

Eight U.S. soldiers killed in Sadr City ambush

At least 30 Iraqis perished in the conflict, and 40 more U.S. troops were wounded

By Colin McMahon
Chicago Tribune (KRT)

BAGHDAD, Iraq — The soldiers of the 1st Cavalry Division steered themselves as their troop truck rumbled toward the crowded streets and narrow alleys of Sadr City. A reconnaissance patrol, including guys like them with only a few weeks in Iraq under their belts, had been ambushed up ahead.

Gunfire echoed through the Baghdad slum, a place they used to call Saddam City but which now bore the family name of another Iraqi who had worked his way up the list of U.S. enemies: Shiite cleric Moqtada Sadr.

"I saw that there were no kids out on the soccer field," a soldier recalled

of the drive into battle. "That's when I knew it was going to be bad."

In the worst Baghdad street fighting since the Iraqi capital fell nearly a year ago, eight U.S. soldiers were killed Sunday night and more than 40 were wounded in clashes with Sadr's militia. At least 30 Iraqis died, Iraqi doctors said.

The ambush that began the bloodshed was fierce, frenzied and calculated, said Maj. Gen. Martin Dempsey, commander of the U.S. Army's 1st Armored Division, who provided an initial but detailed account Monday of the previous night's clashes.

It was about 5 p.m., and 30 or so soldiers were on a reconnaissance mission near the center of Sadr City. Sadr's people had attacked Spanish and Salvadoran troops outside Najaf earlier Sunday. Now there were reports that his men were going to take over Sadr City's police stations. The Americans went

to check it out.

The patrol was made up of a mix of veterans from the 1st Armored Division, men finally going home after a year in Iraq and their replacements from the 1st Cavalry who had been in the country less than a month.

They spotted about 30 men brandishing weapons. Many wore the all-black dress of Sadr's Al-Mahdi Army, a militia that, like all private militias in Iraq, is officially outlawed and supposed to be disbanded. The men would be asked to disarm.

But as the U.S. soldiers prepared to challenge the men, a hellish gunfire rained down. From facing rooftops of two- and three-story buildings, Sadr's militia fighters unloaded their AK-47s on the U.S. Humvees and troop carriers. From the alleys, other militiamen fired rocket-propelled grenades.

"There is nothing more confusing in the entire universe than an

ambush, especially one where the road networks are so narrow, because everything echoes," Dempsey said.

The Americans were hit hard. Dempsey said most casualties typically occur in the first part of a battle, and this one followed form: Half of the dead and many of the American wounded resulted from this ambush.

"They outnumbered us at that point on the ground, so the patrol leader made the correct decision to move to a better defensive position," Dempsey said.

The soldiers scrambled for cover, abandoning their vehicles and taking refuge in a building about 300 yards away. They called for backup. A column of four Bradley armored vehicles responded. It was ambushed too.

One more group of vehicles would enter Sadr City and come under attack before, with the city in darkness and firefights raging, a

column of tanks entered and put the uprising down for the night.

"It was a very calculated action," Dempsey said. If the plan of Sadr's men was sound, it was also relatively easy to arrive upon. There are few paths the Americans could take into Sadr City from their rear bases, and the spots at which to attack were obvious to all.

Beyond that, Dempsey said, the execution of the plan showed that while Sadr's Al-Mahdi may call itself an army, it remains an unprofessional militia. From the rooftops, Sadr's men would raise their automatic rifles over their heads and shoot over the railings, emptying their ammunition clips in one go but barely aiming.

"It's really a mob," Dempsey said. "A mob with a lot of weapons."

(c) 2004, Chicago Tribune. Distributed by Knight Ridder/Tribune Information Services.

Military looks for ways to increase troops in Iraq

U.S. officials, concerned about recent violence in Iraq, look at ways to increase the size of the occupation force

By Stephen J. Hedges and Bob Kemper
Chicago Tribune (KRT)

WASHINGTON — Facing a rising wave of violence in Iraq, the U.S. military is examining ways to expand the size of its occupation force there in case reinforcements are needed.

Gen. John Abizaid, the head of the U.S. Central Command, has asked his staff to determine how the force in Iraq could be bolstered in a "worst-case" scenario, said a senior U.S. military official who briefed Pentagon

reporters by telephone Monday.

"Given the events of this weekend and the obvious potential for more demonstrations or more violence," the official said, "we have asked the staff to at least take a look and see what forces are available out there in a quick-response mode in the event that they should be needed if there was a widespread move in that direction."

"But we don't believe that that's going to occur and we don't believe that we're going to need any additional forces from the United States. So we simply do that as a matter of planning."

The level of unrest has raised doubts about the Bush administration's June 30 deadline for turning power over to an interim Iraqi government.

But President Bush, meeting with reporters during a day trip to North

Carolina, said "the date remains firm."

"I believe we can transfer authority by June 30," the president said, while acknowledging that violence against U.S. forces is likely to increase in coming weeks. "The closer we come to the deadline, the more likely it is people will challenge our will," Bush said.

Until now, Abizaid and Pentagon military leaders have said that the size of the U.S. force in Iraq is adequate.

If additional troops are needed, it is not immediately clear where they would be drawn from, and how large a rapid-response force would be considered. One Pentagon official suggested that the rapid-response troops could even be taken from units elsewhere in Iraq. Also, a force of about 1,800 U.S. soldiers is in Djibouti on a counter-terrorism mission and could be moved to Iraq.

The addition of such rapid-response troop would not necessarily change the composition of the long-term U.S. ground force in Iraq, Pentagon officials said.

Abizaid's request came after a bloody shootout in Baghdad on Sunday between U.S. troops and militiamen loyal to Moqtada Sadr, a radical Shiite Muslim cleric who has called on his followers to challenge the American occupation. Eight Americans and at least 30 Iraqis died in the gun battle.

Bush said Monday that Sadr is "one person who is deciding that rather than allow democracy to flourish, he's going to exercise force. And we just can't let it stand."

Sunday's violence followed Wednesday's grisly attacks in Fallujah, in which four employees of an

American security firm were killed in attacks on their vehicles. Their charred bodies were then dragged through the streets and hung from a bridge by a mob.

In January, the military launched a massive rotation of Army and Marine ground units that will put fresh troops in Iraq; currently there are about 130,000 troops in Iraq. By June, Army planners say, the total force will be near 120,000.

Military officials on Monday said that a major outbreak of violence in Iraq could both require more U.S. troops on the ground and push back the June 30 date for a transfer of power. Still, they said such a scenario seemed unlikely.

(c) 2004, Chicago Tribune. Distributed by Knight Ridder/Tribune Information Services.



Need unlimited income?

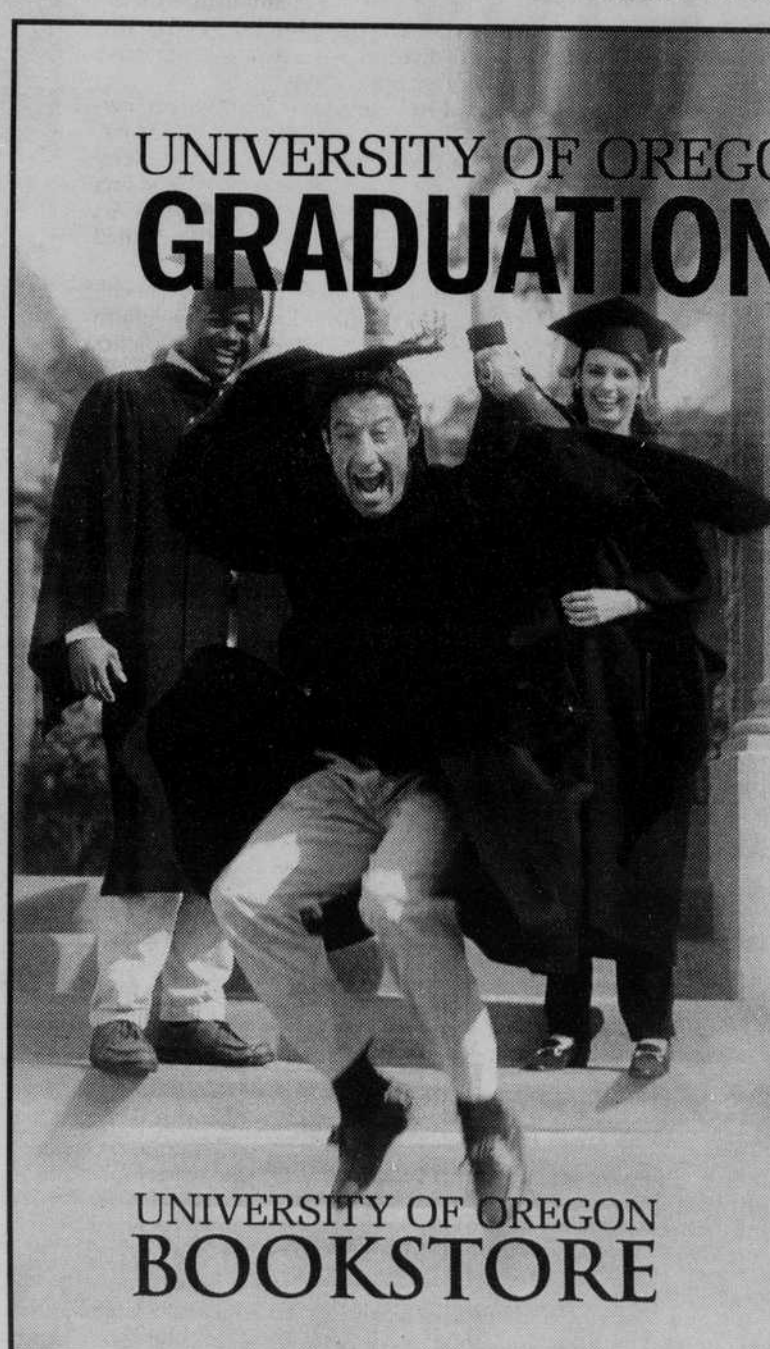
If you want a good job when you graduate, you need a great job now.

Now hiring for advertising executives to start spring term.

The Oregon Daily Emerald is an independent newspaper that provides hands-on experience in the challenging world of advertising sales. We are looking for motivated students who believe in the power of advertising in the Oregon Daily Emerald and who can transfer that enthusiasm into sales. You will have the opportunity to hone your customer relationship management skills, create ad campaigns for clients and see your efforts come to life in the newspaper.

Job descriptions and applications are available at Suite 300 EMU. Applications will be accepted until **Friday, April 9 at 5 p.m.**

Oregon Daily Emerald



UNIVERSITY OF OREGON GRADUATION FAIR

UO Bookstore Main Floor

April 4 thru April 7

Sunday 12 p.m. - 5 p.m.
Monday - Wednesday 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Main ceremony information

Diploma frames

Order your announcements

Caps, gowns, tassels & class rings

UO Alumni Information

UNIVERSITY OF OREGON BOOKSTORE

UOBookstore.com