

There's More Than in That Dumpster



Cute, but oh
so dangerous!

By Dexter Noonan,
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You work as a cook at the base galley, and it's your turn to take out the trash. You're less than thrilled that you have to go out in the darkness without a flashlight. However, you make your way to the dumpster, lift the lid, and toss in the trash, then head back to work. You don't have a clue to the danger you just escaped.

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The next morning, a fellow employee discovers what you missed. He approaches the same dumpster and lifts the lid, only to find six raccoons trapped inside. He notifies the safety officer, who immediately investigates and places a piece of wood in the dumpster so the raccoons can escape.

For the next two weeks, the same critters are found trapped inside this dumpster on a regular basis. They've located a food source and aren't going to leave as long as food is available. Repeatedly, someone puts a piece of wood in the dumpster so the raccoons can leave. This cycle continues until we decide the risk is too high and call a licensed trapper to remove the intruders. At the same time, we replace the dumpster with a type that prevents any critters from entering it.

In the weeks after this episode, we heard several comments about how cute the raccoons were. I have to admit they looked like they could win anyone's heart. In reality, though, they are extremely dangerous.

Raccoons are known to be very curious animals, and when around humans for any length of time, they aren't afraid of them. When startled, though, they will attack, especially if their babies are around, as shown in the accompanying photo.

It's also known that raccoons are a major carrier of rabies. Bite victims, however, don't recognize a problem in the early stages. The only safe course of action for victims is to go through a very painful series of shots.

Of all the dangers faced every day by Sailors and Marines, I doubt that raccoons rank very high on the list. Nevertheless, this incident reminds us that we have to know our environment and all the possible dangers that exist. You can't be too cautious. **A**

Good Deed Takes an Unexpected Twist

By ATCS(SW) Keith M. Olson,
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As a geographic bachelor at NAS Pt. Mugu, I've found that life can get exciting anytime it involves one of those four-legged "bandits" otherwise known as raccoons. My evenings in the BEQ usually are calm, but that wasn't the case one October evening.

I had just put in a long day at the maintenance desk and was looking forward to retiring to my third-deck barracks room for some much needed rest. By the time I was ready to hit the rack (2230), I had accumulated some trash and decided to take it to the dumpster. It was just a matter of walking to the end of a passageway and tossing the trash bag down to the open dumpster.

I always watch out for any of the critters—including cats, dogs, possums, raccoons, and buzzards—that hang out at the dumpster. If I see any, I make a noise to alert them to get away from my well-aimed toss. As I was about to pitch the bag this night, I saw a small raccoon in the bottom of the dumpster, and he was making an awful racket.

He was standing on a bag of trash, trying to jump out. I couldn't help feeling sorry for the little fellow. I knew he would be trapped for a day or two because it would take that long for the trash to build up enough for him to climb out. Workers recently had emptied the dumpster.



I now had to decide whether to find another limb or retrieve the one inside the dumpster.

I figured if I didn't help him, I wouldn't feel good about myself, so I made my way down the ladders and cautiously walked to the dumpster. In the meantime, half a dozen cats and a possum scurried out of my way.

As I peered into the dumpster, I realized this "bandit" was larger than the helpless little creature I had seen from the third story. "Hmm, now what?" I wondered. I looked around for something to put in the dumpster to give the victim a launch pad. I was stumped until I saw a tree.

After making sure the coast was clear, I climbed the tree, found a limb the suitable size, and broke it off. I then climbed down from the tree and placed the limb in the dumpster. I waited for the raccoon to return to his environment, but I only heard him thrashing around inside. Then the limb disappeared.

I now had to decide whether to find another limb or retrieve the one inside the dumpster. After looking at the tree I had just mutilated, I decided to leave it alone. With all the courage I could muster, I hoisted myself up on the dumpster and prepared to jump inside. My little friend was backed up in the opposite corner, standing on his hind legs with his front ones raised in the air as if to surrender. As I soon would learn, though, surrender was the farthest thing from his mind.

I don't mind admitting that I was getting concerned about my safety at this point. I also was wishing I had taken a harder look at that tree. However, only one option was left now. I had to reposition the limb for this rascal before he went from defense to offense.

We stared each other down like a couple of old-time gunfighters as I reached for the limb, which was partly underneath him. That's when he made his move. He leaped for his best avenue of escape—and I don't mean the limb. The rascal jumped on my back.

I quickly spun around and tried to shake him off, but he held on like a bull rider. My heart was racing, and I think I could feel his thumping, too. I jumped

for the edge of the dumpster, and, as I did, he saw his opportunity. He hopped on my head and launched for safety.

I then hopped out of the dumpster, feeling relieved and embarrassed about the ordeal. By now, the raccoon was yards away and on his way home. I suddenly realized how lucky I had been. I looked around and, to my relief, saw no one who had been watching this ridiculous spectacle.

As I headed for the security of my room, I checked myself and found I had survived without a single scratch. It definitely was time to turn in. I'll probably always remember how a not-so-little raccoon and my stupidity combined to turn a long day into a wild night. What did I learn from this experience?

- Never take chances with wildlife. Sometimes, it's better to think with your head than with your heart.

- Although raccoons may be protected on NAS Pt. Mugu, the chances for being attacked are the same as if they were in the wild. Because of all the critters that run free on the base, it pays to be alert for them. Even taking a walk with your kids can pose a risk. The chance of these animals having some kind of disease is fairly high.

- The first thing you should do when faced with an animal is to call the local animal-control agency and let the experts take care of the situation. I unnecessarily put myself in harm's way when all I had to do was to make a phone call. 

Neither of these incidents involved raccoons in the attic of a home, but not everyone is as lucky. If these "bandits" ever move into your attic, here's a tip I picked up from a column in a local newspaper: "Put a small radio and a flashlight in the attic, switch on the light, and turn the radio to loud rock. The raccoons will leave because they like a place that is warm, dark and quiet." A volunteer with an animal refuge supposedly offered this solution.—Ed.