

“Alarm Red!”

Providing Signal Support in Kuwait



Ali al Salem Air Base

by Cherilyn A. Walley and Yul C. Yurcaba

PFC Miller heard the words “Alarm Red! Alarm Red!” echo across the base, and realized this was no drill.

THE sound of the warning siren had become almost commonplace to the 112th Signal Battalion soldiers stationed at Ali Al Salem Air Base, Kuwait in the first few months of 2003. It was always followed by an announcement indicating that the following alarm was only an exercise, and then the alarm itself. Though soldiers dutifully donned their MOPP (Mission Oriented Protective Posture) gear each time the alarm sounded, familiarity was definitely breeding contempt, and enthusiasm for the drills was waning fast.

The air base had four levels of alarm status, ranging from green to black, each indicating the magnitude of the threat. The alarm level also dictated whether or not personnel had to dress in their MOPP suits or merely keep the gear close by. The highest level of pre-attack alert was Alarm Red, indicating that a missile attack was imminent or in progress and all personnel were to assume MOPP IV status—wear all protective gear. Alarm Yellow indicated that an attack was probably in less than thirty minutes and put everybody at MOPP II, where some gear was worn and the rest carried. The primary status of the air base was Alarm Green, normal wartime conditions, which only required that people keep their MOPP gear on hand at all times. In order to keep everybody in practice, Alarm Red exercises were conducted with numbing regularity.

Thus was the situation and mindset of the

112th Signal soldiers when in the early days of Operation Iraqi Freedom they once again heard the Alarm Red siren. At first, Private First Class (PFC) Betsy Miller thought it was another drill and waited for the inevitable “Exercise” announcement. Instead, she only heard the words “Alarm Red! Alarm Red!” echo across the base, and realized this was no drill—the base was under attack.¹

PFC Miller stepped outside her tent to assess the situation and found “people going everywhere. There [was] no organization to it.” Some were racing to take shelter in bunkers, while others were scrambling back to their tents for their MOPP suits. Miller even witnessed people colliding at intersections. The confusion was heightened by the fact that some personnel on the base had taken to ignoring the drills and were therefore all the more excited by the actual alarm. In the excitement, Staff Sergeant Devon Danner’s mask was initially picked up by a frantic airman; fortunately, it was returned by the time Danner had ushered his people out of the communications room and was ready to head to a bunker. In contrast, Miller noticed that the Special Forces soldiers were calmly doing what they needed to do, seemingly unphased by the chaos around them.²

Taking cover was almost as strenuous as the attack itself. PFC Miller and her supervisor Sergeant Ben Parker crowded into an upstairs room surrounded by three-foot thick concrete walls, their

designated bunker. To everybody's discomfort, the bunker was full of people—"It was packed." To make matters worse, the day was hot. With everybody wearing their unventilated MOPP suits in such heat and proximity, the floor became "literally wet" with sweat. Each Alarm Red kept people at MOPP IV and in bunkers for at least thirty minutes.

Reinforcing the knowledge that the war had come to Ali Al Salem, the alarms continued off and on for the next two days, even rising from Alarm Red to Alarm Black at one point, indicating a missile had struck close by. To drive the point home, the soldiers could hear Patriot Missiles launch to intercept incoming missiles. The alarm was often closely followed by the "Boom! Boom!" that indicated a battery had been fired.³

Eventually the danger passed and the alarms subsided, bringing Ali Al Salem Air Base back to Alarm Green and "normal" wartime conditions. The soldiers of Charlie Company, 112th Signal Battalion continued to fulfill their communications mission in Kuwait until they were redeployed to Baghdad in May 2003. The job they did in Kuwait was a familiar one, but the sound of "Alarm Red! Alarm Red!" made the mission memorable for the 112th. 📌

Cherilyn A. Walley has been a historian with the USASOC History Office since 2003. She received her PhD from Iowa State University. Current research projects include special operations units in the China-Burma-India theater during World War II, including Merrill's Marauders and Mars Task Force.

Yul Yurcaba is a Chief Warrant Officer 4 with G3, USASOC Headquarters. He formerly served with 5th Special Forces Group.

Endnotes

- 1 Interview with Private First Class Betsy Miller and Specialist James King by Chief Warrant Officer 3 Yul C. Yurcaba, 30 June 2003, Baghdad, Iraq, notes and recording in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 2 Ibid.; Interview with Staff Sergeant Devon Danner by Chief Warrant Officer 3 Yul C. Yurcaba, 30 June 2003, Baghdad, Iraq, notes and recording in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 3 Miller and King interview; Interview with Sergeant Ben Parker by Chief Warrant Officer 3 Yul C. Yurcaba, 30 June 2003, Baghdad, Iraq, notes and recording in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.



WANTED

OIF PHOTOS

The photographs and maps in this issue of *Veritas* are a few of the best we could find. The History Office invites anyone with photos from OIF—digital or print—to bring or send them in. We will copy and file any photos we receive and will use them throughout the book *All Roads Lead to Baghdad: ARSOF in Iraq*, coming out this summer. We would like photos from all ARSOF components.

If you have maps or suggestions for enhancing these maps, please let us know so that we can accurately portray ARSOF history.

If you wish to submit photos and/or maps for other ARSOF endeavors, we would appreciate those as well.

For your future picture-taking activities, please use the highest resolution possible on your digital cameras to ensure excellent print quality for book and magazine publications.