





They needed a chaplain to replace them-replace him immediately. We looked around the room and of course we're all very senior in rank and I looked at Rabbi and I said, "You know, we could take care of this." And we turned back and looked at the Padre and said, "Well, we'll step forward if you want." And he said, "Fine. You're ordered to go forward."

So Rabbi and I packed our belongings quickly and got in the vehicles and headed to Camp Matilda, 1st Marine Division headquarters and were subsequently assigned to 1st Battalion, 11th Marines, which was an artillery unit that was the farthest north of any American unit in Kuwait; 1 mile from the border. So we literally could see the Iraqis riding the fence line or whatever they were doing, every now and again.

This unit had had 4 chaplains in the last 3-½ years, we being the 4th RMT, religious ministry team, to show up, and no RP. The RP that they had had been assigned from somewhere else and he'd been in the Navy about 3 months...4 months, maybe...5 months. He was very young and very green and had no idea what he was getting ready to go into, so I had him assigned back up to the regimental level and he stayed with the Regimental Chaplain.

Rabbi is an O-5, or Commander, which is the same rank as the battalion commander, which is a Lieutenant Colonel. And I am an RP-1 at the time, as this slide...doesn't show my rank, but that's what I am in this picture. And that's pretty high for an E-6 to be doing this job. It's usually assigned to an O-2 or an O-3 and an E-2 or an E-3, maybe an E-4.

So we were assigned to ride with the executive officer and his driver. And the 4 of us...we're going forward in a non-armored, you know, vinyl sided humvee. Having been a Marine, when you talk about artillery I can tell you that you don't generally think about being in the fight as much. You're reaching out and touching the enemy a good ways away, but I'll explain a little later how that worked out.

So, back to this slide: Here I am unpacking the humvee yet again to pack our gear because I needed to get something out of a bag. Four of us in a Hummer-we were pretty crowded.

#### **Slide 6:**

The next slide is...the date is in the bottom, right-hand corner. It's a little out of order, but I wanted to put that in to show you how beautiful the sunsets were there and how, even in moments of crisis, you can stop and take a look at it, but it lasted about 60 seconds and then it was gone.

#### **Slide 7:**

The next photo; the next slide, is us actually going through the breach. I wasn't very comfortable with going through with the sun up but you know, at 5:30 in the morning the sun just pops up in the sky. So off we go. This is us actually driving through the breach into Iraq; into the, well, no-man's land between the two countries and then on into Iraq.

There were 2 breaches cut. The breach, which would be to our left in this slide, is down the road a bit, collapsed and it was closed. So the entire United States military went through this breach-- that slowed things up-- at daylight.

### **Slide 8:**

These are the Ramallah Oil Fields that were being set afire by the Iraqi Republican Guard. The 5th Marines punched through ahead of everybody else. The war started a shade early, and we went in to stop these oil fields from being burned completely. And the 5th Marines took some casualties and we had to travel through the oil fields to get north.

Right here, I'd like to bring you up to speed on one more thing. We were assigned to the 1st Regimental Combat Team which was the 1st Marines...3rd Battalion, 1st Marines, which are having some problems right now dealing with a shooting in Hadassah, and we also had the reserve battalion; 2nd Battalion, 23rd Marines, which were where I'm from in San Francisco, and then 2nd Battalion, 4th Marines who earned their stripes in World War I and, subsequently, in World War II and thereafter. So we were kind of mix-and-match of battalions assigned to this regimental combat team, but we were designed to go into the country as an arrow, the 5th Marines on our left, 7th Marines on our right coming from Basra and 1st Marines coming up the middle on highway 7 to back up the other 2 regimental combat teams.

Unfortunately, the Iraqis didn't read that memo and things changed for us drastically. So as we go through this oil field on this slide...

### **Slide 9:**

The next slide shows you even more. The road literally wraps around this burning oil well. So I put this in to show you, not only did we have to drive right next to them and watch our windows melt a bit, we also had to deal with all this oil--this burning oil, so environmental hazards were there. And it makes quite an impression on you when you're constantly rubbing your eyes and trying to get oil out of your face. And we were in chemical suits obviously, so they were covered with it as well.

### **Slide 10:**

The next slide shows us in the open and how much the oil had saturated the sky. That is the sun in the middle of the slide there, in the middle of the day. That's probably 2 o'clock, maybe...no, it's earlier than 2 o'clock anyway. And it shows 3 of our vehicles out setting up a firing pit.

### **Slide 11:**

The next slide...I usually reserve Rabbi's religion until we get to this slide but I went ahead and let the cat out of the bag but...this is the pennant, or the flag, which we fly for his services. Every chaplain has the appropriate pennant for their service and this is Rabbi's. I usually ask people if they can guess what that is. But in Iraq or Kuwait, they know what that Star of David is. So we only took this pennant out right here.

This is on the day we're getting ready to do the first Shabbat, or Sabbath, service or Jewish services actually, because it is Friday, again here in Iraq...in southern Iraq. And we took it out just to have our picture taken with it and then Rabbi carried it in side his flak jacket for the rest of the time. I think he donated it to the Israeli Navy Headquarters.

### **Slide 12:**

As we went north...in the next slide you'll see one of the villages and one of the children standing outside. Our progression...natural progression was to first take highway 8 to highway 7, and then off highway 7 go north to Al Kut, link up with the Marine Regiment, and work our way into Baghdad.

We had a town to go through on the way named An Nasiriyah. Nasiriyah was the town at the end of the Gulf War, after much encouragement from our President, that did rise up against Saddam internally, and he sent his army down and crushed and killed a lot of people to get the rebellion down and that's what caused us to install no-fly zones in the north and the south...and Nasiriyah was under the no-fly zone.

When we got there, or were on our way there, we anticipated it being a friendly town. As we got north, we noticed children...a lot of people were anxious to see us. We moved pretty quickly and we learned a lot of things along the way. For instance, to the right here, if you see the little flag pole with the green flag, people had different colored flags up signify tribe, or Shiite or Sunni, or loyal or white flag: Peace, don't shoot us-that kind of thing.

What we found later was these kids were lookouts a lot of places. They were watching out for Fedayeen, which would get into these houses and wait until we got by, or wait until the 1st Infantry Battalion passed and then jump the mid-section of the convoy. The Colonel that we were traveling with decided that he was going to keep us close to the fight so we always were the second battalion in the convoy in a regiment of 5 battalions. So, we were always up next to the front. First Battalion would start fighting and we'd be right behind them.

### **Slide 13:**

The next slide shows more-and a different colored flag. This one's black; usually sympathetic to Saddam. As you'll notice, no one's there; at least that we can see. We sent a recon team in later to sweep the place, and they found a lot of arms but there was no one home.

One of the things I'd like to point out to you here is that in Iraq, everybody thinks it's desert. In Ramadi and places out that way; to the west, it very much is. But this part of the country is called the "fertile crescent" for a reason and if you'll look at the bottom of the slide, in the middle of the slide there's a river, or I shouldn't say a river. In American terms, it's more like a creek and some back up water. As you can see, they've got a lot of stuff in it. But the sand is not there.

It's very fertile, reddish-brown dirt, and it grows good stuff-lots of good food. These people were...we expected to see starving, bulging tummies, bulging eyes, you know, people starving like I saw when we were in Africa, but this wasn't the case; well-fed, happily moving about their day and waving and, you know; "George Bush!" That kind of thing...and smart...very smart.

#### **Slide 14:**

As we moved towards Nasiriyah a sand storm began. The notion was, we were going to take a position on the river before crossing the bridge into An Nasiriyah, and Task Force Tarawa was going to link up with us. They were from the 2 MEF that had been assigned to us to hold the rivers...roads, rivers, and bridges of Nasiriyah while we went through. A regimental combat team was headed through. Our fight, as we knew it, was for Al Kut.

So in this slide, you see the sand starting to kick up, and I wanted to show you this compound--in this photo is where lots of Iraqi Republican Guard troops had been garrisoned. We're not sure if it's a jail or a school. They were using it as a jail and we did capture a lot of Fedayeen troops in here, but what had happened...or regulars...they were planning to cut us off from this compound. This was before we got to Nasiriyah and set up.

#### **Slide 15:**

The next slide is some of our armor. The last slide I was looking West. This slide I'm looking East, and we're about 2 miles away from where that other picture was taken. And as you can see in the bottom corner, the bottom right-hand corner, the cloud is starting to move in. That's the last little bit of sun we saw for three days, and these tanks were heavily involved in the fight.

#### **Slide 16:**

The next slide is our CP that we set up for Nasiriyah. We threw this thing up in 15 minutes everywhere we went. This little tent section went up and down and these antennas; the ant farm; went up and down...up and down. These young Marines constantly were on the move and constantly putting it up, taking it down, so that we'd have a place to control fires from.

By this time, we had been in country for a week and we were engaged and had been in firing missions the whole way up the road, but as we got to Nasiriyah, Task Force Tarawa started across the bridges and we were just set up and waiting. We had tied in with their artillery people just in case something happened. And it was a good thing we did.

#### **Slide 17:**

The next slide shows you one of the tanks, aptly named "Zion", if you can see it on the barrel there to the right of the screen. The tank commander had been an Annapolis mid-shipman that Rabbi had known. His last assignment before he came forward to us was at Annapolis, so this was one of his "Middies" as he called them.

Anyway, you can see the sandstorm and how it's kicking up, and the reason I took a picture of this tank was because they were engaging. What happened, I'd like to explain to you, from this time, for the next few slides...what transpired for us here.

Task Force Tarawa went across the bridge and into the city and met some resistance, but not as much as would slow down a convoy. And as they broke to two columns to go either way in the city, they were fully engaged. And one of the AMTRACs, which is an armored personnel carrier for the Marine Corps, was hit with RPGs; multiple RPGs at the bridge, and disabled; set afire and blocked the bridge for a moment or two...and Marines were inside burning.

I can tell you there are two things you don't usually hear when traveling with Marines. One is, "Retreat." The other is, "Chaplains and corpsmen up! Now!" We heard that on the regimental net. Everything stopped and they called, "All chaplains and RPs and corpsmen forward, now!" so we started running to the bridge, and they stopped us going that way and said, "No, stay here. The fight is too bad" So we had to stand and look across the river as these guys were pinned down and fighting

What we were told at that time was that Marines had gone to the hospital in Nasiriyah; which I'll get back to that in just a second, and they had encountered patients walking around with their bottles, you know, IV and everything else, and they were surrendering. The Marines dismounted the vehicles to start attending to these people, the Iraqis hiding in the hospital opened up on the Marines and killed 11 Marines and wounded 50, and that makes me very angry right this minute, because I was a Marine and my first instinct is to run forward and to help and we were being held back; a pretty tough spot to be in.

One of the other things that I did not touch on, and I only want to touch on it briefly because I have some very personal feelings about this: One of the things we encountered on this road going in to Nasiriyah, the night before the...this ambush started, there was a convoy of vehicles; not a very big one but several tractor-trailers and hummers that came through with their headlights on in the middle of night-- during a war you just don't drive with your headlights on, so we knew they were in the Army. And we all shielded our faces and tried to save our night vision and as they drove by, you could here them yapping and talking and no tactical training whatsoever. And here sits an entire Marine regimental combat team armed to the teeth and ready to fight and they're driving through our perimeter with lights on, drawing all kinds of attention.

What we found out the next morning is, we sent our scouts forward and I was with the Executive Officer; the Rabbi and I were, so we were part of the scout forward team, was the crash scene for Jessica Lynch and her Army crew that was captured. The first Marines that had gotten there were these infantry guys from the battalion in front of us, and then us. And it was, at the time, a very horrendous because there was blood in the vehicles. It hadn't been long after it happened; some of the vehicles were still smoking. At the time, we did not know that her humvee; it was facing south towards us, so we weren't sure what had happened, had rear-ended one of the trucks and killed her driver. At the time, we didn't know, because no one was left. We just knew they were prisoners and there was one spot where we found some brass, but for the most part, we found no rounds. And these were Americans; that was very hard for us to swallow.

So as Task Force Tarawa moved through Nasiriyah and into this ambush, they were pinned down and we ended up spending 3 days blasting Nasiriyah with artillery in this sand storm, and that's what this tank was doing in this slide.

### **Slide 18:**

The next slide is on the north side of Nasiriyah; I'll get you there right now. On the third day what happened was we mounted up; Regimental Combat Team 1 was to push through and go through the northern side and head for Al Kut. As we finally crept across the bridge; we literally crept into the city at sunup, we encountered the 4,000 meter road that they named "The Gauntlet" or "Sniper Alley." We called it "The Gauntlet." They shot us up pretty hard; RPGs back and forth; Marine infantry back and forth, up and down the streets engaging people; kids running around buildings and shouting and all of a sudden RPGs flying through, across, and everywhere else, and we took incoming rounds into our hummer. And again let me remind you, we're in vinyl-sided hummers; none of these are armored. The only ones that are armored are the scout vehicles.

So as we proceeded through, we had to go to the end of highway 7 in Nasiriyah; make a left, go ...I can't remember if it's a couple hundred yards or ten feet, and then make a right back onto the four-lane road which had a median. And as we made the left we could see vehicles starting to flare and herring-bone off the road and we of course, were with the XO which was right up front, so we stopped and there was a bus full of civilians with the windows out. The bus was on fire; a giant hole in the front windshield, and people ganging out the windows; dead people in the bus, dead and screaming and Marines and sailors trying to get the people off the bus.

So naturally, out of the vehicle we came, and I looked down...I started to slip and I looked down and I was standing on somebody. I don't know who he was and we called him "pancake." And I hate to say that, but he was flat. He had gotten underneath the tracks of one of the vehicles, trying to fight a tank and it ran him over and he was squashed. And so I said, "AH!" and Rabbi came around the vehicle and I stopped him. I said, "You don't want to see this." but hands and feet; everything was smashed. It kind of looked like the cartoon drawing for "Beetle Bailey."

So, that was our first encounter with real death and as we rounded the vehicle to go do ministry, it wasn't just the bus. We got on the other side of the bus and there were several vehicles; there were people all over the street and corpsmen...a few corpsmen and an ambulance had pulled in there, trying to ministry-I'm sorry, trying to do triage. So we immediately went to the corpsmen and said, you know, "Where's our end of it?" because we start where they give up-- and they give up where we start. So, we're looking for the ones that are expectorant or dying.

He pointed over to this little burm and we went over to start and were expecting to see Marines. We don't know what we're going to see and step over the burm and there are Iraqi soldiers; one with his leg blown off, with a tracheotomy tube in his throat; the other one with bullet holes in his chest; several others that had already started expiring. And these two we found were alive and I looked at Rabbi and said, "Well, what do we do?" He said, "The only thing I can think we can do is pray."

So we did. We knelt and we prayed and I held the one's hand, whose leg had been blown off and looked him in the face and I mean I...I can only tell you that I watched the life go from his body. As his eyes turned green he took his last breath and...I see that guy often. In my mind...I...I don't guess you ever forget somebody who dies holding your hand looking at your face.

The interesting thing was, here's a rabbi and a born-again Christian holding, you know these Muslim people and praying for them. I think that epitomizes America. I mean, you know, we...even in the heat of battle-- we have compassion for people, and religion aside.

So as this scene unfolded before us, we had to start dealing with Marines and sailors who were dealing with this situation, and we had a lot of upset Marines, especially the ones who'd pulled the trigger on the 20 millimeter cannon that went through the bus. What had happened was the Iraqi soldiers were riding in the floor board and had put the civilians in the windows and were trying to reinforce the fight in Nasiriyah and the bus wouldn't stop, because an Iraqi soldier had a gun to the driver's head. And since the bus wouldn't stop, we engaged it, and these people got killed and so...all the other vehicles as well.

So...and we did ministry in triage and we started moving north again because the fight had to go on. And as we did, we encountered Iraqi vehicles along the road, this slide being one of them. This was a machinegun and an Iraqi soldier; a Republican Guard, who had decided to stay and engage us on the road and this is what Marine firepower, or you tax dollars, can do. ...what's left of him. They shot him up really bad. Of course we had to stop and try to do something because Muslims, like Jews, have to be buried within 24 hours. So we had to stop and try to make sure that someone got forward to bury him in a temporary grave until we could get someone there to deal with it.

#### **Slide 19:**

The next slide is our artillery cannons setting in, in the perimeter just above Al Kut. We were setting in to start the fight for it and these are the guys actually putting the guns in. And as you see, it's kind of sandy here; not real fertile in this one area because I think this probably was a dry lake bed at one time. In front of us is very green and behind us is very green and in the next slide...

#### **Slide 20:**

...You can see a T-62; Russian-made, Iraqi tank that we shot up just before we got there. The Iraqi soldiers were still in it and we had to go, of course, and deal with them as well.

This slide is much better to show you what the terrain looked like out just ahead of this area where we were setting in. And our advance party for A Battery had gone forward. When they went forward the radios lit up as we were setting in and they said, "We are cut off! We are cut off and we are taking incoming fire at this time!" And we could hear...we could hear it. They were only 200-300 yards out ahead of us. And as we mounted to go get them the east side of the road opened up on us.

As the east side of the road opened up we began to engage. Rabbi had to be moved and I grabbed him and drug him out of the vehicle because he had never been under fire before. And I drug him over to an artillery pit that we had made with artillery, as we were firing north, and I threw him in. And the sand storm was still happening to us and air couldn't get in to help us so we had to engage these guys and I had to cover him. That fire was intense enough that I literally laid on top of him to protect him.

As we engaged, all of a sudden from our rear, which would have been the west side of the road, which was where we were, the tree line opened up and we were getting caught in a crossfire. At that moment I had no choice but to move him again, so I picked him up, and we ran for another hole. And I got him down in even farther and I put my knee in his back and held him down until I could get an assessment on the situation. With me, was the executive officer's driver, who had An M16; I didn't. I had an M9 pistol because Marines don't trust anybody with a higher rank, I guess, with rifles.

Anyway, as we looked up forward, the Iraqis were in the field in the open in front of us and cutting us off so...Artillery is not used to having this kind of fight. They're used to, you know, Marines are Marines and they'll fight when they have to, which is what was happening.

And as the Iraqis got into the open, I looked over at the gun line and the guns were going straight up and then they came straight down level. And as an infantryman, I can tell you we always call for artillery, in this case we were firing it, and I have never seen a gun barrel go level on an artillery cannon. But when I saw that I thought, "We're in trouble!" And they started firing into the Iraqis in the open. That's how close they were to us.

We had to get help to the people who were cut off, and we needed help because we're not equipped to fight like the Infantry. So we were fighting as hard as we could on three sides, and finally an infantry battalion; the reserve battalion from my hometown, or from where I was up in San Francisco, came galloping in and engaged and fought them back.

We got one chopper on the ground; it ran out of gas...or almost out of gas fighting the sandstorm to try to help us spot snipers. So he set down in our perimeter. And that night, we dealt with the guys who had been cut off. As they came back in; the captain had lost his hand; an RPG went through the window and cut it off, hit the first sergeant in the chest, broke his ribs and his arm. The driver was injured and the corpsman that was traveling with them had performed tremendous triage under fire.

And we had to deal with all of them and their issues...their stress and trauma. And then the battalion...we had to start dealing with people there. So on top of having all the death that we had dealt with, now we had to deal with them dealing with their own being wounded. And one of the things I want to emphasize here is that we never got to deal with ours.

All right, so I'll move along fairly quickly now.

**Slide 21:**

Now the next slide is a tank. After we cleaned up that area, we were starting north again. This is the 26th and this tank is going to be leading the column in as we go. They engaged shortly thereafter.

**Slide 22:**

The next slide is the Huey the day after we had...basically come out of the sand storm. Here he is getting ready to take off with Captain Frye and the first sergeant, to get them MEDEVAC'd out back to the chaplains and RPs and the medical hospitals that I showed you...the people at in the beginning.

**Slide 23:**

As we moved north to Al Shatrah, this was an Iraqi...I want to say "machinegun vehicle" for lack of a better word, but basically it had anti armor missiles mounted on it, so we took care of that in short order. Things like this got Marines motivated to keep going north. What I found out later in life is that this comes back to haunt them

All right, let me stop here on this slide very briefly. On the 26th we went through a little town called Al Shatrah. We pulled off the side of the road to wait on B Battery to come through and B battery was fully engaged as they came through. The radios lit up and said, "Two-thousand Fedayeen regulars...or 2,000 Fedayeen and Iraqi regulars have engaged the artillery guys' So they gunned it to leave, and as they got into our perimeter and stopped on the hardball-- the road, we ran up to the vehicles to start talking to these guys. Bullet holes are in everything and these guys are really jacked-up.

We get up there and we start talking to them and these guys are 60 seconds into their explanation and we start taking rounds, and we started an intense firefight. The tree line just lit up on us. And I had to grab Rabbi, throw him over my shoulder and flip him over the burm, almost like we were in wrestling, you know, WWE-style. And then I had to run back up under fire, grab the shovel, go back down and dig a hole because the fire got more intense...dig a hole to get him in and then step back up to throw the shovel in and started...I engaged with my pistol because the fire was intense. And then I grabbed some Marines and got them in front of us and started engaging the enemy in the fight.

Having been a Marine, it just kind of came natural to me but I realized that at that moment my job was to make sure that this man got home alive, like I promised him he would. Again, I covered him with my body and we didn't take any casualties but we really had a fight on our hands.

As we moved north we encountered several places and positions where the Iraqis had set up to fight us.

**Slide 24:**













