

TURN BACK
BEFORE
BAGHDAD

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Original Frontline Dispatches of the Gulf War
by American and British Correspondents

LAURENCE JOLIDON



Blue Ridge | Cumming | Dahlonega | Gainesville | Oconee

*This book is dedicated to the men and women of many nations
who fought in the Persian Gulf War, 1990-91,
and especially to those who gave their lives.
May you rest in honorable peace.*

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The opinions expressed in the commentary in this book, preceding each day's chapter, are solely those of the author (LJ) and do not necessarily reflect—indeed may conflict with—the views of the correspondents whose work also is collected herein. Their work appears as originally written for the combat print pool for Desert Storm, and as it was made available with the consent of all parties for the use of any and all representatives of the media.

The editors of this second edition have corrected mechanical (spelling and grammar) errors. All other mistakes appear in their original form, as were the wishes of the author.

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Preface

Turn Back Before Baghdad is a collection of news reports written by American and British journalists during the Persian Gulf War. Not what one might typically consider military history, but one must keep in mind that journalism is often called the first draft of history. Here we have the raw reports out of the field depicting not only the fighting, but also the daily lives of those who served in the war. Military history is more than just battles and tactics, but every aspect of the military.

The work belongs in the Leadership and Strategic Studies series as it offers a close day-to-day view of the war from a variety of perspectives. The book also offers a glimpse of leadership from the very top levels of the war including comments by General Schwarzkopf to junior officers. Of equal importance is the perspective of the average soldier and sailor and how they viewed the officers who commanded them. This ranges not only in terms of actual military leadership, but also interactions between officers and the enlisted. Finally, another form of leadership emerges—those who pave the way for others. While women serving in combat operations remain rare at the moment, at the time of the Persian Gulf War America found itself pondering this possibility with women serving in units near the front lines as soldiers—a possibility that made many Americans uncomfortable. While American sensibilities about gender roles haven't disappeared, they continually change and these first-hand accounts truly demonstrate just how our views have shifted.

Turn Back Before Baghdad: An Introduction

By Ron Martz¹

The 1991 Persian Gulf War was a significant turning point in the often contentious history of American military-media relations.² This war was the last in which journalists for print publications, often referred to as “pencils” in military parlance, by-and-large pursued their craft the old-fashioned way, the same way past generations of war correspondents had done. Those of us embedded with U.S. and coalition forces in January and February of 1991 often wrote our dispatches on portable typewriters while sitting in the back of a cramped armored personnel carrier or Humvee, or huddled in a cold and drafty tent, or squeezed into a sweaty ward room on board ship. After writing our stories we would hand the typewritten pages to a military courier, and hope that the story made it back to the censors at the Joint Information Bureau (JIB) in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia before it became old news. Much of the time, that did not happen. The updated “pony express” system set up by the U.S. military failed in a number of ways. First, there was a great lack of concern about the immediacy of the stories we were writing about this largest American military combat operation since Vietnam. Then, the speed of the war with its one hundred hours of ground combat outpaced the speed with which the military pipeline could push print stories to our newspapers and magazines and thus out to the readers.

This was an era when satellite telephones were novelties. Most were the size of small suitcases and had to be stationary while being used to better enable it to connect to a satellite, if a satellite could even be acquired amid the background electronic clutter of war-time traffic. This also was an era in which those who led America’s military forces retained a dim view of the media because of the perception that the media had turned public opinion against the Vietnam War and those who fought it. Many of the general officers who led U.S. and coalition forces in the Gulf War had been young lieutenants and captains in Vietnam. Among them were Colin Powell, Norman Schwarzkopf, Fred Franks, John Yeosock, Barry McCaffrey, and Tommy Franks. Some still had a media hangover from that war and did what they could to keep the media at arm’s length. For young reporters on their first war-time

¹ Ron Martz is a former newspaper reporter and editor who has covered seven wars and regional conflicts since 1984, including Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm with Laurence Jolidon. He is the co-author of five books on military history.

² This is to acknowledge the contributions and encouragement of Mike Hedges and Don North in the preparation of this introduction. Both were close friends and colleagues of Mr. Jolidon and were instrumental in providing information about his life, his reasons for writing this book, and its significance as a primary source document that provides unusual insights into the military-media relationship that has long been ignored by scholars and critics of the media’s role, especially that of print reporters, in the Persian Gulf War.

assignment, it was a particularly frustrating experience. But for old hands like Larry Jolidon of *USA Today*, it was a matter of working in and around the system that the Pentagon had set up to essentially manage all the news coming out of Saudi Arabia and later Kuwait and Iraq.

Jolidon, perhaps more so than any of the other “pencils” sent to cover the Gulf War, understood its historical significance and the changing media role in reporting it. While Vietnam is often considered the first television war, print journalists dominated much of the coverage in the early years. Television reports from Vietnam often took weeks to make it to the small screens at home. In the Gulf War, the media’s satellite technology had improved significantly so that television journalists could air live broadcasts from Saudi Arabia and Iraq and Schwarzkopf’s press briefings, often with titillating footage of so-called smart bombs demolishing buildings in downtown Baghdad, were seen as they occurred. Print journalism took a back seat to the immediacy of television reporting for the first time not only with the American public, but in the military-media relationship.

Jolidon knew and understood this. But he also understood that print journalists often write the first draft of history, for it is from their words that historians many times are able to get a much better sense of how and why events transpired than they are from the sometimes dramatic but usually brief television reports. So it was that as one of the veteran journalists designated to help assign various news organizations to media pools that would be embedded with the troops, Jolidon fought long and hard in the months prior to the start of the war to ensure that print journalists were well-represented in those pools. The pools were not looked on kindly by either the media or the military. They were the least-worst option, a jerry-rigged system that provided only minimal improvements on media pools created but not fully utilized during the invasions of Grenada and Panama only a few years earlier.

Still, by the time U.S. and allied forces began withdrawing from Iraq and Kuwait in early March following the February 28, 1991 cease-fire, print reporters had filed more than 1,300 dispatches.³ Many of those reports never made it out of the JIB as events on the battlefield rendered them seemingly irrelevant or untimely. Yet, as Jolidon knew and set out to prove, that was not the case at all. Like their predecessors in wars past, the print journalists in Operation Desert Storm attempted to put a human face on combat. They wrote about America’s sons and daughters in uniform. They wrote about the threat of poison gas attacks. They wrote about sailors launching Tomahawk missiles from ships at sea and pilots carrying out their missions from aircraft carriers and land bases. They wrote about the burning oil wells in Kuwait and about how America’s technological superiority had convinced Iraqi soldiers by the thousands to surrender. But the public never saw most of what they wrote. The failure lay not with the journalists, but with the way the military resourced the pool system.

Even before the end of the war the pool system was being derided as one in which the military took and kept the initiative, thus preventing the American public from seeing the truth about what had actually happened. The prevailing myth is that journalists never got a front-line view of the war and therefore became lapdogs for the military’s version of events. According to John Fialka of *The Wall Street Journal*, “This was a war where the military remained in control of most of the evidence and where the Army commanders’ paranoid fear of the media helped bury one of the most positive Army stories since World War II.”⁴ The truth, as Jolidon and others knew, was quite the opposite. It wasn’t so much that the war was not reported from the front as it was that the military was unable to get those stories back from the front in a timely fashion.

³ Barry E. Venable, “The Army and the Media,” *Military Review*, January-February 2002, 69.

⁴ John Fialka, *Hotel Warriors: Covering the Gulf War*, (Washington, D.C.: The Woodrow Wilson Center Press: 1991), 59-60.

As media critics began circling the remains of the war and what had been reported, Jolidon decided to do something about what he knew then was a false impression of the reporting, especially by the print correspondents. When he returned to the JIB in early March, he found stacks of stories from print reporters that had never made it past the military gate keepers. With the help of colleague Mike Hedges of *The Washington Times*, he collected them, boxed them up, and shipped them back to himself at *USA Today*, hoping eventually to sort through them so he could tell the true story of Operation Desert Storm. Using his own money and working virtually alone, Jolidon compiled about 300 of what he considered the best from the more than 1,300 dispatches filed. And, in an era before self-publishing was economically viable, Jolidon in 2002 created his own press to print *Turn Back Before Baghdad: Original Frontline Dispatches of the Gulf War by American and British Correspondents*. The entire collection of dispatches, along with other of Jolidon's papers, is on file at the Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas-Austin.

The book did not receive wide circulation and was overshadowed by other works that were far more critical of the media and their role in reporting the war. Among those most critical were Jacqueline Sharkey's *Under Fire: U.S. Military Restrictions on the Media from Grenada to the Persian Gulf*, John R. MacArthur's *Second Front: Censorship and Propaganda in the Gulf War*, and Fialka's *Hotel Warriors*. But these books looked primarily at the pool system and were not a true examination of the actual work done by the dozens of veteran print reporters who went to the front and reported from there. *Turn Back Before Baghdad* shatters the myth that there was no good reporting from Operation Desert Storm. There are eyewitness accounts of friendly fire, tank engagements at such long ranges that no one was sure who was who or what was what, and the jubilation of Kuwaitis as their country was liberated. There also are unexpected nuggets that pop up from time to time, like the interview with British soldier Captain James Hewitt, who later was alleged to have been Princess Di's lover. There is also an interview with a young American soldier by the name of Timothy McVeigh, who later became better known as the man who bombed the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City in 1995. *Turn Back Before Baghdad* is being reprinted here as an invaluable resource for military officials, historians, and journalists. It gives them an opportunity to examine and judge for themselves if the criticism of the reporting from the print correspondents who covered the Persian Gulf War was truly warranted and whether it was the reporters who failed, or the system in which they were forced to work.

The Gulf War pool system was an evolutionary step not only in how war was reported, but also in the development of the military-media relationship, a relationship that has at times been characterized as grudging tolerance for one another and at other times has been openly confrontational. The first known instance of a civilian journalist accompanying American troops into combat was during the Mexican-American War in 1846, when George Wilkins Kendall rode with General Zachary Taylor and reported for *The Picayune* of New Orleans.⁵ Kendall set the standard for future reporters faced with difficulty getting their stories back from the front. He is said to have developed a courier system of riders that would carry his stories to ships waiting to sail to New Orleans, at one point spending \$5,000 to charter a single ship for a story, an astronomical sum for that era.⁶

While Kendall's reporting apparently had little impact on the American public's opinion of the war or how the military conducted its operations in Mexico, the same cannot be said

⁵ Alicia C. Shepard, *Narrowing the Gap: Military, Media and the Iraq War*, (Chicago: Robert R. McCormick Tribune Foundation, 2004), 17.

⁶ *Ibid.*

of William Howard Russell of *The Times* of London during the Crimean War (1853-1856). Russell, a hard-drinking Irishman who had reported on several small conflicts in Europe, came into his own in the Crimea. It was Russell who wrote the first dispatch from Balaclava describing the disastrous charge of the Light Brigade from which Alfred Lord Tennyson took inspiration for his famous poem. It was Russell who “grew caustic in his criticism of the suffering the soldiers had to endure,” writing frequently about “the pitiful condition of the troops and the command’s lack of concern.”⁷ And it was Russell whose criticism of blunders by British officers eventually caused the government to recall the top commanders and Florence Nightingale to recruit volunteers to tend to the sick and wounded in the field. Russell’s dispatches helped turn public opinion against the British government’s handling of the war at the same time they turned military opinion against correspondents. As Phillip Knightley notes in his book *The First Casualty*, “It is clear that before the war ended the army realized that it had made a mistake in tolerating Russell and his colleagues, but by then it was too late.”⁸

The American Civil War saw an explosion of correspondents eager to chronicle the fighting. An estimated five hundred journalists, both North and South, covered the war for their respective newspapers and magazines, almost as many as the more than six hundred who embedded with American military units during Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003. The telegraph, first utilized during the Crimean War, made it easier for correspondents to get their stories back to their readers more quickly than ever. The *New York Herald* out-did all their rivals, flooding the battlefields with sixty-three reporters at a cost of about \$1 million.⁹ Officers on both sides found little to like about the presence of correspondents in their midst. General Robert E. Lee is widely quoted as saying after the war that “In the beginning we appointed all our worst generals to command the armies, and all our best generals to edit the newspapers.”¹⁰ Union General Irwin McDowell, perhaps only half in jest, said of the correspondents with him that “I have suggested to them they should wear a white uniform, to indicate the purity of their character.”¹¹ And General William Tecumseh Sherman so disliked the reporters who constantly criticized him that after learning that three of them had been killed near Vicksburg, Mississippi, said: “Good! Now we’ll have news from hell before breakfast.”¹² Sherman even went so far as to court-martial Thomas W. Knox of the *New York Herald* as a spy. Knox was found guilty of only one of the three charges brought against him—accompanying a military unit against Sherman’s orders—and his only punishment was that he was prohibited from entering Union lines.¹³

Despite the large number of reporters writing about the war, government officials in the North put severe restrictions on what newspapers could and could not print. Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton seized newspapers that he believed revealed too much military information at the same time he was planting false stories with other papers.¹⁴ The persistent threat of court-martial for reporters who breached security put a chilling effect on the free flow of information.¹⁵ Passage of the Espionage Act in 1917 just after the U.S. entered World War I put even more of a damper on just how liberal correspondents could be with the

7 Phillip Knightley, *The First Casualty: From the Crimea to Vietnam: The War Correspondent as Hero, Propagandist, and Myth Maker*, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 12.

8 *Ibid.*, 17.

9 John F. Marszalek, *Sherman’s Other War: The General and the Civil War Press*, (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1999), 51.

10 William J. Jones, *Personal Reminiscences, Anecdotes, and Letters of Gen. Robert E. Lee*, (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1875), 241.

11 William Howard Russell, *My Diary North and South*, Ed. By Eugene H. Berwanger, (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), 250.

12 Marszalek, 159.

13 *Ibid.*, 152.

14 Douglas Porch, “No Bad Stories: The American Media-Military Relationship,” *Naval War College Review*, Winter 2002, Vol. LV, No. 1, 87.

15 *Ibid.*

information they provided for public consumption. In addition, General John Pershing, commander of the American Expeditionary Forces, gave credentials to only thirty-one reporters, none of whom was allowed to report from the front lines.¹⁶

World War II was unique in the history of military-media relations. Correspondents were considered part of the war effort, part of the team whose mission was to defeat the Japanese and Nazi Germany. Correspondents wore the same uniforms as American soldiers and willingly submitted their stories to censors before they were passed on to their newspapers or magazines. For major operations, a small number of correspondents were selected to accompany the troops with the understanding they would share their work product with their colleagues.¹⁷ Novelist John Steinbeck, who spent time during World War II and later in Vietnam as a correspondent, wrote that during World War II “We were all part of the war effort. We went along with it, and not only that, we abetted it. Gradually it became a part of us that the truth about anything was automatically secret and that to trifle with it was to interfere with the war effort.”¹⁸ The control and cooperation of the media were so complete that only twenty-seven reporters accompanied the D-Day invasion force on June 6, 1944.¹⁹ But those correspondents who embedded with troops produced some of the war’s most memorable stories and photographs, such as Ernie Pyle’s celebrations of the average American GI, Robert Capa’s stunning images of the D-Day invasion, and Joe Rosenthal’s iconic photo of the flag raising on Mount Suribachi as the Marines were fighting for control of Iwo Jima.

During the Korean War, General Douglas MacArthur imposed even more draconian restrictions on the media. He “imposed formal censorship, forbidding reporters to criticize, among other things, military reverses, failures of U.S. equipment, or the South Korean government,” in addition to anything critical of him or his leadership.²⁰ So it came as some surprise to media and military officials alike that Vietnam was just the opposite. Reporters were permitted to go where they wanted when they wanted. There was no pool system, no censorship, no government oversight on the correspondents who flocked to Southeast Asia. Vietnam stood the military-media relationship on its head because of the openness with which correspondents operated. And while print journalists dominated early on, once television got involved and nightly film of the fighting, however much it had been delayed, became commonplace, the power of those moving images had a significant and lasting impact on the American public and its view of the war.

The reporting from Vietnam often seemed in stark contrast to the rosy assessments delivered by military officials in Saigon and Washington, D.C. The Tet Offensive of 1968, particularly the attack on the U.S. Embassy in Saigon, was probably the turning point in America’s perception of the war. Long led to believe the government and its assessments of military activities, the American public watching nightly news saw a completely different picture during Tet. Although Tet was a disaster for the Viet Cong from which it never fully recovered, it was even more of a public relations debacle for the American military. It was “a traumatic shock to the American public . . . Coming as it did, just before the first primaries in a presidential election year, the Tet offensive caught the administration at its weakest politically, and dealt a powerful blow to its sagging credibility.”²¹ Media coverage of the war

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 88.

¹⁷ Venable, 67.

¹⁸ John Steinbeck, *Once There Was a War*, (London: Heinemann, 1959; Corgi edition, 1961), 11-12.

¹⁹ Fialka, 4.

²⁰ Porch, 90-91.

²¹ Knightley, 397.

before Tet had been largely favorable. After Tet, it became increasingly negative, creating an entire generation of Vietnam veterans and many members of the public who came to view the media, not the flawed strategy, as the reason there was no clear-cut victory. What had been a cordially adversarial relationship between the military and the media prior to Vietnam became openly hostile after it.

The Pentagon was determined after Vietnam to not allow the media such unrestricted access to the battlefield again, even if it meant infringing on the First Amendment and the public's right to know how and why their tax dollars were being spent. Planning for what became Operation Urgent Fury in Grenada in 1983 failed to include the media in any aspect of the operation. The media were to be totally excluded. "As a consequence, over six hundred disgruntled reporters were marooned in comfortable exile on Barbados while the story played out unseen and hence unreported, on Grenada."²² Those reporters who took the initiative to try to get to Grenada by boat were intercepted by U.S. Navy vessels and were told they needed to turn back or they would be blown out of the water. But in their after-action explanation of media exclusion from Grenada, the Pentagon claimed that it occurred on such a small island at such a high tempo that the media could not be safely accommodated.²³

Media complaints about that exclusion eventually convinced the Pentagon that it could not keep journalists from finding a way to report on combat operations in which American forces were involved. Enterprising reporters would somehow find a way to get to where fighting was taking place. Army General John Vessey, Jr., then chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, commissioned a study of the problem. Chaired by retired Army Major General Winant Sidle, who had been trained as a journalist, the group included members of the media and the military and became known the "Sidle Panel." In August 1984, the panel issued its report. In his cover letter to Vessey, Sidle stated unequivocally that the panel "unanimously agreed at the outset that the U.S. media should cover U.S. military operations to the maximum degree possible consistent with mission security and the safety of U.S. forces."²⁴ The panel made eight recommendations as a means of preventing future Grenadas. Foremost among them was that the military and the media work together to create a standing National Media Pool that would be trained, have the proper gear, and be prepared to deploy at a moment's notice if there was a military contingency involving American forces anywhere in the world.²⁵ The panel put the onus on the media to have trained professional journalists in the pool. It also put the onus on the military to beef up its public affairs staff, essentially to ride herd on the media horde that would descend on any American military operation.

In theory, it seemed like a workable plan. When put into practice less than six years later during the invasion of Panama in 1989, Operation Just Cause, it proved a miserable failure. It failed not because military failed and not because the media failed, but because one government official still suffering from a post-Vietnam hangover, Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney, decided to delay deployment of the pool.²⁶ As a result, reporters who were not part of the pool system used their initiative to get to Panama ahead of those confined to the pool. Among them was Larry Jolidon. Jolidon flew to Costa Rica, took a taxi to the border with Panama, and then hired a boy on a motorbike to give him a ride into Panama City, getting

²² Porch, 94.

²³ Richard K. Wright, *Assessment of the DoD Embedded Media Program*, (Alexandria, Va.: Institute for Defense Analyses Joint Advanced Warfighting Program, 2004), 1-3.

²⁴ Major General Winant Sidle, *Report by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Military-Media Relations Panel*, (Washington, D.C.: Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1984), 2.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁶ Porch, 94-95.

there well ahead of the press pool.²⁷ Jolidon was not a fan of the pool system or the politics that went along with trying to get a spot in it. He was more of a freewheeling free spirit, ready to take chances when necessary to beat what he saw as an extremely restrictive system at its own game. So it was somewhat surprising to find Jolidon less than two years later deeply enmeshed in helping to formulate the pool system that characterized the media coverage of Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

After Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait on August 1, 1990, and President George H.W. Bush five days later ordered U.S. troops to the Middle East to stop the advance, the Pentagon once again delayed deploying the National Media Pool. Its excuses this time were that it “did not involve two of the ‘essential elements’ that triggered deployment of the pool—combat and the need to preserve secrecy before an operation began.”²⁸ The Saudis also initially were reluctant to provide visas to members of the National Media Pool because of concerns over outside influences in the highly restrictive kingdom. But once they relented, the flood of correspondents began. At one point, more than 1,600 reporters from around the world showed up in Dhahran, the gathering spot for those who wanted to cover the troops, or in the capital Riyadh, for those who wanted the big picture from Schwarzkopf and other top commanders. Those correspondents came from the traditional newspaper and television outlets as well as organizations that seemingly had no reason to be there, among them the Disney Channel and the women’s magazine *Mirabella*.

Whether by happenstance or design, military officials left it up to the media to decide who among them would be in what pools as Operation Desert Shield continued through the summer and fall and on into the winter of 1990. The politicking among media members was intense as reporters fought over what they considered the choice pool slots. Correspondents from larger organizations thought they should have more access than those from smaller, hometown or regional news outlets. It was “a situation akin to a prison system of inmates guarding inmates,” said one critic.²⁹ Those media bosses back in the States who had fought with the Pentagon for years to come up with a workable solution “felt betrayed by what some called ‘censorship by access.’”³⁰ Those who chose to work outside the pool system, the so-called unilaterals who took off across the desert in four-wheel drive vehicles in search of stories, ran the risk of being shot at by both sides, or taken prisoner, as happened to CBS News correspondent Bob Simon when he wandered too close to the border before the ground war began. U.S. Special Forces troops in the area had warned him of the dangers but he and his crew decided to chance it. After Simon’s capture the soldiers re-named the road “The Bob Simon Highway.”

What emerged from the chaos of the Gulf War pool system initially was not pleasing to either the military or the media. There were frustrations on both sides—the military because of their lack of resources to deal with the pool products and the unexpected number of reporters with whom they had to deal, and the media because of what many perceived as a lack of access. Despite that persistent myth, there was access, and there was thoughtful, professional reporting by many of the print reporters who got that access. It’s just that not many of those reports ever saw print until *Turn Back Before Baghdad*. Within two years of the dissolution of the Gulf War pool system, technological advancements had rendered pools obsolete. By the time U.S. forces deployed to Somalia, reporters were able to file

²⁷ Author’s conversation with Laurence Jolidon, January 1991.

²⁸ Jacqueline E. Sharkey, *Under Fire: U.S. Military Restrictions on the Media from Grenada to the Persian Gulf*, (Washington, D.C.: The Center for Public Integrity, 1991), 108.

²⁹ MacArthur, 182.

³⁰ Venable, 129.

directly through their laptop computers and satellite telephones to their news organizations without having to go through a military censor. By the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, sending stories, photographs, and streaming video from the front, even while on the move, was commonplace for all reporters, print and television. The pool system, which never was useful to begin with, no longer was a viable option for the military or the media.

By August 2002, after the publication of *Turn Back Before Baghdad*, Jolidon had moved on. He had become the top civilian press adviser to the NATO Rapid Reaction Force in Bosnia, responsible for coordinating media strategy, talking points, and news conferences. On August 20, while out for a jog in Sarajevo, Bosnia, he suffered a heart attack and died. In a letter he sent to friends and colleagues just a few months earlier after the book was published, he wrote what perhaps was his own epitaph. “Even if this is as good as it gets,” he wrote, “it’s been good, and it’s all been worth it in my book.”³¹

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31 Laurence Jolidon letter promoting *Turn Back Before Baghdad*, Feb. 7, 2002.

First Edition Introduction

In the aftermath of the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, some connections can be seen with greater clarity.

It is plainly apparent now that a direct line exists between the infamous acts and horrible human toll of that day and the aftermath of the Persian Gulf War, which officially ended more than a decade earlier with a ceasefire ceremony at Safwan, Iraq.

When thinking back to that day, some linger over the notion that a relatively swift and overwhelming victory over the Iraqi forces in 1991 was flawed by the failure to take the next step—to send the allied force another 100 or so miles north to oust the regime of Saddam Hussein.

Such a no-doubt-brief expedition would have addressed the very root of the problem but—and even proponents concede this—would have also brought uncertainty, a longer American military commitment, and numerous unforeseen results and repercussions.

So the allied troops, although surging with awesome, deadly, and cohesive power, were ordered to stop after seizing southern Iraq to the Euphrates River, to turn back before they reached Baghdad. By halting the one-sided fight, President George Bush and other Western leaders hoped to quiet those especially in the Arab nations that had joined the effort to liberate Kuwait who rebelled at the idea of overturning another Muslim country.

But to some Muslim true believers, the mistake was even more fundamental, and almost irreversible: the very presence of a foreign army of non-Muslim soldiers in Saudi Arabia, the land that possesses and is sworn to protect Islam's holiest shrines, had been a grave error and insult.

And with the posting of a permanent protective force of American military personnel and assets in Saudi Arabia after the Gulf War—an obvious alternative to ridding the region of Saddam Hussein in the Western mind—the mistake was made more grievous.

It was that decision that is now frequently cited as the turning point in the life of a wealthy Saudi militant, Osama bin Laden. The United States—and the Saudi regime that was responsible for inviting its uniformed infidels to remain—became his target, and the target of uncounted other Muslim extremists who are now sworn to bloody retribution and destruction.

With that cause and effect clear, the Gulf War and the part the U.S. and other Western and Arab allies played become not simply an interesting slice of history, but a vital topic of study for the present and future.

So this book—a collection of accounts by combat correspondents telling the day-to-day story of the Gulf War at the scene of the action—is offered as a bridge, a prism for today's questions, and a tool for understanding.

Many of the stories here strike the same major themes of military readiness and strategy, religious practices, chemical warfare, covert operations, collateral damage, and friendly fire that are beginning to arise once more.

They help us understand the connections between those heady days of Desert Shield and Desert Storm, days filled with glory for the U.S. military, when the old ghost of Vietnam finally seemed to lift from the shoulders of the world's most powerful army, and these darker days, when the battle has moved to America's shores, leapt into view with a fiery vengeance and shown us costs in human terms that are already unacceptably high.

As a work of journalism, this book is also an attempt to rescue the efforts of the men and women of the Gulf War print pool from a myth that has lasted too long.

After negotiations with the Washington, DC, bureau chiefs of the large media companies, the Pentagon in the winter of 1990 agreed that a pool of correspondents—chosen by the reporters in Saudi Arabia from among those who had covered the long buildup and deployment—would go into the field to live with the troops, to ships patrolling the nearby seas and to airbases while missions were being flown.

Daily accounts from these print media “pools” (a separate one was formed for television, which must work in teams of correspondents, technicians, and producers) would then be shipped back to a central office, reviewed for military security and made available to all the rest of the world's press that had gathered in Saudi Arabia who could use the stories, tapes and interviews as they saw fit.

A number of pool critics and their lawyers (a group filed suit in federal court, but failed to change the outcome) opposed the arrangement and argued for completely free access to the battlefield. They looked at the big, open desert and saw plenty of room for the press to wander from dune to dune, tank to tank, wherever their instinct led them, interviewing soldiers, taking pictures, and writing about the war. (One lawyer argued that Gen. Schwarzkopf could make his front lines even longer to accommodate more reporters.)

The Pentagon looked at the big, open desert and saw plenty of room for terrorists, saboteurs, and Iraqi agents to infiltrate allied lines and bases, steal secrets, and plant bombs. Officials promised to lift restrictions on access “when the front was mature and the battle was in progress,” but meantime reporters would not be allowed to travel at will, unescorted, among the allied encampments. Having reporters and TV crews roaming the front would be dangerous for them and the troops.

The Pentagon's premise was that allied armor, artillery and infantry forces were essentially vulnerable, stationed on the periphery of Iraq and Kuwait waiting for a weeks-long bombing campaign to prepare—soften up—the future battlefield.

While the specifics of how the war should be covered were still being debated in federal courthouses and hearings on Capitol Hill, dozens of American and British correspondents were called upon to do a job that some of their colleagues demeaned—and most envied. (All reporters hate pools—except, it has to be said, the one they're in.)

The print pool members tackled an undesirable situation and made the best of it, working steadily and professionally within the rules laid down by mutual agreement to find the news and share it with their colleagues. But in the years since the Gulf War ended, a myth has obscured their work.

The myth presumes that the press was virtually barred from covering the war in the Persian Gulf. It stemmed from the intense opposition to the very idea that the Pentagon had placed limits on media access, and in addition required pool stories to be reviewed for possible violations of military security.

The myth has grown with each repetition by authors, scholars and commentators. It took various forms most readers have probably seen in print before:

- Reporters were basically not allowed to cover the ground war.
- Reporters were not allowed into the field, but had to stay in their hotels, watching CNN and attending briefings where they asked inane questions, like when will the invasion start.
- Reporters were not allowed to talk to soldiers unless a public affairs officer was present.
- Most reporters were kept on ships so they couldn't talk to troops.
- Some stories were held back until after the war ended for security reasons.
- The Pentagon quickly censored any news that reporters did manage to find, ensuring that no military mistakes, embarrassments or shortcomings were made public.

None of the above statements are true. But these and similar allegations were picked up as valid by writers and repeated unchecked until they became common folklore. By October 2001, when the new Bush administration was marshaling the military to strike at the Taliban regime that was sheltering Osama bin Laden, self-appointed defenders of freedom of the press were citing the myth in warning that the Pentagon might again try to stiff-arm the press away from the fighting. It is true that many reporters who didn't arrive in Saudi Arabia until after the bombing campaign began on Jan. 16, 1991, did not see much action. But every print reporter who had reached Saudi Arabia by Jan. 1 had a spot.

The Saudi government—which limited even large news organizations to one visa and tried to force some reporters to leave the country in mid-deployment—played a major part in press restrictions simply by virtue of control over ports of entry.

And it is true that pool stories were subjected to review for military security reasons and to ensure that reporters honored their agreement not to disclose the location or size of units or prematurely name dead or missing personnel before next-of-kin are notified.

Numbers, words, and datelines were changed in several instances, but only one story did not appear because military reviewers had determined it contained a number of facts that could jeopardize the allied effort. The reporter's editor spiked it after talking to the Pentagon.

It's in this collection. ("Gathering Intelligence Any Way You Can: Iraqis Using Deception 'To Show Us Bomb Damage that Isn't There,'" Feb. 11, by Michael Hedges.) You can decide whether the story should have run.

When the dust settled, the main difficulty pool reporters say they faced was not the security review but a land-based courier system that was supposed to ensure that all their copy reached the pool office in Dhahran in a timely manner.

That system failed miserably. Some stories were delayed for days, a few for weeks. Some reporters said they thought it was deliberate meddling by the Pentagon to keep news from reaching the public. In some cases, public affairs officers did sit on stories, either out of spite or an exaggerated sense of some threat to security.

But more often, it was simply a matter of incompetence, poor planning, broken fax

machines and scarce vehicles coming face to face with one of the world's largest deserts and one of history's largest military deployments.

Despite the controversy and crippled dispatch system, from mid-January until after the cease-fire on March 3rd, the print combat pool—eventually a group of about 200 reporters from American and British newspapers, magazines and news agencies—reported daily and directly from the encampments of Marines and soldiers in the desert, from aboard ships and from the flight lines of air bases.

They covered the war from start to finish, from the minefields up and the AWACS missions down. Their stories chronicled the day-to-day lives of more than 700,000 men and women of the allied military forces as they fought, died, were wounded or went missing. More fortunate than the 150 or so U.S. service members who gave their lives in the war, the reporters all lived to tell about it.

An archive of about 1,500 stories from both the American and British pools is the source of some 300 selected for this book. Completely uncensored and raw as the day they came off a sand-choked typewriter, the stories feature fine, even insightful, writing.

Woven together in chronological order (a luxury unavailable during the war) they tell a compelling story.

And the archive itself had an interesting odyssey.

After the cease-fire, I returned from Iraq to the pool offices in the International Hotel in Dhahran where I found all our stories neatly filed away.

Believing they had some historical value, I boxed them up and brought them back to the U.S., expecting some university or foundation would want to make them available to students, scholars, and the general public. When I could find no university or foundation to take them, I put them in storage, where they remained for ten years.

In the spring of 2001, I decided to once again try to attract attention to the archive by compiling some of the most interesting and best-written stories in a collection.

While preparing the manuscript, I was fortunate enough to learn about the Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin, and offered the archive for its new and growing media library.

The archive is now in the Center's collection.

Some might say these stories belonged there all this time.

I'm just glad they made it out of the desert.

Laurence Jolidon

Dallas

October, 2001

PART I

Desert Storm: Ultimatum to Cease-Fire Tent

Tuesday

January 15, 1991

This date was the final deadline set by UN Security Council Resolution 678, the last opportunity for Saddam Hussein to withdraw his troops from Kuwait before the allied coalition used military force to make him comply.

The date passed without war, but war was clearly coming. Gen. Colin Powell, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, phoned Gen. H. Norman Schwarzkopf, commander of the coalition forces in the Gulf, to say that he and Defense Secretary Dick Cheney had just signed the execution order to initiate military action.

The war would officially start with an attack of allied warplanes at 3 a.m. on January 17th. In his command headquarters in Riyadh, Gen. Schwarzkopf reviewed the details of a “blood chit,” military parlance for a paper (or cloth, usually silk) carried by every pilot offering a reward for his return in the case of capture. The blood chits for pilots in the Gulf were in Arabic, but were for naught. All the allied pilots captured by Iraqi forces were held until the war’s end.

So many grievances had led to this pass. Both sides could recite a litany of reasons for being the injured party. Unpaid war debts. Violations of oil production quotas. Colonialist boundary lines. Marshalling of troops along borders.

But the facts were that Iraq’s legions had stormed into Kuwait uninvited and remained there as an occupying army in what Saddam was choosing to call his “19th province” and the UN had voted he must remove them or suffer the consequences.

History had turned somersaults to get here. The big western nations that were now lined up against Saddam had, until very recently, been Iraq’s close allies, weapons providers, trading partners, and benefactors. After the war, the CIA admitted to its oversight committees in Congress that it was exchanging secret intelligence with Iraq up until Aug. 2, 1990, the very day Iraq invaded Kuwait.

The mutual exchange of intelligence, which apparently began in 1984, was based on a common interest: countering the radical Islamic movement in Iran and throughout the region.

Efforts at diplomacy to resolve the crisis peacefully wound down as the deadline approached, Secretary General Perez de Cuellar met a last time with Hussein, then consulted yet again with one of the most active Arabist diplomats in Europe, French President François Mitterand. The Secretary General afterward declared there was no hope for a diplomatic solution. The European Union likewise threw in the diplomatic towel.

Mitterand kept pressing. He tried to keep talks afloat by proposing yet another solution in which the UN would agree to an international conference on the status of Kuwait in return for Iraq’s withdrawal. But more and more, diplomacy was a sideshow to this crisis.

On the Arabian peninsula and in friendly anti-Saddam enclaves nearby, the huge buildup of American and other coalition forces was peaking. Eventually there would be close to

700,000 allied personnel, including more than a half-million Americans, taking on Saddam Hussein's war machine. Iraq had an army of about 1 million, half of which was reported stationed in and around Kuwait.

In this opening chapter, the famed 82nd Airborne Division, whose troops were the first U.S. forces to arrive on Saudi soil the previous August, was getting down to fighting weight. They wouldn't need their parachutes for this mission.

Scud missile alerts were just beginning. They would come to symbolize for many the frustration of trying to be prepared for anything and everything that might come screaming out of the sky from Kuwait or Iraq.

After the war, allied military and intelligence experts agreed that Saddam Hussein actually had more Scuds and Scud-launchers in his arsenal than original pre-war calculations allowed for, and had done a better job of eluding the allied efforts to destroy them than anyone had anticipated.

“Racehorses That Smell the Barn”—82nd Airborne Gets Rid of Xmas Gifts, Burns Letters, Prepares to Fight

By Robert Dvorchak

IN EASTERN SAUDI ARABIA - Apache helicopter pilot Ron Moring made final preparations for war by lightening his gear, mailing home his hand-held computer games and beach shorts.

Specialist James Cox shipped home his souvenir Arab headdress and personal keepsakes, hanging on to pictures of his wife and kids to keep with his military gear.

Specialist Mark Welsh sent back his Christmas stocking and a gift shirt because “I don't want to throw away those memories.”

The Army's 82nd Airborne Division was on war-ready status Tuesday, Jan. 15, the date the world had told Saddam Hussein to quit Kuwait.

The soldiers got down to the bare essentials of military hardware in their rucksacks and kit bags, some by burning their personal letters so no one could trace the addresses.

Capt. Clint Esarey, 32, of Indianapolis, Indiana, prepared by dictating a living will to his wife on a cassette tape and giving details on funeral arrangements should the worst happen.

“If I don't make it back, I want to be buried in my military uniform,” Esarey said. “I'm a soldier. It's my life. The uniform is part of me.”

The mental and emotional part of preparing for battle was just as necessary as making sure weapons were cleaned and attack helicopters, sitting like angry hornets at the launch stations, were armed and loaded.

“In our minds, the war has started. Today is the day. Training is over with. The mindset is this is the real thing,” said Esarey, the father of two adopted children.

“The awareness of the soldiers is definitely heightened. The mood? Somber would be a good word for it. They're mulling this stuff around in their minds,” he said. “Anything you don't have to have you get rid of because you want your rucksack as light as you can get it.”

The mood was businesslike at a base in central Saudi Arabia where the 82nd keeps Apache and Cobra attack helicopters, along with other assault helicopters.

Gun crews loaded each tank-killing Apache with Hellfire missiles and loaded magazines with 2.75-inch rockets.

“We're a bunch of racehorses that smell the barn right now,” said Chief Warrant

Officer Ron Moring, 32, who pilots an Apache called “The Virginia Regulator.” “It’s time to quit the pre-game show. We’re a lot more serious about we’re doing. There’s a little more excitement in the air.”

Specialist 4 Mark Welsh, 21, of Bird Island, Minnesota, worked on a newly arrived Blackhawk utility helicopter. He had been married for a month before Iraq invaded Kuwait, and he had just sent home his treasured Christmas gifts so he wouldn’t be bogged down.

“I don’t want to hang on to them here,

but I want to hang on to them for the future. I didn’t want to throw away some memories,” Welsh said.

Maj. Lee Stuart, 43, of Jonesboro, Ga., executive officer of a battalion of Apache helicopters said soldiers still prayed for peace while they grimly prepared for war.

“GIs are the last ones who want to go to war. They’re the ones who have to shed their blood and give their lives. We don’t want to kill nobody. (But) I want it settled and settled now. I don’t want my young one to have to do it,” Stuart said.

Scud Alert: “If This is Another Practice, Someone Should Have Their Butt Kicked”

By Charles Richards

It was the tins, or at least something like them.

The alert came shortly after 11 a.m. on Jan. 15, the day that had entered popular parlance as “K-Day,” the deadline set by the United Nations for Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait.

Suddenly figures started scuttling across the airbase, disappearing down sandbagged entrances to underground bunkers.

“Scud alert, that’s all I heard.”

“That’s all you need to hear.”

They were a group of National Guardsmen from South Carolina, firefighters with the 264 Engineering Detachment. Down below, someone switched on a light, red for security. There were boxes of rations stacked at the back of the shelter. “Weren’t supposed to be any more practices,” one of them drawled, his southern accent, if not his face, clear through the gas mask and hood.

“If this is another practice, someone should have their butt kicked.”

Time passed. Sweat built up inside the

mask. Breathing was slow, but not hard.

The bunker was more solidly built than most, with a sealed roof supported by fresh timber pit props. It became clear why.

The roof was an Air Force loading pallet “kindly donated by another branch of the military.”

The threat of attack by chemical weapons launched by Scud missiles was not what most of these Guardsmen had bargained for when they joined up. Staff Sergeant Joe Horton, 48, was an insurance salesman in civilian life from Beaufort, S.C. Normal duties were limited.

“We meet one weekend a month and two weeks annual training.” They came out at the end of November after a week’s notice to move. “It’s necessary,” Sergeant Horton said, “but I don’t like it at all. Rulers like Saddam Hussein must be stopped. I really didn’t think it necessary to call out the National Guard.”

They discussed the numbers of times they had drilled for missile or chemical attack. “One long blast is for air attack,” a sergeant declared confidently. “No,” a masked speaker corrected. “One long blast is ground attack. Continuous short bursts are an air attack.”

The confusion did not seem to matter. The sense of urgency when the siren was sounded pervaded the whole camp.

Captain James Smith, however, was not impressed. "About 40 per cent were walking around out there with nothing on. That means 40 per cent loss." He and his grizzled sergeant explained the alert procedure. The warning is meant to come by radio, then be circulated by hand-held Motorola walkie-talkies to the NCOs. This time they heard only the horn, and saw the rush for the shelters. "Someone would be on duty," the captain said. "We don't have time to knock on tin." In the event that turned out to be what had happened.

Someone had heard metal against metal. They assumed it was knocking tin for a Scud warning. They sounded the sirens. The whole elaborate alert system, from high-technology radio to beating eating dishes had been reversed.

It was all a mistake, a false alarm. The exercise, however, demonstrated the heightened sense of awareness at this critical time. After a real alert, they had two minutes until a Scud might hit. But with an average of 3½ Patriot anti-missile missiles per Scud, they were confident they were well-protected. "It takes 1½ hours to launch a Scud," said one of the sergeants. "After the first launch, the launcher is going to be pinpointed and taken out." For Sergeant Robertson, the biggest threat was not Scud missiles but terrorist infiltration. He could not rightly identify who the supposed terrorist infiltrators might be.

"If they wear a rag on their head, I don't care who they are."

Throughout the region, the armies of the U.S. led coalition are continuing their preparations. British army tank transporters take vehicles of awesome destructive power down the road: Challenger main battle tanks, Warrior armored personnel carriers,

even the antiquated but much loved Ferret Scout Car.

The desert is drying out now, after two days of heavy rains. A few pools remain, but the sand quickly drains it away. From the air, puffs of white vapor from the fast evaporating moisture look like treetops in the savanna. And the army turns the rain to its advantage.

A driver had parked his 4-wheel drive before a mud pond. And as a mahout would lead his elephant to a bathing pool, he was clipping in his canteen and covering his vehicle with brown watery mud, immediately transforming his bright green NATO standard camouflage into desert khaki. There's nothing like the old methods.

Other preparations were continuing at the logistics support headquarters for the 7th Corps. Around the sand barrier on the camp's perimeter, groups of men and women soldiers were digging out small bunkers for personal protection. There were clerks and orderlies, and headquarters staff more used to filling forms than sandbags.

They attacked their task with vim and wit. Or perhaps it was that nine would be happy talking and taking pictures and maybe filling the occasional sandbag while one would be using pick and shovel. One grunt leaned on his shovel and proceeded to deliver a discourse on the ideological differences between the rival Syrian and Iraqi branches of the Baath Party. "I don't think we should stop in Kuwait. We should put him out of business. If we wait two or three years, he'll be back with nuclear bombs. The guy is dangerous."

And if elsewhere the world was looking for something different, on this Jan. 15, in the base camp, the date appeared to have no military significance. Rather, such a bright sunny day after two days of rain was a popular wash day, and they were hanging out their washing on the tent guy ropes.