

Running Head: Trip to Ali Al Salem

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MSG VICTOR B. LOVINGS -

OPERATIONAL ROTATION 05/15/2000 TO 09/25/2000

14T/Skill level 40, Platoon Sergeant, Bravo Battery 5-52 ADA 11th BDE -

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Class 57

ABSTRACT

I was a Platoon Sergeant in Bravo Battery, 5th of the 52nd Air Defense Artillery, 11th BDE, Ft. Bliss Texas when I deployed to Ali Al Salem Kuwait. Reflecting on my long journey and career, I have voyaged on many expeditions throughout the middle-east countries. A tour of duty, I never voluntarily embarked, but one that was called upon by one nations duress. That nation was Kuwait. I have spent several tours in Germany, Korea, and three tours in Southwest Asia. The evil dictator Saddam Hussein was conducting his yearly spin up of turmoil that was notorious for happening during the holidays. He had weapons of mass destruction and aimed to use them for offense and defense. I prepared mentally and physically for the tour with my inner feelings toward reenlistment and my Soldiers. Preparation was hard fought but necessary to gain the offensive in that region. When I landed in Ali Al Salem time stood still. I would be there for the next six months of my life. Ali Al Salem drained all those who settled there.

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We were preparing to deploy for another fun filled adventure to southwest Asia. As you know during the start of the Gulf War and Desert Storm, the PATRIOT missile was Americas weapon of choice. Saddam Hussein (the Iraqi dictator or President which ever one is most fitting) was notorious for gassing Kurds and any other force that opposed him. He knew that the only force in the world that had more chemical weapons than him was the US and the Soviets. Saddam had several issues with his fellow Arab nations. He claims that Israel has land that belongs to Arabs. He proclaims to free Palestine and Jerusalem from captivity from Israel's rule.

Saddam Hussein threatened to use chemical weapons in his Scud missiles on the Saudis and anyone who aids them. The US decided to use PATRIOT missiles to thwart and intercept the Scuds. Using PATRIOT missiles to intercept SCUD missiles was not the original plan for PATRIOT. The plan was to intercept a cluster of aircraft. Later software was developed to enable the Engagement Control Station (ECS) to make direct hits. Nevertheless, we use it for double duty during the Gulf War and Desert Storm. Now there were not any PATRIOT's over there. Therefore, units conducted regular rotations over to the theater. Someone had to be on the ground maintaining 24 hr and 365 days a year continuous operations.

Once my unit found out they were next to deploy, I knew there were a few things that I needed to do for my platoon to execute this mission successfully. I ensured that Section Sergeants were well briefed and informed of the mission. I asked them to prepare training schedules that would reflect the deployment. Many training exercises that involved weapons qualification, CTT, and Table VIII certifications were the first things on the agenda. The weapons certifications involved going to the range and ensuring Soldiers are qualified on both crew served weapons and individual weapons.

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Most crew served weapons carry a team of at least two but not more than three. Crew served weapon qualifications involved the M2 Machine Gun, and the Mark 19 grenade launcher. The individual weapon qualifications include the M16, M4, M203 and M9. The section sergeants maintain two complete launchers. Section sergeants also maintain up to date certifications in March Order and Emplacement, Missile Reload, and establishing a Site Routine, and Operational Readiness Exercise. Emplacement entails setting up the Launcher Station from a driving configuration to a firing configuration. March Order is configuring the Launcher Station in reverse order back to the driving configuration. The Missile Reload operations consist of an entire Section of five soldiers: the NCOIC; the Crane Operator; the Signaller and the two Tag man holding the tag lines. Establishing the site routine, was merely conducting 24hr operations 365 days a year with a 3-crew shift consisting of 10 or more combined MOSs (Military Operational Specialty). Operational Readiness Exercises (ORE) were conducted regularly to verify the ability of the shift on duty to be able to engage targets from various states of readiness postures.

Once I got my platoon ready physically and mentally prepared, we were ready to deploy. At that time, understanding the command and the prep phase, I was thinking did I really want to go through this again? Should I reenlist or should I get out. I was at that ten-year mark and thinking what every Sergeant is thinking right about that time. With a deployment and all kinds of thoughts of operating with this unit in this particular environment really made me lean toward getting out. Who wants to go through all that? It would be simple to just get out. Thoughts raced through my mind. Should I get out and take my chances on the block? One thing for sure, I was from Jacksonville Florida and the job opportunities were not there for my ethnicity and education level. Jacksonville Florida was where I joined the Army. I assumed I would be in the same opportunity situations once departed from the service. I knew wUNCLASSIFIED st do. I bluffed them and demanded unless

the Command could guarantee that I could get an instructor Job in TRADOC once we returned, I would not go with them. The Command agreed to my demands and I accepted the commitment to reenlist. Ironically, they were bluffing too.

I deployed during the summer months. It was hot in El Paso. I knew it would be hot in the theater where I was to deploy. The command made every effort to paint a definitive picture of our deployment before we set foot on foreign sands. They informed me at the time that we were deploying to Ali Al Salem Kuwait. It was known as the "Tip of the Spear", meaning that it was the most forward deployed position for any PATRIOT unit. This had little meaning for me. What I did get out of this was that this position was not improved. Facilities were going to be meager and life was going to be hell. This was one of many reasons why I did not want to go. I landed with my Soldiers in a Camp Doha. This was a familiar sight I had seen it too often in the past with previous deployments. The stale stench of heat and dust filled the air. The incoming personnel committee briefed the unit, corralled us all on a bus, and drove us to the main shipping point. My Soldiers and I headed out on another bus and shipped to Ali Al Salem. On the way there, I had a chance to think and reflect on life. What if I had gotten out? Where would I be now? What would I be doing? More so, what would I have dodged by not reenlisting? In this case, how can you evaluate your decision if you don't know the outcome of the alternative decision? I guess the reason I did re-up was to see what I would have been missing if I had not. Many times during the tour, I constantly said to myself, "I knew this would happen". Inevitably, I could use the experience to make oth

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I stared out of the window and noticed the never-ending roads in the sand that seem to end nowhere and go on forever. I could see cars and trucks turned over on the side of the road and wondered how they came to be. Wh here was a familiar stench. It was dark and

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streetlights filled the void of the long endless dirt road to the tents that I would soon call my home. The First Sergeant pointed out some of the facilities as we walked passed them. The Commander simultaneously briefed us on the mission for the next day. While passing the dining facility, I noticed a cook running frantically out of the mess hall. He was chasing a rat the size of a small dog with a cleaver. I was not afraid for the rat, more so what was he going to do with the instrument after he got hold to the rat. The tents were medium size Air Assault tents. Surprisingly, the tents were cool. They were brilliantly designed with liners and air-conditioning units. The latrines and showers were in a trailer within walking distance. The sinks were lined on both sides of the trailer. Looking out over the site, I could see the airfield that we travel in order to get to our PATRIOT site. The air was hot as if a blow-dryer set on the hottest setting was blowing in your face. The realization of being there on the "Tip of the Spear" had sunk in.

I soon discovered that I was able to go downtown on pleasure passes. I visited extravagant places. There was a place called the Oasis. The Oasis was an Americans get-away. It had several pools and other items that made you feel as if you were in a resort palace. I found out through MWR that other things were possible. I could rent or sign-out a Suburban truck to drive down town and do morale runs. No one in the unit found out how to do this until later. Since Soldiers could not travel alone, I took a friend of mine when I traveled to Al Jabbar. Al Jabbar was the place where Soldiers in Ali Al Salem went to vacation. It was nice there. Maybe not, but it was just different from Ali Al Salem. The Soldiers stationed there were our sister unit in our Battalion, Delta battery. They lived better than we did. Bullets riddled the walls of Camp Al Jabbar from the war. Sergeant Summers was a cook and a very good friend UNCLASSIFIED day to visit some friends in Al Jabbar. We were on our way back. I was tired a y p r the night and so was Summers. I would

drive all the time. For some reason, I liked the driving duties. It gave me a rush. Many people in the unit did not share that experience. In some units, you always had one person on the deployment that knew all the routes. I was that person. While Summers and I were driving back from Al Jabbar, I noticed that a truck in front of me was swerving back and forth into my lane. He had a dressing on his head similar to that of a picnic table. As I was trying to move back into my lane, the truck took another serve and that is when I drove off the road. I rolled over three times. The top-heavy Suburban I was driving seemed to lift up from the side. Summers and I seem to be looking at each other while the truck was turning over and over with our arms and shoulders hunched as if to say, "I have no idea what is happening to us right now". Kuwaitis who saw the incident pulled us from the vehicle. They quickly subdued the vehicle responsible for the mishap. The Air Force SPs quickly came on the scene. There was nothing they could do to the national. He was from another country driving trucks as we do in the U.S. The SPs did report him to the Kuwaiti government, whom I assume took his license. It soon became apparent to us why those vehicles lay turned over on the side of the road.

As time grew near for our return back over to the States, the Reserve Infantry Platoon was eagerly awaiting their replacements from Chicago. My impression of infantry was they were harder than woodpecker lips. They were endlessly reconing the site. They were always awake at their post. They always seemed to be in good spirits despite the risky duty. The new infantry platoon came in. Their Captain along with the First Sergeant, Lieutenants, and Platoon Sergeants infiltrated the site like a platoon of gooks swarming a rice field in Korea. The other Platoon Sergeants in my unit were walking around with them showing UNCLASSIFIED. The infantry Platoon Sergeant was a thin small-framed warrior. He grunted a g as if being there was beneath him. He and his entourage of infantrymen whisked around in haste to leave the site. The Platoon Sergeant took three steps and fell forward on his face. It appeared that the group of men underestimated the heat and did -

not frequently take a sip of water.

I came back to the tent after a brutal day of heat on site and weightlifting. One of my tent mates was sitting down feeding a rat Cheez-its out of the box. He soon became friends with the rat and gained its trust. The mouse would dance across the table in front of the TV screen as if he was performing. He would stand up on his hind legs and beg for food. The rule was no food in the tent. It might attract rodents. I had enough of the rat ballet for the night, so I retired to my meager quarters. My battery commander came in and told me very bad news. He informed me that my father did not have long to live. This was very hardening. I had not seen him in years. When you hear news like this, you think of so many things. How much time could I have spent with them? How did I get so far away from my family? I thought that if I had gotten out right before the deployment I would be there right when they needed me most. What did I compromise? What was the cost for my career? Within hours, I was on a plane back to the states, two weeks short of completing my tour. I did not get to the states in time. My dear old daddy expired while I was in the air. I do not have any regrets, any slogans, or new resolutions. When you make decisions, you live with them.

Hindsight being 20-20, continuing with the service was the best choice for me. I was trying to create a short-term solution for something that would have affected me for the rest of my life. Finish what you start. Other lessons learned was don't make deals with the command. Just when you think you have done something to UNCLASSIFIED realize that you are on the shorter end of the stick. Today, when Soldiers try to get over on the Army, my question to him or her is, "Who do you think is Army smarter, your 3 years or my 18 years". I have never lost a battle of wits with Soldiers. Although I did not really believe the command would honor their commitment to let me do other things, I did appreciate that something to make me stay Army. Preparing to deploy is hard work. With

today's changing Army things are becoming more up-tempo and rotations are becoming more frequent. Soldiers must decide early how far they want to take their careers. The 10-year mark is one of the most undecisive times in a mid-careerist Army career. You must weigh the pros and cons of service termination. Sometimes it is humbling what you see. Remember, There are Soldiers and junior leaders out there who depend on us to be there at least until they get out of the Army. If you cannot serve them, someone with less experience and expertise might steer them in the wrong direction.

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