

TAC NEWS

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THE BLOODY ROAD TO BAGHDAD Crisis in the Middle East: 1941 - Part II

(Continued from the March-April Tac News)

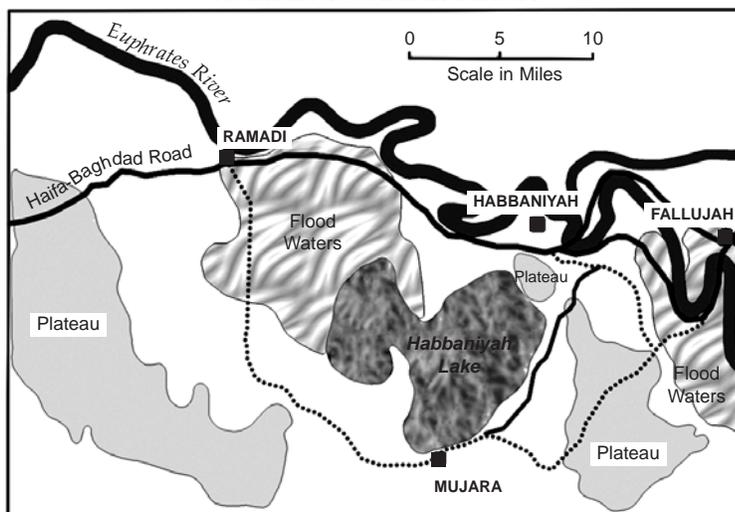
Fallujah

While all this was going on, other events were taking place at Habbaniyah. The garrison had been reinforced by a detachment from the 2/4th Gurkhas flown in from Basra and two companies from the 1st Essex detached by air from Habforce. Air Vice-Marshal J. D'Albiac, taking over from Smart who had been injured in an auto accident, ordered an advance on Fallujah to begin at nightfall on 18 May (the same night Kingcol encamped at Mujara). The advance was to be made in two columns, one along the north bank, and one along south bank of the Euphrates. The northern column was composed of one company of Gurkhas and one of Assyrians supported by some 3.7" howitzers and a few armored cars. This column ran into tough going soon after crossing the river and failed to reach Fallujah in time to take part in its capture.

To the south, a company from the King's Own was flown ahead to a spot called Notch Fall. Here a sluice gate created a bottleneck between Fallujah and Baghdad where D'Albiac hoped these troops could block the road by keeping it under fire. Meanwhile, a company of Assyrians moved down the Euphrates, settling into a palm grove about a mile from the Fallujah bridge before dawn on the 19th. At daybreak, fifty-seven RAF aircraft began bombing Iraqi positions in and around Fallujah, and began dive-bombing Iraqi entrenchments west of the bridge at around 14:50 hrs. Ten minutes later, the Assyrians exploded from the grove, supported by artillery, mortar, and machinegun fire. The Iraqis collapsed like a deflated balloon, abandoning both the bridge and the town beyond in minutes. The attackers hadn't lost a single man!

The road to Baghdad appeared to be wide open, but that was not the case. A surprisingly skillful counterattack, with armored support, developed before Kingcol could resume its advance. It was later found to have been led by German staff officers, "technicians" sent to "advise" their Iraqi allies.

RAMADI TO HABBANIYAH



The attack drove the King's Own, which had joined the Assyrians, into the northeast corner of Fallujah. The Assyrians joined in the fight and, between them, the two groups succeeded in restoring the situation. Fallujah had been secured with the loss of no more than fifty men, mostly among the King's Own. It is interesting to note how ineffective the Luftwaffe was during this period. They seemed to be satisfied with little more than harassing Habforce and dropping a few bombs on Habbaniyah, whereas they might have been much more useful defending Fallujah. As for the Iraqi force bypassed at Ramadi, except for one sally on 25 May that captured two British armored cars, little was heard from them. They simply sat on their hands until the insurgency collapsed a few days later.

The Bloody Road to Baghdad

The time had come for the final advance on Baghdad and, once more, it was decided to advance along two axes. Kingstone, with the main body (approximately 750 men) took the road that ran due east across the soggy flood plain

from Fallujah. Another force (about 500 men) made up of the Household Cavalry minus one squadron, a troop of artillery, the Arab Legion, and a few sappers, under Lt. Col. Ferguson, struck out across the open desert. Ferguson intended to strike the Tigris about ten miles upstream from Baghdad before turning south and closing on the city. The RAF would cover both columns. British intelligence estimated three Iraqi Infantry brigades and an artillery regiment between Fallujah and Baghdad, with the Luftwaffe bound to intervene, but in unknown strength.

At first light on 28 May, armored cars of the RAF recon squadron rolled out of Fallujah, followed by the Household Cavalry, the anti-tank guns with an infantry escort, the headquarters personnel, and the artillery, with the 1st Essex acting as rearguard. Thirty minutes later, Ferguson's column crossed the Euphrates and disappeared into the desert. Glubb's Arab legion, meanwhile, was already ranging as far as the Tigris and had cut the Baghdad-Mosul railroad. After marching about twenty miles (or half the distance to Baghdad), near the town of Khan Nuqta, Kingstone's vanguard ran into a body of Iraqi infantry dug in on both sides of the road. After calling a halt, Kingstone ordered some of his troopers to dismount, fix bayonets, and advance in open order. The Iraqis showed no stomach for a fight, surrendering in a mass.

The phone line running from Khan Nuqta to Baghdad was found to be intact, so Kingstone decided to make use of it. Summoning an interpreter, he instructed him to call in a report of British strength to the Iraqi headquarters in Baghdad. They were advancing in a lengthy column, containing large numbers of tanks and field artillery, he said. The trick was an old one, but worked like a charm. The Iraqis were both alarmed and depressed by this report. Rashid Ali and his supporters began looking over their shoulders for a way out of the mess in which they now found themselves. Some began quietly measuring the distance to the Persian frontier!

The 3rd Iraqi Division was dispatched westward along the Baghdad-Fallujah highway as a blocking force, only to have its vanguard scattered by RAF aircraft before it had gone more than a few miles. By the end of the day, after a few small skirmishes, Kingstone called a halt about twelve miles from Baghdad on the west bank of the Washash Canal by the "Iron Bridge" with the Iraqis dug in on the opposite bank. The bridge had been blown. It was here that word arrived by radio from Ferguson. He had arrived at the Taji railway station, a few miles upriver from Baghdad, having caught the Iraqi garrison completely by surprise. Indeed, a trainload of Iraqis sent out from the city had been forced to back out of the station before it could unload a single man.

Next morning, the 29th, Kingstone's guns were bombarding the Iraqi entrenchments beyond the canal, soon to be joined by RAF bombers. When the Essex Regiment fixed bayonets and began moving forward, resistance melted and, by noon, they were across the waterway. Sappers hurried up to repair the bridge so the rest of the column could join the advance. RAF, Luftwaffe, and even Italian aircraft zoomed around overhead all the while.

During the night Ferguson's column was hit by an Iraqi counterattack led by armored trucks and had repelled it, but could advance no further. Only four miles from Baghdad, he was faced with the town of Al Kadhimain, which, as a holy place, could not be bombarded (although fire was certainly coming out of it!). Since Al Kadhimain sat on a patch of high ground surrounded by the flooded Euphrates, it could not be bypassed.

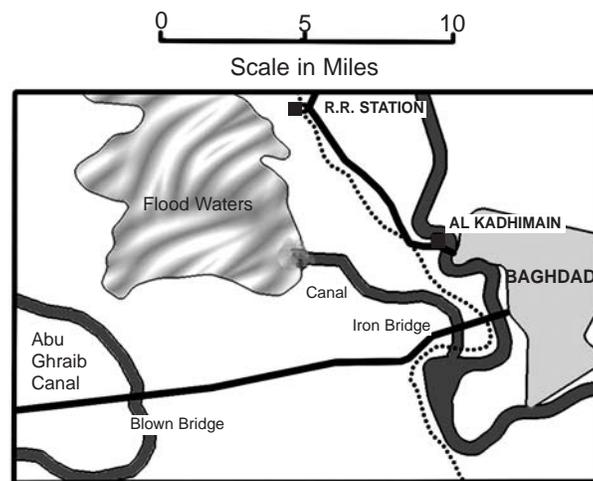
The Battle for Baghdad

On 30 May, the RAF began pounding the Baghdad army barracks without letup, with the Luftwaffe conspicuous by its absence. Rumors were beginning to spread in the city that Rashid Ali and the Golden Square had already fled. Since the bridge over the canal was finally ready, Kingstone ordered his whole command forward. It was immediately clear that not all Iraqis were ready to give up so easily. RAF armored cars making up the vanguard were stopped by an anti-tank ditch and brought under enemy machinegun fire. The Household Cavalry dismounted and advanced, with some difficulty, across flooded rice fields and dikes. With 25lbs firing overhead, they cleared the area, although further progress was impossible. Off to the left, the towers and minarets of Baghdad were now clearly in view. During the afternoon an artillery duel developed, damaging many of the column's trucks. To the north, Ferguson was still unable to pry the enemy out of Al Kadhimain. After so much success in so short a time, things seemed to be bogging down.

Though Kingstone and Ferguson knew nothing of it, the campaign was about to come to an end. The Lord Mayor of Baghdad accompanied by a delegation of army officers knocked on the gate of the British embassy around noon. The news they brought was electrifying. Rashid Ali and the Golden Square, Sherif Sharaf (the puppet Regent), the former Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, and with various Germans and Italians had indeed fled to Persia. The mayor announced he had taken over the city administration and requested an armistice. By midnight, word had been passed to Ferguson and Kingstone.

Epilogue

At 0600 hrs. on 31 May, a deputation of Iraqi officers bearing a white flag appeared at the Iron Bridge. Waiting for them were General Clark, Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac, and Major Glubb.



FALLUJAH TO BAGHDAD

A car brought Ambassador Cornwallis from Baghdad and negotiations began for an official end to the fighting. Over the following weeks, small columns were sent north to Kirkuk and Mosul to secure the oilfields, capturing several Luftwaffe pilots who had lingered a little too long. Oil began arriving at Haifa by the end of June. Another column was sent to accept the surrender of the Ramadi garrison. Reinforcements from the 10th Indian Division came north from Basra. Calm did not descend all at once. Rioting broke out in Baghdad, aimed mostly at the city's Jews. Over 700 lives were lost in a single night!

The whole affair had taken precisely thirty days from beginning to end. British losses numbered about a hundred. Though reliable numbers for Iraqi losses could not be established, they admitted to 497 killed, 686 wounded, and over a thousand prisoners. Many more than that deserted or refused to fight. German intervention amounted to about sixty aircraft, of which six teen were lost from one cause or another. As for Habforce, It was withdrawn as quickly as possible. Things were heating up elsewhere... in Syria.

Habbaniyah Garrison For Micro Armour: the Game - WWII

Assyrian Militia Co: 3x Infantry
 Assyrian Militia Support Co: 1x 3" Mortar (1) or (),
 1x 3.7" Mountain Gun (2)/Truck,
 1x AA LMG, 1x Engineer
 RAF Arm. Car Sqd: 3x Rolls-Royce AC[R]
 Gate Guard Battery: 1x 4.5" QF Mk.1 Howitzer (1)/Truck
 RAF Ground
 Personnel Platoon: 1x Infantry
 British Infantry Co: 3x Infantry
 Garrison: 1x Infantry (HQ), 3x Assyrian Militia Co,
 1x Militia Support Co, 3x British Infantry Co,
 2x RAF Armored Car Sqd, 1x Gate Guard Btry,
 10x RAF Ground Personnel Platoon

Notes:

1. The British Infantry Battalion was flown in from Karachi via Basra in April.
2. This force later took part in the march on Baghdad.

Habforce For Micro Armour: The Game - WWII

Cavalry Co (Motorized): 3x Inf/Truck, 1x 3" Mortar (1)/Truck
 Infantry Co (Motorized): 3x Inf/Truck
 Infantry Support Co: 1x 3" Mortar (2)/Truck, 1x AAMG/Truck,
 1x Eng./Truck, 1x Inf/Carrier
 Trans-Jordan
 Frontier Force Co: 3x Inf/Truck, 1x 3" Mortar (1)/Truck
 1x Engineer Co: 3x Eng./Truck
 Arab Legion: 2x Ford "1939 Pattern" AC[R],
 1x AAMG/Truck[R], 1x Inf/Truck[R]
 RAF Recon Co.: 3x "Fordson" AC
 Artillery Btry: 1-2x 25lbr (2)/Truck
 Anti-Tank Troop: 1x 2lbr ATG/Truck
 Cavalry Regiment: 1x Inf(HQ)/Truck,
 3x Cav Co (Motorized), 2x MMG/Truck
 Infantry Battalion: 1x Inf(HQ)/Truck, 4x Inf Co (Motorized),
 1x Inf Support Co.
 TransJordan
 Frontier Force Regt: 1x Inf(HQ)/Truck,
 3x Trans-Jordan Frontier Force Co,
 2x MMG/Truck
 4th Cavalry Brigade: 1x Inf(GHQ)/Truck, 3x Motorized Cav Rgt,
 1x Inf Bttn (Attached)
 Additional Force Assets: TransJordan Frontier Force Rgt,
 1x RAF Recon Co, 1x Arab Legion,
 3x Artillery Btry, 1x Anti-Tank Troop

Notes:

1. The Arab Legion was a colorful band of brigands commanded by the equally colorful Major Glubb (Glubb Pasha). "Glubb's Girls", as they were called because of their flowing robes, were recruited from among tough Bedouin nomads. Men of remarkable courage, cunning, endurance, and initiative, they distinguishing themselves in several engagements in both Iraq and Syria.
2. Kingcol was made up of units taken from this group.

Iraqi Infantry Division

Infantry Co: 3x Infantry
 Inf. Support Co: 1x 3.7" Mountain Gun (2)/Dragon, 1x MMG,
 1x AALMG, 0-1x 2lbr ATG/Truck
 Machinegun Co: 3x MMG
 Engineer Co: 3x Engineer
 Infantry Bttn: 1x Inf HQ/Truck, 4x Inf Cos, 1x Inf Support Co
 Artillery Bttn: 1x Inf HQ/Horses, 3x 18lbr (2)/Lumber
 Machinegun Bttn: 3x MG Co
 Infantry Bde: 1x Inf GHQ/Truck, 3-4x Inf Bttn
 Artillery Bde: 3x Artillery Bttn

Division: 3x Inf. Brigade, 1x Artillery Brig, 1x MG Bttn,
 1-2x Engineer Co

Notes:

1. A second artillery brigade was sometimes attached to a specific Division.
2. The above TO&E is an estimate based on available sources.
3. The Dragon was a light artillery tractor based on the Vickers Mk.6E, similar in appearance to the Soviet T.26 tank.

Iraqi Mechanized Brigade

Tank Co: 2x L3.33/35
 Infantry Co: 3x Infantry/Truck
 Inf. Support Co: 1x 3.7" Mountain Gun (2)/Dragon,
 1x MMG/Truck, 1x AALMG/Truck,
 1x 2lbr ATG/Dragon
 Recon Co: 3x Vickers/Armstrong/Crosley Arm. Car[R]
 Tank Bttn: 1x L3.33/35 HQ, 2x Tank Co
 Infantry Bttn: 1x Inf HQ/Arm.Truck, 2x Inf Co,
 1x Infantry Support Co
 Brigade: 1x Inf GHQ/Arm Truck, 1x Tank Bttn, 2x Infantry Bttn,
 1x Recon Co

Notes:

1. One infantry company in each battalion was likely mounted in jury-rigged armored trucks.
2. The Dragon was a light artillery tractor based on the Vickers Mk.6E, similar in appearance to the Soviet T.26 tank.

Footnotes

A. The force consisted of 2/11th Sikhs, 2/7th and 2/8th Gurkha Rifles, 3rd Regiment R.A., 1st Anti-Tank Battery, 10th Field Company Sappers and Miners, and 41st Field Park Company.

B. It was later found that certain Iraqi artillerymen, having been trained in England, and feeling no ill will toward their former comrades, saw to it that the guns were laid to produce as little damage as possible. This was verified by the fact that many Iraqi shells passed harmlessly over the base, landing on the empty flood plain beyond. It would have been a simple matter to adjust these fires had there been a desire to do so.

C. Attributed to Prime Minister Churchill, 30 May 1941.

Modeling the Forces Involved

GHQ produces most of the figures, vehicles, and weapons needed. For infantry, British Infantry, either in long pants (UK70/71) or short (UK59/60) will do both for themselves and the Iraqis, Sikhs (UK73/74) do fine for any Indian troops, and Infantry in "slouch hats" (UK75/76) work well for Gurkhas. Trucks are no problem. Morris 15cwt models (UK28) were most common, along with various three-tonners (UK88/89). Tanks were not much of a factor, but GHQ's Italian L3/35 (IT22) covers these nicely.

Artillery is a problem. 2lbrs and 25lbrs (UK48/48) are easy, but the 3.7" pieces, 4.5" pieces, and 18lbrs must be improvised. Italian 100mm pieces (IT20) will do for 3.7's and Italian 105's don't look bad for the 4.5's, while 18lbrs can be represented by French 75's (FR12). "Dragon" artillery tractors can be cobbled up by removing the turrets from Soviet

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Playfair, Ian. *History... Second World War, UK Military Series (Med. and Middle East)*. London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1954

Buckley, Christopher. *Five Ventures*. London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1954

Goralski, Robert. *World War II Almanac*. New York: Bonanza Books, 1981

T26s (R25) or Polish 7TPs (P3) since both these and the Dragon were developments of the Vickers "E" tank.

Recon vehicles are a bit of a problem. GHQ simply does not yet make any of the models mentioned in the text or TO&E lists other than the Universal Carrier (UK14). I might recommend the two Polish models (P4 & P5) or Marmon Herrington (UK31). In addition, the Chevy 30cwt LRDG Truck (UK82) looks really cool and should do just fine for Glubb's Arab Legion. Since most of the armored recon vehicles were machinegun equipped, you should be able to arrange something. Be sure to let GHQ know if you really want to see any the missing vehicles or weapons, customer feedback counts for more than you might think.

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