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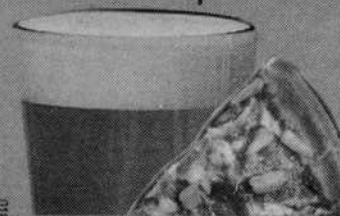
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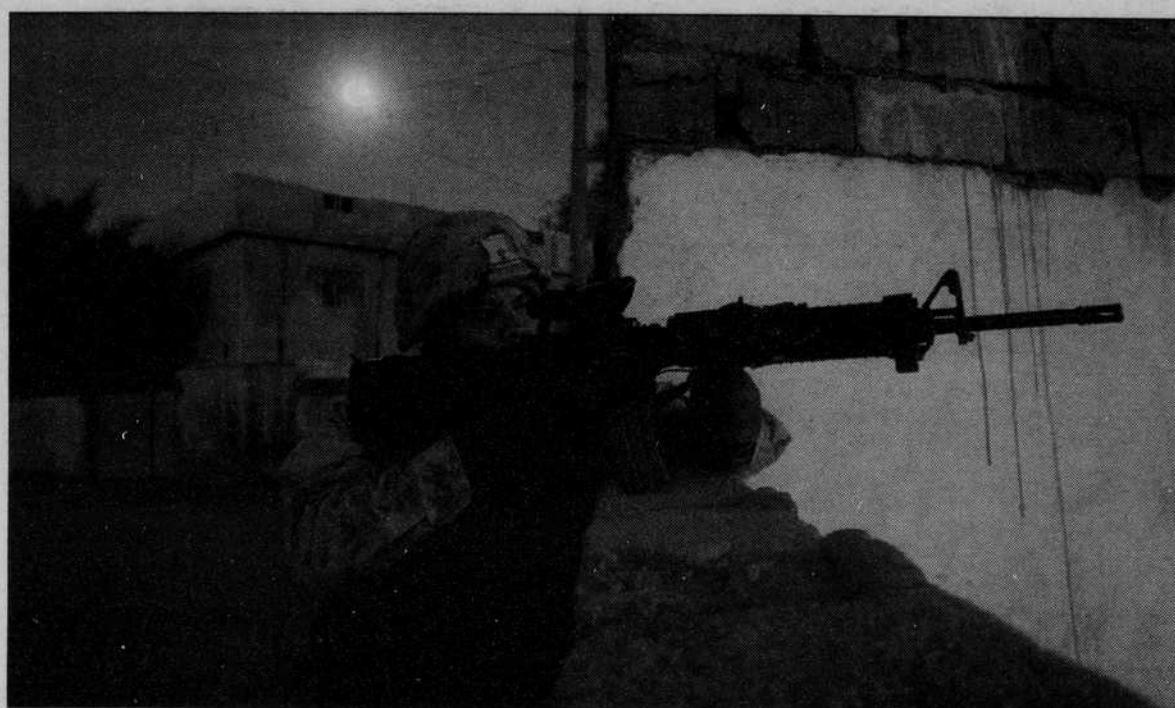
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David Swanson Philadelphia Inquirer

LCpl Ramon Barron, 20, of Mesa, Ariz., patrols in Ramadi, Iraq, as the Second Battalion, 4th Regiment of Marines goes door-to-door through several hundred homes. Half a dozen men were detained and caches of AK-47s and other weapons were found Thursday.

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Coalition death toll nears 50 as uprising reaches fifth day

Marines fight to regain control of Fallujah while Spanish troops battle an insurgent militia in Najaf

By Matthew Schofield
Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

BAGHDAD, Iraq — U.S. Marines and Iraqi insurgents fought pitched battles Thursday for control of Fallujah, and Spanish troops reportedly battled a Muslim militia group in Najaf as the anti-coalition uprising stretched into its fifth day.

There were signs that the uprising had slowed. For the first time since Sunday, no new cities reported combat. But Iraqi insurgents remained in control of three southern towns, and the commander of U.S. forces in Iraq said he expected resistance to continue "for some time."

The death toll for coalition soldiers since the uprising began Sunday neared 50, making the week one of the bloodiest since U.S. forces entered Iraq 13 months ago. A Marine spokesman said four Marines had been killed in Fallujah Thursday and another had been killed in Ramadi.

Hundreds of Iraqis have died.

"We're inside Fallujah, not everywhere, but inside," Maj. T.V. Johnson told a Knight Ridder reporter at Camp Fallujah, a Marine encampment about five miles from the city. "We're digging in, hoping to entice the enemy to attack our positions, and hoping that the citizens will start pointing out the bad guys to us."

The fighting continued into the early hours Friday. Intense artillery fire could be heard in the city from Camp Fallujah, and helicopters were a constant presence in the sky.

In Najaf, one of two cities now under control of Mahdi Army militia-men loyal to Shiite Muslim cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, Arabic television reporters said that seven Spanish soldiers had been killed and that black-clad fighters were digging in positions in the center of the city, which is home to one of Iraq's most holy Shiite shrines.

Meanwhile, in Washington, two U.S. officials said that John D. Negroponte, current U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, is expected to be the first American ambassador to post-Saddam Iraq.

At least 13 foreign workers were kidnapped by Islamic extremists, including three Japanese whose captors threatened to burn them alive unless Japan agreed to withdraw its contingent of soldiers from Iraq.

Inside the Green Zone, the cordoned-off neighborhood where the Coalition Provisional Authority maintains its headquarters, explosives experts detonated a bomb discovered in a parking lot next door to the convention center where U.S. officials hold their briefings.

Sadr City, a poor suburb of 3 million, mostly Shiites, was quiet for the first time since the weekend. Overnight, American forces tried to destroy al-Sadr's office there, but his followers rebuilt it Thursday morning.

In Kuwait, the 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division, on its way home to Fort Riley, Kan., was ordered to

prepare a troop strength report amid rumors that the soldiers might be returned to Iraq. A Fort Riley spokeswoman said Thursday that the return of the 700 to 800 troops was still planned for this weekend.

Coalition authorities were also fighting a public relations battle, as anger grew over civilian casualties and claims that the United States was blocking humanitarian assistance to townspeople trapped by the fighting in Fallujah.

Hundreds, if not thousands, of Baghdad residents conducted food and blood drives for the wounded in Fallujah. Traditionally distrustful of each other, Sunni and Shiite Muslims coordinated efforts, loading trucks with tons of rice, sugar, medical supplies and blood that had been piled in the parking lots of mosques throughout the city.

At the Um al Quraa mosque, where the white sacks of food and supplies were piled 10 feet high in the early morning, Nasar Abdul Kareem, 42, said he had been fired upon while approaching with a convoy. He said a friend was shot in the leg.

"If the Americans will not let us bring food and medicines to the people, I can guarantee they will lose this war," he said.

Some trucks did get through. Amer Sadek, 29, was driving one.

"I went down in a convoy of five trucks, but only two were let into the city," he said. "What I saw was beyond description. Entire neighborhoods have been reduced to battlefields. The people crowded the truck, crying and begging us to take them away from all the death, all the blood. But the Marines told us, 'Two go in, two come out.' So we had to leave them behind."

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