



The Fires of Babylon: Eagle Troop and the Battle of 73 Easting

Mike Guardia

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As a new generation of main battle tanks came onto the line during the 1980s, neither the United States nor the USSR had the chance to pit them in combat. But once the Cold War between the superpowers waned, Iraq's Saddam Hussein provided the chance with his invasion of Kuwait. Finally the new US M1A1 tank would see how it fared against the vaunted Soviet-built T-72.

On the morning of August 2, 1990, Iraqi armored divisions invaded the tiny emirate of Kuwait. The Iraqi Army, after its long war with Iran, had more combat experience than the US Army. Who knew if America's untested forces could be shipped across the world and then contest the battle-hardened Iraqis on their home ground? The Kuwaitis had collapsed easily enough, but the invasion drew fierce condemnation from the United Nations, which demanded Hussein's withdrawal. Undeterred by the rhetoric, the Iraqi dictator massed his forces along the Saudi Arabian border and dared the world to stop him. In response, the United States led the world community in a coalition of 34 nations in what became known as Operation Desert Storm—a violent air and ground campaign to eject the Iraqis from Kuwait. Leading this charge into Iraq were the men of Eagle Troop in the US Army's 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment.

Commanded by then-Captain H. R. McMaster, Eagle Troop was the lead element of the US VII Corps' advance into Iraq. On February 26, 1991, Eagle Troop encountered the Tawakalna Brigade of Iraq's elite Republican Guard. By any calculation, the 12 American tanks didn't stand a chance. Yet within a mere 23 minutes, the M1A1 tanks of Eagle Troop destroyed more than 50 enemy vehicles and plowed a hole through the Iraqi front. History would call it the Battle of 73 Easting.

Based on hours of interviews and archival research by renowned author Mike Guardia, this minute-by-minute account of the US breakthrough reveals an intimate, no-holds-barred account of modern warfare.

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