

Welcome to Iraq

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Welcome to Iraq

by [DannyCalavera](#)

Summary

Captain John Watson of the RAMC has just been deployed to Iraq. He quickly finds out what it means to be a soldier and a doctor.

A set of Oneshots in which I put Captain Watson in the same situations I experienced as an Army Combat Medic in Iraq and Afghanistan.

All of the situations in this series are real and happened exactly as described.

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

Iraq 2007 Op TELIC II

“We are approaching Basrah. Please put on your helmets and body armour for landing” The voice of the pilot could barely be heard over the deafening drone of the four propellers of the C-130 Hercules transport plane. The cargo hold of the aircraft was a bustle of activity as all the soldiers started digging around their bench seats for their equipment. Captain John Watson of the Royal Army Medical Corps was on his first deployment to a warzone after completing his officer training at Sandhurst. He had qualified as a doctor the year before when he took the offer for the Army to pay for his medical degree in return for at least 3 years service. Now he was on a flight into the main operating base for British troops in Iraq, Basrah COB, his home for the next 7 months.

Capt Watson fastened his helmet and tightened the Velcro of his body armour. When the Loadmaster had made sure everyone was secured, he signalled to the pilot through his headset. All the white lights in the aircraft switched off and was replaced by one red light that illuminated the door to the cockpit. A deep groan rose from the 50 or so troops as the huge aircraft descended in a steep dive, Capt Watson swallowed down the urge to be sick as his stomach lurched up to his throat. The loud hum of the engines was replaced by a roar of fast moving air as the tail ramp opened halfway in preparation for landing. A much louder groan came in response to a huge bang and a flash of white coming from outside the aircraft. From his seat facing the rear of the plane, Watson saw the smoke trails of the aircraft's flares firing off. 10 seconds later the aircraft touched down on the tarmac of Basrah's airfield.

Following the long line of soldiers out of the aircraft, Watson was hit with the heady smell of aviation fuel. It was a little after 11pm local time, it was dark, yet the heat of Iraq was still oppressive. Stepping off the tail of the aircraft was like stepping into an oven. Waiting just off to the side of the runway was a line of old minibuses, a soldier was stood by each of them holding a piece of card with the names of different regiments on them. Watson found the bus that was designated 'UK MED GROUP' and approached the soldier stood by. "Captain Watson. Am I to come with you?" Watson asked the soldier "Yes Sir, I'm to take you to Brady Lines where you will get your posting orders in the morning". Watson nodded at the soldier and boarded the bus. After a few minutes of other medical troops boarding, the bus pulled away.

The bus had been driving for no more than two minutes before it screeched to a halt. "Mortar attack! Off the bus!" the soldier who met them off the plane was stood at the door quickly fastening his helmet strap. Everyone scrambled off the bus, helmets and body armour thrown on in haste. Watson dropped into the ditch just off the road with the other soldiers. The whine of the Mortar Alarm echoed hauntingly across the vast base, the sound emanating from many different loudspeakers gave it an eerie undulating sound that came from everywhere. After a few moments the alarm stopped, Watson moved to get up, assuming the attack was over. He was quickly pulled back down by the soldier next to him. as soon as his chest hit the sand and gravel, *WHUMP!* The first impact of the rocket attack shook the ground. The noises of the impacts continued for a half an hour. Some were a little too close, some were barely heard. There was a gasp from the sheltering troops as a sound like an angry chainsaw tore through the silence between impacts. Bright red tracer flew from two different points on the base.

Watson thought that it looked like the sparks from an angle grinder only much, much bigger. As the red fire climbed thousands of feet into the air, a loud pop and an orange spark bloomed where the two tracers crossed paths. "What the hell was that?" Watson asked the soldier who had pulled him down earlier. "Phalanx gun. Big miniguns mounted on the side of US Navy ships to shoot down jets, they are set up to shoot down mortars and rockets if they are likely to hit populated areas on the base. They are awesome, just watch your ears if you are caught near them during an attack." The soldier grinned back. "Is this your first tour?" the soldier asked, shifting on his side slightly to face Watson. "Yeah" Watson replied sheepishly. "Welcome to Iraq" the soldier chuckled.

One Month Later

Captain John Watson had spent the past two weeks commanding a new armoured medical truck on the base resupply convoys, a Mastiff Armoured truck fitted out like an ambulance. He had a team of a medic and two drivers in the vehicle for the 6 hour journey. The drivers took it in turns to drive the truck and the doctor and the medic took it in turns to do 'top cover' duties; this meant manning the machine gun turret on top of the vehicle to defend against any attack and to spot anything suspicious on the route. He set his drivers and medic to prepare the truck for the journey while he attended the commanders briefing. It was a journey like any other, with one exception. On this convoy they would be taking more civilian trucks than they had taken before, 35 trucks. Increased insurgent activity had disrupted resupply convoys over the past few days, so they had more trucks this time to bring supplies that the base in Basrah was running dangerously low on. Capt Watson and his crew were attached to the Force Protection Team that provided security to convoys to and from the Basrah COB and an American military base in Kuwait in 24 hour rotations. The commanders briefing only took a few minutes and after one last check over the trucks the convoy set off.

It was dark by the time the convoy reached the border; the military vehicles pulled into its own designated area to wait for the rest of the civilian trucks to join the convoy they had brought from the American base. They were waiting there for over an hour, so all the crews were mingling around together, swapping stories and sharing cigarettes. The convoy commander came around to tell everyone that they would be moving off in the next 10 minutes, all the troops headed back to their trucks. Captain Watson closed the book he was reading on the stretcher in the back of the specialised medical wagon as the rest of his crew returned. "Grab your rifles lads." Watson told the crew after they had put their helmets and body armour on. The soldiers armed themselves and stood in a line facing the empty desert in a wordless movement they had performed countless times before. "Port arms!" Watson ordered and the assembled crew racked the bolt of their SA80's back and held them up for inspection. Watson moved behind the soldiers and shone a light into the breech of each rifle, a cursory glance just to ensure that no one had left a bullet in the rifle, or snuck one in. Once the Captain had checked a rifle, he tapped its owner on the shoulder with a quick "Clear". After they had all cleared their weapons, Watson gave another curt order "With a magazine of 30 rounds, load!" the troops whipped a magazine out of their ammo pouches and slapped them into their weapons. Watson's medic mirrored the orders for the doctor. After he tapped his magazine home in the rifle, the crew mounted the truck. They were so slick in their drills; the entire process took less than a minute.

Watson had volunteered for the first few hours on top cover, so he clambered up the hatch to the turret as the rest of the crew took their seats. Opening a fresh box of ammunition, he loaded a belt of 100 rounds into the machine gun. He fired off a quick radio check to ensure he was on comms to the rest of the convoy and the trucks peeled away. The village of Safwan was notorious for firefights, its position a few minutes away from the border meant that every convoy must drive through it. The trick was picking a different route through the town each time to reduce the risk of combat. John Watson realised something was wrong when the convoy began heading east through the village. Shortly after, the convoy began heading south, back the way they came. Watson couldn't hear much through the radio headset. Whatever was happening, the commander clearly didn't want the rest of the convoy to know. Watson started to notice some of the houses in the village began to switch their lights on. A flash of realisation and fear hit Watson as he recognised the road that they had just pulled on to was the one they had driven up when they first entered the village. *Shit, we've gone the wrong way! We've just driven in a big circle, in Safwan village!* John Watson was scared now, the sound of 40 large trucks driving through the village would have surely woken the locals up. The fact they were still in the village driving on the same road they had 20 minutes ago would give some of the locals an opportunity to cause trouble. As if on cue, one of the civilian trucks veered off the road. The cab slammed into a wall, jack-knifing its trailer, blocking the last 10 vehicles. "Contact!" a voice pierced through the static on the radio, Watson instinctively yanked the cocking handle of the machine gun. One by one the civilian drivers switched off their engines. The drivers scrambling out of the cabs and melting into the dark. The relative quiet brought another sound into sharp focus, the clattering sound of weapon fire. Much of the incoming fire was directed at the vehicles that were blocked by the truck. The other trucks beyond the barricade had moved on further up the road. This left only two military vehicles to deal with the ambush, the rear Mastiff and Watson's.

Watson flipped down the night vision sight attached to his helmet. The green image brought the shape of the buildings into crystal clarity, it also amplified the light from the muzzle flash of the weapons pointed in their direction. Watson could tell by the crack of the bullets flying past and the thump of the gun that fired them that the enemy was around 300 metres away. Far enough away that the incoming fire would be fairly inaccurate, but close enough that it would be easy for the enemy to close the distance through the built up streets. The doctor fired off a few three-round bursts in the direction of some of the white flashes he saw in the distance. A new sound cut through the crackle of gunfire that made Watson's stomach drop, the clang of bullets hitting the armour of his truck, behind him! They were being fired upon from all sides. Watson swung his turret round as fast as he could to face the new threat, barking a quick message into his radio to let everyone know that they were surrounded. Watson took a second to take in his new surroundings. In line with his turret, stretching away for nearly 100 metres, was an alleyway between two houses. The alleyway and the houses rose up as it followed the curve of Safwan Hill. His attention was drawn to movement in the alleyway. Watson's breath hitched as he saw the stark image of two men running towards him. One was holding an AK47 and the other had a Russian PKM machine gun. They were so close that Watson could see the details on their faces. There was no doubt in his mind what they were about to do. His thoughts were confirmed as they slowed down and pointed their weapons right at him. John Watson squeezed the trigger, the deafening bark of the weapon etched itself permanently in his mind as three bullets slammed into the two fighters. In the eerie green of the night sight, Watson could see one of the men laying face down. The PKM upside down out of reach of the dead enemy, the second man was sat on the floor desperately

trying to get back on his feet. Watson steeled himself and fired another burst into the alleyway. The second man fell dead before he had made it upright, his right arm taking a different path to the floor as it separated away from his shoulder in a puff of misted blood.

The ambush continued on for a few more hours, thankfully none of the enemy had managed to get as close as the unfortunate men in the alleyway. It was dawn before the other Mastiffs from the front of the convoy had returned, their presence and the approaching sunlight ended the ambush. The last of the fighters disappeared into the mess of buildings as one of the lead Mastiffs shunted the damaged truck blocking the way off the road. Watson handed over top cover duties to his medic and sprawled out on the stretcher exhausted. The events of the night warred in his mind. The soldier in him argued that he had dealt with a threat and they would have likely killed him had he not killed them. The doctor side of him repeated his oath to 'do no harm'. He had settled on the fact that he had protected his crew and the crew of the rear Mastiff and that he is a soldier first, doctor second. Despite that feeble justification in his mind, John Watson would never forget the image of the first men he had killed. Stirring him from his thoughts his medic called down from the turret "fucking hell boss! That was mega!"

"Welcome to Iraq!" Watson called back.

End Notes

Whilst an Army doctor might not necessarily be this involved in combat, a medic would. This occurred about 4 months into my deployment to Iraq.

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