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Rifle Platoon Leader (Air Assault)

Training and Leading in the Gulf War

3rd Platoon, Bravo Company, 3rd Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment
101st Airborne Division (Air Assault)

The 3rd Platoon, Bravo Company, 3rd Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, conducted an incredible amount of training, before, during, and after the Gulf War. The platoon was successful as a unit because of the training, leadership, initiative, and pride of the unit's soldiers and leaders throughout the Gulf War.

On August 1, 1990, I took over the leadership of 3rd Platoon. On August 2, 1990, Iraq invaded its neighbor to the southeast, a small country called Kuwait. This was the beginning of the Gulf War and the beginning of my experience as a combat rifle platoon leader.

The Gulf War provided an unprecedented opportunity to grow as a leader and warrior. The training done prior to, during, and after the Gulf War made better leaders, warriors, and men out of the soldiers that served in 3rd Platoon and in Bravo Company. I was called upon to use all of the knowledge that I had amassed in eight years as an enlisted soldier, noncommissioned officer (NCO), and ROTC cadet; however, I learned more from my superiors, peers, and subordinates in the eight months encompassing Desert Shield and Desert Storm, than I had learned in the previous eight years.

My battalion was one of three infantry battalions in the 3d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), XVIII Corp. The battalion had and has a reputation of consistent excellence; the battalion is known as the *"RAKKASANS"* throughout the Army and throughout history.

> The 3rd Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment has a singularly rich history. Since its activation in 1943, the battalion has earned a reputation for heroism on the battlefield and for being in the forefront of the development of glider, parachute, airmobile, and air assault tactics. Additionally, the battalion has earned the distinction of being the only airborne or air assault infantry battalion to have fought in the four major wars of the past half century--World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the Gulf War.1

The battalion returned from Vietnam in 1971. For the next nineteen years, the battalion trained for combat but did not participate in any combat

operations. This lack of combat action, for such an extended period of time, lulled some leaders and subsequently some soldiers into a false sense of security. This can be best shown by painting a picture of what Bravo Company consisted of on August 1, 1990, the day I took over 3rd Platoon.

The Company's Modified Table of Organization and Equipment (MTOE) strength was five officers and 127 enlisted soldiers. We were habitually augmented with one Fire Support Officer (FSO) and eight enlisted fire support specialists, comprising the Fire Support Team (FIST). Additionally, we were augmented with four enlisted medics broken down one per platoon and with one company senior medic in the company headquarters platoon. This brought our total strength to six officers and 139 enlisted soldiers.

These personnel were organized into a company headquarters section with three officers and ten enlisted soldiers, a 60mm mortar section with two 60mm mortars and six enlisted soldiers, and three rifle platoons that each had one officer (the platoon leader) and 41 enlisted soldiers.

The three rifle platoons were organized into a platoon headquarters, three rifle squads, and a weapons squad. The platoon headquarters consisted of the platoon leader, platoon sergeant, radio-telephone operator (RTO), fire support specialist, fire support RTO, and platoon medic. Each of the three, nine-man, rifle squads had an E-6 (Staff Sergeant) squad leader, two E-5 (Sergeant) team leaders, two M203--40mm grenadiers, two M249 squad automatic weapon (SAW) gunners, and two M16A2 riflemen. The nine-man weapons squad had an E-6 squad leader, two M60 machine gunners, two assistant machine gunners, two M47 Dragon gunners, and two assistant Dragon gunners.

On August 1, the company leadership consisted of the commander who had been in command for sixteen months, the company executive officer who had been in position for eighteen months (but who would be promoted and replaced in December, 1990), the First Platoon Leader--in position for one month, the Second Platoon Leader--in position for three months, and the First Sergeant who had been in position approximately six months. The company had alot of new senior leadership that had not worked together; this was not yet a cohesive fighting force.

Bravo Company was known as the "Bravo Bastards"--that was the name, the motto, and the attitude of the company. The company was loaded with untried, untested, and unchallenged talent. The individuals were superb from executive officer to rifleman. Although the commander had been in place for sixteen months, he had not created a cohesive or exceptionally effective unit--he had established a unit that lived up to its name--the "*BASTARDS.*"

The company clung to past glories, some dating as far back as Vietnam, some to the last field training exercise (FTX). As a whole, Bravo Company had a reputation for mediocrity, of trying hard but producing average results.

The Company Commander did not enjoy a good working relationship with his superiors, peers, or subordinates. This carried on through his change of command after the Gulf War. His superiors thought he was incompetent, his peers thought he was crazy and successfully sought to have him examined by a psychologist, and his subordinates did not look up to him for anything--leadership, mentorship, orders, training guidance etc. He was hypocritical and consistently set and reinforced double standards. The Bravo Company Commander stayed in command for a total twenty-six months; however, he actually "commanded" very little.

I had approximately seven years of prior enlisted service when I took over my platoon: three years in B/1-75 Rangers, seventeen months in an S3 section, and two years in the Long Range Surveillance Detachment (LRSD), 134th Infantry. I had learned, from great infantrymen, what a light infantry private through staff sergeant was supposed to do; however, I had only ideas about a platoon leader's responsibilities, or what he was supposed to do.

On August 1, I ran physical training (PT) with 3rd Platoon and then briefly talked to the platoon. I gave the platoon a well-rehearsed "hoo-ah" speech that included telling them that we would train for combat and most assuredly go to combat together sometime in the near future; although I was thinking of many areas in the world, these places did not include Saudi Arabia, Iraq, or Kuwait. Since the 101st had been left out of all recent combat operations, this comment was not given much thought or credence by my new platoon.

That morning, the Platoon Sergeant and I had planned a meeting for the afternoon, as the company commander had tasked me to be the company arms room officer, responsible for ensuring security and maintenance was in accordance with Army regulations and standards.

I entered the company arms room, and I observed that most of the weapons were visibly dirty, to include having mud and light rust on them. Out of eighteen M249 (SAWs), eight were stored with the bolts pulled to the rear (a serious maintenance problem), two had live rounds in the chambers from a recent range, and all eighteen were obviously dirty. The M60 machine gun tripods were rusted, and due to the zippers being broken on the M60 spare barrel bags, the bags were taped shut. Upon cutting the tape off of the bags, I found rusted spare barrels and rusted traverse and elevation (T&Es) mechanisms in each of the six spare barrel bags. Further, the night observation devices (NODs) were damp and dirty, and the M47 Dragon anti-tank sites were not maintained to standard.

Although I had just left a very competent National Guard unit, I distinctly remember thinking "what kind of National Guard unit did I get myself into." My experience in the arms room stuck in my mind, and it set the tone for a directive approach to platoon leadership that I would maintain in 3rd Platoon for the next seventeen months.

After my arms room walk through, I talked to the other platoon leaders and to the First Sergeant; I explained I had been taught some time ago that a "Rifle Company rotates around its Rifles," this meaning we had to develop an immediate fix to our problem. Between us, we derived a plan that quickly evolved into an excellent maintenance standard operating procedure (SOP). My peers knew that the "Bastard" status quo was going to change, and they were very receptive to working together to improve our company's reputation.

The major training event for August was Expert Infantryman Badge (EIB) training. I had the opportunity to survey the site with the battalion commander. This was his opportunity to test my knowledge and provide some guidance and directives for me to concentrate on while working for him.

On August 2, 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait. Although few of us knew where Kuwait was, this caused an immediate reverberation throughout the company and battalion. The battalion continued EIB training with an increased urgency. For the next week, the situation in the Middle East continued getting an incredible amount of CNN coverage, and the rumors began to fly through the unit.

On August 11, the battalion was alerted for deployment to Saudi Arabia. We conducted a company training meeting/warning order that alerted us as a company. I received some minimum guidance from the commander to begin training for deployment and combat. The battalion plan included a few mandatory events, to include nuclear, biological, and chemical (NBC) training; mine warfare training; and acclimatization training. Otherwise, all additional training was delegated to the company and further to the platoon.

We had two solid weeks of EIB training under our belts. This was an outstanding base of individual task training, so we were prepared to transition rapidly to collective task training. The division commander liberalized nearly every policy and regulation regarding training and resourcing live fire exercises (LFX). The environment was very conducive to conduct LFX training and any other training deemed necessary to "prepare for combat"--it was an infantry leader's dream.

The Bravo Company commander decentralized all but the battalion-directed training. The three platoon leaders talked daily to exchange ideas and attempted to find some common ground to focus our training and to exchange lessons learned--we were bonding very quickly to our platoons and to each other.

As platoon leaders, we all focused on arduous physical training in the morning and again in the afternoon. Our collective training included developing and refining platoon SOPs, to include troop leading procedures, movement formations, and techniques (in large open areas to simulate desert conditions); platoon battle drills, to include all supporting collective and individual tasks; and defense classes. The team leaders and squad leaders did a consistently outstanding job of preparing opportunity training classes on

individual tasks to include land navigation, first aid, enemy vehicle/equipment identification, mine emplacement, anti-tank weapons employment, NOD classes, communications to include field expedient antennas, marksmanship (mechanical, battle site, and field zeroing weapons and NODs), maintenance in desert environments, and personal hygiene in desert environments; the company's NCOs were no longer "lulled into a sense of security," but were exploding with years of acquired knowledge. The NCOs rose to the challenge of their responsibility, that of training our soldiers for combat, training them to fight, win, and survive. The soldiers did an equally fantastic job of proactively seeking to learn and understand what was being taught--again, this was the beginning of an infantry leader's dream.

As we trained our platoons, the Executive Officer and First Sergeant made the necessary coordinations to raise our deployability status from Division Ready Force-Five (DRF-5) to DRF-1--ready to deploy to combat in eighteen hours. This entailed receiving shots, updating records (insurance and notification), being issued desert uniforms/equipment, holding family briefs, and helping soldiers and soldiers' families get ready for a potentially lifelong deployment. Additionally, the Executive Officer coordinated the out load of the company's equipment. He did this with minimum impact on the platoons and got all of our equipment to Saudi Arabia.

The battalion enjoyed very liberal pass policies over the Labor Day weekend. Many soldiers moved their families in with relatives; others moved in with another soldier's family to make the separation easier on the families and wives.

On September 11, we boarded a Northwest Airlines 747, from the Civil Reserve Air Fleet, at Campbell Army Airfield (CAAF) (Map 1). We stopped in Germany and then proceeded onto Dahran, Saudi Arabia. When we arrived in Dahran, the temperature was over 130 degrees on the tarmac; it was the most oppressive heat any of us had ever felt.

We were immediately bused to King Fhad International Airport (KFIA), and dropped off at the division reception and acclimatization center. We were given an inprocessing/in-country brief, a designated sector of the parking

garage for the battalion, and shown where the bottled water was--with instructions to drink 24-30 liters of water per day, for the next three days. Our three-day acclimatization period turned into 24 hours. We were then bused to Camp Eagle II (CE II), approximately four miles away.

Camp Eagle II was a very austere division-sized tent city, set up "dress-right-dress." CE II had tents, cots, three-hole latrines, outdoor showers, bottled water, meals ready to eat (MREs), and a Pepsi and donut per soldier per day (courtesy of the King). For the next seven days, we did PT in the morning, hydrated all day, and watched as our equipment began to arrive.

In CE II, the company had seventeen tents. These were white cotton tents with a colorful lining to help shade and insulate the inside of the tent; they were about 60% as large as a general purpose, medium tent. Bravo Company divided the tents as follows: each platoon had four tents (one per squad); one for the FIST; one for the First Sergeant and platoon sergeants; one for the officers; one for a supply room, and one for an orderly/arms room. The significant point is that the squad leaders lived with their squads for nearly eight straight months, in tents of ten to eleven people. As officers and senior NCOs, we worked with the platoon 18-24 hours per day but had the opportunity to relax around a crowd of peers in another setting--a less crowded setting. The squad leaders did a fantastic job of managing stress and leading and maintaining their squads, 24 hours per day, for nearly eight straight months.

As we acclimatized, we continued to give classes covering more of the country/culture specific things such as language cards, area geography, desert hazards and survival, and rules of engagement (ROE). The soldiers were getting acclimated quickly, due to our intense predeployment PT program, and they were anxious to train or conduct "combat" operations.

With the division's assets consolidated into such close quarters, the infantry battalions were rotated on CE II perimeter defense. This was a great experience as we immediately had a combat mission--to defend. We conducted troop leading procedures (TLPs), to include issuing orders at platoon level that included plans to improve the defense of CE II continuously, detailed

inspections and briefbacks, and ROE briefs. Live ammunition was issued and locked and loaded. This combat "mission" served to focus the soldiers and platoon level leaders on the reality of being in a hostile environment.

By the end of September, we were feeling fairly comfortable around CE II. Morale was very high, and we, as air assault soldiers, believed that we were serving a needed purpose in extremely austere conditions. Mail started coming in about this time, and this only served to sustain or increase the soldiers' morale. Additionally, the mobile kitchen tents (MKTs) were set up to serve the soldiers fairly routine hot breakfasts and hot dinners, which was an incredible morale enhancer.

We had received a warning order stating we would be rotating out into the desert as a covering force in the first week of October. We needed to start conducting operations in the desert, out in the sand, to build confidence in our abilities to fight, win, and survive in the desert. Like at Fort Campbell, the commander decentralized the training planning and execution to the platoon leaders. Also like at Fort Campbell, we, as platoon leaders, agreed to some common ground, trained our platoons, compared lessons learned, and retrained to standard incorporating each other's techniques and lessons learned into our platoon training. Our training plan mirrored that of the initial training we did at Fort Campbell, with the exception, that now it was executed with the increased conditions of the harsh desert environment.

As platoon leaders, we did not have a chain of command to provide direction or bond our platoons into a cohesive unit. However, as junior officers, we did realize the need to create a cohesive fighting unit to help guarantee unity of effort in the future, and thus increase the chance of our platoons experiencing success and surviving on future battlefields. Again, this was an infantry leader's dream: virtually no training distractors and no limitations on personnel (we were all at 100% + strength), training areas, or training time--we could execute the training that we planned to standard or until we called it quits.

In early October, we were bussed approximately 110 kilometers north and then air assaulted another 20 kilometers north into our company's sector of

the covering force area (CFA). We established "*Camp Bastard*" and subsequently spent 36 days in this area. We lived under squad camouflaged nets. We were issued three MREs per day for 36 days, and we had unlimited water. Showers consisted of a buddy pouring a five gallon can of cold water over your head about once every two weeks.

We were free to conduct platoon training as we deemed necessary. The platoons were spread approximately 800-1000 meters apart, so I rarely saw or conversed with the other platoon leaders. The 3rd Platoon did physical training every morning, except Sundays, and then conducted squad and platoon collective training. It was much cooler by this time, so we could train all day and into the night.

We were getting extremely proficient at Infantry platoon tasks in desert conditions. As platoon leaders, we were totally in charge of our own destiny and were training 16-18 hours per day. We were starting to run our soldiers into the ground. Since we did not have even a rough time schedule of future events, my NCOs and I opted to slow the pace of training somewhat.

When I overheard some griping, and my squad leaders told me we were still training too hard, we cancelled training for one full day. I gave only one task: each person, team leader and below, would write a seven-day training schedule and turn it in by 1700 that day. As a platoon leader, this was one of the best things that I had done to date. That night, I consolidated every task written on the 30(+) schedules and prioritized the tasks by how they supported our most probable missions. I developed a platoon critical task list (CTL), of sorts, to focus my training. Tasks like call for fire, advanced first aid, weapons cross-training, range estimation, troop leading procedures, building clearing, advanced land navigation, long range infiltration, and troop leading procedures were all requested by the soldiers! Additionally, I derived an idea of how long we should train per 24 hour period. The soldiers did not want more time off; they wanted down time <u>during the day</u> to do weapons and equipment maintenance, personal hygiene, and read and write letters; this made sense since it was getting dark by 1700 daily, so we incorporated this into our schedule.

I learned these things by having the soldiers write a training schedule. I gained a keen insight into which soldiers I could count on to soldier that day and who I needed to counsel and develop. I had leaders who thought the platoon was trained to standard and should lay around all day, and I had privates who thought we should be training longer and harder. I was provided a very detailed consolidated CTL and a better appreciation for a sustainable work/training day. Finally, I had an opportunity to "tailor" the CTL to ensure all mission essential tasks were trained, while the soldiers were motivated about having maximum input into our platoon training plan. For the rest of our tour in Saudi Arabia, the 3rd Platoon used "the soldier derived CTL," and none of the soldiers complained about training because he knew he wrote it. Additionally, the soldiers learned how hard it was to write a training schedule with minimum guidance and limited outside resources.

During our stay at Camp Bastard, we did a 20 kilometer infiltration and deliberate night attack on 1st Platoon. The battalion coordinated for the use of an abandoned town to practice military operations in urban terrain (MOUT), to include a battalion air assault attack, and we did quality PT every morning followed by tasks from our newly created CTL. Most importantly, we became a very cohesive platoon, and the platoons became a very cohesive company (-).

Prior to Thanksgiving, we were rotated back to CE II, after 36 days in the desert. CE II had seen some incredible improvements. The mobile kitchen tents were providing hot breakfast and hot dinner daily, phone banks were installed, a hamburger stand and convenience store were available, and, most importantly, semipermanent hot showers were available almost daily, if desired.

In December, we rotated north again. We established "*Camp Bastard II*," and continued with our platoon training plans, concentrating even more on offensive operations/tasks. Our 35 day stay in the desert was broken up by two, week-long tours of defending forward operating base (FOB) Bastogne and a three day exercise at Faisal LFX range.

We had defended FOB Bastogne once in October and knew this was good duty. This entailed defending an airfield and a consolidated FOB. An FOB has

all the amenities, as a brigade's-worth of support agencies are located within the FOB. Reliable mail, hot rations, showers, and, in some cases, real buildings to live in--this was good duty and extremely good for morale.

The Faisal Range live fire complex was built and resourced by the battalion. It was built to scale from satellite pictures of real-world Iraqi defense. This range was for the companies to conduct individual company live fires and then culminate with a battalion coordinated, night, deliberate attack, on company strong-pointed objectives. All of the combined and joint assets took part in the attack: A10 close air support (CAS), AH64 Apache helicopters, artillery, mortars, and all organic company weapon systems. The conditions and assets available made this one of the most realistic live fires that I have done to date. Besides validating our proficiency and fine-tuning our combat edge, this LFX served to raise the confidence and, thus, the morale, of the soldiers to an incredible level.

Our company was "selected" to spend an additional ten days "up north." We were tasked to guard the brigade ammunition holding area (AHA). This mission left little time to do anything other then defend and do maintenance. Again, as a platoon, we were left to sort out our mission and accomplish it the best we could.

When we returned in January, 1991, CE II was becoming (or seeming to become) even more civilized. This camp that seemed so desolate three months prior now seemed like an oasis. We stood down, did maintenance, and sorted out rumors as K-date (Kuwait date) approached.

On the evening of January 17, 1991, the Bravo Company officers were called into a briefing. We were told that the air war was about to begin and to go inform our soldiers. My men were on guard, so I got into the appropriate uniform and went around to inform them; as I began walking around the perimeter, literally scores of aircraft took off from KFIA--that was a very exhilarating, patriotic sight.

Shortly after the air war started, we received movement orders to move approximately 300 kilometers to tactical assembly area (TAA) Campbell. Our company moved by C-130 fixed wing aircraft to the Saudi town of Rhafa (map 2).

We were loaded onto buses and moved into the B/3-187 sector, approximately ten kilometers south of Iraq (map 3). This defensive line was known as Phase Line Razor.

It was quickly obvious that the battalion had not issued an order to the commanders, and I knew I would not receive one from the company commander; thus, Alpha Company, to the northwest, was in a company circular perimeter (with at least 1/3 of its force oriented at Bravo Company); Bravo Company was in a linear defense with 1st Platoon to the northwest, on line, occupying approximately a 200 meter front; 2nd Platoon in the center, on line, occupying a 150 meter front; and 3rd Platoon to the southeast, in a lazy W, occupying a 400 meter front; Charlie Company, to the southeast, was in a company triangle (with at least 1/3 of its force oriented at Bravo Company).

In TAA Campbell, training was restricted to individual tasks and maintenance. Each squad conducted a nightly patrol, and we were always at 25% security. We began to conduct daily mounted reconnaissance patrols. This was a "hoo-ah" mission that was rotated between platoons and companies throughout our stay in TAA Campbell. These patrols went up to and across the Iraqi border and observed numerous named areas of interest (NAIs) as designated by the battalion.

The conditions in TAA Campbell were the most austere encountered in Saudi Arabia; this was good training for what was to come. We built and occupied modified fighting positions with no overhead cover. It rained routinely, and the temperature dropped into the twenties almost nightly. The ration cycle was again three MREs daily--in 45 days, my soldiers received three hot meals and one shower. This was combat.

> The purpose of the 101st Airborne during Operation Desert Storm was to air assault to establish a Forward Operating Base (FOB) and to attack to interdict, block and defeat Iraqi forces along Highway 8. 3rd Brigade had the mission to interdict, block and defeat Iraqi forces along Highway 8. This bold movement 155 (sic) [175] miles into Iraq, Operation Shenandoah II, blocked counterattacking forces in the northeast through maneuver and prevented escape from the Kuwaiti Theater of Operations (KTO) through firepower. The 101st Airborne Division did two things for GEN Schwartzkopf. The Division isolated the KTO and it sent a message to Saddam Hussein. 'The 101st Airborne Division was the lightning of Desert Storm.3' This was such a shocking effect that the disorganized Iraqi retreat along Highway 8 resembled more of a refugee exodus than a retrograde operation.2

The battalion published an order and desseminated one copy per company. Our company orders process consisted of the platoon leaders gathering in the commander's tent, reading the battalion order, and then coming up with the company plan. Our company mission was to air assault the company (-) 150 miles into Iraq, land on a secure landing zone (LZ), and then provide convoy security for the brigade's combat power (TOWs, Artillery, combat support, and combat service support forces). The combat power would air assault into Iraq and assemble in tactical convoy formation on LZ Sand. The convoy, known as Task Force (TF) Rakkasan, would then conduct a tactical road march 40 kilometers across the desert into area of operation (AO) Eagle. This plan was designed to limit exposing the helicopters with sling loads to enemy anti-aircraft fires.

Although no company order was issued, the platoon leaders issued complete orders to standard. Adjacent coordinations were done at platoon and squad level, large terrain models were used during the orders process, and detailed rehearsals and inspections were completed at all levels.

The battalion rehearsed the plan, and on G-day (February 23, 1991), we moved to pickup zone (PZ) Heavy. We rigged our loads (cargo HMMWVs) and did final mission back briefs. On the afternoon of February 24, we air assaulted 150 miles into Iraq (map 4). We landed at LZ Sand and got oriented and into convoy order (map 5). On order, the convoy moved out along Route 41A, marked on G-day by Team Jerry, the battalion scouts. The weather was terrible. It was raining, illumination was zero, the wind was blowing, and the temperature was about 35 degrees. We continued along Route 41A until we came to a tank ditch. My platoon was tasked to clear the far side of the ditch. I looked through a TOW thermal site and could see a bright signature coming from a building to our front. We could not tell how large the building was or how far it was away, but we were ordered to clear the building and report. I gave a very abbreviated fragmentary order (FRAGO), and we moved out. We cleared the far side without incident and then filled in the tank ditch using shovels

from the TOW vehicles. TF Rakkasan proceeded north through the night and arrived in AO Eagle in the morning of February 25.

When we arrived in AO Eagle, Alpha and Charlie companies had already occupied battle/ambush positions to the north along Highway 8 and had achieved contact along Highway 8 (map 6). My platoon was tasked to clear battle position (BP) WACO for the brigade TOC; as we cleared the BP, we discovered a large weapons cache consisting of 1x82mm mortar, 1x60mm mortar, an RPG-7, and numerous small arms with a large stockpile of ammunition.

Later, we moved west to our defensive position. The defensive order/guidance to the 1st Platoon Leader and myself consisted of the Company Commander pointing to our designated areas and giving us general orientations. The 1st Platoon Leader and I coordinated sectors of fire, trigger lines, engagement criteria, and 60mm mortar fires over the radio, as we were essentially in an L-shaped ambush.

On February 27, I was FRAGOd to get my platoon into PZ posture to conduct a search and air rescue (SAR) mission into Al Khadir. a town of about 25,000 people, to rescue an AH-1 helicopter crew and attempt to back haul the aircraft. We were in PZ posture and flying in eleven minutes; we flew in ammunition heavy, with no NODs, cold-weather gear, extra water, or chow. After back-hauling the pilots and reporting negative contact, I received word to dig in around the helicopter and prepare for extraction at first light. Quickly realizing the criticality of the missing equipment, I explained my situation and called for a resupply. "Higher" opted to back-haul the helicopter and us before night fall.

When we returned, we were briefed on the latest intelligence. A Republican Guards Division was headed toward our AO when it got the word that we--a large American airborne force--had seized Highway 8. As it turned around, the 24th Infantry Division and coalition air force elements destroyed the Republican Guards Division on Highway 8 to our immediate eastern flank. The remaining Iraqi forces were attempting to withdraw through Basra.

On February 28, we were FRAGOd into PZ posture for another SAR mission; this one was approximately 30 kilometers away and only entailed blowing up key

components of a downed F16--the pilot was simultaneously being recovered miles away. However, this time we were in PZ posture in approximately ~~10~~ 15 minutes, with contingency rucks to include approximately a dozen incendiary grenades. When we returned from this successful mission, I was briefed on the plans for a cease fire that was to be in effect that day. Despite the imposed cease fire, I was briefed on a mission to destroy a logistics base that was discovered by 1st Platoon on a mounted reconnaissance.

On March 1, the company conducted a deliberate attack to destroy the Iraqi 197th Reconnaissance Battalion's logistics base. During the attack, we captured and destroyed hundreds of weapons systems, NODs, and communications systems. The resistance was so light that the mission equated to a combined arms LFX in a combat zone.

On March 6, 3/187 Infantry was extracted back to a captured oil refinery, where we stayed for two days. The battalion was air assaulted and ground convoyed 125 miles south to FOB Cobra, with the exception of 3rd Platoon, a TOW Platoon, a Vulcan anti-aircraft gun, and the Bravo Company Executive Officer. This organization became known as Team Gordy. Team Gordy was ordered to reoccupy our former company BP as a show of force, as the Iraqi's were not following through with all of the terms of the cease fire.

From March 8-15, Team Gordy and elements of the battalion S-4 section were holding the western flank of the coalition forces. During this time, we improved our defense, processed enemy prisoners of war (EPWs), and did PT. On March 15, we were ordered into PZ posture and prepared for our flight to FOB Cobra and safety. We stayed at FOB Cobra until March 20, ~~and~~ then flew back to Rhafa and further back to KFIA and CE II.

We conducted equipment and soldier maintenance, AARs, and PT, and prepared to fly back home. On April 7, 1991, nearly seven months after departing from CAAF, we landed back at CAAF to the warmest welcome imaginable.

The 3rd Platoon, Bravo Company, 3rd Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, conducted an incredible amount of training, before, during, and after the Gulf War. The platoon was successful as a unit because of the training,

leadership, initiative, and pride of the unit's soldiers and leaders throughout the Gulf War.

The platoon took part in the largest and deepest air assault in history as part of GEN Schwartzkopf's "Hail Mary" play. It spent 24 days in Iraq, to include going into Al Khadir, which made it the farthest north conventional unit in the theater. It did not lose accountability of any equipment or experience any personal losses--the platoon was noted as proficient and disciplined.

The 3rd platoon's personnel remained together for seventeen straight months, from August, 1990, when all permanent changes of station (PCSs) were frozen, until January, 1992, when the freeze was lifted. With very few exceptions, the 43-man platoon, to include the platoon leader, platoon sergeant, and the four squad leaders, remained in position. When we returned to Fort Campbell, we took three weeks leave and came back to two months of recovery. In August, 1991, we did our first LFX since returning from the Gulf. These exercises were conducted with an intensity previously unseen on Fort Campbell (as per the Assistant Division Commander). The 3rd platoon consistently increased its training proficiency, constantly preparing for the next "rendezvous with destiny."

Lessons Learned/Applicability to Todays Platoon Leaders:

We had to go to war, and the Gulf War was as close to an Infantry leader's dream as possible. We had no training distractions, 100% positive control of our soldiers 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. We had incredibly few "vices" available. But we did have austere conditions and lonely soldiers. With this in mind, this is what we learned.

Many of these lessons learned will initially sound like cliches; nevertheless they are proven lessons learned that you as an Infantry leader may benefit.

Training:

-Train your unit for combat everyday; do not get lulled into a sense of security regardless of your unit's deployability status.

-Learn to use your equipment and maintain it as if you were going to combat tomorrow. You must learn to employ and maintain your equipment in all environments and conditions; train it. You will not get new equipment as you head out the door, so learn to maximize your equipment's affects and always maintain it to Army standards.

-My leaders and soldiers became very familiar with the equipment because we had a long time to train with it. Leaders must understand the capabilities and limitations of all organic and supporting weapons systems. The penetration of weapons, burst radius, minimum arming distance, minimum safe distance etc.

-Know that our LAWs and AT4s do not have an illuminated reticle--that is a problem when illumination is restricted and there is no illumination.

-M47 Dragon bottles and batteries died extremely quickly in the desert and were nearly impossible to keep charged.

-Weapons, NODs, and communications gear must be protected by T-shirts or rags during air assaults and wind storms or the weapons will be inoperable in short order.

-Cross train weapons systems to include training on attached and OPCON equipment. In "combat" you may have long periods of time when you are looking for something different to train--there is always plenty to train.

-During inspections, inspect magazines and ammunition, especially when it has been issued for quite some time. Also inspect accountability. We lived with ammunition for seven months and did not have one accidental discharge in our battalion--discipline is key.

-In the desert NODs, thermal imagery devices and lasers are all outstanding combat multipliers. Zero them and maximize them.

-Signals of all types were generally enhanced in the desert. Distances were spread out, but elements were usually in sight, which greatly enhanced control. Primary, alternate, and tierchiary signals are a must for everything.

-Contingency plan everything.

-When NCOs and soldiers lives depend on their competency, they realize how much training they need to do and how much they do not know as a unit. Your challenge is to breed that attitude into peacetime "normal daily business." Incorporate Battle Drills or individual tasks such as POW and Search techniques or room clearing into the last five to ten minutes of daily

PT--make it a standard. Don't allow your soldiers to do "chow prep," the 20-30 minutes prior to lunch where soldiers don't do anything; check on them and ensure they are training on something--anything.

-Allow and force your subordinate leaders to train and lead, then retrain and lead again. They have got to be used to training and creative when conducting training.

-When soldiers are bored with training, ask them what they think you should be training. A lot of privates have good ideas--this also allows you a chance to assess who your serious soldiers are and who your slugs are; remember this when you promote them. Promote your trainers.

-When deploying take at least one of each of the "FM7-..., 21-...,22-..., 23-..., 25-..., 34-..., 90-..., 100-..., 101-...; take TMs for all equipment, and as many pertinent TSC training aids as possible. Your platoon footlocker should be filled with training materials versus candy and tobacco.

-The lack of tabacco/vice products in an austere environment can be a serious training distractor. Soldiers should coordinate for someone to send it to them or send it to themselves the day prior to deploying.

-In an austere environment with no light source other than flashlights, bulbs burn out and become a prized commodity. Pack extras and have a resupply plan.

-At times during the ground war, AM transitor radios were the best source of intelligence. Think before you arbitrarily cut all of these from the packing list.

-Know the area's light and weather data. Nobody thought that the desert would get down to 20 degrees in January because we were worried about it being 130 degrees when we deployed. It got dark at 1630 in the winter.

-Soldiers need to be shown austere environments (Desert, Arctic, or Jungle) will not kill them, that they can effectively fight in these environments. When you deploy, get them into these environments as soon as possible; set them up for success.

-Personal hygiene in the desert is easier than in the jungle, but it is still of great concern and must be continuously monitored/enforced.

-80% of my soldiers became sick with Sand Fly Fever, for a 2-3 day period, between October and December. This was a totally incapacitating NVD (Nauseas, Vomiting, Diarrhea) sickness. Once it was over, I had no soldiers catch it twice.

-Helicopter landing zones and pick up zones are usually doubled in size in the desert because of brown out.

-Training without seats in helicopters is restricted in most units during "peacetime." However, at a minimum, units must train static loading helicopters on the ground and develop SOPs that support that training.

-Cross talk between platoons and squads must be trained and constantly encouraged/enforced. Leaders have to crosstalk on the battlefield.

-Navigation is a challenge in the desert but can and must be trained and learned well, by practicing it and doing long movements. Only use the Global Positioning System as a backup.

-My soldiers ate MREs for 35-42 straight days three different times. In Iraq, when we reoccupied as part of Team Gordy, my soldiers did not eat for over three days. It did not kill them. MRE heaters became a big morale booster.

-In the desert, we did PT almost every day, even when we knew we may not get a shower for two months. Numerous individuals may give excuses for not doing PT in the field--don't buy them.

-My soldiers averaged four broken hours of sleep for months on end. They got used to it and functioned at 100%.

-The average rucksack going into Iraq, weighed over 130 pounds. The situation and resupply capability was vague, and the weather was harsh. If the soldiers would have had to move far or fast, we would have had to drop rucks and lose nearly everything we brought in. Soldiers' load will always haunt us. Train to fight with heavy loads.

-Although there were no ranger qualified enlisted soldiers in the platoon on G-Day, within eight months of returning to Fort Campbell, Kentucky, six soldiers from 3rd Platoon had graduated from the U.S. Army Ranger Course. These six, along with the other 35, knew that they had successfully faced the harshest environment and had lived through tougher conditions than any school environment would provide.

This is why I believe every Infantry Leader should go to the Ranger Course; the cadre expects nothing of a Ranger student that a leader will not expect of an Infantryman in combat or that an Infantryman will expect of a leader in combat.

-Training soldiers to standard after they have been in "combat" is a challenge for some new platoon leaders. The answer is: be physically fit; technically and tactically proficient; and be a leader; then smoke the "combat vets" against Army standards i.e. conduct a twelve-mile forced-march to a squad or platoon movement to contact lane then evaluate them against ARTEP standards--this will smoke, and thus humble, your combat vets.

The key is to confidently integrate new soldiers, to include yourself as a new platoon leader, and find a way to quickly re-focus your element on training to fight, win, and survive in their next combat engagement.

Leadership:

-Regardless of your highers competence, you must be loyal to him/them and support him/them as long as they are the "higher." Learn their strengths and weaknesses and maximize them to train your unit. If you do not support them, your subordinates will not support you, and your unit will suffer.

-Do not allow your soldiers to deploy without having their paperwork (Powers of Attorney, Wills, Checking Accounts etc.) squared away. This will become an instant training/leader distractor even in combat.

-Do not allow your soldiers to "fall in love" and leave their checkbook with a girlfriend. Numerous soldiers lost their girlfriends and thousands of dollars doing this.

-Soldiers want to be led; they do not want another friend. Leadership in an austere environment is a lonely job. You can never snivel, whine, or show weakness in front of your subordinates--if you do, you will scare them. A technique for showing your individual soldiers that you care about them and that you are human is to talk to them when you check them out while they are on guard. You can learn an awful lot about a lonely or scared young man at 0200, if you are up and listening to him. A soldier will be brutally honest about himself, his family, and about you if he's given the chance.

-Never feel sorry for making your soldiers do the hard right. Do not entertain their snivels--only their concerns.

-Morale activities in an austere environment are a definite combat multiplier. In order: two-way mail, phones, quality rations (hot), showers, living

quarters/conditions (3rd Brigade bought generators to power lights in tents), and entertainment (athletic competitions, TV/VCRs, tape recorders, walkmans, the Chaplain, USO guests etc.); these all seemed very important.

-If your squad leaders are forced to live with their soldiers 24 hours per day, 7 days a week for an extended period of time, have a plan to give them a break. It is incredible pressure to live, work, and relax with the same people when you are charged with maintaining discipline--take care of your leaders, so they can take care of your soldiers.

-Give awards in training and combat. A soldier with an AAM or ARCOM from a LFX in Saudi is probably fairly proud of it.

-Ensure your soldiers are smart about answering "any soldier" mail. They can not write "love letters" to fourteen year old school girls.

ENDNOTES

1. Rakkasan Soldiers Handbook. History of the 3rd Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, p. 2.

2. Operations Plan 90-5. 3rd Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, p. 1.

3. "LTG J. H. Binford Peay Remarks." The Screaming Eagle. September-October 1991, p. 27. LTG Peay is quoting GEN Schwartzkopf upon bidding the division a safe journey home.

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2. Sterling, George W. Interview. Special Forces Qualification Course. (1st Platoon Leader, Company B, 3rd Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment).

3. Ferrier, Michael. Interview, S3, 4th RTB. (Executive Officer [Company B]/Assistant S4, 3rd Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment).

4. Kreis, Paul K. Interview, Monograph. IOAC 3-94. (3rd Platoon, Company D, 3rd Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment- Team Gordy)

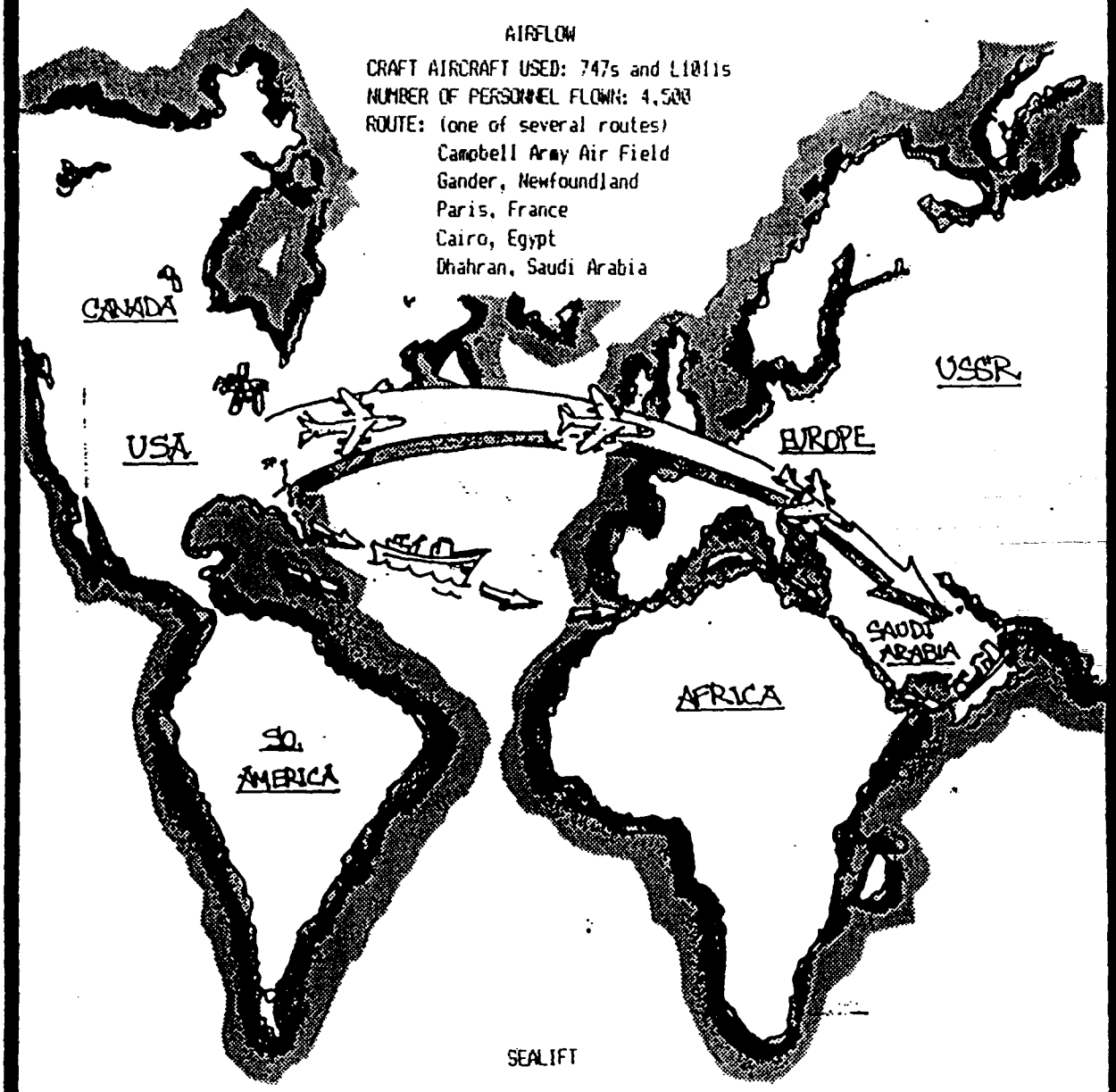
5. Esper, Mark T. **Monograph.** 4/325th Infantry (Abn). (AS3, 3rd Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment). [MAPS]

6. Rakkasan Soldiers **Handbook.** History of the 3rd Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, p. 2.

7. Operations Plan 90-5. 3rd Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, p. 1.

8. "LTG J. H. Binford Peay Remarks." The Screaming Eagle. September-October 1991, p. 27. LTG Peay is quoting GEN Schwartzkopf upon bidding the division a safe journey home.

DEPLOYMENT



AIRFLOW

CRAFT AIRCRAFT USED: 747s and L1011s
NUMBER OF PERSONNEL FLOWN: 4,500
ROUTE: (one of several routes)
Campbell Army Air Field
Gander, Newfoundland
Paris, France
Cairo, Egypt
Dhahran, Saudi Arabia

SEALIFT

SHIPS: RORDs- "Roll on, roll off"
LASHs- "Lighter aboard ships"
EQUIPMENT SHIPPED: 650 vehicles
16 40 ft connex's
24 small connex's
12 personnel

DATES: 9 August 1990 - 3 September 1990
ROUTE: Jacksonville, FL -- Atlantic Ocean
Mediteranean Sea -- Suez Canal
Red Sea -- Indian Ocean
Strait of Hormuz -- Persian Gulf

Note: The BDE conducted a 787 mile convoy from FTCKY to Jacksonville, FL on 5-7 Aug 90.

RAKKASANS

(MAP 1)

MOVE TO INTERMEDIATE STAGING BASE (TAA CAMPBELL)

AIRFLOW TO RAHFA

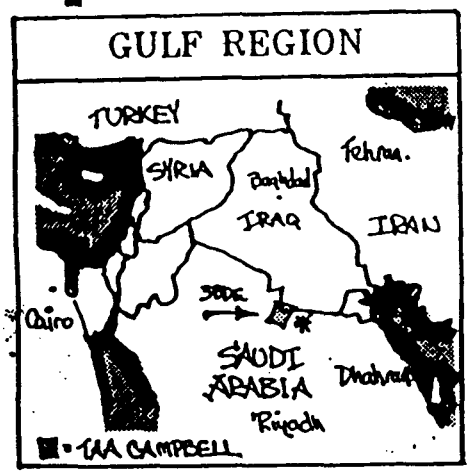
- -C130 Sorties.....137
- -Personnel.....over 2500
- -Distance.....550 mls

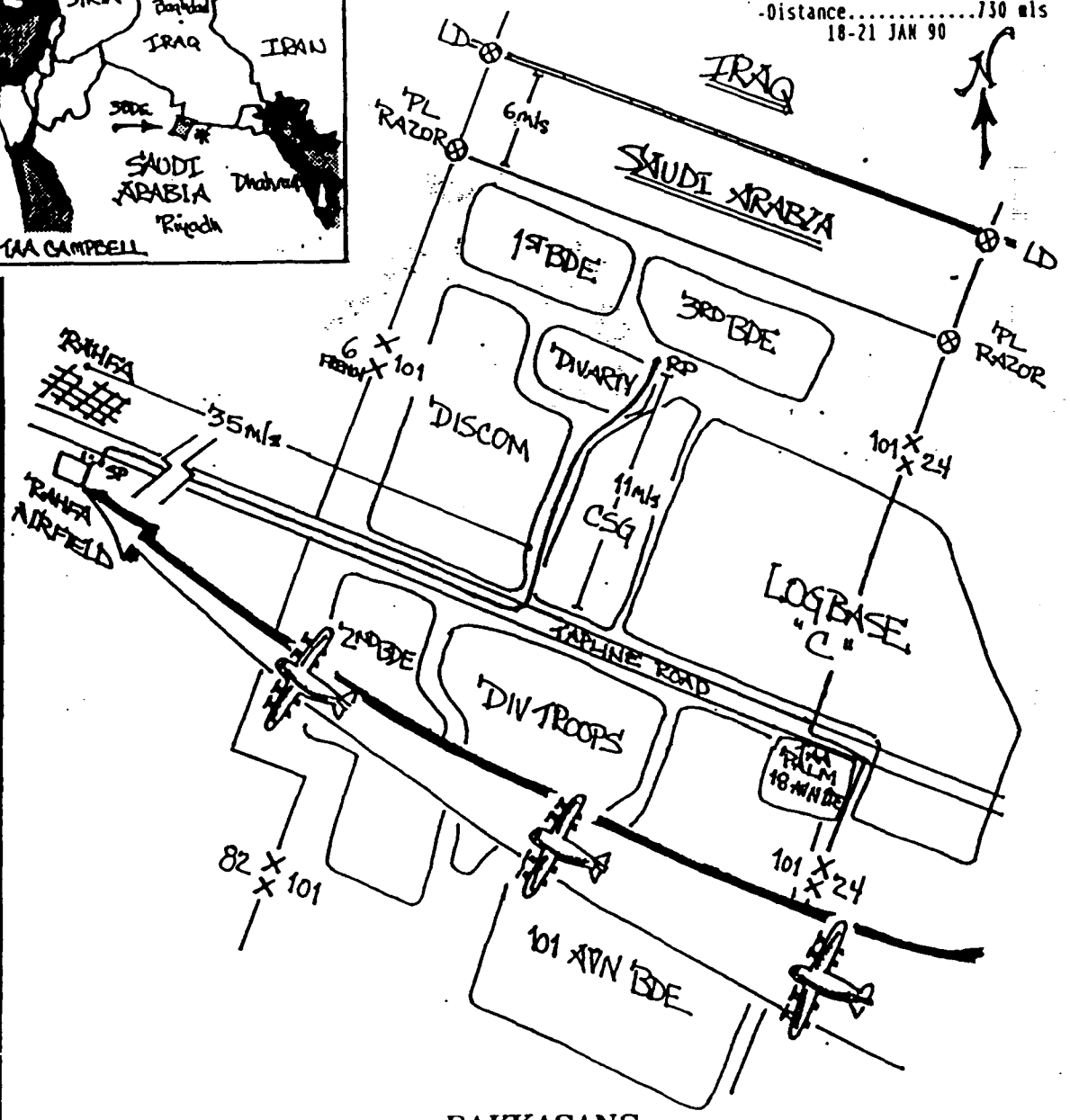
17-19 JAN 90

GROUND CONVOY TO TAA CAMPBELL

- -Number of vehicles.....475
- -Distance.....730 mls

18-21 JAN 90





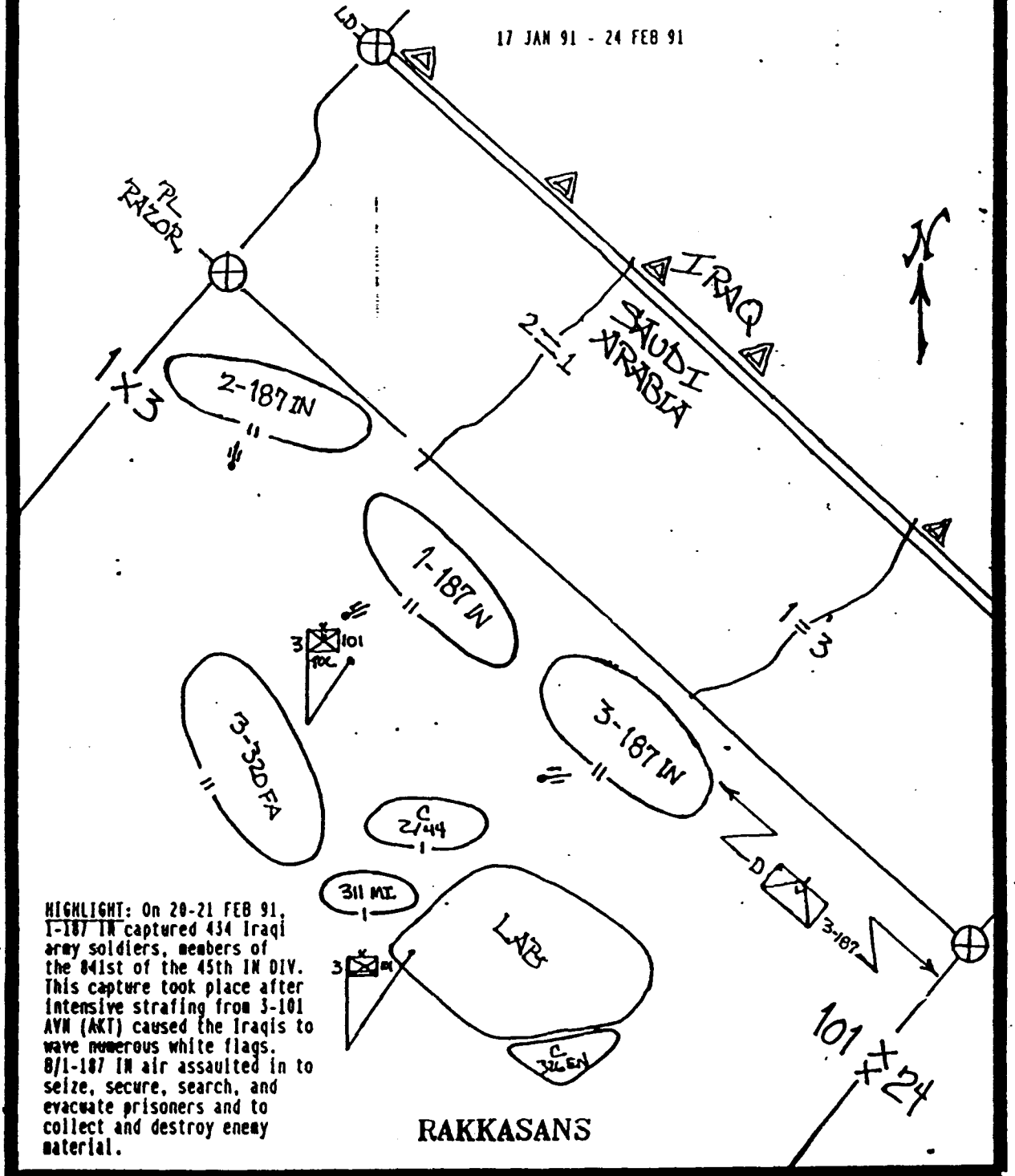
RAKKASANS

(MAP 2)

BORDER OPERATIONS

MISSION: 3d BDE conducts zone reconnaissance in sector from PL RAZOR to LD (SAUDI-IRAQI border) to provide security for 101st ABN DIV (AASLT), gather intelligence, and locate and report targets of opportunity in sector. On order, 3d BDE will conduct an armed reconnaissance across the LD to destroy all Iraqi forces deployed along the border in the BDE sector.

17 JAN 91 - 24 FEB 91



HIGHLIGHT: On 20-21 FEB 91, 1-187 IN captured 434 Iraqi army soldiers, members of the 841st of the 45th IN DIV. This capture took place after intensive strafing from 3-101 AVN (AKT) caused the Iraqis to wave numerous white flags. B/1-187 IN air assaulted in to seize, secure, search, and evacuate prisoners and to collect and destroy enemy material.

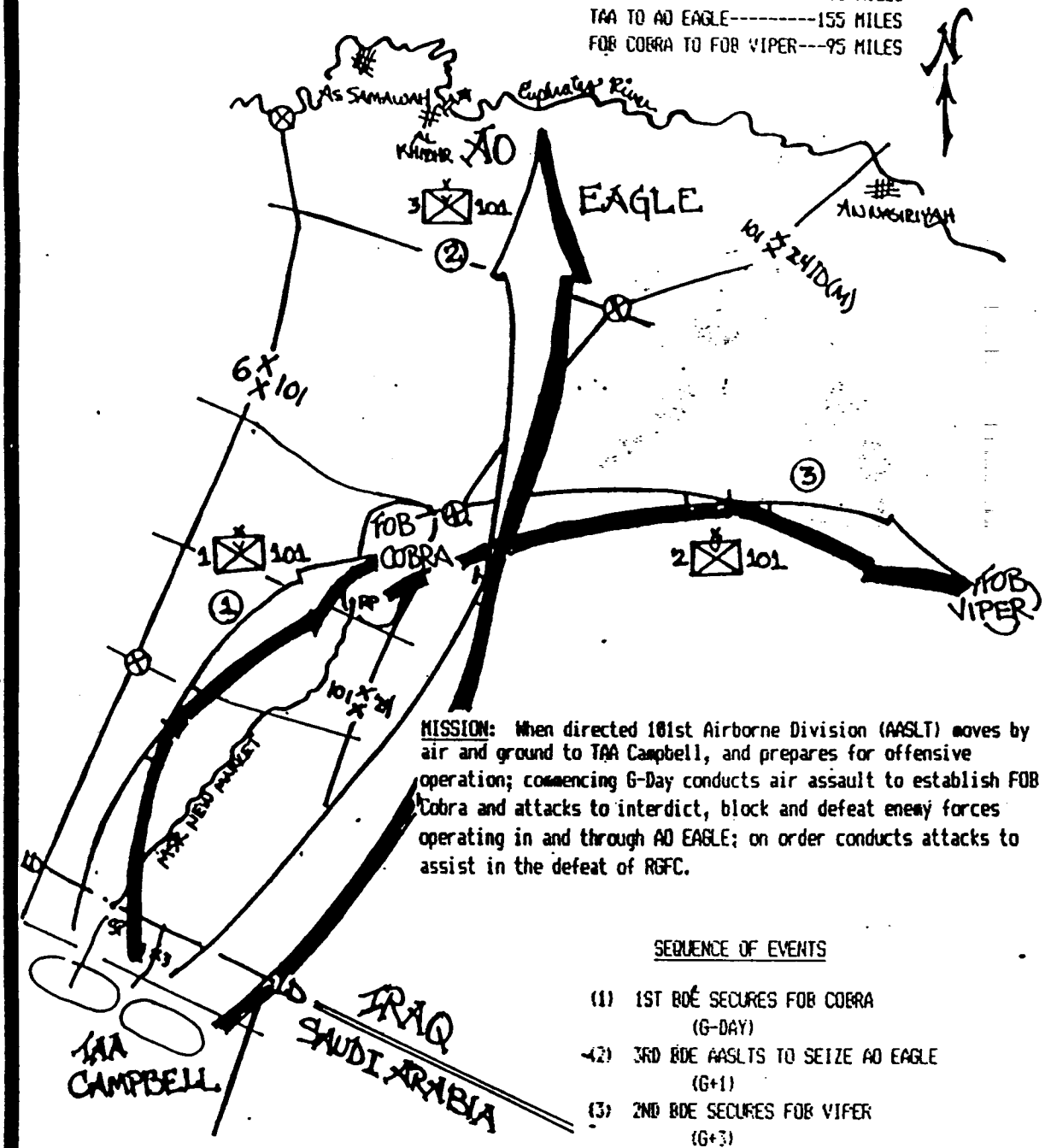
RAKKASANS

(MAP 3)

101st AIRBORNE DIVISION (AIR ASSAULT) PLAN

DISTANCES

TAA TO FOB COBRA---------93 MILES
TAA TO AO EAGLE---------155 MILES
FOB COBRA TO FOB VIPER---95 MILES



MISSION: When directed 101st Airborne Division (AASLT) moves by air and ground to TAA Campbell, and prepares for offensive operation; commencing G-Day conducts air assault to establish FOB Cobra and attacks to interdict, block and defeat enemy forces operating in and through AO EAGLE; on order conducts attacks to assist in the defeat of RGFC.

SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

(1) 1ST BDE SECURES FOB COBRA
(G-DAY)
(2) 3RD BDE AASLTS TO SEIZE AO EAGLE
(G+1)
(3) 2ND BDE SECURES FOB VIPER
(G+3)

RAKKASANS

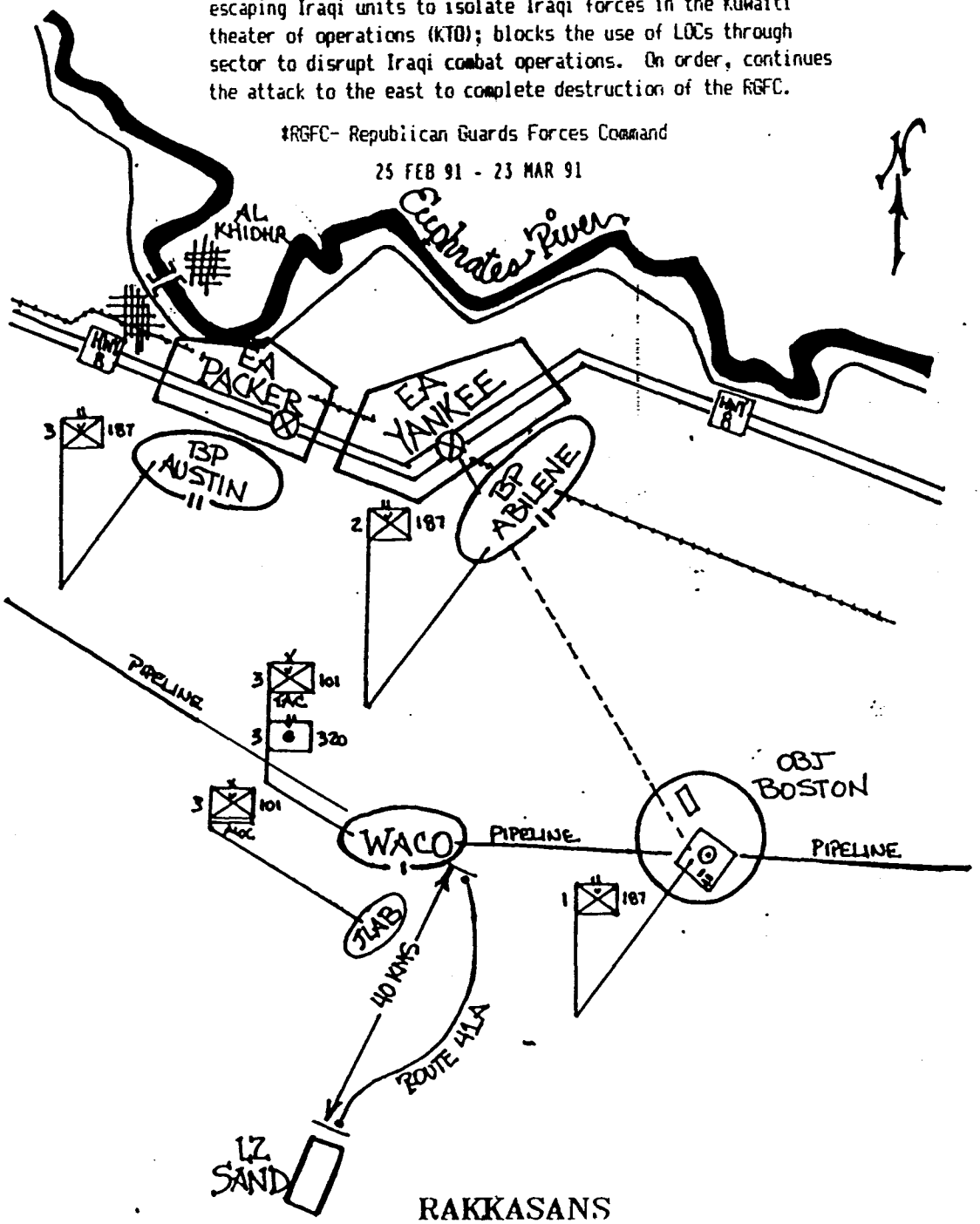
(MAP 4)

OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS
(AO EAGLE)

MISSION: At G+1, 3d BDE attacks by air assault to establish battle positions in sector of AO EAGLE; defeats reinforcing/ escaping Iraqi units to isolate Iraqi forces in the Kuwaiti theater of operations (KTO); blocks the use of LOCs through sector to disrupt Iraqi combat operations. On order, continues the attack to the east to complete destruction of the RGFC.

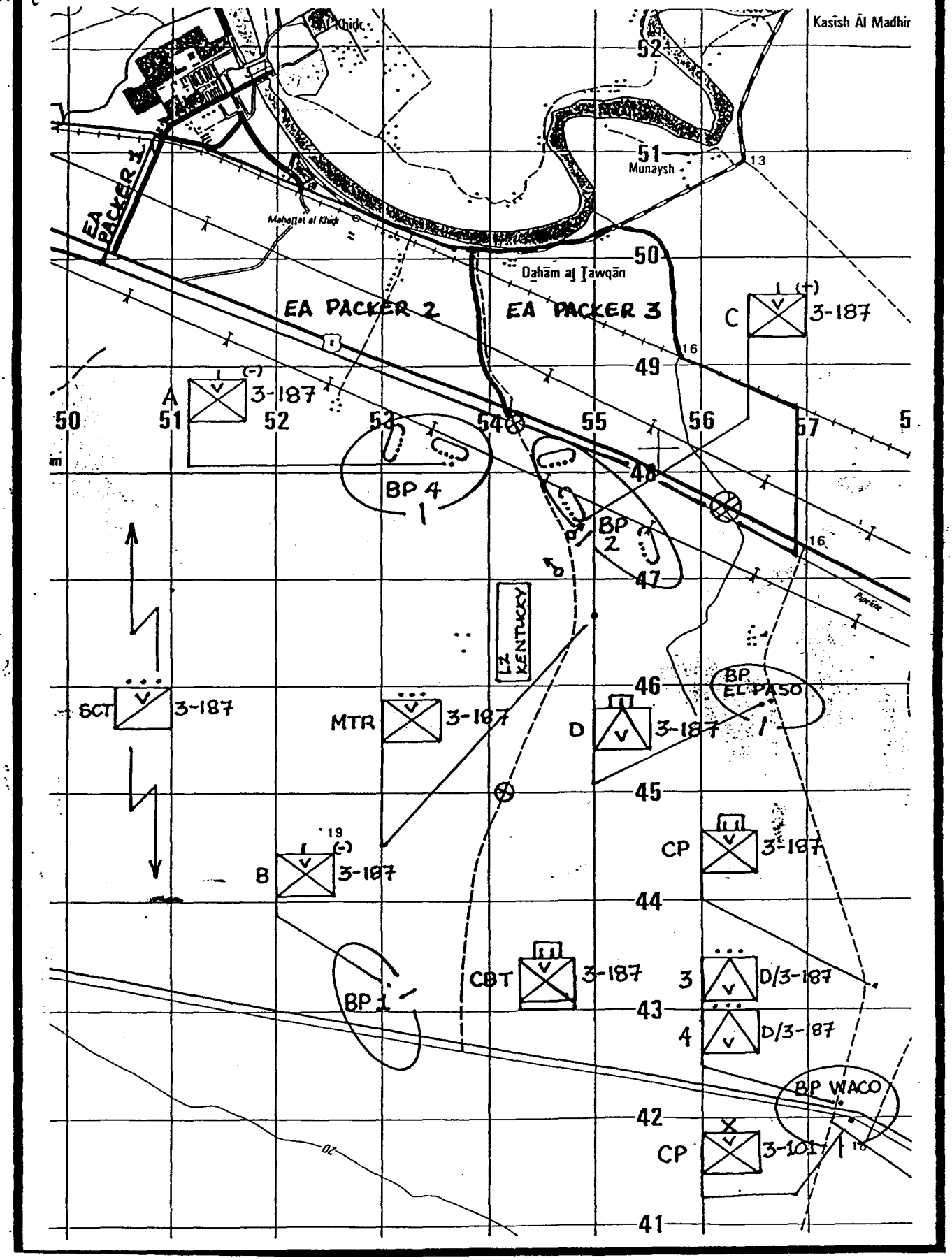
*RGFC- Republican Guards Forces Command

25 FEB 91 - 23 MAR 91



(MAP 5)

BATTLE POSITION AUSTIN



(MAP 6)