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Otto J. Lehrack *America's Battalion: Marines in the First Gulf War*. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2005, 236 pages.

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Otto Lehrack's *No Shining Armor*, a book written about the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marines, (3/3) during the Vietnam War, provided a first-hand account of the first Gulf War, commonly known as Desert Shield/Desert Storm. Much like *No Shining Armor*, the author's more recent *America's Battalion* is told from the viewpoint of a veteran Marine who understands his subject and the reality of war.

*America's Battalion* is written chronologically from the time the battalion was first alerted to the possibility that it would deploy to the Persian Gulf in response to Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait on 1 August 1991. When it appeared that Iraqi tanks had no intention of stopping at the Kuwait-Saudi Arabia border, President George H.W. Bush, ordered the deployment of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division and the 7<sup>th</sup> Marine Expeditionary Battalion to defend Saudi Arabia from the Iraqi Army. Over the course of the next several months, approximately 500,000 American, British, and Coalition troops assembled in Saudi Arabia to launch what eventually became known as Desert Storm in February 1991. For the Marines of 3/3, who had only recently concluded a 6-month deployment known by Marines as a 'pump,' this meant that they would be quickly thrown into the vortex of another potentially dangerous situation that culminated into one of the United States military's finest, most lopsided victories.

After arriving at Al Jubail, after a lengthy flight on jumbo jets, the Marines of 3/3 settled down into a quick routine of training, desert acclimatization, and preparation for war. As the diplomatic and military clock ran out for Saddam's entrenched forces in Kuwait, it became obvious that the Marines would have to invade Kuwait in order to expel the Iraqi Army. Leback provides an excellent account of the battalion's preparations for battle, and of the Marines' unique ability to adjust to the harsh desert conditions of Saudi Arabia. As the Marines trained, the biggest fear among them and the rest of the U.S. military was Saddam Hussein's proclivity to use chemical weapons as he did during Iraq's eight-year war with Iran. As for the Iraqi Army itself, Captain Mike McCusker, the commanding officer for Indian Company, 3/3 stated, "We were briefed on Saddam and his forces-that they were capable, that they were very good on engineering, and we knew their chemical capability. We were briefed a little bit about their nuclear capability-that it may be there, and that was a major problem. Of course, with all of that was their reasoning since they'd just fought the Iran-Iraq war. We got some pamphlets concerning customs and courtesies, very minimal on language-flags, pictures, that type of thing. But I don't think we were ever really prepared for how vast the desert is."

Sergeant William D. Iiams, a reconnaissance team leader with 3/3, in words that seem more applicable to Operation Iraqi Freedom rather than Desert Shield/Desert Storm said, "I guess just because of guerrilla warfare and the lessons learned in Vietnam, we were briefed on the common people. We were really concerned about that sort of situation . . . I was real surprised the way lived, the common Saudi people out where we were at . . . There were a lot of peasant people. They seemed very humble, but they but they also seemed very frightened. I would say that they are religious fanatics. They were very hesitant about us." Finally, Captain Joseph Molofsky stated that, many of the Arab officers he served with during Desert Shield/Desert Storm believed Saddam Hussein to be 'mad and a danger' to the sovereignty of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. But they believed that the Iraqi Army must not be destroyed. The Iraqi Army needs to be used in the future to fight the real enemy, and of course that's the Zionists. Almost to a man, they believed that all those tanks, all those APCs [armored personnel carriers], all those Scuds, sooner or later, , they were going to be allies with the Iraqi soldiers to relieve Jerusalem.

Unbelievable! Unbelievable, but a sincere perception, I believe, on most of the officers' part."

For the Marines, the realities of the desert were oftentimes overwhelming. Searing temperatures by day, sandstorms, and nighttime operations became a fact of life for Marines who sent, as one leatherneck recounted, "Thanksgiving . . . then Christmas and New Year's . . . waiting" for something to happen. As the Marines waited for the politicians and generals to decide the next course of action they dug defensive positions, conducted patrols at night and, as soldiers throughout history have done - waited. In fact, by the commencement of the ground war Marines were `learning how to do it right - everything from the basic patrol to fast foot formation up to the brigade level'.

In one of the accounts, Sergeant Iams recalled how a U.S. Army unit had become lost in the city of Khafji and the state of near panic that two female drivers were in as they told the rescuing Marines "Oh shit, we're lost. We don't know where we are at." Sergeant Iams likewise discussed briefly the capture of Melissa McNeely, who, like Private Jessica Lynch during Operation Iraqi Freedom, had fallen into Iraqi hands. In fact, the situation was remarkably very similar to Pvt. Lynch's capture and abuse at the hands of her Iraqi guards. These two incidents in Khafji point to the fact that sometimes armies do not learn from past mistakes.

Corporal Allen Uskoski recalled that during one mission into the city of Khafji the Marines entered the city and, in an almost a textbook operation, moved into the city and carried out house-to-house raids for any type of weapon that could possibly be hidden there. As Corporal Uskoski wrote, the Marines proved quite adept at urban operations during operations in Khafji, lessons one might add they have applied in today's ongoing war in Iraq against the Islamic Jihadists.

Lehrack spends a considerable amount of time discussing the Battle for Khafji. This occurred when the Iraqis launched a two- brigade attack across the Kuwait-Saudi border. This was the first major engagement of Desert Shield and brought home the reality that the Iraqis were not just going to 'lie down and die' in the face of the awesome U.S. military might. The battle, in what started as an artillery raid, culminated in both a Saudi and Qatari-led counteroffensive that expelled the Iraqi forces and sent them into a headlong retreat back into Kuwait. As the author wrote, however, the Iraqis, in fact,

fought, and demonstrated their ability and expertise at brigade-level warfare. Likewise, the Saudi forces demonstrated an inability to undertake combat operations, a fact that led to some resentment among the Marines trapped in Khafji. While Iraqi forces eventually retreated, the raid demonstrated that the Iraqis could and would fight. Furthermore, Lehrack's three chapters on the Battle of Khafji reinforced the thesis put forth by Anthony Cordesman and Abraham R. Wagner in their masterful *Lessons of Modern War, (Volume 2) The Iran-Iraq War, 1980-1988*, that while the Iraqi commanders had problems handling larger units from division on up, they fought very well at the brigade-level. This they have proven time and again, and did so, in a big way in January 1991, during the Battle of Khafji.

Yet the Battle of Khafji exposed the weaknesses of the Iraqi Army's command and control process, and its inability to sustain a counterattack. As Major General Mike Myatt, who commanded the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division wrote, the Battle of Khafji “‘deflated’ the mythology of the invincibility of the Iraqi Army and that they [the Iraqis], were, not, in fact, ten feet tall’.” General Myatt added, “I don't think that the Battle of Khafji was really recognized for what it was by the people of Riyadh, the Cent[ral] Com[mand] folks. Because it should have told all of us that it was going to be different than the slug-out that they had predicted.”

It is here that a major weakness in an otherwise excellent account of the first Gulf War appears and that is the lack of a good scale map of the city of Khafji. Such a map or diagram would've been useful for the reader to follow the flow of the battle. In fact, there are very few maps enclosed in this otherwise fine book. More maps would've proved extremely useful in describing the Iraqi and Coalition positions; the first battles [or skirmishes] for Khafji; the coastal positions of the Iraqi Army in Kuwait, and the 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Expeditionary Brigade's amphibious deception campaign. This is a serious shortcoming as it leaves it up to the reader either to find another book with maps, preferably the Marine Corps Historical Center's excellent monographs on the Gulf War, that have good maps of the war very similar to that of Major General Robert Scales' *Certain Victory* in order to follow the various phases of the Battle of Khafji. Despite this shortcoming, the book's overall strength remains its excellent first-account narratives by the Marines of 3/3!

As for the ground attack itself, Captain Leon Pappas recalled, “Our attack was supposed to be, I heard, made up of as much as the entire regiment, a minimum of two battalions, and we were told that 3/3 was going to be the first. All three companies would go in on the first wave. I was supposed to take the northern part of the airfield and establish a blocking position. Lima was to take the southern part, and India was going to take the center and the terminal buildings.” Captain Pappas added that as the date for the ground war came closer, so too did the training, “because all of a sudden we were starting to pick back up on helo team organizations, landing zone drills . . . We’d drill every night. . . .”

Like the chapter on the Battle for Khafji, Lehrack’s *America’s Battalion* provides one of the best hour-by-hour, day-by-day account of the start of the ground war on 24 February 1991. On line were Task Force Grizzly, Task Force Poppa Bear, consisting of two infantry and one battalion. Task Force Ripper, also consisted of two infantry battalions and a tank battalion, as well as all the rest of 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division and the Army Tiger Brigade. As the author wrote, the normal pre-attack problems began to surface as the Marines and Soldiers moved to their ‘jump off’ positions. He does an outstanding job in describing the agonizing the battalion commander, Colonel John Garrett, went through as his Marines moved into position. When the attack commenced, the attack went like ‘clock work’ as the Marines, Soldiers, and Coalition troops knifed their way thru an Iraqi Army bent on only thing: surrender. While some Iraqi units put up some resistance, this was few and far between as the . . . Marine part of the invasion force had captured, destroyed, or damaged 1,060 tanks (mostly T-55’s, T-62,’s and some T-72’s), 608 armored personnel carriers, 432 artillery pieces, and 2 SCUD launchers. Tragically, Marine losses in the First Gulf War were 5 killed and 40 wounded. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marines, the subject of *America’s Battalion*, emerged from this war unscathed “and was able to return home with the enviable record of none killed and none wounded by enemy action in Desert Storm.”

Otto Lehrack ends his book with the battalion’s return home to a grateful nation much unlike the reception Marines received after their return from Vietnam. One cannot read this section and look back to the era when *No Shining Armor* took place and wonder what had changed in the twenty- six years since U.S. involvement in Vietnam began.

Like the Marines of Desert Storm, the Marines (and Soldiers) who served in Vietnam were heroes too. Lehrack's book will undoubtedly serve as the first scholarly attempt to objectively analyze the Marines' role in Desert Storm, and is a book all Marines and historians will refer to for years to come. Finally, *America's Battalion* will likewise remain as a tribute to the Marines of 3/3 who served in both Vietnam and Desert Storm.



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