

## CHAPTER 3

### Operation Iraqi Freedom

In 2009 duty called with Operation Iraqi Freedom. His unit was attached to the 504th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade. The 504th had a distinguished history supporting not only III Corps exercises and operations, but contingency operations worldwide. The Brigade deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom in Iraq on two occasions and more recently on multiple occasions provided Soldiers in support of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. The Brigade continues to be at the forefront of Army Transformation and has some of the most state-of-the-art collection equipment making them one of the premier intelligence collection units in the United States Army.

This would be the first of several deployments for Neil and as his father, 82 year old Seaman Second Class Howard Donald Edgar, Jr., WWII US Navy Gunboat Veteran, hugged him goodbye he gave this advice, "***Be where you are with all of your mind***", advice that would be repeated again years later.



1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Neil Edgar's unit, Company F, 425<sup>th</sup> Infantry Airborne Long Range Surveillance, assembled at Ft. Lewis, WA where they spent six weeks mobilizing in anticipation of deployment to Iraq to relieve another Long Range Reconnaissance company from Ft. Hood, Texas. Fort Lewis is a United States military facility located 9.1 miles (14.6 km) south-southwest of Tacoma, Washington under the jurisdiction of the United States Army Joint Base Garrison, Joint Base Lewis–McChord. It was merged with the United States Air Force's McChord Air Force Base on 1 February 2010 into a Joint Base as a result of Base Realignment and Closure Commission recommendations of 2005.



Joint Base Lewis-McChord is a training and mobilization center for all services and is the only Army power-projection base west of the Rocky Mountains. Its geographic location provides rapid access to the deep water ports of Tacoma, Olympia and Seattle for deploying equipment. Units can be deployed from McChord Field, and individuals and small groups can also use nearby Sea-Tac Airport. The strategic location of the base provides Air Force units with the ability to conduct combat and humanitarian airlift with the C-17 Globemaster III.



From Ft. Lewis Edgar's unit was moved to Kuwait for theatre specific training, briefings, and to get accustomed to operating in 125 degree heat and sandstorms.

On arrival at Contingency Operating Site Sykes (COS Sykes) in Tal Afar, Iraq, Edgar spent a week in meetings with the Ft. Hood company Executive Officer learning of his successes and frustrations in order to make smooth transition. U.S. forces manned the base, roughly 37 miles east of Mosul, since the initial stages of Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003. Operation Iraqi

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Freedom transitioned to Operation New Dawn on 1 September 2010 when U.S. Soldiers assumed an advisory and training role to help prepare Iraqi Security Forces to independently secure Iraq from threats.



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It was a long year away from home and Iraq was austere to say the least. They had three main missions there; Time-Sensitive Targeting, Border Interdiction along the Syrian Border, and Security/Stability Operations. They also had a few intelligence gathering missions that were classified in nature. Neil remained very busy. Since he was the company Executive Officer he could pick and choose most of the missions he went on, doing a little bit of everything including leading the company in the Commander's absence and leading the Operations Section as well – completing much administrative work.



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During his first mission on 31 July 2009 much ground was covered and Edgar became familiar with the area in which he would be operating meeting a few of his Iraqi counterparts. Edgar spoke with an

Iraqi Army General through an interpreter and while he seemed genuinely concerned about his particular mission and the overall security of his country, US Forces must remain cautious as some of the Iraqi soldiers are corrupt.



The 504th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade would conduct some of its intelligence and reconnaissance missions alone (without Iraqi counterparts) but all missions needed to be approved by the Iraqis due to recent security agreement. They also did a lot of work with an Iraqi Commando Platoon. There were many successes as Edgar reported in a letter home, "... our silent, sneaky efforts are resulting in the capture of quite a few bad guys."



On a mission at the Syrian border.

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**Containerized Housing Units** - When not on missions, 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Edgar lived in a Containerized Housing Unit. Containerized Housing Unit, usually abbreviated as CHU (and sometimes called Containerized Living Unit or CLU) is the name given to an ISO shipping container pre-fabricated into a living quarters. Such containers can be transported by container ships, railroad cars, planes, and trucks that are capable of transporting intermodal freight transport cargo.



His CHU was 7 ft. wide by 13 ft. long and as an officer he bunked alone. 7 X 13 seems small but since it is air-conditioned his CHU was his castle. There was no indoor plumbing anywhere on COS Sykes. Thus, his CHU was called a dry-CHU. Showers, sinks, and toilets were also in air-conditioned trailers that all shared.



Home Sweet Home .....

The water in Iraq was not potable so there were pallets of water virtually everywhere on the COS. He found the chow hall shockingly good always with a large variety to choose from and a small ice cream parlor to boot. After one mission he found himself on the midnight chow line for a cool refreshing strawberry shake!! In addition there was a movie theatre, a nice gym, a free internet cafe, basketball courts, ping-pong, billiards, and even a softball field - lots to do during downtime.

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Iraq was exactly how he expected it to be and definitely not a place he would return for a vacation. He found it interesting, however, to see how the Iraqi people there live and interact.



One of his least-fondest memories, however, was the infamous camel spider! They were truly creepy! Rumor had it they were not true arachnids but more like the arthropods and that indeed is the case. They are very large (much larger than the largest US spiders) they can run very quickly (but not as fast as Edgar) and if you are a slow runner you may even hear them hiss.



As far as the other flora and fauna he saw goats, camels, donkeys, some birds, and sand fleas. They were like piranhas and liked to gnaw on any exposed flesh, especially faces while you on line at the chow hall.

This was an historical time for the Iraqis as they struggled to take the reins of control and secure their future. The general populace seemed indifferent toward Neil and his men. The children waved and ran to their vehicles because often times soldiers gave them snacks. You find yourself pulling for the Iraqis after watching their youth play soccer in a field of trash. Time will tell if the Iraqis can ever live in peace.



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The little guy to 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Edgar's right is Adin. He was 10 years old and quite a conversationalist. He spoke better English than Edgar spoke his language and was a proud student at one of the two schools in his city. Farming is the career he wishes to pursue when he grows up. He was quite a negotiator so Edgar suggested he should be a car salesman instead. Edgar could not spell or pronounce the boy's name to his left. He spoke very little English so usually they just smiled at each other and thumb-wrestled.

The building behind them is an Iraqi Police Station. Just to the left of Adin's head you will see the remnants of a car bomb that detonated just a few days before. Several Iraqis were killed or wounded as a result.

In another letter home Edgar wrote, "Hopefully someday conditions in Iraq will be such that Adin can raise a healthy crop and thumb-wrestling will be a national past-time."

1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Neil Edgar remained upbeat in his twelve-month assignment. In a letter home he said, "Life here is good, our morale is high, and we are eager to make a difference. For me this is my first deployment and I feel good about being here. Without this, it would be much like a boxer who spent all of his life training, and never getting a chance to step in the ring."



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With that spirit in mind, Neil he would experience something many before him had done – he would be serving his nation far away from home, from family and from friends, at Christmas. No one has captured the essence of that as well as Michael Marks in a poem he dedicated to those who had served and were currently or would be serving:



### A SOLDIER'S CHRISTMAS

The embers glowed softly, and in their dim light,  
I gazed round the room and I cherished the sight.  
My wife was asleep, her head on my chest,  
my daughter beside me, angelic in rest.

Outside the snow fell, a blanket of white,  
Transforming the yard to a winter delight.  
The sparkling lights in the tree, I believe,  
Completed the magic that was Christmas Eve.

My eyelids were heavy, my breathing was deep,  
Secure and surrounded by love I would sleep  
in perfect contentment, or so it would seem.  
So I slumbered, perhaps I started to dream.

The sound wasn't loud, and it wasn't too near,  
But I opened my eye when it tickled my ear.  
Perhaps just a cough, I didn't quite know,  
Then the sure sound of footsteps outside in the snow.

My soul gave a tremble, I struggled to hear,  
and I crept to the door just to see who was near.  
Standing out in the cold and the dark of the night,  
A lone figure stood, his face weary and tight.

A soldier, I puzzled, some twenty years old  
Perhaps a Marine, huddled here in the cold.  
Alone in the dark, he looked up and smiled,  
Standing watch over me, and my wife and my child.

Perhaps a Marine, huddled here in the cold.  
Alone in the dark, he looked up and smiled,  
Standing watch over me, and my wife and my child.

"What are you doing?" I asked without fear  
"Come in this moment, it's freezing out here!  
Put down your pack, brush the snow from your sleeve,  
You should be at home on a cold Christmas Eve!"

For barely a moment I saw his eyes shift,  
away from the cold and the snow blown in drifts,  
to the window that danced with a warm fire's light  
then he sighed and he said "Its really all right,  
I'm out here by choice. I'm here every night"

"Its my duty to stand at the front of the line,  
that separates you from the darkest of times.  
No one had to ask or beg or implore me,  
I'm proud to stand here like my fathers before me.

My Gramps died at 'Pearl on a day in December,"  
then he sighed, "That's a Christmas 'Gram always  
remembers."

My dad stood his watch in the jungles of 'Nam  
And now it is my turn and so, here I am.

I've not seen my own son in more than a while,  
But my wife sends me pictures, he's sure got her smile.  
Then he bent and he carefully pulled from his bag,  
The red white and blue... an American flag.

"I can live through the cold and the being alone,  
Away from my family, my house and my home,  
I can stand at my post through the rain and the sleet,  
I can sleep in a foxhole with little to eat,  
I can carry the weight of killing another  
or lay down my life with my sisters and brothers  
who stand at the front against any and all,  
to insure for all time that this flag will not fall."

"So go back inside," he said, "harbor no fright  
Your family is waiting and I'll be all right."  
"But isn't there something I can do, at the least,  
"Give you money," I asked, "or prepare you a feast?  
It seems all too little for all that you've done,  
For being away from your wife and your son."

Then his eye welled a tear that held no regret,  
"Just tell us you love us, and never forget  
To fight for our rights back at home while we're gone.  
To stand your own watch, no matter how long.

For when we come home, either standing or dead,  
to know you remember we fought and we bled  
is payment enough, and with that we will trust.  
That we mattered to you as you mattered to us.

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While the commitment and training to get this far was beyond intense, and there was always pressure to remain alert in an area of hostility filled with constant risk and uncertainty, by far the heaviest burden Considering the entire deployment, the most pressure for Neil was being responsible for the movement of Company F 425<sup>th</sup> Infantry ABN LRS 4 men and equipment in and out of theater; a task as daunting as war itself. For his overall effort during the deployment he received a Bronze Star of which he is the most proud. But far beyond all his accomplishment and citations, what he is most proud of is bringing 150 men to Iraq and 150 back home safely. As a leader in the Army, you can't ask for more than that. His fondest memory by far will always be when he saw his wife, Cindy, and all of the families and his men reuniting at their homecoming. That is a moment in time he will never forget!



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**THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

TO ALL WHO SHALL SEE THESE PRESENTS, GREETING: THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT THE PRESIDENT  
OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AUTHORIZED BY EXECUTIVE ORDER, 24 AUGUST 1962 HAS AWARDED

**THE BRONZE STAR MEDAL**

TO FIRST LIEUTENANT NEIL EDGAR, UNITED STATES ARMY  
FOX COMPANY, 425TH INFANTRY REGIMENT (ABN) (LRS), 2-3 HEAVY BRIGADE COMBAT TEAM

FOR EXCEPTIONAL AND MERITORIOUS SERVICE WHILE ASSIGNED AS A COMPANY EXECUTIVE OFFICER DURING OPERATION IRAQI  
FREEDOM. YOUR SUPERB LEADERSHIP, TECHNICAL AND TACTICAL EXPERTISE, AND COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE DURING COMBAT  
OPERATIONS CONTRIBUTED TO THE OVERWHELMING SUCCESS OF THE COMMAND'S MISSION. YOUR SELFLESS SERVICE AND DEDICATION TO  
DUTY ARE IN KEEPING WITH THE HIGHEST TRADITIONS OF MILITARY SERVICE AND REFLECT DISTINCT CREDIT UPON YOURSELF, THE UNITED  
STATES DIVISION - NORTH, AND THE UNITED STATES ARMY.

FROM 9 MAY 2009 TO 8 MAY 2010  
GIVEN UNDER MY HAND IN THE CITY OF WASHINGTON  
THIS 28TH DAY OF FEBRUARY 2010

  
ANTHONY A. CUCOLO III  
Major General, U.S. Army  
Commander, Task Force Marne  
PO #059-007, 28 FEBRUARY 2010



  
SECRETARY OF THE ARMY

DA FORM 4980-5-WT, JAN 2000. Previous edition is obsolete.

**Narrative Page**

NARRATIVE TO ACCOMPANY THE AWARD OF  
  
THE BRONZE STAR MEDAL  
  
TO  
FIRST LIEUTENANT NEIL E. EDGAR

First Lieutenant Neil E. Edgar, United States Army, distinguished himself through exceptionally meritorious service to the United States Army as the Executive Officer for Foxtrot Company, 425<sup>th</sup> Infantry, (ABN) (LRS), FOB Sykes, Iraq, from 09 May 2009 to 08 May 2010 during OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM 09-10. First Lieutenant Edgar served as the Executive Officer for F Company throughout the entire deployment and consistently displayed competence and a strong commitment to mission accomplishment. The first critical task that First Lieutenant Edgar accomplished was the successful organization and execution of the company's transfer of property from Bravo Troop, 38<sup>th</sup> CAV (LRS). He ensured that the transfer of information and lessons learned occurred parallel to the property transfer, which provided critical continuity in logistics support. The solid logistical foundation that First Lieutenant Edgar established during the first weeks of the deployment was immediately tested when F Company assumed the role of a battle space-owning unit responsible for a 1628 square kilometer sector along the Syrian border. He quickly applied his effective problem solving skills to an increasingly complex problem set and fostered a solution-oriented culture within his section. At every point during this deployment, First Lieutenant Edgar remained resolute in his drive to align the company's logistical support capabilities with a demanding operational tempo. He routinely empowered his subordinates to analyze a myriad of maintenance, supply and life support challenges and reinforced the value of that decentralized approach by supporting his subordinates' proposed solutions. This method of leveraging every available perspective to attack logistical challenges proved to be invaluable as F Company transitioned through numerous higher headquarters and mission sets. First Lieutenant Edgar's management and organizational skills gave F Company the ability to sustain both forward operating base operations and combat operations, which is directly linked to the decrease in enemy activity in area of operations Thunder. Persistence and innovation were the key components of his success in managing the maintenance of a fleet of 34 up-armored vehicles employed in difficult, mountainous terrain in the Western Ninewah province of Iraq. His unyielding commitment to operational readiness resulted in F Company's ability exert continuous pressure against foreign terrorist and fighter networks along the Syrian border. When equipment needed to be repaired, First Lieutenant Edgar always found a way to get the job done. When missions required additional equipment to integrate LRS maneuver elements with Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance assets, First Lieutenant Edgar leveraged all available channels to acquire that equipment in order to enhance F Company's capabilities. This enabled LRS elements to maintain a "persistent stare" along the border, which resulted in the company's detention of 112 individuals crossing from Syria into Iraq over the course of 120 combat patrols and 55 Time Sensitive Targeting missions. First Lieutenant Neil E. Edgar's actions are in keeping with the finest traditions of military service and reflect distinct credit upon himself, Task Force Marne, United States Division-North, and the United States Army.

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RECOMMENDATION FOR AWARD		
For use of this form, see AR 600-8-22. The proposing agency is DCS, G-1.		
For valor/heroism/wartime and all awards higher than MSM, refer to special instructions in Chapter 3, AR 600-8-22.		
1. TO COMMANDER, TASK FORCE MARNE, USD-N COB SPEICHER, APO AE 09393	2. FROM COMMANDER, F COMPANY, 425 IN LRS FOB SYKES, IRAQ APO AE 09351	3. DATE (YYYYMMDD) 20100131
<b>PART I - SOLDIER DATA</b>		
4. NAME (Last, First, Middle Initial) EDGAR, NEIL E	5. RANK 1LT	6. SSN
7. ORGANIZATION F COMPANY, 425th IN (ABN) (LRS) FOB SYKES, IRAQ APO AE 09351	8. PREVIOUS AWARDS AAM-1	
9. BRANCH OF SERVICE	10. RECOMMENDED AWARD BSM	11. PERIOD OF AWARD a. FROM 20090509 b. TO 20100508
12. REASON FOR AWARD		
12a. INDICATE REASON SVC	12b. INTERIM AWARD YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>	12c. POSTHUMOUS YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
13. PROPOSED PRESENTATION DATE (YYYYMMDD) 20100415		
<b>PART II - RECOMMENDER DATA</b>		
14. NAME (Last, First, Middle Initial) JENZ, BRIAN E.	15. ADDRESS F COMPANY, 425th IN (ABN) (LRS) FOB SYKES, IRAQ APO AE 09351	
16. TITLE/POSITION COMPANY COMMANDER	17. RANK CPT	18. SIGNATURE GENZ, BRIAN, ERICH.1090248959
18. RELATIONSHIP TO AWARDEE COMMANDER		
<b>PART III - JUSTIFICATION AND CITATION DATA</b> (Use specific bullet examples of meritorious acts or service)		
19. ACHIEVEMENTS ACHIEVEMENT #1 SEE ATTACHED NARRATIVE		
ACHIEVEMENT #2		
ACHIEVEMENT #3		
ACHIEVEMENT #4		
20. PROPOSED CITATION		
SEE PROPOSED CITATION		

NAME (Last, First, Middle Initial) EDGAR, NEIL E		SSN
<b>PART IV - RECOMMENDATIONS/APPROVAL/DISAPPROVAL</b>		
21. I certify that this individual is eligible for an award in accordance with AR 600-8-22, and that the information contained in Part I is correct.		22a. SIGNATURE GENZ, BRIAN, ERICH.1090248959
22b. DATE (YYYYMMDD) 20100131		
23. INTERMEDIATE AUTHORITY		
a. TO COMMANDER, 3-73 CAV FOB SYKES, IRAQ APO AE 09351	b. FROM COMMANDER, F CO, 425 IN FOB SYKES, IRAQ APO AE 09351	c. DATE (YYYYMMDD) 20100131
24. INTERMEDIATE AUTHORITY		
a. TO CDR, 2BCT, TF MARNE FOB MAREZ, APO AE 09334	b. FROM COMMANDER, 3-73 CAV FOB SYKES, IRAQ APO AE 09351	c. DATE (YYYYMMDD) 20100205
25. INTERMEDIATE AUTHORITY		
a. TO CDR, TF MARNE, USD-N COB SPEICHER, APO AE 09393	b. FROM CDR, 2BCT, TF MARNE FOB MAREZ, APO AE 09334	c. DATE (YYYYMMDD) 20100216
26. APPROVAL AUTHORITY		
a. TO ORDERS ISSUING AUTHORITY	b. FROM CDR, TF MARNE, USD-N COB SPEICHER, APO AE 09393	c. DATE (YYYYMMDD) MAR 09 2010
27. APPROVED <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DISAPPROVED <input type="checkbox"/> RECOMMEND UPGRADE TO <input type="checkbox"/> DOWNGRADE TO <input type="checkbox"/>		
28. NAME (Last, First, Middle Initial) LUCOLO, ANTHONY A. III		29. RANK CPT
29. TITLE/POSITION COMMANDING GENERAL		30. SIGNATURE
31. COMMENTS		
32. COMMENTS iii, this Officer has earned this recognition through his actions. He has proven his worth in battle as a professional.		
<b>PART V - ORDERS DATA</b>		
33a. ORDER ISSUING TO CDR, TASK FORCE MARNE, USD-N APO AE 09393	33b. NAME OF ORDER BROWN, JONI	33c. TITLE/POSITION JSD-N G1 AWARDS OIC
34. PERMANENT ORDER NO. 059-007	35. RANK CPT	36. APPROVED AWARD BSM
37. DATE (YYYYMMDD) 20100228	38. DISTRIBUTION 1-File 1-OMPP 3-Individual	

Citation Page

CITATION TO ACCOMPANY THE AWARD OF

THE BRONZE STAR MEDAL

TO  
FIRST LIEUTENANT NEIL E. EDGAR

FIRST LIEUTENANT NEIL E. EDGAR, UNITED STATES ARMY, DISTINGUISHED HIMSELF THROUGH EXCEPTIONALLY MERITORIOUS SERVICE TO THE UNITED STATES AS THE EXECUTIVE OFFICER FOR FOXTROT COMPANY 425 INFANTRY (ABN) (LRS), 2D "SPARTANS" BRIGADE COMBAT TEAM, TASK FORCE MARNE, UNITED STATES DIVISION-NORTH, MOSUL, IRAQ FROM 9 MAY 2009 TO 8 MAY 2010 DURING OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM. FIRST LIEUTENANT EDGAR'S ACTIONS ARE IN KEEPING WITH THE FINEST TRADITIONS OF MILITARY SERVICE AND REFLECT DISTINCT CREDIT UPON HIMSELF, THE SPARTAN BRIGADE COMBAT TEAM, TASK FORCE MARNE, UNITED STATES DIVISION-NORTH, AND THE UNITED STATES ARMY.

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With their mission completed Company F 425<sup>th</sup> Infantry ABN LRS returned stateside April 2010. One year later on 14 June 2011 U.S. forces officially transferred responsibility of Contingency Operating Site Sykes to Iraqi Security Forces. U.S. forces had manned the base since the initial stages of Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003. Once Operation Iraqi Freedom transitioned to Operation New Dawn, U.S. Soldiers assumed an advisory and training role to help prepare ISF to independently secure Iraq from threats.



U.S. forces reallocated the equipment through the Foreign Excess Personnel Property program, which is designed to identify and distribute eligible property items to the Iraqi government. They left all the maintenance bays and some other equipment necessary to run their day-to-day operations such as generators. In addition, they left all of the living quarters, including Neil's former residence – the CHU.

At the time this was the largest base that was transitioned since arriving in country.

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