War 3 Essay, Research Paper

The task of the Air Force in Operaton Desert Storm was to obtain air superior ity, provide air support for the ground troops, strike enemy targets in Kuwait and Iraq, and airlift Army and Marine forces. When Operation Desert Storm was launched, it was the Air Force that conducted most of the raids against the Iraqi military. From air bases in Saudi Arabia, Turkey, England, Egypt, and the tiny island of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean, wave after wave of fighter bomber, figh- ter planes, and stategic bombers pounded Iraqi military positions in Kuwait and Iraq. Many experts believe that the air strikes were responsible for the quick four- day ground war. Seeing the destruction wrought by the Air Force’s conven- tional bombs, smart bombs and guided missiles, it is hard to disagree with them. B-52s pounded the Iraqi army day and night. By the time the ground war had begun, most of the Iraqi troops were ready to surrender. F-15s, F-16s, F-111s, Harriers, A-10 Warthogs, and an assortment of other sophistocated machines destroyed Iraq’s communications centers, bridges, power plants, chemical plants and munitions plants. Thousands of tanks, vehicles, and artillery pieces were also destroyed by U.S. air raids. Desert Storm marked the first time in history that an air force had defeated an enemy before a ground war was launched

The Army’s task in Operation Desert Storm was to defend Saudi Arabia and win the ground war against Iraq. Without the U.S. Army, Operation Desert Storm would not have been able to push Iraqi forces from Kuwait. Their powerful firepower and speed with shich they struck made it impossible for Iraqi troops to maintain control of the land. Most of Iraq’s army fled at the sight of the army approaching. Those who stayed and fought either surrend- ered or died. The Iraqi military had never seen anything like it. After relentless pounding by its heavy artillery, the U.S. Army launched its attack at night, adding to the confusion and terror. Spearheading the attack were thousands of M1A1 Abrams Main Battle Tanks. They roared over Iraqi fortifications at speeds of over 40 miles per hour firing their 120mm guns with incredible accuracy. Then came wave after wave of mechanized infantry in their Bradley Fighting Vehicles. Overhead, Army Cobra and Apache attack helicopters let loose a firestorm of Hellfire missiles and cannon fire, destroying Iraqi tanks, trucks, and artillery. While the U.S. Army’s heavy armor rolled over the Iraqi front lines, thousands of Army paratroopers descended on Iraqi airfields to seize control of them. Once on the ground, these paratroopers directed huge C-130 Hercules trans- ports onto the safe stretches of cratered runways. More Army troops and heavy equipment poured out of the transports. Their job was to block the es- cape routes of the retreating Iraqi army. Thousands of Iraqi troops were cap- tured, loaded onto transport trucks, then sent south to prisoner-of-war camps in Saudi Arabia. In four days, the ground war was over. The Marines of the 1st Division were the first U.S. troops to fight the Iraqi army. It happened in mid-January 1991 when Operation Desert Storm was first launched. The Marines had been in position along the Kuwaiti border since August 1990. The Iraqis shelled the Marine positions with artillery fire and missiles. Marine scouts spotted the Iraqi artillery positions and called in their Cobra helicopter gunships and A-10 Thunderbolts. The Marines were also used to capture oil platforms off the shores of Kuwait. These platforms were being used by the Iraqis as anti-aircraft gun and mis- sile sites.

Marine aircraft also played an important role in Operation Desert Storm. Marine Harriers based in Saudi Arabia were sent in to Kuwait to destroy an Iraqi radio communication center. The Marine Harriers swept in fast and low and dropped 500-pound demolition bombs and cluster bombs. The Marine aircraft also attacked elsewhere. The planes subjected the Iraqi Republican Guard to constant, continual bombing with no letup. It was this constant bombing bombing that led to the rout of the Iraqi army. The Marine 1st and 2nd Divisions were also combined with the Army’s heavy armored brigade along the Kuwaiti border for the big push into Kuwait. Using M1A1 Abrams tanks and Bradley Fighting Vehicles, the Marines skirted the Iraqi minefields and fortified bunkers and pushed their way to Kuwait City. They encountered little resistance from the Iraqis, most of whom eagerly surrendered before any shots were fired. The Marines were also used as decoys in Operation Desert Storm. Since Iraq knew that the Marines were usually the first to launch a strike, they kept a good number of troops in place along the eastern shores of Kuwait where the Marines, aboard Navy ships, were stationed. By the time the coalition forces swept into Kuwait from the south and west, it was too late for the Iraqi forces along the coast to repel the attack.

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The task of the Navy in Operation Desert Storm was to obtain control of the Persian Gulf, protect friendly ships, stop Iraqi trade, and launch an attack against Iraq. Much of the heavy armour, supplies, and troops of Desert Shield and Desert Storm were transported to the Middle East by the Navy. Navy ships stationed in the Persian Gulf prevented supplies from being ship- ped to Iraq during Operation Desert Shield. The first shot fired in Operation Desert Storm was from a Navy ship, in the form of a Tomahawk cruise missile. By the end of the first week of Operation Desert Storm, the battleships Wis- consin and Missouri had fired nearly 200 Tomahawk missiles at Iraq. Most Struck with deadly accuracy at Baghdad, over 100 miles away. The big guns on the battleships also softened Iraqi positions in Kuwait, pav- ing the way for the ground assault. Navy and Marine pilots flew thousands of sorties and accounted for nearly 40 percent of all missions flown. Other than launching cruise missiles, shelling Iraqi positions, and launching aircraft, the Navy had little elese to do in the way of fighting. That’s because the Iraqi navy and air force refused to engage the U.S. Navy in battle, fearing its lethal firepower. The Navy also used their minesweepers to help clear the Persian Gulf of Iraqi mines. Navy hospital ships were stationed in the Per- sian Gulf but fortunately for the coalition forces, these ships weren’t neces- sary.

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Aftermath

During the Gulf War, more than 85,000 Iraqi soldiers were taken prisoner. Simply-written leaflets had been provided to detail instructions on how to surrender to the Allied forces. Many of the Enemy Prisoners of War (EPW) were dehydrated, hungry and in need of medical care. The EPW were sent to detention facilities in Saudi Arabia to wait out the war and receive the neces- sary medical attention. Some pilots and air crewmen of downed coalition aircraft were killed. Many others were picked up, sometimes far behind Iraqi lines, by U.S. search and rescue helicopters. Other fliers were captured by Iraqi troops. In violation of the Geneva Convention, Saddam displayed the downed fliers on television. He forced them to make statements and threatened them as human shields at military installations. At the end of the Gulf War hostilities, the captured airmen were safely released.

The Stakes Are High

In the early days of the occupation, Iraqi troops were ordered to rig Kuwaiti government buildings, utilities, and oil fields with explosives for demolition. Within four or five days of the invasion, Iraqi soldiers had affixed plasic ex- plosives to most of Kuwait’s 1,080 working wellheads. The rigging of explo- sives had been carefully planned before the invasion. Six of the oil wells were detonated in December 1990 to determine the effectiveness of the scheme. Ecologically, Kuwait suffered more from the war than Iraq did. Departing Ira- qis had set fire to hundreds of oil wells. Each day, some 5 million gallons of oil burned, creating massive dark clouds of pollution visible even from space. Oil fires in Kuwait were consuming more oil each day than the country had sold before the invasion. Thousands of trees and wildlife were also victims of the environmental disaster, including flocks of sheep, horses, birds, and fish. No estimate has yet been made of the war’s environmental costs. The environmental and ecological damage caused by Iraq’s releasing millions of gallons of Kuwaiti crude oil into the gulf destroyed all marine life in the area, and will likely take more than a hundred years to fully recover. The larger concern for the cleanup crews was what damage would come from the more than 650 Kuwaiti oil wells that were burning when the war ended. An additional 100 wells had been damaged and were leaking oil into the ground and polluting water supplies. By August 1991, only 200 wells had been suc- cessfully capped. However, with 27 fire-fighting teams, a total of ten thousand workers from 34 countries, were able to put out the last fire in November 1991. In the end, the fires alone had consumed about 3% of Kuwait’s oil reserves. The damage to Iraq through massive aerial attacks was very costly, especial- ly to industry and utilities. In April 1991, reporters visiting the defeated coun- try said that economic hardship was widespread. The United States had des- troyed electrical and telephone systems. All six of the plants that produced chlorine for water purification were put out of production by bombing. Both the highway and rail systems were badly damaged. About forty major bridges across the Tigris and Euphrates rivers would have to be replaced, and an- other ten bridges were in need of major repair. Many areas bombed by Allied forces were not safe to enter after the war, especially chemical production plants

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