

The Mission of MSSG-24

Provide Comfort was primarily a logistics operation. The 24th MEU (SOC) logistics arm was MSSG-24 commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Richard T. Kohl. It mustered 14 officers and about 230 enlisted Marines. The MSSG was on board the *Charleston* when the word to move to Iskenderun came in. While in transit to Turkey, Lieutenant Colonel Kohl had the staff prepare a detailed list of MSSG equipment and capabilities. After receiving Major Mugno's preliminary report, Kohl realized MSSG-24 most likely would be separated from its traditional "sea base" and would have to operate an inland support base. This was a problem because MSSG-24 had been forced to leave half of its 5-ton trucks, much of its material handling equipment (especially forklifts), and some engineer assets at Camp Lejeune because of the ship shortage. Planning was hampered by incomplete intelligence, constantly changing information, and lack of specific instructions. Despite these problems, MSSG-24 completed many alternative plans and was "good to go" when the *Charleston* closed Iskenderun Harbor.

Lieutenant Colonel Kohl established the following priorities: 1) combat service support, 2) humanitarian relief, and 3) civic action. The most immediate tasks were provision of emergency supplies (food, water, blankets, baby food, etc.) and rudimentary emergency medical care. The ships began unloading supplies and equipment on 14 April 1991. At first only personnel, cargo, equipment, and supplies required by HMM-264 were unloaded. Because Provide Comfort was a non-combat operation, the BLT, the LFORM supply package, and ground combat personnel and equipment remained on board ship. On 16 April, a combat service support detachment was transferred to the forward support base at Silopi. While much of MSSG-24's equipment was being held by Turkish customs, the 24th MEU (SOC)'s mission was changed. The new mission made it imperative to unload all MEU personnel, supplies, and equipment immediately and to be prepared for potential combat and ready for extended inland operations. Because the MEU's LFORM sustainment package was only good for 15 days, requisitions for additional supplies and equipment were flashed back to Camp Lejeune.

At Silopi, the CSSD acted as an advance party for the remainder of MSSG-24 in addition to its aviation support role. On 19 April, a commercial convoy, escorted by military tactical vehicles, transported MSSG-24's main party and initial cargo loads more than 450 miles through the mountains to Silopi, which served as MSSG-24's forward support base throughout Provide Comfort. The operations section (S-3) manned a Combat Service Support Operations Center (CSSOC) 24 hours a day to coordinate service support and respond to emergencies. The logistics section (S-4) managed internal logistics matters (embarkation, food services, accounting, distribution, and Class V ammunition storage). A post office was established to support Silopi and Zakho under the cognizance of the administrative section (S-1). The disbursing section remained on board ship, but regularly sent contact teams to the field. Lieutenant Colonel

Kohl lost the services of his executive officer when Major Mugno was retained at Incirlik with Navy-Marine Liaison Team 10.⁵¹

The MSSG had seven key functions: maintenance, supply, medical, communications, motor transport, landing support, and engineer support. MSSG-24, as all MSSGs, was created to support a specific MEU and was task organized for that purpose. The detachments assigned to MSSG-24 were from the 2d FSSG. Because of space limitations, MSSG-24 sailed short-handed and left some of its equipment behind. These shortfalls often were made up for by long working hours and inventive use of equipment.⁵²

The Maintenance Platoon (Chief Warrant Officer 2 Kenneth D. Franklin) established an intermediate maintenance activity at Silopi to repair ground equipment, provide wrecker service for disabled vehicles, man mobile welding and fabric repair teams, and man mobile maintenance contact teams. The Supply Platoon (First Lieutenant Todd L. Eggers) warehoused, replenished, and distributed MREs, dry-cell batteries, fuel and lubricants, LFORM supplies, military clothing, medical supplies, repair parts, and selected ordnance items. Medical personnel worked with the Joint Aid Facility, the Joint Dental Facility, and the 39th Air Transportable Hospital. Hospital Corpsman Arthur W. Angel ran a small clinic and conducted medical and dental civic action patrols (MedCaps) to service the refugees and local population. The Communications Platoon (First Lieutenant Patrick J. Allison) established, maintained, and operated tactical radio networks, operated camp telephone networks, augmented the Joint Communications Center, and supported remote communications operations at Zakho and Dohuk.⁵³

The Motor Transport Detachment (First Lieutenant Luke Marsden) ran a motor pool including organic maintenance, vehicle dispatching, stationary refueling, and mobile refueling. Tactical convoys ran twice daily. The first overland delivery of humanitarian relief supplies to Zakho was made on 22 April. Security was paramount so each convoy was escorted by armed guards. Trucks used .50-caliber heavy machine guns on ring mounts for protection. Humvee (short for High-mobility, Multi-purpose, Wheeled Vehicle) utility trucks usually carried a couple of riflemen as "shotgun" guards. Every convoy was treated as a combat mission. The Turkish border was designated the line of departure where all weapons were locked and loaded. While no ambushes or fire fights involving Marines occurred, there were several hair-raising incidents.

On 12 May the occupants of one such convoy were rolling along, enjoying the bright sunshine and chatting as normal. As the convoy approached Zakho, Lieutenant Colonel Kohl and his colleague, both of whom had been wounded in Vietnam, suddenly stopped talking and became abnormally watchful. Each of them had been alerted simultaneously by a combat-veteran's "sixth sense" that something was wrong. "If we were in Vietnam, I'd say we were heading into an ambush," muttered the passenger. Without taking his eyes from the road, Lieutenant Colonel Kohl nodded his assent and ordered the lead vehicle to slow down and move forward cautiously. Using this cue, Marines in the trailing vehicles became restless and hunkered down anticipating possible action. As the



Unexploded ordnance was a major problem in northern Iraq. Here members of an explosive ordnance demolition team remove live mortar shells from an Iraqi military compound at Zakho. This compound later became the 24th MEU (SOC) Headquarters, named Camp Sommers to honor the Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps.

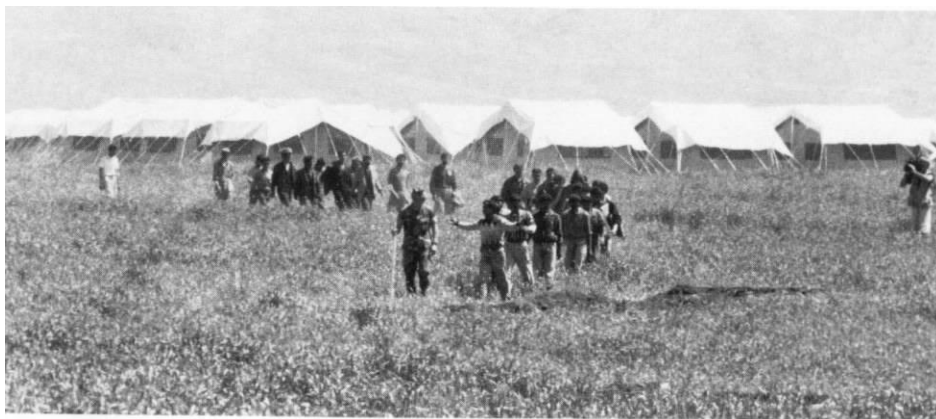
convoy entered Zakho, it slowed to a crawl because the normally busy streets were deserted except for a single mangy dog. Finally, Camp Sommers was reached without incident and the Marines breathed a collective sigh of relief. However, this incident was not actually a false alarm. The Marines at Camp Sommers reported that a mob of Kurds had just overrun the local Iraqi police station in retaliation for an early morning shooting incident. A similar scare occurred on 30 May when a two-vehicle convoy was engulfed by a mob of about 1,000 Kurds demonstrating in front of Joint Task Force Bravo Headquarters. It turned out the demonstrators were pro-American, however, the unexpected sight of what appeared to be an unruly mob created rapid pulse rates among startled Marines who did not understand what was going on.⁵⁴

The Landing Support Platoon (First Lieutenant Christopher A. Arantz), called the "red patches" because of their distinctive scarlet emblems worn on trousers, jackets, and utility caps, was a major part of the initial CSSD sent to Silopi. After arrival, the detachment was controlled by Joint Task Force Bravo. It single-handedly operated the flight line for the first two weeks, servicing helicopters from all American services and six nations. The detachment's forklifts were the only heavy material handling equipment (HME) available and were critical to helicopter offloading. They also unloaded more than 900 commercial trucks. During the first three weeks this detachment unloaded 16 million pounds of supplies. The Red Patches manifested and loaded 2.3 million pounds of relief supplies onto 442 helicopters. The helicopter support team conducted 91 separate lifts without a mishap. These loads included the external lift of a disabled CH-53,

five humvees, 51 fuel bladders, a bulldozer, a small emplacement excavator (SEE), and more than 50 other sling loads."

The Engineer Support Platoon (First Lieutenant Jeffery M. Reagan) was always near the tip of the spear. These Marines provided Joint Task Force Bravo engineer, explosive ordnance disposal, bulk fuel storage and distribution, water purification, mobile electric power, floodlights, and specialized civic action special project support. The MSSG's three-man explosive ordnance detachment (EOD) was strengthened by a U.S. Navy EOD detachment from the aircraft carrier *Roosevelt* and were assisted by foreign EOD teams from the British 59th Independent Commando, Royal Engineers; the French 17th Airborne Engineer Regiment and Foreign Legion sappers; and Italian engineers. The joint Navy-Marine EOD team detonated more than 37,000 ordnance items weighing about 52 tons in April and May. Marines in northern Iraq were frequently dismayed to find Kurdish children playing with live ordnance. Despite all efforts to warn the displaced civilians, several tragedies occurred. More than 20 Kurds had to be treated when explosives detonated in their hands. Three paratroopers were severely wounded by a detonated mine. At Isikveren, a Special Forces soldier was killed and a Marine was badly wounded while trying to extract frightened refugees from a minefield.⁵⁶

The most pressing issue facing MSSG-24 was the lack of materials and equipment. The decision to retain combat and combat support personnel and equipment because of a critical shortage of boat spaces on the ships of Phibron 8 obviated trimming combat service support. The MSSG deployed with only half its normal allocation of five-ton trucks and without the Amphibious Assault Fueling System. One-half of its portable electric generators were left behind, and there was no water truck. During Provide Comfort the motor transport shortage was offset by doubling the number of runs. In the words of Lieutenant Colonel Kohl, "We made 10 trucks look like 20."⁵⁷ This expedient initially provided an



A Marine leads a group of Kurdish men while they plan the layout of Refugee Camp 1, near Zakho, Iraq in April 1991. The Marines of the 24th MEU (SOC) established this camp to show the Iraqis their humanitarian intent. Three camps eventually occupied this area.

acceptable level of transportation support, but eventually compounded maintenance problems which resulted in degradation of overland hauling capacity. The MSSG's trucks accumulated 27,000 miles in the first 30 days (during MSSG-24's previous Mediterranean Cruise it drove only about 25,000 miles in six months).⁵⁸

The mobile electric power shortage was overcome through interservice cooperation. Bulk fuel handling eventually became a multi-service, multi-national effort, although HMM-264 and MSSG-24 carried the whole load for the first three weeks. Potable water was provided by Reverse Osmosis Water Purification Units (ROWPUs), existing wells, and commercial and military water trucks. Again, MSSG-24 carried the entire load for JTF-B until mid-May.⁵⁹

The Marines of MSSG-24 worked hard and accomplished much. They carried most of the load for Joint Task Force Bravo in northern Iraq until additional support arrived, operated a humanitarian service support base at Silopi and a combat service support detachment at Zakho, set up and ran refugee Camp One, and unloaded ships at the docks of Iskenderun. It is safe to say their efforts were critical to the success of Marine forces during Operation Provide Comfort.

Planning Operation Encourage Hope Kurdistan

Kurdistan was a unique place. It had land but no territory; it once had a king but was never a kingdom; it had a flag but was not a sovereign state; many people lived there, but Kurdistan had no "population." A person could search every modern map of the area and never find a country called Kurdistan, because this kingdom existed only in the dreams of the Kurdish people.

For centuries, the Kurds constantly searched for, but never truly found, political independence. Twice in the 20th century this age-old dream almost became reality. An independent homeland was promised after World War I, but this dream ended when the provisions of the stillborn Treaty of Sevres were renounced by Turkish leader Mustafa Kemal. After World War II, the Kurdish state of Mahabad was formed in Iran, but folded after the Soviet Union withdrew its support in 1946.

The area traditionally called Kurdistan was located in the rugged mountains, pleasant valleys, and fertile plains at the convergence of the Taurus and Zagros Mountains. It occupied parts of four modern countries: Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. Iraqi Kurdistan was a triangular area north of the Diyala River, east of the Tigris River, and south of Iraq's borders with Turkey and Iran. This area contained some of Iraq's richest farmland and sat atop its most productive oilfields. Unfortunately for the Kurds, these economic factors meant the Iraqi government would never surrender its proprietorship of this valuable region.

In 1970, an official Iraqi Kurdish Autonomous Zone (KAZ) was created by an agreement known as the March Manifesto. Purposely kept small, this zone included only parts of three provinces: Dohuk, Erbil, and Sulaymaniyah. This was done despite the fact that traditional Kurdistan also included Nineveh,



Photograph by the author

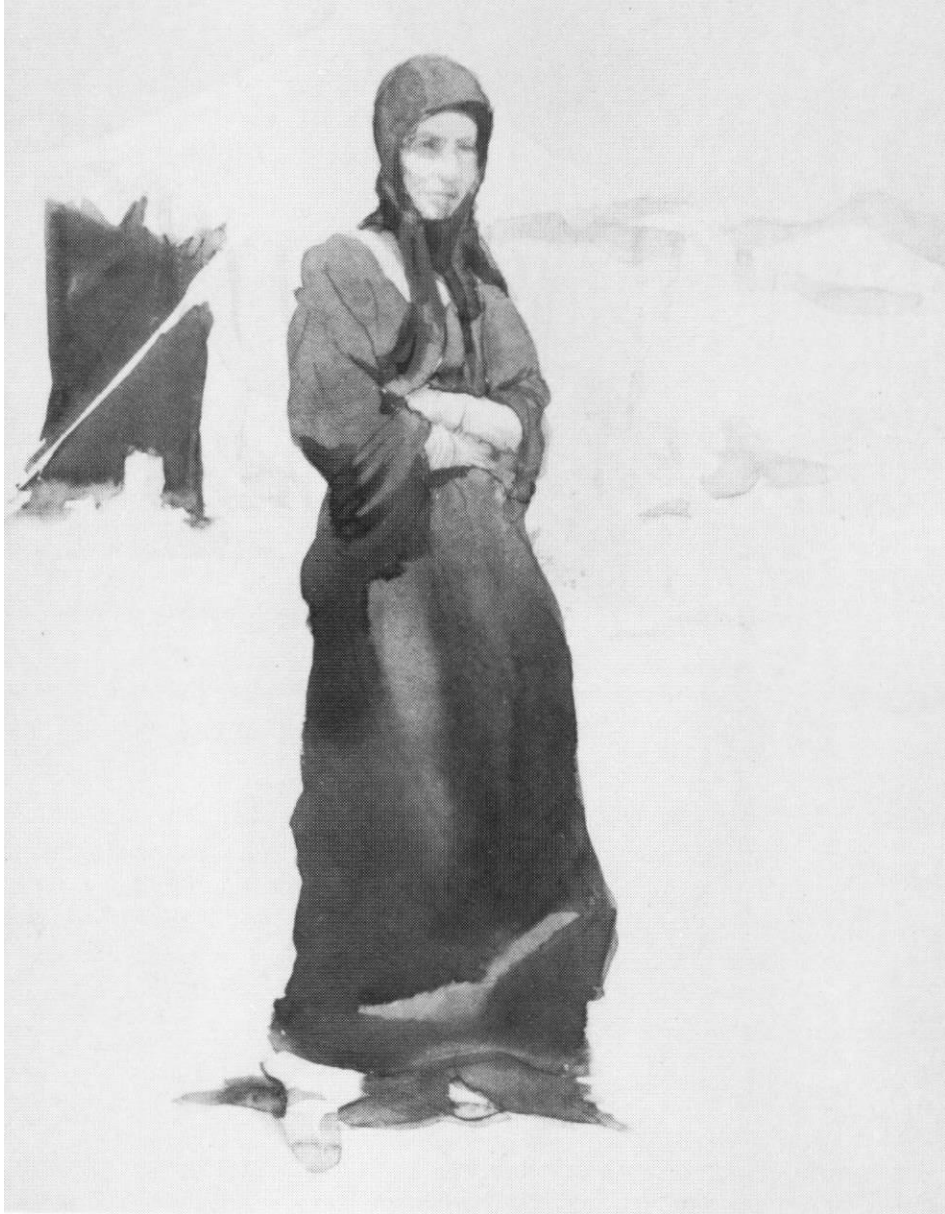
An abandoned Iraqi "Beau Geste" fortress silently guards Highway 6 leading from the Habur border crossing to the Iraqi provincial capital of Dohuk. Similar fortresses occupied most key terrain throughout Iraqi Kurdistan.

Attamim, Salahadin, and Diyala Provinces.⁶⁰ Iraqi Kurdistan now was located in the coarse highlands where mountain peaks reached 12,000 feet and highland valleys rose as high as 4,000 feet. Many small streams and several large rivers traversed the region. One of these, the Hazil-su branch of the Khabur River, part of the Tigris River's secondary tributary system, marked Iraq's northwestern border with Turkey. Kurdistan's cities included Erbil, Kirkuk, Mosul, Sulaymaniyah, Zakho, and Dohuk.

The Area of Operations

The main avenue of approach into Iraq was the Zakho Corridor, a fruitful plain several miles wide cut only by the narrow Hazil River. Dohuk Province was located at the eastern tip of this lush valley where Iraq abutted the Turkish border. The city of Zakho, home to more than 50,000 people before the troubles, was built around a rocky island in the Khabur River, only six miles from the Turkish border. Zakho was a famous stronghold where ancient Kurds battled Xenophon's Greeks, Alexander's Macedonians, and Roman Legions before the

birth of Christ. It was still viewed as a troublesome center of Kurdish resistance by the Iraqi government and had been repeatedly struck by chemical weapons during Saddam's repression campaigns. In more normal times, Zakho's economic livelihood was the sheep and goat trade, and a brisk grain business also fueled the local economic fires.



Painting by Col Peter M. "Mike" Gish, USMCR

A Kurdish woman stands pensively at a displaced civilian movement center in northern Iraq. The Kurds were an ethnic minority that claimed northern Iraq as a traditional homeland. Unlike their Arab neighbors, Kurdish women went unveiled and wore colorful, flowing robes decorated with coins and jewels.

On the Iraqi side of the Habur border crossing, a four-color Iraqi flag fluttered over the customs house manned by a small border guard detachment. The crossing had been closed for several months. Both spans of the bridge across the Hazil River had been destroyed. The river's steep banks and low-lying marshes were mined to discourage infiltrators. Iraqi trenches, tank revetments, and artillery positions were dug into the heights that overlooked Habur.

Iraqi Route 6, a two-lane, hard-surfaced road, led from Habur to Zakho and points east. There was a road junction about midway between Zakho and Dohuk. The eastern route continued through Dohuk and on to Sirsenk. The southern road led to Mosul. Comfortably nestled in the foothills, the city of Dohuk was a provincial capital with paved streets, concrete buildings, and modern conveniences. This contemporary city was normally the home of about 400,000 people and served as the transportation and communications hub of northern Iraq. Nearby Saddam Dam harnessed the waters of the Tigris River to provide irrigation and electric power. The region was cold and wet during the winter but was hot and dry during the summer.

The debris of wrecked villages dotted the Zakho Corridor. Because of the battling between the Iraqi government and the Kurds, many towns and villages in Kurdistan had been razed and their populations scattered. Many villages and towns that appeared on 1970-vintage maps no longer existed by 1990.⁶¹ Unfortunately, these ruins were not the only reminders of Saddam's hostility toward the Kurds. All Kurdistan was salted with explosive mines and booby traps. Dangerous unexploded ordnance littered the region. Every building displayed battle scars from the recent fighting. Less than 2,000 civilians remained at Dohuk and less than 300 stayed in Zakho. In April 1991, the nearly deserted streets of Zakho and Dohuk were patrolled by Iraqi "policemen" wearing Army uniforms and carrying assault rifles. The occupying Iraqis had thoroughly looted every home and carried off every item of value.

Kurdistan seethed with resistance to Saddam's harsh rule, so it was occupied by two Iraqi Army corps. The I Corps held northern Kurdistan and the II Corps was stationed in eastern Kurdistan. The Iraqi I Corps controlled two infantry divisions, several independent mechanized brigades, and an elite special assault brigade. These forces were stationed in or near Dohuk Province. Army posts ranged in size from Saddam's huge summer palace at Sirsenk to small Beau Geste-type forts found on the crest of almost every ridge. The main supply route from the Turkish border to the city of Zakho was overlooked by no less than four such forts. Zakho was the site of a large Iraqi-run Palestinian military training camp whose walls and entrances were adorned by large murals portraying a smiling Saddam and colored designs whose theme was Iraqi-Palestinian solidarity. The Iraqi *44th Infantry Division* was also headquartered at Zakho.

Concept of Operations

Combined Task Force Provide Comfort's initial objective was to provide immediate emergency relief to dislocated Kurdish civilians in northern Iraq and southern Turkey. Although the situation quickly stabilized and refugee survival needs were being met, it was obvious this intense effort could not continue indefinitely. The new focus of the relief effort was to erect temporary facilities in the lowlands so the displaced civilians could move to a more accessible locale. These lowland camps were organized to ease distribution problems, enhance sanitation, increase Kurdish administrative participation, and facilitate turnover of the relief effort to civilian control. Additional tasks were to develop new temporary camps and to improve forward base habitability and accessibility.

The supply support plan was initially based on delivery using prepackaged supplies, referred to as a "push" system by logisticians. This was the best way to move supplies forward in a hurry, but was neither the most efficient nor the most responsive way to supply the camps. Loads had to be relatively small so they could be delivered by air. They provided general materials, but did not meet specific requests or individual needs. The effort was costly, time consuming, and took a high toll on limited air assets. It was far more desirable to use a "pull" system whereby supplies were delivered by truck or rail to a central point, then redistributed according to requests by each camp administrator. Logistics goals were to transition from MREs to fresh food, to move from airdrop to overland delivery, and to change from "push" to "pull" logistics as quickly as possible. The major drawbacks to adopting "pull" support were that it required a large stock of supplies, a complex requisition and delivery system, and well-developed camp infrastructures (roads, landing zones, staging areas, etc.). These requisites were developing rapidly, but were not yet in place.

A second force, Task Force Encourage Hope (later renamed Joint Task Force Bravo), was formed to construct a series of resettlement camps where dislocated civilians could find food and shelter and a secure environment. Encourage Hope was designed to integrate civilian relief agencies into the support, organization, and administration of the camps. The Kurds were expected to assist in the planning, construction, administration, and sustainment of these camps. The camps each held about 25,000 people and were initially supplied by the military. They eventually became self-sustaining and were transferred to Kurdish or non-government agency control as soon as possible. It was hoped that Joint Task Force Encourage Hope could be dissolved after about a month.⁶²

Additional Forces

The increasing complexities of Operation Provide Comfort required ever-increasing support. In addition to massive security and logistics efforts, three other support areas were critical: civil affairs, psychological operations, and civilian operations. Two U.S. Army civil affairs companies and a Marine civil affairs detachment were dispatched to Turkey. The Marine detachment was from



Painting by Col Peter M. "Mike" Gish, USMCR
A young Marine sergeant converses with a Kurdish elder in northern Iraq. Kurdish elders, known as "mullahs," are revered for their wisdom and their opinions carry much weight.

the Reserve 4th Civil Affairs Group (4th CAG). Originally, civil affairs teams were sent to the mountain camps to assess the living conditions and future needs. Later, civil affairs teams at Silopi, Yuksekova, and Incirlik assisted civilian relief agencies. Civil affairs personnel played major roles at Zakho and Dohuk as well.

The 4th CAG was a Selected Marine Corps Reserve unit from Washington, D.C. It was activated for Operation Desert Storm and served with the I Marine Expeditionary Force at Al Jubayl, Saudi Arabia. The group returned to Camp Lejeune for demobilization on 16 April 1991. While at Lejeune, Colonel Easton was informed that 10 members of the unit were needed to support Operation Provide Comfort. This detachment flew from Cherry Point, North Carolina, on 20 April, arrived at Incirlik on 21 April, and moved to Silopi on 22 April. At Zakho, the group was divided into two sections and assigned to existing joint civil affairs teams.⁶³

When Joint Task Force Encourage Hope was formed the civil affairs mission expanded. In order to smooth the way, civil affairs teams planned to control, supervise, and look out for the welfare of the displaced civilians as they moved south. Civilian relief agencies, international private voluntary organizations, and the United Nations also assisted during this phase of the operation. A secondary effort was to drum up Kurdish and civilian support for the movement south.⁶⁴

The U.S. Army's Company A, 6th Psychological Operations Battalion, 4th Psychological Warfare Group provided teams to support Operation Encourage

Hope. They distributed informational leaflets, used loud speakers, made radio announcements, conducted informational briefings, held meetings with Kurdish elders, and contacted Christian and Muslim religious leaders at Zakho. These teams sought to inspire Kurdish self-reliance, to inform Iraqi soldiers that the multinational force had the capability and the will to protect humanitarian operations, to discourage the PKK (a Kurdish anti-Turkish splinter group), and to convince skeptical non-Kurdish civilians that humanitarian efforts were legally and morally correct.⁶⁵

The United States Office of Disaster Assistance sent two Disaster Assistance Relief Teams (DARTs) to Turkey. The team assigned to Encourage Hope was headed by Mr. Frederick C. Cuny. The fact he was a former Marine gave him a common bond with the Marines in Kurdistan and meant that he understood the principles of military necessity. Colonel Jones credited Cuny's service as "invaluable."⁶⁶

Encourage Hope Begins

In mid-April, American Secretary of State James A. Baker III informed Iraqi Ambassador to the United Nations Abdul Amir Al-Anbari that allied forces intended to initiate humanitarian operations at the Iraqi town of Zakho "in the immediate future." He specified the following actions: 1) that Iraq withdraw all its armed forces 30 kilometers south of Zakho, 2) that a consultative meeting between U.S. military personnel and an Iraqi military team take place, and 3) that the meeting be held in Zakho at noon, Friday, 19 April 1991. The purpose of the meeting was to avoid unfortunate incidents between allied and Iraqi forces, to inform the Iraqis about future relief operations, and to discuss any other matters of mutual interest.⁶⁷

Issues Facing the 24th MEU (SOC)

On 16 April, the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff issued the order to begin security operations in northern Iraq. The next day Encourage Hope was launched. General Garner moved Joint Task Force Bravo Headquarters to Silopi on 17 April. Task Force Bravo included a skeleton headquarters and a few Army helicopter air and ground crews, but General Garner would have to rely on the 24th MEU Headquarters to act as the command element until reinforcements arrived. Joint Task Force Bravo's initial maneuver element was the 24th MEU (SOC). When General Garner opened shop, the 24th MEU (SOC) Forward was already operating from Silopi, Colonel Jones and the Alpha Command Group flew in, some of BLT 2/8 was already in place and the rest was in transit, HMM-264 was operating the Silopi landing zones, and MSSG-24 was unloading the ships of Phibron 8 at Iskenderun Harbor.

General Garner tasked Colonel Jones to move the 24th MEU (SOC) into northern Iraq on 20 April to secure the town of Zakho. In preparation, a flight of two MH-53J Pave Low helicopters from the USAF 21st Special Operations



Marines from the 24th MEU (SOC) sit on their packs as they wait for transportation to the humanitarian services support base set up in Silopi, Turkey.

Squadron made a reconnaissance of the area. They brought back photographs and video imagery of the operations area and potential camp sites. During the flight two CH-53Es from HMM-264 stood by as combat search and rescue aircraft, and a rifle platoon from Company E, BLT 2/8 acted as a "Sparrowhawk" reaction force. Under cover of darkness, reconnaissance Marines and sailors from SEAL Team 3 were inserted into northern Iraq and began clandestine operations preparing the way for a two-company helicopterborne operation scheduled to begin three days later.⁶⁸

After receiving General Garner's orders to secure Zakho, Colonel Jones met with his staff, then adopted President Theodore Roosevelt's dictate to "Speak softly, but carry a big stick." The 24th MEU (SOC) was not to back down if the Iraqis tried to bully the Marines, yet, were to allow them an opportunity to pull back peacefully. Colonel Jones termed this policy "aggressive restraint," but the Combined Task Force staff at Incirlik frequently called it "leaning forward in the saddle." For its part, the 24th MEU (SOC) obviously was handicapped because not all of its normal assets were available. Lieutenant Colonel Corwin and BLT 2/8 were "good to go," but were vastly outnumbered and outgunned by the Iraqis. The Black Knights of HMM-264 had to split their efforts to accomplish three missions at the same time. In addition to combat support for the MEU, some helicopters transported supplies and personnel. Others supported JTF-A's emergency relief efforts. Logistics support was still tied to the ships of Phibron 8 at Iskenderun, so supplies had to be hauled long distances by either helicopters or trucks. The support base at Silopi was being developed, but was not yet fully operational. A short-handed MSSG-24 was stretched to the limit because of

scarce transportation, three widely separated work sites, and a supply line that ran more than 450 miles. Though all of these problems eventually were worked out, they hampered operations during the 24th MEU (SOC)'s first days inland.

Joint Task Force Bravo's mission was to establish an allied presence in northern Iraq to convince the Kurds of the allied commitment, to alleviate refugee suffering by delivering relief supplies, and to protect the dislocated civilians from Iraqi reprisal. Colonel Jones had some initial concerns about the proposed operation: He worried about lack of planning time, uncertainty about future operations, the Iraqi forces in the area, the long distance from support bases, Iraqi and Kurdish intentions, and interservice cooperation and compatibility of communications equipment.

Operation Provide Comfort was launched on the spur of the moment. The hurried movement, hasty nature, sketchy details, and lack of long-range goals forced Colonel Jones and operations officer Lieutenant Colonel Tom Linn to burn a lot of midnight oil. Rules of engagement were formulated to cover every possible situation. Implied tasks had to be deduced and solutions worked out. Unknown terrain and foul weather could adversely affect operations. There were no definitive answers about the length of the MEU's stay or the exact structure of the allied forces. Two key questions kept arising: "Would the Iraqis and the Kurds stop shooting? Would Saddam live up to his word, or were his promises just another example of his monstrous capacity for duplicity?"

This last question was troubling. Although Saddam agreed to cooperate, there was no clear demonstration of any intention to do so. Therefore, it was prudent



Photograph courtesy of MajGen Jay M. Garner, USA
MajGen Jay M. Garner addresses the Marines of the 24th MEU (SOC) assembled on the flight deck of the USS Guadalcanal (LPH 7). The 24th MEU was composed of headquarters, BLT 2/8, HMM-264, and MSSG 24.



Photograph courtesy of BGen James L. Jones, USMC

The leaders of JTF Bravo in northern Iraq during Operation Provide Comfort are LtCol John P. Abiziad, USA (CO, 3-325 ABCT); Col James L. Jones, Jr., USMC (CO, 24th MEU [SOC]); MajGen Jay M. Garner, USA (CG, JTF-B); LtCol Cees Van Egmond, DKM (CO, Netherlands 1st ACG); LtCol Tony L. Corwin, USMC (CO, BLT 2/8); and LtCol Jonathan Thompson, RM (CO, British 45th Commando).

to plan both opposed and unopposed scenarios. If hostilities broke out, the 24th MEU faced vastly superior Iraqi combat power. The MEU was a light expeditionary force with no tanks, limited antitank assets, and only about 2,000 Marines. Major Richard J. Raftery, the intelligence officer, reported two Iraqi infantry divisions and several independent tank units inside or near the target area. Also, Iraqi paramilitary guards manned border positions; a brigade of the Iraqi *44th Infantry Division* was still at Zakho; a dozen T-55 tanks lurked in armor revetments between Zakho and Dohuk; Iraqi artillery outnumbered and outranged American guns; anti-aircraft artillery and surface-to-air missiles remained in the hills; two Republican Guard armored brigades waited near Mosul, less than an hour's ride from Zakho; and the Iraqis had planted more than a million mines in northern Iraq. In the words of one Marine, "The MEU has enough combat power to get into a fight, but may not have enough to finish the job." If fighting broke out, Colonel Jones would have to conduct a delaying action and rely on timely air support from Incirlik or the aircraft carrier *Roosevelt*, on station just off the Turkish coast, to tip the combat balance.

There were also concerns about Kurdish reactions. It was obvious that most Kurds were in dire need of assistance, but they were notoriously fragmented politically. Allied forces assisting them had to be neutral dispensers of humanitarian aid and never appear to be "playing favorites." There were fears that Kurdish guerrillas might use the security zone as a base of operations,

creating a sort of "Gaza Strip" sanctuary in northern Iraq. Luckily, these concerns proved to be unfounded.⁶⁹

Only minor problems with joint and combined interoperability arose. For the past decade, joint exercises had been held to eliminate problems similar to those that plagued Operations Eagle Claw (Desert One) and Urgent Fury (Grenada). Most interservice conflicts had been worked out, but a few problems remained. Not all Marine communications equipment was compatible with that of other services. The 24th MEU (SOC) did not have sufficient organic equipment to meet all the needs of a joint task force. Most non-Marine forces arriving in northern Iraq were combat ready, but were not expeditionary, so they relied on the Marines for fuel, food, water, transportation, ground control, spare parts, and technical assistance.

Operation Provide Comfort was a multinational team effort by players of different cultures, nationalities, and races. As Operation Provide Comfort went on, eastern Turkey and northern Iraq became gathering places for representatives of the Free World's military forces. Northern Iraq was also a "hot spot" for foreign correspondents. Therefore, Operation Provide Comfort was conducted in a "glass bowl." Every action was keenly observed by the critical eyes of the world media.



Photograph by the author
An aerial view of the town of Zakho in northern Iraq. Zakho was the site of the headquarters compounds of both Joint Task Force Bravo and the 24th MEU (SOC).

Multinational and interservice planning proved to be no problem because so many allied officers had attended foreign schools or had been "seconded" (assigned) to foreign units during their military careers. This was particularly true for the Marines; many French, British, and Dutch officers attended Marine schools at Quantico, Virginia. Additionally, the Marines had a long history of making combined landings in the Mediterranean. The 24th MEU (SOC) had conducted three such exercises before being assigned to Operation Provide Comfort. This training paid off handsomely because the Marines had already become familiar with British, French, Italian, and Spanish operating procedures.

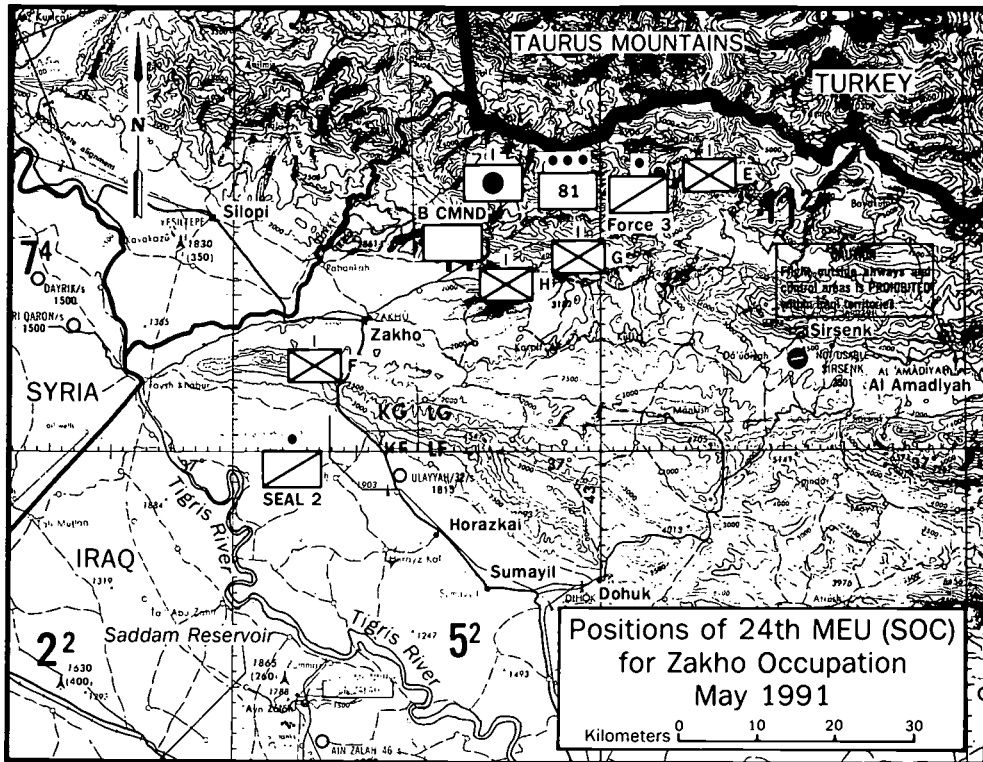
The unique cooperative spirit and the good humor of the allies was shown at one of the 24th MEU's morning meetings. After a discussion of future operations by the MEU staff, Colonel Jones repeated what was said in French (he had lived in France for 12 years), a language understood by the French, Italian, and Spanish liaison officers. After this impressive recitation, Jones apologized for not being able to translate for the only unit whose language he could not understand, that of our British allies! A ripple of laughter quickly spread across the room, and no one appeared to laugh harder than the British representative, Lieutenant Colonel Graham Kerr, commanding officer of the 29th Commando Regiment, Royal Artillery. Largely because of this spirit, Operation Provide Comfort seemed a model of international and interservice cooperation.⁷⁰ With preparations complete, the next order of business for the 24th MEU (SOC) was moving across the Turkish border into Kurdistan.

Zakho

Into Iraq

At noon on 19 April 1991, Lieutenant General Shalikashvili was escorted by a Marine security detachment when he met with Brigadier General Nashwan Dahnoun, the senior representative of the Iraqi Army General Staff. The meeting was held near Zakho and was described as a "polite, proper, frank [discussion that] clarified all views."⁷¹ Rather than beat around the bush or engage in lengthy pleasantries, General Shalikashvili told the Iraqis what was going to happen in a straight forward manner. He outlined CTF Provide Comfort's mission. He emphasized the humanitarian nature of the operation, but made it very clear that Iraqi interference risked military confrontation. The noise of American jets passing overhead reinforced this point, providing overall an excellent example of "aggressive restraint."

General Shalikashvili went over plans to build refugee camps, and the prospective sites were located on a map. To ensure the safety of the refugees and the combined task force, General Shalikashvili also requested information about Iraqi minefields around Zakho. He reminded General Nashwan about the limits on Iraqi military operations and inquired about the scheduled withdrawal of troops.⁷² Nashwan balked at the request to pull back, stating Iraqi "police" were needed to ensure public order, but promised to provide information about the



minefields. In closing, General Shalikashvili proposed establishing a Military Coordination Center (MCC) to prevent future misunderstandings.

At 1330 on 20 April, HMM-264 delivered the first wave of a two-company helicopterborne task force to Zakho. Company G landed just outside the city. The heavily laden Marines (some carrying more than 60 pounds of equipment and ammunition) moved to the high ground and occupied overwatch positions which gave them a clear view of the objective. The remainder of the force included the BLT Alpha Command Group, Company F, and an 81mm mortar section. Lieutenant Colonel Tony L. Corwin noticed Iraqi soldiers still in the objective area, despite the fact they should have been gone. Reports from the reconnaissance teams confirmed the presence of many Iraqis and a few armored vehicles. The Marines and Iraqis were soon standing eyeball-to-eyeball with neither side about to blink.

Lieutenant Colonel Corwin gave clear instructions for the Iraqis to move out of Zakho. At first, the Iraqi commander belligerently replied he knew nothing about Operation Provide Comfort and had no orders to vacate. However, some menacing overflights by heavily armed American A-10 Warthogs and Sea Cobra helicopter gunships convinced the Iraqis to sling arms and hit the road. As soon as the Iraqis left, the Marines began building a refugee camp to demonstrate their humanitarian intent. Before nightfall, a dozen bright blue and white tents had

been erected. These were the first of more than 10,000 tents that would be put up in three camps that eventually housed more than 180,000 refugees! The BLT Bravo Command Group, Companies E and H, the artillery, assault amphibians, and a light armored vehicle detachment remained at the Iraqi border ready to move into Zakho the next day.⁷³

Lieutenant Colonel Kohl, commanding officer of MSSG-24, was given an unusual operational mission by Colonel Jones. The Turkish-Iraqi border crossing at Habur was closed, but had to be opened to allow overland supply of the assault force. This task would normally have been given to the ground combat element, but Lieutenant Colonel Corwin was busy conducting the assault, so Kohl was tasked to do this. Lieutenant Colonel Kohl, First Sergeant Delgado, a five-member civilian relief team, and a rifle squad departed Silopi for Habur during mid-afternoon of 20 April.

During Desert Storm the Iraqis had dropped both bridge spans at Habur and mined the roadway leading to Zakho, but since the cease fire, a field expedient bridge had since been thrown across the river. Reports indicated the Iraqis had removed some, but not all of the mines. At Habur, Lieutenant Colonel Kohl located a Turkish lieutenant who spoke broken English. Kohl patiently explained the crossing was to be opened to allied traffic the next morning. The Turkish



A fast attack vehicle (FAV) on patrol carries two U.S. and one British Marine as it crosses the Khabur River in Central Zakho. A FAV is an M151 jeep mounting either a machine gun or a TOW antitank missile.

officer escorted Kohl to the center of the bridge where they met an Iraqi border guard. Kohl again explained the situation, then indicated he was concerned about explosives on the bridge and along the main supply route. The Iraqi remained silent about the mines, but stated he did not have the authority to allow the Americans to cross and would have to check with his superiors. While Kohl waited for an answer, Iraqi reinforcements occupied the heights overlooking the road. To counter this show of force, Marine Sea Cobras, Army Blackhawks, and Air Force Warthogs droned ominously in the sky overhead. About 20 minutes later the Iraqi returned and granted permission to cross the bridge. For the second time that day, the 24th MEU (SOC)'s policy of aggressive restraint paid big dividends.⁷⁴

Unfortunately, the Turks had neither instructions nor authority to allow the Americans across the border. About 90 more minutes lapsed before Turkish permission to cross was granted. On the bridge, several Iraqis worked with an American explosive ordnance demolition (EOD) team. They discovered no mines but found explosive charges under the bridge and removed them. Lieutenant Colonel Kohl's mission was a success; the first American convoy moved into northern Iraq at 0800 the next day (21 April).

During this time, the MEU Command Element, the Aviation Combat Element, and MSSG-24 settled in at Silopi, while back at Iskenderun convoys carried the final Marine increments forward. The *Charleston* and the *Austin* were completely offloaded and the MEU's 15-day Landing Force Operational Readiness Material (LFORM) was on shore. The *Guadalcanal* remained nearby to provide aviation support.⁷⁵ Messages to the United States requested further logistics and combat support. Included in these requests were those for additional firepower control teams from 2d ANGLICO, an RPV detachment from 2d SRIG, and more engineer assets. It was also hoped that an AV-8B Harrier II detachment might be made available.

Securing Zakho

On 22 April, a Military Coordination Center was established at Zakho. Army Colonel Richard Naab, a team chief, two liaison officers, and two linguists comprised the allied team. A similar Iraqi contingent was led by Brigadier General Nashwan. The Center operated 24 hours a day to provide face-to-face discussions during tense situations, kept both sides informed about future operations, and acted as a sounding board for opposing views about current operations.

General Nashwan used the first meeting to announce that Iraqi forces north of the 37th Parallel had been ordered to pull back and that Iraqi commanders were cooperating completely. However, despite these congenial relations at the MCC, the Iraqis quickly tested the coalition's determination. Although all Iraqi troops had allegedly left Zakho, more than 300 "policemen" wearing military uniforms and carrying automatic weapons remained. Major Raftery's intelligence section later confirmed that they were soldiers from the *66th Special Assault*



Painting by Col Peter M. "Mike" Gish, USMCR
Col Mike Gish portrays the entrance to Camp Sommers in Zahko, Iraq. Camp Sommers, named for Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps David W. Sommers, housed the 24th MEU (SOC) headquarters, Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 133, the U.S. Army 18th Engineer Brigade and 18th Military Police Brigade, and the Joint Civil Affairs Group.

Brigade. At the next meeting Colonel Naab reiterated the coalition's insistence that all Iraqi forces be moved at least 30 kilometers south, but he was answered by silence. The second major incident of the day occurred that evening when a flight of Iraqi MI-8 helicopters headed for northern Iraq was intercepted by F-16 fighters from Incirlik. The incident was quickly resolved when the helicopters landed and offered no resistance.⁷⁶

The American Marines in northern Iraq were joined by their foreign brothers-in-arms when the British 45th Commando, Royal Marines, was placed under the tactical control of the 24th MEU. This battalion-size unit of 637 Royal Marine "Booties" was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Jonathan Thompson. Lieutenant Colonel Thompson established his command post in an abandoned school about 10 kilometers outside Zakho. Thompson's headquarters section was joined by three rifle companies: X, Y, Z, and Company M (the British Commando Mountain and Arctic Warfare Training Cadre). Historically, British and Dutch Marines worked closely together and had often formed combined United Kingdom-Netherlands landing forces. This tradition continued in northern Iraq. On 23 April more than 400 "Cloggers" of the 1st Amphibious Combat Group (1st ACG), Royal Netherlands Marine Corps, commanded by Lieutenant

Colonel Cees Van Egmond, arrived in northern Iraq. With these attachments, the 24th MEU (SOC) formed an unofficial "international brigade" that mustered about 3,600 personnel.

At first, the 24th MEU (SOC) and Joint Task Force Bravo shared the former headquarters of an Iraqi infantry division on the northwestern edge of Zakho, but they had to part company when troop numbers increased. Joint Task Force Bravo increased in size during the latter part of April. It soon included the 4th Brigade (Aviation), 3d Infantry Division; the 18th Engineer Brigade with Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 133 (SeaBees) attached; the 18th Military Police Brigade; the 432d Civil Affairs Company; and the Canadian 4th Field Ambulance (a battalion-size mobile medical unit). The 3d Battalion, 325th Infantry (Airborne) Combat Team (3-325th ABCT) from a duty station in Italy was expected to arrive on 27 April. It was a reinforced infantry battalion commanded by Lieutenant Colonel John P. Abizaid, USA, that included a headquarters company, three rifle companies, 20 Humvee-mounted TOW antitank launchers, an 81mm mortar platoon, a 105mm artillery battery (Battery D, 319th Field



Painting by Col Peter M. "Mike" Gish, USMCR
A U.S. Marine from BLT 2/8 and a French soldier from the 8th Marine Parachute Infantry Regiment stop a vehicle at a jointly manned checkpoint near Zakho.

Artillery), and small supply and reconnaissance detachments. A Spanish expeditionary force and an Italian airborne brigade were also on the way and were scheduled to land the following week.

Despite the presence of multinational security forces, many Kurds were unwilling to return to Iraq. Kurdish elders reported that the Iraqi police intimidated them during an exploratory visit to Zakho and stated they would return only if the Iraqis evacuated and an allied security force remained. General Shalikashvili felt the problem was the continued presence of Iraqi troops in and around Zakho. In addition to the "police," an infantry strongpoint was located only two kilometers from the city and three artillery batteries were in the hills south of Zakho. General John R. Galvin (CinCEur) directed General Shalikashvili to begin planning for forcible removal of the Iraqis should it become necessary. Concurrently, Colonel Naab and General Nashwan reached an agreement to defuse the situation.

General Garner (CG, JTF-B) ordered Colonel Jones to occupy the town of Zakho. During the evening of 25 April, BLT 2/8 cordoned off the northern, eastern, and southern approaches to the city, the Dutch covered the west, and the 45th Commando cleared the city. This was a most appropriate task because the British had just seen duty in Northern Ireland and were adept at low intensity urban warfare. Calling on recent experience battling the illegal, underground Irish Republican Army, the British used a unique combination of force and tact



Photograph by the author
A CH-46E Sea Knight medium lift transport helicopter at HSSB Silopi, Turkey, landing zone. The Sea Knights were sometimes called "frogs" because of their squat appearance. Most had seen more than 20 years of service.

to patrol the streets. They gently reassured the civilians and sent the previously arrogant Iraqis scurrying out of town. By sundown Zakho was in allied hands. The 24th MEU (SOC) and its attachments promptly began a rigorous security program using squad-size patrols to criss-cross the area of operations.⁷⁷

Life in Zakho

After securing Zakho, BLT 2/8 conducted defensive operations. Roadblocks were established on the main supply routes south and west of Zakho. Companies E and F provided rifle platoons and either a fast attack vehicle (a jeep with a machine gun mounted on top) or a combined antiarmor team (CAAT) at each checkpoint. Company G pulled security duty at the Zakho hospital. Company H secured headquarters and one of its rifle platoons stood by as the "Sparrowhawk" rapid reaction force. Weapons Company was divided among the rifle companies or integrated into the command post security forces. Light armored vehicles (LAVs) conducted daily road reconnaissance and MSR security operations. Battery H, reinforced by six lightweight 105mm howitzers of the British 79th Battery, 29th Commando Regiment, Royal Artillery, set up near Zakho.

The Black Knights of HMM-264 operated from Silopi, usually flying morning and evening missions to MEU headquarters, providing visual reconnaissance and medical evacuation flights on request, and making daily runs to Landing Zone (LZ) Raven and other camps as needed. The squadron's ground support personnel ran landing zones at Silopi and Zakho, and manned the Silopi forward arming and refueling point. MSSG-24 set up shop at Silopi, manned rear areas at Incirlik and Iskenderun, and furnished a combat service support detachment at Zakho.

In addition to running combat patrols, holding observation outposts on key terrain, and manning road checkpoints the Marines undertook a wide variety of humanitarian functions. Such operations were described by Lieutenant Colonel Kohl as being "right up MSSG-24's alley."⁷⁸ A 107-man combat service support detachment (CSSD) moved to Zakho on 21 April. The greatest logistics challenge was to equitably distribute MSSG-24's limited resources to support the 24th MEU (SOC) and still meet the needs of so many starving refugees. The first attempts to provide relief were marked by mass confusion caused by mobs of hungry people. Organizational meetings with Kurdish leaders, additional camps, and increased supply flow reduced these problems. Soon, the distribution system was operating smoothly. The Marines first realized the situation had drastically improved when Kurdish leaders began to complain about the suitability of MREs as a food source.⁷⁹ Ironically, this seemingly ungrateful criticism was an unconscious compliment, because by then the Kurds were getting enough food to be picky about what they were eating. Supplies of dry goods and fresh food stuffs soon replaced MREs.⁸⁰

West of town the Marines helped a Kurdish work party pitch more than 600 tents at Camp One, the first of three resettlement camps eventually built near Zakho. The CSSD established LZ Raven to serve Camp One. A Marine



Painting by Col Peter M. "Mike" Gish, USMCR

As part of the British-conceived plan to provide a safe haven for the Kurds in northern Iraq, the allies built three large refugee relocation camps in the vicinity of Zakho. The Marines of 24th MEU (SOC) built the first of these in mid-April, then turned it over to the U.N. High Commission for Refugees in May 1991.

helicopter support team and the landing party's forklifts were the primary movers for this civic action project. A combat engineer detachment from BLT 2/8 helped put up tents and assisted the establishment of supply dumps and water points. Australian, Luxembourgish, French, Dutch, and Canadian medics serviced the camps around Zakho. Military police maintained order and civil affairs teams assisted camp administration. More than 400 wooden latrines were built by the SeaBees.⁸¹ Eventually, the population of Camp One swelled to more than 42,000 people.

Lieutenant Colonel Kohl (MSSG-24) sent engineer and maintenance teams to Zakho to survey the city's power transmission facility on 22 April. At the request of local authorities, the generator at the Zakho Hospital was also examined. These teams reported that the city's power plant and water treatment facility needed major repairs, and the hospital's generator was beyond hope. General Garner responded by ordering a new generator for the hospital and providing engineer and technical support to restore Zakho's power and water plants. However, while these repairs were being made and the requested equipment was being shipped, MSSG-24 provided these vital services for Zakho. The Marines delivered more than 1,600 gallons of fuel to the hospital each week,

operated a water treatment and distribution point in the center of the city, and opened temporary medical and dental clinics.

This last action was important because the medical treatment capability in Zakho was almost nonexistent. The Zakho Hospital was staffed by only one doctor and one nurse. It had electric power only about eight hours each week. Long lines of sick refugees flooded Zakho's narrow streets, vainly hoping to be cured at the overworked medical facility. To fill this void, MSSG-24 sent medical and dental assistance to Zakho. About 2,200 patients were treated by Doctor Buckley and the Navy corpsmen. Doctors Ratliff and Nogacek, dentists assigned to MSSG-24, saw about 70 patients. As time passed, French, Irish, Australian, and Canadian medical teams also set up shop in Zakho.

The engineer detachment (Sergeant David C. Tanczuk) set up two Univox Reverse Osmosis Water Purification Units (ROWPUs) on 23 April. These units purified water by removing contaminants. Unpurified water was forced through a series of cellulose or polyamide membranes fabricated into a spiral element and stretched over a drum. The ROWPUs could produce pure drinking water from polluted water, sea water, or brackish water. Each one pumped about 1,800 gallons of drinking water from the muddy Khabur River every hour. A water distribution point was set up in the center of town where it serviced all who needed water, including allied military units, Kurdish refugees, the Iraqi Christian community, and sometimes even Iraqi soldiers.



Chief Hospital Corpsman Arthur Angel treats a young Kurdish refugee's blistered foot in a medical clinic on the outskirts of the city of Zakho, Iraq. Marine Service Support Group 24 (MSSG-24) set up the clinic and a water purification station for the Kurdish refugees.

Camp Sommers

The 24th MEU (SOC) Headquarters was located just outside Zakho. The MEU's first tasks after moving in were to secure the area and to improve habitability. This former Iraqi army post was a shambles when the Marines first occupied it. The place had been thoroughly looted. There was no electricity. Every wooden door and table had been used for fire wood. There were no unbroken windows. Debris and filth littered the entire compound. Work parties began cleaning up, but major improvements at the site were provided by the SeaBees of Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 133 (NMCB-133). Although attached to the 18th Engineer Brigade, the SeaBees observed naval tradition and went out of their way to take care of "their" Marines. Latrines, showers, hardback tents, a mess hall, and volleyball courts sprouted up.

A six-foot wall ran along the roadway to protect the camp. Inside there was a hard-surfaced helicopter landing pad and an athletic field. Helicopters constantly droned overhead and the concrete landing pad was busy most of the time. The athletic field soon sprouted tents housing the Army engineers, the Seabees, and other assorted support units. The 24th MEU (SOC) headquarters was located inside a small central building. This command post housed a busy combat operations center (COC) and a combined personnel and logistics office. A "U"-shaped outer building housed the communications center, various staff sections, living spaces, and liaison offices. British and American engineers, military police, and logistics offices were also located there. A civil affairs office was located on the compound's northwest corner. The back entrance, gateway to Joint Task Force Bravo Headquarters, was in the southwest corner. This compound was named Camp Sommers to honor David W. Sommers, the Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps, on 5 May.

24th MEU Command and Control

During Operation Provide Comfort the 24th MEU (SOC) staff faced many problems. As previously mentioned, the command which was configured to control a battalion-size ground combat element and a composite helicopter squadron, was actually controlling a 3,600-man international brigade with very little outside assistance. Although all went smoothly, this strained command, combat support, and service support capabilities to the limit.⁸²

The personnel officer, Captain Dewey G. Jordan, was responsible for personnel reporting and mail, both of which were major issues for the Marines at Zakho and each problem had the same root cause, the wide dispersal of MEU personnel. Daily reporting was a chore because communications between Zakho, Silopi, Incirlik, and Phibron 8 sometimes broke down. Unexpected personnel frequently showed up at one of these places, often needing food, equipment, and transportation. Marine units were scattered across northern Iraq and Turkey so it was difficult to deliver mail in a timely fashion. Mail delivery was further complicated because of the sheer volume of incoming letters and packages.

American support for Desert Storm resulted in an unexpected influx of mail addressed to "Any Serviceman." However, while the volume of mail caused the postal section headaches, the field Marines loved it.⁸³ Captain Jordan's most unenviable task was casualty reporting. Two Marines were killed during Operation Provide Comfort; one in a traffic accident and the other as the result of a tragic accidental weapon discharge. Several other Marines were seriously injured and required evacuation to Europe or the United States.

Major Raftery and the intelligence section were busy from the time the MEU departed Sardinia until it was on the way home five months later. The intelligence section was charged with data collection and interpretation. There were three primary collection sources: 1) aerial reconnaissance, 2) ground reconnaissance, and 3) human intelligence. Aerial reconnaissance was limited at first. Operation Provide Comfort was only one of many agencies seeking input from national intelligence sources and the Marines lacked an organic tactical reconnaissance aircraft because the venerable McDonnell Douglas RF-4B Phantom II had been recently retired and was no longer in the Marine aviation inventory. The Marines were scheduled to receive modified F/A-18 Hornets as replacements, but these aircraft were not yet in the pipeline. The arrival of the aircraft carrier *Roosevelt* allowed U.S. Navy F-14 Tomcat fighters mounting TARPS (Tactical Aerial Reconnaissance Photographic System) pods to provide tactical aerial reconnaissance. These specially equipped airplanes flew photo missions over Iraq and returned to the *Roosevelt* for film processing. The finished photographs were loaded on a Lockheed S-3 Viking which dropped the pictures to ground units inside a Sono-Buoy canister.⁸⁴

Major Raftery used intelligence data to identify enemy positions, estimate Iraqi strength, evaluate threat capabilities, and anticipate possible Iraqi courses of action. The S-2 section acquired numerous documents and a lot of Iraqi equipment, including sophisticated communications gear that ranged in size from an electronics van to hand-held security radios. An extensive human intelligence collection network was developed. Interrogator-translator teams exploited "walk-in" sources. One such source was Iraqi defectors. Another source was non-Kurdish local citizens who pointed out minefields, booby traps, and weapons caches. The Kurds identified strangers and reported atrocities. They also identified Iraqi secret police. These suspects were investigated, their presence reported to the Military Coordination Center, and they were removed from the area. Local citizens appreciated these actions and readily cooperated in the intelligence collection effort.

One reason for this wealth of human intelligence was that the Kurds were not the only oppressed minority in the vicinity. Northern Iraq was also the traditional home of many Christian Iraqis. These Chaldeans, as they called themselves, were impressed by the generosity and even-handed distribution of supplies by the Americans. The Marines soon developed a good working relationship with the Christian clergy and made friends among the Chaldean people, many of whom spoke English and had relatives living in the United States.⁸⁵



Painting by Col Peter M. "Mike" Gish, USMCR
A satellite dish at the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit headquarters in Zakho, Iraq.

Major Michael D. Boyd was the MEU logistics officer (S-4). His primary concerns were the lack of combat service support assets, embarkation and debarkation, maintenance management in the field, and supplying scattered units with limited transportation. The shortage of MSSG-24 assets resulted from the lack of shipping space. This shortage sometimes caused delays, but never cancelled a mission. The situation got better as more joint service assets arrived in northern Iraq. Embarkation and debarkation were always headaches for logisticians, but because of their expeditionary nature, the Marines were well-practiced in these arts and very proficient at loading and unloading ships and aircraft.

The first problem faced by Captain Charles E. Headen, the communications officer, was that Joint Task Force Provide Comfort had no standard electronic operating instructions. Instead, Headen relied on plans he prepared during the transit from Sardinia. He did such a good job, that these instructions remained almost unchanged during the entire operation. A second problem was that his section was over-tasked to provide equipment. The MEU rated only four satellite radios, but as the expanded 24th MEU (SOC) and its international attachments spread across Turkey and Iraq, this number proved insufficient. Luckily, the communications section appropriated four additional sets. This doubled the authorized number and allowed communications to continue uninterrupted.

Another issue was that the communications section had no organic capability to leave the ship and still maintain a communications center afloat. This shortfall was made up using U.S. Navy equipment and personnel.

Captain Headen singled out two Marines for their outstanding work. Gunnery Sergeant Martin W. Duncan, the communications chief, kept the section's jeeps running by securing Iraqi parts from destroyed or abandoned vehicles and adapting them to fix American vehicles. Another resourceful Marine was ground radio repairman Corporal Daniel J. Slagle. Although he had no formal training, Slagle repaired satellite communication radios in the field. He repaired radios for Marine units, U.S. Army units, and a U.S. Navy SEAL team. His actions saved valuable time because without his intervention these radios would have been sent the United States for repair without replacement.⁸⁶

Captain Timothy J. Ott, the 24th MEU (SOC) Staff Judge Advocate, was concerned with customs procedures, the rules of engagement, host nation legal matters, and captured weapons. Turkish customs were frustrating, lengthy, bureaucratic battles that required careful accounting and detailed inspections. For a time, the Turks relaxed their stringent standards but later reinstated them so frustrating delays of more than a week became common. The "Rules of Engagement" stated when and under what circumstances a Marine was allowed to fire his weapon. General Shalikashvili, to emphasize the humanitarian nature of Operation Provide Comfort, called such rules "Commander's Guidance for the Use of Force." The first rule was actually a statement of purpose. Provide Comfort was a humanitarian relief operation, not a combat operation and personnel should conduct themselves in an appropriate manner. The rule stressed that the allies were in northern Iraq to give assistance, not to start a war. The next rule dealt with the right to use force for self-defense. Nothing in the rules negated the commander's primary obligation to take all necessary action for self-defense. Combined Task Force Provide Comfort units were authorized to use force to respond to attacks or threats against humanitarian relief personnel or displaced civilians, but were to use only the minimum force necessary. Deadly force could be used only to protect lives in response to a hostile act or to react to a demonstration of hostile intent. On 1 May, General Shalikashvili gave further guidance regarding the treatment of civilians. Any armed Iraqi or Kurd trying to enter the exclusion zone was to be disarmed and detained. This included Iraqi "police," Kurdish Peshmerga guerrillas, and anyone without proper authorization.

Captain Ott faced two other issues. One was host nation status of forces agreements. Normally when the United States deployed on foreign territory it entered into agreement with that particular country to pay for damage accidentally inflicted on either citizens or their property. There was no such agreement with the government of Iraq, therefore, payments were not authorized. The other issue was recovery of abandoned or lost Iraqi equipment and documents. Captured major weapons were turned over to the Military Coordination Center which then returned them to the Iraqis. Small arms, grenades, and explosives were disposed of by EOD teams.⁸⁷