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WAR IN IRAQ

■ Bush warns of tough battle

■ Iraqi forces slow allies' march

■ Terrorists enter the fray

■ Outrage at civilian deaths

US fears hard, bloody war



"If they fight, there could be a tough battle" . . . US Marines engage Iraqi soldiers in gunfire at the headquarters of Iraqi mechanised infantry divisions near Az Zubayr, southern Iraq, in this photograph released yesterday. Photo: AP/Laura Rauch

Marian Wilkinson
in Washington,
Paul McGeough
in Baghdad and agencies

Mounting complications, including stronger enemy resistance and a climbing casualty count, have prompted United States warnings that a longer and more bloody fight will be needed to capture Iraq.

The war shifted to a new phase overnight as Iraqi troops dug in, slowing the ground push to Baghdad and forcing the coalition to defend territory captured after the initial border breakthroughs.

Terrorism has also opened up a deadly new front in the escalating war. A US marine was killed and 12 injured when a fellow American soldier - a Muslim, according to military sources - lobbed several grenades into their tent in Kuwait.

And an Australian cameraman, Paul Moran, died in a car bombing near Halabja, northern Iraq. The attack was apparently in response to a US missile barrage against two Islamic groups connected with al-Qaeda which killed about 50 people.

Amid indications that Saddam Hussein, or at least his senior

military officials, were implementing a calculated defence strategy there was further speculation that the Iraqi leader might have been injured in the first US attack.

The Iraqi Foreign Minister, Najji Sabri, asked if Saddam would meet the foreign media, said the President would address the country on radio. Saddam prefers television, and the choice of radio may be to avoid showing an injury.

Late last night, Sydney time, there were massive explosions in western Baghdad, and Iraqi troops were firing into the Tigris River after reports that coalition pilots had baled out over the city. A US military spokesman denied this.

As the casualty numbers rose, the US President, George Bush, said the war would be "longer and more difficult than some have predicted". Major-General Stanley McChrystal, of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, warned that the coalition still faced "significant Iraqi forces in front of us". He added: "If they fight there could be a tough battle."

The Pentagon has confirmed two US combat deaths. However, 19 coalition soldiers have died in

helicopter accidents, and US Central Command confirmed that an RAF aircraft that disappeared after an operation had been hit by a US Patriot missile.

The Iraqi Defence Ministry says it has shot down seven coalition aircraft, including two helicopters. Iraqi officials also claimed to have captured two US pilots after shooting down their aircraft over Baghdad.

There are also unofficial reports of the arrest of 45 allied paratroopers who are said to be in detention at Ramadi, west of Baghdad, and the capture of 15 US troops at Nasiriyah, about one-third of the way from the Kuwaiti border to the Iraqi capital.

The Iraqi Vice-President, Taha Yassin Ramadan, said captured enemy soldiers would soon be shown on state television, adding that the war was going well for his country.

However, the US central command denied the claims that coalition troops had been captured and that any of its aircraft had been shot down. "More lies from the Iraqis," said Marine Captain Stewart Upton.

Meanwhile, US tank convoys continued rolling towards Baghdad, advancing to within 160

THE TOLL: SOLDIERS, CIVILIANS AND MEDIA

● **Bombing deaths.** Al-Jazeera TV reports 50 Iraqis, many civilians, killed when US jets bombed Basra. It ran gruesome images of victims, including children. Iraq says three killed in intense bombing of Baghdad overnight Friday. Red Cross says more than 200 injured. One killed in Thursday bombing of city.

● **Attack on terrorists.** Witnesses say about 50 killed in a two-hour missile barrage on alleged terror-



In the line of duty: Australian cameraman Paul Moran; US marine major Jay Thomas Aubin, killed in a helicopter collision; and US navy lieutenant Thomas Mullen Adams, killed in a helicopter crash.

ist camps in northern Iraq, near the Iranian border.

● **Combat deaths.** Two US marines. No estimate of Iraqi soldiers.



● **Australian cameraman killed.** Paul Moran, 39 (pictured), a freelancer working for the ABC, died when a terrorist car bomb



exploded in a Kurdish enclave. British TV crew of three feared dead. **Page 3**

● **Grenade attack.** US soldier arrested after grenade attack on US command tent killed one and injured 12. **Page 2**

● **19 die in crashes.** Two British navy helicopters collided on Saturday, killing all seven crew, including one American. On Friday, eight Britons and four Americans died in a helicopter crash.

kilometres of the city. The coalition also appears to be readying a northern offensive with plans for mass paratroop landings.

But the momentum of the ground assault has been checked, with heavy fighting south-east of

the holy city of Najaf. The strategic southern city of Basra remained in Iraqi hands and there was still resistance in the southern port of Umm Qasr. A coalition source said there were no plans for troops to get bogged down in Basra.

With the war intensifying, both the White House and the commander of Operation Iraqi Freedom, General Tommy Franks, appeared confused over how the Iraqi leadership planned to respond.

General McChrystal said commanders were avoiding combat in major centres which could cause civilian casualties and damage infrastructure.

Early forecasts that the regime's top generals and the elite Repub-

lic Guard would defect have so far not been borne out.

Reports of large-scale surrenders by Iraqi troops have also been scaled back. While the leaders of an Iraqi division in Basra had surrendered, the Pentagon said only 1000 to 2000 soldiers had been taken into custody. Others had "melted away" or abandoned their posts.

The Pentagon said the major oil fields in the north were not yet in coalition hands and it could confirm only that special forces had control of one of four airfields in western Iraq.

General McChrystal said that so far no weapons of mass destruction, either chemical or biological, had been found by advancing ground forces or by special forces operating in the north and west of the country. General Franks said he still expected to find such weapons.

The Pentagon said that in 24 hours coalition forces had undertaken more than 1000 sorties against hundreds of targets, dropping 700 bombs and firing more than 500 missiles.

Iran said a missile that landed in the north-west of the country was probably launched by Iraqi forces.

WEATHER

Details - Page 32

Sydney city Showers clearing 18°-23°
Tomorrow rain 18°-24°

Newcastle Chance of shower 17°-23°
Tomorrow rain 17°-24°

Liverpool Fine, SW-SE winds 17°-24°
Tomorrow rain 17°-26°

Wollongong Fine, S winds 14°-23°
Tomorrow fine 14°-24°

Richmond/Penrith Fine 16°-25°
Tomorrow rain 17°-27°

Canberra Early cloud then fine 9°-23°
Tomorrow fine 9°-24°

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Iraqi leaders in denial as coalition forces slowly tighten the vice

Paul McGeough
Staff Correspondent
in Baghdad

In the face of punishing United States-led attacks, the Iraqi regime is in crisis, denying the proof of the invading forces' advance towards Baghdad and issuing desperate appeals to the United Nations Security Council and Arab leaders for help.

As a wearied Foreign Minister, Najji Sabri, was reduced to travelling by taxi to Damascus, in neighbouring Syria, to make his pitch for Arab assistance, the Information Minister,

Mohammed Saeed al Sahaf, held a midnight press conference on a Baghdad kerbside where he insisted that the regime was in full control of Iraq.

Mr Sabri is the only member of Saddam Hussein's tight inner circle to be seen in public since Thursday's first United States missile strike on a bunker where the CIA believes Saddam and five others were taking cover.

As the people of Baghdad ventured out for furtive glances at the damage wrought in Friday night's relentless attacks, Iraqi forces lit a ring of fire around the city, torching a series of oil-filled

trenches in the vain hope that the blanket of thick smoke that now hangs over the city will frustrate US targeting.

Throughout Saturday night, powerful explosions rolled in from the outskirts of the capital, shaking buildings and suggesting that units of the Republican Guard posted to fend off the advancing forces might be taking a hammering.

But the biggest hits on downtown Baghdad were psychological. Ordinary Baghdadis were able to see the precision of the Friday night strikes against regime targets,

and Saddam's continued absence from local reporting of the war fuelled speculation on his fate and that of his henchmen.

Mosques, memorials and monuments were spared. Yet, near a main city intersection, the headquarters of one of the arms of Saddam's oppressive security establishment had been gutted, with sunlight shining through a hole in the roof to the floors that were sandwiched at ground level. But with the exception of a few broken windows, two high-rise apartment blocks less than 50 metres away were unscathed.

The presidency office, Saddam's official suite in the presidential compound on the banks of the Tigris River, was a charred skeleton and the Sajida Palace, his newest, a dishevelled wreck.

Across the road from the palace, a sprawling intelligence complex lay in ruins. The city headquarters of the Air Ministry had been sliced through the middle by a missile.

On Saturday, the information bureaucrats took reporters to see civilian damage - first a mangled tourist resort on the Tigris and, Continued Page 6



A child's war . . . tears in a Baghdad hospital. Photo: AFP