

Sand and Dust

Amazingly, the modernization of 20th century Kuwait required the importation of sand. One would think that a desert country like Kuwait would be the last nation on earth to have a shortage of the stuff. But upon closer inspection, the Arabian Desert is not covered with sand, but rather a very fine, almost talcum powder-like dust that lacks the proper silicates necessary to use in concrete.

So, for modern masonry construction, sand must be shipped from other regions of the earth. Arabian desert dust is so fine, in fact, that several times a year heavy *shamal* (north) or *khamsin* winds pick up this desert powder and carry it several thousand feet into the air, threatening airline traffic and encouraging even hardy Kuwaiti shopkeepers to take a “weather holiday.”

Concrete Needs

“When I first got to Kuwait, 95 percent of the food had to be brought in. So you would think with all that food being imported, food would be the biggest and heaviest of all imports. Wrong! It’s sand. I thought, This is crazy. The whole country is sand! But the sand in Kuwait is not proper for making architectural concrete, and with their building boom, they needed more concrete than food.

“In fact, in 2003 one of the biggest complaints we had, as we were taking up large berth spaces at the port for bringing in all our equipment, was that there were ships full of sand having to wait off the Gulf. We had all these ships stacked up full of sand that needed to be unloaded so it could be turned into concrete to build homes.

“That’s why my Kuwaiti friends tell me, ‘The hardest thing you will ever do in your life as a Kuwaiti is to build your own home!’”

— Colonel (ret) Randy Williams

MPRI-Kuwait National Guard Development
Program Manager



Piles of rubble were left in the wake of Saddam's invading troops. Photo courtesy of Kuwait Ministry of Information.

Cost of Fresh Water

Kuwait is one of the few nations on earth that has absolutely no sources of fresh, potable water, though some brackish water can be found in several locations. Considering the blistering temperatures for much of the year, this absence of renewable water resources could be lethal. All drinking water in the country must either be shipped in (as it was in the past) or produced on an industrial scale by mammoth desalinization plants located strategically on the coasts of the Gulf. It is not an exaggeration to say that a liter of water costs more than a liter of gasoline in Kuwait.

Tank sunk in the desert. Photo courtesy of Jim Janda.



GOD'S BLESSING: LIFE IN A ROUGH NEIGHBORHOOD

In the 18th and 19th centuries, Kuwait turned its Arabian Gulf shoreline into a prosperous port economy. However, after a number of British coastal blockades in the early 20th century put great hardship on the nation, along with the 1938 discovery of vast oil resources, Kuwait—with the help of international oil exploration companies—transformed itself.

Making full use of this new capital-generating commodity between 1946 and 1982, Kuwait invested in a wide array of national infrastructure projects, bringing to the Kuwaiti people the benefits—and challenges—of rapid modernization and ever-climbing personal wealth. But just as Kuwaitis began to participate in phenomenal growth and development and to establish a strong foothold, harsh economic winds again swept over them with the Kuwait stock market crash of the 1980s.

Undaunted, Kuwait recovered and continued to invest in social services, especially expanding and modernizing its educational, medical, cultural, and commercial facilities and oil operations. It also reached out to the world, providing aid and investment in struggling, underdeveloped regions of Asia and Africa. Kuwait's methodical and well-planned economic growth, however, and its extensive investment in the latest and best technologies, did not go unnoticed—the country would become the prey of the rapacious Saddam Hussein on August 2, 1990.



An HH-60H Sea Hawk helicopter from Helicopter Combat Support Special Squadron (HCS-4) of Naval Air Station Norfolk, Virginia, takes off in the sand for a search and rescue mission at the start of Operation Desert Storm. *Photo courtesy of NARA.*



Desert sands of Kuwait.
*Photo courtesy of Kuwait
Ministry of Information.*

Four Principles

“Four simple principles guide our policy. First, we seek the immediate, unconditional, and complete withdrawal of all Iraqi forces from Kuwait. Second, Kuwait’s legitimate government must be restored to replace the puppet regime. And third, my administration, as has been the case with every [U.S.] president since Franklin Roosevelt, is committed to the security and stability of the [Arabian] Gulf. And fourth, I am determined to protect the lives of American citizens abroad.”

— President George H. W. Bush, August 8, 1990

Origin of the Name *Kuwait*

Some claim that the name *Kuwait* originates from the Arabic word *akwat*, the plural of *kout*, which means “small fort (built near water).” Most believe it was named in the 17th century by local rulers in reference not only to the size of Kuwait (which is geographically smaller than New Jersey), but also because of what originally was a migrant, seaside population making a living from the trade routes, both land and sea.

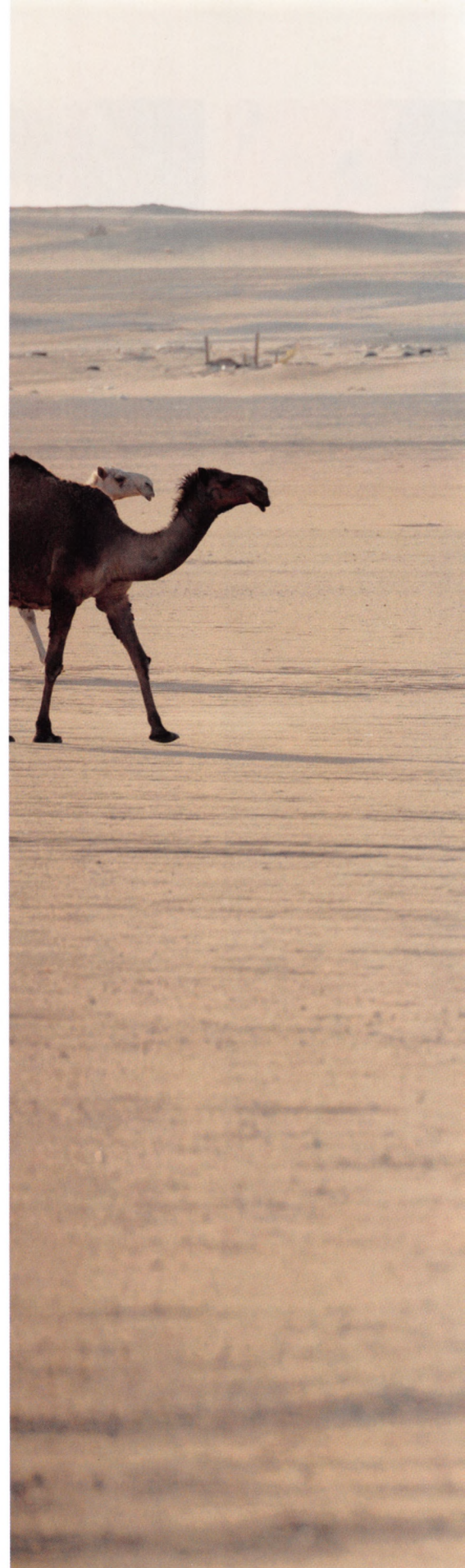
wounded in October 1920, during the Jahra Battle against insurgent tribes trying to invade Kuwait City. Later, during an outbreak of smallpox in Kuwait, the hospital staff saved many who would have otherwise succumbed to the deadly disease. The American hospital was often referred to as “the original gateway to modern medicine in Kuwait.” It served the people of Kuwait until the 1960s, when modern facilities replaced the old structures. Today, the Amricani Cultural Center is located close to the seaside near Souq Sharq (East) shopping mall.

A TRADITION OF HOSPITALITY AND OPPORTUNITY

Kuwait has always opened its land to foreigners. Millions have worked in Kuwait, many in high-paying jobs, including tens of thousands of Americans. Kuwait has sought from its founding to provide opportunities for anyone willing to work hard and earn success.

Before oil was discovered in Kuwait, this was a land and people disciplined by circumstance—the country is one of the most arid and hottest continually inhabited spots on our globe. The people of Kuwait became some of the hardest, most resilient, and creative people on earth. They learned quickly to accommodate a harsh environment, both geographically and geopolitically, developing resilience and skill in dealing with powerful and potentially threatening neighbors. Americans, among many others, admired the Kuwaitis’ flexibility and quiet toughness in the face of hardship.

Such contact with other nations was the result of diplomatic exchange, business and cultural interaction and cooperation, and, unfortunately, an unavoidable war.





Kuwaiti student Jasem Al-Habib volunteered for the U.S. Army during the Gulf War. *Photo courtesy of Kuwait Ministry of Information.*

Embedded with U.S. Ground Forces

Jasem Al-Habib was a young Kuwaiti university student in the United States at the time of the invasion in 1990. “I was going to school at the time,” he recalls, “and it was so difficult to even attend classes, knowing that your country is being invaded and your family is there and you don’t know what is going on there. You don’t have any news out of the country.”

But soon Al-Habib knew what he must do: find a way to turn his anxiety into action. “When I heard the Kuwaiti Embassy was asking Kuwaiti students if any of us wanted to join the U.S. Army, I thought, what an opportunity! Liberate my own country while serving with the finest military in the world!”

Al-Habib became a volunteer in the U.S. Army, an experience he will always remember. “Anyone who saw what Saddam Hussein did to my people and our country of Kuwait—making thousands disappear, setting fire to hundreds of oil wells, and creating one of the most devastating ecological disasters of modern times—will never forget.”

Al-Habib pleads with this new generation of Kuwaitis and Americans to always remember the atrocities of a malevolent dictator. “We need to be sure that people don’t take things for granted,” he says. “Saddam Hussein did some bad stuff. That’s the truth. It’s raw. You can’t forget that. I haven’t.”

formed and strengthened. This is the story of one of the most incredible diplomatic and military successes in history.

KUWAIT AND AMERICA—HISTORY INTERTWINED

Americans have a place in Kuwait’s history—much more than most people realize. In 1912, the then Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah, invited American Christian missionaries near Baghdad to come to Kuwait and establish a hospital. Christian doctors and nurses representing the American Reformed Church willingly accepted. The result of that provident invitation was the Amricani Hospital, which treated many

Chapter 2

KUWAIT'S RESPONSE AND AMERICA'S COMMITMENT

“We choose our joys and sorrows long before we experience them.”

— Khalil Gibran, Arab philosopher and writer

Human history is rarely made by the random acts of nature and geographic upheaval. In reality, such things are a mere backdrop to the true catalyst of history: human choice. These are the acts, courageous and cowardly, generous and brutal, which men and women make at key turning points in history.

On August 2, 1990, wise decisions of the brave and noble, as well as cruel deeds of the self-serving and brutal, would change the course of history. Quick thinking by key members of the Kuwait Amiri Guard, including young, respected officer Sheikh Fahad Al-Sabah, ensured that key members of Kuwait's leadership escaped to the safety of Saudi Arabia, as Saddam's designing web encircled, then smothered, the country.

Had Saddam captured Kuwait's Amir, Crown Prince, Prime Minister, and key Cabinet members, the Iraqi despot could have eliminated the legitimate leadership of Kuwait from the start, making it impossible for the nation to find an approved ruler around which to rally. These acts of human bravery and selfless sacrifice at great personal risk were what saved Kuwait as a sovereign nation.

In Washington, D.C., President Bush watched as Kuwait was overrun, then pillaged and plundered. The world turned its eyes to him for leadership. President Bush was determined from first learning of Iraq's invasion to get Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait—

peacefully through diplomacy and economic sanctions, or forcibly, as a last resort.

In effect, the course of history was determined by one man's hard choice to liberate Kuwait. In January 1991, after all other means had been exhausted, President Bush signed the National Security Presidential Directive authorizing the use of force with the United Nations approval.

THE CHALLENGE: HOW TO MOVE A MASSIVE ARMY A CONTINENT AWAY

Under siege, Kuwait had two major advantages often overlooked: determined and skilled leadership, and influential friends and allies. Also, Saddam had made the mistake (again, a pivotal choice) of invading a peaceful neighbor just as the Cold War was winding down. American forces in Europe were at peak combat readiness, but preparing to downsize and return home.

In such a changing geopolitical environment, the United States had the finest military in the world suddenly freed from European commitments. A logistical challenge remained, however: how to move a massive military machine from the forests of Central Europe to the sands of the Middle East—and do it yesterday. Land, sea, and air forces had to be deployed from the United States beginning that first week of August, as well as Coalition forces from member states who would contribute military forces. Coordinating and executing such a massive deployment was a major challenge.

Again, the solution was leadership—along with the vision and will to choose to right a cruel wrong and ensure that justice was done, even at a potentially high price. At the time, experts considered Iraq a formidable foe, on paper the fourth-largest military on earth, with recent combat experience in their long war with Iran. Whether the United States would lead a coalition of nations willing to fight for Kuwait was anything but certain.

GOVERNMENT IN EXILE

With the assistance and protection of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait set up a government in exile in Ta'if. There the Amir of Kuwait and his advisors began a global diplomatic campaign to counter the many lies issuing from the Saddam regime. In addition, the citizens of Kuwait were now scattered and confused. Some were living outside Kuwait, while others had stayed behind to challenge, or at least survive, Iraqi occupation.

Kuwait's exiled government officials had a daunting task—to take care of their people, both inside and outside Kuwait, and to rally the world in their defense. Such a task would take one of the most incredible diplomatic efforts in history, one that would eventually include a powerful 35-nation coalition led by the United States. Even the Soviet Union and China were persuaded to not block the United States and Kuwait's actions against Iraq in the U.N. Security Council. More incredible, perhaps, was President Bush's success in persuading Israel to stand down from fighting, even though Iraqi scud missiles would consistently attack the Israeli people.

THE ARAB SOLUTION

Not wanting this “squabble” to go beyond the Arab family, Arab leaders kept searching for *al-hal al-Arabi*—an Arab solution. Arab nations never appreciate outside interference. Arabs by nature are private, preferring to keep intertribal conflicts within the family. In the days following his invasion, Saddam was skilled in using that characteristic as a weapon to forestall any organized opposition to his occupation. This gave him more time to entrench in Kuwait, solidify his military and political control, and begin the elimination of the Kuwaiti people.

It soon became clear that Saddam had no intention of withdrawing from Kuwait. Still, as long as he appeared willing to accept some type of Arab solution, Saddam knew that Arab nations would be reluctant to accept any kind of international intervention. The Arab League, particularly, was stymied. While successfully rallying to produce several resolutions condemning Iraq and supporting Kuwait's claims, the Arab League was unsuccessful in mobilizing any kind of military response under its mutual defense pact.

League members needed a leader, one they could trust.

SADDAM'S IGNORANCE OF GLOBAL CHANGES

Perhaps the greatest failure on the part of Saddam was his inability to understand the monumental shift in the existing world order. The Soviet Union, Iraq's longtime ally and weapons supplier, was collapsing. Saddam had assumed that the USSR would continue to back him within the U.N. Security Council and stifle any efforts to condemn his actions. Saddam was blind to the revolutionary changes taking place: the significantly improving relations between Washington and Moscow, and the emerging Russian Republic with new political goals and objectives in the world. Saddam was so hopelessly cocooned behind his advisors, the very worst kind of “yes men,” that he was never aware of the key geopolitical changes taking place in the world.

BREAKING WITH THE VIETNAM SYNDROME

When the Soviets did not oppose Coalition military intervention against Iraq, Saddam was distraught. He believed once more that he had been betrayed, that conspiracy was the only possible explanation. Additionally, Saddam did not understand what had happened within the United States. He believed the Americans still suffered from what was known as “The Vietnam Syndrome”—the inability to act militarily in far-off lands because Americans were still so traumatized by the Vietnam War.

To make matters worse, Saddam was convinced that the United States was involved in a nefarious plot to get rid of him. Consequently, Saddam viewed any attempt



Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah, Crown Prince of Kuwait, was forced into exile during the Iraqi invasion. *Photo courtesy of Kuwait Ministry of Information.*



by the West to bring him to the negotiation table as suspicious at best.

THE ARAB STREET

Beyond that, Saddam also failed miserably in his estimation of just how much support for his invasion he could generate on the “Arab street.” He looked to countries with a high concentration of ethnic Palestinian refugees, like Jordan, expecting that if America attacked Iraq, the Arab world would explode and fight off the “Crusader invaders.” Saddam was banking on his popular support, which all his advisors continually assured him he had—a gambit that turned out to be hopelessly naive.

THIS WILL NOT STAND

When Saddam invaded Kuwait, President Bush and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher both happened to be in Colorado. They arranged a meeting and quickly determined that only a coalition of nations could remove Saddam’s military from Kuwait.

The United States and the exiled Kuwaiti government launched a worldwide diplomatic effort to bring together a coalition to ensure that international law was enforced



LEFT & ABOVE: Devastation in and around Kuwait City from the invasion of Saddam’s troops. *Photo courtesy of Kuwait Ministry of Information.*

His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Provides a Quiet Yet Powerful Example to the World



At the time of the Gulf War, Kuwait's present Amir, H. H. Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, had been Kuwait's top diplomat, the Foreign Minister, since the 1960s. His skill at maneuvering sometimes unruly, even hostile, nations became legendary.

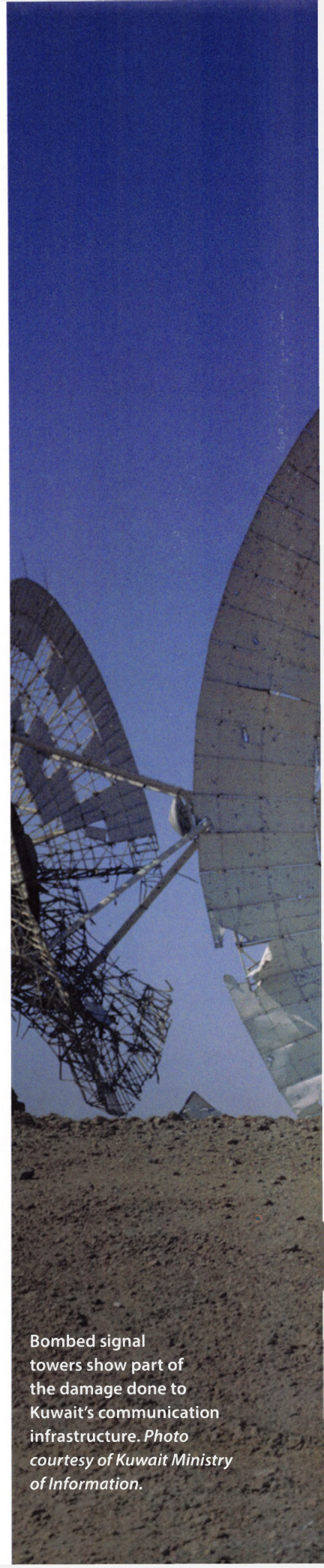
Over such a long and effective career, Sheikh Sabah became the icon of a skilled Kuwaiti cadre of diplomats. Sheikh Sabah knew instinctively where a tiny nation like Kuwait needed to place its diplomatic efforts that would pay the greatest dividends. He was particularly effective in working with

the Permanent Members of the United Nations' Security Council. Speaking before the U.N., Sheikh Sabah said: "Kuwait's participation in international activities clearly indicates that our independence and our membership in the U.N. are not ends in themselves, but are rather a means by which Kuwait can share responsibility in improving the lives of the people in our country and in other countries." Through his long career, the Amir taught and supported peaceful coexistence and a solid diplomatic, cultural, and commercial cooperation.

Perhaps the greatest challenge in the realm of diplomacy comes with conflict resolution and in pushing diplomacy to the forefront of public policy. This takes a deft skill in balancing domestic, as well as foreign, interests. Sheikh Sabah took a lead role in founding and shaping the Common Ministerial Council for the G.C.C. and the European Union. This was essential to build the critical ties which make peace and prosperity such a great blessing to the people.

Sheikh Sabah is well known as a champion for freedom and self-determination and as a warrior against terrorism. He has stood time and again to demonstrate that Islam is not a religion of terrorism, but an organization that provides hundreds of millions hope in their lives and peace in their hearts. But when threatened, as Kuwait was on August 2, 1990, he became a lion in defense of his people and their rights. His efforts led to the Security Council's many resolutions against Iraq for its invasion and helped bring Kuwait to the forefront of world attention, leading to the passage of several key U.N. Security Council resolutions.

Later, the effects of the war, sometimes emotional and subtle, helped free and re-orient the Kuwaiti people and their government, once more shaped by the gentle, yet capable, hand of Sheikh Sabah.



Bombed signal towers show part of the damage done to Kuwait's communication infrastructure. Photo courtesy of Kuwait Ministry of Information.