

War Sounds

Terrell Fox

We were amped up and crammed into our Amtrac. Our packs were slung over the sides to give us more room to stand on the seats and poke our upper bodies out through the top of the open hatches. The sharp aluminum edges of the hatch seals dug into the backs of our SAPI plates as we leaned against them. We tried to let our knees absorb the bumps and jostles of the tracks on the uneven sand. We were excited, suspicious, and nervous. We didn't know what to expect about the coming fight, but the thick black smoke from the distant oil fires announced that it would probably be an aggressive one.

The air was hot and dry. Remnants of the previous night's sandstorm added fine grit to the wind. It coated and abraded my throat. I sucked down uncomfortably warm water through the tube of my Camelback and swished it around in my mouth to rinse out the sand.

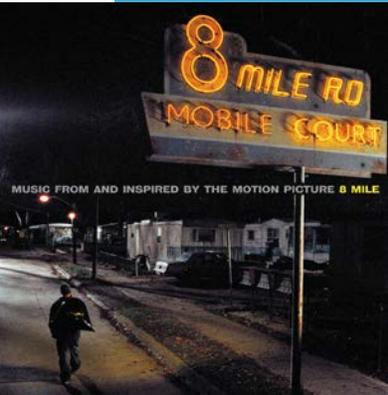
I had the radio handset jammed in between my helmet chinstrap and my left cheek. The hard black plastic dug into my ear. Occasionally the Marine next to me would shift his position and snag the coiled line of the handset that linked me to the radio, yanking my head hard over and to the left. Bits of comm chatter filtered through and I half-listened to PosReps, northings, updates, queries, and acknowledgements, waiting to hear my call sign. The steady rumble of the diesel engines and the shouted orders and exclamations of the Marines around me made it difficult to hear anything specific. It blended together into a wall of noise.

Over it all I could hear the squeaks from the strained suspension and the sharp taps of our rifle barrels as the motion of the Amtrac made us bump them around on the lip of the hatch. The track commander shouted and gestured at the other vehicles around us as he repositioned them in line or moved them out of our way. I felt the transmission grind and I heard the fast slap of the thick rubber track pads as they passed over hard patches of sand. I couldn't hear my heartbeat anymore.

We pulled up and halted, on line and in columns, stacks of green amphibious vehicles spread out across the pale sand of the wide-open desert. I heard the buzz of scout motorcycles as their engines argued with the deeper growls of idling diesels. They zipped between and around trucks and tanks and tracks. Humvees, some hardback, some soft top, and some open air, were scattered throughout the columns like tan colored punctuation marks in sentences of olive drab. I heard all the different engines, running at different pitches and tones, and their timbres combined into one all-encompassing mechanical voice.

I heard the Marines behind me, facing outboard on the other side of the track, excitedly shout something so I shuffled my cumbersome gear around and looked out over my shoulder. Four Psy-Ops Humvees pulled up in a line at the front of the entire armored column right on the bleeding edge of the Line of Departure (LOD).

The speakers mounted on the backs of the Psy-Ops Humvees crackled. I saw distorted movement behind their thick windows. The Psy-Ops guys were preparing something, either for us or for the enemy. The radio chatter petered out and all attempts at conversation died. Our attention focused on the Psy-Ops guys.



Eminem

"Lose Yourself"

*8 Mile: Music from and
Inspired by the Motion
Picture*

10/2002

Shady / Interscope

The hiss of the high-gain speakers increased in volume. It was the sound of pre-noise. It was amplified anti-silence. The non-sound from the speakers made my teeth feel tight. I wanted to bite something.

The speakers erupted. Sound blasted out. The treble and bass fought each other for supremacy. Eminem's first few piano notes shot over the diesels and reverberated across and through the triangular ridges of the up-armor on the Amtracs. The thumping bass guitar kicked in and strummed with violent potential. The music drowned us. It burned in my lungs when I breathed it in. No one cheered.

We collectively started to move to the rhythm. It was a gentle back and forth, a subtle helmet nod. At the first lyric, "*Look*," I glanced at the Marine beside me. We locked eyes and then looked away from each other and back out to the horizon. The engines roared. The Psy-Ops Humvees stepped off. Our Amtrac surged forward across the LOD. Feeling invincible, we charged north towards Baghdad.