

# 'Screaming Eagle' in Desert Storm

"The Air Force and the armor were the thunder of Desert Storm," General H. Norman Schwarzkopf stated, "while the 101st Airborne Division was the lightning."

G-Day, the day selected to commence the ground war in Iraq and Kuwait, was so secret that it was not transmitted by even the most secure means. It happened on Feb. 24, 1991, and Brian Lesslie was driving his HUMM-V vehicle as part of a convoy spearheading a drive deep into Iraq to establish a refueling point for the aircraft of the division.

Brian S. Lesslie was born in Trenton on May 14, 1969, attended Hamilton Township schools, graduating from Nottingham High School in 1987. In May, 1989, he enlisted in the U.S. Army for a four-year hitch. After basic training and mechanic school at Ft. Leonard Wood, he was assigned to A Battery 2nd Battalion, 44th Air Defense Artillery attached to the 101st Air Assault Division at Ft. Campbell, Ky.

The "Screaming Eagles," as the 101st was known, had distinguished itself at Normandy and Bastogne in

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## VETERAN PROFILE

### Nicholas Loveless

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World War II and had a reputation for its fighting ability. Brian was in charge of the vehicle maintenance of his unit in addition to being capable of all the duties of a combat infantryman.

On Aug. 2, 1990, Iraqi troops invaded Kuwait and quickly pushed their way to the Saudi Arabia border. On request for military assistance from Saudi Arabia, President Bush ordered combat forces to the Arabian Gulf, and Operation Desert Shield was under way.

The 101st Airborne was placed on the alert, and on Sept. 18, 1990, left its base at Ft. Campbell for the Persian Gulf. It arrived at Bahrain and then went to King Fahd International Airport, where it established a base camp and prepared for whatever lay ahead.

Brian recalls, "When we got off the

planes at King Fahd Airport the ground temperature was 112 degrees and it felt like being in front of a hair blow dryer. It was a dry heat, and even though we perspired, it would dry right away. We did get relief when it would cool down to 75 degrees. Our camp was adjacent to King Fahd, and consisted of about 2,000 tents that had been put up by the Arabs, and was known as 'Fort Camel,' and we were there for the next few months."

Between September and January, 1991, negotiations between the United Nations and Iraq continued with little progress, and Saddam Hussein refused to vacate Kuwait. U.N. forces in the meantime were building up troops and supplies in the event of an outbreak of war, which was beginning to appear imminent.

On Jan. 12, Congress adopted a resolution allowing President Bush to go to war, and on Jan. 15 the U.N. deadline expired. On Jan. 17, President Bush announced that Operation Desert Storm had begun, and the air attacks against Iraq began as eight Apache helicopters of the 101st penetrated Iraq's airspace to knock out Iraqi radar around the capital of

Baghdad, paving the way for bombers.

"In the meantime," Brian continues, "we had moved from Camp Camel to a tactical assembly area called Camp Campbell near Rafha on the border of Iraq in Saudi Arabia. The Iraqis were being pounded by our air forces and I don't know how they could have held out for so long. We knew that sooner or later we would be going into Iraq.

"Water was no problem, as we always had plenty of bottled water, and our meals were MREs three times a day (meals ready to eat). They weren't too bad and I'm sure were an improvement over the old World War II K-rations. We would drop the vacuum-packed bag into hot water to heat it up, and there was dried fruit and even chewing gum in the pack. We never had any beer or alcohol because we had to abide by the country's custom, which prohibited alcohol."

By the end of January, there were more than 470,000 UN troops in the Gulf and 40,000 sorties had been flown in the air campaign. General Schwarzkopf intended to reduce the effectiveness of the Iraqi army by 50 percent before the ground war began. As a ploy, the Navy sailed within firing range of Kuwait to appear that an amphibious landing would take place there.

The role of the 101st Division would be to use its fleet of helicopters, Cobras, Kiowas, Apaches, Black Hawks and Chinooks, to spearhead into Iraq and cut off Saddam's main supply route between Baghdad and Kuwait, and to isolate the Republican Guards in Kuwait.

