

JUMPING INTO THE JUNGLE

Tim Bowden, in his book *One Crowded Hour* about cameraman Neil Davis, tells about an incident that happened in Borneo during the confrontation between Malaysia and Indonesia in 1964.

A group of Gurkhas – an indigenous people mainly from mid-western and eastern Nepal, well known for their history and their role in the unification of modern-day Nepal – was asked if they would be willing to jump from transport planes into combat against the Indonesians if the need arose. The Gurkhas had the right to turn down the request because they had never been trained as paratroopers.

The Gurkhas usually agreed to do anything, Davis said, but on this occasion they provisionally rejected the plan. But the next day, one of their non-commissioned officers sought out the British officer who made the request and said they had discussed the matter further and would be prepared to jump under certain conditions.

“What are they?” asked the British officer.



The Gurkhas told him they would jump if the land was marshy or reasonably soft with no rocky outcrops, because they were inexperienced in falling. The British officer considered this, and said that the dropping area would almost certainly be over jungle, and there would not be rocky outcrops, so that seemed all right. “Was there anything else?” he asked.

“Yes,” said the Gurkhas. They wanted the plane to fly as slowly as possible and no more than 100 feet high. The British officer pointed out the planes always flew as slowly as possible when dropping troops, but to jump from 100 feet was impossible, because the parachutes would not open in time from that height.

“Oh,” said the Gurkhas, “that’s all right, then. We’ll jump with parachutes anywhere. You didn’t mention parachutes before!”

Any organization can use such Gurkha-like commitment and courage.

– Beecher Hunter