

A Happier Moment in the Middle East

This story is about an experience I once had when I was with the United Nations, stationed in the Middle East. While our Headquarters for the 73 Canadian Service Battalion was located in Ismalia, Egypt, a short distance from the Suez Canal, most of the responsibilities that I had as Sr. Logistic Officer, was to provide emergency response to the Operational needs out in the Sinai Desert, situated between the factions at war with each other, Egypt and Israel. We had several Battalions located from Port Said all the way down to Sharm el Sheik on the Red Sea. They consisted of the Swedes, Finnish, Ganaians and Indonesians - each had a Battalion that was responsible for the monitoring of their territories, and were responsible to the Canadians for their respective functioning and security. Oh yes, there was one more Battalion located with us, the Polish (referred to as the POLOG's) while we were known as the CANLOG's.

Our job was to respond with priority to vehicles' breakdowns, serious medical treatments, water purification breakdowns, communication breakdowns, weapon response, air conditioning breakdowns, grader (bulldozer) assistance for severe sandstorms, etc. This coverage would occur on an ongoing basis (the co-ordination from our office to the Mobile Repair Teams (MRTs), and one person from our cell might occasionally accompany the team responding to the details if it was suspected that ongoing assistance would be needed. On one such occasion, we were asked for Recovery services from the desert for a Swedish vehicle that had to be abandoned after Desert driving instruction. The priority message had been received by our Communication Group and at the end of the transmission it requested that I (personally) accompany the MRT to the co-ordinates indicated and to be there at a predetermined time. I thought it odd, when I received same, but never the less we got the HYAB Recovery vehicle ready with the necessary equipment on board, and away we went. As I had taken great pains to establish a good rapport with the various Battalions, I wanted to make certain this one went well too, as it was a well known fact that one shouldn't proceed out in the desert without a knowledgeable guide, due to all the mines that were still un-accounted for out there.

Little did I know that this operation was a set-up, and when we got to the co-ordinates, we were met by a Swedish Police patrol, who directed the HYAB one way, after convincing me to get into one of their vehicles and proceed with them to the desert! It was quite some distance out to where they were going, and I was getting worried as the sun was sinking quickly, and my heart beat was rising at a comparable rate as well. You can imagine my surprise when, as we came over a rise in the desert topography, I could see an oasis in front of the vehicle, and in front of it was a large table set with white linen, silver, china and crystal, candelabra, the lot. The CO of SWEDBATT appeared with his Officers (who, over the course of 9 months I had served well) and I was greeted as royally as possible. It was the scene of their "Field" Mess Dinner, complete with stewards, bus boys, and a food and wine extravaganza that I would challenge even the Arabs to do it up better and with more aplomb! They were thanking me for my service to them in the best way they knew how, and away from the prying eyes that often mar these special occasions. Somewhere in my vast collection of souvenirs from this posting and many others, I am in possession of a certificate received that night that made me an

Honorary Citizen of either Sweden or SWEDBATT, (I'm not sure which). It was many, many hours before I got back to the CANLOG lines. They sure knew how to make a guy feel real good!

It's an odd story, and I am sorry for the brevity of it, but it's one I am proud of, when you're feted in such fashion! I thought our readers might enjoy once again, another of my stories from the good old days of real Peacekeeping (39 years ago). Opportunities like that were possible in any Military outfit in those days (1978/79), but I fear you might not get away with the same thing nowadays! The THANKS extended from the other battalions were not quite as fancy, but they too, were also special when I received them.

P.S. You may want to know what prompted this story? This Email received from a U.N. buddy of mine as a reminder!!!

A fleeing Taliban terrorist, desperate for water, was plodding through the Afghan desert when he saw something far off in the distance. Hoping to find water, he hurried toward the mirage, only to find a very frail little old Jewish man standing at a small makeshift display rack - selling ties.

The Taliban terrorist asked, "Do you have water?"

The old man replied, "I have no water. Would you like to buy a tie? They are only \$5."

The Taliban shouted hysterically, "Idiot Infidel! I do not need such an over-priced western adornment. I spit on your ties. I need water!"

"Sorry, I have none, just ties - pure silk, and only \$5."

"Pshaaw! A curse on your ties! I should wrap one around your scrawny little neck and choke the life out of you, but I must conserve my energy and find water!"

"Okay" said the little old Jewish man. "It does not matter that you do not want to buy a tie from me, or that you hate me, threaten my life, and call me infidel. I will show you that I am bigger than any of that. If you continue over that hill to the east for about two miles, you will find a restaurant. It has the finest food and all the ice-cold water you need. Go in Peace."

Cursing him again, the desperate Taliban staggered away, over the hill. Several hours later he crawled back,

almost dead, and gasped.

"They won't let me in --- without a tie---"