

## Just Another Quiet Night On Patrol

In 2005 I was working as a California State Park Ranger in the Central Valley of California. It had been forty years since I was a soldier in Vietnam and I had had many occupations since then. I went to the ranger academy to become certified as a state peace officer at the age of 50. I was one of the oldest academy recruits ever to graduate from this academy.

When I became a ranger they gave me a 40 caliber pistol, an AR-15 rifle and a 12 gauge shotgun with slugs. This was more weaponry than I had in Vietnam. It was also quite a surprise to be re-united with practically the same weapon I had slept with for a year in Vietnam. One of the things we were taught in the academy was to trust your instincts when in a dangerous or perceived dangerous situation, have an escape route and not to be afraid to leave the situation for your own safety. I thought this was good advice and I only had to exercise this a few times.

California State Park Rangers patrol thousands of acres of park land, several campgrounds, beaches and reservoirs always alone and often at night. You will encounter fishermen with knives, hunters with rifles, and campers with handguns. So with every encounter you must be vigilant and cautious. One of the most valuable tools you carry is the 'verbal judo' which you were taught in the academy. This is a skill you may use every day to deescalate an argument with a park visitor over a park violation or a visitor fight in the campground. I have written hundreds of citations, encountered bikers, drunks, poachers, and visitors with warrants, and arrested my share of miscreants.

The one time the hair stood up on the back of my neck and my heart raced occurred from none of the above. It was a warm summer night about 9 pm and I was patrolling one of our camp grounds in my state park vehicle. This was my routine before I left for the end of my shift. I had locked up the day use areas and I would drive through all of the campground loops to let the campers think that a ranger was watching over them as they slept. As I drove through my last campground loop the campground was lit up with

torches, there were signs in Vietnamese around the tents and there were young boys and men dressed up in uniforms standing in formation and others in uniform walking around the camp perimeter. Now in my logical brain as I sat up in my seat, I knew that this must have been a Boy Scout outing that occupied the entire campground loop but my unconscious self gave my body an adrenalin highball and I was truly frightened for a few minutes. I drove back to my office and laughed at this silly reaction but at the same time I realized it must be more than that.