

U.S. Air Force AWAC jets track allied aircraft on computer screen

OVER SAUDI ARABIA (AP) —Dozens — sometimes hundreds — of little green symbols flash on a computer screen. Some inch forward toward red flashes on a map of Iraq and Kuwait; others hang back, awaiting their turn.

Away from the swarm, to the north and west, other green symbols move about freely in more open spaces — airspace deep inside Iraq.

The computer screen, which could easily be mistaken for a fast-paced video game, is aboard a U.S. Air Force AWACS plane high above Saudi Arabia. From this high-tech vantage point, the Air Force directs a daily ballet of sorts, tracking an allied air siege that often includes more than 200 planes airborne at one time.

On this night, as on most since the opening days of the war with Iraq, the Air Force's traffic cop in the sky is policing a crowded, but one-way, street. "All we're doing is going up there, dropping bombs and breaking all of his toys," Col. Gary A. Voellger, commander of an Oklahoma-based AWACS wing, told a visitor. "Welcome to the friendly skies."

AWACS is an abbreviation for Airborne Early Warning And Control. The planes, bristling with radar and electronic monitoring equipment, are designed to keep track of allied aircraft and watch out for hostile ones. Lately, there hasn't been much need for the latter.

Still, crew members watch intently for the

enemy that never comes, the red "V" that would, in this deadly showdown, represent in Iraqi airplane.

With none in sight, the word goes out from the AWACS to all the green symbols — the hundreds of allied warplanes — "Picture Clear."

This day's program includes 2,800 allied sorties and runs 950 pages.

The warplanes roaming in western, central and northern Iraq are hunting Scud missile launchers, bombing bridges, raining laser-guided munitions down on hardened aircraft shelters, and circling to protect allies and prevent Iraqi planes from scooting to Iran.

As midnight approaches, a wave of B-52 bombers arrives on cue. On the screen, they appear the same as the comparatively tiny F-15s. But as they pass methodically over their target, an Iraqi missile facility at Taji, it is clear they are different.

The distant yellow glow on the horizon offers proof.

Throughout a 17-hour AWACS mission, the first flown by journalists since the war began four weeks ago, green symbols were stacked one atop the other along the crescent-shaped western Kuwait border.

At the receiving end are troops in southern Kuwait and two Republican Guard divisions along the Iraqi side of the Kuwait border.

Always there are "packages" of fighters and bombers waiting to go next.

"It kind of looks like Safeway on payday — they're just lining up," Voellger said. "We own the skies."

Indeed, not one Iraqi aircraft was detected airborne during an AWACS mission that began at midday Wednesday and ended just before dawn Thursday. As the sun rose, allied aircraft were still pounding Iraqi ground forces, artillery and forward command posts.

"Punishment, pure and simple punishment," Maj. Clark Speicher, the mission control commander, said.

This crew flew the first night of the war, when some Iraqi fighters were airborne and the skies were filled with anti-aircraft fire. Now, there are but pockets of fire, and not an Iraqi plane to worry about.

"They know if they come up, they die," Sgt. Jeffrey Boyland, a surveillance officer, said. "It's that simple."

With the skies so crowded with allied aircraft, on several occasions the AWACS controllers had to order new routes at the last minute, and track jets that drifted dangerously off course. As the AWACS prepared to refuel under the stars, several aircraft passed within sight of it, including several across its nose.

Researchers seek useful heart disease treatment

NEW YORK (AP) — Genes injected into the heart muscles of rats continued to function, raising hopes for treating heart diseases or a cardiac complication of muscular dystrophy, researchers report.

The genes worked for at least two months in rats treated with a drug to suppress their immune systems, but only two weeks in untreated animals.

The work is reported in the January issue of The New Biologist by Dr. Jon Wolff and colleagues at the University of Wisconsin in Madison.

After making surgical incisions in rats, they injected the hearts with genes that make cells produce easily detected substances.

In the future, injecting people's hearts with genes that promote production of therapeutic substances may be useful for treating such conditions as coronary heart disease, they wrote.

Another target may be cardiac complications that are a common cause of death in people with Du-

chenne muscular dystrophy, they said.

In Duchenne, muscles waste away because they lack a gene that lets them produce a protein called dystrophin. Injecting dystrophin genes might block that process in the heart muscle.

The study is "a vital first step in treating the heart problems of muscular dystrophy patients through gene therapy," Robert Ross, vice president and executive director of the Muscular Dystrophy Association, said in a statement.

The association helped finance the research.

The scientists cautioned that such treatment might require putting the genes into a larger percentage of heart muscle cells than they did. In addition, nobody knows whether treatment with dystrophin genes would provoke a harmful immune system reaction, they said.

Poll

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Dr. Bill Stout, speaker of the A&M Faculty Senate, says due to present state deficit, financial will have to come from somewhere. "But Texas A&M is going to cut any faculty cuts all the way, though they are a long way," Stout says.

The poll indicated 85 percent of respondents that the educational would be in serious trouble if the Legislature cut more money to college and university budgets.

Zucker says educational probably will not escape any during the Legislature's next session.

Magazine

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Mathews says magazine solicitors frequent the local area.

To solicit in College Station, salesperson must have a sales license which does not include permission to solicit on University property.

If police receive a complaint, they will check the license. If there are several complaints about one person, the license will be revoked and not renewed.

Mathews says if salespeople do not have licenses, they will be charged with soliciting without a permit.

These illegal sales attempts form a definite pattern, Wiatt says.

"Students are most susceptible to the fall and the salespeople know it," he says. "Students do not know salespeople are illegal."

Between September and January, police questioned 21 unlicensed solicitors, the majority in early January. Police could not address all complaints because some salespeople were not present when officers arrived, he says.

Students, however, are not only victims of magazine sales scams. The salespeople also can be hurt by the business.

Wiatt says solicitors often use classified ads which offer monetary adventure. Crew leaders promise great rewards but they rarely deliver.

Magazine solicitors make very little money and have to pay for their own travel and hotel expenses. They often owe the crew leader money, Wiatt says.

He also says crew leaders do not care about the salespeople. They will send them back to a university even after a police warning.

Wives

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Other military wives have gone through similar experiences.

The wife of a retired sergeant from College Station says she believes most people do not want a repeat of the negative feelings expressed during Vietnam.

"I don't think people want it to happen again," says the military wife, who wishes to remain anonymous. "I think it's wonderful the people are coming out and saying they support our men."

Bryan resident Serita Brothers lived near an Air Force base in Utah while her husband served in Thailand during the Vietnam War. Thailand was a support staging area during the conflict.

"We didn't even know we were there (support groups) were," she says.

Brothers says she had a group of close friends with whom she did things, and they were the closest thing she had to support.

"We didn't call it support," she says. "It was just our friends."

Brothers says support groups are good for those who believe they need them. These groups provide opportunities for family members to share experiences with others going through the same thing, she says.

"There's a million other people in your shoes."



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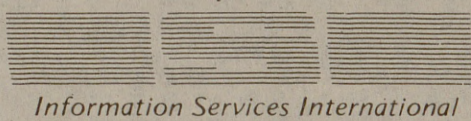


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