

THE SECOND ANFAL

QARA DAGH, 22 MARCH-1 APRIL 1988

<<.... Bring your families. Nothing will happen to them.>>

Army officer to villagers fleeing from southern Qara Dagh

Although the siege of Sergalou-Bergalou consumed enormous resources, the Iraqi armed forces were not so rash as to neglect other targets. To block any attempt by the PUK to reinforce its beleaguered national headquarters, the regime maintained a steady rhythm of attacks against other regional commands, such as the first malband, which was based on Qopi Mountain in Qara Dagh and charged with all operations in the governorate of Suleimaniyeh. At each stage of Anfal, as the main assault changed its geographic focus, this pattern of second ary pressure was maintained. A Few parts of Iraqi Kurdistan are as lovely as Qara Dagh. Its chain of jagged, serrated peaks runs southeast for seventy miles as straight as a razor's edge. The features of its beauty, however, were also those that made Qara Dagh vulnerable. To crush resistance in the Jafati Valley, which is hemmed in by steep mountains, took three weeks for twenty-seven army divisions together with Kurdish jahsh. Qara Dagh was the opposite: a thin line of mountains flanked by almost indefensible lowlands. To the west lies the hilly plain of Germian, the gwarm country." To the east, until 1988, dozens of small farming villages nestled in green valleys of astonishing fertility. Fields of winter wheat, barley, tobacco, and rice flourished next to rich plots of okra, peas, green beans, tomatoes, melons, and grapes. At the southernmost tip of the Qara Dagh chain lay the six-thousand-foot sentinel of Zerda Mountain, a peshmerga stronghold. Beyond this, to the east, a narrow corridor carried the highway from Suleimaniyeh past the town of Darbandikhan and the lake of the same name, with its strategic dam. Even as the first Anfal raged to the north, Iraqi intelligence kept a watchful eye on the lake, ever fearful of a waterborne attack by Iranian forces on the dam and its powa station.



Pictures of the "missing" relatives

The government had relinquished control of rural Qara Dagh in the early days of the Iran-Iraq War. In 1987 the district center, or nahya, itself was emptied, and its population relocated to the nearby camps of Naser and Zarayen. Troops and jahsh took over the deserted town, but they were quickly routed from their positions by the peshmerga. Retaliatory air raids soon destroyed what was left of Qara Dagh, although PUK forces continued to control the territory. Like the civilian population of the surrounding villages, the people of Qara Dagh learned to live with constant artillery shelling from a half dozen government fire bases between Suleimaniyeh and Darbandikhan.

Since 1983 the twin hubs of peshmerga activity in Qara Dagh had been the villages of Takiyeh and Balagjar, which housed armed contingents of the Iraqi Communist Party as well as the PUK. A dirt path linked these two villages, which lay less than two miles apart. The center of Qara Dagh was three hours distant on foot; three miles to the east was the large village of Sayw Senan, where the peshmerga installed a field hospital that serviced much of the surrounding population.

During the early months of 1988 Iraqi intelligence cables were filled with references to Iranian pasdaran moving freely in and out of the Qara Dagh peshmerga camps. A force of Revolutionary Guards, two hundred strong, was reported to be in Balagjar on 25 January; by 6 March their number had risen to four hundred. I Eighty members of "the impostor Khomeini's guard" were said to be in Sayw Senan on g March, and they were heavily armed.

Sometime in February (the date is unclear) eight Iraqi aircraft carried out a chemical attack on Takiyeh and Balagjar. "Many bombs were dropped," said Omar, a Takiyeh man who witnessed the raid. "I don't know how many, maybe eight or nine. When they fell, there was a loud explosion, a little smoke, and it was like salt spread on the ground. People who touched it ended up with blisters on their skin. Animals that ate the infected grass died instantly." But there were no human fatalities; all the Takiyeh villagers had fled to temporary shelters in the fields because of the daily attacks. "In Balagjar, however, many of the pasdaran and PUK peshmerga, and many other people too, lost their sight for three days; the pasdaran moved out of Balagjar three or four days before the Qara Dagh Anfal began."

The continual chemical attacks during the first Anfal, and now on Qara Dagh, seem to have had the effect that the Iraqi government intended. An Amn intelligence report dated 16 March, the day of the Halabja massacre, noted that a dozen teep (divisions) of the PUK had dispersed from their bases throughout southern Iraqi Kurdistan during the previous few days in fear of further chemical attacks. The next day another cable reported, "We have learned from our medical care. The first attack scared people enough so that they rarely returned to their homes and even slept in temporary shelters in the fields. The rajima attack of March 1988 found the village deserted."



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