
Defense Report

AUSA



How We Did It — Smart Weapons Operated By Smart People

Every American leader gives credit for the success of Operation Desert Storm equally to the top-quality people in our Armed Forces and the superb weapons and equipment with which they are armed. But it hasn't been too many months since defense officials had to scramble to keep some of those weapons from falling victim to the congressional budget axe.

Take the Army's Patriot missile system, which nearly succumbed to budget cuts on at least two occasions. Of the 47 Iraqi SCUD missiles engaged by the Patriot, 45 were successfully intercepted.

Another Army success story is the AH-64 Apache attack helicopter, which, as late as last December, was the subject of severe criticism in Washington and in the media around the country. On the night of January 17, Apache attack helicopters from the Army's 101st Aviation Brigade fired the first shots of the war. Two teams of four Apaches each, conducted deep attacks into western Iraq to destroy early warning radar sites. The Apache mission took 15 hours and covered 950 miles round trip. All eight helicopters completed the mission with no damage.

Throughout the 100 hours of the ground war, the operational readiness rates for all the M1 Abrams tanks in both the VII Corps and the XVIII Airborne Corps exceeded the Army's 90 percent standard. Especially noteworthy was a night move by more than 300 tanks of the 3rd Armored Division that covered 120 miles without a single breakdown.

The list of Army weapons given high marks by the commanders and soldiers of Operation Desert Storm — such as the Bradley Fighting Vehicle, the Hellfire antitank missile, the OH-58D Kiowa scout helicopter — has its counterpart in Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps systems, most of which were also the subject of hard-fought budget battles in past years.

But it is most important to remember that all these high-tech weapons are only as good as the people who operate them. The quality of the people in today's Armed Forces are, by every measure, the best we've ever had. That too, took a long time and a lot of persuasion in the right places to accomplish. As the only remaining superpower in the world, we can't afford to lose that edge.