

was normal- 30-40 m as per BN SOP. As I made the turn on Chestnut, I decided to cross the two lane road and drive on the left side of the median. This was a decision, I'm sure, that saved the lives of the Marines in my vehicle. Vehicle four was not so lucky. An explosion louder than anything I have ever heard rocked the entire convoy. I remained calm. I continued to drive west as my A driver started to scream, "The fourth vehicle got hit!" I made my way back to the other side of Chestnut and stopped my HMMWV. Clear skies suddenly turned brown, black and grey as shrapnel from a HMMWV came plummeting down in front of me from hundreds of feet in the air.

LCpl Graviss was immediately on the radio requesting QRF and notifying our command operating center of the IED attack as he struggled to exit the vehicle. I stepped out of the HMMWV after struggling a bit to unstick my door. Smoke and debris was everywhere.

The first thing I noticed outside my vehicle was a white, four door sedan to the southwest. At this point, I realized my mission had changed. We had practiced this scenario before on white boards, in class rooms, in front of superiors, subordinates and peers. My training would take over from

here. Some details of the events that occurred that day will always be vividly clear in my mind; other details will never be.

I remember encountering no vehicle traffic or foot traffic that morning leading up to the IED detonation. The white, four door sedan was parked on the side of the road within 100 m of the IED attack, and within the security parameters of our convoy. I heard yelling mostly from the west where Cpl De La Cruz was shouting in broken Arabic and using expletives to the military aged males who occupied the white car. His weapon was at the ready, as it should have been. They were not complying and in fact were starting to run in the opposite direction to the south away from where Cpl Dela Cruz was approaching them. I took a knee in the road and fired. Engaging was the only choice. The threat had to be neutralized. Vehicle Borne IEDs were a serious threat and would have incapacitated our squad making us combat ineffective. I don't remember anyone else firing at the same time I was, although at a squad debrief later on I learned that Cpl Dela Cruz had engaged the men at the car at the same time as I did and Cpl Salinas reported that he had opened fire, as well. After I watched the military aged males fall to the ground, Cpl De La Cruz advanced on them and I saw him fire at the bodies as they lay before I turned to make my way

to the casualties. That is when I started hearing small arms fire from the south.

LCpl Graviss was on the radio trying to communicate with the COC but was growing increasingly agitated because the COC couldn't understand him and was asking for the same information he provided several times before. Remaining calm, I grabbed the radio from him and conveyed the information the COC requested which included a typical CASEVAC report stating the administration number of the wounded and killed, the priority of the casualties, along with the triage that was being administered by Doc Whitt.

The next thing I remember was the QRF arriving on scene. Lt. Kallop was the first Marine I met from the QRF and I began to present an informal situation report to him. I remember his main focus was on the WIAs. I provided him that information and showed him our KIA LCpl Terrazas. While still receiving small arms fire, Cpl Salinas directed Lt. Kallop to take cover and get down. Cpl Salinas and I then advised Lt. Kallop that we were taking fire from a house to the south and we needed to assault that house. Lt. Kallop agreed and gave us the order to clear south. Cpl Salinas then

commenced suppressive fire on the house using his M203 grenade launcher firing high explosive rounds into the structure. I watched at least three impacts detonate on the upper portion of the house with minimal to no damage.

Small arms fire had ceased and I and Cpl Salinas proceeded to assault that house. Simultaneously, Cpl Salinas directed the two closest squad members (LCpl Tatum and PFC Mendoza), to join us so we would have at least a fire team going into the assault. At some point previous to us departing, Lt. Kallop directed me to give him my 148 because he didn't have a radio with him at the time.

The four of us aggressively advanced on the house and on approach I advised the team something like shoot first and ask questions later or don't hesitate to shoot. I can't remember my exact words but I wanted them to understand that hesitation to shoot would only result in the four of us being killed. This was the first time we would employ MOUT training tactics since we had been in Iraq.

The exact details of clearing the first and second house will forever remain unclear to me. I'll never be able to pinpoint exact shooting positions, exact chronology of events, who was where and when, or even what the exact layout of the houses were. What I do know is that we cleared those houses as we were trained using forced entry, grenade employment, followed with clearing by fire. I remember that after clearing the bottom floor of the first house, a door that was leading south was open. Someone shouted, "There's a runner!" and we quickly exited that house and continued the assault to the second house directly south. We ran to the second house because it was the closest structure and the only place the runner could have gone.

We treated the second house the same as the first. After PFC Mendoza fired at the man at the door, the rest of the team flowed in. Again, we used grenades and cleared the rooms by fire.

After I felt the threat was neutralized and we were no longer being fired on, I took the team back within the security perimeter on Route Chestnut. Heading along Route Zebra, the team stopped twice to search unoccupied structures. Somewhere around the intersection of Zebra and

Chestnut I received my radio back. At that time I transmitted back to the COC that we had finished clearing two houses and there may be collateral damage. I was asked to provide more details as far as a number of enemy vs. neutral KIAs. This was information I did not have at the time. I estimated 15 KIAs and that was the extent of my report.

After communicating with Lt. Kallop that we just finished clearing two houses, he directed us to search a house on the north side of Chestnut that had anti-American writing in Arabic on the courtyard brick wall. We learned about the Arabic language from one of the Iraqi Security Force members. I don't remember who was with me when that house was searched, but upon completion of the search, nothing significant was found. My team then occupied an over watch position at the intersection of Chestnut and Viper. Within the next several hours we located and killed insurgents in a house north of our position and we killed another suspected insurgent fleeing from the scene along a ridgeline. We watched as rotary winged aircraft deployed hellfires and dropped bombs on houses directly to our south. We remained on over watch for the majority of the rest of the day.

The day ended with my squad along with 3rd squad from my platoon and a squad from 1st platoon retrieving the deceased from the multiple locations and transporting them to firm base Sparta via HMMWVs. They were counted, separated and photographed and would later be delivered to the hospital.

As a Sergeant and the squad leader of 1st Squad, 3rd Platoon, I am responsible for the decisions made to employ the tactics we used that day. My Marines responded to the threats they faced in the manner that we all had been trained. I will bear the memory of the events of that day forever, and will always mourn the unfortunate deaths of the innocent Iraqis who were killed during our response to the attack.