

MOVEMENT



It was my first night outside a camp, after about a week in-country. I reported to "B" Company, 4th Platoon at bridge 19. The platoon Sergeant, "Big O," told me what I needed to know: (1) you are an FNG, (2) there's the depository for human excrement, & (3) go burn the contents. I did so and replaced the bottom third of a 55-gallon drum by the river where I had been directed, returning to my assigned bunker at the west side of the bridge.

The time for my first guard duty was midnight to 4. It was the monsoon season, with a dark dreary night raging. The guy I relieved, Fruitcake, told me to keep checking through the starlight scope because he thought he might have seen some "movement down by the shitter." I did so for a half hour or so, but it was almost impossible to discern anything because of the star twinkles' enhancement of the torrential raindrops.

Then I did think I saw some erratic motion in the indicated area. I did not want my first impression to be as a fraidy cat, nor did I want to single-handedly ward off an assault; I woke up my squad leader, who grumbled his way up the ladder to my lookout level, mumbling something uncomplimentary about the FNG, to take a look for himself. In a few seconds he became startled, woke up everybody else (two) in our bunker with an efficient report on the movement and its location: "Get the fuck up – there's movement at the shitter." He told me to call Bunker 3.

"We think we might have movement."

"Movement where?"

"Down by the shitter."

They must have also looked through their starlight scope because I soon heard them report to Big O,

"We have movement."

"Where?" he inquired.

"Down by the shitter."

His command bunker was on a slight hill and across Highway 19 from the #2 & #3 bunker, and the bridge itself somewhat obscured the view, but within a few more minutes he confirmed that he, too, had observed "movement at the shitter." He put the entire platoon on Red Alert and a reported to Company HQ that we suspected an attack on the bridge might be coming from the river north.

Sure enough, within a minute or two I observed more movement and we all opened fire in the direction of the threat - I with the M-60 and bunker 3 with rifles. When no one could see bodies or other evidence through the scope after ceasing fire, we remained on high alert. Then Big O confirmed additional movement. At that we opened fire again, this time adding an M-40 to the array. The rain still impeded us from making out any casualties after this volley, so a flare was sent from bunker #1 – nothing of note seen.

This cease-fire may have lasted 5-6 minutes when the radio crackled there was "movement down by the shitter." To the earlier cacophony of small arms, machine gun, and grenade launcher, bunker #1 added its mortar fire; one of the closer guys lobbed a hand grenade. We decided the M-80 must have done the trick because there was no movement from or problem with that area for the rest of my watch. One lesson I then learned on my first night in the field is that no matter what has happened you can easily get to sleep when you're not on watch.

I was awakened shortly thereafter – at the first light of dawn – by Gary Giafredi. The Greedy Wop said:

"Tennessee, you remember that movement down by the shitter?"

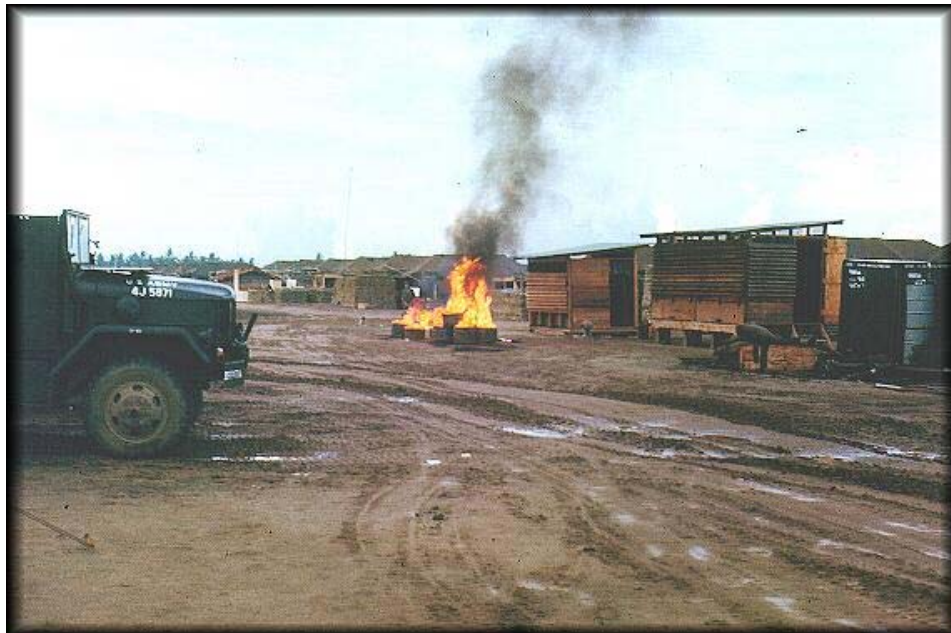
"Umh umh" (like I could have forgotten).

"Well, it was the shitter."

This was pre-*CSI*, nevertheless our primitive reconstruction techniques quickly revealed that the flooding river had lifted up the drum, floating it to various obstructions where it would stay lodged until the next wave or incoming fire had set it in motion again. Our shitter was in bad shape.

I don't think anyone ever amplified a report on this incident, or explained to the REMFs why bridge 19 needed such an atypical ammo re-supply. You can guess who had to make the new shitter; C-4 is really versatile.

I learned much useable info on this first watch. It was a good day.



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