

The END

Saddam's tank carrier



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Al-Zahraa, port of registry Bassorah, Irak, was a transport carrier 110 meters long launched in 1983 (Cf sheet p 12). Her job consisted of transporting rolling military equipment like tanks and armored vehicles. She began her service during the Iran / Irak War (1980 – 1988). She was known for her powerful rear ramp, a crane for heavy loads and a helicopter platform. Her bridges were reinforced. The ship was equipped with two dorms capable of housing 250 men. This marine support of the Iraq War suffered heavy mechanical damage between Djeddah and Northern Europe. She had to stop for repairs in the German port of Bremerhaven. She arrived there July 14, 1990. The work had started at the beginning of August when the UN instituted an embargo on Iraq.

This international decision followed the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq. *Al-Zahraa* was therefore immobilized in the German port. Almost all civilian sailors returned to Baghdad by plane. One of them stayed on board to watch the ship. Since the summer of 1991, there have been 2 sailors who survey the ship and are relieved every 8 months.



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Those who had the misfortune of guarding *Al-Zahraa* in the port of Bremerhaven in 2003 at the beginning of the invasion of their country by foreign armies stayed in exile on board for more than 2 years. They lived aboard the rusted ship in poverty and poor sanitation. If Iraq complied with wharfage and dock floating dock fees for an emergency refit in 1997, sailors did not benefit as much, even in winter. All over radio and TV, bombs battered Iraq, buildings exploded and families sunk into depression. Psychological and physical conditions border on inhumane despite the assistance of neighbors and the support of one of the suppliers in the port. After 21 years of decay, the new Iraqi government declined to spend 6€ million to put the ship back in navigational order. *Al-Zahraa* left the deserted dock at the Bremerhaven fishing port where it had been relegated in 2005 to make room for large sailing festival.

“Shame on the region” according to the population or “Silent witness of world history” for the captain of the port, *Al-Zahraa*, after a high-risk tow, is being demolished at Klaipeda, Lithuania. If *Al-Zahraa* had been able to talk, she would have shed some light on the relations shared by the international community with Iraq and explain its frequent stops between 1983 and 1990 in the Baltic Sea, Romania, Bulgaria, ex-Yugoslavia and Italy. She will hold her silence until the end. But, it's the end of “Saddam's tank carrier”, the pet name over time that accompanied *Al-Zahraa* (*La Rose*) and her Iraqi flag.



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