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NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
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FRAGILE VICTORY

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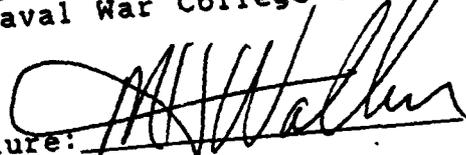
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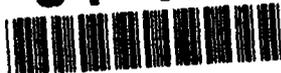
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Abstract of Fragile Victory

Fragile Victory is an analysis of Iraqi operations during the Second Gulf War (Desert Storm). The paper's purpose is to determine if the Iraqi defeat was inevitable or, through better employment of their forces and adherence to accepted tenants of operational art, their performance could have been better. Generally the paper is limited to options available to the Iraqis once Desert Storm had begun. However, the benefits of an early Iraqi strike into Saudi Arabia are examined. Fragile Victory reveals there were other options available to the Iraqis which could have either prolonged the war, or caused the Coalition forces to suffer unacceptable casualties. In fact a preemptive invasion of Saudi Arabia might have foiled the Coalition plans to liberate Kuwait. In conclusion, this work demonstrates what a fragile victory Desert Storm was and warns against drawing false conclusions in a war fought against unwilling, poorly led opponent fighting with yesterday's equipment.

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A Fragile Victory

Chapter 1 Introduction

280500Z February. The Iraqi Army lay in ruins. Initial casualty estimates over one half million men. 3847 Tanks and armored personnel carriers were scattered across Kuwait and southern Iraq. The Iraqi Navy had ceased to exist. Blown from the water either supporting the abortive reconnaissance in force at Kafji, laying mines, or in port. The Iraqi Air Force, by refusing to fight, arguably faired somewhat better. However, 142 aircraft were destroyed on the ground and air, another 121 were interned on their former enemy, Iran's, airfields.¹

A tremendous victory for the Allied Coalition. A tribute to their people, leadership and technology. However, in the glut of narcissistic literature published since Desert Storm have we overlooked the less favorable lessons of the Gulf War? Maybe even forgotten what a fragile thing our priceless victory was? Against a less cooperative enemy, an enemy dedicated, prepared, and equipped to follow Saddam Hussein's

¹ Bellamy, Christopher, Expert Witness(Riverside, NJ.: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1993), p. xxv; . Extracts from Conduct of the Persian Gulf War (Newport, R.I.: The United States Naval War College , 1992), p. 411. Note: Subsequent casualty/equipment destroyed figures have since been reduced.

strategy of attrition, maybe even determined to aggressively impose it's will on the coalition, the outcome could have been much worse, the casualties significantly higher, and war momentarily longer.

Whether by striking early after their invasion of Kuwait, before coalition forces arrived in strength, or through more intelligent operational utilization of their resources and the employment of a concept of operations based on aggressive vice passive, attrition, Iraq could have lessened their defeat.

Chapter 2

Background and Strategy

Saddam Hussien's strategy for fighting the Gulf War was a sound one. Given the technological and training superiority of the western coalition forces, Hussein could not hope for an outright victory once coalition troops began arriving in strength. The Iraqi ruler's strategy consisted of two components. First, he intended to favorably shape world opinion and split the coalition forces. Second, in the event of war, he intended to inflict unacceptable casualties on the Coalition forces. He rightly assumed that the people of the United States would not tolerate a bloody war. Saddam Hussein stated "Yours is a society which cannot accept 10,000 deaths in one battle"². Although Hussein's strategy was sound, his

²Bo Eldridge, "The Mother of All Battles," Command Magazine, Nov-Dec 1991, p. 13.

execution was flawed. As we will examine in subsequent chapters. He was unable to split the Coalition or sufficiently attrite its forces. These problems resulted from inadequate operational planning, preparation, deployment and use of his forces.

The Allies strategy consisted of diplomatically and economically isolating Iraq to pressure Saddam Hussein into withdrawing his troops from Kuwait. If military action was necessary, the Coalition intended to cut off and attrite the Iraqi forces in the Kuwait Theater of Operations (KTO) with air power and destroy them with a follow on ground offensive.

The Desert Storm air crusade was to be executed in four phases. In phase I the allies intended to gain air superiority, destroy strategic command and control, and Iraq's weapons of mass destruction (WMD) production. In phase II The Allies planned to negate the air defenses over Kuwait as a prerequisite to battlefield preparation . Phase III was dedicated to preparing the battlefield for the allied ground offensive. In phase IV the Coalition air forces would provide direct support for Desert Sword³.

The Allies plan for the ground war, Desert Sword, was simple, a battle of envelopment, similar to the Soviet defeat

³ Ibid., p. 16.

of the Japanese at Khalkin Gol.⁴ First, while the XVIII Corps secured the Allies left flank and cut the Iraqi retreat route, the Marines and the Joint Forces Command East would drive for Kuwait City. Next, the Joint Forces Command North would attack north from the Saudi-Kuwaiti border, hopefully convincing the Iraqis this was the main axis of advance.

Between XVIII Corps and The Joint Forces Command North lay the VII Corps. Their primary mission was to swing around the western end of the Saddam line, through the Iraqi desert and march north. After outflanking the Iraqis and driving deep into their lines of communication the VII Corps would turn east and fall on the flank of the Republican Guard.⁵ Marines of the 4th and 5th MEF would remain afloat, off the coast of Kuwait, as the operational reserve and to threaten an amphibious landing.⁶

Supporting the VII corps flanking maneuver would be the shallow envelopment of the British 1st Armored Division. On the heels of the 1st Infantry Division's breaching operations, the 1st Armored would pass through the Saddam line and attack the Iraqi mobile reserve positioned directly behind their

⁴ Bellamy, Christopher, Expert Witness (Riverside, NJ.: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1993), p. 43.

⁵Bo Eldridge, "The Mother of All Battles," Command Magazine, Nov-Dec 1991, p. 20.

⁶ Extracts from Conduct of the Persian Gulf War (Newport, R.I.: The United States Naval War College, 1992), p. 298.

front lines. As the late General Patton would have said " I intend to hold the Iraqis nose and send the VII Corps to kick them in the butt".

No documents defining the Iraqi operational plan have been released from Baghdad. However, the likely plan may be deduced from Iraqi actions and statements from Hussein. The plan must have been focused on supporting his aforementioned goals. He intended to attempt to split the Coalition, either diplomatically, utilizing, among other tools, his linkage strategy , or militarily, by the use of operational fires directed at Israel. Failing the Coalition's dissolution he intended to attack the Coalitions center of gravity- United States public opinion. Although unable to defeat the American armed forces he hoped, through attrition, to make the price of victory too high for the United States and hence the sap the will of the Americans and other western Coalition forces to continue fighting.

The Iraqi's drew on experience from their war with Iran to construct a defense designed to inflict maximum casualties on the Coalition attackers. The Iraqis thought the Allies would attack straight through their prepared defenses. These defenses would attrite the allies and slow the momentum of their advance. Reserves stationed in several echelons behind the initial lines would perform successive counterattacks culminating in a powerful counter attack by the theater

reserve, the Republican Guards ¹

The army was the prominent tool the Iraqis would use to execute their strategy. Hussein wanted to save his Air Force from direct confrontation with the Coalition allies and it never seriously contested the Allies air superiority. Prior to the war experts believed the Iraqi Air Force was capable of surging up to 1000 sorties per day. Yet on the first day of Desert Storm the Iraqis flew only eighty sorties² The Iraqi Navy, comprised of five frigates, 32 patrol boats, and six amphibious ships, was never a serious operational player³.

To effect this strategy the Iraqis had at least 43 divisions in the Kuwaiti theater of operations. The Saddam line, consisting of a mined fortification and obstacle belt as much as 12 kilometers deep, extended from the Kuwaiti coastline west along the Saudi border several miles into southern Iraq. There were three Iraqi Corps manning this line. III Corps was responsible for the western Saudi-Kuwaiti border, VII Corps was answerable for the segment of the line extending into southern Iraq, and IV Corps guarded the beaches

¹ Extracts from Conduct of the Persian Gulf War. (Newport, R.I.: The United States Naval War College, 1992), p. 112.

² Roy Braybrook, Air Power: The Coalition and Iraqi Air Forces, (London, GB. Osprey Publishing Ltd, 1991), p. 50.

³ Frank Chadwick, Gulf War Fact Book, (Bloomington, IL. GDW, 1991), p. 68.

and eastern Saudi-Kuwaiti border¹⁰. Two of these formations, the III and IV Corps, were leg infantry corps with armor support provided by the infantry divisions attached tank battalions and corps level tank regiments. As per Iraqi doctrine, the infantry division's tank battalions were usually not used as mobile reserves but placed in revetments alongside the infantry¹¹. The VII Corps (Iraqi) had two armored divisions assigned. A high percentage of these Infantry Corps were recently (since August) activated reserves. This, as will be addressed in subsequent chapters, would be a problem. In central Kuwait, in the vicinity of Ali-As Saleim Air Base and Kuwaiti International airport, one armored and two mechanized divisions formed a corps level reserve. These units, in addition to the armored and mechanized divisions north of Kuwait City, comprised the VIII Tank Corps. The garrisons, located on the northern Kuwaiti-Iraqi border, were the Republican Guard. The Guards were formed into an eight division corps consisting of two armored divisions (Hammurabi, and Medina) one mechanized division (Tawakalna), four motorized infantry divisions and a special forces division.¹²

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 68.

¹¹ S2, 177th Armored Brigade. The Iraqi Army: Organization and Tactics. (Fort Irwin, CA. NTC, 1991). p. 102.

¹² Frank Chadwick, Gulf War Fact Book, (Bloomington, IL. GDW, 1991), p. 68; Extracts from Conduct of the Persian Gulf War (Newport, R.I.: The United States Naval War College, 1992), p.110;

Not all of the Republican Guard Divisions would be committed to the KTO.

The Iraqi Air Force consisted of approximately 750 aircraft. Many of these were obsolete by western standards and did not pose a significant threat. Nevertheless, Iraq possessed 75-100 Mirage F1's, and 70 Mig-27's both capable of inflight refueling in addition to a cadre of proficient pilots experienced in strike warfare. In the later years of it's war with Iran (86-88) the Iraqi Air Force (IAF) successfully attacked several targets deep in Iran and the southern Persian Gulf including Larak, which is 150 miles further from Iraq than the Saudi capital of Riyadh.¹³ These aircraft were staged in airfields throughout Iraq, hidden beneath underpasses, and stored in a plethora of hardened revetments. Destroying these revetments would be difficult for the allies. Subsequent battle damage assessment (BDA) even more so. It was the classic peanut under a shell game.

Chapter Three

Historical Account

A brief historical account of Desert Storm is necessary in order to analyze the Iraqi operations during the war. The air phase of Desert Storm began on January 17 and lasted until

Bo Eldridge, "The Mother of All Battles," Command Magazine, Nov-Dec 1991, p. 13.

¹³ Roy Braybrook, p. 27.

24 February, although the bombing of Iraqi troops and installations continued until the cessation of hostilities. During the air phase of the campaign the allies shot down 42 Iraqi planes in aerial combat and damaged or destroyed 375 of Iraq's 594 hardened aircraft shelters. Total estimated Iraqi aircraft destruction ranges from 103 to 142 aircraft. Additionally, Iraq flew 122 aircraft to Iran for internment. Total Iraqi aircraft rendered combat ineffective during the airphase was 266 of their estimated 750 plane air force (approximately 35%). Allied losses were 90 planes (68 in combat, 22 to other causes).¹⁴

0100 24 February the French Daguet Division, with the 2nd Brigade of the 82nd Airborne Division attached, crossed the undefended Iraqi border north of the Saudi town of Rafha.¹⁵ This action marked the beginning of Desert Sword. In most cases the Allies rapidly broke through the Saddam line. In fact the rapidity of the breaching operations, coupled with deteriorating weather conditions, prompted General Schwarzkopf to advance H-hour for the other Coalition forces. All Coalition units had launched their attacks by the afternoon of the 24th.

¹⁴ Roy Braybrook, Air Power: The Coalition and Iraqi Air Forces (London, GB: Osprey Publishing Ltd, 1991), p. 64.

¹⁵ Bo Eldridge, "The Mother of All Battles," Command Magazine, Nov-Dec 1991, p. 24.

February 25. On the western flank the 101st Air assault division airlifted a brigade to cut the last major road into the Kuwaiti theater of operations (the As Samawah-An Nasiriyah road). While the French Dauget division continued to advance north, covering the allies left flank. The Iraqi forces in the area were unable to maneuver due to the speed of the allied advance and their lack of intelligence. The 45th and 49th Iraqi Divisions were heavily engaged and crippled.

In the center, the Coalition VII Corps advanced into the Iraqi 7th Corps. The Iraqi 12th Tank Division, functioning as the mobile reserve behind the 7th Corps infantry screen was badly mauled in a night engagement with the British 1st Armored Division. The 1st Cavalry Division, ordered to conduct a diversionary attack up the Wadi Al-Batin, was having a significant impact on the Iraqi's reaction. J-Stars surveillance indicated the Iraqi's were beginning to move their armored reserves south. The Iraqi's appeared to have no knowledge of the strong armored formations advancing on their right flank.

In the east all Coalition forces completed their breaching of the Saddam line. The Marines had encountered virtually no resistance from the first line of Iraqi defenders on G-Day. Today the Marines encountered uncoordinated battalion and Brigade sized armored counterattacks. The Iraqi forces employed were probably the divisional tank battalions

of the III Corps Infantry divisions with tank brigades of the corps tank and mechanized divisions thrown in piecemeal. Marine units closed to within ten miles of Kuwait City.

February 26. Saddam Hussein restates the obvious ".....on this day, our valiant armed forces will complete their withdrawal from Kuwait".¹⁶ Whether the statement was issued as an attempt to get the allies to ease up, or an actual execute command for the Iraq military's retreat is unclear. In the west, the French overcame the last resistance from the 45th Infantry Division and continued to screen the Coalition's left flank. The 24 Mechanized Division, attached to the XVIII Airborne Corps, advanced north to An Nasiriyah, destroying the remnants of the Iraqi 49th Infantry Division. In the center, the armored spearhead of the Coalition's VII corps encountered it's first serious opposition. The U.S. 1st Armored Division would destroy the Iraqi 26th Infantry Division, while the U.S. 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment (ACR) became heavily engaged with the Republican Guard Tawakalna Mechanized Division, and two brigades of the Iraqi 12th Armored Division which were attempting to withdraw to the north. The 2nd ACR fought off repeated uncoordinated Iraqi attacks for nearly six hours

¹⁶ Saddam Hussein, Saddam Speaks on the Gulf Crises: A Collection of Documents. ed. Ofra Bengio. (Tel-Aviv: Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, Shiloh Institute, Tel-Aviv University, 1992), p. 207.

... relieved by the 1st Armored, 3rd Armored and 1st Infantry Division. Further south the British 1st Armored division destroyed numerous Iraqi units attempting to retreat from the border.

In the east, the 1st Marine Division fought a victorious pitched tank battle against the Iraqi 3rd Armored Division for Kuwaiti International Airport and entered the outskirts of Kuwait City. Although the Iraqi 3rd Armored was unable to defeat the Marines, the engagement lasted 12 hours and demonstrated the ability of the Iraqi army to at least slow U.S. forces if employed "en masse". The 2nd Marine Division cut the road north of Kuwait City, and with the help of Tacair, destroyed an estimated 2000 Iraqi vehicles.

By now, Baghdad was aware of the approximate position of VII Corps. The Republican Guard was staggering toward the American armored formation. It's mission was to block the U.S. VII Corps and prevent the complete encirclement of the Iraqi units remaining in Kuwait. Designated formations such as the 3rd Armored Division were functioning as the Iraqi's rear guard. By this time the Iraqi's had given up all hope of attriting the Coalition units and were only trying to save what they could.

February 27th. The Iraqi's had fled Kuwait City, there would be no significant fighting as the Kuwaitis liberated their capital. In the center the climatic battle of the war

occurred as elements of the U.S. VII Corps engaged and decisively defeated the remaining Iraqi Tank reserves, consisting of the Republican Guard Medina, Hammurabi Armored Divisions, remnants of the Tawakalna, and Adan Infantry Divisions supported by elements of the regular armies 52nd, 17th, and 12th Armored Divisions. At 0800 on 28 February the cease fire went into effect.¹⁷

Chapter Four

Analysis of Iraq Operations

The Iraqis were soundly beaten. Very few positive things can be said about the Iraqi practice of operational art in the Second Gulf War. Not only were the Iraqi's beaten by better troops, better equipment and better leaders, but also by better planning, execution and adherence to sound principles of operational art. The following are the primary mistakes the Iraqi's made in their application, or lack thereof, of operational art.

Mirror Imaging: More than a buzzword, it was a fatal mistake for the Iraqis. If the roles had been reversed Iraqi doctrine would have probably dictated a frontal assault. They believed that the allies would reach the same conclusion, for military and political reasons, and took the Allies stated aim

¹⁷ History compiled through the reading of multiple sources listed in Bibliography.

of relieving Kuwait literally. The possibility of a flanking maneuver did not escape them, in fact, the Iraqi 7th Corps was placed west of the Iraqi-Kuwaiti border to guard against such a possibility, but they apparently did not comprehend the magnitude or geographical breath of the allies "Hail Mary". The plan to employ their units in a passive defense, awaiting the allies push into Kuwait, was a decision which exacerbated Iraqi problems once Desert Sword began and greatly assisted in the Allies near encirclement of the Iraqi army.

Operational Intelligence: The faulty troop deployment and passive defense were not the only key factors in the Iraqi's dismal showing. The Iraqi's operational intelligence was abysmal. Operational intelligence "concentrates on the collection, identification, location, and analysis of strategic and operational centers of gravity. In addition, operational intelligence analysis should cover threat force composition, capabilities, and potential courses of action".¹⁸ Failure to correctly analyze existing (open source) material, lack of air reconnaissance, or human intelligence, contributed to the Iraqi's inability to form an accurate assessment of their enemies capabilities, troop deployments or intent. The Iraqi's had little operational intelligence and, with the exceptions of the cross border reconnaissance in force,

¹⁸ Fundamentals of Operational Art. (Newport, RI: The United States War College, 1993), p. 8.

culminating in the battle of Kafji, made no known concerted effort to gain useful intelligence on the Allies. Certainly, a case could be made that the Coalition's VII Corps was the Allies operational center of gravity. Its destruction would have removed the Coalition's capability to execute Desert Sword. Yet, the Iraqi's had no idea of its location or intent as late as February 25th. This is but one example of the complete failing of the Iraqi's operational intelligence.

Lack of Operational Maneuver and Inability to Mass Fires: Linked closely to, and perhaps a result of, the first two Iraqi problems was their lack of operational maneuver and their inability to mass their forces for a decisive counterstroke. In general, the Iraqi's were not able to move their forces to decisively engage the Coalition troops. The Iraqi's were able to occupy Coalition forces in sporadic, localized counterattacks but were unable to mass and offensively maneuver their forces to conclusively engage the Allies.

This fault is attributable to three facts. First, the Iraqi's planned a passive defense with maneuver limited to "movement to contact", straight ahead counterattacks. Second, due to poor operational intelligence the Iraqi's could rarely place the Coalition forces, let alone attack them. The third limiting reason was the Allies complete air superiority.

However, there is a subtle yet significant exception.

On 27 February the Republican Guard Medina and Hammurabi Tank Divisions, supported by elements of the 17th, 52nd, 12th, and Tawalkana tank and mechanized divisions maneuvered to face the oncoming Allies VII Corps. The Iraqi's mission was to allow the other Iraqi units remaining in Kuwait time to escape north. In a day long battle the VII Corps gained an impressive tactical victory against the forces arrayed against it. However, the Iraqi forces had accomplished their job. The noose would not be closed prior to the cease fire. Due to the work of these theater reserves 14 more Iraqi brigades (although some were reduced to as low as 25% of original strength) would escape the Allies death trap. Those brigades held 700 tanks, 1,400 APCs, and 400 artillery pieces.¹⁹

If operational maneuver is defined as the movement of forces to seek a decisive impact on a campaign this certainly fits the bill. There was no defeat for VII Corps but the Allies ability to deny Iraq's army an offensive capability had been significantly altered with the escape of these troops.

Aerospace Control Operations: Iraqi's attempts to derail the Allied air superiority train were weak, uncoordinated and unsuccessful. One of the Iraqi air force's major weaknesses was its centralized control. Within the first few hours of Desert Storm the ability of the Iraqis to exercise this

¹⁹ Bo Eldridge, "The Mother of All Battles," Command Magazine, Nov-Dec 1991, p. 37.

centralized control was eliminated. Thus the Iraqi's response to the Coalition air offensive was fragmented and ineffectual. The largest air battle of the war only resulted in four downed Iraqi aircraft.²⁰

However, there was another, more telling reason, why the Iraqi Air Force was ineffective. The primal reason was Saddam Hussein's reluctance to decisively employ his air force. He seemed to take the "long view". Because the Iraqi Air Force was unable to fight the Coalition's on equal terms he did not want to waste his pilots or planes. These planes and helicopters would serve him well after the war. Two points support this: The defection of 122 Iraqi planes to Iran and the reluctance of the Iraqi pilots to engage in aerial combat. Unfortunately, from the Iraqi view, this took the their most significant tool for effecting the outcome of the war out of their hands.

Offensive Fires: Closely tied with the Iraqi's reluctance or inability to decisively employ their air force was their negligence of operational fires. Scud (actually Al Hussein and Al Abbas) missiles were employed in onesies and twosies, as a terror weapon. Never massed for a decisive strike. The same for the sporadic use of the Iraqi Navy. Although their impact

²⁰Braybrook, Roy The Desert Storm Special: Air Power the Coalition and Iraqi Air Forces(London: Osprey Publishing Ltd, 1991), p.56.

may have been insignificant regardless of employment. The strike arm of the Iraqi air force never came out to play. The Iraqi's never planned or executed an operational fire attack.

Poor Leadership: Starting at the top, the Iraqis were no match for their Coalition counterparts. The Iraqis had developed many good Generals during the Iran/Iraq war. However, too many of them made the mistake of opposing Saddam's policies or becoming too popular and were removed, often in favor of political yes men.²¹

Operational Deception: This is one for the plus column. The Iraqis camouflaged well, hid well and made BDA a difficult task for the Coalition. The Iraqi's practice of *Maskirovka* continually misled the Allied commanders as to the number of Iraqi troops deployed in theater and losses sustained. These deceptions would have a significant impact on the Coalitions decision to end the war. Perhaps leading General Powell into believing he had achieved his desired end state of 100,000 man, 1000 tank Iraqi army.²²

Chapter Five

Iraqi Alternatives

How could the Iraqis have improved their operational

²¹ Frank Chadwick, Gulf War Fact Book, (Bloomington, IL. GDW, 1991), p. 77.

²² Bellamy, Christopher, Expert Witness(Riverside, NJ.: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1993) p. xxix.

employment of their forces to lessen their defeat or, perhaps, even won the Gulf War? The question must be answered twice. Each answer based on a different set of circumstances. The first set of circumstances are historical. Simply put- How could Iraq have improved its performance in Desert Storm? The second set of circumstances are hypothetical. What could Iraq have done beginning on August 2nd 1990 to win the Gulf War?

As stated earlier, Hussein probably wished to avoid conflict with the Coalition forces. Failing that, he intended to attempt to divide the Coalition and to attrite their forces. Hussein believed the Coalitions center of gravity were its democratic contributors populace. He felt when American public opinion turned against the war the Americans would negotiate and the Coalition would cease offensive actions. Many writers have stated that Iraq underestimated our will to fight. I say the Iraqis didn't underestimate it, but rather never tested it. If our casualties had been significantly higher and war perhaps twice as long, the support for the conflict may have waned.

Rather than choosing a course of action based on passive defense, why not attempt an active attrition of Coalition forces? The keys to this active attrition campaign would be the Iraqi Air Force (IQAF), concentration of operational fires, better front line troops, better operational intelligence, and an aggressive ground defense.

* **The IQAF:** The IQAF was never effectively employed during the war. It is doubtful the IQAF could have contested the Allies air superiority or significantly altered the destruction of the Iraqi armed forces during the air phase of Desert Storm. However, if massed for a surge at the beginning of Desert Storm, the IQAF could have disrupted Coalition air operations during the critical opening phase of the ground war, provided operational intelligence, and the strike arm of the IQAF could have been effectively massed in conjunction with SCUD attacks, utilizing chemical/fuel air explosives or conventional warheads, to cripple/destroy Allied critical points (i.e. supply depots, port facilities, airfields, CV's). This constitutes the classic employment of operational fires to bring about a decisive change in the theater of operations. An argument may be made that the Iraqis lacked the command and control necessary to execute a large strike at this stage in the war. However, I believe this strike could have been planned, in general terms, before the war. When the execute command was given the strike would be carried out. Granted, this would be a one shot offensive, interrupting allied supremacy for no more than a day and by no means a surgical strike. However, the Iraqis would be firing for effect, not points.

* **The Iraqi Army:** The critical problems with the Iraqi Army passive attrition COA were the poor morale and training

of the troops employed in the first line, the Iraqis poor operational intelligence, their inability to effectively maneuver, and their failure to defend the defensible terrain.

There were six reserve infantry divisions and 18 other poorly trained and equipped infantry divisions manning the Saddam line. These divisions, like the poorly equipped "leg infantry divisions", melted away when the Allied units began their breaching operations. The 1st and 2nd Marine Divisions reported opposition in the first echelon of the Saddam line as sporadic and ineffectual.²³

To execute our active attrition strategy, regular infantry divisions from the Turkish border would be used to replace the reserve divisions, the three motorized Republican Guard motorized Divisions held in reserve in northern Kuwait (Al Faw, Nebuchadnezzar, and Adnan) would be used to bolster the line, and the remaining infantry divisions would be allocated more modern equipment.

To back up this stiffened front line the Iraqi's could have used operational maneuver to attack the Allies from a positional advantage. As stated earlier the Iraqis were unable to decisively offensively engage the Allies during Desert Storm due to poor operational intelligence and restricted ability to maneuver due to allied air superiority. However,

²³Bo Eldridge, "The Mother of All Battles," Command Magazine, Nov-Dec 1991, p. 23.

intelligence gained during the IQAF's surge and constant aggressive reconnaissance coupled with the brief interruption in Coalition air dominance might enable the Iraqis to decisively engage a portion of the Coalition forces, inflicting significant casualties. This does not necessarily mean the Iraqis would turn to face the U.S. VII Corps in a climatic battle which the Allies would win, but that the Iraqis would use operational maneuver to engage perhaps a weaker segment of the Coalition forces while using economy of force against the VII Corps. The Iraqis definition of success was not to hold Kuwait by force of arms but rather to attrite the Coalition forces to the point where they were willing to negotiate. This could be accomplished as easily against the Marines as the powerful VII Corps. Finally, any course of action which employs active attrition demands that defensible terrain be defended. Kuwait City was abandoned. Historically urban combat is bloody. If the desired end state is negotiations brought about through attrition, terrain such as Kuwait City must be actively defended.

The theory of active defense was tested during several playings of the extremely accurate wargame "Desert Storm" by XTR publishing. Utilizing active defense, United States casualties were 200-300% higher(1000-1500 killed, 60-80 tanks destroyed). In one replay over four U.S. Brigades were rendered combat ineffective. The average time for the

liberation of Kuwait was extended to approximately 144 hours. However, Iraqi losses were also higher due to the intensive offensive operations and allied use of tactical nuclear weapons in response to Iraqi chemical attacks.²⁴

Would this have been sufficient to induce the United States to begin talks prior to the conquest of Kuwait? That is hard to say, but it certainly would come closer than the manner in which the Iraqis originally conducted the war.

What could the Iraqis have done better beginning on August 2nd? The answer is obvious yet rarely explored in print. After consolidating their position in Kuwait the Iraqis could have surged into Saudi Arabia. The objective would have been the same, the annexation of Kuwait, but the means more aggressive.

Facing the Iraqis in August of 1990 was a Saudi Arabian army which possessed 550 main battle tanks and 40,000 men.²⁵ Their ability to mass this force to repel an immediate Iraqi invasion is doubtful. The Iraqis invaded Kuwait with approximately 100,00 men led by the Republican Guard and were capable of quickly transporting additional men to the KTO as

²⁴ Bo Eldridge, "Desert Storm: The Mother of All Battles", Command Magazine, Game Supplement, Nov-Dec 1991.

²⁵ The Military Balance 1990-91 (London: The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1990), p. 115.

evidenced by their post invasion buildup.²⁶ Gulf Cooperation Council States air forces were small in comparison with the Iraqis. The United States had the USS Independence (CV-62) in the Indian Ocean but the next closest carrier, the USS Eisenhower (CVN-69), was a week away. The Iraqis would be able to maintain at least air parity and probably air superiority throughout the invasion.²⁷

The objectives of the invasion would be the seizure of the northern Saudi Airfields and the Saudi Ports of Jubail, Ras Tanura, and Dhahran. These gains would be used as a bargaining chip to be offered in return for retention of Kuwait.

It might have worked. Maj Chris Paparone G4 (warplans) for the XVIII Airborne Corps states that U.S. forces were not prepared to conduct sustained defensive operations until C+120 (approximately December 8th).²⁸ This seems conservative, nevertheless, there was little hope for U.S. forces to pull the Saudi fat out of an August fire. Utilizing the opposed mechanized movement rates established by the Army's CACDA Jiffy III War Game, Volume II, it becomes obvious the Iraqis

²⁶ Bellamy, Christopher, Expert Witness(Riverside, NJ.: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1993) p. 32.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 35.

²⁸ Interview with Maj. Chris Paparone, Student Naval War College, Newport, R.I.: 4 February, 1994.

could have easily captured the northern Saudi airfields in addition to the major Saudi ports required for a U.S. buildup in a seven to ten day offensive.²⁹

Several playings of this scenario were conducted utilizing Victory Games, *Gulf Strike*. In each playing the Iraqis easily captured the ports and northern airfields.³⁰ *Gulf Strike* is widely recognized within the commercial wargaming community as the definitive modern operational level conflict simulation. No wargame or simulation can predict the future. However, an accurate simulation can provide telling insights. It is hard to predict branches and sequels of future events, yet the immediate attack into Saudi would appear to have been the Iraqis best course of action to ensure their retention of Kuwait.

Chapter Six

Lessons Learned

For the Iraqis:

* A passive defense is a disaster against an opponent who has air superiority, excellent intelligence, and maneuverability.

²⁹The Command Estimate Process (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1992), p. 4-15. Estimate is based on *Heavy* opposition (3-1), *Hasty* defense, over *Go* terrain with *Minor* surprise. Actual time to reach Dhahran is 6.4 days.

³⁰Mark Herman, Gulf Strike (New York, N.Y.: Victory Games, Inc. 1983).

* Poor operational intelligence is a show stopper. Because of their nonexistent intelligence, the Iraqis rarely knew where the Allies were. This hindered the Iraqis ability to maneuver and mass their forces.

* An air force in being is great if your main concern is the long view. However, it's worthless as an operational weapon.

* Ditto the Iraqi leadership. In a brutal dictatorship purges are sometimes necessary to retain power. Still, each competent general replaced with a yes man degrades your armies capability.

* Contrary to what Stalin thought, quantity does not have a quality all its own. The Iraqi troops manning the Saddam line were numerous. The Coalition went through them like a hot knife through butter. Quality counts.

For the United States:

* Desert Storm is an anomaly. We cannot count on each future enemy to be as poorly led, equipped and deployed as the Iraqis.

* Desert Storm is an anomaly. We cannot judge future operations by, or hope for, the light casualties we suffered in Desert Storm. Our victory was due to our training, planning and technological superiority. The light casualties were mainly due to the lackluster fight put up by most Iraqis.

Chapter Seven

Conclusions

The Iraqi practice of operational art in Desert Storm was abysmal. They failed to employ their most decisive weapon, the IQAF, frittered away the weapon systems capable of operational fire, neglected to employ operational maneuver in an offensive fashion, did not actively seek operational intelligence, and failed to execute their commander's intentions of attriting the enemy.

These problems primal cause were the allies brilliant planning, quality of troops, and technological edge. However, the Iraqis failed to make the best use of the cards they were dealt or effectively employ their forces. If the Iraqis had conducted an aggressive defense, keyed to attacking the Coalition's center of gravity through the attrition of the United States forces, they could have, if not won the war, significantly lessened their defeat.

Although Coalition forces fought well, it was against an enemy who frequently was unwilling "to pull the trigger". Our national will, untested due to the quick, bloodless nature of the war, probably would not have supported a casualty intensive war. If the Iraqis could have forced us to play their game the result could have been much different.

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