



## The Role of Canadian CC-130 aircraft in the Iraq War

By Richard Sanders, coordinator, Coalition to Oppose the Arms Trade

On April 30, 2003, a comprehensive U.S. Air Force document called *Operation Iraqi Freedom: By the Numbers*,<sup>1</sup> revealed that Canada took part in the initial, invasion phase of the Iraq war using three “Hercules” CC-130 transport aircraft. The author, Lt. Gen. T. Michael Moseley, commander of Central Command Air Forces, provided a thorough review of all U.S. and allied aircraft used during the first month of the invasion.

### Deny, Deny, Deny!

When confronted with Gen. Moseley’s report, Canadian military officials and government representatives repeatedly denied that Canada had indeed supported the Iraq war with CC-130s. When the U.S. report was first mentioned in the *Ottawa Citizen* on June 14, 2003, a public relations spokesperson for the Canadian Forces, Maj. Lynne Chaloux, denied the U.S. assertion, claiming:

“That report is erroneous.... We supported [Operation] Enduring Freedom, the war on terrorism [in Afghanistan], not Iraqi Freedom, the war in Iraq.”<sup>2</sup>

However, a “U.S. Air Force spokeswoman 2nd Lt. Sara Banda,” confirmed the facts saying that:

“the study by Lt.-Gen. Moseley deals with only aircraft involved in or supporting the Iraqi campaign and did not look at any contributions made for Afghanistan.”<sup>3</sup>

Two days later, a member of the Standing Committee on National Security and Defence, the now-deceased Conservative Senator Michael Forrestall told the Senate that:

“a U.S. general has written a report

that reveals that Canada’s three C-130 Hercules tactical transport aircraft took part in the U.S.-led war on Iraq. Did the Canadian Forces C-130 Hercules aircraft or any other Canadian Force units take part in the U.S.-led war in Iraq?”<sup>4</sup>

In response, the Liberal government’s leader in the Senate, Sharon Carstairs, joined the denials. She contradicted the official U.S. Air Force report by simply quoting the denial that had been made by Canadian Forces’s spokesperson, Major Chaloux, in that week’s *Ottawa Citizen*. But, Forrestall was not so easily put off and he made an official request for information:

“[W]ould the minister undertake to seek from [Defence] Minister McCallum an undertaking to bring forward, for tabling in this chamber, the pertinent extracts from the logs of those three Hercules aircraft so that there might be a public glimpse of just what the facts are?”<sup>5</sup>

Carstairs agreed, saying she would “share the information... when it becomes available.” Four months later, in October 2003, Carstairs finally tabled the following curt response to Forrestall’s request for “pertinent extracts from the logs of those three Hercules aircraft”:

“No Canadian Forces (CF) aircraft took part in the Iraq conflict and the information provided by the U.S. military was confused with the CF’s contribution of three Hercules transport planes to the international campaign against terrorism and missions in Afghanistan.”<sup>6</sup>

This statement simply repeated the Liberal government’s empty denial, which as the *Ottawa Citizen* said, claimed that the U.S. military simply made a mistake and got “their wars mixed up.”<sup>7</sup>

### The War is over, Long Live the War!

Although the Canadian government, and its military, vehemently denied U.S. statements that CC-130s had supported the “Iraq conflict,” they did admit that Canada’s large tactical transport planes were used in June 2003 to assist U.S. military operations in Iraq.

How could it be that Canadian CC-130s were not used in America’s war in Iraq, but *were* used to further the U.S. military mission there? As usual, official obfuscation relies on clever, legalistic sleights of hand.

In this case, the verbal trickery seems to rely on a fabrication that the Iraq war, dubbed “Operation Iraqi Freedom,” ended on May 1, 2003.<sup>8</sup> This was, of course, absurd. The quick-war lie served the interests of Canada’s Liberal government which issued a media release on April 29, 2003, entitled “Canada makes Further Contribution to Humanitarian and Reconstruction Efforts in Iraq.” It began:

“Prime Minister Jean Chrétien announced today that Canada will expand the role of its three CC-130 Hercules aircraft currently in the Gulf region to support *immediate humanitarian and reconstruction efforts* in Iraq....

Canada is responding to U.S. requests for assistance *in this post-conflict period* and is assessing additional contributions to Iraq’s reconstruction.”<sup>9</sup> (Emphasis added.)

The ridiculous notion that the “conflict” in Iraq, let alone the war there, was over by the end of April 2003, is—of course—a complete and total farce. This reality aside, the “war-is-over” meme became part of the government’s official narrative about Iraq, and appeared in the Liberal government’s 2004 Budget. It stated that “Re-



Lt.-Gen. T. Michael Moseley, then-Commander of US CENTCOM Air Forces, said Canada supplied CC-130 aircraft for the Iraq war. Canadian Forces Maj. Lynne Chaloux, and Government Leader in the Senate, Sheila Carstairs, vehemently denied it.

storing stability and aiding reconstruction in *post-conflict states* such as Afghanistan and Iraq has become more pressing.”<sup>10</sup> (Emphasis added.)

The thin façade describing Iraq as a “post-conflict state” was quickly adopted by some journalists. The mid-June 2003 *Ottawa Citizen* article mentioning Moseley’s report on Canadian CC-130s in Iraq, repeatedly refers to the Iraq war in the past tense and includes a sentence beginning, “Almost a month after the war ended....”<sup>11</sup>

The official myth that the Iraq war would be over so quickly, was promoted by Canada’s Chief of the Defence Staff, Ray Henault, and his deputy, Vice Admiral Greg Maddison. According to Janice Gross Stein and Eugene Lang’s book, *The Unexpected War: Canada in Kandahar*, Henault and Maddison told Defence Minister John McCallum that “the war would be very short, lasting no more than six weeks, with an air campaign of perhaps as little as five days.”

This “six-week war scenario,” say Stein and Lang, “was consistent with what McCallum had been told in Washington in early January” at the Center for Strategic and International Studies which has “strong and active links with the Defence Department, the State Department, the National Security Council, and the CIA.” Stein and Lang, who describe the quick-war scenario as “staggeringly naïve, deeply ideological, and breathtakingly irresponsible,”<sup>12</sup> assume that U.S. and Canadian officials actually believed the quick-war myth. This assumption is, in itself, “staggeringly naïve.”

### This ain’t War, it’s Post-Conflict Humanitarian Relief!

By building the myth that the Iraq war was already over, officials tried to pretend that Canada’s military efforts to assist the U.S. in Iraq after May 1, were not part of an ongoing war, but were noble contributions to *post-conflict humanitarian/reconstruction efforts*. Using this deception, the Canadian government, its military and subservient media assets covered up Canada’s ongoing role in the Iraq war. The feint was also used to create the impression that Canada got involved in Iraq in order to help solve problems caused by the war.

The Canadian government’s media release on “humanitarian and reconstruction efforts” in “post-conflict” Iraq, spearheaded the narrative. Stretching credulity to the limits, Chrétien was quoted as saying: “Canada is pleased to make this further contribution to help meet the immediate needs of the Iraqi people,” and “We will continue working closely with the international community to determine how best Canada can help Iraq build a future that is secure and stable.”<sup>13</sup>

This official narrative was repeated when the *Citizen* said Canada’s Hercules “completed the first flight in bringing in relief aid on June 2 [2003].”<sup>14</sup> There was, of course, no evidence from the government, military or media that these Canadian CC-130 flights provided any “relief aid” whatsoever. Based on the evidence available, the opposite is likely true, namely, that these CC-130 flights aided and abetted the Iraq war, and caused an even greater “humanitarian” disaster.

### Operation Iris:

#### Moving U.S. Weapons and Warriors into Iraq, for Peace!

The Canadian military admits that it used CC-130s to move U.S. troops and supplies into Iraq, beginning on June 2, 2003. These flights were code named “Operation Iris.” The Canadian military’s “Mission/Operation Notes” for Operation Iris state:

“After the first Gulf War, more than a decade of UN-approved sanctions, and then the American-led invasion of March 2003, Iraq required considerable reconstruction. On 29 April the Canadian government approved the delivery of aid to the country.”<sup>15</sup>

Canadian military support for the U.S. war in Iraq was thus disguised as a peaceful effort to help Iraqis recover from a decade-long economic blockade, followed by the supposedly quick, 2003 war. (Unmentioned was the Canadian navy’s pivotal role in helping enforce the deadly U.S./UN blockade of Iraq throughout the 1990s that killed some 225,000 Iraqi children.<sup>16</sup>)

Although ludicrous, the cover story that CC-130s were doing “humanitarian” work in Iraq was accepted wholesale by some media. For example, the *Ottawa Citizen*’s “defence reporter,” David Pugliese wrote:

“Canadian aircraft are now involved in *humanitarian efforts* in Iraq. A Hercules transport plane completed the first flight in bringing in *relief aid* on June 2.”<sup>17</sup> (Emphasis added.)

Thankfully, Operation Iris was documented by Canadian Forces (CF) photographer Cpl. Henry Wall. As the only concrete, publicly-available evidence regarding “Operation Iris,” Wall’s photos and their captions are worth studying. They certainly do not give the impression that this operation was a “humanitarian effort” designed to bring much-needed “relief aid” to Iraq’s devastated population. (See photographs on pp.34-35.)

The military’s stated “Mission Mandate” for “Operation Iris” was “To deliver reconstruction aid to Iraq.” A military document describes this operation as “the CF contribution to the humanitarian, reconstruction and stability efforts in Iraq.”<sup>18</sup> Further details about this operation appear in captions

associated with Cpl. Wall's photographs. Some of the photographs note that Operation Iris' first flight transported "eight passengers and a load of miscellaneous cargo including a truck and trailer from Kuwait to Baghdad, Iraq."<sup>19</sup> One photograph shows some 18 battle-ready U.S. ground troops waiting to board Canadian CC-130s. The U.S. soldiers' weapons include pistols in thigh-holsters and 5.56mm-calibre, semi-automatic M16 rifles.<sup>20</sup> Also visible are two M249 Squad Automatic Weapon Systems, on bipods. These fully-automatic 5.56mm-calibre machine guns fire up to 1000 bullets per minute.<sup>21</sup> These weapons are not known among reputable development agencies as standard equipment used during "humanitarian efforts" or for dispersing "relief aid."

Wall's photographs also show a U.S. Hummer being loaded onto a CC-130. This M1038 Cargo/Troop Carrier is a High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle (Humvee). It is "equipped with basic armor and used to transport equipment, materials and/or personnel."<sup>22</sup> Like the various weapons systems that Canadian warplanes were so kindly transporting into Iraq during Operation Iris, Hummers are not known for their use in "humanitarian" or "relief" efforts.

None of the available photo-

graphs, captions or descriptions of Operation Iris on the Canadian Forces website even try to explain how delivering U.S. soldiers and their weapons could possibly be construed as "relief aid." Many in Iraq, having suffered the inhumanity of aerial bombardments and an invasion led by U.S. troops, were no doubt in great need of humanitarian assistance. It is doubtful that CC-130 cargo during Operation Iris included food, medicine and building supplies, or other useful materials for distribution to victims of the U.S.-led war. If it had, the military's PR staff would surely have made a great show of this contribution. Instead, we are treated to vague descriptions of the other items transported aboard Canada's CC-130s, such as "a load of miscellaneous cargo."

The government's April 29, 2003, media release about "Humanitarian and Reconstruction Efforts" in "post-conflict" Iraq, also claimed that Canada had "already committed more than \$100 million to humanitarian efforts in Iraq."<sup>23</sup> Since the use of Canada's CC-130s to transport U.S. troops and their weapons into Iraq was also described as a "humanitarian" operation, one must wonder exactly how much of that \$100 million for "humanitarian efforts" was, in actuality, funnelled into aiding and abetting the American-led offensive in Iraq.

## Timeframe for

### CC-130 Missions in Iraq

Lt. Gen. T. Michael Moseley's U.S. Air Force report, *Operation Iraqi Freedom: By the Numbers*,<sup>24</sup> which revealed that three Canadian CC-130s aided the war in Iraq, only covered the first 30 days of the campaign, i.e., between March 19 and April 18, 2003.

The Canadian military's description of Operation Iraqi Freedom, which it says went from March 19 to June 1, 2003, includes this statement:

"Canadian CC-130 Hercules, deployed in the Persian Gulf in support of Operation Apollo were temporarily diverted from supporting that operation to supporting Operation Iris in Iraq."<sup>25</sup>

This indicates that Operation Iris was part of Operation Iraqi Freedom. However, there is a discrepancy in the scant, Canadian documents available on Op Iris. The governments' official description says that Iris took place between June 2 and 4, 2003, i.e., a month after it says that "Operation Iraqi Freedom" had officially concluded.

The Canadian government's media release of April 29, 2003, suggested that Canada's CC-130 flights into Iraq may also have taken place in May 2003. The statement begins by saying that "Canada will expand the role of its three CC-130 Hercules air-

## Operation Iris: Canada in "humanitarian" Iraq war

Canadian CC-130s flew U.S. soldiers, machine guns, semi-automatic rifles and other weapons, a Hummer cargo/troop transport truck and "miscellaneous cargo" to Baghdad in June 2003.



Prime Minister Chrétien said this was a "humanitarian" "aid" mission to "help meet the immediate needs of the Iraqi people."

Source: Canada's Air Force. [www.airforce.forces.gc.ca](http://www.airforce.forces.gc.ca) Photo by: Cpl. Henry Wall Image: APD03-0659-50

craft currently in the Gulf region to support *immediate...efforts in Iraq.*"<sup>26</sup> (Emphasis added.) It seems unlikely that the government would issue a media release saying its CC-130 military aircraft were going to "support *immediate...efforts in Iraq,*" and then wait over a month, until June 2-3, before starting such efforts. This suggests that CC-130 flights were probably taking place in May 2003.

We also know that on June 14, 2003, the *Ottawa Citizen* reported that military spokesperson Major Chaloux said "Canadian aircraft are *now* involved in humanitarian efforts in Iraq."<sup>27</sup> (Emphasis added.) This means that the CC-130 flights discussed in this article were still ongoing almost two weeks after Op Iris had officially ended.

All this indicates that Canadian CC-130s were very likely flying missions into Iraq throughout, at least, March, April, May and June of 2003.

And, in the government's June 3, 2003, media release about CC-130 missions into Iraq, Brig.-Gen. Dennis

Tabbemor, the Commander of the Canadian Joint Task Force Southwest Asia proudly described the participation of Canada's military in the Iraq theatre. In particular, he extolled Canadian "Hercules" transport crews and suggested that their efforts were part of a robust and ongoing Canadian commitment to the U.S. effort in Iraq.

"The 1,000 CF members deployed in southwest Asia are *eager to contribute to the ongoing efforts* to improve the conditions in Iraq. They will do their utmost to airlift, *as often as possible,* the loads of goods required in Iraq."<sup>28</sup> (Emphasis added)

This does not give the impression that Canada's CC-130 flights would end any time soon. On the contrary, the Commander's statement conveys the sense that this Canadian contribution to the efforts in Iraq would continue. The government has issued no media release since then to announce that this valuable contribution to the war was winding down.

## The Mission Continues Under the Radar!

Because of strong public opposition to Canadian participation in the Iraq war, the government has been very cagey about what it reveals regarding such things as its CC-130 transport missions ferrying U.S. warriors and their weapons into Iraq. And, just as Canada's lead naval role in the Iraq war was disguised by the government as if it were only part of Operation Enduring Freedom (in Afghanistan) and not Operation Iraqi Freedom, so too were Canada's CC-130 Iraq-war flights similarly camouflaged.

In the context of its CC-130 flights, one of the ways that the Canadian government has concealed ongoing military contributions to the Iraq war, has been to say that such military transport missions are carried out in the CENTCOM area of operations, "including Afghanistan." For instance, on its web page extolling the CC-130, the Canadian military says:

"By the end of Operation Apollo, in



Besides carrying U.S. soldiers and weapons into Iraq, Canadian CC-130 transport planes shipped other military supplies to aid and abet the Iraq war. For example, on June 2, 2003, during the first flight of Operation Iris, Canada flew this U.S. Hummer Cargo/Troop Carrier from Kuwait to Iraq. This was done in the name of promoting "humanitarian, reconstruction and stability efforts in Iraq." This thin cover was accepted as fact by Canadian media.

**Source:** Canada's Air Force. <[www.airforce.gc.ca](http://www.airforce.gc.ca)> Images: APD03-0659-36, APD03-0659-71

### Operation Iris



Canadian pilot Paul Anderson (left) and flight engineer Colin McDonald (right), are shown here in the cockpit of a CC-130 as they flew U.S. soldiers, weapons and supplies into Baghdad, Iraq, during Operation Iris, on June 2, 2003. These and other Canadian Air Force personnel were living and working at an undisclosed Canadian military base in the Persian Gulf region, likely "Camp Mirage" which was near Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates.

**Source:** Canada's Air Force. <[www.airforce.gc.ca](http://www.airforce.gc.ca)> Image: APD03-0658-06

## Canada's role in Iraq called "humanitarian, reconstruction and stability" effort

This media release from June 3, 2003, was issued by Canadian Forces (CF) Southwest Asia Theatre Support Base at MacDill Air Force Base, Florida, home of U.S. Central Command. CENTCOM wages U.S. wars in the Middle East and Central Asia.

On 2 June [2003], a Canadian Forces CC-130 "Hercules" transport aircraft completed the first Canadian flight in support of the reconstruction of Iraq. The aircraft comes from the Tactical Airlift Detachment deployed in the Arabian Gulf area on Operation Apollo. It transported eight passengers and a load of miscellaneous cargo including a truck and trailer from Kuwait to Baghdad, Iraq.

"The Government of Canada announced on 29 April [2003] that Canada would expand the role of its three CC-130 Hercules aircraft deployed in the Gulf region to support humanitarian, reconstruction and stability efforts in Iraq," said General Ray

Henault, Chief of the Defence Staff. "We are very proud of the exceptional work being done by the men and women serving with the Tactical Airlift Detachment."

"This is the first of a series of flights that will involve Canadian support to Iraq reconstruction," said Brig.-Gen. [Dennis] Tabbornor, Commander of the Canadian Joint Task Force Southwest Asia. "The 1,000 CF members deployed in southwest Asia are eager to contribute to the ongoing efforts to improve the conditions in Iraq. They will do their utmost to airlift, as often as possible, the loads of goods required in Iraq."

Operation Iris is the CF contribution to the humanitarian, reconstruction and stability efforts in Iraq.

**Source:** Media release, "First Canadian flight in support of the reconstruction of Iraq," June 3, 2003.

[www.forces.gc.ca/site/news-nouvelles/news-nouvelles-eng.asp?cat=00&id=1096](http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/news-nouvelles/news-nouvelles-eng.asp?cat=00&id=1096)

October 2003, these [CC-130] aircraft had transported some 6,000 passengers and more than 6.8 million kilograms (about 15 million pounds) of freight to destinations in the theatre of operations, including Afghanistan."<sup>29</sup> (Emphasis added.)

This wordsmithing is an oblique way of making reference to Canada's CC-130 flights into Iraq. Another such wink and nod to the deployment of Canadian "Hercules" aircraft and their crews in Iraq, crops up in a military document called "The Canadian Forces' Contribution to the International Campaign Against Terrorism." It says the "mission" of Canada's Tactical Airlift Detachment (TAL Det) is to "support coalition forces by transporting military personnel, equipment and cargo between destinations in the theatre of operations, including Afghanistan." The versatile CC-130 Hercules is ideal for this mission."<sup>30</sup> (Emphasis added.)

After the incident with General Moseley, when the U.S. Air Force and Canadian officials embarrassingly con-

tradicted each other about Canada's supply of CC-130s to the war in Iraq, the American military became much more obligingly careful not to reveal further examples of Canadian participation. This was no doubt done to protect the Canadian government's need to publicly pretend that it was not involved in the Iraq war.

This cover up was reflected, for instance, in frequent U.S. Central Command Air Force (CENTAF) media releases describing coalition contributions to the air war in Iraq. After releasing General Moseley's *Operation Iraqi Freedom: By the Numbers*, CENTAF began issuing daily air power summaries. These daily reports detailed the support that U.S. forces received from allied countries in the Iraq and Afghan wars.<sup>31</sup>

Hundreds of these daily reports since 2003 contain statements about Canada's CC-130 flights. However, all of these statements conceal which of the two wars Canadian CC-130s were supporting. Instead, readers are repeatedly given obfuscating statements like

"The 1,000 CF [Canadian Forces] members deployed in southwest Asia are eager to contribute to the ongoing efforts to improve the conditions in Iraq. They will do their utmost to airlift, as often as possible, the loads of goods required in Iraq."



**Brigadier-General  
Dennis Tabbornor**

Commander,  
Canadian Joint Task Force  
Southwest Asia

"Coalition C-130 crews from Canada...flew in support of either OIF or OEF [Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom, i.e., the Iraq and Afghan wars]."<sup>32</sup>

It was clearly not in U.S. interests to reveal too much about Canada's role in the Iraq war. This would have alienated the U.S. from a silent, none-the-less key, partner in their war against Iraq, namely, Canada's Liberal government. The Canadian government was contributing as much as it possibly could to the Iraq war, while at the same time maintaining the public illusion that it was completely uninvolved.

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## Colonel Michel Latouche piloted CC-130 missions in Iraq, 2003

In 2002, when Michel Latouche was promoted to Lt. Col., he became Commander of 435 "Chinthe" Squadron in Winnipeg. In that capacity, he flew CC-130 "Hercules" on missions which employed these aircraft in their three main roles: (a) the transport of troops and cargo, (b) the air-to-air refuelling of fighter planes, and (c) search and rescue. His 2002-2003 tour of duty "included a deployment to the Persian Gulf with Operation Apollo and Operation Athena with missions to Afghanistan and Iraq."

### Southwest Asia Service Medal

His decorations include the "Southwest Asia Service Medal for his role in Operation Apollo in 2003."<sup>1</sup> One side of this medal depicts the Queen, while the other shows

"the mythical figure of Hydra, a many-headed serpent of Greek mythology described as a multifarious evil.... The Hydra is transfixed by a Canadian sword and over the design is the Latin phrase, 'ADVERSUS MALUM PUGNAMUS' — 'We are fighting evil.'"<sup>2</sup>

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