It's Only Summer Camp - Saudi, Kuwait, Iraq

Tour '91

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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Purpose of Thesis

This thesis means a lot to me. It is my experiences before, during, and after Desert Storm. It is what I did, how I felt, and how it has changed my life. The making of this thesis started five years ago when I enlisted into the United States Army Reserve at the age of 17, and even though the war has been over for two years, I can still feel its aftershocks. This is my story.
Feb. 4, 1991

Today I did something that I might regret. I volunteered to go to Saudi Arabia. I really don't know why I did this, but I don't as of yet regret the choice. When the Command Sergeant Major asked for volunteers to go to the theater of action, I just stood up and gave them my name. I don't know why I did this, but I did. Let's hope and pray that I did not make a fatal mistake.

Feb. 16

This last week I've been at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. We've been doing things like firing our M-16s, being issued our equipment, and basically doing nothing. Since we last talked, I've gone from contacts to glasses. I hate them, but I don't have a choice. With the blowing sand, it would be impossible to keep them. Tomorrow morning we leave for Saudi. Let's hope that we'll all be home soon.

Feb. 18, Day 1

We flew all day today. First of all, we went from Jackson to New York. On the way out I saw the Statue of Liberty. That was the last U.S. land I'll be on in a long time. We then flew from N.Y. to Rome. Here we couldn't leave the plane because the threat of terrorists was too great. So all of Rome I saw was a runway. From Rome we went to where I am now, some obscure air base near Daharan I think. Actually, I'm not really sure where I am, except that I'm in a desert.

Today I heard some disturbing news. I won't be with the 18th Airborne Corps as was originally planned. I'll be with the 7th Corps, and the 7th Corps is artillery and
infantry on the front line. Half of the group from my unit went to the 18th and the rest went to the 7th Corps. Tomorrow we'll be moving to a point 47 miles from the border. I guess I'll see how that turns out later.

Feb. 19-20

I've learned that we are at (have landed at) King Fahd (sp?) airbase. This airbase is not on the map as of yet, since it is not completed. We are approximately 45 miles or thereabouts east of that country (Bahrain?) out there in the Persian Gulf. Today (20th) we're supposed to move to 50 mi. from the border, to a place called Al Quaissmah. As I'm now attached to the 7th Corps, I'll probably be closer to the border before this is all over with.

Feb. 21

After leaving the reception station at King Fahd, we went to the large International airport there and were loaded into a C-130. We flew for an hour due north to a small airport. This airport was heavily guarded and looked very trashed. We saw a platoon of Brits here. I like their uniforms better.

Once we were unloaded, we were crammed into deuce & a halves and drove approximately 20 miles on asphalt and another 30 on dirt through the desert to the 7th Corps replacement camp.

Feb. 22

I lost more of my friends today. Those of us remaining were split into about six smaller groups. I was in the 1st Infantry group, along with about five others. And then there was five.
Well, shit happens. Right now, I'm 12 miles from the Iraqi border. At night we can hear the artillery bombing. Oh, I almost forgot. I've been assigned to the 1st Infantry Division, 3-37th Armor Battalion. "Looks like I'm in the front line." Anyway, this place is a trip. We sleep in tents with no floors, only sand, and no cot. So, I sleep in the sand. At 5:00 A.M. we have something called "stand to," which means that we get dressed and stand in a foxhole for an hour in the freezing air, with weapons and no ammunition. Oh what fun. They say that if there is going to be an offensive for the other side, it will happen at 5:00 a.m. My group was broken down even further today. Michael Dickson and I were loaded onto a truck and sent to our units. He is going to the 2-16th Infantry and I to the 3-37th Armor. As we were traveling, Michael asked the driver of the truck about his unit. The driver kinda laughed and told him that they were notorious for shooting at each other, and that we would be getting there soon. Curious, I asked him where my unit was. He shook his head and said "All the way up."

7:48 P.M. I've finally reached my unit, 3-37th Armor. Actually, only half of my unit (two tank companies plus headquarters) is 3-37 Armor. The other two companies are infantry from the 2-16th. Apparently, these two units swapped companies. So even though my unit is officially an armor unit, we are as much infantry as the infantry unit. Right now we're about seven miles from the border. Tomorrow I move up to my duty station (platoon?) closer to the front. Tonight I'm spending the night in a track with two tankers. They're pretty cool. I've met my Platoon Sgt. He's laid back. The ground war is supposed to start the 24th, one day before my birthday. Some present, huh? I've finally been separated from the last member of the 5010th USA Hospital. I said good-bye to Michael Dickson today. I guess I'll see him at summer camp. From his unit, I was loaded up into the mail truck and driven to my unit. The mail truck was the only vehicle that was going that far north. The rumor is that I'll only be here for 180
days. We'll see...

Feb. 23

Today I found my duty station. They're 3.3 miles from the border. Tomorrow we make the big ground offensive. I'll be in one of the first companies and the first unit from the 7th Corps through the breach in the Iraqi lines. Right now I'm at an aid station, which is in a track-an armored personnel carrier or APC. Anyway, the British are out here also. Those guys will swap the clothes off your back. Right at this time, I am enjoying a piece of sharp cheese and a corned beef sandwich. We traded some of our stuff for some of their stuff. Tomorrow at 5:00 we move out.

I learned a few new things today. One is that the M-16 that I was issued at Fort Jackson is useless out here. It is the old A1 model, and everyone out here is using the A2 model. Unfortunately, the A2 ammunition does not work in an A1 rifle, so I exchanged mine for one of theirs. Also, there is a medic out here that is kinda nuts. They say that he snapped and threatened a sergeant. I was told to try to avoid him if I can.

Feb. 24

Today the ground war started. After pulling a four hour guard shift last night, we woke up at 4:30 and prepared to leave. We then waited... until 8:30. After getting word that we were finally moving out, we climbed onto our track and moved out. We reached what was called a berm, actually it was a wall of dirt and sand about eight feet high. Our B and C platoons, and engineers had already broken down the berm in a few places, so all we had to do was drive on through. Let me explain the strategy as I see it. 3rd Battalion, 37 Armor Brigade would be the spearhead for the entire 7th
Corps' attack on Iraq. B and C companies clear the area (a path north) and then the medics (me) and the rest of the Corps would follow. It is our job to secure the area for the rest of the U. S. troops. Even though the berm was the border, the Iraqi troops were farther back. We are expecting a 50% casualty rate.

We went through the berm, taking no casualties and about 400-600 POW's for the 3-37th alone. We then traveled north to the place where the bunkers were located. They were only about four feet deep, covered with tin with a little dirt on top. Our artillery effectively blew them to hell before we even got there. After breaching the bunkers, we kept traveling north until we reached this place to rest. Tomorrow, we're supposed to travel north some more, securing the area and then, when the 7th Corps moves east towards Kuwait, follow in reserve behind them. We only move during the day, because at night we cannot see the minefields.

Feb. 25

Today is my twentieth birthday. I wonder how Ace and Johnny (the two tankers) are doing. Those two will always be a riot, even if I never see them again. While I was visiting them, all they had to do was play Rummy, since it takes four to play Spades, and clean their weapons. The entire time I was there, all they did was argue about minutia. I guess all that stress, plus being cramped in that track made them both neurotic.

Today we sit. After traveling for about two hours in an easterly direction, we stopped and waited. Well, we are still waiting. It appears as though we have reached some resistance, as I can hear machine gun fire in front of us. I wonder if I will live to see the sun set today? Here, though, all is quiet for now. Word is that we move at night...
Feb. 26

Today, we are supposed to move north against the Republican Guard, but we changed direction (as British units encounter the Guard) and we continue east toward Kuwait.

Feb. 27

We had a rough fifth night of traveling. Late last night, we found ourselves about half way to Kuwait. Now, however, we are a mere 12 miles and still we press on.

Today I see the war in a different light. For the past couple of days, we have been taking prisoners like mad - 20,000 yesterday and 14,000 the day before. It has gotten to be so bad (about the number of prisoners), that we don’t even keep guards on them anymore. They come staggering into our convoy half starved and desperate. We don’t even stop - just keep going, someone else will stop and feed them.

For example, today a group of about 20-30 Iraqi soldiers walked into our camp. They were starved and wanted only to be fed. We didn’t even bother to load our weapons; we knew they were harmless. They came in half clothed-some without shoes. A Lt. of ours gave a pair of socks to one soldier whose feet were red and swollen from walking. They walked through our camp and we all just stared. This is the enemy? What kind of madman would leave his own people to starve? Of course, it didn’t help that we blew their supply lines to hell.

Feb. 27. -later that day

"Strange things are afoot at the Circle-K," (to quote the movie Bill and Ted’s Excellent Adventure,) Since seven p.m. I have had the strange duty of being a prisoner
guard for one of Hussein's Republican Guard. He had taken some shrapnel in his left upper arm and left side-only superficially however. One of our Sgts asked if someone would watch him, and I said that I would.

His name is Rashad Sanad [according to his Field Medical Card] and he speaks no English. After a long, tiresome ordeal lasting a few hours, I learned that he had to go to the bathroom. (And that's the way it's been all night. Luckily, he sleeps most of the time, only to awaken once in a while to mumble something in Arabic.)

Feb. 28

Today we had a cease fire. I hope it lasts. I will probably never forget this night as long as I live. We have reached a station in which we are treating 100 plus Iraqi soldiers. I have seen personally about 300-400. They are nice people—quick to smile and very understanding. Surprisingly, they are glad to see us. I suppose their situation couldn't get any worse.

These people are tired and hungry. Some of them have been walking (and some without shoes) for days, and haven't eaten for over four days. Every one of them have blisters on their feet and some are trenchfooted.

There is a place about two clicks [kilometers] from here where our bombing has taken out some soldiers. There are bodies everywhere, bits and pieces—decapitation and charring everywhere. All these people want, like all of us soldiers, is to simply go home.

A doctor from one another unit was brought to us for some reason. It was unfortunate that he was in a body bag. Apparently, the jeep that he was riding in hit a land mine on his side. The chaplin had to go through his pockets to find some identification, and an address or phone number so he could reach the man's wife. A
group of men surrounded the chaplin as he did this. I didn’t bother to look. The idea of seeing a man in pieces just does not appeal to me. On the way to one of the prisoner holding areas, I have to walk past a ditch where the dead are thrown. Of course, they are in body bags, but it’s still an eerie feeling to walk near them.

March 1

Today we set up an aid station for the POWs. We have moved them into a bottled water plant warehouse. They are burning boxes and crates to keep warm, since most don’t have blankets. The engineers are starting to blow up bunkers full of Iraqi weapons. One of these blew up near the warehouse. The Iraqi’s must have thought that we were bombing them again because they almost stampeded us trying to get out.

We brought them water. That was a nightmare. They were so thirsty that they were walking over the concertina wire in their bare feet to try to get a bottle. It was Evian bottled water, of all things. A few shots were fired over their heads, and they finally settled down.

March 2

Yesterday we traveled north to be at those peace talks at some airfield in Iraq. They say that this is one big dog and pony show, especial since Hussein had told his people that we have surrendered to them. The few Republican Guard that are left think that they have won, but of course they are wrong.

The POW camp was set up 100 km from Kuwait City in one direction (south) and 3-4 km from the Iraqi border in the opposite direction (north). We set up a semi permanent camp and finally got a chance to take a bath out of a bucket of water and
get cleaned up after over a week wearing the same clothes. That type of bath is often called, provided there are no females within earshot, a bitch bath or a whore’s bath, since, as the story goes, the only areas that a whore really washes are the armpits and the groin area.

March 3

We jumped today. I’m now sitting in some Iraqi town 40 miles from Basrah (sp?) in a town called Safwan. We learned of some of the atrocities the Iraqi army committed. One woman here said that she was lucky that she was poor—they only shot her husband and broke her arm. (She has six kids.) If she was rich, they would have looted her and taken her family as slaves. The story of her goes as follows: The Iraqi army came into her house and demanded that her husband join the Army. He refused. They then broke her arm and again demanded that her husband join. He again refused. They then proceeded to rape her in front of him. He refused again. Apparently frustrated, they then killed him and left her. When we arrived, we found the children playing with an unexploded cluster bomb.

Another thing we saw today was a man who came to us who had been a prisoner of war of the Iraqis. They had tortured him by placing electrodes on his ankles. The electricity turned his ankles to mush. The doctor says that he will never be able to walk again.

One of our Medic tracks was sent out to a nearby farm. It appeared as though one of the children was harvesting tomatoes when he stepped on a cluster bomb or land mine. The explosion effectively blew him in half. The little boy died, screaming, while the medics tried to save him. I saw the medic who made the run today. He looked a bit pale and wasn’t feeling the best.
March 4

Today we did nothing. We jumped again and now are somewhere in the outskirts of Safwan. We have remained in camp, just relaxing. We are supposed to jump today, but we'll see. It looks to me as if we'll be here for a while.

I met that crazy medic today. Actually, he's kinda nice. He's strange, but nice. I say strange in the sense that his personality clashes with the military. He's too much of a free spirit. I finally learned the true story behind what happened the night that he supposedly snapped. Some sergeant told him that he was supposed to be on guard duty at the M-60 machine gun the night before I arrived. According to the Geneva Convention, as he as well as I see it, Medics are noncombatants. This means that they are not allowed to fire on enemy troops unless they threaten the life of one of his patients. Therefore, a medic shouldn't be at watch with a machine gun. He explained this to the sergeant, but it fell on deaf ears. The sergeant left the medic and went back to his tent. The medic followed the sergeant to the tent and words were exchanged. This heated up tempers until they were in each other's face. The medic then left. The next morning, the medic was brought up on charges for disobeying a direct order and disrespecting a noncommissioned officer.

March 6

We're still at camp. This makes day three here. Sometime during this time, we heard a sniper shooting behind us in a quarry. Two others and I followed the sound, but we apparently chased off whoever it was. We never heard him since. The place where we are camped is rather unusual. It's very hilly and embedded in the hills are bunkers stockpiled with ammunition, RPGs, and AK-47s. The engineers are
systematically blowing them up one by one. That's fine, but I don't think they know how close we are to them. The explosion is deafening, even louder than the artillery fire, and the shockwave throws a wave of air on us that almost uproots the stakes keeping down our camouflage nets. One explosion was so close that it rocked our track, which weighs, I think, around 20 tons. In Safwan, one man driving a track was hit in the face by shrapnel from one of the exploding bunkers.

It rained last night and all day yesterday. The smoke from the burning oil fields made the rain black and greasy. In some places, the oil has accumulated into pools a few inches deep. They say we'll move today, but they say that every day.

Today was a rather special day. We were given a few boxes of fresh oranges. This is the first real food we have had to eat in a long, long time. Up until now, we have been eating MREs- Meals, Ready-to-Eat. It is essentially all dehydrated food. They are somewhat edible for the first couple of weeks, but after a while eating them becomes torturous. The crazy medic and I who, by now, have become pretty good friends, confiscated a box of oranges in an attempt to make orange juice “wine.” We squeezed all the juice from the oranges, added sugar and put it in bottled water jugs. We didn't have balloons, so we improvised and placed condoms over the top to catch the escaping carbon dioxide.

March 10

I'm still here. I broke my headphones in transit from the states to my unit, so I have been without tunes for some time. Luckily, someone gave me a pair of headphones today, so I've been listening to music all day. The orange fizz, as I called it, turned out decent. We didn't let it ferment long enough to do any good, but a psychological buzz is just as good as a real one.
There's one old medic here who is quite a tinkerer. Today, his project is kite making. He made one and flew it so high (due to the constant wind out here) that we couldn't see it anymore. The kite was about four feet long with a tail of about ten feet. We really surprised the helicopter pilots who flew by today. They couldn't believe that they were seeing a kite in the sky.

It's spring here. Small white flowers are blooming everywhere. In some places, it looks like a carpet of them. They are the only things growing in this sand at the moment. The temperature has stayed cool because of the oil smoke. It hovers above us and blocks out the sun. In some places, it is so dark that headlights are needed at noon, and it is still hard to see. Of course, the bad thing about the smoke is that it leaves everything outside, including us, covered in a fine layer of soot.

Since we live in tracks, not all of can sleep inside it. Therefore, some of us, like myself, sometimes sleeps on a cot or litter in the sand. It's strange to wake up in the morning and realize the only thing above the sand is one's head. The scorpions are a problem, too. They are everywhere. I spent many an afternoon tormenting a captured scorpion. Some of them out here are very poisonous.

There is a potentially dangerous foe lurking around our camp. Dogs. They have gotten fierce lately. A lot of them are feeding on the dead Iraqi bodies that litter the roadsides, and it appears that they like the taste. A dead horse was lying on the side of the road when we moved in, now the only thing left is a few bones. The dogs ate the rest. They have gotten so fierce that we have to carry a loaded weapon with us when we head out to find a place to defecate.

Since we are in the front, we do not have such luxuries as running water or any sort of toilet facilities nor the wood to build any. Since there are no females in combat units, we have no problem finding a place to urinate. Actually, anywhere, so long as it
isn't atop someone's sleeping bag, usually works. It is the other that causes problems. It is a matter of finding a shovel, a roll of toilet paper (which is always in short supply), and heading off behind a sand dune, if one is available. Some people have been known to walk a half mile to find a place isolated enough to squat in peace. Of course, we have to take all our equipment with us. This includes our weapon, our protective mask, our helmet, sometimes the flak jacket (which weighs about fifteen pounds), and web gear to include: two full two-quart canteens, two full ammo pouches, poncho, and finally the attached shoulder straps. We carry all that just because nature called.

But I digress. One of our fuel Hemmit drivers went out "behind a dune" so to speak and was attacked by a wild dog. He had to shoot it. Upon inspection of the surrounding area, it was found that the dog was protecting her puppies. Feeling bad, he took one of the puppies with him, so now we have a puppy roaming among our ranks.

March 13

We moved today. We are now three km from the DMZ or demarcation line. We moved west. At least we have new sand to look at. I saw a shepherd and his flock of sheep and one camel today. Kinda biblical, I thought. He moved them right through our camp. We waved, and he waved back.

March 18

Moved again. Today I used the phones. I was packed into a Hummer with about eight other people and our Lt. drove us to the phones. On our way we passed a Red Cross tent hospital. There were refugees swarming all over the place. The roadsides were lined with people looking for a handout. Luckily for them, we had leftover MREs and we "accidentally" dropped them as we passed the hospital. We
were told that we should not feed the refugees because they would choke up the roads and start invading our camps looking for food or supplies.

The smoke was very thick along the paved roads. We were so close to some of the oilfields that we could feel the heat from them. The air felt greasy as we passed. Everyone at home was fine, so now I feel better. That was the first contact with the States that I had since I arrived here, a month ago. I received no mail because I didn’t receive an address until I reached my duty station, and no mail was being picked up or delivered since we move so much.

March 20

We moved today. They say that we are going to replace the 82nd Airborne near the Euphrates River, near Baghdad. As we progressed northward, we saw harsh desert turn to farming communities-tomatoes mostly. We saw a herd of wild camels as we trekked onward. It was a very strange thing to see. The funniest thing happened to us, though. We got lost. We were so lost, in fact, that we had to ask a shepherd, who was with his flock of sheep in the absolute middle of nowhere, where we were and how to get to where we were going. If he would have been standing at a gas station wearing coveralls with his name embroidered over the breast, the joke would have been complete.

At our last point, we had an Iraqi family as our next door neighbor. They grew tomatoes and had a flock of sheep. In the morning, the wife would come up to us with her children and ask for food. Later in the afternoon, the husband would come with a gas can and ask for gas. They are very friendly people, but it’s good that we left them. They were taking advantage of us.
March 25

We've been at this new point for three or four days now. Instead of replacing the 82nd Airborne, we are waiting with bated breath whether or not Bush will sign the peace treaty. I really hate this new location. We have moved north and west from Kuwait, and are now no longer under the cloud of smoke. Because of this, the sun is pounding down on us. We went from cold mornings and nice evenings to hot, hot, hot. The sun literally drains the strength from me if I ever go out in it. Also, the ground at this particular location is solid rock under a few inches of blowing sand. When nature calls, we must hike for what seems like forever until we find a place where the ground is soft enough to dig into.

Today, we have a new member of our medic crew, a new Sgt. However, this Sgt. is female. That puts a cramp in our style out here. Now we have to be aware of where we are in relation to her when nature calls. When she first arrived out here, her presence created quite a controversy. Some said that our integrity was compromised because we had to be conscious of not offending her, such as taking a bath out in the open, which we often did because there was no other place to do it, not to mention the fact that women tend to want some sort of latrine, which could not be quickly constructed or torn apart if we had to move out in a hurry. If we can acquire the material, we are supposed to build a latrine in the next few days. Also, privacy is a big problem, because there isn't any. There is no living quarters other than the vehicles, and not every one can sleep in them. There is not enough room. However, our Sgt. seems to manage well enough out there. The only problem that I saw was that she was prone to taking her bath late at night. That in itself is fine. The problem arises when there are bored men roaming the desert with very expensive and very good night vision apparatus. She might as well have taken it at noon. It would have
accomplished the same thing and she would have been a lot warmer.

If the peace treaty is signed, we get to go south. If not, then we go farther onward into Iraq.

A small bird, the only kind I've seen out here, has found a home in camp. It walks all around us, eating flies and small insects. It stepped on my feet today.

Someone had the presence of mind to bring a horseshoe set out here. That was fun for the first week, but it, along with cards, is becoming very boring. I can only play so many hands of Spades or Euchre or Rummy or whatever before it becomes tedious. We need to move. At least tearing down the camp will give us something to do. On our track, a 577, as compared to the smaller 113s, which are the "ambulances," we have a small tent extension that folds outward. This then becomes the aid station where a couple of the severely wounded can stay out of the elements. During breakdown, we have to dismantle our camouflage netting over us. This is quite time consuming because the net always gets caught on the equipment stored on the outside of the track. Once the net is rolled up and put away, we tear down the extension and roll it up. It is attached to the top of the track and is tied there. We then store our gear in the track and squirm inside. With all the medical equipment and personal stuff, there isn't much room for us. The whole process takes about an hour.

March 30

Well, we haven't built that latrine yet. On March 29, I was the TC for the female back to her unit, the 201st, and stayed there for the night. That was fine, but I forgot to bring my mask with me, so I couldn't roam the camp. They had running water and showers, but I didn't dare wander too far outside the tent that I was sleeping in for the night. If I would have been caught without my mask, then I could have gotten in some
serious trouble, especially since it was at another unit. But, I'm now home, and my error wasn't discovered by anyone who really cared. I now know that I was definitely attached to the wrong unit. The 201st had women. Lot's of them. And, since the women wanted equal rights, they are treated exactly as the men are treated. That includes sleeping in coed tents. That was definitely an odd experience for me. I spent a month and a half without even seeing another female, well, American female, and then one day I am sleeping in a tent with ten of them.

They say we'll be out of here by May, so the morale of everyone is way up.

April 15

We finally moved. After packing all day, we finally left this spot and are supposed to head for Camp Hubner in Saudi Arabia. Due to some supposed regulation about activating Reservists, I am supposed to be back in the states no later than May fourth. It's about time.

April 16

Yesterday was an experience.

I was asked if I wanted to ride in a fuel Hemmit, since our 577 was so crowded and uncomfortable, and I said yes, so I jumped in the truck with only the minimal of equipment. I left my sleeping bag in the track, and only brought enough food with me for the day. We drove from seven am to six pm due south, and I was bounced and tossed around the whole ride. Early in the march, however, my track broke down with major mechanical difficulties, so when we arrived at camp for the night, I had no place to sleep. I begged and borrowed food and a blanket from the other medics for the night. I hope my track shows up soon because right now, I don't know where my
luggage is.

I finally got to see everything I missed on the ride up here because I was in a track. Sometime today we are supposed to reach the berm. I now know that we were two days into Iraq. Yesterday we traveled 95 miles due south. Today we traveled 65 miles due south, reaching the border sometime early in the day and traveling the rest of the way in Saudi.

April 17

We reached Camp Hubner today. Here we start turning in our vehicles and equipment. Of course, now that we are in Saudi, the B.S starts up again, like formations and things like that. That's okay, though, because we have showers and hot food here. Best of all is that we're sleeping in tents, and not in the open desert.

I ran into Ace and Johnny. They had a strange tale to tell. When the ground war started, they were left with one broken Bradley Scout Vehicle alone in the desert and didn't have food or water. As a matter of fact our unit forgot that they were there, and didn't send anyone to pick them up when we settled in. On the eighth day out there they finally saw an Apache helicopter and waved at him until he saw them. The chopper pilot then called another unit, and they took them here.

We get to go to a place called Dangertown out here. It's about three miles away, so it's too far to walk. It's really neat. They have a store here, where you can buy stuff, and there are "native crafts" such as prayer rugs and those things that the wear on their heads. Of course, a lot of that stuff is made in another country. There's a food stand here (that's free), as well as a phone center and movie theater. It's really nice. The entire atmosphere reminds me of a carnival.
April 20

Yesterday I was told “Pack up, you’re supposed to be out of here in 48 hours.” So now I’m packed and on standby, and I don’t know what is going to happen.

Sometime while we were in Iraq, one of our medics was sent home to Ohio. The day he arrived, the town had a parade in his honor. That night, he was killed in an automobile accident. We had a funeral service for him here. The entire unit was brought to formation, and the battalion and brigade commanders said a few things. After they were finished, our platoon Sgt. called roll call for the medic platoon. We all said “Here, Sgt.” The last name on the roll call was the dead man, and it was called three times. “Sgt. Jeffrey Collins... (no response) Sgt. Jeffrey Collins... (no response) Sgt. Jeffrey Collins.... (no response).”

April 26

That 48 hours turned out to be four to eight days. This morning, I woke up and left, saying goodbye to everyone, even thought they thought I was C.I.D. That was a real pain. Since I mysteriously appeared just before the ground war, claiming to be a Reservist, they automatically think that I am from the Central Intelligence Division. Of course, the CID does things like that, or so I’m told. Anyway, I was effectively ostracized the whole time I was here, so I don’t feel any lost love for most of these people.

I’m at Brigade, and they lost the plane that I was supposed to go home on. So now they have to find another one and find a place for me on that one. I guess I’ll see what happens soon. I found Dickson. He was the last person from my unit that I saw, and he was the first person I met on the way back.
April 29

Finally reached the States-in New York at 5 am EST.

May 1

I've spent the last few days out processing here at Fort Jackson. We have a lot of down time, which is good so we can wind down.

I guess it's time to try to return to a normal life, whatever that is.
My name is Andy Morton. I enlisted into the United States Army Reserve on 29 February, 1988. At the time, I was a junior in high school. Because I was still in school, I went through Basic Training During the summer after my junior year. I then went through AIT (Advanced Individual Training) at Fort Sam Houston, Texas as a 91A10-- Medical Specialist, often called Combat Medic, during the summer of 1989.

I did not join the Army because I was patriotic, although I am. I did not join the because I really needed the discipline, although it has helped. I did not join because I needed the adventure, because my life is one big adventure without having to search for it. I joined for only one reason. I joined for the college money.

I chose to be a Medical Specialist for a variety of reasons. One of which is that the course was short enough to take during the summer. Another is that I was thinking about taking pre-med courses and applying to medical school. At that point, I really had no experience with the medical profession, other than the rare visit to the doctor's office for the flu. No one in my family is a doctor, nor even in the health care field. I thought that I needed a little contact with the field before making a choice, so I decided to be a medic. I would be gaining medical experience and be able to pay for school at the same time.

I graduated with honors from AIT, and developed a passion for the medical profession. I worked at a nursing home for a few months during my freshman year, but due to a lack of time and sleep, had to quit and concentrate on school. During the summer of 1990, I worked as an emergency room technician at a hospital close to where I grew up. It was there that I really decided that I wanted to be a doctor. During my drill weekends for the Reserves, I work on the surgical ward at the Louisville V.A. Hospital. There, too, I find what I do rewarding, even though traveling from Muncie to Louisville once a month is very inconvenient.
In the Autumn of 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait. On January 26, 1991, about 9:00 A.M. on a Saturday morning, I received a telephone call that would change my life forever. At the time, I was here at Ball state in the second semester of my Junior year. I had been in class for about a month. The call started by saying “You are hereby ordered to active duty in support of Desert Storm.” I would report to Fort Knox on February 1. Approximately three weeks later, I was in a foreign country wondering how close to the front I was going to end up. Unfortunately, I went all the way.

For me, this was a traumatic change. First of all, I was thrown from a liberal college campus setting into a very disciplined, rigidly structured organization with very little time to adjust. Secondly, I was put in a combat unit. Thirdly, I was alone. I was not a happy camper.

I had a very rough time the first few weeks I was there. In the military’s overwhelming brilliance, they sent a Reservist with absolutely no field experience to an armored infantry unit on the front line the day before the offensive. During drill, I usually work at the Louisville V.A. Hospital on the surgical ward. While there I work as a corpsman, which is roughly equivalent to a nursing assistant. I take care of old, sick veterans. I wash them up, change their dressings, take their vital signs, occasionally start an I.V., and mostly joke with them (provided they are conscious) until it is time to go home for the weekend and do it again the next month. The only field experience I have received since I graduated from Basic is walking from my car to the hospital and back, which is every bit of forty yards or so. Of course, sometimes it is cold or raining, but essentially it isn’t very taxing on me.

However, within a span of a couple of weeks, I had been literally dumped into a combat unit in the field. Not only was it a combat unit, it was an armored combat unit in the middle of a war. I was, needless to say, clueless. The first day that I got to my unit, I
was directed toward a group of odd box-shaped vehicles on tracks and was told to go
jump into that 113 until the 577 could come pick me up. My reaction was:

"Huh?"

They said, "Do you see that deuce and a half?"

"You mean that big truck?"

"Yea. Now, do you see the Bradley behind that?"

"The what?"

"The tank looking thing."

"Oh, that. yea."

"Well, directly to the left of that is a small armored vehicle. That is a 113. A 577
is like that, only it has a larger top on it. Got it?"

"Sort of."

Of course that isn't exactly the conversation, but it was very similar to that. It got
even worse later on, when we had to put up the camo netting, build a hasty fighting
position, put up the tent extension, set up the medical supplies, or basically do
anything. I was totally lost.

The transition from civilian to combat ready soldier was also a mess. Without
my book bag slung over my shoulder, I felt very awkward. I couldn't sleep in and skip
the war if I wanted to. I was sleeping in the sand with the scorpions, not in my bed, or
any bed for that matter. During my first few days there, we moved constantly, so we
were forced to sit on very uncomfortable medical equipment and listen to the almost
deafening rumble of the track as it pressed onward, broken only by the occasional pop
of an anti-personnel mine as it exploded underneath us.

The transformation from civilian to soldier, such as the one I experienced was a
very difficult one. The change was literally an adaption from one society to another,
completely different one. The rules were different, the lifestyle was different, the norms and values were different. For me, it was a transformation of personality. Expectations of me were different. I was supposed to know a certain amount of medical knowledge, and this knowledge, or lack of, might mean the difference between life and death for some of those men. I have training equivalent to a civilian emergency medical technician, but I had no experience with most of the medications that we had, and that was a major part of the job. I had no knowledge of a lot of what I was expected to know out there because I was never exposed to it, ever. It was not taught at AIT, and I did not learn it during drill weekends. As a student (biology/pre-med) I was not exposed to anything "medical," only basic biology and chemistry stuff. Out there, if they were shot or otherwise wounded, I could help, but if they were sick, then I was completely useless.

Also, I had to adapt to basic lifestyle changes. To go for days without some sort of bath was the norm out there, while here it is regarded as disgusting. Sleeping in the sand was common, and to be able to sleep on a cot was considered a luxury. Voiding/defecating was done pretty much where you felt like it, as long as the smell didn't blow downwind of the vehicle. Defecating without the luxury of a toilet, or anything to sit on or even lean on is quite an experience. Dig a hole and try it some day if you think it is easy.

For me, there was very little support mechanisms. Whatever I experienced, I experienced alone. I was the only one from my Reserve unit that was assigned to that unit. As a matter of fact, they weren't expecting me when I arrived. I was a compete surprise to them, and of course, they had not made such provisions as finding for me a place to sleep or even a vehicle to ride in. The regulars out there really didn't like me. I was a stranger, I didn't know a damn thing, and I had a lot of luggage. Those soldiers
around my own age already had established clicks, of which I was not invited. By the first of April, there was a rumor that I was from the Central Intelligence Division, or CID. They were supposedly known to do things like drop their people off in a unit at awkward times, to see if they do anything illegal like keep foreign weapons. Oddly enough, I had not even heard of the Central Intelligence Division until I was accused of being in it! Needless to say, I was pretty much ostracized from that group. The older soldiers did not believe it, but they too had their clicks. They shared different interests than I did, and so I really did not connect with any of them. Essentially, I was alone.

It's a very odd feeling to be thrown into a situation in which literally everything is different. The climate was different, the people, the plants, the animals, everything. Even the stars seemed akilter somehow. They were definitely brighter out there, since the sky was so clear (when the oil smoke didn't blow over us). I remember one particularly clear night where a few of us were sitting around just admiring the stars at night. That night was very quiet, at least until a heated argument broke out as to the exact location of the Big Dipper. I had borrowed a pair of binoculars that one of the men had found in a headquarters building in Safwan, and was looking at the moon. The sky was so clear that I could actually get a good look at the moon's craters. That's quite different from Muncie's nights, where to be able to even see the moon at night is almost a miracle.

I guess perhaps the clear sky and the dry air were the only things that I really liked out there. I really liked the dry air. Living in the Ohio Valley all my life, I could not believe it when my sinuses cleared up for the first time. However, that's not worth the scorpions, the heat, the sand, and the flies.

The only ties I had to the life that I left were the things I had brought with me. These included a few pictures, everything that was in my wallet, a few civilian clothes,
and the headphones and cassette tapes that I bought in Jackson the day before I shipped out. I had no way of contacting friends and family back home for over a month after I got there. I did not have an address to give to them so that they could write me until after the ground war was over. It took about a week after the offensive was over before mail started filtering through to us. Of course, I would not get any of it for a long time. From the time that I sent a letter until the time that someone received it here at the States was about three or four weeks. It only took eight days to receive a letter, so that was over a month from the time that I sent a letter until I received one. The first contact that I had with anyone from home was on March 18, the first time that I got to use the phone. It was not for another week or so after that before I got my first letter.

Things were so different over there for me that after a while I had trouble remembering what life was like at home. It all seemed like some movie that I saw a long time ago, like none of it was reality. Perhaps this was a way that I could cope with the utter strangeness of it all. I don't know. I would dream of the States, and it was not my life. It was something else that I may or may not have experienced once. I was isolated there, and I had no contact with the "real" world. After a while, I stopped dreaming of home.

That may sound a little farfetched, but it's the truth. Not everyone experienced the same things over there, nor reacted the same way to the war, and I'm sure that no one experienced what I did. The diary only tells what I saw. It doesn't tell what I felt. It doesn't tell about the constant badgering that I received out there from certain members of that unit, because I was a Reservist, because I was new. It doesn't fully describe the knot in my stomach every time an explosion would rattle our track. It also doesn't describe the annoyance (frustration?) that I would feel when I would wake up and realize that I was still there, and still alone.
When I returned, I suffered from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD. For about four months after returning to the Midwest from the desert, I suffered from depression, anxiety, weight gain, restlessness, and I was easily startled, especially when I heard sounds that reminded me of explosions or gunfire. Anxiety attacks were the normal rather than the unusual. One doesn't have to be in a war, however, to experience PTSD. It can be experienced by anyone who has had some sort of traumatic experience; the military just put a name to it. For example, if someone was in a car accident, and was having problems coping with it—having nightmares or anxiety attacks whenever they ride in a car—it's essentially the same thing.

Here again, I was to go through another transition. One would think that the return trip would be easier, and yet in reality is a hundred times harder. Why was the return trip so difficult? That is a question that I am still asking myself. I think it is because I expected life to return to "normal" when I came home. Perhaps I thought that the world that I left would be the same one that I was returning to. However, that was not the case. I was not the same person when I returned, nor were they the same people that I left. Everyone was a stranger, and it took time to get reacquainted with that other person. Also, not only were the people different, the world in general was not the same one that I left. Life continued while I was gone, and I missed part of it. Even now, someone will make a reference to something that happened during that time, and I have to remind them that I wasn't here then. The phrase around my house is "it happened when you were gone," like I blinked into nonexistence for three months or something.

Another symptom of PTSD is the constant reliving of the experience. I had a very hard time trying not to think about the desert. Dreams of the war were common, which made it even harder to try to find this life when I was still living the other one.
Eventually, though, they faded away, and now I only dream about it once in a great while.

How did I cope once I returned? Oddly enough, I don’t think that I really did. I think that I just kept at it long enough, and things worked themselves out. There was not much that I could really do, I just survived until I could get a handle on things. I think that I was very fortunate to get home in time for summer vacation. I spent the entire summer thinking. I thought about what I had just went through, and what I was going to do now that it was over.

Once school started that fall, I was still a little wobbly about some things, like my relationship with my girlfriend, and definitely touchy whenever someone mentioned the war, especially during drill weekends. Whenever a group of desert vets got together, the topic invariably would turn to the war. It still happens, two years later; it seems like each one tries to outdo the others in his or her stories, whether it be of fun times spent in Kuwait City or the hardships endured in the desert. Personally, whenever they start mentioning the desert, I just feel sick. I would prefer to get on with my life and let the experience fade into hazy memories where they belong.

The experience wasn’t completely a negative one, though. I did bring home some very neat souvenirs. I have two Iraqi gas masks, an Iraqi flag that I found in a headquarters building in Safwan, quite a few of those pamphlets that we dropped on the Iraqis telling than to surrender, a canteen, a complete Iraqi uniform (again from the headquarters building), and an Iraqi license plate that I took off of a burned out car (an American car, no less) that was in the road.

Also, I don’t think I have ever been as emotionally touched as when I shook hands with my father when I came home, and I saw the pride in his eyes. At that moment, I probably felt closer to him than I have ever have in my life.
Now, it's two years later. The experience has definitely altered me. I think that now, I have a greater awareness and definition of myself. While I was out there, I had plenty of time to analyze my life, and myself. I learned a lot about myself out there. I know myself, and that is something that a lot of us will never really achieve.

During those first few days, I did not know whether or not I was going to live or die any time soon. That is a disturbing thing to think about. Also disturbing is why I was out there in the first place. Was it for democracy or for national security? Hell no. I was there to protect our oil interests, pure and simple. I was out there risking my life so that we could keep gas prices down. At times, I thought that my uniform should have had *Property of OPEC* rather than *U.S. Army*. What a cause I was willing to die for!

I'm sure that we all think about death every once in a while, I know I have, but to really be confronted with it is something else entirely. To *actually wonder* if this is going to be the last day on earth is frightening. But I did gain something from the experience. I confronted my own mortality, and I have come to terms with it. I became comfortable with the idea that I am mortal. I will eventually die like the rest of us. How would I spend the day if I knew that it was the last day of my life? I wouldn't change a thing. What I am doing now is what I would want to be doing if I were to die tomorrow (except perhaps not sit here all day typing). I am doing what I want to do.

I'm also much more patient and tolerant now than I was before I left. There are very little things now that upset me. Why? Probably because I can now look at them in perspective. The trials and tribulations that we all face each and every day are nothing compared to the trials and tribulations that I faced in the desert.

Another big change for me is my greater appreciation of nature. I had always loved the outdoors, but now I am a fanatic about it. The natural world is something that we miss here in America because we live in an antiseptic, sequestered life as far away
from nature as we can possibly get. We wake up in a climate controlled house that is more or less animal free, we get in a car that is the same, and we usually work in a place that is not nature. Even when we “go out to nature,” it really isn’t natural, but a facsimile of it. State parks and forests, provided that we go to them at all, have been altered for our recreation enjoyment. There are roads leading directly to a camping spot where we pitch a tent to keep out of the elements, we even bring with us most of the comforts of home, half of which we don’t really need. All we essentially do is move the house to a different location for a few days. Most places have bathroom facilities at our fingertips, and God forbid if there’s no toilet paper!

We rush too much in America. Everything is on a timetable. We even have to plan when to relax, and dare not relax any longer than that or we will be late for something. We’re also bombarded with too much external stimuli. How can we even take time out with so much floating past us, demanding our attention? When I was in the desert, the land and the people had remained essentially unchanged for centuries. Sure, some of the Bedouins drove Mitsubishi trucks instead of rode camels, but some of them did have camel herds. Out there, there was no real timetable. Most of the time here, we rush and don’t even realize it. Out there, all the days were the same, differing only with the passing seasons. Those people did not rush, because there was no reason to.

The sheer enormity of nature out there was overwhelming. As far as the eye could see, which was pretty damn far because it was completely flat out there and there were no trees to create an artificial horizon, was nothing but nature, nothing man-made at all. That’s quite a change from Muncie. I spent the greater portion of two months surrounded by nature. I lived in it. It was actually very beautiful (as long as we weren’t in a part of the country where the actual fighting took place).
On the down side, though, were there any long term problems caused from the war? That's something that I'm still thinking about, and something that I may never have an answer to. The biggest concern that I have is whether or not the smoke from the oil fires affected me in a way that might not turn up for another ten years or so. Also, I know that even now, I cannot donate blood until 1994 because I had to take malaria tablets and other, equally nasty stuff. I guess the jury's still out on this, and I won't know unless something happens. I can guess that I didn't contract some exotic parasite, because something like that would have been apparent by now, I hope.

As I attempt to wrap this up, there are two nagging questions that I still ask myself. One is whether, in general, this experience was a good one or a bad one. I think that it had both qualities. On the short term, the experience itself was very unpleasant, and the initial homecoming not much better. However, as I get farther and farther in time from the actual event, I increasingly feel that there are some things that I gained from this experience. I am now a much stronger person for having done what I did, and I am, in a way, happier because I did it. I really have little doubt in my mind as to what I want to do with the rest of my life, and that allows me to be more focused in what I do. I can concentrate on what I am doing without having that nagging little voice whispering in my ear, asking me if I am really happy doing this.

The second question is, if I had do to this again, would I have volunteered to go? That's a good one. When I initially made the decision, I was really thinking about the men with wives and children that they would have to leave. I really don't know what I would do if I had to decide again. I do know, however, that I don't regret the decision. At the time, I thought that it was the correct one to make.

Now that it is over, what am I doing with myself? Well, I took my medical school entrance exams the following spring after I returned, and did well enough to get
into I.U. Medical School. Since I was a semester behind, I had to take extra classes to catch up, taking 19 hours last semester and finishing up this semester with a grand total of 21. Luckily, though, I'm doing well and plan to graduate this May. After that, it's off to medical school.

And so life goes on.