



I look to J.C. for a decision, and he tells me to shoot them. I don't know if I hit them and more than likely they'd already been hit, but they turn out to be friendlies. War is hell.

In the distance we can see pyros being thrown from the track up onto berms - obviously enemy survivors. We're called down to assemble, but to my frustration we don't pursue that group. It transpires that the enemy approached from the opposite side to that expected, so were not really within our kill sack when the flare was tripped. Nevertheless, 12 have been taken down, a respectable result. We return to camp, where I heat myself some dinner as it begins to rain.

My section have gone to bed and I'm finishing a cup of an exceedingly English warm malt bedtime beverage before doing the same when flares shoot into the sky. There are shouts from the far periphery of the forest, one of them being "stand to!" I grab my gun, hiss the same command at my sleeping section and start to advance in that direction. I pass 1 Section's bashas as the flares burn out and darkness returns and advance a little further before dropping prone in a minor depression in the ground and peering into the woods. It's quiet. I deploy my bipod. In front of me there's no movement in the dark trees, but at the edges of my tired vision shadowy figures dash from cover to cover. It's difficult to concentrate and my imagination is playing tricks. Nobody else has responded, and I don't know where the observation posts are. After ten or fifteen minutes of peering into the night, I return

to my swag and tidy up to go to sleep.

A vehicle drives by along the road at the near edge of the woods and stops. Are the observation posts covering that? Are they stopping vehicles? Maybe we could be attacked where we lie. Twigs crack and voices sound. I lie very still, afraid to reach for my gun which I've buried in my swag to protect it from the rain. Again I think I see shapes moving in the darkness. I wait as long as I can stand and blast my powerful torch into the night, frantically weaving it back and forth in search of an enemy, but there's nobody there. This is the job of the observation posts, I decide - I'll respond if called upon, but I'm not making myself crazy when I should be resting. Leaving my waterproofs and boots on, I slide into the swag and fall asleep, torch clenched in fist with my thumb resting on the switch.

It's daylight and still raining when I'm roused by Zero's voice calling me. I wonder why that is, but not being much of a morning person I don't think too hard on it. I stagger over to where a group stands in the woods, worried that my section's briefing has already started. Zero and the members of my section are gathered there, joking about mass abductions. I don't understand until I look around - where once an entire platoon's worth of camp had been, now there's only empty woodland. It seems the bad weather got the better of everyone, and although there's still plenty more action planned, the decision is made to call the game early. We pack up and are evacuated by helicopter-van,

leaving the side door open as we bounce through Swynnerton.

Thus ended the first of the TacOps, one of the few events deserving of the name military simulation. A lot of effort was gone to make real-world tactics and drills effective and to present realistic situations - by the use of a staff OPFOR, punitive injury rules, limited ammunition, and the chain of command, the result is an immersive and believable event. An excellent balance was struck between the slower pace of real military operations and providing us with a number and variety of missions, between downtime and uptime. You can't emerge from an event like this without feeling you've earned yourself a bit of pride, that you've been through something and to some extent proved yourself. Nevertheless, this is not something that's out of the average airsoft's reach, something for what's been described as "those commando types who eats grubs from your own grub-infested legs." Apart from the military theme, this is just combining airsoft with another popular and enjoyable hobby - hiking and camping - and synergistically improving both. The equipment needed is readily and cheaply available and is just as usable outside of airsoft.

Operation: Zulu, despite being truncated by the weather, was a success, and TA Events intends for TacOps to return in 2010. And I'll be there, because regardless of the time of year, that was a treat.

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