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TASK FORCE IRON 13-18 FEBRUARY 1991

MONOGRAPH

CAPTAIN ROGER H. PALMATEER

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On 1 August 1990, the Republic of Iraq's military forces seized the Emirate of Kuwait. This invasion did two things which the United States of America found unacceptable. One, it gave a hostile government over 20% of the total world supply of crude oil and put it in position to take another 20%. Two, it deposed a government which has almost always been friendly to the United States. On 3 August 1990, American troops were committed to the defense of Saudi Arabia.

Over the next three months, the United Nations passed several resolutions demanding the withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait. The Iraqi response was to build up its forces still more and to construct defenses along the Kuwaiti - Saudi border. By 8 November 1990, the United States had committed one armored, one mechanized infantry, one air assault, and one airborne division to the Gulf defense. With the passage of United Nations measures which could mean using force against Iraq, President George Bush ordered more troops to the Gulf region. In a surprise move, the United States VII Corps, which included the 1st and 3d Armored Divisions, was ordered to move to the Gulf. To round out the VII Corps, the 1st Infantry Division Mechanized, from Fort Riley, Kansas, was also sent. The 1st Infantry Division was not at full strength; one of its brigades was permanently stationed in Europe. Ironically, the 3d Brigade of the 1st Infantry Division was standing down due to the force reductions. To give this division a third brigade, the 2d Armored Division (Forward),

based in Garlstedt, Germany, was ordered to move to Saudi to join the 1st Infantry Division.

The 2d Armored Division's movement began on Christmas Eve, 1990, with the departure of the Advance Party. By 24 January 1991, the entire brigade with equipment had moved to Saudi and arrived at Tactical Assembly Area Roosevelt, located near the Saudi village of Ad Dibdiba, which is forty miles from the border between Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq. (See map one.)

During the period from 24 December 1990 until 24 January 1991, I was part of the advance party from Germany, then from the port area. I held the S-4 position, but on 24 January, I was sent to C Company, 1st Battalion, 41st Infantry, to assume the duties of Executive Officer. The previous Executive Officer had been promoted and was now the battalion Liaison Officer with brigade. I was chosen because I had been the Executive Officer of E Company for 18 months until its deactivation. While at Assembly Area Roosevelt, the battalion task organized into a balanced Task Force. The Task Force had two tank companies and two Bradley equipped infantry companies. Also, a company of engineers and a platoon of Air Defense Artillery arrived to finish our combat organization. This was the organization that became known as Task Force Iron.

No long after the arrival, the 1st Battalion, 41st Infantry Regiment, was chosen to move across the Iraqi-Saudi border to clear the way for the ground assault. Operations

MAP ONE

----- Berm

IRAQ

KUWAIT

MOVEMENT

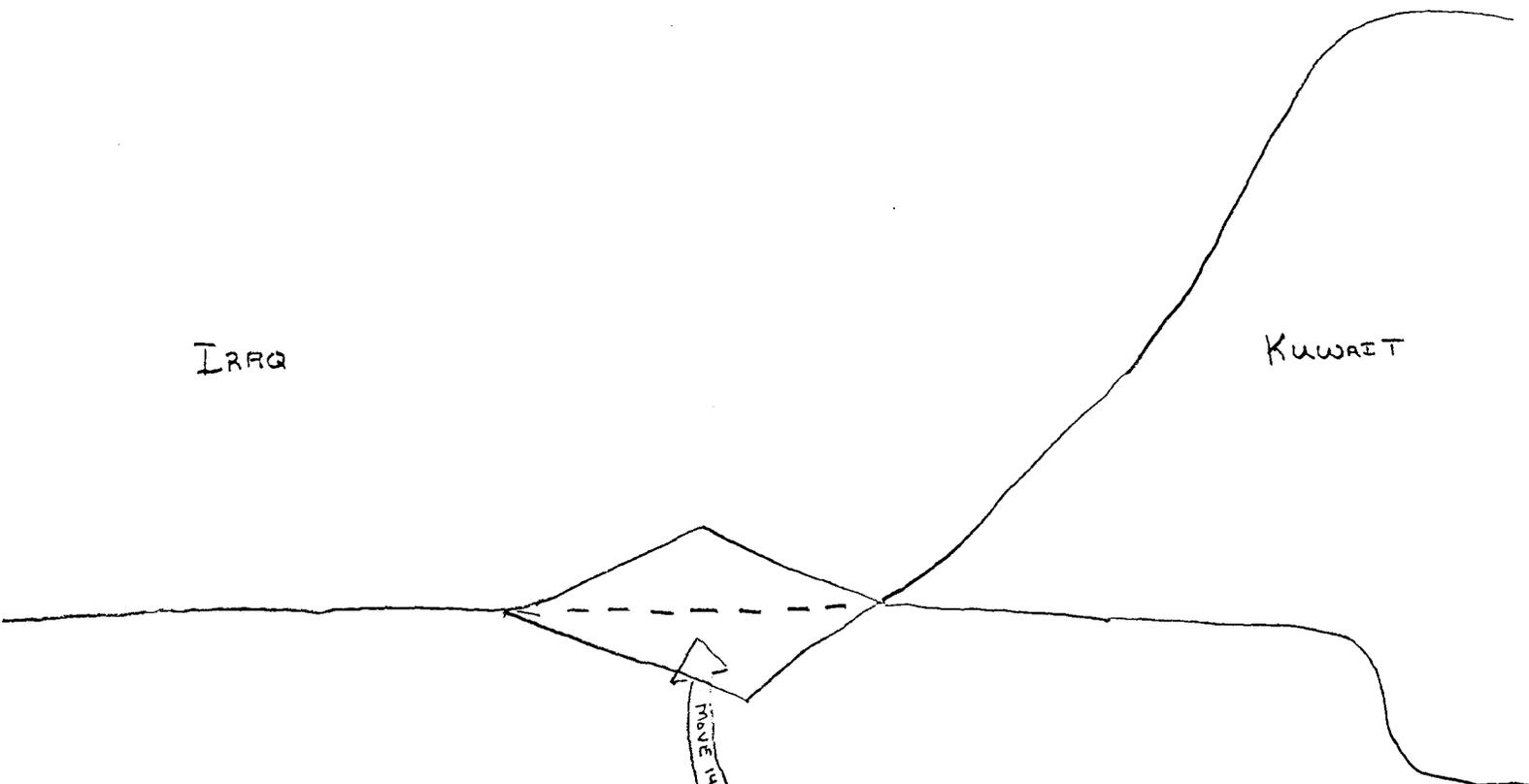
TAA  
MANHATTAN

MOVEMENT

TAA  
ROOSEVELT

Ad Dibdiba

SAUDI ARABIA



Orders were given and training for the mission began on 27 January 1991. On 11 February, the battalion received final word to move on 13 February.

On 13 February, the battalion moved from its positions. The movement was over a two day period and covered over 100 miles. The Commanders were on the border on a leaders recon; therefore, the Executive Officers controlled the movement of the first day. The Commanders rejoined the unit on the movement, by using helicopter transport, the evening of the first day. The movement was more than successful; the hours of maintenance paid off when no vehicles were lost to maintenance problems. In C Company, I can only thank my new Maintenance Sergeant Staff Sergeant Morton ~~Ø~~, who had recently taken the position. His dedication and drive is what drove the maintenance program, and his great knowledge of the systems would fix things almost as fast as we could break them. On 14 February 1991, the Task Force relieved the screening battalion on the border. Task Force Iron faced Iraq, only four kilometers away.

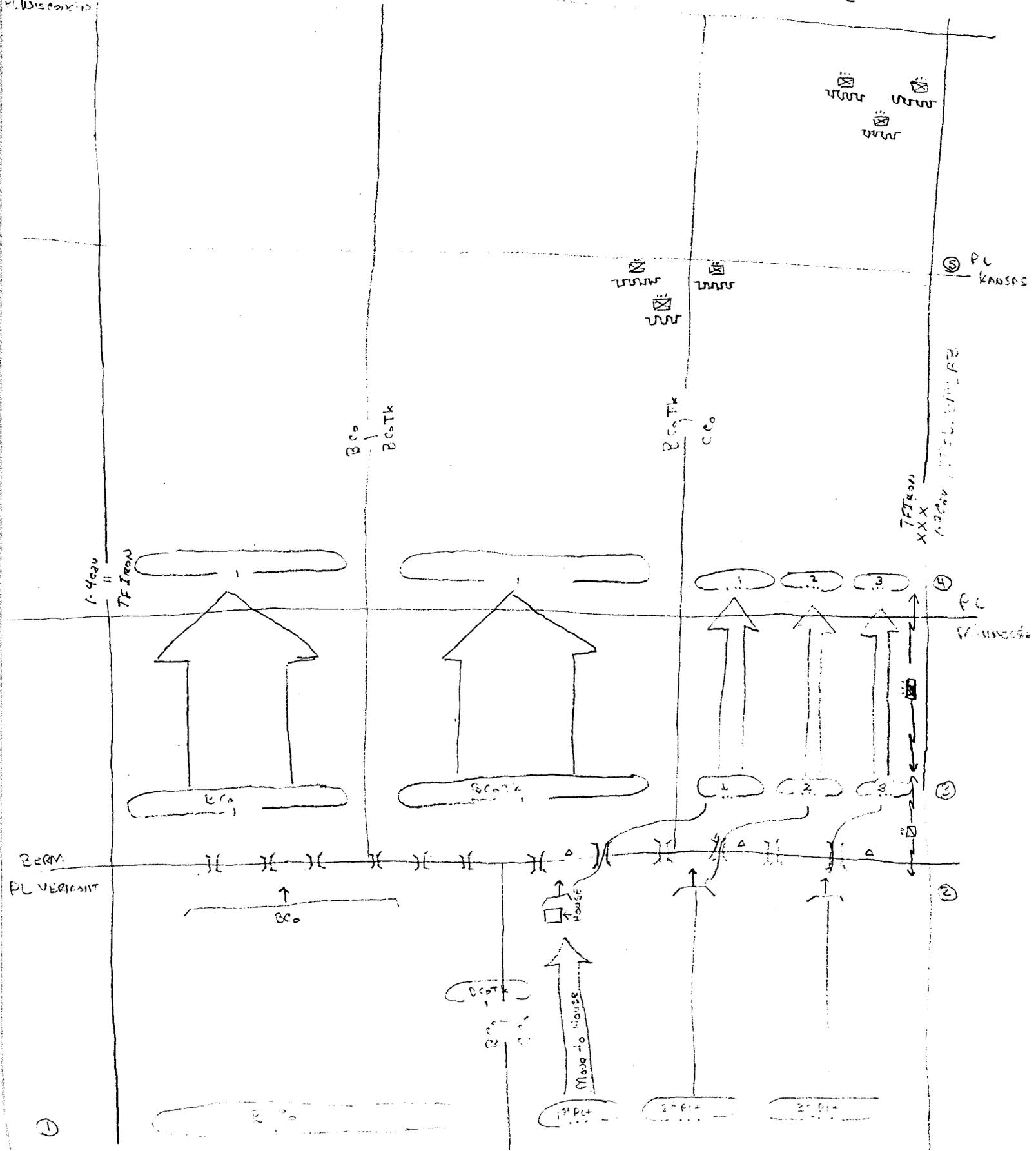
The plan for Task Force Iron was simple: move forward, cross the border, and then clear in sector to within three kilometers of the Iraqi main defensive belt. (See map two) This required a three phase operation.

Phase One ~~Ø~~ was to move to and across the Saudi berm. In the 1970 & 1980's, Saudi Arabia built a berm along its border with Iraq to keep the Desert peoples from crossing the border

MAP TWO

- ① Positions of friendly units
- ② Occupied positions for friendly units
- ③ Positions of attacking force
- ④ Limit of distance 16 Feb
- ⑤ Destination night 17-18 Feb

Enemy  
PL Wisconsin



without knowing it. Built much like a dike along a major river, it was 15-20 foot high and as wide at the base. The plan called for moving mounted to within 500 meters of the berm. A multi-story house on the Saudi side of the berm was to be cleared. Due to its height, this building provided observation of the desert for many miles around, so its seizure was key to the plan. After this, the vehicles would move to the berm and dismount the infantry. The dismounts would cross the berm, clearing 2,000 meters into Iraq. This would all be accomplished by 1200 hours. At 1200 hours, six armored combat earthmovers would cut through the berm at twelve points. The Bradleys would then join the dismounted soldiers. The C Company would move south, and B Company would move north. B Company, Tank, would then move into the gap created by the movement. When the three companies were on line, Phase I was complete. While we crossed into Iraq, 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry, 1st Infantry Division, was to cross to the north of our battalion. To the south, 1st Squadron, 7th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division was to cross. (See map ~~three~~<sup>two</sup>.)

During Phase Two, the Task Force would move forward by two vehicle bounds of one kilometer. ~~We were~~<sup>It was</sup> to move 13 kilometers forward, to within only 2 kilometers of the Iraqi main defensive line. Our intelligence told us that, in the Battalion Sector, the Iraqi's had constructed seven platoon positions, as well as numerous observation posts. Only two platoons were occupying the platoon positions, but we did not know which

positions. Likewise, only a few of the observation posts were occupied. All these positions were to be cleared during the movement. This phase would end upon completion of the movement, which was not to be until after dark.

During Phase Three, we would hold our positions for 24 to 72 hours to deny Iraqi forces access to the berm. While we remained forward, the engineers would enlarge the cuts in the berm so that each cut would allow a platoon to pass in battle formation. After the engineers were complete, we would withdraw to Saudi Arabia. Another battalion would assume picket duty from the Saudi side.

In addition to our attachments given in the Task Organization in Appendix 1, we had in support eleven battalions of 155mm artillery and virtually unlimited Combat Air Support.

On 15 February, at 0700 hours, I arrived with the Armored Combat Earthmovers allotted to our company; five kilometers from the berm, I stopped to await the word to bring them forward. We waited here for the next three hours. During this time, our company moved forward to within two berm.<sup>?</sup> The 1st Platoon suppressed and then captured the three story house on the Saudi side of the berm. Because of the flatness of the land, from the roof of the house <sup>↓ ? a person?</sup> you could see for 20 to 30 miles with good binoculars. The house was bobbytraped and had weapons, ammunition, anti-tank rockets, radios, and other equipment in it, but the Iraqis had left long ago. The engineers later destroyed the house because it could be seen

from the Iraqi positions some 10-15 miles away and could have been used to adjust artillery fire.

At 0800, 2Lt Costelo, an extra Lt assigned to the company and working as my assistant at this time, found the First Sergeant and directed him to his position. This allowed the First Sergeant to play his part in the upcoming mission. The first platoon to reach the berm was 2d Platoon, under 2Lt Jim Swenty. He was quite shocked to find a tank ditch our side of the berm. This had not been noted by any recon of the area and looked like a road from the air. It was 10 <sup>feet?</sup> foot wide and six <sup>feet?</sup> foot deep, so we moved the armored combat earthmovers all the way to the berm early. They immediately began to fill in the ditch where we were going to cut the berm. In the company sector, we were to cut six holes. According to the plan, I was in charge of the armored combat earthmover to cut the center two breaches. The First Sergeant, on the left, had an Armored Combat Earthmover to cut two more breaches. The Fire Support Team (FIST), on the right, had the third armored combat earthmover to cut the last two breaches. The Commander needed the FIST that morning, so the 3d Platoon Leader, 2Lt Minot Crews, was put in charge of the right vehicle.

We moved forward to fill the ditch at about 1100 hours, then waited. At 1130, the dismounted infantry moved forward to ensure that the far side of the berm did not have Iraqi Infantry covering it. They moved forward three kilometers and stopped. It was about 1200 <sup>Q</sup> when the word was given to cut the

berm. My armored combat earthmover had finished with both holes at 1245, and I returned it to the Sergeant Major. It was then I heard the Commander calling the 3d Platoon and getting no response. I hurried my vehicle down the berm to find the armored combat earth movers still waiting and got ~~him~~ <sup>them</sup> started cutting his two holes. I then ordered the vehicles of the 3d Platoon to use the next closest cut to reinforce their dismounts; it was now 1315, and the other two platoons had fully crossed. By 1400, the last two cuts were completed, and I was returning the armored combat earthmover. The 3d Platoon was fully linked up. It was nearly 1430 before I was in position. My commander had not waited for me but had started the company movement without me. I easily caught up because the movement was slow and deliberate.

We only moved forward six kilometers during the day, not the fifteen we had planed on. We found out why later in the day. The 1st Squadron, 7th Calvary, was to cross to my company's right, and the 1st Squadron, 4th Calvary, was to cross to left of the Task Force. This would cover the flanks of the Task Force. The problem was that the 1st Squadron, 7th Calvary did not cross at all, and the 1st Squadron, 4th Calvary, was delayed by dismounted infantry resistance. So, as night fell, we were mostly alone across the berm. Only a single troop of the 1st Squadron, 4th Calvary, covered our left flank, and our own Scout Platoon covered our right flank; the Scout Platoon was attached to C Company for maintenance and

logistical support.

This night was quiet; we saw a couple of dismounted patrols to our front, but they were at too great a range to engage. B Company's movement through the berm was smoother than ours, but it had progressed only as far as we were. As night fell, the entire Task Force stopped its movement on line.

January 16 began great; we prepared to move forward to clear the area to the Iraqi trenches. However, the 1st Squadron, 7th Cavalry, refused to cross the berm or even to put its cuts into it. The fact that the 1st Cavalry Division was under control of the XVIIIth Airborne Corps, while we were under the VIIth Corps, meant that it wasn't just trying to get a Brigade or Division Commander to coordinate the movement but two Corps Commanders, and this made the situation more difficult. To my knowledge, the two commanders never cooperated here. We were still able to move forward some three kilometers. However, we were able to move by adding the Brigade Scouts to our right flank screen. This gave the screen the extra three kilometers. We also received two Ground Surveillance Radar vehicles on the flank for the night. One was set up at the right angle corner, the intersection of the company and scouts. The other was set up between our center and left platoons. This allowed us to cover our entire front. Ground Surveillance Radar can tell the exact range of a target up to six miles away.

During the day, we dug in our dismounted Infantry and prepared for combat. During dusk, we started to get reports of

movement to our front.

About 1930, we got the first positive ID of enemy activity to our front. However, when the Ground Surveillance Radar tried to get a fix, his equipment broke down, and the left radar was out of operation for the rest of the night. Furthermore, the radar on the right was not positioned to cover our front, so we had to guess. Because of the radar, we had not put out range stakes, which later proved to be a very big mistake. As night wore on, I let my crew sleep while I kept watch. My vehicle was positioned 300 meters to the rear of the right most platoon. The platoon to my front was 1st Platoon, under 2Lt Dan Strickland. Dan has spent nine years, as enlisted, in Special Operations, so he was not as nervous as many of the other men who had less time in service. At about 2200, the commander gave permission for the 3d and 2d platoons to open fire. It was estimated that the enemy was 3,000 meters away, but we now know that the enemy was actually between 4,000 and 5,000 meters away. Neither our 25mm cannon nor the TOW anti tank missile would fire that far. About midnight, we started to get reports from the 2d and 3d platoon that they had dismounted Infantry to their front. It was also reported that several tanks were to our front. Two vehicles fired TOWs at the targets which disintegrated on impact. These targets were verified by helicopters to our rear. The next morning, we found out both targets were barrels that litter the desert.

It was also prior to midnight that the Commander moved his

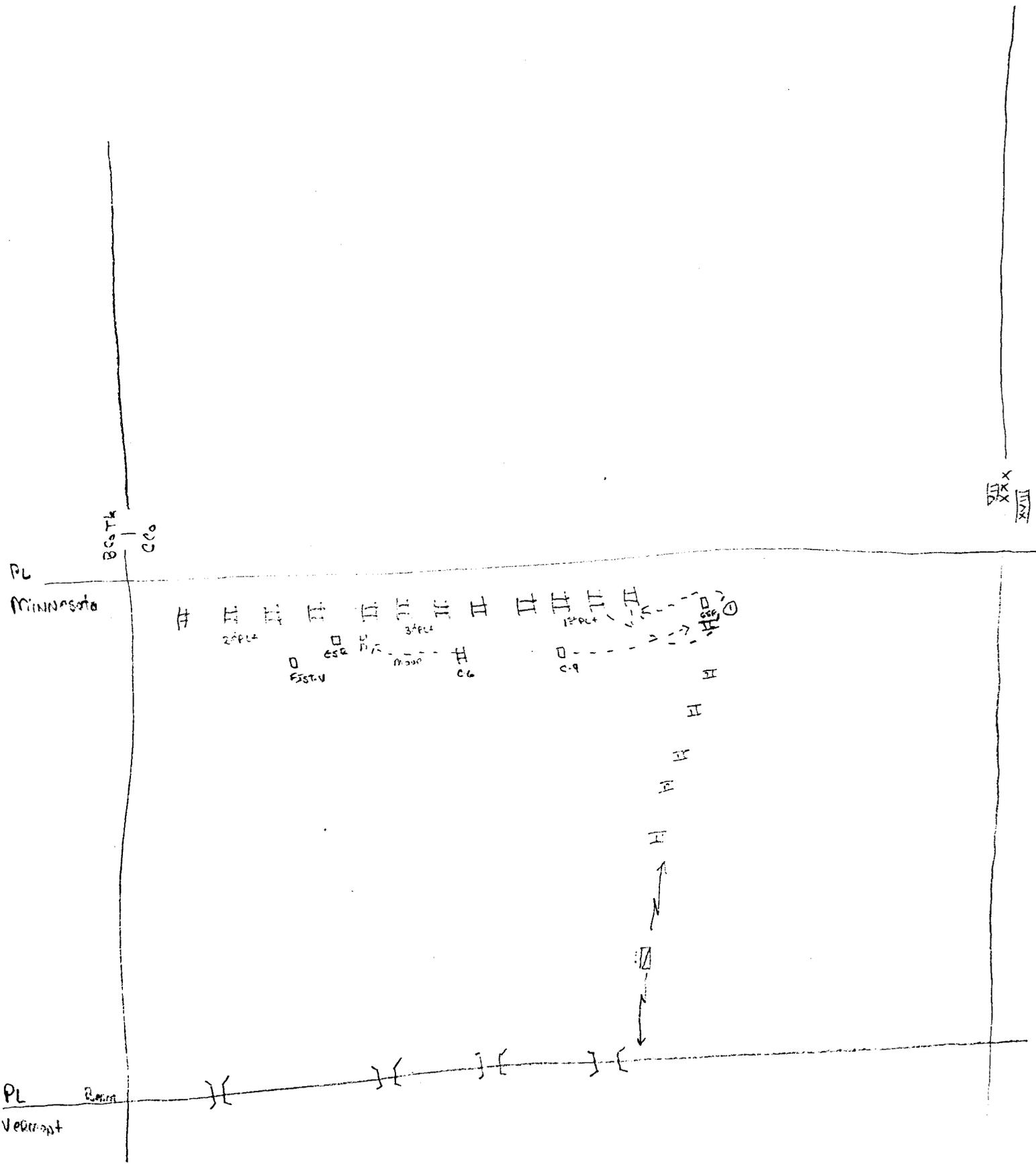
vehicle. This, he decided later, was a big mistake. He not only lost his aiming point, but, after moving, he set himself wrong. Instead of looking to the north, he was looking southwest, to the rear, he sighted eight tanks and at about 2000 meters. This he reported to Battalion and tried to get conformation from the 3d Platoon. The platoon vehicles did not report any, so for 15 minutes he watched them. Finally, he got out of the vehicle and shot an azimuth with a compass. The eight tanks were the two platoons of the Battalion Reserve tank company sent in to reinforce us if necessary. The Commander got his vehicle straight. This only illustrates the problems of night movement and orientation.

While this was going on, both other companies had sighted the enemy vehicles, to the north. They also engaged the enemy vehicles as best they could. Enemy dismounts were reported as far back as the Battalion TOC.

At about 0100, 17 February, it was determined that the dismounted infantry was our only worry at this time. There were tanks to our front, but they were out of our range. It was then that the Battalion called upon the Divisional Attack Helicopter Battalion to come and help. At 0200, Apaches were on hand. The Battalion Commander talked them to a position to the rear of C Company. Both Apaches ID'd two tanks and an Armored Personnel Carrier at 4000 meters to the north. Then they moved to get a shot, a normal maneuver for a helicopter, as they do not stay exposed in one place very long. When they

11/2  
11/12  
Dialing and... ..

MAP THREE



11/2  
11/12  
11/12

came back up, they were no longer facing north but northeast. They had the two tanks and APC out of position. One of the choppers tried to fire cannon, but they jammed, so he went to missiles. It took about 10 seconds to launch both missiles. Dan Strickland saw the vehicles hit. They were not enemy that he saw hit, but a scout Bradley and the Ground Surveillance Radar Vehicle. At this time, no one on the ground knew that the Apache had hit the vehicles. We all thought they had been hit by an RPG team.

Dan came onto the company net and said that the two vehicles on the far right were on fire, and he wanted to go help. The Commander asked why he should go help when we were still engaged. He then said he had seen survivors jump off the vehicles. It was then that I came over the net and said that I would go help them. As we moved to aid the destroyed vehicles crews, I called the Medical track to move as fast as possible to the site of the destroyed vehicles. He asked where to go; I told him to go to the fire. By the time we reached the site, the Bradley was starting to have secondary explosions from the ammunition aboard. I stopped my vehicle some 300 meters from the burning vehicles and told Specialist Gregory Bateham to grab the First Aid box and come with me. I was already jumping off the vehicle. Staff Sergeant Moreland manned the .50 cal Machinegun, the heaviest weapon on my vehicle, and Sergeant Robertson, who had relieved Bateham as driver, got his grenade launcher out and prepared to fight.

Arriving at the vehicle, we found Sergeant First Class Miller and the Assistant Gunner, about 15 meters from the vehicle. They, too, at this time believed that it was an Iraqi attack and were not going to call until they heard Bateham and I calling out in English that we were Americans. By this time, small arms ammunition and all the heavier ammunition was exploding. Bateham and I opened our flak vests and, lifting the two wounded men to their feet, wrapped them inside our flak vests with us. We then moved as fast as we could as far as they could go, only about 50 meters. Once the soldiers were down, we saw two Bradleys come up, I went to one and got the vehicles attention. I found out these vehicles were a section from Dan's platoon (two vehicles); Dan was trying to find any survivors and guard us. We quickly found two men. By this time, my medical vehicle was on hand. My chief medic, Sergeant Rost, came up and checked out the wounded. As he was checking out SFC Miller, a piece of shrapnel from one of the many explosions caught him on the chin. He felt his chin, saw that it was still there, and continued to work SFC Miller. We had gotten both men into the Aid vehicle when the two other men were brought in.

From talking with SFC Miller and his Assistant Gunner, I had found out that there were eight men in the two vehicles. So I got with Dan, and he went around the vehicle at about 20 meters using his night vision sights to look out, while I went back in at about 10 meters looking into the fire. We wanted to

leave no one hurt on the field because if this was the beginning of a larger attack, we might well have to withdraw. Walking around the vehicle, I found enough to determine that two men had been killed. I then returned to my vehicle at almost the same time Dan returned with the two drivers. The APC driver had been blown off his vehicle and had a concussion; he could not walk. The Bradley driver, seeing the explosion to his rear, had tried to drop the ramp to the back to let out the two men in the rear and then jumped out. He had found the APC driver laying on the ground and pulled him about 100 meters away from the vehicle. Dan had found the drivers hiding because they did not know if we were Iraqi or American.

I reported to the commander that I had to evacuate two wounded men on my vehicle. I then took my vehicle due south, directly to the berm. However, I did not realize that the Scout line was angled back to the southwest. This caused me to go to the front of the Scouts. Soon, on the Battalion Command Net, I was hearing reports from the Scouts that an APC was going across their front. The Commander then put two and two together and knew it was me. He broke in on their net and told them that it might be me. I then took my vehicle through a series of maneuvers so that they could see it was me. I then moved behind the Scouts, and soon arrived at the casualty collection point where Sergeant Rost had stopped to wait for me.

All four wounded in his vehicle were stable. I met the

Sergeant Major at this point; he asked what had happened to the other two.

Contacting the Commander, he said that it was too dangerous to return to the company, so I should stay on the far side of the berm until light. This I did, and at dawn, we returned to the company. At noon, I meet with Lt Costello to go to the site to pick up the bodies. Upon arrival, I found the Brigade Commander, Colonel Weisman already there. We then set about picking up the bodies.

During the day, we searched the area in which the fight had taken place. We found no evidence of any Iraqi losses. This was when the artillery began to fall on the position. In the next 48 hours, artillery fired at C Company four times. Three times, we had just moved, and it missed us. The other time it hit directly in front of the 2d and 3d platoons. It did not injure anyone but did hit so close to Lt Crew's vehicle that he lost his hearing for two days.

By night, we had replenished our ammunition and set in aiming stakes. At 1700, we got the mission to move forward six kilometers after dark. At 1900, we began to move, by 2000, my company had lost three thermal night vision sights inoperative. While B Company only had one Bradley Fighting Vehicle with an operational thermal of the thirteen assigned. By using a night sight continuously for over 30 hours, they will start to burn up, depending on how old they are. Throughout the battalion<sup>p</sup> the thermal sights had been operating since crossing

the berm ~~so~~ were burning up from heavy use. ~~(The movement  
their company.)~~ The movement was halted, and the Battalion  
Commander tried to figure out what had gone wrong. We stayed in  
place all night, only 800 meters forward of our old positions.  
This was lucky because the last artillery to hit at us during  
the day came in on our old positions at about 2200.

B Company had not had anyone hit during the night fight.  
But they did receive artillery fire several times. One of the  
bursts blew a hole in the side of the medical vehicle about the  
size of a man's fist. Only the kevlar shield doors kept the  
shrapnel from hurting the crew.

The Tank company received some fire, but it was all  
inaccurate. The TOC was not this lucky; just as it was  
attempting to move to a new position, 82mm mortar fire came  
in. The people inside the HMMWVE's were very vulnerable; one,  
1Lt Steven Nott was wounded, our first soldier wounded by  
enemy fire.

On 17 February, we pulled out to be replaced. We found  
out, as we moved, that we were not to be replaced after all.  
We withdrew to assembly points prior to crossing the berm.  
When we arrived at these points artillery hit the tank company  
in the center. One round exploded above the commander's  
vehicle, and a second hit next to the Executive Officers track.  
The first round wounded the gunner on the Commander's vehicle,  
Staff Sergeant Applegate; it also ripped away all the exterior  
parts of the tank. The Executive Officer's vehicle also lost

its external equipment, and its main gun was pitted by shrapnel. We then pulled out at high speed. We crossed the berm and then moved some 15 miles to an assembly area to rest and repair our vehicles.

Crossing the berm was the end of mission. On the Saudi side of the berm, we crossed through part of the 2d Armored Cavalry Regiment.

During the mission, the battalion had lost two vehicles and two men killed, plus nine men wounded. Of the wounded, two were back to duty in hours. But the men were no longer so afraid of artillery or the enemy. The part of the mission to make us into combat tried men had been a success.

## LESSONS LEARNED

1. Our largest problem was with the thermal night sights. Never had so many Bradley Fighting Vehicles kept on their night sights for so long. It was found that if they are used continuously for over 30 hours, they tend to burn out. The coolant in the sight just cannot keep the heat down. We worked out a solution: only one half of the people would have them on unless in contact.
2. Ranges in the desert are nearly impossible to guess. In the desert, you can see for extremely long ranges. You need to have one of two things: Either a laser range finder or range stakes. On the night of the 16th, we engaged our targets at beyond the maximum range of our weapons. With the loss of our Ground Surveillance Radar, we had no range finding capabilities. You must always put in range stakes, regardless.
3. During our night movement of the 17th, with the loss of the thermal night sights, we were lost. Using a compass to move in pitch black darkness is not easy, nor is it safe. In the morning, we found that we had only moved a hundred meters, but two engineer vehicles had made 90 degree turns. You must stay in sight of the vehicles to your right or left.
4. Our biggest problem with the attack helicopters was the lack of maintaining procedure. The Apache pilot was not sure that he was shooting at enemy, so much so that he used cannon instead of missiles first. If he was so unsure, the last positive signal for friend and foe identification should have

been the use of smoke grenades. The grenade has a large signature which is seen on thermal night sights. The pilot did not request this. Both the ground commander and the pilot had the same grid. If he still had doubts, the pilot should have asked for the smoke grenades.

5. With their first taste of combat, several soldiers froze. In my company, the commander of the vehicle next to the destroyed scout vehicle froze. When a soldier freezes, you should get him help immediately. We allowed the soldier to go to the Chaplain and apply for Consciences Objector status. When he finally saw a doctor, we found it was Battle Fatigue. It can happen anytime; some people reach the breaking point faster than others.

Appendix 1

Task Force Iron - 13 February 1991

Headquarter and Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 41st  
Infantry Regiment

Company B, 1st Battalion, 41st Infantry Regiment

Company C, 1st Battalion, 41st Infantry Regiment

Company A, 3d Battalion, 66th Armor Regiment

Company B, 3d Battalion, 66th Armor Regiment

Company D, 317th Engineer Battalion

3d Platoon, Battery C, 2d Battalion, 3d Air Defense Artillery  
Regiment

Fire Support Element, 4th Battalion, 3d Field Artillery  
Regiment

System Support Team, 498th Support Battalion

Appendix 2

Award: Valorous Unit Award

Date or period of service: See standard name line

Authority: Paragraph 9-19, AR 672-5-1

Reason: For extraordinary heroism in action against an armed enemy. Task Force 1-41 was the first coalition force to breach the Saudi Arabian border on 15 February 1991 and conduct ground combat operations in Iraq engaging in direct and indirect fire fights with the enemy on 17 February 1991. The Task Force was part of the VII Corps main attack beginning 24 February 1991 as it conducted a forward passage through 1st Infantry Division elements and began a mission to clear a zone which again resulted in enemy contact. On 26 February, following a 60 kilometer road march, the Task Force immediately engaged in ground combat with armored and dismounted enemy of brigade size. For six hours it was involved in continuous combat with a tenacious and determined enemy occupying extremely well prepared and heavily fortified bunkers. Task Force infantry elements dismounted and engaged the enemy in numerous short range fire fights while methodically clearing the extensive bunker complex. By Morning the Task Force had systematically reduced the entrenched enemy positions in zone. Continuing as part of the VII Corps attack the Task Force travelled 85 kilometers in less than 24 hours while engaging at short range multiple, dug in enemy tanks in ambush positions. the Task Force reached its final objective 28 February 1991 with a push which continued the destruction of enemy armored vehicles. During the entire ground campaign, involving their attack through Iraq into Kuwait, Task Force 1-41 travelled over 200 kilometers in 72 hours and destroyed 65 armored vehicles and 10 artillery pieces, while capturing over 300 enemy prisoners.

These totals do not include the many captured enemy armored vehicles, while the 300 prisoners is a low figure.

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