

GI SPECIAL 2#B39

PATRIOTISM, IRAQI STYLE



Najaf: Resistance Sgt. wearing a headband reading 'Mehdi Army' flashes the victory sign. (AFP/Ahmad al-Rubaye)

Game Over

Have you noticed? They don't look raggedy-assed anymore. Clearly well supplied. They also tend not to stagger around with +100 pounds of equipment in 130 degree heat.

They don't need supplies. They live there. It's their fucking country.

The reason national resistance movements to foreign occupation win is because they know where their opponents are, because their opponents go around in foreign uniforms that make every move made constantly observable.

On the other hand, occupation forces don't have the faintest idea which of the millions of people who surround them is an opposing individual or formation ready to attack.

When the whole country wants you gone, that's a serious problem.

Mission Impossible. No good reason for it anymore. Senseless. Just more death.

Time to come home.

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Mahdi Army taking position inside an abandoned construction site in Najaf. Check the T. (AFP/Karim Sahib)

What do you think? Comments from service men and women, and veterans, are especially welcome. Send to contact@militaryproject.org. Name, I.D., withheld on request. Replies confidential.

IRAQ WAR REPORTS:

4 U.S. Marines Killed

8/22/2004 By ABDUL HUSSEIN AL-OBEIDI Associated Press Writer

Four U.S. Marines assigned to the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force have been killed in separate incidents in Iraq's volatile Anbar province, the military announced.

Soldier Killed In Mosul Convoy Attack

8.22.04 AP

MOSUL, Iraq - A roadside bomb detonated near a U.S. military convoy on Sunday outside the northern city of Mosul, killing one U.S. soldier and wounding another, the military said. Two Iraqi children were injured in the blast, said Dr. Mohammed Ahmed of al-Jumhuri hospital.

The bomb exploded as the convoy passed a road west of Mosul, 225 miles northwest of Baghdad, said Capt. Angela Bowman, a U.S. military spokeswoman in Mosul.

The soldiers that were killed and wounded were assigned to Task Force Olympia. The wounded soldier was in stable condition, the military said.

Mahdi Army Takes, Holds Kufa: U.S. Attack Beaten Off: “In Kufa, There Are No Americans To Be Seen”

August 22, 2004 Luke Harding, The Observer

Asked how the battle was going, Commander Abu Mohammad Hilu showed off his latest trophy - a blood-drenched American boot. There was a large bullet hole in the middle. 'We found it after last night's battle,' the commander explained. His colleague, Abu Ali, added: 'Originally there was an American foot inside it and a bit of the leg. But we took it out and threw it to the dogs.'

But the most tangible evidence of the Mahdi army's extraordinary self-confidence yesterday, however, came too close for comfort half an hour earlier. We had been driving through the high street in **Kufa**, another stronghold of the Shia cleric Muqtada Sadr, some three kilometres from the shrine where he and his supporters are still holed up.

We stopped to inspect a building - this was a mistake. Mahdi army soldiers armed with Kalashnikovs spotted us, then targeted us. In a convoy of two cars, with guns pointing and pushing at us, we were taken to Kufa's mosque.

Ten minutes later The Observer's Iraqi fixer got us released after phoning a high-ranking Sadr aide.

The aggression disappeared, the fighters turned profusely apologetic. More than two weeks after launching their uprising in Najaf, the Mahdi army was - despite reports to the contrary - still in control of Najaf's Imam Ali shrine - and much of the rest of Iraq. Yesterday fighting carried on.

In pre-dawn darkness, American tanks and Humvees also staged a raid on Kufa, trundling down the high street and past the library. Commander Hilu and his men were waiting.

'The Americans went as far as the mosque then got out,' the commander said, having escorted me back to the scene of what, he suggested, was a heroic victory.

'It was an ambush. All of a sudden we started shooting them. They were surprised. We destroyed two of their tanks.'

Hilu showed off the newly incinerated Kufa court building just across the road. Here, he said, US troops had taken refuge under fire. Crunching over the melted remains of ceiling fans, he pointed to a small annex room soaked in blood.

'They treated their wounded in here. They were firing in the air at the same time. That's a piece of American brain,' he added helpfully. 'We found the boot nearby.'

Over the past 17 days the standoff between Sadr's Shia militia and Iraq's US-backed interim government has been portrayed as a conflict that the renegade cleric will eventually lose. In fact, he is winning.

On Friday afternoon Iraq's interior minister claimed his police had taken control of Najaf's Imam Ali shrine and arrested several hundred 'lightly armed' fighters.

It was a boast that might have come from Saddam Hussein's notoriously unreliable information minister, 'Comical Ali'.

Arriving at the mosque a couple of hours later, I found nothing had changed. Hundreds of unarmed supporters of Sadr still loafed on mats inside the shrine's courtyard.

In the narrow alleyways around the mosque, Mahdi army fighters - one wearing a black Manchester United strip - chatted in the late afternoon sunshine.

Yesterday Sheikh Azhar Kenani, head of Kufa mosque, told The Observer that his fighters would mow down Iraqi troops, should they attempt to storm the shrine.

'One hundred per cent there will be a massacre,' the sheikh predicted. 'The Iraqi police are agents of the Americans. We will not allow the US's agents or the Americans themselves to occupy this holy site.'

'The interim government is illegitimate and doesn't represent the Iraqi nation. Therefore we reject it,' the sheikh said. He added: **'We demand that all occupying forces leave our country.'**

Sitting cross-legged on a carpet outside Kufa's gold-domed mosque, over cups of sweet black tea, other Mahdi army fighters yesterday said they had no intention of giving up.

Nearby, a group of men were carrying away the latest martyr for burial - killed at 3am yesterday when an American tank blew a hole through the west corner of the neighbouring Maitham Tamar mosque.

'I lost three fingers while fighting in the cemetery last week,' Abu Muqtada, 38, explained, waving his bandaged right hand. 'An American helicopter shot me from the sky. But my other hand is still working. I can fight with that.'

Muqtada admitted that many of his comrades had been killed in the cemetery, the vast rambling area to the north of Najaf's old city, where intense fighting took place last week. 'We take away all our dead friends,' he pointed out. 'We clean them up and give them a proper burial.'

In Kufa, there are no Americans to be seen.

There is, however, plenty of damage. The College of Economics, which overlooks the shimmering Euphrates river, had a large Edam-shaped hole gouged out of its roof by an American bomb early yesterday.

US warplanes control the skies above Kufa, dropping two bombs at 7am yesterday on a deserted mosque. But they don't control its streets - or the densely packed alleys around Najaf's shrine, where the Mahdi army appears to have shrugged off nights of bombardment. 'It was a big battle. They came at us from four directions,' Hilu said.

'None of the soldiers in my unit were injured.' He added: 'You will write about the boot, won't you?'

Fighting In Najaf, Amara And Basra; U.S. Soldier Wounded

8/22/2004 By ABDUL HUSSEIN AL-OBEIDI Associated Press Writer & by Jay Deshmukh (AFP)

Najaf: Al-Sadr fighters mortared a police station, and U.S. troops and fighters clashed through the morning.

One soldier was wounded in fighting elsewhere in Najaf.

Fighters loyal to Shiite radical leader Moqtada Sadr launched multiple attacks on US tanks, parked around 300 metres (yards) away from the Imam Ali shrine, as the reverberations of gunfire and mortar bombs could be heard from inside the mosque compound, an AFP correspondent on the scene said.

In the southern cities of Basra and Amara, clashes also flared between British-led forces and the Mehdi Army overnight, with patrols and coalition bases coming under small arms and mortar fire, a spokeswoman said.



Mahdi Army troops demonstrate against US occupation, near Najaf's Imam Ali shrine. 8.16.04 (AFP/Karim Sahib)

LV Soldier Likely To Walk Again; “The Stryker Was Just A Ball Of Metal”

Aug 20, 2004 By Staff, The Daily News, Longview, Washington

A 24-year-old Longview soldier was injured in Iraq on Wednesday when his assault vehicle tumbled over a cliff.

Sgt. Justin Little suffered a broken neck, but did not damage his spinal cord, meaning he likely will walk again, his father, Jim Little said.

Little, who graduated from Mark Morris High School in 1999, was riding aboard an Army Stryker assault vehicle near the Syrian border around 11:30 p.m. when it tumbled over a 30-foot cliff, his family said.

The vehicle had been involved in a firefight Wednesday night and was moving out of the area, Jim Little said.

Troops aboard Little's vehicle were using night vision, which casts the landscape in a flat, green tone. The soldiers thought they were headed off a 5-foot drop that turned out to be much deeper, members of Little's family said.

Little is a gunner on the Stryker, a 19-ton armored vehicle that can carry a .50-caliber machine gun and 40 mm grenade launcher and travel at speeds of up to 60 mph. His head was poked through the vehicle's turret when it rolled off the cliff, his father said.

A fellow crew member yanked Little back into the vehicle as it toppled end over end, surely saving his life, Jim Little said.

"The Stryker was just a ball of metal," when it came to rest, Jim Little said. He said he did not know the condition of the rest of his son's crew. It was unclear how fast the vehicle was moving when it crashed.

A medic strapped Little to a flat surface and evacuated him by helicopter.

TROOP NEWS

KILLED SOLDIER PLANNED TO 'QUIT ARMY'

(THANKS TO CS WHO E-MAILED THIS IN: CS WRITES: "Amazing how similar stories are being reported from across the pond....")

Aug 19 2004 By BRENDON WILLIAMS and JANE KERR, Mirror.co.uk

THE British soldier killed this week in a hail of gunfire in Iraq had been planning to leave the army soon, a family friend revealed last night.

After serving for ten years since school, Lance Corporal Paul Thomas, 29, told his family that he'd "had enough" when he was home five weeks ago.

But on Tuesday night his patrol was attacked by a mob of up to 50 militia carrying firearms and rocket-propelled grenades.

Lance Corporal Thomas - known as 'Taff' - was the fourth Briton to be killed in Iraq this month.

His parents, farm herdsman David and wife Helen, a nursing assistant, were too traumatised to talk last night after losing their only son.

But family friend Anne Jones, 86, said: "I saw his mum and she was devastated. "She could hardly speak, but what she did say was that the army had been Paul's life."

Her son, who was not married, served with the 2nd battalion, the Light Infantry. He went home to the tiny farming community near Welshpool, mid Wales, just before his second

tour of Iraq. Mrs Jones said: **"He was happy. But he had decided he had had enough of being in the army."**

Colleagues of the "immensely popular" soldier are still in shock. Last night they described him as the "backbone" of their platoon.

Mona Broxton, warden of the family's local church in Buttington, said: "He was a very nice, very quiet, respectable lad. He was always a church boy."

Local Soldier Awarded A Purple Heart

August 21, 2004 KATU TV

A soldier who lost an eye, had his jaw wired shut and ended up with shrapnel wounds in his leg was awarded a Purple Heart Saturday at a ceremony in Salem.

Pfc. Simon Garcia was injured in May when an improvised explosive device went off while he was sitting atop a Humvee on patrol in Baghdad.

"We're about ten feet away from it and shrapnel came at me, went through my jaw all the way inside my face up to my left eye, and took out my left eye," Garcia told KATU News in June after returning home from Iraq.

"The first thing that came to me is 'the Lord is my shepherd' and I started praying right then and there – don't take my life here," he said.

"I'm glad that I turned out the way I look right now. It doesn't even look like anything happened to me with the prosthesis in."

Saline Grad Seriously Wounded

8.19.04 By Nathan Bomey, Staff Writer, The Saline Reporter

A 2001 Saline High School graduate was seriously injured in a mortar attack Aug. 8 in Iraq.

U.S. Marine Lance Cpl. Brad Kramer – who made his mark on the local community when he ran for Saline City Council in 2000 at age 18 – was wounded when insurgents exploded a mortar shell fewer than seven meters from him. He has shrapnel embedded in his arms and legs.

"I think his wounds are pretty serious. The big thing they want to monitor is infection," his father said. "At least he's alive. We are very fortunate."

Kramer had been in Iraq for about seven weeks as a mortar man in a weapons battalion.

"He just always told us that he was fine," his father said Monday. "He was seeing a lot of action."

Kramer was one of four Marines injured when the incoming mortar exploded. All four soldiers were wearing standard-issue 26-pound flak jackets and standing on a rooftop when the attack came.

"All four of them are extremely lucky to be alive," his father said.

Kramer was vaulted into the local spotlight in fall 2000 when he announced his bid to run for City Council. He was believed to have been the youngest Saline resident ever to run for public office. He received 1,140 votes – just 352 short of election.

He attended Eastern Michigan University for two years and enlisted in the Marines in 2003.

On his scholastic aptitude exam in the Marines, Kramer scored high enough to qualify for officer training school. But he wasn't interested.

His father said of Brad's deployment to Iraq. "He really could have chosen a different approach there [at officer school], but he chose to go from the ground up."

His family expects to be reunited with Brad this week sometime. Brad married Trish in a private ceremony earlier this year.

"It's been very difficult on all of us," his father said, "not being able to see him."

Valley Soldier Injured

August 19th WorldNow and WAFF

SGT Michael Austin of Grant, Al. serving in Najaf, Iraq in the 711th Sg Bn/279th (ARAB USARNG), was seriously wounded Wednesday evening from a mortar round that exploded just a few feet from him.

The wounds to SGT Austin were primarily to his chest, and he is still listed as VSI (Very Seriously Injured) although stable condition. SGT Austin has undergone surgery at the Baghdad Medical Facility, and has had shrapnel removed from his diaphragm and areas close to the heart.

The surgeon had to remove a very damaged spleen as well.

Mrs. Austin will travel to either Germany or Washington DC (Walter Reed) depending on the length of stay at the Landstuhl Hospital in Germany. Sgt Austin is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Jimmy Austin of Grant, Al. The family request and thanks you for your continued prayers for Michael's recovery.

Death & Duty In Forgotten Corner Of War

August 13, 2004 By Doug Struck, Washington Post Foreign Service

QAIM, Iraq -- Word spread fast. It was Gunny. And the young kid, Nice.

The news was passed in low voices, quiet conversations. No one wanted to say it loudly. The Marines heard it and looked away. They squinted at the heavy sun, kicked their boots in the dust. Their faces hardened. They spat their dip and shifted the guns on their shoulders. They swore. What else was there to say but goddammit.

Gunnery Sgt. Elia Fontecchio, 30, was killed by a roadside bomb, set off by someone who was watching a U.S. Marine foot patrol finish its work on Wednesday, Aug. 4. A half-hour later, Lance Cpl. Joseph Nice, 19, was stringing concertina wire across a road when a single sniper bullet passed through his body.

They were deaths 14 and 15 for the 3rd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment since it arrived in February. With 156 Purple Hearts as well, the casualty count for this battalion is higher than that of any other unit in Iraq, save for fellow Marines in Fallujah.

But to the men here, this is a forgotten war. They are at the western edge of Iraq, the last stop before Syria. The world hears what happens here only in a faint whisper. They are far from the headline cities -- Najaf, Baghdad, Fallujah, Ramadi -- where every spasm is seen by a thousand eyes.

Isolated at this far-flung outpost, the men live packed bunk to bunk, they guard one another's backs, they depend on the group to help ward off fear and loneliness. And they face losses in their own searingly personal way. When one man is killed, the rest are asked to go back where he died, to face the same danger, in the name of duty. They do it, they say, for their comrades, for themselves and for a country that expects it of them.

Fontecchio didn't have to go out. His duties taking care of the company meant he was usually busy at the camp, with no time to patrol. Gunnery sergeants, always called "Gunny," occupy a special place in the Marine Corps. Part supply officer, part morale booster, part problem solver, the gunnery sergeant is responsible for the well-being of the unit. He ranks high enough to get things done, but not so high that he doesn't work and play with the enlisted men.

Fontecchio was ideal for the job. He led with humor, which made him popular. When the company commander, Capt. Trent Gibson, gave him his most recent evaluation, the two men smoked cigars as Gibson told Fontecchio his only fault was he sometimes was too nice. Glowing reviews had moved Fontecchio up the ranks quickly; to be a gunnery sergeant after 12 years in the Corps was impressive.

So was his physique. A weight lifter, he kept a detailed calendar by his bed of his near-daily workouts, along with Arnold Schwarzenegger's "Encyclopedia of Modern Bodybuilding," with pages marked by Post-its. "He was what you think all Marines are supposed to look like," said the assistant operations officer, Capt. Rory Quinn, 29, of the Bronx. "He was a physical stud."

He also did not like to stay in camp too long. As his comrades recalled the events in interviews, that Wednesday Fontecchio joined a patrol.

At an Iraqi police station, they were told that Checkpoint 43, a two-room cinder-block police shelter, had been bombed. The checkpoint is in a lush fringe of the Euphrates River, where the desert suddenly yields to green fields of corn, okra, peppers and tomatoes. It is a pretty spot. And low: Small cliffs nearby offer a clear view of the road below. Four vehicles -- with about 25 men -- went to investigate.

As trained, the Marines dismounted and dispersed, scouting for clues or other bombs. After about 25 minutes, they started to pull back. The men walked toward their Humvees. Someone -- perhaps on the cliffs above, perhaps hidden in a field, maybe passing on a nearby road -- decided this was the moment to explode the foot-long, 155mm artillery shell that had been buried near Fontecchio's vehicle.

"You don't hear the blast. It doesn't register," said Staff Sgt. Shelby Lasater, 32, of Plano, Tex., who was about 150 feet away. "It happens so fast. You see a ball of fire, black smoke, then shrapnel, dirt, trees and branches flying. You feel the heat."

Lasater followed his sprinting medical corpsman toward the center of the blast and found Gunny. "I asked him how old was his son. He told me. I said, 'You're going to see him.' "

Within minutes, one of two attack helicopters that were supporting the patrol dropped onto the road. Marines shoved in Fontecchio's litter and loaded two of the wounded into seats. The "golden hour" so critical for survival of trauma victims was barely 20 minutes old when Gunny arrived at Camp Qaim. The Marines who unloaded him said he was talking. He would be all right, they believed.

The patrol resumed its hunt. A half-hour later, the men heard the blast of another roadside bomb about a mile away, near the police station. A patrol from W Company was closest and began to block off the area. Lance Cpl. Nice pulled off a roll of the razor-sharp concertina wire strapped to the hood of one of the Humvees. With heavy gloves, he unfurled the coil of wire, dragging it across one of the roads to stop traffic.

Like all the Marines, Nice wore a heavy vest with hardened plates in the front and back, the body armor that has saved many lives in this war. But as he turned to grapple with the wire, a single shot rang out. It pierced his side, under his raised arm, where the vest has only canvas webbing to allow flexibility. The bullet passed through his lungs and heart and exited the other side. He dropped on his back in the dust.

Staff Sgt. Chris Bengison, 31, heard the "crisp, clear pop" and calculated that the shot came from a cluster of two-story buildings in the distance. He and others laid down withering fire with their M-16 automatic rifles and a machine gun. Cpl. Jason Lemcke,

23, a squad leader, raced his Humvee toward the fallen Marine. Just as he opened the door, a shot crashed into the side mirror, just missing Lemcke's head. He fell back.

Another Humvee pulled beside Nice, and Cpl. Robert Wells dragged him with one hand, firing an M-16 with the other. They raced toward the open area where Fontecchio had been airlifted. A Black Hawk helicopter was on the way.

As they waited, corpsmen Adam Clarke and John Patrick Crate began mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. For each breath they gave, they got a mouthful of blood. They took turns, vomiting between their efforts. Nice's eyes were glazed, his heart stopped, the life drained from the gaping wounds in his sides. He was dead before the helicopter landed.

The Marines assaulted the buildings. The sniper was gone.

'The Wild West'

Anbar province, where the Marines are responsible for security, **is larger than Virginia**. It is a creased desert with hills and wadis -- dry riverbeds this time of year -- cut by the Euphrates River. Towns and clay-house villages follow the river south.

The 3rd Battalion is split between Qaim and Husaybah, which sits on the border with Syria. The men deal with the same shadowy enemies found elsewhere in Iraq. Added to the mix is a long tradition of smuggling and lawlessness.

"This is the Wild West, the frontier," said Capt. Dominique Neal, a Naval Academy graduate whose Lima Company is in Husaybah. Neal, 29, became the company commander April 17 when Capt. Richard Gannon was killed in a gunfight along with four other Marines. When he got the news on the radio, Neal, the executive officer, followed procedure and took the call sign of the commander: "Lima 5 is now Lima 6," he transmitted.

"It was the hardest message I ever sent," he said. Their base is now named Camp Gannon.

A Tough Loss

The helicopter that whisked Fontecchio toward Camp Qaim settled onto a concrete landing pad 150 feet from the tents of FRSS -- the Forward Resuscitative Surgical System. This is the modern version of the M*A*S*H unit, where surgeons operate as close to the action as they can get. **There are only three such units in Iraq; Qaim's casualty rate merits one of them.**

Marines sprinted from the helicopter with a litter bearing the gunnery sergeant. "He was in very bad shape," said Navy Capt. H. Don Elshire, 53, a surgeon who left a private practice in Orange County, Calif., to come to Iraq. "He was 15 feet from a high-explosive shell designed to destroy a tank. He should have come in here in pieces. It's probably only because he was in such good shape that we even got him at all."

Gunny was talking, trying to sit up, but he was pale, his heart was racing, and he had almost no pulse in his extremities. To the doctors, these were the neon-bright signs of shock; they meant massive loss of blood, somewhere. When Gunny's uniform was cut away, it was clear the blood was not going out the wounds in his legs. But his belly was horribly distended, filled with internal bleeding.

Navy Capt. Kermit Booher, 60, an orthopedic surgeon, would assist in the surgery. When he saw the patient, he was startled to recognize a man he had met a day or two before, in the gym, who had been gregarious and friendly. "He's laying there, and you think, 'Why is it the nice guys?'"

Fontecchio's litter was lifted onto the brackets of the portable operating table in the tent. Halogen lights were swung over the patient. With no blood circulating, Fontecchio was already getting cold, so Elshire turned off the tent's air conditioning. The 118-degree heat quickly nuzzled in.

Elshire slit open Gunny's belly. "It is kind of like slicing into a water balloon. You can't see what's going on. You have to visually imagine where the blood's coming from, and you have a few precious moments to do it."

Elshire did the best he could. He found a sliced aorta, the body's largest artery. He was able to stitch that. Then he found shrapnel that had entered Gunny's leg and swept through the thin-walled veins in the pelvic region. "It had turned that area to shreds." With no single wound to stitch, Elshire furiously packed the area to put pressure on the bleeding. As the minutes became an hour, then two, Elshire was sweating, soaked and starting to feel dizzy from the heat. Finally, he closed the incision.

"We had done everything we could," Elshire said. Already, outside, the blades of a Black Hawk were spinning to take Gunny to the Army hospital in Baghdad. But Elshire and the others knew his odds were bad. They had already pumped nearly eight liters of blood into him -- replacing his body's entire volume.

Booher described it: "All of a sudden everything stopped. His heart stopped beating, the blood stopped oxygenating. He died almost immediately."

For the doctors, it was a tough loss. In five months, the unit had seen 90 shock-trauma patients and operated on 20 of them. "Every single Marine who has come in here alive has left here alive," Booher said. "With Gunny, it was more personal because we couldn't save him. We spent a lot of time thinking about everything we did. "People say, 'You did your best. You did everything you could.' All those platitudes -- they are all true. But it still hurts."

A Different War

Last year, this Marine battalion began the war in Kuwait and fought its way north to Baghdad, without losing a single member in combat. The troops had about five months at their home base in Twentynine Palms, Calif., then returned to Iraq. They came back to a different war.

"I knew it was going to be more deadly. But nothing to this degree," Gibson, the Kilo Company commander, said over midnight rations of beans and rice. A wiry, intense man with a shaved head, Gibson, 35, said that on their first day out, a roadside bomb went off beside another captain's vehicles. The next day, Gibson's vehicle was hit. "I told the men, 'This is a guerrilla war, an insurgency. Marines are going to die. But we have a duty and we'll do it.'"

The Americans insist the majority of residents want them here to keep peace. Abed Ali Habad, who works for the Marines as an interpreter, disagrees. "People feel they suffered from the dictatorship of the Tikritis," he said, referring to Hussein's hometown clan. "Now we suffer from the dictatorship of the mujaheddin and the Americans. We need both to go."

Lt. Col. Matthew Lopez, commanding officer of the nearly 2,000-man battalion, says "By all accounts, we have been very successful," he said. "But the success has come at a cost."

Back at the base, the Kilo Company platoons gathered for a debrief, an exhaustive minute-by-minute rehash of what happened. This is standard -- the U.S. military lives by script, rehearsal and review -- but this meeting was heavy with loss. The men sat in plastic chairs in a room with filthy walls, their faces still smudged with dust, their eyes downcast, their guns beside them on the linoleum floor.

They debated the moves they had made. They reviewed their positions. They compared their observations. In the end, they concluded, the fatalities did not happen because of something they did wrong.

"We took casualties today," Staff Sgt. Lasater told the men. "But you did your job." Gibson, the company commander, looked ahead: "There's a sniper out there. We need to find him and kill him."

Saad Ali, a grizzled Iraqi military veteran now part of a special unit working with the Americans, spoke through an interpreter. "The people of the area, I can read their faces," he said. "They hate the American forces. Even pregnant women want to give birth earlier to fight you. The respect we show them, they don't deserve. We should kill from every house one person and not be sad. We should kill from every house one man. The enemy is ruthless. We must be as ruthless."

Silence greeted him as though he had thrown a dead dog on the floor. The Marines looked at one another in amazement at this Hussein-era prescription and rolled their eyes. After the meeting, the platoon officers and the sergeants lingered to discuss how to handle the losses.

"Hell, I don't want to get killed," said Staff Sgt. Chris Bengison, 31, of Frederic, Wis. "But I've got a whole platoon that is looking at me. I can't go soft on them. So you put your uniform on. You put your boots on. You put your flak jacket and helmet on and get back into the vehicle and do it again. That's the only way you can make it."

Later that night the men were in their barracks, a train depot divided with plywood and hanging tarps to create an illusion of privacy. No one is more than an arm's reach from the next bunk. The place is decorated with pinups and slogans painted on the wall, and jammed with gear and heaps of clothes and magazines.

"When you are back here, you think, 'I was standing right next to Nice,' " Bengison said. "Why him, and not me? What if the sniper had a little different angle?"

In Marine parlance, Nice was a "boot drop" -- someone who had just joined the unit from basic training. He was raised in Ohio, and when his parents divorced, he went to Oklahoma with his mother and grandmother. He got good grades in high school but decided to follow his father and grandfather into the service, as many Marines do.

"Nice was a good kid. That's what he was -- a kid," Lasater said gently. "He grew up fast being here for six months, but . . . he was a kid. He didn't smoke. He didn't drink."

"He always had a smile on his face," added Lt. Chris McManus. "He was one of those guys that you ask to do stuff and it's already done." Others in the barracks used him as a "scribe," to write letters. He was a whiz with a computer and figured out the unit's complex new electronic tracking system in a day.

"He was the kind of kid his father and mother could be proud of," Lasater said.

In the officers' section, a four-foot-wide corridor packed with four cots, 1st Lt. Rudy Salcido, 29, of Tucson, slowly sorted through the items in the empty bunk below his -- Fontecchio's bunk.

The first group from the 3rd Battalion was supposed to begin flying back to Kuwait, and then California, in two weeks. Within a month, the whole battalion, including Fontecchio, would have been on its way home.

"He was going to read these on the plane home," said Salcido, thumbing through two how-to books on child-rearing. "He talked about his kid all the time. He would sit and chat about how he has been away so long and wanted to make it back to them. He was really devoted to his family."

The men knew that just about then two Marines in dress uniforms were giving the news to Fontecchio's wife, Kinney, who was visiting her mother in Virginia Beach with 2-year-old Elia Jr. Two more Marines were at the home of Nice's mother in Prague, Okla.

1st Sgt. Michael Templeton, 40, was a longtime friend of Fontecchio's. He shook his head. "I held Gunny's hand as he came in on the litter. I told him his last lie: 'You'll be okay.' "

The sun rises. The war goes on. Patrols go out. By the next day, the 6 a.m. touch football game had resumed in the parking lot. A squad jogged by in unison, wearing rifles, chanting in cadence. The e-mail blackout imposed after every casualty to stop rumors from flying home was lifted, and within minutes, 26 Marines lined up at the computer tent for their turn to send messages home.

"The first killed-in-action we had, everybody was quiet for a long time," said Lt. Daniel Casey, 30, a former Peace Corps volunteer from Chicago. "They stood around the hallways here, and nobody even thought of going for chow. It's sad what you get accustomed to. Unfortunately, now we have a casualty and the routine just goes on. You feel guilty, but that's how it is."

Two days later, a Kilo Company patrol rolled out of the gates. The men called it an "H and D" patrol -- a search for "hate and discontent." They would stop anyone

who looked suspicious, search any house where their waves were returned by a sullen glare. Maybe they would find some weapons. Maybe someone would react.

"We're out there trying to draw fire. That's the only way we can get them, if they come out to fight," said Cpl. Jack Self.

Their work space was a hot, jammed vehicle covered inside and out with dust. The interior was crowded with metal ammo boxes, a rocket launcher, grenades, boxes of water, radios sprouting plugs and cords. In their vehicle, a gunner stood in the swiveling turret with a 7.62mm machine gun and a TOW missile launcher. The other men rode with their M-16 rifles at the ready.

They said little as the Humvees rolled, turning off the main highway and prowling the dirt roads of the village of Sadah. Children poured out of the houses to watch. Some waved and clapped. One little girl put her thumbs in her ears and wagged her hands, sticking out her tongue. In the back seat, Lance Cpl. Christopher Blissard, 21, of Brandon, Miss., shrugged.

The insurgents' rocket launchers and roadside bombs are often ingeniously made, so the patrol stopped at a machine shop in the village. The Marines roused eight workers, standing them in a line, checking their identity papers. One door was locked. A Marine with a hammer broke the padlock, revealing a small shop stocked with candy and ice cream.

The patrol moved on, their trail of dust drifting over the surrounding houses. They passed heaps of garbage, trucks and tractors in disrepair, vegetable gardens and sheep.

The village seemed placid, pastoral. The residents sleep at midday, awaiting the relative cool of evening. But it is not always calm here, the Marines said. There have been six roadside bombings at a spot near where Gunny was killed. And see that alley? It was rocket alley a few weeks ago, when an American patrol was met by a volley of rocket-propelled grenades.

As they climbed a bumpy street, one Marine said he saw a young man hastily throw something over a low wall. The Marines surrounded a house and brought out seven young men. The Americans ordered them to lie on the ground facedown, with their hands behind their heads. Other Marines searched behind the low stone wall and went through the house, room by room. Four children, two women and an old man sat on the porch, apprehensive and silent.

The Marines found nothing and left. The young men got up, dusting off their clothes and glancing sidelong at the departing Humvees.

House after house was like this. Young men lined up sullenly when ordered. **Only the old women were fearless, scolding the Americans in loud Arabic. "Shut up," a Marine snapped in English.**

The Marines returned to their Humvees. In the heat, rivulets of sweat appeared from under Kevlar helmets, mingled with dust and disappeared under armored vests. The discomfort added to the tension of being exposed to attack.

"Having a sniper out there scares the hell out of me," confided one Marine. "He's a pretty good one, too. Only three shots, and he got one of ours -- Nice. And he almost got Lemcke."



In the village of Sadah, Marines detain men while searching a house where they suspected something was hidden. Nothing was found; the men were released. (Doug Struck -- The Washington Post)

Four hours after leaving, the patrol returned to base. The Marines had found no weapons, made no arrests. Some were disappointed.

"It's always nice to get a bad guy," said Cpl. Travis Struecker, 21, of Algona, Iowa. "It's pretty frustrating when we can't find them. A lot of the guys were pretty pissed after Gunny's death. They wanted to kick some ass."

The men of the 3rd Battalion formed up Saturday morning in crisp, straight lines. The first notes of the "Star-Spangled Banner" brought them rigid, their arms cocked in salutes. In front of the formation, 1st Sgt. Templeton called roll three times. At the names Fontecchio and Nice, the only answer was the snapping of the American and Marine Corps flags.

An honor guard stabbed the absent Marines' rifles, bayonets down, into sandbags on the parking lot. Their helmets were placed on the rifle stocks. Empty boots in front. "The more of these we do, the harder it gets," said Lopez, the battalion commander. "And the harder we get."

The officers said a few words. Gibson, the company commander, acknowledged Fontecchio's priorities: "He was a father first and foremost. And he was a Marine." Nice, he said, "never said much, but you always knew he was there, taking care of your back." Templeton added: "If there's a gym in heaven, Gunny's there."

Fontecchio was never much for sermons. At the last ceremony, the chaplain's words didn't capture what was important to the men, he thought. So he wrote out detailed instructions for his own ceremony -- just in case. No sermons. He added

a few words of goodbye: "I loved every one of you. You will forever be my brothers in arms."

The Marines broke ranks and filed past the upended rifles, each man touching the helmets in farewell. They were slumped. A few shed tears. Salcido crossed himself. Lopez, the last before the honor guard broke, saluted each rifle.

Slowly, the men drifted back to their bunks. Those on duty picked up their helmets and shrugged on their heavy flak jackets.

Sixteen minutes later, the next patrol headed out the gate, trailing a plume of dust in the desert.



Watch Your Mouth Henry, We Got The Rifles

"Military men are just dumb stupid animals to be used as pawns in foreign policy." - Henry Kissinger, quoted in "Kiss the Boys Goodbye: How the United States Betrayed Its Own POW's in Vietnam"

CHECK OUT THE NEW TRAVELING SOLDIER

Telling the truth - about the occupation, the cuts to veterans' benefits, or the dangers of depleted uranium - is the first reason Traveling Soldier is necessary. But we want to do more than tell the truth; we want to report on the resistance - whether it's in the streets of Baghdad, New York, or inside the armed forces. Our goal is for Traveling Soldier to become the thread that ties working-class people inside the armed services together. We want this newsletter to be a weapon to help you organize resistance within the armed forces. If you like what you've read, we hope that you'll join with us in building a network of active duty organizers. <http://www.traveling-soldier.org/>

IRAQ RESISTANCE ROUNDUP

Najaf Battle: Eyewitness to a Siege

Aug. 30 By Scott Johnson, Newsweek

One afternoon I met a dozen or so guerrillas a few blocks from the shrine, racing east through the deserted neighborhood toward the U.S. line. The group's leader, just out of his teens and built like a wrestler, was running barefoot, apparently not bothered by the shrapnel that covered the pavement. **He said his name was Ali; he and his men had traveled from the far northern city of Mosul to join al-Sadr's revolt.** They were going to attack an American armored vehicle.

Almost within sight of their target, they were greeted by other pro-Sadr fighters from Nasiriya and Karbala.

Al-Sadr's men stand watch in shattered windows and alleyways all around the Old City.

On a corner near the city's Wadi al-Salaam cemetery, often said to be the world's biggest graveyard, I saw three men crouched beside a wooden donkey cart outfitted with a crude rocket launcher. Another fighter waited nearby in the shadow of a hotel that caters to Shiite pilgrims. **He said he had traveled down from Sadr City to join the fight against the Americans.**

Collaborator Officials Attacked

8/22/2004 By ABDUL HUSSEIN AL-OBEIDI Associated Press Writer & By Michael Georgy (Reuters) & by Jay Deshmukh (AFP)

A car bomb exploded in the town of Khalis, killing two people and injuring 14 others, **including a deputy provincial governor, Bassam al-Khadran, who was lightly wounded,** Iraqi officials said.

A suicide bomber detonated the car, laden with explosives, as al-Khadran was traveling to work in a small convoy, said Gen. Waleed al-Azawi, chief of police for Diyala province. **Both fatalities and seven of the injured were al-Khadran's bodyguards**, he said. One civilian was also wounded.

Pieces of flesh were found littered on the ground after the attack.

In Jur al-Nadaf, 12 miles south of Baghdad, attackers sprayed a police vehicle with machine-gun fire, killing two policemen before fleeing, said police Col. Adnan Abdul-Rahman of the Interior Ministry.

Near Baquba, a car bomb blew up near a convoy carrying Iraqi officials near the town of Baquba, killing two people and wounding eight, a police officer said.

The attack appeared to have been targeting Ghasan al-Ghadren, the town's deputy mayor, police said. The official was slightly wounded, the health ministry said.

More Coming



Pakistani Shiite Muslim women chant anti-U.S. slogans in Karachi, Pakistan, Aug. 22. **About 5,000 Shiite Muslims held an anti-U.S. rally, protesting the fighting in the holy city of Najaf and demanding American forces withdraw from Iraq.** (AP Photo/Shakil Adil)

Captured Iraqi Intel Officer Found Dead

8.22.04 Associated Press

BASRA, Iraq: An Iraqi intelligence officer kidnapped nearly a week ago has been found dead in the southern city of Basra, his body riddled with bullets.

Iraqi police say the operative was captured by an armed group protesting the fighting in the holy city of Najaf. According to a video shown last Tuesday on the pan-Arab Al-Jazeera television station, a group calling itself the Defense of the Holy Sites Brigades threatened to kill the officer.

The same group says it carried out a mortar attack on an intelligence services building in Basra on Saturday, but its claim couldn't be independently verified.

FORWARD OBSERVATIONS

How The Pre-Emptive War Was Pre-Lost

8.20.04 Tomdispatch.com

It was delusional to imagine that the people of a post-colonial country would happily accept a new occupation.

No consultation with British or French or Israel intelligence agencies was needed to grasp this lesson. It was writ large in the annals of twentieth century history, including the voluminous records of the United States' defeat in Vietnam.

The lessons of Vietnam remain important not because the Vietnamese nation resembles the Iraqi nation but because Vietnam was America's very own, protracted, anguished experience of the almost universal story of imperial defeat at the hands of local peoples determined to run their own countries.

Movements of national resistance have arisen in both the Sunni north and the Shiite south. The Kurdish population is friendly to the United States but not to the Iraq that the United States wants it to join.

On the American side, a former Baathist official and CIA asset, Iyad Allawi, does the bidding of the United States without benefit of popular support.

The contest has assumed a form distressingly familiar from other anti-imperial movements. The local resisters are weak militarily but strong politically. The

imperial masters are powerful militarily but nearly helpless politically. History teaches that in these contests, it is political power that prevails.

But the full truth may be that the war in Iraq was lost before it was launched.

The preemptive war was pre-lost.

The problem was not the Bush Administration's incompetence, great as that has been, but the incurable incapacity of any foreign conqueror to win local hearts and minds, on which everything, in the last analysis, depends.

Don't the recent fortunes of the "empire" as a whole reveal a similar pattern of political weakness underlying military strength?

The handwriting announcing failure was not on the proverbial wall in the form of a prediction whose fulfillment had to be awaited, it was inscribed in every history book of the last hundred years . The verdict was delivered before the crime was committed.

“There Is No Iraqi Government”

22 August 2004 Marc Ash, t r u t h o u t

There is no Iraqi government. However -- entirely for US public relations purposes -- a semblance of an Iraqi government has been cobbled together, and is strategically positioned in front of news cameras at all times. They do not make decisions. All substantive decisions are made directly by the US White House, or when needed by the current US overseer "Ambassador" John Negroponte.

The armed force surrounding The Shrine of Ali in the Iraqi holy city of Najaf is largely a US military force. An Iraqi force -- again for public relations purposes -- has been assembled, and is being displayed for the benefit of the press in attendance.

If an assault is mounted against The Shrine of Ali, that assault will be conducted not by any "Iraqi army," but by US forces. The main reason for this is that no one born in Iraq would even dream of attacking The Shrine of Ali -- only Westerners could conceive of such a thing.

There are two main arguments that are most often used to support a rationale for continued US military action in Iraq.

The first is that if we pull out, there will be civil war. Normally that would be a valid concern. Unfortunately the Bush administration is doing more at this point to foment civil war in Iraq than prevent it. The creation of Iraqi "security forces" in fact pits Iraqis against Iraqis. The result is a bloody rendition of "divide and rule." Yes, if the Bush administration had an interest in preventing violence they might have a leg to stand on. But their interest is oil, and Iraqi unity does not serve that end.

The second argument most often used in support of the continued US military action in Iraq is, for lack of a better term, the installation of democracy.

Again that won't work for Mr. Bush and the US oil industry. Democracy would lead to self rule, and that would be less profitable for us. Democracy, however does work quite well as a sales slogan, so look for it in use there.

Do you have a friend or relative in the service? Forward this E-MAIL along, or send us the address if you wish and we'll send it regularly. Whether in Iraq or stuck on a base in the USA, this is extra important for your service friend, too often cut off from access to encouraging news of growing resistance to the war, at home and in Iraq, and information about other social protest movements here in the USA. **Send requests to address up top. For copies on web site see: GI Special web site at <http://www.militaryproject.org/> or <http://www.notinourname.net/gi-special/> or www.gifightback.org or <http://www.albasrah.net/maqalat/english/gi-special.htm>**

AFGHANISTAN WAR REPORTS

Resistance On The Offensive; Number Of U.S. Troops Killed “Up Sharply”

"We Are Expecting It To Get Worse."

August 22, 2004 By CARLOTTA GALL, New York Times

ARDEZ, Afghanistan - In late June, just two weeks into his tour here, Pvt. Jeremy Kretz from Dubuque, Iowa, was driving in a convoy near the border with Pakistan when a remote-controlled explosion hit his Humvee, causing him to black out and blasting him and his companions with rocks and dust. The American soldiers got away with concussions, ruptured eardrums and gravel-peppered skin.

"Head's pretty full of gravel anyway," joked his commander, Lt. James Avrams, who is in charge of the protection force at Gardez, raising a laugh among his men, all from the 34th Infantry Division, Iowa National Guard.

But for the American military, and foreign and Afghan officials, **remote-controlled explosions have become the biggest threat in Afghanistan. Although they are not being used on nearly the scale found in Iraq, they are becoming more common and increasingly sophisticated, military and other officials said in interviews.**

That point was driven home over the weekend of Aug. 7, when two American soldiers and an Afghan interpreter were killed, and three more men were wounded, south of here by a powerful explosion that tossed their Humvee over and over in the air. **The explosion was not only set off by remote control, probably with a radio set, but also was a "daisy chain" explosion, with explosives laid along the road and linked, to ensure a lethal blow.**

Twelve election workers have been killed in explosions over the last few months as they have registered voters nationwide.

Thirty-one American soldiers have been killed - 23 of them in combat - this year, most of them in roadside explosions or ambushes, a sharp increase over the same period last year.

In the first week of August, the Gardez team recorded an incident every day, whether a clash with fighters suspected of being members of the Taliban or Al Qaeda, or explosions aimed at American forces or supply trucks, Lt. Evan McCrann said.

Lieutenant Avrams said, "We are expecting it to get worse."

The American-led coalition forces now number about 20,000, and are spread across the troubled southern and eastern parts of the country.

The "bad guys," as the soldiers call the suspected Taliban and foreign Al Qaeda fighters along with other groups opposed to the American presence in Afghanistan and to the American-backed election process, remain active along the eastern border with Pakistan, and across southern Afghanistan. United States marines and Special Forces have been brought into specific areas on request to tackle known troublemakers or groups of insurgents.

Civil affairs teams, based in provincial centers, have their own protection units, which also conduct regular patrols and security operations. For one such team in Gardez, the threat of improvised explosive devices, or I.E.D.'s as they are known, is one of the most difficult to combat.

"They tell us to watch out for stacks of rocks, but there's stacks of rocks everywhere here," said Jon, a sergeant who spoke on the condition that his surname not be published. Specialist Leo Pins added: "Or watch for wires, but when you are rolling down the road with lots of dust, you don't see much. You drive down and pray."

And Specialist Toby Handy said, "Just hope you don't go boom."

The sergeant added: "It's also frustrating. It's hard to find the guys trying to do the things against us."

The danger and fear are even greater for government and election officials and aid workers, who do not have the protection of armored vehicles or body armor but have increasingly been the targets of attacks this year.

"The biggest threat to the electoral process is clearly I.E.D.'s," said Brian Nelson Smith, the regional security officer for the election commission.

Paktika Province, one of the most dangerous parts of the country, which runs along the Pakistani border and has been almost a free zone for Taliban and Al Qaeda fighters in the last two years.

A spokesman for the Taliban, Abdul Latif Hakimi, claimed responsibility in a telephone interview for recent remote-controlled explosions against American forces

Mr. Hakimi said there would be more attacks.

The weak link in the country's security remains the local Afghan police. In southeastern Afghanistan, the police are so poorly equipped and understaffed that the tribes have assembled their own militia forces in the last two years.

"They are having a real hard time," Major Renaldo said of the local police. "They have no weapons. They are not in very good shape."

Received:

Re: New GI Special Web Site

From: "J"
To: GI Special
Sent: August 22, 2004
Re: War Reports

Are your reports posted on any website? I received them now in eml form, but when I copy them into Word all the pictures get left behind. But in pdf I can't cut and paste any parts of the text I want to forward.

However, from a website, I can copy whatever is there into Word and the photos come with it.

The reports are amazing, emotionally hard to read but so important. It's very important, what you're doing.

Thanks, J, Subscriber

REPLY:

Just got a web site going this week at: <http://www.militaryproject.org/> Thanks for your encouragement. T.

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