

# Assessing Hussein's Army

By SSG Elroy N. Garcia

In April 1988 Iraq launched a major offensive against Iran that included five major battles and numerous smaller engagements waged over the whole 730-mile Iran-Iraq frontier. Iraq won each battle — decisively — and by the time the blitzkrieg ended in August, Iran's army was virtually destroyed.

The offensive brought a sudden end to the eight-year Iran-Iraq war. It also ended any thoughts in the United States that Iraq was an "inconsequential, militarily weak power," an assumption held by many government officials prior to the war, according to members of the Strategic Studies Institute at the Army War College.

Iraq's army today is much the same as the one that whipped Iran on the battlefield and forced the Ayatollah Khomeini to accept a truce.

As of January 16, Saddam Hussein was known to have the fifth largest army in the world — only the United States, Soviet Union, China and India have larger armies. Among Middle Eastern nations, Iraq is a virtual military superpower, having more than triple the number of troops in the Egyptian army, the region's second largest military force.

Equipment used by Iraq is primarily Soviet made and, according to the Strategic Studies Institute, includes "large numbers of T-72 tanks" and sophisticated long-range artillery systems. A book released by the Institute last year, entitled *Iraq Power and U.S. Security in the Middle East*, lists Iraq as having 5,500 tanks, 3,700 field artillery pieces and 160 helicopters.

While the number of artillery pieces and their potential for destruction are impressive, Iraq lacks the advanced targeting systems required to use them effectively, according to an Army Times report.

Army intelligence experts at the Pentagon describe Iraq's officer corps as

"very professional and patriotic." But, they add, once on the battlefield the officers often become wary of making moves that might anger government officials in Baghdad.

"Iraq's officers are allowed to show less initiative than U.S. officers. They know the price of failure can result in liquidation, so they're less willing to take chances on their own," said Dr. Norman Cigar, Middle East desk officer with the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence.

Among the enlisted corps, pay problems are rampant and the opportunity to advance to leadership positions is virtually nonexistent.

"Traditionally the pay has been very low and very irregular," said Maj. Wallace Terrill Jr., a foreign area officer for

---

## Once drafted, the Iraqi soldier must adjust to austere conditions, particularly in terms of food and shelter.

---

the Middle East. "Many of the soldiers in the Iraqi army were mobilized for the war with Iran and were never sent home — they're still in. You have men who have been in the army for 10 years and are still privates. They're brought in to be riflemen and they stay riflemen."

The typical Iraqi soldier is a male — women serve primarily as nurses and comprise less than one percent of the force — with "considerable combat experience, but uneven training," said Terrill. "There's not a lot of concern with bringing soldiers up through the ranks and cultivating leadership."

According to Cigar, basic training for infantrymen is sporadic, particularly during emergencies. During its war with Iran, some Iraqi conscripts received as little as one week of basic training before being sent into combat — others

went straight from the streets of Baghdad to the front lines with no training at all.

With the exception of the elite Republican Guard, whose members originally served as bodyguards for the president and have since grown into a corps of about 150,000 troops, all Iraqi enlisted soldiers are draftees. And while Cigar said officers are subject to "liquidation" for certain transgressions, enlisted soldiers may suffer severe beatings for their mistakes.

"It's a hard, hard army," he said. "Once a soldier is drafted he has to adjust to very austere conditions, particularly in terms of food and shelter."

Cigar sees the Republican Guard as the backbone of the Iraqi army and described its soldiers as the most loyal and motivated in the country. "The Republican Guard is the cream of Iraqi society," he said. "They're the best educated, best trained and best equipped soldiers they have."

As the hardened core of the army, the Republican Guard will be well entrenched and held in reserve for the critical stages of Hussein's war effort. The first troops to be used against allied forces likely will be poorly trained and driven more by fear of punishment than by political conviction. Military analysts have suggested that early victories against such an enemy could lead allied leaders to underestimate Iraqi capabilities.

When allied forces encounter more experienced Iraqi troops, they will be facing a tenacious enemy, according to the Army War College study. While air superiority may weaken the Republican Guards, in the end it will take a determined ground force to drive the Iraqis from Kuwait. ■

---

*SSG Elroy N. Garcia is NCOIC of the Army News Service, Command Information Division, Office of the Chief of Public Affairs.*