

A Day to Remember

Torrill Marshall

Morning

It was a warm Tuesday morning in the middle of nowhere in central Afghanistan. The sun, also known as Ole Bob, had just started to peak his ugly yellow face through the small clouds. There was a light breeze that contained a very powerful odor that was a combination of burnt engine oil, smoldered tires, and pure body odor. It was very hard for me to remain asleep with the sun in my eyes, the horrible smell in the air, and my boss Sergeant Shoemaker screaming, “Wake the hell up. We have shit to do today.” After a few minutes of being yelled at I decided to get up to brush my teeth and wash my face. As I “hygiened,” the other members of my team prepared breakfast, MRE’s with apple cinnamon muffins and warm energy drinks.

After breakfast the team grabbed all of their gear, weapons, and ammo and began to check everything over to make sure there were no problems. After all the gear was checked Sergeant Shoemaker told me to check the .50 caliber machine gun on the roof, and the smoke grenade launchers on the front of the vehicle. I climbed on the roof without body armor or a Kevlar helmet, which was stupid of me and I knew better, but I was still tired and really didn’t care. My driver yelled, “You’re standing up there like this isn’t Afghanistan; you better put on your gear or get your ass down.” I ignored him and stayed on the roof until Sergeant Shoemaker saw me and pulled me down. After all the weapons were checked my team was bored, so we pulled out some playing cards and began to play spades for a few hours.

Noon

After hours of spades and constant threats to kill us if we didn't help the recovery team pick up the blown up parts and check over their trucks, Sergeant Shoemaker volunteered our team to help lift a blown up bulldozer, put it on a flat rack and chain it down. We were very upset with him for that, so we decided to dump out his chewing tobacco and pour out all of his instant coffee. Sergeant Shoemaker was annoyed, but he didn't really care because our Convoy Commander always brought extra instant coffee and chewing tobacco. I was sent to the truck to tactically acquire (steal) a portion of his stash and bring it back to Sergeant Shoemaker. As I crept up to his vehicle, the machine gunner on the roof spotted me and yelled out, "Look out sir! Marshall is trying to sneak up on you. I think he's trying to steal some food, or some of your personal stash." I was made already, so I stopped trying to sneak and just walked over to his truck and asked him for some coffee and tobacco.

The Convoy Commander started to laugh at me and asked, "Since when you use tobacco or drink coffee? Back in the states you always used to turn me down when I offered, saying it's bad for your teeth. What's the difference now?" I explained to him that Sergeant Shoemaker screwed us over so we helped him get rid of his. He started to laugh and said okay, but he was running low, so we had to do him a favor for it. He wanted me to run a few MRE's over to our assistant Convoy Commander and deliver him a message. I knew the message was something bad because he could have used his radio to relay it, so I said, "No, Sergeant Shoemaker will just have to do without it for awhile." As I began to walk away to return to my vehicle the Convoy Commander told me to wait

for him while he got his gear on so that he could walk with me. He said he needed to talk to Sergeant Shoemaker about something.

Afternoon

As the Convoy Commander and I walked toward my vehicle, Sergeant Shoemaker and two members of my team were walking toward us. We all met up in the middle of the defensive circle to discuss the route we would be taking back to base, and the rules of engagement we were allowed to use if we received fire during our trip back. As Sergeant Shoemaker and the Convoy Commander began to talk the Assistant Convoy Commander called for the Convoy Commander. The Convoy Commander began to walk away when Sergeant Shoemaker yelled, "RPG, get down now!" There was an explosion and everything went dull; all I could hear was a very loud ringing in my ears, and I could see a cloud of dust surrounding us. The RPG landed in the area where the Convoy Commander was walking. As my hearing began to return, I heard my team member Lance Corporal Jones screaming, "I got hit! My ass is bleeding." Sergeant Shoemaker slammed Lance Corporal Jones on the ground and yelled for a Navy Corpsman.

Sergeant Shoemaker noticed that my teammate Corporal McGann and I were standing in a daze from the explosion. Sergeant Shoemaker yelled, "Get your asses to the 88." As Corporal McGann and I ran to the 88, our driver, Corporal Cervantes, began to engage the enemy with his M249 SAW. When we arrived at the vehicle Corporal McGann and I began to load magazines into all the weapons, and passed Corporal Cervantes ammo drums for his M249 and a Cuban cigar. Before my team left for Afghanistan we came up with rituals for gunfights. We would light up cigars and return fire to the enemy. If we were going to die, we were going to die happy and fighting for

one another. After a few minutes of returning fire to the enemy Sergeant Shoemaker climbed into the 88 to ensure that we were all inside and safe. Sergeant Shoemaker asked for a cigar and the radio. After requesting permission from the Convoy Commander, Sergeant Shoemaker told me to get on the .50 Cal and to, "Make sure they regret pissing us off." A few minutes passed us by and 300 rounds later everyone was told to cease-fire because there were two birds coming through. One of the birds was a cobra attack helicopter with enough firepower to destroy an entire town. Just before the birds arrived the last insurgent standing jumped on a motorcycle and tried to drive away. Every Marine in the area opened fire on him. There was no way he was getting away after trying to kill us. The birds arrived and the wounded were loaded; luckily no one was severely injured. The birds left and soon after the Convoy Commander told everyone to move out.

Evening

After hours of driving through the desert, the adrenaline from the fight was no longer pumping and everyone was tired and irritated. Corporal McGann noticed that no one had eaten since breakfast early in the morning and started asking everyone if they were hungry. I told him, "No I'm good, I already have 2 apple cinnamon muffins in my assault pack." As I opened my assault pack I noticed Corporal McGann started to get nervous, so I searched the bag for my muffins, but they were both gone. I asked Corporal McGann what happened to my muffins. He laughed and said, "To be honest someone ate them, and I heard they were delicious." Sergeant Shoemaker, knowing a fight was about to happen, ordered both of us to shut up and get ready to enter the front gates of the base.

Upon entering our motor pool the higher ups from my unit, who stood out front of the gates, began to cheer and applaud the entire team for completing the mission and

taking down the insurgents. After all the vehicles were in the motor pool and staged everyone was ordered to attend a debriefing by the Colonel. During the debriefing a couple of Marines, including Sergeant Shoemaker, were told they would be receiving commendations for their actions during the firefight. After the debriefing the Colonel ordered the team to go to their rooms to relax and get some rest. Before everyone left the area the Convoy Commander told all the machine gunners, including myself, to come back in the morning to clean the machine guns and turn them into the armory.