

es. An extensive MedCAP was conducted concurrent with the cross training. Highlight of the exercise was President Bush's participation in the 4th MEB's Thanksgiving services on the 23d.<sup>97</sup>

The post-exercise critique was held at I MEF Headquarters at Jubayl. It uncovered several operational flaws. There were communications and deconfliction problems that hampered inter-Service operations. The need for more effective control measures was underscored. Hopes to use a helicopter assault force as a maneuver element did not work out. At the close of the conference, plans for a 4th MEB amphibious exercise at Madrasah were refined to correct the noted flaws.

Despite poor weather, Imminent Thunder was judged a successful training exercise. Valuable lessons in fire support coordination, land navigation, and communications were learned. The 2d Topographic Platoon detachment used its time ashore to update the 4th MEB's 1:50,000 maps and the intelligence section presented up-to-date enemy order of battle briefs to Generals Gray and Milligan. The chance to get off the ships was appreciated by all hands. At the end of the exercise the AH-1W Super Cobra helicopters of HMLA-269 which had been attached to the 3d MAW for the initial phase of Operation Desert Shield were returned to 4th MEB and were embarked on the *Shreveport* and the *Raleigh*.<sup>98</sup> While the post-exercise conference was held, the 4th MEB embarkation section assembled serial assignment tables and loaded the ships for upcoming Exercise Sea Soldier III.

### *Training at Al Hamra*

In early December, Company D, 2d Light Armored Infantry Battalion, and Battery A, 1st Battalion, 10th Marines, debarked from the *Gunston Hall* and conducted five days of intense training at Al Hamra in the United Arab Emirates. Company D worked on 25mm and coaxial gunnery while operating in a wide variety of mission-oriented protective posture levels. Battery A perfected artillery and mortar fire direction center procedures and conducted quick firing and hasty displacement procedures associated with artillery raids. Small arms and crew-served weapons were battle-sighted. Integrated unit training included extended ground operations featuring night movement techniques and tactical control of close air support and air delivery aircraft.<sup>99</sup>

### *Sea Soldier III*

Sea Soldier III was a rehearsal for a brigade-size night landing using heliborne and surface assaults. Training realism was of paramount importance, so the 4th MEB intelligence section, headed by Lieutenant Colonel Michael M. Bullen, used a 60 x 100-foot sand table to represent specific landing areas in Kuwait. The model was detailed to show, individual buildings, minefields, barriers, and barbed wire. Index cards were used to identify enemy units and mark the latest Iraqi dispositions.

The training objectives were: conduct a limited visibility amphibious assault

using strict electronic emissions control; establish aviation assault support ashore; improve aviation night vision capabilities; and phase the brigade command element ashore without interrupting operations. Additional objectives were to conduct: a force-on-force field training exercise; demolition and mine clearance training; detailed vehicle and equipment maintenance; a mass casualty evacuation in a simulated chemical contaminated environment; and extensive medical and dental civic action projects.

Sea Soldier III was the largest landing exercise to date. More than 3,500 troops and 1,000 vehicles were brought ashore at Ras Al Madrasah from 8 to 18 December. The assault was conducted during hours of darkness with the landing force observing an electronic blackout. After a force-on-force exercise to capture inland objectives ended, an extensive maintenance standdown was instituted. The final stage of training was a phased withdrawal to amphibious shipping.<sup>100</sup>

Logistics was an important part of Sea Soldier III, particularly debarkation and maintenance. The landing saw expanded use of causeway operations to support vehicle and equipment debarkation. A helicopter detachment was moved ashore to provide assault support. A limited offload of follow-on supplies from the MSC ships *Bonnyman* and *Baugh* was made to practice the use of roll-on/roll-off ships to support landing operations. It was found that embarked equipment was badly in need of both preventive and corrective maintenance. A large shipment of spare parts arrived and were passed quickly to using units in the landing force. The final touch was adding a coat of desert tan paint to cover the existing woodland camouflage before the vehicles and equipment were reembarked.

The 4th MEB conducted both a medical exercise and a medical civic action program. The exercise was designed to evaluate patient accountability and reporting methods, to simulate care in forward treatment areas, to refine communications procedures, and to practice triage and evacuation procedures. The scenario simulated all types of casualties: wounded; non-battle deaths; chemical casualties; and killed-in-action. All procedures were done in a simulated nuclear-chemical-biological contaminated environment. Patients were decontaminated, evaluated, and evacuated from battalion and regimental aid stations to the beach evacuation station, then to designated care-providing ships as applicable. The MedCAP treated 688 patients in four days and was so successful that the Sultan of Oman sent a "well done" through diplomatic channels.<sup>101</sup>

## Assembling the 5th MEB

### *Background*

In the early summer of 1990, the I Marine Expeditionary Force was located at Camp Pendleton, California. The 7th MEB, designated the I MEF fly-in brigade, was located at Marine Corps Air-Ground Combat Center, Twentynine Palms, in California's Mojave Desert. The 5th MEB was at Camp Pendleton where it served as the seaborne brigade of I MEF. Contingency plans called for the 5th MEB to draw its ground combat element from the 1st Marine Division at Camp Pendleton; the aviation combat element, Marine Aircraft Group 50, would use 3d

Marine Aircraft Wing units at Tustin, El Toro, and Camp Pendleton; and Brigade Service Support Group 5 (BSSG 5) would use detachments from the 1st Force Service Support Group at Camp Pendleton to provide logistics support.

The modern 5th MEB was the descendant of the 5th Marine Brigade which was sent to France near the end of World War I.<sup>102</sup> During the Cold War several provisional 5th MEBs were intermittently activated for training exercises and combat contingencies. A hastily formed 5th MEB sailed through the Panama Canal to join the 4th MEB in the Caribbean during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. An interim 5th Marine Amphibious Brigade (5th MAB) was activated at Camp Pendleton in 1969 to fill the gap between the deactivation of the 5th Marine Division and the return of the 1st Marine Division from Vietnam.<sup>\*103</sup> A permanent 5th MAB was created on 1 July 1985 as part of a major reorganization of the Fleet Marine Forces. In 1988 the 5th MAB was redesignated the 5th MEB. In addition to its training and operational responsibilities, the 5th MEB had administrative control of three Marine expeditionary units that rotated duties as the Landing Force Seventh Fleet in the Western Pacific about every six months.

In June 1990, Brigadier General Peter J. Rowe assumed command of the 5th MEB after serving as the assistant division commander of the 1st Marine Division for almost a year. In keeping with the amphibious nature of the MEB, General Rowe was "dual-hatted," serving concurrently as Commanding General, 5th MEB, at Camp Pendleton, and Commanding General, Landing Force Training Command Pacific, at the Naval Amphibious Base, Coronado, California. A native of Stamford, Connecticut and a graduate of Xavier University, he saw combat in Vietnam. After returning to the United States, General Rowe received a Master's Degree from San Diego State University in 1973, earned the Velasquez Award at the Marine Corps Command and Staff College in 1977, and graduated from the Naval War College with "highest distinction" in 1980.<sup>104</sup>

On 1 August 1990, the 5th MEB command element was standing down after returning from a training exercise in Florida. Most of the staff were on leave and those scheduled to remain after the annual personnel turnover were assigned to the I MEF command element. In mid-July the 5th MEB command element had been sent to join General Schwarzkopf, the Central Command staff, and other Service component representatives for a grueling eight-day command post exercise at Eglin Air Force Base in Florida. Exercise Internal Look 90 was designed to test newly developed Central Command Operations Plan 1002-90. When General Schwarzkopf took over Central Command, he was unhappy with the existing contingency plans which viewed a Soviet invasion of Iran as the most likely threat to American interests in the region. He felt the end of the Cold War and political changes inside Iran made Iraq the most likely threat to stability in the Persian Gulf. In response, General Schwarzkopf drew up an exercise scenario in which Iraqi-like Red Forces threatened the Arabian Peninsula and its vital oil reserves. The Central Command Blue Forces were tasked to defend northeast

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\*The term "Amphibious" was used in place of "Expeditionary" from 1965 to 1988.



*BGen Peter J. Rowe commanded the 5th Marine Expeditionary Brigade during its deployment to the Gulf. The 5th MEB participated in Exercise Sea Soldier IV, landed to become I MEF reserve, conducted combat clearing operations in the Al Wafrah National Forest, and assisted humanitarian relief operations by Joint Task Force Sea Angel in Bangladesh.*

Saudi Arabia and to protect Al Jubayl, Al Kobar, Ad Dammam, and Dhahran. At the time no one realized how quickly the diplomatic situation would begin to mirror the imaginary one created for Exercise Internal Look. Before the end of the exercise staff officers would complain they were having a hard time keeping the Internal Look scenario and actual Iraqi movements straight.<sup>105</sup>

Not long after the 5th MEB command element returned to the west coast, history repeated itself for the third time in a half-century. When the I MEF depart-

ed for the Gulf region it seemed to be a carbon copy of what happened when the 1st Marine Division went to Korea in 1950 and again when the "Old Breed" left for Vietnam in 1965. Units hurriedly packed up and departed for the combat zone leaving Camp Pendleton a virtual ghost town. Brigadier General Rowe soon became the only general officer left, so he picked up responsibility for Camp Pendleton, the remainder of the 1st Marine Division, I MEF rear echelon, and the remain-behind equipment in addition to his other duties.<sup>106</sup>

### *Activation Issues*

When the dust finally settled, General Rowe began to wonder what the future held for the MEB. Whispers and innuendos compounded the uncertainty. Some rumor mongers had 5th MEB command element flying to Saudi Arabia to become the I MEF rear area security command element, while others said the MEB was staying put to become the nucleus of a new MEF. On 13 October, General Rowe learned officially that the 5th MEB would deploy to the Gulf as an amphibious landing force on board the ships of Rear Admiral Stephen S. Clarey's Amphibious Group 3 (PhibGru 3).<sup>107</sup>

Brigadier General Rowe had questions about the upcoming deployment. He was particularly concerned with seven crucial areas: mission; organization; manpower; equipment; shipping; logistics; and training. Each of these issues would have to be addressed before the 5th MEB could sail. Aware that the MEB was earmarked for deployment to the Gulf, Colonel Drake F. Trumpe, General Rowe's chief of staff, initiated the planning process and prepared preliminary force lists. General Rowe believed the three missions the 5th MEB would most likely be called on to perform were: an amphibious assault; maritime interdiction operations; and special operations. Not surprisingly, his analysis was very similar to the earlier one compiled by Major General Jenkins. The 5th MEB would be facing a mechanized foe able to conduct biological and chemical warfare in desert terrain. Amphibious operations and maneuver warfare using mechanized combined arms task forces were the primary offensive concerns, while anti-armor defense and chemical/biological countermeasures were the initial defensive concerns. Additional operations might include maritime interdiction or non-combatant evacuations.

On 26 October, Central Command formulated a proposed mission statement and issued a proposed force list. These documents provided a base from which General Rowe could determine requirements to be presented to Headquarters Marine Corps and Fleet Marine Force Pacific when he requested support. The main question was, "Where would the forces come from?" He had to ponder several other key questions as well. When, where, and for how long would the MEB deploy? How many ships would be available? How long would the deployment last? Would a unit rotation policy be established? Once in the Persian Gulf, would the 5th MEB be absorbed by the 4th MEB or would it remain independent? Regardless, the 5th MEB would have to race the clock to be ready to sail on time because the U.N.-imposed 15 January deadline for an Iraqi withdrawal was fast

approaching. Luckily, answers were not long in coming.

By November, it was obvious that Saddam was not going to pull out of Kuwait, therefore General Schwarzkopf requested additional forces and the national command authority concurred. This decision clarified one key issue, the 5th MEB would reinforce, not replace, the 4th MEB. General Rowe could now concentrate on procuring the forces he needed. Unfortunately, when he took stock of what was at hand, the picture was not very promising. A quick look around Camp Pendleton showed there was very little left to pick from. The 5th MEB command element was undermanned. The 5th Marines, designated to become the nucleus of the ground combat element, had only two rifle battalions. There were almost no other ground combat support elements at hand. Marine Aircraft Group 50 and Brigade Service Support Group 5 virtually did not exist and there were very few readily available resources to bring them up to strength.<sup>108</sup>

The command element was critically short of intelligence and communications assets. The ground combat element needed combat support personnel and equipment. The aviation pool had few deployable personnel and not many aircraft were on the west coast. Most of the equipment left behind at Camp Pendleton was needed to outfit Reserve units, but some of it was not combat ready since the few support personnel at Camp Pendleton had been too busy keeping the supply pipeline flowing into the Middle East to fix or maintain what had been left behind.<sup>109</sup>

Although Brigadier General Rowe exercised administrative and not operational control of Colonel Robert J. Garner's 11th MEU, Colonel John E. Rhodes' 13th MEU(SOC), and Colonel Terrance P. Murray's 15th MEU, these units were not immediately available to the 5th MEB. The 11th MEU was undergoing pre-deployment training before sailing for the Western Pacific, the 13th MEU(SOC) was already in the Gulf, and the 15th MEU was standing down after returning from the Western Pacific.

### *Manpower Issues*

General Rowe's most pressing need was manpower. This issue was solved in a number of ways. First, President Bush authorized General Alfred Gray to stop releasing Marines from active duty. This "stop-loss" program immediately made previously non-deployable Marines eligible for overseas duty. Second, the decision to call up the Reserves gave Gray the green light to activate Selected Marine Corps Reserve (SMCR) units and Individual Ready Reservists. Third, Gray instituted the time-honored Marine tradition of marshalling forces from the posts and stations of the Corps to meet an emergency. This bold action allowed the 5th MEB to embed the fully-equipped 11th MEU, to recall Marines already deployed to the Gulf region, and to assimilate intelligence, combat support, aviation, and communications assets from the east coast, Hawaii, and the Reserves.

On 8 November, orders went out to 890 Reservists to report for active duty with

the 5th MEB, and 883 swiftly answered the call.\* Most Reservists reported to their local drill sites for two days of processing before they moved on to Camp Pendleton to be absorbed into the MEB. Reservists began arriving at Oceanside on 15 November. There were reconnaissance Marines from Nevada; tankers, light armored infantry, anti-aircraft gunners, intelligence specialists, and a helicopter squadron from California; an infantry company from New York; an attack helicopter squadron from Georgia; antitank gunners from Louisiana; combat engineers from West Virginia; truckers from Texas; aviation support personnel from Massachusetts; and support engineers from Michigan. Incoming Reservists were assigned to their active duty commands within 48 hours, after which a majority attended a four-day, Southwest Asia training program run by the School of Infantry.<sup>110</sup>

Brigadier General Rowe was a little uneasy at first about the state of Reserve readiness, but he soon found the Reservists to be highly motivated individuals who asked only to serve their country and to be accepted as fellow Marines by their active-duty counterparts. He felt they were devoted, enthusiastic, intelligent, and skilled in their primary military specialties. He favorably compared them to the British territorial soldiers activated for the Boer War described by Rudyard Kipling who, "when they heard the bugle call, their regiment did not have to search to find them."<sup>111</sup> General Rowe noted that the major operational difficulty turned out to be familiarizing Reserve units with the 5th MEB's standard operating procedures. Colonel Drake Trumpe stated the Reserves were "outstanding" and that their smooth transition from civilian life to military life validated the Total Force concept instituted after the Vietnam Conflict. The integration of the Reserves was so successful that Colonel Randolph A. Gangle, RLT 5's commanding officer, reported that by the time the MEB arrived in the Gulf he could not tell the regulars from the Reservists.<sup>112</sup>

Although the Reserve call-up went very smoothly overall, there were a few glitches. One problem had to do with Reserve pay. All Reserve units encountered difficulties in transitioning from the Reserve Manpower and Management Pay System to the Joint Uniform Military Pay Systems. This caused financial hardships for both the Reservists and their families. This problem reared its ugly head when many Reservists had to cancel pre-planned family allotments while on their way to the combat zone. General Rowe was made aware of the pay problem while in Hawaii. It turned out the only way for some Reservists to enjoy an evening's liberty was for their officers to cash personal checks for \$150 and then loan this money to needy Marines. He solved the problem by arranging with the paymaster to have \$50 emergency pay advances available the next day. However, he could do little about other Reserve concerns. Some reservists felt valuable time was wasted on administrative matters that had already been dealt with at their home drill sites. Most Reserve unit commanders would have preferred to

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\*One I&I said that after the local media reported three Reservists would be unable to deploy, the Marine Corps Reserve Center was swamped by volunteers who were thanked for their patriotism but had to be gently turned away.

bring their own well-maintained unit equipment instead of inheriting marginally acceptable remain-behind equipment at Camp Pendleton.<sup>113</sup>

On 19 November, the highly trained and well-equipped 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit, by then designated special operations capable, was embedded into the 5th MEB. This was an arrangement whereby the 11th MEU(SOC) was placed under Brigadier General Rowe's operational control, but would be ready to break away within 12 hours for independent operations. To accomplish this only the MEU and its equipment was embarked on board the five ships of PhibRon 1. The MEU's command element was integrated into the 5th MEB command element; Battalion Landing Team 3/1 (BLT 3/1) was assigned to the ground combat element; Marine Composite Helicopter Squadron 268 (HMM(C)-268) was assigned to the aviation combat element; and MEU Service Support Group 11 (MSSG 11) became the backbone of BSSG 5. The final pieces of the activation puzzle fell into place after the 5th MEB sailed from the west coast. A complete helicopter squadron, as well as much needed communications equipment and intelligence specialists, joined the 5th MEB when it arrived in Hawaii.

### *Force Structure*

The 5th MEB command element was composed of the commanding general and his staff, augmented by intelligence and communications specialists and a military police detachment. The headquarters staff was assigned to Headquarters and Service Company commanded by Major Clifton R. Weyeneth. Incorporation of the 11th MEU(SOC) command element provided a solid, well-trained staff to augment the existing under-manned headquarters staff. The 1st Surveillance, Reconnaissance, and Intelligence Group (1st SRIG) in Saudi Arabia was tasked to return enough Marines to form 5th Surveillance, Reconnaissance Intelligence, and Support Group (SRISG 5), including detachments from 1st Radio Battalion, 9th Communications Battalion, 4th Force Reconnaissance Company, and a military police detachment. The 5th MEB command element mustered 472 personnel.<sup>114</sup>

Regimental Landing Team 5 was a very diverse unit. The 5th Marines (Reinforced) became the nucleus of the ground combat element. Both of its organic rifle battalions and an attached artillery battalion were earmarked for deployment. Most of the combat support units that rounded out the landing team, however, were provided by the Selected Marine Corps Reserve. The crucial third maneuver battalion and its organic combat support units came from the 11th MEU. This addition greatly enhanced the combat power and capabilities of the 5th MEB because Battalion Landing Team 3/1 was fully manned, well trained, possessed all necessary equipment and combat support units, and had just completed a rigorous training cycle before being certified "special operations capable."

Colonel Gangle's landing team included: Headquarters Company; 2d Battalion, 5th Marines; 3d Battalion, 5th Marines; 3d Battalion, 1st Marines; 2d Battalion, 11th Marines; a composite reconnaissance company from 1st and 4th Reconnaissance Battalions; Company A, 4th Tank Battalion; Company A, 4th Assault Amphibian Battalion; Company A, 4th Light Armored Infantry Battalion;



Company F, 2d Battalion, 25th Marines; TOW Platoon, Headquarters Company, 23d Marines; Company B, 1st Combat Engineer Battalion; Company A, 4th Combat Engineer Battalion; and the 5th/6th Truck Platoons, 6th Motor Transport Battalion. The ground combat element included 4,732 Marines.<sup>115</sup>

It was a tough haul forming MAG-50 because so many aviation units had already deployed with MAG-70 in August and September as part of the 7th MEB. Marine Aircraft Group 39 had been alerted in late August that MAG-50 would be deploying to the Gulf as part of 5th MEB. MAG-50's staff was assembled and plans were being initiated when the orders were changed. The staff stood down and was embedded into MAG-39. Most of the personnel, aircraft, and equipment originally earmarked for MAG-50 was absorbed by MAG-70, including HMLA-369, HMLA-367, VMO-2, and MALS-39. The month ended with Col Randall L. West assuming command of the skeletal aircraft group.

General Rowe later cited Colonel West with doing "yeoman work, pulling things together" to create Marine Aircraft Group 50.<sup>116</sup> West was a 42-year-old "Mustang," a former enlisted Marine, who flew A-6 Intruders over Vietnam in 1970 and commanded HMA-269 when the unit received the Chief of Naval Operation's Safety Award and was selected Marine Corps Helicopter Squadron of the Year in 1983. In early October, he was sent a warning order to be prepared to stand up MAG-50 for deployment to the Persian Gulf sometime between 1 December and 31 January. The initial equipment survey indicated that only one unserviceable AH-1W was assigned to HMLA-169, two AH-1Js were being modified to "W" status, one new production AH-1W was in the pipeline from Bell Textron, and one test aircraft could be transferred back to operational status when the deployment order arrived.

Despite the bleak outlook, MAG-50 was quickly brought up to combat-ready status. Colonel West gathered all of the remaining aviation assets of MAG-39 at Camp Pendleton, embedded the 11th MEU's aviation element, brought in a Reserve AH-1J Sea Cobra squadron from Atlanta, arranged to pick up a CH-46 Sea Knight squadron in Hawaii, and added other bits and pieces, including an AV-8B Harrier II detachment. Detachment C, MASS-6, flew in to train with RLT 5 at Twentynine Palms; HMA-773 arrived from Atlanta with 14 AH-1Js; HMM(C)-268 was embedded; and HMLA-169 was brought up to strength. New equipment was added as well. Loran precision navigation sets were mounted in all aircraft except the CH-53Es, which carried Omega Doppler radar, and the Harriers, which mounted inertial navigation systems. Five global positioning systems were distributed, one to each squadron. One UH-1N mounted a Night Eagle forward-looking infrared radar laser designator to direct Hellfire missiles from the air. Flash suppressors were attached to allow firing of .50-caliber machine guns while flying with night vision goggles, laser boresight devices sighted 20mm cannon on the gunships, finger and lip lights were installed, and 16 new Cobra helmets were issued.

When the 5th MEB deployed MAG-50's headquarters included detachments from Marine Wing Headquarters Squadron 3 (MWHS-3), Marine Air Control Group 38 (MACG-38), Marine Air Control Squadron 7 (MACS-7), Marine

Aviation Logistics Squadron 39 (MALS-39), Marine Aviation Logistics Squadron 16, Marine Aviation Logistics Squadron 24 (MALS-24), Marine Wing Communications Squadron 38 (MWCS-38), and provisional rotary- and fixed-wing Marine wing support detachments. The operational units included Marine Medium Composite Helicopter Squadron 268; Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 169 (HMLA-169); Marine Reserve Attack Helicopter Squadron 773 (HMA-773); Detachment B, Marine Attack Squadron 513 (VMA-513); Detachment A, Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 466; Battery A, 3d Light Antiaircraft Defense Battalion; and Marine Wing Support Squadron 372 (MWSS-372). Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 265 (HMM-265) later joined the 5th MEB in Hawaii and Detachment A, Marine Reserve Heavy Helicopter Squadron 772 with four RH-53D Sea Stallions was attached in March 1991 after the breakout of the 11th MEU(SOC) left the 5th MEB without heavy-lift aircraft.\* The aviation combat element had 1,928 Marines when it arrived in the North Arabian Sea.<sup>117</sup>

The most critical shortages were in the combat service support element. Brigade Service Support Group 5 could muster just over 600 people. This was only about one-fifth of the nearly 3,000 personnel normally assigned to a BSSG and caused Brigadier General Rowe to describe his combat service support element as "more like a reinforced MSSG than a full-blown BSSG."<sup>118</sup> To offset this shortfall, General Rowe planned to rely on sea-based logistics, but that meant that the 5th MEB would require substantial outside logistics support if it was deployed ashore for any length of time. Lieutenant Colonel Robert E. Lupton of the 11th MEU(SOC) was selected to command BSSG 5 as his MEU Service Support Group provided more than half of the personnel and much of the equipment used by BSSG 5. Remaining BSSG 5 Marines came from the Marine Corps Reserve. The group was composed of detachments from Headquarters and Service Battalion, 1st FSSG; Headquarters and Service Battalion, 4th FSSG; 1st and 4th Landing Support Battalions; 6th and 7th Motor Transport Battalions; 6th and 7th Engineer Support Battalions; Bridge Company, 6th Engineer Support Battalion; 1st and 4th Supply Battalions; 1st and 4th Maintenance Battalions; and Communications Company, 6th Communications Battalion. When the final count was done, the combat service support element numbered 613 personnel.<sup>119</sup>

### *The 5th MEB Mounts Out*

While the ground combat element was busy training in the desert heat at Twentynine Palms and MAG-50 was being assembled, the 5th MEB logisticians were busy preparing for embarkation. Logistical planning centered around three vital issues: the number and type of ships that would be available; the amount and

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\*RH-53Ds were originally Navy mine countermeasures variants of the Sea Stallion; they had greater range, in-air refueling probes, more powerful engines, and better control systems than the CH-53Ds.

type of equipment remaining in southern California; and the amount of sustainment supplies needed to support the MEB until it could link-up with I MEF forces.\* The 5th MEB was able to acquire 30-day supply for all classes except Class V, ammunition. There was insufficient ammunition on hand or in war reserve stocks, therefore the MEB was allocated only a 15-day supply. An additional 45 days of ammunition supply was to be provided by I MEF when the MEB arrived in the Persian Gulf. Unfortunately, this "15-day" ammunition supply was based on ammunition availability rates, not combat rates. In actual combat this ammunition, particularly high-value antiarmor, would likely be consumed within two to five days.<sup>120</sup>

A major problem was the status of the equipment which was left behind. When the 7th MEB and other units departed the west coast in August and September, they deployed with above-normal personnel and equipment allowances. Since they were headed into a potential combat zone and were not sure how ready the MPS equipment might be, they sometimes took unauthorized items with them. This created problems for General Rowe as the remain-behind heavy equipment was not only slated for use by Reserve units, but left a lot to be desired. The equipment, although undamaged, was in poor repair due to the deployment of the maintenance personnel. In addition, some of the equipment, notably the AAVs, required modification.\*\* These modifications were made by hard-pressed Reservists who were concurrently undergoing individual and unit training. The effort by 1st FSSG (Rear) and BSSG 5 personnel to correct maintenance problems cannot be overstated.<sup>121</sup>

Despite the lack of training time and equipment shortfalls, the 5th MEB was ready to deploy within two weeks. By the time it sailed the MEB was one of the most diverse units in Marine Corps history. Its major subordinate elements included active-duty Marines from around the globe and Reservists from 16 units located in 11 different states, units that criss-crossed the country from California to Georgia and from Massachusetts to Texas. Had there been an award for farthest traveled, it would have been given to the Marines who flew back to California from Saudi Arabia.

When it arrived in the Persian Gulf, the 5th MEB increased the combat power of the Marine Forces Afloat by more than 40 percent. The MEB brought 7,449 Marines and its combat equipment list included 17 main battle tanks, 56 TOW missiles, 52 assault amphibians, 26 howitzers, and 18 light armored vehicles. The aviation combat element included virtually all of the non-allocated attack aircraft left in the United States, six Harriers and 20 Sea Cobras, as well as the all of the available utility and heavy-lift helicopters, 12 Hueys and eight Sea Stallions.<sup>122</sup>

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\*See section, Retrograde and Departure, for a detailed discussion of available transport.

\*\*The AAVs required GPS installation for desert navigation and their main armaments were upgraded; 5th MEB Staff intvw.

## Operation Eastern Exit

### *Crisis in the Horn of Africa*

Although Operation Desert Shield received the lion's share of the media coverage, the Persian Gulf was not the only trouble spot in Central Command's area of operations. A second regional emergency occurred in the famine-stricken country of Somalia where long-festered internal strife burst into full-scale civil war. This fighting threatened American civilians and other foreign nationals and became an international crisis. The American response demonstrated the flexibility of a forward-deployed, combat-ready amphibious force when a contingency Marine air-ground task force from the 4th MEB conducted a daring night helicopter evacuation. This operation, codenamed Eastern Exit, was so well executed that it was described as "flawless" by the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Alfred Gray.<sup>123</sup>

Somalia is located in the tip of the arid Horn of Africa, about 1,500 miles southwest of the Strait of Hormuz. Mogadishu, the capital city, is situated on the Indian Ocean about midway down Somalia's east coast. Unrest had plagued Somalia since octogenarian President Mohammed Siad Barre ousted the constitutional government in 1969. In the intervening 21 years his military regime became increasingly unpopular and more repressive. In December 1990, a rebel force led by General Mohammed Farah Aideed had pushed Barre's forces back into Mogadishu. Afraid that innocents might be harmed by spillover fighting, U.S. Ambassador James K. Bishop recommended American civilians and non-essential embassy personnel leave Mogadishu. One hundred and ten of them departed within two weeks. The emergency seemed to abate for a couple of weeks, but after 30 December fighting broke out once again. On 1 January, Ambassador Bishop cabled the State Department and requested permission to evacuate the embassy. Soon, a contingency Marine air-ground task force from the 4th MEB was ordered to conduct a non-combatant evacuation operation (NEO) to rescue the remaining Americans.

Such operations are a modern extension of the traditional use of Marines to protect American lives and property overseas. One of three MAGTF stability missions, a NEO is tactically similar to an amphibious withdrawal except the unarmed civilians are unable to protect themselves as a military force could.\* During a typical evacuation, amphibious ships, maintaining positions well beyond the visual horizon to mask their locations and intentions, launch a heliborne force consisting of a forward command element, a security element, and an evacuation control team. After landing, the security force isolates one or more landing zones and protects those awaiting evacuation. Evacuees are screened at an evacuation control center (ECC) then they are flown out of an ever-contracting cordon until

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\*These three missions are: support friendly governments; protect American lives and property; and conduct non-combatant evacuations.

the last elements of the rear guard are airborne. Although this procedure appears simple, it is actually a complex operation requiring detailed planning, stringent inter-Service cooperation, split-second timing, iron-willed discipline, great flexibility, and rapid execution. Non-combatant evacuation operations have become a Marine Corps specialty since the closing days of the Vietnam War and are so important that all Marine expeditionary units slated for forward deployment practice non-combatant evacuations before being certified special operations capable.\*

### *Command and Control*

The United States has a well-established chain of command to deal with international emergencies. The President, the Secretary of Defense, or their designated subordinates are the decision-making entities at the strategic level. Unified commanders-in-chief are the operational level commanders. They issue specific missions to their component commanders and designate forces to be used. Specially appointed task force or task group commanders are in tactical control of operations. As in all amphibious operations, a non-combatant evacuation begins with an initiating directive which states the mission, specifies the area of operations, and names the amphibious task force and landing force commanders.

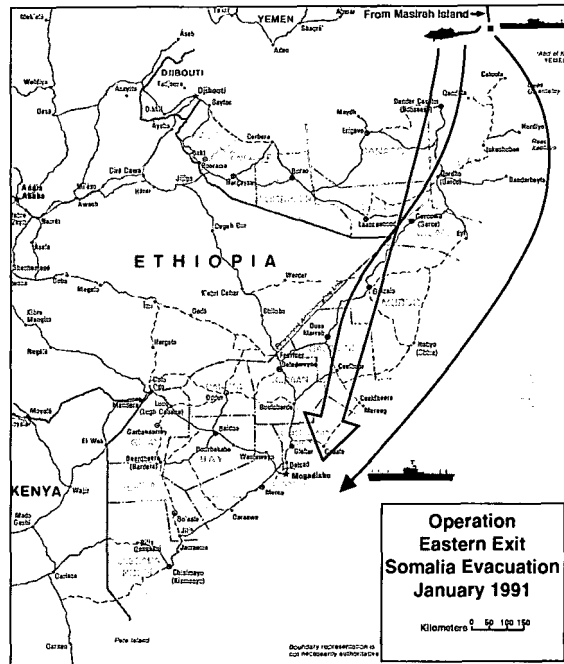
In the case of Somalia, Secretary of State James A. Baker III presented Ambassador Bishop's request to President George Bush on 2 January 1991. President Bush concurred and the American Embassy was ordered closed. As Somalia was within Central Command's area of operations, General Schwarzkopf was tasked to render assistance. His initial options included: moving Air Force combat, transport, and support aircraft to Mogadishu Airport; deploying an amphibious task group from the North Arabian Sea; or using Special Operations Command assets from Saudi Arabia.

The original plan, based on rather sketchy information, envisioned establishing a forward base in Kenya. Central Command was to provide a forward command element, support personnel, and Air Force C-130 transports, gunships, and aerial refuelers. Marine Lockheed KC-130 Hercules aerial tankers from the 3d Marine Aircraft Wing at Bahrain were also alerted. It was first believed that there were fewer than 50 Americans in Mogadishu and that no more than 100 people altogether needed evacuation. Using this information, planners hoped all evacuees could be lifted out by two Sikorsky CH-53E heavy-lift helicopters which would land briefly at Mogadishu, then continue on to Kenya.<sup>124</sup>

On 2 January, General Schwarzkopf ordered Admiral Arthur to launch Operation Eastern Exit to rescue those trapped in the diplomatic compound at Mogadishu. Admiral Arthur then transmitted initiating directives to Major

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\*In 1975 Marine forces afloat in WestPac successfully evacuated Phnom Penh, Cambodia (Operation Eagle Pull) and Saigon, Republic of Vietnam (Operation Frequent Wind); Colonel Alfred M. Gray, Jr., commanded the ground combat element, RLT 4, of the evacuation force.



General Jenkins and Admiral LaPlante, who in turn forwarded them to their respective subordinate element commanders. For the 4th MEB this was Colonel James J. Doyle, Jr., on board the *Trenton*. Colonel Doyle, the commanding officer of BSSG 4, was appointed landing force commander and was directed to move to the *Guam* at Masirah anchorage. On board the *Guam* he would take charge of the 4th MEB alternate, or Bravo, command group. Captain Alan B. Moser, USN, Commander, Amphibious Squadron 6 (PhibRon 6), was named commander of the amphibious task force. He and part of his staff left an amphibious planning conference at Dubai in the United Arab Emirates and flew to Masirah to join Colonel Doyle and his command group on board the *Guam*.

### *The Evacuation Force*

The amphibious task group was a two-ship flotilla from PhibGru 2. Four different ship mixes were considered, but only the *Guam* and the *Trenton* could be spared for the voyage to Somalia without seriously degrading naval forces needed in the Persian Gulf. The Marine component was an unnumbered contingency Marine air-ground task force. Contingency MAGTFs were created units, usually smaller than MEUs, formed for a specific mission. As all MAGTFs, this one had a command element, a ground combat element, an aviation combat element, and a combat service support element.

The command element was composed of about one-third of the 4th MEB Headquarters reinforced by detachments from 8th Communications Battalion, 2d Radio Battalion, and 2d Force Reconnaissance Company. The ground combat element, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Robert P. McAleer, consisted of a headquarters detachment, Company C, and a weapons company detachment from



Department of Defense Photo (USN) DN-ST-91-11243  
*CH-46E Sea Knight helicopters of HMM-365 hug the edge of the Nassau's flight deck as a Marine AV-8B takes off. Twelve of the squadron's helicopters were assigned to the Somali evacuation force.*

Battalion Landing Team 1/2 (BLT 1/2). Lieutenant Colonel Robert J. Wallace, commanding officer of HMM-263, commanded the aviation combat element which included 12 CH-46Es from HMM-263, 12 CH-46Es from HMM-365, 2 UH-1Ns from HMLA-269, and 2 CH-53Es from HMM-461. Major William N. Saunder, executive officer of BSSG 4, commanded the combat service support element. It included a headquarters detachment, a military police platoon, a landing support detachment, and a medical/dental section.

There was a wide variety of support units earmarked for Eastern Exit. Seven provisional rifle platoons—made up of personnel from the command element, the aviation combat element, and the combat service support element—were organized in case a reserve reaction force was needed. Naval Special Warfare Team 8-F (SEAL Team 8-F) supported the ground combat element. Additional support included KC-130 tankers from Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadrons 252 and 352 at Bahrain; the Marine Security Guard detachment at Mogadishu; and U.S. Air Force AC-130 Spectre gunships and HC-130 Hercules refuelers from the 1st Special Operations Wing in Saudi Arabia.

### *Predeployment Issues*

Many factors made an embarked Marine air-ground task force the ideal force for Operation Eastern Exit. An amphibious task group operating out of sight from land can move into a crisis area without revealing its exact strength, intentions, or location. All MAGTFs can rapidly enter and exit an objective area at night or during adverse weather and operate from over-the-horizon without electronic emissions. Joint operations posed no problem as the 4th MEB and PhibGru 2 had been working together since August.

Navy and Marine staffs were collocated in the supporting arms coordination center (SACC) on board the *Guam*, instead of using separate spaces in the landing force operations center and flag plot as was standard operating procedure. This arrangement facilitated cooperation. Sharing a single room allowed information to be quickly disseminated. An added bonus was that message traffic directed to only one agency was immediately available to all interested parties. The commander of one component and the operations officer of the other, for example the CATF and his operations officer or the CLF and the operations officers, were always present in the SACC. This speeded the decision making process and enhanced rapid planning.<sup>125</sup>

A key component of any inter-Service venture, particularly one that is going to cover more than 1,500 miles, is communications. General Schwarzkopf dedicated a Central Command satellite communications channel to support Eastern Exit. This decision allowed long-distance direct voice contact and eased the communications burden. Communications, however, remained a problem area throughout the operation. Use of a single command and control net sometimes caused confusion. After landing, Marine communicators encountered difficulties with the PCS-3 radio, so they used embassy-supplied Motorola commercial radios instead.<sup>126</sup>



The major shortfall was timely intelligence. Information about the situation was often incomplete and was, in fact, sometimes contradictory. To rectify this situation, the intelligence section prepared a message that included 42 essential elements of information queries. Unfortunately, these questions could not be answered until direct communication with Mogadishu was established. The 1969 country intelligence handbook on board was of limited value since most of the information was out of date. One crucial fact missing was that the American embassy had moved from downtown Mogadishu to a new location in the late 1980s.\* Luckily, a member of the BSSG 4 staff had been assigned to Mogadishu and was able to update much of the obsolete data.

### *Planning Operation Eastern Exit*

The two-ship amphibious task group departed Masirah for Somalia at 2330 on 2 January.\*\* The original evacuation plan was based on the mistaken assumptions that a semi-permissive environment existed in Mogadishu and that a cease fire was near. The task group was directed to sail at the best possible speed and was making about 15 knots in the early hours of 3 January. This pace, however, proved impractical when the true situation in Mogadishu was finally realized, so the ships increased speed to 22 knots.<sup>127</sup>

Throughout the voyage to Somalia planners constantly reviewed the situation, revised their estimates as new information came in, and created a series of contingency plans. They relied on standard operating procedures and “playbooks” developed as part of a special operations package. This allowed them to focus on mission specifics, rather than spend time working on such basic concepts as command structure. Each plan was submitted to intense scrutiny by a group called a “murder board.” These reviews helped planners anticipate problems and ruthlessly exposed any weaknesses.

The staff wrestled with several tough issues. What size force should be inserted to secure the area? What aircraft mix would best meet the needs of the mission? Should the evacuation be accomplished in daylight or darkness? The insertion force would have to be large enough to protect the landing zone and control operations, but had to be small and mobile enough to depart swiftly. The helicopter mix would have to have sufficient range and lift to land the security force, yet, still be able set down in a limited landing zone.

The major issue was timing the evacuation, so the staff developed both a daylight plan and a night alternative. If there was a permissive environment, a day-

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\*Adam Siegel reported that this source had been periodically updated and its information was correct, but Marine reports assert it was a flawed source. (Siegel comments; 4th MEB AAR)

\*\*Chronology can become confusing because the operation involved several different time zones; this particular reference was to 2330 Delta (1930 GMT or Zulu), the local time in Oman; all times, unless otherwise noted, are local times.

time lift would be best. Location, coordination, and landing problems would be minimized. Somali forces would see that the helicopters were on a rescue, not a combat mission, and would be unlikely to fire. There was also great concern about locating the compound. Only black-and-white 1:50,000 maps and very few photos of the compound were at hand, therefore, accurate navigation would be much easier during daylight hours.

On the other hand, night vision devices permitted operations after-dark, which offered the advantages of stealth and surprise. The main dangers to an after dark evacuation were unknown navigation hazards, locating the landing zone, and the possibility of being mistaken for an assault force if suddenly discovered. A major problem would be landing helicopters into a small, unfamiliar, poorly marked, sand-covered landing zone during blackout conditions.

The decision to land at night was made as a result of the reports emanating from the embassy. Armed bands were trying to breach the compound wall, rocket-propelled grenades were striking in and around the compound, and the undisciplined soldiers of both sides seemed trigger-happy and unreasonable. Attempts by Ambassador Bishop to negotiate a cease fire were thwarted because no single agency could control the various armed forces inside the city. This last consideration settled the issue: the evacuation would be conducted under cover of darkness.

Colonel Doyle's first option had been to fly the CH-53s from Masirah to Mogadishu, then lift the evacuees to Mombasa. A second plan called for the CH-53s to fly almost 900 miles from the ships to Mogadishu. Both plans were complex, requiring at least four aerial refuelings and a minimum of sixteen hours in the air. There was also great uncertainty about the tactical situation in Mogadishu. The final plan, dictated by events, was two-staged. The first phase would be a night reinforcement mission by CH-53s to stabilize the situation in Mogadishu. This would be followed by the main evacuation, a ferry operation by CH-46s, after the task group arrived off the coast of Somalia.

### *The Situation in Mogadishu*

By the time the decision to evacuate was made President Barre had taken refuge at the airport and was besieged by rebel forces. This obviated an airlift using fixed-wing transports for evacuation, a fact that became readily apparent after attempts to withdraw foreign civilians in this manner failed. Some Americans at the Office of Military Coordination, located about a quarter-mile from the diplomatic compound, were isolated. Ambassador Bishop did not feel they could safely move to the embassy at that time, so he ordered them to stay put. A short time later the embassy became untenable when gangs of looters attacked using small arms and rocket-propelled grenades. The situation was so fluid that within 24 hours an immediate amphibious evacuation had suddenly become the only practical option.

The fighting jeopardized all foreign civilians, not just Americans. Egyptian and European attempts to secure a cease fire or to arrange the evacuation of inno-

cent civilians failed when their appeals to stop the fighting fell on deaf ears. After Soviet and Italian evacuation attempts failed, diplomats and private citizens began seeking the safety of the American diplomatic compound. This trickle became a flood after the arrival of Marine helicopters.

On 4 January, Ambassador Bishop reported the compound was under siege and that looters were trying to scale the walls. When they threatened the security of the compound Bishop asked if paratroopers could be landed to defend the embassy but was told that was not practical. Although looters penetrated the compound and entered an open recreational area, they were held in check by a 30-man Somali security force led by Robert Noble, a former British Special Air Service soldier.

The embassy had a five-man Marine security guard detachment. These Marines were stationed inside the chancery to safeguard classified material and provide close-in protection of embassy personnel. Although many people believe otherwise, Marine security guard detachments are charged with only internal security, not embassy defense. Security guard detachments are not manned, organized, or equipped for sustained defensive operations. Protection of diplomatic compounds is most often negotiated as part of a host nation agreement; hence, this mission is usually the responsibility of host nation police forces or a locally hired security force.

### *Super Stallions to the Rescue*

In response to Ambassador Bishop's strong plea the task group increased its speed to 22 knots. Even at full speed, however, the ships could not be made to close on Mogadishu fast enough to rescue the civilians inside the embattled U.S. diplomatic compound. Two CH-53Es Super Stallions cross-decked from the *Trenton* to the *Guam* in the late afternoon and remained there while Colonel Doyle awaited further instructions. At about 2030 that evening the desired helicopter arrival time at Mogadishu was confirmed as 0600 the next morning. This dictated a launch from 466 nautical miles away. To do this the helicopters would have to leave the *Guam* at about 0145 on the morning of 5 January.<sup>128</sup>

The fly-in force was composed of a forward command element under Lieutenant Colonel Willard D. Oates, Bravo command group's operations officer; a two-man evacuation coordination team headed by Major William N. Saunders of BSSG 4; a Marine security element commanded by Lieutenant Colonel McAleer of BLT 1/2; and a nine-man Navy SEAL team. The 46-man Marine security force would augment the Somali guards and help secure a designated area of the compound, primarily the landing zone. The Evacuation Coordination Center (ECC) would screen evacuees, set evacuation priorities, organize evacuation groups, and direct them to proper embarkation points. The SEAL team would reinforce the Marine security guards at the chancery. The fly-in force was evenly distributed in numbers and capability between the two helicopters.<sup>129</sup>

The flight plan was an intricate one that called for the Super Stallions to land the 60-man security force in Mogadishu at the crack of dawn. This night mission

to Mogadishu was no routine flight. It would require two nighttime, over-water, in-air refuelings and an aerial rendezvous with an Air Force AC-130 gunship. This required exceptional pilot skill, precise dead-reckoning navigation, and split-second timing.

It is an old Marine saying, "the best plans go awry as soon as the line of departure is crossed." This axiom certainly proved true during Operation Eastern Exit. The Super Stallions launched without incident at about 0147 but trouble soon arose. Their Omega navigation systems relied on triangulation signals from three separate ground stations for a precise position, but the CH-53s were flying through a dead space and could receive no signals. Because the Omegas could not give accurate readings, the pilots used a combination of dead reckoning, positive control from the amphibious task group, and pathfinding by KC-130s for accurate navigation.

The most difficult part of the flight was making the planned rendezvous with KC-130 tankers. Two night refuelings were planned. The first was scheduled about one and one-half hours into the journey. This was done so the helicopters could return to their ships if refueling was unsuccessful. The second refueling, timed to take place about three hours after departure, would give the helicopters sufficient gas to locate the embassy, land, and begin their return trip.

The first rendezvous was accomplished using night vision goggles (NVGs). Both CH-53 copilots were wearing NVGs and were able to spot the incoming KC-130s easily. Unfortunately, the KC-130s did not possess NVG capability and had difficulty seeing the CH-53s from a distance. The Super Stallions were flying with running lights on but had to use their search lights to alert the KC-130s as to their exact positions. Aerial refueling was tricky because these tankers and helicopters had never worked together before. In fact, the Super Stallion crews had not practiced aerial refueling since their initial deployment more than five months earlier.

The first attempt almost resulted in an aborted mission. The lead CH-53 sprung a fuel leak in the cargo compartment while refueling. The pilot quickly disengaged to allow the crew chief to locate and repair the leak. A loose fitting was tightened and refueling continued; however, some passengers had been sprayed with fuel. Two had been thoroughly soaked. About an hour before landfall the second refueling was accomplished without incident.

Another mission glitch occurred when the AC-130, which had been detailed to provide suppressive fire if needed, could not be located.\* As the CH-53s approached the coast, the pilots stopped electronic emissions and shut off all exterior lights. This made establishing contact difficult so the Super Stallions continued the mission without their Spectre escort. They went in only three minutes behind schedule, a remarkable achievement. At the initial entry point, the huge helicopters swooped low in the dusky sky to avoid radar that could alert antiair-

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\*This aircraft had departed the area to refuel but could not contact the incoming Marines because it was forced to maintain radio silence as part of the ECM plan.

craft batteries of their unexpected approach. The search for the embassy took some time because none of the pilots were familiar with the area, their maps did not accurately reflect Mogadishu's recent urban sprawl, and landmarks were difficult to see from only 100 feet above ground in the hazy conditions of first light.

### *The Marines Arrive*

After about a 15-minute search the compound was finally spotted. This was no small task because visual terminal control consisted of only one infrared strobe light which was almost invisible in daylight. Despite this handicap, the helicopters spotted the landing zone after a search and landed at about 0620. Former Marine Mike Shanklin, the embassy's commercial officer, assisted the landing by waving a white sheet in the landing zone. Debarking Marines unloaded their equipment, then fanned out into defensive positions.

Like the cavalry in a western movie, the Marines had arrived in time to save the day. Startled attackers fled the compound area when the Super Stallions unexpectedly appeared overhead. The evacuees were certain that they would have been harmed had it not been for the Marines' timely arrival.<sup>130</sup>

Lieutenant Colonel Oates held a quick conference with Ambassador Bishop, then directed the security forces to their assigned stations. The command element, the forward air controller, and the evacuation control team set up in the joint administrative office and the chancery. The SEAL team assumed defensive positions at the chancery. The Marines of Company C, BLT 1/2 manned the southern and western perimeter. Shortly thereafter, an AC-130 arrived on station over Mogadishu. The Spectre was prepared to deliver fire support and use its sensors to warn of potential threats and other events inside the city.\*

The Super Stallions lingered in the landing zone for about an hour while 61 civilians loaded on board. Passengers included the deputy American ambassador, the ambassadors from Nigeria, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, and the charge d'affaires of Oman. The CH-53s departed at about 0700 to return to the *Guam*, which was then in the Indian Ocean more than 400 miles away. During the final refueling on the way out, the helicopters had difficulty maintaining probe connections due to a faulty tanker drogue. This slowed the refueling process and forced one helicopter to take on only about half of the desired amount of fuel. There was some talk of aborting the mission, but the helicopters continued their return flight.

The ride to safety was reassuring but uncomfortable for the civilians, most of whom were clad only in light tropical clothing. The combat-configured helicopters had window panels removed to allow door gunners to man .50-caliber machine guns. The passenger compartments were, therefore, exposed to low tem-

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\*This AC-130H Spectre was armed with two 20mm cannon, a 40mm gun, a 105mm howitzer, and mounted multiple intelligence gathering sensors.

peratures and wind chill when the Super Stallions sped along at an altitude of about 6,000 feet. Once out of danger, the aircrews tried their best to make the passengers comfortable. They offered words of reassurance, passed out the few available blankets, and entertained children by making funny faces and letting them blow the emergency whistles on their life jackets. During the ride to the *Guam* the grateful evacuees thanked the Marines profusely.

Back on board ship the CH-53 crews and U.S. diplomatic personnel were immediately debriefed, after which the diplomats helped screen the embarked civilians. Some of the civilians needed medical attention, others needed clothing, and a few could not speak English. These tasks were normally accomplished at the Evacuation Control Center prior to evacuation, however, the two-man ECC at the embassy had been overcome by events. Instead of delaying the flight for administrative purposes, ECC personnel wisely loaded as many people on the home-bound flight as they could after only cursory preliminary screening.\*

After debriefing the Marine flight crews, a planned second CH-53 flight was scrubbed. The second mission was supposed to carry 40 more Marines—27 evacuation center personnel and a 13-man rifle squad—to the compound. The decision to scrap this mission was made because of crew fatigue and stabilization of the situation in Mogadishu.\*\*

### *Inside the Compound*

The 160-acre U.S. diplomatic compound at Mogadishu was the largest in sub-Saharan Africa. It was located on Afgoi Road, about three miles north of the airport. The entire compound, which included a nine-hole golf course, was far too large to be defended at every point, so an 18-acre, built-up area became the focal point of the Marine defenses. The designated area included most of the buildings and the primary helicopter landing zone.

A sandy open area, boxed on three sides by embassy buildings, was selected as the primary helicopter landing zone (HLZ). The ambassador's residence was located east of the HLZ, the chancery was to the northeast, the joint administrative office building protected the HLZ's northern edge, and the Marine House was located to the west. The highest points inside the compound were the chancery roof and a centrally located water tower. The compound's wall was only about 10 feet high and was pockmarked by two-foot gaps about every 20 yards. These openings were blocked by thin iron bars to prevent entry, but allowed outsiders to rake the compound with small arms fire.

The firm hand of Ambassador Bishop guided American actions throughout the evacuation. Possessing tact, organizational skill, and situational awareness, he

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\*A much larger Evacuation Control Center was planned, but the need for "trigger pullers" outweighed the need for in-flight security so the bulk of the ECC was scheduled for the second wave.

\*\*The CH-53 crews had already spent eight hours in the air and more than 16 hours on standby; two fresh pilots were available, but a two-aircraft mission required four pilots.



Photo courtesy of Col Frederick M. Lorenz, USMC

*A later photo of the United States Embassy compound at Mogadishu which Marines secured during Operation Eastern Exit to provide a base for the evacuation of Americans and other foreign nationals.*

proved to be the perfect man to lead the evacuation. Diplomatic emergencies were nothing new for Bishop. He had been U.S. Ambassador to Liberia and then served as director of the task force formed to manage the evacuation of embassy personnel from that west African nation during Operation Sharp Edge in 1990.<sup>131</sup> Bishop did not want to escalate the crisis so he decided to defend the compound and protect the evacuees using minimal force. He clearly stated the rules of engagement—Marines could fire only if armed people displaying hostile intent breached the perimeter, and then only with his permission.

Bishop directed that a J-shaped defensive perimeter be formed inside the compound to cover the southern and western sides of the HLZ and oriented toward the golf course from where intruders had fired on embassy personnel the previous day. Sniper teams were dispatched to the water tower and the roof of the chancery. From those positions they could observe the wall and engage intruders. The most dangerous threat was posed by a nearby five-story apartment building known as K-7. It towered over the embassy buildings and afforded a vantage point to anyone on the upper stories or the roof. The building had housed some embassy workers, but was evacuated when conditions deteriorated. Armed men were spotted atop K-7, but no shots came from that direction. A Marine sniper team, consisting of a spotter and a shooter, was posted on the water tower but drew fire and was withdrawn at Ambassador Bishop's direction.

Sporadic small arms fire echoed throughout the city. Some rounds impacted inside the compound, but they did not seem to be directed at specific targets inside the compound. Most of the shooting was done by teenage brigands cruising the streets of Mogadishu in pickup trucks.<sup>132</sup> Except for some short forays into town, the American forces remained inside the compound.

After beatings of Kenyan and Sudanese diplomatic personnel and their families by looters, Ambassador Bishop received several notes from fellow diplomats asking for refuge or rescue. Bishop's response was that diplomatic refugees were

welcome, but that the United States could not mount any rescue operations. On 5 January, Robert Noble arranged for the local militia commander, Major Sayeed, to escort several foreign diplomats, their families, and embassy staffs to the U.S. compound during a lull in the fighting.

A four-vehicle convoy carrying three Marines and six SEALs made a 20-minute run to the U.S. Office of Military Cooperation located about a quarter of a mile from the compound on the Via Mekka Highway. It brought back four Americans and 18 foreign nationals, including the ambassador from Kenya and his family. Another convoy brought 38 Russians, including the Soviet ambassador and his wife, later in the day. A similar mission brought 15 British nationals. Special arrangements with a senior Somali official freed the British ambassador and the German charge d'affaires. Unfortunately, South Korean diplomats refused Major Sayeed's escort and remained holed up in their compound instead.<sup>133</sup>

When night fell the embassy was well prepared for the evacuation. The late afternoon and evening hours were devoted to preparing for the upcoming helicopter operation; more than 200 people inside the compound required evacuation. They were divided into 15-person heliteams and were assigned to one of four evacuation serials. The landing zone was marked using chemical neon lights, or Chemlites. There were five landing points, one per CH-46 in each of the scheduled landing waves. The evacuation control center, assisted by embassy personnel, did its best to identify each person but was unable to screen them for medical conditions or conduct last-minute weapons searches. Chemlites were attached to each child so they could be easily found if they wandered away in the confusion. Terrain barriers were marked as well as possible. All lights were extinguished in the compound after dark.

### *The Final Exit*

At sea the task group sailed parallel to the Somali coast, careful to remain over the horizon, out of sight of land. On board the *Guam*, final evacuation plans were made. Four helicopter waves would be used. These waves would be flown by two flights. Thunder Flight was made up of five CH-46s from HMM-263 commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Wallace, and Rugby Flight had five CH-46s from HMM-365 led by Lieutenant Colonel Robert F. Saikowski. The evacuation would be conducted after dark, under blackout conditions, using night vision goggles. Night operations were not a problem because both helicopter squadrons had been preparing for a night amphibious assault in the Persian Gulf since the previous October. Before leaving the *Guam*, Colonel Wallace reminded the pilots of the importance of accurate navigation. If they flew too far north, they would be flying over known surface-to-air missile sites and manned antiaircraft artillery positions; too far south and they would be off their maps.

Thunder Flight lifted off at about 2330 on 5 January. Although they were 30 miles from shore the pilots easily picked out Mogadishu with their NVGs. The flight crossed its initial point, the spot where the designated air corridor crossed



the coast, without incident. The Sea Knights then descended to 100 feet and slowed to 80 knots as they searched for the embassy. Colonel Wallace wisely decided to keep extra distance between the helicopters because of uncertainty about the exact size and nature of the landing zone.

Although some fires burned inside Mogadishu and a few lights created some ground clutter, operational conditions were described as “excellent.”<sup>134</sup> The embassy was blacked out except for an HLZ strobe and Chemlites that marked utility poles, trees, and a small building. The first Sea Knight set down inside the compound at about 2343. Unfortunately, the landing zone was more confined than expected, and the whirling rotor blades created a total brownout by kicking up sand and loose debris. This was dangerous because incoming pilots had to land without accurate reference to the ground or other aircraft. As soon as the dust settled the first evacuees moved to the landing zone and began boarding the waiting helicopters.

The first two waves went well but, as Thunder Flight took to the air for the second time, radio silence was broken to announce there was trouble inside the compound. The circling AC-130 reported that an SA-2 surface-to-air missile radar had been activated. While this news caused some alarm it did not stop the evacuation.<sup>135</sup> The mission was being conducted under combat conditions so this information had little impact on helicopter operations. Flying at low altitude and slow airspeeds prevented the radars from acquiring the incoming helicopters. Had the Somalis opened fire, the AC-130 lurking above would have destroyed them immediately. Evacuees reported the blacked-out helicopters were practically invisible, so well-aimed antiaircraft fire was a very slim possibility. Inbound aircrews, however, took prudent steps such as reviewing flight control transfer procedures and making final weapons checks.

Inside the embassy things were not going well. Major Sayeed, the Somali militiaman responsible for rescuing several diplomats earlier in the day, entered the embassy’s front gate carrying a hand-held radio and an armed hand grenade. He threatened to order his men to begin shooting helicopters out of the sky if “unauthorized violation” of Somali airspace was not stopped immediately. Ambassador Bishop eventually purchased his goodwill with cash and his choice of the vehicles in the parking lot. Although soothed, Major Sayeed refused to leave the compound. He stayed to watch the evacuation and his forces did not interfere with operations.<sup>136</sup>

Ambassador Bishop, the remaining embassy staff, and the Marine security guards were assigned to the third departure wave, but the incident at the front gate delayed the takeoff. Only four of the five helicopters in the third wave loaded up and returned to the ship. This disrupted what had been a smooth operation up to that point. The final departure wave was delayed when an alert crew chief spotted two Marines still in the compound. As it turned out, two communicators almost missed the pickup because they did not realize this was the last flight out. At about 0300 the last two helicopters closed on the *Guam* and the evacuation was declared complete at 0343 on 6 January.

*Finale*

The evacuees stayed on the *Guam* until daylight because Captain Moser prudently decided not to risk further night operations. The next morning 59 evacuees were transferred to the *Trenton* for the return voyage. The evacuees came from 31 countries and included diplomats from Great Britain, Germany, Kenya, Kuwait, Nigeria, Oman, the Soviet Union, Sudan, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates. The ships' crews provided hot meals and spare clothes.

There were no American casualties but some evacuees needed medical attention. The Sudanese ambassador's wife was nine months pregnant. In the chaos preceding the evacuation, one evacuee had been shot and another had been stabbed. On 10 January, the total number of evacuees increased to 282 when Abraham Mohammed Ahmed Musallem Abograin was delivered by caesarean section on board the *Guam*.

On 11 January, the amphibious task group arrived at Muscat, Oman. Before disembarking, Ambassador Bishop addressed the sailors and Marines of the amphibious task group. In a moving speech he commended them for their professionalism and thanked them for their compassion, and he concluded by noting that "few of us would have been alive [without] your extraordinary efforts...we will take a part of each of you with us for the rest of our lives."<sup>137</sup> Operation Eastern Exit was officially over, the mission had been accomplished.

Soon after the last American helicopter departed, the compound gates were blasted open and the embassy was sacked by looters. They smashed what they could not carry off and left the once beautiful compound in ruins. Between 5 and

*A port view of the Guam (LPH 9) underway shows the amphibious assault ship which served as the flagship of the contingency Marine air-ground task force and carried the evacuees from Somalia to Oman.*

Department of Defense Photo (USN) DN-ST-92-07209



12 January, Italian planes and ships evacuated more than 800 foreign nationals and French ships picked up about 100 more.\* On the 17th, Mohammed Said Barre, the octogenarian dictator whose oppressive rule precipitated the crisis, fled Somalia. The warring rebel factions were unable to unite and the turmoil in Somalia continued unabated. Within a year, the situation had become so bad that the United Nations requested international intervention to alleviate widespread starvation and restore order in Somalia. U.S. Marines returned to Somalia in 1992 as the vanguard of Operation Restore Hope, the U.N.-sponsored humanitarian and stability operations in that country.

## Consolidation of the Marine Forces Afloat

### *5th MEB Embarks*

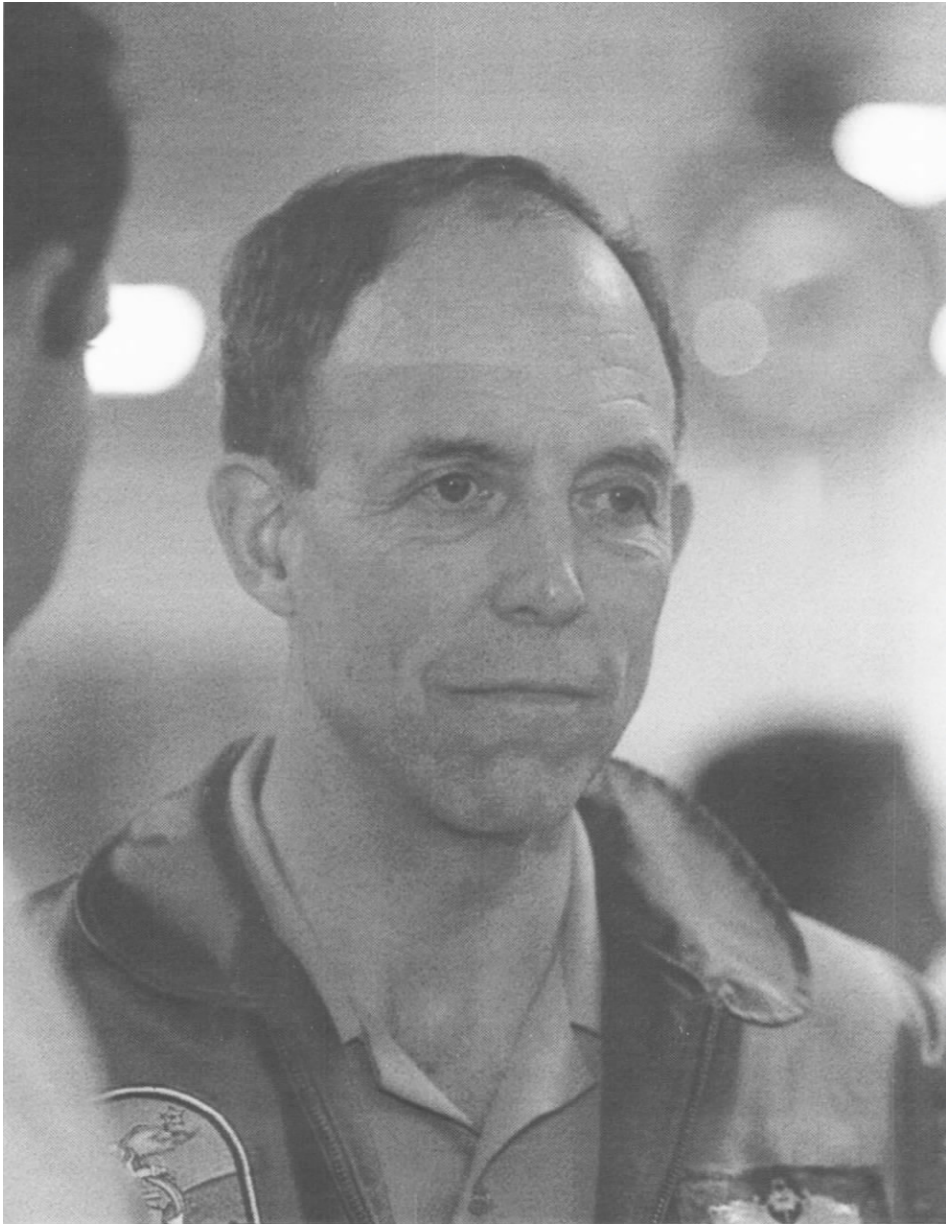
The formation and deployment of the 5th MEB had been contemplated intermittently from 12 August 1990, but the only firm deployment commitment was for PhibRon 1 and the 11th MEU(SOC) to get underway on or about 15 November so the MEU could replace the 13th MEU(SOC) as Landing Force Seventh Fleet in early January. This deployment was tied to an existing Navy rotation policy whereby amphibious ready groups, and their embarked Marines, remained in the Western Pacific for about six months at a time. This schedule changed on 13 October when Brigadier General Rowe received word the 5th MEB was to sail for the Persian Gulf with the 11th MEU embedded. In addition to the 11th MEU, General Rowe was to use "what was left at Camp Pendleton and Reservists" to fill out the 5th MEB. Amphibious Group 3 was to be loaded so PhibRon 1 and the 11th MEU could separate from the ATF within 12 hours if necessary.<sup>138</sup>

As it prepared for embarkation, the 5th MEB encountered a shipping shortage much like the one that marked the earlier embarkation of the 4th MEB. The problem was that a seaborne Marine expeditionary brigade required almost two dozen amphibious ships to carry its assault echelon, but the Navy had nowhere near that number of ships available on the west coast. After carefully studying proposed personnel and equipment lists, Marine embarkation officers figured the 5th MEB could squeeze on board 15 amphibious ships (2 LHAs, 2 LPHs, 3 LSDs, 4 LPDs, 3 LSTs, and 1 LKA).<sup>139</sup> The Pacific Fleet, unfortunately, had only allocated nine amphibious ships to PhibGru 3 (1 LHA, 1 LPH, 3 LSDs, 2 LPDs, 1 LST, and 1 LKA).\*\* After many intercontinental conversations and the direct intercession of CentCom's deputy chief of staff for operations, Brigadier General Richard I.

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\*These updated figures, which conflict with the 4th MEB AAR, were supplied by Adam B. Siegel after an exhaustive study of Eastern Exit. (Siegel comments).

\*\*In September, there was thought of sending a small 5th MEB and the 11th MEU(SOC) on board PhibRon 1 and the *Tarawa*, but the plan was overtaken by events in October.



Department of Defense Photo (USN) DN-SC-91-07588

*RAdm Stephen S. Clarey commanded Amphibious Group 3, the 13-ship group that carried the 5th MEB. PhibGru 3 conducted Exercise Sea Soldier IV, participated in combat actions during Desert Storm, and rendered humanitarian aid during Operation Sea Angel.*

Neal, USMC, a Central Command amphibious planning conference held on 26 October reaffirmed the need to find more than nine amphibious ships. After two weeks of intense negotiations, conducted under the watchful eyes of General Alfred Gray and closely monitored by General Schwarzkopf through his Marine

deputies Generals Johnston and Neal, four more amphibious ships were added and three MSC ships were designated to carry sustainment supplies and some assault echelon equipment.<sup>140</sup>

At first, PhibGru 3 included the five-ships assigned to PhibRon 1—the helicopter assault ship USS *New Orleans* (LPH 11), the amphibious transport dock USS *Denver* (LPD 9), the landing ship dock USS *Germantown* (LSD 42), the tank landing ship USS *Peoria* (LST 1183), and the amphibious cargo ship USS *Mobile* (LKA 115)—in addition to the amphibious assault ship USS *Tarawa* (LHA 1), the dock transports USS *Juneau* (LPD 10) and USS *Vancouver* (LPD 2), and the dock landing ship USS *Mount Vernon* (LSD 39). As Admiral Clarey noted, the big shortfall in this ship mix was the need for at least one more “big deck” assault ship.<sup>141</sup>

By 9 November, following several compromises, Admiral Clarey had one more helicopter assault ship, an additional dock transport, and two more tank landing ships. The requested addition of the amphibious assault ship *Belleau Wood* (LHA 3) had been vetoed because it needed maintenance and would be the only LHA amphibious assault ship left on the west coast following PhibGru 3’s departure. This last factor was critical as there were several potential trouble spots around the Pacific rim that might require an amphibious intervention. Instead of the *Belleau Wood*, the *Tripoli* (LPH 10) and the *Anchorage* (LSD 36) were made available, but neither was able to undergo a predeployment work-up. The tank landing ships *Frederick* (LST 1184) and *Barbour County* (LST 1195) were also included to carry AAVs. By the time it sailed, PhibGru 3—although not a “mirror image” of its east coast counterpart, PhibGru 2—numbered 13 amphibious ships.<sup>142</sup>

The Maritime Sealift Command’s National Defense Reserve Fleet activated two Ready Reserve Force ships to augment the amphibious ships of PhibGru 3. The auxiliary crane ship USNS *Flickertail State* (T-ACS 5) carried 192 pieces of assault echelon equipment and the break-bulk combat logistics ship MV *Cape Girardeau* (T-AK 2009) carried sustainment supplies. These black-bottom ships could make 20 knots and the *Flickertail State* could conduct limited in-stream unloading. Unfortunately, they were not amphibious ships and had some limitations that affected combat readiness. They were not completely self-sustaining and could not support over-the-beach operations, nor could they maintain secure communications with the ATF while underway and lacked suitable berthing space for their embarked Marines.<sup>143</sup> A third ship, the cargo ship SS *Neptune Iolite* which would immediately unload in Saudi Arabia rather than accompany the ATF, was also scheduled to carry some 5th MEB sustainment supplies.

Admiral Clarey noted another problem with the make-up of PhibGru 3. There was no specified airborne mine counter-measures (AMCM) platform from which to operate U.S. Navy MH-53E Sea Dragon helicopters needed for undersea mine clearing operations. This shortfall became a problem for the ATF when the dock transport *Dubuque* departed the Persian Gulf in November. Admiral Clarey at first hoped to include the dock transport *Duluth* (LPD 6) as the designated AMCM platform, but the *Duluth* was needed for other operations. When informed of this,

Admiral Clarey nominated the command ship *LaSalle*, a converted *Raleigh*-class LPD serving as the U.S. Middle East Force flagship, to become the designated AMCM helicopter platform. This issue was still unresolved when PhibGru 3 sailed from San Diego.<sup>144</sup>

Another issue was the sail date of PhibGru 3 and the 5th MEB from the United States. The original sail date for PhibRon 1 and the 11th MEU had been 15 November which allowed for an early January arrival in the North Arabian Sea. This plan was placed on hold when it was decided to embed the 11th MEU into the 5th MEB. Admiral Arthur wanted PhibGru 3 to sail on or about 1 December to allow for an early turnover of Amphibious Ready Group A/Landing Force Seventh Fleet duties, but General Gray and Vice Admiral James F. Dorsey, Jr., Commander, Third Fleet, felt a later date would increase predeployment training time and enhance combat readiness. This issue was put to rest when the Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered the 5th MEB and PhibGru 3 to be on station and ready for combat in the Persian Gulf by 15 January, the U.N. deadline for Saddam Hussein to pull his troops out of Kuwait. This decision established the final sail date as 1 December.<sup>145</sup>

Like the 4th MEB earlier, the 5th MEB had precious little time to get ready to deploy. The major difference was that the 5th MEB would be arriving in the Gulf at about the same time as offensive actions were slated to begin. This meant that the 5th MEB had to combat load because there would be little or no opportunity to reconfigure ship loads on the way. Again, much like the 4th MEB, the 5th MEB had to load from multiple sea ports of departure. Most of the amphibious ships loaded at San Diego and the rest loaded at Long Beach. The MSC ships loaded at Port Hueneme.

On 1 December, the largest amphibious group to sail from the west coast since the Vietnam deployment in 1965 slipped over the horizon and began its voyage to the Persian Gulf.<sup>146</sup> In his final pre-sail report, a statement that later turned out to be prophetic, Brigadier General Rowe informed General Gray that while the 5th MEB was ready for any contingency, it was poorly equipped for sustained operations ashore because it lacked sufficient line haul transportation and had inadequate communications and cryptographic equipment.

### *Training in Transit*

Two of General Rowe's greatest worries, as the 5th MEB sailed, centered on the lack of training time and the ability of so many new units to work in harmony. The training status of the units of the 5th MEB varied widely. The 11th MEU had been training since the summer and was certified special operations capable after a rigorous program culminated with a final training exercise that tested its ability to conduct 18 different missions. The 2d and 3d Battalions, 5th Marines, and the 2d Battalion, 11th Marines, had been conducting normal training, but had not had a chance to fully integrate all of the combat support attachments that made up a true regimental landing team. Most of the Reserve units that came on board in mid-November drilled one weekend each month and pulled two weeks of

active training duty each year. Luckily, elements of the 4th Assault Amphibian Battalion and the 4th Tank Battalion had participated in combined arms exercises at Twentynine Palms the previous summer, so they were familiar with the rigors of a desert environment. On the down side, very few pilots from VMA-513, HMA-773, and HMM-265 had completed recent carrier qualifications, and the “Gulfport Trackers” of the 4th Assault Amphibian Battalion had little experience working with amphibious ships.<sup>147</sup>

The 5th Marines had to make do with what was left after I MEF and much of the 1st Marine Division left for the Gulf region. About one-half of the personnel assigned to 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, were non-deployable under existing regulations. The 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, had just returned from a unit deployment to Okinawa on 4 August, so many of its members were ineligible for immediate redeployment. In addition, the battalion experienced a change of command and the normal turnover of about half of its assigned Marines.

Following receipt of the October warning order, the 5th Marines conducted a computer-enhanced command post exercise to sharpen command and control procedures. In early November, maritime interdiction and small unit special operations training was held. Later in the month, the 5th Marines moved to Twentynine Palms for a series of live fire combined arms exercises. Unfortunately, the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, did not join its Reserve combat support units—Company A, 4th Assault Amphibian Battalion; Company A, 4th Combat Engineer Battalion, and Company A, 4th Tank Battalion—until the exercise was over. The Thanksgiving holidays were spent hurriedly trying to integrate MAG-50, BSSG 5, and the large number of Reservists. Despite the effort, the job was not com-

*The hurried gathering of forces to form the 5th MEB left little time for training, so much of the training was carried out on board ship on the way to the Persian Gulf.*

Department of Defense Photo (USN) DN-ST-91-07750



plete when it was time to embark. General Rowe's solution was to institute an intense training program during the 45-day transit to the Gulf.<sup>148</sup>

The command element's main mission was to plan for an amphibious assault at Ras Al Qulayah in southern Kuwait. Although planning to support a conventional amphibious assault was the primary focus of the 5th MEB's efforts, integrated training and detailed planning for a variety of combat contingencies continued day and night. General Rowe was concerned about air traffic control procedures and supporting arms coordination, both of which would have to be flawless to ensure a successful landing in Kuwait. As he later noted, an amphibious assault could require as many as 70 aircraft using six different airframes to fly from three separate decks simultaneously, a daunting coordination task.<sup>149</sup>

The biggest challenge was to integrate 7,500 Marines whose skill levels varied from rudimentary to special operations capable. While at sea, an aggressive training program took advantage of every opportunity. The 5th MEB staff developed a comprehensive training matrix using a building block approach that focused on contingencies and stressed safety.

The MEB command element had been augmented by a seven-man Battle Training Staff from Quantico while at Camp Pendleton. This staff was able to accompany the MEB when it deployed. The main training function enroute from San Diego to Hawaii was the integration of new staff members since the 11th MEU staff had been absorbed only recently, and at least two key planners did not join the MEB until it was ready to sail.<sup>150</sup> The pilots of MAG-50 used the trip to Hawaii to familiarize themselves with shipboard operations. Performance during this time was considered to be only marginally suitable with a close air support strip alert response of 20 minutes and few pilots night-operations qualified.<sup>151</sup>

A key training concern was the MEB's special operations capabilities, particularly maritime interdiction and non-combatant evacuation procedures. The 11th MEU was special operations capable but might be broken out at any time, therefore, Brigadier General Rowe wanted to ensure that the rest of the MEB could quickly form cohesive units varying in size from a reinforced company to a battalion landing team. The *Mobile*, the ship that most closely resembled the likely profile of an Iraqi merchant ship, was used as a maritime interdiction training platform to practice ship-boarding and search procedures by maritime special purpose forces. Additionally, some ships constructed mock buildings in available space so embarked Marines could practice urban warfare techniques. General military skills training while underway was intense. General Rowe recalled that every ship was a hive of training activity, and that on board the *Tarawa* it was not unusual for live fire practice to begin at sunrise and end at sunset, interrupted only for safety reasons or by flight operations.<sup>152</sup>

When the 5th MEB arrived at Pearl Harbor, intelligence specialists and radio battalion personnel were added to the command element. The aviation combat element got a boost when MAG-50 incorporated the "Rainbows" of Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 265 from MCAS Kaneohe. On 8 December, the group conducted Operation Boomerang, a fly-away training exercise to coordinate safe air operations by 30 aircraft from four squadrons flying off three decks



using six different aircraft types. After a very brief liberty call in Honolulu, the ATF sailed for the Philippines.

While enroute, MAG-50 conducted an underway exercise, So-Damn Insane, a simultaneous simulated helicopter assault involving more than 40 aircraft. This was followed by Stage I and II carrier qualifications. On 27 December, PhibGru 3 entered Subic Bay after MAG-50 conducted Exercise Snake Bite, a second turn-away landing by more than 40 aircraft. The 5th MEB took advantage of the Zambales Training Facility while PhibGru 3 was at Subic Bay. Exercise Quick Thrust included advance force operations, raids, and long-range reconnaissance insertions. Regimental Landing Team 5 then executed a turn-away landing by surface and air-cushion landing craft, while MAG-50 made a helicopter turn-away over six landing zones. By the time it sailed, MAG-50 had logged 1,781.4 flight hours by seven different airframes and had landed on every type of amphibious platform in the U.S. Navy. The command element ran a supporting arms coordination exercise to control naval gunfire, close air support, and artillery fire.<sup>153</sup> Brigade Service Support Group 5 used the in-port period to perform heavy vehicle maintenance.

One vital supply shortfall was filled when much-needed nuclear, biological, and chemical protective overgarments and ancillary equipment arrived. The shortage of cryptography equipment remained, but did not affect later operations. On 29 December, the MEB conducted live fire raid and mass casualty evacuation exercises, in addition to live fire training with small arms, crew-served weapons, LAVs, tanks, and assault amphibians. This training was followed by New Year's Eve celebrations during the final liberty call before the 5th MEB departed the Philippines on 2 January.<sup>154</sup>

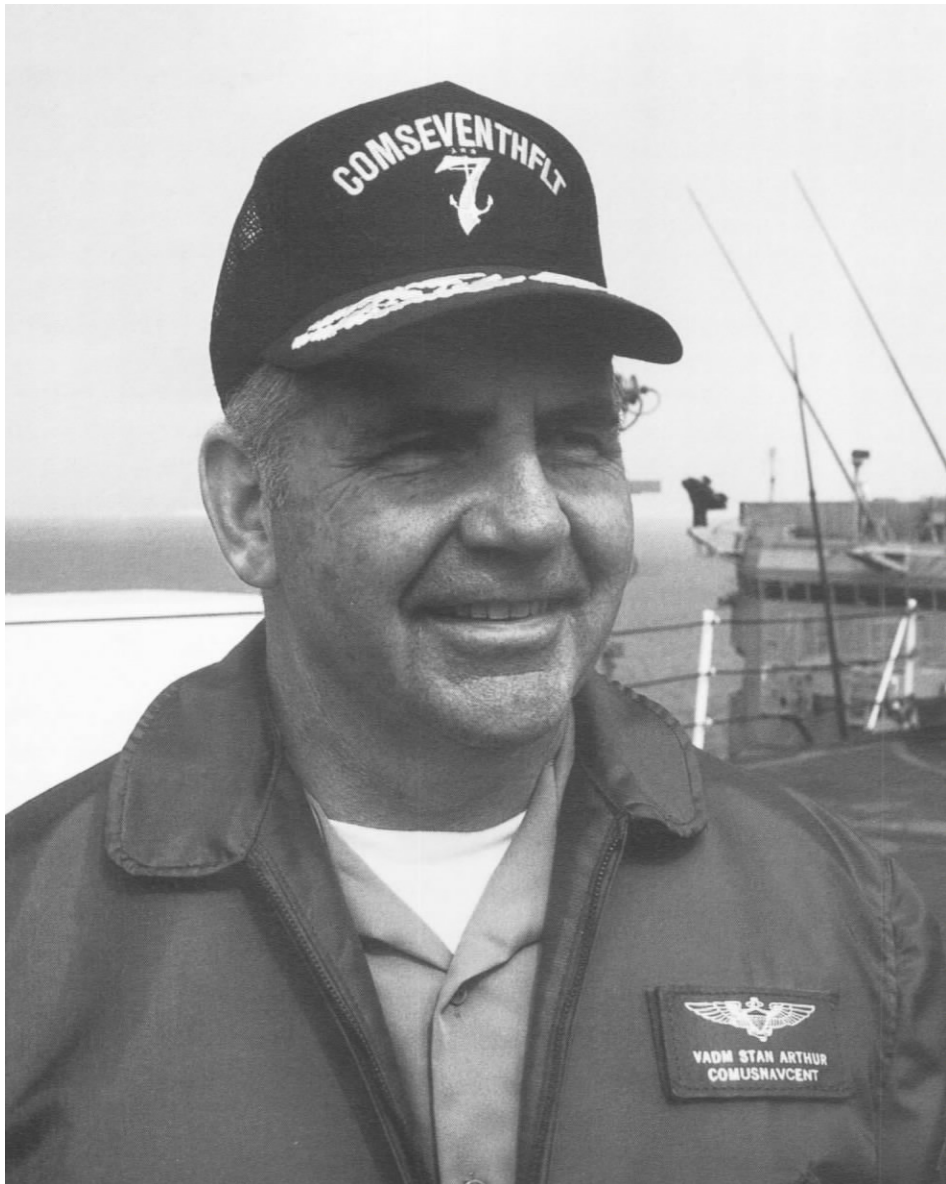
### *Link-up at Sea*

On 4 November, the 13th MEU(SOC) left the Persian Gulf. At that time efforts were made to have the 13th MEU released from its Landing Force Seventh Fleet duties so it could return home.\* Instead, the MEU was ordered to remain in the Western Pacific and was placed on a 72-hour alert to return to the Persian Gulf. On 17 December, Colonel John Rhodes received orders to return to the Persian Gulf via Singapore and to rendezvous with the 5th MEB enroute. On New Year's Eve, the MEU arrived at Singapore for a six-day port visit.<sup>155</sup>

Amphibious Ready Group Alpha and the 13th MEU(SOC) departed Singapore on 6 January, and rendezvoused with Amphibious Group 3 as it passed through the Malacca Straits. During its return voyage the MEU resumed a high tempo of training. Battalion Landing Team 1/4 conducted small unit and classroom training and Composite Helicopter Squadron 164 flew daily missions. During this

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\*Gen Gray objected to having a rotation policy for Marines afloat while there was none for Marines ashore but this issue became moot when additional combat power was needed to support Operation Desert Storm.



Department of Defense Photo (USN) DN-ST-91-08572

*VAdm Stanley R. Arthur, ComUSNavCent during Desert Storm, moved the amphibious task force into the northern Persian Gulf, looked at many amphibious options, and was a strong supporter of the Marine Forces Afloat.*

time, the 13th MEU's small boat, aviation, and anti-aircraft defense assets were integrated into shipboard emergency defense of the amphibious task force. Transport helicopters were used to identify surface contacts while attack helicopters protected ARG Alpha with rockets, 20mm cannon, and AIM-9 Sidewinder missiles. Four of the ships used Marine Stinger missile teams for low altitude air defense. All five of the ships used Marine M60 and M2HB machine guns for close-in defensive fires.<sup>156</sup>

The final leg of the transit to Southwest Asia was uneventful except for the brief flurry of excitement when a Russian Tupolev TU-95 Bear-C reconnaissance plane passed over the task force. After the rendezvous at sea, Colonel Rhodes and his staff often cross-decked from the *Okinawa* to the *Tarawa* for situation updates and to meet with their 5th MEB counterparts. On 12 January, Central Command assumed operational control of the task group. The next day, the 5th MEB and 13th MEU joined the 4th MEB and the *Ranger* (CV-61) Carrier Battle Group in the North Arabian Sea to form the largest amphibious task force assembled in a combat zone since the Inchon landing during the Korean Conflict in 1950.<sup>157</sup>

### *Command Relationships*

There had been several important changes in the command structure of the amphibious task force since the 5th MEB sailed from the United States. On 1 December, Vice Admiral Stanley R. Arthur replaced Admiral Mauz as the Central Command Naval Forces component commander. On the 12th, Lieutenant General Boomer boarded the *Blue Ridge* and briefed Arthur prior to a two-day Central Command planning conference held at Muscat, Oman. Five days later, a 5th MEB liaison team was assigned to 4th MEB. Later in the month, Major General Jenkins went ashore and attended a planning conference at I MEF headquarters at Al Jubayl where he briefed General Alfred Gray about amphibious plans and capabilities.<sup>158</sup> A NavCent planning conference also was held on 30 December. No ATF representatives were invited, however. The conference turned out to be critical since the decision was made to use an ATF amphibious assault ship as the airborne mine counter-measure platform without consultation or approval by Admiral LaPlante or Major General Jenkins.<sup>\*159</sup>

On 1 January, a new NavCent command structure went into effect. Admiral Arthur remained CTF 150 (ComUSNavCent) and the Naval Logistics Support Force retained its designator TG 150.3, but most other designations were changed to reflect the increased size of the naval forces in the Persian Gulf. Rear Admiral William M. Fogarty became Commander, Surface Action Force (CTF 151). All carrier battle groups inside the Persian Gulf were assigned to Battle Force Zulu (TF 154). Admiral LaPlante, the amphibious task force commander, became CTF 156, while Major General Jenkins, the landing force commander, was assigned CTF 158. Within Task Force 158, the 4th MEB was TG 158.1, the 5th MEB was TG 158.2, and the 13th MEU was TU 158.1.4.<sup>160</sup>

The late December conferences resulted in two changes that improved the planning process and enhanced command relationships among the Marine Forces Afloat, NavCent, and CentCom. First, Major General John J. Sheehan and a special planning staff, "MarCent Forward," were assigned to the flagship *Blue Ridge*. Major General Jenkins' predecessor at the Atlantic Fleet Landing Force Training Center and former commanding general of 4th MEB, Sheehan was selected

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\*This decision to use an LPH when an LPD would have sufficed later was criticized.

because of his amphibious expertise.\* Five field grade officers were also members of this planning cell.

The second addition was a landing force targeting cell tasked to work with the existing NavCent targeting cell assigned to the Joint Force Air Component Commander's (JFACC) staff at Riyadh. This cell relayed target information from the ATF and MFA staffs to the JFACC targeteers for inclusion in the air tasking order using the World-Wide Military Command and Control System computer network.<sup>161</sup>

The 5th MEB and the 13th MEU(SOC) linked up with the 4th MEB on 13 January. Together, they formed the largest Marine force afloat since Exercise Steel Pike in 1964. Consolidation of these forces, however, created problems in command and control. General Jenkins had to decide how best to organize the Marine Forces Afloat. Marine doctrine called for compositing separate combat elements by melding existing units into a single large force and specifically prohibited creating "a MAGTF within a MAGTF," but compositing was not a practical solution for the MFA. After extensive long-distance consultations with Brigadier General Rowe and Lieutenant General Robert Milligan, Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force Pacific, General Jenkins opted to expand the "associated" command relationship that had been used until the 13th MEU departed the Gulf in November.

The ATF had been divided into three groups for Operation Desert Shield. Although Admiral Arthur was now NavCent commander, the original reasons for dividing the ATF were still valid. Tactical and logistics factors made small task groups more desirable than one large ATF for day-to-day naval operations. Although the Marine landing force might have to operate as a single integrated force during a major amphibious operation, it would also have to deal with a myriad of special operations requiring smaller forces. These activities would require separate MEBs, independent MEUs, or small special purpose forces. Such contingency operations meant that the ATF would likely remain divided into several amphibious task groups.

General Jenkins also had to ponder the fact that with Operation Desert Storm about to begin, the MFA might be called on to make a landing without an adequate rehearsal. This issue was a factor in amphibious planning and dictated a scheme of maneuver that featured "two MEBs landing side-by-side rather than operating as a single small MEF."<sup>162</sup> Several other limiting factors came into play. There were very few shipyards available in the Gulf, so the Navy had to adopt a round-

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\*Although they differ as to the reasons, members of the NavCent and MFA staffs both agreed MarCent Fwd smoothed relationships.

robin ship maintenance program. The best amphibious training areas were located in Oman in the northern Arabian Sea and in the United Arab Emirates in the southern Gulf. This meant that integrated training was not practical because at least one amphibious task group would have to remain in the Persian Gulf at all times. Another major factor prohibiting traditional compositing was the lack of a suitable amphibious command ship for MEF-size operations.

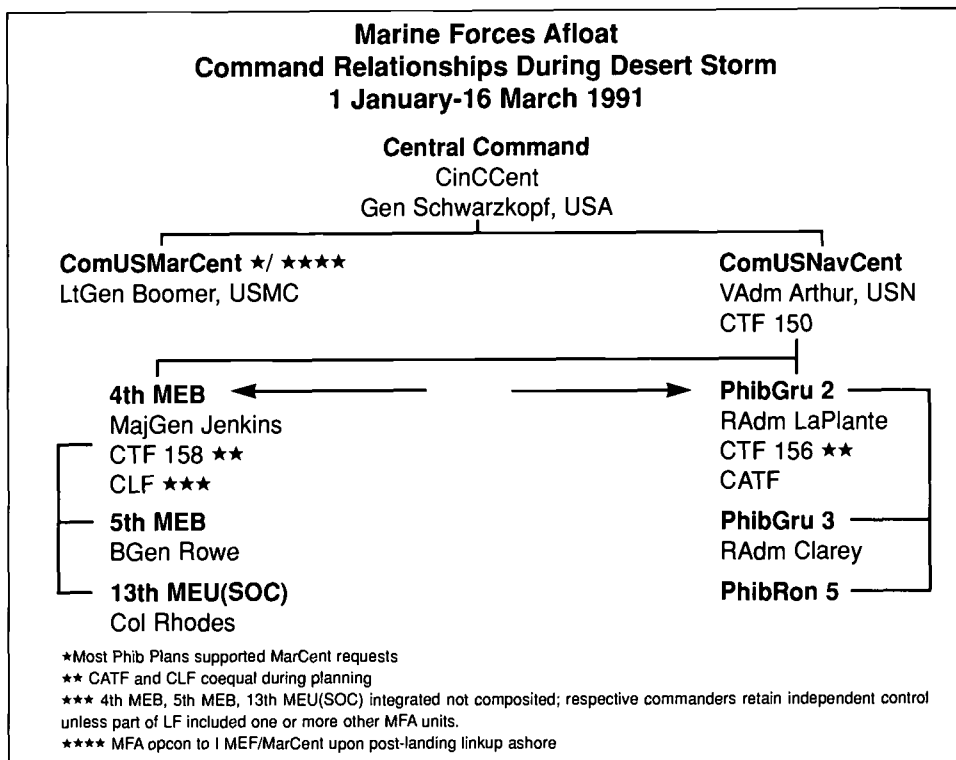
The lack of a command ship for the amphibious forces brought to the fore a long-standing problem. The ATF's most capable ships, the *Tarawa* and *Nassau*, were configured for command and control of only one MEU and a single PhibRon. As MEB- or MEF-level command ships they lacked adequate workspace and communications equipment. These multipurpose ships also served as medical receiving stations, floating ammunition and supply dumps, seaborne FARPs, and motherships for AAVs, LCUs, and LCACs. Ironically, the flexibility that had been built into these ships became a liability since these additional duties at times interfered with task force command and control. The command ships which had been specifically built to control large-scale amphibious operations in the 1960s were reconfigured as fleet command platforms in the late-1970s, but replacement command ships were neither available nor contemplated. One command ship, the *Blue Ridge*, was in the Persian Gulf, but it was not used as an amphibious command ship during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm as it was designated ComUSNavCent's flagship.<sup>163</sup>

The decision to associate was undoubtedly the correct one. Association avoided creating a "MAGTF within a MAGTF" and subordinate elements or task groups could easily break away from the ATF when necessary. Had a large landing force gone ashore for sustained operations the MFA could have compositing at that time. Although there were some problems with logistical support and communications with higher headquarters, associating forces best met the particular needs of the moment since it offered the most operational flexibility to the landing force.<sup>164</sup> Commenting on the compositing issue, General Jenkins noted that while "maximum flexibility was critical to the ATF's ability to accomplish its assigned missions...commanders...have to adapt to the situation at hand."<sup>165</sup> In response to a question as to why the landing force did not composite, Brigadier General Rowe stated that it was never practical, and unequivocally asserted association was the correct way to go.<sup>166</sup>

Within the MFA, the following command relationships were established. The 4th MEB would be the lead unit of the landing force. Major General Jenkins, as senior Marine officer afloat, was designated commanding general and his ship, the *Nassau*, the ATF/LF flagship. The 4th MEB staff became the "alpha" command group. Colonel Thomas A. Hobbs led the landing force ground combat element, while Colonel Glenn F. Burgess commanded the aviation combat element and Colonel James J. Doyle controlled combat service support.\* Brigadier

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\*This created a minor flurry on the Navy side because RAdm Clarey (ComPhibGru 3) was senior to RAdm LaPlante (ComPhibGru 2), but the issue was resolved when Clarey agreed LaPlante should remain CATF.



General Rowe became the deputy landing force commander and the 5th MEB staff was designated the “bravo” command group with the *Tarawa* serving as the alternate command post. Colonel Rhodes and the 13th MEU staff remained intact on board the *Okinawa* and could be used for special operations or as a floating reserve when not a part of the landing force. This arrangement provided solid command and control redundancy and allowed for easy task organization into MEB- or MEU-size units for independent operations.<sup>167</sup>

After being informed the 5th MEB would reinforce rather than replace the 4th MEB, General Jenkins brought the matter of designating the two-brigade force a MEF to the attention of General Gray. Major General Jenkins did not believe this change would have any effect on the internal operations of the Marine Forces Afloat, but he did conclude that it would give him some leverage in inter-Service matters. As a MEF commander he would be accorded appropriate representation at MarCent, NavCent, and CentCom. This would lessen the impact of the “missing link” in the chain of command. General Jenkins cited such issues as aviation control, the establishment of suitable amphibious objective areas, and a larger voice in operational planning as other reasons for changing the MFA designation.

General Gray agreed and sent the matter to Manpower Plans and Policy Division, HQMC, for action. In response, Marine Corps Bulletin 5400 was drafted to direct the activation of VI MEF, to confirm MFA command relationships, and to integrate the Marine Forces Afloat into a single Marine air-ground task force. Led by General Jenkins, the 4th MEB command element was to be designated VI MEF (Forward). The MEF headquarters would be manned in accord

with Table of Organization 49188—121 Marine officers, 117 enlisted, 9 Navy officers, and 108 sailors. Forces for the ground combat, air combat, and combat service support elements were to come from the afloat MAGTFs under the operational control of NavCent. The 4th MEB, 5th MEB, and 13th MEU stateside rear echelons would retain separate designations and would not be designated VI MEF (Rear). Lieutenant General Boomer, as MarCent commander, would be tasked to develop and publish appropriate documents and to initiate all necessary actions to activate VI MEF sometime in February. The draft being prepared for General Gray's signature, however, was overcome by events in the region and was never issued.<sup>168</sup>

### *Exercise Sea Soldier IV*

Exercise Sea Soldier IV was the last major amphibious exercise of the Sea Soldier series and was the only time the 4th and 5th MEBs had a chance to train together. Only the 4th and 5th MEBs participated as the 13th MEU(SOC) had been ordered into the Persian Gulf. Sea Soldier IV was the largest amphibious exercise since the 21,654-man II MEF sailed from the United States to Spain on board 43 amphibious ships and 17 Military Sea Transport Service ships in October 1964 during Exercise Steel Pike.\*

The final planning conference was held on 19 January and the 4th and 5th MEBs were ready to go. There were two rehearsals prior to Sea Soldier IV. The first was held on the night of 22 January and the second took place on 24th. Unfortunately, the exercise began on an ominous note. One of the primary goals of the rehearsals was to familiarize aircrews with night operations. One such mission resulted in tragedy. On 22 January, Captain Manuel Rivera, Jr., a "Bumblebee" pilot from VMA-331, was killed during carrier qualification training. Using a modified instrument approach to make a night landing on board the *Nassau*, Rivera closed to within three miles when his AV-8B Harrier went into a rapid, uncontrolled descent, hitting the beach and exploding. The cause of the accident was never firmly established.<sup>169</sup>

Sea Soldier IV was a much-needed rehearsal for the upcoming amphibious assault at Ash Shuaybah. It also provided a chance for the 5th MEB to practice deception operations. Lasting from 23 January to 2 February, the exercise was held at Ras Al Madrakah's Suqrah Bay, a site by then very familiar to the Marines and sailors of the 4th MEB. The major training objectives were to rehearse and refine day and night landing operations, rehearse supporting arms coordination, rehearse elements of the amphibious deception plan, develop and exercise inland link-up procedures, provide aviation assault support from shore-based facilities, conduct a tactical withdrawal at night, work on prisoner of war collection and pro-

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\*Steel Pike was a harbinger of amphibious force woes; there were ship shortages, inadequate command ships, and insufficient NGF resources—problems that still plagued the MFA almost three decades later.



Department of Defense Photo (USN) DN-ST-92-06923

*An AAV-7A1 amphibious assault vehicle is driven off one of the Nassau's landing craft as 4th MEB Marines train during the Sea Soldier exercises.*

cessing, practice mass casualty evacuations, and conduct extensive vehicle and equipment maintenance while on shore.<sup>170</sup>

The exercise began on the morning of the 23d, when the 5th MEB conducted surface and heliborne demonstrations west of Ras Al Madrasah. The main event, a two-brigade pre-dawn assault controlled by the 4th MEB command element began at 0400 on the 26th. In addition to the surface assault, three rifle battalions were helilifted from nine ships during the largest heliborne exercise conducted by the Marine Corps in recent years. Helicopters from nine different squadrons participated in the landing exercise. Harriers from VMA-331 and VMA-513 made 172 day sorties and 25 night sorties from the assault ships *Nassau* and *Tarawa*.

The landing was followed by a 24-hour field exercise, about a week of desert training, and an amphibious withdrawal exercise. In addition, General Jenkins held a command post exercise at his field headquarters. A 60 x 100 foot sand table, courtesy of the 2d Topographical Detachment, replicated the landing beaches and inland terrain in the vicinity of Ash Shuaybah. The exercise turned out to be the only opportunity for all aviation and ground commanders to get together and carefully coordinate their plans for Operation Desert Saber.<sup>171</sup> During field exercises units worked on individual skills, small unit tactics, overland movement, and combat firing techniques. While on shore, vehicles and equipment were worked on by mobile maintenance teams. A comprehensive prisoner of war exercise tested the ability of the military police and counterintelligence teams to handle Iraqi prisoners. More than 60 role players were interrogated, processed, and held in a mock prisoner of war compound. Post-conflict reports indicated that many lessons learned here were put into practice in Kuwait.<sup>172</sup>



The final training stage was a tactical withdrawal. Major General Jenkins wanted to give the 5th MEB command element some practice, so control of the landing force was passed to Brigadier General Rowe for this action. The withdrawal took place over a 24-hour period and featured a heliborne night extraction of two rifle battalions. Generals Jenkins and Rowe were both satisfied with this part of the exercise.<sup>173</sup>

By the end of Sea Soldier IV, all elements of the landing force and landing plan had been exercised by both MEB command elements. More than 6,500 Marines and 574 vehicles had gone ashore and long overdue maintenance had been completed. Following Sea Soldier IV, the 5th MEB traveled north through Strait of Hormuz to the United Arab Emirates to conduct final training before moving into the northern Gulf. At Al Hamra, it held a three-day supporting arms center coordination exercise (SACCEX). When the SACCEX ended, General Jenkins felt confident his landing forces were ready to conduct any of the 25 amphibious operations then on the drawing board.<sup>174</sup>

## Desert Storm Amphibious Plans

### *The Situation*

The original purpose of Operation Desert Shield was to protect the Arabian Peninsula from further Iraqi aggression and this had been accomplished by late September 1990. Saddam Hussein, however, was determined to solidify his position inside Kuwait. Kuwait, therefore, was turned into a vast fortress bristling with mines, barbed wire, underground bunkers, and concrete strongpoints. The "Saddam Line" stretched from Wadi Al Batin to the Gulf, bent north up the coast through Kuwait City, and continued on to Bubiyan Island. Positive that Saudi Arabia was no longer threatened, General Colin Powell tasked General Schwarzkopf to prepare contingency plans to eject the Iraqis from Kuwait. As September drew to a close Schwarzkopf was confident he could repel an Iraqi assault, but he did not believe he could conduct a successful offensive without significant reinforcements.<sup>175</sup>

At that time, Marine units in Southwest Asia were split between the operational control of MarCent and NavCent and answered to no common superior below CinCCent. MarCent's 30,000 Marines ashore were assigned to defend a coastal area from Ras Al Mishab south to Al Jubayl. The Marine Forces Afloat—under operational control of NavCent and not MarCent—included 12,737 men from 4th MEB and 13th MEU(SOC) on board 18 amphibious ships inside the Gulf and in the North Arabian Sea.\* At first the Marine Forces Afloat were the theater reserve force, but they later grew into the largest amphibious force of its kind in three decades.

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\*MajGen Rhodes noted that 13th MEU(SOC) never chopped from III MEF to 4th MEB, but as senior Marine on-scene, Gen Jenkins exercised tactical control.

*The First Offensive Plan*

In spite of objections about premature offensive action, CentCom was ordered to prepare a concept of operations. A hand-picked staff, informally known as the "Jedi Knights," created several. In the "one-corps option" plan General Schwarzkopf selected for further study on 5 October, American forces were assigned the premier role.<sup>176</sup> XVIII Airborne Corps was to attack into central Kuwait in mid-December. The spearhead would be the 1st Armored and 24th Infantry (Mechanized) Divisions which would drive deep into Kuwait to capture and occupy key terrain between Kuwait City and the Iraqi border. The 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) and I MEF would push swiftly inland to seize and hold a key road intersection at Al Jahrah in order to block the escape of Iraqi divisions from southern Kuwait.\* The 82d Airborne Division would be the corps reserve. A combined French-Egyptian corps would screen CentCom's left flank and Saudi-led Gulf Cooperation Council forces would protect the right wing and liberate Kuwait City.

The Marines, including the 4th MEB which would be incorporated into I MEF prior to the attack, were assigned to the central sector.\*\* Lieutenant General Boomer would also have tactical control of the British 7th Armoured Brigade.\*\*\* The 101st Airborne Division would make a night air mobile assault to seize Mutlah Ridge just northwest of Kuwait City. Simultaneously, British and Marine mechanized combined-arms task forces would penetrate the Iraqi lines under cover of darkness then push rapidly forward to link-up with the Screaming Eagles. The 13th MEU(SOC) would remain at sea in reserve and conduct amphibious demonstrations off the Kuwaiti coast.

This plan was fraught with problems for Marine forces. It had been created without the knowledge of Lieutenant General Boomer, so the Marines had no voice in the planning process. The plan did not recognize or allow for unique Marine capabilities or Marine shortfalls. It violated Marine Corps doctrine in a way that negated Marine strengths and accentuated Marine weaknesses. The essential failing was that the Jedi Knights planned to use I MEF as if it were an Army heavy division. Unfortunately, this was a role for which the Marines were ill-suited in terms of equipment, structure, and tactics. The existing plan threatened to fragment well-trained MAGTFs, strip the Marines of their organic air power, and stretch logistics beyond the breaking point.

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\*LtGen Trainor characterized the plan as "the Marines [would] kick down the door for the Army and then protect the Army's LOC." (Trainor comments)

\*\*The plan was so closely held that even Gen Jenkins had no knowledge of it. (Jenkins comments II)

\*\*\*The 7th Armoured Brigade was the lineal descendant of the famous "Desert Rats" of World War II.



The Marines were not mobile enough to execute the scheme of maneuver because they lacked sufficient line haul, heavy equipment transporters, and tanker trucks to support the planned deep inland movement. Marine assault amphibians had been primarily designed for ship-to-shore movement, not for use as armored personnel carriers, so if the AAVs were used in the manner prescribed they would not be able to sustain the combat tempo envisioned. Without a dedicated aviation component the Marines would lack fire support because they would be too far inland to call for naval gunfire and they had no corps-level artillery.\* After going over the CentCom plan, General Boomer sent Marine Colonel James D. Majchrzak to Riyadh to meet with CentCom planners. He also ordered the MarCent battle planning staff to begin working on its own plan and to provide prompt and appropriate answers to any future CentCom queries.<sup>177</sup>

### *The Home Front*

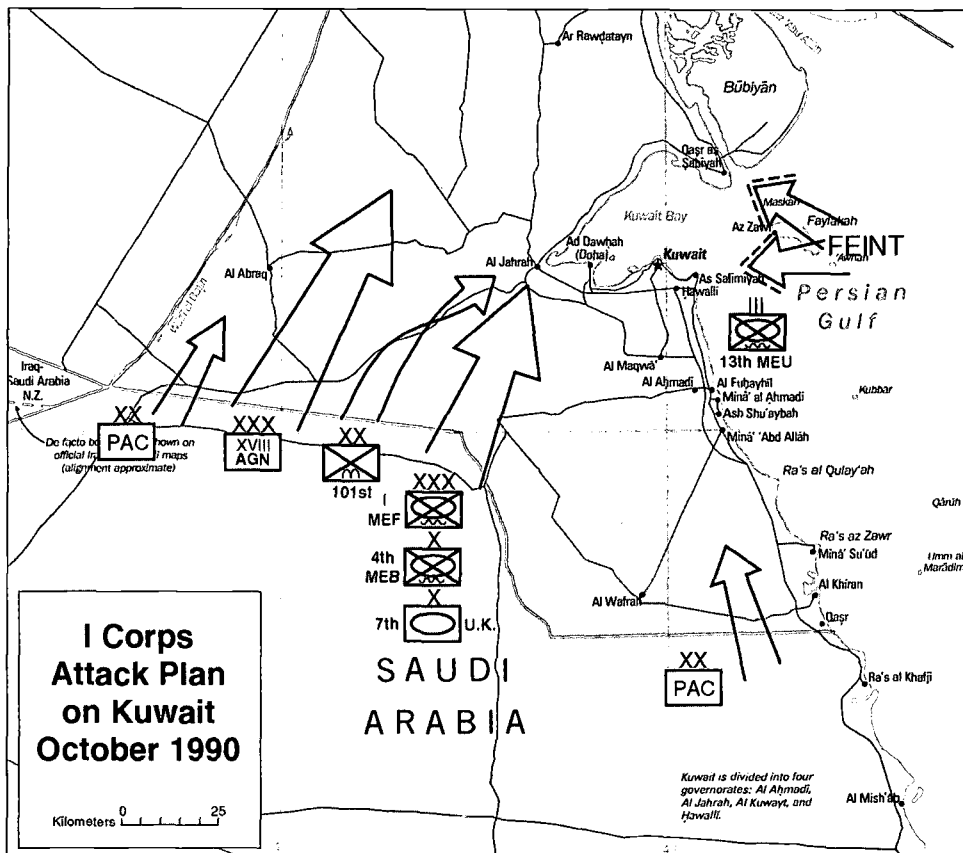
As it turned out, General Boomer and the Marines were not the only ones concerned about this first offensive plan. General Schwarzkopf was uneasy about it as well. He sent Marine Major General Robert Johnston to Washington to brief the Joint Chiefs and the National Command Authorities with an admonition not to be too enthusiastic and to end the presentation with a plea for more troops and more time. Predictably, the Joint Chiefs were not happy when they heard the plan on 10 October. One of the harshest critics that day was General Alfred Gray. The outspoken Marine Commandant felt it was a poor plan that violated the principles of maneuver warfare and ignored the potential for amphibious intervention.

No discussion of Marine operations in the Persian Gulf can be complete without acknowledging the active role played by General Gray. He has been described as "imaginative, innovative, iconoclastic, articulate, charismatic, and compassionate."<sup>178</sup> A former enlisted Marine, Gray possessed vast combat experience. He first saw combat as a sergeant during the Korean War. After becoming an officer, Gray had the unusual distinction of commanding both the first and last Marine ground units to see service during the Vietnam War. While a general officer, Gray commanded the 4th Marine Amphibious Brigade, the 2d Marine Division, II Marine Amphibious Force, and Fleet Marine Force Atlantic. During that time he stressed combat readiness, enhanced the special operations capabilities of forward-deployed Marine units, and was an advocate of maneuver warfare.<sup>179</sup>

The Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 profoundly changed the duties of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. It significantly strengthened the power of the Chairman at the expense of the other Chiefs. Instead of being only "one among equals," the

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\*The approximate artillery equivalents of these supporting arms are: seven fire support ships (2 BB, 5 DD/FF) have the fire power of at least three field artillery groups, and one Harrier squadron can deliver the explosive power of 12 hours of 155mm bombardment by an artillery battalion in a single airstrike.



Chairman became the principal military adviser to the President and he served as the primary conduit between civilian decision makers and military commanders. The Joint Chiefs were purposely placed outside of the operational chain of command. Their new functions were to advise the Chairman and to act as military administrators for each of their respective Services. The unified commanders-in-chief in the field were granted greater warfighting responsibilities and controlled all operational forces within their theaters. These reforms eliminated the sometimes fuzzy nature of the relationships between theater commanders and the Service chiefs that had hampered previous operations.

These new roles for the Joint Chiefs were not the type relished by an activist like Gray. Clearly unhappy as a bystander, he pushed his statutory limits to the edge during the Gulf War. Inside Washington, he was a vocal and outspoken advocate for amphibious operations who constantly lobbied General Powell for a greater afloat Marine presence and a more active operational role for the deployed landing forces. Within the Marine Corps he kept a close watch on training and carefully marshalled available resources to support the Marines in the Gulf.

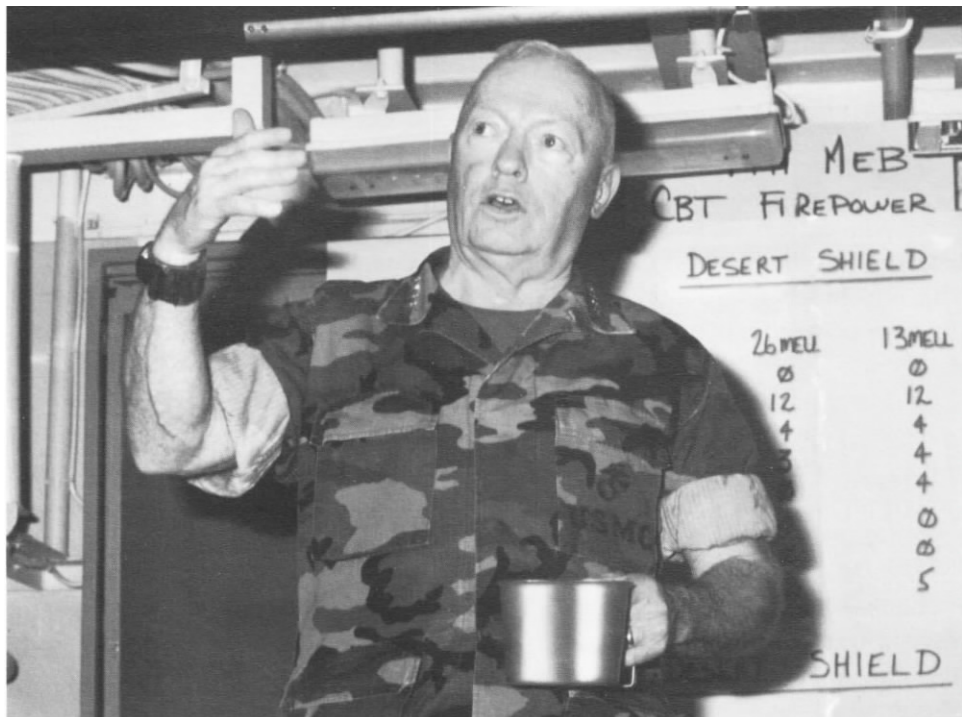
The much-maligned CentCom offensive plan fared no better at the White House than it did at the Pentagon. After President Bush and the National Security Council heard the plan there was a lot of grumbling. They seemed satisfied with the air campaign, but blasted the ground plan as “unimaginative.” Some critics

mirrored General Gray's previous comments and inquired about the possibility of an "Inchon-style" turning movement from the sea. Secretary of Defense Richard B. Cheney was so unhappy with the plan that he suggested a ground attack into western Iraq. President Bush agreed to send more troops, but he also told General Powell to have CentCom come up with a better plan.<sup>180</sup>

General Gray did not limit his activities in support of a greater Marine role in the Gulf to Washington's corridors of power. He went to the Gulf in October and met with senior Navy and Marine officers. The tour convinced Gray that there should be a Marine-generated amphibious campaign plan similar to the "Instant Thunder" air campaign created by U.S. Air Force "Checkmate" planners. Accordingly, Major General Matthew P. Caulfield was ordered to have the Marine Corps Combat Development Command make recommendations for more effective use of amphibious forces in the Gulf. An Ad Hoc Study Team was quickly assembled at Quantico to look at amphibious options and the Warfighting Center conducted a series of war games to test the Study Team's recommendations. Among the options looked at were Marine landings from the Red Sea and over-land strikes into western Iraq from Jordan, Syria, or Turkey. Each of these options, however, were deemed unworkable. Plans for a major amphibious assault into Iraq, codenamed Operation Tiger, and a series of amphibious raids

*The Commandant, Gen Gray, addresses the 4th MEB staff on board the Nassau. Gray worked behind the scenes to showcase Marine capabilities and pushed hard for an amphibious assault despite high-level objections to such an operation.*

Department of Defense Photo (USMC) DM-ST-91-04423



proved to be far more practical and were accepted by General Gray in November.

These concepts were detailed in a report titled “The Use of Amphibious Forces in Southwest Asia.” This document was an in-depth look at a wide spectrum of amphibious operations and their specific utility in the Gulf. Prospective amphibious actions included several small-scale versions of World War II island hopping whereby the small islands and oil rigs in the northern Gulf would be seized or neutralized by aggressive naval action. There were also plans for the seizure of Faylakah Island, landings at Bubiyan Island and Kuwait Bay, and a direct assault on the Al Faw Peninsula. This thought-provoking study was, however, kept close to the vest and did not receive widespread distribution.<sup>181</sup>

A Quantico-based briefing team led by Colonel Martin R. Steele was sent to the Gulf in December, but received a very cool reception. It was obvious Operation Tiger was not going to be implemented and there would be no “Inchon” in the Gulf. Undaunted by this rejection, General Gray instead pressed for amphibious raids to keep Saddam off balance. Although he was unaware of General Gray’s specific plans at the time, General Jenkins later noted that “the World War II style assault ... got all the attention, but other operations had the potential for far greater strategic leverage and were in line with our maneuver from the sea concepts.”<sup>182</sup>

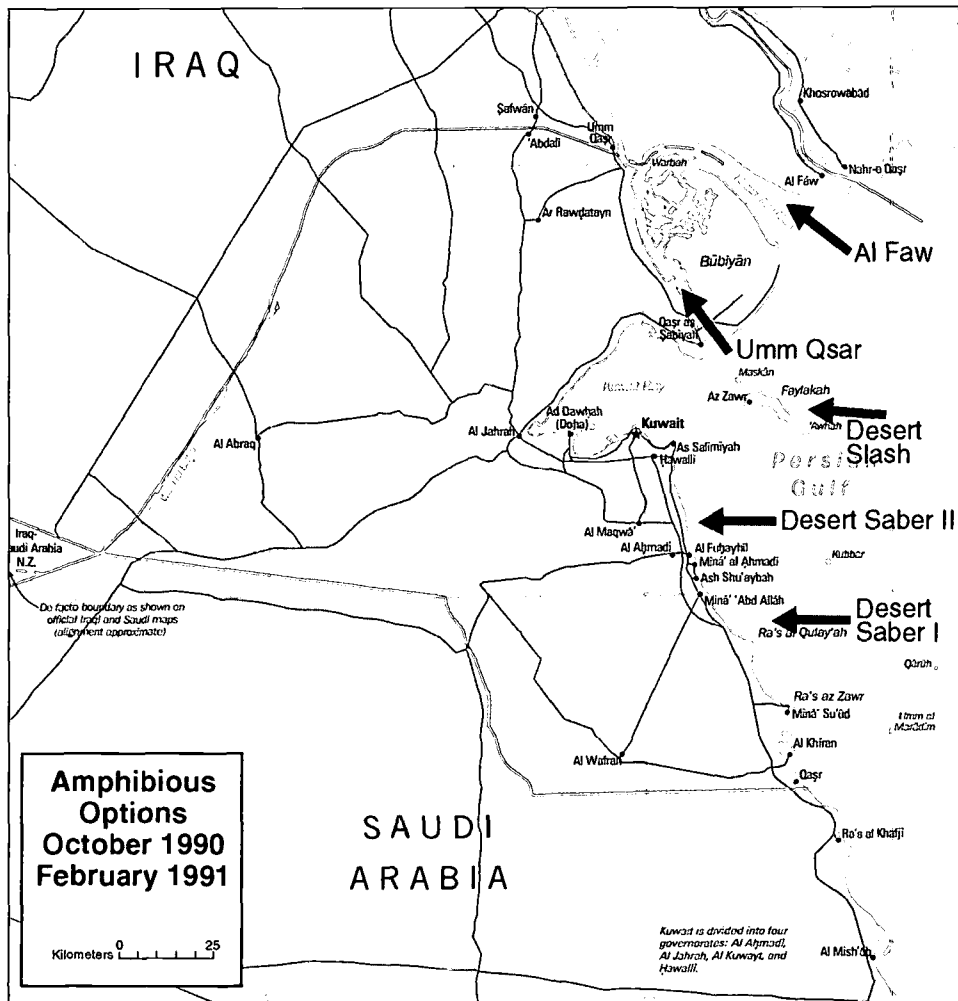
In December, General Gray ordered Major General John J. Sheehan to form an amphibious planning cell to be sent to the Gulf to assist the NavCent staff. At the same time he started the ball rolling to activate VI Marine Expeditionary Force which would be composed of the Marine Forces Afloat. This move would formalize the command structure of the MFA and give General Jenkins more say in joint affairs. Operationally, it would unite three independent MAGTFs that had been operating in-theater without a common headquarters other than NavCent, and would give General Jenkins increased status when working with NavCent and CentCom. Ultimately it led to the deployment of MarCent (Forward).<sup>183</sup>

### *The Al Faw Options*

One major amphibious operation contemplated was a landing on Iraq’s Al Faw Peninsula, an 18-mile-wide stretch of land sandwiched between the Bubiyan Channel and the Shatt Al Arab waterway that delineated Iraq’s border with Iran. This area had been the site of the fiercest battles of the Iran-Iraq War because of its strategic importance. The Iraqi naval base at Umm Qasr, the port at Az Zubayr, and Basrah—the strategic heart of southern Iraq—were all located near Al Faw.

Al Faw seemed to be the best spot for an indirect approach from the sea as had been suggested after the President’s war plans brief. As General Jenkins later noted: “There was really only one good spot for an amphibious landing in the entire Gulf...the Al Faw Peninsula.”<sup>184</sup> This area was such an obvious choice that Quantico and 4th MEB both formulated plans for its capture by amphibious assault. Each plan, of course, had variations in scope and execution.

The Ad Hoc Study Team’s Operation Tiger would synchronize the Marine landings with CentCom’s armor-heavy “left hook” coming across the desert from the west. In this plan, Basrah would be threatened by amphibious forces after the



*Republican Guard* moved south to engage the U.S. Army's VII Corps. A five-regiment amphibious assault force embarked on board all available shipping, including MPS ships, would capture Umm Qasr and Az Zubayr. The Iraqis would then be placed on the horns of a dilemma, they would have to either wheel about to meet this new threat or leave an open corridor to Basrah. The 4th MEB plan was to use an amphibious assault as a supporting attack to draw attention away from the CentCom main effort. The Marine Forces Afloat would land at Al Faw then be reinforced by I MEF forces shuttling north from Al Jubayl. This landing would take place before the inland ground offensive began in order to fix elements of the *Republican Guard* near Basrah and keep this powerful Iraqi reserve force from interdicting the VII Corps armored thrust.

Lieutenant General Boomer tried to convince CentCom to give Al Faw a closer look, but he later opined that General Schwarzkopf never appeared to seriously consider the option. Schwarzkopf asserted that he thought the plan credible, but it was rejected by higher authority.<sup>185</sup> Although the option caused much dis-



quiet on the Navy side, General Jenkins believed that although a landing at Al Faw never came to fruition, the potential for success was excellent.<sup>186</sup> He noted many problems that later sidetracked an amphibious assault on Kuwait could have been avoided by landing at Al Faw. Careful study of Iraqi shipping lanes during Desert Shield revealed a mine-free passage along the Iranian coast, the isolation of the peninsula allowed the creation of a suitable amphibious objective area, the lack of population and infrastructure eliminated concerns about collateral damage, and the area was only lightly defended.\*

There were problems with such daring plans. General Schwarzkopf's Jedi Knights used manual and computer-assisted analysis to conclude an amphibious landing at Al Faw "was not feasible in support of the [CentCom] main attack." They determined Iraqi coastal defenses, the length of time necessary to seize and strengthen the beachhead, the lack of Marine armor, and the threat from nearby *Republican Guard* heavy divisions could result in unacceptably high casualties.<sup>187</sup>

There were other objections as well. Admiral Mauz was reluctant to send ships into the heavily mined waters of the northern Gulf and was concerned about vulnerable ships running a narrow gauntlet that was well within the ranges of Silkworm missiles, Exocet-carrying aircraft, and Scud/FROG missiles. He noted that the only mine-free sea lanes were inside Iranian territorial waters, the northern Gulf had insufficient room for fleet support areas, and sea-based logistics could not support the proposed landing force. Admiral LaPlante shared these objections and further concluded that the 4th MEB did not have sufficient combat power to sustain an attack aimed at Basrah.<sup>188</sup> Colonel Wickersham, the senior Marine on the NavCent staff at that time, opposed landing at Al Faw because of poor hydrography and difficult inland terrain.<sup>189</sup> He also noted the Al Faw option could easily become a trap for the fleet and the landing force, so cost-risk analysis argued against landing there. At the highest levels the Al Faw option was rejected because its proximity to Iran presented unacceptable diplomatic risks.<sup>190</sup>

### *Desert Storm Plans*

In November, President Bush authorized the reinforcements General Schwarzkopf had requested. Among the new units deployed to the Gulf were the Army's VII Corps, the bulk of the II MEF, and the 5th MEB.\*\* These additional forces allowed General Schwarzkopf to draw up a new offensive plan which he named Operation Desert Storm. Little changed from the original air campaign plan, then codenamed Instant Thunder. The ground attack, however, was radical-

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\*No more than a single Iraqi brigade was ever identified in the landing area.

\*\*II MEF colors remained at Camp Lejeune, but the 2d MarDiv, 2d MAW, and 2d FSSG all deployed to the Gulf.

ly different. The point of main effort was shifted from central Kuwait to the far western flank. XVIII Airborne Corps and VII Corps would achieve surprise by sweeping out of the unguarded desert to cut off *Republican Guard* units. General Schwarzkopf later compared this maneuver to the "Hail Mary" play in football where the offensive receivers overload the defense by lining up on one sideline then running downfield into the same corner of the end zone.<sup>191</sup>

In this revised offensive plan, I MEF was slated to conduct a supporting attack to fix and destroy Iraqi forces in southern Kuwait. It was first planned that the Marines ashore would breach the Saddam Line, then link-up with Marine amphibious forces before pushing north to Kuwait City in concert with Joint Forces Command (JFC).<sup>\*</sup> As time passed, however, the situation changed and obviated the need for an amphibious assault although several such operations had been planned.

### *Iraqi Coastal Defenses*

The northern Gulf had been liberally seeded with a mixture of deep-water pressure sensitive, magnetic, and acoustic mines arranged in seven groups and four lines. Closer to shore barbed wire, tanglefoot wire, steel and concrete obstacles, and antitank mines were placed throughout the surf zone. The beaches contained land mines, barbed wire, trenches, berms, and covered machine gun nests. The Iraqis turned seaside villas into fortified bunkers and high-rise apartment buildings along the coast served as lookout towers mounting deadly antiaircraft nests on their roofs. This defensive line was backed up by a row of antitank ditches and dug-in tanks.<sup>192</sup>

Contemporary intelligence estimates reported 68,000 Iraqi troops, 190 tanks, and 342 artillery pieces were earmarked for coastal defense between Kuwait City and Mina Saud.<sup>\*\*193</sup> The Iraqi *11th Infantry Division* occupied Kuwait City, the *19th Infantry Division* defended Ash Shuaybah, the *42d Infantry Division* was at Ras Al Qulayah, and the *18th Infantry Division* was in the vicinity of Mina Saud. The powerful *3d Tank Division* and *5th Mechanized Division* were both located within one hour of any potential landing spot along this stretch of coastline.

Saddam also eventually used environmentally detrimental obstructions of questionable military value. He moored potentially explosive heavily laden oil tankers along the pier at Ash Shuaybah, rigged oil terminals and well heads to flood oil into coastal waters, and reportedly strung underwater cables to electrocute Marines as they waded ashore. One of the most dangerous spots on the coast was the industrial port complex at Ash Shuaybah. Here were located a natural gas pro-

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<sup>\*</sup>JFC was the pan-Arab corps, a parallel command not under Gen Schwarzkopf's operational control; it consisted of Gulf-Cooperation Council JFC-East (JFC-E) and the Syrian-Egyptian JFC-North (JFC-N).

<sup>\*\*</sup>Post-conflict analysis revealed these numbers to be inaccurate; however, they comprised the data used by the planners at the time.



Department of Defense Photo (USN) DN-ST-91-08410

*Barbed wire, mines, and other obstacles were erected along the shoreline during the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait to prevent or slow any attack by sea.*

cessing plant and a storage tank farm that could have exploded with a blast equal to that of a tactical nuclear weapon whether detonated purposely, by accident, or by friendly fire.

The Iraqis launched a campaign of environmental terrorism when they sabotaged the super tanker terminal at Sea Island, dumping thousands of gallons of oil into the Gulf on 25 January. The resulting oil slick stretched 35 miles, devastated area wildlife, and threatened Saudi desalinization plants until the oil flow was stanchied by air strikes and Kuwaiti resistance fighters.<sup>194</sup> Saddam later lit more than 600 oil wells on fire and created a blanket of thick black smoke that obscured ground targets and Iraqi movements.

### *Ras Al Qulayah Plan*

Almost all ATF plans after late October were driven by requirements generated at MarCent. The desire to seize a port facility to establish a logistics base to support the I MEF attack into Kuwait led to a plan to land at Ras Al Qulayah on the southern Kuwait coast.\* Ras Al Qulayah was the site of a small port and naval base located between Mina Saud and Ash Shuaybah. It was selected because it

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\*This plan could be easily adapted if the Iraqis launched an offensive and drove into Saudi Arabia. (Mauz Comments)

sat astride the coastal highway, outflanked the Saddam Line, and could support logistics-over-the-shore operations. Its main drawbacks were a very shallow hydrographic gradient of 1:1,000 which would not allow fire support ships to close the beach and the lack of strategic depth which brought the landing force ashore close to the Iraqi main line of resistance and reserve staging areas.

On 20 October, Admiral Mauz issued a letter of instruction for amphibious planning.<sup>\*195</sup> The document included a number of assumptions: an extensive naval and air campaign prior to the ground offensive would gain and maintain naval and air superiority within the amphibious objective area; enemy forces in the AOA would be destroyed or sufficiently reduced enough to ensure a successful landing; the 3d MAW could provide aviation support; mine countermeasures (MCM) forces would clear underwater mines; link-up with friendly forces would occur within 72 hours; and MarCent forces would penetrate the Saddam Line to achieve the link-up. Admiral LaPlante and General Jenkins were directed to prepare plans for an amphibious assault to seize Ras Al Qulayah to "establish a beachhead/seize a port area to sustain U.S. forces in follow-on operations." The launch date and time would depend on the progress of the Coalition attack into Kuwait. The operation was assigned the codename Desert Saber.<sup>\*\*</sup>

The joint plan called for supporting, pre-assault, and subsidiary operations to begin on D-Minus Seven. At that time theater-wide air operations would begin to isolate the amphibious objective area, reduce enemy strength to an acceptable level, destroy all high priority targets, and amphibious forces would start their movement to the AOA. Beginning on D-Minus Three supporting and advance forces would start to clear underwater mines, make hydrographic reconnaissance, and conduct deception operations while the air and naval bombardments continued.

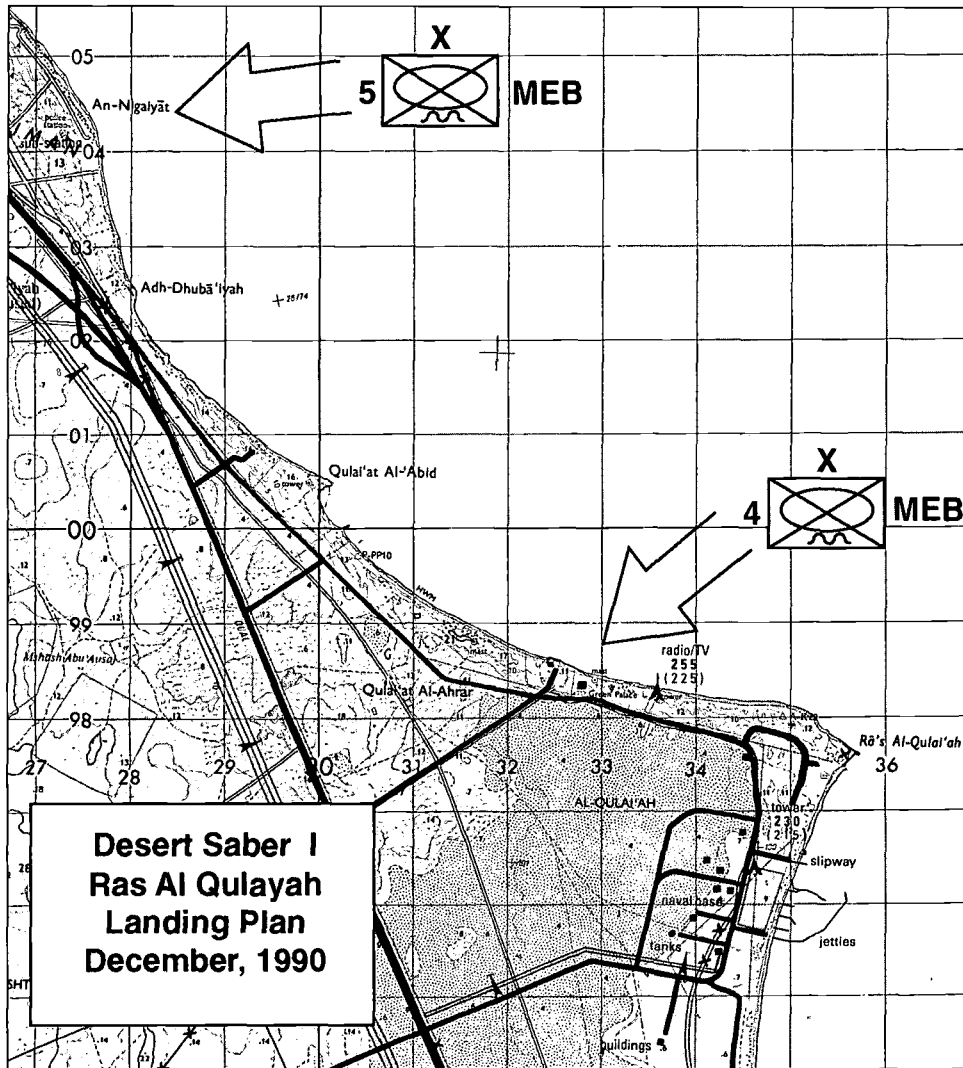
The most complex and crucial of the supporting operations was mine countermeasures. Navy surface and air assets would isolate the AOA to halt further mining and repel Iraqi air and surface attacks. The MCM force would mark all mine-like objects within the fire support areas, sea echelons, and approach lanes. Each area would be swept after divers verified the presence of mines and explosive ordnance men destroyed selected obstacles. Navy SEALs would conduct very shallow water hydrographic reconnaissance. If mines were discovered the assault would be delayed until beach approach lanes could be cleared. Admiral Mauz included the proviso that "Damage/loss of a single amphibious ship...is unacceptable and will result in cancellation...of the amphibious assault."<sup>196</sup>

Another serious planning issue was creating a suitable amphibious objective area. An AOA is the air, land, and sea space reserved for the operational control

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\*Adm Mauz asserted he never favored this option and viewed the resulting planning as almost a training exercise. (Mauz Comments)

\*\*This name caused some confusion because the British attack in support of Desert Storm was codenamed Operation Desert Sabre.



of the amphibious task force commander. It is established to ensure unity of command, to minimize confusion that might lead to fratricide, and to ensure proper use and coordination of a wide variety of supporting arms. A single commander controls all movement and is responsible for fire support coordination within the AOA. He may delegate part of this authority to the advance force commander before the ATF arrives in the AOA or to the landing force commander after the forces are firmly established ashore, but outside agencies must have expressed permission to enter into, fire into, or pass through the AOA. The AOA is terminated upon completion of the amphibious operation.

At Ras Al Qulayah advance force operations would begin on D minus seven. The supporting operations, mine sweeping and naval gunfire support, would be conducted by a surface action force, TF 151. The Desert Saber AOA would be activated five days before the assault. From that point Admiral LaPlante would control all seaborne, air, and ground activities within the AOA until it was dissolved. Admiral LaPlante could delegate coordinating authority for shore operations to General Jenkins once the Marines had landed. Once MarCent and JFC forces linked up, the AOA would be terminated.

The mission was to interdict lines of communication, fix enemy forces on the coastline, and establish a beachhead to secure the naval facility and port area at Ras Al Qulayah. General Jenkins intended to isolate the force beachhead by attacking enemy concentrations with heavy air and naval gunfire support. The Marines would land at night and swiftly establish blocking positions before the enemy could react. The point of main effort would be the attack to seize the naval base and block the main supply route from Mina Saud. Once blocking positions were established, it was imperative that a rapid buildup of combat supplies and equipment take place on the first day. On the second day the beachhead would be expanded and specific link-up points would be established while tactical air continued to isolate the battlefield.<sup>197</sup>

The landing would be a surface-heavy assault by two forces. The landings would take place between An Nigaiyat and the Ras Al Qulayah Peninsula. One mechanized combined arms task force would land in the vicinity of Adh Dhubayah and attack north to establish blocking positions north and west of Umm Qasabah. Heliborne reinforcements would land and be integrated into these defensive positions to prevent Iraqi penetrations of the force beachhead line from the north and northwest. The other mechanized force would land at Qulaiat Al Abid, attack south to capture the port and naval base, then establish a blocking position astride the main supply route south of Al Adami. Heliborne reinforcements would also be integrated into these positions. Aircraft and LAVs would screen the west flank to provide early warning of enemy movement, delay penetration of the force beachhead line, and support economy of force operations. Marine or Joint Forces Command, East (JFC-E) units attacking north from the Saudi border would link-up with the landing force in the vicinity of Al Adami.<sup>198</sup>

When General Jenkins and Admiral LaPlante forwarded their joint concept of operations for Admiral Mauz' approval on 21 November it included some controversial assumptions: the landing force would consist of two regimental landing



*MajGen John J. Sheehan served on board the flagship Blue Ridge as Commander, U.S. Marine Central Command (Forward), from January through March 1991.*

teams; all priority I and II, class A and B targets, would be destroyed before establishment of the AOA; all islands and oil platforms located in the seaward approach lanes or capable of interdicting the landing would be neutralized; an

ammunition ship would be dedicated to support the ATF; and a minimum of 12 naval gunfire support ships would be needed.\*

An in-depth intelligence study estimated 11,000 Iraqi soldiers were within 10 kilometers of the proposed landing beaches and there were no less than three mechanized/tank brigades in reserve nearby. This study convinced General Jenkins that he could not achieve success with the forces at hand, which consisted of only two battalion landing teams in November. General Jenkins, therefore, recommended the recall of the 13th MEU(SOC) from WestPac and the addition of at least one more regimental landing team. Both requests were granted. Instead of just one additional regimental landing team, however, the much more powerful 5th Marine Expeditionary Brigade was ordered to the Gulf and the 13th MEU(SOC) ordered to return.<sup>199</sup>

The Ras Al Qulayah plans were refined at coordination meetings with I MEF, NavCent, and supporting task force staffs throughout December. Discussion topics included the size of the AOA, link-up procedures, logistics support, and naval gunfire support. These were difficult issues that continually had to be revisited and would later surface as sore spots when planning other amphibious landings. The Ras Al Qulayah option was eventually replaced by an amphibious operation at Ash Shuaybah because of poor hydrography and a change in MarCent plans that shifted I MEF's point of attack.<sup>\*\*</sup>

### *MarCent Forward*

On 6 January, Major General Sheehan and five field grade officers bearing the imposing title MarCent Forward arrived on board the *Blue Ridge*. They had been sent by General Gray to assist the NavCent staff. Until that time the primary Marine spokesmen on the NavCent staff were the Fleet Marine Force officer and two Marine staff officers, in addition to Commander Gordon Holder, USN, who was an effective spokesman for amphibious action.<sup>200</sup> The addition of MarCent Forward, collocated with the NavCent staff, resolved most of the problems the MFA had experienced since the beginning of the deployment.<sup>\*\*\*</sup> As General Jenkins later stated: "We should never again deploy without placing a team of [amphibious] planners under a senior Marine general on the fleet or JTF flagship." Admiral LaPlante did not share General Jenkins' belief.<sup>201</sup>

General Sheehan and his planners did not have much time to adjust. The day

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\*Only seven ships were eventually assigned fire support missions.

\*\*General Jenkins claimed a lack of command interest, asserting Admiral Mauz was hesitant, General Schwarzkopf was neutral at best, and General Powell was opposed. (Jenkins Comments)

\*\*\*Predictably, some on the NavCent staff blamed the ATF/MFA staffs and vice versa; no matter who was at fault, the situation improved after MarCent Fwd came on board (Mauz, Arthur, LaPlante, Jenkins, Rowe, and Wickersham comments).



MarCent Forward reported to the *Blue Ridge* Admiral LaPlante and General Jenkins received a warning order from Admiral Arthur directing the development of a detailed concept of operations for a landing in the vicinity of Ash Shuaybah.<sup>202</sup> A joint MarCent/Navcent operations conference was held on board the *Blue Ridge* on 10 January to discuss future operations. At this conference it became clear that things had changed with respect to amphibious operations. Admiral Arthur, who General Schwarzkopf described as “very aggressive,” wanted to step up amphibious planning and was willing to move naval forces into the northern Gulf.<sup>203</sup>

The conference was followed by an initiating directive on the 14th, “the first initiating directive in four and a half months at sea,” General Jenkins later noted.<sup>204</sup> This key document had been drafted by General Sheehan and his staff. It cleared up command relationships, delineated operational areas, and gave the Marine Forces Afloat specific missions. The Marines were to “conduct amphibious operations to include assaults, raids, and/or demonstrations in support of the theater campaign, to deceive, fix and destroy enemy forces throughout the Kuwaiti Theater.”<sup>205</sup> The directive set forth guidelines for an amphibious assault at Ash Shuaybah, but it also discussed a major raid on Faylakah Island, amphibious demonstrations off the Kuwaiti coast and Iraq’s Al Faw Peninsula, and a series of raids against a wide variety of targets.<sup>\*206</sup>

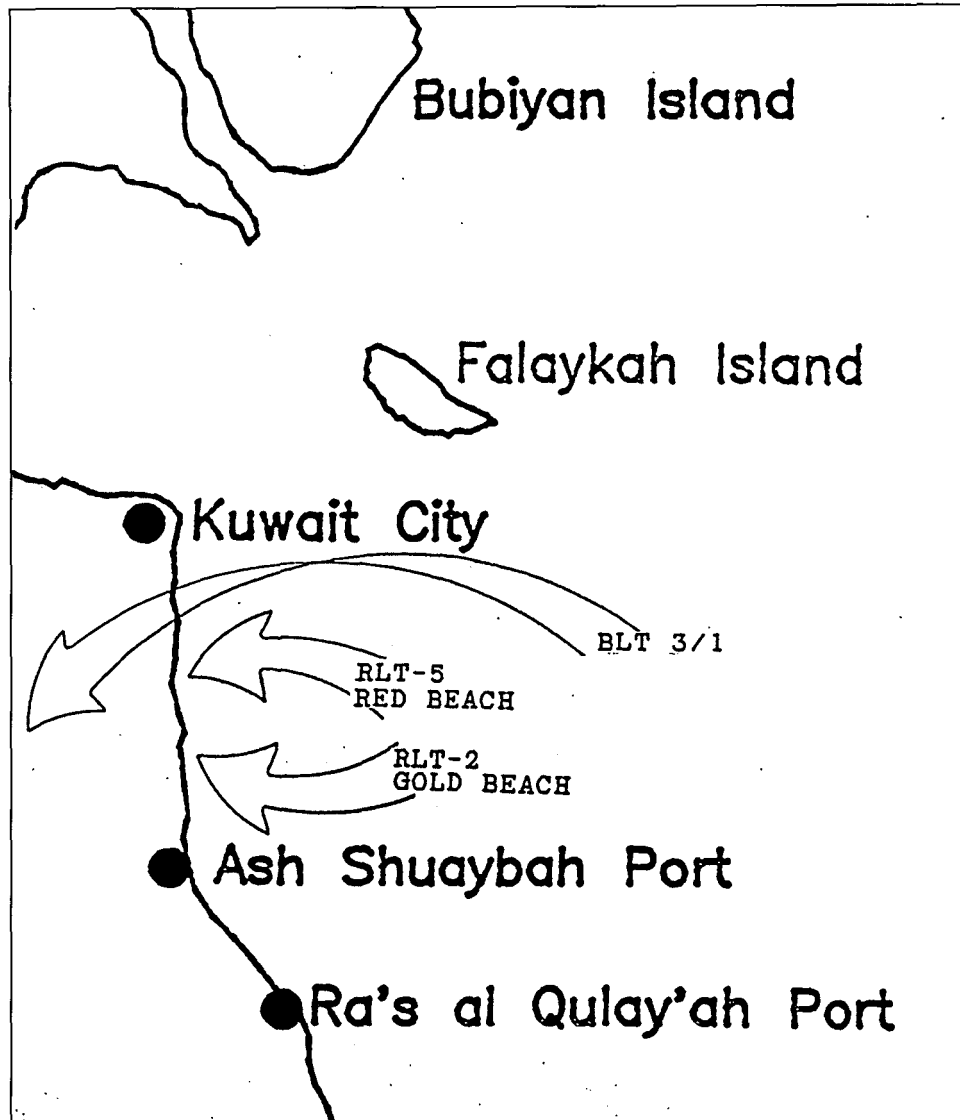
The object of the Ash Shuaybah assault was to establish a logistics support base to support land operations to retake Kuwait City. The seizure of Faylakah Island would convince the Iraqis that further amphibious assaults were about to be made into Kuwait Bay or at Bubiyan Island. Amphibious demonstrations at Al Faw, Bubiyan Island, Faylakah Island, and the Kuwait coast would fix Iraqi forces to the coast. Raids along the Al Faw/Umm Qasr/Bubiyan axis would inflict casualties, destroy equipment and facilities, disrupt enemy cohesion, and force Iraqi defenders to leave their fortifications making them more vulnerable to air interdiction. Admiral Arthur emphasized that “the successful accomplishment of these raid missions is viewed as more important than the tactical value of the target.”<sup>207</sup>

### *Ash Shuaybah Plan*

Admiral LaPlante issued a concept of operations for the Ash Shuaybah option on 11 January. It addressed primarily Navy matters, but had a significant impact on Marine plans as well. Among Admiral LaPlante’s assumptions were: 13 days would be required to clear the fire support and sea echelon areas and the discovery of VSW mines would further delay operations; link-up between MarCent and the landing force might take longer than 72 hours; the oil refinery, liquid gas plant, and all tankers in the vicinity of Shuaybah port would have to be destroyed

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\*Gen Jenkins later lamented that “this initiating directive came too late to effect any change in the overall campaign” (Jenkins, “Letter to Editor,” *Marine Corps Gazette*, Nov94, p. 12).



*The Ash Shuaybah Plan*

prior to the assault; the Iraqis might pump a heavy concentration of crude oil into the offshore area just before the assault began; and naval support element personnel would be available to conduct in-stream offloading of MSC ships.<sup>208</sup> The mine countermeasures timetable, logistics support for MarCent, and the potential for extensive collateral damage eventually became critical factors affecting the decision not to land the landing force.<sup>209</sup>

The initiating directive of 14 January assigned the MFA to be prepared to "seize the Ash Shuaybah port in order to maintain a steady flow of logistics for I MEF and ArCent forces." The joint amphibious staff soon thereafter prepared a concept of operations.<sup>210</sup> The selected scheme of maneuver closely paralleled the Ras Al Qulayah plan using two regimental landing teams crossing separate beaches and reinforced by heliborne units. Extensive use of supporting arms would

eliminate direct threats to the landing force, destroy or neutralize enemy forces within the force beachhead, and interdict targets that could threaten the landing force. No decisions were made as to exact landing beaches nor was a specific timetable or landing date established.<sup>211</sup>

A major point of discussion throughout the planning was the size of the amphibious objective area. This was a thorny issue that had caused problems during the Ras Al Qulayah planning as well. It was no easy task to carve out a classic AOA because of inter-Service and intra-Coalition issues. The joint forces air component commander, Lieutenant General Charles A. Horner, USAF, controlled the skies above Kuwait and was not about to violate single air manager doctrine by granting exclusive air space to a subordinate commander in another component. The ground attack into Kuwait was going to be a multinational operation by MarCent and JFC units. Lieutenant General Boomer and Major General Al (Al Mutairi) Sultan (JFC) had already been given tactical areas of responsibility within the proposed AOA; I MEF was assigned the central sector, JFC-E was given the right (coastal) flank, and JFC-N was allotted the left flank from Umm Gudair to Wadi Al Batin.

Major General Jenkins wanted a doctrinally large AOA that had sufficient size to conduct all necessary air, sea, and land operations under the solitary control of the amphibious task force commander. One reason this proposed AOA was rejected was political. If a large AOA was adopted all forces within it would be placed under the operational control of the U.S. amphibious force commander. This was not possible because the Coalition leaders had previously agreed Americans would not command Arab forces. A second limiting factor was the lack of space. Kuwait was a cramped area compared to the Pacific Ocean in World War II or even the coast of Korea in 1950.

Another issue was unity of command. Had a traditional AOA been established the Iraqis would have been firing on I MEF and JFC-E units from within the AOA. This situation would have required an immediate response and close cooperation by three separate and very diverse components—NavCent, MarCent, and JFC. All agreed this would not be possible. Boomer did not want to surrender operational control of any of his units in the midst of a high tempo offensive and felt that MarCent aviation assets supporting the I MEF attack must remain firmly under his control at all times.

The solution was a compromise that reduced the land portion of the AOA to the size of the force beachhead, an area less than 10 square miles. A temporary expedient was set up to facilitate the link-up with MarCent ground forces. A series of fire support coordination lines were established with agreement that MFA aircraft attacking targets north of these lines would check with the JFACC airborne command and control center, and MFA aircraft operating south of the lines would coordinate with the MarCent direct air support center. The AFCC on board the *Okinawa* would control air operations within the AOA from the onset of advance force operations on D-Minus Seven until the official stand-up of the AOA on D-Minus Five. All air operations within the AOA, except helicopter ship-to-shore movement, from then on would be directed by the tactical air control center on

board the *Nassau* until the landing force was firmly established on shore. Control of air space over the landward sector of the AOA would then be delegated to the 4th MEB tactical air direction center. The AOA would be dissolved upon the completion of link-up operations ashore.

The 13th MEU(SOC) was assigned duties as the advance force and would be the afloat reserve force. This allowed Colonel Rhodes maximum latitude for planning and control. The 4th and 5th MEB staffs remained separate command elements with the 4th MEB staff acting as the lead planners. General Rowe later attributed the success of this organization to General Jenkins who gave mission-type orders and closely monitored planning, but gave his subordinates wide latitude.<sup>212</sup>

The Ash Shuaybah landing plan was actually two simultaneous and separate assaults under the tactical control of 4th MEB. Regimental Landing Team 5 would come ashore over Red Beach, just north of Al Fintas and then move inland to establish blocking positions that covered the northern approaches, particularly the coastal highway from Kuwait City.\* Oilfields and urban sprawl would channel Iraqis attacking from the northwest or west, exposing them to air interdiction and antitank weapons. The beachhead center would be screened by LAVs and tactical air. Regimental Landing Team 2 would land south of Al Fintas with BLT 1/2 and BLT 3/2 crossing Gold Beach Two, and an armored task force composed of the 2d LAI detachment and 4th MEB tanks would assault Gold Beach One.

Each MEB landing plan was different because of the specific task organization of the respective brigades. The 4th MEB would strike on a broad front using landing waves abreast. The assault would put the maximum amount of combat power ashore in the shortest time in order to press the attack to capture Ash Shuaybah, as the 4th MEB had sufficient minefield breaching equipment to accomplish the mission quickly. The 5th MEB had limited breaching assets, therefore Brigadier General Rowe elected to use one narrow breach. Once through the Iraqi lines the maneuver units would spread out to establish blocking positions, await helilifted reinforcements, and prepare for further operations.<sup>213</sup>

In the north, RLT 5 would assume a defensive stance, but after coming ashore RLT 2 would attack south and southwest to clear an area to support logistics-over-the-shore operations in the vicinity of the Kuwait Oil Company's north pier and set up blocking positions in the vicinity of Al Ahmadi. On order, RLT 2 would continue its attack south to seize the Ash Shuaybah port facility.

Landing force engagement areas were planned northwest, west, and south of the force beachhead line to allow maximum use of supporting arms to destroy Iraqi counterattacks. Here, unlike at Ras Al Qulayah, fire support ships could close the beach and the entire landward edge of the AOA was within range of naval gunfire. Potential link-up points were identified west of Al Ahmadi and south or west of Al Maqwa. There was also a possibility of linking-up with JFC-

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\*Because RLT 5 was landing in column there were no numbered beaches in the 5th MEB landing zone.

E forces moving north along the coastal highway. The exact timing of the amphibious assault would be keyed to the MEF's breach of the second barrier line with an eight-hour "go/no go" window of opportunity.<sup>214</sup>

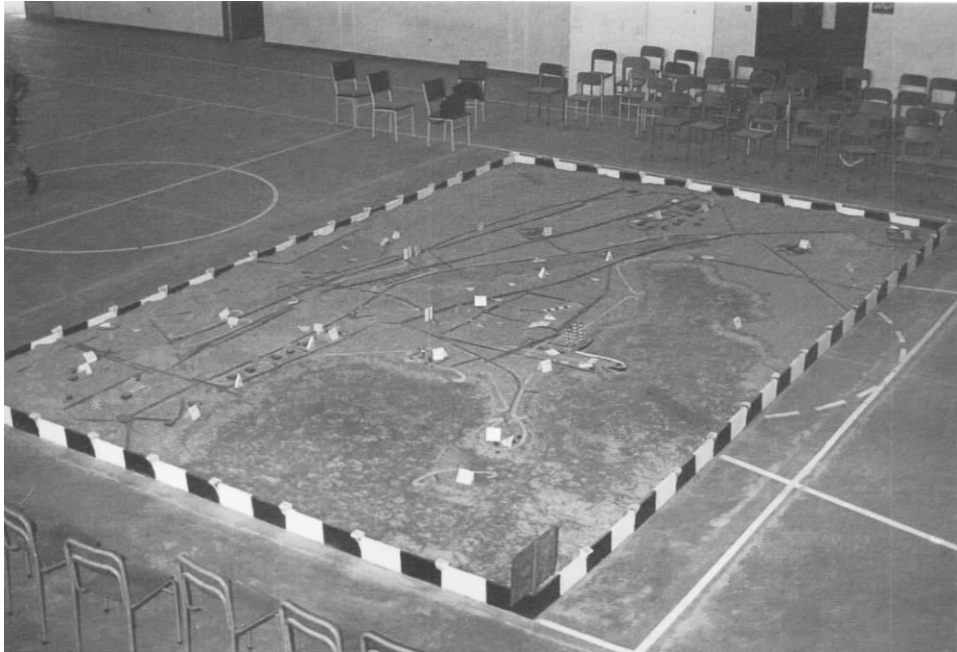
The Al Fintas landing area, located about eight miles south of Kuwait City, was divided into Red Beach in the north and Gold Beach to the south. The landing sites were defended by the Iraqi *11th Infantry Division*. The *45th Infantry Brigade* was dug-in north of Al Fintas at Red Beach. South of Al Fintas, defending the Gold Beaches in the vicinity of Abu Halayah, was the *16th Infantry Brigade*. The *35th Infantry Brigade* was located inland to guard the eastern approach to Kuwait International Airport. Ash Shuaybah port was defended by the *451st* and *452d Infantry Brigades* of the *19th Infantry Division*. Nearby reserve forces included the *20th Mechanized Brigade*, the *15th Mechanized Brigade*, and the *26th Tank Brigade*. It was estimated that there were about 10,000 infantry in the landing area and an additional 3,000 troops mounted in 300 tanks and armored personnel carriers just inland of the force beachhead line.

While Ash Shuaybah was a better target than Ras Al Qulayah, General Jenkins still felt he had been handed a very tough assignment. He had to land a division-size force, seize and clear nine miles of urban terrain, establish a beachhead, and have a logistics support base functioning within 72 hours. All of this had to be done while facing a counterattack by three Iraqi heavy brigades. Although he had reservations about the proposed timetable, General Jenkins was positive he could achieve success using massive fire support. In one message to Admiral Arthur he stated: "I intend to destroy everything in front of me and on the flanks to keep our casualties down."<sup>215</sup> He further elaborated that he wanted the battleships to pound the beach progressively from the shoreline to the inland limit of the AOA and hoped "that whoever survives will be in no mood to fight when the Marines get there."<sup>216</sup>

### *MarCent Offensive Plans*

After receiving Central Command's concept of operations for Desert Storm in November, Lieutenant General Boomer ordered his staff to create a complementary Marine offensive plan. Major General Jenkins was kept abreast of these plans and subsequent changes at a series of MarCent-NavCent plenary sessions held during December and early January. The original document, I MEF Operations Order 91-0001, envisioned a link-up by MarCent forces attacking up the coastal road and an amphibious force landing in southeast Kuwait. As time passed the operations order was repeatedly amended to reflect enemy movements and other situational changes.<sup>217</sup>

One reason for this constant tinkering was that Lieutenant General Boomer had misgivings about the existing plan. It seemed to violate the tenets of maneuver warfare by trying to overwhelm a numerically superior enemy at the most likely point of attack. Boomer was also troubled by a Center for Naval Analyses prediction that between 9,667 and 10,052 casualties could be expected if the campaign lasted more than a week. After careful study of Iraqi dispositions, relief



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) DM-SC-93-05227

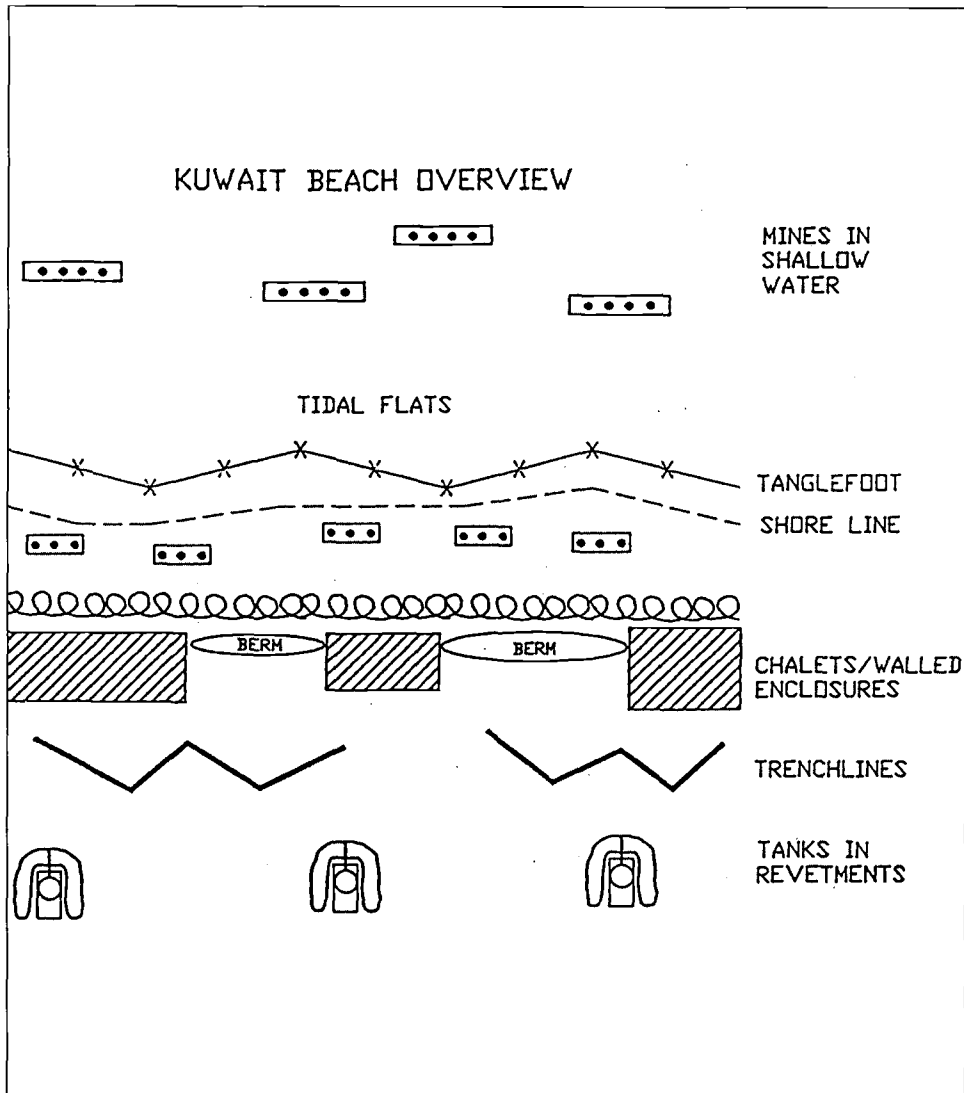
*A close-up view of an Iraqi sand table found in the Al Jahrah School gymnasium after the Operation Desert Storm ceasefire. This is a graphic example of the effectiveness of the "strategic distraction" caused by an amphibious presence. Saddam was worried enough about his seaward flank to order the creation of elaborate defense plans and diverted many scarce resources to stop an amphibious assault.*

from having to support JFC-E breaching operations, and reassessment of available logistics support, he began to consider moving the point of attack about 55 miles inland.

In mid-January, Boomer threw out the old plan and opted instead to mount a two-division breach to quickly capture Al Jaber Air Base then attack north to isolate Kuwait City by capturing Al Jahrah road junction and Kuwait International Airport. This bold new concept utilized the principles of mass, maneuver, and surprise. It allowed the Marines to concentrate their combat power using an unexpected avenue of approach to strike where the enemy was weakest.

On the down side, there were tremendous risks involved. This daring plan pushed the principles of economy of force and security to the limit. Boomer was committing all of his ground forces to the initial assault and would have no operational reserve in case the attack stalled or the Iraqis pushed into Saudi Arabia. Enemy attention would have to be diverted from the actual point of attack and a reserve force would have to be quickly constituted for the new plan to succeed. This new scheme of maneuver, coupled with obvious reluctance about an amphibious assault by the upper levels of command, led Boomer to make a fateful decision.

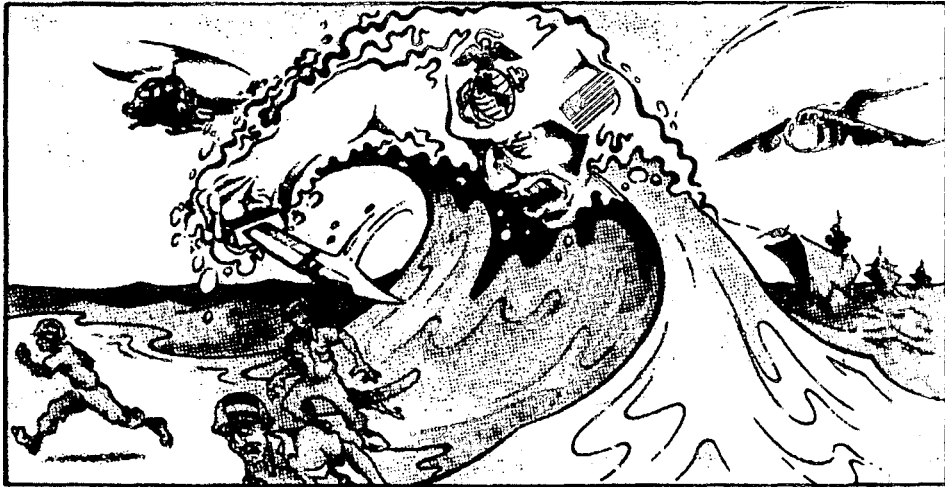
At noon on 2 February, an important naval planning conference was held on board the *Blue Ridge*. Admiral Arthur asked for the meeting so he could obtain a "green light" to begin countermine operations. The primary conferees were



*Kuwait Beach Overview*

General Schwarzkopf, Lieutenant General Boomer, and Admiral Arthur. Major General Jenkins, Brigadier General Rowe, Admiral LaPlante, and Admiral Clarey were not present even though the main topic was future amphibious plans. It had been obvious throughout Desert Shield that there was great reluctance at high levels to sanction a major amphibious assault, but with the onset of Desert Storm a final decision had to be made.<sup>218</sup>

The first issue raised was Navy countermine operations. It would take about a week of preparatory operations to conduct preliminary reconnaissance and neutralize the Iraqi coastal defenses before mine countermeasures operations could begin. Another 13-18 days would be needed to sweep the fire support and sea echelon areas to attain 80 percent mine clearance. If very shallow water mines were discovered, another two to five days would have to be added to the timeline. When another three to five days of naval gunfire preparation were added, the



*This U.S. Marine-specific propaganda leaflet was one of many different types that were distributed along the Kuwait coast and at Faylakah Island. Post-conflict interviews revealed almost all Iraqis had read the leaflet and many had one or more in their possession.*

amphibious supporting operations could require up to a month and might postpone the landings until early March.\*

General Schwarzkopf was not happy with what he had heard so far and found the proposed timeline unacceptable. Unfortunately, the news got worse. Admiral Arthur was worried about shore-based Silkworm missiles, suicide attacks by Exocet-armed aircraft or explosive-laden small boats, and the latent explosive power of the Ash Shuaybah petro-chemical storage areas and natural gas plant. To protect the amphibious task force and ease the Marines' way onto the beach, Arthur noted that every highrise building between the beach and the highway would have to be leveled by naval gunfire and air strikes. At this point General Schwarzkopf, harkening back to his Vietnam experience and well aware that General Powell shared his concerns about collateral damage, said he was not prepared to "destroy Kuwait in order to save it."<sup>219</sup>

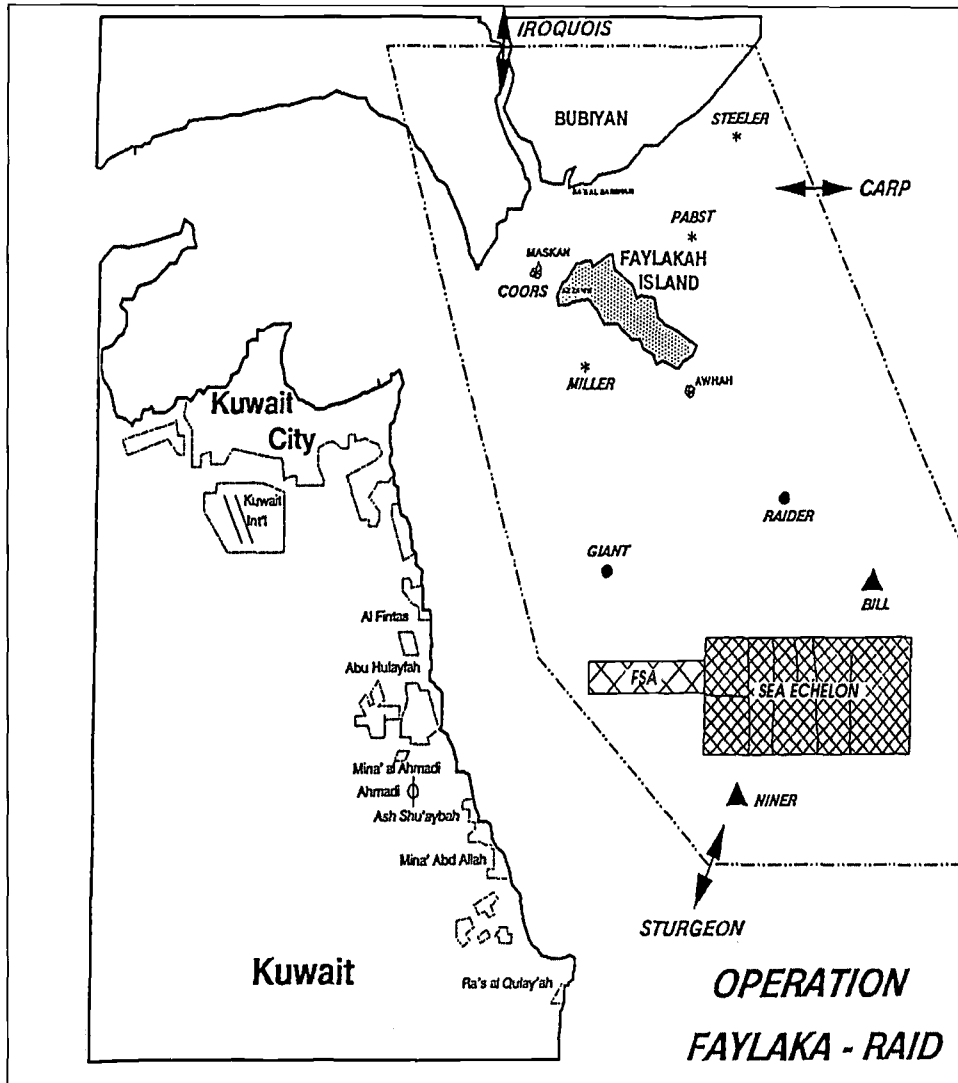
The meeting then reached its climax. It was a moment of high drama when General Schwarzkopf turned to the Marine commander and asked Lieutenant General Boomer: "Walt, can you conduct your attack without an amphibious assault?" Boomer silently mulled over his options. Until recently an amphibious assault had been absolutely necessary because of logistics limitations, but a recent change of plans made it possible to attack without over-the-beach logistics support. Boomer knew there would be later criticism if there was no assault, but he had also pledged not to threaten Marine lives just to do an amphibious assault.\*\*

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\*It was later determined that there were no mines in either the sea echelon or fire support areas. (Jenkins comments II)

\*\*Gen Boomer did not have operational control of the MFA, but the MarCent plan could dictate its tactical employment through the CinC.





After what he described as “the longest 30 seconds of my life,” Boomer replied the Marine ground attack could proceed without an amphibious landing.<sup>220</sup> However, he quickly added that minesweeping operations must continue in order to convince the Iraqis that an amphibious landing was on the way. He also insisted an amphibious assault had to be an option in case the ground attack ran into trouble. Schwarzkopf concurred. Planning would continue and raids and deception operations would be used to fool the Iraqis, but the amphibious focus now shifted from Ash Shuaybah to Faylakah Island.

#### *Faylakah Island Plans*

After the *Blue Ridge* conference Admiral Arthur sent a message summarizing the decisions made. He stated the amphibious mission was now to “hold the enemy in place and deceive him regarding...the main effort.”<sup>221</sup> A 20-raid pack-



Department of Defense Photo (USN) DN-ST-91-10372

*A member of the multinational explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) team studies an Iraqi mine washed up on the beach. EOD team members spent many days following the cease-fire defusing Iraqi munitions.*

age was put together to support the strategic deception plan. These raids were intended to convince the Iraqis that the Marines were planning to strike Umm Qasr, Al Faw, and into Kuwait Bay. They concentrated on “soft targets” located between Al Faw and Mina Saud. Amphibious demonstrations were also planned for Ras Al Qulayah and the area southwest of Al Faw.

To further the amphibious distraction, the 4th MEB began to seriously consider a major raid at Faylakah Island. Faylakah was located inside the Gulf about midway between, and just east of, the northern tip of Kuwait City and southern Bubiyan Island. This “gateway to Kuwait Bay” was about 10 miles long and 5 miles wide. The terrain was relatively flat. The town of Az Zwar was on the west coast, archeological sites and ancient ruins dotted the center, and the Iraqis had constructed defensive positions along the eastern end of the island. There were two small uninhabited islands nearby, Miskan to the northwest and Auhah to the southeast. Faylakah was believed to be defended by up to 3,500 men of the *440th Marine Infantry Brigade*.<sup>222</sup>

The first concept called for the landing force to conduct a simultaneous surface and helicopter assault at night by two battalions. It would be an over-the-horizon raid using helicopters and LCACs supported by 16-inch battleship main batteries and air support by aircraft from the ATF, Battle Force Zulu, and 3d MAW. Extensive air and naval gunfire would fix, neutralize, and destroy enemy forces on the island. The landing force would come ashore on the south side of the

island, capture Az Zwar, then continue the attack east to clear remaining enemy forces. L-Hour was slated to be 0230 due to tides. After extensive discussions between the CATF and CLF and their staffs, it was agreed that the raid force would stay on the island no more than 12 hours and then withdraw under cover of darkness.<sup>223</sup>

On 6 February, Admiral Arthur issued a warning order to begin planning a destruction raid on Faylakah Island. The raid force would be composed of elements of the 4th MEB on board ships of a specially formed amphibious task group. The mission was to attrit enemy forces on the island and confuse enemy forces in the KTO as to the true point of main effort by Coalition forces. Codenamed Desert Slash, the raid was tentatively scheduled for one or two days prior to G-Day. The intent was to strike quickly without becoming decisively engaged while destroying SAM missile sites and antiaircraft positions. It was hoped this raid would keep Iraqi forces in eastern Kuwait from rapidly reacting to the I MEF attack which was tentatively planned for 20 February.<sup>224</sup>

Major General Jenkins borrowed a page from Marine Corps history in planning the raid. The 13th MEU(SOC) would land at Auhah Island and establish an artillery fire support base before the landings, a scheme of maneuver similar to one used by the 4th Marine Division at Roi-Namur in 1944. Colonel Hobbs, commanding RLT 2, was directed to develop a detailed concept of operations for the Faylakah raid and Colonel Rhodes was to do the same for the artillery raid at Auhah. Admiral Clarey was to develop a concept of operations for a simultaneous amphibious feint at Ash Shuaybah to further confuse the Iraqis and draw their attention away from the real attack.

The Faylakah raid was the cause of one of the more intense misunderstandings of the Gulf War. Admiral Arthur issued an "execute" order for the Faylakah raid on 11 February.<sup>225</sup> This message was actually a movement order directing the start of mine countermeasure operations and informed appropriate naval task groups when to move into the objective area. In Riyadh, however, General Schwarzkopf and his staff misunderstood the message. They assumed Arthur had launched an assault without permission and quickly flashed a message ordering the NavCent commander to explain his actions. When the smoke finally cleared and both parties understood what had taken place, Schwarzkopf asked Admiral Arthur to Riyadh to present a detailed operations brief on 15 February.<sup>226</sup>

Admiral LaPlante and Major General Jenkins flew to the *Blue Ridge* for preliminary meetings with Admiral Arthur, General Sheehan, and Rear Admiral Daniel P. March. The next morning all five men flew to CentCom Headquarters in Riyadh to brief General Schwarzkopf and his staff. At the end of the meeting, General Schwarzkopf told General Jenkins he was in favor of such a raid and thought it should be carried out, but that he was having a hard time selling it in Washington. He also set the raid date as no earlier than 22 February. Admiral LaPlante and General Jenkins then returned to the ATF which was on station just north of the United Arab Emirates.<sup>227</sup>

On 18 February, Desert Slash Operations Order 1-91 was issued.<sup>228</sup> Regimental Landing Team 2, less one battalion landing team, would conduct a

simultaneous surface and heliborne raid in the vicinity of a large recreation beach east of Ras Al Qihah to capture as many Iraqis and destroy as much equipment as possible within the 12 hours allotted. Battalion Landing Team 1/2—supported by 20 CH-46s, 8 CH-53s, and 13 UH-1N/AH-1Ws—would make a helicopter assault into designated landing zones inside the recreation area, then would attack west and northwest to destroy targets in the vicinity of Az Zwar. A task-organized armored unit would land by LCAC with 35 LAVs, 8 tanks, and 20 humvee-mounted TOWs to destroy specified targets and screen the east flank of the recreation area.\* One heliborne company and one AAV-mounted mechanized company were designated reserve forces.

Colonel Rhodes planned a night over-the-horizon artillery raid that would use one reinforced rifle company to secure Auhah Island. The raid force would establish a fire support base with four M198 155mm howitzers, prepare an emergency refueling and divert landing site for helicopters supporting the raid, then withdraw on order after RLT 2 had departed Faylakah. One company from BLT 1/4 was the MEU reserve and had to be ready to support either the 13th MEU(SOC) at Auhah or RLT 2 on Faylakah.

These plans were overcome by events when the *Tripoli* and the *Princeton* hit mines about 40 miles east of Kuwait. Admiral Arthur then decided it would not be feasible to launch the planned large-scale raid from beyond the Durrah Oilfield, so Operation Desert Slash was dropped. After the mine countermeasure force opened a channel through the minefield and discovered no mines inside the fire support and sea echelon areas 22 miles south of Faylakah, a modified Desert Slash was revived. The original plan was revamped to suit changed circumstances. The new raid force was cut to about one-half its original size, but the plan kept the same general outline. The LCAC-mounted raiders would move through the channel to the sea echelon area under cover of darkness. From there they would turn north and land at Faylakah. A heliborne force would simultaneously land to destroy specific targets. The Auhah artillery raid plan was unchanged except for compressing the timeline.

The plan was replaced by another that relied upon only the 13th MEU for a reduced-scope night destruction raid at Faylakah. One rifle company would land at the eastern end of Faylakah to destroy the Silkworm missile site while a second force would support the raid force by fire from Auhah. The total time from launch to recovery would be less than six hours.

Amphibious plans in the Gulf included a half dozen feints, two dozen raids, and major assaults at Al Faw, Ras Al Qulayah, Ash Shuaybah, and Faylakah. The reasons most plans were canceled varied, but all were affected by concerns about mines, collateral damage, force ratios, and friendly casualties. Doctrinal issues like establishing AOA's, the proper sequence for amphibious operations, and command and control of amphibious forces, were recurring problems that hindered every plan.

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\*This unit was composed of Det Hq; Co B, 2d LAI; Co C, 2d LAI; Med/Log Det; Co B, 1st LAI (13th MEU[SOC]); and Co A, 2d Tk Bn.

The Marine Forces Afloat were a viable alternative in General Schwarzkopf's arsenal and could have landed if the need arose. Schwarzkopf made this very clear at his 27 February news brief when he stated: "We had every intention of conducting amphibious operations." He later noted that if the amphibious deception had been less effective or the inland Iraqi defense more resolute, the seaward flank would have become Saddam's weak point. As he later wrote: "It was [reassuring] to me as Commander in Chief to know I had this potent alternative available to ensure a quick and speedy victory should the original plan fail."<sup>229</sup> "The Marine Forces Afloat were ready and could have landed," Brigadier General Rowe later commented.<sup>230</sup>

### 4th MEB and 13th MEU Operations from the Sea

#### *Storm at Sea*

More than five months of futile diplomatic negotiations came to an abrupt end when the long-awaited Coalition offensive began. The midnight stillness that had settled over the Iraqi capital of Baghdad was suddenly shattered by a series of explosions in the early morning hours of 17 January. Soon, the dark night sky glowed from the light of tracer rounds fired by panic-stricken gunners who searched for unseen Coalition aircraft with unaimed shots. This aerial bombardment marked the onset of Operation Desert Storm, a carefully crafted campaign to eject Iraqi forces from Kuwait. These first air strikes were only the opening moves of a well-orchestrated air offensive. Follow-on strikes destroyed strategic and industrial targets, interdicted supply lines to isolate Iraqi forces inside Kuwait, and mercilessly pounded frontline defenders for 38 days.

When the uneasy calm of Desert Shield gave way to the sudden lightning of Desert Storm, Admiral Stanley Arthur, an aggressive, highly decorated naval aviator, initiated a naval sea control campaign to wrest the northern Gulf from the Iraqis. There were three major threats to Coalition naval forces operating there: the Iraqi Navy; underwater mines; and antiship missiles. Each threat would have to be eliminated before the Navy could move into position to support planned amphibious landings by the Marine Forces Afloat.

The destruction of the Iraqi Navy began on 21 January when an Iraqi T-43 mine warfare ship was disabled by American A-6E Intruders and it ended when the final OSA missile attack boat was sunk on 14 February. Saddam's navy was small, with less than 90 combatants, but it was equipped with modern weaponry. It operated from two major naval bases. The smaller and southern-most of these was Umm Qasr located on the narrow waterway between the Iraqi coast and Warbah Island not far from Kuwait's northeastern border. The largest base was at Basrah on the Shatt Al Arab, the Gulf outlet formed by the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. In January, the Iraqi Navy included 7 OSA missile attack boats (each mounting four antiship missiles), 29 assorted patrol boats, 9 mine warfare ships, 3 Polnocny "C"-class landing ships, a cargo ship, and uncounted miscellaneous tugs and tenders. Most of these ships were later

destroyed or disabled during the Battle of Bubiyan, when Umm Qasr was left in flames by a Coalition air strike and its entry channels were closed by air-delivered mines on 30 January.<sup>231</sup>

While air power pummelled the Iraqi navy, Admiral Arthur turned his attention to the mine and missile threats. The most difficult of these to solve was the underwater mine threat. During the Tanker War fought by Iran and Iraq inside the Persian Gulf from 1980-1988 an American warship and a Kuwaiti ship sailing under American protection struck mines. Although these mines had been planted by the Iranians, Iraq had also used undersea mines during the conflict, giving the Iraqi Navy some experience in underwater mine warfare. In February, Coalition intelligence officers estimated Saddam had sown more than a thousand underwater mines since the onset of Operation Desert Shield. These mines posed a serious obstacle to landing operations anywhere along the Kuwaiti coast. Unfortunately, active mine countermeasure operations had been placed on the back burner before Operation Desert Storm was launched as a result of diplomatic considerations. As it turned out, the mine problem was so serious that General Rowe termed it "the [amphibious] show stopper."<sup>232</sup>

At first, Admiral Arthur had felt the most serious threat to naval supremacy would be Iraq's antiship missiles. About four years earlier, during the Tanker War, the USS *Stark* (FFG 31) was hit by two French-made Exocet antiship missiles fired from an Iraqi aircraft. Memories of this unprovoked attack caused everyone to take the antiship missile threat seriously since Iraq possessed 34 French-made Dassault Mirage F-1 (EQ5/EQ6) strike aircraft and 5 Aerospatiale AS-231J Super Frelon helicopters capable of firing combat-proven Exocet AM-39 extended range air-to-surface antiship missiles.

The second type of antiship missile in Saddam's arsenal was the Silkworm HY-2, a Chinese copy of the Soviet Styx CSSN-1 mobile surface-to-surface antiship missile. American ships had encountered Iranian-fired Silkworm missiles in the Persian Gulf during the Tanker War but, luckily, none of the Silkworms found their mark during the conflict. Silkworm firing sites dotted the coast of Kuwait from Al Faw to Ras Al Qulayah and there was at least one Silkworm battery on Faylakah Island. Some Iraqi Silkworms had been modified for air launches. Four Tupolev TU-16D Badger bombers had been so configured, and a Dassault-Breguet Mystere-Falcon 50 civilian airplane, or "Saddamikaze," had been rigged to carry a Silkworm for a one-way mission.

Iraqi missile threats were, for the most part, neutralized by air strikes and naval gunfire. The Iraqi Air Force was effectively grounded by the air campaign and mounted no successful antiship missions against the ATF. Ground-mounted Silkworms were difficult to spot and hard to target effectively given the restrictions imposed by the cumbersome air tasking order emanating from JFACC at Riyadh. Only two Iraqi Silkworms were fired and neither struck its intended target.<sup>233</sup>

The final step in the sea control campaign was to clear Iraqi forces from offshore oil rigs and occupied islets which served as Iraqi naval support bases. These operations were somewhat reminiscent of Operation Praying Mantis in 1988

when U.S. naval forces in the Persian Gulf raided several oil rigs used as forward support bases by the Iranians. Admiral Arthur's island-clearing campaign opened on 18 January, when the USS *Nicholas* (FFG 47), supported by Free Kuwait patrol boats, cleared Iraqi defenders from drilling platforms in the Durrah Oilfield. This action inflicted a handful of Iraqi casualties and yielded 23 prisoners.<sup>234</sup> Building on this success, Arthur next ordered Colonel Rhodes and the 13th MEU(SOC) staff to begin planning Operation Desert Sting, a surface assault or heliborne raid to capture Jazirat Kobbar.<sup>235</sup>

### *Operation Desert Sting*

While the 4th and 5th MEBs were in the North Arabian Sea conducting Exercise Sea Soldier IV, the 13th MEU separated from the ATF and was sent north into the Persian Gulf. The transit into the Southern Arabian Gulf began on 15 January. As the *Okinawa*, *Ogden*, *Fort McHenry*, *Durham*, and *Cayuga* passed through the Strait of Hormuz they set Condition III—one-third of the crew at combat stations, all watertight doors and hatches secured, and gun positions manned. The night passage was particularly nerve-racking because the Coalition offensive was slated to begin soon. The five-ship task group quietly slipped through the dangerous narrows between Oman and Iran unnoticed. The movement was unobstructed and Phibron 5 anchored off Dubai in the United Arab Emirates the next day.

This area was popularly known as the "CNN Box" because ships anchored there were able to air Cable Network News (CNN) broadcasts. The news shows were popular because they reduced the sense of isolation imposed by slow mail delivery and kept the Marines up to date about contemporary world events. Although the Marines enjoyed the benefits of on CNN Box, the real reasons for the pause were to conserve fuel and to ease logistics support. The CNN Box was actually the logistics force anchorage, officially termed the "CLF Box" or the "ATF Box." Its waters usually included some large tenders and resupply ships under the protection of two Canadian warships.

During this time Colonel Rhodes activated a landing force operations center to monitor events and plot battle damage from the aerial campaign. Battalion Landing Team 1/4 used the good weather and smooth seas to conduct flight deck physical training and small arms familiarization. Lieutenant Colonel Vanderlinden's HMM(C)-164 enhanced its flying skills with daily flights. MEU Service Support Group 13 took advantage of this time to crossdeck maintenance contact teams via boats and helicopters to conduct preventive maintenance and make minor repairs. This pleasant lull came to an end when Colonel Rhodes received a warning order calling the 13th MEU(SOC) into action.

On 23 January, Admiral Arthur sent an initiating directive to Admiral LaPlante and General Jenkins. Acting as CATF and CLF, respectively, they passed the order on to the PhibRon 5 and 13th MEU commanders. Arthur's directive assigned a codename, stated the mission, established an amphibious operations area, stated the time frame, and delineated command relations. Operation Desert

Sting was going to be an amphibious raid on Kobbar Island, located about 18 miles off the Kuwaiti coast, to capture personnel and equipment and would be conducted within one week. The 13th MEU and ARG A were to operate independent of the MFA and ATF. Colonel Rhodes and Captain Thomas L. McClelland, USN, commanding Amphibious Squadron 5, were authorized to make direct contact with their common superior, CTF 150, and supporting units, TF 151 and TF 154, as necessary.

At that time there was still a very real threat from Iraqi aircraft, naval units, undersea mines, and antiship missiles. Accordingly, Captain McClelland decided to minimize the Iraqi threat by using only two amphibious ships, the *Okinawa* and the *Ogden*. This two-ship task unit left the CNN Box early on the morning of 24 January for a rendezvous with the *Blue Ridge*. Colonel Rhodes and selected staff officers crossdecked from the *Okinawa* to brief Admiral Arthur and to pick up the latest intelligence estimates. Just before his flight left the *Okinawa*, Colonel Rhodes was informed that the raid had been moved to standby status, but that the presentation remained on the table and would proceed as planned. After the briefing officers presented their raid plans to the NavCent staff on the *Blue Ridge*, the *Okinawa* and *Ogden* returned to the anchorage.<sup>236</sup>

On the morning of the 25th, another warning order arrived. This time Colonel Rhodes was to plan additional raids on Umm Al Maradim, as Desert Sting 2, and Qurah Island, as Desert Sting 3. These plans were completed and forwarded for Admiral Arthur's approval on 27 January. The concept was to strike all three targets within 24 hours. This would achieve surprise, maximize the destructive impact, and reduce the Iraqi threat through speed of movement. Both heliborne and small boat raiding forces were to be used. The *Okinawa* and the *Ogden* would approach from the east under cover of darkness using oil platforms to screen their movements. The raids would be conducted from south to north hitting Maradim, Qurah, and Kobbar in rapid succession. Captain Larry L. Richards' "Rigid Raiders" of Company A would land at Maradim Island while reconnaissance teams led by Captains Ignatius P. Liberto and Kenneth Grimes scouted Qurah and Kobbar. Once Maradim was secured Captain Michael J. Brown's Company C, an airborne reserve force mounted in two Super Stallions, would press the attack to seize Qurah. The final assault at Kobbar would be conducted by a third force arriving in HMM-164's Sea Knights. The execute order for Desert Sting was received on the 28th with D-Day set for 29 January.<sup>237</sup>

These plans, however, never came to pass because of other events in the Gulf. On 25 January, a landing force from the USS *Curts* (FFG 38) captured the Qurah garrison after being alerted the Iraqis wished to surrender by two U.S. Army OH-58D observation helicopters supporting combat search and rescue operations.<sup>\*238</sup> This eliminated the need for 13th MEU to make forcible entry at Qurah Island, resulting in the cancellation of Desert Sting 3. A Navy reconnaissance flight on the 26th spotted a surrender notice on Maradim Island. This discovery sent

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\*These aircraft had been renovated during the Army's Helicopter Improvement Program and were called "AHIPs" instead of "Kiowa Warriors," their official designation.



Colonel Rhodes back to the drawing board to again modify his Desert Sting plans. This time he planned to conduct a heliborne enemy prisoner of war evacuation operation instead of an amphibious raid.<sup>239</sup>

The *Okinawa*, which already had the helicopter raid force embarked, was the only amphibious ship assigned to support this revised Operation Desert Sting. She left the CNN Box on 27 January and headed for the northern Gulf. The next day a Kuwaiti Marine detachment transferred to the *Okinawa* to provide translation services and to assist with prisoner handling on the island. This was the first combined combat operation using U.S. and Kuwaiti Marines. An underway rehearsal was held on board the *Okinawa* to practice processing prisoners of war. The task group activated a joint advance force coordination center (AFCC) while the Marines checked communications, issued ammunition, and prepared aviation ordnance. The AFCC included sections from PhibRon 5's flag bridge, the landing force operations center, the tactical air coordination center (TACC), and the supporting arms coordination center (SACC). The AFCC was established in the SACC/TACC on board the *Okinawa*, the only place with sufficient room and enough communications equipment to perform all of the required functions.<sup>240</sup>

The *Okinawa* was joined by the Aegis guided-missile cruiser USS *Mobile Bay* (CG 53) and fire support ships *Curts*, *Nicholas*, *Leftwich* (DD 984), and *Caron* (DD 970) at about 0600 on 28 January. The ships sailed up the Iranian coast before heading west to a position about 30 nautical miles from Umm Al Maradim. This movement used offshore oil platforms to screen the approach. Air cover and support was provided by a Navy Grumman E-2C Hawkeye early warning and air control airplane, a Grumman F-14 Tomcat combat air patrol, a Grumman A-6E Intruder surface strike patrol, Sikorsky SH-3G Sea King and SH-60B Seahawk antisubmarine helicopters, and U.S. Army OH-58D AHIP helicopters flying from the *Curts*.<sup>241</sup>

The Desert Sting AFCC was activated on board the *Okinawa* at 0800 on 29 January. Army and Marine pilots held a face-to-face aviation deconfliction coordination conference before launching. At 0815 the Navy confirmed A-6s would make low-level passes over Maradim at 1130. The action began at about 0855 when the *Leftwich* destroyed a floating mine in the fire support area just west of the Hout oil platforms. Soon thereafter a passing aircraft reported a burning ship and a body floating near the raid area. The aircraft carrier USS *Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN 71) dispatched a search and rescue helicopter to investigate.\*

The raid force was composed of Captain Brown's Company C (Reinforced) and a five-man MEU command element. Lieutenant Colonel George W. Flinn, commanding BLT 1/4, assembled the raid force in the hangar deck for a final briefing at 0923. The plan was to make a low-level aircraft sweep of Maradim Island at about 1130. This would determine if the Iraqis were resisting or not and would give Colonel Rhodes about one-half hour to adjust his plans. At about

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\*Jaguar 614, a SH-3 Sea King SAR helicopter, later reported the ship had sunk and recovered the body of an Iraqi merchant seaman.

1150 two Army AHIPs and two Marine Cobras would take positions to provide observation and suppressive fires as necessary. Four CH-46s would land the assault force and two CH-53s would carry an airborne reserve force. The Sea Knights would shuttle prisoners from Maradim to the *Okinawa* while the Marines continued to search. After all personnel and intelligence materials were evacuated, any remaining weapons and equipment would be destroyed.

The *Okinawa* went to flight quarters at about 1000. The Super Stallions carrying the reserve force lifted off at 1111. The Cobras departed at 1122 then joined the *Curts*' AHIPs at 1134 and headed toward their stations. The raid force was airborne at 1136. At about the same time, Intruders from the USS *Midway* (CV 41) were buzzing the island. They reported no enemy fire and no personnel in sight. At 1141 the AHIPs and Cobras conducted a combat power demonstration to flush out any hidden Iraqis. At 1153 they confirmed no gun positions were manned.

The assault force approached the island under the close watch of the attack helicopters. There was no enemy fire and the insert at the north end of the island was completed at 1201. Colonel Flinn's raid force met no resistance, but found signs of a hasty departure. The Iraqi forces had apparently departed shortly before the Marines arrived. In their haste, they left cooking fires burning and television sets were still turned on. The Marines cautiously searched the buildings and fighting positions using grappling hooks to search for booby traps. During their search the Marines discovered about 300 cases of ammunition, three S-60 57mm antiaircraft guns, two ZPU-1 14.5mm machine guns, two 120mm mortars, 18 SA-7 Grail hand-held antiaircraft missiles, five AK-47 rifles, and a RASIT3190B battlefield surveillance radar. Many documents were also recovered. Major Steven J. Cash, the MEU's intelligence officer, evaluated captured material and equipment to determine what should be kept and what should be destroyed.

The raid lasted just over three hours. The Marines from Company C destroyed all but one of the crew-served weapons. Ammunition was either blown in place or was later dropped into the water from a CH-53. In addition to numerous documents and some observation devices, the raid force brought out one ZPU-1, the Grails, the AK-47s, and the RASIT radar. Before leaving, the Marines raised a Kuwaiti flag and spray painted "Free Kuwait" and "USMC" on the buildings as reminders of what happened for any post-raid Iraqi visitors. A media team flew over the island just in time to photograph an impressive explosion and its attendant mushroom cloud. The raid force departed Umm Al Maradim at 1523, just as Colonel Rhodes received word that about two dozen Iraqi boats were approaching the island.\*

After their return, the elated Marines spent several hours posing for pictures and being interviewed. The *Okinawa* returned to its anchorage on 31 January. Captured materials were examined by the Joint Intelligence Center then were sent

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\*British surface and air units later attacked the flotilla and damaged or destroyed 14 of the 17 Boston Whaler-type boats carrying Iraqi commandos.

to the Joint Captured Material Exploitation Center at Dhahran.<sup>242</sup> No Iraqis were captured but many useful materials were confiscated, numerous weapons were destroyed or captured, inter-Service operations were smooth, and the 13th MEU(SOC) executed a complex plan flawlessly. Although it was successful in every way, Operation Desert Sting went almost unnoticed because it was overshadowed by the battle for Khafji which was raging in northern Saudi Arabia.

### *Desert Slash Canceled*

Operation Desert Slash was slated to be a large-scale amphibious raid on Faylakah Island by the Marine Forces Afloat. The 4th MEB and 13th MEU(SOC) comprised the force list and had conducted integrated raid rehearsals at Al Hamra in mid-February. Regimental Landing Team 2 was to conduct the main landing, the 13th MEU was responsible for establishing an artillery support base on Auhah Island, and MAG-40 was to provide air support to include preparatory bombardment, assault transport, close-in fire support, command and control, and emergency medical evacuation. The plan was for BLT 1/4 to seize Auhah Island, then the MEB would land four M198 howitzers by helicopter one hour before RLT 2 conducted the main attack, a closely coordinated helicopter and LCAC surface assault by BLT 1/2 and a provisional LAI battalion. The main raid was to be carried out within 18 hours and the raid force was to pull out under covering fires by the artillery, close air support, and naval gunfire.

The ATF had been properly divided to support the action. Amphibious Group 2, including three PhibRon 5 ships—the *Okinawa*, *Ogden*, and *Fort McHenry*—was designated as a task group to carry out the raid. Amphibious Group 3 remained behind to support the 5th MEB landings at Jubayl and Mishab. On 17 February, the ships carrying the raid force sailed north. The next day mine strikes on the *Tripoli* and *Princeton* halted operations and placed Desert Slash plans in limbo. A contingency mission commander's brief was, however, held on board the *Nassau* on 19th to discuss future operations.

The next day, Colonel Rhodes received a warning order to conduct a scaled-down version of Desert Slash. The new plan called for 13th MEU(SOC) to conduct a destruction raid at Faylakah. It would occupy Auhah Island and establish an artillery fire support base, then land a raid force on Faylakah Island. Using a rapid planning sequence, Colonel Rhodes decided on a change in concept and the MEU staff modified the existing Desert Slash plan. The new concept of operations was for a SEAL team to conduct a combat rubber raiding craft insertion about 10 miles from Auhah then conduct a direct action mission to scout the island. At the same time the 13th MEU's force reconnaissance detachment would establish a floating observation site in the channel between Faylakah and Auhah Islands. After Auhah was secured, Battery B's 105mm Howitzer Platoon and the BLT 1/4 81mm Mortar Platoon would land and begin firing at targets on Faylakah. Two Super Stallions carrying 50 Marines from Captain Gregory A. Boyle's Company D would then land on the southern tip of Faylakah and conduct a destruction raid using small arms, machine guns, AT-4s, and shoulder-launched

multipurpose assault weapons to create confusion and disable Iraqi positions. The raid force would be covered by close-in fire support from eight attack helicopters and supporting arms fires from Auhah. When the raiders were safely airborne, the Auhah fire base would expend its ammunition and then be lifted out. The raid was timed to draw Iraqi attention away from the I MEF inland breach areas and was tentatively set to begin at 2200 on 23 February, about six hours before I MEF launched its attack.

On 22 February, a MAG-40/13th MEU deconfliction and coordination meeting was held on board the *Nassau*, but the next morning even this reduced-scale artillery raid was postponed by Admiral Arthur. The *Okinawa*, *Ogden*, and *Fort McHenry* remained at anchor with PhibGru 2 in the northern Gulf while things were sorted out. Colonel Rhodes twice more received warning orders to mount an artillery raid, but in both cases these orders were countermanded. On the 25th, the 13th MEU was within one hour of launching the raid force when Colonel Rhodes received word that the raid had been canceled, apparently because CNN had mistakenly broadcast a report that Marines were already on Faylakah Island.\*<sup>243</sup>

### *Harrier Operations*

When the ATF sailed into the Persian Gulf to support Operation Desert Storm, MAG-40's aircraft were spread among six ships. The *Shreveport* carried six AH-1W Super Cobras from HLMLA-269 Forward; the *Raleigh* had six UH-1Ns from Detachment A, HMLA-269; the *Trenton* had three CH-53E Super Stallions; the *Guam* was home to 24 CH-46Es of HMM-263 and HMM-365; the *Iwo Jima* carried 13 Super Stallions from HMM-461; and the *Nassau* had 19 AV-8B Harriers (VMA-331) accompanied by six UH-1Ns and 3 AH-1Ts (HMLA-269). Composite Helicopter Squadron 164, tasked to support MAG-40, had helicopters on board two other ships; four AH-1Ws were on the *Ogden* and 12 CH-46Es, 4 CH-53Es, and 2 UH-1Ns were on board the *Okinawa*.<sup>244</sup>

The *Nassau* deployed with an entire Harrier squadron of 20 aircraft on board. The deck load, for all practical purposes, eliminated the *Nassau* as a vertical assault platform. This unusual configuration had become a point of contention between the ATF, NavCent, and MarCent. Generals Boomer and Jenkins wanted to keep the Harriers on board for the duration. They were wary of stripping the landing force of its only organic fixed-wing assets. Having dedicated close air support aircraft within the landing force structure allowed quick response and operational flexibility not found when aircraft were tasked from carriers or shore bases. Lack of apron space ashore—King Abdul Aziz Naval Air Base and Shaik Isa Air Base were full—was another concern. Admiral LaPlante and General Jenkins maintained that the CATF and CLF must be given the latitude to determine how their ships will be configured and what tactics will be used.

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\*Radio intercepts later indicated that the Iraqi high command believed the false report.



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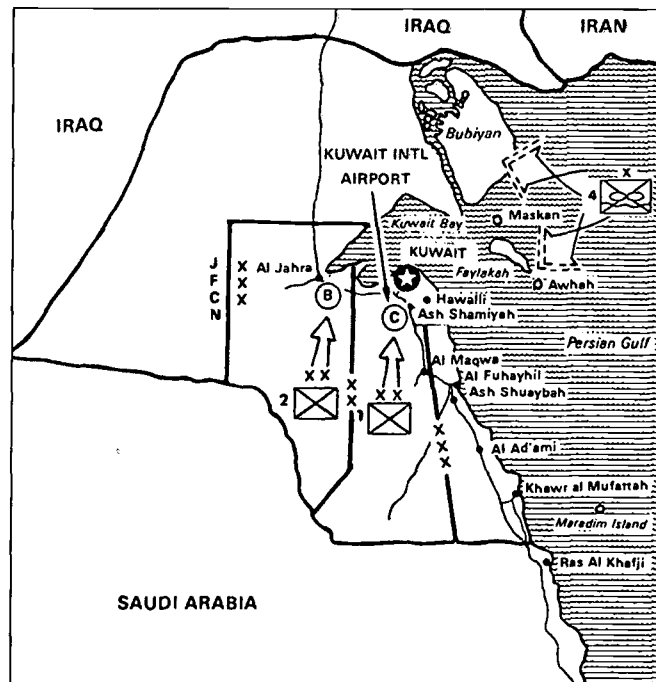
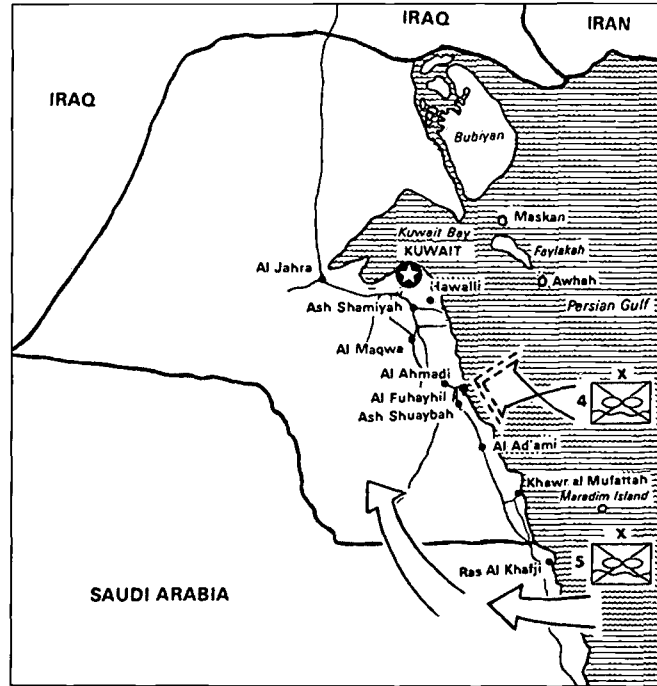
*Flight deck personnel on board the amphibious assault ship Nassau refuel two AV-8B Harriers of VMA-331 as a third comes in to land. Harriers from the Nassau became the first such aircraft to conduct combat strikes on 20 February 1991.*

The Navy was concerned that the employment of the *Nassau* as a “Harrier Carrier” was a misuse of a valuable and flexible multi-mission assault support ship which was being called on to do things it was not designed for. The short range of the Harriers would require the *Nassau* to remain in the forward area. Limited aviation ordnance storage, about three days of ordnance, would create resupply problems and tax the already under-strength logistics fleet. It was, therefore, the Navy view that the Harriers could be better supplied and maintained if they operated from shore bases. This debate was never satisfactorily resolved.<sup>245</sup>

On 20 February, four AV-8Bs of VMA-331 made history when “Magic” flight lifted off the deck of the *Nassau* to make the first-ever combat strike by fixed-wing aircraft operating from an amphibious assault ship. This mission was the culmination of long and arduous deployment training during which the squadron logged 2,838 sorties with 2,426 hours of air time and had tragically lost a shipmate off the coast of Oman. The workup had begun seven months before when the “Bumblebees” flew on board the *Nassau* on 18 August. Training emphasized the particular skills that would be needed in the Persian Gulf: situational awareness exercises; low altitude operations; tactical air control party workshops; and dissimilar air combat training. Night and low visibility operations, armed reconnaissance missions, and close air support techniques were honed to a fine edge at Masirah and Ras Al Madrasah after Desert Saber was announced and Ash Shuaybah was named as the primary target.

Lieutenant Colonel Jerry W. Fitzgerald and his Harrier pilots were anxious to get into the fray after the Desert Storm air campaign was unleashed, but they were held on a close tether because they might be needed to support various contin-

### 24-25 February Movements of 4th and 5th MEB



gency plans generated by NavCent's 14 January initiating directive. The *Nassau* remained on station in the North Arabian Sea, well out of AV-8B range for strikes on Kuwait, until early February. Once in range, plans called for the Harriers to first hit targets on Faylakah Island and in southern Kuwait. They could be used farther north as the ground campaign progressed. The main air plans dealt with operations in support of Desert Slash so most of VMA-331's primary targets were on Faylakah Island.

Specific targets were selected from the landing force target list. These nominations were then passed from Tactical Air Control Squadron 2 (TACRon-2) on the *Nassau* to Battle Force Zulu (CTF 154). Colonel Burgess used guidance from the 4th MEB staff to compile the number of AV-8 sorties available each day and passed them on to Battle Force Zulu. Admiral March, commanding Battle Force Zulu, would then fold them into his daily allocation of sorties to the JFACC staff at Riyadh, who would place them in the daily air tasking order. Individual targets included missile sites, antiaircraft positions, and command and ammunition bunkers. Just before the ground assault, VMA-331's primary mission would be battlefield interdiction to isolate the landing area from Az Zwar and the eastern half of Faylakah. After the landing force was ashore, however, the primary mission would switch to on-call close air support of RLT 2. Although VMA-331 possessed 19 Harriers, only 12 were scheduled for use on any one day according to air tasking procedures. The *Nassau's* magazine spaces could hold enough ordinance for six days. Normal operations prescribed up to 40 sorties per day, but this number could be almost doubled for surge operations.<sup>246</sup>

The initial air plan called for VMA-331 to strike three geographical areas. The first target area was Faylakah Island which was slated for a destruction raid, Operation Desert Slash, no later than 22 February. When Desert Slash was canceled on 19 February, however, Harrier operations were directed at Bubiyan Island and central Kuwait to support the amphibious deception and the I MEF advance. Once the Iraqi forces inside Kuwait had been routed and were in full retreat the primary targets became the roads running from Kuwait City to Basrah and Umm Qasr in northern Kuwait and southern Iraq.

The first Harrier combat launch from an amphibious ship came at 0540 on 20 February. Marine Attack Squadron 331 lit the "amphibious flame" when a four-plane Harrier division took off and headed toward Iraqi antiaircraft batteries and SAM missile sites at Az Zwar on the western end of Faylakah Island. Secondary targets were mortar and artillery positions within range of the planned landing zone on Auhah Island. The weather, however, did not cooperate and the flight was diverted to Ras Al Subiyah near Iraq's Umm Qasr Naval Base to hit targets of opportunity. The Bumblebees attacked surface targets and maneuvered to avoid antiaircraft guns and SAM missiles. At least one SA-2 surface-to-air missile exploded near the formation. Nineteen of the 43 other strikes planned for that day went as scheduled. The other 23 were scrubbed due to bad weather. Those that did fly chalked up only mixed results because of poor visibility.

The next day, 44 more flights were planned, but 16 had to be canceled again due to bad weather. Artillery, antiaircraft, and mortar sites were again among the

primary targets, but armored vehicles and a command bunker were also added to the list for the second day. The flights were once again hampered by poor visibility and this time heavy anti-aircraft fire over Faylakah was added to the equation so only mixed results were reported. The next two days saw 60 more combat flights from the *Nassau*, striking the same targets. This time results were better. The dense wall of anti-aircraft fire was significantly reduced after all known sites were pounded from the air. Other targets were thereafter regularly hit. Buildings, missile sites, and trenchlines on southeastern Faylakah were added to the target list as time passed. Strafing runs on Auhah Island destroyed buildings, but bomb damage assessments determined the islet was unoccupied. Auhah was a key target because it was earmarked for an artillery raid by the 13th MEU(SOC) to support Operation Desert Slash.

After the ground assault began at 0400 on the 24th, Harrier strikes were scheduled as close air support sorties for either I MEF or JFC-E. When these missions could not be carried out the Harriers attempted to hit Faylakah rather than abort without hitting any targets. Forty sorties were planned for 24 February but only 22 were actually flown. The rest were canceled because of bad weather and the huge smoke clouds caused by more than 600 burning oil wells which had been set on fire by the Iraqis. Command and control procedures proved tricky because of the large number of aircraft operating in the same area, but no accidents occurred. Artillery positions, armored vehicles, trenchlines, and command posts were struck with good results.

The next day was a light day for VMA-331 as the *Nassau* had to sail about 100 miles into the southern Gulf to replenish its depleted magazines. Major General Jenkins had requested an ammunition ship be sent north so the *Nassau* could remain within Harrier range of Kuwait, but Admiral LaPlante did not concur, hence, the lost flight time. Flight operations resumed as the *Nassau* steamed north toward its holding position. Twelve sorties were launched in the afternoon to support I MEF's drive toward Kuwait City. The targets were Iraqi armored forces attacking Marine lines from the Burqan Oilfield. Target coverage was good despite dense smoke in the target area.

On 26 February, the Iraqi forces in Kuwait began the "Mother of All Retreats." As the Coalition noose tightened around Kuwait City, the two major north-bound roads were choked with fleeing Iraqi troops. Colonel Fitzgerald originally planned 32 air strikes, but Admiral March passed orders for the *Nassau* to go to surge operations so 70 strikes were now on the slate. The Bumblebees joined other strike aircraft to cut off the Iraqi retreat. All aircraft were ordered to a rendezvous point where stacks of aircraft circled waiting for a chance to close in. When there was an opening, the Harriers were turned over to airborne forward air controllers for specific target assignments. The first four Harriers, led by Major Henry J. Coble, launched off the *Nassau* at 0600. They were directed to the vicinity of Al Jahrah road junction just west of Kuwait City to attack trucks, armored vehicles, and artillery positions. These operations continued throughout the day, gradually moving north and northeast as the Iraqi retreat became a rout. The highway below was soon filled with many smoldering wrecks. Fifty-six of the



planned 70 sorties were flown, but the remainder had to be canceled due to weather and cloud cover. This was VMA-331's best day so far.<sup>247</sup>

If 26 February was VMA-331's best day of the conflict, the 27th turned out to be the worst and was later poignantly remembered as "the day the Magic died" by one squadron member.<sup>248</sup> Again assigned to conduct surge operations, Lieutenant Colonel Fitzgerald planned to launch 60 sorties. The first of these took off at 0600 and headed for northern Kuwait. After "Magic" flight arrived at its assigned post a FastFAC directed the four Harriers north to intercept a retreating Iraqi convoy. Although the swirling confusion on the ground was partially covered by low-lying clouds and thick oil smoke, the Bumblebees began their attack. The run was aborted by the FastFAC, due to another flight of aircraft in the vicinity of the Bumblebees target. During the egress, the flight was targeted by several missiles believed to be SA-9s. One of the missiles brought down the AV-8B flown by Captain Reginald C. Underwood and he was killed. This was the only combat loss suffered by VMA-331. The somber Bumblebees flew 47 sorties before Admiral Arthur ordered a standdown that brought AV-8B flight operations to a halt. As it turned out, 27 February was the last day of combat operations for VMA-331.

Although hampered by poor flying conditions throughout the war, Harrier flight operations were more successful than any one had predicted they might be. Long hours of planning, close cooperation, and hard work by deck crews, ordnance men, and plane handlers on board the *Nassau* reduced the time for an arriving Harrier to be refueled, rearmed, and on its way to under 45 minutes. This was less than half the turnaround time for carrier fixed-wing operations. Teamwork, coupled with the Harriers' extraordinary reliability, resulted in sortie rates of more than 3.0 instead of the 1.2 normally expected for fixed-wing aircraft. With the *Nassau* lying close offshore flight time was significantly reduced and an air strike could be launched and arrive overhead seven minutes after receiving a call; again, this was far less time than was needed for most carrier aircraft.<sup>249</sup>

### *Mine Countermeasures Operations*

By far the most difficult issue faced by the naval forces in the Persian Gulf turned out to be how to defeat the underwater mine threat. The U.S. Navy had previous mine warfare experience in the Gulf during Operation Earnest Will, the American escort of reflagged Kuwaiti tankers, from August 1987 to December 1988. Unfortunately, this experience was not a good one and it revealed serious flaws in U.S. countermine capabilities. The *Bridgeton*, a reflagged tanker, struck an Iranian M-08 contact mine on 24 July 1987, during the very first convoy under American protection. In response, the USS *Guadalcanal* (LPH 7) was pulled from Exercise Bright Star 87 in Egypt and sent to the Persian Gulf to join U.S. Joint Task Force Middle East. Embarked was a Navy AMCM squadron with

about 350 sailors and eight RH-53D mine sweeping helicopters.\* Also on board the *Guadalcanal* was Detachment 2, 24th Marine Amphibious Unit, to provide close-in ship protection and to support AMCM operations using Huey, Sea Knight, and Sea Cobra helicopters. In November 1987, Contingency MAGTF 1-88 embarked on board the *Okinawa* relieved Detachment 2, then was in turn replaced by Contingency MAGTF 2-88 on board the *Trenton* in February. On 14 April, the American frigate USS *Samuel B. Roberts* (FFG 58) struck a freshly laid contact mine triggering Operation Praying Mantis, a series of raids on Iranian oil rigs used as minelaying support bases. The Marines knocked out the Sassan SAG "B" oil platform on the 18th, but lost a Sea Cobra helicopter and its crew during a subsequent action. Contingency MAGTF 3-88 on board the *Dubuque* took over for CMAGTF 2-88 in June and remained on station until the end of hostilities. The American mission in the Persian Gulf was a success, but Iranian mines had extracted a high toll.<sup>250</sup>

The main problem sweeping Iraqi mines from the northern Gulf in 1991 was the lack of accurate information. There was no firm count of the number or types of mines laid or specifics about their exact location. The only hard intelligence was provided by floating mines discovered in the southern Gulf. Admiral Arthur sought permission to interdict Iraqi mine-laying operations using the justification that Iraq was violating international law, but General Schwarzkopf—mirroring diplomatic concerns from his superiors in Washington—refused to allow Admiral Arthur to interfere with enemy mine-laying operations before Desert Storm was launched. Unfortunately, Schwarzkopf's instructions also precluded reconnaissance flights. Without accurate data, intelligence officers guessed the undersea minefields were a submerged extension of the inland Saddam Line whereby the mines should be planted in the coastal waters just east of Kuwait. This assumption proved to be one of the major American miscalculations of the Persian Gulf War.

In reality, the Iraqis had seeded the Gulf with 1,157 mines laid in a 150-mile-long arc swinging out from the coast into the central Gulf to protect Kuwait, Faylakah, Bubiyan, and the Umm Qasr channel. The most numerous underwater explosive devices were moored contact mines. In addition to these World War II contact mines there were more modern Italian-made Manta influence mines. Mantas were particularly effective because they were hard to detect after they settled into the sea bed of the Gulf and could be detonated by magnetic or acoustic triggers that were sophisticated enough to let minesweepers pass by before exploding. Postwar reports revealed four deep-water mine belts and 10 mine clusters. These were supplemented by land mines and underwater obstacles protecting likely landing beaches.

The Coalition minesweeping effort was a combined operation using primarily British and U.S. resources. The British had five mine countermeasures vessels in

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\*RH-53Ds were similar to CH-53Ds but had more powerful engines, automated flight controls, longer range, and in-flight refueling capacity.



Department of Defense Photo (USN) DN-SC-91-08128

*In a starboard view of the amphibious assault ship New Orleans (LPH 11), it lies at anchor with several MH-53E Sea Dragon helicopters on the flight deck. The New Orleans served as a platform for Gulf mine-clearing operations.*

the Gulf: the HMS *Cattistock* (M 31); HMS *Atherstone* (M 38); HMS *Hurworth* (M 39); HMS *Dulverton* (M 35); and HMS *Ledbury* (M 30), with the casualty receiving ship RFA *Argus* (A 135) and logistics ship RFA *Sir Gallahad* (L 3005) in support. The U.S. Mine Countermeasures Group included the modern USS *Avenger* (MCM 1) and the older ocean minesweepers USS *Adroit* (MSO 509), USS *Impervious* (MSO 449), and USS *Leader* (MSO 490). There was also a Sea Dragon detachment from Navy Mine Countermeasures Helicopter Squadron 14 (HM-14) with six MH-53E Sea Dragons and several SEAL underwater demolition teams.<sup>251</sup> The combined mine force was under the operational control of the Commander, Persian Gulf Surface Action Group (CTF 151), on board the *LaSalle*.<sup>\*</sup> The tactical command was designated Task Unit 151.1.1, and the *Tripoli* was the flagship. Minesweeping tasks mirrored those used by NATO whereby the British flotilla was responsible for sweeping coastal waters, the U.S. would clear deep water, and special warfare teams would clear shallow waters to the high water mark. Beach mines were the responsibility of the landing force.<sup>252</sup>

Sweeping operations encompassed three phases. First, British and American helicopters scouted ahead of the surface fleet to identify likely threats, cut mooring lines, and destroy surface mines. They then made a second pass dragging sleds that emitted signals imitating the magnetic and acoustic signatures of passing warships. Finally, surface mine hunters used special sonar to locate individ-

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<sup>\*</sup>RAdm William M. Fogarty was replaced as CTF 151 by RAdm Raynor A. K. Taylor in Feb91.

ual mines so demolitions experts could destroy them. Mine warfare experts originally estimated it would take 18 to 24 days to clear passage lanes and fire support areas.

The import of these operations for the Marine Forces Afloat was that the mine issue decisively impacted potential amphibious operations. Mine strikes on two key ships paralyzed further naval operations in the northern Gulf, the loss of two assault ships reduced the ATF forcible entry options and hampered later air operations, and the time needed to clear mines safely would delay the ground assault beyond a point General Schwarzkopf considered prudent. There was little doubt in the minds of any of the Marine general officers that the mine issue was the single-most important argument against an amphibious assault.

On 6 January, Admiral Fogarty sent a message to Admiral Arthur requesting use of an amphibious assault ship as the AMCM platform and MCM command ship.<sup>253</sup> The decision to do so had been agreed upon at a naval planning conference on 30 December, at which no amphibious representatives were present. The decision to pull an LPH out of the amphibious task force was made without the knowledge of, consultation with, or agreement by either Admiral LaPlante or General Jenkins. This decision incensed General Jenkins who had noted the lack of a dedicated AMCM platform and reported it to NavCent in August, a concern that was reiterated by Admiral Clarey in November; but both men were met with stony silence from their superiors when they pressed the point. Critics later derided this decision which denied the ATF use of big deck amphibious ships as “using a luxury car to do the work of a pickup truck,” citing the suitability and previous use of LPDs for similar work.<sup>254</sup>

*The amphibious assault ship Tripoli (LPH 10) lies in dry dock in Bahrain for repairs to a hole in its starboard bow caused by an Iraqi mine. The Tripoli struck the mine while serving as a mine-clearing platform in the northern Persian Gulf.*

Department of Defense Photo (USN) DN-SC-91-08075



Admiral Arthur passed the message to Admiral LaPlante and ordered him to nominate one of the ATF's four LPHs for AMCM support. After careful review the *Tripoli* was selected. Additionally, the Marines furnished personnel for the *Tripoli*'s supporting arms coordination center, a provisional rifle company, and an attack helicopter detachment. Lieutenant Colonel William N. Myers was the officer-in-charge of this detachment. The command element was pulled from RLT 5 headquarters. A provisional rifle company was formed from Headquarters and Service Company, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, to seize and secure Kobbar Island if it was needed as an emergency landing strip during AMCM operations. Marine Reserve Helicopter Attack Squadron 773 left a detachment of AH-1J Sea Cobras on board the *Tripoli* for close-in protection of the coastal minesweepers and to escort the Sea Dragons.

On 21 January, the 5th MEB began crossdecking 1,500 Marines from the *Tripoli* to other amphibious ships at Dubai. The overcrowding of the amphibious task force resulted in the *Tarawa* sailing to Al Jubayl to offload aviation and support personnel, including all six Harriers of Detachment B, VMA-513. Actual sweeping operations began on 16 February. The next evening, after clearing a lane from Point Echo to Point Foxtrot, the mine group was pinpointed by Silkworm acquisition radar. The small flotilla quickly raised anchor and moved east out of range of known Silkworm sites. This zigzagging convoy was led by the *Tripoli* moving at five knots. At about 0436 on 18 February a huge explosion rent a 20-foot hole near the *Tripoli*'s bow, the result of a strike by a LUGM-145 contact mine. Quick action by the crew and extremely effective damage control allowed Captain G. Bruce McEwen, USN, to maneuver his ship out of the minefield. Later that same morning the Aegis cruiser USS *Princeton* (CG 59) was disabled by a bottom-laid Manta influence mine. In less than four hours the Coalition mine-clearing operations had become a disaster, halting 4th MEB's planned raid on Faylakah Island and depriving the 5th MEB of a second big deck amphibious assault ship.

The loss of the *Tripoli* sent Generals Jenkins and Rowe and Admirals LaPlante and Clarey back to the conference table to find a new amphibious ship for AMCM support. This time they selected the *New Orleans*, the lead ship of PhibRon 1, carrying elements of the 11th MEU(SOC) which was embedded into the 5th MEB.\* Since G-Day was imminent and the 5th MEB was already scheduled to become the I MEF reserve ashore, the *New Orleans* was able to delay joining the MCM Group in order to land its embarked Marines. This loss, however, later caused problems with the backload and breakout of the 11th MEU when Desert Storm ended in March. The *LaSalle* acted as the AMCM command and control ship until the *New Orleans* was able to take station on 4 March. On 25 February the *Tripoli*—which remained on station despite the damage—crossdecked

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\*The assignment was not new for the *New Orleans*. Two decades earlier she had been the flagship for Operation End Sweep to clear North Vietnamese waters of U.S. mines from 23Feb-24Jul73.

AMCM helicopters, equipment, and personnel to the *New Orleans* and then sailed for Al Jubayl.

The temporary loss of the *Tripoli* forced MAG-40 to divert aircraft to support AMCM operations. On 25 February HMLA-269 Detachment A was on board the USS *Raleigh* sailing into the northern Gulf with the Faylakah Island raid force when Lieutenant Colonel Gregory N. Maisel, the officer-in-charge, was tasked to provide armed escort for mine-clearing operations in the vicinity of Ash Shuaybah. Detachment A's aircraft logged 36 sorties and 61 flight hours between 27 February and 2 March.<sup>255</sup>

### *Helicopter Operations*

Helicopters from MAG-40 and HMM(C)-164 played major roles in the amphibious distraction. Conducting well-executed airborne deception operations on G plus one and G plus two, they helped to tie up about 40,000 Iraqis in useless positions along the Kuwaiti coast waiting for the amphibious assault that never came. Saddam's troops were held in place until the morning of 27 February, after which it was too late to turn the tide of battle. Many of these Iraqis were later taken prisoner by I MEF or were caught by aerial bombardment as they fled north.

On the afternoon of 24 February, Admiral Arthur received a signal from General Schwarzkopf requesting a night helicopter assault feint to be conducted in the vicinity of Ash Shuaybah to hold Iraqi defenders in position on the coast to prevent them from turning south or west to meet oncoming ground forces from I MEF and JFC-E which were closing the ring around Kuwait City. Admiral Arthur

*A Marine AH-1W Sea Cobra helicopter of HMLA-269 prepares to land on the Nassau's flight deck.*

Department of Defense Photo (USN) DN-ST-91-06878



notified Admiral LaPlante and Major General Jenkins of this request and told them to execute a deception operation. General Jenkins then tasked the 13th MEU(SOC) to carry out the feint because it was closest to Ash Shuaybah.

Colonel Rhodes received this warning order at about 2215 that night. At 2245, the *Okinawa* and the *Portland* set sail for a position about 50 miles off the coast. These ships were selected because they had TASCAM four-channel deception systems on board and could broadcast tapes to simulate brigade-level radio traffic to fool Iraqi radio intercept technicians. Additionally, Marines from the 2d Radio Battalion detachment were prepared to use heliborne electronic jammers and electronic emissions simulators. Colonel Rhodes held a crisis action team meeting at 2315 on board the *Okinawa* and initiated a rapid planning sequence. Lieutenant Colonel Vanderlinden developed a 10-helicopter deception package containing six CH-46Es, two AH-1Ws, one CH-53E, and one UH-1N.\*

At 0300 on the 25th, the advance force coordination center was reopened on board the *Okinawa* to control operations. At 0346 an E-2C Hawkeye and an EA-6B Prowler from the carrier *Roosevelt* checked in with the AFCC and reported they were ready to provide airborne control and electronic countermeasures support for the deception force. The last of the helicopters lifted off at 0413 and headed for Kuwait. It was a difficult low-level, over-water, 50-mile approach in near total darkness. At 0449 the group reached the turnaround point, popped up to be illuminated by Iraqi radar, and hightailed it back to the *Okinawa*. All aircraft were safely recovered within an hour.

The demonstration was very effective. There was considerable Iraqi radar activity and antiaircraft fire lit up the coastal sky. Electronic intelligence indicated that the Iraqi commander flashed messages to Baghdad indicating an amphibious landing was underway, he was taking tremendous casualties, and had begun to withdraw.<sup>256</sup> In a related incident, two Silkworm missiles were launched at the fire support ships USS *Wisconsin* (BB 64) and USS *Leftwich* (DD 984). One fell harmlessly into the sea and the other was destroyed by a Sea Dart missile fired by the British destroyer HMS *Gloucester* (D 96). Radio intercepts confirmed the Iraqis believed an amphibious assault was imminent and that Saddam had ordered reinforcements sent to the coast.

On the second day of the ground assault, the I MEF attack was hampered by dense smoke and low-lying cloud cover which limited the effectiveness of close air support. Lieutenant General Boomer, therefore, contacted Admiral Arthur to request the transfer of all available seaborne AH-1W Super Cobras. The "Whiskeys" could penetrate the clouds and provide badly needed close-in fire support as the 1st and 2d Marine Divisions neared Kuwait City. The helicopters' Hellfire missiles and laser range finders were perfectly suited to deliver accurate antitank munitions in low visibility. General Jenkins surveyed his needs and quickly made six AH-1Ws from HMLA-269 available.

HMLA-269 (Forward), commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth W. Hill,

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\*MajGen John R. Rhodes' comments reflect a larger package of 10 CH-46s, 2 CH-53s, 2 AH-1s, and 1 UN-1.

was embarked on board the *Shreveport*. The transition was a smooth one because the detachment had been attached to the 3d MAW after being flown to Saudi Arabia while the rest of MAG-40 sailed from the United States. Lieutenant Colonel Hill was tasked to fly off the *Shreveport* and report to Landing Zone Lonesome Dove at Al Khanjar. Lonesome Dove was a primitive helicopter landing strip only recently bulldozed from a gravel plain in northern Saudi Arabia. After the Marines entered Kuwait City, HMLA-269 Forward displaced to Kuwait International Airport.

The flyoff was delayed because the *Shreveport* was too far south and LZ Lonesome Dove was out of Super Cobra range. Early on the morning of the 26th, the ship closed on the Kuwaiti coast. Hill led the Cobra flight 90 miles inland, flying with night vision goggles. The crews had been briefed while the ship was enroute and were ready to fly combat missions immediately upon arriving at Al Khanjar. In six days ashore, HMLA-269 Forward flew 51 sorties in 78 flight hours, including 22 combat sorties and 22.5 combat hours in two days. All six Super Cobras remained 100 percent capable throughout the duration of their stay on shore. Missions included close-in fire support of the 1st and 2d Marine Divisions; the 1st Brigade, 2d Armored Division, attached to the 2d Marine Division; and the 5th MEB. Other missions included medical evacuation escort, psychological warfare operations, and aerial reconnaissance. On 4 March, Lieutenant Colonel Hill and HMLA-269 (Forward) returned to the *Shreveport*. All missions were considered successful and the detachment earned a "well done" from the 3d MAW for its support.<sup>257</sup>

The success of the Ash Shuaybah feint on the 25th led to a deeper deception operation in the vicinity of Bubiyan Island to pin the Iraqi *2d Infantry*, *22d Infantry*, and *51st Mechanized Divisions* in place along the northern Kuwaiti coast. The raid was scheduled for the morning of 26 February. Major General Jenkins tasked Colonel Burgess' MAG-40 to carry out the mission. Lieutenant Colonel Robert F. Saikowski, commanding officer of HMM-365, was named mission commander. The helicopter force included 10 CH-46s flying off the *Guam*, 4 CH-53s from the *Iwo Jima*, and 3 AH-1Ts from the *Nassau*. The Navy provided one E-2C Hawkeye for command and control, an EA-6B Prowler for electronic countermeasures, and four A-6E Intruders as a surface strike package. Intelligence reported Iraqi SA-6 radars, numerous antiaircraft guns and missiles, and a possible Silkworm site in the target area.

At 1500 on the 25th, 4th MEB transmitted the execute order. Lieutenant Colonel Saikowski issued his mission brief by message at about 1900. An inter-ship confirmation briefing was held via secure net at about 2100. Final shipboard flight briefs were held on their respective ships at 0100 on 26th. To ensure Iraqi discovery the flight used uncovered radio frequencies. Each section simulated a large flight element and follow-on strikes were mentioned during radio transmissions. At the turn-away point the CH-46s and CH-53s would expend on-board .50-caliber ammunition in order to create confusion and draw attention to the simulated landing. This was to be followed by 16 minutes of electronic jamming and air strikes to cover the helicopter group egress.



The flights from the *Nassau*, *Guam*, and *Iwo Jima* made their rendezvous just after 0350 and headed for shore traveling about 200 feet above the water at a speed of about 100 knots. Visibility was poor with zero illumination due to smoke and cloud cover so the entire 140-mile mission was conducted using night vision goggles. Flying conditions were so bad that most pilots later reported that this was the worst flight of their careers. A mechanical problem with one of the Sea Cobras resulted in an abort and the AH-1Ts returned to the *Nassau*. The Navy aircraft were on station at 0430 and began their role playing at 0455. Shortly thereafter, Saikowski dropped a flare and the helicopters opened fire. At 0505 the flight reached the turn-away point and headed back out to sea.

Once again the Iraqis took the bait. The southern part of Bubiyan Island was soon lit by flares and tracer rounds criss-crossed the night sky forcing the out-bound helos to drop to 75 feet until they were out of range. The Navy A-6s immediately rolled in and took out the now highly visible targets arrayed along the shore. Bomb damage assessment reported good coverage with many secondary explosions. Post-mission debriefs confirmed the success of the deception mission. The feint achieved all of its goals. The mission was well executed and there were no casualties despite poor flying conditions.

At about the same time the Bubiyan feint was taking place another helicopter demonstration force was launched from the *Nassau* for a preplanned strike at Faylakah Island. At 0400 on 26th, Major Gary A. Mattes led a flight of six UH-1N helicopters from HMLA-269 to Faylakah. The flight departed the *Nassau*, then located near the Durrah Oilfield, on the low-level 133-mile trip. The aircraft skimmed the water at less than 200 feet. The pilots were using night vision goggles, but visibility was still restricted. In fact, Major Mattes later credited the horizon glow from burning oil wells for allowing him to identify Faylakah and the target areas.

The flight was split into three two-aircraft divisions as the helicopters approached Faylakah. Each Huey was armed with rocket pods and machine guns for strafing Iraqi positions in the vicinity of Az Zwar. The flight slowed to about 60 knots and spread to 2,000 meters between groups when it neared the target area. Target coverage was good and there were several secondary explosions. Pilots reported fires burning as they completed their turn for home. The Iraqi response was to fire flares and light up the sky with ineffective anti-aircraft fire. This mission, like the other two helicopter feints, was considered a success.<sup>258</sup>

### *Evacuation of Faylakah Island*

Although combat operations ended on 28 February, there was one major task left for the 13th MEU(SOC). On 1 March, the day after the cease-fire went into effect, Colonel Rhodes received a warning order to evacuate any remaining Iraqis from Faylakah, Auhah, Miskan, Bubiyan, and Warbah Islands. Recent overflights by carrier aircraft and remote piloted vehicles indicated a large number of Iraqis on Faylakah Island were waving white flags and wished to surrender. Colonel Rhodes had little information except that there were between 1,000 and 3,500

Iraqis on the island and no radio contact had been made. The next morning the *Okinawa*, *Ogden*, *Fort McHenry*, and *Durham* cautiously moved through a channel in the minefields and anchored in the fire support area about 15 miles south of Faylakah.

Colonel Rhodes planned to have psychological operations teams use helicopter-mounted loudspeakers to announce the upcoming prisoner of war operation that evening. This would be followed by a second overflight to give specific instructions for surrender the next morning, just before the Marines landed. The ground force would consist of a command element, a security element, and an evacuation control team. Aviation support would be a joint-service effort that included psyops helicopters, Navy strike aircraft, Army and Marine attack helicopters, the Marine transport group, and an airborne Marine reserve force. The operation would encompass five phases: pre-landing preparation; securing the island; segregation of prisoners and gathering intelligence materials; search and evacuation of prisoners; and the withdrawal. The *Ogden* was designated the enemy prisoner holding platform.

Late in the afternoon of 2 March, two specially configured UH-1Ns from Marine Reserve Light Helicopter Squadron 767 flew to the *Okinawa*. Each mounted a large loudspeaker system and carried a combined Kuwaiti-U.S. Army psychological warfare team that had prepared surrender announcements and would broadcast them. The two helicopters conducted several flyovers at about dusk and reported no fire or hostile actions. The stage was thus set for the next day's operation.

At 0530 on the 3d, the *Okinawa* AFCC was activated. About an hour later an *A Marine takes aim as Company D's commanding officer, Capt Gregory A. Boyle, and the 13th MEU's commander, Col John E. Rhodes, prepare to enter the compound where more than 1,400 Iraqi Marines from the 440th Marine Brigade have assembled to surrender on Faylakah Island.*





*BGen Abbud Gambar Hasen Almiki, commander of the Iraqi Marine brigade, prepares to surrender to Col Rhodes.*

Army AHIP attack helicopter reported the Iraqis were waving white flags. Five minutes after that the psyops helos, escorted by Super Cobras from HMM(C)-164, passed overhead. Announcements told the Iraqis to move to a communications compound located at the southwest corner of the island and wait. At 0641 the *Wisconsin's* RPV confirmed no gun positions were manned and that LZ Eagle, the proposed landing zone, was clear. At 0654 a flight of Intruders was on station ready to provide close air support if needed.

At 0745 eight CH-46s carrying the assault wave of Company D, 4th Marines headed for Faylakah. The flight leader reported "feet dry" at 0759, circled the west end of the island, then landed at 0802. Captain Boyle's Marines quickly fanned out to secure a perimeter. The second wave brought in the rest of Company D and the 13th MEU(SOC) Alpha command group including Colonel Rhodes, Sergeant Major Anthony Reese, Major Cash, Major Russell O. Sherck, Major Marshall K. Snyder, and 10 enlisted Marines. Also on board was Captain Abdullah Al Shuaib, Kuwait Navy, a liaison officer who was the son of the mayor of Faylakah and the senior Kuwaiti representative.<sup>259</sup>

The Iraqis had all gathered at the communications compound and their white flags were clearly visible from LZ Eagle. As Colonel Rhodes approached the compound the Iraqi brigade commander, Abbud Gambar Hasen Almiki, surrendered Faylakah Island and his command which included 1,413 members of the *440th Marine Infantry Brigade* without incident. Aerial searches of Auhah, Bubiyan, Miskan, and Warbah revealed these islands were unoccupied and no further prisoners were taken into custody. When it became obvious that there would be no Iraqi resistance, additional Kuwaiti dignitaries were flown to Faylakah and a formal surrender ceremony was arranged. At 1430, the Kuwaiti flag was raised

in front of the mayor's residence in the town of Az Zwar, and the Iraqi occupation officially ended. Colonel Rhodes, Commodore McClelland, and two rifle squads represented the United States at the ceremony.<sup>260</sup>

MEU Service Support Group 13 provided a 60-man evacuation control team. Final coordinating instructions were given at a 0630 formation on board the *Durham*. Team Gold lifted off at about 0750 and Team Blue left the ship at about 0825. Both teams were on the island by 0843. The evacuation control center began processing Iraqi prisoners at 0940. Six processing points were established. The prisoners were mustered by their own officers and arrived at the proper processing point under close supervision by Company D's security squads. At each point the Iraqis were searched, identified, tagged, screened for medical problems, and forwarded to a consolidation area. At the consolidation area they were organized into 15-man heliteams. These heliteams were escorted to the LZ and restrained with flex cuffs before boarding helicopters for the flight to the *Ogden*.

The prisoner evacuation went very smoothly. The Iraqis were in generally good health and had been well fed while on the island. They were docile and most of them were only interested in protecting the two cartons of cigarettes they had been issued when surrender was imminent. Captain Jeffery A. Robb and two forward air control teams directed the evacuation. Fifteen prisoners were assigned to each CH-46 while groups of 60 were placed on board the CH-53s. Company A and Headquarters and Service Company provided security teams on board ship. Upon arrival at the *Ogden* the prisoners were searched before being led down the

*Members of Company D, 4th Marines, carefully search Iraqi Marine brigade prisoners prior to loading them on helicopters of HMM(C)-164 for transport to the Ogden (LPD 5) offshore.*





*Once on board the Ogden Iraqi prisoners were searched again, given rations, interrogated, and transferred to military police compounds ashore.*

ladder to the well deck. Here they were again searched for weapons and were once more screened for medical problems. After the final screening the flex cuffs were cut off and each man was issued two MREs. The main problems during confinement were minor squabbles over food and cigarettes and poor sanitation. The aloof Iraqi officers were incapable or unwilling to assert leadership and enforce the necessary disciplinary measures. During their confinement the Iraqis ignored the portable heads and so fouled the *Ogden's* well deck that it required a thorough cleaning after the prisoners left the ship.

While MSSG 13 processed enemy prisoners of war and Company D provided security on Faylakah, the command element performed special tasks. Interrogators, translators, and counter-intelligence specialists were assigned to the evacuation control center. Senior Iraqi officers—one brigadier general and three colonels—were questioned about the location of minefields and barriers. No naval minefield information was forthcoming, but the exact minefield locations on Faylakah were ascertained. The communications section established and maintained contact with the AFCC on board the *Okinawa*. Major Cash, the 13th MEU's intelligence officer, and a team of combat photographers explored Az Zwar and the western defensive positions. Major Cash noted the town had been looted, military equipment had been poorly maintained, and the defensive positions were poorly constructed. Despite the intense aerial bombardment, howev-

er, the Iraqis reported they suffered no serious casualties.\*

The last of the Iraqis were processed at about 1515 and the final prisoner of war heliteam was on its way to the *Ogden* at 1530. The Blue Evacuation Team departed Faylakah for the *Durham* at 1519 and the Gold Team was airborne an hour later. All hands from MSSG 13 were back on board ship by 1700. The last American personnel lifted off the island at 1656 and all aircraft and personnel were on board PhibRon 5 shipping by 1720. The task group remained at anchor that night, departing for Mishab the following day. On 5 March, the final group of Iraqi prisoners was flown off the *Ogden* and turned over to military police, closing the books on MFA operations in support of Operation Desert Storm. The time to prepare for the journey home had arrived.<sup>261</sup>

## 5th MEB Operations On Shore

### *5th MEB Becomes I MEF Reserve*

The 5th MEB was the only major Marine unit to participate in both the amphibious deception and ground operations during Desert Storm. This was the result of a chain of events that began when Boomer radically changed the I MEF scheme of maneuver from a frontal attack up Kuwait's east coast to a flank attack in the western desert. This new plan eliminated the need to seize a coastal enclave to support over-the-shore logistics and freed the Marine Forces Afloat for other missions. One of these missions was for General Jenkins to release part of the MFA to move ashore and become the I MEF reserve.

Boomer's bold new attack plan was not without risk. It created a huge gap in the Marine defensive lines along the border. The movement of the 1st and 2d Marine Divisions to their assembly areas left almost no defenders in place along the Kuwaiti border near the Al Wafrah National Forest. This void left Combat Service Support Area 1 at Kibrit and the main supply route from Mishab to Al Khanjar at risk. Boomer addressed this problem in two innovative ways. First, he created a special purpose force, Task Force Troy commanded by Brigadier General Thomas V. Draude, to carry out deception operations to convince the Iraqis that offensive forces were preparing to attack. Second, an afloat Marine brigade would slip ashore to become the I MEF reserve. By occupying the Al Wafrah gap this reserve force could ensure the uninterrupted advance of the units on each of its flanks—I MEF on the left and JFC-E on the right—and prevent Iraqi attacks to sever vital lines of communication. That this could be done on such short notice was a testament to the inherent flexibility of amphibious forces.

On 5 February, Boomer requested that an afloat brigade be placed under his operational control to become the I MEF reserve for the duration of Desert Storm. General Schwarzkopf and Admiral Arthur agreed, and on 7 February, the 4th

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\*The low casualty figure was attributed to the fact that the Iraqis generally abandoned their fighting positions and raced for safe areas whenever aircraft warnings were received.

MEB was so designated. It was soon apparent, however, that this assignment would have to be changed because the bulk of 4th MEB was scheduled to conduct an amphibious raid at Faylakah Island. With 4th MEB thus engaged, the 5th MEB would have to become the I MEF reserve. This was ironic since Brigadier General Rowe's final departure report stated the 5th MEB was poorly equipped for sustained inland operations.

### *Preparing to Go Ashore*

On 13 February, General Rowe learned of the new assignment and quickly initiated a rapid planning cycle. There were three important elements in the 5th MEB's preparations to become the I MEF reserve force: gathering intelligence; coordinating logistics support; and planning operations. Lieutenant Colonel Malcolm Arnot's intelligence section and the 5th SRISG worked with the MEF's intelligence officer, Colonel Forest L. Lucy, and their own MSE intelligence sections to create and disseminate an accurate picture of the battlefield. Colonel Eugene L. Gobeli, the MEB's logistics officers, and Lieutenant Colonel Robert E. Lupton, heading BSSG 5, assessed support needs and made arrangements for assistance with Brigadier General James A. Brabham, Jr.'s General Support Groups at Al Jubayl and Mishab. Colonel Robert J. Garner, commanding officer of the 11th MEU, prepared a concept of operations and listed execution tasks for the 5th MEB major subordinate elements.

Tactical intelligence was a major area of concern throughout Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Ground reconnaissance was practically nonexistent because of operational restraints imposed by upper command echelons. The only tactical aerial reconnaissance readily available was provided by remotely piloted vehicles (RPVs) because the Marines no longer flew McDonnell Douglas RF-4B Phantom II reconnaissance aircraft.<sup>\*262</sup> The RPVs—often mistaken for model airplanes—were difficult to detect, could linger over the target area for extended periods, and provided near real-time data. The main problems were their limited numbers and the poor quality of the grainy monochrome imagery they produced. Requests for national- and theater-level assistance were not often granted. The high altitude reconnaissance photos that were made available seldom arrived in a timely manner. Marine tactical intelligence, therefore, came primarily from signal intercepts and information supplied by human resources.

These limitations notwithstanding, the following picture of the battlefield emerged: The 5th MEB would face units from the elite *III Corps*, generally recognized as Iraq's best regular army formation. The *8th Infantry Division* was dug in along Kuwait's central border. Its flanks were guarded by the relatively immobile *18th* and *29th Infantry Divisions*. These units were expected to defend in place. The major offensive threat to the 5th MEB were elements of the *5th*

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\*The last Marine RF-4B flew in Aug90 and promised TARPS reconnaissance pods for F/A-18 Hornets were not yet available.

*Mechanized Division* lurking near Al Wafrah. This force, believed to be the residue from the earlier Iraqi attack on Khafji, numbered up to 500 men and was thought to possess as many as two dozen tanks and a similar number of armored personnel carriers.\*

The logistics situation was a difficult one because General Rowe's concern about the 5th MEB having to operate inland had become reality. Plans to rely on sea-based logistics had to be abandoned due to the overland distances involved and the loss of several key ships. These problems were compounded because an undermanned BSSG 5 would have to unload assault echelon equipment and sustainment supplies at two ports about 100 miles apart, in addition to lacking necessary transportation assets. An alternative logistics plan was formulated. Instead of relying on PhibGru 3 ships for support, the 5th MEB would plug into the I MEF combat service support system by drawing supplies from General Support Group 2 (GSG 2) or Brigadier General Charles C. Krulak's Direct Support Command (DSC). The 5th MEB would land its supplies and deliver them to rear area supply dumps then would later draw ammunition, fuel, and water at forward supply points. As the 5th MEB displaced farther forward, the supply burden would shift from GSG 2 to the DSC.

Transportation was a formidable obstacle because the 5th MEB line haul assets consisted of only 16 five-ton trucks from a provisional truck company. Compounding the seriousness of the situation was the fact that these trucks were intended to operate within 50 miles of the coast, but the 5th MEB was being sent more than 150 miles inland. A partial solution was the use of what became known as "Saudi Motors," a fleet of civilian tractor-trailers and elaborately decorated trucks, called "circus wagons" by Marines, driven by Pakistani and Philippine immigrant workers under control of the 6th Motor Transport Battalion, Selected Marine Corps Reserve.

Although unloading the 5th MEB landing force operational material and follow-on supplies would be a difficult task, several factors eased the burden. General Support Groups 1 and 2 were already well established at Al Jubayl and Ras Al Mishab and were ready to render assistance. The port at Jubayl was an excellent facility with ample material-handling equipment. An experienced local labor force, a U.S. Navy support group, a U.S. Army transportation battalion, and a Marine shore party were on hand to help BSSG 5 with cargo handling.

The Royal Saudi Naval Forces port at Ras Al Mishab was less impressive. There was only one pier and port entry was tricky because an incoming ship had to move through an offshore oilfield, negotiate a narrow channel, and turn around in a very tight space. This difficult sea approach was complicated by two additional factors, the threat of floating mines, and Silkworm anti-ship missiles located near Ras Al Qulayah. Despite these limitations Mishab had to be used because

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\*This force was later deemed to be a Republican Guard-trained commando battalion attached to the *5th Mech*.



it was so close to the forward combat service support areas.<sup>263</sup>

Another logistics problem was the need to cross-deck personnel and reconfigure ship loads because of the loss of several amphibious ships. This created a domino effect that began when the 5th MEB lost the use of the *Tripoli*, which was detached to support mine countermeasures operations. This required an extensive reshuffling of embarked personnel and equipment. Companies E, F, and most of H&S Company, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines moved to the *New Orleans*. The transfer of more than 1,500 men forced other ships to cram supplies into any available nook and cranny and to resort to surge quartering.

The resulting “ship squeeze” required the *Tarawa* to put into Jubayl to transfer VMA-513’s Harriers to nearby King Abdul Aziz Naval Air Base and to unload some personnel and equipment on 15 February. Early the next morning, crewmen and Marines on board the *Tarawa* learned why the Jubayl area was known as the “Scud Bowl.” They were rudely roused from their sleep by sirens screeching a warning of incoming ballistic missiles. One of them, a Scud that may have been specifically aimed at the *Tarawa*, hit the water about 120 meters off the *Tarawa*’s port side.<sup>264</sup> Luckily, the warhead did not detonate and the missile strike caused no casualties or damage.

The *Germantown* had been scheduled to detach from 5th MEB so its LCACs could support the 4th MEB amphibious raid on Faylakah Island, but the requirement was dropped when Operation Desert Slash was downgraded to an artillery raid. The 5th MEB unexpectedly lost the *New Orleans* after the *Tripoli* was disabled by a mine. Fortunately, the *New Orleans* was able to land BLT 3/1 and HMM(C)-268 before departing, but its loss left 1,096 Marines without boat spaces when ground operations ended. For General Rowe, the bottom line was that the 5th MEB retained only one of its original three assault ships to support combat operations ashore. This circumstance dictated that MAG-50 would have to move ashore during the ground war.<sup>265</sup>

After receiving the warning order on 13 February, the 5th MEB command element had to conceive and refine an operations plan in less than 10 days. The resulting plan called for RLT 5 to come ashore as quickly as possible with its advance elements manning positions on G-Day in order to screen the I MEF right flank and to protect supply routes.\* In order to keep the amphibious deception viable most of the 5th MEB would remain at sea until the ground attack had been launched. This meant that RLT 5 would not be allowed to begin landing at Mishab until mid-morning on G-Day.

The concept of operations envisioned 5th MEB landing at both Jubayl and Mishab. Regimental Landing Team 5 was to relieve Task Force Troy and guard the I MEF flank in its zone, be prepared to move on order to protect the I MEF northwest flank, secure breach sites, provide main supply route security, and clear by-passed enemy positions while moving in trace of the 2d Marine Division.

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\*G-Day was the start of the ground offensive and had been given that designation to avoid confusion with D-Day (Desert Storm) and A-Day (amphibious assault).

Initially, the zone of operations would stretch along the border directly across from Kuwait's Al Wafrah National Forest.\* The 1st Marine Division would be on the left and JFC-E units would be on the right. The main limiting factor was logistics; the entire 5th MEB could not be unloaded in one day and all of its ships could not use the same port. An additional concern was the lack of organic transportation. Without heavy equipment transporters for rapid movement, the mechanized task force, BLT 3/5, would have to move cross country at a very slow pace to avoid costly vehicle and equipment breakdowns while in transit.

Before going ashore the 5th MEB was task organized for combat operations. The command element was divided into 5th MEB Forward and 5th MEB Rear. The forward command post would move ashore to coordinate operations while the rear remained on board the *Tarawa*. The forward command post was further subdivided into a "jump CP" and the "main CP." The jump CP would be mobile, either vehicle- or helicopter-borne, and would consist of General Rowe, his communicators, and designated staff members. The main CP would be stationary and was under the direction of General Rowe's chief of staff, Colonel Drake Trumpe. A liaison team from the 5th MEB had been attached to I MEF on 16 February to coordinate plans and keep Brigadier General Rowe abreast of the ever-changing tactical situation ashore.

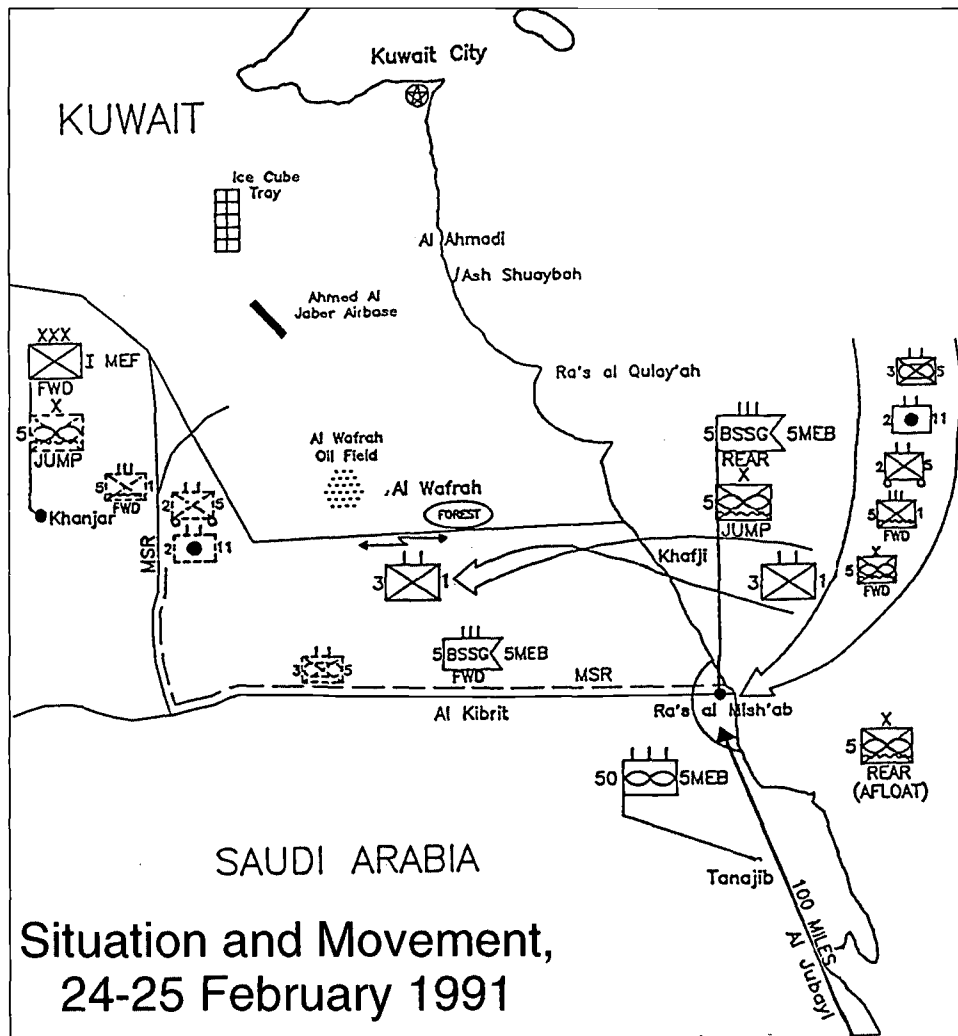
Regimental Landing Team 5 was divided into four combat elements. Battalion Landing Team 3/1 was the heliborne assault element, BLT 2/5 would be the motorized element and emergency heliborne back-up force, BLT 3/5 comprised a mechanized combined-arms task force, and the 2d Battalion, 11th Marines, would control artillery support. Marine Aircraft Group 50, less the Harriers of VMA-513 under the operational control of the 3d Marine Aircraft Wing and a detachment of HMA-773 Sea Cobras on board the *Tripoli*, was slated to move ashore and operate from Tanajib Air Field near Mishab. Brigade Service Support Group 5 had forward and rear headquarters detachments; two port operations groups, one at Jubayl and one at Mishab; a combat service support detachment (CSSD) to operate the main logistics center; and three mobile CSSDs to service forward units.

### *Initial Operations on Shore*

The 5th MEB was placed under General Boomer's operational control at 1800 in the evening of 23 February.<sup>266</sup> The next morning, I MEF initiated the Coalition ground offensive to recapture Kuwait. The assault began at 0400 and by mid-morning lead elements of the 1st and 2d Marine Divisions had penetrated the vaunted Saddam Line between the Al Manaqish and Al Wafrah oilfields. Breaching operations went so smoothly that General Schwarzkopf later lauded

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\*The term "National Forest" is misleading. Al Wafrah was an agricultural station with its vegetation evenly spaced in neat rows rather than a dense growth of trees and underbrush as the title infers.



the Marine effort as a textbook example that should be studied for years. The Marine attack routed the Iraqis and soon the main problem became handling an unexpectedly large number of enemy prisoners of war. This success was due, at least in part, to effective deception operations. Task Force Troy held the Iraqis defending the southern border in place, and the amphibious threat tied at least four Iraqi divisions to static positions along the coast south of Kuwait City.

The 5th MEB "hit the deck running and didn't stop until it reassembled in March."<sup>267</sup> The first ground elements ashore were helilifted into a key blocking position just south of the Kuwaiti border. The bulk of the ground combat element came ashore and conducted a 130-mile overland bypass of Iraqi lines to join I MEF combat units in Kuwait. Marine Aircraft Group 50 moved ashore and provided combat aviation support to the 5th MEB, I MEF, and 3d MAW. Brigade Service Support Group 5 accomplished herculean logistics feats despite being handicapped by ship, personnel, and resource shortfalls. Combat operations started on 24 February and ended on 3 March, but some elements of the 5th MEB

remained ashore to support I MEF until 17 March.<sup>268</sup>

Regimental Landing Team 5 divided its operational focus into two distinct phases. During the first phase BLT 3/1 carried the load. It made a helicopter assault near the Kuwaiti border to reinforce Task Force Troy, engaged Iraqi forces in the Al Wafrah National Forest, then moved north into Kuwait to assist the 2d Marine Division. Meanwhile, the remainder of RLT 5 landed at Mishab, organized and consolidated, made a two-day motor march to join I MEF, and conducted route security operations. These roles were reversed for the second phase. After its release by the 2d Marine Division, BLT 3/1 returned to Mishab and the focus of 5th MEB operations shifted to the Al Wafrah area being swept by RLT 5.

Lieutenant Colonel Robert S. Robichaud's BLT 3/1 was the first 5th MEB unit ashore. Its mission was to establish a blocking position south of the Kuwaiti border in support of Task Force Troy. Battalion Landing Team 3/1, as the rest of the 5th MEB, was task organized to best accomplish its mission. Captain Glenn E. Gearhard's Company L and the AAVs were attached to the BLT 3/5 mechanized combined-arms task force and would not participate in the helicopter assault. Battery G, 3d Battalion, 12th Marines, had no maps of the area so it was attached to Lieutenant Colonel Paul A. Gido's 2d Battalion, 11th Marines. Battery E, 2d Battalion, 11th Marines, was instead placed in direct support of BLT 3/1. Captain Carlyle E. Shelton divided Headquarters and Service Company into four elements: a forward command post; a main command post; an administrative and logistics operations center; and a rear marshalling party. Captain Eric H. Carlson's Weapons Company jump CP and the heavy machine gun section made the helicopter assault, but most of the rest of Weapons Company moved ashore by surface craft and would affect a later link-up with its parent unit. Detachment 11, 1st Light Armored Infantry Battalion, was assigned to escort the follow-on convoy from Mishab to Al Wafrah and landed over Blue Beach.

Battalion Landing Team 3/1's forward command element, three rifle companies, and a weapons company detachment were helilifted into positions seven kilometers south of the Al Wafrah National Forest during the afternoon of 24 February. The first unit in was Captain Michael F. Reineberg's Company I, which departed the *Denver* at about 1135 and set down in Landing Zone Inca at about 1205. Captain Rodney S. Nolan, the BLT, S-2, met with the Task Force Troy intelligence section to confirm enemy and friendly positions and to make last-minute adjustments to BLT 3/1's dispositions. He was shown breaks in the protective berm, alerted to minefield locations, and informed that BLT 3/1 would face an estimated battalion-size enemy force. Lieutenant Colonel Robichaud used this information to establish night defensive positions and to plan an artillery raid for the following day.

The helilift of BLT 3/1 continued throughout the afternoon of G-Day. After Company I was safely on shore, Company K followed. Captain Ronald F. Baczkowski established Company K's defensive positions to the right of Company I. Captain Dane H. Skagen's Company M lifted off the *New Orleans* then set up its company battle position on BLT 1/4's east (right) flank. Although the helilift was cut short by ground fog, the forward command post, including



Department of Defense Photo (USMC) DM-ST-93-02254

*An aerial view reveals the Marine Corps combat service support area near Al Kibrit in Saudi Arabia.*

Lieutenant Colonel Robichaud, Major George E. Stratmann, Jr., and Sergeant Major William A. D. Leblanc, was able to assume control of the ground units and coordinate supporting arms before sunset.<sup>269</sup>

At the forward edge of the battlefield, BLT 3/1 maintained a close watch over the Al Wafrah National Forest for two days. Robichaud covered the most likely avenues of approach with antiarmor teams and ordered his rifle companies to be alert for enemy movement. His artillery, firing harassing and interdiction missions, struck enemy positions, but the BLT encountered no enemy the first night. While their comrades were manning the lines south of Al Wafrah, the surface-landed combat support elements of BLT 3/1 came ashore and then gathered in an assembly area about three kilometers west of Mishab until they could move up to Al Wafrah the next morning. The first night was uneventful except for two explosions believed to have been caused by a pair of incoming Scud missiles, which shook the earth south of BLT 3/1's defensive lines.<sup>270</sup>

While BLT 3/1 defended the border, the rest of RLT 5 came ashore. This force remained in the Mishab area until it had consolidated and formed into three convoys on G-Plus One. Throughout G-Day, Mishab harbor was a flurry of activity. Landing craft carried men and equipment from the amphibious ships to the landing beaches while helicopters raced overhead carrying more men and equipment from ships outside the harbor. H-Hour was delayed due to bad weather and harbor entry was slowed by the mine threat, so the 5th MEB offload began at 1400 instead of mid-morning as planned. The *Anchorage*, *Germantown*, *Mount Vernon*, and *Peoria* landed their men and equipment over the beach while the *Mobile* unloaded at the pier. The landings were halted about midnight and resumed at first light the following day.

The offload was conducted in tactical sequence and lasted until 0956 on 27 February. The first units to land were elements of BLT 3/1, the LAVs, and Battery E, 2d Battalion, 11th Marines. Next ashore was Battalion Landing Team 2/5 from the *Tarawa*, *New Orleans*, and *Juneau*. Lieutenant Colonel Gido's artillery landed from the *Anchorage* with the following echelon. Battalion Landing Team 2/5 continued its offload while Lieutenant Colonel Kevin M. Kennedy received final instructions and was given maps and written orders. The final evolution included the regiment's command element from the *Juneau* and BLT 3/5 debarking from the *Mount Vernon*, *Vancouver*, *Frederick*, and *Peoria*. The Marines came ashore wearing woodland green cammies and carrying a one-day ammunition supply, two days of rations, and full NBC gear including CPOG suits, hooded gas masks, boot covers, and gloves. Marine Aircraft Group 50 used CH-46 and CH-53 helicopters from HMM-268 to move from the *New Orleans* to nearby Tanajib Airfield. At Mishab the BSSG 5 shore party completed its offload operations after bringing 310 vehicles and 280,250 cubic feet of cargo ashore in less than 72 hours. The 4th MEB lent a hand as helicopters from MAG-40 lifted much-needed 5th MEB supplies and equipment off the *Tripoli* as it limped along off the coast on its way to the shipyard to undergo repairs after the mine strike.<sup>271</sup>

The 5th MEB support ships *Flickertail State* and *Cape Girardeau* could not be accommodated at Mishab, so they had to sail more than 80 nautical miles south to Jubayl to be unloaded. Two hundred fifty-three Marines were cross-decked from nine different ships to the tank landing ship *Barbour County* to accompany the MSC ships south. The black bottom ships closed Jubayl on 23 February and the *Barbour County* arrived shortly thereafter. The Jubayl offload took nearly 72 hours. As a result, the equipment, vehicles, and accompanying Marines, including more than two dozen badly needed drivers, did not reach the main body of 5th MEB until after the cease-fire.<sup>272</sup>

### *Into Kuwait*

Early on the 25th, a BLT 3/1 follow-on convoy departed Mishab and soon linked-up with Lieutenant Colonel Robichaud and the main body at the Al Wafrah overwatch position. The LAVs were made the command post security element. Their primary mission, however, was to act as BLT 3/1's reserve, standing ready to mount a counterattack or to reinforce any weak point in the defensive line. The Surveillance, Reconnaissance, and Target Acquisition section was tasked to scout across the border in order to find safe passages through the minefields. Weapons Company established a fire support coordination center to integrate aviation, naval gunfire, and ground indirect fire support. The heavy machine gun section shifted one of its teams north to the border to relieve the TOW platoon. The 81mm Mortar and Anti-armor Platoons set up in overwatch positions located on South Ridge.

The reconnaissance platoon was helilifted to LZ Inca where it briefly joined Company I before being attached to Task Force Troy. The platoon was assigned to positions Alpha, Outpost 2, and Echo, located near openings in the protective