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News in brief

Goggles investigated in crash

AURORA, Colo. — Investigators looking into the crash here of a Colorado Army National Guard helicopter that killed two pilots will pay close attention to the night-vision goggles the pilots were using, officials said.

Tom Schultz, a Guard spokesman, said investigators from the Army Safety Center, Fort Rucker, Ala., will check the goggles because the devices have been blamed for crashes causing 80 deaths during the last three years.

Killed in the crash late Sept. 4 of the OH-6 Cayuse helicopter were Lt. Col. Robert R. Wade, 42, of Westminster and CW4 Charles D. Yingst, 42, of Elizabeth. Both were with the 2d Battalion, 135th Aviation Regiment, Colorado Army National Guard.

The wrecked helicopter was found at the base of a radio tower and officers from the local sheriff's office said white paint on the wreckage indicate its rotor blades may have struck a wire.

Schultz, however, said there was no evidence of a collision. "There's a lot of speculation, about the goggles, about the tower nearby, but that's all it is — speculation," he said.

Further cuts averted

WASHINGTON — While Democrats have talked about cutting the defense budget in light of the collapse of the Soviet Union, when it came time to vote on the matter, they had second thoughts.

On Sept. 10, the Senate defeated at attempt by Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, to divert \$3 billion from military spending to a variety of domestic programs. The vote was 69-28.

With the sound of budget knives sharpening, Defense Secretary Richard Cheney spent several days before the vote lobbying against additional

defense cuts. He said the 25 percent military drawdown planned for the next four years is massive and should not be increased or accelerated.

Cheney warned it is far from certain that democracy has triumphed in the Soviet Union. "There are too many uncertainties out there now for me to conclude there is no prospect for anything other than a pleasant outcome in the Soviet Union," he told the *Washington Post*.

With or without the Soviet threat, Cheney repeatedly has said the military should not be reduced below the "base force" remaining in 1995 after the 25 percent cut.

Lawmakers still may divert a smaller amount of the 1992 defense budget to provide emergency aid to the Soviet Union, an effort Cheney also opposes.

Alleged spy charged

TAMPA, Fla. — The FBI arrested reputed spy Roderick James Ramsay more than a year ago and said he was responsible for an "unprecedented" breach in Western security. But charges against him were announced only recently.

Federal authorities waited 13 months before formally charging the 29-year-old former sergeant with espionage. The indictment was unsealed Sept. 4.

Ramsay, who spent the 15 months since his arrest in the Hillsborough County, Fla., jail, is charged with selling classified documents to Hungarian and Czechoslovakian spies. The documents concerned plans for the defense of Central Europe, the United States' use of tactical nuclear weapons and U.S. military communications technology, according to the two-page indictment.

The indictment says the offenses occurred in November and December 1985, while Ramsay

was stationed in West Germany. If convicted, Ramsay could be sentenced to life in prison.

After his arrest last year, Ramsay waived his right to a speedy indictment and trial. He has declined requests for interviews.

Jones takes Red Cross job

WASHINGTON — Retired Lt. Gen. Donald Jones will head national disaster services for the American Red Cross.

Jones, who retired Aug. 1 as deputy assistant secretary of defense for Military Manpower and Personnel Policy, was named Sept. 9 as general manager of American Red Cross Disaster Services.

As general manager, Jones will direct the agency's national disaster-relief program. The program helps victims of about 55,000 disasters per year.

Before becoming deputy assistant secretary in 1988, Jones was the Army's assistant deputy chief of staff for personnel and commanding general of the then-Total Army Personnel Agency, which became Total Army Personnel Command. He also served as assistant plans officer for the Americal Division in Vietnam.

"His outstanding performance in personnel, testing and evaluation, and Operation Desert Storm indicates that he can address complex organizational challenges with innovation and resourcefulness," American Red Cross President Elizabeth Dole said in a news release announcing the appointment. The Red Cross is headquartered here.

Army Times staff writer Rick Maze, and The Associated Press, contributed to this report.

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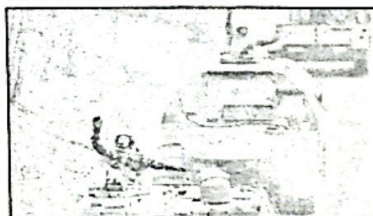
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Time seemed in short supply

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generation of tanks and fighting vehicles from stocks in Germany. The equipment at Fort Hood was thought to be of little more than training value.

"We never thought we'd actually have to fight [with] that equipment," says Parker. "We were taking care of it to keep it operational, but it didn't have all of that tender loving care that goes with [knowing] this is the thing that's going to keep me alive in combat."

The following weeks brought a flurry of activity on Fort Hood as the division geared up for war. All weapons had to be fired, and equipment inspected and painted desert camouflage before being shipped to the Persian Gulf. The Army's logistics system began to pour out spare parts that were never readily available in peacetime.

Soldiers faced an intensive 12-day training program to build proficiency and confidence in weapons and field skills, such as preparing for chemical or biological attack. The installation operated 33 training ranges simultaneously.

The training became more realistic, too. Tank platoon leaders rehearsed in conditions as closely replicating real combat as possible, including firing live rounds instead of playing laser tag with the Multiple Integrated Laser Engagement System, or MILES.

"It gave the opportunity for the platoon leader to control the main vehicles in his platoon while moving out and attacking targets," Parker recalls. "Shooting real big tank bullets at it, not MILES or lasers, but real live bullets."

While the logistics system responded with spare parts, it often lagged on requests for basic soldier items, like desert uniforms. "We had a lot of problems getting uniforms for people," says Maj. William Snelson, a logistics officer for the 1st Cavalry's division artillery. Some soldiers still were without appropriate desert fatigues hours before boarding aircraft for the Persian Gulf.

"Of course, they were all the weird sizes," Snelson says of the last-minute change of clothes. "We were collecting uniforms back from other guys, trading name tags and things like that to get them a uniform and shipped off."

The period was marked by uncertainty for soldiers and their families. "You'd get mentally set to deploy on one day, and instead of deploying that day you'd be deploying a week later and a week later," says 1st Lt. Kent Kildow, a scout platoon leader with the 1/5 Cav during Desert Storm. "At one point, we even brought all our bags in and we were in the middle of dropping our bags when they said, 'Take your bags back home and come back tomorrow.'"

Time, too, seemed in short supply. No one, including senior commanders, knew exactly when the division would ship out or return. Preparations had to be made for lengthy family separations and worst-case scenarios. "The necessity to have a will all of a sudden was a lot more important," remembers Main.

As it turned out, the division didn't begin deploying until Sept. 16, more than a month after the alert order. There "was quite a bit of time [between the alert and departure], but you never knew that, so you had to be doing everything as though you were leaving tomorrow," Main says.

Moving out

During the first week of September, equipment was loaded at Fort Hood on trains and wheeled convoys and taken to ports at Houston and Beaumont, Texas, where it was transferred to ships bound for the gulf. Troops were flown to Saudi Arabia later.

When the equipment was on its way to the Middle East, commanders turned their attention toward family issues and on individual skill training for soldiers. "The intent was to be able to deploy the personnel to link up with

equipment in Saudi Arabia about the same time" it arrived, says Parker. "We had a couple of weeks to actually get our thoughts together and say our goodbyes and tidy up some of the personal things."

The last group of 1st Cav soldiers arrived at Dhahran International Airport, Saudi Arabia, in mid-October.

Strange new world

The move was timed perfectly. Equipment began to arrive just days after the soldiers, who settled into converted warehouses and tents at the Saudi port of Ad-Dammam.

Snelson recalls the cramped living conditions of Warehouse 14, where he slept with as many as 2,000 bunkies. "We had one mess hall, basically. Soldiers had to wait in line for about an hour to get their food," he says. "Showers were a problem."

Commanders believed they were most vulnerable to an Iraqi attack at the port because so many soldiers were in one location. Once units were married up with their equipment, "we decided to get the heck out of Dodge as fast as we could," Snelson says.

So did a lot of other people, as convoys began moving out to tactical positions as quickly as possible. "Of course, we had to fight for buses," Snelson says. "We had to fight for trucks to carry our equipment."

The division moved out 160 kilometers west of the port to its first assembly area, Assembly Area Horse, in Urai'Irah, a dusty, barren expanse of desert interrupted only by several large rock formations.

It was here that soldiers adjusted to life in the desert. The base was about 45 minutes from any road and wheeled vehicles got stuck in the fine, loose sand. Daytime temperatures hovered around 100 degrees, but nights were cooler, with temperatures dropping to the mid-60s.

Soldiers found the uncertainty that bothered them back home had become a camp-follower.

"At this point, we don't know what's going to happen," recalls Parker. "We don't know if we're defending against an attack by Iraq. We don't know if we're going to be here for years. I actually saw plans for construction of barracks and mess halls and things that implied some extended occupation."

Initially, troops trained every day. But as the stay wore on, commanders tried to avoid scheduling training on Sundays. "Six days a week of training in the harsh environment, dealing with that, was tough on them and the uncertainty of not knowing when that would ever end was kind of a key issue to the soldiers," Parker says. Morale often hinged on the day's mail.

New tanks for Christmas

The troops survived mostly on packaged rations for weeks, until Thanksgiving offered all the trimmings of a home-cooked feast: shrimp cocktail, roast turkey, baked ham, roast beef, mashed potatoes, glazed sweet potatoes and a variety of other vegetables and desserts.

Logistics officer Snelson, who was executive officer for 3d Battalion, 82d Field Artillery during Desert Storm, says the holiday also brought a better insight into the plight of Kuwaitis. He happened across two families fleeing their homes after they had been robbed by Iraqis.

One of the men praised the U.S.-led effort to save their homeland. "He kept saying over and over, 'Praise to George Bush, praise to George Bush,'" Snelson recalls. Then the man yelled something else, something that helped Snelson focus on the mission when the heat and long hours got to him.

"See you in Kuwait," the man hollered.

Another great morale boost came in late November: AT&T opened a satellite telephone center with 40 phones and offered all 1st Cav soldiers free 15-minute calls home.

The change in morale was accompanied by a behind-the-scenes change in strategy. "We started to feel like there was more and more of a chance that we might be asked to perform some type of offensive role instead of just the defense of Saudi Arabia," Parker says.

Christmas brought mixed tidings. A complete field modernization including upgraded M1A1 tanks and M2A2 Bradleys that had been prepositioned in Europe was offset by the loss of the Tiger Brigade, which was sent to beef up the 2d Marine Division.

The new equipment alleviated any lingering concerns about mechanical malfunctions on the battlefield. Battal-

ions took turns drawing from the stocks and turning in older vehicles during the smooth transition.

"That was probably the best Christmas present the guys could get," Parker says of the equipment draw. "They came out of that and went straight through gunnery."

In their assembly area, the division had erected a sophisticated tank and Bradley range called Pegasus to ensure crews were confident with the new gear. Pop-up targets were flown in from the National Training Center and set up along a series of trenches.

"The targets were heated up with the heating blankets so we could see them through our thermal sights," says Parker. "It was a demanding, sophisticated range that had been built by just a few NCOs from the division and the brigade master gunners, supported by engineers."

The division stressed realistic battle drills from crew through brigade level, developing between 30 to 40 operational plans. "We had numerous plans that we developed," explains Lt. Col. Jim Gunlicks, the division operations officer. "We wanted to hone this or develop this division battle drill so that no matter which plan we were executing, the basic formations were the same unless there was a [Mission, Equipment, Terrain, Troops and Time Available, or] METT-T factor that overrode using that standard battle drill."

January — and the approaching United Nations-imposed deadline for the possible start of hostilities — sharpened the focus of the mission. "Now we had a target. Something was going to happen by a certain day. We didn't know what it was, but we knew that this was not a forever operation," Parker says.

Heading for Wendy

The order to break camp and move north came on Jan. 7. The division loaded its Abrams and Bradleys on Heavy Equipment Transporter System tractor trailers for the 560-kilometer drive.

Trucks moved in company-sized convoys of 10 to 15 vehicles for the 12-hour drive to Tactical Assembly Area Wendy, near King Khalid Military City in northern Saudi Arabia. Half of the trip was along Tapline Road, a two-lane highway that was being used for three or more lanes of traffic. While military convoys used the shoulders of the road, Saudi drivers weaved their way on any part of the road they could lay claim to.

With the change of scenery came a change of command. The division had been under the control of XVIII Airborne Corps, but was transferred to VII Corps, which was due to arrive from Germany.

The terrain was much different from Assembly Area Horse. The sand was harder packed and characterized by horizon-to-horizon visibility. The only real terrain feature was the Wadi al Batin. The region is marked by a number of wadis — gullies or riverbeds that remain dry except during rainy season.

The area had become a key logistics base to support any offensive operations that might follow the U.N. deadline. "We were positioned there in preparation for offensive operations, but primarily to defend the logistics buildup that was ongoing in and around that area," Parker says.

Road march from hell

After a tough week spent settling into Wendy, Maj. Gen. John Tilelli Jr., the division commander, used a rainy Sunday to hold a rare meeting with his commanders to discuss options under consideration for offensive operations.

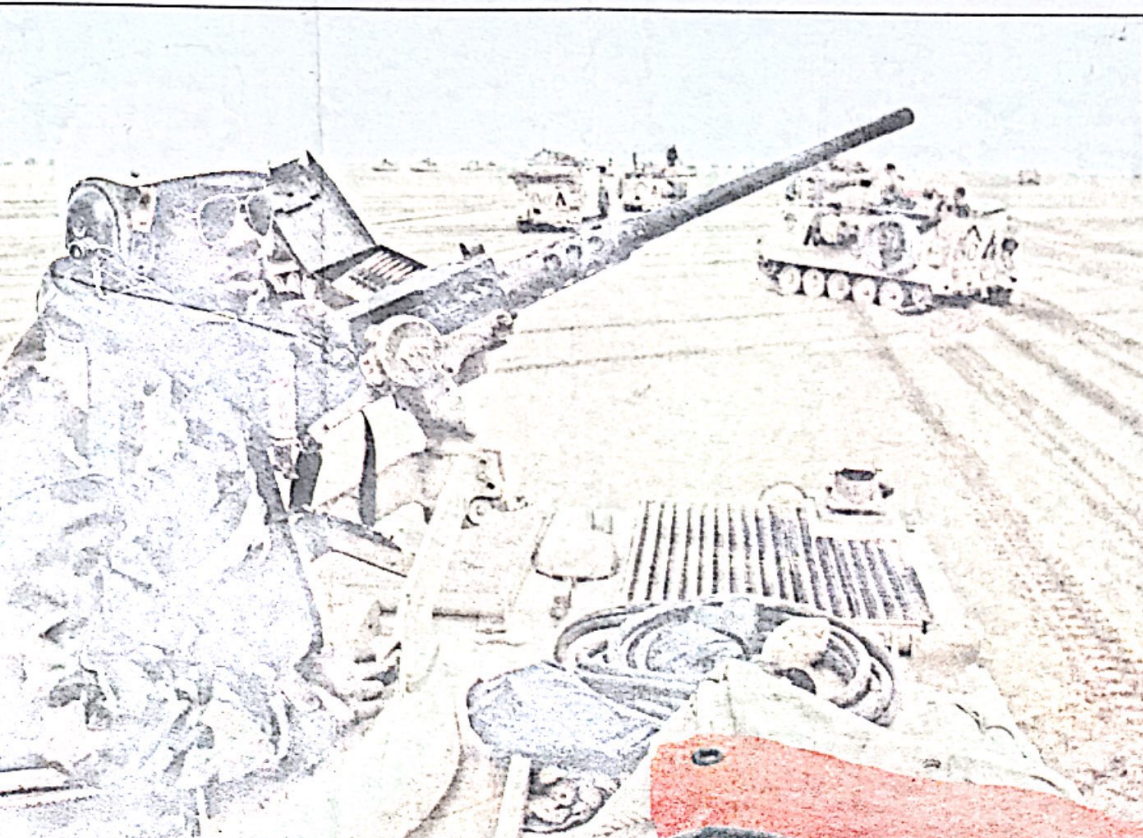
As the meeting began to break up, Tilelli received a call from the VII Corps commander, Lt. Gen. Frederick Franks Jr., who was worried the Iraqis might try a spoiling attack. "He had some initial intelligence indications and a gut feeling based on his experience as an old cavalryman that the Iraqi forces would possibly conduct a pre-emptive strike into the King Khalid Military [City] area," Parker says.

The destruction of the logistics base would have pushed back the timetable of any offensive operations by three to six months. Franks ordered the 1st Cav, his only combat force on the ground, to move 35 kilometers north to establish defensive positions along Tapline Road. In an hour's time the entire division was moving.

Several days of rain flooded the wadi, which suddenly came alive with all the ferocity of a slumbering giant star-

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Shift: SFC Earl Rose, 3d Brigade, 32d Armored Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division mans an M2 50-caliber machine gun during "ail Mary" sweep to surround Iraq's Republican Guard.

The soldiers from this dusty swath of central Texas could very well be the unsung heroes of Desert Storm.

"I'm not sure if history will ever know" the extent of their contribution, says House, 2d Brigade commander. "With one division, we very well could have just totally tied up the focus of the [Iraqi] leadership with their limited intelligence-gathering assets, which made that whole flanking operation a success."

The division had already lost Cooper and two other division soldiers — Sgts. Ronald Randazzo and Jimmy Haws — had nine others wounded and faced down three Iraqi divisions — elements of the 27th, 47th, and 20th infantry divisions equipped with Soviet tanks and armored personnel carriers — all this carnage before the ground war officially started on Feb. 24. And before military officials could discuss operations.

"It was hard on our families back here," House says. "They just didn't understand what was going on and no one could tell them."

Put on alert

It was another blistering Texas summer and the 1st Cav was in the midst of a series of exercises in infantry combat proficiency when word came that Iraq had invaded its tiny oil-rich neighbor.

"The training... really took on a much more important meaning," recalls Lt. Col. Michael Parker, commander of 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry. "We were kind of reading into the news the feeling that something was up."

Official alert for deployment to the Persian Gulf came on Aug. 7. Hastily drawn plans tasked the 1st "Tiger" Brigade of the 2d Armored Division, also based here, to round out the division. The 1st Cav consisted of two active-duty brigades rounded out by an Army National Guard brigade. But the citizen-soldiers were not immediately activated, leaving the division short one brigade as the crisis unfolded.

It was fortuitous that the Tiger Brigade, scheduled to be deactivated, was preparing for one last fight — a mock battle at the National Training Center, or NTC, at Fort Irwin, Calif. It was also by chance that the two 1st Cav brigades had just completed rigorous training rotations there.

Pairing the two units was only logical, says Gen. Edwin Burba Jr., commander of Forces Command, Fort McPherson, Ga., who made the decision to marry the Fort Hood units. The Tiger Brigade was still fully equipped and was freshly trained.

"We had to immediately send a division over there with absolutely no warning [and a] very short fuse," says Burba. "We needed a three-brigade division."

Tired equipment

Besides location, the Tiger Brigade had something else in common the 1st Cav — neither unit intended to take its own equipment into battle.

Vehicles "were very old — they were high-mileage, aged vehicles," says Lt. Col. Stephen Main, commander of the 1st Brigade's 3d Battalion, 32d Armor. The M1 Abrams tank fleet was among the oldest in the Army, having been fielded in the early 1980s, he says.

Military planners had foreseen using the units primarily in a European combat scenario, one in which the soldiers would deploy on short notice and draw the latest

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NIGHT STRIKES

The secret war of the 1st Cavalry Division

By J. Paul Scicchitano
Times staff writer

FORT HOOD, TEXAS — He was everyone's kid brother, a strapping redhead from Seattle. As the orange flashes traced their way across his position, PFC Ardon Cooper used his burly frame to shield a badly wounded soldier.

"Mortar rounds are coming in and I'm watching through my binoculars," recalls Col. Randolph House, who was directing the fight from about 600 meters away. "As the mortar round gets close, [Cooper] throws his body over his buddy and the mortar round hits."

"You can see the dirt and the dust and

the smoke and everything. Then, through my binoculars, I saw him stand up, and the blood run out of his mouth."

Cooper slumped to the ground. He was among the first U.S. soldiers killed in battle during Operation Desert Storm. It was Feb. 20 — four days before the official start of the ground war that routed Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's ensconced legions from occupied Kuwait.

While the world hung on the 11th-hour diplomatic efforts to avert the ground campaign of Operation Desert Storm, Cooper and the soldiers of the 1st Cavalry Division's 2d "Black Jack" Brigade already had experienced the sting of battle. They launched a secret daylight raid across the sand barriers separating Saudi Arabia from Iraq along the Wadi al Batin, a river valley where Saddam's forces were expecting the main allied assault.

The raid was part of a daring-but-dangerous ruse that paved the way for VII and XVIII Airborne corps to pass behind the 1st Cav and deliver a punishing surprise attack from the western flank. The plan hinged on the division's ability to meet the enemy head on, to focus the Iraqi army's attention in the wrong direction and away from the main assault force to the west.

No one can quantify how many lives were spared by the feint, but military strategists believe casualty figures would have been considerably higher if the main allied attack clashed head on with Iraqi forces.

This is the sixth in Army Times' series of after-action reviews of major units involved in Operation Desert Storm. The first five reviews were of the 2d Armored Division's "Tiger" Brigade, the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), the 2d Armored Cavalry Regiment, the 1st Infantry Division (Mechanized), and the 1st Armored Division. For copies of these stories, please send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to: After-action Reviews, Army Times, 6883 Commercial Drive, Springfield, Virginia 22159-0160.

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bled by an intruder. "It was even difficult to drive because of the water in the low-lying areas, and how deep it was on what I think is probably the darkest night that I can remember where there was not a star that could be seen, just a pitch black night," Parker says.

The soldiers called it the road march from hell. Franks' order was given at 5 p.m., and by 6 p.m. the division was on the move, picking its way along a route it had not scouted. In some places, the water was so deep trucks had to be sent another way, only to end up still lost in the storm.

"The [water in the] Wadi al Batin got so high that we almost could not cross it with our tanks. Our scouts had to find a couple of just critical crossings," brigade commander House recalls. "The day before, you could have crossed it anywhere. You wouldn't even of known it was a wadi. And now it's just a river, a torrent."

Normally, the division moved through the desert with the help of either a ground or satellite based navigation system. Neither system was available to ease the move. "We planned that move basically blind and conducted that move using a compass," says Parker. "It was easy to get lost and small units were a bit bewildered awhile."

By dawn, the division had reached its objective and dug yet another temporary home near the town of Hafar al Batin. The division had linked up with 2d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), which had been occupying positions around a nearby airfield at the Saudi town of Al Qaysumah.

"We were really, from our perspective, ... reinforcing [the 101st's] position as well as preparing a counterattack with any force that would maneuver around Hafar al Batin to the east towards the logistics base," Parker says.

That remained the focus of the division for the next three to four days. The division continued to train while conducting reconnaissance and making last-minute preparations for a counterattack if necessary.

The attack never came.

Start of the air war

While the soldiers of the 1st Cav prepared for an Iraqi surprise attack, the pilots of the allied air forces transformed Desert Shield into Desert Storm.

From their positions near the border, 1st Cav troops would have front-row seats to the battle. "The first day or two of that air campaign at night was really a light show because of all of the ground fire that was used by the Iraqi forces up along the border," Parker says.

The start of the air campaign brought yet another order to move further north to a position just north of the city of Hafar al Batin. The mission was to screen the westward movement of VII Corps. More than 100,000 soldiers and 1,000 tanks would slip behind the 1st Cav, preparing to deliver the knockout blow to Iraq's Republican Guard.

The division's two brigades moved in a so-called desert wedge formation for the first time outside of training. The awesome show of armored might went on for miles. "It really stretched from horizon to horizon, but at the lead sometimes you felt very, very alone," observed Parker of the sprawling inverted "V" order.

"There wasn't much to your front," he says. "Occasionally, you'd have to stand up and look back just to fully appreciate what was there with you because of the shape of the wedge."

As the division passed allied positions, commanders also worried for the first time about the possibility of fratricide. The division made sure its move was completed by dusk to minimize risk. It now occupied the Ruqi Road, the main highway from Hafar al Batin through the border town of Ar Ruqi and into Kuwait.

This would also be the main high-speed avenue of approach for an Iraqi advance.

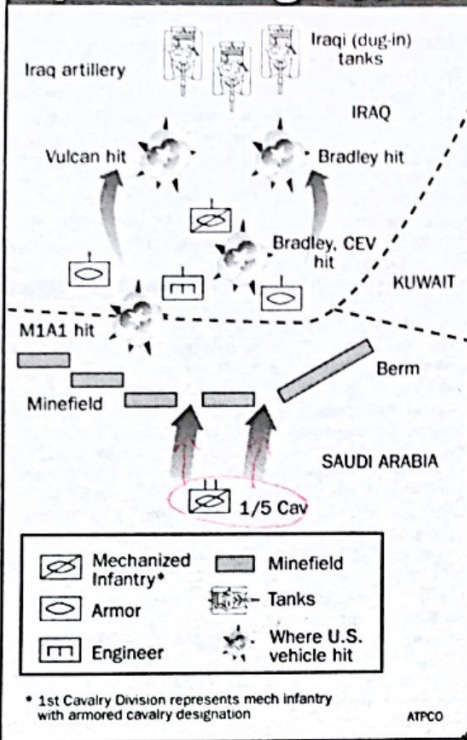
The great pretenders

By Jan. 26, the division had moved once again, this time to take up defensive positions approximately 30 kilometers south of the Iraqi border, just outside of Iraqi artillery range.

Early in February, the 1st Cav began its most important mission: a series of deception operations to reinforce the Iraqis' belief — obvious from the disposition of their forces — that the main American assault would be directed at the Wadi al Batin.

The opening moves in this gambit were successful. On

Operation Knight Strike



Feb. 1, the 1st Cav began pushing the division's cavalry squadron forward to get a clear picture of the Ruqi Highway and the border area; two days later, the Iraqis responded by moving an additional armored brigade to the vicinity of the Wadi al Batin. On Feb. 5, an AH-1 Cobra attack helicopter destroyed an Iraqi observation tower with rockets. Additional enemy armor and mechanized forces moved in to the Ruqi pocket. The next day, substantial enemy artillery assets also were moved to the area to support ground forces.

As the 1st Cav stepped up the pace, it mounted a series of artillery raids, the first coming on Feb. 10 against front-line Iraqi infantry divisions. The next day, the division's cavalry squadron conducted reconnaissance along the border, identifying possible targets.

These early operations, and the continuing success of the air war, contributed to an increase in the number of enemy soldiers attempting to desert. By Feb. 12, the division had taken 126 prisoners.

The next day, the division showered key Iraqi targets with the first of a series of attacks by Multiple Launch Rocket Systems, or MLRS, which deliver large volumes of firepower in spectacular bursts.

The raids were generally conducted by three artillery batteries, two firing and one in reserve.

"The third one was just waiting to see if anybody fired in return," explained Maj. Clint Anderson, operations officer for 2d Brigade during Desert Storm. "If they fired back ... we would be able to track where their rounds had come from, but we never had any return fire from the Iraqis at all."

On Feb. 17, the cavalry squadron crossed into Iraq. While there, it destroyed another enemy tower. The following day, two patrols destroyed enemy recon positions and then helped direct counterbattery fires against enemy artillery positions.

Knight Strike

These raids were the precursors to a daring plan: Send the Black Jack Brigade into Iraq to meet the enemy head on.

"The mission is to find the enemy, determine his composition, his disposition, his intent," says House. "We want to see what his reaction is." The brigade had to hit the Iraqis hard enough to be taken seriously and yet not

so hard that it would be unable to participate in future operations.

The order came at noon on Feb. 19. The mission — dubbed "Operation Knight Strike" after the Black Knights battalion, the nickname of the 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment — would be carried out the following day. But it would be kept secret to avoid a public perception that the allies started a ground war before all diplomatic avenues had been exhausted.

That night, Parker dispatched a company to do mounted and dismounted patrols of the area the brigade would be crossing the next day, and particularly to look for minefields. After nothing significant was found in the operations area, the mission proceeded on schedule.

"None of us had been in combat before, so there was that added dimension," says Kildow, the battalion's scout platoon leader. "We didn't know what it was going to be like. ... People who had played sports a lot of times get the same feeling before a game."

Like gunfighters striding down a dusty street in the Old West, the Black Jack brigade and supporting units crossed the border into Iraq at noon. Led by the 1/5 Cav, they moved through two cuts in the berm, staying well clear of a minefield to the left of the berm.

"The feeling was one of excitement," says House, who had served two tours in Vietnam. "We were the first ground force into Iraq. I didn't think about it at the time in that context, but that was the reality."

As it breached the berm, the 1/5 Cav was moving in a diamond formation with A Company, a mechanized unit, forward. On either side were two tank companies — B Company to the left, D Company to the right — and C Company, another mechanized unit, pulled up the rear. An engineer company was tucked in between them. The 3d Battalion, 82d Field Artillery stayed at the border.

"As soon as Alpha Company made contact and established the base of fire, the two tank companies came up just like we had trained ... and just immediately began suppressing and taking out all of the enemy positions," House says. Within minutes, they had destroyed a battalion-sized element of the Iraqi infantry.

Initial contact was with an Iraqi company reinforced with other units, including tracked vehicles and antitank guns. The Iraqis employed unsophisticated jamming equipment, but it proved somewhat effective, forcing the Americans to change command net frequencies.

Overall, the brigade task force moved about 10 kilometers up the western side of the wadi. The eastern side was rugged, marked by deep gorges. In recent days, there had been a lot of rain and the wadi was wet, but there was no standing water.

To the west, there were no deep gorges. "You almost didn't know you were in a wadi," House says. "It was a very gradual rise out of the bottom. ... You had undulating terrain and that was the reverse slopes where they made their defenses, but it wasn't rugged."

The scouts took fire as they attempted to round up enemy soldiers in a bunker complex.

'An orange flash'

"As we were continuing the mission, the reconnaissance in force came under intense direct and indirect fire from dug-in enemy positions," House says. "We had three vehicles hit by direct fire, enemy antitank direct fire had two soldiers killed immediately. A third soldier died that night."

A Vulcan air defense weapon was struck along with two Bradleys belonging to A Company. Sgt. Haws, the Vulcan commander, was killed instantly by the 100mm round that struck his track. Sgt. Randazzo, a Bradley gunner, was killed when his vehicle's turret was struck.

An anti-armor missile launcher was also struck, setting off the missiles. It was there that Cooper was attempting to give aid when he too was felled.

A noncommissioned officer whose Bradley was one of the vehicles hit, later described the chaotic scene in a written report:

"I saw an orange flash on my vehicle and a billowing cloud of black gray smoke, and saw and watched everyone hit the ground and covering the wounded with their own bodies," the unidentified NCO wrote.

"Parts of the vehicle started ping and bouncing all around me and kicking up dirt. I thought my gunner was

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DESERT STORM AFTER-ACTION REVIEW

★★★

'You could see all the bullets flying'

STRIKES from preceding page

dead as he was in the turret that was hit. Then I heard him say, 'Hey, that's close!' and I felt a great sigh of relief that he was alive."

Throughout the ordeal, House was calling in air support from Air Force A-10 Thunderbolt close air support planes as well as artillery strikes. Even during the worst of the fight, there was absolute calm.

House was watching the scout platoon leader come under fire as he also listened to the action on the radio. "I could see his track getting the shit shot out of it and he was talking like he was at the beach or something," House says. "He says, 'Taking fire, returning the same' As he keyed the mike you could hear BRRRRRRRRRR and you could see all the bullets flying."

There were really multiple battles being waged at once — a battle of indirect fire coming from the distance, a ground battle as scouts attempted to clear the bunker complex, a direct fire battle between armor units, and another indirect fire battle between longer-range weapons.

The Iraqi artillery was somewhat unexpected. "Under cover of darkness they had thickened the battlefield with a lot of artillery and then they covered it up with camouflage nets,"

House says. "None of the ... photography had seen it."

The Iraqis also proved adept at using the desert's limited terrain features to their advantage. "When you were in your tank, you couldn't see the bunkers because there was no spoil," House says.

The bunkers were not only difficult to spot, they were a constant hazard. Once soldiers passed, Iraqis were waiting to fire at them. It became apparent that the Iraqi defenses were also quite extensive, continuing for miles.

The events of Feb. 20 left little doubt that the Iraqis were still prepared to fight if confronted at this point.

"The prisoners we took on the 20th were taken because we had overrun them and taken their positions," House says. "These guys ... were prepared to fight and die."

Five hours after the secret ground war began, Parker felt the mission had been accomplished, and received permission to withdraw.

Later, as the ground war got under way, the Iraqis seemed more willing to surrender. House believes it was because they were outflanked. "When you get in behind someone, it takes a very disciplined force [for them] to continue to fight," he says.

The official start of the ground war came at 10 a.m. on Feb. 24. Once again, the Black Jack Brigade was called on to cross into Iraq, this time supported by AH-64 Apache attack helicopters.

Through the use of the satellite-based navigation system, the division was able to know with pinpoint accuracy where the lead elements of the allied assault were. "We were able to call artillery fire [as close as] about

1,000 meters and we felt very comfortable," Parker says.

As the ground war wore on, division commander Tilelli concluded the Iraqis were weakened to the point that an attack straight up the Wadi al Batin would be successful. But U.S. Central Command chose to withdraw the division and to send it speeding around the flank to provide VII Corps with a reserve in its battle against the Republican Guard, and the decision was made not to press the attack up the wadi. The Black Jack Brigade withdrew south to rejoin the division.

The race ended after traveling 300 kilometers in 24 hours. The division was poised to destroy a Republican Guard division, but it would never get the chance.

Word came that night that a cease-fire was going to take effect the next morning, and House wanted everyone to remain on a high state of alert despite the good news.

"I remember at the time calling up everybody and telling them: 'Guys, I lived through a bunch of cease-fires in Vietnam,'" he says. "Be careful."

In Vietnam, House recalled, his units suffered more casualties on Christmas Day cease-fires than at any other time. "That's when the toughest fights came," he says. "A cease-fire meant get ready. All hell is about to break loose, so I was cautioning them not to break out the champagne."

This cease-fire was without incident for the 1st Cav, but by the time the division returned to its Texas home, a total of nine soldiers had died.

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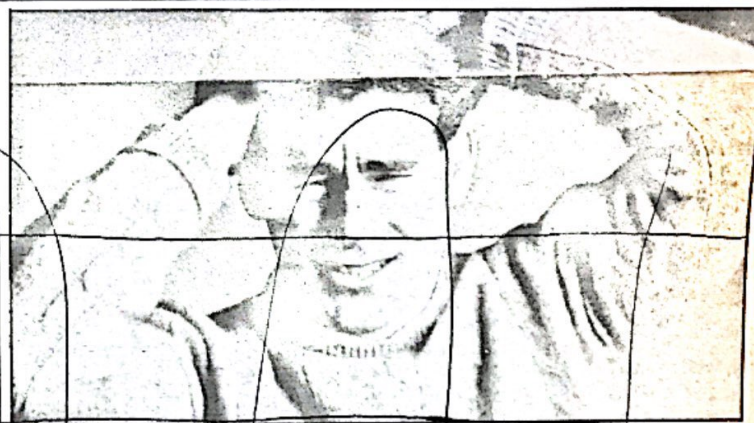


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