

Saturday, November 19, 2005 started off as a normal day for 1st Squad 3rd Platoon Kilo Company in Hadithah, Iraq. 0530 was reveille and 0600 I gave my patrol brief to the squad. Although, the mission was something we had conducted and accomplished dozens of times before, today would be extraordinarily different.

The vehicle order was the same, and the squad break-down was the same. Two forms of positive communication was a requirement and that was met with a 148 in the third vehicle, and VRC-89 in the first vehicle which was a hard back HMMWV. The other three vehicles were high backs. Special equipment was the same and rechecked which included at least one AT-4, GSR kits, digital camera, pyro used for Escalation of Force, among other things. Pre-combat checks and pre-combat inspections were conducted prior to and while mounted on the vehicles. I gave my required brief to the watch officer which included a mapped out route and a description of the mission, special equipment and communication.

Cpl Salinas, LCpl Sharrat and LCpl Rodriguez occupied the first vehicle. LCpl Tatum, Cpl De La Cruz, and PFC Mendoza occupied the second vehicle. I, LCpl Graviss, and the corpsman Doc Whitt occupied the

third vehicle. LCpl Terrazas, LCpl Crossan, and PFC Guzman occupied the fourth vehicle. Once I re-checked our vehicles we conducted one last radio check and requested permission to exit friendly lines.

Because our enemy goes to great lengths to exploit our patterns I chose to change our route to the traffic control point our company occupied. We reached our objective without incident. Business was as usual while there which included a daily crypto change with the radios, chow re-supply, and a relief in place of our comrade counterparts the Iraqi National Guard.

The day was chilly and the sky was clear. The city was ominously quiet. Our route back included driving north on River Road, west on Route Chestnut, north on Route Leopard, east on Hadithah Road, and through our entry control point into our firm base parking lot. Again I changed the normal route of north on River Road and west on Hadithah Road. This is one decision I will always regret.

Vehicle one turned left on Route Chestnut. Vehicle two turned left on Route Chestnut. My vehicle turned left on Route Chestnut. Vehicle four turned left on Route Chestnut. We were half way home. Vehicle dispersion