

Ten Survival Tips From A Former Infantryman

By Bob Merriman

In squad-level training at Advanced Infantry Training at Fort Polk, La., many years ago, a staff sergeant instructor said: "What we teach you here is not guaranteed to keep you alive. But, what we teach might keep you alive long enough for you to figure out what to do."

Addressed to slick-sleeve privates, the sergeant's words contain what every soldier knows: There are no guarantees.

With American soldiers about to again go into harm's way, I offer a few rules learned as an 11 Bravo squad leader and platoon sergeant. (Remember, these are rules to follow, not laws of occurrence. A law of occurrence is: Your radio will fail when you need it most. A law of occurrence is: The artillery fire you need now is going somewhere else.)

1. Never ask for volunteers. If you are in charge, asking for volunteers is a waste of precious time. Soldiers will debate with and among themselves about whether to volunteer, and the moment for action will have passed.
2. Never volunteer.
3. Cash the check. If the Army wants the money back, you will be told. I once tried to return a \$32 overpayment. The paperwork took more than a year.
4. Always conduct reconnaissance. Always, always, always. Even if you don't think reconnaissance is necessary, do it anyway. Especially if you don't think it is necessary.
5. Camouflage everything. That's *everything*. Dirt, rocks, trees if necessary -anything that might cause the enemy to spot your position.
6. Always know how many rounds are in your magazine. Few things are more frustrating than having a bolt unexpectedly lock back when you thought you knew how many rounds you had remaining.
7. Never miss an opportunity to eat or sleep. You don't know when the next chance will occur.
8. When you wake up in the morning or in the middle of the night, touch your rifle. Before you shake possible scorpions out of your boots, before you even think about that first cup of coffee, touch your rifle. Before you go to sleep, touch your rifle. It's there; you can see it, but touch it anyway.
9. Always carry spare batteries. In the increasingly technological, battery-driven Army, even a grunt needs batteries. And more batteries.
10. There is no such thing as overkill. If you have a valid target, fire on it, call for fire, and then call for more fire.

Good NCOs know all these rules, and more. If you have a question, ask your sergeant. If your sergeant does not know, he or she will find the answer. If your sergeant fails to find out, the Army is paying the wrong person.