

# NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL Monterey, California



## THESIS

### THE BATTLE OF AL-KHAFJI

by

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June 2002

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**THE BATTLE OF AL-KHAFJI**

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Major, United States Marine Corps  
B.S., Michigan State University, 1986

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requirements for the degree of

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## **ABSTRACT**

The battle for the Saudi coastal town of al-Khafji, was the first major ground battle of Desert Storm. Despite the fact that Iraqi forces were being systematically destroyed by the allied air campaign, the Iraqis were nonetheless able to mount a rather sophisticated ground attack and seize the Saudi town with relative ease. The Iraqi attack came as an absolute surprise despite the coalition's technological advantages in reconnaissance equipment and the impressive array of coalition forces defending the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Saddam Hussein attempted to use the surprise attack into Saudi Arabia as a method to advance several strategic-level political and military objectives. First, he was able to use the attack as a propaganda mechanism to rally domestic and Arab nationalistic support. Next, he endeavored to destabilize or destroy the coalition arrayed against him. Lastly, he sought to dampen American enthusiasm for the war by generating American casualties, thus demonstrating to the American public the unappealing potential for, and disastrous results of a protracted ground conflict. Ultimately, the Iraqi incursion was a failure in that it neglected to achieve Saddam's strategic objectives of disrupting the coalition forces arrayed against him.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In every conflict there is a moment when the tide is seen to turn. In the Gulf War, the Battle of al-Khafji was such a moment.<sup>1</sup>

General Khaled Bin Sultan

Desert Storm was the first war broadcast live, as it transpired, on national television. America was riveted to their television sets as the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) staff, led by its Commander General Norman H. Schwarzkopf, provided daily updates on the conduct of the allied aerial campaign. Using this forum to bolster American sentiment for the conflict, the generals boasted of coalition successes and heralded the overwhelming Iraqi losses. To substantiate their assertions they showed gun-camera footage of “smart munitions” striking hapless Iraqi targets. The American public was informed that coalition air forces had severed the Iraqi command and control structure the first few days of the operation and that the Iraqi Army in the Kuwaiti Theater of Operation (KTO) was left withering on the vine.

Despite the fact that the Coalition air forces had been punishing the Iraqi Army for 12 consecutive days, somehow, the Iraqi leadership was able to coordinate and execute a successful ground foray into the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The impressive collection of coalition forces arrayed against the Iraqis was taken completely by surprise as the Iraqis crossed the border and seized the Saudi coastal town of al-Khafji. In doing so, the Iraqi leadership endeavored to utilize military force in order to achieve critical political objectives.

This encounter was to become known as the Battle of Khafji and it was to be the first major ground battle of the Gulf War. As such, one would assume that there would be volumes written about the Battle of Khafji, but Khafji is typically a mere footnote in most Western accounts of the Gulf conflict. This can be attributed to the fact that Khafji was a propaganda coup for Saddam Hussein and an utter embarrassment to the American led coalition arrayed against him. So taken by the Iraqi advances, news of the battle was not released to the American public until after the coalition had wrestled the initiative

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<sup>1</sup> Khaled Bin Sultan, *Desert Warrior*, Harper Collins, New York, 1995, p. 362.

from the Iraqi forces. Even as General Schwarzkopf was dismissing the significance of the event on national television, coalition leadership was scrambling to provide a rational explanation for the Iraqi incursion. Subsequently, they failed to recognize the strategic implications of the battle.<sup>2</sup> Although characterized by the Coalition leadership as a minor skirmish, the two-day clash was the war's defining moment.<sup>3</sup>

As the only organized Iraqi offensive operation during the Gulf War and the first major ground conflict between the belligerent forces, the Battle of Khafji warrants an objective study. From a military perspective, the Battle of Khafji provides an opportunity to study Iraqi Army offensive tactics, techniques and procedures. Politically, the Battle of Khafji demonstrates Saddam Hussein's propensity to use military forces to achieve political ends, even when it appears that the military means are unattainable and it cuts across conventional logic to use a military option. By studying the battle one could conceivably gain some insight into the decision making processes of Saddam Hussein and derive some appreciation for the fact that future actions against the Iraqi regime may provoke similar irrational behavior from its leader.

#### **A. OVERVIEW**

Initially, much to the humiliation of American military leadership, the Iraqi incursion into Khafji proved to be a highly successful military operation. Whether or not Saddam achieved his political objectives is a matter of perspective. This thesis will address Saddam Hussein's possible motivations for initiating the Battle of al-Khafji and seek to derive lessons learned from this particular event. It will also examine whether or not Saddam achieved his political objectives.

Chapter I will advance probable incentives for the Iraqi attack. Saddam Hussein attempted to use the attack to seize vital oil fields in the northwest region of Saudi Arabia. This accomplished, he could force the Saudi regime to the bargaining table and demand that they eject the Coalition arrayed against him. Additional motivations were to destabilize or destroy the coalition arrayed against him and to dampen American enthusiasm for the war by generating American casualties, thus demonstrating to the

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<sup>2</sup> As persuasively argued by General Khaled Sultan in his book *Desert Warrior*, Harper Collins, New York, 1995.

<sup>3</sup> As suggested by General B. E. Trainor in his book *The General's War*, Trainor insinuates that Schwarzkopf's failure to grasp the significance of Khafji was one of the general's greatest oversights.

American public the unappealing potential for, and disastrous results of, a protracted ground conflict. It will also examine the results of Saddam Hussein's propaganda initiative and his attempt to generate Arab public sentiment for the Iraqi cause.

Despite the fact that Iraqi forces were being systematically destroyed by the allied air campaign, the Iraqis were able to mount a rather sophisticated ground attack and seize the town of al-Khafji in Saudi Arabia. They were able to cross the border and seize the town with relative ease. Initially, General Schwarzkopf attempted to downplay the significance of the fact that the Iraqis were able to seize Khafji. The Iraqi attack came as an absolute surprise despite the Coalition's technological advantages in reconnaissance assets and an impressive array of forces defending the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Chapter II will provide a chronological account of the battle to include a description of the events that occurred during the skirmish at Umm Hujul and the actual battle to liberate the city of al-Khafji from Iraqi forces. The intention is to demonstrate that although the Iraqi forces were able to seize the city of Khafji, the attack was a failure in that it neglected to achieve Saddam's strategic objectives of disrupting the Coalition Forces arrayed against him.

Chapter III will consist of an overview of the battle and discuss whether or not Saddam achieved his objectives by initiating the battle. It will also address Allied failures and several lessons derived from the encounter.

## **B. METHODOLOGY**

This thesis will rely mainly on qualitative analysis of primary and secondary unclassified sources, including the author's personal experiences and perceptions of the event, interviews with other participants of the actions in and around al-Khafji, journalistic and scholarly analysis of core issues and relevant media reporting of the event. This study is limited by the lack of information available from Iraqi sources. Given Saddam Hussein's inherent illusiveness and his unwillingness to cooperate with the West, it is possible that the real intentions of the Iraqis may never be known by the Western world.

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## II. MOTIVATIONS FOR THE IRAQI ATTACK

### A. INTRODUCTION

The Iraqi Army attacked and seized the tiny emirate of Kuwait on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of August 1990. Saddam Hussein justified the Iraqi aggression by asserting that Kuwait was the 19<sup>th</sup> province of Iraq and he was just addressing long-standing grievances that Iraq had with the manner in which the borders had been created by the British early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The invasion was the first in a number of calculated moves that Saddam would make in his stand against the West and the subsequently formed American-led coalition. In an effort to intimidate its neighbors and enhance the chances of their gamble paying off, the Iraqis deployed massive amounts of men and material to the Kuwaiti Theater of Operations (KTO). The Iraqi order of battle on the eve of war was formidable. The Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) assessed Iraq as having 540,000 troops, more than 4,200 tanks, more than 2,800 armored personnel carriers, and approximately 3,100 artillery pieces fielded in the KTO.<sup>4</sup>

Within days of the Iraqi capture of Kuwait, senior American and Saudi officials met to evaluate the situation. Saddam's army threatened the world's premier oil-producing region which was Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province. Iraqi forces poised on Saudi Arabia's northern border had the ability, with little or no warning; to launch an armored thrust, move down the coast to seize the oil fields, and close Saudi Arabia's Gulf ports. Such a move would have threatened the Kingdom's survival, and would have allowed Saddam to control an additional 20 percent of the world's oil reserves, on top of the 20 percent he already controlled in Iraq and Kuwait.<sup>5</sup> It was surmised that an immediate response to the Iraqi threat would be required to dampen further Iraqi aggression.

To counter the Iraqi build-up, an impressive coalition force would be assembled. Nearly 50 countries contributed. Among those, 38 countries deployed air, sea, or ground forces. Together, they committed more than 200,000 troops, more than 60 warships, 750

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<sup>4</sup> Department of Defense, *Conduct of the Persian Gulf War*, p. 85, Government Printing Office, Washington D.C., April 1992.

<sup>5</sup> Department of Defense, *Conduct of the Persian Gulf War*, p. 19, Government Printing Office, Washington D.C., April 1992.

aircraft, and 1,200 tanks.<sup>6</sup> The coalition was comprised of a tenuous mixture of Western and Arab nations united in the common cause of ejecting the Iraqi aggressors and restoring the legitimate government of Kuwait. The United States became the de facto champion of the Kuwaiti cause and assumed the task of assembling and maintaining the fragile coalition.

Traditionally, American doctrine stipulates that the attacker possesses a 3-to-1 advantage in manpower prior to attempting offensive operations. The coalition would be unable to gather the desired 3-to-1 ratio in manpower. To overcome this they would construct a war plan that would enable them to exploit the intangible benefits of information dominance and air-superiority. An assessment of the terrain in the KTO revealed that the Iraqi forces would be unlikely to adequately conceal themselves in the desert terrain from the devastating effects of airpower. An Iraqi assessment of the situation would lead them to a divergent assessment of the situation in that Saddam would significantly underestimate the capabilities of airpower on the modern battlefield.

Within the U.S. Air Force, there were those who advanced the theory that air power alone could win wars. This theory essentially relegated ground forces to the role of guarding the air bases from which they launched their ruinous attacks. While the senior American leadership never subscribed entirely to this theory, they were confident that air power would at least reduce the Iraqi-to-Coalition manpower ratios to an acceptable level. Also, in a best-case scenario, they were hopeful that it would compel the Iraqi army to surrender without a ground conflict. Thus, the expectations of the allied plans were pinned to the capabilities of the air forces.

Desert Storm was initiated on 17 January 1991, with a withering demonstration of allied air power. Selected targets were destroyed with precision as America demonstrated the capabilities and utility of “smart bombs”. Nightly, the American public was made privy to what was heralded as the war of the future. Warfare was depicted as a technological affair and the United States possessed an insurmountable technological advantage over the Iraqi armed forces. Our Stealth fighters could strike enemy targets at will. Global pre-positioned stations (GPS) would aid ground force navigation across the

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<sup>6</sup> Department of Defense, *Conduct of the Persian Gulf War*, p. 20, Government Printing Office, Washington D.C., April 1992.

vast expanses of desert. The virtues of smart munitions were also extolled. There was a perception that wars had become neat and clean. Only targets of military value would be “addressed”. The American public was led to believe that war could be accomplished with a minimum of collateral damage and without civilian casualties. Warfare had become a “push-button” affair. Our boys would deploy to the scene of the conflict, do their duty, and return home unharmed to their loved ones in short order.

The 29<sup>th</sup> of January appeared to be another typical day in the air campaign. During the daily briefing, the CENTCOM staff suggested that the war was going tremendously well for the allies. After two weeks of conflict, the coalition had virtually annihilated the Iraqi air forces. There were claims that the Iraqi command and control apparatus had ceased to function and that the Iraqi 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps, operating in the KTO, was functioning without direction from Baghdad. The Iraqi logistics capability had been diminished to the point that soldiers in the field were subsisting without adequate food and medical supplies. In general, the Iraqi military situation was so dire that it would preclude offensive actions – or would it?

## **B. THE IRAQI POLITICAL/MILITARY MOTIVATIONS**

The Soviet Union, in a last-gasp effort to exert themselves in the international political arena, desperately attempted to mediate a resolution to the ensuing crisis. Given the Soviet efforts, Saddam had ample opportunities to resolve the situation in a diplomatic manner and still save face militarily. Instead, he elected to test American and international resolve over the annexation of Kuwait. What was his intent? As discussed below, Saddam had multiple political and military motives that may have inspired him to attempt what the allies thought was the most unlikely course of action: an attack into Saudi Arabia.

Saddam undoubtedly viewed the oil-rich regions around the Arabian Gulf as targets with substantial strategic value as possession of these areas would provide the owner with a significant percentage of the world’s oil reserves, and consequently, considerable influence within the international political arena. This offensive action was a type of aggressive offensive behavior that was not unprecedented during Saddam Hussein’s reign in Iraq. His offensives into the Khuzistan region of Iran at the beginning of the Iran-Iraq War, and indeed the Iraqi seizure of Kuwait itself, were demonstrations

of his pretentious desire to obtain control of these oil-rich areas. The Iraqi attack was reminiscent of previous Iraqi offenses and was likely an ambitious grab for the lucrative Damman oil fields in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia.

It is also possible that the alliance was a primary target of the Iraqi attack. Certainly the “coalition” of conservative Arab monarchies, creaky Arab authoritarian states, an Arab dictatorship (Syria), Western European nations, an authoritarian democracy (Turkey), and the United States looked like a fragile mosaic cemented by little more than spit and a prayer. To break it apart, or so it seemed to Saddam, he would only have to whisper, “Israel,” and watch the incredible structure topple.<sup>7</sup> Only through the tireless diplomatic efforts of President Bush and his staff would the Coalition endure the Battle of Khafji and countless other similar attempts of political sabotage administered by Saddam during the crisis.

If Saddam could generate the illusion that this was an Arab-on-Arab conflict the political ramifications could prove to be extraordinary in the Arab world. Arabs are well versed in the historical rivalry between the Saudi royal family and the Hashemite regime that the Saudis had driven from the Arabian Peninsula into Jordan and Iraq. Saddam could leverage Arab public opinion against the fact that the Saudi’s were allowing infidel forces to attack a brother Muslim nation in an attempt to further discredit the Saudi regime. In the eyes of the Muslim world he had already called into question the legitimacy of the Saudi regime for recruiting non-Muslim infidels for the defense of the home of Islam. Saddam would use this struggle to advance himself amongst Islamic fundamentalists and rally Muslim support for his cause. By changing the political dynamics, Saddam could disrupt Arab support within the coalition and even splinter the fragile alliance arrayed against him. Additionally, with every day that Iraq held out against the assaults of the coalition led by the world’s sole surviving superpower, Saddam became more of a hero to the masses of Arabs who have long felt humiliated by the West.<sup>8</sup>

President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt said that the war would be over in a month. Even if the Egyptian leader was right, that would mean Saddam had succeeded in

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<sup>7</sup> Dunnigan, J. F. and Bay A., *From Shield to Storm*, William Morrow and Company, Inc., p. 55, 1992.

<sup>8</sup> George J. Church, “Calculus of Death”, *Time*, February 18, 1991, p. 23.

standing up to an immense Western juggernaut for six weeks, which is better than Egypt did against Israel in two attempts. If the Iraqi leader survived, he clearly believed that his defiant resistance to those whom he called the infidels gave him a strong claim to regional authority in this vital but chronically unstable part of the world.<sup>9</sup>

Saddam Hussein could never have realistically expected a decisive military victory against the rest of the world. Once diplomatic negotiations had broken down the military outcome of the crisis seemed inevitable. His army was out-classed by the technologically superior Western-led coalition forces. From the outset of hostilities, the Iraqi forces took a drubbing. However, by taking the military initiative, Saddam could have hoped to accomplish several objectives. Among those goals might be included the need to show to his civil population that their leader had not abandoned them to the onslaught of Stealth bombers and Tomahawk cruise missiles, but instead was carrying the fight to the enemy on their home ground. Saddam was also shoring up military morale by demonstrating what the Baghdad radio called the ability of Iraqi soldiers to counter “the so-called superior technology” of the allies. As stated earlier, coalition air forces had achieved air superiority early in the campaign. This enabled them to fly with relative impunity and effectively deliver massive amounts of ordinance upon Iraqi ground forces without fear of retribution. The Iraqis entrenched themselves in an effort to reduce the effects of the aerial bombing, but it was to little effect. The devastating air attacks continued day and night, imparting a feeling of terror and despair upon the Iraqi ground forces. Iraqi defectors portrayed tales of slumping morale in the trenches. Should Saddam orchestrate a successful offensive action it would enable the Iraqi army to arise from the destitution of their defensive positions and seize the initiative from the coalition forces.

The fact that the coalition was able to achieve air superiority proved to be disadvantageous to the Iraqis from the perspective that they lost their “eyes” into Saudi Arabia. During the Iran-Iraq War, the Iraqis relied primarily upon satellite and AWAC supplied imagery provided by the United States to ascertain Iranian troop movements. Without the benefit of these technologies, the Iraqi army became reliant upon aerial observation from the Iraqi Air Force for information on enemy troop dispositions. Since

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<sup>9</sup> R. W. Apple, “Khafji Clash: Whose Lose?”, *The New York Times*, February 2, 1991, Section 1, p. 1.

the coalition was able to quickly ground the Iraqi Air Force, the Iraqi leadership became oblivious as to what the coalition was doing south of the border. The Iraqis had little other means to gather intelligence about Allied troop dispositions in Saudi Arabia.

The Iraqis did know that primarily Arab Coalition forces defended the region along the coastline because the Saudi forces had been providing food and clothing to the Iraqi soldiers along the border for some time.<sup>10</sup> The Saudi armed forces had never been tested in modern battle and their ability to succeed in combat was universally regarded as marginal. It is probable that Saddam's battlefield analysis led him to believe that his forces might be able to attack, push through the Saudi defenders and seize the Damman oil fields.

Some have theorized that the Iraqi attack was in fact a reconnaissance in force, which is a military maneuver used to gain or regain contact with opposition ground forces when the situation is unclear. A reconnaissance in force requires units move to engage the enemy, report enemy dispositions and develop the situation. The Iraqi's lack of operational intelligence certainly warranted a reconnaissance in force. However, it is doubtful that this was the Iraqi leadership's intent. The Iraqi units participating in the battle failed to operate in a fashion consistent with those conducting this form of maneuver. This was evident when the units that came across the border consistently attempted to break contact with the coalition forces and move east. The initial Iraqi forces committed to the battle appeared fixated on seizing al-Khafji. These activities were hardly consistent with those of a unit conducting a reconnaissance in force.

During the war with Iran, Iraq's ground forces frequently launched probing attacks into Iran's lines. The Iranians would counterattack, pursue, and end up being drawn into traps where Iraqi forces could inflict heavy casualties from carefully prepared defensive positions. Saddam may have calculated that an Iraqi attack across the border at al-Khafji would work the same way. If the coalition's ground forces could be compelled to engage and pursue the Iraqis, a costly battle might weaken the coalition and perhaps

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<sup>10</sup> As reported by Thomas B. Rosenstiel in "Allies, Iraqis Trading Shots in Image War", *Los Angeles Times*, Part A, p. 1, 4 February 1991.

even prevent the Iraqis from being forced out of Kuwait.<sup>11</sup> Again, this appears to be an unlikely explanation for the attack. The Iraqi forces in al-Khafji were well entrenched and defended the town ferociously. Additionally, there is no rational explanation for why the Iraqis subsequently committed two additional divisions to the south if they were trying to lure the Allies into Kuwait. Regardless, if this was the Iraqi motive it did not work. The Coalition Forces were ill prepared for an offensive action and did not take the bait.

At home, many Americans were still hopeful that either a diplomatic solution could be reached or that the Iraqi regime would collapse under the weight of the overwhelming air onslaught. Their hopes were buoyed by the fact that there appeared to be time to negotiate. In the air, the coalition was still committed to setting the conditions for a successful advance against the Iraqi defenses. On the ground, the U.S. was still positioning troops and equipment for the invasion.

Politically speaking, many Americans were still hesitant to fully support a ground war. Saddam's strategy could have been motivated by the conviction that the Americans would not tolerate heavy casualties. The Iraqi leader could have hoped that by forcing a stalemate on the battlefield in which the Americans took steady losses, he could stir up political opposition to the war at home.<sup>12</sup> The hope that this strategy would succeed would undoubtedly have been bolstered by the announcement by Secretary of Defense, Richard Cheney, that "the number one priority" of America was to expel Iraq from Kuwait "at the lowest possible cost in terms of loss of U.S. life." The mere fact of having prolonged the war and the infliction of high casualties on the American military would make Saddam Hussein the winner psychologically.<sup>13</sup> The central question was not how much punishment the allies could inflict but how much the Iraqis were ready to absorb. Saddam claimed that Iraq could accept large numbers of casualties but the U.S. could not because public opinion would quickly turn against the war. His Foreign Minister, Tariq

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<sup>11</sup> Rebecca Grant, "The Epic Little Battle of Khafji", *Air Force Magazine*, Vol. 81, No. 2, p. 2, February 1998.

<sup>12</sup> Gordon and Trainor, *The Generals War*, p. 271.

<sup>13</sup> George J. Church, "Combat in the Sand." *Time*, February 18, 1991, p. 23.

Aziz, told U.S. Secretary of State James Baker that Iraq could hold out for a year or even two.<sup>14</sup>

It is likely that some or all of the above theories were entertained during the Iraqi decision making process prior to the Battle of Khafji, but as discussed in the next section, it is probable that Saddam Hussein had a much more ambitious goal for the Iraqi incursion into Saudi Arabia. Given the size and composition of the attacking forces it is likely that al-Khafji was not the objective of the Iraqi attack. The armor and mechanized forces that the Iraqis committed to the capture of al-Khafji were not well suited for urban warfare. Instead these types of units are traditionally utilized to conduct deep thrusts into the enemy's rear areas. Furthermore, if a single brigade of soldiers was able to capture the city of al-Khafji, why would the Iraqis send more troops, particularly, if they had already accomplished their mission? Why did the Iraqis commit more than two additional divisions to the fray? These divisions most certainly were not reinforcements. They were destined to attack an objective deeper in the Saudi peninsula.

### **C. A GRAND INVASION SCHEME**

The bulk and organization of the Iraqi units mobilized for the attack suggests that the Iraqi leadership had grand designs for the incursion. The loss of oil, port, water, and industrial facilities at al-Khafji, al-Mishab, al-Manifah, al-Jubayl, and Ras Tanurah would have been a serious economic and political blow to the Saudi regime. By seizing these vital areas, the Iraqis would have placed themselves in a politically strong position to negotiate a solution to the crisis on Baghdad's terms. The Saudis, devoid of their source of wealth, would be compelled to capitulate to Saddam's demands for the annexation of Kuwait and the expulsion of the coalition forces. The Iraqis would have achieved an important strategic victory both militarily and politically.<sup>15</sup> From the beginning of the hostilities, it was recognized that this could be one of the courses of action that the Iraqis might adopt. However, the feasibility and likelihood of such an attack had been discounted by the Coalition leadership after the commencement of Desert Storm.

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<sup>14</sup> George J. Church, "Combat in the Sand." *Time*, February 18, 1991, p. 29.

<sup>15</sup> Department of Defense, *Conduct of the Persian Gulf War*, p. 32, Government Printing Office, Washington D.C., April 1992.



The Times of London, quoting unidentified British officials on February 2, reported that the Iraqi raid on Khafji and other incursions into Saudi Arabia (January 29-30) had been part of a larger planned invasion.<sup>16</sup> The Iraqi battle plan for the attack was viewed as so important that Saddam Hussein traveled to Basra on January 27 to review the arrangements for the battle with his field commanders. The trip was a noteworthy visit in more ways than one. On the way back from Basra, two Air Force F-16s spotted his convoy and attacked it, but Saddam Hussein survived unscathed. Only later did American intelligence find out that the Iraqi leader was in the motorcade.<sup>17</sup>

The initial forces that attacked and seized al-Khafji were likely the advanced guard of a much larger force that was to attack deeper into Saudi Arabia. Prisoners of war captured from the western-most prong of the attack indicated that their final objective was al-Mishab, a port city dozens of miles south of al-Khafji.<sup>18</sup> The allied command refused to confirm or deny persistent rumors that Iraq was preparing for an additional ground offensive near the Saudi-Kuwaiti border. U.S. Marines near Khafji spoke of unconfirmed reports that indicated there were five or six Iraqi divisions, as many as 60,000 soldiers, massing near the Kuwaiti town of Wafra, about 35 miles west-northwest of Khafji.<sup>19</sup> A force of this size was not required to seize Khafji. Therefore, it is probable that the intended mission of this massive follow-on force was to continue the attack south and seize the strategically significant oil fields in the vicinity of Damman.

Caught totally off guard, the coalition headquarters scrambled to assimilate information on Iraqi dispositions and intentions so that they could position forces to counter the Iraqi incursion. However, this task was made infinitely more difficult because the coalition leadership was oblivious to Iraqi's tactical or strategic intentions. Army Lt. Gen. Thomas W. Kelly theorized that Saddam's ground attack on Khafji was an

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<sup>16</sup> "U.S. Officials Leave for Saudi Arabia to Evaluate Possibilities for Ground Attack on Occupied Kuwait; Air War's Effect on Iraqis Debated," *Facts on File World News Digest*, p. 73A1, 7 February 1991.

<sup>17</sup> Gordon M. R. and Trainor B. E., *The Generals' War; The Inside Story of the Conflict in the Gulf*, pg. 268, Little, Brown and Company, 1995.

<sup>18</sup> Pollard R. L., "The Battle of OP 4: Start of the Ground War," *Marine Corps Gazette*, p. 50, March 1992.

<sup>19</sup> Broder J. M. and Kennedy J. M., "Allies Drive Iraqis from Saudi Town and Take 167 Prisoners," *Los Angeles Times*, Part A; p. 1, 1 February 1991.

attempt “to draw us into something that we don’t want to be drawn into right now.”<sup>20</sup> Wildly conflicting information coming from frontline forces made accurate intelligence assessments difficult. Embarrassed by the success of the Iraqi strike, the coalition headquarters was slow to impart news of the invasion. When the news of the Iraqi success was released, the coalition leadership was still without a rational explanation for the attack.

So clueless were the U. S. Marines in the vicinity of Khafji that they incorrectly assumed that their command and control apparatus was a primary target of the attack. Marine General Charles Krulak, the commander of marine logistic efforts described later that:

On the evening of 30 January 1991, one day after the beginning of the battle for Khafji, the situation along the Kuwaiti border was still extremely uncertain. My command was located at the combat support base at Kibrit. The forward command post of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division was located some 36 miles to our northwest. Around 1800 (6pm) on that day, I received a radio call from the operations office of 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Expeditionary Force directing that I send a convoy to the location of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division Forward Command Post and evacuate them back to Kibrit because of concern that a major Iraqi attack was going to be directed at them later that evening.<sup>21</sup>

Despite the fact that hundreds of Iraqi armored vehicles had entered Saudi Arabian sovereign soil, the coalition leadership was still in denial about the gravity of the situation. Brigadier General Pat Stevens IV of the U.S. Central Command in Riyadh, the Saudi capital, emphasized that the massing of the Iraqi armored force “does not indicate that there is any major action about to happen.”<sup>22</sup>

News for the coalition headquarters went from bad to worse when allied pilots flying routine combat patrols reported massive concentrations of Iraqi armored forces in the vicinity of the al-Wafra forest in south central Kuwait. As many as 1,000 Iraqi military vehicles were moving through southern Kuwait toward the Saudi border

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<sup>20</sup> Broder J. M. and Kennedy J. M., “Allies Drive Iraqis from Saudi Town and Take 167 Prisoners,” *Los Angeles Times*, Part A; p. 1, 1 February 1991.

<sup>21</sup> Charles Krulak, “Draft Remarks for The Woman Officers Professional Association,” <http://www.usmc.mil/cmcspeeches.nsf>, 15 September 1995.

<sup>22</sup> “Iraqi Armor Rolls South; Allied Jets Rain Bombs on Convoys,” *Los Angeles Times*, Part P; p. 1, 1 February 1991.

Thursday, according to a U.S. squadron commander. Marine LtCol Dick (Snake) White, commander of a group of Harrier jump jets, said his information was based on intelligence reports and sightings by other pilots. "There is no sign of the Iraqis retreating, vehicles are still heading south," he told reporters. White said it was difficult to have a clear picture of the situation because "the nature of the battlefield changes on an hourly basis." He said another Harrier pilot flying minutes ahead of him reported dropping 720-pound Rockeye cluster bombs on six tanks moving southeast along the border in the direction of Khafji. White said there were almost too many targets to choose from. "It's almost like you flipped on the light in the kitchen at night and the cockroaches start scurrying, and we're killing them," he said. "It's exactly what we've been looking for. It sounds to me like he (Saddam) lost his marbles." White said he flew in the same area Wednesday and found 20-25 vehicles parked "bumper to bumper" beside a road. "If Saddam wants to bring these tanks out and line them up on the road, bumper to bumper.... that's fine with us... It's going to be a turkey shoot," he said.<sup>23</sup>

In one instance, allied warplanes pounded a 10-mile-long Iraqi armored convoy massing in southern Kuwait. "There is a significant enemy force that is attempting to mass itself north of the (Saudi-Kuwaiti) border," a pentagon official said. "We are, and have been, engaging them with air strikes with some considerable magnitude."<sup>24</sup> U.S. jets took part in what Air Force Major Richard Pauly of Mandeville, LA, described as "a feeding frenzy" on Thursday night. A-10 Warthogs swooped down on an Iraqi armored column of more than 100 vehicles. The A-10s bombed the first and last vehicles to trap the column, then systematically destroyed all the tanks and armored personnel carriers in between. "I rolled in and gave them a wake-up call with six 500-pound bombs," Pauly said. "That pissed them off, and they shot back." The Iraqi air defenses could not cope with the A-10s, and Pauly said the whole column was finally destroyed.<sup>25</sup> There were reports of more than 100 Iraqi tanks being wiped out Thursday in air raids along a 250-

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<sup>23</sup> Broder J. M. and Kennedy J. M., "Allies Drive Iraqis from Saudi Town and Take 167 Prisoners," *Los Angeles Times*, Part A; p. 1, 1 February 1991.

<sup>24</sup> "Iraqi Armor Rolls South; Allied Jets Rain Bombs on Convoys," *Los Angeles Times*, Part P; p. 1, 1 February 1991.

<sup>25</sup> Tom Morganthau, "In the Heat of Battle," *Newsweek*, p. 20, 11 February 1991.

kilometer stretch from Khafji, on the Persian Gulf, to where the Iraqi, Kuwaiti and Saudi borders meet.<sup>26</sup>

Fortunately for the coalition forces, Saddam Hussein had grossly underestimated the capabilities of air power and had attempted the attack without providing this ample invasion force adequate air defenses. Subsequently, the main body of the Iraqi invasion never crossed into Saudi Arabia because the allied air forces were able to destroy or disperse any gatherings of armored vehicles before they could cross the border.

Without even realizing it, the 31<sup>st</sup> of January became the Air Forces' finest day. They had repulsed a three-division attack and thwarted a major Iraqi initiative. Air power enthusiasts have since come to recognize the significance of this action and use it to highlight the effectiveness of air power.

If the Iraqi intention was merely to conduct a raid and seize the town of al-Khafji the brigade that attacked on the evening of January 29<sup>th</sup> had accomplished that mission and achieved that particular endstate. The Iraqi plan, as it unfolded, had three additional divisions massing to continue the attack into Saudi Arabia during the next evening. Why were additional forces moving into Saudi Arabia? While JSTARS imagery supports the assertion that Iraqi second-echelon forces were attempting to advance down the coast road toward Khafji, no such claim can be made toward OP-4 or Al Wafra.<sup>27</sup> This follow-on force was simply too large to be assembled solely for the purpose of reinforcing the capture of the city of al-Khafji. This study proposes that Saddam Hussein had grander intentions than the capture of al-Khafji. He was going for a much more lucrative target. He was going for a strangle hold on the Saudi Regime. Saddam was attempting to capture the Damman oil fields, the richest producing oil fields in the world, and in doing so he would be able to force the Saudi royal family into negotiations from a position of advantage. From there he could demand that the Saudis expel the Coalition assembled against him, force the world to accept his annexation of Kuwait, and thus establish himself as a powerbroker on the international political stage.

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<sup>26</sup> Bill Taylor, "Coalition Forces Brace for Second Onslaught," *The Toronto Star*, p. A1, 1 February 1991.

<sup>27</sup> *Joint Stars Data Analysis of "The Battle of Khafji," Final Report* (Washington D.C.: Air Force Studies and Analysis Agency, May 1997), pp. 44-48.

#### **D. THE IRAQI PROPAGANDA INITIATIVE**

After nearly two weeks of watching his army being decimated by the Allied air assaults, Saddam Hussein must have been compelled to act before the remainder of his forces in Kuwait were totally annihilated. He undoubtedly recognized the significance of winning the battle of the media. While it was always possible that the attack into Saudi Arabia might not win militarily, Saddam demonstrated the political savoir-faire to use the attack to advance himself politically in the Arab world by standing up to the West. In addition to soliciting favor from his brother Arabs, he also sought to conduct a battle on another front in the living rooms of the American public. He understood that the liberal western press could be manipulated and used as an effective weapon to dampen western enthusiasm for the carnage of warfare. Winning the propaganda war would influence the course and duration of the hostilities and also help determine the political landscape at the conclusion of the conflict.

It is doubtful that the propaganda campaign that the North Vietnamese used to achieve their means against the United States escaped his study. Saddam initially modeled his propaganda techniques after those used by the North Vietnamese in the Vietnam War. Early in the conflict Saddam flaunted captured Western pilots before the press and forced the pilots to renounce Western aggression towards Iraq. However, these publicity ploys blew up in Saddam's face. Western governments pointed out that this inhumane treatment of their pilots was counter to the law of war and demanded that it be discontinued. The spectacle of bruised and bloodied pilots being forced to speak against their will only sought to harden the resolve of the American public. Western leaders were able to use these techniques to further villainize Saddam and mobilize public sentiment against him. Realizing that world public opinion was jelling against him, Saddam quickly terminated this spectacle.

Saddam subsequently became angry at the way that he was being portrayed by the Western press and expelled them from Iraq. This played directly into the hands of the coalition for it too had come to recognize the power of the press and sought to strictly control the flow of information provided to the public. They had restricted journalistic freedom of movement within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia under the guise of

“operational security” and fed the media only what they wanted reported. “Press pools” were ferried to events that the leadership deemed worthy of reporting and every evening CENTCOM would conduct a daily situational briefing in which sanitized information would be imparted. Saddam recognized that the Coalition had gained the advantage in the media war and that his story was not being portrayed in the West. Soon he readmitted a CNN crew.<sup>28</sup> The American public was soon privy to Peter Arnett interviewing a self-assured Saddam Hussein. The image of a poised Saddam standing up to the Western Coalition was not lost on those who observed the broadcast and he quickly gained status within the Arab World.

Saddam’s attempts to solicit Arab public opinion for the Iraqi cause incorporated what amounted to a disinformation campaign designed to enrage Arabs outside Iraq.<sup>29</sup> He attempted to portray the war as a bloody duel across the fault line that lies between the rich Gulf States, with their oil money and American military hardware, and the poorer Arabs of many lands who Saddam Hussein, with some justification, claims are rooting for him.<sup>30</sup>

With every day that Iraq held out against the assaults of a Coalition led by the world’s sole surviving superpower, Saddam became more of a hero to masses of Arabs who had long felt humiliated by the West.<sup>31</sup> Saddam’s message evoked a deep sense of resentment among Arab masses over the lack of freedom in their own countries and what they felt was a lack of respect from the rest of the world. While he was losing militarily, Saddam was beginning to make headway in the sphere of Arab public opinion. All he would have to do is separate the Arab and the Western elements of the coalition and he could claim victory. Then Saddam would be able to promote the struggle as one between Arabs and Western Imperialists. It is doubtful that the Saudis would be able to continue as a unilateral Arab actor in the coalition. They would unlikely be able to withstand Arab nationalistic pressure to allow the continued presence of the American infidels and their

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<sup>28</sup> Rosenstiel, T. B., “Allies, Iraqis Trading Shots in Image War,” *Los Angeles Times*, Part A; p. 1, 4 February 1991.

<sup>29</sup> Rosenstiel, T. B., “Allies, Iraqis Trading Shots in Image War,” *Los Angeles Times*, Part A, p. 1, 4 February.

<sup>30</sup> Youssef M. Ibrahim, “Choosing Sides; in the Mideast, A Fear that the War is Only the Beginning”, *The New York Times*, Section 4; p. 1. 3 February 1991.

<sup>31</sup> George J. Church, “Calculus of Death”, *Time*, p. 24, 18 February 1991.

cohorts on the holy soil of Saudi Arabia. Some felt that time was on the Iraqi President's side in this complex struggle. "With every day that passes it is very clear that the longer the war goes on, the longer Saddam Hussein holds out, the more you will have groundswell of support for Iraq," Ahmad Khalidi stated, a Middle East expert who edited a London-based Arab Strategic review.<sup>32</sup>

Saddam Hussein could have succeeded had there been a sufficient amount of time. He attempted to manipulate the diplomatic process to allow himself more maneuvering room in the propaganda campaign. However, the incessant coalition aerial attacks were quickly weakening his armed forces and the Iraqi capability to resist. Saddam was forced to devise a dramatic plan and enact it posthaste. The Battle of Khafji was to be Saddam Hussein's ultimate publicity ruse.

As the Iraqi military moved into al-Khafji the Iraqi propaganda machine kicked into high gear in an attempt to generate support for the Iraqi cause domestically and abroad. Radio broadcasts in Baghdad January on 30<sup>th</sup> said, "We expelled the Americans from the Arab territory, " and called the attack an "omen." The Iraqi action had brought "jubilation" to supporters in Jordan, according to the Financial Times.

When it became clear that the operation had caught the allied forces off guard, Saddam Hussein immediately sought to associate himself personally with the Battle of Khafji. The Baghdad radio revealed that Saddam was instrumental in the planning of the successful attack into Saudi Arabia and had personally taken charge of the Iraqi ground offensive.<sup>33</sup> Iraqi public sentiment for Saddam swelled. Crowds heartened by Baghdad radio's account of the fighting around Khafji chanted "O Saddam, from Khafji to Damman!"<sup>34</sup> Arab leaders from President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt to King Hussein of Jordan were at each other's throats, justifying in daily endless diatribes, their divergent positions. In Algeria, Jordan, Yemen, the Sudan and even in faraway Muslim nations like Malaysia and Pakistan, thousands of people demonstrated in favor of Iraq.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Youssef M. Ibrahim, "Choosing Sides; in the Mideast, A Fear that the War is Only the Beginning", *The New York Times*, Section 4; p. 1. 3 February 1991.

<sup>33</sup> "News Summary," *The New York Times*, Section A; p. 2, 31 January 1991.

<sup>34</sup> Alan Cowell, "War in the Gulf: Iraq; Hussein is Controlling Plans for Ground War, report says," *The New York Times*, Section A; p. 11, 31 January 1991.

<sup>35</sup> Youssef M. Ibrahim, "Choosing Sides; in the Mideast, A Fear that the War is Only the Beginning", *The New York Times*, Section 4; p. 1. 3 February 1991.

As the Iraqis rolled forward, Baghdad Radio broadcast a war cry.

O Iraqis! O Arabs! O Muslims who believe in justice! Your faithful and courageous ground forces have moved to teach the aggressors the lessons they deserve! They have launched their lightning land attack, bearing high the banner, saying God is great, and crushed the armies of atheism as they advance, routing those who could run away while cursing the infidels and heathens! Our units advanced on the battlefield approximately 20 kilometers into the battlefield where the enemy in the Saudi kingdom of evil is found!<sup>36</sup>

Baghdad Radio had a special broadcast for the Saudi populace in an attempt to disenchant them with their government's decision to allow the Coalition to muster in their country.

O people in the kingdom of the Saudis, the radio said, we do not covet your land. We are your brothers, and you are our brothers.... Our entry into your land is not occupation, but it is made necessary by the circumstances of the fight against the armies of atheism and aggression that have turned your land into a base for aggression.<sup>37</sup>

The Battle for Khafji lasted 36 hours and would remain in Saddam's eyes a symbolic victory for his forces, even though they failed to hold on to the coastal town.<sup>38</sup> The battle was unquestionably a propaganda coup for Saddam Hussein in the Arab world. Not only was he able to depict himself as defiantly resisting the Western led coalition against all odds, he was also able to organize and conduct an offensive action against the allies despite the fact that the Western press had branded his army combat-ineffective. Eighteen days after the fighting began, it is obvious that the progress of the Persian Gulf war deepened Arab wounds and widened the confusion throughout the Middle East over who is right and who is wrong, what the fighting is all about, and even how to define victory.<sup>39</sup>

The Americans were so humiliated by Saddam's success that General Schwarzkopf sought to diminish the significance of the battle. "About as important as a

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<sup>36</sup> Kennedy J. M., "Allies Battle for Saudi Town," *Los Angeles Times*, Part A; p. 1, 31 January 1991.

<sup>37</sup> Kennedy J. M., "Allies Battle for Saudi Town," *Los Angeles Times*, Part A; p. 1. 31 January 1991.

<sup>38</sup> Michael Evans, "Thirty-Six Hours at Khafji Mark Turing Point in Conflict," *The Times*, p. 1, 1 February 1991,

<sup>39</sup> Youssef M. Ibrahim, "Choosing Sides; in the Mideast, A Fear that the War is Only the Beginning", *The New York Times*, Section 4; p. 1. 3 February 1991.



mosquito on an elephant” he stated at the daily press briefing. He later recognized on CNN that Iraq’s seizure of Khafji might have been a propaganda victory for Saddam. The Battle of Khafji should not have been allowed to happen. The allies had given Saddam a Propaganda victory... Saddam’s supporters in the Islamic world believed he won a victory. The Western public concluded that he retained a worrying measure of the initiative, or at the very least that the allied high command was careless.<sup>40</sup>

While it is true that the grand invasion that was initially planned never materialized, and as these plans were never made public. Therefore, Saddam could assert that the capture of al-Khafji was his primary objective. Also, while Iraqi forces were only able to occupy Saudi sovereign soil for 36 hours, they undeniably surprised Coalition leadership and seized the initiative from the Coalition, if only for a short period of time.

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<sup>40</sup> Daily Telegraph, Britain, “Conflict in the Gulf: the Khafji Offensive”, Public Diplomacy Query, World Opinion Roundup, p. 2, 4 February 1991, <http://www.fas.org/news/iraq/1991/910204-171137.htm>.

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## II. A CHRONOLOGICAL ACCOUNT OF THE BATTLE

Military historians will probably say the fighting along Saudi Arabia's northern border last week was only an early skirmish in the great gulf war of 1991 – but it was real enough, and surely frightening enough, to all those who fought in it. At Khafji, a deserted Saudi coastal town, and at two or more nameless map coordinates to the west, the Iraqi army suddenly materialized in the desert night in a surprising tactical offensive. Call it a series of probing attacks or call it a military blunder: whatever it was, a handful of U.S. Marine units and their Arab allies were quickly baptized in the realities of modern war. At some locations, U.S. troops faced enemy attackers no more than 25 yards away – and in Khafji, it took more than 36 hours of bitter combat to push a sizable force of Iraqi raiders out of the battered town. “They laid down some real heavy (fire), said Marine Cpl Jeff Brown of Cincinnati, Ohio. “They were well disciplined and good troops.

Newsweek - 11 Feb 91<sup>41</sup>

### A. INTRODUCTION

Prior to Desert Storm, the Iraqi army was the fourth largest army in the world and generally regarded as a highly capable fighting force. American intelligence estimates reinforced these assessments of the Iraqi Army. The prevailing theory held that the Iran-Iraq War, which lasted 8 years, had steeled the Iraqi Army into a tactically proficient and battle-hardened organization. To add to policy maker's insecurities about the potential outcome of the approaching conflict, the American experience in the Vietnam Conflict had instilled doubts regarding U.S. military proficiency. American casualty estimates, for the impending war, ranged from the thousands to the tens of thousands. The Bush administration began to steel the American public for the potential for multitudes of U.S. servicemen being sent home in bodybags once the hostilities commenced.

The Iraqi Third Corps initiated the ground action of Desert Storm on the 29th of January with a well-coordinated attack. The strike was comprised of approximately 2,000 men in several hundred armored vehicles from three different divisions, the Third Armored Division and the First and Fifth Mechanized Divisions. It was comprised of four prongs. Each element departed sequentially from west to east in order to arrive in

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<sup>41</sup> Tom Morganthau, “In the Heat of Battle,” *Newsweek*, p. 20, 11 February 1991.

al-Khafji at approximately the same time and presumably from different directions in order to overwhelm the city's defenders. The western-most prong, the one with the farthest to travel, would launch some 60 miles to the west of Al-Khafji and cross into the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the vicinity of Umm Hujul. The skirmish at Umm Hujul would involve elements of the U.S. Marine Corps and would become the first major ground action of the Gulf War.

## **B. THE SKIRMISH AT UMM HUJUL**

Umm Hujul was situated in a desolate area near the “boot heel” of the Kuwaiti border with Saudi Arabia. Labeled the “boot heel” by the Marines operating in the area, it was the point where the border turned north some 60 miles west of the Persian Gulf.<sup>42</sup> Three manmade structures punctuated the stretch of desert labeled Umm Hujul on the map. The first was a fifteen to twenty foot earthen berm that generally served to delineate the border between Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. The second was a trail that ran generally southwest to northeast. This trail intersected the berm at the only gap for some twenty kilometers in either direction. The third, located some fifty meters from the intersection of the trail and the berm was a police post, named the As-Zabr Police Post. The As-Zabr Police Post consisted of a castle-like main building and two towers constructed out of brown stone. To the north of the “castle” was a white one-story concrete structure housing the electrical generator that provided power to the complex. Some small trees, a fenced-in area, and a water tower completed the station compound.<sup>43</sup> On the 29<sup>th</sup> of January 1991, this nondescript location in the middle of the Saudi Arabian desert would serve as the unlikely setting for the initiation of ground hostilities during Desert Storm.

U.S. Marines positioned reconnaissance platoons at eight outposts (OPs) along the Kuwait border to gather intelligence as well as detect a surprise attack.<sup>44</sup> Each police post was significant because it was co-located with a breach in the massive berm. Therefore, these posts allowed the only vehicular access between the two countries. The

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<sup>42</sup> Charles H. Cureton. *U.S. Marines in the Persian Gulf, 1990-1991- with the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division in Desert Shield and Desert Storm*. p. 24, History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1993.

<sup>43</sup> Charles H. Cureton. *U.S. Marines in the Persian Gulf, 1990-1991- with the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division in Desert Shield and Desert Storm*. p. 24, History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1993.

<sup>44</sup> Captain Steven A. Ross and SSgt G.L. Gillispie, “OP-4 Once More”, *Marine Corps Gazette* 76, no.7, (July 1992): pp. 11-12.

observation posts were numbered one through eight, with numbers 4, 5 and 6 located in the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division area of operations. These three were significant because of their close proximity to the Marine Supply base at Kibrit.

Kibrit served as a massive forward staging area for the Marine logistics organization supporting the First Marine Expeditionary Force. It was the brainchild of Brigadier General Charles Krulak, a future Commandant of the Marine Corps. Krulak's intent was to pre-stage all of the required logistical assets needed to support the ground invasion of Kuwait as close to the border as possible. This was done to preclude the labor-intensive process of moving the mountains of logistical equipment in successive bounds behind the Marine forces as they shifted north in preparation for the ground assault. Kibrit was precariously positioned some 30 kilometers south of the border making it highly vulnerable to an Iraqi attack. By moving his combat service support assets north of the preponderance of Marine ground combat forces, Krulak was taking a huge gamble. However, both he and Lieutenant General Boomer, the senior Marine commander in theater, had confidence that the ongoing deception operations that the 1<sup>st</sup> MEF was conducting would mask the forward presence of the Marine's logistics base from the Iraqis.

The task of screening the area north of Kibrit fell upon Task Force Shepherd and elements of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Light Armored Infantry (LAI) Battalion. Task Force Shepherd was comprised of the Alpha and Charlie Companies of the First Light Armored Infantry Battalion and Bravo and Delta Companies from Third Light Armored Infantry Battalion. The Task Force had moved into position along the Saudi Arabian – Kuwaiti border mid-afternoon on January 29<sup>th</sup>. Task Force Shepherd's mission was to screen the border between the two countries and report Iraqi unit dispositions and movements. Since the berm along the border canalized vehicular traffic towards the police posts, Lieutenant Colonel Cliff Myers, Task Force Shepherd's battalion commander, was able to situate his companies in the vicinity of the police posts and still be able to screen the extensive frontage assigned his unit.

The screening mission implied that a unit would fight the enemy within its capability, and operating within their means, attempt to deny the enemy access to the

main force. The defense of Kibrit was determined to be an implied task. Lieutenant Colonel Myers' concept of operations did not envision a static defense. He planned to maneuver his four companies and use their TOW missiles and 25mm cannon, in combination with air and artillery support, to delay the enemy long enough for the division's main forces to arrive, and then "collapse the screen line" in such a way as to channel the enemy attack into a kill zone.<sup>45</sup>

The Task Force arrayed itself with Charlie Company located at the northern most position. Charlie Company was located in the vicinity of Observation Posts (OPs) 5 and 6. Delta Company was centrally located in the vicinity of OP 4. Bravo Company was positioned some 25 kilometers to the south of Delta, approximately 5 kilometers east of the boot heel. The Task Force command post was located ten kilometers to the west of OP 4, along with Alpha Company which was designated as the Task Force reserve.

Ironically, there was redundancy in the MEF's reconnaissance efforts in the region. Second Platoon, Alpha Company, 1st Reconnaissance Battalion had also been tasked to conduct reconnaissance in the same area of operations. This platoon physically occupied positions in and around Observation Post 4 in the conduct of their mission. The force reconnaissance Marines had been engaged in observing and reporting Iraqi activities in the "boot heel" of Kuwait for several weeks. The platoon became infamous when one of its members received the first purple heart of the war. This occurred when elements of the platoon were attempting to call an air strike on an Iraqi reconnaissance element. The aircraft inadvertently released its ordinance on the reconnaissance platoon's position and wounded the platoon's corpsman.<sup>46</sup>

The platoon commander, Lieutenant Steven Ross, had organized his platoon into three elements. Ross positioned two of the elements several hundred meters from the police post along the berm, one to the north and one to the south. The third observation post was positioned on the tower in the police post compound. The platoon's mobility assets consisted of three high mobility multiple-purpose wheeled vehicles (HMMWVs)

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<sup>45</sup> Charles H. Cureton. *U.S. Marines in the Persian Gulf, 1990-1991- with the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division in Desert Shield and Desert Storm*. p. 32, History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1993.

<sup>46</sup> The author garnered this information during conversations with members of the platoon on the afternoon of the 29 January 1991.

and a five-ton truck. The vehicles were parked behind a small earthen berm. Should the need to evacuate their position arise, the vehicles were designated as a rallying point for the platoon.

### **1. Delta Company, 3<sup>rd</sup> Light Armored Infantry Battalion**

Captain Roger Pollard, an infantry officer, assumed command of Delta Company in September of 1990. The company was comprised of 13 LAV-25s, 2 LAV-Logs, 1 LAV-C2, 1 LAV-R, three 5-ton trucks and a HMMWV. The company was organized into two platoons of six LAV-25s and a headquarters element. Second Lieutenant Glenn Sadowski commanded the first platoon and First Lieutenant David Kindle commanded the second platoon. Delta Company had arrived in Saudi Arabia on 16 August 1990, as part of the 7<sup>th</sup> Marine Expeditionary Brigade and had been conducting screening operations for the First Marine Division since their arrival in August.

On the morning of 29 January, Delta Company executed orders to move northwest to screen in the vicinity of OP 4. The company conducted a lengthy road march to their assembly area some 15 kilometers from the border. At approximately 1200 hours<sup>47</sup> a TOW section from Task Force Shepherd was attached to the company. It was the first time that Delta Company had had a TOW section attached to it because up until that point Task Force Shepherd had husbanded the TOWs for training purposes. The TOW section, with its 7 LAV-TOW variants, was a significant firepower enhancement to the company. In addition to firing a tank destroying TOW missile, the LAV variants also had the additional capability of a thermal night vision device. The thermal sight was significantly better than the passive night vision devices that the LAV-25s possessed and Delta Company would come to rely heavily upon the TOW vehicles for their night vision capabilities.

The company leadership was assembled, the TOW section leader was introduced, and then Pollard established standard operating procedures for the operational integration of the TOW section into the company. Next, the leadership of Delta Company conducted a reconnaissance of their future area of operations, during which they affected a linkup with Lieutenant Ross of the Force Reconnaissance platoon at OP-4. Lieutenant Ross described the enemy situation along the border. The two units then exchanged radio-

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<sup>47</sup> All times are local.

operating frequencies and parted ways. From there Pollard and his subordinate leaders scouted out the battle position where they would settle in for the night.

As discussed above, the terrain in this locality was featureless. The police post sat in the middle of what could be best described as 20-kilometer wide shallow punchbowl. Pollard elected a position some 4 to 5 kilometers northwest of the police post and approximately 3 kilometers from the berm. From this position the company could observe some 10 kilometers into Kuwait. The company faced generally east and it was arranged in a line along a 4,000-meter frontage. The First Platoon was on the northern left flank and the Second Platoon was on the right.<sup>48</sup> The selection of this position was somewhat shortsighted in that it bordered the maximum effective range of the company's weapons systems from the berm. This required the unit to displace from the relative safety of its fighting positions and move east several kilometers in order to engage enemy forces on the Kuwaiti side of the berm.

After the battle position was reconnoitered, the company leadership returned to the assembly area, mustered their Marines and returned to the battle position at approximately 1500 hours. After arriving at the battle position, the unit began digging fighting positions for their vehicles. This was a significant task, in that each crew was required to excavate a hole large enough for a 16-ton fighting vehicle while equipped with only individual entrenching tools or e-tools and the one shovel allocated per vehicle. However, the threat of Iraqi artillery was a powerful incentive for the men to dig and the work was completed by 1800 hours. The Marines then ate a Meal Ready to Eat (MRE) for dinner and settled into the watch routine. The watch required crewmembers of the LAV-25 to use their passive sites to observe enemy activity while monitoring the vehicle's radios for relevant traffic. The Marines that were not assigned to post quickly fell asleep.

At approximately 2000 hours a vehicle from the LAV-AT section reported that they were observing approximately 50 armored vehicles in Kuwait moving in a southerly direction toward the police post at Observation Post 4. As the company executive officer,

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<sup>48</sup> Charles H. Cureton. *U.S. Marines in the Persian Gulf, 1990-1991- with the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division in Desert Shield and Desert Storm*. p. 33, History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1993.



I initially received this report while standing radio watch, and viewed it with some skepticism. Earlier in the week Bravo Company had been operating in the same vicinity and had engaged an “enemy vehicle” which subsequently turned out to be a pick-up truck. Additionally, there had been no radio traffic on the Task Force Tactical Net that would indicate that there was any enemy activity in the area. Despite this, and after reconfirming the distance and direction of the vehicles sighted with the LAV section leader, I ordered the company to 100% readiness status.

The Iraqi unit being reported by the LAV-AT was a reinforced armor battalion; I MEF intelligence assessed that the incursion at OP-4 was an attack by the 6<sup>th</sup> Armored Brigade of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Armored Division.<sup>49</sup> This was the western-most of a four-pronged attack advancing on the coastal city of al-Khafji. The Iraqi battalion was comprised of Soviet designed T-62s and BMPs equipped with passive night vision devices. Their intent was to pass through the opening in the berm at the as-Zabr Police Post. Once through they were directed to seize Kibrit and Khafji, and then drive south to secure Mishab.<sup>50</sup>

The night was exceptionally dark. Despite the full moon there was a dense cloud cover that limited the effectiveness of passive sights. This meant that the rival forces would be reduced to throwing punches in a proverbial dark closet. Only the crewmembers in the LAV-ATs would be able to view the battlefield with any clarity. As the Iraqis trekked south they were apparently unaware of the presence of Delta Company to their west or the Force Reconnaissance platoon at OP 4.

## **2. The Battle at Umm Hujul**

The engagement that occurred at Umm Hujul took place in three distinct phases. The reconnaissance platoon came under attack and withdrew. Company D moved to cover the platoon’s withdrawal and attempted to delay or repulse the Iraqi advance, took

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<sup>49</sup> Minutes of I MEF Daily Command Briefing, 31 January 1991, A.M., U.S. Marine Corps Historical Center, Washington, D. C.

<sup>50</sup> Pollard R. L., “The Battle of OP 4: Start of the Ground War,” *Marine Corps Gazette*, p. 50, March 1992.

casualties, and withdrew. Then Companies A and B from Task Force Shepherd replaced Company D and drove out the Iraqis from OP 4 which concluded the engagement.<sup>51</sup>

Captain Pollard quickly recognized that he would be required to close with the enemy unit in order to engage them. He ordered Delta Company out of their fighting positions and directed that they move east on line. When the company had proceeded to some 1000 meters from the berm, Pollard halted them and issued a company fire command in which he instructed the LAV-AT vehicles to launch their TOW missiles at his command. On his order all 7 missiles were launched simultaneously. Most found their mark. However, one missile raced erratically across the desert and hit another LAV-AT vehicle. A brilliant flash illuminated the sky as the errant TOW missile struck the vehicle and detonated the other missiles carried inside. Every member of the company immediately sensed that something had gone woefully wrong. It was apparent from the magnitude of the explosion that none of the four crewmembers aboard could have survived the explosion.

At about this time, the advanced guard of the Iraqi Mechanized Battalion, comprised of a tank platoon, came in contact with the Force Reconnaissance Unit at OP 4. The members of the reconnaissance unit started engaging the tank platoon with light machine guns and Light Anti-armor Weapons commonly referred to as LAWs. The Iraqis, who had not expected enemy contact until they had reached the vicinity of Khafji, stopped and called their Battalion Headquarters to request guidance. Lieutenant Ross promptly realized that they were about to be overrun. He fired several red-star clusters into the air, signifying his desire for the platoon to muster at their vehicles so that they could displace to a safer position. However, so absorbed with the rigors of the engagement, the members of the platoon stationed on top of the police post failed to observe the signal to move and instead continued to engage the Iraqi tanks. Unable to muster his Marines, and in danger of being overrun, Lieutenant Ross radioed me desperately requesting assistance.

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<sup>51</sup> Charles H. Cureton. U.S. Marines in the Persian Gulf, 1990-1991- with the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division in Desert Shield and Desert Storm, p. 33, History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1993.

Five kilometers to the north Delta Company was not in a much better situation. The eruption of TOW fire from Delta Company's position had raised the ire of the Iraqi Battalion. Using the flames of the burning LAV for illumination, the Iraqis directed tank main gun and machine gun fire at the outgunned LAV Company. Amid the heavy enemy fire, First Platoon Leader, Lieutenant Glenn Sadowski, volunteered to search for survivors on the stricken vehicle. As the vehicle continued to burn, Sadowski and his men searched unsuccessfully for survivors of the destroyed vehicle.

Captain Pollard immediately advised Lieutenant Colonel Myers that the Iraqis were at OP 4 in large numbers and seemed intent on continuing the attack into Saudi Arabia. Myers passed this assessment on to the Division Staff along with an urgent request for air support. The Task Force Shepherd Commander then prepared to defend in sector. Myers alerted his artillery batteries and he moved Company A slightly north to a location that was within sight of Company D.<sup>52</sup>

Responding to the request of the Reconnaissance Platoon Commander, I directed Lieutenant David Kindle's platoon to push south and engage the lead elements of the Iraqi Battalion. The Second Platoon Commander aggressively moved his unit south to blunt the Iraqi advance. Kindle's platoon was equipped with the 25mm Bushmaster chain-gun that fired tungsten armor-piercing rounds. It became apparent that the tungsten rounds were not penetrating the Iraqi tank armor, because the tracers were ricocheting skyward. Therefore, the crewmen began to engage the Iraqis with high explosive (HE) rounds.

As Second Platoon arrived to render assistance in evacuating the Reconnaissance Platoon it was greeted by the sight of two Iraqi T-62s emerging through the breach in the berm next to the police post. These tanks were engaging the retreating Reconnaissance Platoon at a distance of approximately 100 meters with tank main-gun rounds and machine gun fire. As the three HMMWVs and the 5-ton truck of the Reconnaissance unit lumbered away, the Iraqi rounds buffeted the ground all around their vehicles. Kindle held the fire of his platoon until the reconnaissance Marines were clear and then engaged

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<sup>52</sup> Charles H. Cureton. *U.S. Marines in the Persian Gulf, 1990-1991- with the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division in Desert Shield and Desert Storm*. p. 34, History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1993.

the lead elements of the Iraqis' advanced guard. As Kindle's platoon peppered the lead tanks with 25mm fire, the Iraqis were again compelled to halt their advance.

Sadowski's platoon had concluded its unsuccessful search for survivors at the destroyed LAV-AT's position and moved south towards the ensuing firefight. Control of the units was made incredibly difficult because of the extreme darkness. The leaders were forced to close intervals between vehicles in order to effectively direct their maneuver, but the unit's closed ranks had the unintended effect of clumping them together and making them easier targets for the Iraqi gunners. As first Platoon moved toward the muzzle flashes of the firefight they literally became intertwined with the Second Platoon. Eager to get into the fray they immediately began to engage the Iraqi tanks. Recognizing that the two platoons were interspersed, I ordered Sadowski to move his platoon west and then south of Second Platoon in order to form a fire sack around the breach. Despite the inherent difficulties of maneuvering the platoon in the utter darkness, Sadowski gathered his unit and moved into position. The company then began to direct heavy fire onto the Iraqi forces.

Fighter/attack aircraft arrived in the vicinity of OP 4 at about 2130 hours.<sup>53</sup> Delta Company's Forward Air Controller (FAC) Corporal Zwalick sequestered a section of Marine FA-18s, and while Company D pounded the two tanks in the breach with their 25mm cannons, Corporal Zwalick directed the fires of the Marine fighter aircraft on them. Both tanks were hit and destroyed by the aircraft. "Sympathetic" detonations from the destroyed tanks rocked the vehicles. Zwalick's timing could not have been better. The tanks had been located near the breach in the berm and the intense fires emulating from them prevented the rest of the Iraqi battalion from slipping through the breach. Temporarily trapped on the east side of the berm, the Iraqis became easy targets for subsequent air attacks.

Recognizing that a major battle was developing, Task Force Shepherd's Air Officer, Captain Bill "Wingnut" Cartwright, requested as much airpower from the DASC as was available. In an attempt to control the growing number of planes, Cartwright

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<sup>53</sup> Charles H. Cureton. *U.S. Marines in the Persian Gulf, 1990-1991- with the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division in Desert Shield and Desert Storm*, p. 36, History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1993.

ordered the aircraft to an Initial Point (IP) directly above OP-4 so that they could loiter before being employed by Corporal Zwalick, the forward air controller. Soon the skies above the OP looked like a disturbed hornet's nest.

The extreme darkness that posed a problem for the Marines of Delta Company also made target acquisition difficult for the pilots supporting the company. Hearing that Zwalick was experiencing difficulty describing the disposition of forces to the attacking pilots, I suggested using the burning Iraqi tanks in the breach as "marks" or reference points from which the pilots could orient themselves on the battlefield. This proved to be an extremely effective technique and Zwalick was able to direct the fires of several sections of aircraft onto the Iraqi forces. Most of the aircraft were armed with Rockeye munitions, a 750 pound cluster-bomb munition, which consisted of a series of armor penetrating sub-munitions or bomblets, which would saturate an area and devastate any armored vehicle unfortunate enough to be positioned in its path. As the fires of the aircraft were successfully being directed against Iraqi armored vehicles, the Marines of Delta Company were able to catch their breath.

Soon the fires on the two Iraqi tanks in the breach began to subside and the Iraqi force again attempted to push into Saudi Arabia. Again, the belligerent forces engaged in a tenacious direct fire engagement, oftentimes firing at ranges of only hundreds of meters. Unable to acquire targets with their passive sites, the gunners on both sides were reduced to shooting at each other's muzzle blasts. This resulted in a maddening scene with red and green tracers flying wildly in all directions. Recognizing that the advancing Iraqi battalion held the advantage in firepower and numbers, I directed that the company disengage from the Iraqi onslaught. Fearful of losing control of some of the unit I ordered them to close ranks, get on line and literally drive backwards away from the enemy in reverse gear. In doing so, Delta Company slipped discreetly into the refuge provided by the cover of darkness. After moving about a kilometer in a northwesterly direction the company stopped and reoriented on the Iraqi invaders.

As Delta Company resumed its direct fire battle with the Iraqis, the ante was upped. Staff Sergeant Eby announced on the company tactical net that the Iraqis were shooting missiles. The significance of this was not immediate, because some members of

the company assumed that the Iraqis were shooting Frog missiles. Frog missiles were a tactical-level, indirect fire missile system that the Iraqis had been firing for some weeks at the port city of al-Khafji. Frog missiles, while devastating if they hit their target, were generally inaccurate and hardly a threat to mobile units such as a LAV Company. However, the company soon realized that Frog missiles were not what Eby was referring to. Instead, the tank main gunfire had been augmented with Sagger, anti-armor missiles. Sagers were deadly accurate, Soviet-designed armor vehicle killers and used with great effect by the Egyptians during the 1973 Arab-Israeli conflict.

The presence of Sagger missiles sent chills down the spines of the Delta Company Marines. As these missiles screamed dangerously close to various LAVs in the unit, the Marines wisely adopted an Israeli tactic to counter them. The LAVs would sit patiently as the missile streaked towards the vehicle and at the last second the vehicle would turn and accelerate quickly out of the way. Small fins on its fuselage steer the Sagger missile rendering the missile unresponsive to rapid adjustments in their flight path. The Iraqi gunners were unable to adapt to the agile movements of the LAVs.

As they pushed forward, the Iraqi battalion was able to concentrate a large volume of fire upon the LAV Company. Panic-stricken, several Marines abandoned their vehicles in an attempt to remove themselves from the peril of the heavy Iraqi fire. They preferred the sanctuary of the darkness and vastness of the Saudi desert to the confines of the thinned-skinned lightly armored vehicle. The vehicle commanders promptly and sternly ordered them back aboard and reluctantly the frightened Marines capitulated.

Recognizing the danger posed by the Sagger missiles I ordered Delta Company to cease their direct fires. Without the telltale muzzle blasts the company once again became invisible to the Iraqi tank and Sagger gunners. The company conducted another rearward, westerly movement of two kilometers. There, safely concealed by the blackness of the desert night, the company settled to let the allied aircraft circling overhead wreak their havoc upon the Iraqi battalion.

Conduct of the battle fell to the command and control vehicle known as the C2 or C-squared. The C2 carried the company FAC and forward observer (FO). These two individuals provided indirect fire support, air and artillery for the company.

Unfortunately, no Marine artillery was in position to support the company. With no artillery available, Delta Company would have to rely solely upon air power for support. Corporal Zwalick, working from the command and control vehicle, would contact a section of aircraft and then provide each a nine-line brief. This served to orient the pilots on friendly and enemy dispositions. Once he was comfortable that the pilots were prepared to execute the mission they began their run. The entire crew of the C2 would assist Zwalick in looking for the aircraft in order to clear them to drop their bombs.

The situation appeared to be well in hand. However, the company had lost contact with several of the Iraqi tanks west of the berm and was wary of the possibility that they may attempt to maneuver onto the company's flank. Visibility was limited but the Platoon Commanders ordered vehicles on the flanks to be on the guard for a flanking attack. Zwalick successfully ran numerous sections of aircraft with devastating effect. Running close air support in the dark when the distances between friendly and enemy forces were in such close quarters was a difficult task. As he ran each section, Zwalick was forced to paint a verbal picture of the battlefield for the pilots, describing both friendly and enemy dispositions. Despite these difficulties, Zwalick was able to direct over half a dozen sections of aircraft against the Iraqi forces with devastating effects. After each run, the company was greeted by the brilliant detonation of aircraft ordnance destroying mechanized vehicles. Section after section of allied aircraft released their ordnance upon the Iraqis flailing on the eastern side of the berm.

Confident of the situation and aware that the Marines were exhausted after almost three hours of grueling contact with the enemy, I suggested that the company relax and enjoy the firepower demonstration being put on by Corporal Zwalick and the allied air forces. After over an hour of successfully running aircraft on the enemy tragedy struck.

Corporal Zwalick was having difficulty with a particular section of aircraft. The pilot of an A-10 Warthog was unable to discern between friendly and enemy forces on the ground. Zwalick laid out the disposition of forces and still the pilot was unable to distinguish friend from foe. Growing impatient I ordered Zwalick to wave this particular section off and use the next section of aircraft. Undeterred, Zwalick continued to work with the frustrated pilots. Both parties were determined to complete the mission. In an

effort to confirm the location of friendly forces one of the planes dropped a flare in the midst of the company position. Unfortunately, the flare had the unintended effect of illuminating the entire company for the Iraqis and caused all of the company's passive sights to washout, rendering them unusable. I hastily ordered a member of First Platoon to bury the flare because of the illuminating effect it had on the company's position. Corporal Baumgardener quickly jumped off a neighboring vehicle and moved to extinguish the flare. Meanwhile, Corporal Zwalick confirmed with the aircraft that he was directing that the flare did indeed land in the midst of the company position.

Suddenly, a Maverick missile ripped through the armor of one of the LAV-25s near the flare, killing 7 of the 8 crewmen. Additionally, flying shrapnel wounded Corporal Baumgardener, the Marine that was extinguishing the flare. Baumgardener was evacuated but the sympathetic detonations of the ammunition on the burning vehicle prevented a close examination of the vehicle for survivors. Corporal Zwalick immediately directed that the section of A-10s cease their fire. They responded that they had not fired a missile. He quickly scanned the TAD (tactical air delivery) nets in an effort to find out who had dropped the Maverick missile. Zawalick's efforts were to no avail as the responsible aircraft refused to acknowledge his calls.

I then radioed Captain Pollard and told him that the C2 was no longer in control of the vast amount of aircraft over our position. I recommended that Delta Company extricate themselves from the area before another mishap occurred. Pollard agreed and arranged a rearward passage of lines with Task Force Shepherd. Delta Company then linked up with the Force Reconnaissance platoon and conducted a rearward passage of lines with Alpha Company. Delta Company and the reconnaissance marines then moved to an assembly area where they regrouped and bedded down for several hours of rest. It was shortly after midnight and the Battle of Umm Hujul moved into its third phase.

Still holding to his original plan of having Company A attack the enemy, Myers directed Captain Michael Shupp, the commander of Company A, to move toward OP 4.<sup>54</sup> Shupp cautiously directed his company's advance because the enemy situation was

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<sup>54</sup> Charles H. Cureton. *U.S. Marines in the Persian Gulf, 1990-1991- with the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division in Desert Shield and Desert Storm*, p. 39, History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1993.



largely unknown. It took almost two hours for Alpha Company to move the 8 kilometers and reach Delta's former position and establish a screenline.<sup>55</sup> Captain Shupp then ordered a search for survivors from Delta Company's engagement. Lance Corporal Ronald Tull was found near the front of the burning LAV-25. First aid was administered to Tull and he was subsequently medevaced.

While the injured Marine was being evaluated, Captain Shupp received a report of possible enemy helicopter actively north of Company A. Concerned that an attempt was being made to flank his position; Captain Shupp began preparing the company to move. Fortunately, an OV-10 arrived and quickly swept the area with thermal sights. The aerial observer found the suspected landing site to be clear of enemy activity, but he advised Captain Shupp that there were many burned out vehicles between the company's screenline and OP 4.<sup>56</sup>

As daylight approached, Shupp directed the advance of his company towards OP 4. Supported by AH-1W attack helicopters, the unit meticulously advanced upon the Iraqi survivors in the vicinity of Umm Hujul. At 0720 hours the Iraqis launched a company-sized attack against Alpha Company. This was the first engagement to occur in which the belligerent forces could see each other. Shupp was able to solicit the use of several sections of aircraft and the Iraqi attack was broken up in short order.

Overwhelmed by the cumulative effects of air, ground fire and an artillery unit that had moved to support Task Force Shepherd, this Iraqi unit elected to discontinue their efforts to advance to Khafji. Instead they retreated to the north. As the Iraqis retired, Shupp pushed his unit to the berm and continued to engage the fleeing vehicles. Lieutenant Colonel Myers brought up Company B and positioned it on the berm to the southeast of Company A and he moved Company D to the northwest of Company A. For the next two hours, the three companies called in air and artillery strikes on the withdrawing Iraqis. The last enemy tank destroyed by Task Force Shepherd was hit by an antitank missile fired from an LAV-AT attached to Company B. The members of the

<sup>55</sup> Charles H. Cureton. *U.S. Marines in the Persian Gulf, 1990-1991- with the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division in Desert Shield and Desert Storm*, p. 39, History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1993.

<sup>56</sup> Charles H. Cureton. *U.S. Marines in the Persian Gulf, 1990-1991- with the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division in Desert Shield and Desert Storm*, p. 40, History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1993.

battalion later counted 22 destroyed Iraqi tanks and within the next several days captured several hundred enemy prisoners of war.<sup>57</sup>

### **C. THE SKIRMISH AT OP-1 AND OP-2**

While the Marines exchanged fire with the Iraqis at OP-4, the central Iraqi prong attacking from the relative sanctity of the al-Wafra forest crossed the border near OP-1 and OP-2. I MEF Intelligence concluded that the 26<sup>th</sup> Armored Brigade of the 5<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Infantry Division had concentrated in the al-Wafra forest and launched a company-sized attack against those Marine outposts.<sup>58</sup> As they crossed into Saudi Arabia, the Iraqis stumbled into components of the Second LAI Battalion from the Second Marine Division. The Marines had arrayed their LAVs to provide defensive cover both north and east.<sup>59</sup> The Marines from 2<sup>nd</sup> LAI Battalion greeted this Iraqi column, comprised of approximately 20 armored vehicles, with TOW anti-tank missiles, resulting in the destruction of two Iraqi tanks. By 2300 hours, Air Force A-10s and F-16CGs joined several flights of Marine fixed-winged aircraft and helicopters in engaging additional Iraqi units marshalling near the al-Wafra forest. By morning, the LAV mounted Marines, reinforced by close air support, repulsed the attack, forcing a general Iraqi retreat north to the relative sanctity of the al-Wafra forest.<sup>60</sup> In sum, both Iraqi attempts to attack Al-Khafji through the Marine Corps area of operations were repulsed. Subsequently, allied aircraft patrolling these areas destroyed all the additional echelons of Iraqi armor before they could reach the Saudi border.

Hours later, another Iraqi column drove due south on the coastal highway in an effort to gain entrance into the city. At one point, it was reported that Iraqi tank crews rolled their T-55s up to the border and signaled that they wanted to surrender. “They (the Iraqis) reversed their turrets, put their main gun in lock and quit.”<sup>61</sup> When approached by Saudi forces, the Iraqi tanks spun their turrets around and fired at the surprised Saudis.

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<sup>57</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> Light Armored Battalion Command Chronology, January-February 1991: 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 25<sup>th</sup> Marines Command Chronology, January-February 1991.

<sup>58</sup> Minutes of I MEF Daily Command Briefing, 31 January 1991, A.M., U.S. Marine Corps Historical Center, Washington, D.C.

<sup>59</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division Log, entry for 29/2125 January 1991. U.S. Marine Corps Historical Center, Washington D.C.

<sup>60</sup> Jamieson (U), 165. (Secret) Information extracted is unclassified.

<sup>61</sup> Kennedy J. M., “Allies Battle for Saudi town,” *Los Angeles Times*, Part A; p. 1, 31 January 1991.

This column was quickly engaged by coalition air forces, which destroyed four tanks and 13 vehicles.

Just after midnight, the fourth Iraqi column advanced into Saudi Arabia. This column crossed the border northwest of al-Khafji in the sector guarded by Arab coalition forces. A reinforced Iraqi armored battalion, it attacked south from Kuwait and thundered into the coastal city of al-Khafji virtually unopposed. The Iraqi armored column completely surprised the Marine Air Naval Gunfire Liaison Company (ANGLICO) team on the border at OP-8. Barely avoiding capture, the Marines sounded the alarm and retreated south toward Khafji.<sup>62</sup>

The Iraqi forces that attacked and consequently occupied Khafji were from the 20<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Brigade of the 5<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Infantry Division, a formation that had been in reserve behind the Iraqi forward defensive belts.<sup>63</sup> This was the only Iraqi unit of the multi-axis attack intended to seize the coastal city that was able to reach its objective. Unobserved by the defending forces, this column drove unopposed into the city and immediately began to establish themselves defensively. The suddenness of this movement caught the Coalition Forces off guard. Two American Marine reconnaissance teams were cut off and unable to escape.

#### **D. ARAB ACTIONS TO RETAKE THE CITY**

Al-Khafji was situated on the Persian Gulf about eight miles south of the Kuwait-Saudi border. The oil-refining town of about 20,000 people had been the first target of Iraqi artillery in the war and had been abandoned for 10 days when the Iraqi forces invaded.<sup>64</sup>

The responsibility for the defense of the oil-rich region adjacent to the Persian Gulf fell on the Arab Coalition forces and their commander Saudi General Khaled Bin Sultan. The defense of the Eastern Area, the core of which consisted of three Saudi brigades, was reinforced by contingents from their GCC allies. General Khaled

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<sup>62</sup> John F. Newell, *Airpower and the Battle of Khafji: Setting the Record Straight*, School of Advanced Airpower Studies Air University, June 1998, p. 39.

<sup>63</sup> Martin N. Stanton, "Khafji: Trial by Fire for the Saudi National Guard," *Armor Magazine*, p. 8, March-April 1996.

<sup>64</sup> "First U.S. Deaths in Ground Combat," *Facts on File World News Digest*, Section: International Affairs, p. 57A1, 31 January 1991.

organized these forces into four task forces, named Abu Bakr, Othman, Omar and Tariq.<sup>65</sup> The 3rd Marine Regiment, known as Task Force Taro, and their commander Colonel John Admire, were also resident in the Arab sector. The U.S. Marines had conducted joint training exercises with the Arabs and were responsible for anchoring the Arab defense of this area.

Khafji should have been easy to defend. A coastal town, it was situated in a vast expanse of flat, featureless desert. The town was surrounded by low, wet sand areas known as sabkhas, impassable to heavy vehicles because of seasonal rainfall.<sup>66</sup> The town straddled a two-lane highway that ran from Kuwait City in the north to Jabayl in the south. This coastal highway was tactically significant because it afforded the Iraqis an opportunity to negotiate the sabkhas with their heavy armored vehicles without getting mired. It also provided a critical navigational aid to the Iraqi forces as they traveled through the otherwise unremarkable desert. The highway also harbored strategic significance because it could serve as the primary avenue of approach for the oil fields of Damman, Saudi Arabia.

General Khaled's strategy was to defend the border region with firepower not manpower. If the Iraqis attacked, the General's plan was to take them on with air power and with supporting arms.<sup>67</sup> This was an appropriate strategy given the situation. The desert afforded the Saudi forces the opportunity to attrite the Iraqis as they crossed the expanses of desert toward Khafji. Unfortunately, the strategy required a trip-wire to announce the Iraqi attack. This is a role traditionally conducted by cavalry units and the Saudi's failed to field such a force. Khaled's defensive strategy would prove to be a failure because there would be no units present that would serve to detect the Iraqi's attack, initiate the engagement, and designate targets for the supporting arms. The Iraqi brigade that seized Khafji did so without any opposition from its Saudi defenders.

Once inside the city, the Iraqi aggressors quickly established in-depth defensive positions. Armor vehicles with anti-tank missiles were positioned on the city's southern

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<sup>65</sup> Khaled Bin Sultan, *Desert Warrior*, Harper Collins, New York, 1995, p. 370.

<sup>66</sup> Chris Hedges, "In a Ghost Town, a Deadly Skirmish," *The New York Times*, Section A; p. 11, 31 January 1991.

<sup>67</sup> Khaled Bin Sultan, *Desert Warrior*, Harper Collins, New York, 1995, p. 366.

perimeter in order to extend their missiles range and effectiveness. The Iraqi infantry were placed in an intricate web of interlocking positions inside the buildings inside the city center. Combat in an urban area is one of the most complex military operations, and as the Saudi military was about to find out, the Iraqis would prove difficult to dislodge.

### **1. U.S. Reconnaissance Marines are Stranded**

The Iraqi attack was so abrupt and the element of surprise was so complete that two six-man reconnaissance teams from the First Marine Division were unable to extricate themselves from the city. Faced with the decision of staying put or fighting their way out of the city, the section leader, Corporal Ingraham, elected for the units to “go to ground”. The teams occupied two different rooftops in the southern portion of the city armed with only their small-arm weapons and radios. Reconnaissance Marines are an elite force and are trained for operations behind enemy lines, but Ingraham and company found themselves in a situation for which they were unprepared. The Marines spread claymore mines in the stairwell of the apartment buildings where they were hiding and waited.<sup>68</sup>

Corporal Ingraham immediately established communications with his higher headquarters and began to feed valuable situational updates of the Iraqi activities in the city. The situation grew tense as Iraqi soldiers cleared the bottom floors of the buildings in which the Marines were located. The Marines were barely, just barely, managing to keep themselves hidden from the Iraqis. From the roof of one of Khafji’s building, Corporal Ingraham had watched the Iraqis enter the structure and had seen the tops of their helmets in the stairwell as they searched the rooms below. To encourage the Iraqis to move away from the building, he had called for artillery fire and air strikes on the street around him.<sup>69</sup>

Concern for the trapped Marines intensified in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Regimental headquarters when shrapnel from the American artillery wounded one of Corporal Ingraham’s men. Colonel Admire raced to the Saudi command post when he learned of the Khafji attack. Once there, he informed the Saudi’s that he had two Marine

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<sup>68</sup> Chris Hedges, “War in the Gulf: Combat Town Regained, Morale of Arab Allies is Lifted,” *The New York Times*, p. 5, 2 February 1991.

<sup>69</sup> Gordan, Michael R. and Trainor, Bernard E., *The Generals War*, Boston, Ma, Little, Brown and Company, 1995, p. 280.

reconnaissance teams trapped in Khafji.<sup>70</sup> When General Khaled heard the news he proclaimed:

Our first priority is not to free al-Khafji. It is to get the Marines out. The nature of the problem had changed. I determined to rescue the Marines for two main reasons. First, the main priority of any commander is to accomplish his mission, while minimizing his casualties. Secondly, I was extremely worried that Schwarzkopf might use American troops, either U.S. Marines in an amphibious attack or a heliborne U.S. Army unit, to free my town in my sector. The shame would have been difficult to bear.<sup>71</sup>

To make the situation even more complicated for Coalition forces, an American Army truck had gotten lost earlier in the day and had inadvertently ventured into the city after the Iraqis had captured it. As they drove into the city the soldiers were unaware that the town had fallen into Iraqi hands. While driving through the town, the vehicle took a wrong turn and wound up surrounded by Iraqis. The truck crashed into a wall and the soldiers were quickly taken prisoner.

The Marines quickly organized a rescue mission. A unit from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marines was sent in to rescue them. “I expect we are going to go up and spank them (the Iraqis)”, Major Craig Huddleston, the battalion executive officer, predicted confidently as he left for Khafji. “They probably ought to call 911 right now.”<sup>72</sup> However, the Marines were unsuccessful in their attempt to rescue their army brethren. Shortly after entering the city a Marine patrol found the vehicle where it had crashed into a wall, its wheels still spinning. Though some of soldiers’ equipment was still in the vehicle, both soldiers were missing.<sup>73</sup> Huddleston returned without the swagger. “They weren’t in the vehicle. We don’t know if they fled or were captured,” he said, walking swiftly and speaking back over his shoulder. Later, the officer could hardly finish his sentence. “Yeah – it’s a...” His voice broke. “We wanted to get ‘em pretty bad.”<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Gordan, Michael R. and Trainor, Bernard E., *The Generals War*, Boston, Ma, Little, Brown and Company, 1995, p. 280.

<sup>71</sup> Khaled Bin Sultan, *Desert Warrior*, Harper Collins, New York, 1995, p. 378.

<sup>72</sup> Kim Murphy, “U.S. Forces Find Enemy Tougher Than Expected,” *Los Angeles Times*, Part A, p. 6, 3 February 1991.

<sup>73</sup> J. M. Kennedy and J. M. Broder, “Allies Drive Iraqis from Saudi Town and Take 167 Prisoners,” *Los Angeles Times*, Part A; p. 1, 1 February 1991.

<sup>74</sup> Kim Murphy, “U.S. Forces Find Enemy Tougher Than Expected,” *Los Angeles Times*, Part A, p. 6, 3 February 1991.

Unbeknownst to the Marines, the two soldiers had been captured by Iraqi forces and whisked north to Kuwait. One of them, Specialist Melissa Ann Rathbun-Nealy, had the distinction of becoming the first American female prisoner of war. The Iraqis reveled in the capture of the two soldiers and the American prisoners were soon amongst those flaunted by the Iraqi news media.

## **2. Planning the Attack**

The initial reaction of the Saudi leadership was horror that a piece of Saudi Arabia was now occupied by Iraqi troops. King Fahd ordered the commander of Joint Forces, General Khaled, either to eject the Iraqis from Saudi territory or to have the Americans do it immediately.<sup>75</sup> General Schwarzkopf was puzzled by the Saudi leadership's strong reaction to the Iraqi seizure of the city. He viewed Khafji as an insignificant event, designed to throw the Coalition forces off their game plan and he was hesitant to fall for Saddam's ploy. Schwarzkopf was ignorant of the enormous political implications of the Iraqi presence in the Shi'ite region of the Saudi Kingdom. However, Saudi leadership was acutely aware of the propaganda coup that Saddam was pulling in the Arab world and sensitive to how it affected the regime's credibility. They regarded it as a personal affront and as a situation that needed to be remedied immediately. The Iraqis must be removed from Saudi territory, even if it meant destroying the whole city to do so.

When Khaled discovered that air support that was expected by his troops was instead diverted to support Marine operations to the west he became agitated and immediately sought counsel with General Schwarzkopf. Khaled's notion was to shift assets from the air campaign in Iraq to air strikes on Iraqi forces in al-Khafji. Khaled suggested to General Schwarzkopf that the U.S. Air Force eliminate the problem through heavy bombardment by B-52 bombers. General Schwarzkopf counseled against this idea, and in the end it was decided that Arab forces would attempt to liberate the city.<sup>76</sup>

Saudi leadership had never seriously considered a scenario in which the Iraqis might attack into Saudi territory. Therefore, contingency plans to retake al-Khafji did not exist. They would have to start planning from scratch. General Khaled directed that the

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<sup>75</sup> Rick Francona, *Ally to Adversary: An Eyewitness Account of Iraq's Fall from Grace*, Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, Maryland, p. 120, 1999.

<sup>76</sup> Rick Francona, *Ally to Adversary: An Eyewitness Account of Iraq's Fall from Grace*, Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, Maryland, p. 120, 1999.

planning would be composed of two separate operations: the first was to be a raid that very evening on the southern fringes of al-Khafji. The objective was to isolate the buildings where the trapped Marines were hiding and push back or destroy the Iraqi troops in the immediate vicinity so as to free the Marines and permit their withdraw. The second operation was to be a full-scale attack in the morning on the Iraqi forces in al-Khafji.<sup>77</sup> When the Saudis learned from prisoners that the Iraqis had entered al-Khafji with two battalions, or about 1,500 men, they had second thoughts.<sup>78</sup>

That evening Colonel Admire met with senior Arab officers to provide reassurance and coordinate U.S. support. The Americans had since become sensitive to the political ramifications of the situation. They understood that Arab Coalition forces must be the ones to “liberate” al-Khafji, although a plethora of U.S. support would be provided to ensure the coalition Arab’s success. As Colonel Admire later recounted:

That night, along the coastal road, I met with Saudi Colonel Turki and Major Omani of Qatar. We had a frank conversation. I explained that my two recon teams were in the city. I said, “I believe that my teams can operate for 36 to 48 hours before they are jeopardized by the Iraqis.” Colonel Turki listened quietly. Then he said the two most important words of the war: “We attack.” We didn’t do a lot of planning. We just drew it out in the sand and went for it. I emphasized that the Arab force would do the main attack...<sup>79</sup>

Colonel Admire promised artillery support for the assault into al-Khafji and directed his ground elements to screen to the west. In addition, the Saudis would be provided U.S. airpower to isolate the Iraqis by preventing any reinforcements from the north.<sup>80</sup>

The strategic requirements, which generated the urgency to eject the Iraqi forces from al-Khafji, had left little preparation time for the tactical commanders who would have to conduct the operation. Planning and preparation at the tactical level was poorly conducted - if done at all. As evident, there would be no time to solicit intelligence

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<sup>77</sup> Khaled Bin Sultan, *Desert Warrior*, Harper Collins, New York, 1995, p. 378.

<sup>78</sup> Khaled Bin Sultan, *Desert Warrior*, Harper Collins, New York, 1995, p. 373.

<sup>79</sup> Al Santoli, “Lessons Learned in the Savage 1972 Eastertide Offensive Paid off at the Battle of Khafji Almost Two Decades Later.” [http://www.thehistorynet.com/Vietnam/articles/02963\\_text.htm](http://www.thehistorynet.com/Vietnam/articles/02963_text.htm).

<sup>80</sup> Gordan, Michael R. and Trainor, Bernard E., *The Generals War*, Boston, Ma, Little, Brown and Company, 1995, p. 280.



sources and no time to conduct any reconnaissance.<sup>81</sup> This forced the commanders to draw up the scheme of maneuver with only very rudimentary knowledge of the positions and strength of the enemy.<sup>82</sup> Operation orders and rehearsals, considered essential to successful execution of combat, would not be conducted. Additionally, the units would be hastily reorganized just prior to the attack. This meant that elements that had never trained together would be forced to fight together in urban combat, one of the most complex of military operations. It was a formula for disaster.

### **3. The Action to Retake al-Khafji**

The campaign to retake Khafji began late January 30<sup>th</sup>, when Saudi forces, backed by Qatari tanks and by American Marines, tried to move up the coastal highway that bisects the town.<sup>83</sup> This would constitute the first engagement by modern Saudi Arabian military forces and it was the first action the six-year-old Qatari army had ever seen.<sup>84</sup> With no combat experience and only marginal training, the battalion's prospects for a difficult night attack against the Iraqis were dismal. The Saudi unit did not have maps of the city and the commander had only the vaguest idea of what they would do once his men got there other than attack any Iraqis they could find. No plan existed to facilitate communication between the Saudis and the Qataris. Nor did the Saudis have a plan for directing artillery or air strikes which is a standard procedure for any professional military.<sup>85</sup>

As the allies advanced toward the city they came under such intense fire from the Iraqi defenders that the attack fragmented. The Coalition forces withdrew several kilometers to the south in disarray. A few Saudi soldiers were pinned down between their original positions and the Iraqis, but a rescue operation was being planned.<sup>86</sup> Shortly afterward, the Arab coalition leaders rallied their troops and a second nighttime

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<sup>81</sup> Martin N. Stanton, "Khafji: Trial by Fire for the Saudi National Guard," *Armor Magazine*, p. 8, March-April 1996.

<sup>82</sup> Martin N. Stanton, "Khafji: Trial by Fire for the Saudi National Guard," *Armor Magazine*, p. 8, March-April 1996.

<sup>83</sup> R. W. Apple, "Saudis Recapture Ghost Town; Allies Bomb New Iraqi Column; A 36-Hour Struggle," *The New York Times*, Section A; p. 1, 1 February 1991.

<sup>84</sup> J. M. Kennedy, "Allies Battle For Saudi Town," *Los Angeles Times*, Part A; p. 1, 31 January 1991.

<sup>85</sup> Gordan, Michael R. and Trainor, Bernard E., *The Generals War*, Boston, Ma, Little, Brown and Company, 1995, p. 281.

<sup>86</sup> Chris Hedges, "In a Ghost Town, a Deadly Skirmish," *The New York Times*, Section A; p. 11, 31 January 1991.

foray toward the city was conducted. The second attack, like the first, was also little more than a rush forward, and the results were similar.<sup>87</sup> Confusion reigned. In the chaos, the Qatari's began to fire on the Saudis.<sup>88</sup> For the second time in the same night, the Iraqi armor that ringed the city's perimeter, including T-62 tanks, BTR-60 and BMP personnel carriers armed with Sagger missiles and cannons, repelled the Coalition forces' assault. At 0400 hours the task force withdrew past a burning Qatari tank to its original position south of the city. The attack was a total failure.<sup>89</sup> As the night gave way to dawn, nearly a dozen destroyed Arab-Coalition armored vehicles littering the periphery of the city, paid tribute to the failed attacks.

Despite the setbacks, all was not lost from the Coalition perspective. Throughout the night of January 30-31, Coalition planes, taking full advantage of their night-fighting ability, hammered two divisions of Iraq's 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps, which were detected assembling inside Kuwait for a follow-on attack into al-Khafji.<sup>90</sup> The Iraqi reliance upon the coastal highway would become critical during the battle. The Iraqis typically marshaled their vehicles in columns along the road for the attack. This technique made them highly vulnerable to the allied air forces. Allied planes proceeded to destroy the first and last vehicles in the columns, making it impossible for the other vehicles to move. Then the planes would conduct successive strafing runs on the column of immobilized vehicles. The results were dozens of Iraqi armored vehicles destroyed in a matter of minutes. At one point allied bombers pounded a 10-mile Iraqi armored column apparently headed for Saudi Arabia.<sup>91</sup>

Allied pilots were thrown into a bloodlust type of frenzy, which put them and their crews in danger. When reminded that the approaching daylight made their slow-moving aircraft vulnerable to surface-to-air missiles, one U.S. Air Force AC-130 attacking an Iraqi column at dawn on January 31<sup>st</sup> refused to return to base. The pilot

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<sup>87</sup> Gordan, Michael R. and Trainor, Bernard E., *The Generals War*, Boston, Ma, Little, Brown and Company, 1995, p. 282.

<sup>88</sup> John King, "Confusion in the Battle for Khafji," *The Guardian* (London), 2 February 1991.

<sup>89</sup> Gordan, Michael R. and Trainor, Bernard E., *The Generals War*, Boston, Ma, Little, Brown and Company, 1995, p. 282.

<sup>90</sup> Khaled Bin Sultan, *Desert Warrior*, Harper Collins, New York, 1995, p. 375.

<sup>91</sup> R. W. Apple, "Saudis Recapture Ghost Town; Allies Bomb New Iraqi Column; A 36-Hour Struggle," *The New York Times*, Section A; p. 1, 1 February 1991.

reportedly radioed his headquarters that there were just too many targets to break off the engagement. A short time afterward, the plane was shot down by an Iraqi surface-to-air missile and the entire crew of 14 airmen was lost.

The Iraqi soldiers in Khafji, expecting to be reinforced by tens of thousands of allies, would be disappointed. Since the Iraqi attack began on January 29<sup>th</sup>, 350 close-air-support missions were flown in connection with the ground actions, stifling all Iraqi ground maneuver.<sup>92</sup> When the follow-on units failed to arrive as scheduled, the throng of allied aircraft to the north certainly foretold the story of why their reinforcements had failed to arrive. This undoubtedly had a psychological impact on the Iraqis and subdued their motivation to continue defending the city.

The next allied assault on al-Khafji was planned for dawn which gave the attackers only a few short hours to prepare. Coalition commanders recognized that better coordination was needed and the communications problem had to be addressed before the next attack. Since the Marine reconnaissance teams in the city could only communicate with other Marines, the Arab forces were task-organized with Marine liaisons.<sup>93</sup> Task Force Taro provided anti-armor detachments, infantry security forces, air and naval gunfire liaison teams, and crucial artillery and air support.<sup>94</sup> The next attempt to dislodge the Iraqis was heavily supported by U.S. Marine fighter aircraft and helicopter gunships anxious to protect their fellow Marines trapped in the city.<sup>95</sup> Lieutenant Colonel White, a Marine pilot operating in support of the mission said that there was so much U.S. air power supporting the attack “that you had to dodge the aircraft.”<sup>96</sup>

The next attack began at 0730 hours, when Marine artillery began pounding Iraqi defenses in and around the town.<sup>97</sup> Initially, Coalition forces conducted a probing attack.

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<sup>92</sup> R. W. Apple, “Saudis Recapture Ghost Town; Allies Bomb New Iraqi Column; A 36-Hour Struggle,” *The New York Times*, Section A; p. 1, 1 February 1991.

<sup>93</sup> John King, “Confusion in the Battle for Khafji,” *The Guardian* (London), 2 February 1991.

<sup>94</sup> U.S. Marines in the Persian Gulf, 1990-1991: With the I Marine Expeditionary Force in Desert Shield and Desert Storm, History and Museums Division Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1991, p. 44.

<sup>95</sup> Rick Francona, *Ally to Adversary: An Eyewitness Account of Iraq's Fall from Grace*, Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, Maryland, 1999, p. 120.

<sup>96</sup> Marilyn Greene and Paul Hoversten, “Battle of Khafji Ends, But Portends More Action,” *Gannett News Service*, 1 February 1991.

<sup>97</sup> Gordan, Michael R. and Trainor, Bernard E., *The Generals War*, Boston, Ma, Little, Brown and Company, 1995, p. 285.

The stranded Marine Reconnaissance elements in the city radioed where the Iraqis were shifting their forces to react to the allied movement.<sup>98</sup> The 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 2<sup>nd</sup> Saudi Army National Guard Brigade, with ANGLICO naval gunfire spotter teams in support, attacked north and northeast into Khafji. Meanwhile, the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 2<sup>nd</sup> Saudi Army National Guard, supported by a Naval Gunfire Spotter Team, conducted the main Arab attack aimed at rescuing the two reconnaissance teams.<sup>99</sup> The Reconnaissance Marines that were hiding in Khafji reported that the fighting was far from organized. “The Saudi APCs (armored personnel carriers) came rolling in and once they encountered fire they just started shooting all over the place,” said one Marine.<sup>100</sup> The stranded reconnaissance Marines, who had by now witnessed two failed attempts by the Coalition Arabs to extract them, surveyed the battle unfolding around them. Despite the concentration of Iraqi forces around them, Corporal Ingraham decided to take matters into his own hands. As the story was later recounted:

Ingraham ordered his men to leave everything on the roof except their weapons. Then, carrying an M-16 rifle in one hand, a radio in another, and holding an orange cloth panel in his teeth to identify the team as friendly, Ingraham ran half a mile to the Saudi lines. “We escaped, linked up, extracted when the Saudis and their V-150s were just on the outskirts of the city. Either an Iraqi tank or APC was burning on the side of the building when we hit the street,” Ingraham later recalled. “The smoke and secondary explosions from it helped to cover our egress. We were very, very, very lucky throughout the whole ordeal.”<sup>101</sup>

The one constant in the battle of Khafji was confusion with the allies underestimating Iraqi strength and troop positions and Saudi troops firing wildly in areas of the city full of friendly forces.<sup>102</sup> The Saudis fought pitched battles within the city center against the Iraqi troops, reinforced with tanks and BMPs. Qatari forces repeatedly dashed in for sharp exchanges of cannon fire and heavy machine guns and then retreated

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<sup>98</sup> Al Santoli, “Lessons Learned in the Savage 1972 Eastertide Offensive Paid off at the Battle of Khafji Almost Two Decades Later.” [http://www.thehistorynet.com/Vietnam/articles/02963\\_text.htm](http://www.thehistorynet.com/Vietnam/articles/02963_text.htm).

<sup>99</sup> U.S. Marines in the Persian Gulf, 1990-1991: With the I Marine Expeditionary Force in Desert Shield and Desert Storm, History and Museums Division Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1991, p. 45.

<sup>100</sup> John King, “Confusion in the Battle for Khafji,” *The Guardian* (London), 2 February 1991.

<sup>101</sup> Gordan, Michael R. and Trainor, Bernard E., *The Generals War*, Boston, Ma, Little, Brown and Company, 1995, p. 285.

<sup>102</sup> John King, “Confusion in the Battle for Khafji,” *The Guardian* (London), 2 February 1991.

beyond the city line to regroup.<sup>103</sup> What one Marine termed “pretty fierce street fighting” eventually developed in the town’s center.<sup>104</sup> The Iraqi armor was countered by TOW missiles fired from Saudi armored units, and more than 45 of the enemy armored vehicles were destroyed. The Iraqi armor in Khafji was clearly no match for the allied missiles it confronted.<sup>105</sup> The Iraqi defenders, overwhelmed, out-gunned and cut off from their source of resupply, put up a valiant defense nonetheless. The sky was ablaze with rose-colored tracers and blinding yellow flashes from the pitched tank battles as the Coalition forces assaulted the city again and again.<sup>106</sup>

The presence of the helicopters flying at low level up and down Khafji’s streets gave the Saudis and their Qatari allies a psychological boost and rattled the Iraqis.<sup>107</sup> Pockets of Iraqi resistance were identified and subsequently reduced by artillery and air support. The city shuttered under the intensity of the fight, hardly a building was left unscarred. Eventually the weight of the allied offensive was too much for the Iraqi defenders to bear. The Iraqi soldiers, recognizing the futility of the struggle, one by one began to lay down their arms.

The task of clearing Khafji fell to the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Saudi Army National Guard. By 1600 hours on 1 February, the battalion reached the northern edge of the town and linked up with the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion.<sup>108</sup> It was then that the city of Al-Khafji was declared liberated.

That evening, under the glare of reporter’s camera lights, General Khaled held a press conference on the edge of town to announce the liberation of al-Khafji. In Riyadh, the commander of the American forces participating in Operation Desert Storm was saying U.S. forces had no role in the fighting to force Iraqi troops from Khafji. “Tell him that,” said a Marine officer, pointing to an exhausted Marine who had escaped from the

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<sup>103</sup> John King, “Battle For Khafji Swings to the Saudis,” *The Associated Press*, 31 January 1991.

<sup>104</sup> R. W. Apple, “Iraq Raid Across Saudi Border Leads U.S. Into Ground Combat; General Recounts Air Success,” *The New York Times*, Section A; p. 1, 31 January 1991.

<sup>105</sup> Malcolm W. Browne, “Invading Force is Destroyed as Saudi Town is Won Back,” *The New York Times*, Section A; p. 1, 1 February 1991.

<sup>106</sup> John King, “Battle For Khafji Swings to the Saudis,” *The Associated Press*, 31 January 1991.

<sup>107</sup> Gordan, Michael R. and Trainor, Bernard E., *The Generals War*, Boston, Ma, Little, Brown and Company, 1995, p. 285.

<sup>108</sup> U.S. Marines in the Persian Gulf, 1990-1991: With the I Marine Expeditionary Force in Desert Shield and Desert Storm, History and Museums Division Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1991, p. 44.

frontier town just minutes earlier, carrying with him a charred AK-47 he took from an Iraqi armored personnel carrier.<sup>109</sup>

Despite Saudi assertions that the border city of Khafji had been recaptured, fighting continued in the northern part of the town. Small-arms fire crackled throughout the night, and several units spent the next several days trying to ferret out a few Iraqis who had continued to resist.<sup>110</sup> Saudi vehicles equipped with loud speakers were dispatched into the city to compel the remaining Iraqi holdouts to surrender. A bright moon over the town lit a scene of devastation, where allied troops were moving cautiously because of the danger of booby traps.<sup>111</sup> Throughout the night Brazilian-made Iraqi artillery rockets, 130-millimeter “Astros”, traced fiery paths through the sky, hitting targets within friendly lines, but in the distance.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> John King, “Confusion in the Battle for Khafji,” *The Guardian* (London), 2 February 1991.

<sup>110</sup> Chris Hedges, “War in the Gulf: Combat Town Regained, Morale of Arab Allies is Lifted.” *The New York Times*, p. 5, 2 February 1991.

<sup>111</sup> Malcolm W. Browne, “Invading Force is Destroyed as Saudi Town is Won Back,” *The New York Times*, Section A; p. 1, 1 February 1991.

<sup>112</sup> Malcolm W. Browne, “Invading Force is Destroyed as Saudi Town is Won Back,” *The New York Times*, Section A; p. 1, 1 February 1991.

## **IV. CONCLUSION: OVERVIEW AND IMPLICATIONS**

### **A. CONCLUSION**

By initiating the attack on al-Khafji, Saddam Hussein sought to wrestle the strategic initiative from the American-led Coalition who had been waging a successful aerial campaign against his army for two weeks. Saddam Hussein attempted to use the Battle of Khafji as a propaganda mechanism to rally domestic and Arab nationalistic support for the Iraqi cause. Additionally, by attacking Saudi Arabia he attempted to destabilize or destroy the coalition arrayed against him and dampen American enthusiasm for the war. The Iraqi units destined to seize the Damman oil fields some 60 miles to the south of the Kuwaiti border failed to reach their objective or achieve their strategic purposes. However, the attack did serve to cause considerable disquiet in Riyadh and other Gulf capitals.<sup>113</sup> While not militarily successful, Khafji was a political boon for Saddam Hussein. The Battle of Khafji enabled Saddam to gain and was subsequently able to maintain substantial political capital in the Arab world.

The Battle of Khafji was not only a significant event in Desert Storm but indeed in the America's continuing saga with Saddam Hussein. The course of the Gulf War was permanently altered by the events at Khafji. Iraq never attempted a subsequent ground offensive, nor did it try to move armored units in large groups even at night. However, the effects of Khafji on the direction of the Gulf War lay more in the psyche of the two sides than in any physical alteration of the battlefield. Each discovered the true extent of its enemy's capabilities, both in skill and fighting spirit. The Saudis discovered that they could fight and win; the Iraqis shattered that same myth about their own military force. Finally, the Coalition passed its first ground operation test, and received some indications about how its forces would work together.<sup>114</sup>

### **B. THE AFTERMATH**

In sharp contrast to the rapid and decisive offensive that seized al-Khafji, the Iraqi defense of the city sputtered to an unremarkable conclusion. Allied air power had smashed the subsequent echelons of the Iraqi attack and had enabled the ground forces to

<sup>113</sup> Khaled Bin Sultan, *Desert Warrior*, Harper Collins, New York, 1995, p. 363.

<sup>114</sup> John F. Newell, *Airpower and the Battle of Khafji: Setting the Record Straight*, School of Advanced Airpower Studies Air University, June 1998, p. 42.

fight a relatively rapid and conclusive battle. American commanders in the area said that if the Iraqi soldiers had wanted to fight, they could have turned the battle into a bloody house-to-house confrontation that would have left far more dead and wounded. “With the force they had they could have tied us down for a week or longer,” Major Huddleston said.<sup>115</sup>

The Battle of Khafji was a dramatic introduction to warfare for the allied ground forces. The gruesome remains of battle littered the streets of the town. Numerous Iraqi, Saudi and Qatari armored vehicles, some with smoke pouring from the turrets, lay abandoned in the streets, several bearing the charred bodies of soldiers. Buildings and walls were pockmarked with bullet holes and, in many places, shattered by heavy shells.<sup>116</sup> This would be the first time that many of the young Coalition soldiers would face combat and they had been anxious to size up their battle-hardened Iraqi opponents. On a personal level, the Iraqis had fought courageously even though they were outgunned and overmatched. The individual Iraqi soldier made the Coalition forces pay heavily for the recapture of al-Khafji. Despite the fact that the allies enjoyed air superiority and an overwhelming advantage in firepower, the Saudis still suffered 18 dead, 29 wounded and lost dozens of armored vehicles.<sup>117</sup>

At the entrance to Khafji a small bus, guarded by Saudi soldiers with submachine guns, waited to drive to the rear. Inside, Iraqi soldiers in green uniforms stared vacantly out the windows and smoked cigarettes. One prisoner held his head between his hands.<sup>118</sup> The initiation of the battle of Khafji was a gamble for Saddam Hussein and in defeat he paid dearly. Over five hundred Iraqi soldiers, including several general officers, were taken prisoner. The Iraqis suffered several hundred dead, dozens wounded and nearly one hundred armored vehicles destroyed in al-Khafji alone. In Kuwait, the better part of three Iraqi Armored Divisions attacking south into Saudi Arabia had been destroyed.

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<sup>115</sup> Chris Hedges, “War in the Gulf: Combat Town Regained, Morale of Arab Allies is Lifted.” *The New York Times*, p. 5, 2 February 1991.

<sup>116</sup> Chris Hedges, “War in the Gulf: Combat Town Regained, Morale of Arab Allies is Lifted.” *The New York Times*, p. 5, 2 February 1991.

<sup>117</sup> Kim Murphy, “U.S. Forces Find Enemy Tougher Than Expected,” *Los Angeles Times*, Part A, p. 6, 3 February 1991.

<sup>118</sup> Chris Hedges, “War in the Gulf: Combat Town Regained, Morale of Arab Allies is Lifted.” *The New York Times*, p. 5, 2 February 1991.



The defeat at al-Khafji would go beyond the numbers of dead and wounded in Saudi Arabia. It would directly affect the resolve of all the Iraqi soldiers that still sat in their bunkers being continually pounded by Coalition aircraft, each of them knowing that the day would come that they too would have to square off against the Coalition ground forces. There would be no way to tally the effect of the Iraqi defeat at al-Khafji on the esprit and morale of Iraqi forces unwillingly deployed in Kuwait. It had to have been devastating.

The exhausted Saudi troops, their eyes red after two days of fighting, turned to the few onlookers along the road, raised their weapons over their heads, and shouted “Allah Akhbar!” – God is great.<sup>119</sup> Amid the hulks of burned-out armored vehicles and the skeletons of charred bodies, Saudi Arabian troops exulted Friday in crushing the Iraqi assault on Khafji.<sup>120</sup> “We are very proud, “ said a commander of a Qatari tank unit. “This is the first time our army has seen combat and we have been victorious.<sup>121</sup>

### C. ALLIED FAILURES

The Iraqi tactical successes during the Battle of Khafji illuminated shortcomings in allied intelligence capabilities. America touted its significant technological capabilities including satellites and sensing devices. However, it is difficult to explain how, with all of the sophisticated detection devices focused on the KTO, that allied intelligence analysts were unable to predict the attack until Iraqi forces were running amuck in Saudi Arabia. When asked for an explanation of the Iraqi successes Lieutenant General Thomas W. Kelly, director of operations for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said that allied forces had detected a reasonable amount of movement. However, “we can’t read the Iraqi high command or Saddam Hussein’s mind.”<sup>122</sup> This is a valid point. However, it does not explain how hundreds of armored vehicles could approach the border of Saudi Arabia without being challenged or even detected. Post war analysis reinforced

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<sup>119</sup> Chris Hedges, “War in the Gulf: Combat Town Regained, Morale of Arab Allies is Lifted.” *The New York Times*, p. 5, 2 February 1991.

<sup>120</sup> David Lamb, “Saudis Praised After Their First Test in Combat,” *Los Angeles Times*, Part A; p. 1, 2 February 1991.

<sup>121</sup> Chris Hedges, “War in the Gulf: Combat Town Regained, Morale of Arab Allies is Lifted.” *The New York Times*, p. 5, 2 February 1991.

<sup>122</sup> Broder J. M. and Kennedy J. M., “U.S. Planes Pummel Iraqis Along Border,” *Los Angeles Times*, Part A; p. 1, 2 February 1991.

shortcomings in intelligence acquisition and dissemination. It is a situation that still needs to be resolved.

One senior Army officer said that Khafji should not have been lost, even briefly. The initially unopposed incursion, he said, was the result of an “obvious oversight” on somebody’s part. In Riyadh, Schwarzkopf said Khafji fell because it had been abandoned on the first day of the war, “so there was no one there.”<sup>123</sup> Schwarzkopf was correct in asserting that the city of Khafji possessed no military value but the coalition staff should have recognized the potential political value of al-Khafji. Saddam was able to achieve a significant propaganda triumph by seizing sovereign Saudi territory, even if it was for a short period of time.

The tremendous success of the allied air campaign had likely lured the Coalition into a false sense of security. Given their initial success, the Coalition planners viewed an Iraqi attack as a highly improbable event. The Coalition was fortunate that the Iraqi forces underestimated the potential of air power and therefore failed to equip themselves sufficiently against the forthcoming air onslaught. Had they been properly equipped with adequate anti-aircraft artillery or surface-to-air missiles, the Battle of Khafji and indeed, the entire Gulf War, could have reached a different conclusion.

By most accounts, the tactical air command center (TACC) initially failed to grasp the size and scope of the Khafji attack and consequently did not divert a significant amount of airpower to the KTO. Clearly, there was confusion in the TACC about what was happening at Khafji, as a dubious General Horner had predicted that reported tank columns would be “mythical.”<sup>124</sup> Though initial contact between Iraqi ground forces and the Marines at OP-4 occurred at 2030L, the first of several TACC-directed aircraft arrived after 2300L.<sup>125</sup> The rapid response of Marine aircraft to the Khafji incursion highlights the difference in perspective between Boomer and Horner. For the Marines, the Khafji incursion superceded all other tasks and objectives. Boomer, as the I MEF commander, correctly perceived the Iraqi attack as a major threat to his subsequent

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<sup>123</sup> Kennedy J. M., “Allies Battle for Saudi town,” *Los Angeles Times*, Part A; p. 1, 31 January 1991.

<sup>124</sup> Hosterman Notes, 29/2231L January 1991 (Secret) Information extracted is unclassified.

<sup>125</sup> John F. Newell, *Airpower and the Battle of Khafji: Setting the Record Straight*, School of Advanced Airpower Studies Air University, June 1998, p. 52.

operations, and responded with a significant increase in Marine airpower.<sup>126</sup> Conversely, Horner and the personnel in the TACC had become lulled into a sense of complacency. They became fixated on executing the plan and therefore paid little attention to the events of the war as they unfolded on the ground. This led to their delayed response to the Iraqi attack.

There was also an apparent breakdown of the allied command and control apparatus. The flow of information from the tactical level to the strategic level was spotty. It was evident in the haphazard method that information about the battle was revealed to the media that the Allies were reacting to an unforeseen event. The one constant in the battle of Khafji was confusion, with allies underestimating Iraqi strength and troop positions, Saudi troops firing wildly in areas of the city full of friendly forces and Saudi and U.S. military officials giving inaccurate accounts of the situation.<sup>127</sup> In Washington, U.S. officials tried to downplay the significance of the fighting. “The (Iraqi) incursion ...did not represent the start of the ground war,” said President Bush’s spokesman, Marlin Fitzwater.<sup>128</sup> American efforts to dismiss the significance of the Iraqi presence on Saudi territory were unconvincing, particularly in light of the extensive allied efforts to remove the invading forces. It was also apparent that senior American leadership was not cognizant of the situation or of allied efforts to retake the city.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February, military officials were still denying that they had been complacent. They said they had not been taken by surprise on Tuesday night. Lieutenant General Walter Boomer, Commander of the U.S. Marines in the Gulf, insisted that the allies had been ready.<sup>129</sup> However, actions on the ground indicated an atmosphere of confusion. Interviews with U.S. and Arab soldiers in the area revealed that the allies were totally unprepared for the Iraqi move and scrambled to contain the Iraqi thrust with hastily called air strikes and artillery barrages.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> John F. Newell, *Airpower and the Battle of Khafji: Setting the Record Straight*, School of Advanced Airpower Studies Air University, June 1998, p. 53.

<sup>127</sup> John King, “The Gulf War: Confusion in the Battle for Khafji,” *The Guardian (London)*, p. 1, 2 February 1991.

<sup>128</sup> Kennedy J. M., “Allies Battle for Saudi Town,” *Los Angeles Times*, Part A; p. 1, 31 January 1991.

<sup>129</sup> Phil Davison and Tim Kelsey, “Crisis in the Gulf: Blood and Blunders in the Battle for Khafji,” *The Independent (London)*, p. 13, 3 February 1991.

<sup>130</sup> Phil Davison and Tim Kelsey, “Crisis in the Gulf: Blood and Blunders in the Battle for Khafji,” *The Independent (London)*, p. 13, 3 February 1991.

## 1. Did Saddam Achieve his Goals?

It is difficult to ascertain whether Saddam Hussein was successful in achieving his objectives because he has never publicly divulged the Iraqi intentions of the offensive. Given the massive size of the force committed to the attack it appears that Saddam was endeavoring to achieve decisive military and political gains. It is likely that the enormous gamble that he took probably fell well short of his ambitions.

Politically, Saddam emerged victorious in the eyes of many Arabs. Diplomats and analysts observed that he did not need to defeat the coalition militarily to emerge as a political victor.<sup>131</sup> Always the opportunist, the Iraqi leader skillfully turned the military defeat into a propaganda triumph. Despite the losses, Iraq hailed the attack at Khafji as a great victory. “They fled in front of us like women and like shepherds roving aimlessly in the desert,” said one Iraqi soldier in an interview on a Baghdad radio station.<sup>132</sup>

Newspaper reports made it evident that the Battle of Khafji increased Saddam’s stock in the Arab world. “Khafji may be Saddam’s October war,” a Cairo-based European diplomat said, citing Egypt’s October, 1973, war against Israel.<sup>133</sup> According to a senior Tunisian official quoted in a New York Times story datelined January 23, “If the people are with Saddam, it is because he is challenging the Western world. He is a symbol of pride. Arab people feel humiliated, especially regarding Israel and the lack of progress of the intifada,” the Palestinian uprising in Israeli-occupied territory.” “The Arabs”, the unidentified official said, “are hoping that through Saddam they will regain a sense of dignity.”<sup>134</sup>

However, militarily, the Iraqis took a beating. Casualties ranged into the thousands and the Iraqis lost hundreds of armored vehicles. The roughly 700 Iraqi soldiers that stayed and fought coalition forces in Khafji either died or surrendered. Additionally, the Iraqi forces lost the better part of three divisions to Coalition airpower

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<sup>131</sup> Michael Evans, “Thirty-Six Hours at Khafji Mark Turning Point in Conflict,” *The Times*, Section: Overseas News; p. 1, 1 February 1991.

<sup>132</sup> Broder J. M. and Kennedy J. M., “U.S. Planes Pummel Iraqis Along Border,” *Los Angeles Times*, Part A; p. 1, 2 February 1991.

<sup>133</sup> Bill Taylor, “Coalition Forces Brace for Second Onslaught,” *The Toronto Star*, p. A1, 1 February 1991.

<sup>134</sup> “First U.S. Deaths on Ground Combat,” *Facts on File World News Digest*, p. 57A1, 31 January 1991.

before they could even be committed to the fray in Saudi Arabia. If Saddam had intended the raid to lure allied forces into a ground war before they were ready, he failed. General Schwarzkopf's comment, this is "just one battle, not the war" likely put the battle into proper context. The American supreme allied commander conceded that the Iraqi tactical move won valuable propaganda points for President Saddam Hussein but few military rosettes.<sup>135</sup>

## 2. Lessons Learned

It is important to understand that time provides a lens through which we can more accurately examine and access any event. The confusion created by the Iraqi onslaught made it difficult for Allied leadership to conduct an accurate appraisal of the situation and adjust their warplans accordingly. Many of the lessons learned during the Battle of Khafji are now just clearly coming into focus.

Immediately after the Battle of Khafji, there was a perception that Iraq had asserted itself militarily and demonstrated that its army was still relatively capable. By successfully attacking into Saudi Arabia, the Iraqi army accomplished a feat that few Western participants thought was possible. After two weeks of absorbing abuse from the coalition air forces, the Iraqi army was thought to be near collapse. At the time, it was suggested that the most prominent lesson of Khafji was also the simplest: the Iraqis, in General Schwarzkopf's words, "certainly have a lot of fight left in them."<sup>136</sup>

The Khafji action brought renewed respect for the Iraqi Army from the allied military forces. "It was quite a shock to me that they got that many vehicles together across the border without getting them shot up. It made me think twice about what the Air Force is claiming with its bombing," said Sgt. E. J. Ingram, 25, an artilleryman with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division.<sup>137</sup> Though allied forces crushed the Iraqi incursions and reportedly inflicted heavy casualties, many of the soldiers who waged the initial ground war say the enemy they fought was not the tired, demoralized, frightened army they expected to encounter. Instead, many in the U.S. armed forces were expecting the Iraqi

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<sup>135</sup> Michael Evans, "Thirty-Six Hours at Khafji Mark Turning Point in Conflict," *The Times*, Section: Overseas News; p. 1, 1 February 1991.

<sup>136</sup> George J. Church, "Combat in the Sand," *Time*, p. 25, 11 February 1991.

<sup>137</sup> Kim Murphy, "U.S. Forces Find Enemy Tougher than Expected," *Los Angeles Times*, Part A; p. 6, 3 February 1991. I suspect that the reporter misidentified the Sergeants unit.

army to put up a substantial fight. It became apparent that the inevitable ground war could span not weeks but months.<sup>138</sup>

Time has shed a different light on the significance of the battle. In the book *The Generals War; The Inside Story of the Conflict in the Gulf*, Lieutenant General Bernard Trainor has suggested that General Schwarzkopf failed to recognize that the Battle of Khafji was a defining moment in the Gulf War. Trainor has heaped stinging criticism on Schwarzkopf concerning his actions, or lack of actions, after the battle. He suggests that had Schwarzkopf properly analyzed Iraqi capabilities following the battle he would have halted the army's movement westward and started the ground war immediately. My experience during the battle leads me to believe that the Iraqis that fought in Khafji fought with much more tenacity than Trainor gives them credit for. Hindsight is 20/20, but given the circumstances it would have been impossible to conclude that the Iraqis were going to capitulate the way that they did when the Coalition initiated the ground combat phase of Operation Desert Storm.

Operational analysis of the Battle of Khafji ultimately contributed to the success of the allied ground offensive by providing a vivid illustration of Iraqi warfighting capabilities and limitations. This action provided Coalition war planners with copious amounts of timely intelligence concerning the capabilities and limitations of the Iraqi forces prior to the initiation of the ground war. Nearly a dozen prisoners-of-war were captured in the U.S. Marine Corps area of operations after the battle. They were interrogated and willingly provided valuable information concerning the Iraqi army and its intent. The following day, the Marines quickly took notice and reported on the poor state of repair of the captured Iraqi armored vehicles.<sup>139</sup> The action also demonstrated the Iraqi inability to effectively operate under periods of limited visibility.

The Battle of Khafji also served to dispel the myth that the Iraqi Army was invincible. Despite their overwhelming numerical advantage during the actions at Umm Hujul and south of the al-Wafra forest, the Iraqi advances were repulsed. The Battle of Khafji served as a test-bed for revamped American doctrine and equipment. These

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<sup>138</sup> Kim Murphy, "U.S. Forces Find Enemy Tougher than Expected," *Los Angeles Times*, Part A; p. 6, 3 February 1991.

<sup>139</sup> Richard Lacayo, "Five Decisive Moments," *Time*, p. 32, 11 March 1991.

actions validated the effectiveness of Marine maneuver warfare doctrine including the integration of air and ground forces working in concert. Although the Marines were numerically overmatched and outgunned, they were able to blunt the western-most prongs of the Iraqi advances by integrating the overwhelming firepower of air forces into the combat equation. LtGen Boomer, the senior Marine commander, later commented that the most important lesson of Khafji was that

...in a fight with the Iraqis, if you bloody their nose in round one, they do not want to come out for round two... It demonstrated some things that we were beginning to feel...I began to feel more and more confident about accomplishing my mission without getting a lot of marines killed.<sup>140</sup>

The battle provided U.S. military planners with their first opportunity to see how Iraq's troops operated against American mobile tactics. It became apparent that the Iraqis themselves had not mastered the art of combined-arms operations as evidenced when the armor units that attacked Khafji did so without the support of indirect fires or air defense assets, this, in spite of ten years of war with Iran. Khafji was a bitter lesson in what allied airpower could do to an army stripped of air cover.<sup>141</sup> The Iraqis performed badly, surrendering en masse when the Marines counterattacked. "They showed us that they couldn't handle combined operations," says a senior Pentagon official. "They maneuvered but couldn't work effectively as a unit."

Khafji also served to remove U.S. doubt concerning its own military capability. The senior American military officers that planned and orchestrated Desert Storm had been junior officers during the Vietnam conflict. They were determined to apply lessons learned from their own failed war. They effected the coordination between American political leadership and the military leadership that was instrumental for our success in the Gulf. These senior military leaders also assured that the American military forces committed to the Gulf arrived with the best equipment available and were well trained prior to their commitment into battle.

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<sup>140</sup> "Special Trust and Confidence Among the Trail-Breakers." Interview with LtGen Walter E. Boomer, USMC. Command General, I Marine Expeditionary Force. U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, 117 no. 11/1,065 (November 1991): 47-50.

<sup>141</sup> Gordan, Michael R. and Trainor, Bernard E., *The Generals War*, Boston, Ma, Little, Brown and Company, 1995, p. 288.

Another significant aspect of the battle was the Saudi and Qatari participation in retaking the city. Arab forces in the Coalition had not been tested in modern battle and their contribution to the coalition was viewed primarily as political in nature. After the combined Saudi and Qatari forces successfully dislodged the Iraqi force holed up in the city, Arab coalition morale soared. For the Saudis who were stung by widespread suggestions that they lacked the will to fight for their homeland, Khafji was a vindication.<sup>142</sup> Respect for the Arab military forces participating in the coalition increased so much that the Arab Forces of the Coalition were used in the difficult mission of dislodging Iraqi defenders in Kuwait City.

The Battle of Khafji served to steel the resolve of the coalition against Saddam Hussein. The Arab members were now full-fledged members of the partnership and as such they were fully committed to seeing the conflict through to a successful conclusion. General Khaled summed the significance of the battle best when he said:

The battle of al-Khafji's importance lay primarily in what it did for morale, ours and Iraq's. After al-Khafji, every man on our side knew that we were going to win the war, and every man on his side knew that they were going to lose it.<sup>143</sup>

Another critical lesson of the battle that was not immediately apparent to the senior Allied leaders was the significant capabilities of airpower. Air power enthusiasts within the Air Force had vocally advocated the potential of airpower on the modern day battlefield. Subsequent reviews of the contribution of airpower during the battle revealed its enormous impact. Aircraft acting without support from ground forces had blunted a three-division attack and stymied a major Iraqi initiative. Subsequently, the Air Force has touted the Battle of Khafji as an example of the tremendous capability that airpower brings to the battle.

Besides boosting morale and confidence, the outcome at Khafji did not shift the initiative to the Coalition in any real sense. It simply offered of a glimpse into the future. The Iraqi military was out-gunned, out-trained and out-classed.<sup>144</sup> Significantly, the

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<sup>142</sup> Apple R. W., "War in the Gulf: Khafji Clash: Whose Loss?; U.S., Saudis and Iraq can Claim Benefits," *The New York Times*, Section 1; p. 1, 2 February 1991.

<sup>143</sup> Khaled Bin Sultan, *Desert Warrior*, Harper Collins, New York, 1995, p. 362.

<sup>144</sup> John F. Newell, *Airpower and the Battle of Khafji: Setting the Record Straight*, School of Advanced Airpower Studies Air University, June 1998, p. 45.



actions that occurred during the Battle of Khafji served to dampen morale of the Iraqi army and ultimately foretold the fate of the Iraqi Army during the ground war to come.

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