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Iraq's "Chemical Ali" Executed

One of Saddam Hussein's most notorious henchmen, Ali Hassan al-Majid — known as "Chemical Ali" for masterminding the poison-gas killing of some 5,000 ethnic Kurds in a village in northern Iraq — was executed January 25, a week after receiving his death sentence by an Iraqi court. Majid, 68, was Hussein's cousin and one of the last high-ranking officials in the regime to be tried and sentenced.



Majid had been earlier been convicted of over a dozen counts of genocide, and had received death sentences in four separate trials, including one that focused on the 1988 attack in the village of Halabja, which killed 5,000 and gained him his infamous moniker.

In all, it is estimated that more than 100,000 civilians perished in the campaign against the Kurds, but it is the attack on the village of Halabja that focused the world's attention on the ruthless nature of Saddam's regime, and which helped provide rationale for the 2003 U.S. invasion.

Majid's reputation for cruelty was legendary, and spawned tales of horror that later came out in trials against him. One former Iraqi intelligence officer told the *Christian Science Monitor* of how during a 1991 campaign to crush opponents of Saddam, agents under Majid rounded up a group of men from southern Iraq, transferring them to Baghdad. Once there the men were taken to a large pool of acid, where they were pushed in one by one. "There was just a brief scream and they were gone," he said. Other prisoners were taken to a large field, the man said, where they were buried in sand up to their necks and crushed with a steamroller.

As with the capture and deaths of Saddam and other high-ranking officials in the regime that ruled up to the 2003 invasion of the country, the capture, trial, and subsequent execution of Majid was done under the watchful eye of U.S. military officials. In fact, Majid was held by the U.S. from the day of his capture until the day before his execution, when he was turned over to Iraqi officials.

Since his capture, Majid had become a polarizing force between different factions within the country. "Chemical Ali was the symbol of crimes and genocide in modern history," said Saadi Ahmed of political party known as the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan. "Executing him is a lesson to those who kill their people...." But in Tikrit, where Saddam's own family was from, many residents considered Majid a hero and his death led one to say, "I give my condolences to the Iraqi people on the martyrdom of comrade Ali Hassan al-Majid. Tikrit and Iraq are proud of him."

Shortly after Majid's execution was announced, a series of what appeared to be coordinated car bombings rocked the city of Baghdad killing 36 people and injuring others, with some observers speculating a correlation between Majid's death and the violence.



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Photo of Ali Hassan al-Majid: AP Images



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