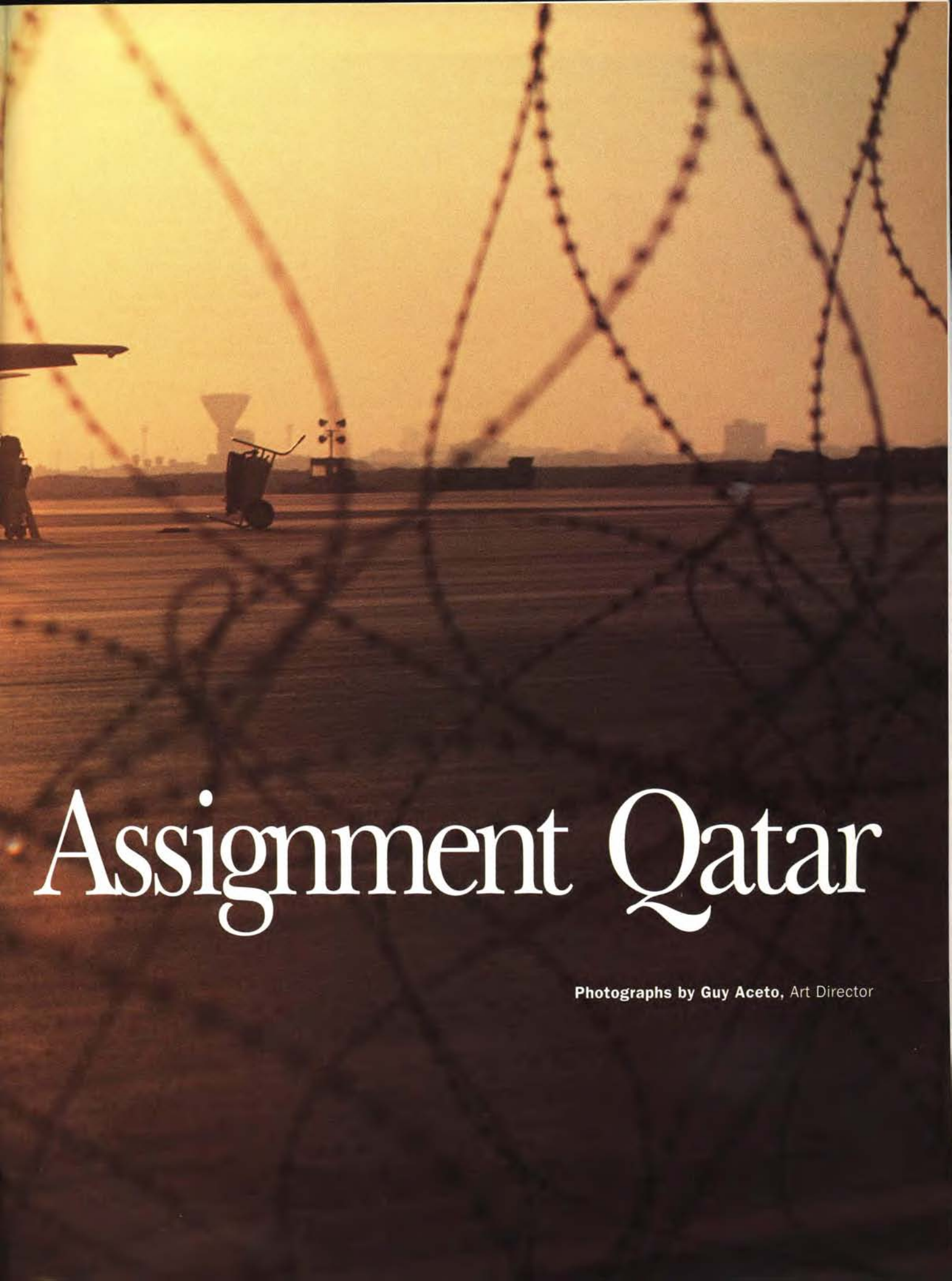




**For four months, the 4417th Air Expeditionary Force (Provisional) made a home at a desert airfield outside of Doha, Qatar.**

*An F-15E from the 335th Fighter Squadron sits on the tarmac, behind a security ring of concertina wire.*



# Assignment Qatar

Photographs by Guy Aceto, Art Director



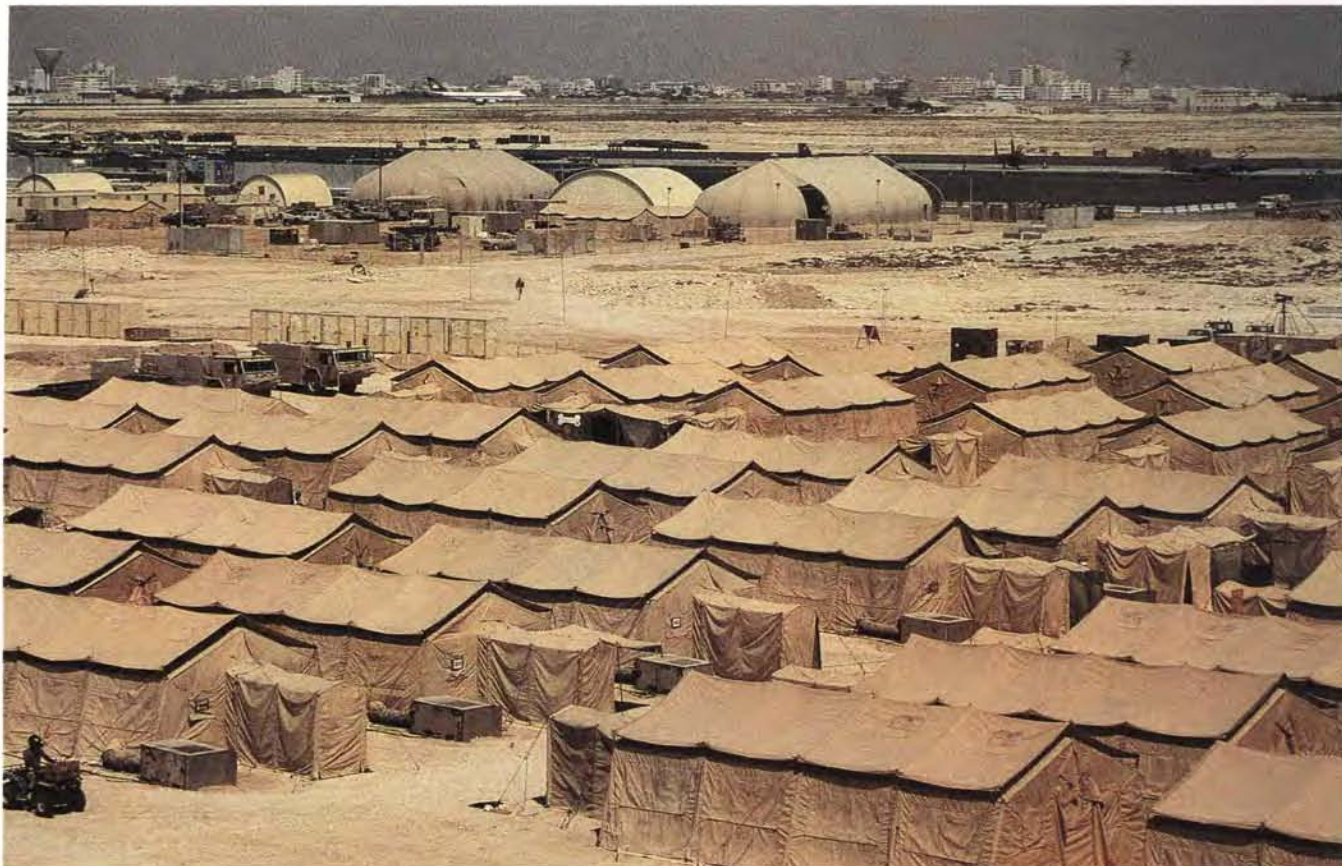
In June, elements of the 4th Fighter Wing, Seymour Johnson AFB, N. C.; 20th Fighter Wing, Shaw AFB, S. C.; 33d Fighter Wing, Eglin AFB, Fla.; and 319th Air Refueling Wing, Grand Forks AFB, N. D., gathered at an installation near Doha, Qatar, to form USAF's third air expeditionary force. AEF III—the 4417th Air Expeditionary Force (Provisional)—was a further refinement of a concept that first appeared in the fall of 1995: taking a composite group from Stateside bases and creating a lethal force on short notice. The idea originated in October 1994, when quickly deployed airpower, augmenting forces already in the area, caused Iraq to halt its buildup of troops on Kuwait's border.

For AEF III, the 4th FW served as the core, bringing twelve F-15Es from its 335th Fighter Squadron, as well as operational and logistics personnel. Three B-1Bs from the 7th Wing, Dyess AFB, Tex., and three B-52Hs from the 5th Bomb Wing, Minot AFB, N. D., and the 2d Bomb Wing, Barksdale AFB, La., were also ready to support the AEF from Stateside bases. Brig. Gen. Lance Smith, commander of the 4th FW and AEF III, said, "Our goal is, once we're notified, . . . to deploy and fly combat sorties within about forty-eight hours of initial notification." He also said that the fighter pilots flew fifteen hours nonstop from Shaw AFB and Seymour Johnson AFB to Qatar—with the F-15Es requiring eleven air refuelings and the F-16s needing fourteen to fifteen.

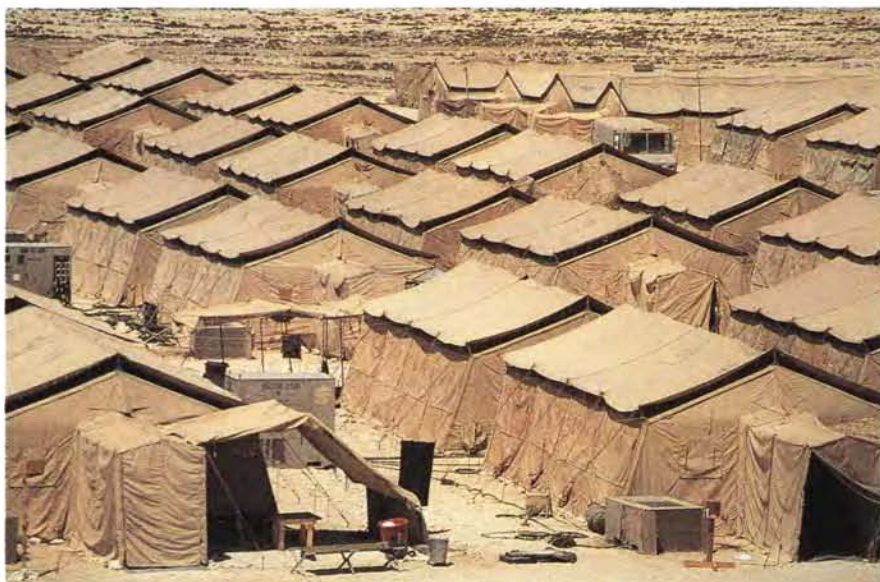


General Smith added that three AEF III F-16s were ready to fly Operation Southern Watch sorties—one of their tasks on this AEF—two hours and fifteen minutes after arriving in Qatar.

At left, an F-15C arrives back at base after a Southern Watch sortie. In addition to supporting the enforcement of the no-fly zone over southern Iraq, AEF III participated in Rugged Nautilus, a USAF-Navy exercise to test US Central Command's ability to gather and organize forces quickly in theater. As part of Rugged Nautilus, B-52s from the 2d BW flew more than 16,000 miles on a round-trip mission to a target range in Kuwait.



There was not much to start with. Above, the modern international airport of Qatar's capital city, Doha, lies in the distance. But the Camp Snoopy operations center—whose maintenance facilities are shown in the middle distance of the photo above, along with the tarmac where AEF III F-15Es are parked—needed to be supplemented to support the thirty-four aircraft and more than 1,000 people that made up the air expeditionary force. Improvements included a hot-pit refueling center on the flight line and additional maintenance space. Air Force civil engineers had been in and out of this region since 1991, but they still found some unexpected problems. Beneath a foot or so of desert sand lay solid coral that had to be drilled for every tent peg.



It's easy to see how the section of sand-colored tents (foreground above and at right) got the nickname "Dune." Along with tents for housing, special tents were set up for everything from movie and recreational facilities to the post office, finance center, and mess hall. The tents and many vehicles were prepositioned and will be put into storage for the next AEF.





News from home—and for the folks back home—is always welcome. Near the end of the mission in Qatar, news teams from Goldsboro, N. C., Columbia, S. C., and other home bases of the troops arrived to collect personal viewpoints for families in the States. The airmen enjoyed being interviewed by familiar faces—hometown television anchors and newspaper reporters. At left, television cameras run as a Security Policeman describes what life is like in Qatar.

F-16C crew chief A1C Robert Coursey, of Shaw's 78th Fighter Squadron, had been to the desert before and, like many of the AEF III crews, knew what to expect. Located on a peninsula on the Persian Gulf's western shore, Qatar can average daily temperatures of 115° F during the summer, with humidity at ninety-five percent. For Airman Coursey and other experienced maintenance crews, coping with intense heat and humidity was a minor adjustment as they went about their jobs of turning aircraft for their missions.



AEF III was assigned as a package for most of its time in Qatar. The Suppression of Enemy Air Defenses (SEAD) mission was a small but important part of this package, with F-16s from the 20th FW the key players. At left, three fully armed F-16s from the 78th FS await the next sortie. No training rounds here; all the weapons used by the AEF were live for these real-world missions. Future AEFs will be structured like this one, combining twelve F-15Cs for air superiority, twelve precision guided munition airplanes, six SEAD aircraft like these F-16Cs, and four tankers. For AEF III, KC-135Rs from the 319th ARW were kept extremely busy, supporting more than 800 sorties in Qatar.



The terrorist bombing of Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia in June highlighted the need for increased security at Camp Snoopy and Dune. Extra Security Police were added, augmented by Qatari security. A series of stone berms was constructed to ring the area and enhance security. Above, what appear to be random piles of rubble are stone berms strategically placed to slow traffic on base. Near the flight line, concrete barriers serve as protection from both outside threats and flight-line mishaps.

At right, A1C Rueben Aguirre, a Security Policeman from the 377th Security Police Squadron, Kirtland AFB, N. M., mans an M60 machine gun atop a Humvee near one of the smaller outposts on the edge of the camp. On the horizon are the hangars (far left) of Camp Snoopy and the tents of Dune. Security is tight enough so that only some of the local wildlife (below right) have free access to the base.





Keeping AEF III adequately supplied was a logistical challenge. At left, MSgt. Mark Freund, chief of supply, goes over the details with Maj. John Cooper (far left), head of logistics. Both from the 4th FW, they praised the other units who augmented them during AEF III. Each unit brought expertise in the systems they use and knowledge of what their aircraft needed to keep flying.

Part of that supply line is the "air bridge" created by the transports of Air Mobility Command. At right, a C-5B is loaded at Dover AFB, Del., for the lengthy haul "across the pond." Long hours put in by active-duty, Guard, and Reserve crews are vital to the success of AEF deployments.



General Smith noted that the operations tempo was seven days a week, with only two days off each month. But everyone needs a break, and services that some might take for granted at home become special events for the troops in Qatar. The recreation tent (left) is a popular place to spend spare time. Though security concerns after the Khobar Towers bombing curtailed most off-post activities, gracious Qatari hosts arranged for cultural events that allowed the American service members to taste traditional Arabic cooking and meet local people.



*US airpower has been a regular presence in the region since the Persian Gulf War, but with AEF III, the pattern has been set for future deployments. A tailored force can arrive within hours, operate out of a familiar airfield, and be able to put iron on target.*

*Allied cooperation is vital in an AEF, and everyone has a chance to work with the Qatari military. "We are learning as much from them as they are learning from us," said General Smith. "There are exchanges at all levels, not just [at the] flying [level]. Our firemen are similar to their firemen. Our controllers are similar to theirs. Our maintenance folks have exchanges back and forth."*

*When these aircrews walk off the flight line at Doha for the last time, they will have gained more than improved facilities for the next deployment. General Smith noted that the American and Qatari troops who work together today will be tomorrow's military leaders and will have established a good relationship because of this AEF deployment. ■*

