

JUST ANOTHER EXCITING DAY IN WESTERN AFGHANISTAN



There are days in our lives which we will never forget. Today was such a day for me. At 00:10, 18 Aug 09 my Forward Operating Base (FOB) “Stone” came under rocket attack which lasted for more than two hours. There were only ten (10) missiles; however, the interval between rounds was such that we were at general quarters (“stand to” for you Army guys) until 02:30. But it was the first rocket which jolted me awake. My first conscious thought of what I had just heard was a repeat of what had happened in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia when our camp there was devastated by a 750-pound terrorist Vehicle-Born Improvised Explosive Device (VBIED). In my semiconscious awakening, I postulated that the front gate to our FOB was under attack in preparation for a ground attack like what had happened in May 2003 at our camp in Riyadh which resulted in 10 killed and 30 wounded. This flash-back was supported by the sound of shattered glass flying through my confined quarters immediately following the initial concussion. Instinctively, I rolled out of my bunk, but I was immediately met with pain to the bottom of my left foot which was burned by what seemed to be red-hot metal. I cursed but kept

moving forward in the dark to where I knew my helmet and flak jacket were located. In the darkness and in short order, I was dressed in gym shorts, clogs, flak jacket & helmet and out the door to the nearest bomb shelter. It was then that I learned we were under an enemy rocket attack. From the sound of the initial round which woke me, I assumed that the rocket had hit near my hooch. Eventually as I sat in the bomb shelter, I ran my hands through what little hair I have remaining and there it was-- that familiar smell of cordite. How could this be I said to myself; but nevertheless, it was unmistakably the smell of cordite. And once again I queried myself, just how damn close did that rocket hit to my hooch? The answer came at first light. It hit ten feet from my room as was evidenced by the perforation of my outer wall and the utter destruction of things in my room. Numerous pieces of shrapnel had torn through not only my outer wall but had continued through the opposite inner wall and into the adjacent rooms. No other rockets hit near other living quarters. The most remarkable thing is that I escaped unscathed except for a blister on my foot caused by hot shrapnel despite numerous shrapnel holes above, below and beside my bunk where I slept. During the remainder of the day as I cleaned, I found numerous pieces of shrapnel which had imbedded themselves into walls, clothing and blankets but more frequently than not, they had just ripped gaping holes in the things they encountered. My heart sank when I saw the condition of the outer sleeve of my movie series, “Lonesome Dove” but upon careful examination of the content there was no damage to the CDs. Miraculously and but for

the grace of God, I was once again spared! It has taken me all day to clean, discard ruined items and get windows and electrical wiring repaired. But throughout the day there has been an outpouring of concern for my wellbeing. I have been either visited or phoned by many folks; friends, colleagues, Italian Coalition, US Army, Interpreter / Translators and my Afghan counterparts. All expressing thanks for my safety and expressing encouragement. Their assessment was correct, I was extremely fortunate. During the Afghan Battle-update Brief the following day, it was heartwarming to receive an enthusiastic welcome from the 207TH Corps Commander and his staff. They vowed to find and execute the perpetrator of the rocket attack, a Taliban commander named Gholam Yahya Seywshani, so much for another exciting day here in Western Afghanistan.

LtCol Tom Williams, USMC (ret.)

P.S. Some weeks later, I was called to the 207TH Corps Commander's office to be shown postmortem photos and to be informed that Gholam Yahya Seywshani had been tracked down and killed. Addressing me by my moniker "Baba Qolordu (father of the corps), he can never try to kill you again" said the Corps Commander.