

How the Military Deal with Snakes

The Armed Services are not great fans of the civil service. They often joke that *'Britain has invented a new missile. It's called the civil servant - it doesn't work and it can't be fired.'*

I was therefore pleased to find that the various elements of the military also like to joke about their own colleagues. I particularly like the last two items in this summary of how the various branches deal with snakes-

1. Infantry: Tracks snake through jungle. Snake smells them and quickly leaves area, travelling upwind.
2. Parachute Regiment: Lands on and kills snake.
3. Armour: Runs over snake, laughs and looks for more snakes.
4. Cavalry: Treats snake with haughty disdain as having no impact on primary objective – to hold London against the Roundheads at all costs.
5. Royal Marine Commando: Plays with snake, gets smashed with snake. Eats snake.
6. Combat Engineer: Studies snake. Prepares tactical plan for fixing snake using counter-mobility assets and defeating snake using mobility assets. Chain of command pays no attention. Snake falls into hole dug by infantry and drowns.
7. Artillery: Fires 3 hour concentrated barrage. Misses snake. Tree blown up by stray round falls on snake and kills it. Mission declared successful and all participants awarded gallantry medals.
8. Special Forces: Makes contact with snake and, ignoring Foreign Office directives, builds rapport with snake and starts winning its heart and mind. Trains it to kill other snakes. Files massive expense claims. Writes bestseller "Python Two Zero"
9. Army Medical Services: Snake dies by mistake on operating table. Dissects snake.
10. Royal Navy: Fires 183 missiles from 17 ships. Estimates 60% of snake killed. Makes PowerPoint presentation to MoD Select Committee on how Naval forces are the most cost-effective means of conducting anti-snake operations.
11. Territorial Army: Kills snake by accident on weekend camp. Keeps quite about it.

12. RAF: Obtains geo-co-ordinates for snake. Alerts 40 Jaguars, 20 Harriers, Raf Regiment. Loads laser-guided bombs by mistake. Flies in at 20,000 feet. Can't find snake. Drops bombs in sea on way home. Returns to base for crew rest, dry-cleaning collection, facial and manicure.
13. Intelligence Corps: Snake? What snake? Only 4 of 35 indicators of snake presence currently active. Assesses potential for snake activity as low. Dies of snakebite.
14. Defence Logistic Organisation: Orders 2-year study by Anderson Consultants at cost of 1.5m, generation massive workload at grade 1 staff level. Report kinds that killing snake may contribute to 20% output costing savings by inclusion of snake meat in tri-Service messing. Snake Meat Implementation Team formed, with 2-star tri-Service steering group. Aim to introduce snake meat into all messes and ration packs by 2002. Snake experts from Special Forces and Gurkhas told not know what talking about. High profile £2M PR campaign launched featuring celebrity chef Ainsley Harriott and retired 4-star officers keen to supplement their excessive pensions. Snake meat launched in Service messes and restaurants to resounding clamour of apathy. Desperate to recoup lost money. Army demolishes 300 married quarters and sells snake meat holdings to Indian and Canadian Armed Forces.
15. Defence Procurement Agency: Decide they want to buy a Snake. Offer ambiguous contract out for tender. Contract states that an ell will be supplied to meet the performance characteristics of a snake as laid out in the aforementioned ambiguous contract. 6 years late and 3 billion pounds over budget, the project is scrapped and a COTS snake is bought from the US for \$10 billion.

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