Prologue

As Ceasar Santucci gazed out from the 16th floor of the Kuwait Plaza Hotel, he surveyed the ruins of downtown Kuwait. He was distressed to see the sparkling, modern city that he remembered now coated with oily soot and littered with abandoned vehicles, trash, and broken glass. The once noisy, bustling downtown streets were nearly deserted. Before the Iraqi invasion in August 1990, Santucci, a civilian engineer with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, had spent six years in Kuwait, part of that time overseeing the construction of a flight crew training center for Kuwait's Air Force.[1] Now in early March, he was among the first of hundreds of U.S. Army soldiers and civilians who, over the ensuing months, would struggle to bring Kuwait back to life.

Kuwait, an Arab state sandwiched between Iraq on the north and west and Saudi Arabia on the south and west, was founded in the early 1700s by a nomadic tribe that migrated into the Persian Gulf. The small Gulf nation derived its early prosperity from pearling, fishing, and trading.

Oil wealth later transformed Kuwait into a modern nation with a high standard of living. Oil exploration in Kuwait began in the 1920s. When oil revenues soared in the early 1950s, Kuwait's ruling Al-Sabah family devised a scheme to distribute the windfall. The Emir began transforming the cluster of mud huts into a clean, modern metropolis with skyscrapers. By 1990, more than half the country's population, roughly 1 million people, lived in Kuwait City, the "pearl of the Gulf."

Each neighborhood became a self-contained microcosm of a city with its own supermarkets, schools, medical centers, and municipal services. These neighborhoods were established as cooperatives. This system of neighborhood communities became especially important after the Iraqi invasion. During the occupation, neighborhoods provided services ranging from food distribution to rudimentary medical assistance and hid scores of foreigners from Iraqi authorities.

Kuwait is 6,880 square miles of desert, slightly smaller than New Jersey. But, for the most part, Kuwait's desert is not scenic dunes and sand seas sprinkled with groves of palm trees. In contrast to images from *Lawrence of Arabia*, the land varies from firm gravel and clay in the north to sandier, looser terrain in the south. The vast sea of beige is broken occasionally by small shrubs and plants. Only 3 percent of the land is marginally arable and only 1 percent is under cultivation. However, Kuwait exports over 1 billion barrels of oil each year.

Kuwait's wealth, coupled with the small size of its armed forces, made the country an attractive target for neighboring Iraq. Iraq was having financial difficulties because of its military buildup and its exhausting eight-year war with Iran. The war had left Iraq heavily in debt and had impaired its ability to export oil. The annexation of oil-rich Kuwait would ease the financial strain. Iraqi leaders maintained that Kuwait overproduced oil in violation of the OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) guidelines and thus drove down the price of oil. They estimated that the lower price cost Iraq billions of dollars. Iraqi leaders later demanded $2.4 billion in compensation for oil Kuwait pumped from the disputed Rumaila fields. They also insisted that Kuwait forgive $10 billion to $20 billion in loans that helped fund the war against Iran. Finally, Iraq saw in Kuwait a way to overcome the disadvantages of being virtually landlocked. For years, Iraq had been trying to annex or lease two of Kuwait's islands, Bubiyan and Warbah, but Kuwait had refused.[2]

On 18 July 1990, Iraq's President Saddam Hussein accused Kuwait of driving down the price of crude oil and reasserted Iraq's claim to oil in a disputed border area inside Kuwait. During negotiations, Kuwait indicated that it would pay a sizeable sum for peace. The Iraqis, however, demanded total capitulation on all counts, and discussions between the two nations broke down.

The United States, with growing concern, watched events unfold in the Middle East. The United States had a long-standing interest in supporting its allies in the region and ensuring continued access to the region's rich oil supply. In 1980, President Jimmy Carter announced, in what became the Carter doctrine, that the United States would regard any attempt by an outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region as a threat to its vital interests and would repulse that threat by military force if necessary. The U.S. Liaison Office, Kuwait, an arm of the Defense Security Assistance Agency, had been administering a foreign military sales case to provide Kuwait with certain military equipment. A foreign military sales case, administered by the Secretary of Defense, is a process through which eligible foreign governments purchase defense equipment and services from the U.S. government.

In the summer of 1990, U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), the joint command responsible for military operations in the Middle East, began planning for a possible Iraqi invasion. On 31 July and 1 August, the commander of CENTCOM, General H. Norman Schwarzkopf, presented

Kuwaiti child stands in the ruins of the Seif Palace, March 1991.

deployment options to Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Colin Powell, Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney, President George Bush, and the National Security Council.

Before dawn on 2 August, three divisions from Iraq's elite Republican Guard forces—some 140,000 soldiers—pushed across the Kuwaiti border. Within hours they gained control of Kuwait City and drove Kuwait's royal family into exile in Saudi Arabia.

The United Nations Security Council quickly passed a resolution condemning Iraq's actions and demanding the unconditional withdrawal of Iraqi troops from Kuwait. When Saddam Hussein refused to comply, the council imposed economic sanctions on Iraq. President Bush invoked the Carter doctrine and decided that, if invited, the United States would deploy a force large enough to defend Saudi Arabia and deter further Iraqi aggression.

General Schwarzkopf already commanded all U.S. forces in the theater and Lt. Gen. John Yeosock, commander of Third U.S. Army, would command ARCENT, the Army component of CENTCOM. After discussion with Secretary Cheney on 6 August, Saudi Arabia's King Fahd bin Abdul Al-Aziz Al Saud agreed to let U.S. forces enter his country. Two days later, President Bush announced the deployment of U.S. troops to Saudi Arabia as part of a coalition force in what was designated Operation DESERT SHIELD.

The first soldiers from the 82d Airborne Division, XVIII Airborne Corps, deployed on 8

Kuwaiti children celebrate the liberation of their country.

Defaced monument to Saddam Hussein at the Kuwait Ministries Complex, March 1991

August. During the next few months, over half a million U.S. soldiers poured into Saudi Arabia. This massive deployment of U.S. forces culminated in Operation DESERT STORM: a five-week air campaign (17 January–24 February 1991) and a brief ground operation (24–28 February 1991). As a result of these military operations, the United States and its allies liberated Kuwait. By 1 March, the combat situation stabilized enough that the emergency relief and reconstruction of Kuwait could begin.[3]

Senior U.S. officials determined that the United States would help Kuwait recover. If the problems of the postwar period were not adequately addressed, they reasoned, the people of Kuwait would suffer tremendous physical and economic hardship that could lead to further unrest and instability in the region. The U.S. officials realized that winning the war was not enough; they must also secure the peace. The Department of Defense would have the primary responsibility for the recovery operations, and the Army would act as its executive agent.

Several key factors shaped the recovery effort. First, the rapid completion of the ground war meant that the transition from a military offensive to an active restoration effort had to occur much faster than anticipated. Military leaders had not planned nearly as well for the recovery operations as they had planned for the war. As a result, they quickly had to develop various ad hoc organizations to administer the recovery operations: the interagency steering group committee, the Kuwait Task Force, the Combined Civil Affairs Task Force, Task Force Freedom, and the Defense Reconstruction Assistance Office.

In addition, damage caused by the month-long air campaign, especially to roads and power lines, made the recovery work particularly challenging. Political factors, such as the pressure to limit the role of the U.S. Army and to use small and small disadvantaged American firms, also complicated the recovery operation.

Elements of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' culture also shaped the operation. Although during the Persian Gulf War the Corps had performed a number of construction projects in Saudi Arabia on a compressed time schedule, for the most part, the Corps was not used to fast-track construction overseas. Nor was it used to operating without being able to describe the scope of the work in advance. Unlike in Saudi Arabia, no labor force or equipment was available in Kuwait. The existing procurement regulations became cumbersome. Decisionmakers in Washington often did not operate with the same sense of urgency as did Corps personnel in Kuwait and granted few exemptions from the federal acquisition regulations.[4]

Finally, the operation was shaped by the extensive, day-to-day involvement of the Kuwaitis in making decisions and executing the work. As both the bill payer and the customer, the Kuwaitis established priorities and shaped recovery operations.

Military planners ultimately found that damage to Kuwait was less extensive than anticipated. With the invaluable assistance of soldiers and civilians from the 352d Civil Affairs Command, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and other Army units, Kuwait came back to life faster than anyone could have envisioned. In the process, the people of the United States and Kuwait forged a bond that would continue long after the recovery work was completed.