

End of major combat declared

Small-scale battles still likely as U.S. shifts to peacekeeping, nation-building

By **JONATHAN S. LANDAY, SARA OLKON and MARTIN MERZER**
 Knight Ridder News Service

Tikrit, Iraq — The Pentagon declared the end of significant fighting in Iraq on Monday as Marines stormed the heart of Tikrit, suppressed hard-core resistance there and captured the last stronghold of Saddam Hussein.

"The major combat operations are over," Maj. Gen. Stanley McChrystal said after more than 3,000 Marines fought their way to the center of Hussein's ancestral hometown.

They seized an opulent presidential palace and rolled their armored vehicles along the city's broad boulevards. They watched white flags flutter from taxicabs, concrete homes and mud huts. They accepted

roses from a few grateful residents — and stayed alert for suicide attacks by the remnants of pro-Hussein militias.

Tikrit was the last important center of Hussein's regime, and now it had fallen — much like Basra, Nasiriyah, Najaf, Karbala, Kut, Kirkuk, Irbil, Mosul and Baghdad.

"There is nothing beyond Tikrit," said Marine Lt. Col. Doug Hardison. "That is it. It's

now just a function of when to call the win."

Said McChrystal: "Tikrit was the last area where we anticipated seeing major combat formations."

Iraqi forces once again evaporated, and large concentrations of Iraqi troops no longer existed anywhere, McChrystal and others said, though they cautioned that small-scale battles remained likely.

The war began March 20 in Iraq time, less than four weeks ago. The U.S. military death toll: at least 118, with many more wounded. Hussein's fate remains unknown. No confirmed discoveries have been made of chemical or biological weapons — the primary justification President Bush cited for resorting to war.

WAR AGAINST IRAQ

■ **Poll:** Bush's approval rating soars at home. **12A**

■ **Deadly vipers:** Snakes are latest scourge. **14A**

■ **Tikrit:** Residents wary of change in power. **20A**

■ **Guide to coverage:** **2A**

■ **On the Web:** www.jsonline.com

Please see **IRAQ, 16A**

For children, a bewildering time



MICHAEL MACOR / SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE

An Iraqi boy stands in front of burning vehicles Sunday in Baghdad. For the youngest children in Baghdad, curiosity seems to overtake any fear as the war winds down.

Their life in Baghdad and notions of Hussein are turned upside down

By **NAHAL TOOSI**
 of the Journal Sentinel staff

Baghdad — In middle school, back when I was in session, the teachers told Wa-seem Namat that Saddam Hussein was a hero and patriot.

Kuwait, the textbooks said, was really a part of Iraq. And when the school raised the Iraqi flag, Namat, 15, and his fellow pupils would move in military formation and shout "Long live Saddam!"

But now, he hears adults complain openly about life under the toppled Iraqi ruler, something they didn't do before. Now, he has seen a war rage around him, and watched the grown-ups he knows praise instead of fight the outside force that has taken over the capital.

He used to believe much of what

FRONT LINE: IRAQ

Journal Sentinel reporter **Nahal Toosi** is with the 6th Support Battalion of the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force.



he was taught. Now, he says, "Everything I learned in school will vanish from my mind."

It is a strange time to be young in Baghdad.

The city is full of fresh piles of rubble and bullet holes. Explosions have been all too frequent. School is out. Most businesses remain closed. People are looting build-

ings. Journalists have overrun the hotels. Foreign troops are blocking various roads.

Perhaps most importantly for the young minds, hypocrisy is out. People are starting to speak freely — and they are demonizing Hussein. A few weeks ago, many would have been afraid to criticize Hussein in front of their own siblings.

So the children are confused and curious. Why is Saddam not a good man anymore? Who are these camouflage-wearing men parading through town on those gigantic vehicles? Why are the adults home so much?

For the youngest, curiosity seems to overtake any fear. They approach the Marines guarding the roads with caution at first, then playfulness. Soon, they are kicking around soccer balls with the troops and asking the Marines

to sign their arms and messing with the helmets on their heads. One girl made a Marine take off his helmet and tied a green scarf on his head.

"I think the children think it is some kind of a great carnival," said Cpl. William Kaczkowski, 19, of Oak Harbor, Wash., who stood guard on one neighborhood street. "I don't think they really understand."

There does seem to be an understanding that life will never be the same.

"We are living in bad conditions, and the Americans will make our lives better," said Mustafa Hashim, 11.

The youths said they wanted Iraq to be a better country, a developed country that lives in peace.

Please see **IRAQI YOUTH, 16A**

"We are living in bad conditions, and the Americans will make our lives better."

Mustafa Hashim, 11

U.S. warns Syria of sanctions

White House says Damascus is hiding Iraqi leaders

By **PAUL RICHTER and ROBIN WRIGHT**
 Los Angeles Times

Washington — The Bush administration Monday threatened diplomatic and economic sanctions against Syria, repeating accusations that Damascus is harboring Iraqi regime leaders and terrorists.

In a chorus of criticism, top administration officials also complained that Syria was developing chemical and probably germ weapons, and was allowing enemy fighters to cross its territory to strike U.S. forces in Iraq.

They warned the country's leader, President Bashar Assad, against interfering as the United States tries to usher in a new day in the region by rebuilding Iraq.

Ari Fleischer, the chief White House spokesman, called Syria a "rogue nation" and said it was time for "President Assad, who is a new leader, a young man, to under-

Please see **SYRIA, 17A**

■ **Hailed as martyrs:** Syrians who fought alongside Iraqis praised in death. **17A**

General's task: Put nation back together

By **JANE PERLEZ**
 New York Times

Kuwait City — The retired U.S. general who will run postwar Iraq for the Bush administration flew to Iraq on Monday on a mission to remake the country's politics, a process he predicted would be messy and contentious.

But Lt. Gen. Jay Garner insisted that U.S.-style democracy could sprout on the shards of President Saddam Hussein's government. "I don't think they had a love-in when they had Philadelphia" in 1776, when the Declaration of Independence was adopted, he said in an interview here before his departure. "Any time you start the process, it's fraught with dialogue, tensions, coercion — and should be."

The general will preside over a meeting of Iraqis and Iraqi exiles in Nasiriyah today, the first of many meetings that the Pentagon



Retired U.S. general Jay Garner will run postwar Iraq.

Please see **GARNER, 13A**

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TODAY'S TMJ4 WEATHER

MAP, FORECASTS ON BACK OF SPORTS
TODAY: 83 / 60
 Unseasonably warm. Thunderstorms possible late.
TOMORROW: 47 / 42
 Much cooler. Periods of rain and thunderstorms.

GOOD MORNING

TODAY'S TOP NEWS

TAX DEADLINE

Last options for mailing

To meet the midnight deadline, last-minute filers of state and federal income-tax forms are down to two choices for mailing from the Milwaukee area tonight: the main Post Office, 345 W. St. Paul Ave., where hours are being extended, and the Airport Mail Facility, 5500 S. Howell Ave., which generally is open 24 hours.

METRO

Property taxes could jump
 December property tax bills

could rise between 8.2% and 9.4% under Gov. Jim Doyle's proposed state budget. Republican legislators suggest levy limits or spending controls. **1B**

NATION

Genome map almost done

An international consortium of scientists announces that it has completed the map of the human genetic code to an accuracy of 99.99%. **3A**

A WORD — REPARTEE

(rep' ahr TAY)
 A series of quick, witty replies. *n.*
Page 1E

Parts of state on highest fire alert

Grass blazes increase sharply during unusually dry year

By **MEG JONES**
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Smokey Bear signs throughout much of Wisconsin have been changed to "extreme fire hazard," as record warmth and precious little moisture from a winter with relatively little snow have turned many areas into tinderboxes.

Metropolitan Milwaukee isn't exempt from the danger, either — ask the firefighters who fought a 12-acre blaze Monday in Greenfield Park in West Allis.

"The dry, parched leaves of this very dry winter made the fire spread

and get worse," West Allis Battalion Chief Richard Mueller said.

The blaze in the park's recreation area in the 2000 block of S. 124th St. started about 6 p.m. and took more than an hour to extinguish.

Investigators are not sure what caused the fire, but they consider it suspicious, Mueller said.

Some forest ranger stations in Wisconsin have issued red-flag alerts — the highest — to warn people of the explosive fire conditions; two people have died at grass fires, including a fire chief; burning permits in several

Please see **FIRE, 12A**

1,762

Acres burned in grass fires in Wisconsin this year.

795

Acres burned in same period in 2002.

122%

Percentage increase over last year.

■ **What snow?** One week after storm, temperature hits record 85 in Milwaukee. **1B**

