

VETERAN ACCOUNTS

(Arranged alphabetically by last name)

MARK ALLISON

Mark Allison served as a Latter-day Saint chaplain in the U.S. Navy, U.S. Marine Corps, and U.S. Army and retired from military service in 2018 at the rank of Colonel. In 1990, he was the first U.S. military chaplain to arrive in the Operation Desert Shield combat zone, and from 2004 to 2005 he served as the senior Latter-day Saint chaplain and priesthood leader in Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom. He currently serves as the Latter-day Saint chaplain at the VA Medical Center at Salt Lake City, Utah. His wife is Kathleen Allison.

A few months before my ship (USS *England* [CG-22], U.S. Pacific Fleet) departed on a routine six-month western Pacific deployment, Elder Neal Maxwell of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles accepted my invitation to speak at the San Diego regional Latter-day Saint military fireside. Prior to the fireside, I accompanied him to my ship berthed at the Naval Station San Diego, where we met the commanding officer and dined together in the officer's wardroom. Later, Elder Maxwell graciously gave me an apostolic blessing of protection and counsel before I deployed overseas. This blessing proved to be prophetic, as we did not know at that time (at least I didn't know) that in only a few short weeks my ship would unexpectedly be at the tip of the spear in a combat situation in the Persian Gulf.

At approximately 0400 hours [4:00 a.m.] on the morning of August 2, 1990, we awoke to the sound of General Quarters [a readiness condition when action is imminent]⁶ and the command "Battle stations, battle stations. All hands report

to your battle stations immediately." The voice of the officer of the deck through the ship's intercom sternly added, "This is not a drill." Like my fellow sailors, I hurried to my assigned battle station site with great haste.

Geographically, we were in the northern portion of the Persian Gulf with Kuwait to our left and Iraq to our right. There we were, alone, the only U.S. military deterrent on station. The USS *Independence* (CV-62) battle group, five days behind us, was still crossing the Indian Ocean. Throughout the first few days of the war, Iraqi fighter aircraft flying across the Persian Gulf toward Kuwait repeatedly locked their missile systems on our ship as if to fire. We, in turn, locked our anti-aircraft missiles on their planes. In essence, we were "playing chicken" to see who would fire first. It was an extremely perilous and tense situation with enemy jets in the air and mines floating in the water. Events were further complicated by the fact that U.S. military rules of engagement were

news channels were reporting the events we had supported with our refueling the night before.

I wondered, as I watched the reports of death in Iraq, if I had just broken any of God's commandments. I knew I had definitely helped other pilots drop bombs and kill people with my air refueling support. I resolved this personal dilemma by remembering that Captain Moroni and many other good and noble leaders in the Book of Mormon had also fought for freedom and righteousness. I knew that God does not like war but that he ultimately supports those who fight against evil.

Shortly after the air war started, I was told we were going to a secret location to set up a new air refueling operation. Normally, refueling tankers were stationed in groups of thirty to fifty aircraft with more than enough aircrews to keep the jets flying around the clock. We were informed that only a few aircraft and about ten aircrews would deploy to our new location. I was the only Latter-day Saint in that group. When we arrived at Malpensa International Airport in Milan, Italy, we were told to take our military uniforms and American-looking property and put them in a duffel bag. None of these items were to leave the hangar.

Our commander and intelligence officer told us this flight operations location was reluctantly agreed on by the Italian government. They said there was an unusually high amount of antiwar sentiment in our area. This briefing included information about local Communist party protests and radical antiwar groups known for their violent factions and threats against U.S. forces. We were also briefed on specific threats to our aircraft, like surface-to-air missiles, and how to counter them. Our tanker task force was quickly becoming more than just another air refueling support operation.

We were driven thirty minutes to a hotel at the base of the Italian Alps. German soldiers had used this hotel during World War II as a command and control center until Allied forces bombed it. You could still see bomb damage on the outside of the hotel. The hotel was on top of a hill that rose about

three hundred feet above the ground. The entrance and base of the hill were guarded by Italian police who kept out unauthorized personnel. Security was tight.

Night after night, formations of our KC-10s would depart, often through layers of fog, on ten-hour missions, to refuel formations of B-52s [a U.S. Air Force heavy bomber]. We became increasingly stir-crazy and needed a break in the routine. After a few days, the protests and threats seemed to settle down. The intelligence officer said it would be all right if we took short walking trips in the immediate area.

As we left our base, we felt good about getting out. When we approached the shopping area of the small town, I became more vigilant watching the people around us. I made eye contact with a man standing on the other side of an upcoming four-way intersection to my right. I was aware he was watching us from over 150 feet away. He looked to his right at another man and called out something in Italian. The second man looked directly at me and began moving in our direction. The first man and a few others also headed for us. My two companions had not witnessed any of this. The entire exchange only took a few seconds. I was then overcome by an overwhelming message from the Holy Ghost, as clear as a verbal conversation, that I should immediately "turn around and depart now." I told my companions something was wrong, and our trip to town was over. Before they could ask why, I turned around and headed toward the hotel.

The next day, I was asked to see the commander and intelligence officer. They asked me what had happened in town the day before. I was surprised the commander knew so much about the details of the event since no one, not even the two companions I was with, saw it happen. He told me that the Italian secret police had tailed us when we left our hotel because the threat situation was very high. The Italian secret police became very concerned as we approached the four-way intersection in the small town because they believed we



Captain Brent Johnson training on the new F-15E Strike Eagle at Luke AFB, Arizona, in August 1991.
Courtesy of Brent Johnson.

I don't want to trade my boots, and I don't really want their boots anyway, but some money might be a good idea." So I took my weapons off, gave them to my compadre, and told him to cover me while I went up to the POW fence line. I walked up to an Iraqi major who spoke decent English and asked, "Hey, do you have any money you'd like to trade? Here's a dollar." He gave me one Iraqi dinar. I'm sure he got the better exchange rate out of the deal, but that was one neat little souvenir I got out there.

As Church members, we just need to show care and love no matter who our enemy is. Driving back and forth between Kuwait and southern Iraq, where I was stationed, you would see little children running along and waving at you. It was good to learn that kids all over the world are the same. They have the same dreams, hopes, and aspirations. They just want to be loved. Those kids in southern Iraq, who had just witnessed one of the biggest tank battles in history, were running, playing, and having fun.

THERON LAMBERT

During Operation Desert Storm, Theron Lambert served as an armor platoon leader in D Company, 7/6 Infantry, the leading element of the 3rd Brigade, 1st Armored Division. He has served as elders quorum president, high councilor, stake clerk, and bishop. He is the father of four children, the first of which was born during Operation Desert Storm.

In August of 1990, I served as a platoon leader with 3-35th Armor of the 1st Armored Division and was stationed in Germany. I awoke one morning and turned on AFN [Armed Forces Network] to listen to the news. The headlines were about the deployment of the 82nd Airborne and the 101st Air Assault Divisions to Saudi Arabia to defend against the threat of an Iraqi invasion. At that moment, the Spirit bore witness to me that I would be deployed. I felt prepared personally and professionally but was concerned because we had just learned that my wife, Cheryl, was pregnant with our first child. During the next several months, I prepared while Cheryl worried. I was the elders quorum president in our branch, and Cheryl was the Relief Society president. There was quite a scramble leading up to deployment. I was busy preparing my troops and quorum, as well as making arrangements for Cheryl to return to the States to stay with her parents while I was deployed. I gave numerous blessings of comfort and counsel to deploying soldiers and their families, but it had not occurred to me to receive a blessing. On the last Sunday before our departure, someone mentioned it to me. I asked two missionaries who were standing nearby if they would give me a blessing. I sat down without telling them about any of my concerns, but nevertheless they gave me a blessing in which they addressed each of my worries—starting with the welfare of my wife and our unborn child and progressing through the spiritual welfare of my quorum members (all but two of whom were deploying), the physical welfare of my platoon, and finally concluding with a promise that I would return safely. The Spirit spoke through them and left me at peace.

We deployed as scheduled in January and spent several uneventful weeks preparing for what was to come. In late February, we moved forward into Iraq. A few days in, I spotted what was obviously a Soviet-made Iraqi BMP2 (a Russian-made armored personnel carrier used by the Iraqi Republican Guard's mechanized infantry). The thermal signature in our night sights was quite clear, but our commander wanted us to advance closer to confirm the identification. This vehicle was about two thousand meters to our flank and could be dangerous to our Bradley Fighting Vehicles, although it was unlikely it could seriously damage our tanks.

The column halted while my wingman and I were sent to confirm it was an enemy vehicle. We moved forward in bounding overwatch [a military term for leapfrogging fighting forces] until we were within eight hundred meters. At that point, the Iraqi crew became alerted to our presence, and we detected movement. I gave the order to fire, and the vehicle was immediately destroyed. I have since wondered if I should have held my fire a bit longer to see if they would have surrendered. Despite my concern for those behind me, I will always wonder if this was the correct course of action.

Later that night, through our thermal sights we spotted dismounted infantry, who quickly dropped out of sight. Again, my wingman and I were sent forward, this time followed by a Bradley fighting vehicle with infantry aboard. Having closed in on the position where we believed the enemy to be, I ordered a machine gun burst to be fired. The Iraqi infantrymen immediately popped up in front of us with hands high above their heads. Our infantry dismounted and collected the

TIMOTHY NORTON

Timothy Norton served as a civilian contractor for the Army. He taught combat leadership. He served on the stake high council in Savannah, Georgia, and Barstow, California, and as a ward executive secretary. He is married and has three children.

I was married with three children—ages ten, eight, and six months. The youngest was my first son. I wrote a letter, which I sent to my mother to give to him when he was twelve if I did not make it back. I remember telling him in the letter to honor his priesthood, to honor his mother and sisters, and to take care of them. I remember telling him how sorry I was that I was not there to teach him how to play football or drive a car. I remember telling him to go on a mission and bearing my testimony of the truthfulness of the gospel. I cried as I sealed the letter.

I had always prayed that if I was ever sent into battle that my unit's chaplain would be a Latter-day Saint. I knew the chance of that happening was slim to none, so I was shocked when, in August of 1990, a new Latter-day Saint chaplain reported to my unit. Not more than a week later, Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, and I knew I would be going to war. Having Chaplain Vance Theodore near was a God-sent blessing. I will never forget when the two of us went into the desert and partook of the sacrament. It was after my battalion commander's last words and prior to our crossing the berm. The MLRS [multiple launch rocket system] were firing missiles overhead, and artillery battalions were shooting hundreds of rounds into the night sky as Chaplain Theodore and I blessed the bread (MRE crackers) and water (in his chaplain's sacramental cup) and prepared ourselves spiritually for combat.

★ ★ ★

We had been in pursuit of the vaunted Republican Guard for twenty-eight hours and had just completed a two-hour firefight in the early hours before dawn. As we raced to cut off the Basra highway, the battalion intelligence officer told us that

we had seen the last of our heavy fighting for the day. There would be no enemy for the next sixty kilometers. My tank company had been the advance guard for the brigade since the start of the war. It would be good to relax a little.

“Gray 6, this is Green 4. I have a T-69 [tank] at 3,250 meters, moving southeast to northwest. Request permission to engage.”

“Roger, Green 4. You are clear to fire.”

I looked out over the terrain as Green 4 engaged its prey. The sand there was rolling, with dunes as high as twenty or thirty feet. The sky was dark with an impending storm. As the skyline lit up with the flames from the burning T-69 tank, I projected the path of the destroyed tank to what looked like the mouth of a small valley. I thought to myself that the mouth of that valley would be a perfect place to set up an ambush.

“Guidons, this is 6. Stay alert for a possible armor ambush near the entrance of the valley 3,500 meters to our present position.”

Ten minutes later, all hell broke loose. Boom! Crack! The sound of the 105mm main guns, coming from the four M1s belonging to my lead tank platoon, brought me out of a stupor of thought and back into the here and now.

“Contact, tanks northeast, out!” called the Red platoon leader. The next thing I heard was the loud report of eight M1 tanks going off in volley fire. My Blue tank platoon had pulled alongside Red and was also engaging.

“Gray 6, this is Red 1. Have engaged and destroyed five tanks at grid QU335033.”

This time, there was a note of pride in his inflection. My company had just destroyed five tanks, and it had taken no more than sixty seconds. As my tank passed by the burning hulks, I saw smol-

dering duffel bags and other personal gear strewn across the desert floor by the explosions that had rocked the tanks. It made me think again how fragile life is in combat. Only moments before, this tank crew had been lying in ambush, waiting to do the same thing to my company. Somewhere in Iraq were the wives, parents, and children of the Iraqis we had just killed, who would now be left with emptiness in their hearts.

And yet I did not feel sorrow or grief. I felt pride. My platoon leaders had acted exactly as I had trained them. It had been a perfect, textbook engagement. It is hard to explain. Somehow, you keep telling yourself that it isn't right to feel this way, but it had been a fair fight. If anything, they held the advantage, but we had defeated them before they could destroy us. An army trains hard to be the very best it can.

Back when I was in college, my classical literature professor told me something that I will never forget. He was an old Marine, a veteran of the Pacific campaigns during World War II. He told me that although he would never admit it to anyone other than another soldier, combat was the most exciting time of his life. He related how he had never felt more alive than when he was in a firefight. "There is something about being in a situation where it is your skill against your enemy, the ultimate test, with victory for the winner and death for the loser that makes you thrive on every moment." I could not have said it better.



We were the first soldiers into the town of Safwan, Iraq. We had responsibility to secure the northeast sector of town—the sector closest to the enemy. My M1 tanks had been staring down the Iraqi T-72 tanks, only 1,500 meters from our position, for the last forty-eight hours. Peace talks had been scheduled to begin the day before, but the Iraqis had requested a twenty-four-hour extension.

We set up a checkpoint called Checkpoint Charlie on a highway overpass that controlled the

main highway to Kuwait City. Safwan had been a Republican Guard stronghold, and they had withdrawn to the edge of town, waiting for their generals to negotiate the peace before leaving Safwan.

When word got out that the Americans controlled the town of Safwan, refugees started to work their way to our lines. It was a slow trickle at first, like the waterdrop that forms from condensation on the cool side of a glass of water on a hot summer day, but when the Iraqi generals signed the peace accord and the Republican Guard tanks pulled back, that trickle became a flood.

The first people to arrive were in newer model German and Japanese cars. They appeared to be the well-to-do. They were going to take this opportunity to leave Iraq while Saddam Hussein was busy elsewhere. Our responsibility was to search the vehicles and individuals to ensure that they were not carrying weapons or other illegal war material, and then let them continue down the road. Outside of Safwan, the International Red Cross had established an aid station to handle the refugees as they streamed south.

Soon, however, the refugees we were seeing presented a much different appearance. Our checkpoint started to fill up with the seriously injured, the homeless, and little children who had no one to take care of them. They arrived packed into anything that could move: an old school bus, a dump truck, and even cattle cars. We still had to search them because our military mission came first. Nevertheless, I had my medic provide immediate first aid. Each platoon fought for its turn to give the kids various little gifts of food and candy they had saved.

Here is an example engagement: An old truck would pull up to the dismount point. Depending upon what time of day it was, the vehicle might have been in line for two or three hours. The truck would normally be overheating, with steam billowing out of the radiator. One of my soldiers would motion to the individual driving to step outside while at least one Bradley Fighting Vehicle



An M-1A1 Abrams battle tank of 1st Armored Division, 7th Corps, moves across the desert in northern Kuwait during Operation Desert Storm. Courtesy of DoD.

and one tank kept their main guns pointed at the vehicle to provide security. The driver was usually an old man, dressed in traditional Arab garb, not able to speak any English. The driver would always smile, bow, and attempt to strike up a conversation. My soldier would attempt, the best he could, to explain to the driver that he needed to have all the passengers in the back of the truck get down on the ground. Once this was accomplished, my medics would treat any wounds while another team of soldiers searched the vehicle and the occupants for contraband.

My medics treated everything from amputations to broken bones. I still remember a little boy who was no more than four or five years old. An Iraqi soldier had shot him in the hand. Our language barrier did not allow me to determine why

he had been shot. The wound was over twenty-four hours old. His older sister had wrapped a rag around the hand to stop the bleeding. My medic unwrapped the dirty, blood-soaked rag covering the child's hand. Several bones in his hand were broken, but he never cried or made a sound. He just looked as my medic washed and then tenderly bandaged his hand in gauze. There wasn't much else that could be done.

Another of our missions was to destroy all the military equipment in the surrounding countryside. Since this had been a Republican Guard stronghold, it seemed you could not take five steps without discovering some underground bunker filled with ammunition or military equipment. Some of those bunker complexes were quite

RICHARD REYNOLDS

Richard Reynolds is a retired colonel in the United States Army. He is a graduate of Brigham Young University with a degree in European studies. He served many tours in Middle Eastern countries.

The First Gulf War was about liberating Kuwait. When I went into Kuwait City, it had been looted and, in many ways, destroyed. The hotels had their carpets, wires, and lights stolen. Anything of value had been stolen by Iraqi soldiers and taken north to Iraq. The Iraqi Army had been allowed to loot, rape, and pillage in Kuwait, and they had done so to tremendous effect. I worked with the Kuwaiti resistance forces during that war. Many of them suffered through horrible situations. The acts of debauchery and violence were unspeakable. The Kuwaitis were ecstatic to have us there. It was difficult to travel in Kuwait City because people were continually wanting to thank me, invite me

to dinner, or do whatever they could to show their gratitude.

I was later assigned to a Kurdish area, and one of my responsibilities was to fly a helicopter to an Iraqi Army base and meet with Iraqi generals to talk about the situation in the north. As soon as I arrived, the Iraqi generals complained that the American fighter planes flying overhead were waking up Iraqi babies, causing them to cry. I explained that Kurdish babies seemed to sleep much better when our fighters were in the air.



Newly arrived Marines move through an airfield encampment during Operation Desert Shield. Courtesy of DoD.

DAVID A. SAWYER

Dave Sawyer was an Air Force pilot for twenty-nine years. He served in the Church as a counselor in a stake presidency, a counselor in a bishopric, a Gospel Doctrine teacher, a Scoutmaster, and a choir director. He commanded the “Flying Tigers” during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. He was a major general serving in the Operations Directorate of the Joint Staff in the Pentagon at the time of his death in June 1997. He married Jeanne Tucker in 1967, and they have seven children.

Selected Journal Entries

October 15, 1990

I arrived here on 31 August 1990 after flying across the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean.

October 16, 1990

Flying was fun today. I hadn't been up in over a week. Went to the north CAS [close air support] area for the first time and ran simulated attacks against a whole bunch of U.S. armored units about halfway to the Kuwaiti border from here.

January 12, 1991

This was a very eventful day. Brig. Gen. Buster Glosston, my new commander of the 14th Air Division—all the fighter wings in CENTAF [Central Air Force Command]—came to King Fahd [a Saudi Arabian air base] and briefed all our pilots on the offensive plan to take down Iraq. Those of us in the A-10s would have a big part of that action, particularly in dismantling/destroying the Iraqi military. . . . I hope we can do it without losing any aircraft or aircrews—probably wishful thinking. I do, however, believe we have the possibility of saving thousands of Army lives by the destructive power of the Air Force that will be unleashed. History will be made in the next few weeks.

January 13, 1991

Well, two more days until the January 15 deadline for Iraq to pull out of Kuwait. Our pulses are up here, with some intelligence reports indicating Saddam will preemptively attack around 3:00 a.m.

Tonight we further discussed the offensive plan. I will be flying early on the first day. . . . I will fly smart—too much riding on all this. Leadership by example is good, but if my example is not effective, I'll do more harm than good. After day one, we'll have around ninety new combat veterans in this seven-squadron A-10 force.

Monday, January 14, 1991

One day to go to the deadline! It's actually midnight, Eastern Standard Time USA, so it will be 8:00 a.m. here (and in Baghdad). I don't expect a U.S.-led offensive to start on the 16th. We'll probably wait a few days for good weather (still raining here). I got all the support troops together in tent city and talked about the final preparations. It went well. I asked for a show of hands of those who had been to war before—there were four of us, which gives us credibility.

Tuesday, January 15, 1991

We received a warning order to implement the offensive against Iraq. Looks like war for sure. I spent a lot of time in the two 23 TFW [tactical fighter wing] squadrons giving last-minute advice to pilots and getting ready myself. I will be the first 76 TFS [tactical fighter squadron] vanguard flight. . . . I stayed up until 3:30 a.m. finishing letters to all the kids and Jeanne. I wanted them to have a precombat record of my thoughts—even Daniel. It felt good to put my love down on paper. They all mean the world to me, and I miss them terribly.

Friday, February 15, 1991

She did. I had another reason to call her today. I flew early this morning, going further north than I had ever been before. My wingman was Karl “Bugs” Buchberger, a captain fairly new to fighters and to the A-10. We had a preplanned target in the Republican Guard Tawakalna division, right near the Division Headquarters, which is in Iraq, near the Kuwait border. Our target was a tank battalion. We found the target area just fine—a beautiful day. Good delivery of our CBU [cluster bomb units] right on target on some storage vehicles in bunkers, and then I put a Maverick in a tank in a ditch. I saw three people run from the bunker I hit; they were heading for the next ditched vehicle, so I strafed that vehicle, and then climbed up to give the wingman a chance to shoot his Mavericks. Unfortunately, during the climbing turn, I took a very bad hit from a surface-to-air missile (we think—came to that decision later today after examining the aircraft). I felt a jolt in my feet and heard a muffled clank. At first, I thought I’d taken a hit under my feet because that’s where I felt it. I immediately checked my engines first. It panicked me a little that it was becoming quieter, but after I assured myself that the RPM, temperature, oil pressure, and hydraulic pressures were all good, I figured it was only getting quieter because I was climbing and slowing down. I was about forty-eight miles from friendly territory, so it took us about twelve minutes to get there—a long flight. After we crossed into Saudi Arabia, I had Karl fly in close and check me out. Both rudders were heavily peppered with holes, and the right rudder middle hinge was broken with the rudder bowed out. The right elevator was 90 percent blown away. Fortunately, the left elevator was mostly there, so I had pretty good pitch control. I flew back uneventfully and smoothly, so I didn’t put any strain on the flight controls, and performed an uneventful controllability check and landing. The pitch control was a little stiff, but everything else felt normal. After I climbed out of the airplane and got

my first look at it, I was amazed at how much damage there was! The tail end was also shredded and hanging down by a thread—about the last foot or two. There are probably about two hundred holes in the airplane—also some in the engine. The miraculous thing is that there was not one hydraulic line or control cable damaged, much less severed! God was really watching out for me today. President Baker of the Alexandria Stake promised all of us at Eglin Air Force Base that we’d come home safely. I surely put that to the test today! I’m not proud of taking the hit—I obviously made one pass too many. But I feel I did a good job and kept cool. Unfortunately, two Myrtle Beach 354 TFW [tactical fighter wing] pilots weren’t as lucky this afternoon. Two pilots in the same flight were shot down, probably by missiles also. . . . What a terrible day!

Sunday, February 17, 1991

Very nice church meetings today. I’ve had dozens of people come to me and tell me to be careful. My battle damage was really extensive yet not that serious. My aircraft already has a new tail on it, from [a] New Orleans Jet. It looks really funny. I’m getting lots of kidding about it already.

Tuesday, February 19, 1991

Darn! We lost an OA-10 today. Lt Col Jeff “Sly” Fox, the ops officer of the 23 TASS (Tactical Air Support Squadron) was the pilot. He’s been captured by the Iraqis. The first anybody knew he was in trouble was a mayday call on Guard [emergency] channel, where he said he’d ejected and was on the ground. Just a few seconds later he said there was a guy with a gun coming toward him. Two minutes later he was captured, saying, “Too late, guys. He’s here.” Jeff was flying by himself, so no one else was around. I can’t figure out how he was shot down. His brother was notified first, then his sister and elderly father. Terrible days. We got a call from Gen. Glosson, who said the war’s going to last only another three weeks, that Iraq is on its



knees. I hope he's right. I don't want to lose any more guys!

Wednesday, February 27, 1991

Today turned out to be the last day of the war. We should be beside ourselves with celebration, and would be if it were not for an awful tragedy. Lt. Patrick Olson ("Oly"), an OA-10 FAC [forward air controller] from Davis-Monthan, whom I know very well, died today when he crashed his battle-damaged airplane trying to land at KKMC [King Khalid Military City]. We could have saved him from himself if we had known how serious his situation really was. We knew he was in manual reversion, meaning he'd lost both hydraulic systems, but we figured he'd be able to land safely. Oly was committed to landing that aircraft, and he rushed the approach and put himself in a fix. The approach looked normal to some eyewitnesses, steep to others. It seemed alright until the last little bit when he developed a steep descent rate in the last seconds and hit the runway hard. His right landing gear collapsed, the right wingtip hit the runway, and he rolled upside down while getting airborne again and then landed upside down in a fireball. On the last day of the war—how very tragic.

Thursday, February 28, 1991

The cease-fire is holding. My last combat mission was Monday, which was kind of anticlimactic. I flew as #2 with Tom Coleman, Squadron commander of the 706 TFS [tactical fighter squadron] from NAS [Naval Air Station] New Orleans. Our first mission was good, supporting U.S. army tanks and armored personnel carriers against Iraqi artillery positions. We bombed some artillery positions, and I shot one tank. I would like to have worked longer, but I ran out of self-protection flares. That's



Damage to the tail assembly of Colonel Dave Sawyer's A-10 (Warthog) aircraft. Courtesy of Jeanne Sawyer.

how I got shot up—not flaring enough. So we had to knock it off—we were almost out of gas anyway. On our second mission, we couldn't get to the target area because of clouds. Tonight, we had a very nice memorial service for Oly. It was extremely moving, especially when Oly's roommate read a letter Oly had written, which he wanted read in case he died. His Squadron Commander Lt. Col. Bob George gave an emotional tribute.

Monday, March 4, 1991

Time flies when you're having fun. The cease-fire is still holding, and some POWs were released today in Baghdad. We got news that Dale Storr was a "fellow POW" with CBS newsman Bob Simon. This is really good news. . . . Gen. Glosson came by yesterday and talked to the troops, offering them some nice words of congratulations. He also said we'd be out of here fast, probably within two weeks after the actual cease-fire is signed. Come on, guys, let's sign quickly!

VANCE P. THEODORE

Chaplain (Colonel, retired) Vance P. Theodore entered active duty in January 1984. He served in the 1st, 3rd, and 7th Infantry Divisions. He was an instructor at the School of the Americas, Fort Benning, Georgia, and served as the XVIII Airborne Corps artillery chaplain, installation chaplain at Fort Wainwright in Alaska, and as the Army Air Missile and Defense Command chaplain at Fort Shafter in Hawaii. He earned a PhD in human ecology at Kansas State University in 2011. He is married to Christine Clark of Berkeley, California. They have five children and eleven grandchildren. He is currently the associate graduate coordinator for the Master of Arts in Chaplaincy program at Brigham Young University.

During my first four years as a young chaplain, I belonged to the fifth of the twenty-first infantry battalion, part of the 7th Infantry Division. I was proud to serve with them. We had mottos like “Pack light—freeze at night.” I learned to love the men I served with. I remember having an interview with Elder Gene R. Cook, a member of the Seventy. He sat me down and said, “Vance, whenever you go into a commander’s office or first sergeant’s office, I want you to stop outside of that office, and I want you to ask, ‘Father, what would you have me do?’” I used that motto throughout my whole career.

I was a young chaplain captain in an armor unit, and we were getting ready to go to war. I remember going to the railhead, being with the men at two o’clock in the morning. I would always sweep my unit. Sweeping the unit means that before I went home, I would walk through the unit work areas—such as the motor pool, go to the offices, talk with commanders, and so on. I called it sweeping, just so they’d see my face. It was quick.

When we deployed to Desert Storm, I was involved in an intense battle, probably one of the most intense tank battles since World War II. We had the 24th Infantry Division to our left flank and the Brits to our right flank. We were the breach battalion. The breach battalion was the battalion that was going to breach the berm and go into Iraq. We were going to clear the mine fields, and I was their battalion chaplain. If you want to picture combat, just picture mines and clearing minefields. You’re

on a lane and staying in your lane because if you get off the lane you might set off an explosion.

The previous week we had been asked to take some commo [communication equipment] about fifteen kilometers to a small village in Iraq. This is the routine of a chaplain. My guys were doing their preparatory battle checks. While they were doing that, I went to each Bradley [Fighting Vehicle] and offered to have prayer with the service members.

They were scared young men—concerned about going into battle. One soldier said, “Hey, chaplain, come here!”

“Okay,” I said.

He was sitting on an MRE [meals ready to eat] box, and said, “Hey, Chaplain Theodore, you got one of those Bibles that has one of those metal covers on it?”

“No, I don’t have one of those. They got rid of them after World War II.”

“You got one of those crosses?” he asked.

“Yeah,” I answered, “I’ve got a cross.”

“You wouldn’t happen to have a Star of David, too, would you?”

“Sure. I’ve got a Star of David,” I said as I handed it to him.

“You wouldn’t happen to have some of those prayer beads the Muslims use, do you?”

In my mind I thought, “Hey, what’s going on here?” But you have to realize that you don’t question soldiers when they’re going into combat. You just try to help them so I gave them to him. Then he said something I’ll never forget.

“You know, chaplain, you just can’t be too careful.”

Then we received a particularly hard assignment where we could have been killed. I monitored the radio. All of a sudden, I heard a tremendous amount of fire. You hear the machine guns—pop, pop, pop, pop, pop! You can hear all the chatter and scatter on the radio and soldiers screaming. When it was over, I remember talking to the commander and learning they had just destroyed a village. Fortunately, the villagers saw us coming and ran away first.

We had a friendly fire casualty. One soldier was shot in the leg. After that incident, the battalion commander took all six hundred of his soldiers before we crossed the berm into Iraq and talked to them about command and control. We never had another friendly fire incident. It was only a four-day battle, but there was an intense amount of conflict. When you’re in combat, it’s just very intense. But, surprisingly, I never felt scared. In fact, I would tease all the tankers because they were all safe. I drove on the battlefield in a hummer. A .50 caliber machine gun could slice through my vehicle like butter. We would always laugh about it.

I remember being in the aid station. We didn’t have any casualties from our soldiers because we were very protected, but we inflicted a lot of death. When we crossed the line, we were going at thirty kilometers per hour. We destroyed fifty-nine tanks. The carnage—I try not to think about it—was terrible.

Combat is horrible, and my men would come to me for comfort. I remember one particular scene when I was traveling about one hundred meters behind my men, so I could see everything, the battlefield and the death. One event broke my heart. An Iraqi T-72 tank had just popped its tank cover, and a white flag was starting to poke out. Just in that instant, it was destroyed. Those things are hard.

After a battle is over, the job of chaplain is to minister to prisoners of war. We took over a thou-

sand prisoners on the first day of battle. It’s a tremendous amount of work. We were traveling and engaging the enemy at thirty kilometers an hour. At the same time, we were taking prisoners. I was trained and knew what you did with prisoners of war. I knew the procedures. First, you separate the officers. My job was to make sure that they were being taken care of adequately. If I saw soldiers abusing the Iraqi prisoners of war, I stopped it.

You have the thousand prisoners. Smoke was everywhere. It was surreal. It broke my heart to see how the Iraqis were treated by Saddam Hussein. As a chaplain, I was kind of like their grandpa. You would see improper things that some of the soldiers tried to do, and you stop them when necessary. Anytime we found an Iraqi dead, we catalogued the death, recorded GPS coordinates, and buried the person with respect. Then we gave the coordinates to the Iraqis when they signed the peace treaty so they could retrieve their dead.

During Desert Storm there were some funny things that happened, too. My wife had sent me some white socks. When you’re going to war, your command sergeant puts out a packing list, and you have to take all that stuff. We needed so many black socks. But the First Infantry Division had taken all the available socks. There were none left. So my wife came up with a brilliant idea. She would dye my white socks black. Brilliant! She dyed them, and I thought that I was good to go. When I was in the desert, I had my Hummer, and I got to wash once in a while. I had a plastic tub, and I washed my uniforms and black socks together. I looked at the water, pulled out my uniforms, and saw that they were now pink! My wife had actually dyed my socks with purple dye. They looked black, but now all of my uniforms were pink. My unit laughed at me for two weeks. “Hey, chaplain, where did you get those pink pajamas?” They provided a lot of comic relief.

I remember once I hadn’t taken a shower for three months, and my wife had sent me a beautiful black bag. You could put it on a tank or armored



A soldier carries his gear after arriving in Saudi Arabia during Operation Desert Shield. Courtesy of DoD.

and laughing. That's kind of the life of an infantry soldier. You love them—most of the time.

After the conflict was over, we began deploying home. One of the roles of the chaplain after combat is to take care of the wounded. It doesn't matter who they are. I was tasked to take care of wounded Iraqis. I went to a field hospital station

and was told, "On order, chaplain, be prepared to move out. You're going to spend a week at a field hospital station," in the middle of nowhere. I held Iraqi hands that were beaten up by battle, talked to them, and tried to soothe them. I spent a week there. War is not humane. It's nasty, but I experienced only a little bit of it, so I'm not an expert.

NOTES

1. “This Aggression Will Not Stand,” *New York Times*, March 1, 1991, A26.
2. “The Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm Timeline,” *DoD News*, U.S. Department of Defense, August 8, 2000, archive.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=45404. Many of the items in the previous Gulf War timeline are from this source.
3. “The View from France: America’s Unyielding Policy toward Iraq,” *Foreign Affairs* 74, no. 1 (January/February 1995): 61–62.
4. “This Aggression Will Not Stand,” A26.
5. Exact numbers for coalition troops deployed in the Gulf War vary. See, for example, “Gulf War Coalition Forces: Countries Compared,” <https://www.nationmaster.com/country-info/stats/Military/Gulf-War-Coalition-Forces> and “Coalition of the Gulf War,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coalition_of_the_Gulf_War.
6. See glossary for definitions of military terms, acronyms, and phrases used more than once.