

EYEWITNESS TO CHEMICAL WAR IN THE GULF

by Brooks Tucker

The title of the article in the Sunday paper caught my eye: "Pentagon Says Troops Were Exposed to Chemicals in Gulf War." I smiled. The Defense Department was confirming what thousands of us Gulf War veterans have surmised for some time. As I read the article, I recalled a moment from February 1991 that is still very vivid in my mind.

Six months earlier, we Marines of the Sixth Regiment's First Battalion had been helicoptered into Saudi Arabia. Since then, we'd moved gradually north, on foot or in armored personnel carriers. During the day, we lived in a barren desert landscape under skies darkened by oily clouds of smoke. At night, our sentries watched over a horizon glowing from hundreds of petroleum fires. We trained for battle throughout the scorching summer days when the mercury reached 125 degrees, and we continued to drill in winter's frosty nights. It was late February now, two months since we'd enjoyed our last shower or tasted a cooked meal.

Tomorrow, we would rise at 3 A.M. from our shallow holes in the coarse Arabian sand and clamber aboard our assault vehicles. Then, platoon by platoon, we would grind our way across the final kilometers of open desert towards the Iraqi minefields. We expected they would shell us with chemical artillery once we were in the "no man's land" between the first and second belt of mines; so we wriggled into our thick, charcoal-lined chemical protective suits. My platoon milled about in the dark, whispering nervously. A few stood silent around a tiny radio, straining to hear the BBC World Service report that the last-ditch peace talks had failed.

I roused my squad leaders and climbed into the commander's hatch of our assault vehicle. The men crammed into the troop compartment behind me. The rear ramp whined as it closed shut, sealing them in a claustrophobic metal coffin bathed in pale red light. A cold rain had begun to fall, and it tapped on my Kevlar helmet. In my earphones the company commanders reported they were "Oscar Mike"—on the move. Along the

western horizon, white streaks of flame whooshed upward from rocket launchers, and flashes of fire signaled the opening barrages of artillery. Hundreds of yards ahead, the combat engineers were positioning themselves at the edge of the first mine belt. They were preparing the explosive charges that would breach 12-foot-wide lanes through which we could pass. In a series of deafening explosions, they sent geysers of smoke and sand spewing into the air, and our vehicles began to creep forward.

Then I noticed the ground erupt in thin plumes of smoke a few hundred meters away. "Snowstorm, snowstorm!" said an emphatic voice over the battalion frequency. Incoming enemy artillery. More shells hit the soft sand to our front and flanks. I heard the distinctive sound of a round passing overhead, as if it were ripping the air apart like a cloth. The ground shook and our vehicle trembled. I felt my lungs deflate as the over-pressure sucked out oxygen. Another call over the radio, this one more urgent. It was from a company commander.

"Lightning, this is Nightstalker. Our lead vehicle hit a chemical mine and is disabled. Lane Red One is blocked. We are dismounting and moving the company forward on foot." Then, seconds later, another message, this one from our Fox chemical detection vehicle. "FLASH-FLASH-FLASH! Fox vehicle has detected possible nerve and blister agent in vicinity of Lane Red One."

The men in my troop compartment reflexively donned their gas masks in a matter of seconds. My stomach tightened as I listened to the frantic and distorted voices on the radio. The battalion commander calmly passed his guidance on to the commander who was now moving his company forward on foot.

I yelled to the men to relax and unmask. The threat was not yet imminent. There was no need to worry them any more than necessary. Our vehicle rocked forward slightly as another shell exploded a few meters behind us. The lane ahead was jammed with vehicles. I leaned out of the hatch to alert my driver and pointed to an anti-tank mine protruding from the edge of the lane, just a few inches from the vehicle's steel tread.

THE MEN IN MY TROOP COMPARTMENT DONNED THEIR GAS MASKS IN A MATTER OF SECONDS.

By now, the engineers had cleared lanes through the second belt of mines. Our traffic jam subsided and we began to make some headway. Overhead, a pair of Cobra attack helicopters circled a nearby bunker complex like hawks searching for prey. Their chain guns whined like buzz saws as they spewed bullets into the subterranean fortifications. Disheveled men waving dirty rags emerged from bunker after bunker, knelt in the soft sand, and raised their hands in surrender.

The following morning, the chemical alert posture was downgraded, and we were ordered to bury our chemical suits before pressing further north toward Kuwait City. I learned later from a fellow officer who was in the company that went in on foot that the chemical detection and monitor team had taken samples from the contaminated area and verified that the chemical was a nerve agent. The battalion and regimental combat logs contain records of the minefield incident and mention two other incidents when chemical alarms were sounded on the battlefield that day in February.

I suppose the reason the Defense Department and the Central Intelligence Agency continue to deny that Iraqis used chemicals directly against U.S. forces is because any evidence to the contrary would compromise our longstanding national strategy of deterrence: We had threatened the Iraqis with nuclear retaliation if they used chemical weapons. But there is no doubt in my mind that our battalion encountered low levels of chemical agents during our three-day race to the outskirts of Kuwait City. And the government's persistent inability to disclose the details of these incidents leaves a bitter taste in my mouth.

Brooks Tucker served as an infantry officer in the Second Marine Division.

Let's Sell More U.S. Visas

by Kenneth Lee

"We've done great on boat people. I see no problem with a few yacht people," quipped Harold Ezell, an Immigration and Naturalization Service official. Ezell was referring to the provision in the Immigration Act of 1990 that set up the so-called "foreign investor visa program." The plan was to allot 10,000 green cards (out of the 700,000 visas issued annually) to foreign entrepreneurs who were willing to invest at least \$1 million in a business in the United States—the first time in American history that visas would be "sold" to immigrants.

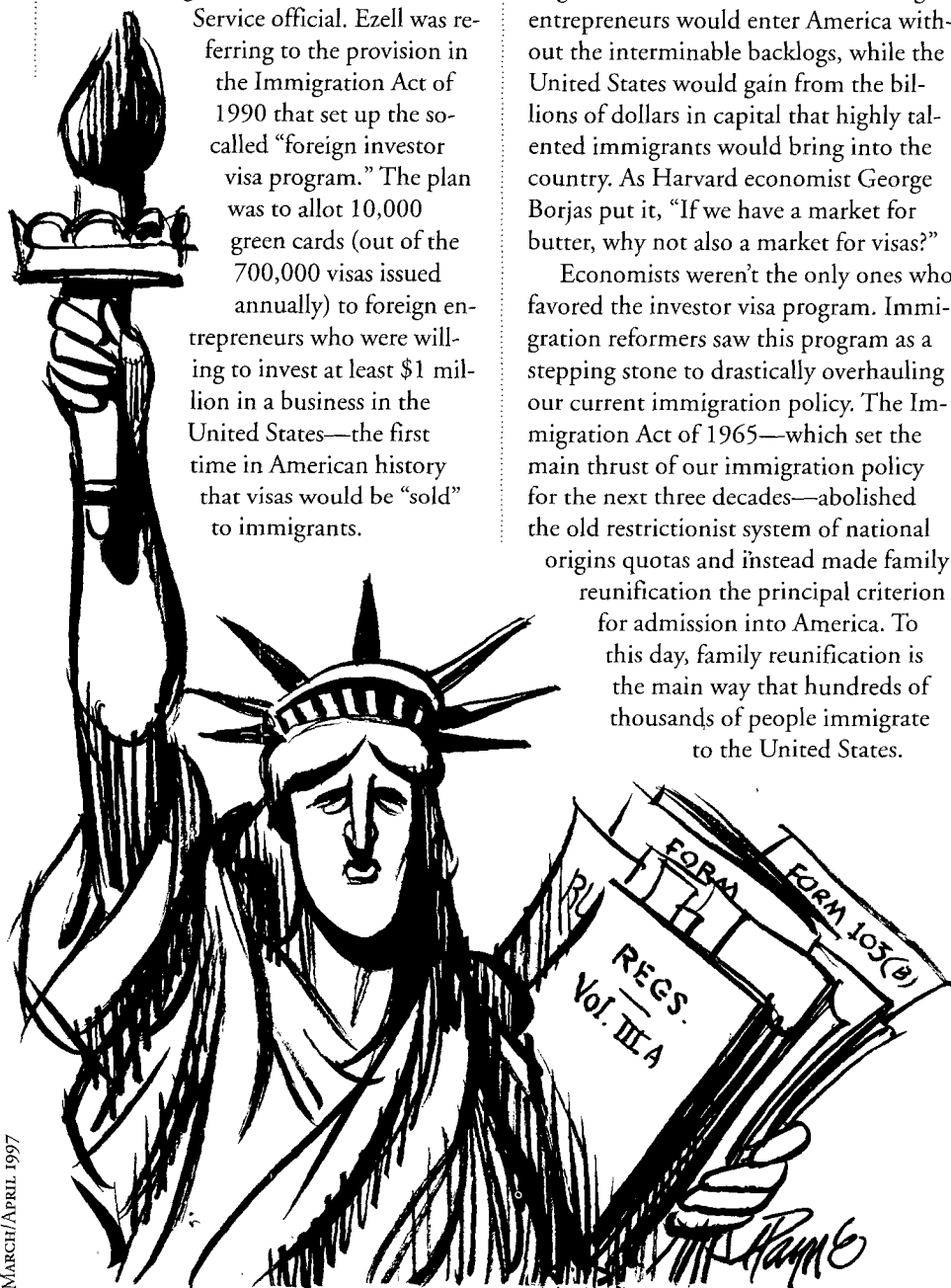
This idea of "selling" visas has long been championed by free-market economists as a good way to benefit both immigrants and the United States. Foreign entrepreneurs would enter America without the interminable backlogs, while the United States would gain from the billions of dollars in capital that highly talented immigrants would bring into the country. As Harvard economist George Borjas put it, "If we have a market for butter, why not also a market for visas?"

Economists weren't the only ones who favored the investor visa program. Immigration reformers saw this program as a stepping stone to drastically overhauling our current immigration policy. The Immigration Act of 1965—which set the main thrust of our immigration policy for the next three decades—abolished the old restrictionist system of national origins quotas and instead made family reunification the principal criterion for admission into America. To this day, family reunification is the main way that hundreds of thousands of people immigrate to the United States.

The booming economy of the '60s had allowed policy-makers to largely ignore economic considerations and instead focus on such humanitarian concerns as family reunification. But after three decades, it has become painfully clear that the 1965 act had the unintended consequence of admitting less educated and less talented immigrants. Of course, many recent immigrants are well-educated people who have had tremendous success in both business and academia. Many of the top high-tech companies in the country today, including AST Computer and Sun Microsystems, were founded by immigrants.

Unfortunately, the aggregate picture of today's immigrants is not as sanguine. For example, in 1970, recent immigrants had 0.4 fewer years of education than native-born Americans. Today's immigrants, in contrast, have 1.3 fewer years than natives. And newer immigrants are likelier to go on the public dole: The percentage of immigrant households on welfare spiked up from 5.9 percent in 1970 to 9.1 percent in 1990.

The investor visa program, despite its small and modest scope, was a radical departure from the 1965 act. It made capital and entrepreneurial talent, not family connection, the main basis for admission. Many reformers hoped that if this program were successful, it would pave the way for other criteria—such as educational background, occupation, talent, and English-language proficiency—to be emphasized when selecting immigrants. As Ben Wattenberg, an immigration enthusiast, argued in *The First Universal Nation*, the United States should adopt a system of "designer immigration" that would emphasize skills over family reunification. Countries like Australia and



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