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Advanced Communication
(Funny) Anecdote Manuscript

This story takes place in 2004. I was 23 years old and it was my first deployment to Balad, Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. As a young 23-year-old, I had an important job. I had to issue work badges to the Iraqis that worked on the base. They performed menial jobs like filling sandbags and taking out the trash for just a few bucks a day. In addition to my mission during the deployment, Soldiers were also required to perform an additional duty; Tower Guard Duty. The entire base “Camp Anaconda” was protected by approximately thirty-six towers that secured and watched the perimeter to ensure that Iraqis didn’t try to attack the base.

The worst shift, in my opinion, was the midnight to 4 am shift. After the workday, you would have dinner chow, shower, and try to grab an hour or two of sleep only to have to wake up and report to Guard duty, and then after duty, try to sleep for an hour or two, and then the work day begins again. It was brutal. This thing about that particular shift, other than the fact that you are half-asleep and exhausted, is that your eyes start to play tricks on you.

Once we were all briefed by the Sergeant of the Guards, in pairs of two, we all reported to our designated towers. Once we were in the tower, we checked all our gear and equipment, and one by one, each tower had to perform a radio check and call in; one by one from Tower number 1 to Tower number 32. The point of Tower Guard was to protect the base and remain vigilant. If we spotted anything we had to call it in. The J-Lens would be deployed above whatever we were reporting. Nowadays it’s equivalent to a drone. Except the J-Lens was so tiny that it could be right above someone’s head and not even know it; it was incredible.

As I was watching my area I saw what looked to me like an Iraqi, dressed in white, floating down a small stream or river just outside the base walls. I was certain that we were going to be attacked! I called it in and provided the coordinates so this could be verified. I was locked and loaded and told my buddy to be prepared for anything. Once I called it in, all of the other thirty-one Towers were able to hear so they were on guard as well. After a short while, a call came into my Tower, Tower #15, if memory serves. I, in my vigilance, called in an old vacuum cleaner that was streaming downstream with other rubbish. I was mortified and knew that they would never let me live this down.

At the end of your duty, we waited for our relief and all Soldiers from the Towers gathered for a debrief. Needless to say, I was the focal point of the debrief. Although they applauded my vigilance and willingness to call in to report something that seemed out of the ordinary, the sound of their laughter and jokes assured will never leave my mind.