Let's have a war| A punk perspective on Operation Desert Storm and other tales of nihilistic horrors

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LET'S HAVE A WAR
A Punk Perspective on Operation Desert Storm and
Other Tales of Nihilistic Horrors

by

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Let's have a war--so you can go die.
Let's have a war--we could all use the break.
Let's have a war--we need the space.
Let's have a war--clean out this place.

It already--started--in the city. I'll be goddamned--eat me.

Let's have a war--jack-up the Dow Jones.
Let's have a war--we could start in New Jersey.
Let's have a war--blame it on the middle class.
Let's have a war--we're like rats in our cage.

Let's have a war--sell the rights to the networks.
Let's have a war--never once get fat like last time.
Let's have a war--give guns to the queers.
Let's have a war--the enemy's within.

--Fear, "Let's Have a War"
nihilism 1 a : a viewpoint that traditional values and beliefs are unfounded and that existence is senseless and useless b: a doctrine that denies any objective ground of truth and esp. moral truths 2 a : a doctrine or belief that conditions in the social organization are so bad as to make destruction desirable for its own sake independent of any constructive program or possibility.

—Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary

Or, as the punk rockers would say, ever so eloquently: fuck you. My tale of the Persian Gulf War is not the Audie Murphy story. It does not make reference to Gary Cooper, Ronald Reagan, or John fucking Wayne. Refreshingly, (I think) it is a politically incorrect attempt to explain what it's like to war. So the reader can more fully relate to the story, I have used rock as the background to the narrative. Not the Acid Rock of the Vietnam era or the sensitive rock that followed, but that most foul and disgusting form of rock—punk rock. It's motto: "Life sucks, so let's party while we can, man."

And, to me, punk is the perfect "religion" for the professional soldier. Besides the obvious shared characteristics: the predilection for violence, the consumption of great quantities of alcohol, an irrational sexual appetite, and the general live for today attitude, both share many physical characteristics. The bloused combat boots, tattoos, shaved heads, and, my favorite, the Mohawk.
I first read about the Mohawk haircut in a story about the paratroopers who jumped into Normandy in 1944. Many of the troopers of the 82nd and 101st Airborne (both of which participated in the Gulf War) had their heads shaved in the Mohawks of that distinguished Native American tribe. Could it be that WWII paratroopers were the first punk rockers? Come to think of it, the paratroopers were the first to blouse their boots, too.

Even the punker's slam dancing (undisputedly the world's most violent dance form) seems appropriate for today's Nintendo soldiers. When I attended the Special Forces Qualification Course for medic, our class contained a number of Mohawked-headed Airborne Rangers from Ft. Lewis who found great amusement in going to punk rock bars in Seattle and slam dancing with military issue flak jackets.

"Hey, guys. Let's go down to such and such and go slam dancing and get beat up."

On a personal level, I can appreciate the punk mentality for its rejection of American values. This seems appropriate in this era of the decline of Empire America and it says, quite emphatically: the American Dream sucks. It's the dream of a sick and depraved people; a people that thinks nothing of destroying that which is beautiful for Christian capitalism, for the corporate bottomline, for the Marlboro Man. Our obsession with money, with maintaining
our standard of living, with "growth" is such a powerful force that we refuse to recognize it as anything but a positive. As Ed Abbey, an individual truly in touch with the American dream, once said: "Growth for the sake of growth is the ideology of the cancer cell." And we're not just looking down the gun barrel into the shiny bore, we are inside the bore wondering where it goes and, being the impatient people that we are, how long will it take us to get there?

Americans like to think that they are civilized, that they are civil, that they are civilizers. And, Americans simply must share their disease, their desire to inflict their standards, morals, and wants on the rest of the world. Do you know that it's virtually impossible to travel anywhere on planet earth without seeing some sign, sometimes ever so faintly, of America and Americans--the crushed Coke can, Joe Camel, the Golden fucking Arches.

And what really saddens me, no, what pisses me the fuck off, is the fact that we are a nation of feckless airheads and yet we're the envy of the rest of the world! What a pitiful comment on the status of our species. I have concluded that Americanism is the most insidious ideology in all of recorded history and that it is so ingrained into humanity that there is no longer any hope. It's a goddamn virus that's infected every wretched soul on this planet and
will probably eradicate our species long before malaria, TB, or AIDS.

But alas, it is probably for the best. Maybe we, as a species, don't deserve to survive. Maybe the best that we can do is to continue to do what we do until we destroy ourselves—either through cancer, pollution, or, that favorite of history's most inspired despots: war. So . . . let's have a war . . .
FT. BRAGG:
Clank, Clank, I'm a Tank

I'm a product of my environment, my vocabularies like licking the gutter.

--Circle Jerks, “Product of My Environment”

"Hey, man, it'll be fun--war is the ultimate high."

--Advice from a Viet Nam chopper pilot on being activated for the Gulf War.

A few days after Iraq's imaginative, but nevertheless unwise decision to invade Kuwait, I found myself prostrate on a hand-me-down Nauga-hide couch, recovering from a nasty bout of alcoholic flu, when that goddamn, fucking telephone started its evil reverberation. It was ARPERCEN, the Army Reserve Personnel Center in St. Louis and the conversation went something like this:

"Hey, Mike Jarnevic, this is Sergeant Socie with ARPERCEN, guess what?"

"Ah . . . could it have anything to do with headline news?"

"What a sharp guy. You're an 18 Delta, a Special Forces medic, right?"

"I haven't been a medic in several years, but I do hold that MOS (Military Occupational Specialty), yes."
"Well, bud, you’re on a list with 27 other reserve SF medics that have been requested by 5th Special Forces Group."

"Yea, what does that mean?"

"Nothing yet, they just wanted the list."

"I'm elated. Anything else?"

"Nah, we'll keep you informed. Have a day." CLICK.

"Oh, boy. Here we go," I thought out loud. This was a phone call that was not entirely unexpected. SF qualified medics are a rare commodity in the special operations community and when something goes down, the medics are often abducted from other organizations to fill needed positions. And 5th Group, which was oriented toward the Middle East and did frequent training in such wonderful places as Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon, wanted me to help out.

Over the next six months I badgered ARPERCEN about the call-up to 5th Group, but they were ambiguous about my status. Then on the 17th of January, they called, telling me to "pack my shit" and be ready to report by the 23rd. They didn't even tell me the war had started. As soon as I dropped the phone back into the cradle, it rang again and it was George, a friend of mine.

"Hey, man, the balloon just went up."

"Fuck! I know! They just called me!"

I bolted over to the radio to catch the news, but they were still playing the regular programming, a children's
hour, on public radio. But after about five minutes, the news came on with:

"Just a short time ago, coalition forces commenced an air assault on Iraq and Kuwait. Operation Desert Shield has now become Operation Desert Storm."

For the third time in my military career, I found myself, an American, bound for an overseas destination, like, a combat zone, defending an ideal that I did not truly believe in. (But hey, the money's good--tax free, free lunch, diplomatic carte blanche, etc. What can I say--I'm a mercenary.)

Prior to the air offensive, I had attended a peace rally at the university and I had to admit that I couldn't see a true justification for American intervention--least ways in the quantities that we were sending. Deployment of half a million troops was reminiscent of the war in Viet Nam and look where that got us. The liberal battle cry of "No blood for oil" sounded to me a fairly realistic appraisal of the situation. Still, in many ways, I wanted to go. While my allegiance to the American Dream was certainly questionable--"America is a parasitic infestation ravaging planet earth," says the self-quote on my refrigerator--my loyalty to my fellow SF troopers was still strong and I knew they would be hurting for qualified medics. This would be especially true if it became a protracted war with high casualties. Thus, I was torn as to the right thing to do.
Of course, with the advent of Desert Storm, the government made the decision for me. The next few days were a mad scramble to get things in some sort of order.

"Let's see, I need to make arrangements with: my wife (separated), my girlfriend (confused), my landlord (baffled), the university (sympathetic?), my cats (ignorant), the bank (sullen), creditors (demanding), etc."

And, I had to pack for an extended, and definitely indefinite period. (The orders read for 179 days, but this was later amended to 12 months.)

The airport scene was somewhat awkward, as both the wife and girlfriend were there to see me off, but I managed to get through it with only a small amount of trauma and angst. I felt like Roy Scheider in the movie All That Jazz where he is being wheeled down the hospital corridor to surgery. Scheider looks to his estranged wife and says:

"If I die, I'm sorry for all the things I did to you." He then turns his head to his girlfriend and says: "And if I live, I'm sorry for all the things I'm going to do to you."

The plane ride out to Ft. Bragg was the usual cram em' in, move em' out, crowded kind of joyless ride. Shit, why are Americans so structured and straight and God, can't this be an atypical flight with good food and unlimited wine and naked stewardesses? But, regrettably, the plastic food on the plastic tray seemed especially horrid and tasteless.
Thank goodness for the booze cart and a couple of leggy stewardesses. Alcohol and sex are such pleasant diversions when you desperately want to detach your mind from thoughts of impending doom.

"Oh, by the way, stewardess, I'm going off to war and it's going to be really scary, and I might get killed, maimed, or severely fucked and all that, so would you mind pulling up your skirt and sticking your taco in my face just for a few seconds so I can inhale that delicious smell through your pantyhose and then things will be all right again—OK?"

For some strange reason, (and, as I later learned, against orders) I had decided to wear my class A dress green uniform out to Bragg. Ever since the Vietnam Experience, wearing a uniform in public had made me feel conspicuous and vulnerable. Vietnam taught us that it was not cool to be in the military and wear the uniform of the despised. That notion still remained. Why I chose to wear it still escapes me. Was I hoping to somehow feel good again about my military involvement after the Vietnam War? Would wearing all my baubles and shiny jumpboots somehow make up for that twisted and wicked time 15 years before?

By the time I got off the plane in Fayetteville, I'd had one too many drinks, one too many bad meals, and was desperately in need of unconsciousness. A bunch of other reserve 18 Delta's were there, waiting, like me, for their
baggage. Some of them I knew from schools and from annual training; some of them I knew to be pricks. I was the only one in uniform and I was waiting for someone to say something about that but none did . . . which is good for I was in a really foul mood. Of course, conveniently, I was also an SFC, a Sergeant First Class, and I outranked them.

I was traveling with my normally heavy load: a pilot's helmet bag, a daypack, a flyer's kit bag stuffed absolutely full, and an old, OD green, wooden footlocker that I'd stolen from army Jumpmaster School years before. The footlocker was for valuable and fragile items--it was the only thing that I knew of that the airlines couldn't destroy without some effort. An old and trusted friend, I'd swiped it at Ft. McCoy, Wisconsin, in 1986, on my way down to the Contra War in Honduras. With reinforcement at crucial points, it had been modified to stand up to the rigors of the commercial airlines and our beloved Air Force. The inside of the lid had various appropriate pictures (one of the wife, one of the girlfriend), Monte Dolack postcards from Montana, and two woodscrews at either end to hold tiny speakers for a Sony Walkman--an item that is indispensable for foreign travel. The Walkman became my almost constant companion and would supply me with the music that seemed ever so appropriate for the activities we would be involved in for next few months.
After collecting up all our gear we were bussed out to some dilapidated WWII barracks at Bragg. These were the old, whitewashed buildings that were temporarily constructed for the Big One and were supposed to have been "deconstructed" after the war, but never were. Some, such as the ones at Ft. McCoy, still had coal-fired boilers. Military bases nationwide are full of these relics.

We were given a classified briefing on the upcoming deployment and, contrary to the normal unconventional mission that Special Forces soldiers are trained for, it was revealed that we would be assigned to coalition forces as advisors to direct CAS (Close Air Support), call in artillery strikes, and to prevent "fratricide," the killing of friendly forces. We would be attached to units such as the Kuwaiti Martyr Brigade, the Syrians, and other such "allies."

Battlefield casualties were predicted to be high: 1.) because this was to be a tank war (notorious for producing mucho KIA and WIA) and 2.) because desert warfare is equally notorious for grinding the country's "best and brightest" into unrecognizable detritus. Fighting in the desert shares many characteristics of fighting at sea: you can see for miles because there isn't anything to obstruct your vision (or cannon shells, bullets, or shrapnel for that matter), thus it is very easy to locate a target and merely drive to it and kill it. Added to this is the fact that there's
simply nowhere to hide and you have the potential for a truly grisly scenario.

It was an interesting lesson in physiology to watch my fellow medics as we were briefed on the expected war. You could see, with absolute clarity, the blood drain out of their faces as the picture became grimmer. No hope! as Fear would say.

By the end of the briefing and the initial inprocessing, we were allowed to unpack and settle into our new home. But instead of attending to our gear, many gathered into small groups and whispered to each other about our anxieties and fear. That's FEAR in caps; that's the fear of nightmares and the fear of expecting the worst and knowing that it might be your fate.

"Oh, sweet Jesus, don't let me get killed in any number of horrible bloody, burned, exploded, gassed, tortured ways and please, please, please don't let me lose an arm, a leg, an eye, a dick, and God I'll be good if you just get me through this terrible, stinking ordeal, please, please, please . . ." 

We had been assigned an active duty liaison NCO from Special Forces Command, our parent organization until we actually made it out to Saudi. This guy, Phil Carmona, a SFC like me, had been a reservist prior to coming on active duty and therefore was the ideal nursemaid for our little group. And, as a medic, he would be deploying to 5th Group
with us. Phil became our best hope for making it through what we expected to be the quintessential bloodbath.

Our first full day at Bragg was devoted to the madness that the military calls "inprocessing." This is a cleverly designed operation where you spend a tremendous amount of time getting very little accomplished. Probably 90% of this time is spent waiting to get waited on. Thus, you wait to get shots, you wait to get your pay processed through the system, you wait to get ID cards, etc. You wait, you wait... and because we were reservists, there were always questions about how things were to be handled. Special Forces Command had little idea how to organize, train, equip, and manage our group. We were all medics, so medical refresher was obviously central to our training, but even that took a long time to arrange.

Eventually, a training program came together and we were scheduled for instruction in various aspects of the coming battle. One of the first classes was in modern mine warfare and we spent an entire day on this quite relevant subject. Do you know that there are mines that actually have onboard computers that can control an entire field of mines and even tell certain ones to explode while others remain intact? Yes, our culture has advanced to the level of producing silicon-based explosive devices that might even
be smarter than we are—further testimony to the fate of our species.

We were shown plastic mines, wooden mines, mines that contained mustard or nerve gas, mines that looked liked children's toys or something other than what they really were. We were shown color slides of mine casualties and the tactical employment of mines to channel forces into a certain area. This was another of those pre-deployment events that I know set a lot of our people thinking about possibilities—possibly losing a leg, possibly being vaporized by an object that "thinks" about how it is going to kill you.

Every morning, Phil led us in PT (Physical Training) with various calisthenics and runs with our rifles and the LBE (Load Bearing Equipment) which is a harness system that contains your ammo, canteens, fighting knife, pistol, etc. Running with all this stuff and holding your rifle in front of you is not very enjoyable, but considered necessary. At least we weren't running with boots, which I knew from past experience produced millions of fucked-up feet.

The training was conducted before dawn with the runs going anywhere from 2-4 miles. 28 guys running in formation, in the dark, with an M-16 at port arms would be a surreal experience except that you sing and scream and act "hooah" which destroys the effect. Still, the morning
ritual run gave you a feeling of power and accomplishment and was probably beneficial to both the mind and the body. On these runs, I often thought: what's the sense of getting your body into shape so you can go out and get it destroyed? I had visions of the muscles in my arms or legs laid open like so many deer I'd shot. I'd look at the tendons moving underneath the skin and would think: "I wonder what it looks like in there?" Well, as a medic, I knew—damn good and well—what it looked like under there. Of course, seeing your own arm laid open like some frozen chicken is not quite the same.

The next few weeks were taken up with whatever training could be arranged and max slack time. Because the training schedule was erratic we were given lots of time off and I took advantage of this by renting a car and getting as far from Ft. Fucking Bragg and the military as I could. (This is difficult on the east coast for it seems as if the military is everywhere there.) One of my favorite places to go was Weymouth Woods, a tiny wildlife preserve on the west side of Bragg. It supposedly was the last piece of undeveloped sandhill country in North Carolina and while small, offered the facade of wilderness that I so dreamed about back in my home state of Montana.

Hikes at Weymouth Woods were not only therapeutic, but reinforced my reasons for living in a rural setting and
attempting to divorce myself from "society" and "culture". I had long ago lost any sort of patriotism, in the classical sense, for god, country, and corps. Viet Nam showed us the darkest side of the American psyche, not only in the wholesale destruction of a country and its people, but of the destruction of its own--of native sons and daughters. I had come to see Americanism as an evil--perhaps even the ultimate evil.

While we as a people have many desirable traits, i.e., the melting pot of the world and certainly more freedom than any place else on the planet, I also see America as the supreme influence, an influence so powerful than it can drastically alter, and in some cases, almost completely remove any indigenous aspects of a culture. If you travel this planet extensively, as I have, you will note, with monotonous regularity, that you are never very far from the American dream. Thus, you can climb to the most remote areas of the planet, to genuine wilderness, and there it is: a cigarette butt with the words Marlboro on the side.

The guy in the bunk above me in our barracks was a postal employee from Amarillo by the name of Ben Bitonel, also an SFC. Ben was Mexican-American and a cowboy-type who would often complain that the central problem (in almost any given situation) was that there wasn't enough Tex-Mex music.
(How about Tex-Mex punk. Actually there is a Mexican punk rock band called The Plugz. Isn't that amazing?)

Ben became my friend and we would confide in each other about the upcoming deployment and the fact that it appeared that we would now become Special Forces tankheads. We both agreed that the thought of being inside one of those steel pigs was pretty fucking scary, and that we hadn't been trained for armored operations, and that the whole notion generally sucked.

So it was with some reluctance that we got on a bus, one morning, and rode out to a North Carolina National Guard tank unit for some hands-on training with those big, destructive toys. We were to be checked out on the Bradley fighting vehicle, the M-1 Abrahms main battle tank, and some of the older stuff—the M-60 tank and the M-113 armored personnel carrier or APC. They actually let us drive these things which was educational and pointed out just how vulnerable these creatures were and how you didn't really want to be in one. For instance, when driving the Abrahms, I found that if you had to get out of it fast and the main gun was over your hatch, the only way out was through the back and up and out of the turret.

"How'd you like to be on fire with your balls smoldering, shit flying around, people screaeming, and you can't get out of this mother-fucking dinosaur, Jack? And
when you do get out some goddamn huge machine gun is going to smoke your ass and pulverize you into taco meat."

The big pigs were fun to drive though. In the Abrahms, you sat on your back, head upright with your torso tilted slightly forward and controlled the tank with handgrips like on a motorcycle, only closer together. The beast would flat move and it was kind of like racing in an extremely fast bulldozer with no blade.

Some corpulent, old guardsman Staff Sergeant had me sit in the gunner's seat while he traversed the turret. As I watched through the optics, I happened to look down and notice that my left jungle-booted foot was in a small recess that was growing ever smaller as the turret rotated clockwise.

"Holy fuck!" I screamed. "I nearly lost my foot!" He grinned a moronic grin and said,"Y'all have to watch yourself in these here things."

One of the last blocks of training before the medical refresher was on the Stinger missile and calling in artillery strikes. These were held in adjoining facilities and we did one on one day and the other on another. The Stinger, which was a shoulder-fired ground to air missile system was, of course, designed to bring down enemy aircraft . . . or our aircraft if you were uncoordinated or unlucky. It was somewhat complicated to use, but once you gained the
skills needed it would kill an airplane or helicopter with a percentage in the high 90's.

The Stinger training facility was a building with a large half-dome on one side that projected a landscape with a skyline. Across this, computer generated aircraft would fly laterally and you would attempt to acquire the target, lock on it, and then fire. If you did this properly the simulated target would explode on screen with the appropriate sound effects and disappear. If you screwed-up, it would emit a loud beeping noise, a noise similar to one you'd hear on a telephone, and let everyone know that you were a dink. (In SF, this is probably the most painful of fears--not participating in a dangerous act, not almost getting killed, but making a mistake in front of your peers and being typed as being an incompetent bumble-fuck.)

After practicing a few times with two different models, it became relatively easy to hit stuff and then it became entertainment, sort of like an extremely sophisticated (and expensive) video game.

"Hey, this would be a great bar game!" someone shouted.

"Yea, especially trying to do it fucked up."

I liked that. Playing a multimillion dollar video game designed to simulate shooting down multimillion dollar airplanes, while intoxicated, could definitely appeal to the punker mentality.
"It's too bad that we're limited just to airplanes and helicopters," I suggested. "I'd like to be able to shoot at stuff on the ground, too. Like farm animals, buses, and police cars. Maybe even some stationary targets like the Chamber of Commerce or Wal-Mart." The possibilities seemed unlimited.

The artillery simulator was similar in design to the Stinger facility, but was projected on a less sophisticated flat screen. With this game you would plot coordinates for a target on a map and then simulate talking on a radio to relay those coordinates for a fire mission. When these coordinates were run through the computer it would then show where your artillery fire would land in relation to the target on the screen. These would appear as white explosions and you would then adjust fire to be dead center on target and then "fire for effect" or cut loose with everything to obliterate the target. Also amusing, but this one required extremely precise map reading which can be a pain sometimes—especially when the pucker factor is high, like under fire.

That night, I talked to my mom who essentially wailed into the phone about trying to cope with my grandmother dying of cancer and me going to Saudi Arabia. It was unusual to hear and difficult to take for my mother had always been a very strong willed, independent person who never showed much emotion. Now, every time I talked to her
on the phone she wept and that certainly wasn't doing my morale much good.

I decided that the best thing to do was to limit the amount of time spent on the phone with her and concentrate on more important things, like learning how to kill more efficiently and to practicing my secondary job of medic. The latter now became an issue, as we had finally reached that time when we could do the refresher "thing" at the US Army Special Operations Medical Laboratory, known as goatlab—the place with the evil reputation, and an even more evil stench.
GOATLAB:
Kill Your Billy For Jesus

"I am a doctor,
I know what you need
A pelvic sort of examination
They'll be no pain
No pain
No pain
No pain
No pain
No pain
No hope
No hope
No hope
Let's make love"

--Fear, "I am a Doctor"

"This is where they come in by the door
and go out by the chimney."

--Anonymous joke by the SS at Auschwitz

Returning to medlab or as it is affectionately called by SF medics, "goatlab," was a strange and powerful experience indeed. I can only compare it to the Jews who returned to Auschwitz after the war--it's that kind of place.

I had attended the Special Forces Qualification Course (the "Q" course) for medic back in 1982-83, which, at the
time, was a series of six schools not including Airborne Training. The medic portion of the course was divided into four schools: Basic Aidman, the SF Aidman Course 300 F1 (a preparatory course), OJT at a hospital, and then goatlab. Goatlab, the final phase, was an 8 week, extremely intensive program that brought all of the medical knowledge, training, and skills together and applied it to live "patients."
These patients were, aber natürlich, domesticated goats. The average workday was about 20 hours and ran 7 days a week for two months. To say that it was a ball-buster is like calling Marlon Brando, AKA Colonel Kurtz, "big." (To add credence to this, all the Rangers in our class said it was worse than Ranger School, which is generally considered to be the hardest course in the army, almost as bad as navy SEAL school.)

SF medical students were assigned at least one patient (I got two) and were expected to perform as substitute doctors, dentists, veterinarians, lab techs, nurses, etc. They were required to diagnose, treat, and document all aspects of their patient's condition.

And they will have conditions, that's for sure. They will be shot, stabbed, burned, eviscerated, amputated, suffocated, poisoned, and broken in any number of ways. Their ultimate fate will be death. Hopefully, death will come at the end of the course because if your patient dies before that time, you flunk. "The horror. The horror."
Watching the coverage of the 50th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, I could not help but contrast the two. Goatlab was sort of like the section of Auschwitz where experiments were conducted by Dr. Mengele, except in this case it was a company of dangerously trained little "Mengeles" with approximately the same powers of life and death.

"So, Sergeant Mengele, what is the status of your patient? Perhaps he needs 'special treatment,' yes? Perhaps we should administer some medicinal trauma, yes?"

I saw the instrument for inflicting "trauma" on several occasions--it was a hefty, single-bitted ax inscribed with the words "Treat me gentle" on the handle. I watched, with some trepidation, and total fascination, while an instructor chopped the forward half of the muzzle clean off a goat with one vicious swing. It lay there quivering and bleeding while a collective cry went up from those standing nearby. "Damn!" we groaned in unison. This was followed by nervous laughter, while the instructor, Staff Sergeant Van Slambrook (known as Slammer) grinned slyly and yelled "Medic!" At which point someone from our group would come running from around the corner of a building and attempt to treat the victim. The goats were always at a place where you couldn't see what was being done to them and therefore wouldn't know what to expect. One time I responded to "Medic!" and ran around the building to be squirted in the face with a
five-foot long stream of blood from the mesentery artery in the abdominal cavity. The goat's guts lay in a pile by his/her side and with every heartbeat, this gusher of blood watered my fatigues and the surrounding grass.

That particular goat died. It bled to death while I was trying desperately to complete the primary survey and I just couldn't get the goddamn bleeder to stop bleeding.

At Auschwitz, there was a sign above the gate that proclaimed "Arbeit Mach Frei,"—work makes you free. Goatlab had no sign at all (for the army didn't want you to know about it) and work certainly didn't help the goats. All they were required to do was live, despite repeated attempts to administer "care," and then die at the appropriate time, which was, hopefully, at the end of the course. (At one point, it was revealed that percentage wise, the goats statistically had a better chance with no patient care than they did with, which says something about medical care in general, I think.)

The bodies of the patients were disposed of, a la Auschwitz, by incineration in a large furnace which, like that place, had a long, metal pipe chimney belching large quantities of vile, black smoke. One time, after a mass casualty exercise where we had killed 20 or 30 goats, I was down at the PX and there were a couple of housewives wondering about the black soot raining down out of the sky.

"Oh, Liebchen, if you only knew. I have seen Dante's
inferno and it is a wretched place where in the name of science nightmares come true and I could take you there and show you, but first wouldn't you like to go somewhere secluded and conduct some medical experiments of our own?"

That first day back at goatlab was a queer experience indeed. Just being there was bad enough and we had to train there for several days. That morning, we received classes on the latest updates in trauma medicine--our specialty--and conducted training in (for me) that most feared of procedures: intravenous infusion.

Now, you must understand that while I have absolutely no trouble inflicting trauma (actually, I sort of enjoy it: "Hey, man, think of yourself as a training aid"), I don't like having trauma inflicted upon me. IVs are especially terrifying not only because the pain is extreme, but once they're in I have this almost uncontrollable urge to rip the needle out and run away--perfect when you are a battlefield casualty, right? There's just something about being plugged into a goddamned plastic bag with all those tubes and that huge coathanger diameter needle that feels like, well, having a coathanger in you.

(When I was in the Q course, I had to endure around 30 or 40 attempts at starting big-bore IVs by my fellow medics-in-training and it was not a pleasant experience. I remember one incident, in detail, when we were doing a
combat casualty exercise and I was the "victim." Because I was supposed to be unconscious with a simulated mouth injury, I was rolled onto my stomach to prevent choking from blood drainage. Therefore, veins different than the ones normally used in the front of the arm were the only ones accessible. The student medic was Steve Trijillio, a Ranger who later won the Silver Star in Grenada. Now I don't know if Steve was having a bad day from the stress of the exercise or the odd angle of the veins confused him, but he tried five times to stick a 14 gauge catheter into both of my basilic veins without success. On the fifth try he must have punctured the vein clear through and actually hit the bone just below it. I suddenly and miraculously regained "consciousness" and popped off the ground.

"Hey, you're supposed to be unconscious," said our instructor. "Yea, right," I thought,"Let me stick one of these coathanger motherfuckers in your left ulna bone and see what you do.")

That afternoon, we moved into the hands-on training, in what the army calls a "round robin," where there are a series of stations set up to train you in particular techniques. There were stations for triage, CPR, Advanced Cardiac Life Support, and of course IVs. Ben and I paired off for the IV section and I proceeded to set up and start an IV in his arm without much trouble. (Actually, I'm pretty good at finding veins and it was one of my stronger
Q course—*I like inflicting trauma*). I wanted to start one on him first because I knew I'd be shocky and incoherent after mine. I hadn't had an IV in me since my last time at goatlab and I just knew I was going to throw up, pass out, or whatever. As I said before, I don't handle pain very well.

And, of course, Ben had trouble hitting my vein. (Sometimes they roll away from the needle, sometimes you go clear through, sometime you hit an artery instead of a vein or, even worse, mistake a tendon for a vein.) Ben probed and experimented, cursed and cajoled, but couldn't come up with a patent stick. All the while I'm writhing in pain, stomping my feet and fighting blackout.

Our instructor asked "Hey, you look a little pale, are you OK?"

"No, I am not FUCKING OK, you bilious, little dickheaded, jive-ass son of a bitch."

By then, a small—no make that a large—pool of blood had accumulated on the paper towels under my arm and I was very close to becoming unconscious and falling over. This is always a joy, especially when you have a large diameter needle in your arm. Finally, oh finally, Ben got the thing started and the instructor thought it would be a good idea to leave it in for a while, open full bore, to "bring my color back." How considerate. I was fortunate in that this was the final training for the day so I would have time
off to recover. And, it appeared that this was the one and
only IV stick we would do on each other.

The next day was taken up with reintroduction to the
anatomy and physiology of the capron, the technical name for
the goat, and how they react to trauma, severe trauma, and
terminal trauma. This was a topic that I knew intimately,
for the memories of goatlab in 1983 were still very fresh in
my mind. Back then, I had been given two goats—a male and
a female—as patients, the first of which I named Rasputin
for the historical figure who was reputed to be extremely
hard to kill. Somehow, I hoped this would be lucky for me.

The second was Debbie IV, for a long string of
girlfriends named "Debbie" that culminated in this doomed
female goat, thus bringing some twisted closure to past
relationships with girls named Debbie, Debi, or Deborah.
(Oh, I forgot to add that while I was attending the Q
Course, my girlfriend's name was Debbie, also. That would
be Debbie III.)

My primary goat, Rasputin, was a pretty cool goat, as
goats go, I guess. He never complained too loudly while he
was being tortured and abused and I admired his sexual
prowess. He always seemed to have the energy and the desire
to "do it." Goats have peculiar sexual habits like pissing
on their legs and licking it off, mounting females even
though they had bandaged appendages (or missing appendages),
and my personal favorite, the curling up of their lips in a
sort of goat-sneer when aroused. After seeing this the first time, our whole class would start to talk in goat-sex terms, imitating the lip curl for effect. "I love you. Curl, curl. Baby, it'll be sooo good."

Hailing from Montana, whose population is known for sex with barnyard animals (I love ewe), I felt, to some degree, "at home." And, of course, I had a whole repertoire of sheep-fucking jokes. (I remember Doc Delap the Executive Officer of our A-Team and a former SF medic, telling some guy from Washington state "Yea, we fuck sheep. And then we kill em', butcher em', and then sell them to you and you eat em'.")

My favorite, though was a story out of the book Montana Gothic, by Dirck van Sickle, about a Montana sheepherder sticking a ewe's hind legs into the front of his rubber hip boots (so she couldn't get away) and doing her. At the moment of orgasm he'd shoot her in the back of the head with his Winchester 30-30 so he could get that dying quiver and some sort of added sexual gratification. (Hey, it's a sick world out there. I know.)

That afternoon we prepped the goats for the following day's combat casualty exercise, where various wounds would be inflicted on the BILLYs to simulate a battlefield situation. The prep consisted of shaving the stomach, chest, neck, and one leg of the goats as closely as possible.
to simulate human skin. This was accomplished with electric trimmers and was a lot of fucking work. And, with 14 goats and only four clippers it became an ordeal. The clippers constantly broke down, became dull, gummed-up, and got too hot. I mean real hot—smoking hot. They became so dull that they were starting to draw blood, but we had a schedule to keep and had to stick to it. That, plus we wanted to get done so we could go drink beer, etc.

The next day's exercise was similar to those I had experienced in the Q course except there wasn't the constant harassment of being a "student." It was relatively low-key with the emphasis on teaching us as much as possible in a short period of time.

The goats were administered Ketamine, a horse tranquilizer that put them at a level right above death and from which they would not return. We operated in pairs, but unfortunately I didn't get paired with Ben. Instead, I had Steve Wilson, a master sergeant and our senior man. Working as a team, we ran through the ABCs of the Primary and Secondary surveys and demonstrated competency in the following procedures: a cricothyroidotomy, which is an incision into the cricothyroid membrane below the larynx to open an occluded airway; a sucking chest wound which is remedied by simply applying a waterproof piece of material over the wound to seal it; stopping gross arterial bleeding, either by the use of direct pressure or with hemostats; a
venous cut-down, where an incision is made over a vein for insertion of an IV; and the IV without the cutdown.

The procedures went fairly well. It was obvious that we were rusty, but it appeared (to me) that much of our training would come back to us if we needed it. The most difficult task was finding a vein in those tough old billys. My stick went pretty smoothly "This won't hurt me a bit," but Wilson had trouble getting an IV started due in part to the fact that a goat's skin is really tough (especially in the neck area that we were using for the IVs) and much more difficult to penetrate.

After the procedures, the instructor OD'd the goat on the Ketamine and we were responsible for removing and burning the body. A new incinerator had been constructed next to the OR (operating room) building to aid in fast disposal of the carcasses and it was an impressive piece of machinery for sure, with a stack probably 25 feet tall. The bodies were unceremoniously heaved in through the rusty steel door and were ablaze within seconds. They burned furiously and were consumed. "Machts nichts. Let's go have a beer."

Having completed the medical refresher we were informed that we would have to "validate" as SF troops prior to deployment. Validation was something that had just started to come on line when I had left SF back in 1989 and it was
unfamiliar to me. The process tests your ability as an individual to perform certain tasks such as the PT Test, land navigation, and a rucksack march with a 50 lbs pack, LBE, and rifle. If you meet the standard, you are then "validated" and eligible for deployment. So the first question, of course, was "If I don't validate, does it mean I won't go to the Gulf?" And the answer was predictable: no.

Regardless of your validation status, you'll still go to 5th Group. "So why fucking bother?" we said, almost in unison. (Even though this was about as stupid as Ronald Reagan sending a bible to the Ayatollah, this was the army, after all, and they were compelled to act as if redundancy was not only tactically sound, but doctrine.)

So, validate we did, and I was unfortunate in that on the goddamn land nav course, I stepped in a hole in one of Ft. Bragg's infamous swamps (pronounced like ramp) and twisted the fuck out of my right ankle. (I have chronically sprained ankles and the weight of all that gear plus fatigue and the wrath of the "swamp" caused me to take a bad step.) I ended up hobbling out to the highway and was picked up by a couple of girls who took me back to the start point.

The next day I wrapped up the ankle with an Ace bandage, ate some Motrin, and limped out to the ruck march. This was a timed event requiring us to complete the walk in so many minutes and, by God, I fucking made it. The ankle
bothered me, but I developed a cadence that allowed me to limp at an adequate speed and complete the miserable sonofabitch within the allotted time. So now I was officially a real person and would be allowed to go and get killed in the Persian Gulf.

By the first week in February it was determined that we were ready for deployment and we packed up our junk (sending much of it home) and boarded a bus for Ft. Jackson, in South Carolina. Jackson was one of the designated facilities for POM or Processing for Overseas Movement and was the final training prior to transport to Saudi. We were lumped into groups of 500 people and did all of our pre-deployment training in this oversize and unwieldy element. POM was being managed by a reserve unit that mostly consisted of drill sergeants and troop handlers who were used to dealing with basic trainees. Since our group consisted almost exclusively of senior NCOs, their methods and attitudes were met with icy stares and, frequently, overt hostility. In fact, at one point our group "divorced" itself from the main body and attempted to accomplish our tasks independently.

The first day started with a lineup, in alphabetical order, of the 500 and initial inprocessing for POM. They checked our records, our pay, dog tags, ID cards, Medic cards, etc., etc. etc. We were issued M16A1 rifles which
were of the old style that was not in use by our destination unit. (5th Group was using the new model M16A2s that were completely redesigned and used different ammunition.) Nevertheless, we were required to take the weapons and sight them in at the rifle range, knowing full well that once we got to Saudi we would be issued new ones. "When we get to group" became a sort of mantra: we'll get all the good stuff at group, they'll take care of us at group; life will be good at group.

We also received various classes and were finally marched to a parking lot outside of these big yellow warehouses (everything at Jackson seemed to be painted a putrid, faded-mustard kind of color) for clothing issue. We found ourselves in long lines with, get this, grocery shopping carts, so we could receive our overseas issue of clothing and equipment.

And damn, you needed a fucking cart to haul all the shit they threw at you. Unfortunately, by this late in the war much of the stocks were depleted so many crucial items were missing. I am a tall, skinny man (six-one, one sixty) and I normally wear size medium long fatigue shirts and small long trousers. I was informed that the only desert fatigue pants left were extra large, extra short. I held these pants up in front of me and it appeared that they were wider than they were long. "Now how the fuck am I supposed to wear these?" I whined. No wait, I'm a bitcher not a
whiner. "The person that these things would fit shouldn't even be in the goddamn army." Which is true. An individual with a waist bigger than the inseam is not a lean, mean, fighting machine. More likely it belongs to a gluttonous pig with bovine sweat glistening off the upper lip. They certainly couldn't meet the height/weight standard.

"Take the fuckin' things," someone shouted "maybe we can trade them for the right sizes when we get to group." Group was beginning to take on the air of some mythical place, like Valhalla or Eden, but I was beginning to feel, deep down, that it would fail to satisfy, leaving us flaccid and dysfunctional.

Moving through the line, they filled our baskets with rucksacks, duffel bags, desert scarves, jungle boots, (the way-cool desert boots were nowhere to be seen—unless you were General Schwartzkopf or a surplus store magnate), holsters, gasmasks, sleeping bags, foam pads, insect repellent, desert camouflaged field jackets (these were in some kind of weird checkerboard design and were called the "night desert" pattern), bush hats, canteens, socks, MOPP suits (MOPP stands for Mission Oriented Protective Posture—it's a rubber suit with gloves and boots, to defend against the big nasties like gas, bacteria, and radioactivity.), flak jackets, Kevlar helmets, Goretex jackets, etc. ad nauseam. I had so much crap that it filled three duffel
bags and a large ALICE rucksack. "What in hell I'm I going to do with all this shit? Send it home? Sell it? What the fuck? Over."

I finally managed to drag my grossly overloaded and sorry ass into the barracks late that night and was too tired to manage anything productive, but instead dropped on to my bunk "just for a minute" and became unconscious. What I should have been doing, however, was assembling my gasmask (which is somewhat involved) for the first thing the next morning was . . . the gas chamber. Bad timing, dude. Either that or my stinking, fucking karma was finally catching up with my sinful and pathetic, little life.

But wait, maybe my karma was only slightly tainted. The next morning, while standing in line waiting to get in the "chamber," I managed to assemble the fucking thing and test it before entering that evil place. Unlike the last time I had been gassed with CS (back in the Marines in 1973) we weren't required to do pushups or sing the Marine Corps hymn or run in place or something equally ludicrous. All we had to do this time was take the mask off and walk out. I hardly even noticed the gas.

And with that, we were officially cleared to deploy to Saudi Arabia. That night we held a small party in our barracks with some of the women attached to our group of 500.
"Hey, baby, since we're going to the land of dire straits, world-class blood letting, and NO alcohol, what say we get intoxicated and stupid, and copulate like wild animals in this overcrowded barracks because we may not get another chance and by this time next year we could be dead or severely unhappy and we're probably all fucked anyhow, so what do you say, eh?"

One of the troop handlers came through and saw our little party (we weren't supposed to have alcohol in the barracks) and someone asked him if everything was OK and he just said "I don't see anything wrong here."

The next day we boarded buses out to the airhead and were herded into a staging area, a large hangar, and told to wait. The Red Cross was on hand to feed us and give us little white bags of comfort items, "Hey, baby, why don't you comfort this . . ." These were things like toothbrushes, toothpaste, chewing gum, candy, etc. "Hey, where the fuck are the condoms? How can you deploy to the land of camel sodomizers without fucking condoms?"

After several hours, we were packed in to a contracted, dirty gray 747 waiting on the runway. Since we would be landing in a combat zone, we wore our LBEs with pistol, knife, and gasmask, and carried our rifles and one carry-on bag. It certainly felt bizarre getting on a commercial airplane with guns and knifes, but I really kind of liked it, actually.
Although the plane had regular seats with stewardesses it seemed vaguely military somehow and I wondered just what kind of deal they had worked out with the army. (I always tend to question our government in times of high stress and possible danger, but I'm kind of paranoid, you know?) The stewardesses seemed surly and clearly they had been on flights shuttling troops over to the Gulf for a quite some time—probably since the previous fall.

By the way the operation was being run, I could tell that this was going to be another one of those hellish, claustrophobic, and painful flights, but worse so because we were going to a truly dreadful place that some of us would not return from and would certainly never want to return to. So bon voyage, motherfuckers . . .
SAUDI ARABIA:
Knee Deep in the Shitlands of the Middle East

From way out yonder
in the old wild west
to kickin' them Iraqi ass
from Billy the Kid to GI Joe
said fuck you let's rodeo.

--Fear, "Fuck You, Let's Rodeo"

"The real trouble with war is that it gives no one
a chance to kill the right people."

--Ezra Pound

Our contract 747 dropped into King Fad International
Airport around midnight on the 18th of February. My first
impression of Saudi Arabia was, yea, it's a flat
motherfucker, that's for sure. Flat and barren and dusty
and full of venomous insects, venomous snakes, and well . .
. venomous people. Who would be stupid enough to want to be
from this vile piece of shit? And if you were from here
wouldn't you want to make every effort to escape to
someplace else, like Tijuana or Cleveland or maybe even
Babb, Montana?

We were divided into groups with similar destinations
and told that we were now in a hostile fire zone. Oh, baby.
The 18 Delta's were bused over to the airport control
tower—a massive, white structure that must have been at least 200 feet tall—to the underground section of the tower that had been commandeered by the 5th Group people and was known as the "Bat Cave." The Bat Cave was an, as yet, unfinished portion of the airport control center and was an immense, dark, multilevel complex of cots, tents, and equipment. There was never any light in the upper section where people had their cots, while the lower section contained all the electronics gear, satcoms (satellite communications radios), generators, and other miscellaneous equipment of war. And certainly all the usual "mission essential equipment" that the US military can't seem to live without. Things like TVs, VCRs, Boomboxes, Walkmans, Gameboys—you know, all the neat stuff that makes us real Americans. We were told to find a cot, dump our shit, and pass into unconsciousness for a few hours.

Prior to that blissful state, I discovered a wonderful new product of the army of the 90's—Shelf Stable Bread. These were little loaves of bread that had been baked flat or smashed flat or flattened somehow, and were maybe an inch thick. They came in a small brown package about the size of a postcard and, amazingly tasted like bread. I began hoarding these little treasures and by the end of the tour I'd collected a whole grocery bag full to take to the folks back home and show them that not all of their tax dollars were being squandered on dysfunctional social programs,
congressional junkets, and multi-billion dollar B-2 bombers.

Speaking of B-2 bombers, did you know that the flak jackets we were issued wouldn't even stop bullets? They were designed to stop shrapnel, yet comfortable (read: lightweight) body armor that will stop a .357 magnum at point blank range has been available on the civilian market for years. And how about all that neat highspeed, lowdrag Gore-tex raingear, rucksacks, sleeping bags, boots, etc. that you can buy at the surplus stores, but never seems to be available within the system? Well, dear friends, the powers that are would much rather spend your tax dollars on extravagantly and needlessly expensive high-tech weapons systems that are probably useless and redundant, than to protect the real folks on the ground.

"We regret to inform you of the loss of your son/daughter (insert name here) because your cocksucking congressman/woman (insert name here) surrendered to the special interest pressure of the greedy defense contractor (insert corporate name here), thus assuring the needless death of your love one. Thank you. Have a nice day."

Fuck, if there was any justice at all, these people would be languishing in some federal penitentiary being sodomized on a daily (or perhaps hourly) basis by illiterate, HIV positive, sweaty football-player types with immense hard-ons and no KY jelly.
The next morning we attended a briefing by the 5th Group commander, the group sergeant major, and others. I remember one of our 18 Delta's asking about getting some desert fatigues that fit properly and the commander pulled up his blouse to show us that his pants were about two sizes too big (extra large, extra short?) and were held up with a big medical safety pin—the kind they use to hold arm slings together. So much for getting all that neat gear when we got to group.

The SGM, a tall black guy by the name of Simms (less affectionately known as Simba), harangued us on how we would maintain proper military bearing and let us know that we were essentially reservist scum, and were here to fuckup HIS army.

"Oh, that's nice. So because we're only weekend warriors we can only bleed on the weekends, right, and you're treating us like shit is certainly going to make us perform better under fire? No hope."

That evening, I made my way to the latrine for the old shit, shower, and shave. Because we were now in a combat zone, we were required to be armed at all times which included the LBE with pistol, gasmask, and a rifle. So, when you got into the stall, you'd hang all this junk on hooks while you did your business. The Saudi toilet stalls were a self contained shitter, pisser, and shower all rolled into one. How ingenious. How Muslim.
Like many Third World countries, there was no toilet bowl, but instead there was a porcelain hole in the floor that you squatted over. There were even etched-in footprints on either side of the hole showing you where to put your feet, as if you didn't know. The shower was simply a nozzle on a hose and the floor sloped into a drain. And while the whole system was foreign to American shitting habits, it was functional. (Some enterprising individuals, real Americans no doubt, had constructed several wooden boxes that were similar to an outhouse shitter that was placed over the hole so one could sit down. These stalls were obviously in high demand.)

On the way out, the group chaplain, a captain, came up to me and asked how I was doing. Whenever I'd meet a Special Forces chaplain I always thought about a cartoon I'd seen years before that showed this SF trooper walking down the street while two legs (that's non-airborne people) stood by as he passed. He was covered with guns, knives, and grenades, and sported railroad-track scars, vampire-like teeth, and a terrible sneer. He even had a knife blade protruding from the toe of one of his jumpboots. The caption read: "Talk about a tough outfit, that's the chaplain!"

The cartoon had made me laugh when I first saw it because it is so typical of the image that SF conveys to those on the outside. Nevertheless, I looked at this guy
and thought of the cartoon. "So, chaplain, can I see your bootknife?" Actually, what I really wanted was to call home on the emergency line he had hooked up to the States to make sure my wife had taken care of the rent. Chaplain Bootknife, however, felt that this was not a genuine emergency and would not allow it. He did ask me if there was anything I needed to "sustain" me in the coming battle and gave me a little book entitled The Spiritual Survival Kit—a publication of the Harlan Park Bible Church out of Conway, Arkansas. I opened it to the preface by the pastor-teacher of the church, the Right Reverend Gene Cunningham:

> It is my prayer that the truths to which this book points will provide the necessities of spiritual survival for many Christian warriors as they fight in the pain and darkness of their own battlefields.

> "Amen, brother but what about the special pagan version for those of us of a more enlightened persuasion who feel that Christianity is nothing more than an excuse to inflict questionable beliefs on those who don't believe in that tired, little charade?"

Chaplain Bootknife would surely have appreciated that little tirade, I'm sure, but I was a good boy and acted the pious Christian American. I would have loved to pontificate on the subject of Christianity, which I see as an arrogant, racist, deceitful, decadent device to enslave the world with
a dangerous philosophy that says: go forth and pillage the
earth in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy
Ghost. Convert the unbelievers (whether they desire
conversion or not) and attempt to influence every aspect of
life on this planet.

Remember, it was the Christians who attempted to
subjugate an entire hemisphere, on the assumption that "Hey,
we're white and Christian and you're dark and pagan, so obey
us without question because white is right and if you don't
... we'll kill you. So fear us just like we fear our god.
But you should also love our god too. O.K."

In this respect, Christianity's parallels with Marxism
are distinct and, to me, horrifying--like waking up some
morning and realizing that deep down you have always wanted
to be a pedophile serial killer. I remember once, as a
child, asking my mother, the Sunday school teacher, about
the importance of all the other religions and their
relationship to Christianity. She replied that while the
other religions don't worship Christ, they recognize that he
was the most important religious figure in recorded history.
Being 10 years old, this explanation sounded plausible
enough, but to an adult, with a brain, it now seems so
egotistical as to defy description.

"So, mommy dearest, does that mean that all these
Shiite Muslims who turn themselves into human bombs believe
that Jesus Christ is more important than Mohammed?" Yea, I got your "Christian warrior" dangling.

It was also starting to dawn on me that I was now among the Southern Baptists of the Muslim world, so to speak, and thinking:

"Fuck. This religion sucks as bad as the other one. Is there no escape from fundamentalist kooks and cretins? Why can't they act normal . . . like me? What's a motherfucker to do?"

And only a mother could love that sensitive, caring Islamic fundamentalist attitude towards anyone who isn't of the Muslim persuasion (i.e., "infidels"), and the legendary Muslim penchant for violence, particularly irrational, senseless violence involving casual bystanders and frequently school children. When one hears the word terrorist they almost immediately think of a dark, fiery-eyed, gun waving Muslim extremist.

The Muslims have their own adorable little quirks just like the Christians. For instance, it's impolite to cross your legs while sitting and point the sole of your shoe in the direction of another person. Why? Because the feet are dirty. And don't forget their fetish with those "dirty" pork products. Do you know that Muslims eat with their right hand and that it is impolite to touch another person with your left hand. Why? Because Muslims wipe their ass with the left hand.
Now being the smart-ass that I am, I wanted to shake some Arab's hand with my right hand and say "Ha, ha. Fooled you, fool. I wipe my ass with that hand!" or "How about this delicious MRE 'Pork patty in swine-brine' for that memorable dining experience?"

The pig thing was always a big joke for the SF troops and I remember one suggestion for resolving the Iranian hostage crisis back in 1979:

"Well, this is how you do it. You have two flights of B-52s. The first has the bomb bays filled, not with bombs, but with liquefied pig-fat, and you fly low over Tehran (or Baghdad or Tripoli or Damascus or some goddamn Arab city) and soak 'em down real good with the bacon drippings and then when they're in a greasy frenzy of terror and anguish, you follow on with the second flight that has the white phosphorous and the napalm and the cluster bombs and send them to a heavenless afterlife, in pieces, and hopefully on fire." So much for Arab-American relations.

Not that I hate Arabs. It's just that they seem to be on their own equally tired little trip that, like the Christians, seems obsessed with "saving" someone. But from what? Ourselves? No hope there. From Satan? We are fucking Satan! He doesn't live in the center of the earth next to some mythical pond full of liquid fire, he lives in the goddamn White House, in the Kremlin, in the Vatican, in
the corporate boardrooms, the schoolrooms, and the hospitals—"the enemy's within."

Whew. I'm glad I got that out the way. Now we can talk about relevant things—like gunshot wound debridement, battlefield burns, and advanced trauma management in a Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical environment. And fucking girls. And drinking beer. And listening to the extremely obnoxious screech of punk music: "I don't care about you—FUCK YOU—I don't care about you!"

We 18 Delta's were divided into battalions the next morning and those going to 2nd and 3rd batts were sent up to KKMC--King Kalid Military City, about 60 miles south of the Kuwaiti border. So, once again we packed up our shit and loaded up a school bus and a duce and a half (2 and 1/2 ton truck) and drove out to the airfield and, as senior man, I was put in charge of this mob of about 20 guys.

We refined our already quite polished techniques for endlessly waiting and almost had to beg to catch an aircraft out of there. One of our guys suggested hijacking one of the C-130s. "Fuck. Why not? It's not like we lack for guns and knives, and shit. Besides, what are they going to do? Send us to a combat zone?"

After a lengthy palaver, "Hey, like, can we get on one of your hallowed, fucking airplanes so we can make it up to
Kuwait and go kill some Iraqis, and win medals, and be on CNN, and Geraldo, etc. OK? OK? OK? Fucking douche bags," we convinced the Air Force that it would be in their best interests if they let us on a flight up to KKMC. We arrived late that night and were, once again, bused over to our newest home. After unloading the vehicles and hauling our gear up to the 5th floor of the 10 story barracks, we were forced to inprocess and receive all the gear needed for the coming ground battle. By the tempo of the proceedings, it was apparent that the ground offensive was imminent and so we were forced to inprocess all night. And I mean all fucking night.

About half of us were attached to 2nd batt and were ushered into the battalion sergeant major's office and given our assignments. We were asked to describe our medical experience and based on that, I was assigned not to an "A" team (the operational element of Special Forces), but to the battalion aid station and then detached to the "B" team (the command and control element) that was attached to the Egyptian 3rd Mechanized Division. Thus, we would be right behind the frontline directing our forces and advising the Egyptians on how to fight the battle and to (hopefully) not kill each other or, more importantly, not kill us.

After the briefing, we moved to the aid station and received our first series of anthrax shots. We were also issued the atropine auto injectors (for nerve gas), the
anti-nerve gas pills, and the valium injectors. We were reminded, as the anthrax shots were being administered, that the vaccine was totally untested and there was a possibility of "sideeffects."

"Sideeffects? Does that mean that somewhere down the road we might swell up and turn into some hideous, organic manufacturing center for the anthrax bug and then explode like some black, bloated corpse in the hot desert sun, thus spraying a lethal aerosol of toxic bacteria in every direction like a broadcast seeding device? No thanks, man, I'm a reservist. I don't do anthrax."

"Yea, yea, we know . . . bend over."

Following the inoculations we were moved over to the admin section and they reviewed our wills, power of attorneys, etc. Because there was a possibility that we would be operating behind enemy lines, special precautions (the same as for pilots) were taken to insure survivability. We were issued "Blood Chits," a waterproof piece of cloth that contained information in several languages explaining that we were Americans (no shit) and that a reward would be paid by the United States government for our safe return to friendly lines. These were serial numbered and I received #724, which is my lucky number (the date I moved to Montana) and I took this to be a good omen. (Look, when you're going into deep serious, you start to look at the metaphysical stuff, O.K.? Things like numbers and patterns and omens,
etc. What do you want to hear? That I became superstitious? O.K. I did. I also was wearing a medicine pouch on my dogtag chain, given to me by my wife--so fucking there.)

We also filled out cards with information that would be used to verify our identities in the event of capture or in a rescue attempt. Things only you would know, like: My dog's name is Schlong or my first car was a Bugatti. Shit like that.

Finally, we exchanged our M-16A1s for the new M-16A2s and the new ammunition. Someone asked about ammo for the .45s and we were told that, as far as they knew, there was no .45 ACP ammunition in country.

"Oh, that's nice. We have pistols that can't shoot. Look, motherfuckers, I need batteries for my gun--it doesn't work without batteries and I realize that they're not included and you'd better shit some fast." That's the ticket. Be aggressive with these morons.

Miraculously, one of the supply pukes began rummaging through one of the desk drawers and managed to produce enough .45 caliber ammo to give each one of us one loaded magazine.

"Now this is the way to fight a war," I remarked, "a seven-shot throw away weapon." Well, at least we had some kind of sidearm.
Another item of issue was the Gargoyles, the anti-shrapnel laser-protective glasses. The modern battlefield contains all sorts of things driving around, flying around, maybe even walking around with laser rangefinders and sighting devices. And if you happen to have one of these hit you in the eye, you become one of those "see no evil guys"—literally. Unfortunately, for those of us who wore glasses and would need prescription lenses, the Gargoyles wouldn't be available. So watch your eyes, GI.

After a sleepless night of inprocessing until about 0530, we loaded up a couple of trucks and drove out to someplace designated for small arms fire to sight in our new rifles. A master sergeant from the battalion headquarters (who thought he was some kind of fucking stud muffin) was in charge of our little group. We sighting in the guns and then tried to make it back to the base and immediately became lost. We wandered, aimlessly, for about half an hour, until we finally stopped and this MSG asked me, with adolescent sheepishness, if I had a compass.

Nope. Didn't issue us one. Said all our movement would be by vehicle, therefore we'd have GPS (the Global Positioning System). So here we were lost in the desert on our first day with our new unit and let me tell you, you couldn't see a single manmade structure in any fucking
direction. And it became apparent, after awhile, that we were driving in circles. "We're doomed, we're hopelessly lost, lost before we even get into battle," I thought optimistically,"they'll find us in about 500 years in some archeological dig and someone will think 'I wonder what happened to these guys?'"

While this get-us-lost stunt was probably the act of an incompetent man, it also gave me a valuable lesson in desert land navigation, i.e., your land nav had better be really good, like fucking perfect, because if it isn't you will become lost and bewildered and condemned to a short life followed by desiccation.

After about three hours of this nonsense we finally made it up to a little "hill" (it's not totally flat everywhere) and managed to see KKMC, and I was greatly relieved to not have to die a horrible, excruciating death in the middle of that Middle Eastern shitspot. After arriving back at the base, I was tempted to tell the 5th Group MSG that he should, as an old marine buddy of mine once said, "kill yourself before it's too late."

We were finally allowed to settle in and pursue unconsciousness by about noon but, unfortunately, at around six in the evening, this cheesy siren started blaring and I saw people rushing to grab weapons, LBE, and gasmasks. It was a Scud attack, and as this was my first time under fire, it was with some trepidation that I donned the mask and
hustled to move into one of the stairwells. I was breathing hard and the glass was starting to fog making it difficult to see—and think.

After a few minutes we began to hear explosions above us and knew that the Patriots were being launched. I noticed someone sitting on the stairs playing a Gameboy, the handheld video game. It was the physician’s assistant, Chief Redman, who had given us our shots the night before and who I would be working with in the aid station. He was playing Tetris, the Russian block game and something that I knew well, for it was on my computer back home. He noticed my interest and handed the game to me. About that time there was a thunderous explosion right above the building and someone said a Patriot must have gotten a Scud. We could hear the metallic rattle of debris hitting the roof of the building. These 5th Group guys had been putting up with this for quite sometime and were used to the attacks. But not me. I began to question why we were in the stairwells. It seemed dangerous. Won't these things collapse if we take a hit? Don't they just fall on top of each other all the way down like big concrete dominos? Is Darwin involved somehow?

Redman seemed unconcerned with the rockets and bullshitted with some buddy while I discreetly sweated behind my mask. I tried to get into the game, but felt
strangely preoccupied. Finally, an all clear siren sounded and we removed our masks and plodded back to our rooms.

But there was to be no rest that night, for Saddam felt that this was just the right time to fuck with us and we received three more Scud attacks, the last one coming at two in the morning which really pissed people off. By then we were dragging ourselves into the stairwells and didn't even don our masks. I was in a room where the lights never went out, as if darkness would bring bad ju-ju. The people there were mostly cooks, were mostly black, worked odd hours and played poker in between. They seemed to live for gambling which they did constantly and with great zeal. Being cooks, they didn't have to think about much except when they had to stand their next tour of duty.

After a couple of days, we were informed that the ground offensive would take place on the 24th and that we should make final preparations for the coming shitstorm. I began to pack my rucksack, using the supplied packing list and throwing in stuff I knew I'd need. The list didn't have anything out of the ordinary: sleeping bag (it was cold out there at night, man), foam pad, 2 MOPP suits, poncho, Gore-tex, flak jacket, gasmask, helmet, LBE, rifle, and, of course, my aidbag.

The list did mention that under no circumstance should personnel take stereo equipment, personal radios, Walkmans,
etc. This particular order was ignored, I'm sure, right across the board, and I wonder who had been stupid enough to even put it on the list.

"Deploy into this rag-head infested, camel humping, fundamentalist band of Commie, terrorist, motherfuckers without toons'? You must be high. You need to be piss-tested, for you must be smoking, sniffing, shooting or something, you jive-ass, turkey-breasted bunch of motherfuckers, anyhow . . ." Yea, those cooks could lay down a line. Too bad they wouldn't be deploying with us.

In a final briefing we were informed that because there was uncertainty about just what chemical weapons Saddam possessed, they were implementing a new MOPP 5 status (the normal MOPP levels are 1-4). This was donning all the chemical protective gear--the suit, boots, gloves, and the mask--and then sitting down and draping the poncho over your entire body.

The thought of cowering under a flimsy little poncho like some hallucinogenic desert mushroom certainly did not instill confidence in the chemical protective system and I wondered just what it was that they thought he had, that prompted this additional measure.

"Maybe it's because of the fucking Brits," someone suggested. The British had told the Iraqis, publicly, that if they deployed chemical weapons, that they would retaliate with nuclear weapons. What a joy. But, come to think of
it, it did make sense, the poncho would protect you from fallout . . . for a while.

I had been keeping one of those stupid, little journals, on which this prevarication, oops, that's classified, I mean this story, is based and I made the following entry that night:

21 Feb. Tomorrow I deploy to the front line in a Mercedes ambulance . . . the responsibility is unbelievably overpowering--people will live or die depending upon my abilities . . . or lack of.

Yea, that about sums it up. I was a scared motherfucker. Scared not so much about getting killed as about fucking up and killing someone with incompetence.

"Now, let's see now. Where does that tube go? and how many CCs of epinephrine do I inject, and how do I treat this gross arterial bleeder, under fire, with a gasmask on in an NBC environment and should I stop the bleeding or patch the poor bastard's chemical suit or maybe I should just piss my pants and burrow into the sand like some terrified desert rodent and DIE, asshole . . . ."

The next morning I loaded my gear into our Mercedes Unimog ambulance--a quarter of a million dollar vehicle. It appeared to be brand new and was probably donated by the Bundeswehr, the West German army. The Mercedes was fully equipped with all the facilities for surgery and the
transport of six litters. It had a refrigerator (but no beer for miles in any direction!), was fully lighted and heated and had six 12 volt batteries to power all this stuff even with the engine off. Regrettably, it was also (and I noticed this immediately) the tallest vehicle on the battlefield, rising a good ten feet off the ground. Added to this were our rucksacks and about a dozen cases of MREs and bottled water, and we had a vehicle that could be seen by dwarf Iraqis in Kuwait City, or perhaps even by inbred farmers in Ainsworth, Nebraska. The big red and white crosses on the side of the vehicle were of no comfort at all. Crosses are not exactly sacrosanct in the Middle East, fool.

"Ismail, bring down the wrath of Mohammed on that large, ponderous green vehicle with the obscene markings of infidels."

"Insh'allah. It shall be done."

The Mercedes was geared like a semi trailer truck with 21 gears, I think, and was a slow mover at best. It would go at highway speeds, but it took a while to get there. On the road up to the B Team encampment a case of water jumped off the roof and exploded with a very satisfying splash. We tried cleaning it up but decided "Hey, we're medical warriors/killers and can't be concerned with such trivial matters," so we left it by the side of the road, as any
good, ugly American would. Besides our "rendezvous with destiny" awaited--so fuck it.
KUWAIT:
Riding the Big Screen TV

Fading vision of life unlived
You don't regret a single thing you did
Don't want to push the button
Don't want to be dead
Just got to feed the creature inside your head.

--Circle Jerks, "Rats of Reality"

"Fighting for peace is like fucking for virginity."

--Anonymous saying during the Viet Nam War

We rode out to the B Team in that big Mercedes, just south of the Kuwaiti border, and within 15 minutes, found ourselves standing in formation with about 40 other SF troopers. The company commander, a major, gave a brief speech and then walked down the line and shook each man's hand and made some brief gesture of concern. When he got to me, he gripped my hand and said: "God bless you, son."

I couldn't restrain a smirk and thought "You fucking dolt, you're probably younger than I am. Shit, I've got almost 20 years of service and this is my third war." Oh, well, the guy probably saw something like that in some John Wayne movie--"Keep a stiff upper lip, trooper," as the 7th Cavalry rides off to glory and eradication.
Prior to the formation, I was introduced to the B Team sergeant major, SGM Cockbite. This man was, I'm quite sure, a genuine psychopath. That there was something wrong with him was beyond question. Most SGMs would shake your hand and mutter "Welcome to the unit," or something equally inane, but this twisted little pud preferred the "volume is better" brand of leadership. As soon as we pulled into the camp, he ran up and started shouting obscenities at us (and god knows I hate obscene language), demanding that we get off the truck and stand at attention. Irrational behavior of the senior enlisted man is neither safe nor comforting in a combat zone.

"Too much desert sun for that fucker," remarked my driver, "You're a medic, don't you have some kind of medication for that sort of thing?"

"Oh, yea. I've got something for that--can you say FRAG. F-R-A-G. I know you can."

(FRAG was a term left over from Viet Nam [fuck, will we never forget that place?], and refers to throwing a fragmentation grenade under someone's cot or in through the outhouse door to "take them out." It was usually reserved for officers, but could also apply to senior NCOs and was known as "fragging." Perhaps the SGM would get an opportunity to revisit that somewhat outdated, but nonetheless relevant expression--maybe within the day.)
That afternoon we prepped our vehicles and equipment for combat. We put "GLINT" tape (some kind of fucking acronym—hell if I know) on all four corners of the Mercedes and on top of our helmets, hats, and rucksacks. GLINT tape was a silvery gray cloth maybe an inch wide and was used to identify friendly troops through the use of low-light television in the various aircraft. (We had been thoroughly briefed on our pilots "enthusiasm" for wanton violence.) We also stocked large quantities of medical supplies, rations, ammunition, and more bottled water. My driver had rigged up his Walkman with small external speakers on the dashboard and the Mercedes' battery operated refrigerator was filled with whole blood, plasma, and a case of Coke—this roadtrip was gonna be in style.

The other medical vehicle was a Toyota pickup that had been modified with large metal boxes on and around the truck bed that swung down for instant access to supplies and equipment. On the bumper was a sticker which read: "I've tripped and I can't get down," most appropriate for a truck full of drugs and, oh boy, did we have drugs. Morphine, Demerol, Valium, Nubain, you name it. "Let the good times fucking roll, Jack!"

Riding in this vehicle was the surgeon and another SF medic, an active duty guy—Staff Sergeant Michael Jackson. Yea, right. But no shit, this guy's name was Michael-fucking-Jackson. SSG Jackson was about five-five
and a weightlifter and had the little-man or short-shit or somekindofshit mentality. His mouth was perpetually in motion and he was always going into bodybuilding poses for effect. He especially liked to boast about how he was going to get out of the army and become a male stripper for Chippendales. He'd put his fist on his forehead and demonstrate the hip thrust and the dick-flop and tell us that he was a natural for that type of work. Oh, yea, I forgot to tell you: Michael Jackson was a white guy.

Jackson hated the Arabs, all Arabs—Saudis, Kuwaitis, Syrians, Egyptians, with great enthusiasm and would never miss an opportunity to berate them. "Hey, Acknard, want some pork patties with cummsauce after your morning shit and a prayer?" This was in reference to the Egyptians morning routine of rolling out their little rugs and praying toward Mecca and then taking a big dump right next to it. They did this every morning and depending on the situation, as many as four times a day (the prayers, not the dumps.) In the morning they would be scattered all over the desert, striving for distance between each other, praying and shitting. (Yes, this was certainly different than the fast-paced American routine of a cup of coffee, the morning paper, and the lunatic dash to the office with maybe an EggMacmuffin in between. This was religious introspection, soul-searching, and being one with God and nature. Of
course, this was followed by a big, stinky splat in the sand.)

Early the next morning our convoy moved into Kuwait and it was little different than the traffic jams on Interstate-5 out of Los Angles. We puttered along, mostly in first or second gear, gazing at the sights and wondering what would come next. I was kicked-back with my feet up on the dashboard, listening to the Walkman. My driver, a young corporal out of Fitzsimmons Army Hospital in Denver, was a heavy metal aficionado and to him the situation was best endured through the head-banging screech of Def Leppard. Not punk, but it would have to do. The windshield of the Mercedes became a sort of big-screen television and with the music gave the world an MTV quality that was in some ways surreal, but mostly monotonous and boring.

"You know, this place reminds me--a lot--of fucking Texas," remarks my driver.

"Yea, it's flat, desolate, and ugly," I agree,"and it's populated by fundamentalist kooks who appear to have nothing better to do than to fuck with people. Like that town down there on the Texas border--what's the name? Yeah, Del Rio, 'the gold buckle of the Bible Belt'--that diseased, little shit-spot in the sand."

Del Rio has a Christian radio station with a transmitter that would be illegal in the States, but is strategically positioned right across the border in Mexico.
This allows them to broadcast their swill hundreds of miles to innocent and unsuspecting people. People like me.

Speaking of radios, we had two, a PRC-77 (known as a PRICK 77) and a PRC-25. This allowed us to monitor several frequencies, call in air or artie (artillery) strikes, evacuate the wounded, and kept us apprised of the situation in front of us. It was amusing to listen to some of the conversations:

"Uh, we're pinned down and taking some pretty heavy artie here. We need some Tac Air (Tactical Aircraft) ASAP, over."

"Negative, Tac Air is grounded because of low ceiling, over."

"Goddamn it, I don't want to hear that fucking shit, over."

"Hey, don't fucking cuss on the radio, over."

"Ah, maybe we shouldn't be talking about this on a clear channel--go to Green (the secure channel), over."

By noon we reached the first of the Iraqi positions which had been overrun by the forward elements and we were surprised and (what can I say) disappointed. The vast network of defensive fortifications was a farce. The much vaunted fire-fucking-trench was about as wide as a Volkswagen and the mine field was fully visible with the anti-tank and anti-personnel mines set in neatly manicured
rows—we merely drove between them. Apparently, the mine placement was standard doctrine from the old advisors to the Iraqis—the Soviets. It said a lot about Soviet mentality.

Our B Team was attached to the Egyptian divisional headquarters as advisors and, to prevent fratricide. As a group, the Egyptians were not a bad bunch and they occasionally dropped off boxes of their chow for our evening meal. This usually consisted of chicken or goat and rice or fries on a paper plate. We even received an invitation to smoke hashish with the divisional commander.

"Huh, I don't think the guys with the stars would be very happy about that, but if you could come up with a couple cases of Budweiser, a bottle of Mescal, and some physically fit and truly loose women we'd be oh so grateful and would even consider converting to Islam or perhaps rediscovering the joys of the Methodist religion, but then again maybe not."

That afternoon, our column stopped to reform and I was staring mindlessly out at the vast shit-lands that are Kuwait. The soft wail of a woman singing Arabic rock was playing on a radio from a Soviet troop carrier parked to our right. Suddenly, the mob of troops standing next to us started running in all directions. I lurched forward in my seat, pressing my face against the window, just as a young Egyptian soldier sprinted in front of the Mercedes. His eyes were spread wide and appeared to bulge. He had a
dirty, checkered-red rag clasped over his mouth. "What the fuck is going on?" hissed my driver. People were putting on gas masks and we quickly did the same—donning the mask, clearing it, pulling on the two sets of protective gloves. Then we waited.

Of all the ways to die this was the one that I feared most. "Which one is it?" I thought. "Nerve gas? Mustard? Maybe something we don't know about yet?" But after a few minutes, I calmed myself with resignation and apathy. What else was I going to do? Everything around us seemed to be stilled as we watched, my driver and I, silently waiting for something to happen.

In times of extreme duress I have heard people say that they relive past events in their lives or have thoughts that are unrelated to whatever is occurring at the time. I don't do any of that, although I have been known to laugh, in a manner only slightly hysterical, as I envision the possible consequences, but my head is usually clear. (I remember, as a teenager, sitting in the back seat of a car pulling across a highway and watching with cold, calm clarity, as another car sped toward us from the side, knowing perfectly well, that the car was going to hit us at a high rate of speed. I didn't say a word, but just sat there until impact at which time I blacked out. I do remember laughing, though, thinking: "Isn't this nice?")

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After what seemed like a long time, but was just a few minutes, I saw our people taking off masks and gloves. It was an all-clear. Apparently, an Egyptian chemical detector had malfunctioned spreading a cruel lie about the air we were breathing. Mechanical objects never fail to fail, and to slap you out of complacent behavior with a good dose of fear. (Although this was supposedly a false alarm, I later read a newspaper article that showed various locations around Kuwait where chemical agents had been detected after the war and this area was one of them. And the agent detected was nerve gas. I was also later told, by reliable sources, that the detection devices do not lie, and if they told us there was no nerve gas they were lying.)

That evening the B Team formed a perimeter to RON (Remain Over Night) so we dug two foxholes in front of the Mercedes, just in case something happened. Cockbite came by and was his usual cheery, paranoid, delusional self and I noticed that he was never without his mirror-lensed, wraparound sunglasses—even at night. It began to occur to me that all the B Team people were wearing radical sunglasses like him. What did it mean?

While we were scooping sand out of our little holes, we found an amusing little piece of paper, a leaflet, that had been dumped over the Iraqi positions asking that they surrender. It had probably been dropped in conjunction with bombs. On the front was a cartoonish, if not childish,
little story showing this Iraqi guy thinking about fighting tanks and helicopter gunships or surrendering to coalition forces and being reunited with his family. On the back it said in both Arabic and English:

CEASE RESISTANCE—BE SAFE
To seek refuge safely, the bearer must strictly adhere to the following procedures:
1. Remove magazine from your weapon.
2. Sling your weapon over your left shoulder muzzle down.
3. Have both arms raised above your head.
4. Approach the Multi-National Forces position slowly, with the lead soldier holding this document above his head.
5. If you do this, you will not die.

Something this leaflet didn't say, though, was that we had not been informed of this procedure and, I, for one, would probably shoot, like with extreme prejudice, any Iraqi carrying a weapon—even if it was slung. (I remember a conversation prior to deployment with some of my fellow medics about rules of engagement, prisoners, civilians, etc. I interjected with "You kill ANYTHING Iraqi. Period." One of the guys, who was a veterinarian in civilian life, said "You can't do that--you've got to live with yourself." And I replied "Yea, how are you going to live with yourself if you come home in a rubber bag or hopelessly fucked up because you didn't off some dude you thought was harmless. You've got to look out for the guy that lives in your head, man." Several of them looked at me like I was deranged, but, oh, well, it was more of that old Viet Nam stuff coming
out. Hey, I'm a ticking, fucking bomb. You got a problem with that?)

We sat in the cab listening to the B-52's "Channel Z" on the Walkman, and watched as our B-52's pulverized the Republican Guard. "Space junk--laser bombs--ozone holes--better put up my umbrella!" Yea, put up your fuckin' umbrella, Acknard, 'cause your God is calling you home with 500 pounders.

No need for "smart" bombs here, the "dumb" bombs would work marvelously, especially since thousands of them were raining down in the shit-storm from hell. It was a tremendous light show and with each spectacular flash and boom we laughed and hollered. Occasionally, I would jokingly yell "Get some!"," recalling my first experience with "that other war" that no one from that era ever seems to leave.

I had to stand guard duty from 0400 to 0600 which consisted of sitting inside a humvee and watching one half of the perimeter while someone on the other side watched the other. It gave me an opportunity to check out how the non-medical people were living. The humvee was absolutely crammed with ammunition (either .50 caliber or ammo for the Mark 19, a way-cool machine-gun that shot 40mm grenades), rucksacks, M-16 ammo, cases of MREs and bottled water, and all kinds of "personal" junk--magazines, (but thank god no
pornography), paperbacks, Walkmans, Gameboys, etc. A huge ghetto blaster was prominently padded and ducttaped to the engine compartment between the front seats and was obviously an item of major concern, if not worship. "Shit, man. You can't ride into combat without the tunes'." But it was either heavy metal rock or country; certainly not classical or jazz and definitely not punk.

Sitting there with nothing to do but stare out into the shit-dark desert, I discovered that the MOPP suits had an interesting property in that you could fart inside one and the charcoal would render it undetectable.

"Surely, we could put this piece of technology to good use in the civilian marketplace. Perhaps charcoal-lined underwear or maybe even designer MOPP suits that cover the vitals, yet are sensitive to the needs of modern society and are, of course, politically correct."

At 0600, I had to wake up SGM Cockbite and I anticipated an ugly scene. I found him sitting in the driver's seat, slumped over the wheel of his humvee where he had apparently tried to sleep. When I knocked on the window and told him it was 0600, his eyes flashed open and he croaked "NO!"

"He, he. Sorry, you bilious, little pissant, but it's true and I'm just so delighted to deliver this news to you at oh-dark-thirty and I hope you have a wonderful day, especially after having slept in the sitting position with
steering wheel marks across your forehead and drool in your lap . . . dickweed."

By the second day it was apparent that the mighty army of Saddam Hussein was paper. Iraqi prisoners told us that the night before we made the breech into Kuwait their officers had told them to fight to the death . . . then those same officers skipping off to Iraq. There were many, like me, who were pissed off about this. We were geared to fight the mother of all battles, but instead encountered the mother of all mediocrity.

That evening, Jackson came over and ate dinner with us (probably a pork patty) and we watched with some amusement as an Egyptian anti-aircraft battery set up around the division headquarters practiced immediate action drills.

"Stupid motherfuckers. Look at them. Running around like little monkeys—shouting and waving their little flags and shit, as if there was a serviceable Iraqi plane within a thousand miles of here."

Which was true—coalition aircraft had all but annihilated Saddam's air force and those that remained intact flew off to safety to their new found, and no doubt faithful ally, Iran. If an Iraqi helicopter or jet was so foolish as to appear over the battlefield, there would be an insane scramble by hundreds of fighter jets of several nations to descend on it and kill it, in a frenzy of
bloodlust and laughter. They would probably shoot at each other just to get at it.

With the start of the next day, we continued our advance in the long columns with the Egyptians seemingly unconcerned about safety or common sense. At one point I saw an Egyptian soldier run over to an abandoned Iraqi T-72 tank and drop a grenade down the turret hatch and then run off, laughing, like some fool. The grenade exploded with a white puff of smoke and little else. "Children must play," remarked my driver. The dickhead would have been in for a nasty surprise if the tank's ammo and fuel had exploded.

By late afternoon we reached an area just outside our objective, the police post at Al Abraq, and set up a perimeter. Since hostilities were now apparently at an end, we went into the "goof-off" mode while we waited for "the word." This entailed looting the battlefield, playing hackey sack and nerfball, and fucking with the Egyptians. We drove out to an area that the Iraqis had abandoned and it appeared as if a riot had taken place. The ground was covered with uniforms, coats, packs, web gear, canteens, helmets, . . . and boots--hundreds and hundreds of boots. Why had they taken off their boots? And of course there were weapons, mostly AKs and SVDs, the Soviet sniper rifle, and an occasional automatic grenade launcher--the Soviet copy of our Mark 19. Sorting through the stuff yielded a
cornucopia of guns and equipment and occasionally one would come across something really cool, like a pair of NODs (Night Optical Device) or a Makarov pistol. I picked up an AK-47 bayonet and a magazine with Arabic markings thinking that they would be nice souvenirs that I could take home, considering that you could buy either one in the States for less than twenty bucks. I also acquired an OD wool shirt, a haversack, various items of medical equipment, including a way-cool German snakebite kit, and some Iraqi emblems and ID cards.

Since the Egyptians were bored like us, they would come over and make small talk and, I guess, seek favors. One guy continually liked to brag about his superb skill as a tennis player, as if we (as Americans with great social and political leverage) could somehow get him into the pro tennis circuit.

"Look man, I don't give a shit about how well you play tennis back in Egypt or how much pull you think I have back in the States, my question is: do you have any daughters?"

The last night in Kuwait, I pulled guard duty from midnight to two in the am. I was given a pair of the new ANPVS-7 NODs and they were a real treat. Unlike the old ANPVS-5s, these had excellent depth perception and wouldn't black-out if bright light was encountered, and they were light-weight and comfortable. (Back in the mid-1980s, my
Montana A-Team had been inserted into the Arizona desert on a moonless night with the 5's and we discovered just how user-hostile they were. Because they lacked depth perception, you'd take about 10 steps and then fall down—frequently into some really nasty shit, like five foot long Spanish bayonet cactus or huge patches of prickly-fucking-pear or some awful, virulent penetrating weed of some kind. And then there were jagged rocks, deep ravines, etc. This was all done with rucks weighing around 75-100 lbs. and rifles and LBEs. It became so bad that our team commander finally said "Fuck it—just fuck this. We're not going any farther in this shit tonight and we're gonna RON, RFN." That's Remain Over Night, Right Fucking Now.)

Anyway, I'm standing there with my rifle and these NODs and out of nowhere, about 15-20 Egyptian trucks drive right through our perimeter, at high speed and with their headlights burning. The lead vehicle nearly runs me down. All I can do is gape at these buffoons who doesn't seem to realize or care that they're driving right through someone's encampment. It's like watching a holodeck program on Star Trek with all the lights and noise, but the occasional dusting of sand in your face reminding you that it's all quite real.

I thought momentarily of putting a few rounds through the last vehicle—just to keep them on their toes and let them know that there were other people out here is the big
shit-hole, but decided against it. A midnight firefight with our "allies" might be fun for a while, but could also lead to an international incident, repercussions, brig time, etc.

It was decided the next morning that the B Team should detached itself from the Egyptians and head back down to a border town just across the line in Saudi. The SF people had the battalion aid station set up in some school building there, and we moved right in. These guys were living in relative comfort with a TV, VCR, hot showers, and messing facilities. This included the new "T" rations, which were big pans of food cooked in immersion heaters and designed to feed a squad-sized element. And there was more of that good old shelfstable bread, and a sundry bag with little cans of pudding, candy, Kool-aid, and junk like that.

We were moved into a large room with a couple of other guys where we set up our cots and unpacked our rucks. I even constructed a small dresser out of a cardboard box to keep things in order. The only "work" was the occasional four hour tours of guard duty, either sitting in a humvee with the Mark 19 or sitting on the roof manning a Browning .50 caliber machine-gun, essentially a small cannon. The first time I stood the duty on the roof, it was actually kind of fun, except that it was from midnight to 0400 in the morning. Staring out into the darkness with the NODs
quickly lost its appeal and after awhile I began to fantasize about shooting that big tripod-mounted .50 cal sitting there, enticingly, in front of me. The thought of popping off a few 600 grain copper-jacketed boxcars at the desert fauna or passing cars or maybe even surrendering Iraqis, became almost too much to bear.

"Yes, sir, that .50 cal just up and started shooting at the those prostrate, surrendering, and yes, pleading Iraqi mongrels and I was amazed at the power with which it decimated their ranks, and no sir, the laughter only came later out of frustration and rage at the calamity of this senseless act and yes sir it could only have been an act of God . . . he, he."

In the morning, as if to liven things up a bit, a victim was brought into our aid station and probably a dozen medical people—doctors, PAs, and SF medics—swarmed around this poor fool like barflies to the local suck-queen. He had been riding in some vehicle, in convoy, and an ammo box jumped out of the duce and a half in front of him and bounded up, crashing through the window and landing on his leg. He received a nice fracture, although it wasn't the compound kind which produces protruding bones and mucho angst.

As there were so many people crowded around this guy, I couldn't get close enough to see the wound. Of course, I
wanted to do more than just see it—I wanted to probe and fondle and torture this dimwit who was stupid enough to get hurt and come to us. Not that I was some sort of sadist, mind you, it's just that I was bored and fresh trauma seemed to be just the ticket to bring me out of my mild, depressive state that I was positive was coming on, but it was not to be. He was splinted, drugged, and packaged for transport back to KKMC and I never even got a chance to put my slimy, little, fucking fingers on him.

After about three days of intense boredom, four-hour tours of duty, and too many over-seen VCR tapes, we broke down and packed-up the aid station and formed up to move out for our triumphant entrance back into KKMC. We were wearing various items of Iraqi military gear (I had an Iraqi emblem on my bush hat) and had all kinds of equipment stuffed in rucks. God knows what we thought we were going to do with all that junk. We couldn't bring it back and it might be fun to play with for awhile, but then what?

Just before we left, Cockbite strides past me and from behind those wraparound sunglasses remarks, "Sorry it wasn't more exciting."
"Are wars . . . anything but the means whereby a nation is nourished, whereby it is strengthened, whereby it is buttressed?"

--Marquis de Sade

Pulling into KKMC, we were greeted with one of our most favorite forms of noise, the four times a day call to prayer over a circular bank of loud speakers on top of the central mosque. They were situated so that everyone would just fucking know that it was time to go pray.

"Goddamned vile bunch of fucking varmints. Why do you have to make such a production out of everything? Why can't you people just live in your head like the rest of us? And why do you have to torment ME with your wretched religion?"

I'm sure the Saudis really despised us, not only because we were infidels and all, but also because we were the ugliest of Americans and I could kind of identify with that--I didn't like us either. Jackson suggested that
maybe, as a parting gesture, we should conduct some covert ops to break in and change that prayer shit to something more meaningful, like heavy metal rock or maybe even gospel music. "That would get the fuckers going."

Of course, I wanted something excruciatingly loud, sacrilegious, and especially obnoxious played four times a day:

"No more peace talks. No more disarmament. No more mister nice guy. No more nothing. No more nothing. No more nothing. No more Playboy. No more Newsweek. No more Walter Cronkite. No more watered-down television crap. No more nothing. No more nothing. No more fucky. No more sucky. No more noise. No more nothing. No more nothing. No more nothing."

Yea! That would really give the Arabs a reason to hate us. And about time, too.

We unloaded our gear (and loot) and trooped back up to the 5th floor of our barracks. As more and more of the battalion began to trickle in from up north, the parking lot in front of the building began to look like a gathering of a Soviet military collector's association. A carnival atmosphere prevailed: troopers were yelling and laughing and pulling stuff out of rucksacks and pockets. And they weren't just bringing back the odd, interesting piece of equipment or something that could actually be used, but literal tons of junk. Trailers piled high with AKs and sniper rifles, automatic grenade launchers, towed anti-aircraft guns, and some were even driving Iraqi
vehicles. There weren't any T-72 tanks, though. It would have been way-cool seeing a 60 ton Russian monster grinding down the streets, pulverizing the Mosque and thus silencing those annoying fucking loudspeakers, praise Allah. It could then hit the chaplain's office on the way out.

After some minor attention to gear and administrative duties, we were turned loose to fuck off and the days were filled with sunbathing, reading, watching TV, and general boredom. As there was nothing to do, we did nothing. (I will give 5th Group some credit: unlike some organizations I had belonged to, they didn't find something for us to do.)

I watched a lot of TV. CNN was on 24 hours a day and we were inundated with news, mostly about the troops redeploying back to CONUS (the continental US). From the seemingly endless parades and ceremonies it was apparent that the short-term memory of the American people was about as long as my dick. The prewar image of the Iraqi military was all but forgotten: the poison gas, FAEs (Fuel Air Explosives), and the dreaded Republican Guard (who just a month before USA Today had compared to Hitler's Waffen SS) were filed away in the nether regions of American consciousness. Many had concluded that since the ground offensive only took four days, that it wasn't really a war after all.
If you were an American, the war seemed easy and the casualties exceptionally light. If you were Iraqi, your perception was somewhat different and you probably felt that your god had forsaken you. The image of a dead Iraqi soldier, sprawled on the road in the Corridor of Death, completely consumed by fire except for his face, summed up the fate of the Iraqi grunts. "Tough fucking luck, Acknard," says Jackson, "but you were just a bunch of spineless, rag-headed motherfuckers, anyhow."

Then came the comparisons between the Gulf War and Viet Nam; between the Gulf War and WWII; between this war and that. But the reality was that the Gulf War was not the war in Viet Nam— it was not WWII.

Viet Nam veterans were especially angry because they didn't get their parade; Korean War veterans were miffed because their's was "the forgotten war"; WWII veterans because their's was the most important war, and, unlike the Viet Nam veteran, they won their's.

I saw a newspaper editorial by Mike Royko that featured the wisdom of a rural Montana physician in a community not far from mine. This doctor, a WWII veteran, was sarcastically irritated over all the welcome home hoopla and, in particular, that a Congressman had proposed giving each Gulf War veteran a $10,000 cash bonus. It was his contention that if all the Gulf War vets were going to get
$10,000 then he, as a WWII vet, should also receive said amount with interest compiled since 1946.

It was as if Americans, and especially veterans, would have been happier if more troops had come home in rubber bags. Would the physician have been happier? What if his son or daughter had been one of those KIAs? This animosity was especially ironic considering the parades weren't exclusively for the veterans of the Persian Gulf War but, more than anything, for the collective guilt of the American people over the treatment of Viet Nam veterans.

As a Viet Nam veteran, it didn't take ME very long to figure out that the war was not about the liberation of an oppressed nation, it wasn't about a New World Order, or some idealistic Bushist claptrap, it wasn't even about fucking oil. It was about trying to recapture some of the greatness that this country once possessed. It was for making up for the terrible loss of face and loss of life from the war in Viet Nam. For it was Viet Nam, that most terrible of American wars since the Civil War, that started this country on the downward spiral to hell and oblivion. (Personally, there is nothing that America or the American people can ever do that will allow me to forgive them for the treatment they gave to Viet Nam era military personnel. No amount of anything will ever make up for the 150,000 that committed suicide following their return back to "the world" or the thousands and thousands who have turned to drugs and crime.
Those people are forever condemned to live with thoughts of Nam and will never be allowed to forget that place and that time. I know about that--real goddamn well.)

I was in our TV room one night and CNN was showing some of the troops returning back to the states. An army unit paraded through a Pennsylvania town and the voice-over said this was such and such fucking messkit repair battalion, or some shit, from the army reserve and everybody laughed. But then the voice said that these were the surviving members of the unit that was in the barracks destroyed by the Iraqi scud that killed 28 people. The 5th Group people stopped laughing abruptly and there was silence. "Yea, motherfuckers, reservists die too," I thought.

I don't think most Gulf War vets wanted non-stop parades, celebrations, and limelight. They were just happy to be going home--alive, intact, and thankful that things had gone so well. The biggest thrills would be coming back to a real toilet seat and a cold Budweiser, not to mention pussy (or dick depending on your preference). The parades were fun for a while, then, at best, became an embarrassment to the participants.

One afternoon, the battalion surgeon informed us that we would be liberally showered with decorations and baubles for our valorous service--not only would we get the combat
patch (the patch worn on the right shoulder signifying service in a combat zone), and either the Combat Infantry Badge or the Combat Medic Badge, but they wanted to give us all the Bronze Star. That's right. Every swinging dick (or clit or whatever), in 5th Group was put up for the Bronze-fucking-Star. "I wonder what the people who really did something are in for," says Jackson. "Must be Silver Stars or maybe even the MOH (Medal of Honor)."

In the end, we were all given ARCOMS, the Army Commendation Medal, which can be awarded for meritorious service in peacetime, but even then one had to ask: Why give out medals at all? I knew a lot of Viet Nam vets who didn't get anything other than the service and campaign medals and many of them saw heavy shit. I mean sloshing through the paddies with 100 lbs rucks, chasing Victor Charles daily, and for a solid year.

I was in country for less than a month, admittedly got the piss scared out of me, but really didn't do that much or see that much. Yet, I was awarded the ARCOM for: "Exceptionally meritorious service while assigned to 5th Special Forces Group." More of that Viet Nam reconciliation bullshit, I guess. Still, it left a bad feeling in my stomach that was shared by many of those around me. It also made me wonder what kind of head trips were in store for the Gulf War vets and what evils the government would try and lie about and cover up. Many of the Viet Nam vets had been
driven to drugs, alcohol, and criminal pursuits because of their wartime experiences. Many of the Gulf War vets would be out on the street in weeks, if not days, and one could not help but speculate about their fate. And for some, the "street" would be another war zone, only in a different place.

(As for me, I had my psychosis pre-planned. I knew exactly what I was going to do and actually had a strategy for when I snapped and how best to employ it for the civic good and, you know, the best interests of the community. Instead of climbing up on the clock tower at the University and shooting innocent bystanders, I instead had a list of less-than-innocent bystanders that I felt needed "pruning" and would not be especially missed. Parasites like Stan Stevens, Ron Marlenee, and James Watt to name a few—our country certainly didn’t lack for bottom-dwelling shitbags. Thus, my delirium would take the form of a five-state killing spree (or maybe ten) that would be, not random, but selective, with carefully chosen targets whose demise would be tolerated, if not applauded.)

We began to grab at any opportunity to get out of KKMC and I managed to hook up with some guys going to Hafar al Batin in a humvee. We got the official business, whatever the fuck it was, out of the way, fast, so we could go screw
off and mingle with the “indig” (that’s the indigenous population. You know, the locals).

The Saudis continued to be a pretty sour lot, who, except for the children, seemed to go out of their way to ignore us and would frequently turn their backs and pretend we didn’t exist. The kids, though, would wave and cheer and I guess hoped we would throw them something (a pork patty maybe?) and seemed to be like kids everywhere: desperately wanting a change from the life they had been born into. Large herds of Saudi females, clad head to toe in black and aptly named by the 5th Group people the ”Ninja Nuns,” swarmed down the streets in search of goods and services.

"Say hey, little woman, what’s you got under that black sack?"

We finally arrived at our destination spot—a Saudi restaurant—where we waited in line with about 20 other GIs to sample some of the indig chow. Of course, we were charged about three times too much (Hey, we're all rich Americans), but I guess it was worth it for we got to observe Saudi Arabian eating habits up close and personal. Right next to our table was a group of about five Saudi soldiers. Their meal was served on a traditional and elaborate platter about the size of a extra large pizza pan and as the Saudi’s don’t use silverware, they merely took their right hand (sure don't want to use that deadly, feces clinging, microbe infested left hand) and scooped out as
much as they could feed into their mouths. "Never would have thought of that—organic fucking spoons," says Jackson.

Now with some of the stuff it seemed to work OK, but have you ever watched someone eat rice with their hands? The Ninja Nuns were nowhere to be seen.

"Oh, fuck, how silly of me, you can't allow those detestable females to eat in the same room with us manly men. But, you know, I kind of like eating with those 'women.' It kind of makes me feel alive and I, like, associate women with eating and all those other raw pleasures of life, like getting carnal, etc."

By the second week in March, with the monotony becoming extraordinarily intense, we, as medics, began to search out individuals as training vehicles for "medical experiments." We found this one buffoon with enlarged and external (Read: dangling) hemorrhoids and the PA, Redman, felt that decisive action should be taken—and immediately.

Now Redman, who was a pretty sleazy little fucker and a chain-smoker, decided that this operation, being great theater, should be performed with the patient bent over the desk in the battalion sergeant major's office. A small army of admirers of vicarious entertainment formed to assist with the procedure or at least to add witty commentary.

Redman had the man drop trow' and assume the position. He then shot up the poor sucker's roids' with about 3cc's of
Lidocaine, which I'm sure hurt like hell until it set up.

"Open wide, sugar pudding" he laughed as ashes fell from the cigarette hanging out of his mouth, "Nothing cures like the cut of cold steel."

He lanced the danglies with a disposable scalpel and the blood, it just gushed. The crowd let out a groan with the first cut and then began to laugh excitedly.

"Fuck, this is much better than CNN," says Jackson.

"And educational, too," I added.

After Redman was satisfied that the deadly roids' would offend no more, he taped a large wad of 4X4s to the guys asshole and let him pull up his underwear and trousers.

"Well, now. Be on your merry way," as the guy waddles out the door of the office.

"He'll be in some pretty intense pain in a couple of hours--I think I'll give him some medication for tonight," says Redman, still dropping ashes, "Maybe some Darvon."

"Holy fuck," says Jackson, "I'd want a lot more than Darvon after that."

"Yea, no shit. I'd want something a lot stronger--like fucking heroin."

We were told that we would probably be redeployed back to the States within a week and to start packing up all the gear. Nothing wrong with that. As far as I was concerned they could have, in its entirety: the Arabs, their camels,
their call to prayer, their prayer rugs, their left-handed ass wiping, the weather, the sand, Saudi Arabia, and the entire piss-ridden Middle-fucking-East, for that matter. Fuck it—let's leave today!

Yes. My attitude was, by then, pretty ugly. The army had mysteriously misplaced our mail (the reservist mail) and the only contact with "the world" was through the telephone system with an eternal waiting line, usually in excess of a 100 yards long. Plus, there was a time limit of only five minutes. One night I called my mom and she related this somewhat usual, if not far-fucking-out story about the death of my maternal grandmother in Kansas City:

During the summer of 1990, just after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, Grandma had been diagnosed with terminal cancer and had been given, at the most, a month to live. I saw her briefly over the Christmas holidays and she was fading fast. She would fall in and out of a coma state and tenaciously clung to life for no apparent reason. The doctors were bewildered and could only suggest that she had some reason for hanging on.

Two weeks later I was on my way to war and thought often of my little grandmother wasting away in what was once my old corner bedroom back in KC. My mother never told her that I had been activated and I don't think she even knew anything about America's involvement in the war. Finally, around the last week in February she fell into a deep coma.
and everyone thought: this is it. But she continued to live.

Then on the 7th of March, about week after the cease-fire, when everything seemed to be over, my grandmother regained consciousness, sat up in bed, and declared: "Mike's OK. Mike's OK. He's coming home soon." And with that, she slipped back into unconsciousness and then died the next morning.

Too much, right? Even a pagan, punk motherfucker like me could appreciate Grandma's ironic departure and strength of will. But, I tell you, when I'm ready to check out of the net, I'm not waiting for anything or anyone. A-fucking-men, Jack.

A firm departure date was now disseminated to the battalion and we began to get anxious about leaving the Saudi Arabian paradise. Equipment was cleaned and loaded into cargo containers and the vehicles were prepped for transport out to the coast for shipment back to CONUS.

But the real job of horsetrading and bartering booty became the principle object of attention. Souvenirs were collected, traded, and if we possessed an item of true, but illegal, value, plans were made to smuggle it back in a manner that would ensure "plausible denial." If you weren't willing to risk arrest, confinement, savage beating, etc. then you traded it away.
As I had grown up close to Ft. Leavenworth and had no desire to return there, I opted to unload the AK bayonet to some stupid reservist doctor at the hospital down the road for some pretty good stuff that was completely legal to take back. This dolt thought I was some really cool, green beret-wearing, murderous, kind of battle-hardened thug and, I'm sure, he would tell tall tales about the guy he got it from. Good thing I didn't mention the fact that I was another scummy reservist . . . just like him.

On the day we were to move to the airhead for the flight back to the states, we were given a briefing on contraband and what was, and was not, legal to take back to CONUS. It was fairly redundant by then—we knew the deal. But it was something the army had to do, so we listened patiently while they did their thing.

We were informed that there would be an "amnesty box" where we could deposit, with impunity (yea, right), any contraband materials: guns, knifes, grenades, bombs, and, of course those insidious bayonets.

Jackson nudges my arm and says:

"Hey, I heard somebody from the 82nd Airborne tried to bring back an arm wrapped in a plastic bag and got spooked and put it in the amnesty box. What do you think?"
"We should try and do them one better and bring back a head or a headless, armless torso. That would really be cool."

"Maybe it should be burned--I mean a totally pan-blackened--headless, armless torso."

"Could we get that into a duffel bag?"

"Fuck yes. You can get virtually anything into a duffel bag if you stomp it down."

In Viet Nam, collecting ears was a popular sport, but I had never heard of anyone trying to bring back extremities or torsos. Of course, this was 1991 and things had progressed, so perhaps this was not an irrational proposal.

That afternoon, right on time, our big 747 "freedom bird" touched down and taxied up to our building and we started to gather up all of our carry-on baggage, equipment, etc. Once again we would be getting on a commercial aircraft with guns and knives. "I could really, really, really learn to like this."

As we moved to board the plane, I could see stewardesses waving at us from the open door and several of the windows. "All fuckin' right! Finally! Naked, insatiable, promiscuous American women! Can we drink real beer and get real stupid and put this plane in peril on the way back?"
The line moved slowly, as we struggled with our gear and snaked our way up to the staircase. All the while they're playing that goddamn "I'm Glad I'm an American" or some nonsensical crap like that. Just before I stepped through the door, I turned and looked back out at the desolate, dreary landscape of that Middle Eastern cocksucker and thought: "Well, I guess it wasn't too bad, but I hope wherever they have the next one has better fucking nightlife."