



USAF's first big conventional air raid of Desert Storm proved unexpectedly dangerous.

Package Q



F-16s line up to take on fuel from a KC-135 during Operation Desert Storm.

By Peter Grier

Swaying under his parachute, Maj. Jeffrey S. Tice broke out of cloud cover at about 3,000 feet. He was descending toward marshland—a bad sign. In the Iraqi desert, water attracted people.

There were black rectangles about two miles off. As he neared the ground Tice realized they were tents. Was that campfire smoke rising from the encampment? No, it was automatic weapons fire. Somebody down there was shooting at him.

Tice tried to collapse half his chute to turn away and present a more difficult target. That was hard, as it was not exactly maneuverable. He hit the sand in perfect position, jettisoned the

parachute, grabbed his rescue kit, and started to run.

“I got about three or four Jesse Owens-style strides away before they shot up the ground in front of me,” Tice says today.

He stopped and held up his hands. The shooters formed a rough circle. There were about a dozen—Bedouin tribesmen, not Iraqi police or the elite Republican Guard.

“Most of them didn’t have teeth or shoes but they had brand-new AK-47s,” Tice says.

It was Jan. 19, 1991. For Jeffrey Tice the Gulf War was about to enter a new and arduous phase: captivity.

Somewhere nearby, the wreckage of his F-16 was burning. Tice had been shot

down by a radar guided surface-to-air missile while participating in the Package Q air strike, a major US effort to hit strategic targets in downtown Baghdad.

Package Q did not work out as US war planners had expected. Small glitches combined to make the overall results of the strike unsatisfactory, according to the postwar *Gulf War Air Power Survey*. The Air Force lost two F-16s: Tice’s and an aircraft piloted by Capt. Harry M. “Mike” Roberts. Both men were members of the 614th Tactical Fighter Squadron, the “Lucky Devils,” flying out of Qatar.

But these losses did not daunt those actually fighting the air war. If anything, they energized them. Over the door

leading out of the 614th TFS operations building, someone painted a sign, referring to the two pilots. It read, "God Bless Tico and MR." Before every mission for the rest of Desert Storm, pilots leaving reached up and slapped those words.

"My guys didn't back up one inch," says now-retired Air Force Lt. Gen. Bruce A. Wright, who in 1991 was a lieutenant colonel and 614th commander. "Once their brothers were shot down, they were committed to take the fight to Saddam Hussein like never before."

Package Q, launched 25 years ago this January, was the largest air strike of the Gulf War. Though it involved many different types of coalition aircraft, its main force was composed of F-16s. It likely remains the largest operational F-16 mission of all time.

It was born of success. The US air war against Iraq began on Jan. 17, 1991. Its first two days went very well. The US

and its allies flew thousands of sorties, destroying Iraqi early warning radars, airfields, and other strategic targets. Iraqi aircraft were reluctant to rise to the challenge and largely ceded control of their nation's airspace to the opposition.

A COMPLEX OPERATION

But these initial attacks did not target Baghdad in force. The Iraqi capital was protected by a Soviet-style air defense system of overlapping anti-aircraft artillery and optical and radar guided surface-to-air missiles. In the war's opening hours the only coalition aircraft that ventured "downtown" was the stealthy F-117 Nighthawk. This limited the immediate damage to critical Iraqi government buildings and other command and control targets.

Package Q was meant to change that. Launched the third day of the war, its main targets were in downtown Baghdad

and environs. Planners intended it to level important government buildings, dealing a psychological blow to the Saddam Hussein regime and Iraqi populace, while underscoring that coalition forces could reach any target in Iraq.

The central strike force was composed of 72 F-16s: 56 from the 388th Tactical Fighter Wing, based at Al Minhad in the United Arab Emirates, and 16 from the 401st Tactical Fighter Wing, based at Doha in Qatar. Each carried two 2,000-pound bombs. They were supported by eight F-15s to provide air cover and eight F-4G Wild Weasels and two EF-111s to jam and attack enemy radars.

The plan's operational challenges were evident from the beginning. The complexity of the operation would require aircraft from four different bases to take off at four different times before rendezvousing and refueling south of Iraq's border, over Saudi Arabia.

NO CHAFF, NO FLARES, NO PROBLEM

During the Package Q air strike into Baghdad on Jan. 19, 1991, Emmett Tullia outflung at least six Iraqi surface-to-air missiles and lived to tell about it. A famous head-up display video of his dancing with SAMs remains a teaching tool in the Air Force today.

Then-Major Tullia flew one of the F-16s assigned to attack an oil refinery in Baghdad near a bend in the Euphrates River. Intelligence indicated that the Iraqis had grouped substantial defenses in the area.

Still, Tullia was surprised at the intensity of the ground fire as he approached the target. Anti-aircraft shells were creating a virtual carpet of smoke and shrapnel in the sky, mostly at altitudes from 10,000 to 12,000 feet.

"I didn't expect such a big effort on their part," he says.

The first SAMs appeared just prior to roll-in. There were two of them, SA-2s.

"I turned around, saw them coming up. They went beneath us and overshot," Tullia says.

He was getting some additional missile warnings but he dived in and delivered his bombs on the now-burning refinery. As he pulled off and headed south the electronic countermeasures warnings escalated. He was now the hunted, not the hunter.

He looked back and saw two missile plumes. He wondered if they were directed at him, and it quickly became clear they were.

"Then I go, 'Oh, no, time to start maneuvering,'" Tullia says.

He jettisoned his wing tanks to lighten up his F-16 and make it more nimble. Tullia remembers thinking the effect of this move was pretty impressive—it really did make a difference.

These two missiles also over-

shot and detonated harmlessly above his aircraft. He turned back onto the egress heading. But then two more SAMs came at him, from his left and right rear quadrants.

Tullia began dancing in earnest, waiting until the last second before a hard turn to cause the missile to overshoot and detonate far enough away to avoid shrapnel damage to his fighter.

At this point he was separated from the right of his flight and losing altitude due to his defensive maneuvers.

"It was challenging because I didn't have a lot of chance to gain airspeed," he said.

He'd punched his wing tanks and did not have a lot of remaining fuel. Using the augmented thrust could have made it impossible for him to return to base.

"I was gambling that maybe in military power I could still get enough speed to maneuver. I was lucky because it did work out," he says.

Finally he was out of the SAM envelope and heading for south of

the border at high altitude. A fellow 614th TFS pilot lagged back to keep him company. In the end, Tullia was surprised he had enough fuel to make it back. He landed in Qatar, pulled right off, and shut it down.

"I don't know how much gas I had left. It couldn't have been much," he says.

Walking around the F-16 afterward Tullia and his crew chief discovered that his chaff and flares had not dispensed. He had avoided those missiles without countermeasures, utilizing his flying prowess alone.

"I was kind of surprised," he says, drily.

For this exploit, Maj. "E.T." Tullia was later awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.



Maj. Emmett Tullia (r) and his crew chief, SSgt. Eddie Dowdell, in front of Tullia's F-16 days before the first Gulf War began.

Photo by SrA. Jeff Roll

In addition, Package Q's air tasking order reached commanders so late that some slated to participate in the strike received the orders after completing exhausting missions on Jan. 18.

When digging into plan details, leaders of the 401st TFW discovered some unexpected changes. Their original primary target had been a suspected nuclear research facility southeast of Baghdad. Overnight the ATO had changed that to three major sites in downtown Baghdad.

In practice this meant US F-16s would start striking targets on the capital's outskirts and then work their way in toward a city center alerted to attacks.

"Such an approach would maximize the exposure of the F-16 train to enemy air defenses; however, it was too late to change the order in which the mission subsets would attack targets," wrote the authors of the *Gulf War Air Power Survey*.

The plan seemed risky but doable to the F-16 crews themselves. They felt that earlier attacks intended to suppress enemy air defenses had worn down Iraq's capabilities, and that the Wild Weasels and EF-111s would be able to handle what remained.

"We felt pretty confident it wouldn't be as difficult as it seemed on paper," says Tice.

For the 614th TFS, Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm had been unusual from the beginning. In late August 1990, it had deployed to Doha, where no US aircraft had ever been stationed. The base was so bare the unit brought a suitcase of money to help pay for setting up flying operations. The only person present to greet them on the ramp was US Ambassador Mark G. Hambley, remembers Wright.

Initially "we operated really out of the back of a KC-10," says Wright.

The first few nights they slept in a nice downtown hotel. Then someone pointed out this was a security risk;

they moved to the base and lived on the floor of a condemned Qatari barracks. "Gourmet" MREs made up the meal service for weeks. Eventually a mobile kitchen arrived. Hot food seemed a treat.

Training, in part, meant flying with Canadian CF-18s and French and Qatari Mirage F-1s. The Iraqis had similar Mirage aircraft, and the 614th's allied compatriots taught them more about the airplane's limits and capabilities than US intelligence ever could.

On the first day of combat operations the base was under an Alarm Red—indicating possible incoming Scud missiles—as the squadron prepared to launch. All 16 of the 614th crew chiefs refused to stop work to put on chemical protection gear—or move to safety—until their aircraft and pilots were safely underway.

The squadron's first targets on the morning of Jan. 17 were two Iraqi-held

HORSESHOES, HAND GRENADES, AND SA-6s

Capt. Harry M. "Mike" Roberts was nearing the southern edges of Baghdad, approaching his target—an air defense headquarters—when a following F-16 called for him to "break."

Roberts had already managed to defeat an SA-2 surface-to-air missile fired in his direction. Now he had a new enemy: a more capable SA-6 radar guided SAM.

At the "break" warning he rolled his aircraft onto its back. He saw the missile and did a last-second hard turn to try and force it to overshoot.

It did, somewhat. Then its warhead exploded and shrapnel flew into the exposed belly of the F-16.

"Initially I thought it had missed," says Roberts.

It had not. At least, it had not missed by enough. The airplane lost power and began to go out of control.

Roberts looked over his left shoulder and saw "tons of smoke." He tried to restart the stalled engine. No luck.

The nose pitched toward the ground. He tried to correct it. Nothing happened.

"I figured it was time for me to get out," he says.

Roberts ejected at about 20,000 feet. He started to fall, face down. Just as he thought the fall was lasting a little too long, his parachute deployed.

As he broke through a cloud layer he could see Baghdad off to the north. The prevailing wind was from the northwest, so at least he was not being blown closer to the city.

As he got lower he could see that he was near a four-lane highway. He could also see tracers coming in his direction. There were cars stopped along the road. "A welcome party," he says.

He landed a few hundred yards away from the highway. Roberts dropped his chute and grabbed his survival kit and ran. He did not get far. A mob of angry, AK-47 toting civilians blocked his path.

"I put my hands up and they kind of swarmed around me and took me," he says.

They stripped him of everything they could. They left him his flight suit and survival vest—but only because they could not figure out how to remove them.

Iraqi troops showed up and took control. They stuffed Roberts in the back of a station wagon and drove him to a nearby building, where they blindfolded him and began the first of what would become many interrogations.

"Cujo" Roberts—like Maj. Jeffrey S. "Tico" Tice—was beaten harshly in this initial phase of his captivity, and eventually both POWs appeared in a propaganda video that the Iraqis released to the international news media.

These videos had the opposite effect of what was intended. They were a shot of adrenaline for American morale.

Back in Torrejon, Spain, Roberts' wife Patty was waiting in a base hospital for a prenatal checkup. She looked up at a TV screen tuned to CNN—and saw her missing-in-action husband, alive. Back in Qatar, Roberts' and Tice's fellow pilots were elated.

The tactical call signs of the POWs became the names for flights of the 614th TFS for the rest of the war. "Tico" and "Cujo" flew every day.

In Baghdad the two pilots were held near each other.

"We were always in solitary confinement. They did not like us to communicate," said Roberts.

On Feb. 23, 2,000-pound bombs from F-117s hit the Iraqi headquarters where they were being held. Miraculously, they survived the building's virtual destruction.

After that they were moved constantly.

Then, one day a guard went cell to cell, telling them the war was over and they would be going home. They presented the prisoners with real food: a slice of orange and sprig of parsley on a ceramic plate.

"They were trying to make nice or something," says Roberts.

It was true—the war was over. All the POWs were released to the International Red Cross. They spent one last night in Baghdad before flying to freedom.

"Besides them not feeding us, beating the hell out of us, and doing nothing for us, it was not a bad time I guess," Roberts says today.





air bases. Initial strikes were highly planned and generally against fixed installations. During this initial phase of Desert Storm 614th pilots learned several things: The weather in the Iraqi theater of operations could be marginal, and Iraqi air defenses were generally uncoordinated. Iraqis threw lots of AAA and surface-to-air missiles into the air but they'd quickly learned to leave guidance radars off, lest US anti-radiation missiles come down their throats.

"We got pretty comfortable the first two days that our electronic combat was going to work pretty well," says Wright. "It looked like the Iraqis were not going to turn anything on."

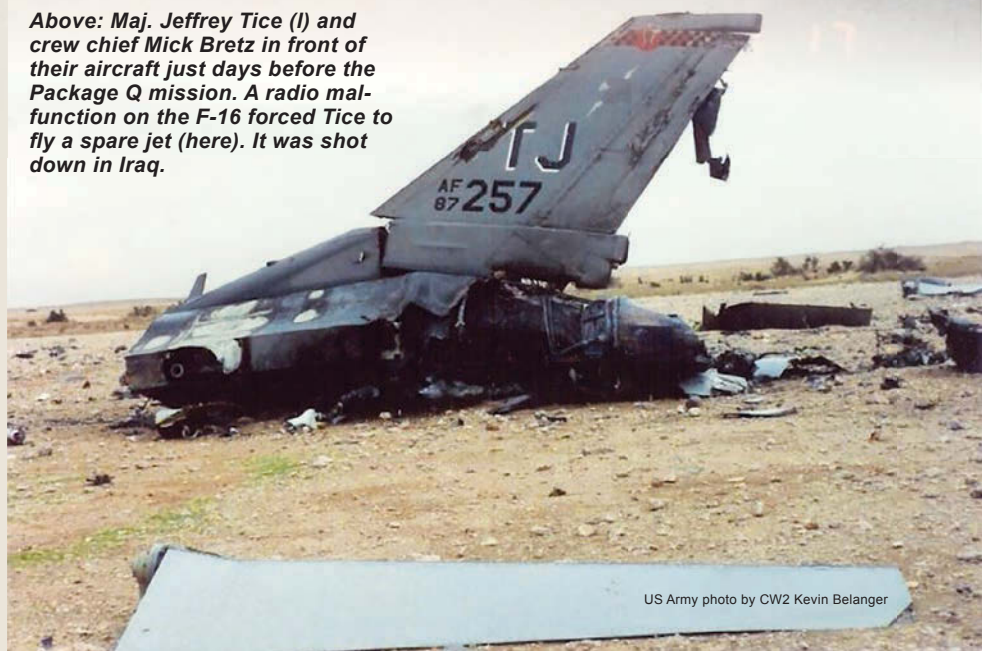
Then came Day Three—the day that changed everything for the Lucky Devils.

For Tice, Package Q was his second combat mission, as he'd served as a maintenance officer the first day of the war. Since the 614th was based as close to the Iraqi border as any US squadron, it was assigned lengthy and difficult flights, and this was one of them: downtown Baghdad.

Much of the strike force was assigned to hit a suspected nuclear site. But Tice was leading an eight-ship formation with another strategic target: a large oil refinery on a bend of the Tigris River.

The whole package was supposed to begin by flying up the western side of Iraq, leaning toward Syria. That was intended to make it appear as if they were hunting Scud launchers in the desert.

Above: Maj. Jeffrey Tice (l) and crew chief Mick Bretz in front of their aircraft just days before the Package Q mission. A radio malfunction on the F-16 forced Tice to fly a spare jet (here). It was shot down in Iraq.



US Army photo by CW2 Kevin Belanger

Then it was student body right, and dash for Iraq's capital city. Everyone was scheduled to be over target at approximately the same time.

Pilots were confident that US equipment and tactics could shut down Iraq's defensive command and control system, but that did not mean the attack was a stroll in the sand.

"Was it a dangerous mission? Absolutely. Baghdad was the most heavily defended piece of real estate in the world at the time from the point of view of the pilot," says Tice.

For Tico, things began to go slightly off from the beginning. His radio was bad, so he had to switch to a spare aircraft. Weather was abysmal, with thick cloud from 2,000 up to 14,000 feet.

Then Package Q timing began to drift. Tankers at their tracks south of the Iraqi border approached their release points too early. They throttled back to minimum speed, making it difficult for their accompanying fighters. Some almost stalled and had to light afterburners to stay airborne, according to the *Gulf War Air Power Survey*.

“That’s where things started to go a little bit wonky,” says Tice.

Two of the eight aircraft in his formation had to turn back due to the tanker issue and thick weather. Two turned back due to a maintenance issue. He proceeded into Iraq with four.

About 20 miles north of the border a burst of AAA came through the clouds, exciting some of the US pilots. Then a Wild Weasel fired a HARM, which can climb up to 70,000 feet before diving down toward its radar target.

Things quieted down. Everybody made their right turn and sped in to Baghdad. Some of the F-16s found their primary targets obscured by weather. But Tice did not.

“As I turned into my target area it was a proverbial sucker hole, a huge clear area right over the top of the oil refinery. There was plenty of room to see everything,” he says.

From a distance he could not discern any problems, such as visible SAMs or other defensive fire. He and his formation moved in, each aircraft targeting a refinery cracking tower. It looked like his formation would have an easy time.

It wouldn’t. For one thing, the F-4 Wild Weasels did not accompany the F-16s over downtown Baghdad. They may have run short on fuel due to the long mission, or fired all their HARMs. Whatever the reason, the Lucky Devils were on their own.

“About that time is when the world lit up underneath us,” says Tice.

The good news was that most of the defensive fire seemed to be visually guided. The Iraqis had been watching and seen both Tico’s flight and another group of F-16s passing high above. They were just throwing AAA and SAMs into the sky and hoping for a hit.

MEETING SAM

But the SAM fire was heavy enough to be a nuisance as the F-16s maneuvered into their target. And then Tice’s radar warning receiver buzzed. Somebody—not him—had a radar guided SAM on his tail. Tice called for the targeted aircraft to break right, but it didn’t make the turn in time. Missile shrapnel hit the F-16’s fuselage.

“That was Mike Roberts. I was pretty busy,” says Tice. “I didn’t get to pay much attention to what happened after his missile hit.”

Then Tice released his weapons on the refinery cracking tower. It went up in a beautiful series of secondary explosions. Over his shoulder he could see his target area would not be making oil for some time.

He did not look long. SAMs continued to ripple after him. Later, US intelligence determined that the Iraqis fired between nine and 12 missiles at Tice and his wingman in a one-minute period. Most were ballistic, meaning unguided.

The receiver buzzed again, and this time, “I knew a missile had been launched at me,” says Tice.

The SAMs left contrails and were easily visible. Tice had between three and five seconds to plan his response. That seems like a blink, but in practice time slowed down, he says, due to temporal distortion.

At first he thought the missile was pointed away from his aircraft, then he saw it arcing toward him. He waited until the last moment, and then did a sort of barrel roll around the SAM. Per training, he was trying to give it a square corner to turn, something it could not do. He had been told that if it were 33 feet away when the proximity fuse exploded its warhead, his F-16 would remain relatively safe.

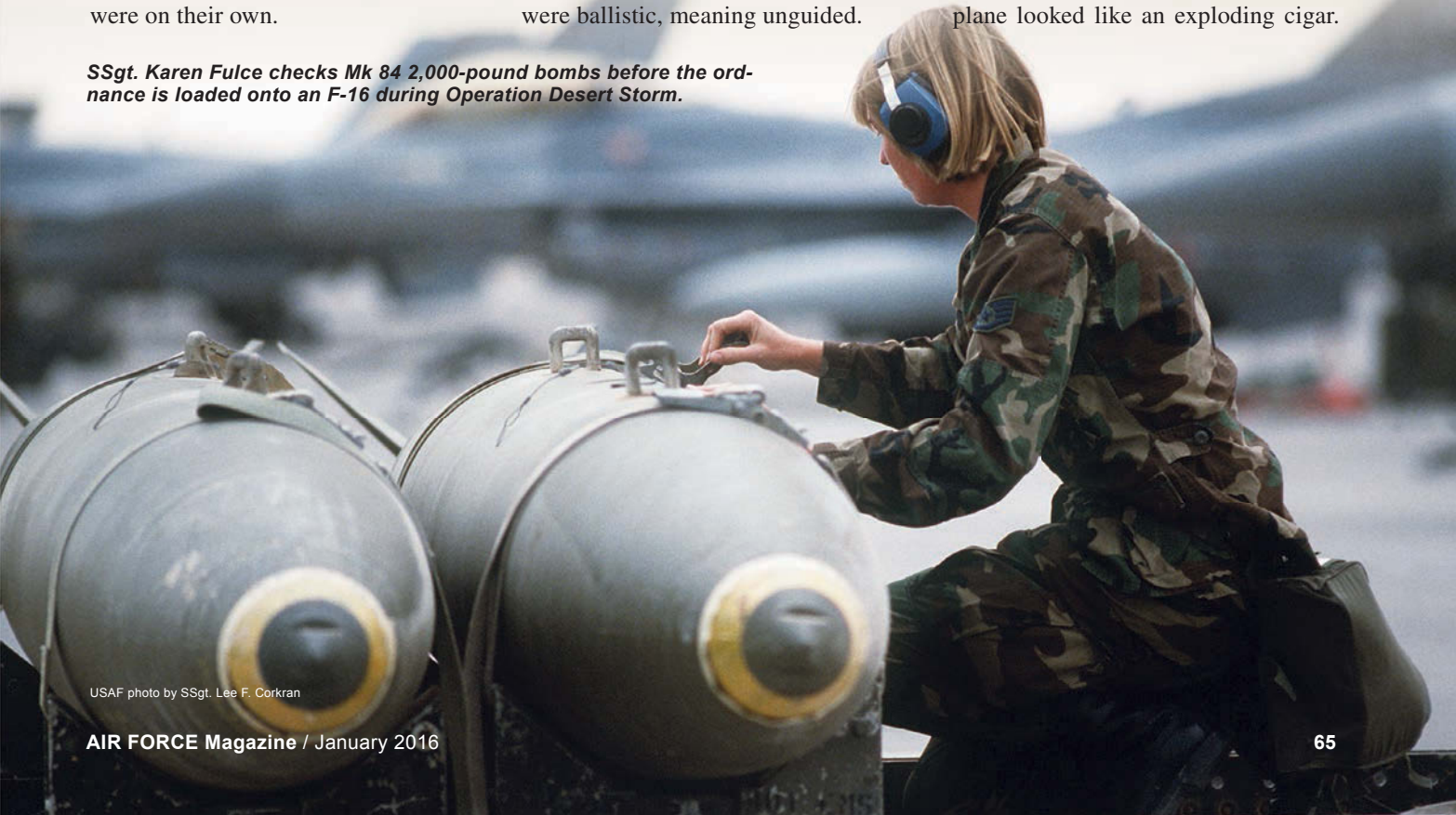
“I had a 32-foot day,” he says.

Shrapnel riddled his aircraft. Fortunately, he had managed to prevent the SAM from exploding in front of his canopy; that would have killed him. The bad news was that the F-16’s controls had stopped responding.

Eventually the aircraft came back to life as back-up systems kicked in. But Tice was now underpowered and lacking most of his instruments. He separated his external stores, and one of the fuel tanks rolled up and hit the already-damaged horizontal stabilizer.

“Essentially the back end of my airplane looked like an exploding cigar.

SSgt. Karen Fulce checks Mk 84 2,000-pound bombs before the ordnance is loaded onto an F-16 during Operation Desert Storm.



USAF photo by SSgt. Lee F. Corkran

There was stuff burning and I couldn't do anything about it. The airplane was still producing thrust. I let it take me as far as it was going to go," says Tice.

That turned out to be some 200 to 150 miles north of the Iraqi border. The F-16 essentially decided it was done flying. It glided for a while, and then Tice decided it was time to go. He grabbed the ejection handle and pulled. Nothing happened. He began to prepare for an emergency manual jettison of the thick polycarbonate canopy.

Except something was happening. Time had slowed so much, due to the continued temporal distortion, that tenths of a second seemed like forever. Suddenly Tice was face down in the cold air, canopy tumbling away, strapped in the ejection seat.

At 14,000 feet, the altitude where oxygen is thick enough to breathe, the full parachute came out. The temporal distortion and confusion began to clear away. He had survived the shutdown and ejection. He was now descending

at a rate of approximately one minute per thousand feet.

"I had 14 minutes, roughly, of time to figure out what's going on around me and get another plan going here," says Tice.

LUCKY DEVILS

For the 614th TFS maintenance troops back in Doha, this was the day the seriousness of the war hit home.

"It affected our wing top to bottom and it changed the war for our entire

VIPERS AND WEASELS IN THE DESERT

In August 1990, Capt. Philip M. Ruhlman was chief of standardization and evaluation for the 401st Tactical Fighter Wing. When his squadron deployed to Qatar at the start of Desert Shield the only ordnance they had traveled on the wings of their F-16s.

When the unit landed in Doha and popped its canopies, the heat sucked the oxygen out of the pilots' lungs and there was nothing but sand to be seen.

For some weeks they thought their deployment might be temporary. In October 614th TFS commander Lt. Col. Bruce A. "Orville" Wright straightened them out.

"Orville said, 'Unpack your bags, fellas, we ain't going home till this is over. He shifted our mind-set,'" says Ruhlman.

American expatriates in Qatar treated the airmen well. One construction company executive asked what they wanted for Christmas dinner. They said Mexican.

"He had 30 people for tacos and margaritas," Ruhlman remembers.

As conflict drew nearer the 614th flew air defense missions near the border. Iraqi helicopters sometimes popped up on the other side, trying to drag the Americans over the line into preset flak traps.

Plans for the beginning of the war were closely held. First mission launches on the fateful day of Jan. 17 were at dawn, meaning the pilots had to arise around 2 a.m. When they walked into the dining hall the staff announced that the midnight meal was over and they were closed.

"We said 'No, you're not. We want some breakfast.' The whole base had no clue," says Ruhlman.

That morning Ruhlman was part of a four-ship mission to bomb an Iraqi-held airfield in Kuwait. They were supposed to bomb the concrete in front of aircraft shelters to seal the doors. US intelligence believed Scud missiles might be inside the buildings.

When he crossed over the border for his first combat mission, it was like a dream, Ruhlman remembers.

"Your heart's beating a lot. This is what I had trained my whole life to do, this moment," he says.

He rolled in and put his bombs on target. His blood was pumping so much after release that he pulled on the stick too hard and slowed down. The rest of the flight was running for the exits. He was lagging—and his radar warning was going off. An SA-2 air-to-ground missile was chasing him down from behind.

At that moment an F-4G Wild Weasel saved his life.

"I heard them say 'Magnum.' Within five seconds, they nailed the site that was trying to shoot me."

Deprived of the tracking signal from its ground radar, the SA-2 went unguided in the air and veered away.

Ruhlman flew a morning mission on Jan. 19, the day of Package Q, so he was trying to sleep when the pilots returned from their flight into Baghdad's air defenses.

Loud discussion about Package Q's two downed pilots woke him, and airmen gathered at a makeshift juice bar in their dorm's open-air quadrangle.

They watched the head-up display video of "Cujo" Roberts' jet exploding.

"It shocked us," Ruhlman says. There seemed no way Roberts could have survived.

Then, a few days later, their comrades appeared miraculously on CNN in Iraqi propaganda videos. They didn't look good, but they were alive.

The Iraqis may have intended the video to depress US morale, but for the 614th it had the opposite effect.

"In three days, we went from the lowest low to the highest high. It was amazing," says Ruhlman.

As the war progressed the unit settled into a routine. F-15s shut down the air-to-air

threat and Wild Weasels countered the SAM threat.

At one point Ruhlman and his wingman found themselves flying without Wild Weasel cover. So they faked some F-4G cover, by imitating the Weasel's distinctive chatter.

"Hey, Viper, we're here," said Ruhlman.

Detecting an operational SAM radar in the area, Ruhlman said, "Magnum," faking a HARM launch. The radar immediately turned off.

As Desert Storm neared its end the squadron spent much of the time hunting Republican Guards in the desert. They didn't go into downtown Baghdad again.

After Iraq's defeat, US prisoners of war were released and flown to hospital ships in the region. The 614th was allowed to send two pilots with a big canvas bag full of comestible treats to greet Tice and Roberts.

The former POWs' stomachs shrank so much during their captivity they couldn't eat or drink their gifts, Ruhlman said, but aside from that hitch it was "certainly a great reunion."



Photo courtesy of Gen. Phil Ruhlman

Phil Ruhlman in the cockpit of his F-16 on Jan. 17, 1991.

base,” says Mike Kopack, who was an E-4 sergeant and crew chief for the 614th in Qatar.

Among other things, Kopack was top aircraft decontamination NCO for the wing. So on Jan. 19 he was standing on hard-packed sand near the end of the runway, wearing a chemical suit, waiting for the return of the aircraft from the Package Q strike. He remembers that the radio net seemed quiet—in retrospect, more quiet than normal.

When the first F-16 appeared it came straight in, with no overhead break. That was unusual, and unusual was rarely good. Kopack started to count the airplanes, as was his habit. He quickly noticed something.

“What’s that under the wings?” he asked.

“They’ve all blown their wing tanks and those are the tank mounts,” said someone else.

Kopack’s count came up two short. He hoped that maybe the missing aircraft had been forced to stop in Bahrain or Saudi Arabia for fuel. Somehow he knew that wasn’t the case.

Decontamination inspection was skipped for the day. The aircraft taxied directly to the ramp and Kopack and his decon team raced back in their truck. That is when they heard the news about the two lost pilots.

After that the maintenance crews did what they could: rearming and refueling the aircraft as quickly as possible so the F-16s could return to the air and search for the missing men.

“A lot of unrecorded records were set in the next few minutes,” says Kopack today.

Within an hour they saw head-up display tapes of the mission. Roberts had taken a hit amidships and his aircraft had just exploded. It did not look survivable, but someone had seen a canopy come off, so there was a sliver of hope that Roberts had ejected. As for Tice, he had made it halfway back to the Saudi border and ejected under controlled circumstances.

“We felt pretty confident that if he could get hunkered down until dark there was a good chance that we’d get him back,” writes Kopack.

Mike Roberts was alive. He had ejected and landed close to a major Baghdad highway. Stripped of all but

his flight suit and survival vest by an angry mob of civilians, he was turned over to Iraqi intelligence and interned in a Baghdad prison.

Within days the outside world knew he and Tice had survived, as film clips of their captures appeared on CNN.

For his part, Tice had no time to hunker down. At first, his Bedouin captors screamed at him and threatened him with firearms. Later, after discovering pictures of his wife and children in his vest, they gave him a place of honor next to their chief at a meal inside their tents.

But the next day they drove him to a town and turned him over to Iraqi authorities. After that his problems got worse. He was beaten and tortured with electric shocks, delivered through wires wrapped around his head. He called it the “talkman.” It would blow out pieces of his teeth.

Other than that he was in solitary confinement for five of the six weeks he was imprisoned. He was in a Baghdad building, in a cell that had nothing but a ventilation louver, not a real window, looking south.

At sunset every night he would get beneath this louver to watch the bombs falling on the city. The sequence was always the same: The ordnance would fall, the airplanes would leave, and then the sirens would sound and anti-aircraft fire would begin.

In other words, the Iraqis were unable to detect and defend against the F-117s and cruise missiles hitting Baghdad.

“Because of them being out of sequence I knew this war would not last long,” says Tice.

On the night of Feb. 23, the F-117s hit his prison, located in a Baath Party headquarters in Baghdad. Their target was a bunker underneath the building.

Four bombs blew most of the structure apart. The overpressure lifted Tice in the air and threw him around the cell. Miraculously, the wing where he and his fellow coalition prisoners were incarcerated was largely undamaged. None were hurt. An Iraqi fire brigade came in the morning to extract them. They thought the prisoners would be dead.

“I used up six of my nine lives in Iraq,” says Tice.

Taken blindfolded to a new prison, treatment began to improve. An Iraqi guard told him in broken English that if he needed something, to ask. Food and water improved in quality and quantity.

Finally, in early March, a guard came and asked his name. “You’re going home soon,” the guard said.

Tice did not believe it. He thought it was some sort of psychological torture.

Thirty minutes later another guard ordered him out of the room. “Turn to your right,” he said.

Tice was near the end of a line of prisoners.

“I didn’t like the way this was going,” he says.

The first person in the line reached some double swinging doors and went through.

At the bottom of a set of stairs, just in front of the door to the outside, was an Iraqi. As each prisoner passed, the Iraqi sprayed him with perfume.

Outside stood a representative of the International Red Cross. “You’re now under our control,” the Red Cross official said. Tice was flown out of Baghdad on March 6.

MIXED BAG

Package Q was neither a failure, nor a smashing success. A number of elements, from weather to timing to the premature exit of electronic warfare assets, combined to increase the danger to US pilots.

“The raid illustrates how a number of small incidents—or frictions—none of which by themselves are necessarily serious, can contribute to a less than satisfactory outcome: in this case the loss of two F-16s,” concluded the *Gulf War Air Power Survey*.

Coalition airpower continued to pound Iraq and established virtual dominance over Iraqi skies by the end of the war. But Air Force planners learned from Package Q that Baghdad’s defenses were lethal, and it was not worth it to send large conventional forces to attack the capital—especially since the stealthy F-117 could attack the city with much less risk. ★

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