 “4 July 1966 in the Barracks”

This may be the only story that I innocently instigated the following events.

In the summer of 1966, VMA 131 went to the Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort for the first time under the command of Lt Col. Hendershot. Thinking back, I believe the C/O’s plan for keeping us a ready squadron was to fly the wheels off our Skyhawks. This way the pilots got ample flight hours (had over 500 hours that year). The aircraft would require maintenance keeping those in the hanger shops busy and those of us assigned to the flight line would work more hours than we ever wanted to work (first there and last to leave).

By the beginning of the second week, those on the flight had a good case of that famous oriental disease: Dragging Ass. It was also the first time that I had worked the Port and Starboard duty work days. This meant that you worked twenty-four hours on duty day followed by twenty-four hours off duty beginning at 12:00 hours.  On your duty day there were always night flying which made for a very long day.

The line had bunks next to Ordinance. The guys in Ordinance had the end of the barracks which was about twenty percent of the total space. They strung out a rope with blankets attached to create their private space. Not really a problem at first; however, there was always an all-night poker game. As the days added up, the card game began to impact the sleep of those of us around them.

I think it was the Tuesday of the second week my buddy, Pvt. John Kane, showed me a firework just before lights out. It went by many names but looked like a torpedo and when lit would slide along the deck for about twenty feet or so and then very loudly blow up! We waited until 23:30 hours, placed it on the deck and with my trusty Zippo we lit it. Worked exactly as planned, it slid hot, straight and true under the blankets and exploded almost directly under their card table. John and I quickly jumped into our rack feeling quite satisfied.

Then, our little prank went **terribly wrong**. Within seconds, we heard:

“Real Fu\*king funny”

“Think you’re a smart asses”

“God dam wise guys”

“TAKE THIS”

The blankets came down. Followed by Cherry Bombs and Ash Cans exploding all over the place. **It did not stop for a long time**. (Where did they get so many fireworks?) Luckily no rockets were fired or we would have had fires. You could see the lights coming on in all the barracks around us. More disturbingly, you could see the flashing lights of the MPs quickly coming to our barracks. The fireworks finally stopped when they arrived.

Everyone was escorted by the MPs outside the barracks in our skivvies. The Staff NCOs also were led out of their quarters and down the stairs with the rest of us. For some reason, I still remember seeing MSgt Stolarik coming out of his room with a sleepy look of disbelief and wonder (or maybe, it was a look of what the hell has happened) on his face.

We waited about twenty five minutes or more for Lt. Col. Hendershot to get there. He then worked his magic for the first time. Don’t know what he said to the MPs, but within a few minutes were going back upstairs into the barracks.

Our barracks smelled like burnt gun powder until the next day because of the Paris Island type humid air with no breeze. Strangely, we never heard anything about that night’s activities again.

PS: Mission accomplished. No more card games were played.

Brian Putney

Semper Fi