

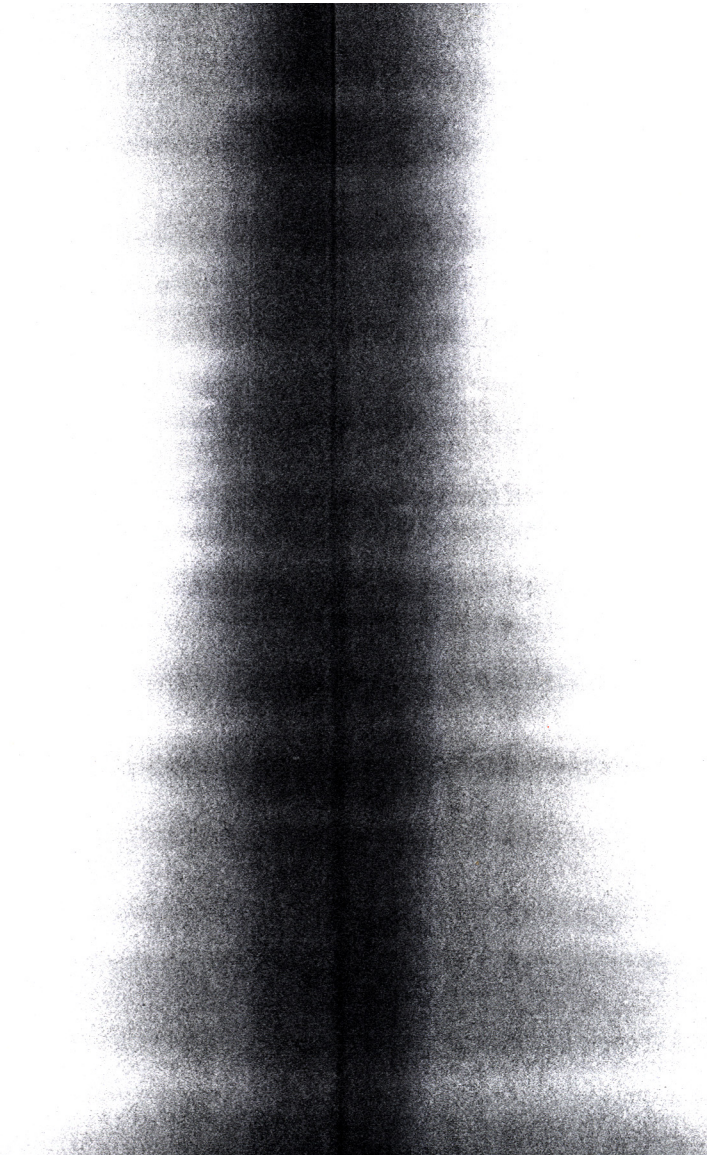
Luke Leonard

Objects for Deployment

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These writings have come out of a compilation of my journals, emails, scraps of paper and memories. When I went away to war, my grandmother asked that I make a recording of the things that I had seen and done, since my grandfather had not spoken or written much about his time in the Army over in Korea. While I did not keep a consistent journal, I hope this sketch of the things that transpired on my tour gives a sense of my thoughts and experiences during this time. I dedicate this book to my Grandma with lots of love.

—Luke Leonard



??/??/2003

I don't know what day it is but I'm flying on a plane headed to Frankfurt, Germany. Then I'll be on my way to Kuwait to join the war in Iraq. We are riding on a commercial airline and one of the stewardesses is wearing an officer's Kevlar. It all seems so surreal, to be on my way into a war zone.

I am excited about all of this. Seeing the emptiness of the desert, meeting people from foreign places. It's not like my mission is to kill them or something, my mission is to "Save and Serve Again," to save soldiers so they can get back into the fight. At least that's the company motto. I hope I never have to fire a shot in anger. I hope I can just do my job and come home and start again.

??/??/2003

We landed in Kuwait after a really long flight. An Army sergeant got on the plane and shouted "Welcome To The War!" like we had just landed in Disneyland. Everybody cheered as if we had just won a beautiful vacation.

The heat was incredible. Stepping out of the cool plane, the hot dry air hit me like a high power blow dryer. I can't believe we went from snow on the ground in Wisconsin to the 130 degrees of Kuwait.

??/??/2003

The desert floor is littered with garbage. Pieces of broken pallets, cigarette butts and empty water bottles. I'm sitting here in the middle of the desert with nothing to do but play cards and complain. We are still trying to figure out when we are going to cross the border.



Those who rule accordance with Tao do not use
force against the world.

For that which is forced is likely to return.
Where armies settle, Nature

offers nothing but briars and thorns. After a
great battle has been

fought the land is cursed, the crops fail and the
Earth lies stripped of its

motherhood.

-Tao Te Ching

6/11/2003

I have found it exceedingly difficult to stay centered, focused, and relaxed in the situations I have encountered. Personnel conflicts and situational factors have had their effect on me. I feel I am over my head and don't know how well I have handled things. Some not so well, and others, I think I did pretty well.

The big challenge is coming up though. We have a mission on the north side of Iraq. That means we basically have to travel across the entire country, through the very center of it. And there is rumor of a large offensive occurring on the Syrian border.

The war is not over here. I'm a little nervous, but I am sure everything will be OK. So, I think I need to feel things out, more than just using strength to push through, and that is very difficult.

?/??/2003

We found a snake moving thru the sand at the edge of our tent.

9/14/2003

Just got up to Mosul at the airfield. I'm working at the Combat Support Hospital; it's a good job for me. My job consists of driving from the hospital to the walk-in gate and riding in an ambulance when there is a patient exchange between us and the Iraqi civilian hospital. Normally I go out in the morning and pick up one of the interpreters from the hospital, drop him off at the gate and then wait for the other one to show up.

Most of my time is spent bullshitting with the guys working the gate and helping them search the workers as they come into the base. When my interpreter shows up, I haul him back to the hospital. I also get to take any VIPs around the base and sometimes take soldiers to their appointments on other parts of the base.

I've also jumped on a lot of convoys heading north when I've had the chance to pull security or just to go along for the ride. The thing I like to do the most is to go along as an extra gun when the pilots have a seat available on a medevac. The great thing about working at the hospital is I get to learn about the language and culture. I have met some really interesting people, like the good Dr. Muhammad and his family.





??/??/2003

The Kurdish soldiers are awesome. I beat one of them in a push up contest and he tore the flag right off of his uniform and gave it to me. These guys are crazy. We went down to the market with them; they took us into this photo booth and we got these pictures. Where in the hell did this background come from?

The Kurdish soldier in this next picture, Amran, was killed in Baghdad a few months after this picture was taken.





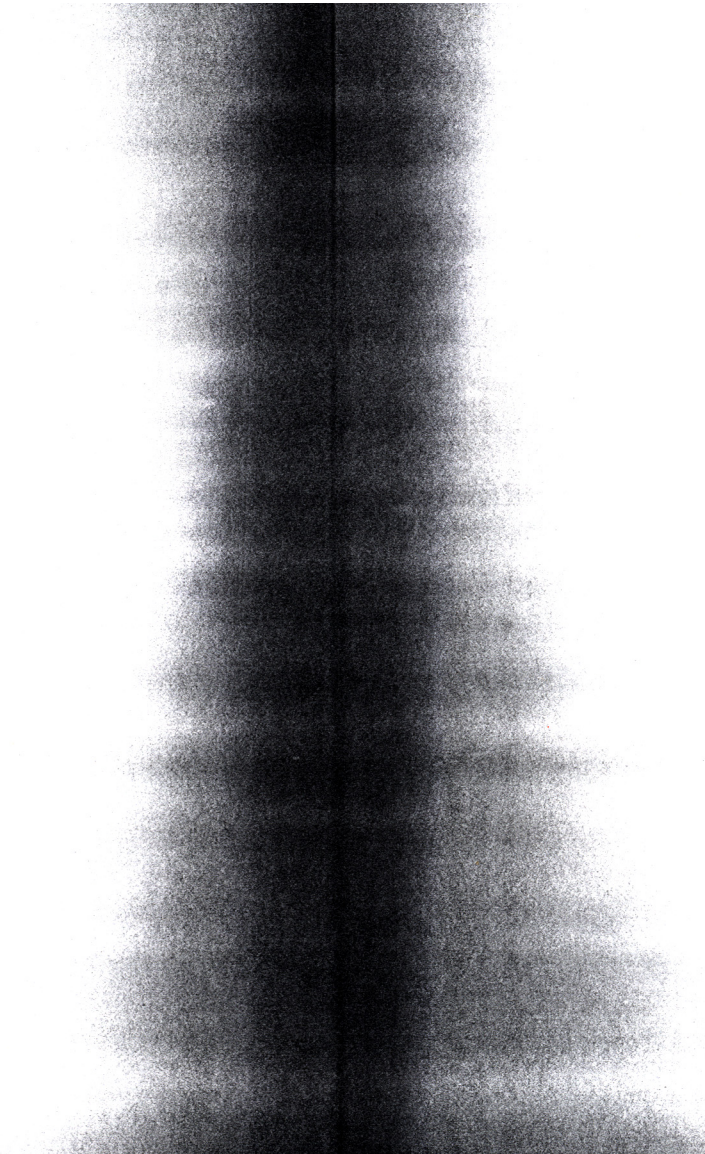




10/5/2003

The people I feel a deep connection with are the people that I meet and become friends with. I consider my friends from all over the world as part of my community. It doesn't matter that they live in another country. The Iraqis and Kurds that I've met here have become my friends. They represent my community much more than any citizenship can.

I guess what I'm trying to say is, it all goes beyond the bounds of mere geography. These people are my people too.



10/19/2003

We see a lot of stuff out here: people getting blown up, people's body parts missing, injured women and children. Some of those things are hard to deal with, and people can't cope.

Shit, there are mortars going off right now, might have to cut this short. Well, I better go head to the bunker.



A person who is free from ego, who has
attained purity of heart, though

he slays these people, he does not slay and is not
bound by his actions.

-The Bhagavad Gita



?/??/2003

Wake up, workout, eat, sleep.
Rinse and repeat.

10/20/2003

I live in a tent with five females. They are like the sisters I never wanted! They harass me on a daily basis, but we get along pretty well. There are not as many women as there are men, which becomes clear when we have a party out here (non-alcoholic beer and potato chips). It's a total sausage fest.

It does make for some weirdness living in the same tent. The females have to pass through the male area to leave the tent. So, they don't bother to knock or announce that they are coming through. More than once I have been undressing while they came through. They say "oops," and keep right on walking.



10/27, 2003

I've been to the Turkish border a few times, Kurdistan, Kuwait, and Qatar. Most of my time is spent here on the airfield, trying to stay sane. We've had quite a few mortar attacks here lately. Kinda makes it hard to sleep at night.

It's raining right now, which really sucks. Our tent leaks all over the place, so everything is getting wet. It gets really cold at night, and the heater doesn't always work, and taking a shower is really cold! The whole airfield had turned into one big muddy mess. What joy I have being in the Army, I should have joined the damn Air Force.

10/27/2003

Want to know what it's like over here? Go out into the middle of the worst part of Chicago, take about 60 people you don't know with you, tell the citizens there that you are here to help them, accidentally kill a few of them, live in a tent in the sewer, bring a lot of stuff that you don't need and carry it around with you where ever you go, only contact your family by email.

That about sums it up.

Vanity of vanities! All is vanity! What real
gain is there for a man in all the gains he
makes beneath the sun? One generation
goes, another comes, but the earth remains
the same forever. There is nothing new
under the sun!

-Ecclesiastes



11/30/2003

The biggest insight to Iraq that I can give is this:

The media portrays this campaign as unsuccessful and that we haven't got anything accomplished, and it's taking too long.

Well, fuck them. We are doing our best to get things up and running in Iraq.

It isn't an easy job.

12/??/2003

I got to go to Tikrit the other day. It was crazy, a buddy and I stayed in Saddam's palace. You would not believe the size of this place! I went into the bathroom and it was all marble, the banister to one of the stairs is made of solid marble and it's about as big around as a man's body.







12/05/2003

We had a bit of good news yesterday. The capture of Saddam was pretty big. I couldn't believe it until I saw the video. I was just in Tikrit a few days ago. I'm still a little shocked. We got the shit bombed out of us last night. We had rockets and mortars and gunfire all over. Didn't get much sleep. Hopefully it's just the last breath of a dying beast, but I'm not so sure. Anyway, it's good news for the Iraqi's.

In extreme situations, the entire universe
becomes our foe; at such critical times, unity
of mind and technique are essential.

Do not let your heart waver!

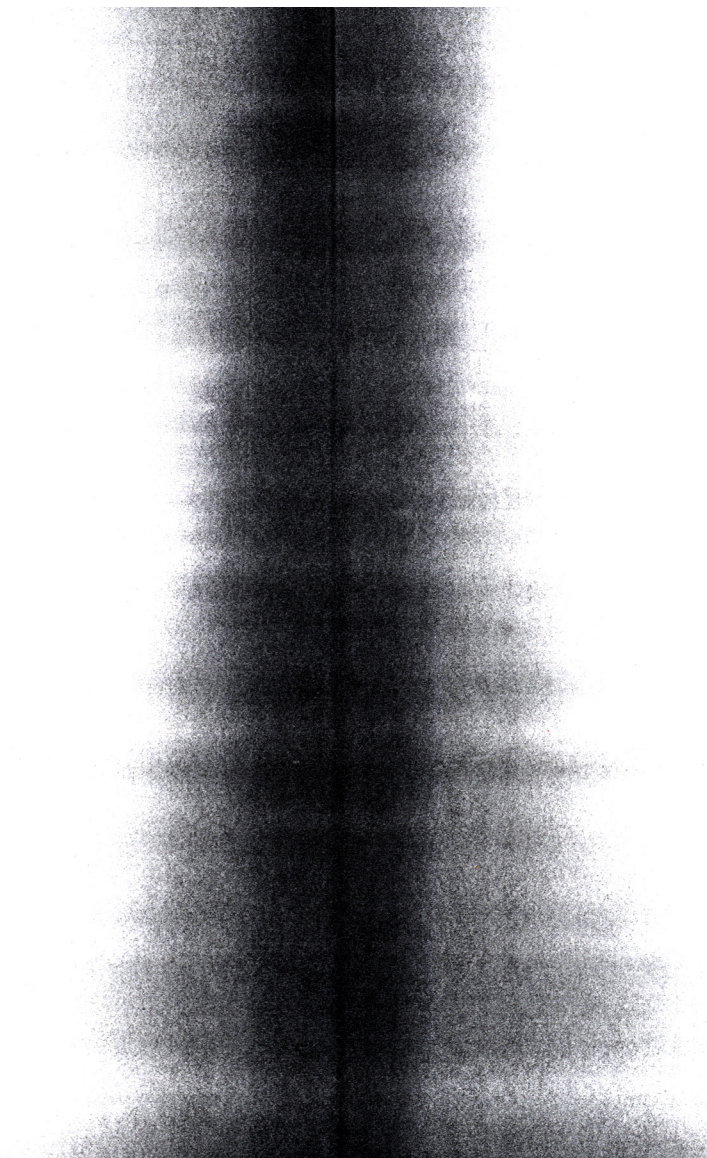
-Morihei Ueshiba from The Art of Peace

12/10/2003

One of the rockets hit 15 meters from one of our guard towers, pretty close. Most of the time, we're like, "Shit, I just got to bed," but this one was a little too close. We put on our gear. Flak Jacket(body armor), Kevlar (helmet), grabbed our weapons(m-16), and stood around this cement shelter smoking cigarettes looking at the sky.

When we go out to the bunker mainly the women get inside the shelter, the guys stand outside and watch the sky.

I look at it this way, IF your going to get hit, your going to get hit. I would rather die on my feet than huddle up in a ball. If the bunker gets a direct hit, you're toast anyway. So, most of us are pretty calm about it. Others aren't so. Plus, I get this 'fuck it' kind of attitude. I'm ready to go either way.



What is the point of being afraid? Not to say that I haven't been afraid, I'm not going to try to tell that fairy tale. But it's a different kind of fear.

It's like a punch to the belly, that doesn't hurt, it just shocks you a little. Like electricity in the belly. I can't really explain it. I have been really afraid over here, more afraid than I think I've ever been. It was this kind of paralyzing fear. I was inside an abandoned motor pool(garage) on the other airfield I was at. We were getting attacked, and there was only one way out of the building, I was just trying to get some sleep. And I started thinking (big mistake) "what if they stormed our position and I was trapped inside this building with no where to go", and on and on. It didn't last too long, but damn, I've never felt like that before and don't desire to again.



I will show you fear in a handful of dust.

T.S. Eliot from The Waste Land



??/??/2003

On a medevac today I sat next to these two soldiers. They had both been wounded, their faces were scraped and burnt. I think they got hit by an IED. The young guys hands were shaking as the chopper took off. The older guy, maybe in his 40s, held the other guy close to him, telling him it was going to be OK. Tender, like it could have been his own son. The young guy was really air sick and shook up, he kept puking so he took off his own helmet so he didn't get it all over the bird. The older guy just looked out the window with his hand on the other guys shoulder, crying, tears streaming from his one good eye. His throat moved like he was trying to swallow his grief.

??/??/2003

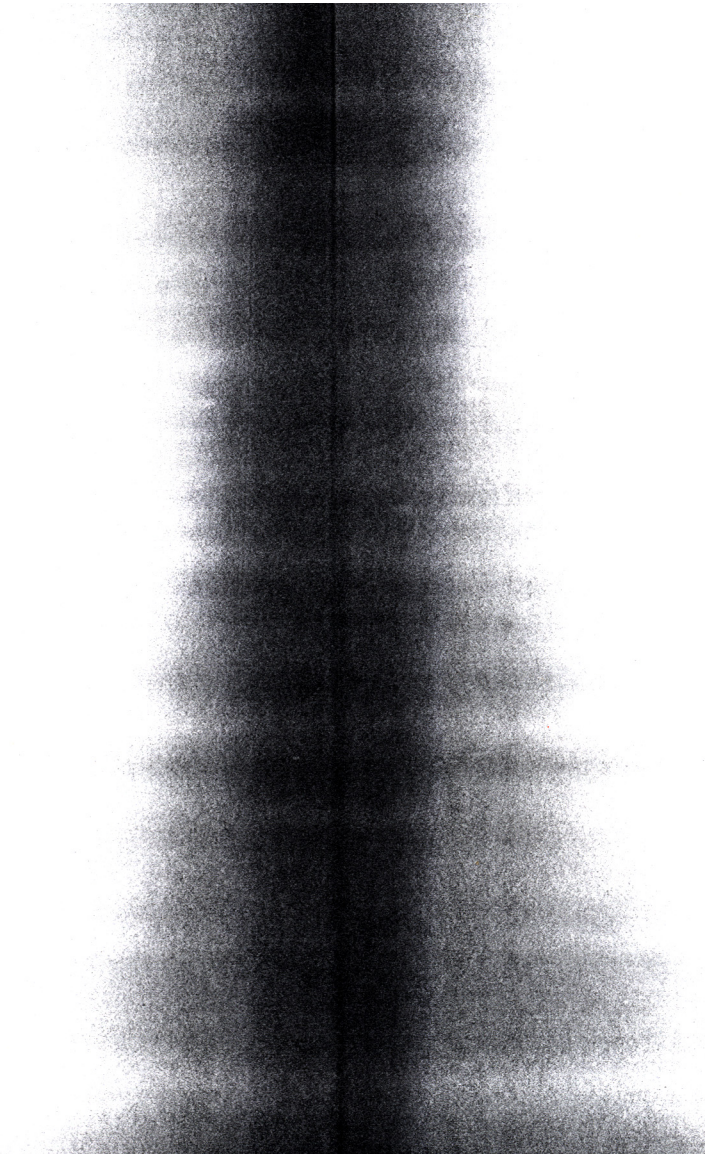
We gave the good Dr. Mohammad some gifts to take home to his family for Christmas. He is a devout Muslim but he had no problem accepting gifts. We even gave him a Christmas tree! His wife pulled up to the outer gate and we went out there together with the Chaplain and he strapped it to the roof of his car like he was Clark Griswald.

I finally got to meet his wife when she pulled up in the car. At first there was fear in her face as I walked up to her, but as I pulled off my helmet she looked surprised then relieved. She began to laugh and because she didn't speak much English I asked the doctor to tell me what was so funny. She said that she thought we were like storm troopers from Star Wars because she had never seen us without our helmets on. Now that she could see my face she was relieved to know I was human.



?/??/2003

In the Army you learn to sleep everywhere. Standing up, on the back of a truck, in a chopper, on a C-130 (big ass noisy plane used for airdrops and transport), curled up in a foxhole, everywhere. Like walking through a daze all the time, that's what basic training is like. Always too much to do, and never enough sleep. Here it's a little better, but I just can't sleep very well. I sleep on this damn cot and it's killing my back.



?/??/2004

Dr. Mohammad brought in a huge plate of food today! Lamb and rice and bread. It was awesome. We sat around the ER tent and the docs and nurses came around and ate with us.

All people are a single nation.

-Al-Qur'an

??/??/2004

Today an Iraqi interpreter brought a young boy, he couldn't have been more than 13 or 14 years old, up to the gate asking for medical attention. I guess the deal was the boy had been wounded by a car bomb in another city and they had travelled here because some sergeant out in the field wrote them a note saying they could receive medical attention at the army hospital.

I radioed up to the hospital but they gave me a "no-go" on the boy coming in because he hadn't been wounded by American forces. I've gotten my ass chewed on a couple of occasions for getting people treatment at the hospital who weren't technically supposed to get treatment, but they told me we didn't have anyone who could work on him so I had to turn him away.

The interpreter was pissed that he couldn't get treatment at the hospital, and rightly so, the boy's eye was covered with a bandage and you could tell it was infected. He offered to have me take a look beneath the bandage but I couldn't bring myself to do it. I can't help but think there was more that I could have done.





??/??/2004

A man came up to the gate today claiming that he had been bitten by a rabid dog. I told him that he needed to go to the local hospital and get vaccinated but he told me that he had already been there and that there was no vaccine. He started to shake and cry. I couldn't understand what he said because it was in Arabic but I understood that he was pleading for his life.

I radioed up to the hospital and finally got them to agree to get him in but by the time I could get back out to find him, the man had already left. I guess to try to find somewhere else to get a shot. I have no idea what happened to him.

??/??/2004

Today I told a guy to go across the street and wait with the rest of the workers. To explain more, We allow Iraqi workers onto our base, but they have badges which their escorts bring to them. So they wait in a crowd on the other side of the street from our gate, which is a bunch of cement barriers and razor wire.

Well, the guys came across the street before they were supposed to, so I told them to go back across the street and they didn't listen, they started to try to explain something to me. And I just about snapped. I mean I really just about came unhinged at these two guys. Luckily their escort showed up and gave them their badges.

I have never felt like that before, and don't want to. I think it's time to go home. It really is difficult sometimes. OK, I should get going, duty calls.





A government should not mobilize an army
out of anger, military

leaders should not provoke war out of wrath.
Act when it is beneficial,

desist when it is not. Anger can revert to joy,
wrath can revert to delight,

but a nation destroyed cannot be restored to
existence, and the dead

cannot be restored to life.

-Sun Tzu from The Art of War





?/??/2004

I watched a line of birds move across the sky. It lasted for hours. It reminds me of the sight of geese moving south for the winter. The honking of the geese as they take turns taking the lead in heavy winds.

1/10/2004

Well, it's been an interesting day. I had tower guard, and hospital guard, 4 hours sleep, and then more guarding. Fun!

I just want to live in ignorant bliss like I used too. Eatin' at Mickey D's, wearing my Nikes, watchin' my TV, dimly aware that the soldiers I see on the news are really out here in the shit.

One thing I'm thankful for is that this is not Vietnam, or WWI or II. We have it much, much, much better. All the modern conveniences. We now have a toilet that flushes, we got it about the same time we got the plates for our body armor.

Gotta love the Army.

?/??/2004

Dr. Mohammad told me that things have been really bad out in the city today. He said that he is afraid to send his kids to school because he doesn't know if they will come back. The violence is so bad that he spent last night huddled in his bedroom with his wife and kids. He has dark circles under his eyes and he doesn't seem to be able to focus that well. My heart feels sick and sad to think of his wife and children.

1/ 25/2004

It has been raining for almost a full day. The whole airfield is flooded. I woke to the sound of a C-17 flying low over my living quarters, at about 0600 hrs.

Then tonight we had a big attack, just about an hour ago. Lots of mortars and .50 cal fire. Hopefully that will be the last for the night. I guess a couple people got some shrapnel but that was about it.

Last night the moon came dropping its clothes
in the street.

I took it as a sign to start singing,

falling up into the bowl of sky.

The bowl breaks.

Everywhere is falling everywhere.

Nothing else to do.

-Rumi from The New Rule

??/??/2004

I can hear a helicopter coming in. I wonder
if somebody is dead.

??/??/2004

Absolutely nothing happened today.

Thank God.

1/28/2004

Some stuff got damaged and we had a tanker get hit awhile back. The thing blew up and there was a big fire. Then there was a Chinook that got hit (big double bladed helicopter used for transport and air lift). We had one van get hit (basically like a telephone switch board station, only mobile). That's all I think that has been damaged around here. We have a lot of open space on the airfield, so it's harder for them to do damage.

2/ 3/2004

We haven't had any mortars hit the airstrip. A guy did lose all the skin and muscle of the top of his arm the other night, but other than that, he's ok.

Well, night is falling, better get back to the hooch.

?/??/2004

I sent a disposable camera home with Dr. Mohammad today because I wanted to get some pictures of him with his family. I won't know what they look like until I can get home and develop them. Not likely to find a one-stop photo shop over here.







2/ 14/2004

Things are going alright. It has been calm up here in the north for the past week or so. We did have that bombing in Erbil. Some of my friends went there to work with Special Forces. They said it was a massacre, body parts everywhere. I didn't have to go, luckily.

I guess the bombers were from Yemen. What the hell do the Yemenis have to do with the politics in Kurdistan? This whole area just doesn't make sense to me. They are protesting against us, but the Iraqi people are the ones who die. I hope that we pull out of here soon and leave the whole operation to a multinational force. That would be the best, for us at least.

03/??/2003

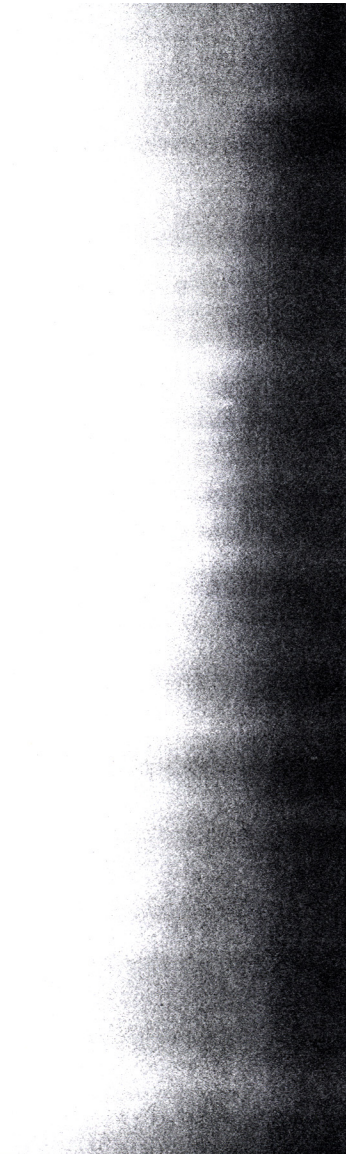
Some of the guys and I volunteered to stay back in Kuwait while the rest of the unit went home. So we're here at the port in Kuwait City, loading our vehicles onto a ship.

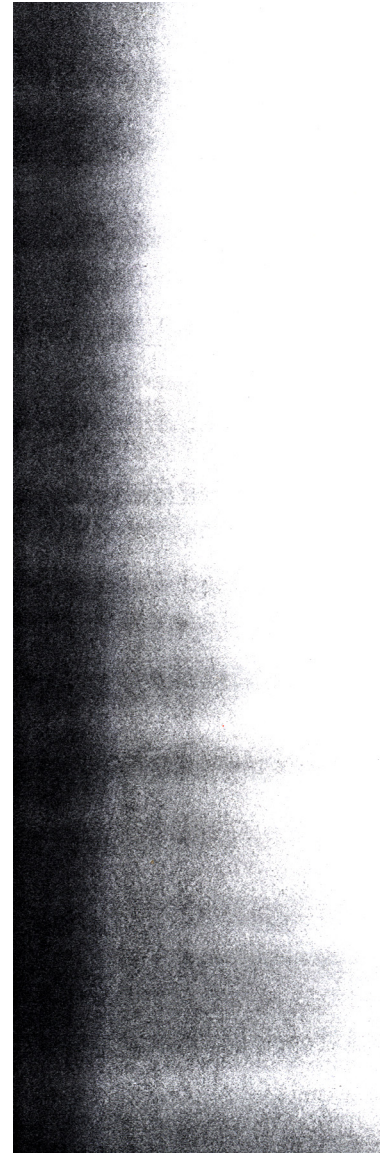




04/??/2003

Home. We landed in Maine and there were people we didn't even know there to greet us. I couldn't help but break into tears as people welcomed me home.





??/?/???

I wish I could sit down with the good Dr. Mohammad or some of the Kurdish soldiers and find out what has happened to them since I left Iraq.

I don't know where most of the Iraqi and Kurdish people that I met are. I know that at least one of them is dead. He died in Baghdad before I even left for home. I think most about the interpreters and their families and the Kurdish soldiers that always made the best of even a terrible situation.

Sometimes the war seems like a distant dream, lived in another life time. Other times it is real and present and fresh, like I just stepped off the battle field. My heart goes out to anyone who is living with this war.

This gift to my close
friend Leonardo, and
I hope this (Qur'an)
will stay with you and
bless you for life.

Your friend
Mohammad
Mosul-IRQ
Jan. 9. 2004

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We made this book for listening. Please accept our invitation. We made this book for deployment. Please pass it along and invite someone else to listen.

Thank you,
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Luke Leonard joined the Army in 2000. He served in South Korea from 2000–2002, after which he was deployed to Iraq from 2003–2004. He has served nine years in the military and is currently an officer in the Minnesota National Guard. Luke lives in Saint Paul, MN with his lovely wife, Sarah, and their cat Perseus.

