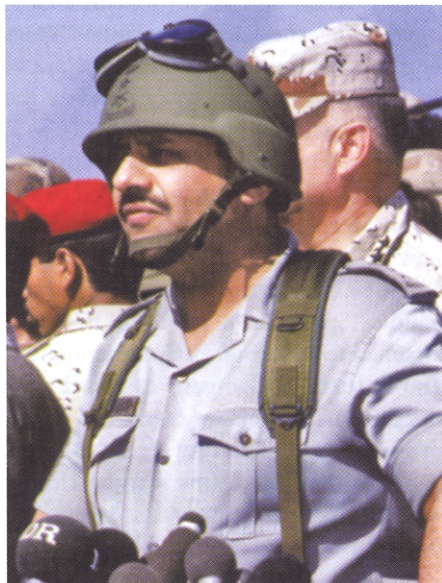


del" army on Saudi soil, home to Mecca and Medina, the two holiest cities in Islam (forbidden to nonbelievers), was a potential public relations disaster. On the other hand, Saddam had invaded Kuwait, a fellow Arab country that had materially aided Iraq in its war against Iran. Moreover, Saddam's own Ba'athist party was an avowedly secular organization devoted in part to ethnic Arab nationalism. Both of these facts helped Saudi Arabia maintain its image in the Islamic world while accepting American aid. But the situation required constant, careful manipulation. There were many tensions between the Saudis, who naturally wished Coalition forces would disrupt Saudi life as little as possible, and the Coalition forces who often felt unappreciated by the Saudis they were ostensibly in the desert to protect.

Saudi military forces were divided into two distinct services. The Ministry of Defense and Aviation (MODA) consisted of the regular Saudi ground and aviation forces, whose mission was to protect the kingdom from external threats. The

Gen Khaled bin Sultan bin Saud, a prince of the Saudi royal family, was the Joint Forces Commander and General Schwartzkopf's opposite number. Joint Forces Command was composed of the Coalition's Islamic members forces: Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria, and others. The Battle of al-Khafji was the first conflict on Saudi soil in decades; as a result Gen Khaled was pressured to end the battle decisively and quickly.

DVIC DA-ST-92-08034



Saudi aviation forces were folded, along with other Coalition air forces, into the air campaign, but the Royal Saudi Land Forces or Saudi Army operated separately as nine brigades.²¹

The Ministry of Defense and Aviation units were supplemented by the Saudi Arabian National Guard (SANG) comprised of two mechanized brigades. Ostensibly the Saudi Arabian National Guard was intended to reinforce the Ministry of Defense and Aviation forces in the event of a war, but in reality the Saudi National Guard's primary role was to protect the royal family from internal rebellion. Staffed with personnel loyal to the House of Saud specifically through family and tribal ties, the Saudi Arabian National Guard was descended from the Ikhwan (White Army), a Wahhabi tribal militia, which formed the main body of Ibn Saud's forces during World War I. The Saudi government employed the National Guard to protect the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, and to counter the regular armed forces in the event of an attempted coup. It received the lion's share of training and equipment that was available to Saudi forces, although it did not possess tanks.²²

The Saudi National Guard was favored over the Ministry of Aviation and Defense. The Royal family kept the two forces separated, and neither force trained with the other. Nevertheless, oil-rich Saudi Arabia did not lack resources and both services were lavishly equipped with modern military hardware. Despite massive amounts spent on modernization, many Saudi soldiers lacked professional standards or competence and the officer corps granted the noncommissioned officers neither authority nor responsibility.

In 1990-1991, direct American military assistance to Saudi Arabia centered around two organizations. Officially, there was the Department of Defense's Office of Program Manager for the Modernization of the Saudi National Guard, which assigned American officers as advisors to the Saudi National Guard. In addition, the Vinnell Corporation provided military contract advisors to the Saudi National Guard, most of whom were American veterans of the Vietnam War. In both cases, the personnel assigned to train the Saudi National Guard

prior to the invasion of Kuwait fought with the National Guard forces, greatly increasing their effectiveness. The military advisors and Vinnell Corporation employees worked closely together supporting the Saudi National Guard.²³

Since neither Saudi Arabia nor the United States was willing to have its forces under the other's command, a joint structure was set up. Joint Forces Command, a parallel organization of Central Command, was composed of most of the Arab contingents and was led by Saudi General Khaled bin Sultan. A nephew of King Fahd, he was a graduate of the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, and the Air War College at Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama. In 1986, after 25 years in the armed forces of his country, General Khaled was appointed commander of the Royal Saudi Air Defence Forces.

The command was further subdivided into Joint Forces Command-North and Joint Forces Command-East. Joint Forces Command-North, although dominated by two Egyptian divisions, also contained Saudi Arabian Ministry of Defense and Aviation, Kuwaiti, and Syrian brigades. It controlled the territory from the "elbow" at al-Manaqish to the Kuwait-Iraq border. Saudi National Guard units, Ministry of Defense and Aviation forces, as well as Kuwaiti forces and a Qatari mechanized brigade made up Joint Forces Command-East. It controlled the territory from the eastern border of the al-Wafrah oil fields to the Persian Gulf coast, including al-Khafji and the surrounding territory.²⁴ The assignment of National Guard units under the command of General Khaled was out of the ordinary, and indicated how seriously the House of Saud took the crisis.²⁵ The placement of the subcommands was due to Arab pride which dictated that they hold positions in the front line to ensure theirs would be the first blood shed.

Although well equipped, and provided with professional military advisors, the Saudi forces were still not up to Western military standards. Islamic holidays, daily prayers, and familial obligations dramatically decreased the amount of training. The troops generally averaged an eighth grade education. The officers were often well educated and most spoke at least some English, but they were discouraged from independent thought or

action until given battalion-level command. They faced tremendous pressure to keep their superiors happy. As Captain Joseph Molofsky, 3d Marines liaison officer to the 2d Brigade of the Saudi Arabian National Guard, noted: "It's all make or break. You displease your senior and you're done forever. You make him happy and he sends you on vacation to Europe. Literally."²⁶ Saudi forces were untested in 1991, having last seen action in the 1920s. There was serious concern about how well they would perform in battle.²⁷

As Desert Shield progressed, additional liaison elements were attached to the Saudi forces. United States Army Special Forces teams were attached to Ministry of Defense and Aviation forces at the brigade level, and the Marine Corps assigned 1st Air-Naval Gunfire Liaison Company (1st ANGLICO) teams throughout Joint Forces Command-East.²⁸ When it became clear that the 1st Marine Division would be fighting beside Saudi forces, the division's commander, Major General James M. Myatt, ordered

his assistant division commander, Brigadier General Thomas V. Draude, to take primary responsibility for liaison duties.²⁹ Brigadier General Draude used 3d Marines, the Marine unit nearest to Joint Forces Command-East units, as the primary focus of his liaison effort. As Colonel John A. Admire, commander of the 3d Marines, noted:

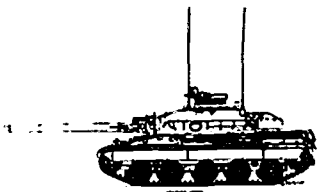
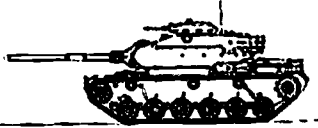
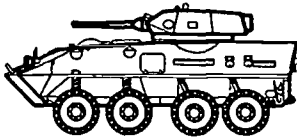
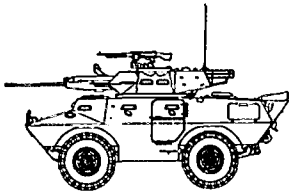
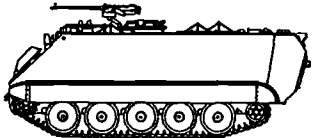
We were the only U.S. combat force located on the eastern coast. Now the significance of that of course is that we continued to train with Coalition forces. We were the division's primary instrument from October-November-December and through January of training with the Saudis and training with the Qatari forces.

Colonel Admire assigned Captain Molofsky, an officer with previous experience in the Middle East serving with the United Nations on the Sinai Peninsula, as the 3d Marines liaison officer to the 2d Brigade, Saudi Arabian National Guard.³⁰ From the beginning, there was tension between the Marines and the Saudis. "The Marines felt that they needed to get their own eyes on," Captain Molofsky explained. "They couldn't trust the Saudis. The Saudis were insulted that the Marines didn't trust them."³¹ This situation was exacerbated in January 1991 when 3d Marines was given the duty of protecting the town and airfield of al-Mishab. Previously al-Mishab had been part of Joint Force Command-East's area of operations; placing it within the Marine area of operations, especially as the United States began to use the airfield, implied a lack of faith in Saudi military capabilities on the part of Marine commanders.³²

In addition to the U.S. Army advisors and Special Forces teams assigned to the Saudi forces, commanders attached air-naval gunfire liaison teams to coordinate Marine air and artillery support for the Saudis. Specifically, 1st ANGLICO was attached to Joint Forces Command-East, and in turn the company assigned supporting arms liaison teams to Saudi brigades and fire control teams to Saudi battalions. These teams worked closely with their Saudi counterparts, developing excellent working relationships.³³

On the eve of the battle of al-Khafji,

Coalition Armored Vehicles

Vehicle	Type	Armament	Top Speed
	AMX-30	105mm main gun Coax 12.7mm MG 7.62mm MG	65kph
	M-60	105mm main gun Coax 7.62mm MG 12.7mm MG	48kph
	LAV-25	25mm main gun 2 x 7.62mm MG 4 troops or TOW-2 ATGM	100kph
	V-150	.50 caliber MG 6-8 troops or 4 troops TOW-2 ATGM	88kph
	M-113	12.7mm MG 11 troops or 4 troops TOW ATGM	61kph

American and Saudi forces had worked and trained together for five months. There was some unease between the two forces, but both sides had made a concerted effort to overcome it. The Iraqi invasion would put those efforts to the test.

Ra's al-Khafji

The Saudi coastal town of Ra's al-Khafji, more commonly known as al-Khafji, lies approximately seven miles south of the Saudi-Kuwait border. Before the war, the primary industries in the town were oil and tourism, but it was essentially deserted just prior to the attack. General Khaled bin Sultan had ordered the town evacuated in August because it was too close to the Kuwaiti border to properly defend.³⁴ North of the town there was a water desalination plant, and to the south there was an oil refinery, a pier, and a small airstrip. Southeast, beyond the town's outskirts, was a Saudi Arabian National Guard compound.

Ra's al-Khafji was particularly difficult to defend because the town lies to the north of extensive *sabkhas* or salt marshes. As Captain Molofsky explained: "A *sabkha* is a patch of desert that has some kind of underlying moisture that causes a thin, mud like crust to develop on the top, which cracks in the heat, but it's easily penetrated by a vehicle and very soft underneath—you get stuck in it in a huge way."³⁵ The *sabkhas* served to chan-

The crew of a Marine LAV-25 scans the desert. The LAV-25 was the backbone of the light armored infantry battalions, an untried concept prior to the Battle of al-Khafji. The battalions were used in a traditional cavalry role, providing a screen in front of the main body of I Marine Expeditionary Force.



History Division Photo



Photo courtesy of Capt Charles G. Grow

Saudi soldiers move through the evacuated border city of al-Khafji. Although the city's architecture was relatively monotonous it offered civilized amenities and was a popular stop for Coalition commanders and journalists.

nel traffic onto the coastal highway, especially the heavy vehicles needed to support the logistics of large military forces.

Coalition Dispositions

Covering deployed Coalition forces were a series of observation posts strung out along the Kuwaiti-Saudi border. Each post was situated near a Saudi border fort, described by virtually every eyewitness as a "Beau Geste fort." U.S. Navy Sea, Air, and Land (SEAL), Army Special Forces, and Marine reconnaissance teams

manned these posts in order to gather intelligence on Iraqi forces in Kuwait. Placed at 10 to 20 kilometer intervals, Observation Post 8 was set on the coast, Observation Post 7, further to the west, with Observation Posts 2, 1, 4, 5, and 6 following the border until the "elbow" was reached at al-Jathathil.*

Nearest to the coast, the Marine Corps' 1st Surveillance, Reconnaissance, and Intelligence Group controlled Observation Posts 8, 7, and 2.** The coastal highway ran between Observation Post 7 and Observation Post 8, which gave those two posts overlapping oversight of the most likely route into al-Khafji. In addition to the special operations teams, air-naval gunfire supporting arms liaison teams also occupied these observation posts. The 1st Surveillance, Reconnaissance, and

*Most works on the Battle of al-Khafji list the observation posts slightly differently from east to west: OP-8, OP-7, OP-1, OP-2, OP-4, OP-5, and OP-6. Two important primary sources, the command chronology of the 2d Light Armored Infantry Battalion and the after action report of 1st ANGLICO/1st Surveillance, Reconnaissance, and Intelligence Group both make clear that the order should be the one given in the text.

**The 1st Surveillance, Reconnaissance, and Intelligence Group (1st SRIG) was a unit responsible for coordinating intelligence gathering operations, and was subordinate to the I Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF) rather than the 1st Marine Division. Its primary headquarters was with the I MEF headquarters, but it maintained a forward headquarters in al-Khafji.

Intelligence Group had a headquarters at the desalination plant located to the north of al-Khafji.³⁶ The 1st Air-Naval Gunfire Liaison Company, attached to Joint Forces Command-East, was a subordinate unit of the 1st Surveillance, Reconnaissance, and Intelligence Group, which coordinated closely in and around al-Khafji with the various units in the Kuwaiti border area.

Task Force Shepherd (1st Light Armored Infantry Battalion) of the 1st Marine Division had companies on a screening mission near Observation Post 4 (Company D), Observation Post 5 (Company B) and Observation Post 6 (Company C). Only Observation Post 4 had a Marine reconnaissance platoon in place when the Iraqi attack occurred on 29 January.³⁷ * The 2d Marine Division's 2d Light Armored Infantry Battalion established a similar screen to the east directly in front of the al-Wafrah oil fields and Observation Post 1, between Task Force Shepherd and the Joint Forces Command-East area of operations along the coast.

Under the command of Major General Sultan 'Adi al-Mutairi, Joint Forces Command-East was further divided into task forces. Abu Bakr Task Force, comprised of the 2d Saudi Arabian National Guard Brigade and an attached Qatari armored battalion, was responsible for al-Khafji and the surrounding desert. The 2d Saudi Arabian National Guard Brigade's 5th Battalion established a screen north of al-Khafji and west of the coastal highway, behind Observation Post 7. Tariq Task Force, comprised of the nascent Saudi Arabian Marines as well as a battalion of Moroccan infantry, was along the coast south of al-Khafji. Further west was Othman Task Force, built around the 8th Mechanized Ministry of Defense and Aviation Brigade. A battalion of the 8th Brigade served as a screening force behind Observation Posts 2 and 7. In addition, further west in Joint Forces Command-East's area of operation was Omar Task Force, built around the 10th Mechanized Ministry of Defense and Avi-

ation Brigade, with a battalion serving as a screen behind the border. The Saudi mechanized screens were approximately three kilometers behind the border, while the main Saudi defensive positions were approximately 20 kilometers behind the screen.³⁸

The I Marine Expeditionary Force's area of operations at this time was shaped somewhat like a fat "L." The leg of the "L" extended along the bend of the Saudi-Kuwaiti border from al-Jathathil to just east of the oil fields at al-Wafrah and the foot of the "L" extended south of Joint Forces Command-East's area of operations to al-Mishab and the airfield. Al-Mishab and the surrounding area were held by Task Force Taro, built around the 3d Marines. The pillar of the "L" was held by Task Force Shepherd and 2d Light Armored Infantry Battalion, which stretched along the border in a light armored screen. Behind this screen was the massive Marine logistical base at Kibrit, which Lieutenant General Boomer, commander of I Marine Expeditionary Force, decided to place forward of the main Marine combat forces, in order to speed the eventual attack into Kuwait. Kibrit was relatively vulnerable, and during the Iraqi attack on al-Khafji, Brigadier General Charles C. Krulak, commander of the Direct Support Command and the Kibrit logistics base, would quickly call for armored forces to establish positions north of the base. There is little indication, however, that the Iraqis were ever aware of the base, or its importance to future Marine operations in the region.³⁹

Colonel Admire, responsible for the defense of al-Mishab, was unconvinced that Saudi forces between the Marines and the Iraqis would fight if attacked. In January, he began to run reconnaissance training missions into the town of al-Khafji. Teams from the 3d Platoon, Company A, 3d Reconnaissance Battalion, then attached to Task Force Taro, would infiltrate the city by vehicle, usually humvees, establish an observation post, and then leave a day or so later. Unfortunately, these missions were not coordinated with the Coalition forces in al-Khafji. This would have a dramatic impact during the Iraqi invasion, as Captain Molofsky later noted: "I was unaware, [1st ANGLICO's Captain James R.] Braden was unaware, and the Saudis were un-

aware, that the Marines had reconnaissance teams up in al-Khafji."⁴⁰

Other Marine operations would lead to the Coalition's success at al-Khafji, however. In response to the difficulties involved in defending Saudi Arabia from an Iraqi attack in the early days of Operation Desert Shield, Marine planners had developed Task Force Cunningham. They designed it as a task organized, aviation only task force that would stop Iraqi ground maneuver forces with concentrated fire from the air, covering the withdrawal of Saudi and Marine forces along the coastal highway. Bell UH-1N Huey and AH-1W Super Cobra helicopters would operate alongside North American OV-10D Broncos and McDonnell Douglas AV-8B Harrier II fixed wing aircraft in the task force. Joint Forces Command-East liked the plan, and it would serve as the model for air support during the battle.⁴¹

Artillery Raids

After the air campaign against Iraq began, I Marine Expeditionary Force began a series of artillery raids against Iraqi forces in Kuwait. The first artillery raid occurred on the night of 21 January, and was fired from a location just north of al-Khafji against enemy artillery positions north of the border. Two subsequent raids occurred on the nights of 26 January and 28 January. The 26 January raid was near the "elbow" at al-Jathathil, while the third was again from just north of al-Khafji. Although Iraqi counter-battery fire was ineffective, there was a vehicular accident during the 26 January raid that resulted in the death of three Marines.

The raids served multiple purposes. First, they were aimed at specific Iraqi artillery forces; second they were designed to confuse and bewilder the Iraqis by making the ultimate Marine breaching points unclear; and third they permitted Marine air to strike against the Iraqi artillery, considered Iraq's most dangerous conventional asset, which inevitably replied with counter-battery fire.

Each raid followed the same basic pattern. A Marine artillery battery would advance to the border and fire a carefully planned barrage. As soon as the shells cleared the barrels, they would "limber" the artillery pieces and drive away. Within minutes, the firing location would be

* The 1st Marine Division's 1st Light Armored Infantry Battalion was actually a composite organization with companies from three separate light armored infantry battalions. To encourage a sense of identity in the ad hoc battalion, it was designated Task Force Shepherd.



History Division Photo

Marines of Task Force Shepherd plan their next operation. In addition to screening duties, the light armored infantry battalions also provided security for the Marine batteries conducting artillery raids on Iraqi forces in Kuwait.

empty desert. When Iraqi artillery attempted counter-battery fire, it would fall on the abandoned position, and waiting Marine air would pounce on the revealed Iraqi artillery and destroy it.

The composition of the raid forces followed a pattern as well. The ground element consisted of a battery of artillery with a small security force and a company of light armored vehicles from one of the light armored infantry battalions. The 3d Marine Aircraft Wing provided an aviation element: usually an OV-10 aircraft acting as an airborne forward air controller, a McDonnell Douglas F/A-18D Hornet and two Grumman A-6E Intruders to strike the enemy artillery sites, an F/A-18D and two McDonnell Douglas F/A-18 Hornets to suppress enemy air defenses, an F/A-18D as a forward air controller, and a Grumman EA-6B Prowler to provide electronic counter-measures support.^{42*}

27-28 January

Despite the danger of Coalition air attacks, Saddam Hussein journeyed from Baghdad to the southern Iraqi city of al-Basrah on the morning of 27 January,

*The F/A-18D was a two seat version of the F/A-18. It was often used to perform coordination duties or to act as an airborne forward air controller.

where he met with two of his senior Iraqi officers in Kuwait, General Aeid Khlel Zaky, commander of *IV Corps*, and General Salah Aboud Mahmoud commander of *III Corps*. Among others at the meeting was the Minister of Defense, the chief of staff, their deputies, other members of the general staff, and Colonel Aboud Haneed Mahoud, commander of Saddam's body-guard.⁴³

Al-Basrah's infrastructure was in ruins: "It was apparent on the road, which had big holes from the bombs and some destroyed military vehicles on the both side of the road," General Salah Aboud remembered. "In al-Basrah region all the damage was clear and we noticed it on the bridge, railroads, on the roads, on the facilities.... And the streets were very dark, compared to before the war, when they were glowing." At the military headquarters there was no power and small candles dimly lit the rooms. General Salah did not realize that he was to meet Saddam until he "saw the faces of the special guards."⁴⁴

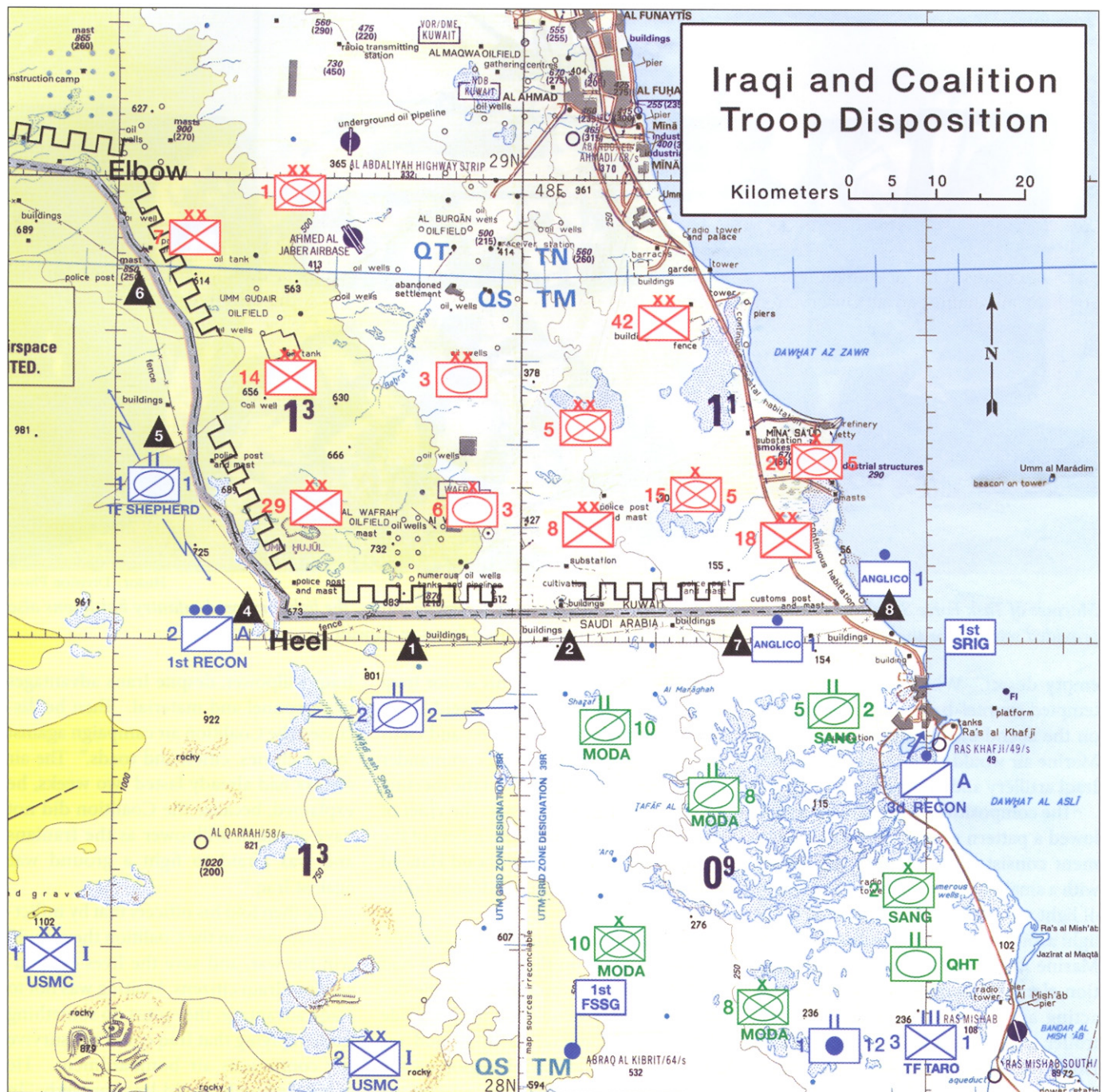
At the meeting, the Iraqi president presented the plan for the attack on al-Khafji and then gave his officers some words of inspiration. As General Hashem Sultan later recalled, Saddam began by discussing Iraqi military successes in the Iran-Iraq War. He said that success had come from

Iraqi willpower, despite Iran's advantages in personnel and material. Then he discussed the Coalition air campaign against "our factories, cities, and roads." The air attacks had already lasted two weeks, he explained, because the Coalition did not have as much willpower as the Iranians and was afraid to fight a ground war against Iraq.⁴⁵

He then told his officers that by inflicting casualties on the Coalition they would win the war, and save the lives of thousands of Iraqi citizens. Waiting was not to Iraq's advantage, they must do something now, implying that Iraq could not survive the continuous air bombardment. He concluded with an old Iraqi proverb: "In order to be ready to fight the fox, you must prepare to fight the lion."⁴⁶

General Salah Aboud Mahmoud, given command of the al-Khafji mission, informed Saddam that he would present him with the city as a present on the morning of 30 January.⁴⁷ The meeting then broke up and the Iraqi president returned to Baghdad, surviving an attack by two U.S. Air Force General Dynamics F-16 Falcons. The Air Force did not realize they had hit Saddam's convoy until after the war.⁴⁸

General Salah Aboud returned to Kuwait and met with his division and



Ministry of Defense, United Kingdom, 1991, Modified by W. Stephen Hill

brigade commanders at the 5th Mechanized Division's headquarters, then at the oil facility of al-Maqoa. He instructed his commanders in tactics for countering Coalition airpower and ordered them to dig in quickly after reaching their objectives. He then passed on Saddam's inspirational words and told them of his promise to make Saddam a present of al-Khafji on the morning of 30 January. Finally, he approved IV Corps' request for artillery fire against the sector opposite the 7th Infantry and 14th Infantry Divisions. The Iraqi forces then began to

move into position for the upcoming battle.⁴⁹

Warnings

The Coalition did have some indications that the Iraqis were planning something. One of the E-8C Joint Surveillance and Target Acquisition Radar System aircraft reported large Iraqi vehicle movements on the night of 22 January, and again on 25 January. These were only preliminary Iraqi movements, but it also noted the Iraqi movement on the night of 28 January, which was the direct prepara-

tion for the upcoming offensive.⁵⁰

All three of the observation posts manned by air-naval gunfire liaison Marines (Observation Posts 2, 7, and 8) reported unusually heavy Iraqi activity on the nights of 27 and 28 January. In addition, the Marines reported "sporadic Iraqi rocket and artillery fires were directed at the city of al-Khafji, the forward Saudi defensive belt, and the border observation posts, often with illumination rounds mixed in."⁵¹ On the night of 27 January, Marines at Observation Post 7 called in a strike on Iraqi "mechanized reconnais-

sance forces” moving in front of their position, reporting two Iraqi armored personnel carriers destroyed.⁵² Some Marine officers considered the Iraqi movements to be a response to the Marine artillery raids which had taken place on 21 and 26 January.⁵³

On the night of 28 January the reported Iraqi mechanized movements coincided with another Marine artillery raid. The teams at the desalination plant north of al-Khafji, and at Observation Post 8, each called for airstrikes on Iraqi forces they observed, but the artillery raid just to the west had the priority for air support.⁵⁴ By 0315 on the 29th, the artillery raid had concluded and air support was again available to the observation post teams. At Observation Post 7, the air-naval gunfire supporting arms liaison team under Captain John C. Bley II called a flight of Fairchild-Republic A-10 Thunderbolt attack aircraft in on a column of Iraqi armored vehicles moving west across its front toward the al-Wafrah oil field. The Iraqi column suffered heavy damage; Bley’s team reported nearly a dozen vehicles destroyed. The team observed Iraqi soldiers trying to recover vehicles at sunrise.⁵⁵ The team at Observation Post 2 also observed a large Iraqi force moving from east to west, which Coalition air power engaged. All three observation posts heard the movement of the Iraqi vehicles for the rest of the night.⁵⁶

One Coalition officer who realized, at the time, that the Iraqis were preparing for an offensive was Lieutenant Colonel Richard M. Barry, commander of the forward headquarters of the 1st Surveillance, Reconnaissance, and Intelligence Group. He closely monitored Iraqi radio traffic during the airstrikes on 28 January and decided that “the Iraqis put probably 150 sappers out there to try and clear that road. [I] sensed they really wanted it opened. They were obviously using that road as some sort of interior line like at Gettysburg.”⁵⁷ The information was passed on to higher headquarters. Lieutenant Colonel Barry was right; the air attacks against the *3d Armored Division* as it tried to pass through the Iraqi minefields of al-Wafrah paralyzed much of the division and General Salah Aboud spent much of 29 January trying to fix the scheduling problems these attacks caused.⁵⁸ When the division’s attacks finally did fall on Observation Post 4 and Observation Post 1, they would be far weaker as a result.

Despite Lieutenant Colonel Barry’s warning that “this is it ...the Iraqis want Khafji,” Central Command thought the possibility of an Iraqi ground attack remote as attention was focused on the air campaign and the expected ground offensive to liberate Kuwait.⁵⁹

29 January

On the morning of 29 January, Gen-

eral Salah Aboud inspected the assembly areas of the *5th Mechanized Division*, and found fewer vehicles moving than he expected, many being broken down alongside the road. He also found that the division’s deception operations were working well and he saw no sign that Coalition forces knew of its movements. He believed this was because “the order was given to take cover under the smoke clouds of the burning oil, and also the tanks, the armored personnel carriers, and the support weapons’ vehicles were all deployed under the trees of al-Thal and were hard to see.”⁶⁰

Things were going worse with the *3d Armored Division*, especially with the division’s *6th Armored Brigade* commanded by Colonel Ibdil Raziq Mahmoud. The brigade had been pounded by Coalition aircraft the night before and it had lost at least two tanks.

“On the morning of 29 January, the enemy started screaming and shouting after we completed deploying our forces in the desert area; although the enemy had their reconnaissance technologies they were not able to notice our forces,” recalled Brigadier General Hussan Zedin commander of the *3d Armored Division*. He added: “[Coalition aircraft] started to attack our troops during the daylight, in their concealed locations. They tried to affect our morale and cause damage in order to make us too weak to execute the mission.”⁶¹

The Marines of 2d Platoon, Company A, 1st Reconnaissance Battalion, would spend much of their time in the desert at Observation Post 4. Here they pose around an Iraqi T-55 tank captured on the morning of 30 January 1991.

Photo courtesy of MGySgt Gregory L. Gillispie



The air attacks led General Salah Aboud to conclude that the Coalition had discovered his brigade, and he expected it would face stiff resistance at its objectives. He told the *3d Armored Division* commander, Brigadier Commander Husan Zedin, that the *6th Armored Brigade* could expect to face “tanks, anti-tank weapons, and armored cars.” He ordered the brigade to employ “a reconnaissance assault a suitable distance ahead of the main convoy to get information about the strength of the resistance of the enemy.”⁶²

General Salah Aboud was wrong, however. Aside from Lieutenant Colonel Barry at 1st Surveillance, Reconnaissance, and Intelligence Group, the Coalition was not expecting an Iraqi attack, missing much of the Iraqi movement and interpreting the movement that it did observe as either training exercises or reactions to the Marine artillery raids. On the morning of 29 January, the Iraqi *III Corps* and *IV Corps* had moved to their assembly areas successfully. Coalition air power had already inflicted significant losses, but those losses had resulted from routine strikes in Kuwait and chance attacks against Iraqi forces caught moving in the open. The bulk of the Coalition’s air effort remained focused elsewhere.

At al-Khafji, the various special operations and reconnaissance forces occupying the city were proceeding with what had become their normal day. For the air-naval gunfire liaison Marines, this meant routine relief of the forward positions. Captain Douglas R. Kleinsmith’s supporting arms liaison team relieved Captain Bley and his team at Observation Post 7 in the early morning, and Bley’s team returned to the group headquarters at the water desalination plant north of al-Khafji.

Less routine, but not surprising, was the capture of three Iraqi soldiers by Marines at Observation Post 8. All three were in clean uniforms, and appeared to be in good health, despite two weeks of Coalition airstrikes. First Lieutenant Kurtis E. Lang, commander of the air-naval gunfire team at the post, thought they were forward observers; the Iraqis carried maps that detailed Iraqi and some Coalition positions, including Observation Post 8. A U.S. Navy SEAL unit took charge of the prisoners and sent them to the rear. Approximately 30 minutes after



Marine Corps Art Collection

The Saudi border fort at Observation Post 4 was known as “OP Hamma” to some Marines. The painting by Capt Charles G. Grow depicts the oil fields at al-Wafrah on fire following a Coalition bombing raid on 24 January 1991.

the team captured the Iraqis, the enemy fired a single tank shell at the position, causing no damage.⁶³

Along the coastal highway there were also indications of increased Iraqi activity. At Observation Post 7, Captain Kleinsmith reported Iraqi artillery six to eight kilometers in front of his position, while at Observation Post 8, Lieutenant Lang reported heavy vehicle noises.⁶⁴ At 2000, Captain Kleinsmith directed a successful A-6 attack on the two Iraqi artillery positions, eliminating at least one of the sites.⁶⁵

Outposts

Observation Post 4 was a two-story Saudi police post known as Markaz al-Zabr. To the north, along the border ran a large berm approximately 15 feet high. The fort protected one of the few openings in the embankment.⁶⁶ On 29 January, Observation Post 4 was the only post this far west that was manned; it was held by 2d Platoon, Company A, 1st Reconnaissance Battalion, and a company of light armored vehicles.

The reconnaissance platoon had originally been Deep Reconnaissance Platoon, Company C, 3d Reconnaissance Battalion, based on Okinawa. Comprised of volunteers, it had shipped out to the Middle East in the initial rush to get Marines

to Saudi Arabia in September 1990. With its parent battalion remaining on Okinawa, the platoon was absorbed into 1st Reconnaissance Battalion.⁶⁷

Nearly two weeks before, the platoon, commanded by First Lieutenant Steven A. Ross, was assigned to Observation Post 4. Working as a platoon was a welcome change, since it had been previously assigned to various observation posts in smaller groups alongside other Marine reconnaissance and Army special forces teams. Supplies were running low, however, and the platoon was to be relieved on 30 January. Lieutenant Ross had dispersed his men along the berm, divided into three teams along a 500-meter front. Armed with M16 rifles, M249 squad automatic weapons, M60 machine guns, and M136 AT4 antitank weapons, the Marines were not equipped to stop a major Iraqi assault. Lieutenant Ross stationed the platoon’s vehicles, four humvees and a 6x6 5-ton truck, behind a U-shaped berm approximately 500 meters to the rear of the observation post. In the event of a serious Iraqi attack, the plan was for the platoon to withdraw to the U-shaped berm, mount up, and move to the rear while calling in airstrikes on the Iraqis.⁶⁸

Captain Roger L. Pollard’s Company D, 3d Light Armored Infantry Battalion,