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Allies suffer setbacks

U.S. troops killed, captured in heavy fighting, but push toward Baghdad is declared on target



A British Royal Marine from 42 Commando fires a Milan wire-guided missile at an Iraqi position on the Al Faw peninsula in southern Iraq.

At least 20 Americans reported dead

By PATRICK E. TYLER

The New York Times

KUWAIT CITY — American and British ground forces on Sunday suffered their worst casualties so far as they battled determined Iraqi forces on two fronts in what an American commander said were "the sharpest engagements of the war."

Military officials in the war zone reported that at least 20 American soldiers were missing or killed and 50 or more wounded in a day of ambushes, accidents and tank and artillery engagements. Precise casualty figures were not immediately available.

Late Sunday night, American ground forces began to attack Iraq's Republican Guard for the first time, apparently hoping to weaken the divisions guarding the roads to Baghdad.

Most of the American losses occurred at Nasiriyah, along the Euphrates River, about 100 miles north of the Kuwaiti border, where an Army maintenance convoy was ambushed, resulting

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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A U.S. Marine is carried on stretcher to a waiting ambulance after suffering life-threatening injuries in an Iraqi attack Sunday at Camp Viper in the Iraqi desert. Several Marines were injured when their armored personnel carrier was hit by an Iraqi rocket-propelled grenade outside the city of Nasiriyah.

Captures and deaths mark toughest day

By MICHAEL WILSON

The New York Times

AN NASIRIYAH, Iraq — What looked to be an easy ride into this city turned into a messy fire-fight on Sunday when Iraqi tanks, regular soldiers and guerrillas darted through the streets and turned their mortars, artillery cannons, rockets and rifles on advancing U.S. Marines.

The battle began shortly after dawn on Sunday. The infantry unit, code-named Timber Wolf, approached the southern edge of An Nasiriyah, which straddles the Euphrates River. The city's bridges, which were eventually captured, are essential to the

allied troops behind Marine Task Force Tarawa, who are looking to head north, toward Baghdad.

There was little clue what was in store for the Marines — the deadliest battle of the war so far. Minutes before 7 a.m., Col. Glenn Starnes, commanding officer of the artillery battalion, listening on a radio several miles south, shouted, "Timber Wolf is taking fire!"

Tanks, part of a light armor reconnaissance unit, crept forward 100 yards at a time against pockets of the Iraqi infantry and bands of Iraqi guerrillas, nick-

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OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

Casualties mount

Eighteen American and 16 British troops have been confirmed killed as of late Sunday.

Killed	When	Where	Circumstances
8 British	Friday	Kuwait	Helicopter crash
4 American			
2 American	Friday	Iraq	In action
1 American	Saturday	Persian Gulf	Helicopter collision
6 British			
1 American	Saturday	Kuwait	Camp grenade attack
1 American	Sunday	Kuwait	Vehicle accident
9 American	Sunday	An Nasiriyah	Fake surrender
2 British	Sunday	Kuwait	Jet down in friendly fire
Missing	When	Where	Circumstances
12 American	Sunday	An Nasiriyah	Believed captured

Other casualties

► Iraqi officials reported 77 civilians killed in the southern city of Basra.

► Australian photographer was killed in a bomb blast in Iraq.

► A British television journalist is believed killed over the weekend.

SOURCES: ESRI; Associated Press

AP

U.S. girds for real 'Red Zone' battle

By MICHAEL R. GORDON

The New York Times

V CORPS ASSAULT COMMAND POST, near Najaf, Iraq — American forces on Sunday night began the battle for the "Red Zone," the area around Baghdad that is defended by Iraq's Republican Guard and one of the most treacherous regions of the country for the invading allied forces.

The strikes Sunday night by Army attack helicopters and Army ATAMCS surface-to-surface missiles represent the first American ground attacks on Iraq's Republican Guards. The

aim was to soften up the Medina division, one of the three Republican Guard divisions that guard the approaches to Baghdad. The American firepower was intense but the U.S. forces did not emerge unscathed. One pilot was wounded by small arms fire but managed to fly back.

The assault underscored the risks of a war that began with lightning speed and which is now approaching its most critical phase. Optimistic statements may have created expectations in Washington and elsewhere that

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Bush seeks to dampen public's expectations

By R.W. APPLE JR.

The New York Times

WASHINGTON — Like a coach seeking a psychological advantage, President Bush pressed an effort on

Sunday to temper public anticipation of an early, relatively painless victory in the fighting in Iraq.

"It is evident that it's going to take a while to achieve our objective," the president said on the White House lawn after returning from Camp David. "I can assure the American people we're making good progress, and I can also assure them that this is just the beginning of a tough fight."

Bush spoke as word reached Washington of a sharp clash, surely the sharpest so far in this second Persian Gulf War, near Nasiriyah, a tactically important city between Basra and Baghdad. The loss of Marines there contrasted sharply, and potentially damagingly, with the news of almost unbridled coalition success in the first days of fighting. So did the ambush of an army convoy in the same area, with a dozen American troops reportedly killed or captured.

"A war is a war," Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld remarked tersely on the NBC

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