

The Battle of Al-Khafji:

28 January-1 February 1991

Keystone Battle Series
Marine Corps History Division



Lecture Overview

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I. The Situation: Background

- Iran/Iraq War (1980-88)
- Aug 1990- Invasion of Kuwait
- Formation of the Coalition
- **Saddam's plan**- war of attrition

Below: Scene of Iranian troops during the Iran/Iraq War. On the right is an American built M60-A1 MBT, one of hundreds the Iranians used during the war.



Above: Saddam Hussein totalitarian dictator of Iraq from 1979 to 2003



Right: Map depicting the first phase of the Iraqi 2 Aug 1990 Invasion of Kuwait.

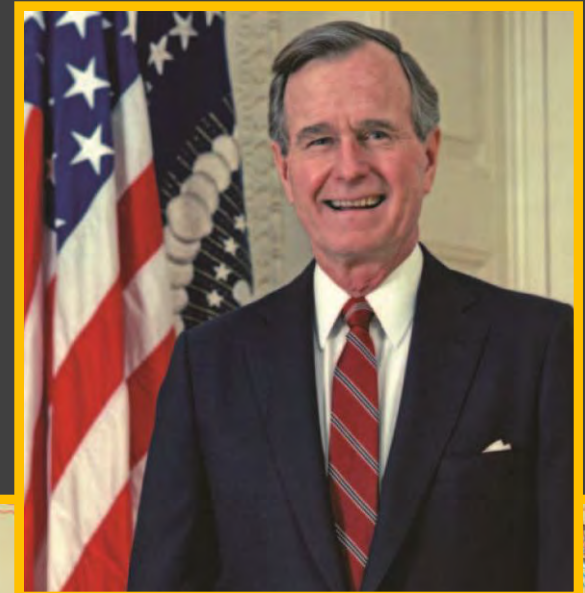
I. The Situation: Background

- 17 January 1991- Desert Storm launched
- Effective air campaign
- Iraqi spoiling attack planned



Above: U.S. Marine Corps F/A-18 Hornet strike-fighter aircraft from Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 212.

Top Right: President George H. W. Bush assembled the largest Coalition seen since the World War II



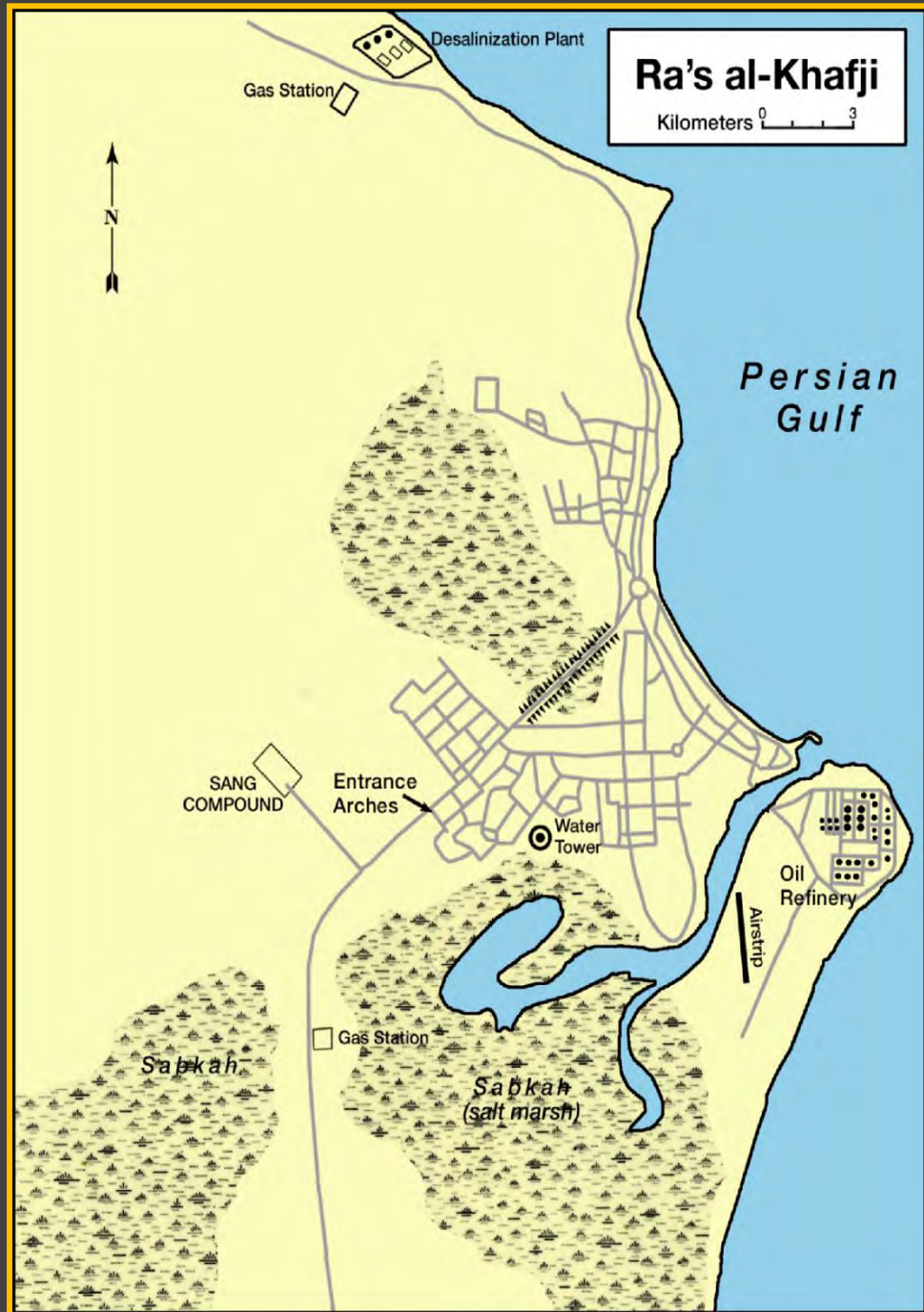
Right: Map depicting the second phase of the Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait which took place on 3 Aug 1990



I. The Situation: Al-Khafji

- Identified as objective for Iraqi offensive
 - Within range of Iraqi artillery support
 - Misidentified as Coalition base
- Evacuated by the Saudis on 18 August 1990
- *Sabkhas*- channelized vehicle traffic

Below: The Entrance Arches of al-Khafji



II. The Iraqi Plan: Operational Plan

- Saddam hoped to capture American POWs
- Not a skirmish or limited raid

Defensive forces



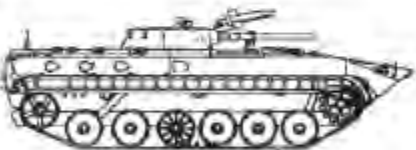
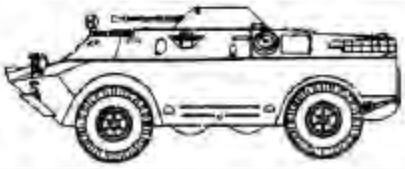
- 18th Infantry Division
- 8th Infantry Division
- 29th Infantry Division
- 14th Infantry Division
- 7th Infantry Division
- Occupied 'Saddam Line'

Offensive forces

- 3d Armored Division (III Corps)
- 5th Mech. Division (III Corps)
- 1st Mech. Division (IV Corps)

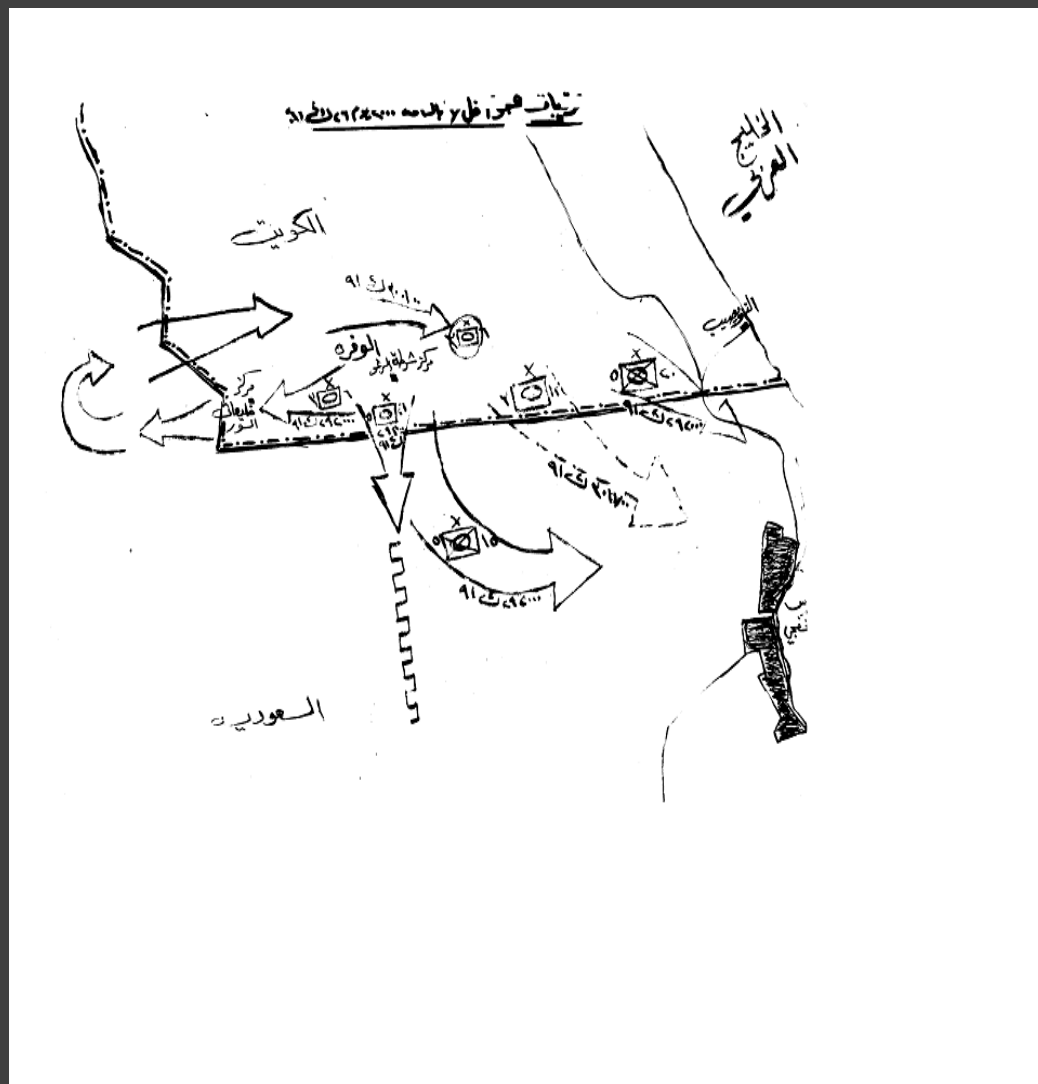


Iraqi Armored Vehicles

	Type	Armament	Top Speed
	T-54/55	100mm main gun, 1300m effective range Coax 7.62mm MG Bow 7.62mm MG 12.7mm MG	50kph
	T-62	115mm main gun, 2000m effective range Coax 7.62mm MG Bow 7.62mm MG 12.7mm MG	50kph
	BMP-1	73mm smoothbore cannon 7.62mm MG AT-3 Sagger ATGM 8 Troops	80kph
	BRDM-2	14.5mm MG 7.62mm MG 4 troops	100kph

II. The Iraqi Plan: Division-level

- Enemy Attacking Divisions
 - The *5th Mechanized Division* [*III Corps*] - would drive south along the coast road to al-Khafji.
 - The *3d Armored Division* [*III Corps*] - would drive through the al-Wafrah 'forest' to the coast road, cutting al-Khafji off from the south.
 - The *1st Mechanized Division* [*IV Corps*] - would drive across the berm then pass south to screen the *3d Armored Division's* flank.
- Planned retreat into Kuwait
- Attack set for 2000 on 29 January

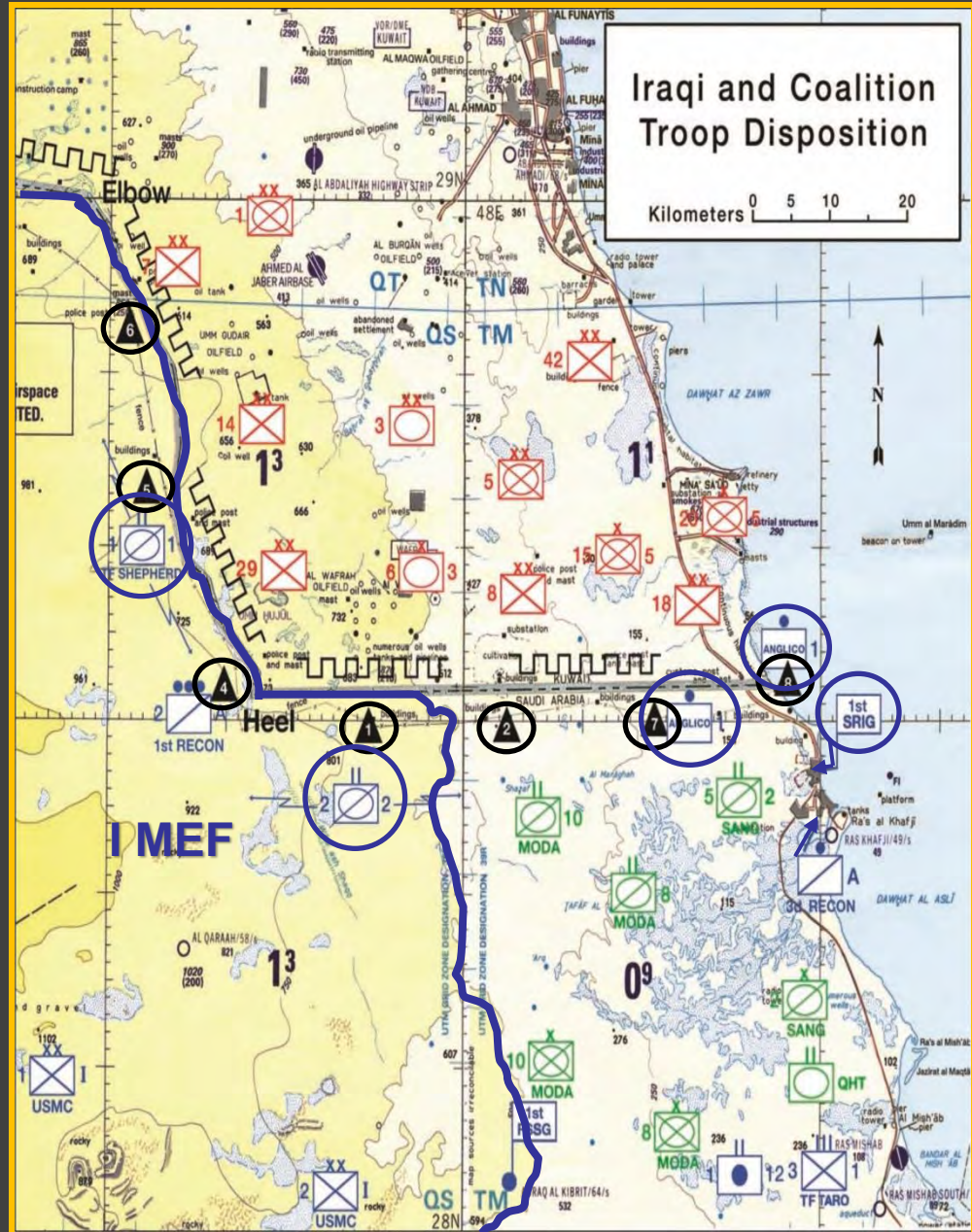


Above: original Iraqi sketch showing planned movements of 3rd Armored and 5th Mechanized Divisions.

III. Coalition Forces: I MEF

- I MEF was the main element on the ground and included 1st and 2d Marine Divisions
- OPs along Berm (8,7,2,1,4,5,6)
- Units Manning the OPs
 - TF Shepherd (1st Light Armored Infantry Bn)
 - 2d Light Armored Infantry Bn
 - 1st SRIG (Included ANGLICO Teams)

Below: Two LAV-ATs from 1st LAI Bn. Note the lack of turret and pintle mounted machine gun.



III. Coalition Forces: Saudi Forces Organization

The Ministry of Defense and Aviation (MODA)

- Royal Saudi Land Forces: nine brigades
- External threats
- Advised by United States Army Special Forces teams
- Air Naval Gunfire Liaison Companies (ANGLICO)



Above Left: Saudi Flag, translated "There is no god but Allah and Muhammed is his messenger"

Saudi Arabian National Guard (SANG)

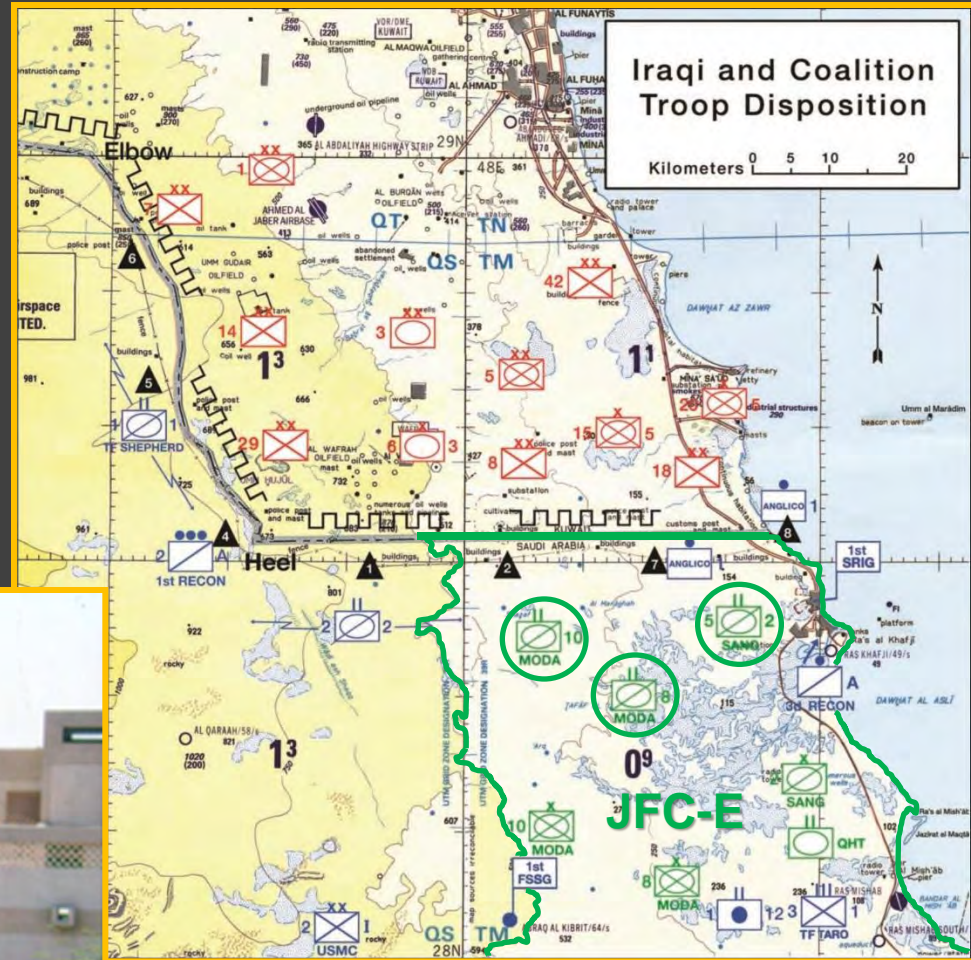
- Two mechanized brigades
- Internal threats
- Highly favored
- Advised by American contractors and Special Forces teams
- Air Naval Gunfire Liaison Companies (ANGLICO)



Above Right: Saudi Arabian National Guard Flag


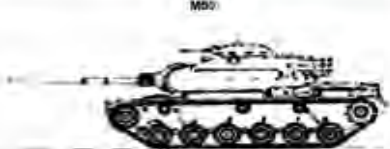



III. Coalition forces: Joint Forces Command-East

- JFC-E's area of operations extended along the Kuwaiti/Saudi border from the coast to just East of the al-Wafrah Oilfields
- Saudi units within JFC-E
 - 2d SANG with Qatari armored Bn
 - 8th Mechanized (MODA)
 - 10th Mechanized (MODA)
 - 3 Saudi battalions in a screening role



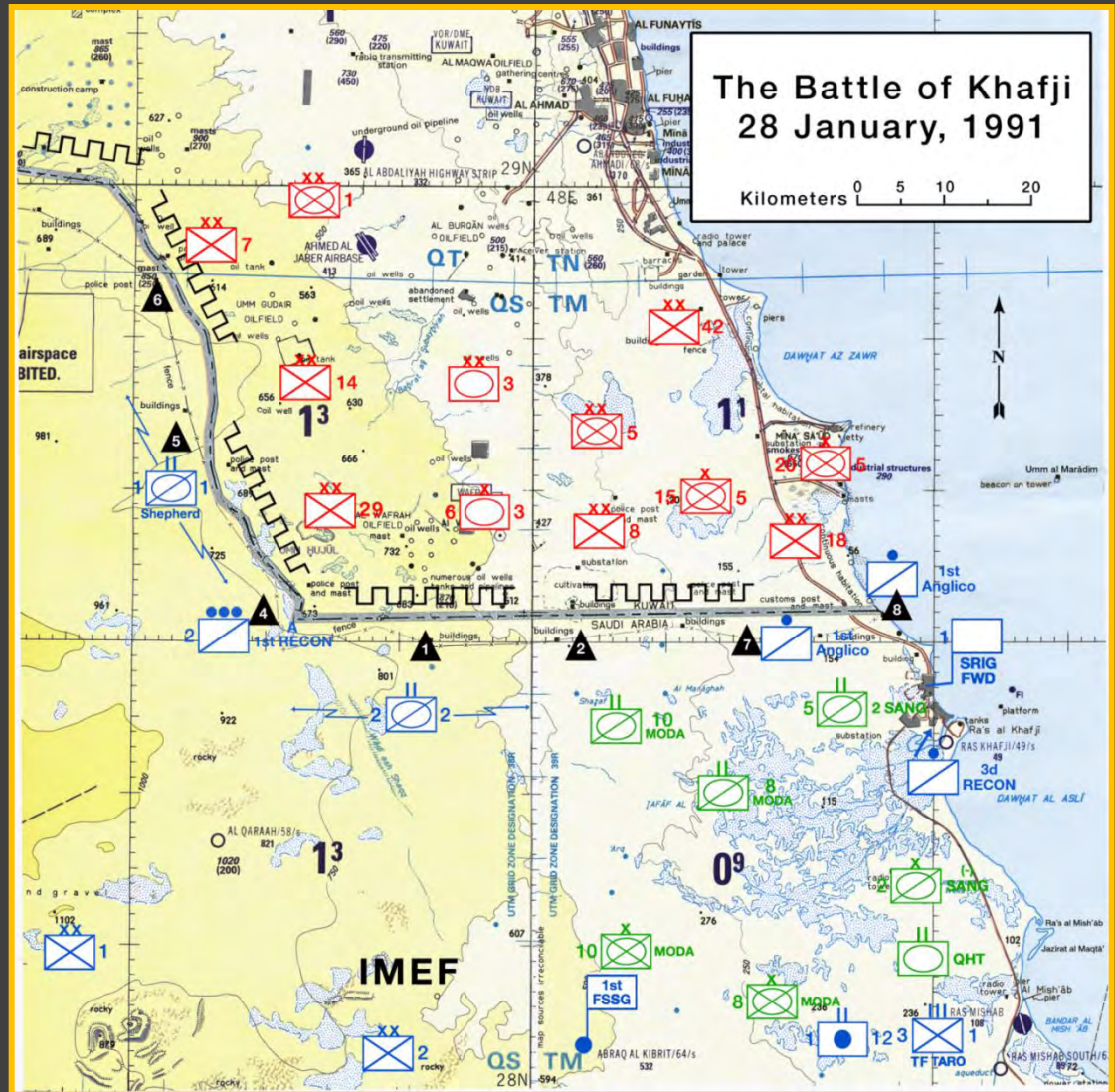
Left: Saudi soldiers move through the evacuated border city of al-Khafji which was part of Joint Forces Command-East's area of responsibility.

Coalition Armored Vehicles

	Type	Armament	Top Speed
	AMX-30	105mm main gun Coax 12.7mm MG 7.62mm MG	65kph
	M-60	105mm main gun Coax 7.62mm MG 12.7mm MG	48.3kph
	LAV-25	25mm main gun 2x7.62mm MG 4 troops Or TOW-2 ATGM	100kph
	V-150	.50 caliber MG 6-8 troops Or TOW ATGM	88.54kph
	M-113	12.7mm MG 11 troops Or TOW ATGM	61 kph

IV. The Battle: 28 Jan

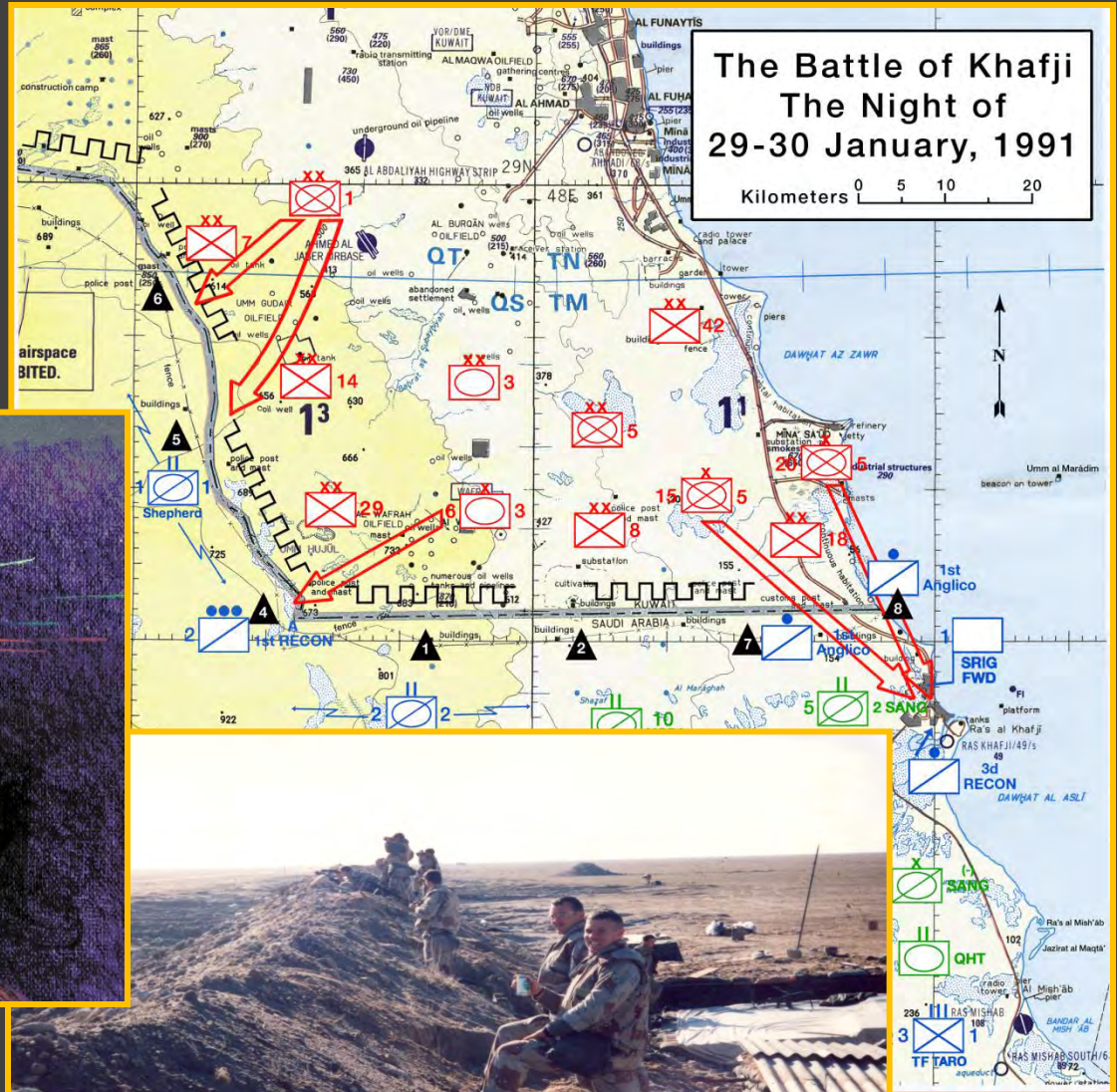
- Night before Iraqi attack
- *3d Armored Division* hit hard from air
- Iraqi movements spotted but not interpreted properly.



Left: AV8B Harriers were used to provide close air support during the Battle of Khafji

IV. The Battle: 29-30 Jan

- Iraqi units reach staging areas
- No attack expected
- *6th Bde, 3d Armored* begins fight for OP-4



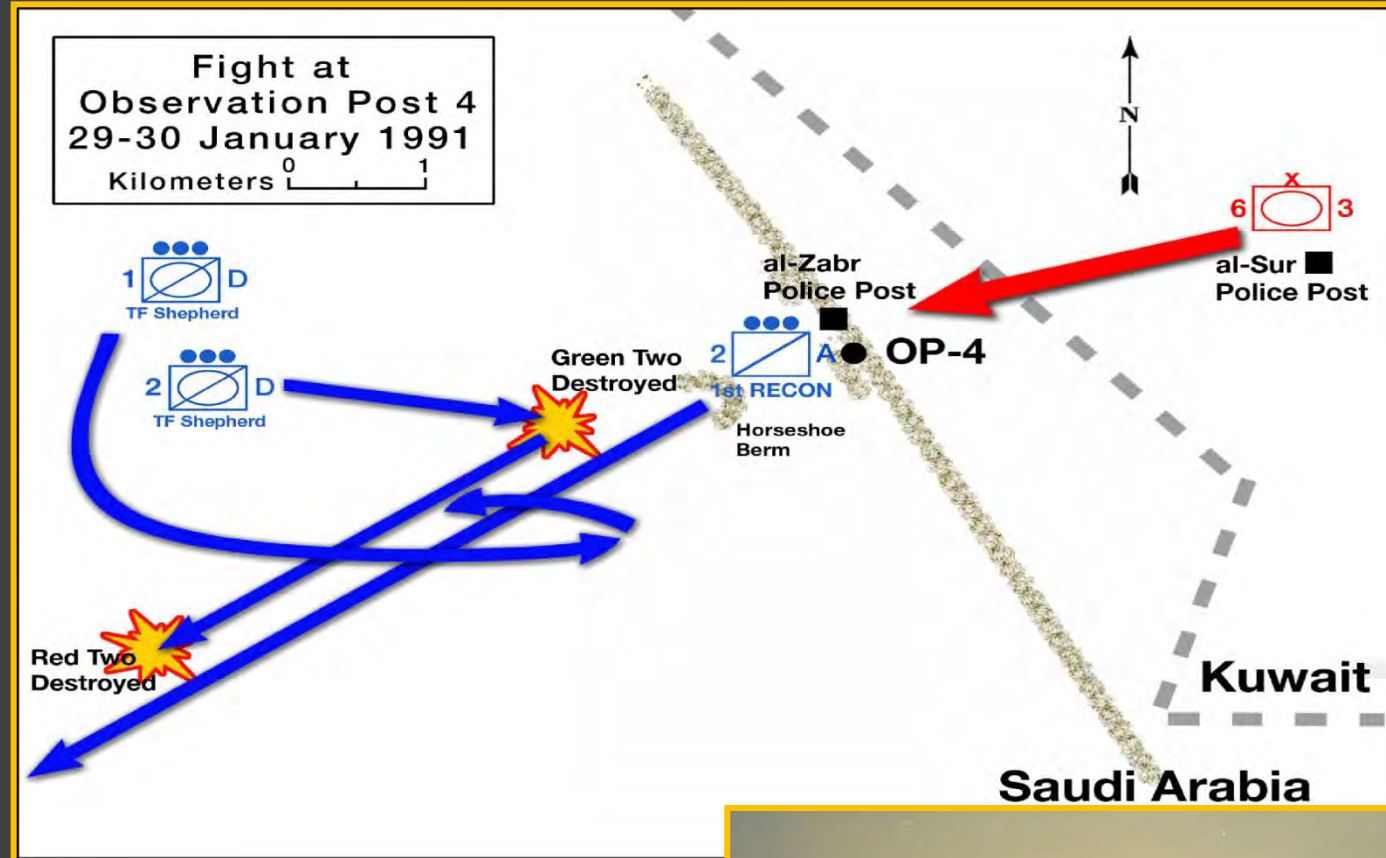
Above: Gulf War Marines in a firefight

Right: Marines of 1st Recon Bn at OP-4 prior to the attack



IV. The Battle: 29-30 Jan

- Fight for OP-4
- TF Shepherd
- Attack contained but friendly fire occurred
 - “Green Two”
 - “Red Two”
 - 11 Marines lost
- Iraqi losses
 - 22 vehicles
 - Scores of men

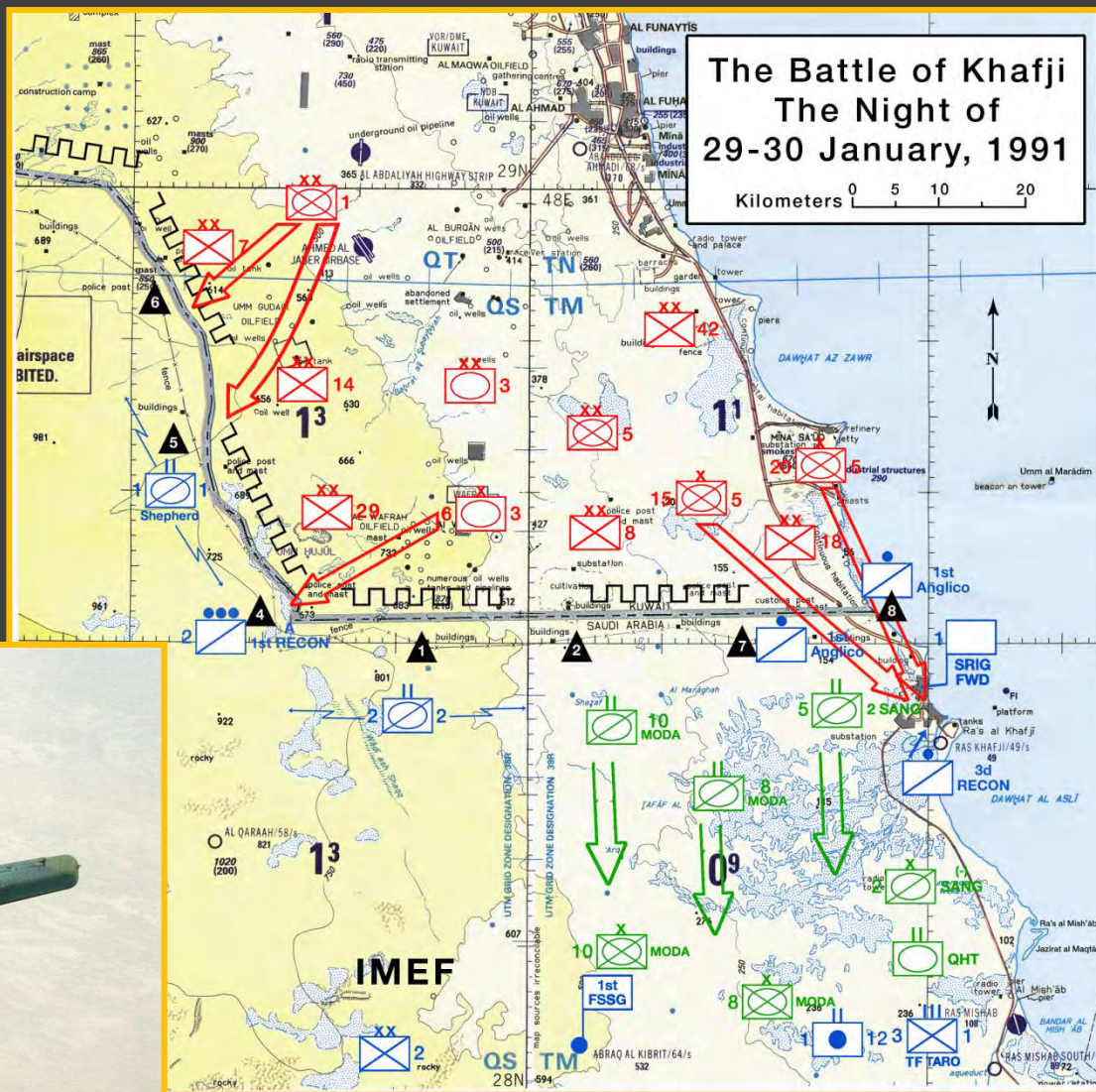


Below Left: “Green Two”
Below Center: “Red Two”
Below Right: Two destroyed Iraqi T-62s at OP-4



IV. The Battle: 29-30 Jan

- 1st Mechanized Division attacks OP-6 and C Co, 1st Light Armored Infantry Bn (TF Shepherd)
- OP-1 and 2d Light Armored Infantry Bn under attack
- Attacks stopped by air power with no casualties and end early on 30th
- Final attack on OP-4 stopped

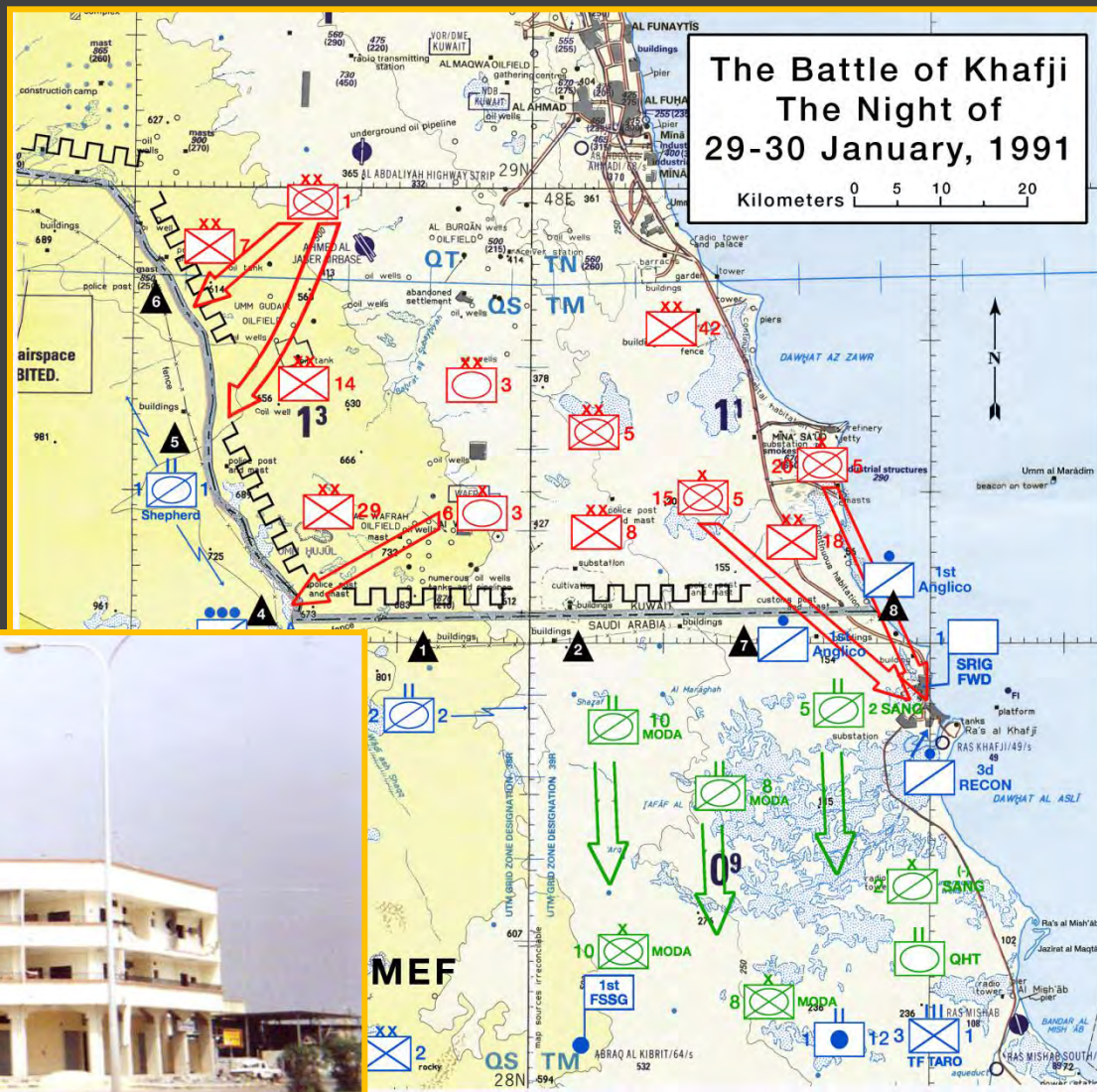


Left: The Fairchild Republic A-10 Thunderbolt II "Warthog" proved itself to be very effective against armored vehicles

IV. The Battle: 29-30 Jan

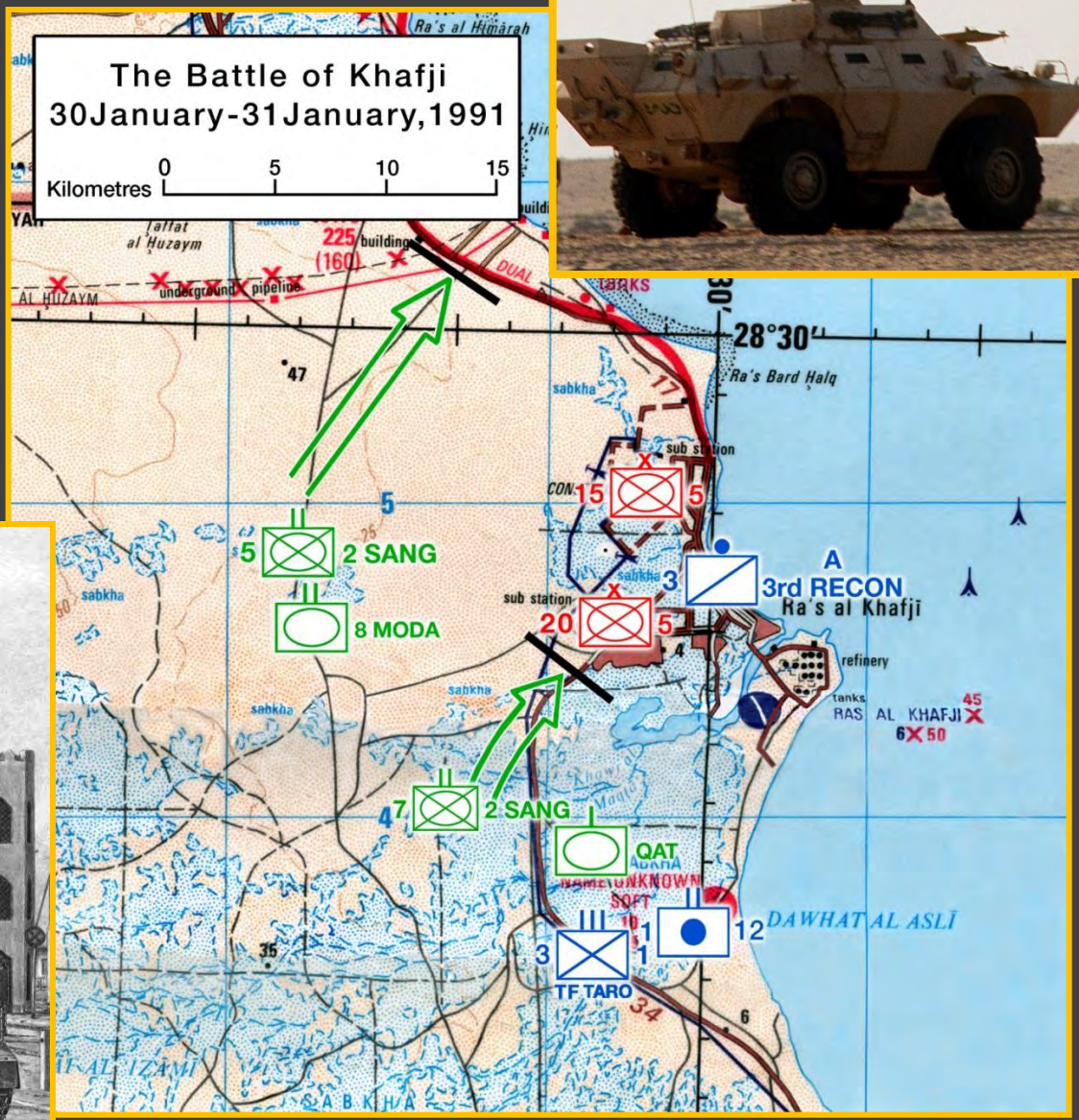
- 2200 29 Jan 5th Mechanized Division overruns OPs 7 & 8
- 3 Saudi battalions retreat ahead of Iraqis
- al-Khafji occupied but two Marine recon teams remain

Below: One of the buildings occupied by a Marine recon team



IV. The Battle: 30-31 Jan

- US Army truck captured and 3/3 launches rescue mission
- 1100 30 Jan - 1st attack
 - 2d SANG (V-150 AC)
 - Qatari armor (AMX-30)
- 0830 31 Jan - 2nd attack
- Both attacks repulsed but the *15th Mechanized Brigade* was halted during the second attack



Top Right: SANG V-150 with a M220 launcher for the BGM-71 TOW antitank missile

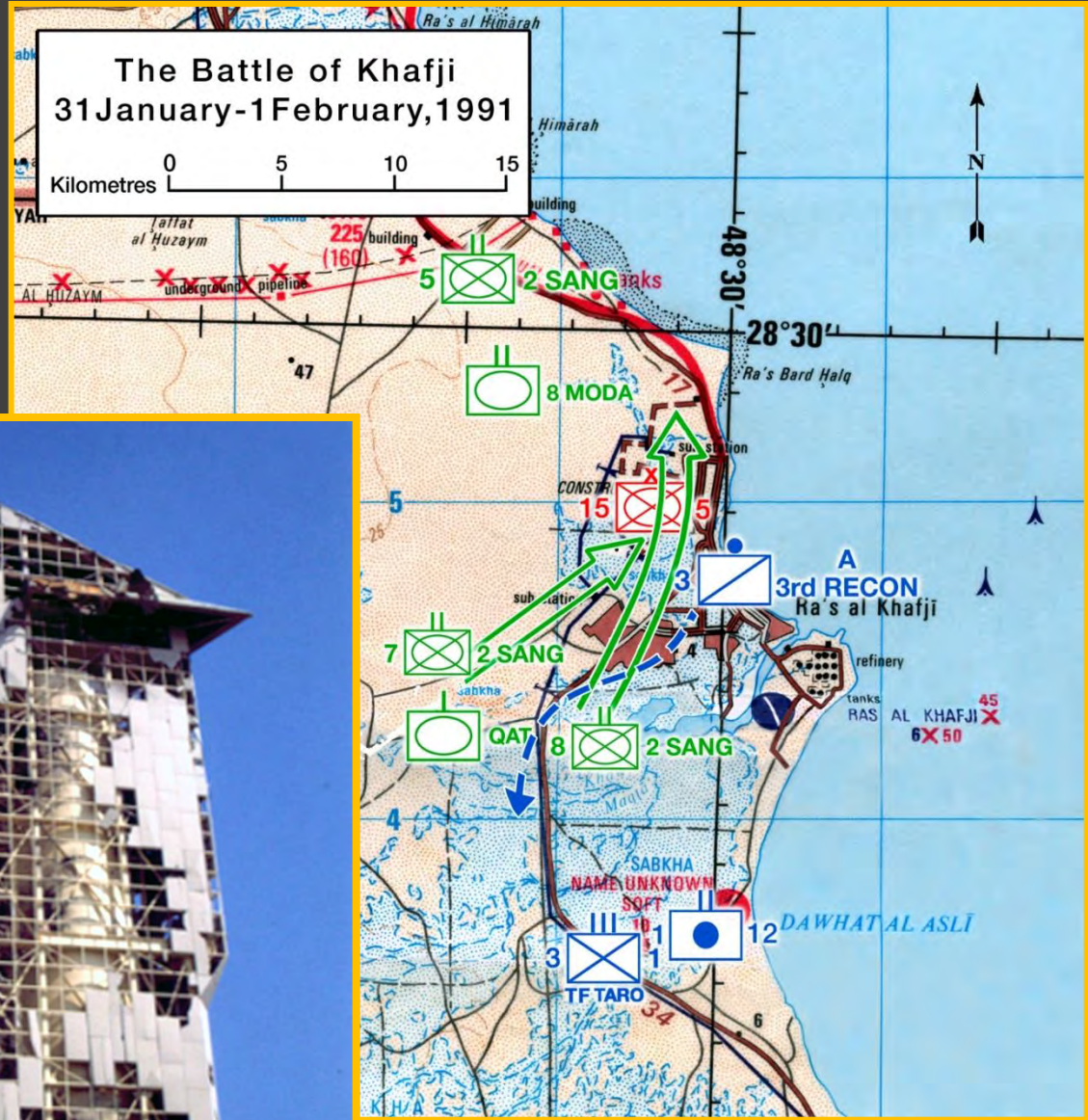
Left: Qatari AMX-30 leads two Saudi V-150s into al-Khafji. The arches were the focal point of each Saudi counterattack into the city

IV. The Battle: 1 Feb and Aftermath

- Third attack on morning of 1 Feb
 - 2d SANG Bde
 - Qatari Armored Bn
 - 8th MODA Mech. Bde
- Marine recon teams withdraw
- Khafji captured

Aftermath

- Saudi Losses
 - 7 V-150s
 - 2 Qatari AMX-30s
 - 18 dead
- U.S. Losses
 - 2 LAVs
 - 1 AC-130
 - 25 dead
- Iraqi Losses
 - Scores of tanks and APCs
 - Several hundred dead or captured



Left: The water tower in southern al-Khafji was heavily damaged during the battle. It was a favorite target for both Iraqi and Saudi troops, and was strafed at least once by U.S. Marine Cobra helicopters.

V. Significance

A. To the Gulf War

- First ground combat of the war
- Iraqis suffered extreme losses but saw the operation as a propaganda victory anyways
- Coalition strengthened and the importance of airpower reiterated



B. To the Marine Corps

- Increased confidence and prowess
- Pre-war doctrines and philosophies confirmed
- Marine units performed well
- Air ground task force concept proven
- New safety measures brought about



Top Right: The Saudi border fort at Observation Post 4 was known as "OP Hamma" to some Marines. The Painting by Capt Charles G. Grow depicts the oil fields at al-Wafrah on fire following a Coalition bombing raid on 24 January 1991.


Bottom Right: Marines of 3d Battalion, 3d Marines, search al-Khafji for Iraqi stragglers and examine the battle damage as depicted in the painting "Cleaning up Khafji" by Capt Charles G. Grow.

VI. Discussion and Review

Question #1: Why did the Iraqi Army attack al-Khafji? Did their plan make sense; why or why not?

Question #2: What was the general course of the Battle of al-Khafji over the four days in which it was fought?

Question #3: What is a lesson that can be learned from the Battle of al-Khafji?



Charles Brown SGT USMC

OP HAMMA OCCUPIED BY A CO 1 RECON BN

0615, 24 JAN 91 AFTER B-52 BOMBING OF AL-WAFI

VII. Suggested Reading:

- Morris, David J. *Storm on the Horizon*. New York: Free Press, 2004.
- Pollack, Kenneth M. *Arabs at War: Military Effectiveness 1948-1991*. London: University of Nebraska Press, 2002.
- Westermeyer, Paul W., and Alexander N. Hinman, trans. *Desert Voices: An Oral History Anthology of Marines in the Gulf War, 1990-1991*. Washington D.C.: United States Marine Corps History Division, 2016.
- Westermeyer, Paul W. *U.S. Marines in the Gulf War, 1990-1991: Liberating Kuwait*. Washington D.C.: United States Marine Corps History Division, 2014.
- Westermeyer, Paul W. *U.S. Marines in Battle: Al-Khafji, 28 January-1 February 1991*. Washington D.C.: United States Marine Corps History Division, 2008.

UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS



Notes were created from Paul W. Westermeyer's *U.S. Marines in Battle: Al-Khafji, 28 January – 1 February 1991*.

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