
The Bearded Midget

(and other asian The Bearded Midget: (and other asian adventures) adventures)

by

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To Truman

(because Lydia and Hillary already have their dedications)

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It Ain't Always Pretty, These Military Shows

I've been fortunate enough to perform for American Soldiers stationed in the high-stress countries of Iraq and Afghanistan, but those aren't the only locations I have visited for the military. The United States has bases worldwide, and each one has a department dedicated to boosting troop spirits.

MWR stands for Morale, Welfare and Recreation. Their offices are filled with many former military servicemen, and they work with The Bearded Midget: (and other asian adventures) an ever-dwindling budget—one stretched to the limit thanks to entertainment agencies that see the military as a place to profit from, not an outfit with which to offer more-bang-for-your-buck—to bring bands and comedians to faraway locations and soldiers.

Providing entertainment to our troops is a noble cause, but not always a necessary one.

I'll explain.

I The Bearded Midget: (and other asian adventures) have been both lucky and unlucky enough to perform in Japan and Korea numerous times. I have absolutely enjoyed my experiences, have no complaints whatsoever, and would jump at the opportunity to go back. That said, I'm not always sure what the point of my travel was. When I compare tours through Iraq and Afghanistan side-by-side with my Asian adventures, the situations are as widely chasmed as can be.

In Iraq and The Bearded Midget: (and other asian adventures) Afghanistan soldiers lived in hostile environments. When off duty, they were not allowed off base. Downtime was spent staring at the same stones and sand as when on duty. Imagine having to live in your office building, never The Bearded Midget: (and other asian adventures) able to leave.

When a comedy show (or band) arrived, it was a nice diversion from the drudgery of day-to-day life. The distraction was needed and appreciated, especially the further out from civilization you went. After leaving behind the larger bases and getting out on the front lines to

the tiny Forward Operating Bases, the appreciation for the distraction was immense. In fact, a general rule of thumb was: the smaller the base, the larger their gratitude. Sometimes to the point of embarrassing. All too often I was told, “Dude, thanks for coming all the way out here.” All I could ever say in response was, “Dude... *thanks for serving.*”

This is in stark contrast to visiting bases in Japan or Korea. There, every soldier is eighteen-years-old, away from home for the first time, and allowed off base during down time.

When The Bearded Midget: (and other asian adventures) it comes to entertainment, they weigh their nightly options carefully: “Ok, I could stay on base and go to a comedy show... OR, I could leave, get drunk, and bang a hooker.”

After a near millisecond of consideration, the outcome is always the same: “So long!” is bellowed to anyone staying on base.

With a wave, away they go.

(And really, who could blame them?)

On every one of my tours through Japan and Korea almost as many shows were cancelled than went ahead as planned. Which is fine. As said earlier, I’m not complaining. If just one person shows up to use comedy as The Bearded Midget: (and other asian adventures) their wind-down for the evening, it’s my job to make sure that one person has a good time.

I do, however, wonder if The Bearded Midget: (and other asian adventures) entertainment for some locations isn’t just another “\$500 hammer” in the defense budget. It looks good on paper—“We’re providing entertainment for the troops!”—but if no one is attending, is it worth the effort and cost?

Struggle as I might, I can only The Bearded Midget: (and other asian adventures) recall

a couple of nights that were absolutely fantastic. A marine base in Iwakuni, a naval The Bearded Midget: (and other asian adventures) base in southern Japan... names escape me, but images remain ingrained in my mind. Packed houses; howling service members.

More often than not, however, the shows were at best sparsely, and at worst accidentally, attended.

To explain the latter statement, I should point out that most shows are not held in theaters; they take place in bars or restaurants on base. So when I The Bearded Midget: (and other asian adventures) say The Bearded Midget: (and other asian adventures) shows were "accidentally attended," I mean people showed up to hang out, only to discover a comedy event was happening.

The general consensus was always a surprised, "Well hey, how about that?" followed by a quick exit or movement as far from the stage as possible so their conversation could continue uninhibited.

The two "worst" cases of this were hilarious in their awfulness. One was on an Army base in Korea, the other an Air The Bearded Midget: (and other asian adventures) Force base in Japan.

The Korean show was a gem because the base was enormous. I couldn't begin to give you spatial dynamics, but it was large enough to have a The Bearded Midget: (and other asian adventures) half-dozen bars spread across its acreage. Every tour had two shows scheduled on that base, one per night at two different clubs: the "white" club, and the "black" club.

These were not sanctioned designations, it's just how everything happened to work itself out. Over time, more African-American soldiers hung out The Bearded Midget: (and other asian adventures) at one bar, and more white soldiers another. This became ingrained with the Rap music that began to dominate the stereo/DJ booth at one location, as well as the mix of country/rock at the other.

On my first military tour, I was with an African-American comedian named Marcus. He was rather light-skinned, and wasn't "street" in the slightest. Our first show on the Korean base was at the "black" club.

When I hit the stage I was greeted with a barrage of blank stares. Think of the moment in *Animal House* when the gang goes to see Otis Day and the Knights. It wasn't exactly "Boon, we're the only white people here" staring, but eyebrows did arch.

The Bearded Midget And Other Asian Adventures

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