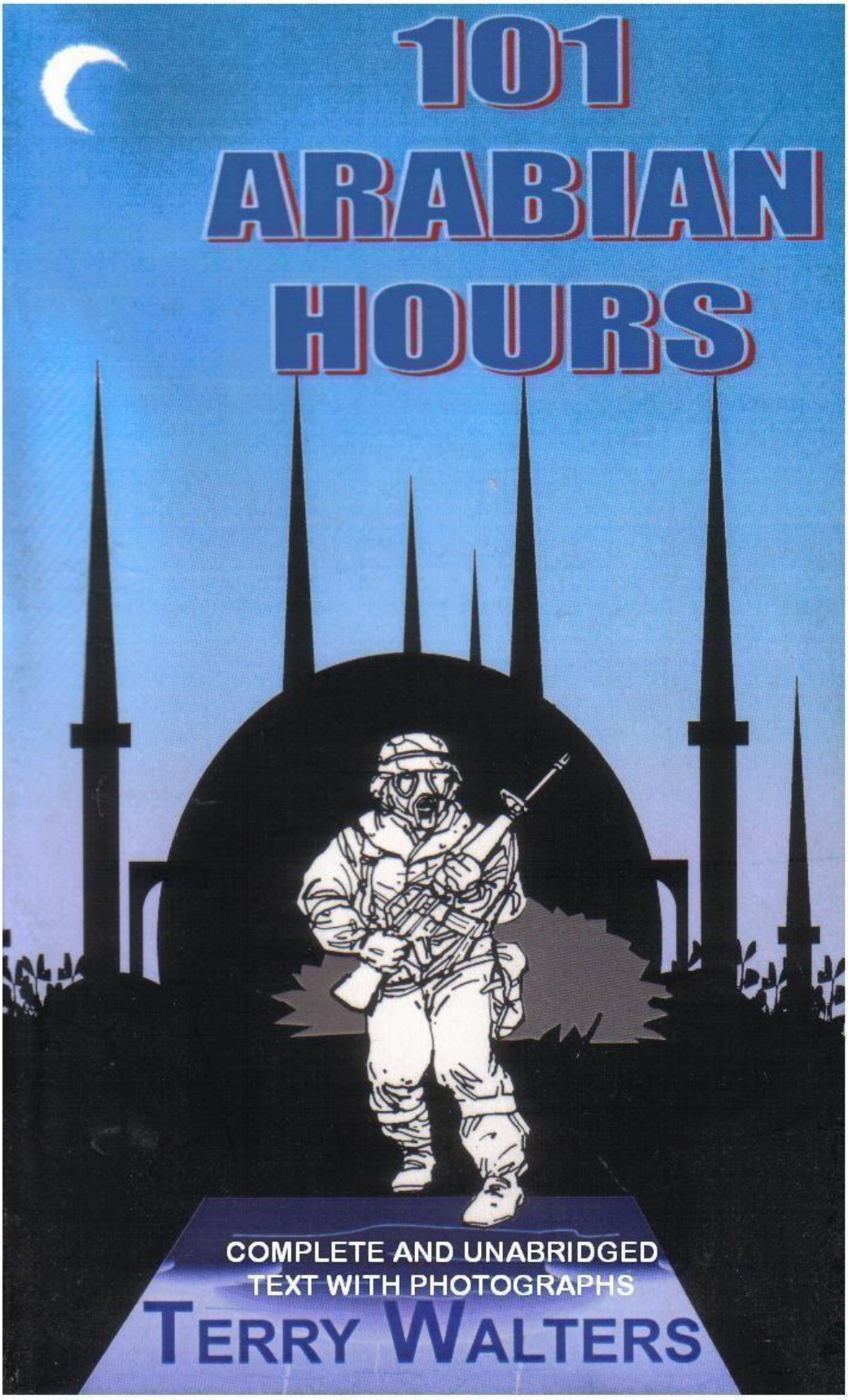
101
ARABIAN
HOURS
COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED
TEXT WITH PHOTOGRAPHS
TERRY WALTERS

101 ARABIAN HOURS

By

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Dedicated to God, Marcie Bryan,
family and friends, and to those
who served

CHAPTER 1

The National Guard is the oldest fighting force in the United States. This is the militia that is referred to in the Constitution- you know, the second amendment- the one that allows possession of firearms. During Colonial times, this group of citizen soldiers was known as the Minutemen. Paul Revere's midnight excursion was directed to those who dropped whatever they were doing and took up weapons to repel the invading British. Throughout history, the National Guard has served in all major wars, most minor incidents and a variety of disasters (natural and otherwise). More U.S. Presidents have served with the National Guard and its variations than any other branch of service. From these beginnings evolves the modern Army and Air National Guard, comprised primarily of trained reservists who answer the call of duty one weekend a month and two weeks during the year, fulfilling a two-fold mission. First, there is security of the state. Then, when Uncle Sam's full-time fighting force gets jammed up, the reserve can be federally activated by order of the President of the United States.

The history of the Guard has been colorful. When anyone mentions the National Guard, some think of the statue of the minuteman, striking a stoic pose , musket in hand, truly prepared for duty. For the most part, however, the Guard struggles with a public-image problem. A good example is the media's concept of the "weekend warriors". The movie "Rambo" showed, for example, several Guard guys unable to contain a single super troop. During the course of action, several soldiers requested to go home for a variety of reasons. Then, there was the movie "Southern Comfort", where ill-prepared soldiers were fighting a real war with rifles filled with blanks. My personal favorite was "Attack of the Killer Tomatoes", where-in fatigue clad individuals were bowled over by mutant tomatoes. Then there was the nasty incident at Kent State University, where students were shot and killed by "overreactive" reservists from Ohio's National Guard. How about the concept of being able literally buy one's way into the Guard? This would have probably kept you from going to war during the Vietnam era.

Even within the ranks of the military, there is that mindset of National Guard- the NG's- the *Nasty Girls*, the *No-Go's*, the *Girl Scouts*, the *Boy Scouts*, *Weekend Warriors*, etc. The book, "The Sunshine Soldiers", was based on basic training of reservists during the Vietnam war. There was no disguising the contempt the regular military had for the part-timers. It seems as though the intense training produced a group of troops just short of military standard. They were undisciplined and somewhat rag-tag in appearance, not to mention that they were probably on their

way back home after basic, while others were preparing to ship to unknown destinies.

With this in mind, one would have to wonder what type of person would, by choice, enter this somewhat peculiar branch of service. Why would a God-fearing man reared with Christian values leave a wife of four months to undergo the rigors of learning to kill and survive in the most absurd of conditions, enduring a variety of hardships and deprivations and learning seemingly useless disciplines from people with very limited social skills? Add to this the fact that there was no requirement to do this.

I enlisted in the Florida National Guard in February 1977. This was in spite of the fact that I had outlasted the draft with a student deferment while in college. When the draft went to a lottery system, I was far enough down the list that the draft had become a non-issue. Still, I felt compelled to serve. My father and brother had both been career military, which I knew was not my calling. But I was driven by curiosity at least to sample the menu. As I boarded the Greyhound bus at Jacksonville for Fort Jackson, South Carolina, I must admit I was wondering exactly what I was doing there. I thumbed through a copy of Ian Fleming's "From Russia With Love" and talked to other people who were headed for a similar fate. I thought of my apartment, which was less than a block away from the beach, where the sound of the surf was always present. The one thing that I would not miss was my job as a "client representative"- or bill collector. In theory, I would be able to gain a new trade through the training I would receive.

Everyone who has been through basic training has his or her share of horror stories. The rumor that we were hearing was that the Army was attempting to make their version of the Marines' Parris Island happen at Fort Jackson. And for the next several weeks, I believed that rumor. The long hours, nasty food-like products, physical training (PT) at a variety of times, classes of infinite boredom, weapons training, nuclear, biological and chemical (NBC) training, endless hours of marching and inspections were but a few of the highlights. Kitchen Police (KP) and other details would cut into the few moments of sleep we thought we were going to get. Days started as early as 4:30 a.m. and terminated when the drill sergeants were tired of messing with us, which was usually quite late. The army is always fond of reminding you that they are only required to give you three hours of sleep per day, and not necessarily in a row. But they were ingenious. Who would have ever thought of using a garbage can as an alarm clock substitute? It works well when waking sixty guys, as it rolls down the barracks aisles. Thanks to ill-fitting boots producing hall of fame blisters and a nice dose of pneumonia, I got to visit the troop clinic and spend quality time at the hospital.

After basic and a week at home, it was back to Fort Jackson briefly for a primary electronics school, and then off to Fort Gordon, Georgia, where I completed my military occupation specialty (MOS) training.

Approximately six months after signing up, I was back at home and assigned to my home station, the 146th Signal Battalion. Here, I learned to use equipment that was, in some cases, so obsolete that there were no repair parts available in the system. My first taste of annual training (AT) aka summer camp, was an education. In the pre-dawn hours of the first day, we stood for inspection and promptly mounted our vehicles. Primarily we were in 2-½ ton trucks known as deuce-and-a-halves. There were also 5-ton trucks and at that time, the jeep or "quarter ton". These fine motor machines had been inspected prior to use by the crack motor pool folks. As we began lumbering through the parking lot of the armory, our vehicles began to disintegrate. Already hoods were up on vehicles that had overheated while the convoy commanders attempted to move the equipment. As we pulled onto the street, the vehicle in front of us lost the passenger-side mirror- a rather large piece. Within several hundred yards, we were using evasive action to avoid a muffler, which had fallen off a truck. This was outdone by a smoking truck exhaust stack, which had also decorated the roadway. Over the course of the next thirty miles of convoy route, assorted vehicles sat roadside suffering from flat tires and assorted mechanical problems. As we hit the front entrance to Camp Blanding, Florida, located near the booming metropolitan area of Starke, Florida, and home to some of the most disgusting drinking water on the planet, pure sulfur, we were told what a great convoy we had! No one got killed…at least in the convoy. Seems as though one individual was permitted to drive a privately owned vehicle (POV) to camp. That night on her way home she lost control of her car. There were rumors she had been under the influence of alcohol. As difficult as summer camps could be, it was preferred to her option.

These two weeks, as with most other military operations, felt like two years. The NBC training phase, which requires all troops to bask in the glory of CS gas (most call it tear gas), was cut short. There we sat in our M17A1 protective masks, sweating profusely. As we waited in 98-degree heat to get our dose of "perfume", we were given the "all-clear", indicating that the threat had passed. It seems a highranking officer wanted to be the one to launch the canister, so he and his driver took a quarter ton to a position slightly elevated above the unit's position. Apparently, he discharged the gas projectile and for whatever reason, the canister failed. It simply rolled into some bushes. The officer now had to go looking for this unexploded device. A search of the area revealed nothing. As he was about to resign himself to having lost the device, the officer's driver managed to find it for him- by

driving over it. As the gas spewed from underneath the tires, it probably crossed his mind that the next time he too should carry his mask with him.

Florida is known as the lightning capital of the world. During a field exercise we sat in our communications vans when a storm began. The storm lasted a long time. Everyone was waiting for orders to shut down, but that never happened. The net result was a member of the Alabama National Guard being struck by lightning while he monitored his station. Both of his ears and the area on his neck where his dog tags lay were burned externally, and he also suffered internal burns. He was flown to Jacksonville for medical assistance. One Major from the Alabama National Guard was screaming at the Army evaluator from Fort Campbell, Kentucky. Some of the Alabama Special Forces members were also irritated with the evaluator. Halfway through the field problem, the evaluator was *suddenly recalled* to Fort Campbell for another assignment. Prior to departing, he stated that we had all done an outstanding job. He was due to leave on Sunday; instead he left on Thursday.

After two summer camps and numerous drills, a logistical problem loomed on the horizon. My wife, Marcie, and I had moved south several hundred miles. Although I was still able to drive to drills in Jacksonville, gas was becoming in short supply, so I began looking for a unit closer to home; the nearest was in Fort Lauderdale. The 149th General Supply Company was housed in an armory built in 1965 and located somewhat near Port Everglades and International Airport. Although my signal training was of no apparent value, I transferred in and began working in a variety of jobs. The members of the unit were easy to get along with. A General Supply unit would set up shop in a rear area in the event of a war. This sounded nice, but just like naval ships, you become a *sitting duck*. On the plus side, the enemy has to find you first. On the down side, that's probably you and your friends gathered under the camouflage screening, surrounded by army stuff, in vague proximity to the bad guy's location. This unit, however, was not prone to routine activation. At least, that was what I was told.

My civilian job was, by this time, that of a cable technician. Soon enough, though, I would be putting the "Support of the National Guard and Reserve" policy to the test. It actually started when Marcie and I were on a one-day getaway to a seaside hotel in Pompano Beach. We were sitting on the balcony, overlooking the Atlantic Ocean, when I noticed a large number of fuel-bearing vessels spanning the horizon. They were grouped together and not moving. We turned on the television, only to find the event on the news. Remember the fuel problem that kept me from commuting to drills in Jacksonville? These laden ships weren't moving because, at the port of Fort Lauderdale there were trucks that weren't moving either. The truck drivers, whose job was to move the fuel from the port to retailers, were conducting

a wildcat strike. As we left the hotel, we noticed inordinately long lines of cars sitting at gas stations. This would lead to the Governor of the Great State of Florida finding our unit's phone number, along with several other units, resulting in our activation. For a week the Guard drove fuel trucks with placards on the side indicating the trucks had been commandeered by the state. It was interesting watching the Guard's Special Forces unit members hanging onto the trucks with one hand, M16's in the other, rolling through the port. My job was at the port with a squad that pulled security details.

It wasn't long after this that hurricane season opened. Hurricane David closed in on South Florida and, once again it was back to the armory. My wife was pregnant at the time, and I was working as a volunteer with the Parkland Fire Dept. One of the unit members was also a fireman. His father was the chief. We had arranged to leave the armory and remain on standby with Parkland. We were deactivated the following morning.

Then came the Cuban Refugee Crisis. Fidel Castro allowed thousands of his fellow countrymen to leave and journey to the U.S. by way of a massive flotilla. People were crowding onto anything that would float and making the ninety-mile journey across the Straits of Florida, straight to Miami. Guess what happened next? Yes, there we were at an armory in Miami, acting as s greeting committee to large waves of humanity. In the midst of these seemingly endless lines of folks were some of Cuba's lesser citizens. Before long law enforcement discovered clusters of inmates and psychologically challenged clientele. Intelligence revealed that some of the worst offenders wanted to call Miami home.

My recall of high school Spanish got me activated one day earlier than the rest. For over a month we housed, fed and coordinated a massive effort to assist these *new folks on the block*. We lived on black beans and rice, Cuban cigarettes-made with cigar tobacco, and a little rough going down- and Cuban coffee. We did a 36-hour shift with no one sleeping. The only problem was that everything had a greenish glow to it.

We were eventually pulled from the armory and sent farther south to abandoned missile sites that were being used as temporary holding facilities. Efforts were underway to expand a somewhat permanent detention facility. People were free to move around these various compounds. Our job was to maintain order. Other than a few cultural differences, things went fairly smoothly. Those who needed to be isolated from the general population were. There were rooms that had law enforcement as hall monitors. In Cuba, the police wore fatigues. As this just happened to be our uniform at the time, the people had a healthy fear of us.

The biggest problem was that there was no place for us to hide after hours. Most irritating was that the state had rented a variety of hotel rooms for our use, but in true military fashion, they did not provide a means to routinely use them. I did manage one night at a hotel. Air conditioning, clean facilities and television- what a thrill. The only problem was the room was only available for five hours. Realistically, though, all we really wanted to do at that point was sleep.

Finally, the day came when our services were no longer needed, so we dragged our sorry bodies and brains home. A week later we were at drill once again Miami was in the news. Racial tensions were mounting over an incident in which police allegedly beat a black man to death. When the system failed to punish those thought to be responsible for the death, Miami literally went up in flames. At the conclusion of the drill, the unit commander, in a veil of nervous humor, told us not to overindulge in partying, as we could be called up. We were told, however, that we would only be activated if things were totally out of control. By late night, someone at the state level was able to define what qualified as "out of control".

Once again, we were at the armory. This time, we were issued weapons, live rounds, bayonets, flack jackets and face shields. This was looking serious. In the early morning hours, we were told that our convoy would not receive the escort from law enforcement as scheduled because everyone was busy in the impacted area. Swell! We mounted the convoy and proceeded southbound on Interstate 95, as we had done so many times before. This time, however, everyone was armed and riding tactical in the motor movement that took us to Miami Stadium. As soon as we had dismounted, we were given instructions and divided into squads. We were given an hour to sleep. I found the bleachers to the right of home plate to be some of the finest cement on which I have ever had the occasion to sleep. Very firm.

In the pre-dawn hours, we consumed food that, according to one source, was being condemned as it slid down our throats. It really didn't matter, as long as we had coffee. We quickly mounted our vehicles and proceeded to an area in Miami known as Liberty City, where we assumed our positions and began directing traffic. It was a truly confusing and bizarre situation. Two blocks from our location, someone had attempted to drive through a heavily guarded intersection and was shot and killed. Another similar situation resulted in the sparing of the individual. His car, however, paid the price. So, there I was standing at this intersection which was fully loaded with fellow guardsmen. To my right was a tire store, which was spewing flames and toxic smoke. On my left was s shell of what once was a gas station. Amazingly, the water was still running from a hose on one side of the building, which we could use to cool down. To my rear was a gutted Mom and Pop grocery store. In the parking lot was a car that had been overturned and set on fire.

It was here that various police SWAT units came to pose for pictures. The other corner had a fast food chicken outlet. To the disbelief of many, they had not only been spared, but were actually doing business- and there was a line at the drive-through window. Then, in front of me a video journalist chose to lay down in the street and shoot up toward me. I'm sure I must have looked sixty feet tall. I believe he was with the British media. I would be interested to know if this shot was ever used. (I did see my picture in Miami Magazine shaking hands with other soldiers as I cruised with others in a military jeep-a sort of *General Patton with the guys* type photo.

Meanwhile, a group of people carrying rocks and bottles was approaching our intersection. It was at this moment that I was thinking that I could just as easily have sat at home and watched this whole thing on television. We were preparing to do business with the advancing crowd when a small police unit became involved and discouraged them with smoke grenades.

As night fell, we were trucked to another intersection. Most of us had at least two magazines of ammunition. In some cases, the police gave us additional rounds. Here, I spoke with one of my fellow troops who told me how was guarding an area with particularly good target potential for the rioters, with a total of two bullets. I know he was thrilled.

We were finally relieved from our posts, mounted a truck and were making our way back to the stadium. As we proceeded through the area, we heard a popping sound. Although we may never know for sure, the sound had one of two origins. Some thought it may be engine backfire; others just knew it was gunfire. In any case, there was a rapid dismount from the truck and a tactical move to seek cover. As I jumped from the truck, my protective mask slipped out of its carrier, as did that of another soldier. I quickly claimed what I thought was my mask. The other guy never did find his, but we managed without them. After several moments of stopping everything that moved, police arrived and secured the scene, allowing us once again to proceed back to the stadium. When we arrived, I though of Sir Winston Churchill, who once indicated that being shot at and missed was a most exhilarating experience. Amen!

We were taken from the riots the second day, where we were guarding an old folks' home. Then we were sent home. No, it was not out of the goodness of their hearts. By the end of the week, we were packing for summer camp in Fort Drum, New York. I can recall my civilian employer asking me if I was going to ever have the time to work for him again. The only thing I learned in two weeks while at Fort Drum was that, in the army, a veterinarian is an enlisted person who inspects the meat you eat. At least we had the weekend for a boat ride into Canadian waters. It

would have probably been nicer had there not been record cold temperatures that we Florida folks were having to play in. From fry to freeze to back again. I suppose this is one reason our entire clothing issue went with us everywhere. We did have a small problem in that we had two persons attempting to run the unit. Our regular Fist Sergeant didn't make the camp, leaving two diametrically opposed individuals to argue at the front of our formations and issue conflicting orders. Quite entertaining. Because of the cold, we had activated the furnaces in the barracks. We were told by Fort Drum personnel that we couldn't do that, as it was no longer winter- as defined by the army. Our response was not one of agreement. Even the radio weather guy was telling us it was alright to shiver when the temperature was twenty-six degrees. In the end, after much dialogue, we were permitted to heat the rooms.

The following year produced a major renovation for the unit. We were now reorganized as the 743rd Maintenance Company. We were now a Forward Direct Support (Fwd DS) unit as designated by the Guard. To the Army, we were simply Direct Support (DS). Either way, it meant that if we should end up going to war, we would have the opportunity to tour with the frontrunners.

After being assigned to various jobs, the first order of business was training. We were flown to Fort Lee, Virginia for a tow-week crash course on our new assignments. We traveled and trained with another unit- the 149th General Supply Company, now based in Miami. This was not a happy group. For years, they had been a Military Police (MP) company. Now, they were performing less exotic duties. While there were no overt plans for mutiny, their attitudes reflected a given amount of disgust.

My job was to go to school and advance through the module levels as quickly as possible. Military training is somewhat different that the real world. You are given books and learning material based on a given block of instruction. As you complete one training module, you are rewarded with the next level of material. If you don't get to the next level, no goodies for you. Each day I would take the material and test out on the level. I was trying to get through what was really more than two weeks of material. After school, there was marching, PT and affiliated fun. In the morning, there were formations and announcements. It was announced one morning that an investigation was underway to determine who exhibited his displeasure with our summer camp by defecating in the showers, referring to the gesture as "animalistic". It was off to the PX for some better shower shoes. During one afternoon formation, we were rushed back into the barracks for a shakedown inspection. Someone decided to pack a handgun in his footlocker- for show and tell, perhaps- which is frowned on. It was quite coincidental, I'm sure, that it was found

in the second locker inspected. It was back to the PX to see of there was any ballistic sleepwear on sale.

As a unit, we spent a lot of time in the traditional *front leaning rest* position. Most people know this as the *push-up* position. Apparently, no one had informed them that after basic training you could not be required to assume the position unless the leadership was willing to join you, which, in this case, they did not. It was also the only pay call line I stood in where the Sergeant-at-arms stood near the line with a military 12-gauge, looking as if he wanted a reason to use it. I was under the impression he guarded prisoners for a living.

The next couple of years provided little in the way of activity for the new unit. There were the usual drills summer ATs at Camp Blanding and Fort Stewart, Georgia. The one notable difference was an immense increase in what the Army calls rolling stock- things that move on wheels or track. As a maintenance company, there were repair personnel for every common army item. Among others, there were the mechanics, armament and small arms specialists, communications and electronics experts. There was even a canvas repair shop at one time. Additionally, there were the supply, mess and administrative sections common to all army units, all of which required vehicles. There were also the support services such as production control and my platoon, which handled stock control and common repair parts supplies.

I must admit there was one summer camp where I managed to distinguish myself in an unusual way. We were in the middle of a field problem, approaching the evening meal on one of those typical Florida summer days- hot and humid. Two of us had volunteered to cover the perimeter points while the assigned soldiers went to chow. We had both decided that having a radio playing music was good. Unfortunately, the Army didn't care too much for the idea. We took our portable radios and carefully rigged the wiring through our uniforms and into our steel helmets. Inside the helmet were the headphones, which covered the ears and eliminated other noises. It was great. We were each enjoying our tunes with no one the wiser- or so we thought. As we stood by our positions, the black female Army Captain who was our evaluator, approached. No problem, I thought as I had made provisions for just such an occasion. All I had to do was unplug the headset from the radio, and I could manage very well, thank you. The problem arose while I was attempting to grasp the plug. It was stuck at such an angle that I couldn't disconnect it. Now, the evaluator was on top of me, so I reported, as is Army custom. She then asked me a question, but all I could hear was the music blaring from the radio. I could see her lips moving, but it wasn't in sync with the music. I had no idea what she was asking. Apparently, she was asking me if I had a range card for the position

I was manning. I had responded by telling her what day of the week it was and giving her a brief forecast of the weather. The expression on her face told me we were not communicating. In the meantime, the other soldier had managed to get rid of his radio and was prepared to speak with the evaluator. After inquiring about my mental capabilities, she asked the other soldier the same question about the range cards. Although he was simply sitting in for someone else, the evaluator had him doing range cards for the balance of the camp. I don't believe she and I ever spoke again. My platoon leader, a second lieutenant, did have some comments. They were not uplifting.

As the unit expanded, there were vehicles and jobs for eventually hundreds of troops. Although my primary job was in the area of "tech supply", which encompassed stock control and repair parts supplies, I found myself appointed to the Nuclear, Biological and Chemical warfare section. Despite minimal training in the area- there was no one school qualified in the unit- I was appointed noncommissioned officer in charge of the section. I eventually completed a course in NBC defense, but that dealt with only the most fundamental aspects of operations in an NBC environment. Still, there was training for the NBC unit as well as required training for the troops. During one annual training period, our NBC training unit was sent to other units to assist in their training, at the request of our Army evaluator- in this case , a captain from the Puerto Rico National Guard, who liked the way we did things. What was awkward was training Vietnam veterans who probably knew this stuff better than most. I also had the opportunity to train troops for civil disturbances.

Every year, we issued riot gear and beat each other up on drill time. It was great.

As there was a push for basic soldiers' skill training, I spent an immense amount of time preparing and executing the fundamentals for the unit. There was also the administrative upkeep that was required- specifically, the paper work. In the meantime, the had changed leadership, and there were many other changes taking place. With the introduction of computers, the manual system I had learned was being phased out, although there was the feeling that there would always be a need for non-electronic back-up. With most of my time devoted to training, my section job became that of trivial contribution and, as a squad leader, dealing with personnel problems. Over time, the leadership would again change and become more computer oriented.

We were once again at annual training, going through the motions and jumping through the hoops as we always had, but we sensed a more urgent pace in the training. Our evaluators were not as bent on the war games as they were in seeing

the section as a whole performing well. The politics normally affiliated with camp were seemingly minimal. I engaged the evaluator in an informal conversation as we worked in our office- trailer. We were wrapping the AT period up. He wanted to know- more so than previous evaluators- that we had what we needed to perform and maintain operations. He had indicated that we could be going to war. Now, we had heard this at every summer camp. However, there was a conviction in his voice that captured my attention. Although it was said that only a handful of Pentagon-type individuals were aware of plans for the future, I had to wonder if the evaluator's manner was strictly fortuitous.

CHAPTER 2

Summertime in Florida is a swell time. Again, it marks the start of hurricane season, hot days, hot nights, high humidity and the endearing sounds of female mosquitoes attacking you and your barbecue. I have also notice a general mood swing in the public- that of heightened irritation, aggravation and manners befitting barnyard animals. This was especially important to me, as I had been working as a police officer for the city of Boca Raton since 1981. By 1991, I had been firmly established for some time as a marine officer, which involved riding around in a boat all day. Okay, someone has to do it. I would usually work the day shift and be at home in the evenings eating dinner and watching the news. Usually, there would be the normal rapes, murder and mayhem that so delicately embrace the region; however, there was a budding interest in stories being filed from the Middle East. It seemed Iraq was creating a small global issue by walking into the small but oil-rich country of Kuwait. There have, of course, been moments of unhappiness in this region since the beginning of time. In fact, Iraq had just been at war with another neighbor, Iran, and was not playing well with other countries in the region. The surrounding Arab world was trying to reason with Saddam Hussein to pull his troops out and go home. The stories of atrocities being committed to the people of Kuwait began to expand into nightly news coverage. President George Bush was beginning to publicly condemn their actions, stating that the United States and its Allies demanded an immediate and total withdrawal from the region, and indicating that a diplomatic solution of the region's problems must be reached. Hussein, however, indicated that he was not moving. Apparently, there were those in the Pentagon who knew, long before things began to manifest themselves, that we were going to be gearing up for a conflict with Iraq. One problem with this area was military intelligence- meaning we had little. Although we had our allies in the area, such as Israel, information was difficult to usurp from a culture quite foreign to ours.

The threats were getting more serious as the evening news was now devoting the majority of its coverage to an escalating situation. It was apparent that top negotiators were having no luck in convincing Iraq's defense forces to leave. Instead, there were more invading troops following the road to Kuwait, with fortifications being developed and long term military provisions being put in place. At home, President Bush was now stating that he would be looking to the United Nations and allied forces to seek support should military action become necessary. Several of the nations indicated that they would love to help out. Our staunchest allies, the British, had some of the best desert fighters on the planet. We had an arsenal stockpile and new war toys that had never been battle tested.

Meanwhile, on the home front, everyone was asking the same question: Why should we get involved in someone else's civil war? We were being told that we could not stand by while countless people suffered and died from injustices being delivered from such a menacing satanical force. It was generally assumed, however, that justification for military intervention actually would evolve around greed. After all, with the Middle East in turmoil, the flow of oil (the Babylonian whore?) could dwindle and obviously paralyze a nation based on mobility and comfort. Each night, efforts to peacefully resolve matters deteriorated. The war talk volume was getting louder. Some even wanted God to take sides, claiming this could become a "holy war". Now, matters were becoming personal. The talk was that if the U.S. were to activate its military, there would be a need for reservists to supplement regular forces. At our drills, people were becoming more serious. We heard well- placed hints that if a deadline for a peaceful solution were to come and go without resolution that our unit could be in the mix. Then, there was the possibility that, if activated, we would simply remain stateside. Our unit would replace the staff at Fort Stewart, Georgia, while they went to war. But most of us decided that, if we had to be activated, then we would rather "pay our money and take our chances" overseas, even though we really didn't want to be activated at all.

But peace was not breaking out as we had hoped. In fact, it became painfully evident that military action was eminent. Plans to put the big war machine into motion were now being executed.

One Wednesday evening, I sat in front of the television with great frustration, watching the drama unfold. Everyone at work was asking if we were going to be deployed. I had no answer. Every ring of the telephone caused a bit of minor panic. Finally, the phone rang with due cause. The voice told me that I was to report to the armory as soon as possible. I donned my uniform quickly and drove the distance, wondering if this was it. Upon arrival, I was told that I was to prepare the NBC equipment for transport. After inspection of the devices, it was decided that while the equipment had served well as training aids for the unit, it wasn't designed to be real war material. So the paper work began, declaring all of our stock as "unserviceable". My conversations with the several other troops, who had also been brought in for the night detail, continued to hold out for a pre-war settlement. Or maybe, because this was hurricane season, Florida Governor Bob Martinez would find our state mission as a priority, and not throw us under the bus. I left the armory with no answers, but one of the sergeants from our higher headquarters who found himself attached to us stated that he didn't believe that we would be going anywhere. The following night, I was back at the armory, again with the NBC equipment. The sergeant from the previous night approached me. "Remember what I told you guys

about not being activated? Well, you can forget that." Although not exactly what I wanted to hear, I had been listening to the news all day and I could have predicted this.

Our regularly scheduled drill weekend had arrived, but it was no longer a status-quo event. There was an air of unusual tension and presence of an unusual high-ranking *brass* in the armory. I was once again training the troops in NBC, this time with greater audience enthusiasm. Suddenly, questions pertaining to potential mask problems increased big time. Another indicator was tables throughout the armory being set up for paper processing. But the real clue was from the company commander, Captain Andrew Grimalda. During a formation before the troops , he stated, "I don't have official word yet, but be thinking activation". Even after the drill, we were making lists of what to pack: tooth paste, deodorant, clean socks and underwear- and I suppose I should bring my military issue. The one piece of equipment I thought would be of considerable value was a portable international short-wave receiver. With short-wave radio a passive hobby of mine, I found listening to Radio Cairo interesting. If nothing else, there was potential for program variety, some of which was in English.

We knew we were definitely going when we attended drills on a Wednesday and Thursday. Another clue to ponder was having family members attending the drills also. As the kids played on the military vehicles and ran about the armory compound, there were military dependent identification cards for issue, paperwork to complete, and last will and testaments to authenticate. Also present were military doctors, lawyers area support personnel and family support folks. As the drill concluded, we were set to go. Diplomatic resolution was the only thing that might prevent our activation, and that didn't seem likely to happen. Even thought the state of Florida had a much larger and full time maintenance unit sitting in Starke (near Camp Blanding), it was decided they were essential to the home front. Governor Martinez had given the green light to clear us for federal duty. We were out of excuses, alibis, logic and hope. Formal invitations- called orders- were given to me and nearly two hundred of my closest military friends to attend a war. The orders began "…by the direction of the President…" and were initially issued for a period of ninety days. These orders were quickly amended to read six months.

In the early morning hours of Saturday, October 13, 1990, there was a formation for the members of the 743rd Maintenance Company. The armory was jammed with family, friends and supporters, the 13th Army Band, media, police, (who would provide the unit an escort to the interstate), along with hot and cold running high ranking officers. There was an emotional presentation, highlighted by sobbing, weeping and long good-byes as the unit mounted the vehicles and began

driving out the gate toward the start of the journey. At least, that is what I was told. Shortly before four o'clock the previous morning, a teary-eyed wife dropped off a slightly uptight soldier at the rear door of the armory. There was a brief good-bye as I carried the two well-packed duffle bags onto the floor of the well secured building. As I crossed the threshold, I was Sergeant Terry Walters, United States Army. Inside, the rest of the company was slowly assembling. There would be a formation for attendance and work would begin.

In any collection of people, work is best produced within a framework of teamwork and chemistry. The Company Commander, Captain Grimalda, was fairly new to the unit. He was a West Point man, Ranger trained, who gained the trust of the unit members. Hank Obester was the First Sergeant. He was a former Ranger sergeant and Vietnam veteran who made his way through the ranks at our unit. Although he came across as aloof, and was prone to yell and scream, he obviously cared for the members of his company. Sergeant First Class John (JD) Steele led our platoon. Steele was, in my opinion, the quintessential platoon sergeant. He was a black man with a square build and a voice quality and presence that indicated that he was in charge. Within his domain was our section, Stock Control.

Unlike most sections, there were actually two of us in charge. Sergeant Chris Allen was a young enthusiastic guy who had been with us for a short time. He had been present at our last summer camp, and did very well. He was knowledgeable and pick things up quickly. This was evidenced by the fact that, as things began heating up, he was sent to learn a computer system that was anticipated for use by our section. The only problem was that he was pulled out of the school shortly after it began. He was given a literal library of system technical manuals and a handshake as he was sent back to our unit.

Sergeant Mike Reno was a school-trained military computer repairman whose job was to maintain the same system that Allen had just been to school on. What was unusual was that Reno had just left active duty and had transferred to our unit. His first drill was assisting the loading of vehicles bound for war.

Sergeant Beamon Rich was a rather reserved black soldier who happened to be a fellow law enforcement officer- a deputy sheriff for Glades County.

Specialist Joanne Gilbert had been with the unit for quite a while. She was familiar with one of two computer systems used for our section and was with Sergeant Allen at the computer school. She too was a quick understudy in addition to being a very nice person. Although she was always being reminded that she was a blonde, she possessed a personality that could handle it. She had been a bride of several days when we were activated.

Specialist Freddie Twiggs was a young black man, pleasant by nature and by no means a rugged individual. I remember talking to his mother, assuring her that we would look out for him.

Specialist Konrad Rowe was an import from Jamaica. His military experience began with the Jamaican Defense Force. He was loquacious and at times loud, but a capable soldier none the less.

Private Bill Way rounded out the section. Way was somewhat undisciplined but when gainfully employed could get the job done.

I met with my section briefly before formation and then loaded my gear into a waiting vehicle. I had been assigned to the advance party, placing me on the road a day early. I was actually glad to be getting a short head start and missing the ceremonial departure the following day. After a day's travel north, we spent the night at Camp Blanding. There were always hassles when arriving at the state's military reservation. Probably it was just their way of showing everyone who was in charge. On this occasion, they had been told to dispense with the custom and get us whatever we needed for the night. The following morning, we waited for breakfast to settle and the dense fog to lift before we began the last leg past the Georgia Welcome Station. By noon, the short convoy entered the domain of Fort Stewart.

We had been here before, for summer camps. Like Camp Blanding, they had rude rust-flavored drinking water in the barracks. This was a large infantry post and home of the 24th Infantry Division, including armored vehicles and the "Desert Rogues", specifically trained for desert warfare. This was also headquarters and home to the Georgia National Guard. Usually, we would be sent to the Guard barracks, which were older structures, isolated from view and with generally wanton conditions. This time, we reported to a centralized staging area with hopes of slightly improved facilities.

As we stepped from the vehicles, we were met by a detachment that, during our formation, began with "You are now in the United States Army. The first thing you want to do is remove those earplugs from your uniform. They belong on your LBEs (load bearing equipment)." From there, it was a series of time schedules, briefings and establishing housing and meals. There would be getting the customary salutations, such as, "You're in the wrong dining facility. We don't have enough provisions to feed you." There was marching to and from meals and the "You don't walk on the grass here." Just reminders that we were not at home. There were defined places where one walked or ran. But whatever we would do, it would be wrong anyway.

The following day, we were placed in strategic areas of Interstate 95, waiting for three convoy movements. They were running a little behind schedule as a result of the big send-off from Fort Lauderdale, but all went well- almost. Two of the three movements had cleared. We sat and waited and waited, but soon it became apparent that something had gone wrong. Darkness was closing on a motor movement due earlier in the day. We were eventually brought back to Fort Stewart, missing a line of vehicles. Later, as the well-overdue troops arrived, a story circulated as to how someone had lost the balance of the convoy and eventually came in through a different gate. At the final formation for the night, our rather large and *happy* family was *all* present and accounted for.

Over the period of the next several days, we acclimated to "real army life". There were the initial formations and bussing to and from the dining facilities for breakfast. There were flurries of paperwork related to mission preparation. It was then off to lunch and back to work until we were released back to the company area. Then, after dinner, it was back to the company area where we undertook some of our basic combat skills. The true field training would not take place for a while. Communication with the outside world was sparse. Phoning home was only in short spurts late at night. There would be lines everywhere. Once connected, we would have about five minutes to talk. Some of the guys were receiving "Dear John" threats and promises from their wives, while the rest of us simply found out what was going on at home. There was little availability of newspapers, but that was one reason I brought my radio. Perhaps they didn't want us relating to incidents, such as what happened to the Oklahoma National Guard. They had been activated, but their paperwork did not reflect reality. As they drove to their activation station, they were literally drafting people from the roadside. It was incredible to see how many people responded to the aid of their country, even if they didn't have the proper training or experience. Of course, once this was noted, they were sent home. Again, the Guard had worked its way into the headlines. There was suddenly a mass of individuals claiming to be conscientious objectors. Many people find God when they feel they are about to meet him.

One of our first orders of business required us to offload every piece of equipment from every vehicle we owned. With some units, this was no major deal. With us, this was a monumental undertaking. We had already completed loading plans describing everything we owned, down to its weight and location on the vehicles. But, the Army is somewhat skeptical about taking someone's word. So, everything that we owned was taken off, placed in large bays, stenciled, accounted for and packed again. We were told that once we were activated that we would receive new equipment, including weapons and masks. That proved incorrect.

Everything we brought, we took with us, praying it would work when we needed it. By this time it was obvious we were not simply replacing the folks at Fort Stewart. We were going to war. As the trucks were unloaded, they were painted. The green vehicles would enter the paint bay and emerge with sand camouflage. This took a while, but the paint dried quickly. This operation did, however, add to the long days. There were times we didn't get to the dining facilities, but for times like these, there was the on-post Burger King. This was the closest thing we had to a *night on the town*.

When packing tons of equipment in someone else's place, there arises confusion over what was brought and what was already there. Anything not properly stenciled prior to our arrival might be *inadvertently* packed in our vehicles. There was a fine line between incidental misidentification and what we in the military call *procurement* or undocumented supply activity. After all, we were talking about numerous 5-ton trucks, 2 ½ ton trucks, HMMVs (aka Hummers), all with trailers jammed full of stuff. Plus, we were working with people who knew nothing of the materials we had. Consider, for example, the plight of the common refrigerator. Perhaps we had one when we arrived, but maybe not. The fact that the device was cold to the touch might have been a clue that it wasn't ours, but then we could have plugged it in to keep it cold. Who knew? Our adage became, when in doubt, pack it. Perhaps of more questionable intent was a certain window-model air conditioner. According to legend, this unit was taken from the office window where it was installed. In fact, the unit was still plugged into the wall as it was yanked from its spot. One of the parties laying claim to the raid stated that he saw other people in the immediate area and was controlling panic until he realized it was some of our guys from a different section with the same thought in mind. As we were not allowed to bring devices such as this from our home station, it seemed this would be a standout item. How could one explain it? Several items we were directed to load appeared to be foreign matter, but our job was to do as we were told.

As the days passed, we established our barracks and social orders. The American and Army flags hung halfway in the barracks, which was somewhat near my bunk. I had a bottom rack, which was conveniently placed around some of the more normal soldiers of the lot. At one end, there were clusters of soldiers who didn't get along well, which resulted in lots of screaming and an occasional fight. One fellow woke up one morning and found his hair missing. Someone had dumped hair remover on him as he slept. Despite saving the man the cost of a haircut, he stood in front of the formation swearing vindication, assuming he could find the responsible party. Every night, there were bunk checks, as we were in lock down. At first, there were those who were appointed the task, but it seems some of their

friends were rumored to have escaped. These troops would hit the rack, then use their duffle bags and pillows to create the illusion of someone asleep in the bunk, and head out to undisclosed locations.

At the morning formations, we would be briefed on what had to be done during the day. Anyone who had a birthday was hauled before the front of the formation as the unit sang "Happy Birthday". Eventually, I would spend the morning of my 40th birthday in front of this makeshift choir. My wife told me shortly afterwards that she had sent me this birthday card that was six foot tall. I told her I never got it.

There were also people from other areas attached to our unit. One such person was Staff Sergeant Terry Bradford, who came form a small town near Tallahassee where he worked in law enforcement. His job was to establish, train and run the NBC section as he was school qualified and well versed on the subject. He was also able to obtain equipment that really worked. He spent many hours getting the soldiers squared away. Many times drills were conducted involving Military Oriented Protective Posture, or MOPP gear, used in contaminated areas.

Once the vehicles were packed, they were secured and packed for shipping. The next phase of activity was preparations for operations in the war, including the daily dose of PT and NBC training, complete with a trip to the "gas chamber". We held classes on camouflage and concealment, including how to eat in a tactical environment. We were taught to identify enemy equipment and we spent time on the range qualifying with our weapons. We had force field marches, where we strolled through the terrain of upwards of eighteen miles. Sergeant First Class Steele always became somewhat irritated when he saw virtually every female in the unit riding on the sag wagon., which was designed for medical transport. They were laughing about the fact that they were unable to complete the march due to a variety of foot and leg problems. There was little sympathy from the guys.

One day an incident occurred involving a female soldier who was notorious for passing out in the heat. We were in the field attending classes; it was hot and humid, and this soldier predictably fell out. Another of the troops, a male nurse by trade, was going to assist her. As she was regaining consciousness, he stood over her. He had removed her Kevlar helmet, but had not removed his. The last thing she saw was this helmet sliding off his head, approaching her and slamming her in the head. She was out cold again. This time when she regained consciousness she began screaming.

There were the sounds of crying agony radiating throughout the forested region.

After a night move, some soldiers were missing. A frantic search of the area revealed nothing, so the leaders were planning what to do next when it was

discovered that the *lost sheep* had managed to find their way to the NCO club. As I recall, there was a price to pay for that stunt.

There were classes on land navigation featuring military maps and compass work. There were classes on what to do if you became a prisoner of war, how to eat, drink and relieve yourself with your MOPP gear. Flash cards were used to identify foreign aircraft, fin flashes- I assume these are only useful if the planes are sitting still- as well as tanks, weapons and survival cards the same size and format as playing cards. Even the regular playing cards bore survival information. For those of us who needed them, there was the issue of the not-so-fashionable optics known as birth control glasses. With the sunglasses, we could at least partially hide.

We were also given classes on customs in the Middle East. The females were agitated when they learned that they were, in essence, property. For instance, if one could afford them, one could have as many as four wives. Some other items of interest included the hand signal affiliated with signifying everything is alright. Over there, this is seen as putting the evil eye on someone. Crossing one's legs with the bottom of ones shoes facing someone else tells them that you feel they are beneath your feet. We were told of the headdress indicating social class and that people with no right hand had probably been caught stealing. The left hand is used for sanitation purposes, which is why you only shake hands with right handed folks. There is, however, a very low crime rate in the region.

As training continued we were aware that not everyone was going to be deployed. As a unit, we failed tank simulation. Hold it, guys! We are a maintenance unit and some of us could barely fit in those things, never mind driving and fighting in them. One member of my squad, Sergeant Beamon Rich, was eventually sent home, but returned to work to a hero's welcome. Every day when busses or trucks transported us to our work site we would pass a certain parking lot. The cars there belonged to a select group of soldiers. They had either suddenly disappeared and were classified as Absent Without Leave or had developed a desire to be re-classified as a conscientious objector. We often wondered if these folks were ever found and deployed.

Then came picture day. Everyone marched to, and posed in front of, a sign and tank at one of the entrances to Fort Stewart. Surely on everyone's mind was who would be missing from the token photo when this episode was over. Even my wife had resorted to a similar tactic prior to our activation, as my mother-in-law snapped a family moment with my wife and child, the dog and me, the "departee", be it temporary or otherwise.

During the heart of training, our unit was given a family day. Just a few weeks prior to this, we had severed ties with our families and left for war. Most assumed

that they would be reunited after this thing was finished. As the invitations were being extended to rekindle relationships *just one more time*, I contacted Marcie and we decided that this was not necessarily a great idea. Why engage in this great weekend, only to have that departure feeling thrown back at us? Some were truly less fortunate. At least two, in addition to prepping for war, were being advised that their wives were filing for divorce. What great timing!

On Thanksgiving Day, we ate a rather splendid meal and reflected on the immediate past. Training was, for all intents, complete. Most of us, if we hadn't before, were praying before meals. Chaplains found themselves more popular than ever. It was during this phase that we were doing more busy-work. I had also been selected to train as a combat lifesaver. This gig required a couple of days learning the fine art of administering intravenous infusions, which I managed during testing despite seven cups of coffee just prior to the practical, which left me a tad shaky. We also received a medic bag filled with everything from cold pills to several atropine injectors used in NBC environments. Just what I needed, more equipment!

Early one morning there was a formation conducted at the side of the road next to our barracks. We formed a single line and saluted as our vehicles proceeded to the Port of Savannah, where our equipment was to be loaded onto a ship destined for the Middle East. The rest of us had some down time. For the most part it was a mulling around and speculating the future. In the last few days, we played football, softball and volleyball to pass the time. There was a second unit that had been activated at the same time as us, the 325th Maintenance Company from North Florida, whose barracks were nearby. For some reason, we did not have positive karma flowing with them. In fact, things were at times hostile. We did face them in a football game, and all that developed was a greater path to misunderstanding.

As we were busy packing what we could to avoid that great last minute rush, I looked around the barracks. Some appeared truly ready to go; obviously others were not. I was reminded of a working definition of the term *hero*, as seen by Harry Hall, my father-in-law. This was not the person you would read about in history's pages who confronted the enemy with a near reckless approach, and was prepared for fate's delivery. It was the lonely soldier who sat in a dark foxhole, who was truly scared out of his mind, but yet was willing to stay and fight because it was the right thing to do. Some of each were in the room.

CHAPTER 3

Finally, the big day arrived. All of the preparation was now going to be put to the test. It was off to chow, where we engaged the 325th Maintenance Company unit in some last minute jousting. Sergeant First Class Steele ended up in a shouting match at the front of the chow line as both units jockeyed for pole position. Hey, we could have saved the government many dollars and simply had the war at the dining facility. For the record, we won the duel and the other troops were sent to a second door. Everyone was talking about going first in line, as they had a plane to catch. I suppose no one anybody that we were all headed for the same location, on the same plane. Then there was the task of cleaning the barracks. Usually this is an event where the inspectors can delay departure by finding candy wrappers jammed into the bunk bed tubing. And usually this is the forethought when you really want to leave. There was a final mail call where I was presented with, among other things, my sixfoot tall birthday card. I had nowhere to pack the thing, so I eventually folded it and placed it in my backpack until I could find storage for it. It was early afternoon before all items set outside the barracks were being loaded onto transport trucks. The inspectors arrived and conducted an unusually cursory glance at what had been home and quickly gave us a thumbs-up. Then it was time to board the bus. The accountability aspect that is beat into every soldier during the non-commissioned officer's academy was featured as we loaded the bus *alphabetically*. Once we were on, we were on. While this process took time, we knew that from this point on this routine would play out for virtually all occasions.

The bus pulled out from the housing areas, passing the theater, bowling alley, fast food restaurants, laundry, tailor, base exchange, commissary, holding and work area and the weapons ranges with which we had become so familiar. We saw the "Welcome to Fort Stewart" signs in the rear-view mirror as we rolled down a two-lane of sparse traffic. The next welcome mat was displayed on arrival at Hunter Army Air Field, which is also the home of the Airborne Rangers. There was excitement that one can imagine similar to any adventurous undertaking. We were looking sharp in our new battle dress uniforms (BDUs) which were sand colored. There were Jewish soldiers in our numbers. As a precaution, they were given the option of changing their names on their uniforms. We even had the freedom to wear our hats in any style we chose. Several of us chose the Australian lift of the flatbrim hats. Although desert boots, fabric and sand colored, were available, the soldier paid for them. There was a rumor that there would be an issue of these boots once we were *in country*, so I chose to wait.

We were moved off the bus and routed into a huge hangar where we were divided by rank. We ate and then ambled about for a while as the jumbo jet was serviced. We were given water and told to start drinking as much as we could consume, which we did. The troops were formed up as the boarding call was given. We stepped from the hangar and climbed the ramp, accepting the smiles of the crew, and found seats on Tower Air's military specification 747. The biggest difference between this and civilian models is room- there is simply less of it. The seats are smaller and less wide than regular seats. This normally wouldn't be a problem, except for all our gear, including all our battle issue, plus our weapons. After all, we were headed directly to war.

Once on board, more bottles of water started down the aisles. Our evil sister unit sat in a different section, but as we went airborne, we all walked around the cabin getting acquainted. This was a movie flight, and there were magazines, card games and competitive water drinking to keep us occupied. Most of the activity revolved around the bathrooms. All of the water we drank had to go somewhere, so there was a reason for standing in lines. At times, there was a one-hour wait. This would become a problem as we touched down in Bangor, Maine. Although the aircraft was stopped, the troops were still going. There was no getting off the plane for fear someone would not return, so everyone on the plane paid the price. There was a rumor that a warrant officer from another unit had *engaged* one of the female flight crew members during the flight. If this was fact, someone must have been using a hidden bathroom. Despite this, water continued to be wheeled down the aisles. The second stop of the journey occurred at Brussels, Belgium. Once again, the same situation arose with the bathrooms. There were some things to see as the flight continued. For me, the most impressive sight was that of the French and Italian Alps- actually more Italian than French. Although I was afforded a fleeting glance at the Matterhorn that became Disneyland's visual landmark, the French refused their airspace to American flights. This was to be the case until Iraq said something bad about the French, at which time they too became involved.

It was during the last hours of the flight when fighter aircraft planes became visible on both sides of our aircraft. Not to worry, says the pilot. This is an escort accompanying us until we touch down.

In the dark morning hours, as the plane was descending on final approach, we could see military aircraft sitting on the tarmac near hangars that bore the rather distinctive markings of the Saudi Arabian Air Force. As we taxied to our final stop, we passed garbage bags around, quickly filling them with empty water bottles. The ramp was wheeled up after the customary delays, and we exited the aircraft. There are those who claim that we never traveled to the moon and that the entire event was

staged by the media. If that were the case here, I would have to give the stage hands and prop people credit. Descending the ramp, I noted an individual wearing a headdress. Our First Sergeant, Hank Obester, had sternly warned us about referring to the locals adorned as such as *rag heads.*

I was tasked with taking a small squad and removing the mountain of duffle bags from the aircraft and moving them over to trucks for transport. Having accomplished this, we joined the company at a staging site some distance from where we had landed. We stood in the middle of a black sky surrounded by generator activated light sets, watching the organized confusion.

Exactly how we were selected for our mission again, goes to rumor. We had a lieutenant, Mary Stermer, who knew the officer who was cutting orders foe deployment while we were at Fort Stewart with the 325th Maintenance Company. Captain Grimalda was given an option on the mission. Supposedly, during the flight over, it was his choice to have us in the field, while the 325th would take up a position in buildings in the city. It would come to light that Grimalda's decision was the right one. It was at least an hour later when we boarded a bus. The seats were plush and bore the Mercedes-Benz logo, but the bus didn't really run that swiftly. We were rolling across a variety of road materials, mostly dusty in composition. Periodically, we would see an established roadside security point monitored by soldiers manning M-60 machine guns. We were approaching a location that appeared well fortified. The bus stopped at a gate guard post. Small talk ensued at the front of the bus as another soldier walked the length of the aisle, doing a headcount and cursory observations. After a short delay, the bus doors shut and we crept down a series of dirt streets, which were lined with rows of large tents. The bus pulled to our section and we proceeded to exit the bus and offload our duffle bags. We hastily assembled after securing our goods and after brief information was exchanged, we bedded down. As the sun rose, so did we. We were now part of the populous of *Cement City*, located near the city of Dhahran and in proximity to the port of Damman. This was going to be the primary living facility for most of the troops deployed in what was now being deemed Operation Desert Shield. We had chow and began arranging our new digs. For the first several days, we were left alone to acclimate. One of the reasons we were brought in was that we were from a comparatively hot climate, although I must admit Southern California's Death Valley would have been better preparation. Temperatures were routinely around the 120-degree mark. It did get nice in the evenings, and as a desert, things could get very cool on summer nights. Among the rows of tents were those bearing "For Sale or Rent" signs, along with enterprising ventures, the best being advertised as a bus depot, complete with bench and mileage to a variety of destinations.

First, there was the issue of establishing housekeeping. Then there was a matter of making a routine. Everywhere we went we carried our weapon, protective mask and MOPP gear. Sanitation was in a small wooden structure, similar to the *johns* at American construction sites, complete with flies. Cement city was literally that. It was an American investment on this huge piece of desert floor that was converted for the cause.

We were not assigned any post details for several days. The fine tradition of boot polishing was pitched. They wouldn't look like anything after two seconds, and other boots were to be eventually issued. Sergeant Allen, Specialist Gilbert and I had paperwork that had to be completed for our section. Although there were a few moments of tension among us, things were quickly resolved and by nightfall, they were usually caught up. In the evening hours, after chow, most of the soldiers were ready for a shower. The problem was moving many troops through shower point with limited resources. The solution was to stand in line for up to three hours and play in the shower for exactly three minutes, after which you were then hustled out. If you were toward the end of the line, chances were the hot water was long gone. My military experience had shown me an alternative which after time became the norm for several. There was bottled water ("purified by reverse osmosis" according to the only English printed on the label) available in quantities beyond count. The army wanted it to be consumed, so I did. I would also take a bottle to one of the lovely latrines and proceed to bottle bathe as well as possible. It was, perhaps, not as fulfilling as a shower, but I came away somewhat cleaner and definitely refreshed. I also shaved at night to avoid the morning rush around the makeshift shaving stations. Here, bowls of water, sometimes heated, sometimes not, were supported by a counter area and makeshift mirrors, located right outside the tents. Early on, as a reminder that this was a war we were attending, we were hustled into our tent and told to standby. The officers went from tent to tent hurriedly, almost breathlessly yelling at us to have our MOPP gear ready and to standby the end of our bunks. We were told to dawn our masks and be ready to go to MOPP 4, which is the highest level of preparation. Our suits were readily available in sealed packages and opened at a moment's notice. As we looked at each other, we noticed two soldiers having problems. One had problems getting the mask on. It had fallen to the ground. Eventually, it was retained. The second incident kills soldiers. It is known as panic. One soldier began to fall apart, talking in nervous tongues, finally being assisted by one of the soldiers near his bunk. Naturally, our soldier who passed out when the weather was hot, dropped out, but not before getting her mask on. She would have at least continued to breathe. Others would not have been so lucky.

Things did work out, however, as the alert was issued an hour and a half after the incident, according to our sources.

The food lines were unique. Companies were dispatched to chow on a time clock basis, made necessary by the thousands of soldiers. As we passed through the line, it was noticed that servers didn't talk much. For the most part, it wasn't that they were antisocial. It was a language thing. There were people from every neighboring country cooking and serving. Communications were accomplished primarily by hand gesture and grunting noises. Sri Lanka and India seemed to provide the largest part of the work force, but there were folks from everywhere feeding our troops. Breakfast was usually consumed directly behind the tent where we got our food. Lunch was MREs, known to most as "Meals Ready to Eat. We preferred the acronym "MRPs", or Meals Ready to Puke". Dinner was served in the same tents, but was eaten in a mess tent, which could house all of the serving tents.

By day, folks amused themselves in a variety of ways. There were even reporters from the Miami area who had made it to our location. One soldier, Private First Class Lee Becker, was a budding musician and had written a song about the war. While accompanied by Lieutenant Mary Stermer, cameras recorded the cot-side concert. At night, soldiers could cluster around one of the coffee and tea stations that were set near the movies. It was nice sitting in the open air, drinking, smoking, relaxing and watching recent movies on a large screen, with the desert as a backdrop. Details were not too extreme, and were rotated from company to company. I was called on once to assist in a cleaning detail and it really wasn't bad. There was also the detail that required us to go throughout the tents and provide a slat count. The slats were used for flooring and were sometimes stolen. The toughest of the details was the Ready Response Team, a 24-hour security detail that was in essence like a police SWAT team. Throughout the shift, the troops were trained to respond to various hot spots and provide supplemental firepower in the event of an enemy security breach. By the end of the shift, the troops had been sent to numerous sights we well as providing security along the perimeter.

There was, of course, the main entrance, which was always a matter of delay when entering. Directly across from Cement City was the Arabian version of the convenience store. As alcohol was strictly forbidden in Saudi Arabia, folks would amble across the street in an attempt to find other vices. The closest thing they would have to alcohol was soft drinks, which we already had in abundance, and fruit cordial, which tasted much like Vicks Formula 44. It was fascinating to see American products in Arabian packages. Coke and Pepsi were still identifiable by color, but the logos were in Arabic. There were cigarettes of many varieties and, like virtually everything in Saudi, they were imported. The popular local cigarettes

were brought in from India, and truly smelled like burning marijuana. I was a smoker at the time, and I brought a lot of tobacco products from stateside- some for use, some for barter- but it was a while before I adjusted to these things. No, they didn't produce a high, which was fine with me. There were several other places we could go if we could catch one of the commuting trucks or busses, including a large PX facility located near to town. The street signs were in Arabic and English.

Our massive amounts of shipped equipment had reached the port and were secured in a holding area until needed. Some of the unit had already been sent forward to get things settled. At last, we were hesitantly preparing to leave our secured hold and began the journey to a staging area. The drive took us inland to Camp MacArthur, an expanse of tents off the main road known as MSR (Military Supply Route) Dodge. Our first night found me assigned to guard duty along with several troops, with me in charge. First Sergeant Obester had convinced me that he needed "…someone who knows what they are doing out there…" for the first night. Right! Let it be known that when the sun disappears in the desert, the sky is black-very black. As a modest amateur astronomer, I was getting myself literally lost in the December sky. Even the obvious constellations such as Orion were more difficult to see as the skies were loaded with celestial properties that I never knew existed. As the night progressed to early morning, we were aroused from a brain numb state by noises coming from the vicinity of the mess section. We were some distance from the tent and had to move, quickly but quietly, toward the source of the noise. During our little jog my feet introduced themselves to each other, and the silence of our mission was interrupted as I gracefully slammed to the ground. As I was collecting myself, Sergeant First Class Simon Barnes, our mess section sergeant, stepped cautiously from the tent. Busted! But, when feeding nearly two hundred troops and guests, I suppose you do rise earlier than most.

Once again, we busied ourselves with establishing home. In supply, there are things that are available that are perhaps not common issue items. Or perhaps no one thinks to order these items, or is unaware that such an item exists. That would include me. But those who had operated on the full-time side of the house were fully aware.

For some reason, our tent had the goodies. In essence the soldiers, up to and including the brass, simply moved their cots into their tents and began stowing gear. There were issued shelter halves, ponchos and mosquito bars that divided the living space into approximately ten spots. There was clothesline for hanging clothes and forming "walls" and footlockers that doubled as tables or desks. Cardboard boxes were generally used between the ground and the cot. We, on the other hand, had a legitimate canvas floor, which no one else had ordered. We had also come into

brightly colored office dividers that we fashioned into separate living cubicles. We took storage bins and used them as drawers. Specialist Rowe, who was dubbed "Jamaican Power and Light", ran us leads from a generator, and split the leads to our ten *rooms*. Here, at night, one could enter the tent and visit whomever they chose, with privacy. Usually, there was the smoke of incense spiraling from multiple sources as radios played the local FM easy listening station, or eventually, A.F.R.T.S. (Armed Forces Radio and Television Service). Or, in my case, the short wave radio as I searched for a signal in English that wasn't being electronically jammed. The officers and First Sergeant, who were escorted through our domicile, hated what they saw. But, it was hate built on envy. "Camel Lot II" became a frequent place for after-hours visitation.

With the house looking good, we began putting our house in order. The interior was set up quickly. The only variation from normal operations was providing a spot for Warrant Officer Candidate Christina Durocher. She had been a unit supply sergeant. Normally, supply sergeants are E-5s or regular sergeants. She was an E-6, Staff Sergeant, and was given the "WOC" designation and assigned to our effort. She was diminutive, but a very knowledgeable person and easy to get along with. Our trailer sat in a configuration to other trailers in our platoon. The biggest undertaking was that of placing camouflage screens and netting over the various vehicles and workstations. In this situation, we were not attempting to be invisible in the desert. We were trying to provide a little bit of shade and comfort from the heat. Once completed, there was a matter of generators that had to be connected and maintained. At one point, the temperature reached 127 degrees- even a tad warm for folks in Florida. But, as we were a computer operation, there would be need for air conditioning. We were going to use a small unit that we had, uh- come upon- inside our tent. At the rear of our trailer sat a refrigerator. While these things were not necessarily authorized items, I don't recall anyone complaining. After all, we truly were a sharing bunch.

At the company level, we had to fill sandbags and secure all common areas as well as the living quarters. We were rich in resource and it was here that I learned how to truly pace myself. What was nice initially was that there was a work stoppage after hours. This was primarily due to generators being shut down, so the enemy wouldn't sneak up on us. We also began forming perimeter guards and fighting positions. After evening chow, after sunset, troops made their way about using the blue and red lenses provided with their flashlights. Anyone showing standard white light would be remanded by voices that probably created an even bigger risk. It was during these times when I gave astronomy lessons. Those interested in the natural things that were in the sky approached me.

Meanwhile, the 325th Maintenance Company had distinguished themselves and placed themselves in the national media spotlight. Once they occupied their facilities in the heart of a heavily populated region, they quickly removed the existing flag and hoisted the American flag. Big mistake. When they were told to remove it, they said “no”. Then came the media, the protesting locals, and orders from higher ranking army folks. Finally, the flags were returned to their original positions. Certainly, the call to take our unit to the filed was proving to be the right choice. Over time, the 325th’s mission included painting other unit’s trucks in the paint motif we loved.

CHAPTER 4

Camp MacArthur quickly expanded. Normally a battalion is formed from about four companies, usually from the same location. In our case, we were integrated with army reservists and other National Guard units to form the 541st Maintenance Battalion, with leadership being provided by a major from Fort Riley, Kansas. Although I had been told of administrative problems generated by our association, there was little effect on the troops in their day-to-day operations. Work continued as we made our little place in the sand as fortified and livable as possible.

Still, the objective was to fight a war. We had already established ourselves with KMMC, a distribution center for our supplies located on a major road among other industrial buildings. Inside this vast complex was everything we would need to provide our services. Once inside the small front entrance, we noticed a canary cage. These are swell pets to have when conducting business in a location prone to chemical warfare. The theory is that regardless of other warning devices, should the little fellow appear to be sunning himself with his feet up, it is time to mask. As we worked around the clock throughout the complex, we noted other birds stationed at various spots.

Shortly after returning to camp, Sergeant Allen and Specialist Julio Tobar were going on a field trip. A computer known as the DAS 3 had been located for our use. This was a monster office jammed with high-tech items that rolled inside a trailer identified by the huge air conditioning units mounted at the front. The duet left early one morning and drove to the Air Force base where the trailer was located. They returned a day or two later with the DAS 3 in tow. In the late afternoon, as they dismounted, Specialist Tobar ran over to where I was standing and exclaimed "Hey, you know all those hours of NBC training you had us doing? Thank you." Sergeant Allen echoed the sentiment, advising that the trip wasn't without incident. They had arrived to pick up the unit late at night and before they had done all the paperwork they headed toward the trailer. They were given a bad time by those inside the dining facility as they were offending the garrison-based Air Force personnel. They weren't clean and smelling nice like those who had access to facilities. It soon reached a point where the sergeant who ran the dining apologized to them facility set up an area where they could eat and not be harassed. They were tired and simply wanted to get the 5-ton tractor attached so they could leave.

As they were working, the base NBC alarm went began blaring. Instinctively, both donned their protective masks and, while racing to grab the MOPP gear, managed to open the rear door of the trailer. Once opened, they got inside and closed the door. Here, they stumbled over each other in the total blackness of the walls of

the wheeled office. They waited for what seemed forever, until they finally heard a knock on the door, advising them that all was clear. The trip back went without further problems. I am not a paranoid person, but I spent most nights in uniform with my boots on. I noticed that several others had adopted the same practice.

Days were devoted to improving our fighting positions. We had a guard gate at the front entrance to our company area. It was here that we found unique clay that had some type of fossilized impressions. The stuff was thick and hard. At one point, I was trying to fashion chess pieces out of the clay, but it became brittle and turned to dust. We had to play on chessboards that were purchased or provided. I arrived in country with a perfect chess record. I had never won a game in my life. Many nights, we battled it out on the boards. My record remained in tact. We initially had crude showers, but bottle baths were, at times, all that were available. Even after cleaning up, we were back in the same nasty uniform and MOPP gear, which would again cover us in charcoal. Alcohol wipes proved very handy. It was interesting sleeping with a rifle as a bedmate.

Security details were eventually extended to a listening post which had been placed inside a hill, and provided an excellent view of the area. It was from this vantage point that I was sitting one morning, gazing into the hills. I thought we might have been the first people to ever occupy this little spot on the earth. As I continued, I noted movement in the distance. It was a tank, one of the friendly types. Another, and yet another, until it soon looked as though the hills were alive with this ant-like trail of Bradley fighting machines. Other convoys of every size and shape of tank followed. I have no idea how many millions of dollars proceeded on this trail, which lasted a long time, but it was truly impressive. For the first time, I was getting a glimpse at the size of this adventure.

Our company was fairly good sized as a stand-alone unit, but our presence was virtually inconsequential in contrast to the big picture. I had been told that my brother, Jack, was somewhere in country dealing with some of the electronics that guided these machines. Although we never met, we were actually close to each others' sights.

There was an effort to install trip flares on one perimeter, warning of intruders. One morning, we observed smoke rising from the activated flares. Everyone began running to the perimeter, only to realize that the *enemy* was a wandering group of Bedouins whose camels found the flares irresistible.

Often, in the pre-dawn hours, we were pulled from our tents and required to perform a battalion-wide *stand-to* inspection, where we took our places at predesignated locations on the perimeter. We even had our own reaction unit that barreled to their positions in vehicles, ready to reinforce hot spots. Once the

inspection was concluded, it was off to chow. One sense of security was visible from an adjacent hill, where a Nike missile battery posed- great neighbors to have. There were a few people who, over time, would be exempt from duties involving weapons. This courtesy was extended to those who had threatened others, up to and including First Sergeant Obester. These folks were assigned a variety of tasks, which were not necessarily popular, but were essential to the company. They could assist in handing out weapons, but that was it. The company supply was constantly issuing and receiving M-16s around the clock. This was a headache when the entire company had to draw rifles in the pre-dawn hours; especially when there was a hurry to get the stand-tos over with. It was usually cold and they lasted too long. There was also a police siren that was used as an emergency warning device.

There were other people attached to our unit, including a small group of Inactive Ready Reserves (IRR)- who were no longer inactive. Although they were not attached to our section, there were plenty of jobs they could handle. Staff Sergeant Terry Bradford, our NBC attachment, had set up shop in the back of a small trailer, where he issued our NBC alarms and detection kits, and insured all the folks had their atropine injectors. As a combat lifesaver and NBC team member, I spent time with Bradford. We both smoked pipes, had similar interests and jobs, and compatible personalities. Also attached to us was a civilian, Mike Billington. Mike was a reporter with the Fort Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel who was a military vet, a Ranger during Vietnam days. With the exception of the rifle, he had the same issue as the soldiers. He would gather his story during the day, and fax his stories in the evening. Staff Sergeant Joe Dwyer had a column that was submitted on a weekly basis, letting the folks at home know we were surviving.

Fairly frequently we received mail from home. My wife truly knows how to write. I would also receive personal mail from a few close sources. But for those who had none, there was the *Any-soldier* mail. This arrived in bulk and was inspiring. There seemed to be an interest in what we were doing, which was quite the contrast to the Vietnam days. This was a great public relations deal that kept everyone busy. My son, Bryan, even had a writing pal from the 82nd Airborne Division.

There was a video tape recorder and movies that were supplied by the military for morale. I did notice that most of the videos were war-based. We made audio tapes for the families at home, as they took less time to prepare. The USO even had us making videos for the folks at home. Some were somber; mine was not. Entitled "The Uncle Terry Show", I was able to feature some of my friends and co-workers in a "Tonight Show" format. Although the show was confined to a single stateside television, it was well received.

There was even a rest and relaxation spot designated for the troops, known as Half Moon Bay. On the day we were to go, we were awakened before the rest of the troops. After a ride to battalion headquarters, we boarded the bus for a day away from the grind. We found it a bit bizarre walking around a recreational site with all our military issue. I can appreciate Israel's Defense Force, which has long conducted this lifestyle. We had access to a swimming pool and a variety of shops. The major problem was an electrical failure, which shut down a large portion of the attractions. I spent most of my time standing in line for a boat ride in the Persian Gulf. In light of my boat-oriented day job, it was only right. We spent about twenty minutes or so seeing the local sights from the water.

Late in the afternoon, the electricity was restored and our troops selected movies as the afternoon activity. After perhaps fifteen minutes of film, I was summoned to the projector room to use the public address to gather the troops, as we were leaving. I was surprised that no one wanted to kill me. We were soon back on the bus and, after a nice meal at a large mess hall nearby, on our way home- that is until the bus stopped about half an hour later. After finding the problem, it was announced we were out of gas. It wasn't long before some passing troops gave one of our passengers a ride to a fueling facility. An hour and a half later we got enough gas to return to a fueling site where we refueled and then returned to the camp.

There was a second R&R adventure available. This one would appeal to those who had not had an alcoholic drink since activation. As an alternative, there was non-alcoholic brew, but for some, this wouldn't do. So, there was a getaway to the nation of Bahrain. Unlike Saudi Arabia, alcohol was permissible there. Some of our troop were given the opportunity to consume their reasonable limits. There were card games and other activities to pass the time. Interestingly enough, this activity was available to all branches of service, and to everyone's bewilderment, there was little trouble. The Marines were there in mass, but were well behaved. In fact, some of the folks from the Air Force created the only problems. But problems were short-lived, as military police found alternatives for those out of control.

When dealing with the military while using a civilian brain, one gets creative. Most of the members of our unit had different day jobs and skills than their military assignments. This not only diversified the talents, but formed a large pool of resources. We had construction workers, electricians, plumbers, carpenters and a non-union labor pool, along with the materials to develop. There were those who were tasked with building a long-term shower facility. While there may not be a standard for such a structure, this would have been it. In a location slightly remote from the living area- first berm, turn right- stood a shower point that could rival the pyramids for inspiration, and was considerably more useful. There were walled-in

stalls, each with a separate showerhead that would deliver hot water at moderate pressure, being delivered by a generator outside. On a daily basis, troops were already delivering fuel to the vehicles and generators. There was an added detail now to obtain water in the same manner. In the center of the structure was a long counter, which could accommodate several shavers. The drainage formed a pool outside, which was quickly sucked up by the thirsty ground. There was even interior electrical lighting. Elsewhere, candles were used, usually secured in spent water bottles for the tent. In fact, the water bottles proved to be one of the most versatile items. They served as cereal and hot beverage containers, fuel funnels, mini-shovels, paperweights and keepers of souvenirs, among other things.

Everywhere on earth there is natural weather phenomena. Some places are prone to flooding, tornadoes, hurricanes, etc. Here, it is the dust storm. With no weather forecasters attached to the unit, we were at the mercy of the elements. There was only the view of the horizon, obstructed by a curtain of sand, which would blow through. It was during these episodes that we tested the theories of tent fortification. I must admit that, in general, we did quite well. There was the occasional collapse of a tented structure, but quickly all hands pitched in to secure and reinforce "home". These breezes were frequently in excess of sixty miles per hour. Usually, the outhouses got it first. Yes, there were those occasion when troops were conducting visitation when the storms hit, bringing new light to a moving experience. There was one soldier who was technically assigned to my section, but spent most of her time assisting another section. She was a nice person, but her short fuse landed her on a detail of little desire. Every day she would lug five-gallon diesel fuel cans to the latrines and pull the buckets of waste from under the structure. Her job was to add diesel fuel, burn the contents and place the bucket back under the structure. She eventually developed a system, which prove to be expedient. One day, another female soldier was called on to assist in this function. She performed the job as prescribed, with one exciting difference. In lieu of straight diesel, she added regular gas, resulting in quite the explosion, which left her only dazed, but nearly blew her eyebrows into memory.

One morning I was pulling guard duty at one of our posts. For the most part, this was a fortified hole where I was standing. Without warning, the structure collapsed. It must have created quite a scene, as there were troops from everywhere running to our location. I was still in the hole, with people asking me if I was all right. Yes, I was fine and yes, I could have pulled myself from the mess. However, I had been waiting for nearly half an hour for the water to boil for an instant cup of coffee. I wasn't moving until the water was ready. Now, according to Sergeant Allen, there was a lieutenant who had taken charge of the extraction efforts. He

asked if I was able to exit the hole. I said yes, but not until the water was ready. As I was responding, the water boiled and I quickly fixed the coffee, then stepped out as rest of the hole began filling in. As repairs began, Sergeant Allen approached me, laughing, reminding me that I had disobeyed the lieutenant's command. I soon began drinking cold coffee, which really wasn't that bad.

I spent several nights with others, working guard duty after renovations were completed. Incidentally, this was the same lieutenant who had brought magazines from home. Pornography was prohibited in country. His contention was that his bondage periodicals did not fit the definition of porn, as there was no activity depicted. Further, he stated that it was an instruction manual for unique applications for nylon rope and tape. No one challenged his definitions.

The unit was drumming up limited business and providing emergency repairs to our attachment from the 24th Infantry. We had soldiers driving through the desert to our location in search of repair parts. As we had office space, normally we would invite visitors in and allow them to relax a while. One morning a vehicle approached us, which was not unusual. Someone stepped out of our van to greet the visitors, the quickly retreated and said hurriedly, "Don't let these guys inside the van!" There were voices outside that indicated business as usual. Soon enough, the door opened and there was a sigh of relief as everyone in our office asked "What was that all about?" The soldier pointed to the rear of the van. "I just didn't want them seeing the refrigerator. After all, it's theirs".

Christmas arrived and there was a large gathering of troops inside the mess tent as we ate a well-prepared dinner meal. Usually, after being served our meals, we would exit the tent and sit on benches under the sky, eat and then either retreat to the mess tent to watch movies or mosey back to our digs. From there, it was usually off to the showers or we would amuse ourselves by our bunks. On this occasion, as we did for briefings, we sat or stood in the crowded room while Captain Grimalda gave us a goodwill speech, indicating that the Christian faith was given us in a location actually not that far from where we were. There were a grab-bag variety of gifts distributed, along with seasonal music provided from talent among us. Among the gifts received from the states were, for sum, rum cakes. It wasn't that the cakes were baked with rum. The point was that there were bottles of rum, which had been inserted inside the cake, sneaking alcohol into a dry country. Yes, there were those among us who were feeling no pain. Overall, the party was a nice event that ended with me going off to guard duty. Conversations were primarily spiritual in nature, even at the guard duty posts.

Guard duty was a learning experience. If working the main gate, there was the customary use of passwords and greetings for those visiting the complex.

Occasionally, one of the locals would approach the main entrance, primarily out of curiosity, and usually on foot while maintaining a safe distance. There were the occasional civilian cars that would drive a safe distance toward the checkpoint, but they usually turned around when the guard approached them. There was even the request for roadside assistance. As far as I can recall, no one asked us for directions. Cars were frequently seen disabled along the roadside. Most of them were Mercedes Benz. There were also busses of the same make unoccupied, with the keys in them. There was even an understanding that, if one could start the bus, it was alright to use it. That rumor was put to rest when military police arrested GIs who subscribed to the theory. Incidentally, American and Japanese cars seemed to be the most desired cars among the locals.

Our listening post in the hillside was not bad. The problem was that we were locked in for the shift. Smoking was accomplished in a tactical mode. We lit our cigarettes under a poncho and then sneaked the lit end into a spent soda can, leaving no visually traceable light. Bottles were used for relief, and someone insured candies were always available. Coffee was always supplied in containers holding plenty of fluid. There were even spare MRE bags and magazines for use during the day watch. A field phone was used to report to company headquarters.

Eventually, we picked up a third guard post, another remote listening post. Our missile-packing neighbors had moved, leaving us with a hilltop hole with a panoramic view.

Occasionally, the troops departed for a variety of reasons. In our section, Specialist Gilbert was one of the efficient people, and our number two computer person. She brought new meaning to Fort Stewart's "Family Day", as she was pregnant as a result of her husband's visitation. Swell. Like an episode of the television series "M.A.S.H.", we had her packed and we stood by and waved as she departed. After she left, she was taken to the same airport where we had landed. As she sat waiting for her flight home, there was a scud alert. These unique missiles are similar to the German buzz bombs of World War II, which were effective but highly inaccurate. The scare came and went and Gilbert made it home safely. Private First Class Twiggs was informed via Red Cross that his mother was critically ill, and he was sent home o n temporary leave. He would eventually return.

One of the platoon members, Sergeant Ray Evans, had been left at Fort Stewart after he broke his wrist on the confidence course, but he caught up with us over time. Specialist Alan Hickox was injured during a baseball game at Fort Stewart, bringing him to the war late. Then, there was the case of Specialist Michael Arbit. Mike was a really big kid and the army didn't have MOPP gear that fit him. As a result, he was one of the last members to arrive.

Part of the responsibility of the First Sergeant was to notify the troops of any news from the Red Cross. Hank Obester and I agreed that bearing bad news was not one of the better assignments. He further noted that things seem to come in packages of three. We were dealing with one such incident, which was the second one of the week, as another soldier's father died. On the plus side, we had not been forced to generate one of those letters that are sent home, telling relatives of the loss of a family member.

Then there were the contact teams. These were sections designed to assist forward units. One team would be sent to assist the French 6th Armored Division. A second contact team would eventually be pulled and assigned to the 196th Field Artillery, with both units gearing for a move into Iraq. There was a female assigned to the armament section. Initially, when she was told she would not be going, she was upset. Later she felt that, while she wasn't thrilled with the decision at that time, it was the right decision.

CHAPTER 5

As the days progressed, there would be an increase in mission-related activities. While away from home, there were those who had established their *squeezing partners* and engaged in non-mission related thrills.

Each morning, some of the top brass would stop by my cot and receive a briefing based on short-wave radio information. Although most signals were jammed, I was usually able to find something in English. Most common for me was Radio Australia. In the early days, information was being transmitted, which was later determined to be intentional misinformation. This would probably continue throughout, but something was better than nothing. It was apparent that all was top secret to the troops, or our battalion was out of the information loop; we concluded the former. Only information concerning our activity was passed on. I could only hope that our command wasn't that ill-informed.

Again, things were gearing up. Activity was increasing and the rumor machine was in the *on* position. One evening we were told there would be a company briefing in the mess tent. Again, we sat or stood as Captain Grimalda stood before the troops.

He confirmed that we were getting set to move again. His final statement to us was " be thinking war."

It was during this period we were issued little white pills that would later become a major controversy. Beyond the realm of the usual shots and pills we had taken, there were two beyond the norm. One was birth control pills. A few of the female troops took them because they feared becoming prisoners of war. The other was something that was a supplement for use in an NBC environment. Questions were asked regarding these pills which, according to several sources, had never been tested on humans. I had already decided that this pill was not going to find its way down my throat. In fact, when we were commanded to ingest them, I allowed mine to drop to the sand. Maybe a scorpion would eat it and become NBC impervious. Most of the soldiers did the same thing, including several officers. One soldier who took the pill began having odd reactions afterwards, and went from sick call to a hospital in Germany, with varied problems, including dehydration.

While the balance of the company began preparing for the big move, I was assigned guard duty at the hilltop listening post. I never realized how cold things got in the desert until this night. Specialist Tony Cook and I were pulling a twelve-hour shift. On top of the hill, we were getting a full dose of the wind. Technically, we were not to step outside, but the interior, unlike our other posts, was so small that we would occasionally have to sneak outside to stretch. I was dressed in my regular

uniform with sleeves down, a filed jacket with liner, a second night jacket and MOPP gear, and I was still freezing. We somehow made it, although there was a brief moment that neither Cook or I could account for.

As the day broke, the company was busy packing our tents and forming the convoy, which was scheduled to leave around eight o'clock that night. Even if I wanted to sleep, there was no place left than company headquarters, the mess tent and a few battalion-related administrative tents. The place looked somewhat like a ghost town. Although there were a few civilians who were checking the area for *deals* that would be left behind, there was one individual who really stood out. She was dressed from head to toe, carrying a blade, which gave her the appearance of the grim reaper. She had a nose that, although covered by veil, stuck out quite a distance, giving her an almost comical appearance, despite her otherwise depressing presence. Nobody in our chain of command knew exactly how to deal with her. In the long run, we simply ignored her.

First Sergeant Obester would remain with a handful of other troops to assist the battalion while the rest of the company would move out. As we were moving out of our living quarters, the battalion was moving in. Our facilities were better than they had imagined. There was talk at one point of leveling our showers and leaving them to restructure but there was always the possibility that we might need the showers again. Besides, there were still a few people of ours to look out for.

As night fell, we had our final meal before hitting the road. The vehicles were up and running. Ours was the last in the lengthy convoy. Behind our office trailer were two generators in tow that could make for interesting fishtail material. Chris Allen, Jennifer Evans and I squished into the cab and on command began rolling. We rolled past the guard gate, now manned by battalion troops and those left behind by our unit. We turned left, proceeding north on MSR Dodge. The idea of the convoy was simply to keep up with the vehicle in front. As I sat on the passenger side of the truck, I looked across the darkness and began to wonder what lay ahead. The answer came when I saw something in the mirror. "Hey, Chris, you may want to pull over."

Why?"

At that same time, Jennifer glanced over and, noting what I was seeing, announced, "I think the truck's on fire."

We pulled to the side of the road as we saw flames shooting out somewhere near the rear and bottom of the trailer. We jumped from the cab, fire extinguishers in hand, and ran to the back of the truck. We saw flames gently licking the generator. This wasn't good, we concluded, and foamed the area. By now the lead vehicle of the convoy had doubled back and pulled alongside. It was too dark to see who was

in the HMMV as far as rank, but I knew it was loaded with folks we didn't know, mostly battalion officers. They asked us what was wrong and we explained our plight. A second vehicle, containing our unit, had also come to assist. "Hey, you gotta get this truck moving" said the convoy commander. *No*, I'm thinking, *we decided we like the view where we are, and chose to stop here for the night.* Our contact team, after investigation, realized the generator trailer's wheels had locked. Fixing them was easy; we simply disconnected them. This way we could proceed with our truck-driven train with fewer brakes. Compromised safety was just part of the thrill. I was sure glad I was not driving.

Soon enough, we were rolling again. We passed the adjacent town, called Sarrar I think, knowing that the big problem was now going to be catching up with the rest of the convoy. Chris locked his hand on the wheel and eyes on the road and we drove hard and fast. The only moment of indecision came when we entered a city that would require us to select a direction. After some deliberation, Chris chose a path, which proved to be the right decision.

As the sun began coloring the desert, we were beginning to close in on the convoy. Chris pulled to the side of the road and said "Terry, I need you to drive for a while." We swapped places, and here I was, driving sown a stretch of road known as *"Death Alley"*. Regardless of what the war was going to do, there had already been several lives claimed here. The problem was this was a narrow two-lane road with military vehicles going in both directions at high rates of speed. Initially, the speed limit was set at sixty, but this was reduced to thirty as we were using it, and things were still tight. After only an hour of sleep, Chris wanted back at the wheel. After a fuel stop, we caught up with our convoy. We would habitually lean to the right as other vehicles passed. Our driver's side mirror was smashed by another truck's mirror, which was the only incident during the move.

MSR Dodge had a total of ten checkpoints. Number nine was the northernmost location prior to entering Iraq, with number ten being an alternate fueling sight south and west of Dodge. By the late afternoon we were turning right and over a newly formed dirt path, somewhere south of checkpoint nine. Here, the sands were already blowing hard. Despite this, we were able to pitch tents, fill sandbags and place our shop vans into place prior to nightfall. We were really getting good at this. As for me, I had been up for a couple of days and I was ready for a good snooze.

As operations began inside the air conditioned comforts of the DAS 3, my job was to oversee a computer operation maintained outside the trailer and just beyond the walls of refrigerated air. I didn't know computers, but I could supervise those who did. Our routines had already been well established by now. Everyone knew

the work hours, details and grind of life. I would continue to pass information to those who were interested in short-wave radio transmissions. We were already aware that we would not be in this neighborhood for long, as there was already talk of yet another move. Still, things would happen here.

Our Field First Sergeant, Sergeant First Class Richard Cain, approached me. He advised me that there was a list of people, including myself, who were being considered for promotion. The only down side to this is that Chris Allen should have been on that list. After all, he possessed all the qualifications and bearing for the job. He, in fact, was technically far more eligible than I was. The problem stemmed from an incident at Camp MacArthur. One of our lesser troops was known to be a problem. On one occasion, Chris had finally had his fill and attempted to settle the problem on one level, but resorted to a physical direct approach. This didn't settle well with the brass. He would pay by being passed over during this board. While this must have bothered him, he was quick to let me know that my being eligible would not create a problem.

There was a preliminary interview with the battalion First Sergeant. I boned up on things that were customarily part of the interview presentations; things that ranged from knowing the name of the current President to our current chain of command, as well as knowledge of current affairs. For the first time since arriving in the desert, I actually polished my boots. I even used the services of Mike Reno as a barber. He didn't do a bad job. Having spent time mentally rehearsing for the moment, I approached what was to be the first part of the promotion board. Once inside his office, the First Sergeant quickly put me at ease. We engaged in fairly informal exchange and, after a short time, he told me he was satisfied with my bearing. There would be a second board, this one with the battalion major.

It was several days later when we were told that once again the major was able to allocate time for the board. Once again, those of us on the eligibility list began sprucing up and memorizing tidbits of trivial matter, which could be spontaneously uttered. We were brought into the battalion tent and, one at a time, were ushered into the presence of the major. After formally reporting to him, I realized that the *board* consisted of the major, who was sitting on a log, and Sergeant First Class Cain, who was listening to the proceedings in the distance. Despite the horror stories, I didn't find the man imperious as advertised. The conversation was informal and situational. There were no weird questions about some weird nation's pro-tem secretary or other morsel of irrelevant trivia. We talked for about twenty minutes, after which I left. Later, I heard Cain talking with Captain Grimalda, claiming that all prospects did a good job. That was good enough for me.

During our stay, there were more wind and rainstorms than we had previously encountered. The cloudy days did, however, provide welcome relief from the penetrating sun and allowed the equipment a better functioning environment. The army had always taught the principle being one color when referring to ethnicity. Never was this truer than the days when the wind blew. All of us were literally sand colored from head to toe. During one afternoon, those who wanted to were given the opportunity to do some target shooting, using the hills as bullet stoppers. There were those of us who didn't mind shooting, but really hated cleaning the rifles, so we became the cheering section.

The one point of genuine concern came late one afternoon. We were used to seeing aircraft overhead, and gave little attention to the fighters whose flight patterns we were under. But one aircraft seemed lower than the norm. It then dropped a device of some type, which exploded. This appeared to be a friendly aircraft, but the device began smoking. Lieutenant Momot was in charge of our detail, and stared toward the device. After several moments, leaning to the side of caution, he had us don our masks. There was little movement for quite a while. Soon, Momot had a volunteer remove his mask. With no ill effects for several minutes, the area was declared all clear. A quick inquiry determined that the aircraft- one of ours- was forced to dump a load containing nothing of consequence. One of our troops laughed at the lieutenant's reaction and decision. Needless to say, the laughing soldier didn't have a clue as to what happened, but was fast with a finger point, indicating overreaction on the lieutenant's part.

One afternoon, it was announced that the largest part of the battalion would be leaving. In fact, the only portion that would be left would be our platoon. Once again, we were waving good-bye as a convoy drove through the desert to another sandy spot. I was told I was being placed on the Ready Response team, but this was primarily a paper position, as none of us had been through training. There were no long lines for food. There was no waiting for the facilities. There was no wait for the showers. This really wasn't that bad. At one point, Chris and Mike Reno were taking time to shoot at water bottles "down range".

But, as was becoming common practice, we were again tearing down that which we had built. The biggest problem relocating was the DAS 3 trailer. Any time it was pulled and reset, it had to be leveled so the computers would function. We were punching *save* buttons on our work frequently, as the system was susceptible to head crashes. During operations, we had to be vacuumed before entering the inner office area. There were times during short stays when this office became our bedroom. This may have had something to do with the air conditioning. We eventually mastered moving the trailer, and could be set up, grounded and

connected to generators in short order. One morning, it was announced we were going to get more practice.

CHAPTER 6

A gray sky removed the color from the afternoon desert sky, but rain was not an issue. We were placing equipment anywhere we could. Tents and gear would be packed in and on top of anything that would roll. Again, there would be a convoy through the desert. This one, however, would be substantially shorter, and would be lead by a forklift. This time, there was no road to follow. Sandstorms had long erased the path to our next stop, but I believe Chris Allen was good with the compass. I believe it was during this move that Chris's navigation skills found one of the phone centers. There were always lines leading to the tents housing the banks of telephones. Although we may wait quite a while, the voices we heard on the phone were worth the wait. There was always a slightly irritating delay when we stopped talking as our voice was tossed half way around the world through space, but this was the most important five minutes we would spend.

It was after nightfall when we finally twisted into the latest encampment. Our location was within a few miles of the Iraqi border, near the western end of a neutral zone separating Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Kuwait. It should be noted that these folks are not real big on signs that define an entry point. Although we were within a couple of miles of a town we were told was called Ash Shabbah, we could not know for sure. Nestled in the center of a region comprised of a series of small hills sat our company. After a quick, dinner meal, despite our protests, we set up our equipment. We worked well into the night, but when we arose the following morning, we were ready to work again.

Our new area was quite a large spread. The company area was expanded to handle a large surplus of various supply items, ranging from clothing and boots to field-ready goods, stored on pallets and when necessary, housed in tents. In our travels, we stopped by a tent to visit Staff Sergeant Al Fuller. Al's job was, in part, cooking hamburgers and selling candy bars and the like, to raise money for various functions. Working with another Staff Sergeant, Joe Ursone, he had the area set up similar to an E.M. club, complete with benches. A true oasis. Although he was located quite a distance from our platoon's field sight, he was centrally located in camp.

One major change that evolved was each platoon now provided their own mess sections. In our platoon, several of the female troops had volunteered to run a selfcontained mess tent. They would fix breakfast and dinner, while lunch was MREs or whatever we found in stock. Throughout the company, cardboard boxes outside of various tents contained a variety of commodities. There were toothbrushes, toothpaste, unscented deodorants (after-shaves and perfumes were

taboo), foot powder, pain relievers, disposable razors, various candy products and other items free for the taking. There were cases of soft drinks, long-life milk and bottled water along with instant coffee and tea that were always available. My lunch usually consisted of chicken soup and long-life milk, which isn't bad despite the fact that it was hot, just like everything else. I was also told that the soup mix was supposed to be put in water and boiled but, hey, who wants to wait. In time, our platoon was serving others who found their food not as palatable through their sources. This may have been, in part, because lots of our food was purchased in town, rather than using issued foods. It cost a flat fee for the better meals, which was reasonable; maybe it was the friendlier atmosphere. Helicopter pilots were treated to great hot meals, which broke the string of endless meals of MREs they were consuming.

Field troops, who were interacting with other nations' soldiers, were collecting meals from around the globe. In most instances, they would trade their MREs for the foreign equivalent, with the understanding that they were not designed for taste, but sustenance. Not so, said the French. Their theory held that a good meal makes for better morale. Although the package was somewhat cumbersome, most had no problem toting the box, which contained a day's dining. The meals were commissioned from a famous French chef who provided great meals in great detail, right down to the bottle of cognac. While the French didn't care to trade their provisions for ours, they would trade for other items and sometimes simply give them away. The best meal we could have offered, I felt, would have been the pork patties, but those were pulled from the menu to avoid offending our host country. But this couldn't begin to compete with the cuisine afforded the French.

The other major commodity was tobacco. Although everyone realized it was a nasty habit, it was one I acquired in youth. There were even a couple of us who thought we would try to give it up during the war. During one NBC warning, I remember having just lit a cigarette as the siren went off. There I was, pulling the mask over a cigarette. We were trying to figure out how one could smoke with the mask on. We always kept cigarettes stashed in our duffle bags. I had chewing tobacco, which I supplied to Sergeant First Class Barnes, our mess sergeant. While he was always appreciative, I always kept wondering where and when he was spitting. I also had cans of snuff, which I gave to those who used it. I always stayed with cigarettes, which were inexpensive, especially if we smoked the generic brands, and purchased them by the carton. I always bought mine by the pack from Sergeant Joe Kupczyk, who was located in another section. My thought was to discourage myself from smoking by walking the long distance to his office trailer and paying more than what the smokes were worth. While the psychology didn't work, he

always had coffee ready. We would smoke and joke as he, a Marine during the Vietnam days, would contrast the two wars. He frequently stated that he was in the Marines when "…the average IQ of the battalion equaled the number of people in the battalion". Unfortunately, he was experiencing health problems, while continually denying that his hacking was related to our habit.

Although we preferred to sleep in our own van, our work sight and living quarters were separated, and we were told we would sleep in our tents. This was actually better for the mission and allowed a little more control. We had a main gate we manned throughout the affair. I pulled a few watches with different people. One night, I was with Specialist Tommy Thompson, one of the troops I found had a great sense of humor. We sat the shift watching for *Iraqi Injuns*, discussing life in general. One learns a lot about fellow workers during twelve hours of sleepless nights, requiring conversation to avoid dozing off. He was telling me how some of the drivers were getting lost at times, as there were long hauls through dirt, with no roads. One of the drivers told about accidentally driving up on a checkpoint. The guard asked him if he had any clue as to where he was. His response- *no*. He was told to turn back as he was on top of enemy territory. Better him than me, I thought. For some reason, I must have hit it lucky, as I got along well with those I worked with. I would occasionally hear complaints coming from those who pulled guard duty with partners that weren't compatible. There were those moments when things seen or heard required a field phone call to the command post. Although there were moments of concern, the incidents proved to be nothing.

The same field phone provided not only the essential communications link between our various posts and tents, but there was a *radio* program that evolved called "Nick at Night'. The host, whose first name was Nick, sent music and commentary down the wires so that we would have something to listen to in those early morning hours. He was still able to take calls from the phones, be it mission related or requests for music. While the music library was somewhat limited, there were soldiers lending their collection to the midnight man. There was still the FM programming being delivered by A.F.R.T.S., which was being beamed from a trailer in the region, with public service announcements reminding us that sexual harassment was a violation of military code. There was still the easy listening station, which beamed over versions of American tunes. On the shortwave band, there was always the challenge of trying to decipher the jammed signals. Even at this location, Radio Australia remained the easiest to tune. Most of us had cassette units. Locally purchased tapes were placed in hot weather packages and reproduced on standard retail tape with no labels, as if they were done at someone's home, but the quality was good enough.

Periodically, tempers would flare. Tensions had been mounting with the war potential escalating. No, not with Iraq. Things were starting to be taken personally. If it was simply a matter of argument we were looking for, we could simply compare the National Guard to the Army and watch Mike Reno heat up. Reno was a former member of the 24th Infantry, the brigade we just happened to be supporting. Mike had arms that were muscle-bound to the point that, during his peak, he needed help scratching his back, and was more intellectually inclined than the weight-trained stereotype. He would routinely beat our computer at chess, and worked successfully in the real world in the computer field, but his objectivity waned when anyone mentioned the job they were doing. At the height of one such conversation, he told of what the frontline soldiers were doing and the conditions under which they labored. Out of frustration, he asked "What is it that we've accomplished? What exactly is it that we are doing here?" My response to the latter thought was, "Whatever we're told to do."

One morning there was a heated conversation escalating in our tent. Sergeant First Class Steele and I entered the tent to see what was going on. Two guys, one from my section, were now starting the pushing routine. Steele started to intervene. My thought was, "Hey, let them go." The loser goes to the troop medical center The other goes to the MPs. "Yeah, we can do that". His reply had just passed his lips as the fists started flying. My man, who was much smaller, was last seen sliding under the tent, with the bigger soldier on top of him, buried in a cloud of dust. Steele and I, assisted by others in the area, managed to separate the two. Steele was really mad. Shortly after the incident, our platoon was marched to our isolated work area. Others in the area were told to leave. Steele didn't bother with a mellow diplomatic voice. By the time he was finished with his verbal meltdown, the fighters had made up.

We found out that there were even problems with our family support section stateside. Those who had volunteered to help were now engaged in politics which were creating resentment.

Meanwhile, Chris Allen was busy in the DAS 3- probably too busy. In fact, there was concern that he was going to burn himself out. While others were taking advantage of down time, Chris was busy with data input and such. With Specialist Gilbert gone, he alone knew the system. He didn't have time to train the others, which was resulting in an unbearable work load. The rest of us did what we knew to do, but we could only proceed at Chris's direction. It was during this time that we realized that as a squad, we would only be doing what we could. It wasn't worth dying over. While it was a hard sell, Chris finally agreed. Although he continued to push hard, he paced himself and allowed himself some down time.

The war effort was escalating. There had been a bombing campaign underway for some time. From our vantage point, we would see large number of bombers flying overhead. Depending on where we were, we could observe the formation fly over. We would check the time and wait until the bombers returned, and calculate what city they had bombed. Basra was the short span, with Baghdad taking a while longer. While windstorms were the most common, there was the occasional rain. Serious rain. During one overnight storm, our entire location became a mud bowl. It was difficult to walk through and at times somewhat precarious, as we would begin sinking in the goo. Which brings us to the report of the missing *Hummer*- well, not missing, just unavailable. The driver had the misfortune of parking in a spot, which, during the night, swallowed the HMMV. Everything below the window line was submerged. It was several hours before the water subsided far enough for the recovery efforts to commence.

There was a lot of transitional traffic making its way through our compound. There was the interaction of the field troops with the allied forces. Among the players were soldiers from Argentina, Australia, Bahrain, Belgium, Bangladesh, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Egypt, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Italy, Kuwait, Morocco, Netherlands, Niger, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Poland, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Spain, Syria and the United Arab Emirates. Occasionally, we would meet soldiers from Great Britain or Saudi, but it was usually American troops who were telling us about the different nations participating. We were getting the impression that things were about to happen.

There are those in charge of supplies and provisions who are good to have as friends. Clothing issues ranged from PT uniforms to desert night shirts and everything in between. Considering our circumstances, I must admit that between our supply and provisions we were given, we had little need as far as comforts. One afternoon, there was a pair of boots sitting on my cot- the right size, too. So, who was I to ask questions? I didn't really need them at the time, but they would eventually become important. From a financial standpoint, we were doing quite well. In fact, we were being awarder every benefit available. There were the standard allotments, plus we received all combat-related embellishments. The Soldier and Sailor's relief would assist most of the troops, placing financial matters on hold until after the war. In my case, I was told that the city of Boca Raton was making up whatever difference there was to my army income. Things like this allowed us to concentrate on the matters at hand.

Things were truly heating up. Scud missile attacks occurred with absolute frequency. Israel had become the target of most of these attacks. Early on it was found, apparently quite by accident, that one of our war toys, the Patriot missile, was

a formidable antidote for scuds. They were not, however, one hundred percent effective. One scud slammed into a building in Dhahran, killing several members of the Pennsylvania National Guard as they slept. It was a reminder that, we too, were sitting ducks. By the same token, we were pleased to be sitting in the field. Even if the scuds were launched at us, there inherent inaccuracy would probably keep us safe. The short-wave was telling of numerous scuds showering the skies over Israel. The Israelis were being asked to refrain from retaliating, which they did. In exchange, batteries of Patriots were being dispatched to areas near Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Additionally, the U.S. told Iraq point blank that the release of any nuclear, biological or chemical attacks would have the ultimate consequence. On detection of usage of NBC material, there would be an immediate withdrawal of all allied forces which would be replaced with a device that would essentially turn Iraq into glass with things that are measured in half-lives.

From the start, we were never given much information from our battalion. Everyone who should have known what was going on was claiming they had no idea. News came from two sources. There was the short-wave radio that told us what happened, and the soldiers in the field who visited our compound providing us with information we needed. We were talking to a sergeant and his captain and lieutenant, all from an infantry unit. As we were talking, the sergeant looked at us quizzically.

"Nobody's told you anything, have they?"

"Matter of fact, no they have not," we replied.

The sergeant stared at his officers in bewilderment, then turned to us and began. "Look, right now there is a line of troops at the Iraqi border. What's going to happen is, once we're given the word, we'll be moving like a huge windshield wiper through the desert between Baghdad and Basra. We've got troops from everywhere, with the French closest to Jordan. We've already been told that, once we are in Iraq, we are to kill every man, woman and child we see. The theory is, if it's breathing, kill it. If it's in the way, go through it. The Marines are going to be in Kuwait pushing the Iraqis back. Special Forces and Ranger units will be here and airborne units over here," he said, pointing to the map.

"Hey, thanks, guys" we said.

"No problem. I think it's better if you had some sort of idea about the game plan. After all, you may be headed in our direction."

Good point.

We shared our information with several members of our brass, who stated seriously they had no idea. "We're not getting anything at our briefings as far as war plans. Please let us know what you find out."

There were periodic ventures beyond our compound, but they were few and far between as the war game was working its way to the stage. Work from all sections was being conducted at a feverish pitch. My short-wave radio was in constant use with those concerned stopping by for updates.

CHAPTER 7

As far as the ground troops were concerned, Operation Desert Shield became Operation Desert Storm as the soldiers began making their moves through the desert. It has always been indicated that the foot soldier will never become obsolete, as there will always be a need for confrontation on the personal level. To this point, the aerial missile assaults from the Navy in the Persian Gulf and from the Air Force had concentrated on pinpoint targets, which accomplished many things. Disruption or destruction of supplies and utilities had been imposed. Iraq's elite Republican Guard headquarters had been relentlessly subjected to intense bombings. The entire Iraq Air Force and Navy had literally been eliminated from participation. Mobile scud launchers were located and destroyed. Aircraft conducting bombing raids and sorties were visible from our skies, and had increased in frequency and intensity as they flew their formations over our compound. With the remote Iraqi troops being cut from supply lines, there were food and water shortages. The Republican Guard would have been kept awake literally for days with the constant explosions of various warheads. It was now time for the soldiers and Marines to do their job.

From our vantage point, the black night desert sky was suddenly illuminated and the floor of the desert shook as tanks announced their intentions, rolling quickly through Iraq. I was able to tune in to English speaking radio reporters describing the action in tones usually affiliated with sporting events. There was a full-scale move underway in Kuwait by the Marines. The war was less than a day old and announcements were indicating that our troops were advancing at a fast rate. Interviews with pilots described the retreating Iraqi motor convoys as "…scattering like cockroaches when the refrigerator light goes on." There was chaos as the enemy troops were trying to turn around on the Iraqi roads. Low flying aircraft would hit the tanks and trucks with warheads made with white phosphorus, which would penetrate the vehicle armor, killing the occupants.

We continued with our job functions, with a noticeable heightened alertness. Rumors began to circulate that we would once again be moving. Captain Grimalda was able to confirm that plans were being made which would move us through the desert in convoy fashion, placing us in or near Basra.

Sergeant First Class Steele gathered his troops and began preparing for the move. "You are going to be seeing dead bodies- lots of them. So prepare yourselves." Having been in police work for a while, I had been exposed to the dead and dying on numerous occasions. I had adopted a philosophical approach to the matter, which I told Steele I would share with those who he might see as having a

problem with the matter. His response was a *wait and see* approach, which was consistent with everything else that was happening.

Reports from the field were positive, assuming one was pro-American. The amazing part of the war was the quickness with which the Iraqis were displaying the white flags and other signs of surrender. One story evolved around an American whose vacation plans landed him in a foxhole with Iraqi troops. He was in Baghdad visiting his father when the war began and was sent to join the war effort and found himself in the middle of the ground attack. It was his Chicago Cub uniform shirt that was displayed for surrender. He was not alone. The number of troops that were giving up actually created a logistical situation that no one had considered. The word coming down was that the Iraqi troops were attempting to fight a World War II battle against contemporary warfare.

There were stories of our tanks driving over enemy fortifications and bunkers, literally burying troops alive. In Kuwait, the Marines met stiff opposition. Reports had them engaged in short range combat. The stranglehold did not last long. The Marines managed to enter Kuwait City, leaving a trail of enemy troops in their path. On arrival, they made short work of forcing the opposition to flee. Those who managed to escape the city would still have to elude forces, with limited options. Each morning officers were in our work area getting briefed from the trusty shortwave. They would, in return, take the information to the command structure. These reports now included the deployment of Special Forces, Rangers, Airborne and Air Mobile troops to the north, south and between Baghdad and Basra. Things were looking good strategically, but there was plenty of other activity to keep the media busy. On the down side, there were stories about how smart bombs had struck civilian structures and stories of soldiers being killed by friendly fire. There were stories of downed friendly aircraft, and American troops being taken prisoners of war, as well as American and allied casualties. Mobile scud launchers were still operational, which could be loaded with nuclear, biological and chemical substances. As usual, my day was starting in routine fashion, finding a radio station for war status before breakfast. The voice, sitting in a broadcast booth somewhere far away, changed our day's outlook completely as he announced: "President Bush has announced a cease-fire in the Middle East crisis!" Okay, what's next, we wondered? I flagged a passing officer to let him know the latest, but he had already been informed. On this morning, our formation took on a different look. There were hopeful and cautiously optimistic tones in the message delivered to us. There were matters involving tentative agreements between all parties, which could instantly go sour. We listened throughout the day as plans started to materialize for the meetings that could put this entire episode behind us. During Vietnam, meetings

like this would result in dashed hopes because no one could agree on the furniture used at the point of negotiations. There was the surrender of Japan in World War II, which seemed to be accomplished without much of a hitch. All the reports at this time were positive. All we knew was that the President's announcement ending the hostilities had come only one hundred hours after the ground war started.

The officers were in meetings for the most part, trying to figure out what our mission would become. While we were thinking this would be a good time to leave, there were the realists among us who reminded us that things could still happen on the war front. Also, there was the nature of our company and the makeshift battalion. The odds of the army going through the operation they had just completed without damaging their vehicles was zero. We knew it. It seemed as though even if the war was over, the work was just beginning.

CHAPTER 8

Each day began with a formation on a hilltop, which gave us a nice view overlooking the compound below, with the exception of our area, which was isolated from view by hills. On an absolutely delightful sunny day when peace hung in the air, I stood in formation as usual. On this occasion, however, I was called out of formation and stood in a line with a small number of other soldiers. The Captain approached each person in line. As orders were read, he would remove the collar rank insignia from the individual's uniform and place a new insignia indicating the new rank. I had been promoted to Staff Sergeant. What made this particularly great for me was that we were standing in a war zone in a foreign country. Shortly after the ceremony, Sergeant Steele approached me. "Terry, I hate to do this to you, be we're very shorthanded. I wouldn't ask you to do this if there was another way. You are, after all, an E-6, and this duty is normally performed by an E-5. Would it bother you to pull guard duty one more time? I really am sorry." "Not a problem," I said. After all, I had plenty of experience and this would keep me out of trouble. I was even given the day shift, which was nice. As I pulled my last guard duty detail, I thought of those like Chris Allen, who should have been standing there with me. Chris had already been told that he was again eligible, and would be next in line.

There was evidence that the peace process was starting to gel. Staff Sergeant Terry Bradford found that, although the NBC unit had been a very popular stop during the tense times, nobody was stopping by much to visit. He would stay hidden in his small tent, securing the gear, which had been the center of attention for so long. We learned that, at the time the war was terminated, we were on a *T-minus-three-day* status. Had the war continued for another seventy-two hours, we would have been moving with the rest of the battalion to Basra. We were pleased to be right where we were.

For a while, we remained busy. Vehicles were being brought in, some behind tow trucks, which were pending repair. The most interesting, however, was a foreign piece. Sitting on our compound was an Iraqi tank retriever. Unlike its American counterpart, this vehicle was a weapon-bearing device. But, like the tanks it would tow, whether domestic or foreign, the people manning the vehicle would have to be either very short or very uncomfortable. People who are claustrophobic tend not to do well here, as there is hardly enough room to turn around. This particular retriever bore an option not available on most models. There was a whole on the side where a projectile had customized the exterior. The interior wreaked of smoke and the wiring was black. Perhaps the driver escaped, which would indicate that he would

be one of the countless faces at prisoner of war encampments in the region. The vehicle was ours, and talks began about how to transport the wide-load souvenirs.

The contact teams who had been attached to other units had returned, all in one piece. We were beginning to think that we, as a unit, would manage to return home unscathed. The pictures they had taken showed vast numbers of those who had not escaped the wrath of war. These were the charred remains of Iraqi soldiers who had fallen victim to the *tank killers*. The photographs showed roadways cluttered with war machines surrounded by those who died defending their cause.

One of the contact teams had experienced most serious and tragic incident of the war. I was walking through the compound, noting intense conversations among the officers and staff personnel. I overheard bits and pieces, then asked someone what was happening.

"Sergeant Anderson and Specialist Cook are in the hospital. It's bad," someone said.

I learned that the two were part of a reconnaissance mission that had left that morning and proceeded into Iraq. The first situation involved Cook, with whom I had pulled guard duty at Camp MacArthur. He had opened the door on his truck and, from what I was told, threw a soda can just outside of his truck. He was positioning himself to step down when the can struck a land mine. The steel projectiles struck him in the chest, penetrating his flak jacket and his body, landing dangerously close to his heart. He was evacuated and sent to a hospital in Germany for immediate surgery. In an unrelated incident, Sergeant Anderson had stepped from his vehicle and was walking about when he stepped on another land mine. According to one lieutenant who was an eye witness to the event, Anderson was thrown high into the air. A young soldier, Private Sam Foster, reacted and began assisting Anderson in the field as medical assistance was summoned. Foster would eventually be decorated for his actions. The rumor was that Anderson might lose part of his leg, a rumor that eventually became fact. Ironically, Anderson had always been known as one of the fastest runners in the unit.

The workload was beginning to thin down. Chris Allen was telling me that the DAS 3 van was soon going to be moved. He and Mike Reno would be taking it back to Camp MacArthur where they would perform a series of consolidation efforts. There was rumor that the trailer and its contents would be assigned to the unit, meaning we would be wrapping it up and sending it home with us. I, on the other hand, would remain at our present location and begin doing a manual process that would prepare our war inventory for turn-in. Early on, my computer operations were conducted out of a commercial carrier, which was nothing more than a conventional truck trailer. We had to poke a couple of holes in the carrier to feed

electrical wiring to the computers. Because my task would involve late hour operations, I moved my cot into the trailer.

During the day, I would be doing the paper process. After dark, I would have a variety of people visit. Because of the length of the trailer, we took empty water bottles partially weighted with sand and opened a bowling alley. It was great, but involved additional house cleaning after ten frames. I also found that my bedroom was more substantial than the tent. This was apparent during one late night storm. Outside, the wind and rain appeared quickly and began to deluge, which began unearthing tents. Some were collapsing; some were blown away. Inside the trailer, I quickly found where the holes were in the roof and managed to move the computers and electrical equipment toward the closed end of the trailer. The pounding rain pouring through the cracks in the roof appeared much as a waterfall. Although the trailer doors were closed, I could hear shouting in the distance as men attempted to secure the compound. Suddenly, the trailer door flew open with one of my troops seeking refuge. "Hey, man, I'm moving in. The tent's down, so I'm sleeping here." Wishful thinking, until the rivers crested over his boots. Everywhere he could have stood, sat or lay down was saturated. Once he realized that his options were nil, he exited the trailer and ran toward another potential shelter, sleeping bag in hand.

A few nights later, I was dragged out of a deep sleep when the trailer door opened. There were soldiers, one of whom was an officer, standing over my cot. I didn't recognize any of them. "Who are you? And what are you doing in here?" the officer queried.

"I think I was sleeping. I'm sorry, who are you?" I asked.
He identified himself as the owner of the trailer. Great! After he realized I was part of the unit, he explained that he had several trailers issued to him, one of which was my office. "We've had a little problem with unauthorized people wandering in and setting up living quarters," he explained.

Yeah, that's me alright- but I'm thinking these folks were on my compound. We came to an agreement that allowed me a couple of days before my eviction. In fact, I was concluding my portion of the mission. After a couple of days of laborious pen work, I was able to complete my paperwork and forward the forms to the boys in the DAS 3.

Once again, we stood on our little hill overlooking the compound, doing the morning formation thing. Captain Grimalda stood before the formation, smiled, and stated, "Essentially, we have no more work to perform. Take the day and do whatever you want. We'll see you tomorrow morning for the next formation."

Now, while there might not be too many places to go, down time in the military is a rare commodity. So we took it. There were trips made periodically to

a small town, which was near our compound. This was a typical town in Saudi, complete with an American looking vehicle junkyard which we passed daily en-route *downtown*. The prayer tower public address system would crackle to life, calling the faithful to prayer. All road traffic would cease, with vehicle occupants exiting and facing east until prayer was over.

The females hated these trips, because the vendors throughout the region refused to deal with women. There was the occasion when a female major was standing outside a store, having enlisted guys to buy her a soft drink. It was during one of these trips that we were greeted and thanked by one of the local policemen for a job we had done. There was a phone center that had been set up which was more convenient to use. As we were trucked to the centers, we would see bus after bus at the side of the road, loaded to capacity with Iraqi prisoners of war. They would eventually be sent to holding facilities, where they would be processed. There was the story of the Iraqi officer who was given an MRE package. He tore the bag open and methodically began to distribute its contents to his soldiers. An interpreter was called in to advise him that the bag was his and that each soldier would be receiving his own. It was apparent that many of the opposing forces had not eaten in a while. It was the troops closest to the borders who had the fewest supplies. They were, in essence, the most disposable, with the best troops located inland, mostly in Baghdad. While there were American and allied soldiers held in Iraq, the number was negligible. Although the phone centers were a welcome sight and we stood in long lines for short calls, the rides to and from the sights were very educational.

With no mission and too much spare time, I found myself doing things like writing short stories by day and burning them by night. After a couple of days with no valid activity, the troops were getting bored. After all, we had been pushed hard since leaving our home station, and now we wanted to go home. Even Captain Grimalda, who was normally an even-tempered man, had developed a short fuse and would occasionally lose it.

Then one day, to the benefit of everyone, it was announced that we would be leaving the site. This was actually a major undertaking, because there were certain things were not going with us. There were things that appeared incredibly wasteful; things that were dismantled, destroyed or left behind for purposes of economy. Some things were buried and rendered useless, poured into the sand and otherwise eliminated or neutralized. Watching soldiers having a great time destroying things was interesting.

One major hurdle, which had to be cleared before we could leave the area, was a massive turn-in of items we had acquired in the field. Even if we had wanted to keep

these goods, there was no way to transport even the smallest portion. On a daily basis, our trucks were filled with items to be returned. There were the red-tape headaches and tales of horror coming from the drivers, who were having to return with some of the issue we were trying to get rid of. Paperwork seemed to be the biggest problem. I recall getting sucked into a trip for turn-ins. As a matter of fact, this was to be the last trip. I don't recall the specifics of the incident, but I do remember there were items we were to turn in which did not have the correct documentation. The vehicle driver was told to off-load certain items and create documents for the rest. I sat in the truck, manufacturing the paperwork to get the stuff returned. Somehow, as I was doing my job, the driver returned, telling me everything had been taken care of. The truck was practically empty. As we pulled from the massive facility, he indicated that he had driven to his designated locations inside the compound and, when no one was looking, he drove to an isolated spot and pushed the undocumented stuff off the truck and simply kept rolling. In the meantime, we had obtained the proper signatures that indicated we properly given them their stuff back.

After dark, we began activating the chemical glow sticks. We would start with a single stick being activated. One could see it being thrown toward the *opposing force*. Soon, a stick would be lobbed back. Then, the sticks would be thrown end over end, developing to two and eventually three at a time. After a while, the distance would close between the two factions and the sticks would be opened at one end and flung through the air, causing the fluorescent-like fluid to go everywhere. The last act involved pouring the contents directly on each other, leaving the victim quite visible for a short time.

In the military, what one does, one must undo in the same manner. We would be leaving our position to return to Camp MacArthur. Our last night on the site, we took our trash and certain bulk supplies to a machine-dug pit where we began offloading the goods. Of course, that led to the Beenie-Weenie wars involving throwing unopened cans of bean products into the fire inside the pit. After a short time, the cans would heat and explode, sending them high into the air. Children, don't try this at home. We were war professionals. Eventually, the fire was extinguished.

On the following morning, we were placed in convoy formation. There were already small groups of locals scrounging through piles of items that were left behind which were usable but not transportable. During the late night hours, there had been a substantial rain, turning our paths into pools of mud. The first two trucks were buried to the axles, leaving the balance of the convoy to explore various other paths leading to the blacktop which would lead us back to Camp MacArthur. Once on the

road, the passage south seemed somewhat more relaxed than the ride north. As if an omen, the sun slowly broke through, returning the heat and the brightness to the blue desert sky to which we had grown accustomed. In several ways, it was short-termed *deja-vu*. There, along the road, were endless lines of busses with even more prisoners, being guarded by American MPs. As we headed back, the number of busses thinned out and finally no longer appeared. We continued down the road, returning as a company, which was now divorced from the battalion configuration. With the exception of a *comfort stop* or two, the ride was uneventful.

CHAPTER 9

Night was approaching as the company convoy pulled into familiar territory. Winding past the guard's checkpoint at the entrance to our area, we were waving to those pulling guard duty, seeing faces that remained at Camp MacArthur when we pulled forward. We parked, dismounted and established our housing with assistance of headlights from the trucks. The tents were being put up in record time and, while illumination was minimal, our set-up crews were able, for the most part, to place the proper poles and pieces in the right spots. After the last heave-hos were uttered, we threw our cots and goodies into the tents. I had already established contact with Chris and Mike. The DAS 3 was being fed information from the cards I had generated, although this was only one of several functions being conducted by *Mr. Machine.* The days that followed were busy. Mechanics were performing a host of must do repairs on dad-lined vehicles. Had the war continued for any great length of time, it had been said that repair parts would have become a real problem. For the most part, that simply meant that repairs would have been performed in a more creative manner. Engine gaskets would have been formed from cardboard, leaks plugged with substances used for other purposes, and modifications beyond specifications would have been necessary. As it was, they were getting most of what they needed. While working in the DAS 3, Chris had received a cassette tape from home. It was a broadcast from one of the rock stations. While we had been gone, music had continued. One song in particular caught my ear. As a long-time fan of the Byrds, I heard the familiar sound of the 12-string guitar filling our office area. It was a song from a Roger McGuinn solo album. Now I had yet another reason to go home. I remember as the ground war began, the song "Midnight at the Oasis" kept playing in my head. Too much desert air, perhaps.

One night, we were sitting at our cots when the mail was delivered. One piece I got was unusual. It was an *any-soldier* letter from a student. She wrote that she was against wars in general and didn't know if she was able to support us on the mission side of the house, although she was happy to write and support us as we were separated from homes and families. She also stated that she did not trust police. These letters were issued to us in a random draw. What a pick. I read the piece a couple of times. I then stared at the pile of unanswered letters from anonymous writers who were probably writing letters as a class project. The pile seemed to grow. Those of us sitting in our corner had decided that not everyone was going to get a response. I was never a big writer, so I must confess I was weary from the letters I had written in the course of the war. I'll never know if she gained confidence in the system.

Now that we had reunited as a company, we were again under the direction of First Sergeant Hank Obester. During a lull, I happened into his office. "Sergeant Walters, I have a detail for you, "he said as we were trying to bum cigarettes from each other. The detail involved going to the different sections and finding those who would like to purchase cigarettes, then collecting the money and driving to a nearby store for purchases. I never realized how many people in our company smoked. With one or two exceptions, money was given with the expectation of no change. This allowed us, in the long run, to purchase several cartons more, which was given to the *First Shirt*. He was then able to distribute these to others in times of need.

Each day, during the morning formation, we would hope for news that would send us home. One of the problems included the fact that we would have to return to Cement City. Simply put, there was no room at the inn. We remained prepared, prepacked predisposed toward any optimistic indicators. It wasn't long before the green light was given. It was an enthusiastic group that would now be rolling back to the place where it had all begun. There was the matter of our tents-our houses would not be returning with us. The canvas shelters had been with us for years and had endured summer camps and now, war. These tents were not cheap items, but they were placed in a pit and set on fire. It seemed a sad destiny for a material war hero. There, along with the memories, went the disease potential and transport problems. At least we knew we would be spending the night somewhere else.

We had conducted many miles and many hours of motor movements, be it convoy style or independent mission driving. Although there were a few situations, none could compare to the roadside incident where one of our HMMV drivers stood over a dead camel. The driver was one of the nicest people in the world. He was coordinating part of the movement when the camel apparently spooked and collided with the *Hummer*. The driver felt bad but was reassured that things would be all right. For the record, the vehicle suffered only incidental damage. This convoy also found Specialist Jennifer Evans behind the wheel of our 5-ton tractor, still pulling the generator sets. Although she had not relished the idea, she found that it wasn't bad at all. In fact, Chris Allen spent a large portion of this trip as a passenger. Still, at every rest stop, we were besieged by kids trying to sell the hallmark collectibles-Arabian rugs. When we first arrived, the going rate was ten dollars. Now, as the market was thinning, wise sellers parted with their product for two bucks. The road remained littered with cars and busses that had been left in the sands.

Our arrival back at Cement City in the late afternoon hours was quite the revelation. Large, white tents that were substantially cooler and considerably cooler replaced the green army tents. The compound was fully occupied with soldiers who were wandering through a maze of tented streets and buildings, highlighted by an

occasional profit enterprise. There were stands selling ice cream, souvenirs, and, by name, my favorite, *Wolfburgers*. When we were first here, there was a steak that was absolutely delicious, but we never identified the animal. While *Wolfies* may not have solved the issue, they were doing a great business, considering our meals were free. It was obvious that most of us had lost substantial weight while away. Perhaps the burgers were the military's way of providing profit and pounds in packaging. One order of business was a calculated gamble. It was known that before we would be allowed to go home, we would have to go through physical exams, so we were assembled and bussed to a working medical facility for just that purpose. The idea was to get it done here and waive this portion of out-processing when we got to Fort Stewart. So there we were, being prodded and poked, giving samples and being checked for signs of obvious damage. This was probably the only major event of the day and was completed before the afternoon.

The phone centers remained active, but the time limits were not strictly enforced. The movies had been relocated into a large permanent building that was usually packed to near capacity. Meal lines were still long and remained manned by multi-lingual assistants, but for some reason, the serving areas simply looked cleaner. The mess tents were of the huge variety, which could have probably housed a small circus. The shower points had been expanded and, if one went at the right time, the time limits for the showers was not enforced. Off-post busses ran frequently carrying troops to an area in downtown Dhahran. Yes, there were capitalistic pockets in every corner in the world. There were even vendors who would sell to women. It should be noted that the women were dressed in the customary garb, but when they were backlit from the sun, one could see they were wearing designer jeans underneath the flowing skirts.

Our equipment had been moved to a staging area for the mother of all inspections. This was the event that would at least allow our equipment to go home. This process would take quite some time. Initially, it was thought to be a daylight operation, but eventually spread to an around-the-clock operation. Initially, we were gathered in an area where there were strips of cement, where the vehicles were parked. Every nut and bolt in every drawer had to be removed and inspected. The vans were emptied of every removable object and could not be replaced until one of the inspectors gave the *thumbs-up*. Those who were performing the inspections were selected individuals who had received special training. There were not a lot of them, so when they happened to be in the area, everyone wanted to be ready. They would do a preliminary inspection then compose a list of things that had to be performed. They would then leave, returning when they could. There was a lot of breath-holding as the inspectors would wander up and down the floor space of the trailers. When

they spoke, officers and enlisted personnel alike would take copious notes, which would translate into action. Unlike most units, there were lots of things for our inspector to view. But, they were helpful in letting us know what problems existed and how to correct them. Although the inspection had begun early in the day, there were light sets being imported for what would be a very long ordeal. Once a trailer was completed, all bodies would go to another location and begin assisting others. Eventually, we had the entire company cleared. Soon after our inspection, these would become daylight-only operations, at least for the trailer interiors.

Those who were affiliated with the trucks as drivers or assistant drivers and those who were volunteered would undertake the cleaning of the vehicle exteriors. Washing a truck doesn't sound like a monumental task, unless it is one of *those* inspections. The drivers and assistants would take their vehicles to one of a limited number of wash points. Before they started, they were given a check-off sheet and detailed instructions, indicating what the inspectors would be looking for. It was simple. There was to be absolutely no dirt in or on any surface anywhere, including mud flaps, undercarriage or engine components. How serious were these inspectors? They employed light devices and mirrors to reveal details not visible to the naked eye. Without the availability of same tools, those who were cleaning were expected to find and flush matter before an inspector would pass the vehicle. There would be several hours of waiting in line highlighted by intense steam-cleaning, washing and frustrating rewashing and minute-detail inspections performed before any vehicle would be cleared. The soldiers on this detail, now sunburned and steam-cooked, would be rewarded as their vehicles rolled into a holding area where they would be stored until placed on ships for the voyage home.

Although I was an assistant driver, I was not involved in the vehicle purification process- at least directly. First Sergeant Obester had a couple of us fall out after evening formation. "You guys have worked with U.S. Customs on your regular jobs," he said. "You've been selected to attend a two-day school and you'll be working for them, doing inspections."

The following morning, we were sitting in a classroom in Dhahran, learning what we needed to perform the inspections we had already undergone. In the class with me was Sergeant Danny Willover, who worked with Operation Guardian stateside. Daily, he worked with customs, on loan from the National Guard. The instructor began. "You are about to become the most hated and most desired people in country. You are, essentially, the last thing that stands between a unit and their departure for home." Not a bad gig, I'm thinking.

For the next two days, the instructors explained how a variety of diseases were brought stateside from improperly cleaned items. There were microorganisms

transported in the sand, which could wipe out certain food crops, citrus and plant varieties. In addition to the cleanliness agenda, we were to remind soldiers to obey the laws of the land. They referred to a situation where a soldier was caught shoplifting. Punishment in the region for this crime was the removal of the right hand. Although the State Department intervened, the best-negotiated deal allowed anesthesia to be used, as the soldier became a permanent *southpaw*. After two days, we were ready to do the job. Sergeant Willover and I reported to the detail, lead by a female Captain whose primary job was that of parachute rigger. She and one of her sergeants were on assignment from Fort Sill, Oklahoma. We also had a couple of troops from Fort Drum, New York. Our unit had spent one summer camp at Fort Drum. These troops were trained to fight in mountains, which didn't appear to frequently in these parts. Together, our detail consisted of great people, with a Captain who did an excellent job of backing us and taking care of whatever we needed. She reminded us, as the first day began, that we were in charge. The soldier who had inspected our unit was with us, so we were able to draw on his experience, which made the job easier.

As our *Hummer* pulled into the inspection area, a collection of officers and enlisted personnel greeted our committee. After we were introduced, there were those who were exhibiting social graces that were probably foreign to their nature, but were willing to suck it up as we did our job. As example occurred almost immediately. I pulled a cigarette from a pack I had in my uniform jacket. By the time I had it in my mouth, my moustache and eyebrows were almost burned away. The Major was only one of several people trying to offer me a light. There was the unit's First Sergeant, who was constantly asking if there was something I needed. If there were, he would peer through a pair of green safety glasses and appoint someone to handle the issue. As I would enter each trailer or van, there were those who closely followed either to handle the problems seen or make notations for corrections. Yes, I took the job seriously, but I was fair in my assessments. In fact, those things I would note were said to be reasonable assessments. Willover did admit to being bureaucratic when he detected hostility toward him or toward us in general, but these were short-lived instances. This would happen when troops attempted to fake the inspector out by sneaking a disputed item or contraband onto a vehicle.

The crowning moment for each vehicle would occur when we placed the red tape and locking seal across the vehicle, securing it and indicating the passing of inspection. What those being inspected did not know was that there were clues we would leave on a vehicle that would indicate there was a problem with the manifest, such as illegal substances inside a trailer. From all appearances, the vehicle would have passed inspection. There were, however, subtle procedures such as a signature

block which, if not completed, would be noticed by customs inspectors. There was a story circulated about a unit commander who gave one of the inspectors a bad time over an item that had been classified and placed illegally in a trailer. The inspector advised the commander that he would not be allowed to load the item. The commander insisted on keeping the item on board and became abrupt with the inspector, using threats to get his way. Under duress, the inspector sealed the van and told the inspecting detail officer in charge of the situation. Unknown to the unit commander, it was agreed that, while the vehicle would be sealed, there would be a portion of the procedure eliminated, which would flag the vehicle. The detail officer managed to get word to Customs in reference to the vehicle. As the vehicle was rolling to the port for cleaning, Customs stopped the vehicle. They had no obligation to the unit commander, and the unit commander did have an obligation to Customs. The entire unit sat roadside as Customs located the vehicle and demanded that the entire contents of the vehicle be off-loaded for re-inspection. To be sure, the Customs officers were in no particular hurry.

This gig was obviously great. We would begin at eight, breaking for lunch, and be back at the compound by five for evening chow. I would catch up with our crew, which was looking exhausted from the cleaning points. I recall one evening looking into the vacant eyes of my squad as they had been at the wash point since the predawn hours and were about to go out again to complete the job. I almost felt guilty until it was brought to my attention that the balance of the company simply sat around in the tent all day. Our guys were nearing the end of the detail anyway.

On the final day of inspections, as we turned the reigns over to new inspectors, we took lunch at a nice restaurant unknown to the masses. It was there that we would say goodbye to our female captain who had treated us so well. The sergeant from Fort Sill had two of the male troops from his section sent home as they were found romantically involved. There were others with us at our meal to which we bid our best. Then finally, we returned to our tents, mission accomplished.

We had, at some point, managed a ride with one unit's warrant officer, who simply wanted to go cruising. So we joined him in his issued *Hummer*, and spent several hours riding the roads around Dhahran. We were riding the main road adjacent to the waterline of the Persian Gulf, staring at the water. It was truly inviting. It captivated our driver. He pulled to the side of the road and parked the vehicle. Once he decided there was no audience, he stripped to the waist, rolled up his pants legs, emptied his pockets and went swimming. The other passengers and I were invited to join, but we declined. By the time we arrived back at Cement City, he was dry.

With our details complete, we were loading busses and trucks that were heading to various locations that were away from the post. In addition to Dhahran's downtown district, there were two American Post Exchange facilities, Camp Jack and Camp Jill. Both had commissaries and hosts of local concessions. For the most part, these were either food or jewelry stands. I was amazed at how many places offered chains, lockets, rings, watches and other fine metal trinkets. We had been advised that the deals were actually quite reasonable, even when declared at Customs. There was also a big push for the prayer rugs, which were sold by various vendors, including little kids wandering footpaths throughout the country. We had been to Camp Jack on a few occasions prior to the war. During the early visits to the compound, there were those who would push their way onto the bus for fear of being somehow lost or forgotten. But not anymore. We found the heretofore-mythological Jill lying on a stretch of road, that led to an open desert. The ice cream was no different there.

I saw Captain Grimalda standing by himself and we engaged in brief conversation regarding the job we had performed in the desert. "Do you realize that you managed to move a maintenance company several times through a large desert- a unit that really wasn't designed to be as portable as we managed to be?" I inquired.

He looked at me and laughed. "Yes, I did."

CHAPTER 10

We anxiously waited for the next move, as this one would be the final one *in country.* Kobar Towers was a sprawling housing complex which had been built for the Bedouins. True to their nomadic culture, they had declined to use them. We were told that each apartment had hot and cold running water, indoor facilities and air conditioning. Heaven. But each time we thought we were on the way, something stopped the show. One time, there simply was no room. Hey, we'll sleep in the open- we had done before. There was another delay because our airplane wasn't ready. Okay, we'll walk home. But just when we thought we had exhausted all our options for sanity, word came down.

It was just another beautiful day in the neighborhood as we quickly began gathering our possessions. We had lugged the duffle bags, MOPP gear, backpacks and weapons for so long now that we were one with them. Even those of less physical means were slinging their weighted bags with no problem. The trucks arrived for the gear and, soon after, the busses arrived for the troops. In a strange way, we had grown accustomed to Cement City. But we were able to shake the melancholy mood quickly as we now delegated the sprawl to memory.

The bus pulled into a secured compound, which looked unusually American in style. Street after street of buildings reached upward about seven stories. We rolled up to our building, secured our gear and began seeking our separate rooms. Infantry soldiers who jumped out of airplanes had previously occupied our building, which translated into why certain things were trashed. The elevator didn't work, allegedly being broken by previous tenants. That meant that for those of us destined for housing on the seventh floor there was the stairwell to conquer. As promised, cool air laboriously circulated from the undersized air conditioning unit. And there were flushing toilets. But the center if idol worship was the shower. The hot and cold pleasure dispenser had no time limit affixed. Our need for a hat rack behind the door was fulfilled when someone took an atropine injector and injected it through the wood. A story circulated regarding a soldier that was using his protective mask as a pillow. The atropine needle activated, sending the needle into the soldier's head, killing him. Our door, however, seemed to be unaffected.

A variety of features were located in a centralized area: a commissary, post exchange, and shops of all varieties lined the streets. There was even one area where we could get our picture taken riding on an elephant. It was tempting, but the only picture I had taken there was another soldier, as we stood on the roof of our building in the late afternoon, looking onto the Gulf from one viewpoint and looking at the airport from another.

There would be a formation at three o'clock in the morning so we could receive a new boot issue. Ordinarily, most of us would have slept through this, but it was mandatory. This was because the boots we were wearing had to be pitched. The pair I had on had created some foot problems for me, but I wasn't about to say anything at this point. So, we fell out for our *rise and no shine* cluster and quietly marched though the streets to our issue point. It was here where a Tennessee National Guard unit with no observable charisma greeted us. Initially, we couldn't figure out why they were so hostile. Even our officers were rudely handled. They were out of the most common sized boots, which happened to include mine. I was thinking maybe I could just paint the boxes black and wear them. I now realize that the pair of boots that had been left on my bunk was through divine intervention. If it weren't for them, I could have been left in country while the rest of my unit headed home. There was an apology from Tennessee's brass to our people. It seems this unit was on standby throughout the war, but wasn't activated until after the action. For us, it really wasn't important. We had paid our dues. We marched back to our apartments and waited for the sun.

By late morning, it was once again time to reload all of our gear. With the elevator broken, we employed field-expedient tactics. Although we had not developed them, we used common practice. Two troops would go to the sidewalk; other troops were several floors up. They would open the window and attaching lines-bed sheets, clothing or usable extender gear- all the gear was lowered. This would take quite a while, but eventually, if the object wasn't fragile, the two men on the ground became safety personnel, warning pedestrian traffic as the items were simply tossed out the windows. It was a real time saver. The gear was taken away, and we cleaned our room as we waited for our busses. During the final room inspections, the atropine injector was overlooked. Hopefully, someone managed it's use as we did. The only thing left to pack was the human cargo. With one last glance at the Gulf, we stepped from the building to the sidewalk where we made last-minute purchases from sidewalk food and drink stands within a two-block area. Then the busses arrived for the short ride taking us through the streets and highways of Dhahran for the last time. It was late evening as we stepped from the bus and entered a huge hangar for departure preparation.

Hurry up and wait! It's not an idle phrase; it's an ideology practiced and honed to perfection through endless military campaigns. We were told that we had to be something like ten hours early for our flight. This was because we had one last process to undertake. We had already been briefed regarding what was to be a thorough inspection of goods being loaded on the aircraft. This included everything we wore and bore. Contraband was loosely defined as anything other than items

issued or purchased through legitimate channels. This meant that bottles of Saudi sand-regardless of size-, war souvenirs, of any other country, other than Iraq's currency, and certain food products had to be pitched. There were those who had brought weapons from home. Bringing them to the war was no problem, but taking them home would be a challenge. Some were destroyed, while others were well concealed in freight containers and cargo holds that were ocean-bound. For the rest of us, this was just another shakedown, not unlike the ones we had undergone previously.

Customs declaration forms in small stacks were signed without thought, and then the big wait for inspection of our gear. We were one of an untold number of companies sitting in groups on benched reminiscent of vintage bus depots. As one company would be ushered into the inspection area, we would slide up to the next group of benches and re-read literature and signs posted on walls. Eventually, we heard the call for the 743rd Maintenance Company. It was another line to stand in until we were farmed out to one of the waiting Customs inspectors, which were augmented with soldiers and military police at various workstations. I took my place in front of the inspector. We were told that we would automatically begin emptying our duffle bags and backpacks for inspection, so I began jerking out the contents of the bags. About half way through bag one, I was asked if I had any boots other than the new ones I was wearing. I said no. The inspector then asked about weapons and I said no. I was then told to re-pack. Great. I stuffed and jammed the removed items into the bags. We walked the duffle bags to one location outside, and kept the balance of our gear with us. We sat in an isolated boarding area waiting for the plane to arrive. There was another unit returning with us to Fort Stewart. We were willing to share the ride.

Feverish anticipation was finally rewarded as a jumbo jet was placed in front of our window. The ground crew was busy and soon the manifest roll call began. Of the many times our name was given during a situation, this was one time we were happy to *sound off*. We were really boarding. We were really headed home. We were aware of some changes regarding this flight. First, there was a friendly crew as we stepped aboard. Second, there was a cleanliness that almost seemed foreign. Third, as we made our way toward the smoking section and sat down, we had room to sit. This was no military specification aircraft, no sir. This was a real civilian model 747, with working toilets and everything. We were in our places, seats up, trays forward and listening to pleasant electronic tones and safety briefings as we taxied down the runway. With few exceptions, we were going home intact. We were all leaning over the aisles, attempting a final glance through the small port windows of the land of sand, which had been our host. Then, we were airborne.

The pilot's voice circulated through the cabin's public address system. "Good evening and welcome aboard Lyon Air, the official line of Luxembourg. You may be wondering why we are taking you home. As part of our agreement with allied forces, our country has contributed seven flights to return soldiers to their homelands. It is with pride that we do this. Congratulations on a job well done." There was loud cheering as we continued our ascent.

The first scheduled stop was a layover in the country of Luxembourg. During the approach, we were afforded a view of the countryside, filtered through a light fog as daybreak was giving way to a new day. Castles stood out against the mountains. While we were allowed off the plane as it was serviced, we were told, as were airport personnel, that no alcohol was to be purchased. I'm sure that attempts were made, even though they would have to conduct business with folks who predominately spoke German. And, although we were there for a few hours, there were only so many things to see and do in an airport. The rest of the countryside was probably still sleeping.

Once again, we were boarded and underway. Again, the Captain spoke. "Welcome back. We were scheduled for a second stop in Toronto, but there has been a change in plans. We are now headed directly for Hunter Air Field, Georgia." Nobody heard the estimated time of arrival as everyone again began cheering. We sat back and watched the in-flight movie and tried sleeping just to make the time go faster.

After a short eternity, we arrived at Hunter Army Air Field. The weather may have been anti climatic as rain fell at a moderate rate, be it wouldn't be enough to ruin the moment as soldiers kissed the American tarmac after descending the loading ramp. We moved from the plane to a reception line, which was comprised of Florida National Guard Headquarter brass, as well as those from our immediate support battalion. It was here that we surrendered our weapons and protective masks. We shook hand with those whose job was to provide logistical support stateside. We loaded onto the school-type busses and road to Fort Stewart, where we were taken to the parade field. We formed up and marched toward a group of civilians who were cheering. The rain had formed large puddles on the field, but it was a pleasure to stomp through the standing water to reach the other side. Although most were local folks there to greet other units, there were a very limited number of unit family members who made the trek to see us. Most of us were more than willing to wait for the big homecoming. Then, it was another bus ride to a building where we reclaimed our duffle bags. The same bus then took us to our barracks.

We stood outside the familiar cement structures and listened to Captain Grimalda as he gave us our schedule of events. We would, as usual, go to supply

and set up housekeeping. After we settled in, we would not have a formation until ten o'clock the following morning. That was a first. In the military, that's half the day already gone. Secondly, which was also a first, was the edict that "…you may have alcohol in the barracks." While I am not a drinker, I know this was a state of euphoria to many.

By the following morning, the sun had returned. A group of us went off post to a real restaurant in Hinesville, the city surrounding Fort Stewart. We returned and were advised that the out-processing activities would take as long as the in-processing activities. Although somewhat disappointed, we had anticipated it. That meant that the physicals we had just prior to leaving Saudi Arabia were of no particular value. But there was a plus that many had not counted on. This is one that the army allegedly didn't want us having. We would, by the time we arrived home, be entitled to a host of veteran benefits guaranteed by law. The cutoff was 180 days. We returned stateside on day 181. This made the paperwork, debriefings and meetings a little easier to take.

Over the next several days we went where we were told and did what we were supposed to. The major difference this time around was that we were not getting the usual low life National Guard treatment. We were actually getting treated quite well, with virtually no harassment. This was not the case for those who arrived from Florida to assist us. In speaking to one of our officers, there was an overt hostility sensed by those wearing the green battle dress uniforms. This was the signature of those who hadn't been overseas. They would be harassed at the post exchange, commissary and areas of common usage. As one Fort Stewart soldier told the officer,

"You guys were here drinking our beer and having our women while we were over there fighting." Perhaps this was not the legacy to possess at the time. There were reports that Hinesville was experiencing a sharp increase in shooting-related crimes, almost all domestic in nature.

On our last morning at Fort Stewart, we had turned in our linen supplies and managed a quick breakfast, cleaned and cleared the barracks as three chartered busses worked their way into the company area. These busses were the ones that would return us to Fort Lauderdale. The drivers sat patiently as the roll was called for the most important ride yet. The doors shut, and after some tight maneuvering, we were on the small roads leading to larger post roads, which led to major roads off post and toward Interstate 95. This time, when the Fort Stewart signs appeared in the rear view mirror, there was the satisfaction of knowing that we wouldn't be returning right away. Once on I-95, the driver radioed his counterparts and we were heading somewhere to fix a mechanical problem. Sergeant First Class Steele asked

him what the problem was and was told "guys, the air conditioning isn't working. We want to stop and get it charged. It shouldn't take long and hey, you guys really have earned it."

Steele looked down the aisle, and then back at the driver. "We've been in Saudi Arabia for the last six months. It got really hot over there. Unless someone has a real problem with it, we don't need to stop." Rarely does an announcement of this nature go unchallenged. This time, it did.

There was an essential lunch stop at a mall in Daytona. The driver parked far from the main parking area, so we walked through the parking lot with plenty of exposure to civilians. There were people applauding our efforts and thanking us for a "job well done". There were eateries that offered us gratis meals and store managers extending military discounts on various products. The gestures were truly appreciated. It was obvious to us that, from a public relations standpoint, the war had been well engineered. President George Bush would experience the highest favorable rating of any president during the war period. One soldier, Sergeant Terry Rutter, was a Vietnam-era Marine. In explaining the vast differences in reception for returning troops, he said, "We were greeted by people throwing bottles and spitting at us."

We were on the road again, and now, the drivers were pushing the busses over eighty miles per hour, according to those who had the speedometer in view. There were civilians who were blowing their horns, waving and yelling "Thanks" as we passed their cars. As we continued, traffic began to thicken. We could tell that we were now in striking distance of home. The windows were now all down, with troops acknowledging those who waved and yelled. We had made it most of the way through Palm Beach county when, ahead of us, police and fire units appeared, beginning to cut a path and form an escort for us. As we hit the Broward county line, we were trailing an unknown number of emergency vehicles that, with lights and sirens, led the procession. We reached the off ramp and proceeded east on State Road 84 and found ourselves going on a road going south past the armory. Although some of us did not know precisely where we were, it was obvious we were not stopping there. There was a small number of us that agreed that, once we were able to get free, we would march to the ocean and head on into the water. The uniforms needed cleaning anyway.

The busses arrived at a baseball field not too far from the armory. We sat in the busses until plans had been finalized. First Sergeant Obester stood at the front of the bus and gave quick instructions to Sergeant First Class Steele. Then, on command, we began to exit the bus. We had no idea what exactly stood beyond the bus. We emerged to a group of people who had come to greet us as we disembarked.

There, among the spirited group, were people from the Boca Raton Police Department. These were people who had come on their own time to see us. What a rush! We were hurried off to a formation led by Sergeant Anderson, the victim of the land mine incident. He had become proficient with his crutches as he made his way to the front of the formation.

In the distance, we could see the bleachers filled with family, friends and well-wishers. The 7th Army Band, which had sent the troops off to war, was providing music as the formation was brought to attention. An indistinguishable voice from the public address system brought the crowd to a roar as we approached. Then, we came to a halt in the stadium's infield. There was an itinerary complete with people of local distinction and military brass, with an invocation, followed by a series of speeches and musical selections, followed with a formal closing. But, it never happened, as the crowd began cascading onto the field, climbing over barricades and pushing their way through the sparse police line. The public address system was initially filled with calls to order, but a crowd already tired of waiting drowned the voice out. As I stood in formation, I felt a tug at my uniform pants. My son, Bryan, managed to find me in a field of look-a-likes.

As the glossy presentation was tossed aside, we were quickly dismissed. I found myself quickly reunited with my wife, family members and even more members of the police department. Even our preacher was there to meet me. He would end up missing his Wednesday night service as a result of his presence at this ceremony.

We never did get the opportunity to march to the ocean. Things were so confusing that everyone second-guessed everyone else's intentions, and then we left. Rightfully so. We threw those items that we had carried for the past six months into the trunks of our civilian vehicles, driving to places where we could begin making up for lost time.

CHAPTER 11

For the next several weeks we experienced reentry to the real world. Welcome home parties were thrown in our honor. Several members of the police department held a well-attended gathering in my honor at a Mexican restaurant in Delray Beach. For those soldiers seeking employment or career changes after the war, job offers were plentiful, some of which were quite good. Discounts were offered to veterans from many service providers as well as retailers. We had returned in April and the good residual effects were still being experienced as late as December. I was invited to speak at a school where kids filled an auditorium to hear all about the war. There was even an appearance on a float during Boca Raton's holiday street parade. Because there had been so few of us from the immediate area available to stand and wave from the float, an airman was brought from Homestead Air Force base, as well as an imported soldier. Although the soldier was in the desert garb, the Airman and I wore Class "A's" as we had been advised. The desert battle dress actually made more sense, but the crowd yelled and waved anyway.

For the unit as a whole, there were no drills scheduled for three months, which was truly a welcomed break. Sadly, some returned to face major problems-some involved legal hassles, some financial, and some domestic. Those who were threatened with divorce returned to empty houses. Others were faced with bankruptcy. Still others found their jobs no longer available. Although there were laws in place to prevent this from happening, there were just as many loopholes. Now we were all once again standing around formation, but we stood on familiar ground in our compound.

As we inspected our footlockers, it was obvious someone had been through them. Items such as compasses, knives and such which had been bartered, purchased, or otherwise were obtained, were missing. Had these items been placed in duffle bags, the soldiers would have retained their mementos. Oh, well. For most of us, reestablishing the monthly drill and two-week summer camp habit was going to be difficult.

Things change over time. I was approaching my fifteenth year in the Guard, and I was simply attempting to make it to the twenty-year mark. But there were those who became disenchanted with various aspects. While we all came away with a variety of decorations for our participation in the war, there were those who received many of the same medals without leaving their desks stateside. We would be told by some of our support battalion that they "…really wanted to go, but the Army said no…" There were those who simply could not get back in the groove, including those who had upwards of fifteen years of honorable service.

After the 325tth Maintenance Company returned to the states, they were besieged with health-related problems stemming from the lead-based paint used on the vehicles. More personal were problems of our own people. Sergeant Al Fuller, who had been our snack-selling concession-running money-generating cheer leader soldier who was also with the NBC team, in addition to performing his regular job, had not returned with us from Fort Stewart. There were complications with the military hospitals incapable of dealing with his white pill-related problems. Even after his return to Fort Lauderdale, he was not well and eventually suffered a heart attack. Specialist Louis Berry, who had a hand grip that could remove lug nuts from wheels, was also suffering from health problems allegedly tied to these same pills. There were two females whose health was affected. One began losing her hair in clumps, and her biological cycles were unpredictable. At one time, she was thought to be excellent officer material. Now, her health appeared to be gone, along with her dreams for a military career. The other female experienced much the same symptoms, although not so dramatic. Both had taken the same pills. Suddenly there was a new item labeled "Desert Strom Syndrome", which was being played down by the Pentagon in much the same way "Agent Orange" had been during Vietnam. Most felt that, as before, the military would simply ignore the whole thing until after most died from it, then admit yes, there was a problem. It was cheaper that way. After all, we soldiers realized that we are readily disposable.

We had veteran soldiers, some of whom had survived both Vietnam and the Iraqi war who wanted out. This was especially irritating as they were so close to retirement. One soldier had seventeen years in service and he threw in the towel. Although the financial aspect of the military reservist's pay check is hardly rewarding, it could have some incidental value. Those who left were, for the most part, good friends as well as comrades in arms. But Sergeant Larry Bartlett explained to me that, for him, it was the right decision. He got a good civilian job after the war and didn't need the conflict of schedules that always created problems for civilian employers.

Those who left managed to miss the next one. During the summer of 1992, a year after the Gulf war, Hurricane Andrew struck, devastating Miami and the surrounding areas. This was a month and a half of the worst activation I had dealt with. The many twenty- hour days in the office, with a ceiling and roof collapsing on a daily basis, were horrible. At the state level, the politics and lack of coordination was somewhere beyond irritating. I found myself in charge of the section, trying to employ the DAS 3system, which I knew nothing about. In that regard, I was not alone. Only two people knew anything about the system- Chris Allen and Mike Reno. Reno was a technician, who simply kept the thing running.

Neither of them could be reached. For several days, we were trying to work a manual system, with changes and procedures being implemented all the time. It was days later when, at the pinnacle of my frustration, Chris Allen was located. He was able to redirect our efforts and get us established as a working section, despite his reluctance to be there. He had been in Los Angeles when the storm had hit and had just returned to the area when he picked up the phone. Big mistake, as the call was from the National Guard, requesting his presence.

Once on track, we managed to get the job done. But Chris let everyone know that he would be seeking a discharge as soon as this mess was over. He did just as he indicated after we were deactivated. Mike Reno had been in the northern states when we were brought in. He even called, quite late in the activation, as he had been working and was in the process of moving to the cold country with a good job in computers. "If you really need me there, I'll be more than happy to come," he said over the phone in our crumbling office. I told him to leave and enjoy, as the worst of this one had come and gone. Besides, we had arranged to keep the DAS 3 out of use, as it was more of a hindrance to the process.

Mike left to accept his new position. After the storm, Chris was given a discharge, and took a job in retail management. Or, as he stated, "The National Guard has managed to mess up a part of my life. It won't happen again." Joanne Gilbert, sent home pregnant during the war, was there to greet us on our return. She was discharged shortly thereafter, on her request. Beamon Rich, who was sent home during the preparation for the war, returned to the Glade County Sheriff's Office. He was told that, even though he didn't go, he went through the process and allowed the military to send him home, as opposed to dodging the situation. He remains in law enforcement. Freddie Twigs moved from the area. Although never verified, there was talk that he was attached to the National Guard in Nevada. Bill Way ran his term of enlistment and did not extend. Jennifer Evans also left. By the time the Hurricane Andrew affair had cleared, I was now in charge of a section with all new people.

At the top, Andrew Grimalda had been promoted to Major and sent to higher headquarters. Hank Obester was transferred to another unit, where he remained First Sergeant. John Steele continued as our platoon sergeant until he was eventually promoted to First Sergeant. Joe Dwyer, who had chronicled our events for the newspaper, was transferred to a Public Affairs detachment.

There were, however, other situations that were not so positive. Terry Rutter, who had a great homecoming contrasting Vietnam, was arrested for murdering his wife and alleged lover during the Hurricane Andrew activation. He would eventually be convicted and sentenced to life in prison. The day after we were

finished with Hurricane Andrew, another National Guardsman was arrested for killing three people during a bizarre incident in proximity to the area our unit had vacated. He, too, was convicted. I do remember a captain of either an infantry or military police unit being interviewed for television. "I don't think these guys are under as much pressure as we are out here in the field." Having been in law enforcement for many years, I would like to ensure him that I would gladly have traded places with him.

Among the commendations we received was a Kuwait Liberation medal. Amazingly, it wasn't long before these awards surfaced in pawn shops. The desert uniforms, which bore the patch of the 24th Infantry and an American flag on their sleeves, became available at flea markets when soldiers sold them to vendors.

My personal goal when I enlisted in the National Guard was simple: complete twenty years of service and retire. The concept sounds easy. I once met a man who did his twenty at a time when I deliberated reenlistment. "Once you pass the first ten, the worst is over," he said. "The second ten you can do standing on your head." I'd like to find him again. He was one of the deciding factors in my continuation. For the record, the last five years were the worst.

As stated, we were in a state of transition. I was now *the* section sergeant. In addition to transfers and recruitment, the 149th General Supply Company of Miami had been dissolved. There were plenty of new faces. While most were hard working troops, there were those who had an *attitude* and created more problems than they were worth. The DAS 3 had become obsolete shortly after the introduction of personal computers. We still had the office space and air conditioning with the trailer, but our training on the equipment was brief and, while helpful, was no substitute for a legitimate school. We had those who thought they had answers to our computer problems and attempted back door solutions, only to create new and exotic problems. There were several Change of Command ceremonies, introducing new unit leaders. Each had a specific direction they wanted to take the unit. We were assigned an army advisor, a captain, who, in addition to our leadership and state advisors, issued conflicting directions which were both confusing and frustrating. The net result was long drills highlighted by mid-month meetings. In the middle of the mess, there was an issue of items we had ordered for Middle East deployment. We had ordered a lot of items, some purely by accident, which we felt we would need, including electronic and antenna systems valued at over twenty thousand dollars. The army wanted them back, but it was literally years before they were returned.

There was one Friday through Sunday drill in the field that was, for me, the low point of my career. It was so bad that I began to look for alternatives. Among

the considerations was transfer to another local unit, be it infantry or whatever, or simply get out altogether. But yes, there is a God, and things improved. One summer camp gave us the essence of what we needed to perform our jobs. This happened after a disastrous summer camp. The only problem with the training was that we were learning a system that would no longer be used, as the latest technology we had at the unit was already being phased out.

Within a short time, we had fellow soldiers whose health began failing. Jose Bermudez and I spoke of things that could be passed on to our wives, such as liver problems and the like. One drill, he wasn't there. I later learned he had died. Although he was a good-sized individual, and generally not in a health-based lifestyle, there are those who believe the war generally contributed to his demise.

Ray Evans, with whom I had worked directly for years and with whom I had discussions of Biblical matters, was due to reenlist. This would be the last time he would have to extend prior to retiring. But, as he explained, "Terry, I just don't have the energy or desire to continue. I'm just worn out." He chose to pass on extending. He, too, died from what was described as a "very rare form of leukemia." His service was conducted on drill time. He was buried in his Class "A" uniform. Outside the funeral home, our former First Sergeant Hank Obester and his wife were distributing flyers pertaining to the war's syndrome and symptoms to watch for. During Ray's graveside service, I got with his sister, Jennifer, one who had contributed to our section, who had been out of the Guard for a while. John Steele was tasked with presenting the flag to Ray's family. He suffered a stroke soon after, which left him partially debilitated.

Although there was much speculation over how much the war had contributed to individual health problems, we were losing several veteran troops as a result of drug testing. There was an inordinate number of unannounced lock downs at which time everyone was required to give a sample for testing. Despite the frequency of the testing, someone's career ended each time by testing positive for the likes of marijuana and cocaine. There were those who survived that battle, but lost their own personal wars.

Although Desert Storm was over, there were periodic flare-ups that resulted in boundaries and no-fly zones being imposed throughout the region. One morning, we arose to the news that Kobar Towers, our one-day apartment complex, had been partially destroyed by an exploding truck bomb, killing several American service personnel.

Because of a job conflict, I was now performing my summer camp at Fort Lauderdale. Instead of packing my bags and heading out with the crowd, I was able to drive to the armory each day, where I was given administrative tasks and assisted

those who were preparing to leave for camp after my two weeks was complete. This allowed me to view the convoy making the annual trek northbound for what promised to be just another miserable summer camp. From a vantage point at an overpass to I95, I waved at them with one hand while clutching a cup of coffee with the other. There were those who knew I was there, and as they spotted me, they acknowledged my presence with a variety of hand gestures, some expressing disdain.

As I reported to the armory for *camp,* I was under the impression that I would have to make it to February to reach retirement. I would have been out the previous year, but the National Guard has a point system requiring fifty points to have a good year toward retirement. The year I nearly quit, I didn't attend summer camp due to a job conflict. My points were assessed as being under fifty. During a free moment, I was speaking to a female sergeant who had been temporarily assigned to our unit. We were informally discussing my situation and she asked me about the particular year, and I told her. She stated that during that year there were mistakes made on point computations due to a new system being implemented. Not everyone's records were updated. "If it's alright with you, I'll check your records," she said.

Sure, I thought. I had nothing to lose, but I really didn't have much hope on the revised version. No summer camp, and there were frills I missed. It was about an hour later when two women bounced into the room. "Sergeant Walters, it appears you have more than fifty points," one of them said, showing me the revision. She stated that she would request an audit to insure this was the case.

Within a few days, verification was returned. "You can officially retire today, if you choose," the same sergeant who had chosen to double-check my records told me. The two helpful sergeants were treated to the lunch of their choice and my lifetime of gratitude.

It was only a matter of months before I submitted my letter and turned in my army issue. During the final formation of my final drill, I was placed in front of the formation. As I looked out, it dawned on me that so many of the names and faces were unfamiliar. Only a few of us were left, just six years after Desert Storm. Perhaps the time would come when these new troops would be required to make the same sacrifices. Perhaps their fate would be different. As for me, the drills, the summer camps and the activations would now become only memories. It was definitely time to move on.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Terry Walters was born in England, raised in Southern California and has retired from careers in law enforcement and military reserves. His is a graduate of San Bernardino Valley College, California, and California State University at Fullerton. He and his wife, Marcie, live in Florida. His son, Bryan, is a member of the United States Navy.

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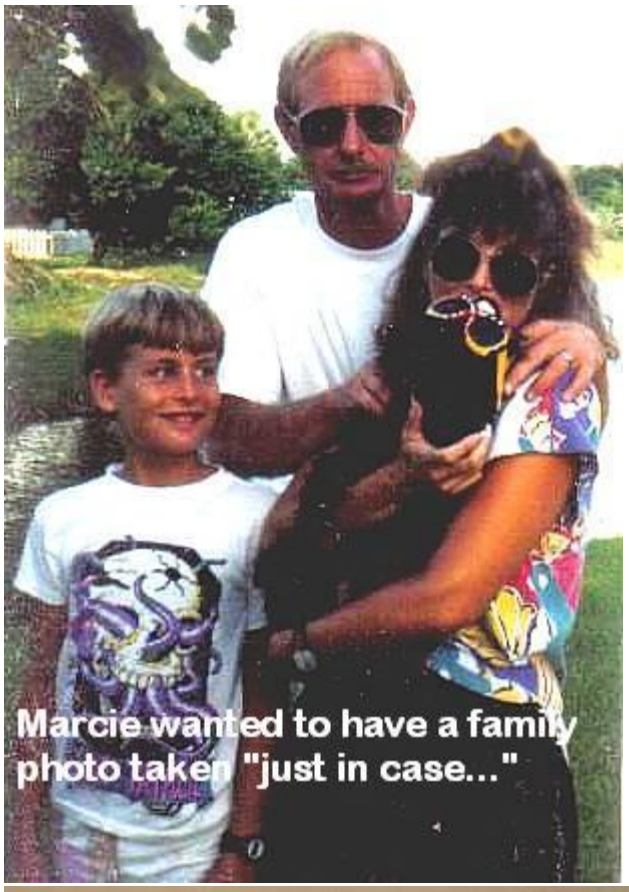
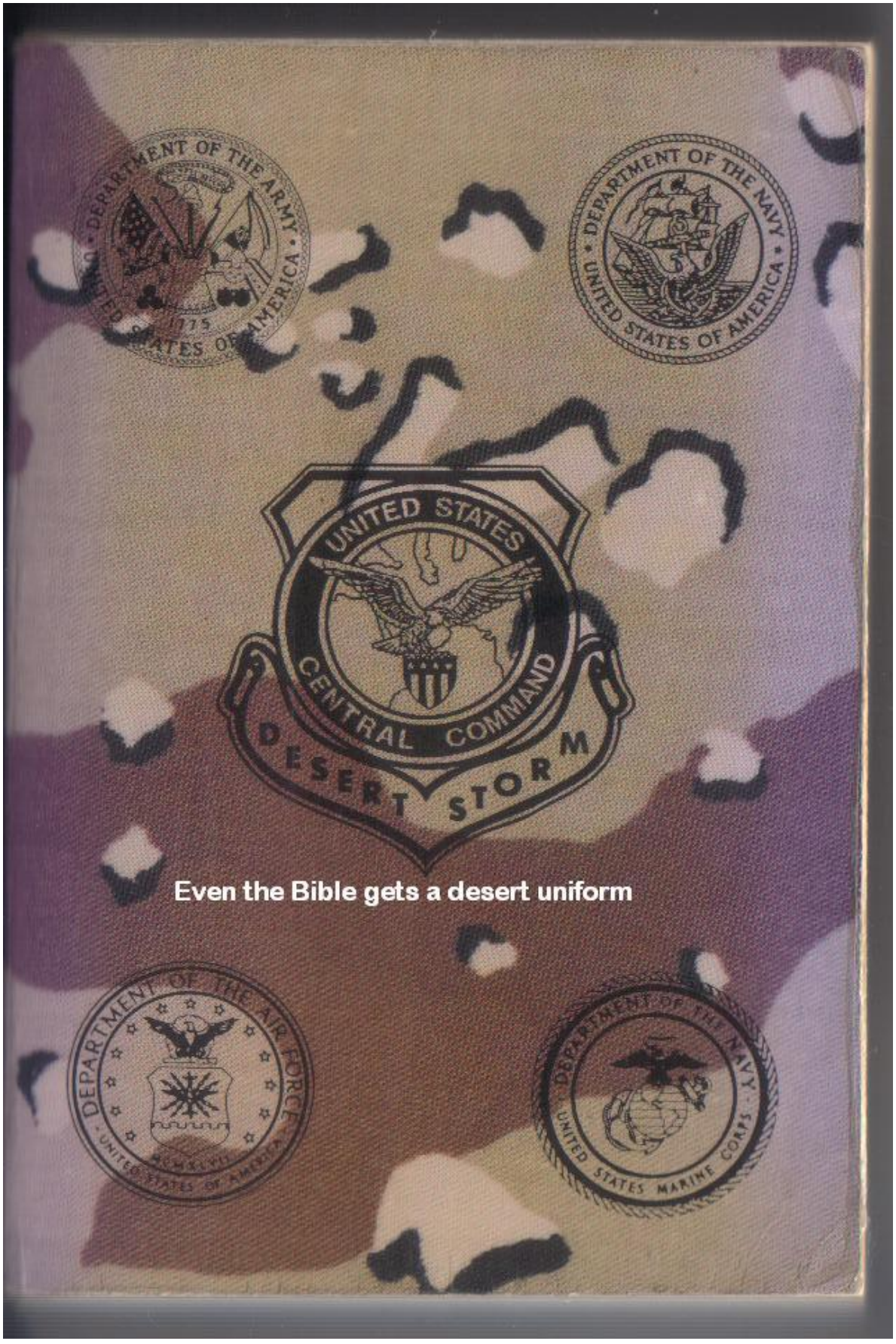

Marcie wanted to have a family
photo taken "just in case..."


Standard ranch haircut
for the big event...Ft.
Stewart style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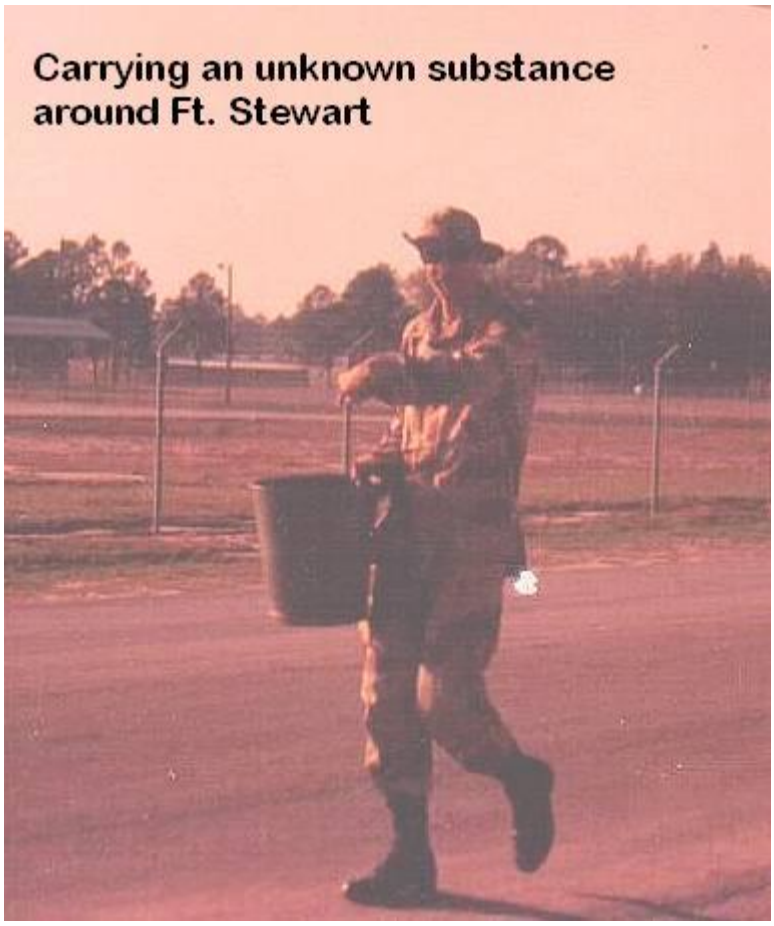
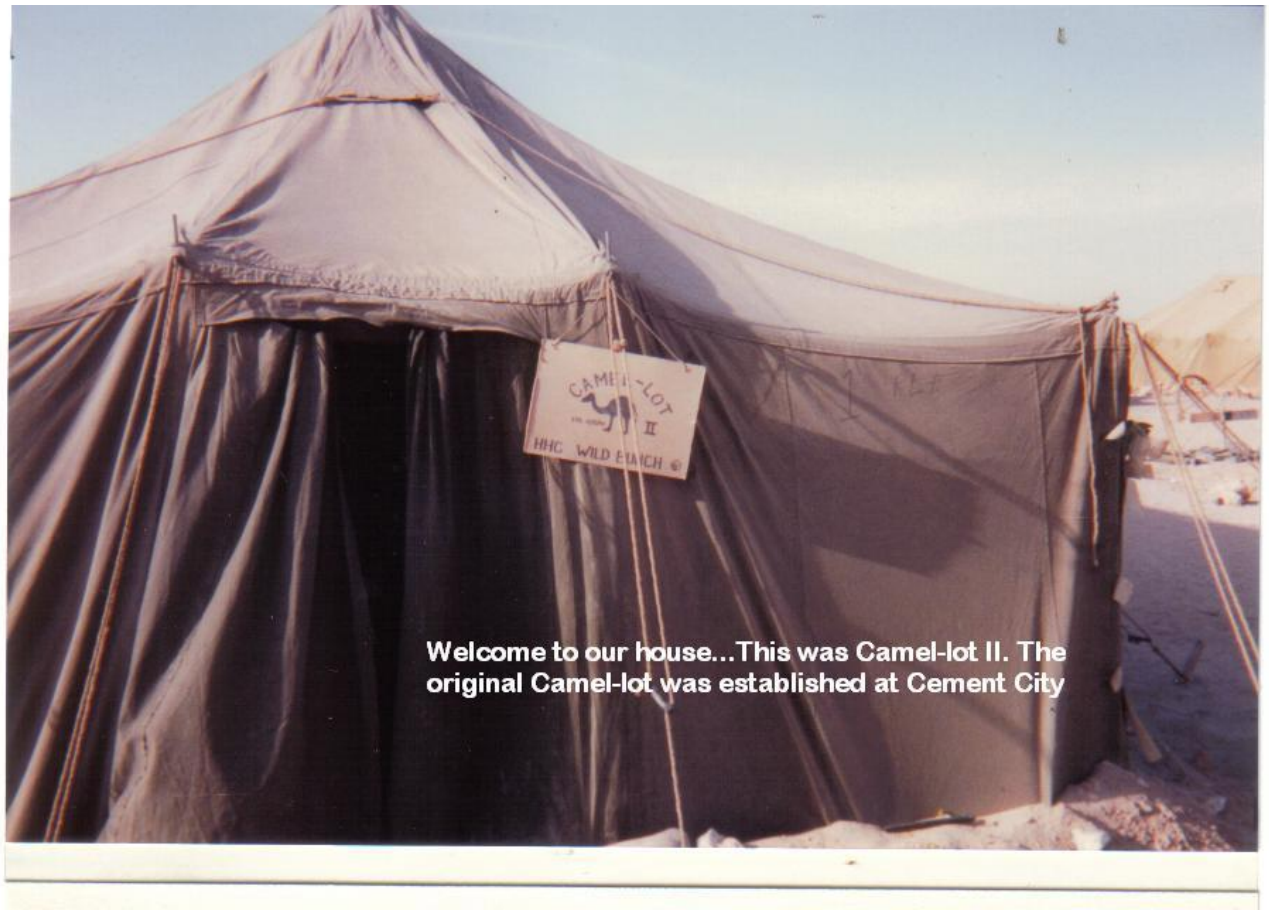
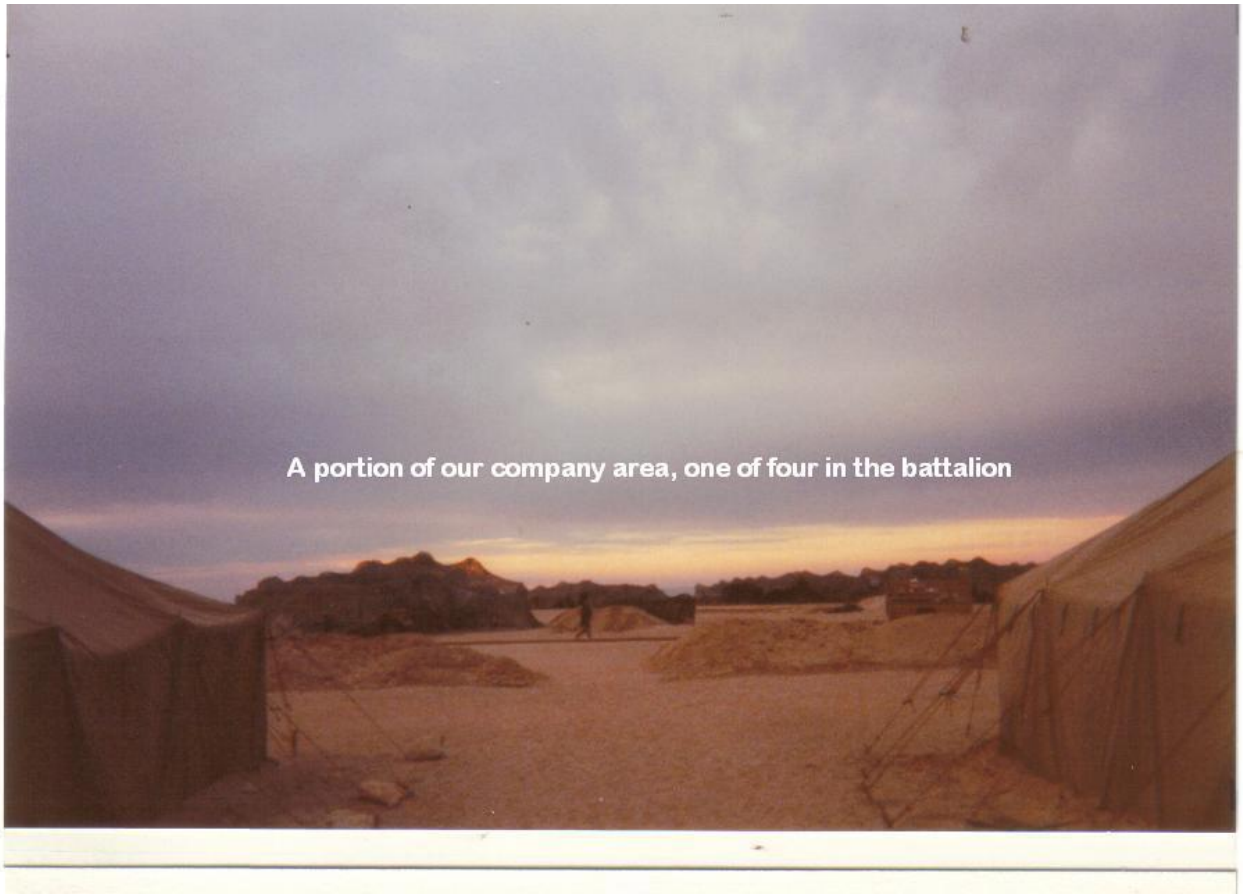
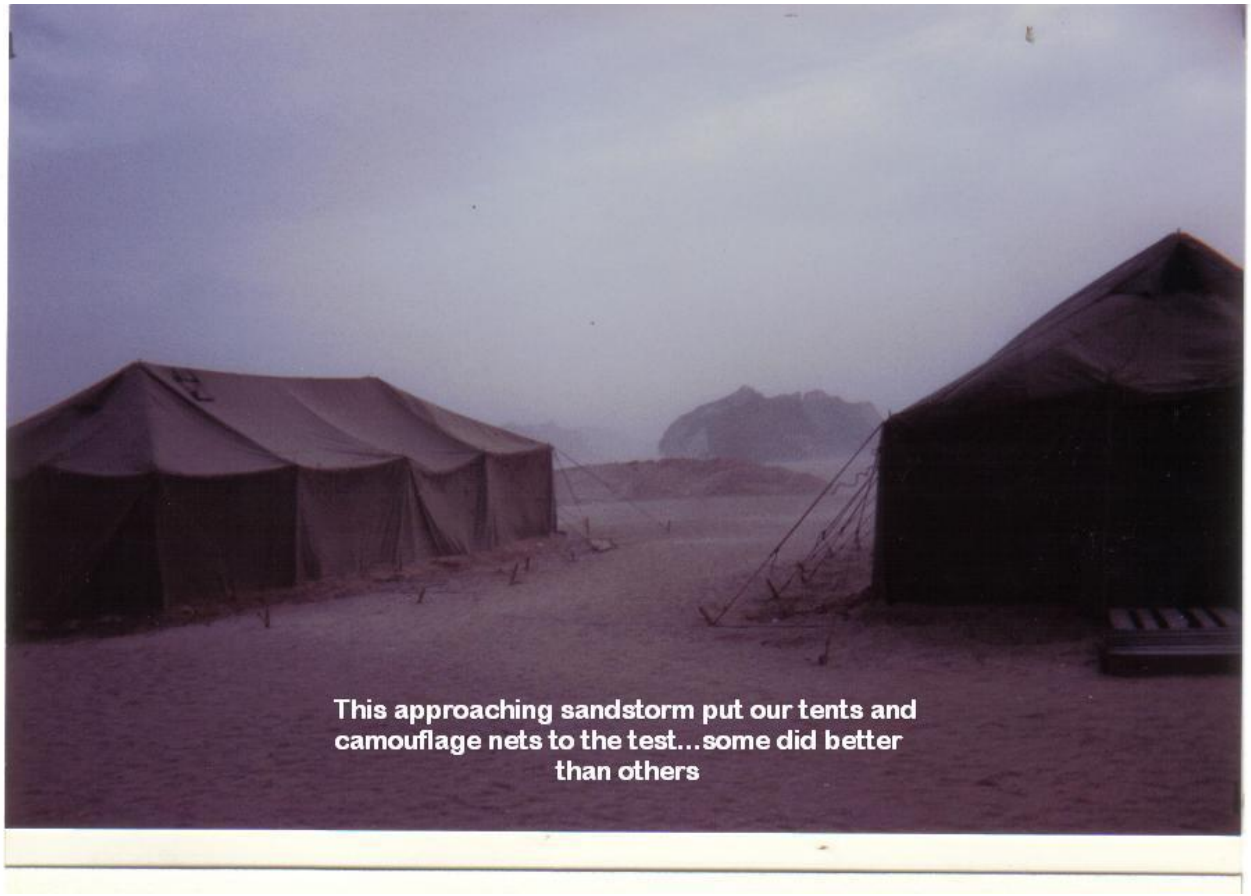

Carrying an unknown substance
around Ft. Stewart


Suburban sprawl with all homes looking alike

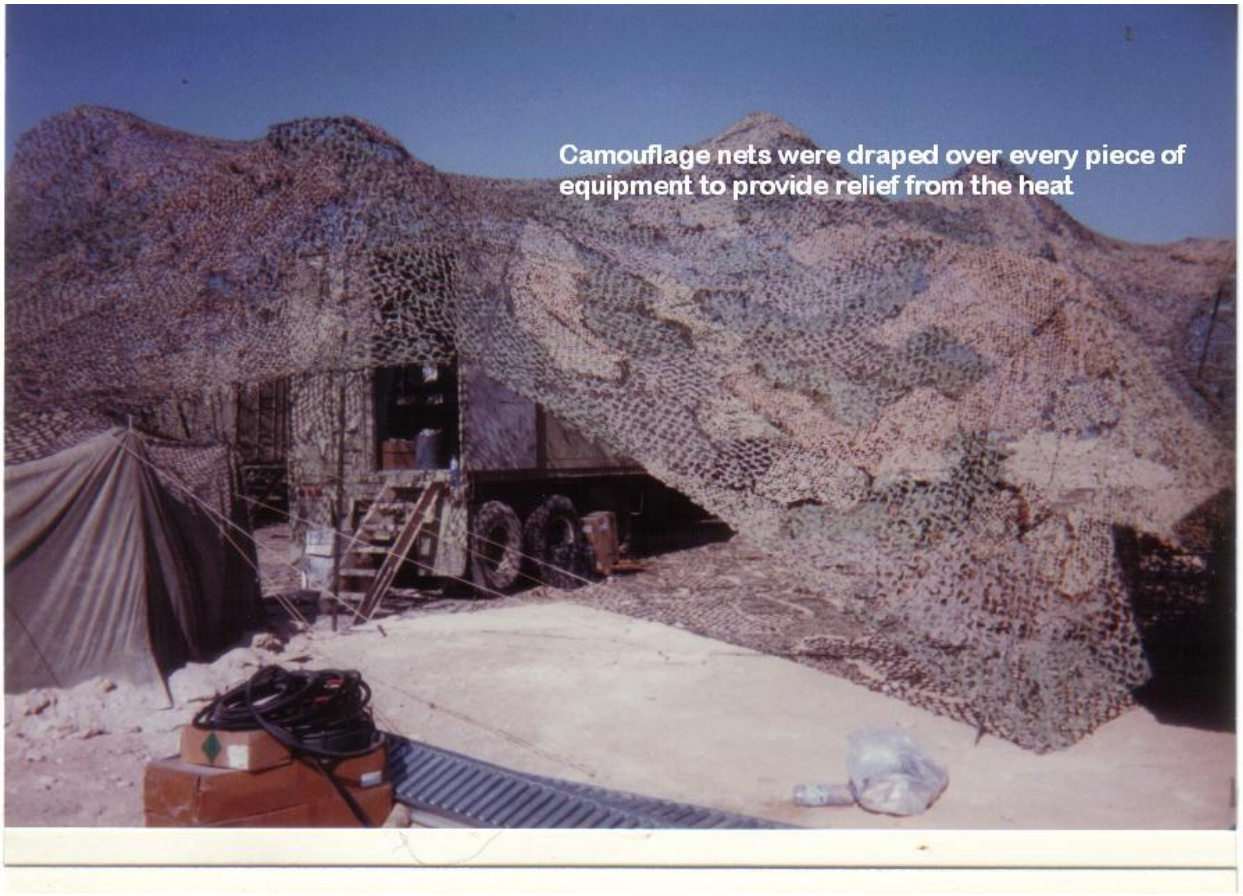

CAMEL-LOT
II
HHC WILD BUNCH
Welcome to our house...This was Camel-lot II. The original Camel-lot was established at Cement City


A portion of our company area, one of four in the battalion

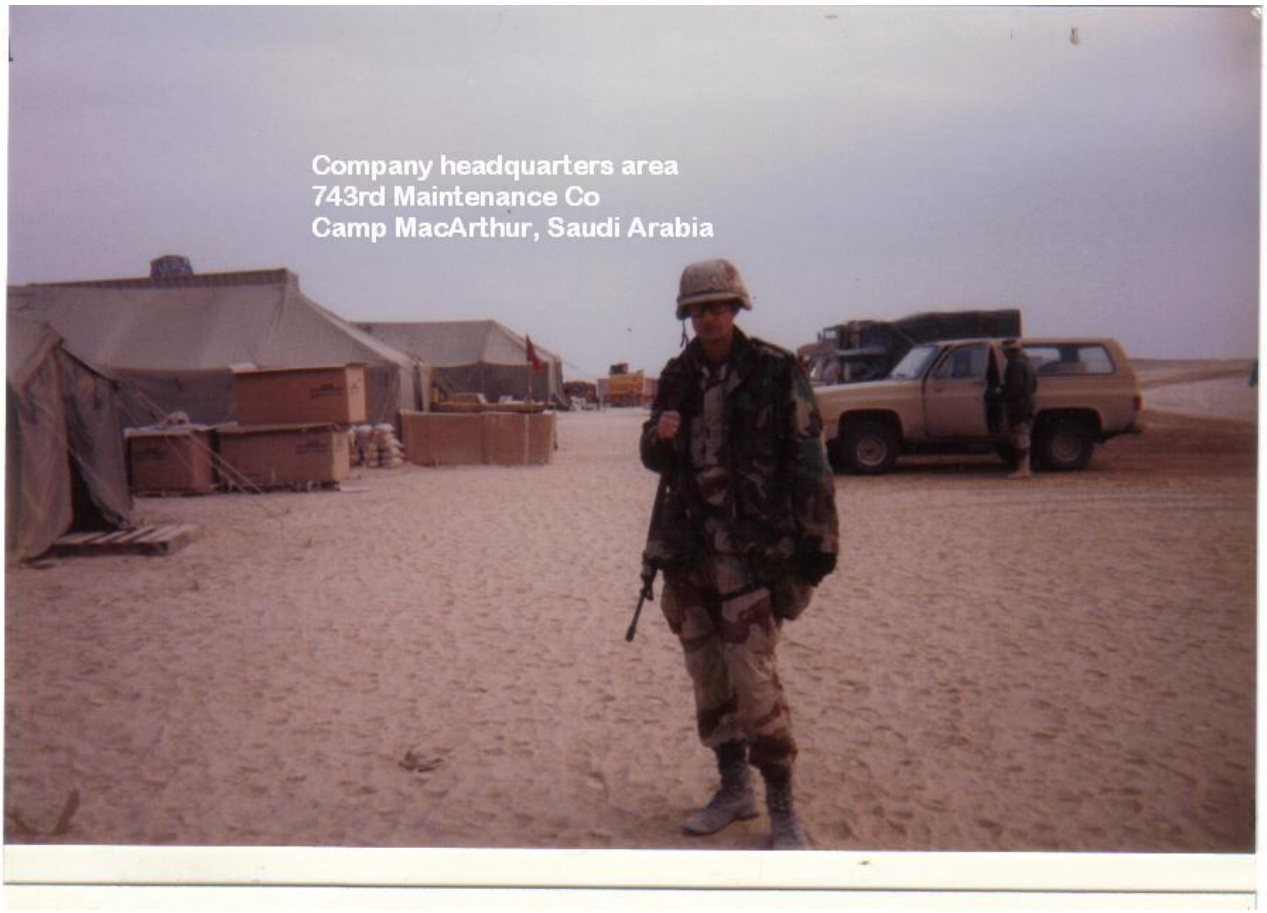

Welcome to the 'hood

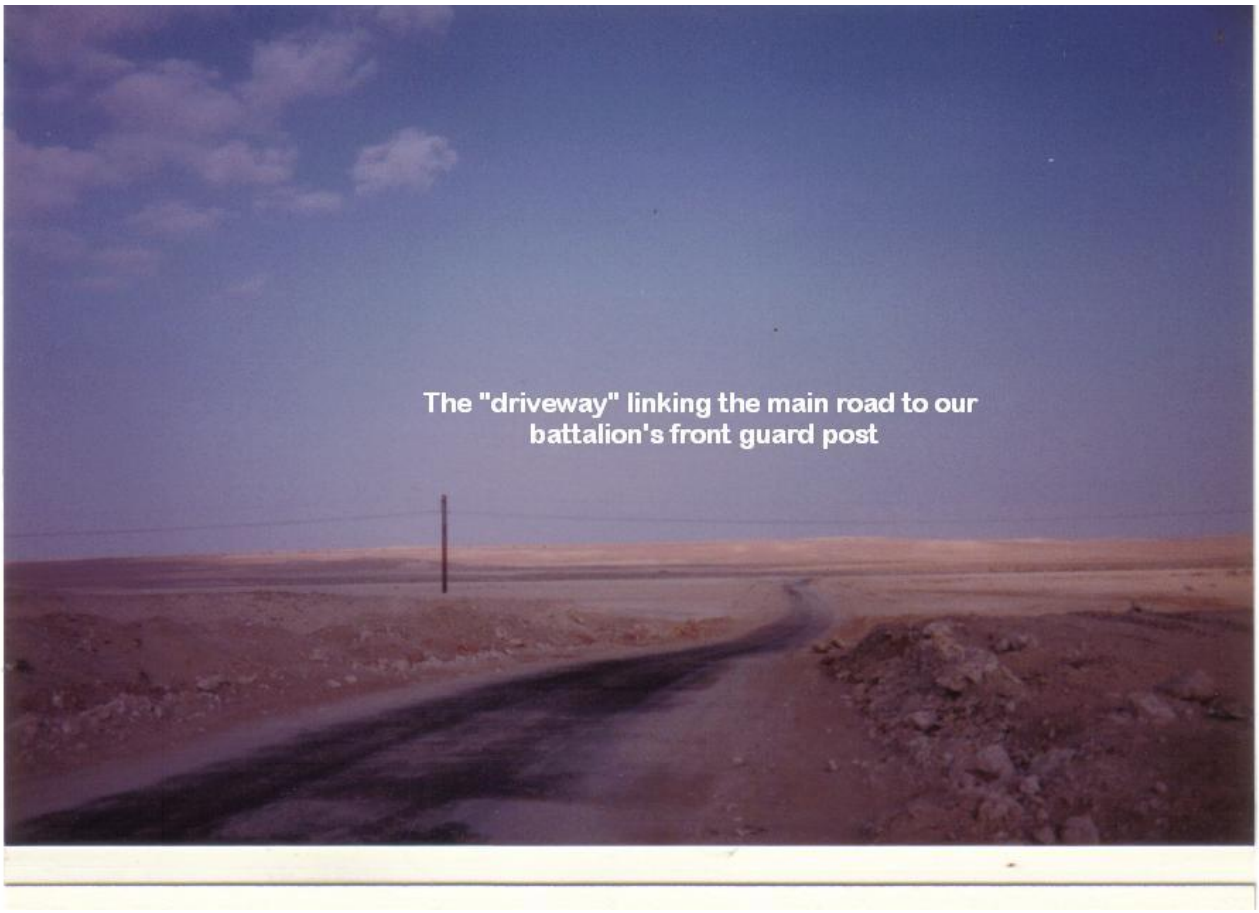


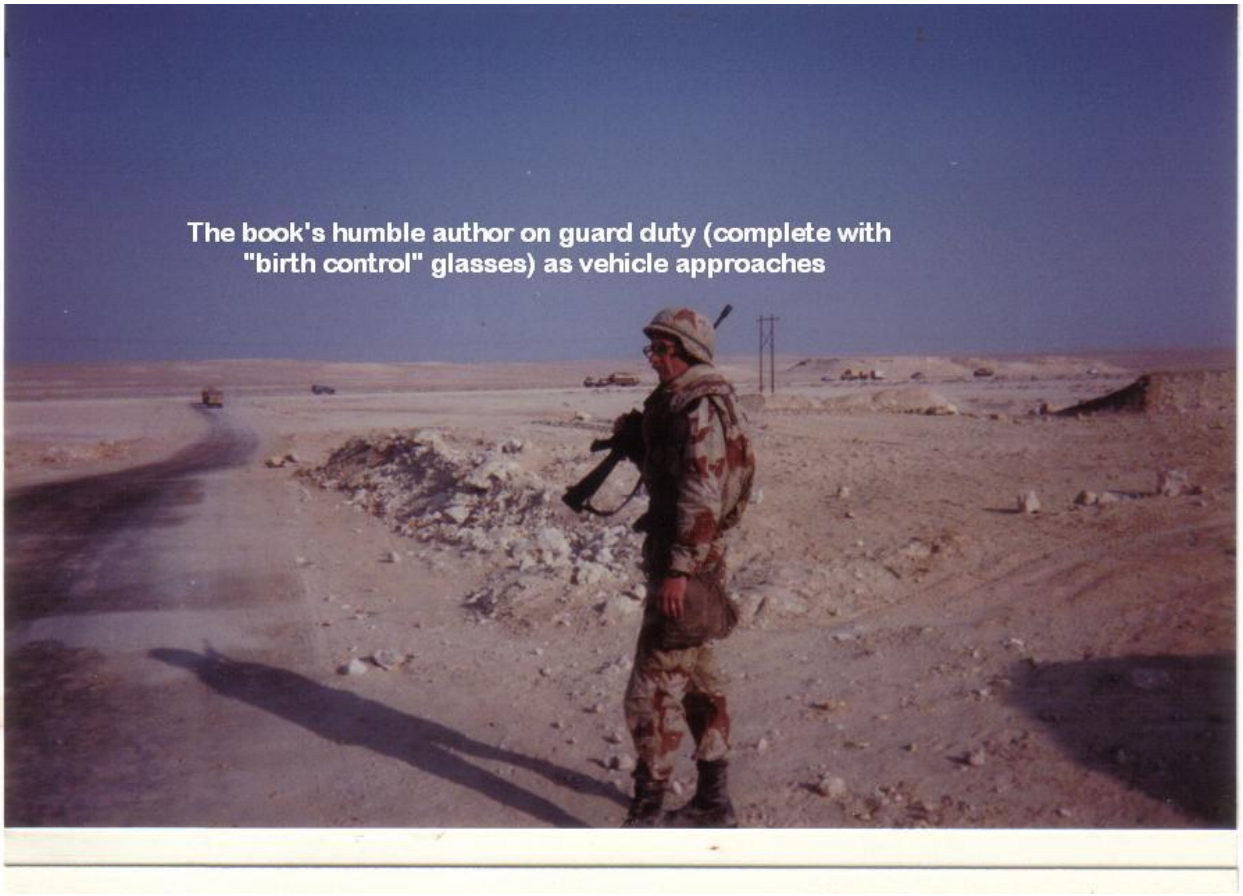
This approaching sandstorm put our tents and camouflage nets to the test...some did better than others

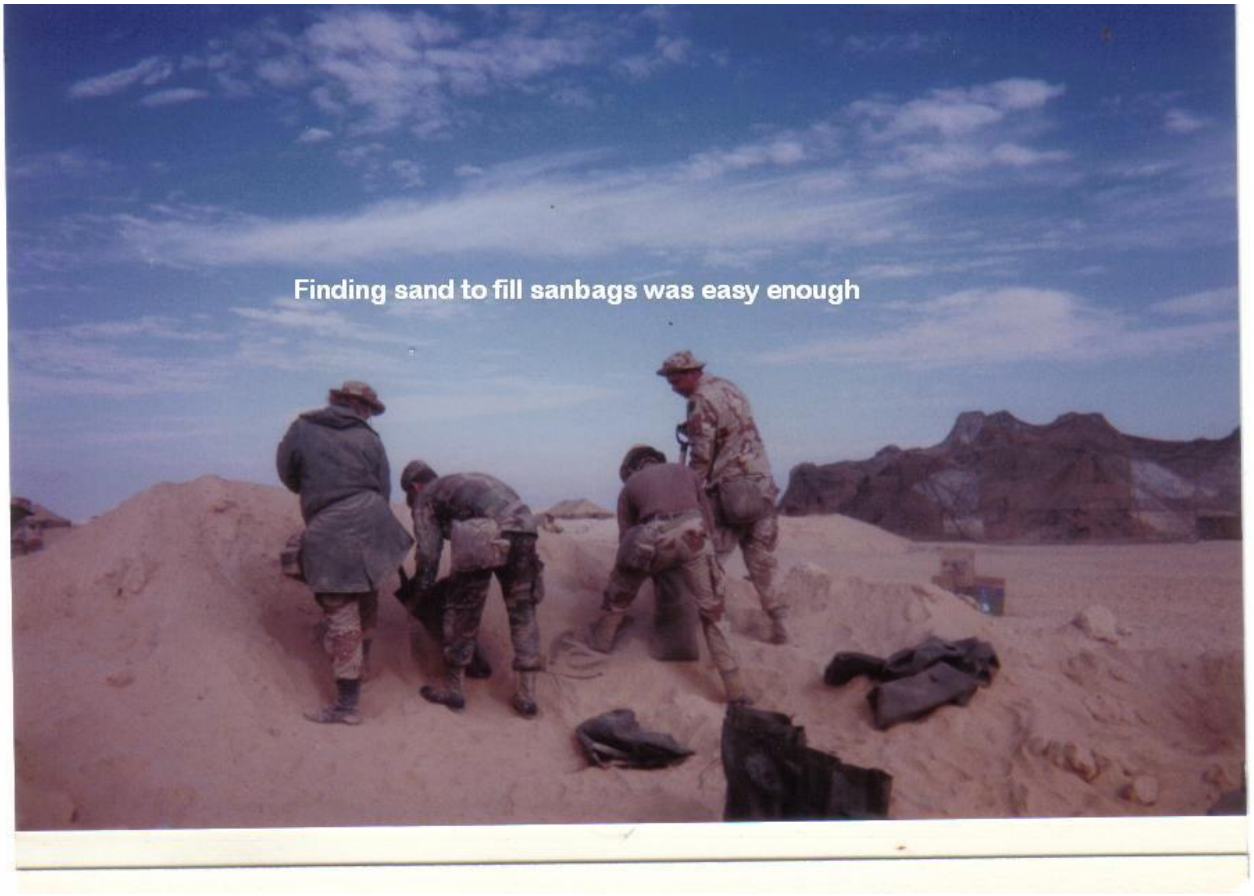

Camouflage nets were draped over every piece of
equipment to provide relief from the heat

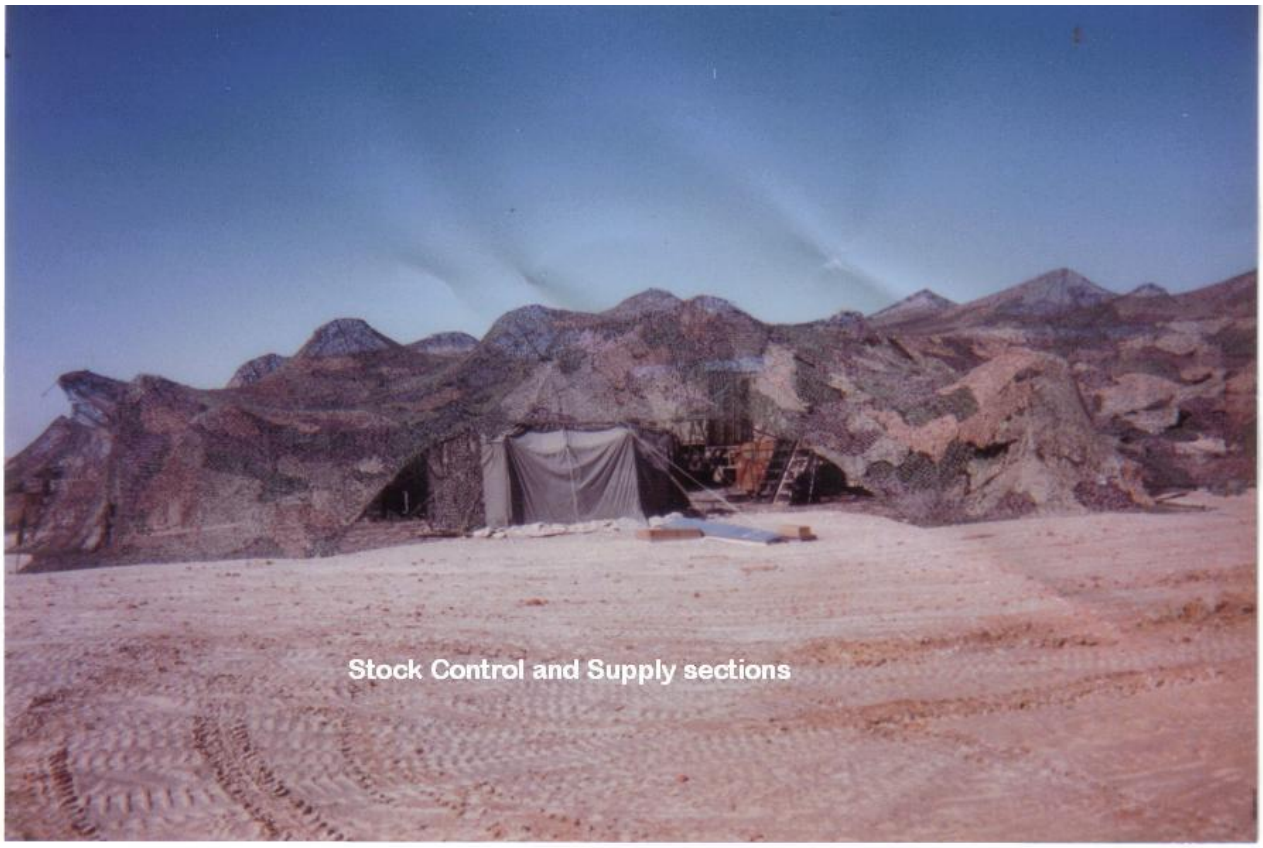

First formation starts
another work day

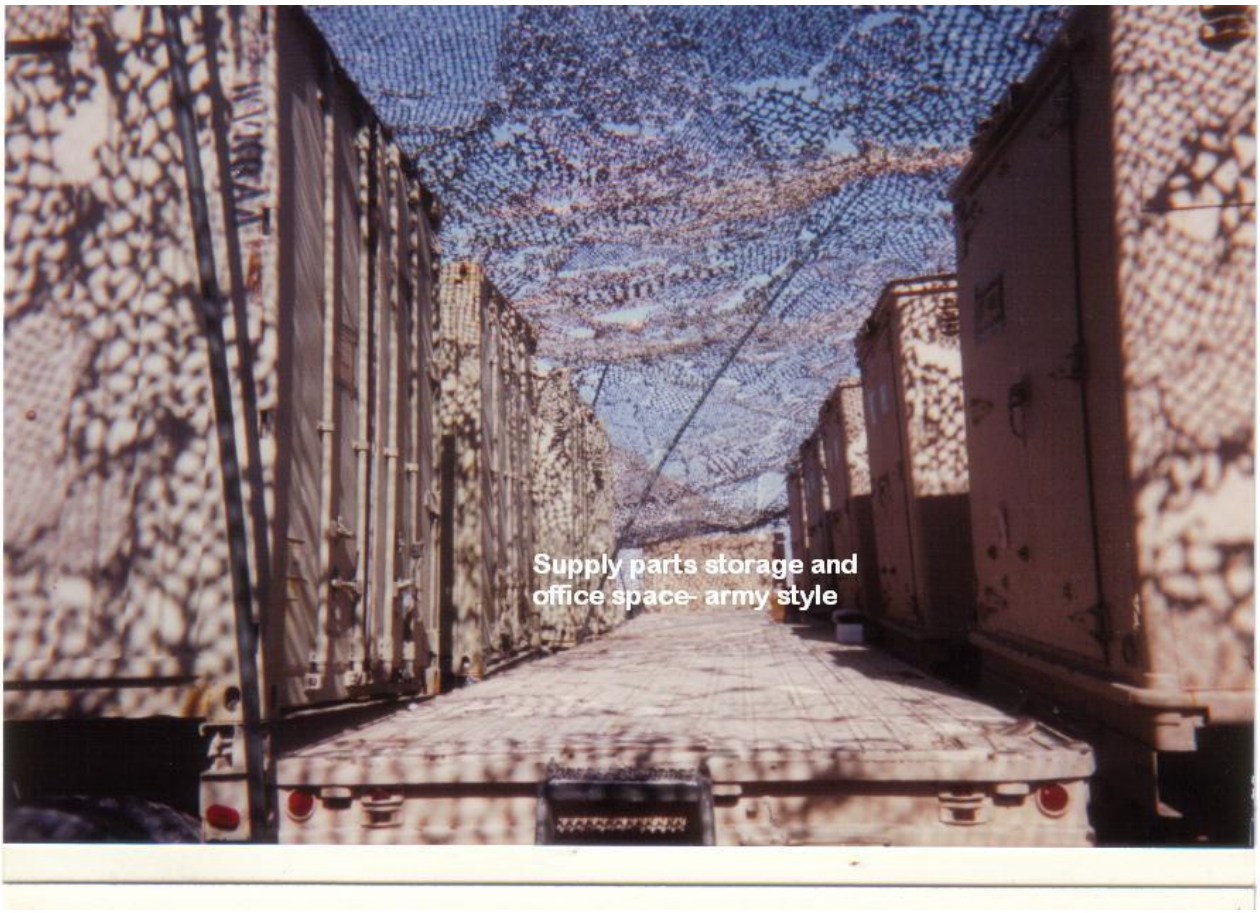

Company headquarters area
743rd Maintenance Co
Camp MacArthur, Saudi Arabia

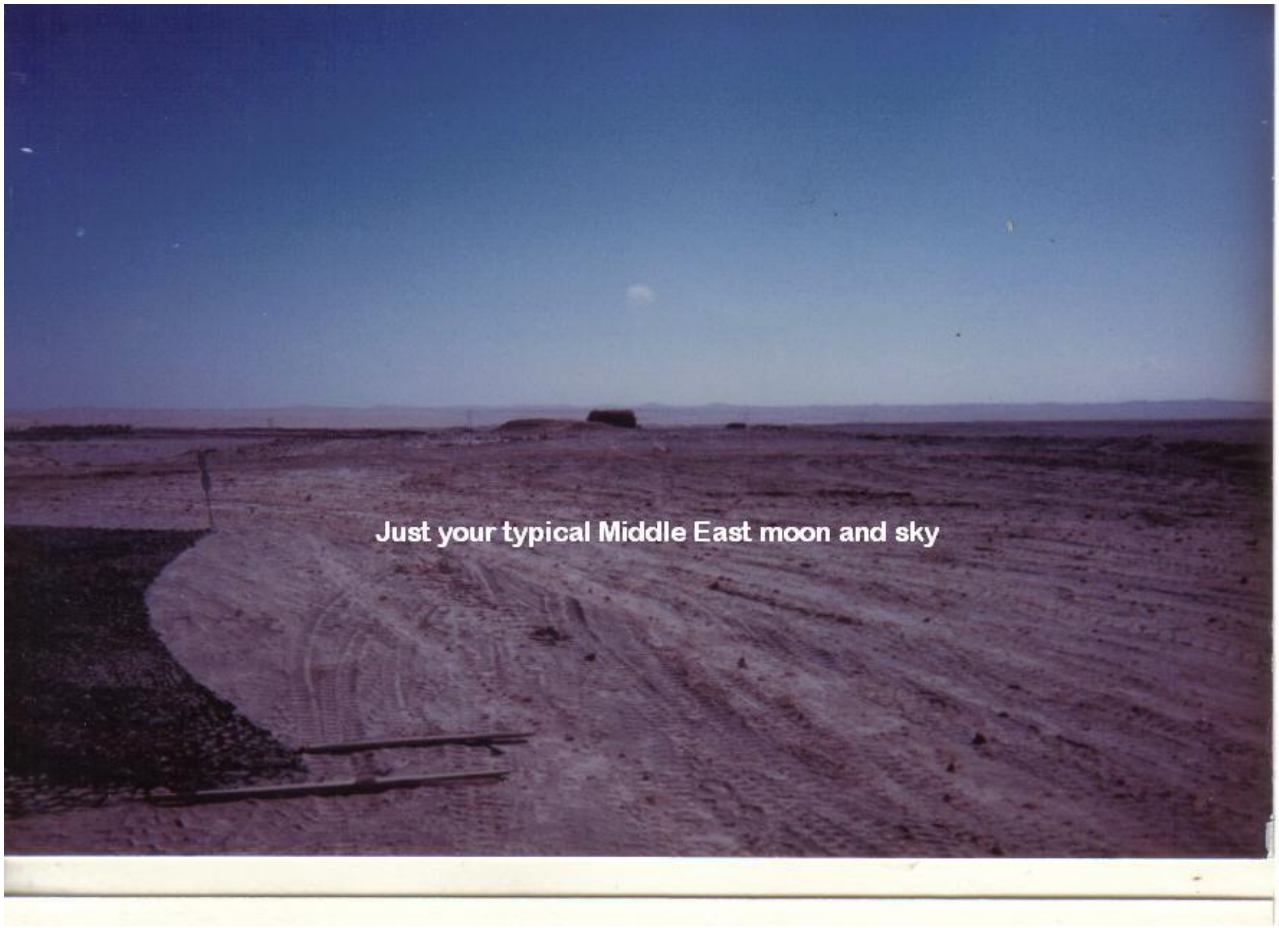

The "driveway" linking the main road to our
battalion's front guard post

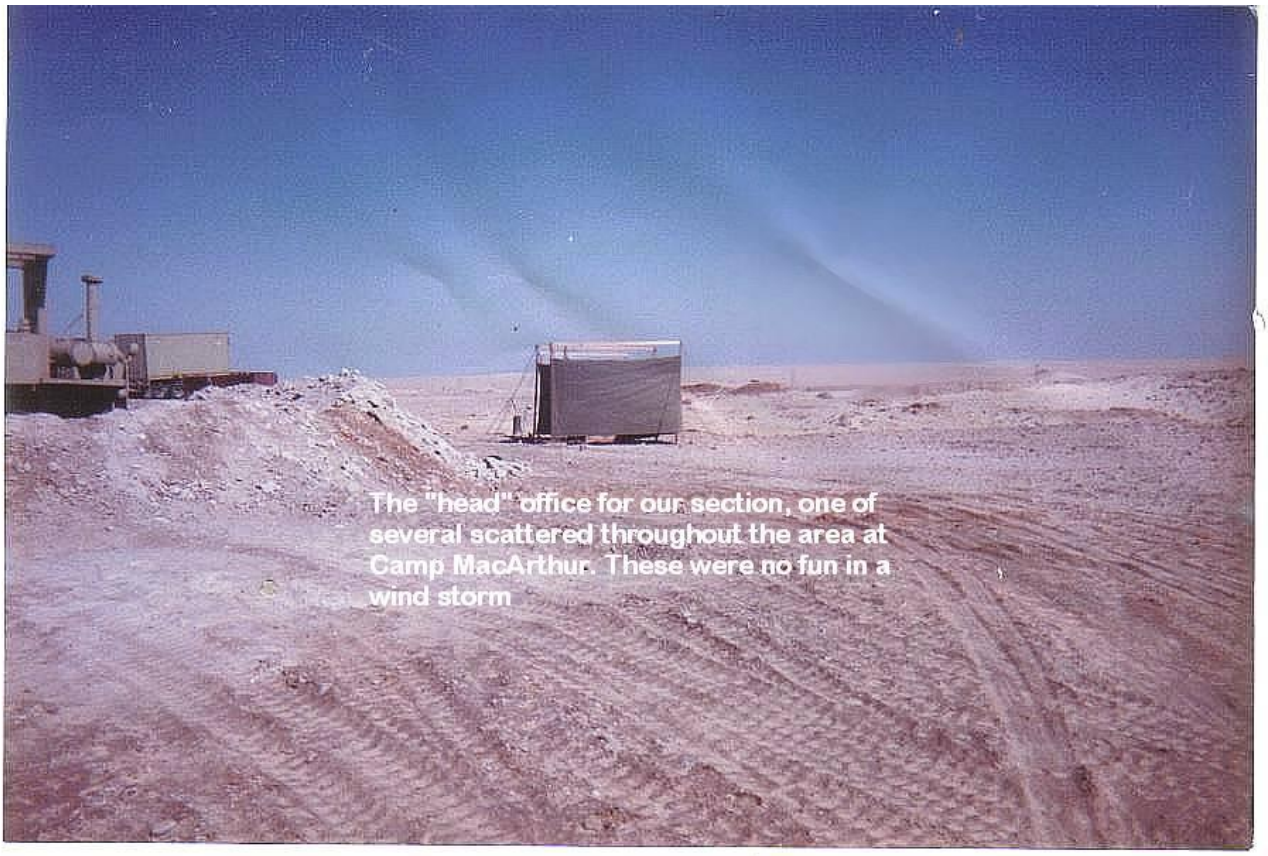

The book's humble author on guard duty (complete with
"birth control" glasses) as vehicle approaches

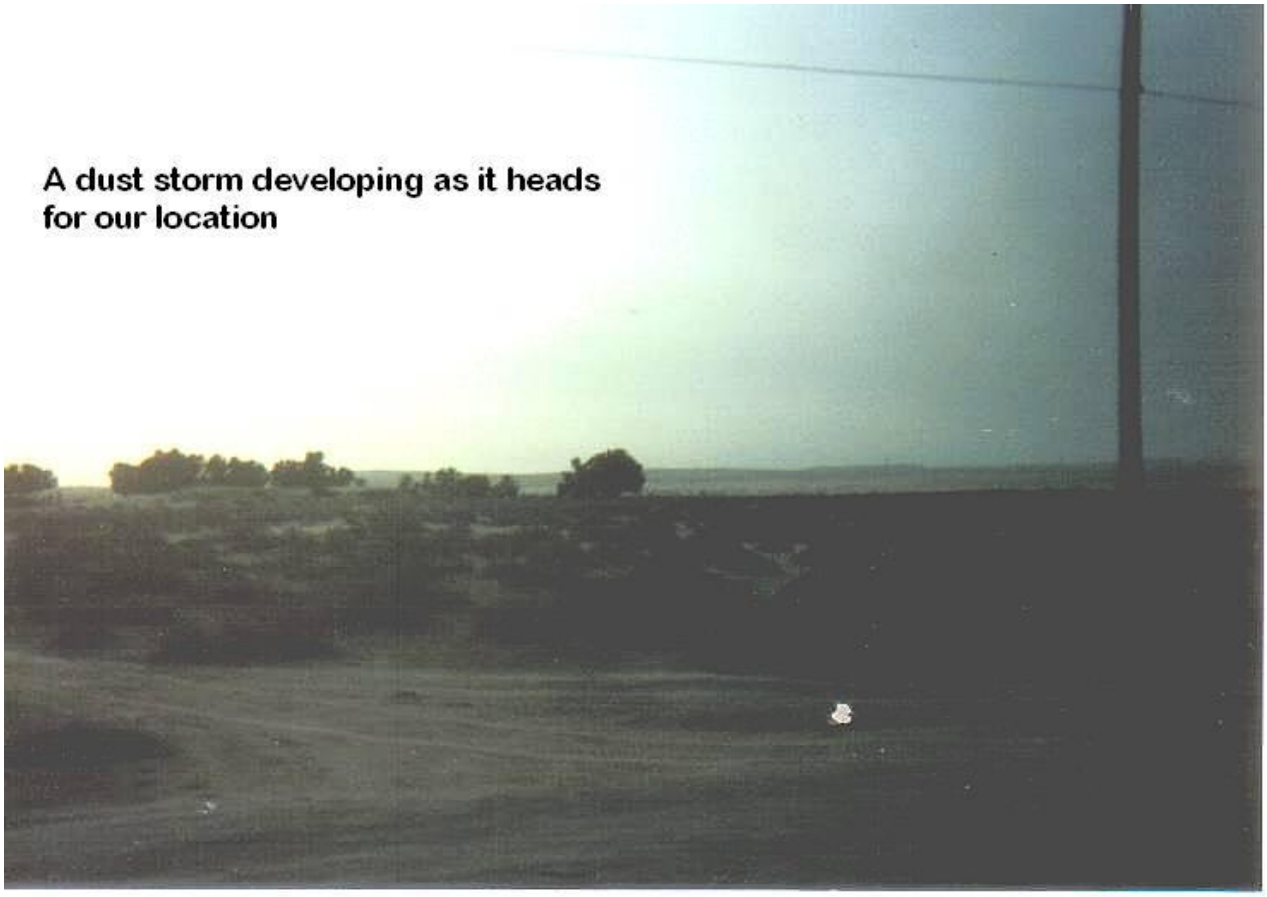

Finding sand to fill sanbags was easy enough


Stock Control and Supply sections


Supply parts storage and
office space- army style


Just your typical Middle East moon and sky

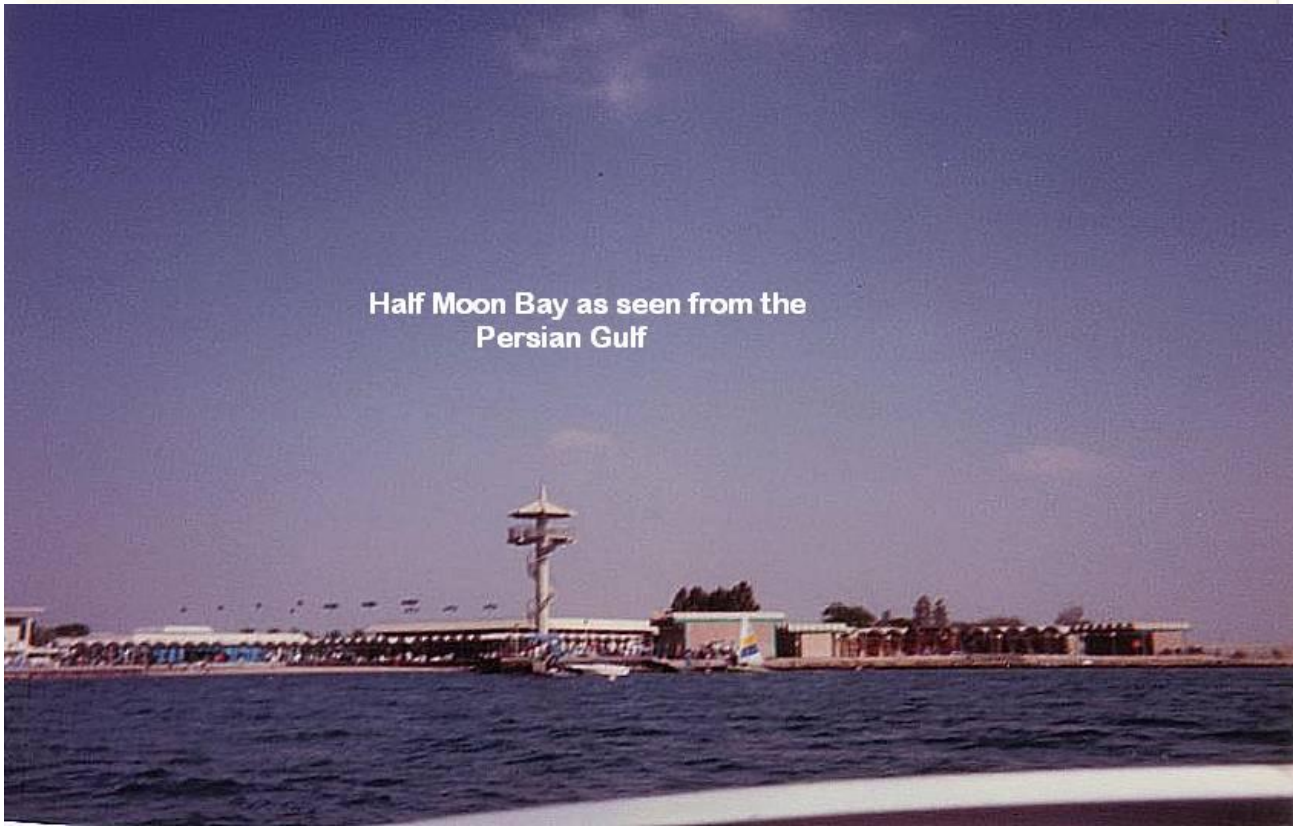

The "head" office for our section, one of
several scattered throughout the area at
Camp MacArthur. These were no fun in a
wind storm

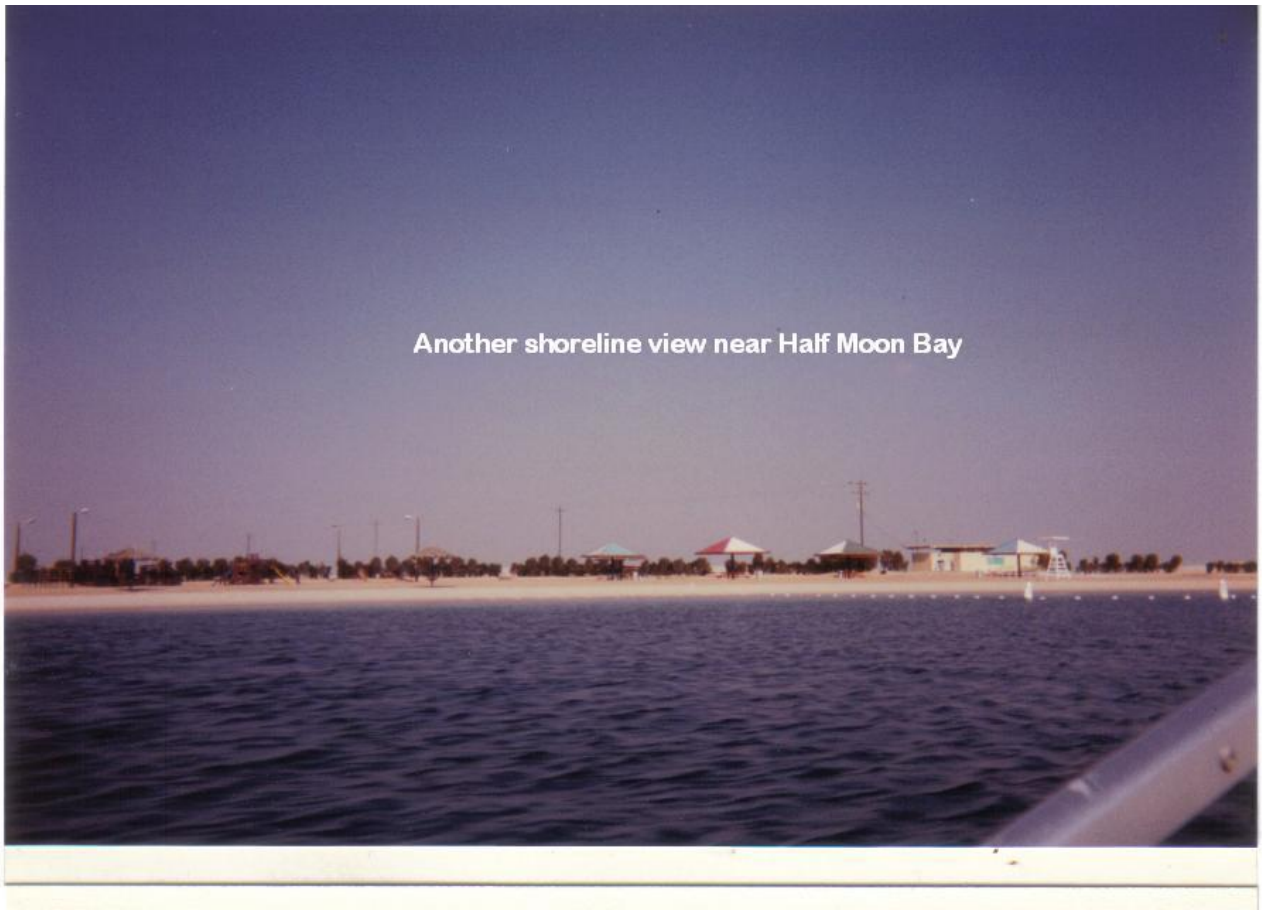


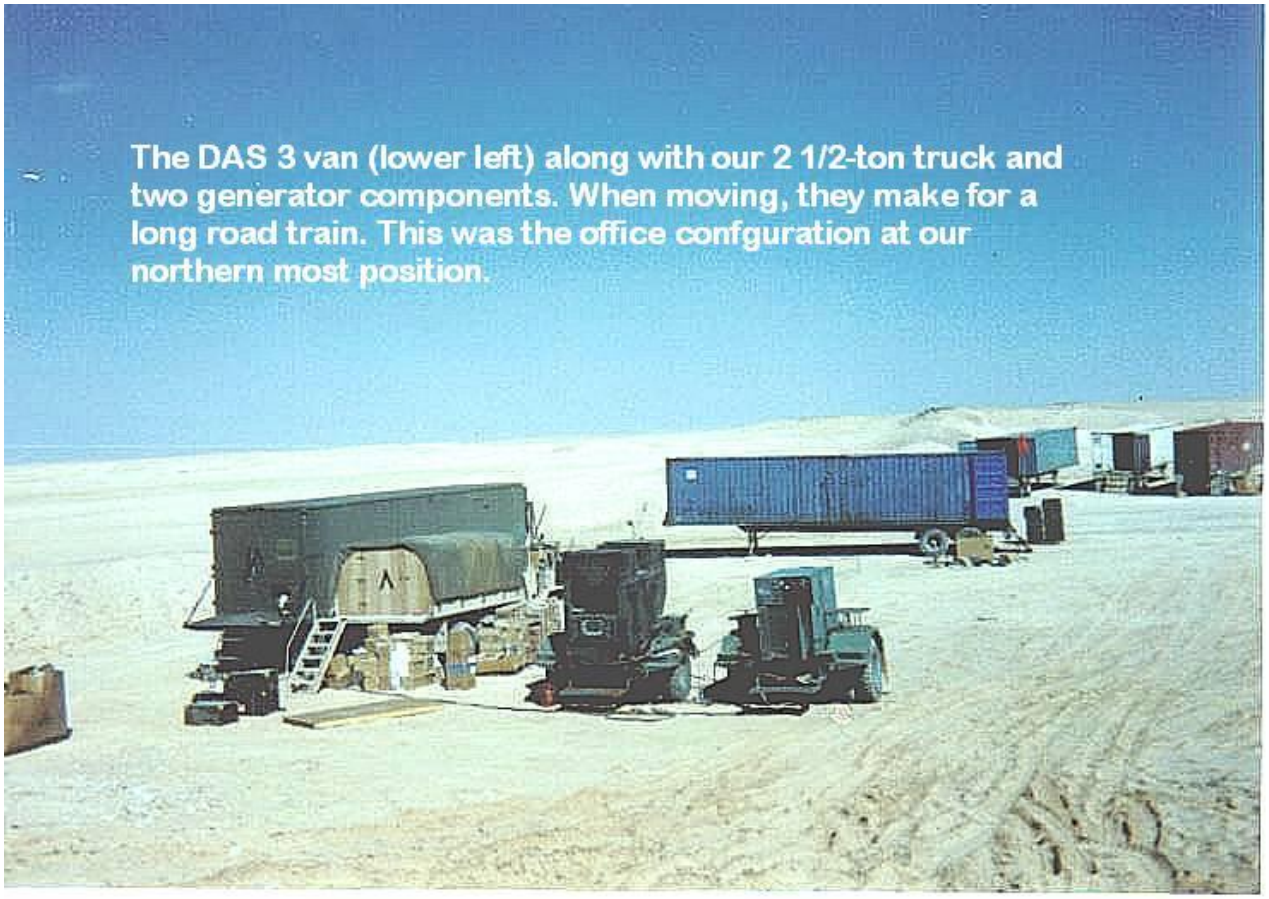
A dust storm developing as it heads for our location

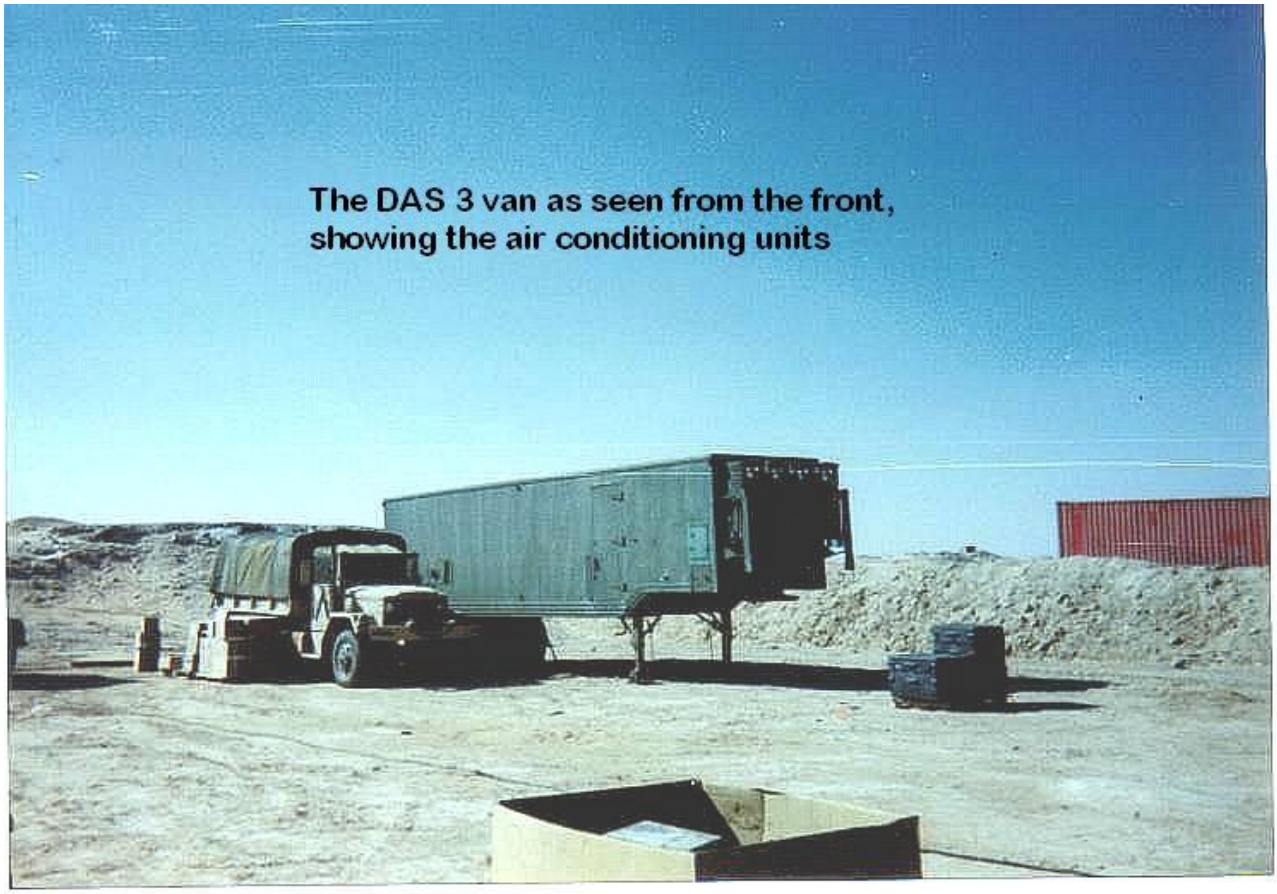
desert chow line

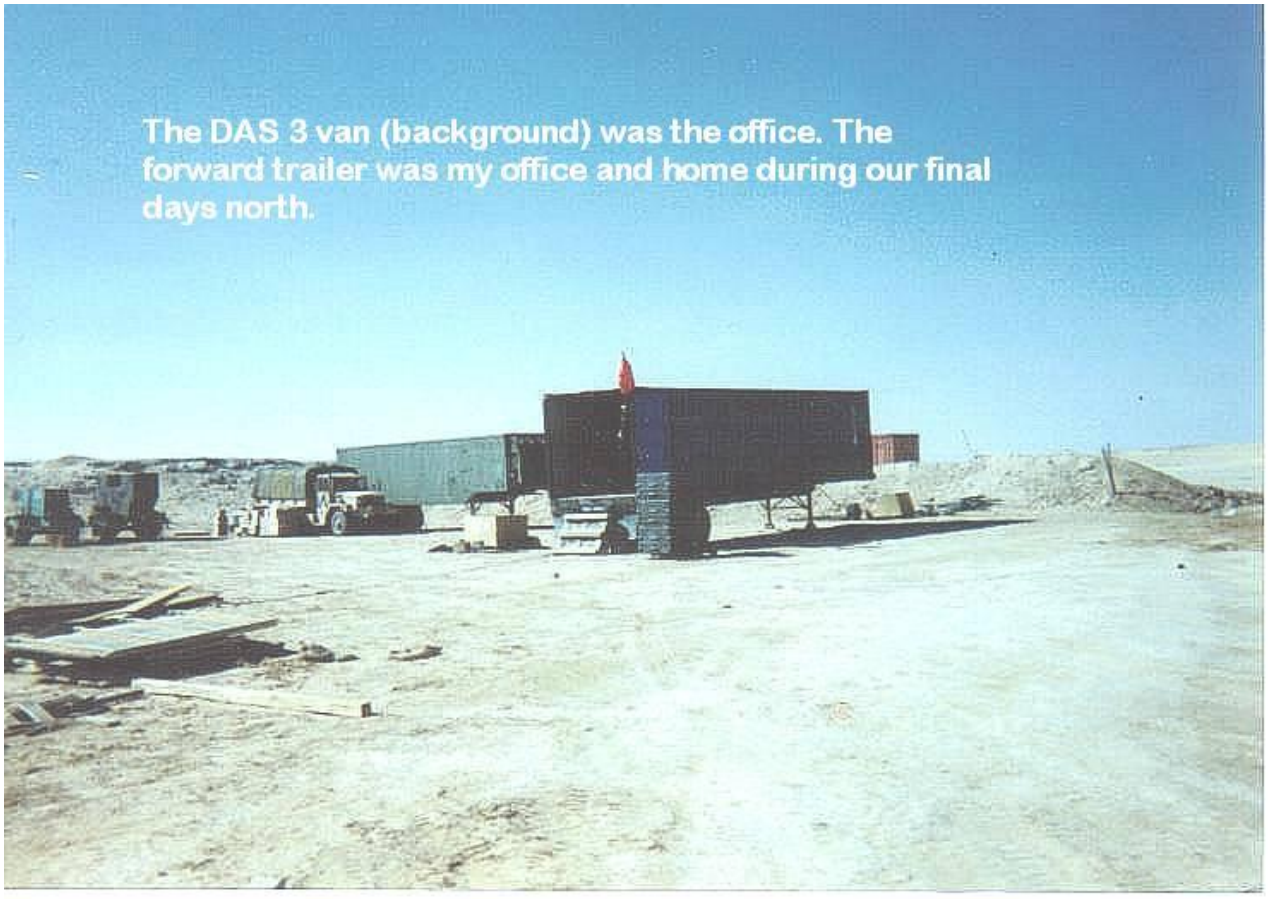

Prayer tower at Half Moon Bay

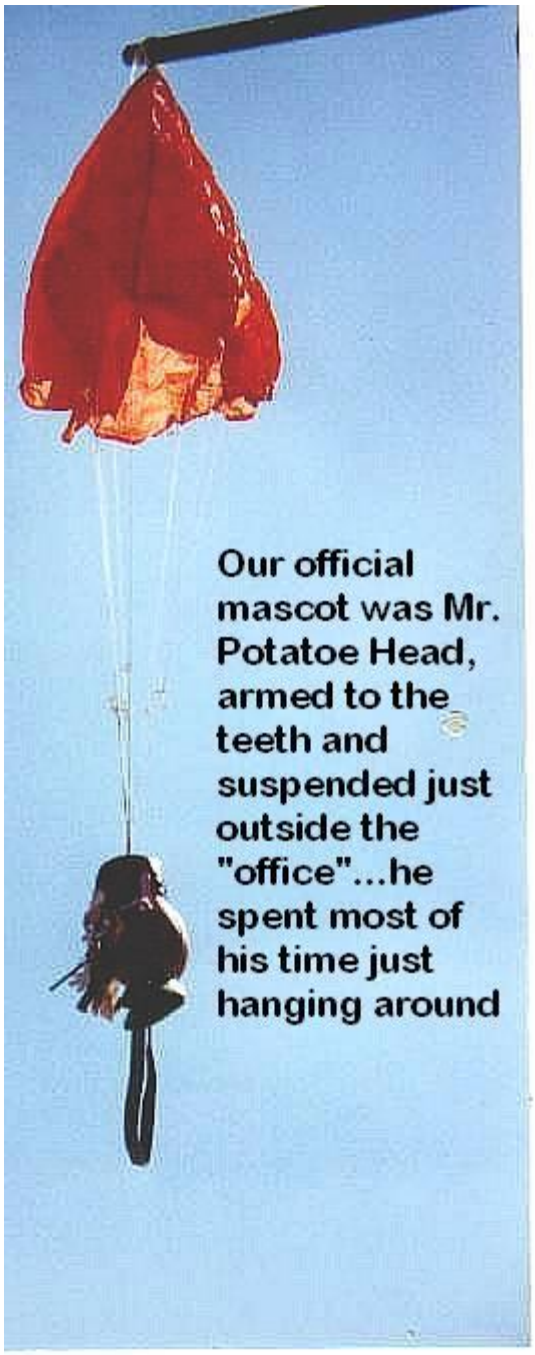

Half Moon Bay as seen from the
Persian Gulf

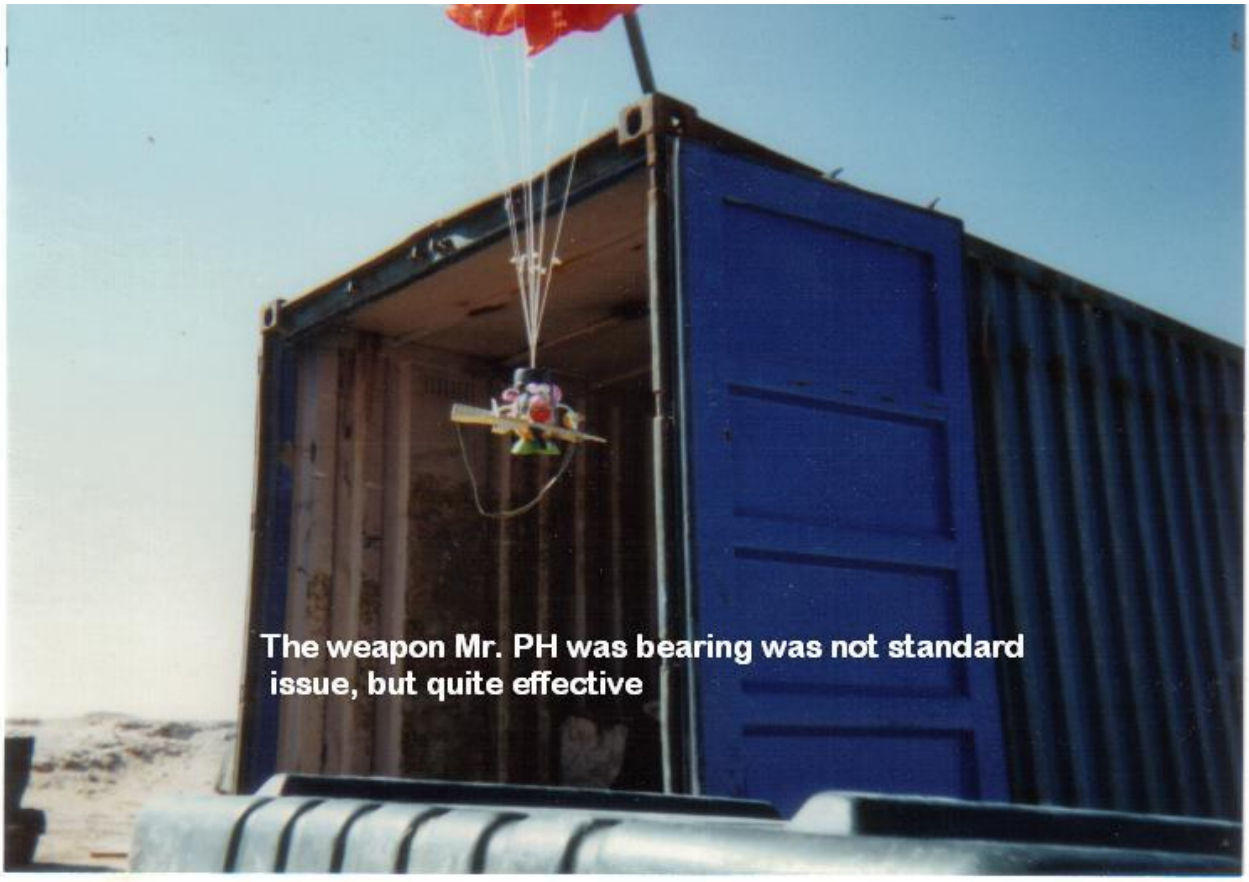

Another shoreline view near Half Moon Bay

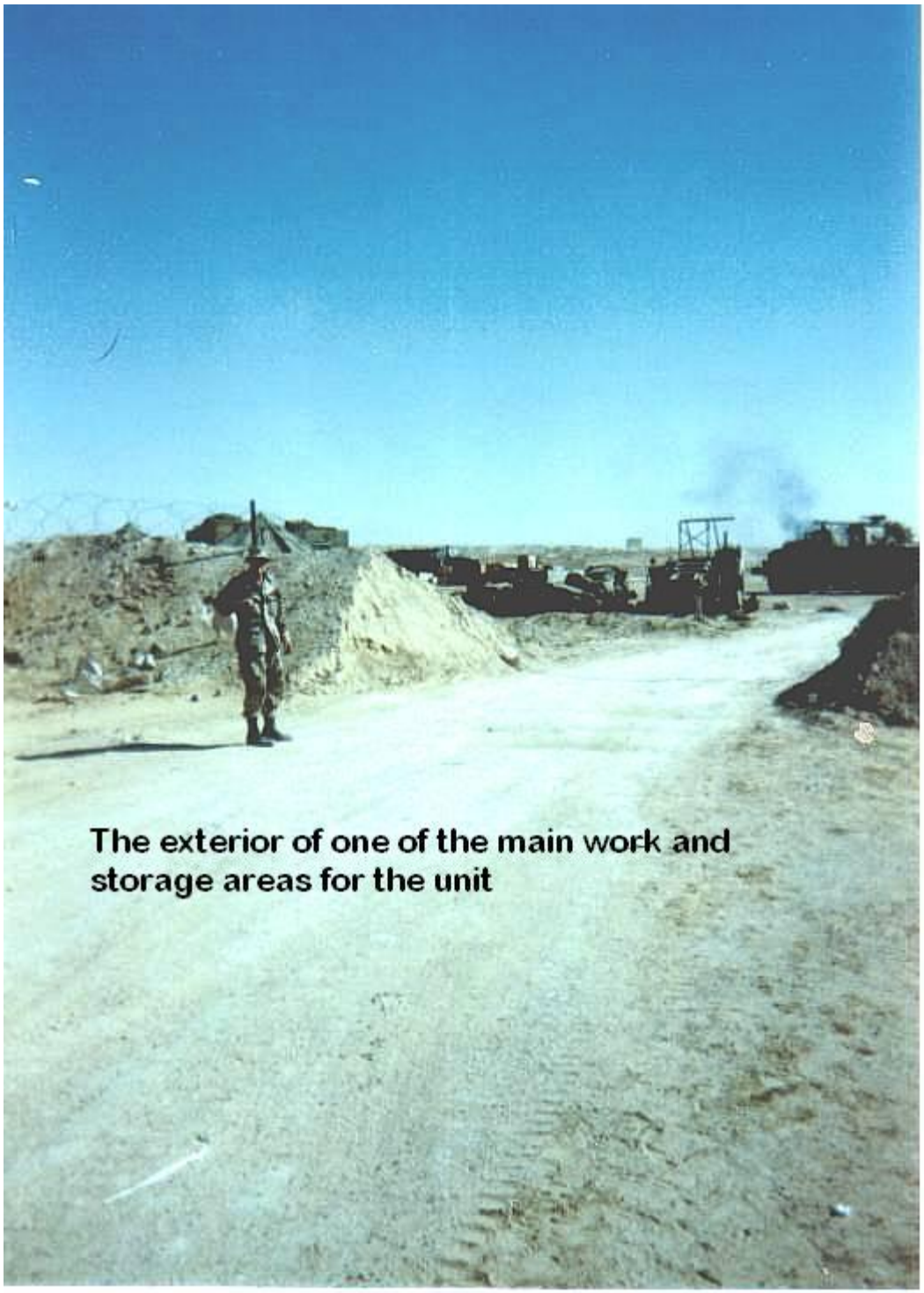

The DAS 3 van (lower left) along with our 2 1/2-ton truck and two generator components. When moving, they make for a long road train. This was the office confguration at our northern most position.


The DAS 3 van as seen from the front,
showing the air conditioning units

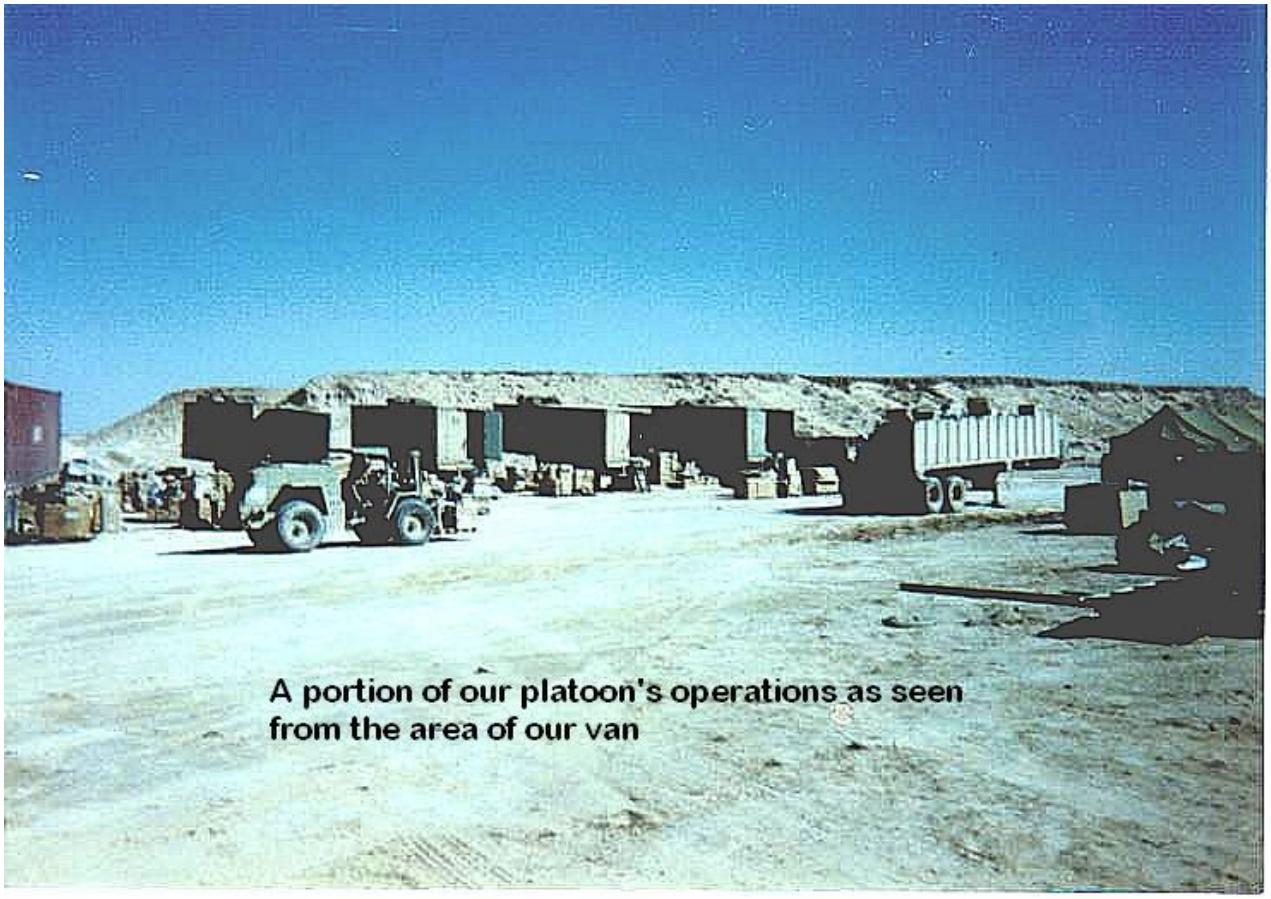

The DAS 3 van (background) was the office. The forward trailer was my office and home during our final days north.


Our official mascot was Mr. Potatoe Head, armed to the teeth and suspended just outside the "office"...he spent most of his time just hanging around

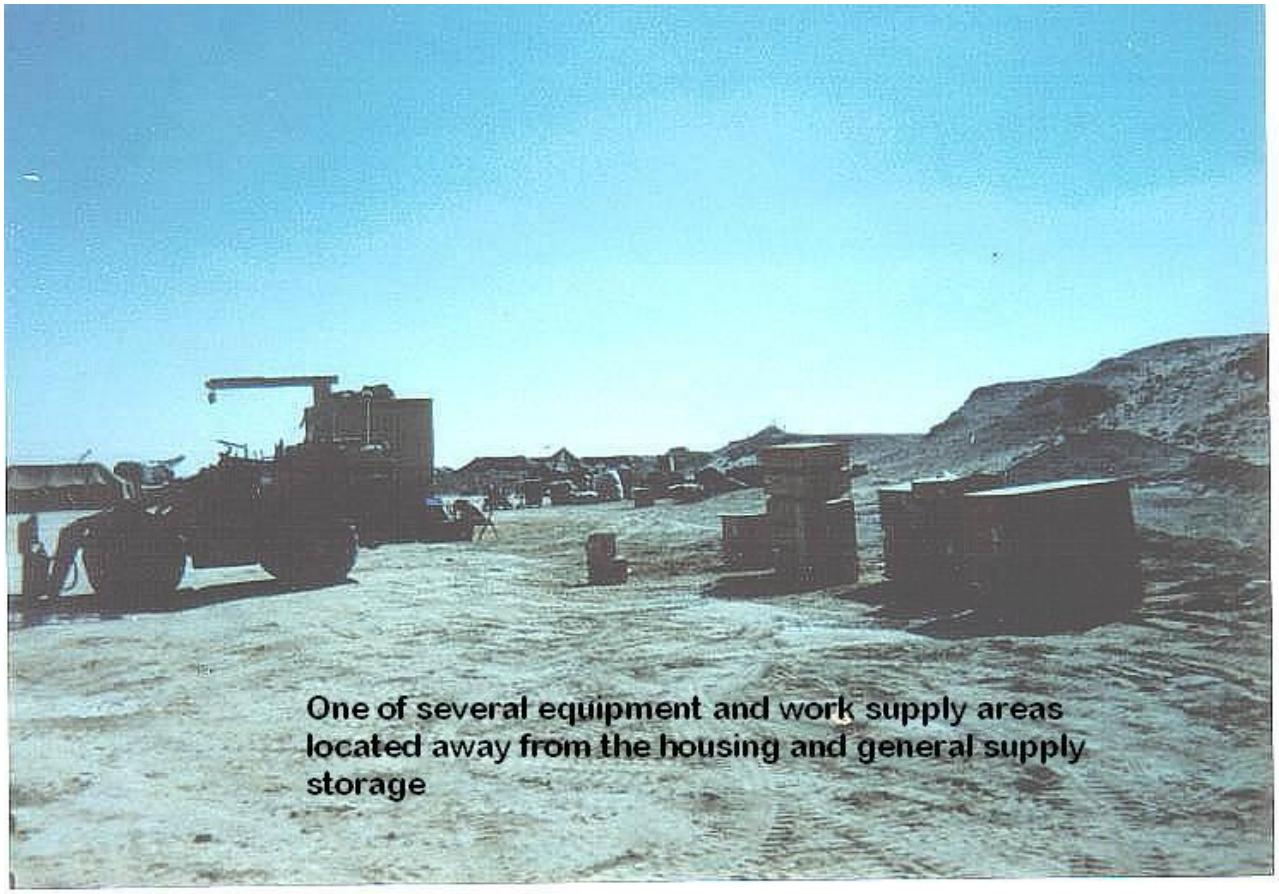

The weapon Mr. PH was bearing was not standard
issue, but quite effective



The exterior of one of the main work and storage areas for the unit

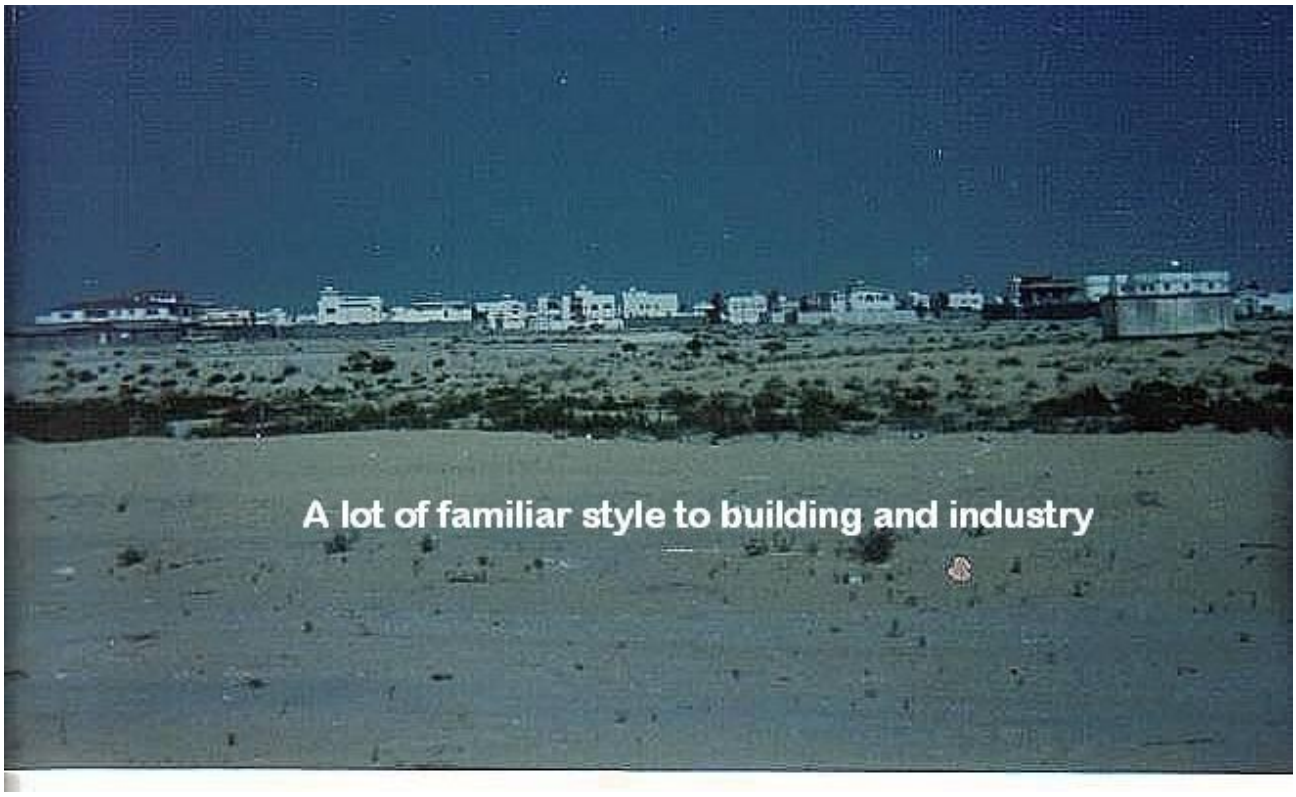


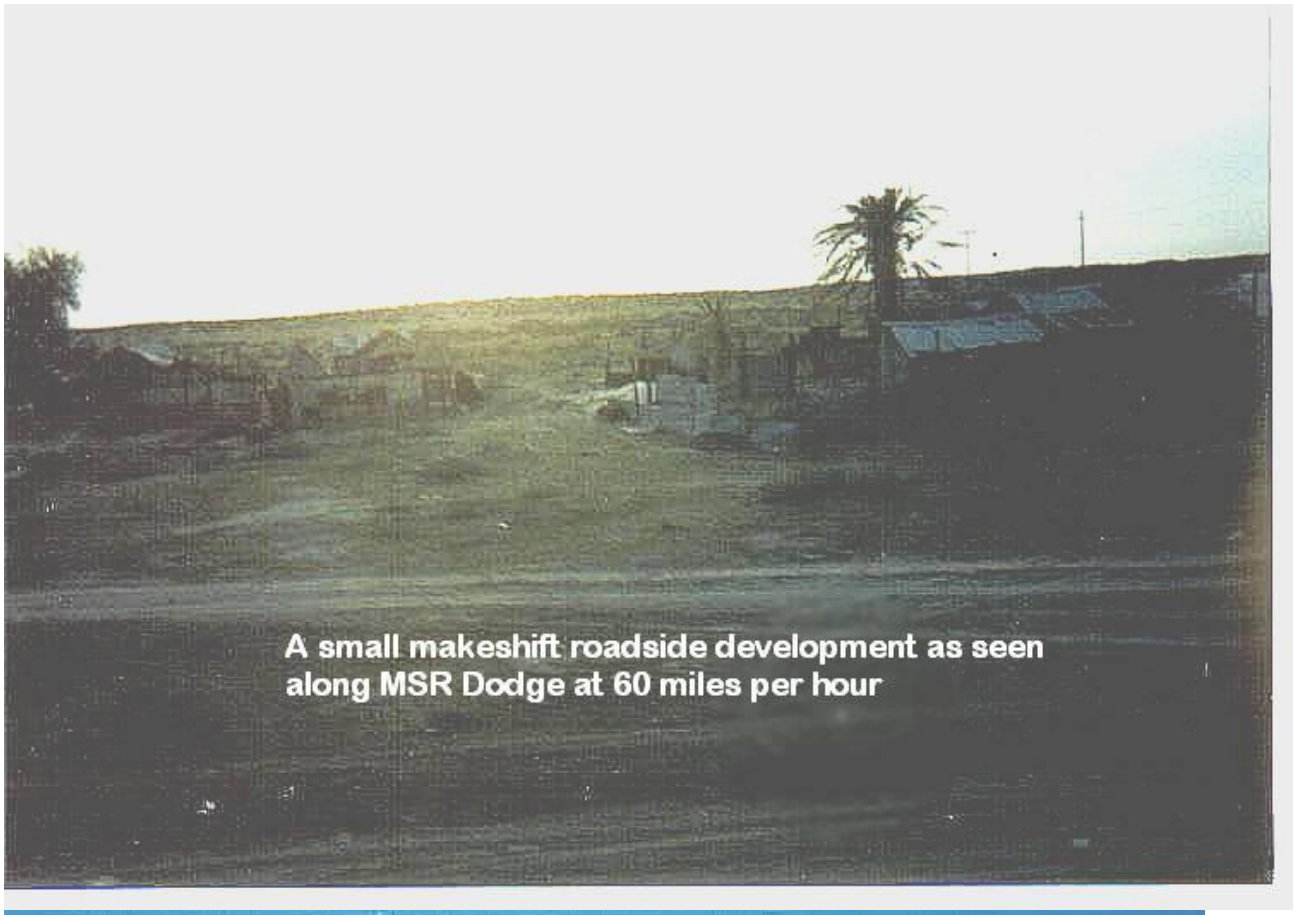
A portion of our platoon's operations as seen from the area of our van


One of several equipment and work supply areas
located away from the housing and general supply
storage

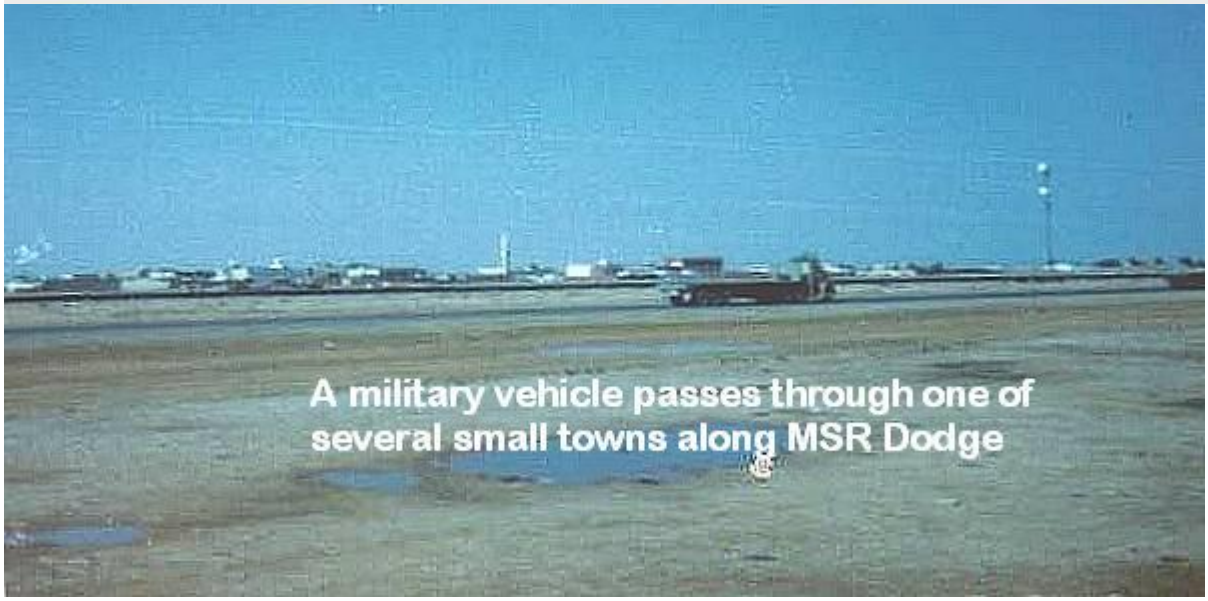

Just another day at the office


Camels hearding as we pass along MSR
Dodge in convoy fashion

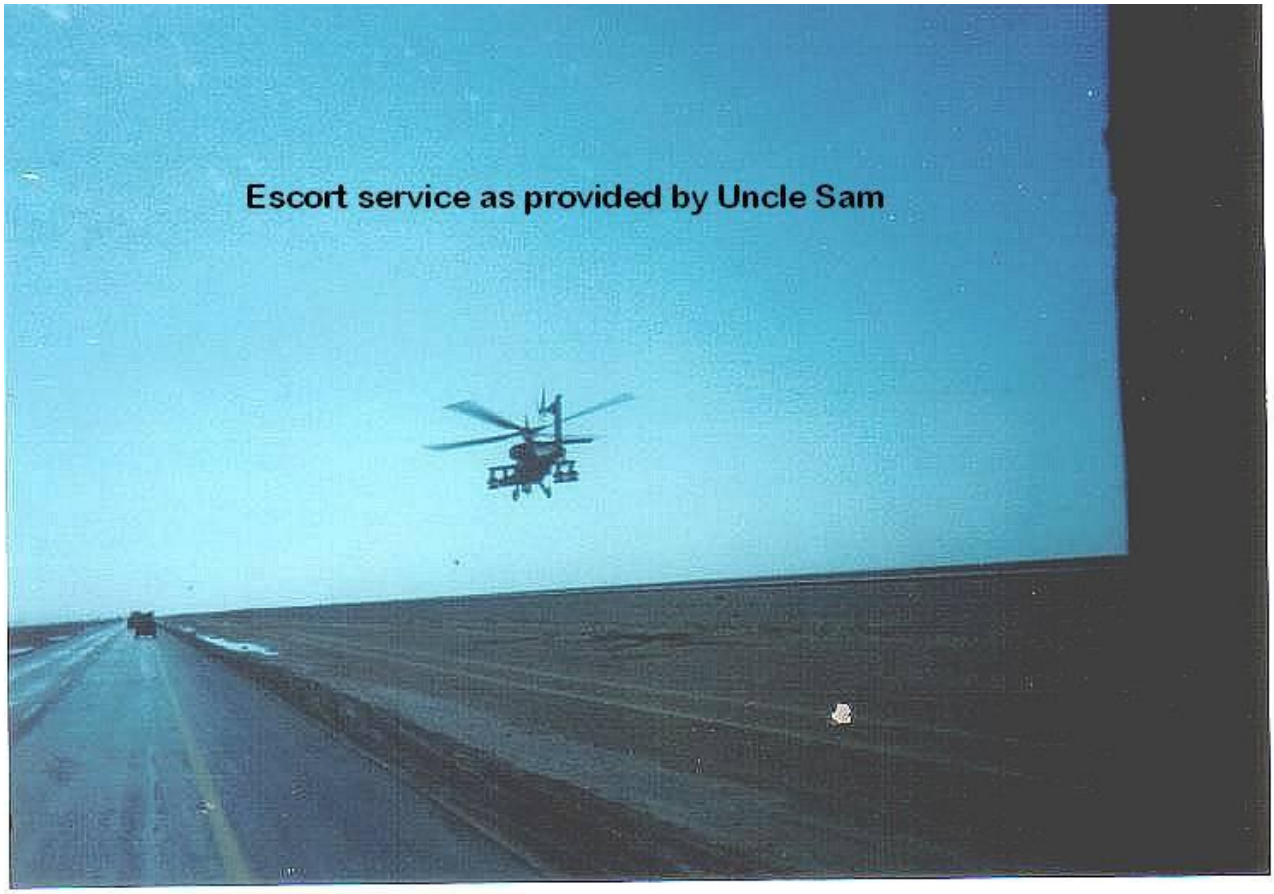

A lot of familiar style to building and industry



A small makeshift roadside development as seen along MSR Dodge at 60 miles per hour



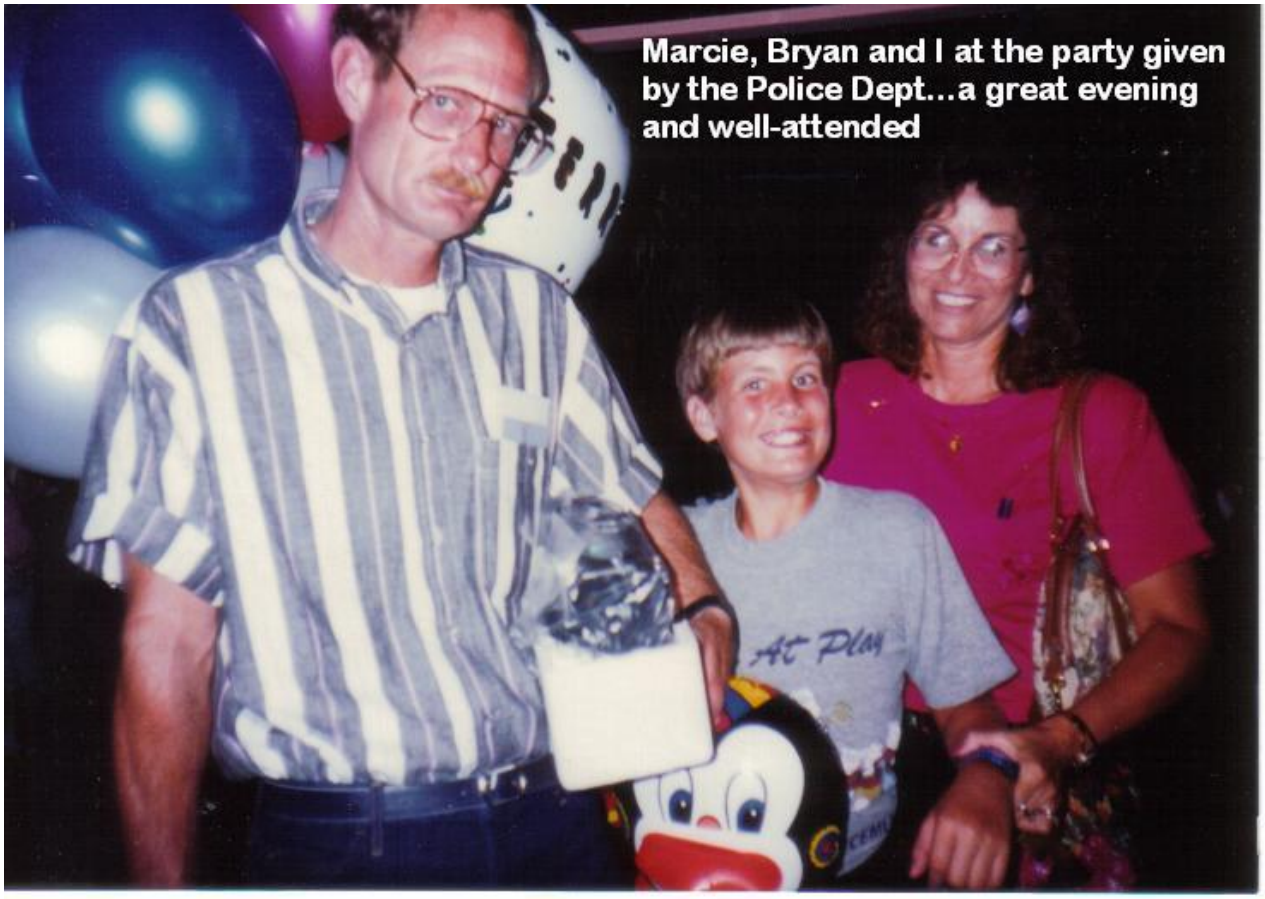
A military vehicle passes through one of several small towns along MSR Dodge


Escort service as provided by Uncle Sam

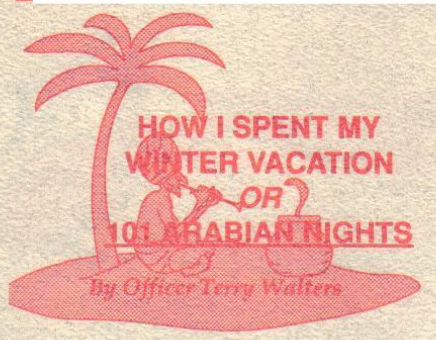

A welcome site in the skies seen frequently
along the convoy line


A view along MSR Dodge where accidents were
frequent and often fatal


THURSDAY - MAY 2
6:00 PM TO 10:00 PM
WELCOME HOME TERRY PARTY
TACOS
TACITOS
CASADILLAS
CHICKEN WINGS
REGULAR + SUPER NACHOS
ALL YOU CAN EAT!
LA PINATA RESTAURANT
1920 S. FEDERAL HWY.
DELRAY BEACH
ONLY $10.00 PER PERSON
CONTACT: LORI PERKINS OR SGT. DARES
CASH BAR


Marcie, Bryan and I at the party given by the Police Dept...a great evening and well-attended
At Play

Feedback from this article is what inspired the book



Like so many people, I studied the National Guard Travel poster with anticipation - "See Foreign Lands - Meet New and Different People - Kill Them - But Only On Weekends". So, you can imagine my surprise when a few hundred of my closest Ft. Lauderdale Guardsmen (and women) had been selected to vacation in the Middle East. Too good to believe, you say? Not only are airfare, meals, lodging, transportation, medical expenses and various tours free, but gratuities are unheard of.

The trip started with seven marvelous weeks at Ft. Stewart, GA, where we were provided costumes and party favors for the trip. Some survival information and party etiquette were included at no extra cost. We all chose the "sandman" or "chocolate chip" dress motif to help us blend in. Surely, we would not want to stand out in some of the hotter spots. We had been told there could be some anti-American sentiment.

Finally, the big moment. The rather cramped military spec. 747 flew us to Banghor, Maine & Brussels, Belgium, over the Alps at the Swiss and Italian border, and finally to the airport at Dhaharan.

Here, our tour guides placed us in a spartan atmosphere of tents at a location called Cement City. The itinerary included three meals a day, to include T-rations (indescribably delicious), MRE's (informal bag lunches) and catered dinners featuring exotic meats (camels? sheep?).

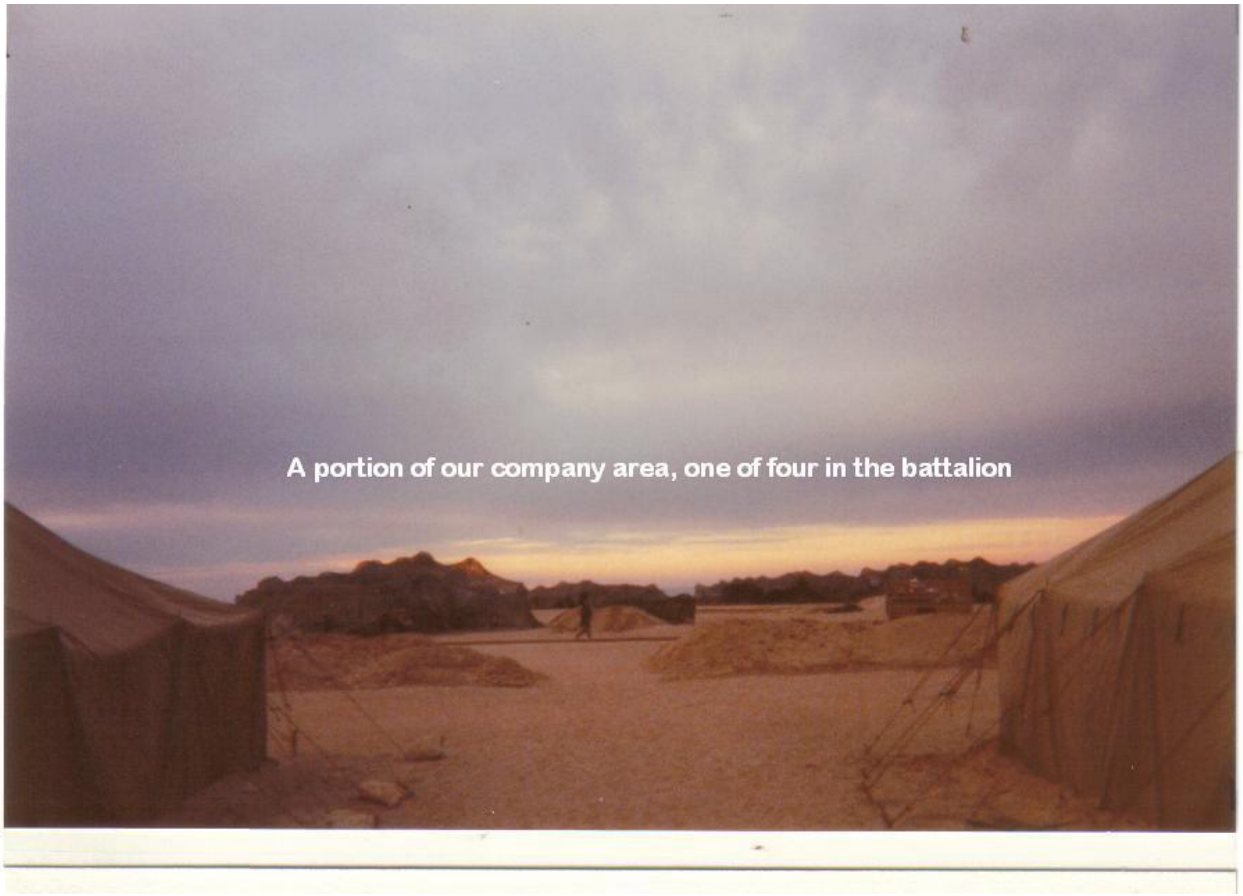
After several days, our unit undertook a discovery tour to an area known as Camp McArthur. Here, we learned how to live off the sand. Warm days, cool nights. It eventually turned cold. For Christmas, we tried building sandmen. New Year's was guard duty - great stuff!

Eventually, the Air Force began lighting up the evening skies. This, unfortunately, led to complaints from other countries that Iraq's backyard was being trashed. Everyone was invited to gather closer to the border for a better view. So, our unit advanced to an area only referred to as a checkpoint. From here, we could see that the Air Force was, in fact, providing lightening for all occassions.

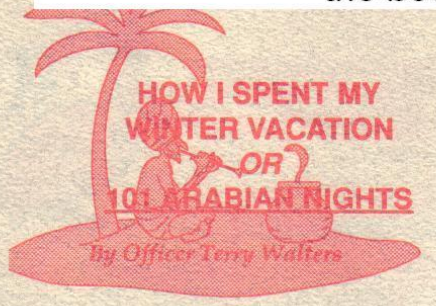
Artillery forces eventually began their show, bringing new meaning to the term "Rock and Roll". Infantry units, who we supported, were now invited to look for treasures and souvenirs, as our unit accompanied them to the Saudi-Iraq border. The foot soldiers provided the magic touch to the landscape modification plan - urban rubble.

Although we were stranded at the border, we eventually worked our way back to the Saudi Airport and from where we came, and to Ft. Stewart. For a week we swapped travel notes of our seven month extravaganza, preparing for the big bus ride back to Ft. Lauderdale.

I will, however, for my next vacation, hopefully select a tourist agent with a better sense of humor!


A portion of our company area, one of four in the battalion

Feedback from this article is what inspired the book



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If you are looking at purchasing a new car, check out the Credit Union's auto rates. 8.9% for a three year loan, 9.5% for a 4 year loan and 10.5 for 5 years. If you have any questions, call Mary Ann or Rose Marie at 367-6790.