GI SPECIAL 2#B57

Chaos in Ramadi

Capt. Kelly D. Royer, center, leads his "quick reaction force" to reinforce the pinned-down Marines. (Photo: David Swanson/Philadelphia Inquirer)

(This three part article gives an exceptional look at the reality of the war, as well as a report on the decisive battle that drove the occupation out of the city. Some of the Marines interviewed were dead a short time later.

(Part 3 interviews family of the Marines killed in Ramadi.)

August 16, 2004 Knight Ridder Newspapers

This is a three-part series on Echo Company, which has lost 22 of its 185 men, more than any other Marine or Army Company in the Iraq war.

U.S. soldiers and Marines have stopped patrolling large swaths of Anbar.

After losing dozens of men to a "voiceless, faceless mass of people" with no clear leadership or political aim other than killing Americans, the U.S. military had to re-evaluate the situation in and around Ramadi, said Maj. Thomas Neemeyer, the head intelligence officer for the 1st Brigade of the Army's 1st Infantry Division, the main military force in the area.

"They cannot militarily overwhelm us, but we cannot deliver a knockout blow, either," he said.

RAMADI, Iraq - The Marines of Echo Company jumped from their trucks into Ramadi's narrow streets and alleys and ran toward the sound of the guns. They followed their commander, Capt. Kelly D. Royer, through palm trees and warrens of cinder-block buildings.

One of Echo's sniper teams had come under fire, and Royer's "quick reaction force" was going to reinforce the pinned-down Marines.

Before they'd gone far, headquarters at Combat Outpost, a Marine base in the Iraqi city of 500,000 on the Euphrates River, called on the radio. The snipers had repulsed the attackers, but now Echo Company's 1st Platoon, which had been sent out earlier to clear the main supply route through Ramadi, was taking fire and needed help.

Amid the dust and noise, Royer radioed 2nd Lt. John Wroblewski. While Royer's team moved on foot, "Lieutenant Ski," as his men called him, was leading a second Echo quick-reaction force in Humvees through the chaotic streets of Ramadi. Pick us up at the intersection at the marketplace, Royer told Wroblewski.

Wroblewski had told his men the day before to be alert. Something's not right, he said. In this neighborhood, the residents didn't wave and the children didn't flock to the Marines, the way they did in other parts of the city. They only stared.

Although neither Royer nor Wroblewski knew it, earlier that morning, April 6, Iraqi and foreign fighters had slipped through the marketplace, telling shopkeepers to close their stores and kiosks and warning: "Today, we are going to kill Americans."

If the Iraqi insurgency has a center of gravity, Ramadi, the capital of Anbar province and a bastion of Saddam Hussein's military and intelligence services, probably is it. The city sits astride the main road from Baghdad to Jordan, and the insurgents in Ramadi were far better organized and far better schooled in guerrilla warfare than the Marines originally realized.

Gunfire rattled to the east, where Royer's force had been moments earlier. Marines seemed to be under attack everywhere. Royer and his men started running to reinforce their comrades in the 1st Platoon.

Two Marines from the 1st Platoon, Pfc. Benjamin Carman, 20, of Jefferson, Iowa, and Lance Cpl. Marcus Cherry, 18, of Imperial, Calif., already were dead.

Carman's high school coach said he was "one of the hardest-working football players I've ever had."

There are five large tires in a field near Jefferson-Scranton High School. Four of them are for tractors; the fifth and largest is for a combine. It's 5 feet tall, and it weighs 80 pounds. As part of their daily workout, the football players had to flip each tire 10 times.

Medium-sized Ben Carman ran straight to the big tire every day, and he didn't flip it 10 times. He flipped it 12.

Like Ben, Marcus Cherry had wanted to be a Marine. But he had to practice that Marine Corps stare. He would stand in front of a mirror at home, jaw forward, eyes hard, and hold it as long as he could before his trademark grin gave him away.

In a letter home from boot camp, Marcus wrote: "I knew, Mom, the Marine Corps was the best decision for my life at the time I joined. It's a fast way to grow up, but I was made for it."

As Royer and his men hustled toward the 1st Platoon, Wroblewski rolled past with his convoy. Royer radioed Wroblewski again: Stop and pick us up.

"Roger, Six," Wroblewski responded, using the military term for "commanding officer."

Royer and his men heard Wroblewski's Humvees and trucks slow as they approached the marketplace.

Then Royer's Marines heard the staccato sound of AK-47 rifle fire, the deeper growl of a machine gun and the thuds of rocket-propelled grenades.

Like Cherry, Wroblewski was where he'd always wanted to be: leading Marines in combat. He'd even named his Alaskan malamute pup Semper, after the Marine Corps motto, "Semper fidelis" ("Always faithful").

Six feet two, with piercing blue eyes and a linebacker's build, Wroblewski, 25, was a natural leader, popular with his men and respected by other officers. Royer called him "one of my best."

The day before the firefight, "J.T." had talked about home as he led a 10-mile foot patrol through Ramadi. He talked about fishing, about the Marines, about his wife, Joanna.

He grew up in Morris County, in northern New Jersey, where he was a high school football and baseball standout, and he graduated from Rutgers before he joined the Marines in 2002.

Wroblewski had caught Joanna's eye at the County College of Morris in Randolph, N.J. "Wow, that guy's hot," she thought. He also was shy. "I had to ask him out," she said. They were married in July 2003.

He had been at home with Joanna in Oceanside, Calif., on Valentine's Day when he got his orders to Iraq. She was making waffles with strawberries for breakfast when the call came. He had to leave the next day.

His last phone conversation with her had been three days earlier. Instead of signing off as usual by saying, "I'll see you soon," he'd told her: "I'll always be with you."

On all sides of the intersection that marked the Ramadi marketplace, Iraqi fighters with AK-47's and rocket-propelled grenade launchers had taken positions on the roofs of the

one-story buildings. A heavy .50-caliber Russian-made machine gun was on one corner rooftop, where the gunner could sweep the street. Other fighters were hidden behind trees just beyond the market stalls.

About 50 well-armed insurgents were waiting for Wroblewski and his Marines.

PART 2

The first of 2nd Lt. John T. Wroblewski's three Humvees slowed as it entered the Ramadi marketplace where the insurgents were waiting.

At the wheel was Lance Cpl. Kyle Crowley, 18, of San Ramon, Calif. With him in the unarmored green Humvee were radio operator Lance Cpl. Travis Layfield, 19, of Fremont, Calif.; Pfc. Christopher R. Cobb, 19, of Bradenton, Fla.; Lance Cpl. Anthony Roberts, 18, of Bear, Del.; Navy Petty Officer 3rd Class Fernando A. Mendez-Aceves, 27, of San Diego, a medic; Staff Sgt. Allan K. Walker, 28, of Lancaster, Calif., and Lance Cpl. Deshon E. Otey, 24, of Louisville, Ky. In the back, manning the machine gun, was Pfc. Ryan Jerabek, 18, of Oneida, Wis.

Most of them were following in their family's footsteps. Crowley's great-grandfather had been a World War II Marine. Layfield's maternal grandfather was a Seabee in World War II. Cobb's stepfather had served, and so had Roberts' dad. Mendez-Aceves had listened to his great-grandmother rocking him to sleep humming soldiers' marches. Men in Walker's family had served in virtually all of America's wars. Jerabek's father, Ken, had served in the Army during Vietnam.

Ryan Jerabek had pre-enlisted in the Marines with his friend Mike Andrews when he turned 17. "He had the sweetest smile," said Faye Girardi, one of his teachers at Pulaski High School, who thought Ryan was "too gentle" to become a Marine.

Ryan's sense of humor survived boot camp: He laughingly called his military-issue glasses "BC glasses" - birth control glasses - because they were so effective at keeping girls away.

When Travis Layfield was about 9, his family visited an air show at Moffett Field in Mountain View, Calif. "He saw kids in uniform and he said, ‘I want to sign up,' " said his sister, Tiffany Bolton. "That's where it started."

Cobb's minister, John Marlow, an Army veteran, had taught 8-year-old Chris what it meant to be a soldier.

"We were talking and I said, "Chris, I was in the U.S. Army and I tried to be a good soldier," remembered Marlow, now 70. "Chris looked me in the eye and said, 'Well, I will be a good soldier.' "

Roberts had stood over his father's casket, a boy of 13 staring silently at the man he had adored. Tony went on to star in karate, baseball, volunteer service for the elderly, even the summer reading program. He was handsome and, said his ROTC teacher, Maj. Daniel Alvarez, "he had the ladies after him all the time."

William E. Roberts Jr. with his son, Anthony Roberts, in an undated family photograph. William's death in 1998 profoundly affected Tony, then just 13

The driver of the Humvee, Kyle Crowley, had been something of a troubled kid who drove around San Ramon in the San Francisco Bay area in a 1980s Cadillac he'd inherited from his grandmother. He signed up in a pre-enlistment program when he turned 16, over the objections of his father, Mark, a sheet-metal worker who'd raised Kyle by himself from age 4.

Kyle slapped a Marine Corps sticker on the back of his car. He hung American and Marine Corps flags in his room, and he wore Marine T-shirts to school.

When Cobb came home from boot camp to Bradenton, Fla., he wore his uniform back to Bayshore High School, where his teachers remembered "a quiet kid in the back of the class."

"He was so proud," said Richard Jorgensen, who taught Chris' orchestra class. "He had just finished basic. He seemed more relaxed. I think the Marines gave him a sense of identity. A sense of pride that he didn't seem to have before."

Navy medic Fernando Mendez-Aceves had been a scrawny boy, but boot camp had changed him, too. His biceps grew so big that he had to wear oversize shirts. At the Naval Medical Center in San Diego they called him Rocky, the Muscle Man or Hulk. He volunteered for duty with the Marines in Iraq because he didn't want his combat training to go to waste.

They called Staff Sgt. Allan Walker, at 28 one of Echo Company's senior noncommissioned officers, the Beast. Six feet 2 and 230 pounds, he'd played high school football and flipped burgers in the Mojave Desert town of Palmdale, Calif.

But Walker "had all these little twists and turns," said Jim Root, his old football coach and friend. Walker was a high school jock who also hung with the drama kids, and a rebellious teenager who wore punk rock T-shirts and spiked hair but loved poetry.

"The Marine Corps was his intervention program," said his father, Kenneth Walker.

When the war came, Allan Walker, too, volunteered to go. "How can I teach a corporal how to take a hill if he's been there and I have never?" he asked his father. "How can I teach men to fight if I've never been to battle?"

As the green Humvee neared the T-intersection at the Ramadi marketplace, the insurgents hidden on the rooftops opened fire. Bullets plowed through the windshield and the metal doors. Crowley, the driver, was killed, and the truck canted sideways. Jerabek opened up with his machine gun, but he, too, was quickly cut down.

Deshon Otey leapt out of the Humvee and began firing from behind a low wall. The others stayed in the truck and were quickly gunned down.

"We all took cover," Otey said. "There was firing coming from all directions. They were shooting AK-47's, RPK machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades."

Mendez-Aceves, the Navy medic, was killed next to Walker, apparently working to save the sergeant's life.

Wroblewski was behind them in the second Humvee. He was hit in the face by a bullet that smashed through the radio handset he was holding.

As soon as Royer's reinforcements moved toward the firefight in the marketplace, they came under fire, too.

Running toward the cover of nearby houses, Royer yelled at his radio operator to keep up with him: "Suck it up, find it . . . find it, son, your Marines are being shot at!"

Royer's Iraqi translator, a man everyone called "007," was smiling as he ran, in tan sandals, a sleeveless jogging outfit and a navy blue T-shirt that said "Operation Iraqi Freedom" across the front. Wearing neither a helmet nor a protective vest, he was blithely fatalistic: "Inshallah," he said. God willing.

Royer and his men reached the relative safety of a house. Other Marines were already there, and so was an Iraqi family, huddled in the living room. Bullets smacked into the side of the house as Royer led his Marines up the stairs to the rooftop to begin returning fire.

Royer got on the radio and called for air support, but the helicopters were in action elsewhere, circling over firefights in the center of the city.

Royer sent a team to silence the insurgents' Russian-made machine gun on the corner rooftop but by the time the Marines got there, the Iraqi machine gunners had vanished, leaving only a pile of spent shell casings.

Five Iraqi men walked along the intersection. "Do they have weapons? Do they have weapons?" Royer yelled. Marines opened fire, and the men scattered out of sight. The Marines saw cars and vans approaching the area, then slowing down and turning back, picking up walking men. Were they retreating fighters? The Marines couldn't tell.

Other Marines entered the marketplace and began removing the bodies of the dead Americans from the green Humvee. Royer and his men joined them.

Remnants of cotton and paper trauma supplies littered the ground. The bed of the truck was littered with empty water bottles and exploded green packages of meals-ready-to-eat, mixed among brass shell casings. The rectangular top handle of an M-16 was sheared off in a pile of debris. Blood and water and diesel oil drained into the ground.

A Marine passed by slowly, carrying the body of a fallen brother on his shoulder. He gently placed the heavy, dark green bag in the back of a Humvee.

A pair of military-issue eyeglasses lay smashed on the ground by the lead Humvee, blood drying on the right lens. They were machine gunner Jerabek's birth control glasses.

"I talk with some of the other guys in the platoon about what happened, but it still hurts," Otey, the lone survivor in the green Humvee, said later. "Every time I walk into our living space I see the empty racks (bunks). Those were guys I used to talk to about my problems. Now I don't hear their voices anymore."

Otey, 24, was killed two months later on a rooftop in Ramadi with three other Echo Company Marines.

Taking the rooftops of nearby houses that April day, the Marines gained control of the intersection, and the sound of gunfire died down.

A sergeant from Combat Outpost arrived and said he'd seen Wroblewski and that Lt. Ski would be OK.

He was wrong. Wroblewski died while a helicopter was evacuating him. An enemy bullet had severed an artery, and the medics couldn't control the bleeding.

The bodies of four Iraqis lay in the street, one beside a red-and-white taxi. Royer stood over one of the dead men for a few seconds, then stepped over the body. The translator everyone called "007," trailing Royer, kicked the body hard and muttered, "Bastard."

The evening light was growing softer, cooler.

Pfc. Eric Ayon, 26, of Arleta, Calif., climbed behind the wheel of the green Humvee and tried the ignition. Nothing. A rocket-propelled grenade had pierced the engine compartment. Photographer David Swanson of The Philadelphia Inquirer, who was traveling with Echo Company, took pictures of Ayon sitting behind the Humvee's shattered windshield.

Ayon had wanted to join the military since the days when he ambushed his sister's Barbie doll with his G.I. Joe. He told everyone he was going to be a Marine. He told his co-workers at Mid-Valley Community Day School in the Los Angeles suburb of Van Nuys, where he counseled gang-hardened teenagers.

And when he thought that his son Joshua, at 7, was old enough to grasp what it meant to be a Marine and why his father would have to go away now and then, he told him, too.

Afterward, Joshua told his friends, his teachers and anyone else who would listen: "My dad's a Marine."

Three days later, on April 9, Good Friday, Eric Ayon was killed at that same intersection. The word is that a homemade bomb - what the military calls an improvised explosive device - exploded. Ayon left the driver's seat for cover and was hit when a second IED blew up.

Pfc. Eric Ayon attempts to start a Humvee that had been ambushed, killing seven Marines. Ayon would die three days later at the same intersection.

PART 3

More than 129 U.S. servicemen have died in Anbar province since President Bush declared the end of major combat operations in Iraq on May 1, 2003.

The Marine force in Ramadi, the 2nd Battalion of the 4th Marines, nicknamed "The Magnificent Bastards," has had the highest casualties of any U.S. battalion since the war in Iraq began: at least 29 killed and 175 wounded, roughly 20 percent of the battalion's 1,000-man strength.

Echo Company has lost 23 of its 185 men, more than any other Marine or Army company. It's had more than 40 wounded.

U.S. soldiers and Marines have stopped patrolling large swaths of Anbar.

After losing dozens of men to a "voiceless, faceless mass of people" with no clear leadership or political aim other than killing Americans, the U.S. military had to re-evaluate the situation in and around Ramadi, said Maj. Thomas Neemeyer, the head intelligence officer for the 1st Brigade of the Army's 1st Infantry Division, the main military force in the area.

"They cannot militarily overwhelm us, but we cannot deliver a knockout blow, either," he said.

Joanna Lynn Wroblewski said farewell to her husband, 2nd Lt. John T. Wroblewski, in a letter she read at his funeral. It began:

"Hey babe,

"I saw you today. We were taking one of our usual strolls with the dog and the sun was shining all around you. You looked at me again the way you always did with that handsome cool smile. That look that told me how much you love me, and how everything was going to be OK. 'We're OK,' that was what we kept saying the day you left for Iraq. You were always right. My brave warrior."

Fernando Mendez-Aceves' mother, Sandra, got a letter from his platoon leader after Doc Mendez was killed: "He never complained at all, even if he went on missions that lasted day and night. . . . I could tell he was a good man, and whoever raised him did a good job."

In the family's small apartment, a candle burns on a memorial. Fernando watches over them from half a dozen photographs. There's a bottle of Corona beer, a deck of playing cards, a last letter from a girlfriend, unopened, and a plain blue sack with a box that contains Fernando's ashes.

"Fernando believed that all things happen for a reason, and that it is not our place to question God's plan," his mother said.

His younger brother, Kenneth, 15, wears Doc's old oversize T-shirt and baseball cap when he runs and lifts weights. "I'm so proud of him," Kenneth said.

Staff Sgt. Allan Walker's mother, Nancy, got in her son's little red Chevy pickup and drove from her home in Lancaster, Calif., in the Antelope Valley 60 miles north of Los Angeles, to Texas and Iowa and Minnesota, visiting mothers and fathers of Echo Company Marines she'd contacted by mail and e-mail since Allan's death.

She's angry. She hates the war in Iraq, and disagreed with it from the start. She's fiercely proud of her son and has no trouble speaking out against the war and President Bush because, she says, doing so honors the values her son fought and died for.

Her ex-husband, Kenneth Walker, who supports the war, has begun a journey inward to a respite from his pain: the Hindu teachings he's embraced for decades.

"There is no such thing as death," he said one afternoon at his home in Palmdale, where Allan had played football and flipped burgers. "So if you really believe that, I mean really believe that in your gut, then it makes the death of someone you care about and love easier to deal with."

Kyle Crowley and his dad had parted ways before he left for boot camp. He spent some nights at friends' homes, others in his old Cadillac, but he found refuge at his girlfriend Trisha Johnson's home. Her parents, Steve and Gail Johnson, welcomed Kyle. "He told us: ‘I want to go fight to protect families like yours,' " Steve said.

"He wanted family most of all, and the Marines are like family," Gail said.

Nelson Carman goes by himself to his son Ben's grave in Jefferson, Iowa. He tries not to grieve in front of his family. He finds comfort there, where tiny American flags have sprouted and someone has stuck a fishing pole in the ground. Some days, he finds a glass of brandy and a cigar butt.

Ben's favorite spot was an overlook on the Carman farm, on a bluff 60 feet above the river. Eagles soar there, and deer roam. Ben and his siblings and friends camped there summer and fall, fished the river, hunted the woods and looked for arrowheads. It's sacred ground for all of them now.

Ben's mother, Marie, said: "What he could have been. . . . You just don't know."

A month after Ryan Jerabek was killed, a package arrived at the Jerabek home. It was a late Christmas present that Ryan, who was fascinated with his Irish ancestry, had ordered from Ireland before he left for Iraq. Inside the box was a curved white shield with the family crest painted on the face, and a silver and gold sword for Ryan's younger brother Nick.

His mother, Rita, said simply: "He was a gift."

Sometimes the Ayon family goes out to the driveway and gets in the silver Toyota Solara that Eric Ayon had said would belong to his baby sister, Jazmine, if anything happened to him in Iraq. They sit in his car, start the engine and roll down the windows, but they don't go anywhere.

They remain suspended somewhere between a past in which Eric cracks jokes, dances goofily and lectures Jazmine on the virtue-less nature of boys and the April day when two somber Marines arrived at the door to tell them that Eric was dead, blown up by a homemade bomb.

Eric's sister Cynthia, 23, tells herself that he's just away on vacation. His father, Henry, tries not to talk about it. His mother, Maria, visits his grave every day. As she bustles around the house she talks aloud to Eric, who peers out from a life-size photo over the mantle.

Before he left for Iraq, Eric had said goodbye to one of the kids he'd counseled, 17-year-old Ashley Mendez, whose tangles with gangs and drugs had landed her in juvenile hall repeatedly since she was 12.

"He was a really good friend," Ashley said. "I thought he was going to come back. But he never did."

Two weeks after they buried Chris Cobb, his mother received his last letter home: "I am coming home alive and in one piece," he wrote. "I promise you that mom."

His cousin Kaylee Morris, 18, said she screamed when she heard of his death. "Why would God take such a young person from us?" she asked.

A few days after Chris' funeral, Kaylee got back a package that she'd sent to Chris with a four-page letter and a bundle of beef jerky. "I just saw it there on my doorstep and started crying," she said. "It's the little things like that that make it hard."

On April 3, Marcus Cherry and his older brother, Andre, both Marines, had met at division base camp in Iraq and had a final few hours together.

After Marcus was killed three days later, Andre escorted his casket home.

Marcus and Andre were running backs for the Imperial High Tigers in Imperial, Calif. Marcus was No. 34. The school has retired his jersey. Next season, the players will wear the initials "M.C." on their helmets.

Diane Layfield remembers a slow dance with her son Travis under the stars at a Brooks & Dunn concert last year. She remembers thinking how lucky she was that her son would dance with her in public. She spends her free time filling boxes in her Fremont, Calif., home with photos, letters, articles, anything she can find that has a connection to her "Travi."

Travis' dad, John Layfield, 47, a forklift operator, has restored Travis' most prized possession, a sky-blue 1962 Ford Galaxy, to keep his memory alive.

He carries Travis' last letter home with him. It arrived the day they buried Travis.

Neither of the Layfields has ever voted. Both now question what their country is doing in Iraq. John says "babies" are dying in Iraq, and he thinks about running for president just to get Bush out of office.

Some mornings, Diane wakes up thinking how her lovely son will never marry or give her grandbabies. And how there will never be another mother-son dance under the stars.

In April, when there was a knock at the door at her home in Middletown, Del., Emma Roberts peeked out the window and got a glimpse of a Marine officer's hat. "I tried to run away. I ran into the family room, and they rang again."

Tony Roberts, at 17, had needed his mother's consent to enlist. "I definitely feel responsible," Emma Roberts said. "But he was just so enthused with becoming a Marine."

After Tony died, his family found a poem he'd written about his father's death years earlier:

"I thought my father was invincible

I didn't think he could or would die

All I can do is cry

One thing I really hate

Is I never got to say goodbye."

GET SOME TRUTH: CHECK OUT 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 WAR REPORTS:

U.S. Soldier Dies In Baqubah Road Crash, 7 Hurt

September 9, 2004 HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND
Release Number: 04-09-13C

TIKRIT, Iraq -- One 1st Infantry Division Soldier died and seven other Soldiers were injured as a result of a vehicle accident near Baqubah at about 8:45 p.m. on Sept. 8.

Six of the injured Soldiers were evacuated to a military treatment facility and are in stable condition. One Soldier was treated and returned to duty.

Hoosier Soldier Killed; Man Dies Shortly After 2-Week Leave

September 9, 2004 CLARKSVILLE, Ind.

The family of a 23-year-old Army sergeant from Clarksville says they've received word that he has been killed in Iraq.

Sgt. James Daniel Faulkner was killed Tuesday when his armored vehicle was hit by enemy fire.

The 1999 Clarksville High School graduate had been on active duty in Iraq since March.

He had just returned to the Middle East Sept. 1 after a two week leave to return home.

Faulkner was engaged to be married and had recently reenlisted for a six year term that would have begun in April.

Funeral services are pending.

Faulkner is the 27th Indiana soldier to die in the Persian Gulf since March 2003.

Roseville Marine Injured

September 8, 2004 TR Staff Reports, Times Recorder

ZANESVILLE — A local Marine could be coming back from the war in Iraq as early as this weekend, provided he's in stable condition when he leaves a German hospital.

Cpl. James D. Bookless, 25, of Roseville, sustained injuries to the shoulder, back, hands, face and right eye after an explosive device detonated under the vehicle in which he was traveling. He was serving with the Second Division of the Marine Corps in Iraq.

His children — Austin James Bookless, 8; Kyle Anthony Bookless, 6; Hannah Ihinger, 5; and Dominic Barbour, 8 — live in Roseville, as does his wife, Nicole, and the couple's three-month-old daughter, Madison.

His mother, Becky, and his brother, John, live in South Zanesville. His sister, Rebecca Matson, resides in Reynoldsburg. His father, Dale Bookless Jr., lives in Zanesville.

Bookless is a 1997 graduate of Maysville High School, and he played football for Zanesville High School.

He was serving with the Third Battalion, 7th Marines, weapons platoon. He was expected to undergo surgery last week in San Diego, Calif.

Indiana Marine Seriously Wounded

September 8, 2004 KOKOMO, Ind. (AP) -- An Indiana Marine has been seriously wounded in an attack on a convoy in Iraq.

Corporal Bret Mc-Cauley of Howard County was wounded in an attack on a Humvee convoy Monday in Fallujah. His father, Greg Mc-Cauley of Westfield, says the soldier's spleen and a kidney have been removed. The younger Mc-Cauley also suffered a broken left arm and second-degree burns to his face and right hand.

It's the second time the 2001 graduate of Taylor High School near Kokomo has been wounded in Iraq. His father says he received a Purple Heart after being shot in the leg at Fallujah.

Abu Ghraib Convoy Attack

BAGHDAD, Sept 9 (AFP)

Three Iraqis were killed and two US military policemen wounded when a roadside bomb exploded near a multinational convoy near the notorious Abu Ghraib prison outside Baghdad, the army said Thursday.

The attack happened early on Wednesday, a spokesman said.

War Comes To Baghdad: U.S. Forced To Use Air Attacks To Hold The Capital; “The War Will Never End Until The Last American Soldier Leaves”

9.9.04 Howard LaFranchi, Christian Science Monitor

The smoke of battle between US forces and the army of poor young Iraqis supporting anti-American cleric Moqtada al-Sadr now rises over Baghdad.

Less than two weeks after an agreement ended a costly confrontation in the southern city of Najaf, the US is again fighting the followers of the fiery religious leader who rails against the "American occupation."

Only now the fighting is in the sprawling, densely populated slum that is Mr. Sadr's base of support. That this fight is in Sadr City and not Najaf, is both good and bad for the US, analysts say.

Confronting Sadr's loyalists here removes the complication of fighting in one of the holiest sites of Shiite Islam. But it also means the Americans are fighting on the enemy's turf and in the even bigger showcase of Baghdad.

"It's a Hobson's choice. It takes away the symbolism that somehow we're fighting Islam," says Ellen Laipson, an intelligence specialist and president of the Henry L. Stimson Center in Washington.

"But if the US objective is to demonstrate that we're on an upward trajectory, that's hardly served by having deadly fighting in the capital - where the US has its strongest presence - and where the Allawi government [of Interim Prime Minister Iyad Allawi] already faces assassination attempts and other challenges."

On a trash-piled street deep within the maze of this crumbling neighborhood of several million people, ***a horse lies dead outside the pockmarked house where neighbors say American planes shot repeatedly early Wednesday morning.***

The shooting added four more to Sadr City's official death toll of 40 residents since Tuesday, the neighbors say**. They insist attempts to remove the wounded by car were met by more gunfire.**

"The Americans are killing our fathers and brothers just as Saddam did, so of course the boys will join the resistance!" wails Bushra Hamood, a black-robed woman who says she lost neighbors in Wednesday's air attack. "I thought the Americans could do a lot of good in Iraq, but it has come to this!" she cries, pointing to the blasted house and the putrid waters oozing down the street. "We have been pushed back to the age of boiling water."

Thick black smoke rose over Sadr City Wednesday as an assistant to Sadr, Sheikh Mohammed Ali Khadeem, sipped tea in his home and predicted the "occupation" foretold more violence.

"This war inside Sadr City and indeed all of Iraq will never end until the last American soldier leaves," he says, his two-year-old son Ali asleep in his lap. Arrayed around him are smiling young men from Sadr's Mahdi Army, most holding a Kalashnikov in one hand as they, too, sip tea, with the other.

Mr. Khadeem, who is also a fighter in the Mahdi Army - one of several militias the Allawi government says it wants to disband - says his fellow fighters had respected a week-old cease-fire, which Sadr had called to allow him time to formulate a political platform. Elections are planned for January. But Sadr's negotiations with the Allawi government have stalled. **It was the Americans, he claims, who "provoked" the violence by running raids into the neighborhood beginning Monday night.**

"Despite what they say, the Americans cannot accept the idea of [our] participation in any Iraqi government," he says, Sadr posters dotting the whitewashed walls around him. "It would be a government of Islam that the Iraqi people want, but not one the occupiers want."

A tall, thin man dressed in the traditional long white dishdasha, Khadeem reserves his severest words for Prime Minister Allawi - "a tool of the Americans," "a CIA thug," referring to Allawi's long relationship with American intelligence - suggesting any definitive accord with the government will be difficult.

U.S. Air Attacks Slaughter More Civilians In Insurgent-Controlled Cities; Resistance Holding In Tall Afar Battle; U.S. Column Enters Samarra

Sep 9 ROBERT H. REID, BAGHDAD (AP) & (IslamOnline.net & News Agencies) & Matamat.com & By DANICA KIRKA, Associated Press Writer

"All the children next door used to fill the streets with noise. Today I hope they will be like birds in heaven," Abbas said.

"I want to know why the Americans decided to bomb a family with children," he said, with an apparent expression of anger. (Answer: The Bush regime has decided to launch a program of terror bombing of civilians in Fallujah so thousands more Iraqis will join the resistance and spend every minute devising more ways to kill U.S. troops. What other reason could they possibly have for wiping out children?

American warplanes struck positions in two insurgent-controlled cities Thursday and U.S. and Iraqi troops quietly took control of a third in a crackdown that followed a recent spike in attacks against U.S. forces.

More than 60 people were reported killed, **most of them in Tal Afar, one of several cities which American officials acknowledged this week had fallen under insurgent control.**

In a statement, the U.S. command said military operations around Tal Afar were designed to rid the city of "a large terrorist element **that has displaced local Iraqi security forces throughout the recent weeks."** The provincial health director, Dr. Rabie Yassin, said 27 civilians were killed and 70 wounded.

Bashar Mohammed, a teacher who fled the city with his family said fighting went on "throughout the night in three streets of Tal Afar between U.S. and Iraqi forces on the one hand and the resistance on the other."

Dr Rabya Khalil, the general director of health in Iraq's northern province of Ninawa, told Aljazeera his medics was unable to reach all the wounded.

"We sent ambulances, medical teams and medical supplies but unfortunately the Iraqi national guardsmen prevented them to enter the town. This is a shameful action and unacceptable act as how wounded could be evacuated to hospitals.

"We call on the Iraqi government to intervene to prevent such violation of human rights. It was a slaughter that should not have taken place.

Nineveh province health chief Dr. Rabie Yassin also accused the military of stopping outsiders from bringing in help.

"The U.S. forces are sealing off the city and the national forces are not allowing ambulances and other medical aid ... to enter the city," Yassin said. "I want the government ... to intervene."

"All the casualties were Iraqis. Residents of Tal Afar resisted occupation forces which carried out this attack to punish them", he added.

Using a different strategy, American and Iraqi forces entered the central city of Samarra for the first time in months under an agreement with local leaders to restore central government control peacefully.

A member of the Samarra council, Raad Hatem, said the deal called for the appointment of a new mayor and police chief and for reconstruction to begin next week. In return, Samarra residents agreed to remove guns from the streets. **The Americans pledged to stop raiding private homes.**

The troops that entered the city will maintain joint traffic control points in the city and will also open the Samarra Bridge.

Maj.-Gen. John Batiste, commander of the 1st Infantry Division, said this week he had offered a deal to insurgents under which they would be free to leave Samarra or to remain inside as long as they stopped fighting. **It was unclear Thursday whether the insurgents had actually accepted any kind of proposal. (OOPS)**

Women and children were among 12 people killed in an overnight fresh US missile strike of the western Baghdad city of Fallujah, press reports and medical sources said Thursday, September 9.

Local residents removed bodies from the rubble of a house in the city demolished in the dead of night by a US missile while people were sleeping, a correspondent for Agence France-Presse (AFP) on the scene reported.

Doctor Mushtak Taleb from Fallujah's general hospital said 12 bodies had been brought in, including five children and two women, and that at least nine people had been wounded since the raids began.

Witnesses told AFP that the family who lived in the single-storey house was sleeping on the roof when the missile ploughed through the building, blowing their bodies to smithereens.

The roof had collapsed entirely and two small cranes were trying to lift up the debris to allow rescuers to search for more people.

Several neighboring houses in the Nowad Al-Dhubat district were damaged and children could be seen sifting through rubble and mangled metal to help collect pieces of flesh.

Local inhabitants were furious over the raid, further to escalate anti-American sentiments among ordinary Iraqis.

"We were sleeping on the roof because the electricity keeps going off at night. When the explosion went off, the blast threw me back by at least five meters," said neighbor Khaled Abbas.

"First I thought the explosion was in my house but when I awoke from the shock I saw that the neighbours had been hit," he told AFP.

He said the owner of the house had four wives, two of whom lived in the house with at least 10 children.

"All the children next door used to fill the streets with noise. Today I hope they will be like birds in heaven," Abbas said.

"I want to know why the Americans decided to bomb a family with children," he said, with an apparent expression of anger.

Residents look for dead bodies under the rubble after an U.S. air raid in Fallujah Sept. 9, 2004. Dr. Ahmad Thair of the Fallujah General Hospital said five people were killed, including two women and a child, and nine others injured in the strike. (AP Photo/Abdul Khader Sadi)

OCCUPATION ISN'T LIBERATION
BRING ALL THE TROOPS HOME NOW!

TROOP NEWS

British Generals Fear Army Revolt

11 Sept. 2004 Socialist Worker (UK)

“I THINK what’s happening in Iraq is terrible. I don’t think any of the young ones should be there.”

So says Yvonne McBride, the mother of 17 year old British soldier David McBride, who is refusing to fight in Iraq. He has gone absent without leave (AWOL).

Britain’s top brass are so worried about the growing feeling among soldiers and their families against the war in Iraq that they moved quickly to placate the family and take David off the AWOL list.

Salman Mirza, a reservist who refused to fight in the 1991 Gulf War, says, “This is unprecedented. I’ve never heard of anything like it before.

“When I was there you had to go through a system. You faced imprisonment. **This is the effect of the anti-war movement and things like Rose Gentle’s campaign to bring the troops home.”**

This comes as five ex-servicemen in Portsmouth have written a public statement calling for all British troops to be withdrawn from Iraq.

Rose Gentle’s son Gordon was killed in Iraq in June. Her campaign is winning wide support. Yvonne McBride said she would join it. David McBride was told that he would be sent to Iraq with his unit in November when he turns 18.

When her son went AWOL Yvonne spoke about his case in a number of Scottish newspapers.

Yvonne told Socialist Worker, “David doesn’t want to be in the army.

“Major James from Edinburgh phoned me and said that he’d been in touch with David’s unit in Cyprus, taken him off the AWOL list and wants to talk to him.

“I think me writing something in the newspapers has moved them.”

Salman Mirza says, “It is extremely difficult to get out of the army.

“Even if you want to leave on medical grounds they still usually put you in prison.

Mohsin Khan, who was a medic in the RAF, went AWOL in February of last year because he saw the war on Iraq as “an attack on innocent people”.

He was arrested, charged and given punishment—docked pay and “loss of privileges”.

Dunkan Tickner was a navy cook who served in the Falklands. He is also one of the Portsmouth ex-servicemen whose statement is printed on this page.

Dunkan Tickner told Socialist Worker, "I think the army are realising that the war is totally unpopular. I have never heard of anything like the way the army is treating David McBride. When they've got you they try to keep hold of you.

"I'm sure that in army towns and cities like Plymouth and Aldershot there are people who have had enough and want to do something. The best thing would be that tomorrow all the guys are back home."

(For a report on growing resistance to the war in the U.S. armed forces, see the article "Bring The Troops Home Now" at http://www.socialistworker.org/2004-2/511/511_12_BringThemHome.shtml**)**

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.**

Cheney Guard Likes *Fahrenheit 9/11.*

(A few months late, but worth it.)

Jul. 11, 2004 By Steve Goldstein, Inquirer Washington Bureau

SITE R, Pa. - Welcome to the undisclosed location.

Known familiarly to government insiders as the "underground Pentagon," this is where Vice President Cheney set up shop in the aftermath of the attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, and where he sometimes is when his office is being secretive about Cheney's whereabouts.

The location is a highly secure complex of buildings inside Raven Rock Mountain near Blue Ridge Summit, Pa., close to the Maryland-Pennsylvania state line and about seven miles north of Camp David.

One of the heavily armed soldiers allowed a reporter to approach and identify himself. When an outside phone failed to work, the reporter was invited into the guardhouse to use the house phone.

Before long, one of the guards was chatting away about having seen the film *Fahrenheit 9/11*.

"There are so many people who haven't seen this stuff," the soldier said. "And this really opened their eyes."

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.

Costa Rica Demands Exit From Coalition

Sep. 09, 2004 MARIANELA JIMENEZ, Associated Press

SAN JOSE, Costa Rica **- Costa Rica asked the United States to remove it from a list of Iraq coalition partners Thursday**, after the Constitutional Court ruled inclusion on the list violated the country's pacifist principles.

Foreign Minister Roberto Tovar said a diplomatic note had been delivered to the U.S. embassy in San Jose Thursday.

"The court has ordered me to get the country's name off that list, and that's what I'm doing," he said.

White House spokesman Scott McClellan said the United States would be willing to remove Costa Rica, though **a White House Web site still had the country listed on Thursday evening.**

The court ruling, announced late Wednesday, was cheered by a country that widely rejected the U.S.-led war in Iraq.

"I think it's great," 23-year-old student Rosario Camacho said. "I was opposed to Costa Rica being on the list because it couldn't support the war. It is a sovereign country and supporter of peace."

President Abel Pacheco said Thursday he agreed only to join countries that were against terrorism, and he said he would comply with the court's order and ask to have Costa Rica removed from the so-called "coalition of the willing" list.

"I was just supporting a friend in the fight against terrorism," he said. "Costa Rica was against terrorism, against dictatorships and that was it.

"Afterward, it turned out that there weren't weapons (of mass destruction) and all that, but that happens. The Sept. 11 attacks didn't leave much doubt about fears. Now we consider that only a thing of the past."

The country has no army, and Oscar Arias, who served as Costa Rica's president from 1986-90, won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1987 for his work bringing peace to Central America.

Controversy over the issue erupted when local newspapers noted that the White House had listed Costa Rica as a member of the coalition "that has already begun military operations to disarm Iraq of its weapons of mass destruction."

The White House page in question reads "Forty-nine countries are publicly committed to the Coalition, including ... Costa Rica."

Wabash Valley Soldier Injured

9/7/2004 Will Frampton, WTHI (Terre Haute, Indiana)

For Charles and Nancy Allen, the last two days have moved in slow motion.
"It's been nerve-wracking, I tell you," said Charles Allen. "You can't do nothing, you're a nervous wreck."

That's because there's so much they know, yet don't know, about the condition of their grandson Brennan Allen. A member of the 1544th Transportation Unit based in Paris, Illinois, Brennan was injured Sunday in Iraq.

"I heard about it (Monday) morning when my son called me, said that Brennan had gotten wounded," said Nancy Allen.

"We really don't know how bad he is," said Charles. "They were getting ready to eat supper I think, and they shot them bombs, and they all laid down, and that's how he got hit I think."

Hit with nearly two dozen pieces of shrapnel.

"20 wounds to his feet and legs," said Charles.

Charles has heard the injury prevents his grandson from walking. But whether or not it's permanent, or how soon he'll be able to recover, is still unknown.

For Charles and Nancy Allen, all they can do is hurry up and wait.

The Allens told us their grandson was originally due back from Iraq in February.

They don't know if his injury will lead to an early return.

The Burn Center

09/09/2004 By: Donna Miles, American Forces Press Service

Fort Sam Houston, Texas - Army Staff Sgt. Michele Mitchell's journey here to the Defense Department's only center committed to treating burn victims began in late April,

when she was riding in an up-armored Humvee near Baghdad as part of a five-vehicle convoy dispatched to pick up troops.

The 571st Military Police Company medic, who deployed to Iraq with her unit from Fort Lewis, Wash., recalls sitting in the back seat, directly behind the driver, "scoping" the area for aggressors as the convoy traversed through a series of checkpoints.

What Mitchell's scope didn't detect was a hidden improvised explosive device in the roadway that sent shrapnel blasting through her vehicle and caused it to burst into flames.

The explosion and fire mangled Mitchell's arm and left both legs with extensive burns. "It just ripped me up," said the veteran of 10 years, who said she "knew something was wrong" immediately but never actually saw her injuries until weeks after the incident.

Mitchell was quickly transferred here, to the U.S. Army Institute of Surgical Research's Burn Center.

Of all the center's patients, typically several hundred a year, Army Lt. Col. Lee Cancio said none pull at the center staff's heartstrings more than service members injured in the line of duty, particularly in combat.

"The war has increased our workload quite a bit," said Cancio.

Initially, many burn victims from Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom were injured through preventable accidents, including those involved with burning human waste, he said. Later, after an aggressive education program helped reduce those injuries, Cancio said, rocket-propelled grenades became the No. 1 cause of burns in Southwest Asia.

But today, roadside bombs like the one that Mitchell said left her legs looking "like burned hamburger meat" are the leading cause of severe burns in Iraq.

Regardless of their cause, burns inflict tremendous damage to the body.

Infection threatens exposed tissue. Skin can't retain fluids, sometimes threatening to shut down the kidneys. Body temperatures plummet, causing patients to shiver from cold, even when under heat lamps. Lungs often are damaged by fire, smoke and chemicals.

"This is probably the worst kind of injury a person can endure," said Army Staff Sgt. Dave Waymon, a licensed vocational nurse at the center for almost five years. "The treatment is long, extensive and painful for the patient."

And while the pain of the injury can be unbearable, the treatment can sometimes feel worse. Staff members at the center say the hardest part of the job isn't working 12-or-more-hour shifts in wards heated to 85 to 100 degrees, or is it not having to scrub up and don a mask, gown, gloves and boots every time they come near a patient. It's not treating patients so deformed that they're unbearable to look at.

It's knowing that everything they do for a patient, however therapeutic, inflicts even more pain. Dressing changes, dead tissue removal, antibiotic cream applications and skin grafts - all necessary to fight infection and speed up healing - can be unbearable. Spray from a shower nozzle can feel like bullets against charred flesh. Physical therapy exercises, critical to keeping a patient's muscles from tightening as they heal, can be tortuous.

When a new patient is admitted to the center, one of the first steps is to remove any dead skin or hair from the wound that can harbor bacteria and lead to infection, Waymon explained. That requires a thorough scrub-down that some burn patients, like Mitchell, say they're so medicated they don't remember - and that those who do remember wish they could forget.

"The whole time they're here, that initial bath or shower is the most painful," Waymon said. "I explain to (the patients) what I'm going to do and why I have to do it, and tell them that I will give them pain medicine and do my best to minimize the pain."

Treatment for burn victims generally takes far longer than for other trauma patients - typically one to two days for every 1 percent of the body burned, according to Maj. Louis Stout, head nurse at the center. For some patients, hospital stays can last months.

Five months after her injury, Mitchell is well along the path to recovery, but still undergoing treatment at the burn center. "Laughter and a lot of prayer got me through" the most difficult days, she said. "You learn just how strong you can be, and your patience increases because healing doesn't happen overnight."

Recovering from severe burns, she said, "is like going through a tunnel. If you realize you're simply going through it and that it's not a permanent stay, you'll make it."

"It's probably the best feeling you can get, seeing the success stories," said Stout. "It's great seeing patients come back to visit, like one guy who had 70 percent of his body burned and was here for seven months. It's successes like that that keep you coming back every day."

OCCUPATION REPORT

Occupation NGO's Flee Baghdad; "The Flights Are Full Until Friday"

September 9, 2004 Sophie Arie in Rome and Luke Harding in Baghdad, Guardian Newspapers Limited

The remaining international aid agencies in Iraq are considering pulling out of the country after the kidnapping of four humanitarian workers, including two Italian women, from their headquarters in Baghdad, it was claimed yesterday.

Jean-Dominique Bunel, a coordinator for the agencies, said the abduction on Tuesday had already prompted some aid workers to leave and others would follow by the end of the week. "We are reviewing the situation," he told Reuters.

Speaking to Agence France-Presse, he said: "It seems that most of the international non-governmental organisations are preparing to leave Iraq and some expatriate [staff] already left this morning.

"More will follow in coming days. The flights are full until Friday."

DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK

OSAMA FIRES PUBLICIST
No Mention At Republican Convention Has Madman Miffed

September 6, 2004 The Borowitz Report

Al Qaeda kingpin Osama bin Laden, reportedly "furious" that his name was not mentioned once at last week's Republican National Convention, fired his publicist today and warned that more changes in the Qaeda publicity department may be imminent.

According to sources close to Mr. bin Laden, the Qaeda kingpin had eagerly anticipated watching the Republican gathering in its entirety, hoping to hear his name bitterly invoked dozens of times by G.O.P. speakers.

But after hearing four nights' worth of speakers excoriating Democratic nominee John Kerry instead of him, an increasingly riled bin Laden picked up the phone and fired his publicist, David Grenway of the Grenway Group, a leading New York public relations firm.

"He said he was firing me and hiring whoever does publicity for Kerry," Mr. Grenway said.

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