**The War Against Iraq**

**The Eagle Troop Account**

On 23 February 1991, spirits were high as the troop staged on the south side of the Iraqi-Saudi border. The first phase of the operation centered on busting through the border berm; a task for which the troop was organized with an engineer platoon and an ACE.

AT 1330, the troop crept up to within sight of the berm and the artillery barrage began. The first platoon and engineers bolted forward and quickly reduced the obstacle. The tanks sped forward first in column and the deployed into a tank wedge on the far side. The commander’s tank went through first in the Squadron and the others emerged from the dust and took up their position in the wedge. The flank scouts came through next. Then, the scouts who had come forward to the berm at first, poured through the breach and raced ahead to assume the lead of the formation. The tanks and Bradleys conducted reconnaissance by fire into any suspicious positions. The troop halted at PL BUD and the scout platoon arrayed in depth (3rd) established flank security and made contact with 3ACR. Heavy rains that night made rest difficult.

**24 February**

The troop began moving North again the following morning and halted at PL BUSCH. The soldiers wanted to keep advancing north. CPT McMaster ordered the troop to boresight and test fire all weapons systems. The troop refueled.

Later that day the troop continued its move to the north and by nightfall had traveled another fifty kilometers.

Eagle troop halted just before sunset and resupplied. CPT McMaster issued a fragmentary order to establish a hasty defense for the night. The first platoon leader, LT Petschek reported that he had detected an enemy defensive position. CPT McMaster went forward to assess the situation. SSG Lawrence’s section had the enemy under observation from a distance of 2500 meters. Fox troop was still forward so indirect fire could have been risky. CPT McMaster decided to eliminate the enemy defensive position to ensure the security of the troop. Every enemy soldier milling about a triangularly arrayed trench system was easily seen through the thermal sights. LT Petschek’s Bradley and CPT McMaster’s tank would overwatch and provide a base of fire while SSG Lawrence’s section maneuvered to the flank. All would remain outside of RPG range. The Bradleys fired HEAT into the trenches and the commander’s tank fired a HEAT round at a bunker in the center of the enemy position. The enemy position was effectively eliminated. The scouts returned to their OPs.

Later, the first platoon sergeant, SSG Patterson, reported contact with infantry to his front. He adjusted mortar VT fire onto the enemy and destroyed them.

**25 February**

The next morning, the troop collapsed its defense, reformed, and resumed moving north. The troop encountered countless groups of enemy soldiers surrendering. Scouts quickly searched them, gave them food and water, and reported their location for the trains to collect them. The enemy was walking south in groups of 3-15. They had nothing but their clothes. Many of the enemy greeted the troop with thumbs up signs and waved wildly.

The troop halted for refuel after having covered fifty kilometers in less than four hours.

The troop assumed a hasty defense for the night and the heavy rains returned. CPT McMaster issued a fragmentary order concerning a reorientation of the defense toward the east the following day.

**26 February**

The troop moved to a new defensive sector at 0600. The troop tied in with Ghost to the south and Fox to the north. CPT McMaster checked the scout OPs and was developing a fire plan with the mortars when SSG Patterson reported contact with three MTLBs to his front. He believed they were enemy scouts probing our lines. CPT McMaster brought his tank forward to observe the point of contact. Ghost Troop had killed two with 25mm and the third was attempting to withdraw. CPT McMaster asked SSG Patterson if the MTLB “had his name on it.” SSG Patterson replied that the commander’s name was “all over it.” CPT McMaster’s gunner’s fire was dead on with a HEAT round at 2800 meters. The MTLB erupted into flames and burned for quite some time.

AT 1000 hours, the troop was ordered into a new sector further south. Eagle quickly established the defense and coordinated with I Troop of 3rd Squadron to the south. The night’s rain had yielded to heavy fog and CPT McMaster employed the GSR forward with 1st platoon. The troop refueled; anxious for the order to attack.

AT 1500 hours, the long awaited order came. CPT McMaster told his men “We attack in five minutes to the 70 Easting. This is the moment we have all waited for.”

The Troop rolled forward through the blowing sand. As the troop crested a slight rise, air burst artillery fell on SSG Lawrence’s scout section. The troop did not break stride. Soldiers closed their hatches and swung to the south around the impact area.

After reorienting to the east, third platoon’s scouts reported taking small arms fire from a building complex just north of the troop’s southern boundary. CPT McMaster decided to suppress the enemy position and bypass it to the north. Scouts fired 25mm chain gun HEAT ammo into the buildings and across the berm which concealed the enemy fighting positions. CPT McMaster brought all nine tanks on line and gave a troop fire command which resulted in the near simultaneous firing of nine HEAT rounds into the buildings which blew gaping holes in them. The troop would take no more enemy fire from that position. Scouts would later discover that the site was an enemy logistics compound.

The troop resumed movement eastward. First platoon was moving tentatively and berms were visible in the distance. CPT McMaster switched to a tanks lead formation and instructed 2d and 4th to “follow his move.” The CO took the lead and the tanks passed through the scouts in a wedge. The scouts now moved to secure the flanks and rear of the tanks and overwatch their move forward. The terrain, however, would preclude lojng range detection of the enemy.

The commander was issuing final instructions to the troop when his tank crested another, almost imperceptible swell in the terrain. His gunner SSG Koch yelled “tanks direct front.” In an instant, CPT McMaster had counted eight of them in dug-in positions. They were close. The laser display showed 1420 meters. CPT McMaster yelled “Fire! Fire sabot!” A HEAT round destroyed a T-72 in spectacular fashion. E-66 would destroy two more enemy tanks before the tank platoons crested the hill. Small arms sprinkled 66’s turret and two enemy tank rounds impacted on either side of the tracks. As the remainder of the troop’s tanks crested the hill, the enemy felt the full fire power and shock effect of armor. Enemy tanks and BMPs erupted into innumerable fire balls and threw sparks. The troop was cutting a five kilometer swath of destruction through the enemy position.

Traffic on the troop radio net was relatively calm in the face of battle. CPT McMaster directed the tanks to keep formation and assault through the enemy position as the scouts fired to the flanks and “scratched the back” of the tanks with small arms fire to clear pockets of enemy dismounted resistance. Bradley’s pumped HEAT [HEIT??] and AP rounds into enemy personnel carriers and bunkers along the flanks and occasionally stopped to fire TOWs at tanks in the depths of the enemy’s defense.

The tanks continued to press forward. No one was missing his target and fire distribution was perfect. No opposing vehicle escaped destruction within range of the troop’s weapons. The enemy position was reduced to a spectacular array of burning armored vehicles.

The enemy was arrayed in a U shaped defense and the troop had attacked in the center. The scouts on the flanks, however, destroyed enemy vehicles and positions on either side. At one point, LT Gauthier’s platoon received effective fire from a ZSU-23-4 in a bunker. The platoon launched two TOW missiles simultaneously. The first collapsed the bunker and the second destroyed the ZSU.

The tanks were now even with the enemy’s first line of defense and were destroying more enemy tanks in the depth of the position. Now indirect fires fell behind the enemy’s positions which the troop FIST, LT Davis, had called. At this point, LT Gifford, the executive officer, called the commander to remind him that the 70 Easting was the limit of advance. CPT McMaster replied, “We’re past the 70 now. We’re in contact. I’m sorry.” LT Gifford informed LTC Kobbe of the situation. The enemy was withdrawing in a panic. The troop had to move through the enemy’s defense and establish on the far side. The now artificial restriction of the 70 Easting could no longer apply.

The tanks and Bradleys were no cutting down hundreds of infantry fleeing to subsequent positions. Some tried to play dead and pop up behind the tanks with rocket propelled grenades. They fell prey to the Bradley’s 25mm and coaxial machine guns. CPT McMaster finally found the position for which he was looking just behind the 73 Easting. Dominant terrain is difficult to discern in the desert, but this was it—a small hill which allowed observation out to several kilometers in all directions. It was an apparent gap in the enemy’s defense between the position through which the troop had assaulted and positions further to the east.

Tanks fired main guns and Bradleys fired TOW missiles at enemy vehicles forward of the 73 grid. Spectacular explosions followed the impact of the perfectly aimed and guided fires. CPT McMaster breathed a sigh of relief when the platoons reported 100% strength. All vehicles were suppressing enemy dismounts who scurried back and forth among the seemingly endless berms which comprised the enemy positions.

The enemy attempted a futile counterattack just before nightfall. Several enemy tanks and armored vehicles weaved between the berms toward the troop’s front, attempting to close within range of their weapons capabilities. Tanks and Bradleys to the flanks, however, had a relatively clear shot through the berms and the enemy’s effort was soon thwarted in a series of violent explosions. In one such engagement, LT Hamilton’s crew destroyed an enemy tank that had crept to within 1200 meters of the perimeter. His sabot round detached the T-72 turret from its hull and threw sparks and a tremendous fireball into the air. CPT McMaster exclaimed, “White One, that was rather spectacular!” LT Hamilton replied, “That’s known as the hammy, slammy.”

TOW antitank missiles pursued and caught truckloads of enemy soldiers fleeing to the east. The troop’s mortar section was well into the action now, dropping VT on the enemy infantry, and being adjusted on to subsequent targets by the troop’s scouts. The troop could see through the thermals that the mortars were exacting a heavy toll on the enemy.

The sun had set. Continuous machine gun and 25mm high explosive fire kept the enemy at bay and prevented him from engaging in any counter attacks.

The enemy forward appeared broken by the heavy mortar and direct fire. An enemy truckload of soldiers approached to within 200 meters of LT Destefano’s tank platoon, apparently unaware of their proximity to the troop. The troop’s soldiers demonstrated great humanity and discipline as CPT McMaster ordered them to hold fire until the enemy’s intentions were known. Upon detecting the troop’s positions, the enemy truck halted and the Iraqis jumped from the truck brandishing weapons. SSG Foy’s tank destroyed the enemy truck and wounded one enemy soldier with his machine gun. The remainder surrendered. Scouts searched the enemy soldiers, treated the wounded one, and moved them to a collecting point.

At this point, the squadron S-3 ordered the HMMWV mounted psychological operations team to come forward. The Kuwaiti interpreter blasted a surrender appeal forward of the troop’s position. CPT McMaster ordered a temporary ceasefire. Tens of enemy soldiers came forward as the Kuwaiti interpreter gave them instructions in Arabic. The lead enemy soldiers carried a white flag affixed to a wooden staff. The prisoners fell into single file with their hands up. SGT Digbie’s scout squad augmented by SSG Burns and the crew from the squadron TAC CP, searched them and secured them with their M16s. One could see the surprise with which the enemy regarded their humane treatment. There were 42 EPWs in all. The troop’s medic, SGT Piwetz, treated their wounds. Over 150 more would surrender to Eagle Troop that night and the next morning.

1SG Virrill had weaved through friendly units to the rear to bring up a resupply of fuel and ammunition. Several vehicles at a time rotated to the troop trains rear area while others maintained security.

CPT McMaster ordered a scout section from first platoon north to make contact with Ghost Troop. Ghost Troop had fought a similar battle to the north and the area between Eagle and Ghost had been covered by overlapping observation and fire. It was still a dangerous mission as no one had physically cleared the intervening ground. LT Petschek and another squad moved north out of the troop’s defense. LT Petschek yelled “Contact! Tanks!” over the troop net. CPT McMaster was concerned for the section’s safety, but before he could order second platoon north, LT Petschek had destroyed two T-72s at close range with TOW missiles. The section contact with Ghost, and the troop’s northern flank was secure.

Similarly, the troop was well tied in with Iron Troop to the south. Although they had halted at the 68 Easting, LT Gauthier’s platoon had maintained contact with them. LT Gauthier recommended a 120-degree azimuth as the troop’s limit of fire and that became the RFL between Eagle and Iron. CPT McMaster called CPT Miller (Iron Troop) to solidify a similar restriction on Iron Troop.

LT Gauthier reported two BMPs moving toward the troop’s positions; perhaps to ascertain the limits of the defense. 3d Platoon destroyed them with 25mm. The BMPs had no chance of at night. Minutes later, 3d Platoon sent a subsequent report of an Iraqi attempting to start one of the BMPs. SGT Hovermale fired a TOW missile to ensure that the vehicle was unusable.

The battle waned as the 1st Infantry Division column approached to the south. LT Davis called in an artillery strike along the 75 Easting, the area from which the enemy counterattacks and probes had come. After witnessing several secondary explosions, a massive artillery strike ensured. Numerous secondary explosions erupted forward of the troop.

The troop’s battle was almost over. The rest of the night was relatively quiet with only occasional machine gun fire in both directions.

As the sun rose the next morning, the true extent of the damage inflicted on the enemy became apparent to the troop’s soldiers. Countless enemy tanks, PCs, trucks, and bunkers were still smoking or in flames. CPT McMaster had grossly underestimated enemy losses. The troop had, in fact, destroyed 35 enemy tanks and an additional 30 or so BMPs and MTLBs. About ten enemy trucks were smoldering. One of the POWs claimed that he commanded a mechanized infantry battalion of 900 men reinforced with tanks, and forty of the prisoners were all who remained alive.

The next day, 27 FEB, involved taking more prisoners, and collecting and treating enemy wounded soldiers. SGT Piwetz treated a wounded enemy soldier on the stretcher of his medic track. When the enemy soldier attempted to stab him with his own needles, the medic knocked the enemy soldier unconscious with his M-16, then continued to treat him. The troop did not gloat over their victory. The soldiers of Eagle had simply done their part in freeing Kuwait from Saddam Hussein and his Republican Guard henchmen.