
2014 OP SUMMIT DUKE II (MOUNT KILIMANJARO)

January / February 2014



UP AND DOWN AGAIN

A Tale of a Mountainous Fellowship
(Like Lord of the Rings, but with less Orcs)
By Sgt Stephen Clews

Chapter 1: An Idea

Our adventure begins not with a heroic meeting or a great battle; not even with some young impressionable youth finding some item of great power and strife. Our tale finds its start a short few years ago with an idea. Kilimanjaro, a mountain that so many have heard of yet know so little about... With that, I suppose then, our story actually started hundreds of thousands of years ago with the creation and eruption of the mountain. However, I lack the time and motivation to go into depth of that extent.

The British Columbia Regiment had just finished its battlefield tour of Europe. All were excited and on a high from the experience although it left all to wonder what would come next. Many knew that another was to follow later but not for years and the void left the adventurous sorts wanting. Thoughts floated about with travel in mind, seeing other battle sites, the odd mention of a bender in Bangkok, and even climbing a mountain. The fates filtered these musings to the ears of our Commanding Officer LCol Sajjan where they simmered over time. As the simmer changed to a boil he began to ask his soldiers what they thought of a trip to Kilimanjaro. It was in Africa, it was a mountain, it was an adventure so why not. As the questions were asked momentum was gained. Our Commanding Officer changed in those days and began a path that would show him his true role as Gandalf the Grey(ing) mastermind of our mountainous fellowship!

Yes there will be countless references to Lord of the Rings (LOTR). Read on to find out why.

LCol "Gandalf" Sajjan began the planning so he called up the leader of the Elves, Elrond, who just so happened to be a Squadron Commander in the very same Regiment. Elrond, also known as Major Virk, was summoned to a secretive meeting. The initial plans were set so the work could begin. They enlisted the

aid of Tom Bombadil who went happily by the name of Honorary Col Ted Hawthorne. The need for funds was imperative. HCol Hawthorne approached The British Columbia Regiment Association while the CO cast his spell of unending networking. The process of finding hotels, flights, benefactors, association subsidies, and people on the ground to help out was time consuming. Many favours were called in and a bit of hard selling was done but by the end enough funds were raised that 15 members of the Regiment could go. The trip with flights and accommodations was around \$5500 with the members paying \$1500 of that. An extra deal was struck before the departure date which secured a Safari for \$375 per person. The framework in place, a date set and a final task revealed: Who shall attend this quest?

Chapter 2: The Fellowship

Word spread through the ranks as though a fire burns through tinder. Interested soldiers of all ranks and ages submitted their names. The hard decision of who should go and who would remain was left to their superiors. After careful deliberation, a cast of characters was picked. In a grand ceremony of obscure emails the lucky few learned of being chosen for this trek and on a Wednesday evening the Fellowship of the Mountain assembled for the first time.



Frodo – Tpr Togeretz – The youngest of the group, experiencing the world for the first time having never left his homeland(ish) before and tasked with the burden of bearing incredibly tight hiking pants.



Gimli – Maj Lindsay – Aggressive, determined, winning attitude and a hot streak if he thinks he might lose; most ideal to be a dwarf as he has the glare of one down perfectly.



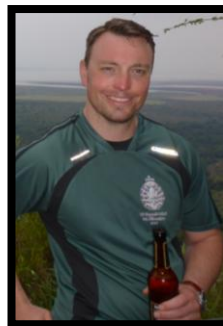
Samwise – Cpl Fleming – The packer of things, the carrier of much, the man who wore shorts the entire trip while ensuring his companions were well looked after.



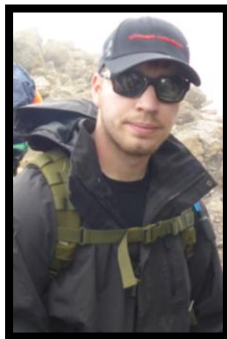
Aragorn – Chris Alden – The one who spends the most time out of all of the fellowship in the mountains. The closest thing to a Ranger we have who is also hilarious when drunk.



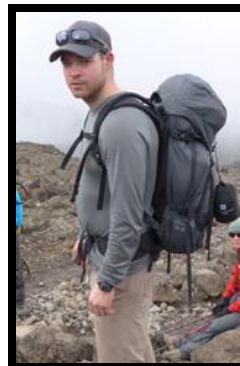
Pippin – Cpl Palmer – Always getting into shenanigans, running into walls and tripping up, but determined and loyal.



Faramir – MCpl Carswell – Stalwart and dedicated to his duty despite its outcome; Always eager to help even if he drifts off into his own world on occasion.



Mary – Pansagrau – The accompaniment to every situation, although he is never the cause of any hijinks, he is always found nearby, often with a drink in hand.



Steward of Gondor – Cpl Halpin – A fit individual who likes to light fires all around him even at the top of the highest peak in Africa.



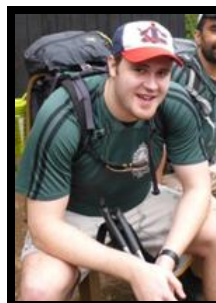
Legolas – MCpl Lee – The pretty one of the group with his exotic features. He boasts the highest speed most expensive equipment of the party but uses all of it to support his team.



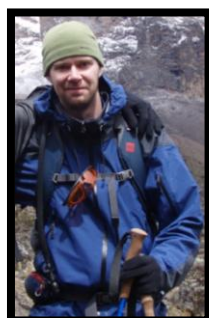
Eowyn – Cheema – Warrior at heart but forced to take care of those that needed it (Duke A. Bear). Throwing off the shackles of his ward he pressed on his own path. Well, the same path as the rest of us but you get the point.



Elrond – Major Virk – Leader of men and machine, he always has something in the works. He manages to enact all of his plans and ideas without ever actually getting involved.



Treebeard – 2Lt Ellis – The big and strong member of the group; Shows genuine concern for those around him; Is reliable beyond all measure though it may take a while.



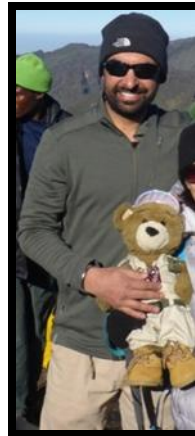
Sméagol – MCpl Boxall – The good guy part not the crazy eats living fish part. Oft seen on our adventure hunched over a wash basin with a menacing look; also the last to be named.



Gandalf the Grey – LCol Sajjan – The overlord of our adventure. Always knows more than he lets on. Spends his time with the group except when he randomly goes to far off lands on other quests. Main spells used – Master Networking and Befriend Big Wig.



Arwen – Na – Delicate but determined she powered through to the best of her abilities while still showing concern for the entire team.



Bilbo Baggins – Ranjiv Sandhu– The benevolent benefactor of our adventure. He helped to set us on our travels and even started it off with a big party. No Eleventy First but still a great send off.



Théoden King of Rohan – Sgt Clews – Was useless in the beginning but changed into someone that was somewhat productive by the end; Also very Handsome.



Eomer Marshal of Riddermark – SSM Harris – Stern and aggressive if he had his choice he would spend his time riding the land finding evil things to kill; Impressive frown.



Tom Bombadil – HCol Hawthorne – Though he did not do the climb he had a hand in helping us every step of the way. Behind the scenes he raised funds, garnered support, and made sure we were well taken care of.

Borimir – Note that although he is a member of the fellowship his name was reserved for anyone who needed full evacuation off the mountain. Valiant effort does his best, doesn't quite make it.

I promise I will get to the part where I explain all the LOTR references.

None of us knew the roles we would play on our journey, though all of us were elated that we had been selected for this excursion. For the next couple months the physical training picked up, for most of us anyway. Most took to hiking the mountains of the Rohan and the hills of Shire which basically meant North Vancouver and trails in the Fraser Valley. A very unique way of training was adapted by Cpl "Samwise" Fleming. Instead of a standard back pack that was weighted down, he took a more entertaining approach by strapping a tiny human to his back. Cpl Fleming's daughter Bella could obviously not come on the trip with us so to include her in his adventure Fleming would pack her around in a carrier back pack while he went hiking. Fleming did not know at the time that his training method would prepare him for the assistance he would render to one of the fellowship members. As a token of love and affection Bella gave her daddy her favorite stuffed animal to take with him up to these distant lands. This little toy's head could be seen sticking out of our bearer of burdens pocket for the entire trip.

The training carried on with a youthful excitement. Members of the fellowship would link up and spend the days together practicing before the departure date; From me - "King Théoden" Clews and the SSM "Marshal of Riddermark" Harris climbing through Deep Cove to Major "Elrond" Virk and Ranjiv "Bilbo Baggins" Sanduh plowing through snowy trails of Grouse Mountain. Everyone was doing their part to be in fit and fighting shape. 2 months is not a lot of time to train especially with the winter season sapping all your energy, so between hikes in poor weather the Fellowship would run, do squats, train with gas masks, and drink beer. You never know what contaminants and toxins you may find on the other side of the world so a well trained liver prepares you for the worst. A more interesting training regime was conducted by the CO who did indeed live up to his name of Gandalf - He set everything in motion, then promptly disappeared. In this case he went to Thailand. Little is known about his travels to this distant country but it can be assumed it was mysterious, fraught with danger, and in at least a 4 star hotel.

As each person pressed themselves hard, an expert was brought in for us to learn about his high altitude experiences. He talked of what to bring while not becoming over encumbered. His warnings of taking it slow were well warranted. At the height we wished to reach altitude sickness can take hold quickly. Oxygen levels drop rapidly just because there is so little at that elevation compared to sea level. Although altitude sickness is rarely fatal if one is not careful other conditions can occur that are life-threatening. Recounting his advice, all our climbers sought out their respective healers and apothecaries to fetch medications for altitude sickness. The Fellowship was prepared and the final process was to take our leave from home.

Chapter 3: Departure to Foreign Frontiers

January 27, 2014, the group arrived at Vancouver international airport. All documents needed for the flight were collected and much to everyone's surprise, we made it through customs with no incident. It was at our gate that we met up with another member of our party. Sgt (Ret'd) Chris "Aragorn" Alden joined our ranks. We had never met him before but luckily for us military men are pretty easy to spot. The introductions were cut short when the boarding call sounded. The group boarded the plane and nestled in, in preparation for the long Trans Atlantic flight.

The plane ride was uneventful and the landing smooth. We were eager to disembark and put the cramped space and in-flight movies behind us, especially with the prospect of a night in Amsterdam. Almost everyone had heard of the stories of parties and the Red Light district so a few of the leadership side were a bit concerned of the trouble that our group might get into while exploring. Shrugging off the thought we took a sketchy cab ride to the hotel to prepare for a night on the town.

Although it was a bit of travel time the route was easy being a bus back to the airport then a train right to the city core. To the pleasure of most of the group, myself especially, we split into smaller groups. Large groups just meant longer decision processes. Priority one was a stop to get food and a drink in the new surroundings. The small group I was a part of stopped in an Irish pub. From here a few more people split off leaving Chris "Aragorn" Alden, Paul "Gimli" Lindsay and I to wander. We ended up in a bit of a pub crawl which worked its way into the red light district and out the other side. Details aside, it was a very good night that ended with "Aragorn" trying to read a Dutch newspaper out loud to the amusement of us and dismay of the locals. Back at the hotel we were left to wonder what trouble the other group had gotten into.

We were greeted with disappointment; surprising, uneventful disappointment. Every one of our party being the responsible and slightly jet lagged men that they were had abandoned the prospect of hitting the town. Each of them except for the leadership group had gone back to the hotel after a short while in town and gone to bed. Chris, Paul and I were the only ones to roll in past midnight. There were worries of arrests or close encounters with ladies of the night but the only ones to cause even a hint of trouble were the ones most concerned about it. Disappointment at the lack of stories aside, I was very happy to be with a group that could keep its nose clean. The next leg of the journey would take us another long half day of travel into Tanzania.

Chapter 4: Far off Lands and Wide Eyes

It was another uneventful trip, some minor turbulence though still easy going and a good landing. Leaving the airport we were greeted by people who were to take us to our hotel. They strapped our baggage to the roof of the bus. Well, not all of us. Due to some confusion / corruption Chris Alden's bag never made it to Tanzania. It was hot even in the dark of the evening during the bus ride. Arriving at our first hotel we began to experience hospitality that blew the North American standard out of the water. We tried to assist in the removal of our bags but were very politely asked to stand aside and allow the valets to fetch it.



Walking to the main building, moist towels were given to each of us and the staff had stayed to prepare a late supper for us. The grounds were beautiful and green. Filled with lush trees, flowers everywhere and the main building looked like a castle. At this point we linked up with our advance party consisting of the LCol "Ganfalf" Sajjan, Maj "Elrond" Virk, and "Arwen" Na. This was the first meeting of our group with Na and it was good to put a face to the name. The fellowship held its first full meeting to identify the events to come. Learning that in the morning we would be off to the Orphanage we had dinner and went to bed. Mostly anyway, a few stayed up to try the local brews that the SSM had been raving about before turning in.

It was not an overly early morning but with the jet lag on us most of the group was moving slowly. The reason for the trip to the Orphanage was that we had a connection with them through SSM Harris and they had asked us to bring over a few text books. Being the group that we were, we took the task and ran with it. All of us brought as much as we could. There were 4 rubber maid totes that were filled with text



books and items that the children could use and play with. When we arrived, they had not expected as much as we had brought considering that it was intended as a side trip. We mingled with the kids and even started a game of soccer in which good old Cpl "Mary" Palmer was a bit over enthusiastic and body checked a brick wall. The orphanage was a profound experience in particular for 2 of our members. Cpl Togeretz had never seen poverty before to the extent he saw it with this group of kids. It was a world changing and eye opening experience for him. Cpl Fleming had met a young girl there who reminded him of his daughter and the living and learning conditions of the children moved him. Everyone reacted in their own way to the short time we spent there. It has moved some to want to create closer ties with that particular orphanage so they can keep assisting them. For others it has made them more aware of how different other countries are and how lucky we are to live the lives we do. This short stop made an impact and turned the trip into more than just climbing a mountain.

Chapter 5: Up, Up and... Polepole

It was an early morning the day we started the climb. We first cleared out of our rooms then piled our bags near the entrances so the porters could weigh them. Each member of the team was assigned a porter for their bag, not the main pack that was carried each day but the follow up kit, warm gear, wet gear, extra clothing, mithral vest, whatever you needed but didn't need to carry that day. To prevent injury to the porter they would check the weight and if you went over you needed to pull some things out. Only a select few needed to redistribute equipment. The guides gave us all lunches for the road and we mounted the trucks to roll out.

A few hours later we arrived at the main gate for the mountain. By this point we still had not actually seen the top since it was always covered in cloud. The main building by the gate required all of us sign in. This was the first of many check points. We would log our name, age, occupation, and nationality. They had one of these check in points at each camp. It is meant in part as a safety check to ensure everyone makes it in and in part as a reference to make sure you actually did complete the mountain. A few groups left before us as we waited our turn to step off. It felt almost like a race at the beginning, everyone anxious to get a fast pace going. We learned quickly that this is not how you face this challenge. The lead guide was going at an uncomfortably slow rate. We would all bunch up together then accordion out and when we asked him about it he would just respond "Polepole my friend, polepole". Polepole means slowly in Swahili. This was the saying of the mountain. After hour 3 we began to understand the necessity of polepole. For those of us who pack like we're going to be on the mountain for a month, polepole was the only way to go. Starting at an elevation of 1500m did not seem that bad on the body. It was at the end of the first day of walking, camping at 3000m that you started feeling it. The bag seemed just a little bit heavier. The breaths needed to be just slightly deeper and you tired out just a little quicker than normal; manageable, but noticeable.



At the first camp we learned the extent of what the guides and porter team did for us. All of us arrived to a fully assembled camp. All our tents were set up, our support bags inside, sanitation areas ready and mess tent up complete with popcorn and tea waiting for us. It was a jungle trail and still we were being well taken care of. There was a group medical check done with no real issues. The worst that had happened was Cpl "Aywen" Cheema chugged his water a bit too quickly on route and was cramping. Some salt and rest cleared it up and a good lesson was learned by all on water drinking rates. Later that evening we had a rest and time to lay out our sleeping gear the dinner bell was sounded. It was a good meal, no Lembas bread for us. The first course (yes first course of three, even on the side of the mountain African hospitality kills North American) was a tasty potato soup. The soup was then followed by spaghetti with meat sauce, ending with a desert of fresh mango slices. After the dinner the guides came in to brief us on the plan for the next day. This was to become a nightly occurrence as was the oxygen monitor they brought with them: a fantastic little device that monitored heart rate and blood oxygen levels that was small enough to fit on the end of a finger. Immediately, we began competing with each other on who could have the lower heart rate and higher oxygen, things that of course we cannot really control. Everyone had a good laugh and was in high spirits before going to ground for the evening.

Chapter 6: Shira Camp and the Pineapple Tree

The morning had a good feeling in the air. The party was well rested and ready to go. Morning routine was to pack our equipment, pull it out of the tent and then hand in our water bottles to be filled by the porters. From this point on we needed purification tablets in all the water we drank. Around us, the climbing support team was busy at work. They had slept in between our tent lines in the night for security and were up before the sun to begin the camp cleanup. Not much attention was paid to it though as food was on the mind. For breakfast a kind of cream of wheat / oatmeal substance of which I am still not entirely certain what it was, was served. It tasted alright if you threw a bit of sugar over it. They then brought out a small slice of omelette for each of us. After expecting the food to be some sort of compressed food brick before we had left for the climb, fresh hot grub kept the morale at a high. When breakfast was complete we left the tent to grab our kit. By this time, the entire camp was broken down and the mess tent was one of the only things left to collapse. The support staff were hard workers, that was for sure. The packs were on and the guides led us out. I had the med kit and was in the rear while the hobbits led us in the front.



The first day we had gone through some very interesting vegetation changes. It began as a tropical rainforest type surrounding; very lush and green, then turned into something more like BC with evergreen style trees but lower to the ground. Now as we climbed the forest grew even less dense and very unique plants could be noticed along our path. The one that gathered the most attention was a peculiar looking tree. This tree started off as a small looking shrub that looked like the top of a pineapple. As it grew, the leaves slowly fell lower on the plant until at the halfway point they began to die but did not fall off. They withered and darkened. As the tree grew taller and taller more leaves piled up creating a bulbous top with the end result looking something

like a pineapple on a stick. SSM "Eomer" Harris was awestruck by this and began taking countless photos of them. These funky plants aside, the terrain opened up considerably. It was almost like walking in rocky tundra and this too was a sudden change. The plants just dwindled as we moved further along the route until it was just rocky outcrop to rocky outcrop.

We set up for lunch on a beautiful rock formation. We were eating the contents of our little coloured lunch boxes when a visitor arrived. It was a White Collared Raven. He was well adapted to people and saw us for the gullible bunch we were. A number of us threw him bread and other bits of our lunch and he even got within a couple feet of us. This was not enough though. When our backs were turned, he swooped down to greedily snag a sandwich in his talons before flying away triumphant. The Raven knew to keep a bit of distance after showing his thieving abilities.

Some of the team was a bit more energetic than others, so after lunch it was decided to split into 2 groups. The second group waited for a few minutes to prevent any lagging on the trail, then the 2nd group stepped off. Of course from this point we moved all of 10m before the sky opened up like a flurry of arrows over the walls of Gondor. With a hasty and frantic stop we donned our rain tops, ready to push on. Little did Ranjiv "Bilbo" Sanduh know that he had packed the wrong jacket - it was not waterproof. The remainder of the days travel involved a bit of light rock bouldering on the path that of course now was slick with rain. There were no major missteps on our part but one of the guides slipped from a rock and slammed into the ground. He passed it off as nothing but stayed back for a rest with one of the other guides.

Climbing over the last bit of rough terrain, the camp could be seen just under 1km away. A few of us lagged a bit behind to get some photos but entered the camp soon after the lead portion of the team. We began the nightly routine and I, accompanied by 2 elves, a dwarf and some hobbits. went exploring a nearby cave. It turned out to be a bit of a disappointment. It was more of a rocky covered spot than a real cave. Guides had used it in the past as shelter before adequate tenting was used. The excursion ended quickly and we went back to our camp for the night sleeping at just under 4000m.

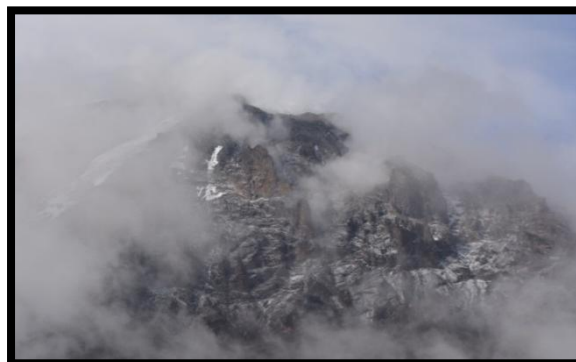
Chapter 7: The Naming

Nothing unusual came from the morning's activity and we began eager to cover some ground. The plan for the day was to climb to a higher elevation and then back down again to allow the body acclimatization time. The point to which we would ascend was called the Lava Tower. It was a large free standing rock formation apart from the main rise in the mountain. It was very cool but I will get to that. It was now day 3 into the climb and some of my fellowship brethren had noticed that I kept comparing our journey to a story in both book and movie form called The Lord of the Rings. I was relentless with my comparisons. So much so, that the group began agreeing with me. This led to a very amusing and lengthy debate into the naming of every member of our group with a LOTR character by vote. The advantage that we had now split off into 2 groups was that only half of us knew about the LOTR vote and it was decided to reveal their characters to the other half over dinner. With the flood gates blown open like the walls of Helms Deep, the LOTR comparisons would not stop. It was a good day to be a geek.

Lunch was called by the guides at the base of Lava Tower. The way this pillar of stone had formed was a miraculous sight. It jutted out of the ground over 100m high. The side we observed was brittle and crumbling. The rocks that had fallen landed in such a way that it seemed like it was once a grand stone wall that had been sundered into rubble like the Black Gates of Mordor after 1000 years of decay. We were now sitting at around 4800m above sea level. At this height the effects of a lower atmosphere were apparent. Members of our group began to get headaches and a few needed to take a short halts to catch their breath. These symptoms dwindled quickly since the drop down from Lava Tower was steep. However, the lack of oxygen was quickly replaced with harsh weather.

Poor weather systems rolled in around 1300 hrs every day. We learned the hard way. As we descended from Lava Tower the weather came upon us with relentlessness. We were walking into a strong wind with hail and rain whipping into our hoods. The clouds floated around us obscuring our vision to less than 50m. To start, none of us wore rain pants so we could feel it soak in and the wind whistled through our wet clothing chilling us down. The advantage to the area we were in was that the weather changed fast. It was about an hour of walking before the clouds began to break and soon after that a bit of sun would come out periodically. From the Lava tower down, the trail went from all rocky and barren to sporadic greenery accompanied by a series of waterfalls. Yet again, the change in terrain was amazing to see. Further down the trail we arrived at our new camp, signed in and prepared for the evening.

The view from this camp was breathtaking. To our north we had the peak of the mountain. To the west were the heights of the trails we had just come from. To the east was the Barranco wall, the large rock formation we were to scale the next day and finally to the south was the country side. We were high up and could see the city stretch across the landscape. At night it was like watching a valley of tiny twinkling lights. Paired with a crystal clear sky in which you could make out every shining star, it was a sight you would never get to see at home.



Chapter 8: Barranco Wall and Intestinal Troubles



By this stage in the journey we had begun adapting to the local food and even the water to some extent but it was not a smooth transition. A few members had been constipated for a few days now while others had the opposite problem. It is not a pleasant thing have intestinal problems while you are away from civilization. Luckily for us we are prepared and come from the land of pharmaceuticals. For the remainder of the trek, half of the Fellowship were popping pills of all sorts to keep their bodies in check. If it were prison, an Imodium dose

would be worth a carton of smokes. Ill feelings aside, we moved on to our next achievement: the climbing of Barranco wall. For me this was the most enjoyable day. It was more than just steep climbing. The hiking poles were stowed in our packs and we used our hands to clamour up portions of the rock face. It was a shorter day that seemed to be a bit easier than the others because of the downhill portion. The weather picked up again and obscured everything around us. Coming down a slope we saw the next camp. It was maybe 800m – 1000m away; not far at all but that was a lie. As we approached, we noticed that the ground that was obscured by cloud was just still cloud and not earth at all. The closer we got, the more cloud we saw and less ground was visible until we were close enough to realize that although we were now around

700m away from the camp as the crow flies, we had to go to the bottom a massive valley and up the other side. The faint glimmer of hope for an easy day vanished.

Group 2 rolled into camp wet and sore as per normal. We could not see it from across the valley, but the camp was on a considerably steep angle. So much so that whenever someone left their tent they would stand up what they thought was straight and get disoriented enough to stumble. Even the Mess Tent was perched at an awkward angle which made for amusing, high stakes eating and sitting. We finished up and got into our sleeping bags knowing that we would be sliding to the bottom of the tent repeatedly during the night.

Chapter 9: The Trek to the Top Camp

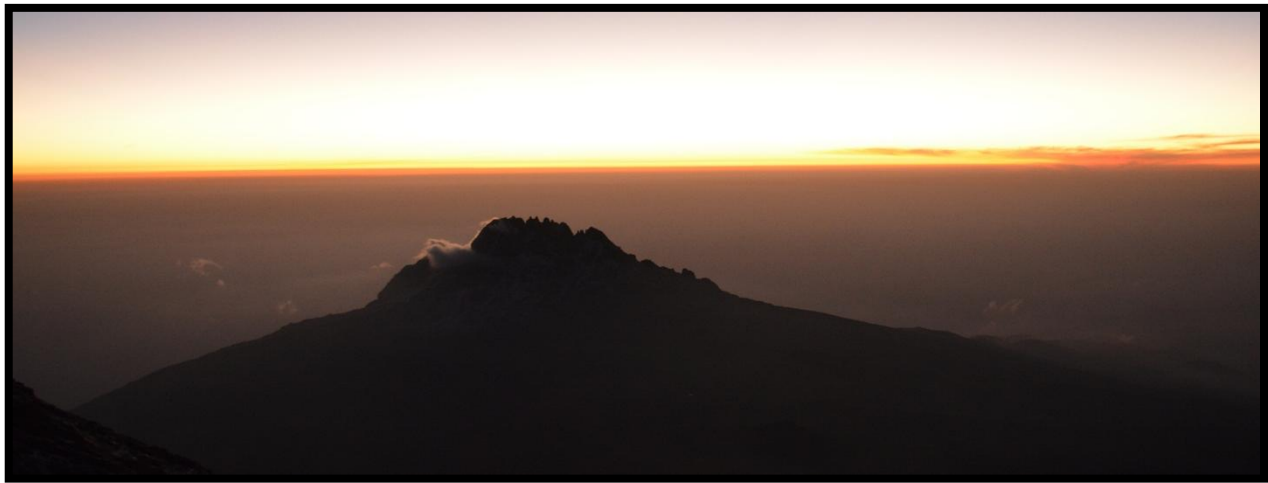
The final leg of the trip to our highest camp was uneventful. The landscape was rocky and turned into unending slivers of slate stone. There were juts of rock coming out of the ground at all different heights although the path we were on was quite even. There was a very steep rise at the final portion of the section. We did not make it into camp before the weather overcame us again. This time it was all hail and snow. By the time we reached the camp hut to sign in, the ground was covered in a layer of white. The snow came down even harder when we found the tent line. Everything was still being set up. Porters shouted instructions at each other, pelted by the deluge. After a short rest in the tents, the dinner call was sent out. We had a summit brief with the guides after dinner during which we had our final O₂ / heart rate competition. The guides explained what we should expect when we stepped off and how long it would take to reach the top. After a quick health and welfare check, the group racked out early knowing that in just a few hours we would start the final leg to reach the top of Mount Doom... Mount Kilimanjaro... Yes that one.

Chapter 10: The Top is a Lie

Reveille was 2300hrs. We awoke in darkness with only small flashlights to guide our path. The mess tent was ready with hot beverages and snacks to keep our energy up. Well rested are not words that one would use to describe our group. We shake out in our order of march with the slowest of the party in the lead. I am still taking up the rear. Baby steps are all we can take on the route up because of the thin air and darkness. Even though the mountain is not visible, a snake of twinkling lights zigzags back and forth in the darkness - up and up into nothing. It was a wondrous sight as though the stars were close enough to walk to.

Guys joked on the way up to keep themselves alert. Majors "Elrond" Virk and Major "Gimli" Lindsay were in the back and exchanged insults written in the snow as they walked, but there is only so many times you can write "Virk sucks" or "don't trust the elves" in the snow before it gets erased. While on the path there was another amusing encounter. Cpl "Mary" Pansagrau had lagged behind with an impending bowel movement. At this point in the pitch black, there were not many places to go but with a, "Yup, it's happening" he wandered off along a wide ledge and around a rock. I waited for him and knew he had found a comfortable spot when his headlamp went from white light to red. It was worth the laugh even though we now had to catch up with the main group. A slow catch-up mind you.

Along the way our group encountered its first major problem. "Arwen" Na, having never experienced cold below 0 before and living all her life around +20 was becoming concerned. She could not feel her feet or fingers, which as Canadians we know can be normal. But she was worried. We took a long pause, then decided to leave back 2 guides and 2 of our group, Lt "Treebeard" Ellis and Cpl "Samwise" Fleming while the rest pushed on. After "Arwen" Na recuperated under a blanket for a spell, she tried to finish the trek to the top but could not quite make it. At approximately 5500m, Na decided it was best for her to head back to camp. She had done exceptionally well but the cold had done her in.



Ellis and Fleming were now behind and pressed out a faster pace to make up time to the disagreement of their guide. While pushing themselves harder, the guide had kept asking them to take a break, to which they responded, "No we're fine". They eventually realized the guide was not with them and had stopped to sit down. He was not telling them to take a break but asking them to let him take a break. At the speed they were going, they quickly caught up with the remainder of the group at Stella Point.

This chapter is called "The Top is a lie" for a reason. It is because of a single sign. As the sun rose at our back the group was finishing its journey to the top. The guide was standing on the flat portion of the top congratulating us as we walked up one at a time. The hoots and hollers from other climbers could be heard as we finished the crest. Finally we saw it, the sign that we were at the peak of Africa... Or so we thought. Tired as we were we did not clue into the fact the sign just said welcome to Stella Point. It was the first crest, a sign that more or less meant "Welcome to the kind of flatish portion of the top of the mountain". All of us were cheering and taking pictures, happy we were done only to be betrayed by a false sign. Cpl "S.O.G." Halpin even took the time to recreate a photo that his uncle took when he climbed up to Everest. I realize that it was our own lack of situational awareness but I chose to blame the sign. All that was left was the walk around the crater rim at a slight grade to get to the actual point.



1. The actual peak of Africa

we could see fluffy white bumps to the end of the horizon. The Peak itself had a massive glacier on one side and a giant crater on the other. After taking it all in, we collected up a few rocks to go home with us then ventured back to the rest of the group at Stella Point. After a quick consolidation of water and snacks we prepared ourselves for the journey off of this great peak.

Reaching the actual peak and the real sign we found a second wind, in as much as you don't move too quickly. Cpl "Legolas" Lee found this out when he and Major "Gimli" Lindsay went for a short 25m sprint only to almost collapse from a lack of oxygen. At the top Polepole is the only way to go. The group all lined up in front of the Peak of Africa sign to begin the photo op; and what a photo op. We changed the flags that we were holding more times than I can remember with guys jumping in and out when needed. After this was done some of the Fellowship were getting headaches and dizziness from the altitude so we sent them back to Stella Point with one of the guides while the rest of us finished up. The views from the peak were spectacular. High above the cloud line as we were,

Chapter 11: Short Way Down

The sun was now beating down on us as we walked down the slope to get back to the summit base camp. Water was in limited supply as some of the Fellowship had drank all of theirs on the way up. Going down¹¹

was faster than going up but not by much. Exhaustion had set in and some of the lads were now feeling the effects of dehydration and altitude sickness. Group 2 arrive around an hour after group 1 did and it was not too long before everyone was in their sleeping bags for a nap.

The quick rest was out of the way and as hard as it may have been we needed to get moving again to a lower camp. The length of the trip was supposed to be around 4 or 5 more hours to get to the next camp. A discussion with the guides led to the decision of stopping at the camp 2-3 hours away instead. This meant the next day would have us walking a lot longer but it also meant that we would be well rested. We split back into the 2 groups again with the guys in the lead having a good to go and the guys having a bit of a rougher go in the back. Moving slowly we encountered a very peculiar sight. It was a group of stretcher looking devices piled to one side. These were long metal stretchers with bicycle wheels and shocks underneath. We learned that this device was used to evacuate injured (or dead) persons down the path from that point. It was meant for those people that did not have insurance covering Helicopter extraction. Even so, it was dubbed the Tanzanian Helicopter. A few pictures and laughs were had and we were underway again.

The terrain stayed rocky and rough for the bulk of the descent to the first camp. As we tromped down the path, more greenery was popping up until we were walking in a forest of low trees again with a sea of green treetops that could be seen on the down slopes. Though it was only a 3 hour walk, we were gassed out when the registration Hut was reached. Darkness rolled in as we went for dinner and after that, so did the rain. It came down for several hours and the party was fast asleep by the time it ended.



Morning came and with it, our final leg of the journey. With a quick packing of gear we set off again. Going was very slow this day. The path was a lot of stream beds intermixed with stairways of dirt and logs. It took maybe one hour of walking for the trees to seamlessly change from the shorter evergreen types into the tall growing jungle from the first day. As we walked, the porters from above whipped by with our equipment on their heads, carrying it as though it weighed nothing, smelling the finish line. The time ticked by while the ground passed underfoot. The path would level out or rise a bit on occasion and it would be a welcome change from the constant pressure on the knees of dropping down. After several more hours we reached the bottom. HCol "Bombadil" Hawthorne was there to greet us and to the surprise of "Arwen" Na, her husband managed to make it out to see her at the base even though he had just recovered from a bout of Dengue Fever. There was one more registration book to sign, then that was it. We had officially completed the Mount Kilimanjaro climb. Not a single Griffon helicopter was used to get down either.

Chapter 12: The Porters Party and the Tulip

A tradition we found out about was the donation of equipment. The porters did not have much nor were they well paid, so a collection of kit that climbers may have felt they did not need anymore was taken up. Again, being the generous folk that we are, we tried to dig deep and throw in as much gear as possible. There was everything from water bottles to rain gear and the CO even took the boots off his feet since they were in good shape and gave them up too. The gear was placed on mats in an orderly fashion while the guides pulled out the list of everyone's names. The system they had started off with the newest member of the team getting first pick and the most senior getting last pick. It seemed a surprisingly fair way of doing things. When all of the names on the list had been read, there was still enough left over for a few of them to grab a second round of items. It was impressive since there were over 60 support staff for us. When it was all said and done, they thanked all of us for our gifts to them and sang us a song. It sounded lovely even though I did not understand it and for all I know they could have been singing that we are all gullible foreigners. Many of the fellowship felt a bit disappointed because they knew that back in the bags they'd left at the hotel there was more they could have given. With the departure ceremony complete and kit stowed in the trucks, we departed for our hotel.

The African Tulip is where we were booked to stay. It was an awe inspiring hotel amidst the poor demeanor of the area. There was a shallow pool in the back and the dining area hosted a large support pillar in the form of a giant concrete tree. Valets took our bags to our rooms and brought us juice to quench our thirst. First on the list for every member of the team was to have a shower.

Later that evening we gathered in the lounge to relax and chat before dinner. It was good to relax and the beers were not going to drink themselves. The head guides showed up during this time and we were able to talk to them about distributing a bit more equipment that the guys wanted to donate. A collection was made and set aside for them for after dinner. The fellowship then gathered for their first dinner off the mountain, no fear or worry that the Eye of Sauron was upon them (last one I promise). With the meal now over, more packing was needed as our next trip was to Lake Manyara for the first part of the Safari.

Chapter 13: The Lake and the Crater

The group was lucky enough to have 2 days that we could spend on Safari. The first was at Lake Manyara. This was a gorgeous nature preserve with a host of different animals. The first priority for the safari trucks was to go hatches up with everyone poking their heads out. While not even in the preserve yet, countless Baboons could be seen at the side of the road. Right out of the gate we saw more baboons and monkey's than I have ever seen before. The guide also introduced us to what is called a "sausage tree". It is a tree that has its fruit dangling from it making it look like its growing sausages. The day spent in the preserve was fantastic. The group was able to see everything from Zebras to Lions. We even caught a quick glimpse of two Giraffes fighting – with those long legs it was awkward at best. With so much activity, the day flew by and we had to end it to go to the hotel.

The Lake Manyara lodge was the destination that evening. It was a very expensive looking place that was occupied by the lot of us. They threw us a bonfire party overlooking the lake and made the night for us. Dinner was occupied by talk of the safari and of what was the best war movie in each of the last 5 decades. Heated debates ensued. After dinner the CO presented some coins to the support staff of the hotel for their help arranging everything and then we all broke off to the lounge for a drink. After several hours and many shenanigans, it was adamantly recommended that our group go to bed.

The next morning, we traveled to the Ngorongoro Crater. This crater was formed when a volcano basically collapsed in on itself several million years ago. It left a 326sq km basin that is now a major nature preserve for the area. Many of the animals we saw were the same as Lake Manyara with one big exception, a Black Rhino. From a distance we saw all of the safari vehicles converging on one spot and the driver clued in that it must be a Rhino. Flooring it, we headed into the fray of trucks. With some fancy driving and illegal manoeuvres onto the grassland we took pole position and saw this huge animal up close. The best part of this portion of the excursion was the absolute madness of every vehicle in the reserve piling onto this tiny road. I think more pictures were taken of that than the Rhino.

It was around lunch time now and we needed a pit stop. We were taken to the Hippo Pool and saw some of these very happy beasts lounging in the water bobbing up and down out of the miniature lake. It was mentioned that a bag lunch would be given to us but I suppose our "bag" means something different because when we arrived at the lunch area they had a large tent set up for us with dining tables and fancy table cloths. A bar was established for drinks while cooks were busy BBQ'ing our lunch. It was by far the best "bag" lunch I have ever tasted. It was reminiscent of a bad movie about a rich person on safari. Again, North American hospitality has nothing on Africa.

The end of the safari also marked the end of our journey. Many adventures were had with stories to take home to the ones we care about. This trek will forever remain as a highlight of our lives, having made new friendships while strengthening old ones. The challenge for us all is to now discover a new path to adventure and best the tales of our road to the top of Africa.



OPERATION SUMMIT DUKE II

By Cpl Fleming

When the plan to send a group to Africa to climb Mt. Kilimanjaro was first revealed to us, I immediately thought, "I've got to get in on this". "I have always wanted to see Africa". "This is an amazing opportunity for me to realize a lifelong dream." Eventually, it occurred to me, as it did everyone, that I could possibly do something to help others and bring some things with me to give to people as gifts. Having kids myself, I wanted to bring things for children. I thought about what to bring; should I bring pens? Should I bring toothbrushes, toothpaste and soap? Whereas those things are important, they didn't really seem like gifts and might be a little insulting. "Here, have some soap". I decided to bring pencil crayons. They may not be as important to their physical wellbeing but they would certainly be more fun.

With a few weeks to go before our departure date, SSM Harris, liaised with a teacher friend and supplied a table full of school books that we could all bring, a few each, in our bags. We would carry them to our hotel where they would be picked up by someone who worked at a local orphanage. I brought a few home and placed them with my kit to be packed for the trip. With a week to go before our departure date, it occurred to me while picking my daughter up from school that the school could possibly have some old books to spare. I approached the office staff and they said they would look into it. The office lady took the ball and ran with it, putting the word out to all the districts librarians and on the Friday before our departure she presented me with a giant pile of children's books.

It was immediately obvious that there were far more than I could carry in my luggage. I drove down to Canadian Tire and bought a bunch of Rubbermaid tubs and zap straps and started drilling the lids so they could be secured. With 200lbs of books in 4 bins, I headed home.

Departure day arrived and I loaded all my gear and books into the car and headed for the airport. We distributed the bins among the group that could take extra luggage and soon we were Africa bound. Sitting on the plane, I found myself thinking about the children of the orphanage and what their reaction would be to receiving the books and all the other gifts the group had brought. Upon arrival in Africa, I began to feel that leaving the books to be picked up at the hotel, never to be seen again, seemed a disappointing prospect so I inquired about the possibility of taking them there ourselves. I was thrilled to hear that we would be traveling to the orphanage to deliver them and meet the children.

In the morning, we loaded into our convoy of LandCruisers, the tourist vehicle of choice, and began the journey from the style and luxury of our resort to the orphanage. As we drove, our surroundings became₁₄

increasingly impoverished. There was the odd comment about stray dogs and foul odors as we looked at the strange world that presented itself. We turned off the main route to a narrow dirt track through what seemed like an endless row of shacks surrounded by debris. On either side of the street, the open sewers competed with the smell of burning garbage. A local man upon seeing a convoy of tourists diving through his community began to yell in Swahili and gesture with his fist. We pulled off to the left at a wide point in the road opposite an archway with a sign saying KIBOWA.

We all exited the vehicles and began to unpack all our bins and duffels of books and gifts. As we walked toward the gate, I couldn't help but to feel an air of anticipation about giving the kids the books and gifts. We entered a small but tidy dirt courtyard to see a large group of children varying in age gathered around a couple of teachers in a doorway. They began to sing and clap a song to our group, "Welcome, Welcome, How do you do? Happy to see you. Happy to see you." I found myself somewhat embarrassed that I was standing there, in all my tourist glory, surrounded by these children singing happily. It occurred to me that I hadn't brought enough pencil crayons. Once the formality of their greeting was over, we all stood around looking at each other, not really sure what to do next. I began looking around at the kids. In a doorway a few meters away, there were three kids, two girls and a boy. The youngest, a little girl of about two or three, standing in front of the door, was dressed in a Spiderman hoodie. She had the sunken cheeks and eyes of a child suffering from malnutrition and disease. She looked at us mistrustingly. In the door threshold sat the other two, a boy and a girl of around four. The boy sat with his elbows on his knees wringing his hands like an old man. He had an expressionless look on his face that gave the impression that he had seen far more in his short life than a little boy should. The girl sitting next to him was another story. She had a mischievous grin and wore a pink backpack with Korean writing on it. I had to disregard my initial sense of shame in taking pictures of them. The girl started to make faces and ham it up for the camera. She reminded me of my daughter Bella at home. She could not sit still for a picture or avoid making a funny face.

We asked if we could break out some of the things we had brought and got the go ahead. Clews pulled out a pack of Crayons he had brought and handed them to the little girl. She looked at them with a puzzled look on her face and looked back at us. We indicated to her that they were for her. Her eyes immediately lit up with the most genuine look of joy and excitement I have ever seen and she turned and ran, holding them high above her head, yelling to her little friends to show them what she had.

Against a wall under a clothesline, Cam was pumping up the soccer balls that he had brought. He gave one to Spidergirl and she stood there hugging it like a stuffie. It was almost as big as she was. He then pulled four goal markers out of his bag and marked out a soccer field in an alcove in the courtyard under the clothesline. In moments, a fierce game was on with several of the older boys and BCR's and any hesitation in the group melted away. One of the boys checked Nathan, driving him head first into a concrete wall. Everyone pointed and laughed.

A group of people was gathered around the bins of books including the SSM's teacher friend and one of the older boys. He was dressed neatly in a sweater and was looking over one of the math books. He was very excited about it as he talked to the teacher. It was then that it became obvious to me the potential impact our visit could have on some of the children. Education is not the right that it is to children in Canada. It's a gift.

Soon, we were told it was time to leave and we slowly filtered back to the trucks. I found myself lagging behind, not wanting to leave, wishing I had brought more. Cam walked back with a little girl holding his finger in her tiny hand. As the vehicles pulled away up the road, a group of kids ran alongside our vehicle, including the little girl with the pink backpack. She yelled out "Bye" to me, over and over until she couldn't keep up. Soon the kids were out of sight and a quiet fell over the vehicle, each of us looking quietly out the window, thinking about the experience.

That evening, back in our room, Cam and I talked about the unexpectedly powerful impression the experience had had on us. He mentioned the little girl holding his finger and we wondered about what had happened in the life of "the little man" wringing his hands in the doorway to make him look so distant. We₁₅

had planned to go to the market that day but elected to go to the orphanage instead, something we both felt was far more important and long lasting than any tourist trinket we might find. That night, we each had a hard time getting to sleep.

Soon, the preparation for the climb and the eventual move to the mountain focused us all on the challenge ahead. As the climb progressed, amazing sights and experiences came daily, but all the while, there was the memory of the children of the orphanage in Arusha somewhere in our thoughts. On our last night on the mountain, LCol Sajjan asked the group as we sat around the table in the mess tent, what was each member's most vivid, powerful memory of the trip so far. When I was asked, I said, as amazing an experience as the climb was, with the exotic terrain and plant life, the image of the headlamps of the other climbers as they ascended to the summit in the dark, the porters and guides that we had all gotten to know, I thought the one thing that will stand out in my mind the strongest will be the children of the orphanage.

OPERATION SUMMIT DUKE II – TANZANIA IN 10 DAYS

By Major Paul Lindsay

In the middle of a typical planning discussion with LCol Sajjan 2 years ago he said, "I'm thinking we should climb Mt. Kilimanjaro next year..." On the heels of a successful battlefield tour in Europe, the idea seemed fairly straightforward on the surface. However, it would soon develop into OP SUMMIT DUKE II, one of the most ambitious trips the Regiment had ever undertaken. The first planning brief on the Op was given by Captain Vince Virk in Oct 2012, when it was agreed that the trip would be privately funded and include members of the extended Regimental family. As a result, the plan would be shelved until mid-2013 in order raise funding for the climb.

In August 2013, Major Paul Lindsay picked up where Capt Virk had left off and continued with the planning process. At this point team selection was underway and the most critical part of the plan, physical training for the climb, was about to begin. Every soldier selected for the trip was dedicated to a strict training regime to ensure a maximum chance of success on the mountain. Regular briefings and group training sessions were held as the departure date neared.

On the afternoon of January 27th, the team met at the Vancouver Airport. WO Harris and the junior ranks had organized a collection of used school books to be donated to an orphanage in Tanzania and six Rubbermaid tubs filled with knowledge arrived with them. After a long flight to Amsterdam, the climb team had a 24 hour layover before the flight into Kilimanjaro International Airport. Everyone took the opportunity to catch a train from the hotel and explore Amsterdam for a few hours before returning to get ready for an early flight.

After another 10 hours in the air, the BCR climb team arrived in Tanzania. With the exception of another passenger being repeatedly and violently ill in the trash can next to the immigration lineup, everyone got through without incident. After another hour by bus, the team finally arrived at Lake Duluti Lodge and enjoyed a delicious late dinner before retiring to their assigned rooms.

After breakfast, the team headed out to Kirou Bora Orphanage to deliver the donated textbooks and some soccer balls. They received a warm welcome from a group of children of all ages who were genuinely happy to receive the books. After a few group photos, the team carried on to the future site of the Agha Khan University and got a briefing on the multi-million dollar campus development plan before heading for a late lunch at the "River House" restaurant, a local favourite.

Back at Lake Duluti, the team started reorganizing kit and packing for the Kilimanjaro climb before being treated to a barbecue dinner in the garden at the hotel lodge. Unfortunately, Sgt(Ret'd) Chris Alden's bags were lost by the airline and had not been located in the interceding day. He had almost no gear to make the climb. Without hesitation, the team pooled all of their extra kit together and was able to provide enough gear for Chris to be comfortable throughout. Excitement had started to build during the final preparations for the climb.

The following morning, the team was met by the head guide, Kassim, and his assistants guides before everyone loaded up into Land Cruisers for the drive to the base of the mountain. Once registration was complete in early afternoon, day 1 was underway. What follows is a daily synopsis as recorded in the journal of climb team member Major Lindsay:

Day 1. Machame Gate to Machame Camp. We start slow and steady on a wide trail taking us up through the rainforest. It is humid and sticky but spirits are high. The guides have set quite a slow pace, but we trust them to take care of us for the long haul. We observe a few groups who are their way down – this route is meant for ascending only, so they must have encountered injuries or other problems at the start. Everyone is excited and conversation is lively. It's quite hot and humid and we can't see much yet as the large trees block out most of the view. The trail is smooth and well maintained. After about 5 hours, we reach Machame Camp at 9,927 feet up. Everyone is fresh and chatty, but settle into their tents fairly quickly after dinner.



Day 2. Machame Camp to Shira Hut. I awake to clanging pots and shouting in Swahili. Apparently breakfast is on. We are fed cream of wheat, eggs, and toast before heading out. We start out again at a slow pace and about an hour in we determine that one 18 person group is too unwieldy for good pace management and breaks. We split up into two and continue. We break out above the rainforest early on and catch our first glimpse of the peak. The vegetation gets more and more sparse and the trail has turned from a well maintained path to bare granite and loose rock. We pass a group carrying a stereo and listening to Justin Bieber - Someone suggests tossing the radio down the mountain. I am inclined to agree. Major Virk and I kick off a lively team-wide debate about the utility of trekking poles. He supports their use and I do not. The argument entertains us for much of the day. We stop for lunch on a large outcropping. The local Ravens are clever and quick; they manage to steal another climber's sandwich when he is not paying attention, much to his dismay.

The trail changes again as we continue: it is now just bare granite sculpted by thousands of years of rain. We crest another outcropping and it starts to rain but not enough to make us stop and dig our rain jackets out. After another hour we are up in the clouds and the temperature drops significantly right before it starts raining in earnest. Everyone digs out their jackets this time. The rain churns up the mud a and makes the

bare rock slick – it's tough going for a while. We crest the final hill and see Shira camp laid out in front of us like it's on a shelf. We are treated to fantastic views down the mountain toward Moshi from 12,355 feet up but are exposed to a cold, hard wind. Hoods go up and hands are jammed into pockets for warmth.

Everyone has warmed up by dinner and we pass around the pulse-oximeter. Being a tent full of soldiers, getting the best results immediately becomes a competition. Some guys try deliberately slowing their breathing to lower their pulse with mixed results. Nobody has any oxygen issues.



Day 3. Shira Hut to Baranco Camp. Today will be our first altitude test - we will ascend to about 15,500 feet by midday, then descend back down to 13,000 to sleep in order to acclimatize. We start at a quicker pace and steadily reel in other climbing groups. We hike over undulating valleys and there is pretty much no vegetation anymore – it looks like the surface of the moon. It is hard to get a sense of how far we've come as we're often socked in by cloud with limited visibility. My debate over trekking poles with Maj Virk continues and we draw LCol Sajjan into the debate along with a few others. MCpl Lee, our designated documentarian, is working hard running up and down the trail to take stills and video of the ascent from every angle. We stop for lunch at a massive vertical volcanic rock outcropping called the Lava Tower. We end up singing Oh Canada to an American couple who quietly admit to us that they can't really remember the lyrics. Everyone is suffering a little bit from the altitude and we are happy to descend. The first part is slippery loose rock and quite technical. I make my point about trekking poles by completing the first pitch of the descent with my hands in my pockets. Partway down, we hear a crack of thunder and within five minutes there is torrential downpour. We're soaked instantly. We are getting close to camp and increase the speed and press on. It's been a tiring day and some guys are running out of water – Still, we make it to Baranco Camp by mid-afternoon at 13,000 feet. It's still raining and the wind has picked up. 30 minutes after settling into our tents to warm up, the sun comes out again. The clouds move off and we are treated to a breathtaking view of the summit – although it does not appear any closer than day 1. At dinner we learn that the other climbing group has taken the liberty of assigning us all nicknames based on "Lord of the Rings" in our absence. None are flattering but everyone has a good laugh.



Day 4. Baranco Camp to Karanga Hut. Today we kick off with a 600 foot climb up the Baranco wall. It's classic west coast scrambling, but with plenty of hand holds – everyone does well on this section and it takes about 1.5 hrs. We take a quick break at the top for a group photo – we are literally in the clouds and visibility is minimal. Next we traverse a slippery muddy ridgeline and head down into the next valley. It starts raining again with a vengeance. The trail leads us to a mountain stream with a few small trees at the edge. It's the first greenery we've seen all day. We cross the valley and head straight up the other side. It's steep, tough going but we make it up quickly and roll into camp early. Today is a short day and we're at about the same height – it's our last chance to acclimatize. It's still raining after lunch and we all retreat back to our tents to stay dry. The weather changes and the sun burns away the clouds, once again revealing the peak. It looks a little closer now. MCpl Lee interviews a few of our guys on camera for his video but is killing his batteries quickly. Everyone is energetic at dinner due to the shorter hiking day. At this point about half of the team is suffering gastro intestinal problems due to water, food, or both but everybody soldiers on.

Day 5. Karanga Hut to Barafu Hut (Base camp). Spirits are high as we set off again. The guides set a slower pace today in order to save energy for our summit attack at midnight. We're treated to some great views for the first while, but the wind soon carries in clouds again. The trail is loose mud and shale at this point but not too steep. We are high enough up that nothing grows or moves up here and it's pretty cold. A long steady hike takes us across several shallow valleys and up to Barafu hut at 15,239 feet. It starts hailing hard just as we reach the camp. The hail turns to snow and within an hour there is a thorough coating on our tents and filling the valley below. After lunch we discuss preparations for the ascent with the guides. We will rise at 2330hrs and launch for the peak at 0000hrs. This will put us at the summit by about 0730. The weather changes three more times before a quick dinner. Everyone passes the pulse oximeter-test (still a competition, despite having no control over the results). The tents are filled with nervous excitement and conversations about gear for the peak. We all try to get some sleep before the big ascent.

Day 6. To the Summit and Down to High Camp. Midnight comes too early and it is very cold. Everyone is layered up and sporting headlamps for the ascent in the darkness. The headlamps illuminate little cones of falling snowflakes in front of everyone. After a warm drink we set out for the final climb of our journey. There's about an inch and a half of snow covering everything, but the trail frozen dirt that is not too slippery. The guides set a very slow pace to compensate for altitude so the group sets out together. At about 0300hrs everyone starts getting drowsy and we stop for a snack. Some guys are in their own private struggle to stay warm and stay focused while others are engaged in positive chatter, keeping everyone motivated. A few more hours of ascending go by and I catch myself looking over my shoulder and willing the sun to rise and warm us up. I look back up and can see the whole route above illuminated by dozens of headlamps strung out like Christmas lights. As we approach Stella Point (18,864 ft) at 0700hrs, we are rewarded by a beautiful sunrise behind us. Everyone is feeling the altitude now. The sunlight makes the snow sparkle across the mountain and high fives and congratulations circulate through the group. We have only about 400 feet of ascending left to Uhuru Peak. We gather ourselves and start slogging up the crater rim to the summit. Glaciers shine in the sun to our left and we can see down into the mountain's vast crater to our right. We pass several delirious, wide-eyed, shambling climbers being coaxed down by grim-faced guides. Some can barely stand up.

60 minutes later we reach the peak. Everyone celebrates in their own way before coming together for group photos in front of the Uhuru Peak sign at 19,340 feet. After spending far more time than is recommended at the peak, we begin our descent.



We split back into 2 groups for the descent and our guide takes off like a shot down the mountain. We take it as a challenge and charge after him. Everyone is immediately feeling better because we're descending. After 15 minutes we're all soaked in sweat because there's now full sunshine and we're all still wearing our ascent layers. The high speed descent has spread the group out all over the place and is beating people up, so we gear down while we're waiting and regroup. As we continue down, we pass the ominous frame of a "death stretcher" with mountain bike tires. Our guide explains that it is used to convey unlucky dead climbers, back down the mountain. The sunlight has turned the trail into a mix of loose rock, mud and slush- the combination makes for an exciting descent but its hard work to stay upright. We are back at base camp by 1100hrs. We replenish our water and get a few hours to nap before continuing down the mountain. Everyone is exhausted even after the nap, so the guides set a more reasonable pace as we set out for High Camp. The route is essentially a goat trail of loose rock, but we push down to High Camp in about 90 minutes. It's pouring raining again and everyone is moving a little slower than usual. At dinner we reflect on our favourite moments of the climb and turn in early for the final descent tomorrow.

Day 7. High Camp to Mweka Village. We rise early at 0630 hrs, grab a quick breakfast and head out in our groups. The route is a washed out streambed and is extremely slippery. Someone has clearly tried to put steps in but they have long since washed away and we all have many close calls navigating it. After descending about 4000 feet, we pass through Mweka Camp and carry on down toward the base. The route is actually a trail again and the going is much easier – we have re-entered the rain forest. The cloud cover finally lifts and we get some sunshine. The trail continues to get better as we descend and we are at the bottom in just 3.5 hrs. We're greeted by HCol Ted Hawthorne at the bottom, who joins us for a celebratory buffet lunch in a small courtyard behind the park building.

LCol Sajjan formally thanks our guides and porters and we end by donating some of our lightly used equipment to the porters. They surprise us by singing "Kilimanjaro" together in Swahili, complete with dancing, as a farewell. We pile back into the Land Cruisers and head back to the hotel in Arusha. Everyone is looking forward to their first shower in 7 days. We've hiked just over 60km linear and ascended/descended over 8km.



SAFARI AND HOME

With the climb completed, the group turned its attention to a half-day safari in Lake Manyara National Park. Arriving early in the afternoon, the team dropped their luggage in their rooms and returned to the trucks to head into the National Park. The trip was extremely successful. Within the first hour, everyone had seen countless animals including an elephant, several giraffes, three lionesses in a tree and another two lions guarding a recent kill. The evening ended with an appetizer from the viewpoint overlooking Lake Manyara, followed by dinner at the hotel restaurant.

The following day saw the group travel to the Ngorongoro Crater, an eight square kilometer wildlife reserve naturally bounded by the 5000 foot crater rim. The view from the rim was incredible but got even better after descending to the floor. The amount of wildlife on display was simply staggering, with verdant green grass and grazing animals spread all the way to the horizon. New sightings included hippopotami, ostriches, Cape buffalo, hyenas and a rare endangered black rhinoceros. To cap off the day, the team had a delicious catered lunch under open tentage in the middle of the crater next to a hippopotamus pool. Appetites for sightseeing and food satisfied for the time being, the team returned to the African Tulip Hotel in Arusha for one last night and a celebratory dinner by the pool.

The team sadly waved goodbye to Arusha and Tanzania. 27 hrs of flights and layovers later, they were safely back at Vancouver International airport. The final chapter of the trip was a surprise greeting by LCol (Ret'd) Archie Steacy while being played into the arrivals lounge by the Regimental Piper. The climb gave all involved a chance to experience a once in a lifetime trip and strengthen their professional and personal relationships with several of their peers. They will carry on to share their experiences with those members who were unable to make the trip, continuing to build esprit de corps and stir interest in further training and activities. By all accounts, Operation SUMMIT DUKE II was a resounding success and the entire Regimental family is looking forward to the next great adventure.

MY JOURNAL ENTRY

By Cpl Togeretz, CH

31 JAN 14

OP SUMMIT DUKE II

Today we visited an orphanage to drop off books and soccer balls for the kids. Not many of the young children were there because they were in school, but some of the older children (age 12-13) were there. We played a small game of soccer, which I think was enjoyed by kids and Dukes alike. It was discomfoting to see how little these children had, but at the same time humbling to see what kind of happiness a gift as simple as a soccer ball could bring. It makes you regret complaining about the wool socks grandma gave you last Christmas.

It will be an awesome experience to climb Mt. Kilimanjaro and go on safari, but I think the visit to the orphanage might just be the highlight of our trip. As we were leaving I was walking towards our land cruiser and a 3-4 year old girl was walking beside me. She looked up at me with a mix of emotions in her eyes which reminded me of my 5 year old sister back in Canada. She reached up and held on to my pinky finger and walked with me to the vehicle and I had to pry her hand away in order to get into the vehicle. Whoever you are, whether a trained soldier or a clueless civilian, it is impossible to keep your heart from bonding a connection to both a country and an individual child in a situation like that. I would like to see a team of Dukes helping this orphanage in the future.

On another note; we begin our climb tomorrow. I am excited and nervous. Most of us haven't seen the mountain yet so it is hard to mentally prepare ourselves. I am not worried though, the group of Dukes we have sent here will do everything we can to get everyone up to the top of that hill.