

'Seven'. It was 0100Hrs and the relative stillness of that glorious African night had settled about us. Suddenly our idyll was shattered by the unmistakable staccato chatter of an AK 47 on 'full auto'.

"My goodness Sergeant Ncube", I said calmly to my trusty ethnic companion, "It sounds as though those blighters are shooting at us". This was it, what a way to test the system. A real live terrorist attack (never volunteer for anything sprang to mind on that occasion as well). Sergeant Ncube waxed pale as I, with trembling hand, clutched the radio mike and began the all stations 'alert' mantra. "All stations, All stations, this is farm seven, standby, standby. We are taking incoming from the north east corner of our inner perimeter". It got worse... Much worse because, after following the radio 'alert' protocols and in so doing waking up sixteen farmers, their wives, their kids, their labourers, their dogs, their goats and other sundry district residents and hangers on, as well as calling in the cavalry from the District police station (Two sleepy african constables in an old landrover who had to bounce and crunch their way through 80 Kms of African bush in the pitch dark), I suddenly realized that the firing signature of this particular AK47 was not quite right and that the usual rocket and mortar fire one would expect as part and parcel of the show during these little adventures was absent .

Oh dear, my gallantry medal citation began to slip through my fingers, a career in CID cycle theft unit loomed. Looking up at the radio set, its charge light winking insolently at me, a sneering cyclops in the dark, I noticed that which I had previously overlooked, the inner perimeter fence sensor 'speaker unit' was innocently parked atop the radio set . It was making a very loud noise which sounded a little like an AK47 on 'full auto', albeit one that never ran out of bullets. My future detective skills came to the fore , I pulled hard on another cigarette. Sergeant Ncube left me, skulking from the room in disgust. Could it possibly be that a large flying ant, common in this district, had become entrapped in the bellshaped protective body of the fence sensor on the north east corner of the inner perimeter fence? Could its wingbeat during an escape frenzy become an AK47 soundalike? Would my Commanding Officer see the funny side of it when I was marched in to district HQ later that same day? No, perhaps not. Sixteen grizzled tobacco farmers were not amused ...

Predictable and inevitable comments from the readership, speculating on interpretations of, and variations to, the term 'de bugging', whilst justified, may be a little unkind to the author. After all I avoided a punishment posting to CID cycle theft section and now live in Riyadh, holding down a good job as a (non technical) risk consultant for Saudi Arabia's Best Bank.



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