

Nathan Lewis

Objects for Deployment



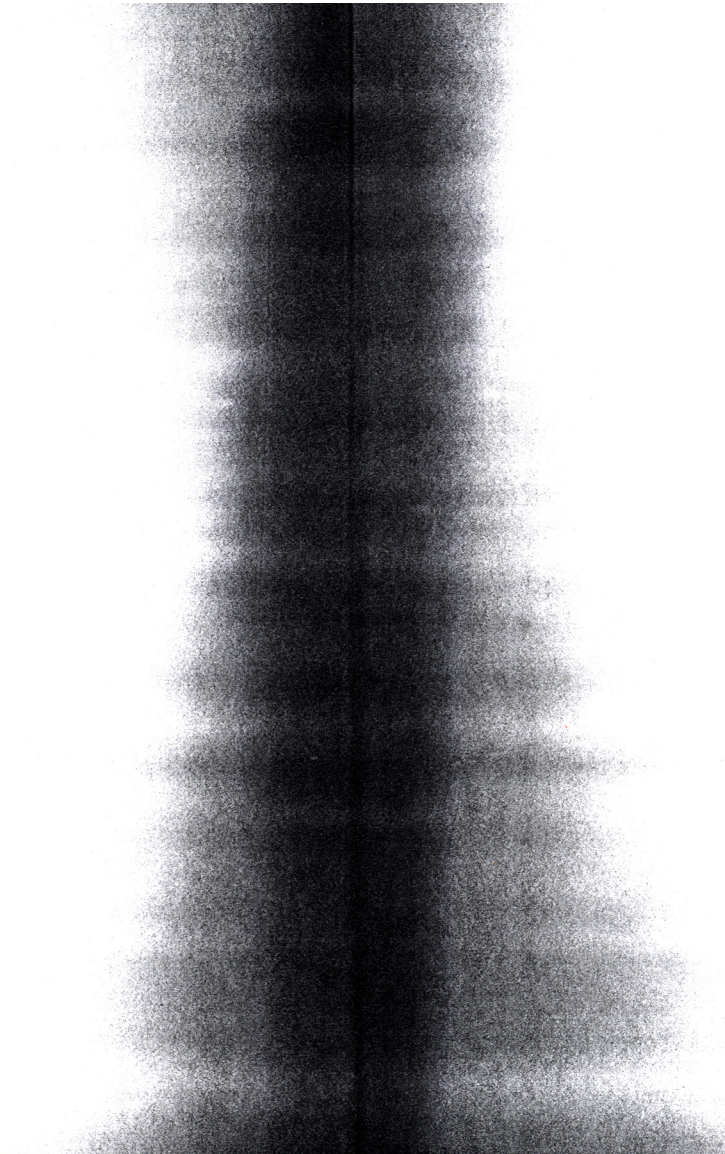
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PART I
INCOMING



The recruiter never mentioned the kids.

Incoming

They packed us in a plane for three days. Three days of sweaty seats, boots and rifles. We streamed out and down into the Kuwaiti night in a deliberate motion. I felt rage I had never experienced. Rage at everyone, rage at the heat, and rage at another chartered vehicle. They packed us in to cook like meat in a sausage. Strongest of all was the fear and excitement sandwich. We all took a bite and years later we are still looking for crumbs.



Newly arriving soldiers were herded into a large tent. Incoming rounds put the lights out and the alarms up. We donned our gas masks and ridiculous suits of rubber and charcoal. They stained our uniforms as much as 9/11 stained our judgment. Popular opinion in my unit was that the war was retaliation for Saddam's role in 9/11. My horseshit trough was full. This was day three of our long war on Iraq and I silenced my own incoming alarms.

-8

Billions of solitary tears
from millions of mothers,
from a silent river
that cuts across.









Booze Attack

These six guys had probably been waiting hours to ambush our convoy, not with bullets and bombs, but with whisky and rum. Judging by their smiles, I don't think they realized how close I had come to turning their Caprice, with worn out shocks, into a piece of scrap metal, twisted and flaming on the side of the road. Did they really think an Army convoy, moving at top speed stretched as far as the eye could see, would pull over to purchase whisky? We had been told the ground war would be brutal and bloody. Now only two weeks in, we sped down the main highway in Southern Iraq, facing Iraqis brandishing alcohol instead of weapons. Did they think we were some type of crazed beasts coming to Iraq for a hell of a party? What had these brave entrepreneurs been told about us?

Guthrie

Guthrie drives and doesn't say much. Occasionally he lights up one of his old lady bingo cigarettes or requests a new CD. After thirty days in Kuwait and two days of almost nonstop driving, the many cartons squirreled away into his bags are now gone and the CD's are all scratched. For Guthrie, the Army, the invasion, the heat, the bare foot kids, all the weapons, all the sweating and cursing - none of it gets him excited. His voice is calm and simple. When trucks start blowing up Guthrie's voice never gets hysterical. It never takes on the primal, animal like qualities that come so naturally to some. We became good friends. Guthrie had a newborn son at home along with some kids from his wife's first husband. One of them who Guthrie called "Bubba," gave him a G.I Joe keychain. He hung the toy from the roof of our truck. Once on a highway in Baghdad Guthrie squeezed the truck between two large Iraqi dump trucks.

It was so tight the side mirrors were knocked out of place. "It's all good Louie" Guthrie would say. He was known to duck under the hood with a long screwdriver in hand. This is how the beast was started. The beast was our twenty-ton truck. It gulped diesel fuel and moved unbelievably fast, on or off the road, if you knew how to push it. Guthrie was the beast master. He never got us stuck in the sand deep enough where a little shifting and swearing couldn't get us out. The beast drooled oil out of six different places and was our home and church. It was our weapon.







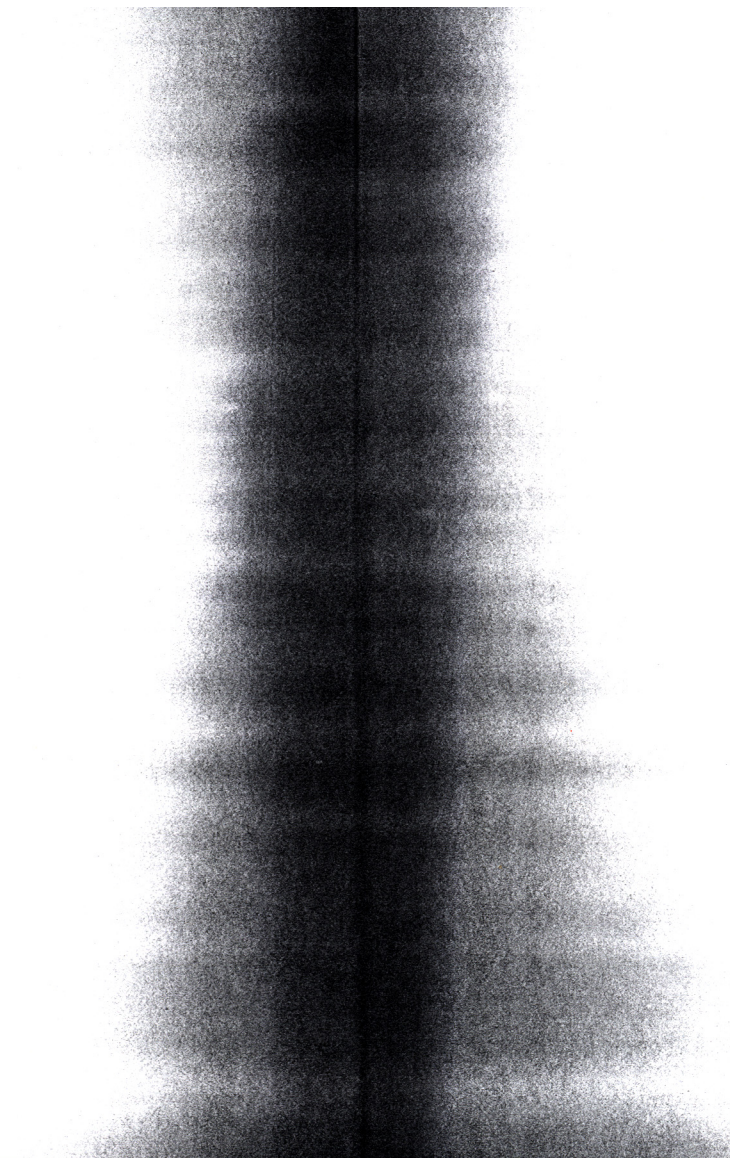






PART II

DIESEL TRUCK TIME MACHINE















Diesel Truck Time Machine

Sunny skies
Walking to class
A skip in my step, a song in my head
Wave to friends
Search for glimpses of the river showing
through the houses

Pierrepont Avenue is always busy
It divides the university from the river front
property
The tremendous party houses hold out another
year

My footsteps
Two fall per sidewalk square
Step on a crack get sent back
A truck drives by and takes me to Iraq

The sound, the smell, especially the sound
A throaty deep down rumble
The distinct sound of a large diesel with its
engine brake on
After the noise the exhaust blows through me
I'm carried away in the fumes and sound and
waves

Every bit of conciseness
Gone, Zap
All the way back through time
Across oceans, Back to Iraq

Guthrie's driving and I'm riding shotgun
Its late morning and we're lost
The officers got us lost again
Taking an exit the road disappears
Simply disappears

Tires and trash are burning
We announce our presence with a cloud of
dust
Barely enough room to turn the convoy
around
People are running from us
Tank columns blasted their way through here
weeks ago

A tall man holds a shovel and is standing above
two graves
The child clinging to his leg barriers his face in
trousers
Don't stop here
I point my weapon and finger the trigger
He points back with an accusing finger
Points at the graves

Rubble is blasted all over
Huge chunks of concrete and steel
Something in the ditch is dead
You can smell it
Spent shell casing yellow brink road
Ghastly evidence of a crime
It's everywhere, you can smell it

A few steps later I'm back on Pierrepont Ave
Looking for friends and cute girls
A golden retriever drives by with his head out
the window
He looks at me and I swear I see him smile
My heart beat returns to normal

Sometimes I go different ways
But sometimes I take Pierrepont and
intentionally drop my guard
Wait for the inevitable reptilian brain panic
rush

Take the route and go back
Back for one minute
Just for one second
Just for a thought
Just for a memory
The rubble, the smoke, the man with the shovel
I visit them in memory so they don't visit me in













Exit 2011 to Slogansburg

The years slip past so fast,
and I know I'm destined to be a toothless vet,
The war carries on and I can't imagine another
Bumper stickers change as you head south
Korean War memorial highway this
Purple Heart way that
Different stretches of infrastructure
Same hollow gesture, a meaningless homage
A jingo you might know but can't remember
what it's selling
You can arrange the bumper stickers on your
'fridge
"Real Men Love Jesus Undocumented
Terrorist Hunting Support"
Army mom this, Support the troops that
Feeling soured today
If you've burned the veteran's hero bridge long
ago
A scary road indeed
That feeling in your heart that you've been
criminally filled with nonsense
Only a fool can believe rich man's State Terror,
will beat the poor man's Religious Terror
A sign reads Rough Road Ahead



PART III

NORMAL





Charlie Battery Has Places To Go

Charlie Battery has places to go
That's why we cruise at 60
All 20 of our trucks
Like a green snake
Charlie battery has Iraqis to liberate
The engine noise, a late night, no music
I'm lulled asleep

I wake when we slow to a crawl
Ahead on the right another green snake
Bravo Battery stopped, everyone dismounted
I recognize a driver
He's standing there smoking and joking
At the head of the snake a very different scene
Soldiers and civilians in a big group
All sweating and screaming

A mother wails and claws at her face
Blood and dirt cover the front of her Abaya
My insides are grinding
Guthrie says "Shit" and I see the kid
A skinny boy, maybe 8 years old
His face is covered with a jacket
I stare at his dirty bare feet

Later, back home, when asked by fools and
children

Did you see any action?
I always want to tell them
But I never saved the courage to tell
About this sort of action

Rumors whispered by the Bravo boys
Between tobacco spits and cigarette drags
And boot heels digging nonsense pattern in the
sand
They tell a sad story

Bravo Battery had places to go
That's why they cruise at 60
Water or Skittles are thrown from truck
Water or Skittles bounce back into road
Hungry and fearless kid gives chase
We pass and wind back up to 60
Charlie Battery has places to go









N RICE

I RICE BY FAR

شركة اولاد جاسم الوزان للتجارة العامة ذ.م.م.













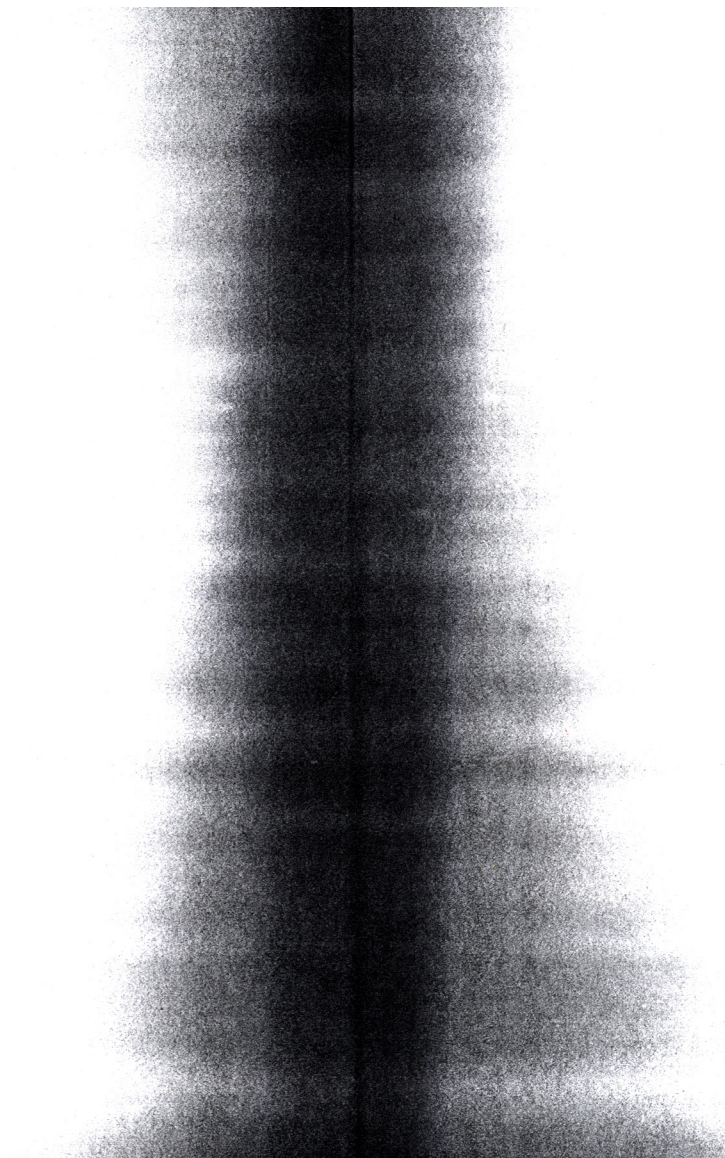
Of all my photos this one haunts me the most. When I came home I showed my photos at my sister's graduation party. Someone remarked that the Iraqi boys "look so normal." I've never been able to describe to people how they helped Guthrie and I load high explosive artillery shells onto our truck. How do you describe that scene to someone on the street? We tried to chase them off but they insisted on helping us. It took two of them to lift one shell. They would waddle over in pairs and drop them at the base of our truck. Guthrie and I would stack them in the bed because they couldn't lift the shells over their heads. When we were fully loaded we stood around. One of the boys snatched the camera from my hand. I wanted to grab it back immediately and lunged at him. He hid it behind his back and said, "No Ali Baba." He wasn't trying to steal it; he just wanted to take a picture of me to return the favor. Now I realize that I never offered them any water. Guthrie never offered them any cigarettes either.





PART IV

DESTRUCTION





They almost looked like part of the natural landscape, rusting and slowly returning to the earth.









The Drill Sergeants never told us how to forget
the looks on the faces of starving people.
They taught us to keep frostbite away from our
fingers but not our souls.







Little Spring Soldier

Baghdad spring 2003
War flowers bloom
Big green ones, little red ones
Everywhere the shiny brass ones
Careful don't touch
They're delicate; some may burst when
trampled
Thousands of thorns waiting to see light
Waiting to do their job and shred the world
apart

We watch where we step
Republican Guard debris
A howitzer here, burnt truck there
Boxes of ammo everywhere
Houses burnt and scored
We bombed real good here
Thorough, vicious, horrific

Across the field of dirt and metal flowers
The kids come to us
A whole school full
Fearless and curious
In English, Hello how are you?
They ask for food and water
Just like the adults

With hands on hips and heads high

We fill our trucks with debris
Waiting we wave goodbye
Snap a few more pictures
These are the kids who lived
Through the decade of sanctions, diarrhea,
malnutrition,
Through the bombing, depleted uranium,
doggy bag cluster bombs
We should get their autographs

Then I see him
He might be 5 years old
A discarded Iraqi Army helmet
The shattered remains of an AK-47
Just like the adults
He has come to play war





If you look close you can see the Iraqis sitting on the side of the road watching the truck burn. Nobody liked carrying the old mortar shells. We knew they were bad news. The cracked plastic cases would occasionally dump one or two onto the floor. After a while we stopped getting freaked out when a case of 60-millimeter mortars spilled and rolled back down into the darkness of the bunker. It just didn't excite us. Not after four months in Iraq. To relieve ourselves of the excruciating work of clearing an extensive bunker complex we began to kick, throw and roll mortar rounds at each other. On the way back to base one of the mortar rounds cooked off and exploded in the bed of the truck. Ordus and I were the first to arrive. We peeked over the side panel and saw flames licking up through the mortars. That's all we needed to see. We split and separated the other trucks. The fire smoldered until our Platoon Commanders went to put it out with fire extinguishers. It exploded while they were on top of the truck.

The photograph was taken seven years ago in Iraq, so maybe it's time to write about it. Whenever I rake the sandbox of Iraq war memories I expect to find this story. I take another look at the photo and remember more of that day. Let us set it out to look at. We dissect it and break it all apart, we study it and ultimately we both step on it and track it home with us on our shoes. Look again and look closely. Do we see the Iraqis on the side of the road?



COLOPHON

A PROJECT BY
Monica Haller

BOOK BY
Nathan Lewis

PHOTOS
Nathan Lewis
Taken with a disposable camera

TEXT
Nathan Lewis
Some of the text also appears in his book
I Hacky Sacked in Iraq.

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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,
Monica Haller

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Nathan Lewis joined the Army straight out of high school. September 11, 2001, was his second day of boot camp. The towers fell and the Drill Sergeants were right; war was just around the corner. Nathan grew up in the small town of Barker, New York. There they hung yellow ribbons on all the trees to honor the many young service members from the area. Nathan's picture hung in the center of the school, surrounded by flags. Nathan joined Iraq Veterans Against the War after he got out of the military. He recently played a role as a U.S. soldier in the movie *Green Zone*. He currently lives in Ithaca, New York and is building a veteran's community where farming, art and service are held in the highest regard.

