

drove south to al-Khafji. He claimed “that there had been no air attack,” when in fact an attack had taken place against the Iraqi column.¹¹¹ But primarily the Saudi impatience arose from differing priorities. The Americans viewed the Iraqi occupation of al-Khafji as a minor inconvenience that would soon be rectified, but for the Saudi kingdom it was an assault on their own sacred soil.

Saudi impatience could explain the perception of lack of air support, as well as inexperience in modern air-ground cooperation that the battle required. However, the Marines working alongside Joint Forces Command-East also supported the Saudi belief. As Captain Braden later wrote: “Little air support was available to the [Joint Forces Command-East] forces as the priority of effort was with the Marines to the west in repulsing the attack of the Iraqi *1st Mechanized Division* and elements of the *3d Armored Division*. The Marine fight had preceded the JFCE fight by a couple of hours and would remain the focus of effort throughout the night.”¹¹²

The fight at Observation Post 4 attracted the attention of Coalition aircraft right away. A later Air Force study found: “Marine and Air Force CAS [Close Air Support] began to arrive in front of OP-4 by 2130 local time. By 2300, three AC-130 gunships, two F-15Es, two ... F-16Cs, and four A-10s had joined the battle at OP-4.”¹¹³ Despite the rapid response to the fighting at Observation Post 4, all sources agree that the tactical air control center did not respond promptly to the initial Iraqi attacks. By most accounts, it was not until Brigadier General Buster C. Glosson, the director of campaign plans, entered the center on a routine check of current operations that someone thought to wake up Lieutenant General Charles A. Horner, the Joint Force Air Component Commander. Prior to that time, although the 3d Marine Aircraft Wing had responded to Marine calls for air support with alacrity, the tactical air control center remained focused on the evening’s strikes into Iraq. Once awakened, General Horner realized that this was a major Iraqi offensive, and a wonderful opportunity to strike at Iraqi forces while they were on the move and vulnerable. He re-focused the Coalition air effort into Kuwait accordingly.¹¹⁴

Much of the Marine air support for al-Khafji fell on the Cobras of Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 369, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Michael M. Kurth, and Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 367, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Terry J. Frerker.¹¹⁵ Because the arrangement with Joint Forces Air Component Command left Marine helicopters totally in support of the Marine air-ground task force, the Cobras were able to respond rapidly to the Iraqi offensive. Eight AH-1W Cobras responded to initial calls from the air-naval gunfire liaison Marines, ensuring that the Iraqi advance into al-Khafji was not unopposed. Not long after 0100 on the 30th, a flight of four Cobras from Kurth’s squadron, led by Major Michael L. Steele, engaged in a gun duel with six Iraqi armored personnel carriers on the coast road, reportedly pitting the helicopters’ 20mm Gatling guns and 2.75mm rockets against the armored personnel carriers’ 73mm main guns.¹¹⁶

Two AH-1Ws from Frerker’s squadron, led by Major Gary D. Shaw, had an even more hair-raising experience. Launching from al-Mishab to provide air support at Observation Post 4, they found themselves circling and waiting for a forward air controller to provide them with targets. Eager to support the Marines on the ground, they over stayed their fuel limits and attempted to reach the logistics base at Kibrit, only to find themselves flying over an Iraqi armored column which fired on them. They then attempted to divert back to al-Mishab, but their navigation equipment malfunctioned and they landed instead at the al-Khafji oil refinery. This was a stroke of luck. They refueled their aircraft from the refinery’s supplies as the Iraqis marched into the city. The unidentified fuel worked well and they were able to return to base.¹¹⁷

Another flight of Cobras, led by Captain Randal W. Hammond, destroyed four T-62 tanks. When nine Iraqi soldiers waved white flags and indicated they wished to surrender, they used their helicopters to “round ‘em up like cattle” until Marines on the ground could secure the prisoners. Iraqi artillery fire forced the section to withdraw, but not before one Cobra destroyed a final T-62 with a wire-guided missile. The explosion caused “its turret to flip upside down and land on the

open hole like a tiddlywinks,” Captain Hammond later recalled.¹¹⁸

A little after noon on the 29th, the Iraqis also dispatched 15 fast patrol boats from Ras al-Qulayah, as a U.S. Marine raiding force was taking Maradim Island. Apparently intending to land commandos at al-Khafji in support of *5th Mechanized Division*, the Iraqi boats were intercepted by Royal Air Force SEPECAT GR-1A Jaguar aircraft and Royal Navy Westland HMA.8 Lynx helicopters from HMS *Brazen*, *Cardiff*, and *Gloucester*. Other Coalition aircraft then continued the attack, destroying or severely damaging all of the Iraqi boats and landing forces.¹¹⁹

At Observation Post 7, Captain Kleinsmith continued to call for fire while forming a defensive perimeter with the U.S. Army Special Forces and Marine 3d Force Reconnaissance teams. An OV-10 Bronco arrived over the battlefield and worked with Captain Kleinsmith as the airborne forward air controller. He found it difficult to control airstrikes because the location of friendly forces was unclear. Looking north of the border, Captain Kleinsmith directed Intruder and Harrier sections in a strike against Iraqi artillery positions, while a flight of Cobras circled above. He thought the Cobras would prevent his team from being overrun as Observation Post 8 had been, and he was “trusting that their sheer intimidation would keep the enemy away from his position.” But as the Cobras circled overhead, the soldiers and Marines listened as Iraqi vehicles moved in the darkness around their position.¹²⁰

Captain Kleinsmith had been kept informed as the other air-naval gunfire teams withdrew through al-Khafji. When the Cobras circling above his position were forced to return to base due to low fuel, Captain Kleinsmith and the leaders of the other two teams at Observation Post 7 decided there was little reason to remain in place. The Special Forces team had two escape and evasion routes planned: one east to the coastal highway and then south to al-Khafji; the other traveling west to Observation Post 2 and then south across the desert. Both routes appeared to be cut off by Iraqi forces, so Captain Kleinsmith led the teams’ humvees south, directly into the *sabkhas*. He hoped the heavier Iraqi armor would



Photo courtesy of LtCol Douglas R. Kleinsmith

Capt Douglas R. Kleinsmith poses with his air-ground liaison team. Capt Kleinsmith is on the left, and to the right are Cpl John D. Calhoun, Cpl Steve F. Foss, and Cpl Edward E. Simons, Jr. On the night of 29-30 January 1991 Kleinsmith's team was cut off from Coalition forces by the Iraqi advance. They evaded the enemy by maneuvering through the sabkhas and returned to Coalition lines.

not follow them into the salt marsh.¹²¹

The teams departed at 0230 as Iraqi artillery fire briefly pursued them. They suffered no casualties. Kleinsmith's group remained in radio contact with the OV-10, which was now free to call in airstrikes around the observation post. As it drove south it discovered "the remnants of the SANG [Saudi Arabian National Guard] screening force camps, complete with boiling tea on the fires just outside their tents."¹²² At approximately 0330, Kleinsmith ordered a halt, worried that the teams might come under friendly fire if they attempted to join up with a Saudi unit in the darkness. They remained deep in the salt marshes until daybreak.¹²³

The Iraqi View

At 1800 on 29 January, General Salah Aboud shifted from his main headquarters to his mobile headquarters so he could better control the upcoming battle. Despite Coalition air attacks, as night fell on the 29th the Iraqi offensive was progressing according to plan. At 2000, the various brigades of the 5th Mechanized, 1st Mechanized, and 3d Armored Divisions crossed their lines of departure and

began the attack. As General Salah Aboud later observed: "The troops faced some difficulties executing these missions. The territory of one mission faced the road, which was hard for all the mechanized equipments to use, and for that reason, this mechanized brigade didn't have another choice, except to occupy their targets by walking. Still, all the troops reached the targets on time. And this actually deceived the enemy."¹²⁴

In particular, the 15th Mechanized and 26th Mechanized Brigades of the 5th Mechanized Division passed through Ragawa at 2000. At this point, the Iraqi artillery began firing flares that they could use to navigate through the desert. While moving into position they observed the withdrawal of Coalition forces from the border observation posts.¹²⁵ Although the Iraqi mechanized forces had difficulties in the *sabkhas*, they reached their objectives on time. A convoy from the 22d Mechanized Brigade met no resistance at Saudi border stations, and its arrival along the beach completed the encirclement of al-Khafji. The 26th Mechanized Brigade, encountering no resistance, returned to its positions in Kuwait after its role of de-

fending the Western flank of the 15th Mechanized Brigade was complete.¹²⁶

General Salah Aboud kept his promise, delivering the city of al-Khafji at 0200 on the 30th as a present to Saddam Hussein. The supporting attacks had all run into heavy resistance and been stopped with high loss of life, but al-Khafji was in Iraqi hands. Now the Iraqis had to decide how long they needed to hold the city in order to accomplish their objective of provoking a major ground war.

The Iraqi Army Chief of Staff then contacted General Salah Aboud and asked for his predictions and recommendations. The general replied that "when the enemy discovers the size of my force, he will focus his air effort on it," but that "the time we have until morning will not be enough to pull back from al-Khafji." General Salah recommended that his troops pull back the next night, the evening of the 30-31 January, "after this great victory we achieved without any damage." He noted "the first night was passed without any specific operations from the enemy side."¹²⁷

Although the Iraqis occupied al-Khafji, they were not alone. The 3d

Marines had a pair of reconnaissance teams in the city on 29 January; they had not left with the air-naval gunfire and special operations forces. They were in contact with their platoon commander, Captain Daniel K. Baczkowski, at 3d Marines' headquarters, who had informed the 3d Marines commander, Colonel John Admire, of the teams' locations. Colonel Admire ordered the teams to remain in place.¹²⁸

Corporal Lawrence M. Lentz commanded a seven-man team comprising Corporals Scott A. Uskoski, Scott A. Wagner, Lance Corporals Marcus C. Slavenas, Alan L. Cooper, Jr., Jude A. Woodarek, and Hospital Mate Carlos Dayrit. Corporal Charles H. Ingraham III commanded a six-man team consisting of Corporal Jeffery D. Brown, Lance Corporals Harold S. Boling, David S. McNamee, Patrick A. Sterling, and Hospital Mate 1st Class Kevin Callahan. The teams were part of 3d Platoon, Company A, 3d Reconnaissance Battalion. Company A had been attached to 1st Reconnaissance Battalion for Operations Desert Shield and Storm.¹²⁹

The intent of the 3d Marines' staff was that these teams, hidden within the town, would provide a valuable view of the city during a counterattack. However, in practice they were a liability, as Captain Molofsky later explained. Their presence

affected the "ability to conduct the counter-attack, because we're not even sure where they're at," he said. "They did not even have restricted fire areas around them. Well, maybe they did, maybe they didn't. But that wasn't translated to us, so that when we want to do this counter attack and want to prep it with artillery; we don't know where the Recon teams are."¹³⁰

The teams were not aware of these issues. They carefully prepared their observation posts, set out claymore mines in case the Iraqis discovered their positions, and attempted to call artillery fire and airstrikes on the Iraqi forces they observed. They were not always successful; artillery support was sometimes refused because the teams did not know where Saudi or air-naval gunfire units were, and air support was still being sent primarily to the fight at Observation Post 4.¹³¹

30 January

By the morning of the 30th, the fierce battles of the night before had ended. It became clear that the Iraqis had halted, and while the fighting had been intense for those at the front, for the I Marine Expeditionary Force staff the Iraqi offensive left a feeling of bemusement. At the morning briefing on the 30th, General Boomer observed: "Other than our losses, I am not unhappy with last night. It proceeded as it should.... My only concern is

that we get something out to kill [the Iraqi force] before it gets back up into Kuwait."¹³² "I believe that my feeling," he said later, "was that if they're trying that now, they're going to play right into our hands.... Then as it became clear that they were trying to do something of significance we began to react. I think by that point the MEF staff was at the point where it could handle this kind of thing without it being some huge crisis."¹³³

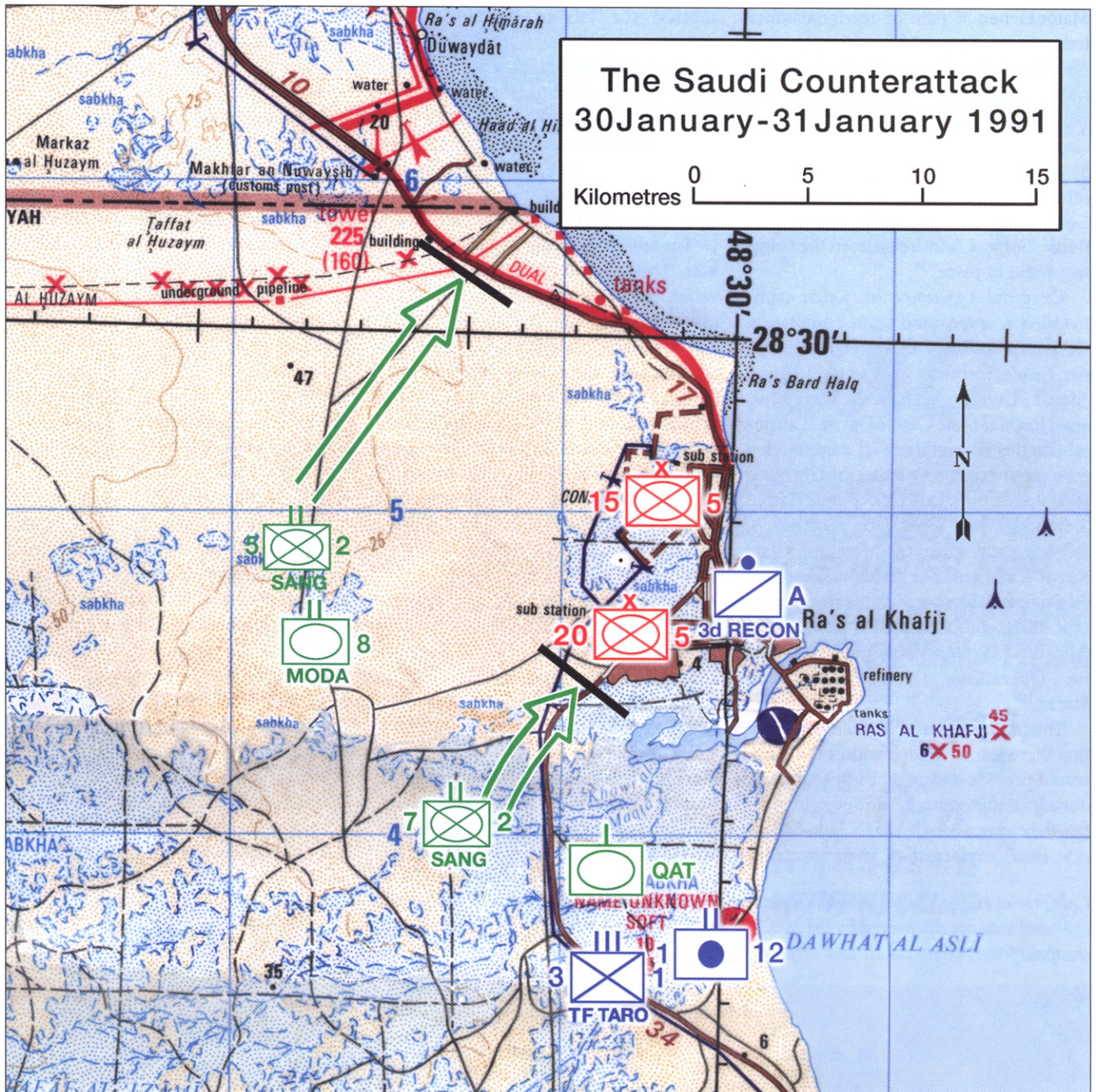
General Khaled had a less sanguine view of the invasion. The Saudis understood how easily Saddam could turn even a battlefield disaster into a propaganda victory. They simply could not accept the loss of Saudi territory, even for a short while. When he received the news of the attack he "felt a great deal of anxiety."¹³⁴ King Fahd ibn Abdul Aziz of Saudi Arabia was often in contact. "King Fahd wanted quick results, and rightly so. He wanted the enemy force expelled at once. He wished to deny Saddam the chance of showing the world that he could invade Saudi Arabia and get away with it. He telephoned me a number of times, calling for action."¹³⁵ Faced with such pressure General Khaled did not consider al-Khafji a minor skirmish.

As dawn broke in the *sabkha* west of al-Khafji, Captain Kleinsmith's small caravan spotted unidentified tanks in the distance. His men mounted up and proceeded

Cpl Charles H. Ingraham's reconnaissance team used this building in al-Khafji throughout the battle as their observation post. Although the team was not discovered by the Iraqis, the building was hit by fire from Iraqis and Saudis during the night engagements, as well as shrapnel from American air and artillery strikes.

Photo courtesy of Cpl Charles H. Ingraham III





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

south to Saudi Arabian lines. At this point, the Special Forces and 3d Force Reconnaissance teams departed for al-Mishab, while Captain Kleinsmith and his Marines moved to the 2d Saudi Arabian National Guard Brigade headquarters, joining the main body of 1st ANGLICO.¹³⁶

Meanwhile, other 1st ANGLICO teams were spread among the Saudi and Qatari forces that were preparing to retake the city and push the Iraqis back into Kuwait. Captain Mark S. Gentil's Supporting Arms Liaison Team 5, First Lieutenant Bruce D. McIlvried's Fire Control Team 13, and

First Lieutenant Kurtis E. Lang's Fire Control Team 9 were assigned to the Qatari Brigade, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Ali Saeed. Each of the fire control teams joined with one of the brigade's battalions, while the supporting arms liaison team acted as the fire support coordinator. Each battalion had a company of AMX-30 tanks attached as well.¹³⁷

Captain James R. Braden's Supporting Liaison Team 6 was attached to Colonel Turki al-Firmi's 2d Saudi Arabian National Guard Brigade. Captain Braden's team acted as a central clearing house for

all supporting fire and allowed Colonel Turki to use the Marine communications net to keep track of his battalions. Fire Control Team 12, commanded by Captain John C. Bley II, was assigned to the 8th Battalion, 2d Saudi National Guard Brigade, along with Captain Mark V. Dillard's team from Supporting Arms Liaison Team 2. Dillard's team originally was assigned to a Moroccan unit south of al-Mishab but was called forward to assist in the battle.¹³⁸

Responsible for the defense of al-Khafji and the coastal region, Saudi

Major General Sultan 'Adi al-Matiri's initial plan of action was to cut off the Iraqi forces in al-Khafji and convince them to surrender. His intention was to avoid a potentially costly battle within the city.¹³⁹ To this end he dispatched the 5th Battalion, 2d Saudi Arabian National Guard Brigade, north of al-Khafji as a blocking force, supported by a company from the 8th Ministry of Defense and Aviation Brigade, equipped with M60 Patton tanks. He placed the Qatari Brigade, supported by the 7th Battalion, 2d Saudi Arabian National Guard Brigade, in positions to block the road south from al-Khafji.¹⁴⁰

Once established just south of the city, the Qatari Brigade began to engage targets of opportunity within the city. A platoon of Iraqi T-55 tanks emerged and engaged the Qatari AMX-30s, resulting in the destruction of three T-55s and the capture of a fourth. Iraqi prisoners revealed that there was close to an enemy "brigade in the city and another brigade was to join it."¹⁴¹ In response, General Sultan bolstered the northern blocking force by committing the balance of the 8th Ministry of Defense and Aviation Brigade's armored battalion. The southern force was reinforced with the 8th Battalion, 2d Saudi Arabian National Guard, in addition to M113 armored personnel carriers equipped with antitank missile launchers from the 8th Ministry of Aviation and Defense Brigade.¹⁴²

At 1152 on 30 January, 1st Battalion, 12th Marines, the Marine artillery battalion assigned to support the Saudi attack on al-Khafji, reported it had already expended 136 rounds of dual purpose improved conventional munitions and eight rounds of high explosive munitions.¹⁴³ The Cobra attack helicopters of Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 367 continued to support the Marines along the frontier and in al-Khafji. For the same period, the squadron reported one tank, seven armored personnel carriers, one jeep, and one truck destroyed.¹⁴⁴

At noon, Colonel Turki al-Firmi met with Colonel Admire. Colonel Turki was in command of the Saudi force specifically tasked with retaking al-Khafji. Captain Braden, the 1st ANGLICO officer assigned to Colonel Turki's brigade, observed the meeting. Colonel Admire told Colonel Turki that Marine reconnaissance teams were still in al-Khafji and

briefed him on the 3d Marine plan to remove them from the city. Captain Braden recalled that "Col Turki stated that the city was his and that he had a tasking from 'Riyadh' to rescue the Marine Recon teams.... Col Turki asked if the Marines lacked trust in the Saudi abilities to perform their mission of defending their sector? The question of sector defense seemed moot at this point as the Iraqis were in control of al-Khafji, but the matter of trust between Coalition partners was in question."¹⁴⁵ Admire agreed and offered support.

Battery C, and later Battery A, 1st Battalion, 12th Marines, provided artillery fire, and a combined antiarmor team from 3d Marines moved to the gas station four kilometers south of al-Khafji.¹⁴⁶ Despite Saudi desires to fight the battle on their own, Marine air-naval gunfire liaison teams provided critical communications to the Saudis and coordinated artillery and air support. In addition, U.S. Army advisors from the Office of Program Manager for Modernization of the Saudi Arabian National Guard and civilian advisors from the Vinnell Corporation fought throughout the battle alongside their assigned Saudi units.

Colonel Admire said that acting as the supporting force was "one of the most difficult decisions I've ever had to make."¹⁴⁷ The decision to have the Saudis lead the attack to free al-Khafji shaped the rest of the battle. Marines would observe and aid their Coalition partners, but the

Saudis and Qataris did the heavy fighting from this point on.¹⁴⁸

As plans were being made to liberate al-Khafji, another strange event in the battle occurred. Two U.S. Army tractor-trailer heavy equipment transporters from the 233d Transportation Company drove into the city. The drivers were lost, unaware that they were in al-Khafji, and that an Iraqi offensive had occurred. One of the reconnaissance teams watched in horror as the two tractor-trailers drove into town, only to be met by a hail of fire from the Iraqis. The first of the two trucks was disabled and crashed, Iraqi fire having wounded its driver and assistant driver as well as disabling the steering. The second truck performed "the fastest U-turn in history, like he was a VW bug" and fled.¹⁴⁹ The Iraqis quickly overwhelmed and captured the two wounded soldiers, Specialist David Lockett and Specialist Melissa Rathbun-Nealy, whom were quickly transported back to Kuwait. Specialist Rathbun-Nealy was the first American female soldier captured since World War II. The two were not freed until after the war.¹⁵⁰

Soon after the Army trucks disappeared into al-Khafji, Major Craig S. Huddleston was informed of their disappearance. On Colonel Admire's orders, 3d Battalion, 3d Marines, established an outpost, Check Point 67, south of the city to coordinate with the Saudis. Major Huddleston, the battalion's executive officer, was given command of the outpost.

The Saudi National Guard battalions, which freed al-Khafji from the Iraqis, employed Cadillac Gage V-150 Commando light armored vehicles, some of which were equipped with a M220 launcher for the BGM-71 TOW antitank missile.

DVIC DF-ST-91-04523





Photo courtesy of Capt Charles G. Grow

The water tower in southern al-Khafji was heavily damaged during the battle. It was a favorite target for both Iraqi and Saudi troops, and was strafed at least once by U.S. Marine Cobra helicopters.

He quickly formed a patrol to enter the town and recover the two soldiers; every one of the 128 Marines at the outpost volunteered to go, but he only took about 30 Marines. Huddleston mounted the patrol in humvees, including antitank missile and heavy machine gun vehicles, and headed for the city.¹⁵¹

Al-Khafji was still in a state of confusion. As the patrol raced into the town, they encountered some Iraqis but had no major fire fights. The Marines found the disabled tractor-trailer, but not the missing soldiers despite shouts of "U.S. Marines, U.S. Marines!" There was a short engagement with Iraqi armored personnel carriers, which Major Huddleston directed a pair of Cobras against. The patrol also found a destroyed Qatari AMX-30 tank and its dead crew. Disappointed, the Marines returned to the outpost. "We wanted to get them [the missing soldiers] pretty bad," Major Huddleston later said.¹⁵²

Journalists, prevented by the prevailing press system and Saudi prohibitions against observing the battle in al-Khafji, began to congregate south of the town. Several spoke with Major Huddleston and others from the patrol, which led to a

misunderstanding. The Coalition explained in press conferences that Saudi and Qatari forces were freeing al-Khafji, but the journalists who spoke with Major Huddleston mistook his brief patrol for a major Marine assault. They concluded that the Marines were doing the major fighting at al-Khafji, but that the Coalition was, for political reasons, giving credit for the battle to the Saudis. This myth was to persist; the belief that the military had lied to the press concerning al-Khafji would sour military-media relations long after the Gulf War ended.¹⁵³

Meanwhile, General Khaled arrived at the Joint Forces Command-East headquarters south of al-Khafji. He was agitated, since King Fahd was pressuring him to liberate the city as quickly as possible. He also was upset about what he considered a lack of promised air from the Marine Corps. He contacted General Horner. "I told him I wanted air support as well as strikes by B-52s to break up Iraqi concentrations and prevent reinforcements reaching al-Khafji, even if it meant diverting air assets from the air campaign against strategic targets inside Iraq. Minimize raids on strategic targets and maximize them at al-Khafji, I urged him."¹⁵⁴

General Horner saw the developing battle as an opportunity to inflict maximum losses on the Iraqis, but he did not consider the B-52 to be the proper weapon to use in this situation. He told General Khaled the same thing he routinely told ground commanders: "Don't tell me how to do the job. Tell me what you want done."¹⁵⁵

Unsatisfied, General Khaled phoned Brigadier General Ahmad al-Sudairi, Saudi Director of Air Operations, an hour after he spoke to General Horner. "Forget about the Joint Forces. If the U.S. Air Force or the Marines don't come at once, I want you to take our air assets out of the Coalition and send them all to me! I need the Tornados, the F-5s, everything you've got!"¹⁵⁶ A few moments later the air assets General Horner had already designated for al-Khafji began to arrive. General Khaled was convinced his threat had worked and as General Boomer later said: "Ultimately, it was our air support that turned the tide for them."¹⁵⁷

In addition to his distress over the lack of air, the two Marine teams in the city

also presented General Khaled with a problem. "I was extremely worried that Schwartzkopf might use American troops, either U.S. Marines in an amphibious attack or a heliborne U.S. Army unit, to free *my* town in *my* sector. The shame would have been difficult to bear." Consequently, he ordered Major General Sultan's plan to talk the Iraqis into surrendering be abandoned, and an immediate assault launched against the city.¹⁵⁸

Given orders from General Khaled to attack at once, General Sultan passed the order to Colonel Turki, who in turn assigned the task of assaulting al-Khafji to Lieutenant Colonel Hamid Matar's 7th Battalion, 2d Saudi Arabian National Guard Brigade, supported by two Qatari tank companies.¹⁵⁹

Captain Molofsky, the 3d Marines liaison officer, observed the Saudi preparations for battle. "Matar's Battalion is just really lined up on the road, you know – out into the desert a little bit, into Check Point 67. It's a beehive.... And, Matar's orders are to attack. And, that's it, you know—nothing else. Attack." Matar's battalion had received the order to attack at 1600, but it was not in position until 2000. Captain Molofsky observed that Matar was "really nervous; smoking cigarettes, pacing back and forth."¹⁶⁰

There was a 15 minute preparatory fire by 1st Battalion, 12th Marines, and then the 7th Battalion literally charged forward against al-Khafji. "Out of nowhere, vehicles start up and people start driving forward," observed Captain Molofsky, who joined the 7th Battalion for the attack. The Saudi battalion drove straight up the middle of the road, but the Qatari tanks pulled to the side as the force approached al-Khafji. As the first couple Saudi vehicles entered under the arches of the city, "the whole place lights up," Molofsky said. "I mean a whole lot of directed fire, straight down the road ... just a firestorm of tracers, and tank main gun. And I notice a V-150 blow up, or it looked like it blew up, about 30 meters off to the side of the road."¹⁶¹

The Saudi attack was disorganized and undisciplined; they expended massive amounts of ammunition fired wildly into the city, as 1st ANGLICO reported afterwards. At one point, Qatari tanks fired on their Saudi allies although quick action by Captains Dillard and Gentil

ended the fire before any casualties were taken. Still, the undisciplined fire and scattered assault was suspected to have caused two Saudi deaths.¹⁶²

Lieutenant Colonel Michael Taylor was the U.S. Army advisor to the 7th Battalion and he aided Lieutenant Colonel Matar throughout the battle.¹⁶³ Throughout the night Saudi and Qatari soldiers fought against the Iraqi forces, suffering fire so heavy that Taylor, a Vietnam War veteran, described it as “flabbergasting.”¹⁶⁴ But the Saudis and Qataris did not hesitate to return fire, as Captain Molofsky noted: “Qatari tanks came back up the road and were shooting up from behind and, at one point, the volume of fire got so heavy that we all got out of the truck and took cover in a ditch and you know the Saudis were shooting TOW missiles up in the air. Once they started shooting, they were shooting. I mean everybody was shooting at the max rate.”¹⁶⁵

Despite their efforts, the 7th Battalion was not able to retake al-Khafji nor was it able to relieve the reconnaissance teams still trapped within the city.¹⁶⁶ Captain Molofsky later recalled the engagement’s surreal conclusion: “We pulled back into defilade in a small depression, just south

of the city, and they [the Saudis] got out of the vehicles and they put their cloaks on, built fires and brewed up coffee, and then they prayed. I think my sense then was that the team couldn’t have been much different than if they were riding with Lawrence except that they were mechanized vehicles instead of horses. Really extraordinary.”¹⁶⁷

North of al-Khafji

At nightfall, Lieutenant Colonel Naif’s 5th Battalion, 2d Saudi Arabian National Guard Brigade, moved into position to block Iraqi movement in and out of al-Khafji from the north. The battalion was soon reinforced by a battalion of the 8th Ministry of Defense and Aviation Brigade, companies of which drifted north throughout the night. Iraqi forces attempted several times to reinforce al-Khafji, but Coalition air support was now available in copious amounts, and the air-naval gunfire teams attached to the 5th Battalion were able to call F/A-18s, AV-8s, and A-10s down on the Iraqi forces, inflicting a large number of casualties and forcing an even larger number of Iraqi troops to surrender to the Saudis.¹⁶⁸ The Saudis claimed 5 Iraqi vehicles destroyed,

6 captured, and 116 prisoners taken.¹⁶⁹

The engagements were not without problems. The lack of joint training between the Saudi Arabian National Guard and Ministry of Defense and Aviation forces led the 8th Ministry of Defense and Aviation Battalion’s commander to fear that the two Saudi forces might fire on each other, so in the morning he pulled back to refuel and rearm. This kept the Saudis from completely sealing al-Khafji at the end of the first night of battle, allowing a few Iraqi units to escape back into Kuwait.¹⁷⁰

Coalition airpower was now focused on the al-Khafji area, taking advantage of the Iraqi offensive to strike at their forces which had previously remained hidden. The E-8C Joint Surveillance and Target Acquisition Radar System aircraft were used to track Iraqi movements in Kuwait. “The new JSTARS system proved a vital asset in beating back the Iraqi attacks,” an Air Force study noted. “An airborne radar that could monitor enemy vehicle traffic at night with impressive clarity, JSTARS was an indispensable element in ensuring the efficient and effective use of Coalition aircraft.”¹⁷¹ The tactical air control center was focusing aircraft on al-Khafji and in-

Marines of 1st Battalion, 12th Marines, prepare an M198 155mm howitzer. The battalion fired numerous missions in support of Saudi and U.S. Marine forces during the Battle of al-Khafji.

History Division Photo



terdiction missions in southern Kuwait.

But the success of the air interdiction was not without loss. A U.S. Air Force AC-130, call sign "Spirit Zero Three," remained over its targets as the sun came up despite the policy that AC-130s only be employed at night. An Iraqi surface-to-air missile struck the aircraft, killing its 14-man crew.¹⁷²

The massive effort had an effect on the Iraqi forces. General Salah Aboud had already begun requesting permission to withdraw. Although the offensive was termed "The Mother of Battles" by Saddam, General Salah radioed that "The

mother was killing her children."¹⁷³

31 January

Early in the morning on 31 January, Batteries A and C, 1st Battalion, 12th Marines, attached to the 3d Marines, fired an improved conventional munitions mission into al-Khafji under the control of the Marine reconnaissance teams inside the town.¹⁷⁴ Corporals Ingraham and Lentz, the team leaders, requested the artillery strike on a large Iraqi column between their positions at 0645. Initially, clearance was denied by 3d Marines fire support control center, but the mission

was approved at 0701. At 0705, Batteries A and C responded to the call for fire. At 0740, 1st Battalion, 12th Marines, was told by the fire support control center that all future fire missions had to be approved by the air-naval gunfire teams attached to the Saudi forces.¹⁷⁵

The barrage was a success from the perspective of the Marines inside al-Khafji, as it landed a solid blow against the Iraqis and essentially eliminated the Iraqi column. But it was placed dangerously close to their positions; Corporal Jeffrey Brown received a wound from the shrapnel.¹⁷⁶

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

