

Task Force 3-505 Parachute Infantry Regiment

Monograph

Captain John C. Paglianite

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On 2 August 1990, the Republic of Iraq's military forces, under the leadership of Saddam Hussein, seized the small, oil rich Emirate of Kuwait. The international community found this action unacceptable for two particular reasons. First, it gave a hostile government well over 20% of the world supply of crude oil and placed Iraq in a favorable position to conduct combat operations into the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.<sup>1</sup> This would have given Saddam Hussein possession of approximately 40% of the world's crude oil if he were successful. Second, it deposed a government that was friendly to the United States.

Six days after the invasion of Kuwait, President Bush committed American troops to the defense of Saudi Arabia. The 82nd Airborne Division, America's guard of honor, became the vanguard of the largest deployment of American combat troops since Vietnam.

Over the next four months, the international community, in conjunction with the United Nations Security Council, passed several resolutions demanding the unconditional surrender of Kuwait and the removal of Iraq's forces from Kuwait. Iraq's response was a clear act of defiance: it built up its forces in the Kuwait theatre of operations and continued to improve its defensive positions along the Kuwait-Saudi Arabia border.

In October 1990, the United Nations Security Council passed

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<sup>1</sup>Conway, p. 72.



a resolution authorizing any means necessary, including the use of force, to remove Saddam Hussein from Kuwait. During the first week of November 1990, President Bush responded by sending one mechanized infantry division, one armored division, and one air assault division to supplement the 82nd Airborne Division already in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. These troops included thousands of National Guard and Reserve forces. The 7th Corps, which included the 1st and 3rd Armored divisions, was also ordered to the Persian Gulf (see Figure 1). It was evident now, with two full American Corps in theatre (the 18th Airborne Corps, commanded by Lt. General Gary Luck; and the 7th Corps, commanded by Lt. General Fredrick Franks), that the United States forces and allies were quickly moving from a defensive to an offensive posture.

Operation Desert Shield had begun for the 82nd Airborne Division and 3-505 Parachute Infantry Regiment on 4 August 1990. My company, Charlie 3-505, had been conducting night live-fire exercises at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Around 2230 hours on the night of 4 August, I received a Warning Order from my commander, Captain Charles Dydasco, to prepare for movement to the Battalion Area. Shortly after midnight, in a torrential downpour, we began movement back to our billets. We were immediately locked in and began the H-hour alert sequence in preparation for the deployment. Deployment tasks and training activities continued until 13 August when we began deployment to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The 82nd Airborne Division drew the "line in the sand" that deterred Saddam Hussein from invading



Saudi Arabia.

Prior to being committed to the Persian Gulf, 3-505 Parachute Infantry Regiment conducted very little battle oriented training. From May until mid-July 1990, the battalion supported ROTC advanced camp. Not until late July 1990 did the battalion begin any effective collective training. Although paratroopers were effectively trained in their individual tasks, there was not adequate time to train effectively for collective Mission Essential Task List (METL). Additional training on these tasks would have demonstrated the weaknesses in our Standing Operating Procedures (SOP).

Forty-five days after deploying to Saudi Arabia, I was assigned as the company executive officer of Charlie Company. This event is significant only when considered in conjunction with the transition the Battalion and, particularly, Charlie Company were undergoing. Our Battalion Commander, LTC LaPlante, had assumed command in April of 1990, and our Battalion Executive Officer, Major Smith, had assumed his duties in July of 1990, only weeks before deployment. Equally significant is the fact that the Battalion's Sergeant Major, SGM Allen, had also assumed his duties in July of 1990. Captain Dydasco had only received the guidon of Charlie Company in March of 1990.

The first order of business for this relatively new chain of command was to understand and improve upon the existing Battalion and Company SOPs. However, the deployment of the entire Division did not allow 3-505 Parachute Infantry Regiment to complete the Intensified Training Cycle needed to completely integrate its new

leadership. Again, if that opportunity had been afforded, the weakness in our SOPs would have been discovered and corrected prior to the ground war as opposed to during, when it risked soldiers' lives.

From September to December 1990, the training focused on small unit training and live-fire exercises, with special emphasis placed on the attack of Iraq's strong points. This was a key training event during our External Evaluation in December of 1990.

On 8 January 1991, 3-505 Parachute Infantry Regiment received orders to depart from Champion Main and to move to Thumamah, Saudi Arabia, and prepare for future combat operations. Thumamah is located 70 kilometers south of Riyadh (see Figure 3). Using ground transportation, the convoys took from 8 to 12 hours to cover the 280 miles from Champion Main to Thumamah. Although the order was given with no notice, elements of the battalion completed the occupation of Thumamah within 48 hours of the order to move.

Panther Base was the name given to the Brigade Area of Operations at Thumamah. We continued to conduct small unit training and live-fire exercises and began sustained airborne training.

The air campaign phase of Operation Desert Storm began around 0200 hours, 17 January 1991, while we were at Panther Base.<sup>2</sup> We responded to the air campaign by continuing

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<sup>2</sup>Stars and Stripes, January 1990, p. 1.



individual and collective training in preparation for the ground war.

On 1 February 1991, the Battalion received the order to move from Panther Base to Tactical Assembly Area Plum (TAA Plum), located southwest of Rafha (see figure 3). The Battalion started moving on 4 February 1991. Most of the paratroopers and equipment flew by C-130 Hercules from King Khalid International Airport. I escorted the battalion's Class IV material 486 miles by ground convoy to TAA Plum to Attack Position Wheeler.

The priorities of work in TAA Plum focused on preparation for combat. Charlie Company, 3-505, hunkered down and prepared for war. Inspections, rehearsals, pre-combat checks, weapons serviceability firing, and training continued in anticipation of the ground assault.

On G-1, 23 February 1991, Charlie Company, 3-505 Parachute Infantry Regiment, crossed the line of departure/line of contact as part of the brigade convoy north along Main Supply Route (MSR) Texas. We continued to move east to MSR Virginia (see Figure 4). On G+3, 27 February 1991, the battalion received an order to move ASAP toward objective Gold, Mea Suq Ash Shuyuk in the vicinity of Talil Airfield (see Map 2), to conduct a movement to contact to prevent elements of the Republican Guard (ABN) from withdrawing north across the Euphrates River. We did not move until G+4, 28 February 1991.

Each company in the task force was given a sector to conduct a movement to contact along a parallel zone with the limit of advance as the Euphrates River. The 1st Platoon from Charlie



Company had been detached and reassigned to the Delta Company Anti-Armor unit to provide dismount security for the TOW weapons systems. Prior to initiating the movement to contact, the company Fire Support Officer, 1st Lt. Roy Alston, submitted a target list to the supporting Battery, Alpha-1st/319th. 1st Lt. Alston targeted the two main objectives in our area of operation: a small bridge which spanned a levy and a road intersection. 1st Lt. Alston also plotted targets short of the line of departure, from the line of departure to the march objectives, and beyond the objectives. Captain Dydasco then instructed 1st Lt. Alston to lay on the initial target and change priority targets on his command.<sup>3</sup>

The company moved approximately six kilometers when the anti-armor section that was leading north toward its objective radioed back. Lt. Kelly, the anti-armored platoon leader attached to our company, said that the recent rains had made the low areas soft and that he had two M996 (Humvees) stuck. We stopped and put out local security, and I moved up in a five-ton truck with a squad from 2nd Platoon as security. We pulled out the Humvees, then pulled back into the safety of the company perimeter. Local civilians were starting to gather and pointing towards the area where the vehicles had been stuck. They did not speak English, and the Task Force linguist was still at the Battalion Command Post. This made communication impossible. Captain Dydasco gave a fragmentary order (frago), dismounted the

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<sup>3</sup>1st Lt. Roy Alston.



remaining two platoons, and moved through the low area. He instructed me to take the company's five-ton trucks, along with the Delta Anti-Armor platoon, and a squad from 2nd Platoon, under the control of 2nd Lt. Rakocy, for security, and move south to what appeared to be a Petroleum, Oil, and Lubricant (POL) site to fill up the vehicles and then rejoin the company. I suggested to Captain Dydasco that I only take two five-ton trucks, all the five gallon cans, a Humvee, and a squad from 2nd Platoon, minus Lt. Rakocy, for protection. I thought 2nd Lt. Rakocy should be with his platoon. This could have given the company an overwatch or support by fire position if needed while they moved north. I was moving south and believed the risk was not as great. Captain Dydasco overruled my recommendation.

Now the company movement to contact, in conjunction with Task Force movement to contact, had been reduced to one complete platoon, a platoon minus, and a headquarters section minus with nothing larger than a 7.62mm machine gun to be used in direct fire mode. The mortar section was with me. It seemed that the majority of combat fire power was moving south with me and not north with the maneuver element and Captain Dydasco.

I maneuvered the five-ton trucks and the Stinger section with the Delta Anti-Armor section pulling security in lead and trail. I decided to sacrifice security for speed because most of the area had been cleared previously, and the threat was minimal.

We had been correct by map recon, and the area was a POL site. The POL site had three 400-500 gallon tanks of diesel but no pumping apparatus. We tied 550 cord to the tops of the five



gallon cans and lowered them down into the tanks. The process was slow but effective. We had security posted, and the TOWs watched the high speed avenues of approach. We were almost two-thirds finished when I received a radio transmission from Captain Dydasco instructing me to bring up the Delta Platoon and remainder of the Headquarters element to set up a support by fire position. Charlie Company's lead platoon was receiving direct fire to its front. 1st Lt. Hughey was the platoon leader in command of the lead platoon. I confirmed the grid and called 2nd Lt. Rakocy (the 2nd Platoon leader) and 1st Lt. Kelly (Anti-Armor Platoon Leader). I gave a quick frago and decided that we would use the roads (see Map 1). They both agreed that this would be quicker. We assembled the troops, gave them a very quick brief of the situation, and moved out with a Delta section, comprised of a Mark 19, a 40mm grenade launcher, a .50 caliber machine gun, and a Stinger Humvee. The five-ton trucks followed the Humvee with the remainder of the Delta Platoon trailing. I traveled in the Stinger Humvee so I would have access to a radio. We maneuvered to the position directed by Captain Dydasco and his radio transmission. I did not have the luxury of a Global Positioning System (GPS), but I was positive that we were in the specified area and could support the company. I radioed Captain Dydasco and let him know we were in position. The company net was busy with traffic, mostly 1st Lt. Hughey sending situation reports back to Captain Dydasco. Captain Dydasco ordered 1st Lt. Hughey to move back to the south side of the road but did not say

why.<sup>4</sup>

I made a decision that I would later regret. Without authorization from Captain Dydasco, I moved the anti-tank platoon closer to the company to establish a support by fire position. I believed that this action would better support the company and place me in a position to support the operation more effectively. However, I did not have access to the fire support net, and I was unaware that all guns of the 105mm battery had been requested as an "at my command" mission by the company fire support officer and were targeted at the area in which I was going to enter. I noticed OH-58 Delta hovering in the nearby area. I thought it was in the process of lasing a target for an Apache. Then I saw a soldier from 2nd Platoon trying frantically to get my attention. I realized that something was wrong and turned the Delta Platoon around and moved back to our original support by fire position (see Figure 5). Fortunately, the 105mm fires never materialized.

In the few hectic moments before Delta Platoon turned around, dozens of messages flooded to battalion and battery headquarters, attempting to stop the fire mission.<sup>5</sup>

The presence of the OH-58D indicated that the brigade had become involved as well. Release authority for employment of Army Air was held at the Brigade level.

It is unclear whether the fire mission ended due to the

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<sup>4</sup>Lt. Tony Hughey

<sup>5</sup>1st Lt. Roy Alston.



repeated pleas over the radio by our company FSO or whether the OH-58D pilot had identified the United States soldiers fleeing the target area and then alerted the other units involved. Ultimately, Colonel Hale, the Brigade commander, cancelled the mission.<sup>6</sup> The only element that should have called for fire in this situation was the 3rd Platoon, with the consent of the company commander. The company should have had the 60mm mortars, but they were with me. I should have instructed the Mortar Sergeant to set up when we arrived at our original support by fire position, and he could have suppressed the objective area.

Captain Dydasco ordered Lt. Hughey to move back across the road and clear the far side. When he was sure that there were no indirect fires inbound, 1st Lt. Hughey reported that the enemy had retreated from the objective area.<sup>7</sup> Captain Dydasco ordered me to move back to the south side of the road and to link up with the company. We set up a company perimeter, while Captain Dydasco requested permission to cross the limit of advance in pursuit of the enemy. The request was denied. We were later told that President Bush had announced to the world that, "midnight eastern standard time, exactly 100 hours since the ground war commenced and six weeks since the start of Desert Storm, all United States and coalition forces will suspend combat operations."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>1st Lt. Roy Alston.

<sup>7</sup>Lt. Tony Hughey.

<sup>8</sup>Fayetteville Observer-Times, 28 February 1991, p. 1.



For seven months, Charlie Company, 3-505 Parachute Infantry Regiment, had prepared to engage the Iraqi army and defeat them. Our mission had been simple. In my opinion, the soldiers, squads, and platoons had been well-prepared and ready for combat. We had spent months on small unit training to prepare the individual paratrooper tactically, physically, and spiritually. We continued to fix equipment shortcomings right up to crossing the line of departure/contact. It was clear to me that we had made contingencies for everything until I found myself separated from the maneuver element of the company and desperately tried to rejoin them for the fight. It is clear to me now that we did not have all of the glitches worked out of the command and control portion of the plan.

The Euphrates Valley is large, flat, and open, with long range visibility possible, which could have enabled us to incorporate numerous SOPs to assist in communication. If SOPs had been established, rehearsed, and understood by all, we would have had a primary and alternate means of communications, which could have prevented me from making a poor decision and moving the support by fire position from its original location.

We were fortunate that afternoon not to have had any paratroopers killed by friendly fire, either by direct or indirect fire.

The logical step to prevent any action like this from repeating itself would be to streamline the company Tactical SOPs with emphasis on the most complex element: command, control, and communications. Future soldiers' lives depend upon it.



Task Organization 28 February 1991

Company Commander	Charles A. Dydasco
Executive Officer	John C. Paglianite
1st Platoon Leader (Detached)	Jon Mayer
2nd Platoon Leader	Jason Rakocy
3rd Platoon Leader	Tony Hughey
Fire Support Officer	Roy Alston
Anti-Tank Platoon Leader	Dave Kelly

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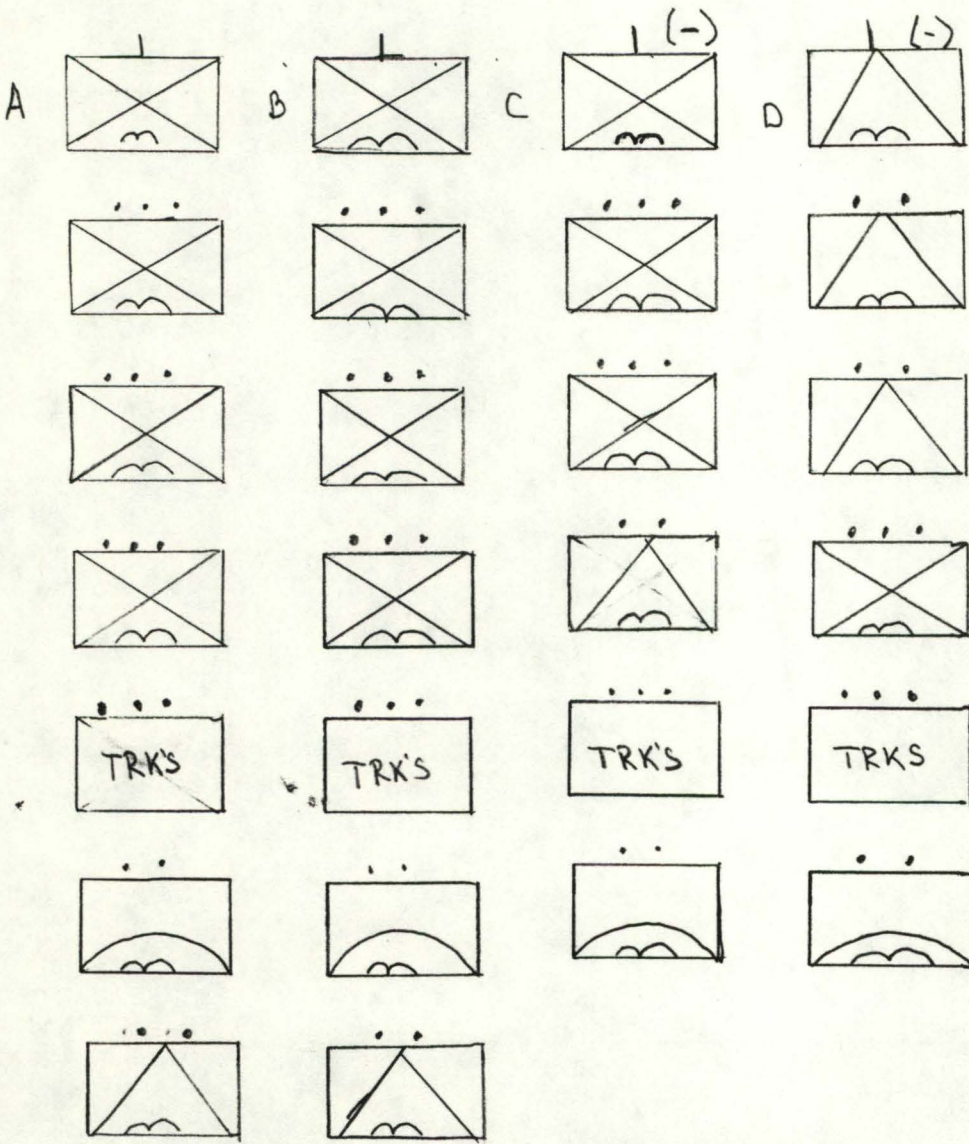
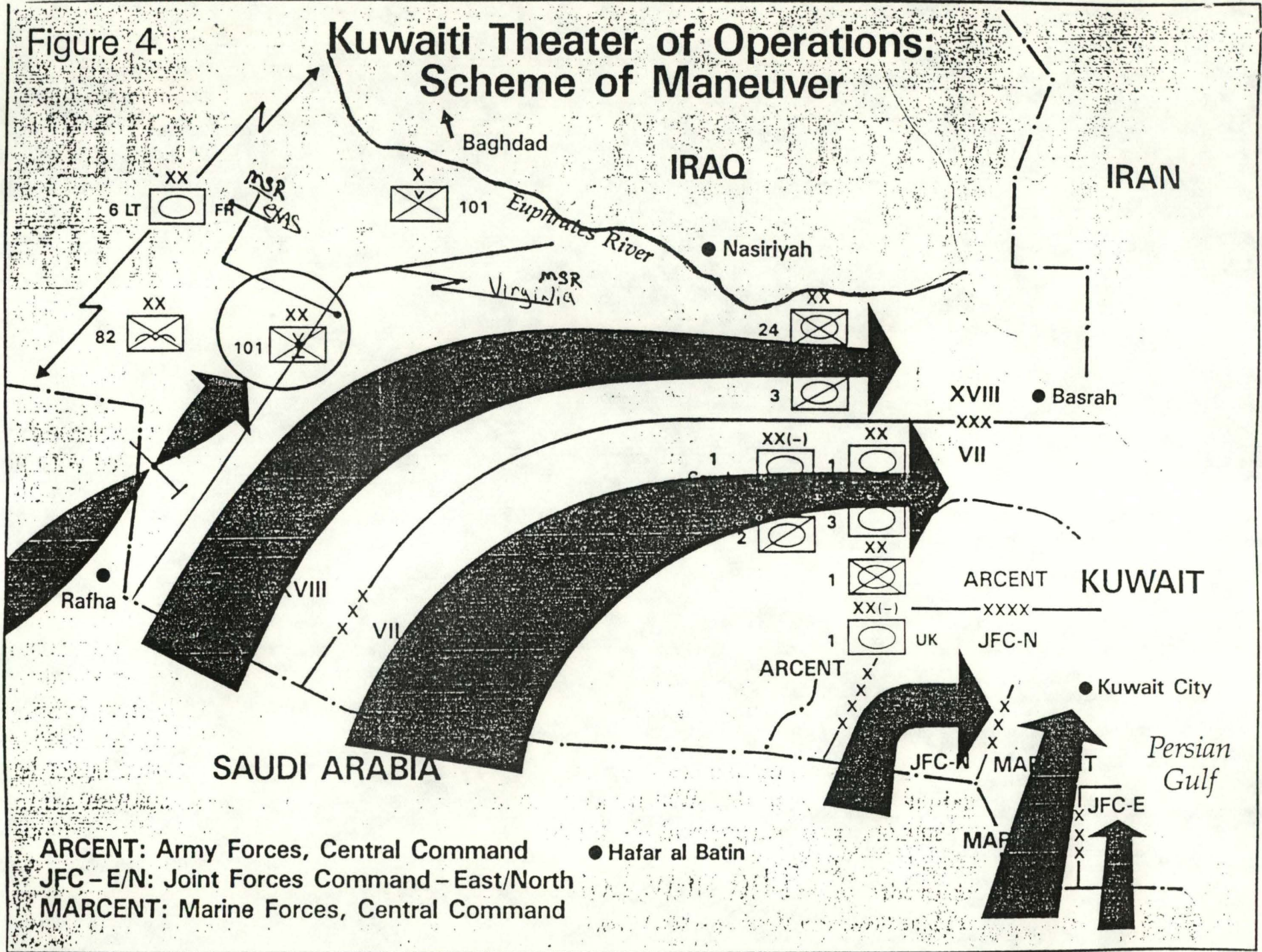




Figure 4.

# Kuwaiti Theater of Operations: Scheme of Maneuver



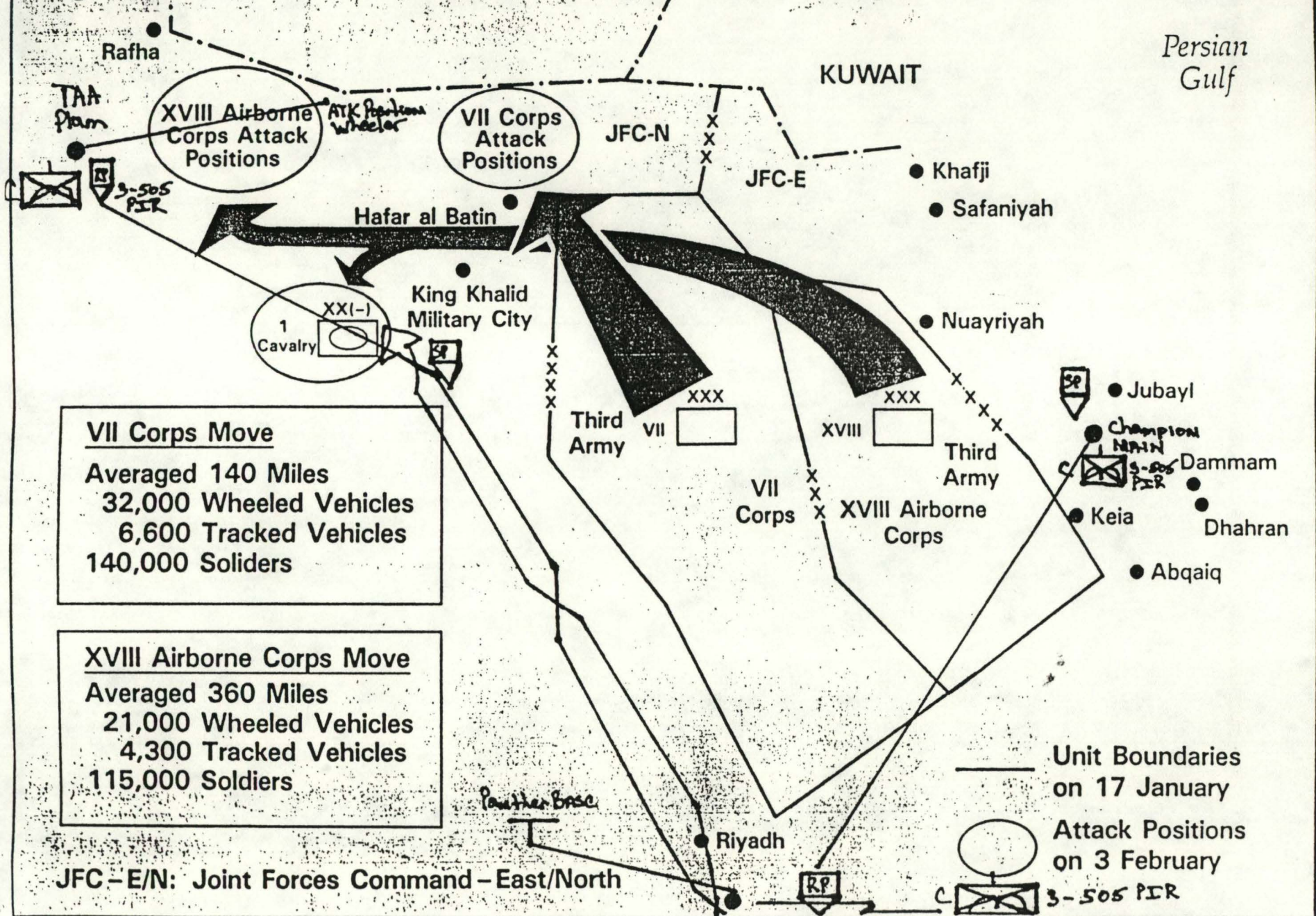
ARCENT: Army Forces, Central Command  
 JFC - E/N: Joint Forces Command - East/North  
 MARCENT: Marine Forces, Central Command

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Figure 3.

# Movement of Two Corps





# Figure 1. Army Forces, Central Command and Control

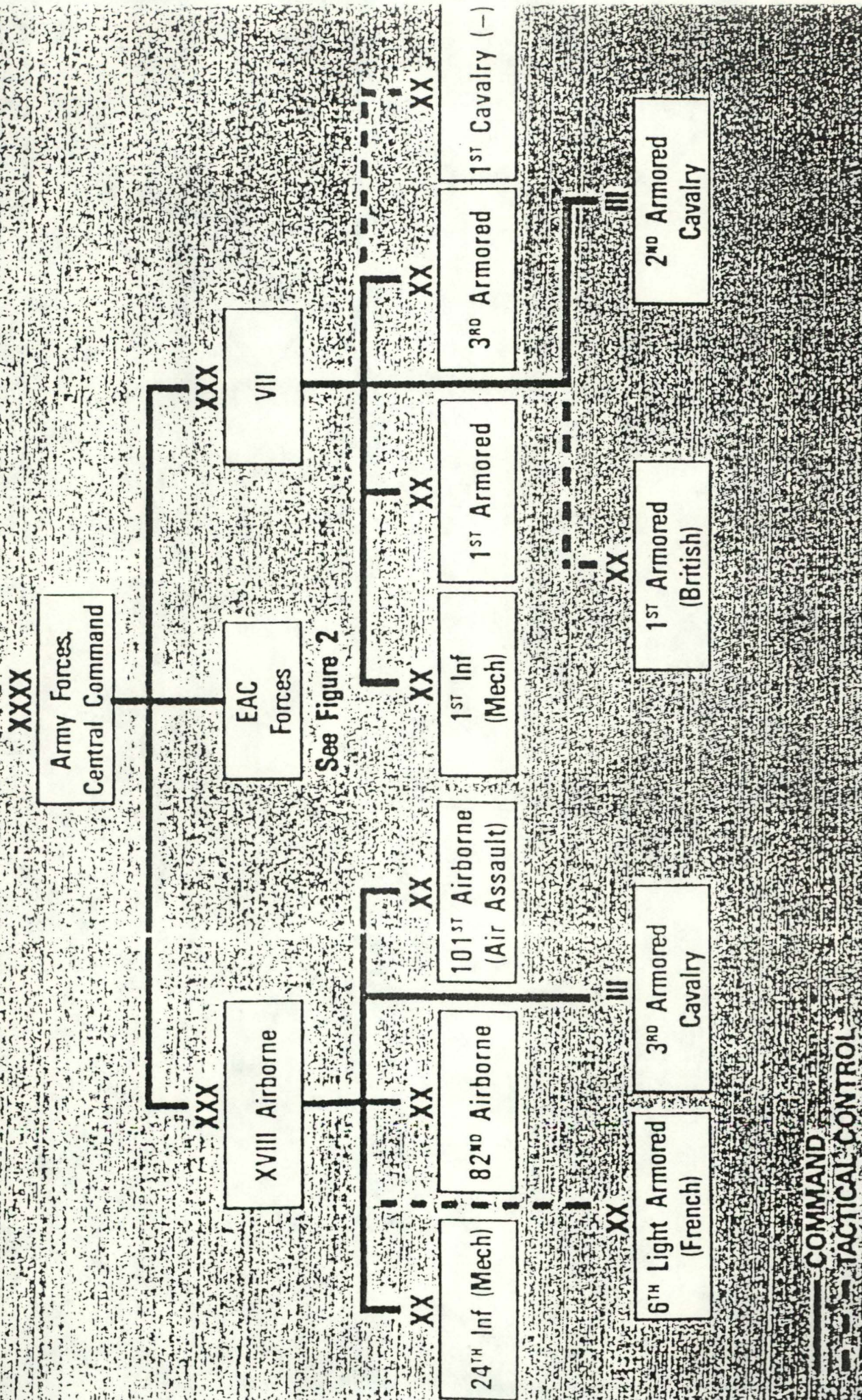








Figure #5

