




**SCOUT/TF 2-325 AIR
OPERATION DESERT STORM**

By


**CPT Robert R. Craig
30 Jun 2003
ICCC Class 2-03**



On G-1 at 231100 Feb 1991, Task Force (TF) 2-82, the 2d Brigade of the 82d Airborne Division (ABN DIV) attacked into Iraq in support of Operation Desert Storm. TF 2-82, commanded by COL Ronald Rokosz, was under operational control (OPCON) to the French 6th Light Armor Division (LAD) (Caraccilo, 9). As the Reconnaissance Platoon Leader of TF 2-325 Airborne Infantry Regiment (AIR), the 2d Battalion of TF 2-82, my main mission was to ensure that TF 2-325 AIR was prepared to attack and defeat Iraqi forces near As-Salman in Western Iraq. By the time TF 2-82 attacked, my recon platoon had already completed almost all the combat missions we would perform. While not every mission was flawless, my recon platoon accomplished its mission, gained valuable combat experience, and suffered no casualties.

As some of the first forces in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), TF 2-325 AIR arrived around 12 August 1990. Our first combat mission on the night of 25 January 1991 could not have come sooner for the men of my platoon. After six long and tedious months in the KSA, we were more than ready for a fight if for no other reason than we could then go home. But the events leading up to this night began many months previous on the night of 6 August 1991 at Ft. Bragg, North Carolina. As part of the 82d Airborne Division's Ready Brigade 1 (DRB 1), rumors constantly ran rampant concerning possible deployments. If no recent rumor existed, then we would entertain thoughts of where we could possibly deploy and undoubtedly start a new rumor. Thus was life as a soldier in the DRB 1.

The invasion of Kuwait on 2 August 1990 by Iraqi forces under Saddam Hussein provided plenty of material for DRB 1 rumors. The 82d was ending its summer ROTC



training cycle. When no alert was initiated by the end of the week, it seemed that the Iraqi invasion was just another event to be put in the past. The weekend passed with no alert, and so the rumor generators looked for another current event. On Monday evening, 6 August 1990, I called Joe Hubisch, a former fellow platoon leader and good friend. Joe worked at brigade after leading a rifle platoon in A Company, 2-325 AIR. If a Mid-East deployment was planned, he would know. He told me that he had been at division all day, and things were quiet. I knew he wouldn't tell me anything that was unauthorized, but he would have at least cautioned me to perhaps 'stay by the phone,' or 'don't let your guard down.' But Joe assured me that as far as he knew nothing was happening.

When I got a phone call around 2330 hours that night from the HHC CQ informing me of an Alpha alert, I was not concerned. I got dressed, gathered my ruck sack and A-bag, and headed to work. I kissed my wife good-bye and informed her that I would see her in a while. I told her it would be at least a couple of hours and perhaps as long as a couple of days. As I left the house, never did the thought cross my mind that the next time I would see her would be March, 1991.

Generally speaking, Desert Shield was a time of acclimatizing and intense training. Although deployment of the force, while strategically challenging, was quick and effective, sustaining the force, both in camp and in the field, was extremely challenging. TF 2-82 was neither prepared nor trained for an extended deployment from a DRB 1. For many months, the day to day living in a secured camp site was primitive if not crude. Problems during field training were exacerbated by our desert unfriendly weapons and


[REDACTED]

equipment. The biggest challenges were fire power and mobility for a light airborne force.

PART I: DESERT SHIELD - DEPLOYMENT, TRAINING, AND BUILD UP

The 82d ABN DIV standard for moving a BN TF anywhere in the world to support a National Command Authority (NCA) mission is 'wheels up' in 18 hours. This means that the force has left Pope Air Force Base, North Carolina, and is prepared to conduct operations upon delivery by the United States Air Force. Desert Shield commenced with this sequence, but due to political posturing, "wheels up" occurred five days after the alert. We arrived in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, on 12 August 1991 in 100 degree weather. The peculiar thing was it was close to midnight when we arrived! Iraqi forces were postured along the Kuwaiti-Saudi border but had come no further. We did not arrive to the frantic situation we had anticipated. Instead of jumping into a hot landing zone and conducting a night movement to contact to establish an anti-armor defense, we drug our tired selves to a small burlap tent pitched on a sand bar near the air field.


Back at Ft. Bragg, we had been briefed to be prepared to move immediately to an area and establish an anti-armor defense, but because we were given no specific grid coordinates, we did little planning. Instead of conducting a combat operation, we were moved to a vacant trailer park near Al -Jubayl. Named Falcon Base, this was to be our home for the next month while we conducted our mission. As a TF, we were ordered to 1) protect the force, 2) acclimatize to the operational environment, and 3) prep for combat. These missions were under the umbrella of deterring an Iraqi attack.



We diligently executed the 'protect the force mission.' The terrorist threat was real, and we provided our own security. Acclimatizing meant spending time outdoors and conducting physical activity in the 120 to 130 degree temperatures. Because we were on a combat deployment, we could not easily leave the compound and conduct training, so acclimatizing really meant physical training (PT) and Common Task Testing (CTT). Meanwhile, the battalion leadership continued to prepare for an anti-armor defense. We defended from outside Al-Jubayl near the airport and the main north-south highway. An Iraqi mounted attack would have either quickly defeated or bypassed us. In retrospect, a more logical plan would have been to defend inside of Al-Jubayl. We could have held out for weeks by forcing the Iraqis into an urban operation (Lerario, Interview).

The TF accomplished the three missions initially assigned. However, at Falcon Base, we began to encounter our first problems. As a light airborne force, we deployed with little more than two weeks supply of anything. Meals Ready To Eat (MRE) were issued but eaten sparingly. We anticipated deployment to the Kuwaiti-Saudi border, and eating the MREs we currently had would diminish our supplies. The supply lines were still very immature. The mobile kitchens were either en-route or, more likely, back at Ft. Bragg. So for the first couple of days, even though we had MREs in our ruck sacks, we ate dates, almonds, rolls, and drank bottled water. A few more days into the deployment, and we were eating sandwiches from Hardee's. Eventually, local contracts provided adequate meals. Finally, the mobile kitchens caught up with us.

We did not deploy with running shoes and PT gear. We did PT in boots and BDU bottoms with an olive drab (OD) t-shirt. We were required to conduct garrison-like



training (hip pocket, CTT, etc.) but had no resources. Small unit leaders wrote on MRE boxes and Hardee's bags. Personal hygiene items ran low. Soldiers shaved with soap, brushed their teeth without toothpaste, and gave each other bad haircuts. Soldiers ran out of tobacco products. They used the coffee in the MREs and tried to trade local workers for cigarettes. They had a difficult time buying from the locals because few had deployed with any cash. Life in Al-Jubayl was a challenge, but the soldiers of TF 2-325 AIR were well disciplined and survived. Squad leaders worked small miracles for their troops; in fact small unit leadership held the battalion together.

TF 2-82 deployed on 23 August 1990 and again on 30 August 1990 to set up anti-armor defenses. The deployments were rehearsals for the defense of Al-Jubayl airfield and port (Lerario, Interview). Dealing with intense heat, harsh sand, long distances, and little cover and concealment were lessons we learned after just 24 hours away from the trailer park. To win in this environment, we knew we were going to have to make some adaptations, both tactically and logistically. Had the Iraqis attacked at this time, they would not have had much to attack. The desert itself would have devoured most of the task force. However, after six months of learning the desert fight, we were well-prepared to win.

TF 2-82 handed over the mission to deter an attack to Marine Central Command (MARCENT) on 25 August 1990. Rumors began to abound that we would be headed back to Ft. Bragg within the week. Oh, how wrong we were. Instead of a heroic return to Fayetteville and family, we were moved south 100 miles to Ab Qaiq (Map, p. 7). Commonly referred to as "Butt Cake" by the TF soldiers, Ab Qaiq is one of those places

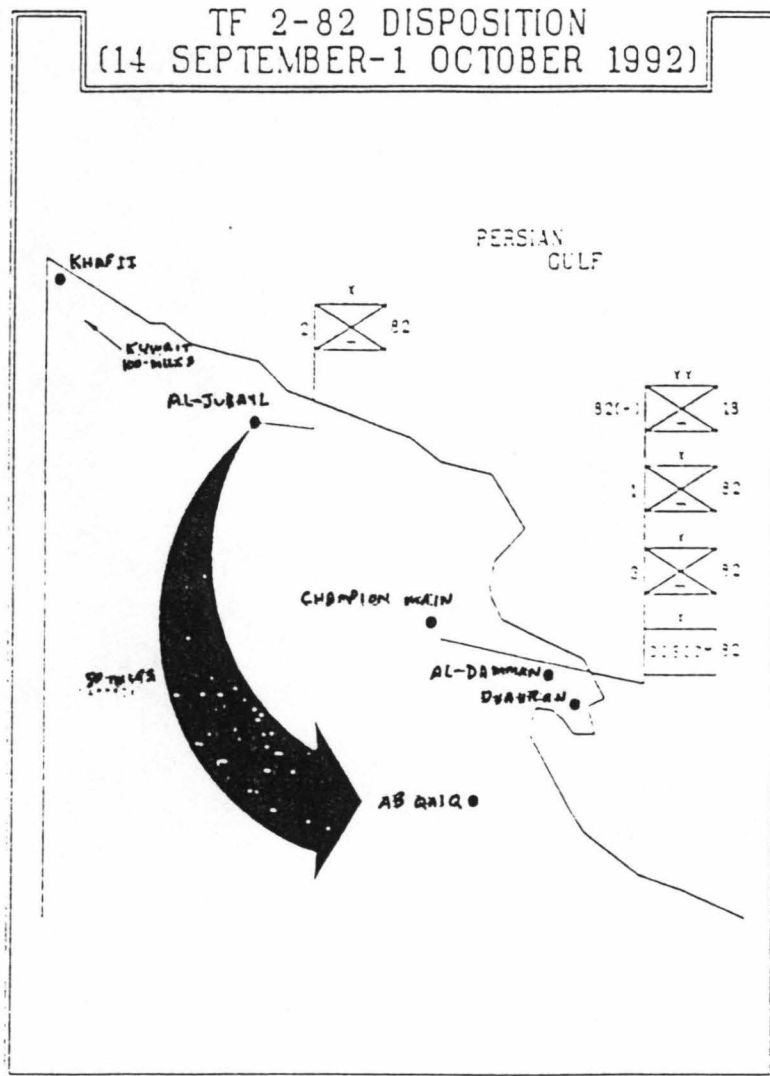



Fig. 5.3. Redeployment map for TF 2-82, from al-Jubayl to Ab Qaiq, 14 September to 1 October 1992. Illustration by Curtis L. Irland.

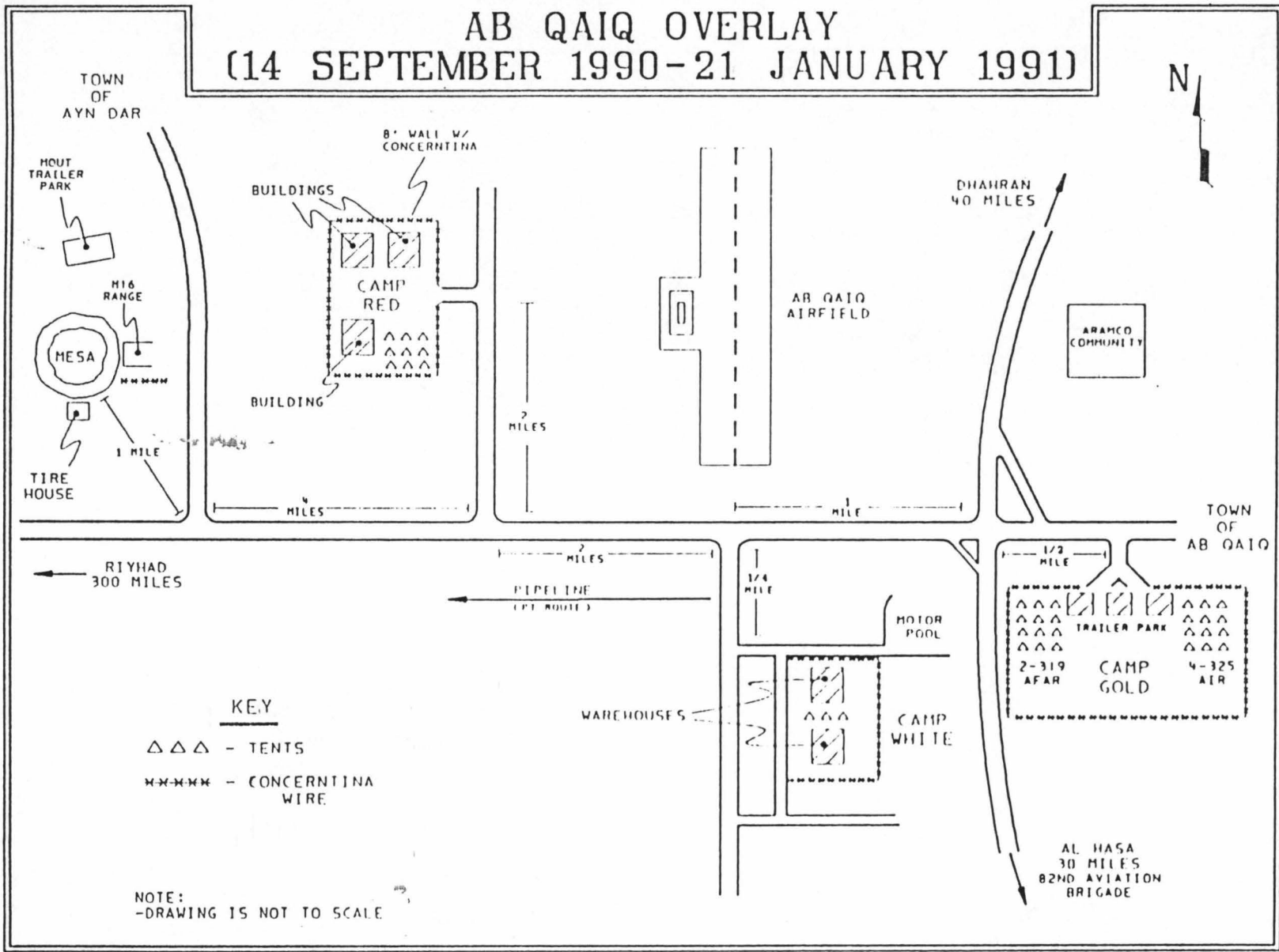


that is stereotypical of the Arabian desert; namely sand, camels, and ugly! We were sent there to defend US interests in the area (oil wells) and become the 18th Airborne Corps reserve. We all thought it was punishment for entertaining hopes of returning to the United States. This would be our home until 21 January 1991 when we moved north for combat operations in Operation Desert Storm.

In Ab Qaiq, TF 2-325 moved into an abandoned mechanical compound. Named Camp White, the camp was near an auto salvage yard, and the perimeter had a chain link fence all the way around (Map, p. 9). Inside Camp White, the entire BN TF and BDE TF staff crowded into two small warehouses that were initially smothered in pigeon waste. But that wasn't all bad, as it turned out to be a real mission for the decontamination section of our chemical units. The other two battalions lived in tents within a few miles of Camp White (Map, p.9). We got as comfortable as one can get when living in an open warehouse in extreme heat. Training continued from Ab Qaiq. We were in an excellent situation to conduct training since there were no training distracters. Although we were somewhat constrained by the "protect the force" mission, we constructed ranges, ammo was abundant, and space was unlimited (Caraccilo, 47).

My scout platoon worked on link-up procedures, movement in the open space, and long movements. In the desert, we trained the same tactics as we did at Ft. Bragg, but adapted them to the new environment. We learned how to hide in the openness and survive in a hide position during the heat of the day. We learned where the scorpions were likely to be and how to keep water cool in canteens. Between PT, long road marches, and

AB QAIQ OVERLAY (14 SEPTEMBER 1990-21 JANUARY 1991)



[REDACTED]

EXEVALS, my scouts were well prepared for what they did in Iraq in January, 1991.

One of my squad leaders (SSG Darrel Cassle) and I had been training for the Best Ranger Competition prior to deployment. With the long desert movements we conducted in our training, I felt prepared for the foot movements of the competition.

Finally, Ab Qaiq camp life was characterized by primitive although steadily improving living conditions. It was here that we made the transition from defending the KSA to removing Saddam Hussein from Kuwait (Caraccilo, 88). We learned how to live in crowded conditions with no privacy. We endured countless rumors of re-deployment to Ft. Bragg. We trained harder than we ever had as a task force. We learned how to fight in the desert. And we grew close with our fellow soldiers. We solidified the brotherhood that exists between soldiers as hardships are endured.

PART II: THE AIR WAR

My scout platoon spent the majority of Desert Storm on a screen line in western Iraq south of As-Salman, Iraq, and north of Rafha, Saudi Arabia. Generally speaking, living conditions were difficult to harsh. The desert winter was difficult on soldiers normally prepared for tropical climates. By this point in the deployment, the attitude of soldiers was one of "let's hurry up and get this done so we can go home!" It was also the period where my platoon conducted our five recon missions.

We moved from Ab Qaiq around 21 January 1991 and by 23 January 1991 occupied tactical assembly area (TAA) Hawk. Moving the force to TAA Hawk was no small feat. TAA Hawk, the home for TF 2-82, was approximately 450 miles northwest of Ab Qaiq

[REDACTED]

within the 6th LADs (French) area (Map, p 12). Because it was such a long distance, TF 2-325 AIR could not be moved in its entirety, and the unit arrived piece-meal. Although we were one of the first elements of TF 2-325 AIR to arrive, my scout platoon spent less than 24 hours in TAA Hawk. We were almost immediately deployed in combat operations. Thirty-two days on the screen line north of TAA Hawk was enough to harden any soldier. The air-war began on 17 Jan 1991. Cold and wet weather, as well as sand storms, also began at this time and lasted intermittently until our departure.

Even though my platoon was a task force asset, we were under operational control (OPCON) to Delta Company (D Co). Logistics and mobility were the biggest reasons for this relationship. I had recently served as a D Co (anti-tank) platoon leader and had a good relationship with the unit, especially the company commander CPT Mike Lerario. D Co and my platoon spent over a month forward (north) of TAA Hawk. As a unit, we never came off the screen line. D Co conducted the screen up until G-1 and TF 2-82s attack. Our mission was to support D Co by covering dead space and patrolling between their positions. We lived out of our fighting positions and battled daily with the cold, precipitation, and wind.

To survive in these forward positions, we combined field craft learned the previous six months with the mental and physical stamina we had gained. The first 10 days of the 32 spent north of TAA Hawk were filled with adrenaline rushes and emotional intensity; the days of the reconnaissance missions. The remainder of the time was characterized by boredom, speculation, and both physical and emotional perseverance. Day to day life

[REDACTED]

after the completion of our last reconnaissance mission on 30 January 1991 was physically painful and emotionally challenging.

PART III: THE RECONNAISSANCE MISSIONS

22 January 1991

The weather turned markedly colder by the middle of January. The significance of this is that for the next 40 to 50 days, we would be exposed to the elements and some of that time was without adequate gear i.e. sleeping bags. Precipitation in the form of extremely heavy fog, thick morning dew, and light but long lasting showers, combined with the cold, made for miserable living conditions. The morning dew was so thick that when we woke up, it appeared that we had slept through a major rainstorm. If the temperature dipped below the freezing point, sheets of ice and frost covered us and our gear in the mornings. More than a handful of times, we had to "break ice" on our equipment. This was the type of weather we experienced during our reconnaissance missions. However, it gave us an advantage. It was cold enough to make a stationary soldier bundle up and not want to move to cover his sector. But it wasn't cold enough to severely hamper a soldier moving on a patrol.

Around this time, we were introduced to what was called a "shamail." A shamail was a desert windstorm that kicked up dust and sand. During one of these storms, visibility was degraded to as low as 100 meters, depending on how severe the storm. They would last about 72 hours, with the extremely low visibility periods occurring about mid way through. Cleaning the sand out of our equipment, weapons, and selves after a shamail took a few hours. Months later, at Ft. Bragg, I still had sand coming out of my ears. The

[REDACTED]

days were overcast and cold. The ground was hard and rocky unlike the sandy soil of Ab Qaiq. Between the threat of an attack as we moved to TAA Hawk and the change in the weather, there was a change in the attitude of the soldiers. There was an eerie feeling. For months we had prepared, thought, and dreamed about these times. They were finally here. I could tell my platoon was getting very focused and serious.

After leaving Ab Qaiq on 21 January 1991, we boarded a C-130 and flew to King Fahd Military City (KFMC). Our transportation for movement north was not yet available, and so we had to spend the night on the tarmac at KFMC. Early on the morning of 22 January 1991, a National Guard transportation unit (5-ton trucks) from New Jersey was attached to TF 2-325 AIR, and we moved north to the Saudi-Iraqi border north of Rafha, KSA to TAA Hawk (Map, p 15).

Near Rafha, KSA, a border dispute between Iraq and the KSA existed. Civilians in that area either didn't know or didn't respect the established border. Iraqi nationals were living in Saudi and vice versa. As we trucked north to TAA Hawk, we passed through numerous small Saudi towns. We were informed that most of the population in that area was Iraqi nationals. The task force intelligence officer (S2) briefed that the local population would be neutral toward us. However, because Allied forces had started bombing Iraq, we were not convinced.

Now TF 2-325 AIR's purpose was to move and protect the force into TAA Hawk. We treated the movement to TAA Hawk with caution. The main body moved in 5-ton trucks and D Co provided front, flank, and rear security. As we rolled through urban areas,


[REDACTED]

soldiers in the back would face out with the weapon at the ready. In retrospect, the threat was minimal. We probably had more of a chance of casualties from a vehicular accident or an accidental discharge than from a hostile. However, at the time, especially with the threat of terrorism, our diligent security measures were the right thing to do. It also put the soldiers in the necessary frame of reference for where we were headed. We reached TAA Hawk without incident.

23 January 1991

Events during our first day at TAA Hawk were, for the most part, uneventful. The BN TF was positioned between two French brigades that arrived a few days ahead of us. They led us into our positions and coordinated right and left limits. By early afternoon, my platoon was digging our fighting/survival positions. We were positioned near the BN tactical operations center (TOC) and thus were not assigned a sector of fire. We had to spread out more than I wanted due to standing water in numerous locations.


Later that afternoon, I finally got to see a map of our AO. I was shocked to find out that we were actually in Iraq! The border between Iraq and the KSA was in dispute, and different maps had different borders. The map we used during operations showed that we were in Iraq. The terrain had some relief, unlike as Ab Qaiq and Al-Jubayl. Vegetation was visibly present although nothing higher than the knee. It did not provide concealment. However, numerous outcroppings and ravines provided both cover and concealment. The dominating piece of terrain was an "escarpment" that ran from west to east for many miles. I had never heard the term escarpment used to describe terrain. I had to ask what it was. Once I saw it, I equated it to a mesa of the southwestern United



States. The difference was that, unlike a mesa, the escarpment stretched for at least a hundred miles and didn't have a distinct beginning or end. The recognized border between Iraq and the KSA was the top of the escarpment. Iraqi outposts on the top of this piece of terrain (specifically Objective Green) would be the subject of our reconnaissance (Map, p 18).

Late in the evening, a chemical alert was sounded, and we donned our protective masks. The French chemical detectors had sounded, and everyone had reacted appropriately. We were used to these chemical alerts. To this point, none had been credible, and we were fine with that. However, it was a hassle to don the mask and continue work. Some soldiers had become lax and cynical about chemical alerts. But on the Iraqi border, the alert was taken serious. The "all clear" was given a short time later, and normal activity continued.

Finally, I was glad to be away from the mainstream television coverage of the war. At Ab Qaiq, we had one station that received US news programs. We were all hungry for news, but I had no appetite for the sensational or speculation. The stories that bothered me the most concerned the political careers of world leaders involved in the conflict. Polls showing the popularity of George Bush, Margaret Thatcher, Mikhail Gorbachev, and numerous others filled the air waves. My concern was with the safety of my soldiers. Other topics included the popularity of the war itself and potential fall out. All I wanted




to know was where and when do we attack. I wanted news meaningful to my situation. While I did not watch the coverage, my friends and soldiers did. They would continually discuss the latest speculation. It was a relief to be rid of that source. Our only source for news came in the form of reports from the chain of command, and I was comfortable with these sources of information.

24 January 1991

We received our first platoon mission in Desert Storm. It was a 2-3 day mission in conjunction with D Co. We were supposed to screen the brigade's flank as LTC John R. Vines' 4-325 AIR Gold Falcons moved into position. It was a limited mission, and my sniper squad leader was disappointed that the snipers were not involved. D Co set up a screen line but could not cover dead space to its front. I assigned an area of dead space for each squad to cover. The squads would move by foot to and from the positions and occupy them only during hours of limited visibility. Each squad coordinated with the D Co platoon in whose sector they patrolled. This included departure and re-entry times and locations, number of personnel, and challenge and password.

Because CPT Lerario (D Co CDR) had the task force's anti-tank weapons systems, he would be in charge of the screen. He and I conducted a map recon of the screen line and identified positions for my scouts. The TF 2-325 AIR S3, MAJ Karl Horst, wanted us to go with him on a leader's recon to the area where we would conduct the screen. SSG Mizer's 1st Squad and one of SSG Barnes' sniper teams went with me. We looked at the rocky but relatively flat terrain that led to the 350-foot escarpment that rose out of the desert floor. It was an impressive sight. After about an hour of looking over the terrain,



I got my first look at an enemy soldier! The 45th Iraqi Division, a seasoned regular army unit and veteran of the eight-year war with Iran, opposed us (Caraccilo, 99). We saw several vehicles that moved across our front and would periodically stop. Even though we shot an azimuth to them for a fire mission, we just watched them for about 20 minutes. As soon as they topped the escarpment and went out of sight, we departed so I could get my squads ready.

I returned to the D Co command post (CP) and did a quick planning to generate an operations order (OPORD). A couple of hours into the planning, CPT Lerario broke some bad news to me. The scout mission had changed from manning forward observation posts (OP) to patrolling between positions on the screen line. I was very disappointed because patrolling between positions wasn't how we were supposed to be used. Because it was late in the day, I wouldn't have time to go back to TAA Hawk to pick up the rest of my platoon and develop another plan. CPT Lerario told me that we would begin the mission the next night.


The soldiers in the platoon were very disappointed about the change. They were not happy about conducting a mission that was more suited for a line company squad. I didn't like it either, but the line companies had not yet closed on TAA Hawk. Even though no one in the platoon had combat experience, I believed we were the most trusted and experienced soldiers for this first mission. I had worked hard to get us ready for the original mission. I had conducted a thorough terrain analysis and located good routes, rally points, and hide positions. I had coordinated fires, signals/challenge and password,

[REDACTED]

and logistics. I didn't discard the planning I had done. It turned out that I would need it again later that night.

D Co assumed the screen mission immediately. My plan was to go back to TAA Hawk to pick up my platoon and our gear. Unfortunately, when our mission changed, we lost our transportation back to TAA Hawk. We were stuck on the screen line without our equipment. I was very concerned for our well-being because as soon as the sun went down, it was cold. I knew that by morning, we would be covered with dew, and we had no cold gear at all. We borrowed some cold gear from the D Co platoons and dug several positions in which to hide. The D Co soldiers gave us as much as they could, but they had to survive the night too. The night was bitter cold. The days were moderate, but when the sun went down the change in temperature was significant. Also, we did not have the right equipment for cold weather. Our A-bags with sleeping bags didn't show up until three days later. Except for sharing body warmth, we may have had cold weather injuries. Digging down into the earth also made a big difference.

At 2200 hours, I got another WARNO from CPT Lerario. I was in my hole in the ground in the beginning stages of misery when he sent for me. I moved over to CPT Lerario's position, and he briefed me. The task force had identified an Iraqi position about 10 km to our front. He wanted to know more about the position and anything else that was to our front. I was excited because this was a real scout mission. I was given full support for the mission. I had priority of fires for 155mm and 105mm (our 81mm mortars were still not in TAA Hawk). We were given three global positioning systems (GPS) which weren't very helpful because we had never trained with them. I immediately went back



to my position and began my planning under a poncho with a red lens flash light. I worked until around 2400 hours. I was tired but had most of tomorrow to plan, so I slept until about 0300 hours. I woke up only because I was so cold. SSG Mizer was wide awake and as cold as I was, so we discussed the mission and finished the plan. I usually planned a mission by myself after getting input from subordinates. However, I knew SSG Mizer was an exceptional NCO, and planning together with him saved me some time and turned out to be a good idea.

25 January 1991

COL Rokosz wanted to be personally back briefed at 0600. My battalion commander LTC Belford, MAJ Horst, and CPT Lerario also attended the brief. I was a little nervous briefing the BDE CDR but more excited about the mission; however it wasn't meant to be. Sometime during the night, while we were freezing on the screen line, the brigade TOC figured out that the position that I was supposed to scout was actually a Saudi position. Once again, I was severely disappointed. However, as soon as I got the bad news, I got another WARNO. I was a bit skeptical but glad I wasn't going back to my platoon empty handed again.

TF 2-82 was instructed to conduct reconnaissance on top of the escarpment. The brigade plan was to seize Objective (OBJ) Falcon, which consisted of three objectives on top of the escarpment, to pass the remainder of the 6th LAD. The French forces would then seize OBJ Rochambeau which contained the town of As-Salman and its airfield. The end-state was to screen the western flank of the entire coalition. On top of the escarpment were three Iraqi outposts appropriately named Objectives Red (TF 1-325 AIRs



assignment), Gold (TF 4-325 AIRs assignment) and Green (TF 2-325 AIRs assignment).

Although we were the White Falcons, the French had already used that name on one of their intermediate objectives in OBJ Rochambeau (Map, p 18)

I was instructed to conduct an area reconnaissance to find routes up the escarpment for the task force to attack OBJ Green. After we found routes, we were supposed to scout the outpost. However, we were put under some extremely tight commo constraints that were forced on us by the coalition plan. Central Command (CENTCOM) intended for the Iraqis to think the coalition was attacking only into Kuwait. The coalition left clues about an amphibious assault and a main attack coming right into Kuwait City. Central to the plan was that the Iraqis did not know what was lurking out in Western KSA.

Between the 18th Airborne Corps and the VII Corps, most of the coalition's killing power remained undetected on the western flank. Named the "Hail Mary," General Norman Schwarzkopf's (CENTCOM Commander) plan required strict secrecy, and under no circumstances was the location of unit's to be compromised (Caraccilo, 99). What this meant for us was that strict radio silence would be observed. Radio transmissions would be limited to contact made, fire missions to break contact, and MEDEVAC.

When I first heard about the radio listening silence, I didn't make the connection with the effects of that directive. Even though routine radio communication was forbidden, command and control had to still be observed. What this meant was that we would string wire and communicate via TA-1 (tactical telephone). This would prove to be very time consuming and the biggest threat to our security.

[REDACTED]

COL Rokosz dismissed me and informed me that he would attend my rehearsals later that day. Even though the planning for this mission was different than the two previous cancelled missions, the planning I had already done would be helpful. I immediately began mission planning in my head. I had already been through this process twice and felt comfortable with what I had to do. Once I got back to my position and with the help of SSG Mizer, I had a solid plan in about an hour. The patrol would consist of a D Co platoon under the leadership of 1LT Chris Kendzeria, SSG Mizer's squad, SSG Barnes' sniper team, a commo section HMMWV, and the recon platoon head quarters (minus the platoon sergeant).

We conducted rehearsals about a kilometer behind the screen line. We were probably still in view of the enemy on the escarpment. As briefed earlier in the day, COL Rokosz was in attendance. He watched silently as the comm HMMWV laid the wire and periodically connected the TA-1 so that phase lines could be called. He watched even closer when the dismounted patrol laid out wire from the DR-8s and continued to call in phase lines and check points. Laying commo wire was a sore spot, with almost everyone involved in the execution. I think the reason COL Rokosz attended the rehearsal was to ensure that the commo plan was executed.

Several key leaders and I had unsuccessfully argued to not string wire. We understood the need for radio silence but wanted to conduct the operation without calling in any phase lines or check points. This was a risky venture, but stringing wire seemed to be too restrictive. The brigade leadership was not willing to assume high risk. Given the

[REDACTED]

constraints placed by coalition planners, there was no good way to conduct this patrol. We would string wire.

We departed friendly lines when it got dark. We met the platoon leader (PL) of the platoon we passed through on the screen line. We made final coordinations to include the time and location we would return. We planned to re-enter friendly lines through the same platoon but at a different location. We entered into enemy territory for the first time. After years of training, we were finally doing what we had trained to do. I was nervous and excited but very focused because this was for real!

My soldiers traveled in the D Co hard top HMMWVs and back of the D Co cargo HMMWV. A few of my soldiers assisted the commo HMMWV string the wire. Initially, our movement was slow and deliberate. Several times, my soldiers dismounted to clear a wadi or defile. We called in every phase line and continued our movement.

We reached our release point (RP) at about the 7 km mark. My squads dismounted and set off on foot. Several soldiers had DR-8s stowed in their ruck sacks. As we continued towards the escarpment, we laid the wire and maintained commo with the task force. Already we discovered that even though the terrain appeared to be mostly flat, there were numerous small hills and ravines. It was easier to move in the dead space than we had thought.

About a kilometer away from the RP, we had a dangerous situation. The patrol was halted in a small depression. In the distance, we could hear the sound of vehicles moving

[REDACTED]

to our rear. We called the RP and verified that they were stationary. They were, in fact, stationary and said they could hear the vehicles as well. Fortunately, we were in a depression and had some concealment. The vehicles drew closer and eventually came within 100 feet of the trail end of my patrol. Two civilian trucks with crew-served weapons mounted in the back passed between us and our RP. A few minutes later, they passed in the same place headed in the opposite direction. This continued for about four passes, and then they were gone. Remaining motionless during this time was easy for every member of the patrol, considering our biggest weapon was an M203. Obviously, we were not looking for contact with the enemy.

About five minutes after the last time we saw the vehicles, we heard a massive explosion to our flank. A fire-fight erupted not more than 500 meters away. I thought they had hit my D Co platoon. However, a radio check proved me wrong. We could see bright flashes and tracers high in the sky. The noise was not deafening but quite loud.

Adrenaline was running fast as I considered our options. I thought it best to do nothing: to remain in place and wait. We waited motionless in the depression for another half hour. The RP did not see any of the fight but saw and heard the same thing we did.

We continued movement cautiously and deliberately for another one km. We made it to the bottom of the escarpment but had to turn around because we were running out of time for re-entry of friendly lines at the designated time. Even though we had moved a short way from the fire fight location, we wanted to return to the RP from another direction. Unfortunately, we had to recover the wire we had laid and were forced to return on the same route. That was something that I hadn't considered during the planning. That was

[REDACTED]

another good argument against using wire. I sent the sniper team as a forward element to provide security for the main body. They cleared the danger areas and then called us forward, using a messenger.

Although I was extremely nervous traveling so close to the ambush site and so quickly after it had happened, we linked up with the RP without incident. The link up was facilitated by D Co's thermal sights. They picked us up when we were still a few kilometers away. We would disappear from time to time but would appear again when we came out of the low ground. I felt very relieved to be back with 1LT Kendzeria's platoon and on our way back home. Unfortunately, we still had a major problem to overcome.

The problem came in the form of recovering the wire. To say it did not go well does not do justice. Recovery of the wire was difficult enough without the rain storm that began about 20 minutes into our return. The wind and rain made recovery extremely slow. I had planned to roll the wire back onto the large spools it had come off of, and we were able to do that until the storm started. Once the storm started, we attempted to deliberately recover the wire, but after half an hour, it was apparent that we would not be able to put it back on the spool. I ordered my soldiers to walk behind the HMMWVs and roll the wire by hand and carefully place it in the vehicle. What this did was reduce our max speed to the rate at which we could move on foot and recover the wire. We cut the wire several times because it became so tangled. We rotated soldiers recovering the wire. We re-entered friendly lines about the time the sun came up, about two hours later than

[REDACTED]

planned. There was no need for formal re-entry procedures as the screen line could see us, and we could see them. We drove straight to the battalion TOC.

26 January 1991

By the time the patrol was over, everyone was physically and mentally exhausted. SSGs Mizer and Barnes and I reported to the brigade TOC for a de-brief. We quickly briefed the BDE S2, and we spent about an hour talking with our battalion commander, S3, and S2. Although the most intriguing report was the fire fight to our flank, it was not the most useful information. Significant findings were as follows:

- 1) The terrain was not as flat as it appeared. If we were careful, we could move undetected to the bottom of the escarpment. Conversely, the enemy could also move undetected toward us.
- 2) We found a few places that were impassable to vehicular traffic. These would be avoided when we attacked.
- 3) We knew how long it would take to complete a future recon mission. Recovering the wire had consumed a large amount of time.

The patrol returned to our positions and conducted recovery operations. By 1000 hours, they were all asleep. On the other hand, I had another mission to plan. This time, SSG Cassle's squad and another sniper team would go out. I chose not to go out because physically I was not up for it. In the previous 48 hours, I had planned three different missions and executed one. I had a cold and was generally rundown. SSG Cassle was an experienced leader capable of handling the mission. After he and I planned the mission and linked up with his D Co Platoon, I turned the mission over to him. SSG Cassle's

[REDACTED]

patrol followed the same format as the previous patrol but had different departure/re-entry points, routes and RPs, and recon areas.

Mission number one was very successful but had potential for great failure in the form of fratricide. It turns out that the fire fight we heard was a Saudi vehicular patrol running into an Iraqi ambush. Three Saudis were wounded, and they brought back the Iraqi killed. Putting the pieces together of that information told me that the vehicles that were stalking us were Saudi. They didn't know we were friendly, and our ROE told us everything to our front was enemy. We would only engage to protect ourselves, but we considered everything out there as enemy. Obviously, coordination among coalition forces had broken down somewhere.

27 January 1991

I met SSG Cassle and his patrol at the BN TOC as they rolled in. Like the previous night's patrol, the leaders were debriefed and released. I stayed at the TOC and made coordinations with the S3 for the next night's patrol. Unlike the previous night's patrol, SSG Cassle was able to get up on top of the escarpment because the D Co vehicles took him closer to the Iraqi positions. He had a sketch of the objective and a couple hours of activity logged in a notebook. This was the first picture we had of what the TF would attack when the ground war started.

Later that afternoon, one of the snipers brought me a sketch to look at. Since moving to the screen line, he had used his spotting scope to conduct daylight surveillance on the objective. Gifted with a sharp eye and an artistic ability, the drawing confirmed what


[REDACTED]

SSG Cassle had reported. Meanwhile, SSG Bertram Vaughn's 3d Squad prepared to go out next.

28 January 1991

I went back on patrol for the second time. I brought along a Saudi soldier and his interpreter. The soldier sat by the wheel of a HMMWV at the RP all night. It was bitter cold, and as far as I could tell, the only thing he wanted was to go back to his unit. He didn't act like he wanted to go out with the dismounts, and we didn't want him to. The interpreter, on the other hand, was interesting. He was a Kuwaiti and was in the US studying engineering when his country was invaded. He volunteered his services to the coalition because he spoke several languages fluently.

After about an hour of waiting at the RP while my squad was on top of the escarpment, we heard a fire fight erupt to our left flank. It was not as close as the one the night of the first patrol. I was immediately more alert and wished for the patrol to hurry back. We left a three-man sniper team near Objective Green to conduct 24-hour surveillance. Once it departed the RP, it moved to its designated hide location and prepared for 24-hour occupation. The dismount patrol returned without incident, and we made our way back to friendly lines. As the battalion S2 did his de-brief at the TF TOC, I could tell that, in terms of intelligence gathering, this was the most successful patrol. The squad produced a detailed sketch with distances between positions, locations of positions, and types of weapons systems in each position. Additionally, the squad had located an easy way climb the escarpment.



We were briefed that the fire fight we heard was a friendly adjacent unit stumbling into an ambush. Friendly casualties were zero, and only enemy equipment was captured. Apparently, the US patrol had moved into the kill zone at the same time the Iraqis were moving into place. US forces forced a meeting engagement, and both sides came out with no casualties. A recon of the ambush the next morning told the story behind the ambush. The US patrol's commo wire had been cut and staked. This was the center of the kill zone (Lerario, Interview).

But there was another part to the ambush that turned out to be a tremendous learning experience. There was a concern that I was not producing enough intelligence. I did not know this at the time because CPT Lerario shielded me from any pressure. He knew we were getting results. The problem was that the nightly wire recovery we faithfully executed cut into our reconnaissance time. CPT Lerario refused suggestions that we leave out the wire like the other battalions to get a couple more hours of reconnaissance (Lerario, Interview). This judgment was tactically sound and, after the friendly unit got ambushed, proved to be the right thing. Some of the platoon leadership had harshly criticized the nightly wire recovery. They were humbled and apologetic after hearing the ambush story.

29 January 1991

This turned out to be the last recon patrol on the escarpment. Once again, the patrol followed the same format. The patrol made it to the top of the escarpment and was able to add more detail to OBJ Green. It also picked up the sniper team that had been out. The snipers turned over a detailed log to the S2. They had recorded vehicular and


[REDACTED]

personnel movement in and out of the objective. They reported that a platoon minus was present. It looked as if forces were systematically moving off the objective. We couldn't confirm where they were going, but the outpost was not strong. We didn't need any more intelligence on the layout of OBJ Green. What we needed was to develop patterns and schedules of enemy activity on the objective. Although we planned several more missions, we never got the opportunity to execute them.

PART IV: DESERT STORM - THE GROUND WAR

After our last mission, the platoon consolidated into a triangular perimeter in the D Co rear. Each squad constructed two or three fighting positions that became home. The ground was rocky and not sandy like in Ab Qaiq. In Ab Qaiq, it was rare that an adequate fighting position was built. The sandy soil continually caved in the sides. However, on the screen line, this was not the case, and we dug deep into the earth. The first couple of inches were frozen, but after that, it was a matter of removing the rocks. In some positions, the sides had to be slightly shored up using MRE boxes filled with, of all things, sand. During the night, we maintained 30% security in the form of a roving patrol and radio watch.

Overhead cover was not available, so every position was covered only with a poncho or the dull side of a space blanket. This was a constant worry because around 1 February 1991, Iraqi patrolling and random enemy indirect fire in our area of operation (AO) dramatically increased. It was part of their counter-reconnaissance, responding to the recon my platoon had conducted. However, the enemy counter-recon efforts were wasted because by our last patrol we had excellent sketches, numbers of vehicles and fighting



positions, and generally enough information for the task force to complete the attack plan.

After our highly emotional first few days, we moved into a period of stagnation. We remained on the screen line OPCON to D Co, but we were no longer required to support the screen line. The rifle companies assumed a more aggressive counter reconnaissance posture. This left us with very little to accomplish; we literally sat and waited for another mission. We hoped for the ground war to begin or for a mission further into Iraq via air insertion; we passed the days cleaning weapons, discussing rumors, and unsuccessfully attempting to stay warm and dry. The next high-energy time was on 20 February 1991 when we were informed that we were officially at G-3. The attack would begin in just three days.

The start of the ground war generated tremendous energy and excitement but provided few missions for my platoon. We remained OPCON to D Co and traveled with it. We spent most of the four-day ground war capturing territory and passing enemy prisoners of war to the rear. We did conduct one recon patrol on the night of G+2. TF 2-325 had led the brigade all day. As night fell, we reached a ridgeline south and east of As-Salman along main supply route (MSR) Virginia. We went into a hasty defense and soldiers started digging individual fighting positions. Since our last reconnaissance mission on 30 January 1991 on the escarpment, my platoon had an extremely limited role in the operation. Since the start of the ground war, we pulled local security for D Co and moved POWs to the rear. It was frustrating to not have a role in events. While the task force dug into position, CPT Lerario saw the need to see what was the beyond the next

[REDACTED]


ridge. He briefed me that I needed to send an element forward. The patrol moved out into the darkness to look for enemy positions. What they found was abandoned positions but no enemy. This patrol was the last real operation for my platoon (Lerario, Interview).

PART V: CONCLUSIONS

Despite the fact that, on 14 February 1991, the United States Air Force completely destroyed OBJ Green with bombers, the experience I gained on those missions has served me well. The five recon missions made a lasting impression on me. Actually, all of OBJ Falcon was destroyed prior to TF2-82s attack to seize it on G-1. Accordingly, the brigade mission changed to fit the new circumstances. The assault on OBJ Falcon was conducted in daylight. Instead of passing the 6th LAD through towards As-Salman, TF 2-82 moved up the western side of MSR Texas and seized OBJ Rochambeau. After the 6th LAD seized the As-Salman Air Base, TF 2-82 moved east along MSR Virginia toward the Euphrates Valley until a cease fire was called (Caraccilo, 130).

Numerous lessons were learned during the patrols. Even though the patrols were highly successful, I believe that had I to do it over again, I would change some things. I want to address some good and bad lessons learned.


First, even though we lacked operational experience, the platoon was successful in combat because of the platoon's leadership and discipline. In light of now knowing whether we were going home or fighting Iraqis, we focused on tough realistic training. The squad leaders took a personal responsibility, more sincere than ever before, for their units and the soldiers believed in their leadership. We did not cut corners or make the



training easy. We trained long and hard, just like at Ft Bragg, except more so because there were no training distracters. Also, the desert training we did in Ab-Qaiq really started at Ft. Bragg. That is not to say tat Ft. Bragg is a desert training environment, but all we had to do was convert our already learned skills to a desert environment. The point is that you never know when or where you will be deployed. Always assume you will be in combat very soon.

Secondly, detailed rehearsals will raise realistic questions. I thought it was excessive when COL Rokosz came to watch our rehearsal of an area reconnaissance. I couldn't figure out what he intended to watch. I realize now that he was there to ensure the commo plan was properly implemented. CENTCOM would rather have us go in blind on G-1 than to conduct patrols and expose the number of forces arrayed in the west. Rolling out the big spools and the DR-8s was more technical than I had thought. During rehearsals, we devised a way to keep the big spools from getting caught up in the vehicle's tires. We also learned that realistic contingency plans are critical when an element leaves the main force. No one would have anticipated not being able to use radios. During dismounted patrolling, teams that left the patrol had no commo with the patrol. One example was the snipers clearing an area for the rest of the patrol. We needed a plan to communicate even when they left. I had learned a technique at Ranger School for this type of contingency planning, and we used it. But it wasn't until the rehearsals that we realized there was a problem.

Thirdly, unity of command was something we did well. During the vehicular portion of the operation, the D Co platoon leader was the patrol leader. He remained the patrol



leader at the RP. The senior man from the recon platoon was in charge during the dismounted patrol. Also, the scout platoon was a task force asset but remained OPCON to D Co. The task force gave up some control of the scouts, because, as a light force, the scout platoon was not equipped with mobility assets. D Co provided us the mobility we needed to do our job. I worked extensively with both CPT Lerario and the BN TF S3 MAJ Horst. MAJ Horst ran the missions through CPT Lerario instead of trying to bypass him. On occasion, he would provide guidance directly to me, but he always made sure that CPT Lerario was involved. The relationship between the three of us was excellent.

Fourth, immediate patrolling in an unknown area is paramount. Patrolling will allow the commander to see the battlefield and develop the situation to his advantage. We gained the necessary intelligence before the Iraqis could prevent it. During the early weeks of Desert Storm, we were forbidden from certain actions such as radio communication and combat patrols. The purpose of the restrictions was to hide the forces in Western Iraq. The 54th Iraqi intelligence on the escarpment could not have known we were in the AO because the five recon patrols encountered light counter-recon. It wasn't until after the first three missions that we encountered any counter-recon at all. During the weeks following the last recon mission, the Iraqis realized what was going on and saturated the area with counter recon in the form of patrolling and indirect fires. However, by the fifth mission we had collected enough intelligence to prepare an attack


Fifth, the commo plan violated the simplicity principle. The TF 2-82 commander insisted we lay wire and maintain communication. Without having to lay commo wire, the

[REDACTED]

missions would have been much simpler and less risky. Once we knew we had to lay wire, we did two things; we rehearsed laying and picking up the wire, and we decided to pick up the wire every night. We weighed the risk of leaving the wire out for more time on the objective against the security of rolling up the wire and not giving the enemy our intention. Leaving the wire out every night would have forced us to travel to and from our objective on the same route every night. Rolling up the wire every night reduced our signature and did not give the Iraqi counter-recon an idea where we would show up next. We knew we were getting enough intelligence on the objective, and we made the decision to roll up the wire every night. The commo plan was not simple and caused us increased risk, but we were able to take steps to mitigate it.

The reason the coalition achieved strategic surprise was due, in part, to the required radio listening silence for all forces in Western Iraq. We were forced to string the wire to maintain commo because of the radio listening silence. I believe the other option would have been no recon missions. Tactically, it would have been highly risky to attack without any intelligence. Strategically, I believe CENTCOM would have assumed that risk. No intelligence we gathered would have been worth compromising the "Hail Mary" plan. But stringing the wire forced us to travel to and from our objective on the same route and consumed a tremendous amount of time. When one of the adjacent recon platoons did not follow the wire recovery guidance, they almost paid for it with casualties.

Finally, as a platoon we were successful in our combat operations. We were also successful in the train up during Desert Storm. During the 223 day deployment, we



didn't sustain any casualties. This success was due to unit discipline and effective training. This same discipline and training was the reason we were able to overcome a difficult commo plan. We recovered the wire every night. It was a laborious and time consuming task, and it was not popular. But because it was an order, it was carried out by professional squad leaders. Ultimately it was the character of my squad leaders that gained our success. Credit for the preparation and eventual success in combat must go to the chain of command of the recon platoon; 1st Squad - SSG Glen Mizer, 2nd Squad SSG Darrel Cassle, 3rd Squad – SSG Bertram Vaughn, Sniper Squad - SSG Rocky Barnes, and PLT SGT SFC David Angerhoffher. Through these men, the recon platoon, along with the help of D Company, successfully completed the assigned combat operations of TF 2-325 AIR.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

Caraccilo, Dominic J. The Ready Brigade of the 82nd Airborne in Desert Storm. McFarland & Company, Inc., 1993.

Craig, Robert R., Personal Journal Aug 1990 – Mar 1991.

Lerario, Michael P., Interview via e-mail, May 2003.