

## DESERT STORM

# Iron Troop's Trial By Fire

Story and Photos by  
SSgt. William H. McMichael

*SADDAM Hussein would have done well to heed a well-known Arab proverb: "He who chooses too large a stone cannot strike with it."*

*The English equivalent: "Don't bite off more than you can chew."*

...

"SHAMAL" is Arabic for the northwesterly winds in Iraq that sometimes produce blinding sandstorms. Time and again, American soldiers heard it spoken by their incredulous Iraqi prisoners, as in: "You attack shamal, no."

The sandstorms raged during the first days of the land battle. And while the Iraqis hunkered down, the Allied forces attacked. After a month of continuous air raids, psychological warfare, food and water shortages and desertions, it was the final straw in the Persian Gulf War.

"They were just overwhelmed," said SSgt. Robert Micklich, an M-1A1 tank commander. "They couldn't see us, and we could see them."

On the right flank of the VII Corps thrust into Iraq, the 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment was one of the "screens" for the huge armored divisions that would eventually corner Iraq's forces south of the Euphrates River. The regiment was ordered to locate and bypass enemy infantry and to engage and destroy all mechanized and armored forces.

Feb. 23, a day before the land war's official start, the 3rd Squadron's I Troop rumbled across the Iraqi border along with the rest of the regiment.

"That's the one time I was really scared," said "Iron" Troop tank gunner Sgt. Rod Warner, "when we crossed the berm. That was a really intense moment."

His was the first tank through, but fear of the unknown turned out to be fear of nothing. "We shot out 600 meters and stopped," he said, laughing.

Some chose the "Apocalypse Now" method of going to war. Tank

driver Spec. Scott Mangino was tuned in to the The Doors' rock song "Break On Through to the Other Side" as he breached the berm.

Moving 10 kilometers north, the tankers halted and prepared for a 90-kilometer march to the northeast to a spot on the map called Objective May.

Late on the 25th, Iron Troop got its trial by fire. The opponent, it was later learned, was a battalion-sized mechanized infantry unit from the Iraqi 12th Armored Division.

"The scouts found them first," said I Troop's commander, Capt. Dan Miller. "They started engaging at about 2,000 meters." The primary targets were tracked, Soviet-built armored personnel carriers called MTLBs.

"We just kept creeping closer and closer, as we discovered they didn't have any effective anti-armor fire," Miller said. "They apparently didn't have any artillery to call for either, 'cause we never took any during the battle."

The attack was on. "I was sweatin' pretty good, got a little salt water in my eyes," said Miller's gunner, Warner. "It burned a little bit, but it didn't keep me from lookin'. I can guarantee you."

"They heard us comin'," but they figured that we were far off," said Sgt. Ernest Boring, a Bradley gunner. "But because of the wind blowin', and the storm, they couldn't see us. We had our night vision, and we could see them before they could see us."

The troop was taking some RPG anti-tank rockets, potentially deadly for the Bradleys. "But once the tanks rolled up and started shooting, that's when you started seeing a lot of hands raised and a lot of white flags come out," Miller said. "They were kind of willing to fight the Bradleys, but once they saw the big tanks, that's when they decided, 'Hey, maybe we can find something else to do with our time.'" The battle had lasted just an hour and a half.

Once they saw enough hands

raised, Iron Troop came forward and began taking prisoners, "about 200," Miller said. "We were in no way equipped to handle that many prisoners." Later that night, the squadron had to empty its supply trucks to collect them all.

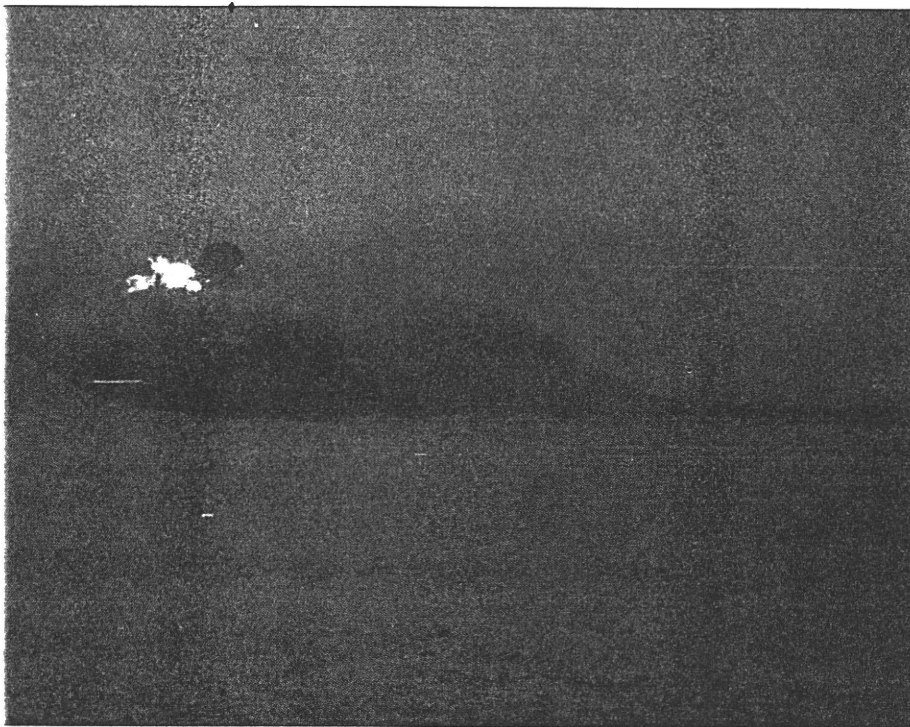
After "setting in" their defense, much of the troop's effort was spent in getting medical treatment for the enemy wounded. "We saved one guy's life," said Miller. "His leg was nearly amputated, and his right arm was crushed."

"It was a different experience to see someone's leg cut off," said medical Spec. Gary James of Headquarters Troop. "It's something school can't teach."

"The protocol was to treat them the same as us," said Sgt. Marvin Evans. Aside from the section's personal commitment to do so, he said, "We found out that when we did that, they would tell you some things that might be pertinent to the operation."

That night, said Warner, "we were on the back deck of the tank, makin' a cup of coffee, talking real quietly. The more I thought about it, I realized we were right in the area we just came through and waxed 'em. And you knew there were guys that were still out there, but the feeling was, 'they can't even hurt us.'"

The next day began with a bang:



Spec. Brian Bell

**Clockwise, from left: An Iraqi armored vehicle burns as an I Troop M-1A1 tank rolls past. • Regimental commander Col. L. D. Holder listens to comments during an after-action review. • The remains of an Iraqi Republican Guard truck lie abandoned in the desert.**



one kilometer away, an MTLB and a BTR-50 that had belonged to the unit they'd hit the day before began shooting off flares as Iron Troop prepared to continue the attack.

"They died," said Miller. "I thought it was brave, but it was really kind of stupid. Sergeant Stewart's tank took care of those two with HEAT (high explosive anti-tank) rounds."

The original plan was to keep going in the same direction, but a fragmentary order preceded the movement. "They captured an Iraqi captain," said

Spec. Thomas Young. "I heard over squadron net that he destroyed his equipment and gave them a map of everything there was. We shot across to the east and flanked 'em, and that was it."

The troop, spread across a zone four kilometers across, began moving east through a sandstorm. "We didn't know it at the time," said Miller, "but the intent was to get contact with Republican Guards." After moving to what was termed the 60 Easting (a longitudinal map reading) they halted for two and a half hours in a defensive screen. Then came

the terse radio message: "Move in five minutes. Continue to the east."

Visibility was less than 400 meters, but the troop had to assume an offensive formation while on the move. "The tanks could not see the scouts," said Miller. "Basically, everybody behind the scouts just kind of blindly moved as fast as they could to get a visual on the scouts."

The formation didn't come together for five kilometers and was a lot closer than Miller would have liked. But they were fortunate. "Luck of war," as Miller termed it. "We didn't make contact until after my formation was set."

Luck can run badly, too: Miller's tank threw a track. While the rest of the crew got out to break down the track, he jumped on his executive officer's Bradley and kept moving forward.

Three kilometers later, the 3rd Platoon scouts spotted an observation post with an armored vehicle and dismounted infantrymen. The mortar section lobbed in 10 rounds of high explosive, and that, along with direct fire from 1st Platoon, took them out. Whatever awaited I Troop now had no idea they were coming. "Be sharp," Miller warned his scouts.

They continued to the east. Within two kilometers, the scouts found what they were looking for.

## DESERT STORM

**Right: Spec. Ronnie Stiles (left) and PFC Dale Goodling overhaul the engine of a museum-bound Iraqi BMP. • Wearing borrowed clothing, two survivors — SFC Ronnie Mullinix (left) and Spec. Joe Gilman — display a piece of their destroyed Bradley.**



“They saw some machine guns sticking above the berms,” Miller said. “They shot TOW, and as they got closer, they said, ‘We got tanks.’ Which ... was a concern of mine,” he laughed.

“I came up on a vehicle and shot the machine gun off the top, which made me feel good,” said Boring. “Then I found out it was a T-72, and he turned his main gun on me and fired. But he missed to the right. That was about the most scared I’ve ever been in my life.”

Miller sent the two tank platoons up to meet their respective scout platoons. Every I Troop tank and Bradley came on line, creeping forward side-by-side through a sandstorm, scanning for targets. The firefight was on.

The Iraqi vehicles were dug into defensive revetments that limited their fields of fire to the south and southeast. “You could just see the top of the turret over the berm,” said Sgt. Sam Clements, a tanker. “So I started shooting two or three feet down from the top. We were shooting sabot rounds right through the berms. You’d hit it, and see sparks fly, metal fly, equipment fly. We were lucky that their fighting positions were dug in the other way.”

“We were told before the battle that you’ve got to hit ‘em in a certain place,” said Micklich. “But anything you shot ‘em with, they blew up. Usin’ sabot, we blew one turret out of the hole about 20 feet. It landed upside down. And we just said, ‘Yeah!’”



The Iraqis still couldn’t see who was shooting at them, although their tanks and MTLBs were blowing up all around them. Some of the scouts were stopping to shoot TOW missiles, then rolling again. Others fired their 25mm cannon, killing armored personnel carriers and “marking” the T-72s for the M-1A1s. “Again, we shot through the berms, and the tank rounds and TOWs were going through the berms and into the vehicles,” Miller said.

“They really didn’t have a chance,” said SSgt. Tadhg Kelly. “Because of the way the wind was blowin’ and the storm, we just kind of appeared all at once, and it was too late for them. I think they were more in the mode of being ready for an air raid ‘cause they all had little air raid shelters built around their vehicles.”

As Iron Troop approached the wreckage, the scouts made two positive identifications: the tanks were indeed T-72s, and they belonged to the Tawakalna Division of the Republican Guard.

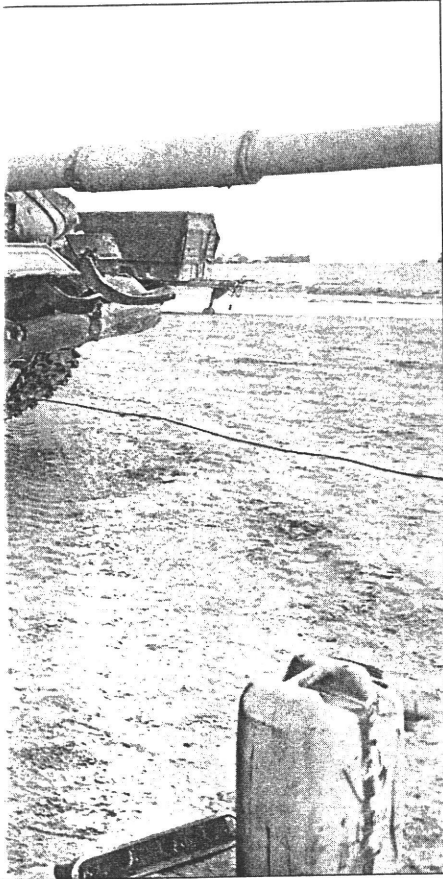
“The Republican Guard fought a lot longer than the regular army,” Miller

said. “And it was the first time we’d seen artillery. It wasn’t really effective, but it was landing between me and my supply trains. The only real effect of it was to make me keep urging my guys forward, because you want to attack forward out of artillery, instead of running away from it.”

Iron Troop was now advancing past the burning, twisted wreckage of Iraqi vehicles, and was still scanning for targets. Iraqi soldiers waving something white seemed to be everywhere. As they passed the burning vehicles, the scouts saw a second line of T-72s.

The troop’s gunners blazed away, killing a commander’s MTLB, the second ZSU-23/24 anti-aircraft track of the day, and more T-72s. K and L Troops spotted the unit’s supply trains and destroyed them, and L Troop shot up a brigade support area.

“There were times when it was point-blank,” said Sgt. George Barnes. “They jumped out of their vehicles and gave up, so before we left, we would just pull up next to one, point the gun at it, and pound it.”



## "But by God, we did our job..."

OPERATION Desert Storm was the first taste of combat for the vast majority of America's front-line soldiers. For some, enemy resistance was relatively light. For others, like the 3rd Armored Division's A Troop, 4th Squadron, 7th Cavalry, the trial by fire was fierce. Two 3rd Platoon soldiers whose Bradleys fought in tandem remember what it was like:

**Cpl. Robert Tyler:** "It was 1545, and there was a sandstorm. We came around, and there was a BMP armored personnel carrier at our eleven o'clock. My gunner was trying to find it, and I said 'just point the gun over my hatch, she's right there.' He found it and laid in with some AP (anti-personnel) and then some HE (high explosive) rounds. It blew up pretty good. And then he shifted and found another BMP.

"My sister track was takin' out BMPs left and right, and three-six (vehicle number 36) lit up some T-72s. We shifted south, and that's when we lit up a T-72. I couldn't see it, but my gunner saw it through the thermals. He fired off a TOW missile, and it just disappeared into the smog and sand, and the next thing you know, an inferno — it blew up.

"About that time, the commander came across the net and told us to move back a couple of hundred meters and shift south 500 meters. He was trying to get 2nd Platoon (a tank platoon) ahead of us because contact was gettin' pretty heavy. So we're all pulling back, and my sister track here (he chuckles) couldn't move."

**Cpl. Darrin McLane:** "We were trying to stay abreast of 2nd ACR and, we thought, British Challengers. Everything was goin' real fast, and there were BMPs everywhere. I engaged three BMPs. They go up pretty quick.

"We came up on another ... it didn't look like a BMP, but it was a vehicle. It was glowing bright in the sights. I fired upon it, and nothing happened, so I told my BC (Bradley commander), 'It's not a BMP.' He said, 'Put one on the wire.' I sent a TOW downrange, and right before the missile hit it, you could tell what it was — a T-72, fat and ugly. And it just blew up.

"I took out one more BMP, and we got low on ammo. We needed to reload, so we started backing up, and I noticed another tank. I lit it up. We fell back about 100 meters, kept the gun tube scanning, and pivoted to reload. The loaders started loadin', I'm pulling up the linked rounds, trying to get the ready box loaded. My BC's up on the net, he's standing up out of the hatch, and my driver's yelling, 'We've got small arms all over the track!' My BC notices a flash in front and a spark, and dust kicks up and you hear this 'ching, ching, ching,' and a 12.7mm took out the front transmission. We tried to move back — nothing. Forward — nothing. We had to get out.

"So Sgt. Jones gets on the horn, calls up Sgt. D, and says, 'Blue-blue, this is blue-six, we gotta get out of here, we've been hit!' Sgt. D said, 'Wait a second, I'll be there, get out when I get there!' So as soon as Sgt. D pulled up, he said, 'Get out!' I had still been trying to load, but as soon as I heard that, I jumped out of the hatch, I came over the TOW launcher, and about halfway down, in the air, there was a huge explosion behind me.

"My whole right side felt it, and I caught some shrapnel in the arm. I hit the ground and staggered a couple of steps, and started runnin'. Three-one pulled up right behind us. Three-five was in front of us, and they were engaging. I got to three-one, and I heard my driver screaming, 'I've been hit, I've been hit!' He was laying on the ground spread-eagled and couldn't move.

"I threw my protective mask and my weapon in three-one, ran back, and grabbed his shoulder. The loader for three-one came over and grabbed his other shoulder, we dragged him to the track and heaved him up in there. My whole crew crawled in the back. We pulled off, flankin' the enemy, and two sabot rounds hit the track right where that periscope is, and went straight through. They were about five, 10 seconds apart.

"We caught a lot of flash burn. It was real loud. The explosive in the 25mm casings started blowing up. I inhaled smoke, and I couldn't breathe. Sgt. Black was grabbin' onto my flak vest and pullin' on me and saying, 'Breathe, breathe, you'll be OK!' I caught my breath. Sgt. Jones and I were burned in the face. My driver caught a piece of a casing across his eye. He's been 'evaced', and they say he's doin' well.

"But it was pretty hairy. I don't know if it was a Sagger anti-tank missile or an RPG that hit my track, but a couple more seconds, and I'd be toast."

**Tyler** reflected on the fight, becoming at times choked with emotion: "We definitely made it through," he said, shaking his head. "Only thing I can say is, Sgt. (Edwin) Kutz and Sgt. (Kenneth) Gentry, the two KIAs from 2nd Platoon ... they will definitely be in our hearts forever..."

"We found the Republican Guard Tawakalna division, and the 3rd Armored Div. and the British Challengers came through there. The very next morning, we received word that the Tawakalna was combat-ineffective.

"But by God, we did our job. We met the Tawakalna, and the division found it and destroyed it ... the Iraqis paid dearly for the mistakes they made. I'm just glad my 'bro' here (nods at McLane and smiles) made it." They shook hands.

Tyler was asked if it was worth it. "Gut level? Yeah, it was worth it. From the very beginning of this thing, I've always thought it was worth it. Because the man, Saddam Hussein, he couldn't have been allowed to get away with the things he'd done for so many years. To hold another country captive for his own gains, for their oil fields ... he is a dangerous man to the region. It was worth it.

"We destroyed — destroyed — an army that could have controlled this whole region. And for all those people back home that supported us, who believed in us (here, he choked up again), we did it for them. The people that didn't think this thing was worth it? To hell with them. This thing was worth it." — (from a videotaped interview by the VII Corps Public Affairs Office)

Once again, the white flags appeared when the tanks became visible. "All these guys just gave up; they all quit; they didn't do nothin'," said Barnes disdainfully. "We just drove up to them, and they said, 'OK, the war's over for us; we're going to get food and water now.'"

After the second Republican Guard unit was destroyed, Miller received orders to consolidate and refuel.

"We began collecting the prisoners, got a report of more T-72s moving north," Miller said, "and right about that time, my one-four track got hit by a missile."

"I never really felt we were in any danger at all," said PFC Kevin Hammond, a Bradley driver, "until one-four got hit. The whole battle I was just sittin' there, eyes wide open like everyone else, and then when his track blew up, I was like, 'Man, this is real!'"

"I remember this big ol' flash and a loud boom, and something sprayed all over me," said Spec. Joe Gilman, an observer in the rear of that ill-fated Bradley. "I yelled, 'open the ----- door!' and we ran out."

## DESERT STORM

***"I remember this big flash and a loud boom, and something sprayed all over me."***

"The driver (Spec. Gregory Scott) was the worst – it shredded his back," said SFC Ronnie Mullinix, the Bradley commander. "And the gunner (Sgt. Kirk Alcorn) was burned from head to foot. But we got the crew out and put them in the lieutenant's track, and he came back and put the fire out."

All five crewmembers had been wounded. The gunner and driver were evacuated to a field hospital. Both observers were bandaged by the medics and hopped on another Bradley. Mullinix had a piece of metal removed from his leg and also returned to action.

Iron Troop then moved into a screen formation. That night, two 1st Infantry Div. battalions passed through. "For us, at that point, the combat was over," Miller said. The troop followed the Big Red One as a corps reserve, but the call never came.

The battle with the Tawakalna took five hours. In two days of combat, losses were unbelievably light: two seriously wounded, and just one vehicle lost.

"When everything is over and you think about it," said Evans, "you realize, 'Hey, did we really do that?'"

"It was a weird feeling," said Sgt. Daniel Carreon. "You expect something to go wrong, not as smooth as it went. You expect the worst, but it came out like a 'T.'"

Everyone's perspective was different. "The Bradley observers can't tell much, because sittin' in back, you don't know what's goin' on except what comes over the radio," said PFC John Koller.

For others, like Sgt. Michael Bobst, the view was constricted and disorienting. "It was pretty creepy being a gunner, because you really don't see all that's actually going on around you in the battle," he said.

"I'm on the platoon leader's track," said Cpl. Stephen Malestein. "I'm kind of trailing all these guys, and all my shooting was at a distance. So I always felt I was kind of isolated. I had this little



**Top: Two T-72s that met their end in the Iraqi desert. • Above: A 2nd ACR soldier gets a post-war shower with the help of a friend.**

picture window to scan through, and it wasn't personal."

With a sandstorm swirling, in the face of enemy fire, two things unified the troop: internal communications and successful battle drills. "Every time someone would see something, they would call it on the radio," said Spec. Lynn Ferguson. "Someone else would say, 'Yeah, I see it, I got a good shot at it.' And they'd say, 'Go ahead.'"

"I can't say they fought like veterans, because I wasn't one," said Miller. "But when we hit those Republican Guards and found out they were T-72s, no one freaked out. Everyone just did their job. We did the drills that we trained on when we came down here.

"I couldn't be more proud of these guys," Miller said. "We took 526 prisoners, and we never gave ground to the enemy. We pressed them hard, and we killed them. This troop did very well. By the same token, I don't think we did any better than anybody else in this regiment. I think in some respects we got more contact than some of the other units, but it was just the way things fell out."

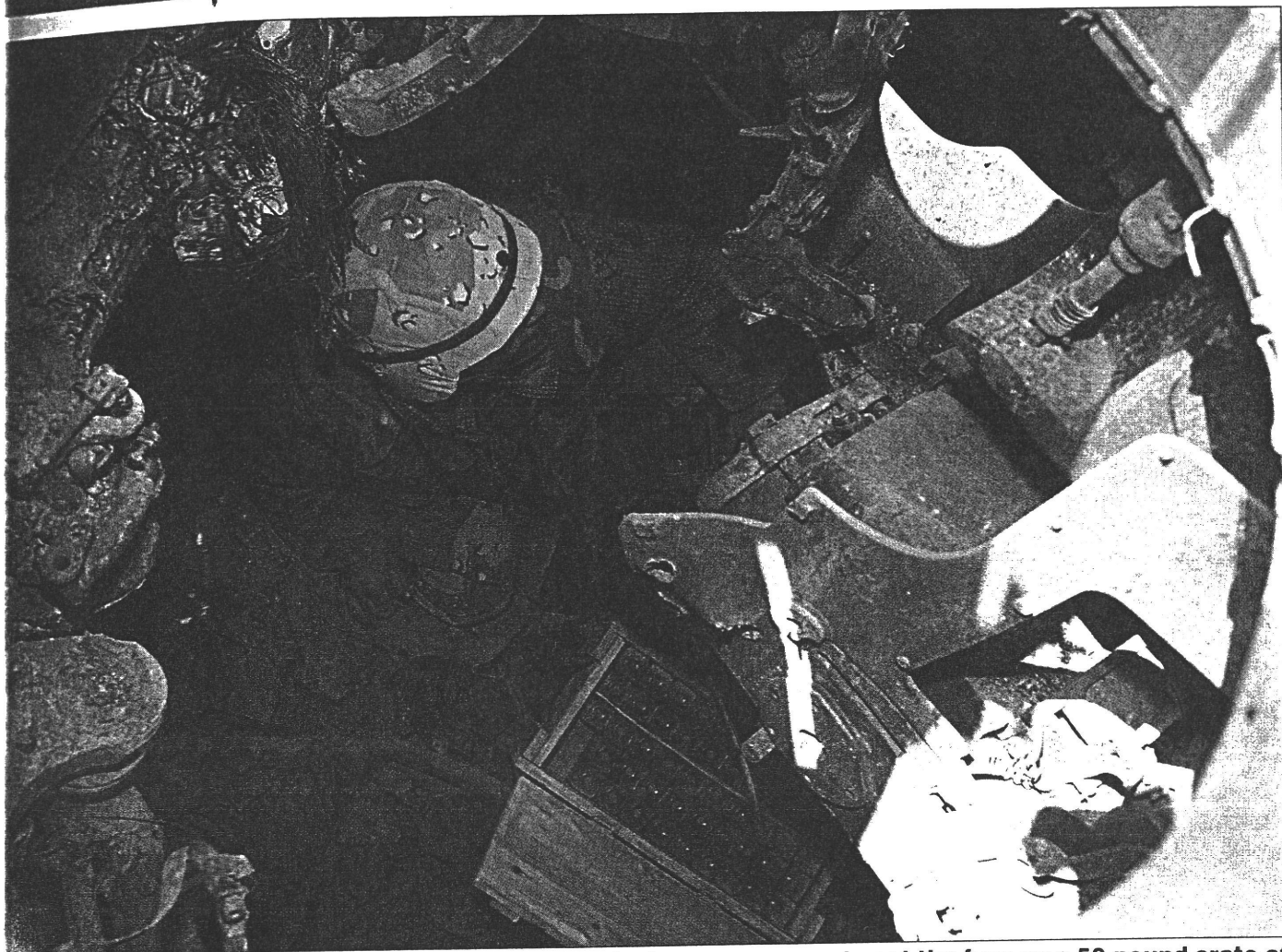
A few days later, at a hilly encampment in northwest Kuwait, an Iron Troop sentry was shot in the leg while out at an observation post. The sniper was never found.

Within a week, the entire regiment was back in southern Iraq, reacting to the unrest in that country and, along with the rest of VII Corps, providing a screen for the southern movement of XVIII Airborne Corps units.

"The thing I'm proudest of is that everybody in the troop is going back," said Miller. "Some of them went back a little earlier than I wanted them to, and hurtin' pretty bad, but everybody's going back, and they've all got the same number of arms and legs they came down here with."

At the regimental after-action review held a week after the land battle, the unit's commander seemed equally pleased with the performance of his men, praising "the bravery of our soldiers," and his subordinates' "coolness under fire."

"We were green," said Col. L. D. Holder, "but as a first-time operation, it was very well done. It is recognized that you guys all did a great job. But realize we made some mistakes. Learn from them." □



Inside the turret of an Iraqi T-72 tank, Spec. Bruce Steinman prepares to set the fuze on a 50-pound crate of TNT. Together with two 40-pound shaped charges, the dynamite will permanently disable the vehicle.

*There was no shortage of work for those destroying captured and abandoned Iraqi equipment.*

## **Desert Demolitions**

Story and Photos by  
SSgt. William H. McMichael

"THREE, two, one, zero..." For an instant, a bright red fireball engulfed the Iraqi T-72 tank. Then the blast was lost in dark gray smoke billowing out and upward, and shards of metal seemed to fly from the rising cloud in slow motion.

"Oh, YEAH!" The engineers whooped and holiered, as much as the

perfect timing of the demolition as at the explosion itself. The 3rd Platoon of Company B, 19th Engineer Battalion, had bagged another postwar trophy.

The final combat shots of Operation Desert Storm had been fired days before. But for the next several weeks the sound of engineers at work would thunder throughout the theater. Usable Iraqi equipment and supplies were being turned into scrap metal.

The former battlefield was no more than a vast, open-air museum of Soviet-style vehicles and weapons, some shattered, some untouched. The untouched equipment had to go. "The emphasis was on destroying this stuff so that we wouldn't have to fight this war again," said Maj. Robert Mansell, 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment engineer.

The task facing combat engineer and explosive ordnance disposal (EOD)

## DESERT STORM

### *The land battle left the desert carpeted with unexploded ordnance.*

teams was enormous. The VII Corps sector alone encompassed 70,000 square kilometers.

Dealing with thousands of armored vehicles spread over such an area demanded a major, concerted effort. As a result, Task Force Demo came to life: 13 combat engineer battalions and 18 three-man EOD teams under the guidance of the 7th Engineer Brigade.

With the support of corps aviation assets, the engineers began demolition activities where the battles ended. To rid the battlefield of usable enemy property, the task force had to make a sweep through occupied Iraq, all the way back down to the original breach sites.

Those breaches had been cut through what was known as "the berm." Before the attack, the soldiers had heard stories of the labyrinth of defenses the Iraqis were said to have built. The berm, stretching all along the northern Saudi Arabian border, had become a fearsome thing — if not for what it contained, then for the unknown hazards it symbolized.

"We were told the berm was loaded with chemical mines and booby traps," said 3rd Platoon's Spec. Ramon Saint-Hilaire. The rumors were false, but there were more anxious moments to come.

On the land battle's first day, 3rd Platoon had supported the 54th Engineer Bn. and their own companies A and C, which had punched 200 breaches along a 10-kilometer length of the berm. All down the line, engineers hustled to finish before darkness. "We were still punching the holes when the 1st Armored Division's scouts rolled up," said Spec. Bruce Steinman. "My squad was placing the chemlights on the breaches."

Then they came. The entire 1st Armored Div. swept forward toward the berm in one massive formation.

"It was magnificent," said PFC Michael Cullen. "We heard a big rumble, and then all we could see was this sweeping cloud of dust coming at us."

But then it occurred to Cullen that

in all the dust and confusion, the engineers might be hard to distinguish from the chemlight-marked breaches. The thought of having a 65-ton tank slam into your 5-ton truck was a little worrisome.

"All you could do was pull the truck up to the berm," Cullen said. "You could just hope and pray that the track commanders could see you."

The division blew past with its own engineers up front and Co. B in hot pursuit. The chase didn't last long. "We knew going in that the 5-tons couldn't keep up," Cullen said. "But we gave it a hell of a try." Later, he said with a grin, "we were attached to 2nd ACR — for about 30 minutes."

The forward unit engineers stayed close to the scouts, ready to clear lanes through minefields and wire. For units like the 82nd Engineer Bn., which supported the advance of the 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment, the obstacles never materialized. "We were pretty lucky," said Lt. Col. Patrick Slattery, the 82nd's commander, "because the regiment never ran into any obstacles on the way up."

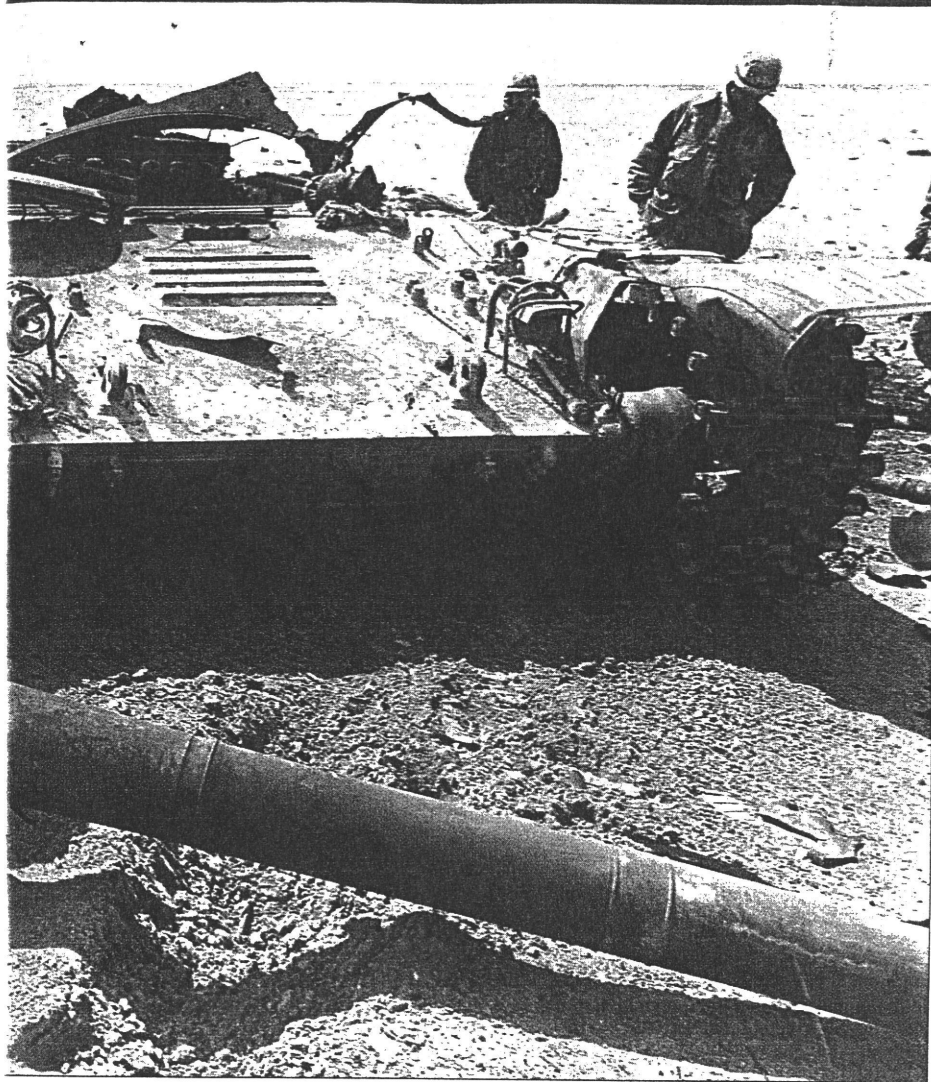
Slattery's unit did find two phony

minefields. "They had wires and signs up," he said, "but there was nothing inside." With the enemy on the run and few defenses to pierce, there wasn't much call for engineer activities. The 82nd spent a lot of time marking lanes for units to pass through in dust storms and at night, and collecting enemy prisoners of war.

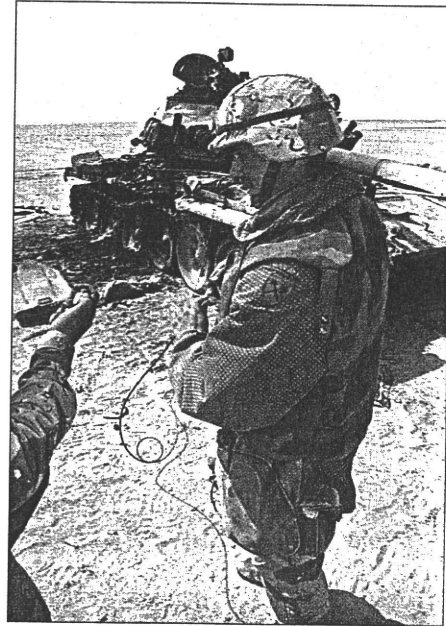
But farther back, where Co. B was making its way forward behind the first wave, combat had been no more than a rumor. Except for a brief scare — BMP armored personnel carriers reported to be in the area turned out to be camels — the breaching operation was the extent of Co. B's 100-hour war. For them, and eventually for every engineer in the theater, the brush with death was just beginning.

Three days after waving goodbye to "Old Ironsides," the 19th found itself in southern Iraq, 70 kilometers west of Kuwait. The land battle had left the desert carpeted with unexploded ordnance. From enemy mines and booby-trapped tanks to cluster bomblets and rockets half-buried in the sand, there were areas on the battlefield where soldiers dared not step. Dozens of post-combat





**Clockwise, from below: An engineer sets off the timed fuze that will explode the charges inside an Iraqi tank. • Nine minutes later, 130 pounds of explosives blow the vehicle apart. • The engineers then return to the tank to study the effects of their handiwork.**



deaths and injuries were reported throughout the theater.

There wasn't enough time or manpower to destroy everything. With the priority on major systems, the engineers could only mark the areas of unexploded ordnance and tread away lightly.

"Lots of equipment received minimal damage or was abandoned by the Iraqis and bypassed," said Lt. Col. Mark Vincent, operations officer of 7th Engineer Bde.'s Task Force Demo. "We found entire formations of tanks. There was one formation of 45 unhit BMPs." Some were headed back to serve as training aids, museum pieces, and enemy vehicles for the OPFOR at the National Training Center. Those that had been hit, he said, still had to be examined.

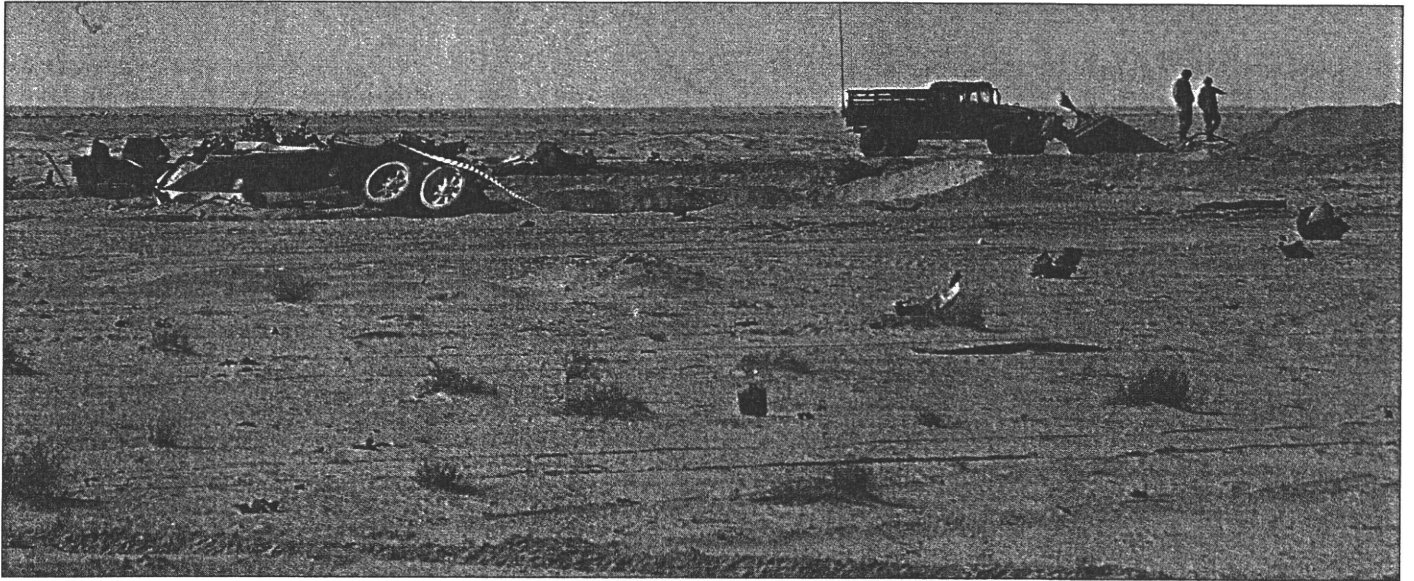
"A sabot round may have disabled the chassis and engine," he said. "But the main gun might be OK. That is a salvageable tank." The priorities on each vehicle were: destroy the breech; destroy the engine; attack the turret ring; and burn the entire vehicle.

Several times a day, billowing gray clouds appeared on the horizon, followed





## DESERT STORM



**Top: U.S. soldiers carefully examine battlefield debris near the remains of an Iraqi armored vehicle already demolished by combat engineers. • Above: A cache of unused Iraqi artillery rounds awaits destruction by Army explosive ordnance disposal experts.**

by the deep rumble of a tremendous explosion. These were usually bunkers or Iraqi ammo dumps being blown by joint engineer-EOD teams. Three-man crews of EOD experts were called in to supervise these more volatile demolitions.

"What it's costing us in 'demo' is just pocket change — \$100 to blow a T-72, which is costing them maybe a million dollars," said Co. B, 3rd Platoon's Sgt. Randy Trombley. "What we're doing out here is hurting the Iraqis farther down the road — their economy, along with their ability to rebuild their army."

The target-rich environment suited 3rd Platoon just fine. They were staying busy, getting the mission done, and squeezing in more live demolition train-

ing in a few weeks than they would get in a few years back at Fort Knox.

As the squad came upon a T-72, Trombley would assess its condition and recommend the type and amount of explosive charges. The privates and specialists then took turns calculating the length of detonation cord needed for a 9-minute fuze. As they prepared the site and emplaced the charges, Trombley let them work for the most part on their own.

"I like to just check their work, rather than micromanage them. I want to see what they actually know and challenge their minds," he said.

As a result, squad confidence rose quickly. "When I came out here, I wasn't that confident," said Saint-Hilaire. "I

didn't know what the hell I was doin'. It took me a while." Now, he called it "fun, and a chance to experiment."

But classes were short. With so much to demolish, the engineers had to work fast. Still, safety remained the prime consideration. "As safely as they'd do a demo on a range," said Vincent.

The demo teams could choose from a full menu of explosives: crates of TNT, C-4 plastic explosive, 40-pound shaped charges, Bangalore torpedoes and more. Hardly a dull job.

"It makes it more intriguing," said Cullen. "If you know what you're doin', there's no danger. If you don't, someone's going to get hurt. It's just experience. You take all of the book learning you've done, you practice over and over again, and when you finally get to put it to use, it comes real natural."

All expressed a desire to do more demo work back at home station, but they recognized the home-station restrictions of little money for training and increased demand for time on the ranges. "Besides," said Cullen, "if you did as much demo as we did out here, half of Fort Knox would be covered with shrapnel."

The signing of the cease-fire would ultimately bring the demolition efforts to a halt, and the engineers realized that they could never get it all anyway. "Unfortunately," said Mansell, the 2nd ACR engineer, "that means people and animals will probably be killed or maimed in this area for years to come." □