.
- H. As a minimum, your wilderness survival kit should allow you to make a fire, build shelter, and purify/carry water. Also consider first aid, signaling, and food procurement.

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I. Do not delay the completion of a survival kit to support you in various situations. Do not buy "high speed" components. Concentrate on sturdy, inexpensive components that will perform the required functions.

J. Maintain a survival log in a survival situation. Entries into the log should be clear and concise. They should explain who you are, how you got into a survival situation, and an inventory of your equipment. Further entries should include your activities, what you eat/drink, amount/description of urine/feces, and physical/mental state.

K. Draw a map of the local area. Include a legend, north arrow, location of your shelter, water sources, game trails, your traps and snares, major terrain features, roads, latrine area, and an alternate camp site.

Fire Building

Fire building is one of the three critical factors in a wilderness survival situation. A fire can improve your mental well-being, keep you warm, purify water by boiling, be used as a signal, and cook your food.

A. Selection of a site takes into consideration the possibility of grass or forest fires, wet or flooded ground, rain, and snow.

B. Heat, fuel, and oxygen are needed to build a fire.

C. Heat can be obtained by matches, lighter, magnifying glass, friction, battery, or the discharge of a weapon.

D. Fuel falls into three categories:

(1) Tinder ignites with a minimum of heat. Examples of tinder are birch bark, wood shavings, dry straw/grass, sawdust, waxed paper, bird down, hemp rope/twine, a candle, cloth squares dipped in paraffin/wax, or gasoline mixed with dirt.

(2) Kindling is readily combustible fuel that is added to tinder once sufficient flame is obtained. Examples of kindling are small twigs, cardboard, and split wood.

(3) Sustaining fuel is added to maintain the fire once it is started. Examples of sustaining fuel include deadwood, logs, and split green wood.

E. Holly and fir should not be used for fire building since they can explode.

F. To build a fire, place a small amount of tinder on a clear dry surface; ignite the lower windward side of the tinder; slowly add kindling after the tinder has ignited; slowly add sustaining fuel after the kindling has ignited. Build your fire "loosely" to ensure oxygen can circulate around the fuel.

Shelter

Exposure to the elements is the biggest killer of people in a survival situation. The ability to shelter yourself from the extremes of the elements will go a long way to improve your chances of survival. Shelter can be portable and carried as part of your kit or built from natural material.

A. In selecting a site for a field shelter, consider what the shelter will protect you from. Ideal sites in winter and summer will differ. Select a winter site near fuel and water that will offer protection from the wind. In

summer, choose a site that will protect you from rain, sun, and insects. Evaluate your environment.

- (1) In coastal areas, consider high tide levels.
- (2) In foothills, avoid flash flood (low) areas.
- (3) In mountainous areas, avoid potential avalanche sites.
- (4) In all areas, choose a site that is well drained.

B. Ponchos and tarps can be used to construct quick, effective, temporary shelters. Using a poncho or tarp, you can construct a lean-to, pup tent, hammock, or envelope.

C. A timber lean-to is similar to a poncho or tarp lean-to, but it is made from locally procured, natural materials (brush, pine needles, etc.).

D. When building a shelter in snow, insulation from the ground is extremely important.

E. A simple, effective desert/beach shelter can be made by digging a man sized hole approximately 18 inches deep in the sand and covering it with two layers of shade producing material (poncho, tarp, etc.). There should be an air space of approximately six inches between the shade layers.

Water Procurement/Purification

The ability to procure and purify water in a survival environment is one of the most critical and difficult tasks to accomplish. Dehydration is second only to exposure as a killer in survival situations. Many survival manuals and kits emphasize food procurement, but water procurement is much more crucial. A person can go weeks without food but only several days without water.

A. Seawater, blood, urine, or alcohol should not be used as a substitute for water. Your body will expend more fluid purifying them than it will derive from them.

B. Snow and ice are an excellent source of water but must be melted prior to use.

C. Rainwater or dew may be collected in waterproof material such as a poncho or tarp. It may be soaked up in cloth and wrung out. Shallow wells may be dug to collect rainfall and run-off. Water may be obtained from hollow trees, puddles, crevices, and leaves.

D. Water may be condensed from the steam of boiling seawater.

E. The basic water still will provide water in almost any environment. The water still can be in ground (a sheet of plastic, weighted in the center, spread over a hole in the ground, with a collection vessel underneath), above ground (a plastic bag filled with non-poisonous green vegetation and placed in the sun), or a transportation still (a plastic bag, tied over the end of a living, non-poisonous plant or tree branch). The in ground still is the best expedient way to purify water in a contaminated environment.

F. Muddy, stagnant, or polluted water should be made clear by filtration through layers of sand, gravel, and charcoal; or by settling prior to purification.

G. Water must be purified by boiling for 5-10 minutes; adding purification tablets per package instructions; adding 5-10 drops of 2% tincture of iodine per quart of water (let stand for 30 minutes); adding 5-10 drops of chlorine bleach per quart of water (let stand for 30 minutes); or using a portable purifier available commercially.

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