

## CBS Bob Simon reports on the war he 'missed'

### Simon and crew were prisoners for 40 days

By Suzanne Gill

"I spent six months sitting in Saudi Arabia waiting for the (Persian Gulf) war to happen, and more than that, I've been covering the Middle East and off since 1973, and here was the cataclysmic event that had been building for a long time, and then I missed it," says CBS correspondent Bob Simon of the air and ground war in the Persian Gulf.

Simon "missed it" when he became a story himself on Jan. 21, just four days after the start of the air war. Unable to get the information he wanted through the pool reporting system, Simon and his three-man news crew were out having "a good look around" in the non-man's-land between Kuwait and Iraq when they were taken captive by Iraqi soldiers.

In "Back to Baghdad," airing Thursday, July 4, Simon returns to the scene of the war to tell the story he missed the first time, giving those at home a new perspective on the aftermath of the gulf conflict.

In the special, Simon examines current conditions in four countries: Kuwait, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Israel, and the Occupied Territories. During a recent telephone interview from Tel Aviv, Israel, where Simon has made his home since 1987, he said conditions in each country were about as he expected.

Saudi Arabia, says Simon, has changed the least, Kuwait the most. With its continuing oil-well fires and official recriminations against those suspected of having sympathized with the Iraqis, the tiny Arab kingdom is still hostile territory, both environmentally and politically. But, he adds, "I think that, of all the countries we visited, in Kuwait there is the most serious possibility of political change."

By way of contrast, most Israelis are eager to put the war behind them, says Simon. The average citizen wants to forget about gas masks and sealed rooms, but the

country's leaders are undoubtedly preparing for the future. Israeli resolve was sorely tested during the SCUD attacks, and Simon observes that the government feels it has political "credit in the bank" with the United States for abiding by its early promise not to take independent military action.

Iraq, meanwhile, is the most interesting case of all. With Saddam Hussein still in power and the rebuilding of Baghdad and other cities being carried out as rapidly as possible, Simon spoke candidly about the victory of the Allied force led by Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf.

"President Bush is perceived all over the Middle East as the Emperor of the Middle East. He's the man who won the war, and there is nothing that is respected (here) as much as victory."

"The Iraqis do not love George Bush. There is enormous resentment of Bush for bombing Iraq but not getting rid of Saddam Hussein. But they respect him. They're perfectly aware that Bush's Gen. Schwarzkopf could have gone all the way to Baghdad, but chose not to. (Iraq) is a nation that has been bred on fear, fear of Saddam, and if Saddam had been removed, Bush and Schwarzkopf would be the heroes of Iraq."

Simon spent much of the war, 25 days, in solitary confinement in a Baghdad prison. His cell had no bed and only the crudest sanitation. The only source of light and fresh air was a small vent. Once a day, a small metal door would be opened and an anonymous hand would leave a single meal. On Feb. 23, the building was bombed by Allied jets. On another day, Simon's colleague Peter Arnett of CNN reported a rumor that Simon and his team were alive. It was the first such news Simon's wife and daughter had heard since his disappearance in the desert.

"I've covered so many wars and haven't been hurt," Simon reflects. "Maybe my number was just up." He is not so philosophical about the system of pool reporting imposed by the Allied command. "It was an inadequate way to cover the war, and my colleagues who stayed in the pool system ended up very,

very frustrated."

Simon draws a distinction between the censorship of the pool reporting system and an embargo, or hold on reporting the news for hours or days at a time, "with which we were all prepared to cooperate."

"I think the verdict now is that it's unfortunate that one of the great American military victories of our time went largely uncovered."

In an age of prolific amateur and professional video record-keeping, there will, ironically, be no counterpart to "Victory at Sea" and other newsreel series that documented the battles of World War II.

"The Americans who did the fighting will not have many pictures to show their grandchildren because the newsmen who were in Saudi Arabia and would have been very eager to have been at the front lines weren't there, because they weren't taken there."

On Independence Day, Simon takes us back to Baghdad to see some of what we all missed.

CBS news correspondent Bob Simon and his crew were tortured, beaten and held captive by Iraqi military intelligence during the war.

Thursday the journalist returns to the Iraqi capital to report on the aftermath in "Bob Simon: Back to Baghdad."



Dana Delany looks forward to new challenges in film and television.