



3/7 CAVALRY



Fighting the Co

...and Fighting It Well, With A Little Help From The Cadre

ALRY:

In an engineer bridging boat, team heads up the Euphrates to recon some suspect islands. Their overwatch boat turned back with mechanical problems – and this small vessel returned shot full of holes. The islands may not have harbored hostiles – but the riverbanks certainly did.



ood Fight

Of American Industry – PART TWO

By SFC Dillard J. Johnson
Photos from
Author's Collection

Captain Michael Burgoyne was tall and thin and reminded me of John Wayne in *The Sands of Iwo Jima*. We gave our new Troop commander the nickname of Captain America for the way he always conducted his operations just like the all-American boy.

Captain Burgoyne called SFC Todd Young, SFC Mark Madrey, plus the platoon sergeants from 1st and 4th platoons and me, into his office to come up with ideas on how to take out the IED threat in our new zone in Baghdad. After two days of all four platoons doing recons of the area, we all knew we would have to have a good plan. Our mission was set and ready, when CPT Burgoyne came and told me we were going to do a river assault on some islands in the Tigris River. At first I thought that he was joking and said “Yessir! Heh, heh.” Long story short, 3rd and 4th platoons got the mission and, yes, it was down the Tigris River. The 318th Engineer Company, better know as Lighting Over Water Company, would be our ride across the river in their bridging boats.

After some quick training, we put the 318th boats in the water down river about 20 miles from our biggest island. We would take two boats up-river on a recon to make sure there would not be any sand bars to stop the upcoming mission. The first boat had CPT Burgoyne, LT Cummings, LT Goulet, SSG Ingleson, myself, and three members of the 318th in it.

The second boat would just be members of the 318th to watch over all of us. We would have three Bradley's from my platoon in over-watch from the east side of the river, where they would follow our movements. The three Bradley's would be commanded by SSG Sowby, SSG Craig and SGT (P) Rodriguez. SFC Madrey, my wingman, would be running the command post at the launch site with two of his M1 Abrams. After only 20 minutes into our mission, our over-watch boat had engine trouble and had to turn around.

Bradley's At Our Back

We still had three Bradley's and some Apaches to cover us, so we kept moving north. It was a nice day out, and I was thinking about being



(above) Team shoves off to assault the suspect islands in an RIB, in Operation Steamboat. SGT Sean Cochran is in bow. Note improvised landing ladder. (below) SFC Johnson in bow has downloaded Google map taped to stock of his M4. Banks of Euphrates are choked with rushes and bamboo, complicating launch.



back in Mosquito Lagoon with Mike Marple and my boys fishing for reds. Then the water around the boat started exploding. I looked to my right and could see insurgents firing from the west riverbank. Everyone in the boat was returning fire but CPT Burgoyne who, with a cool head, ordered the boat skipper to take us behind an island and out of the line of fire. After firing six M203 rounds at the insurgents, I looked around inside the boat only to see that everyone had dropped below the water line, except me. I was on the engine deck that was even with the top of the boat. I fired another 30 rounds of 5.56 from my M4. CPT Burgoyne was on the radio net talking my Bradley's onto the insurgents. SSG Craig opened up with 25mm, hitting the insurgents with more than 50 rounds of high explosive.

Needless to say, it broke their back, and the insurgents stopped firing and were trying to get their shit back together. By this time, CPT Burgoyne had our attack air support back overhead.

The two insurgents that got away from SSG Craig started to fire at MAX 26, our air support. Bad idea. That lasted about 30 seconds before MAX 26 had 30mm chain guns rounds and 2.76 inch rockets on top of them.

We had had all the fun we could stand for one day, so we headed back down river and into yet another firefight. This time we had our air support and Bradley firing back at the insurgents as soon as they opened fire on us. I had fired all

10 of my M203 rounds and we only had about 120 5.56mm rounds left with us in the boat.

Why Teamwork Counts

The day's total was insurgent 0, Crazy Horse 9. I would like to thank MAX 26 and his wingman for the Apaches, and SSG Craig who killed six insurgents with his Bradley and saved the lives of everyone in the boat. Although I recommended him for an Army Commendation award with valor, Brigade thought that he was just doing his job. I would not be here and neither would anyone in the boat if SSG Craig had not been there, in time and on target.

The rest of the way down river all I could do was laugh. Everyone was just looking at me like I was crazy. If you think about it, there we were, going up the middle of the Tigris River in one of the worst times that most Iraqi people could remember.

It's like I told my First Sergeant, Tony Broadhead, every 'Raqi Redneck on the river got out their rifles and started shooting at the sitting ducks in the boats. When we got back to our launch site, we counted more than 20 holes in the boat and ten of them hit right next to where I was sitting above the gunwales drawing fire.

This trip up the river had caused Command to change the plan. We would now assault the island from smaller RB15s, which are 15-man rubber boats and can be put in the water almost anywhere. The day of our assault, I was number-one man and would be the first man out of the boat. My boat hit the bank of the island. [Note to anyone in a combat zone: make a small wooden ladder that will fit on the hood of your Bradley: It is worth its weight in gold.] I put the six-foot ladder in place and started out of the boat. I heard a splash. As I continued up the bank, I realized that I was hung up on something. I turned to look back down the bank and I could see my pistol stuck on a root under water. Once again my Blackhawk lanyard had saved my pistol.

After pulling my pistol up the bank we completed the mission. There would be no enemy contact that day at all. As it turned out, all four islands did not have any insurgents on them. After talking to Tom O'Sullivan from Blackhawk about my pistol falling out of my holster, we figured it was because I kept forgetting to snap the thumb lock. He sent me the new SER-

PA tactical holster with the automatic locking system. The SERPA holster locks your pistol in the holster as soon as you place it inside, and with the push of a button with one finger it comes out lighting fast.

Back to the IEDs

After the boat mission it was time to put into action our plan for the IEDs in our zone. The first thing we had to do, however, was to check all the polling sites in our zone for the upcoming elections. My platoon would send out three gun trucks. SSG Sowby would be in the lead, LT Cummings and LT Adam Harris would be in the second truck I would bring up the rear in my gun truck. Less than a mile from the turn-around point, SSG Sowby's gun truck was hit by an IED. The IED blew a big hole in the road but the tough armor on the 1114 gun truck protected the crew. LT Cummings took charge and had me dismount with a small team to try and catch the insurgents that had emplaced the IED.

My team consisted of SGT Sean Cochran, PFC Patty Turnbull and myself. We moved down the road to where the IED had detonated. SGT Cochran told me he had movement up ahead, so I fired an M203 parachute flare. As soon as I did, I could see three men running towards the river with AK47s. I opened fire with my M4 and then started chasing the insurgents. They fired wildly back at me as they were running away. I tripped and fell in a ditch as the air was filled with 7.62x39mm rounds from their AK 47s. SGT Cochran helped me up and we took off after the insurgents again. Running down the riverbank we picked up the trail again. This time, two of the insurgents were waiting in ambush and opened fire on us. SGT Cochran fired first, hitting one of the insurgents in the chest and knocking him down the bank into the river. I fired at the other insurgent knocking him down into their boat with the third one. I had emptied the magazine on my M4, and loaded weeds into the magazine well with my next magazine. As soon as I let the bolt go forward I knew what had happened, but it was too late.

There I was, looking down at this insurgent less than 10 feet away from me reaching for his AK47, so I fired an M203 HE round into the boat. A flash of light, than a hard hit in my chest and I found myself lying next to SGT Cochran and PFC Turnbull.



Author (center, in shades) and some of his team pose with members of the Iraqi POB (Public Order Battalion) they helped train and support. Indigenous forces have come a long way, have a long way to go.

The M203 round had exploded in the boat, breaking it in half and knocking us back six feet. [Note to Self: 10 feet is too close to shoot the M203.] Luckily, we were all OK.

Just as we were getting up, SPC Jeff Sund, the lieutenant's gunner, spotted one insurgent on the other side of the river, shooting at us. SPC Sund was the best M240B gunner we had in the troop. At a range of more than 400 meters he fired across the river at the insurgent. By his second six-to-nine-round burst, he was on target. SPC Sund then opened up with a long 75-round burst that ate up the insurgent and the riverbank.

Flying a Fleeting Target

Lieutenant Cummings called attack air in for help, but the Apaches were on another mission north of us and by the time they got there it was over. Just like in the movie *Top Gun* where the aircraft carrier captain said the fight would be over in two minutes, most of the firefights in Iraq are over as soon as they start. With four more kills to add to our platoon, we would move back to our FOB to begin what we *thought* would be an easy mission set.

Crazy Horse troop would take control of one of the major supply routes in eastern Baghdad. CPT Burgoyne had all four platoons in-zone at the same time.

Bushnell's range finder proved spot-on, and priceless for quickly determining the range of a fleeting target. It proved a good match for the Bushnell optics author had mounted on his M14.



We would be working around 14-hour missions outside the wire. I had my platoon broken down into two sniper teams and a heavy support team of three Bradley's. SSG John Williams would be in charge of one sniper team and I would be in charge of the other. My new Lieutenant David Dejesus, along with SSG Sowby and SSG Craig would be in the Bradley's.

Our first night out, SSG Williams spotted a would-be IED setter. He had the guy in his sights, but Williams waited and watched to make sure that it was the right guy.

Williams called the CO and told him what he had, and the CO sent SSG Wyatt our mortar platoon sergeant, who was acting as our light quick reaction force (LQRF) that night. When the guy saw the gun trucks coming at him he ran to his car. This was the worst-case scenario for SSG Williams: Why was this guy running? To kill him or let him go? Did this guy emplace an IED? SSG John Williams did the smartest thing he could do at night at a range of more than 300 meters: He looked through his Bushnell Elite 4200 rifle scope he was using with a



First Sergeant Broadhead and Captain "America" Burgoyne take a minute for a glamour shot before heading out on ops. As this goes to press, author is on leave until his ETS, before going back over as a PSD contractor. When you have served with men like these, a little bit of them goes with you.

universal night sight? and took out the passenger-side tires of this guy's car as soon as he started moving. This stopped the guy, and without killing anyone, a sniper team took a bad guy off the street.

Let there Be Light... NOT!

The next two missions were long and cold. I had SSG Kennedy on my sniper team and we had been on every roof in town but had spotted no bad guys. We had been out in sniper positions for more than a week, often working at night. There was one instance when I got a chance to take out an insurgent that was an easy shot - less than 100 meters. But just as I fired, I saw about 20 guys moving around Kennedy and me. We moved into an old compound with no lights, where we could watch the gate and shoot anyone that came inside to get us. I had SSG Kennedy watch my rear and I watched the gate to my front. I called my Bradley's to come and pick us up. They were a good 15 minutes away.

This was no big deal. It was dark and I had a good wingman with me, and I had the best night sight in the world. Then I heard the engine start on a generator and then the compound lit up. It was like we were in a Wal-Mart parking lot. I looked at Kennedy who was now looking at me and pointing at the high-voltage power line running down the wall to the lights in the compound. We had to put a plan into action quick, or we would be dead. Kennedy told me to use the LMF II I had gotten from Mark Schin-

del at Gerber Legendry Blades.

You could tell from the sound of the engine, this was a serious generator. The power lines were about two inches thick and had a lot of juice running through them. Mark had told me I could use the LMF II to cut through anything, to include power lines. So now you see my dilemma. My only way out was to trust a \$100 knife I was *told* would work -- or the two of us could try and fight a large force under the lights.

It was one of the easiest hard decisions I ever had to make. I took my LMF II and told Kennedy, "if this thing gets me fried, go kick Mark's ass for me," and went over to the wall and down to the power line, and stuck the knife in between the power line and the wall, saying to myself "in Mark we trust." Using my body weight I jumped and pulled down on the LMF II. A bright flash, then it was dark again and the best thing was, I only felt the heat from the lines as the LMF II cut through them. I had two spots burned into my knife but, hey, it worked, we were alive and it was dark again. The LMF II saved my team's life.

Now that we had the lights off, it was our fight again, and the bad guys hauled ass, giving us the opportunity to disengage. Lieutenant Dejesus showed up in our Bradley's and we took the long ride back to our FOB. ✂

Next month: sniper duel, and the good guys win.