

Aerospace World Special: Gulf War II

Air and Space Power in Action



USAF photo by SSgt. Derrick C. Goode

An F-117 stealth fighter returns to base early on March 20 (Baghdad time), after dropping penetrating laser-guided bombs on a bunker in which Saddam Hussein and top aides were believed to be meeting. Shortly afterward, about 40 sea-launched Tomahawk missiles rained down on this "target of opportunity." The mission took place as Operation Iraqi Freedom was about to get under way; "battlefield prep" strikes against possible Scud missile launchers, air defenses, communications nodes, and artillery had begun 15 hours earlier, and Special Operations Forces were inside Iraq. Main ground forces moved the night of March 20.



USAF photo by TSgt. Richard Freeland

USAF photo by SSgt. Cherie A. Thurlby



Above, a B-52H pilot of the 40th Expeditionary Bomb Squadron on a nighttime strike. (The green glow in the cockpit comes from the night vision camera.)

At left, members of the 405th Air Expeditionary Wing load 2,000-pound Joint Direct Attack Munitions onto a long-range B-1B bomber.



F-16CJ pilots "Lude" and "Lobo" return to flight ops after a defense-suppression mission. Armed with High-speed Anti-Radiation Missiles, the F-16s (below) either destroyed mobile radars or so intimidated their operators that they did not use their radars at all. Few, if any, of the missiles launched at coalition aircraft were guided.



At right, an HH-60 helicopter from Air Force Reserve Command's 301st Rescue Squadron, Patrick AFB, Fla., lifts off on April 3 for a combat search and rescue mission in Iraq.

Below, two pararescuemen of the 301st escort a rescued A-10 pilot after the ride back to base. The pilot ejected safely over Baghdad after anti-aircraft fire hit his aircraft.



An HH-60G Pave Hawk returns to its forward base. Pave Hawk helicopters played an important role inserting and extracting special operations teams throughout Iraq.



An A-10 from the 332nd Air Expeditionary Wing heads out for a March 29 mission. In Iraq, A-10s got a chance to do what they are best at doing—using 30 mm cannons, Maverick missiles, and bombs to chew up enemy armored columns. At right, an A-10 gets an engine check.



Precision targeting, as seen from a cockpit: At left, an Iraqi truck is shredded by an A-10's 30 mm gun; at far left, a laser-guided bomb cursor is fixed on a revetted Iraqi tank. Precision was the hallmark of the operation. Airpower hit more targets in Gulf War II than in 1991—and in half the time.



This A-10 got a ripped-up right engine, courtesy of an Iraqi missile. However, it returned to base safely on April 8. A-10s and other aircraft largely destroyed Iraqi Republican Guard divisions arrayed outside Baghdad, giving US ground forces a big boost.



After Turkey declined to allow US ground forces or strike aircraft to stage from its soil, the job of opening a northern front fell to US Army paratroopers. USAF air controllers serving with the Army's 173rd Airborne Brigade board a C-17 in Europe to head for drop zones in northern Iraq.

Now it's been done in combat: Field deployment of the Army's 70-ton M1A1 Abrams tank via Air Force C-17 airlifter happens for real, as an 86th Expeditionary Contingency Response Group crew unloads a tank in northern Iraq on April 7.



Another loaded C-17 arrives at an airfield in Iraq. USAF crews pushed through a steady stream of troops, supplies, and equipment.

Lt. Col. Joseph Justice and Maj. David Wright, operation center directors from the 379th Air Expeditionary Wing, coordinate the flying schedule at an air operations center in Southwest Asia. Exquisite coordination of hundreds of aircraft was the order of the day, every day.



USAF photo by MSGT. Terry L. Blevins

USAF photos by SSgt. Matthew Hammen



Desert operations offer unique challenges. SSgt. Jason Nipp, a crew chief deployed from Ramstein AB, Germany, to the 363rd Expeditionary Equipment Maintenance Squadron, wears goggles and a scarf in a blistering sandstorm as he prepares a missile for an F-16CJ.

A wounded soldier is carried off a C-141 by members of the 932nd Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron from Scott AFB, Ill., and the 86th Aeromedical Staging Facility at Ramstein AB.

Pentagon officials reported that, as of April 17, 109 US personnel had been killed in hostile action and more than 500 wounded. Several service members, including two USAF pilots, were still listed as missing in action. (DOD reported on April 18 that one of the USAF pilots had been killed in action and on April 23, reported the second had been killed in action.)



USAF photo by TSgt. Justin D. Pyle



An MQ-1 Predator is readied for action. Unmanned aerial vehicles offered round-the-clock surveillance of enemy troop concentrations and proved invaluable in watching the streets of Baghdad for signs of reinforcements and troop movements. This Predator, operated by members of the 15th Expeditionary Reconnaissance Squadron, is armed with a Hellfire missile, which can be fired using the MQ-1's laser-designator turret. USAF is reconfiguring most of its current Predator fleet so they can shoot what they observe, if need be.



USAF photo by SSgt. Tony R. Tolley



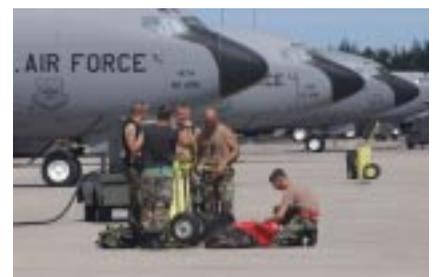
US Navy photo

No bombs on target without gas: In the early hours of the fight, a B-2 stealth bomber approaches a KC-135 tanker for a fill-up en route to targets in Iraq. At right, a USAF KC-135 hooks up to refuel a US Marine Corps F/A-18.

Given demands of homeland defense and operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, USAF's 45-year-old tanker fleet is maxed out.



At right, a ground crew from the 28th Expeditionary Refueling Squadron cleans up after performing maintenance on the hardworking tanker fleet.



USAF photo by TSgt. Janice Cannon



MSgt. Donald Dougherty and SMSgt. T.J. Jones, members of the 621st Tanker Airlift Control Element, work at an airfield in Southwest Asia on April 1 as a C-130 taxis. Faced with one of the worst sandstorms in Iraq in recent memory, ground forces slowed to a crawl, but aircraft above the clouds continued to rain satellite-guided bombs on Iraqi targets.



Above, soldiers board a C-130. At left, Capt. Jeff Banks, a pilot, pumps a hydraulic jack while SSgt. Joe Sharp, crew chief, works on a C-130's flat tire. Both are from the 41st Airlift Squadron, Pope AFB, N.C.



The US dropped millions of leaflets, instructing Iraqi troops on ways to avoid being killed. Those that disregarded the warnings met a grim fate. At left, a tank hit by an A-10; above, another tank on fire.



US and UK air forces for 12 years had pounded Iraqi anti-aircraft systems. Any that remained were quickly taken out during the early stages of Iraqi Freedom. Hulks here were photographed on April 2.



Retreating Iraqis left behind caches of weapons, ammunition, "suicide vests," chem/bio warfare suits, and gas masks. This missile, found in an abandoned trailer about 70 miles south of Baghdad, appears to be an Ababil-100.

Patriot missile batteries managed to intercept several Iraqi short-range missiles hurtling toward Kuwait. On March 31, coalition ground forces found two of the longer range al Samoud II missiles, prohibited under UN resolutions, in central Iraq, and an F-15E crew reported destroying at least one Scud missile near the Kuwaiti border in the opening hours of the conflict.



The media billed it as the "shock and awe" campaign, but air strikes on Baghdad in the initial days were mostly calculated to penetrate hardened underground targets and destroy above-ground elements of the Iraqi regime. The effect was awesome enough, as the city shook and, one by one, the seats of repression disappeared, leaving relatively little damage to non-regime structures.



Information operations played a key role in the success of OIF. The leaflets dropped in Iraq drove home the message that Saddam and his cronies, not the Iraqi people, were the target. The leaflets promised humane treatment to Iraqi troops that surrendered. Thousands of underfed regular troops did pack it in, carrying the leaflets like coupons for food.

At left, an MC-130E Combat Talon loadmaster ties down boxes containing leaflets to be dropped over Iraq.



The massive job of coordinating the actions of thousands of strike, support, and cargo aircraft fell to the E-3 AWACS command and control aircraft. At right, an E-3 takes off during a sandstorm. AWACS mission crews deconflicted the airplanes aloft and passed short-notice strike instructions to fighters and bombers.

RC-135 Rivet Joint electronic surveillance aircraft, such as the one below, listened to Iraqi Army radio chatter. Air National Guard EC-130E Commando Solo airplanes broadcast messages to the Iraqi people on radio and TV. E-8 Joint STARS aircraft also played a key role.





An F-15E gets the “go” signal from A1C William Gilmer of the 379th Expeditionary Aircraft Maintenance Squadron.

Below, F-15E pilots “Ginger” and “Salvo” walk to their fighter for a sortie on March 23.



A1C Nicholas Hoffman, an F-15E crew chief, prepares to launch a fighter for a Gulf War II sortie over Iraq.

Coalition air forces—US Air Force, US Navy, US Marine Corps, Royal Air Force, and Royal Australian Air Force—flew more than 42,000 sorties. Of that total, USAF accounted for some 58 percent. USAF also flew about 40 percent of all strike sorties and delivered 65 percent of munitions tonnage.



A1C Edward Crofoot, a security forces member deployed with the 86th Expeditionary Contingency Response Group, takes a moment to chat with local children while on a patrol April 9.

It was expected that many of the Iraqi people would welcome US troops, once they were certain Saddam Hussein would not return. Many did. The war, for all purposes, ended on April 9 with the fall of Baghdad. ■