



Naked in Baghdad: The Iraq War as Seen by NPR's Correspondent Anne Garrels

By Anne Garrels

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As National Public Radio's senior foreign correspondent, Anne Garrels has covered conflicts in Chechnya, Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and elsewhere. She is renowned for direct, down-to-earth, insightful reportage, and for her independent take on what she sees. One of only sixteen un-embedded American journalists who stayed in Baghdad's now-legendary Palestine Hotel throughout the American invasion of Iraq, she was at the very center of the storm. *Naked in Baghdad* gives us the sights, sounds, and smells of our latest war with unparalleled vividness and immediacy.

Garrels's narrative starts with several trips she made to Baghdad before the war, beginning in October 2002. At its heart is her evolving relationship with her Iraqi driver/minder, Amer, who becomes her friend and confidant, often serving as her eyes and ears among the populace and taking her where no other reporter was able to penetrate. Amer's own strong reactions and personal dilemma provide a trenchant counterpoint to daily events. The story is also punctuated by e-mail bulletins sent by Garrels's husband, Vint Lawrence, to their friends around the world, giving a private view of the rough-and-tumble, often dangerous life of a foreign correspondent, along with some much-needed comic relief.

The result is enthralling, deeply personal, utterly authentic--an on-the-ground picture of the war in Iraq that no one else could have written. As *Chicago Sun-Times* critic Lloyd Sachs wrote about Garrels's work in Baghdad, "a few choice words, honestly delivered, are worth more than a thousand pictures . . . In your mind's eye, they carry lasting truth."

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

It is hard not to admire Garrels. Enduring everything from bombing raids and artillery barrages to bad food, corrupt officials and aggressive border guards, this veteran war correspondent continued to report for NPR from her perch at the Palestine Hotel throughout the coalition drive toward Baghdad. After all the major television networks pulled out their staffs, Garrels stayed in the middle of it, painting with words the only picture available to most Americans of what was going on in the center of Iraqi power and in the hearts and minds of the frightened and confused residents. Though she writes in the same clear, straightforward prose familiar to radio listeners, the powerful stuff of her live broadcasts translates poorly to the written page in this day-by-day account of her experience. She admits her limited purview, restricted in what she could see by the Iraqi Information Ministry and later by the hazards of the battlefield, and with the manuscript completed only months after her return, the reader is left feeling that reflection is not Garrels's strong suit. There are some nice details, like an Information Ministry staffer asking Garrels for batteries for his shortwave radio so he can "find out what's really going on." But her off-the-cuff impressions of the response of ordinary Iraqis to the war, which rang so true at the time, come off now as obvious and overly simple. This account works well as a personal narrative of courage under fire, suffering and survival, but unfortunately, it lacks in insightful commentary and summing up of events.

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From [Booklist](#)

NPR correspondent Garrels, on assignment in Iraq from October 2002, before the war, until April 2003, after the war, offers an inside look at the conflict. She intersperses her reports and reflections with e-mails her husband sent to friends and family, which provide secondary color on the life of a news correspondent. New to Iraq, Garrels focuses on the perils of a new assignment, gathering reliable sources, shepherding all the technology needed for modern radio reporting, and coping with "minders," who monitor interviews with Iraqis. She is frank about her uncertainty of how "to tackle this complicated story in a country I don't know." This book is a fascinating look at how she manages, as one of only 16 unembedded reporters in Iraq, with the help of her driver-minder, who becomes a confidant, to cover the build-up to the war and the war itself. Readers looking for details and background on the war will appreciate Garrels' account. *Vanessa Bush*
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Review

"Anne Garrels risked her life to bring the war in Iraq to her listeners, even after her network suggested she leave Baghdad for her own safety. She couldn't offer pictures, but she didn't need to - her extraordinary reporting skills and personal courage combined to create a powerful and compelling portrait of war."

--William Cohen, former Secretary of Defense

"Anne Garrels is an extraordinary person and a rare kind of journalist. Blessed with a razor-sharp intelligence and bravery in equal measures, she is also knowledgeable, fair-minded and unerringly honest. As a uniquely trustworthy American voice from the far-flung battlefields of today's new world, Garrels deserves the attention of as many of her fellow citizens as possible."

--Jon Lee Anderson, author of *The Lion's Grave: Dispatches from Afghanistan*

"When I hear that a report from Annie Garrels is about to come on the radio, I stop what I'm doing and

listen. I know I'm going to learn something remarkable from some place I've never been and am never likely to go. Her reports from the crumbling Soviet Union and the resurrected Russia, from Afghanistan in turmoil and Baghdad under fire stand out as some of the bravest and most enlightening reporting for any news organization over the last decade. Garrels is scrupulously fair, always thorough, unfailingly interesting and unbelievably courageous."

--Cokie Roberts, *ABC News*

"Whether from Baghdad or Moscow, Jerusalem or another place of crisis, Anne Garrels infuses her reporting on warfare and politics with lucid, human accounts of lives caught in conflict. Every time her voice comes on NPR, it's a signal that you are about to hear a story with exceptional clarity and rigorous respect for the highest standards of journalism."

--David K. Shipler, former Jerusalem bureau chief, *The New York Times*

"Among foreign correspondents, Anne Garrels is one of the true, brave, clear-eyed greats--a voice that cuts through and rises above the general chatter to tell you most vividly what it's like and what's at stake in the defining moments of our time."

--Philip Gourevitch, author of *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families*

"Anne Garrels is one of America's most insightful and courageous journalists. Her reporting from Baghdad during the war was another very impressive reminder of her cool tenacity in getting the big story in the worst of conditions."

--Tom Brokaw, *NBC Nightly News*

"Like so many of her NPR colleagues, Anne Garrels reports with eloquence and insight. Anne, however, has that additional quality that keeps you in your car even after you've pulled into your driveway, carport or garage. When Anne reports on the radio, you want to keep listening. When she has a book in her, you want to read it."

--Ted Koppel, *Nightline*

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Jonathan McLean:

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