

Running Head: OPERATION DESERT SHIELD

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OPERATION DESERT SHIELD

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**Abstract**

The contents of this paper begin during the pre-deployment phase for Operation DESERT SHIELD, when I was a Squad Leader in C/2/325 Airborne Infantry Regiment, 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division, located at Ft. Bragg, North Carolina. As a part of the United States of America's Quick Reaction Force, my unit was part of the Division Ready Brigade on 2 Aug 90. That day Iraq invaded the sovereign nation of Kuwait. The contents of this paper will end with the beginning of the ground war.

### **Body**

In July of 1990, I was a squad leader in the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division. I was just finishing up with the Basic Noncommissioned Officers Course at Ft. Bragg. My unit was part of the 2300 Soldier strong Division Ready Brigade. The Division Ready Brigade consisted of three battalions of paratroopers and combat support “slice” elements that could deploy anywhere in the world, and engage any enemy, within 18 hours of notification. The DRF 1 (Division Ready Force 1) battalion was on two-hour recall. The DRF 2 battalion was on four-hour recall. Lastly, the DRF 3 battalion was on six-hour recall. One brigade in the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division, to this day, maintains the same alert status 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Because I had just finished BNCOC, I was allowed a four-day pass on 4 Aug 90. While on DRF status, each unit could have 10% of the assigned soldiers pass or leave and I was part of this group. I watched the events of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait from my parent’s home in Northern Virginia. The call came in the middle of the night. My friends and I were down stairs, playing pool when my Dad came down and said, “I don’t want to tell you this but, Ft. Bragg just called and ask for you but we were cut off”. I think we all (my family and friends) knew the deal. Someone said, “just call them back tomorrow”. Being a Squad Leader, and having my guys down there, I knew that was not an option. I picked up the phone and called back to

the unit. I talked to my Platoon Sergeant and he told me that we were on alert and I needed to get back to the unit. I ask him if I could wait till morning after I had a couple of hours sleep. He told me they probably would not still be there in the morning. At that point, we were cut off. I tried a couple of times to call back but all calls in and out of Bragg had stopped. I told everyone I had to go. My mother was crying while she made me some coffee for the trip. A couple of friends offered to ride down with me but I declined. I jumped in the truck sometime around 0100 and headed south for Ft. Bragg.

I arrived back in Fayetteville, NC about 0600 and went straight to my house to pick up my "Army Stuff". Because of being bring part of the Division Ready Brigade, my equipment was already packed. I grabbed my gear, said goodbye to my roommate and headed for the unit. I had no idea what I would find when I got there. All the phones were still down so I had no contact with my unit since about midnight the night before. I was still in civilian clothes when I walked in the back door of the unit. The 1SG was the only one in the hallway. He looked at me, smiled, and said, "it's about time.....your guys are out in formation". I made it on time.

I walked out the front door of the company and looked to the where my squad was. They didn't really look scared, just kinda bummed. I walked out on the stairs, and one of my soldiers, Tim French, saw me and his eyes lit up. I heard him say, "there he is, I told you he would make it." It was like something out of a movie. Watching the faces of my guys go from uncertainty to excitement was the best feeling, I've had, in my military career. We got on the trucks about 5 minutes later and headed for the PHA (personnel holding area).

DEPLOYMENT.....What a mess. This is all from memory. I wish I could remember everything that went on in the PHA. It was a very confusing time. To tell you the truth, at the beginning, we didn't know if this was real or just a drill. I remember thinking, "this is it", when we went through the ammunition supply point. During a drill, we would get a basic load of blank ammo and that was about it. This time the guy ask, "how much shit do you want". LAWs, Claymores, Grenades, Bullets.....come one come all..... get what you want.....get as much as you want. There was no accountability. We didn't sign for anything. We knew this was the real deal.

We were in the PHA for about two days. We prepped our equipment, our Company Commander's vehicle, slept, talked, and tried to figure out what was going on. There were more questions than answers. Was Iraq going to go into Saudi Arabia? Would President Bush really send us? Would we be jumping in? How hot was it anyway? What would combat really be like?

GREEN RAMP.....Bigger mess. We were as ready as we were going to be. We moved to Green Ramp, Pope Airforce Base. I was so tired at this point that I don't remember much. We were just waiting for planes. At this point, we didn't know where we were going to land. However we had one specified task, "defend Saudi Arabia or die trying". The Airforce would land an aircraft, put equipment on it, and let us know how many Soldiers they could take. "We need 15.....we need 11.....we can take 30.....just get on the Damn plane." I waited till I could get ALL my guys on the same aircraft and jumped on. I don't remember anything about the trip over. Maybe I was asleep.....I don't know. It is just a blur. The next thing I remember was the HEAT. WOW. HOT...HOT...HOT. One of the most vivid memories I have of Operation DESERT

SHIELD was when the ramp dropped in Saudi Arabia. The heat was like a blast furnace. It took our breath away. We moved by bus to a tent and told to get some rest. No one slept. We just sat there, sweating, and wondering when the Iraqis were going to show up. We still had no idea what was going on. We heard rumors that F-15 fighters were going to land in the next several hours. That was good news as long as they go here before the bad guys. We still fully expected to be engaged in combat in the next few days. We would have done our best but we would have had our asses kicked.

The next thing I remember is moving to secure the Port of Al Jubayl where the Marine Corps were scheduled to arrive. That would be nice. Until the Marines got there, we really were nothing more than a speed bump. We really didn't secure the Port. We secured the lines of communications into the port. My Platoon was responsible for three kilometers of highway. Lets do the math.....30 infantry guys, a couple of Dragon anti-tank missiles, and one M551 Sheridan tank against 2 or 3 Iraqi Republican Guard Divisions attacking into our 3 kilometer area of responsibility. What a joke. I remember the orders I was given.... "Defend this sector until you have no more ammunition and then move east to the ocean." Thanks!

We improved our fighting positions at night and rested during the day. Moral was high. We were miserable but we were together. There was a lot of laughter, and bitching. We were tight and that helped us through the mess we were in. Dehydration was a big problem at this point. We all had our canteens, but the water inside was 120 degrees. There was no such thing as cold, cool, or even NOT HOT water. So getting the guys to drink was a major leadership challenge. One of the guys saw "flying rabbits" because he was so dehydrated. There was no E-mail, Postal Service, or Phones.

I guess we accomplished our REAL mission – Deterrence. The Marines, the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division and the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division arrived. The 7<sup>th</sup> Corps was on the way. Saddam's window of opportunity was closed. Where do we go from here? We all thought home. Rumor was we were going to be home by Halloween. Yeah Right. Around the end of October we made the transition from defensive operations to training for offensive operations. We really had no idea what our role would be in the liberation of Kuwait. As a result, we went back to what we knew, individual and collective training. We moved to a place called Ab Quiq. We lived on cots in a warehouse. The engineers built us some showers and we had a chow hall. Life was good. The only bad part was we still had to burn shit (worst job in the army). We did PT early, before the sun came up, when we first arrived at Ab Quiq. Later in the day we would work on battle drills such as movement to contact, clear a trench line, clear a bunker. Additionally we would incorporate NBC training, desert survival or some land navigation.

AAFES set up a small, plywood PX at our location. What a treat. Those guys are heros in my book. AAFES is everywhere we are. Just spending a couple of dollars on razors, and a candy bar was a treat at this point. I later found out that one of the reasons we moved to Ab Quiq was because there was a large population on American civilians living there. They worked for ARAMCO, an oil company. Knowing that we were protecting American civilians was a huge morale boost. ARAMCO families also started a host-a-soldier program. Five or six times a week, ARAMCO families would have soldiers from our unit over to there home for dinner, a phone call home and a movie. What a treat. I remember my movie to this day. It was "Top Gun". I think we ate

chicken. Whatever....doesn't matter.... It was an awesome experience. Thank you ARAMCO.

Movement to (I think) Ar Ar Saudi Arabia and the "LEFT HOOK". I guess because we were the first ones in country, someone decided we should be involved in the liberation of Kuwait. Great idea.....throw some paratroopers in the middle of a tank fight. Anyway, we were OPCON to the French 6<sup>th</sup> Light Armored Division. We moved up to the boarder and dug some fighting positions around 17 Jan 01. We lived in our holes from then until we crossed into Iraq on 26 Feb 01 (another story). Again, the guys motivation was incredible. Living in a hole for over a month, and keeping a positive attitude was a testemate to there discipline. We did stand to every morning and stand down every night. We didn't have a shower for a long time. We did not really care because we all stunk. The line in the sand had held. Next came an anti-climatic 100 hour ground war and a trip home.