

When wife's away Smiley can play

In a war, front-line troops who have been particularly hard pressed for some time by the enemy, are occasionally given a spell of R and R behind the lines. Rest and Recreation.

It gives them a chance to get clean, to sleep a decent sleep, to eat some real food instead of something resembling dog-food out of a can, and perhaps even get a few cold beers or watch an old movie. Then, supposedly rested, they go back to the front lines, the fear, the filth, the lousy grub, and the physical effort and indignities involved.

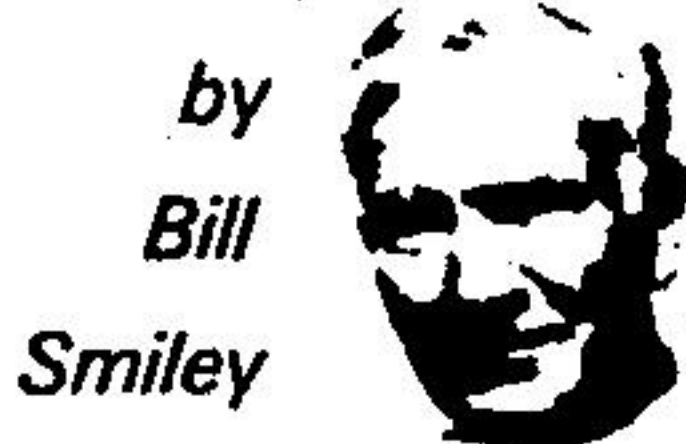
Well, I've just had 12 days of R and R, and it was great. Now I'm back in the front lines again, and as General Sherman said, "War is hell."

My wife was away for 12 whole days, which I devoted to Rest and Recreation. My kind.

But mine was a little different from the typical R and R of an army unit. Normally, while serving in the front lines of the domestic war, I'm clean, I sleep decently, the grub is excellent, there is no filth, and the only problem is the constant harassment of the Top Sergeant, my old lady.

During my R and R days, I did the opposite to what soldiers do. Let myself get dirty (I didn't shave, wore old, shabby but comfortable clothes, didn't make the bed once, slept in my underwear.)

I slept like a log, but on my own terms, from about 4 a.m. until noon, or 6 a.m. until afternoon. Or whenever I felt like it.



by
Bill
Smiley

I ate well, but in the same manner in which I eat on the front lines: meat, potatoes, vegetables and dessert for dinner; a simple breakfast of a boiled egg or a banana with toast, peanut butter and tea. "And don't forget your vitamin pills."

Nope, I had bacon and eggs for dinner. I have ice cream and peaches for breakfast, if I felt like it. If I didn't I had apple strudel and pears, or maybe just a hunk of cheese and a glass of beer.

And I chose my own hours. None of this eight o'clock breakfast. Sometimes I had it at 4 a.m., sometimes at 11 a.m.

None of this noon-hour for lunch. At three in the afternoon, I might settle down to a good book, and a big plate of head-cheese, a huge dollop of cottage cheese, a dill pickle, a rosy tomato, right out of a friend's garden, cut into chunks (my wife likes them sliced) and half a can of cold pork and beans. A good protein diet.

Occasionally, I'd splurge on a frozen food meal, but they're generally pretty lousy and very expensive. And another trouble is that I read the directions, and forge them, or get engrossed in a book or

newspaper. As a result they were overcooked and overflowing into the oven (a cardinal sin), or they were half-raw and I threw them out.

And another difference from the soldiers is that I didn't watch any old movies. I don't think the TV set was on more than twice during this golden period. Thus, I didn't have to quibble with anyone about what we'd watch, which I do on the home front. I didn't watch nuthin, and I'm sure I missed nuthin.

What I did do was go to a couple of movies at the local cinema, all by myself. My wife just won't go to movies, because she falls asleep after 10 minutes. She suffers from insomnia, and can sleep only in movies, on boats, trains, buses, or aircraft, on none of which I can close my eyes.

One of the most restful parts of my R and R period was sitting in the backyard, feet up, reading a good escape novel. No guilt feeling, nothing to do but bat away the odd wasp.

Another was reading the morning paper, perhaps at three in the afternoon, without just sitting there with the thing on my knees, listening to all the troubles about our children, her father, the upcoming wedding, her lack of sleep, and my general shortcomings as a husband and father.

Another was forgetting about money. I just piled all the bills on the counter in the kitchen, and put them out of my mind. She likes paying bills. I abhor it.

Another was the telephone. If I felt life answering it, I did. If I didn't, I didn't. For me, the telephone is one of the great sores in modern society. Every time it rings, somebody wants something. It never rings to bring you good news. I answered it a few times, found the caller had a wrong number, and quit.

All in all, it was Elysium. A quiet trip to the library to pick up four more books, a coffee in my favorite place, a little shopping, a quiet dinner of cucumbers, ham, tomatoes and a couple of hard-boiled eggs, a quiet read until four in the morning.

Despite the fact that I washed four days of dishes, ran the vacuum over the floor, and made the bed. I was caught in the act.

I knew exactly when her bus was coming in. I was to meet it. Despite this, and due to my sleeping habits (I'd had one hour the night before), I had a fine dinner, then fell deep into the arms of Morpheus, and missed the bus. She was, shall we say, purple with rage.

Then she checked the garbage pail, and found there were only two little bags in it. It's usually full. This convinced her that I'd been too lazy to cook a meal and had been eating out all the time. All hell broke loose. Imagine being subjected to a tirade because you haven't filled the garbage pail.

Next time she's away, I'll have three garbage bags full of empty mickeys, frozen food boxes, and great bundles of corn husks.



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