



Photo courtesy of MGySgt Gregory L. Gillispie

*Maj Keith R. Kelly, Executive Officer, 1st Reconnaissance Battalion, and SSgt Gregory L. Gillispie, Platoon Sergeant, 2d Platoon, Company A, 1st Reconnaissance Battalion, pose at the southern end of their position on the berm at Observation Post 4. One of the platoon's bunkers can be seen to the right.*

was attached to the 1st Light Armored Infantry Battalion, designated Task Force Shepherd. It had 19 General Dynamics LAV-25 light armored vehicles divided into two platoons and a company headquarters element.\* Each LAV-25 was armed with an M242 Bushmaster 25mm cannon and carried a four-man infantry fire team. A section of seven General Dynamics LAV-AT light armored vehicles from 1st Light Armored Infantry Battalion's Headquarters Company was attached to Pollard's company. Each LAV-AT was equipped with an Emerson 901A1 TOW 2 [Tube launched, optically tracked, wire command link guided] anti-tank guided missile launcher, a thermal imaging system, and was manned by a crew of four. They were the company's primary antitank asset.<sup>69</sup>

At 1200, Company D was ordered to move to Observation Post 4 and act as a

\*Standard light armored infantry company organization was three platoons and a headquarters element, but Company D had only four assigned officers. To compensate for the lack of officers, Captain Pollard organized the company into two platoons and trained the company to operate as two elements.

screen for the evening. Captain Pollard conducted a reconnaissance and established his company and its attached LAV-

*Maj Jeffery A. Powers (left), operations officer of 1st Light Armored Infantry Battalion (Task Force Shepherd) and Capt Roger L. Pollard (right), commander of Company D, 3d Light Armored Infantry Battalion (Task Force Shepherd) examine the aftermath of the battle at Observation Post 4 on the morning of 30 January 1991.*

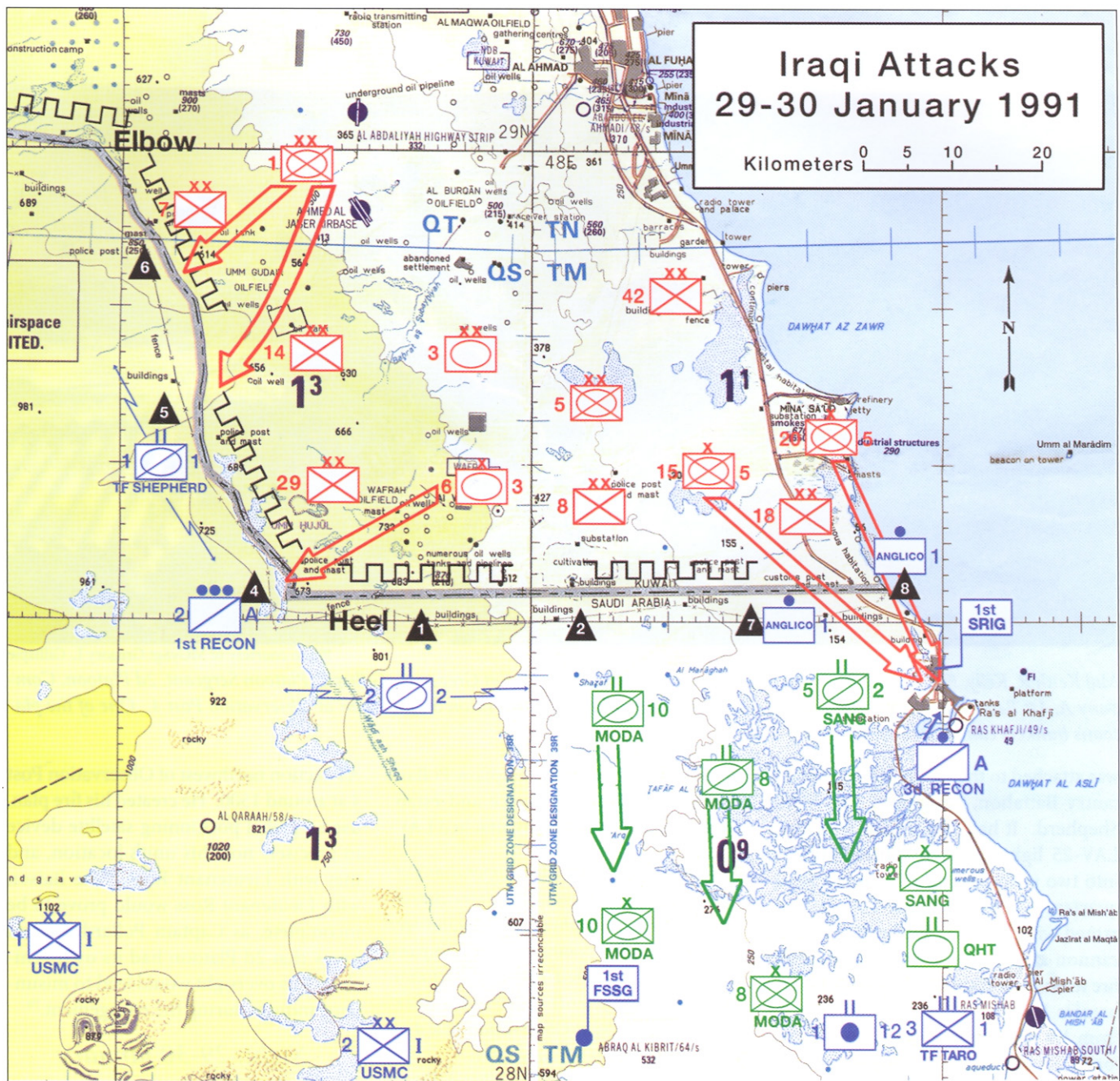
Photo courtesy of Col Jeffrey A. Powers



AT section northwest of Observation Post 4 at around 1500. He created his fire plan, used a global positioning satellite device to precisely note his unit's location, and met with Lieutenant Ross. The liaison with Lieutenant Ross would prove to be incomplete, as Captain Pollard did not know that 2d Platoon had its own vehicles. This oversight would lead to misunderstandings during the engagement.<sup>70</sup>

### *Night, 29-30 January At the Observation Posts*

The first serious ground combat in the Battle of al-Khafji occurred at Observation Post 4. The 6th Armored Brigade of the 3d Armored Division was assigned to strike through the gap in the berm, drawing attention away from the movement of the 5th Mechanized Division to the east. As General Salah Aboud later recalled: "The 6th Armored Brigade was ordered to move forward from the heights above the al-Zabr [Observation Post 4] and they crossed the line at the eight o'clock at night. And at nine o'clock and thirty minutes they encountered enemy resistance at al-Zabr, in Saudi Arabia."<sup>71</sup>



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

At 2000, Lieutenant Ross heard the clank of treads, then observed Iraqi armored vehicles advancing through his night-vision device; it was a sizeable force. He attempted to contact his outlying teams as well as Company D and the reconnaissance battalion headquarters by radio but got no response. Since contact earlier was no problem, there was a strong presumption that the reconnaissance platoon's radios were being jammed. Using runners, Lieutenant Ross alerted his platoon and continued trying to get through and inform higher headquarters and Company D of the oncoming Iraqi force.<sup>72</sup> Finally, at 2030, he made radio

contact and informed Company D that a large mass of Iraqi vehicles, tanks, and armored personnel carriers, were advancing on Observation Post 4. Captain Pollard informed Task Force Shepherd and prepared his company to face the threat.<sup>73</sup>

At the observation post, there appeared to be some confusion within Ross' platoon. Rather than simply retreating to the U-shaped berm as planned, one of the teams opened fire on the oncoming Iraqi armor with machine guns and antitank weapons. At the ranges involved, there was very little chance that the Marines would do any damage to an Iraqi vehicles

with their light antitank weapons. However, the fire startled the oncoming Iraqis, who slowed or stopped as they heard the "ping" of machine gun fire on their tank hulls. In response to the reconnaissance platoon's fire, the Iraqis began to fire back. Their fire was random and inaccurate, but the volume was impressive. At the same time, Iraqi communications jamming appeared to have stopped and Lieutenant Ross was able to re-establish radio contact with all three of his teams. He promptly ordered everyone to fall back to the U-shaped berm as previously arranged.<sup>74</sup>

To cover the reconnaissance platoon's withdrawal, Captain Pollard led his 2d



Photo courtesy of LtCol Charles H. Cureton

*During the fight at Observation Post 4, LAV-AT "Green Two" was struck in the rear by an antitank missile fired by one of its fellows, causing the armored vehicle's magazine of 16 missiles to detonate with catastrophic results. Four Marines were lost with the vehicle: Cpl Ismael Cotto, PFC Scott A. Schroeder, LCpl David T. Snyder, and LCpl Daniel B. Walker.*

Platoon's light armored vehicles forward, along with half of the LAV-ATs. The plan was for 2d Platoon to advance in line to aid the reconnaissance platoon, while the LAV-ATs conducted a "bounding overwatch." The LAV-AT had to stop when they fired. In order to provide cover for the advancing LAV-ATs and LAV-25s, half of the LAV-ATs would stop, ready to fire, while the others advanced a short way. The second group would then stop and cover the first group as they advanced, and so on. During the advance, after receiving permission, one of the LAV-ATs fired its antitank missile on what it believed to be an Iraqi tank. Instead, the missile hit "Green Two," one of

its fellows, a few hundred yards to its front.<sup>75</sup>

The missile penetrated the rear hatch of the armored vehicle and detonated the 16 missiles stored in the rear compartment, completely destroying it in a huge fireball and killing its crew.<sup>76</sup> "It came through the bottom, right, troop hatch on this one," Lieutenant David Kendall of Company D later said. It "hit all the other missiles, I guess, and it was all a spontaneous detonation. There were no secondary explosions. Nothing. This whole thing just went up."<sup>77</sup>

There was confusion at this point, with some Company D Marines believing the vehicle had been destroyed by Iraqi tank

fire and others not certain the vehicle had actually been destroyed. The explosion obliterated it so completely that there was not enough wreckage left to register on night vision devices. The crew did not respond to radio calls, but it was common for a radio to cease working. The fate of the LAV-AT would not be confirmed until the next morning.<sup>78</sup>

Captain Pollard and his 2d Platoon continued forward, leaving the LAV-ATs behind. He was finally informed that Ross' platoon had sufficient vehicles to withdraw. Pollard's platoon halted and began firing on the Iraqi vehicles with their 25mm guns. The reconnaissance platoon had observed the incident and

*Two LAV-ATs from 1st Light Armored Infantry Battalion drive across the Saudi desert. The LAV-AT provided the heavy fire power of the battalion with its antitank missiles.*

History Division Photo





DVIC DF-ST-92-07825

*An Air Force A-10A Thunderbolt patrols over the desert during the Gulf War. The aircraft carried AGM 65 Maverick air-to-ground missiles and was one of the primary providers of close air support during the Battle of al-Khafji.*

Lieutenant Ross was convinced that Company D would soon fire on his troops by mistake as well. He ordered the platoon to mount its vehicles and withdraw from the battlefield.

After Ross' platoon had completed its withdrawal, Company D's 1st Platoon shifted south of the 2nd Platoon in order to support 2d Platoon's fire against the Iraqi forces advancing on the now-abandoned observation post. Pollard's company then backed away from the border but continued to engage the Iraqi armor with missile and 25mm cannon fire. Al-

though the fire had little hope of damaging the Iraqi vehicles at the ranges involved, it served to disorient the Iraqi tanks, which stopped and buttoned up as the rounds ricocheted off their armor. The fire was also useful for marking Iraqi vehicles for incoming aircraft. The company's executive officer, First Lieutenant Scott P. Williams, and Corporal Russell T. Zawalick, acted as forward air controllers for a series of air strikes against the Iraqi forces, using this method of marking the enemy.<sup>79</sup>

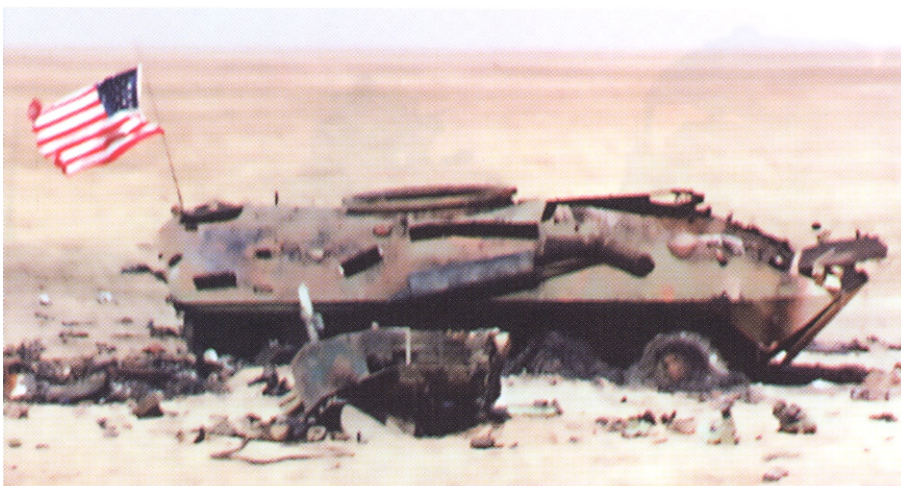
The battle at the observation post was

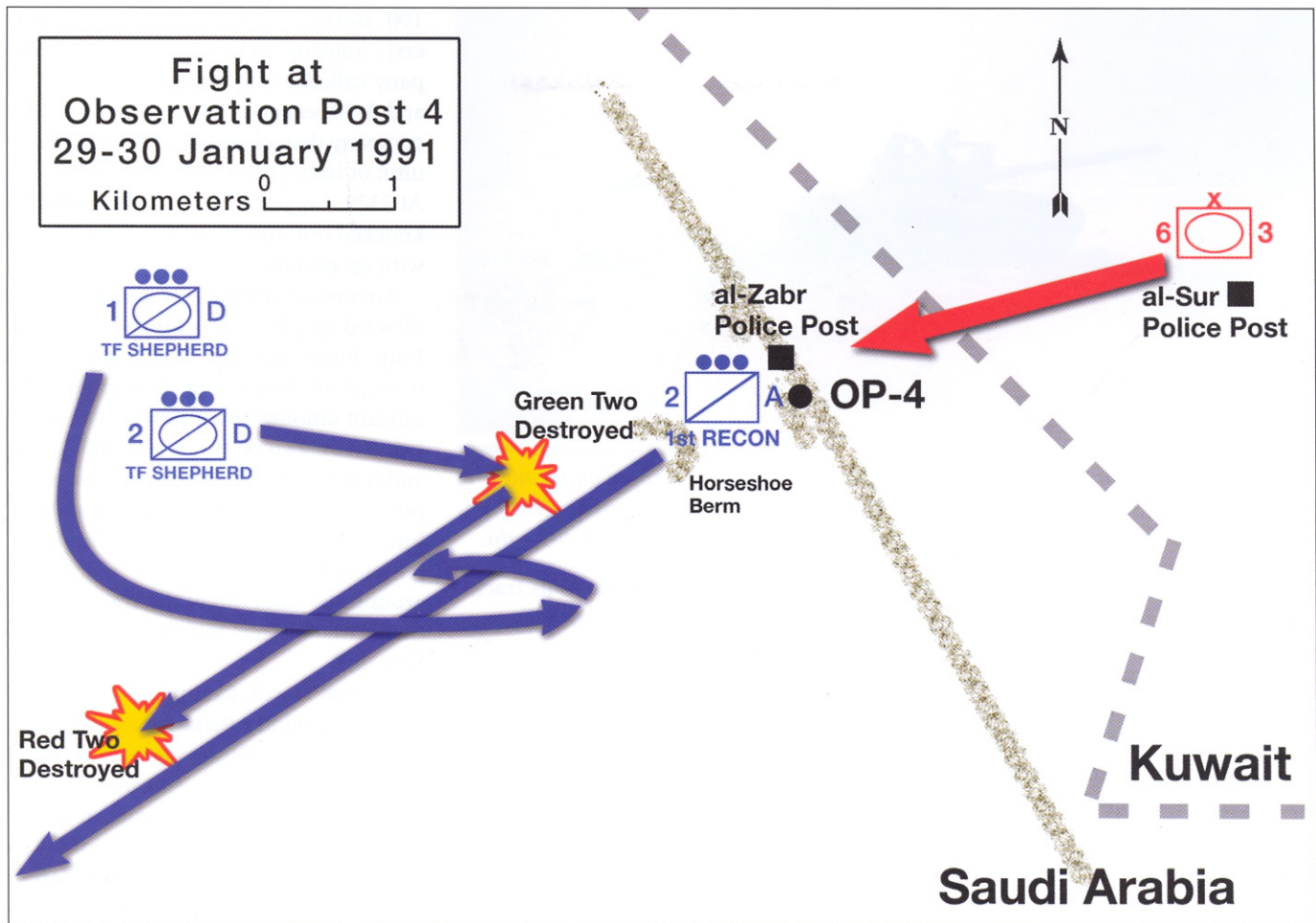
now under control as Coalition air support arrived in large numbers. "At that point, everything was going pretty well." Lieutenant Kendall later noted, "We started getting the air in. It was hitting the tanks down there, and we were just marking for the air by firing our main guns at the tanks and they were following the tracer rounds to them and hitting them with the air."<sup>80</sup> Hearing reports of some Iraqi tanks attempting to cross the berm further south, Captain Pollard withdrew the company approximately 5,000 meters from the observation post.

A section of Air Force A-10 Thunderbolts then arrived over the battlefield. Corporal Zawalick was controlling air support with live ammunition for the first time, but under Lieutenant Williams' guidance, he directed the incoming aircraft to their targets. But the A-10s were finding it difficult to identify the Iraqis. After two failed attempts, a Thunderbolt dropped a flare, which landed next to "Red Two," one of the company's LAV-25s. Corporal Zawalick informed the A-10 the flare had marked a friendly position, and directed them toward the enemy from the flare. Meanwhile, a rifleman jumped from "Red Two" to bury the flare, but as he did so the A-10 fired an AGM 65 Maverick air-to-ground missile which struck the LAV-25, destroying it and killing all of the crew that remained inside save the driver, who was ejected from the vehicle.<sup>81</sup> The investigation con-

*An American flag flies from the burnt hulk of "Red Two," which was destroyed by a malfunctioning air-to-surface antitank missile during the fight at Observation Post 4. Seven Marines were lost with the vehicle: LCpl Frank C. Allen, Cpl Stephen E. Bentzlin, LCpl Thomas A. Jenkins, LCpl Michael E. Linderman, Jr., LCpl James H. Lumpkins, Sgt Garrett A. Mongrella, and LCpl Dion J. Stephenson.*

Photo courtesy of Sgt Mark S. McDonnell





Map by W. Stephen Hill

ducted by I Marine Expeditionary Force after the battle determined that the most likely cause of the incident was a malfunction by the Maverick missile.<sup>82</sup>

Again there was confusion as Pollard tried to determine if “Red Two” had been destroyed by friendly or enemy fire. “That’s the first time, the first time I got scared,” he later remembered. “I didn’t know what had happened. I didn’t know where the bad guys were.”<sup>83</sup> There was some worry that the Iraqis had penetrated the berm and succeeded in out-flanking the company. As a result, Pollard reorganized the company into a screen line and pulled it back slowly.<sup>84</sup>

“The Marines, of that company, as the whole battalion, were calm,” said the commander of Task Force Shepherd, Lieutenant Colonel Clifford O. Myers III. “All of my conversations with Captain Pollard... were extremely calm and in total control. Even after the Maverick hit ‘em.”<sup>85</sup>

Despite the calm demeanor that Lieutenant Colonel Myers observed, Pollard’s company had lost one vehicle to fire from

its own air support and another was missing. With massive amounts of air support moving to the border, and other companies ready and able to move into contact, Lieutenant Colonel Myers ordered Company D to withdraw to the west and link up with Task Force Shepherd’s Company A, commanded by Captain Michael A. Shupp. Company D accomplished the maneuver shortly after midnight on the 30th. The remaining six LAV-ATs were transferred to Company A, and Company D was reorganized and resupplied behind Shupp’s company, which moved forward to screen Observation Post 4.<sup>86</sup>

The Iraqi perspective on the battle’s outcome at the observation post differed considerably from the American view. “Now this small [enemy] force consisted of armored vehicles equipped with a large number of the antitank weapons and the brigade informed us they had destroyed a number of tanks, stopping the brigade convoy,” General Salah Aboud remembered. “So, I ordered those fighting the enemy, to stop the enemy forces and let the brigade pass this resistance to the east,

and to move towards the brigade target without stopping. [The] 6th Armored Brigade moved deep into Saudi Arabia and the small resisting force was rolled over and the brigade caused a large amount of damage.”<sup>87</sup> There is no evidence that the flanking movement General Salah described penetrated more than a few hundred meters into Saudi Arabia, and the 3d Armored Division’s commander did not mention it. “Although, our troops continued by moving towards the targets, we faced a very strong ground resistance at al-Zabr supported by the Air Force and helicopters from the enemy.” As Brigadier General Hussan Zedin reported: “At 8 o’clock on 29 January, we executed our duty and we stayed in the area until the forces of Mohammad Al Qasim completed their duty and mission to occupy al-Khafji.”<sup>88</sup>\*

Whether or not it had entered into Saudi Arabia, the 6th Armored Brigade had accomplished its primary mission.

\* “Mohammad Al Qasim” was the honorific name for the 5th Mechanized Division.



Photo courtesy of MGySgt Gregory L. Gillispie

*The remains of two of the 6th Armored Brigade's T-62 tanks, destroyed on the night of 29 January 1991, lie abandoned on the sand in front of Observation Post 4. The Iraqis suffered severe materiel and equipment losses during the four-day Battle of al-Khafji.*

"All the airplanes of the enemy were over the brigade convoy and attacking the area," as General Salah explained. "The brigade had succeeded in capturing completely the attention of the enemy. And the enemy didn't observe any movement of our troops to occupy al-Khafji so at midnight, I instructed the 3d Armored Division to order the 6th Armored Brigade to go back towards Al Wahfra and their original positions."<sup>89</sup>

Supported by air, the Marines of a light armored vehicle company and a reconnaissance platoon had stopped the attack

of an Iraqi armored brigade in its tracks. The two units suffered 11 casualties, none of which was from enemy fire. The Marines at Observation Post 4 had not experienced combat before the attack on 29 January.

While the fight at Observation Post 4 was taking place, a brigade of the *5th Mechanized Division* attempted to cross into Saudi Arabia through the berm near Observation Post 1, then screened by Company A, 2d Light Armored Infantry Battalion, commanded by Captain Dennis M. Greene. At 2115, it observed "60-

*A Marine LAV-AT is positioned behind the sand berm that separated Saudi Arabia from Kuwait. Built to control the wanderings of nomadic Bedouin tribesmen, the berm offered a convenient demarcation of the border between Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Observation Post 5 can be seen in the background.*

Photo courtesy of Cpl Kenneth J. Lieuwen



100 BMPs [armored personnel carriers]...moving south with arty."\* The company called in air, reporting that AV-8s and A-10s engaged the Iraqi forces.<sup>90</sup> The company then observed a 29-vehicle column of Iraqi armor arriving at the berm. At 2320, Corporal Edmund W. Willis III knocked out one of the Iraqi T-62 tanks with an antitank missile.<sup>91</sup>

Greene's company continued to act as forward air controllers for strikes on the Iraqi forces moving across the berm throughout the evening. It received a significant amount of air power: five A-6s, two F-16s, two A-10s, and eight AV-8s, and reported 11 destroyed vehicles. Corporal Willis fired another missile at 0157, hitting the same T-62 as the Iraqis attempted to move it to the rear.<sup>92</sup> At around the same time, the Iraqis halted their attack and retreated back into Kuwait.<sup>93</sup>

Further north, Company C, 1st Light Armored Infantry Battalion established a screen between Observation Post 6 and Observation Post 5. Commanded by Captain Thomas R. Protzeller, it had a section of LAV-ATs attached, similar to Pollard's company at Observation Post 4. But unlike Company D, it had a section of General Dynamics LAV-Ms (a light armored vehicle variant armed with an M252 81mm mortar) attached. Originally, Protzeller's company screen line centered on Observation Post 5, but early on the evening of 29 January, the company had fired its mortars at suspected Iraqi forward observers. As a result, Major Jeffrey A. Powers, Task Force Shepherd's operations officer, ordered the company to withdraw from the berm in order to forestall any retaliatory Iraqi artillery fire.<sup>94</sup>

Protzeller's company observed the

\* Most sources confuse Observation Post 1 and Observation Post 2, but according to both the 2d Light Armored Infantry Battalion's command chronology, and the 1st ANGLICO's after action report, Observation Post 1 was in 2d Light Armored Infantry Battalion's area of operations and Observation Post 2 was in the Joint Forces Command-East area of operations. Most likely, this confusion resulted from the use of two conflicting methods of numbering the border observation posts. Originally, U.S. Army Special Forces teams numbered the observation posts as they occupied them, in chronological sequence rather than geographic sequence. The Marines later attempted to regularize the observation post designations, but the new system did not stick and only served to confuse the issue.



Photo courtesy of Cpl Kenneth J. Lieuwen

*Iraqi prisoners of war huddle near a fire to keep warm, while Marines of Task Force Shepherd examine the prisoner's weapons, an AK-74, RPK-74, two pistols, and two grenades. Although some prisoners were captured by Marine and Saudi forces during the Battle of al-Khafji, they did not surrender in the vast numbers taken during the later advance into Kuwait.*

fighting taking place to the south around Observation Post 4, but did not take part in the fight until around 2230 when it was ordered to occupy Observation Post 5 as a blocking force. Shortly thereafter, the company was informed that approximately 70 enemy vehicles were moving toward Observation Post 6, and it was ordered to block that position. Traveling along the berm, Protzeller's company advanced north cautiously; each platoon took turns covering the other. As it advanced the company fired antitank missiles at a group of Iraqi vehicles it spotted on the Saudi side of the berm. Once the company reached Observation Post 6, around 0100, it settled in and called airstrikes on the Iraqi infantry, who had occupied the post and on their vehicles that had retreated back to the Kuwaiti side of the berm. In the morning, many of the demoralized Iraqi soldiers surrendered with little fuss, others having apparently withdrawn.<sup>95</sup>

The 2d Light Armored Infantry Battalion's fight at Observation Post 1, and Company C, 1st Light Armored Infantry Battalion's fight at Observation Post 6

both ended early on the morning on 30 January, but the enemy made one last gasp at Observation Post 4 just after the sun rose at 0720. There Task Force Shepherd's Company A, under Captain Shupp, called in airstrikes from Air Force A-10s and Marine Corps F/A-18s. The air attack smashed this final Iraqi advance at the outpost.<sup>96</sup>

At dawn, Company A established a screen on the berm while Company D recovered its dead and secured Iraqi prisoners. The morning light revealed fully the destruction caused in the previous evenings fight. Pollard's company and its attached LAV-AT section had lost 11 Marines and two vehicles in the five hour battle at Observation Post 4, but destroyed approximately 22 Iraqi tanks and armored personnel carriers and killed scores of Iraqi soldiers. When the recovery effort was complete, Company A withdrew and Company D reestablished its position at Observation Post 4, which it was to hold for another 10 days.<sup>97</sup>

### *Assault on al-Khafji*

At Observation Post 2, Captain David

W. Landersman and his air-naval gunfire team heard a large number of vehicle noises approaching their position. Keenly aware of the fight at Observation Post 4 to their west, they requested air support but abandoned the outpost before the air support could be diverted from the fight at the western observation post.<sup>98</sup> Meanwhile, Iraqi artillery began firing on Captain Kleinsmith and his team at Observation Post 7, as well as south along the coast road. The two teams reported that the artillery fire was a combination of illumination and high explosive rounds.<sup>99</sup>

As Captain Kleinsmith's team was being shelled by the Iraqis, a mechanized Iraqi force attacked Observation Post 8 and Lieutenant Lang's team with "intense direct machine gun, recoilless rifle, and tank main gun fire."<sup>100</sup> Three different groups were stationed at Observation Post 8: Lang's fire control team team; a U.S. Navy SEAL detachment; and a team from 3d Force Reconnaissance Company. "After numerous illumination rounds, pop-up flares, and mortar rounds Fire Control Team 9 [FCT], south of OP-8, was overrun by APCs [armored person-

nel carriers] with the SEALs from OP-8 retreating just in front of the enemy APCs.”<sup>101</sup> Despite the heavy fire, all three teams managed to evade the Iraqi assault and fell back without suffering casualties. The SEAL and reconnaissance teams pulled back to al-Mishab, and Lieutenant Lang’s team joined 1st Surveillance, Reconnaissance, and Intelligence Group at the desalination plant.<sup>102</sup>

Three Saudi battalions had formed a screen along the Kuwaiti border in Joint Forces Command-East’s area of operations. Their orders, according to General Khaled, were clear: “to observe the movement of Iraqi troops and report the approach of hostile columns. They were not to engage the enemy or risk being taken prisoner. I did not want to give Saddam a propaganda victory. If the Iraqis crossed the border, they were to rejoin our main force further south.”<sup>103</sup>

The 5th Mechanized Battalion of the 2d Saudi Arabian National Guard Brigade, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Naif, had responsibility for the coast road and the surrounding area. The road itself was not covered; the vehicle assigned to it was repositioned closer to the rest of the unit, and the battalion was not in communication with the various American forces stationed in al-Khafji and the border observation posts. As the battalion advanced down the coast road, it came under enemy artillery fire, and pulled back before the Iraqi advance

without offering any resistance. Two battalions from the 8th and 10th Saudi Arabian National Guard Brigades, screening further inland, executed similar movements.<sup>104</sup> Unopposed by ground forces, the Iraqi 15th Mechanized Brigade drove south into al-Khafji, although it was struck by an Air Force Lockheed AC-130 Spectre gunship and Marine AH-1W Super Cobras.<sup>105</sup>

“As the APCs overran the forward position tank main gun and mortar rounds began impacting in the area of the desalination plant that SALT 5 [Supporting Arms Liaison Team 5] and SRIG [Surveillance, Reconnaissance, and Intelligence Group] forward occupied,” Captain James R. Braden of 1st ANGLICO explained. “SRIG [Surveillance, Reconnaissance, and Intelligence Group] forward ordered all teams in the city to pull out and head for the ‘safehouse’ in al-Khafji. A hasty meeting was held just south of the desalination plant between FCT 9 [Fire Control Team 9] and SALT 5 [Supporting Arms Liaison Team 5] to conduct a head count and confirm the rendezvous at the safehouse in the southern part of the city of Khafji.”<sup>106</sup>

Lieutenant Colonel Barry’s group and Lieutenant Lang’s team withdrew from the desalination plant to the southern outskirts of al-Khafji and established an observation post in a water tower, but the advancing 15th Mechanized Brigade forced the units to withdraw again.

Barry’s group headed south to al-Mishab, while Lieutenant Lang’s team rejoined other 1st ANGLICO teams with the Qatari brigade.<sup>107</sup>

Stationed on the east side of al-Khafji, near the beach, was a unit of Saudi Marines. Designed to emulate U.S. Marines, this newly formed Saudi force lacked equipment and their American Marine advisors who had not yet joined them. As Captain Molofsky later explained, they were “camped out—basically functioning at very low ebb.”<sup>108</sup> Joint Forces Command-East ordered the unit to withdraw just after midnight to al-Mishab and they took no further part in the battle.<sup>109</sup>

At this point in the battle, some bitterness arose on the part of the Saudis concerning the amount of air support being allocated to Joint Forces Command-East forces. In the face of the Iraqi advance, Major General Sultan “repeatedly called on the U.S. Marine Corps for air strikes to stop them.” As General Khaled later recounted: “He was in close touch with the Marines because they shared a sector. They had trained together and an American liaison officer was attached to his headquarters. But in spite of his pleas, no air strikes had taken place. Coalition aircraft had not moved.”<sup>110</sup> The resentment can be attributed in part to poor communications. Shortly after midnight, Major General Sultan had called for airstrikes against the 15th Mechanized Brigade as it

*During exercises prior to the beginning of the war, Marines rush to load antitank missiles onto an AH-1W Cobra of HMLA 369. The Cobras provided extensive close air support during the Battle of al-Khafji, both at the observation post battles and in the town proper.*

History Division Photo

