

## ROCKING OUT IN THE WAR ZONE

In the Army, you are either busy or you are bored. I've been told more than once it's a good sign if the chaplain is bored. Today is one of those days. Nothing is going on, no crisis, no drama, we're just hanging around camp.

There is only one shower trailer for men and women at my end of the camp. On the door hangs a sign. One side of the sign reads "MALE," the other "FEMALE." The major form of entertainment in camp seems to be switching the sign after someone has gone in. This happens over and over. You would think by now people would catch on, but it continues to be a major source of laughs.

During the holiday season a punk rock band called The Vandals came to camp to perform for the troops. I had never been to a punk rock concert. In fact, up to that day, the only concerts I ever attended were performed by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. But it was one of those days with nothing happening so I decided, what the heck. Besides, I overheard some soldiers talking about the band. They were supposed to be quite good and especially noted for their witty lyrics.

The band was playing at the recreation center known as Uncle Frosty's. The hand-painted sign above the entrance displays a polar bear sipping on a drink while lying on the beach. No doubt the name and imagery is supposed to get our minds off the oppressive heat come summertime.

The air was charged with expectation. Hundreds of soldiers in uniform were crammed in a room made much too small by their presence. Sound levels and microphones were adjusted. Soon the band appeared. I felt like an anthropologist that just discovered a new culture. There I was, an outsider, intruding on some sacred and rare ritual.

The first impression the band members made on me came by way of their clothing. Black T-shirts and torn blue jeans were de rigueur. The persona they seemed to try to affect was that of cool indifference to everything. "Too cool to care" might be a better way to describe their act.

The music started, which elicited shouts of approval from the soldiers. The sound level, or from my perspective, the noise level, was extraordinary. The lead singer screamed every word into the microphone. I stayed for four songs. During that time I was literally unable to comprehend even one word he screamed. For all I knew, he could have been reciting instructions on how to program a VCR. I thought to myself, how in the world is this band known for their witty lyrics if you can't understand a single word?

None of this seemed to matter to the soldiers. The louder and more pronounced the gestures, the greater they seemed to enjoy it.

At one point, the electric guitar player began swinging his instrument around wildly. It must have slipped because it came crashing down on his head. This created a scalp wound which produced a considerable amount of blood. Of course, part of the act was to appear like you don't care about anything so he continued to play as blood dribbled down his face.

By the fourth song, the soldiers were fully into the experience. About 50 or so got up and began to "mosh." The act of slamming their bodies together made me feel even more uncomfortable. I decided to leave before I got trapped in the mosh pit.

Never in my wildest dreams did I think I'd attend a punk rock concert in the middle of a desert in a war.

I learned that boredom will motivate one to try all sorts of new things.

Given the choice, I'm glad I had the chance to alleviate my boredom through this punk rock experience.