

# GRANDPA'S WAR

## 501<sup>st</sup> MPs in the Gulf War



By

Richard L Muniz



# **Grandpa's War**

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**To Austin, Alexia, Caleb, and Genevive – and children everywhere. I hope that someday  
you pull this down from your bookshelf to show you children.**

**I hope you live in a world where humanity has finally grown up and there is no such thing  
as war anymore.**

**That young men and women don't need to leave their homes to fight.**

**May God be good to you and yours.**



A long time ago in the [Gulf War](#), I took about a hundred million pictures (okay, slight exaggeration) of [1st Armored Division's 501st MPs](#). Over the next several days, weeks, and months, I'm going to start scanning and posting them. I was officially the unofficial photographer of the unit and I've tried hard to record who we were and how we lived.

So, stay tuned for that. I will also use the page as an excuse to start coming out from the shadow of Will Ablan. (Hmmm, good title for a book there). It doesn't take Sherlock Holmes to figure out Will Ablan is really a very thinly disguised Richard Muniz.



I also made a promise years ago that I'd get the pictures out there (we looked at photobooks, yearbooks, and so on, just too expensive). So, members of 501st MPs, feel free to download them and consider it a promise fulfilled. The pictures are copyrighted, but I've no qualms about you downloading them for personal use.

One thing I'm very sorry about is I don't have pictures of the other platoons. It would have been easy enough for me to set up (all I had to do was ask). Looking back, I wish I had. Sorry Guys.

Here's the first of the many pictures that will make it in here. It's yours truly standing in front of my [HUMVEE](#).

## 14 Dec 90 – THE STORY BEGINS

Our deployment started in August of 90.

I was patrol supervisor that day. I got up and got ready to take my team of MPs out for road duty. I shaved, combed my hair, and while dressing, I realized I hadn't seen any of them. So, I went knocking on doors. They were all up and ready to go, but their eyes were fixed on the TVs. Their eyes were wide with disbelief. They were watching the news, and it showed Iraqi tanks rolling into Kuwait City.

I recall one of them asking if I thought we'd be going.

My response was to bet on it.

Our adventure actual deployment began December 14th, 1990. It had snowed in Ansbach, Germany. That was the only snow I'd see that year. We were up before the sun, getting our

rooms closed out, drawing weapons, and getting our bags downstairs for transport. Buses showed up, and goodbyes were made.

We were confined to barracks the night before. Most of us had ordered food in. My last meal in Germany was Spaghetti Carbonara ordered from a small Gasthaus just down the block. Desert was a pint of Hagans-Daus butter Pecan ice cream.

I felt a little like a guy waiting for his own execution, and enjoying his last meal, but I'm sure most everyone felt that way.

That morning, we were all issued bayonets. Now bayonets are made to go on the end of a rifle, and supposedly, these would fit ours.

The problem was bayonet fighting training was something none of us had ever received. So, fixing bayonets would have left us in a world of hurt. I also made the discovery that I couldn't get mine out of the sheath. Either it, the sheath, or something was warped, or it had rusted in there. I had a buddy grab the hilt, and I grabbed the sheath, and with two, very in shape men pulling at it, the blade wouldn't budge. I complained and was told not to worry. "You PROBABLY won't need it."



**1-Sgt. Motti and SSG Hahr look towards the camera. This is in the hallway right outside my room the morning we left.**

Then why give it to me? is the first thing I thought.

Needing a knife when we got down there, I eventually purchased a cheap hunting knife out of an Arab PX at KKMC (King Khalid Military Community). I recently gave it to my Grandson.

The next morning, we had a light meal. Doughnuts and coffee if memory serves. The kitchen was already closed down and the next food we ate (after airline food) would be MREs (Meals Ready to Eat, or Meals Rejected by Ethiopia - take your choice).

I think our leaving was especially hard on the married guys and those with young children. The hardest part was that we were just a few weeks away from Christmas.

It's unfortunate that we couldn't pick what day we left, but that's the way it goes for a soldier. Many of the families celebrated Christmas weeks before.

That morning, the normally bustling Kaserne (barracks) was quiet. The field artillery guys who shared the Kaserne with us had shipped out a few days before.

By evening, except for a few folks left behind to keep an eye on things, it would be quiet there.



**2-Sgt Greg Bradley says so long to his wife.**

We loaded out duffle bags onto a truck and last minute goodbyes were made. I really felt for the guys who were leaving their families behind, My family was back in the states so I walked around getting pictures.

We boarded the buses and were driven to the airport in Nuremberg. A Pan-Am 747 was waiting to fly us to Saudi Arabia.

We stacked out

It would be several hours before we boarded, however. Cots had been set up and many of us took advantage of that and took a quick nap, or just tried to relax. I lay back and tried to catch some shut eye but couldn't. We had our ruck sacks with us (we'd carry those onto the plane) and I had a copy of Star Trek – The Kobayashi Maru in one of the pockets. I'd almost finished the novel by the time they called for us to board.

We got up and walked out to the plane.

Several hours later, we were enroute to Saudi Arabia.

It was a party at thirty thousand feet with unlimited sodas, in flight movies, and stewardesses that looked after us. I remember watching "She Devil" with Rosanne Barr. I'd have preferred a western, but hey, it was free, and not a half bad movie.

Here's a page I put together in my photo album showing pictures from that flight.





VACATION  
BEGIN...  
MADE VERY  
WELCOME...

ABOVE: Somewhere  
over Germany.

RIGHT: Lt. Bielecki  
and Lt. Wilhelm being  
strange.

BELOW RIGHT: Sunset  
at 30,000 feet.

BELOW: One honey of  
a hostess.



Never in my life would I have dreamt of flying into combat with movies, stewardesses, and first-class accommodations. My uncles who served in WW II got to their battlefields on crowded ships. I doubt there was even a hint of the luxury we had. Maybe they had occasional movies. I've seen films with guys smoking and playing cards to pass the time. I'm sure most of them spent their time throwing up all the way over.

Now here I was, flying into combat. It was more like flying across the country for a business meeting than going to war. Sometimes I wonder who goes to bed at night and dreams up this stuff.

The party atmosphere changed as we approached Saudi Arabia, however. As we turned to land, and the lights came down low, the plane quieted. I remember looking out the window and seeing the city of Dhahran spreading out in front of us.

I don't know what I expected.

I guess I'd expected the city to be blacked out like the cities were in World War II. But not here. The place was lit up. I could see the runway and, as I watched, I saw several bright, star-like objects race down it and head up into the sky. They were launching fighters. A Combat Air Patrol (CAP) was already standing by and orbiting the city.

A few minutes later, we landed. Reality slapped us in the face at that point. I remember as we rolled past a connecting runway, I had a glimpse of an F-15 sitting with an Air Force crew around it. What caught my attention was the plane had missiles under its wings. White ones. It was loaded for combat.

We stopped a few minutes later and got out. We stood in the sand as our duffel bags were unloaded. Mine was easy to find. I'd drawn our brand onto the bottom with a black magic marker. We picked them up and waited for someone to tell us what to do next.

What to do next turned out to be to get some sleep. Buses wouldn't be there until after sunrise, and we were hours away from that. I put my duffel and ruck down in the sand next to the busy runway. Spread about me were the two hundred plus people who'd flown with me.

With jet fighters screaming down the runway, helicopters flying overhead, and engines whining, we lay down and slept.

The next morning was a blur. The buses arrived, and I have a vague recollection of getting my stuff and boarding the bus. I put my duffel in the overhead bin, sat down, and looked down at my feet. There was a hole rusted through the bottom of the bus. As we started off, I looked through the hole and could clearly see the ground passing under us. I found it remarkable that the bus was even running. I should have felt concerned. I didn't. Instead, I fell asleep again. I woke up once to see my side of the bus headed into another bus. I remember saying to myself, "Boy, go back to sleep. You're about to be part of something you don't want to know about."

Remarkably, I did.





### **Guard standing outside the Dew Drop Inn sign.**

It felt like I slept forever. When I woke up, we were just a stone's throw from a large oil refinery. Someone with a sense of humor had made a sign and hung it up like one would a city limits sign, or a sign for a fancy hotel. It was a tent city we'd arrived at, and they'd named it the Dew Drop Inn. We'd be there for a week or so until our vehicles caught up to us.

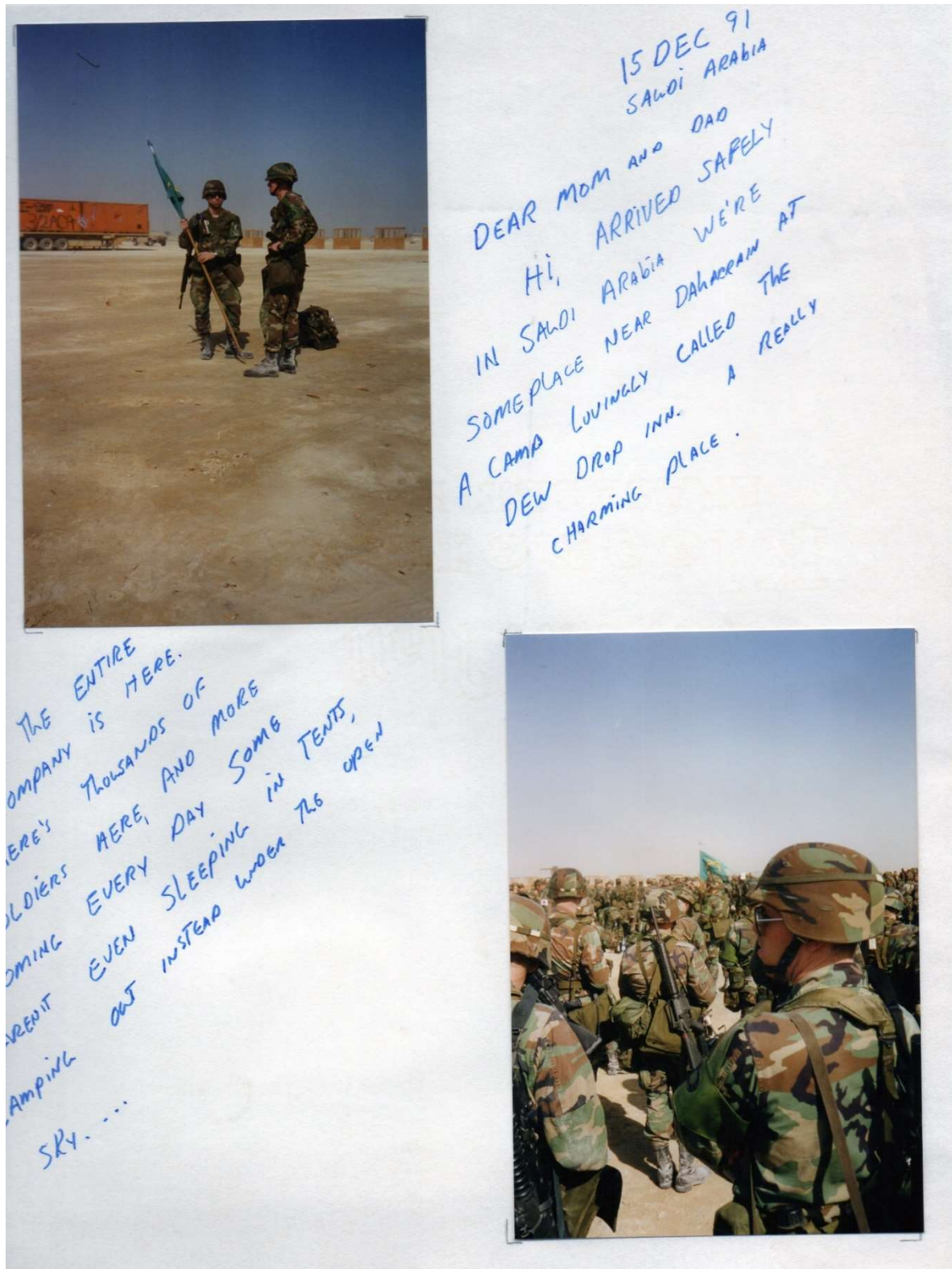
Here's some stuff I put together that came straight from the old photo albums on the next page. When I wrote it, I put it together with the idea of trying to get across the living conditions there.

The place was crowded, dusty, hot in the day and cold at night, and compared to some places we ended up at, this place might as well have been summer camp.

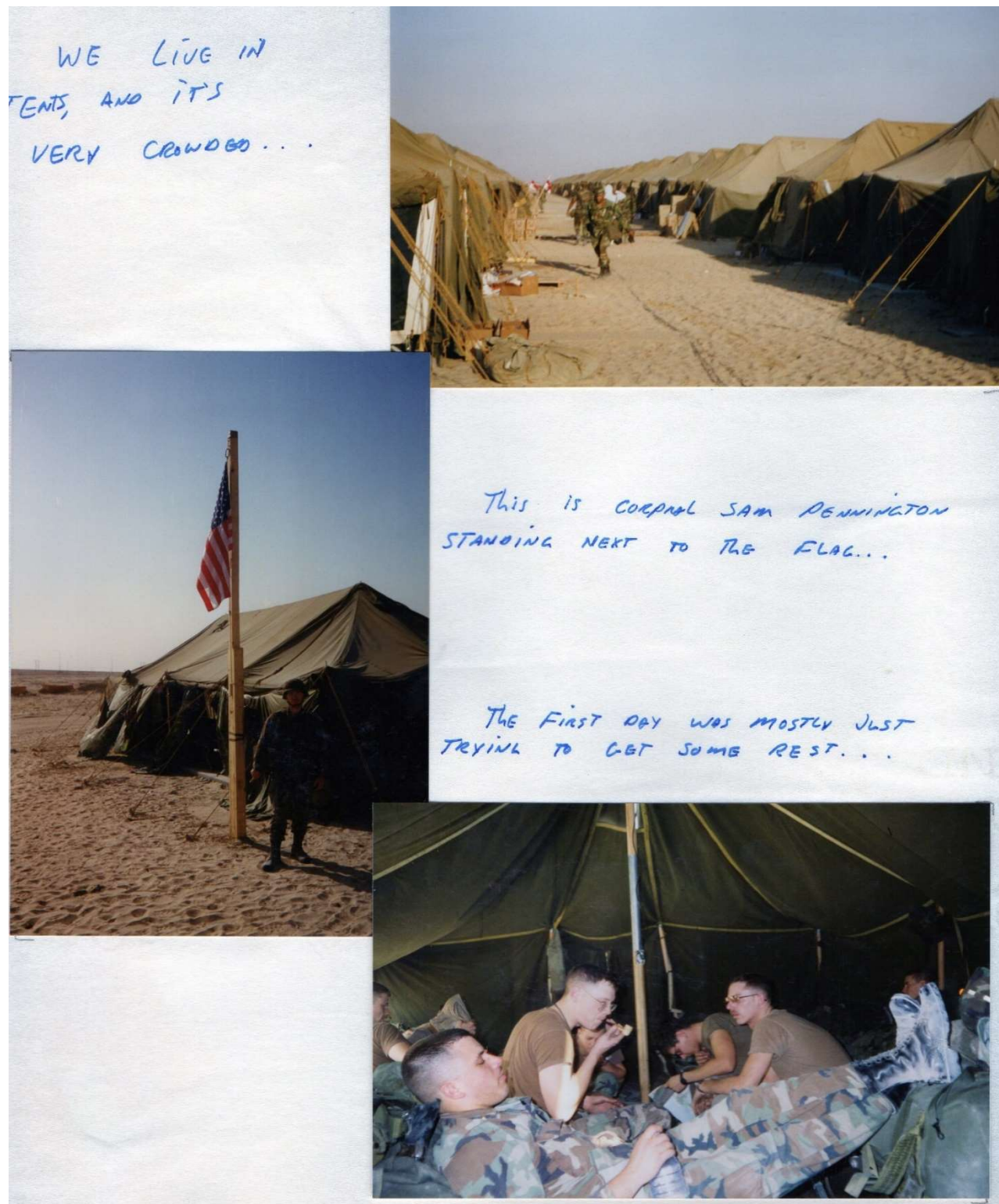


### **3 Airfield at Daharan**





When we arrived that morning, we were the only ones there. By that evening, the Dew Drop Inn was hosting thousands of soldiers. Cpl. Eric McArtor stands in the foreground. Mid picture is the Company guidon.



More from the old photo albums.





WE EAT IN AN  
OPEN AIR MESS  
THE FOOD ISN'T THE  
BEST, NOR IS THERE  
ENOUGH.

DESPITE THE  
RAW LANDSCAPE,  
WE DO HAVE  
A RARE, VERY  
SPECIAL MOMENTS...



Pakistanis cooked for us. Food seemed to be doled out with an eye dropper.



WE TRAIN  
THE DAY, NBC TRAIN  
OCCUPIES A LOT OF OUR TIME.  
IN THE 100+ TEMPERATURES, WE  
CAN TRAIN FOR ONLY A LITTLE  
WHITE  
BUT IN THE COOL OF  
THE EVENING, WE ALWAYS  
FIND TIME TO RELAX  
I DON'T KNOW  
HOW MUCH LONGER  
WE'LL BE HERE. HOPE  
WE LEAVE SOON.  
MORE LATER  
GOOD NIGHT



Top picture: SP4 Roberts and Hagadorn covered with sweat. Below: Blowing off a little steam with soccer. Two water bottles mark the goals.

The Dew Drop Inn had a small PX in a tent. The first few days we were there, I went to take a shower, and the old Casio watch I'd worn for years got wet and gave up the ghost. I went to the small PX and bought a watch. I paid for it with a check (it was AFESS - did I spell that right? - so my check was good.)

The check never cleared. Even after we got back to Germany, it still hadn't cleared. It wasn't until over a year later that it finally hit the bank. It was my account in Germany, and by that time I'd moved on, and that account was closed. Uncle Sam collected it from my taxes years after I was a civilian.



**Lt. John Bielecki at the Dew Drop Inn**

The tent we found ourselves in was sitting on a cement floor. I wondered when they'd poured those, and how much pre-planning had gone into it. A few days later, I saw engineers pouring more tent floors. This wasn't that planned, but an ongoing task.

Our meals were served at an open-air mess, and Pakistanis cooked for us. Food seemed to be doled out with an eye dropper, and I always felt hungry. The MREs we received were raided for extra calories.

A typical breakfast was some kind of cereal (frosted flakes, corn flakes, etc.) in small single serving boxes. The front of the box was perforated, and you cut along the lines, spread the resulting flaps apart, and cut into the wax paper bag that held the cereal. Pour in your milk, and you had a DIY bowl.



I recall eating and thanking God for being raised in some sheep and cow camps because that's how you did things up there. It didn't take long for others to emulate me.

I seem to recall getting eggs, scrambled of course. I want to say sausages (that might have been wishful thinking – Saudi Arabia is a Muslim nation after all), as well as toast, and an occasional pancake. OJ and milk was in boxes.

Considering this was some of the last food we saw that didn't come out of an MRE bag, it's surprising I don't recall more about it. I recall lots of chicken and rice.

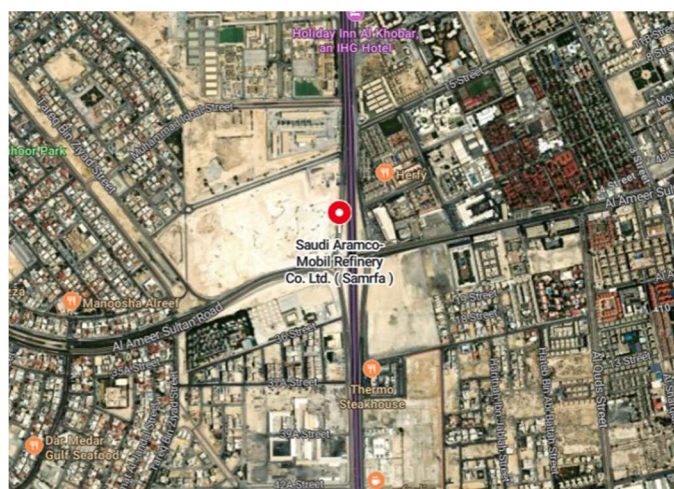
A few days later, our HUMVEEs caught up to us. We were relieved that they'd arrived safely. We'd stowed a lot of gear inside them, and it was all there. SPC Doty had traveled on the ship with them, kept an eye on things, and he said he had a good time on the voyage.

One of the orders we got, and one that sounded stupid at the beginning was that we needed to keep our boots shined. So, we shined our boots, stepped out of the tent, and instantly, the shine job was destroyed. Turns out there was some common sense here. The dryness, dust, and heat leached oils from our boots. Without replenishing those oils they'd have fallen apart quickly. Also, when it rained, the wax helped to keep moisture out which helps keep the feet a little dryer.

There was little to do except do some light training. Since Saddam had Chemical weapons and common sense dictated, he might try to use them (there were reports he'd used them in the Iran-Iraq wars – And reports he'd used them on other tribes within Iraq.).

So, we did a lot of NBC (Nuclear, Biological and Chemical) defense training.

It was already getting warm so we trained in the morning and tried to stay out of the sun in the afternoon. It would be weeks before we adapted to the desert and in the meantime, everyone was under orders not to push it.



**4- I THINK this is where we wound up, in the large open area just south of the refinery. Not exactly sure.**

We'd been pretty much sitting on our butts despite some light training. Then we got a mission. I'd heard a bomb was found just outside the entrance to the Dew Drop Inn.

I'm not sure how true that was, but that was the rumor floating around the Inn. But rumor or not, it prompted someone to start taking things a little more seriously.



**Patrolling the Dew Drop Inn. A show of force with empty guns.**

With security suddenly an issue, someone realized there was a company of MPs doing nothing. Since we had our vehicles, we could patrol the camp and its area. After all, the job of an MP is to secure the rear area, or so our training manual tells us.

There was one small problem with the idea.

We had no bullets! I guess we could have thrown rocks.

Somehow, we got one box of ammo per M-60 machine gun. That was a single belt of ammo of about hundred rounds each and would have lasted about four seconds in a fire fight. But we patrolled the camp, put empty magazines into our rifles, and made a show of force that might keep any would be terrorists or the like away.

## **22 Dec 91 – We leave for TAA Thompson**

We had this mission for just a few days. By the time we got order to leave the Dew Drop Inn, we were more than happy to. The constant sameness of the tent city, the food that marginally better than hunger, and the enforced mission of protecting the place with few bullets, empty guns, and dirty looks had begun to wear on us.

But when the word came that we were moving out. We didn't have a clue where we were headed. All we had was the LT with a list of directions, a map (no cracks about an officer with a map, please. He knew how to read one.) and ordered to watch for a wrecked tanker truck on the side of the road.

That was our destination. We loaded up the Humvees with everything except the gear we'd need, our rucks and our cots. The next morning, well before sunrise, we each drew an MRE and left the Inn.

There's only a few things I recall about the journey into the desert. One was a fuel stop. The army had established several with pumps and huge bladders full of diesel. A single female specialist was running the place. She looked as tired as we felt.

The other was the number of cars off the road. It seems when one broke down or got a wreck, the Saudi's just left it to rust away.

We arrived at TAA (Tactical Assembly Area) Thompson well before sundown. TAA Thompson was a large, spread-out area and seemed to be part of the KKMC (King Khalid Military Community) areas. We weren't far from a small town.

I thought I'd seen the middle of nowhere before.

I was wrong.

Here's a few more pictures,





When we arrived at Thompson, a few miles outside the town of [Al Qaisumah](#), we found 501st MPs was assigned to a small cluster of large tents maybe a mile and half from the road. Each tent housed a platoon and associated gear. A slightly smaller tent housed the headquarters (Supply, CQ, Captain and 1st Sgt, that kind of stuff).

The floors were dirt and we'd have to string a couple of bare bulbs to illuminate out tent. That also meant blackout conditions. At night, if you stepped out of a tent and lights were on behind you, you needed to look and make sure very little, if any light was leaking out.

We had latrines that harkened back to the old Two-Holer's that our great grandparents enjoyed. But Granny's old toilet was a little mor private. We had open screens on all four sides to help provide some air flow. Lack of privacy was the debt we paid to keep from choking from the stench.

Granny, when she went to the john, effected into a hole dug deep into the ground. We did our business into cut down 50 Gallon drums. Every day, these had to be emptied and the contents burnt, a task that is about as disgusting as it sounds.

Burning wet crap required an enormous amount of fuel and the best we managed was to get ride of maybe a 10<sup>th</sup> of it. Most of it went wet into the so called "Burn pit".

The good news was we had an adequate supply of TP. But it sure wasn't Charmin, Northern, or even Walmart two ply cheap. In a pinch, this stuff could be used for sandpaper (slight exaggeration, but not by much). TP seemed to be the only thing there wasn't a shortage of and it was used to mark things, write on, you name it.

We also had relief tubes which were nothing more than PVC pipe buried in the sand at an angle. The idea was you relieved yourself (works only for male soldiers), and your urine ran down into the sand. The folks back home thought those looked cool, but the truth was they began to stink after a while. They stank so bad, we even bought bleach and the Arab take on Pine-Sol to make them smell better, If anything, they smelled worse afterwards.

Then we had the burn pit. We burnt stuff daily and no matter where you were, the smoke seemed to follow. The wind could be blowing north, and you're south of the burn pit, and the smoke would still blow into your tent. I remember someone said smoke follows beauty. I guess that's what we all got for being so damn good looking!

It's safe to say that within a matter of weeks our tidy little camp smelled like the county dump mixed in with a backed-up sewer.

A mission we picked up early was what we called "Checkpoint Bravo" (I don't think it ever really had a name - we just called it that). It was the turn off from the main highway (right next to the wrecked tanker trailer) and out to the desert. Trucks and other units arriving were instructed to watch for us, and we'd point them off the road in the direction they should go. We spent most of our time yelling at the drivers to put on their helmets since this was a combat area.



**Humvee at Checkpoint Bravo. Notice the parking pit behind the vehicle. Facing the camera is Cpl. Dietz.**

The engineers had dug out a pit where we could park our HUMVEEs in. But it rained and the pit turned into a swimming pool. We didn't park there.

But the parking pit was the location for the closest thing we'd have to a Christian service all the while I was there. There was a boatload of prohibitions on us concerning religion. Services, if any, were very small scale. We couldn't exhibit any crosses, religious medallions and so on. Putting the Bible out in the open was a major no-no.

And there were mosques everywhere to include truck stops. We were warned that unless you practiced Islam, you never, ever, under no circumstances, entered one. A story I heard (unconfirmed) centered on a soldier with the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne who urinated on the floor of one.

It took every favor we could get from the Saudis to commute his sentence from death to life imprisonment.

Like I said, I don't know how true the story is.

One of the coolest things that happened occurred with SSG Hahr. He'd come to us from recruiter duty, and now he was standing alongside a dusty MSR (Main Supply Route) along with everyone else.





A truck pulls off the road to turn down towards the division assembly area, and the driver of course didn't have his helmet on. SSG Hahr went to yell at the driver and got a reaction he didn't expect. The driver almost fell out of the truck laughing, looks up at the sky, and says, "Thank you, God. My recruiter is here with me." It was a nice reunion for them.



**SSG Dean Hahr out at Checkpoint Bravo**

Life at TAA Thompson was rather uneventful. At least the first week of it. Mostly, we were just trying to adapt to our new surroundings and build a home (if you can call a tent, home) in the middle of the desert.

Christmas day brought our first storm. It rained that night, and the water pooled in ruts and froze. Some people said it had snowed. Then the wind came up, and even with wet sand, there was still just enough of a sandstorm for it to be a very gloomy day for us all. The stove was going full



**Christmas Day, 1990. PFC Stevens, fresh out of AIT. A lot of those young men and women grew up quickly.**

Blast, but it barely kept the cold at bay. I think that's one thing that caught us by surprise was just how cold the desert can get. I guess in retrospect, that shouldn't have been a surprise since there's really nothing out there to hold the heat. I was thankful for cold weather gear and in the middle of what can be one of the hottest regions on Earth, we were wearing winter coats and shivering.

I recall some of the guys cut up an MRE box and drew a Christmas tree onto it. I guess they were trying to make it feel like Chri

It didn't help.





**Christmas day brought our first storm. It rained and created puddles that froze over**

Everyone wanted to be anywhere except there. I remember lying back on my bunk and thinking of the Kringle Market in Nuremberg and buying a glass of warm Gluhwein. The Christmas before I'd done just that and walked around looking at the different booths. I remember it was snowing, and the snowflakes fell into the drink like tiny meteors hissing to their death.

I also thought about my kids and how the toys I'd bought them before leaving Germany had probably arrived busted. It was a sad, lonesome day.

My Christmas dinner was a Chicken and Rice MRE. I gave myself a treat, tossed it on the stove, and heated it up. Dust from the sandstorm helped season it.



**This water supply was just for my platoon and would last about four days. The water was usually hot and drinking it almost impossible. Crystal Light and presweetened Kool-Aid were our best friends. The cooks made sure we stayed well stocked with it.**

Lt. Bielecki and SFC Gallizou disappeared for a while. We didn't think anything of that. That evening they came in, told us to grab our gear and go down to the checkpoint.

So, we got dressed, grabbed our rifles, and convoyed down to the checkpoint. We had a nice surprise waiting for us. They had gone into town and purchased soda pop and snack cakes. SSG Honor was a PK (Preacher's Kid) and had a put together a small service for us. He preached from John 3:16 and talked about how Jesus had taken on flesh and died for our sins. Afterwards, we had one of the strangest communions I've ever been part of. A single slice of MRE bread had been torn apart, and we had a juice container like a kid would have in his lunch. We each got a piece of bread from a canteen cup, and a sip of juice. It was one communion that caught the very essence of what it's supposed to be. In this case, a bunch of men from all walks of life, and on the far side of the world, united by one thing, and that was out faith in Christ. Afterwards, we hugged and talked, ate our cakes and drank our soda like the big happy family we were.



I guess when you're thousands of miles from home, and away from your family, you enjoy the family you have.

We eventually got Christmas dinner. . .Two days later! If my fading memory is correct, a few people got sick off it. I recall steering away from the turkey thinking that it smelled funny and couldn't possibly still be good. I

dined on mashed potatoes, stuffing, and dessert.

A quick word about food. There's a variety of ways to get food in the field.

One is [MREs](#). I'd known about C and K rations as a kid. My dad talked often about them. I even kept a couple of cans of C-Rations in my patrol car in the event I got caught at crime scene in the middle of nowhere.

MREs come in a box of about a dozen meals, and in our time featured delicacies such as BBQ Beef Patty (really good -- unless you get it three meals a day for a week straight - I never tried to figure out the odds of that happening, but it did), Chicken a La King, Spaghetti, and the like. All come with the entree, crackers, a spread (cheese, peanut butter, cheese spread, or jelly), and some kind of dessert.

In the old days, they had an accessory packet that included cigarettes. No cigarettes now, but there is a small piece of TP, Coffee, Cream and so on.



**5 - In addition to being artist in residence, John was always good for a laugh - Christmas dinner 1990**



#	MRE I – VII (1981–87)	MRE VIII – XII (1988–92)
1	Pork Patty	Pork w/ Rice in BBQ Sauce
2	Ham & Chicken loaf	Corned Beef Hash
3	Beef Patty (nicknamed "Hockey Puck")	Chicken Stew
4	Beef slices in BBQ sauce	Omelet with Ham
5	Beef Stew	Spaghetti w/ Meat Sauce
6	Frankfurters w/ Beans (nicknamed "Four Fingers of Death")	Chicken a la King
7	Turkey Diced w/ Gravy (nicknamed "Wild Turkey Surprise")	Beef Stew
8	Beef Diced w/ Gravy	Ham Slice
9	Chicken à la King	Meatballs w/ Tomato Sauce
10	Meatballs & BBQ sauce	Tuna w/ Noodles
11	Ham slices	Chicken w/ Rice
12	Ground Beef w/ Spiced Sauce	Escalloped Potatoes w/ Ham
13	Chicken Loaf	

A spreadsheet showing the typical contents of a box of MREs. There were boatloads of MRE 1 still in depots, so we got them often. A note about the Pork and Beef patties. These were dehydrated, and the idea was you put some water in it and it would soften up. Truth be told, you could have dropped one in the Pacific Ocean, it could have soaked the whole thing up, and it would still be hard as a rock. Might be useful for combating the rising sea levels due to global warming!

Traditionally, this is how the troops eat. Someone opens a box of MREs. The lowest ranking EM takes one, then the next, and so on. Once the Privates and Specialists get their meals, then the NCOs take one out, followed by the officers. Sorry, searching through the box is discouraged. You grab and move on and whatever you got, you eat. If you don't like it, then trade with someone.

One of the things I remember well is the tribal wisdom handed down concerning MREs. Some it was assembled into what's known as the "MRE Cookbook." As the name implies, it's a method of taking the inedible, and turning them into something yummy, or improving what you got.

Two I remember are:

- **Peach Cobbler** - Take your canteen cup and put your dehydrated peaches into the cup. Crush one cracker from your MRE into it. Add the coffee creamer, sugar, and enough water to re-hydrate the mess. Stir and enjoy.
- **Ranger Cookie** - Take your brownie from the MRE Packet, and top with peanut butter. Enjoy.

Some of the recipes have actually been compiled and are online in book form. I had a cookbook, and it was about a dozen pages thick, and the cook in this case was Sad Sack from the cartoons. I wish I'd known where it went.

One thing I reference a couple of times in Event Horizon is how Will and Jonesy heat their food up in the mountains. Since they're eating MREs, what they do is take the main course out of its cardboard container. They open the foil pack a little. Then they poke holes with a knife into the box, place the pouch back inside it, and then light the box on fire. The box burns quickly, and you have a hot meal. This is very welcome on a cold winter day when you're standing at a traffic control post in the middle of the freezing cold.

Thank you, Greg Bradley, for passing on this tribal wisdom back in the snowy cold of Germany.

Today, MREs come with their own heater.



Of course, he (or she) who had Tabasco Sauce was king.

Then there's T-rations. These come in a large can that in a lot of ways resembles a cake pan. The idea is you toss them into boiling water, get them hot, and then open them. There's usually beef or chicken, rice or mashed potatoes, and maybe a cake. You need a can opener to open it up.

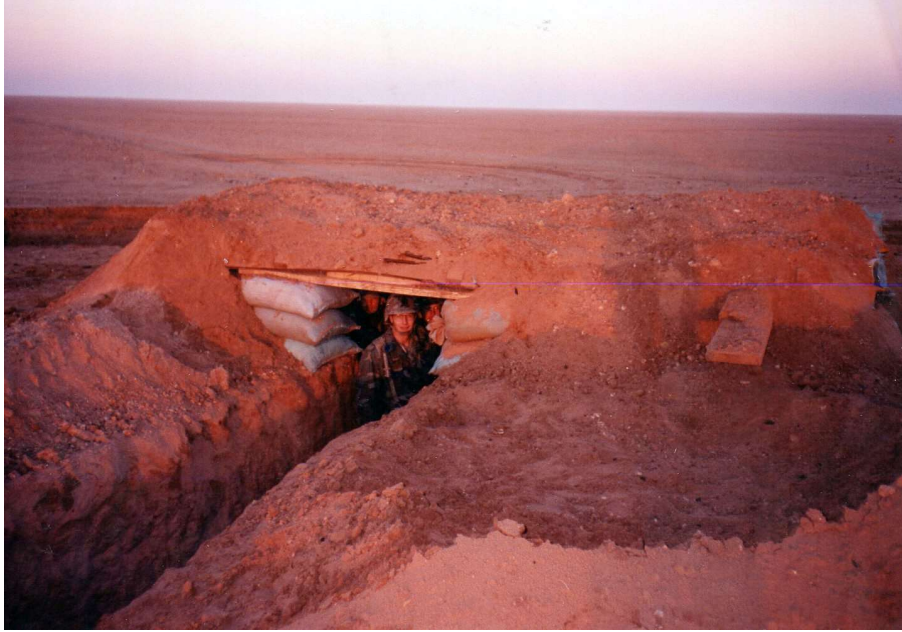
A third way is to get your meal delivered to you from a mess tent someplace. In this, several aluminum pots are filled up. These are then placed into a larger container filled with hot water. It's

delivered to you, and you eat. It was this last way our Christmas meal was delivered to us.

I first saw this method used when I was in Basic training. On Range Days, a truck would show up from the Battalion with several of these, paper plates, utensils, and coffee.

They'd set up, and we'd file by and get out breakfast on a paper plate. Usually we'd be talking scrambled eggs, bacon or sausage, and hash browns.

There never seemed to be enough, but then what did one expect. It was either that or eat MRE's three meals a day (which we often did in Saudi Arabia)/



We were also united by a constant fear that Saddam would do a preemptive strike on us before we got up to strength. We still had very little ammo but we did dig in, just in case. We built a series of bunkers connected by trenches. It was back breaking Break



**One of our bunkers we dug out by hand. Note the sandbags and overhead cover being set up. In the distance sits one of our HUMVEEs helping to provide security.**

Digging into the Saudi Desert wasn't exactly like trying to chop through cruiser armor plate, but it was pretty close. It took us several days to get it the way we wanted. The bunkers were large and, all things considered, comfortable.



To make a good bunker, you want it dug into the ground. You need good cover, in this case a couple of sandbag thick walls covered with dirt, overhead cover, again covered with more sandbags and dirt. You want to make sure you've got good fields of fire. And the manual says that you dig grenade sumps into the sides. These are pits about two to three feet deep. The idea is if a grenade is tossed in, you might be able to kick into the sump where it would explode, and hopefully save you and your buddies

I'm thankful that we never had to put that idea to the test.

We'd managed to scrounge wood and, in some cases, even steel to provide overhead cover for us. Days later we were ordered to remove the cover. Apparently, someone had a bunker cave in on them (not our unit), and there were several injuries.

We did as ordered and thought all along how vulnerable we now felt. I'm sure all of us had visions of an overhead burst, and steel raining down on us at supersonic speed.

All things considered; the explosions themselves might have caused the roof to collapse.

Later, you'll see some bunkers the Iraqis dug. Ours were small by comparison. Of course, we weren't living in them either.

One of the things to always take into account is something called "Fields of Fire." What that fancy term means is every inch of whatever is front of you should be covered by someone with a gun.

You also need interlocking fields of fire. In this way, each fighting position helps to protect each other.

The idea is to make it damn nearly impossible for a ground force to attack and overwhelm the bunker.

Of course that doesn't take armor into account, and while we had AT-4s, we had only so many and tanks shoot further.



**SFC G helps dig a trench with a pick**



**Our fortifications were large and comfortable. Notice how that one beam is sagging down. Maybe taking the overhead cover wasn't such a bad idea after all. In the picture from back to front: SSG Hahr, SSG Honor, Cpl McArtor.**

I've gotten up on Google Earth and looked at the imagery of where I "think" we were. I think I found the perimeter of our camp (the engineers dug a ditch around it), but I'm not finding any of the fortifications we made. I suspect they were bulldozed over shortly after we left. After all, driving into a hole in the ground can hurt. Maybe some future archaeologist will find them, dig them up, and find the letter in an envelope that proclaimed, "Kilroy was here."



**Unless I'm very mistaken, this is what remains of our site. I believe the lighter area are the filled in fighting positions and the long scar at the bottom is what remains of the burn pit. I'm not exactly sure since I never bothered writing down the lat-long. The extensive, disturbed area on the left side of the picture would be the fighting position my platoon dug, and the smaller areas are what others dug. Thank you, Google Earth!**





**A quiet moment before bedtime. SP4 Richard Williams reads Stars and Stripes and listens to music**

Eventually we got showers, but I was only able to use them once. It had been weeks since we showered. Up to that point, we used a wash basin to heat up water on the stove and did the best we could. The showers were delivered, and the mechanics set up the water heaters. Trucks came in and filled them. The water heaters were started, and the lines formed for the showers.

Unlike the showers we had at battle central, these were fully enclosed. You went in a small room, stripped, stepped into the shower, and turned it on. We were doing the same kind of shower they do in the Navy. You step in, get wet, wash up, rinse. If you have the water on for more than ten seconds, you're wrong.

As it turned out, we couldn't enjoy the shower much. It had two settings. Off and scalding hot. I love hot showers but standing for more than a quarter second under that water could have caused severe burns. We went back to the basin rather quickly afterwards.

About a month and a half later, and not long before the jump up to FAA Garcia and our linking up with battle Central, the LT came in. I noticed an odd look on his face and a quivering of his lips. I thought maybe his MRE was threatening to have a boomerang effect on him.

But that wasn't it.

He'd walked into the tent and got a good whiff of us.

The next day we were directed to grab a clean uniform, a towel, and shaving kits. We had no clue why.

We drove several miles and came to a place called Log Base Alpha.



**Thank God we had someone who knew his way around a pair of clippers.**

And they had showers!

Huge tents had been set up with wood pallets as floors. Showers had been set up, and the supply of water was seemingly inexhaustible. Okay, maybe not. But there was none of this get wet, soap up, shower off. We could actually enjoy a good minute or so Hollywood shower with water temperatures in the Goldilocks zone.

I tell you; it was heaven on Earth. There is no feeling like the dirt and dust washing off your skin, your pores opening, and your skin being able to breath.

I even got to wash out my hair! It felt so great someone started singing in the shower and before long everyone joined in. One of the guys even tried his hand at some Italian opera. For the record, he wasn't bad!

I'd forgotten what it felt like to be clean!

We went to shaving tables with mirrors, broke out our razors and scrapped the stubble off our faces.

While we shaved, several of the girls in the unit came up. Women had their own showers, and like us, they'd gone without a decent cleaning in some time. They'd shampooed and stood at the shaving tables with us, bushing out their hair.

It was like standing next to a garden, and all we could think of was, "So, that's what a girl smells like." I remember asking one of the girls if I could take a good whiff of her hair. She said to go ahead and so I put my nose in her hair and enjoyed the smell of a girl.

I hadn't taken any aftershave with me to the Gulf. After all, you're not going to need it in the middle of the desert. It's also a bad idea from the tactical sense. But one of the other guys had. He poured some Old Spice into my hand and I splashed it on. The burning of my freshly shaved face felt wonderful. I combed my hair, put on my BDU top, and my combat gear. Picking up my ruck, I started walking towards the Humvees.



**Logbase Alpha and Showers**

I felt human again

Like me, everyone else was taking their time getting there. We knew the minute we got in and started down the road, the Saudi dust would cake us again.

And that's exactly what happened.

But at least we were clean for a little while.



One person I haven't spoken much about was our platoon daddy, SFC. Michael Gellizeau (hope I spelled that right). In a lot of the pictures I have, he can be seen wearing a jacket, maybe even a parka. SFC G suffered from some blood disorder and as result, he was always cold. Part of how he stayed warm was to work out like a machine. As a result, he was one seriously in shape individual.



**SFC Gellizeau (back) and SSG Honor (foreground) look out of the perimeter. If you look closely over SSG Honor's shoulder you can see a fence post and loops of barbed wire. If it weren't for the can of Pepsi Tim was holding, this would be a very dramatic picture.**

Training was high on the list. Since Saddam had chemical warfare capability, we did a lot of NBC (Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical) training.

I'd picked up a secondary MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) of Chemical Warfare Defense specialist before leaving Germany, and I backed up our NBC NCO. I helped her deploy and keep up the monitors, train soldiers, and test their gear.

A very frightening incident after the air war started was, we were doing some NBC training and were reviewing how to detect nerve agent. This involves a test kit, and a small procedure. Basically, you wipe an object, use some test chemicals, and it changes colors. So here we are training, and damned if the test didn't come up for nerve agent. I reported that to the NBC NCO (SSG Patterson) and she runs it up the chain.

The explanation we got was they were hitting Saddam's chemical weapons depots; the stuff was going up in the air, and some of it was coming down. They said it was in such low amounts; it wouldn't be a problem.

Right!



**PFC Stevens in the turret**

I wonder if prolonged exposure, even to small amounts, hasn't had something to do with some of the issues our troops have reported.

I also helped check everyone's protective mask for fit. What this involves is the soldier sits in an enclosed area. In this case, we used one of the HUMVEEs. They put on their protective

mask, and I waved a rag around them that had banana oil on it. If they smelled it, their mask wasn't fitted right, and we'd fix that.

I don't remember exactly when it happened, but one day we went out to a site where they were painting the vehicles. Our HUMVEEs were sporting the green paint job that would have been perfect for Europe. It stood out a little in the desert. The idea was to paint all sand color, and spray paint the upside down "V" that would identify us as coalition vehicles. We also had Military Police stencils.

The painting process was slick. Using rolls of paper and masking tape, we covered all the glass and markers, and a guy came along and sprayed the paint all over it. Reminded me a little of the operation a guy had in Antonio. Since no primer was used, it eventually began to wear off. I'd say within an hour, the vehicles all looked good.





**Freshly painted in Desert Sand, we took one more step towards Iraq.**

We also trained in calling in fire or air support. What this involved is a map, binoculars, and trying to determine where the target was. We'd call grid coordinates off the map of



**SPC John**

**Hagadorn checking out a distant object.**



where we thought the target was, and if we were correct, they'd drop shells on target. The idea was to watch where the first shells fall and adjust. If it took you more than thirty seconds to destroy the target, it was probably gone already.

I should point out this was the best guess since we really weren't calling anything in. Back in Germany, we'd have done that in a simulator. No such luck here. It was all classroom without the benefit of lab experience.

Equipment maintenance was another never-ending task. Our gear was ideally suited for European operations.

The desert was a whole another problem. One of our problems was keeping the dust out of the engines. Beating dust out of the air filters was a daily task. We'd put cloth (towels, t-shirts, even pantyhose) around them to help, but that met with mixed results.

One thing we hadn't expected was how the sand would tear up the brakes on the HUMVEEs.



**The roads bulldozed by the engineers became rivers during the rainy season.**



**Our Mechanics working on a starter for one of the trucks. They had their hands full keeping us going.**

Shortly after our arrival, the engineers began making roads across the desert. This was really handy for finding our way around, but when it rained, the roads became ditches full of water. The traffic going through it stirred up the sand and kept it in suspension. This got up into the brakes and ate the brake pads alive.

Most of the Humvee fleet was sidelined because of brake pads, and it took setting up a special shipment to get new ones in. When we got them, our mechanics had their hands full replacing them.

A few of us who knew how to work on a vehicle pitched in and helped, even if it was just jacking up a Humvee and yanking the tire off for them.



**Sgt. Motti had been a mechanic before coming over to the MPs. His former MOS sure came in handy**

### **-CALLING HOME**

Calling home was an adventure worthy of Indiana Jones.

I'd later see in movies how we had phone tents and so on. Later, we did. But initially, we were on whatever resources were local. The nearest pay phone was in Al Qaysumah, an Arab community about three miles away. The town was so close that in the morning while we were in the trenches, you could hear the call to prayer echo across the desert.

I must admit that the call has beauty about it. In an uncertain world we were living in, it seemed to offer some form of consistency.



Al Qaysumah seemed to be a small community, smaller than the small village of Capulin (almost my hometown) back home (Colorado). Oddly, when I look on Google Earth, it looks bigger than I thought it to be. There was one phone outside a small store, and it wasn't uncommon to see three or four hundred soldiers waiting to use it. We'd have made one heck of a target for some lucky terrorist.



**One of the few pics I got of SPC Lavigne**

I recall once we were all standing in line waiting to use the phone. The afternoon Call for Prayer went out, and it's interesting to see a town shut down. Within minutes, shops were closed, people left the streets and prayed. We were standing there marveling at that when this white Toyota pickup with two kids in it came tearing around a corner. It does a doughnut in front of us, and then tried to gun down a side road, and almost collides with a white Land Rover. These two older men get out. They were both wearing white robes and beards. I don't know the name of their exact position, but we called them the Prayer Police. That was their job, to ensure people were observing the dictates of Islam. And these two young men had just violated a big one. They got the youngsters out, shook their hands, and then proceeded to beat the living tar out of them in front of us.

I'm sure the next time the Call went out, they had their prayer rugs out and were facing Mecca rather than trying to impress the infidels.

The first time I was able to call home, I dragged my folks out of bed. They said the TV showed us living in air-conditioned barracks, equipped with satellite TV and hot meals. My response was "I don't know what army you're looking at, but I'm not in it."

I explained I was living in a tent in the middle of nowhere, eating MREs three meals a day, and hadn't seen a TV in months. For entertainment, we could get Armed Forces Radio or Baghdad Betty, depending on which way the wind was blowing.

A word on Betty. I'm not exactly sure what war she thought this was, but the music certainly wasn't anything of the '90s or even the '80s. Truthfully, our boys from WWII would have enjoyed the tunes she shared. I guess what's a war without the Andrews Sisters.

But she was a hoot. One day she advised us to go home because our wives and sweethearts were messing around with Tom Cruise, Robert Redford, and [Bart Simpson](#).

I always suspected by ex dabbled in watercolors.

One night, the Air Force was practicing bombing runs, and there was a loud explosion. In the distance, a fireball was seen to arch up into the sky and then disappear. Some of our mobile units had seen one of the F-16s go down and raced out there.

There was debris scattered everywhere, to include ordnance. I don't recall who was out there, but they were talking to the base and reported that his gunner had just picked up a missile. He was instructed to have his gunner very carefully put the missile down.

The gunner is reported to have said it seemed to be the logical thing to do at the time.

I suppose things have changed with cellphones and email out in the field, but we lived for mail call. What was interesting was how it ran. It



**6John Hagadorn calling home**





wasn't uncommon to get a letter mailed say January 15th before getting one mailed January 2nd. So sometimes you got a letter and felt a little like you'd walked into the middle of a movie because something was referenced in an earlier letter that hadn't arrived yet.

Still, mail is something we lived for. Mail arrived and was broken down by platoon. It was the platoon daddies' job to get the mail, gather the troops around, and pass it out.

Mail was something looked forward to constantly.

It brought not only news from home, but pictures, magazines (reading material was at a premium), and often times, goodies.

Of course, the mail was gone through with a fine-tooth comb. There were certain things that just didn't make it out to us to include skin magazines, booze, etc. I think Cpl Eric McArtor summed it all up when he complained by saying, "No Booze. No dope. No babes. What the hell

kind of war is this?"

One of my fondest memories of something that made it through came from SPC Arnold.



**Mail Call Again - SFC Gellizeau hands out mail. Note that most of us are in regular uniforms and he has a jacket on. He suffered from some blood disorder and was always cold. He had a profile allowing him to wear warm clothing, even in summer.**



Arnold was descended from a long line of military types. His great grandfather was General 'Hap' Arnold, the Father of SAC. It's safe to say that generals and colonels are a dime a dozen in his family.

He'd just got a small package from home. Inside there were 10 wax bottles. They resembled the wax candies we got as kids that were filled with Kool-Aid. Only this wasn't Kool-Aid. They were filled with different kinds of wine. He offered me one and when I drank it, I discovered it was filled with peach brandy. And not just any cheap brandy, but some of the finest I've ever tasted. It was one of the biggest surprises of the war. Somehow drinking something we weren't allowed felt good! A little rebellion is a good thing now and again.

Enough can't be said about the great folks who supported us over there. At least once or twice a week, each of us got a box with candy bars, notes, books, magazines and so on stuffed into them. Sometimes there were things we really needed (toothpaste for instance).



For some reason we had trouble getting essentials. We had a small PX that operated out

### **Captain Kenneth Kroupa, commanding 501st MPs.**

of a truck, but while it was well stocked on candy bars, and even film, it didn't have things like shaving cream, soap, and so on. So, what came out of a box was often a Godsend.

Goodie boxes were never aimed at just one soldier or even a unit. A bunch just arrived and everybody got one. Occasionally, our goodies boxes had some interesting items. One guy received some girl's underwear and a proposal of marriage. Another found a box of Trojans. They were useful to keep dirt out of the M-16s. By far the most interesting thing we received were several copies of the "Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Edition." They were most definitely moral boosters.

I did my level best to respond to folks who included a return address. It was hard though, and I'm sure I missed some along the way. All I can say is God bless you for your generosity, support, and prayers. They sure weren't wasted.

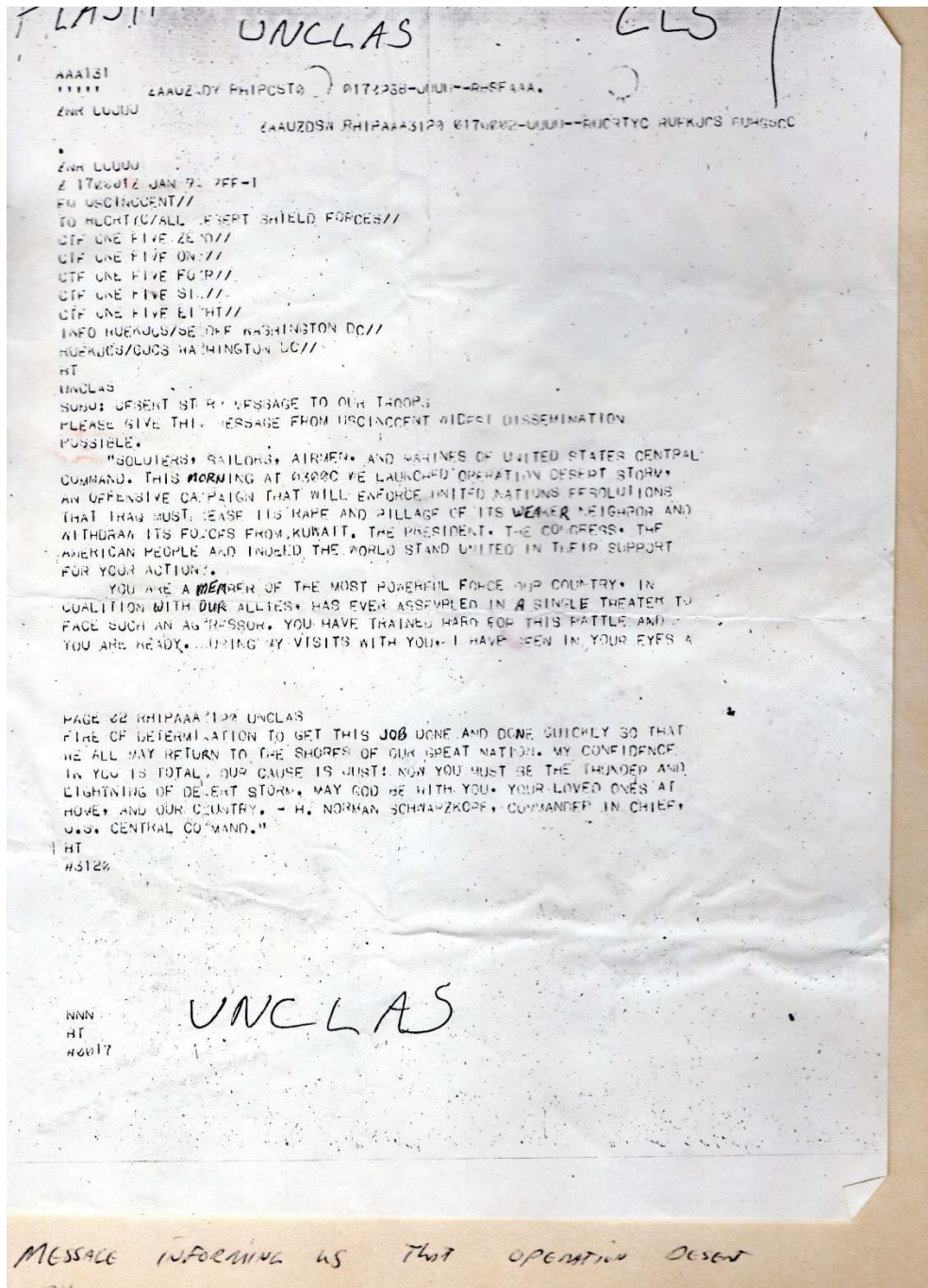
One fine beautiful morning, we received word that the preemptive strike feared from Saddam had sort of happened. A handful of tanks and troops were sent into Saudi Arabia. It wasn't in our section at all, but sending troops down Wadi Al-Batin was a scenario we thought Saddam might try. If that happened, we could expect company. We were rousted early and sent to the trenches. The war was officially on, even if we hadn't done much more than show up.

I recall turning and looking at the sunset that evening. Like so many sunrises and sunsets in Saudi Arabia, it was spectacular.

Grandpa's War – By Richard Muniz

On January 17th, 1991, I had the watch. Normally, it was nothing much more than sit in the command tent, drink coffee, and answer the radio if someone called. There were several of us in there. I recall one of the privates commented that there seemed to be a lot more jets overhead.

I'd expected that. The date the UN Security Council gave Saddam had come and gone. As if to confirm that, a message came over the radio. In a nutshell it announced that we'd



I saved this from the trash a few days after the announcement came through that the air war was on.

begun a series of deep attacks into Iraq, and for local military commanders to assume a defensive posture. I wish I could recall the exact message or find a copy of it. But the air war was on.

"Go wake up the captain," I told a private. "Tell him the air war has started."

Our immediate concern was a counterattack from Iraqi forces. We'd been slowly getting stronger and stronger. Each passing day brought more troops and equipment. We now had adequate ammo for our weapons. The entire back half of our Humvee was filled with ammo for the M-60s, M-16s, and our pistols. We also had about a dozen grenades each, AT4s, and a couple of mines. I remembered telling one of my friends that if any of us got hit, it would be a glorious ending.

So, with our strength up, and loaded for bear, it reasoned Saddam might try to even the odds with a gas attack delivered by his missiles or aircraft. We went into the trenches wearing our protective masks.

As the sun was rising, I heard thunder in the skies. A strike was heading in, and I caught jet contrails up high.

We came out of the trenches about 8 AM but stayed close. No one seemed to know what was going to happen next. Would Saddam fold? Would he come south?



No one knew. We got out of our MOPP gear and went about our day. Everyone kept looking north as if they expected something terrible to materialize in the distance.

But nothing ever did.

At least to us.

Saddam did toss a handful of old Scuds at installations in Saudi cities, but about all that managed to do was create some nice fireworks shows. Our [patriot missiles](#) made short work of them.

But one girl I knew told me of a close call. She and an officer had gone to this one installation. They'd just left it when the Iraqis tried to send a missile down south. The patriots intercepted it all right, but the warhead fell on the installation she'd just left. Several soldiers were killed and injured by the warhead. It was a close call for her.

## **7 An airstrike heads north into Iraq**





**I don't consider myself a great photographer, but I do think this picture of Mac is one of the best I ever took.**

One of the coolest things that happened was there was a series of stories about five miles down the road. We called it "The Mall" because it was a long adobe structure broken down in dozens of small shops. We were down there one day, and I spotted an MP wearing the [1st MP](#) Brassard. I walked up next to him and asked, "How's things at 1st MPs?"

The MP turned, looked at me, and his eyes went wide. It was a buddy of mine from my time at the 1st, SSG Richard Kelley. I was glad to see him. His was the first face I'd seen from home in over a year. The reunion deepened when three 1st MP vehicles pulled up. I knew all the guys, to include SPC Ed Fiegel, who had gone to them from 501st. I've always thought of Ed as my protegee and a very good friend, and I worked with him closely while he was the 501st. Kelly said he was "a damn fine soldier," which is about as big a compliment as anyone can receive.

I missed those guys a lot.

One thing I haven't discussed much of was our living conditions in the big tent. The tent was big enough to house the entire platoon, our gear, and still had some room left over. Each of us had a fold out army cot. They came in one setting for comfort, and that was rock hard. We usually put our wool blanket or even our ground mat on it for a little additional comfort. Our sleeping bag went over that.



**Huddled around the stove on Christmas morning. This about the best picture I've got of the inside of one of tents we lived in.**

Inside the sleeping bag, most of us put a bed sheet. While the sleeping bags were SUPPOSED to keep you warm at down to forty below, the truth was they were cold. Most of the time we'd put our uniform in there with us, toss underwear and socks down at the bottom to keep our feet warm, and then put a bed sheet inside with us. We slept inside the bed sheet, and that made the sleeping bags comfortable.

At least once a week, we took the sleeping bags out and hung them up to air out. The air and the sunshine killed the odors associated with living in proximity with everyone else.

The center of the tent had a stove, one of these small MOGAS powered stoves. Full blast it





**This is like the stove we had in the tent. The silver gadget sticking up and out of the stove was the burner. It was fed fuel from a 5 gallon can of MoGas. While it worked well, they were dangerous, and you had to be careful getting them going.**

would keep the tent barely tolerable in cold weather. In the morning, it served as a gathering point to get warm, heat a cup of MRE coffee or make coffee in the pot and get ready for the day. A lot of water was heated on that little stove.

## **HEADING FOR IRAQ**

We continued getting ready, then one day it came time for us to leave.

Our platoon's immediate mission was to help the division cross a major highway. We broke camp and loaded up everything we owned, including the large tents we'd been staying in. We were already cramped for space, and they didn't help any. Fortunately, each Humvee had a trailer and most of the gear we'd never use was stashed in it. Taking down the tents was a huge effort. I don't think any of us had ever handled that big a tent, but somehow, we got them down and loaded up. Also loaded up were the basins and shaving stations, and in some cases, even the johns.

The company was breaking up to handle the many different jobs assigned to us. The captain came out and gave us a little pep talk before we left. Captain Kroupa was a





**The captain gives us our pep talk.**

great guy. He was one of the best Commanders I'd ever had.

We drove from the camp to a place some miles away. A single two-lane highway was what we'd have to control. This was the area 1st Armored Division had to cross to arrive at the Saudi/Iraqi border.

Once the Division was across the road, we'd turn north and follow them. Our mission was locating stragglers, breakdowns, or anyone who had just gotten lost along the way.

This move represented our (1<sup>st</sup> Armored) getting into position to invade Iraq.



**Anti-Air Tracks cross the highway outside Hafar Al-Batin. I thought I'd seen some terrible drivers in the Americas and Europe, but the Arabs take the prize. They could have seen this formation of tanks crossing and would still have tried to squeeze through between them.**

It took several hours to get Division across the road. From here, our mission would be to finally hook up with Battle Central. The mission 6th Platoon historically had was the defense of the Battle Central. Interestingly, in exercises in Germany, we set up an access control tent, sent out a few patrols, and that was it.

Here, our mission was different. There would be no tent, and we'd protect part of the flank of the Battle Central.

But first, we had to get there. With Division across the road, we now followed them





**Crossing the Division**

north. The area reminded me of many of the areas in the San Luis Valley, a wide dry plain dotted with sagebrush, rocks, and small dunes.

The only breakdown we found was a single truck, and their outfit knew they were there. We just made sure the two soldiers were okay, had food and water, and moved on.

I think one of the most heartbreaking pieces of the war happened while we were conducting this sweep up patrol. We came across an area where some outfit had emptied out their refrigerators. Piles of food had been dumped and burnt. I remember rolls of hamburger, burnt and rotting in the sun. Bread now crawling with ants. There were eggs in the pile, their shells burnt and blackened, and I tried to remember the last time I'd eaten an egg. It smelled like breakfast at Golden Corral.





**If memory serves, I got this picture of the LT while he was in the turret of one of the tanks assigned to Battle Central.**

We dug through the piles of food and salvaged a couple of bags of potatoes and some cooking oil. That evening when we stopped, we cut up the potatoes, broke out the cooking gear, and made a campfire. We made French fries and that was our dinner. We had very little salt, no ketchup, and the fries tasted like a slice of heaven. It was a perfect day to be a U.S. Army Soldier in the field.

As I mentioned, our mission had changed some by the time we hooked up with Battle Central. Instead of an Access Control Tent, we were part of the muscle on the perimeter of Battle Central. As much as we liked being with our Company, the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division Battle Central was our home away from home. It meant hot meals, showers, and friends.



**Both Spc Estrada. A husband/wife team in the 1st Armored Division. He's the MP, and she was an Intel expert. It had been months since they'd seen each other.**

We worked closely with everyone there and had good working relationships.

For some, such as the Estrada's pictured above it was indeed a family reunion. A husband and wife, she worked intelligence at Main post while he was one of my MP Buddies.

All things considered, it's odd that I don't have a lot of pictures of Battle Central or the people around it. I think I was starting to run low on film and wanted to save what I had for Iraq.

It's too bad, I had some good friends there. One was a Sgt. Richard Mooney, Satellite Communications Expert. Another was a young lady who was a cook. She was a model and together, we'd made some money in Germany doing photographs for sale ads.

I've no pictures of either one of them or, for that matter, much around Battle Central. But here's a few photos.





**Baseball in the middle of nowhere. I've still got the baseball.**

We did manage to get some baseball in. It was always an odd experience. This is one of the few times we'd take off most of our gear. To be sure, it was never far away, and we could have it back on in seconds. The umpires were dressed in full combat gear. Since arguing with a man carrying a loaded M-16 is a rather stupid thing to do, the umpires calls were final.

We also got caught up on much needed personal hygiene such as haircuts, showers, and the like. The only downside was that, once again, our mail had no idea where we were, and we waited patiently for that to catch up to us.





**This is the Battle Central below. It's made up of several expandable vans. When stopped, they pulled out the sides, linked them together, and it formed a mobile office area to coordinate the battle. Each vehicle was stuffed with desks, radios, phones, and computers.**

They practiced setting this thing up so much, they could have the whole system up and going in under five minutes. I always thought it was good training if you wanted to join the circus.

Being such a key piece of real estate, our job was to protect it.

We had a lot of help. The perimeter around it was protected by us, the boys and girls of the Headquarters Company, a team of engineers, and the 1st Infantry Division Band. With the exception of the headquarters folks, we'd never really worked with the other elements, and it took some getting used to.

When we first learned that the band had a piece of the defense of Battle Central, it caused us a little concern. Most of us didn't think in terms of the band being combat soldiers. Yet they were.

One of the issues was some of these outfits we'd never worked with. The Headquarters company and the Band were always there, but not the engineers. Before we'd made the jump up to the

border, they were already assigned to the Battle Central. We were sending HUMVEEs to go out and sit outside the perimeter in a static listening post.

What eventually happened was a classic case of the left hand not knowing what the right hand was doing. Word never filtered down, we were out there most nights, and that was a recipe for an almost disaster.

One night, they (the engineers) realized something was out there. When it didn't respond, they fired on it. Thank God they were lousy shots. The something was an MP HUMVEE with Sam Pennington and his team. When the first burst went over them, Sam immediately ordered the lights to be turned on, and knowing what had happened yelled they were an MP patrol. A burst from a fifty-caliber machine gun would have made junk out of the Humvee and probably killed everyone aboard. Sam and his crew got lucky.

For at least a little while, there was some bad blood between us and them, but eventually we got over the fact they'd almost blasted some of our buddies to kingdom come and actually became friends with them.



**Sam Gets promoted. The punching on the arms is tradition to make sure he kee[s] his rank.**





**A member of the 1st Armored Division Band relaxes for a few minutes. I can't remember if this was before or after the ground war. (I tend to think the latter since he's in PTs).**



In addition to the Band (who incidentally had a couple of 50 caliber machine guns), and the Engineers who had [M113s](#) and 50s also, we had assigned to us a small Anti-Aircraft contingent.

Battle Central would be a target the enemy went after, and protecting it was a big deal. Losing it would basically decapitate the division, and hopefully the brigade level commanders could take over and still run their piece of the battle.

The problem is that some of the higher-level coordination would be gone, and that would increase the chances of friendly fire incidents and such.

MPs are extremely well-armed to provide just this kind of support. The typical MP team is extremely mobile. The HYMVEEs provided some protection and could get us from point A to B quickly.



**SP4 Mrs. Estrada. She worked battle central to help keep information flowing. Married to one of our guys, it made her one of our favorite people.**

We were armed as follows:

Team Leader - [M203](#): This is an M-16 with a grenade launcher attached. A serious weapon and a lot of fun to shoot.



The M203 actually refers to the grenade launcher mounted onto the M-16. The entire unit is normally referred to, incorrectly I assume since it's two weapons put together as the M-203.

Driver - [M 16](#)

Gunner - [M-60 machine gun](#)

In addition to these weapons, we each carried our sidearm. At the time, MPs carried the Colt 1911 Sem-Auto pistol. It's still one of my goto weapons.

We also had a dozen hand grenades, ammo for the 203, 4 [AT-4](#) anti-tank weapons, and



**An Air Defense Track. Those are Sidewinder missiles on it, the same missiles the jet fighters use. Very effective.**

[Claymore mines](#). We were most definitely a force to contend with.

My father had asked how well armed we were and I told him that with what we had, my team and I would not only have held the Alamo, but wiped Santa Anna and his army off the battlefield. Modern warfare relies heavily on force multipliers, and it's a sobering thought that three men could be so dangerous.

One thing we weren't supposed to have were SAWs ([Squad Automatic Weapons](#)). This is basically a light machine gun and fired the same round as the M-16. We had a CONEX (shipping container) mis-delivered to our company, and these were in it. We never did find out who they belonged to, so each squad leader ended up carrying one.

We did have one big surprise for the defense of Battle Central. Two [M1A1s](#) had been assigned to us to help with its protection. In a worst-case scenario, their firepower would have been a huge asset.

As it was, they mostly ended up babysitting. I wonder how the tankers assigned to us felt about being left out of the last great tank battles of the 20th Century.



**One of the tanks tasked to help defend the Battle Central.**

As they say, all good things must come to an end. The air war had been going on for over a month, and we were coming up on the end of February. While the weather wasn't too bad yet, it



would be hot soon. The desert heat would be more dangerous to us than the Republican Guard ever could.



**The HUMVEEs were terribly light on armor, and the gunner had no real protection. We filled sandbags and placed them around the turret. it was better than nothing, but probably not by much. By staggering an area in the sandbags, we also made it possible to keep a couple of boxes of ammo with the gunner.**

One day, we went

It was heaven on earth in one of the most inhospitable places on the globe.

I was walking to the mess tent with my platoon. The warm February sun beat on my back, and my rifle was slung over my shoulder. Whatever the cooks had put together for lunch smelled great, and I could see smoke boiling up from the stoves.

The 1st Armored Division Band was playing in what we called the town center, a bare patch about fifty yards by fifty yards that sat in the middle of all the trucks and tents. They were in full combat gear and the trumpets and trombones and drums looked wildly out of place as they played and danced. A cameraman from CNN was recording them, and they were doing a first-class job of hamming it up and dancing for the camera. They looked more like a high school band that had dressed up and was playing soldiers.

But they were soldiers. The band formed another quarter of the combat force that defended the battle central. In a worst-case scenario, it would be us, the band, an engineer platoon, and the Headquarters Company soldiers consisting of cooks and the like that would defend this fragile

collection of trucks. A few hundred yards beyond the perimeter, two M1 tanks waited. They were the heavy muscle if worse came to worse.

A rushing siren scream from the south split the air, then exploded overhead as two F-16s thundered into Iraq. Before I could even glance up, the fighters were there and gone, the thunder of their engines fading away.

The air war had been going on for about a month now, and it was just a matter of time before we flooded across the border, dealt with the Republican Guard, and liberated Kuwait. “It won’t be long now,” Greg said, looking in the direction the planes had gone. We’d been saying that for some time now. We were tired of sitting in the desert. Get us in there, let us do our jobs, and then let us go home!

We walked into the mess tent, our eyes adjusting from the bright sunlight to dimmer interior. Soldiers sat at folding tables, their food on paper plates in front of them. It smelled wonderful. No hamburgers today, that was for sure.

We went to the serving line, got our plate and plastic utensils, and waited till we got up to the steam tables. I frowned as I saw what was being served.

Steak!

Not small pieces of steak. These were serious steakhouse sized sirloin steaks, cooked to perfection with just the slightest hint of moisture leaking out. The cook placed it on my plate, warning me to hold it from the bottom. I did, and he piled on sauteed onions and mushrooms. The steak was joined by a baked potato with all the fixings, whole kernel corn, bread, and blueberry cobbler for desert.

We found an empty table and sat down and looked at the steak. It was a meal fit for a king, but we all knew what this sumptuous meal meant. We had a lot of names for this meal. “The last supper.” “Death row chow.” Call it whatever you wanted, there was only one time 1st Armored would serve a meal like this and that was on the eve of combat.

“Boys,” I said, picking up my plastic silverware. “Make sure your stuff is packed up. We’ll be headed north by sundown.”

We ate, talked, laughed, did anything to keep from thinking that the moment was at hand. All of us knew the day we enlisted that there was a chance we’d see combat in our career. We trained for it, we talked about it, and now here it was.

Being the kind of person who reflects on history, I wondered how the people in my family felt when they were heading into combat. What my cousin Gary thought when he got off the plane in ‘Nam, or my Uncle Neff fighting through France and Germany in WW II. thought about. They were the men I used as a yard stick to measure myself against, and now I was about to join them by actually being up close and personal with a war.

I hope I measured up.

After we ate, we went back to our tent and started squaring our gear away. We broke everything down except the tent itself. If the word came, we could be packed and gone in under a half hour.

I was sitting on my ruck when I looked out and noticed that Headquarters Company wasn't tearing anything down yet. Maybe we'd just jumped the gun by being ready. Maybe they hadn't figured it out.

Either way, the showers hadn't been taken down and were in business. Screw it, I thought. If we left today, it would be several days before I saw a shower again. If I'm going into combat, I want to go in clean.

"I'm going to take a shower," I said.

I pulled out clean underwear and socks, a clean uniform, and my shaving kit. Quickly I went



over, got in the stall, and stripped down.

The shower stalls were right out there in the open and was little more than a series of plywood boxes just high enough to give the illusion of privacy. I draped my uniform over the sides and turned on the water. It was warm and that was a pleasant surprise. Most of the time the water was either freezing cold or scalding hot. Rarely did you get the water in the Goldilocks zone. I lathered up, and then scrubbed ears, face, and under arms.

## **8 MY ONLY CLAIM TO FAME, ME IN THE SHOWER**

Turning I saw one of the girls from the headquarters company a couple of stalls down. I nodded to her, she nodded back. Maybe she'd come to the same conclusion I had. I went back to washing up and wondering what would happen in the next few hours.

Just a quick word about sexism in a combat zone. It doesn't exist. Oh, we know there's men and women serving together, and there's ample opportunity for things to happen between them. I'm not saying that the difference cease to exist, or through some magic you stop noticing (though I have often wondered what's put in the food). What I'm saying is combat makes everything and everyone equal. A lot of things you'd do in a combat environment, you'd never do back in the world.



A good friend of mine related a story where he was using the bathroom (we had outhouses, two holers to be exact). One of the girls came in, sat down and used the bathroom while he was in there. They talked, and when they finished, both got up and left. About five feet from the door it hit them that this was something they'd never have done back in the world. Here, it was no big deal.

So I shaved, washed my hair, and generally made myself look good. If I'm going into battle, by God I wanted to look good doing it.

Being clean wouldn't last. We'd be going through dust, and whatever else was tossed at us. I also knew we'd be wearing MOPP gear (what we wore going into potential chemical warfare environments). They had charcoal in them, and that made a mess out of skin and uniforms. But as I slipped on my uniform, I felt good, and ready to go in.

I walked back to my tent, and twenty minutes later word came to tear down and mount up. One hour later, the entire Battle Central was heading north. Ninety minutes later, we were in Iraq.

## **IRAQ**

My expectations proved to be correct. It wasn't until the cease fire was in effect that I got to clean up again. And all I got was a quick bath using my canteen cup to warm water and wash off with.

Two weeks later I got to call home.

"We saw you on the news," my dad said.

"On the news?" I didn't remember a camera around.

"Yeah, you were taking a shower!"

Then I remembered CNN with us at Battle Central. Apparently, they'd noticed me, and used a zoom lens to close in.

Several months later I got home and saw the video. I'm rather tall, so a large part of me was up above the rim of the stall.

Fortunately, everything else remained hidden.

So that's my five seconds of fame from the Gulf War.



**The Battle Central breaks up and heads north. There was a light sandstorm to hide our advance.**



**One of our HUMVEEs riding the flank of the convoy. Note the roll of wire on the hood, the sandbags around the gun turret. Both added a little more protection if needed. We'd also**

**placed sandbags on the floor for additional protection against mines. This arrangement made an uncomfortable vehicle even more uncomfortable.**

I always thought the light sandstorm was convenient for us to move out in. Later, I was to see an event in the sky that made me wonder if there wasn't some weather warfare being conducted. Note that's a wild guess, totally unconfirmed on my part, but it still made me wonder.

The sun went down while we still moving, and somewhere around 10 PM, and in the dark, we crossed the border into Iraq. There are these large berms of sand bulldozed up on the border. Our engineers had made roads through them, and it seemed that every bit of traffic in the world was headed right for those openings. In the dark, all we could see were the small red blackout markers of other vehicles. We spotted one of the vehicles with the convoy we were with and stayed focused on its black out markers. I remember hoping it was doing the same.

That was hard, because if you blinked, it was sometimes difficult to reacquire the blackout lights.

Somehow, Battle Central made it through the narrow gaps intact, and with no one following the wrong vehicles. I didn't see any MPs directing the traffic and, unless we were staggered and I didn't know it, I don't know how we got through without getting tangled with another convoy.

We traveled for several more hours and finally stopped for the night about two thirty in





**Someplace in Iraq, Sgt Greg Bradley enjoys a quick morning cup of coffee. War is already over since Greg isn't in MOPP gear**

the morning. I slept in my seat, my elbow on the windowsill. We were moving early the next morning.

One thing I'll never forget is the cooks showed up with boxes of breakfast sandwiches. I haven't a clue when they set up the kitchen or cooked them. For all I know, they cooked them before we left Saudi and just kept them on ice. They were just a fried egg, a slice of cheese and ham and mayo between two pieces of bread. I hung the name of 1st AD sandwiches on them. They've been a favorite breakfast since in my family, even if my kids did call them "First Eggee Sandwiches" when they were younger.

We drove all day, stopping only to refuel, eat a hasty meal, and then get on our way. Only once did we see anything that even remotely looked like combat. About noon, one of our MLRS systems located a few miles away fired a single missile. It arced away and I wondered what that was all about. I never found out.

We stopped moving about sunset. Our first night in enemy territory and we hadn't seen any evidence they were even around. I admit I was getting a little worried. I'd have



**Sundown in Iraq on the first day. An unknown MP gunner is behind his weapon and watching out into the desert.**

expected something by now. I half wondered if Saddam wasn't trying to do to us what the Russians had done to the Germans in WW II. Get them in deep, then cut their supply lines.

We stopped moving and set up the perimeter for the night.

Along about midnight, a storm moved in, and it started raining. We're not talking a small storm, but buckets of water from the sky.

Small rivers flowed about, and the heavy rain swallowed up what little light there was. I've seen dark. But I've never seen dark like this. Later, someone would comment that it had an almost supernatural quality to it.

Someplace out there, a tank battle was underway. We could hear it on the radio, and bright flashes of light would erupt through the darkness. It looked like



**One of our tanks races to get between Battle Central and some fighting going on a few miles away.**

something out a Sci Fi movie. When the sun came up, the storm moved out. In the sky, I saw a meteorological phenomenon I can't explain. The clouds were marching out in what looked like waves. I was reminded of one of those animated diagrams of wave propagation, which shows a radio wave moving away from a radio antenna. I'd never seen anything like it before or since. For all I know, it's a weather event peculiar to that area. But I never shook the impression I was seeing weather warfare. The rain and darkness would have certainly given us another edge in what an uneven fight was already.

(I've since learned that this is rare meteorological condition where low clouds with good winds, impact a geological feature. In this case, it was a very small hill, and it causes what almost seems to be the rings by disrupting the airflow. Or so says some of the books I've read.



Sometime in the afternoon, we began to see evidence that the Iraqis had been around. We started coming across abandoned bunkers. Their places looked like the city dump. Abandoned gear, helmets, clothing, and the like were scattered everywhere.

Until a few hours before, soldiers had been living here. They'd left in one big hurry, and in a lot of cases left most everything behind.



**9 the remains of an Iraqi bunker. The pipe sticking out of the ground is a stovepipe.**

I remember looking down into one of the bunkers. They'd been here long enough to have dug them out and made them somewhat comfortable. I didn't dare go in, but instead crouched at the entrance and looked in.

The bunkers struck me as the perfect places to put a booby trap or two. I'd had a relative that lost a body part by poking around in a German bunker back in WW II while souvenir hunting. I wasn't eager to carry on the tradition.

I figured the only souvenir I wanted was me back home, intact and alive. I crouched down and took these pictures.

I figured the only souvenir I wanted was me back home, intact and alive. I crouched down and took these pictures.

I only heard one story of anyone getting hurt in the bunkers, and it might be just that, a story.

I never confirmed it.



**Entrance into one of the bunkers.**





**Looking into the bunker.**

Braver souls than I went into the bunkers. One came out with a spiral notebook like a kid would use in school. There was a picture of Saddam on the cover.

I haven't a clue what all happened here, but it appears the occupants left in a big hurry. The might have been the trash troops Saddam put in our way. These guys had no stomach for the fight and gave up in droves.

Many had little water, less food, and all they wanted to do is go home.

There's a story of an armored company that stopped for the night, got into a defensive perimeter, and in the middle of the night, there's a knock at the back door of a Bradley. Opening it, the troops were astonished to find a squad of Iraqi soldiers with a white flag. It seems they looked out of their bunker and found themselves surrounded (of course the guns were pointing the wrong way).

Again, it just might be a story.





**An abandoned wire spool and an RPG round sitting in the dirt. Note the bottom has been crushed. It was still very dangerous. This was one of the few areas we encountered with a paved road.**

I settled for some stuff I found lying about topside, a spoon and a beret (some war souvenir). I still have the spoon, but the beret was taken by my son to show and tell. One of his classmates stole it. I was a little upset about that.

Years later, my boy made up for it by bringing me back a helmet from Afghanistan. It's one of my most treasured items.

Things became a blur of sorts.

We drove up on where the battle had been fought the night before. It was a small valley, and scattered below us were the remains of tanks, trucks, and tracks. Most were still burning, and the smoke of battle still hung over the area. I could see the tracks of the tanks that had engaged them the night before. It looked like they'd gone straight through it, just shooting as they went, and leaving a junkyard behind.

It was like something from War of the Worlds, only we'd been the Martians.

Suddenly there was a shout that someone was down there. Sure enough, there was a single human being walking through. He seemed to be the only survivor of the engagement. We went down to check him out. He was badly injured and noticed us only when we shouted at him. He turned, started walking to us, only to collapse from his wounds. I don't think we were fully aware that we were Americans.

The medics came in, treated him, and a chopper was called in to get him to a MASH. What happened to him, I don't know. I hope he made it.

What also made the scene unforgettable was a small song on the battlefield. I'd followed it and there was a small bird sitting on its nest. I wondered what it had thought of the night before when forces beyond its comprehension raged around it. I took a lesson from the bird that horrible things pass, and the sun always comes up..

One of the things I've had a hard time understanding is the lack of bodies. I knew they were around. Having a background as a first responder, I know what burnt human flesh smells like. And if we could come across a survivor of the battle, then there had to be corpses about. I just don't remember them which makes it all even more unreal.

Again, things became a blur after that. We were surviving on less than an hour or two sleep a day during the ground war, and that taxes your physical and mental resources terribly. I knew a little of what to expect because they toss the same situation at you at the National Training Center.



**Death Dealer sits between us and a potential threat.**

Seeing what's left of a modern-day battle is something I've never been able to find words for. I could talk about the broken machines, or the smell of burnt flesh and diesel that hovers around the wrecked vehicles. Or the carnage of it all.

Somehow, even almost thirty years later, I still can't find the words. and I'm a writer.

Going through what's left in the wake of modern-day battle is overwhelming. Powerful machines are just so much junk now, their crews dead or injured. I don't know how someone can describe it. Even a poet would be at a loss for words.



**A soldier inspects the remains of a tank. This was one of Saddam's main battle tanks. Superb machine that it was, it can't even be mentioned in the same breath as the M1A1.**





**Looking up from the inside of the Humvee to the gunner turret. SPC Williams watches the area.**

That night there were more battles. We stopped while one was being fought. We knew from reports that we'd inflicted serious damage to the Iraqi army, and that they were falling back.

About a mile from our location, the MLRS batteries started firing. These are multiple rocket launchers and at night it was like something from Star Wars. With loud booms, the rockets ignited, then hurtled into the skies, a trail of fire behind them.

Every time one fired; it was like a flash of lightning. In that split second, I could see the launchers, and even make out the faces of those around me.

And then the thunder from the launches reached us. They were loud like a 747 taking off. In the flashes, I could see several people covering their ears.

One after the other they fired, the rockets hurtling up and away over the horizon.



**Someplace in Iraq. Note the helicopters on the horizon.**

MLRS has often been referred to as the Division Commander's personal shotgun. I don't know what they were shooting at, but I didn't want to be on the receiving end of that. I tried to get some pictures, but they were disappointing at best. If I'd had my Pentax 1000 instead of a small Kodak camera, I might have got some good shots. As it was . . .

I don't recall sleeping much that night.



**Ruined  
Iraqi tanks. We're moving carefully because of unexploded ordnance and debris.**

The next day was more of the same. We rolled through and past more ruined positions. It's a funny thing when you're in the middle of a historic event, that you know nothing about what's really going on. All we knew were now moving east. I'd expected us to keep



**Lt. Bielecki scans the area for enemy activity. Note the LORAN navigation device in the upper left-hand corner of the picture.**

heading north till we got to Turkey, shake hands with the Turks, and call it good. That wasn't happening.

Years later I was to learn that the battles I'd witnessed had names. To us, they were points on a map, nothing more.





**I saw this infantryman standing and got a picture of him. I seem to recall this as being day two of the ground war. I've no clue where we were**

I began to understand the Republican Guard had at last begun to put up a fight. We heard that Iraqi forces were leaving Kuwait. That put us in a rather interesting position. First, we had to make sure they didn't get out. We'd be talking several heavy divisions retreating North. They were almost directly in our way. There was nothing to say they might not turn and join up with forces already in the area. There was no doubt we couldn't handle them; they'd just have made our mission harder.



Estrada in the Turret keeping an eye on things. This appears to be a pre-invasion picture.

That afternoon, we went through a minefield. Scattered across an area a dozen city blocks in size, the Air Force had dropped land mines. What we'd done is to push the Republican Guard through it. I don't know how well this worked or what, if any real damage had been done to them (I did see a couple of burnt-out tracks), but now we had to go through it in pursuit of them.

The Engineers had opened paths through the minefield for us. Using M1 tanks with a rotating drum of chains, they beat the ground and detonated anything they hit. The small mines were about the size of a frozen juice can and were too small to present a danger to the tanks.



But that couldn't be said for the trucks and HUMVEEs in the convoy. Once again, we were funneled down to a few lanes of traffic. The idea was to go straight, don't steer to the left or the right. If you were off even a little, it could mean disaster.

I recall noticing a mine less than three inches from our front tire at one time. They were scattered everywhere. I had to hope that the engineers had gotten them all. There was very little room for error.

As we started to clear the minefield, we heard a loud explosion from one of the other lanes. A Humvee belonging to the Division Chief of Staff had found a mine.

The explosion shredded the back tire, and shrapnel punched a hole in the fuel tank.



**SPC Williams poses next to a destroyed Iraqi tank.**

Another piece of metal exploded up through the floorboard. All of the HUMVEEs had sandbags on the floor. We'd placed them there for a little extra protection. The sandbags helped save the driver's life. The shrapnel ripped through the floorboard, sandbags, and through the back of the driver's chair. The driver was wearing a flak vest. The vest stopped the shrapnel and saved her life. It still struck her with enough force to knock her face first into the steering wheel and break her nose.



I understand she got the Purple Heart for that, and she confessed she felt like a damn fool receiving it for something so minor.

Shortly after clearing that minefield, we stopped for the night. There were still mines in the area, and I remember soldiers marking them. We'd long since run out of yellow caution tape, and they were using the next best thing. Toilet paper.



**I recall SFC G and I checking out some decoys set out by the Iraqi army. Trouble is, I don't recall if this was during the actual fighting, or after the cease fire had been declared. Probably after - I'm not in MOPP gear.**

What I do recall is our looking at three or four tank turrets that had been set on a small rise. if you didn't know what you were looking at, and from a distance, it might appear to be tanks down in a fighting position. In reality, all they were the turrets of long scrapped tanks set up to fake us out. They had just been set out there, maybe to drive us in another direction, maybe to make us waste ammo. Of course, through the thermals of an M1A1 or an attack helicopter, it would be obvious there was no heat signature associated with them, and they were decoys, nothing more.

I recall hearing more battles on the radio, and we watched all night long. Then it was announced that a cease-fire would be in effect the following morning. We were hours



**Our rolling artillery. They got in the last licks of the war.**

away from the cease-fire when the big guns opened up. Not far away, the 155s were firing. It was the

I remember my father telling me of seeing artillery rounds arching across the sky when he was in the Army. Now I got to see what he'd seen and how they moved like stars up and then down in their ballistic arcs.



**After hours of moving, moving, moving, the ceasefire, everyone just kind of collapsed.**

Then the guns went silent.

The General called everyone together and explained the cease-fire was in effect, to get our maintenance done, get some food, and then go to sleep.

I recall walking back to the Humvee and thinking about how with a few simple words it was over. But I had a deep feeling of dread, as if there was unfinished business.

I recall the LT asked me, "What do you think?" He knew my interest in history and was wondering what I was thinking in terms of historical perspective.

I remember looking out into the desert as we walked. "Sir, I think our children will be back to figure out who won it the first time."

God, I hate being right.

I got out of the MOPP gear I'd been wearing. The uniform I'd been in for days now had gone from Camo Green to black. No amount of scrubbing got that uniform clean and I threw it away. Greg got out his little gas-powered stove, and I heated up a canteen cup of water, and bathed and shaved out of it. I tried to eat an MRE but was too tired to enjoy it. I laid down on the top of the Humvee and slept for sixteen hours.



### **Mar 91 – Waiting to leave**

We stayed in Iraq for several weeks and life became routine again. We were just outside an abandoned Iraqi airfield. One of the immediate things that had to be taken care of were the huge numbers of POWs. Barb wire fences had been erected, and we used the Humvees as guard towers. The night winds were cold, and so



**Iraqi POWs. Keeping them fed was a challenge.**

we gave the POWs shovels to dig pits they slept in. Everything was spread pretty thin for them. We were able to get them food and water courtesy of the Air Force. The airfield we were at had been bombed. The engineers filled in the craters, and C-130s started bringing in food and water.

One of the things we did was to transfer the POWs out of Iraq and to Saudi Arabia. The Saudi's would handle returning them to Iraq. I heard that an offer was made to each of them if they wanted to stay, they could. I don't know if any of them took the Saudis up on it.

One of the real issues we faced was that we were still being spread thin. We still needed to keep the area secure. The airfield we were sitting just outside of, had bunkers full



**SP4 Hahn watching over POWs**

of ammo. I never went to check them out, but I also heard that there were a couple of fighters in the hangers.

Our female MPs weren't supposed to be watching the POWs, but we had few choices. One of our MPs was SP4 Hahn. A pretty girl, she tucked her hair up under her helmet, put on a flak jacket, and she looked more like Ron Howard's little brother than a girl. She pitched in and helped when we needed help the most.

We started settling into life in Iraq. Between running missions, and waiting for whatever





**Lt. Bieleki and SPC Doty enjoy a meal at the Stammisch table.**

was going to happen next, we forged a home of sorts. Someone had found a damaged table in a bunker and we salvaged and repaired it. We called it the "Stamisch table" after the tables in Germany where the guests of the management were allowed to sit. We set it up in a tent, and that became our kitchen/rec room.

There was still some rather bizarre stuff going on. One day, our Platoon Daddy asked me to go with him. We went out to this one unit where they'd detained two Arab men. The story I got was that they'd shown up in a little white and orange Toyota pickup and identified themselves as Saudi Intelligence officers. They wanted gasoline for the truck. Thinking this was slightly bizarre, that unit arrested them. SFC G and I took them to an actual Saudi outfit and turned them over to them. I haven't a clue who or what they really were, but it was odd and just one more incident to file under "What the heck."

Things got routine there for a while. Here's a few pictures from our time in Iraq.





**One day a small donkey wandered into camp. We gave it water, posed with it for pictures, then we had to take it out of the camp. I hope it found a good home.**



**Greg washing clothes. We salvaged the box of laundry soap from an Iraqi bunker. That stuff will get anything clean. We had a clothesline, and we'd wash out clothes, hang them up to dry, and it was so warm, and so dry, our laundry would be dry inside of five minutes.**

One night, Greg woke me up with one question, "Are you OK?"

Apparently, I was gasping for breath. It felt to me like I was running a fever and when I tried to sit up, I felt weak, almost worn out. The next morning, I wasn't any better.

SSG Hahr, my squad leader, told me to go to the medics. I went, they checked me out, and then they told me to come back half an hour later and leave my weapons with my platoon.

I should have expected trouble. Blackhawks were always coming in, and I didn't notice the MASH Blackhawk that arrived. maybe I was so sick I didn't pay it any mind.

When I came back to the Medics half an hour later, a few others and I were helicoptered out to a MASH in Saudi Arabia.

I don't remember much about the flight. I remember flying over the desert, then falling asleep and waking to land at the MASH. A medic took me into this large structure and showed me a cot where I lay down. I was in a gym-sized building full of beds. Most of them were empty. I thanked God for that.

A doctor examined me, then sent a medic in with an inhaler. Sometime after lunch, I was back on the helicopter and headed back for my unit. I was sick for several days, and it wasn't until we were back in Germany that I began feeling better.

While there, one of the female medics told me an interesting story. They had a Saudi doctor assigned to them, and he liked grabbing himself a handful of boob, butt, or whatever. The girls didn't like it one bit and objected. He blew it off, so they went to their command who spoke to his command. It didn't do any good.

In frustration, they complained again, and that's when their command told them that the US Army had put a lot of time and effort into teaching them how to take care of themselves, and maybe they should use it.

Their concern was getting in trouble. They were told he'd never say anything about getting the hell beat out of him by a bunch of girls.

Until Doomsday comes, the official story is he fell off a ladder while replacing a light bulb. The truth is that American women stood up for themselves and cleaned his clock. Too bad not all sexual harassment can be handled so easily.

But that was just the cherry on the sundae on a visit to a MASH for me.



**We check out a building Iraqi soldiers had occupied. That's Lt. John Bielecki in the center.**

A lot of things have been blamed for Gulf War Syndrome. Some of it is blamed on a small white pill we were issued that was supposed to help protect us against nerve gas. The first time I tried one, my heart rate went through the ceiling, I got lightheaded, and I never took one again. My feeling was if it was doing that to my body, I didn't want anything to do with it. I heard a story (unconfirmed) that the pill wasn't even tried on lab animals, and there was no sure knowledge of what it did or if it would even work.

Despite being under orders that we'd take one a day, I never did again.

What I do know is it wasn't till I got out of there and went back to running and working out that I began to feel better. That said, I spent a week hacking up a lung, and I never seem to have gotten back all the strength I had before going down there.

What I lay the blame on for my getting sick is the oil well fires. I remember the first time we saw them was when we were pulling into the location we'd occupy for several months. It was towards evening, and on the horizon was what looked like city lights. I remember wondering what city it was, pulled out the map and couldn't figure that one out. The only city even close to use would have been Basra and it was below the horizon.

We'd heard Saddam Hussein had blown the wells, and it was several minutes before the truth of what we were seeing closed in. Oil well fires. Lots of them. That's what we were seeing.



**The oil fires.**

By day, a thick cloud hovered over the area, and at night, we could see the fires. On occasion, the wind would shift, and we could smell the choking smoke. All we could do was endure it.



I vividly recall the first time we drove through the area. The smoke was so thick that it blotted out the daylight. I could look straight into the sun (when we could see it), and it didn't bother my eyes at all. It was like viewing it through thick welding glass.



**The 6th platoon regulators pose next to a disabled Iraqi tank. The road is roughly the border between Iraq and Kuwait. I'm on the extreme right without my helmet on and wearing sunglasses.**

If a medieval man had been dropped into the desolate area, he'd have been convinced he'd stumbled into Hell. Columns of fire whooshed from the shattered well heads, shooting up dozens of feet. I was reminded of the static tests done on rocket engines.



And the sound. Some of the wells sounded like rockets taking off, the thundering burn audible through the windows and drowning out the noise of the engines. Others actually sounded like the damned burning in Hell. If you let your imagination run wild, you could hear voices.

And the heat. It was already getting warm, but the thick smoke trapped the heat of the fires and made it worse.

We drove through it twice. Once when we were checking the route to bring the Division back, and the other when we left Iraq and Kuwait for the final time. When we drove through it, we always wore our masks. The gas masks did nothing to kill the stench, and we sweated as we drove through as fast as we could. I doubt they did much to protect our lungs.

Much has been written about the so-called "Highway of Death." Faced with taking on the



**Rolling up into the so-called Highway of Death. The picture is taken from the gun turret of one of our vehicles.**

American, Saudi, and Kuwait forces coming in to liberate the country, and being cut off by our forces sweeping through Iraq, the Iraqis tried to get out and take us much combat power as they could with them.

Simply put, the Highway of Death was open season on several Iraqi heavy divisions. They were bombed and strafed till there was nothing left to bomb or strafe.

A lot of criticism has been waged that we did was something we never should have done. Critics have compared it to murder. That it was extremely one sided, I don't disagree with that. But war isn't about being fair or nice. It's about getting your butt home alive.

So, I don't condemn it simply because if all that armor and manpower had gotten out, we'd have had to face them. That would have meant more casualties on our part. George Patton said it best, "You don't win a war by dying for your country. You win a war by making the other poor bastard die for his."





**More Highway of Death pictures. Note the high number of civilian vehicles in the mix. In addition to trying to get their forces out, a lot of stuff that wasn't nailed down was taken.**

Even knowing that, I couldn't help but feel pity for them. Faced with a modern air force, and without air cover of their own, the Iraqi tanks and vehicles were turned into one large

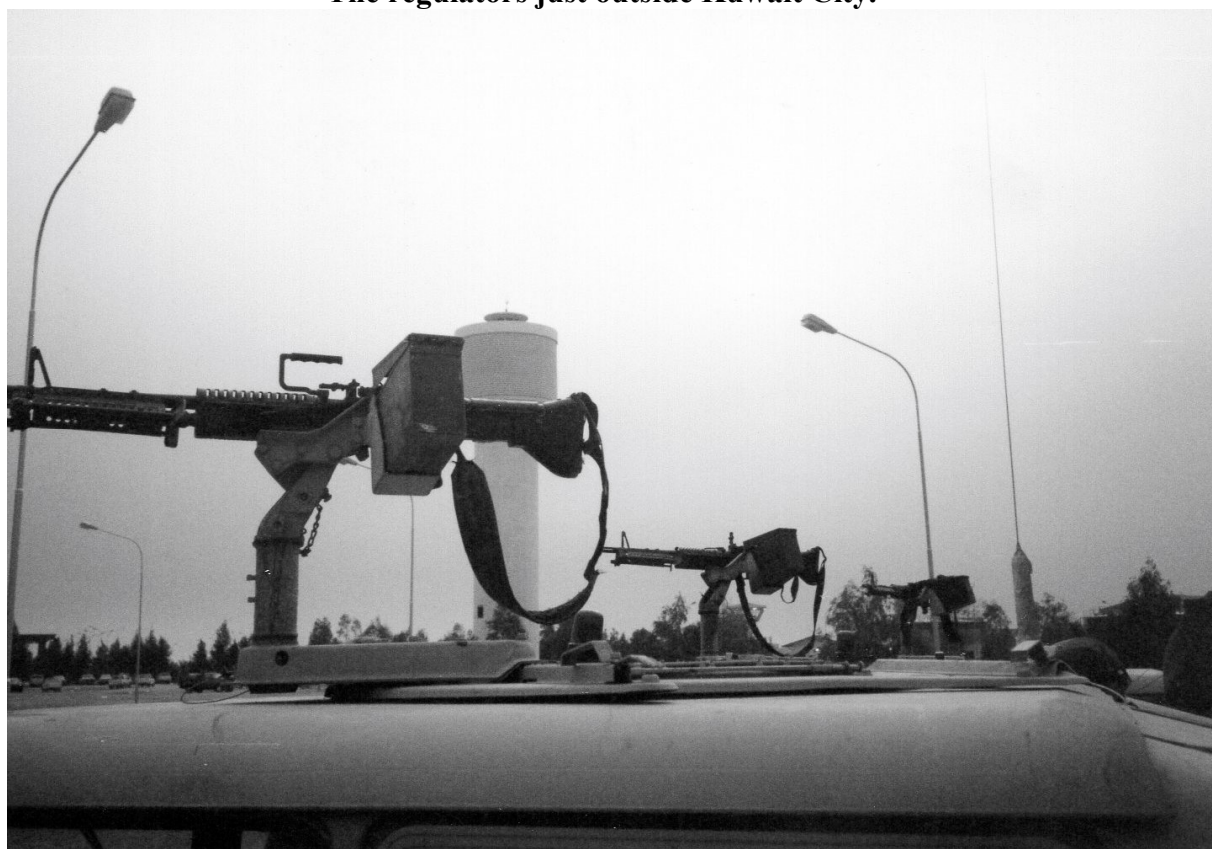
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(unconfirmed) that the pill wasn't even tried on lab animals, and there was no sure knowledge of what it did or if it would even work.

Despite being under orders that we'd take one a day, I never did again.



**The regulators just outside Kuwait City.**



*10ART*



One of the more memorable pictures I took was of my platoon at the city limits sign of Kuwait City. I think in the back of our minds, we knew it wouldn't be long before we went home, so we were letting our hair down a little bit more.



To say Kuwait City was a mess would be an understatement. The Iraqis had torn the city apart and built fortifications almost everywhere. Some houses had been sandbagged rather heavily and turned into fortresses. Some places they burnt, like the Kuwait City Sheraton.

The Iraqis had also built fortifications along the beach. No doubt they expected the Marines to do a landing by sea just like they did in the Pacific in WW II or the Army did on the beaches of Normandy.

They made the beaches into a maze of fortifications, wire, and minefields. Somehow, they could never conceive that we'd just bulldoze through their land defenses and come in through the back door.

We passed in front of the Kuwait City Sheraton, and I took a picture of several people in front of it. Something about the picture bugged me and it wasn't until years later that I realized a man in it was wearing a Sombrero and looked like he'd blown right out of old Mexico.

Like I said, who goes to bed nights and dreams this stuff up.





**I'm at a complete loss to explain this guy . . . Unless there was a Mexican restaurant and he was the chef. I'd have killed for a taco about this time.**

Had it come down to a sea landing, I'm sure the battleships would have destroyed any and all resistance with their big guns. Gunnery during the Gulf War was pinpoint



**Fortifications looking out over the Persian Gulf.**

accurate. Unlike WW II, the big guns could land shells almost anywhere a commander wanted them to drop, to include sending them through any window on a building they wanted to send them through.

We didn't dare try to wander about too much and explore the area. When they left, the Iraqis left a fair number of mines behind.

As Lt. Bielecki put it, "You want a souvenir? Get home in one piece."

The Iraqis destroyed a lot, but didn't touch this work of art. I'm not sure what it is





**The Regulators check out a work of art on the shores of the Persian Gulf.**



(reminds me of a sail), but I thought it was beautiful. All things considered, I'd have thought it would have been torn down but wasn't.

I'm glad they left it alone.

One rather interesting thing occurred while we were looking about. A Mercedes convertible pulled up with two girls in it. These were the only Arab women I saw while in the Gulf not covered from head to toe in black robes.

To the contrary, both girls had their hair done, were wearing makeup and jewelry, and wore nice clothing that looked like it came from the finest boutiques in Europe. I haven't a clue who they were, but they got out, hugged us all, and thanked us for giving them their country back.



Then they got back into their convertible and drove back the way they came. It was like something out of the Twilight Zone.

The trip back to Saudi Arabia was a long one but rewarding. The highway connecting Kuwait City with Saudi Arabia had been cleared of mines, and some minor repairs made. The Iraqis had cut huge trenches through the desert and filled them with black crude oil. What I heard was the Iraqis planned on setting them ablaze if we tried to come in the back door. We did. I don't know if they tried to set them on fire but the defense didn't work.

We pushed right through it.

**Cpl Mac and SPC Hagadorn enjoy gyros purchased from a street stand in Hafar Al-Batin. The Pepsi's were the first cold drinks we'd had in a long time**

We stopped in Hafar Al-Batin and had an excellent meal of Gyros. . In route, the Lieutenant's vehicle developed a brake problem. We were miles from our mechanics with no one to fix it. We made it into Al Qaisumah, and spent the night in the town square.

When we woke up the next morning, a small farmers' market had popped up around us.

I've written a lot about the hospitality I received while in the Middle East, and the farmers' market was no exception.

One of the traders had a small gas-powered stove, and he made coffee, broke open a tin of dates, and invited us to breakfast.

I was always making sure our people didn't refuse hospitality. If an Arab offers you coffee or a meal, and you don't sit down, it's one of the biggest insults you can offer. Several of us sat, drank coffee, and ate. Some of the traders spoke English, some didn't

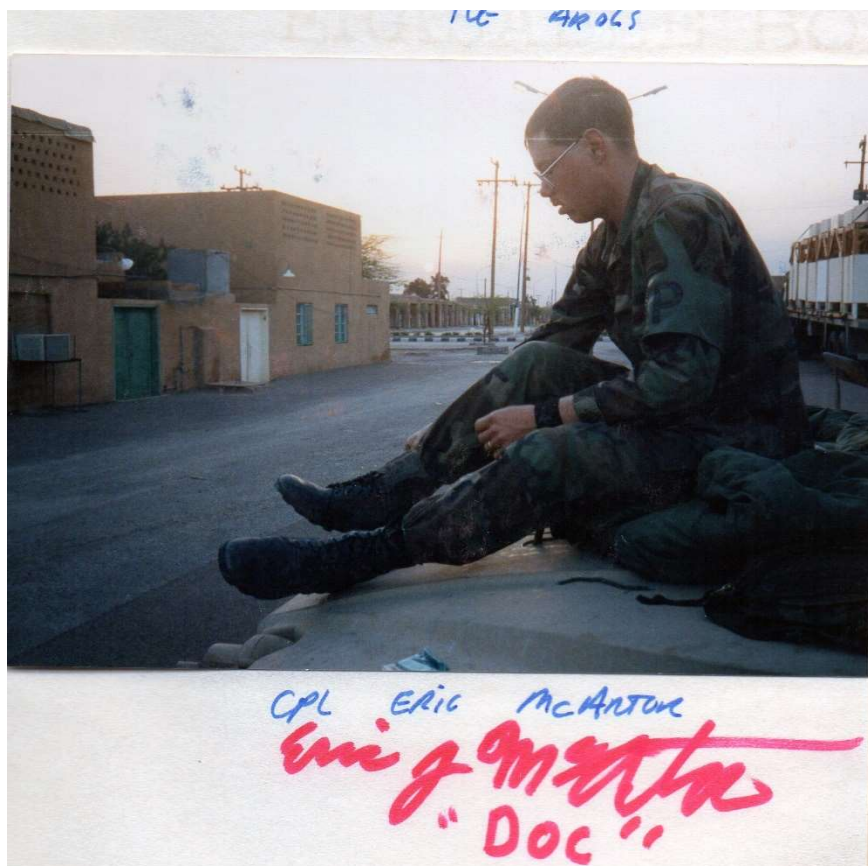
When one of the traders found out I was from Colorado, he asked if there were still American Indians.

Since I have Native American blood, (not enough to brag much about, but the ancestry is there), I told him I was one, and that a lot of Americans have bloodlines from the different tribes. They found that fascinating.



They also found it interesting that my grandfather was from Lebanon. I think the idea of a man with bloodlines from dozens of nations and peoples was a little alien to them. They'd heard of the "Great Melting Pot" and here was a man who embodied that idea.

One of the big questions on our mind was how to get the brakes fixed on the Lieutenant's Humvee. Sgt. Motti (he'd been a tank mechanic before coming over to the MPs) didn't know much about wheeled vehicles and was unable to help.



Early orning





### Someplace in Saudi Arabia



**11 Farmers market**

After numerous false tries, we learned from a Syrian outfit that that there was an American National Guard outfit in the area calling themselves the Road Warriors. They were all about working on vehicles and picking up breakdowns. They directed us to where they were located.

We found their compound easily, but the place looked deserted. There were no guards at the gate, and no one came out when we pulled up. A honk of the horn and this guy comes sauntering out of a tent. He had his hands in his pockets, his BDU top unbuttoned, and looked more like a Taos hippie that had wandered off the commune than an American soldier.

He looks at the Lieutenant and says, "What do you want?"

No, "Yes, Sir." No, "Can I help you, Sir." Just an insolent, "What do you want?"

My Lieutenant was a graduate of the Citadel, a school with a rather hard-core military tradition. He wasn't about to stand for this.



**Yours truly with Officer John Chalker of the NYPD. He's the craziest SOB I've ever had the pleasure to meet.**

He gets out and starts going off on the guy. The guy looks at him like someone would a barking dog.

He laughs and then tells the Lieutenant, "Sir, I'm Officer John Chalker of the New York City Police Department. And you're under arrest because I think you're an F..... Perv!" He held up his badge.

The Lieutenant realized he wasn't going to intimidate a New York City cop and backed off in a hurry.

Sure enough, these guys could help us out. They got some tools together, we went back to town, and in short order they had us fixed up.





**Shade tree mechanic extraordinaire gets the brakes fixed for us.**

The problem turned out to be dust. Dust had gotten into the brake lines and all that had to be done to fix it was to bleed the brake lines. We were back on the road, and headed



**Now, that's what we call lunch.**



north back into Iraq. But before we went too far, one more stop in Hafar Al-Batin. This time for another good meal that didn't come out of an Army kitchen or an MRE bag.

It was the little meals like this that made it all worthwhile.

We arrived back at our base camp the following day. Our mission at this point was to get ready to go home.

One of the many questions I've tried to sort out is where was this Iraqi Air Base? I've peered over Google Earth imagery, maps, and so on, and the only real candidate I come up with is Jalib al Southeast Airbase. I'm inclined to suspect I'm not correct. The maps of our advance shows us a little south of that location, so I'm going to have to just say, hell if I know.

If I'm looking at the right place, this was it looked like. If so, and if you'll see a road that runs through the middle. Come down to just below the runways and you'll see a dark area. If I'm correct, we pitched out tents in that area.



But there was an unfinished piece of business to conduct first. The large ammo dump adjacent to the airfield had to be destroyed. And so did the airfield. During the last few nights we'd be in Iraq, we had to make certain no one pilfered from the ammo dump. Greg Bradley and I went out and watched the dump one night and so began the only ghost story I have to tell.



**One of the last of the pictures taken before we left Iraq. Chilling in the tent. Right to left, SSG Hahr, SPC Hagadorn, PFC Stevens, SSG Honor, SPC Lavigne, Lt. Bielecki, Cpl McArtor**

There were a couple of pieces of business still.

One was to get rid of our ammo. And they were going to let us do it in style. There were several dozen abandoned trucks and tanks. What better way than to fire them up. I mean really, how often does a soldier get to fire off a real live AT4 (for an MP, almost never).



**Captain Kroupa poses with a captured AK-47.**

But it wasn't going to happen. The concern was that a stray from our fun could cause a lot of devastation for a camp in the area.

We simply turned in our ammo and that was the end of it.



There was a rather funny aside concerning the ammo. when we'd been issued out ammo, we'd be told, via a yell punctuated with threats of court martial that we would have to account for each round. Sure, I thought. "We used 56 rounds in the engagement, Sir. I know, I counted each and every one of them. And here's the brass to back it up." Right.

We'd made a sort of rack by spacing sandbags for ammo up on the turrets. The idea being that if the gunner needed to reload, the TC or driver wouldn't have to hand him up another box. The idea of handing a box of ammo up made sense, but in practice proved to be difficult. A full box of ammo was heavy and handing it up proved awkward. And the TC might be rather busy. It made more sense to have it already up there. Each rack would hold four boxes.

The rack for one team leader (no name's please) vehicle didn't work very well, and every time the Humvee hit a bad bump, a box of ammo would be jolted loose, fall through the turret, and hit him. After this had happened about a million times, he grabbed the box that had just fallen down, opened the window, and tossed it into the desert.

He confessed he was worried about explaining where that box went.

As it went, not a single round was counted.

The other was that we weren't exactly finished with fighting Saddam. More specifically, we supported--while not appearing to support--a grassroots revolt.

There were several so called "Freedom Fighters" in the area. A band of them showed up needing food, water, medical attention, and a place to rest for a bit.

The POW camp was empty and if they stacked their arms, they were welcome to stay the night. We fed them, gave them water, and the medics looked after their injured. In the morning, we gave them food and water, turned their weapons back over to them, and sent them on their way.



**Sgt. Richard Jordan leads a band of Freedom Fighters to a secure place to rest. One of the men claimed to be related to Saddam. I often wonder what happened to these men.**

I've often wondered what happened to these men. Are they still alive? Are they part of the new Iraq and fighting for a better tomorrow? Or did they turn an

One thing I failed to mention was the daily airshows we received while parked at that airbase. Almost every day several [A-10 Warthogs](#) would show up and do simulate bombing and strafing runs on the airfield. As the attack planes roared and twisted



overhead, all we could do was watch, shake our heads, and say, "That looks like way too much fun to be work."

I think most of us forgot that these same pilots, just a few weeks before had braved a sky full of machine gun fire, shoulder mounted SAMs, and larger weapons to knock out tanks and disrupt enemy operations to make things easier and safer for us.

To the Air Force guys, thanks!

Of course we wanted to go home, and finally that day arrived. We tore everything down and loaded up. Our last mission was to keep people out of the area as the engineers prepared to blow the ammo dump. We were told to set up the perimeter some mile or so from the base.

On cue, they blew the place. It was nothing short of remarkable to watch a mushroom shaped cloud tower up into the sky as the area ripped itself apart. Occasionally we could see puffs of smoke as rounds exploding upwards came down and impacted into the dirt. As we watched we heard a whistling overhead, then an explosion maybe a hundred meters away. That was way too close for us. We put another quarter mile between us and it very fast like.

Before they blew the place, we encountered an Iraqi family who had been dislodged by the fighting,



**An end result of the war. A family dislodged by the fighting tries to get to the refugee camp. We provided them with some food, water, and I gave gum to the kids.**

They were trying to get to the refugee camp at Safwan. We pointed them in the direction, then made sure they had a case of water and a case of MREs. I had left Germany well supplied with chewing gum, so I handed out several packs of Juicy Fruit and bubble gum to the kids. IT was all hard as a rock, but chewing gum soften up and keeps the mouth moist.



Like the freedom fighters, I've had occasion to wonder what happened to them.

At the designated time, it was announced they were ready to blow the dump. From a mile or so away the initial explosions weren't at all impressive. It sounded like a kid lighting Black Cat firecrackers a block away. But like a match to paper that lights the wood, the explosions became bigger and more energetic as the chain reaction built on itself.

And immense dust cloud started rising up into the sky, and debris was seen to start falling and impacting.

We'd be told that we would be well outside the danger zone. Of course, that was a lie.



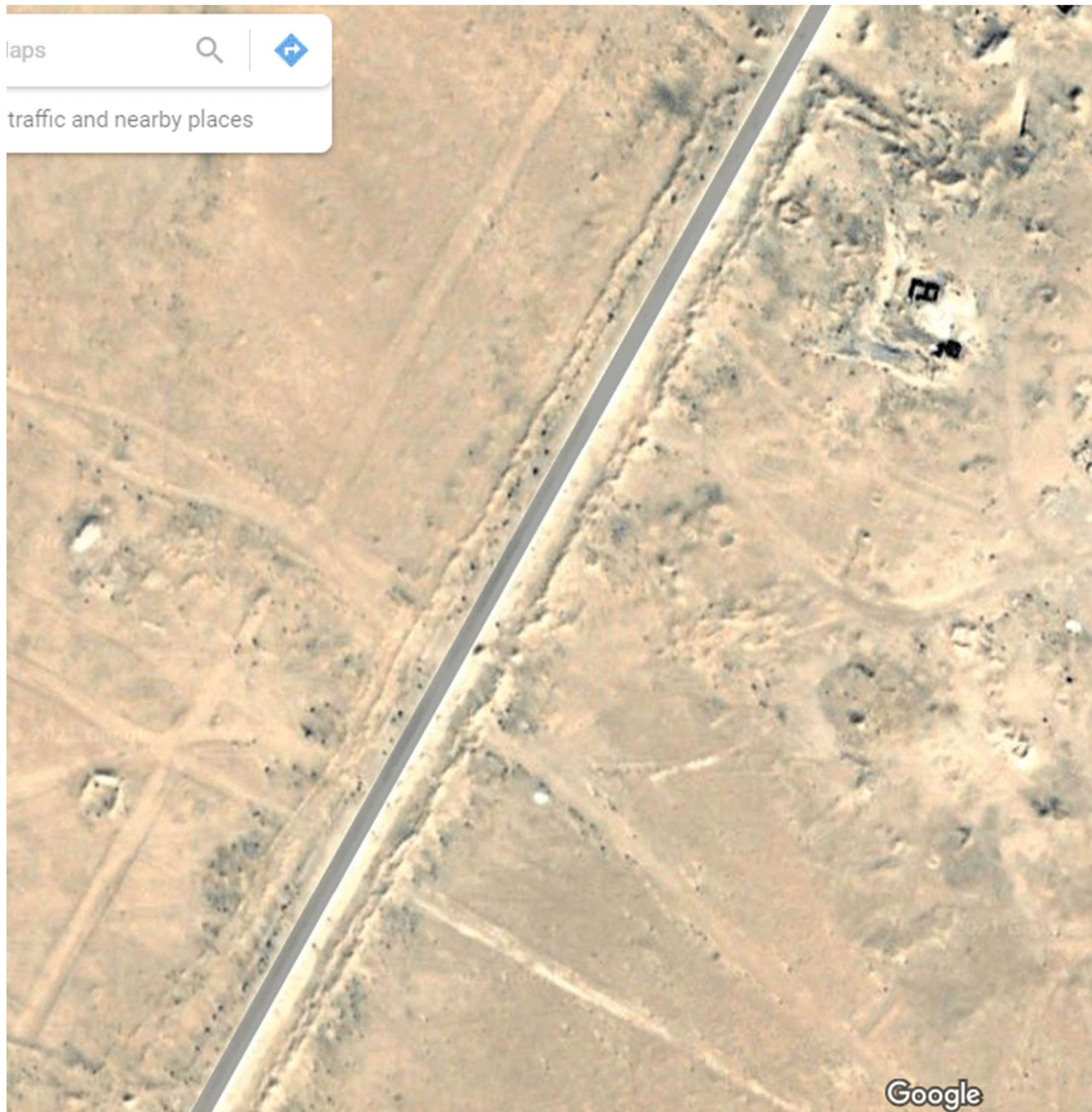
**The ammo dump is destroyed. This is roughly two minutes after the initial explosion.**

Sam Pennington and his team were about a third of mile away from us and maybe a hundred meters closer to the dump than us. Suddenly, there was a large explosion not far from them. Something had gone up, come down, and landed within fifty meters of them.

Everyone thought the same thing and we quickly put another half mile between the dump and us, just in case. It would have been a sad note to go through the war without so much as a papercut and then get hammered by a chunk of something on the day we were leaving.

I kept taking pictures of the destruction and within ten minutes it was all over.





**Unless I'm mistaken again, this is what remains of the ammo dump today (or whenever the picture was taken). A zoom out from this location would show the airfield we occupied, and a landscape riddled with impact craters. Thank you, Google Earth.**

After we blew the place to bits, we followed the route we'd scouted days before back to Saudi Arabia. We went back through the Highway of Death, and then towards Saudi Arabia.

We'd been driving, when we saw a bus ahead of us stop and pull over. There was a Union Jack flag in the back, meaning it was the Brits. Several men got out and milled about. I assume it was a bathroom break. Suddenly, there was a cloud of dust and the sound of an explosion. Several of the men fell over, and more staggered back.

We knew right away what had happened. One of the soldiers had stepped on a mine. We stopped to help, but whoever was in charge told us to get the hell out of there. They had medics and could take care of their own injured. In retrospect, had we rushed in to help like our first instincts said to do, some of us would probably have gotten injured or killed. The Iraqis had set up a minefield down along the road and our allies stepped right into it.

It makes me wonder how many of those minefields are still over there.

About a mile into Saudi Arabia we did what I call the "Ceremonial Dumping of the Sand." We stopped and pulled dozens of sandbags out of the floor of our vehicles. We opened them and, there on the side of the road, dumped the sand back into the country we'd gotten it all from.



**SGT Greg Bradley and the Ceremonial Dumping of the Sand**



## THE ROAD HOME.

It meant we weren't going back. For us, it was a watershed moment. Home was now weeks, maybe only days in the future. Unless we managed to get ourselves killed in a traffic accident, we'd made it through.

The road to Daman and home led us back to the vicinity of Hafar Al-Batin, and in this case KKM (King Khalid Military Community). At least we weren't exactly in the middle of nowhere anymore. We were starting to get at some creature comforts.



**A break area at KKM. Slightly above center is a hamburger stand someone named McGunners.**

One of the more interesting things that happened is we actually got our Desert Issue uniforms. Up to this point we'd wore our woodland BDUs, the same ones we'd worn in Europe.

I've heard that the Iraqis felt we were some kind of super unit since we were the same soldier that ran the Russians off. It was probably all talk, but I groan every time I see a movie about the Gulf War and see the soldiers in desert BDUs.

We got almost unlimited access to phone tents.

And we got American hamburgers. There was a large built-up area about two miles from our camp where we went often to get free hamburgers and sodas. Somebody hung the name of McGunners on it, and all things considered, it didn't turn out to be a bad cheeseburger.

We also had a TV. The only thing we had to watch was the Superbowl and it was already history. They put the tape in, and we pretended we didn't know that and enjoyed the game (we actually had popcorn).

One of the funnier things that occurred while we were parked at KKMC was when a girl I knew came out to say hi. Greg and I were sharing a tent, and she came in. She sees our cots, the bare bulb hanging from the ceiling, and the Styrofoam cooler we got ice in twice a week (if we were lucky). I remember she sat on my cot, and said, "Wow, this is the field."

Greg and I laughed and one of us responded, "Compared to where we've been, this is the Hilton!"

It was at one of the phone tents I would first talk to my future bride to be, Julie. I had to call my lawyer to set up a time. For me, it was the middle of the night. I remember

### **Sgt John Wherry enjoys a burger from McGunners**

when I called, I heard the phone ring, she picks up, and says hello, and I started to speak. Then



she said "Hello," again, but by now she'd heard me. I re-identified myself and told her I was calling from Saudi Arabia. There was latency in our conversation caused by the signal crawling up to a satellite in Geosync orbit, then back down to the ground. It was Astronomy 101 stuff, but was proof just how big space really was.

One of the more interesting things about KKMC was a small white house that sat on maybe a quarter acre of ground. The house was surrounded by a high white wall, there was a single gate with a wall behind it and had two armed guards at the gate.

I was told that Idi Amin, the former dictator and strongman of Uganda resided there. As I understood the arrangement, when he was deposed, he went into exile in Saudi Arabia. He was put in the house, given food, and limited contact with the world. He could go out into the yard and tend his garden. He could watch TV, read, and eat his meals which he fixed himself.



Step outside the walls surrounding the yard and he'd be shot! While it looked nice, it was a gilded cage, and he was still a prisoner. I never tried to confirm the story.

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**The Mosque at KMC. Picture doesn't really do it justice.**



**KMC. As military bases go, no expense was spared here.**



The day came when we left KKMC for the drive to Daman. It was a long and uneventful drive, and we got there just in time for supper. The mess hall had been set up in a garage. We walked in needing a bath and covered with dust from the road. We were still in full combat gear to include M-16s slung over our shoulders and .45s on our hips. The soldiers eating their meals there looked at us like we were some flea ridden, tumbleweed battered shepherders that had wandered into a country club.

For the first time in a very long time, I got a tray and real silverware. I got a china plate and stood in line. There, a man wearing a white shirt with a red bow tie and a tall white chef's hat served me my dinner from a tray that looked like it had come from a four-star hotel.



*12 The LT wait a young friend*

It was totally unreal.

We were put up at some high-rise apartment buildings along with the rest of the 1st Infantry and 1st Armored Division troops.

We had access to an elevator that worked, toilets that flushed, and ice-cold showers. The water heater in our apartment didn't work, so we were taking cold baths, and shaving in cold water.

I often suspect they put us there so we could remember what a flush toilet was.

The apartments were supposed have been built for the nomads, but since there was no place to keep the sheep, they never lived there.

Or so I heard.

We were also able to walk around and enjoy the sights. Not that there was a lot to see, but we did get to have the closest thing to a beer in Saudi Arabia we were going to get. It tasted perfect.

We also walked around, spent some money, and wondered how long we'd be there. I should point out that while we were walking around, we were without weapons, combat gear or the like. After all that bulk, it was like going to the beach. We felt, for the first time, airy and cool.

About the only issues we had were with fellow MPs. While we walked around, two MPs came up and told us we weren't supposed to be wearing our brassards, the arm band that says MP on it. We had to take them off. It left us all feeling strangely naked.

A few days later, we got to take our vehicles down to be shipped home. What we didn't realize was that what had arrived in Saudi Arabia in good shape wouldn't be in such good shape when they got home.

Windows would be cracked, fenders broken, tires flat. In a lot of cases the batteries were dead, and one or two of the vehicles just didn't run anymore.

Our proud fleet of Humvees that had served us so well and so faithfully looked like candidates for the junkyard. We weren't happy, and many expressed deep disappointments. In some cases, items that had been shipped back were now missing.

I ended up taking several rolls of pictures of the damage for the captain.

While there, I spoke with the MPs who were doing the inspections of stuff leaving the country. One of the big things was units or individuals trying to smuggle weapons out. These were captured AKs, RPG launchers and the like. They found a lot of false floors, walls and etc. where weapons had been secreted. They told me of one trailer they were looking through, and it just didn't seem right. finally, someone realized what the problem was. it was longer on the outside than the inside. There was a false wall, and when they tore it open, there was a Mercedes tucked away inside the trailer.





A few days later, we received word it was our turn to go home. We'd been issued Desert Uniforms at KKMC, and I find it interesting we got them just in time to go home. The buses showed up, took us to the airport, and a Tower Airlines 747 waiting for us.

The flight back to Germany seemed faster than when we flew down. Maybe we caught a tail wind, maybe it really was just faster. Or maybe it was one of those weird time dilation effects not predicted by Albert Einstein.



One thing I did notice, the flight back was quieter. We landed in Germany, where more buses took us to Ansbach.

Soldiers were reunited with their families. I don't recall how I got back to my barracks. I want to say those who had cars ferried everyone back, but I can't really be sure.

That evening, I stowed my gear and took a shower to end showers. An almost endless supply of warm water seemed to be an incredible concept. I shaved and put on civilian clothing. Somehow, it felt odd wearing regular clothes.

It was May 12th. We were two days shy of six months being gone.



### **13 Everyone getting ready to go to town**

Everyone else was going to hit the discos. That wasn't my scene.

One of the young ladies in the band and I walked down to a Gasthaus and treated ourselves to steak and a beer.

Since we were both Star Trek and Star Wars fans and not discos., we planned a night of sitting and indulging. We purchased a six pack of beer, chips, and some other goodies. We sat on the couch in her room and started watching the movies.

We didn't even make it through Wrath of Khan before both of us were fast asleep. We woke up the following morning, sore and stiff, and with kinks in our necks.

Considering how everyone else was throwing up and looked like death warmed under the following morning, I figure her and I had the best time of all.

Iraq was now a thing of the past.



**I took this picture one morning during the ground war, but I couldn't recall who it was. For a long time, we didn't know if it was Hagadorn or Maybaugh. I took the negative into the lab, did some magic on it, and we determined it was SPC Maybaugh. There are times I think I shouldn't have and left it alone.**

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Richard Muniz is a former police officer and Military Policeman.

He is the Award Winning author of The Cross and the Badge, Life on Mars, Broken People, and Event Horizon.

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*Figure 14-Award winning author Richard Muniz stands next to the B-25 "Maid in the Shade."*