

WAR IN THE GULF



Attack on Israel a 'sadistic' act, U.S. soldiers say

Texans in gulf condemn firing at civilians

EASTERN SAUDI ARABIA — Following the second Iraqi missile attack on Israel, the conversation among American soldiers here was dominated by questions about how Israeli retaliation would impact the war effort.

Through television and radio, news of the missile attacks had filtered down to American servicemen, including three with Texas roots who were deeply critical of the targeting of civilians by Iraq.

"It's sadistic. Killing citizens and shooting at citizens isn't going to accomplish anything. It doesn't have any military value," Specialist Christopher Vernon said. Vernon, 21, of Eastland, is part of a field artillery unit of the 8th Infantry Division now based in Saudi Arabia after transfer from Germany.

While he relaxed on an armored ammunition carrier, Vernon expressed a view held by many of the servicemen interviewed Saturday: Israel should respond and that response could well help the coalition now at war with Iraq.

"They (the Israelis) have got to do what they've got to do," Vernon said.

Specialist Ernijay Lombard, 24, of Beaumont, agreed. "I feel he (Saddam Hussein) is making a big mistake, because Israel has proven by far it's one of the most battle-ready countries around. I think once the Israelis are out of the gate, Iraq doesn't have a chance," Lombard said.

While he also thinks the Scud attacks are "foolish," another member of the artillery unit, David Crockett of Sealy, fears that an Israeli retaliation could complicate the war.

"If Israel goes into it, I think it'll make it more complicated...."

at their base in eastern Saudi Arabia. Chemical attack is one threat all three acknowledged fearing.

For that reason, they have no problem with media reports Saturday suggesting that a ground assault against Iraqi forces could be delayed until February while the air war against Iraqi forces continues.

They think the concentrated air attacks will reduce the danger of chemical attack against allied troops.

"We'll fight better knowing the gas will be gone," Crockett said.

"If they (the Air Force) are capable of bombing for three or four more weeks, I think they should. It'll be better for us on the ground," Vernon added.

Crockett said: "I think they



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On the Scene

should continue to do this bombing, and let the civilians get out of town (Baghdad). And then there's nothing else we can do and we should level the town."

Although a major assault into Kuwait may be delayed, U.S. and Iraqi forces skirmished in and near that occupied country Saturday.

U.S. forces in the northern Persian Gulf took the first Iraqi prisoners in an attack on offshore oil platforms that had been used to fire missiles and anti-aircraft guns at American warplanes. The 12 prisoners were brought to a Marine installation in northeast Saudi Arabia for interrogation and medical care.

One of their first activities after capture was to experiment with the U.S. military's ready-to-eat rations, which are almost universally loathed by American servicemen.

It was also reported that elements of the Army's Rapid Deployment Force were moving north toward the Kuwait border.

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The artillerymen's disgust with the Scud attacks is hardly academic. They have been placed on chemical weapons alert repeatedly

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"We're on the way home now. We're just taking a detour through Iraq," said Sgt. Steve Brown of Kent, Ohio.