

Australian Army Training Team – Iraq Rotation 8

The Australian Army Training Team in Iraq (AATT-I) was established in October 2004 to train Iraq Army personnel as part of Australian Defence Force Operation *Catalyst*. Despite being designated 'Army', it is not widely known that there also have been many RAAF personnel deployed with the AATT-I.

When, on 2 June 2007, the eighth rotation of the AATT-I took over responsibility for mentoring and advising instructors and commanders of the Iraqi Army, with a handover ceremony at Camp Terendak on the Ali Air Base at Tallil in Dhi Qar Province, the 100-strong team included 15 members of the RAAF (five officers and ten airmen).



The Government had announced the previous February that it would expand the training team to develop new capabilities for the Iraqi Army, such as combat operations and logistics.

The RAAF members of AATTI continued their work with the team when it relocated soon afterwards from Tallil, 300 kilometres south of Baghdad, to the coalition base at Taji, some 40 kilometres north of the capital. There was one more changeover of personnel within the AATTI before the team was withdrawn to Australia in mid-2008.

Some Personal Observations

“...I went to the Regional Training Centre which was located at Camp Uhr about two kilometers from Nazaria. That involved me and the team living at Tallil which was about a seven kilometer drive from Camp Uhr where we conducted training with the Iraqi Army. They used to pronounce it as Grrrrr or something similar.

So initially the team was 24 and then about four or five of the guys split off to look after the IMAN. I had another couple of officers who were Air DefendO's and also had an MP Captain assisting.

The next level down was a bunch of WO2s, some regular Army some reserve and they came with an eclectic mix of experiences. Particularly a couple of the older guys who were extremely set in their ways and offered fearless and frank advice when required that was appreciated.

The RTC also conducted specialist MP, infantry, RAEME comms type courses, so part of my team worked with those instructors on the so called advanced courses and the other half just looked after the basic recruit training type stuff, noting that in five weeks these kids were going from Camp Uhr to battalions in Fallujha, Bagdad and over in Basra to fight the insurgency.

The interpreters. It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge their contribution Without those guys we cannot do our job here, our mission whether you're training, advising government ministers or conducting combat operations, if you don't have a full grasp of not only the language but the culture, the body, the voice inflections it's useless...”

“... The Northern stuff in Taji was a new initiative by our Prime Minister to provide logistics training and sustainability training to the Iraqi army in that location so that was an add on to all the other training schemes.

Our professional facilities, they were very poor. We were on the Iraqi side so we provided our own computers; most of us were using our own lap tops. The Iraqi logistic system wasn't working very well at all so they would run out of power because they'd run out of fuel. They had little or no paper to prepare materials on. One of the courses we were teaching was bakery, because Iraqis eat bread the way Asians would eat rice, it's a staple food diet. They didn't have enough flour, didn't have enough to cook with. They didn't have enough of anything to prepare with.

We had two female cooks allocated to the catering area. So you weren't allowed to be on your own alone on the Iraqi side of the wire. So any time we were doing things I'd have to escort one of the two ladies or both to go somewhere and do stuff, because they weren't allowed to be without a male. So I had that cultural role.

Everything was taught through interpreters, so the interpreters getting them onside and making sure they understood what we were doing was one of the most important things and they got along with the two female instructors.

The Iraqis had bought some equipment, some of it Russian some of it was Czechoslovakian made. The particular kitchen for baking was French designed, I think was Ukrainian made and the books were all over the place, so the hardest part we had was working out how to use the kit with the Iraqis and then making them understand how to use it and then devising a program so they could teach it to somebody else...”

“.. For there it was our next jump from Baghdad to Taji which is 30Ks North and Taji’s a helicopter base, it’s not on an airstrip suitable for aeroplanes, so it was helicopter. So that night it was probably ten thirty or eleven o’clock at night into the back of a Chinook and flying over Bagdad with the rear gunner lying on the floor next to me with his cocked M60 sticking out the back, it was certainly an experience I’ll never forget.

Certainly our biggest issue was training aids. The Armourers knew fairly well what they were going to be training and they were AK47s and they were readily available because they had shipping containers full of cached weapons they captured. The welders again were fairly simple, they had access to equipment. Ours was a little bit different.

The base itself was covered in generators, because they had no general power infrastructure, obviously we’d blown it up previously. We had 15 students and they ranged from senior Warrant Officers for a better word who had actually previously worked in the tank facility as a tank builder to young 18-19 year olds who basically got on the course because they knew a relative of a relative of a relative. There’s one thing we learnt about Iraqis they were very family orientated.

Basic electrical theory what creates an AC and DC generation. Battery power and then we went onto the engines, so we did turbos, injector systems, fuel systems and then we had training aids. We also had practical phases, so we were able to pull apart one and then put it back together and stuff like that.

The results were pretty good actually. We managed to get a couple of generators up and running and at the end they went back up to the warehouse where our logistics stuff were and they found a warehouse full of old generators and they were able to pull them out and get them started and stuff like that...”