

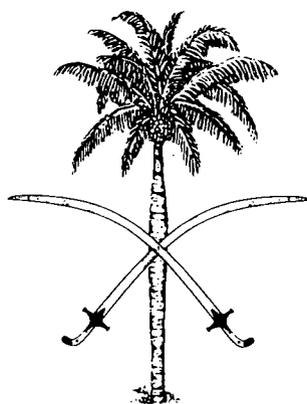
# Humanitarian Operations in Northern Iraq, 1991 WITH MARINES IN OPERATION PROVIDE COMFORT



HISTORY AND MUSEUMS DIVISION  
HEADQUARTERS, U.S. MARINE CORPS  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

*COVER: A painting by Col Peter M. "Mike" Gish depicts a CH-46E from the Black Knights of HMM-264 delivers relief supplies to a Kurdish refugee camp in northern Iraq during Operations Provide Comfort. In March 1991, more than 760,000 Kurds fled into the rugged Taurus Mountains of Eastern Turkey and Northern Iraq to avoid the wrath of Saddam Hussein.*

# Humanitarian Operations in Northern Iraq, 1991 WITH MARINES IN OPERATION PROVIDE COMFORT



by  
Lieutenant Colonel Ronald J. Brown  
U.S. Marine Corps Reserve

HISTORY AND MUSEUMS DIVISION  
HEADQUARTERS, U.S. MARINE CORPS  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

1995

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# Foreword

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This monograph tells the story of more than 3,600 U.S. Marines who supported Operation Provide Comfort, an international relief effort in northern Iraq from 7 April to 15 July 1991. The term "monograph" was carefully chosen. This short work does not purport to tell the entire story of Operation Provide Comfort, but focuses on Marine activities and contributions. The author presents historical glimpses of the Kurds, modern Iraq, and non-Marine activities only to provide necessary background information. This monograph is not an exhaustive analysis of the operation nor does it try to define Provide Comfort's place in the diplomatic history of the Middle East.

The U.S. Marines have continued a long tradition of humanitarian relief operations. Assistance during the San Francisco earthquake, Hurricane Hugo, and Operations Sea Angel and Fiery Vigil, and Restore Hope are but a few recent examples of these efforts. Provide Comfort was another such operation. In less than three months allied forces created a safe haven in northern Iraq, provided emergency food and medical aid, moved more than 750,000 refugees back to their homeland, and helped them reestablish normal lives. Marines were among the first Americans to deploy, and then were among the last to leave northern Iraq. During that time the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) operated more than 500 miles from its sea base, the farthest inland a Marine expeditionary unit had ever been deployed. A purpose of this monograph is to show how the success of Operation Provide Comfort can serve as a case study for future humanitarian operations.

Lieutenant Colonel Ronald J. Brown has been a member of Mobilization Training Unit (Historical) DC-7 since its inception in 1976. This unit, composed of specially skilled reservists, augments the activities of the Marine Corps Historical Center. Members include historians, artists, and museum experts. Each member is assigned a suitable historical project. Additionally, members practice fieldcraft and test division doctrine by participating in major exercises or deployments. However, the ultimate purpose of the MTU has been to provide historians for combat and contingency operations. It was envisioned that teams of historians and artists would be called to active duty and assigned to major Marine commands should such a contingency arise. This plan was first tested during Operation Urgent Fury (Grenada) and was validated during Operations Desert Storm and Provide Comfort.

Lieutenant Colonel Brown, a history teacher in civilian life, was an infantry officer in Vietnam. Formerly executive officer of MTU(HIST) DC-7, he is also the author of *A Brief History of the 14th Marines*. Lieutenant Colonel Brown was sent to Saudi Arabia in 1991, where he served as deputy command historian, then later, command historian, I Marine Expeditionary Force. He volunteered to cover Operation Provide Comfort. He was joined at Zakho, Iraq, by Colonel Peter M. "Mike" Gish, a retired reservist famous for his work as an artist. The results of their efforts were combined to produce this monograph.

This work is one of an experimental series about U.S. Marine operations in the Persian Gulf. Each monograph will be written by historians who actually participated in the events described. It is hoped that those who walked the ground and smelled the powder can provide insights sometimes lost when history is written from the official records many years later. It is recognized that these monographs will have informational gaps and lack the detailed panorama provided by the passage of time. Therefore, they are viewed as preliminary works that eventually will be incorporated into a more complete official history. Lieutenant Colonel Brown completed this monograph immediately after his return from the combat zone, before many official records had been submitted and prior to publication of most secondary works about Operation Provide Comfort. Therefore, in the interests of accuracy and objectivity, we welcome comments on this monograph from interested individuals.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "E. H. Simmons". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "E".

E. H. SIMMONS  
Brigadier General  
U.S. Marine Corps (Retired)  
Director of Marine Corps History and Museums

## Preface

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This monograph tells the story of the U.S. Marine deployment in support of Operation Provide Comfort from April to July 1991. As part of an international humanitarian intervention force, U.S. Marines played a major role in almost every aspect of Combined Task Force Provide Comfort: the 24th MEU (SOC) and CMAGTF 1-91 operated from forward bases at Silopi, Turkey, and throughout northern Iraq; Marines served as staff officers at Zakho, Silopi, and Incirlik; 24th MEU (SOC) rear parties remained with Phibron 8 at Iskenderum Harbor; and FMFEur (Designate) Marines provided long-distance direct support from Germany and England.

This monograph relies heavily on primary sources, mostly the author's observations and the first-hand testimony of participants, to capture the emotions and perceptions of the moment, what historians call the "climate of the times." No single source does a better job of capturing this climate than the art work of Colonel Peter M. "Mike" Gish, USMCR (Ret), whose paintings illustrate this monograph. Colonel Gish is a great campaigner, a good friend, and a fine artist.

My way into northern Iraq was smoothed by the careful ministrations of Major Charles V. Mugno and the assistance of Senior Master Sergeant Thomas L. Robb, USAF; Staff Sergeant Thomas A. Traylor, USAF; and Staff Sergeant Marie Y. Herrera, USAF, of the Combined Task Force History Office. In the field, Brigadier General Anthony C. Zinni, USMC, gave me excellent guidance and opened many doors. Colonel James L. Jones Jr., USMC, and the staff of the 24th MEU (SOC) made me a part of the team and were never too busy to help. My thanks also to Lieutenant Colonel Joseph A. Byrtus and the Black Knights of HMM-264 for their time and taxi service. Lieutenant Colonel Richard T. Kohl (MSSG-24) was a gracious host and a fine comrade whose company I enjoyed immensely. The staff of MSSG-24 was very helpful to me and the best friends one could have, especially Mongo, Jake, Harley Bob, the Rate, and Doctor No. Lieutenant Colonel Robert L. Bailey and Contingency MAGTF 1-91 enthusiastically provided everything I requested and more. It was a great surprise to find Captain Wayne O. Ouzts--an old pal from Desert Storm--at Incirlik, ready to buy a broke friend his first libatious refreshment after so many months in the desert.

I owe a special salute to the combat historians of MTU(HIST) DC-7 who served during Desert Storm: Colonel Charles J. Quilter II, Colonel Dennis P. Mroczkowski, Lieutenant Colonel Charles H. Cureton, Lieutenant Colonel Frank V. Sturgeon, and combat artist Lieutenant Colonel Keith A. McConnell.

Thanks also go to the fine staff at the Marine Corps Historical Center, without whose support this monograph would not have been possible: Brigadier General Edwin H. Simmons (Ret), Colonel Daniel M. Smith, Mr. Benis M. Frank, Dr. Jack Shulimson, Mr. Charles R. Smith, Major Charles D. Melson, Captain David A. Dawson, Mr. Danny J. Crawford, Mr. Robert V. Aquilina, Mrs. Ann A. Ferrante, Ms. Lena Kaljot, Ms. Regina Strother, Ms. Shelia

Phillips, Mrs. Meredith P. Hartley, Ms. Nancy C. Miller, Ms. Joyce C. Conyers, Sergeant Kevin L. Parker, Lance Corporal Joshua R. Ford, Captain Roberta E. Breden, Mr. Charles A. Wood, Mr. Richard A. Long, Mr. J. Michael Miller, Ms. Jennifer L. Gooding, Mr. William S. Hill, Ms. Patricia E. Morgan, Lieutenant Colonel Carmen Dragotta, Mr. Kenneth L. Smith-Christmas, Lieutenant Colonel Steven D. Hinds, Lieutenant Colonel Dale K. Johnson, Captain Joe Wells, Jr., Staff Sergeant John Hudson, Sergeant Michael S. Weldon, Sergeant Robert E. Clarke, Sergeant Andre L. Owens III, Lance Corporal James D. Lyles, Jr., and Staff Sergeant Randy Shouse. Special thanks to Colonel Allan R. Millett, Mr. Robert E. Struder, Mrs. Catherine A. Kerns and Ms. Evelyn A. Englander.

The author is solely responsible for the content of this text, including all opinions expressed and any factual errors. Comments, corrections, additional information, and other pertinent items are solicited from participants and interested readers.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ronald J. Brown', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ronald J. Brown

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Humanitarian Operations in Northern Iraq, 1991

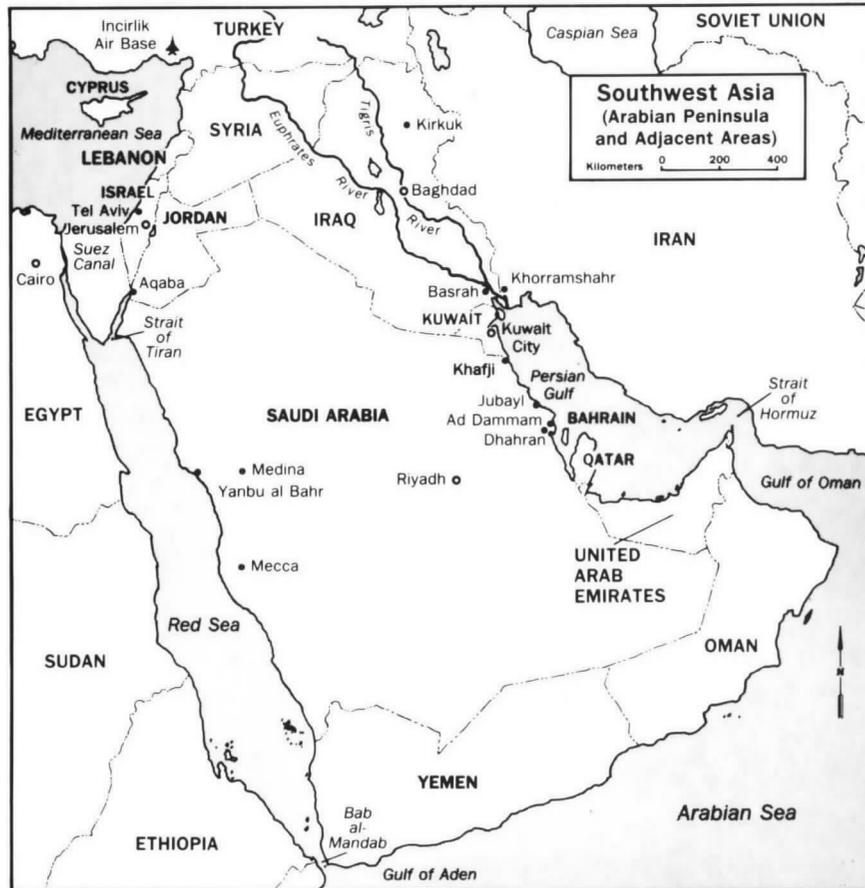
## With Marines in Operation Provide Comfort

### *Call To Action*

In early April 1991 the rugged, snow-capped mountains of northern Iraq were flooded by waves of refugees fleeing the wrath of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. In the aftermath of a failed revolt, more than two million people decided to leave Iraq. The resulting exodus was a dangerous journey toward an uncertain future. Many of the roads were mined, and helicopter gunships sometimes strafed the refugee columns that stretched as many for as 30 miles back from the border. Some fled in automobiles, others jammed on board buses. Open-bed trucks overflowed with humanity, tractors and donkey carts hauled families, and barefoot young mothers carried infants or dragged shell-shocked children as they trekked toward the chilly safety of the mountains. Most of these refugees were Kurds, an ethnic tribal minority that comprised one-fifth of Iraq's population and claimed northern Iraq as an ancestral home, Kurdistan.

After Desert Storm devastated Iraq's military, the Kurds tried to rid themselves of the yoke of Saddam's regime. At first, they easily drove disheartened Iraqi soldiers out of Kurdistan. A festival atmosphere prevailed and the towns and villages were filled with celebrating people. The revelry was premature. Saddam carefully reconstituted his army, used it to crush a Muslim revolt in the south, then turned his attention to the north. Saddam's troops soon overwhelmed the Kurdish Peshmerga ("Those Who Face Death") fighters whose rifles and pistols were no match for tanks, artillery, and helicopter gunships. One by one the cities of Kurdistan fell. On 31 March 1991, the city of Zakho, the final Kurdish bastion before the Turkish border, was bombarded by artillery fire and strafed by helicopter gunships. When Iraqi forces neared the town, rumors of an imminent chemical attack spread like wildfire. Most of Zakho's Kurds fled under cover of darkness and began a difficult four-day journey to the border. For them, to flee provided the only hope of survival.

The lucky and the rich among them escaped into Turkish or Iranian towns, but most could only retreat to the dubious safety of the mountains. Soon, the barren hillsides along Iraq's borders were peopled by thirsty, starving refugees living without shelter from the wind and bitter cold. Each night families faced sub-freezing temperatures with a single blanket for warmth. Hunger, exhaustion, disease, exposure, and dehydration were rampant. Water had to be ladled from muddy potholes, melted from snow, or dipped from contaminated streams. The situation was classified a "medical apocalypse" by the international organization Doctors Without Borders. Measles, cholera, typhus, and dysentery swept through the unsanitary camps. Health care was almost non-existent. Often one doctor served several thousand people, able to perform only the most rudimentary surgery, without anesthetic, and unable to provide proper medication.



More than 750,000 refugees were starving. Relief workers reported about 1,500 refugees were dying each day. By early April, two out of three people in northern Iraq were dislocated civilians. The situation seemed hopeless. In an act of desperation, Kurdish leader Moussad Barzani made an uncharacteristic plea for help when he publicly asked the United States for assistance.

At first, American President George W. Bush was reluctant to intervene, but he eventually reacted to public pressure to join relief efforts underway from Europe. The decision to commit American resources was made on 5 April 1991. Urgent orders for action flashed to American military units around the world. The first Marines to be alerted were 19 parachute riggers from the Air Delivery Platoon, 1st Landing Support Battalion, 1st Force Service Support Group at Camp Pendleton, California. On the island of Sardinia in the Mediterranean, the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) [MEU (SOC)] was ordered to sail for the eastern Mediterranean. On the Pacific island of Okinawa, a contingency Marine air-ground task force (MAGTF) was created from the 3d Force Service Support Group (FSSG). At Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, members of an unmanned aerial vehicle detachment from the 2d Remotely Piloted Vehicle (RPV) Company, 2d Surveillance, Reconnaissance, and Intelligence Group (SRIG), dumped desert sand out of their seabags and mounted

out for the Middle East less than three weeks after returning home from Operation Desert Storm. Ten Marines from the 4th Civil Affairs Group (CAG), a Reserve unit from Washington, D.C., turned around and flew back to the Middle East instead of being released from active duty. In Saudi Arabia, Marine reservists volunteered to stay in the Persian Gulf to assist the Kurds rather than return home as scheduled. From the four corners of the globe, Marines embarked to support Operation Provide Comfort, soon to become the largest humanitarian relief operation in Marine Corps history.<sup>1</sup>

### *Joint Task Force Provide Comfort*

In response to President Bush's expressed desire for immediate action to assist dislocated civilians in northern Iraq, General John R. Galvin, USA, Commander-in-Chief Europe (CinCEur), ordered the formation of an American military force to support humanitarian relief efforts. On 5 April 1991, Major General James L. Jamerson, USAF, was detached from his duties as Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, U.S. Air Force Europe (USAFE), to serve as the commander of a joint task force--tentatively named Provide Comfort--created to assist Iraqi refugees. Military aircraft were ordered to deliver relief-related items and medical units were prepared to deploy to refugee camps in eastern Turkey. General Jamerson's initial tasking was a two-phase operation: the first phase



Photograph courtesy of MajGen Anthony C. Zinni, USMC  
*MajGen James L. Jamerson, USAF, and BGen Anthony C. Zinni, USMC, stand at Incirlik Air Base, Adana, Turkey. MajGen Jamerson was the first commanding general and BGen Zinni was his deputy when Joint Task Force Provide Comfort was formed in April. They assumed similar roles during Operation Provide Comfort II in July when this photograph was taken.*

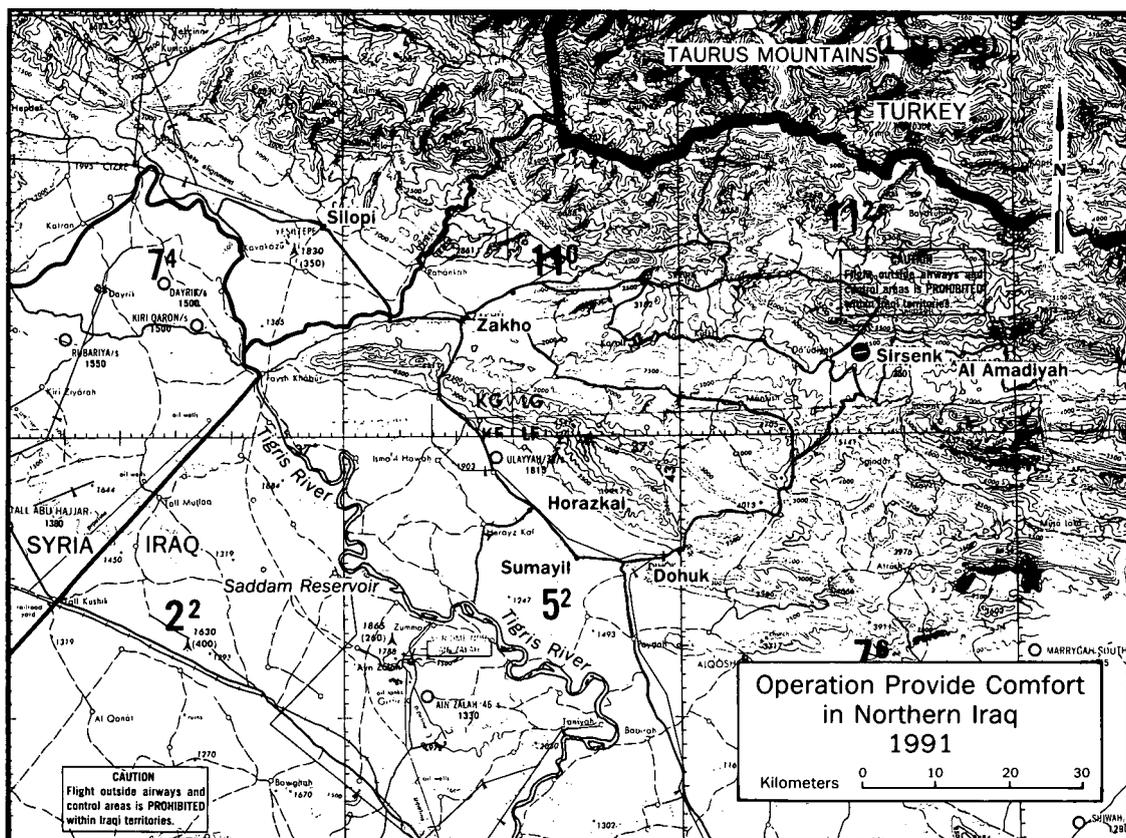
called for delivery of emergency relief, the second was to be a sustained effort to deliver humanitarian assistance.<sup>2</sup>

Joint Task Force Provide Comfort deployed to Incirlik Air Base at Adana, Turkey, on 6 April 1991. General Jamerson's first briefing painted a gloomy picture. The refugee camps were scattered across some of the most inaccessible terrain in the world. Refugees were virtually clinging to cliffs. There was inadequate shelter, no potable water, little food, poor sanitation, and limited medical care. Hard-pressed Kurdish families often faced the difficult choice of saving either their aged parents or their young children because there was not enough food and water to go around. The relief needs were so massive that no single international agency had the resources to support an adequate effort. To make matters worse, all this misery existed in a politically complex, potentially hostile environment.<sup>3</sup>

The initial Provide Comfort deployment was a scaled-down package made up of the lead elements of the USAF 39th Special Operations Wing (SOW). The remainder of the joint task force was assembled from units in England, Germany, and Italy. They included a headquarters, follow-on echelons of the 39th SOW, and the 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) [SFG (A)]. The command component was Joint Task Force Provide Comfort Headquarters made up of detachments from USAFE Headquarters; the 7440th Composite Wing; Headquarters, Joint Special Operations Task Force (later redesignated Joint Task Force Alpha); and a Patriot missile battery.

Brigadier General Richard W. Potter, USA, was temporarily released from his post as Commanding General, Special Operations Command Europe (SOCEur), to lead a joint special operations task force to support Operation Provide Comfort. This unit was first labeled "Express Care."<sup>4</sup> Joint Task Force Express Care consisted of a headquarters detachment, the 39th SOW, and the 1st Battalion, 10th SFG (A). The headquarters detachment was provided by SOCEur at Bad Toelz, Germany. The aviation component was the 39th SOW from Rhein Main, Germany, and Woodbridge, England. The 39th SOW was comprised of the 7th Special Operations Squadron flying Lockheed MC-130 Talons, the 21st Special Operations Squadron flying Sikorsky MH-53J Pave Low deep-penetration search and rescue helicopters, and the 67th Special Operations Squadron flying HC-130 aerial refuelers. Its ground organization included command, administration, ordnance, maintenance, supply, and support personnel.

The ground component of Joint Task Force Express Care was the 1st Battalion, 10th SFG (A). The Army's Special Forces were experienced, highly skilled, unconventional warriors specially trained to work and live with indigenous populations in remote areas. About 200 Special Forces soldiers were assigned to support Provide Comfort. These units included headquarters, combat intelligence, service, support, signals, and tactical detachments. The 1st Battalion, 10th SFG (A) had one C-Team (command group), three B-Teams (control detachments), and 12 A-Teams (operational units). The men of the Special Forces were called the "Green Berets" by most Americans because of their distinctive headgear, however, during Operation Provide Comfort most



Special Forces soldiers in the field opted to wear soft-cloth, ranger-style fatigue caps. Ironically, the military forces wearing green berets in northern Iraq were the French, British, and Dutch Marines.

The first Special Forces A-Teams were inserted into the border camps on 13 April 1991. They were air-lifted into the mountains, located the refugee sanctuaries, then prepared them to receive assistance. A-Teams were composed of a command element and about 10 specialists above the rank of sergeant, each an expert in weapons, communications, medicine, engineering, or demolitions. These small detachments were lightly equipped, air-deployable, self-reliant combat teams designed for sustained independent field operations. During Express Care, their mission was to organize refugee camps, receive and assist supply distribution, and act as liaison between the Kurds and other allied forces.

### *Express Care*

The immediate task facing JTF Provide Comfort was to bring emergency relief to stop the dying and suffering. Implied in this mission was locating the refugees, identifying their most pressing needs, and building an efficient distribution system. This initial effort, the first stage of Operation Provide Comfort, was labeled "Express Care."

The first humanitarian relief air operations were conducted on 8 April 1991. Six Lockheed C-130 two-seat, four-turboprop, medium-lift cargo aircraft departed Incirlik carrying food (dehydrated combat rations called MREs, an acronym for the designation Meals, Ready-to-Eat), blankets, and water.<sup>5</sup> This first flight delivered 27 tons of supplies using container delivery system bundles weighing about 1,000 pounds each. Support sorties were flown by KC-135 aerial refuelers, RC-135 reconnaissance "snoopers," EC-130 electronic jammers, and E-3 AWACS command planes. General Jamerson reported that 3,022 people from four American services supported these drops: 687 from the task force; 399 Desert Storm personnel, and 1,936 permanent party personnel. These first air drops took place within 36 hours of JTF Provide Comfort's formation.<sup>6</sup>

Doctor Marcel Bonnot from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs observed the first airdrop while visiting a refugee camp near Uludere, Turkey. He noted that there were desperate shortages of food and water, that sanitation and personal hygiene were practically non-existent, and that diarrhea, skin diseases, and infections were common. The arrival of the first aircraft was a dramatic and emotional scene. The noisy camp hushed when the sound of arriving airplanes was heard. At first, many refugees rushed for cover, thinking the humming engines heralded a reappearance of Saddam's air force. However, when no bombs began falling, eyes focused upward and followed a lumbering C-130 as it slowly circled the camp.

A roll of toilet paper thrown from the plane tested wind direction. Suddenly, a series of large objects dropped from the plane's tail section. The fearful Kurds were astounded when gigantic white parachutes blossomed and bundles of food floated toward earth. The hungry people they mobbed the drop zone and each scrambled to capture one of the small brown plastic MRE packets. Despite the confusion on the ground, the lack of a distribution system, and poor understanding about the proper use of MRE rations, the Kurds in the camp realized that someone was helping them.<sup>7</sup>

British and French aircraft joined the American airlift the second day. Australia, New Zealand, and Italy flew supplies to Incirlik. Denmark, Luxembourg, Japan, Spain, and Belgium flew supplies into Diyarbakir. A German composite helicopter force commanded by Brigadier General Frederick W. Ehmann conducted independent relief operations from Diyarbakir using Sikorsky CH-53D Sea Stallion heavy-lift helicopters. Aircrews bringing these gifts of life flew in marginal weather conditions--low clouds, thunderstorms, and snow flurries--while navigating through narrow valleys to deliver their payloads to drop zones on the sides of steep mountains. Operations became more efficient as time passed and by the sixth day the daily delivery rose from 27 tons to 284.6 tons.

The initial phase of Operation Provide Comfort was underway, but it was apparent much more needed to be done. Joint Task Force Provide Comfort identified 12 major camps near the Iraqi border. Each camp had at least 40,000 people! Every camp suffered food and medical shortages. Official estimates placed the number of dead at about 600 each day, but observers on the scene

guessed the number to be about triple the official tally. Made aware of the problem by the international media, sympathetic countries pledged money, supplies, equipment, and troops to support the relief effort. As a result, General Jamerson's mission was expanded from 10-day emergency aid to 30-day sustainment operations, and then was later extended to no less than a 90-day deployment.

### *The First Marines Arrive*

The first Marine contribution to Operation Provide Comfort was a detachment of parachute riggers from the Air Delivery Platoon, 1st Landing Support Battalion, 1st FSSG at Camp Pendleton, California. Although just returned to the United States after a tough eight-month stint in the desert of Saudi Arabia, they repacked their well-worn sea bags and departed Norton Air Base for Incirlik on 8 April, less than 48 hours after returning home. At Incirlik, the detachment was attached to the 21st Theater Army Area Command's 7th Special Operations Command. The Marines labored side-by-side with other service personnel for almost three months, often working "eight-hours on/eight-hours off," a round-the-clock shifts. They built and loaded more than 350 pallets daily, stacked with food, bottled water, baby food, coats, blankets, and tents. Parachutes were attached and the pallets were placed onto aircraft for delivery to the refugees. Despite the hardships, these hard-working Marines tackled this difficult assignment with enthusiasm and were later commended for a job well done.<sup>8</sup>

### *Combined Task Force Provide Comfort*

The decision to expand Provide Comfort's mission from relief to sustainment, coupled with a growing international military and civilian presence, required structural changes in the task force organization. On 9 April 1991, Joint Task Force Provide Comfort was redesignated Combined Task Force Provide Comfort in recognition of international cooperation. Lieutenant General John M. "Shali" Shalikhvili, USA, assumed command of Combined Task Force Provide Comfort on 17 April. General Jamerson became the new deputy commander and Marine Brigadier General Anthony C. Zinni became the new chief-of-staff. Combined Task Force Provide Comfort eventually numbered more than 20,000 allied troops divided into two ground task forces, a logistics support unit, and an air contingent.

Provide Comfort's ground elements were designated Joint Task Force Alpha and Joint Task Force Bravo. Logistics units were either assigned to, or closely coordinated with, the Combined Support Command (CSC) at Silopi. Aircraft were provided by all four U.S. armed services and each multinational force. The Marines provided a composite helicopter squadron; the U.S. Navy furnished a carrier air wing and a combat support helicopter squadron; the U.S. Army brought two attack helicopter squadrons, an assault helicopter squadron, a



Photograph courtesy of MajGen Anthony C. Zinni, USMC  
*LtGen John M. Shalikhshvili, CG CTF Provide Comfort, meets with Iraqi BGen Danoun Nashwan.*

transport helicopter squadron, and an aerial medical evacuation company; the U.S. Air Force had a fighter squadron, a ground attack squadron, and a fighter/attack squadron. Each of the other allied forces brought its own aircraft. Not part of the military task force, but closely associated with it, was a host of international relief agencies and volunteer organizations.

### *Joint Task Force Alpha*

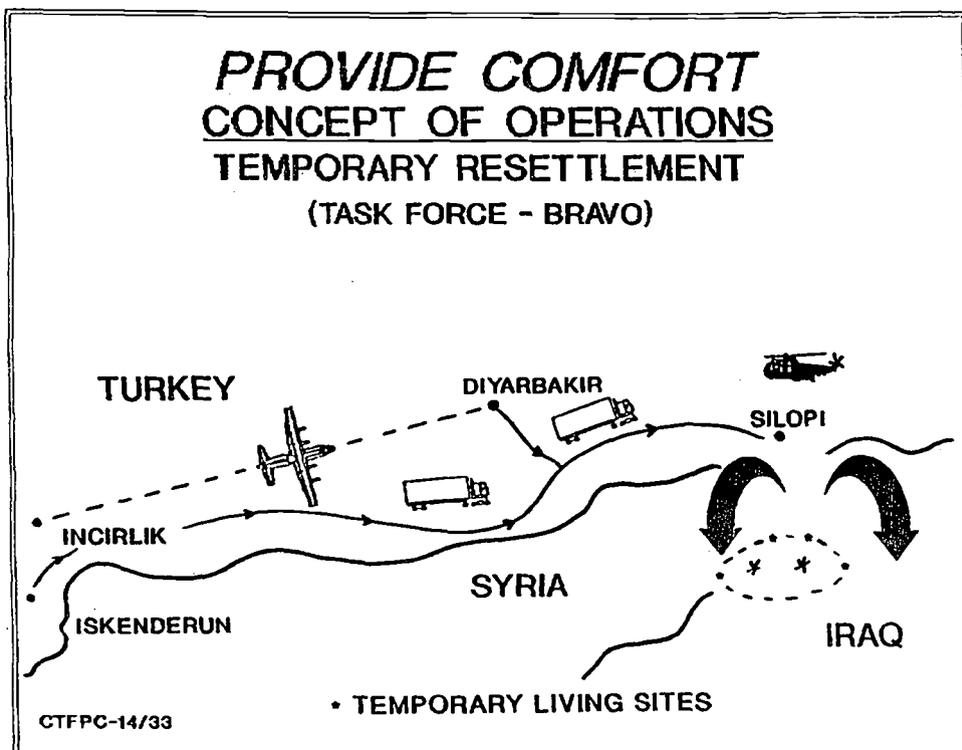
General Potter's Express Care was redesignated Joint Task Force Alpha (JTF-A) on 17 April and was given the missions of providing immediate relief, improving the camps, and encouraging dislocated civilians to return to Iraq. The ground element of the task force was the 1st Battalion, 10th SFG (A), supported by the USAF 39th SOW and the helicopters of the 24th MEU (SOC) Forward. The 4th Psychological Operations Group and the U.S. Army's Civil Affairs Command supplied assistance teams. In late April and early May, the remainder of the 10th SFG (A), the British 40th Commando, Royal Marines, and Italian Alpine troops joined JTF-A.

There were many tasks implicit in JTF-A's mission. A census of the displaced civilians living in the area had to be made so that their sustainment needs could be assessed. A more efficient forward resupply system had to be

implemented. The camps had to be organized, distribution points established, basic medical care provided, and lines of communication opened. Humanitarian service support bases were needed, ideally ones that could be supplied by trucks, transport airplanes, or railway instead of helicopters. Combat search and rescue had to be available to support aerial operations. Finally, the entire system had to be ready to be handed over to civilian agencies as quickly as possible.<sup>9</sup>

Major General Jay M. Garner, USA, formerly Deputy Commander, V Corps, and once an enlisted Marine, was named to lead Task Force Encourage Hope, later redesignated Joint Task Force Bravo (JTF-B). Colonel John O. Easton, a Marine reservist, was transferred from his duties as commanding officer of the 4th CAG and appointed General Garner's chief of staff on 23 April. Easton, a lawyer from Fairfax, Virginia, had been a Marine platoon leader in Vietnam in 1967-68, made a Mediterranean cruise in 1969 with the Sixth Fleet's Marine landing force, then served as a recruiter and instructor before leaving active duty. A graduate of Baylor University, Easton then attended law school at George Mason University before beginning to practice law in the Washington, D.C. area. He had just returned from duty with the I Marine Expeditionary Force in Saudi Arabia before joining Provide Comfort.

Joint Task Force Bravo's missions were to establish temporary camps inside northern Iraq and to provide security for the returning refugees. The tasks implicit in this mission were to select and secure likely camp sites, to deploy construction personnel and materials, and to develop water points and sanitation





Photograph courtesy of MajGen Jay M. Garner, USA  
*Marine Cols James L. Jones, Jr., and John O. Easton meet with MajGen Jay M. Garner at JTF-Bravo Headquarters in Zakho. Col Easton, a Marine Reservist, was commanding officer of the 4th Civil Affairs Group before becoming JTF-B Chief of Staff.*

areas. An important function was to involve the Kurdish leaders in the selection and development of the camps.

The initial ground force assigned to JTF-B was the 24th MEU (SOC). Its mission was to build the resettlement camps while providing security and relief assistance. It did not take the Marines long to go into action. A platoon from Company E, 2d Battalion, 8th Marines was flown to Silopi and became the Marine forward security element on 16 April. The rest of Company E, as well as a combat engineer platoon, a combat service support detachment (CSSD), and additional aviation support personnel were bused to Silopi the same day, but did not arrive for almost 36 hours. On 17 April, MEU Service Support Group (MSSG) 24 began unloading the ships of Amphibious Squadron 8 at Iskenderun Harbor while moving combat power inland as rapidly as possible. By 19 April 1991, most of the 24th MEU (SOC) had moved to Silopi and the Marines prepared for the next phase of Operation Provide Comfort, the movement into Kurdistan.<sup>10</sup>



Painting by Col Peter M. "Mike" Gish, USMCR  
*The color, pattern, and style of this Kurd's jama dama turban, tight-fitting jacket, pestern sash, and baggy trousers indicate tribal and territorial associations.*

### *International Relief Efforts*

Operation Provide Comfort was a unique international effort responding to the tremendous suffering of innocent people. Countries around the world sent military forces, civilian volunteers, government workers, and relief supplies. Thirty-nine civilian relief agencies supported Operation Provide Comfort, 12 countries sent military forces, and 36 countries sent money, supplies, or relief aid. More than two dozen ships carrying relief supplies landed every week. Tents, blankets, clothing, and medicine flooded into Turkey where much of it might have remained to spoil had it not been for the immediate availability of management, labor, and transportation supplied by international military forces and civilian relief agencies.

Although reluctant to permanently admit stateless refugees, Turkish President Tugrut Ozal consented to provide limited assistance to dislocated Iraqi civilians. By mid-April, Turkey was swamped with fleeing refugees and both sides of the border were crowded with starving people who overwhelmed Turkey's capacity to assist. With a humanitarian crisis on his hands, President Ozal approved a United Nations plan to move the refugees back into northern Iraq. Turkey provided operating locations at Incirlik, Mersin, Iskenderun, Diyarbakir, Batman, Silopi, and Yuksekova. It dedicated aircraft and railway lines to send relief supplies forward. Turkish security forces maintained order and provided medical care in the temporary mountain camps. Fuel, building materials, food stuffs, and clothing were provided by Turkey. Individual Turks provided carpentry, sanitation, and transportation services. Operation Provide Comfort could not have been conducted had it not been for Turkish support.

On 12 April, the government of Turkey approved an increased flow of materials to the refugees and cut the "red tape" for incoming relief supplies. Materials arrived by air at Incirlik and Diyarbakir, and by sea at Iskenderun and Mersin. These much-needed supplies were sent forward by ground transportation to humanitarian service support bases (HSSBs). These bases were remote staging areas for receiving, preparing, and transloading goods destined for refugee relief by air or land. Two bases were planned, one at Silopi near the tri-border confluence and another at Yuksekova near the Iran-Iraq border.<sup>11</sup>

Civilian relief agencies participating in Provide Comfort included the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Program, the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Red Cross, the Turkish Red Crescent, the League of the Red Crescent, the American Red Cross, the Italian Red Cross, the Red Cross of Malta, Medical Volunteers International, Doctors Without Borders, the International Medical Corps, Doctors of the World, Catholic Relief Services, the World Council of Churches, the Mideast Church Council, the World Relief Foundation, Cooperative for American Relief Everywhere (CARE), the United Kingdom Tear Fund, the International Rescue Committee, Samaritan's Pulse, Swiss Disaster Relief, the Jordanian Red Crescent, World Vision, Direct Relief International, Christian Outreach, Save the Children Foundation, Irish Concern, International Action

Against Hunger, a Swiss Charity Team, Equilibre, Oxfam, German Bergwacht, the Swiss National Rescue Team, European Helo Mission, the German Red Cross, Concern International, Danish/Norwegian Church Aid, and Hospitaldienst Souveraender.<sup>12</sup>

### *A New Mission*

Three months after entering the Mediterranean the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) [MEU (SOC)], was bogged down in the mud on the island of Sardinia. Amphibious Exercise Sardinia 1-91 commenced at 0518 on 7 April. A short time later, the initial landing waves of BLT 2/8 were on the shore slowly crawling through the mire toward their assigned objectives. Company F crossed the beach in assault amphibian vehicles, Company G conducted an air assault, and Company E landed using motorized rafts. Lurking in the hills, Company H played the role of defending threat forces. At sea "on call" landing waves were preparing to debark when the communications center on board Amphibious Squadron 8's (PhibRon 8) flagship, the helicopter assault ship *Guadalcanal* (LPH 7), received an urgent dispatch.

Mediterranean Amphibious Ready Group 1-91 (MARG 1-91) was ordered to stop the exercise, to reembark Landing Force Sixth Fleet (LF6F) immediately,



Photograph courtesy of MajGen Jay M. Garner, USA  
*MajGen Jay M. Garner, USA, CG, JTF-B, discusses Operation Provide Comfort with the leaders of the 24th MEU (SOC) on board the USS Guadalcanal (LPH 7). The Marines are, from left, Col James L. Jones, Jr. (CO, 24th MEU [SOC]), LtCol Tony L. Corwin (CO, BLT 2/8), and LtCol Joseph A. Byrtus, Jr. (CO, HMM-264).*

then proceed to the Turkish port of Iskenderun in the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>13</sup> The 24th MEU (SOC) had been ordered to support Operation Provide Comfort. Phibron 8 was slated to remain on station just off shore. The signal to halt the exercise was greeted with skepticism at first, but eventually the backbreaking job of cleaning and reloading equipment began. The Marines worked through the night and into the next morning. On 10 April 1991, MARG 1-91 set sail for Iskenderun. A common training exercise had unexpectedly become a complex "real world" operation.<sup>14</sup>

### *The 24th MEU (SOC)*

Marine units are organized, trained, and equipped to provide combined arms forces to the fleet. In order to do this best, tactical units are united to form Marine air-ground task forces (MAGTFs). These MAGTFs are self-sufficient combat teams that unite combat, combat support, combat service support, and aviation units under a single commander. They are powerful, flexible, amphibious, expeditionary forces capable of independent (single service), joint (multiservice), or combined (multinational) operations. They are prepared to strike anywhere in the world, ready to fight on land, at sea, or in the air.

In 1991, every MAGTF, regardless of size, had a common structure that included four elements: a command element, a ground combat element, an air combat element, and a combat service support element. The three most common MAGTFs were the Marine expeditionary force (MEF), the Marine expeditionary brigade (MEB), and the Marine expeditionary unit (MEU). Contingency Marine air-ground task forces (CMAGTFs) were sometimes created to accomplish special missions.<sup>15, 16</sup>

The MAGTFs most commonly deployed to forward areas were MEUs. There were six permanent MEUs, three on the U.S. east coast and three on the west coast. At any given time, two MEUs were forward deployed, two others were in training, and the remaining two were either standing up, standing down, or in transit. While MEU headquarters were permanent organizations, the units assigned to them rotated on a 15-month cycle (nine months stateside and six months deployed). A normal deployment included the "work up," a six-month training and familiarization program that welded separate MAGTF units into a unified combat-ready force; a six-month deployment, known as a "pump"; and the return trip which included the turnover, wash down, and homebound transit.

The Landing Force Sixth Fleet (LF6F) in April 1991 was the 24th MEU (SOC). The designation "Special Operations Capable" was never granted until a unit successfully completed a special training syllabus, had been rigorously tested, and was certified to perform 18 special missions: amphibious raids, limited objective attacks, non-combatant evacuations, show of force, reinforcement operations, security operations, training foreign military, civil action, deception operations, fire support coordination, counter-intelligence, initial terminal guidance, signal intelligence-electronic warfare, tactical recovery



*A CH-46 Sea Knight helicopter of HMM-264 takes off from the flight deck of the amphibious assault ship Guadalcanal (LPH 7) as another Sea Knight remains on the deck during vertical replenishment operations during Operation Provide Comfort.*

of personnel and aircraft (TRAP), clandestine reconnaissance, military operations in urban terrain (MOUT), special demolitions operations, and in-extremis hostage rescues.

Marine expeditionary units sailed on board the ships of U.S. Navy amphibious squadrons which were designated "amphibious ready groups" (ARGs) when deployed to forward areas with Marines embarked. Most ARGs consisted of four or five ships, usually including an amphibious assault ship (LHA or LPH), amphibious dock landing ships (LPD or LSD), and some tank landing ships (LSTs).<sup>17</sup> However, the demands of the crisis in the Persian Gulf changed that. In January 1991, the 4th MEB, the 5th MEB, and the 13th MEU (SOC) were in the Persian Gulf on board more than three dozen amphibious ships. This caused a "ship crunch," so Mediterranean Amphibious Ready Group 1-91 (MARG 1-91) had to sail shorthanded.

Commodore (Captain, USN) Dean Turner's three-ship Amphibious Squadron 8 (Phibron 8) included the amphibious assault ship *Guadalcanal* (LPH 7), the amphibious transport dock *Austin* (LPD 4), and the amphibious cargo ship *Charleston* (LKA 113).<sup>18</sup> The ship shortage forced careful planning, detailed loading, and use of surge quartering, but still vital equipment and personnel had to be left behind.<sup>19</sup> The 24th MEU (SOC) was forced to sail without tanks. Motor transport assets were restricted. MSSG-24 had to leave critical support items and equipment behind. No fixed-wing aircraft were in the aviation package. Only one ship could conduct a traditional amphibious assault using amphibian tractors and surface landing craft. The lack of LSTs meant there was no over-the-beach unloading capability for vehicles or other heavy equipment and logistics over the shore (LOTS) operations would strain an already short-handed combat service support element.

### *The Command Element*

The 24th MEU (SOC) consisted of the 24th MEU Headquarters, Battalion Landing Team 2/8 (BLT 2/8), Composite Helicopter Squadron 264 (HMM-264), and MEU Service Support Group 24 (MSSG-24). The commanding officer was Colonel James L. Jones, Jr. Colonel Jones had strong Marine Corps roots, as the son of a legendary World War II Marine Reservist who retired as a brigadier general, and the nephew of a retired Marine lieutenant general.<sup>20</sup> He graduated from Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., in 1967, served in Vietnam as a rifle platoon leader and company commander, then commanded Company H, 2d Battalion, 9th Marines on Okinawa when that unit was one of the contingency forces for non-combatant evacuation operations in Southeast Asia. This experience came in handy during Operation Provide Comfort. Later in his career, Jones commanded the 3d Battalion, 9th Marines. His staff duties included five years as a Senate liaison officer and a tour as senior aide to the Commandant of the Marine Corps.<sup>21</sup> His partially European upbringing and mastery of foreign languages made him an appropriate choice as the commander of 24th MEU (SOC) during Operation Provide Comfort.

The command element included the executive officer, Lieutenant Colonel Ralph C. Morse; the personnel officer, Captain Dewey G. "Guy" Jordan; the intelligence officer, Major Richard J. "Rick" Raftery; the operations officer, Lieutenant Colonel Thomas C. "Tom" Linn; the logistics officer, Major Michael D. "Mike" Boyd; and Sergeant Major William E. Hatcher.

The existing 24th MEU headquarters was reinforced by detachments from 2d Air and Naval Gunfire Liaison Company (2d ANGLICO), 2d Force Reconnaissance Company, 2d Radio Battalion, 8th Communications Battalion, a force imagery interpretation unit (FIU), and a sensor control and management platoon (SCAMP). There were also counter-intelligence, interpreter-interrogator, and terrain analysis support teams. In Iraq, an unmanned aerial vehicle detachment was attached to the 24th MEU (SOC) and additional ANGLICO firepower control teams were attached to allied units.

### *BLT 2/8*

Battalion Landing Team 2/8 was the MEU's ground combat element (GCE). It was composed of the 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, reinforced by antitank, reconnaissance, artillery, combat engineer, assault amphibian, and light armored infantry units. The battalion included a headquarters and service company, four rifle companies, and a weapons company. These organic components and their attached units gave the landing team a lot of fire power: 8 M29E1 81mm mortars (range 4,500 meters); 12 M224 60mm mortars (range 1,500 meters); 8 M270A1 tube-launched, optically tracked, wire command link, guided antitank missiles (range 3,000 meters); 24 M-47 Dragon man-portable antiarmor weapons (range 1,000 meters); 31 SMAW shoulder-launched multi-purpose assault weapons (range 250 meters); 10 40mm machine guns (range 500 meters); 4 M101A1

105mm towed howitzers (range 11,000 meters); 4 M198 155mm towed howitzers (range 23,000 meters); 13 assault amphibious vehicles; and 8 light armored vehicles (LAVs).<sup>22</sup>

The commanding officer was Lieutenant Colonel Tony L. Corwin, a veteran infantry officer. He had been with BLT 2/8 for more than a year and had been executive officer during its 1989 Mediterranean cruise. Colonel Corwin assumed command of the 2d Battalion, 8th Marines at Camp Lejeune on 12 January 1990. The executive officer was Lieutenant Colonel John J. Hogan III. The senior enlisted Marine was Sergeant Major William G. Creech. The personnel officer was First Lieutenant James W. Bierman, the intelligence officer was Captain Peter H. Devlin, the operations officer was Captain Dennis M. McNulty, and the logistics officer was Captain Raymond B. Joseph. Headquarters and Service Company was initially commanded by First Lieutenant Demetrius Bellizaire, then later by Captain Charles J. Lesko, Jr. Company E was commanded by Captain Peter J. Streng, Company F by Captain William F. McEvoy, Company G by Captain Christopher U. Mulholland, and Company H by First Lieutenant Allie A. Hutchinson, Jr. The BLT artillery was Battery H, 3d Battalion, 10th Marines (Reinforced), commanded by Captain William P. Holowecki; the 3d Platoon, Company D, 2d Assault Amphibian Battalion was commanded by First Lieutenant Michael L. Kuhn; Detachment 24, 2d Light Armored Infantry Battalion was led by First Lieutenant James F. Desy; the 2d Platoon, Company C, 2d Combat Engineer Battalion was led by First Lieutenant Joel B. Baker; and the 1st Platoon, Company C, 2d Reconnaissance Battalion was commanded by Captain Peter F. Owen.

### *The Black Knights of HMM-264*

The aviation combat element, appropriately called the ACE, was Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 264 (Reinforced), known as HMM-264. The squadron was nicknamed the Black Knights, its emblem was a black chess piece superimposed on a red and gold checkerboard, its motto was "Checkmate," and its mascot was a cartoon horse--a spinoff of the squadron's chess knight symbol--called "Mr. Ed."

The squadron deployed as a composite unit, merging organic and outside assets under a single commander. This task organization allowed HMM-264 to best utilize its aircraft and enhanced its ability to perform a wide variety of missions. In July 1990, the squadron joined utility, attack, heavy-lift, and ground support assets to become the aviation combat element for Landing Force Sixth Fleet Deployment 1-91. In addition to the assets of HMM-264, the composite squadron also incorporated Marines and equipment from Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 461 (HMH-461), Marine Light/Attack Helicopter Squadron 167 (HMLA-167), Marine Air Control Group 28 (MACG-28), 2d Low Altitude Antiaircraft Defense Battalion (2d LAAD), and Marine Wing Service Support Squadron 272 (MWSS-272).



*This is the insignia of HMM-264, the helicopter squadron assigned to 24th MEU (SOC), during Operation Provide Comfort. The squadron nickname is "Black Knights" and the motto is "Checkmate."*

The commanding officer was Lieutenant Colonel Joseph A. Byrtus, Jr. He had been commissioned in 1972 and earned the gold wings of a naval aviator in 1973. Colonel Byrtus had spent most of his flying career with East Coast units. He also served as a maintenance officer, attended Forward Air Controller School and Jump School during a tour with 2d ANGLICO, and familiarized himself with Soviet tactics and weapons during a staff tour with U.S. Central Command. In 1988 he became the executive officer of HMLA-167, then assumed command of HMM-264 on 16 March 1990.

The squadron had 61 officers, 289 enlisted Marines, and 8 Navy personnel. The executive officer was Lieutenant Colonel David L. Ramsey. The squadron staff was: operations officer, Major Richard J. Crush; intelligence officer, Captain George Taber; maintenance officer, Major John W. Cowan; logistics officer, Captain Richard T. McFadden; administrative officer, Major Richard A. Mehaffey; and safety officer, Major David T. Kerrick. The Black Knights' top enlisted man was Sergeant Major Francisco Deleon.

As a composite squadron, HMM-264 used a variety of aircraft to accomplish different tasks. It included heavy-lift cargo helicopters, medium-lift transport helicopters, attack helicopters, and light utility helicopters. These aircraft displayed some of the finest nose art in the Marine Corps and were given names like "American Pie," "Saddam's Revenge," or "Warlock." Composite squadrons often included a detachment of fixed-wing McDonnell Douglas AV-8B Harrier II "jump jets," but ship space limitations prohibited this on this Mediterranean cruise. Lieutenant Colonel Byrtus had operational control over AV-8Bs (VMA-542), KC-130s (VMGR-252), and OV-10s (VMO-1) during the training cycle, however, during the deployment fixed-wing air support was provided by Navy Carrier Air Wing 8's McDonnell Douglas F-14 Tomcats, McDonnell Douglas

F/A-18 Hornets, Grumman A-6 Intruders, EA-6 Prowlers, Lockheed S-3 Vikings, and Grumman E-2 Hawkeyes on board the *Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN 71). Another source of air support was the U.S. Navy's Mediterranean-based Combat Support Helicopter Squadron 4 (HC-4) from Sigonella, Italy, which flew Sikorsky CH-53E Super Stallion heavy-lift cargo helicopters.

The mainstay of HMM-264 was the Boeing Vertol CH-46E Sea Knight. It was a shipborne, twin-engine, tandem-rotor, medium-lift transport helicopter. Although the CH-46 was officially named the Sea Knight, most Marines called these aircraft "Frogs" because of the dark green paint and squatly appearing high-nose/low-tail posture on the ground. In tactical situations the crew consisted of two pilots, a crew chief, and a door gunner. A Sea Knight was supposed to fly at a cruising speed of 158 miles per hour with a ceiling of about 9,000 feet and a combat radius of about 75 nautical miles, but age had taken a toll. Safety factors, terrain, and weather, and extended use, severely limited the performance of these old work horses during Operation Provide Comfort. So many of HMM-246's Frogs had patches covering combat scars from Vietnam, it was a squadron joke that a pilot couldn't fly a "Forty-six" unless the aircraft was older than he was.<sup>23</sup> Service-life extension programs added years of operational usefulness and marginally increased capabilities, but the CH-46s were ready for replacement by more capable aircraft in 1991.<sup>24</sup>



*Two Marine CH-53E Super Stallion heavy-lift cargo helicopters prepare to lift off the deck of the Guadalcanal (LPH 7) in Iskenderun Harbor. An AH-1T Bell Sea Cobra attack helicopter sits in the left foreground.*



Photograph by the author

*"Leroy Three Two" was a UH-1N two-pilot, twin-engine, utility helicopter. Although officially named "Iroquois," UH-1s were always called "Hueys," a nickname first used during the Vietnam conflict.*

Sikorsky CH-53E Super Stallions were the most capable heavy-lift cargo helicopters in the free world. They had three jet engines, a single main rotor, and a four-man crew. They could carry 55 Marines internally and sling a 16-ton external load. These workhorses were able to recover any airframe in the Navy-Marine Corps inventory. They flew 172 miles per hour, had a practical operational ceiling of 10,000 feet, and a ferry range of 1,000 nautical miles. Nose-mounted aerial refueling probes made the Super Stallions valuable as long-range transports and cargo carriers. Commonly called "Echoes" or "Fifty-threes," they provided the only helicopter lift for M198 howitzers and light armored vehicles. The four Super Stallions assigned to HMM-264 came from Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 461 (HMH-461) at New River, North Carolina. Although notorious for leaking fluid, these rugged birds were dependable cargo haulers that carried heavy loads over long distances. During a flight from Silopi to Incirlik on board a U.S. Navy CH-53, an alarmed civilian passenger alerted the crew chief to a hydraulic leak. The Marines on board burst into laughter at the veteran flier's unconcerned reply: "Be glad, lady! It means there's some fluid still in there."

Two Bell-made aircraft comprised the squadron's light aircraft contingent. The Bell UH-1N Iroquois, familiar to most Americans as the "Huey," was a twin-engine, single-rotor utility helicopter. Two pilots flew it at a cruise speed of 125 miles per hour, with a ceiling of 10,000 feet, and a range of about 200 nautical miles. The Huey was primarily used for passenger transport, command and control, and reconnaissance missions, but flew medical evacuation flights when needed. The squadron's other light helicopters were among the stars of

Marine aviation, AH-1T Bell Sea Cobra gunships, frequently called "Snakes" because of their menacing appearance, narrow silhouettes, and long profiles. Sea Cobras were two-seat, twin-engine, single-main rotor, attack aircraft. They mounted a wide variety of ordnance, including a three-barrel 20mm M197 chin-mounted rotating cannon, TOW antitank missiles, and sidewinder antiaircraft missiles. The three UH-1Ns and four AH-1Ts assigned to the Black Knights came from HMLA-167, stationed at New River, North Carolina.

A detachment from MACG-28 gave the squadron and its associated amphibious task force the ability to command, control, and coordinate air operations. This unit provided vital air traffic control systems and personnel. MWSS-272 provided a detachment of aircraft specialists and ancillary equipment, including a Helicopter Expeditionary Refueling System (HERS). This refueling system was a collection of rubber bladders that looked like gigantic black waterbed mattresses. The associated hoses, pumps, connectors, and generators enabled the Marines to refuel rotary wing aircraft at a forward area rearming/refueling point (FARP). The HERS was fully transportable by air or ground mode and made the squadron a truly mobile expeditionary force. Air defense was furnished by a detachment from the 2d LAAD armed with hand-held Stinger missiles. The major drawback for HMM-264 was that it had no Harrier "jump jets" to provide fixed wing close air support attached.

### *MSSG-24*

MEU Service Support Group (MSSG) 24 provided the MEU's "beans, bullets, and band aids." This logistics unit was formed by uniting service



Photograph by the author  
*An AH-1T Bell Sea Cobra attack helicopter was assigned to HMM-264. Four such two-pilot, twin-engine, armed rotary wing aircraft provided close-in fire support for the 24th MEU in northern Iraq.*

support detachments from the 2d FSSG at Camp Lejeune. It contained the equipment and trained personnel to support an amphibious assault or to become the MEU's lifeblood on shore. Marine Corps doctrine dictated that MSSG-24 be organized and equipped to operate using sea-based logistics. Briefly, this meant MSSG-24 relied on shipborne facilities for maintenance and supply, rather than bases on the shore. Doctrine anticipated an amphibious campaign conducted close to the beach, so equipment needed for inland operations or extended periods on shore was limited. Bulk supplies had to be transported ashore from amphibious shipping by helicopters or landed from surface craft. The MEU brought only enough supplies for 15 days of operations on shore, a package called Landing Force Operational Readiness Material (LFORM). Although this period could be marginally extended by careful management or reduced demand, any extended stay on shore required outside support.

The MSSG-24 commanding officer was Lieutenant Colonel Richard T. Kohl. Kohl was a logistics specialist with many years of experience. Originally an infantry officer, he became a rifle battalion logistics officer (S-4) after being wounded in Vietnam. He became a logistician full time in 1978. Kohl had experience with logistics units ranging in size from small combat service support detachments to Fleet Marine Force level. Lieutenant Colonel Kohl had nine continuous years of service in the Fleet Marine Force. He was assisted by Major Charles V. Mugno, MSSG-24's executive officer. Mugno knew the ins and outs of logistics well, and had an excellent eye for detail.<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately for MSSG-24, Mugno would be obliged to attend to other duties during Operation Provide Comfort. Luckily, Kohl could count on the services of a proficient staff which



*Marine engineers from MSSG 24 are busy constructing a water distribution point on the banks of the Khabur River in Central Zakho. Clearly visible are a portable electrical generator, the Reverse Osmosis Water Purification Units (ROWPU) holding tanks, and a field antenna. The compound is protected by a single strand of barbed wire. The Khabur River is a tributary of the famous Tigris River which runs from the Taurus Mountains through Iraq to the Persian Gulf.*

included: adjutant, First Lieutenant Thomas M. Buehner; intelligence officer, First Lieutenant Robert W. Pavlicin; operations officer, Captain Kevin L. Foley; logistics officer, Captain Kenneth E. Jacobsen; embarkation officer, First Lieutenant Matthew J. Connors; supply operations officer, First Lieutenant Todd L. Eggers; disbursing officer, First Lieutenant Gavin R. Reardon; medical officer Lieutenant Ronald Buckley, USN; and dental officers Lieutenant Donald R. Ratliff, USN, and Lieutenant Kenneth P. Nogacek, USN. The senior enlisted personnel were First Sergeant Donald A. Delgado and Master Sergeant Ross E. Lewellen.

The MSSG was composed of a headquarters platoon and detachments from 8th Engineer Support Battalion; 2d Landing Support Battalion; 2d Maintenance Battalion; 2d Medical Battalion; 2d Dental Battalion; 2d Supply Battalion; 8th Motor Transport Battalion; 2d Support Battalion; and administrative, military police, and communications personnel from Headquarters and Service Battalion, 2d FSSG. Its diverse equipment list included radio sets, fork lifts, portable electric generators, water purification units, cargo trucks, ambulances, medical



Photograph courtesy of MajGen Anthony C. Zinni, USMC  
*BGen Anthony C. Zinni makes friends with Kurdish youngsters in northern Iraq. Gen Zinni was the highest-ranking Marine assigned to CTF Provide Comfort.*

supplies, and battery chargers. The MSSG enabled the 24th MEU (SOC) to "shoot and scoot," feed itself, repair broken equipment, get paid, heal the sick, and send mail. If one imagined the 24th MEU (SOC) as a mobile village, MSSG-24 provided all the civic services for its population.

### *24th MEU Forward Command Element*

After receiving the warning order for movement to Turkey, Colonel Jones formed the 24th MEU (SOC) Forward Command Element (FCE), composed of Lieutenant Colonel John J. Hogan III (BLT 2/8), Major Charles V. Mugno (MSSG-24), and Major David T. Kerrick (HMM-264). This team departed the Naval Air Station Sigonella, Italy, for Incirlik on 10 April. At Incirlik, the FCE reported to Combined Task Force (CTF) Provide Comfort Headquarters and met with Brigadier General Anthony C. Zinni, USMC. Zinni was the senior Marine assigned to Operation Provide Comfort. He had been Deputy J-3, United States European Command (USEUCOM), but was detached to become Deputy Commander, JTF Provide Comfort on 6 April. He was later named chief of staff when Provide Comfort expanded and became a combined task force. A stocky ex-football player from Villanova University, Zinni's credentials included the U.S. Army Special Warfare School, the Naval War College, and two master's degrees. He was a veteran of two combat tours in Vietnam, where he had commanded the 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, and the 9th Marines. His staff duties



Photograph courtesy of MajGen Anthony C. Zinni, USMC  
*BGen Anthony C. Zinni, CTF Provide Comfort chief of staff, poses with Marines assigned to CTF Headquarters at Incirlik Air Base, Adana, Turkey.*



Photograph by the author  
*Helicopters of HMM-264 arrayed in "LZ Leatherneck" on the southeast side of HSSB Silopi. HMM-264 established the Silopi base in April 1991. A detachment from MACG-28 operated the landing zones for the first month of Operation Provide Comfort.*

included two teaching stints at Quantico, a headquarters tour in Washington, D.C., and joint-service duty with the USEUCOM.<sup>26</sup>

Joint Task Force Provide Comfort was to conduct multinational humanitarian relief operations in northern Iraq until international relief agencies and private voluntary organizations could assume overall supervision of such operations. The basic concept of operations included the following tenets: 1) meet life-sustaining requirements immediately; 2) establish a manageable relief process that could be easily transferred; 3) promote the role of non-military organizations and maximize the participation of international agencies; 4) seek active refugee participation during site development operations; and 5) ensure security of allied troops and dislocated civilians. The priorities established were: 1) to stop the dying and the suffering; 2) to resettle the population at temporary sites while establishing a stable, secure, sustainable environment in northern Iraq; and 3) to return the displaced civilians to their former homes.<sup>27</sup>

The MEU FCE carefully read and dissected the operations order, flew a relief supply mission, discussed the situation, then sent a staff estimate to Colonel Jones. His highest priority was to get aircraft ashore and into operation as soon as possible. The rest of the MEU was scheduled remain on board ship. Phibron 8 would remain near the coast at a modified offshore deployment location to provide logistic support.

This concept changed on 14 April when Combined Task Force Provide Comfort received a message from the American Ambassador to Turkey, Morton I. Abramowitz, that outlined a plan for the return of dislocated Iraqi citizens

from Turkey and Iran. It envisioned a series of relay points along major routes leading from the refugee camps to locations in northern Iraq. Later that same day, the American Consulate at Adana announced that President Ozal had agreed to establish a humanitarian service support base near the Turkish town of Silopi. The military unit sent to Silopi was assigned to the Haj facility used by pilgrims making their way to the holy shrines of Islam. A newer facility would be used for refugees in urgent need of medical care. Permission was also granted to send humanitarian service support detachments (HSSDs) to the towns of Diyarbakir and Isikveren.<sup>28</sup>

This mission would not be easy. Kurdistan was located far from existing bases in some of the region's most forbidding terrain and weather. The political climate was uncertain. The Turks and Iranians had a long history of problems with the Kurds and were lukewarm about providing assistance at first. Peshmerga guerrillas and the Iraqi Army were still fighting, so the Americans had to avoid taking sides in a historical civil conflict.

### *24th MEU Forward*

Phibron 8 made landfall at Iskenderun Harbor on the evening of 13 April.<sup>29</sup> The next morning, operational control of the 24th MEU (SOC) was transferred to Combined Task Force Provide Comfort. General Jamerson told Colonel Jones to establish a forward supply base and a forward area rearming/refueling point at Silopi, an agricultural village located about 450 miles east of Iskenderun in the Taurus Mountains. To best accomplish this task, Colonel Jones created a special purpose force, the 24th MEU Forward, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Joe Byrtus from HMM-264.

This ad hoc unit was to fly to Silopi, establish a command post, set up an air control system, and put a helicopter expeditionary refueling system into operation. The 24th MEU Forward included personnel from HMM-264, MACG-28, MWSS-272, and MSSG-24. Follow-on elements included command, ground security, aviation, and logistics personnel. A convoy of buses and trucks departed Iskenderun but did not arrive at Silopi for almost 36 hours.<sup>30</sup>

Silopi was a sleepy farming village in Turkey's isolated Hakkari Province, located about eight miles from the Habur Bridge, the gateway to northern Iraq. Silopi was so small and unimportant it did not appear on most maps of the area. There was no airfield, no railhead, and a poor road network. Only a single hard-surface highway ran through the mountains to reach this small town in eastern Anatolia. Silopi was an agricultural trade center for local wheat farmers. Visiting there was like traveling far back in time. Its people lived in mud brick huts with straw roofs and had no electricity. Cultivation was done by hand instead of by machine. Skinny mules pulled wooden plows to break the ground. Entire families took to the fields with scythes in hand when it was time to harvest the grain. However, life in Silopi changed radically after the helicopters of HMM-264 dropped from the sky. The local peasants, unaware of the world situation that



Photograph by the author  
*An HMM-264 CH-46E on board the amphibious assault ship Guadalcanal (LPH 7) in Iskenderun Harbor. The ships of MARG 1-91 served as an afloat logistics base supporting a Marine landing force more than 500 miles inland.*

brought these strangers to their isolated valley, stared at the new arrivals with unsettled curiosity.

The 24th MEU Forward was placed under the operational control of General Potter's Task Force Express Care (redesignated Joint Task Force Alpha on 17 April). Its mission was to support Express Care by providing helicopter support, air traffic control, air space coordination, and refueling capability at a forward support base. Colonel Byrtus, the MEU Forward's commanding officer, attended joint task force meetings and acted as Marine liaison between the forward base and the forces afloat.

The 24th MEU Forward moved its lead elements to Silopi on 15 April. The Black Knights used three CH-53E helicopters to deploy the advance party consisting of helicopter expeditionary refueling system personnel and air traffic controllers. The difficult five-hour flight required aerial refueling while flying only a few hundred feet above the undulating terrain to reach an undeveloped wheatfield earmarked to become the main landing zone at Silopi. Within two hours of their arrival, the Marines had refueled their helicopters and established an air traffic control station. A primitive landing zone was in operation that afternoon.

However, the long day was not over. From Silopi, the Black Knights flew food to Drop Zone One at Isikveren, Turkey. The heavily laden CH-53s followed the Hazil River as it meandered along the Turkish-Iraqi border, then flew over a narrow valley dotted by small refugee camps. It was a rough flight because the helicopters were often buffeted by cold, swirling gusts of wind rising off the snow-streaked ridges. Eventually, a colorful patchwork of tan, olive, orange, blue, and white tents came into view. Isikveren was one of the largest refugee

camps, housing more than 80,000 Kurds. It was located above the 5,000-foot mark on the slopes of snow-capped mountains.

At first glance, every square foot of level ground seemed to be occupied. A careful search located an area that was relatively uninhabited, uncluttered by refuse, fairly flat, and free of flight obstacles. Purple smoke from a landing marker pinpointed the exact spot. Unfortunately, there was only room for one helicopter to land at a time. The first Super Stallion to arrive at this minuscule landing zone parted what was described as "a sea of refugees" who ran from the winds created by its rotor wash. A great cloud of dust billowed up and pelted the waiting crowd with pebbles, sand, and broken twigs, causing them to move back. Blankets, an assortment of loose items, and even a few tents were picked up by the whirlwind and blown across the camp. The pilot alertly used this temporary opening to set down. The aircrew hustled to unload the cargo quickly, however, the impatient crowd swarmed the landing zone. Ignoring the pleas of relief workers and oblivious to the danger of the whirling rotor blades, refugees charged toward the idling helicopter. The hungry, thirsty crowd rushed forward to get desperately needed food and water. Afraid for the safety of those on the ground, the aircraft commander popped up into a low hover and began to taxi forward very slowly. This tactic worked. The rotor wash cleared away the mob and created a lane so the remaining pallets could be shoved off the rear ramp. The other two aircraft followed this procedure as well.<sup>31</sup>

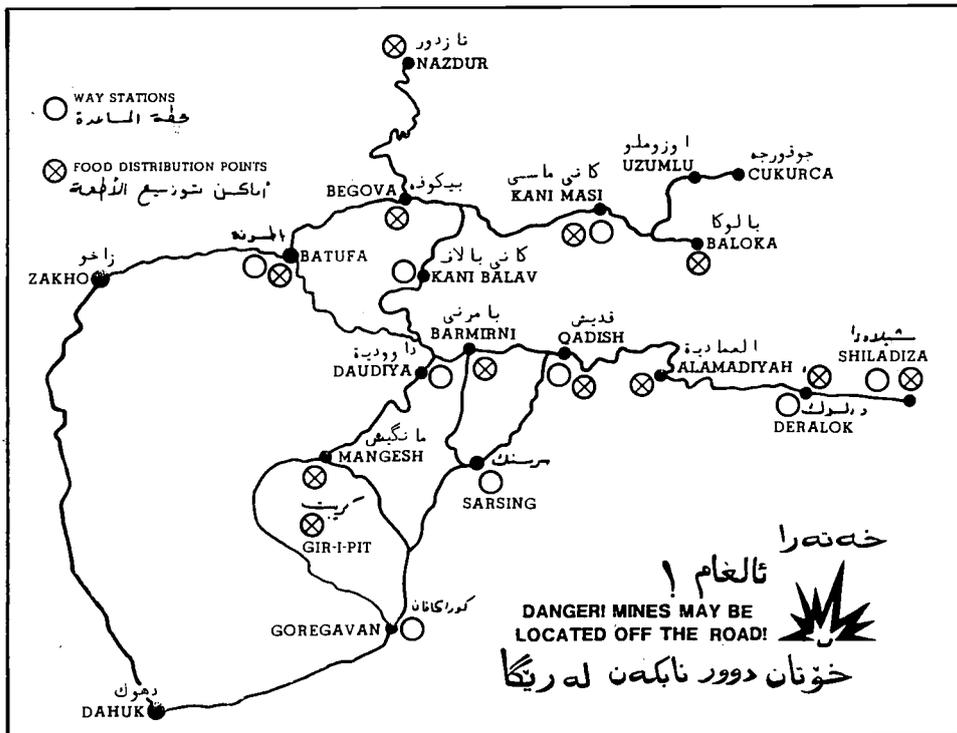
After the drop the helicopters departed the refugee camp for Silopi to pick up Lieutenant Colonel Byrtus for the return flight to the *Guadalcanal*, which



*Harried Marines try to bring order from chaos as starving Kurds charge a CH-46E Sea Knight helicopter carrying food. LtCol Joseph A. Byrtus, Jr., HMM-264 commander, described these initial relief flights as "trying to land into a sea of refugees."*

was at anchor in Iskenderun Harbor, but the flight was diverted to Incirlik for the evening because reduced visibility precluded safe return to the ship. The first day's operation had been successful and it provided some important lessons for future operations. General Jamerson credited the Black Knights with pioneering low-altitude drop techniques that expedited safe delivery of food and water. The increased flow of supplies resulted in more subdued crowd reactions. However, better ground control and a more orderly distribution system were still needed. The number of needy people vastly outnumbered those being assisted. More Marines were needed, and a prolonged sustainment effort was required. The forward base at Silopi needed to be expanded to adequately support large-scale, long-term operations.

On the other hand, the Marines achieved several important milestones. The Black Knights delivered 1,290 MREs and 18 boxes of bottled water to the refugees. The first forward Humanitarian Service Support Base was operating. An interesting sidelight was that the Marines were being used as a true expeditionary force, rather than an amphibious force, operating far from the nearest sea base. No MEU in Marine Corps history had ever been deployed so far inland.<sup>32</sup>



The following day, 16 April, most of the squadron moved to Silopi. Three CH-53s, nine CH-46s, and two UH-1s arrived at approximately 1500 in the afternoon. They used the newly installed HERS to refuel, then immediately launched a supply run to the distant mountain camps. The FARP site was manned by eight Marines from MWSS-272 (Corporal Charles G. Trainor) and a 45-man Shore Party Platoon, MSSG-24 (First Lieutenant Chris A. Arantz) worked the loading zone. The first day the FARP refueled 319 helicopters, then settled down to an average of about 220 per day, distributing about 55,000 gallons of fuel each day. The fuel bladders on the ground were pumped full of gas at the rate of 2,600 gallons per minute from military and civilian fuel trucks. Silopi was beginning its transition from an unimproved landing zone to a major support base.<sup>33</sup>

For the next few days HMM-264 devoted its air assets to Joint Task Force Alpha. Many Kurdish camps couldn't be reached by truck, so the Marines loaded more than 100 tons of supplies per day on the helicopters. The squadron usually flew from sunrise to sunset. Between 15 and 18 April HMM-264 delivered 137 tons of relief supplies to the Kurdish refugees. On one day 170,000 pounds of food were delivered. On several different days, HMM-264 logged more than 90 flight hours. During the first two weeks the squadron delivered more than one million pounds of relief supplies and flew more than 1,000 accident-free flight hours. Distribution operations were turned over to the Kurds as soon as possible to encourage them to help themselves. However, the rapid pace of events made it very clear that the entire MEU would soon be required on shore.<sup>34</sup>

### *Humanitarian Service Support Concept of Operations*

Logistics planning for Provide Comfort was kept fairly simple. There were three overlapping phases. At first, the military handled the movement of all supplies. Emergency support was delivered directly to refugee camps in Turkey and Iraq by airdrop or helicopter. As the distribution system developed, civilian agencies assumed responsibility for operation of the camps, while the military provided security and some logistics support. By the time Combined Task Force Provide Comfort departed, all supply and security missions in northern Iraq were handled by civilian agencies or the United Nations. As the Kurds began to move south, a series of way stations along major travel arteries were established in northern Iraq. Inside the exclusion zone temporary resettlement camps were built with the intention of turning them over to civilian agencies as quickly as possible.<sup>35</sup>

A supply "ladder" was established with three "rungs": reception, movement, and distribution. There were three main supply and personnel delivery points in Turkey. Incirlik was the aerial entry port. Mersin and Iskenderun were the sea entry ports. A three-day supply reserve was established at each entry site. Aircraft landing at Incirlik were quickly unloaded. All arriving goods were inspected by customs officials. At first the Turks used an expedited inspection

**Food will be distributed ONE time  
each week.  
Bring this card with you each week  
to receive your FOOD RATIONS.**

يوزع المظام مرة واحدة في الاسبوع .  
أجلب هذه البطاقة معك في كل اسبوع لكي تحصل على نصيبك .  
نه رزاقنا هر ئى ننه نه قلك دي ده نه ده .  
هر ئى بنه نه نه نه ده ره نه له كل خوبينه دا نه رزاقنا نه  
به ده نه .

*Kurdish families were issued ration cards when they registered at one of the three refugee camps in the Zakho area. Food supplies were originally U.S. "Meals Ready to Eat" combat rations, but these were quickly replaced by bulk foods more suited to Kurdish tastes.*

system, but as time passed this procedure became more complex and later took up to eight days for goods and equipment to pass through customs. Supplies were then either rigged for airdrop, palletized for helicopter transport, or loaded onto trucks for the trip forward. Similar procedures were used at Mersin and Iskenderun. Sea-land containers were unloaded, opened, their contents inspected, the goods were separated and packaged, then loaded onto trucks or trains for movement forward.

The second phase was movement of relief supplies and personnel from their port of entry to a forward humanitarian service support base. At first, there were two, HSSB-1 (Silopi) and HSSB-2 (Yuksekov). Later HSSB-3 was opened at Sirsenk, Iraq. Sirsenk quickly replaced Yuksekova when the refugees left their mountain camps and moved south. At the HSSBs, every attempt was made to expedite the movement of supplies forward to the humanitarian service support detachments (HSSDs). At the HSSBs, trucks were directed forward after the drivers made only brief stops for food and fuel. If necessary, supplies were divided into truck-transportable and air transportable-loads. A two-day supply reserve was maintained at each HSSB. Other supplies were sent forward as quickly as possible.

The final rung on the supply ladder was distribution. A typical HSSD included a command element, a helicopter support team, an engineer support team, civil affairs representatives, and a communications section. These teams, usually about a dozen people, occupied one or two tents near the landing zone.

A "mayor's" tent, the civilian relief workers' tents, a medical center, a water point, and a supply dump were almost always nearby. The detachment directed airdrops, received the trucks, pumped potable water, manned delivery points, and coordinated services. The actual distribution was left up to civilian relief workers or the Kurds. American influence in the camps was obvious when visiting dignitaries were greeted by children singing "Old MacDonald Had A Farm" or little hands flashed a "vee" accompanied by the refrain "Kowabunga Dude!"<sup>36</sup>

### *Incirlik Air Base*

Combined Task Force Provide Comfort Headquarters was located at Incirlik Air Base near Adana, Turkey. Incirlik was a large, modern NATO base. The airfield supported a multitude of air operations including fighter, bomber, reconnaissance, and transport aircraft. A stretch of taxiway and some reinforced



Photograph by the author  
*Maj (now LtCol) Charles V. Mugno, executive officer of MSSG 24, was assigned to the 24th MEU forward command element and flew one of the initial relief missions into northern Iraq.*



Photograph by the author  
*1stLt Frank W. Vido and Col. Peter M. "Mike" Gish wait for a flight to Silopi at Incirlik's India Loop. Col. Gish, a well-known painter, was the oldest Marine on active duty in 1991. He was a naval aviator during World War II and commanded a reserve helicopter squadron before serving as a combat artist in Vietnam, northern Iraq and Somalia.*

concrete hangars known as "India Loop" became the home base for the U.S. Navy's HC-4 and supported Marine helicopter operations as well. Billeting was at a premium because on-base quarters and all of the local hotels were filled, so a tent camp was erected along the main roadway. The primitive facilities led to crowded, sometimes uncomfortable conditions. However, for those who had just arrived from the harsh desert environment of Operation Desert Storm, any place with a swimming pool, a well-stocked post exchange, and fast food eateries seemed almost like heaven. The post exchange was often filled with smiling

service people wearing desert cammies enjoying their first pizza and beer in many months.

Fleet Marine Force Europe (FMFEur) was the conduit between Provide Comfort Marines and the United States. Both joint and combined task forces included Marines in staff and liaison positions. Fleet Marine Force Europe (Designate) in London functioned as the single point of contact for U.S. Marine matters in Europe. Operation Provide Comfort required FMFEur (Designate) to shift its focus from Operation Desert Storm in the Persian Gulf to Turkey and northern Iraq.

Colonel Donald A. Gressly, the chief of staff, sent a liaison team to Incirlik on 11 April. This team, collocated with a team for Navy Forces Europe (NavEur), was designated Navy-Marine Liaison Team 10, Combined Task Force Provide Comfort. Fleet Marine Force Europe (Designate) coordinated material and personnel movements from Europe, conducted hospital liaison support, and assisted special logistics support in Europe. The FMFEur G-1 and G-4 sections provided administrative and logistics support to include fiscal, administrative, transportation and billeting, and postal services. The G-3 section prepared daily situation reports, worked on planning issues, and relayed intelligence (especially threat conditions) to CTF Provide Comfort.<sup>37</sup>



Photograph by the author  
*Humanitarian Service Support Base Silopi (HSSB 1) was the site of the Combined Support Command (CSC). The CSC coordinated logistics efforts for Operation Provide Comfort.*

Navy-Marine Liaison Team 10 worked out of a converted warehouse across the street from the CTF headquarters. On 20 April, 20 additional Marines were transferred to Headquarters, CTF Provide Comfort from FMF Europe (Designate). Colonel Robert M. Hansen was the senior Marine. Major Mugno (MSSG-24) was the MEU liaison officer and acted as executive officer, supervising administrative matters and arranging transportation for incoming and departing personnel. The team also included one air liaison officer, three watch officers, a staff sergeant, and three administrative clerks.

The Joint Operations Center, called the "Jock," was manned by members of all services. The Joint Operations Center at Incirlik included eight Marines: one in the personnel section (C-1), two in the operations section (C-3), one in the plans section (C-5), a protocol officer, a linguist, and two public affairs officers.<sup>38</sup>

Colonel Peter M. "Mike" Gish, a Marine combat artist in Vietnam and an internationally famous watercolorist, covered the activities of Combined Task Force Provide Comfort at Incirlik and Silopi in Turkey, in northern Iraq, and with Phibron 8 afloat.<sup>39</sup> The Marine historical team worked with Senior Master Sergeant Thomas L. Robb, USAF; Staff Sergeant Thomas A. Traynor, USAF; and Sergeant Marie Y. Herrera, USAF, of the Combined Task Force History Office. Lieutenant Colonel Gordon W. Rudd, USA, an instructor at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, later joined the History Office.

### *Combined Support Command*

General Shalikhvili formed the Combined Support Command (CSC) to administer the logistics needs of Combined Task Force Provide Comfort. The CSC was based at Silopi and was commanded by Colonel (soon to become Brigadier General) Harold E. "Hal" Burch, USA. In Europe, Burch had been the deputy commander of the 21st Theater Army Area Command (21st TAACOM) at Kaiserslautern, Germany. Although the CSC eventually became the logistics focal point, the 7th Special Operations Support Command (7th SOSOC) initially provided planning and support coordination for the U.S. Army forces involved in Provide Comfort. The expansion of Operation Provide Comfort required more support than the 7th SOSOC could provide, so the 29th Area Support Group assumed this role. The Combined Support Command was primarily an Army organization. It served as the principal gateway for theater logistics support for United States forces in Turkey. Requisitions flowed from the originating unit through its parent task force, either JTF-A or JTF-B, to the CSC. The Combined Task Force logistics section (C-4) coordinated support not available through U.S. sources (commercial cargo and fuel trucks, for example). The CSC directed its requests to the 200th Theater Army Material Management Command in Europe for action. Supplies coming from Europe were usually routed from the General Support Center in Germany. They arrived at Incirlik, Mersin, or Iskenderun. From there, they were shipped to Silopi, Yuksekova, or Sirsenk, then moved to a forward humanitarian or combat service support detachment for distribution.

The CSC was organized into three sections. A helicopter support base provided refueling, minor repair, and loading and packaging. It was manned by a joint air component. There was also a joint ground support component to provide supply, maintenance, engineer, transportation, medical, and personnel services. The third component was Contingency Marine Air-Ground Task Force 1-91. This unit provided terminal air control and helicopter landing support at forward areas.

The Combined Support Command Headquarters was located in an abandoned warehouse that once served Muslims making pilgrimages to the holy city of Mecca or other Muslim shrines. The Contingency MAGTF 1-91 Command Element and the International Red Cross Center were collocated with the CSC Headquarters. A hard-surface helicopter pad was located in front of the CSC Operations Center (CSCOC), several dirt landing zones were across the road;



Photograph by the author  
*The author prepared to ride "shotgun" on a supply convoy from HSSB Silopi to 24th MEU (SOC) headquarters at Zakho. Silopi was the home of MSSG 24, HMM-264, and CMAGTF 1-91. Its 2,400 tents housed more than 10,000 personnel from 14 different nations.*

MACG-28 monitored air traffic and MWSS-272 ran the FARP. The U.S. Army's 51st and 66th Maintenance Battalions provided repair services and the 14th Transportation Battalion coordinated overland movement. The primary medical care facility at Silopi was the USAF 39th Air Transportable Hospital, a 50-bed facility capable of emergency surgery and limited post-operative care. The French, Dutch, British, Italians, and Canadians set up military field hospitals. Numerous civilian-run medical facilities were scattered around northern Iraq. Medical evacuation was provided by the U.S. Army's 149th Aviation Company. Military personnel requiring additional treatment were evacuated to Diyarbakir, then were flown to the 39th Tactical Air Control Hospital at Incirlik.<sup>40</sup>

### *HSSB Silopi*

The humanitarian service support base at Silopi was located in a wheatfield adjacent to Turkish Route 24, the main road that ran east from the town of Silopi to the Iraqi border. At the border, the road became Iraqi Route 6 leading to the city of Zakho. Silopi was nestled in the shadows of snow-capped Taurus Mountain peaks on the fertile plain that eventually became the Zakho Corridor. The Silopi site was selected by an advance party on 12 April because it was level, free of obstacles, located near a river, large enough to support helicopter operations, and only eight miles from the Iraqi border.

On 13 April, a convoy of support vehicles and equipment departed Incirlik for Silopi and arrived at mid-day on 15 April. Base development proceeded rapidly. More than 200 airmen from the 564th Civil Engineer Squadron (Ramstein, Germany) and the 36th Civil Engineer Squadron (Bitburg, Germany) began constructing a 450-tent "city" large enough to accommodate 1,800 Allied personnel. Base camp materials were provided by USAF Harvest Eagle comfort kits, were installed by USAF "Prime Beef" teams, and were administered by USAF "Prime Rib" teams.<sup>41</sup> Items like tents, chairs, tables, and cots were included in the Harvest Eagle package. Soon, more than 300 tents lined the main road of HSSB Silopi. The first camp commander was Colonel William P. Tangney, USA, who was also the commanding officer of the 10th Special Forces Group from Fort Devens, Massachusetts.<sup>42</sup>

Within weeks the base held more than 3,000 military and civilian workers. More than 600 tons of supplies were used at Silopi each day. The sprawling base soon extended several miles along both sides of the road. When Silopi became the home of the Combined Support Command, that organization assumed responsibility for base operations and Colonel Burch became camp commander.

Silopi was a focal point for Marine activity. Colonel Kohl established the MSSG-24 headquarters and a Combat Service Support Operations Center (CSSOC) in the center of the main camp, across the road from the Combined Support Command headquarters. The Marine motor pool was placed south of town in a gravel pit, and the supply center was located just southeast of the Combined Support Command supply dumps. Colonel Byrtus placed HMM-264's operations center at the northwest corner of the main camp adjoining the



Photograph by the author

*A unit designator tree quickly sprouted in front of the Silopi mess hall. Identified units include the U.S. 24th MEU (SOC) and CMAGTF 1-91, the British 3d Commando Brigade, the Dutch 1st Amphibious Combat Group, the U.S. 1/10 Special Forces Group, and the French Cougar team.*

wheatfield landing zone and Marine operated FARP that serviced allied helicopters.

The Silopi landing zone was a busy place. In addition to HMM-264's three UH-1Ns, four AH-1Ts, four CH-53Es, and a dozen CH-46Es, virtually every other type of NATO helicopter was also using the airstrip. The U.S. Army was supported by a medium transport squadron flying CH-47 Chinooks, the 149th

Aerial Ambulance Company flying UH-60 Blackhawks, and the 4th (Aviation) Battalion, 3d Infantry Division with UH-60 Blackhawks, UH-1 Hueys, AH-64 Apaches, OH-58 Kiowas, and EH-60 Nighthawks. The British had three squadrons: the Royal Air Force Chinook Squadron flying CH-47s, 846th Naval Air Squadron flying HC.4 Westland Sea King transports and HAS.3 Westland Lynx attack helicopters, and the 3d Commando Brigade Air Squadron flying Aerospatiale SA-341/HCC.4 Gazelle utility helicopters. The French Combat Helicopter Regiment used SA-342 Gazelle light attack and AS-332 Super Puma transport helicopters. The Dutch Composite Squadron (with several female pilots) used Chinooks, Gazelles, and SA-361 Alouette III helicopters. The Italians and Spanish used Hueys and Chinooks. Although the skies of northern Iraq were crowded, no major air incidents or crashes resulted in Marine deaths during Provide Comfort.

As time passed, Silopi's main base not only increased in size but became more comfortable as well. Engineers dug a 400-foot well to enrich the water supply. Showers were set up with 32 water points for the men and 8 for women. Portable covered latrine facilities with running water were set up. The mess hall was centrally located. It handled 6,000 people twice each day for pre-packaged "T" ration hot meals and provided home-made soup, fresh-baked bread, and cold drinks at noon. The chow lines were sprinkled with soldiers and Marines from many nations. British, French, Italian, and Spanish servicemen joined the Americans waiting for chow each day. The obligatory signpost showing unit home bases was placed in front of the mess hall. Its more than 20 arrows pointed to Europe, North America, South America, and the Pacific Rim. The international population was so diverse, Silopi had to be declared a "no saluting area" because almost no one could correctly identify rank insignia from so many different nations.<sup>43</sup>

There was a busy post office (although postage stamps were not required on letters, many people mailed packages home). The Mediterranean edition of the *Stars and Stripes* newspaper was distributed daily by the joint public affairs office. The Army and Air Force operated a joint disbursing office, unofficially called the "First International Bank of Silopi." The U.S. Army 9th Finance Group provided \$60 "health and comfort" pay advances, cashed checks, and disbursed emergency funds.<sup>44</sup>

A post exchange and other morale, welfare, and recreation facilities were opened for the military and civilian relief workers. At first, the exchange was caught short because it brought only enough items to cater to the needs of 1,000 people, and an international crowd estimated at more than 4,000 people began to visit the busy exchange each week. The store had little to offer until supplies were sent from Saudi Arabia and its shelves were stocked with snack food, cameras, film, cassette tapes, tape players, and assorted health and comfort items. There were two recreation tents, one had two television sets and another had a game room and a library. Volleyball, soccer, and touch football games were frequently played.

Another source of diversion was the street market or "souk." Up and down the roadway Turkish vendors--called "Meester, Meesters" because of their calls to passing soldiers--hawked a wide variety of goods including cold sodas, oriental rugs, and Iraqi money with Saddam's picture on it.<sup>45</sup> In all likelihood, however, the major form of recreation was story-telling. Soldiers from around the world swapped tall tales about faraway places and exciting adventures or showed off wounds from previous conflicts. The atmosphere at Silopi was a friendly one where all nationalities, races, creeds, colors, and both sexes were united by the desire to assist the Kurdish refugees, and many veteran campaigners felt Provide Comfort was among the most rewarding experiences of long military careers.

### *CMAGTF 1-91*

Contingency MAGTF 1-91 was formed from elements of the III Marine Expeditionary Force (III MEF) stationed on the Japanese island of Okinawa in the western Pacific. The CMAGTF's command element came from the 3rd Force



Painting by Col Peter M. "Mike" Gish, USMCR  
*The air control tower at Sirsenk was manned by an arriving/departing air control group from Okinawa-based CMAGTF 1-91. The Sirsenk airfield had been badly damaged during Desert Storm, but was repaired by Seabees from Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 133.*

Service Support Group (3d FSSG); the ground combat element was from the 3d Marine Division; the aviation combat element was from the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing; the combat service support element was Company B, 3d Landing Support Battalion, 3d FSSG. Company B was reinforced by service support detachments from the 3d FSSG. Detachments came from the 3d Supply Battalion, two dump-site sections and repair personnel out of the 3d Maintenance Battalion, administrative personnel from Headquarters and Service Battalion, and a detachment from the 9th Engineer Support Battalion. The commanding officer was Lieutenant Colonel Robert L. Bailey. Major Robert E. "Bob" Milstead, Jr., doubled as executive officer and air officer. The personnel chief was Gunnery Sergeant Michael J. Campbell, the intelligence officer was Captain Charles R. Sontag, the operations officer was Captain Gregory M. Ferketish, and the logistics officer was Captain Bruce G. Montgomery.<sup>46</sup>

Contingency MAGTF 1-91 formed very quickly. The 3d FSSG was alerted on 25 April. Lieutenant Colonel Bailey was notified on 26 April that he would command the unit. He quickly formed a staff and began analyzing the unit's mission. Bailey contacted the Marine liaison at Incirlik to find out details, then briefed Major General Henry C. Stackpole III (Commanding General, III MEF) about possible courses of action.

Combined Task Force Provide Comfort wanted two support companies or their equivalent. Bailey suggested that one reinforced support company could do the job. This concept was approved on 27 April. Contingency MAGTF 1-91 built up from zero strength to 186 Marines in less than 72 hours. At 0140 on 30 April, CMAGTF 1-91 was at the airhead with all its equipment and cargo. However, because of problems with aircraft assignment the unit didn't depart Okinawa until 6 May. That interval was used to complete follow-on training, to do additional maintenance for equipment and vehicles, and to publish Operation Order 1-91.

The CMAGTF departed Kadena Air Base in Military Airlift Command heavy-lift Lockheed C-5A Galaxy transports, but it took more than two and a half days to get to Incirlik. The specified route went from Okinawa to Clark Air Force Base in the Philippine Islands; however, some aircraft were rerouted to Utapao, Thailand, due to bad weather. From Thailand, they flew to the U.S. base at Diego Garcia island in the Indian Ocean. The airfield at Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, was the final stop before arriving at Incirlik. This change of plans resulted in a two-day echelon of arrival, 7 to 9 May 1991. The first plane to arrive at Incirlik carried the CMAGTF command element and Company B's advance party.

Lieutenant Colonel Bailey reported to Combined Task Force Provide Comfort Headquarters. The original plan was for CMAGTF 1-91 to operate two forward cargo transition shipment points, one at Silopi and the other at Yuksekova. An Arriving-Departing Air Control Group (A/DACG) was needed at Yuksekova because C-130 transports were using the airstrip. The CMAGTF's specified tasks were to maintain command and control of widely scattered support teams, provide landing support (helicopter support teams and A/DACG), manage

on-site commodity dumps, provide local security, and provide landing zone communications support at six HSSDs.<sup>47</sup>

After arriving in Turkey, Lieutenant Colonel Bailey discovered Silopi was well-developed and Yuksekova had almost completed its mission. The CMAGTF was attached to the CSC on 8 May, then was immediately assigned to support Joint Task Forces Alpha and Bravo. The CMAGTF deployed over a wide area, much of it in rugged terrain, in appearance reminiscent of the Grand Canyon. Forward support teams were assigned to way stations, formally titled Displaced Civilian Movement Centers (DCMCs). Displaced civilian support teams (DCSTs) consisted of one officer and about 20 enlisted Marines. There were six of them, all located in northern Iraq: Kanimasi (Captain Michael K. McClanahan), Baloka (Captain Charles R. Sontag), Kanibalav (First Lieutenant Kevin S. Brooks), Nazdur (First Lieutenant Byron J. Paez), Singee (First Lieutenant James A. Herzberg), and Chimaju (Captain Montgomery). An A/DACG was placed at Sirsenk. The CMAGTF command element operated from Silopi.<sup>48</sup> At Incirlik, the CMAGTF's gear was impounded for five days. Although the entire unit couldn't go to the field, an advance party moved to Silopi on 10 May.

Lieutenant Colonel Bailey's first task was to formulate a new plan. He and his staff wrote Operation Order 2-91 which changed the mission and assigned new tasks to CMAGTF 1-91. Lieutenant Colonel Bailey also initiated an internal reorganization because officers were needed in the field to command displaced civilian movement centers. The parachute riggers from 1st FSSG joined the CMAGTF on 7 May. These additional Marines gave CMAGTF 1-91 a total strength of 205 people.<sup>49</sup>

The DCSTs moved to six different locations in northern Iraq, using U.S. Army CH-47 Chinooks and UH-60 Blackhawks. On the ground they quickly established communications with Silopi. The biggest DCMC team was located at Kanimasi. It mustered 33 people to provide helicopter support teams (HSTs) and a Class I supply dump (fuel, water, dry cargo, bread, and foodstuffs). During the first two weeks of operation, Kanimasi changed from a way station to a resettlement area. The Nazdur DCMC displaced to the city of Begova, again changing from a way station to a resettlement camp. The Chimaju and Singee DCMCs and their associated DCSTs moved south of Sirsenk on 24 and 26 May to support the movement of displaced civilians to Zakho and Dohuk.

One of the highlights of the CMAGTF tour in northern Iraq occurred on 18 May. At about 2100, a six-month old Kurdish girl was diagnosed as having pneumonia in both lungs and a temperature of 103 degrees. The medic reported that without advanced treatment, the child would be dead by morning. The Marines requested a helicopter. Chemical illumination markers were placed around the landing zone and an infrared strobe marked the touchdown spot. Using night vision goggles borrowed from the Special Forces, the Marine helicopter support team directed an Army helicopter safely into the zone. The helicopter pilot had such a smooth approach and such good landing instructions that he congratulated the Special Forces for a job well done. After being told it



*Cpl Darryl F. Fuller of MSSG 24 mans a rig-mounted M-2 .50-caliber heavy machine gun atop a M-934 five-ton truck. This convoy carried bulk foods, building materials, and medical supplies to Refugee Camp 1 at Zakho.*

was the Marines who brought him down, he shouted a loud "ARRUUGGAHH!" "into the speaker, then gave the Marines an "outstanding" rating. This almost certainly was the first time night vision goggles and an infrared strobe light were used for Marine air control.<sup>50</sup>

The harsh landscape and long distances created communications problems. The CMAGTF brought enough satellite communications (SatCom) equipment to accomplish its original mission, but found it impossible to communicate from deep valleys more than 60 miles from the receiving station at Silopi. The four terminals were quickly overwhelmed. This problem was overcome by "workarounds" using Air Force and Army communications systems. Three of the four SatCom units eventually needed repairs. Every time repairs were needed, Army and Air Force technicians had the equipment operating within a matter of hours. The addition of three SatCom units and four high-gain antennas alleviated some of the communications problems. Despite technical problems and the wide dispersal of its units, CMAGTF 1-91 was a key to the efficient movement and supply of the Kurdish return.

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\* This guttural yell of unknown origin was a distinctive Marine battle cry.

### *The Mission of MSSG-24*

Provide Comfort was primarily a logistics operation. The 24th MEU (SOC) logistics arm was MSSG-24 commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Richard T. Kohl. It mustered 14 officers and about 230 enlisted Marines. The MSSG was on board the *Charleston* when the word to move to Iskenderun came in. While in transit to Turkey, Lieutenant Colonel Kohl had the staff prepare a detailed list of MSSG equipment and capabilities. After receiving Major Mugno's preliminary report, Kohl realized MSSG-24 most likely would be separated from its traditional "sea base" and would have to operate an inland support base. This was a problem because MSSG-24 had been forced to leave half of its 5-ton trucks, much of its material handling equipment (especially forklifts), and some engineer assets at Camp Lejeune because of the ship shortage. Planning was hampered by incomplete intelligence, constantly changing information, and lack of specific instructions. Despite these problems, MSSG-24 completed many alternative plans and was "good to go" when the *Charleston* closed Iskenderun Harbor.

Lieutenant Colonel Kohl established the following priorities: 1) combat service support, 2) humanitarian relief, and 3) civic action. The most immediate tasks were provision of emergency supplies (food, water, blankets, baby food, etc.) and rudimentary emergency medical care. The ships began unloading supplies and equipment on 14 April 1991. At first only personnel, cargo, equipment, and supplies required by HMM-264 were unloaded. Because Provide Comfort was a non-combat operation, the BLT, the LFORM supply package, and ground combat personnel and equipment remained on board ship. On 16 April, a combat service support detachment was transferred to the forward support base at Silopi. While much of MSSG-24's equipment was being held by Turkish customs, the 24th MEU (SOC)'s mission was changed. The new mission made it imperative to unload all MEU personnel, supplies, and equipment immediately and to be prepared for potential combat and ready for extended inland operations. Because the MEU's LFORM sustainment package was only good for 15 days, requisitions for additional supplies and equipment were flashed back to Camp Lejeune.

At Silopi, the CSSD acted as an advance party for the remainder of MSSG-24 in addition to its aviation support role. On 19 April, a commercial convoy, escorted by military tactical vehicles, transported MSSG-24's main party and initial cargo loads more than 450 miles through the mountains to Silopi, which served as MSSG-24's forward support base throughout Provide Comfort. The operations section (S-3) manned a Combat Service Support Operations Center (CSSOC) 24 hours a day to coordinate service support and respond to emergencies. The logistics section (S-4) managed internal logistics matters (embarkation, food services, accounting, distribution, and Class V ammunition storage). A post office was established to support Silopi and Zakho under the cognizance of the administrative section (S-1). The disbursing section remained on board ship, but regularly sent contact teams to the field. Lieutenant Colonel

Kohl lost the services of his executive officer when Major Mugno was retained at Incirlik with Navy-Marine Liaison Team 10.<sup>51</sup>

The MSSG had seven key functions: maintenance, supply, medical, communications, motor transport, landing support, and engineer support. MSSG-24, as all MSSGs, was created to support a specific MEU and was task organized for that purpose. The detachments assigned to MSSG-24 were from the 2d FSSG. Because of space limitations, MSSG-24 sailed short-handed and left some of its equipment behind. These shortfalls often were made up for by long working hours and inventive use of equipment.<sup>52</sup>

The Maintenance Platoon (Chief Warrant Officer 2 Kenneth D. Franklin) established an intermediate maintenance activity at Silopi to repair ground equipment, provide wrecker service for disabled vehicles, man mobile welding and fabric repair teams, and man mobile maintenance contact teams. The Supply Platoon (First Lieutenant Todd L. Eggers) warehoused, replenished, and distributed MREs, dry-cell batteries, fuel and lubricants, LFORM supplies, military clothing, medical supplies, repair parts, and selected ordnance items. Medical personnel worked with the Joint Aid Facility, the Joint Dental Facility, and the 39th Air Transportable Hospital. Hospital Corpsman Arthur W. Angel ran a small clinic and conducted medical and dental civic action patrols (MedCaps) to service the refugees and local population. The Communications Platoon (First Lieutenant Patrick J. Allison) established, maintained, and operated tactical radio networks, operated camp telephone networks, augmented the Joint Communications Center, and supported remote communications operations at Zakho and Dohuk.<sup>53</sup>

The Motor Transport Detachment (First Lieutenant Luke Marsden) ran a motor pool including organic maintenance, vehicle dispatching, stationary refueling, and mobile refueling. Tactical convoys ran twice daily. The first overland delivery of humanitarian relief supplies to Zakho was made on 22 April. Security was paramount so each convoy was escorted by armed guards. Trucks used .50-caliber heavy machine guns on ring mounts for protection. Humvee (short for High-mobility, Multi-purpose, Wheeled Vehicle) utility trucks usually carried a couple of riflemen as "shotgun" guards. Every convoy was treated as a combat mission. The Turkish border was designated the line of departure where all weapons were locked and loaded. While no ambushes or fire fights involving Marines occurred, there were several hair-raising incidents.

On 12 May the occupants of one such convoy were rolling along, enjoying the bright sunshine and chatting as normal. As the convoy approached Zakho, Lieutenant Colonel Kohl and his colleague, both of whom had been wounded in Vietnam, suddenly stopped talking and became abnormally watchful. Each of them had been alerted simultaneously by a combat-veteran's "sixth sense" that something was wrong. "If we were in Vietnam, I'd say we were heading into an ambush," muttered the passenger. Without taking his eyes from the road, Lieutenant Colonel Kohl nodded his assent and ordered the lead vehicle to slow down and move forward cautiously. Using this cue, Marines in the trailing vehicles became restless and hunkered down anticipating possible action. As the



*Unexploded ordnance was a major problem in northern Iraq. Here members of an explosive ordnance demolition team remove live mortar shells from an Iraqi military compound at Zakho. This compound later became the 24th MEU (SOC) Headquarters, named Camp Sommers to honor the Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps.*

convoy entered Zakho, it slowed to a crawl because the normally busy streets were deserted except for a single mangy dog. Finally, Camp Sommers was reached without incident and the Marines breathed a collective sigh of relief. However, this incident was not actually a false alarm. The Marines at Camp Sommers reported that a mob of Kurds had just overrun the local Iraqi police station in retaliation for an early morning shooting incident. A similar scare occurred on 30 May when a two-vehicle convoy was engulfed by a mob of about 1,000 Kurds demonstrating in front of Joint Task Force Bravo Headquarters. It turned out the demonstrators were pro-American, however, the unexpected sight of what appeared to be an unruly mob created rapid pulse rates among startled Marines who did not understand what was going on.<sup>54</sup>

The Landing Support Platoon (First Lieutenant Christopher A. Arantz), called the "red patches" because of their distinctive scarlet emblems worn on trousers, jackets, and utility caps, was a major part of the initial CSSD sent to Silopi. After arrival, the detachment was controlled by Joint Task Force Bravo. It single-handedly operated the flight line for the first two weeks, servicing helicopters from all American services and six nations. The detachment's forklifts were the only heavy material handling equipment (HME) available and were critical to helicopter offloading. They also unloaded more than 900 commercial trucks. During the first three weeks this detachment unloaded 16 million pounds of supplies. The Red Patches manifested and loaded 2.3 million pounds of relief supplies onto 442 helicopters. The helicopter support team conducted 91 separate lifts without a mishap. These loads included the external lift of a disabled CH-53,

five humvees, 51 fuel bladders, a bulldozer, a small emplacement excavator (SEE), and more than 50 other sling loads."

The Engineer Support Platoon (First Lieutenant Jeffery M. Reagan) was always near the tip of the spear. These Marines provided Joint Task Force Bravo engineer, explosive ordnance disposal, bulk fuel storage and distribution, water purification, mobile electric power, floodlights, and specialized civic action special project support. The MSSG's three-man explosive ordnance detachment (EOD) was strengthened by a U.S. Navy EOD detachment from the aircraft carrier *Roosevelt* and were assisted by foreign EOD teams from the British 59th Independent Commando, Royal Engineers; the French 17th Airborne Engineer Regiment and Foreign Legion sappers; and Italian engineers. The joint Navy-Marine EOD team detonated more than 37,000 ordnance items weighing about 52 tons in April and May. Marines in northern Iraq were frequently dismayed to find Kurdish children playing with live ordnance. Despite all efforts to warn the displaced civilians, several tragedies occurred. More than 20 Kurds had to be treated when explosives detonated in their hands. Three paratroopers were severely wounded by a detonated mine. At Isikveren, a Special Forces soldier was killed and a Marine was badly wounded while trying to extract frightened refugees from a minefield.<sup>56</sup>

The most pressing issue facing MSSG-24 was the lack of materials and equipment. The decision to retain combat and combat support personnel and equipment because of a critical shortage of boat spaces on the ships of Phibron 8 obviated trimming combat service support. The MSSG deployed with only half its normal allocation of five-ton trucks and without the Amphibious Assault Fueling System. One-half of its portable electric generators were left behind, and there was no water truck. During Provide Comfort the motor transport shortage was offset by doubling the number of runs. In the words of Lieutenant Colonel Kohl, "We made 10 trucks look like 20."<sup>57</sup> This expedient initially provided an



*A Marine leads a group of Kurdish men while they plan the layout of Refugee Camp 1, near Zakho, Iraq in April 1991. The Marines of the 24th MEU (SOC) established this camp to show the Iraqis their humanitarian intent. Three camps eventually occupied this area.*

acceptable level of transportation support, but eventually compounded maintenance problems which resulted in degradation of overland hauling capacity. The MSSG's trucks accumulated 27,000 miles in the first 30 days (during MSSG-24's previous Mediterranean Cruise it drove only about 25,000 miles in six months).<sup>58</sup>

The mobile electric power shortage was overcome through interservice cooperation. Bulk fuel handling eventually became a multi-service, multi-national effort, although HMM-264 and MSSG-24 carried the whole load for the first three weeks. Potable water was provided by Reverse Osmosis Water Purification Units (ROWPUs), existing wells, and commercial and military water trucks. Again, MSSG-24 carried the entire load for JTF-B until mid-May.<sup>59</sup>

The Marines of MSSG-24 worked hard and accomplished much. They carried most of the load for Joint Task Force Bravo in northern Iraq until additional support arrived, operated a humanitarian service support base at Silopi and a combat service support detachment at Zakho, set up and ran refugee Camp One, and unloaded ships at the docks of Iskenderun. It is safe to say their efforts were critical to the success of Marine forces during Operation Provide Comfort.

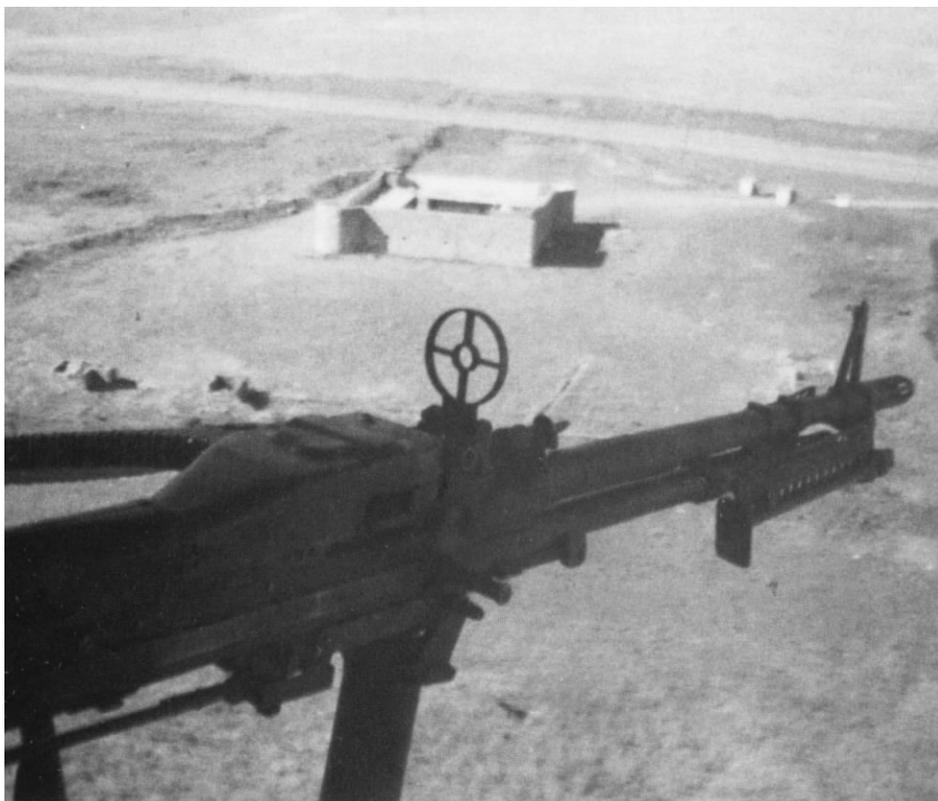
### *Planning Operation Encourage Hope Kurdistan*

Kurdistan was a unique place. It had land but no territory; it once had a king but was never a kingdom; it had a flag but was not a sovereign state; many people lived there, but Kurdistan had no "population." A person could search every modern map of the area and never find a country called Kurdistan, because this kingdom existed only in the dreams of the Kurdish people.

For centuries, the Kurds constantly searched for, but never truly found, political independence. Twice in the 20th century this age-old dream almost became reality. An independent homeland was promised after World War I, but this dream ended when the provisions of the stillborn Treaty of Sevres were renounced by Turkish leader Mustafa Kemal. After World War II, the Kurdish state of Mahabad was formed in Iran, but folded after the Soviet Union withdrew its support in 1946.

The area traditionally called Kurdistan was located in the rugged mountains, pleasant valleys, and fertile plains at the convergence of the Taurus and Zagros Mountains. It occupied parts of four modern countries: Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. Iraqi Kurdistan was a triangular area north of the Diyala River, east of the Tigris River, and south of Iraq's borders with Turkey and Iran. This area contained some of Iraq's richest farmland and sat atop its most productive oilfields. Unfortunately for the Kurds, these economic factors meant the Iraqi government would never surrender its proprietorship of this valuable region.

In 1970, an official Iraqi Kurdish Autonomous Zone (KAZ) was created by an agreement known as the March Manifesto. Purposely kept small, this zone included only parts of three provinces: Dohuk, Erbil, and Sulaymaniyah. This was done despite the fact that traditional Kurdistan also included Nineveh,



Photograph by the author

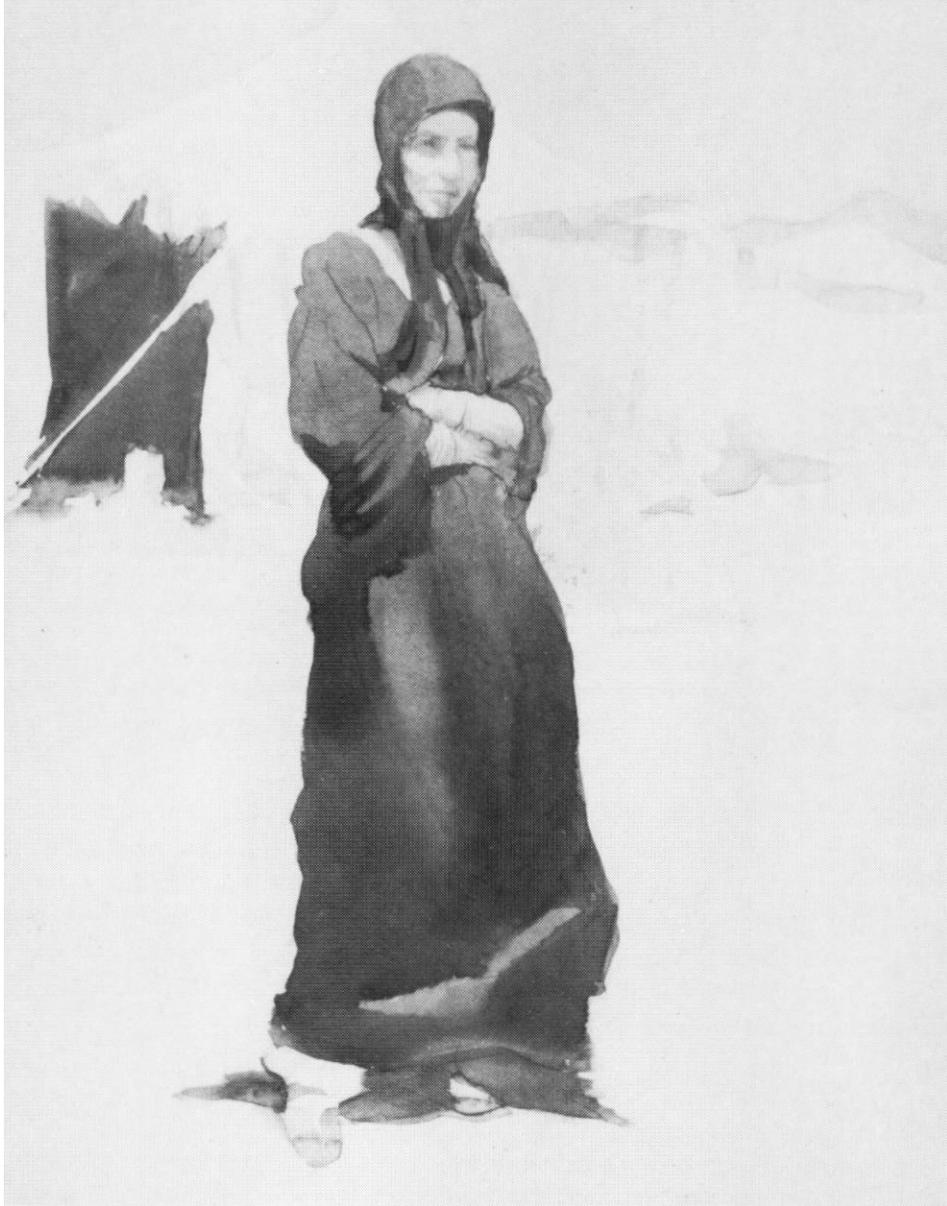
*An abandoned Iraqi "Beau Geste" fortress silently guards Highway 6 leading from the Habur border crossing to the Iraqi provincial capital of Dohuk. Similar fortresses occupied most key terrain throughout Iraqi Kurdistan.*

Attamim, Salahadin, and Diyala Provinces.<sup>60</sup> Iraqi Kurdistan now was located in the coarse highlands where mountain peaks reached 12,000 feet and highland valleys rose as high as 4,000 feet. Many small streams and several large rivers traversed the region. One of these, the Hazil-su branch of the Khabur River, part of the Tigris River's secondary tributary system, marked Iraq's northwestern border with Turkey. Kurdistan's cities included Erbil, Kirkuk, Mosul, Sulaymaniyah, Zakho, and Dohuk.

### *The Area of Operations*

The main avenue of approach into Iraq was the Zakho Corridor, a fruitful plain several miles wide cut only by the narrow Hazil River. Dohuk Province was located at the eastern tip of this lush valley where Iraq abutted the Turkish border. The city of Zakho, home to more than 50,000 people before the troubles, was built around a rocky island in the Khabur River, only six miles from the Turkish border. Zakho was a famous stronghold where ancient Kurds battled Xenophon's Greeks, Alexander's Macedonians, and Roman Legions before the

birth of Christ. It was still viewed as a troublesome center of Kurdish resistance by the Iraqi government and had been repeatedly struck by chemical weapons during Saddam's repression campaigns. In more normal times, Zakho's economic livelihood was the sheep and goat trade, and a brisk grain business also fueled the local economic fires.



Painting by Col Peter M. "Mike" Gish, USMCR

*A Kurdish woman stands pensively at a displaced civilian movement center in northern Iraq. The Kurds were an ethnic minority that claimed northern Iraq as a traditional homeland. Unlike their Arab neighbors, Kurdish women went unveiled and wore colorful, flowing robes decorated with coins and jewels.*

On the Iraqi side of the Habur border crossing, a four-color Iraqi flag fluttered over the customs house manned by a small border guard detachment. The crossing had been closed for several months. Both spans of the bridge across the Hazil River had been destroyed. The river's steep banks and low-lying marshes were mined to discourage infiltrators. Iraqi trenches, tank revetments, and artillery positions were dug into the heights that overlooked Habur.

Iraqi Route 6, a two-lane, hard-surfaced road, led from Habur to Zakho and points east. There was a road junction about midway between Zakho and Dohuk. The eastern route continued through Dohuk and on to Sirsenk. The southern road led to Mosul. Comfortably nestled in the foothills, the city of Dohuk was a provincial capital with paved streets, concrete buildings, and modern conveniences. This contemporary city was normally the home of about 400,000 people and served as the transportation and communications hub of northern Iraq. Nearby Saddam Dam harnessed the waters of the Tigris River to provide irrigation and electric power. The region was cold and wet during the winter but was hot and dry during the summer.

The debris of wrecked villages dotted the Zakho Corridor. Because of the battling between the Iraqi government and the Kurds, many towns and villages in Kurdistan had been razed and their populations scattered. Many villages and towns that appeared on 1970-vintage maps no longer existed by 1990.<sup>61</sup> Unfortunately, these ruins were not the only reminders of Saddam's hostility toward the Kurds. All Kurdistan was salted with explosive mines and booby traps. Dangerous unexploded ordnance littered the region. Every building displayed battle scars from the recent fighting. Less than 2,000 civilians remained at Dohuk and less than 300 stayed in Zakho. In April 1991, the nearly deserted streets of Zakho and Dohuk were patrolled by Iraqi "policemen" wearing Army uniforms and carrying assault rifles. The occupying Iraqis had thoroughly looted every home and carried off every item of value.

Kurdistan seethed with resistance to Saddam's harsh rule, so it was occupied by two Iraqi Army corps. The I Corps held northern Kurdistan and the II Corps was stationed in eastern Kurdistan. The Iraqi I Corps controlled two infantry divisions, several independent mechanized brigades, and an elite special assault brigade. These forces were stationed in or near Dohuk Province. Army posts ranged in size from Saddam's huge summer palace at Sirsenk to small Beau Geste-type forts found on the crest of almost every ridge. The main supply route from the Turkish border to the city of Zakho was overlooked by no less than four such forts. Zakho was the site of a large Iraqi-run Palestinian military training camp whose walls and entrances were adorned by large murals portraying a smiling Saddam and colored designs whose theme was Iraqi-Palestinian solidarity. The Iraqi *44th Infantry Division* was also headquartered at Zakho.

### *Concept of Operations*

Combined Task Force Provide Comfort's initial objective was to provide immediate emergency relief to dislocated Kurdish civilians in northern Iraq and southern Turkey. Although the situation quickly stabilized and refugee survival needs were being met, it was obvious this intense effort could not continue indefinitely. The new focus of the relief effort was to erect temporary facilities in the lowlands so the displaced civilians could move to a more accessible locale. These lowland camps were organized to ease distribution problems, enhance sanitation, increase Kurdish administrative participation, and facilitate turnover of the relief effort to civilian control. Additional tasks were to develop new temporary camps and to improve forward base habitability and accessibility.

The supply support plan was initially based on delivery using prepackaged supplies, referred to as a "push" system by logisticians. This was the best way to move supplies forward in a hurry, but was neither the most efficient nor the most responsive way to supply the camps. Loads had to be relatively small so they could be delivered by air. They provided general materials, but did not meet specific requests or individual needs. The effort was costly, time consuming, and took a high toll on limited air assets. It was far more desirable to use a "pull" system whereby supplies were delivered by truck or rail to a central point, then redistributed according to requests by each camp administrator. Logistics goals were to transition from MREs to fresh food, to move from airdrop to overland delivery, and to change from "push" to "pull" logistics as quickly as possible. The major drawbacks to adopting "pull" support were that it required a large stock of supplies, a complex requisition and delivery system, and well-developed camp infrastructures (roads, landing zones, staging areas, etc.). These requisites were developing rapidly, but were not yet in place.

A second force, Task Force Encourage Hope (later renamed Joint Task Force Bravo), was formed to construct a series of resettlement camps where dislocated civilians could find food and shelter and a secure environment. Encourage Hope was designed to integrate civilian relief agencies into the support, organization, and administration of the camps. The Kurds were expected to assist in the planning, construction, administration, and sustainment of these camps. The camps each held about 25,000 people and were initially supplied by the military. They eventually became self-sustaining and were transferred to Kurdish or non-government agency control as soon as possible. It was hoped that Joint Task Force Encourage Hope could be dissolved after about a month.<sup>62</sup>

### *Additional Forces*

The increasing complexities of Operation Provide Comfort required ever-increasing support. In addition to massive security and logistics efforts, three other support areas were critical: civil affairs, psychological operations, and civilian operations. Two U.S. Army civil affairs companies and a Marine civil affairs detachment were dispatched to Turkey. The Marine detachment was from



Painting by Col Peter M. "Mike" Gish, USMCR  
*A young Marine sergeant converses with a Kurdish elder in northern Iraq. Kurdish elders, known as "mullahs," are revered for their wisdom and their opinions carry much weight.*

the Reserve 4th Civil Affairs Group (4th CAG). Originally, civil affairs teams were sent to the mountain camps to assess the living conditions and future needs. Later, civil affairs teams at Silopi, Yuksekova, and Incirlik assisted civilian relief agencies. Civil affairs personnel played major roles at Zakho and Dohuk as well.

The 4th CAG was a Selected Marine Corps Reserve unit from Washington, D.C. It was activated for Operation Desert Storm and served with the I Marine Expeditionary Force at Al Jubayl, Saudi Arabia. The group returned to Camp Lejeune for demobilization on 16 April 1991. While at Lejeune, Colonel Easton was informed that 10 members of the unit were needed to support Operation Provide Comfort. This detachment flew from Cherry Point, North Carolina, on 20 April, arrived at Incirlik on 21 April, and moved to Silopi on 22 April. At Zakho, the group was divided into two sections and assigned to existing joint civil affairs teams.<sup>63</sup>

When Joint Task Force Encourage Hope was formed the civil affairs mission expanded. In order to smooth the way, civil affairs teams planned to control, supervise, and look out for the welfare of the displaced civilians as they moved south. Civilian relief agencies, international private voluntary organizations, and the United Nations also assisted during this phase of the operation. A secondary effort was to drum up Kurdish and civilian support for the movement south.<sup>64</sup>

The U.S. Army's Company A, 6th Psychological Operations Battalion, 4th Psychological Warfare Group provided teams to support Operation Encourage

Hope. They distributed informational leaflets, used loud speakers, made radio announcements, conducted informational briefings, held meetings with Kurdish elders, and contacted Christian and Muslim religious leaders at Zakho. These teams sought to inspire Kurdish self-reliance, to inform Iraqi soldiers that the multinational force had the capability and the will to protect humanitarian operations, to discourage the PKK (a Kurdish anti-Turkish splinter group), and to convince skeptical non-Kurdish civilians that humanitarian efforts were legally and morally correct.<sup>65</sup>

The United States Office of Disaster Assistance sent two Disaster Assistance Relief Teams (DARTs) to Turkey. The team assigned to Encourage Hope was headed by Mr. Frederick C. Cuny. The fact he was a former Marine gave him a common bond with the Marines in Kurdistan and meant that he understood the principles of military necessity. Colonel Jones credited Cuny's service as "invaluable."<sup>66</sup>

### *Encourage Hope Begins*

In mid-April, American Secretary of State James A. Baker III informed Iraqi Ambassador to the United Nations Abdul Amir Al-Anbari that allied forces intended to initiate humanitarian operations at the Iraqi town of Zakho "in the immediate future." He specified the following actions: 1) that Iraq withdraw all its armed forces 30 kilometers south of Zakho, 2) that a consultative meeting between U.S. military personnel and an Iraqi military team take place, and 3) that the meeting be held in Zakho at noon, Friday, 19 April 1991. The purpose of the meeting was to avoid unfortunate incidents between allied and Iraqi forces, to inform the Iraqis about future relief operations, and to discuss any other matters of mutual interest.<sup>67</sup>

### *Issues Facing the 24th MEU (SOC)*

On 16 April, the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff issued the order to begin security operations in northern Iraq. The next day Encourage Hope was launched. General Garner moved Joint Task Force Bravo Headquarters to Silopi on 17 April. Task Force Bravo included a skeleton headquarters and a few Army helicopter air and ground crews, but General Garner would have to rely on the 24th MEU Headquarters to act as the command element until reinforcements arrived. Joint Task Force Bravo's initial maneuver element was the 24th MEU (SOC). When General Garner opened shop, the 24th MEU (SOC) Forward was already operating from Silopi, Colonel Jones and the Alpha Command Group flew in, some of BLT 2/8 was already in place and the rest was in transit, HMM-264 was operating the Silopi landing zones, and MSSG-24 was unloading the ships of Phibron 8 at Iskenderun Harbor.

General Garner tasked Colonel Jones to move the 24th MEU (SOC) into northern Iraq on 20 April to secure the town of Zakho. In preparation, a flight of two MH-53J Pave Low helicopters from the USAF 21st Special Operations



*Marines from the 24th MEU (SOC) sit on their packs as they wait for transportation to the humanitarian services support base set up in Silopi, Turkey.*

Squadron made a reconnaissance of the area. They brought back photographs and video imagery of the operations area and potential camp sites. During the flight two CH-53Es from HMM-264 stood by as combat search and rescue aircraft, and a rifle platoon from Company E, BLT 2/8 acted as a "Sparrowhawk" reaction force. Under cover of darkness, reconnaissance Marines and sailors from SEAL Team 3 were inserted into northern Iraq and began clandestine operations preparing the way for a two-company helicopterborne operation scheduled to begin three days later.<sup>68</sup>

After receiving General Garner's orders to secure Zakho, Colonel Jones met with his staff, then adopted President Theodore Roosevelt's dictate to "Speak softly, but carry a big stick." The 24th MEU (SOC) was not to back down if the Iraqis tried to bully the Marines, yet, were to allow them an opportunity to pull back peacefully. Colonel Jones termed this policy "aggressive restraint," but the Combined Task Force staff at Incirlik frequently called it "leaning forward in the saddle." For its part, the 24th MEU (SOC) obviously was handicapped because not all of its normal assets were available. Lieutenant Colonel Corwin and BLT 2/8 were "good to go," but were vastly outnumbered and outgunned by the Iraqis. The Black Knights of HMM-264 had to split their efforts to accomplish three missions at the same time. In addition to combat support for the MEU, some helicopters transported supplies and personnel. Others supported JTF-A's emergency relief efforts. Logistics support was still tied to the ships of Phibron 8 at Iskenderun, so supplies had to be hauled long distances by either helicopters or trucks. The support base at Silopi was being developed, but was not yet fully operational. A short-handed MSSG-24 was stretched to the limit because of

scarce transportation, three widely separated work sites, and a supply line that ran more than 450 miles. Though all of these problems eventually were worked out, they hampered operations during the 24th MEU (SOC)'s first days inland.

Joint Task Force Bravo's mission was to establish an allied presence in northern Iraq to convince the Kurds of the allied commitment, to alleviate refugee suffering by delivering relief supplies, and to protect the dislocated civilians from Iraqi reprisal. Colonel Jones had some initial concerns about the proposed operation: He worried about lack of planning time, uncertainty about future operations, the Iraqi forces in the area, the long distance from support bases, Iraqi and Kurdish intentions, and interservice cooperation and compatibility of communications equipment.

Operation Provide Comfort was launched on the spur of the moment. The hurried movement, hasty nature, sketchy details, and lack of long-range goals forced Colonel Jones and operations officer Lieutenant Colonel Tom Linn to burn a lot of midnight oil. Rules of engagement were formulated to cover every possible situation. Implied tasks had to be deduced and solutions worked out. Unknown terrain and foul weather could adversely affect operations. There were no definitive answers about the length of the MEU's stay or the exact structure of the allied forces. Two key questions kept arising: "Would the Iraqis and the Kurds stop shooting? Would Saddam live up to his word, or were his promises just another example of his monstrous capacity for duplicity?"

This last question was troubling. Although Saddam agreed to cooperate, there was no clear demonstration of any intention to do so. Therefore, it was prudent



Photograph courtesy of MajGen Jay M. Garner, USA  
*MajGen Jay M. Garner addresses the Marines of the 24th MEU (SOC) assembled on the flight deck of the USS Guadalcanal (LPH 7). The 24th MEU was composed of headquarters, BLT 2/8, HMM-264, and MSSG 24.*



Photograph courtesy of BGen James L. Jones, USMC

*The leaders of JTF Bravo in northern Iraq during Operation Provide Comfort are LtCol John P. Abiziad, USA (CO, 3-325 ABCT); Col James L. Jones, Jr., USMC (CO, 24th MEU [SOC]); MajGen Jay M. Garner, USA (CG, JTF-B); LtCol Cees Van Egmond, DKM (CO, Netherlands 1st ACG); LtCol Tony L. Corwin, USMC (CO, BLT 2/8); and LtCol Jonathan Thompson, RM (CO, British 45th Commando).*

to plan both opposed and unopposed scenarios. If hostilities broke out, the 24th MEU faced vastly superior Iraqi combat power. The MEU was a light expeditionary force with no tanks, limited antitank assets, and only about 2,000 Marines. Major Richard J. Raftery, the intelligence officer, reported two Iraqi infantry divisions and several independent tank units inside or near the target area. Also, Iraqi paramilitary guards manned border positions; a brigade of the Iraqi *44th Infantry Division* was still at Zakho; a dozen T-55 tanks lurked in armor revetments between Zakho and Dohuk; Iraqi artillery outnumbered and outranged American guns; anti-aircraft artillery and surface-to-air missiles remained in the hills; two Republican Guard armored brigades waited near Mosul, less than an hour's ride from Zakho; and the Iraqis had planted more than a million mines in northern Iraq. In the words of one Marine, "The MEU has enough combat power to get into a fight, but may not have enough to finish the job." If fighting broke out, Colonel Jones would have to conduct a delaying action and rely on timely air support from Incirlik or the aircraft carrier *Roosevelt*, on station just off the Turkish coast, to tip the combat balance.

There were also concerns about Kurdish reactions. It was obvious that most Kurds were in dire need of assistance, but they were notoriously fragmented politically. Allied forces assisting them had to be neutral dispensers of humanitarian aid and never appear to be "playing favorites." There were fears that Kurdish guerrillas might use the security zone as a base of operations,

creating a sort of "Gaza Strip" sanctuary in northern Iraq. Luckily, these concerns proved to be unfounded.<sup>69</sup>

Only minor problems with joint and combined interoperability arose. For the past decade, joint exercises had been held to eliminate problems similar to those that plagued Operations Eagle Claw (Desert One) and Urgent Fury (Grenada). Most interservice conflicts had been worked out, but a few problems remained. Not all Marine communications equipment was compatible with that of other services. The 24th MEU (SOC) did not have sufficient organic equipment to meet all the needs of a joint task force. Most non-Marine forces arriving in northern Iraq were combat ready, but were not expeditionary, so they relied on the Marines for fuel, food, water, transportation, ground control, spare parts, and technical assistance.

Operation Provide Comfort was a multinational team effort by players of different cultures, nationalities, and races. As Operation Provide Comfort went on, eastern Turkey and northern Iraq became gathering places for representatives of the Free World's military forces. Northern Iraq was also a "hot spot" for foreign correspondents. Therefore, Operation Provide Comfort was conducted in a "glass bowl." Every action was keenly observed by the critical eyes of the world media.



Photograph by the author  
*An aerial view of the town of Zakho in northern Iraq. Zakho was the site of the headquarters compounds of both Joint Task Force Bravo and the 24th MEU (SOC).*

Multinational and interservice planning proved to be no problem because so many allied officers had attended foreign schools or had been "seconded" (assigned) to foreign units during their military careers. This was particularly true for the Marines; many French, British, and Dutch officers attended Marine schools at Quantico, Virginia. Additionally, the Marines had a long history of making combined landings in the Mediterranean. The 24th MEU (SOC) had conducted three such exercises before being assigned to Operation Provide Comfort. This training paid off handsomely because the Marines had already become familiar with British, French, Italian, and Spanish operating procedures.

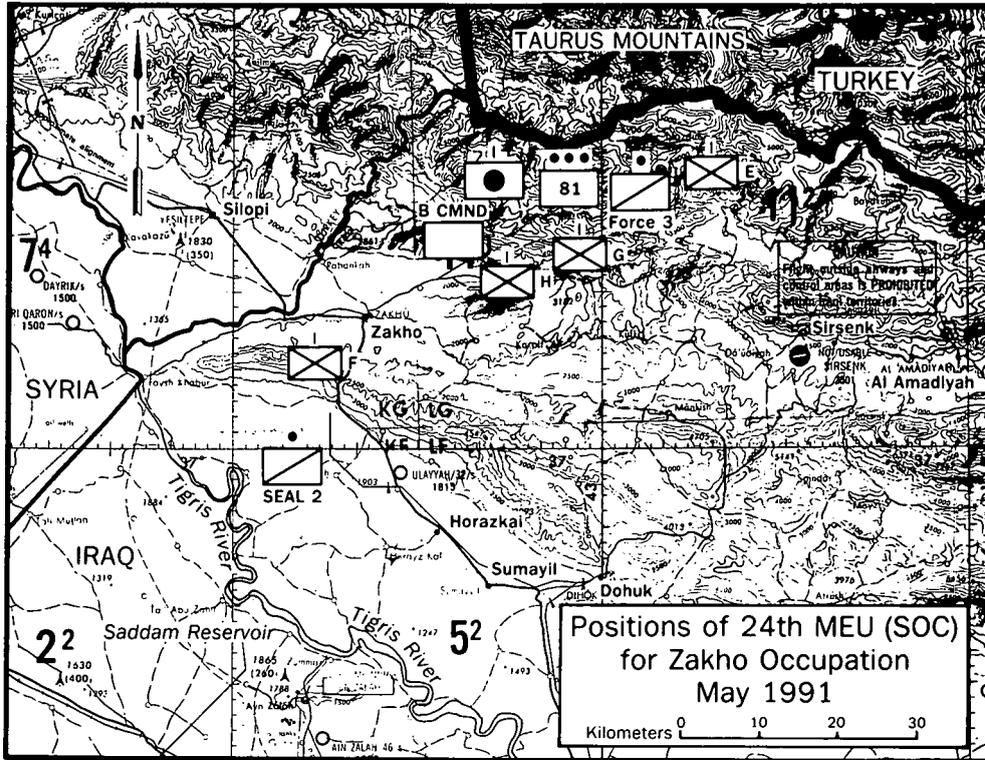
The unique cooperative spirit and the good humor of the allies was shown at one of the 24th MEU's morning meetings. After a discussion of future operations by the MEU staff, Colonel Jones repeated what was said in French (he had lived in France for 12 years), a language understood by the French, Italian, and Spanish liaison officers. After this impressive recitation, Jones apologized for not being able to translate for the only unit whose language he could not understand, that of our British allies! A ripple of laughter quickly spread across the room, and no one appeared to laugh harder than the British representative, Lieutenant Colonel Graham Kerr, commanding officer of the 29th Commando Regiment, Royal Artillery. Largely because of this spirit, Operation Provide Comfort seemed a model of international and interservice cooperation.<sup>70</sup> With preparations complete, the next order of business for the 24th MEU (SOC) was moving across the Turkish border into Kurdistan.

### *Zakho*

#### *Into Iraq*

At noon on 19 April 1991, Lieutenant General Shalikashvili was escorted by a Marine security detachment when he met with Brigadier General Nashwan Dahnoun, the senior representative of the Iraqi Army General Staff. The meeting was held near Zakho and was described as a "polite, proper, frank [discussion that] clarified all views."<sup>71</sup> Rather than beat around the bush or engage in lengthy pleasantries, General Shalikashvili told the Iraqis what was going to happen in a straight forward manner. He outlined CTF Provide Comfort's mission. He emphasized the humanitarian nature of the operation, but made it very clear that Iraqi interference risked military confrontation. The noise of American jets passing overhead reinforced this point, providing overall an excellent example of "aggressive restraint."

General Shalikashvili went over plans to build refugee camps, and the prospective sites were located on a map. To ensure the safety of the refugees and the combined task force, General Shalikashvili also requested information about Iraqi minefields around Zakho. He reminded General Nashwan about the limits on Iraqi military operations and inquired about the scheduled withdrawal of troops.<sup>72</sup> Nashwan balked at the request to pull back, stating Iraqi "police" were needed to ensure public order, but promised to provide information about the



minefields. In closing, General Shalikashvili proposed establishing a Military Coordination Center (MCC) to prevent future misunderstandings.

At 1330 on 20 April, HMM-264 delivered the first wave of a two-company helicopterborne task force to Zakho. Company G landed just outside the city. The heavily laden Marines (some carrying more than 60 pounds of equipment and ammunition) moved to the high ground and occupied overwatch positions which gave them a clear view of the objective. The remainder of the force included the BLT Alpha Command Group, Company F, and an 81mm mortar section. Lieutenant Colonel Tony L. Corwin noticed Iraqi soldiers still in the objective area, despite the fact they should have been gone. Reports from the reconnaissance teams confirmed the presence of many Iraqis and a few armored vehicles. The Marines and Iraqis were soon standing eyeball-to-eyeball with neither side about to blink.

Lieutenant Colonel Corwin gave clear instructions for the Iraqis to move out of Zakho. At first, the Iraqi commander belligerently replied he knew nothing about Operation Provide Comfort and had no orders to vacate. However, some menacing overflights by heavily armed American A-10 Warthogs and Sea Cobra helicopter gunships convinced the Iraqis to sling arms and hit the road. As soon as the Iraqis left, the Marines began building a refugee camp to demonstrate their humanitarian intent. Before nightfall, a dozen bright blue and white tents had

been erected. These were the first of more than 10,000 tents that would be put up in three camps that eventually housed more than 180,000 refugees! The BLT Bravo Command Group, Companies E and H, the artillery, assault amphibians, and a light armored vehicle detachment remained at the Iraqi border ready to move into Zakho the next day.<sup>73</sup>

Lieutenant Colonel Kohl, commanding officer of MSSG-24, was given an unusual operational mission by Colonel Jones. The Turkish-Iraqi border crossing at Habur was closed, but had to be opened to allow overland supply of the assault force. This task would normally have been given to the ground combat element, but Lieutenant Colonel Corwin was busy conducting the assault, so Kohl was tasked to do this. Lieutenant Colonel Kohl, First Sergeant Delgado, a five-member civilian relief team, and a rifle squad departed Silopi for Habur during mid-afternoon of 20 April.

During Desert Storm the Iraqis had dropped both bridge spans at Habur and mined the roadway leading to Zakho, but since the cease fire, a field expedient bridge had since been thrown across the river. Reports indicated the Iraqis had removed some, but not all of the mines. At Habur, Lieutenant Colonel Kohl located a Turkish lieutenant who spoke broken English. Kohl patiently explained the crossing was to be opened to allied traffic the next morning. The Turkish



*A fast attack vehicle (FAV) on patrol carries two U.S. and one British Marine as it crosses the Khabur River in Central Zakho. A FAV is an M151 jeep mounting either a machine gun or a TOW antitank missile.*

officer escorted Kohl to the center of the bridge where they met an Iraqi border guard. Kohl again explained the situation, then indicated he was concerned about explosives on the bridge and along the main supply route. The Iraqi remained silent about the mines, but stated he did not have the authority to allow the Americans to cross and would have to check with his superiors. While Kohl waited for an answer, Iraqi reinforcements occupied the heights overlooking the road. To counter this show of force, Marine Sea Cobras, Army Blackhawks, and Air Force Warthogs droned ominously in the sky overhead. About 20 minutes later the Iraqi returned and granted permission to cross the bridge. For the second time that day, the 24th MEU (SOC)'s policy of aggressive restraint paid big dividends.<sup>74</sup>

Unfortunately, the Turks had neither instructions nor authority to allow the Americans across the border. About 90 more minutes lapsed before Turkish permission to cross was granted. On the bridge, several Iraqis worked with an American explosive ordnance demolition (EOD) team. They discovered no mines but found explosive charges under the bridge and removed them. Lieutenant Colonel Kohl's mission was a success; the first American convoy moved into northern Iraq at 0800 the next day (21 April).

During this time, the MEU Command Element, the Aviation Combat Element, and MSSG-24 settled in at Silopi, while back at Iskenderun convoys carried the final Marine increments forward. The *Charleston* and the *Austin* were completely offloaded and the MEU's 15-day Landing Force Operational Readiness Material (LFORM) was on shore. The *Guadalcanal* remained nearby to provide aviation support.<sup>75</sup> Messages to the United States requested further logistics and combat support. Included in these requests were those for additional firepower control teams from 2d ANGLICO, an RPV detachment from 2d SRIG, and more engineer assets. It was also hoped that an AV-8B Harrier II detachment might be made available.

### *Securing Zakho*

On 22 April, a Military Coordination Center was established at Zakho. Army Colonel Richard Naab, a team chief, two liaison officers, and two linguists comprised the allied team. A similar Iraqi contingent was led by Brigadier General Nashwan. The Center operated 24 hours a day to provide face-to-face discussions during tense situations, kept both sides informed about future operations, and acted as a sounding board for opposing views about current operations.

General Nashwan used the first meeting to announce that Iraqi forces north of the 37th Parallel had been ordered to pull back and that Iraqi commanders were cooperating completely. However, despite these congenial relations at the MCC, the Iraqis quickly tested the coalition's determination. Although all Iraqi troops had allegedly left Zakho, more than 300 "policemen" wearing military uniforms and carrying automatic weapons remained. Major Raftery's intelligence section later confirmed that they were soldiers from the *66th Special Assault*



Painting by Col Peter M. "Mike" Gish, USMCR  
*Col Mike Gish portrays the entrance to Camp Sommers in Zahko, Iraq. Camp Sommers, named for Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps David W. Sommers, housed the 24th MEU (SOC) headquarters, Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 133, the U.S. Army 18th Engineer Brigade and 18th Military Police Brigade, and the Joint Civil Affairs Group.*

*Brigade.* At the next meeting Colonel Naab reiterated the coalition's insistence that all Iraqi forces be moved at least 30 kilometers south, but he was answered by silence. The second major incident of the day occurred that evening when a flight of Iraqi MI-8 helicopters headed for northern Iraq was intercepted by F-16 fighters from Incirlik. The incident was quickly resolved when the helicopters landed and offered no resistance.<sup>76</sup>

The American Marines in northern Iraq were joined by their foreign brothers-in-arms when the British 45th Commando, Royal Marines, was placed under the tactical control of the 24th MEU. This battalion-size unit of 637 Royal Marine "Booties" was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Jonathan Thompson. Lieutenant Colonel Thompson established his command post in an abandoned school about 10 kilometers outside Zakho. Thompson's headquarters section was joined by three rifle companies: X, Y, Z, and Company M (the British Commando Mountain and Arctic Warfare Training Cadre). Historically, British and Dutch Marines worked closely together and had often formed combined United Kingdom-Netherlands landing forces. This tradition continued in northern Iraq. On 23 April more than 400 "Cloggers" of the 1st Amphibious Combat Group (1st ACG), Royal Netherlands Marine Corps, commanded by Lieutenant

Colonel Cees Van Egmond, arrived in northern Iraq. With these attachments, the 24th MEU (SOC) formed an unofficial "international brigade" that mustered about 3,600 personnel.

At first, the 24th MEU (SOC) and Joint Task Force Bravo shared the former headquarters of an Iraqi infantry division on the northwestern edge of Zakho, but they had to part company when troop numbers increased. Joint Task Force Bravo increased in size during the latter part of April. It soon included the 4th Brigade (Aviation), 3d Infantry Division; the 18th Engineer Brigade with Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 133 (SeaBees) attached; the 18th Military Police Brigade; the 432d Civil Affairs Company; and the Canadian 4th Field Ambulance (a battalion-size mobile medical unit). The 3d Battalion, 325th Infantry (Airborne) Combat Team (3-325th ABCT) from a duty station in Italy was expected to arrive on 27 April. It was a reinforced infantry battalion commanded by Lieutenant Colonel John P. Abizaid, USA, that included a headquarters company, three rifle companies, 20 Humvee-mounted TOW antitank launchers, an 81mm mortar platoon, a 105mm artillery battery (Battery D, 319th Field



Painting by Col Peter M. "Mike" Gish, USMCR  
*A U.S. Marine from BLT 2/8 and a French soldier from the 8th Marine Parachute Infantry Regiment stop a vehicle at a jointly manned checkpoint near Zakho.*

Artillery), and small supply and reconnaissance detachments. A Spanish expeditionary force and an Italian airborne brigade were also on the way and were scheduled to land the following week.

Despite the presence of multinational security forces, many Kurds were unwilling to return to Iraq. Kurdish elders reported that the Iraqi police intimidated them during an exploratory visit to Zakho and stated they would return only if the Iraqis evacuated and an allied security force remained. General Shalikashvili felt the problem was the continued presence of Iraqi troops in and around Zakho. In addition to the "police," an infantry strongpoint was located only two kilometers from the city and three artillery batteries were in the hills south of Zakho. General John R. Galvin (CinCEur) directed General Shalikashvili to begin planning for forcible removal of the Iraqis should it become necessary. Concurrently, Colonel Naab and General Nashwan reached an agreement to defuse the situation.

General Garner (CG, JTF-B) ordered Colonel Jones to occupy the town of Zakho. During the evening of 25 April, BLT 2/8 cordoned off the northern, eastern, and southern approaches to the city, the Dutch covered the west, and the 45th Commando cleared the city. This was a most appropriate task because the British had just seen duty in Northern Ireland and were adept at low intensity urban warfare. Calling on recent experience battling the illegal, underground Irish Republican Army, the British used a unique combination of force and tact



Photograph by the author  
*A CH-46E Sea Knight medium lift transport helicopter at HSSB Silopi, Turkey, landing zone. The Sea Knights were sometimes called "frogs" because of their squat appearance. Most had seen more than 20 years of service.*

to patrol the streets. They gently reassured the civilians and sent the previously arrogant Iraqis scurrying out of town. By sundown Zakho was in allied hands. The 24th MEU (SOC) and its attachments promptly began a rigorous security program using squad-size patrols to criss-cross the area of operations.<sup>77</sup>

### *Life in Zakho*

After securing Zakho, BLT 2/8 conducted defensive operations. Roadblocks were established on the main supply routes south and west of Zakho. Companies E and F provided rifle platoons and either a fast attack vehicle (a jeep with a machine gun mounted on top) or a combined antiarmor team (CAAT) at each checkpoint. Company G pulled security duty at the Zakho hospital. Company H secured headquarters and one of its rifle platoons stood by as the "Sparrowhawk" rapid reaction force. Weapons Company was divided among the rifle companies or integrated into the command post security forces. Light armored vehicles (LAVs) conducted daily road reconnaissance and MSR security operations. Battery H, reinforced by six lightweight 105mm howitzers of the British 79th Battery, 29th Commando Regiment, Royal Artillery, set up near Zakho.

The Black Knights of HMM-264 operated from Silopi, usually flying morning and evening missions to MEU headquarters, providing visual reconnaissance and medical evacuation flights on request, and making daily runs to Landing Zone (LZ) Raven and other camps as needed. The squadron's ground support personnel ran landing zones at Silopi and Zakho, and manned the Silopi forward arming and refueling point. MSSG-24 set up shop at Silopi, manned rear areas at Incirlik and Iskenderun, and furnished a combat service support detachment at Zakho.

In addition to running combat patrols, holding observation outposts on key terrain, and manning road checkpoints the Marines undertook a wide variety of humanitarian functions. Such operations were described by Lieutenant Colonel Kohl as being "right up MSSG-24's alley."<sup>78</sup> A 107-man combat service support detachment (CSSD) moved to Zakho on 21 April. The greatest logistics challenge was to equitably distribute MSSG-24's limited resources to support the 24th MEU (SOC) and still meet the needs of so many starving refugees. The first attempts to provide relief were marked by mass confusion caused by mobs of hungry people. Organizational meetings with Kurdish leaders, additional camps, and increased supply flow reduced these problems. Soon, the distribution system was operating smoothly. The Marines first realized the situation had drastically improved when Kurdish leaders began to complain about the suitability of MREs as a food source.<sup>79</sup> Ironically, this seemingly ungrateful criticism was an unconscious compliment, because by then the Kurds were getting enough food to be picky about what they were eating. Supplies of dry goods and fresh food stuffs soon replaced MREs.<sup>80</sup>

West of town the Marines helped a Kurdish work party pitch more than 600 tents at Camp One, the first of three resettlement camps eventually built near Zakho. The CSSD established LZ Raven to serve Camp One. A Marine



Painting by Col Peter M. "Mike" Gish, USMCR

*As part of the British-conceived plan to provide a safe haven for the Kurds in northern Iraq, the allies built three large refugee relocation camps in the vicinity of Zakho. The Marines of 24th MEU (SOC) built the first of these in mid-April, then turned it over to the U.N. High Commission for Refugees in May 1991.*

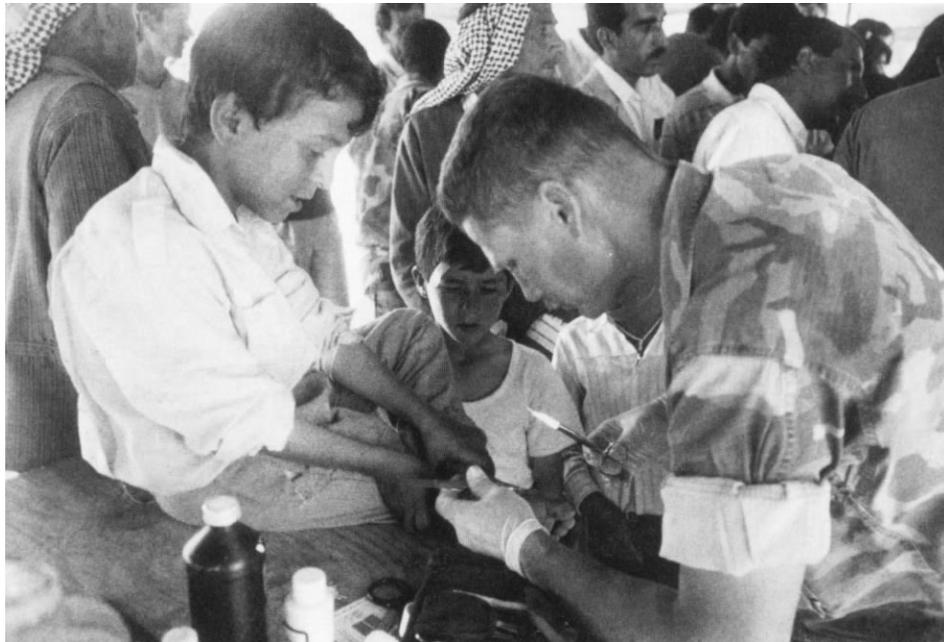
helicopter support team and the landing party's forklifts were the primary movers for this civic action project. A combat engineer detachment from BLT 2/8 helped put up tents and assisted the establishment of supply dumps and water points. Australian, Luxembourgish, French, Dutch, and Canadian medics serviced the camps around Zakho. Military police maintained order and civil affairs teams assisted camp administration. More than 400 wooden latrines were built by the SeaBees.<sup>81</sup> Eventually, the population of Camp One swelled to more than 42,000 people.

Lieutenant Colonel Kohl (MSSG-24) sent engineer and maintenance teams to Zakho to survey the city's power transmission facility on 22 April. At the request of local authorities, the generator at the Zakho Hospital was also examined. These teams reported that the city's power plant and water treatment facility needed major repairs, and the hospital's generator was beyond hope. General Garner responded by ordering a new generator for the hospital and providing engineer and technical support to restore Zakho's power and water plants. However, while these repairs were being made and the requested equipment was being shipped, MSSG-24 provided these vital services for Zakho. The Marines delivered more than 1,600 gallons of fuel to the hospital each week,

operated a water treatment and distribution point in the center of the city, and opened temporary medical and dental clinics.

This last action was important because the medical treatment capability in Zakho was almost nonexistent. The Zakho Hospital was staffed by only one doctor and one nurse. It had electric power only about eight hours each week. Long lines of sick refugees flooded Zakho's narrow streets, vainly hoping to be cured at the overworked medical facility. To fill this void, MSSG-24 sent medical and dental assistance to Zakho. About 2,200 patients were treated by Doctor Buckley and the Navy corpsmen. Doctors Ratliff and Nogacek, dentists assigned to MSSG-24, saw about 70 patients. As time passed, French, Irish, Australian, and Canadian medical teams also set up shop in Zakho.

The engineer detachment (Sergeant David C. Tanczuk) set up two Univox Reverse Osmosis Water Purification Units (ROWPUs) on 23 April. These units purified water by removing contaminants. Unpurified water was forced through a series of cellulose or polyamide membranes fabricated into a spiral element and stretched over a drum. The ROWPUs could produce pure drinking water from polluted water, sea water, or brackish water. Each one pumped about 1,800 gallons of drinking water from the muddy Khabur River every hour. A water distribution point was set up in the center of town where it serviced all who needed water, including allied military units, Kurdish refugees, the Iraqi Christian community, and sometimes even Iraqi soldiers.



*Chief Hospital Corpsman Arthur Angel treats a young Kurdish refugee's blistered foot in a medical clinic on the outskirts of the city of Zakho, Iraq. Marine Service Support Group 24 (MSSG-24) set up the clinic and a water purification station for the Kurdish refugees.*

### *Camp Sommers*

The 24th MEU (SOC) Headquarters was located just outside Zakho. The MEU's first tasks after moving in were to secure the area and to improve habitability. This former Iraqi army post was a shambles when the Marines first occupied it. The place had been thoroughly looted. There was no electricity. Every wooden door and table had been used for fire wood. There were no unbroken windows. Debris and filth littered the entire compound. Work parties began cleaning up, but major improvements at the site were provided by the SeaBees of Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 133 (NMCB-133). Although attached to the 18th Engineer Brigade, the SeaBees observed naval tradition and went out of their way to take care of "their" Marines. Latrines, showers, hardback tents, a mess hall, and volleyball courts sprouted up.

A six-foot wall ran along the roadway to protect the camp. Inside there was a hard-surfaced helicopter landing pad and an athletic field. Helicopters constantly droned overhead and the concrete landing pad was busy most of the time. The athletic field soon sprouted tents housing the Army engineers, the Seabees, and other assorted support units. The 24th MEU (SOC) headquarters was located inside a small central building. This command post housed a busy combat operations center (COC) and a combined personnel and logistics office. A "U"-shaped outer building housed the communications center, various staff sections, living spaces, and liaison offices. British and American engineers, military police, and logistics offices were also located there. A civil affairs office was located on the compound's northwest corner. The back entrance, gateway to Joint Task Force Bravo Headquarters, was in the southwest corner. This compound was named Camp Sommers to honor David W. Sommers, the Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps, on 5 May.

### *24th MEU Command and Control*

During Operation Provide Comfort the 24th MEU (SOC) staff faced many problems. As previously mentioned, the command which was configured to control a battalion-size ground combat element and a composite helicopter squadron, was actually controlling a 3,600-man international brigade with very little outside assistance. Although all went smoothly, this strained command, combat support, and service support capabilities to the limit.<sup>82</sup>

The personnel officer, Captain Dewey G. Jordan, was responsible for personnel reporting and mail, both of which were major issues for the Marines at Zakho and each problem had the same root cause, the wide dispersal of MEU personnel. Daily reporting was a chore because communications between Zakho, Silopi, Incirlik, and Phibron 8 sometimes broke down. Unexpected personnel frequently showed up at one of these places, often needing food, equipment, and transportation. Marine units were scattered across northern Iraq and Turkey so it was difficult to deliver mail in a timely fashion. Mail delivery was further complicated because of the sheer volume of incoming letters and packages.

American support for Desert Storm resulted in an unexpected influx of mail addressed to "Any Serviceman." However, while the volume of mail caused the postal section headaches, the field Marines loved it.<sup>83</sup> Captain Jordan's most unenviable task was casualty reporting. Two Marines were killed during Operation Provide Comfort; one in a traffic accident and the other as the result of a tragic accidental weapon discharge. Several other Marines were seriously injured and required evacuation to Europe or the United States.

Major Raftery and the intelligence section were busy from the time the MEU departed Sardinia until it was on the way home five months later. The intelligence section was charged with data collection and interpretation. There were three primary collection sources: 1) aerial reconnaissance, 2) ground reconnaissance, and 3) human intelligence. Aerial reconnaissance was limited at first. Operation Provide Comfort was only one of many agencies seeking input from national intelligence sources and the Marines lacked an organic tactical reconnaissance aircraft because the venerable McDonnell Douglas RF-4B Phantom II had been recently retired and was no longer in the Marine aviation inventory. The Marines were scheduled to receive modified F/A-18 Hornets as replacements, but these aircraft were not yet in the pipeline. The arrival of the aircraft carrier *Roosevelt* allowed U.S. Navy F-14 Tomcat fighters mounting TARPS (Tactical Aerial Reconnaissance Photographic System) pods to provide tactical aerial reconnaissance. These specially equipped airplanes flew photo missions over Iraq and returned to the *Roosevelt* for film processing. The finished photographs were loaded on a Lockheed S-3 Viking which dropped the pictures to ground units inside a Sono-Buoy canister.<sup>84</sup>

Major Raftery used intelligence data to identify enemy positions, estimate Iraqi strength, evaluate threat capabilities, and anticipate possible Iraqi courses of action. The S-2 section acquired numerous documents and a lot of Iraqi equipment, including sophisticated communications gear that ranged in size from an electronics van to hand-held security radios. An extensive human intelligence collection network was developed. Interrogator-translator teams exploited "walk-in" sources. One such source was Iraqi defectors. Another source was non-Kurdish local citizens who pointed out minefields, booby traps, and weapons caches. The Kurds identified strangers and reported atrocities. They also identified Iraqi secret police. These suspects were investigated, their presence reported to the Military Coordination Center, and they were removed from the area. Local citizens appreciated these actions and readily cooperated in the intelligence collection effort.

One reason for this wealth of human intelligence was that the Kurds were not the only oppressed minority in the vicinity. Northern Iraq was also the traditional home of many Christian Iraqis. These Chaldeans, as they called themselves, were impressed by the generosity and even-handed distribution of supplies by the Americans. The Marines soon developed a good working relationship with the Christian clergy and made friends among the Chaldean people, many of whom spoke English and had relatives living in the United States.<sup>85</sup>



Painting by Col Peter M. "Mike" Gish, USMCR  
*A satellite dish at the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit headquarters in Zakho, Iraq.*

Major Michael D. Boyd was the MEU logistics officer (S-4). His primary concerns were the lack of combat service support assets, embarkation and debarkation, maintenance management in the field, and supplying scattered units with limited transportation. The shortage of MSSG-24 assets resulted from the lack of shipping space. This shortage sometimes caused delays, but never cancelled a mission. The situation got better as more joint service assets arrived in northern Iraq. Embarkation and debarkation were always headaches for logisticians, but because of their expeditionary nature, the Marines were well-practiced in these arts and very proficient at loading and unloading ships and aircraft.

The first problem faced by Captain Charles E. Headen, the communications officer, was that Joint Task Force Provide Comfort had no standard electronic operating instructions. Instead, Headen relied on plans he prepared during the transit from Sardinia. He did such a good job, that these instructions remained almost unchanged during the entire operation. A second problem was that his section was over-tasked to provide equipment. The MEU rated only four satellite radios, but as the expanded 24th MEU (SOC) and its international attachments spread across Turkey and Iraq, this number proved insufficient. Luckily, the communications section appropriated four additional sets. This doubled the authorized number and allowed communications to continue uninterrupted.

Another issue was that the communications section had no organic capability to leave the ship and still maintain a communications center afloat. This shortfall was made up using U.S. Navy equipment and personnel.

Captain Headen singled out two Marines for their outstanding work. Gunnery Sergeant Martin W. Duncan, the communications chief, kept the section's jeeps running by securing Iraqi parts from destroyed or abandoned vehicles and adapting them to fix American vehicles. Another resourceful Marine was ground radio repairman Corporal Daniel J. Slagle. Although he had no formal training, Slagle repaired satellite communication radios in the field. He repaired radios for Marine units, U.S. Army units, and a U.S. Navy SEAL team. His actions saved valuable time because without his intervention these radios would have been sent the United States for repair without replacement.<sup>86</sup>

Captain Timothy J. Ott, the 24th MEU (SOC) Staff Judge Advocate, was concerned with customs procedures, the rules of engagement, host nation legal matters, and captured weapons. Turkish customs were frustrating, lengthy, bureaucratic battles that required careful accounting and detailed inspections. For a time, the Turks relaxed their stringent standards but later reinstated them so frustrating delays of more than a week became common. The "Rules of Engagement" stated when and under what circumstances a Marine was allowed to fire his weapon. General Shalikashvili, to emphasize the humanitarian nature of Operation Provide Comfort, called such rules "Commander's Guidance for the Use of Force." The first rule was actually a statement of purpose. Provide Comfort was a humanitarian relief operation, not a combat operation and personnel should conduct themselves in an appropriate manner. The rule stressed that the allies were in northern Iraq to give assistance, not to start a war. The next rule dealt with the right to use force for self-defense. Nothing in the rules negated the commander's primary obligation to take all necessary action for self-defense. Combined Task Force Provide Comfort units were authorized to use force to respond to attacks or threats against humanitarian relief personnel or displaced civilians, but were to use only the minimum force necessary. Deadly force could be used only to protect lives in response to a hostile act or to react to a demonstration of hostile intent. On 1 May, General Shalikashvili gave further guidance regarding the treatment of civilians. Any armed Iraqi or Kurd trying to enter the exclusion zone was to be disarmed and detained. This included Iraqi "police," Kurdish Peshmerga guerrillas, and anyone without proper authorization.

Captain Ott faced two other issues. One was host nation status of forces agreements. Normally when the United States deployed on foreign territory it entered into agreement with that particular country to pay for damage accidentally inflicted on either citizens or their property. There was no such agreement with the government of Iraq, therefore, payments were not authorized. The other issue was recovery of abandoned or lost Iraqi equipment and documents. Captured major weapons were turned over to the Military Coordination Center which then returned them to the Iraqis. Small arms, grenades, and explosives were disposed of by EOD teams.<sup>87</sup>

### *Camp Security*

The terrorist threat was high, the compound was exposed, and the Marines were menaced by unknown enemies.<sup>88</sup> Every Marine was well aware of the infamous Beirut bombing in 1983 and all vowed such an incident would not be repeated in northern Iraq.<sup>89</sup>

Needless to say, northern Iraq was a perfect place for such an attack, so the 24th MEU (SOC) had to be particularly alert. Colonel Jones wisely placed headquarters compound security in the able hands of Master Gunnery Sergeant John B. MacDonald.

Master Gunnery Sergeant MacDonald, a Vietnam veteran, placed listening posts along the wall, ran constant patrols, and scattered broken vehicles in the road leading to the MEU compound.

### *Marine Reinforcements*

Several combat support units were attached to the 24th MEU (SOC) while it operated in support of Operation Provide Comfort. The need for tactical deep penetration aerial reconnaissance required the presence of an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) detachment. The U.S. Army and foreign units required air and naval gunfire liaison teams.



*A LAV-25 patrols the streets of Zakho. These lightweight, helicopter-transportable LAVs were the only armored vehicles available in northern Iraq.*

A shortage of national intelligence assets in northern Iraq and the lack of organic tactical reconnaissance aircraft led Colonel Jones to request further intelligence gathering capabilities. His request was granted. On 2 May, an experimental unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) unit that used "off the shelf" technology was ordered to Turkey. Captain Wayne O. Ouzts, the S-3 Alpha for the 2d Surveillance Reconnaissance and Intelligence Group was designated the officer in charge of the Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Detachment, 2d Remotely Piloted Vehicle Company, from Camp Lejeune. The detachment mustered six personnel and had 15 unmanned aerial vehicles. Members of the detachment had just finished six grueling months in the desert during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Most Marines had been back in the United States for about three weeks, but Captain Ouzts had been home only three days before being ordered to Turkey. The detachment arrived in Turkey on 7 May, but it took eight days to clear customs. From Incirlik the UAVs and their ancillary equipment took three days to get to Silopi and another day to get to the forward operating base at Muqbal. The UAV Detachment used an abandoned Iraqi artillery position.

The unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) selected for use was the Exdrone, a disposable unmanned aircraft with a fixed camera. About the size of a large model airplane, its delta shape made it look like a miniature Stealth bomber. It was hoped these Exdrones could fill the gap between ground reconnaissance and high altitude photographs. The UAVs gave Colonel Jones and Major Raftery timely video coverage of choke points and areas of interest. They provided a cost-efficient, long-range, unmanned aerial vehicle intelligence gathering platform, and flew approximately 40 kilometers south of Dohuk to photograph Iraqi rear echelon areas and assembly positions.

The UAV Detachment prepared its equipment the previous night. The UAVs launched around 0930, flew to Dohuk, then traced the main supply route south into the heart of Iraq. When the drones overflew choke points or Iraqi positions, they swooped low to reveal a video panorama of the target area.

The UAVs made 22 flights in 12 days, often flying two missions per day. Air space coordination was difficult because there were so many different aircraft in the area. Pilots were apprehensive about flying with unmanned aerial vehicles in the air because they were hard to see in the crowded sky. A compromise was made. The UAVs were sent aloft only at specified times during daylight hours. There were three crashes during experimental operations and three crashes during flight operations. The detachment departed Zakho on 28 May 1991 and returned to Camp Lejeune on 1 June. During Operation Provide Comfort the UAVs ". . . probably saved two years on the developmental process . . ."90

Marine air and naval gunfire liaison companies (ANGLICO) provide air and naval gunfire support to non-Marine U.S. and allied forces. The Marines of an ANGLICO firepower control team (FCT) are specially trained to observe, direct, and coordinate supporting arms. Marine units possess organic capabilities to control supporting arms, so ANGLICO firepower control teams are tasked to provide such services for attached or allied units working with the Marines.



Painting by Col Peter M. "Mike" Gish, USMCR  
*Marines of 2d ANGLICO rappel from a hovering helicopter demonstrating what is known as a "fast rope" insertion. Six firepower control teams from 2d ANGLICO supported U.S. Army and allied units serving in northern Iraq.*

The 24th MEU (SOC) Command Element included a detachment from 2d ANGLICO, but the demands of Operation Provide Comfort required additional ANGLICO support. On 7 May 1991, 2d ANGLICO at Camp Lejeune was ordered to send four firepower control teams (FCT) to Turkey. These teams departed Cherry Point and arrived at Incirlik on 12 May. They were in the field with Joint Task Force Bravo on 15 May 1991.<sup>91</sup> Six firepower control teams were used in northern Iraq: FCT-1 was attached to the British 40th Commando, Royal Marines; FCT-2 was with the French 8th Marine Parachute Infantry Regiment; FCT-3 worked with the Italian Folgore Parachute Brigade; FCT-4 was with the British 45th Commando; FCT-5 was with the Dutch 1st Amphibious Combat Group; and FCT-6 joined the U.S. Army's 3-325th Airborne Combat Team.<sup>92</sup> These ANGLICO Marines participated in combined tactical exercises, made parachute jumps, and conducted fire support demonstrations. Unfortunately, several ANGLICO Marines were injured during a training accident on 4 July and had to be hospitalized. Luckily, no one was killed when the "Slide for Life" rope parted and the Marines crashed onto the rocky ground below.<sup>93</sup>

In a very short time, all was going well in northern Iraq. The Marines had settled in, were assisting refugees as they arrived, had cleared the Iraqis out of Zakho, and were working smoothly with allied forces. However, there was one gigantic hitch. Many Kurds refused to return to northern Iraq unless the city of Dohuk was liberated, the security zone expanded, and political issues resolved. In early May, the decision to expand the security zone, coupled with a concerted effort to move the Kurds out of Turkey, was announced and named "Gallant Provider."

### *Launching Gallant Provider: Expanding the Security Zone*

The next phase of Operation Provide Comfort was Gallant Provider. Despite its initial success, Provide Comfort had not achieved its ultimate goal. Most of the Kurds still refused to come down from the mountains. News about the liberation of Zakho reached the mountains and some Kurds began moving back into Iraq, but many continued to cling to the dubious shelter of their mountain hideouts. This was a troubling prospect for General Shalikashvili because the warm weather was about to dry up the mountain streams and make life there even more difficult.

To try to encourage more Kurds to leave the mountains General Shalikashvili decided to expand the security area in northern Iraq. New orders were passed to Generals Potter and Garner. Joint Task Force Alpha was to close down the mountain camps, open a series of way stations on the route out of Turkey, and begin an intense campaign to convince the Kurds to return to Iraq. Joint Task Force Bravo was ordered to expand its area of operations east and south.

On 29 April, Colonel Jones relinquished tactical control of the 45th Commando, the 29th Commando Regiment, and the 1st ACG when these units



*Aerial view of a resettlement camp (bajeer) near Zakho. Roads divided this bajeer into 60-person zanon (hamlets). Zanon were grouped into gunds (villages) of about 1,000 people. Joint medical, administrative, and food distribution centers, and water distribution points, were centrally located. This camp served more than 21,000 people.*

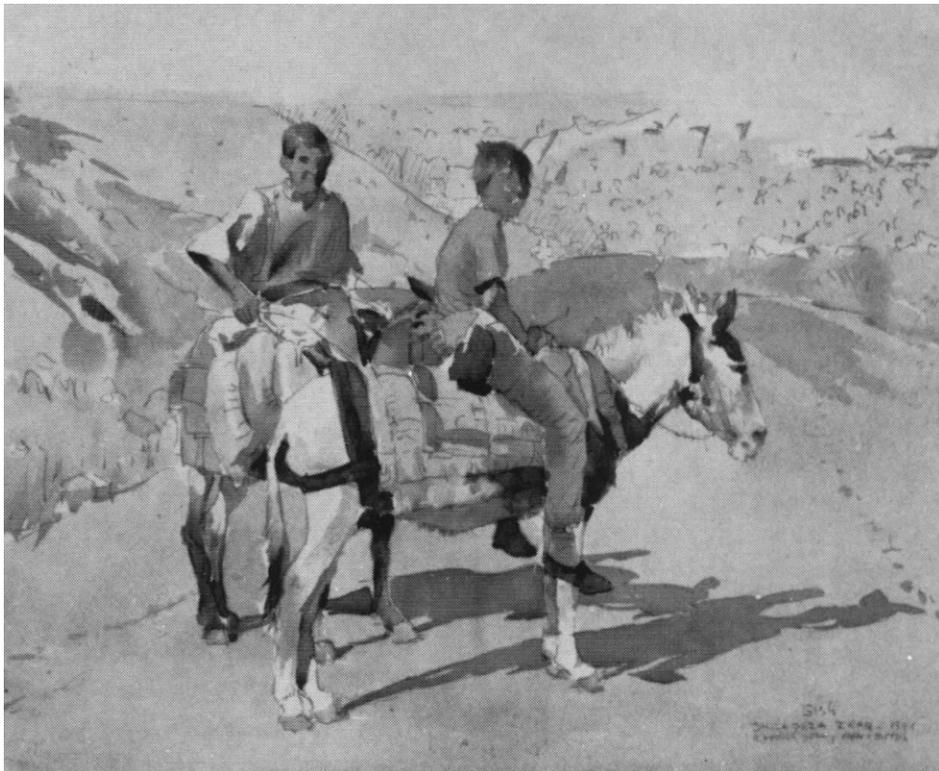
were turned over to their parent unit, the 3d Commando Brigade, Royal Marines. The 3d Commando Brigade was reinforced by firepower control teams from 2d ANGLICO: the 105mm artillery platoon, Battery H, 3d Battalion, 10th Marines; and an LAV section--two LAV-25s, an LAV-AT (mounting a TOW II antitank missile launcher), and an LAV-L (logistics vehicle).

When General Garner received the warning order to extend Joint Task Force Bravo's tactical area to the east, he tasked the 24th MEU (SOC) to assist the reconnaissance effort. The Marines deployed force reconnaissance teams approximately 120 kilometers from Zakho. After the British secured Al Amadiyah and the French moved into Suri, Joint Task Force Bravo began looking toward Dohuk. To assist this effort, reconnaissance teams relayed information about Iraqi positions and movements south of Zakho. Colonel Jones used these reports to monitor the Iraqi movements. Reconnaissance teams also located and marked many minefields. There were 52 ground reconnaissance missions during Provide Comfort.

On 1 May 1991, the United Nations raised its flag over Zakho before a crowd of about 1,000 Kurds.<sup>94</sup> By 4 May, about 3,000 Kurds were living at Zakho. Bulk food (rice, flour, lentils, sugar, and salt) stored there could feed an estimated 9,000 refugees two meals per day for about 30 days. The Zakho Civil Affairs Team met with the mayor, the police chief, and the leader of the Baath Party. They worked out a compromise and agreed only 50 unarmed police would remain in town. The major civic problems were electric power and sanitation because all electric generators were out of order and Saddam stubbornly refused to switch on external power sources. Despite these handicaps, Zakho's markets and shops were open, currency was plentiful, and one of the banks was operating. The streets of Zakho soon teemed with people hurrying to market.

### *BLT 2/8 Moves South*

On 4 May, Battalion Landing Team 2/8 moved south of Zakho along the road leading through Summayl to Dohuk. A platoon from Company E relieved a similar unit from Company F. Company F then formed a combined arms



Painting by Col Peter M. "Mike" Gish, USMCR  
*Young Kurds on burros in Shiladeza, Iraq*



Photograph courtesy of MajGen Jay M. Garner, USA  
*The commanders assigned to JTF Bravo at Zakho are an international contingent, including American, British, Dutch, and French Marines. MajGen Jay M. Garner, USA (CG, JTF Bravo), is seated center front row. The American Marine commander, Col James L. Jones, Jr. (CO, 24th MEU), is seated second from the right. LtCol Tony L. Corwin (CO, BLT 2/8) stands behind him.*

mechanized task force. The rifle company was mounted in assault amphibian vehicles reinforced by one LAV section and two combined antiarmor teams. Battery H and the BLT's 81mm mortars were in direct support. Sea Cobras from HMM-264 buzzed angrily overhead and additional air was available if needed. The Iraqis grudgingly moved from one post after another as the Marines advanced. Company F eventually moved about five kilometers south of Summayl Village before stopping. Company G was immediately inserted by the Sea Knights of HMM-264 and reinforced Company F. The BLT command element, Company H, and Battery H established a fire support base at Muqbal on 9 May.<sup>95</sup>

### *Allied Forces*

The British forces assigned to Operation Haven, as the British called Provide Comfort, were commanded by Major General Robin J. Ross, Royal Marines. The command element was Joint Force Headquarters, drawn mostly from Headquarters, Commando Forces. The ground combat element was 3d Commando Brigade, with three commando battalions, an artillery regiment, and an engineer squadron. The British 40th Commando, Royal Marines, was temporarily under the tactical control of Task Force Alpha. The British 45th Commando, Royal Marines, held Sirsenk and Al Amadiyah. The Dutch 1st Amphibious Combat Group was located at Batufa. The 29th Commando

Regiment, Royal Artillery, had a headquarters battery and three firing batteries armed with 105mm lightweight towed howitzers. The 59th Independent Commando Squadron, Royal Engineers, was collocated with 3d Commando Brigade Headquarters. The British deployed three helicopter squadrons. The Chinook Force (Royal Air Force) and 846th Naval Air Squadron (Royal Navy) operated from Silopi. The 3d Brigade Air Squadron flew out of Sirsenk. The Commando Logistics Regiment (Royal Marines) operated from Silopi, where it worked closely with the Combined Support Command.<sup>96</sup> The Dutch sent about 1,000 troops to support Provide Comfort. About 400 were Marines and the rest were aviation, service support, or medical personnel.

The French contingent was the "Cougar Force" comprised of a light infantry brigade, a field hospital, and part of a helicopter regiment. The ground combat force was drawn from the French Rapid Action Force's 11th Airborne Brigade. This task force included headquarters, an infantry regiment, an Alpine company, a medical detachment, and support personnel. The main ground force was the 8th Marine Parachute Regiment.<sup>97</sup> French terminology differed from American usage, and French Marine units were not "soldiers of the sea" as were the American, British, and Dutch Marines, rather, they were expeditionary units made up of professional soldiers formerly called "colonial infantry."<sup>98</sup> The French were assigned the far eastern sector of the security zone.

Italy sent elements of the famous Folgore Parachute Brigade, an Alpine special forces company, a helicopter detachment, and a field medical unit. The Folgore Brigade had previously served beside the American Marines as part of the Multinational Force in Beirut from 1982-84. The Italians were given the east-central sector.

The Spanish Expeditionary Force was the first large military unit deployed outside of Spain since 1898. Its ground combat element was three rifle companies from the 1st Airborne Brigade, "Roger De Flor." The Spanish also sent engineer, medical, and helicopter detachments. The Spanish guarded Habur crossing and Zakho's western lines of communication. Germany, Canada, Denmark, Australia, and Luxembourg also sent small military units, usually medical detachments, which were attached to larger allied forces.<sup>99</sup>

By mid-May, the allied security zone spread from the Turkish border about three-quarters of the way across Iraq toward the Iranian border. The 3d Commando Brigade pushed west and nudged the *Iraqi 36th Infantry Division* out of Batufa. From there the brigade moved on to Sirsenk where it occupied a vital airstrip that was capable of landing C-130 transport airplanes, but had been damaged during Desert Storm. Six days of around-the-clock repairs put it back into action. The airstrip was reopened on 14 May and was operated by an Arriving/Departing Air Control Group from Contingency MAGTF 1-91. Sirsenk soon became a major humanitarian service support base replacing Yuksekova in Turkey.

The 526-man Spanish airborne battalion was assigned route security from Habur to Zakho. The French "Cougar Force" moved east toward Suri. Battalion Landing Team 2/8 continued local patrolling, manned three checkpoints,



Photograph courtesy of MajGen Jay M. Garner, USA  
*MajGen Jay M. Garner, CG, JTF Bravo, center, and Col James L. Jones, Jr., CO, 24th MEU (SOC), meet with Kurdish leaders Jalal Talabani, second from left, and Moussad Barzani, third from right, in Zakho. Talabani was leader of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and Barzani headed the Kurdish Democratic Party. These long-time political rivals joined forces as the Kurdistan United Front during Operation Provide Comfort.*

consolidated defensive positions, and worked on civic action projects. The U.S. Army's 284th Military Police Company patrolled Zakho, and the 18th Engineer Brigade built refugee camps, manned fuel and water points, and participated in numerous civic action projects. In Joint Task Force Bravo's area all was well and the allies awaited the return of the refugees.

### *The Kurds*

The major stumbling block to a successful campaign was Dohuk. Most Kurds still in the mountains were from Dohuk Province and wouldn't budge until it was liberated and secured. More than 1,500 Kurds demonstrated in Zakho, asking the allies to retake Dohuk on 12 May. Discussions with the Kurds revealed they would not return unless the allies opened the city of Dohuk, worked out a political settlement for an autonomous Kurdistan, and agreed to protect them from Saddam's wrath. General Garner relayed this information to General Shalikashvili, and patiently waited for further guidance.

The Kurds have never been noted for political unity. Kurdish politics was a confusing labyrinth not easily explored by the uninitiated. There were six major political parties: the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), the Party of United Kurdistan (PUK), the Kurdistan Socialist Party (KSP), the Socialist Party for

Kurdish People (SPKP), the Kurdistan Peoples Democratic Party (KPDP), and the Workers Party (WP). The Kurds also were deeply divided by tribal rivalry.

The oldest, best known, and most powerful political organization was the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP). From 1946 until 1975, Mustapha Barzani's KDP was the single most important conduit for Kurdish nationalism in Iraq. In 1975, Jalal Talibani started the rival Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). The KDP and the PUK have vied for Kurdish leadership ever since. Charismatic Massoud Barzani inherited the mantle of KDP leadership after his father's death in 1979.

In late April, Jalal Talibani met with Saddam Hussein, after which he announced a return to the principles of Kurdish autonomy. He also urged the Kurds to cease fighting and begin returning home. However, the skeptical Kurds remained unconvinced because they had heard Saddam's lies too many times before. In 1970 he promised them autonomy, but by 1975 had renewed a campaign of repression which included using chemical weapons against Kurdish civilians in 1988. The brutality of the recent reoccupation of Kurdistan was also still fresh in their minds. Talabani's pronouncements were ignored by the Peshmerga who continued fighting Iraqi forces.



Painting by Col Peter M. "Mike" Gish, USMCR  
*Tents at Zakho I, Iraq*

Iraqi representatives met with Kurdish elders and political leaders at Kanimasi on 13 May 1991. The Kurds were pleasantly surprised to discover they were being invited to return to Dohuk. However, they made their return dependant on two requests. First, an agreement had to be worked out with Baghdad to guarantee a return to democratic principles, institution of civil rights, and Kurdish autonomy. Second, they wanted allied security forces to protect them. Without both guarantees, the Kurds would not return. In the words of one Kurd, "We would rather live like dogs than be slaughtered like pigs."<sup>100</sup>

The continued Iraqi occupation of Dohuk remained the main stumbling block to successfully concluding Operation Provide Comfort, and became a very sticky point when the Iraqis refused to leave. General Nashwan told Colonel Naab "If you enter . . . Dohuk, we will . . . take [military] action . . . ."<sup>101</sup> The Iraqi army responded by moving a mechanized battalion nearer to Dohuk. Unsure of allied resolve, Saddam instigated several provocative acts to test the waters. An American EA-6B Prowler was fired on twice during a routine reconnaissance flight. On 5 May, two Iraqi civilian helicopters spraying pesticides "slimed" Company F while flying over the Marine lines. Although the Iraqi pilots claimed innocence, this incident appeared to be a deliberate provocation. The helicopters were quickly intercepted and forced down. A search of the aircraft revealed a camera and some film, but it was never determined if this was Iraqi intelligence equipment or the innocent tools of an Iraqi "shutterbug." The chemicals were tested but contained only normal pesticide toxins and the incident was closed.

There was a major shooting incident on 13 May between Saddam's palace guards at Sirsenk and the British Marines. No allied troops were hit during the firefight. The Iraqis reported two wounded, but burial parties the next day indicated this report was in error. About a week later, members of the Joint Historical Team were sent running for cover when Iraqi 82mm mortar rounds were fired near allied positions.

Several firefights, a few food riots, and continual scuffles broke out between the Kurds and the Iraqis. In Zakho, General Garner became increasingly anxious about the safety of General Nashwan after his car was vandalized by angry Kurds on two different occasions, so the Americans found themselves in the awkward position of defending the Iraqis from the Kurds rather than vice versa.<sup>102</sup>

### *Opening Dohuk*

Fed up with Iraqi harassment, General Shalikashvili decided to use some more "aggressive restraint" and ordered an American response. American air activity increased and Joint Task Force Bravo turned its attention south. Colonel Jones anticipated three possible solutions to the Dohuk crisis: 1) forcible entry of Dohuk, 2) peaceful entry into Dohuk, and 3) neutralization of Dohuk with neither Iraqis nor coalition forces inside the city. Lieutenant Colonel Linn and the S-3 section prepared plans for all three courses of action.<sup>103</sup>

The plan to capture Dohuk using military force impacted the 24th MEU (SOC) the most. The 24th MEU (SOC) was given considerable additional combat

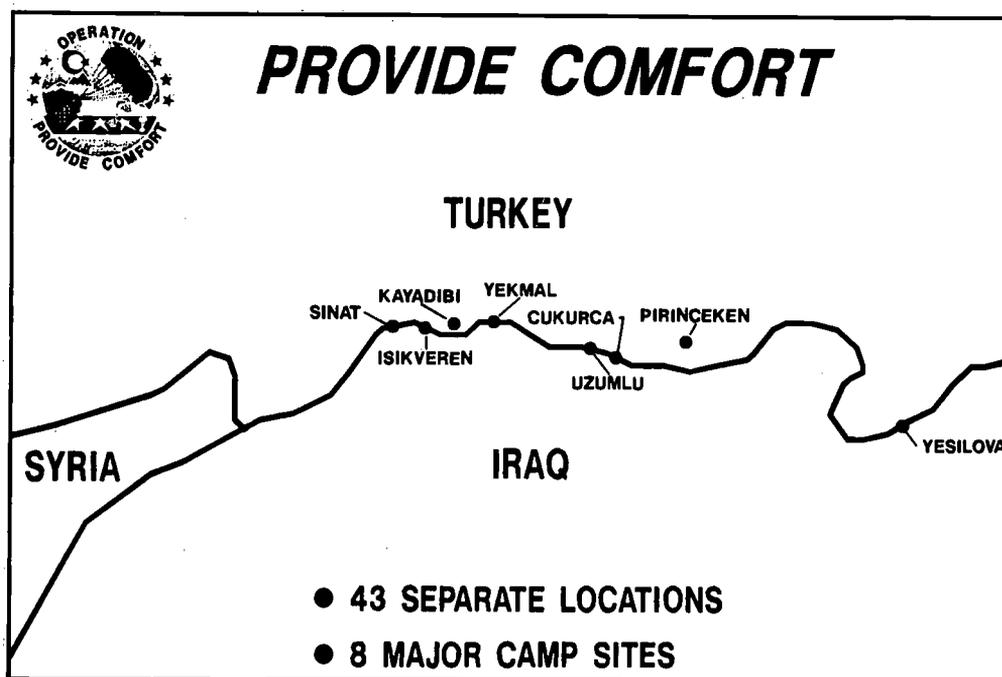
power to achieve this task. The 3-325 Airborne Combat Team was placed under Colonel Jones' tactical control. The British 29th Commando Regiment's 18 105mm howitzers reinforced the guns of Battery H. Marine Sea Cobras were reinforced by two Army attack helicopter companies from the 4th (Aviation) Battalion, 3d Infantry Division, at Zakho. Air Force A-10s and F-16s from Incirlik and Navy F-14s, F-18s, and A-6s from the *Roosevelt* were "on call."

Colonel Jones opted to use a pincer movement. The 3-325th Airborne Combat Team would isolate Dohuk from the northeast moving down MSR "Banzai." Battalion Landing Team 2/8 would approach the city from the northwest along MSR "Ninja." Combined command post exercises, fire support coordination exercises, and a sandtable exercise were used to prepare the attack. Luckily, however, this plan never had to be executed.

Three events loosened the logjam in the mountains and eased tensions at Dohuk: 1) Kurdish leader Massoud Barzani, meeting with Saddam Hussein, arrived at a tentative agreement about Kurdish autonomy; 2) a new allied-Iraqi agreement was reached; and 3) the Turks agreed to the establishment of a multinational residual force to be stationed on Turkish soil. The first two events opened the floodgates and Kurdish refugees began streaming south; the other one settled questions about the allied commitment to stay and protect the Kurds.

On 18 May, Massoud Barzani, leader of the Kurdish Democratic Party and the most influential spokesman for the Kurdish United Front, announced an agreement in principle between the Kurdish rebels and the Iraqi government. It called for restoration of democracy in Iraq and granted autonomy to the Kurds. A Kurdish Autonomous Zone (KAZ) would be established in northern Iraq, but it would remain part of Iraq. Kurdish would be the official language and the Kurds would be responsible for legal and political matters inside the zone, but would retain close economic ties with Baghdad. The Iraqi government would continue to handle international diplomacy.<sup>104</sup> This announcement was linked to further negotiations between the allied command and the Iraqi military. On 19 May, General Shalikashvili met with Iraqi Lieutenant General Abu Firas Saber to discuss opening Dohuk. A agreement was reached whereby the city of Dohuk was declared an "open" city. This agreement allowed limited humanitarian, civil affairs, and logistics teams to enter Dohuk along with United Nations and non-government relief agencies. Allied forces held positions north of Dohuk while the Iraqis pulled back to positions about 15 kilometers southeast of the city. A small convoy of coalition vehicles entered Dohuk carrying a strictly limited exploration and observation team on 20 May. This team established its command post in an empty hotel in the heart of the city and began to restore city services. This seemed to appease the Kurds and by 25 May most were on their way back to Dohuk.

Several hundred thousand Kurds left their mountain sanctuaries. They moved on foot, on horseback, and by mule cart, tractor, car, truck, and bus. Brightly colored civilian trucks, overflowed with happy Kurds as they returned home. A gigantic serpent-like procession snaked its way south stopping at way stations at Batufa, Kanimasi, Kanibalav, Daudiyah, Sarsing, Qadish, Deralok, and



Goregavan. Food and fuel were available at Nazdur, Baloka, Al Amadiyah, Barmini, Mangesh, and Giripit. Suddenly the border camps became ghost towns. Isikveren dropped from 80,000 to less than 1,000; all 4,500 people at Sinat left; Kayadiyah went from 8,000 to less than 500; Yekmal dropped from 74,000 to 5,000; Umzumlu went from 45,000 to 10,000; and Cukurca from 118,00 to 8,900. The last camp closed on 7 June 1991. The end of Operation Provide Comfort was in sight.

### *Provide Comfort Winds Down*

#### *Northern Iraq*

The massive movement out of the mountains signaled the end of Combined Task Force Provide Comfort's mission. After Dohuk was declared an "open city" on 24 May. The Marines had accomplished their mission and were about to head home. Old hands at expeditionary operations, the Marines got an early start. Captain Ouzts and the unmanned aerial vehicle detachment departed Turkey for Camp Lejeune in late May. The parachute riggers were detached from Contingency MAGTF 1-91 and returned to Camp Pendleton and Okinawa in early June. Once the final wave of refugees passed through the way stations, CMAGTF 1-91 had accomplished its mission and packed up for home as well.

Once the Kurds began returning to northern Iraq, the main tasks left for Combined Task Force Provide Comfort were to turn the camps over to civilian control, surrender the security mission to the United Nations, pull up stakes, and return home. On 30 May, General Colin L. Powell, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, inspected Joint Task Force Bravo's area of operations. During his tour he stopped at several checkpoints, talked with some enlisted Marines, and thanked them for a job well done. Following his visit, General Powell reported to Washington that all was going well and Operation Provide Comfort should be terminated soon as the diplomatic situation allowed.<sup>105</sup>

Battalion Landing Team 2/8 remained at the Muqbal fire support base, named Camp Denton to honor a Marine accidentally killed during Provide Comfort, from 9 May until 15 June. During this time Colonel Jones insisted on maximum cross training with other allied forces. Live-fire exercises, combined combat patrols, parachute jumps, and military schooling were constantly taking place. Lieutenant Colonel Corwin developed a rotation system whereby BLT 2/8 units manned forward checkpoints for six days, then rotated to Camp Denton for six days where they participated in live-fire demonstrations, ran squad-sized tactical exercises, and held organized athletic events. This last activity featured spirited competition and was a welcome relief from the military routine. The Marines won the "Northern Iraq International Soccer Championship" after defeating British, French, Italian, Spanish, and Dutch teams.

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 264 worked at a hectic pace. Each morning several Sea Knights and Super Stallions were used for routine supply runs. One CH-46 was stationed at the Zakho landing pad, reserved for emergency medical evacuation. One or more of the UH-1N's were devoted to daily aerial reconnaissance, liaison, or transportation missions. Any helicopters not scheduled underwent a maintenance stand-down. These stand-downs were necessary because of the hard use and difficult operational environment. The busy landing zone at Silopi was often crowded and was always dusty. The squadron headquarters and air control elements operated from tents set up along the edge of the landing zone. The squadron was billeted in nearby tents.

When the withdrawal plan was announced, Lieutenant Colonel Byrtus realized night operations were imminent. He, therefore, ordered the squadron to become proficient at low-light flying and night takeoffs and landings. Low-light operations were part of the 18 SOC-related missions, but correct use of night vision goggles required constant practice. Night vision goggles captured visible light too dim to be used by the human eye, then electronically displayed a brightened green image not unlike that of a video camera viewfinder. These devices allowed Marine pilots to fly after dark, but they also imposed some limitations. Depth perception and peripheral vision were severely hampered, so these problems had to be overcome by intense training and frequent repetition. The result was that by late May, the night sky over Silopi was filled with the constant drone of helicopter engines as the pilots of HMM-264 honed their night flying skills.



Painting by Col Peter M. Gish, USMCR  
*BLT 2/8 withdrawal from Zakho, Iraq*

The major topic in MSSG-24's future was the 24th MEU (SOC)'s departure and reembarkation on board the ships of Phibron 8. This did not promise to be an easy task. More than 2,200 Marines had to be moved from northern Iraq to Silopi and then to Iskenderun. At the same time, MSSG-24 had to continue normal supply and maintenance operations in the forward area. The accomplishment of these multiple tasks required detailed planning, careful use of resources, and use of outside materials.

During its deployment to Turkey and northern Iraq, MSSG-24 had notable achievements. Foremost, the efforts of MSSG-24 Marines helped to save the lives of nearly three-quarters of a million refugees. In the process, its trucks drove 42,426 miles, hauled 998.2 tons of cargo, delivered 297 pallets of food, transported 8,628 passengers, and spent 8,109 hours on the road. Its engineers produced more than 150,000 gallons of purified water, dispensed almost 3.5 million gallons of water to displaced civilians at Zakho, set up more than 1,000 tents, and destroyed approximately 45,000 ordnance items. Tragically, one MSSG-24 Marine was killed in a motor vehicle accident.

Despite being designed to support the tactical employment of a single Marine expeditionary unit for 15 days, MSSG-24 provided the lion's share of service support to an almost division-size joint task force for almost a month. MEU

Service Support Group 24 operated further inland than any previous MSSG and was a critical element in the longest, most complex, and largest Marine humanitarian effort in history.<sup>106</sup>

### *The Retrograde*

It had been obvious from the start that Combined Task Force Provide Comfort's main mission was to work itself out of a job by moving the Kurds back into their homeland. General Colin L. Powell's visit confirmed that this had been done, so the Combined Support Command issued a warning order for the pull-back of allied forces in late May. In military jargon, an unpressured withdrawal is called a "retrograde." At the first retrograde planning session, General Burch repeated the diplomatic sensitivity of the issue, then identified the French as the first contingent to fall back. His goal was to reduce occupied areas quickly, so he ordered that the last increments be flown out no later than 15 June.

These orders came as no surprise to the Marines. The 24th MEU (SOC) had been planning for this since mid-May and put its plans into effect in early June. Colonel Jones' intent was use a phased withdrawal. Because of Iskenderun's limited facilities, it was to be an 18-day evolution. The first 15 days were devoted to the movement of MEU, HMM, and BLT personnel with no tactical mission. Most of the combat service support element, all bulk supplies and equipment not necessary to support combat operations, and most vehicles were scheduled to move back as soon as possible.

All vehicles and equipment had to be disassembled and thoroughly cleansed of dirt and micro-organisms before being loaded on board ship. Normally, a departing MEU accomplished this "washdown" at Rota, Spain, during the MARG "turnover," however, this was not possible because the "turnover" was going to take place in Turkey. The presence of dangerous micro-organisms in the dirt required the Marines to strip down and carefully wash each vehicle and piece of equipment. To do this properly, specially constructed wash racks and high pressure steam hoses were needed. Lieutenant Colonel Kohl had to make arrangements to have these shipped from Haifa, Israel, to Iskenderun. Each vehicle required about 24 man-hours of labor to strip, wash, and reassemble. After the washdown, a medical team conducted a rigorous inspection making sure there was no dirt or dust before clearing each item for embarkation. One rifle company was to be sent to Iskenderun to act as a security force and to assist the washdown.

The final three days would see one-third of the remaining Marines returned to Silopi each day. To cover the pull-back and keep the Iraqis guessing, all movement was scheduled during the hours of darkness. Colonel Jones wanted a strong urban presence. All checkpoints would be manned until the very end. Silopi was designated the 24th MEU (SOC) transfer point and Sirsenk was the 3-325th Airborne Combat Team's transfer point. The Combined Support

Command's 14th Transportation Battalion was responsible to coordinate overland movement from Silopi to Incirlik and Iskenderun.<sup>107</sup>

Colonel Jones worried about several issues. There were no firm plans as to where the respective command posts were going to be located or how they were going to be configured as Joint Task Force Bravo moved back to Turkey. Jones hoped they could be collocated somewhere near the border. He also had questions about the overall force structure. Jones recommended that only combat echelons, what he called "trigger pullers," stay until the last day. Finally, it was necessary to carefully synchronize plans with the other allied forces, Joint Task Force Bravo, and the 3-325th Airborne Combat Team.

Lieutenant Colonel Kohl (MSSG-24) was most concerned about Turkish customs and the agricultural inspection. The Turks had been very cooperative of late, but had recently returned to stringent customs inspections. They intended to strictly limit cross-border traffic at Habur and initiated detailed inspections to ensure no weapons were being smuggled inside Turkey to arm PKK terrorists. The washdown and follow-up agricultural inspection were difficult jobs. The first elements pulled back were the Bravo Command Group, Company H, and advance parties from MSSG-24 and HMM-264. They moved to Iskenderun on 1 June.

General Shalikashvili declared 8 June "R-Day," the official beginning of the retrograde. The first CTF unit out was Joint Task Force Alpha. The 24th MEU (SOC) was scheduled to begin pulling out once JTF-A left. Within two weeks, most of the 24th MEU (SOC) rear echelon personnel, equipment, and vehicles were either at Silopi or Iskenderun. On 12 June, the 4th Civil Affairs Group departed Zakho for Camp Lejeune. Colonel Corwin closed Camp Denton on 15 June. Battalion Landing Team 2/8's Command Element and Company F moved to Silopi after turning over the security zone to the Italians. Operational control of Company G was transferred to the French at Shaladiza, and Company E was attached to the British 40th Commando.

On 16 June, Colonel Jones closed Camp Sommers and the 24th MEU (SOC) Command Element moved to a new command post which it shared with Joint Task Force Bravo. The new command post was located about four miles from the Turkish border along Route 6. Major Boyd, the 24th MEU (SOC) S-4, used a phased redeployment to move cargo, equipment, and personnel back to Iskenderun by echelon. His plan worked well and the MEU had returned 97 percent of its cargo, 85 percent of its equipment, and 50 percent of its personnel to the ships by the end of June.<sup>108</sup>

Contingency MAGTF 1-91 ceased operations and recalled its teams in the end of June. Lieutenant Colonel Bailey noted a sense of accomplishment. During a visit by Lieutenant General Carl E. Mundy, Jr., Commanding General, FMF Atlantic/FMF Europe, Brigadier General Burch (CG, CSC) told the Marine commander that he was very pleased with the performance of CMAGTF 1-91 and intended to pass favorable comments to Major General Stackpole on Okinawa and to the Marine Commandant in Washington, D.C. The Marines of CMAGTF 1-91 had efficiently accomplished every mission given them.

Marine emphasis on rapid planning paid off when the CMAGTF staff published two entirely different operation orders and an additional fragmentary order within two weeks. Marine flexibility was shown when staff non-commissioned officers were unexpectedly called upon to fill key staff billets in the command center because the officers were needed to be team leaders in the field. The CMAGTF also demonstrated its ability to work in a joint and combined service environment. The Marines of CMAGTF 1-91 worked with U.S. Special Forces, British Royal Marines, Dutch Marines, and French soldiers. Professional relationships and feelings of mutual respect were established all around. Lieutenant Colonel Bailey noted that morale was high throughout Operation Provide Comfort. The CMAGTF suffered no fatalities because safety and common sense prevailed under the most difficult conditions. Contingency MAGTF 1-91 returned to Okinawa on 3 July 1991.<sup>109</sup>

Although the Marine movement went smoothly, General Shalikashvili encountered some unanticipated problems. After learning of plans to pull out, the



Painting by Col Peter M. "Mike" Gish, USMCR  
*American and Western European forces built a series of temporary refugee relocation camps throughout northern Iraq in April to encourage the Kurds to come down from their mountain hideouts in Turkey, Iraq, and Iran.*

Kurds held demonstrations protesting the allied departure. At Dohuk, the Iraqis and the Kurds engaged in a two-hour gun battle during which at least 17 people died. The British and the Peshmerga got into a firefight near Al Amadiyah. There were scattered incidents between the Kurds and the Turks along the border. These actions forced General Shalikashvili to postpone the allied egress until 15 July.

To try to settle things down, General Shalikashvili decided to have a meeting with Kurdish leaders. Colonel Jones, combat artist Colonel Gish, and Sergeant Major Hatcher flew to the 3d Commando Brigade Headquarters. There, they met with General Shalikashvili and the British commander to discuss future options and to anticipate the Kurdish response. From Sirsenk, the group moved to the heavily guarded French compound at Shaladiza where the Kurdish mullahs had gathered for this important meeting.

General Shalikashvili met with the Kurdish elders, each one dressed in distinctive ceremonial robes and fancy turban. The Kurds talked of their dreams for a free Kurdistan and told the general they wanted the allied forces to expand the security zone to include Mosul and Kirkuk. After their passionate presentations, General Shalikashvili rose and addressed them. He told them that what he was going to say was sure to be a disappointment to them, but that he had to be honest with them. He said the security zone was not going to be expanded and that the allied security forces were going to leave Iraq. He reassured the Kurds that the United Nations would keep the peace and urged them to settle their differences with Baghdad through negotiations. This did not satisfy the Kurds, who pressed for a continued allied presence.<sup>110</sup> Shalikashvili pointed out that Saddam was well aware that any intrusion into the security zone would bring a strong allied response, then closed the meeting by saying that he would convey their concerns about the future to his superiors, but that he could make no promises.

### *The Final Days*

On 6 July, the Turkish government agreed to allow an international reaction force, called Combined Task Force Poised Hammer, to remain at Silopi. Poised Hammer was comprised of a headquarters, an international infantry battalion, an aviation component, and a service support component. General Jamerson was designated commanding general and General Zinni was made deputy commander. The U.S. Army's 6th Battalion, 6th Cavalry, and 6th Battalion, 502d Infantry, were the major American combat units assigned to Poised Hammer. The 6th Battalion of the 502d was actually a provisional rifle battalion that included rifle companies from the United States (Company A, 6th Battalion, 502d Infantry), United Kingdom, Netherlands, Spain, Italy, France, and Turkey. The 6th Cavalry's 6th Battalion included scout, utility, attack, and transport helicopters. Fixed-wing air support was provided by the U.S. Air Force at Incirlik. The only Marine units assigned to Task Force Poised Hammer were the firepower control teams from 2d ANGLICO.



*Marines paddle down the Khabur River during a Fourth of July field day that featured international military and athletic contests.*

Mediterranean Amphibious Ready Group 2-91, with a MEU embarked, and a Navy carrier battle group were designated standby forces, and would conduct normal operations unless needed in northern Iraq. Amphibious Squadron 4 replaced Amphibious Squadron 8 as the Mediterranean amphibious ready group

on 11 July. Colonel Jones and his staff briefed the incoming MEU command element at Iskenderun, then the 24th MEU (SOC) turned over its duties as Landing Force Sixth Fleet to the 26th MEU (SOC). The aircraft carrier *Roosevelt* had already been relieved on station by the *Forrestal* (CV 59).<sup>111</sup>

Combined Task Force Provide Comfort had successfully accomplished its mission. Before the allies departed northern Iraq, however, Saddam Hussein was given some final terms: No Iraqi aircraft could operate above the 36th parallel. A coalition force would be located at Silopi, ready to intervene if necessary. Allied aircraft would continue to patrol the skies of northern Iraq without interference. The Military Coordination Center would continue to monitor the security zone and report Iraqi compliance with the stated terms. It was made clear that only Iraqi acceptance of this understanding would pave the way for the end of Operation Provide Comfort.

On 12 July 1991, the Bush administration publicly announced its decision to pull American forces out of northern Iraq. The next day, thousands of Kurds lined the road near Habur and blocked an allied convoy for about three hours. More than 3,000 people carried banners that thanked the allies, but also warned that "the job is only half done." They were grateful for the help rendered, but fearful of what would happen after the allies left. General Garner, the senior American officer on the spot, tried to calm their fears by reminding them that Iraqi military forces were prohibited from entering the 3,600-square-mile exclusion zone established in April, and that a multinational rapid reaction force would remain at Silopi to repel any Iraqi advances. General Garner stated, "We have told [Saddam] not to come back in here." Fadhil Merani, a top official of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, accompanied Garner when he went to talk to the Kurds. Merani's words, "Shame on you, these people came here to help us, and look at the way you treat them," appeased the crowd which silently pulled back and allowed the movement to continue.<sup>112</sup>

At 1600 on 15 July 1991, a bugler sounded "Colors," and the American flag was hauled down for the last time in northern Iraq. The convoy carrying the last Marines and soldiers to Silopi was stopped at the Habur Bridge. A peaceful crowd of about 500 people gathered to thank them for all they had done. General Garner accepted emotional well-wishes and reaffirmed coalition support for the Kurds. As the sky darkened behind the towering mountain peaks in the east, Colonel Jones and General Garner crossed the border into Turkey. The last elements of the 24th MEU (SOC) were in Silopi by 15 July. As it turned out, debarkation was not a problem and the MEU loaded the last of its equipment in less than 96 hours. The 24th MEU (SOC) sailed for home on 19 July 1991.<sup>113</sup>

Provide Comfort, the largest humanitarian relief operation in Marine history to that time, was over. In early April, everyone had been skeptical about launching a such an operation. Politicians didn't want to get involved, host nations refused to help, and a ruthless dictator banked on world-wide apathy to achieve his goals. After the refugees fled to the mountains, U.N. relief experts surveyed the situation and said it was hopeless. They predicted it would take at least seven months for recovery and stated that the Kurds would never return to

Iraq. But within seven weeks, more than 750,000 starving people were being fed, the sick were being nursed back to health, and once fearful expatriates had returned to their homeland filled with hope.

When they arrived, the Marines were greeted by the horrifying sight of starving, freezing refugees in the mountain camps and the haunting images of the deserted towns of Kurdistan. By mid-July, however, the mournful wails of mothers with dying children had given way to the joyous laughter of the children themselves, and the once empty streets of Zakho and Dohuk teemed with people. It became business as usual when shepherds drove their flocks to the open-air markets and the cafes were filled with arguing men. Children who once quaked with fear when soldiers appeared now stopped playing and yelled "Meester, Meester, wave at me!" as Marines passed by.

In the spring of 1991, the Marines proudly called themselves "Devil Dogs," but to the appreciative Kurds they were known by a different name, the "Food Soldiers." Returning veterans of Desert Storm were cheered by the American people because of their stunning performance as warriors; the unheralded Marines of Provide Comfort proved no less adept at their craft while acting as Samaritans in northern Iraq. Humanitarian Relief Operations (HROs) are referred to as "Heroes" in military shorthand, for the Marines of Operation Provide Comfort it was a fitting accolade.

# NOTES

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Unless otherwise noted the material in this monograph was derived from the following: LtCol Robert L. Bailey intvw, 2Jun91, hereafter Bailey intvw; LtCol Joseph A. Byrtus intvw, 25May91, hereafter Byrtus intvw; Capt Charles E. Headen intvw, 27May91, hereafter Headen intvw; MajGen James L. Jamerson, USAF, intvw, 16May91, hereafter Jamerson intvw; Col James L. Jones, Jr. intvw, 31May91, hereafter Jones intvw; Capt Dewey G. Jordan intvw, 29May91, hereafter Jordan intvw; LtCol Richard L. Kohl intvw, 11May91, hereafter Kohl intvw; Capt Timothy J. Ott intvw, 28May91, hereafter Ott intvw; BGen Richard W. Potter, USA, intvw, 17May91, hereafter Potter intvw; Commo Dean Turner intvw, 1Jun91; BGen Anthony C. Zinni intvw, 10Jun91, hereafter Zinni intvw; SMSgt Thomas L. Robb and SSgt Thomas A. Traynor, CTF-PC Chronology, 7Apr-8Jun91, hereafter PC Chron; FMFEur ComdC, Jan-Jun91; 24th MEU(SOC) ComdC, Jan-Jun 91; HMM-264 ComdC, Jan-Jun91; MSSG-24 ComdC, Jan-Jun91; Maj Charles V. Mugno presentation to CTF-PC, 9May91, hereafter Mugno Brief: CMC SitReps, Mar-Apr91; Col Peter M. Gish, Provide Comfort Journal, hereafter Gish Jnl; LtCol Ronald J. Brown, Provide Comfort Journal, hereafter Brown Jnl; Dept of Army, Area Handbook for Iraq (Washington, GPO, 1969); John Bulloch and Harvey Morris, No Friends but the Mountains (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Albert Hourani, A History of the Arab Peoples (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991); Middle East Watch, Human Rights in Iraq (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); Sheri Laizer, Into Kurdistan (London: Zed Books, 1991); Trevor Mostyn, The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the Middle East and North Africa (Cambridge: University Press, 1988); Peter Douglas, "Bloody, Beautiful Kurdistan" Soldier of Fortune Magazine, Nov91, pp. 52-57; Col James L. Jones, Jr., "Operation Provide Comfort: Humanitarian and Security Assistance in Northern Iraq," Marine Corps Gazette, Nov91, pp. 99-107, hereafter Jones, "Provide Comfort."

1. Provide Comfort later was eclipsed by Operation Restore Hope in Somalia.
2. USCinCEur/ECJ3/CAT msg dtd 6Apr91.
3. JTF-PC SitBrief, 7Apr91.
4. This designation was later changed to Joint Task Force Alpha.
5. These aircraft were actually four C-130 Hercules and two MC-130 Talons.
6. JTFPC SitRep #1, 7Apr91.
7. CTF-PC Chron; some of the Kurds ate the MREs dry, then drank water, causing the dehydrated food to swell and resulting in severe gastro-intestinal problems.
8. CG, JTF-PC "Bravo Zulu" msg to 1st LSB dtd 271325Z Jun91.
9. CTF-PC Chron.

10. Jones intvw.
11. CTF-PC "Concept of Operations."
12. FMFEur ComdC, Jan-Jun91.
13. Mediterranean phibrons were known as the Mediterranean Amphibious Ready Group (MARG); embarked Marine forces were designated Landing Force Sixth Fleet (LF6F); in this case, PhibRon 8 was MARG 1-91 and the 24th MEU(SOC) was LF6F.
14. SSgt Lee J. Tibbetts, "24th MEU Hits Sardinian Beach," Marines, Jun91, p. 20.
15. In 1991 most special-purpose forces were designated contingency forces (CMAGTF or CM); currently these forces are designated special purpose MAGTFs (SPMAGTF).
16. Senior Marine leaders felt the term "expeditionary" implied a mission, while "amphibious" was simply a transportation method.
17. When an ARG used an LPH, a landing ship dock (LSD)--capable of launching surface landing craft--was normally included.
18. The necessary inclusion of the Charleston degraded the 24th MEU's amphibious capabilities; although an amphibious cargo ship, the Charleston could neither conduct an underway launch nor offload directly onto the beach.
19. Surge quartering was the use of all available space to house embarked personnel: non-berthing space, temporary cots, hospital bunks, and "hot racking," whereby several men shared the same sleeping area, are all used for surge quartering.
20. His father commanded the daring amphibious reconnaissance units in the Pacific--the antecedent of modern Force Recon--before returning to civilian life as vice president of International Harvester; his uncle was Lieutenant General William K. Jones, known to readers of the Marine Corps Gazette as "Baseplate McGurk."
21. One legislator jokingly cited Col Jones as the perfect commander for Provide Comfort because he had dealt with so many poor helpless wretches during his time as Senate Liaison Officer.
22. The amtracs were 11 AAV7P, 1 AAV7C, and 1 AAV7R; the armor was 6 LAV-25s, 1 LAV-LOG, and 2 LAV-TOWs.
23. After one flight, the author jokingly claimed he probably rode that particular helicopter into combat in 1969; a check of its record of service by a curious crew member proved this was well within the realm of possibility.

24. It was hoped the Bell-Boeing MV-22 Osprey rotating twin-turboprop, S/VTOL airplane would replace both the CH-46 and CH-53 helicopters as Marine shipborne assault aircraft by the mid-1990s, but budget problems have delayed its development.
25. Mugno was described by another Marine as "being able to spot a gnat on a zebra's behind at twice the engagement range."
26. In 1992-93 MajGen Zinni saw extensive service during Operation Restore Hope in Somalia, eventually being appointed special assistant to the U.N. Ambassador.
27. Mugno Brief.
28. CTF-PC Chron.
29. Iskenderun was the site of a famous battle where Alexander the Great defeated Persian King Darius III.
30. Jones intvw.
31. Jones, "Provide Comfort," p. 101; Brytus intvw.
32. Byrtus intvw; CTF-PC Chron.
33. Cpl E. H. Hughes, "Refuelers Keep Birds Flying," Marines, Jun91, p. 4.
34. Brown Jnl; Byrtus intvw; Jones, "Provide Comfort," p. 100.
35. The exclusion zone was all Iraqi territory north of the 36th Parallel.
36. "Relief Supplies Distribution," Mugno brief.
37. FMFEur ComdC, Jan-Jun91.
38. FMFEur ComdC, Jan-Jun91; Mugno intvw.
39. The activities of this historical team are covered in "Historian Documents Marine Assistance To Refugees," Fortitudine, Summer 1991, pp. 12-13.
40. CTF-PC Chron.
41. These were Air Force expeditionary packages designed to supply materials, engineer assets, and specially trained personnel to operate forward bases; Prime Beef teams were support engineers who provided construction and maintenance, and Prime Rib teams were support personnel who administered the camp.
42. CTF-PC Chron.

43. A humorous incident occurred when an excited messenger burst into the MSSG-24 tent and told the author that an Italian brigadier general wanted to see him. The "general" turned out to be a private (Italian enlisted men wear star emblems on their collars).
44. Ron Jensen, "Base Camp Arises From a Wheatfield," The Stars and Stripes, 13May91, p. 3.
45. This was true capitalism in action. Iraqi 25 Dinar bills had an international exchange value of about \$5.00, but vendors sold them for as much as \$20.00.
46. Bailey intvw.
47. CMAGTF OpO 1-91.
48. CO, CMAGTF 1-91, sitrep #1.
49. CMAGTF OpO 2-91.
50. Bailey intvw.
51. MSSG-24 ComdC, Jan-Jun91.
52. Kohl intvw.
53. MSSG-24 ComdC, Jan-Jun91.
54. Brown Jnl.
55. MSSG-24 ComdC, Jan-Jun91.
56. Brown Jnl.
57. Kohl intvw.
58. MSSG-24 ComdC, Jan-Jun91.
59. MSSG-24 ComdC, Jan-Jun91.
60. The KAZ had been notoriously gerrymandered to keep the Kurds from controlling Iraq's oilfields.
61. The number is estimated to be as high as 3,900 villages.
62. CG, CTF-PC, "Concept of Operations."
63. Col John O. Easton intvw 15Apr92.
64. CTF-PC CA Brief.

65. This was necessary to offset Baathist propaganda that the U.N. had no right to interfere in Iraqi affairs.
66. Jones, "Provide Comfort," p. 102.
67. CTF-PC Chron.
68. SEAL is an acronym for Sea, Air, Land; both U.S. Navy SEALs and Force Reconnaissance Marines are trained for deep penetration and clandestine operations in enemy territory.
69. Raftery intvw.
70. Brown Jnl.
71. CG, CTF-PC SitRep, 19Arp91, p. 7.
72. General Shalikashvili's warnings were taken seriously because two Iraqi jets had been shot down in March after the Iraqis ignored warnings by General Schwarzkopf.
73. Mugno brief.
74. Kohl intvw.
75. 24th MEU (SOC) ComdC, Jan-Jun91.
76. Brown Jnl; CTF-PC Chron.
77. MajGen Robin J. Ross, RM, "Operation Haven," Globe and Laurel, Nov-Dec91, p. 208-09.
78. Kohl intvw.
79. The Kurds did not complain about the taste or monotony of a MRE diet, but pointed out most MREs contained pork, violating Islamic dietary laws; the Marines began saying MRE meant "Meals Rejected by Everyone."
80. Supply officers were baffled when the Kurds requested a shipment of potatoes, food most Kurds considered unpalatable; the mystery was solved when the MCC reported Iraqi police were being pelted by potatoes as they walked the streets.
81. These latrines required close supervision because Kurdish families used these comfortable, roofed, and screened enclosures as homes.
82. See LtCol Gordon W. Rudd, USA, "The 24th MEU (SOC) and Operation Provide Comfort: A Second Look," Marine Corps Gazette, Feb93, pp. 20-22.
83. Jordan intvw.

84. The Viking was an antisubmarine warfare aircraft whose capabilities were used in an imaginative way in northern Iraq.
85. Raftery intvw.
86. Headen intvw.
87. Ott intvw.
88. These threats included Iraqi and Palestinian terrorists, disgruntled Kurds, and Turkish leftist groups.
89. The 24th MAU, the lineal antecedent of 24th MEU, was the command element of the Marines in Beirut when the bombing occurred.
90. Ouzts intvw.
91. FMFEur ComdC, Jan-Jun91.
92. Brown Jnl.
93. Gish intvw, 21Dec91.
94. CTF-PC Chron.
95. Brown Jnl.
96. MajGen Robin J. Ross, "Operation Haven," Globe and Laurel, Jul-Aug91, pp. 208-09.
97. French regiments were about the size of American battalions mustering about 800 men each.
98. French law prohibited draftees from serving outside France; French Marines are professional soldiers who can be sent anywhere in the world.
99. Brown Jnl.
100. Brown Jnl.
101. CTF-PC Chron.
102. Brown Jnl.
103. Linn intvw.
104. "Kurd Leader Says Saddam OKs Accord," Stars and Stripes, 19May91, pp. 1, 10.
105. CTF-PC Chron.

106. MSSG-24 ComdC, Jan-Jun91.
107. MSSG-24 retrograde meeting, 3Jun91.
108. 24th MEU ComdC, Jan-Jun91.
109. CMC brief 15Jul91.
110. One Kurd tearfully told Col Gish a single platoon of Marines would do more to guarantee peace than 200 U.N. policemen.
111. CMC Brief, 30Jun91.
112. AP, Washington Post, 14Jul91, p. A20.
113. Boyd intvw.

# Appendix A

## Chronology

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1991

April

- 6 Joint Task Force Provide Comfort formed.
- 7 Joint Task Force Provide Comfort deployed to Incirlik Air Base, Adana, Turkey.
- 9 MARG 1-91 received warning order to deploy to Iskenderun, Turkey.
- 10 Backload completed, MARG 1-91 with 24th MEU (SOC) embarked, sails for eastern Mediterranean; 24th MEU (SOC) receives Provide Comfort Operation Order 1.
- 11 24th MEU (SOC) Forward Command Element arrives at Incirlik.
- 13 24th MEU (SOC) FCE flies first relief mission.
- 14 24th MEU (SOC) under operational control of CTF Provide Comfort.
- 15 24th MEU Forward moves to Silopi; HMM-264 flies first Marine relief mission; offload of Phibron 8 begins.
- 16 24th MEU Forward operates from Silopi.
- 17 Task Force Bravo established; Operation Encourage Hope announced.
- 19 24th MEU (SOC) CE, GCE, ACE, and CSSE at Silopi; General Shalikashvili meets Iraqis.
- 20 24th MEU (SOC) secures area around Zakho.
- 21 First Marine convoy enters northern Iraq; CTF-PC Navy-Marine Liaison Team 10 opened at Incirlik.
- 22 45th Commando, Royal Marines, attached to 24th MEU (SOC).
- 23 Dutch 1st ACG attached to 24th MEU (SOC).
- 26 American, British, and Dutch Marines clear Zakho.
- 27 CMAGTF 1-91 formed on Okinawa.
- 29 British and Dutch Marines transfer to 3d Commando Brigade.

## May

- 5 24th MEU (SOC) HQ named Camp D. W. Sommers; CMAGTF 1-91 arrives at Incirlik.
- 8 UAV Det, 2d RPV Company, 2d SRIG deploys.
- 9 BLT 2/8 opens fire support base at Muqbal.
- 12 2d ANGLICO FCTs arrive from Camp Lejeune.
- 17 29th Commando Regiment, Royal Artillery, attached to 24th MEU (SOC).
- 19 29th Commando returned to 3d Commando Brigade.
- 20 Marine civil affairs personnel enter Dohuk as part of international relief team.
- 21 Negotiations succeed; Dohuk proclaimed "open city."
- 28 UAV Det, 2d RPV Company, 2d SRIG detached.
- 30 General Powell, Chairman, JCS, visits 24th MEU (SOC).

## June

- 1 24th MEU (SOC) initial contingent returns to Iskenderun.
- 5 Rigger dets leave Incirlik for home bases.
- 8 CTF-PC Retrograde order issued to 24th MEU (SOC).
- 15 BLT 2/8 moves to Silopi.
- 16 Camp Sommers closed, 24th MEU (SOC) CE moves to JTF-B HQ.
- 18 Retrograde halted.

## July

- 11 24th MEU (SOC) turns over LF6F duties to 26th MEU.
- 15 24th MEU departs northern Iraq.
- 19 Operation Provide Comfort, Phase II begins; 24th MEU sails for home.

## Appendix B

### Command and Staff List

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#### Combined Task Force Provide Comfort

CG.....MajGen James L. Jamerson, USAF  
LtGen John M. Shalikashvili, USA

Deputy CG.....BGen Anthony C. Zinni, USMC  
MajGen James L. Jamerson

Chief of Staff.....BGen Anthony C. Zinni

A/CS, Plans.....Col Daniel M. Pender, USMC

#### Air Force Force

CG.....BGen James L. Hobson Jr., USAF

#### Civil Affairs

CG.....BGen Donald L. Campbell, USA  
4th CAG, USMCR.....Col John O. Easton, USMCR

#### Joint Task Force Alpha

CG.....BGen Richard W. Potter, USA

#### Joint Task Force Bravo

CG.....MajGen Jay M. Garner, USA

Chief of Staff.....Col John O. Easton, USMCR

#### 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit

CO.....Col James L. Jones, Jr.

ExO.....LtCol Ralph C. Morse

S-1.....Capt Dewey G. Jordan

S-2.....Maj Richard J. Raftery

S-3.....LtCol Thomas C. Linn

S-4.....Maj Michael D. Boyd

BLT 2/8.....LtCol Tony L. Corwin

HMM-264.....LtCol Joseph A. Byrtus, Jr.

MSSG-24.....LtCol Richard T. Kohl

Contingency MAGTF 1-91

CO.....LtCol Robert L. Bailey

UAV Detachment, 2d RPV Company

OIC.....Capt Wayne O. Ouzts

Navy-Marine Liaison Team 10

OIC.....Col Robert M. Hansen

4th Civil Affairs Group Detachment

CO.....Col John O. Easton, USMCR

# Appendix C

## Combined Task Force Provide Comfort

### Task Organization

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Headquarters, Combined Task Force Provide Comfort

#### Air Force Forces

- Headquarters
- 7440th Composite Wing (Provisional)
- Composite Aviation Logistics Force
- Composite Helicopter Squadron-Provider
- Composite Helicopter Squadron-JTF Bravo

#### Joint Task Force Alpha

- 10th Special Forces Group (USA)
  - 1-10 SFG
  - 2-10 SFG
  - 3-10 SFG
- 40th Commando, Royal Marines (UK)
- 112th Signal Battalion
- 4th Field Ambulance (Canada)
- 432d Civil Affairs Company (-)
- Detachment, 6th Psychological Operations Group
- 39th Special Operations Wing (Reinforced)
  - 7th Special Operations Squadron
  - 21st Special Operations Squadron
  - 67th Special Operations Squadron
  - 667th Special Operations Maintenance Squadron
- Detachment, 52d Signal Battalion

#### Joint Task Force Bravo

- HQ, JTF-B
  - 18th Military Police Brigade
  - 18th Engineer Brigade
  - NMCB 133

#### 24th MEU (SOC) (USMC)

- BLT 2/8
- HMM-264
- MSSG 24
- 3-325th ABCT (USA)
- Italian Special Forces Group

4th Aviation Brigade, 3d Infantry Division (USA)  
6th Battalion, 6th Cavalry  
Task Force 23

3d Commando Brigade (UK)  
45th Commando, Royal Marines  
1st Amphibious Combat Group (NL)  
USMC ANGLICO FCTs

French "Cougar" Force  
Parachute Brigade (Fr)  
Security Platoon (Sp)  
Italian Special Forces Group  
USMC ANGLICO FCT

Spanish Expeditionary Force  
Parachute Brigade  
USMC ANGLICO FCT

Italian Force  
Parachute Brigade  
USMC ANGLICO FCT

Combined Support Command  
21st Theater Army Area Command (-)  
29th Aviation Support Group (-)  
CTF Surgeon (-)  
Contingency MAGTF 1-91  
Task Force Provider

Civil Affairs  
CMOC  
354th Civil Affairs Brigade (-)  
96th Civil Affairs Battalion  
432d Civil Affairs Company (-)  
418th Civil Affairs Company  
USMC 4th Civil Affairs Group Detachment

Navy Task Force 60  
*Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN 71)  
Carrier Air Wing 8  
*Belknap* (CG 26)  
*Richmond K. Turner* (CG 20)  
*Leyte Gulf* (CG 55)  
*Virginia* (CGN 38)

*William V. Pratt* (DDG 44)

*Caron* (DD 970)

*Vreeland* (FF 1068)

*Hawes* (FFG 53)

*Preble* (DDG 46)

# Appendix D

## Combined Task Force Provide Comfort

### Major Allied Forces

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#### **British Forces, Operation Haven**

(Major General Robin J. Ross, Royal Marines)

Headquarters, Commando Forces, Royal Marines

3d Commando Brigade

(Brigadier A. M. Keeling)

Headquarters

40th Commando, Royal Marines

45th Commando, Royal Marines

29th Commando Regiment, Royal Artillery

59th Independent Commando Squadron, Royal Engineers

Commando Logistics Regiment, Royal Marines

3d Commando Brigade Air Squadron

Mountain and Arctic Warfare Cadre

Chinook Helicopter Force, Royal Air Force

846 Naval Air Squadron, Royal Navy

#### **Netherlands Expeditionary Force**

1st Amphibious Combat Group, Royal Netherlands Marine Corps

(Lieutenant Colonel Cees Van Egmond)

Composite Helicopter Squadron, Royal Netherlands Air Force

Mobile Field Hospital Unit

#### **French Cougar Force**

(Brigadier General Paul Marie LePage)

1st Brigade, 11th Airborne Division

(Brigadier General Xavier Prevost)

Headquarters

8th Marine Parachute Infantry Regiment

Alpine (Special Forces) Group, 27th Mountain Division

17th Parachute Engineer Battalion Detachment

5th Helicopter Regiment Detachment

Field Hospital Group

**Italian Expeditionary Force**

(Brigadier General Mario Buscemi)

Headquarters  
Folgore Airborne Brigade  
1st Carabinieri Company  
9th Alpine (Special Forces) Group  
26th Composite Helicopter Squadron  
Field Hospital Detachment

**Canadian 4th Field Ambulance Battalion**

(Lieutenant Colonel Mike Murphy)

Headquarters  
4th Field Transport Detachment  
4th Field Hospital Company  
    Zakho Field Medical Detachment  
    Yekmal Field Medical Detachment  
    Kanimasi Field Medical Detachment

**German Composite Helicopter Force**

(Brigadier General Frederich W. Ehmann)

Headquarters  
Heavy Helicopter Squadron  
Utility Helicopter Squadron

**Spanish Expeditionary Force**

(Colonel Juan Narro)

Independent Parachute Brigade  
    (Colonel Javier Ledesma)

1st Airborne Battalion "Roger De Flor"  
    Engineer-Signals Detachment  
    Mobile Antitank Detachment  
Expeditionary Combat Engineer Force  
Expeditionary Field Medical Unit  
FAMET Helicopter Force  
    1st Transport Helicopter Battalion  
    5th Combat Helicopter Battalion Detachment

**Other National Military Detachments:**

Australia  
Belgium  
Luxembourg  
Portugal

## Appendix E

### Contributing Nations

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Australia  
Austria  
Belgium  
Bulgaria  
Canada  
Czechoslovakia  
Denmark  
Finland

France  
Germany  
Greece  
Hungary  
Iceland  
Ireland  
Israel  
Italy

Japan  
Jordan  
Luxembourg  
Netherlands  
New Zealand  
Norway  
Pakistan  
Portugal

Romania  
Saudi Arabia  
Spain  
Sweden  
United Kingdom  
United States

## Appendix F

### International Relief Agencies

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Action Nord-SVD	Italian Red Cross
Adventist Development and Relief Agency	Japan <u>Sotoshu</u> Relief Committee
American Friends Service Committee	Maltese <u>Hilfs Dienst</u>
American Red Cross	Medical Volunteers International
American Refugee Committee	Mideast Council of Churches
AMHURT	Operation Mercy
Catholic Relief Service	OXFAM
Christian Outreach	Red Cross and Red Crescent
CONCERN	Red Cross of Malta
Danish Church Aid	Samaritans Pulse
Doctors Without Borders	Save the Children
Doctors of the World	Swedish National Rescue Board
Equilibre	Swedish Rescue Service
German Bergwacht	Swiss Charity Team
German Red Cross	Swiss Mission
Global Partners	Swiss Project of Emergency Help
HELO Mission	TEAR Fund (United Kingdom)
<u>Hul Aan Kuterdan</u>	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
International Action Against Hunger	World Council of Churches
International Committee of the Red Cross	World Food Program
International Medical Corps	World Relief International
International Refugee Year Trust	World Vision Relief and Development
International Rescue Committee	World Vision, Australia

## Appendix G

### The Kurds

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An ancient myth tells us that in olden times King Solomon the Wise was troubled by the antics of a group of wild spirits called the Jinn, so he had them imprisoned in a bottle. When the bottle was accidentally opened, the Jinn escaped. While in Europe, they abducted some beautiful women, then fled to the most isolated area in the world, the rugged mountains of Kurdistan. There, safe from retribution, the Jinn happily ignored a curse that their descendants would have to endure endless sorrow to make up for the wanton acts of the Jinn. Modern Kurds call themselves "the children of Jinn," and stoically accept the misery of their lives. This myth is often used to explain the presence of fiercely independent, light-skinned people living in the Middle East.

The Kurds are separated from their Arab neighbors by race, language, religion, and culture. There are about 20 million Kurds, most living in the Taurus Mountains of eastern Anatolia or in the Zagros Mountains of southwestern Iran. Most are hospitable to strangers but are suspicious of their neighbors. The Kurdish language, probably an archaic form of Farsi, is the glue that binds the diverse Kurds together.

The Kurds accepted Islam in the 7th century, and today many are devout Sunni Muslims. Most Kurds, however, reject the Arab culture associated with Islam. For the most part, rural Kurds are a close-knit, tribal society. The major Kurdish tribes are the Barzani, the Dizai, the Hamawandi, the Herkki, the Jaff, the Sorchi, and the Zibari.

Kurdish history has been a repetitive story of rebellion and disunity. Ancestors of the modern Kurds were first mentioned in history when Greek General Xenophon's Ten Thousand battled local warriors near the modern town of Zakho (Iraq) during the 5th century B.C. The actual name "Kurds" was first applied by Muslim conquerors around 750 A.D. The most famous Kurd was Saladin the Great. Traditional enmity between the Kurds and their rulers resulted in a tenacious struggle for Kurdish survival. The Persians, Mongols, and Ottoman Turks have conquered Kurdistan, but never successfully subdued its rebellious inhabitants. Relations between the Iraqi Kurds and Saddam Hussein have been acrimonious. Although promising peace and autonomy in the March Manifesto (1970), Saddam is suspected of initiating a policy of genocide. He used duplicity, lies, exile, assassination, and military force (including chemical weapons) to subdue the Kurds.

## Appendix H

### List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

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A-6--Grumman Intruder; a shipborne, twin-seat, twin-jet attack aircraft capable of striking point targets masked by inclement weather or darkness.

AAA--Antiaircraft artillery; Iraqi AAA included 12.7mm, 23mm, 37mm, and 57mm guns and surface-to-air (SAM) missiles.

AAR--After action report.

AAV--Assault amphibious vehicle; AAV7A1 amphibian manned by a crew of three, capable of transporting 25 Marines through water or cross-country; officially designated "AAVs" they were sometimes called "Hogs" by the Marines and "Tracks" or "APCs" by allied soldiers.

AB--Air base.

ABCT--Airborne battalion combat team; the U.S. Army's 3d Battalion, 325th Infantry (Airborne) and its combat support and combat service support units stationed at Vincenza, Italy.

ACG--Dutch Korps Marinier 1st Amphibious Combat Group, a battalion-size unit attached to the 3d Commando Brigade, Royal Marines.

AdminO--Administrative officer; military shorthand refers to AdminOs as S-1 (bn), G-1 (div), or J-1 (joint).

AH-1T--Bell Sea Cobra; a twin-seat, single-rotor, twin-jet, attack helicopter; also known as a "snake."

AirO--Air officer.

AK--Kalishnikov-designed, gas-operated, air-cooled, 7.62mm assault rifle with an effective range of about 400 meters; made in numerous Communist Block countries, the AKM was the standard rifle of the Iraqi Army, but was often mistakenly identified as an "AK-47."

ALMAR--A CMC bulletin directed to all Marines, usually dealing with a sweeping change of previous orders or the practical application of new policies.

ALO--Air liaison officer; a naval aviator/flight officer attached to a ground unit who was primary advisor to the ground commander; in the 24th MEU the ALO was a member of the operations section (G-3).

AO--Area of operations.

APC--Armored personnel carrier.

ARG--Amphibious ready group.

Arty--Artillery; Marine artillery included M198 155mm towed howitzers and M101A1 105mm towed howitzers; the British 29th Commando was armed with lightweight 105mm towed howitzers.

Bde--U.S. Army designation for brigade.

BLT--Battalion landing team; a task-organized combat team including a rifle battalion and combat support units (engineers, AAVs, LAVs, artillery, communications, medical, etc.).

Bn--Battalion; an American organization of about 1,000 personnel, the British equivalent was called a Commando.

C-130--Lockheed Hercules four-turboprop, medium-lift transport airplane.

CAS--Close air support.

Cdo--Commando; in this monograph it refers to British units of battalion size, not specific soldiers.

CH-46E--Sea Knight medium-lift transport helicopter; a tandem rotor, twin-engine, two-pilot craft capable of carrying 25 troops or 4.5 tons over a 50-mile radius; known to Marines as a "Frog."

CH-53E--Super Sea Stallion heavy-lift cargo helicopter; a single main rotor, triple engine, two-pilot craft capable of lifting 55 troops or 16 tons and has aerial refueling capability; also called an "Echo."

CH-47--Boeing Vertol Chinook; a heavy-lift helicopter used by the U.S. Army and allied forces; it was commonly called a "Hook."

CMAGTF--Contingency Marine air-ground task force.

ComdC--Command chronology.

CSC--Combined support command.

CSSD--Combat service support detachment.

CTF--Joint: Combined task force; Naval: task force commander.

CTF HO--Combined Task Force History Office.

CTF PC--Combined Task Force Provide Comfort.

CTF 61--Commander Task Force 61.

CTF 62--Commander Task Force 62.

DCMC--Displaced civilian movement center.

DCST--Displaced civilian support team.

Det--Detachment.

Dragon--Medium antitank/assault weapon, consisting of man-packed, tube-launched, optically-tracked, wire-guided missile with range of approximately 1,000 meters.

HC--US Navy combat service helicopter squadron (HC-4).

HMM--Marine medium helicopter squadron (HMM-264).

HSSB--Humanitarian service support base.

HSSD--Humanitarian service support detachment.

Intvw--Interview.

Jnl--Journal.

JTF--Joint task force.

KDP--Kurdish Democratic Party, headed by Moussad Barzani.

KUF--United Kurdistan Front.

LKA--Attack cargo ship.

Ln--Liaison.

LPD--Amphibious dock transport.

LPH--Amphibious assault ship.

LSB--Landing support battalion.

Ltr--Letter.

MAGTF--Marine air ground task force.

MARG--Mediterranean amphibious ready group.

MEU--Marine expeditionary unit; about 2,800 Marines.

MSSG--MEU service support group.

Phibron--Amphibious squadron.

PPK--Turkish Kurdish Separatist Movement, a terrorist organization opposed to Operation Provide Comfort.

PUK--Kurdistan Patriotic Union; headed by Jalal Talabani.

RFA--Royal field artillery.

ROWPU--Reverse Osmosis Water Purification Unit.

RM--Royal Marines.

SF--Special forces.

SFG--Special forces group.

SOC--Special operations capable.

SRIG--Surveillance, reconnaissance, and intelligence group.

UAV--Unmanned aerial vehicle.

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*The device reproduced on the back cover is the oldest military insignia in continuous use in the United States. It first appeared, as shown here, on Marine Corps buttons adopted in 1804. With the stars changed to five points this device has continued on Marine Corps buttons to the present day.*

