

F>O>C>U>S on CSS in DESERT STORM

As is always the case, logistics was crucial to the outcome of the Gulf War. The herculean efforts of the combat service support (CSS) community to meet the needs of the combat arms enabled I MEF to prosecute the war against Iraq successfully. While numerous articles in the *Gazette* over the past year have touched on these efforts, the CSS story has not been adequately told. This section of the *Gazette* seeks to correct this by providing an overview of CSS activity and addressing some of the emerging logistics issues.

CSS in the Desert

by BGen Charles C. Krulak

Logistics was key to nearly everything in Southwest Asia. Here, the commander of the Direct Support Command provides an overview of decisionmaking and logistical preparations during the final days before the beginning of the ground war.

Although 4 February 1991 is not a date you will see listed in the history books, for Marine Corps logisticians it is the date that the ground war in Southwest Asia (SWA) began. On that date I was visiting Mobile Combat Service Support Detachment 26 (MCSSD-26), located approximately 10 miles to the southwest of the major Combat Service Support Area (CSSA) at Al Kibrit. Al Kibrit itself was the result of a gritty decision by LtGen Walter E. Boomer, commanding general (CG) of I Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF), who had ordered the Direct Support Command (DSC) to establish a CSSA close enough to the southern border of Kuwait to support an attack at any point along that border. This was a gamble, because the decision placed the DSC far forward of any Marine forces. In fact, the only friendly forces to the north of Al Kibrit were screening elements from the Saudis and the Qataris. Construction on Al Kibrit had begun on 28 December, and by 4 February it was fully stocked with seven days' worth of all classes of supply. Since this was the stockage objective desired by the MEF commander, from the CSS standpoint we were ready to go to war.

As I was returning to Al Kibrit from the location of MCSSD-26, I decided

to make a short detour to visit the command post (CP) of MajGen William M. Keys, (CG, 2d Marine Division). I had served a year as Gen Keys' assistant division commander and stopped by to see him when I got the chance. Since his CP was on the way to Al Kibrit, I took a gamble that he might be in the area. When I arrived at his hooch I was told by his aide that he was in the briefing tent with LtGen Boomer. I stuck my head into the tent and saw both generals leaning over a map board in serious discussion. LtGen Boomer looked up as I entered the tent and, after a quick hello, explained that MajGen Keys and his G-3, Col Ronald G. Richard, had just proposed a two-division breach of the Iraqi defensive positions and asked what I thought of the proposal.

As background, you might be interested to know that until that day the only "official" proposal had been for a single-division breach. There had been a great deal of discussion as to the location of that breach—sites ranging from the coast road, to either side of the Al Wafra oilfields, to a far western option that would have had us attack where the border turns sharply west of Kuwait (Figure 1). LtGen Boomer encouraged his commanders to be innovative in their approaches to the I MEF plan of

attack; and since there were no "shrinking violets" among the commanders, he received a great deal of input. This openness among commanders was, in my opinion, one of the true combat multipliers of the war. It would be tough to assign it a numerical value, but it was extremely important.

In answer to LtGen Boomer's question, I mentioned many of the issues that all of the general officers in SWA had discussed at one time or another. A two-division breach would give the Iraqi high command more to worry about; it would allow our divisions to mutually support each other in the attack; it would avoid the requirement for one division to pass through the other once the breach was made; it would eliminate the very lucrative target presented during that passage—two divisions in a very narrow zone. If successful, it would put two full divisions plus the Army's Tiger Brigade into the battle at the earliest possible time, completely throwing into disarray the set-piece battle that the Iraqis favored.

From the combat service (CSS) standpoint, we had already done a great deal of work in the area of improving our mine-clearing capability—constructing "Ninja Dozers," outfitting tanks with rollers, flails, and track-



width mine plows, etc. I felt that we had enough equipment to handle a two-division breach and told him I favored that approach. Gens Boomer and Keys had obviously gone over these points and, I am sure, a great deal more because Gen Boomer's reply was that he agreed and was looking favorably on the proposal. He then turned to the map and said, "And Gen Keys proposes that the breaches be made here"—and pointed to locations near the westernmost option. (See Figure 2.) I swallowed hard because he was pointing to breach areas on the western flank of Kuwait, locations literally impossible to support from Al Kibrit.

His next question was, to the logistician, the "\$64,000 question"—"Can you support a two-division breach on the western flank of Kuwait?" My answer was that I could not support it from Al Kibrit, but if allowed to move the CSSA to the northwest, I felt we could do it. I indicated that we would need to find a suitable location, move a tremendous amount of gear, and do all of this in a very short time. Gen Boomer said that he had not definitely made up his mind, but to go ahead and develop an estimate of supportability for the option. I immediately excused myself and returned to my CP at Al Kibrit.

Upon arriving at Al Kibrit, I gathered members of my staff together along with the commanding officers of the 7th and 8th Engineer Support Battalions, LtCols David L. John and Charles O. Skipper, and the commanding officer of 8th Motor Transport Battalion, LtCol Tom Woodson. Key members of the staff present were the chief of staff, Col John A. Woodhead III; the G-2, Maj Mary V. Jacocks; the G-3, Col Stephen A.

Tace; the G-4, LtCol Frank W. Griffin; the G-6, LtCol James Hull; and the officer who was to be the key player over the next few weeks, Col Gary S. McKissock, the G-4 of II MEF. Since we were short one colonel, he was "on loan" to augment the 2d FSSG. He became a critical addition to our group.

At this impromptu staff/commanders' meeting I gave the participants an overview of the discussions with Gens Boomer and Keys and then directed that an engineer reconnaissance effort, headed by Col McKissock, move to the northwest of Kibrit and look at two possible sites for the relocation of the CSSA. We had already done a map reconnaissance and were familiar with much of the ground from previous reconnaissance trips, so I directed that their efforts be concentrated on the area of Al Qaraah and at a location known only by the map designation as the "Gravel Plain" (See Figure 1). I asked that they be back to provide me their assessment by the following afternoon—5 February 1991.

After the meeting, Col Tace called the I MEF G-3, Col Billy C. Steed, by secure-voice to ask if he knew when Gen Boomer was going to make the decision regarding the two-division breach to the west. Col Steed indicated that Gen Boomer planned to discuss the subject with his commanders at the next weekly commander's brief, to be held at 0830 on Wednesday, 6 February. The meeting would be held at Ra's Safania, about 80 kilometers from Al Kibrit along the coast and the current location of his CP. It was during these meetings that Gen Boomer encouraged the active participation from not only his commanders, but from anyone who had an idea that would help us achieve our mission.

On the afternoon of 5 February, Col McKissock reported back with an assessment of the two locations he had visited, and the staff provided an estimate of supportability for each option. The assessment was that the "Gravel Plain" was the recommended CSSA and that the western option was supportable providing (1) all motor transport assets, to include the "Baghdad Express" belonging to BGen James A. Brabham, Jr., (CG, 1st FSSG)* would be thrown against the effort; (2) the resupply of the two divisions and the Tiger Brigade during the move could be supply point distribution rather than DSC "force feeding" of the MEF units as we were doing at the time; and (3) the stockage level for Classes I, III, and V were raised to 15 days instead of the 7 we had at Kibrit. The reason for the increase was that at Kibrit we were only 50 kilometers from the port of Al Mish'ab, where we could get all classes of supply quickly. The move to the "Gravel Plain" was going to take us 130 kilometers from Al Kibrit and would render Al Mish'ab virtually useless in a fast-moving scenario. Gen Keys and MajGen James M. Myatt (CG, 1st Marine Division) needed their support with them, not 180 kilometers to their rears.

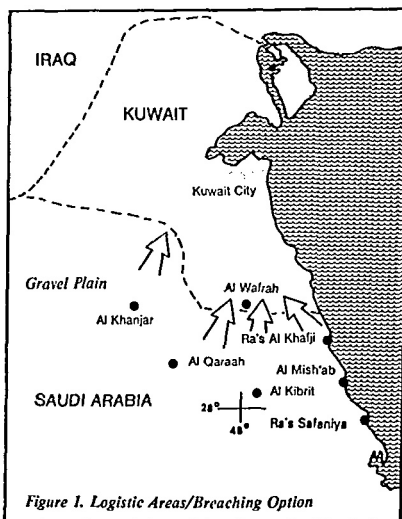
With this information, we directed that all the earth-moving equipment from both engineer support battalions be loaded on heavy equipment transporters and be prepared to depart from Al Kibrit to the "Gravel Plain" the following day, 6 February 1991.

Although many important preparations took place during the evening, one special story needs to be told. No one liked calling the new CSSA location the "Gravel Plain." It just didn't have the right ring to it, and it certainly wasn't going to mean anything to pilots, truck drivers, etc., who would have to locate it, so we had a contest to create a name for our possible new home. Maj "Ginger" Jacocks and her G-2 Marines came up with the winning name, "Al Khanjar" (pronounced Al Hanjar). A *khanjar* is the small dagger worn by Saudi men in their waist sash

*The Baghdad Express was Gen Brabham's innovative method of getting around the problem caused by the lack of linchaul capability. He leased over 1,000 civilian tractor trailers and had either Marines or host-nation drivers operate the vehicles.

and is given to the young Saudi males when they reach manhood. A talented young Marine quickly sketched a logo that showed a dagger sticking into the heart of Kuwait. How could we fail to call the new CSSA anything but Al Khanjar?

On the morning of 6 February, we departed Al Kibrit for Ra's Safania and Gen Boomer's commanders' meeting. As we pulled out onto the main supply route we could see the earth-moving equipment staged and ready to move to the northwest. Once we received the decision from the MEF commander, we would use a secure ra-



dio transmission relayed by my aide, 1stLt Joseph W. Collins, Jr., as the signal for the convoy to move out. The meeting started around 0830 and was located in a briefing tent that had as its centerpiece a huge map of Kuwait and northern Saudi Arabia placed flat across some supports. At these meetings LtGen Boomer, his commanders, and other general officers sat around this map board while the G-2/G-3 briefers spelled out the enemy and friendly situations. Members of the MEF staff and selected members of

and each commander had an opportunity to talk over his portion of the upcoming battle.

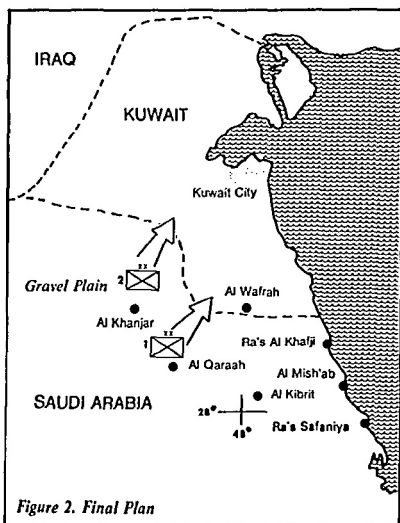
As time passed, we flirted with the concept of a two-division breach, but did not come close to a decision on that issue. I became more and more concerned with each passing minute, because for the DSC, the faster they could start moving towards Khanjar, the better off they would be. Finally, at 1130 Gen Boomer recessed the meeting so that we could get some lunch. As he got up to leave the tent, I asked Gen Boomer for a minute to discuss something privately. We went over near a map board and I explained to him that my people were on the road ready to go, that we could support the two-division breach to the west, but that every second counted. I then asked him if he had reached a decision. Without a moment's hesitation, he looked me straight in the eye and said, "We will make a two-division breach of the Iraqi defenses at these locations" and pointed to the breach sites on the western flank. It was a go! Lt Collins immediately flashed the signal to Col McKissock, and his column moved out towards the northwest.

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the major subordinate commands' staffs also attended and sat on benches behind the generals.

On this day the briefings began as usual. The G-2 briefer briefed the intelligence picture and went over the intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB). This elicited several comments from the assembled general officers and was followed by a discussion of the major decision points as they related to the IPB and the possible moves of the Iraqi forces as a result of our movement. Gen Boomer encouraged maximum participation from his generals and normally received just that. This day was no different,

What transpired over the next 14 days was, perhaps, the most challenging movement of Marine forces, equipment, and supplies in the annals of the Corps—not to mention the unbelievable engineering effort that accompanied that movement. Within this two-week span, the hostile desert was transformed into the CSSA at Al Khanjar. Khanjar was immense; it covered 11,280 acres. It had over 24 miles of blast-wall berms—every supply dump was segregated by these berms, every working and living space was dug into the ground and



bermed, every vehicle was dug in and bermed. The ammunition supply point (ASP) was over 780 acres in area and had 151 separate bermed cells for the storage of Marine and Army, ground and aviation munitions. It was the largest cellular ASP in Marine Corps history. The fuel farm was also dug in

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and bermed. At the beginning of the war it contained approximately 5 million gallons of fuel—again, the largest fuel farm in Marine Corps history. The water point was dug in and bermed and contained, on G-day, 1 million gallons of water. A field hospital was dug in and bermed—a hospital with 14 operating rooms, multiple wards, and even a ward for patients suffering from battle fatigue. From the standpoint of operating rooms, the hospital at Khanjar was the 3d largest hospital in the naval service. With the help of the Seabees, two C-130-capable airfields were constructed out of the desert. “Khanjar International” received its first C-130 aircraft two days after Col McKissock and his Marines and Sailors arrived at Khanjar. Three days after their arrival Col McKissock’s troops were already providing supplies to both Marine divisions and to the Tiger Brigade.

Even while Khanjar was being constructed, engineer support battalion detachments were building four-lane highways from Khanjar to the Kuwaiti border in both division zones. These highways, soon to be known as the “Khanjar expressways,” served as the main supply routes for each division and were eventually extended into Kuwait, through the minefields, and followed in trace of the attacking divisions. In the case of the 1st Division, that meant 65 kilometers into Kuwait, and for the 2d Division it meant 40 kilometers. At the same time, supplies were flowing into Khanjar around the clock.

Gen Jim Brabham and the Baghdad Express pushed supplies and ammunition up to Al Mish’ab and then west to Khanjar. Meanwhile, LtCol Tom Woodson and his composite motor transport battalion drove around the clock, moving all the gear that was at Kibrit to Khanjar as well as transporting supplies and ammunition from Al Mish’ab to Khanjar. In a period of 14 days, Woodson’s composite battalion drove approximately 1 million miles. They accomplished this amazing achievement the same way the heavy equipment operators were able to produce their “miracle.” The trick was that the equipment was never turned off. The drivers drove for 12 hours and then were relieved in their cabs by the next operator, who jumped in and kept on going. A certain percentage of all equipment was pulled off the line for maintenance, but for the most part, the engines were turned on and were not turned off until the move was completed on 20 February. It should be noted that at no time did the tactical vehicles or equipment of the motor transport battalion or the engineer support battalion drop below 93 percent ready. On the 20th, all equipment that wasn’t critically needed was put in a maintenance standdown posture so that it would be in top condition for what was to come.

While all this was taking place, the 2d Marine Division and the Tiger Brigade were moving to the south and then west through the 1st Marine Division in order to reach their assembly area and subsequent attack positions. This incredibly difficult maneuver was carried off in a truly professional manner. What could have resulted in a traffic jam worthy of Shirley Highway at rush hour was accomplished with minimal difficulties. Perhaps the best indication of what was to eventually happen in Kuwait was the phenomenal coordinated passage of two Marine divisions and an Army brigade through each other within 20 kilometers of the Kuwaiti border!

The deadline for having the divisions in place and Khanjar fully prepared to support the I MEF push into Kuwait was 0001, 20 February 1991. The deadline was met. The Marines and Sailors, men and women who accomplished this feat were magnificent. Words literally cannot express the respect and admiration I have for these young people. As an

officer who has spent 26 of his 27 years in the Corps as an infantry officer, I can only say that I have never worked with or observed a more dedicated group of Marines and Sailors in my life.

I could spend another few pages articulating personal lessons that I learned from this experience, but if I had to single one thing out—aside from a renewed appreciation and respect for the individual Marine and Sailor—it would be the importance of communications. I don’t mean communications in the C³ sense, although there were lessons to be learned in that area. No, I mean the open communications that existed between Gen Boomer and his commanders, among the commanders themselves, and between the various staffs. It was an extremely rewarding experience to be associated with a large number of officers who cared not about themselves or how their unit stacked up against another in the scheme of maneuver but, rather, dedicated themselves wholeheartedly to accomplishing the mission at hand. There was no time for careerism, no holding back of opinions or ideas because they might irritate someone else or appear foolish. Instead, there was a continual open exchange of ideas that eventually led to a plan that resulted

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in the complete destruction of the Iraqi defenses in Kuwait. Everyone had an opportunity to contribute. You didn’t have to be a general to speak up and, if the truth be known, often it was the thoughts and ideas of the company and field grade officers that carried the day. Likewise, an individual didn’t have to be wearing a Marine uniform to have credibility. Some of the most insightful comments came from Army and/or Navy officers. The bottom line was that the strength of the planning process came from the openness of the dialog and the willingness of all the participants to give an idea a chance. It was a truly motivating experience.

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