

You remember the other day when I talked about the FPS (Force Protection Service) and how they had issues with having “extra” people on the base. People not cleared properly through our security to be on the base (for instance say, insurgents). Well apparently the head guy, the guy running the FPS, was busted in some kind of conspiracy to provide or disseminate information on how to sneak on to the base with fraudulent documentation. I don’t know all the details but I was told this from a reliable source that is in a position to know.

So what did we do to this guy, this guy that was helping sneak people on the base that might try and kill our people? This guy that was providing aid and comfort to the enemy. Did they shoot him, beat him, put him in prison, torture him and interrogate him to find out who else was involved? I mean after all it is a war and many peoples lives are on the line right? Who would blame us if we did? No, none of that. It might upset some people back home. What did we do? We fired him. Kicked him off base. Yep. He lost his job. Us brutal evil Americans. Can you believe in such harsh tactics? I mean what are we barbarians? If the ACLU finds out about this we are all in trouble. The UN is likely to scream “Human Rights Violations”. France is going to have something else to condemn us big bad Americans about.

I don’t know, think maybe we were to harsh? Did I call it though? Yea I did! I’m thinking I should be some kind of security expert or something. If you will recall I said there must be some kind of conspiracy and there was..... O.k. so that was an easy one. Why then did it happen? That’s my question.

O.K. I have to be careful with this part. One thing they tell you over here is that to assume that every e-mail is being read by someone other than the intended recipient, maybe a US intelligence officer or maybe the enemy, and that every phone call is being listened to by someone, maybe a US intelligence officer or maybe the enemy. We are not in the US and we don’t have the same rights to privacy as we do there. They monitor all communications to try and gather intelligence to help locate the bad guys. Which is fine by me. I mean the sooner we can get these guys the sooner we are out of here and the sooner the people of this country can start living free peaceful lives. So back to my point, I was talking with a guy that again was “in a position to know” and he told me some things. He gave me information about some people that are doing certain jobs in certain positions providing certain information that is helpful to us, the US. Was that vague enough? I didn’t give up any covert information. There is not enough detail there for someone to act on is there? I mean we can all assume that there are people in places that are doing things and providing information right? Right. Here is my point. He gave me specific details that if discovered by the enemy, people would die.

That’s the first part of my point, the second part of my point is; what the hell is this guy telling me that stuff for? I don’t need to know that. They have a term here that you may have heard in the movies or on TV, its “need to know” or “need to know basis”. It basically refers to information and whether you need to know it to complete your mission

or job. Folks, I'm counting cans of oil and white out here. I'm putting floor dry on small spills of gasoline and diesel fuel. I'm one level up from janitor. I don't need to know this stuff. There was no other reason for this guy to tell me the details of this stuff other than for him to try and make himself look like a big shot. Granted I'm not the enemy. I'm not passing on the details of this information to anyone. I am an American and it is pretty simple to tell that. I'm like one of three guys here with blond hair or any hair at all for that matter. Soldiers all have shaved heads. Maybe I'll discuss it a year from now back home over a beer when it will no longer matter, but not now when it could mean peoples lives and neither should this guy. It's stupid, stupid, stupid.

They have another term here its called "OPSEC" it stands for "operational security". It basically means "shut your damn mouth". Remember the old saying from World War II, "Loose Lips Sink Ships". So we don't have any ships here but you get the point. It applies. The Army should do a better job getting the word out to these soldiers to "OPSEC".

So today, as I write this it is the Muslim holiday of Hajj. I'm no expert on the Muslim religion but you can't be here and help but learn a little about Muslims. Hajj is the celebration of some guy going up some mountain with his son to sacrifice his son for Ala (the Muslim God) on some alter. While he is at the alter, just before he sacrifices his son, something like an angel appears and tell him that he does not have to sacrifice his son, he can sacrifice a sheep instead. So this father, because he is so happy that he does not have to sacrifice his son (why he thought he had to sacrifice him the first place is not clear to me), builds this new alter like thing and it becomes a religious symbol. This same original alter that this guy built is now inside a building in a town called Mecca. You may have heard about that. Well the Muslim religion says that every Muslim should go to Mecca at least once in there life (I am not so sure that this part is not sponsored by the Mecca Convention and Visitors Bureau) and pray before that alter/building.

Before one can go to Mecca however, one is supposed to get forgiveness from all people they have disagreements with (enemies and such) and one has to pay all debts. That's about all I know about Hajj. Oh, except that we expect to get attacked. Yea, something about the fever of a religious holiday makes some of the more radical Muslims want to kill people. We Americans are mostly Christians, we like to get drunk on holidays, radical Muslims, kill people. Praise Jesus, pass me the wine, Praise Ala, pass me a mortar. I can see the parallels. Hey a party is a party. O.K. enough sarcasm. The Hajj apparently goes for like 3 – 5 days. I'm not clear on those details, but we expect a significant increase in the action, bombs and rockets around here. Maybe Hajj is like their 4th of July.....hmmmm. I'm still trying to understand this.

Speaking of bombs and rockets (I say that a lot don't I?). I was told a story which I am going to tell you. For some reason this sticks with me. About 2 months ago a mortar came in to the base and landed right on top of a hooch very similar to mine and everyone else's here at the base. Well there was an Army Captain or Sergeant or something in the hooch at the time. It was morning and he was sitting in his chair all showered and

dressed for the day ahead. He was apparently just about ready for the day except he was cleaning his ears with a q-tip. Just sitting in his chair, cleaning his ears with a q-tip when the mortar hit his hooch right on top of him. That's how they found him. Still had the q-tip in his ear. It was the first mortar in. No warning. Probably never felt a thing.

Every morning now, I think about that guy. Never met him, never saw the hooch, its just a story to me. But every morning I think about that guy. Yep, when I clean my ears with a q-tip. It makes me think about how quickly it could all be over with. You can do all the planning you want, take every precaution there is and with one random mortar its all over.

There is a certain stress from living with that thought in the back of your head. It's not always there. It occurs to me when I am doing the most mundane things like just walking or once in a while sitting here typing. Certainly every time I clean my ears now. It's not just me, I see it in other people but you just don't talk about it. Once in a while but not much. The reality is there is not much you can do about it. Oh, I could leave Iraq. Chances of me getting mortared in Traverse City are pretty slim. But the real reality is it could all be over for anyone, anytime, anywhere. I'm not turning all fatalistic or anything. In fact that realization makes me appreciate life and what I have now even more. The little stresses that can seem so big when life is all comfy and practically guaranteed disappear here. It's hard to explain but I know I will be different person from now on. More appreciative and less worried about the little things. Hopefully through this journal, I can help some of you get there with out having to come here.