



SAVE MY FATIGUES!

By Charles Anzalone
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It was 1953 -- on an airbase somewhere in the desert. I was barrack's chief. There were many other Staff Sergeants around but none were responsible. I got stuck with the job, but it did have one perk: a large room with a locked door on the first floor. It was an uneventful job, but I did like the privacy.

No one ever said or implied that he wished a room for himself. I rarely locked the door, unless I was going to be gone for more than a day. The only thing of value was my locked foot locker which everyone had at the foot of their beds and a cheap phonograph with a long-playing Glen Miller record. These barracks dated back to the early forties. They were not permanent but they were sufficient; not a home away from home because there was no urgency to feel at home.



Republic F-84 Thunderbird (Thunderjet)

Once a week we had to take the beds out for airing. Whoever had barrack duty that week had to scrub the floor with lye, mop it down, and clean and dry it with fans. All the bunks were brought in, new bedding was put on the mattresses with hospital corners, taut enough to bounce a quarter on the blanket to indicate tightness.

When I arrived, it was June and the air was dry and stifling hot with no winds. These buildings were temporary. We were there to prepare pilots for war in Korea. Our barracks had all the radar mechanics. We were situated right in the middles of all the planes. The mechanics who were assigned to the last aircraft had quite a distance to walk. They thought twice before going for a coffee break. There would be hell to pay if no one was there to meet incoming pilots who may have wanted to speak to a sight man, a gun plumber, or an aircraft mechanic. I was lucky. I always was assigned to a squadron near the radar shack.

There were approximately three hundred and twenty aircraft; two-thirds were F-86 Sabres. The other third were Republic F-84 Thunderbirds. They were straight-winged. The 86's had swept back wings; the 84's appeared to have built the shell, then stuffed the equipment into it. The 86s seemed to have been given some thought to the placement of equipment. The A/C and the gun mechanics all agreed: the 84s were dogs. But they had a slower landing speed which made them easier for landing though slower in dog fights.



F-86 Sabre

Now, this hot night was drowsy one. Everyone stayed in. It was near the end of the month and no one had money to go out. So, we just about had a full house. I watched the checker game for a while. Near the other exit door was a pinochle game. Upstairs there was a chess game in progress and a Crazy Eight game. Every airman would accommodate the game players, sleeping in other's beds so that certain lights could stay on while others could sleep where it wasn't so lighted.

Except for the bids, pinochle is a very quiet game. Checkers and chess is a no-talk game. The concentration occurs in evading a double or triple jump while trying to set up your own double or triple jump. All jumps were mandatory. The concentration sometimes was so intense that one night when I was on late night duty, I saw Major Bulluck come in to the radar shack. No one heard him. I went to attention; then I yelled, "Ten hut!" None of the players heard me, or perhaps, they thought I was joking around. You can imagine the shock on their faces when the Major asked what they were doing. That's concentration and fodder for another story.

Now, lights were out at nine o'clock except for the previous accommodations. I wanted to make early breakfast so I hit the sack around nine thirty. I lay there with a blank mind ready to dose off. I had closed my door as I usually did. Suddenly, there was commotion outside. It wasn't that loud at first. I then began to smell something burning. The shuffling got louder; I was just at the point of no return. Trying to wake myself, I smelled a stronger odor; then felt the sting of smoke in my eyes. I bolted out the door. I first had to grab something to get my bearings. I grabbed the nearest pole, ran around it, then darted for the door. I hit the porch -- one leap off into the crowd outside.

I looked over to Johnnie. It was dark. No one thought to turn on the porch light. Porch lights were supposed to be left on but everyone in other barracks complained that porch light kept them awake -- *Ergo* -- no lights. At Johnnie's side, I looked down to his arms. He was holding his old fatigues. You "gotta" understand this: Johnnie was a "clothes horse." In his "civvies," he was "Dapper Dan." He was a better dresser than I and prided himself with nice clothes.

I tried to remain composed as I asked him why he held his fatigues in his arms. He shrugged, "I knew that I had to save something and lying next to my bed were my fatigues, so I grabbed them and ran out." I obnoxiously screamed with laughter, "--Your fucking fatigues! You saved none of your dress clothes?! -- Your fatigues?!" I began to laugh so hard that I almost pissed myself. "Can you imagine . . . my fatigues . . . my fucking fatigues." He felt so subdued. He just shook his head.

Then he recovered himself to ask me why I had run around the pole. "What the fuck was that all about, running around the pole . . . twice?" I laughed. "I was still groggy. I could not wake this blank mind. I just couldn't pull myself out of bed. To get my bearings and not liking to act rashly, I saw no imminent danger. Running around that pole gave me the view to get out the door. I didn't see any fire . . . only smoke.

John got the last word in, "Running around in circles, ha?"

During this time the checker players, not wanting to mess up their game, slowly moved their game out the door. They had just about made it when a mob came running down from the second floor, falling over the checker players and sending the game board flying with checkers strewn in all directions.

Now the pinochle game players just held their cards, carefully picked up their books, each holding his own books, and sauntered out the rear door. The checker players had barely adjusted themselves when another bunch tumbled down onto the players, *ass over tea kettle* --- so to speak, with everyone ending up on the ground . . . again.

It was a marvelously funny sight and was the talk of the “Checkerboard Squadron” as we came to be called. No one went to sick bay. They needed to around to exchange stories. Of course, many embellishments were added but all in all, it brought some excitement to a sometimes monotonous life.

In the year of our Lord MMX.



Sample Air Force fatigues circa Korean War