

# Chemical warfare veteran narrates 121 months on frontlines

Not all stories of war have been told to people



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By Sadeq Dehqan  
Staff writer

Nasser Mashhadi Farahani, aged 65, is a chemical veteran of the eight-year Iraq-Iran war (1980-1988). With a record of 121 months of service on various fronts and operational areas in the north, west, and south of the country, and recovering from three separate wounds, his life story has turned into a book about the history and manner of occurrence of many battles and combat operations from the beginning of the Islamic Revolution to the end of the Iraqi-imposed war, the pages of which are filled with unforgettable and even heart-wrenching events. The veteran soldier, who, after years of treatment and enduring many hardships, managed to return to normal life, said, "We have not been able to convey the facts and instructive lessons of the eight-year war to the people as they deserve."

According to Farahani, the years of war that passed over Iran contain untold stories and extraordinary scenes that, if described well, will have many instructive lessons for the younger generation and today's society and will help us overcome the challenges and difficulties of the country.

At the young age of 19, Farahani joined the army as a second sergeant and served in the 21st Hamzeh Division in Tehran. He left for the western city of Sanandaj in the midst of the first days of the revolution as conflicts started by the rebels in different regions of the country.

He said, "At that time, our division was stationed in Tehran, and we were assigned to various missions in remote areas. At that time, neither the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) nor the Basij existed, so anytime there was a conflict in any part of the country, army personnel would join the ranks to confront the enemy. In the early days of the revolution, in Sanandaj, a group of Kurds rebelled under the name of Democratic Party and Komala. However, shortly after Ayatollah Taleghani's speech in Sanandaj, which

was like pouring water on fire, things quieted down. We were engaged in a three-month war with Kurdish rebels in Sanandaj. The conflict there ended, and the city was liberated. We were then sent to Urmia on foot. It took about 20 days to reach Mahabad, which had been besieged by the Democrats and Komala forces. The liberation of Mahabad from the insurgents took almost four months.

"After Mahabad, clashes occurred in Turkmen Sahra and the city of Gorgan in northeastern Iran. Twice from Mahabad, we were directly sent to Gorgan. They sent us twice from Mahabad to Gonbad-e Kavus. There, we were engaged in a five-month war with a group called the People's Fedai Guerrillas led by Ashraf Dehqani. All these battles I'm describing took place in about a year and some since the beginning of the revolution."

The Iranian People's Fedai Guerrillas is the group that split from the Organization of Iranian People's Fedai Guerrillas (OIFPG) in 1979, dropping the word 'organization' from its name. It is currently operating against the Islamic Republic of Iran. Unlike the majority of the organization, the group believed in continuing armed struggle even after the overthrow of the Shah.

Farahani continued, "Ashraf's group was engaged in combat with the Turkmen in Gorgan and Turkmen Sahra and tried to gain control of these areas. They also aimed to establish their own government. In fact, in the early days of the Islamic Revolution, any group that thought it had the capability was vying for power in different parts of the country. After a while, things quieted down there as well, and we returned to Tehran. The exhaustion from the journey hadn't left our bodies yet when the Iran-Iraq war began in earnest on September 22, 1980. This marked the beginning of my presence in the imposed war."

## Unwavering presence on frontlines

I asked him how long he had been present in the war and operational areas in total.

He said, "In total, it was 121 months and 14 days, which is

about 10 years. Only 76 and a half months of that were spent in the war with Iraq on the frontlines. That means I was on the frontlines for the entire duration of the eight-year war, and even after the war, along with my comrades, I remained in war zones for months to stabilize the situation because, at any moment, conditions could change and a new attack could occur.

"I was wounded three times during this period. Two of those injuries were chemical, related to Operation Badr on Majnoon Island. I was wounded once before the operation and once after it. Each time, I was hospitalized for 20 days to a month, and, depending on the need, I would return to the frontlines. Once, during Operation Valfajr (Dawn) 4, I was hit by a bullet in the leg.

"Operation Valfajr 4 was an Iranian operation of the Iran-Iraq war, launched in October 1983. It took place for 33 days in Suleimaniyah and Penjwen, both in the Sulaymaniyah Governorate of Iraq, in October and November 1983. The operation involved the participation of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, the Army, and the cooperation of Kurdish militias affiliated with the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, a political party in the Iraqi Kurdistan.

"At the end of the operation, we had captured some territory from the Iraqis including the Garmak military garrison, and entered Iraq. We intended to cut off enemy forces deep within 180 kilometers into the country and, subsequently, the cities of Suleimaniyah, Halabja, and some other areas came under our control. However, later, during the cease-fire between the two countries and the issuance of United Nations Security Council Resolution 598, the order to withdraw was issued."

## Courage wounds

I asked him to explain more about his chemical injury.

"That day, we were busy preparing for the details after the operation. In fact, Operation Badr had already been carried out.

"Operation Badr was carried out in February 1985. In the initial advance from Majnoon Island, the Iranian forces managed to take control of the Tarabeh checkpoint and parts of the Baghdad-Bas-

ra highway. However, the Iraqis' counterattack pushed back the Iranian forces.

"It was the time when Saddam went mad, or rather, became crazier. He was frequently using chemical weapons, either by shells or by airplanes. Several divisions of our forces had been stationed in Majnoon Island. Suddenly, we saw eight Iraqi planes flying over the island. In less than a minute, a total of eight chemical bombs – four bombs carrying nerve gas and four bombs carrying cyanide gas – were dropped on us. The bombs hit the ground in the area where we were located, an area about the size of two football fields.

"Cyanide gas usually completely destroys the eyes. And the nerve gas bombs – if they hit the ground near someone, the person's head will explode just like a balloon.

"But we were lucky and, in fact, God was kind to the fighters. The two different bombs hit the ground at the same time and exploded; since cyanide and nerve gas have a neutralizing effect on each other, their harmful effects were reduced.

"On the same day, about 2,500 of our forces were injured by chemical bombs. I, along with 16 other fighters, were transferred to Torfeh Hospital near Baharestan Square in Tehran. Four fighters lost their sight and the remaining 12 people are mostly healed, but the effects of that injury are still with us.

"I am now a war-disabled person. Cyanide gas destroyed the capillaries of my eyes. My vision is now very weak. The bombs affected me mentally. Of course, during these years, I have tried to decrease their negative consequences; I have tried hard to communicate with people and become a normal person again.

"Of course, I still take medicine. The condition of my lungs is not bad. I try to rest, walk and exercise every day."

## Against warmongers with empty hands

I asked him about the Sacred Defense Week, what he thought about the commemoration of this week and the days after the war.

He said: "Unfortunately, we have not been able to explain the battlefield and the war very well to the young generation and familiarize them with the facts of the

war. We withstood against the world with empty hands. They haven't described this issue for the public very well.

"We were a human shield against the enemy. At the time, Saddam was taking delivery of military equipment and ammunition from Western countries so much that he targeted our people with tank bullets, while we did not have enough bullets for our guns.

"We had ammunition, but it was not enough. The shortage of ammunition caused us to lose more fighters in operations and battles. On the other hand, the situation was such that some of our Armed Forces had been going to the frontlines without sufficient military training and they lost their lives due to the lack of experience in the battlefield.

"But, thank God, today we produce military equipment ourselves and enjoy advanced military and defense facilities in such a way that the defense power of the country is worlds apart from the time when Iraq invaded Iran.

"I remember that fifteen other fighters and I, along with Major General Hassan Abshenasan, were on our way to a military patrol when we encountered an Iraqi military brigade with around four thousand soldiers equipped with all kinds of military ammunition. But we managed to stop them. We did not allow them to achieve their goals, and this was a victory." What was the secret of the victory of the Iranian fighters in these unequal battles?

"Our warriors fought with heart and soul, to sincerely defend this land and water. God also helped them. Even today, if we want to overcome the country's problems, that is the secret of victory. Serving people from your heart."

As a last question, I asked him, do you think today, if another war occurs, will our youth do what you people did? Will they die to defend the revolution and the country?

After pausing for a few seconds, he said, "Certainly, even if Iranians are dissatisfied with the conditions of their country, or if there are differences of opinion in the country, when it comes to the issue of our homeland and the invasion of a foreign enemy, they will come to defend the country and put aside their differences."