

Desert Shield/Desert Storm

Stories from the Marines on the Ground

Jan. 15, 1991, Was Payday at the Front, But Nobody Remembers It

Just hours before Operation Desert Storm began, Sergeant Kevin Kessinger, a tank commander with the 1st Marine Division's armor-heavy Task Force Ripper, said the only thing different about Jan. 15, 1991, was that it was payday.

But over the predawn crackle of radio updates, it seemed that Kessinger and his crew would have to leave their checks in the bank.

Kessinger and his fellow Marines have been in Saudi Arabia for seven months. They said they have had plenty of time to contemplate war, and that they have come to terms with it.

"You know when you join the Marine Corps that people go to combat," said Lance Corporal Kevin Moroney, Kessinger's tank driver. "It's on our minds, but we don't dwell on it."

This sentiment, which prevailed among Marines throughout Operation Desert Shield, did not change with the passing of the United Nations deadline. There was little change whatsoever. The recent change in weather from scorching heat to rain and cold was, in fact, welcomed by the Marines of Task Force Ripper.

"It's been wet and miserable, but at least it's different," said Moroney of Lucas, Ohio. "Anything different is welcome."

The last word from Kessinger and Moroney just before they embarked on the biggest change in their lives was that they were going into it with confidence and caution.

"The only thing I'm worrying about is doing something stupid and getting one of my Marines killed," said Kessinger, who has been training for war for more than nine years. He added that he believes the United States has the best-trained military force in the world and that all he has to do is live up to its standards. "The people who are doing the planning for this operation are simply the best," he said.

Colonel Carlton Fulford, commanding officer of Task Force Ripper, expressed similar concerns for his men, and also expressed confidence in the Marines' ability to defeat Iraqi forces. He said

that this is in part due to the quality and quantity of training they have had since arriving in August.

"Since the beginning of August, we have literally been on one solid training cycle," Fulford said. "We haven't gone out on liberty, and we haven't gone out to the liberty ship, wherever that is. We're desert-hard, and we know each other real well.

"I would prefer not to go to war because

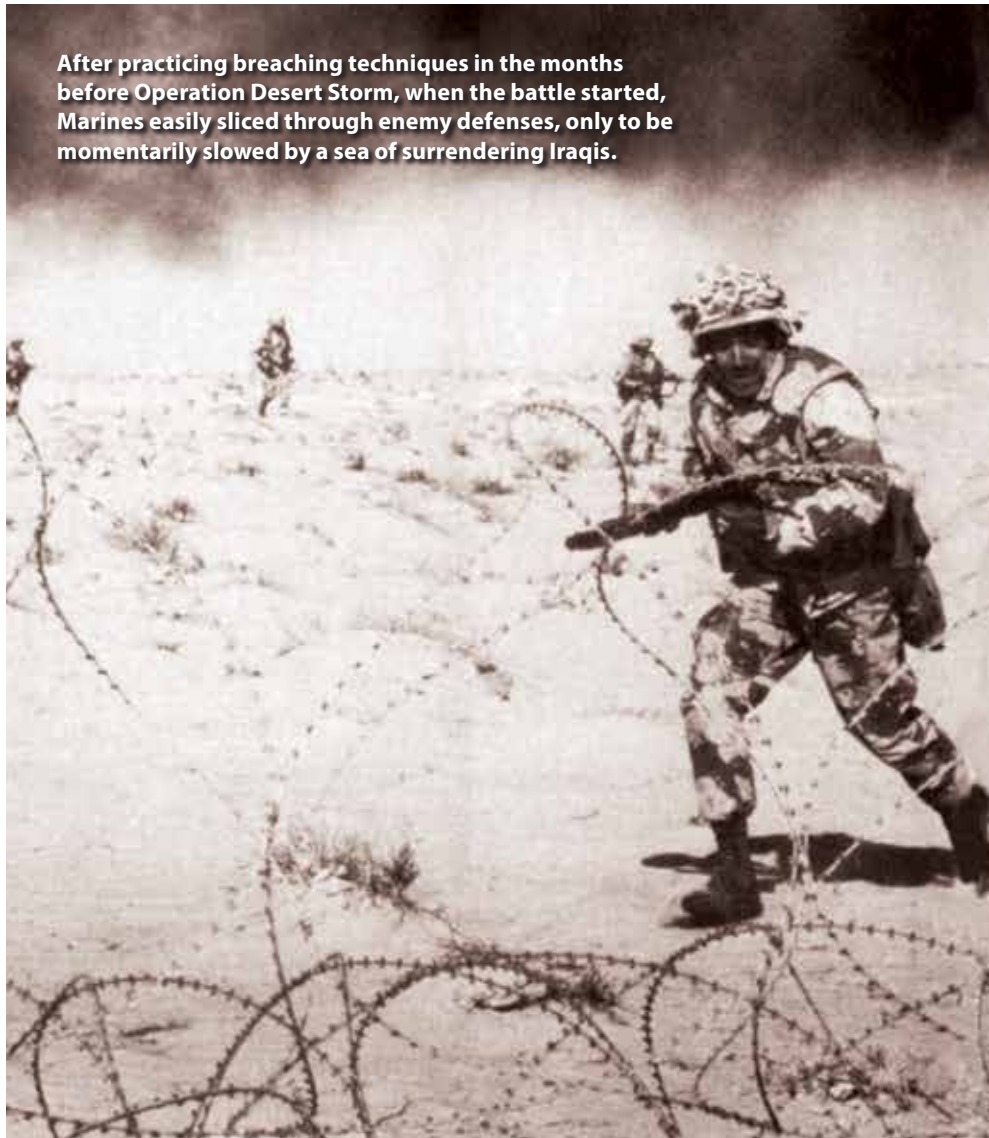
of the cost in human lives," Fulford added, "but should we go, I think this organization is as ready and prepared as it could possibly be at this time."

As Fulford, Kessinger and all the other Marine leaders here prepared for the imminent responsibilities of perhaps one of the world's most grave crises, the waiting was indeed over.

"Things haven't changed much out here," Kessinger said. "Like I said, it's payday and I haven't been paid yet. I don't even remember yesterday."

Sgt Brad Mitzelfelt, USMC

After practicing breaching techniques in the months before Operation Desert Storm, when the battle started, Marines easily sliced through enemy defenses, only to be momentarily slowed by a sea of surrendering Iraqis.



Fire Mission: LCpl Gabriel Juarez Yanked the Lanyard And Sent the First Arty Rounds Onto the Iraqis

The first artillery offensive by U.S. ground troops took place here Jan. 21, 1991. The 1st Marine Division artillery unit opened fire from Saudi Arabia across the border on Iraqi positions at 3:14 a.m. and concluded its mission at 3:40.

The actual firing time lasted six minutes. The battery pumped out 71 rounds of improved conventional ammunition shells from M198 155 mm howitzers, covering roughly 1,000 square meters, according to Captain Phillip Thompson, a battalion fire direction officer. The unit was about 3 miles from the border and fired about 8 to 10 miles into Kuwait.

During a routine training exercise, Lance Corporal Gabriel Juarez probably wouldn't have moved at lightning speed

after waking up at 3 a.m. to assist in firing artillery rounds into an impact range.

But this wasn't Camp Pendleton, Okinawa, Hawaii, or any other training base. This was Saudi Arabia in the midst of a war, and Juarez and the rest of his gun crew had just received a "real-world" fire mission.

They received the order nine hours after setting-in their positions near the Iraqi border. The temperatures had been cold all night, and since his battery's mission involved some waiting, Gun Six's crew was at 50 percent guard—one half remaining awake and on alert, and the other half asleep and/or trying to stay warm.

"We received a call for fire from an infantry regiment and were told that an enemy artillery battery was actually firing down into Khafji [from across the border]," Thompson said.

"We were told to bring only what we needed for the raid, so we didn't have much cold-weather gear with us," Juarez said. "But it [worrying about the cold]

kept our minds off of thinking about incoming rounds we might have taken from the Iraqis or anything else that could have gone wrong.

"It was a rude awakening," he said, "but it didn't take long to wake up. After I heard that we had a fire mission, the butterflies kicked in. We all just jumped up, everybody went to their respective places, and we started throwing rounds downrange."

Juarez is the number one man, meaning that he is the last man to contribute to the gun's operation by priming the powder charge and pulling the lanyard which fires the projectiles. "At first, pulling the lanyard wasn't too big of a deal because my adrenaline was pumping and I just wanted to shoot the rounds downrange and get out of there, knowing that we might be taking some incoming fire, too," Juarez said. "In a way, it was almost like a regular training mission, but at the end, we all started to ponder that we were the first ones to fire on them (the Iraqi forces).

"When you shoot the type of rounds we fired and as much as we did, the trails of the gun dig in pretty much so it took longer than usual to get them out and hooked up to the truck, but we did well, considering we were pretty tired."

Thompson said that the battalion had less than 12 hours notice that it was going to execute the mission. Despite the short notice, the "cannon cockers" were on the road at 3:30 p.m. on the 20th and were in place at 6 p.m. They waited for a fire mission throughout the night.

About two hours before they unleashed their howitzers, the battery received enemy fire, but it had no effect, landing about 2,000 meters southeast of its position.

According to First Lieutenant Christopher Mayette, a battery executive



CPL KEVIN DOLL, USMC

**"After I heard that we had a fire mission, the butterflies kicked in. We all just jumped up, everybody went to their respective places, and we started throwing rounds downrange."
—LCpl Gabriel Juarez**

officer, the possible targets the battery was to engage included multiple rocket launchers, a command-and-control site, and a surface-to-air missile site. “The rocket-launcher battery is one that fired upon us, but was later taken out by air,” he said. “We ended up firing on a different battery that was firing on Marine positions near the border.”

Gunnery Sergeant Juan DeWilliams said that Marines rehearse for combat but cannot rehearse actual combat. “The boys impressed me,” said the 14-year veteran. “We did what we had to do, then got the hell out of there.”

“I was nervous of the unexpected,” said Sergeant Norman Arias. “I’m an artillery meteorologist. My job is to get weather-condition information to the fire direction center, so the guns don’t have to use ‘Kentucky windage’ to aim their rounds. It felt good knowing I helped the guns get all those rounds downrange and on target.”

LCpl Robert Redwine said, “The 3rd Marines were the first to take incoming from Iraqi troops, and now we were able to give some of it back.” Redwine was one of the Marines who supplied the security for the mission. “I was happy to be out there and to make a little history,” said the Marine from Portland, Ore.

Cpl Steve Nelson, USMC and Sgt John Dodd, USMC

While Cannoneers Sent Rounds Downrange, Infantrymen Took Incoming and Waited for Word to Attack

“Incoming, incoming! Hit your fighting holes!” could be heard throughout the area as the leathernecks from an infantry battalion of the 1st Marine Division rushed for cover.

For more than a week, these Marines were taking artillery rounds from Iraqi positions inside the Kuwaiti border.

“We don’t mind taking incoming as long as we don’t take any hits,” said Captain Kent Bradford, an operations officer. Bradford said the Iraqis had been dropping two to three rounds a night for five nights running but hadn’t hit them yet.

“Marines here haven’t displayed any amount of stress or strain,” added the captain. “The apprehension is there, but we don’t talk about shells landing on our position.”

Being shelled was the worst feeling in the world for Private First Class Scott Zmiewsky. “You don’t know where the rounds are coming from, and all you can do is run for cover,” said Zmiewsky.

“At first you’re scared,” added Lance Corporal Chad Graff. “You find yourself stopping what you are doing and looking around. Then all of a sudden, it clicks in your head what to do.”

The incoming wasn’t like the Iraqis were pounding the hell out of them, noted First Lieutenant David Johannsen, a platoon commander. “It’s just a couple of rounds a night,” said the Algonquin, Ill., native.

“Yeah, just enough to tick you off,” said LCpl John Couch. “They wake us up in the middle of night. We have to head to our fighting holes, then back to the rack after the attack is over.”

Sgt John Dodd, USMC

For These Guys, Desert Storm Means Getting Sandblasted by Helicopters

Hunkered down in a hole in the desert floor, four Marines sat and idly talked as the frigid wind of the Saudi winter passed overhead. Storm clouds covered the sky, intermittently spitting rain at them.

A low grumbling caused the Marines to perk up and look out over flatland toward the horizon.

“Bird comin’,” one of the Marines stated matter-of-factly.

Grabbing goggles and helmets, two Marines wearing reflective vests clambered out of the protective pit and scurried onto the landing zone (LZ).

Like giant bumblebees, two approaching CH-53E helicopters gently maneuvered toward the LZ. Their “pollen,” six pallets of meals, ready to eat (MRE), dangled in nets underneath. The helicopter support team used a variety of hand-and-arm signals to guide the incoming ‘53s safely down onto the LZ.

Unhooking their load, the helicopters pulled up and soared out of the area.

Marines of the helicopter support team (HST), part of Beach and Terminal Operations Company, 2nd Landing Support Battalion (LSB), are the eyes and ears of helo pilots who approach and land in an LZ under their control.

During the first weeks of Operation Desert Storm, these HST Marines were working to help furnish a supply depot near the Kuwaiti border. The incoming “birds” were supplying the depot with MREs, medical supplies and maintenance parts.

“Our main mission is to talk the helos into the zone,” said HST leader Corporal



CPL SUWAT ITTHAPATHACHAI, USMC

Cpl Donald Vaught, left, and Cpl Marc Carbonetto, both “Stinger” missilemen, practice honing in on targets from USS *Guam* in the Persian Gulf. They were part of an 18,000-Marine amphibious force that tied down several Iraqi divisions, forcing them to keep close to the Kuwaiti coast while trying to guess where the Marines would land.

“He cut his load and was pulling up when one of his engines blew. The bird began wobbling around and came down within about 30 feet of me.”

—PFC Timothy L. McClintic

J. Shane Bost. “We also help the Landing Support Equipment Marines move the cargo off the LZ, and we package and hook up any outgoing cargo.”

The Lexington, N.C., native said that his company had been in country and manning the landing zone about a month. He added that the helicopter support teams quickly learned how treacherous the desert can be during their operations.

“We have a lot more trouble seeing the birds when they get close to the ground,” the Camp Lejeune Marine said. “We get sandblasted pretty good from the rotor wash.”

Bost and his crew are usually part of an HST; however, they can perform a number of duties required of a beaching operation.

“If we were at the beach, the entire BTO company would be staging vehicles and gear. If there were any helo support ops to do, we would probably be doing that also.” He added the red patches LSB Marines wear on their utility trousers and covers are to let people on the beach know who they are as they run the operation.

Other duties an HST is tasked with are helping to move litters of wounded personnel on and off helos during a medevac and the management of personnel hitching rides on the aircraft.

Although infrequent, mishaps can occur as the HST performs its duties.

“I was bringing in a bird with an external load the other day,” began Private First Class Timothy L. McClintic, a member of Bost’s HST. “He cut his load and was pulling up when one of his engines blew. The bird began wobbling around and came down within about 30 feet of me. The pilot moved to the side of his cargo and came down pretty hard,” said the landing support specialist from Seymour, Ind.

Luckily, no one was hurt in the incident and the HST reviews events such as this.

“We often have safety briefs with the pilots. They tell us if they have trouble over the LZ, they’ll try to head to an 11 o’clock position and so we move to 5 o’clock,” commented Bost.



CPL KEVIN DOLL, USMC



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Above: Getting sandblasted from helicopter prop wash is part of the price Landing Support Battalion Marines paid to keep their fellow leathernecks supplied.

Left: LCpl Danny J. House talks to an incoming helo via radio.

The HST Marines are usually on the LZ shortly after daybreak. They often work into the night as long as the birds are coming in. A spotlight on the bird and their reflective vests help pilots to pinpoint them in the dark.

“We are a mobile unit, like all Marine

units,” Bost said, as he brushed desert grit from one of his crew’s automatic weapons. “We don’t know how long we’ll be here at this supply depot. But anywhere we’re needed by the helos, that’s where we’ll go.”

Cpl Kevin Doll, USMC

Tanks a Lot! The Corps Put Abrams Tank on Front Line In Time for Shoot-Out



SGT ROBERT C. JENKS, USMC

Above: LCpl Adam Kennedy peers up through the gunner's hatch of his M-1A1 tank before aiming it north and driving into Kuwait.

Below: M1A1 Abrams tanks arrived in Saudi Arabia in time to roll into Kuwait and battle the Soviet-made T-55 and T-62 tanks.

Marines of 2nd Tank Battalion, 2nd Marine Division unloaded M-1A1 tanks from military prepositioning ships Jan. 10. The Abrams tanks will gradually replace the aging M-60s and are the first of the sophisticated tanks to join the Corps. They couldn't have arrived in Saudi Arabia at a better time.

The tanks are out-of-the-factory new. When they rolled out of their assembly plants, they rolled onto ships and were joined with forces already in place.

When the ships docked, 2nd Tank Bn Marines boarded them to ready the tanks for offload. Private First Class Chester Bryans climbed aboard the first tank. After a quick light and instrument check, he drove the 67.5-ton tank onto the ramp spanning the gap from ship to shore.

Bryans taxied the tank to a rally point to ready it for its first test. There, a factory employee replaced Bryans for the trial run.

Once in position, a road guide gave his signal, and the tank lunged forward, picking up speed. The tank's engine revved up as its driver drove down the

darkened road, at approximately 40 mph.

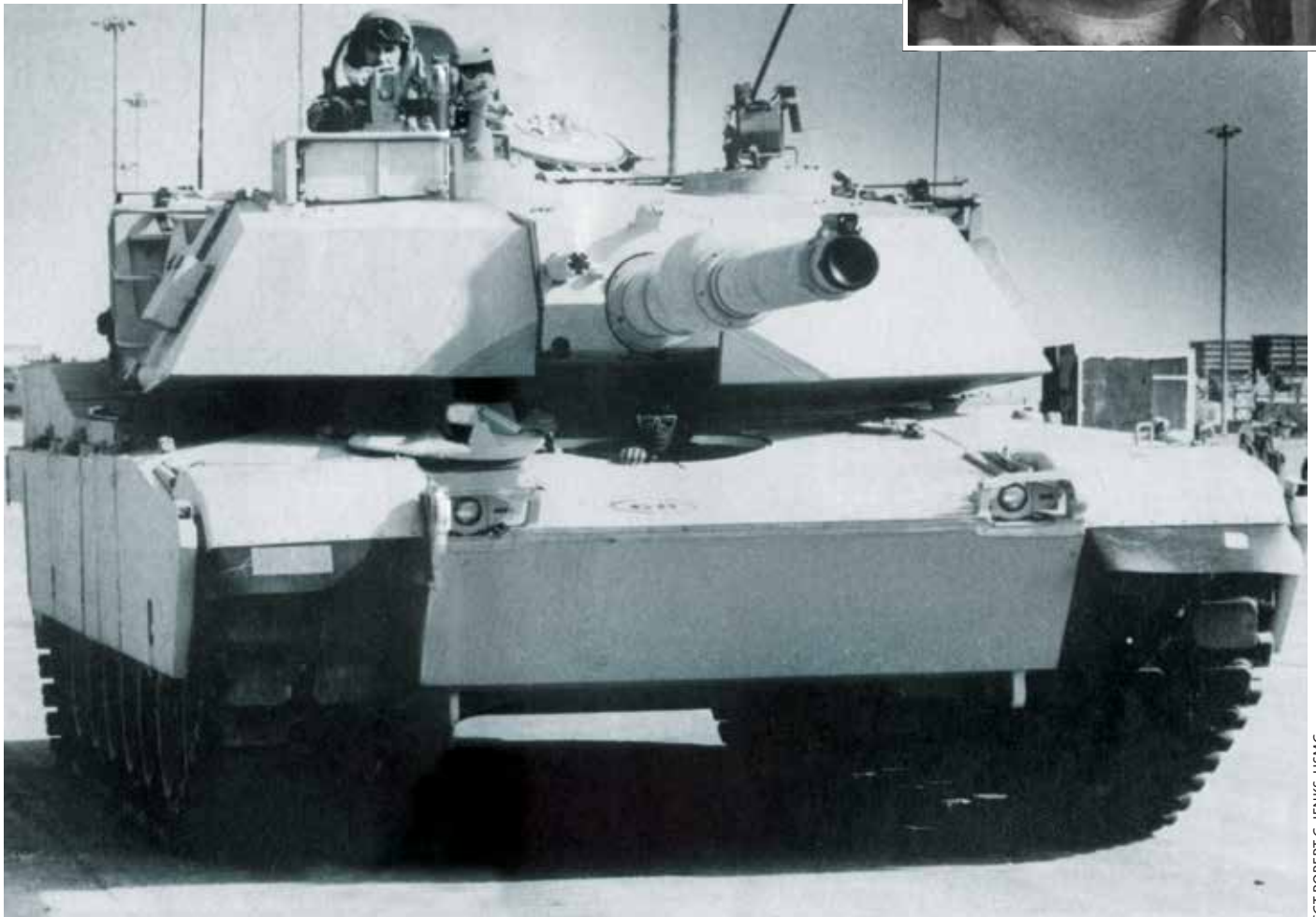
At the end of the half-mile strip, the driver parked the tank in a staging area, where tankers started the depreservation process by taking off equipment boxes and removing tape from the M256 120 mm main guns.

For several days, the Marines equipped

LCpl John C. Maloney maneuvers his M1A1 Abrams. Tanks helped spearhead drives by the 1st and 2nd Marine Divisions that reached Kuwait City in less than three days.



SGT ROBERT C. JENKS, USMC



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the tanks with machine guns, removed the packing grease, and readied what they call "Silent Death" for combat.

In November, the 2nd Tank Bn leather-necks had learned to operate the new tank.

"We spent two weeks learning about the M-1A1," Lance Corporal Allan Bouchard of Lexington, N.C., said. "We mostly focused on our own stations because of the (Persian Gulf) crisis."

According to Bouchard, the Marines like the M-1A1 much better than the M-60. "It's a lot faster, has a lower profile, a larger gun and has much better armor," he said. "It's just a far better tank."

The Marines are also very confident of the tank's capabilities. "We can outrun, outgun and take a hit better than any other tank made," Corporal James J. Reinhardt of Cherokee, Iowa, said. "Besides, the M-1A1 even has an NBC (nuclear, biological and chemical) defense system on board so we don't have to worry about getting gassed."

With the new tanks in Saudi Arabia, 2nd Tanks now has a piece of equipment with the technology of tomorrow, for combat today.

Cpl Philip Haring, USMC

2nd Marine Division Took First Iraqi Prisoners: "Very Prudent Individuals"

The first Iraqi prisoners taken by the 2nd Marine Division surrendered on the afternoon of Feb. 5, 1991.

The six Iraqi soldiers, two officers and four enlisted men, drove to the berm in a vehicle displaying a white flag. They dismounted, walked to Marine units that had them under observation and asked to surrender. "Each had the pamphlets explaining surrender procedures," said Lieutenant Colonel Jan Huly, the assistant operations officer of the division.

"They were part of a combat engineer unit," Huly said. "They told us that they were disenchanted with the war effort. They indicated that food, medicine and other basic needs were in short supply. They were very prudent individuals."

The prisoners ate meals, ready to eat (MREs) and a hot meal, underwent a medical checkup and had the opportunity to clean up. "They were in pretty good condition when they showed up," said Huly, "but they were grateful for the food. They especially enjoyed the MRE candy."

LtCol Huly stated that after questioning, the prisoners were turned over for their detainment in accordance with the Geneva Convention.

"They indicated that their particular unit was suffering greatly from desertions, apparently the results of allied bombing. They also indicated that many more of their soldiers would defect, but they lack the opportunity. There seems to be a shortage of almost everything there, so it seems that our bombing campaign is having positive effects for us," Huly said.

Sgt Earnie Grafton, USMC

Getting Attention The Hard Way

They weren't looking for trouble; they just wanted to be seen. Elements of the 1st Marine Division were sending out mobile patrols to let everybody up north know that the United States had its eye on the area near the border.

"The patrols are mainly for surveillance and to establish a U.S. presence in the area," said Captain Kevin Scott, a rifle company commander. "If there are unfriendlies in the area, they see us, and, therefore, know that we're still interested in the ground we're patrolling. It keeps them guessing."

Each company of the task force which was running the patrols usually headed out with troops, vehicles and weaponry consisting of small arms, antiarmor, and large-caliber weapons. They also had the ability to call for fire and always had a Saudi liaison officer or translator with them.

"If we keep doing these patrols, somebody's bound to see us and call it in on their radio," said Sergeant Don Milojevich, a Weapons Company Marine. "As long as they know we're here, it's good."

With weapons always at the ready, the patrols usually headed out at midmorning and returned to their respective base camps just before nightfall.

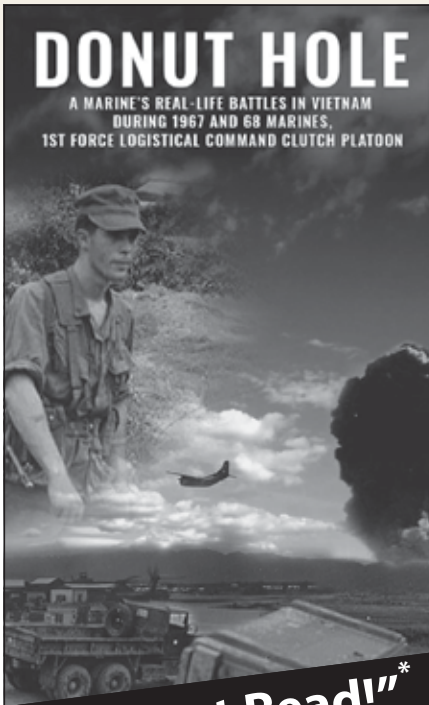
Rolling across the barren desert, the patrols often met up with Saudi military personnel and stopped to converse for a while to further make their presence known.

Sheep and camel herders and other Bedouins were also passed by, often waving or holding up the "peace" or "victory" sign.

Whether it was dry, dusty terrain or mud-filled sabkhas, the patrols pressed on through the desert, stopping from time to time in order to compute a grid to give them their exact location and keep them on the right course.

"They [the Iraqis] may still have a forward observer in the Khafji area," Scott said. "We want to be seen."

Cpl Steve Nelson, USMC



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