



CECIL'S RIDE

A Tank Platoon Leader In Desert Storm

by Captain David Norton

After an extended delay caused by a maintenance problem, we were finally ready to continue our journey. The pilot pulled the 747 to the end of the runway and stopped. Over the intercom, he said there was something he wanted us to hear.

He switched the radio on over the intercom and the main body of the 1st Battalion, 34th Armor, sat on the runway at New York's Kennedy Airport and listened as the ball dropped in Times Square. Never before, and never again, will the New Year carry such a vivid memory as that night. The men who

would control the combat power of an M1A1 tank battalion sat in total silence. Thoughts of family, friends, home, and happier times mixed with fear, doubt, and anxiety about what lay ahead. As the cheers of the New Year's crowd swelled on the intercom, the engines' whine increased and the plane moved slowly forward. The 1st Battalion, 34th Armor was going to war.

After the long, long flight to Saudi Arabia, we stepped off the plane, greeted by a cool breeze and a darkened airfield. I don't know what I expected, but the emptiness just seemed to engulf us as we

formed up. It was probably less than a quarter of a mile, but the walk to the point where we would meet the buses seemed much longer. When we reached the bus pick-up point, we were given bottled water and told to start drinking. When we finally boarded the buses to the warehouse that would be our home for the next two weeks, most of us were sorry we had consumed so much water. We arrived at the warehouses at around 0230, and by the time we had our bags separated, it was 0330. We couldn't get an area until around 0600, so we simply dropped our bags and laid down on the cement to get some sleep.



Rumors were the order of the day for the next week. We didn't know when we would move, where we would move, or if we would use our M1 tanks or draw M1A1s. Finally on the 10th, we learned that we would turn in our M1s and draw M1A1s sent from stocks in Europe. For the next three days, Charlie Company turned in M1 tanks, and drew and prepared M1A1 tanks for combat. The tanks we drew were not new, and our last tank was late getting on a truck due to a maintenance problem, but in spite of the problems and the rush, Charlie Company had its tanks loaded and moved north on the 14th.

I had never experienced anything similar to our deployment into the desert. The company was loaded on two buses which followed the trucks carrying our tanks. Prior to leaving the port, the company commander had called all the platoon leaders together and updated us on the situation. Intelligence was predicting the Iraqis would attack on the night of the 14th. This was based on the January 15th deadline imposed by President Bush. So, as we rolled off to face the enemy, we were riding on buses and only the platoon leaders had any ammunition. Needless to say, this is not the picture a tanker normally imagines when he thinks of going to war.

When we climbed off the buses on the morning of the 15th, we found ourselves on the flattest piece of earth I have ever seen. Most of our tanks and the M998s with the commander, first sergeant, and support personnel had arrived ahead of us. When I went to find my tank, I was in for some bad news. The driver off-loading the tank was not used to driving in sand, and he turned too sharply, throwing a track. As we worked to get this problem corrected, the truck carrying my wing tank pulled in. Unbelievably, this truck had side-swiped another which was also carrying a tank. Only the front left side of each tank made contact, but this tore the number one and number two skirts off, crushed six track blocks, and dented the bustle rack and sponson box. After replacing the bad track blocks, the tank was able to move under its own power and operate normally.

We finally got all our personnel and equipment together, and word came down for us to pull through a logistics site to get fuel and ammunition. As we were moving through the logistics site, the 1SG came and found me. He told me that, due to the classified nature of the armor in the skirts of the M1A1 tank, we would have to retrace our route and try to find my wing tank's missing skirts. Four or five hours later, after searching up and down the main supply route, we received

word that the skirts had been picked up by another unit. By the time we made it back to the company, it was dark, and we had no reference to guide on. Somehow, we found the company and I returned to my platoon. As a new platoon leader with only three months in the company, my first day in the desert had not exactly been a rousing success.

January 16th was a better day. We organized our tanks, secured our gear, and prepared our weapons for combat. We also drew a mine plow per platoon and one of the tanks in 1st platoon was fitted with a mine roller kit.

Nothing exciting happened until I was awakened at 0330 on the morning of the 17th. We were told to go to REDCON One and stand by. At 0400, we began to see flashes to the north as Operation Desert Shield turned into Operation Desert Storm. I remember having my gunner and driver pop their heads out of the tank and look north. As we sat and watched the explosions flash across the sky, I told my crew they were watching the start of a war.

The next six weeks were filled with fear, anxiety, and extreme boredom as we waited to see if a ground war would be necessary. The days turned to weeks, and then we learned that if a ground war came, our parent unit, the 1st Infantry

Division (Big Red One) would be the breach force for VII Corps. In preparation for a ground war, we moved to a firing range and tested all our weapon systems. After ensuring that all our systems were functioning properly, we started a series of rehearsals. Beginning at the platoon level, the rehearsals grew in size and scope. The final rehearsal was the movement of VII Corps to its attack position.

We also conducted leaders' recons into the neutral zone that separated Iraq and Saudi Arabia. These recons gave us a good feel for what we would see when we moved into the attack. I can't imagine a force ever being better equipped or better prepared than we were.

When I talk to people who weren't there, I hear how Desert Storm was such an easy war. Sometimes I even feel that way when I look back at how things turned out, but sitting in the desert waiting, I sure didn't feel that way. As we prepared for our mission, we were told that as the breach force, the Big Red One could expect 10% killed in action (KIA) and 30% wounded in action (WIA). As a tank platoon leader, that equals four or five soldiers and at least one tank lost. When you look at numbers and turn them into names and faces of men that you are responsible for, easy is not the word that comes to mind.

On the morning of 24 February, I climbed out of my sleeping bag and secured my gear, knowing that in a few hours we would begin our attack north. I went from tank to tank in the platoon to ensure each crew and vehicle was ready to go. As I checked my tanks, I found a stenciled picture of Cecil, the cigar-smoking rabbit, on the front slope of each turret. I soon learned that Cecil was the combined work of all the junior enlisted members of the platoon. Prior to our arrival in Saudi, 2nd platoon had been looked upon as a bunch of troublemakers. Cecil was a sign that this group, ranging in age from 19 to 46, had finally pulled together. I was proud to carry Cecil's image on my tank as we moved off to face the Iraqis.

With every weapon checked, every bustle rack secure, and every crewmember in his place, we waited for the order to move. Finally the company radio net came to life, "short count follows 5, 4, 3, 2, 1," as the number one rang out, 14 radios were switched off and the sound of 14 M1A1 tank engines filled the desert air. A minute later, the company commander was back on the radio and we began our move. We were the right side of the company wedge formation, and

waited for 3rd platoon to move so we could form up on their flank. When the time came for us to move, I keyed the intercom and told the driver to move out. Instead of hearing the engine gain power and feeling the tank move, I heard the driver yelling, "Sir, it won't move!" There we sat as the rest of the company moved around us. I was frantic; I called for the maintenance team and the entire crew began to troubleshoot the problem. Five minutes later, we were screaming across the desert as fast as we could go, to regain our place in formation. My driver, who was tall and slender, had accidentally bumped the throttle cable when he climbed into his seat, jarring it loose. This simple and unforeseen problem was in some ways a sign of things to come.

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I can't begin to describe the feeling that ran through me as we moved north. We passed units of all types, and everyone must have been out to watch us pass. Each unit we passed greeted us with waves, cheers, and shouts of encouragement. Knowing that we had the support of our families, the American public, and the rest of our comrades in arms was a great feeling.

When we moved past the field artillery, I knew we were getting close. Shortly after passing the artillery, we stopped. We were waiting on orders to continue or to wait until the following morning. While we waited, contact reports began to come across the radio. The first report was that enemy attack helicopters were spotted moving in our direction. This report was followed by a report that the unit to our right was under chemical attack. These reports all proved to be false, but they did help to keep us alert while we waited. Finally, orders came down to continue the attack.

The battalion shifted forward and left, to get lined up on the lanes that would be cut by Task Force 5-16 Infantry and Task Force 2-34 Armor. 1-34 Armor, as a tank-pure battalion, would move through these lanes, destroy enemy second-echelon forces, block any enemy counterattack, and open the way for follow-on divisions to pass through. Once in position, we watched as truckloads of Iraqi prisoners of war moved past us to the rear. More concerned with what was going on to my front, I didn't really notice the battery of eight-inch guns that set up a couple hundred meters behind me. This quickly changed when the first volley of the prep fire exploded over our heads. I nearly had to change my pants. Watching and listening to the size and violence of the prep fire, I closed my eyes and thanked God that we were not the ones on the receiving end.

Even before the last rounds impacted, the lead elements moved forward. I have to admit that after watching the prep fire, having 60 tons of steel wrapped around me gave me a real safe feeling. On the other hand, I began to think of the men who would have to dismount and clear the battle-hardened Iraqis from their trenches. To everyone's surprise, word that the trenches were clear and the lanes were open came quickly from the breach task forces. We moved forward and as we neared the breach lanes, I was glad that we were not facing serious resistance. Dust and smoke made visibility a real problem that was compounded by the large number of vehicles in such a small area. Several vehicles nearly collided as we moved through the lanes with everyone trying to maintain position in line.

The training and rehearsals paid off as the battalion quickly moved into a diamond formation after exiting the lanes. Buoyed by the limited resistance during the breach, we moved forward with careful confidence. Leading the task force, the scout platoon and Charlie Company were first to make contact with the enemy. Hot spots began to appear in our sights at ranges in excess of 3,000 meters. Unable to positively identify what was out there, we continued to move. We stayed under very tight fire control, and no one was given permission to engage until we identified the hot spots as towed guns and wheeled support vehicles. The guns and some of the support vehicles were destroyed with main gun rounds as we continued to move forward. These guns were anti-aircraft guns, and were part of an enemy trench and bunker system. We rolled right over the top of the bunker system using machine guns to

suppress suspected enemy positions as we moved.

We didn't see any Iraqi soldiers around the equipment or in the first set of bunkers as we passed. It wasn't until we crested a small ridge at the rear of the bunker complex that we began to pick up movement in the distance. Approximately 2,000 meters to our front was a second bunker complex. Through our thermal sights we could now see soldiers moving in these distant trenches. The turret distribution valve went out on my tank at the same time that we first identified what appeared to be the main bunker in the complex ahead. No longer able to traverse my turret quickly, I told my driver to pick up a tight weave. This made it possible for us to scan our sector and enabled me to control the platoon. My three tanks had also identified the large bunker to our front, and after clearing fires, I told my gunner to hit it with a HEAT round.

The impact of the HEAT round and the Iraqi reaction were simultaneous. Before the dust had even cleared, a sea of white flags went up throughout the enemy position. The battle area that just seconds before was filled with machine-gun fire and the crash of tank main guns grew deathly quiet. We pulled into an overwatch position as the scouts, assisted by the engineers, rounded up the enemy prisoners of war. We soon learned that we had captured an Iraqi infantry brigade, including the commander and staff. Information that the Iraqis had no idea who was to their front filtered back to us on our tanks. They expected to see an Arab force comprised primarily of infantry. The sight of 58 M1A1 tanks was devastating, and they lost all their will to fight as soon as that tank main gun round impacted their bunker.

Day quickly turned to night as the last enemy prisoners were gathered up and the command bunker cleared. With the day's objectives secured and the battalion arrayed to defeat an enemy counterattack if it came, we stopped for the night. As soon as we got word to stop for the night, soldiers began to clear the area around their tanks. Knowing that tankers are not really trained or equipped to clear bunkers, and with all the unexploded artillery bomblets in the area, the battalion commander ordered everyone back on their tanks. We had come too far to get someone hurt or killed needlessly.

The adrenaline that pumped through our veins during the day began to slowly leave our systems. Soldiers began to wind down, and as soon as we established se-

curity, we rotated guards so soldiers could get some rest. I was still too wound-up to rest, so I teamed with my loader to take the first watch, allowing my gunner and driver to get some sleep. Near the end of our watch, Alpha Company, to our right, reported three Iraqi dismounts moving across their front. They were told to continue to observe but not to engage unless necessary. A short time later, my three tank reported that the dismounts had moved into his sector. Tired of manually traversing my turret, I decided to use my tank to watch the Iraqis. This left my three good tanks free to scan our sector.

Time passed slowly as I continued to track the Iraqis moving from right to left across our sector. Watching them, I noticed that one of them was carrying something over his shoulder, but I could not make out what it was. I became concerned as they moved between our scouts and us. Each time they came near a Bradley, they would stop, drop to their knees and face the Bradley. I could see well enough to know that they never pointed any type of weapon at the scouts, but I wasn't sure of what they were up to. After a minute or so, they would get back up and continue on their way. Once they crossed in front of my tank, the battalion commander, who was about 100 meters to my left rear, decided they had gone far enough. He ordered the scouts to button up, then had his gunner fire a burst of coax a safe distance in front of the Iraqis. The Iraqis dropped to the ground and didn't move. Several minutes later they got back to their feet and continued to move. This time the battalion commander told his gunner to fire a little bit closer. Once again the Iraqis dropped and didn't move for what seemed like a very long time.

I was surprised when I again heard the rattle of machine-gun fire. I called on the radio to ask the executive officer what was going on. Apparently the battalion commander's gunner had seen the Iraqis start to crawl toward the scout vehicles and awakened the commander. The commander, concerned for the safety of scouts, told his gunner to fire a burst at the Iraqis. I stayed awake all night keeping an eye on the three forms on the ground eight hundred meters to my front. Two of the men laid perfectly still, but the third one reached his hands out like he was in pain. Soon he quit moving, and as I watched through my thermal sight, his image turned from green to gray as the heat of life drained from his body.

At the first light of morning, two of the Iraqis got up and with hands raised, be-

gan to walk towards our position. They came up between my tank and my wingman. While we covered them from my tank, my wingman checked them for weapons. They said that their friend had been wounded and needed a medic. Not wanting to send a medic out alone, my commander told me to move out and secure the area. When we neared the Iraqi, I knew he was dead before we had even stopped moving. We were told to search him for documents, identification, and any personal property that his family might want returned. We were then told to bury the remains and mark the site for future recovery. This presented a situation that I don't know if anyone is ever really prepared for. This was the first time I had ever handled a dead body. The smell and the gore caused by a single 7.62mm round surprised me. No movie or picture can come close to real life. When we finished, we turned the soldier's belongings in to the battalion commander, and I was glad when we moved out of the area.

I honestly don't know how far we moved, or where we ended up. We were off the maps that we had, and the entire company was relying on the company executive officer, who had a Global Positioning System (GPS) and one large-scale map. When we stopped, we pulled into a blocking position and received word that follow-on divisions were passing forward. The Big Red One had successfully completed its mission, and would now become the corps reserve. We completed resupply and maintenance checks, and once again moved out, only this time we were following VII Corps. Even as the reserve, we maintained our battalion diamond formation and never let our guard down as we moved across the desert.

On the afternoon of the 26th, we began to receive reports that the 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment was in contact with an armored division of the Republican Guard. Unknown to any of us, someone at an extremely high level decided to move the Big Red One forward to destroy the Tawalkana Division of the Republican Guard in a night attack. Unaware of what was going on, we were relieved and happy when we stopped to refuel just before dark. After hours of riding through wind-blown sand and dust, any rest was welcome. Not until later, when we were once again on the move, did the company commander come up on the radio and tell the platoon leaders to go green. Riding through the night with the wind in my face and the sand in my eyes, I learned of what was to come.

I don't remember being afraid when we went through the breach on the first day of the war. I was excited, nervous and anxious, but I don't remember any real fear. That changed as I listened to what the company commander had to say. Not only were we going to conduct a forward passage of lines with a unit in contact, but we would be doing it from the march and at night. When we exited the passage lanes, we would face a Republican Guard Division equipped with T72M1 tanks, dug in and waiting.

Fanning the flames of doubt and fear was a briefing the company had received prior to deployment. The briefers told us all about the T72M1, and that it was a great tank, almost as good as the M1. We were going to conduct one of the most dangerous maneuvers possible against a well-equipped and prepared enemy, and I couldn't even brief my platoon properly. The shortage of secure communications equipment made it impossible for everyone to have a secure system in their tank. So over a non-secure radio net, I became very creative in letting my platoon know what was happening.

Unbelievably, the passage of lines went smoothly. We simply used battle drills to move through the lanes and re-deploy on the far side. The fact that it went smoothly didn't make it any less exciting. We flowed through the lanes as artillery fired overhead, and the horizon was dotted with burning Iraqi combat vehicles. Soldiers who just moments before were dead tired and dragging, came to life as the adrenaline of combat once again began to flow. We used the burning vehicles to guide on, and as I passed a burning Iraqi tank, we were told that we no longer had friendly forces to the front.

The 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment (ACR) had destroyed everything in range of their weapons, allowing us to fully deploy before we made contact. We began to pick up vehicle movement to our front as we moved in front of the 2nd ACR. The scout platoon, approximately 1000 meters to my front, was using 25mm and machine guns to recon by fire. They were firing at bunkers and unidentified hot spots. Suddenly, a SABOT round went right through the Bradley to my left front. We weren't sure who fired at the scouts, but we did know that it came from the direction of friendly forces. The scout platoon leader, not knowing where the round came from, moved his vehicle to support his damaged track. His vehicle was also engaged as it moved into position. The battalion commander quickly moved Bravo Company forward to se-

cure the area so the medics could treat the injured. The gunner on the platoon leader's Bradley was killed, and the platoon leader was injured. Miraculously, no one on the first vehicle hit was seriously injured.

Only the soldiers involved in evacuating the wounded knew the extent of the damage, but everyone in the battalion knew we had suffered our first casualties. The battalion commander moved the remaining four scout tracks back, and Charlie Company moved out to lead the attack. With no one to our front, we began to engage targets at ranges of 3000-3500 meters. We were not going to take the chance of getting too close and giving the enemy a chance to fight back. Riding up in an open hatch, I used AN-PVS-7B night vision goggles to keep track of our place in formation. I only dropped into the turret to look through the sight to identify long-range targets. After destroying several vehicles, to include at least one tank and some armored personnel carriers, we began to see numerous trucks and trailers. I told my guys not to fire unless they identified a combat vehicle or an enemy fighting position.

We identified a large logistics site, and were soon moving through a corps-level supply area. Along with all the trucks and trailers were a large number of enemy dismounts. We also skirted a large fenced-in area that turned out to be a major ammunition holding area. Most of the dismounts we came across didn't want any part of a fight, so they simply dropped their weapons and we sent them to the rear. My platoon sergeant's wingman reported eleven dismounts 3000 meters to his front. I told him to keep an eye on them but continue to move. A few minutes later, he reported that the dismounts had taken up a position in a bomb crater. I told him to watch them, and if they did anything stupid, we would deal with them when we were within machine gun range.

The company's direction of travel put the Iraqi position directly in front of my tank. We kept them under continuous observation, and they didn't move or take any hostile action as we approached. When we were close enough and they got a good look at our tanks, they began to stand and drop their weapons. I pulled my tank up beside their position and yelled for them to leave their weapons and move west. Most of them started to move, but just at that moment my loader and I noticed two guys with machine guns trying to sneak around a berm. Knowing that we couldn't traverse fast

enough, I screamed at my driver to back up, right track! The engine roared, the dust flew and a squad of drop-jawed Iraqis found themselves looking down the barrel of a 120mm smoothbore cannon. Mouths were open, hands flew up and a couple of them began to pray. I nearly came out of my turret yelling at them to drop their weapons. I can't begin to list or even remember the stream of profanity that came out of my mouth. All I remember, is that I really didn't want to kill these guys just because of a couple of idiots. After a few seconds of yelling, I suddenly stopped and calmly asked if any of them understood English. One guy who was white with fear, slowly raised his hand. I said OK, and began screaming again. I told them that if they didn't all want to die, the guys with the machine guns better drop their weapons.

Paralyzed by fear and the sight of a crazy American yelling at them from the top of a tank, it took the Iraqis a few seconds to react. Finally, one of the Iraqis near the last guy with a weapon reached over and knocked it out of his hands. Knowing that I was falling further and further behind the company, I was out of the turret and on my way down the front slope before the machine gun hit the ground. Without stopping to think, I found myself on the ground in the middle of a Republican Guard infantry squad. I realized as I collected weapons and sent the Iraqis marching west to be picked up by follow on forces, that I was armed only with a 9mm pistol. In reality, I wasn't armed at all since my pistol was still holstered, and I didn't even have a round in the chamber. Fortunately, I didn't need a weapon, and my loader dismounted to assist in destroying the captured Iraqi weapons.

We smashed the Iraqi weapons between the track and the sprocket of the tank, ensuring that they could not be used in the future. I scanned the area after re-mounting the tank, and saw M1A1 tanks about 500 meters away. I told my driver to kick it so we could catch up quickly. When we were close enough to identify the tanks, I realized that they belonged to Delta Company. Delta was at the rear of the task force diamond, meaning we would have to pass through the center of the task force formation to catch the company. I quickly called the company executive officer to have him notify the rest of the task force that our tank would be moving through the center of the diamond. I was worried that someone would see a lone tank out of formation and mistake us for the enemy. When I received

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word that it was clear, we moved as fast as possible to join the company.

We attacked through the night, stopping just before sun-up. I can't say exactly when the passage of lines started, or exactly when we stopped, but I do know that the night of 26-27 February was the longest of my life. Morning held little change from days past. Fuel and ammunition came forward, allowing us to re-supply and we did some very basic maintenance on our tanks. Later, with no sleep and only an MRE, we once again moved out in pursuit of the retreating Iraqi army. We moved all day and into the night. We passed through the worst tank country I have ever seen. The S3 called it "The Valley of the Boogers," some type of strip mine in the desert. As we started through it, we went to platoons in column, then companies in column, then the entire task force was in a single column. We moved along a single trail, all aware that a relatively small force with light anti-tank weapons could have stalled our move indefinitely. We didn't meet any resistance, but we did see a number of dismounted Iraqis as we continued to move. The night grew extremely dark. Due to the hazardous terrain and soldier fatigue, we were forced to stop. The commander ordered the task force to halt, establish local security, and get a few hours rest so we could move again at first light. I stopped my tank and had my platoon jockey around to provide all-around security. The road was so narrow that by the time we were in place, I could jump from tank to tank.

I knew how tired everyone was, so I told my tank commanders to get their soldiers as much sleep as possible. We went to 50% security, with two soldiers up in each turret. We heard reports of Iraqi dismounts in the holes and ravines around our position, but no one in the platoon saw any. Approximately 100 meters to our front, where the rest of the company had stopped, we heard machine-gun fire as tank crews tried to frighten Iraqis out of the area. After making my rounds, checking on soldiers and ensuring security was in place, I rolled out my bag for some much-needed sleep.

I had my bag rolled out on the blowout panels and was just getting ready to pull my boots off when the tank commander of my three tank jumped across to mine. He informed me that his gunner had spilled boiling coffee on himself. I

grabbed my helmet, mask and weapon, and went to check on the injured soldier. After being briefed by the combat lifesaver, I called to get a medic to evaluate the burn. The medic vehicle was up with the rest of the company and, due to the narrow road, couldn't get to us. Because of dismounts in the area, we didn't want the medic to cross the 100 meters to our position on foot. I told the commander to have the forward platoons hold their fire, so I could come get the medic. I started up the road to get the medic, and the injured soldier's tank commander joined me because he didn't want me to go alone. As it turned out, the burn wasn't serious, and the soldier was able to continue to perform his duties. After returning the medic to his vehicle, I climbed back on my tank.

Before going to sleep, I thanked God that we had come so far without serious injury in the platoon. I also thanked Him for the way Second Platoon had come together and I drifted off to sleep. A short time later, I was awakened by the explosion of two mortar rounds near our tanks, but exhausted by the past three days, I asked if anyone was injured, rolled over, and went back to sleep.

We moved out at 0600, amid rumors of a pending cease-fire. Charlie Company moved out ahead of the task force, taking the shortest possible route to block the route of Iraqi forces retreating north. The company executive officer (XO), who was leading the company, used a GPS to navigate our way out of the "Valley of the Boogers." Topping a small rise in the road, the XO reported an enemy tank to his front. A SABOT round at 500 meters set the enemy tank ablaze, and we continued to move. A few minutes later, as my platoon passed the burning tank, the XO reported more enemy vehicles to his front. These vehicles were facing in the opposite direction, and appeared to be unmanned. The commander told the XO to continue to move and not engage the enemy vehicles. We would use thermite grenades to destroy the vehicles and save our main gun rounds. I asked the commander to allow my platoon, the trail platoon, to destroy the vehicles. The road was so narrow that I was worried about my tanks passing so close to burning vehicles as their ammunition exploded.

We destroyed three tanks, one ZSU 23-4, and some APCs prior to battalion telling us to leave the rest of the vehicles for

follow-on forces. We picked up the pace of our move as word came down that a cease-fire would go into effect at 0800. We moved through the fog and haze, bypassing several enemy vehicles and dismounted soldiers to establish a blocking position facing south just prior to 0800. Sitting in the desert under a sky darkened by the smoke of oil well fires, we all slumped a little and felt the fatigue wash over us as 0800 passed, and the war came to an end.

Exact dates, times, and places on a map hold little importance in my memories of Desert Storm. The things that stand out are the people and the emotion that can never be fully explained by those who fought, or fully understood by those who didn't. I remember the immense pride that swelled within me when my loader pressed PLAY on his Walkman and I heard Lee Greenwood's *God Bless the USA* as we moved forward into the breach. I remember the loneliness and pain I felt writing letters home to my wife, kids, and family, knowing that we would soon be fighting. The fear of the unknown...was I ready? Was there anything more I could do to prepare myself or my platoon? This was the self-doubt that soldiers at all levels must feel prior to combat. Aside from my love for my wife and family, I have never experienced such strong emotions. I learned more about myself as a soldier, an officer, and a man in the hundred hours of Desert Storm than in the rest of my 35 years.

CPT David Norton began his military service in 1983 as a voice intercept operator. He served with the 511th MI Battalion in Ludwigsburg, Germany, and the 3rd ACR at Ft. Bliss, Texas, prior to receiving his commission from OCS in 1990. After attending AOB, he served with 1-34 Armor as a platoon leader and tank company XO. He completed AOAC, then served as the brigade plans officer with 1st Brigade, 2d ID in Korea. He commanded A Company and HHC, 1-34 Armor, and also served as the battalion maintenance officer. A graduate of the Defense Language Institute, he is currently instructing Army Operations and Tactics at the Military Intelligence Officer Basic Course at Ft. Huachuca, Arizona.