

**IRON SOLDIERS: HOW AMERICA'S 1ST
ARMORED DIVISION CRUSHED
IRAQ'S ELITE REPUBLICAN GUARD¹**

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Although many books have been written about the war in the Persian Gulf, few have been written from the perspective of the soldiers on the ground. Tom Carhart provides this perspective in his book *Iron Soldiers*. Based primarily on interviews with unit members, Carhart attempts to explain how the 1st Armored Division prepared for and fought its part of the Persian Gulf War. The division's mission, as part of VII Corps, was to destroy Iraq's Republican Guard. The division achieved a higher level of mission accomplishment than did the book. While the book is interesting and informative, it lacks the depth and objectivity to explore fully the interesting issues it raises about how the war was fought by this armored division.

The book begins as one battalion of the division, 1/37 Armor, prepares to engage the Iraqi Republican Guard for the first time. After the author introduces Major General Griffiths, the Division Commander, the division G3 and G2, and some of the men, 1/37 Armor rolls off to their first engagement. As the battalion rolls forward, Mr. Carhart takes the reader back to Germany, where the division was first notified that it was deploying to the desert. From that point, the book marches forward from preparation for deployment, through movement to Southwest Asia, preparation for combat, to the actual combat operation itself. Along the way, the author introduces and resolves several subplots which fall into two main categories: those that are operational in nature, and those of a human interest appeal.

The scene for these subplots is set as the division learns that it will deploy as part of VII Corps. First, Mr. Carhart discusses the reorganization of the division—how third brigade, 3d Infantry Division, under the com-

1. TOM CARHART, *IRON SOLDIERS: HOW AMERICA'S 1ST ARMORED DIVISION CRUSHED IRAQ'S ELITE REPUBLICAN GUARD* (New York: Pocket Books, 1994); 325 pages, \$5.99 (soft cover).

2. Judge Advocate General's Corps, United States Army. Written while assigned as a student, 45th Graduate Course, The Judge Advocate General's School, United States Army, Charlottesville, Virginia.

mand of Colonel James Riley, went in place of 1st Armored Division's first brigade, and how 6/6 Infantry moved from third brigade to second brigade. He then introduces the key players of the subplots.

The most interesting pre-deployment subplot involves Colonel Snowmont, the third brigade commander. According to General Griffiths, of all of his brigade commanders, Colonel Snowmont was the one "who looked like he may one day be the brightest star of all."³ This assessment changed, however, as General Griffiths becomes concerned about third brigade's apparent lack of enthusiasm (and readiness) as the deployment draws near. Finally, Colonel Snowmont takes himself out of command, indicating that he suffered from a longstanding medical problem that made him nondeployable.

It is this incident, as much as others in the book, that leave the reader frustrated and seeking a more definitive resolution of the issue presented. As the incident with Colonel Snowmont unfolds, the reader discovers that, according to the colonel, he suffered a head injury in a training accident in the late 1980's that he managed to keep from limiting his career. Apparently, he had a CAT scan done prior to the deployment that showed no evidence of malfunction, and Brigadier General Hendrix, the Assistant Division Commander for Maneuver, believed Colonel Snowmont was trying to avoid his duty by feigning medical problems. General Griffiths accepted Colonel Snowmont's relinquishment of command and put Colonel Zanini in his place. The book never offered a conclusion, nor any objective evidence, as to whether Colonel Snowmont suffered from a medical condition. We are also not told what happened to Colonel Snowmont after he gave up command of the brigade. Did he retire? Was he reassigned? In a strict sense, these matters are beyond the scope of the story of how the 1st Armored Division fought the war, and it may be impossible to come to any definite conclusion regarding what really happened. However, the story of a senior commander (indeed, the "brightest star") who voluntarily gives up the opportunity to lead his unit into war, is so intriguing and unusual that some sort of further explanation or investigation would have been welcomed by the reader.

Another subplot of an operational nature involved the second brigade commander, Colonel Meigs, and one of his battalion commanders, Lieutenant Colonel Mike McGee. Lieutenant Colonel McGee's battalion, 6/6 Infantry, was originally part of third brigade. However, the battalion was

3. CARHART, *supra* note 1, at 49.

moved to second brigade to replace their infantry battalion that was not deploying. As the division deployed to Saudi Arabia and prepared for war, friction developed between Lieutenant Colonel McGee and Colonel Meigs. Eventually, it got to the point where Colonel Meigs issued an administrative letter of concern to Lieutenant Colonel McGee and the battalion commander became convinced that Colonel Meigs would soon relieve him of command.

Here again, however, Mr. Carhart leaves the reader with unanswered questions. Lieutenant Colonel McGee was not relieved, and in fact the 6/6 Infantry played an important part in the division's war effort. Lieutenant Colonel McGee and Colonel Meigs resolved their differences at the conclusion of the battle of Medina Ridge. According to Mr. Carhart, as Lieutenant Colonel McGee traveled through the battlefield at the conclusion of the battle, he developed a new respect for Colonel Meigs based on the mass destruction leveled against the Republican Guard by the second brigade. According to Mr. Carhart, all differences were resolved in a radio transmission where both commanders profess admiration and gratitude for the other. As in the case of Colonel Snowmont, however, questions were left unanswered concerning the exact nature of the disagreements between the two men. Was Lieutenant Colonel McGee insubordinate? Did Colonel Meigs ride Lieutenant Colonel McGee too hard in his attempts to demonstrate second brigade standards? Again, these questions may never be definitively answered, but more information, or even an opinion offered by the writer, would be helpful to the reader.

The human interest subplots are both heartwarming and poignant. Mr. Carhart relates the story of two lieutenants, an armor platoon leader and a military police platoon leader, who fell in love just before they both deployed to Southwest Asia. Included in this subplot is a rather humorous account of how the officers and senior noncommissioned officers in the armor battalion arrange a meeting between the two in the desert. This is one subplot that Mr. Carhart resolves: included in the book are photos of the lieutenants' wedding.

Mr. Carhart provides his greatest insight into the human dynamics of this war, however, in his coverage of the role and activities of the family members left behind in Germany. He provides a detailed account of how the spouses of officers and senior noncommissioned officers took on the important mission of keeping up the morale and spirits of family members during the deployment, including a detailed account (including photos) of an "unbirthday party" given on Valentine's Day.

On a more poignant note, one of the author's subplots involves a matter that certainly has occurred throughout history, yet has not received much attention until recently: mothers leaving their young children and going off to war. In the book, a young pregnant lieutenant in the aviation brigade asks her supervisor, the brigade S-1, to hold her slot for her until she returns from maternity leave from having her third child. However, after the baby is born, the lieutenant changes her mind and wishes not to deploy. In the book, the brigade S-1, also a woman, denies the young lieutenant's request and requires her to return to duty (after her maternity leave had expired). The S-1's order to the lieutenant highlights the conflicts that arise when members of the armed forces (male or female) are required to fulfill their obligations as parents and as soldiers:

Lieutenant Hill, I didn't *make* you join the Army, I didn't *make* you go to flight school, I didn't *make* you get married, I didn't *make* you have a baby and I did not *make* you fight to keep your slot open when the deployment was announced! I am now simply *enforcing* your voluntary *agreement*! The army's sole purpose is to be prepared to fight and protect the interests of the United States! It is *not* a social welfare agency! Now listen to me! So long as you draw an army paycheck and are physically able to perform our duties, you *must* perform them!⁴

These subplots develop in the context of the division preparing for war. As the various stories unfold, the reader learns about how the division moved to the desert, trained for the war, and fought the war. Included are explanations of the functions of various staff officers and levels of command, as well as a primer on basic armor tactics. Mr. Carhart, a former officer who served in Vietnam, dedicated the book to the noncommissioned officer's corps, so the book naturally highlights the important role played by the noncommissioned officers of the division. Mr. Carhart's explanations are readable and understandable, yet not too basic for those readers who already have a working knowledge of the Army. To make his points clearly he provides basic maps of the division's position. While those who served in Southwest Asia may find the maps too simplistic, they do place the division in the context of the theater of operations. Also included are photographs of many of the characters mentioned in the book.

4. *Id.* at 95 (emphasis in original).

Although the book is full of useful, pertinent information, the usefulness, and indeed the credibility, of the information provided is diluted somewhat by the author's cheerleading writing style. Perhaps the reason he fails to provide the information and opinions for the subplots previously discussed is simply because to do so would involve taking sides in some form or fashion. To take sides in such a manner would no doubt detract from one of the soldier's image. Mr. Carhart appears too enamored of his subjects to conduct such an objective analysis.

This lack of objectivity and critical analysis is the most glaring in the discussion of a friendly fire incident during the war that killed one soldier and injured others. The author discusses the investigation of the incident in one sentence, and then concludes that the accident was "not terribly surprising: They [the victims of the friendly fire incident] were, after all, broken down in a war zone, and there were a lot of exhausted and heavily armed American soldiers moving across the Iraqi desert in the dead of night with blood in their eyes."⁵ To take such a cavalier attitude to such a serious problem does a great disservice to the cause the author tries so desperately to promote. After the war, much attention and criticism was focused on the friendly fire incidents that occurred during the war. News media and Pentagon officials alike discussed how these incidents could have been avoided, and what technological or operational changes could deter such incidents in the future. To dismiss this tragedy as almost inevitable, without any discussion of the investigation into the incident or plans for improvement in the future, is to miss one of the most controversial and important issues to come out of the Persian Gulf War.

As part of Mr. Carhart's style, he includes melodramatic prose that grows increasingly tiresome as the book progresses. Two examples of this style should be enough to make this point:

And now, there was an unmistakable sense in the air that this was for *real*, that they were going out with their fearsome weapon systems and kill Iraqis. The smell of cordite made their hearts pound, their blood churn, their mouths water, and the appetite for war grew stronger every day.⁶

The wagon train of supplies edged forward single file, trying oh-so-carefully to keep their tires in the path cut by their point man's

5. *Id.* at 283.

6. *Id.* at 116 (emphasis in original).

steel tracks. Flaming Iraqi T-72 steel torches lit their way, and bagpipes playing thunderous tunes of glory seemed about to burst from Sergeant Kennedy's forehead as he led them in a slow parade across the burning battlefield.⁷

Even the soldiers involved, although excited about the opportunity to apply their training in live combat, would most likely agree that such prose overstates their emotions.

The soldiers and family members of the 1st Armored Division have much to be proud of for their efforts in support of Operation Desert Storm. Although lacking in detailed critical analysis, Mr. Carhart's book captures the essence of these efforts. Despite its shortcomings, this book should be on the reading list of all students of Operation Desert Shield/Storm.

7. *Id.* at 265.