

# **H061.2 Desert Storm Part 3 (March - June 1991)**

Sam Cox, Director of Naval History, 31 January 2021

This series is a departure from my normal H-grams in that this is a personal recollection. I was the Current Intelligence Officer/Iraq Analyst on the Intelligence Staff of Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Central Command for the entirety of Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, serving under VADM Hank Mauz and VADM Stan Arthur. I first wrote this a number of years after the fact but I kept it true to what I believed and understood to be true at the time, so my dim view of Joint Operations as conducted during Desert Storm (which held the Navy back from making maximum contribution to the war) and U.S. Central Command, particularly the Intelligence Support Architecture, will be readily apparent. My reward for this heresy was to spend 12 of the next 21 years in joint commands, including three years as Commander of the U.S. Central Command Joint Intelligence Center, where I had opportunity to see significant improvement in U.S. joint operations.

## **DESERT STORM DEPLOYMENT, USS *BLUE RIDGE* (LCC-19), August 1990 - June 1991**

## **DESERT STORM AFTERMATH, Arabian Gulf, March - May 1991.**

### **April 1991. Mina Salman, Bahrain**

"When are we going home?" became the new battle cry, although we quickly learned to be discreet about it after seeing what Vice Admiral Arthur did to the USS Mars, whose skipper had whined once too often. Ships that had been

deployed the longest (except for us) were the first to start heading home; within a few days of the formal cease-fire signing at Safwan on 2 March, the carriers Saratoga, John F. Kennedy, and Midway, and the battleship Wisconsin were heading home. But there was still a lot to do, such as clearing over a thousand Iraqi mines to make the waters of the northern Arabian Gulf safe for navigation. As the Commander of Middle East Force (I think) observed, "The mines haven't stopped fighting yet."

The Mars was a member of a group of logistics ships that arrived just before the start of Desert Storm, and even though she hadn't been deployed as long as many other ships, her skipper was very vociferous about how badly his crew wanted to go home. Admiral Arthur was normally rather mild-mannered, but you don't survive over 500 combat missions in Vietnam without having a hard edge, and the Admiral got fed up. Mars was directed to go home immediately, by herself, without the rest of the ships in her logistics group. Several days after the Mars rather ignominiously slinked out of the Gulf, the staff surface operations officer noticed that Mars was considerably exceeding her authorized speed of advance, apparently in an attempt to squeeze a day or so more of liberty out of her scheduled stop in Singapore. In a zinger of a message, Admiral Arthur responded by giving a direct order for Mars to proceed at a specific speed that would preclude her from stopping in Singapore at all and result in an excruciatingly slow transit across the Pacific until she crossed out of the Seventh Fleet area at the International Date Line (We still retained responsibility for the Seventh Fleet area in the Western Pacific throughout the Desert Shield/Storm operation.) There was no whining from any other ship.

Compared to the period before and during the combat phase of Desert Storm, the intensity of our workload decreased greatly. Nevertheless, there was still a lot of work to do, and since most of us were mentally and physically

exhausted by the long ordeal, it was still grueling. The euphoria of the stunning and overwhelming victory wore off quickly, especially as it appeared the victory was quickly being tarnished.

No one, including me, thought that Saddam would last more than a few weeks after such a lop-sided and humiliating defeat, one of the worst in modern military history, before he would be overthrown or assassinated by his own generals. But to everyone's frustration, Saddam didn't act like he'd been defeated at all but in fact was claiming a great victory. Worse, as U.S. forces were in a pell-mell rush to redeploy home, Saddam was busy using his remaining forces to ruthlessly crush uprisings by Iraqi Shia and Kurd populations, who had been encouraged to revolt by public statements by senior U.S. officials, to include the President of the United States.

Despite U.S. rhetoric, Saddam thumbed his nose and used his Baathist thugs to brutally suppress and massacre Shia opposition in the south of Iraq, sometimes practically within sight of remaining U.S. forces. Shia leaders pleaded for U.S. help, but none came. Using a loophole in the cease-fire agreement, Iraqi helicopters repeatedly flew combat missions (instead of permitted logistics flights) in southern Iraq to destroy Shia rebels, who had no hope without any kind of air defense. Despite General Schwarzkopf's famous statement about helicopters, "If they fly, they die," the only thing dying were Shia men, women and children.

In the north of Iraq, Saddam attempted to flaunt the cease-fire agreement by launching fixed-wing Su-22 Fitter jet fighters to bomb Kurd positions. Although three of these jets were promptly shot down in mid March, the Iraqi Army had no problem driving tens of thousands of Kurd civilians from their homes into the cold mountains, creating an immense humanitarian crisis. Although the U.S. military launched a major relief effort to bring food and shelter to thousands of freezing

refugees, the Kurds still felt betrayed by promises of U.S. military assistance that didn't come. The Kurd's uprising proved to be a massive disaster for the Kurds.

Although there were numerous good reasons not to have invaded Iraq and gone all the way to Baghdad (reasons which became even more obvious in the post-major combat phase of Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003-?), the American draw-down was so precipitous that within a matter of weeks, we no longer had the capability to do so even if American leaders so directed. While the U.S. was busy celebrating our great victory, Saddam was busy reconsolidating his hold on power with brutal efficiency.

As the fruits of victory over Iraq soured, considerable staff energy was expended on determining what the U.S. Navy command structure in the Middle East should be after the war. There was near universal agreement that the command structure that existed at the very start of Desert Shield in August 1990 was completely screwed up. General Schwarzkopf made clear he did not want to go back to the pre-war structure. For all the animosity, once General Schwarzkopf had a three-star Navy Component Commander, he didn't want to let go.

The Navy had resisted the formation of U.S. Central Command in the mid-1980's, viewing it as a potential permanent drain on resources from the Atlantic and Pacific Fleets. The Navy reluctantly agreed to form a Naval Component Staff for Central Command, but deliberately kept it small and weak. In fact the Naval Component Command for CENTCOM was stood up at Pearl Harbor, far from the CENTCOM headquarters in Tampa, where it could be kept under the thumb of the Pacific Fleet Commander. In fact the Commander of "NAVCENT Pearl Harbor" was only a one-star Admiral (a brand new one at that) who was a member of the Pacific Fleet staff, working CENTCOM issues as an additional duty.

When Saddam invaded Kuwait, the small NAVCENT Pearl Harbor staff immediately flew out to Bahrain to serve as the Central Command Naval

Component Commander, where he was grossly outgunned by the Air Force, Army and Marine Component Commanders, who were all three-stars. Even more awkward, he was outranked by a Navy command that was already based in Bahrain, the two-star Commander, Middle East Force (COMIDEASTFOR). The arrangement was so dysfunctional that within a week, Vice Admiral Mauz (a three-star) was directed to fly to Bahrain with a part of his staff to take charge of the mess, while the rest of the Seventh Fleet staff (including me) sailed to Bahrain on the flagship, Blue Ridge.

After Admiral Mauz took command of the operation and was designated Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT), in mid-August, COMIDEAST Force was designated as a subordinate NAVCENT Task Force (TF150) and put in charge of the Maritime Interception Operations. The original NAVCENT Pearl Harbor staff was re-designated as Commander, Naval Logistics Support Force (COMNAVLOGSUPFOR), known more commonly by the NAVCENT staff as "COMNAVLOGJAM" or just "Log Jam," (for good reason, but not because the staff wasn't doing their best.)

After the war, a variety of command proposals were batted around between CENTCOM, NAVCENT, and "Big Navy," in an attempt to come up with a more permanent solution. One plan appeared to gain considerable momentum, much to the consternation of many of us on the staff. This plan called for those of us on the NAVCENT staff to get off the Blue Ridge and establish a permanent Naval Component Command headquarters in Bahrain, staying until our normal tour length was up, while the Blue Ridge would go back to Japan and new people would be brought in to reconstitute the Seventh Fleet Staff for control of naval operations in the Western Pacific and Indian Ocean. While there was actually considerable logic to this plan, I still thought it sucked. It would mean that out of my two year

Seventh Fleet tour, I would spend all but two weeks of it away from my wife in Japan, which the Navy would no doubt count as a "co-located" tour.

As April dragged on, there appeared to be no resolution on the command issue. Our stay in the Gulf looked to remain indefinite. All the ships that were in the Gulf for Desert Storm had started home; many were already home. Replacements were already arriving, such as the carrier USS Nimitz. Yet there seemed no end in sight for us.

Then one day, practically out of the blue, we were told we were leaving, in a few days. It was if higher authority had just decided, "Screw it, we're out of here." The next few days were a scramble, as we dumped our responsibilities onto COMIDEASTFOR and hit the road, leaving much undone. It would be another three years before the Navy command relationships in the Middle East would be sorted out.

#### **Late April 1991. Strait of Hormuz, Underway on USS Blue Ridge.**

My thoughts and emotions were decidedly mixed as I watched the Iranian radar site on Lesser Tonb Island fade into the shimmering heat and dust-blown haze; at last we were in the Strait of Hormuz, exiting the Arabian Gulf. By far the dominant sensation was one of overwhelming relief and gratitude for surviving a war zone and to be finally heading home. I was tired to my core, from months of doing my utmost to give the best intelligence support to forces engaged in life-and-death combat operations. We'd achieved a great victory, yet I had this gnawing feeling that we hadn't finished it. If I never had to work with Central Command again it would be too soon, yet I had this feeling that someday I'd be back. I wasn't really expecting Saddam to still be there when I did. (2021 Comment: Little did I know I'd be back as the N2 for the Theodore Roosevelt Battle Group (1999,) the N2 for Naval Forces Central Command/FIFTH Fleet (1999-2001,)

and as Commanding Officer of the U.S. Central Command Joint Intelligence Center (2004-2007.)

I believed strongly at the time (and still do) that invading Iraq would have been a huge mistake, resulting in protracted struggle with no obvious way out. I also believed it was the right thing to do to stop the slaughter on the Highway of Death when we did. Our mission was to liberate Kuwait, and we did that. But I also believed we could have and should have done much more to help the Shia and the Kurds, thousands of whom died because they mistook our empty rhetoric for a promise of aid if they rose up against Saddam. They did, and were massacred. We were too busy throwing ourselves ticker-tape parades to notice. When the confetti settled, Saddam was still standing.

I felt strongly that the U.S. Navy in Desert Storm had the best intelligence of any naval force in the history of warfare. Yet it was far less than it could have and should have been. Because of short-sighted and parochial decisions made well before Desert Storm, the naval intelligence support infrastructure that existed and worked so well in the Atlantic, Mediterranean and Pacific did not exist in Central Command. Naval forces in Desert Storm did not get all the support they would have gotten had the war been fought anywhere else; and the Navy had mostly itself to blame because of its failure to invest more than the bare minimum in Central Command. The entire Ocean Surveillance Information System (OSIS) infrastructure was built for the wrong war.

It was also clear that the concept of "Joint Operations" still had a very long way to go. I don't think there was an officer on the NAVCENT staff who wasn't completely fed up with the Central Command Staff in general, and the Joint Force Air Component Command concept in particular. From our perspective, Joint Operations were apparently all about Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines working together on or over land to do what the Army and Air Force wanted. If the problem

was on or over water, then it was a Navy problem for the Navy to handle, and don't expect any help from the rest of the "joint" force. (Although the coordination mechanisms are vastly improved, this statement is still largely true even today.) (2021 Comment: Still mostly true.) In fact, when I gave the Admiral the "Intelligence Lessons Learned" brief I'd been tasked to prepare, I showed an "unofficial" graphic, on which lesson number one was, "Joint Sucks. (If you want it done right, do it yourself.)" This lesson was roundly applauded by the audience. (Lesson number two, "MISREPS lie" wasn't such a big hit, but grudgingly recognized as true. MISREPS are "mission reports" by pilots, that resulted in inflated claims of tanks destroyed, ships sunk, and a supertanker being blown up.)

We all watched with disgust as the post-war spin in Washington seemed intent on belittling the Navy contribution. The Navy public relations campaign in Washington was abysmal. One time the Staff Public Affairs Officer stood up all excited and briefed the Admiral about a great article on our operations that appeared in "Sea Power" magazine. He seemed taken aback when he was greeted by stony silence from the entire staff and a collective unspoken shrug, "Big deal. If we can't get our story told in "Sea Power," where the hell can we? The people who read "Sea Power" already believe."

What galled us the most, however, was our strong belief that Joint Operations as conducted in Desert Storm actually held the Navy back, preventing us from making even greater contributions to the war than we did (and didn't get much credit for.) Worst of all, if the Iraqis hadn't been so completely incompetent, and we hadn't been so lucky, Joint Operations as conducted in Desert Storm could easily have cost the lives of hundreds of Sailors.

We were glad to be leaving. WESTPAC ho!

**Late May 1991. Hong Kong**

The nighttime view from the American Club in Hong Kong was spectacular beyond belief, as if the heavens were turned upside down and the rheostat on the multitudes of stars cranked way up; the city was glowing with luminescent energy. The restaurant was about 20 stories up right on the waterfront; laid out below in a 270 degree arc was downtown Victoria, the bustling harbor, Kowloon, Kai-Tak airport, lights as far as the Chinese border, with hundreds of ships, boats, planes, cars and all other modes of transportation in frenetic motion. There is no urban view to compare. Best of all, my wife was there to share it. (and the food was really good, and reasonable.)

There had been considerable debate on the staff as to whether we wanted to stop somewhere for our first real liberty in months, or to continue straight home to Yokosuka. But, there was only one vote that really counted, and the Admiral chose to stop in Hong Kong. It was a great liberty call for the single Sailors, and the vast majority of staff and ship's wives flew down from Japan to meet us, so for many, this was our real homecoming reunion. It was truly joyous.

It was a short visit, and it flew by in a blur of activity, just like Hong Kong itself. The city was simply in constant motion, truly a world hub of commerce, and a world away from troubles of the Middle East. I could have ridden the Star Ferry between Victoria and Kowloon all day long; it is one of the most memorable rides in the entire world, and all for only seven cents (twelve if you want to go "first class"), which has to be about the best entertainment deal on the planet.

Hong Kong was what "WESTPAC" and the Seventh Fleet were supposed to be about. Bahrain and the Arabian Gulf hadn't even been in the fine print when the detailer signed me up to go. It was a great taste of the rest of my terrific assignment to the Seventh Fleet Staff.

**Early June 1991. Yokosuka, Japan**

A rousing chorus of jeers went up as we watched the Desert Storm Victory Celebration in New York City; a few threw wads of paper at the TV. There, on prominent display, representing the U.S. Navy contribution to the war effort was our sister ship, flagship of the Second Fleet, the USS Mount Whitney.(LCC-20). Mount Whitney never left the pier in Norfolk the entire war.

What made the sight of Mount Whitney even more annoying was that she could have played a major role in Desert Storm, but the Atlantic Fleet Commander apparently decided that Mount Whitney had something more important to do than serve as the flagship for the largest U.S. Navy armada assembled since World War II. At about the four-month point in Blue Ridge's deployment to the Arabian Gulf, with no apparent end in sight, there was serious discussion about getting a relief. At that time, the Navy was very strict about adhering to a six month maximum for deployments, having learned the hard way that deployments longer than six months caused Sailors to start to vote with their feet and get out of the service. We had already sent two carriers home, the Dwight D. Eisenhower and the Independence, which had been on-scene at the very beginning of Desert Shield, when they approached the six-month mark. The fact that the Navy continued standard rotations throughout Desert Shield raised eyebrows at CENTCOM, since Army and Air Force deployments were all a one-way flow. The regularly scheduled change of command between Vice Admiral Mauz and Vice Admiral Arthur on 1 December 1990 provoked further consternation.

Despite the Navy's apparent business-as-usual approach, it was very clear that it made no sense to turn over the Admiral's staff just before a war started; we'd developed considerable irreplaceable corporate knowledge. The flagship, on the other hand, was a different matter. The Blue Ridge was basically a large floating office building, communications station, and barracks, but its older design made it very manpower-intensive. Keeping the ship past six months would affect an awful

lot of Sailors. The Mount Whitney was virtually identical to the Blue Ridge, so somebody came up with an obvious solution; have Mount Whitney off-load the Second Fleet Staff in Norfolk, steam over to the Arabian Gulf, where the 300-person NAVCENT staff (over twice the normal size, counting augmentees) would "cross-deck" from Blue Ridge to Mount Whitney, and the Blue Ridge and her 1200 crewman would go home to Japan on time. The Atlantic Fleet immediately balked at this idea, the Mount Whitney was far too important to Atlantic Fleet operations, she couldn't possibly be spared, blah, blah. When the proposal got raised to an even higher level, the final decision came down; the Mount Whitney needed so much repair work, she couldn't possibly get underway for so long. The idea was dropped; Blue Ridge would stay for the duration. Of course, Mount Whitney wasn't so broken that she couldn't make it to the Victory Party.

While the Mount Whitney and the Second Fleet staff were getting the ticker-tape parade treatment in New York, our homecoming a few days earlier had been rather anticlimactic. Blue Ridge returned to Yokosuka on a dismal, chilly, wind and rain-swept day. One forlorn Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force tugboat came out to greet us, her sputtering water cannon dribbling out a limp salute. Dozens of tugs and ships had met the carrier Midway when she returned to Yokosuka two months before we did. No doubt Midway deserved her welcome; the oldest carrier in the Navy had flown thousands of strike sorties in Desert Storm without losing a single plane, but hero's welcome fatigue had set in by the time we returned home.

A couple of the West Coast amphibious ships that had already been in the Indian Ocean at the very start of Desert Shield were actually deployed for a few days longer than Blue Ridge, but they had returned to their home port earlier. Blue Ridge, with the Seventh Fleet Staff embarked, was the last ship to return home

from Desert Shield/Storm, with a deployment that came in just a few days under ten months long.

Despite our rather lame official welcome, the welcome from family on the pier was every bit as emotionally intense as my previous deployments. It truly was good to be "home," even though I had never been to it yet; during my absence, my wife had moved into on-base housing from the house in Shonan Takatori that I'd lived in for all of two weeks before deploying.

I felt exhausted and relieved to finally be back after my longest deployment. I knew I never wanted to go through something like Desert Storm again, but I wouldn't have wanted to miss it.

I moved some of my account of Desert Storm aftermath to the rear as these are more in the line of sea stories (although they are true) than an account of the war. But, if interested, feel free to read on.

### **March 1991. Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates**

Sometimes even I am astonished by the behavior of Sailors on liberty in foreign ports; they could find hookers where none were thought to even exist.

Commander Perras and I flew from Kuwait directly to Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates to meet the Blue Ridge as she was arriving from Bahrain. The ultra-modern city was a ghost town. It was the height of Ramadan, the most important of Muslim holidays, and the local population was indoors fasting. There was considerable discussion before the portvisit about whether it even made sense to go into port during Ramadan, since most everything was closed and there was substantial concern that the effect of any "liberty incident" would be magnified during the religious holiday. I guess Admiral Arthur became convinced that since it was Ramadan, there wouldn't be any alcohol to be found, which would significantly reduce the chance of drunken Sailors creating a diplomatic crisis.

By the time Commander Perras and I hitched a ride from the airport to the port facility, the Blue Ridge had already been docked for several hours and the sun had yet to go down. Nevertheless, I was astonished to hear two of my Intelligence Specialists already bragging about the Ethiopian hookers they found out in town. "Ethiopians? Are you guys nuts?"

Their response, "But Mr. Cox, the Russians are too expensive."

Amazingly, there were no serious liberty incidents.

### **March 1991. Southern Arabian Gulf, Underway on USS Blue Ridge**

"Man overboard, man overboard! Man overboard, port side!" blared the 1MC (public address circuit).

"I didn't hear him say drill, did you?" said someone in the Intelligence Office. That's because it wasn't. But it wasn't one of our own crewmen either.

It was just before sundown as the Blue Ridge was returning to Bahrain from the Abu Dhabi port visit. A Marine captain, an augmentee on the intelligence staff, was relaxing and shooting the bull with several other Marines on the fantail, the aftermost part of the ship below the helo deck, when he saw what looked like a person's head floating in the water, already astern of the ship and receding fast. None of the ship's lookouts had seen it. Initially not believing his eyes, the Marine was astonished to see the person wave. The Marine captain made a mad dash all the way from the stern, up about six decks to the ship's bridge and breathlessly blurted out that he'd seen someone in the water aft of the ship. There was a moment's hesitation as the Officer of the Deck seemed to be thinking that the Marine must be hallucinating, but he turned the ship about, and sure enough, rescued a British Sailor from the water.

The Sailor had fallen overboard from a British minesweeper the previous morning, while reading a book on the fantail. He'd been in the water for almost 36 hours, without a life jacket. He was in surprisingly good spirits, especially

considering his ship had yet to notice he was missing (which proved an extreme embarrassment to the Royal Navy once they were notified) and that it was unlikely he would have survived a second night treading water. He'd managed to stay awake and pass the time by continuing to read his book, which he still had. Gotta hand it to the Brits for being able to make the best out of a bad situation.

It certainly could have been much worse. I distinctly remembered a particularly graphic report during the Iran-Iraq war in which an Iranian helicopter was trying to rescue a downed Iraqi Mirage F-1 pilot near Kharg Island, only to be beaten to the pilot by the sharks.

### **March 1991. Mina Salman, Bahrain**

"Where is your Petty Officer taking me?" The CIA officer sounded pretty agitated.

"To the airport. Why is something wrong?" I responded.

"Well, we're on the causeway heading to Saudi!"

My Petty Officer had assured me he knew the way to the airport, and technically he did. I'd neglected to specify which airport, assuming he would take the CIA officer to Bahrain International. But my Petty Officer was driving to the airport he'd driven to before, in Riyadh, where he had driven the previous October when he was supposed to come to Dhahran to pick-up my wayward team that was trying to get back from our adventure in Riyadh.

I had to mount a rescue operation to salvage the situation on the causeway because my plan had not been "Sailor-proof."

Although my Petty Officer was slow and methodical to the point of being excruciating, he had accurately plotted thousands of Iraqi positions during the war, and accurately re-typed hundreds of CIA messages for retransmission to the fleet. Petty Officer Hannibal was a hero too. I owed him a lot.

### **April 1991. Mina Salman, Bahrain**

The only two casualties suffered by the NAVCENT/Seventh Fleet Staff occurred well after the end of the war, both mostly self-inflicted.

As I was coming down the brow to go for a run on the pier late one afternoon, I had to make way for a group of medical personnel carrying a stretcher litter up the brow. I was surprised and not a little distressed to see that the person in the litter was my boss, Commander Wayne Perras, whom I'd thought was up in Kuwait with Vice Admiral Arthur. Worse, he was a ghastly shade of gray, and looked to be in really bad shape. I thought he might be a gonner. Fortunately it wasn't as bad as it looked and he quickly recovered, but not from the embarrassment.

As it turned out, Vice Admiral Arthur, Commander Perras, and several other senior staff members had gone out to Faylaka Island with some Kuwaiti military and U.S. Marines, who had landed on Faylaka Island and liberated it at the very end of the war. The Marines took the Admiral and staff for a ride in a captured Soviet-made Iraqi BMP armored personnel carrier (APC). Somehow the BMP hit a bump so hard that it bounced Commander Perras completely up and over the rear ramp, causing him to fall about seven feet on his back on the pavement behind the moving BMP, resulting in an emergency helicopter medevac back to the medical facility on the Blue Ridge. Amazingly he broke no bones, but did have a very sore tailbone, and became the butt of numerous jokes about "joyriding" in Soviet armored vehicles. (Commander Perras was awarded a Bronze Star for his role in Desert Shield/Storm, along with the Chief of Staff, the N3 and the N5.)

Our other casualty was even more embarrassing, and involved a married officer on the staff falling out a window and breaking his leg in an unsuccessful attempt to avoid being caught cheating on his mistress. (2021 Comment: I think I shall leave the details out of this version.)

Women were extremely scarce in Bahrain, at least Westerners, even in the best of times. After the war, members of the staff frequented a bar called the

Londoner because, supposedly, some British Airways stewardesses had once been sighted there after international flights resumed. I never saw any, and the more cynical of us began to joke that the Londoner was really Bahrain's biggest gay bar.

For my part, I did receive some notoriety for being the only person on the staff known to have been spoken to by a Bahraini woman. By this time, we knew full well that Arab women would have absolutely nothing to do with foreigners (except for the "Marine and the Princess" incident in 1999). One evening as I finished buying gold jewelry for my wife in the crowded souk market, I had just gotten into the driver's seat of the staff car when a woman dressed head-to-toe in a black abaya approached. "This is highly unusual," I thought, as I rolled down the window, wondering what this mysterious veiled woman could possibly want with me.

"May I have parking spot?" she asked in halting English.

"Uh, well, yes of course," I said, the full extent of the conversation.

As I pulled out, she stood in the spot, saving it for her husband who was cruising the jammed lot in his car looking for a space.

### **Early June 1991. East China Sea, Underway on USS Blue Ridge**

The flotilla of Japanese ships appeared one-by-one like apparitions in the haze, reminiscent of an oriental painting, with the lead ship exchanging flashing light morse code with the Blue Ridge. We were manning the rails on the Blue Ridge in a gesture of respect as the lead Japanese ship dipped its colors in salute and we dipped ours in return. It was a historic moment; the first operational deployment out of home waters by the Japanese Navy (Maritime Self-Defense Force) since World War II.

The lead ship was the command/mother ship for a squadron of four (or so) minesweepers, and they were deploying to the Arabian Gulf to join in the international minesweeping effort to clean up the remaining Iraqi mines, an

agonizingly slow process that was still ongoing months after the end of the war. The impromptu "pass-in-review" was over in a matter of minutes as the Japanese pressed on with obvious resolute determination. They were in a hurry to get the Gulf, as they disappeared once again into the mist. We were in a hurry to get home. (2021 Comment: This is a case study in the fallibility of human memory, including mine. This incident occurred almost exactly as I described it, except it was December 1991 and BLUE RIDGE was heading south to Subic Bay and Bali and the Japanese minesweepers were returning home from their deployment.)

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Source (Me. Although I wrote these pieces by memory a number of years after the fact, the best pretty comprehensive source for information on the U.S. Navy during Desert Shield/Desert Storm is still the two-volume set of "Desert Shield at Sea: What the Navy Really Did" and "Desert Storm at Sea: What the Navy Really Did" both by Marvin Pokrant (the NAVCENT/C7F CNA Rep during both operations): Greenwood Press, 1999. (It wasn't cheap.) Also useful is the Department of the Navy, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, "The United States Navy in Desert Shield, Desert Storm" of 15 May 1991 which has the best chronology and other facts and figures, although some number of them are "first reports (always wrong.) I would note that these are more "PC" than my account. Also, "Shield and Storm: The United States Navy in the Persian Gulf War" by Edward J. Marolda and Robert J. Schneller: Naval Historical Center, 1998) is excellent.

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