

War College Colonel: From Marching to Waltzing

By Elena Patton, Public Affairs Office 21 January 2021



Retired Col. Frank Hancock



Retired Col. Frank Hancock during Desert Storm.



James Dietz painting "Lightning in the Storm" (Frank Hancock is the guy with the binoculars)

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Retired Col. Frank Hancock's experience is one of many featured in the U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center's new Desert Storm exhibit, "This Will Not Stand: The U.S. Army's Road to Victory during the Persian Gulf War." The exhibit, now open to the public, draws on the testimonies of those who experienced the 100-Hour War to create an authentic, holistic account of Desert Storm.

Hancock is known to many as the war college community's dance instructor, leading MWR classes for students whose choreography to date has been about drill and ceremony.

"I came up with my own style of teaching. It was kind of basic training, ballroom dancing," said Hancock. "If a guy can learn to march, he can

learn to dance.”

A 1995 Army War College graduate, Hancock completed his 30 years of service as chair of the Department of Military Plans, Strategy and Operations, 1998-2002.

His career began in 1972, with an infantry commission from the U.S military academy. During Desert Storm, he was the youngest battalion commander in the 101st Airborne Division.

He led the 1st Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment into Iraq. Hancock and his men were the lead infantry element that launched the single biggest air assault operation on February 24, 1991. The purpose of the assault was to establish a forward operation base—85 miles inside Iraq—that would help split Highway 8 in the Euphrates River Valley.

The brigade commander directed Hancock to plan a landing on a hillside with a trench dug into its side, based on intelligence that it was not occupied. “That was when these thinking soldiers came in,” said Hancock about his intelligence team, Capt. Delgado and Sgt. Gonzalez. They reported new satellite imagery showing people on top of the hill.

He approached his commander, presented the evidence, and suggested moving back the location of his regiment’s landing.

The commander dismissed Hancock. “Now here is the brigade commander with his youngest battalion commander, me, and I am telling him we need to move this,” said Hancock, about being dismissed, initially.

“The next morning, my brigade commander calls me and says he’s had a change of heart,” said Hancock. After reviewing the evidence, the commander moved the original landing point a kilometer and a half.

When Hancock and his men landed, the hillside—the original landing point—immediately exploded into gunfire.

“I was supposed to land 88 folks on this [hillside], and in my opinion, they would’ve all died,” said Hancock, who noted that an entire Iraqi battalion of 344 soldiers was on the hillside.

NO SOLDIERS IN HANCOCK'S REGIMENT WERE INJURED OR KILLED DURING THIS AIR ASSAULT.

"So, as you look back at Desert Storm, the reason why you don't focus on this debacle, this tragedy, was because of two thinking soldiers, Delgado and Gonzalez," said Hancock.

In its entirety, Hancock believes that operation Desert Storm illuminated how advancements in training, equipment, and resources allowed for a swift victory during Desert Storm and that those advancements continue to shape today's military.

"The military you see right now . . . comes from that military, said Hancock. "The genesis was Desert Storm."

AHEC's Desert Storm exhibit offers a personalized perspective of this historic victory.