



Year: 1990

Location: King Fahd International Airport, Saudi Arabia

Author: Paul Walsh, SMSgt (ret)

*Weather Support to the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) —
Operation Desert Shield / Desert Storm
Detachment 9, 1690th Weather Group (Provisional)*

A large portion of the weather personnel from Detachment 1, 5th Weather Squadron at Fort Campbell, Kentucky had just returned from a deployment to Fort Bragg, North Carolina in early August 1990.

Three weeks later, 1Lt Tom Lunsford and TSgt Rob Fuller — the OIC and NCOIC of the unit's combat weather team — arrived at King Fahd International Airport (KFIA) with the division's Assault Command Post.

They were the first of what would ultimately be a 30-person weather team, later designated Detachment 9, 1690th Weather Group (Provisional), assigned to support the 101st Airborne. Detachment 9, commanded by Captain Mike McDonald, quickly became:

- The largest single Air Force weather unit in theater
- The only unit with dedicated (infantry) brigade-level support teams

Because of that role, its personnel were placed in front-line positions almost immediately upon arrival in Saudi Arabia. Training and Deployment.

To prepare for forward operations and the very real threat of combat, deploying members of Detachment 1 — plus augmentees — underwent rigorous physical and tactical training.

Augmentees arrived with as little as 24 hours' notice and slept wherever space existed: on couches, floors, even a pool table. When an air-conditioning system failed, flooding the barracks, many lost personal belongings — a harsh preview of the discomfort ahead.

Still, compared with what waited for them in Saudi Arabia, the dayroom was luxury. The full weather team was in theater with the 101st by 11

September 1990.

Life in the Desert

The D-MAIN TOC (Division Main Tactical Operations Center) weather team lived in wooden-floored “Bedouin tents” and worked from an unfinished solid-waste facility.

Air-conditioning was nonexistent; mice and scorpions were not. Showers were outdoor facilities and unheated until mid-December. Latrines were six-holers emptied daily — whether needed or not.

Brigade weather teams experienced even harsher conditions:

- No tents or shelters
- No regular showers except during brief rotations to Camp Eagle II
- “Facilities” consisted of a shovel, (Stars and Stripes) newspaper, and the nearest dune

The Aviation Brigade weather team lived at Forward Operating Base (FOB) Oasis — austere, but slightly better than the infantry teams.

Special Operations Weather Support

Detachment 1 also supported the 5th Special Forces Group. Its Special Operations Weather Team (SOWT) element deployed to King Faud International Airport (KFIA) and (King Khalid Military City) KKMC, living under comparatively stable conditions but enduring SCUD attacks and involvement in high-risk operations.

Just prior to air operations, SrA Gregg Cobb deployed to a classified location with a MARWIN upper-air system. The data he collected was crucial to initial Desert Storm combat sorties.

Transition to Combat Operations

The launch of Desert Storm triggered strategic deployment north to the Iraqi border near the city of Rafha, mostly via C-130. When dense fog forced aircraft to divert, the D-MAIN weather team stepped in. SSgt Dan Choplick, SrA Scott Peters, and A1C Mike Byars took observations directly from Rafha airfield — relaying critical data to incoming airlift through the Airlift Control Center (ALCE). Their work allowed the air-movement mission to continue.

Front-Line Weather Support in Desert Storm

The 2nd Brigade weather team deployed to Quasimah, Saudi Arabia, in entrenched positions, anticipating a preemptive Iraqi attack. Despite being outnumbered and

outgunned, they remained steadfast and mission focused — demonstrating the selflessness and courage that became the Detachment 9 trademark.

The Largest Air Assault in History

The 101st Airborne launched an assault approximately 60 miles inside Iraq to establish Forward Operating Base (FOB) Cobra — a logistics base enabling deep operations toward the Euphrates.

During Operation Desert Storm, Forward Operating Base (FOB) Cobra was established by the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) on February 24, 1991. This was a major helicopter assault into Iraq to create a secure base for logistics and support future attacks aimed at disrupting Iraqi forces along Highway 8. The base was successfully established after the 101st Airborne secured the area, which was a critical tactical component of the ground campaign to liberate Kuwait. Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf famously described the 101st Airborne's role, saying, "The Air Force and armor were the thunder of Desert Storm, while the 101st was the lightning," due to their deep, fast-moving air assault missions.

The assault force included:

- SSgt Scott Thompson
- SSgt Charlie Walker
- Sgt Chuck Lindstrom
- A1C Larry Gold
- A1C Tim Batson

Foreseeing the need for immediate operational weather in the objective area, Lindstrom and Gold volunteered to insert early via helicopter. Expecting heavy resistance, Sgt Lindstrom volunteered as door gunner — he was previously a Security Policeman and M-60 qualified.

Upon landing, resistance was scattered. The team delivered the first (weather) observations from inside Iraq within 3 hours of the ground war's start.

Infantry and Aviation Weather Support

- 2nd Brigade team convoyed to (Forward Operating Base) FOB Viper, northwest of Basra

Forward Operating Base (FOB) Viper was a location used by the 101st Airborne Division during Operation Desert Storm. It was established west of Basra, Iraq, and served as a base for the 2nd Brigade Combat Team "STRIKE" as they operated against Iraqi forces during the ground war.

When poor weather delayed a major air assault, 101st leadership tasked Capt McDonald's team with identifying a viable execution window:

- Weather cleared exactly when forecast
- A dense fog formed within 30 minutes of prediction the following morning

The mission executed flawlessly.

Commander's Assessment

Capt Mike McDonald summarized:

“This contingency tested the very core and fabric of Army-support weather teams... living in the desert for months under extremely austere conditions quickly separates the wheat from the chaff. I can proudly state: there was very little chaff.”

He noted his team had the distinction of being: “the earliest and furthest north deployed weather personnel in the theater.”

End of Report