

Sunset over Baghdad

—William Howerton

No napalm today, just small arms fire and fear in Sadr City, Baghdad and Balad. Troops are hated and loved, villains and heroes, vigilantes and professionals. Saddam palaces everywhere, green zone mortars flying all over, Apaches in the air, HMMWVs and MRAPs on the ground traveling at the speed of light to avoid IEDs and chase SUVs carrying terrorists. We operate in donkey cart environments, create firefights in bombed cluttered alleys, locate our enemy hiding in adobe huts which create the Baghdad “skyline” with the Tigris River creating a different Garden of Eden through our zones of responsibility, somewhat mindful of the ROE.

No seasons feature Baghdad, only the color brown. Brown buildings, brown uniforms, brown vehicles, brown trees, brown Mosques, even care packages from home come wrapped with love and brown. Our chow comes from you guessed it, Kellogg BROWN and Root. Only flashes of orange and red come in forms of explosions, rifle flashes, and blood.

Nightly patrols, traffic control cones, and cache discoveries drive us to catch the bad guys. Listening to our instincts, trusting only those in the same uniform, we do it all over again while developing feeling and visions which may never go away. This is not about oil or WMDs, sectarian violence between Shia and Sunni; it's about freeing the oppressed, our battle buddy, and leaving the desert. No iron men in Baghdad, just iron weapons, men of steel will waiting for the sunset over Baghdad for 364 days.