Oh Shit

Travis Poindexter

I was taking a shower in Iraq one night during the summer of 2003. The shower had three stalls and was fabricated from things that had been sourced from around the base. The water heater that had been brought from the U.S. had yet to be used, since the sun heated the water enough to keep it hot all night long. Due to the absence of water in Iraq, I was forced to take a military shower. A military shower, also known as a Navy shower, requires using as little water as possible. First, I used just enough water to get myself wet before turning it off. Once wet, I applied all the soap and shampoo I needed before turning the water back on just long enough to rinse off. That night, I was about to rinse off when a mortar exploded right outside the shower. After picking myself up off the shower floor, I donned my pants and ran as fast as I could to the nearest bunker. Once in the bunker, I realized I was still covered in soap and shampoo and could not do anything until the all clear was called. By the time the all clear came, the soap and shampoo was long dried. I walked back toward the shower in a shitty mood, thinking of how much I hated all the shit in Iraq. Shitty working conditions, shitty food, shitty Iraqis with their shitty mortars and rockets, and now even the showers were affected by Iraq's shitiness. If there is one word that best described Iraq, it would be shit.

The word shit is a versatile word that can be used as both a noun and a verb. As a noun, it can be used to describe poop (don't step in that shit) or as a generic term for anything (grab that shit). If used in the plural form, "the shits" is a slang term for diarrhea (I've got the shits). When used as a verb, it describes the act of defecation (I've got to shit). It can be used to describe surprise (I shit myself or he shit bricks) and to describe getting in trouble (I'm in deep shit, tough shit, or the shit hit the fan). If something or someone is bad, calling or comparing them to shit can be an effective way of showing displeasure (the food was shitty or he is a piece of shit). To assert dominance, a person can lift themselves up (I'm the shit) or put someone down (you ain't shit). Attaching an animal characteristic to shit can emphasize a person's traits (chickenshit, batshit, or apeshit). If a person exaggerates,

a response can be directed toward the person (you're full of shit or stop talking shit) or the person's comment (that's bullshit/horseshit). Lastly, it is an effective way to convey an emphasis (shiiiiit) or a quantity (that's a shitload). How did this versatile word come to be?

The word shit likely originated from the Old English word for dung: scite, before morphing into the Middle English word for excrement: schitte. The Oxford English Dictionary also notes that the word has Germanic origins and is related to the Dutch word schijten and the German word scheissen. It should be noted that shit was originally a neutral term and could be used without vulgar connotation. A popular myth on the internet gives the origin of shit as an acronym for "Ship High In Transit." The story of the acronym claims that dried manure being moved by boat would produce explosive methane gas if it got wet. Therefore, S.H.I.T. would be printed in the outside of the bundles to let the sailors know that it must be kept dry. While the story sounds credible, it has been debunked. Since methane gas is lighter than air, if it was created, it would rise and leave the ship rather than accumulate in the hold. Additionally, the use of acronyms didn't really begin until WWI, which occurred long after the manure shipments had occurred. So, is there anything good that comes from shit?

During WWII, the German army in North Africa had many soldiers suffering from dysentery. The Germans learned from the local African residents that consuming fresh camel shit was the best remedy for the disease. Of course, the Germans weren't about to start eating camel shit, and instead used the knowledge to extract the beneficial bacteria contained within the camel shit. Since camel shit became known as the cure for dysentery, German troops regarded it as a good luck charm and would drive over it. When the British learned of this, they created land mines that looked like piles of camel shit. The Germans soon caught on and began avoiding anything that resembled fresh camel shit. In response, the British created land mines that looked like camel shit that was already run over and appeared to be safe. Oh, the creativity of war.

Works Cited

7 Creative Uses for Poop. N.d. *Mental Floss*. Retrieved March 1, 2014. http://mentalfloss.com/article/23998/7-creative-uses-poop.

Ingenious Trifling. N.d. *Online Etymology Dictionary*. Retrieved March 1, 2014. http://etymonline.com/baloney.php.

Shit. N.d. *Oxford Dictionaries*. Retrieved March 1, 2014. http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/english/shit.

Shit. N.d. *Wikipedia*. Retrieved February 22, 2014. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shit.