

Pentagon rushes supplies to gulf

WASHINGTON (AP) - In its rush to move critical ammunition and supplies to U.S. troops in the Persian Gulf, the Pentagon is at times bypassing procurement rules and making multimillion-dollar deals on a handshake.

With war possible any time after the U.N.-authorized deadline of midnight Tuesday, the Army is scrambling to ship 30-day supplies of fuel, lubricants and equipment parts to Saudi Arabia for newly arrived heavy ground forces. The kits are loaded with tank and other parts expected to wear quickly in combat and are modeled after packages created last fall for the first armored divisions to reach Saudi Arabia.

"I'll have that in the air within a week," Maj. Gen. Charles M. Murray, the Army's deputy chief of staff for supply, maintenance and transportation, said in an interview Friday. Although those shipments won't arrive by the deadline, Murray said:

"We can go to war on the 15th and we can sustain that war and we can keep the pipeline going, both by surface and air, that will allow us to sustain a war for however long it takes."

More than \$1 billion has been spent on food, clothing and medical supplies for Operation Desert Shield. It is difficult, however, to put an exact figure on ammunition, parts and other hardware, although it is at least in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

Most recent contracts aren't specifically earmarked for the Persian Gulf deployment. Rather, they will refill stocks emptied to supply the Middle East force, which is approaching 400,000 troops.

Many existing contracts have an option that allows the Pentagon to order equipment as needed at a previously set price.

Murray and other Pentagon officials said the Army, as well as other services, has

made "handshake" deals with some suppliers, deciding to violate contracting procedures and probably federal law because of emergency needs of the gulf forces.

The number and value of these deals won't be known until the agreements are formalized.

For example, the Army is buying hundreds of powerful engines needed for heavy equipment haulers from Roger Penske, the former race car driver who owns an automotive business. No formal contract exists.

"Penske immediately shut off all civilian buyers for the head engine and turned his entire production line over to us, several hundred engines very quickly," Murray said.

A senior Pentagon official involved in procurement said he was aware the Army and other services had violated contracting procedures on several occasions since the deployment began in August.

Kuwaitis join U.S. army, leave for the Middle East

FORT DIX, N.J. (AP) — Kuwaiti soldiers ended a crash course in U.S. Army training Sunday by firing their M-16 rifles at plastic targets supposed to represent Iraqi invaders.

The 291 Kuwaitis recruited as part of Task Force Desert Owl were scheduled to leave Monday for Saudi Arabia, where they will be attached to U.S. military units.

"They're starting to act like U.S. soldiers now," said Lt. Col. William Knightly, battalion commander. "They've come a long way in a very short time."

The Kuwaitis arrived at this training base a week ago for the most basic of basic training. The normal eight-week course was condensed to eight days, and the recruits have learned little more than how to wear chemical suits and take orders, military style.

Sunday was their first chance to fire live ammunition.

Woodland green camouflage uniforms, cloth-covered army helmets and M-16s belied the non-military backgrounds of the recruits from the oil-rich emirate.

Most are students studying at U.S. colleges. The others are businessmen or tourists who happened to be in the United States when Iraq invaded Kuwait in early August.

Driving into the firing range area, the soldiers passed a plastic dummy of a mustachioed soldier in a green uniform, who looked suspiciously like Saddam Hussein. A sign below his neck read, "One shot, one kill."

For many recruits, one shot is all they want.

"A lot of people think we are

afraid to fight, but we have just never had the chance to go," said Bader, a 36-year-old Kuwaiti student who was studying political communications at Syracuse University. The Army requested their last names not be used out of consideration for family members still in Kuwait.

"We are not afraid of Saddam Hussein; he will be stopped," Bader said. "Stopping Saddam now will stop all the future Saddams."

Most of the Kuwaiti soldiers being trained here, however, will not face combat. The soldiers will serve as linguists and translators for America forces, officials said.

Retired Staff Sgt. Nick Katona seemed surprised that the Kuwaitis hit any of the plastic-soldier targets.

"For first time exposure, they're doing damn good," Katona said. "Overall, I'd say they're shooting it up real good."

The Kuwaiti recruits had more to deal with Sunday than their inexperience with firearms.

Below-freezing temperatures forced the soldiers to wear coats and gloves as they fired at targets dispersed through a mock desert.

"Gas! Gas! Gas!" one of their superiors shouted over a loud-speaker.

At once they whipped off their helmets, pulled on gas masks and then replaced the helmets.

"We're getting used to the military life, but I do not know about this weather," said Ali, 25, a mechanical engineering student at Bradley University in Peoria, Ill.

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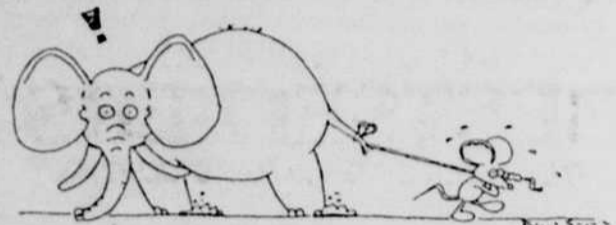
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