

# *To Sleep or Not To Sleep*

## **Whistling Dixie**

by Denis Cook (RIP: 21 May 2017)

### *377th Combat Security Police at Tân Sơn Nhứt - February 1968*

As a member of the 377th Combat Security Police at Tan Son Nhut, Vietnam, I was assigned a sandbag bunker while we were constantly on alert. We were on post 22 hours a day, the remaining 2 hours we returned to base for a shower, clean clothes, and food (at least two of the basic three-S's). All posts were doubled or tripled up on manpower. Because we were on post so long, we could only sleep while on duty, and that took some getting used to.

If I remember the rules correctly: "NO RADIOS, NO READING MATERIAL, AND NO SLEEPING ON DUTY." Offenders would be hung by the neck until dead!!! But after 24 hours the body starts to retaliate by playing tricks. First there are daydreams of round eyes. Then you see things that aren't there (round eyes again). Your mouth becomes dysfunctional, and disconnected from your brain: "HEY MIKE, YOU'RE THE DUMBEST UGLIEST DAM THING I EVER SAW IN MY LIFE! YO! AND YOUR MAMA...." Your brain no longer *understands* the term logic.

Finally, you instantaneously nod-off in mid-sentence, totally asleep, and immediately wake up scared too death that you just fell asleep on duty! You realize that's what happened and accounts for your neck being whiplashed as your head fell off your shoulders and hit the middle of your back---while your mouth played bug-trap.

The first night I just couldn't convince myself to close my eyes on duty. Sleeping on post is... a... a... *SIN*... immoral ... God is watching... and sarge said the world as I knew it, *for me*, would---end! and he would personally choke me'til I did *the chicken!* But ... I'm... so... sleep... eeee, I'd give anything to be sleeping in my bunk---despite the choppers taking off over my barracks.

The second night I fought the urge as long as I could. And when I thought of giving in---the boot camp training *prohibited sleeping on post!* And just when Mike, and I begin working out a scheme to sleep on our post, which was positioned close to the 057 Gate, sporadic sniper fire would cut loose on the Gate---and did so every few hours.

The Sandman was working overtime and my body was decomposing into a zombie-state: I needed sleep desperately. Finally, I convinced Mike to sleep---*first* (if his world didn't end, I would try it), as he was as anxious as I about not breaking the golden rule instilled in our DNA by every NCO in the Air Force. I assured him that it would be Okay---*what could go wrong? I'll keep half an eye open on the fence line."*

Trying to stay alert, for a zombie, I found my C-rats and absentmindedly set an open can of pears on the sandbag. The next mouth full of pears seemed to be alive. It was alive---with an entire population of ANTS attempting to drag the can (or my bunker?) toward the V.C. line. *Figures*. My disconnected Id began to think that was hilariously funny. *Hey ... anyone seen my bunker?* But I couldn't laugh without waking dead-Mike, and drawing fire. So I decided to let the horde of ants work hard dragging the can for a yard or two before reclaiming it! *Heh-heh...* and I'll recapture my can of pears and I'll *WIN!* Oh my God---I need sleep.

About 1 AM, I woke Mike and I crawled in my make-shift bed (rat-infested bunker) for some needed shut eye. I told Mike to wake me at the first sign of any activity. Mike thanked me for letting him sleep and reassured me that I would have a *wakeup call* if he detected *anything*. "What could go wrong?" he reminded me.

I remember dreaming about how good it felt to sleep in the sunshine. The sun was so bright, not a cloud in the sky. As I lay slumbering in the sunlight I heard a faint whistling sound and the snapping of a bed sheet. It got louder by the second until I heard a loud *BOOOOONG*. I jumped to my feet, waking with a start, and sure enough it *was* a bright and sunny day---at 1:30 AM---but strangely, only at my position was in the sunlight. The rest of the base was dark. *Why am I lit up like on-stage?*

As I came to my senses I realized that Snoopy dropped a flare directly over my position. The canister, whistling through the air, just missed crashing into my bunker. Worse yet, Snoopy lit my bunker up with a billion candles power---Uncle Ho could see *me* from Hanoi! As I stood there, basking in the glow of the midnight-sun-flare, I slowly come to my senses. My eyes focused on the jeep sitting 3 feet from me with the Duty Officer glaring from the passenger seat. I braced myself for the stream of profanities and other unrecognizable BS that would stream from the Lt.'s lips. Man, I've done it now, LBJ---here I come. *I wonder if they have rats and cockroaches in Leavenworth?---do they like pears?* All I wanted was a little shut eye ... and *what happened to that sell-out MIKE?* He, what, fell asleep again??? Oh well, I didn't like this job anyway.

The Sargent is giggling---*my ass is grass---I don't wanna do the chicken!* He couldn't wait to *get me back* since I trounced him in a game of hearts. Of course my head was bare (helmets made for hard pillows but what works, works). Then I heard the D-O scream, "COOK, I SEE YOU LOST YOUR HELMET, AGAIN!" OH, NO... not *that* D-O again. I thought he forgot about our last little encounter when I lost my Helmet throwing it defending government property (me) from **King Rats**. Then the mod squad broke out in a roar, laughing till the M60 mounted on the jeep about fell off.

The bottom-line of this story is: 1) *Don't get caught without your helmet while in the light of a flare*, 2) *Don't open peaches or pears until you're ready to eat them*, and 3) *Sleeping was tolerated, but not wearing your helmet wasn't!* My sentence was 10 more months of a 12 months tour in-country.

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