



MOD-83-0000294-A

IN THE MATTER OF AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE DEATH OF
MR AHMED JABBER KAREEM ALI

WITNESS STATEMENT OF MR **SO18**

Background

1. I applied to join the Irish Guards in 1998, aged 16. After making the initial application, I went to Litchfield for a medical, which lasted a day. From there I went to Purbright in Surrey for basic infantry training. This was mainly physical training and lasted about twelve weeks.
2. After passing out of Purbright, we went to Catterick which is where I first had real military training. This lasted sixteen weeks and during that time, the training became much more intense.
3. All the training I received at Catterick was for combat. We had no training whatsoever for peace keeping duties. All of our training took place in the woods. We did not receive any training at all in urban combat. We practiced "bugging out" i.e. packing up your gear and moving out when under attack. We learned battle formations, did bayonet training and learned to use firearms and explosives.
4. After passing out, I was stationed in Munster, Germany. This would have been around January 2000. I remained there for three years. We did very little during that time apart from physical training, which took place daily, and weapons

training from time to time. Once in every two or three months we went to Osnabruck for exercises with Warrior tanks. Again, this was fully focussed on all out battlefield combat. We had very limited training in urban or counter-insurgency combat. We had no peacekeeping training whatsoever. The Irish Guards were not at this stage deployed to Northern Ireland. I did not have the training in riot control and civilian peacekeeping that soldiers conducting tours in Northern Ireland would routinely receive.

Deployment to Iraq

5. In late 2002, there were rumours that we were going to war in Iraq. The training became much more intensive. We had two sessions of physical training every day and weapons training in the afternoon. Again it was all combat training. There was never any mention of peacekeeping.

6. I recall that we were shown a film clip showing the use of chemical weapons by Iraqi forces. We were told that this was "Chemical Ali's" weaponry and that the intelligence was that we would be attacked with nerve gas when we went into Iraq. We went through intense training to deal with chemical warfare, which involved spending a day in camp wearing respirators. All our weapons training was conducted whilst wearing these respirators. We were told that we would have under a minute to get our gas masks on before we were bombed with nerve gas. We had a "buddy" system. Every soldier was given a pen containing an antidote which we were to use to inject our "buddy" if he was affected by nerve gas. I was only 21 years old at the time and the prospect of experiencing chemical warfare was terrifying.

7. This training went on for around a month. In January 2003, we were ordered to put all the armour onto the Warrior tanks. Once the tanks were fitted we went to Sennelager in West Germany for tank training. The exercise was planned for seven days but it was around minus fifteen degrees centigrade every day and the tanks kept breaking down. The training was cut short to three days. I found it strange that we were training for desert combat in freezing conditions.
8. In February 2003, I was deployed to Kuwait as part of 1 Company. I had received no training or education whatsoever at this point which might have prepared me for deployment to the Middle-East other than training for combat. I had never experienced Arab or Muslim culture. It was something of a shock to find myself in what was a completely different environment to that which I had experienced in the past.
9. We caught up with the tanks at a camp which had been set up in the Kuwaiti desert. We trained by looking for mines in the desert which had been left over from the last Gulf war and by attacking bunkers and jumping over barbed wire. This was the first training in desert combat that I had ever received. There was still no training for peacekeeping. It was simply not on the agenda. Such training as we received in dealing with Iraqis was directed solely to the handling of prisoners of war. This involved the most rudimentary lessons in Arabic. We were taught to say "salaam alaikum." However, we were taught next to nothing about Arab culture or Iraqi society. I don't think that any of my fellow soldiers had any better understanding of Iraq than I did.
10. We were taught to detain POWs by strapping their arms behind their backs, placing them in plasticuffs and tagging them. We practiced these detention methods on each other. My recollection was that we were told to use force if POWs showed any resistance in order to ensure compliance. After detention

they were to be fed along the chain of command. We had some training on the Geneva Conventions insofar as they were relevant to the treatment of POWs. However, this was taught to us in the context of armed conflict, not peacekeeping. I can no longer recall much of the detail of this training. The idea was that we would be detaining POWs during live combat and obviously, this determined the manner in which we were trained to deal with them. We knew that if we were detaining POWs whilst under fire (or under the imminent risk of attack) we would simply have to put our training into practice, with no time to ask questions. It is important to remember that at this stage, nobody thought that the fighting would last only a few weeks. We were expecting the war to last several months at least. It simply didn't occur to us at this stage that we would soon be given responsibility for policing the civilian population of Southern Iraq.

Invasion and occupation of Iraq

11. At the beginning of March 2003, we were ordered to prepare for conflict. We crossed into Iraq and kept moving gradually northwards towards Basra. After about a week, we experienced our first resistance, when mortars were fired at us whilst we were on Bridge 4 in Basra. We went back that night to camp and planned to attack a college in Basra where Iraqi army units were situated. The following dawn we attacked with warrior tanks. As we approached the college, the doors of the tanks were opened and we all "debusted" i.e. charged out of the tanks towards the enemy. A fire fight ensued which lasted throughout the day until we finally entered the building. We threw in grenades and took the building room by room.

12. After the fire fight concluded, we surrounded the area that 1 Company had cleared in a circular defensive formation. However, we didn't realise that there were three enemy soldiers hiding within the area. That night, shots were fired at

us from inside the circle. We couldn't return fire for fear of hitting our own soldiers on the opposite side of the ring. People were screaming and shouting. It was like being hell. No one knew what was really happening because we had no night vision goggles. Everyone filtered into the tanks for protection but by this stage, we had lost a corporal nicknamed Molly and Mazulu, a South African member of our Company. His tank was the one that was hit the hardest in the fire fight. In the end, we lost two members of the Company, and three were wounded.

13. Once we were back in Basra, we were ordered to set up Vehicle Checkpoints (VCPs) on Bridge 4. Everyone was fleeing the city and our job was to check cars for weapons. We were given no training on how to conduct VCPs, we were just thrown into it. In the meantime, 1 Company had taken over a gym in Basra. From there, we conducted raids to capture weapons and to arrest Baath party members. These raids would usually result from intelligence. Having received intelligence, we would take the tanks and launch a raid on the suspect's house. We were trained to get everyone on the floor as soon as we entered the house. Then we would search for weapons, often stripping the floor boards. Usually, we would not encounter much resistance. The people detained were moved on and I would not have anything very much to do with them after the raid.

14. I do not know precisely at what point the "conflict phase" of Operation Telic ended and the "peacekeeping phase" started. I cannot specifically remember being told that the war was over. All we did was continue with our routine, which involved one night on guard duty, the next on Quick Reaction Force (QRF) and the third on rest. Guard duty involved the protection of a number of different assets, including the Basra hospital and a petrol station. There were occasional fire fights when on QRF. I was also involved in a fire fight when we were guarding the petrol station.

15. Basra hospital was situated on a very large site and surrounded by a wall, which was broken at various points. Our tank was always positioned at the front end of the hospital. 1 Company took over a building at the back and we rested in there. We would patrol the hospital in groups of four to show a presence to the people and deter would-be looters. By now, looting had become a huge problem for us, as I will detail below. Sometimes there were reports of gun fire and we would go and check it out. We also had to look out for wild dogs because they would run around with body parts their mouths. On one patrol we saw a decayed body on the floor of the hospital. We opened the door and saw a body on the floor. His face was decayed. I opened another door and came across a huge freezer compartment containing around eighty bodies of men, women, children, many of whom had bullet holes to their heads and arms. I assumed they were civilians who had been killed in the conflict phase of the war.

16. I cannot recall ever having had training in how to deal with Iraqi civilians during the peacekeeping phase of my deployment, not that I was ever fully aware of a transition from the conflict phase a peacekeeping phase. I do recall that there was a point at which we were told that we should no longer shoot to kill on sight, but only if someone aimed their weapon at us. In retrospect, I think that this must have been when the peacekeeping phase began. I am not sure how long after entering Basra we were told this. I have seen the statement of Lt Col Mercer and I can say that we never had any detailed training in the Laws of Armed Combat. As I have already explained, all we were given was a booklet on Geneva Conventions and some very basic Arabic. This was in Kuwait, before the start of hostilities and in the context of training to deal with POW's in battle conditions, but nothing more. There was no additional training on the Geneva Convention, on policing or peacekeeping once hostilities ended.

17. In my experience, the biggest issue we had with the Iraqi civilian population was the difficulty that we were finding in dealing with looters. This was such a huge problem that we were dealing with them on the hour, every hour. Pretty much the minute we moved into the gym, looting started. People would scream and shout at you "Ali' Baba" which we knew to mean "thief". You couldn't walk ten metres without someone shouting at you in the street. There were no real orders about how to deal with looters or what was to be done with them after they were detained. We were left to our own initiative. I never once saw the Royal Military Police (RMP) and there was no Iraqi police force worthy of the name.
18. If we detained a looter, we would search them to make sure that they had no weapons. When we did so, we'd usually just put them up against the wall and pat them down. Usually, we'd then let them go although there was one occasion when looters were caught robbing a bank and then taken to POW section. The "Iraqi police" such as they were, just seemed to be men carrying sticks. If we handed a looter over to him, they would usually beat him, then let him go.
19. I was not at that time aware of any policy of driving looters to the outskirts of Basra, then releasing them. That is not something that I was ever instructed to do.

Incident of 8 May 2003

20. I should say at the outset that I have only a vague recollection of this incident. Indeed, even at the time I was first interviewed by the RMP on 27 April 2004, I was struggling to remember much of the detail. My memory has faded

considerably since then. I can confirm that during that interview (and the subsequent interview on 30 September 2004) I was trying my best to answer the questions truthfully and accurately.

21. I have been taken through those interviews. I am aware that the incident of 8 May 2003 took place whilst we were on guard duty at the hospital. I can recall the looters being detained in the field behind the hospital and that they were made to go into a muddy puddle by an Iraqi policeman. I remember that there were other Iraqis throwing things at the looters (I believe stones) and I had to tell them to stop. I can't remember which other members of the Company were with me. The looters were taken back to the hospital and Sergeant **SO15** ordered them to be taken into the tank. Iraqi civilians were gathering around, shouting at them. I thought the looters were being put in the tank for their own safety. Sergeant **SO15** told me to get into the tank along with Private **SO17**.

22. The tank drove off. Sergeant **SO15** was in the turret and Private **SO16** was driving. The four suspected looters were on seats facing us. We did not punch or kick them but I did force one back into seat at one stage. I had no idea where we were going.

23. When the tank stopped, Sergeant **SO15** opened the doors. I got out as did Private **SO17**. It was only then that I realised that we were at Bridge 4. The Iraqis came out after us. I believe that Private **SO16** also dismounted. As I explained in my interviews, the Iraqi civilians, including the boy I understand to have been Ahmed Jabber Kareem Ali, went into the water. I can say for certain that I did not force any of the civilians into the water, either physically or by threatening them with my weapon. I did not punch or kick any of the civilians, nor did I force the civilians into deeper water by throwing stones at them. The only

physical contact I had with the male I believe to have been Ahmed Jabber Kareem Ali was in the circumstances that I described in my interviews.

24. I know that I returned to the tank because Sergeant **SO15** told us to do so. I believe that he stayed in the turret throughout.

25. The first I heard that a civilian had died in the river was when I was deployed to Northern Ireland after the war.

26. The contents of this witness statement are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Signed:

SO18

Dated:

04/05/16