

## Southtown Article # 11 Fear Factor

It's strange what makes you afraid and what doesn't. Not too long ago as we were traveling in a convoy in southern Iraq, a girl maybe 16 years old darted out from behind a building. She aimed her AK-47 at our vehicle. Our gunner swung the .50 caliber toward her. Neither fired their weapon. I assume the young girl froze in fear as she saw the open barrel of the massive gun pointed at her. It shoots a bullet the size of a hot dog. It carries with it such fierce power that upon traveling through a person, it can leave an exit hole the size of a coffee cup saucer.

Strangely, however, our gunner didn't fire either. I suspect she was so taken off guard that the threat was a young girl, that she did not pull the trigger. But according to the rules of engagement, if someone aims a weapon at you in a hostile manner, you shoot. Period. As I watched the situation unfold, I felt neither fear nor adrenaline. It was as if I was some how detached from the situation, like watching a mildly interesting two star movie.

The following week I was traveling through the northern desert of Kuwait. My chaplain's assistant and myself came upon a herd of about 50 camels. They were about 25 meters off the sand road. We pulled over and exited the vehicle on foot, digital cameras in hand. At first the camels seemed a little uncertain of us so we made our way toward them slowly.

After we snapped a few pictures, the herd became more curious of ourselves than we were of them. One brazenly came toward us followed by another and a third. Soon the rest of the herd wanted to get a close up of these strange two legged creatures in beige camouflage uniforms. Before we knew it they had us surrounded. The largest of the bunch was particularly curious. It maneuvered its head about six inches away from my own. At that point in time two things ran through my mind. The first thing I thought of was that Americans have about a three foot circle of space around us that we don't like violated. Obviously camels share no such spatial inhibitions.

The second thing I felt was fear. My heart was racing. Do camels bite? Do they kick? They could easily enough knock us down and trample us. I wasn't liking the feeling one bit. In a low whisper so as not to startle them I suggested to my assistant that we slowly make our way back to the vehicle if they would let us. He reminded me that over his shoulder was his M-16 and that if worse came to worse he would use it.

By this time we were entirely surrounded and on the verge of getting squeezed. I suggested to my partner that he put his ammunition clip in his rifle.

At that moment the camels decided we weren't all that interesting after all. They drifted off, aimlessly wandering the desert sands in search of food.

I asked myself, why would an armed would be insurgent aiming her weapon at our vehicle not even raise my heartbeat while a herd of unarmed camels caused so much fear? It seems awfully backwards to me.

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