

## The Iraq I Knew was not a one-size-fits-all war...

Travel with Captain, Major, Lieutenant Colonel, and finally Colonel Burl Randolph, Jr. on his three combat tours in Iraq. In Desert Shield/Desert Storm, the mission was the liberation of Kuwait from Saddam Hussein, and the Iraqi Army. In OIF One after 9/11, the objective was the search for Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). In his final deployment with the XVIII Airborne Corps, it was the fight with Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) to regain control of the country. Every visit to Iraq was a different adventure for Colonel Randolph that shaped his military career and personal life, culminating in living with no more Iraq's.

Colonel Randolph shares his experiences in and out of Iraq in four books designed to provide a glimpse into life as a Soldier in combat that the American public never sees but are the grateful recipients of this service.

### About the Author

Colonel Burl Randolph, Jr. spent nearly 32 years as an Army officer. He served as an operations officer in an Army Reserve Engineer unit before entering Active Duty as a Field Artillery Officer. He transitioned to Military Intelligence (MI) after Desert Storm and served all his combat tours in intelligence positions. Between combat tours, he was a Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) Weapons Inspector; served three tours as an Army Recruiting Officer; and commanded at every level. He last served as the G2 for Army Sustainment Command and Rock Island Arsenal. Colonel Randolph has a Doctor of Management in Organizational Leadership.



The Iraq I Knew

Colonel Burl Randolph, Jr., US Army (Retired)

# The Iraq I Knew...

From Saddam Hussein  
to  
Weapons of Mass Destruction  
to  
Al Qaeda in Iraq

Book I: Into the Storm

Colonel Burl Randolph, Jr.  
U.S. Army (Retired)

## “THE LONG, HOT SUMMER...”

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*The heat was like an oven.*

Texas is HOT! I had lived in Texas for two years, but the summer of 1990 seemed the hottest I had experienced. Stationed at Fort Hood, Texas (now Fort Cavazos), known in the Army as ‘The Great Place’, it seemed more like ‘the Hot Place! In 1988 we had a fire ant infestation in the upscale apartment complex I lived in. The fire ants were vicious! When I left a basket of clean laundry by my ground floor window, the scent of the detergent must have lured them in, and they chewed through one of my Army t-shirts, causing it to look like Swiss cheese!

In 1989, a grasshopper invasion barely allowed us to walk in the motor pool without a crunching sound with each step. We had a cricket plague in the summer of 1990, and the crickets never stayed quiet. The real heat began in June 1990, when the average temperature for the month was nearly 100 degrees. We thought that the worst of it had passed because July was relatively mild, but then came August. The average temperature was again 100 degrees, one day reaching 108 degrees. Outside, it felt like an oven.

It was April 1990, and the President of Iraq, Saddam Hussein, was shaking up the world. I faintly remember the rumblings about oil prices, some sort of advanced weaponry, and Iraq being dubbed ‘*The fourth largest Army in the world.*’ None of that mattered much to me as I transitioned to a C-level staff position. I was the firing battery platoon leader, executive officer,

and Special Weapons Officer (SWO, pronounced Swo) for Bravo Battery, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Field Artillery, 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division (B BTRY, 3-82 FA, 1CD). A firing platoon consisted of four howitzer artillery guns and 40 personnel, whereas a firing battery had two firing platoons and a support platoon for nearly 120 people. SWOs led the tactical nuclear sections for firing batteries, and yes, in the early 1990s, we had tactical nukes.

Photo 1. M109A2 155mm Self-Propelled Howitzer



Photo retrieved from

Also in the 1990s, Field Artillery was one of the combat arms branches, that are now referred to as Maneuver, Fires, and Effects (MFE). MFE are the units that close with and destroy the enemy directly, with the maneuver branches of infantry, armor, and aviation. Or, indirectly with Field Artillery and Air Defense Artillery (ADA), which are the fires. The effects are the corps of engineers, chemical corps, military police, and cyber. Cyber did not exist in 1990 and is one of the newest branches in the Army based on cyber warfare and terrorism. As an aside, I served 4.5 years in the corps of engineers in the Army Reserves and 5.5 years as a Field Artillery Officer, so my first 10 years of service was as a combat arms officer, hence, my swagger.

Back then, combat arms units did not have women assigned to them, so imagine a bunch of testosterone laden, Type-A personalities all vying to be top dog. This is where my competency, confidence, directness, and gruffness were learned because without those attributes as a combat arms officer, success was limited. Under the current system with Brigade Combat Teams – BCTs, women are a part of the equation because the unit is self-sustaining with most military occupational specialties (MOS).

In this new C-level position, I was a First Lieutenant assigned to Captain's duties as the Battalion S4 – Logistics and Supply Officer (Vice President for Logistics) for 300+ artillerymen. In the Army, a battalion is considered a corporation that come in various sizes, and Battalion Commanders are Presidents and CEOs selected by a Department of the Army Selection Board. My selection for the C-level staff as a first lieutenant would have been more significant if I were not on the captain's promotion lists, slated for promotion in either September or October 1990.

As a First Lieutenant, I had not attended the Officers Advanced Course, which teaches you how to lead as a captain and function on a C-level staff, so I was literally 'winging it.' I studied a great deal to learn about the classes of supply, equipment and supply requisitions and turn-ins, and reports of surveys. Reports of Survey are now referred to as Financial Liability Investigation of Property Loss – FLIPL (pronounced Flipel). I also tracked the status of the Equipment Readiness Codes (ERC) (pronounced 'Irk'). I learned as a platoon leader why it was pronounced 'irk': If you were not at the top readiness level, someone was constantly on your butt to get there. Hence, it irked you.

All of that seemed simple compared to what was referred to as 'The War on Excess': Lateral Transfers. Lateral Transfers were where one unit swapped excess equipment with another unit that was authorized the equipment but was short. Although the unit

with the equipment had too much or was not authorized to have it, they still did not want to release it. You know, more is always better, right? That is what made this process a monster and a war. It was mostly a paperwork drill until it was time for the equipment swap, then it became oh-so-real! That is likely why an officer was assigned to oversee it, and that officer for my organization was me.

I will not bore you with the details of the constant fighting, bickering, complaining, and general harassment associated with the process, but the job got done, and with good reasons, as we all soon discovered.

### SADDAM HUSSEIN'S SABER-RATTLING

The President of Iraq in 1990 was Saddam Hussein, and he was constantly making headlines. He boasted about having the “*fourth-largest army in the world*” and all the new toys that went along with it. Big deal, I thought, ‘fourth ain’t first!’ In April 1990, Hussein bragged about manufacturing a rocket gun with a range of 750 kilometers, hence the term rocket gun. The typical artillery piece did not have a firing range that far, as those distances were reserved for rockets. The Multiple Launched Rocket System, or MLRS, was the largest rocket in the US Army inventory at the time and is also what was shipped to Ukraine in 2022 to help against the Russian invasion.

Hussein also crowed about something referred to as a SCUD missile. Unlike the Soviet FROG – Free Rocket Over Ground missile, SCUD was not an acronym and touted firing ranges of 300, 450, and 600 kilometers. None of this seemed particularly important at the time, and just like the heat in Texas, it was the norm. However, by August 1990, Hussein and the heat would have significant meaning for me, my unit, and the nation.

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## A Sudden Shift

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Sometime between May and June 1990, Saddam Hussein rumbled about how Kuwait was still part of Iraq. No one fully realized what he was talking about or how serious he was until, in July 1990, Iraqi tanks began massing on the southern border of Iraq which was the northern border of Kuwait. Reported by Iraq as 'military exercises' within their sovereign borders, the world simply watched and monitored the build-up until August 1, 1990, when the Iraqi army crossed the border into northern Kuwait. 'What was he doing?' the world asked. Once we looked at a map, it became clear what he was doing: Iraq had seized the Rumaila oilfields in northern Kuwait.

There were Rumaila oilfields in southern Iraq and northern Kuwait, but Iraq accused Kuwait of 'slant-drilling': drilling into an oil well at an angle and pumping the oil out. On the Iraq/Kuwait map I eyeballed, it looked like Kuwait had just as many or more oilwells in northern Kuwait as Iraq had. The issue: Hussein's saber-rattling in the previous months was just a pretense to invade Kuwait to seize their oil fields, in my opinion. Remember, the Iraq/Iran war lasted eight years, and although hostilities had ceased in 1988, it ravaged Iraq's natural resources and crippled its infrastructure, especially oil production.

This impeded Iraq's ability to produce and sell its oil at a level it wanted to provide income. Hussein probably thought, 'Why not just take someone else's oil?' Regardless of the United Nations (UN) Declarations and US sanctions, Iraq refused to withdraw from Kuwait. This appeared to leave only one option: an invasion by US forces to forcibly remove Iraqi troops from Kuwait.

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## So Much for The Weekend

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Everyone lives for the weekend. No matter how much you love your job, and especially if you don't, the weekend is the respite that recharges, and we all look forward to and crave it all week. So-what if the weekend is filled with honey-dos, children's sports, and yard work? Watching major league sports, attending church, and sleeping in on Sunday makes it all worth it, right?

Friday, August 10, 1990, began like any other Friday: searching for ways to leave work early. Physical Training at 0630, work call by 0830, and doing the day's business in anticipation of the weekend. That was until I received a call at 1530 (3:30 pm) from the Battalion S3 (Operations and Training Officer). "*S4, battalion formation, 1600 in the motor pool,*" he said. Nothing like a short, sweet, and to-the-point conversation with a superior officer. The S3 Officer was a Major's position, one of three majors in an artillery battalion and the second in the line of succession. My response was just as short and sweet, "*Yes, sir.*"

As we stood in formation in front of the battalion, waiting for 1600 (4pm), I asked the S3, "*What's up, Sir? Why are we here?*" His response startled me:

*"I have no idea."*

I was shocked and dismayed because that was his job: to know every operation occurring in the organization, including formations. If the S3 didn't know, then who did?

As the S3 turned and began speaking to me, he noticed that I was ignoring him, my eyes fixed on the entrance to the motor pool.

*"Hey, S4,"* he said, "*I'm talking to you. What the f\*ck are you looking at?"*

I pointed in the direction of the motor pool entrance. The S3 turned to see our Service Battery marching into the motor pool,

wearing civilian clothes. Field Artillery battalions have batteries versus companies like most of the Army. With his mouth gaped open, the S3 response was classic:

*“What the f\*ck’s going on?”*

Service Battery had a scheduled Organization Day and was supposed to be at Six Flags over Texas in Arlington, TX. As the Service Battery took its place in the formation, there was a great deal of head-scratching and questions being asked. The Service Battery Commander walked over to us and said,

*“Look, the Old Man contacted me and said to get back here ASAP. With the urgency in his voice, I didn't ask any questions. We just found everyone and put the pedal to the metal to be here by 1600.”*

Before we could begin speculating, the Battalion Commander, Executive Officer, and Command Sergeant Major entered the motor pool. After the customary reporting procedures, the Battalion Commander walked out into the middle of the formation and said,

*“Gentlemen, the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division has been alerted for deployment to Southwest Asia.”*

As he continued, you could have heard a gnat sneeze.

*“All leaves (Paid Time Off), PCS (Permanent Change of Station), and ETS (Expiration Term of Service) are canceled, and we are in a Stop Loss status. Battery Commanders and staff, meet us in the conference room ASAP.”*

Alerted to deploy? Were all leaves, PCS, and ETS moves really canceled? And what the heck was Stop Loss? What did all this mean? And where was Southwest Asia? We soon found out the answers to most of our questions and thoughts.



## IT GOT HOTTER

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Most of us were mute as we sat around the conference room table. The typical jokers were quiet, the snoozers were awake, and we fidgeters sat perfectly still. When the commander entered, he immediately told us to keep our seats and began speaking. He explained that the unprovoked invasion by Iraq into Kuwait was tantamount to a declaration of war on another sovereign country. All diplomatic measures had failed to convince Saddam Hussein to withdraw the Iraqi Army from Kuwait. Fast forward to February 2002. Does this sound familiar? The Battalion Commander explained.

*“The United Nations felt all means had been exhausted to convince Hussein to peacefully leave Kuwait. UN Resolution 662 created a coalition force of countries willing to participate in expelling the Iraqi Army from Kuwait.”*

When, where, and how we were supposed to deploy were still unclear, but the requirements for preparation were clear-cut.

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### Batter Up

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Our commander loved baseball, and I thought this metaphor / cliché was appropriate. As the meeting continued, the battalion commander said,

*“S4 (that was me), you need to have the requisitions submitted for all classes of supply to the Division Property Book Officer (PBO) by 0730 tomorrow morning.”*

Everyone oow'd, ah'd, and gasped as they all looked at me. It felt like people were looking at me through the windows, hanging from the ceiling, and looking up through the floor but of course, that did not happen, but it sure felt like it. What else could I say but "Yes, sir."

I thought, *'How in the world would we complete this humongous task of ordering all our required equipment and*

*supplies by 0730 Saturday morning?’* I needed to get back to my office quickly and nearly began running, but it was about a mile away because I had walked from the motor pool to the headquarters (HQ). Then, I needed to gather my crew of three and explain to them the mission as I knew it.

As I returned to my office, my mind raced, and my heart fluttered with everything I needed to do and war game the unknowns. I needed to call my fiancé to tell her that dinner would probably be late that night. Back then, we did not have the convenience of cell phones, text, or email, so it was not like I could walk and talk. Worse yet, I could not tell her *why* I was ‘working late’ because deployment information was and is classified, especially over an unsecured line. Once I reached the office, sweating like crazy, the new situation made it become hotter inside the building, and the outside heat became inconsequential.

Photo 2. 1LT Burl Randolph Jr. in the S4 Office of 3-82<sup>nd</sup> Field Artillery Battalion, Fort Hood, TX, Jun 1990.



Photo provided by the author.



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I hope you enjoyed your free sample of **The Iraq I Knew: From Saddam Hussein to Weapons of Mass Destruction, to Al Qaeda in Iraq – Book I: Into the Storm.**

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