

MODERN
WARFARE



THE IRAQ WAR

OPERATION IRAQI
FREEDOM 2003-2011



ANTHONY TUCKER-JONES

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An Irish Guards sniper covering a Warrior near the university factory complex in Basra.

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Preface

Modern Warfare Series

Pen & Sword's Modern Warfare series is designed to provide a visual account of the defining conflicts of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. These include operations Desert Storm, Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom. A key characteristic of all three, fought by coalitions, is what has been dubbed 'shock and awe', whereby superior technology, air supremacy and overwhelming firepower ensured complete freedom of manoeuvre on the ground in the face of a numerically stronger enemy. The focus of this series is to explain how military and political goals were achieved so swiftly and decisively.

Another aspect of modern warfare is that it is conducted in the full glare of the international media. This is a trend that started during the Vietnam War, and today every aspect of a conflict is visually recorded and scrutinized. Such visual reporting often shapes public perceptions of conflict to a far greater extent than politicians or indeed generals.

All the photographs in this book, unless otherwise credited, were issued by the US Department of Defense and the UK's Ministry of Defence at the time of the conflict. The author and the publishers are grateful for the work of the various forces' combat photographers.

Introduction

Saddam Betrayed

Iraqi President Saddam Hussein declared, in August 2002: 'If they come, we are ready. We will fight them on the streets, from the rooftops, from house to house. We will never surrender.' However, history has a nasty habit of repeating itself, and in his brief to Saddam Hussein on 14 January 1991, General Wafiq Al-Samarrai, head of Iraq's military intelligence, stated that Iraq would suffer a swift defeat. In late March 1991, when the fighting following Operation Desert Storm had finished, Al-Samarrai went before Saddam again to inform him they had suffered the biggest defeat in military history.

One of the Al-Samarrai's successors, former intelligence chief Farouk Hijazi, captured on 24 April 2003, had a similar tale to tell: Saddam would simply not accept that they could not successfully resist the technological array of weapons facing them when the US-led Coalition conducted Operation Iraqi Freedom. By this stage the loyalty of many of Saddam's generals had reached breaking point.

In 2003, in the run-up to war, Washington had many senior military Iraqi exiles it could draw upon, such as General Fawaz al-Shammari, former Chief of Staff of the Iraqi 3rd Corps. Just before hostilities he stated, 'We have good contact with the Iraqi armed forces, the tribes and even some officers in the Republican Guards. They put good hope on the support of the US.' In late November 2002, it became public knowledge that senior Iraqi security officials had approached Washington with a view to abandoning their leader.

American troops burst triumphantly into Saddam International Airport (SIA) and the Rashid military air base, both just outside Baghdad, in early April 2003. Only at the former was there any real resistance and to the Americans' amazement there was no sign of the once powerful Iraqi Air Force (IrAF). Two no shows in three major wars is a remarkable achievement, yet during Operation Iraqi Freedom, as in Desert Storm in 1991, the IrAF decided discretion was the better part of valour. Little was expected of the IrAF in 2003 – after all, it had only put up token resistance twelve years earlier – but no one expected it to vanish completely.

Along with the elite Republican Guard, elements in the IrAF knew they could not avoid the war altogether and sought a way to safeguard themselves and their

remaining airworthy fighters. It appears the Americans agreed that if they did not fight, Al Asad – about 170km north-west of Baghdad, and home of the IrAF's Fighter Command and the second largest base in Iraq – would be spared. Secretly across Iraq, the order went out not to resist.

Evidence indicates that the IrAF were either bought off, like the Republican Guard, or simply threatened into submission. US military planners wanted to secure SIA and take out the main Iraqi fighter bases at Al Asad, Al-Taqqadum and Rashid, so they cut a deal with some elements of the IrAF. It is unclear what level of complicity IrAF Commander Lieutenant General Hamid Raja Salah al-Tikriti had with Washington, but the fact remains that the Iraqis did not put up a single aircraft to resist the Coalition. Intriguingly, unlike the senior Republican Guard and intelligence officers who are believed to have betrayed Saddam Hussein, General Salah was listed as number seventeen in the US military's 'Iraqi Top 55' most-wanted deck of playing cards.

Intelligence analysts felt that the superior educated air force personnel had a better appreciation of the situation and were viewed as a threat by the very regime that they were supposed to defend. Saddam Hussein knew he faced betrayal. For example, former IrAF General Ali Hussein Habib was arrested just before the Coalition air attacks commenced on Baghdad. His headless body was located on 15 April in a shallow grave outside Abu Ghraib prison. Habib had been involved with the Iraqi Chemical Weapons Programme and was prepared to be interviewed by UN inspectors without minders. It may have been that Saddam's regime suspected he was already collaborating.

On 16 March 2003, at an Iraqi council of war in Baghdad, 150 senior officers, including IrAF General Kareem Saadoun, dared not remind Saddam Hussein they simply could not win. In 1991 the IrAF's pilot training was poor, as was the serviceability of its fighters. On top of this it was operating some fifteen different types of fixed-wing aircraft. Twelve years on, the IrAF was not blind to the fact that these deficiencies had only become worse. The UN embargo ensured they received no vital spares, no new aircraft or surface-to-air missiles, although some spares for Iraqi MiG-23 and MiG-25 may have been sneaked in via Syria.

Once the fighting started, according to some IrAF officers they received no further orders. Colonel Diar Abed at Rashid Air Base noted, 'We had no orders. We just stayed in the bases and waited. ... Why don't they give us orders? The leaders at the base didn't know anything.' General Saadoun, also at Rashid, recalled bitterly, 'They just gave us Kalashnikovs [assault rifles], not even anti-aircraft weapons.' Two weeks before Rashid fell, its communications were cut. Somebody, somewhere, had betrayed them. The Coalition blitzkrieg sliced through Iraqi defences and rolled into Basra and Baghdad with relative ease.

The tale of how the Coalition swiftly defeated the Iraqi Army in a matter of weeks, subsequently allowed the country to become ungovernable and then spent almost a decade trying to put it back together again is well trodden. Washington officially said farewell to its military commitment to Baghdad on 31 December 2011. Operation Iraqi Freedom – launched in 2003 to oust President Saddam Hussein – was finally put to rest.

Ultimately, though, Washington and its allies were never in a position to truly remedy Iraq's ills. Like Yugoslavia, it had taken a brutal dictator to hold all the disparate feuding factions together in a single unitary state. While the various former Yugoslav republics were allowed to achieve independence, partition for Iraq was the last thing its neighbours and the international community wanted. Ethnic and sectarian violence are a way of life for Iraq, as are the longstanding tensions with neighbouring Iran. Despite this, Operation Iraqi Freedom remains a remarkable military victory.



JUST SAY NO...

In 2003 America and Britain decided Saddam Hussein must go once and for all. America dubbed this military action Operation Iraq Freedom while Britain operated under the codename Operation Telic.

Chapter One

Babylon Lion

Regardless of what the intelligence agencies thought, on the basis of data collected by the UN alone the case for war against Iraq in 2003 seemed irrefutable. The Iraqis had not inconsiderable stocks of chemical and biological munitions that they themselves could not account for and the CIA for a long time estimated that Baghdad had up to 300 Scud ballistic missiles stashed away. On the basis of this Britain and America opted for the conspiracy theory rather than the bugger's muddle theory – i.e. Saddam was deliberately hiding something that constituted a threat.

The Iraqis and Kurds had been on the receiving end of his weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in the past and it is widely believed that the only reason Saddam did not use them in 1991 was because America threatened to go 'nuclear'. After the UN inspectors departed Iraq in 1998, Saddam gave the impression he was up to his old tricks. It was a bluff that was to cost him dearly in early 2003.

The Iraqi regular army was believed to consist of about seventeen divisions (each with about 10,000 men) with a total of about 2,200 tanks, 3,800 armoured personnel carriers and 2,000 artillery pieces. In reality these formations were under-strength in terms of equipment, firepower and tactical ability. Even Iraq's elite Republican Guards were no match for Britain and America's modern mechanized forces.

Iraqi Army deployment January 2003

Kirkuk area 1st Corps: 5th Mechanized Division, 2nd, 8th and 38th Infantry Divisions.

Diyala area 2nd Corps: 3rd Armoured Division, 15th and 34th Infantry Divisions.

An Nasiriyah area 3rd Corps: 6th Armoured Division, the 51st Mechanized Division and 11th Infantry Division.

Amarah area 4th Corps: included the 10th Armoured Division, 14th and 18th Infantry Divisions.

Mosul area 5th Corps: 1st Mechanized Division, and the 4th, 7th, and 16th Infantry Divisions.

Western Desert: Armoured Infantry Division and other units in western Iraq.

To defeat Saddam Hussein it was necessary for the Coalition to capture his seat of power, namely the Iraqi capital, Baghdad. It was anticipated that the toughest nut to crack would be the six divisions of his 50,000-strong Republican Guard and their 400-700 tanks. As well as the Guard, the 10,000 Special Republican Guard (SRG) was also regarded as a highly trained and equipped force. Notably, half the Republican Guard Divisions were deployed in an outer ring around Baghdad as the first line of defence.

Iraqi Elite Forces

Republican Guard	Special Republican Guard
50,000 men 6 divisions (3 armoured, 2 infantry, 1 mechanized) 400-700 tanks	10,000 men 4 brigades 100 tanks

Republican Guard Division deployment January 2003

Unit	Location
Nebuchadnezzar	North of Baghdad
Hammurabi	South-west of Baghdad
Al Nida	South-east of Baghdad
Medina-Karbala	Karbala
Baghdad	Al Kut
Adnan	Tikrit

In 1990 Saddam was estimated to have 5,500 tanks, 8,100 armoured personnel carriers (APCs), 500 self-propelled guns and 3,200 pieces of artillery and multiple rocket launchers. Whilst it is impossible to account for all these, visible deliveries of Iraqi armoured vehicle imports from 1953-90 number at least 3,500 main battle tanks (MBTs) and 5,200 armoured fighting vehicles (AFVs). In the aftermath of Desert Storm in 1991, Saddam Hussein still had some 250,000 men remaining under arms equipped with 1,700 tanks, 6,700 APCs and almost 800 pieces of artillery.

Although the Iraqis were left with well over 8,400 armoured vehicles intact, by 2003, after twelve years of sanctions, not all of these were serviceable. In fact, many

lay rotting in various Iraqi service depots. In December 2002, a spokesman of the US Army 5th Corps commenting on Saddam's 1991 junkyard at Al-Udairy in Kuwait said, 'I think the strongest message we could send to Mr Hussein right now is to take pictures of this and drop them on Iraq.'

The bulk of Saddam's remaining armoured forces were equipped with Russian-supplied T-54/55, Chinese T-59/T-69, Russian T-62 and some T-72 as well as Russian BMP-1/2 infantry fighting vehicles (IFVs). Only the T-72, known as the Babylon Lion, constituted any kind of real threat to Coalition armour, of which they may have had a few hundred in running order. Iraq commenced the Iran-Iraq War in 1980 with just fifty Soviet-built T-72 tanks. By the end of the war, eight years later, it had managed to acquire approximately 200-500. Reportedly, the Iraqis fielded three variants of the T-72: the Soviet T-72M1 and the T-72B, built at Nizhniy Tagil in what is now Russia, and the T-72G (T-72G/M), built in former Czechoslovakia and Poland. The T-72M1 was a modernized T-72M, which was the export version of the T-72A accepted into Soviet service in 1979. The newer T-72B variant appeared in 1986.

The T-72G was also an export version of the T-72A, built by Poland and Czechoslovakia under the designation T-72M. If it is the case that the Iraqis had T-72Gs then the Czechs and/or Poles may have supplied some of them. Former Czechoslovakia built the T-72 under licence from 1979-93 for both domestic and export markets. Similarly, Poland also manufactured the T-72 under licence until the early 1990s. However, Czechoslovakia was only reported as supplying Baghdad with armoured infantry fighting vehicles and APCs, not tanks. Poland or East Germany are believed to have supplied Iraq with 100 T-55 MBTs in the early 1980s, and 70-100 Polish T-72M1 are known to have been supplied to Iran in the mid-1990s, but not to Iraq.

In the late 1980s, Iraq claimed to be assembling the T-72M1, known locally as the Assad Babyle or Babylon Lion. Iraqi defence industries were producing the ordnance, breech mechanism, ammunition and some of the electronics; the rest was presumably provided as knock-down kits by Russia. Local assembly of the T-72M1 in Iraq is believed to have come to a rapid halt after the 1990-91 Gulf War, due to a lack of parts.

It was only after Saddam's downfall that it became evident what a used car lot Iraq's armoured forces were. The sheer range of suppliers and vehicle types were a logistical and training nightmare that was probably never fully resolved. It transpires the Iraqis also bought armoured fighting vehicles from such diverse countries as Bulgaria, Italy, Hungary, Poland and former Yugoslavia on top of the nine countries previously identified – Austria, Brazil, China, former Czechoslovakia, Egypt, France, Saudi Arabia, South Africa and Spain.

Among the more unusual vehicles supplied to Baghdad during the 1980s was the Hungarian 4x4 PSZH-IV, which apparently was not very mechanically reliable. In

comparison to the other East European former Warsaw Pact members (such as Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Romania), Hungary was hardly noted for its manufacture of either Soviet or indigenously designed armoured vehicles. Romania also supplied Iraq with its 122mm APR 40 rocket launcher, carried on a DAC 665T 6x6 truck chassis in the late 1980s.

According to at least one source, Baghdad also imported some ancient Yugoslavian-tracked M-60P APCs. The Italian 4x4 Fiat OTO Melara Type 6614 APC also allegedly found its way into the Iraqi order of battle. This was a joint development between Fiat and Otobreda and was built under licence by South Korea. Whilst by the mid-1990s some 1,160 had been exported, Iraq was not listed as one of the official customers. It is thought possible that some may have come via Somalia or Tunisia.

Many of the 800 Soviet-designed MT-LB multipurpose tracked vehicles acquired by the Iraqi Army were actually built in Bulgaria. The Bulgarians manufactured the MT-LB under licence for both home use and export. The general layout is the same as the Russian versions. However, it is possible that Bulgaria supplied Baghdad with its indigenously designed MT-LB Mortar Carrier variant, which in Iraqi service was modified to carry an Egyptian 120mm mortar. The weapon fires to the rear through an oblong two-part roof hatch, or can be dismantled for ground use.

During the Iran-Iraq War, Kuwait loaned Iraq a battery of at least eight French Giat Industries 155mm Mk F3 self-propelled guns. After the invasion of Kuwait, Iraq captured up to another seventy of them; it is not known how many were subsequently recaptured. Similarly, in 1982, Saudi Arabia loaned Iraq some of its GCT 155mm self-propelled guns to train with while awaiting an order from France. Apparently, self-propelled guns made up 10 per cent of the Iraqi Army's artillery and were only issued to the Republican Guard Corps.

Additional French vehicles supplied included the Panhard VCR (*Véhicule de Combat à Roues*) 6x6 APC, developed as a private venture for the export market in 1975. The Iraqis received 100 of the VCR/TH (Tourelle HOT) anti-tank variant. This was equipped with the Euromissile UTM 800 HOT turret mounted on a raised plinth, capable of carrying four ready-to-launch HOT missiles, with another ten in the hull. As well as the French Panhard 4x4 M3 APC, Iraq also purchased 100 AMX-10P tracked infantry combat vehicles. The production of this model began in 1972 and ended in 1994. Iraqi variants included some with the ATILA automatic artillery fire control system.

After UN sanctions were imposed post-1991, without spares Iraq found it increasingly impossible to maintain its wide range of armoured vehicles. Whilst the Iraqis were able to get some spares on the black market, cannibalization became the name of the game.