President Gerald Ford â€“ My Close Encounter

Description

I canâ€™t find the exact date, but it was in 1974 sometime. It was warm, so not the winter, and my sophomore year, so it was before summer.

Vice President Ford was scheduled to make a visit to The Citadel, and we, the Corps of Cadets, would put on a parade for him.

So, in the fragile years, when military service was looked down upon, a Cadet Corps of about 2000 men, had, in one way or another, volunteered to be in uniform, and about 50% were going into the military. Future leaders for the nation, in the halls of power, and the halls of the Pentagon and on the battlefields of our future.

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The first event of the visit was VP Ford having lunch with us. We formed up and marched, in company formation, to Coward Mess Hall, where we were locked in the building while every single barracks room in four battalions, were checked for stragglers by some one, I assume the Secret Service. Once that hurdle was cleared, VP Ford arrived in the Mess Hall and sat at the table with the Regimental Commander, front and center. The word was out: No one was to try to â€œwipe outâ€• the VPâ€™s shoes (this consisted of taking a bottle of ketchup, crawling under the table of the â€œtargetâ€• and dousing the victims shoes profusely with the red, citrus based liquid. Today was not to be such a day to exercise that form of warfare.

The VP ate, and then rose to leave. Once more, the doors were locked until the VP was safely wherever, at which time, we were released to head out to afternoon classes.

In preparation for the afternoon parade, the â€œTac Officersâ€• (the active duty ROTC instructors assigned to the campus, each with a collateral duty to mentor a company or a staff) had to personally inspect each M-14 rifle of the his assigned unit, to make sure the rifles were not equipped with firing pins. All cadets, except those with ranks requiring carrying a sword, were issued a fully function M-14 rifle, sans the vital firing pin, each year for use in drilling and inspections. The concern was possession of functional firearm near a national level leaderâ€¦..

Down the peninsula, the College of Charleston held a civilian student body, with a different outlook on life. Rumor had it, someone was planning t â€œstreakâ€• the VP, during the parade, and we were told (but, it was coming via the rumor mill) that not only were there snipers on the roofs of the campus buildings, armed with â€œconventionalâ€• arms, but also with rifles that cold fire tranquilizer darts, in the event that a streaker made their way onto the parade grounds. I guess they figured there was no risk of concealed weapons, so they would only have to put the offender to sleep in that event.

Now, in addition to checking all the M-14 rifles for firing pins, initially, the guidon corporals were instructed to remove the spear tip from their guidons, so there wouldnâ€™t be a chance of a crazy sophomore, the head of their respective class among their peers, deciding to skewer the VP during the â€œeyes rightâ€• portion of the parade, as they passed the reviewing location. Iâ€™m not sure who

brought some sanity to the equation, but before we marched onto the field, calmer heads had prevailed, and the guidons for each of the 17 companies carried the ceremonial spear tip as we paid tribute to the Vice President of the United States.

So, there we were, showing we had a degree of loyalty to the Government of the United States, in our troubled times following the Vietnam war and the social upheavel it produced, and we were looked upon with significant suspicion.

The parade went well and thatâ€™s the story of the one time I came close to any top level leader of our nation.

Today, we fly our flags at half mast for one more President. Fair winds and following seas, President Ford.

Tracked back at:
Cdr Salamander, Third World County

Category

1. History
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