



Marine Corps History Division
SMALL UNIT ACTIONS

Front Cover: Marines of 2d Battalion, 8th Marines take cover during fighting with insurgents at Nasiriyah, Iraq.

(AFP/Getty Images photo/Eric Feferberg)

SMALL UNIT ACTIONS



Compiled and Edited by
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**HISTORY DIVISION
MARINE CORPS UNIVERSITY
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Foreword

The stories and vignettes contained in this pamphlet are intended for a general audience, but more specifically as a potential “read-ahead” for small unit leaders preparing to go into combat. Whether you are a new squad leader, platoon sergeant, or a “Basic School bound” second lieutenant, we hope that this unique pamphlet will give readers an understanding of the variety of potential situational leadership challenges Marines find themselves facing in 21st century combat operations.

This particular pamphlet had its genesis in an earlier Vietnam-era production undertaken by then Assistant Chief of Staff (G-3), Major General William R. Collins to “provide a timely series of short, factual narratives of small unit action, stories which would have lessons learned” for the small unit leader. At that time, then Marine Reserve Captain Francis J. (Bing) West was called to active duty in the Republic of South Vietnam as an observer/member of a number of Marine units in action against the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces. As a result, Bing was able to later produce the widely acclaimed monograph, *The Village*, which, to this day, remains an integral part of the Commandant of the Marine Corps’ professional reading list. We continue to be thankful to Bing West and the other authors who have collaborated with us in producing a more contemporary version of Major General Collins’ original idea to acquaint small unit leadership with a sense of the challenges they might face on the battlefield.

We need to thank Major Daniel B. Sparks, for overseeing this very important project. Major Sparks served as the chief editor and like Bing West, who also returned to Iraq to report on his second conflict involving Marines at the small-unit level; Major Sparks similarly combined his historian’s eye for detail with his personal experience as an historian who served “in theater”. Major Sparks remains an integral part of the History Division and he continues to provide timely and rele-

vant service to the Marine Corps Field History Branch.

It should also be noted that this pamphlet is based on eye witness accounts of events by those who recorded them and we present them to our readers as the authors gave them to us. As such, some of the vignettes contain the rough language of combat action. Like Major General Collins' earlier Vietnam-era work, the primary focus of this contemporary pamphlet is toward those men and women "who are serving or will serve" in Iraq and Afghanistan. We also hope that by reviewing these vignettes, readers will gain a better appreciation of the situational demands faced by individual Marines in combat today.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "C.P. Neimeyer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large, prominent "C" and "P" at the beginning.

DR. C.P. NEIMEYER
Director of Marine Corps History

Preface

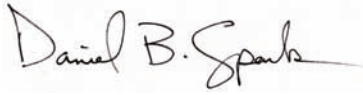
This book is dedicated to the memory of Colonel John A. Cash, Infantry, U.S. Army, who was an example of the perfect mix of a warrior and a historian. His experiences in the Battle of the Ia Drang lead to assignments with the Office of the Chief of Military History that included contributing to *Seven Firefights in Vietnam* that documented small unit actions for that war. I would also like to thank Howard University Professor Joseph Reidy for pushing me down the history road at an early date.

These accounts of Marine small-unit leaders would not have been published if not for the foresight of Lieutenant Colonel John Piedmont who saw the utility in revisiting Bing West's seminal work, *Small Unit Action in Vietnam*, and updating it's theme for use in the Long War on Terrorism.

Credit should be given the History Division Director, Dr. Charles P. Neimeyer and Deputy Director Colonel Richard D. Camp for having the confidence that this project could be completed. I would like to thank the Marines and Civilian Marines at the History Division whose support, encouragement and guidance were critical to the successful completion of this project. These include Colonel Patricia D. Saint, Chief Warrant Officer 3 William E. Hudson, Major Stephen J. Winslow, First Lieutenant Mark T. Newman, and Master Sergeant Robert A. Yarnall for support and guidance. On the civil side thanks go to Mr. Charles R. Smith, W. Stephen Hill, and Charles D. Melson for preparing of the manuscript for publication.

Some of this material is used with generous permission of the authors and copyright holders. Acknowledgements go to Bing West and Bantam Books for material based on his *No True Glory*; to Rich Lowry and Berkley Caliber for material based on his *Marines in the Garden of Eden*; and to Gary Solis for material based on his *Marines and Military Law in Vietnam: Trial by Fire*. I'd also like to gratefully thank Lucian M. Read, whose evocative photos are throughout the book. This is for one time use and does not imply further reproduction and dis-

tribution. The authors and photographer provided their work because of their belief in the goals of telling the story at the small-unit level.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Daniel B. Sparks". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

DANIEL B. SPARKS
Major
United States Marine Corps Reserve

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READ

Introduction

By Bing West

The Marine Corps revolves around the corporal. In peacetime, we often forget that, because the strict discipline and regulations bring to the fore both the power of the staff noncommissioned officers who set the tone of the Corps and the planning exactitude of the officers who develop the doctrine and set the direction. Sure, we all say every Marine is a rifleman. But from the squad leader on down, it often seems the days are set and all too predictable, with little room for initiative.

In battle, that changes. The squads spring to life. They carry the fight. It is their initiative, toughness and determination to close with the enemy that is renowned. Reporting from Fallujah in 2004, a journalist wrote: "The Marine Corps is the world's most lethal organization." He did not mean it as a compliment, and that gives his observation even more weight. In war, the moral is to the physical as four to one, and it is the

self-confidence of the Marines--the cockiness that they will prevail--that causes adversaries to pause, unsure what they are facing. That uncertainty gives the Marine an advantage.

So too does thinking before acting--projecting what is going to happen. Major General Ray L. "E-Tool" Smith, one of the finest fighters since World War II, said he tried to picture each fight before he became engaged. He imagined how the firing would begin, how his troops would react and what his first actions should be. Often his mental image was wrong as the firefight unfolded. But that was beside the point. Like a football player before the game, he was mentally preparing for contact.

That is the purpose of the stories in this narrative--to prepare ahead of time. This is different than planning. The Marine Corps systematically plans and rehearses every movement to contact. That is a group effort, much like a football coach will review the plays before the game. What General Smith was doing was individual preparation so that he would still be thinking when the combat came, and not just reacting. He had prepared his mind to think in the chaos and din of combat. The instant the fighting differed from his mental image, his brain would signal *Tilt!* and he would be thinking how to adjust, not simply responding to action around him.

How do you develop the habit of mental acuity to adapt immediately under fire? By reading. No one of us will ever personally experience the breadth of combat in all its variations and surprises. We have to learn from others. The official lessons learned have become an endless array of tactics, techniques and procedures held together by a massive index. By definition, they lack narrative coherence.

In contrast, a narrative tells a story from start through apex to conclusion. If written well, a combat story enables the reader to ask himself: what would I do at that instant? When the reader begins to do that, he is building his own mental playbook. He is starting to think actively, and not just rely on the Power Point plan and mission rehearsal.

We and our enemies exhibit patterns and tendencies that become automatic responses in battle. I will offer a few

observations about Iraq. Desert Storm in 1991 has been called “the general’s war,” because the generals directed a long bombing campaign and maneuvered five divisions across a flat desert in accord with a carefully scripted plan. In 2003, the March-April march to Baghdad was basically a regimental and battalion war, because the units were mounted, firepower was overwhelming and the few highways restricted maneuver to a few routes, with battalions moving in long vehicle trains. There were few dismounted fights and scant dismounted patrols, except for security of the vehicles.

When the Marines returned and were sent to Anbar Province in late March 2004, the first inchoative battle for Fallujah, followed by the investment of the city of Najaf in the August heat, followed by the second and conclusive battle of Fallujah. These three city brawls, together with the 1st Armored Division’s fight in Sadr City in April 2004, comprised the bulk of the urban combat in Iraq.

The enemy fought in small gangs that were quickly swept from the rooftops but were much more tenacious in running down back alleys in “shoot and scoot” tactics. They were no match for the firepower and squad tactics of the less agile Marines in their heavy personal protective equipment. In 60 to 100 instances in Fallujah, squads engaged die-hard jihadists inside buildings.

Fallujah II marked the end of the insurgent effort to hold urban terrain when Americans pushed in. In 2005, the Marines undertook a series of battalion and larger-sized operations to push the insurgents out of the upper Euphrates River Valley. Rather than stand and fight, the enemy tried to withdraw, mainly by civilian cars but sometimes by simply caching weapons and standing among the civilians.

Polls indicated that a large majority of the one to two million Sunnis in Anbar considered the Americans to be infidel invaders and sympathized with or supported the insurgents. The al Qaeda extremists, to include Iraqi radicals, emerged as the toughest core enemy. Distinguishing among al Qaeda, former Baathists seeking a return to power and Sunni “nationalists” fighting because they rejected the American presence

and the Shiite-dominated government in Baghdad, was problematical.

In general, 2005 saw operations for forward operating bases along the lines of a quick, strong jab to push the insurgents back and keep them from consolidating open bases in cities, while in 2006 the Marines set out an interconnecting line of areas of operations, with a primary mission of training Iraqi Security Forces. Old counterinsurgency primers like the *Small Wars Manual* from the late 1930s were dusted off and updated. A new counterinsurgency manual was issued, with elaborate escalation of force restrictions. A new lexicon, with terms like non-kinetic fires, sprang up, as planners sought to win the minds, if not the hearts, of a tribal, uneducated Sunni population that had benefited under Saddam and was deeply suspicious of the Americans and the Shiites who had gained power due to American arms and the American imposition of democracy. The problem was that U.S. Army and Marine Corps had designed no operationally coherent doctrine to defeat an insurgency waged by Islamic extremists and Baathist advocates. So much of what posed as practical advice was really lofty exhortation that could not be applied on the streets.

In 2005 and 2006, three successive Iraqi governments failed to establish traction and determination, leaving it to the Americans to keep a lid on the insurgency among the Sunni insurgents in Anbar Province and the Shiite militias attacking the Sunnis in Baghdad. In Anbar, the Marines experienced city fights in 2004, a series of upper Euphrates Valley operations in 2005 and the areas of operations, or battle spaces in 2006. Conceptually, areas of operations fitted into the counterinsurgency concept of operations referred to as "clear, hold and build." The end result at the squad level was hard, usually unrewarding work--patrol, patrol, patrol with few contacts. In 2005, most riflemen in a squad saw the insurgents--in civilian clothes, usually with a black tee-shirt or black bal-clava--on two or three occasions for at least four seconds--long enough to confirm positive identification that allowed aimed fire.

In 2006, most riflemen did not acquire clear targets. The insurgents had learned to stand off from the Marines on patrol, both mounted and dismounted, and shoot a few rounds or lob a few mortar shells. The improvised explosive device was the insurgents' main weapon, accounting for about 70 percent of casualties. The insurgents controlled or were supported by the population. It was frustrating to patrol in heavy armor, usually without any Iraqi soldiers or police, unable to distinguish who the insurgents were, waiting for the insurgent to initiate a contact and make a mistake that would enable a successful counterattack.

Night raids against specific individuals were frequent, and rarely did an insurgent choose to shoot when surprised in his house at three in the morning. But the insurgency was deeply imbedded in the Sunni cities and farmlands, while the porous judicial system let a majority of those detained at the battalion level go free inside six months.

In 2006, the war was one of squad and platoon patrols, with as many mounted as dismounted. But the combat initiative remained with the insurgents. To change that meant deploying Sunni police who had knowledge of the local residents, a feat that required devising concepts of operation that could give the police a good chance of not being eventually assassinated. Also in 2006, the Iraqi Army was becoming more proficient at the battalion level, although their martial skills, like those of the Marines, were designed to keep a lid on the military growth of the insurgency, not detect and eradicate its roots.

Only the Iraqi government and dedicated nationalist Iraqi leaders could resolve the Sunni insurgency by a compromise deal of reconciliation and a sharing in the oil wealth that lay outside Anbar Province. Only the Iraqi government and dedicated nationalist Iraqi leaders could dissolve the Shiite militias and undercut the influence of radical Shiite political leaders.

The insurgency was frustrating for the Marines because many of the insurgents were hard-core killers who had to be killed. Al Qaeda wouldn't quit; it had to be destroyed.

Alongside al Qaeda were the uneducated, unemployed youths who had to be offered jobs and a promise of a brighter future--promises only Iraqis could make and keep.

Regardless of the politics, the Marine mission was to prevail in its operations. By 2006, the mission centered on the actions of squads and platoons through two weather seasons, one of heat and dust, the other of wind and mud. In Iraq and Afghanistan, there was the routine that went with being strangers in a strange land, sleeping and eating in operating bases, gearing up and sallying forth for what seemed routine operations, never knowing when the next improvised explosive device was going to blow or where the sniper lurked, never knowing which among the thousands of cars driven by innocent civilians held a suicidal murderer, knowing that maybe once in a hundred or two hundred patrols would come that 10-second firefight.

So how does the squad, platoon or company commander prepare, in addition to the daily prescribed routines? By reading accounts like those contained in this publication, so that when the unexpected does happen, he has thought of it. Somewhere in the back of his mind, he's seen it before. He can think under pressure, because it is not new to him.



Read

Small Unit Action in At Turbah

By Chief Warrent Officer 3 William E. Hutson

Sergeant Kris R. Haines glanced at his watch; it was 0444, local time. Using his squad radio, he reported the sound of an unusually brief call to prayer which had just broken the silence in the still-dark city of At Turbah, Iraq. The crack of enemy small arms fire was the next thing to jolt his senses that morning, and less than a minute later, Haines and his small detachment from 1st Platoon, Company B, 1st Battalion, 23d Marines found themselves face down, digging for cover. An insurgent 12.7mm machine gun emplaced on the far side of the Euphrates River was now booming, sending a surge of fire that would continue until midday. What began on the evening of 10 October, 2004 as a limited action for the platoon would turn into more than a day's worth of intense fighting for the "Lonestars" of 1st Battalion, 23d Marines, and for the "Vipers" of Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 169 (HMLA-169).

At Turbah and Hit were on opposite banks of the Euphrates

River, connected by a long bridge. In the days leading up to this fight, enemy activity in Hit had increased markedly. Earlier that week, Major General Richard F. Natonski's (Commanding General, 1st Marine Division) convoy had been attacked with rocket propelled grenade and sniper fire at a traffic circle in Hit, along route "Bronze." Contractor vehicles had also been fired upon at the circle earlier that same day. Colonel Craig A. Tucker, Regimental Combat Team-7 (RCT7) commander, and his staff had been in restive western Al Anbar Province for more than eight months. They knew their area of operations well and were able to sense the difference between minor flare ups and gathering threats. Anticipating the latter, RCT 7 tasked 1st Battalion, 23d Marine Regiment to send Marines into At Turbah to preventing insurgents from flowing into town from Hit. The battalion gave the task to 1st Platoon, Company B. Their mission was straightforward: to determine whether the police station in At Turbah was in the hands of insurgents and to block all bridge traffic between At Turbah and Hit, which was now a suspected strongpoint for the insurgents. Intelligence estimates pointed to an increasing concentration of insurgents in and around Hit (approximately 400-800 strong), but no firm estimates of insurgents yet had been formed for At Turbah.

Earlier on the 10th, 1st Platoon, led by Captain R. Shayne McGinty, returned from a security mission conducted at an old Iraqi ammunition supply point (Dulab). At 2200, 53 Marines and Corpsmen from 1st Platoon rolled out of Camp Lonestar at Al Asad Marine Air Base. Less than two hours after receiving their orders, they left the camp mounted in three Medium Tactical Vehicle Replacement, "seven-ton" trucks) armed with two .50-cal machine guns and one MK-19, and three High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicles (humvees).

The most direct route to At Turbah would have been through the center of Hit and across the bridge. This option would have cost the Marines the element of surprise, and would have risked an ambush in Hit due to the insurgent activity. There was also a shorter northerly route, but the bat-

talion had run patrols along those roads recently and had received enemy small arms and mortar fire on several occasions. Further, the bridges spanning the river along the northerly routes were thought to be incapable of supporting the weight of the 7-tons. So Major Michael R. Miller, Company B commander, instructed Captain McGinty to consider using the longer southerly route.

The night movement to At Turbah took about six hours, taking more than 140 kilometers southwest along the Euphrates toward Ramadi. They crossed the river and then worked their way northwest back toward At Turbah. Running short of time, they drove under both lit and black-out conditions to reach their destination before first light. Approaching from the southeast, they arrived at the outskirts of At Turbah shortly after 0400.

The platoon dismounted and entered the city on foot. The police station in At Turbah located on the northeast edge of the traffic circle. At about 0410, 3d Squad led by Sergeant Armando Sanchez began the action by hitting the police station hard. They found the police inside surprised; some were asleep. No insurgents were present, and no shots were fired. They disarmed the police, detained them briefly, took the keys to the building, and then sent them home. Second Squad, led by Sergeant Kyle A. McCracken, began securing the traffic circle and setting up the platoon command post.

A detachment of six Marines and a Corpsman from 1st Squad, led by Sergeant Kris Haines and accompanied by Staff Sergeant William R. Gilman, the platoon sergeant, moved south to the secure the bridge. Some walked to the bridge while others rode in a humvee. One of the 7-tons mounted with .50-caliber machine gun began backing midway down the road leading to the bridge in support of the detachment. Two scout-sniper teams were also sent to the river, setting up positions west of the Marines working at the bridge, just back from the river bank.

The At Turbah edge of the bridge was about 300 meters from the traffic circle. Using concertina wire and traffic cones, the Marines blocked the bridge leading to Hit. They

were about to place some chem-lites along the span of concertina wire when they heard the call for prayer coming from the mosque in At Turbah.

Enemy small arms and automatic fire soon erupted. Sergeant Haines took a hasty knee, scanning for targets across the river. Seconds later, a 12.7mm machine gun fire opened up on the detachment's position, lighting the sky with a torrent of green and blue tracers. Haines sent three Marines who were still near the humvee back up the road toward the traffic circle in their vehicle.

Four remained at the bridge, three Marines and a Corpsman. They consolidated on the west side of bridge road where there was a small unpaved shoulder sloping away from the road. Between the end of the bridge and the shoulder there was a long piece of thick steel. They huddled behind this life-saving ribbon of steel under heavy machine gun and small arms fire, and occasionally returned fire during the lulls. Concerned that their limited return fire would only give away their location and draw enemy rocket propelled grenade fire, Staff Sergeant Gilman told his Marines to stop firing. Due the limited range of their squad radio, Sergeant Haines sent a message back through the Marine snipers nearby to Captain McGinty, telling him not to send anyone to the bridge until they sized up their options.

Sergeant John M. Grinter was in charge of the supporting 7-ton truck which was set up now about halfway down the bridge road. Neither Grinter nor his Marines could confirm the precise position of the Marines at the bridge; so Grinter began directing a narrow line of supporting fire to the pinned-down Marines, firing directly into incoming enemy 12.7mm fire. At this point in the fight, the only casualties were several nearby palm trees and a fence made of dead vegetation which had caught fire from the incoming rounds.

The Marines at the bridge quickly observed that the heavy gun (emplaced in a building directly across the Euphrates to the left of a mosque's minaret) gave the enemy a clear line of fire across the bridge, up bridge road toward the traffic circle in At Turbah where the bulk of 1st Platoon remained. On

each side of the road was dense foliage, mainly palms, and sets of houses and smaller buildings. Their options were: stay put; make a suicide run up the beaten zone of bridge road; or, run through 300 meters of unsecured palm groves toward the platoon command post. Fortunately for these Marines they were not alone; the rest of 1st Platoon was busy developing a set of additional options for them. The only thing they could do for now was to relay target information back to Captain McGinty.

From the traffic circle, McGinty had come to the same conclusion as his pinned-down Marines. The geometry of fire and the position of his Marines near the river constrained his actions. Without knowing the precise position of the two sniper teams along the Euphrates, he was hesitant to let the .50-caliber gunner lay down massive suppressive fire. Beyond battle space constraints, there were also time constraints. Daylight would be arriving soon, and McGinty needed to do something fast before he lost the advantage of darkness. Further limiting his range of action was the fact that his Marines near the traffic circle were now receiving harassing fire from a set of small buildings and a large schoolhouse located to their north on their rear flank. They were also taking fire from the palm groves to their direct front.

Against these pressing threats, McGinty formed his plan. He quickly concluded that he needed to enlarge his set of options. He decided to turn a ground problem into an air-ground solution, teaching the insurgents a lesson in Marine combined-arms tactics. McGinty's plan was to get the Cobras to suppress the ongoing fire across the river. He would send a team down to the bridge to coordinate the withdrawal of his Marines, and then during one of the Cobra gun runs, the Marines at the bridge would bound back, supported by the Cobras, Marine small arms fire, and the .50-caliber, which was still in a covered position along bridge road. With all his Marines back, McGinty intended to then turn the tables on the insurgents.

Within 40 minutes of the initial volley of fire, AH-1W Cobra attack helicopters and UH-1N Huey utility helicopters

armed with guns and rockets from HMLA-169 led by Captain David R. Blassingame had checked in with Captain McGinty and were now on station. They began hammering the enemy on the far side of the bridge. Blassingame, a fellow Texan, was in the middle of his third combat tour in Iraq. As recently as August, he had provided close air support for the Marines' assault in Najaf. He was back in the air again ready to assist the Marines on the ground.

By this time, the Marines in the Humvee returning from the bridge were arriving at the traffic circle. As the Marines left their vehicle, Captain McGinty noticed that Lance Corporal Jesse Spivey, 29 years old and a financial analyst in the civilian world, had been wounded. His lower leg was badly bloodied. In the moments between the eruption of fire at the bridge and his return to the command post, Spivey had been wounded in his calf by a 7.62 round ricocheting off the road. The wound did not appear to be life-threatening to; Petty Officer Third Class James Golden, who was at the platoon command post, quickly dressed the wound.

Sergeant Sanchez and Corporal Rick Mendoza had attempted twice before to get to the bridge, but both times had been driven back by the hail of enemy fire. Frustrated but determined, Sergeant Sanchez told Captain McGinty, "Sir, I am going all the way this time." Moving through the palm groves on the west side of bridge road, he and Corporal Mendoza, ran headlong through the incoming fire, pressing their way toward the Marines at the bridge. Getting within earshot of the Marines, they made contact and communicated the plan. As they waited for the Marines in the air to make their run, Sanchez and Mendoza pulled a chest-high fence down, removing what could have been a troubling obstacle for the withdrawing Marines at the bridge. During the Cobras' second northeast-to-southwest gun run supporting the extraction, Sergeant Sanchez popped a high explosive round into his M203 grenade launcher, aimed toward the concentration of fire across the river, and took his shot in an attempt to suppress, the enemy fire.

The Marines with their Corpsman had been pinned down

for more than 45 minutes. They now bolted out of their covered position and began a breakneck 300-meter run through dense foliage back to the traffic circle. Enemy rounds snapped all around them. Mendoza and Haines covered the rear. The group sprinted, tripped, tumbled, regrouped, and, most memorably to them, laughed their way back to the traffic circle. None of the enemy rounds found their target.

The snipers (apparently unobserved by the enemy) quietly withdrew to the circle shortly after the extraction without needing additional support. All Marines were back at the traffic circle just after daybreak

Durr



The initial Cobra runs were conducted in the dark, and by early morning Captain McGinty had all the air support he could use. Enemy fire alternated between heavy and sporadic all morning. During the course of the day, he later estimated that he called between 20 and 30 airstrikes. Later, following the action, McGinty and his company commander, Major Miller, were both struck by the presence and variety of Marine aircraft, which included Cobras, Hueys, F-18s, and Harriers. Further, they were moved by the relentless and aggressive attitude of the Marine pilots who stayed with them throughout the battle.

Around 0630, Major Miller, who was at Camp Lonestar, was told to report to the battalion combat operations center. There he learned that his first platoon was in serious trouble and needed immediate reinforcement. He told 2d Platoon to mount up; it had been placed on strip alert hours before and was ready to go, having pre-staged its equipment and their vehicles. He stood up 3d Platoon and told the Marines to get their trucks staged. In less than an hour, Major Miller and 2d Platoon left the gates of the sprawling Al Asad Air Base. Traveling in daylight, it took them about three and one-half hours to get to At Turbah, traveling the same route as McGinty's convoy did the night before. Miller and his reinforcements arrived around 1120.

Within minutes of his arrival, Major Miller conferred with Captain McGinty and assumed command of the battle area, allowing McGinty to focus entirely on directing air support (with support from Sergeant John Grinter). Staff Sergeant Gilman, who had just returned from the bridge, assumed command of 1st Platoon. Major Miller directed 2d Platoon led by Gunnery Sergeant Richard H. Simmons, to expand its boundaries in At Turbah, and specifically, to clear out the high ground to the north and east of At Turbah where the harassing fire was originating, apparently from a school building and some smaller buildings. Miller took note of the volume of enemy fire striking the area and concluded that the enemy either had unlimited ammunition or absolutely no fire discipline. He was also surprised at the density of the palm groves

and other foliage; it reminded him of the Northern Training Area in Okinawa, Japan.

Staff Sergeant Gilman began coordinating the medevac of Lance Corporal Spivey. Due to the density and location of power lines in the area, the only suitable landing zone for helicopters was more than a kilometer north of the city. In what became known within the platoon as the "Mogadishu Mile," Gilman led a detachment of eight Marines in two humvees to the landing zone. Covered overhead by Marines from HMLA-169, the U.S. Army's 507th Medical Company "dustoff" helicopter another (Texas-based unit), arrived soon after and evacuated Spivey without drawing enemy fire.

Intermittent and occasionally heavy fire continued well beyond noon that day. But now was mixed with indirect fire (both mortars and rockets) coming from a position near the base of a large mosque a short block up from the river's edge in Hit. The mortar fire initially impacted in the palm groves near the southern banks of the river, but the fire quickly found a rhythm, and began its march northward, bracketing the Marines within just a few minutes. One round hit within three meters of the center of the traffic circle, causing the Marines to push into some buildings on the perimeter of the traffic circle. Lance Corporal Gary T. Denton was hit in the face by a piece of shrapnel; it was not life threatening. In fact, the Corpsman dug it out, and Denton soon returned to the fighting.

It became clear to the Marines both on the ground and in the air that most of the enemy mortar activity was located near the base of the large green-domed mosque in Hit, known as the Sharqi Mosque. Approval was secured for an airstrike on the mosque itself, targeting the north side. The strike was to target the enemy activity at and near the base of the mosque, not the minaret, even though the Marines suspected the minaret was being used to spot the mortar rounds. Shortly after 1300, the mosque was hit by a laser guided Maverick missile (LMAV). Marine pilots reported secondary and tertiary explosions quickly followed the strike. This airstrike eliminated the enemy indirect fire originating from that location.

Around 1400, Company B's 3d Platoon and one platoon from Company A, 1st Battalion, 23d Marines (the regimental reserve) arrived in At Turbah giving Major Miller some additional forces to use in the fight.

With the indirect fire silenced and the buildings toward the rear high ground now cleared and secured, Miller's Marines continued to push out into the town. He placed the platoon from Company A along the main east-west road, just west of the traffic circle. His 2d Platoon continued clearing the buildings to the north and east of the city, tying in his 3d Platoon which he had placed on his east facing the palm groves, along the east-west road. First Platoon, having fought all day, was given some relief, and remained on line near the traffic circle. Moving through and clearing the palm groves would wait until dusk.

Marines were now receiving increased small arms fire coming from the groves. Some insurgents had climbed into these trees to get a better shot at the Marines who were slightly uphill from them. Unimpressed, the Marines simply shot them out of the trees. Miller, however, saw a more threatening sign. He noticed a change in the pattern and movement of the muzzle flashes; the enemy was maneuvering on them. It was now late in the afternoon.

Around 1600, Colonel Tucker, RCT7 commander, arrived to check on his Marines and to confer with Major Miller. Miller briefed Colonel Tucker on the events of the day, the enemy situation, and on his plan to clear the palm groves early that evening. The regimental sergeant major had brought some ammunition with him, and he helped distribute it to the Marines in position.

With a growing threat developing on the near left flank of the palm groves, Captain McGinty requested heavier air support on his side of the river. He briefed the pilots about the threat, the distances involved, and the risk of friendly fire—he was requesting heavy air support within 200 meters of his position. Major Miller got on the radio and approved the strike. A few Marines in forward positions were pulled back to more covered positions. A Marine Harrier on its second

pass dropped a 500pound Guided Bomb Unit-12 into the palm grove, landing close but well-centered on the enemy forces. As an added measure, the Cobras followed with two strafing runs. This combined punch from the air had the desired effect, effectively clearing the palm grove of the enemy.

Major Miller next began to prepare his Marines for the evening's clearing operation. His intent was to make a detailed sweep through the entire grove between the river road and the river itself, some 300 meters deep. He moved 3d Platoon to the river down bridge road. He pushed 2d Platoon to the high ground behind the traffic circle to guard the rear. First Platoon, worn from the day's fighting, remained spread along the frontage, near the traffic circle. Earlier in the afternoon, Miller had also gained a platoon minus from Company A, 1st Battalion, 23d Marines. He placed it along the right flank, screening the east side of bridge road. With his Marines in place, they swept through the palm groves, but to their surprise no fighting occurred – they found only the remains of dead insurgents.

By daybreak of the second morning in At Turbah, the Marines of Company B, 1st Battalion, 23d Marines had reestablished their blocking position at the bridge. Third Platoon was on the east side of bridge road near the edge of the river. Company A's first platoon was working its way toward the river on the west side of bridge road, moving a bit slower because it had houses to clear its route. Over the next four days, the Marines held their position in At Turbah, receiving little fire from either At Turbah or from Hit, which had now become RCT 7's main effort.

The regiment's plan was to sweep through Hit on the morning of 15 October using Marines from 1st Battalion, 8th Marines (Two companies), Company A from 3d Light Armored Reconnaissance, 2d Force Reconnaissance Company (one platoon), and an element of Iraqi National Guard. Marines from Company C, 1 Battalion, 23d Marines set up vehicle checkpoints on the outskirts of Hit in order to isolate the town. Marines from Company B, 1st Battalion, 23d Marines would

remain the blocking force across the river. Snipers from the regiment set up near a train track on the west edge of Hit engaging small groups of insurgents the day before the sweep. On the 15th, October, RTC 7 swept through Hit, facing virtually no resistance. By midday it had linked up with Company B on the other side of the bridge.

The Marines of 1st Battalion, 23d Marines returned to Al Asad on 16 October having sustained two wounded during their actions in At Turbah. A hotbed of insurgent resistance was reduced through aggressive leadership and combined arms action.

Company B would engage in other combat during their deployment, including fighting up the peninsula alongside 3d Light Armored Reconnaissance on the west side of Fallujah during the first part of Operation Al Fajr in early November 2004. During that action, some Marines from Company B would be wounded, including Major Miller, the company commander.

The Marines of Company B had been drawn together for this deployment from a handful of reserve units, mainly from the southern and western United States. Some Marines came out of the Individual Ready Reserve to fill open billets in the company. Many of these Marines had never met before, much less trained together. In the civilian word, they held a mix of occupations, including police officers, a police special weapons and tactics team member, a pharmaceutical sales representative, marketing representatives, builders, financial advisors, and college students. Also with them were several active Marines from their Inspector-Instructor staffs who had deployed to Iraq with the reservists. Little cohesion existed prior to deployment. On paper, they would not have been sized up as a formidable combat team.

Among themselves, however, when they had a chance to pause and engage in small talk, the Marines of Company B began to refer to their deployment together as the "Perfect Season." The Marine team, on call, came together.



Read

The Naz

by Richard S. Lowry

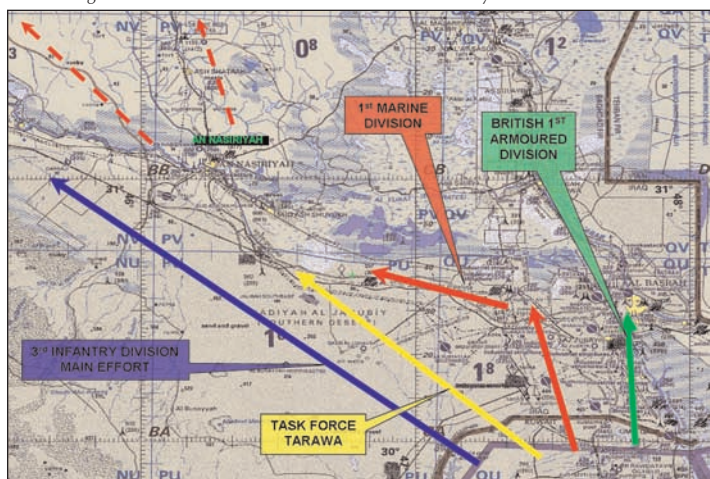
In the predawn darkness of 23 March 2003, United States Marines were approaching the first major battle in the invasion of Iraq. I Marine Expeditionary Force had been ordered to charge through Iraq's heartland to Baghdad while the U.S. Army's 3d Infantry Division swung wide through the Arabian Desert to attack from the southwest.

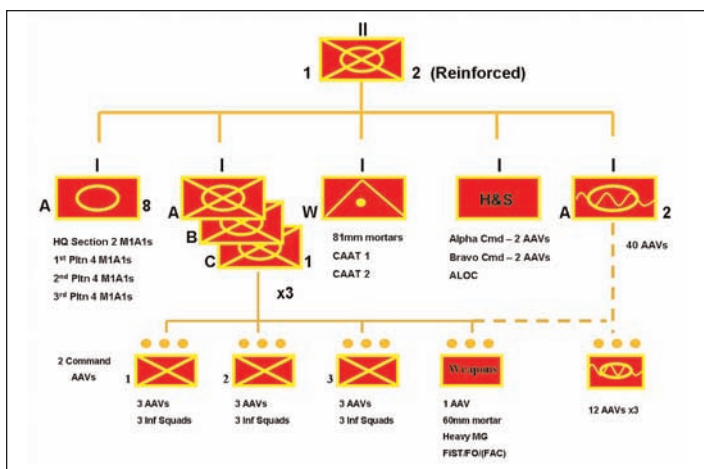
The Marines needed to cross the Euphrates River early in their advance out of Kuwait. The only viable crossing point for a hundred miles in either direction was at the dusty desert town of An Nasiriyah. There were five major bridges in, and around, the city which afforded access to Iraq's Fertile Crescent and the road to Baghdad. Three bridges crossed the Euphrates River and two crossed the Saddam Canal north of An Nasiriyah. The Highway 1 Bridge crossed the Euphrates River about 20 miles west of the city. There were two pairs of bridges which spanned the Euphrates and Saddam Canal in the center of the city.

1 Marine Expeditionary Force commanders decided to advance on a two-pronged attack. Regimental Combat Team 5 and Regimental Combat Team 7 would cross the Highway 1 Bridge, west of the city of An Nasiriyah and proceed up Highway 1 to Baghdad. Regimental Combat Team 1 would cross the Euphrates and Saddam Canal using the eastern pair of bridges. This route would take the Marines directly through the heart of An Nasiriyah, running a four-kilometer gauntlet through built-up areas within the city.

Task Force Tarawa's 2d Marines were tasked with securing the eastern bridges. Once secured, Regimental Combat Team 1 would pass Regimental Combat Team 2 and attack toward Baghdad on Highway 7. As Colonel Ronald L. Bailey's 2d Marine's led the charge toward Nasiriyah, he ordered his 3d Battalion and a company of light armored vehicles to the western crossing at the Highway 1 Bridge and he sent his 1st Battalion directly into the city to secure the two eastern bridges. Lieutenant Colonel Rickey L. Grabowski's 1st Battalion was the only mechanized battalion in Bailey's regiment. Grabowski's Marines advanced in amphibious assault vehicles, supported by a company of Abrams M1 tanks (Company A, 8th Tank Battalion).

The Big Picture – Task Force Tarawa would clear the way for 1st Marine Division





1st Battalion, 2d Marines

Bailey and Grabowski had been planning this operation for months. Even though the hope at U.S. Central Command was that the soldiers of Iraq's *11th Infantry Division* would lay down their arms as soon as the Marines approached, Bailey and Grabowski planned for a fight. None of the Marines commanders wanted to move through the city along the four kilometer eastern urban route between the Euphrates River and the Saddam Canal. So, a plan was developed to avoid what came to be known as "Ambush Alley."

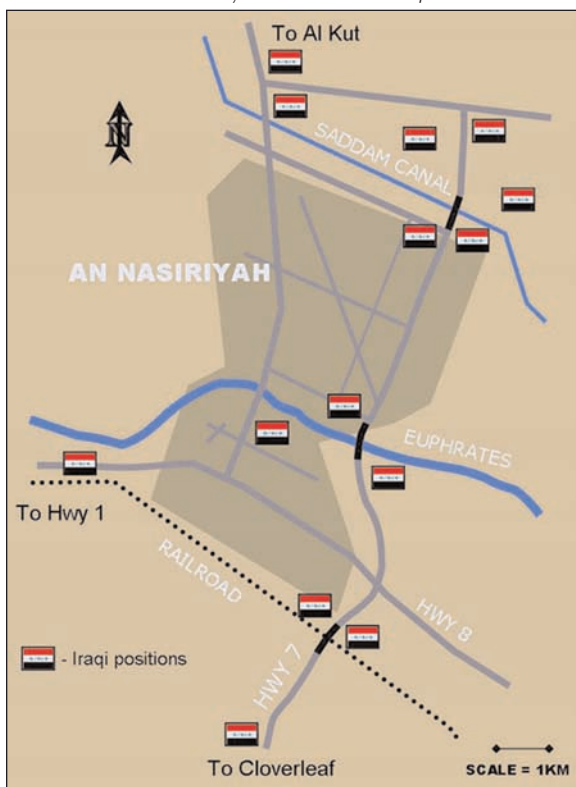
The first order of business for Grabowski was to configure his battalion to incorporate Major William P. Peeples' tank company. Grabowski ordered Company B and Company A, 8th Tank Battalion to swap a single platoon. This left Company B with two platoons of mechanized infantry and one tank platoon. The tankers ended up with two tank platoons and a mechanized infantry platoon. Now Grabowski had a tank-heavy company--"Team Tank"; an infantry heavy company--"Team Mech"; two additional mechanized infantry companies--Companies A and C; and his Weapons Company mortars and combined anti-armor platoon.

Once organized, Grabowski planned for Team Tank, Team Mech and his Alpha Command Group to develop a support

by fire position on the southeast bank of the Euphrates River. Then, Company A would race across the Euphrates River Bridge and establish a defensive perimeter on the north shore. Team Tank, Team Mech, Alpha Command Group, and Company C would race across the Euphrates River. Once inside the city, Grabowski would make the decision on the next course of action.

If there was opposition inside the city, 1st Battalion would make a hard right turn and move to the eastern edge of the city. Then, Team Tank and Team Mech would push to the Saddam Canal, followed by Grabowski's Alpha Command Group and Company C. Grabowski's Marines would develop

An Nasiriyah was an armed camp





Lowry

a second support by fire position on the southern bank of the Saddam Canal, just as they had done at the Euphrates. Company C would then move to secure the Saddam Canal Bridge. Colonel Bailey planned to move 2d Battalion, 8th Marines up to relieve Grabowski's Company A at the Euphrates River, then 2d Battalion, 8th Marines would move into Ambush Alley to secure the entire route, as Grabowski consolidated north of the Saddam Canal. If the city was calm, 1st Battalion would not skirt the city. They would simply drive north through the city to the Saddam Canal Bridge.

The plan started to fall apart well before sunrise, on 23 March, when a small U.S. Army supply convoy raced past 1st Battalion on the southern approach to An Nasiriyah. The 507th Maintenance Company was lost. They drove across the Euphrates River, straight through Ambush Alley, over the Saddam Canal Bridge and continued for another few kilometers before they decided that they needed to retrace their path. Unfortunately, the soldiers had awakened every Iraqi with a gun. Their race south was one long, rolling ambush resulting in the death of 11 soldiers and capture of 6 more, including Private First Class Jessica Lynch.

Nasiriyah was an armed camp. Iraqi commanders knew

from their experience in Desert Storm that they had absolutely no chance of defeating the Americans in a toe-to-toe fight. So, they decided to use their cities as cover. Surely, the Americans would not bring their overwhelming firepower to bear on the civilians. Nasiriyah was the city selected for the first stand against the American invasion. It was heavily fortified and there were myriad weapons caches strategically located throughout the city in mosques, schools, and hospitals.

The city's defenses were manned by regular soldiers of the *11th Infantry Division*, locally conscripted militia of the Al Quds, Baath Party loyalists, and 500 of Uday Hussein's private thugs and murderers who went by the name *Saddam Fedayeen* (Saddam's Martyrs). Fully manned, there were more than 5,000 Iraqis defending An Nasiriyah. Initially, the allied hope was that the regular Army would lay down its arms and go home at the first sight of American troops.

Now that the 507th Maintenance Company had been forced to flee under fire, Iraqis began returning to the city and manning their positions. Any hope of capitulation was now dashed. The people of Nasiriyah had learned that it is important to be on Saddam's side if he had any chance of staying in power and the *Fedayeen* roamed the streets reminding the locals that they were still firmly in power and that they had beaten back the "first wave." They dragged two American soldier's bodies through the streets as a grim reminder of what would happen to anyone who opposed them.

In the south, the first defensive position was at the railroad overpass. The Iraqis had a dug-in tank company, supported by infantry, mortars and machine guns just north of the bridge. Some of the soldiers of the 507th managed to race back across the railroad bridge. They would be the only soldiers who were not captured or killed. Once they were south of the railroad overpass, Major Peeples' tank crews noticed the vehicles fleeing toward them. Peeples and three of his tanks raced forward, rescuing 16 soldiers. During the rescue, the tanks had been forced to dump their external fuel cells. Grabowski ordered these tanks to the rear to refuel and continued his

march north with his now tankless Company B. As Captain Timothy A. Newland's first track crested the railroad bridge, it screeched to a halt and backed down from the top.

"Tanks!" The lead trackers announced over the net. There would be no capitulation. The Iraqis were standing and fighting. Grabowski quickly sent a combined anti-armor team to the bridge. Staff Sergeant Troy Schielein's tube launched, optically tracked, wire guided missile gunners methodically took out eight Iraqi tanks. Nasiriyah's first lines of defenders were decimated in a half-hour firefight, but with this unexpected resistance, Grabowski decided to wait for his tanks before he advanced any farther.

As soon as Team Mech's tank platoon returned, the 1st Battalion pushed forward. Team Mech and Schielein's combined anti-armor team led the charge up Highway 7 toward the Euphrates River. Grabowski's Alpha Command Group followed Company B in the two P7 command tracks and a dozen soft-skinned humvees. Company A followed Grabowski and Company C moved up behind Company A.

No plan ever survives first contact with the enemy. Now that the Marines had lost the element of surprise, Grabowski, Bailey and the brigade commander, Brigadier General Richard L. Natonski, all worried that the Iraqis would blow the bridges in the city. So, Grabowski decided to abandon the plan to develop a support by fire position and he charged directly for the Euphrates River Bridge.

Team Mech's tanks and Schielein's combined anti-armor teams crested the Euphrates River Bridge first. As they rolled down off the bridge into Ambush Alley, they encountered a hail of gunfire. Team Mech made a sharp right turn into the narrow streets of eastern Nasiriyah and headed for the outskirts of town. Lieutenant Colonel Grabowski's Alpha Command Group came down off the bridge right behind Company B and they too turned east to avoid Ambush Alley. Captain Mike Brooks' Company A followed Grabowski over the bridge and hastily set up a "horseshoe" defense on the north bank.

Second Lieutenant Michael S. Seely, a decorated Desert

Storm veteran, was Company C's most experienced platoon leader. Charlie's company commander, Captain Daniel J. Wittnam, had assigned Seely's 3d Platoon to lead the company into Nasiriyah. Third Platoon rode in three assault amphibious vehicles--C209, C210, and C211. As Seely was moving his tracks back onto Highway 7 to fall in behind Company A, Seely's track, C209, stalled and refused to restart. Third Platoon ground to a stop and executed a "bump drill" which they had practiced many times during their long wait in the Kuwaiti Desert.

Again, the plan broke down during the "Chinese fire drill." The plan had been for Lieutenant Seely to take the troop commander spot in C211 and the platoon sergeant, Staff Sergeant Anthony Pompos, to man the troop commander position in the remaining track, C210. But, Company C's executive officer, First Lieutenant Eric A. Meador, was the troop commander in C210, so Pompos jumped in the back of the track. Third Platoon's Marines quickly crammed themselves into their two functioning assault amphibious vehicles then they pressed forward up Highway 7, now the trailing platoon in Company C. Company B and the command element had disappeared into the eastern city streets and Company A had taken up defensive positions around the bridge. The battalion radio

Bachmann/Lowry



nets were cluttered with excited chatter, making command communications nearly impossible. The adrenaline rush of first contact had completely disrupted radio discipline. Everyone with a radio wanted to announce what was happening, effectively making it impossible to communicate. Captain Wittnam could not contact his battalion commander so he made a command decision.

Wittnam incorrectly surmised that Company B had pushed directly through Ambush Alley, so he ordered Company C forward. Passing Company A, Sergeant William Schaefer led Company C into Ambush Alley as Iraqis jumped into the road firing AK-47s and releasing a hail of poorly aimed rocket propelled grenades. The rocket propelled grenades snaked through the air and skidded across the ground; some duds actually struck Schaefer's track and bounced off. One whizzed past, scraping the side of C201. Schaefer led Company C's 11 tracks and 3 humvees deeper and deeper into Ambush Alley with Seely's 3d Platoon taking up the rear in their two crowded armored vehicles.

C210 and C211 were bulging at the seams. Marines were standing on Marines who were sitting inside the overcrowded troop compartments and more Marines were hunkered down, riding atop the vehicles. Sergeant Michael E. Bitz was driving C211. First Squad's Sergeant Jack Maloney stood in the troop compartment, only a few feet behind Seely. Corporal William Bachman stood shoulder-to-shoulder with Maloney. Lance Corporal Donald "John" Cline, Jr., Bachman's close friend, was at Bachman's back facing outward on the right side of the track along with Corporal Michael Mead and several other Marines. Corporal Randy Glass and Sergeant Jose Torres sat next to each other down in the crowded troop compartment.

The Marines pressed forward through an increasing hail of gunfire. Soon, Schaefer could see the Saddam Canal Bridge. Seely was over half way through Ambush Alley when C211 was rocked by the impact of a rocket propelled grenade. Shrapnel spewed into the troop compartment, wounding several Marines and setting the track on fire.

Seely pounded on Sergeant Bitz' helmet, "Go! Go! Go!,"

he commanded. Bitz struggled with the controls and raced forward as smoke and flames spewed from the disabled vehicle. Inside, Sergeant Torres had been temporarily blinded by the blast. Corporal Randy Glass was bleeding profusely and screaming in pain. Torres, barely able to see, quickly worked to apply a tourniquet above Glass' wound.

Atop the track, Corporal Mead was also writhing in pain with another leg injury. Trying to assess the situation, Seely shouted, "How many casualties do we have?" No one answered. Sergeant Bitz continued to race forward. He raced over the Saddam Canal Bridge and ground to a stop a few hundred meters north of the canal, right in the middle of an elevated road. Muddy marshes and a web of ditches and small canals flanked the road on both sides.

Seely tapped Bitz' helmet again, "Drop the Ramp!" he ordered and then he jumped from the troop commander's hatch. Seely moved along the top of the burning track ordering his men to get out. Sergeant Schaefer, who had been the first across the Saddam Canal, sprinted to C211 and opened the back door. Schaefer was shocked when he saw Glass. He had never seen such a severe injury. After a second's hesitation, Schaefer helped others lift Glass out of the burning track.

Cline helped Mead from the track and Bachman remained in the troop compartment until all the other Marines were safely out. By the time Bachman had exited the burning track, Corpsman Luis Fonseca had arrived. Fonseca quickly splinted Glass' leg with a jack handle and all the wounded were helped to the cover of the embankment along the side of the road.

Sergeant Torres refused treatment and found a Marine to guide him to one of his machine gun teams. Seely ordered one of Torres' teams to the west side of the road and then he turned to Sergeant Maloney and ordered him to take a half-dozen Marines to a berm not far from the east side of the road.

By now, the Marines of Company C were in a fight for their lives. The Iraqis reined down a steady barrage of artillery and mortar fire on the elevated road. Heavy machine gun fire raked the road.

Maloney, Bachman, Cline and the others took cover along the eastern berm while Seely grabbed the rest of his men and ordered them to follow him to the west side of the road. Seely led the way, then, one-by-one, 10 of his Marines ran across the fire-swept elevated road and dove into a trench on the west side.

Lieutenant Meador had ordered C210 to roll north past the burning hulk of C211. He moved his track several hundred meters to the north of the company formation, leaving Seely and his squad of Marines. As a unit, 3d Platoon was now combat ineffective, but Seely was not about to give up. He took his small group and moved to the north and west to engage the enemy. Atop C210, Pompos gazed south knowing that the burning track was his, but not knowing the fate of Seely and his men. There was no time to worry about C211's occupants. Pompos dismounted with what was left of his platoon and they too advanced toward the enemy in the west.

Most of Company C's mortar teams rode in C208, led by the Weapons Platoon Leader, First Lieutenant. James "Ben" Reid. As his track rolled to a stop, on the right side of the road, Reid was on the ground in an instant. He ordered his mortar teams to deploy and soon they were locked in a deadly indirect fire duel with the enemy. As Reid was setting up one of his mortars, an enemy round landed a direct hit on his team, severely wounding Reid and his forward observer, Second Lieutenant Frederick E. Pokorney Jr., and killing most of the team. Now, Company C had no forward air controller, no forward observer, and its fire support team leader was badly wounded and so dazed that he was effectively taken out of the fight. When Lance Corporal Cline saw the mortar team take the direct hit, he sprinted to their aid.

In 2003, there were only two billets for forward air controllers in Marine infantry battalions. Company A and B each had a forward air control teams. Company C had no forward air controller. Captain Dennis A. Santare was the closest forward air controller to the fight north of the Canal. He was Company B's forward air controller and he was still moving north on the eastern side of the city. All he could see was the

column of billowing smoke north of his position.

In all the confusion, Santare was never told that Company C had taken the canal bridge. Both Captains Santare and Newland thought that they were the lead trace. The battalion air officer's radio was dead. So, Santare was running all the air. He sent his AH-1 Cobras to protect the battalion's eastern flank and he cleared two Air Force A-10 Thunderbolts "hot" north of the canal.

As they came on station, the A-10 pilots found a dozen armored vehicles along the highway, north of the canal. One was engulfed in flames. They swooped in and strafed the road. After the first pass, Lieutenant Meador began waving to his Marines on the ground to return to C210. Pompos returned and remounted C210, believing that Meador was just repositioning his track. Seely had no radio. When he saw Pompos, and the other Marines on his flank, begin to withdraw back to the tracks on the road, he ordered his men to return to the road too.

Just as Seely and his men reached the tracks, another A-10 swooped in on another run. One Marine was cut down just as he reached the back ramp. Corporal James Carl was severely wounded and several more were peppered with hot shrapnel. All the wounded were quickly loaded into C201, then Seely took the remaining men to set up a hasty defense in the north.

Most of the wounded Marines from the mortar team were loaded into C208 and believing that the track platoon leader was dead, Sergeant Schafer rallied the trackers to carry the mounting wounded back through Ambush Alley to the battalion aid station. C201, C206, C207, C208 and C210 all headed south for the bridge. C206 crossed the bridge first, just as the A-10s overhead were lining up for their next pass. The pilots overhead believed that Iraqi mechanized units were moving into the city to engage Marines.

The first A-10 let loose a Maverick missile which went astray, missing the tracks but causing the back ramp of C206 to fall. C206 continued south, dragging its ramp through Ambush Alley. The second A-10 rolled in and fired another

Maverick. It was a direct hit. C208 was thrown 20 feet in the air. When the shattered hulk finally came to rest, all in the troop compartment had been killed. Amazingly, the driver and track commander climbed out, wounded, but alive.*

C201 was right behind C208. It crashed into a telephone pole and all the Marines poured out. Most sought shelter in a nearby house. Second Lieutenant Scott M. Swantner and Sergeant Schafer jumped into C210 which raced south to Company A's position at the Euphrates River, along with C207. Seely, now thinking that the dozen or so Marines at his position were the only ones left north of the canal, dug his men in, waiting for the Iraqis to attack. The Iraqis didn't attack, but the A-10s returned. Seely got on the radio. "Stop the air! Stop Everything!" He ordered. Santare immediately called off the aircraft but Company C was still under fire from the enemy.

Major Peeples heard Seely's call for assistance; he left two of his tanks with Company A, then immediately ordered his driver into Ambush Alley. Peeples and his wingman, Captain Scott A. Dyer, drove north to relieve what is left of Company C. Major Peeples passenger was the tank company forward air controller, Major Scott Hawkins. As soon as Peeples was north of the Saddam Canal, he stopped near the bridge to help Captain Wittnam. Peeples sent Dyer north to relieve Seely. Once Peeples' two tanks were in the battle and Hawkins started bringing in Cobra gunships, the Iraqis lost their stomach for a fight and fled the battlefield.

Company C had held under heavy fire. Company A was not far behind Peeples. By late afternoon, Lieutenant Colonel Grabowski had consolidated all of his battalion north of the Saddam Canal. The 2d Battalion, 8th Marines had moved to secure the Euphrates River bridge. It would take Task Force Tarawa nearly a week to secure the entire city, but by 24 March, 1st Marine Division units were charging north through Nasiriyah, to continue the attack toward Baghdad.

*Editor's Note: After the Battle of An-Nasiriyah, an investigation was conducted. The results, which were released Multi National Corps-Iraq (MNC-I), found that C208 had been hit by both enemy and friendly fire, however there was no determination as to which fire killed the Marines.

As the sun set on 23 March 2003, no one knew the extent of the casualties. Captain Wittnam only knew that he had 18 men that could not be accounted for. Everyone hoped that some of those Marines had moved south with some of the wounded and that they would be found to be safe. The Army had no idea how many soldiers were missing from the 507th Maintenance Company. It would take weeks for the details to be sorted out. As it turned out, 18 Marines and 11 soldiers were killed in Nasiriyah on 23 March and dozens were wounded. Six American soldiers were captured. Jessica Lynch was rescued from the Saddam Hospital in downtown Nasiriyah on 2 April and the other five were rescued over a week later, after the fall of Baghdad.

Nearly everything went wrong in the battle to secure the bridges in An Nasiriyah. Yet, the Marines stayed on the offensive, led by small unit leaders. corporals, staff noncommissioned officers, platoon leaders and company commanders led their Marines to victory because they had the intelligence to adapt and the fortitude to continue. They were prepared mentally and physically to overcome setback after setback because failure is not an option for United States Marines.

Lowry





DOD (USMC) A185824

Was the Lieutenant A War Criminal?

by Lieutenant Colonel Gary D. Solis

All Marines are trained in the Law of War, all Marines will report violations of the Law of War, but Marines cannot comment on specific cases while under investigation. As such, this example from the past has current relevancy.

Vietnam was a nasty piece of work. But isn't every war? In its own way, though, the Vietnam War was particularly unpleasant. It was a protracted conflict, with little evidence of progress, and it engendered feelings of frustration and futility. Although the Marine landings had taken place only 18 months before, by September 1966, the insurgent nature of the conflict was already apparent and any Marine could tell you that an insurgency is the worst kind of combat. Brutal and unforgiving, it pitted un-uniformed irregulars against Marines used to fighting organized opposing units like the North Koreans and Japanese. True, the Marine Corps' pre-World War II service in

the Caribbean and Central America gave it an invaluable background and experience in fighting irregulars, but that made it no easier to take on the Viet Cong insurgents. Only later would units of the North Vietnamese Army, regulars, be encountered in significant numbers.

The war had already produced its first Marine Corps war crime court-martial. On a night in August 1965, Lance Corporal Marion McGhee, 3d Battalion, 3d Marines, while apparently drunk, walked through his battalion's lines into a nearby village, kicked through the wall of a Vietnamese thatched hut and seized a 14-year-old girl, pulling her toward the door. When her father interceded, McGhee shot and killed him. The girl escaped, McGhee was apprehended and sent to trial, a general court-martial held in Chu Lai. His defense of insanity was accompanied by an assertion that he had been pursuing someone he suspected of being a Viet Cong. His defense was rejected, he was convicted and sentenced to a dishonorable discharge and confinement for 10 years. Much worse was to come.

Chu Lai, 57 miles south of Da Nang, had been established in mid-1965 as one of three principle Marine Corps enclaves, the others being Da Nang and Phu Bai. By January 1966, Major General Lewis W. Walt, commanding general of both III Marine Amphibious Force and the 3d Marine Division, had more than 41,000 men under his command. The Chu Lai tactical area of responsibility also held more than 100,000 civilians in an area of 205 square miles. Chu Lai was home to two Marine infantry regiments, an artillery group, and three aircraft groups. Units of the 1st Marine Division arrived from Camp Pendleton by way of Okinawa during March 1966, and assumed responsibility for the tactical area of responsibility. One of the regiments based at Chu Lai was the 5th Marines, one member of whom was Private First Class John D. Potter, Jr.

The Patrol

In early October 1966, Colonel Leo J. Dulacki (later a lieu-

tenant general) was sitting in General Walt's office on Hill 327, three miles west of Da Nang.

I was chief of staff at the time...discussing the case with him at length. Let me say, he had deep problems in trying to accept the results of the investigation. He couldn't believe that a Marine, any Marine, would do something like this....This had to be someone other than Marines because Marines just wouldn't do something like this....We had to [refer the cases to general courts-martial] because the evidence was such that it indicated that these people were involved....We would not tolerate such actions, they would be punished, and we didn't cover it up.

The case Colonel Dulacki was referring to was the Potter patrol.

At about 1900 on 23 September, a nine-man ambush patrol left Hill 22, several miles northwest of Chu Lai. Hill 22 was the command post of Company B, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines. A member of the patrol, Private First Class John Potter, was a combat-experienced 20-year-old with a strong and assertive personality. The patrol's leader was Sergeant Ronald L. Vogel. Vogel was viewed by those on the patrol as a somewhat weak and ineffective noncommissioned officer, lacking the aggressive drive that some of them felt was required of a good combat leader.

It is said that wherever there are two Marines, one of them is senior. Perhaps more than in any other Armed Service, the Marine Corps' hierarchy of grade is understood and respected.* Every Marine understands the grade and rank structure and his/her place in it. It is an unusual instance when grade is not accorded instant, even unthinking respect and obedience. It is rare when it is disregarded, court-martial usually being the result. It could not be otherwise, of course, for mil-

* Although the terms rank and grade are often used interchangeably, "grade" properly indicates an individual's position in the military hierarchical structure. "Rank" indicates one's seniority within a particular grade.

itary service is based, in large part, upon obedience to lawful orders and directions that are given from time to time by those senior in grade to those junior. Military discipline is based primarily upon military grade, and military discipline is nowhere more paramount than in the United States Marine Corps.

But in Vietnam a strange phenomenon referred to as "bush rank" sometimes arose. More prevalent in the later stages of the war, it was occasionally seen even in the early stages. In Vietnam, as in Korea in 1952, there was a shortage of combat experienced noncommissioned officers. With the Marine Corps rapidly expanding to meet the needs of newly assigned missions in South Vietnam, "slick arm sergeants"--Marines who wore sergeant's chevrons but had not yet earned their first service stripe--were not uncommon. Some of those young noncommissioned officers had not yet grown into their new positions of authority and were initially unsure of themselves. In combat, this sometimes led to an unaccustomed and uneasy flexibility in the usual system of seniority but "bush rank" could be as real as official rank. Lieutenant General Charles G. Cooper, a lieutenant colonel when he commanded an infantry battalion in Vietnam, although referring to a period later in the war, noted, "this type of small unit jury-rigging was unfortunately not unusual....In my opinion, the problem started here. It was a judgmental error of considerable magnitude." A judgmental error that led to perhaps the most heinous war crime in the Vietnam War, and one of the few in which a Marine Corps officer was an accused.

Strange as it is to recount, on that night and in that circumstance, Private First Class Potter effectively supplanted the patrol leader, Sergeant Vogel, and through force of personality (how else to account for it?), took control of the patrol. The court-martial records do not reveal how Potter went about his take-over of the patrol, but by whatever means it was done the others followed Potter's lead. Just as strange, Sergeant Vogel continued on the patrol, effectively just another Marine subordinate to Potter. The record is silent as to whether or not he did so without complaint.

With Potter in the lead, the eight Marines and the Navy Corpsman cautiously approached the small hamlet indicated on their 1:50,000 map as Xuan Ngoc (2). Potter signaled a stop and gathered the patrol around him. Hospitalman Jon R. Bretag, the Corpsman, later testified: "He said that this would be a raid instead of an ambush....We are to beat up the people, tear up the hooches, rape and kill, if necessary....He told us to roll down our sleeves, take our insignias off, make sure our covers are on [and] assigned us numbers. He said, if you want to get somebody, don't mention his name, call him by number....The entire squad moved out."

The patrol entered Xuan Ngoc (2), 9 or 10 widely separated thatch-roofed huts, some with woven reed walls, others of cinder block. Most had at least partial roofs of corrugated tin, liberated from American bases or outposts. Approaching one of the hooches with an adjoining bunker--a frequent feature the Vietnamese had learned the value of--several of the Marines seized a girl who just then happened to emerge. Forcing her to the ground, they removed her clothing and directed the Corpsman to examine her. Bretag obliged and, in his medical opinion, found her to have a sexually transmitted disease. That saved her life. She was released and the patrol moved on to another hooch.

The nine young men paused while Potter and another Marine entered the hooch. Moments later, a Vietnamese male ran out, only to be tackled and seized. Dao Quang Thinh was dragged a few yards away while the Marines shouted accusations that he was Viet Cong because they had quickly found a hand grenade in the hooch. He denied it and was beaten for his trouble. As his beating continued, other patrol members entered the hooch and found his wife, Bui Thi Huong, who was holding their three-year-old child. They pulled her outside, took the child from her and forced her to the ground. They ripped her clothing from her and Bretag again made his examination. Despite the Corpsman's inconclusive verdict of disease, four of the patrol, including Potter, raped her in turn.

Outside, the husband's beating ceased but he continued to shout his objections. An attempt to gag him with a field dress-

ing failed. Three Marines raised their M-14s and, at point blank range, shot and killed him. Awakened by the noise, the rape victim's sister-in-law had run to the scene, carrying her own child. Patrol members turned on her, shot her, shot her child, and shot the rape victim's child, as well. Moments later, Potter rolled the sister-in-law over and, hearing her moan, exclaimed, "Damn, she's still alive!" Standing over her prostrate form, Potter fired a burst of automatic fire into her.

Looking over the carnage they had wreaked, the patrol concluded that they could cover up what they had done. Potter pitched a fragmentation grenade near the bodies "to make it look good." Edging back toward the hooch they encountered Bui Thi Huong, their rape victim. They shot her, leaving her for dead.

The patrol returned to their firebase on Hill 22 and gave a false report of their mission to their platoon leader, Second Lieutenant Stephen J. Talty, telling him only that there had been a minor enemy contact. The report was relayed to the company commander, a more seasoned Vietnam hand. The vague details the patrol members offered, differing in detail and sequence, aroused his suspicion. Mulling over the patrol's report, there were too many inconsistencies for him to accept. He decided that he had best look further into the contact.

At first light, the "Skipper" approached the platoon leader from which the patrol had been drawn. Lieutenant Talty, a Marine for only 10 months, was new to the company, only just arrived in Vietnam. But he was a Marine officer, qualified to lead Marines. If inexperienced in doing so he was no different than any other recently commissioned lieutenant arriving in-country. The company commander directed Lieutenant Talty to re-trace the patrol's route and examine the scene of the purported contact. The patrol, reinforced with three additional Marines, would accompany him, the skipper said, to point out the location of the events they described in their report.

Xuan Ngoc (2) was not far away. As soon as Lieutenant Talty looked around the hooch, viewed the bodies and their



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condition, he realized that something far different had happened than what the patrol members had reported. The only record of the conversation that ensued between Talty and the patrol is Bretag's later testimony that, "we were instructed by the lieutenant to make the ambush site look good." Lieutenant Talty assisted them in further disguising what had happened.

As the patrol and the lieutenant went about repositioning bodies, policing up brass and brushing over the scene of the husband's beating, one of the previously wounded children was discovered to be still breathing. Private First Class Potter approached the small form and knelt beside it. Taking his M-14 in both hands, he raised it over the child and said, "Someone count for me." Sgt. Vogel counted, "One, two, three," as Potter repeatedly slammed his rifle butt into the child's head, killing her.

Talty and the patrol returned to Hill 22 to report to the commanding officer that all was well. But, in their return to Xaun Ngoc, they had overlooked the rape victim, Huong. She was alive.

Even as Lieutenant Talty was making his false official statement that made him an aide and abettor to the war crimes of murder and rape, the villagers were carrying Huong to the only doctor they knew of, the Navy doctors at 1st Battalion, 5th Marines' battalion headquarters. The doctors immediately recognized what had happened to her and reported her wounding and rape. It was only a brief time before the place of her injuries pointed to Marines from Hill 22 and, in turn, to Sergeant Vogel's patrol of the night before. Lieutenant Talty, confronted by his company commander, admitted all.

The Law of War

The law of armed conflict, commonly referred to as the law of war, is simple and accessible. There have been codes relating to battlefield conduct for hundreds of years. The most influential was the 1863 Lieber Code. As America's Civil War began, Francis Lieber, a Columbia University law professor and Austrian immigrant who had fought Napoleon at Waterloo, was asked by the leadership of the Union Army to write a code of conduct for soldiers in the field. His resulting guide reflected the customary practices of armies of that period – practices that had evolved over hundreds of years of warfare. President Lincoln, impressed, directed that the Lieber Code be incorporated into the Army's General Orders, and in 1863 it became General Order 100. The Code was binding only on Union soldiers but its worth was widely appreciated and it was soon adopted by the Confederacy and also became the basis of similar codes by the British, French, Germans, Russians, Spanish, and others. Today's United Kingdom Manual of the Law of Armed Conflict, pays respect to Lieber, saying, "The most important early codification of the customs and usages of war generally was the Lieber Code issued by President Lincoln."

In 1907, the international community adopted Hague Regulation IV. Drawing on conventions that had been concluded at a previous, 1899, Hague Peace Conference, the 1907 Conference included an annex entitled, "Convention IV

Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land.” Drawing on the Lieber Code, Hague Regulation IV, as it is usually referred to, lists the battlefield laws and customs observed by combatants in 1907. Hague Regulation IV is still cited as binding authority by international tribunals and courts-martial and it is, in turn, the basis for significant portions of the 1949 Geneva Conventions.

The modern standard of the law of war are the four 1949 Geneva Conventions. Negotiated and adopted after the German and Japanese excesses of World War II, the 1949 Conventions are the most widely ratified treaties in history. They are unique in several ways. First, they obligate every nation that signs and ratifies them to enact domestic legislation to punish grave breaches – that is, serious violations – of the Conventions. For the first time, there was to be clearly delineated personal responsibility for violating the law of war. The U.S. ratified the Conventions in 1956 and, as article 6 of the U.S. Constitution specifies, “all Treaties made...under the Authority of the United States, shall be the supreme Law of the Land.”

The U.S. looks to the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) as our vehicle for punishing grave breaches committed on the battlefield. Although not enacted for that specific purpose, the criminal provisions of the UCMJ correlate to virtually every grave breach envisioned by the Geneva Conventions and meets their requirement for domestic legislation to punish those committing grave breaches. For example, should a soldier beat and kill a prisoner of war, both the beating and the killing being grave breaches, he would be charged with violations of UCMJ articles 128 and 118, assault consummated by battery, and murder. Should a Marine rape a South Vietnamese noncombatant, a grave breach, he would be charged with violating UCMJ Article 120. The term “law of war” never arises in such prosecutions, but the cases are nevertheless prosecutions for violations of the law of war.

After the Vietnam War, two protocols (treaties by another name) amending and up-dating the 1949 Geneva Conventions were agreed upon by most of the international

community. The 1977 Additional Protocols I and II have been signed by the U.S. but, because of substantial disagreements we have with some of their provisions, we have not ratified the Protocols. Nor are we likely to do so in the foreseeable future.

It was the UCMJ that was in play, standing in for the 1949 Geneva Conventions, when the Potter patrol went to trial by general courts-martial at Chu Lai, in late 1966.

The Courts-Martial

All nine patrol members were to be tried, although the prosecuting judge advocates recognized that the evidence was not strong as to several of the accused. But there would be no offers of immunity in exchange for testimony against the others. This was too heinous a crime for anyone to be allowed to escape with government-granted immunity. Instead, the Marine prosecutors set a course often practiced in cases involving multiple defendants: they would first prosecute a few of the lesser players and work their way up to the principal actors, Vogel and Potter. In that way the prosecution could employ evidence revealed in the early trials in the cases they most wanted to nail.

The Corpsman, Jon Bretag, was first to be tried. A relatively minor player in the crimes of 23 September, he was convicted for his part in the rape of Huong, a grave breach of the law of war. Along with a reduction in grade and loss of pay and allowances, Bretag was sentenced to confinement for six months.

Private First Class James Boyd followed. He pleaded guilty to murder and was sentenced to four years confinement and a dishonorable discharge. While four years is not what one might expect as punishment for a conviction of murder, a comparison with sentences for murder imposed in U.S. jurisdictions suggests that, while light, it is not an inappropriate sentence. The cases one usually reads of in U.S. jurisdictions are often more notorious in nature, receiving heavier sentences. But lengthy sentences to confinement, even for mur-

der, are not necessarily the norm.

Three other courts-martial quickly followed, two accused being acquitted of major charges but convicted of relatively minor assaults with intent to commit rape. The third was acquitted of all charges.

Feckless Sergeant Ron Vogel was next. He was convicted as a principal* in the murder of the child Potter battered to death and in Huong's rape. He was sentenced to a dishonorable discharge and fifty years confinement. Rather than immediately returning to the U.S. to serve his sentence, Vogel joined Bretag and Boyd, all hoping for reductions in their confinement and up-grades of their discharges, as they waited to testify against Potter in the next court-martial.

Private First Class John Potter went to trial in January 1967. Despite his pleas of not guilty, and the advocacy of an energetic and tenacious defense counsel, Marine Captain Jim Shannon, the court-martial was not lengthy. The testimony of three of Potter's co-actors was damning, as was the testimony of his victim, Huong. Potter was convicted of five specifications (counts) of premeditated murder, of rape, and the attempted rape of a second Vietnamese. He was sentenced to a reduction to private, loss of all pay and allowances, a dishonorable discharge, and confinement for life. The conviction and sentence were approved by the convening authority and the Navy-Marine Corps Board of Review, the intermediate appellate court.

Years later, in February 1978, Potter was released from confinement, having served 12 years and 1 month. His was the longest period of confinement served by any prisoner convicted by Marine Corps court-martial in the Vietnam War. Not long enough, many will say.

What of Lieutenant Talty? At his general court-martial, he pleaded not guilty to being an accessory to murder and to making a false official statement. The members acquitted him

* A principal is anyone who commits an offense, or who "aids, abets, counsels, commands, or procures its commission." Principals who do not actually commit the offense but aid and abet its commission may be convicted and sentence as if they had actually committed the crime. UCMJ, article 77.



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of being an accessory after the fact but found him guilty of falsely reporting to the company commanding officer that there was nothing amiss in Sergeant Vogel's patrol report. The lieutenant was sentenced to dismissal from the Marine Corps. But his case didn't end there.

Upon appeal to the military court that in that day reviewed court-martial convictions, the three-member Navy-Marine Corps Board of Review, two of the Board's judges, one of whom was a Marine colonel, voted to affirm the sentence. The third believed that Talty had been on "tacit probation,"

and that the dismissal should be commuted to a loss of 300 numbers on the lineal list.* With that two-to-one split, the Board approved the sentence. But they made a critical error in announcing their opinion. "Appellate Defense Counsel," they wrote, "has assigned as error that the sentence to a dismissal is inappropriately severe for this accused. We consider that the assignment has merit under the particular facts and circumstances....Accordingly, it is recommended that appropriate authority suspend the sentence to dismissal...with the view to ultimate remission."

Headquarters Marine Corps had no such sympathetic view of the sentence's severity and took no action on the Board's recommendation. Lieutenant Talty then appealed to the United States Court of Military Appeals, in that era the military's highest appellate court. Talty argued that the Board of Review had determined that his sentence was overly severe, yet failed to set it aside, as was within their power and, he argued, as they were required to do upon determining it to be inappropriate. Instead, they improperly urged others to reduce the sentence that they had found too harsh.

Unanimously, the three civilian high court judges agreed. They returned the case to the Board of Review for reconsideration, saying, in other words, "Do it!" Soon Lieutenant Talty's sentence to dismissal was itself dismissed and he returned to his home of record with an honorable discharge, his period of obligated service already having been completed.

In fairness, the Court of Military Appeal's legal hands were tied. Case law had established precedent long before, that appellate military courts have a duty to affirm sentences they consider just, without regard to action others might later take to reduce a sentence. Still, Marines may view an officer, however green, who assists subordinates in concealing rape and multiple murder, including that of a female child, as meriting more than a mere dismissal.

Beyond the case of Lieutenant. Talty, how could young

* While it is a permitted sentence, a loss of numbers is rare, as part of a Marine Corps court-martial sentence. It is less so in the Navy. There often was a Navy judge on the panels of the Board of Review.

Marines and a sailor, all with good prior records – Potter had no prior military offenses – commit such cruel and wanton crimes? At Potter's court-martial, the Navy psychiatrist who examined him and found him sane, may have shed light on Potter's actions and those of the other Marines who committed war crimes in Vietnam. His sympathetic testimony has a resonance in today's war against terrorism, as well:

War in Vietnam is one where the enemy is usually unseen until he chooses to make himself known, while the Marines are forced to repeatedly expose themselves to attack and ambush. Civilians often shelter and aid the enemy and give rise to very strong resentment from the Marine troops, especially when it is clear that the civilians can prevent the death of numerous Marines by providing information about the presence of enemy troops and the location of booby traps and mines. This is a situation that caused PFC Potter to feel appropriately angry and frustrated and to look forward to raiding a village....Potter's state of emotional turmoil against the Vietnamese people probably accounts for his [acts].

But can there be any excuse for Potter's grave breaches of the law of war? Or for the acts of an officer who helped conceal them?



Read

Five Corporals

By Bing West

As [First Lieutenant] Jesse A. Grapes and the 3d Platoon battled the foreign fighters in the house from hell, other jihadists were burrowing in across southern Fallujah. Company I, just east of Company K, was running into the same badger-like resistance. The previous day Company I had fought for hours at a mosque with a blue-and-white-striped minaret. The mosque was built like a fort, with a dirt market square to its front and a row of one-story drab repair shops on the far side of the square. Ammunition caches inside the shops were cooking off, dust from the tank shells filled the air, and the insurgents were firing from inside positions, with few muzzle flashes showing. It took Company I three hours to smash down the mosque wall, drop the minaret, and storm the mosque, finding 10 insurgents dead and 5 severely wounded. India pushed on in the attack, leaving behind the wounded insurgents.

On 13 November 2004, Captain Brett Clark led Company I on a sweep back toward the mosque, again engaging

jihadists in scattered houses. The 1st and 2d Force Reconnaissance company's had sent to the battalions teams trained in close quarters battle. At many hard spots a close quarters battle team was asked to conduct the assault. There was no embarrassment in the asking. The clearing and reclearing was affecting some of the lance corporals, and the close quarters battle Marines were the experts. But the toll on the recon teams was heavy.

When the Marines smashed into one small house, a band of jihadists opened fire; the bullets ripped through a closed door and hit one Marine. A man with a chest rig ran at the Marines as they entered. Though hit repeatedly, he staggered forward and blew himself up, killing Lance Corporal Justin D. McLeese. The Marines dragged out McLeese's body and blew the house apart.

Expecting contact at any minute, the Marines of Company I retraced the route of yesterday's attack. When they reached the mosque where they had fought so bitterly the day before, they entered warily. An embedded television journalist began filming the scene. Lying on the dirt floor were the dead and wounded insurgents from the previous day's fight.

A Marine who had been wounded the day before pointed his rifle at a wounded insurgent. "He's fucking faking he's dead! He's faking!" the Marine yelled, and shot the man in the head.

Blood splattered against the wall as the man's legs twitched. "Well, he's dead now," another Marine said.

The television journalist sent the video back to the press pool for world-wide distribution.

On 14 November, the battalions again searched house by house. North of Highway 10, 3d Battalion, 5th Marines was continuing with its squeegee tactics. Company K was moving through an upper-class neighborhood of three-story houses landscaped with palm trees, grass, and flowered shrubbery. In one attractive house Lance Corporal George J. Payton climbed up a wide stairway and paused on the landing, then opened the door to his left.

A burst of automatic fire tore into his left leg, practically

severing it, and he fell to the ground. Lance Corporal Kip Yeager scrambled forward, firing a full magazine from his M16 into the room. As Lance Corporal Mason Fisher fired over his shoulder, Yeager pulled back Payton, who was dying. A half-dozen Marines crouched around him on the stairs, trying to stanch the bleeding. Fisher threw a grenade into the room, and Yeager heard a clunk! As it came back out and bounced down the stairs.

Yeager stooped, caught it on the second bounce, flipped it into the room, waited for the explosion, and then went back in firing. Two insurgents were down on the floor. Another tumbled out of a closet. Yeager shot him. As Lance Corporal Phillip Miska burst into the dust-filled room, as insurgent lying behind the door fumbled for a grenade. With Miska in the line of fire, Yeager leaped on the man, drew his Gurkha knife, and plunged it into the insurgents neck.

In the afternoon of the 14th, 3d Battalion, 5th Marines smashed through the twisted labyrinth of the Jolan souk, whose paved alleyways were lined with hundreds of shops protected by padlocked gratings or roll-down metal shutters that the Marines tore off like the tops of beer cans. Air strikes had split open the sides of buildings, exposing demolished rooms and sagging roofs. Telephone poles lay snapped, with hundreds of sheared lines dangling like webs of giant crazed spiders. It looked like a savage tornado had roared through

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the downtown district, smashing everything in its path, pausing capriciously to rip some buildings apart brick by brick before moving on.

In souks throughout the Middle East, centuries-old guilds specializing in leather goods, rugs, and jewelry clustered in different alleys. In the Jolan, Lieutenant Colonel Malay saw the same business tidiness and free-market enterprise, with different goods arranged in different alleys. Some alleys offered Kalashnikov rifles, while others sold rocket-propelled grenades, improvised explosive devices, or mortars. Some shops stocked small-arms munitions, while the upscale shops specialized in spare parts for heavy-caliber weapons. There was even an alley for antiaircraft guns. In six days the battalion executive officer, Major Todd Desgrosseilliers, had inventoried for destruction more than a hundred thousand weapons and large-caliber shells.

Two hundred meters west of the souk lay the Euphrates and the narrow green trestle bridge dubbed the Brooklyn Bridge. In late afternoon, when Malay walked onto the bridge, the trestles stood etched against a beautiful sunset. It looked like a scene from *The Bridges of Madison County*. After mutilating the Americans last March, the mob had written in white paint an Arabic verse on the north trestle. It read: Fallujah--Graveyard of the Americans.

Twenty feet away, on the south trestle in thick black paint, a Marine had printed a reply. It read:

THIS IS FOR THE AMERICANS OF BLACKWATER
MURDERED HERE IN 2004.
SEMPER FIDELIS, 3/5 DARK HORSE
FUCK YOU

Lieutenant Colonel Malay squinted at the hand-scribbled note. "Paint over that last line," he said. "Leave the rest."

Malay knew how his Marines felt. That afternoon they had found a female corpse dumped on a street, arms and legs cut off, entrails eviscerated. A later check determined that it was not Margaret Hassan, the English-born director of CARE who

had lived in Iraq for two decades caring for the sick and the infirm. Kidnapped from Baghdad four weeks earlier, she had been shown on television tearfully begging Prime Minister Blair to withdraw the British troops before she was executed. The Marines were unable to identify the mutilated female corpse. Like the hacked-up bodies in the torture house next to the merry-go-round at Jolan Park, the woman was laid to rest in a grave under the name "unknown."

By the afternoon of the 14th, the Marines had occupied all of the city, from the railroad station in the north to the one-story dwellings in the south.

On the morning of 15 November, 1st Battalion, 3d Marines continued to search in the eastern section. In one sharp fire-fight inside a house, Sergeant Rafael Peralta was shot in the head and fell to the ground. As the other Marines sought cover in the room, the insurgents lobbed a grenade into their midst. Peralta reached out, grabbed the grenade, and rolled on top of it, smothering the explosion. He was recommended for the Medal of Honor. His valor was a credit to 1st Battalion, 3d Marines, which lost 50 killed in Iraq.

South of Highway 10, the remnants of the insurgents had several more blocks of houses to hide in. Lieutenant Colonel Buhl with 3d Battalion, 1st Marines and Lieutenant Colonel Brandl with 1st Battalion, 8th Marines linked up and put four companies abreast to finish the job, using squeegee tactics to search every house.

By mid-morning on November 15, 1st Battalion, 8th Marines was methodically clearing the last rows of half-finished cement houses in the south. The previous afternoon, Company A had searched a hundred dwellings, finding several "muj" houses with drapes across the windows and blankets and drugs in the center rooms. In one house, a dog lay in the kitchen with a butcher knife in its side, a crude way of stopping its barking.

Company A had captured about 20 Saudis, Egyptians, and Syrians, and Captain Cunningham warned his platoons to be especially careful; the final diehards had no place to run. The platoons had only a few more blocks to clear before they



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reached the open fields. It was a poor section, the least attractive land in Fallujah, prone to flooding and plagued by mosquitoes. From the telephone poles dangled only a few wires. A house was lucky to have enough current for a few lights, and cooking was done with propane. Many homes were half finished, with piles of sand and bricks scattered about. None of the roads were paved, and most of the houses were simple cement squares with four or five downstairs rooms and a stairway to the roof, for sleeping in the open in hot weather. They were built of thick brick and concrete and enclosed by stout walls of cinder block and cement. Heavy metal grates of iron bars covered the windows. Most houses were laid out with fronts facing on a dirt road, but in some sections there was no order, with houses facing in different directions, some catty-corner to each other and not connected to any road.

Second Platoon was clearing a disorderly section of 20 houses when the Marines came under fire from three sides. The insurgents were shooting from the corners of houses and from windows on the street level. Sergeant Pillsbury, who had taken over after Lieutenant Hunt was medevaced with crushed fingers a few days earlier, scarcely had to say a word to get the platoon moving. His three squad leaders had come up through the ranks and been together in the battalion for three years. Within minutes the squads had flanked the insur-

gents, who fled from the block of houses and took up firing positions behind an earthen berm on the far side of the dirt street. Realizing their sudden good fortune, the entire platoon charged forward, climbed to the roofs of two adjacent houses, and poured fire down on the hapless enemy, quickly killing 10.

When the firing ceased, Pillsbury yelled for them to shift west a block to make room for Company B, which was pinching in from the east. Corporal Eubaldo Lovato signaled to his first squad, and they led off, moving to their right to search the next batch of half-finished brick and cement houses. Corporal Connors was half a block behind them with his third squad when he heard a burst of Kalashnikov firing, the crump! of a grenade, and the yell "Corpsman up!"

He ran through the soft sand and dirt toward the next row of houses. In front of him was a beige one-story house with bars on the three windows in front. The house was wedged between two similar cement homes, with scarcely enough room for a man to squeeze between one house and the next. Two Marines were dragging a third out of the beige house. None appeared to be injured.

"Let me go!"

"Shut up, Doc. You're not going back in."

Corporal Lovato had a firm grip on the web gear of Corpsman Julian Mask. "Desiato is down. Those fuckers kept shooting him." Lovato said, spitting out the foul-tasting black grime from the Composition B powder of a grenade. "There is a serious amount of guys in the room."

"He's down hard," Corporal Lonnie Longenecker said. "He's gone." Lance Corporal Desiato, who had been in Connor's squad for a year, had been assigned to guard the gear at the base when the battalion left for the Fallujah fight. He had begged Connors to get him into the action.

"I enlisted to fight, not to watch gear," Desiato said.

Connors had finagled Desiato a slot in Lovato's squad. Now he was down, and Connors felt responsible. He looked at the house. There was a large barred window to the right where the main room would be, a small entry door, and a

smaller barred window to the left. There were not more than three or four rooms, no second story, and no apparent fields of fire for a defender.

"I'm checking it out," he said.

At 21 Connors was the most experienced squad leader. Captain Cunningham, while he had been short of officers and senior noncommissioned officers back in the States, had made him the acting platoon commander for several weeks. Connors had been in 11 gunfights inside houses.

He ran to the doorway and peeked in. Inside, the floor was hard-packed dirt, and there were no interior doors, no fixtures, and no furniture. It was an empty shell of bricks mortar with the smell of fresh construction, months away from completion. To his right, the main room was empty. To his left, a dirt corridor led past a room and through an open door to a back bedroom. Lying against the bedroom wall in plain sight was Desiato's body.

With Longenecker, his fire team leader, one step behind him, Desiato had stepped into that small, dark room, swung his rifle to the left, and was slammed up against the wall by a hail of bullets. He slid down the wall, face and torso toward the assailants who were still firing. Bullets continued to strike him in the face, the armored vest, and the legs. The bullets had pinned his body against the wall, the squad automatic weapon lying by his side.

Connors could plainly see Desiato's wounds and knew he was dead.

Lance Corporal Brown entered and stood behind Connors, peering over his shoulder.

"Before we do a thing," Connors said, "we have to be sure he's dead. Can you confirm he's dead?"

Brown looked at the body lying in the kill zone a few feet away, the wounds all too clear.

"He's dead," Brown said.

"All right," Connors said, "lets get him out of there."

Desiato was so close, lying just inside the room. The insurgents hadn't said a word or made a sound. With a quick lunge Connors could grab his web gear, give a tug, and have

the body back in the corridor. He eased his shoulder into the foyer.

A hail of Kalashnikov fire ripped past his face as he flung his body back.

"SAW! Give me a SAW!" Connors screamed.

He turned back in to the foyer, letting fly two hundred rounds down the corridor into the back room. He waited, the barrel smoking. No sounds, no return fire.

"Get out," he said over his shoulder, spooning a grenade.

He took out the pin and let the spoon spin loose. He milked the grenade for the count of one,! pulled his arm back for an underhand lob, looked down the corridor, and locked eyes with a man with wild black hair and a full beard, his arm also back. The two grenades sailed past each other as Connors shouted "Grenade!" and pushed Brown behind him into the room to his left. They went down in a tangle as both grenades went off, filling Connors's ears with that ringing sensation, mouth instantly dry, teeth black and grimy, and acrid and burning taste in his mouth. The dirt and dust particles filled the room, blocking out all sight. The two Marines got to their knees and staggered out the foyer door to their left.

In the courtyard, Corporal Connors washed out his mouth and wished he could brush his teeth, now filthy with gunpowder. Corporal Camillio Aragon saw a man crawling along the roof and brought him down with one burst. Connors squiggle sideways down the alley behind the house to a small window, stuck his rifle through bars, and got off a long burst, raking the room. Two or three Kalashnikovs blazed back, and Connors crabbed out of the alley before they could get to the window and shoot down on him.

"It's a fucking Nazi pillbox," he said. "Those haj fucks are gonna die."

He grabbed a one-pound stick of C-4, shoved in a 10-second fuse, and sneaked back to the front door, covered by Lovato. He popped smoke on the time fuse, fired a few rounds from his 9mm pistol, threw the C-4 down the corridor, and ran into the courtyard to his right. With Lovato and two other Marines, he took cover under the overhang of the adja-

cent house, about 30 feet away. The C-4 blew, but before they could react, an AK-47 muzzle poked out of a hole in the roof next to their heads. Firing blindly, their attackers sprayed the wall a few feet above their heads.

Connors pulled another grenade from his web gear and lobbed it into the hole. It exploded, and a foot encased in a sneaker flew by them.

"All fucking right," Connors said.

The rest of the platoon had pulled back to a large house about 30 feet to their right, and they were the only Marines in the open. Soon they were taking fire from two directions, poor shooters in houses not 20 feet away, but steadily improving. spurts of dirt were continuously erupting in the open courtyard separating them from the large house.

"I'll get some more grenades," Lovato said, running across the courtyard. Connors watched the bullets striking behind his friends feet and thought, "Boy, if he sees those, he'll never come back. Lovato collected grenades from the other Marines, who were firing wherever they thought the insurgents were hiding, and popped back out the door. This time he did see the dirt puffs around him and dove into a trench next to the large building.

"You're screwed, Connors!" Lovato yelled. "I can't get the grenades to you." They have pins in them, for God's sake, Pitch them over!" Connors yelled. "How many do you have?"

Oh, I forgot. I have three. I'll throw you two."

"You don't like it, go get your own,"

Lovato threw over two grenades, and Connors scooped them up.

With the Marines in the house providing heavy fire, Connors and his small group threw their grenades and dashed safely across the courtyard.

Inside the house, Staff Sergeant Pillsbury listened to their report.

"We need to get him back," Connors said.

"I'll take care of those assholes sniping at you," Pillsbury said. "You know the situation. You get Desiato."

Connors looked around. Everybody was edging forward.



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He whispered to Pillsbury: "All those grenades, C-4. I don't want the young guys seeing Desiato when this is over. Just the squad leader."

"Agreed. The corporals go with Connors," Pillsbury said. "The rest of you fall in on me. I'll assign shooting posts."

Corporals Lovato, Aragon, Donaghy, and Longenecker slipped out of the door behind Connors, moving by hand and arm signals, the roar of the M16s behind them deafening. Aragon slipped first back into the beige house and quickly ducked back out. "Shit, the body's gone," he said. "They've taken Desiato."

Forty minutes had gone by since they had last been inside the house, plenty of time for the defenders to slip down a back alley or tunnel.

Longenecker ducked inside for a second look and came back out.

"We're fucked," he said. "Shit, shit, shit."

It was their worst fear: a repeat of Mogadishu, the body of an American soldier stripped naked and dragged through the streets. Connors felt like vomiting. He called Pillsbury over his handheld, knowing Generals Sattler and Natonski would stop the whole operation and rip Fallujah apart brick by brick, looking for Desiato.

Pillsbury was aghast. "Check again, for God's sake."

Corporal Brad Donaghy went in for the third time, creeping farther down the corridor for a better look into the back bedroom. The others pressed behind him. Donaghy backed up a few feet. "I see Desiato," he murmured.

"They've pulled him back to sucker us in. They've crossed his legs and put his arms at his sides. I don't know whether they're jerking with us or showing him respect."

Just then an insurgent ran forward into the back room a few feet, fired a burst of Kalashnikov rounds at an angle down the corridor, and leaped back before the Marines could return fire. Aragon and Longenecker pitched grenades into the room, and the firing stopped.

"Wasn't Desiato a SAW gunner?" Donaghy said. "Well, I didn't see any SAW,"

A squad automatic weapon fired so fast it could cut a man in two. "We gotta make sure they're down," Connors said, sidestepping toward the open bedroom door. Aragon drew his 9mm and followed on Connors's shoulder. At the edge of the doorway Connors reached down and picked up a piece of cement.

"I'll throw this in there and see if they shoot," he said.

He threw the rock and nothing happened.

"I'll shoot," Aragon said, reaching over Connors shoulder and squeezing the trigger to his pistol.

Nothing happened. Aragon ejected a round, recoiled, and reached around to shoot again. Blaam. The squad automatic weapon spewed 200 rounds back at their faces. Connors and Aragon clung to each other and tried to push their heads inside the wall. The stream of bullets, looking like a long rod of fire, flew by, burning Aragon's cheek. Connors could feel the hot wind, and chips from the cement wall stung his face.

They both tumbled back along the corridor to the opening to the next-door room, bumping into Lovato, who was furiously pulling the pin on a grenade.

"Frag out!!" Lovato yelled.

The grenade struck the doorway and bounced back, hitting Connors on his foot. Connors launched himself into the

room, the grenade exploding while he was in the air. He landed hard, the wind knocked out of him, groggy, unable to breathe or see for a few seconds. He tried his arms and legs, the wiggled his hands and toes. All were attached and working. He lay alone in the room, keeping his pistol trained on the doorway, worried that the insurgents next door would rush in. After a while he could hear the voices in his radio ear clip.

"Connors, Connors! My God, I think I killed him!" Lovato was yelling. "Answer me, for God's sake, answer me!"

"Yeah, yeah, yeah, I'm fine," Connors said over the radio, "but get me the fuck out of this room right now!"

Longenecker threw covering fire down the right-hand side of the corridor as Connors crawled down the left side. After he fired three rounds, Longenecker stopped shooting.

"I'll supply all the fucking rounds you'll ever need!" Connors screamed.

Longenecker resumed firing, and Connors stumbled out into the bright sunlight of the courtyard.

Aragon poked around in the garbage and pulled out a broken mirror. Smashing off a corner, he taped it to a stick. "We'll poke it around a corner and see where they are," he said.

Connors and Aragon went back down the corridor to try their invention. It fell apart on the first try. So they each threw another grenade into the quiet bedroom and backed out of the corridor.

"Let's check with the staff sergeant," Connors said. "We don't have enough firepower."

Once inside the large house, the five corporals became uncomfortable from all the stares from their Marines. Aragon asked for a Shoulder-Launched Multipurpose Assault Weapon, and they went up on the roof. The sniper fire had ceased, and Aragon drew aim on the back part of the bedroom, 50 feet away across the courtyard. The rocket struck a little to the left, gouging out a corner of the house but not creating a line of sight in the bedroom. The pillbox remained intact.



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Pillsbury called for tank support, and the corporals went down to keep careful watch, determined that Desiato's body was going home and nowhere else. When the tank rolled up with the hatches shut, the gunners sprayed the walls and windows with .50-caliber, then backed into the front of the house, trying to collapse it.

Connors ran forward and banged on the side of the tank with his pistol. When the hatch opened, he vigorously shook his head no--they weren't going to bury Desiato. He couldn't make himself heard over the tank engine, so in pantomime he showed that he wanted the main gun to fire where he directed. He then calculated the angles, pointed his pistol at the front of the house, and fired two bullets, one high and one low, to the left of the doorway. The tanker nodded and backed off, while the five corporals took cover.

BAANG! The first jarring round slammed through the high side of the house exactly where Connors had shot. BAANG! Again, dead on, this time through the lower side. The pillbox was breached. The five Marines ran up, three to the main door, one to each hole, rifles aimed in. As the dust settled, through both holes they could see into the back bedroom. Donaghy saw a movement, yelled *Ooga!* (Stop!), and put one round in a man's head. Having moved down the corridor, Longenecker peeked around the corner as an insurgent darted out to fire. Longenecker dropped to on knee and put three rounds into the man's chest. Connors, Aragon, and Lovato rushed forward and flooded the room, firing into every

corner, emptying magazines into every crumpled figure they could see.

Through the acrid smoke they counted six insurgents sprawled inside the tiny room, one flattened against the back wall under the window, three sagging along the back wall, and two lying on top of one another in a corner. All wore dark shirts and pants and sneakers. They had backpacks, Kalashnikov Rifle magazine vests, money, binoculars, grenades, Kalashnikovs and a Dragunov sniper rifle with a telescope. The oldest--the one with the thick black beard who had thrown the grenade at Connors--looked to be in his late forties. The other were in their twenties or late teens, except for the youngest. He was about 12 or 13.

The five corporals--in Homer's words, "deadly men in the strong encounters"--had finished their mission. They took a stretcher, covered Lance Corporal Desiato with blankets, and carried the body from the pillbox back to the platoon position to await transportation to Massachusetts.

That afternoon the television networks showed the video of the Marine shooting the wounded insurgent inside the mosque. Al Jazeera played the clip every hour. The terrorists had provided a video of the execution of Margaret Hassan, but Al Jazeera refused to air it, knowing that would provoke outrage against the insurgents. Instead, Al Jazeera posted side by side a photo of Hassan and a picture of the Marine aiming his rifle, suggesting they were the twin sides of terror.

Zarqawi and his terrorists had used Fallujah as their sanctuary for six months. The man was the face of evil, cunning and calculating. His suicide bombing had driven the United Nations from Iraq, slaughtered hundreds of Shiites, killed dozens of Americans, and inspired extremists to follow his example. Several times the special forces thought they had him trapped, but he continued to escape.

On 16 November, a kilometer east of where Connors had fought, the armored battalion 2-2 had trapped two dozen insurgents in a large walled compound. When the insurgents had held out despite repeated poundings from the Abrams tanks, Lieutenant Colonel Newell, the 2-2 commander, called

in air strikes, reducing the complex building by building.

Amid the smoldering wreckage, Newell's soldiers found under-ground tunnels shattered body parts, computers, passports, and letters from Zarqawi. An Arabic sign on one wall read "Al Qaeda Organization." Inside a factory for making bombs, a Ford Explorer rigged with explosives sat on the assembly line.

The demolition of the Zarqawi complex signaled the termination of major combat inside the city. Zarqawi confirmed the defeat by posting an audiotape on the Internet, condemning the Sunni clerical establishment for abandoning his cause in Fallujah.

"You have let us down in the darkest circumstances and handed us over to the enemy," he said.

While his base of operations had been eliminated, Zarqawi himself remained at large.

The battle began on 7 November, and the Iraqi government declared the city secured on 13 November. But as Malay and the other battalions applied squeegee tactics to a larger and larger area, American casualties continued for weeks.

The rationale for stopping the attack in April was a perception that the damage being done was too great. In the month of April, 150 air strikes had destroyed 75 to 100 buildings. In November the damage was vastly greater. There were 540 air strikes and 14,000 artillery and mortar shell fired, as well as 2,500 tank main gun rounds. Eighteen thousand of Fallujah's 39,000 buildings were damaged or destroyed. In the November attack 70 Americans were killed and 609 wounded.

During the 20 month struggle for Fallujah, 151 Americans had died and more than a thousand were wounded.

In late November a high-ranking American general from Baghdad drove through the city, looking carefully to the left and to the right. After several minutes he told the driver to stop. He got out and looked up and down the devastated street, at the drooping telephone poles, gutted storefronts, heaps of concrete, twisted skeletons of burnt-out cars, demolished roofs, and sagging walls. "Holy shit," he said.



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The House From Hell

By Bing West

On the morning of 13 November 2004, Company K set out to clear the dense blocks of houses stretching from the Phase Line Henry west to the Euphrates. Captain Jent told First Lieutenant [Jesse A.] Grapes that his platoon would take the lead, and Grapes assigned a block to each squad. After the previous day's fight, the platoon was tired but excited, expecting immediate action, but the insurgents had retreated to the south and no contact was made in the first block.

The 3d Squad began searching the second block by shooting and hammering at an unyielding lock on a courtyard gate. Admitting defeat, Corporal Ryan Weemer sat down to smoke a cigarette.

Screw this one, he thought. *Second Squad has some C-4. They can clear it later.*

Sergeant Pruitt, the platoon guide, ran across the street to pry open a side gate of the next house. Tough and muscular, Pruitt had a challenging nature and never relaxed. "Hey, this gate's open," he yelled, "Let's go!"

Weemer threw down his smoke and hustled over with Sergeant James Eldridge and Lance Corporals Cory Carlisle and James Prentice.

The five Marines slipped into the courtyard, and Pruitt looked inside the outhouse. Fresh shit.

"They're inside!" Pruitt whispered.

The house looked typical of Fallujah--two stories of thick cement squares. Usually on the first floor you entered a foyer with a large living room off to the right, a large common room straight ahead, a kitchen and bathroom with a one-hole toilet in the rear, and uneven cement steps leading to an upstairs corridor with doors opening onto three or four bedrooms. This house, though, had a raised cement dome with skylight windows in the center of the roof, an unusual addition.

The house looked too small to hold more than a few enemy. So rather than wait for a tank, the Marines decided to assault. Weemer, who had gone through the close quarters battle special training, posted Prentice as rear security and gestured to Carlisle and Pruitt to stack behind him. He slung his M16 and took out his pistol. Drawing a deep breath, he kicked down the door and charged across the room. He was "running the rabbit," a technique where the point man rushes across the room to distract the enemy while the second man in the stack does the shooting.

As Weemer sprinted across the entryway room, he glimpsed an insurgent with a Kalashnikov rifle hiding next to the door. As he ran by, Weemer fired three rounds into the man. Carlisle burst in after Weemer, almost bumped into the gunman, and jumped back, spilling into Pruitt.

"Go!" Pruitt yelled, shoving him back into the room.

Carlisle stepped forward and fired a long burst into the insurgent, who sagged to the floor. Carlisle then fired another burst into the dead man.

"Stop shooting and get over here!" Weemer yelled.

Carlisle ran across the room and flattened himself against the wall next to Weemer.

"Ready to clear?" Weemer said, gesturing at the open doorway to his left that led to the main room.

With Carlisle at his hip, Weemer charged in and was blinded by the pulsing white flashes of a Kalashnikov muzzle

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exploding in his face, Weemer thrust out his right arm and fired eight bullets into the insurgent. The two were standing five feet apart, looking into each other's eyes, firing furiously. Weemer could feel bullets whizzing by his face. Chips of brick and concrete were pelting him on the checks, his ears ringing.

Weemer was a qualified expert shot with a pistol. There was no way he had missed with a dozen bullets. He was close enough to slap the man. The man would not go down.

Weemer was running out of bullets. He shuffled toward the door, still firing, and pushed Carlisle back into the first room.

The Kalashnikov rounds that missed Weemer as he made entry had passed through the door and struck Pruitt and Eldridge. Bones were shattered in the wrist of Pruitt's firing hand, and Eldridge was hit in the shoulder and chest. They staggered out of the house, and Pruitt tripped and fell near the front gate. As he struggled to get up, an insurgent on the roof opened fire, the bullets kicking dirt into his face. He dove around the wall and joined Eldridge on the street.

Inside the house Prentice, who had slid inside the doorway, saw a man wearing a green camouflage jacket and black pants rush out from a back room. Prentice fired a long burst

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from his squad automatic weapon, hitting the man in the chest and head, killing him instantly.

Weemer turned back to Carlisle. "Reload, and we'll finish that other fucker."

Keeping his eyes on the doorway, Weemer patted his pistol leg-holster. *Where's my extra mag?* He thought. *Fuck.*

He dropped his pistol and unhooked the M16 from his back. He heard someone stumbling toward them and backed up as the insurgent hobbled out from the main room. Weemer shot him in the legs and, when he fell, shot him twice in the face. The man, wearing black body armor over a blue denim shirt, was light-skinned, with a red bandanna tied around his curly hair.

Hearing the firing and seeing the wounded, other Marines were rushing to the house. Lance Corporal Severtsgard burst into the entry room. As he had done in yesterday's fight, Severtsgard was holding a grenade.

Weemer nodded at Severtsgard, who pitched the grenade into the main room. Immediately after the explosion, Weemer and Carlisle rushed in. The air was filled with black smoke and the acrid smell of gunpowder. Weemer broke right and waited a moment for the dust to settle. He saw a stairwell against the left wall and quickly raised his M16. Above him was a dome-shaped skylight and a circular catwalk with a solid three-foot-high cement guard railing. The stairs led to the catwalk.

As Weemer brought his rifle up, he saw an insurgent leaning over the cement railing, sighting in. The M16 and the Kalashnikov began firing at the same time, the sound deafening. Weemer felt his leg buckle. A hard blow rocked back his face.

To his left, Carlisle was struck down in a fusillade of bullets, the shooters taking dead aim from the catwalk overhead. Deafened by the din, Weemer hobbled back to the entryway. In the dust-filled room he didn't see Carlisle lying with a shattered leg, and he couldn't hear his screams.

His face numb and dripping blood, Weemer limped out to the court-yard. He had flashbacks of a jihadist whom his

team had shot in the face a few days ago. He saw Prentice squatting next to the doorway covering the roof. "What's wrong with my face? How bad is it?"

Prentice barely glanced at him. "You're cut above the eyebrow. It's nothing."

Weemer took off his Kevlar helmet and found a spent bullet lodged in the webbing.

Carlisle was screaming in the main room, lying directly below the catwalk. The insurgents were using him as bait instead of killing him.

The platoon sergeant, Staff Sergeant Jon Chandler, heard the screams and ran to the house, followed by Corporals Farmer and Sanchez. They huddled with Severtsgard.

"We're gonna flood the room, okay? It's the only way," Chandler said. "Everyone point their muzzles up high and blast away until we can pull Carlisle out. All right, let's go! Sanchez, you're number-one man, I'll follow."

Farmer thought it was a good plan. "Let's do it," he said.

Sanchez thought, *Oh shit, here we go*, and his mind went blank--just doing, not thinking.

Severtsgard thought, *Throw one grenade, then enter*. He pulled a grenade from his deuce gear and thumbed the clip.

Carlisle screamed again. *What am I thinking?* thought Severtsgard, as he pictured Carlisle lying in the middle of the room. *Hope nobody saw that.*

He slipped the grenade back into its pouch.

Chandler kned Sanchez in the buttocks to signal "Go!" and they flooded the room. Sanchez ran straight across the room. Chandler and Severtsgard broke right, aiming up at the catwalk, Farmer was the last one to the door, where he froze for a moment, trying to convince himself it wasn't fear. A second later a grenade landed in the middle of the room and exploded right where he would have been standing.

Farmer was blown off his feet back into the foyer. Severtsgard and Chandler disappeared in a huge swirl of dust and debris, as the deafening roar of Kalashnikovs filled the main room. Chandler fell instantly, three bullets in his leg and both his shoulder and leg shredded by the grenade shrapnel.



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Severtsgard was also torn up, with shrapnel in his leg and foot. With one hand he dragged Chandler from the kill zone into the kitchen.

Sanchez, who had raced across the main room, turned around and saw no one. *What the fuck? Where did they go?* he thought.

In front of him was the door to a small room. Sure he was going to be shot, he kicked open the door and stepped in alone. The bedroom was empty. He propped his rifle against the wall and ran back into the main room. He grabbed Carlisle under his shoulders and pulled him into the shelter of the small back room.

Bullets were ricocheting off the walls and skipping across the floor. From behind the cement guardrail on the circular catwalk, the insurgents were darting back and forth. Their fires covered all angles of the main room below them.

In the kitchen, Chandler was howling in pain. Severtsgard had his rifle trained on the door so no one could enter and finish them off. After a minute or so Chandler calmed down.

"Hey, man, the Corps will send us home now," Chandler said, "We're all messed up."

Severtsgard smiled and kept watch on the door.

Farmer was lying on his back in the foyer, his trigger finger and thumb badly shredded with shrapnel. He couldn't hold his rifle. He leaned against the wall and let loose a barrage of profanity. "Fuck! Those motherfuckers! I'll kill'em. Those fucks!"

More Marines rushed to the house. Private Rene Rodriguez stood in the courtyard for a minute to sort things out. He had seen Sergeant Pruitt stagger down the street with a shattered hand. He had seen Weemer limp out yelling for reinforcements. The platoon's Corpsman, Doc Edora, was kneeling by the wall treating Eldridge for gunshot wounds in his chest. The word was the platoon sergeant and two or three more were down inside. And his fire team leader, Corporal Sanchez, was in there somewhere, unaccounted for.

Rodriguez grabbed Lance Corporal Michael Vanhove and ran inside.

Corporal Sanchez! Sanchez?" Rodriguez yelled.

"I got Carlisle!" Sanchez yelled. "We're in the front room. Watch your ass. The center room's a kill zone!"

Rodriguez and Vanhove sprinted past Farmer, past the sprawled Iraqi bodies, past the weapons, shell casings, and blood. The insurgents above them opened up with a long burst of AK-47 fire. The rounds hit between the two Marines, forcing Vanhove to dive back into the foyer. Rodriguez plunged through the fire and into the bedroom with Sanchez and Carlisle.

"Take security on the door!" Sanchez said.

Sanchez had taken his pressure bandage from his shoulder pocket and was straightening Carlisle leg, which had twisted backward from the force of the bullets. As Carlisle screamed, Rodriguez's stomach turned over. "Clean the wound, direct pressure, bandage, more pressure... just like in Doc's classes."

There was no back door, only a small window covered with sturdy metal bars. The insurgents were steadily shooting at the doorway.

A block away Pruitt and Eldridge were wobbling up the street toward the medevac humvee. First Sergeant Kasal from Weapons Company was walking forward next to a humvee.

Kasal ran to Pruitt's side and pulled him to cover.

Pruitt was close to passing out. "Bad guys in that house," he mumbled. "We got people down inside."

Kasal grabbed the three nearest Marines and ran forward to the courtyard wall, where the squad leader, Corporal Robert Mitchell, was crouching with five more Marines. Mitchell led them forward, and they stacked along the wall outside the door. Mitchell was in charge. Kasal considered himself just another Marine pitching in. Taking no fire, they tumbled through the doorway.

It was a new house, with clean beige drywall and a light, brown-speckled concrete floor covered with cement dust and swaths of bright red blood. Inside the doorway Kasal saw two dead Iraqis.

Sanchez and Rodriguez were yelling for a Corpsman. "Get Doc in here!" they yelled. "Carlisle's bleeding out!"

The insurgents knew the Marines had to move across the main room to get their casualties out, and from the catwalk they had an ideal field of fire. Joining Mitchell inside the house were First Sergeant Kasal, Private First Class Nicoll, and Lance Corporal Morgan McCowan. For Kasal and Nicoll, this was their second day fighting side by side. After four years of

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service, Nicoll was still a private first class, repeatedly busted by Kasal. In a battle of wills, Kasal had called Private First Class Nicoll into his office nine times for fighting, drinking, and tardiness.

Nicoll's irreverence was legendary. On the eve of the battle for Fallujah, the battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Willie Buhl, gave him the microphone to motivate 900 Marines with his "I AM PRIVATE FIRST CLASS NICOLL!" speech, a parody of Mel Gibson's "I am William Wallace!" exhortation in the movie *Braveheart*.

"Nicoll, you're with me," Kasal said, "Cover my back."

The firing had died down, Mitchell, a school-trained medic, decided not to hesitate. "I'll go across," he said. "You all cover me."

Mitchell ran across the main room in a dead sprint to reach Sanchez, attracting only a few scattered shots. Kasal and Nicoll stepped into the main room, staying close to the wall. Kasal looked at the stairs to his right leading to the second floor. Midway up it looked like someone had chopped a peephole a foot wide out of the cement wall. He next noticed a small room to the left of the room Mitchell had entered.

"Anyone been in that room to the left?" he shouted.

When no one answered, Kasal grabbed two Marines behind him.

"Cover that mousehole and the ladder well," he said. "Nicoll, we'll clear that room to the left."

Kasal kicked open the door and thrust the barrel of his rifle forward, sweeping or "pieing" the room from right to left, ending his two-second scan with his eyes locked on the muzzle of a Kalashnikov pointed at his nose. The insurgent had been hiding inside the door next to the light switch.

Instead of shooting right away, he yelled in Arabic, then fired. In that instant the shocked first sergeant had jumped a foot back, and the AK-47 rounds streaked by, hitting the wall. Kasal stuck his rifle barrel over the top of the Kalashnikov barrel and pulled the trigger, sending 10 bullets into the man's chest. The thickset man, dressed in a khaki shirt with a black chest rig holding a row of rifle magazines, slowly slumped to

the floor. Kasal pushed back the insurgent's sand-colored helmet and, not wanting to be killed by a dying man, shot him twice more in the head.

Without looking behind him, Kasal shouted over his shoulder, "Cover that ladder well!" and stepped forward to look around the small bathroom a second time. As he did so, bullets hit the wall around him and he felt like something had hit his legs with a sledgehammer. He fell into the doorway and was hammered again. He started to crawl around the corner, then remembered Nicoll was in the open behind him.

Lying on his side, Kasal looked back and saw Nicoll propped against a wall. Nicoll jerked and winced as the bullets hit him, shoving his hand under his armored vest. When he pulled it out, it was covered in blood. Lying on his stomach, Kasal reached up and grabbed Nicoll by the sleeve, pulling him down. As he did so, he felt a baseball bat hit him across the ass, and he knew had been shot again.

The insurgents had held their fire, then sprung their ambush. The firing went on and on; Kasal estimated it continued for 30-seconds. Why had those Marines taken their eyes off that damn mousehole, he wondered.

Kasal pulled Nicoll to his left into the room. He propped Nicoll's shattered left leg on his stomach, trying to tie a pressure bandage as a tourniquet. His hands were sticky with blood, and he kept fumbling with the tourniquet, worrying that Nicoll was going to bleed to death due to his clumsiness. He heard a thump to his right and turned his head to see a pineapple grenade lying just out of reach. He rolled left on top of Nicoll and bear-hugged him as the explosion went off. He felt sharp pressure in his legs and buttocks and knew he had been hit again. When his head stopped ringing, he shoved his rifle out the door so the Marines would know which room they were in. He didn't want to be hit by friendly fire, and he knew they would be coming for them.

Down the hall, Mitchell heard Nicoll yell, "I'm hit!" and First Sergeant Kasal yell, "Get that goddamn cocksucker!"

"Is Nicoll okay!" Mitchell shouted. "Is he going to die?"

Sanchez felt his stomach turn over again. Nicoll was one



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of his best friends. He couldn't die. This was all wrong. They had to get them out of there.

Mitchell told Sanchez to take care of Carlisle. Without a word he ran out of the room, hugging the wall as he sprinted for the bathroom. A grenade bounced and exploded behind him, and several Kalashnikovs started firing. One round hit Mitchell's rifle in the chamber. Another ricocheted off of his weapon and tore into his thigh--his third Purple Heart.

He skidded into the bathroom. Kasal lay on his side to let Mitchell attend to Nicoll in the cramped space. As the blood dripped from him, Kasal's blood pressure fell and he drifted in an out of consciousness. Each time he jerked back, he yelled at Nicoll to stay awake. Nicoll was nodding off for minutes at a time, then muttering that he was okay.

"Get him out," Kasal said, "or he'll bleed to death."

Outside First Lieutenant Grapes ran up to the house as Pruitt, Eldridge, Weemer, and Farmer were being helped into medevac humvees. Over a handheld radio Grapes reached Mitchell.

"Find us another way out," Mitchell's said, "or to kill those fucks so we can walk out!"

Corporal Wolf, who had bandaged Mitchell's arm in the fight the day before, pushed into the entryway next to Grapes

and started shouting to Mitchell: "I got to get over there, man! You're my boy! I've gotta come over there!"

Grapes and Wolf circled the house and found no other doors. The five windows had 1-inch steel bars covering them.

"Where are they firing from?" Grapes asked Mitchell over the radio.

"There's a ladderwell, and a skylight over the living room. At least one of them is on the roof!"

"All right," Grapes told Wolf. "You get your team ready to pull them out. I'll put shooters on the roof across the street to suppress those guys. Once I give you the signal, get in there and pull them out."

Wolf agreed. While Wolf put together his rescue team, Grapes led a heavily armed squad onto the roof.

Sergeant Byron W. Norwood, who commanded a humvee with a .50-caliber, entered the foyer with Wolf to see how he could bring the heavy gun to bear. Formerly a crew member on Colonel Toolan's humvee, Norwood came from a small town in Texas. His sharp wit had reminded Toolan of New York City-type humor. Norwood poked his head around the doorway just as an insurgent let loose a burst. Rodriguez, guarding the door to the bedroom saw Norwood peek into the main room and watched as his eyes suddenly grew wide. The bullet hit Norwood in the forehead, killing him instantly. Wolf was hit in the chest by the same burst and fell back unharmed, a bullet lodged in his armor vest.

Seeing the expression on Norwood's face terrified Rodriguez. *I'm gonna be the next one shot*, he thought. Rodriguez asked Sanchez to relieve him in the doorway.

The quick reaction force, a squad from Lieutenant John Jacob's 2d Platoon, arrived on the scene. Within seconds Jacobs had his Marines maneuvering to bring fire on the insurgents.

On the nearby roof the Marines with Grapes poured fire toward the skylight. They were at the same height, though, and the bullets were passing over the heads of the insurgents. With the wounded inside, throwing grenades or bringing heavy weapons into play was out of the question. Wolf

couldn't push across the main room without better suppression.

Chandler and Severtsgard, trapped in the kitchen, thought they could batter their way through a padlocked metal panel leading to the entryway. After shooting and hammering at the panel for several minutes, they pried it open and squeezed through. Wolf laid down suppressing fire, and they staggered through the entryway and out into the courtyard.

Both were bleeding badly. Chandler was howling in pain, his leg twisted in a spiral fracture from hip to foot. Severtsgard slumped down against the courtyard wall, blood pouring from his fractured foot. Lance Corporal Stephen Tatum came to his aid. Tatum, who had the thickets pair of glasses in Company K, offered to remove Severtsgard's torn boot. "Go to hell, you blind fuck! No way you are working on my foot!" Severtsgard yelled at his friend, getting to his feet and limping toward the nearest humvee.

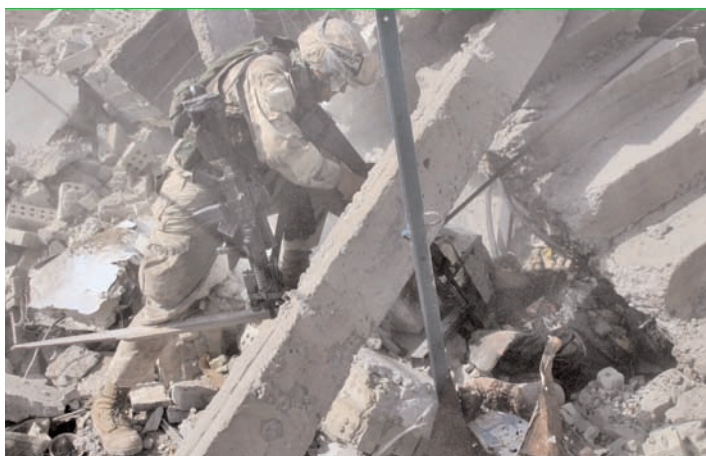
Grapes and Jacobs knelt by the wall to plan what to do next. Five Marines were trapped inside. Rifle fire wasn't budging the insurgents hiding behind the cement wall on the catwalk above the main room, and Mark 19 fire or hand grenades would injure the trapped Marines.

"Flashbang! The insurgents will think they're grenades and duck," Grapes said.

Jacobs led his men to the entryway, flipped in two flashbangs, and rushed in firing. The insurgents immediately returned fire. Stalemate.

Back outside Grapes, Crossan, and Private Justin Boswood crept up to a bedroom window in the back of the house. Grapes and Boswood took turns with a sledgehammer, hammering at the steel bars. Grapes could hear his wounded Marines wailing in pain inside. He could hear Mitchell yelling, "Get us the fuck out of here!" After smashing and smashing, they pried two bars slightly apart. They stripped off their armor and gear and squeezed through. Marines handed their weapons to them.

Boswood pulled a dead insurgent's body out of the doorway, the blood from his skull covering the floor. Grapes slid



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on his back into the main room, his sights fixed on the skylight above. Boswood knelt over Grapes chest, covering the stairs.

Grapes, Jacobs and Sanchez at last had the catwalk in a three-cornered crossfire.

"Ready?" Grapes yelled, "Fire!"

From three angles the Marines fired up at the crosswalk, forcing the insurgents to duck behind the wall.

Lance Corporals Christopher Marquez and Jonathon Schaffer sprinted across the kill zone, grabbed Kasal, and dragged him back to the entryway. Then they ran back and brought out Nicoll. Then Mitchell.

That left Sanchez, Rodriguez, and Carlisle in the back bedroom down the hall. The Marines could either continue running the gauntlet across the main room or get through the bars over the bedroom window. Corporal Richard Gonzalez, a demolitions expert known as the "mad bomber," suggested blowing the bars off the window.

"Are you fucking crazy?" Sergeant Jose Nazario yelled. "You'll fucking kill them! Don't blow it!"

Corporal Eric Jensen came running up with a long chain that was looped around the bars. Jensen hooked the chain to

a humvee and pulled out the bars. Sanchez and Rodriguez put Carlisle on a makeshift stretcher and passed out his limp body.

With all the wounded out of the house, Grapes linked up with Mitchell. "Now we let Gonzalez do his work," Grapes said.

The Marines peppered the house with fire and hooted and hollered as if they were still inside while Gonzalez prepared a 25-pound satchel charge--sufficient to blow down two houses. Gonzalez crept inside the house and placed the satchel on top of a dead insurgent's body. A few seconds later he ran outside.

"Fifteen seconds!"

They ducked for cover. The house exploded in a huge flash of red, followed by chunks of concrete thudding down as a vast cloud of dust. A pink mist mixed with the dust and gunpowder in the air. Grapes was happy to see it.

The Marines waited several minutes, then moved forward into the dusty rubble. They saw two bodies lying among the slabs. As they drew closer, they noticed one of them move.

"They're still alive!"

An arm flicked limply forward, and a grenade tumbled toward the Marines. They turned and ran for cover. Sanchez saw Grapes and Crossan racing by him. *I'm too slow! I'm fucked!* He thought. The grenade went off, injuring no one.

Seven Marines climbed back up the rubble and fired 200 rounds into the two insurgents. Among the detritus, First Lieutenant Grapes found a woolen winter skullcap with bright colors, the kind worn by fighters in Chechnya. He kicked it into the dirt.



Read

Kilo in the Attack

by Major Stephen J. Winslow, Jr.

As darkness settled over the shell torn industrial complex, the exhausted Marines of Company K, 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, settled in for the night. The shadowy figures of Kilo's unit leaders moved cautiously through the debris-littered buildings checking the lines and passing last minute instructions, often lingering for a few minutes to shoot the bull with their Marines, many of whom were experiencing heavy combat for the first time. The dull boom of explosions and the occasional rattle of small arms fire punctuated the night, overcoming the constant drone of the idling vehicles that were scattered throughout the complex.

One shattered building loomed high above the surrounding area. Nicknamed the "Flour Factory," the seven-story masonry structure served as an observation tower and sniper position, despite the collapse of the top three or four floors from an airstrike. Marines equipped with night vision goggles were carefully positioned in its bomb-gutted interior to detect infiltrators. Because the factory was the dominant "high

ground" in the area, Captain Timothy J. Jent, Company K's commanding officer, decided to use it as his command post, which he established in the administrative building at the entrance to the facility. The remainder of his heavily reinforced company was positioned to provide all-around security of the complex.

Having been on the move since before daybreak, those Marines not on watch quickly took the opportunity to catch up on badly needed sleep--and turned in. Captain Jent was no exception and, after reporting to battalion and ensuring Company K was safely "tucked in," he did the same. Jent had been on his feet for the past 48 hours and was exhausted. "For the first three days I could just not fall asleep. My brain was going a thousand miles an hour." He had hardly closed his eyes before being awakened; a frag order had come in over the command "chat room," changing his mission. Company K was now to push south along Phase Line Henry, a control feature that ran north to south, splitting the city of Al Fallujah in half. Captain Jent now had only a few hours to reorient the company and have it on the road at first light.

Phase Line Henry

Phase Line Henry was a wide four-lane divided concrete highway that served as an operational boundary between Regimental Combat Team 1 and Regimental Combat Team 7. It was divided by a median approximately nine feet wide and a foot high that ran its entire length. The road was one of the most heavily traveled arteries in the city—and looked like any boulevard one might see in the United States or Europe. The eastern side of the road was commonly referred to as the "Industrial District, a dense market place with thousands of small shops and cramped alleys winding through single story warehouses. The alleys were only 10-15 feet wide and littered with debris that restricted vehicular traffic. The western side was called the "Queens" or the Nazal neighborhood, and occasionally the "Martyr's District." This area was suspected of housing many foreign fighters and was thought to be heavily fortified. Its buildings were primarily single-family, middle-class homes of

masonry construction, enclosed by high walls of the same heavy construction materials—a ready-made defensive position. The original city planners had laid out the neighborhood in a north to south axis in long linear blocks which provided few vehicle crossing points for the Marines to use.

Al Fallujah, a city of a quarter of a million people, was located approximately 30 miles west of Baghdad in Al Anbar Province, home to a mostly Sunni population. The city was a rallying point for a Devil's Brew of Saddam Hussein loyalists, former Republican Guards, Baathist party members, criminals, and foreign fighters from all over the Muslim world, an estimated 7,000 to 10,000 fighters. Fallujah had been the scene of a bloody clash in April when the 1st Marine Division was ordered to oust the insurgents after they had killed and mutilated three American contractors. The operation was halted before the Marines could complete the job and now, seven months later, they were going in to finish it. The pause had given the enemy time to build up their defenses. They had converted thousands of houses into fortified bunkers, dug hundreds of meters of protective trenches and deployed dozens of improvised explosive devices. Mosques, hospitals and schools were stockpiled with weapons and ammunition.

Two regiments, Regimental Combat Team 1 (3d Battalion, 1st Marines; 3d Battalion, 5th Marines; and 2d Battalion, 7th Regiment US Army) and Regimental Combat Team 7 (1st Battalion, 8th Marines; 1st Battalion, 3d Marines; and 2d

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Battalion, 2d Regiment, U.S. Army), were given the task, which would be the largest military operations in urban terrain since Hue City, Vietnam, in 1968. Regimental Combat Team 1 was initially assigned to clear the north-eastern sector of the city, with Company K designated as the main effort.

Company K

Company K arrived in Iraq in late June 2004 and spent the next four months conducting security and stabilization operations six miles northeast of Fallujah. First Lieutenant John Jacobs, 2d Platoon commander, recalled that “we started out there just patrolling the village of Al Shahabi, looking for weapons caches and insurgents, trying to provide security for the local inhabitants.” During this period, the company numbered approximately 185 Marines. However, on 8 November, in preparation for the attack into Fallujah, it was reinforced with a platoon of tanks, a section of amphibious assault vehicles, an engineer squad, a psychological operations team, a combined anti-armor team, a Naval Special Warfare (SEAL) team, interpreters, artillery and mortar forward observers and several imbedded journalists, swelling its ranks to 289 men and 32 vehicles.

This sudden increase in strength concerned Captain Jent. “I was worried about keeping track of the men, as well as not having enough time to train with them. At first we were pulling our hair out trying to make sure everyone was on the same page but after a while, it was like we had been doing it our whole lives. I found it’s important to establish a personal relationship with the attachments by getting to know them. Next, let them know your expectations, find out how they can support and how they can do it. Finally, let them go to work.”

Crossing the Breach into Fallujah

At 0400 9 November 2004, Captain Jent signaled Lieutenant Jacobs to push his platoon through a wide breach in the railroad berm, initiating the assault into the city. “My

platoon was the main effort," Jacobs recalled. "We ended up right in the middle of the whole battalion, on a route called Route White. The breach went smoothly and within minutes the company formed a tactical formation for the attack toward Jolan Park, a former amusement park, complete with a Ferris Wheel. "It was a center for insurgent activity and hidden weapons caches. Captain Jent described the formation. "The company had two platoons up and one back, with the command post located behind the lead elements. I attached the tank platoon to the lead platoons. India Company was on our eastern flank, and 3d Battalion, 5th Marines to our west." The company made excellent progress through the almost deserted city. First Lieutenant Jacobs remembered that, "as soon as we got into the city we were met by sporadic small arms fire—but not a lot in our immediate vicinity. We had tanks with us, and I think they [insurgents] knew they couldn't stand against them and were taking off."

Insurgents

The insurgents faced by the Marines of Company K were composed of Iraqi nationals and foreign fighters. Of the two groups, the foreign fighters were the most determined. This belief was supported by Captain Jent. "It seemed like the foreign fighters fought to the death more so than Iraqi's that we ran across. They were tough, hard people because they've been at it for awhile. You can't wish them away and expect they're going to surrender just because of a little pressure." In one instance, Lieutenant Jacobs described how his platoon used a 25-pound satchel charge against an insurgent holed up in a house. "As we're walking by the rubble, a hand comes up and throws a grenade at us." No Marine was injured and a volley of rifle fire ended the threat.

The restricted terrain made the attack a squad and fire team leaders fight. Company K's Marines had expected to fight in the city and had trained for it. In its pre-deployment training, even while emphasizing support and stability operations, "there was an understanding, that at some point we would



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fight in Fallujah,” according to Captain Jent. Once in-country, the company was deployed in traditional support and stability operations until early November when it received the Fallujah warning order. At that point, “Kilo turned a small urban facility into a squad training site for practicing basic movement, room clearing, etc,” Captain Jent recalled. “I would also gather the platoon commanders together with the company staff for a kind of stubby whiteboard ‘chalk talk.’ We would go over friction points, such as casualty evacuation, tactical formations, control of fires, command and control and coordination with attachments, operational discussions.”

As soon as Captain Jent received “hints” of the mission, he gathered his platoon commanders and fire support representatives in the company command post where they had imagery based graphics of the battle space. They planned a “fighting the box” formation—two platoons up, supported by tanks; combat train in the middle and a lighter platoon, without tanks, either providing flank security, connecting file or assisting in casualty evacuation. “It was our basic formation and we used it the whole time,” Captain Jent explained. The training was critical to bring his officers up to speed. “All my platoon commanders, except for my executive officer were brand new. They had very little experience, one joined in January and another in April. Another had a little experience, as he had been in the tail end of Operation Iraqi Freedom I.

Finally, I was short an officer, which forced the executive officer to be dual hated but, as I look back, we were about where we wanted to be."

Al Kabir Mosque

The company's first objective, the Al Kabir Mosque complex, Regimental Objective Delta, consisted of the actual worship building and a large barracks. Intelligence indicated that the complex contained the largest weapons cache in northern Fullujah and was strongly defended by the insurgents. On 10 November, Kilo was given the mission to seize it. "We had to reorient our attack in the west," Captain Jent recalled, "for the 0800 attack. The second platoon was the main effort; first platoon would support by seizing the souk to keep insurgents from interfering with the attack; while the third platoon, with combined anti-armor team attached, would provide overwatch and fire support."

Initially, Captain Jent received word that he could not use prep fires. However, that changed. First Lieutenant Jacobs related that "as soon as the sun came up, the area around the mosque was hit with artillery and two 500-pound bombs, which destroyed the barracks but left the mosque intact." Several rounds of artillery were also used on the complex. The insurgents responded with ineffective 82mm mortar fire. Lieutenant Jacobs started the assault by seizing a school on the eastern side of the mosque. His third squad quickly set up a base of fire for the first squad's entry into the mosque. "It was pretty anti-climatic," Jacobs related. "There was no resistance. All we found was some rocket propelled grenades, a few rounds, some magazines. The big weapons cache that was supposed to be there never materialized. It could have been there but the building that got bombed was just a pile of rubble, and there was no way to know what was lying under it." As the company consolidated, their mortar section came under light small arms fire from three insurgents, who were subsequently killed.

The next day, 11 November, the company continued the

attack south, along Phase Line Elizabeth to Phase Line Grace and the flour factory complex. Captain Jent remembered that “we had light resistance through the built up areas—mortar and small arms fire, which caused a few casualties, mostly lightly wounded.” Lieutenant Jacobs said that his platoon took “sporadic small arms fire, here and there, but for the most part, it was easy going.” That night Company K stayed in the complex.

Ambush

Captain Jent spent most of the remaining hours of darkness briefing the company on their new mission—attack south on Phase Line Henry to Phase Line Isabel, a distance of “about three miles, max.” 1st Platoon was in the lead, followed by 2d Platoon and the command group, with 3d Platoon bringing up the rear. He pressed Lieutenant Adam P. Mathes to move quickly because battalion wanted the company “on Isabel as soon as possible because the mission had shifted to a more time driven focus.” Initially Company K was held up by “a little bit of confusion, there were a lot of people on the road. Army vehicles--Bradley's and tanks--that we had to serpentine through. It definitely slowed us down.”

However, by 0900 Captain Jent's Marines were moving east on Phase Line Fran. They were spread out in a column

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over 800 meters long because the densely packed buildings and narrow alleys forced the attached tanks to stay on the hard surface road. "Anything off Henry was very tight," Jent recalled. "If you had a disabled tank, there was really no way to get it out; there was only a foot on each side of the vehicle on the side streets." As the 1st Platoon turned south on Phase Line Henry, the point spotted a daisy chain of improvised explosive devices in the center of the road and halted to bring the attached engineers forward. The platoon was immediately taken under heavy mortar, small arms and rocket propelled grenade fire that seriously wounded three Marines and four Navy SEALs. It had run into a deadly insurgent ambush. "It was basically the enemy's intent to fix us at that intersection," Captain Jent later determined.

Lieutenant Mathes, 1st Platoon commander, had his hands full maintaining control, directing return fire, as well as treating and evacuating the wounded. When his lead units started encountering heavy fire and incurring mounting casualties, he was forced to dispatch a squad to guard them as they were transported to the battalion aid station at the train station. Luckily, an Army unit had established a vehicle strong point at the intersection that included an armored ambulance. It was used to evacuate the Marines, while the SEALs used their own vehicle to get to the aid station.

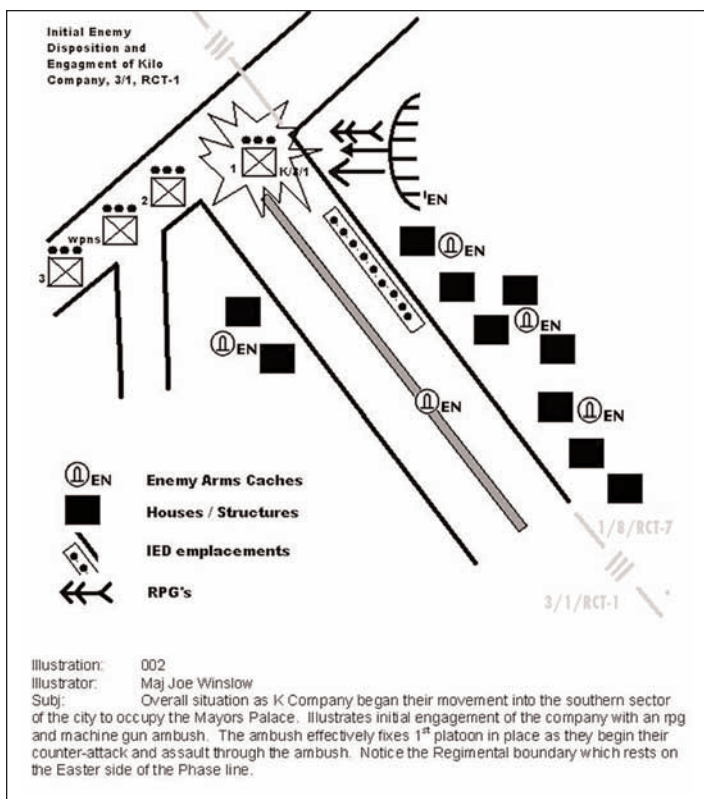
Casualty Procedures

Company K had devoted a considerable amount of time planning for possible casualties. Captain Jent stressed a "five minute" rule, dictating that wounded Marines receive initial medical treatment and be evacuated within five minutes. The company's standing operating procedure dictated that a minimum of four vehicles had to be used because of the danger of insurgent attack. With multiple casualties, "your assets start to get depleted and quickly." Captain Jent tried to have an unengaged platoon help out to maintain the momentum. The company first sergeant and the platoon sergeants were designated to track and evacuate the casualties.

The insurgents continued to pour fire into the 1st platoon from a mosque on the west side of the road as an explosives ordnance disposal team set about to disarm the improvised explosive device. The tanks fired their 105mm main guns and .50-caliber machine guns to cover them until several well-placed rocket propelled grenade rounds forced them to withdraw--one tank counted more than 12 rocket propelled grenade impacts on the hull. The rocket propelled grenades destroyed the armored vehicle's evacuation tubes and the ability of their turrets to traverse. Supporting arms were not available because of the location of other friendly units, so the company was forced to maneuver against the hostile forces. Captain Jent related that it was a question of geometry or battle space awareness. "You've got to be able to know where other friendly units are located so you don't shoot into them. Some of the firing lanes were a straight 200 to 300 meter shot but it was difficult to discern whether it was a Marine or insurgent. Most of our fire was directed south where there were no friendlies."

As 1st Platoon fought its way forward, it captured several prisoners, who were bound and placed along the median. As the platoon's strength diminished because of casualties and guarding prisoners, it came to a stand-still. Captain Jent ordered the 2d Platoon to pass through his lead element and continue the attack. He reasoned that, "you have to make the decision to maintain momentum--to accomplish the mission--you can't just sit there."

Lieutenant Jacobs moved his men forward. "We got pretty much on line with the first platoon and that's when we started taking fire from the southern and eastern side of the road. My Marines ran across the road and took cover against the buildings. Several insurgents on the roof tossed grenades down on top of us and lightly wounding five of my men--nothing serious, a broken nose and some minor shrapnel wounds." The Marines responded with their own grenades, which drove them off the roof. "Unfortunately the prisoners in the middle of the road had taken the brunt of the grenade throwing contest," Lieutenant Jacobs recalled sadly, "several



of them were badly wounded and bleeding profusely. It must have been terrible for them. They were hand-cuffed and blind folded and there was nothing they could do to get out of the way. I think it was the first and only time that I felt any compassion for the enemy."

Second Platoon continued the attack. Lieutenant Jacobs ordered "two squads to break off and clear a large building, while the other took cover in the street. The squad in the street ended up getting into a pretty good fight when the insurgents hit the rear of the convoy. Several Marines broke off and chased them down an alley into a building." The insurgents immediately launched several rocket propelled grenades and

a hail of grenades. The Marines returned fire and assaulted the house, clearing it room by room until reaching the roof. They discovered several enemy in the courtyard and took them under fire. "That's when Sergeant Morgan W. Strader was hit through the head," Lieutenant Jacobs related. Amid a hail of gunfire, Private First Class Chris Marquez crawled forward and dragged the mortally wounded man out of the line of fire. "The Marines did a great job trying to resuscitate him," Jacobs said, "but his wounds were too serious."

Insurgent Tactics

"Most of the enemy contact was taking place inside buildings," Captain Jent related. "They would hold their fire until we entered the house and then engage, hoping to inflict casualties inside the building to negate our destructive fire. Once detected, they would fight to the death." The insurgents had converted the houses into fighting positions. They knocked man-sized openings through the walls to allow them to move from position to position without exposing themselves. In one house, "six insurgents waited until a squad began clearing it." Three enemy were killed on the first floor but three others on the second floor fired down on the squad, inflicting several casualties. The action continued for three hours until the insurgents were finally killed. One Marine related that "grenades, sniper fire, nearly 800 rounds of small arms, and two rockets were fired—I was dumfounded." Writer Patrick K O'Connell, author of *We Were One*, wrote that, "It was drugs." During the battle, the Marines found stockpiles of adrenaline, cocaine and amphetamines. Used needles were strewn about. In this action, the Marines suffered one man killed in action and ten wounded in action.

The fight continued as the enemy fighters retreated along the phase line paralleling the advance of the company. They established strong points and used pre-positioned ammunition caches to supply their fighters. However, the nature of the Marine response had changed. Captain Jent was now able to use fire support, fundamentally changing the nature of the

action. "Before we started our maneuver," Captain Jent recalled, "we used artillery and 81mm mortar fires on targets that might house insurgents. The forward air controller worked pretty much through the night taking out targets with air, primarily fixed wing with 500-pound bombs. As long as people were down and covered, you can drop stuff really close."

By 1900 that evening, the company had reached its final objective and, for the next several days, consolidated its position and began systematically clearing the buildings in its area, perhaps the most dangerous aspect of the operation. Company K would continue to encounter insurgents but by now, it had established a battle rhythm, having developed a keen situational awareness. As Captain Jent said, "The platoon commanders were employing all their attachments—tanks, assault amphibian vehicles, bulldozers—effectively because we were seeing multiple enemy killed and fewer friendlies being injured. That's a measuring stick for how well we're doing. We sensed that the enemy's cohesion had been destroyed and their ability to conduct offensive action was eliminated."

The company continued to operate in Fallujah until the end of January 2005, when it re-deployed to Camp Pendleton.

Learning Objectives*

Small Unit Action in At Turbah

- What were some of the decisions made by Captain McGinty and Major Miller that made the operation successful?
- How did close coordination and employment of aviation fires influence the battle?
- Did Major Miller employ tempo and maneuver as combat multipliers to his situation?
- What impact did one platoon's success have on regimental operations?

The "Naz"

- Were the battalion, company commanders, and platoon leaders in position (friction points) for effective command and control?
- How did the management and use of the existing radio nets by four different units impact upon the fight?
- How did fire support restrictions prevent proper employment of all Marine air-ground task force capabilities (on call targets, lack of forward air controllers, etc)?
- How did understanding and applying of the commander's intent "Secure the bridges to allow 1st MarDiv a second axis of advance", coupled with individual initiative in the absence of orders, contribute to success at the bridges?

Was the Lieutenant a War Criminal?

- How could this incident been prevented by effective leadership?
- Can this incident happen today? Why or why not?
- At what levels did the chain-of-command fail to prevent the war crimes from happening?

The House from Hell

- At what point does the cost in living Marines preclude retrieving the remains of dead Marines?
- After the buildings were cleared were they properly

secured in order to prevent the insurgents from re-occupying them?

- Private First Class Nicoll was considered a “problem child”, however First Sergeant Kasal chose Nicoll to accompany him into the “House from Hell”. Based upon Nicoll’s record would you have chosen him also? Is Nicoll indicative of a “field” Marine vice a “garrison” Marine? Why?

Five Corporals

- What would you do in the same situation as Corporal Connors (locating the body of a Marine being held in an enemy fortified position)?
- What was the motivation for the “Five Corporals” to recover Lance Corporal Desiato’s body intact?
- What are some considerations when joining new attachments or individual Marines like Lance Corporal Desiato into a unit?

Kilo Company in the Attack

- What were some issues that Captain Jent had to consider while leading his company in combat? (For example, casualties, adjacent units, fire support restrictions).
- What are some tactical techniques that Captain Jent employed in an urban fight with his Company?

*Editor’s Note: Provided by The Basic School Staff.

Glossary

AAA	Anti-Aircraft Artillery
AAV	Assault Amphibian Vehicle
Amtrac	Amphibious Assault Vehicle (AAV)
AO	Area of Operations
APC	Armored Personnel Carrier
CAAT	Combined Anti-Armor Team
CAS	Close Air Support
Casevac	Casualty Evacuation
CENTCOM	U.S. Central Command
Chop	Removing a unit from its parent unit and assigning it to another unit
Comm(s)	Communications
CP	Command Post
FAC	Forward Air Controler
FiST	Fire Support Team
FLOT	Forward Line Of Troops
FO	Forward Observer
HEMTT	Heavy Expanded Mobility Tactical Truck
Humvee	High Mobility Multi-Wheeled Vehicle
I MEF	I Marine Expeditionary Forces
KIA	Killed In Action
LAR	Light Armored Reconnaissance
LAV	Light Armored Vehicle
LAV-25	Light Armored Vehicle with 25mm cannon
LVS	Four wheel drive heavy lift vehicle
LZ	Landing Zone
MOUT	Military Operations in Urban Terrain
MRE	Meal-Ready-to-Eat
MSR	Main Supply Route
NCO	Noncommissioned Officer
Phrog	Marine nickname for CH-46 helicopter

POW	Prisoner Of War
RCT	Regimental Combat Team
RPG	Rocket Propelled Grenade
RPV	Remote Piloted Vehicle
SAW	Squad Automatic Weapon
SEAL	Sea, Air, And, Land Team
SF	Special Forces
Skids	Marine nickname for UH-1 Huey Helicopter
SMAW	Shoulder-fired Multipurpose Assault Weapon
Snake	Marine nickname for AH-1W Cobra Helicopter
TACP	Tactical Air Control Party
TOW	Tube-launched, Optically-tracked, Wire-guided, antitank missile
UAV	Unmanned Ariel Vehicle
WIA	Wounded In Action

Writers

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Richard S. Lowry is the award winning author of the best selling book, *Marines in the Garden of Eden*, Berkley, New York, 2006. Richard served in the U.S. Navy Submarine Service from 1967-1975 and spent the time from 1975 to 2002 designing sophisticated integrated circuits for everything from aircraft avionics to home computers. Richard turned to serious writing after 9/11 and published *The Gulf War Chronicles* (2002), iUniverse, New York. For more information on Richard and his work, visit www.marinesinthegardenofeden.com or www.gwchronicles.com.

Lieutenant Colonel Gary D. Solis is an Adjunct Professor of Law at both the United States Military Academy and at Georgetown University Law Center, teaching the law of armed conflict. He was a 2006-2007 Scholar in Residence at the Library of Congress. He is a retired Marine with 26 years active duty, including tours of duty in Vietnam as an amtrack officer. He attended law school at the University of California at Davis and for eighteen years was a Marine judge advocate and military judge. He holds a Master of Laws degree from George Washington University. After retirement he earned a Ph.D. in the law of war from The London School of Economics and Political Science. His books are *Marines and Military Law in Vietnam* (1989), and *Son Thang: An American War Crime* (1997).

Francis J. "Bing" West, wrote his first book, *Small Unit Action in Vietnam* (1967) while he was a Marine infantry offi-

cer in Vietnam. He subsequently wrote *The Village* (1972), a chronicle of a Marine squad that lived and fought for 485 days in a Vietnamese village; *The Pepperdogs* (2003), a novel about a recon team in Serbia; *The March Up: Taking Baghdad with the US Marines* (2003); and *No True Glory: a Firsthand Account of the Battle for Fallujah* (2005).

Major Stephen "Joe" Winslow with Regimental Combat Team 1 during Operation Al Fajr (Vigilant Resolve) in 2004-2005 as a field historian tasked with recording ground combat operations. To accomplish this he traveled with units ranging in size from squads to regimental command posts. When not deploying with the History Division, Maj Winslow is a resident of Washington, D.C. where he's a business owner.

Back Cover: In an original painting by Maj Alex J. Durr, an AH-1W Super Cobra from HMLA-169 (Vipers) comes off a target in Hit, Iraq.

(Marine Corps Art Collection)

