

# THE BIG STORM

Inside Task Force 5-5 Cav  
Operation Desert Shield / Desert Storm



by  
Dr. Anthony Jones Boyette

**WARNING:**  
**This book contains profanity. And that's because that's the way it was.**

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**Fifth Cavalry Regiment  
First Brigade**  
Third Armored Division (Spearhead)



This book is dedicated to the eight soldiers of First Brigade  
who did not come home alive:

**Sergeant Tracy Hampton**

Killed January 1991 at Cement City, Saudi Arabia, when the sandbags of his bunker collapsed on him during heavy rains while he was on sentry duty.

**Captain Joseph Kime**

Killed March 1991 when his Humvee ran over a mine.

**Staff Sergeant Christopher Stephens**

Killed in Action when his vehicle was hit by a Republican Guard T-72 tank.

**Private First Class Adrian Stokes**

Killed in Action when his vehicle was hit by a Republican Guard T-72 tank.

**Staff Sergeant Roy Summerall**

Killed April 1991 during a patrol when he stepped on a mine near Safwan, Iraq.  
He died during aerial medevac.

**Specialist Peter Swano**

Became critically ill from pneumonia-like symptoms in Feb 1991 and had to be taken to the battalion aid station.  
He collapsed and died there just days before the ground attack started.

**Staff Sergeant Kenneth Gentry**

Killed in February 1991 during direct fire engagement with an Iraqi armored unit in the battle at 73 Easting.

**Sergeant Edwin Kutz**

Killed in February 1991 during direct fire engagement with an Iraqi armored unit in the battle at 73 Easting.

and

**First Sergeant Bill Corkran**

First Sergeant Bill Corkran was First Sergeant of Delta Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 68<sup>th</sup> Armor until shortly before Desert Storm when he was medevac'd back to the United States with a relapse of cancer.  
He died shortly after.



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### Army infantry school

Pvt. Anthony C. Boyette, son of Gradie C. Boyette of Rt. 2, Pikeville, N.C. has completed training at the U.S. Army Infantry School, Fort Benning, Ga. During the course, students received training which qualified them as light-weapons infantrymen and as indirect-fire crewmen in a rifle or mortar squad. Instruction included weapons qualification, tactics, patrolling, land mine warfare, field communications and combat operations.

Goldsboro News Argus, November 1988



## INTRODUCTION

“Call me SPEARHEAD”

Third Armored Division (SPEARHEAD) was the U.S. Army's largest heavy armored division in Europe during the cold war. The **Fulda Gap** is an area between the Hesse-Thuringian border and Frankfurt am Main in Germany. The terrain of the Fulda Gap is neither particularly flat nor broad. It is however, suitable for the advance of mechanized forces on a large enough scale to present a significant threat to United States forces in the context of the Cold War. The Fulda area is one of only two corridors of lowlands through which Warsaw Pact armor is able to pass in a surprise attack by the Soviets and their Warsaw Pact allies. As the defense of the Fulda Gap terrain feature came to be seen as a key battle location of World War III, so soared the standards and performance of the United States Army units assigned to defend it. We trained constantly, spending seven months of every year at Grafenwohr, Hammelburg, Hoenfels, and other Bavarian training areas. Of all the United States Army's forces in Germany, the Third Armored Division had been chosen to defend this path of attack from East Germany to the Rhine River. A successful advance by the Soviets to the Rhine River via the Fulda Gap would have essentially split American forces in Europe into two parts.

For forty-five years, the U.S. Army's Third Armored Division (SPEARHEAD) was Americas choice to defend the Fulda Gap. Our assigned mission, should World War III break out, was to hold the Fulda Gap at all costs; to buy the time for Allied reinforcements to mobilize and arrive. Whomever held Fulda would most likely be the victor in the battle for Europe. Military analysts estimated that should World War III kick off, it would take at least 48 hours for American stateside forces and European NATO forces to mobilize and arrive. The Third Armored Division was America's largest heavy armored division yet we were out numbered by Warsaw Pact forces ten to one. In the event that reinforcements could not be mobilized and arrive within 48 hours, our unspoken mission was "*die in place*" defending Fulda if necessary. There was no retreat from Fulda.

The Third Armored Division was a combined arms task force, consisting of Infantry, Armor, Artillery, and Air Support units all training and fighting together in concert. The division landed in Normandy without a nickname and was placed under the command of Major General Maurice Rose just as the Normandy invasion began. Third Armored Division attacked to close the Falaise Pocket. Some 20,000 Germans escaped, but tens of thousands did not, nor did their hundreds of smashed and abandoned tanks, trucks, and guns. With the Germans on the run, the Third Armored Division pursued with a vengeance, charging across the Seine, Marne and Aisne rivers. The Third Armored Division then swiftly crossed the trench lines of the Great War. On the 31<sup>st</sup> of August 1944, Allied code-breakers identified German columns retreating near Mons, Belgium. Rose's Third Armored Division was ordered to head east at full speed toward the German border. The armored task force pivoted 90 degrees and pushed hard to the north. The idea was to cut off and destroy German units trying to pull out of France. In a brutal meeting engagement on September 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>, Rose's troops encountered German tanks, killing many and taking some 8,000 prisoners. But they didn't hang around to admire their handiwork. Instead the division continued it's attack towards the German border.

Intelligence reports said the German fortifications at Siegfried Line had been abandoned. Again, the division outran withdrawing German elements, liberating the Belgian cities of Huy, Liege, Verviers, and Eupen. But intelligence reports had been wrong. In three days of vicious close combat among dragon's teeth, minefields, barbed wire aprons, and concrete bunkers, all very much manned, the division broke through. Then it halted. The Third Armored Division was out of gas. The Division had raced so far, so fast, that they had outrun the ability of Allied supply trucks to keep up.

Next, the Third Armored Division drove to secure Aachen, Germany, as well as the ill-fated, blood-soaked attempts to take the Hürtgen Forest. Many Americans died. Scores fell wounded from tree-burst shells; General Rose himself was wounded in both of his shoulders. On December 16<sup>th</sup>, the Germans regrouped and tore open a 60-mile stretch of the thinly held American lines with a blitzkrieg tank attack. As the Allied forces scrambled to parry Hitler's counter attack, the Siegfried Line began to falter. Major General Maurice Rose's Third Armored Division held the far end of the northern shoulder of the line. To the Division's rear was the Meuse River and certain German victory. But the Germans never made it past the Third Armored Division. Nazi tanks and Infantry hit the Third Armored Division again and again. They did not get through. The Third Armored Division punched east. After a week of bloody fighting with German rear guards in battered towns the Division took the vast, ruined city of Cologne on the rain-swollen Rhine River. The retreating Germans blew up the bridge on the Rhein River as they fled, but Third Armored Division engineers got the Division across the river, still in pursuit. Ten days later, Third Armored Division liberated the horrific Nazi slave labor camp at Nordhausen. Three weeks later, Nazi Germany surrendered. The Third Armored Division advanced all the way from the sandy Normandy beaches into the heart of Germany, penetrating the enemy like the tip of a spear. In 231 days of combat, General Rose's Third Armored Division lost nearly 3,000 soldiers killed and 7,500 wounded, with over 600 of their tanks destroyed — more than any other American armored division.

When the story of Germany's surrender hit the *Chicago Tribune* on V-Day, war correspondent Jack Thompson's newspaper headline simply read "**SPEARHEAD**" and the moniker stuck. The Division earned through hard fighting significant "firsts of its kind" honors in Europe, thus the name on the patch and the greeting of its members. In the fall of 1990, the Spearhead Division received a new mission: Liberate the country of Kuwait and destroy Saddam Hussein's army.

The main body of the Spearhead Division departed Rhein Main Airbase in Germany on the afternoon of January 1st, 1991 on U.S. Air Force C-141 *Starlifter* cargo aircraft. At that time during the troop buildup, there was a plane taking off from Rhein-Main every fifteen minutes around the clock, the largest airlift since the Berlin Airlift of World War II. That day there was about fifteen aircraft lined up on the apron awaiting departure. I was on the second plane that left that day. We arrived at King Khalid Military Center Airfield in Saudi Arabia at 2:00 AM the next day. From 1941 until 1992 when the Division was deactivated and its colors retired, the men and women who wore the SPEARHEAD patch caused peace to happen wherever they were sent. This is my story.



January 17<sup>th</sup> 1991 ~ It began at 2:00 AM Saudi time. Earlier that morning as we slept, hundreds of tomahawk missiles had been fired from U.S. Navy warships offshore, sucker-punching Iraqi command and control centers all over Iraq. American stealth fighters destroyed Iraqi air defense batteries with impunity, then a sortie of twelve Army Apache attack helicopters of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division, code named “Task Force Normandy”, penetrated Iraqi defenses in the darkness and had taken out what remained of Iraq’s ability to see anything in the air, at sea, and on land.

Except for the sentries on duty around the perimeter of the compound, soldiers of First platoon, Charlie company, SPEARHEAD, were asleep in our GP large tents at Cement City in Saudi Arabia. Then all of a sudden the noise was deafening. We got up from our cots and walked outside and looked up to the sky. Fighter jets roared overhead, low to the ground, headed north from the Saudi airfield several miles away. I could see the flashing lights on the jets as they passed overhead. Scores of them. The night sky was full. They looked like fireflies on a summer night. The jet’s afterburners lit up the sky as they turned up and climbed. This had never happened before in the two weeks that we had been here at Cement City. “*This must be it*” I thought. Captain George walked out of the back door of the tent. Apparently he had come in the front door, seen that we were all gone, and had exited the back door to where we were all standing looking up to the night sky in awe at the sheer volume of activity. “*Saddam Hussein has failed to meet the United Nations deadline to leave Kuwait. As of now, we are officially at war with Iraq, Gentlemen*” he said. But we had already figured that out. “*Gather your teams, briefing will be at zero six hundred hours.*”

For the next six hours, there wasn’t a span of five minutes without deafening jet engine noise. As the sun came up over Saudi Arabia, the jet noise continued. The jets taking off would leave north, ordinance loaded on the rails under each wing while others were returning. In the morning light I could see the ones returning had empty rails where the bombs were supposed to be. They’d return, rearm and refuel, then take off again. It was non-stop, an airborne conveyor belt of bombs and missiles. Sortie after sortie after sortie. Some of the jets had “**SJ**” in big black letters on the tail fins ~ F-15 Strike Eagles from Seymour Johnson Air Force Base, my hometown. “*See that SJ?*” I said to Private LaCosta and pointed to a jet overhead. “*That’s my homeboys delivering some whoop-ass.*” I said. And it continued all day long, non-stop. There were American jets, French jets, Saudi jets, Italian jets, Canadian jets, British jets. Every country in the coalition was participating in this “shock and awe” and it didn’t stop. “*I didn’t know there were that many fighter jets in the world*” I thought. “*Wherever they’re going, I’m glad I’m not on the other end.*”



## CHAPTER ONE

### Warriors

*“Hey Boyette, Chaplain Bebber is holding services over by the eighty-eight. You going?” “It must be Sunday again?” I replied as I wiped the black oily booger from my nose. Kuwait’s burning oil wells filled the sky with a dense black oily smoke. Soot fell from the sky like snowflakes. One day we had rice for chow. The falling soot looked like black pepper all over the food we ate. But hot chow was rare, so we ate it regardless. Two decades later the Department of Veterans Affairs reports all the carcinogens and other toxins that their research shows is in burning oil well smoke. One day was just like the next in Desert Storm. There was no day of the week. Each day all day consisted of preparing for a battle we knew was imminent; there was no clocking in at 9 AM and clocking out at 5 PM. The earth makes one complete rotation on its axis, it separates light from darkness, and that’s all the definition of a day that is needed on the battlefield. Sergeant McCarroll turned and walked on down the line, stopping at every position and informing the squad members that Chaplin Bebber was having non-denominational services over by the mechanic’s recovery vehicle if anyone wanted to attend. Few did. I almost felt sorry for the Captain. I considered walking over and joining his little services. We were kept awake all night by scud missile attacks, up and alert at 5 AM for stand-to, and patrolling during the day before the ground war started. After the ground war started, we were awake twenty four hours a day. If we were lucky we got to brush our teeth once a week. Water was a premium in the desert. It couldn’t be wasted on trivial things like bathing. We got a “rinse off” shower every week if we were lucky. I believe the longest I went without a shower in Iraq was a month. Days were over 100 degrees. We wore thick, hot body armor to protect us from shrapnel. Underneath the body armor was a battle dress uniform. Underneath that was fire-proof long underwear in case our Bradley got hit by enemy fire. It’d buy us a few more seconds of escape time while the on-board halon fire suppression system put out the fire if we were burning. But all that protection came with a price; It was hot. The only shade in the desert was when we got to sleep underneath a tank or a deuce-and-a-half. But the sweat and funk wasn’t that bad. We all stank, so nobody noticed. “As long as we all stink the same, we’re in uniform” Captain George would say. Take seven sweaty stinky grunts who haven’t washed in weeks and shut them up in a small steel box called a Bradley Infantry Fighting vehicle and let them bake in the desert sun all day long. You won’t find that kind of stink at a neglected dog kennel. It was a luxury to be able to spare the water to shave daily. We had been promised the “mother of all battles”, and intelligence reports told us that would likely involve chemical and biological weapons, so shaving was a mission-critical activity, not pampering. If the gas mask didn’t stick tight to a smooth hairless face it wouldn’t seal.*



*“Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition.”*

It would leak and you'd die within minutes as the Sarin gas destroyed your nervous system. So when we got a spare moment it was usually spend making up for lost sleep, wiping off with a baby wipe from a care package from home, or brushing our teeth.

*“Yo Quintin! I’m going outside the wire. Don’t shoot me, you fuckin’ lug nut.”* I yelled across to Specialist Quintin Mann, my closest squad member about 40 feet away. “The wire” was a sand berm about 4 feet high pushed up by bulldozers and topped with stakes and concertina wire. It defined our perimeter. Beyond the wire was no man’s land. It was the “you are no longer in a safe zone” boundary. If our task force was to come under a surprise attack, in doctrine at least, the berm would

provide enough obstacle to slow the enemy down so we could engage them with rifle fire and cause them to bottleneck while they were trying to breach the berm. This would give us additional minutes to call for mortar support or close air support.

Stand-to had just ended and I had just finished up the “morning routine”. Task Force 5-5 was a mechanized assault force. We didn’t have toilets. We didn’t stay in one place long enough to have such amenities. But one did not defecate inside the perimeter, that was unsanitary. I dropped the dirty toilet paper into the waste filled empty plastic MRE bag each of us saved daily for the purpose, and rolled the top closed. I grabbed my entrenching tool off my rucksack, picked up my rifle and slung it across my chest, and headed to the berm. Digging a hold in the loose sand berm along the Kuwait/Saudi border was easier than digging a “cat hole” hole straight down in the packed sand to bury my waste. I took a few steps on out of my position, scanned the horizon for any threat, looked all around the ground in front of me, to the right, and to the left, just in case the engineers had missed marking any landmines left by the retreating Iraqi forces. Nothing seemed out of place, so I walked up to the berm and started digging a small hole with my entrenching tool. *“What the hell is that?”* I thought. It looked like an index finger. I raked away another shovel full and it was a finger, a thumb, and then a hand. The sand berm that surrounded us was littered with decaying bodies of Iraqi soldiers that had been killed in coalition air strikes days earlier. The Iraqi unit that had occupied this place before we took it from them found it easier to bury their dead in the soft sand berm versus digging graves in the packed desert sand. *“What difference did it make?”* I thought *“They are just as dead no matter how you bury them”*. In the obligatory sick twisted humor expected of any self-respecting Infantryman, I raked out a little more sand, wrapped the dead mans fingers around my bag of waste, and muttered, *“Here. Hang on to this for me”*. Then I filled the hole back in.



Burning oil wells, Kuwait 1991

*“I bet you thought of me when you took that dump. Felt good didn’t it?” Quintin yelled with a laugh as I came back through the wire. “That’s the same question I asked your girlfriend when you were gone to ULLS training back in July” I retorted. I looked over my right shoulder. The Captain and his flock of about a dozen all had their heads bowed in prayer. I scanned the horizon over the berm for threats. Nothing looked out of place to my trained eye. Sometimes you can’t see a threat, you know. You just know something looks out of place. You feel it. You can’t pinpoint a threat in that clump of bushes, but you know that clump of bushes just doesn’t “look right”. Your intuition is telling you there’s a danger. It’s a survival instinct that one can only learn from being the hunter or the hunted. I headed on back to my position, that snapshot of the praying warriors in my mind. I thought back to our directives:*

- 1) I will accomplish my mission.**
- 2) I will see to the safety and well being of my fellow team members.**
- 3) If I cannot accomplish both objectives one AND two, then I will accomplish my mission.**

The shrink said, “*You know things. You see things average people don’t. No matter what the salesman says, no matter how enticing the “new car” smell is, something tells you “don’t buy this car”. You meet a person and know within ten minutes if he’s worth a damn or not. If I could do that Anthony, I’d be a millionaire right now. We don’t use the word “abnormal” in these sessions because there is no such thing as abnormal behavior. It’s a made-up psychologist’s word to describe behavior society can’t relate to. ALL behavior is normal within it’s environment. You’re normal for what you’ve experienced. If you didn’t have PTSD, then THAT would be not normal. So don’t say you’re fucked up and not normal. You are normal. You’re just not average, and you never will be average again*”.



## CHAPTER TWO

### Gas Attack

Time in country, twenty-four hours. Task Force 5-5 arrived at King Khalid Military City airfield at 2:00 AM that morning. It was forty degrees when we left Germany. When we got off the Air Force C-141 Starlifter in Saudi Arabia, it was eighty degrees. Our aircraft taxied up to the parking space. The hydraulic motor hummed as the large steel ramp slowly lowered. I walked down the ramp onto the tarmac. It's not a wonder that the ancient Mesopotamians, where the ancient kingdoms of Sumeria, Assyria, and Babylonia were located, were the world's first astronomers. The night sky was black and clear. The stars shone brightly like diamonds against black velvet. It seemed like I could see the entire universe in the warm clear cloudless night. *"Wow. That's a shame. If these people weren't such religious radicals, the revenue from tourism would be billions"* I thought.

We were here for a couple of weeks waiting for our armor to arrive on the ships from Germany. There were no barracks as this was a working commercial seaport and had not been designed with living quarters. Our Humvees and wheeled vehicles came with us on the aircraft as they were light enough to be airlifted. The Abrams tanks and Bradley Infantry Fighting vehicles were too heavy to airlift. At night most of us slept wherever we could find a spot - in the cabs of the trucks, in the back of the trucks, on the ground, wherever there was enough room to roll out a sleeping bag. My buddy PFC Nicholas was a mechanic and I paired up with him for our stay at the seaport. His deuce-and-a-half had a shipping container on it that carried all his spare parts and all his tools and equipment. *"You can crash with me in the deuce"* he said. It was hot and stuffy inside the trucks at night. And I didn't like the idea of being shut up inside the back of a truck where I couldn't raise my head and see what was around me. *"Thanks man, but I'll sleep under the truck"* I said. The deuce was parked in a staging area away from the main hub of the port. I rolled out my sleeping back under the truck, fastened my rifle to my ALICE gear, laid it down against my right leg, and went to sleep. This was a good spot. If Saddam launched scud missiles, the truck would offer me overhead protection from falling debris, and if the port was attacked, any enemy wouldn't see me underneath the truck before I saw him. I had a pretty decent firing position through the loop holes between the trucks rear tires.

During the day it was hot. Over one hundred degrees. But at night the temperature dropped down into the sixties. A chilly forty degree difference in the matter of hours, and this caused a dense fog from the water that rolled in off the Mediterranean Sea. If you've heard of the London fog, this was similar. It was a dense, thick fog that seemed like you could slice it open with your bayonet. But this was our first night in-country. We hadn't been there long enough to know this.

The sound started after dark. A "crunch...crunch...crunch" sound. It sounded weird. It was loud. It wasn't a normal sound. Infantrymen are trained to notice what is out of place; what doesn't fit in the picture. And this sound was out of place. I woke up and found my flashlight easily enough by the dim light coming from the lights that illuminated the seaport. Shining it all around, there was nothing. And then I saw the camel spider. He was a tarantula-looking thing about eight inches in diameter, with hairy legs and big fangs. He was the biggest spider I'd ever seen and he was about six feet away. Someone had dropped some Doritos earlier in the day and here was this huge camel spider sitting there eating a Dorito and staring at me.

I kicked the door open to the truck box with my foot and threw my sleeping bag down. Nick was lying on his back on top of his mechanic's workbench wrapped in his green wool Army blanket. He raised his head and looked up at me. "*I'm your new room mate*" I said as I threw my green wool Army blanket in an empty spot on the dirty floor of the deuce, leaned my rifle up against the wall, and shifted around to get comfortable. We slept in uniform, boots on, ALICE gear on, gas mask on our left hip, our rifles by our side. If there was any assault I could be up and engaging within seconds.

About 3:00 AM Nick got up, "*I gotta go piss*" he announced as he slung the M2 sub-machine gun around his neck. The latrine was a cement block building about 200 feet away. Nick, still half asleep, put his kevlar on his head, adjusted his ALICE gear on his waist, and opened the door. Then after a few seconds pause, "*GAS, GAS, GAS!*" Nick yelled as loud as he could, seeing the fog and scrambling for his gas mask. I jumped up at the alarm, grabbed my mask and began masking up. Five seconds or you fail. I got the mask on and stepped out of the truck to see what was going on. Somehow we must have been infiltrated during the night. By this time the soldiers in the vehicles to our left and right had heard Nick yell the alarm, they had masked up and passed the alarm on down the line. To my left and right I could hear "*GAS, GAS, GAS!*" being shouted like it was echoing through a canyon. Eventually someone activated the electronic alarm that sounded all over the seaport. The alarm was spreading like wildfire all over the forty square mile seaport and the facility went to a THREATCON DELTA status. I grabbed my rifle and went to find my team. They were scattered in the vehicles to our left and right. By now the seaport was in a bustle, soldiers in chemical suits were running around organizing their teams, MP's in chemical suits were driving around in Humvees with machine guns manned, masked soldiers were calling on radios, officers in chemical suits were stomping around finding out what had happened and what the reaction plan was. Port security had been alerted by now and there were Saudi patrol cars with flashing blue lights driving around. Armed Saudi soldiers were walking around the area looking for any threat. Army Apache attack helicopters began circling the perimeter of the port. Nick whipped it out and peed in an empty water bottle, screwed the cap on, and laid it in the floorboard of the deuce.

Specialist Walker's Alpha team and my Bravo team converged in the assembly area. We locked and loaded our weapons, and fourth squad went into a defensive posture and we waited for our squad leader Sergeant McCarroll to arrive with a situation report from leadership. We couldn't determine where the attack had come from, if there were ground forces involved, or what the situation was. By 4:00 AM it was determined there was in fact no gas attack and the all clear order was given. Nick took off his gas mask, reached into his cargo pocket for his Copenhagen, and crammed a wad of snuff in his lip. "*What a cluster fuck*" he mumbled. "*Hey, looked like gas to me too, man*" I said. I flipped over the nylon strap that covered my watch face. It was less than an hour until stand-to, not worth lying down to sleep, so we all just remained awake until the sun rose. We expected nerve gas. Saddam had used it on his own people so he certainly wouldn't hesitate to use it on us. Our chemical alarms went off two or three times per night. The alarms would sound, we'd jump up and get that gas mask on and go to stand-to. After twenty minutes or so we would get the all clear order, and we could stand down and go back to sleep. Eventually we just started sleeping with the chemical suit on, it just saved time.

One thing Nick and I never did was tell anyone that he was the idiot responsible for putting the largest seaport in Saudi Arabia into a THREATCON DELTA condition ~ "a terrorist attack has occurred or intelligence has been received that terrorist action is imminent."

## CHAPTER THREE

### No Problem

Third Armored Division (Spearhead) arrived at the Dammam seaport in Saudi Arabia on January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1991. We had boarded C-141 Star lifters in Frankfurt Germany the day before and our plane landed at the airfield at King Khalid Military City about 2:00 AM the next morning. Buses took us to the seaport on the Persian Gulf to wait for our M1 Abrams tanks and Bradley Infantry Fighting vehicles to arrive. We had loaded them onto ships in Germany weeks ago. For the next week, we would be training, rehearsing tactics, and preparing for the battle we were sure would come. There was a little “down time” but we were free to roam the port and visit the makeshift store for our toiletries and browse the booths the Saudis had set up to sell souvenirs to the arriving soldiers before we rotated out to take our positions in the desert to await orders. Outside the walls of the seaport Patriot missile batteries had been set up for defense against incoming air threats. On a daily basis, Saddam would launch a scud missile, the Patriot would launch, and its missile would find its target and destroy the scud. But the Patriot couldn’t protect against a scud’s warhead that contained nerve gas. The chemical alarms would sound, and we would all don our gas masks until the “all clear” order was given, telling us that there was no chemical nerve agent detected.



I had just visited the latrine at the seaport and was walking back to our company area of operations, minding my own business, when I heard a loud, “Hey, you! Soldier!” I looked to my right and there stood General Norman Schwarzkopf (AKA “The Bear”). Our Abrams M1 Main Battle tanks had arrived and were being unloaded from the ships. There were two details. One detail would drive the tanks down a ramp and onto the concrete pad, leave it idling, and go back inside the ship to get another one. The second detail would take that tank and drive it to a designated motor pool at the seaport. The detail driving the tanks to the motor pool was behind. They were holding up the detail that was driving the tanks off the ships and General Schwarzkopf was not pleased at the delay. “Yessir?” I replied. “Get over there and drive that tank to the motor pool” he said, pointing to the Abrams sitting idling at the bottom of the ramp. Now in the Army, one simply doesn’t drive anything one wants to. You have to go through a little training class, take a road test, and then you’re issued a paper drivers license showing you’re trained and mostly competent to drive a particular vehicle. I was a Bradley dismount; I was trained and licensed to drive the Bradley Infantry Fighting vehicle, the deuce and a half, the five ton truck, and the M113. I wasn’t a tanker, so I wasn’t licensed to drive a sixty ton Abrams Main Battle tank. I had never been inside one before. “General, I don’t have a license to drive the Abrams tank” I replied.

The General scowled, “*Soldier, I didn’t ask you if you had a god damned license. I said get up there and drive that tank to the motor pool*” he barked. Normally driving a vehicle that you didn’t have a license to operate would be an disciplinary offense, but hey, when you’re a specialist and a four-star general gives you an order, you don’t argue. I climbed down into the drivers seat and looked at the control panel. There were arrays of buttons and switches and lights on the panels to my front, left, and right, and a steering wheel that looked like it came out of the Batmobile. The engine was idling and it was similar enough to a Bradley that I figured it out on the spot and drove the big beast off to the staging area a few hundred yards away without incident. Once there, I handed the tank off to the guy parking them in the motor pool. I took a different route back to my unit’s area of operation. After all, the General hadn’t told me to come back. “*Carry out your orders as they are given, do not add anything that is not stated*”... the General hadn’t told me to return for more.

I was walking across the cement lot, it was a beautiful day and the sun was shining, when the Patriot alarm sounded. GAS GAS GAS! I instinctively grabbed my gas mask from the carrier on my left hip and had it on within five seconds. I sealed the mask and cleared it, and flipped the rubber hood over my head. Then I looked around the port to assess the situation. Others were masking up and running around the port. There was a blue civilian garbage truck with two Arabs inside emptying dumpsters a short distance away. BOOM! The Patriot launched. It was loud. I watched as the Patriot missile streaked up into the sky to find it’s target. Then I looked around for cover from any falling debris that would result if the Patriot found it’s mark. On my right I saw the passenger leap from the garbage truck. He came running up to me frantic and wide-eyed. My hand wrapped around the pistol grip of my rifle and my thumb rested on the fire selector switch. I didn’t know his intent. He spoke little English but he knew the situation was serious. “*Problem? Problem? Problem?*” he kept yelling over and over. “*Ain’t no problem for me ‘cause I have a gas mask*” I replied. Another loud boom. Another Patriot launched. The frantic garbage man ran back to the garbage truck and climbed back in and within seconds the garbage truck sped off at full speed. The dumpster it had been dumping was still hoisted up in the air over the cab on the forks. The two sped off at high speed strewing garbage all over the cement lot as they left. “*Somebody’s gonna have to pick up all that trash*” I thought. “*I’d better get scarce and not be caught standing around like I don’t have anything to do*”. The last time I had been caught “standing around like you’re in the Air Force” as Top had put it, I ended up on shit-chef duty. The “shit-chefs” were the guys volunteered to go to each plywood porta-potty, drag out the tin barrel from underneath that held all the waste, pour diesel fuel into it, set it afire, and stand there stirring it with a long pole while burning turd smoke blew into their face until the barrel was burned empty. Then you’d walk around the next few days in a uniform that smelled like burnt shit. Shit Chef duty was usually reserved for the privates or the screw-ups. So I had learned early in Germany that standing around “like I was in the Air Force” was an activity to be avoided at all costs. I made my way quickly back to the company area of operation to find my squad and we waited for the “all clear” order that would tell us it was safe to take our masks off.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Stack ~ An exercise in faith



“The strength of an army lies in its loyalty to each other.”

~Mario Puzo

“The stack” ~ The description of a tactic used to stay alive when clearing a confined danger area. There’s another old adage in the Infantry...“Hope isn’t a tactic”. Grunts don’t rely on hope. Hope is passive. It gets you killed. It takes faith to stay alive in combat; faith is proof, but not blind faith. Blind faith is hope.

The Stack is a term used to describe a four-man Infantry team that, in close combat, is the safest way to enter a confined space to kill an enemy. You take four men, in a single line, one behind the other, packed tightly together, so as to make a smaller target. “Nuts to butts” as the cadre describe it. *“Pack so closely together that you make your buddy smile”* the cadre would yell at us during training. The stack enters the room as one single unit, moving together, in concert, with one purpose. Everyone in the stack is assigned a specific area of responsibility. The goal of the stack is to survive. The weapon of the stack is faith, then training. Absolute faith. The rifle or pistol is just a tool. Those who have never been in a stack will never understand what I’m saying. Not because they’re less intelligent, but because it’s a lesson in faith that one can never experience unless one is in a situation where he has to place his life into the hands of another man and ask that other man to place his life into his hands. Your faith is your knowledge that your Brother will never fail you as long as he is alive. His faith is his knowledge that you will never fail him as long as you are alive. One can’t hope that into being. As the stack enters the bunker, the first man in the stack has an area of responsibility from the 10:00 position to the 2:00 position. His only purpose in existing at that moment is to kill any threat that appears in his area of responsibility. Alpha team leader Specialist Brent Walker was usually the number one man in the stack when we entered a bunker to clear it. This was the most dangerous position in the stack. Our entry into the bunker had to be fast, decisive, and determined. “Surprise and violence of action” is how the Army training manual described it.

If anyone in the stack was going to get zapped right off, it was the number one man in the stack. That's why surprise and violence of action was required. If the enemy inside the bunker is expecting you, then it's a trap. The first man into the bunker is the first vulnerable target. That's just simple physics. I was usually the number two man. My area of responsibility was to kill any threat that existed from the 2:00 position to the 5:00 position. Obviously the number two man is the second most vulnerable position in the stack. My actions had to be absolute, decisive, quick, and sure. Although there were four men in the stack, there was no individuality. We either succeeded as a team or failed as a team. If we failed, we all died. The number three man in the stack had an area of responsibility from the 7:00 position to the 10:00 position. If any threat to the team appeared in that sector, his job was to kill it. The number four man in the stack was the last man into the bunker. His area of responsibility was any threat from the 5:00 to the 7:00 position. Number four made sure no threat entered the bunker behind us and trapped us. Number four man covered our six. Using this method, every man in the stack had a known area of responsibility, a sector that he and he alone was responsible for as long as he was alive. Using this tactic we, in theory, were protected from any threat in a 360 degree circle. There was no room for "pretty good". We trained constantly for stacking up and clearing buildings in Hammelburg, Germany, a small vacant town in Bavaria that was a urban warfare training center for NATO.



Task Force 5-5 Cav, Hammelburg Urban Warfare Training Center, Germany 1989  
I'm on the staircase upper right corner

My shrink was talking to me about a concept once, a theory in psychology. A reason many vets become detached from family, friends, wives, and lovers. A theory why some combat vets often never fit in again in society after they leave the military. He was probing for my experience in Iraq and I explained to him. *“Sometimes we cleared bunkers. The Air Force can bomb the hell out of them, but if the enemy retreats into bunkers, the bombs are ineffective. Bombing destroys their moral, but it doesn’t kill them. My job was to wait several miles away with my team and watch the Air Force bomb the hell out of them. The flares would fall, the night sky would flash with explosions, the ground would tremble as the 2,000 pound bombs found their target. The air was full of the smell of smoke and cordite. Tracer rounds would streak up into the sky. We’d sit and watch the death and destruction sometimes for an hour or two.”* “What was going through your mind?” he asked. *“I was watching people die. It was like the most awesome fireworks show on the fourth of July that you have ever seen. A mile or two from where I sat, husbands, sons, and fathers were being blown apart. They weren’t Saddam the evil dictator. These were ordinary people, just like me. They had a god too. They were proud to serve their country, just like me. But it was my job to kill them. After a short while, the F-16’s would run low on fuel. The B-52’s would run out of bombs; there’s only so many bombs an airplane can carry. They’d have to leave to go back to base to refuel and rearm. Then my team had to do our job...surprise and violence of action. Once the bombing stopped, my squad’s job was to stack up and enter the bunkers and kill any threat we found. During this time was when we were most at risk. If I was going to die, it was most likely going to be then. We would stack up and approach the bunker quickly as one unit, then toss a couple of flash-bang grenades into the bunker. Seconds later there would be a violent concussion blast and a bright flash of light inside the bunker that would stun, deafen, and blind anyone inside the bunker. That confused and dazed the enemy. It rattled his brain and stole his senses from him for about ten seconds. That was our edge - ten seconds. If the team failed to neutralize any threat within that ten seconds, our lives might end. I was looking at a life expectancy of about fifteen seconds once that flash bang went off if anyone failed to do their job. There was no do-over; do-overs were for training exercises. Walker was the number one man in the stack. Immediately on entering the bunker he killed anything in the 10:00 to the 2:00 position. I was the number two man, Dodds was the number three man. LaCosta was the number four man. At that moment, those three men were the only thing I had in the world. My survival depended on them doing their job, and their survival depended on me doing my job. You see when I entered the bunker, my job was to kill any threat in the 2:00 to 5:00 position. That was my only reason for existing at that moment as a part of the team.”* But then I offered a question back to the shrink. I knew he would give me the wrong answer. *“Suppose when the stack entered the bunker I saw no threat in my sector. But then out of the corner of my eye I saw an Iraqi standing to my left with a weapon pointed at me. Do you know what I had to do?”* The shrink slowly nodded his head, “Yeah.” he said quietly, “You had to kill him”. “NO!” I replied. *“My job in that situation was to do nothing! That’s just it. You see, I had to have such faith in Walker that I was willing to bet my life at that moment that he would do his job. I had to have such faith in him that I knew he would take out that threat that was seconds away from killing me. Why did I have to have that faith? Because what if I took my eyes off my sector and turned to engage the threat that was in Walker’s sector, then a threat stands up in my sector with a machine gun and kills us all. The whole team dies because I didn’t do my job; because I didn’t have faith. Some parents or spouse back home will get a letter from the Department of Defense that reads Charlie Company, Fourth squad, died bravely in Iraq in an engagement with the enemy. What the letter won’t say is that it was my fault because I didn’t have faith in my fellow team member.”*

***“A distracted warrior is a dangerous warrior.”***

Then his words to me were, “Anthony, you have to stop looking for the kind of relationship with people that you had with your team in the Army. It doesn’t exist in the civilian world. Civilians will never comprehend that kind of faith in another person. Family will stab you in the back. Lovers will cheat on you. Employers will screw you over. Friends will abandon you when you need them. Humans are generally disappointing creatures. You will never find that kind of relationship ever again. Sometimes it happens in the case of cops and firemen who survive a traumatic experience together such as nine eleven, but rarely. You have to stop expecting that kind of loyalty from the people in your life today. You’ll never find it.”

I thought back to the time Reppert and LaCosta got in a brawl at the Embassy Club in Frankfurt one Saturday night. Reppert had been a participant in the brawl but LaCosta had stayed out of the fight but watched the whole incident. Captain Davis read the MP’s blotter report as he did each Monday morning. “Private, report to the mess Sergeant. You’ve got KP for a week” Captain Davis had told LaCosta when he was called into the CO’s office. “But Sir, I didn’t participate in the fight” LaCosta plead in his defense.

**“2) I will see to the safety and well being of my fellow team members.”**

“You’re not being punished because you were in a fight, Private. You’re being punished because you stood by and watched your battle buddy get his ass whipped and you didn’t come to his aid. Fighting in the club is disorderly conduct. Not coming to the aid of your buddy is the bigger sin. You’re dismissed” Captain Davis explained.



"The swamp" Kuwait 1991

Living quarters on the Kuwait/Iraq border  
Fourth squad, First platoon, Charlie company, Fifth Cavalry regiment  
First brigade, Third Armored Division (SPEARHEAD).

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Claustrophobia

The chemical alarms went off again. It was mid January and Task Force 5-5 had moved from the Dammam Seaport in Saudi Arabia to an evacuated cement factory on the outskirts of the city. There, we lived GP large tents. We had dug defensive trenches around the compound when we arrived in case Saddam invaded Saudi Arabia, and now we spent our hours at a makeshift firing range shooting at paper targets, rehearsing the stack, going over first aid to treat bullet wounds, splinting broken bones, treating head injuries, and controlling bleeding. And the Atropine; we practiced administering the nerve agent antidote several times daily. The antidote needles were three inches long, and each of us carried two pair in our gas mask carrier. If we couldn't get our gas mask on within five seconds and we breathed nerve gas, we had a few seconds to self-administer before the convulsions would begin. The first injector contained Atropine. The second one contained Pralidoxime. I hoped I never had to use them. Two three-inch needles in the thigh muscle was going to be painful. The syringes were spring-loaded and as soon as you pressed them against your thigh, it was all automatic; the injector needle shot out and injected the nerve agent antidote into your thigh muscle. Afterwards you poked the empty syringe needle up through the left pocket flap on your blouse and bent it over. That way if your buddy found you lying unconscious, he would see that you had already self administered the nerve agent antidote.

Scud missiles were launched at the area daily, and every time, our warning alarms went off. Those scuds were capable of carrying chemical warheads. We had to assume Saddam would use them on us. We relied on the Patriot missile system to warn and protect us. The Patriot was a mobile missile system that sat on a large trailer. It had an integrated radar dish that scanned the skies continuously. When it detected an incoming missile, the alarms sounded. The Patriot computer was a genius. Within seconds, the Patriot's on-board computer synced with its radar system data. The Patriot was able to accurately predict where the incoming scud missile would be at any time during its flight based on its speed and trajectory. Then the computer calculated its own missile travel time to target. Based on this mathematical formula, the Patriot was able to launch its own missile to explode near the incoming scud missile, destroying it. It was like hitting a bullet with a bullet, only on a grand scale. It happened several times per day. The procedure was always the same. The Patriot alarms would scream. We would drop whatever was in our hands and scramble to don our gas masks and chemical protective gear. Twenty-four hours per day your gas mask was on your left hip. You lived with it. You ate with it. You slept with it. When you went to the plywood toilets the engineers had built for us at Cement City, it went with you. That gas mask was never more than an arms reach from you at any time. We had trained for this in Europe constantly.



"Cement City", Saudi Arabia 1991

A competent solder was supposed to be able to have that gas mask on within five seconds. During training the Cadre would surprise us at any time by screaming GAS, GAS, GAS! Then he'd start counting ... one ... two ... three ... four ... five ... STOP! Then he'd walk through the squad looking at every soldier. If anyone didn't have that gas mask on and sealed he'd stop in front of them. *"You're dead! Uncle Sam is sending a fuckin' letter to your mama, soldier. You let your team down."* And we knew we'd do it again. And again. And again. *"Amateurs train until they get it right. Professionals train until they can't get it wrong"* the cadre would bark. Our lives depended on it. We trained and fought, lived or died, as a squad. There is no individual in an Infantry squad. Once the mask was on and sealed then came the charcoal lined suit. Then the rubber boots, then the gloves. Three minutes to get the entire chemical suit on, or you're dead.

This day was the same, albeit without the screaming Cadre. We all knew it was real this time. We all knew there was no do-over. If that scud was chemical, we got it right or we died a painful suffocating death within ten minutes. Sarin nerve gas is twenty-six times more deadly than Cyanide gas. They use Cyanide in the gas chamber when they execute an inmate. Sarin attacks the nervous system. You struggle to breath, you begin discharging bodily fluids. Your organs stop working. Your body is paralyzed and you fall to the ground twitching. Then you suffocate to death. There is no more gruesome way to die. The next event was the Patriot launch. There was an explosion as the Patriot missile launched outside the perimeter. The Patriot streaked up into the sky. In fewer than thirty seconds we'd know if the Patriot found it's target, or if it missed. During this time we all dived for cover. Cement City was a cement factory. They had manufactured cement culverts before the war. Some of them were huge culverts, five feet in diameter. The engineers had placed them all over the compound with bulldozers. If that Patriot found it's target, there would be a second loud explosion as both missiles collided and detonated in the sky. Then the next threat...falling debris from the sky raining down on us, most of it smoldering, possibly contaminated with nerve gas. The problem was we lived in tents. Canvas is no match for a burning chunk of metal the size of a washing machine falling from the sky. Once MOPP'd up as we called it, we'd dash for our assigned nearest cement culvert. The culvert might protect us from falling debris. Once the debris stopped falling, we'd exit the cement culverts and take our assigned positions in the foxholes that surrounded the factory, in case there was a follow-up attack from enemy Infantry.

This day was different because I was the the last man to enter the culvert. Staff Sergeant Wright and myself arrived at our culvert at the same time and he went in first. Most of the other guys had been closer and were already inside the culvert, hunched over, knees to their chin in the familiar "prepare for the airplane crash" sitting upright fetal position. It was hot in there. It was 107 degrees outside. It was dark in there. The gas masks restricted our breathing. Ten sweaty guys who hadn't showered in weeks packed elbow to elbow inside a twelve foot long cement tube. It was like a tomb. We listened for the second explosion. If it didn't come, the Patriot had missed. I sat with my rifle sitting upright between my legs, the culvert was just tall enough to bring in a rifle. Five seconds already; no explosion. There was silence. I ran my right hand across the receiver of my rifle. The black metal was smooth and hot from the sun. The selector switch was on safe. If there was an accidental discharge inside this culvert, it'd be lethal. The bullet would ricochet all around inside the cement tube, probably hitting everyone inside. Ten seconds. Still no explosion. Twelve seconds..BOOM! Then we waited. I looked to my left and could see the large sandy area where we lived, framed by the circle of the edge of the culvert; nothing falling yet. It'd be several seconds if the Scud was at a high altitude. I looked over at Staff Sergeant Wright.

He was still and quiet, staring straight ahead. It was hot in here. I could see the outline of the rest of the squad through the light at the opposite end of the culvert. It was labor to breathe through the gas masks chemical filters. “*Lemme the fuck outta here*” Staff Sergeant Wright said in a quiet voice. I looked to my left and could see the large sandy area where our tents were, framed by the circle of the edge of the culvert. He was staring straight ahead at the concrete in front of him, like he was in a daze. I replied, “*You can’t go out there, Sarge. There’s debris falling...*” His right hand came up, his 1911 pistol in his hand. He racked the slide back with his left hand, chambering a round. The metal sound of the slide slamming forward made a distinct echo inside the cement tube we were in. “*I SAID LET ME THE FUCK OUTTA HERE*” Staff Sergeant Wright snapped loudly and firmly. His hands were trembling. He meant business. That 1911 with the hammer cocked back looked as large as a mailbox at that moment. “*Not a problem Sarge, I’m getting out.*” I said loud enough that I sure hoped he heard me. I couldn’t get out of that cement tube fast enough. I rolled to my left, out into the hot sand, stood up and stood back as Staff Sergeant Wright crawled out of the culvert behind me. I could see his eyes were wide open through the two big lenses in the gas mask on his face. He stood up, shoved his pistol back into its holster, and started walking back to our tent without saying a word. I crawled back into the culvert, assumed my “Prepare for the plane crash” sitting upright fetal position and waited for the all clear order.

The next time I saw Staff Sergeant Wright later that day he was standing in the back of a deuce laughing and talking with some of the Bradley turret mechanics. Neither one of us every mentioned the cement culvert incident. I guess we both just understood. Nothing needed to be said.





## CHAPTER SIX

### The Basterds

Cement City, Saudi Arabia. January 1991. Our "General Purpose Large" tent was eighteen by fifty-two feet in size. There were about fifteen of them set up at the cement factory. One row of army green cots lined either side of the tent, and there was a door at each end. We spent our days at the firing range in the desert heat shooting at paper targets, and in training classes going over battlefield first aid, movement tactics, rules of engagement, over and over, preparing for when the order came. Each day the chemical alarms would go off, the Patriot missile batteries would scream and launch their missiles at the incoming scud missiles.

We'd "mask up" and wait for the "all clear" order that would eventually come that told us the Patriot had found its mark and there was no chemical agent detected in the scud's warhead, and it was safe to remove our gas masks. The daily event usually went off without much drama. But this day was different with morbid amusement.

Task Force 5-5, Charlie company, first platoon, fourth squad, was assigned to the tent that housed Headquarters company mechanics and NCO staff. My cot was down near one end, with Quintin and Dodds and the rest of my squad to my right. Today Quintin was asleep on his cot and Dodds and I were sitting on our cots cleaning the sand out of our rifles. The gas mask went everywhere you went...to the latrine, to the chow tent, every minute of every day it was always within arms reach. Getting caught without it in a scud missile chemical attack was sure death. Often times, it provided the only pillow you had. Our bunks were our home, and everything we possessed was stored under that bunk. Equipment was stored in every possible space, and the quarters were cluttered and full. Then the Patriot started screaming. Captain Keith George was our commander, an Army Airborne Ranger. He was from Kentucky. He had told us one time about his eccentric uncle Mooneyham George who lived in a cave on his land in the Blue Ridge Mountains. He had just walked into our tent when the Patriot alarm went off. GAS GAS GAS the alarm sounded. Everyone dropped whatever was in their hands and with the skill and precision of a gunslinger, everyone began to mask up. Five seconds was the standard. If there was nerve gas, and you didn't get that mask on within five seconds, the convulsions would start, and death would follow within 10 minutes.

The Bradley crews had tanker masks. They differed from the standard Infantry issue gas mask in that they had a 1-inch diameter hose that came from the mask face that lead to a filter in the carrying pouch on your hip, sort of like fighter pilots wear to provide them oxygen in the cockpit. Since Captain George was Bradley one-one commander, he had a tanker's mask.



The intake hose for the tanker gas mask was designed with a fitting on the other end that could be connected to the air filtration system in the Bradley that filtered the air for the crew, saving the mask filter for when you were outside the track. In this environment we were issued red plastic dust caps that went on the gas mask fitting to keep sand out of the filter when not in use. A sand-clogged filter would render the mask useless.

I dropped the rifle onto the cot and had my mask on within a few seconds. I was sealing my mask and had flipped the hood over my head. Looking over, Captain George was close behind me and was sealing his mask to his face. Quintin had jumped up, startled awake at the sound of the alarm, but there was a problem. While he was asleep, his "pillow" had fallen from the cot and had rolled underneath, out of sight, and was hidden from view. He was scrambling around, trying to find it. Dodds was masked up when he noticed Quintin scrambling around in a panic trying to find his mask. "Put your fuckin mask on!" he yelled at Quintin. "I can't find it!" Quintin yelled back frantically. "Well you'd better find the damned thing! GAS GAS GAS!" Dodds barked. "Well give me yours then!" Quintin yelled back. Dodds had began to reply when Quintin grabbed at Dodds mask, trying to take it off him. I watched as the struggle began to determine if Quintin or Dodds got Dodds' gas mask. Then my attention turned to Captain George. He was stumbling towards us, seeming disoriented, and after about five steps he fell over face down cross-ways the nearest cot, his arms and legs hanging off the sides. I ran over to Captain George and rolled him off the cot onto his back. Through the big lenses in his gas mask I could see his face was turning red. His eyes were bugged out. "Shit! It's really gas this time!" I thought. My mind was playing scenes from the training videos that showed dead twisted Iraqi bodies lying in the street after Saddam's gas attacks on his own people. Now they were reality. Captain George didn't look like one of those ragged dirty Iraqi civilians in the training videos. He began to twitch around and that brought me back to reality. "They got me. The basterds got me. I can't believe the basterds got me already" he was mumbling as he was fading out. I instinctively started to grab the Atropine and Diazepam injectors stored in his mask pouch and jab him in the thigh to administer the nerve agent antidote...and then I saw it. The little red plastic dust cap. You now you have to take that off, else the hose is plugged and you can't breathe. Captain George was suffocating. It's like trying to breathe through a soda straw while your finger is over the hole on the other end. I yanked off the cap, and yelled at him to breathe. Within twenty seconds or so he began to revive. "Where is my team?" I instinctively thought. My attention turned back to Quintin and Dodds. "Give me that mask!" "Hell no" "You have my mask." "No this is my mask!" "Where's my mask then?" "How the hell would I know?" it went back and forth. "Hey," I yelled, "you two shitbirds realize that if there was really nerve gas, you'd both be dead right now, yeah?" They stood there for a few seconds thinking about that logic until Dodds yelled, "There's your fuckin' mask!" and pointed under Quintin's cot. Quintin leapt over to his cot, grabbed his mask, and began masking up. I grabbed my rifle off my cot and headed to the cement culvert that was our protection from falling missile debris. I slammed my palm up against the bottom of the thirty round magazine. It was locked in. My thumb felt the selector switch. It was on safe. I ran my hand down the receiver, the metal was smooth and warm and the ejection port dust cover was closed. After about twenty minutes the "all clear" was given indicating that there in fact, was no chemical warhead on the scud and it was safe for us all to come out and unmask.

I don't know if Quintin and Dodds ever talked that over later, but I don't recall anything ever being said about the two fighting over one gas mask. But the entire morning sure would have made a good episode of Seinfeld.

We never let Captain George forget that mistake. About every other day someone would grab his chest like Fred Sanford, fall over onto his cot yelling, "*The basterds got me. I can't believe the basterds got me already*" and we'd all chuckle. Captain George would just smile and take it all in good humor. But he didn't forget to take that red plastic dust cap off next time.



SPC Anthony Boyette, Bavaria 1989



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Follow Me

The order hadn't come yet. So we were still training. First Sergeant Ronald Martelly was about six feet, four inches tall, a big Samoan who had one name for every soldier in his company: limp dick.

*"Saddle up, limp dicks! We're moving out!"* he'd bark every evening as our patrol would prepare to leave the Cement City compound and make a five mile patrol through the Saudi Arabian desert and back. Any time one of us would complain, he'd tell us about how dangerous his Polynesian Island birthplace was and how you might get killed by the gangs for just looking at someone the wrong way. That's why he left his home and came to America and joined the Army, he said. We'd begin our patrol about dark, and if we were "rikki-tik" as they say, we would be back by about three AM. *"If you limp dicks don't get out there and start playing grab-ass with each other, you'll be back in time to wake up. See you at breakfast"* he barked as he walked off to his tent. It was a punishing patrol through the desert. Even at night it was hot. The sand made it twice the effort to walk through the dunes. The rucksack on your back weighed about thirty pounds.



This night was different. Command had decided that since it was pre-combat preparations, it would be good for the mechanics to go patrol with us. *"You don't mind learning on the fly, do you, Soldier?"* First Sergeant Martelly asked. *"No Top, I don't"* Nick replied. Nick was a mechanic and mechanics weren't Infantry. They didn't have the same training we did. They didn't carry rifles, they carried the M3 sub-machine pistol. They were trained to be the best track mechanics in the world, not trigger pullers. *"That's just fuckin' great. In addition to busting our asses humping through the desert, dodging the possible insurgent hiding behind the next dune, now we have to baby sit fuckin' mechanics too"* Specialist Walker said in a voice low enough so Top couldn't hear him. On our patrol route there was some sort of refinery storage yard several dozen acres in size. It was all gravel and surrounded by a ten foot chain link fence with barbed wire on top. It contained a lot of big steel girders and huge oil rig equipment, the ideal place for an insurgent to hide and take a shot at you. But there was an old gray haired Saudi security guard that watched the place at night. We had fun seeing how close we could stalk up to him before he realized we were there. It had turned into a nightly game of hide-and-seek.

We'd cut the chain link fence, use our night vision goggles to find him in the dark, try to quietly get close enough to garrote him, then continue our patrol. There were about ten holes in the chain link fence by now as we'd always come from a different direction. He never knew when or from where we'd come and he seemed to enjoy the contest to break the monotony of his night shift alone. Tonight PFC Nicholas was my mechanic protégé. Nick was a "good old boy" from Louisiana, I think it was. He always had a fat lip full of Copenhagen snuff. Nick had a liking for the hashish that was available from the young German guys in the train station subway in Frankfurt, so he always burned the urine test when he got selected. Back then when you failed the urine test the Army didn't kick you out like they do now. They tried to reform you, and for Nick, it just didn't seem to take. Nick had been a Corporal three times. He'd make Corporal, burn the urine test, then get busted back down to PFC. Every time I saw Nick off-duty he was a Battalion Headquarters mopping the floor, taking out the trash, and running errands for the Officer of the Day as punishment.



“POG”, noun, rhymes with “rogue”. The acronym means “Person Other than a Grunt” and is usually considered derogatory. If you serve in the Infantry, you are the sharp point of the spear and the first one through the door during combat. On the other hand, the POG is the soldier who isn’t in the firefight, but supports the grunts. Cooks, mechanics, clerks, como, the chaplain, they’re all POG’s and of course, in the camaraderie of back-and-forth over whose job is more important, we’re better than them. Except for Doc. Doc follows me into the firefight armed with only a pistol. Doc isn’t a grunt, but he isn’t a POG either. Doc is the only POG that is “one of us.” Every grunt in the squad respects Doc and looks after his safety and well being just like he does his fellow grunt. We know when we’re lying on the battlefield with a sucking chest wound, it’s Doc that comes for us. If we’re bleeding out in the Basra street after an IED explosion, Doc will stop the bleeding, even if he’s under fire from the enemy. You have to awe a man that will do that. *“Before you call on your God, before you call for your mother, you’ll call for me”* Doc says.

I looked over my shoulder at Nick. In the moonlight I could see he was about five feet behind me, on his hands and knees, fumbling around in the dark with his hands in the gravel trying to find the lost rounds. *“Leave the fuckin’ magazine!”* I shouted in a whisper as I grabbed him by his ALICE gear and dragged him upright. We arrived on the other side of the danger area and fell down into the prone. The squad would have to lie here quietly for about 10 minutes now to see if anyone responded to the noise. Captain George was right. *“You go to war with the army you have, not the army you’d like to have.”* The mechanics need training.

“Doc”



Medic platoon, Task Force 5/5 (SPEARHEAD)  
Snowstorm at Ayers Kasserne, Germany, 1988



## CHAPTER EIGHT

### The Lizard



The Lizard. Kuwait, 1991

February 1991. Task Force 5-5 Cav had moved to the border of Kuwait and Iraq. Kuwait had been liberated now. The Division was establishing refugee centers and assisting the indigenous people to get back on their feet. Our Bradley Infantry Fighting vehicles and M1 Abrams tanks were being serviced, battle damage repairs made, and preparations made for Schwarzkopf's Hail Mary that would crush the fleeing Iraqi forces fleeing back to Iraq. We had some down time.

This day Quintin was sitting on the ground beside a trailer, leaning up against the wheel asleep. Most of the platoon were writing letters home, reading "any soldier" letters, cleaning weapons, sleeping, and whatever else we felt like doing in this break in the storm. Part of squad camaraderie is practical jokes. This kept you on your toes. You had to watch your back and use your wit, else you'd get pranked. And everyone would know and rag you about it until the other guy got got. We had a variety of pranks for the "cherries" (the new arrivals to the platoon), also referred to as "NFG's" (New Fuckin' Guys). Monday morning checks and services at the motor pool was a prime time to prank an NFG. *"Hey Private! What the hell are you doing?"*... *"Sarn't told me to tap all over the tank with this hammer and circle any soft spots in the armor with this piece of chalk."* ... *"Carry on soldier! You're doing an outstanding job."* We'd usually let him tap for a couple of hours, freezing in the German snow, before we told him depleted uranium armor is one of the hardest alloys on earth and doesn't have "soft spots". Another regular prank on the cherry was "collecting an exhaust sample so it could be analyzed at the Army lab to make sure the engine was still good". In this prank, the cherry was given a big plastic garbage bag and told to hold it around the tanks exhaust pipe until it was full, then seal it up and take it to the motor pool sergeant. Of course the motor pool sergeant would tell him to take it to the supply sergeant, the supply sergeant would tell him to take it to the NBC sergeant. By this time he should've caught on. The favored prank was having the NFG climb on top of the Bradley or tank and jump up and down "So we can check if the tanks shocks need to be replaced".

We had to stop that one after Command Sergeant Major Cheney came thru the motor pool one Monday morning and saw the cherry jumping up and down like an idiot on top of our Bradley. He chewed us out real good and told us if he ever saw that again our squad would be “sweeping his motor pool with toothbrushes until we couldn’t taste the difference between shit and french fries.” We had never thought about it, but he was right. If the NFG slipped and fell ten feet onto the concrete he could be killed or permanently injured. The cherries were always easy. Once they had gotten got, they were initiated...now one of the team. The others, the experienced, already initiated, were harder to get. It was a training aid. You noticed every detail, sensed when something wasn’t right. We had learned to expect it. Pranking a seasoned grunt was a bigger prize than pranking a cherry. Anyone could prank a cherry easily enough. We had “infiltrated” into the Tactical Operation Center one night on a field exercise in Germany while they were all asleep and stolen Major Reese’s briefcase one time right from under the cot he was sleeping on. That was quite an accomplishment getting past the guards and into the command center. *“If we can do it, so can the enemy”* we argued when we defended our actions. But Colonel Goff chewed us out and made us give it back, claiming the Major’s briefcase contained classified documents. I don’t think it did. I believe he was just embarrassed that they had gotten got.

***“Do you think I’m going to put my life into the hands of a man I can outsmart?”***

I spied Quintin from my shady spot under the tarp where we lived. He was reclined back, his head laid back against the trailer tire, mouth open, dozing away. His rifle was laid across his lap. The stealing his rifle while he was asleep prank was only about a four on a scale of one to ten. But Quintin was a seasoned grunt. I noticed he had run his rifle’s sling through his ALICE strap so he’d feel any tug just as soon as anyone touched his rifle. Failed pranks were frowned upon. If you tried it and couldn’t pull it off, it was nearly as bad as getting pranked yourself. But his kevlar ~ I observed he had set that in the sand beside him, upside down. I smiled. *“Bad mistake. I wish I had an egg”* I thought. Then it occurred to me. I had seen some kind of lizard a few hours earlier near one of the mechanics trucks that had been killed in an airstrike earlier. He was about ten inches long. A real ugly looking thing. *“How ‘bout that, the Lord provides”* I thought. I got up and went and found my dead lizard and brought him over and laid him in Quintin’s helmet. Quintin was a city boy. I knew how janky he was over snakes and lizards and spiders when we were training in the field. I looked over my work. LaCosta was lying in the sun up on top of the trailer in a bunch of soft camo nets. He sat up, smiling in anticipation of what was about to happen. Satisfied that everything was just right, I kicked Quintin’s foot hard, *“SADDLE UP, WE’RE MOVING!”* I yelled. Quintin jumped up while grabbing his rifle with one hand and his kevlar helmet with the other all in once quick motion. Everyone in the squad was watching by now and it couldn’t have gone off any better. We all watched eagerly as Quintin raised his helmet over his head and turned it upside down to put it on. The dead lizard fell straight down onto his head, landed right side up, his two front legs flopping down over Quintin’s forehead. Quintin was flapping his arms and jumping up and down and going around in circles and screaming. The dead lizard fell to the ground at his feet. It took him about five seconds to realize what it was, and that the entire platoon heard him screaming like a girl. Quintin looked down since we were all laughing at him now, and realized the creature was dead, and that he’d just gotten got. Then he got mad; mostly embarrassment. I winked at him. *“Stay alert, stay alive”* I smiled and said, and then the fight started. He charged at me and we both fell to the ground, an entanglement of arms and legs and ALICE gear, gas masks, and rifles. We wrestled for a few seconds until the team separated us. Quintin was holding the dead lizard in his hand and slung him in my direction, cursing the whole time.

Sergeant McCarroll had walked over to see what all the cursing and commotion was about and shot me the displeased look, so I picked up my rifle and headed on out like I had a mission. “*Five bonus points for the fight*” LaCosta laughed and yelled at me as I walked off.

I did notice that Quintin never laid his helmet down ever again unless it was right side up so nothing could be put inside it.



## CHAPTER NINE

### Hot Refuel

Task Force 5-5 movement to contact began on January 17<sup>th</sup> 1991 from Tactical Assembly Area Henry early in the morning. The Task Force was to rendezvous with and organize with 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 32<sup>nd</sup> Armor and continue pre-combat preparations and movement/attack rehearsals. On February 18<sup>th</sup>, the Task Force received orders to move with the rest of Third Armored Division (SPEARHEAD) from Tactical Assembly Area Henry to Forward Assembly Area Butts. My squad was assigned to the combat trains as force protection. Our frag mission was to defend the supply train from any attack as it moved forward through hostile territory in the advance through Kuwait. The Division plan called for a tactical movement of over 300 miles into enemy territory to Objective Collins with refueling stops enroute. During this movement we only stopped for a "hot refuel". The hot refuel was a tactical refueling of our wheeled vehicles, M1 main battle tanks, Bradley Fighting vehicles, and other support vehicles while on the move across hostile territory. Refueling points were established along our route of advance, either by rendezvous with tanker trucks or by refueling from gigantic

rubber bladders that were airlifted to the designated location in the desert. When the Task Force arrived at a hot refuel point, the job of force protection was to defend the refuel point from attack by screening the convoys flanks and rear. Hot refueling is a danger. By remaining in one place more than a few minutes, we were vulnerable to artillery and mortar attacks from any hostile forces in the area. The procedure of a hot refuel was as follows: Upon arrival at the refuel point, the combat vehicles would adopt a "circle the wagons" formation with the refueling truck or bladder in the center of the circle. All guns and canon faced outwards, ready to engage any attack at a seconds notice. The Bradley Infantry Fighting vehicles and M1 main battle tanks scanned the horizon left and right with thermal and night sights, looking for any threat. Spearhead Infantry would take up positions on the perimeter with crew served weapons, LAW rockets, and Dragon missiles to defend against any attack. One by one, each vehicle would take it's turn refueling. It was a coordinated and precision procedure. Each vehicle had five minutes to take as much fuel as it possibly could in it's allotted five minutes. A member of the crew on each vehicle would open the fuel lid ahead of time so as not to waste time when the vehicle arrived at the fueling point. On command, the vehicle would move from the defensive circle, proceed as fast as it could to the fuel point where the fuel specialist standing on the fuel tanker or bladder would hand the nozzle to a crew member standing on the tank. As soon as the tank crew member received the nozzle in his hand, the clock would start.



Kuwait, 1991

The tank crew member would shove the fuel nozzle in the gas tank of his vehicle, open the valve, and not stop until the fuel specialist yelled “stop!” at which time the fuel was turned off. Then the tank crew member would hand the nozzle back to the fuel specialist and the vehicle would take it's position back on perimeter defense while another vehicle moved into it's place and the procedure repeated until all vehicles were refueled. Speed and intent was key because if you had a slow or untrained tank crew member, your vehicle would get less fuel. The large fuelers pumped several hundred gallons of fuel per minute, so every second mattered. With a company of twelve Bradley Infantry fighting vehicles and accompanying support vehicles, this meant it would take sixty-six minutes to refuel the Task Force. When a Task Force is stationary for an hour in combat, it can be lethal. Enemy observers have reported your position and called in artillery or mortar fire on you. Once each vehicle got its five minutes of fuel the Task Force moved on, the fuel bladder was abandoned for recovery later or the fuel tanker departed back to Division Rear.

The Abrams tank burns 60 gallons of fuel per hour...  $\frac{1}{2}$  a mile per gallon was the average fuel mileage. So each one would require 1,400 gallons of fuel per day during the “Hail Mary” so a hot refuel was a regular event. That's why Force protection detail was such an important assignment. If Saddam could successfully attack the supply train and cut off that fuel supply, Schwarzkopf's Hail Mary would fail and Task Force 5-5 Cav would pay in blood.



Members of Task Force 5/5 (Spearhead), Kuwait 1991

## CHAPTER TEN

### The Accordion

The "Highway of Death" is a six-lane highway between Kuwait City, Kuwait and Safwan, Iraq, officially designated Highway 80. Once the Country of Kuwait was liberated, Task Force 5-5 set up a checkpoint at the Kuwait/Iraq border called "Checkpoint Charlie" to screen all persons leaving or entering Kuwait. Saddam's forces had used that highway to invade Kuwait, and were now using it to flee back to Iraq. Iraqi tanks, armored vehicles, trucks, and troops fleeing the coalition onslaught had formed traffic jams as they fled. But the United States Air Force wasn't having it. F-15 Eagles from Seymour Johnson Air Force Base and other coalition aircraft bombed the vehicles at the front of the line and the end of the line, trapping all those vehicles in between. Then strafing runs began up and down the traffic jam...all day long. The devastating attack resulted in the destruction of over 2,000 Iraqi vehicles.

*"We don't have any brakes, Sergeant Spears. The pedal goes all the way to the floor"* I reported to the Task Force motor pool sergeant. *"We're going to a war, soldier. I ain't got no time to fix no fuckin' brakes"* Sergeant First Class Spears snapped as he walked to the front of the convoy so we could head out to Checkpoint Charlie. As McCallister and myself rode down Highway 80 with the convoy, the only way we could stop when the convoy came to a halt was to downshift into first gear, then crash into the vehicle in front of us. This scenario played out every few miles in the deuce we were riding in. Every few hours, we would switch. I'd drive a few hours and McCallister would shotgun, then he'd

drive and I would shotgun. Our vehicles were spaced about fifty feet apart as we moved, so if we were attacked we wouldn't be easy targets all bunched up together like the dead guys on Highway 80 were. About noon time I looked in my side view mirror and I saw him...the little white Toyota pickup. He was in a big hurry. He was leap-frogging in and out of the convoy trying to make his way past us, but our convoy stretched out for miles. Again, then again, then again, in and out. He was getting closer. I slapped McCallister across the chest *"Lock and load, man. We might have a problem*



"Check point Charlie", Kuwait

*soon" I said. I looked in my side view mirror. He was three vehicles back now and passing on the left. In and out...passing each truck in the convoy. Pretty soon he'd pull in front of us. We were rolling along about forty miles per hour. My eyes had to stay on the truck in front of us because as soon as his brake lights came on, if I didn't begin downshifting immediately, it would be too late. We'd slam into his rear and have a bad wreck instead of a hard bump. I checked the side view, he was one vehicle back now. And, he's trying to pass. There he goes, he's passing the truck behind us.*

It wasn't difficult for the Toyota to pass the slow moving military trucks. Seconds passed. I checked my side view mirror, here he comes. He was beside us within seconds. *"Hang on, man. We're about to squash us a raghead"* I told McCallister as the Kuwaiti in the white Toyota ducked in front of us. Just like a prediction from a New Orleans fortune teller, it happened... BRAKE LIGHTS. But there was little time to downshift. The little Toyota was only about 20 feet in front of us. I had enough time to think out loud, *"Shit!"* and I braced for the impact. The little Toyota was no match for the heavy duty, four-ton military truck. Time moved in slow motion as we hit the rear of the Toyota and shoved it into the back of the truck in front of us. It seemed to take forever for it to crunch up into an accordion only about six feet long. When it was all over, the convoy had stopped, we had stopped, and the little Toyota was crunched up in between us. *"Damn! This dude has to be dead. No way in hell he survived"* I told McCallister. But about that time a hairy leg stuck out the side window of the pickup, and the little Kuwaiti climbs out and jumps down onto the highway. It was a miracle. Not a scratch on him but the Toyota was unquestionably totaled.

*"Well, this is something we never trained for in Germany"* I thought. *"What are you supposed to do when you have a wreck with a civilian in combat?"* It happened occasionally in Germany but always during training. The whole convoy would stop on the side of the autobahn and wait for the MP's to get there. They'd do a report and Uncle Sam would buy the German a new car regardless of whose fault the wreck was. So, we pulled over, I stepped down off the running board of the deuce. By now the Kuwaiti was flapping his arms and yelling something in Arabic. *"I wonder if I'm supposed to wait for the MP's to get here?"* I thought. The Kuwaiti was still yelling and pointing at his Toyota, which was crunched up and smoking and leaking fluids all over the road. Then the truck in front began to move, the convoy was moving again. I put on my "war face" like Sergeant First Class Spears, shrugged my shoulders, *"I ain't got time for no fuckin' wreck, man. We got a war to go to"* I said even though he obviously didn't speak English. I climbed back into the cab, backed the deuce up and pulled around the crumpled up pile of twisted truck. The last time I saw the Kuwaiti he was in my side view mirror standing in the middle of Highway 80 screaming and pointing at his Toyota. I expected to be questioned about the incident later but never heard about it again. Maybe the MP's got there and Uncle Sam bought him a new truck, too.



McCallister and I broke a banana off the bunch and threw the peel out the window as we drove away. We always kept the windows down for two reasons. Obviously it was hot and military trucks have no air conditioning. And ... deuces aren't armored. That piece of glass inside the door when the window is down provides a laminated sort of armor when the window is down. Small arms and shrapnel will have to pass through the outer door metal, then through the glass, then through the interior door metal. Usually small bullets and shrapnel will mushroom or ricochet when they hit glass. You might get lucky.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### The Ashtray

*“Hey Quintin, let’s go check out the bunkers and see what we can find”* I said. I already had a nice Russian Makarov 9mm pistol I had taken from an Iraqi officer that had surrendered to us a few days earlier. I had disassembled and reassembled it a dozen times over the last couple of days. By now I knew every single part of it like a lover and could reassemble it blindfolded. It was a small, compact little pistol that would fit right in your pocket, unlike the large powerful 1911 Colt .45 ACP we were issued. *“Might come in handy”* I thought when I patted down the Captain. The Makarov was like the Russian AK ... simple, reliable, built like a tank. It had a floating firing pin, no bells-and-whistles, and the simple, reliable design meant it simply wouldn’t malfunction. It was a grunt’s weapon. You could drag it through the sand, throw it off a mountain, run over it with a tank, then pick it up and wipe it off and it would still fire. General Schwarzkopf had ordered that all Iraqi officers were allowed to keep their sidearms. *“There’s no way in hell I’m leaving an armed enemy behind my back”* I reasoned as I took it out of the Captains holster and shoved it into my waistband. The Iraqi Captain just shrugged his shoulders. The last thing he wanted that day was to get in an argument over a pistol in the middle of the desert while confronted by a squad of heavily armed, tired, filthy, pissed-off grunts who all had rifles pointed at him.

We had been told to stay inside the wire and not enter into any of the bunkers that lined the desert a hundred yards in front of us. The bunkers were booby trapped, and outside the wire was strewn with land mines the retreating Iraqi soldiers had left for us. But it was a slow day. No attack was imminent. Intelligence reports said what was left of the Iraqi units were fleeing north. Most of the squad was dozing under tanks in the shade. LaCosta and Reppert were playing ping pong on a makeshift table we had made out of plywood with a piece of mosquito cloth for a net. Someone had showed up with a few ping pong paddles and a box of ping pong balls but no ping pong table. The air strikes had subsided and it was all quiet except for the occasional F-16 or Apache attack helicopter passing overhead every once in awhile. A Blackhawk had landed that morning with a pallet full of new uniforms. We didn’t have water to wash our uniforms, so we usually just wore them for a couple of weeks at a time. We were glad to get new uniforms as the ones we were wearing were greasy, nasty, and most had dried blood on them. We had thrown all our nasty ones away and had brand new ones now, so we felt fresh even though most of us hadn’t showered in weeks.



That morning I dug around in the cardboard box on the pallet and found a couple of blouses and trousers that were my size. I had taken my trousers off that morning and they were so full of grease and salt from the dried sweat that when I put them against the side of the deuce, they just stood there leaning against the side of the deuce and a half.

Quintin slowly got up, stretched, looked around, then picked up his kevlar and put it on his head. Quintin was a few inches taller than me with a size 13 foot. When the Blackhawk had dropped the pallet of new desert tan boots earlier that week, we all dug through the box and found us a brand new pair. I had grabbed me two new pairs out of the crate. Not so easy for Quintin. The Army just didn't keep a lot of size thirteen combat boots on hand but I was a size nine and a half. Quintin was from New York. He had told me the reason he had joined the Army was because his fiance was a New York transit cop, he had cheated on her, she had found out. *"Bitch went crazy"* he said. She had taken her service pistol and put it to his head and said she'd kill him, so he had needed to get out of town fast and the Army recruiter had the perfect solution to his problem. I stood up, slung my rifle across my chest, my hand moved across the receiver. The black metal was warm. The fire selector switch was on safe. The ejection port dust cover was closed. We headed over to the berm where there was a hole in the concertina wire we could pass through. The mechanics were busy working on a deuce that had taken some small arms fire into the engine compartment earlier. As the old adage goes, it's easier to get forgiveness than to get permission, so we didn't tell Sergeant McCarroll we were leaving the AO, we just told Reppert we were going outside the wire and we'd be back. Once on the other side, we scanned the horizon. Nothing seen, nothing heard. We walked the hundred feet or so to the first bunker. To our left and to our right were strips of orange plastic marker tape pinned to the ground as we walked. Those were landmines the engineers had marked earlier. But we scanned the ground in front of us carefully as we walked just in case the engineers had missed one. The first bunker was pretty trashed; mostly worthless junk and torn clothing. And boots. The fleeing Iraqis had taken their boots off. They do that because they believe it's disrespectful to go to paradise wearing shoes. So when they were expecting to be killed, they'd take their boots off. I flipped the fire selector switch on my rifle from the safe position to the burst position. We entered the bunker cautiously just in case there was anyone hiding inside. Once inside, we swept the room with the muzzles of our rifles...nothing. It looked safe. Quintin kicked over a makeshift bed made out of wooden crates just in case anyone was hiding underneath...nothing. The bunker was a typical expedient Infantry field bunker. It measured about ten by twelve feet, about the right size for an Infantry squad, and had been dug about 6 feet into the ground. The floor and walls were dirt. For a ceiling, it had wooden beams placed parallel to each other spaced a few feet apart. Tin had been laid on top of the beams, then covered over with dirt to camouflage it from the air. To our left was a stack of sandbags with some firing ports for the Infantry inside to engage any troops that might be approaching their bunker. The entire thing was only a foot or so above the ground, difficult to see from any distance, and pretty easy to walk up on before you realized what it was ... until the Infantry inside opened fire on you. *"Pretty good little defensive position they had here"* I thought to myself. The dirt floor was scattered with rags, papers, a canteen or two, some pails, general stuff you'd expected to see. Quintin was in front of me to my 10:00 rummaging through some junk the retreating Iraqi Infantry had abandoned when they fled. I was looking for a cool Russian bayonet mostly, or another Makarov, and especially some ammo for my Makarov I already had. The Iraqi captain only had six rounds on him when I had searched him. *"Don't be taking souvenirs"* command had told us.

*“We’re going to search you before we go back to Germany so you’re not going to be able to bring it back home with you anyway. If we catch you trying sneaking contraband back you’re going to get a court martial”* they had told us.

My eyes scanned the wooden beams that made up the roof of the bunker. That was a good shelf to put something. *“Hell, I’m a grunt. If I was living in a bunker and had something cool, that’s where I’d keep it”* I thought. About that time something up there caught my eye. It appeared to be about ten inches in diameter, about four inches high, metallic, and was olive green. I looked over at Quintin. He was pilfering through some small boxes in the corner...mostly junk. The whole bunker had the smell of Iraqi to it...an odor I can best describe as sweat, tomatoes, and onions. I’ve only smelled that smell a time or two since, and it’s a very distinct smell. I’d heard stories from the Vietnam vets about how they could smell the Viet Cong in the jungle. *“Oh bullshit”*, I had thought every time I had heard one of those tales. *“No one’s nose is that sensitive”*. I had learned I was wrong. Saddam hadn’t fed his soldiers. Their diet consisted of a mixture of boiled tomatoes and onions they had gotten from the local villagers. Often times when we cleared bunkers we’d find pots and pans they’d used to cook the stew. Once we found a whole crate of tomatoes outside the entrance to a bunker. It had been knocked over in the firefight and all the squashed tomatoes reminded me of blood and guts in the sand. Take a sweaty soldier who hasn’t showered in months and feed him tomatoes and onions for a month or so, and you can smell him. He sweats it out of his pores, just like you can smell a drunk after he’s been on a three day long binge.

*“I wonder what that is?”* I thought. *“Looks like an ash tray. Could be a tin of some sort.”* *“Hey Quintin, there’s a little round box or something up here”* I said. *“What is it?”* he asked. *“I don’t know. Looks like it has a little depression in the center. Looks like an ash tray.”* The sling on my rifle took up the weight as I let go of it and reached up with both hands and gently lifted the ash tray up a little bit and tilted it so I could see the top. I froze as I read the English words stenciled in a circle around the depression in the center, *“MINE, ANTI-PERSONNEL...”* My eyes followed a thin wire from the top of the mine back over the wooden beam to my right. The wire still had a little slack in it. I hadn’t brought it down far enough yet to pull the string taught. *“Oh shit!”* I said. *“What?”* Quintin asked. I slowly said *“It’s a landmine. It doesn’t have a fuse installed, but it’s wired. I can’t see where the wire is going but it’s still slack”*. Quintin and I just stood there in silence staring at each other for about five seconds. It was a real come-to-Jesus moment. Then we realized no explosion had occurred yet. If the mine detonated it would destroy the whole bunker. *“You move back to the exit and I’m going to lay this back down on the beam real easy. Let’s get the fuck out of here”* I said. As Quintin stooped down and exited the small door I placed the ash tray back down gently as a baby. We got the hell out of there. Neither one of us said anything as we walked back to the assembly area. We scanned the ground in front of us carefully as we walked just in case the engineers had missed one. We knew we had just used our *“get out of hell free card”* so we were extra careful as we walked. We found the hole in the concertina wire and climbed over the berm. Sergeant McCarroll, Reppert, Walker, Dodds, and LaCosta were all lying in the shade under a tarp they had suspended from some camouflage poles and a deuce and a half. Empty water bottles littered the ground all around an army green cot Walker was lying on. *“Y’all been out there in them fuckin’ bunkers?”* Sergeant McCarroll snapped as we walked up. *“Nah, Sarge, we were checking out the area out past the wire making sure everything is secure. Everything is good.”* Quintin and I never spoke of the ash tray again, even after we got back to Germany. It was one of them things you just don’t want to tell anybody else you were dumb enough to do. After all, we were grunts. We were supposed to know better.

Quintin died in 2011 in Palm Bay, Florida in a vehicle roll over accident. Until this writing, he and I are the only ones that knew of the ash tray incident and how close we might have came to dying that day. Today Quintin rests at South Florida National Cemetery in Palm Beach County, Section 39, Site 297.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### Club Med

*Club Mediterranean* ~ a French travel and tourism resort headquartered in Paris that specializes in luxurious all-inclusive holidays. Our Club Med was a Kuwaiti oil refinery that had been staffed by multi-national workers prior to Saddam's invasion of Kuwait. The huge refinery was modern by 1990 standards and many of the employees had lived on site. When coalition soldiers found it, it was damaged and dirty. Saddam's forces had taken it from the Kuwaitis and converted it to Iraqi oil production until the air campaign started, then it was bombed by coalition forces in an attempt to drive the Iraqi forces from Kuwait. Division brass had decided that the battle weary Spearhead soldiers needed some rest and recuperation ~ "R&R" in military slang. So Division had cleaned up the residential area which consisted of bungalows for the foreign employees, a dining hall, some volleyball courts, and a quite nice recreation facility complete with a huge projection TV and VCR. There

were trees! A rare sight in the middle east. That meant cool shade and a nice breeze! And it had an awesome swimming pool. That was nice; a swimming pool in the middle of the desert. Well, except for the bodies. When the Spearhead Division recreation detail arrived, there were dead bodies in the pool. It was evident that some had been tortured as one still had the noose around his neck. Most were injured in some way in a manner that suggested torture. It was suspected they were either refinery employees who hadn't evacuated, or prisoners that the Iraqi soldiers had confined at the refinery after it ceased operations. The detail had taken all the bodies out of the pool, drained it, sanitized it, and filled it back with clear cool water. Division had flown in a box of assorted VHS movies for the VCR and air lifted a huge tractor-trailer generator to power the section of the refinery that now bore a home-made sign over the entrance gate that read "Club Med". The residential area had been cleared of booby traps, bodies, and live ordinance, so the facility became a resort for all coalition forces, who rotated through on three-day "vacations".

*"Boyette! You're going on R&R. Turn your weapon in to the armorer. There's a five-ton in the middle of the compound, that's your ride." Sergeant McCarroll yelled as he walked up. "Turn in my weapon? Sarge has been in the desert sun too long if he thinks I'm surrendering my rifle in the middle of a hostile zone" I thought to myself. "I'm good, Sarge. I don't need no R&R. Send one of the other fellas" I replied. "That was an order. Move the fuck out. All you need is your gas mask and kevlar." he shot back.*



"Club Med", Kuwait, 1991

I got up and reluctantly made my way across the assembly area to the truck that served as the Task Force armory. It had a steel shipping container in the bed that stored grenades, explosives, odds and ends like LAW rockets, and it was where our rifles and other gear could be locked up securely if someone was medevac'd out. I walked up to the blonde haired armorer and wiggled out of my ALICE gear. “*Don't loose my shit*” I said as I begrudgingly handed it up to him. Everything but my gas mask and kevlar. My finger found the magazine release and I ejected the thirty round magazine from my rifle and handed it up to the Corporal. I knew the routine. As he watched, I racked the charging handle back on the rifle and ejected the round that was “in the pipe” into the sand ... I held the rifle up just like at inspection and visually checked that the chamber was in fact empty ... I hit the slide release button and felt the bolt slam forward ... then I pointed the rifle at the ground and pulled the trigger ... “click” ... it was empty. I flipped the fire selector switch back to safe and closed the ejection port dust cover. “*Safe weapon!*” I said to the Corporal as I handed it up to him. He wrote my rifle’s serial number down on his clipboard and handed me a paper receipt for my gear, then placed my rifle into the metal storage rack inside the steel container. Then I walked the hundred feet or so over to the middle of the compound where the five-ton truck was waiting with about a dozen other guys in the back, and I climbed up the ladder to join them.

The ride to Club Med was about thirty minutes. Our truck pulled into the facility and parked under the direction of a sergeant who was the compound’s NCO that ran the joint. The driver came around to the rear and unlatched the tailgate on the five ton truck and propped the ladder against the bed for us to climb out. “*FALL IN!*” The sergeant yelled. We all climbed out of the truck and assembled into a formation to receive our safety briefing. The sergeant walked down the line, “*One, one. Two, two. Three, three...*” he said as he want along point at each of us to pair us up. This was our bungalow number we were told. Two guys were assigned to each bungalow. Latrines were over there, the rec center with the TV and pool table over there, he pointed. A Blackhawk helicopter was taking off a few hundred feet away, “*That's your chow here at Club Med tonight, eighteen hundred hours, over by the volleyball court, Gentlemen. Don't fight, don't rape nobody, don't leave my AO, and you won't have to see me again. You got three days free to play grab-ass. Your Uncle Sam has just flown in hamburgers, hot dogs, soda pop, and “near beer” for your enjoyment. Remember your General Orders. Fall out*” he said. General Schwarzkopf had issued General Order Number one, which said no gambling, no porn, and no alcohol was allowed for U.S. Soldiers. We could play cards, but not gamble. A large grill and charcoal had been air dropped days earlier. I looked around the area. Some guys had stripped down to their boxers and were playing volleyball. Some were in the pool. Some were just hanging around smoking cigarettes and talking. Some were writing letters home. “*Looks like the recreation yard at a prison*” I thought to myself. Every once in a while a jet or a Blackhawk helicopter would pass overhead on their regular “no fly zone” patrol.

I followed my new buddy over to our designated bungalow, number eight it was. The number was on a sign over the door of each bungalow. The bungalows were pretty decent. They were wooden buildings about fifteen by twenty feet in size and each one contained two twin beds and two empty wall lockers that had served the refinery employees as a closet. There was a writing desk between the two beds and a night stand beside each bed. The floor was scattered with papers and personal belongings that had been rummaged through by the Iraqi soldiers. I picked up a letter from the floor and scanned it. The refinery employee that had lived here was British; it was a letter from his wife or girlfriend back home. I dropped it back on the dusty floor and went for a tour of Club Med.

The recreation building was pretty nice. Some guys were sitting in chairs and on sofas watching a movie on the TV, more were sitting at a table playing spades, some were at playing dominoes and shouting as they slammed their bones down on the table. Every few minutes one of the movie watchers would yell to the domino players to keep it down so they could hear their movie. Some were playing checkers and chess. I left the recreation building and walked over to the pool where some guys were splashing around playing tag in the water. The volleyball court looked like the scene from Top Gun with nearly naked GI's spiking the ball on the other team. I stripped down to my briefs and jumped into the cool refreshing water. Six o'clock came soon and the huge grill was loaded down with meat and was smoking by now, and it smelled good. I took a paper plate and a plastic fork from the table. "Hamburger, hot dog, or camel burger? The cook asked as he dropped a pile of french fries onto my plate. "I'll have a sirloin, cool in the center, and lobster" I said. "We ran out of sirloin and lobster about fifteen minutes ago, but I'll call the General and have some choppered in for you tomorrow" was his snarky reply as he slung a hamburger patty onto and almost off the other side of my plate. I headed over to the table where the condiments and drinks and buns were. I had no desire for beer-flavored water so I took two Cokes from the large vat of ice and headed over to the poolside. It had been three months since I'd had anything but water or Kool-Aid to drink.

I slept in late the next morning until about nine AM. Some of the fellas had been splashing around in the pool and playing volleyball, laughing and howling all night until about 2 AM. After a movie or two and a chess game or two and some swimming, I had joined a group of five or six guys by the volleyball court. "Let's go to the refinery" somebody said. It sat a few hundred feet away and was the typical oil refinery-looking structure about ten stories tall. Some huge tanks, some metal catwalks, probably had toxic chemicals leaked all over it. As we snooped around I saw little black steel balls about the size of a baseball all

over the yard. Some guys had stacked some of them up like canon balls into little piles. We didn't know what they were but they were cool so we were playing with them and had begun throwing them around like baseballs. "What..in..the..hell..do...you...assholes...think...you're...doing? The voice was loud and angry. It was the NCO in charge that had greeted us yesterday. "We were just tossing these balls around, sarge." someone said. "You fuckin' idiots are about to blow yourselves up." He said. "That's LIVE ordinance. Get your happy asses back to the recreation area and if you leave it again you'll spend the rest of the war in the stockade." he yelled.

When we got back to Club Med we learned those pretty black metal balls were in fact bomblets dropped by the Air Force when the occupying Iraqis were attacked and the refinery was taken back.



Headed to "Club Med" Kuwait, 1991

When dropped from a jet, the bomb breaks apart mid-air and scatters hundreds of these grenades which fall to the ground and explode on impact, sending deadly shrapnel for dozens of yards. In the soft desert sand though, they sometimes didn't hit the ground hard enough to detonate. We had watched them deployed and explode in training videos, but since that was Air Force ordinance, we had never actually seen any up close. So we didn't recognize them when we found them. But throwing them onto a hard surface or kicking them might result in detonation and a big explosion. Good thing sarge had shown up when he did. Someone had suggested that we grab a two by four and start us a baseball game with one of the bomblets as the baseball. The first inning would have started off with a bang, so to speak. So the third day of R&R was spent playing checkers and chess, swimming, playing volleyball, watching TV, and eating camel burgers and drinking beer-flavored water. Apparently the General didn't get my sirloin and lobster on the chopper before we had to leave Club Med to go back to things more serious than playing baseball with live ordinance.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### The Radio Station

The building was beige in color, made out of some sort of cement block, just like every other building in Kuwait. The door was steel and hanging off its hinges. There were a few small storage building looking structures around it made of tin. A beige jeep sat out in front, twisted all up into a mess from a missile attack. On the left side of the building on the ground lay a twisted up steel girder tower. It had

stood a couple hundred feet tall judging by its twisted up skeleton. *“It used to be a radio station”* Sergeant Morton said.

*“Saddam took it from the Kuwaitis when he invaded Kuwait and he used it for communications and airing his propaganda.”* The radio station was about a hundred yards in front of us. It looked abandoned. It was a target in the first night of the ground war when eight attack helicopters of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne penetrated into Kuwait and Iraq. Their mission was to take out any radar and communication centers that Saddam’s army might use.

Sergeant Morton scanned the building in

front of us with his thermal sights. *“It looks empty. I don’t see any hot spots inside. We either have to clear it or bypass it. If we bypass it and it’s occupied, the First Infantry Division following up behind us might walk into an ambush. Fourth squad dismount. Stack up”* he said.

Fourth squad split into its two teams. Brent Walker was a Specialist like me, but with more time in grade and more experience. He was about four years older than I was. He would be a Corporal now if the war hadn’t stopped promotions in garrison. He led Alpha team and I led Bravo team. Alpha team took the right and Bravo team took the left. We’d leap-frog up to the radio station, each team covering the other as we got closer. Our Bradley covered us with its Bushmaster chain gun. If the building was occupied, at least we’d have them in a cross fire. Alpha team would sprint a couple dozen yards, fall down into the prone, cover the building with their rifles, then Bravo team did the same. That way one team was always covering the other. If this turned to shit, only one team would be vulnerable in the open while the other could provide cover fire. If there was a crew served weapon inside, they likely wouldn’t be able to kill both teams. Sergeant Morton and the crew of Charlie one-four would cover us as well with the coax and the Bradley main cannon. I ran my right hand across the receiver of my rifle. The black metal was smooth and hot from the sun. The selector switch was on safe and I flipped it to fire with my thumb. Once we got up close to the building and made our way to the door, we’d stack up and enter the building and clear the rooms. Just like when we trained at Hammelburg in Bavaria, Germany. Only this time if we got killed, we didn’t get a twenty-four hour time-out. Now we were there. Thirty feet from the door, each team on its side of the building. No more leap frogging. We waited and listened. No noise from inside. No sounds of anyone moving around. No gunfire from the building.



The canon on the Bradley one hundred yards or so away hadn't started firing on the building so the thermal sights must've still showed no hot spot movement inside. Was the building empty or they were sitting quietly inside waiting for the stack to enter? We couldn't lie here in the prone all day so I gave Brent the "stack up" hand signal, and he nodded in agreement. Here we go. Both teams darted for the door. Once there, Alpha team was on the left side of the door and Bravo team was on the right. A few seconds pause. No noise from inside. No sounds of anyone moving around. No gunfire from the building. We quietly stacked up. "Nuts to butts" ...now GO". LaCosta yanked the steel door open on it's one hinge that was still holding the door on, and then dropped flat to the ground. In the same instance the stack entered, rifles pointed to our assigned sectors. We weren't met by bullets. My tunnel vision concentrated on my sector, 2:00 to 5:00. Whatever else I saw or heard made no difference. My responsibility was 2:00 to 5:00. My sector was clear for now. The building consisted of two rooms, joined in the center by a wall with a wide doorway connecting the rooms. It was obvious the radio station was unoccupied. The cabinet doors were all open or torn off. Tools and equipment and papers and books had been rummaged through and lay strewn all over the floor. My heart rate slowed down and I took a good look at what lay around me. Wires hung from the ceiling and the ceiling tiles had all fallen from the ceiling and lay scattered all over the floor in broken pieces. Sand had blown in through the busted windows and holes torn in the walls from explosions. It looked just like a radio station that had been in an airstrike...except for the blood. In the center of the room were three tables lined up side by side with space between them. Tables like you see in a church fellowship hall. You know, the ones about six or eight feet long, about three feet wide, with the fold-up metal legs on them. The debris had been pushed away to provide a clear area on the floor around the tables. There was coagulated blood on the tables and blood on the floors..lots of it. The floor was littered with bloody gauze and rags and a few simple medical tools like hemostats and tourniquets. These were operating tables. This had been a makeshift hospital. Some Iraqi unit had occupied this building and had used it during the airstrike for their wounded. Standing there looking around every thing was surreal. I was hearing sound in slow-motion. You could sense something terrible had happened here, there had been a lot of suffering here. You knew people had died here in this room, on those tables. You could tell that by the pools of blood on the floor. No one could lose that much blood and still live.

*"And there was bodies in there!"* my V.A. shrink said, wide eyed. "No. No bodies. No arms or legs. Nothing. Just blood and bloody gauze. Lots of it" I replied. He seemed disappointed that there was no climax to the story. He wrote something down on the notepad on his lap.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### The Ketchup Packet



25 mm chain gun ammunition being inspected at Monday morning maintenance in the motor pool.

the way to Bradley Charlie one-four, until all four of first platoon's Bradley Infantry Fighting vehicle's radios were confirmed working properly. The gunners were pulling the bolts from the Bradley's chain guns, inspecting them, oiling them, and putting them back together. Dismounts were checking the humidity indicators on the TOW missiles making sure they were still good. The drivers were checking the fluid levels in their Bradley's. Each Infantry platoon had four Bradley Infantry fighting vehicles, one per squad. Four platoons per Infantry company. We had sixteen of these 40-ton beasts. Each one with one Bushmaster twenty-five millimeter chain gun, one 7.62 mm coaxial machine gun, one TOW missile launcher, and six Infantrymen in it's belly. The firepower was immense.

Day four with no sleep. Spearhead and coalition forces had smashed into Saddam's Republican Guard in Schwarzkopf's famous "Hail Mary". The Battle at Medina Ridge had resulted in a bad defeat for the Medina Luminous Division of Saddam's elite Republican Guard. The Iraqi Colonel had deployed his armor too far from the ridge line. This gave the Spearhead M1 Abrams Main Battle tanks the advantage, as they are designed for accurate long-distance kills. The Iraqis had fought hard, shooting down one A-10 aircraft and two Apache attack helicopters during the battle, but the range of the Spearhead Divisions M1 Abrams tank was fifteen hundred yards. The range of the Iraqi's T-72 tanks was only one thousand yards. The American tanks could hit the Iraqi T-72 tanks before the Iraqi's could get within range to shoot back. Spearhead tanks and Infantry extracted a high price for the Iraqi Colonel's tactical error. The Battle of Norfolk had begun with a three-hour long intensive barrage from the Divisions artillery against the Iraqi 18th Mechanized and 9th Armored Brigades of the Republican Guard Tawakalna Mechanized Infantry Division, along with elements from eleven other Iraqi divisions.

*"Charlie one-two, Charlie one-one, radio check, over." ... "Charlie one-one, Charlie one-two, Lima Charlie, over" ... "Charlie one-two, Charlie one-one, copy Lima Charlie, out."* The frag order to attack was expected any time now. According to the "combat triangle" concept you have to be able to do three things to survive in a firefight. You have to be able to shoot, be able to move, and be able to communicate. If any one of the sides of the triangle fails, your odds of survival plummet. And so it went down the line, *"Charlie one-three, Charlie one-one, radio check, over." ... "Charlie one-one, Charlie one-three, Lima Charlie, over" ... "Charlie one-three, Charlie one-one, copy Lima Charlie, out."* ... all

The battle would go down in history with the Battle of Norfolk being the second largest tank battle in American history behind the Battle of the Bulge in World War II.

Staff Sergeant Wright's voice came over the radio, "Stay in the tracks of the vehicle in front of you. If we stop don't get out of your vehicles. We're in a minefield." One Abrams tank was leading us through the minefield, mines detonated harmlessly as the 60-ton tank rolled over them. "If you drive out of the tracks of the vehicle in front of you, you'll run over a mine" he said. The Battle at 73 Easting had just finished two hours earlier. It was named for the east-west coordinates from the Abram M1 tanks GPS receivers. Darkness and sandstorms hampered visibility, but thermal sighting systems on the M1 Abrams tanks and Bradley Fighting vehicles allowed Spearhead gunners to engage Iraqi targets at will. Intelligence reported that Iraq's 10th Armored Division had been entirely destroyed, and what little remained of the Iraqi 17th Armor Division was fleeing. The elite Iraqi Tawakalna and 52nd Divisions had suffered similar fates. Just before midnight, the order came down to the Spearhead Division that would conclude the fighting..."Attack to complete the destruction of the Iraqi 17th and 52nd Divisions in your sector." By morning, Third Armored Division had destroyed over 76 Iraqi tanks and 84 Iraqi troop vehicles.

Bravo Team walked among the bodies lying on the ground. They were all dead, most burned beyond recognition when their tanks were hit by the M1 Abrams depleted uranium penetrator rounds. Iraqi tanks were burning. I looked down at the dead Iraqi soldier lying on the ground in front of me. He had black curly hair. He had been hit by an Air Force flechette bomb. Steel spikes a little larger than a pencil stuck out of his face and body. The flechette bomb breaks open mid-air, raining down thousands of these ten-inch long steel spikes on any personnel below. Supposedly, one of these bombs will put a steel dart every square yard on a football field. I stared for several seconds. A steel dart stuck partially out of his skull. I wondered if that was a quick painless death or a slow agonizing death. About fifty feet away was a huge red fan-shaped spot on the ground. I walked over to to satisfy my curiosity. The scene was enough to turn anyone's stomach. The Iraqi soldier had apparently first been shot. As the M1 Abrams tanks had advanced, one had run over this soldier. Whether intentional or coincidental, the twenty-inch wide track on the tank had began at his feet, as it rolled forward over the soldiers body like a sixty-ton rolling pin, his head had popped off, spraying bloody goo and what looked like foamy red "paste" in a fan shape in front of him. I thought about when I was in high school and we'd step on a ketchup packet and it would pop, sending that red fan shaped spray out in front of your foot. "Man, I hope he was dead already when that happened" I thought. The two "snapshots" of these enemies stay in your mind forever.



Tanks of the Third Armored Division moving to contact with Iraqi forces.

(PHOTO: U.S. Army - US 3rd Armored Division Department of Public Affairs)

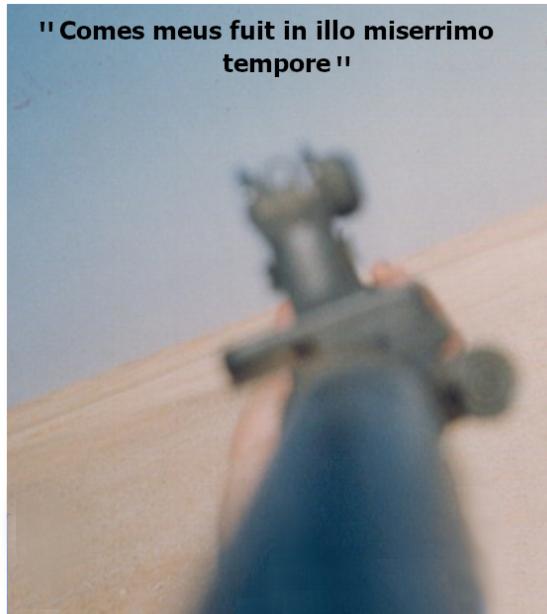
Graves detail would be along shortly. We didn't bury dead bodies, we made them. Graves detail would follow up behind us later and dig large trenches with a backhoe. The dead bodies would be put in the trench, covered with lime, and a bulldozer would fill the trench back in. The sites GPS coordinates would be documented so the location of the mass grave would be known. I looked down at the dead body lying at my feet. Something stuck out of his blouse pocket. I reached down and took it out. It was a homemade ID card. He had written on fabric with an ink pen, then wrapped it in plastic and sewn around the edges with thread to protect it. I stuck the ID in my blouse pocket. A large book lay on the ground beside a busted wooden field desk. I opened the book and flipped through the pages. There were black and white photographs of soldiers along with some Arabic writing beside them. Obviously it was a troop roster book of some sort. Most of these dead soldiers were probably in the book.

*“Dismounts, Saddle up. We’re moving”* sergeant Morton yelled. I walked up the ramp of the Bradley Infantry Fighting vehicle and took the seat behind the turret on the right side of the track. The hydraulics hummed as the laminated armor ramp slammed shut with a sound that sounded like the sealing of a tomb. The inside of the Bradley was hot, dark, and stank of sweat and vomit. The only light shone through the periscopes along the left and right sides so the dismounts could see what was happening outside.

“*Tink, tink...tink tink tink*”, the rifle rounds bouncing off the Bradley’s laminated armor made a distinct sound.

“*GUNNER, Infantry in the open, nine o’clock, one hundred sixty yards, H-E*” Sergeant Morton yelled. The electric motors in the turret made a high-pitched whir sound as the gunner rotated the turret to his left.

“*Identified, sending it!*” the gunner yelled and the Bushmaster chain gun sent two volleys of high explosive rounds towards the two Iraqi soldiers that had just fired on us. Within a few seconds it was all quiet again except for the sound of the diesel engine and some chatter coming over the radio.

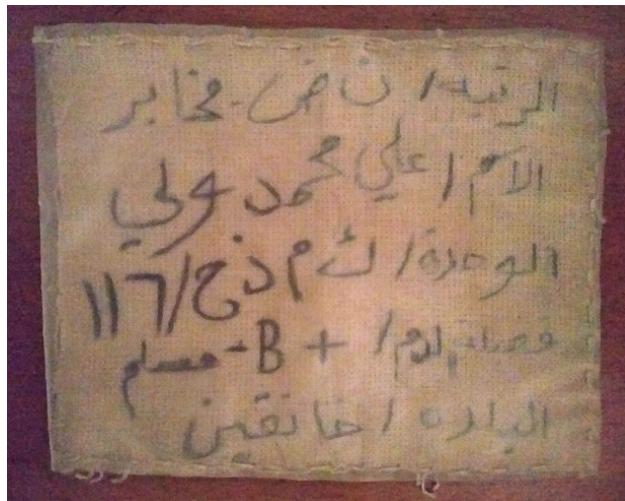


I pulled away from the Wendy’s drive through window. “*Let me check to make sure these burger flippers didn’t screw it up.*” You know they always screw up the order. One Son of Baconator burger ... one small fries ... one Dr. Pepper. Well impress the hell out of me, they got it right this time. Down in the bottom of the sack was two ketchup packets. The same kind like when I was in high school and we’d step on a ketchup packet and it would pop, sending that red fan-shaped spray out in front of your foot.

By now the Task Force had handcuffed all those that had surrendered with plastic zip ties and sat them all down in a group. A heavily armed company from the 503<sup>rd</sup> Military Police would be along to collect them up once the area was deemed safe enough.

*“That’s not plywood” he said. The Iraqi Captain tapped on the side of the Abrams with his fist. “Hell no. That’s depleted uranium. One of the hardest metal alloys on the planet” someone replied. “Saddam told us you had taken jeeps and had put plywood on them to make us think you had more tanks” he said. “Deception … the art of war? You speak good English” I said. The Captain had family in Chicago. He had come to America on a student visa and was studying at some college up north. He had returned home to Iraq during spring break for a family visit and was told that he wouldn’t be allowed to leave Iraq and that he was now an officer in the Iraqi Army. The rear ramp was still down and the captain looked into the back of our Bradley and I noticed something caught his eye. The gunner had taped a picture of Erwin Rommel to the turret safety door. “Why do you have a photo of your World War II enemy in your tank?” the Captain asked. The gunner smiled. “If you had studied the tactics of Rommel more carefully, you wouldn’t be my prisoner right now, Cap’n” the gunner said as he wiped his nose on the back of his arm.*

*“You won’t be needing those spare Makarov magazines at the POW camp” I told the Captain as I dropped the two Makarov pistol magazines into my trouser cargo pocket. Now I had more than six rounds for my Iraqi pistol. General Schwarzkopf had ordered all Iraqi officers were allowed to keep their sidearms. “Carry out your orders as they are given. Do not add anything that is not stated” I thought. The General had said they were allowed to keep their sidearm, not their ammo, I reasoned.*



In 2005 I asked an Arab friend to tell me what the ID card I took from the dead man that day says. He translated it:

RANK: NZ Informer  
NAME: Ali Muhammad  
DIVISION: k m z h / 117  
BLOOD TYPE: B+ Muslim  
TOWN: Khanaqin

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### The Ambush

“CONVOY, HOLD STILL. I SAY AGAIN, HOLD STILL! HOLD STILL!” the order barked over the company net. It was the first day of the ground war. Fifteen hundred Third Armored Division tanks, Bradley Infantry Fighting vehicles, and support vehicles were rolling across the desert in a three hundred mile wide swath. The order had come down at 11:15 AM on the 24<sup>th</sup> of February... “Attack abreast with 2nd Brigade in the north and 1st in the south, 3rd in reserve.” Within half an hour, First and Second Brigades were across the berm. This was the first day of Schwarzkopf's “Hail Mary”. The first day was marked by hard pushing into enemy-held territory as fast and as deeply as possible. We didn't know it then, but this would be day one of a five day long period with no sleep.

The drive into southern Iraq couldn't stop. Saddam's forces had been led to believe the attack would come from the east, by U.S. Marines landing on the beaches of Kuwait. But the tanks of the Spearhead Division would slam into the Republican Guard from the west. But for the Hail Mary to work, it had to be a total surprise to the Iraqi units whose guns were all pointed east.



Task Force 5/5 Cav (SPEARHEAD) movement to contact, Kuwait 1991

Division supply lines were able to keep pace with the Abrams Main Battle tanks rolling towards the Republican Guard. For those tanks to continue to move, they had to have spare parts, oil, fuel, and mechanics. The crews in those tanks had to have food and water. This day I was assigned to force protection detail. If somehow Iraqi forces managed to cut our supply train, it would bring the attack to a standstill, spoiling the surprise, and the Spearhead Division would pay in blood. I was assigned to Headquarters Company, in a supply train following the main attack. My job was to ride “shotgun” in a deuce and a half with PFC McCallister, a Bradley turret mechanic, guarding the convoy as it rolled forward through the desert. McCallister was a black guy from Mississippi and he had one speed...slow. He walked slow, talked slow, and I don't believe I ever saw him the entire three years I was in Germany when he wasn't wearing his greasy olive drab mechanics coveralls and smiling. McCallister was the kind of fellow you got amusement from watching move and talk. When you were interacting with McCallister your world was moving at one half the normal speed. You already knew every sentence he was going to say before he finished it because he spoke so slowly. It was almost tiring to listen to him speak. For this convoy there was a grunt riding shotgun in every vehicle.

When the convoy came to a stop, our job was to dismount the vehicle, move out about twenty yards, and lie down in the prone, rifle at the ready. This way, the convoy was protected from attack by a line of Infantrymen along both sides. Any threat that appeared was to be eliminated. The war had begun, we were in enemy held territory, intelligence had reported no friendly forces in the area, and we didn't need permission to engage. *"If he ain't dressed like you, kill him"* was the order to the force protection for the convoy.

*"What's the fuckin' problem now?"* McCallister mumbled as he moved the gear shift into neutral. I braced for the crash. When McCallister stepped on the brake pedal it went all the way to the floor. The only way we could stop was to down shift and then coast into the rear of the vehicle in front of us. I had reported the failure to Sergeant First Class Spears first thing that morning before the convoy rolled. *"We got a war to go to"* he snapped. *"I ain't got time to stop and work on no fuckin' brakes"*. The guys in the deuce in front of us were getting pissed. This was about the fourth time this morning the convoy had stopped and the fourth time we had smashed into their rear. The driver climbed down from the running board of his deuce and was walking towards us. I could tell he was pissed. *"What the fuck?"* he yelled. *"You assholes have plowed into our ass every time we've stopped. Are you motherfuckers asleep or what?"* *"Sorry, man"* I said. *"We got no brakes. Sarn't Spears was advised and he said roll on, he didn't have time to fix no fuckin' brakes because we had a war to go to."* The driver looked pissed and turned around and headed back to his truck.

Sergeant First Class Spears was a nice old black NCO about fifty years old, short, forty pounds over weight by Army regulations, but he had a skill and expertise the battalion needed. He was an expert at managing the battalion motor pool. He was the NCO in charge of the entire motor pool and he was responsible for seeing that every vehicle in it was combat ready and operational. We kind of liked to pick on Sergeant First Class Spears because of his weight. He just smiled and shook his head when Reppert had asked him one time if he bought his BDU's in the maternity section of the clothing store. He'd always shake his head and pretend he was pissed and he'd threaten to punish us, but he never did because he knew it was done in affection. I think the old motor pool sergeant liked the attention he got from it.

I found a good spot about thirty feet from from our deuce on the drivers side, behind a little sand dune a few feet high and took up my position. My eyes scanned the horizon left and right. No movement, no noise. I ran my hand down the black warm metal of my rifle's receiver. The ejection port dust cover was closed and the selector switch was on safe. The desert was flat, with a few small dunes scattered about, a clump of rocks here and there, some kind of scraggly leafless bush-tree every now and then. I had done this a dozen times today already. The convoy had to stop every few miles for some reason or another.

My eyes scanned the horizon left and right. No movement, no noise. I ran my hand down the black warm metal of my rifle's receiver. The ejection port dust cover was closed and the selector switch was on safe. About that time, a Blackhawk medevac helicopter approached from our rear. It hovered for a few seconds then landed about two hundred yards on the right side of the convoy. This was something new. That had never happened before. I looked at the huge red cross on the side. It just sat there, the rotor spinning. Somebody on the line joked *"Sarn't Spears must've finally had that heart attack that's been creeping up on his big ass"*. We all got a chuckle from that. My eyes scanned the horizon left and right. No movement, no noise. I ran my hand down the black warm metal of my rifle's receiver. The ejection port dust cover was closed and the selector switch was on safe.

The next thing I heard was helicopter rotors. Lots of them. On my left in the distance I could see a formation of Apache attack helicopters coming towards us. Further left, about a half a mile away from the approaching Apaches I saw some Cobra attack helicopters coming towards us. As the Cobras approached nearer I saw MARINES printed in huge black letters on the tail sections. Something was up, I knew. My eyes scanned the horizon left and right. No movement, no noise. I ran my hand down the black warm metal of my rifle's receiver. The ejection port dust cover was closed and the selector switch was on safe. The Cobras stopped short and appeared to provide cover for the approaching Apaches. Within thirty seconds or so the Apache attack helicopters formed a line along our convoy, facing away from us out into the desert. "*What's going on?*" I thought. My eyes scanned the horizon left and right. No movement, no ....SHIT! There was a tank six hundred yards away to my 11:00. Then another appeared, then another. All along the left side of our convoy, a half a mile away tanks began appearing on the horizon. Russian T-50 battle tanks and Russian BMPs. They had been "hull down", a tactic where they were hidden by digging a hole in the desert with a bulldozer, then driving the tank down into the hole. Each tank was hidden except from the air. When you looked out across the desert, you saw nothing, it was all flat; the tank was concealed below ground level. When the ambush was sprung, the tanks would roll out of the holes they were in, in a surprise attack. As the tanks rolled out of their pits into view, I saw Iraqi Infantry moving with them to the left and to the right. "*We're screwed*" was the first thing through my mind. Our Bradleys and tanks were several miles away, too far away to get here in time. We weren't the attack force, we were the supply convoy. Fyet, ....fyet, fyet, something whizzed past me. The sound was distinctive and unmistakable. Instinctively, without thinking about it my thumb slammed the selector switch to burst. I picked one, any one, it didn't matter, there were plenty to go around, and I lined him up. There was no significant wind so adjusting for windage wasn't a factor. I gauged the sight post on my rifle on his crotch "*Shoot him in the dick*" the cadre had taught us. When you pull the trigger the barrel of the rifle is going to rise from the recoil. If you aim at his chest, the second and third round might go over his head. If you "shoot him in the dick", the second and third rounds will impact his chest. The rifle leapt into my shoulder, the three spent casings ejected as the ejection port dust cover flipped open. He fell. By this time I could hear the others along the line firing at our attackers. They dodged for cover, moving left and right as they moved closer. I picked another target. He fell. We had one advantage. The disadvantage with a hull-down tank is that the turret has to be rotated so the gun points to the rear while it is in the pit. Otherwise, when he rolls forward out of his pit, the barrel on the tanks main gun will dig into the sand, bending it down and rendering the tank useless. These were old Soviet tanks, tanks that the Russians had given Saddam because they were obsolete by today's standards; no match against the American Abrams should the war in Europe break out. I knew the turrets on these old Soviet tanks didn't rotate by an electric motor like the American M1 Abrams did. The Abrams could rotate its turret 360 degrees in seconds. But not the old Soviet T-50s. The gunner had to crank a wheel round and round to manually rotate the turret. That meant we had about two minutes after each tank rolled out of its pit before they could rotate their gun 180 degrees to fire on us. Maybe more if the gunner was slow. Fyet, ....fyet, fyet... more rounds whizzed past me. Guys were screaming orders up and down the line... "*Infantry to the left, Infantry to the right*". They were planning on attacking the length of the convoy. I picked another target. He was carrying an RPG, a two man team. I squeezed the trigger. He fell. I shifted a few feet right to his buddy who was picking up the fallen RPG and I squeezed the trigger. He didn't fall. I missed him. The Cobras and Apaches opened up with TOW missiles and 2.75 inch Hellfire rockets. The entire horizon in front of me flashed with bright explosions and was engulfed in smoke and dust. Infantry was still moving towards us. The mechanics had all been standing around playing grab-ass when the convoy stopped. Now they were diving under vehicles and engaging with their "grease gun" machine pistols and rifles. Fyet, ....fyet, fyet... that sound again.

This time they were closer. I felt sand hitting me in the face. “*Too damned close. They’re engaging me. They know where I’m lying*” I thought. “MOVING!” I yelled and I rolled to my left and stood up and retreated back about 20 feet. My mind counting off the time like they had taught us in training... “*I’m up, he sees me, I’m down*”... about five seconds. If I’m up and moving for more than five seconds he’s getting a bead on me. I picked another target. I squeezed the trigger. He fell. Another. He fell. “*Don’t stay in one place too long*” Captain George always said. “*Shoot and scoot. If you lie in one place too long, you’ll never get back up*” he had taught us. I glanced behind me to make sure nothing was in my way... “MOVING!” and made a dash further back and to my right, zig-zagging. “*I’m up. He sees me. I’m down.*” I dove into the prone position. Those damned spare magazines digging into my hips, I landed on my face, chin tucked in so I landed on the front of my kevlar instead of my face. My hips hurt from landing on the hard steel magazines on my left and right hips. They’d be bruised if I was still alive this evening. I picked another target. I squeezed the trigger...miss. Magazines: how many rounds did I have left? I wasn’t keeping count. I rolled over on my left side and unsnapped the magazine pouch on my right hip and took out a thirty-round magazine. “LOADING!” I yelled so the guy to my right and my left would know I was not engaging and they had to take up my slack. I instinctively pressed the mag release and dropped the nearly empty mag and replaced it with the full mag all in one smooth motion. My hand instinctively slapped the bottom of the magazine to make sure it was locked in place. A mis-feed was something I didn’t need right now. This was no time to have to stop and clear a jam. “LOADING!” the guy to my left screamed. The Cobras and the Apaches were still launching TOW missiles and hellfire missiles on the Soviet tanks in front of me. Many of them were burning now. But the Infantry. They were still coming. I picked another target. I squeezed the trigger. He fell. Then another. At this time there was nothing in my mind. My mind was blank. I was on auto-pilot, my training had kicked in. This was survive or die, and thinking takes seconds. I didn’t have the luxury of time to think right now. They were still coming. “*FOUR MOVING LEFT, TWO MOVING RIGHT!*” someone yelled. I got that sinking feeling in my stomach. “*How many of them were there?*” I picked another target. He was closer. Close enough I could see the expression on his tanned filthy face. I squeezed the trigger. He fell forward, landed on his face in the sand, then seemed to try to crawl forward unable to stand. Shoot him in the dick - my round had probably shattered his pelvis. The tanks were all burning now. Loud explosions shook the air like thunder during a summer rainstorm as the ammo inside the Iraqi tanks cooked off. A turret blew off one of them, a loud explosion as the turret flew straight up in the air spinning like a banjo, then came back down. The barrel of its cannon stuck in the sand. It stood there like a giant smoking lollipop sticking out of the ground. Black smoke was everywhere. Iraqi bodies were lying scattered in front of us. The Infantry was still coming. Magazine ~ the bolt hadn’t locked to the rear on my rifle yet. That meant I still had rounds in the magazine. I picked another target. I squeezed the trigger... miss. He dodged to his right and dived into the sand, then got up again. I squeezed the trigger again. He fell. I hear someone yell “LOADING!” and I look around but can’t see him. I picked another target. I squeezed the trigger. He fell. Fyet, fyet, fyet... that sound again - bullets flying past me. And then I felt wind on me “whop, whop, whop, whop,” I heard the sound in slow motion and I looked up and to my right. About fifty feet over my right shoulder an Apache attack helicopter was hovering. I remember wondering how long it had been since the attack started. I looked up and saw the pilot in the helicopter. I couldn’t see his face as he had the cool looking mirrored visor covering his face. I remember seeing the black hose going up to his face that supplied him with oxygen. Everything was happening in slow motion now. I looked at the thirty-millimeter canon in the nose of the helicopter. I remember the two wheels hanging from the bottom of the helicopter and I remember the little wings on either side that held the missile pods.

The pilot looked to his right, the thirty-millimeter canon in the helicopters nose followed as he turned his head, he looked to the left, the thirty-millimeter canon swept to the left. Then it happened. BAP, BAP, BAP, BAP, BAP, BAP, BAP, BAP, BAP. I saw a stream of fire coming from the canon as he turned his head left and right, the canon raking fire left and right. Two hundred feet in front of me the sand erupted in a dust wall eight feet high. Hot shell casings fell from the sky as the canon continued BAP, BAP, BAP, BAP, BAP, BAP, BAP, BAP, BAP. A pause. Again BAP, BAP, BAP, BAP, BAP, BAP, BAP, BAP, BAP. I looked to the scene in front of me, the Apache's canon chewed up sand, machines, and humans. It was tunnel vision. The only thing that existed at that moment was me, that Apache, and the enemy in front of me, mostly all whom were lying in pieces on the ground now. Then it was quiet. I looked out in front of me. Several Infantry dashed back towards their pits for cover but they were quickly cut down as the canons on the other Apaches along the line gunned them down. I looked up over my right shoulder. The Apache was still hovering there, like a dream. I looked back out to my front and I saw him. This Iraqi soldier had climbed on top of his Soviet made BMP, stood up, and began firing on the Apache. I heard the AK fire BOP, BOP, BOP, BOP, BOP, BOP, BOP, BOP, BOP. I looked up and over my right shoulder again to the Apache hovering now just yards over my shoulder and I saw sparks flashing off the canopy of the helicopter as the Iraqi's bullets bounced off the helicopter's armor. Then it was fabulous. I see the pilot turn his head to the left about ten degrees. The canon in the nose of the helicopter swept left with the pilots head. Then BAP, BAP, BAP, BAP, BAP, a stream of fire streaked from the canon again. I turned my eyes back to the Iraqi standing on the BMP. In slow motion I saw the canon rounds impact. His torso simply vaporized into a pink mist. His whole body disappeared from his knees up to his armpits. His arms and his head fell into a pile on top of what was left of his legs. For several seconds I just lay there trying to process what I just saw. Out in front of me nothing was moving now. They're all dead or hiding. Bodies are scattered all over the desert in front of me. Some arms. Some legs. Some equipment. The tanks are burning. It's all quiet except for the rounds inside the tanks cooking off and the whop whop whop of the helicopter rotors. Again I look up and over my right shoulder. The Apache is still hovering there, the canon sweeping right and left, but it's silent now. I look at the pilot's mirrored visor again. The pilot looks to his left and down at me. Then he snaps a sharp salute with his right hand and the Apache peels off to the right and he flies away. It's all quiet now except for guys in the convoy shouting and regrouping. The Iraqi tanks are still burning. I lie there for a few seconds and think, *"What just happened? That pilot saluted me. He has to be the coolest guy to ever fly an Apache. Nobody is ever going to believe what I just saw. The guy vaporized. The pink mist... I'm alive."* Reality set back in and I scanned the field in front of me for movement. None seen. I needed to get up and check down the line and see if there was wounded in our convoy and find out what our instructions were now. The Blackhawk medevac helicopter lifted off and flew away. I'm still trying to wrap my mind around this Apache pilot who just saved my ass. Off in the distance the sortie of Apaches and Cobras are getting smaller and smaller, about to fade out of sight. *"You don't even get to know their names"* I thought to myself. I ran my hand down the black warm metal of my rifle's receiver. The ejection port dust cover was open so I snapped it closed to keep the sand out. The selector switch was on burst so my thumb moved it to the safe position. I made a mental note to count my rounds later. I started with two hundred and ten. Did I fire sixty? Eighty? A hundred? I have to go find McCallister, wherever he is. Soldiers were scattered about and there was a lot of confusion as the convoy re-organized and did damage assessment. *"Saddle up! Convoy is moving!"* somebody yelled. *"We don't have any brakes."* I thought.

Out in front of me Iraqi tanks were burning, Iraqi bodies lay scattered in the sand. The radio was alive and full of chatter about the retreating Iraqis that were being attacked by nearby forces as they tried to flee. The odor of cordite and acrid smoke from burning petrol was in the air. Leadership was up and down the line assessing battle damage and reorganizing the detail. The wounded were being treated. It was all surreal. *“Where is your team?”* Sergeant Morton yelled, staring at me. *“I don’t know, Sarn’t”* I replied. *“What is your team doing right now?”* ... *“I don’t know, Sarn’t”* ... *“Well if you don’t know where your team is and what they’re doing, that’s a problem ain’t it?”* He stood quietly staring at me. I didn’t have time right now to think about the last hour that had just unfolded in front of me. That was tucked away in my brain, to quote Scarlett O’Hara, *“I can’t think about that right now. I’ll think about that tomorrow.”* Right now I had to go find McCallister and Quintin and Dodds and LaCosta and Walker and Reppert, wherever they were. I had come through the entire ambush with just a bleeding two-inch long gash on the back of my right hand that I still bear the scar today. How it got there is still a detail lost in the fog of battle. I like to jokingly tell other vets who ask, that I got it in combat when my bayonet slipped off the lid as I was trying to open a can of pork and beans.

We found out later during the after-action review that the Iraqi armor had been waiting, sitting in hiding for us. It was an ambush. An Iraqi POW had been captured and interrogated earlier in the day and he had told of the impending ambush. As soon as it was revealed, Division had sent the Apaches and the Cobras to us. When we got the *“Convoy hold still!”* order over the radio, we were minutes from driving into the kill zone for the ambush. So we only got about one third the force attacking us than we would have if we hadn’t stopped when we did. The conscientious objectors can complain all day about how inhumane and cruel torture may be. As for me, I really don’t give a damn what the interrogators had to do to that soldier to get that information out of him. He took his chance and he lost. Just like the idiot who decided to climb on top of a BMP and fire on an Apache with his AK that day. As each of us was questioned later at the after-action review about what happened and what we saw and what we did, the brass asked, *“How many did you hit? How many did you miss?”* The answers were all the same. *“I don’t have a damned clue, Sir. I was surviving in the moment, not keeping score.”*

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### The Professionals

BANG BANG BANG, Staff Sergeant Wright hammering on the door of the deuce with his fist woke me up. I looked up, startled by the loud noise... “*You gotta stay awake!*” he snapped as he walked on down the line of vehicles stopped at the barbed wire entrance to the Tactical Assembly Area. We had arrived at the designated location somewhere in the desert and the convoy had stopped as each vehicle was directed where to park in the usual “circle the wagons” formation, all the cabs of the trucks facing outward. We had been stopped for only about five minutes when I dozed off sitting in the drivers seat. For the last four days the only time the convoy stopped was to refuel. During those few minutes you used the bathroom if you needed to, and if you got the chance. If not, you peed in an empty water bottle, then flung it out the window as the convoy moved along. If a vehicle broke down, it was left behind to be recovered by the follow-up forces behind us. To our front were the Abrams M1 Battle tanks and Bradley Infantry Fighting vehicles that took the fight to the Republican Guard. Without the parts and tools and mechanics I guarded in this convoy, those vehicles wouldn’t roll. I looked over to McCallister. He was eating a banana. The bunch of bananas we had stolen from the mess tent a couple

days earlier hung from the rear view mirror of the deuce. The bunch was about two feet long, and as we rolled along we’d just reach up and break one off as the convoy moved through the desert. That had worked out for us. The hot desert sun had ripened them fast and they gave off a nice banana smell that helped cover up the stink of two guys in the cab of a truck in one hundred and four degree heat that hadn’t showered in three weeks. We had several cases of MRE’s stacked on the floor of the deuce under our feet, along with sandbags. The sandbags in the floor would hopefully maybe save us if we ran over a mine, but probably not. One of our vehicles had run over a mine a day earlier. The officers



wouldn’t let us see it because it was so gruesome. The blast had blown the batteries under the seat clean through the driver, they said. So as we rode along, our knees were up near our chin as the floor of the deuce was full of MRE’s and sandbags. McCallister grinned at me. “*See, you fuckin’ trigger-pullers do sleep, too. Just like the rest of us*” he said. “*Now take me*”, he said, “*I’m a turret mechanic, a fuckin’ professional. When I get out of this Army I’m going to get me a goooooood job. This nigga learned skills in the Army. You just a fuckin’ trigger-puller*” he said as he chuckled. This was our usual “my job is more important than yours” routine typical to all branches of the military. “*But you see they sent us fuckin’ trigger-pullers to ride shotgun in your convoy to keep your POG asses from getting zapped, yeah?*” I replied. “*I’m a professional too. My profession is pulling this trigger. Your profession is being a boring-ass mechanic.*”

McCallister laughed and flung his banana peel out the passenger window. But he was right, you know. McCallister was a professional. He knew every nut, every bolt, every wire, every switch, and every other component in a Bradley turret. He could rebuild it blindfolded. Without him that turret wouldn't spin around, the canon wouldn't elevate, the coax wouldn't fire, the vast array of electronic sensors and sights and radios wouldn't function. Without McCallister that Bradley was just a forty-ton target.

We had trained for sleep deprivation in Germany, but only for three days at a time. Army doctrine said after five days with no sleep you become combat ineffective. It had been four. I was familiar with my sleep dep pattern from that training. The first day I was OK. The second day I was dog tired and struggled to stay awake and by the end of the day I had turned into an ill, mean, son of a bitch. The third day I was over the hump and got a second wind and I was tired but not sleepy. Now, the fourth evening, we were all walking zombies. We were slow to react and we were all grumpy. The previous three days we had rolled along through the desert to what would become the Battle of 73 Easting, the Battle of Norfolk, and The Battle of Medina Ridge, three of the largest tank battles in modern history. Armor had been shot up by crew served weapons and RPGs, a few weapons systems had failed during the fight, wheeled vehicles were damaged by small arms fire. "McCallister the professional" was about to earn that handsome salary Uncle Sam paid him, and work his magic to get those vehicles back into the fight.

When the convoy moved along, McCallister and I would take turns driving. McCallister would drive for a few hours, and when the convoy stopped, we'd swap and I'd drive for a few hours. We did that for four days. That was the procedure. The shotgun always wore the night vision goggles (NVGs) while the driver never did. NVGs amplify light. The light from the moon and the stars made the black desert night look like daytime with a greenish glow. The shotgun could see things in the night the driver couldn't, such as ditches, potholes, and obstructions. The convoy moved at night with no headlights, no brake lights, in total blackout so the enemy couldn't see us. So the shotgun directed the driver where to go. But NVGs amplify light. So if there was a bright explosion nearby, whomever was wearing the NVGs would be blinded for a minute or so. The driver had to drive by moonlight then. The idea being that the driver could continue driving in the moonlight, but couldn't continue driving blind, so the driver never wore NVGs. The previous night Quintin and his mechanic in the deuce they were driving had driven off the edge of a wadi in the night, the vehicle fell about eight feet into a ravine and nearly rolled over. The two managed to escape with just some cuts and bruises.

Some guy in olive drab mechanic overalls with a machine gun pistol strapped across his chest directed us into the spot we were supposed to park. I down shifted, and coasted to a stop. The deuce bucked and lurched as it choked off as we still had no brakes. We climbed down out of the vehicle. McCallister would go find his mechanics and see what battle damaged vehicles were to repair to get them back in the fight and I'd find the squad to see where my defensive position would be on the edge of the perimeter. "*There's them nanners up there if you want some, man*" I told the guy as I pointed to the windshield of our deuce and went to find my squad. He looked over at our truck then got this weird look on his face that said, "*How in the hell?*" But he didn't waste any time climbing into the cab and breaking a few off the bunch. I imagine McCallister and I are the only two cats that ever went through a war in a deuce with no brakes and twenty pounds of bananas hanging from the rear view mirror. It's a good thing they build them military trucks with the rear view mirror bolted to the top of the cab else it would've never held.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

### The Three

The previous days rumor had spread that a cease fire had been agreed upon with the Iraqi leaders. That day Division Intelligence reported Iraq's 10th Armored Division had been totally destroyed, and what little remained of the Iraqi 17th Mechanized Division was withdrawing. The elite Tawakalna Republican Guard and the Iraqi 52nd Mechanized Division had suffered similar fates. At 6:34 am on February 28th, the order came down that would conclude the fighting: "*Attack to complete the destruction of the 17th/52nd Divisions in sector before 0800hrs.*" The Spearhead Division turned east and we engaged anything that appeared hostile. The clock finally ticked 8:00 am and high fives went around. We had accomplished our mission and the war was over. That night we were able to stop in an assembly area, 50/50 security with the hopes that news of the cease fire would have spread to any enemy units that were out there in front of us.

The sun came up on the desert horizon in an orange fireball the next morning and the soldiers of Task Force 5-5, Charlie Company, First Platoon still manned their stand-to positions at 5:00 AM just like the other mornings. I lay up against the sand berm around our perimeter, in the prone position, staring down the barrel of my rifle. My eyes scanned the horizon left to right for any threat. The cease fire had begun the previous morning, but the Iraqi units were so decimated most of them probably hadn't gotten the message yet. They might still attack, not knowing about the cease fire. No movement, no noise. Everything looked safe. I had been awake most of the night with only about three hours sleep over the past day and I struggled to stay awake. I had unbuckled my web belt so the spare magazines on my right and left hip didn't dig into my hip bones. I was already sore there from the bruises from falling down into the prone position during firefights and landing on top of the steel magazines; three on each side... 210 rounds. That was what I carried. Once those 210 rounds were spent, that was it. I had taken a belt of M240 SAW ammo from the ammo point a week earlier, but it was in a belt for the machine gun. If I needed those rounds I would have to break them apart out of the ammo belt one by one to reload my mags. A time consuming process that wouldn't be very practical in a firefight. I had also taken two boxes of .45 ACP pistol rounds from the ammo dump, but I had given my 1911 to Doc after he had gotten a new medic who didn't have one so they were worthless to me. I had kept them though because I thought, "*Well what if we're in a firefight and someone gets zapped and I grab his 1911. Then I don't have any rounds for it.*" So the extra weight of a hundred .45 ACP rounds in my rucksack was an investment, I figured. I also had the Russian Makarov that I had taken from the Iraqi captain a few days earlier in my trouser cargo pocket. The sand was soft and warm and I was cozy. My eyes burned because I hadn't slept. The kevlar was heavy on my head and I rested my chin on the stock of the M-16. I wanted to close my eyes for about 10 seconds because they didn't burn when my eyes were closed but I knew if I did I'd fall asleep. I thought about the cartoons when I was a kid where the character would put toothpicks in his eyes to keep his eyelids open. I was looking too comfortable when Sergeant McCarroll walked up, so I tilted my head in his direction so he'd know I wasn't asleep. "*No movement, no noise*" I said, and he walked on down the line to check the other positions.

It was 5:30 AM now. Stand-to would be over at 6:00. I was hungry. PFC Nicholas and I had sneaked over to the mess trailer the previous night and stole a bunch of bananas off the pallet that the Blackhawk had dropped. We figured bananas wouldn't last long in the desert heat so we went back to steal a case of MRE's "just in case". We had discussed it and came to the conclusion that since the bananas belonged to the Army, and we were the Army, it really wasn't stealing. As we crept up to the mess trailer where the pallet of MRE's were stacked a cook on guard duty stood up and yelled, "*Hey, what y'all doing over there?*" I yelled back, "*We're looking for Sergeant Williams*", a name I made up on the spot. He suspected what we were up to. He yelled back, "*Ain't no fuckin' Sergeant Williams in our mess. Get the fuck outta here.*" So we left empty handed that time. I scanned the horizon again. My eyes burned. No movement, no noise. So I reached into my blouse and pulled out an MRE. That's how I usually carried them, inside my blouse. Two of them usually. Sometimes three if we were going on patrol. Just in case we got in a tight spot and no one brought us any for a day or so. I looked down at the brown plastic bag. "Chicken and Rice" printed across it in black upper-case letters. "*Hell yeah*" I thought. Chicken and rice was my favorite. Dump a bottle of Tabasco sauce in there and stir it up and that was a meal. If there was time, we'd lay it on the exhaust vent of the nearest Abrams tank. The Abram's turbine jet engine exhaust would heat in up in about twenty seconds. The Chicken a la King MRE I hated. If I drew that one out of the box I'd just take out the candy and Tabasco sauce, the toilet paper, the Kool-Aid powder and crackers and throw the entree away. The Chicken a la King MRE was so nasty nobody would trade you for it so there was no need to ask. I reached around on my right hip and found my canteen and set it on the warm sand in front of me. The water was warm but if you mixed that Kool-Aid powder from the MRE in it, it was okay. I took my bayonet out and sliced the top off the MRE bag and put it back in its scabbard. I scanned the horizon again. My eyes burned. No movement, no noise. So I dumped the contents of the MRE bag into my right cargo pocket. That's how grunts do it. A POG spreads it all out in front of him like he's at a buffet. Grunts do what's called "eating out of your pocket". You take one packet at a time from your pocket, open it and eat it, then take out another and so on until it's all gone. That way if a firefight erupts and you have to shoot-and-scoot, you don't have to leave your food behind. I took a swallow of my lemon Kool-Aid and put the canteen back in the pouch and snapped the flap closed for the same reason. I scanned the horizon again. My eyes burned. No movement, no noise. Finishing the Chicken and Rice, I stuffed the empty plastic bag it came in into the plastic MRE bag and reached into my pocket again. I felt the familiar rectangle shape of the chocolate covered oatmeal cookie. Us Armor guys call it a "track pad" because it looks just like the hard rubber pads that bolt onto the track of a Bradley Infantry Fighting vehicle. Another favorite. The M&Ms all melt in the desert heat. The Starburst candy melts into a sticky gooey blob. But the track pad's oatmeal center stays pretty much edible in the desert heat.



Nick and I goofing around in an Iraqi jeep that was run over by an Abrams tank at the Battle of Norfolk. Photo taken at noon. Black sky is oil well smoke.

The crackers I decided to save for later. I didn't know if the packet that came with it was jelly, peanut butter, or the fake cheese, but I decided I wouldn't look to see and it'd be a surprise later. The little pad of toilet paper that came in every MRE I'd need later. I took the track pad out my right cargo pocket and pulled my bayonet from its scabbard and sliced the top off the packet and then put it back in the scabbard. The chocolate covering on the track pad was melted in the desert heat so I had to rip the foil packet open flat to get it out. I clenched the track pad in my teeth and stuffed the foil wrapper down into the MRE bag, getting melted chocolate all over my fingers as I did so. I scanned the horizon again. My eyes burned. No movement, no noise. I looked to my right and left. The rest of the platoon along the berm was starting to stand up one by one here and there. I flipped the nylon strap over that velcro'd over the crystal on my watch that prevented it from reflecting in the sun and compromising my position. The hands were at 6:00, stand-to was over.

Maybe what remained of the beaten Iraqi army had gotten the message that the cease fire was in effect. I stood up, buckled my web belt so my remaining MRE wouldn't fall out the bottom of my blouse, and slung my rifle across my chest. I ran my hand down the smooth warm metal of the receiver. The ejection port dust cover was closed and the selector switch was on safe. I scanned the horizon again. My eyes burned. No movement, no noise, so I headed to the center of our assembly area where the NCOs were gathered with Chief Delaloy to see what orders might have come down during the night and what the plan for the day was. My MRE was right over my belly button, and I figured if a firefight started and I had to fall down into the prone, that would hurt. So I reached inside my blouse and shifted it around to my left side.



Guarding the refugee camp at Safwan, Iraq. Iraqi children playing around our Abrams tanks.

A new Operations Order had been issued. Task Force 5-5 was to move to a place near a small village in Iraq named Safwan. The war was over. The Division was now charged with the job of relocating thousands of Arab refugees and providing them protection from any Iraqi forces who might retaliate against them. The first job before we moved was to recover the "tattletales" we had deployed when we arrived earlier. A tattletale is a small black metal device that looks like a large mouse trap. It was an early warning device. The way you normally use it was you tie it to a tree about eight inches or so

off the ground. But since there were no trees in the desert, we'd drive a small stake in the ground to tie it to. A infrared chem light glow stick is insert into the device and the bail is flipped over and secured in place, just like with a mousetrap. A small olive drab wire is attached to the trigger and the other end is tied to the stake off in the distance. The idea is that if someone is creeping up on your position during the night, they run into the trip wire, it trips the bail. The spring loaded bail flips over just like in a mousetrap, smashing the infrared chem light stick, which then glows bright and lights up the area. Since the chem light is infrared, you can see it with your NVGs but the

light can't be seen with the naked eye. You know someone a hundred feet or so away is probing your lines, but the guy who tripped it won't know he tripped it and that you've been alerted. Quintin and I were charged with recovering the tattletales. Eight of them were positioned around the perimeter. I looked at the range card. The first one was a hundred feet past the berm near the bunker we had pilfered through the previous day. This was a dangerous detail. All the landmines had been marked with plastic orange tape, but the engineers might have missed one. Or two. Quintin and I headed over the berm and made our way through the hole in the concertina wire. I scanned the horizon. No movement, no noise. My right hand moved down the smooth warm metal of my rifle's receiver. The ejection port dust cover was closed. The selector switch was in the safe position. We made our way to the first tattletale, scanning the ground in front of us as we walked for anything suspicious looking, just in case the engineers missed one. Or two. The only important part of the tattletale was the metal mousetrap-looking body. The olive drab trip wire was considered expendable, we just left it, we had miles and miles of that thin wire on rolls. So was the stake on the other end. One, two, three. We used the range card someone had sketched earlier and made our way to each tattletale. We'd need the tattletales again later if this war really wasn't over.

My eyes scanned the horizon. No movement, no ... wait a minute. *"Hey Quintin. 12:00. What is that?"* It was about a half a mile away and it appeared to be moving towards us. It appeared blurred and wavy through the desert heat coming off the sand. I remembered the old cowboy movies I saw on TV when I was a kid. You know, the mirage scene in the desert of any decent western movie. My eyes scanned the horizon to the left and to the right. My eyes scanned the sky. No jets, no helicopters. Nothing seemed amiss. A mirage? I looked over my left shoulder at the assembly area two hundred yards away. The vehicles were sitting there in the "circled wagons" formation, guns facing outwards. Not much activity from anyone there. A few people were milling around but the activity was all casual. I looked back to the horizon. The artifact was a little larger now. Fight or flight? We could probably sprint back to the assembly area safely unless we stepped on a landmine along the way. Or we could fall prone and fight. If we had to engaged this thing approaching us, our shots would alert the platoon in the assembly area and they'd come to our aid. *"Looks like three people"* Quintin said. They were closer now. Yes, it was three people walking towards us. Still too far away to know if they were friend or foe. There were British, French, Kuwaiti, and Saudi units in the area, probably some Canadian forces, too. The cease fire was in effect. What to do but wait? *"There's three of them"* Quintin said. *"Don't appear to be armed."* The three kept coming. I could see them better now. Yes, there were three. Olive drab uniforms so they weren't American, probably Arab. No weapons seen. It looked like the one in the middle was limping and he had his arms across his buddy's shoulders so he could walk along. They came closer. Their hands appeared to be empty. Hair was black and unkept. They were unshaven. They were barefooted. That was a clue. The Iraqis took off their boots when they were expecting to be killed. When a Muslim enters a mosque, he takes his shoes off. It's considered disrespectful to wear shoes in a holy place. No Muslim wants to go to paradise with combat boots on. He can't enter paradise shod, so when they think they're about to be killed, if there was the opportunity, they'd take their boots off so as to arrive at paradise fit to enter. Friend or foe? Foe. But there's the cease fire. And we can't shoot unarmed men regardless. We're soldiers not murderers. *"I got the one on the left"* Quintin said in a low voice. *"I got the one on the right"* I replied. *"But what if it's a trick?"* I thought. My right hand moved down the smooth warm metal of my rifle's receiver. The ejection port dust cover was closed. The selector switch was in the safe position. I heard a sharp familiar click as Quintin flipped the selector switch on his rifle from safe to fire. My thumb found the selector switch on my own rifle and I flipped the selector switch from safe to fire.

My eyes scanned the horizon to the left. To the right. No other movement. If this was a trick it wasn't a big one, but Quintin and I were still outnumbered three to two. But they appeared unarmed. It was the cease-fire. They were the enemy. My mind was calculating all this in a second, like a Vegas bookie checking off items to figure odds he would give on a football game. The three stopped about forty feet in front of us. We looked at them, they looked at us. Neither Quintin or I spoke Arabic. My eyes quickly scanned the horizon to the left. To the right. They were alone... probably. I remembered the assembly area was to my 6:00 but I didn't dare turn my head to look in that direction to see what was going on there. That might be the distraction they were waiting for if this was a trick. Quintin and I had our rifles leveled at their chests and Quintin gave them the "come here" gesture with his left hand. The three stood for a few seconds, unsure of our intentions, then began moving towards us slowly, the one guy in the middle limping forward on his bad leg with the help of his buddies. *"At least that evens the odds a little"* I thought. *"If this turns to shit, I'm taking the one on the right first. Since Crip was barely ambulatory, he'll probably be the least motivated and certainly the slowest one of the three."* When they got within twenty feet of us, Quintin gave them the "stop" hand signal with his left hand. More seconds of two enemies staring at each other. I broke the silence, *"Back up a few feet"* I said to Quintin. *"I'm going to go forward and search them for weapons. If they make any sudden movements, kill all three of them"* I spoke loudly as I knew all Iraqi officers and many of their regular troops understood English. I did the "hands up" gesture. All three understood and obeyed. I could feel my heart beating inside my kevlar body armor. I approached slowly. Once I was within eight feet of them my thumb flipped the selector switch on my rifle to safe. If this was a trick, I reasoned, and one of them grabbed for my rifle, maybe it would buy me a few seconds while he was trying to figure out why it wouldn't fire. By that time Quintin would've put three into his chest. I looked at the first man in front of me and gave him the "come forward" gesture with my left hand, then the turn around gesture with my finger.

His eyes were brown. His hair was black and curly and matted. He stank of sweat, tomatoes, and onions. The sling took up the weight of my rifle as I let it go and reached out with both hands and felt his torso, each arm, his pockets, each leg. His feet were blistered from the hot sand. *"CLEAR"* I said loudly to Quintin. I motioned for the man to move back away from me and told him to sit down in the sand. He either understood English or he understood when I pointed to the ground because he complied. Now Crip. Same thing. *"CLEAR"*. Now the guy on the left. *"CLEAR"*. The three were unarmed. Quintin lowered his rifle as I stepped back. *"Who are you?"* Quintin asked. The man on the left understood. He spoke choppy English. The three had been in a coalition bombing attack on their bunker complex two days earlier. Many in their unit were killed. Those who hadn't been killed just wandered off. These three had been walking for two days now hoping to find someone to surrender to. Crip had been injured when a piece of shrapnel hit his ankle during the air strike. The man slowly reached up to the breast pocket on his blouse and took out a piece of paper. It was a surrender leaflet dropped by the Air Force prior to their bombing run. It was a little larger than a dollar bill, printed in Arabic and English, and promised that if one surrendered, he wouldn't be killed, but would be treated humanely by his captors. The man shoved the paper towards me. I didn't need to look at it. They were blowing all over the desert as the Air Force dropped them by the millions. Realizing I didn't care to see his promise, he stuck it back into his pocket. I carried two 1-quart canteens on my belt. One on each hip. I reached for the one on my left hip and took it from the pouch. I unscrewed the cap and handed it to the man. He didn't protest about germs or slobber he just grabbed it and drank. Then he passed it over to Crip. Crip did the same then passed it to the third man. When the third man had finished he handed it back to me. It was empty and I put it back into my pouch on my left hip with the lid left unscrewed. That way I'd remember to wash it and sanitize it before I refilled it.

No telling what diseases these three might have. I felt inside my blouse and took out an MRE. It was printed in black capital letters across the package, "Beef Stew". I took out another. This one read "Frankfurters". I thought to myself, "*Well let's see if these Muslims refuse pork now.*" I wouldn't blame them. Frankfurters were the second nastiest MRE, behind Chicken a la King. I took my bayonet out of its scabbard and sliced the top off the first package and handed it to the man on the left. There were no patches or rank on their uniforms, but he seemed to be the one in charge of the three. The other two seemed to look to him for decisions or permission about matters. He dumped the contents out on the sand in front them. I sliced the top off the second MRE package and replaced my bayonet in its scabbard and handed it to the one I now called the Leader. He dumped it out in the pile and the three began rifling through it like three kids emptying a stocking on Christmas morning. Quintin handed Leader his spare canteen and the three sat and ate. The three hadn't eaten a decent meal in weeks Leader said. The coalition bombing runs had cut their supply lines on the opening day. Any convoys attempting to supply the Iraqi units were immediately destroyed by coalition fighter jets. They had survived on tomatoes and onions they scavenged from the locals and on camel meat from the free-range camels they could shoot and butcher in the desert. If they were lucky every now and then they'd find a goat to kill and cook. The sun was high in the sky now. I looked at Crip. His ankle was swollen and obviously badly infected. Bloody pus oozed from the filthy wound. "*That's going gangrene*" I thought to myself. "*He'll probably lose that leg if he doesn't die from infection.*" While in Germany I had ordered a Vietnam-era butt pack from the U.S. Cavalry magazine. It was made of canvas, was worn on the ALICE web belt behind you like a fanny pack. The Army didn't issue them anymore, it cost me about thirty bucks but it was great for the field because it held all the little things that a grunt needed but didn't have room to carry while on patrol without his rucksack ~ cigarettes, a lighter, chewing tobacco, candy, sunflower seeds, whatever. A few of us had them and they were envied by all. I reached around and felt inside my butt pack and found a small tube of antibiotic cream that I always carried. Grunts are always wading rivers, creeping through the brush, crawling on the ground, going through briars, and kicking doors. Scrapes and cuts are par for the course. Infection is an enemy, especially when you can't shower but once a month. I opened the tube, squeezed a little of the cream on my dirty finger, and made a "wiping on" motion at my ankle. I handed the tube to Crip and pointed to his ankle. He understood. I also carried a bottle of "Fish Mox" in my butt pack. I had bought it at the post exchange in Germany in the pet section. Fish Mox is Amoxicillin. It's used to treat fish tanks for bacteria. If your fish had bacteria, you dropped some pills into the water and it's supposed to clear it up. It's labeled "Not for human consumption" but combat is combat. Doc isn't always available. Antibiotics aren't always available. Amoxicillin is Amoxicillin. I opened the plastic bottle, and held it out towards Crip. He held his hand out and I dumped a couple dozen of the capsules into his hand. I held up four fingers, "*four per day*" I said. He stared at the capsules and I could tell he didn't understand. The normal dose of antibiotic is about 600 - 800 mg per day for an average male. Each Fish Mox capsule was 200 mg. I didn't have a pen. I didn't know how to make him understand. I looked over at Leader. He was busy chewing and smiling at me. "*Four per day*" I told him, "*one every six hours until they're all gone*" I explained slowly. "*Do you understand?*" He looked at Crip and mumbled something in Arabic with his mouth full, the two exchanged some words and Leader told me in broken English that he understood. Then Crip ate the whole handful of capsules. "*Oh well, he'll either get well or die*" I thought.

Quintin and I started backing away from the three. Leader saw we were leaving them and he reached into the breast pocket of his blouse and shoved his surrender leaflet at us. "*Surrender. We want to surrender*" he said in choppy English.

They had learned that if they surrendered to Americans or British or French they were treated well. If they surrendered to Arab forces, they were abused. After all, they had invaded Kuwait and killed Kuwaiti civilians. Surrendering to Quintin and I was a far better option than surrendering to a Kuwaiti or Saudi unit. Surrendering to a Kuwaiti or Saudi unit meant torture. “*Well, we don’t want want you*” Quintin said. Leader stood up, shoved the surrender leaflet in my direction. “*Look, we’re an Infantry task force. We’re fast movers. We don’t have time for prisoners. You have to go surrender to somebody else*” Quintin told him. I pointed out to the desert, “*Walk that way about two miles. You’ll run into coalition forces. Go surrender to them. We don’t want you.*” Leader seemed to understand and looked disappointed. I handed the bottle of Fish Mox to Crip. Quintin and I and the three exchanged “see ya laters” and started to walk away.

“*Wait*” Leader said, and reached into his trouser pocket. We were comfortable enough with them now not to be alarmed, just cautious. My eyes watched his hand and my fingers reminded me that my rifle was still there. The selector switch was on the safe position. My thumb moved on top of the fire selector switch. This could still turn to shit really fast, and if it did, I’d be able to flip it to burst and fire three rounds within a fraction of a second with one squeeze of the trigger. Leader pulled out something small out of his pocket and poked it towards me. I took several steps forward and took it from him with my left hand and looked at it, nodded, and handed it back to him. He waved his hand and shook his head. He wanted me to have it. Leader sat back down and continued rummaging through what was left of the MRE packets on the ground as if we were no longer there. Quintin and I backed away. Once we were twenty feet or so away we turned around and walked away. I looked back over my right shoulder. Looked like they were smearing jelly on the MRE crackers as if in some excited feast. Quintin and I made our way back through the minefield back to the assembly area. I’ve often wondered what happened to Crip. Did he lose his foot? Did he lose his leg? Did he die from infection? Did he heal up just fine? Crip would be a few years older than me now, maybe sixty, if he survived.

“*What was the item the leader gave you?*” my shrink eagerly asked as if it was the ending of a movie. I shook my head. “*I’m not going to tell you that*” I said. “*I’m not going to tell you because Quintin is dead now. So only me and the three know what the item was that Leader gave me that day. If I ever meet some Arab guy and he claims he was there that day, if he can’t tell me what Leader gave to me, then he’s proved a liar.*” The shrink slowly nodded his head, “*That’s fair enough*” he said and scribbled something on the notepad in his lap.



## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

### The Dreams

They call it a “shotgun” house. It’s a rectangle residence usually about 30 feet wide with rooms arranged one behind the other with a hallway down the center, a door on each end. It was a popular style of house in the United States up until the 1920’s. The “shotgun” is a reference to the idea that if both doors are open, a shotgun blast fired from the front door will fly cleanly to the other end and out the backdoor.

This one was about twenty feet wide and fifty feet long. The three-walled rooms were on my left and right with the hallway down the center. It was night and there were no lights. I turned my head, I held my index finger up to my lips in the “be quiet” sign and shook my head. “Follow me” I whispered to the Iraqi man and his wife and small son. My Colt .45 caliber Army issue 1911 was in my right hand and I held a small penlight in my left hand. The spare magazine pouch on my ALICE belt held two extra magazines. Twenty-two rounds, combat load. I inched forward, the family of three about six feet behind me huddled together. The exit was fifty feet in front of us.

I turned to my right, pistol held in both hands. I pushed the little button in the rear of the flashlight with the thumb of my left hand and the small room lit up. It was empty...my thumb pushed the button on my penlight and the house went dark again. I pivoted to my left. I pushed the little button in the rear of the flashlight with the thumb of my left hand and the small room lit up. In front of me was an Iraqi soldier dressed in olive drab. I squeezed the trigger on the 1911. The flame shot out about 2 feet as the huge slow .45 ACP round knocked him back against the wall. He slid down the wall falling into a sitting position, his head flopped over to the side, blood dripping from his mouth. My thumb pushed the button on my penlight and the house went dim again. We stood there in silence, listening. No movement was heard. I motioned for the family to move forward with me as I proceeded down the hallway to the next room. Pivoting right, I pushed the little button in the rear of the flashlight with the thumb of my left hand and the small room lit up. In front of me was an Iraqi soldier dressed in olive drab. I squeezed the trigger on the 1911. The flame shot out about 2 feet as the huge but slow .45 ACP round knocked him back against the wall. He slid down the wall falling into a sitting position, his head flopped over to the side, blood ran down the wall behind him. My thumb pushed the button on my penlight and the hallway went dark again. Progress was slow and deliberate as we repeated this scene over and over, making our way towards the exit. I could see the exit now. We were half way there. I ejected the empty magazine and loaded a full one.



I turned to my right, pistol held in both hands. I pushed the little button in the rear of the flashlight with the thumb of my left hand and the small room lit up. It was empty...my thumb pushed the button on my penlight and the house went dark again. I pivoted to my left. I pushed the little button in the rear of the flashlight with the thumb of my left hand and the small room lit up. In front of me was an Iraqi soldier dressed in olive drab. I squeezed the trigger on the 1911. The flame shot out about 2 feet as the huge slow .45 ACP round knocked him back against the wall. He slid down the wall falling into a sitting position, his head flopped over to the side, blood dripping from his mouth, blood running down the wall where my round exited his back, blowing flesh and blood against the wall.

My thumb pushed the button on my penlight and the house went dark again. I motioned for the family to move forward with me as I proceeded up to the next room. I ejected the empty magazine and loaded a full one. This continued as we slowly moved closer to the exit. Right, left, right, left, right, left, room by room. Almost there now. Once we get through the door we will be outside, safe, away from the danger waiting for us in all the rooms. We moved along slowly. If I failed we all four would be killed. I pivoted to my right, pistol held in both hands. I pushed the little button in the rear of the flashlight with the thumb of my left hand and the small room...the small room was still dark. I pushed the little button in the rear of the flashlight with the thumb of my left hand again. I could hear the quiet click of the switch. But the room was still dark. Again and again, click, click, click...the room was still dark. My penlight had failed. "One is none, two is one, three is two" my training had taught me. I had only one penlight, now I had none.

I sprung upright in bed. My heart was racing, I was sweating. I looked around my bedroom. It was dim ... just like the last room I had been clearing. The Carolina moonlight cast shadows on the walls. The bedroom was empty.

*"What happened next?" my shrink asked. "We died" I replied. "We all died, and it was my fault. I failed to get this man, woman, and young child out of the house and to safety. We were so close. The exit door was just yards away. Then the penlight failed me. I could no longer engage any targets in the darkness. We were helpless." "How do you know you were killed?" he asked. "I don't know how I know. I just know that we were all killed." "That is a defense mechanism" the shrink said as he wrote something on the notepad in his lap. "Your brain woke you up from your dream to protect you from the trauma of watching your own death."*

Whack-A-Mole. It's a carnival game. You've all seen it. The player stands in front of a small table holding a little cushioned mallet in his hand. The table is about four feet by four feet with holes in the top. Randomly, a little mole doll with pop out of a hole. The player earns points by whacking the mole before he can duck back down into the hole.

The room I was standing in was a large circular room, probably sixty feet in diameter. I stood in the center of the room with my Army issue .45 caliber Colt pistol. The magazine had seven rounds. The spare magazine pouch on my ALICE belt carried two more magazines, each with seven rounds. Including the round in the chamber, all together I had twenty-two rounds. The room was dark except for a spotlight overhead. The game began...I was illuminated by the spotlight above my head. They could see me. I couldn't see them but I knew they were all around me in a circle standing against the wall of the circular room, three hundred sixty degrees. I raised my pistol in both hands. Then just like Whack-a-mole, a small light would come on, illuminating a person standing by the wall, facing me. Within a fraction of a second I had to determine if he was friend or enemy. Enemy...I squeezed the trigger. The light over the target's head went off. The room was dark again. Seconds passed. Then to my right, a small light came on, illuminating a person standing by the wall. I quickly pivoted ninety degrees. My finger took up the slack on the trigger. One more thousandth of an inch and the hammer would fall... FRIENDLY. DON'T SHOOT. It was an Iraqi civilian lady.

The light illuminating the civilian went off. The room was dark again. Seconds passed. Then I saw my shadow on the floor in front of me. A light had come on behind me. I spun around, my pistol in front of me rotating with my body just as we had been taught.

Enemy...I fired two shots...the small light illuminating the Iraqi soldier went out. This game continued over and over and over. To my 8:00, then to my front, then to my 5:00, one by one randomly the moles appeared illuminated. I'd determine friend or foe and fire or not fire. Sometimes the mole was a woman. Sometimes it was an Iraqi soldier. Sometimes it was a child. Sometimes the mole was an elderly civilian man. "Don't shoot the innocent civilians" ... that was the rules of engagement. I ejected the empty magazine and slammed a loaded one into the pistol. Again, to my 10:00, then to my 2:00, then to my rear. One by one each mole was randomly illuminated. "Shoot, don't shoot" they called this range in training. I ejected the empty magazine from the pistol and slammed a loaded one into the pistol. Again, one by one, to my 11:00, then to my 7:00, then to my front. Shoot, don't shoot. And then the slide locked back on the semi-automatic pistol in my hands. It was empty. I had no more spare magazines. Then the spotlight over my head went off. The room was dark.

"*What happened next*" my shrink asked. "*I died*" I replied. "*How do you know you died?*" he asked. "*I was out of ammunition, I was alone and surrounded by enemies all around me. It is the only logical outcome*" I said. "*What were the similarities in both dreams?*" He asked. "*In both dreams I was a lone defender. In both dreams light was involved. In both dreams I died as the result of a failure that was outside my control*" I replied. "*What do you think that means?*" he asked. "*I don't know. I'm not the California Psychic. I don't interpret dreams. That's your area of expertise.*" The shrink scribbled something down on the notepad in his lap. I nodded at his notepad, "*So did you figure out yet what's wrong with me, Doc?*" I asked. "*There's nothing wrong with you, Anthony. You're normal for someone that has experienced the trauma of war. If you didn't have these nightmares and these emotional issues and fears, that would be not normal. It's no different than a woman who has been violently raped, and afterwards, she can't have a healthy intimate relationship with her partner*" he said. The shrink laid his glasses on the table beside him and rubbed his eyes. "*Let me ask you a question, Anthony. Suppose I told you a person walked into this room, walked over to the corner, dropped his pants, squatted down, and took a dump right there in the corner. Would you say that was abnormal behavior?*" "Well, Yes" I answered. "*Now suppose I told you that person was two years old. Would you say it was abnormal behavior then?*" "No" I conceded. "*My point exactly. There is no such thing as abnormal behavior, Anthony. ALL behavior is normal within its environment*" he said. "*So how you gonna fix, me, Doc?*" "I can't fix you. Nobody can", he said. "*Your brain re-wired itself in combat to deal with these unique life endangering challenges you experienced in combat stress. The same way the brains of our cavemen ancestors ten thousand years ago adapted them to survive in an environment full of man-eating predators. You'll never un-know what you know from Iraq. Maybe in the future we'll know enough about the human brain to understand how it works and how we can re-wire you. Until then what we'll work on is how you manage those emotions and fears so that you can live a more average life. You didn't fail, Anthony*" he said. "*The situations failed. You were just the actor who was following your training. People don't fail. Circumstances fail. Your brain inserted you into situations in your dreams that you couldn't possibly win, then it protected you from further trauma by waking you up before you were killed*" he said. "*I counsel Veterans like you everyday. You're perfectly normal for that subset of individuals.*"

*“Here’s your seat”* the Air Force Load Master on the C-141 Starlifter said and he pointed and walked away. The aircraft was empty except for me and two pretty blonde stewardesses in the typical flight attendant black skirts and blazers and white blouses and high heels.

I sat down in the nylon web seat. *“That’s odd”*, I thought. *“Military cargo aircraft don’t have flight attendants”*. I felt the G-forces as the aircraft lifted off the runway and turned nose-up, climbing fast to avoid any missiles or gunfire that might come from the ground. Once the plane got to altitude and leveled off, I looked to my right. The two flight attendants were standing in a little “stewardess” area at the tail of the plane. I got up and walked to the rear of the aircraft and talked with them for about five minutes, then returned to my seat. I don’t know what the conversation was that we had, but the oddest thing … one of those stainless steel toilets with the sink built in was in the stewardess area, the kind like are in prison cells. I returned to my seat and as I buckled the shoulder straps I observed a small pile of “U” shaped wire staples lying in front of my seat, the kind like you buy at the hardware store commonly used to nail wire fence to wooden fence posts. They were strewn about, bouncing around all over the aluminum floor as the aircraft vibrated. A few minutes later one of the flight attendants walked up to me. *“Are you going to pick up those staples?”* she asked. *“No”* I replied. The stewardess turned and walked back and joined her friend in the little flight attendant room that doesn’t exist in the tail of a military aircraft. And then I woke up.

*“Why didn’t you pick up the staples, Anthony?”* the shrink asked. *“Those were not my orders”* I replied. *“But the staples may have caused a problem bouncing around loose in the aircraft”* he said. *“Carry out your orders as they are given. Do not add anything that is not stated”* I recited. *“The Load Master is in charge of the aircraft. If he had wanted me to pick up the staples, he would have told me to”*. *“What do you think that means?”* he asked. *“I don’t know. I bought some wire staples at Williams Hardware last week, identical to the ones scattered on the aircraft floor. The neighbors dog keeps getting out by squeezing between the fences separating our yards”* I said. *“I bought a short piece of wire fence and nailed it up onto the four by four posts to block the hole so she couldn’t get out. It didn’t work. Instead of just walking out of the neighbors yard through the gap, she dug under the piece of wire fence I put up and still got out. My idea didn’t work. I failed.”*

*“I see”* he said as he wrote something down on his notepad in his lap. *“Another circumstance beyond your control. Why were the pretty civilian stewardesses on your aircraft? He asked. “I don’t know”* I replied. *“How is your relationship with your wife?”* He asked.



Leaving for Saudi Arabia, January 1st, 1991

**P**FC Eason and I were in the living room of a house somewhere in Iraq. It had a huge bay window in it that was busted out. Debris and sand littered the room. There was no electricity so it was dark in the room, the right kind of place for a sniper nest. Eason and myself were standing in the shadows facing one another when to my left an Iraqi soldier stood up in the window, his rifle in his hands, looking at us. I immediately rotated left, sweeping my M-16 towards him, my thumb flipping the selector switch to "burst", and fired three rounds. The soldier fell backwards as the three rounds impacted his chest. I looked out the huge bay window and I saw a convoy of humvees about 150 feet away. The soldiers in the humvees had been standing around smoking cigarettes, playing grab-ass, and talking to one another. Now some of them moved into a group and were looking down at something on the ground.

"*Oh shit!*" I said to Eason as I starred out the window at the group of soldiers looking down at something at the ground. "*I didn't clear my backstop before I fired! I shot one of our guys. I was supposed to clear my backstop before I fired*". Eason thought for a few seconds. "*Don't worry about it, man. No one knows we're over here. It's a war, we can just walk away and no one will know. We won't tell anybody.*" "*We can't just not tell anybody*" I replied. "*If I shot one of our guys, we have to tell somebody*" I said. "*Look, this is what we'll do. We'll leave, come around to the rear of the convoy, and we'll walk past the group like we're going to the head of the convoy and when we walk by, we'll look over and see what they're looking at. If it's nothing, like I just shot the humvee we'll just keep walking and not say anything.*" Eason and I walked past the group. By now a fairly large group had congregated, about 20 people standing and looking down at whatever was on the ground. We "rubber-necked" as we walked past but the group was too large. We couldn't see what the group was standing there looking at. When we got 50 feet or so past them we stopped. "*I couldn't see anything. What'd you see?*" Eason asked. "*I couldn't see anything either*" I replied. "OK. Here's what we'll do" he said. "*We'll walk on up to the head of the convoy so we won't look suspicious, then we'll turn around and walk back to the end of the convoy and try to get another look.*" As we walked to the head of the convoy we were about to turn around when I saw a very attractive young black lady sitting in a lounge chair in a bikini. She had one of those floppy beach hats on and was holding a fruity cocktail with a little umbrella in it. "*Y'all looking for someone?*" she said in a soft southern accent. "*Well, sort of. But we don't want them to know we're looking for them*" I replied. "*See that group of soldiers over there*" she nodded her head at the group of soldiers standing in a circle looking down at the ground. "*They're recruiters and they're recruiting men to join the Army.*"

"*What do you think that means*" my shrink asked. "*I don't know. It was just kind of silly us doing that like no one would notice us and everybody was so calm and unaware we were there*" I said. "*What do you think it means?*" I asked. The shrink finished scribbling something on his notepad... "*Uncle Sam uses beautiful women to recruit young men. A beautiful lady sitting on a beach in a lounge chair in a bikini with a cocktail is something you might see on a recruiting poster, don't you think?*" he said. "*Maybe it's a manifestation of your feelings about joining the Army and being sent to Iraq. In your dream, you lashed out in anger at one of the officers who recruited you. I'll see you again next Tuesday. Three O'Clock OK?* He said.

The staircase was long and made out of wood. It went down into a basement of a home in Iraq. We moved down the rickety staircase carefully, each of our rifles pointed in our assigned sector. Just like we did at the urban warfare training in Hammelburg, Bavaria. When we got to the bottom of the stairs we couldn't believe what we saw. There were wooden shelves lined up in the entire basement, like stacks in a library, and all the shelves were full of little golden animals, jewelry, and other trinkets. Then there was a "time loss" in the dream. The next thing I remember of the dream I was standing before Captain Davis who was seated at a desk. "*I'm going to let Sergeant McCarroll deal with this since he's your squad leader*", Captain Davis said. I handed Captain Davis a solid gold clipboard. The kind like you see engineers and such use that have the storage place for forms inside and the metal cover flips over so you can write on it. "*Tell your grand kids Specialist Boyette gave you this in Iraq*" I said and I turned and walked out of his office. Sergeant McCarroll and Staff Sergeant Hargrove were waiting for me outside the Captain's office. "*It's five miles back to the company area*" Sergeant McCarroll said. "*Me and Sergeant Hargrove are taking the humvee back. You're going to run all the way back to the company area.*" Staff Sergeant Hargrove had been a drill sergeant. He had a keen eye for detail. Sergeant Hargrove pointed to my trouser cargo pocket... "*Going to be a tiring jog with that extra weight in your pocket*" he said. I gave him the "you caught me" look and I reached into my cargo pocket and handed Sergeant McCarroll the golden match safe. He took it from my hand and put it in his pocket. "*See you back at the company area*" he said as they got in the humvee and drove away. I smiled to myself as I jogged down the sandy dirt road in "full battle rattle". The sun was hot. I could feel the golden pocket watch on a golden chain that I had tied to my belt loop and suspended inside my trousers bump against my nuts with every stride. It was 3 AM. I awoke and scribbled the details down on the legal pad I had laid on the desk beside my bed so I wouldn't forget it, then went back to sleep.

"*Did anything like that ever really happen when you were in Iraq?*" my shrink asked. "*No. We never went into any residential basements. There was never any room full of gold or anything like that. What does it mean?* I asked. "*You got a gold pocket watch and chain and the only punishment was that you had to run five miles. Hell, you did that every morning at zero-dark-thirty for four years. Who cares what it means*" he said and laughed. "*I'll put you down for three O'Clock next Tuesday*".

# In Memory of

## **Sergeant Michael Morton**

Charlie Company, Task Force 5-5 Cav



Sergeant Morton was my platoon Sergeant in Germany. After Desert Storm he went to Officer

Candidate School and became a Captain. After retirement he returned to Iraq where he was a contractor providing force protection consulting and training to Iraq's new military. Sergeant Morton was one of the best platoon sergeants I ever had. I was there when he married Petra in Germany, and I was there when his first son was born. That son became a United States Marine. Today Michael lies at

Arlington National Cemetery, Section 60, Site 10186.



**Specialist Quintin Mann**  
Headquarters Company, Task Force 5-5 Cav



**Quintin Reynolds Mann**  
Obituary

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Quintin Reynolds Mann, 42 of Palm Bay died July 29, 2011. The funeral will be Friday at 10:00 am at Macedonia Missionary Baptist Church in Melbourne. Buggs Funeral Home is in charge.

Quintin left the Army at Fort Bragg, NC and moved to Florida where he became an emergency room nurse at Sebastian River Medical Center near Palm Bay, Florida. Quintin died in a vehicle rollover in Melbourne, Florida in 2011. Today he rests at South Florida National Cemetery in Palm Beach County, Section 39, Site 297.

***“You buy, I fly?”***

Fourth Squad didn't often eat at the company chow hall on post. Food from the imbiß stand outside the front gate that was run by Uli, the German girl who lived in the penthouse in the Welcome Inn Bar at the front gate of Ayers Kaserne, was a favorite. “Imbiß” in German means “snack”, but it is also a general term for any small food stand or street food shop. Each day at lunch the guy who went to the imbiß stand to get lunch for the team would get his lunch bought by the others that day in exchange for the labor of his half-mile walk. That gave the others the enjoyment of an entire hour lunch to lounge rather than having to spend half of their lunch hour going after lunch. The first time I ever heard the term, I was the FNG, brand new to Germany, and Quintin explained to me how it worked. Some days Quintin would go to the imbiß (fly) and bring back the lunch and I'd pay (buy), other days I would go and bring back the lunch and Quintin paid.

Someday, when I see Quintin again, I know the first thing I'm going to say to him

***“I buy, you fly?”***



# VALOROUS UNIT AWARD

## CRITERIA FOR AWARD

The Valorous Unit Award is awarded to units of the Armed Forces of the United States for extraordinary heroism in action against an armed enemy of the United States while engaged in military operations involving conflict with an opposing foreign force or while serving with friendly foreign forces engaged in an armed conflict against an opposing armed force. The unit must have performed with marked distinction under difficult and hazardous conditions in accomplishing its mission so as to set it apart from the other units participating in the same conflict. The degree of heroism required is the same as that which would warrant award of the Silver Star to an individual. Extended periods of combat duty or participation in a large number of operational missions, either ground or air, is not sufficient. This award will normally be earned by units that have participated in single or successive actions covering relatively brief time spans. It is not reasonable to presume that entire units can sustain Silver Star performance for extended time periods under the most unusual circumstances. Only on rare occasions will a unit larger than a battalion qualify for this award.

*~Department of the Army, Human Resources Command Awards and Decorations*

## AWARDED 5 March 1996 (SPEARHEAD)

“Headquarters and Headquarters Company (HHC), 1st Brigade, 3d Armored Division distinguished themselves by gallantry in action during the period 10 January 1991 to 19 April 1991, in support of Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM. Initially encountering light resistance, HHC, 1st Brigade, 3d Armored Division captured small groups of prisoners and destroyed armored vehicles. Gaining full contact, HHC, 1st Brigade, 3d Armored Division engaged enemy forces in large bunker complexes with direct and indirect fires. HHC, 1st Brigade, 3d Armored Division's overwhelming direct and indirect fires completely decimated the 9th Brigade, Tawakalna Division of the Republican Guard. HHC, 1st Brigade, 3d Armored Division's attack transitioned into a 100 kilometer exploitation. HHC, 1st Brigade, 3d Armored Division's battle formation sliced through successive enemy defensive belts, destroying armored vehicles with marching fires and capturing hundreds of prisoners. The extraordinary heroism displayed by Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Brigade, 3d Armored Division reflects great credit upon themselves and the United States Army.”





REPLY TO  
ATTENTION OF

TAPC-PDA (600-8-22)

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
U.S. TOTAL ARMY PERSONNEL COMMAND  
ALEXANDRIA, VA

22332-0471



5 March 1996

MEMORANDUM FOR COMMANDER, FORCES COMMAND, ATTN: FCAG-IS-S  
FORT MCPHERSON, GA 30330-6000

SUBJECT: Valorous Unit Award (VUA)

1. The recommendation for award of the Valorous Unit Award to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Brigade, 3d Armored Division was approved an as exception to policy, for the period 10 January 1991 to 19 April 1991. The following assigned or attached units are included as well for this award:

3d Battalion, 5th Cavalry (3 Jan - 15 Jun 91)  
5th Battalion, 5th Cavalry (4 Jan - 15 Jun 91)  
4th Battalion, 32d Armor (5 Jan - 20 May 91)  
4th Battalion, 34th Armor (4 Jan - 20 May 91)  
2d Battalion, 3d Field Artillery (6 Jan - 16 Jun 91)  
2d Battalion, 29th Field Artillery (2 Jan - 20 Jul 91)  
Battery A, 5th Battalion, 3d Air Defense Artillery  
(3 Jan - 19 May 91)  
12th Engineer Battalion (19 Jan - 19 May 91)  
503d Support Battalion (1 Jan - 20 May 91)

2. The citation and certificate is enclosed. The individual ribbons (emblems) should be procured through local supply channels.

3. If the unit is a color-bearing unit, the streamer will be authorized by Department of the Army, Center of Military History, Attn: DAMH-HSO, 1099 14th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20005-3402, upon request.

4. This correspondence will serve as authorization for the award of the VUA to be annotated to military personnel records, pending announcement in Department of the Army General Orders.

FOR THE COMMANDER:

2 Encls  
1. (1) Certificate  
2. (1) Citation

*Carole M. Milazzo*  
CAROLE M. MILAZZO  
SFC, USA  
NCOIC, Boards Section  
Military Awards Branch

CF:  
Ctr of Mil Hist  
Cdr, ARCENT



*The  
End*