

Intermediate

Nightmare in a Minefield

A Warm-up Question

...War – is it scary?

(minefield - area of land with bombs buried in the soil)

B Today's Article

Among the thousands of frightened US Marines out there in the dark on the night America invaded Iraq, Chuck Hewitt, a **veteran** at 33, should have been one of the cool, confident father figures to the younger men. He kept his head, but the hours of combat and chaos he saw in the fight to take Iraq's oilfields from Thursday to Friday were worse than anything he had experienced in the 1991 Gulf war.

'It was a nightmare,' he said yesterday, chewing tobacco and **spitting** regularly as he waited on a motorway bridge near Basra, preparing to move west. 'It was the worst night of my life.'

Hewitt, a sergeant, commands an M1 tank in the Marine's 5th regiment, which drove deep into Iraq in one of the first moves of the invasion. His tank was one of a group of four following a unit of Marine **infantry**. The **objective** was to **seize** the Rumaila oilfields, one of the richest prizes in Iraq, so that they would be safely under American control before the big battle to take the capital, Baghdad.

They set off in the darkness. No sooner had they crossed the border between Kuwait and Iraq than one of the tanks broke down and had to be left behind. Not long after that, the hydraulics collapsed on two of the tanks, including Hewitt's. **Corrosive** fluid from a broken hydraulics **pipe** poured over Hewitt's gunner, Corporal Adam Finch. 'It was going all over him. He was getting burned,' Hewitt said.

'It was too much for him so even though we were well inside Iraqi territory he climbed out of the tank, stripped off his clothes and got back in. In the middle of the night, he went **bare**-assed into the combat zone. I was thinking: How the hell am I going to explain this if he gets shot?'

To make things worse, the thermal imaging system on Hewitt's tank - the equipment which enables the crew to see in the dark - went **on the blink**. Amid the chaos, they lost sight of the others ahead of them and they got lost. In a minefield. 'I got out and with the night-vision **goggles** on I looked down and I could see the round shape of landmines. They were all around the tank,' Hewitt said. 'It took us about 50 minutes to maneuver out.'

All this happened before they were involved in any fighting. In the end, despite the breakdowns and near-disasters, the Marines outgunned the Iraqis. One Marine lieutenant died of his wounds after being shot, but many more Iraqis were killed, and hundreds surrendered. 'There were white flags going up all over the place and our boys would go and round them up,' Hewitt said. The extremely low morale of the Iraqis was obvious from the speed with which they surrendered or abandoned uniforms and fled.

Looking back, the commander was under no illusions about the **vast** technical superiority of the US and British troops over their Iraqi opponents, and unromantic about the ease with which they **crushed** the Iraqis. 'Arguably, it wasn't a fair fight, but I'm all for unfair fights.'

Key Vocabulary and Expressions

Match the words that have similar meanings. Please note that there may be more than one correct answer. Explain how the words are used in the article and make sentences using the new vocabulary.

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|--------------------|---|
| 1. Veteran | a. foot soldiers |
| 2. spit | b. someone with experience of war |
| 3. infantry | c. aim, goal |
| 4. objective | d. burning, melting |
| 5. seize | e. to shoot saliva out of the mouth |
| 6. corrosive | f. naked |
| 7. pipe | g. glasses, mask |
| 8. bare | h. destroy (like a beetle beneath a boot) |
| 9. on the blink | i. tube |
| 10. goggles | j. to take control of |
| 11. vast | k. faulty, not working properly |
| 12. keep your head | l. not panic |
| 13. crush | m. very big, enormous |

D Discussion Questions

Share your thoughts on the following discussion questions.

1. Have you ever lived in a country at war?
2. Is being a soldier compulsory in your country?
3. Is having an army a waste of money in your country?
4. How can countries prevent conflicts when other nations are not trying to bring peace?
5. Is there a special day to honor veterans in your country?

E Wrap Up

Take notes on what you can recall from this topic.