

SCOUNDRELS IN IRAQ

AN ENGINEER'S ADVENTURES

Kenny Dupar

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AUTHORS NOTE:

This autobiography portrays my work with the United States Army in Iraq. I tried to have as much fun as I could, while always taking care of soldiers.

When Saddam was in hiding in 2003 the people were scared, and we had our ass in both hands. However, it wasn't long before I realized I could do pretty much whatever I wanted. But first, I had to do my job.

Do NOT get crosswise of Uncle Sugar. He don't play.

Dedication: *To the women and men of the United States Army Reserve.*

To my daughter: *I never planned to become a traveling man. Our loss of time together is my greatest regret.*

IN MEMORIUM: *JIM FESTER*

Disclaimer: *Everything in the book is true, except for anything that could eventually lead to my criminal prosecution. Enjoy!*



— Me ringing the Freedom Bell in honor of Jim Fester. Capitol Mall. June, 2016



Map of Iraq

PART ONE: OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

Baghdad 2003-04

CHAPTER 1

The World's Biggest Ashtray

It was like going to war with a gang of thieves and scoundrels. Unless a piece of equipment was screwed down, chained, and guarded, it was obvious to us that no one really wanted it. Even then, bolt cutters became our favorite piece of equipment. We ignored most Army regulations in the lawless state of Iraq, in the summer of 2003. If it could be smoked, we smoked it. If it contained alcohol, we drank it. Within a vague, horny concept of fraternization, the motor pool was the place to go at night if two Army Reserve soldiers wanted to “knock boots.”

Members of the 169th Engineer Battalion soon gained the reputation within the military as the most talented builders in Iraq, as well as a criminal organization masquerading as an Army outfit. When we left leadership conferences, other units' officers instinctively checked to see if they still had their wallets. We were given contemptuous stares as if we were outlaws, a reputation we embraced.

I served for the welfare of the soldiers of my unit, Tony, and the President of the United States, in that order.

My name is Kenny.

•••

The 169th Battalion, headquartered in Dubuque, Iowa, was tasked to support Operation Iraqi Freedom in the second game of a double header, the first having been the Gulf War of 1990-91. We deployed under the control of the 1st Armored Division, which planted their guidon flag in Baghdad after offensive combat operations were successfully completed. The Engineers were sent to build and re-build.

I had seventeen years of service in the Army Reserve and had been working as a union carpenter when Army Personnel Command called me up mid-February, 2003 for the re-match. I was cross-leveled/reassigned to the 169th from another Engineer Combat Heavy Battalion out of Milwaukee. By the end of March, I was in Davenport, Iowa helping to load all of Headquarters' rolling stock (vehicles), the earth-moving equipment (heavy junk), and forty-foot storage containers onto trains bound for a ship at New Orleans. Other companies were placed throughout the State: Iowa City, Cedar Falls, Decorah, and Waterloo.

At that point I was Captain Dupar, so immediately upon arrival at Davenport, as the highest ranking soldier, I was informed that I was now the Detachment Commander. My new assignment was for only two weeks, as the outfit would soon be reunited with our parent unit. Chief Warrant Officer Plummer had been running the detachment for years, so when the local media showed up to interview Commander Plummer, I deferred to him. I wasn't sorry because I was damn lost in process, and it was in fact his outfit. Everyone was a stranger to me. It took a while to start making friends, especially since I outranked everyone there. Happily, Sergeant First Class Hank Molina was a full time Army Reserve soldier working at the unit. He became my battle buddy and friend for life, but it took getting to Iraq before I actually got to know him.

I watched the invasion of Iraq on TV, lying on the bed in my motel room, just prior to convoying to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. The infantry boys

were kicking ass. And Saddam Hussein's statue was winched down by an armored wrecker. Its brass face was contemptibly beaten with the soles of his countrymen's shoes.

En route to the mobilization station, I finally met the Headquarters Commander, Captain Diana Berry, at a truck stop. I received an old wheat penny with my change from a quick purchase of a bratwurst and a pack of cigarettes. I took that as a good omen. Berry was young, black, tough as nails, super smart, pretty, and experienced. The troopers simply called her "Mom." She didn't leave her Humvee, merely uttering a few syllables to me through the open vinyl window, with a look of distrust towards a fellow captain now stuffing his uniform with a sausage and his lungs with smoke.

All units had to be as close to 100% as possible with personnel before deploying overseas. The Army Reserve had to take soldiers from some units and reassign them, or "cross-level" the Force. When these first mobilizations took place, volunteers for different Military Occupational Specialties (MOS's) were requested. But if an outfit was required to provide, for example, five carpenters, the cream of the crop wasn't offered. Who would you send from your team except those with attendance and attitude problems? That's right—soldiers with borderline personality disorders, the patriotic, those who hated their civilian jobs, and a few with warrants volunteered. The balance were the unlucky, the malingerers, and those who didn't play well with others. Tony and I got caught up in the sweep of the latter group. One third of the 169th Engineers soldiers were cross-leveled, from thirty different states, a cross section of America. Losing military units became shells of their former selves, broken irretrievably. They were combined with others or merely folded up their flags, disbanded and forgotten. Being cross-leveled meant you had no ties to the community, with no allegiance to the gaining outfit, so we became more like free agents on a one-year contract. After the deployment, you'd never see these people again. Conversely, the two-thirds who called Iowa home found temporary compatriots to their own schemes. Lawlessness, in a lawless country, came pretty easily to us.

Soldiers in the 169th were untested, and our battalion was one of the first out of the Army Reserve gate toward the dangerous unknown, or as it is called, “downrange.” Downrange was where the bullets flew. At non-automated small arms ranges, soldiers would have to walk forward to score their paper targets. When the line was clear, shooters would walk downrange, in front of the weapons. It was always an exciting feeling. The other side of the world was eerie, dangerous, where there would be live ammunition. Thus the phrase “being downrange.”

If we were scared or even apprehensive, as soldiers we didn’t say it. It was important to be tough, or appear to be, and stay silent. Nervousness wouldn’t help the loves back home. Everything was always “fine” and we complained about something else when at the outdoor phone banks connecting us to parents, kids, wives/husbands, and friends—like how bad the food was. S.O.S. is still shit on a shingle since World War Two.

The Army always gives you a four-day pass just before shipping you off to war. Everybody cries at the airport. My wife saluted me, her face beet red, before I had to turn to walk down the concourse. She held our daughter, almost three. The baby could feel the sadness, too. After a few steps I stopped to grab my handkerchief and gain some composure. I shouldn’t have looked back. But I did. They were gone. That was the hardest part of the deployment. In only days I’d be flying over the Atlantic Ocean.

Post-mobilization training lasted for two months at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. By the end of May, we finally boarded the chartered 747. In the late afternoon as we were walking across the tarmac in Kuwait City, the 110-degree heat slapped us in the face, windy and dry. It sapped our strength continually, like facing an open blast furnace. Coming down the passenger stairs, our battalion of 500+ soldiers de-planed and crammed into buses with our personnel baggage. Curtains were drawn across the windows for physical security, and I prayed the air conditioning would put a dent in the constricting heat. Many bodies in a confined unventilated space makes the

temperature rise fast. The 12-hour flying time from Missouri to Prague to Kuwait City had left us exhausted and on edge. We were a sweaty, stinky mess.

You might ask, did our leaders have our backs? Did they have a plan? Well, our uniforms were woodland camouflage with black boots. The Army Reserve was dressed to kill in Germany against the Russians, not for a counter-insurgency in the deserts and cities of Iraq, where thousands of human beings had died violently in recent months. We were now going forward, not knowing at all when we might be coming home.

At this point I'd like to give the reader a chance to opt out of the book. This account may be too bold and raw for you, so you may want to quit reading. So I'll just answer the most basic question: "How did it feel to be at war in Iraq?" I want you to gather four things from around your home—a shovel, a roll of toilet paper, a flashlight, and some sort of weapon (firearm, steak knife, Louisville Slugger, pepper spray, etc.) Now, the next time you need to poop at night, I want you to gather these items, go out to your back yard and do your business. Try that for a year. The flashlight is actually dual purpose. In Iraq, you only poop in the daytime, as there are no lights inside Port-a-Potties. That's how it feels to be at war in Iraq. Everything is out of place when you go downrange.

...

The theater of operations was Southwest Asia. But to get to Iraq you had to go through Kuwait, the world's biggest ashtray.

Sergeants make stuff happen and officers plan and get in the way. The senior Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) for a company is the First Sergeant, who is responsible for everybody's ass. They do not cry at the airport. The sergeants conduct several head counts, then a by-name roll call, each time the unit leaves for a new destination.

First Sergeant Kringle was getting pissed off, the veins sticking out at his temple as he took another head count to ensure no soldier from the Headquarters' Company had wandered off like Private Snuffy, Chaplain Charlie, or Second Lieutenant Shit-for-Brains.

We boarded a line of buses that eventually swung through Kuwait International Airport's twenty-kilometer boundary, dropping our Heavy Combat Engineer Battalion personnel at Camp Wolf ten minutes later. We were in theater, time to "embrace the suck." We dragged ourselves into large tents that were empty save the plywood floors. But the air conditioning was cranked within closed flaps and the space was clean, as yet unused by thousands of transient American soldiers. We laid on our duffle bags and attempted to rest. Some tried to call home from the phone banks which charged \$5/minute to tell Sweetie you're OK, which I did. Ellen was elated I called, but my daughter didn't want to talk into the receiver. She still didn't get the concept of phones. Not talking to her tore me up. It still does, every opportunity lost, to this day.

The NCOs organized about fifty soldiers from the five companies making up the battalion to help offload the 2000 plus duffle bags and hundreds of M16 rifles from the belly of the plane. When they arrived back at Camp Wolf two hours later, every soldier had to claim four bags. Our equipment, uniforms, and personal clothing were stuffed to the gills in four duffle bags. The desert combat uniforms and desert boots were promised to be waiting overseas. It was the Army's property, but individually signed for. You lose it, you buy it. Going to the desert? The Army makes sure you have cold weather gear, just in case. Going to the frozen tundra of Green Bay? You'll have your mosquito netting. Who knew where the deployment roulette wheel could send you? "Don't worry, it'll be there in theater," the supply sergeants back at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri had said with a smile. I did not doubt we would be supplied soon, as logistics is one thing at which the United States Army is a master. Killing people and breaking things are two others. The US Military had won a series of tactical victories, but the plan on what to do next was probably written on a cocktail napkin.

Saddam Hussein certainly had chemical weapons and had used them before. He had murdered thousands of people with them. The fear was that he might have had nukes or dirty bombs. In hindsight, his capacity was misrepresented, the intelligence false. Now he was in hiding, someplace. Nuclear, biological, or chemical (NBC) were all weapons of mass destruction. They were stored somewhere, or buried. Nobody knew. We had chemical protective suits in large sealed bags that we took wherever we went. They took up half of a duffle bag or more. They included olive-drab thick charcoal-lined pants and top with boots and rubber gloves, a recipe for sweat. We'd need it to survive a chemical or biological attack. If the alarms sound and you can't get your green weight-reduction suit on fast enough, and you smell the sweet fragrance of fresh-cut grass or almonds even though you're in the desert, it is nerve agent, and you'll be dead in about fifteen seconds. Blister agent or choking agents like mustard gas or chlorine perfected in World War One were a lot scarier. You could be disabled for life, or drown as your lungs filled with fluid. If you lost your protective mask, an immediate and painful response from the chain of command ensued. The entire unit would stop what it was doing until the "sensitive item" was found, with written counseling and great embarrassment to follow.

Although extremely remote, the possibility of an attack was nevertheless real. But the truth was, you were far more likely to be exposed accidentally to deadly agents through the destruction of munitions and the whim of the breeze. The Pentagon eventually called this some sort of sickness, but I can't remember the name of it. I never liked to think about it, but I wonder how many soldiers became unofficially disabled. Try and submit that claim to the Veteran's Administration. There are great people helping our vets. And there are providers who can't be easily fired but should be, who prescribe opioids like candy and call it care. In the Army, as in the National Football League, everything is great until you get hurt; then everything changes, for the worse.

The movement to Camp Virginia, Kuwait started five hours after landing. It was evening now, the temperature dropping to a pleasant 80

degrees, the night sky bright and calm. Time for “you’re your buddy smile” as we crammed hip-to-hip onto more buses to take the battalion forty miles inland into the unmarked desert. Fencing along every highway appeared to have caught every plastic bag and all garbage that could blow in the wind. White and brown cigarette butts dotted the landscape everywhere. Sergeants soon placed coffee cans in designated smoking areas for ashtrays.

Everything looks like a road in the desert. Floodlights deceive your sense of distance. The line of flatbeds, buses, and admin vehicles serpented through the ECP and more tents, row upon row, were organized into quads. Thousands of soldiers were stationed there in transit. It was 2:00 a.m. by the time we arrived at Camp Virginia. Time to un-ass, claim your duffle bags again, and drag them into huge tents 100 feet long and 40 feet wide, with the AC blowing low. We plopped down anywhere, exhausted, and tried to sleep. The first order of business in the daylight was to sign for cots. There were plenty of clean Port-a-Potties, thankfully. Three hours later, with a mean headache, I was standing in line to get breakfast. It would take several more days to start feeling like a human being again. For the next two weeks the 169th would acclimate to the blowing grime, camel spiders, the rare scorpion, and getting used to 125-degree heat in the shade. Metal was so hot you had to wear gloves. Our black boots soaked up the sun until our feet felt like they were on fire.

Soon we found the Post Exchange (PX). Yet another line which took about an hour to get in the door. Imagine a small Walgreens with various sundry items like beef jerky, Tylenol, baby wipes, Pepsi, all the basic essentials. I bought a Hot Mamma pickle in a plastic pouch, along with some other stuff I probably didn’t need but felt it was wise to have. Having made my purchase, I munched on the pickle outside the PX. It was pretty spicy and I drank the juice it was in, just to be a tough guy in front of other soldiers. I was burning on the outside and now the inside. I’d would soon pay for that bravado.

The next day it was time to get our heavy junk from the port. From the Headquarters Company we had dozers, scrapers, twenty-ton dumps, dozens of Humvees, water distributors, steel wheel vibrators, dozens of forty-foot steel containers, tractors with their low boy trailers, and excavators. There were Magical Mobile Mixing Machines, graders, cranes, generators, air compressors, Vietnam vintage transport trucks general purpose (nicknamed Deuce – shortened from 2 ½ ton cargo), and laser levels. We received our maintenance shops, welders, ambulances, water buffaloes, sheepsfoots, asphalt distributors, and even night vision goggles. Included were carpenter, plumbing and electrical kits, along with tentage, camo netting and one mysterious box full of athletic gear, all waiting at the port of Al Zour.

I volunteered to go on the convoy mission, mostly to get off of Camp Virginia for the day, out of curiosity to see more of Kuwait's super highways and blowing garbage, and to help the Battalion Maintenance Officer, Captain Mike Sanchez, with getting our equipment back to Camp Virginia. The heavy junk (said with all affection) was already lined up in rows from ships coming out of the Gulf of Mexico. Other units were receiving equipment, too. Captain Sanchez got started accounting for our stuff when I doubled over. Sixty seconds to launch. I had a tremendous case of the bubble guts and the end was near.

“Hey, Kenny, you OK?” Mike asked.

“No! Is there a Port-a-Pottie around here?”

My future battle buddy, Sergeant First Class Hank Molina, asked me, “Are you sick?” I heard genuine concern in his voice. He put his hands on his knees to get closer to my screwed-up face. A battle buddy is another soldier you can confide anything to. Every soldier is required to have one. If you didn't have one, it meant you must be a first class idiot/asshole. That bastard Tony had a huge grin on his big, fat face. Hank asked again, “Are you OK?” “No! I ate a Hot Mamma pickle yesterday!” Twenty seconds to launch. That made our group of soldiers smile and chuckle at my gurgling

stomach. I moved out double quick once the first spasm subsided. It was 9:00 a.m. and already 100 degrees. I wanted to double over and walk but my damn rifle swung on my shoulders wildly. Around one corner, no Port-a-Potties, past another line of vehicles, nothing, and then, there! Shimmering like a mirage at a hundred yards out was a blue box. 10, 9, 8.... Crapping my drawers would have led to never-ending ridicule from the troops. There was even a roll of toilet paper! Sweat was dripping off my nose at two-second intervals inside this tiny oven. My M16 was in one corner of the box, Kevlar helmet and flak jacket in the other, barely room to move. After bolt cutters, baby wipes became another essential piece of equipment, never to go without on mission. I was learning.

Coming out, I felt a breeze, and had a completely different point of view, but was greatly surprised by a smell like that of burning tires. I hadn't noticed the oil refinery, under whose shadow the Army's equipment yard fell. It belched toxins unrestrained. I guess I was focused on other things. But I felt great! Next, I found my comrades to see how I could assist the organization of the convoy serials. I pledged to never again eat a Hot Mama Pickle or try to be a tough guy.

It took hours to get the go ahead to leave the port. Captain Sanchez passed out a strip map he'd gotten from Movement Control. No scale, no compass directions, no landmarks; just some road names and approximate distances. It was almost worthless, basically crap. Mike took me to one side and said, "Kenny, I need you to take the last serial in the convoy." This was not good. A convoy is divided into manageable segments or serials, usually not more than 15 vehicles each. Being in charge of the last serial meant that I was responsible to pick up soldiers stranded beside anything that broke down. And oh, by the way, the vehicles had been aboard a ship for a month and not maintained. It meant that we would be by ourselves if we had to tow a vehicle, and with a 100% chance of that happening.

"Sure, man. You got it. What vehicles am I going to have?"

“I’ll get back to you. Give me fifteen minutes,” Mike said.

He, like me, was to lose about 30 pounds over the next year, as we were running our asses off. By the stifling autumn of Iraq 2003, he was promoted to Major. I had to pass two more years after my first deployment before being advanced from Captain.

Mike gave me a little fist bump before he ran off. I didn’t see him again until the next day. Hours melted into early evening. Poor Captain Sanchez was running to arrange chaos into some semblance of order. I didn’t know when we were supposed to leave. More hours passed. Finally, the tractor trailers started to pull and their gooseneck pintles snapped obediently into place. The serials lurched forward, about 15 vehicles each. Behind the three main serials I had the rear with two wreckers and some Humvees. We crept towards the inevitable, not showing our apprehension, not even to teammates.

Radio communication was sketchy. We had Motorolas with usually pretty fair range, maybe ten miles over flat terrain. I followed out, hearing the chatter between Headquarters personnel, but immediately a Deuce (military cargo truck) broke down. Beloved by the Army, venerable in service, and now a piece of shit, it was only 100 meters outside the gate, its brakes locked up. The mechanics got it going in about 20 minutes. A young soldier gave me the thumbs up when she was done. We could roll again.

“Great,” I thought, “just enough time to completely lose contact with the rest of the convoy.” We’d already struck out. My radio went dead. The sun was beginning to set. We had eight or nine vehicles in the trail party. The strip map that Movement Control published wasn’t to scale and looked like my three-year-old had drawn it. I held it in my lap, using the Humvee’s odometer to try and navigate. Less than ten miles in, we found a broken down Humvee near another which had pulled over to help. After the mechanics set up the wrecker we were moving again. More vehicles, more soldiers. Luckily, I found the Kuwait Air Force Base of Ali Al Salem, the last point of civilization prior to driving into the desert. I asked for directions to

Camp Virginia. The Kuwaiti Airman spoke some English and followed with wild arm movements, both of which left me baffled.

Now was the worst part, trying to navigate in the desert without comms (communications), maps, or proper signage. It had been about three hours since we left the gate at the port of Al Zour, having traveled some 50 miles. I saw lights in the distance and we drove towards them, but the tracks in the desert kept crisscrossing over each other. I couldn't find the Entry Control Point. We were lost. The soldiers were getting plenty nervous, as was I. Then that same Deuce got mired in soft sand. I decided to leave most of the element there, and proceeded with just two Humvees. I had to find the gate! Soon we were running parallel to the camp perimeter. The berm surrounding it was a dozen feet high with guard towers higher still, placed every 200 meters—probably unmanned, but who knew? Friendly fire was a remote yet still frightening possibility. Keeping the berm 100 meters to our left, we continued to search. Was this installation even Camp Virginia? Another hour had gone by and it was almost midnight now. Eighty degrees started feeling cold against our sweat-soaked green woodland uniforms. We slowed down. Then we noticed small plate-sized discs scattered around us. I told my driver to stop and got out, seeing what I thought was an arming switch on the tops of these discs. Surface laid anti-personnel mines? I had my doubts. My young driver was completely unnerved and refused to move the Humvee. Another soldier suggested we abandon the vehicles and strike out on foot. I guessed that Camp Virginia could be more than a dozen miles all around or more. We backed the vehicles out slowly and turned around. It seemed like another hour went by before we returned to where the Deuce had mired, but no one was there. Now we were truly alone, with no communications.

But then I saw light! We sped toward it. The Entry Control Point was lit up like a vast welcome sign, a quarter of a mile long with serpentine between fighting positions, speed bumps, and floodlights. At the end of it, now "inside the wire," Major Posey and Major Perez sprung out of the last

guard shack, slapping us on the backs like prodigal sons and daughters. We were the last in. All accounted for. Mission complete.

Later, I was able to piece together from Camp Virginia's Major Cell that the discs we had seen were probably the storage canister tops from artillery rounds. So much for taking your dunnage/garbage with you so the enemy doesn't know what you were doing or how much equipment and personnel you have. After the previous night, perhaps I shouldn't have been too critical of others' soldiering. I felt pretty sheepish about getting lost. And by the way, those guard towers were manned, but probably at only 25%.

A few days later, around sundown, the sky turned an eerie orange hue. A black wall of cloud was approaching from the west, although the air was calm, not moving at all. I almost bumped into Tony en route to the Port-a-Potties. Pointing to the horizon, I asked, "Is that a sand storm?" He responded, "Dust storm. It's a lot closer than you think. Better hurry and find your goggles. Probably last all night and into tomorrow. This is going to get nasty."

A dust storm spreads a fine talc of whatever has rotted on the desert floor. It moves at a constant 40+ miles per hour. It gets into everything and can last for days. When it hit us, I looked over to a small rise to see four young soldiers mooning the storm. Must have been Iowa boys the way they were screaming and hooting, baring their backsides. Normal soldiers secure ever flap, every possible opening and get into the tent. They're not going anywhere for a while. If you have to use the latrine, you retrieve the humongous goggles in the bottom of one of your duffle bags and wrap a bandana over your face. But the grit always gets beneath your clothes, the filthiness taking days to shake out. Better to stay put and swap stories with your battle buddy unless you absolutely have to venture out.

The previous combat operations in Kuwait had been wildly successful. The next phase of the strategic plan, Stability Operations, was set to begin. Lieutenant General Franks retired about then after conducting a brilliant

operational campaign. I guess no one really had a plan after that. If it had been written upon a cocktail napkin, it hadn't been published. The "Mission Accomplished" banner displayed on the aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln should have been shoved up some White House staffer's ass. All the self-congratulatory mutual approbation wasn't going to stop the first Combat Heavy Engineer Battalion crossing the berm into Iraq. We knew what to do. We had the Commander's intent: Go build stuff.

I was in the Tactical Operations Center (TOC – pronounced "talk") when I had the opportunity to use a satellite phone to call my wife. Usually, a leader will deny him or herself a luxury not afforded to all, but I still placed the call. Ellen was beside herself, relieved, crying. "This is the best birthday present I've ever gotten!" It was her birthday? I had lost track of the date. But I went with it, saying that of course I'd call her to say I was all right. Very few had called home from Camp Virginia, as AT&T still hadn't made it out into the desert.

Terror in theater exists on many corners. But nothing compares to losing positive control of your weapon. Captain Sanchez and I got a ride to the community center of Camp Virginia after duty hours around twilight. As we got dropped off I turned to grab my rifle, when suddenly the driver revved up. I ran after the vehicle yelling, but lost the Humvee when it turned and turned again. My buddy was gone, too. I was among dozens of other Humvees that all looked the same. This one was from another unit. Career-ending panic rushed over me, as I scurried to find my rifle. They could shut down the entire camp. Seventeen years of service down the tubes. I was sweating despite the cool of the impending night. Then I shuddered, having lost my weapon.

"Nice going, Captain. What's wrong with you? I guess you don't really want to be in the Army!" I imagined the faceless Colonel who ran Camp Virginia sneering. I flung open more than ten vinyl doors. I was shaking like a dog pooping razor blades. Finally, I found it. In the dim light I confirmed the serial number with my little flashlight. Thank you, Jesus! I chain smoked a few butts.

...

Captain Diana Berry had a big decision to make. She was the Headquarters Company Commander and I was her Executive Officer (XO). Without Diana, I'd be in charge. And nobody wanted that, especially me. I'd just completed a three-year hitch in Command and couldn't imagine taking on her job. One of her NCOs—a supply sergeant—had gone on a hunger strike. I pleaded with the sergeant to take care of herself, but it was to no avail. Her lack of a family care plan before we deployed became a huge deal, as she tried to claim that she had no one to take care of her two kids. This woman was out there. Maybe bi-polar. Hell, I don't know, but the open rumor was that she'd knock boots with any willing fella. Her steady boyfriend in Fort Leonard Wood was a married man. We lived in a fish bowl, so everybody knew everybody else's business.

As the XO, I had conducted an inventory of all equipment while still at the mobilization station, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. I found out she couldn't account for a \$15,000 pair of night vision goggles. The promiscuous soldier, who refused to eat when we got to Kuwait, was the full time supply sergeant, and I thought she was going to lose her mind. Captain Berry knew a colonel who was able to grease that issue over. But in the Kuwaiti desert, my sympathy with this recalcitrant soldier was at an end. I recommended to Diana that we take her north.

"She's just going to be a bigger pain in the ass if we take her."

"Yeah, but then everybody will know they can get over on us," I argued.

She shook her head violently, "Oh, no they won't. Not on me." We stared at each other. "Look, Captain Dupar, I've got a chance to kick her ass out right now. She's been a pimple on my butt for years. You just joined us; you don't know."

At first blush it might seem that promiscuity would increase morale. It doesn't. This Sergeant would have continued to play "Queen for a Year," preying on the lonesomeness and stupidity of male soldiers throughout the deployment. A few times you'd see a female soldier revel in the unabashed attention given to her. Maybe she wasn't the prettiest girl on the block. I observed both genders trying to fill a perceived need, recklessly grasping another body. Sometimes this can become completely destructive. Men taking advantage. Girls just as horny as the guys. Diana sent the supply sergeant home. So, they both got what they wanted.

Just before we departed Camp Virginia each soldier in the battalion received two pairs of desert camouflage boots, trousers, blouses, and several T-shirts. The first stop was the tailor's shop to get our name tapes and rank sewn on our shirts, helmet covers, caps, and boonie hats. The Vietnam era flak jackets were still the woodland pattern. In about six months we'd be resupplied with more uniforms, and receive actual body armor with Kevlar plates.

A rumor started that civilians were throwing children under the tires of military vehicles moving north in order to hinder movement. I didn't know if it was true or not.

"I can't do it, Sir. I'll swerve or stop if I have to." One soldier told me just prior to departure.

"Bullshit!" Several soldiers were listening to me, "A convoy is like a freight train. It don't stop 'til we get where we're going." Pause. "Maintain your speed and following distance, always. And if some asshole shoves a kid under your tires, who killed him? Them or you?" Enough said.

The same idiot who sketched the route from the port Al Zour to Camp Virginia drew the strip map into Iraq—barely a squiggly line showing the 400 plus miles to our objective, Baghdad International Airport (BIAP – pronounced Bi-op). We had military maps and good comms for the tactical

convoy. The NCOs and officers organized and rehearsed. We began staging the serials at 2:00 a.m. Start point (SP) was at 5:00 a.m., and the advance party moved out smartly to prepare a new home for the rest of the gang. I made sure I was in the advance party. The rest of the battalion would follow two days later. We were acclimated enough from two weeks' time in the World's Biggest Ashtray. It was time to cross the berm into Iraq.