

101 Things to Do in a Foxhole

BY

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So you dig this hole. A foxhole that is as deep into the earth as the tallest guy's shoulders, about five and half feet. It's really called a combat effective fighting position, and it isn't really going to end up that deep. Not tonight anyway. You've been humping all day, a fifty-pound ruck through mountainous terrain that is less than favorable on your disgustingly blistered feet. The rain is a welcome break because it gives you something to do. You sit in the hole, about a foot shy than what it should be, and empty the falling water with your canteen cup.

Your battle buddy starts a *no shit* story, probably one that you have heard; they're all the same goddamn story anyway. All stories in the Army are *no shit* stories, "No shit, there I was," followed by some manifested idea of manhood in which at least part of it is probably bullshit and not no shit. Your company doesn't have the good stories anyway—not like Alpha who was strategically prepping to cross a river and ended up capturing five stark-naked, enemy soldiers. And not like D Co., the first platoon leader in Delta Company escaped from a POW camp last fall. That fucker endured having twenty-three bones broken by the enemy, and he gave only his name, rank, serial number, and date of birth—not a whisper more. Then he escaped by tunneling out with a spoon the day before they were going to execute him by cutting off his limbs. One at a time. With a rusty pocket knife. So the story goes anyway.

Your stories aren't like that though—not even the fictitiously honest ones. Not Bravo. You don't find any naked bastards to capture, and you have no heroes. You hump around all day, build a perimeter at night, and wait for some sort of absolution...or redemption...or an end...or beginning. Who the fuck knows. But you just sit there, half-heartily listening to some random story and thinking about what got you into this hell:

You were eighteen, barely out of high school. Maybe you

had a good time. Maybe you were even successful. But who cared anyway? It didn't matter anymore. Sometime during the four quick years of discovering, or attempting to discover who you were, something possessed you to get some sick and twisted obsession of patriotism. So you joined the Army. Chances are you did it for some money, or maybe to get away. But maybe, just maybe, you were one of the few who really did care. It doesn't matter either. Trivial. Everything before then. Suddenly you were in this completely erratic world of disgusting conformity. Some middle-aged Drill Sergeant with revolting breath spat 2.3 centimeters away from your face. You were treated like a possession, convinced you were lower than whale-shit, and the idea that things would get better was nothing more than a hideous lie conjured up by what little hope you still possessed. That was the easy part. Soon after you were shipped overseas, thrown into some bizarre notion of mortal combat, and treated as a worthless pawn on a politician's chessboard. Again, insignificant details. Here's what matters, the dénouement of your reality: you went to war, became a man (or so they said), and will never go back the same. You will have nightmares the rest of your life, flashbacks that are debilitating, and you can never truly put it behind you. Not entirely.

So now there is nothing except tally marks on your Kevlar to tell you how many days you have been covered in mud, hunting a figment, and an empty bottle of foot powder to remind you how many days remain. Maybe you will make it home...maybe you won't. If you don't you are a hero, but it doesn't matter anyway because you're dead. If you do make it and happen to suffer from a severe case of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, society sees you as troubled. Or if you get injured and become a cripple, you are a drain on the economy. The idea of dying no longer seems so perilous... it seems the quickest, most honorable solution. It might even be the onl....

The rain stops and your battle buddy throws in an expletive at the end of his story that pulls you from your life-altering trance.

Foxhole living is an art, really. You find ways to keep yourself occupied...keep yourself sane. Daydreaming isn't a good way to remain mentally stable. So maybe you write a letter that you will never send out, maybe a quick game of cards, and then possibly polish off the last of your rations while talking about home. But back in your mind, you prep yourself for night watch. Three hours of perpetual torture, the circle of hell that Dante couldn't even fathom in his infernos.

It's pitch black now, late...you got the 0200 shift. A supply shortage means there is only one set of night vision goggles for your platoon—the rotation has them on third squad's watchman, not you. So you stare off at nothing and see everything, especially the stuff that really isn't there. It's cold, too, probably because you were still wet from the evening showers. Your feet, which are wrapped in socks drenched with a week's worth of sweat and stale rain, feel as if they are disintegrating...you wonder how many toenails you have left.

But the sound. The distinct noises that come from the darkness make you forget the fungus that was once your most fundamental mode of transportation—and now you listen. Pulling your rifle close into your side, you hear it... so distinctly... rustling... not wind—something louder. Maybe you don't hear it. Maybe you want to hear it. Hear something. Anything. It would prove your eyes right—make them honest again. Infallible desperation.

You readjust so your rifle is actually pointing at something. You know everything out there, beyond the perimeter, signifies sin...every noise and every sight and everything that may not even truly be there. All of it. The dark woods reek of anger. The night encompasses sloth. The dim stars are lust hiding behind dark clouds that are actually greed. There is gluttony in the fallen leaves, and the enemy is pride. The enemy *is* pride. Squinting hard, you stare at the same dark nothingness and begin trying to combat the seven deadly sins with the seven Army values you learned so long ago as just a recruit in basic training. Loyalty...Duty...Respect...Selfless Service...Honor...Integrity...and...*Damn*.

Here's the problem: you're tired. And not just simply in the need of rest—you are excruciatingly exhausted. Mentally, physically, emotionally. Perpetually. Fear keeps your eyes open, transfixed on the blackness that is your reality. Yet your eyes, in which you know you cannot trust, are still more dependable than your mind. For all you know, you are dead—killed some time over the past few days when you hit a trip wire and splattered into pieces all over the rest of your squad. If hell is in fact the palpable manifestation of the individual's demon, a place created exclusively for the independent soul to be tortured, this would indeed be your hell: sitting in a foxhole, watching blackness, for eternity.

So you are stuck in this hole...if you are dead, it is going to be a while—an insufferably long while. If you are still alive, you figure you have about two hours and fifty-nine minutes left. You brace yourself for the time ahead, and for just a second you rest your cheek on the butt of your rifle.

There is a cruel and abrupt kick in your side. You open your eyes, and you are relieved to see your pissed off squad leader standing over you eclipsing the sun with his massive form.

You are awake. And alive. You don't remember much about last night, maybe because there is drool all over your rifle. You are too tired to care, anyway. You stand up, fill in the hole, and etch another tally onto your Kevlar. You will spend the rest of the day humping a fifty pound ruck through mountainous terrain that is less than favorable on your disgustingly blistered feet.