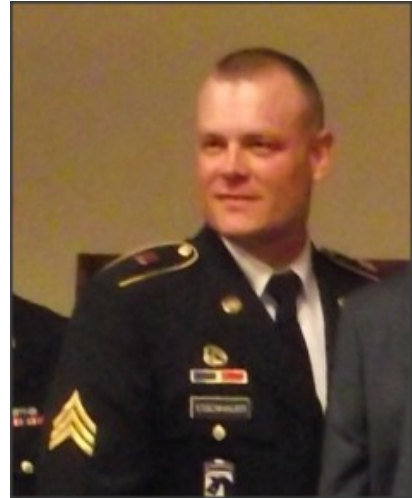


This is the journal kept during the invasion of Iraq by SGT Adam Robert Eisenhauer. During his career Adam served as a Red Dragon and later as a member of the Old Guard (3rd US Infantry Regiment.) In the invasion he was assigned as a Team Leader in 2nd Squad, 1st Platoon, 101st Chemical Co. His unit had a mission of Equipment and Personnel Decontamination, Casualty Evacuation and Reconnaissance in support of Combat Service Support Group 11 (CSSG-11), CSSB-10. 1st Marine Division.



I missed a few days to recap so I think it appropriate to clarify the timeline.

18 March 2003- Our platoon moved out from Camp Bougainville to our dispersion area. That night four SCUDs flew overhead and crashed in the desert Three were hit by the Patriots and one hit some indiscriminate location. People were clanging metal on metal every three hours. Mask on, mask off, it was a riot.

My favorite was trying to dig holes with e-tools in that awful sand. Mask on, in the hole, off, out of the hole, on, in the hole, off, don't sleep in the hole, can't stay in the hole...

19 March 2003 - The bombing of Safwan Hill begins. We can see the flashes from our dispersion area. The morning reveals several smoke clouds to the North. We move across a 500M no man's land with a path cleared by the harrows. British are guarding the Kuwaiti side of the breach. An anti-tank mine had rolled back into the roadway and I told Dorian Grant to swerve. Tried to call 132 to warn but 131 was passing by. Missed the mine by a foot or so. We are met by several well fires spewing 100-150' gouts of flame into the air. The 58th Armor had fled so fast some of their gear littered the roadway. We come to a checkpoint where a pile of weapons about 5' high. Some Iraqi civilians arrive in a truck waving a white headscarf. We park near a burning oil well for a couple of hours which nearly melts some of the rubber on our doors. Not much sleep that night.

20 March 2003 - We move slowly North. Look to the right and I see two desert trucks creeping their way toward our convoy. I call up on the radio to CPT Yuzuik to clarify identity. He says their ours. Knowing what I know now, they weren't. Don't know what happened but I think someone intercepted them. Come across Marines escorting 50-60 POWs. A huge blood stain is in the road with various bits of flesh, disgusting. We keep plunging into the oil fields. Suddenly the M198 guns go flying down the road like their stolen. Night falls and we are still in the burning oil fields. One guy, and I won't say who, thinks it's a great idea to PMCS his lights in a strict blackout. The S2 comes running and demands whoever did it see COL Palmford immediately. We profess ignorance and let's leave it at that.

22 March 2003 - Pretty uneventful day. We stay here and get some rest. A truck next to us has rigged some stereo system to the 24V system and are blaring some of the worst music I ever heard. I take it upon myself to eat the Country Captain Chicken and the Pork Chop and never give those MREs to my Joes. Eating those MREs was like recycling dook, no matter how you tried you could not get those to taste better. MREs three times a day begin to taste the same. A day there and just outside the convoy perimeter becomes a mine field of cat holes and make shift toilets from MRE

boxes. Curious Iraqis begin to skirt our perimeter. I didn't know it then but Grant's only mechanism for dealing with the situation was his music. Being in the middle of the convoy gave me a sense of security to let him listen. The CSSG-11 1SG thought otherwise. We come up with this idea that when we needed to use the latrine we would take the doors off the HMMWV and use them as screens to do our business. 23 March 2003 - We begin moving out. The Iraqis become bolder and start to actually engage us in limited conversation. One engages Anthony Quinn Harris and could only say, "House" and point. After clarifying Harris waves him through and assures him it's alright. Gas masks marked with "West Germany" litter the road and burned out vehicles dot the landscape. One truck is destroyed, spewing an entire load of tomatoes everywhere. After the encounter with the 1SG I tell Grant to ditch his headphones. He refused because it was the only thing keeping him grounded. I blew up. It got ugly, I embarrassed him on the radio. CPT Yuzuik chews me out for that and I switch Grant with Fiala. Fiala was having trouble and getting into arguments with Green and someone else. We arrive at ORP 12. Three Iraqi infantry attempt to sneak up on our convoy with an RPG and quickly surrender when they are spotted. I adapt to the environment and get some decent rest on the hood of the HMMWV.

24 March 2003 - Tello, the PSG's driver, approaches me and tells me that he can't stand the cigarette smoke. The PSG is delighted to tell him to GFH. It was his release. [Alan Sedam](#) captured this large 18" lizard and calls him, "Al". He has a passion for reptiles. He keeps Al around in case we get slimed. We edge closer to the Tigris river. The stench from the low water is a little over the top. [Scott Beaudry](#) gets bored and starts weaving back and forth. Fiala does it a little too. SSG Brooks tells him to knock it off. Sadaam's highway is missing sections so we have to go around in areas. In some places the dust is so heavy it messes with your breathing. The Army gave us these single tents for cat holes. By this point no one wanted to deal with setting it up, so females and males are doing their business next to each other. I'm doing my business only to see [Nicole Hutchins](#) and Fiala taking pictures of my keaster and critiquing. At this point I run out of cigarettes. Hutchins is nice enough to let me have some Hawken's chew which was mediocre but it was something. We drive some more until we reach ORP 24. We get a mission call to set up a decon site 50 miles up the road in unsecure territory. We're told it will be secure when we get there. The air support is grounded. We know it's a recon mission up the road. We have a huge prayer before we fuel up and then the sandstorm hit. You couldn't see your hand in front of your face. Some of us had to use our pro mask to breathe. You didn't dare wander away from your vehicle or else you would get lost.

25 March 2003 - The sandstorm will not subside. Mission is delayed again and again until COL Palmford scratches the mission entirely. I only know it's day due to the light color in sand. Seeing anything is nearly impossible. The USMC have this idea that leap frogging the support with the armor columns will enhance resupply efforts. The armor column passes within a few feet of our convoy. I have no idea if they saw us or not. The only reason I knew they were there was a faint glimpse of the 20mm turret on a passing AMTRAK. About mid-day the sandstorm lets up a little and we are able to move a few miles but the risk of accident slows our progress. We only get about 5-10 miles before the sun sets and we are plunged into absolute darkness. I am hacking up phlegm that is straight up mud. Fiala and I are nearly silent the entire time to reduce ingesting or breathing more dust. The sandstorm finally dissipates in the night.

26 March 2003 – Everyone and everything is coated in dust. We make an attempt to clean the air filters on our vehicles but there is no time. We make a few miles up the road. At a halt, a Gunny is chewing out some Lance Corporal and then a massive fire fight breaks out up the column. The Gunny screams, "DO SOMETHING, IT'S NOT SAFE!" and chucks his weapon at the Lance Corporal. The fire fight ends and our column starts hauling butt up the road. The scene is grizzly, dead Iraqis

are strewn all over the place. One, is a squished ketchup packet, another's face is missing, and another has his brains blown out behind him. A ring of POWs sit quietly on the ground, their faces a portrait of catatonia. Our group occupies the area parking in columns with trucks parked 5M next to each other (was not our choice). We immediately dismount and establish a perimeter defense 100M long. To our left is a barren strip for 500M to an LP/OP; on our right is a small platoon of Marines, and a five ton with a hastily mounted MK-19. It is relayed to us that nearly half of the enemy had escaped into the desert. I take the opportunity away from the line to survey the carnage. I find Marines looting and taking pictures with the bodies, don't judge, it was their way of coping. Back on line, the sun starts setting. A shot rings out, and you can tell it's not one of ours. SSG Ray screams, "GET DOWN, GET THE F@\$% DOWN!" SSG Brooks hastily makes his way to tell me that a green star cluster would be our cue to open up with the M203s. It gets eerily quiet. Suddenly the Marines on our right pick up and leave. All that's left is the five ton, and we are on our own. Another shot rings out from the berm and no one says anything. It's getting dark and our right and left flanks are open for nearly half a click on the left, and who knows on the right. Eerie howls start to fill the air from the direction of the incoming shots. WTF. Shots start coming from my left followed by an M249. Tracers start going out and then muzzle flashes from in front. Our entire line opens up. The MK-19 gets off four rounds and JAMS! The Marine gets up on top and starts kicking the charging handles. The green star cluster goes out and up about 75-100M in front of our line. Mortar rounds start to land in front of our line, falling short. In 20-30 seconds I have enough time to take aim, fire one round of 5.56, put it on safe, and lob 8 aimed 40mm grenades. The enemy stops firing. "Cease Fire!" is heard along the line. Harris moves from position to position to check on people. I get up to check on my Joes. Severely rattled, I mechanically move among the positions checking each. The Marines show up and an E-5 wants to know my SITREP. All I could get out was, "I'm busy." SGT Faga is helping either McAlister or Miranda to correct the malfunctions on their M249. The dust from the prior days had filled the gas regulators with sand effectively inerting the weapon. The Army skimping on giving us tools to correct the error made the correction impossible. SGT Faga yells, "Test Fire!" and fires a few rounds. The Marine E-5 yells, "STOP FIRING, YOU'RE GIVING AWAY YOUR POSITION, I'M IN CHARGE HERE!" All I could think is, "Where were you five minutes ago?" SGT Faga casually says, "I have an HE round with your name on it, GTFA." That E-5 realized that he was staring at death and did a quick about face. I am positive SGT Faga meant what he said and in some strange way, I probably would've helped him hide the body. A few minutes later, all NCOs including myself began grabbing up Marines to get them on the line. One says to me, "I'm a truck driver, I'm required to have 8 hours of sleep." My response, "WE MAY BE FIGHTING FOR OUR LIVES IN A MINUTE, GTFO OF THE TRUCK!" SSG Ray sees this Private pointing his M249 at our line. He runs up and kicks the weapon away from him, WTF ARE YOU DOING!" He weakly says, "I'm pulling inner perimeter security." SSG Ray, "BS! YOU HAVE YOUR GUN IN OUR BACKS!" Marines slowly make their way to the line. The S2 makes the case to pull us from the line. SSG Sedam says, "I don't trust these Mfers!" and we decide to maintain an LP/OP on the line. I crawl into my truck and dream a dreamless sleep. Here's the big picture. Prior to the fire fight, the S2 assured the colonel that the perimeter was secure. He never walked the line to verify or else he would've realized our perimeter had gigantic holes. The enemy were remnants from the days fire fight and had come back to counter attack. Sanchez was the one to first open up on some movement to his front. He did so at the prompting of SSG Ray. Perrin followed up with the M249. The howls we heard was an Iraqi technique to unsettle their usual enemy (other Muslim forces) and communicate basic intel. The five ton did not leave the line because he was never given orders. Our meager Platoon had driven off the enemy. This event will probably never come to light because the S2 would've been Court Martialed.

27 March 2003 – I make my way down to our LP/OP on the western side of the perimeter. An explosion occurs about 300M to the left and 50M short of the perimeter. I'm so used to this by now that I just shrug and continue. In hind sight it, it should've been reported but no one else seemed to

react. I get to Beaudry and I think it was McAlister to find out how they are doing. Beaudry tells me he sees some Iraqi soldiers watching us about 800M out. I look and I don't see anything. I get 1LT Yuzuik and ask him if he sees something. He pulls out his binoculars and says he can see three of them. He immediately makes his way to the Group's CP. Word gets back that the 3rd LAR is going to sweep the western area. We let it go. While putting something under the tarp of my smoke generator, a Gunny with an E-5 in tow makes his way toward our column. Gunny, "So, I heard you friendly fired one of our guys last night." He's casual and he is addressing some of us. Me, "Excuse me?" Him, "I heard you shot one of our guys last night!" I swear the next thing that came out didn't even seem like I was the one talking. Me, "What was the caliber of the round?" Gunny, "What?" He totally lost his momentum. Me, "What was the caliber of the round?" Him, "7.62!!!!!" Me, "We don't carry that ammo." 5.56 was highest caliber ball ammunition that we carried. The enemy uses a 7.62x39. He immediately turns and leaves totally baffled. It was reported that indeed a Marine was hit with 7.62 the previous night. We are informed that we must survive on one MRE a day. Later orders come down that they want us to dig survivability holes IN FRONT of our trucks. Stupid! If we have to leave in a hurry we'll drive right into them. Not our call. Fiala and I begin digging the hole. As an afterthought, I go to the Hemmett in the column next to us and offer him my hole in the event of indirect fire. Him, "Oh, that won't save you." Me, "Huh?" Him, "There's 18,000 Lbs. of C-4 on this truck, and the Hemmett behind me has artillery shells. If we take indirect, we're hauling @\$\$. " I laugh it off, but think about it. Trucks and columns are parked within 5M of each other and this guy is sitting in the middle of the regiment. We took mortar rounds the previous night and we know the enemy is in the area. One hit. One. Even at the perimeter, everyone would be dead from the concussion. I get back to digging our hole. Later that day the Regiment decides to dig in and everyone is dispersed. The Marines are nice enough to give us a cushy position in the center. Frustrating thing is we had to dig new holes. The dirt for 8" down is soft. After that, it's solid sedimentary rock. Fiala and I only make about 3-4'. SSG Brooks starts riding on Fiala to make better progress. I bulk up on him and tell him to leave her alone. He chews me out and talks of UCMJ action. 3rd LAR never shows up to investigate the western area so the Colonel dispatches skirmisher squads. They don't find any active enemy but they do find bodies. Reports begin to come in. The first report was seven dead. Then it moved up to a little under twenty. That night SSG Brooks gathers the squad and tells them how proud he is of everyone. Then I say something that nearly finds me in a lot of trouble. "I gotta tell ya, I am so glad we killed those MFers." SSG Brooks gives me this weird look and says, "Take his weapon." Me, "Whoa..... I'm good.... I meant nothing by that..... I'm just glad we got through it." He thinks about it for a little while and says, "Ok." The rest of the night was uneventful.

28 March 2003 – This is the day that HOT 54B IRAQ is born. We monitor our own internal net (FH 107, if I remember right) and SSG Ray decided to play some Ludacris while holding the mike to his mini-speakers. The positive response from the Joes led to the creation of our own station with SSG Ray as the DJ. He has a career as a radio announcer if he wants it. The hardness of the dirt and the lack of "give a dook" ceases improvement on the survivability pits. The one MRE a day begins to take its toll not only on us but the Marines as well. Tempers get a little short. It's a sad day because 1LT Yuzuik is promoted to CPT and we are informed that we will lose him as soon as the CO can make his way to us. He was a good officer and we hated to hear that we would lose him. The campaign against the Iraqi forces is going so well that both the Army and USMC decide to call a halt so that logistics could catch up; hence the lack of MREs. SSG Brooks invents this mobile toilet which he puts between the PDDA1 and the Heating element. Because it's easy to put up two ponchos for privacy, everyone wants to use his invention. The rest of the day is cleaning weapons in shifts and getting some sleep. We still maintain an LP/OP and man it in shifts. Shifts consist of two soldiers per hour but often the shifts would be odd and one soldier would end up pulling double duty. In order to avoid this, I put myself on a shift as well. During the night I am pulling shift with (I think it was Green or Talford). Green or Talford needs to use the latrine real quick so I'm at the LP/OP by myself for a little bit. The S2 comes by verifying that security forces are in place. We strike up a conversation which leads to the night before. I don't remember how

we exactly got to that part of the conversation but as soon as I mentioned the casualty reports. His expression changes to that of a cornered feral animal, "SHUT UP! THAT DIDN'T HAPPEN!" Me, "Well, that's what we heard." Him (low-tone snarl), "WELL KEEP IT TO YOURSELF!" and he stomps off. Now remember, this is the guy that would be court martialled for neglect of duty so his reaction was understandable. The rest of the night passes quietly except for the sound of distant explosions.

29 March 2003 – We continue cleaning our weapons and servicing our equipment. The Doxycycline has caused many to be sick and I get some first hand experience watching Esto-Esta throw up. This is when I notice many others having this problem. Vander Vos is sporting corn rows (I remember it but not sure it's this day), which was different for me. A Marine swings by and asks if we have any MREs. Unfortunately we do not, and it becomes apparent that some Marines do not have anything to eat at all. Luckily 1SG Edick ordered everyone to have three MREs in their rucks prior to the invasion and that's what got us through (or at least it did for me). Some of the leadership suggest the idea to use the decon systems to operate a field shower. We pull 131 and 132 next to each other and put some pallets down. We then string two ponchos on either side and put the suction hose directly into the tank. The showers boost morale and we invite the Marines to partake. For some reason they refuse. About mid-day 1SG Edick, CPT Kerr, and 1LT Bruno arrive on-site. First Sergeant immediately pulls The E-6s aside and has an explosive conversation. Not sure what was said, but SSG Brooks needed some time alone and SSG Sedam was rattled. SSG Sedam orders the immediate tear down of the showers, SGT Lowry to find a water source as quickly as possible, and the rest of us to locate a reliable source of MOGAS (gasoline). Luckily the Marines had setup a water purification source about half a click up the road but MOGAS was a much harder find. CPT Yuzuik put on his CPT bars but was ordered to remove them because it was not considered official until a formal ceremony. CPT Yuzuik gathers the Platoon and says an emotional farewell. We would not see him again until Baghdad. We are introduced to 1LT Bruno and CPT Kerr provides some words of encouragement. Not going to lie we were upset and bewildered that they would switch up our PL. 1LT Bruno was an unknown to us and I kind of viewed her as an interloper for a little while. The Command team leaves. Some of the Joes get bored and start playing pranks on each other. It's another uneventful night except for the occasional helicopter buzzing overhead.

30 March 2003 – Finally the advance picks back up. We move into columns and prepare everything for moving. The one MRE a day restriction is lifted. The 1SG from CSSG-11 offers us some MREs on a pallet to take with us. Now I'm not sure if I should be proud of this but our Joes take every MRE case on that pallet. SSG Sedam has a brief conversation with the 1SG and orders us to return the MREs. Maybe only half or so of the cases are returned. Most ended up in the Decon trailers hidden within the M17A3 boxes or BII boxes on the FMTVs. Either way no one under any circumstances intended to have an encounter like we had over the last few days. We move slowly up the Tigris and start to see an increase in vegetation. We halt in front of a bridge looking at two abandoned Iraqi military communication trailers. The equipment looks like something out of a bad Vietnam movie. We move across the bridge and see a herd of unfortunate sheep that had walked into an anti-personnel minefield. The stench from the rotting meat is horrendous. Moving further down the road I pop the question over the radio, "If you could have any hero face off, no matter the universe, who would it be?" Beaudry says he wants Punisher versus Venom which sparks a nearly 15 minute long back and forth conversation about how Punisher would get thoroughly beaten. HOT 54B IRAQ plays on occasion. At one halt I attempt to help a Marine open an old Jerry can. The attempt breaks my Leatherman. Further up the road we halt and EOD sets off the largest explosion I have ever witnessed in my life. For nearly ten minutes we get the light show of light shows as an entire depot of Iraqi munitions is destroyed. RPGs fire off and fly into the air only to fall toward earth and detonate before impact. It was glorious. A little further up and we are requested to carry POWs on the back of 114. I ask the Marine guard if they need water and he says, "They're good." We arrive at some sort of warehouse facility. On the sides are painted in hasty script, "USA GO HOME." Lamest attempt at demoralizing I ever saw. We set up a small perimeter on the southeastern side and notice that once again our platoon is staring down the barrel of a M240G from our position. It's mentioned to SSG

Sedam but by now we recognize this as typical behavior. As usual I take the liberty to familiarize myself with the surroundings. In one warehouse the POWs are held and I decide to investigate. Sections are established with Concertina wire between enlisted, officers, and Baathist party members. One of the Baathist party members stands up and pleads with, "Mishta, Mishta.... Please," to which the Marine guard points and replies, "SIT DOWN!" "MISHTA!" "I leave. I move over to where a Hemmett is loaded with MREs and ask the guard if I could have a case (I don't want to dig into our hidden stash in case SHTF again). He replies it's for the war fighters at the front. I say, "Ok," and we settle in for the night.

31 March 2003 – We move out from the warehouse facility and closer to Baghdad. At one halt I make a deal with an Iraqi to buy two packs of local cigarettes for about \$4. These are called Summers and they come in these blue packs with a harp on the side. These cigarettes are terrible and have green tobacco in the center but beggars can't be choosers. At another stop I am tasked with getting our squad's water jugs filled. I come to a Marine purification point and find them sucking from a drainage ditch. The water in the ditch has all sorts of trash and garbage floating in it. Although the water is run through the system it still tastes like where it came from; but beggars can't be choosers. We are at this stop for a little while and a fire rages out of control at an oil tank about a click to the south. A Marine E-5 comes around asking for volunteers to perform some patrol directly to our front. I refuse because the convoy would be leaving in a few minutes and, to be honest, I was afraid they would in some way get me killed. Some of our soldiers go with them and scare a few kids hiding in the bushes about 200M to our eastern flank. It is here that SSG Sedam acquires the SPG-9. A SPG-9 is a recoilless rifle that can fire direct and indirect. We load it into the back of 115 and haul this thing all over Iraq, intended as a war trophy for our Company. We see destroyed tanks and BRDMs along the way. We finally make a turn into some farm that has an abandoned T-72 outside its front gate. Dead sheep are all over the place and appears to be abandoned. We take up position on the northern corner. In the evening we are told to not walk around and EOD begins to blow up UXOs down the road. The explosions continue into the early night.

1 April 2003 – We are informed that the Chemical threat is diminished enough to downgrade from MOPP 2 to 0. I take the opportunity to get a haircut from a Marine performing haircuts for a cigarette or two. Fiala was bit by something in the night and is sick as a dog the next morning. Inspection of her sleeping bag reveals a large arachnid that looks like a Camel Spider but it doesn't have the large mandibles. I get back to my vehicle and 1LT Bruno informs us that the Colonel wants to view how we setup our decon line. Huh?!! The Colonel had refused requests to train his unit in Kuwait and now in the middle of combat with enemy around, he wants us to setup a mock decon!! Smells of recon work. We move out to the east from the farm about 2-3 clicks along a dirt road bisecting two vast fields. The site is selected and 131 plunges into the field on the south side. THE FIELD IS NOTHING BUT STRAIGHT MUD AND FECES! 131 sinks into it and cannot get out on it's own. The rest of the Platoon is on the road and 132 drives out a little into the field to assist with getting the truck out. About 30 minutes into recovery operations someone spots two Iraqi military trucks driving adjacent to our southern flank. The trucks stop and personnel begin to dismount. SSG Sedam immediately orders us to make it to an irrigation ditch to the South in a semi-defensive perimeter. I tell Vander Vos to stay put, monitor the radio, and guard our rear to the north. The rest of us plunge into the field. The mud has the smell of fresh feces and in some places is higher than my hips. Some lucky maneuvering along some higher berms enables me to make it to the irrigation ditch. The ditch is full of water and turds. SSG Brooks takes someone with him and makes his way to the further side of the ditch. I look back and poor Matthews is sinking into the mud. Her M249 is almost buried. SSG Sedam and I make our way to pull her out. He grabs her by her LBE on her flak vest and begins pulling. I take the M249 and grab her right arm. We drag Matthews to the ditch. Marine gun trucks

make their way to the Iraqi trucks. They report that these are civilians that acquired the trucks and were simply looking for food in the fields. 132 resumes recovery operations and finally gets 131 out of the mud. We make our way back to our trucks. McAlister gets out, and is missing a boot. His foot was stuck fast in the mud and he had no choice but to abandon the boot in the field. We're all a little upset at this point. We are told that we cannot use the water we have to wash off the mud so the smell of offal stays. About mid-day, SSG Sedam orders us to bury the dead sheep because he is unsure how long we will be here; he doesn't want to increase the odds of disease, and the smell of the rotting sheep is awful. Later that night I am awoken by an explosion so big that it rattles my skeleton. I look to the west about a click away and theirs this fireball throwing off red sparks like the 4th of July. An A-10 Warthog throws off dispersion flares and dives in for an attack. The 30mm gun starts firing. Another one of those skeleton rattling explosions rips the night, then another, another, and another. In a way I felt sorry for whoever was under those explosions. I fall asleep on the hood of my truck, wrapped in my poncho liner.

2 April 2003 – A small bobcat starts to bury the bodies of sheep. We then get orders to load up and move out. Along the road we see destroyed tanks, and in some places, we see intact BRDMs with their barrels bent upward. The frequency of Iraqis lining the road increases. Most face our convoy and the men in particular have their palms up. I think they were begging but I could be wrong. Pictures of Sadaam line the sides of the road in some places. All the pictures have large bullet holes dotting them. In one case we come up to a statue. The statue was 8' tall and all that was left is a right arm and the legs. Further up we come upon a smoking M1A1 Abrams tank. It was a little unsettling. WTH, did the Iraqis possess that could kill an Abrams? It didn't look like it had any exterior damage. Fortunately, we learn later that the tank had an internal malfunction and the column was in fast pursuit of fleeing enemy forces. In a hurry not to be left behind, the crew had thermited the tank and loaded up with the other armor crews. We come to a bridge constructed by the Engineers because the original bridge was destroyed. Huge gaping holes in the Iraqi bridge made it unstable. We have arrived at the southern edge of Baghdad. Our particular column moves to the southwest of the city where we stage in a field of wheat. We stay there the night. We can see huge fires and hear large explosions throughout the night. Tracers fill the air in concentrated areas on occasion.

3 April 2003 – We move out from the wheat field and skirt along one of the major rivers. Iraqis line the roads. Men, women, and children shout and wave at us as we pass. It is utter chaos in the inner city. Vehicles are rushing everywhere and all of us struggle to keep up with the vehicle in front of him or her. Orders are given that no vehicles will be allowed to enter the convoy; if they do we are authorized to ram them out of the way. For fear of wrecking in the middle of Baghdad, I tell Fiala to close in on 121 as close as possible. A little white cab with orange fenders attempts to enter in front of us and I tell Fiala to veer toward him as a warning. She hesitates then does it. He gives me a frustrated look but my M16A2/M203 is more than enough warning for him. We pass a major highway overpass and we somehow lose the main convoy. We come to this mined roadway. We have to turn around. Now we need to backtrack. Before we left Kuwait 124 had died and the Marines gave us a 5-ton as a replacement. 5-tons have a lousy turn radius which compounds when you add a trailer. Well, we can't go forward and we are somewhat lost in the middle of Baghdad. Our convoy turns around and Green is having the hardest time getting the 5-ton, with a trailer, turned around. On the right is a canal with about 5' of easement and in the center is a concrete divider. Green is lodged horizontally between the two. Now I do not remember who was with Green inside the 5-ton but at this point I wasn't about to leave without my Joes. I look back and the convoy is taking off! I tell Fiala, "STAY HERE!" and I dismount to ground guide the 5-ton. Now for me this was another one of those blurry moments but I swear someone was shooting at me. Fiala yells, "SERGEANT SEDAM SAYS GET BACK IN THE TRUCK!" I say, "\$*#% THAT, I'M NOT LEAVING THEM!" I continue to ground

guide the 5-ton. Next thing I know 115 is there, and SSG Sedam is there screaming at me from the truck. Not more than a second later we get the 5-ton turned around. We are able to catch up with the splinter convoy and meet up with our main convoy a few minutes later. Iraqis are there trying to sell us bottles of whiskey. Where they got it, I have no idea. We go through the gates of Baghdad University. Not a word is said about the incident at the mined roadway. I start to investigate the University where I acquire this bag of chai tea (which I still have) from the pantry. A Marine in a pro mask emerges from a basement access door carrying an M13 DAP. No idea what he was doing. Get back to our assembly area where, I think it was Vicente, wants to take this yard art tree stump as a trophy. I trade a Marine two packs of Summers for an AK-47 bayonet. I leave that bayonet unguarded in the front of the truck and someone steals it. Later that day we are informed that we will rejoin our Company the next day. The Joes are not thrilled. The sound of bullets and explosions fills the air.

4 April 2003 – We link up with the rest of the 101st Chem and consolidate with the other Platoons. We move out in a convoy moving East along the Tigris. Iraqis line the roads cheering and waving as we move by. Some children are even bold enough to come up for a high five. Unfortunately, we have to show our weapons and keep them at bay. Our next destination looms ahead which is a white building with several buildings scattered over a large campus. Our area of operation is the Baghdad Hospital. Company HQ takes control of the hospital and uses some of the platoons to clear the building and the surrounding areas. Our area encompasses the Republican Guard Motor Pool, CIF, and aviators test facility. In one field near our area is a severed human foot laying by its lonesome. We stake out our perimeter and First Sergeant comes down for a chat. While First Sergeant is talking, SSG Brooks says something that upsets him so he sends him off doing Iron Mikes. Another person says something and First Sergeant says, “WHO THE #\$@% SAID THAT?!” To which Perrin replies, “It was Billy.” The entire Platoon just starts laughing. First Sergeant totally loses momentum, says a few comments, and then leaves. I decide to scout our perimeter and find two RPGs just sitting there with a spray painted UXO at the eastern corner. One of my soldiers misplaces a magazine of ammo and SSG Brooks tells me to prescribe a punishment. I decide to have the soldier dig a fighting position. Just as I am leaving with the soldier to dig the position SSG Brooks stops me. He says that in Garrison it would be appropriate but here in this stressful environment it would be better to have the soldier conduct an ammunition inventory. He was right. Our HMMWVs were hastily equipped with IR vision so we placed those on our corners for effective coverage. On my shift during the night I can see heat rising from hot garbage inside a dumpster. I can even see the heat from rats as they crawl in and out. It was something to help stay awake on shift. The night passes quietly with only a few explosions and shots fired.

5 April 2003 - I wake up on the hood of my HMMWV then make my way toward the main hospital on some errand for the PSG. I pass through the aviation facility. It's roof is completely shot up and the equipment looks like it's pretty expensive. The entrance of the hospital has all sorts of trash out front. After completing my task (whatever it was) make my way over to where 4th platoon is and chat with Balmer. After that I make my way back through some Republican Guard Offices. Now I kick myself nearly every day for not taking advantage of the opportunity because inside this building is all sorts of souvenirs. I find a picture of Sadaam with holes in it, bandages with instructions in Arabic, and then a jackpot; this is the Republican Guards Central Issue Facility! Brand new uniforms (still in the plastic), sleeping bags, belts, insignia, and linen. I leave it there for now, thinking I would come back later. A little later, half the platoon goes on adventure to tour the Baghdad museum which is within walking distance of our location. It's sad, because it's been raided. Cases with medals and priceless art are destroyed. A 600 year old painting is slashed right down the center. Just after we get back the CO issues an order that we are not allowed to investigate the buildings without his strict permission! AAAAAAAHHHHHHHHH!!!! There is no way now to get those souvenirs. Anyhow, we decide to take field showers because a hose with little pressure runs at the northwestern corner of

the motor pool. We hang some ponchos and fill this bucket that has a showerhead on the end. SSG Brooks holds the bucket for me, and I hold it for him. It feels great to get the muck off after nearly two weeks of filthy living. All of a sudden it sounds like a huge battle is raging at the front gate so we kit up real fast and run as fast as we can. When we arrive we find out it's EOD destroying a huge cache of weapons. Tracers fill the air like roman candles. We head back to our assigned area. The CO ordered the Company to maintain a watchman at the front gate along with the Marine guards. The Company realized earlier on that we were on the last to notify list in the event of significant activity. On this night I had a shift in the guard house. As soon as I arrive I could smell alcohol in the air. Yup, I'm pretty sure someone is getting tanked in the guardhouse but at this time I was numb to any sensation of giving a dook about what other people do. One of the guys in the guardhouse is Lebanese and speaks Arabic. After shift I make my way back to the motor pool, curl up, and awake again at 0230 to take a turn on guard duty.

6 April 2003 – We awake to a real treat. The Marines have us gather together in a complex a little ways from our perimeter. There are several Marines around immersion heaters pulling out large cake tins. Inside the cake tins are eggs mixed with sausage and other tins are some type of hybrid blueberry muffin pancake. After eating MREs three times a week for nearly a month, we welcome this pleasant change in diet. They have religious services at the center of the museum where we learn a few things about our location. It was an amazing morning. About mid-day I start feeling queasy. By evening I am sick. I find myself running to our Platoon cat hole or throwing up every hour. The soldiers start to play spades on the back of an Iraqi recovery truck. Supply drops off a case of 7-up; captured from the Iraqi soda plant. The evening is the quietest in our journey. Guard shift is absolutely miserable.

7 April 2003 - Feeling like absolute garbage. I check the perimeter and conduct some routine maintenance here and there. The PSG is nice enough to bring us some shelf stable milk that was liberated from the Iraqis. I think it was strawberry and banana. I am so sick that I refuse to get any T-rations and refuse to eat an MRE for lunch. My day consists of running to our makeshift tent that covers a community cat hole, throwing up behind a nearby garbage bin, and sleeping in the back of 114. I didn't want the Joes, SSG Brooks, SSG Sedam, or anyone else in the leadership to see me infirmed like I was. I climbed into the back of 114 and hid behind the fog oil barrels where I slept for most of the day. I wrote up the guard roster for that night and I was so out of it that I wrote Esto-Esta on there twice. She approaches me later stating that the roster is unfair and I start chewing her out for whining. Later I would realize my error. It took everything I had to stay awake for my guard shift.

8-9 April 2003 - Still having stomach issues but at least I am somewhat functional. For the most, it's very uneventful. SSG Brooks gets this idea that he will give us a class that he learned in EO. The class goes like this: He puts subjects on little pieces of paper and then soldiers would draw out a piece of paper. For two minutes they would be the SME and we as a class could ask questions. Right or wrong the soldier giving the class, for two minutes, is considered the absolute authority of that subject. Things are going as he intended with the first couple of soldiers and then the tables get turned on him. I can't remember her name. She was in first squad, short, and older female. She begins like she's telling a great tale about "trees." It starts with the great creator creating the trees, then moves into how the trees take over the planet. They develop buildings and all sorts of stuff then it all goes to pot. Eventually they develop ghettoes and the great creator as punishment creates gangsters which perform horrible things to the trees, "the end." We are dying laughing. SSG Brooks is shaking his head. "She destroyed my class, did not see that coming." From that incident I would develop my class, "BS like a Pro."

Mid-day of the 9th we are informed that major combat operations have concluded and the Sadaam regime is no more. I fly two flags to commemorate that day. One is with my Dad and the other I keep in my assault pack.

With that I would like to give a short thought on the 2nd Squad:

SSG Brooks - He was an Alpha male and for the good of the squad I played the part of Beta. He's a good man but sometimes a little quick to execute before fully assessing the situation. Very good leader overall.

SPC Beaudry - He was compliant but his eyes and tone would tell you a different story. Cannot tell how many times his experiences helped in fixing technical issues. Very smart, strong, and reserved. Grudgingly, he kicked my butt in two wrestling matches.

SPC Vander Vos - Always prided herself on being part Japanese and I believe it because she had the "Tee-hee-hee" thing going for her. Fun, playful, and when the chips were down she performed admirably.

SPC Fiala - "BUT SEAAAAAARGGGGGGGEANT!" Can't tell you how many times I heard that. She had no problem telling you what she thought, really loved Jesus, and put up well with my slapstick humor.

SPC Green - Was one of like eleven siblings and had one of the softest voices I ever heard. Had the flexibility of a cat and wrestling him was like fighting a spider monkey. He's one of those guys that will probably look young forever. He was also a great artist.

SPC Esto-Esta - Honestly, I think she hated me. Kept pretty much to herself and could give the iciest of stares when she was upset. I actually made it a point to keep her and Green together because I could see faint glimmers of romance. Later those two would marry.

PFC Grant - This guy could put lyrics to anything and spit mad poetry. He wore his emotions on his sleeve and if prompted could tell you some stories about Newport News. In truth, he needs to write a book about those experiences. You think you got it rough; sit down with this guy for a few minutes.

PV2 Harris - He had some trouble in Kuwait but during combat he was a warrior. Until we reached Baghdad I felt unworthy to lead this guy because I had chewed him out in Kuwait a few months earlier, when in truth I should've stood up for him. He was right when he said, "The NCOs have flipped the script."

SSG Reeder - I am saddened that she won't accept my friend request. I think she blames me for feeling inadequate. I wanted to help her in anyway I could. Because here's some truth: It's probably good she left because, I had fallen in love with her. I said some of the things I said because I was upset that I couldn't tell her. The night we had to write the SOP for a six lane decon; I wanted to hold her and tell her it was going to be okay. I gave subtle indicators that I wanted to kiss her, and she shied away.

This ends my story. Road to Baghdad.