



Company B, 71st Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry, "California Regiment" at Fort Irwin, Ca. 20-21 March 2004

Right up front I'd like to thank everyone who was able to make it to Fort Irwin, it was only because you came that this event was a success. I really appreciate everyone traveling so far, and it is quite a trip out here, and seems longer as you hit Americas Longest Driveway, arriving at Americas biggest Cul-de-Sac. From all accounts this event was an almost complete success. I say almost because it was bloody hot in the afternoon!

Starting on Friday evening folks arrived with only a modicum of getting lost. Terry Jenkins, our newest recruit showed up just in time to help Faye and I set up our tent. We managed to get the fly up without killing each other. But I think getting the tent up would have led to blood shed, mostly mine. Thanks Terry for coming to my rescue. I really believe the Holts aspired to giving Kelly's brother a self-guided tour of Fort Irwin, and I understand for not ever having been here before was quite successful at finding most of the back roads. But I'm sure there are several other stories floating around out there about the sites of Fort Irwin at night and finding their way around. I am happy to say that everyone DID in fact find their way to the site without having to call for us to come find them. Which is a testament to all our navigational skills.



Ok, so the sign needs a little work!

Those of us who were able to arrive at a decent hour had hotdogs and very good chili for supper. The Vegas crew pulled in somewhere in the gray zone between evening and morning, and as always it was great to see them. I really appreciate Jason and Lisa making the extra effort to come on down. Especially after some of the trials thrown their way lately, thanks folks. The evening was actually pretty cool, lulling us into a false sense of things for the morrow!

Saturday dawned clear and wasn't as cool as I thought it should be, which made me a little uneasy. As Connie puts it I was running around like a chicken with my head cut off trying to get the range setup and be done in time to brief our folks on the days activities and be back at the range in time to run it. Didn't help that I woke up feeling like someone had thrown me down a dung shoot (probably looked it to). Thanks to some help from Ron who was up at the crack of dawn I was able to get what I wanted done at the range. We had our formation at 0700 where we checked weapons and I passed out instructions on what we were looking at for the day.



A battle ready crew if ever there was one!



Faye said no sun in the face this time!

And the day was heating up. The cooks fixed up what I understand was a great breakfast (looked good but my stomach said, oh no you don't!). I headed up to run the rifle and pistol range just as Max showed up in time to make the 10th rifle. While I ran the competitions everyone else did their living history piece for folks as they came through. We didn't have nearly the numbers I expected, but there were enough I think to keep folks on their toes. And the ladies certainly did their part! And the day got hotter.



The 19th and 21st Centuries collide

The shooting competition finished a little sooner than I expected so I had time to eat lunch with our folks and get ready for our live fire training session. We decided to use it as a training session versus a demonstration as there were more folks who had never fired a live round than there were of those who had. And as the day got hotter it was decided to go without coats (didn't want any heat injuries, including me!) The company formed up and marched on up to the range; and I must say for having so many new folks we did a good job of marching up. We formed on the firing line and got ready. There was a small crowd of about ten or twelve folks but enough to make it interesting. I gave a brief introduction and told the crowd who we are and a little about the weapons we use and what we were going to do this afternoon. And the day got hotter. I indicated the enemy watermelons down range at 25 yards.



Um, Jason I think you're supposed to stay "with" the instructor?

What we did then was a talk through/walk through of loading in nine times. Most folks stayed with me while a couple folks had twenty fingers and one or two just thought they'd do it on their own. There are always those no matter where you go, but life is that way. Anyway, we got through to the prime command where I had everyone do an about face before we primed. Well weapons were pointed down range away from the crowd and I gave the command prime and was looking down the line watching folks put the caps on. When all of a sudden BOOM a rifle goes off! As I

pushed my heart back in my chest I walked over to the "perp", who as it turns out is, no not Jason, no not James, no not the new guy Terry, ready? Some folks know, guessed yet? It was Ron's weapon that had a premature explosion. Now you know why we always face away from the crowd when priming a live weapon, things do happen even to the most experienced of us. After the shock and of course the other had sorta passed he loaded again. Now that everyone was ready...again, it was time. Those vicious watermelons were getting more vicious by the minute. Ready, aim, fire! Boom! The left hand squad obliterated the watermelon on the left. However the enemy watermelon on the right burst out into extreme laughter as it was left unscathed. After fixing a couple weapons malfunctions and removing one from the line we loaded again for a fire by file. Fire by file! Commence firing, the vicious watermelon on the right isn't laughing anymore as Terry Jenkins plugged it dead center and it flew apart. After the fire by file it was time to see what a .58 ball would do compared to a .69 cal loaded with buck and ball. We could hear the two remaining enemy watermelons in the box. I swear one said they couldn't hit an elephant from there. Seems I've heard that somewhere else. I had our two shooters move forward (Jason with his .58 and Rich with his .69) and get ready to engage the melon heads. I had them load, ready, fire at will. Jason takes aim, Boom! He creases the melon, melon head says, ouch! Rich takes aim and Boom! Dang that melon was still there to! Geez, maybe the melon heads were right! Can't let em get away with that! Load! ready! Fire at will! Jason takes aim, Boom! That melon is cut in half and ain't gonna laugh no more! Rich takes aim, Boom! That melon disappears in a red mist, just as it was saying again, you couldn't hit an el..... Teach them to talk smack huh! Now it was on to the 2x4 cutting contest. Fire by file, commence firing! Hm mmm, I think we need a little more target practice. After banging away for a while I gave everyone one more shot. Deal is if I can break the post by pushing on it slightly you win, if you lose you have KP that night. So I walk on down and push on the right 2x4, although it had been hit and looked to be pretty splintered in the back; when I pushed on it, it didn't go. So I walk on over to the left squads 2x4, I noticed that it's about half cut in two, so I barely push on it and snap, over it goes, left squad wins! Lastly I thanked everyone for coming and we cleaned up and moved back to camp. And it was getting hotter!



The rest of the afternoon was spent talking to visitors (Max had an awesome layout, Rich had set up a Dog Tent and Mike had a great displayed tent) and staying out of the sun, unfortunately for me I had already fried and this cold was kicking my bu--! As the sun was going down the cooks fixed a supper of roast and mashed potatoes, even sick it was sure good! If anyone went hungry it was their own fault.

Because of the heat that day and the outlook for Sunday I called some of the folks together and explained that I thought we needed to cut one of the events for tomorrow. If we continued the whole day we'd be breaking down during the absolute hottest part of the day. It was decided to cut the shooting competition out and do the tactical (good choice in my mind). I took Jason and Mike out for a short leaders recon. I have to admit, between the heat, being sick and yeah a little

stress about the days events I crashed early. By all accounts there was some good visiting going on that evening, not to mention lots of stars out.



Snipers Roost in Rock Fort

Sunday dawned, in my opinion a little to early, but a nice day. The reb section formed (Ron, Terry and I) to go and get ready to defend the objective (Rock Fort), which was a rebel outpost. We departed in our wagon for the drop off point and move the 1/4 mile to get set. The rest of the company showed up and the fight was on. It was a delaying fight at first by the rebs, but the yanks pushed on. Then the fight for Rock Fort began in earnest rock to rock. It was a great fight, with the rebs giving way slowly to their final defense. First Terry fell, then the Yanks got Ron and finally after taking out several yanks (some I had to shoot twice!) I fell from a blast from Max. Would have been James but he only snapped a cap. Great fight! And I think we all had a great time out there. And it was getting hotter. After a couple pictures and resting a bit we returned to camp.



Company B pauses for a photo Op in Snipers Roost after the Battle of Rock Fort

Who can forget on the way out the young lady on the horse (Cav was late again) who looked at us like we'd just stepped through a time warp. Well we had! When we got back to camp the cooks had a great breakfast waiting. After breakfast we all attended services at the Christian Commission hosted by Rich Holt, and a fine job he and his crew did I must say.



After services we all posed for a unit photo. And it was getting hotter. After the photo everyone pitched in and helped everyone break down and get ready to go. I don't think any of us really wanted it to be over yet, but it was just to hot not to. After the farewells everyone headed out for their respective homesteads until movement orders bring us all back together again. Onward to Wooden Nickel!

To our family of the 71st who couldn't make it, know that you were sorely missed and it is hoped that everyone can make it to Wooden Nickel! And lastly, thanks again to those who were able to make it, without you it would have been just another day in the desert.

I remain your obedient servant, Sergeant Dave Crichton