ISC takes the desert by Storm

by Wrenne Timberlake

In a special report summarizing ISC's "bottom line" activities in the Persian Gulf, Command officials said support provided by the ISC to Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm "clearly showed the value of a strong, centralized IMA Command."

"Remarkable!" "Outstanding!" "Superb!"

These are just a few of the characteristic words used by Joint Chiefs of Staff leadership to describe the achievements of the Information Systems Command in the Persian Gulf.

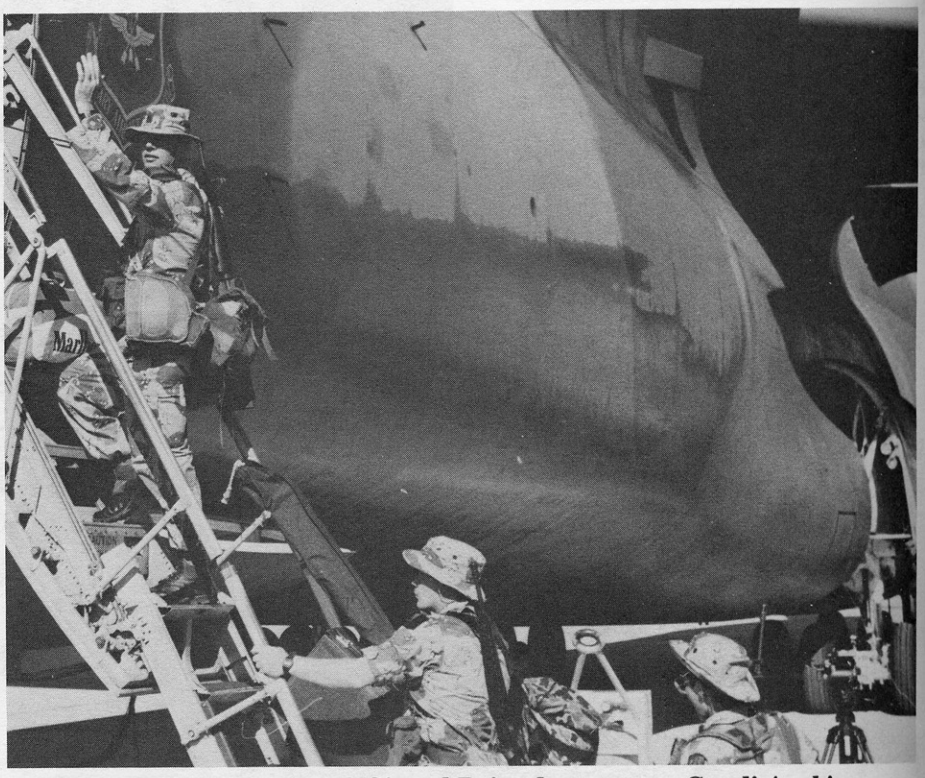
The JCS was saluting, of course, ISC's team of some 3,900 C-E specialists. And for good reason. They had provided prompt, reliable and critically needed command and control communications in America's Desert Shield/Desert Storm operations.

Pulled in from the Command's worldwide structure (from the U.S., Europe and as far away as Hawaii and Japan) to join ISC's small desert detachment in Saudi—ISC Central Area Command—they were in business and making history within weeks.

With professional speed and efficiency, a task force from the 11th Signal Brigade hooked up with ISC-CA to install a reliable and responsive Internet network within six weeks after Iraq had invaded Kuwait. Soon afterwards, hundreds of other brigade troops from Fort Huachuca, AZ were on the scene to what amounted to the fastest communications buildup in Signal Corps history.

The brigade provided tactical and strategic DCS entry communications in the theater. Satellite radios, telephone switching and message center capabilities supported Army's Central Command (ARCENT) and the combined arms ground forces.

And so began an extensive array of services within all five disciplines of the Information Mission Area (IMA)—an unprecedented support described by GEN Colin Powell as "the



The deployment of 11th Signal Brigade troops to Saudi Arabia amounted to the fastest communications buildup in Signal Corps history. (US Army photo)

key to our success" in bringing the war to such a stunning close.

In a speech to an AFCEA meeting in Washington, Powell said C3 systems let him and other national leaders communicate with GEN Norman Schwarzkoph within moments.

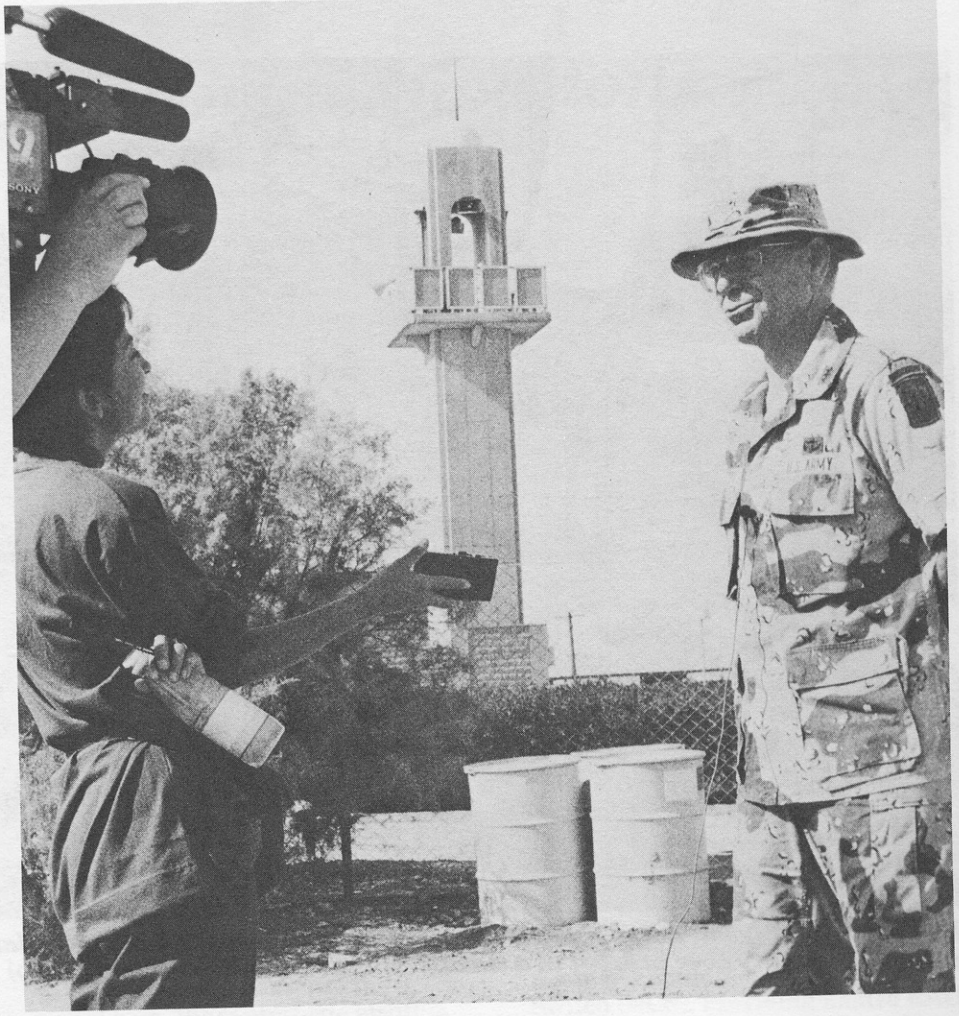
"I can sit at my desk each day and reach out—effortlessly—and touch GEN Schwarzkoph immediately and securely."

There's a reason for it. And it traces back to the early days in Saudi when ISC and its 11th Signal Brigade quickly got to work. Within days, they had provided immediate, on-the-spot telecommunications support by activating 10 terrestrial voice circuits between Fort Bragg and the area of operations.

By early September, the command fielded a commercial transportable satellite terminal (CTST1) with an initial capacity of two compressed T1 circuits (96 channels). This was later expanded to three compressed T1 circuits and nine microwave extensions.

ISC also installed two transportable standard remote terminals (TSRTs) to back up over-the-counter message service at Dhahran and Riyadh—a critical expanded service at that stage of the hugh deployment.

A mobile satellite terminal (an AN/TSC-86) augmented existing facilities at Fort Detrick and made possible centralized control for all satellite assets in theater.



COL Chuck Sutton, commander of the 6th Signal Command, discusses command and control with ABC TV in Riyadh. (US Army photo)

Brigade soldiers line up for one of their two daily hot meals near Dhahran. The third meal? MRE. (US Army photo)

By the end of August, the brigade was operating what was to become the largest common user data communications capability ever present in a theater of operations. (US Army photo)

Establishment of an internet, dubbed ODS-NET by ISC, was next, as was the DoD-wide commercial telecommunications support made possible by the ISC's ARCCO (for Army Commercial Communications Office) which also activated commercial voice circuits in CONUS and the theater.

So, by the end of August, the brigade had designed, engineered and installed—and was operating—what was to become the largest common user data communications capability ever present in a theater of operations.

The data communications traffic in and out of theater averaged 10 million words per day. And while this strategic infrastructure was being developed, virtually the entire brigade was being deployed with as many as seven flights from Tucson during one week in November.

Later in the month, all but several companies of the 11th were deployed to the Middle East, extending C-E capabilities there to state-of-the-art automated message and telephone switching, satellite, tropospheric and line-of-sight radios plus cable and wire construction.

The ISC expansion continued in December with the formation of the 6th Signal Command at Huachuca and its subsequent deployment on Christmas Day to Saudi. Located in Riyadh, it was to assume responsibility for all ISC assets in theater.

Units from Fort Gordon (67th Signal Battalion), CONUS and Europe (including the ISC's 7th Signal Brigade) were soon on board to fulfill added EAC tactical needs.

In addition, the strength of the ISC-Central Area was increased and to a point where it became the 54th Signal Battalion.

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The report added: "In a recent speech, the Chairman of the JCS indicated that Desert Storm's communications system—installed in only six months—was much superior to the Vietnam system which required six years to install."

Mr. Timberlake has been the public affairs officer for the ISC since the Command was formed (then known as STRATCOM) in 1964. Much of the information noted in his piece was based on a personal trip he took (airlift) to Saudi Arabia with 11th Signal Command troops last December. A World War II veteran (Infantryman in Europe), Timberlake says his visit was something else despite the cold nights, cold showers and cold MERs.