

Battle at Rumaila

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Iraq & Rumaila Overview

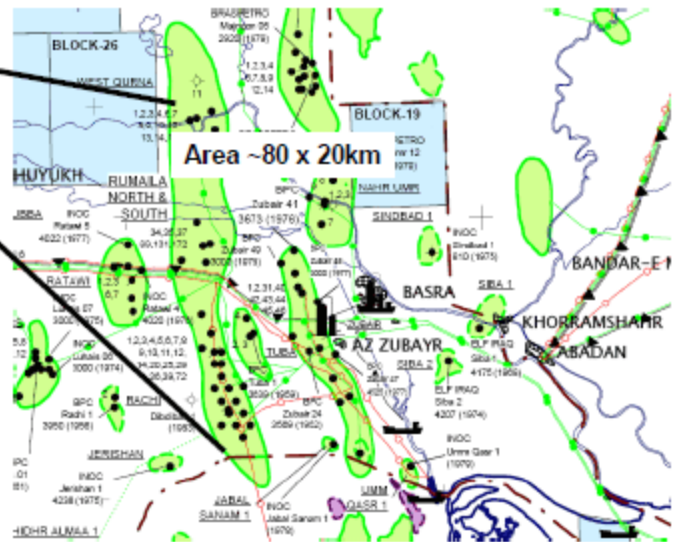


Iraq Oil & Gas

- ~80 major fields discovered (9 super giants and 22 giants)
- 115 bn bbl proven (11% global total)
- 3rd in world largest oil reserves
- Peak production (1990) of ~3.3 mmbpd
- Ambition to produce >12 mmbpd (10 yr Plan)
- Export (Mina al Bakr southern marine terminal; Turkey & Syria pipeline)

Rumaila

- Main Pay, Mishrif and Upper Shales reservoirs
- Iraq's largest & 4th in the world, Rumaila has produced since the 1950's, with ~13bnbbls recoverable left (excl. gas)
- Field output peaked at ~1.6 mmbpd (late 70s)
- Current production is around 1Mbbls per day: ~40% of Iraq's total



Desert Storm

The Battle of Rumaila, also known as the Battle of the Causeway or the Battle of the Junkyard, was a controversial engagement that took place on March 2, 1991, near the Rumaila oil field in the Euphrates Valley of southern Iraq, when the U.S. 24th Infantry Division under Maj. Gen. Barry McCaffrey attacked and nearly annihilated a large column of withdrawing Iraqi Republican Guard armored forces in the immediate aftermath of the Gulf War.

As the sun rose that day over the desert landscape, the soldiers of Team Anvil prepared for another day of searching for abandoned Iraqi equipment. They were a task-organized company team — a mixture of tanks and infantry fighting vehicles. Their commander, Captain Bob Roth, drank a cup of coffee as he sat in the cab of his Humvee listening to the radio. He cocked an eyebrow as he received word from the battalion headquarters to get his unit ready to move. There was tension in the voice on the radio; something was happening. Roth gave the order to mount up. His soldiers scurried across their vehicles tying down gear, cranking engines and loading machine guns. As the lanky Ohioan walked toward his tank he shook his head in disbelief. Two days into the cease-fire he was about to lead his company into battle in the last ground combat engagement of the Gulf War.

It was 2 March 1991, and the ground war with Iraq had supposedly ended at sunrise on 28 February with a U.S. declared cease-fire. The preceding week had happened at breakneck speed. Under the command of Lt. Colonel John Craddock, Task Force TUSKER, a tank battalion of the 24th Infantry Division, had charged across the Iraqi border on 24 February, raced nonstop for 36 hours as part of the HAIL MARY, and attacked into the Euphrates River Valley. Despite an attack through the Republican Guard's 26th Commando Brigade, as well as a night attack into a logistics depot, only three soldiers had been wounded, one seriously.

The task force was a task-organized tank battalion, 4th Battalion, 64th Armor Regiment. They consisted of two M1A1 Abrams tank companies, two M2 Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicle-equipped infantry companies, an engineer company and a headquarters company.

As part of First Brigade, the TUSKERS stood quietly astride Highway 8, just east of the Rumaila oil fields, blocking the retreat of the Iraqi Army.

First Brigade, commanded by Colonel John LeMoyne, was arrayed with two infantry battalions defending forward and Task Force TUSKER in reserve behind them. The remains of the Republican Guard, bottled up in the Basra pocket, were probing the American lines along Highway 8 looking for a way out to Baghdad. Throughout the evening scout elements had reported the movement of vehicles with their lights on. The Division's Air Cavalry Squadron confirmed the northward movement of over 200 trucks across the Hawr al Hammar causeway, a 2½-mile bridge that crossed a tributary lake of the Euphrates River. It had just been repaired by the Iraqis the evening before.

Shots fired

At 0700 hours an armored convoy of T-72s and BMPs from the Hammurabi Division ran into the scouts of 2nd Battalion, 7th Infantry and opened fire. After a brief exchange of shots, the scouts

overran an Iraqi dismounted RPG team but then reached their limit of advance. Lt. Col. Ware, the 2-7 Infantry commander, ordered his companies forward to return the fire. His tank company, commanded by Capt. Russ Shumway, opened fire from 2,000 meters, destroying approximately 20 vehicles. The stunned Iraqi column, part of a caravan of over 600 vehicles, turned north trying to work their way across the Euphrates River. The Hammurabi Division, which had remained relatively unscathed throughout the war, was attempting their escape. Ware's battalion waited in frustration for permission to advance as they watched the convoy slip away. Several long columns of armored and light-skinned vehicle were now moving north across the causeway toward Baghdad and freedom.

Escape would not be so easy. The rules of the U.S. declared cease-fire allowed the Americans to return fire when fired upon. The Iraqis were about to get more than they had bargained for.

Major General Barry McCaffrey, the 24th Infantry Division Commander, approved a counter-attack by First Brigade. While the brigade prepared to attack, 1st Bn., 24th Aviation Reg., the division's AH-64 Apache attack helicopter squadron, was placed under the operational control of LeMoynes. LeMoynes would use the helicopters as well as artillery delivered minefields to stop the convoy. He would then attack with Task Force TUSKER to finish the job.

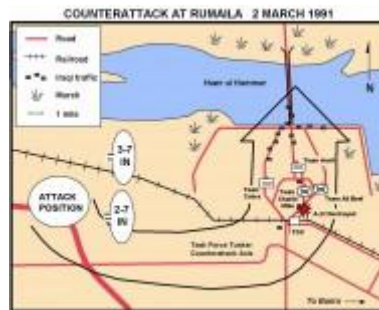


At 0830 hours the Apache helicopters, commanded by Lt. Col. Thomas Stewart, passed over the waiting TUSKERS heading for the Iraqis. Meanwhile the artillery fired scatterable munitions onto the causeway creating instant minefields slowing the Iraqis' movement. Bumper to bumper the Iraqis were lined up in a deadly traffic jam extending over seven miles. LeMoynes instructed the Apaches to fire in front of the lead vehicle to stop the convoy. The warning shots had no effect — the vehicles kept moving. The Apaches then destroyed the lead vehicle but the Iraqis simply pushed it into the water and continued their escape. LeMoynes then issued the order to destroy the convoy. During the next hour the helicopters fired 107 Hellfire missiles and countless rounds of 30mm cannon fire. With munitions expended and fuel low, the helicopters pulled off station leaving over 120 burning vehicles in their wake.

Attack positions

At 1015 hours the TUSKERS were ordered forward to an attack position just behind 2-7 Infantry. Craddock moved his battalion in a box formation with the two tank company teams on the front corners of the box and two mechanized infantry teams on the rear corners. The tank teams, Teams ANVIL and COBRA, each consisted of 10 M1A1 Abrams tanks and four M2 Bradley Fighting Vehicles; the mech teams, Teams ALL BEEF and CHARLIE MIKE, were a

mix of 10 Bradleys and four Abrams. The formation stopped in place upon reaching the attack position and waited for the order to attack. At 1045 the order came and the TUSKERS sprang forward.



On the front left and right corners of the attack formation were COBRA and ANVIL tank teams commanded by Captains Todd Mayer and Bob Roth respectively. From the turret of his tank Roth surveyed the 14 combat vehicles of his company. They were in a wedge formation with a tank platoon in the front center, a Bradley platoon on the left trail, and another tank platoon on the right trail. Roth had not lost a soldier nor vehicle and he was determined to keep it that way. As the juggernaut of 30 tanks and 29 Bradleys roared toward the Iraqis, the open, flat desert gave way to a marshy oil field crisscrossed with pipelines. The heavy, armored vehicles were forced to abandon their dispersed formations and line up in staggered columns on the roads. As they entered the peninsula, the terrain forced the entire unit through a single intersection less than a mile from the Iraqi vehicles.

Beyond the chokepoint, the road system branched into three parallel roads leading north to the Iraqis. The companies broke through the bottleneck and split onto these three routes. Team COBRA went up the left side. ANVIL and a mechanized infantry team, CHARLIE MIKE, went up the center and the other mech team, Team ALL BEEF, advanced up the right side. There was no way out — the Iraqis were trapped.

As Team ANVIL cleared the chokepoint Roth looked forward at the great billows of smoke just over the horizon. The Apaches and artillery had done a job on the Iraqis in front of them. His column plowed forward on a road raised about four feet above the surrounding mud flats. He could see several Iraqi trucks and a BMP stopped at odd angles on the road in front of them. Roth's lead platoon of tanks, under the command of Lt. Robert Andrews, opened fire on the derelict vehicles. The BMP burst into flames and a truck that was hit exploded with a deafening roar.

As 2nd Platoon passed the burning BMP, Andrews realized that they had missed a truck. He ordered the last tank in the platoon to destroy the unscathed vehicle. As the coaxial machine gun rounds struck the truck, it exploded and immediately set off a second tremendous explosion in a truck adjacent to another platoon tank. Roth watched incredulously as 2nd Platoon vanished amid the smoke and fire.

Sit Rep

Craddock, who was moving behind Team ANVIL, immediately requested a situation report. One of 2nd Platoon's tanks, A-22, had caught fire when burning debris fell through the hatches. The internal fire extinguishers had failed to quell the flames. Sergeant Lyle Stola, the tank commander of A-22, ordered the crew to abandon her when it became apparent that they could not stop the fire. The tank ammunition inside was highly volatile if exposed to flame. Stunned and bleeding, the crew took cover in the mud next to the road as ammunition continued to explode on the truck. The rest of the platoon tried to extinguish the flames with hand-held fire extinguishers but in vain. Sergeant Stola and his crew watched sullenly as their proud steed burned.

After ordering his soldiers to leave the trucks to the engineers, Roth then ordered the final destruction of A-22. The ammunition bay doors protected the classified main gun rounds from destruction by the flames in the turret. With all hope of saving the tank gone, the rounds had to perish with the rest of the vehicle. Lt. Kirk Dorr of 3rd Platoon received the grim task of finishing the job. As in the days of the plains cavalry, the injured mount had to be put out of its misery. Dorr fired two main gun sabot rounds through the rear of the turret penetrating the bay doors and exposing the rounds to the inferno within. The company rolled solemnly by the dying Abrams. Despite his best efforts, Roth had lost a tank, not to enemy fire, but to a secondary explosion. He thanked God that the crew was all right.

ANVIL and COBRA teams systematically destroyed the Iraqi tanks and infantry fighting vehicles as they moved north. The trucks were being left for the engineers to blow up later once the area was secure. It was a turkey shoot as the tanks and Bradleys fired round after round into the abandoned vehicles, many of them with their engines still running.

By 1500 hours the companies had reached the north end of the peninsula and the beginning of the causeway. The snarl of abandoned vehicles coupled with the U.S. artillery-delivered minefields made it impossible to proceed any farther mounted. The companies began the task of gathering any remaining prisoners and collecting the Iraqi dead for burial.

Iraqis defeated

Roth climbed down from his tank onto the road overlooking the lake and causeway. As far as he could see, the causeway was littered with burned and abandoned Iraqi vehicles. The shattered remnants of the doomed Hammurabi Division convoy extended for miles. Roth's gaze fell to the ground in front of him and he hesitated. In the mud were the bare footprints left by hundreds of Iraqis as they fled east towards Basra. The Iraqis had not fought here. They had run from the onslaught of Apaches, the deluge of artillery, and the thundering charge of the tanks. In the same area where civilization had begun — on the banks of the Euphrates — the Iraqis had been soundly defeated and the ground war had ended.

The battle at Rumaila had not been without significance. The destruction of the Iraqi column played heavily in the surrender talks at Safwan the next day. As McCaffrey pointed out, the "battle in the Rumaila oil fields had one major impact, among other things, the immediate return

of our prisoners of war. Our CINC, General Schwarzkopf, looked them dead in the eye and said, 'Earlier today, with zero effort on our part, we destroyed a division minus. Hand back our prisoners'."

The 24th Infantry had destroyed 30 tanks, 33 artillery pieces, 56 other armored vehicles, 486 trucks, as well as an estimated 200 Iraqi dead and 89 captured. The cost to the Americans had been only one wounded soldier and one destroyed tank. The one-sided battle was the final blow to the Iraqis in a disastrous conflict.

[Source: Military magazine Feb 2011 ++]