



The Saga of Black Cat

Taken from Camel Tails – A Saga of the RSMC
By Dick Culver

I tell the following story with some trepidation. I initially had declined to include this one in my “Camel Tails,” but after some consideration, I decided that it was just too funny to let lapse into the mists of time. My only caution is that it is probably not for the ears (or eyes) of the younger set. While not exactly “X-Rated” it should receive at least a *PG-17* label. That having been said, herein lies the tale (tail?).

In 1985 both the Marines and the Navy had a training presence in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. There were five retired Marines recruited to raise and train the Royal Saudi Marine Corps, and three former Navy SEALs and one retired Army Special Forces type running what was called the Saudi Arabian Special Forces Unit. This was something of a misnomer, as what they should have called the outfit was the Special Navy Unit or the Special Naval Warfare unit. The Marines consisted of three former USMC Force Reconnaissance Marines (Pat Teague, Skip Hartnett, and myself), one Explosive Ordnance Disposal Expert (Rod Roper), and a former Nuclear Security man and weapons expert (Paul Shomper).



**“Black Cat”
Much Beloved
Feline of the
Saudi Naval Forces**

The Navy Unit had their share of problems, as virtually none of their students were qualified swimmers and what little aquatic experience they had acquired had been overseen by a gaggle of Pakistani-types doing an exchange tour with the Saudi Navy. We watched with some amusement as the Pakis used poles (not unlike cane fishing poles, albeit a bit stouter) with a rope attached and tied to the fledgling Saudi frogmen allowing them to be towed up and down the indoor swimming pool until they sank or learned how to swim! Hummm... Underwater scuba navigation had been accomplished by the Pakis pre-anchoring lengths of cable on the ocean floor leading to the beach that allowed the stalwart Saudi Sailors to pull themselves hand-over-hand to the beach. The use of the magnetic compass was difficult to teach on dry land for our Marines and apparently a virtual impossibility to teach to the scuba students underwater. The Pakis had solved the problem in a most workmanlike fashion, although the outcome in combat would be problematical to say the least.

Since we in the Marine Corps contingent shared many of the skills of the former SEALs, parachute jumping, scuba techniques, etc., we watched with some amusement at the rather

halting progress that our brothers in arms were experiencing... They had our sympathy, and our good wishes. We rarely trained together, but often commiserated when actual training was not in progress, as we knew many of the same people in the service and were operating with the same level of incompetence with our charges. We realized that our efforts would probably go for naught in the big picture, but what the hell, it was a living and kept us from playing in traffic.

When training was slow or we were between classes, we would often hold the traditional military bull sessions common between our two sister services. We (as Americans) held some built in necessity for accumulating pets, and lavishing affection on them as only the U.S. military can do, which brings us to the story of our respective cats.

Now having served on both coasts of Saudi Arabia (the first two years in the Jeddah area bordering on the Red Sea, and the last year or so on the east coast near Jubail [Ras-al-Gar]) on the *Persian Gulf* which the Saudis adamantly maintained was properly named The *Arabian Gulf*. The Red Sea side of the peninsula is virtually devoid of dogs, but is almost overrun with felines! Cats, cats and more cats! When you'd hit one of the metal dumpsters with a rock, it would literally rain cats of all types, kinds, and descriptions. Conversely, the Persian Gulf side is overrun with dogs, with virtually no cats in sight. The tale of Black Cat necessarily took place during our tour in the Jeddah area.



Bonnie Pussy Cat on fence enjoying the Saudi Sun

We came across two small kitties of orange and white persuasion, barely weaned from their momma. Since the Saudis often sent extermination parties around to kill the excess kitties, we decided to save the tykes from the likes of the cat killers. We named the pair Bonnie and Clyde, and brought milk from the mess hall, and all sorts of goodies for their enjoyment and pleasure. It became obvious early on, that Bonnie was the dominant kitten of the pair. Once she discerned that Clyde was consuming more than she considered to be his fair share of the chow and goodies, she soundly whipped his furry fanny, boxing his ears and sending him packing! We were

totally amazed, and figured it must be something about a Saudi feline instinct, having to do with the survival of the fittest. Clyde departed the area never to be seen again although we searched the various wood piles and the boat locker looking for the rejected cat. Kipling had it right when he said that the female of the species is more deadly than the male! At any rate, we attempted to bring young Bonnie up to be a proper young Marine kitty.

While this was going on, the Navy types had come up with a black cat marked remarkably like Sylvester Pussy Cat of the



Black Cat surveying his prospective harem

cartoon series. Lacking the imagination of the Marines, they quite mundanely named the male feline of their affection, simply "Black Cat." Conversations between the Navy folks and the Marines of course occasionally speculated on a cross breeding of the Navy's Black Cat, and the proper young lady USMC kitty, Bonnie. This was to take place somewhat in the future however as they were both rather young.

I'll have to give the Navy their due however, Black Cat lacked for nothing a cat could desire. He was petted, allowed to sleep in their desk drawers, and brought continual delicacies to tickle a cat's pallet. I was totally taken aback one morning however when I walked into the Navy office as it appeared that one of the old chiefs was satisfying Black Cat's most intimate desires by what appeared to be... Naw, even the NAVY isn't THAT perverted I thought, but when I mentioned the apparent perversion, the Navy gents simply looked at me as if I had two heads and made mention that "how was a kitty to learn?" and they didn't want Black Cat to get any kitty venereal diseases. I went outside shaking my head, not believing what I "thought" I had just witnessed. Several others of our group verified that they too had witnessed a similar sight. Dear Allah! That's what you get when you get too much sun and have spent too long in the Kingdom with no diversions!

Taking the above descriptions of the Navy's attachment to Black Cat, they became visibly distraught when their favorite kitty came down with what appeared to be a case of the mange! Horrors! Now what? The Marines and the Sailors had a confab on the proper treatment of feline mange, and no consensus was forthcoming. I pointed out that when I was a kid, they often treated mange on an animal with sulfur mixed with axle grease. Since nobody knew



Bonnie attending to administrative duties with the RSMC

where to acquire any sulfur that solution was out, besides what do you do with a cat smeared with axle grease who's used to sleeping (and goodness knows what else) in your lap! Back to the drawing board!

I suddenly had an inspiration. I had gotten some nasty coral cuts on my feet earlier while attempting to get our young Marines used to getting their bodies wet in the Red Sea, and urban legend said that the coral indigenous to that region could result in some nasty infections. I figured that perhaps soaking my feet in peroxide might just preclude such a disaster. A trip to the local Saudi Navy Sick Bay brought me in contact with an exchange Paki Navy Hospital Corpsman. He obliged my request for a bottle of peroxide in a rather large dark brown bottle with an obviously dissolving plastic cap, apparently the result of oxidation from the contents. Since the writing was in Arabic, any cautions and/or strength of the contents were undecipherable to this Marine infidel. I should have perceived something was amiss when I detected the slightest hint of a smile on the Paki's usual deadpan expression.

Upon repairing to my digs, I dutifully washed my feet and looked around in vain for some sort of receptacle to pour the peroxide into to soak my cut-up feet. Finally I decided to use the sink and by standing on the commode seat, I was able to soak each foot for what seemed to be an appropriate amount of time. I should have been suspicious as my feet were actually

foaming (much like when you wash your mouth out with peroxide). Now it didn't sting, so I dried my feet, but suddenly it felt like someone was using a blowtorch on the bottom of them! Dear Allah, this did not bode well, as it was about a three quarter mile walk to the mess hall! I managed to get to my rack and lay down with my feet hanging over the end of it to air out. It was almost two hours before the pain had subsided enough for me to get a pair of shoes on and hoof it to the mess hall, but they were still mighty tender. Apparently this stuff was almost pure peroxide, and had literally boiled all the dirt and oils out of the soles of my feet. Damn, I sure wished I could have read the label (along with any cautions) – that stuff was potent! My barely tapped bottle sat unused in the medicine chest with a piece of plastic wrapped around the top as the original plastic cap had simply crumbled in my hand, NOW I understood why!

Back to Black Cat, (you can probably see this one coming). The retired (U.S.) Navy Chief SEAL hospital corpsman we simply called *Doc* in the manner of the Naval Service, allowed as how this stuff might be just the stuff to cure Black Cat's mange! I had not gotten too descriptive when I described how it boiled the dirt and oil out of my feet, and prevented infection, so Doc told me to bring the stuff to work. I dutifully packed my bottle of liquid "oxidizer" (this stuff could have been used for rocket fuel!) and took it over to the Navy digs.



Black Cat looks on as his "intended" relaxes between training sessions

Doc poured the sink full of the stuff (it was a BIG bottle), and prepared to immerse the cat! Now Black Cat had always been treated like royalty and suspected nothing – anything Doc wanted to do was alright with him (by now I'm thinking back to previous evolutions I had witnessed). Much as with my feet, the effect was not immediate, and Black Cat seemed to be luxuriating in his cool bath in the summer heat. As Black Cat's lesions started to froth when the peroxide got down to the seat of the mange, he suddenly let out a yowl that would have cracked fine crystal wear! That cat became a virtual flurry of hysterical activity, almost literally rounding the walls in a perpendicular

fashion, never apparently hitting the deck, much in the manner seen in cartoons. No one could catch him, and I suspect that if someone *HAD* been able to lay hands on that enraged feline, it would not have been a pretty sight! Here his favorite sailor and alleged surrogate sexual partner had just dipped him in liquid fire! Black Cat fled the building through an open door and was gone for days. Search parties came to naught, but after about a week, Black Cat's remembrance of good chow began to ameliorate his disposition towards the U.S. Navy in general and Doc in particular. Upon Black Cat's return his fur had turned bright red, compliments of his peroxide bleach-job. It took several months for his fur to return to its normal color. Black Cat resumed residence with his Navy mentors, but he never again was quite as cozy with the co-inhabitants of the Navy quarters.

I went to great pains to keep from inquiring how the cat scalding session had affected Black Cat's and Doc's rather cozy relationship, Miz Culver didn't raise any damn-fools! At some future date, I'll relate how Black Cat was finally introduced to normal feline-type carnal relationships with his intended, Miss Bonnie Pussy Cat.

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