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Crossing the Berm

Eddie Camp

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Crossing the Berm Eddie Camp

Pre-combat checks and pre-combat inspections (PPC/PCIs) were completed. I had conducted headspace and timing drills with each gunner three times—checked ammo counts—conducted commo checks with frequency hops and conducted a map recon. Second Lieutenant (LT) Miller and I had conducted the convoy brief and Chaplain Wyle had prayed over us. As I conducted some last-minute battle drills with the platoon, Pvt Jones asked, “What’s going to happen when we cross the border?”

I told him and the other soldiers that as we moved across the Kuwait desert things would start slow; we’d roll out by serials.

“As we get closer every nerve in your body will be on hyperdrive. You’ll be able to hear your heartbeat, feel the blood flowing through your body, and your pucker factor will be tighter than it has ever felt. Soldiers, that is when I want you to trust your training, trust your weapon, trust yourself, trust your battle buddies, trust your leaders, and know that we are ready. Now return to your trucks, stand by for the call forward and make peace with your god as I have made peace with my God. We are the best army in the world, and we will be victorious.”

On the walk back to my truck, I could smell the power of diesel and hundreds of soldiers ready to go. As I climbed in, I stopped to pick up a red, white, and blue bandana that was lying on the cab floor. It had the Ninety-First Psalm printed on top of the American Flag. Brother Davis from my church back home had given it to me in remembrance of his mother’s gift to him when he deployed to Vietnam. He challenged me to memorize it while in Iraq and watch it work in my life. Squeezing into my seat between the movement tracking system (MTS) and radios, I caught the moonlight as it caused a shadow of military power on the desert floor. Yes, we were ready. We were the logistical support team for the world’s most powerful tank division, the First Cavalry Division. In my serial of nineteen heavy equipment transport systems (HETS), I had two

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HMMWV gun trucks with .50 caliber machine guns, sixteen forty-foot containers, and two Bradley tanks. I was surrounded by men and women ready to die for our nation and her causes.

The call forward came over the radio faster than I had anticipated. I gave the signal hanging out the door of my truck to mount up. We were moving, marched our still dragons northward to Baghdad. In the midnight air as we crossed the border into Iraq fast movers buzzed overhead, delivering hell rain on our enemies, clearing the way. To my west, the rolling thunder of First Cavalry Division placing still on target, releasing balls of light into the night air. We rolled on. I could see from my MTS the massive waves of blue icons moving across the desert as the red icons disappeared. I told my driver, “Keep your eyes on the red cat eyes of the trailer in front of you. Remember your training scan left, I got your right side. You are doing great.”

As we crossed checkpoint one (CP1), LT called up, “Open CP1.”

When I crossed CP1 as the rear truck in the convoy, I closed out with, “CP1 Closed.” We had four CPs before our refuel on the move (ROM) at CP5. A lot could happen between here and there; we had to stay alert, stay focused, locked and loaded. I sent a message over the MTS, “Keep each other awake and alert.”

We crossed CP4 as golden sun rays peaked over the dunes, exposing for the first time the mighty force of our coalition. The Iraqi tanks destroyed with popped turrets, holes through their hulls and having tracks blown throughout the desert roads. In villages, homes demolished from a failed attempt by Iraqi tanks trying to use them to shield themselves. I made a radio call and sent out an MTS message to all vehicles, “Stay focused, keep your eyes open and your head on a swivel, remember your training.” It seemed that all hostilities had stopped as we continued the movement to CP5. We were running low on fuel; the ROM would be right on time.

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The ROM was about five minutes out; we could see the line forming with tanks, trucks, and soldiers ready to top their vehicles off. We made it. Each truck worked its way through the line. I told my driver, "Let me out to ground guide you through the line." As I walked and looked around. I could see the marshaling area had ice down water, coffee and MREs. Once we made it to the marshaling area, I met up with the LT to review the route to our release point (RP).

We reviewed the paper map and locked it in the MTS. She said, "WTF, Platoon SGT, did you see those tanks and homes back there."

I said, "Roger, ma'am, that was the hand of God working in our favor. We could have been in the middle of it with our soft skin vehicles if we didn't hit our CPs on time. You are doing a great job. We need to make our RP before nightfall. Go ahead and eat some chow, ma'am. I will check the soldiers on my way back to my truck."

The soldiers were in good spirits and ready to reach the RP, offload, and rest under the comfort of being at the logistical support area (LSA). Once I reached my truck, I gave the hand signal to mount up and we rolled out.

The convoy moved very quickly with little to no sight of the enemy. The high-con frequency of the radio was quiet, and my MTS screen was clear. I knew we were on the right course: When did the next serial leave? Why couldn't I see their icon? Who's at the LSA? Okay, now I saw some icons.

I said over the radio, "Attention all stations, we are approaching the RP, stay alert. We have to pass through this town first." Moving through the town we passed abandon homes, obliterated tanks and a bullet-riddled white van with bodies hanging out the windows. The town had been cleared. We moved forward ten more miles to RP.

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At the release point, LT called the convoy to a halt. We immediately formed a herringbone defense position. I moved my truck to the center, told the gun trucks to take up the 0- and 180-degree positions. I pulled the LT's truck backward into the center with me and had the Bradley gunners mount the small guns for the 45- and 95-degree position. I said, "LT, we are in the right location. I can see friendly movement all around here. Report to HQ we are in place and will set up a hasty position. They will return here once they have completed their main effort. I will move the trucks into a wagon wheel and make camp."

I told SSG Davis, "Lead the trucks into the wagon wheel formation. Once in place, send up the LACE with ammo status, and them dig hasty positions." I moved the LT and my HMMWV into the center of the wagon wheel. I had the Bradleys offloaded and position where could provide 360-degree coverage for our small guns. I moved our standby .50 cal. onto a tripod and placed it in position for suppress fire. We had ten pair of NVGs in the platoon to share. Night had fallen and we were in place. Everyone was on high alert; sleep was a distant memory. The night sky lit up. We could see shapes moving in the distance we were not sure if they were getting larger or smaller. I yelled, "Hold your fire!!!"

One of the soldiers yelled, "Incoming, incoming, incoming!" I saw a white tail and knew it was outbound. I looked at the hasty position to find a butt in the air facing the enemy.

I yelled, "It's our guys giving it to them! Our boys are back! Let's set up a 50:50 guard shifts and get some rest."