

## Catch A Zombie Tiger By The Tail?

### Match Conclusion

It's an early summer evening and a dozen off-duty ZKs are gathered on the barracks porch in the twilight sharing outpost news and gossip and intermittently singing to the accompaniment of a guitar and harmonica. They are far enough from the perimeter fence that attracting the attention of the undead is not a concern and discussions are lively and sometimes loud as they pass around a jug of homemade brandy. As they laugh, talk and sing, a familiar figure approaches and they greet him heartily.

"Where you been for the last week Malone?" asks one of the ZK revelers.

"Well...I'm not supposed to tell," he replies.

"Well then we can only assume you've taken up an alternative lifestyle with a zombie and set up house in the Dead Zone," an inebriated voice calls out from porch.

"Yeah, a same-sex one!" chimes in another half-drunk jokester.

"Malone don't roll that way with the Zed you clowns," the new arrival retorts, dropping his duffel bag and taking a seat on the porch. "Let me have a belt from that jug and maybe I'll start to appreciate your humor more."

They pass the jug and ZKs come and go as the night falls leaving only the dim illumination of the nearly full moon. Each newcomer to the porch party asks Malone the same questions and gets the same polite rebuff until the cumulative effect of two hours of drinking finally loosens his tight lip.

"Alright, I'll tell you...but you got to keep it quiet. I was on leave for a week living it up in town, because I'm the second most expert guy on tigers here." His explanation is at first met with silence.

"Your aren't expert at whipping your butt," someone finally says. "That story is a crock."

"I said that wrong," Malone replies. "I mean the captain thinks I'm the second most expert man on tigers and she gave me the furlough as a reward for helping her get the tiger." This comment is also met with initial silence.

After several seconds someone asks, "You mean the tiger they sent all those hunters and ZK escorts out to look for last week to put in the zoo?"

"Yeah. The man-eater. I helped the captain get it."

"Let me guess," says another skeptical voice in the dark, "your buddy who went with you also got leave?"

"Yeah but he got two weeks because he did a lot more than I did. In fact, I really didn't do anything. He was the one that beat the bushes for the tiger and cleared out all the undead. He shot 35 zombies. I didn't even run into one. They were all on his side on the low ground. I was about 150 feet above him

on the hillside to his left. I actually saw him find the tiger. By pure luck there was a break in the trees and I could see where his trail came out of the forest. I didn't see the tiger at first, but I saw a man's bloody leg on the ground about ten yards in front of him. I got my binoculars out and I could see it was bit through the thigh bone. You know zombies don't do that. They'll gnaw off a limb at the joint but human teeth aren't made for crushing bone. I knew the tiger had done it."

Then someone interrupted, "You know, he might actually be telling the truth because I heard one of those hunters got eaten on that boondoggle and that's why they called it off before they caught the tiger."

"Oh that hunter got eaten alright, but not by the tiger," Malone continued, "the tiger ripped him up figuring on eating him but the undead came along and took his supper. That tiger must have been crazy hungry. I saw it a couple seconds after I saw the leg."

"So your buddy was walking right up on the tiger and didn't even see it"

"Well, he saw it alright. But he was less than twenty feet from it when he did. It's hard to see with those stripes."

"It's 900 pounds and orange!"

"Hey, you weren't there." Malone answered defensively. "I'm telling you they are harder to see than you think. I think I could see it better because I was above. Anyway, the tiger sees him too and jumps out. Well...jumped out doesn't exactly describe it. It was more like it had a rocket up its butt. It just leapt horizontally so fast it was sort of this orange blur through the air and just before it landed on his head there was a shot that was so loud it was like the crack-of-doom and the tiger folded up in the air and fell like a sack of manure right on the ground at his feet. It was an amazing shot."

"He shot the tiger in mid-air?!" a ZK asked incredulously from the darkness.

"No, the captain shot it." Malone replied. "She was about 50 yards behind him and a little bit above. She must have shot right over his left shoulder. Amazing shot. Anyway, she gave him most of the credit for tracking and flushing the thing out. As far as she's concerned, ZK Private First Class Frank Thomas is the most expert man on tigers in the company."

"What this about private first class?" the harmonica player inquired.

"Oh yeah, she gave him a promotion too," Malone added.