

## DUTY ON A COLD WINTER NIGHT

By Kent Scott

It was January 19, 1959. My twenty third birthday, or would be at 10:37 PM. I had assumed the duty and was standing watch on the midnight to 0800 shift at the American Embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan. The temperature was ten below outside. Here on the inside at my guard desk was a ceramic gas heater. I was scorching my ass on one side and freezing it off on the other. I would have to tour the outside in a little while—I was thankful for the detachment's only cold weather parka hanging in the corner. It was too big for me and I was bigger than most of the Marines in the detachment.

The mittens that came with it were the kind that if you wore them, you couldn't get to your weapon if you needed it. I didn't wear them very often. I did the Un-Marine like thing. I kept my hand in the parka's pocket. I had a plan in my head. With a sharp knife and needle and thread, I'd modify the right hand glove so you grip and fire a 38 Smith and Weston. Later I did the modification.

On this watch, in this lonely place, it was not unusual for my mind to drift and start reviewing the events of my life. I'd stood this watch many times after I arrived in Kabul on New Year's Day 1958. I was a Corporal E-3 then and made Sergeant E-4 last May 1, 1958, on my Dad's birthday. I could have been proud of making Sergeant in 22 1/2 months except for one fact. The yard stick by which I measured my success, my twin brother, now Sergeant Beldon K. Scott, already had been a Sergeant 8 1/2 months when I made it. His enlistment date came one week after mine.

I secretly kept score on the accomplishments I deemed important. I had him down three to nothing until he got promoted. I beat him on the rifle range by one point in boot camp and won a five dollar bet. Not important to him—up to one year after I'd graduated boot camp no one had broken my record running the MCRD obstacle course. My feeling of self importance was really boosted when I was meritoriously promoted to Corporal in 10 1/2 months—one month before he made it.

I was in shock. I was in awe. No one made Sergeant in 13 1/2 months in the Marine Corps. I found out about his amazing accomplishment in the most direct

way. I had gone over to Main Side to take a test to see if I qualified for the Naval Academy. I didn't. I missed one math problem too many. The testing was done in a building across the street from the 7th Motor Transport barracks where he lived. I'd visited there a few times and knew one of the Marines that was a part of his unit. I went through boot camp with him.

Bro Keith's squad bay was on the second floor so I went up there with the intention of seeing him and visiting. Well blow me down, there was Bro with Sergeant chevrons on his collars and cap. He was doing what Sergeants do. He was falling the troops out for the noon formation. He prepared to march the troops to the mess hall for chow. He acknowledged me with a nod and a smile and went on outside to take care of his Sergeant business. It was the last time I saw him until I was released from Marine Corps almost three years later.

I was just standing there with an astonished-dumb look on my face, when Bud Kiem, the Marine I'd gone through boot camp with told me what happened. According to Bud, seven of the 7th Motor Transport Marines decided to go beer drinking at Ma's outside the rear gate. In this group was brother Keith and a big thick-necked, heavy-muscled Corporal from Chicago who was supposed to be really bad. His name was something that ended with 'ski. So 'Ski is all I know to call him.

It seems, according to Bud, after a few, Corporal 'Ski started insulting and playing the better of Bro Keith. If I had been there I could have told him how this was going to play out. The only thing quicker than Bro's fists was his wit. If you started trading insults with him—you were going to lose. Pfc. Bud Kiem didn't have to tell me, I knew. Corporal 'Ski lost his cool and said something to the effect of, "Scott, I'm coming over there and kick your Missouri hillbilly ass."

It wasn't a fatal mistake, but it was mistake. According to Bud who was there, Bro whipped him really fast and left him with swollen eyes and a big pregnant lip.

Monday morning when the Company's tough old Gunny Sergeant saw Corporal 'Ski, he made inquiry and found out what and how it happened. He was really impressed with Bro Keith. He put him up for meritorious Corporal and he made it. Two months later, the Gunny put him up for meritorious Sergeant. Bro impressed the review board and got promoted.

I'll have to tell you, I was both proud and jealous of my brother. My internal self defense mechanism took over. In my mind I took credit for his success. I was responsible for Bro becoming tougher than a weather cured hard oak board. I was the reason he became a skilled fighter and scrapper, the main reason he got promoted. I had been his sparing partner his entire life.

Oh my god, how the time does fly by. I've got to dawn that parka, and go outside. I've got to "walk my post in a military manner, keeping on the alert, and observing everything that takes place within sight or hearing", on this cold winter night.



