

Reaching Out:

Psychological Operations in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM



by Cherilyn A. Walley and Michael R. Mullins

PSYCHOLOGICAL Operations (PSYOP) is potentially one of the most powerful tools the military possesses. Conveyed to foreign audiences in a variety of ways, PSYOP messages support U.S. goals and objectives, whether they be offensive, defensive, or peaceful in nature. Properly applied, PSYOP



The Special Operations Media System-B (SOMS-B) consists of a Mobile Radio Broadcast System (MRBS) and a Mobile Television Broadcast System (MTBS). With the SOMS-B, the 4th Psychological Operations Group is able to broadcast messages on AM, FM, and short wave radio bands, as well as television signals.

can wear down an enemy's resolve to fight, diffuse a tense standoff between would-be attackers and U.S. troops, and ensure fair distribution of humanitarian aid. PSYOP activities leading up to and during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF) used a number of means

to deliver coalition messages to the Iraqi military and the civilian population. Two of the more notable methods of distribution were radio and television broadcasts of coalition programming and leaflet drops.

A large part of the PSYOP in OIF activities consisted of media broadcasts directed at the Iraqi people, both military and civilian. Both the Special Operations Media System-Broadcast (SOMS-B) and the EC-130E Commando Solo proved to be capable and valuable broadcast platforms. Working independently and in concert, the SOMS-B and Commando Solo teams successfully delivered their messages to critical audiences throughout Iraq.

The SOMS-B consists of two primary subsystems: the Mobile Radio Broadcast System (MRBS) and the Mobile Television Broadcast System (MTBS). Between the two subsystems, the SOMS-B can broadcast via AM, FM, and short wave radio, as well as television. The Joint PSYOP Task Force made up of elements of the 4th PSYOP Group initially set up a SOMS-B in Kuwait in mid-December 2002 and immediately began to broadcast messages throughout southern Iraq. In the beginning the SOMS-B unit broadcast radio messages for five hours a day, but by February transmission times had extended to eighteen hours every day. When combat operations began on 19 March, the SOMS-B broadcasts provided PSYOP support twenty-four hours a day.¹

CPT Robert Curriss, the commander of the SOMS-B element, requested additional SOMS-B equipment be brought into theater to supplement his unit's capability. The new unit, a SOMS-B "light" comprised of just the MRBS, accompanied 3rd Infantry Division north to Baghdad. A third SOMS-B arrived from Romania and began broadcasting from Baghdad International Airport (BIAP). With three systems established between



The EC-130E Commando Solo aircraft has the ability to broadcast on commercial AM/FM and short wave radio bands, VHF/UHF television bands, and military VHF/HF/FM frequencies. Such versatility allows the Air Force National Guard 193rd Special Operations Wing, based in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, to distribute psychological operations messages over vast areas.

Kuwait and Baghdad, combined with daily Commando Solo broadcasts, almost all of Iraq had access to coalition messages via AM, FM, and short wave radio.²

The EC-130E Commando Solo aircraft also played a significant role in broadcasting PSYOP messages. Based in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, the Air Force National Guard's 193rd Special Operations Wing (SOW) is home to the Commando Solo Aircraft and is tasked with providing aerial transmission of PSYOP messages. The Commando Solo platform can broadcast on the commercial AM/FM and short wave radio bands, VHF/UHF television bands, and military VHF/HF/FM frequencies. Having such comprehensive broadcast capabilities in an aircraft enables the 193rd SOW to support military operations worldwide. As the 193rd SOW is the only unit in the Air Force dedicated to this mission, the Commando Solo crews truly do support global operations, and OIF was no exception.³

A detachment of the 193rd SOW, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel (LtCol) GERALD Otterbein, arrived in the region on 24 March 2003. The detachment consisted of one EC-130E Commando Solo aircraft, two full EC-130E crews of eleven people each, two support C-130s, and associated staff and support personnel. The Commando Solo detachment brought into theater aerial television transmission, AM/FM/HF radio broadcast, and "net intrusion" (military radio net interruption) capability, all of which allowed wider distribution of PSYOP messages.⁴

The 193rd SOW detachment was fully operational within forty-eight hours of arriving in theater. Under the tactical control of the Joint PSYOP Task Force (JPOTF) in Qatar, the detachment was given areas to

target with the television and radio broadcast tapes that the Commando Solo crews received from the 4th PSYOP Group at Fort Bragg. The Army PSYOP liaison attached to the 193rd SOW, Sergeant (SGT) Dennis Relyea, reviewed the taskings and planned and coordinated all broadcast plans with the detachment's Operations Officer, LtCol Kevin Satow.⁵

Flight planning proved to be a delicate undertaking. The 193rd SOW initially flew missions outside Iraqi airspace, but still close enough that it could transmit to the majority of western Iraq. The JPOTF urged LtCol Otterbein to broadcast to cities north of the Euphrates River, which would require flying over western Iraq, making the aircraft vulnerable to attack. The EC-130E mission called for it to orbit in "tracks" for long periods of time. The EC-130E is also an extraordinarily heavy aircraft, lacking the maneuverability necessary to react quickly to threats. While transmitting, the aircraft also normally trails a four hundred-foot long wire antenna that is invisible at night, which further reduces maneuverability. Major (Maj) David Redclay, an aircraft commander in the 193rd, explained that with the antenna deployed, the aircraft "can make one reaction from a threat. If there's a follow on, second one, you're going to the guillotine the aircraft or cut the wire and then our AM broadcasts are done." Further risk lay in the fact that the aircraft's APR-47 missile warning system was inoperative. In short, the 193rd SOW would not conduct flights over hostile areas until the Joint Special Operations Air Detach-



During the early days of OIF, Commando Solo crews flew broadcast-intense missions over Iraq. Besides radio broadcasts, the EC-130E transmitted such television programs as "Towards Freedom TV" in support of coalition goals.

Translated excerpt of a Commando Solo broadcast:

People of Iraq. The standard of living for Iraqis has dropped drastically since Saddam came into power. Every night, children go to sleep hungry in Iraq. The sick suffer from ailments that are easily treatable in the rest of the world.

Saddam has built palace after palace for himself and has purchased a fleet of luxury cars—all at the expense of the Iraqi people. This money would be much better suited to build libraries and schools. This money would have gone a long way to provide better food and medicine for the people of Iraq. The amount of money Saddam spends on himself in one

day would be more than enough to feed a family for a year.

The Oil for Food program was set up by the UN to provide relief aid to Iraqis who had fallen into poverty due to Saddam's leadership. Only 25 billion dollars out of the available 53 billion were ever applied for. Much of the food and equipment purchased under the Oil for Food program was stored away in warehouses, never to reach their destinations. Saddam illegally resold much of this equipment for his own profit. Saddam has exploited the Oil for Food program to illegally buy weapons and materials intended

to produce nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons and for lavish gifts for his elite regime members.

The countless pictures and billboards of Saddam that litter the landscape of Iraq do nothing to help the people of Iraq. Saddam has built monuments to promote his legacy at your expense. These lavish monuments serve as a constant reminder to the Iraqi people of money that would have been better spent on the welfare of the Iraqi people.

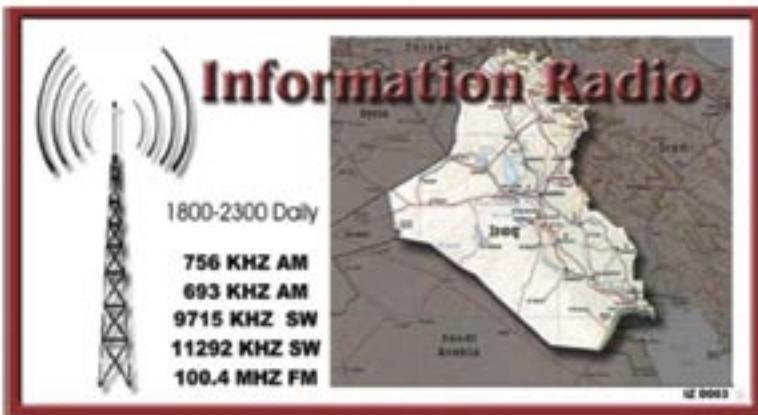
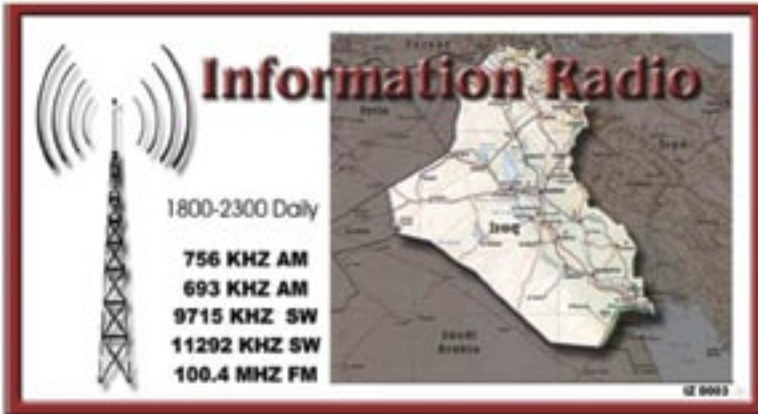
How much longer will this corrupt rule be allowed to exploit and oppress the Iraqi people?

ment (JSOAD) and 193rd SOW detachment intelligence officers decided the threat was at an acceptable level.⁶

With clearance from the JSOAD, the detachment advanced operations to an area north of the Euphrates River in the first week in April. The JPOTF added television broadcasts to the unit's mission the following

week, giving the EC-130E crews more responsibility than usual. One of the first broadcasts from the new coalition television service called "Towards Freedom TV" included an interview with opposition group members, information on humanitarian aid deliveries, and a feature on Iraqi culture and arts. Another

Leaflets advertising "Information Radio" comprised an important part of the multimedia campaign to promote coalition-sponsored radio programming to the Iraqi people.



contained a joint message from George Bush and Tony Blair to the Iraqi people. The programming was outsourced to World Television, a production company in Iraq, which transmitted the programming by satellite daily to the 4th PSYOP Group at Fort Bragg for approval and distribution. Once approved, 4th PSYOP Group transmitted the program by satellite to Qatar, where it was transferred to videotape for broadcast from both the EC-130E Commando Solo and SOMS-B units.

Of the increase in the EC-130E's workload, MAJ Redclay observed, "I've never run this many frequencies and missions out of the back end as an aircraft commander... Usually it's two tasks, and a third one if you get around to it." Despite the pressure of extended missions over Iraq, the members of the 193rd SOW detachment remained focused. LtCol Otterbein stated, "We're aware of the impact we have on the theater battle... If we get one person to put his gun down and surrender, think about how many Americans that might have saved."⁷

The 4th PSYOP Group turned to the air for more than electronic broadcasts; it also made liberal use of leaflet airdrops to spread important PSYOP messages. Between 12 December 2002 and 18 March 2003, U.S. forces dropped over twenty million PSYOP leaflets into Iraq. By mid-April the total exceeded forty million. The 4th PSYOP Group, who orchestrated the entire PSYOP effort of the war, designed the leaflets and delivered them to U.S. Navy aircraft carriers by computer, where they were printed and packed in canisters typically holding sixty thousand leaflets each. Naval F-18s stationed aboard aircraft carriers, including the USS *Harry S. Truman*, USS *Theodore Roosevelt*, and USS *Constellation*, then dropped the leaflet bombs in targeted areas throughout Iraq.⁸

The Army performed its share of leaflet drops, as well, giving deployed PSYOP personnel an opportunity to participate in the air distribution end of the PSYOP campaign. Between 14 and 23 April 2003, C Company, 9th PSYOP Battalion, conducted over ten static-line leaflet box drop missions over Baghdad in support of 3rd Infantry Division. The missions were typically conducted with blacked out UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters flying at approximately 3000 to 5000 feet above ground level, carrying two drop boxes containing fifty thousand leaflets each. The first two missions over Baghdad were carried out by SGT Lizabeth Lee and Corporal Jennifer Salkiewicz, both from the Product Development Team, C Company, 9th PSYOP Battalion. The PSYOP personnel on board each helicopter took into account wind direction and velocity, the size and weight of the leaflets, and the altitude the boxes were being dropped

from in order to compute wind drift. With accurate calculation, the drops delivered the necessary density of leaflets over the targeted areas within the city.⁹

One of the more successful leaflet efforts orchestrated by the 4th PSYOP Group addressed the need to protect Iraq's petroleum production and processing facilities. Leaflets urged Iraqi citizens and soldiers to remember that oil was a vital part of the nation's



UH-60 Black Hawks were used for early static line leaflet drops over Baghdad. SGT Lizabeth Lee and CPL Jennifer Salkiewicz of C Company, 9th Psychological Operations Battalion conducted two such missions in mid-April 2003.

economy, and the destruction of the oil infrastructure would negatively impact their families. The combination of the PSYOP leaflet program and the advancement of combat operations is credited with preventing Iraqi forces from perpetrating the kind of environmental devastation that was committed in 1991, when they set oil fields ablaze in Kuwait.¹⁰

Major General Victor E. Renuart, CENTCOM Director of Operations, discussed the PSYOP impact in his 10 April 2003 Operation IRAQI FREEDOM Briefing: "We mentioned the 40-some-odd million leaflets. And the people have said, 'Well, so what do they really do for you?' Well, let me give you an example. As we were going back into the oil fields with the U.K. engineers, U.S. engineers, Kuwaiti engineers, and returning the Iraqi oil workers back to the sites, we were interview-

ing the staff of the Iraqi oil industry. We noticed that many of these wells had, in fact, been wired to be destroyed. And we also noticed that many of them, even though there were explosives set in place, had the valves turned off, so that, even if you had an explosion, it wouldn't necessarily damage the oil well. And we said, 'You all were here. You watched this happen. How did they do this?' And they said, 'We read your leaflets. We heard your broadcasts. We understand that keeping the oil infrastructure was important to our future. And so while we complied for our own protection with the regime, we ensured that true damage to the oil fields would not occur.'" ¹¹

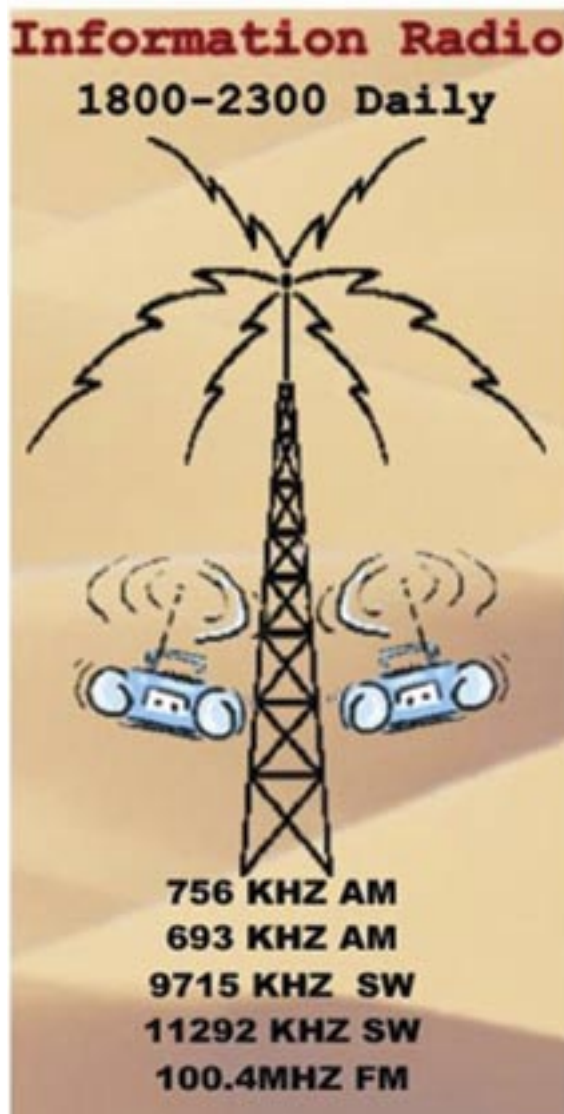
The 4th PSYOP Group seldom used only one method of disseminating PSYOP messages. Radio and television broadcasts were coordinated with leaflet drops as often as possible, in order to reach the maximum number of people and reinforce the messages. The PSYOP efforts surrounding the coalition's "Information Radio" program is a prime example of broadcast-leaflet coordination. While the radio programs were obviously a broadcast media distributed by SOMS-B and from the EC-130E Commando Solo broadcast platform, leaflet drops were used to advertise the programming and encourage Iraqis to tune into Information Radio for accurate and pertinent news.¹²

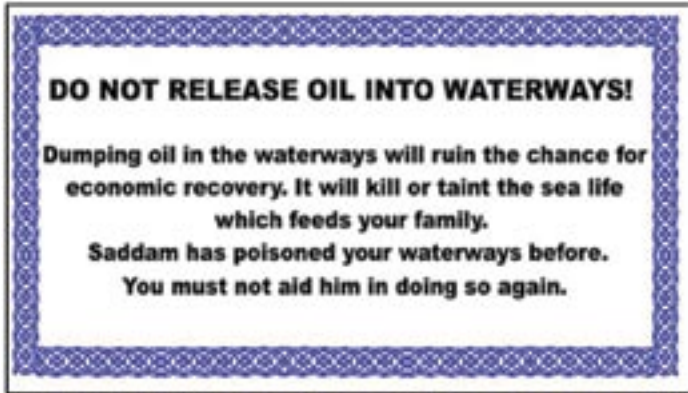
Under the direction of 4th PSYOP Group at Fort Bragg, PSYOP efforts in OIF took many forms and met many needs in the early days of the war. Whether urging cooperation with coalition forces or providing much needed information about the new government, PSYOP messages advanced the coalition's cause and saved lives. The close cooperation of all branches of the U.S. military allowed for the widest possible distribution of PSYOP messages. Coordination of diverse media—from radio and television to printed leaflets—reinforced important messages and helped the messages reach diverse segments of the population. PSYOP still plays an important part in the stabilization and rebuilding efforts going on in Iraq today, and will continue to be a vital component of U.S. military strategy in years to come. 📡

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Endnotes

- 1 Captain Robert Curris, 8th Psychological Operations Battalion, 4th Psychological Operations Group, interview by Lieutenant Colonel Robert W. Jones, Jr., 23 June 2003, Fort Bragg, NC, tape and transcripts, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Paul Hart, "The Most Deployed Unit in the Air National Guard," *The Voice of the Quiet Professionals of AFSOC*, www.spectrumwd.com/c130/articles/193rdsog.htm.
- 4 Lieutenant Colonel Michael Schellhammer, "Psychological Operations (PSYOP) in Joint Special Operations Area-West," 9, USSOCOM History Office Classified Files, MacDill Air Force Base, FL.
- 5 Ibid., 10.
- 6 Ibid., 11.
- 7 Ibid., 14.
- 8 Rick Rogers, "Psy-war: Old tactic, new technique; unit aims to confuse, convince," *Daily Press* (Newport News, VA), 15 April 2003.
- 9 Major David A. Converse, "Operation Iraqi Freedom, Psychological Operations Field Collection Team, Operational Assessment," 57–58, copy in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 10 Ibid., 34.
- 11 Major General Victor Renuart, Director of Operations, "CENTCOM Operation Iraqi Freedom Briefing," 10 April 2003, centcom.mil/CENTCOMNews/Transcripts/20030410.htm.
- 12 Converse, 33.





The 4th Psychological Operations Group produced leaflets urging Iraqis to preserve their oil resources by not sabotaging pipelines or refineries. By all accounts, the leaflets were instrumental in preventing widespread destruction of the oil infrastructure.

While usually informative and designed to encourage positive behavior, some leaflets deliberately targeted enemy troops and warned them against hostile action toward coalition forces.

