



*A letter to the Soldiers of the 507<sup>th</sup> Medical Company (AA),  
“Lonestar Dustoff”.*

*Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm  
From their commander MAJ Greg A Griffin*

## TO THE SOLDIERS OF LONESTAR DUSTOFF;

The 24th of February marked the anniversary of the initiation of the ground war against Iraq. It's hard to believe that ten years have passed since the days of blowing sand and black smoke. I think that it is most appropriate to reflect on that period of time that has touched our lives forever.

After being alerted for deployment in August 1990, taken off alert status the middle of September, undergoing an Aviation Resources Management Inspection in October, and re-alerted in mid-November, we came together as a company the second week in December. This was the first time that the entire five-platoon/25 ship company had been assembled together since Vietnam, over 20 years ago. As we began to associate each other's names with faces, we immediately began to bond as a team, building the unit cohesion and pride that was to sustain us through the many challenges which lay ahead that got us through challenge after challenge that was to follow.

The first challenge began before we assembled. There was much confusion as to the composition of the 507th Medical Company (AA), Air Ambulance. After Vietnam, four of the five platoons were stationed at four different installations in order to provide peacetime MEDEVAC support. Derivative Unit Identification Codes (UICs) had been established to allow each platoon independent resourcing from the company headquarters, while still identifying the platoon as a part of the 507th. Funding and personnel requisitioning were the responsibility of the installations on which they were stationed. The Headquarters, 507th Medical Company (AA), with Headquarters Platoon, Maintenance Platoon and 1st Flight Platoon was stationed at Fort Sam Houston, Texas and was responsible for company level collective training and Unit Status Readiness reporting. Collective training proved to be particularly difficult, since each of the 4 installations as the stationed installations declared ownership of "their" platoon. In the spring of 1990, the units at Fort Sam Houston were evaluated as a company under the Army Readiness and Training Program (ARTEP). The other three platoons stationed at Fort Bliss, Fort Hood, and Fort Sill could spare only one or two aircraft each because of the competing demands of their installations. Success was achieved through the dedicated efforts of those young platoon leaders. . .

During the deployment notification sequence, bringing the unit together for training did not get any easier. Installation Commanders still refused to acknowledge that the platoons stationed on their installations with derivative UICs had any relationship with the company at all. After the Platoons received my training and pre-deployment guidance for the company, one Installation Commander cornered the platoon leader and said, “That’s a fine memo from a Major at Ft Sam Houston, but he doesn’t have anything to do with your Platoon.” Finally after much discussion, 3d Platoon (on Ft Hood) and 4th Platoon (on Ft Sill) were allowed to train and prepare for deployment. It was during the middle of November, after a “Personal For” letter from the Fifth Army Commander to the Installation Commander of Ft Bliss, before 2d Platoon was released from flying civilian MAST support at the installation and allowed three weeks for night vision goggle and readiness training. During the late 1980s most aviation units met only minimum requirements for night vision goggle training and were not focused on proficiency and there is a definite distinction between minimum currency and proficiency.

The entire company deployed, with all organic equipment, vehicles, and aircraft on ten C5As. The deployment from Kelly Air Force Base in San Antonio to Dhahran, Saudi Arabia took three days. Our only problem was when the Company XO, CPT Leo Hughes’s aircraft, who had to cross load his equipment, when his assigned C5A was declared un-operational in Dover AFB. He then had to cross-load two more times before they found one that worked.

Additional challenges started immediately with our arrival into “Chaos” at the Dhahran Airport. After landing, our palletized cargo was dropped by third-world nationals in the "Lost in Space" sand lot, some of which was never to be seen again. There were no location markings for identifying unit cargo. Contractors would drop the pallet in an empty hole –any empty hole- and go back and get another one. The Air Force Ground Operations personnel were demanding that we “Clear the flight line of our aircraft NOW!” We explained that the UH-1s required some assembly and flight-testing prior to movement, but they weren't hearing any of that. Their plan was to drag them a mile and a half down the ramp to a U.S. Army portion of the flight line. Army Flt OPNS told us that there was no room there, and stated, that the UH-1s had to be flown to a “bazillion acre” helicopter parking lot located about three miles away. Well AF OPNS still wanted their flight line cleared **NOW!** **NO ONE IN CHARGE!** **NO LIAISON!** **NO PLAN!** Welcome to the tip of the “Chaos Iceberg”. Our maintenance personnel and crew chiefs worked round the clock to get the aircraft ready for maintenance flights and the flight over to the helicopter staging area.

The rest of the company was transported in shifts by bus to the lovely Port of Dammam. We found ourselves a spot in an open-sided warehouse and made camp. Our flight crews finally linked up the company a few days later. It was in the port where we enjoyed Christmas, while we attempted to coordinate for movement to our tactical assembly area. The commander in charge of the port operations said we needed to leave the port and make way for more units that were in-bound. We asked the quartering party from our assigned higher headquarters, the 332d Medical Brigade, where they wanted us to assemble. Their answer was a general area of over twenty square miles, north of Tap Line Rd and east of the Wade Al Batin. We were told just to go find a spot in the desert, and then let the BDE know where we were. Our quartering party arrived at our first spot in the desert for New Year's Eve 1990. The remainder of the company soon followed to our initial assembly area. The move required 36 trucks and flatbed trailers in addition to our organic vehicles to transport the company's 120 pallets of cargo, which included 30 days of all classes of supply.

We were now in our "Brave New World." It was there on our spot in the desert, where we fine-tuned the true art of convoy operations, formation flight, pinpoint navigation, building bunkers, physical security, and disposing of human waste. We learned the uniqueness of Desert Operations, and oh yes, night vision goggle (NVG) operations in conditions similar to Baja, Oklahoma! Operating with the aid of night vision goggles was a major turning point in our military "Owning the Night". Flying under night vision goggles in the desert, however, is extremely difficult due to the lack of terrain definition. The almost complete total darkness of the desert coupled with very limited peripheral vision cues makes it very much like flying over Open Ocean. Continuous crew teamwork and crosschecks with all navigational instruments are the only things that keep you from flying it into the ground.

We began to figure out our command and control relationships with higher headquarters, and defined our relationships with units we were to support. The 507th Medical Company (AA) was to be in direct support of the 1st Infantry Division (ID), 2d Armored Cavalry Regiment (ACR), and 1st Armored Division (AD) UK for breach and follow-on combat operations. OPLANS were not disseminated down to brigade level and many of the required units had not even arrived in country yet.

As we went over the VII Corps MEDEVAC procedures, the decision was made for all MEDEVAC requests to be made in the Green. MEDEVAC coverage often overlapped divisional boundaries, and all MEDEVAC units used the same radio frequency. We found that we needed a CALLSIGN to distinguish each of the various MEDEVAC units from each other. All of the 507th's platoons were from Texas, except the 4th Platoon (PLT), "Sooners." The 4th PLT decided that Oklahoma was really North Texas, so the name LONESTAR DUSTOFF was born.

At approximately 0500 hours on 17 January 1991 our unit was alerted from higher headquarters that the "Air War" had started. We scrambled to our bunkers, donned our chemical gear and listened to "CNN Live" from Baghdad. Our company headquarters had a particularly outstanding bunker built by yours truly and the Headquarters Section. The best digger of the lot was, 6'2", 200lb CPT Mike Garfield, our Assistant Operations Officer. To this day, Mike proudly answers to "Backhoe". The boy could move some dirt.

There were only a handful of us with prior combat experience going back to Vietnam. All bunkers and fighting positions were dug by hand. Again, it was the “limited support” thing. The Air Force lost thousands of 463L pallets, because we used them to build overhead cover with 4x4 shoring and four to five layers of sandbags over them. As the Air War was underway, I was first concerned for our Soldiers’ safety, but quickly my thoughts and prayers went out to the Air Force and Navy aircrews, who were more directly in harm's way. The start of Operation DESERT STORM significantly increased the pucker factor, intensified planning, and magnified anticipation for what was to come next.

As the Big Red One (1st ID) began to move in, our mission responsibilities were further defined. We began direct coordination with their 4th Aviation Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, divisional medical units, and medical elements supporting the 1st Armored Division (UK). I established our operational alignment with the 1ID. The commander of the 4th Brigade was COL Jim Mowery. He was one of those leaders that you only read about. Strong as an Ox, heart of a Tiger, smart like a Fox, and had “Follow-Me” written all over his back. I introduced myself and said that the 507th would provide the MEDEVAC support to 1ID. COL Mowery said, “Well that’s great, but do you think that we (1ID) could get the 82d Med Company that we have trained with at Ft Riley?” I explained that the 82d had been assigned to the XVIII Corps and couldn’t be switched out. After much grumbling, he went on to say that I would be assigned to LTC Wilkerson’s battalion. He said that there was a Reserve MEDEVAC unit that he was going to assign to me and place responsibility for all MEDEVAC under my command. I reluctantly explained that he couldn’t do that. He couldn’t assign them to me, because neither of the units actually was assigned to him. The doctrine at the time called for MEDEVAC to be in Direct Support, which didn’t make very much sense and certainly wasn’t understood by the warfighters. I pledged to COL Mowery that WE would ensure the MEDEVAC support to the 1ID and its soldiers. I further reiterated, that WE would live by whatever rules that he issued, fit into his footprint where directed, and synchronize operations under his supervision with the division. He wasn’t happy about the Direct Support command and control relationship, but we looked each other in the eye, shook hands, and got on with the mission. I met with LTC Phil Wilkerson, Commander of the Support Battalion. LTC Wilkerson took us in his battalion as if we had always been part of the team. We fully integrated into his footprint and tactical operation. LTC Wilkerson was also a very special kind of leader.

Long after the dust from Desert Storm had settled, I heard another example of one LTC Wilkerson's leadership attributes. You see, we both lost soldiers in battle. Upon returning home to Ft Riley, he took 30 days leave, traveled around the country and personally visited the family members of the soldiers he had lost. He is the epitome of a caring leader with unmatched morale courage.

The OPLAN for Operation DESERT SABER (The Ground War) began to unfold. I made the decision to co-locate the 507<sup>th</sup> with the 4th Aviation Brigade in order to better support the Operation. There was no definitive doctrine at the time that specified command and control relationships. In fact, a number of DUSTOFF units aligned themselves with hospitals and never caught up with the war. Our relationship with the 4th BDE, 1st ID proved to be invaluable in keeping pace with a fast moving offensive operation and evacuating wounded soldiers from the battlefield.

The first week in February we were told to move into a forward assembly area some 70 miles to the northwest. We began by moving Flight Operations and all four flight platoons into position by sling-loading their organic equipment. The UH1 has very limited sling load capability. The truck and flatbed support that had been promised by higher headquarters, to move the 120 pallets of company equipment forward, never came. Service and Headquarters Platoons were left holding the bag, or I should say the pallets. Through ingenuity, tireless dedication, and hours of sweat, those soldiers de-palletized, reloaded, and transported that equipment for 24 hours a day over two weeks with our old tired 2 1/2 ton trucks logging over 3,000 miles.

The company now had flight crews and aircraft pre-positioned forward with the medical companies of the 1st Forward Support Battalion (FSB) and 498th FSB along Phase Line Cherry supporting across the Forward Line of Troops (FLOT) probing missions. It was on one of those night probing missions that LT Christ's, 2d Platoon, crew responded to an urgent MEDEVAC request across FLOT. A Bradley fighting vehicle and an M113 armored personnel carrier had been hit and taken major casualties. It was later learned that it had been friendly fire from an AH 64 attack helicopter from the 4th BDE, which had mistakenly engaged the vehicles. Responding to this tragedy was to be the first of many night vision goggle (NVG) missions flown under near zero illumination and extremely adverse conditions. The next morning COL Mowery thanked me for the job done by our aircrew. He said that he didn't know how they had flown the mission with the visibility so bad. I told him, that the crews were well trained in crew coordination, and that a lot of luck never hurt either.

Only a few days before the ground war began, I was told that their RC Medical Battalion Commander had withdrawn the Reserve MEDEVAC Det in support of the 2d Armored Cavalry Regiment (ACR), without authority. With time being of the essence, I volunteered to attach one of our flight platoons to the 2d ACR for support. 2d Platoon volunteered to move with the 2d ACR, as they had established a support relationship earlier in the Operation. 2d Platoon departed without any organic company support, and quickly integrated with the 2d ACR's offensive operation. They were on their own -for the duration of the War – and provided flawless and synchronized lifesaving support to the 2d ACR.

As 1SG Pruett and CPT Kueter with Headquarters and Maintenance Platoons and the last of the company's logistical slice closed on the forward assembly area, we were told to move to vicinity Phase Line Cherry for commencement of ground operations. I only had time to shake the 1SG's hand and leave Headquarters and Service Platoons with him and the Service Platoon leader, CPT Kueter. We did not have the organic vehicles for them to keep up with the Flight Platoons and Company Operations in a fast paced/deep offensive operation. Since the end of Desert Storm, the MEDEVAC MTOE has been significantly improved to allow for independent operations and mobility.

On February 22, we moved north with the 4th Brigade into position. We split Flight Operations into three sections, the Main, Jump TOC, and Jump/Jump TOC. The Jump/Jump TOC was to move with the advanced elements of the 4th AVN BDE. Additionally, we had been in very close coordination with the 1AD(UK) during the planning phase for the breach operation. We received a British liaison/communication team and access to six Puma and six Lynx helicopters, if needed for additional evacuation assets. We broke some new ground on doctrine that day as well. The 1ID DMOC made the decision to move with the 507<sup>th</sup> TOC and the 4<sup>th</sup> BDE to be as far forward as possible. The breach went much faster and smoother than anticipated. Now, we were off to the races.

I requested and received augmented support from the 236th Medical Company with UH60s for the initial jump into Iraq. The 236th aircraft replaced our forward pre-positioned crew's co-located with the 1st and 2nd FSB's, while our company operations and aircraft moved with the advance elements of the 4th Brigade. We were now in front of the "Tip of the Spear". It is an awesome sight flying over and in front of an Armored Division in a V formation.

As soon as we arrived, some 70 miles north at our new site, we began receiving MEDEVAC requests and flying missions in support of 1st ID combat operations. We had the day crews flying missions and the night crews trying to sleep in their aircraft for a few hours before dark. As darkness set in, the missions became more numerous, the fighting more intense, and determining friend and foe more difficult. Flight Operations with the Jump/Jump TOC was being run out of the back of a M1008 pickup truck, as the main body of the convoy still had not arrived.

The flight crews had been flying since 0300 the prior morning. The only sleep that they got was in their aircraft, while waiting for the next mission. In addition to the fog of war, we had less than 25% illumination. At approximately 0345, we received an urgent MEDEVAC request from Witch Doctor, 2d AD FWD/498th for 2 URGENT litter patients, followed moments later upgrading to 2 litter/3 ambulatory. Before I had finished briefing the crew the Witch Doctor upgraded his casualties again to 4 URGENT litter/5 ambulatory, one of which was a double amputee, with 15 wounded on the ground. The landing zone was said to be hot, with enemy situation unknown. The first aircraft was launched immediately. The next crew, LT Dan Graybeal and W01 Kerry Hein's, was briefed and launched at approximately 0400.

As I began to brief the next crew to launch on this mission, the PC said, "What is that?" I looked out of the back of the truck in the direction he was looking. I saw a helicopter about 500 ft AGL with its search light on. It made several rapid descents and climbs. My first thoughts were back to Vietnam, of a Cobra attacking a target, but those are not our tactics today and especially under NVGs. The aircraft made another descent followed by a five second pause and then an explosion. I immediately dispatched the crew that I had been briefing to the crash site. I instructed CPT Bobbitt to stay away from the fireball and search for survivors, who may have been blown clear. My heart was definitely racing, as I ran to get the next crew to brief for launch. CPT Bobbitt radioed back that the aircraft on the ground had red crosses and appeared to be ours. At first, he stated that he did not see any survivors, but called back and said that he saw something and was going to land. He radioed that he had a survivor in hand and was departing to the nearest hospital, which was over 80 miles away over unknown enemy terrain. I was still a bit in shock, when my RTO, SP4 Gary Hughes said, "Sir, don't we still need to launch another aircraft on that mission to the Witch Doctor?" SPC Hughes' comments brought me back in the game, and we continued with our missions. I've always been one who listened to input from subordinates, and SPC Hughes forever engrained that philosophy into my leadership style. SPC Hughes is now LTC Hughes and deployed to Iraqi Freedom as the 82d Airborne, Division Optometrist.

Before first light, my crew with CPT JT Toner flew to the site of our downed aircraft. The wreckage was still smoldering and the worst was realized. Not much of the aircraft was identifiable except for the pieces that were not intact. The horrific scene is still stenciled in my mind. The survivor, SPC Nick Wright, later stated that he had been blown out of the aircraft. He had unbuckled his seat belt when he thought he was on the ground. What he felt hit the ground was only the tail boom striking, and it actually had been the second impact that blew him clear. He recalled being dazed, but heard screaming from the aircraft. He returned to the blaze to see one of the pilots trying to get out. He tried to undo his seat belt, when a second explosion blew him clear again. When CPT Bobbitt finally found Nick, he had his 38 revolver in one hand and a strobe light in the other.

I returned to our base camp only two miles away and debriefed our DUSTOFF crews on the loss of our three crewmembers. LT Dan Graybeal, W01 Kerry Hein, and SSG Michael Robson died, while desperately trying to evacuate the wounded from the battlefield under limited visibility and hostile fire. Only the crew-chief, SPC Nick Wright miraculously survived.

I gathered the aircrews at my vehicle and briefed them on the tragic loss of our brothers. We held hands, offered prayer, and cried together at their loss. I then told the aircrews that we could say that we were down for crew rest, or we could get back in our aircraft and continue to pick up those wounded soldiers that needed us. We knew the criticality of our missions, and that there was only one imaginable option. So we climbed back in the saddle, buckled up, and continued to fly missions pushing our old Hueys and us to the limit. We immediately moved with the 4th BDE into Kuwait. Ironically the tragic mission in support of the Witch Doctor later was revealed to have been a result of a friendly fire exchange.

Writing the letters of notification to Dan's mom and Kerry and Mike's wives was the most difficult thing that I have done in my entire life. The deaths of Dan, Kerry, and Mike will remain etched in my mind and heart forever! Flying DUSTOFF, we sometimes desensitize ourselves, as a protective shield to things that we see, and we often keep our feelings deep inside. Well, the shield was down! The horror and reality of War had just set in!

At 0800 that morning, 25 Feb, our main Operations Section finally caught up with us. Within an hour, we received orders to move some 90 miles east to the Kuwaiti border. It didn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that we were about to extend our evacuation lines beyond our aircraft's fuel range. I met with CW3 Bingham from the 236th MED, on our spot in the desert, and explained the situation. I told him that we needed to establish an air Ambulance Exchange Point (AXP) on the spot where we were standing. We then coordinated with the 4th Brigade to co-locate a FARP (refueling point) with his aircraft. Another mutation of doctrine! Normally an AXP would optimally have some type of medical provider, an MC or PA, to further stabilize or treat as necessary, and would have some form of security. This AXP had neither. It started as just a designated point in the desert with one lonely UH60 and a HEMMT refueler. We ended up using that critical exchange point for the next two days.

We continued to fly missions and by afternoon, we began to leap frog aircraft east to our next assembly area. We linked our last aircraft back up with the 4th Brigade just before dark. Heavy fog and black smoke quickly brought flight operations to a halt. We had a few requests for MEDEVAC, but had less than 50 meters visibility and zero illumination. We launched one of the most experienced NVG crews on an Urgent mission request. The aircraft was forced to land less than a mile away due to extremely limited visibility. We still had brigade commanders demanding and generals asking us to fly. I asked the Division G3, if he had any divisional aircraft flying; he said "No". I asked, "Can your AH 64s launch?" he said "No." I responded, "Neither could we." It had been a long couple of days, and the exhaustion was visible with the senior commanders as well as the soldiers conducting the fight.

At approximately 2100 that night, I had an urgent request for armed assistance come over the MEDEVAC frequency from the 1st ID Division Medical Operation Center (DMOC). The DMOC, MAJ Terry Davis, was in the 4th Brigade trail convoy with some of my personnel and vehicles. Again we had improvised our doctrine and had the DMOC move with our air ambulance company instead of the DISCOM. We did this to facilitate communications and evacuation within the division in this fast moving offensive. At one point, they had hooked up an OE254 antenna to a HMMWV with 100 mile an hour tape and drove at 5 mph in an attempt to maintain a MEDEVAC frequency commo relay. Terry had stopped their convoy at the last known ground checkpoint due to the limited visibility. It just so happened that this checkpoint had been an overrun Iraqi bunker complex. What had appeared to be a blown up/deserted area during the day now had enemy soldiers coming out of the bunkers with unknown intentions. This became of deep concern to Terry, as the only weapons in the convoy were M-16s and .45 pistols. He and I discussed options and explained that AH64s could not launch due to weather and the only support that could get to their position was by ground. With ground support two hours or more away, they made the command decision to depart the area. During the haste of their departure, they had to abandon one of my 2 1/2 ton trucks that would not start (only 40 years old). The following morning I flew to the bunker complex where they had abandoned our truck. Amazingly it was still there. I then flew to the 2d ACR and coordinated directly with the S4. I even flew one of his recovery drivers to the 2 1/2 ton's location to ensure that he knew exactly where it was. The S4 said that they would recover it. We never saw the truck again. A very small price to pay!

Because we were unable to fly that night, the crews finally got some rest. We were exhausted! At first light, the 4th Brigade began to move deep into Kuwait. 4th Brigade left a FARP with the Flight Platoons, while our Operations Section moved into Kuwait with their Main TOC. We resumed flying missions with the day's difference that the majority of our patients were Iraqi. Our crews were constantly landing in the middle of unexploded cluster bombs to pick up the wounded. Again more miracles, none exploded.

By about 1130, visibility had dropped to about 25 meters with blowing sand, black smoke, and winds 35 to 45 knots. We still had crews out flying missions with patients on board desperately trying to find us for critically needed fuel, and searching for the 236th's ambulance exchange point. We were guiding them by radio signal (FM homing) into us, firing pin flares, turning on our strobe lights, and waving panel markers in the air. The aircraft would fly by our location, where we could see them, but they could not see us. Miraculously, we didn't lose any aircraft during this ordeal.

At about 1300, I received a mayday call over the MEDEVAC frequency from a convoy belonging to a medical clearing company. They said they were taking sniper fire and needed armed assistance with MEDEVAC for wounded personnel. By exchanging our longitudes/latitudes, we determined that we were only a couple of miles away from each other. I instructed the unit to drive away from the sniper fire and to our location. The only vehicle at my site was a HEMMT fuel truck, and we still only had 25 meters visibility in which to launch aircraft. We prepared our best instrument crew and coordinated with AWACS. We were prepared to launch an aircraft on an instrument takeoff (ITO) directed by AWACS, if the casualties could be brought to us. The casualties never arrived.

At 1700, almost mysteriously, the visibility increased to two miles and the winds died down in a matter of minutes. We launched one of our aircraft and located the clearing company. What had been called in to us as sniper fire ended up being a physician and specialist accidentally blowing themselves up with souvenir cluster-bombs. Evidently, the vehicle that they were driving hit a bump. The bump caused a cluster bomb beneath the seat of the Doc to explode. The Doc was killed, but the driver exited the vehicle and dove to the ground with her M16 at the ready, when a 2d bomb located in the cargo pocket of her trousers exploded causing her to lose her leg. When will we learn from our past mistakes? LT Bolton and CW2 Finley's crew evacuated the casualties to a forward deployed MASH, but to no avail.

We were receiving calls for MEDEVAC from our forward Operations Section, now to the east and deep into Kuwait. I gathered the crews of the 15 aircraft present, gave a mission brief before dark, and began to launch in three flights. I was a member of a non-NVG designated crew. I cross-leveled pilots and crew, between CPT Pete Rodigue's and WO1 Jeff Smith's aircraft. I appointed Jeff as the PC of my aircraft and assigned J.T. Toner to fly with Pete. This balanced the crew proficiency for the required mission. As we flew under NVGs toward the 4th Brigade's new site, the calls for MEDEVAC increased, as did radio traffic from units in contact with the enemy. We flew east over burnt and blown up Iraqi equipment in previous enemy positions. As we looked on the horizon toward the FM radio signals, there loomed an enormous orange glow that filled the view of the upper half of the windshield. I just knew this was going to be "The Big One", and that we were flying straight into the jaws of Hell. I breathed a sigh of relief, as we identified our unit on the ground, and realized that the orange glow was, in fact, oil wells ablaze on the other side of our unit's assembly area. We had aircraft flying missions throughout the night. We were still fortunately evacuating more enemy and Kuwaiti civilians than allied casualties.

We soon got word of the enormity of the coalition's success against the Republican Guard and other Iraqi forces. The next day, there was talk of a cease-fire and negotiations. We pre-positioned aircraft once again, with the FSBs, and two more to a secured airfield at Suwain. Suwain had been chosen as the site for the negotiations, or as the place where Gen Schwarzkopf said, "I'm going to tell the Iraqis what they are going to do!" We continued to provide MEDEVAC coverage in Kuwait for the next week. Now we were flying U.S. accident casualties daily. The casualties were mostly from stupidity. Soldiers would try to get a souvenir or photo, and would get blown up by a booby trap, or step on a land mine or unexploded cluster bomb.

It was about the 9th of Mar, when the company was withdrawn from Kuwait and reconsolidated in the vicinity of Al Qasumah, just south of Tap Line Rd in the 332d MED BDE's Rear Assembly Area. We still had aircraft and crews pre-positioned with the FSBs, as the combat units conducted mopping up operations and secured the newly defined cease-fire boundaries. Crews were rotated back to our rear assembly area, where they got at least one hot meal a day, kind of a shower, and some good sleep. Everyone that rotated back from the front wanted to kiss SFC Sam, our Mess SGT, and his crew for the great chow that they made up out of almost nothing. I can still taste SFC Sam's biscuits now! No matter the intensity or duration of a war, the things that keep soldiers happy are: a hot meal, a hot shower, and a dry cot.

We were finally released from our forward deployed coverage by the end of April and immediately began preparation and movement for redeployment home. I was ordered to remain at my Spot in the desert until called forward. I remained and personally complied with the order, while I infiltrated most of our company to the rear. My scouts had told me that there was coordinated space on the wash racks, so I began to shuttle aircraft, personnel, and equipment to King Fahd airport for recovery. It was pretty lonely for my driver, SGT Brian Daggett, and myself, in our lone tent in the middle of the desert by the time I received official orders to recover.

There again began the chaos, "Who is on the wash rack?", "What is the deal with chow?", "How about those latrines?", "Where's my name on the manifest?", and "When do we go home??" Once again, no one in charge! One of the few resemblances of sanity was MAJ Jim Rice, who was facilitating the redeployment of medical units.

I was appointed as the aircraft commander for one of the Freedom Birds returning to the World. My command decision was to have all the Vietnam Vets sit in the First Class section. I wanted them to return home for once with dignity.

I'll never forget the feeling as I saw Saudi Arabia in the "rear view mirror" during our departure on the Freedom Bird. It was exactly the same feeling I had almost twenty years earlier when I left Vietnam. It's difficult to adequately describe that emotion to those who have not experienced it. It's much more than just knowing you're going home. It's a feeling of being safe, being "Outa There", and leaving the chaos and horror behind. "Hasta La Vista, Baby!"

Well I think that I speak for all of us in saying that the memory of Desert SHIELD/STORM will remain with us forever. I know that I've only scratched the surface in the memory banks of all of you, the Soldiers of LONESTAR DUSTOFF. What I hope you remember is that we succeeded by working together as a team. That each one of you was an important member of the **TEAM**, and because we truly were a **TEAM**, we **succeeded!** From the unsung heroes of Fuels (POL), Maintenance, Mess, Supply, Operations, and the Aircrews, each one of you is a **HERO!**

And let us never forget the loss of our friends Dan Graybeal, Kerry Hein, and Mike Robson, and the families they left behind. They paid the ultimate sacrifice and epitomized the motto:

***"WHEN I HAVE YOUR WOUNDED"*** Charles Kelly

Sincerely,

LONESTAR 06, OUT!