

# Life almost routine as war clouds gather

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DHAHRAN, Saudi Arabia — A steady stream of military transport planes heads north. A caravan of trucks loaded with furniture and other family belongings travels the highway south.

Meanwhile, American soldiers, eager to "get it over with" quick, shop for souvenirs and journalists, who've tapped the story well dry, interview one another.

It's the reality of war impending here near the Kuwaiti border.

It is not that no transports left Thursday. Friday, there just seemed to be a few more.

There also seemed to be a few more civilians lined up in the airport's departure lines Friday, too.

A desk clerk at the airport contended the numbers of people leaving were about normal. But many of those waiting to leave had brought boxes to the airport, large boxes, the sort people use when moving to a new residence.

Many of the boxes were marked with addresses in India, Thailand and The Philippines.

The changes in daily life are not extreme. During the day Friday, traffic was light and many businesses were closed, but that is considered normal because Friday is the Islamic day of rest.

But at night crowds still thronged to the brightly lit business district. A group of U.S. soldiers from Louisiana who had come to Dhahran to deliver mail and rest also were shopping.

They were dressed in street clothes, but carried gas masks at their hips. Soldiers are the only people I've seen carrying the masks.

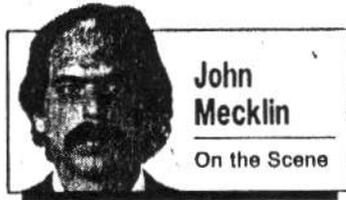
These particular soldiers were members of the Army National Guard, who said they had been told not to give their names to reporters.

They also had seen changes in the last few days. They had been "up north," but were not allowed to say exactly where in Saudi Arabia.

"There's a lot of equipment moving around, yeah, a lot of activity," one of them said. He was a 22-year-old staff sergeant who had been a student at the University of Southwest Louisiana until his unit was called up in the fall.

The activity, he said, is not limited to the military. "Everybody who lives north is moving south. We pass trucks loaded with furniture and stuff all the time."

All four of the soldiers said the growing signs of war did not scare them. In fact, they expressed irritation with the length of time they had been in Saudi Arabia, and with



John Mecklin

On the Scene

way we want to, we'd win it quick."

Then he bought a Hard Rock Cafe-Saudi Arabia T-shirt and moved on toward other stores on the crowded narrow street.

Although there were some changes to be seen near Dhahran, the type of action and words that serve the purposes of news reporters was in short supply.

As it now stands, only those reporters chosen to be in combat "pools" generally are allowed to speak with soldiers in the field.

As a result, several hundred journalists not chosen for the pools are scrambling over one another, looking for something to report while they wait to see if war breaks out.

Often they turn to reporting on one another.

Friday's media-on-media event was a training session conducted behind the Dhahran International Hotel concerning protection from chemical weapons attack.

There, beyond the miniature golf course, next to the swimming pool, about 50 reporters learned how to help someone twitching on the ground after a nerve gas attack.

The demonstration was conducted by Air Force Sgt. Nash Howell and was meant largely for those journalists in the combat pools.

Howell showed the reporters and photographers how to adjust a gas mask so it will not leak, how to don and arrange the accompanying hood, jacket, pants, boots and gloves, and how to give shots to someone seriously contaminated by nerve gas.

It was the same training given to previous pool reporters, but because of the dearth of news, the session quickly turned into a media event.

Eventually, officers had to order the reporters to quit interviewing and taping Howell so the training session could be completed.

The incident was almost as comical as it was depressing — reporters at war, reduced by events and restrictions, to asking each other questions.

When I returned to my hotel later in the day, the desk clerk said he was on the phone with a woman who needed to talk to an American reporter.

The woman was an assignment editor calling from the CBS station



Vicki Sepulveda, assistant manager of Gifts in Sharpstown mall

## It's all inane w

BY DERICK RILL  
OF THE HOUSTON POST STAFF

Need a way to vent your frustrations against Saddam Hussein?

Novelty shops around Houston are selling items as a paddle ball set in which each shot results in the ball smacking off the Iraq face. Or there's a dart board with Hussein target and Saddam voodoo dolls.

Tish McCracken is marketing an expensive item that has given new meaning down and negotiating with Saddam Hussein of toilet paper with a caricature of Saddam sheet.

According to the operators of Houston shops, these Saddam articles are the hottest since the Bart Simpson craze.

"We're down to our last T-shirt," said Anderson, a saleswoman with Sheer Insa shop at the Galleria. "We ordered two about seven different kinds before Chris we're down to our last one."

One shirt that sold out quickly showed clutching his groin above the caption, HUSSEIN." Others included Saddam caricature the headings "Iraqnophobia" and "So sane."

Vicki Sepulveda, assistant manager of Gifts in Sharpstown mall, said the store stocked with Saddam toilet paper, tee shirts and voodoo dolls before the holiday.

"All we have left now are the voodoo couple sweat shirts," she noted. "People s

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The activity, he said, is not limited to the military. "Everybody who lives north is moving south. We pass trucks loaded with furniture and stuff all the time."

All four of the soldiers said the growing signs of war did not scare them. In fact, they expressed irritation with the length of time they had been in Saudi Arabia, and with the continuing Congressional debate over the use of force against Iraq.

"Our congressmen shouldn't be doing this," the sergeant said. "It's time we get it over with. If the 'suits' would let us fight the war the

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When I returned to my hotel later in the day, the desk clerk said he was on the phone with a woman who needed to talk to an American reporter.

The woman was an assignments editor calling from the CBS station in Detroit. She needed a reporter to do a live interview for their noon news show. I hemmed and hawed a little, but did the interview.

The editor said I performed admirably. She wants me for another interview in a few hours.

**Vicki Sepulveda, assistant manager at Spencer Gifts in Sharpstown Mall**

## *It's all inane with*

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### **CRISIS CAPSULES**

#### **BEEFED-UP SECURITY**

The State Department Friday went on heightened alert because of the Persian Gulf crisis. Employees were told by written notice and closed-circuit television that the department had implemented a "markedly improved building security

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