

**U.S. Marines in the Persian Gulf, 1990-1991**

**Marine Communications in  
Desert Shield and Desert Storm**



**History and Museums Division  
Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps  
Washington, D.C.**

# Foreword

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This monograph is an account of the role of communications within the I Marine Expeditionary Force and the Marine Forces Afloat during the 1990-1991 Persian Gulf War. It is one of a series covering the operations of the I Marine Expeditionary Force; the 1st Marine Division; the 2d Marine Division; the 3d Marine Aircraft Wing; Marine Combat Service Support; Marine Forces Afloat; and Marines in Operation Provide Comfort.

Communications by its very nature is an elusive subject. The technology behind this specialty has changed rapidly in recent years, leaving the individual who comes into only occasional contact with it often perplexed and intimidated by its seeming complexity. This situation is made more difficult by the very nature of tactical communications, which cut across most of the other specialties in the Marine Corps. It is rarely a topic of separate study in military historical writing, except when its inadequacies are said to cause or to contribute to failures on the battlefield.

The author of this monograph, Major John T. Quinn II, USMC, served as a historical writer with the History and Museums Division from January 1994 to July 1996. A communications officer by military occupational specialty, he was struck by the lack of information about tactical communications during previous American military conflicts. He thus set out to capture the essence of the I MEF communications system during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. He intends for it to benefit those who seek a greater understanding of the effort required to support a corps-sized Marine Expeditionary Force at war.

Major Quinn joined the Marine Platoon Leaders Class program in 1981. He graduated from the University of Delaware in 1984 and was commissioned in the Marine Corps. He attended the Basic School and Communications Officer School at Quantico, Virginia. Reporting to the 2d Marine Division in April 1985, he served his first Fleet Marine Force tour as the communications officer for the 2d Light Armored Vehicle Battalion. His next tour was on board the USS *Saipan* (LHA-2), where he served as the officer-in-charge of the Marine Communication Detachment. Transferred to the 3d Marine Aircraft Wing (MAW) in November 1989, he served in a variety of billets with Marine Wing Communication Squadron 38 until May 1992.

During his tour at the 3d MAW, Major Quinn deployed to the Persian Gulf region from August 1990 to March 1991, where he participated in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. He subsequently earned a master's degree in national security affairs from the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California. He joined the History and Museums Division in January 1994. Besides writing this monograph, Major Quinn served as the primary researcher for the planned single-volume history of Marines in the Gulf War, and he also deployed as a field historian during Operation Uphold Democracy

in Haiti in the fall of 1994.

Unless otherwise noted, the material in this monograph is based upon the command chronologies of Marine units participating in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm from July 1990 through June 1991. These chronologies are on file with the Archives Section, Marine Corps Historical Center, Washington Navy Yard, Washington, D.C. 20374. The other primary sources for this monograph are approximately two dozen taped oral history interviews conducted by the author with key Desert Storm participants between April 1994 and May 1995. These sources have been augmented by articles, after-action reports, and letters provided to the author by interested Marines. All are contained in the Desert Storm Communications folder on file at the Marine Corps Historical Center.

*Marine Communications in Desert Shield and Desert Storm* is the work of one officer who participated in the conflict with the 3d MAW. We invite comment, amplification, and correction.

M. F. MONIGAN  
Colonel, U.S. Marine Corps  
Director of Marine Corps History and Museums

## Preface

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On the morning of 2 August 1990, I heard about the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait from a radio broadcast during my commute from my home in Rancho Santa Margarita, California, to my place of duty at Marine Corps Air Station, El Toro. I had joined the 3d Marine Aircraft Wing there about eight months before as a newly minted captain. Temporarily serving as the operations officer of Marine Wing Communication Squadron 38 pending the arrival of an inbound major, I was struck by the business-as-usual approach that many there on base took upon hearing the news out of the Persian Gulf region.

I should not have been surprised. The U.S. Government's initial public reaction was one of condemnation, but the absence of an immediate military alert reflected Kuwait's uncertain status vis-a-vis the U.S. Kuwait and the U.S. had no codified defense arrangements, and by all appearances, the Kuwaitis expected that their independence from the world's two superpowers and their oil wealth would combine to protect their interests. By first light in California on 2 August, it was clear that they had badly miscalculated their security needs.

Although it regularly deployed many of its fixed- and rotary-wing squadrons on board ship or to the Western Pacific region and occasionally dispatched composite aircraft groups for overseas training exercises, the 3d MAW had not deployed as a unit from its Southern California home in many years. It seemed for a short while in early August that the invasion of Kuwait was not going to upset this track record. Within a few days, of course, this approach changed dramatically when President George Bush decided to dispatch the first group of what would eventually amount to nearly half a million American servicemen to the Persian Gulf region initially to protect Saudi Arabia and later to liberate Kuwait from Iraqi occupation.

I departed for Saudi Arabia just after daylight on 20 August 1990 on board a Boeing 747 with the initial detachment of my squadron. After my first two weeks in Bahrain, in early September I moved to Jubayl, Saudi Arabia, and took command of a communication unit located at the airfield nearby. For most of nearly seven months, I performed the duty of providing external communications links to the airfield and to its tenant units as well as serving as the communications officer for Marine Aircraft Group 16. After the 17 January 1991 commencement of Operation Desert Storm, I relocated my unit northward to Tanajib, Saudi Arabia, where MAG-16 and other units operated from until their March 1991 departure for the U.S. after the cease-fire agreement.

A little more than a year after my return from the Gulf War, I detached from the 3d MAW and reported to the History and Museums Division for duty as a historical writer. Since I had no formal training as a historian, the Director of the Division, Brigadier General Edwin H. Simmons, USMC (Ret), and the Chief Historian, Mr. Benis M. Frank, directed that I develop a small project from which

I could begin my research of Marine operations in the 1990-1991 Persian Gulf War while at the same time learning the fine points of the profession of military historian.

The topic that I chose for this small project was Marine communications during the Gulf War. Having spent the majority of Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm in theater, I believed that there was an interesting story to tell. In the decade prior to the Gulf War the fields of communications, information systems, and electronics maintenance grew increasingly complex and interrelated thanks mainly to the widespread introduction of the microcomputer into tactical units in the U.S. military. I believed that an understanding of the expertise and equipment needed to facilitate the command and control of a corps-sized Marine force would be facilitated by a short and readable history.

My initial review of unit command chronologies from the period underscored my earlier impression that communications personnel do not often record their efforts in any great detail in prose. They tend to express their ideas in Communication Annexes supported by radio guard charts, bubble charts, and wire diagrams. Since I had experienced in reality only a small portion of the extraordinary communications network established by Marines during the conflict, this paucity of written material had the fortunate effect of forcing me to solicit interviews and accounts from Marines at all levels of communications staff and command positions during Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

My call for support for the project was answered with enthusiasm from my colleagues around the Marine Corps. Many officers provided extensive oral histories and then took additional time to answer repeated follow-up questions or to provide important documentation. Others continued in this vein by reviewing various drafts and providing meaningful clarifications and editorial advice. The efforts of Colonel Robert G. Hill, Colonel Timothy J. Himes, Colonel Glenn R. Williams, and Lieutenant Colonel Nicholas C. Petronzio were particularly helpful in this regard. Others who made substantial contributions to this work include Lieutenant Colonel Leslie A. Duer, Lieutenant Colonel Mateusz K. Jastrzebski, Lieutenant Colonel Lawrence E. Troffer, Lieutenant Colonel William S. Febuary, Major Timothy G. Learn, Major Gerald R. Boeke, Major Michael J. Smith, Major George P. Elsasser, Major Patrick C. Regan, Major John E. McKnight III, Captain David M. Salyer, and Captain Erik J. Knutla.

Within the History and Museums Division, Mr. Frank, Dr. Jack Shulimson, and Mr. Robert E. Struder encouraged me to use the active voice, express my thoughts in plain English where possible, and avoid splitting my infinitives. They also taught me many of the intangibles that combine to form the art of writing good operational histories. Mr. Charles R. Smith contributed important advice and prepared the index. Colonel Michael F. Monigan, Lieutenant Colonel Dave Beasley, Jr., Captain David A. Dawson, Captain John T. Simpson, Mr. Frederick J. Graboske, Mr. W. Stephen Hill, and Ms. Evelyn A. Englander also made important contributions to this work through their invaluable support. Mrs. Catherine A. Kerns designed the volume and produced it through desktop

publishing techniques. Brigadier General Simmons, now retired from his long and fruitful stewardship of the Marine Corps Historical Program, has been an example to me of what a thoughtful and articulate gentleman can contribute to the Marine Corps and to the country over the course of a lifetime of service.

While I have a long way to go before I can claim the title of Marine historian, my apprenticeship in the field has been a highly rewarding experience thanks to the men and women of the Marine Corps Historical Center. I am grateful for the chance to serve with them. Finally, I would like to thank the Marines of Unit A, MWCS-38. They took great pride in doing the most with the least for seven months while perched on the edge of the Arabian desert. This work is dedicated to their spirit and perseverance.

J. T. QUINN II  
Major, U.S. Marine Corps



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