

= Battle of Khafji =

The Battle of Khafji was the first major ground engagement of the Gulf War . It took place in and around the Saudi Arabian city of Khafji , from 29 January to 1 February 1991 and marked the culmination of the Coalition 's air campaign over Kuwait and Iraq , which had begun on 17 January 1991 .

Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein , who had already tried and failed to draw Coalition troops into costly ground engagements by shelling Saudi positions and oil storage tanks and firing Scud surface @-@ to @-@ surface missiles at Israel , ordered the invasion of Saudi Arabia from southern Kuwait . The 1st and 5th Mechanized Divisions and 3rd Armored Division were ordered to conduct a multi @-@ pronged invasion toward Khafji , engaging American , Saudi and Qatari forces along the coastline . These three divisions , which had been heavily damaged by Coalition aircraft in the preceding days , attacked on 29 January . Most of their attacks were repulsed by U.S. Marines as well as U.S. Army Rangers and Coalition aircraft , but one of the Iraqi columns occupied Khafji on the night of 29 ? 30 January . Between 30 January and 1 February , two Saudi Arabian National Guard battalions and two Qatari tank companies attempted to retake control of the city , aided by Coalition aircraft and American artillery . By 1 February , the city had been recaptured at the cost of 43 Coalition servicemen dead and 52 wounded . Iraqi Army fatalities numbered between 60 and 300 , while an estimated 400 were captured as prisoners of war .

Although the invasion of Khafji was initially a propaganda victory for the Ba 'athist Iraqi government , it was swiftly recaptured by Saudi and Qatari ground forces . The battle serves as a modern demonstration that air power in a supporting role to ground forces can be of great assistance in halting and defeating a major ground operation .

= = Background = =

On 2 August 1990 , the Iraqi Army invaded and occupied the neighboring state of Kuwait . The invasion , which followed the inconclusive Iran ? Iraq War and three decades of political conflict with Kuwait , offered Saddam Hussein the opportunity to distract political dissent at home and add Kuwait 's oil resources to Iraq 's own , a boon in a time of declining petroleum prices .

In response , the United Nations began to pass a series of resolutions demanding the withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait . Afraid that Saudi Arabia would be invaded next , the Saudi government requested immediate military aid . As a result , the United States began marshalling forces from a variety of nations , styled the Coalition , on the Arabian peninsula . Initially , Saddam Hussein attempted to deter Coalition military action by threatening Kuwait 's and Iraq 's petroleum production and export . In December 1990 , Iraq experimented with the use of explosives to destroy wellheads in the area of the Ahmadi loading complex , developing their capability to destroy Kuwait 's petroleum infrastructure on a large scale . On 16 January , Iraqi artillery destroyed an oil storage tank in Khafji , Saudi Arabia , and on 19 January the pumps at the Ahmadi loading complex were opened , pouring crude oil into the Persian Gulf . The oil flowed into the sea at a rate of 200 @,@ 000 barrels a day , becoming one of the worst ecological disasters to that date .

Despite these Iraqi threats , the Coalition launched a 38 @-@ day aerial campaign on 17 January 1991 . Flying an estimated 2 @,@ 000 sorties a day , Coalition aircraft rapidly crippled the Iraqi air defense systems and effectively destroyed the Iraqi Air Force , whose daily sortie rate plummeted from a prewar level of an estimated 200 per day to almost none by 17 January . On the third day of the campaign , many Iraqi pilots fled across the Iranian border in their aircraft rather than be destroyed . The air campaign also targeted command @-@ and @-@ control sites , bridges , railroads , and petroleum storage facilities .

Saddam Hussein , who is believed to have said , " The air force has never decided a war , " nevertheless worried that the air campaign would erode Iraq 's national morale . The Iraqi leader also believed that the United States would not be willing to lose many troops in action , and therefore sought to draw Coalition ground troops into a decisive battle . In an attempt to provoke a ground battle , he directed Iraqi forces to launch Scud missiles against Israel , while continuing to

threaten the destruction of oilfields in Kuwait . These efforts were unsuccessful in provoking a large ground battle , so Saddam Hussein decided to launch a limited offensive into Saudi Arabia with the aim of inflicting heavy losses on the Coalition armies .

As the air campaign continued , the Coalition 's expectations of an Iraqi offensive decreased . As a result , the United States redeployed the XVIII Airborne Corps and the VII Corps 480 kilometers (300 mi) to the west . The Coalition 's leadership believed that should an Iraqi force go on the offensive , it would be launched from the al @-@ Wafra oil fields , in Southern Kuwait .

= = Order of battle = =

The Iraqi Army had between 350 @,@ 000 and 500 @,@ 000 soldiers in theater , organized into 51 divisions , including eight Republican Guard divisions . Republican Guard units normally received the newest equipment ; for example , most of the estimated 1 @,@ 000 T @-@ 72 tanks in the Iraqi Army on the eve of the war were in Republican Guard divisions . The Iraqi Army in the Kuwaiti Theater of Operations (KTO) also included nine heavy divisions , composed mostly of professional soldiers , but with weapons of a generally lesser grade than those issued to the Republican Guard .

Most non @-@ Republican Guard armored units had older tank designs , mainly the T @-@ 55 or its Chinese equivalents , the Type 59 and Type 69 . The remaining 34 divisions were composed of poorly trained conscripts . These divisions were deployed to channel the Coalition 's forces through a number of break points along the front , allowing the Iraqi Army 's heavy divisions and the Republican Guard units to isolate them and counterattack . However , the Iraqis left their western flank open , failing to account for tactics made possible by the Global Positioning System and other new technologies .

In Saudi Arabia , the Coalition originally deployed over 200 @,@ 000 soldiers , 750 aircraft and 1 @,@ 200 tanks . This quickly grew to 3 @,@ 600 tanks and over 600 @,@ 000 personnel , of whom over 500 @,@ 000 were from the United States .

= = = Iraqi forces = = =

Earmarked for the offensive into Saudi Arabia was the Iraqi Third Corps , the 1st Mechanized Division from Fourth Corps and a number of commando units . Third Corps , commanded by Major General Salah Aboud Mahmoud (who would also command the overall offensive) , had 3rd Armored Division and 5th Mechanized Division , as well as a number of infantry divisions . Fourth Corps ' commander was Major General Yaiyd Khalel Zaki . The 3rd Armored Division had a number of T @-@ 72 tanks , the only non @-@ Republican Guard force to have them , while the other armored battalions had T @-@ 62s and T @-@ 55s , a few of which had an Iraqi appliqué armor similar to the Soviet bulging armor also known as " brow " laminate armor or BDD .

During the battle of Khafji , these upgraded T @-@ 55s survived impacts from MILAN anti @-@ tank missiles . These divisions also had armored personnel vehicles such as the BMP @-@ 1 , scout vehicles such as the BRDM @-@ 2 , and several types of artillery . Also deployed along this portion of the front , though not chosen to participate in the invasion , were five infantry divisions that were under orders to remain in their defensive positions along the border .

U.S. Marine Corps reconnaissance estimated that the Iraqi Army had amassed around 60 @,@ 000 troops across the border , near the Kuwaiti town of Wafra , in as many as 5 or 6 divisions . Infantry divisions normally consisted of three brigades with an attached commando unit , although some infantry divisions could have up to eight brigades ? however most infantry divisions along the border were understrength , primarily due to desertion .

Armored and mechanized divisions normally made use of three brigades , with each brigade having up to four combat battalions ; depending on the division type , these were generally a three to one mix , with either three mechanized battalions and one armored battalion , or vice versa . Given the size of the forces deployed across the border , it is thought that the Iraqi Army planned to continue the offensive , after the successful capture of Khafji , in order to seize the valuable oil fields at Dammam .

The attack would consist of a four @-@ prong offensive . The 1st Mechanized Division would pass through the 7th and 14th Infantry Divisions to protect the flank of the 3rd Armored Division , which would provide a blocking force west of Khafji while the 5th Mechanized Division took the town . The 1st Mechanized and 3rd Armored divisions would then retire to Kuwait , while the 5th Mechanized Division would wait until the Coalition launched a counteroffensive . The principal objectives were to inflict heavy casualties on the attacking Coalition soldiers and take prisoners of war , who Saddam Hussein theorized would be an excellent bargaining tool with the Coalition .

As the units moved to the Saudi border , many were attacked by Coalition aircraft . Around the Al @-@ Wafrah forest , about 1 @, @ 000 Iraqi armored fighting vehicles were attacked by Harrier aircraft with Rockeye cluster bombs . Another Iraqi convoy of armored vehicles was hit by A @-@ 10s , which destroyed the first and last vehicles , before systematically attacking the stranded remainders . Such air raids prevented the majority of the Iraqi troops deployed for the offensive from taking part in it .

= = = Coalition forces = = =

During the buildup of forces , the United States had built observation posts along the Kuwaiti @-@ Saudi border to gather intelligence on Iraqi forces . These were manned by United States Navy SEALs , Marine Corps Force Reconnaissance and Army Special Forces personnel . Observation post 8 was farthest to the east , on the coast , and another seven observation posts were positioned each 20 km (12 mi) until the end of the " heel " , the geographic panhandle of southernmost Kuwait . Observation posts 8 and 7 overlooked the coastal highway that ran to Khafji , considered the most likely invasion route of the city . 1st Marine Division had three companies positioned at observation posts 4 , 5 and 6 (Task Force Shepard) , while the 2nd Marine Division 's 2nd Light Armored Infantry Battalion set up a screen between observation post 1 and the Al @-@ Wafrah oil fields . The U.S. Army 's 2nd Armored Division provided its 1st Tiger Brigade to give the Marines some much needed armored support .

The Saudis gave responsibility for the defense of Khafji to the 2nd Saudi Arabian National Guard Brigade and a Qatari armored battalion , attached to Task Force Abu Bakr . The 5th Battalion of the 2nd Saudi Arabian National Guard Brigade set up a screen north and west of Khafji , under observation post 7 . At the time , a Saudi Arabian National Guard Brigade could have up to four motorized battalions , each with three line companies . The brigade had a nominal strength of an estimated 5 @, @ 000 soldiers . The Saudis also deployed the Tariq Task Force , composed of Saudi Arabian Marines and a battalion of Moroccan infantry . Two further task forces , Othman and Omar Task Forces , consisted of two Mechanized Ministry of Defense and Aviation Brigades , providing screens about 3 km (1 @. @ 9 mi) south of the border . The country 's main defenses were placed 20 km (12 mi) south of the screen .

The majority of the Arab contingent was led by General Khaled bin Sultan . The forces around Khafji were organized into the Joint Forces Command @-@ East , while Joint Forces Command @-@ North defended the border between observation post 1 and the Kuwaiti @-@ Iraqi border .

= = Battle = =

On 27 January 1991 , Iraqi President Saddam Hussein met in Basra with the two Iraqi army corps commanders who would lead the operation , and Major General Salah Mahmoud told him that Khafji would be his by 30 January . During his return trip to Baghdad , Saddam Hussein 's convoy was attacked by Coalition aircraft ; the Iraqi leader escaped unscathed .

Throughout 28 January , the Coalition received a number of warnings suggesting an impending Iraqi offensive . The Coalition was flying two brand @-@ new E @-@ 8A Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System (Joint STARS) aircraft , which picked up the deployment and movement of Iraqi forces to the area opposite of Khafji . Observation posts 2 , 7 and 8 also detected heavy Iraqi reconnoitering along the border , and their small teams of air @-@ naval gunfire liaison Marines called in air and artillery strikes throughout the day . Lieutenant Colonel Richard Barry , commander

of the forward headquarters of the 1st Surveillance , Reconnaissance and Intelligence Group , sent warnings about an impending attack to Central Command . CentCom leaders were too preoccupied with the air campaign to heed them however , and so the Iraqi operation came as a surprise .

= = = Beginning of Iraqi offensive : 29 January = = =

The Iraqi offensive began on the night of 29 January , when approximately 2 @, @ 000 soldiers in several hundred armored fighting vehicles moved south . The Gulf War 's first ground engagement was near observation post 4 , built on the Al @-@ Zabr police building . Elements of the Iraqi 6th Armored Brigade , ordered to take the heights above Al @-@ Zabr , engaged Coalition units at Al @-@ Zabr . At 20 : 00 hours , U.S. Marines at the observation post , who had noticed large groups of armored vehicles through their night vision devices , attempted to talk to battalion headquarters but received no response . Contact was not established until 20 : 30 hours , which prompted Task Force Shepard to respond to the threat . Coalition soldiers at observation post 4 opened fire on the Iraqi column , but this largely ineffective fire drew a heavy Iraqi response which forced the company to retire south , by order of its commanding officer .

To cover the withdrawal , the company 's platoon of LAV @-@ 25s and LAV @-@ ATs (anti @-@ tank variants) moved to engage the Iraqi force . One of the anti @-@ tank vehicles opened fire , after receiving permission , at what it believed was an Iraqi tank . Instead , the missile destroyed a friendly LAV @-@ AT a few hundred meters in front of it . Despite this loss , the platoon continued forward and soon opened fire on the Iraqi tanks with the LAV @-@ 25s ' autocannons . The fire could not penetrate the tanks ' armor , but did damage their optics and prevented the tanks from fighting back effectively .

Soon thereafter , a number of A @-@ 10 ground @-@ attack aircraft arrived but found it difficult to pinpoint enemy targets and began dropping flares to illuminate the zone . One of these flares landed on a friendly vehicle , and although the vehicle radioed in its position , it was hit by an AGM @-@ 65 Maverick air @-@ to @-@ ground missile that killed the entire crew except for the driver . Following the incident , the company was withdrawn and the remaining vehicles reorganized into another nearby company . With observation post 4 cleared , the Iraqi 6th Armored Brigade withdrew over the border to Al @-@ Wafrah under heavy fire from Coalition aircraft . Coalition forces had lost 11 troops to friendly fire and none to enemy action .

While the events at observation post 4 were unfolding , the Iraqi 5th Mechanized Division crossed the Saudi border near observation post 1 . A Company of the 2nd Light Infantry Armored Battalion , which was screening the Iraqi unit , reported a column of 60 ? 100 BMPs . The column was engaged by Coalition A @-@ 10s and Harrier jump jets . This was then followed by another column with an estimated 29 tanks . One of the column 's T @-@ 62 tanks was engaged by an anti @-@ tank missile and destroyed . Coalition air support , provided by A @-@ 10s and F @-@ 16s , engaged the Iraqi drive through observation post 1 and ultimately repulsed the attack back over the Kuwaiti border . Aircraft continued to engage the columns throughout the night , until the next morning . Another column of Iraqi tanks , approaching observation post 2 , were engaged by aircraft and also repulsed that night .

An additional Iraqi column crossed the Saudi border to the East , although still along the coast , towards the city of Khafji . These Iraqi tanks were screened by the 5th Mechanized Battalion of the 2nd Saudi Arabian National Guard Brigade . This battalion withdrew when it came under heavy fire , as it had been ordered to not engage the Iraqi column . Elements of the 8th and 10th Saudi Arabian National Guard Brigades also conducted similar screening operations . Due to the order to not engage , the road to Khafji was left open . At one point , Iraqi T @-@ 55s of another column rolled up to the Saudi border , signaling that they intended to surrender . As they were approached by Saudi Arabian troops , they reversed their turrets and opened fire . This prompted air support from a nearby AC @-@ 130 , destroying 13 vehicles .

Nevertheless , the Iraqi advance towards Khafji continued on this sector , despite repeated attacks from an AC @-@ 130 . Attempts by the Saudi commanders to call in additional air strikes on the advancing Iraqi column failed when the requested heavy air support never arrived . Khafji was

occupied by approximately 00 : 30 on 30 January , trapping two six @-@ man reconnaissance teams from the 1st Marine Division in the city . The teams occupied two apartment buildings in the southern sector of the city and called artillery fire on their position to persuade the Iraqis to call off a search of the area . Throughout the night , Coalition air support composed of helicopters and fixed @-@ wing aircraft continued to engage Iraqi tanks and artillery .

= = = Initial response : 30 January = = =

Distressed by the occupation of Khafji , Saudi commander General Khaled bin Sultan appealed to American General Norman Schwarzkopf for an immediate air campaign against Iraqi forces in and around the city . However this was turned down because the buildings will make it difficult for aircraft to spot targets without getting too close . It was instead decided that the city would be retaken by Arab ground forces . The task fell to the 2nd Saudi Arabian National Guard Brigade 's 7th Battalion , composed of Saudi infantry and two Qatari tank companies attached to the task force . These were supported by U.S. Army Special Forces and Marine Reconnaissance personnel .

The force was put under the command of Saudi Lieutenant Colonel Matar , who moved out by 17 : 00 hours . The force met up with elements of the U.S. 3rd Marine Regiment , south of Khafji , and were ordered to directly attack the city . The engagement of that night was to be the first battle the Qatari Army had seen in its entire history . A platoon of Iraqi T @-@ 55s attacked a Qatari tank company south of the city , leading to the destruction of three T @-@ 55s by Qatari AMX @-@ 30s , and the capture of a fourth Iraqi tank . Lacking any coordinated artillery support , artillery fire was provided by the 10th Marine Regiment .

An initial attack on the city was called off after the Iraqi occupants opened up with heavy fire , prompting the Saudis to reinforce the 7th Battalion with two more companies from adjacent Saudi units . The attempt to retake the city had been preceded by a 15 @-@ minute preparatory fire from U.S. Marine artillery . However Iraqi fire did manage to destroy one Saudi V @-@ 150 armored personnel carrier .

Meanwhile , 2nd Saudi Arabian National Guard Brigade 's 5th Battalion moved north of Khafji to block Iraqi reinforcements attempting to reach the city . This unit was further bolstered by the 8th Ministry of Defense and Aviation Brigade , and heavily aided by Coalition air support . Although fear of friendly fire forced the 8th Ministry of Defense and Aviation Brigade to pull back the following morning , Coalition aircraft successfully hindered Iraqi attempts to move more soldiers down to Khafji and caused large numbers of Iraqi troops to surrender to Saudi forces .

That night , two U.S. Army heavy equipment transporters entered the city of Khafji , apparently lost , and were fired upon by Iraqi troops . Although one truck managed to turn around and escape , the two drivers of the second truck were wounded and captured . This led to a rescue mission organized by 3rd Battalion 3rd Marine Regiment , which sent a force of 30 men to extract the two wounded drivers . Although encountering no major opposition , they did not find the two drivers who had , by this time , been taken prisoner . The Marines did find a burnt out Qatari AMX @-@ 30 , with its dead crew . That same night , a U.S. Air Force AC @-@ 130 was shot down by an Iraqi surface @-@ to @-@ air missile (SAM) , killing the aircraft 's crew of 14 .

The interdiction on the part of Coalition aircraft and Saudi and Qatari ground forces was having an effect on the occupying Iraqi troops . Referring to Saddam Hussein 's naming of the ground engagement as the " mother of all battles " , Iraqi General Salah radioed in a request to withdraw , stating , " The mother was killing her children . " Since the beginning of the battle , Coalition aircraft had flown at least 350 sorties against Iraqi units in the area and on the night of 30 ? 31 January , Coalition air support also began to attack units of the Iraqi Third Corps assembled on the Saudi border .

= = = Recapture of Khafji : 31 January ? 1 February = = =

On 31 January , the effort to retake the city began anew . The attack was launched at 08 : 30 hours , and was met by inaccurate Iraqi fire which knocked @-@ out two Saudi V @-@ 150 wheeled

vehicles . The 8th battalion of the Saudi brigade was ordered to deploy to the city by 10 : 00 hours , while 5th Battalion to the north engaged another column of Iraqi tanks attempting to reach the city . The latter engagement led to the destruction of around 13 Iraqi tanks and armored personnel carriers , and the capture of 6 more vehicles and 116 Iraqi soldiers , costing the Saudi battalion two dead and two wounded . The 8th Battalion engaged the city from the northeast , linking up with 7th Battalion . These units cleared the southern portion of the city , until 7th Battalion withdrew south to rest and rearm at 18 : 30 hours , while the 8th remained in Khafji .

The 8th continued clearing buildings and by the time the 7th had withdrawn to the south , the Saudis had lost approximately 18 dead and 50 wounded , as well as seven V @-@ 150 vehicles . Coalition aircraft continued to provide heavy support throughout the day and night . A veteran of the Iran @-@ Iraq War later mentioned that Coalition airpower " imposed more damage on his brigade in half an hour than it had sustained in eight years of fighting against the Iranians . " During the battle , an Iraqi amphibious force was sent to land on the coast and move into Khafji . As the boats made their way through the Persian Gulf towards Khafji , American and British aircraft caught the Iraqi boats in the open and largely destroyed the Iraqi amphibious force .

The Saudi and Qatari units renewed operations the following day . Two Iraqi companies , with about 20 armored vehicles , remained in the city and had not attempted to break out during the night . While the Saudi 8th Battalion continued operations in the southern portion of the city , the 7th Battalion began to clear the northern sector of the city . Iraqi resistance was sporadic and most Iraqi soldiers surrendered on sight ; as a result , the city was recaptured on 1 February 1991 .

= = Aftermath = =

During the battle , Coalition forces incurred 43 fatalities and 52 injured casualties . This included 25 Americans killed , 11 of them by friendly fire along with 14 airmen killed when their AC @-@ 130 was shot down by Iraqi SAMs . The Americans also had two soldiers wounded and another two soldiers were captured in Khafji . Saudi and Qatari casualties totaled 18 killed and 50 wounded . Two Qatari AMX @-@ 30s main battle tanks and between seven and ten lightly armored Saudi V @-@ 150s were knocked out . Most of the V150s were knocked out by RPG @-@ 7 fire in close @-@ range fighting inside the town of Khafji , although one of the two that was a catastrophic kill was hit by a 100mm main gun round from a T @-@ 55 . Iraq listed its casualties as 71 dead , 148 wounded and 702 missing . U.S. sources present at the battle claim that 300 Iraqis lost their lives , and at least 90 vehicles were destroyed . Another source suggests that 60 Iraqi soldiers were killed and at least 400 taken prisoner , while no less than 80 armored vehicles were knocked out ; however these casualties are attributed to the fighting both inside and directly north of Khafji . Whatever the exact casualties , the majority of three Iraqi mechanized / armored divisions had been destroyed . The U.S. Army 's 2nd Armored Division 's 1st Tiger Brigade claims 181 destroyed or captured enemy tanks , 148 APCs , 40 artillery pieces , 27 AA emplacements , 263 Iraqi dead and 4 @, @ 051 captured after 100 hours of combat .

The Iraqi capture of Khafji was a major propaganda victory for Iraq : on 30 January Iraqi radio claimed that they had " expelled Americans from the Arab territory " . For many in the Arab world , the battle of Khafji was seen as an Iraqi victory , and Hussein made every possible effort to turn the battle into a political victory . On the other side , confidence within the United States Armed Forces in the abilities of the Saudi and Qatari armies increased as the battle progressed . After Khafji , the Coalition 's leadership began to sense that the Iraqi Army was a " hollow force " and it provided them with an impression of the degree of resistance they would face during the Coalition 's ground offensive that would begin later that month . The battle was also a major propaganda victory for Saudi Arabia , which had successfully defended its territory .

Despite the success of the engagements between 29 January and 1 February , the Coalition did not launch its main offensive into Kuwait and Iraq until the night of 24 ? 25 February . The invasion of Iraq was completed about 48 hours later . The Battle of Khafji served as a modern example of the ability of air power to serve a supporting role to ground forces . It offered the Coalition an indication of the manner in which Operation Desert Storm would be fought , but also hinted at future friendly

@-@ fire casualties which accounted for nearly half of the American dead .