



U.S. Marines in the Persian Gulf, 1990-1991: With Marine Forces Afloat in Desert Shield and Desert Storm

USMCR (Ret.), Lt. Col. Ronald J. Brown

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This monograph presents a preliminary account of operations by the embarked Marine units under the operational control of the Commander, Naval Forces, Central Command, in the Persian Gulf from August 1990 to May 1991. It tells the story of the 4th and 5th Marine Expeditionary Brigades (MEBs) and the 13th and 11th Marine Expeditionary Units (MEUs) which comprised the Marine Forces Afloat during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. The term "Marine Forces Afloat" was chosen carefully because although each of these units served in the same theater of operations, they remained separate entities capable of rapidly integrating into a single force or breaking away to conduct independent operations as the situation required. The Marine Forces Afloat came into existence early in Operation Desert Shield when the seaborne 4th MEB joined the forward-deployed 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) in the North Arabian Sea in mid-September. These Marines were later joined by the 5th Marine Expeditionary Brigade during what would eventually become the longest continuous shipboard deployment by a brigade-sized force in Marine Corps history. For those Marines, the major events of Desert Shield were a series of large amphibious exercises, maritime interdiction operations, and a daring evacuation of the American Embassy at Mogadishu, Somalia. During Operation Desert Storm the U.S. amphibious threat created a strategic distraction that kept Saddam Hussein's attention focused away from the main attack; Marine Aircraft Group 40 flew the first-ever fixed-wing combat strike off an amphibious assault ship; the 13th MEU made two landings; the 4th MEB conducted amphibious demonstrations off the coast of Kuwait; and the 5th MEB participated in ground combat ashore. On its way home the 5th MEB joined Operation Sea Angel, the international humanitarian effort to assist Bangladesh in dealing with the devastation of Cyclone Marian.

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