

## CHAPTER ONE

# The Day Before

23 FEBRUARY 1991 2100  
VII CORPS MAIN COMMAND POST

**A**FTER the evening briefing and a brief talk to his staff and the liaison officers from subordinate units, Fred Franks went back to his sleeping shelter.

In his talk, Franks was emotional about the soldiers and hard-nosed about the task ahead. The staff was quiet and serious. Most listened quietly, and there was a lot of eye contact. When he finished, they all hollered a big “JAYHAWK”—VII Corps’s nickname—and that was it. He left the tent.

Then he was alone with his thoughts. Before he got some rest he wanted to go over some things about the operation ahead and reflect on the events of this day.

There was one thought that would not leave him. “Don’t worry, General, we trust you.” A soldier in 3rd Armored Division had said that to him on 15 February during one of his many visits to VII Corps units. Now, how am I going to fulfill that trust? he asked himself. It was what the soldiers were thinking—he knew that—and he wanted to be worthy.

During Vietnam, that bond between the soldiers and the country’s leaders in Washington had been shattered. It was an open wound. Fred Franks wanted to be one of the commanders who could heal that wound, who could rebuild that trust. It was a powerful, consuming thought on this eve of battle, one that never left him, ever.

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THE next day was G-Day, the beginning of the ground attack to liberate Kuwait of Iraqi forces. The Coalition plan was for the U.S. Marines and the Saudis to

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attack at 0400, 200 kilometers to the east of VII Corps, while the light forces of U.S. XVIII Corps—the 82nd Airborne Division and the 101st Airborne (Air Assault) Division—and the French would attack 100 kilometers to the west. And then the heavy forces—VII Corps, the armored units of XVIII Corps, and the JFCN (the Arab Joint Forces Command North, an Egyptian Corps and a Syrian division)—would attack on G+1, the day after the next, at BMNT (the beginning of morning nautical twilight, or first light), or 0538 GPS local time (they used global positioning systems to give exact time).

What Franks didn't know then was that this night was going to turn out to be the eve of his own VII Corps attack. When he learned of this change of plans the next day, it was to be for him one of the two greatest surprises of the war.

As far as he knew, the plan and the attack times were set, and he was considering nothing different. Nobody had mentioned the possibility of going early, not Third Army, CENTCOM,\* John Yeosock (the Third Army commander, and Franks's immediate superior), or Norm Schwarzkopf. They had hashed out the timing time and again. As far as he knew, they had settled it. The Marines and the Saudis would go into Kuwait and fix Iraqi forces there, and then the heavy forces would go after the RGFC—the Republican Guards Forces Command. VII Corps, the Egyptian Corps, and the heavy part of XVIII Corps were scheduled to attack on G+1 at BMNT.

As he sat there in the silence of his sleeping shelter—an expando van on the back of a five-ton truck—he checked his cigar supply. It was still holding up. Then he lit one as he began to go over in his mind the posture for the attack the day after tomorrow. He had no map, but by now they had been over the plan so many times he had it almost committed to memory. As was his practice, he used the Army's basic problem-solving method and one he himself had taught many times, which went by the acronym METT-T (Mission, Enemy, Terrain, Troops available to you, and Time).

### MISSION

The mission was simple: to destroy the RGFC in the VII Corps zone (the corps area of operations) and be prepared to defend northern Kuwait.

\*Third Army was Franks's next higher command, while CENTCOM (Central Command) was the overall U.S. Joint Command (Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines) in the Gulf. CENTCOM was commanded by General H. Norman Schwarzkopf.

## ENEMY

The situation was the same as it had been for the past several weeks. The Iraqis had essentially stayed in place, which was not surprising, considering the punishment they would take from the air if they tried any major force repositioning. As far as Fred Franks was concerned, that was just fine. The coalition had them where they wanted them.

Directly in front of VII Corps across the border was the Iraqi VII Corps. Their defense consisted of five infantry divisions, side by side, east to west, and one mechanized division behind them in depth. That defensive line started about twenty kilometers north of the border, with a complex obstacle system of mines, trenches, and defensive bunkers, thicker in the east and less so in the west. In the west, they had left an opening of about forty kilometers, where their defense line curved to the north and west, in order to prevent an envelopment. In military terms, this is called “refusing the flank.” The width of their defending infantry divisions was about twenty-five kilometers each, with a total depth of twenty to thirty kilometers.

The VII Corps plan was for the 1st Infantry Division to penetrate one of these divisions in a breach mission, while an enveloping force, consisting of the 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment, the 1st Armored Division, and the 3rd Armored Division, would simultaneously sweep around the Iraqi flank and attack toward the RGFC. The British 1st Armored Division would meanwhile pass through the 1st INF (infantry) breach, once that was secured, and attack toward the east to prevent Iraqi forces from threatening the VII Corps flank.

A big disagreement ahead of time had concerned the estimated width and depth of Iraqi frontline division sectors. U.S. intelligence thought the sectors were twenty-five kilometers wide and not so deep; the British thought the Iraqi division sectors were a more narrow fifteen kilometers and deeper. The British were correct, as it turned out, except that the division sectors got wider the farther west you went. That was of significant consequence later, as the British attack hit the command posts of the Iraqi frontline divisions rather than passing to their rear.

Behind the Iraqi VII Corps, the Republican Guards, Iraq’s best, had not moved, either. There were six RGFC divisions, three armored/mechanized and three infantry (each Guards division had three brigades), with the closest of these about 150 kilometers from the VII Corps’s line of departure. Though at this point, all six were in the VII Corps zone of attack, from the start Franks’s intent was to aim VII Corps at the three Guards armored/mechanized divisions (Tawalkana, Medina, and Hammurabi). They knew about

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where these heavy divisions were, as well as the locations of the three RGFC infantry divisions.

Because air had been able to fix the RGFC strategically (the Iraqis knew that if they tried any major moves, they'd get hit hard), there had not been any apparent major force repositioning since the air campaign had started on 17 January. But air had not completely immobilized the RGFC. The Guards were able to move up to brigade-sized units locally in tactical repositioning, and they had done so frequently. Since immediate intelligence about these changes in position was not available to VII Corps, they would know only approximately where the RGFC brigades were located at any given time.

In other words, that meant that the Iraqi armored forces retained tactical freedom of movement and could move from twenty-five to fifty kilometers to adjust their positions. Thus, attacking units would not know for sure what was just beyond visual range. It would therefore be up to attacking troops to fix the enemy tactically, and then to destroy them. That distinction would dictate Franks's tactics and those of his subordinate unit commanders as they approached RGFC locations. It was likely that attacking units would be involved in a great many "meeting engagements."\*

As he pictured in his mind the layout of Iraqi forces, Franks turned his attention to some of the number designations of Iraqi brigades and divisions. They had been the subject of many discussions among intelligence staffs—was it the 12th Division over here, and the 52nd Division over there, or the other way around? These were interesting discussions, and important historically to get the record straight, yet for the purposes of the upcoming attack, he did not think such matters had any practical consequence. Getting unit designations right is valuable for history books, but what he really needed to know was how many divisions and brigades there were, and where they were located. And he had a very good idea of that.

Turning his thoughts back to the Iraqi VII Corps, Franks pictured their five infantry divisions forward on line, behind a barrier system that was less complex moving west from the Wadi al Batin. (The Wadi is an ancient, dry

\*A meeting engagement is a tactical action in which a force that is usually moving "meets" or otherwise runs into an enemy force that is also usually moving, but which could also be stationary. Normally, this is a surprise encounter, even though you know the enemy is out there somewhere. The faster-reacting force usually wins. It takes a lot of practice for units to absorb the initial surprise and continue to act faster than the enemy and in a way that brings combat power to bear. It is a tough tactical maneuver, and indeed a commander obviously would prefer to know in advance where the enemy is so he can think ahead about his mode of attack.

river valley, angling south and west out of Iraq into Saudi Arabia. Along the way, the Wadi defines the western boundary between Kuwait and Iraq.) The division numbers from east to west were the 27th; 25th; 31st; 48th; and 26th. The tactical reserve, located behind the 25th and 31st divisions at a depth of fifty to seventy-five kilometers, was the 12th Armored—actually the 52nd (it was one of the unit designations they'd gotten wrong). Again, it didn't really matter to Franks whether it was numbered the 52nd or the 152nd. It did matter that there was an Iraqi mechanized division that could move; if it could move, it could interdict his logistics or otherwise get in the way of his attacking force. In order to make sure that didn't happen, he had assigned to the British the mission of defeating that division.

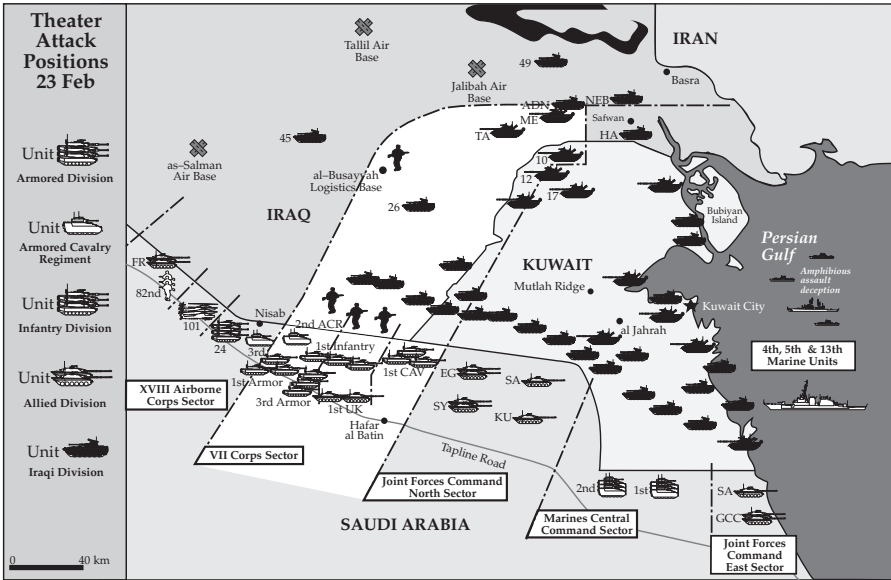
The Iraqi VII Corps's westernmost division, the 26th, had two brigades forward in the defensive line. In order to refuse that western flank, they had an infantry brigade in depth, stretching perhaps fifty kilometers to the rear of the defensive line. It was this 26th Division that the 1st Infantry Division, the Big Red One, would penetrate in their breach mission and that the enveloping force would overrun.

The Iraqi VII Corps had assigned their artillery to frontline divisions and to their subordinate brigades located with those units. Other artillery retained under their corps control was positioned to support the frontline divisions. Total gun count along that initial Iraqi VII Corps defense before the air attacks began was approximately 400 to 500, with over half that in range of the 1st INF breach.

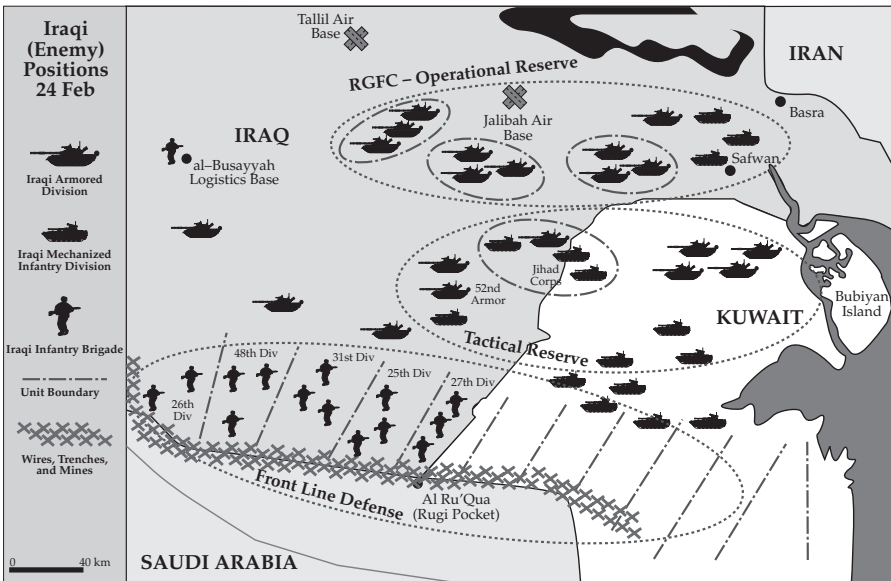
Though Franks was relatively sure about what they were facing in Iraqi VII Corps, he was less sure of the organization of their deep forces and how they would fight. He knew the Guards were their best and most loyal forces. They also were the best equipped, mostly with Russian-made T-72s, BMPs, and self-propelled artillery. In the Iran-Iraq War, they had done well. In the invasion of Kuwait, they had moved and fought efficiently. Even though air had hit them hard, there wasn't much doubt that the RGFC would fight.

Franks's key question, then, was what the Republican Guards would attempt to do when or if they discovered the attack. Defend? Maneuver toward VII Corps units to meet their attack? Attempt to escape up Highway 8 to Baghdad? (Highway 8 was the main route on the south side of the Euphrates between Basra and Baghdad.) Retreat toward Basra? Franks's aim was to fix them where they were, or to surprise them before they could move.

There were other Iraqi heavy divisions in the corps's zone as well, the 10th and 12th Armored divisions, formed into what he discovered later was the "Jihad Corps." What would these intermediate forces do? In addition, another heavy division, the 17th, was located near the RGFC, but was not in



The forces arrayed by the Coalition spread from the Persian Gulf to approximately 600 kilometers inland. VII Corps's mission was to destroy the Republican Guard in their sector of attack.



The Iraqi defenses were arrayed in three belts. The frontline consisted primarily of infantry units defending behind a massive obstacle belt of minefields, trenches, and wire. The tactical reserve was poised to reinforce wherever the front lines were breached. The operational reserve—the Republican Guards and other units—defended the southern approaches into Iraq and were capable of counterattacking the Coalition force.

the VII Corps zone. The presence of these formations and their subordination to the Guards would make a difference in how the Iraqi high command chose to fight VII Corps. Not counting the three RGFC infantry divisions, that gave the Iraqis a six-division theater reserve, three RGFC heavy divisions and three other armored divisions.

As he played all this in his mind's eye, he also considered something else: the location of the Iraqi army was only one piece of the intelligence picture. The other piece was how strong were they? What was their ability to fight? Even at this point, he was not very confident that he knew the answers to that.

In his zone of attack were two very different-type forces. Except for their mechanized infantry reserve, the Iraqi VII Corps consisted of five frontline conscript infantry divisions, fixed in a World War I-type defensive arrangement. VII Corps had had some combat against these units over the previous two weeks, and prisoners and deserters had been taken. After these Iraqi soldiers had been questioned about their dispositions, strength, unit identification, and morale, Franks and his commanders had gotten a pretty clear picture of the Iraqi VII Corps. The infantry divisions were brittle and would easily crack at the first hard, sustained ground attack. They'd been hurt badly by U.S. air, Apache, and artillery attacks, and by the desertion of some of their own leadership. The conclusion was that they were between 50 and 75 percent strength. They did not have much fight left in them.

But Franks had no such clear picture of the RGFC, or of the other Iraqi armored/mechanized formations. Prewar air campaign objectives had called for the reduction of RGFC strength by 50 percent by the time the ground war started. Theater had selected that number based on an analysis of friendly and enemy force ratios. If that figure was achieved, they'd thought, VII Corps would have enough combat power available to finish the destruction in direct ground combat.

As it happened, none of the ground commanders had participated in setting this objective. And when they had learned of it, most had thought it would not be achievable unless the attacks went on a long time.

The real problem was not the specific objective (whether 50 percent or whatever). The problem was that there was no reliable method for determining if the objective had actually been achieved. There was no way of knowing, in fact, if they were even close. Precise bomb-damage assessment (BDA) was difficult. It was relatively easy to figure damage done to a fixed target such as a bridge or an aircraft shelter by a precision-guided weapon, but damage against mobile armored units by dumb bombs or 30-mm cannons from 10,000 feet and higher—now, that was harder.

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So VII Corps estimates of Iraqi RGFC strength remained quite conservative. Though in the plans they had briefed they had assumed the stated objective of 50 percent, they always hedged their bets. Their own estimate was that Guards and other Iraqi armored/mechanized units would be closer to 75 percent when VII Corps hit them. Corps also thought that, unlike the front-line infantry divisions, the Guards would fight, and not run away or desert.

As Franks weighed these numbers, he became aware that the real art was to assess enemy fighting capabilities, competence, and willingness to fight. Locating them and determining numbers was the easy part. It was almost scientific. It was this other part that was the art. You wanted neither to overestimate nor underestimate the enemy.

Fred Franks's experience in Vietnam had influenced him on this matter. If he erred, he wanted to err on the side of overestimating the enemy. He wanted to be sure that, this time, the results would be different.



IN the final analysis, Franks knew that he had a decent intelligence picture for Iraqi unit locations but a poor picture of RGFC strength, fighting capability, and competence.

He was aware again that he had to come to a conclusion. He would also need to predict and influence their tactical maneuver. Would VII Corps be able to keep them fixed where they were and surprise them in the size and direction of the attack? Would they come toward his advancing units? Would they attempt to go up Highway 8? Would they attempt to escape out of the theater? And he also knew he would have to decide all that about twenty-four hours after the VII Corps attack at first light on 25 February.

### TERRAIN

From his perspective as corps commander, Franks had not spent a lot of time examining terrain. In Europe it had been vital to determine key terrain—the pieces of ground that dominate an area—and to look very closely at avenues of approach—the areas that allowed rapid movement by large formations in the direction in which you or the enemy wanted to go. They had examined the cross-country traffic ability—the capability of the terrain to allow heavy armored movement—and looked at roads, bridges, airfields, towns, and cities, and at how they might influence operations and logistics.



Not much of that mattered here. This was desert. Fighting here was like naval surface warfare on the open ocean. Here they could essentially take their fleet anywhere, and in almost any formation they wanted. Now smaller units in the corps had to be concerned with the normal rises and drops in the desert as they attacked. They also had to be aware that in some places—especially in 1st AD sector—the sand was softer than in others (and thus less trafficable for heavy armor), and that in some places there were narrow defiles.

So that they could have the best available intel about such areas, a Special Forces night flight had been sent forward into the VII Corps zone to look over the terrain. When the flight had determined that the terrain would hold anything Franks wanted it to, he'd figured he could maneuver his fleet anywhere. So could the Iraqis, he realized. But as it turned out, they anchored their fleet with short chains. Since they had no confidence in cross-desert maneuver (and they did not have access to GPS receivers), the Iraqis mainly stuck to their roads.

In fact, weather turned out to be a bigger factor. Severe local sandstorms, called *shamals*, hid VII Corps attacks from Iraqis, but also limited some use of Apaches, and troops had to fight through cold night temperatures and torrential rains.

## TROOPS

The VII Corps situation was excellent. The plan was sound and well understood by all units; they had rehearsed and war-gamed it. The Corps was at full strength, and the equipment availability of major combat assets such as tanks and Bradleys was at 97 percent. That was better than in the Corps's best Cold War days in Germany as part of NATO.

The commanders were ready, and the teamwork among them was tight. It was a talented team. Franks's major maneuver commanders were Major General Tom Rhame, 1st Infantry Division; Major General Ron Griffith, 1st Armored Division; Major General Paul "Butch" Funk, 3rd Armored Division; Major General Rupert Smith, 1st (U.K.) Armored Division; Colonel Don Holder, 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment; and Colonel Johnnie Hitt, 11th Aviation Brigade. Brigadier General John Tilelli commanded the 1st Cavalry Division, which was to be released to CENTCOM as theater reserve the next day. The corps artillery commander was Brigadier General Creighton Abrams; and Brigadier General Bob McFar-

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lin was the commander of the Corps's almost 27,000-soldier Support Command.

The troops were mentally ready, and they were trained to a razor's edge. During the weeks before combat, they had trained hard to adapt their tactics to the desert and to practice their tasks. They also had been in combat against Iraqis. During the two weeks prior to the attack, Franks had wanted some actual fighting in order to get his forces mentally ready to fight, as well as to conduct feints to deceive the Iraqis as to the actual point of attack, and to destroy artillery in range of the breach site. As a result, the artillery and aviation of every major maneuver unit in VII Corps had by now participated in a combat action against Iraqi frontline units.

### TIME

The timing of the attack was clear. They would attack the day after tomorrow at G+1 at BMNT.

Franks's best commander's estimate was that the whole operation would take about eight days: two days to get through non-Guards Iraqi forces and the 150 to 200 kilometers to the Guards themselves, four days to destroy the Guards, and two days for consolidation. The Third Army estimate had been two weeks for the ground offensive and another four for consolidation.

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THAT was the METT-T situation facing Fred Franks as he sat in his sleeping shelter, gazing out the opening to the now-quiet life of the main command post.

It was a very familiar scene. It was the Army's practice to use three command posts, called the "tactical," "main," and "rear" posts, depending on their closeness to the enemy. The close—or immediate—battle was led using the tactical command post as a base of operations; the rear post directed all the logistics or combat service support of the unit; and the main command post kept track of the immediate fight and the deeper fight beyond that one, and planned the battles to be fought in the future. At the main command post, all three command activities were normally fully coordinated, as was air support. The main command post was also the link to higher headquarters, both for operational matters as well as for intelligence—all downlink terminals were located there, which brought direct theater or national intelligence system "feed" to the unit.

Franks pictured the main CP in front of him—essentially, a large camp-

site with tents and truck vans. The area of the CP covered about 500 meters in diameter and perhaps a kilometer in circumference. The entire area was behind a circular, ten-foot-high berm of sand shoved up by Corps engineers. About ten feet outside the berm was triple-strand concertina barbed wire arranged triple-thick and piled in tightly tangled coils. At regular intervals around this berm were six-by-six-foot bunkers, with up to two feet of overhead cover. These were manned by armed soldiers with communication to a central post commanded by the HQ battalion commander.

There was only one entrance to the command post area. To get in, you had to identify yourself to military police, who would pull the temporary sliding wire barrier out of the way, and then you had to drive down a serpentine course past high mounds of sand. Only a few vehicles were permitted inside, and these were directed to a parking area just inside the entrance. There all personnel would dismount and walk to wherever they needed to go. To allow much vehicle traffic inside the CP was to stir up so much sand that it was harmful to the equipment, plus it wasn't safe at night with no lights, and it made life unbearable for the troops. Most vehicles parked outside, and their occupants walked to their destination. Troops manning the entrance could spot vehicles approaching from a long distance.

Inside the perimeter, the truck vans were arranged according to their individual function: Staff elements were located close to other staff elements with whom they needed to coordinate. For example, intelligence and operations were always next to each other, and Air Force air, corps artillery, and Army aviation stayed close together.

These truck vans were what the U.S. Army called "expando vans," like Franks's own sleeping shelter. They were five-ton trucks with a steel enclosure on the back. When the vehicle was stationary, this could be "expanded" by about two feet on each side, thus increasing the work area. The inside of these vans took on various physical configurations depending on their function. Inside dimensions were about twenty by fifteen feet, and they were prewired, so that when you stopped you could plug in cables and have lights. In other words, they were essentially portable offices.

At the main CP were about a thousand soldiers and perhaps two hundred vehicles. Because of the time needed to install long-haul communications for both intelligence and command, and because of the network of cables and wires that had to be hooked up to provide electronic networking capability between these vans, it was not very physically agile.

The picture of a high-tech CP Franks's unit was not. Patton or Bradley would have been right at home here. They used paper maps with hand-drawn symbols on acetate coverings to depict boundaries, phase lines, and objec-

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tives, the usual control measures for a corps. They used line-of-sight radios and longer-haul comms that were the equivalent of radio telephones to reach Riyadh or the United States. They used commercial fax machines to transmit hard copies of small papers. For larger acetate overlays, they drew them one at a time and sent them via land or air courier to subordinate units. They had computers for analysis, word processing, and especially intelligence. But in the end, the central focus of all the friendly and enemy information was a paper map posted by hand, not a large-screen computer monitor. It was around that map that they held their discussions, and where Franks made whatever decisions he made in the CP and where he gave guidance.

During the war, Franks would not stay in the main CP, but in the smaller, more mobile TAC CP closer to the fight. He wanted to be up front, where he'd have a more precise feel for the battle.

In Riyadh as well, the battle was tracked on paper maps. In order for information about friendly and enemy units to be accurately and timely posted on those maps, the staff had to rely on voice phone calls and written situation reports that were hours old. In such a setup, where there was no automatic and simultaneous electronic updating of these common situational displays, you had a built-in prescription for misunderstanding.

### EARLIER THAT DAY

Franks let his attention stray back over the events of the day, and especially his visits to the units.

He had gone all around the corps talking to commanders, looking soldiers in the eye, shaking their hands, banging them on the back, handing out VII Corps coins, saying a few words, such as "good to go," "good luck," "trust your leaders, we've got a great scheme of maneuver here," "the Iraqis will never know what hit them." And he had called out a "JAYHAWK" or two.

He wanted to show confidence and to get a sense of the electricity going through the units. And he found to be true what he had reported to Secretary Cheney and General Powell on 9 February in the final briefing in Riyadh: "VII Corps is ready to fight." Soldiers were all pumped up. There was some of the usual "kick their ass" type of thing, "the Iraqis are messing with the wrong guys." Soldier-to-soldier chatter.

For the most part, the troops and leaders were going about their work with an air of quiet professionalism. They were doing small things that count, such as cleaning weapons, checking fuel, checking oil in their vehicles, and doing a little maintenance on their vehicles.

During his visits with commanders that day, Franks had talked about some of the pieces of the attack maneuver. Though by this time they had been over the basic maneuver many times, he wanted to review some of the details again. For example, he wanted to look over the coordination between the 1st Armored Division coming up on the left of the 2nd Cavalry. That is, he wanted to review how the 2nd Cavalry, which was initially covering—in front of—both the 1st AD and 3rd AD, would uncover the 1st AD—get out from in front of them—so that 1st AD could dash forward to al-Busayyah, which was their initial objective (called Objective Purple), about 140 kilometers from the attack start point.

He had also talked to Major General Gene Daniel, his deputy, about the task force headquarters that Daniel would head up at the breach. Since the 1st Infantry Division, the British, the Corps logistics elements, two Corps artillery brigades, and perhaps the 1st Cavalry Division had to pass through the breach, he needed a commander there who could make sure that process went without letup, and who could make the necessary adjustments on the spot. (The 1st Cavalry Division was the theater reserve; it was expected—but not certain—that this division would be added to the VII Corps attack.)

And he went to visit the 1st CAV again. His intention had been to attend the memorial service for two soldiers killed on 20 February during division actions in the Ruqi Pocket,\* but because of GPS navigation problems (not that unusual in a helicopter), he hadn't arrived at the division until the service was over. However, he was still able to stay around and talk to the troops and commanders. It had been an emotional moment, visiting soldiers who had just lost friends in combat. He knew well that death in combat is sudden and usually unexpected, even though you know it will happen. And he was reminded again of the inner steel required of soldiers and leaders. Soldiers were speaking in soft tones about the action. While they were clearly touched by the loss of their buddies, they were not about to back off. They were ready to go again.

He drew two lessons from the firsthand accounts he heard of the action that morning: First, the 1st CAV was able to strike back hard with a combi-

\*In order to lure the Iraqis into believing that the main American attack was coming due north up the Wadi al Batin axis rather than further west, Franks and his planners had devised a deception scheme that had the division operating in the Ruqi Pocket of the Wadi al Batin. (The Ruqi Pocket was at the tricorn area where the borders of Iraq, Kuwait, and Saudi joined. This area lay at the eastern edge of the VII Corps zone of operations.) Here the 1st CAV had conducted a skillful series of feints and demonstrations against Iraqi forces. During their operation they had captured 1,800 Iraqi prisoners.

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nation of ground maneuver, artillery, and air and severely punish the Iraqis. Second, the Iraqis could deliver heavy and accurate fires if you happened to drive into their predetermined defensive area.

At the 1st Infantry Division, he visited Colonel Bert Maggart's first brigade. Maggart, his commanders, and his brigade staff gave him a thorough briefing on their attack plans in their TAC command post (three M577s parked side by side with canvas extensions off the back to form a small twenty-five-by-thirty-foot work area). They needed no notes or references. They had been over it many times before. Their soldiers were keyed up, ready to go; plans for the attack were set and rehearsed; soldiers had confidence in their leaders and their ability to accomplish the mission. You could see it in their eyes. You could hear it in their voices. Because there had been lots of predictions about the timing of the attack, the troops were getting a little impatient with all the fits and starts. By now they wanted to get into it and finish it and go home.

He found the same attitude in both the 3rd and the 1st Armored Divisions. "We're trained, we know what to do," troopers told him again and again. And he, too, was saying the same thing again and again: "We're ready, we're tough, we're trained. Just look out for each other, follow your leaders, and know what the hell you're doing." He got quick status reports from both division commanders.

At the 1st Armored Division, the spirit of one unit especially touched him, and he spent the better part of an hour with them. They were a Bradley platoon, the 1st Platoon, Company C, 1st Battalion, 7th Infantry, 3rd Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division. They called themselves "Raiders" and their motto was "Get some." The platoon leader was First Lieutenant Doug Morse, and the platoon sergeant was Staff Sergeant Jamie Narramore. They were ready and tough and not without a sense of humor. They had composed a song and sang it for him, a profane description of how tough they were and what they were about to do to the Iraqis. He wasn't sure how they had done it, but they had put every cussword he knew in there. "Thanks for not court-martialing us," Sergeant Narramore told him afterward. They had even gotten him to sign his name on a Bradley for good luck, and Franks and the twenty-eight platoon members had posed for a team picture. After the war, just before they got on the plane to go home, Franks and the Raiders had a mini-reunion; they told him some war stories. They had not had anyone wounded or killed in the action. He still has the Raiders picture on his wall at home.

Some of the leaders were going through last-minute rock drills when he visited. In a "rock drill," leaders go out in the sand and mark out a piece of

ground with white engineer tape to make a scaled replica of their actual anticipated battle area. Then, using rocks as unit icons, they move the rocks to show how they plan to move their units in relationship to one another, the terrain, and the enemy.

Based on what he'd seen in Vietnam, the troops were in about the right frame of mind and keyed up properly. In Vietnam, another generation of American soldiers had gone across half the world to do what their country had asked; and tactically they'd done it as well as any other generation of American combat soldiers could. But this time it was going to end differently. They all would see to that.

## REFLECTIONS

Franks was proud of his VII Corps team. After looking back over the day's visits, he thought again about trust—and made a quick inventory of what he needed to do to fulfill that trust.

He had gone over his “commander's intent” with his commanders a number of times. This is the concise expression of how you visualize the operation, and it is always written by the commander personally. In the absence of specific orders, it could be used as operating guidelines. By now he thought it was clear and well understood. It read,

*I intend to conduct a swift series of attacks to destroy RGFC and minimize our own casualties. Speed, tempo, and a coordinated air/land campaign are key. I want Iraqi forces to move so that we can attack them throughout the depth of their formations by fire, maneuver, and air. The first phases of our operation will be deliberate and rehearsed, the latter will be more METT-T dependent. We will conduct a deliberate breach with precision and synchronization, resulting from precise targeting and continuous rehearsals. Once through the breach, I intend to defeat forces to the east rapidly, with one division as economy of force, and to pass three divisions and ACR as point of main effort to the west of that action, to destroy RGFC in a fast-moving battle with zones of action and agile forces attacking by fire, maneuver, and air. CSS must keep up, because I intend no pauses. We must strike hard and continually and finish rapidly.*

Franks then turned his attention to a specific skill: the ability to picture operations in his head, and to judge time/distance factors to get the right

units in the right combination at the right place at the right time. Franks called this “orchestrating” the battle. How would we do? How would his commanders?

The Army had given Franks lots of opportunities to practice and develop this skill, from platoon leader to corps commander. That training and some excellent mentors had a lot to do with the honing of his ability, as had the crucible of Vietnam. But it was not only a matter of practice and experience; it also had to do with the way the brain worked—with imagination.

All he knew was that somehow he could see a battle clearly in his head, relate the physical and soldier pieces together, and figure how long it would take a division, for example, to turn three brigades ninety degrees, or to mark twenty-four lanes of a minefield breach, or to close an artillery brigade on a moving division, or to close three divisions on a common objective.

Some commanders were better than others at orchestrating a battle. For some it was a learned skill; for others it came more easily. For the conduct of battle they were about to wage, it was indispensable. But Franks felt all his commanders had it. He had had the opportunity to make his own judgments about all of them during their time together these past few months.

At Third Army he trusted John Yeosock. Even though he had not commanded a corps, Yeosock understood all this, as did his G-3, Brigadier General Steve Arnold. Senior to them, Franks was not quite sure. He was never sure, especially at CENTCOM in the basement of the MOD building in Riyadh, how VII Corps maneuvers would be interpreted. As it happened, the perception there of what it would take to maneuver this large, multidivision, 146,000-soldier armored corps in a coordinated attack of over 200 kilometers was very different from how it was on the scene in Iraq and Kuwait. This difference in perception would lead to controversies later.

Allied to this last issue was a communications matter that did not concern him then—CENTCOM HQ’s picture of both the enemy and friendly situation. In light of later events, he realized it should have.

Would their picture be the same as his own? Would his main command post (itself many kilometers from his location and the battle) be able to track the battle close enough to keep Third Army informed and to accurately write the required daily commander’s situation reports? And then would this information get passed accurately to CENTCOM? Would J-3 (CENTCOM operations) even pay attention to what a single corps was doing? Or would that get rolled up in a big picture? Would CENTCOM be aware of the normal time-info lag of ground operations reports and situational displays? And then would they ask for an update before making decisions critical to ground ops? Where would Franks’s higher commanders



choose to locate themselves during the conduct of the ground war? Would they come forward into Iraq, where he would be in order to get a firsthand feel for the fight? And, finally, should he talk to Schwarzkopf during the war? Or should he communicate primarily with his immediate commander, John Yeosock?

He was confident that his subordinates at VII Corps's main command post would get the communication job done. They were a smart, talented, skilled group. They would certainly report the correct picture of VII Corps's actions to Third Army.

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POSSIBLE use of chemical and biological weapons was a big concern, however. Had they gotten to all the Iraqi artillery capable of reaching the 1st Infantry Division in the breach or the follow-on units passing through the breach? They had no way of completely knowing. No other issue made Franks feel so much anger at the Iraqi leadership as their possible use of chemical or biological warfare.

VII Corps was face-to-face with the possibility that the Iraqis would use one or both. They had them. They had used them on their own people and against Iran. There was nothing in their behavior or battle tendencies that indicated they would do anything different this time. Franks truly expected it.

The VII Corps commanders and soldiers were not intimidated by any of this, however. For a long time, they had trained in chemical protective gear in NATO and U.S. training exercises, fully expecting the Warsaw Pact to use chemicals. It had all seemed so abstract then, though. They would endure these periods of time in masks and chemical suits, shouting in squeaky voices through their masks to be heard on the radio, sweating even in the winter inside the charcoal suits, fumbling as they tried to lace up the damned rubber booties someone had designed to go over their regular boots, wearing the monster rubber gloves, and laboring to look through gun sights with a protective mask on. They had made it work through disciplined training. They had done it so much it had become routine and a source of confidence, as long as they had the right gear. They had gotten that taken care of a few days before. They had protective measures. They also had antidotes. They were ready.

Biological warfare was a different matter. Franks was not so sure about this. They had had very little training against biological agents in Germany and were mostly unfamiliar with the agents, even though some of them, such as anthrax, botulism, and salmonella, were commonly known sicknesses. The problem with biological warfare is that the biological agents have a delayed effect, which makes detection of the source difficult. It's hard

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to find evidence of who did it—and thus retaliation is difficult. They had all taken a crash course on Iraqi delivery means, though. The VII Corps NBC officer, Colonel Bob Thornton, and G-2 (Intelligence) Colonel John Davidson were helpful in getting whatever information was available. Franks wanted to stop a lot of rumors and bad information going around. He did not want the troops intimidated by Iraqi biological warfare capability. Of all the capabilities possessed by the Iraqis, it was the one that concerned him the most, right up to the end of the war.

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HE also was aware of some other things that night—larger issues beyond the actual conduct of their mission.

To Fred Franks, and to most of his soldiers and leaders, what they were about to do was their duty, pure and simple. They were professionals sent to skillfully use force as an instrument of their government (and of the UN), to compel a foreign belligerent to do what a UN resolution had ordered them to do. They knew how to do that. But this was not a jihad for them. This was neither total war, nor a war to save civilization, nor a war to stop madmen from trying to enslave the greater part of the world. The mission was clear: to liberate a nation and drive an invader out in an area of vital interests. It was use of force to gain specific strategic objectives at the least cost to their own side—then go home. This would affect Franks's selection of tactics; he thought it would be irresponsible of him and of VII Corps to pay an unlimited price in the lives of their soldiers for a limited objective. Vietnam had taught them all that.

Perhaps SFC Ed Felder of Company D, 1st Battalion, 37th Armor, 1st Armored Division had said it best: "Nobody wants to go to war, but we train for it every day. That's what we get paid to do. We're professionals." And PFC Bruce Huggins, a tank mechanic of that battalion's headquarters company, said, "They asked for our help and we're going to give them that help and we'll free that country. We'll do our job, go home, and carry on with life."

The end result was never in doubt. They would win. For him as a major commander it was a matter of selection of method and one that would come at least cost to soldiers for the mission assigned. There would be individual acts of heroism, as there always were. But for senior commanders, Franks saw nothing particularly heroic in what they were about to do. He had said right from the start, "We'll go do what we have to do and talk about it later." This was in the mode of Korea, Vietnam, and Panama. It was not a crusade.

That distinction comes hard for Americans. In our own history, more often than not, we have fought "crusades" or used force for national sur-

vival: the Revolution, the War of 1812, the Civil War, World Wars I and II. Not only do Americans have less experience with the other kind of war, but they tend as a matter of national character not to be warlike—even though America's sons and daughters make the best warriors when called upon.

The other factor that stayed with Franks was Vietnam. In the hospital at Valley Forge, where he had had his leg amputated, he had made a pledge to his fellow amputees and to his fellow Vietnam veterans: "Never again." Never again would young men and women come away from a battlefield on which they were asked to risk their lives without gaining their objectives, without having those objectives thought to be worth the effort, without an agreement ahead of time that the tactical methods needed to achieve strategic objectives were acceptable for the military to use, and without a word of thanks to those who went when it was all over.

Fred Franks was not in charge of all that; but he was in a position to satisfy himself as a commander that all these mistakes would not be repeated. That conviction burned hot in him, like a blue flame. Vietnam was never far from him throughout Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Now, that was a crusade, at least for Fred Franks.

Another factor he got out of Vietnam was a respect for war and its costs, and for what it takes to win. When you're on the battlefield, you get into fights, either deliberately or in surprise meeting engagements with the enemy, and they got into a lot of those in Vietnam. Franks believed that you had to make it an unfair fight as rapidly as you could. You wanted to get all the advantages on your side, and to win the tactical engagement as rapidly as possible and at least cost to your soldiers. That meant a lot of firepower. It also usually meant moving into a positional advantage and bringing brutal amounts of fire to bear on the enemy, until they called it quits and ran away, or you destroyed their capability to continue, and controlled the area. And that was the end of it.

In Vietnam, "If the enemy fired at us with a single AK-47 round, we pounded them with all we had. We put as much firepower back on them as we had, so much firepower that they wished they hadn't started something."

That influenced his thoughts on Iraq. Different commanders might do things in different ways, but Franks's way was, "When we came into contact in the area of main attack, then it was going to be with a big fist. We were going to hammer the Iraqis relentlessly with that fist until we finished them. We were going to sustain the momentum of that attack until we were through with what we came there to do."

So the idea of "fair fight" had no meaning for Franks in this context. It seemed totally insane to give the enemy some sporting chance to win.

“If you have to fight,” Franks liked to say, “then 100 to nothing is about the right score for the battlefield. Twenty-four to twenty-one may be okay in the NFL on Sunday afternoon, but not on the battlefield.

“My inclination in tactics is to maneuver our force to bring so much combat power to bear on the other force that we will get them backpedaling. I want to get them on the ropes and keep them there. Then, when we’ve got them down, we’ll finish them. We’re going to finish them.

“If we have to fight, then we were going to go for the jugular, not the capillaries.

“But once we are winning our battles, we’ve got to link those successful battles in some pattern or direction, so they add up to mean something bigger. They have to end up accomplishing your strategic aims. That is why you are fighting those battles. And that is why the troops who are risking it all to win those battles trust that the generals and Secretaries of Defense and Presidents know what they are doing, and will make all that sweat and blood count for something.”

From what Franks and his commanders had seen so far, the command climate was far different from the one in Vietnam. They could feel the steel in the will, from the President and the Secretary of Defense through General Powell, to the theater. It was solid.



FINALLY he was at peace with himself, as much as any commander could be on the eve of battle. His troops and leaders were ready. They had worked like hell to get to where they were, and most units had had the minimum two weeks’ training he thought necessary. Soldiers were confident in themselves, their equipment, one another, and their leaders. Franks had known that would come because of the training in Saudi Arabia and the team-building they had worked on since the start of the mission to deploy on 8 November. They had become the VII Corps team so necessary for success in combat.

On 21 February, Sam Donaldson of ABC News came to visit VII Corps. Franks escorted him to the 2nd ACR and 1st AD. While at 1st AD, Donaldson talked to members of an M1A1 tank company commanded by Captain Dana Pittard. Franks was never more proud of his soldiers than he was when he heard them talk of the mission and of one another. Specialist Shawn Freeney, a mechanic in Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 37th Armor, said, “It lets you know that, when it comes down to it, you’re around family. All of us here are family—right here is my family.”

They had prepared the way you would for a big game. They had empha-

sized skills in fundamentals and teamwork. They had gone through situation drills against possible game situations. They had gotten their “batting practice” under close-to-game conditions and they had had some scrimmages.

But where Franks knew the sports analogy stopped was game time. War is different. Ground combat is physically tough, uncompromising, and final. The enemy can be as close as a few meters or thousands of meters. There you deal in the ultimate reality—life and death. There is no home-and-home scheduling. There is no next year. When it’s over, it’s over; the memories and results are frozen in time for a lifetime. For some soldiers, there would be no more lifetime after this. Fred Franks knew that, and so did they.

Franks thought again of his soldiers and leaders. “Have I prepared them well enough for this mission? I think so. Did we have a workable plan? Yes. Have we thought of everything? Probably not. Have we ignored anything major? I don’t think so. Are the troops ready? Yes. They know what to do, they’re motivated by the right things, and they want to get this going and get it finished so they can go home. Not a complicated set of emotions. Soldiers and units go at two speeds, all-ahead full or stop. There can be no half-stepping, especially for a mounted attack. We’re ready.”

He recalled then something Captain Dana Pittard had said to Sam Donaldson: “My biggest fear, of course, is making sure I don’t do something wrong that would cost somebody’s life or something else. There’s no fear on the personal side.” He also recalled the old saying that generals can lose battles and campaigns, but only the soldiers can win. He believed that. He also believed that if he got them and their commanders to the right place at the right time in the right combination, in battle after battle, they would take it from there and win.



His thoughts turned to Denise, his wife of thirty-one years, and to their daughter, Margie, and her family. They were all a close family; they’d been through a lot together. Denise was now busy at home in Germany with family support work. For the first time in the history of the U.S. Army, they had taken units already deployed in one theater (with families), deployed to another, and left their families overseas.

Someone had asked Denise if she was “going home”—that is, leaving Stuttgart and returning to the United States. “I am home,” she replied. Though they could have returned to the States, most families stayed right there. In doing that, they were breaking new ground, adapting to new realities. And Denise was providing leadership and moral strength in her own quiet and forceful way. She was showing her own form of courage . . . just as

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were all the other family members in Germany. They were answering the call. Their favorite song was “From a Distance.”

Franks remembered all that he, Denise, and Margie had been through during and after Vietnam. And he remembered the hospital recovery of almost twenty-one months.

Before he’d left for the Gulf, he had promised Denise he’d come back “whole” from this operation, but with a smile, she’d reminded him that that was no longer possible. They hadn’t been able to phone each other often while he was on duty in the Gulf. The one phone call they’d had to this point in January was tense and full of feeling.

In Bad Kissingen, Germany, Margie, also now an Army spouse, had her own family of two boys and her husband, Greg. Greg was a captain in the Blackhorse. At that moment, he was S-3 of the 2nd Squadron, 11th ACR, or “Battle 3,” the same job Franks had had in Vietnam. Now Margie’s dad was at war again. Denise had sent him a tape recording of the family, and he would listen to it to hear the sounds of their voices. Family was real close, just like his VII Corps family. They both inspired him.

After pulling his tanker suit pant leg over the top so he did not have to remove the boot, Franks unstrapped his prosthetic leg. He set it where he could reach it in the dark, then pulled the sleeping bag over him, said a prayer for his troops and that he would have the wisdom to do what was right, and slept soundly.