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NEWS REVIEW 3



GULF WAR II

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Cook urges Blair: bring army home



Royal Marines carry the coffin of one of the 10 British servicemen killed in the Gulf at RAF Brize Norton yesterday

Labour revolt as Iraq launches suicide attacks

ROBIN COOK laid down a challenge to Tony Blair last night by condemning the war against Saddam Hussein as "bloody and unnecessary" and urging the prime minister to bring Britain's forces home. Cook's call came as Iraq threatened to send suicide bombers on missions to Britain in a "dirty war" to terrorise its enemies. In the first such attack on American forces within Iraq, four soldiers died yesterday when a man in civilian clothes waved to them from his car at a checkpoint near the central city of Najaf, then blew himself up as they approached. In an article published today Cook, who resigned from the cabinet 13 days ago in protest at the conflict, declares: "I have already had my fill of this bloody and unnecessary war. I want our troops home and I want them home before more of them are killed." He also attacks President George W Bush and — by extension — Tony Blair for the "badly planned" conduct of the campaign and says that British forces have "ended up exposed by the mistakes of US politicians". "Nobody should start a war on the assumption that the enemy's army will co-operate," Cook says in the Sunday Mirror. "But that is exactly what President Bush has done. And now his marines have reached the outskirts of Baghdad he does not seem to know what to do next." The current encirclement of Iraq's second city of Basra, he writes, gives a chilling foretaste of what could be in store for the capital. "There is no more brutal form of warfare than siege. People go hungry. The water and power to provide the sinews of a city snip. Children die." Government insiders had been braced for an explosion

Downing Street last night stressed the government's determination to continue the campaign: "Robin Cook has a well-known position on Iraq and it is not one that the government shares," said a spokesman. Cook's comments coincided with a poll showing popular support for the war is rising. Despite setbacks in the first 10 days of fighting which have cost 23 British lives and sparked fears the conflict will drag on for months, 84% of people believe it should be seen through to a successful conclusion, according to the survey by ICM Research. The threat of further suicide attacks was issued by Saddam's vice-president, Taha Yassin Ramadan, who said they would now become "routine military policy". In a clear threat to take the war to the British and Americans on their own territory, he added: "We will use any means to kill our enemy in our land and we will follow the enemy into its land." Iraq could not match the fire-

Eben Black, Nicholas Rufford, Qatar and Jonathan Calvert Basra from Cook since his resignation. His article was the clearest example yet of the deep unease even at the highest level within the Labour party and could provide a new focus for opposition to Blair from the left. Tam Dalyell, a leading anti-war Labour MP, yesterday branded the prime minister "mad" for involving Britain in the war.

THE BATTLE FOR IRAQ
11-page Focus special How a war of liberation was met by bullets and bombs, pages 17-27
Plus all the best front-line reporting and analysis from the Gulf, pages 2-9

US Marines turn fire on civilians at the bridge of death

THE light was a strange yellow grey and the wind was coming up, the beginnings of a sandstorm. The silence felt almost eerie after a night of shooting so intense it hurt the eardrums and shattered the nerves. My footsteps felt heavy on the hot, dusty asphalt as I walked slowly towards the bridge at Nasiriya. A horrific scene lay ahead. Some 15 vehicles, including a minivan and a couple of trucks, blocked the road. They were riddled with bullet holes. Some had caught fire and turned into piles of black twisted metal. Others were still burning.

Amid the wreckage I counted 12 dead civilians, lying in the road or in nearby ditches. All had been trying to leave this southern town overnight, probably for fear of being killed by US helicopter attacks and heavy artillery. Their mistake had been to flee over a bridge that is crucial to the coalition's supply lines and to run into a group of shell-shocked young American marines with orders to shoot anything that moved. One man's body was still in flames. It gave out a hissing sound. Tucked away in his breast pocket, thick wads of banknotes were turning to ashes. His savings, perhaps.

Down the road, a little girl, no older than five and dressed in a pretty orange and gold dress, lay dead in a ditch next to the body of a man who may have been her father. Half his head was missing. Nearby, in a battered old Volga peppered with ammunition holes, an Iraqi woman — perhaps the girl's mother — was dead, slumped in the back seat. A US Abrams tank nicknamed Ghetto Fabulous drove past the bodies.

This was not the only family who had taken what they thought was a last chance for safety. A father, baby girl and boy lay in a shallow grave. On the bridge itself a dead Iraqi civilian lay next to the carcass of a donkey. As I walked away, Lieutenant Matt Martin, whose third child, Isabella, was born while he was on board ship en route to the Gulf, appeared beside me. "Did you see all that?" he asked, his eyes filled with tears. "Did you see that little baby girl? I carried her body and buried it as best I could but I had no time. It really gets to me to see children being killed like this, but we had no choice." Martin's distress was in contrast to the bitter satisfaction of some of his fellow marines as they surveyed the scene. "The Iraqis are sick people

at Nasiriya. The feat of Martin, Dupre and their fellow marines in securing them under heavy fire was compared by armchair strategists last week to the seizure of the Remagen bridge over the Rhine, which significantly advanced victory over Germany in the second world war. But it was also the turning point when the jovial band of brothers from America lost all their assumptions about the war and became jittery aggressors who talked of wanting to "nuke" the place.

None of this was foreseen at Camp Shoup, one of the marines' tent encampments in northern Kuwait, where officers from the 1st and 2nd battalions of Task Force Tarawa, the 7,000-strong US Marines brigade, spent long evenings poring over maps and satellite imagery before the invasion.

The plan seemed straightforward. The marines would speed unhindered over the 130 miles of desert up from the Kuwaiti border and approach Nasiriya from the southeast to secure a bridge over the Euphrates. They would then drive north through the outskirts of Nasiriya to a second bridge, over the Inahr al-Furbat canal. Finally, they would turn west and secure the third bridge, also over the canal. The marines would not enter the city proper, let alone attempt to take it.

The coalition could then start moving thousands of troops and logistical support onto highway 7, leading to Baghdad, 225 miles to the north. There was only one concern: "ambush alley", the road connecting the first two bridges. But intelligence suggested there would be little or no fighting as this eastern side of the city was mostly "pro-American". I was with Alpha company. We reached the outskirts of Nasiriya at about breakfast time last Sunday. Some marines were disappointed to be carrying out a mission that seemed a sideshow to the main effort. But in an ominous sign of things to come, our battalion stopped in its tracks, three miles outside the city. Bad news filtered back. Earlier that morning a US Army convoy had been greeted by a group of Iraqis dressed in civilian clothes, apparently wanting to surrender. A sideshow to the main effort, the Iraqis pulled out AK-47s and sprayed the US trucks with gunfire. Five wounded soldiers were there are three key bridges

These had still been the brightest-eyed small-town boys with whom I crossed the border at the start of the operation. They had rolled towards Nasiriya, on a mission to secure a safe supply route for troops on the way to Baghdad. They had expected a welcome, or at least a swift surrender. Instead they had found themselves lured into a bloody battle, culminating in the worst coalition losses of the war — 16 dead, 12 wounded and two missing marines, as well as five dead and 12 injured. When the American soldiers stopped, the Iraqis pulled out AK-47s and sprayed the US trucks with gunfire. Five wounded soldiers were there are three key bridges

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'Iraqis are sick people and we're the chemotherapy'



American marines pinned down in the battle for Nasiriyah in central Iraq tend their wounded comrades and wait for the intense Iraqi fire to abate

Continued from page 1
rescued by our convoy, including one who had been shot four times. The attackers were believed to be members of the Fedayeen Saddam, a group of 15,000 fighters under the command of Saddam's psychopathic son Uday.
Blown-up tyres, a pool of blood, spent ammunition and shards of glass from the bullet-ridden windscreen marked the spot where the ambush had taken place. Swiftly, our AAVs (23-ton amphibious assault vehicles) took up defensive positions. About 100 marines jumped out of their vehicles and took cover in ditches, pointing their sights at a mud-caked house. Was it harbouring gunmen? Small groups of marines approached, cautiously, to search for the enemy. A dozen terrified civilians, mainly women and children, emerged with their hands raised. "It's just a bunch of Hajjis,"

going in," shouted one of the officers.
More than 20 AAVs, several tanks and about 10 Hummers equipped with roof-mounted, anti-tank missile launchers prepared to move in. Crammed inside them were some 400 marines. Tension rose as they loaded their guns and stuck their heads over the side of the AAVs through the open roof, their M-16 pointed in all directions.
As we set off towards the eastern city gate there was no sense of the mayhem awaiting us down the road. A few locals dressed in rags watched the awesome spectacle of America's war machine on the move. Nobody waved.
Slowly we approached the first bridge. Fires were raging on either side of the road. Cobras had destroyed an Iraqi military truck and a T55 tank positioned inside a dugout. Powerful explosions came from inside the bowels of the tank as its ammunition and heavy shells were set off by the fire. With each explosion a thick and perfect ring of black smoke ring puffed out of the turret.
An Iraqi defence post lay abandoned. Cobras flew over an oasis of palm trees and deserted brick and mud-caked houses. We charged onto the bridge, and as we crossed the Euphrates, a large mural of Saddam came into view. Some marines reached for their disposable cameras.
Suddenly, as we approached the ambush alley on the far side of the bridge, the crackle of AK-47s broke out. Our AAVs began to zigzag to avoid being hit by a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG).
The road widened out to a square, with a mosque and the portrait of Saddam on the left-hand side. The vehicles wheeled round, took up a defensive position, back to back, and began taking fire.
Pinned down, the marines fired back with 40mm automatic grenade launchers, a weapon so powerful it can go through thick brick walls and kill anyone within a 5-yard range of where the shell lands.
I was in AAV number A304, affectionately nicknamed the Desert Caddy. It shook as Keith Bernize, the gunner, fired off round after deafening round at sandbag positions shielding suspected Fedayeen fighters. His steel ammunition box clanged with the sound of smoking empty shells and cartridges.
Bernize, who always carries a scan picture of his unborn baby daughter with him, shot at the targets from behind a turret, peering through narrow slits of reinforced glass. He shouted at his men to feed him more ammunition. Four marines, standing at the AAV's four corners, precariously perched on ammunition boxes, fired off their M-16s. Their faces covered in sweat, officers shouted com-

mands into field radios, giving co-ordinates of enemy positions. Some 200 marines, fully exposed to enemy fire and slowed down by their heavy weapons, bulky ammunition packs and NBC suits, ran across the road, taking shelter behind a long brick wall and mounds of earth. A team of snipers appeared, yards from their house. In all probability, the family is dead.
The fighting intensified. An Iraqi fighter emerged from behind a wall of sandbags 500 yards away from our vehicle. Several times he managed to fire off an RPG at our positions. Bernize and other gunners fired dozens of rounds at his dugout, punching large holes into a house and lifting thick clouds of dust.
Then the Iraqis fired again. This time the rocket plunged into the vehicle through the open rooftop. The explosion was deadly, made 10 times more powerful by the ammunition stored in the back.
The wreckage smouldered in the middle of the road. I jumped out from the rear hatch of our vehicle, briefly taking cover behind a wall. When I reached the stricken AAV, the scene was mayhem. The heavy, thick rear ramp had been blown open. There were pools of blood and bits of flesh everywhere. A severed leg, still wearing a desert boot, lay on what was left of the ramp among playing cards, a magazine, cans of Coke and a small bloodstained teddy bear.
"They are f***** dead, they are dead. Oh my God. Get in there. Get in there now and pull them out," shouted a gunner in a state verging on hysterical.
There was panic and confusion as a group of young marines, shouting and cursing orders at one another, pulled out a maimed body.
Two men struggled to lift the body on a stretcher and into the back of a Hummer, but it would not fit inside, so the stretcher remained almost upright, the dead man's leg, partly blown away, dangling in the air.
"We shouldn't be here," said Lieutenant Campbell Kane, 25, who was born in Northern Ireland. "We can't hold this. They are trying to suck us into the city and we

haven't got enough ass up here to sustain this. We need more tanks, more helicopters."
Closer to the destroyed AAV, another young marine was transfixed with fear and kept repeating: "Oh my God, I can't believe this. Did you see his leg? It was blown off."
Two CH-46 helicopters, nicknamed Frogs, landed a few hundred yards away in the middle of a firefight to take away the dead and wounded.
If at first the marines felt constrained by orders to protect civilians, by now the battle had become so intense that there was little time for niceties. Cobra helicopters were ordered to fire at a row of houses closest to our positions. There were massive explosions but the return fire barely died down.
Behind us, as many as four AAVs that had driven down along the banks of the Euphrates were stuck in deep mud and coming under fire.
About 1pm, after three hours of intense fighting, the order was given to regroup and try to head out of the city in convoy. Several marines who had lost their vehicles piled into the back of ours.
We raced along ambush alley at full speed, close to a line of houses. "My driver got hit," said one of the marines who joined us, his face and uniform caked in mud. "I went to try to help him when he got hit by another RPG or a mortar. I don't even know how many friends I have lost. With tears in his eyes and blood splattered over his flak jacket, he held the remains of his friend in his arms until someone gave him a poncho to wrap them with.
Frantic medics did what



Nervous soldiers take control of a hospital on the outskirts of Nasiriyah

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award-winning reporter Mark Franchetti was named foreign reporter of the year at this month's British Press Awards for his dispatches from inside the Moscow theatre taken over by Chechen terrorists last autumn. He was commended for his "painstaking reportage and graphic description" as he walked into the building at the height of the siege. He followed it up with an exclusive interview with Britons held captive. Franchetti is Moscow correspondent of the Sunday Times and has reported extensively from Chechnya. He was also the first newspaper reporter into Kosovo with UK forces in 1999

plunging weapons in dozens of houses, between which they moved freely pretending to be civilians.
"It's a bad situation," said First Sergeant James Thompson, who was running around with a 9mm pistol in his hand. "We don't know who is shooting at us. They are even using women as scouts. The women come out waving at us, or with their hands raised. We freeze, but the next minute we can see how she is looking at our positions and giving them away to the fighters hiding behind a street corner. It's very difficult to distinguish between the fighters and civilians."
Captain Mike Brooks, commander of Alpha company, pinned down in front of the mosque, called in tank support. Armed with only a 9mm pistol, he jumped out of the back of his AAV with a young marine carrying a field radio on his back.
Brooks, 34, from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, had been in command of 200 men for just over a year. He joined the marines when he was 19 because he felt that he was wasting his life. He needed direction, was a bit of a rebel and was impressed by the sense of pride in the corps. He is a soft-spoken man,

'Iraqis are sick people and we're the chemotherapy'



Troops walk past a burnt-out marine attack vehicle destroyed in the fighting for Nasiriyah, one of the bloodiest battles so far in the war

men were killed. They had been travelling with some 10 other civilians, mainly women and children who were evacuated, crying, their clothes splattered in blood. Hours later a dog belonging to the dead driver was still by his side.
The marines moved west to take a military barracks and secure their third objective, the third bridge, which carried a road out of the city.
At the barracks, the marines hung a US flag from a statue of Saddam, but Lieutenant Colonel Rick Grabowski, the battalion commander, ordered it down. He toured barracks. There were stacks of Russian-made ammunition and hundreds of Iraqi army uniforms, some new, others left behind by fleeing Iraqi soldiers.
One room had a map of Nasiriyah, showing its defences and two large cardboard arrows indicating the US plan of attack to take the two main bridges. Above the map were several murals, praising Saddam. One, which sickened the Americans, showed two large civilian planes crashing into tall buildings.
As night fell again there was great tension, the marines fearing an ambush. Two tanks and three AAVs were placed at the north end of the third bridge, their guns pointing down towards Nasiriyah, and given orders to shoot at any vehicle that drove towards American positions.
Though civilians on foot passed by safely, the policy was to shoot anything that moved on wheels. Inevitably, terrified civilians drove at speed to escape; marines took that speed to be a threat and hit out. During the night, our teeth on edge, we listened a dozen times as the AVVs' machineguns opened fire, cutting through cars and trucks like paper.
Next morning I saw the result of this order — the dead civilians, the little girl in the orange and gold dress.
Suddenly, some of the young men who had crossed into Iraq with me reminded me now of their fathers' generation, the trigger-happy grunts of Vietnam. Covered in the mud from the violent storms, they were drained and dangerously aggressive.
In the days afterwards, the marines consolidated their position and put a barrier of trucks across the bridge to stop anyone from driving across, so there were no more civilian deaths.
They also ruminated on what they had done. Some rationalised it.
"I was shooting down a street when suddenly a woman came out and casually began to cross the street with child no older than 10," said Gunnery Sergeant John Merriam, another Gulf war veteran. "At first I froze on see-

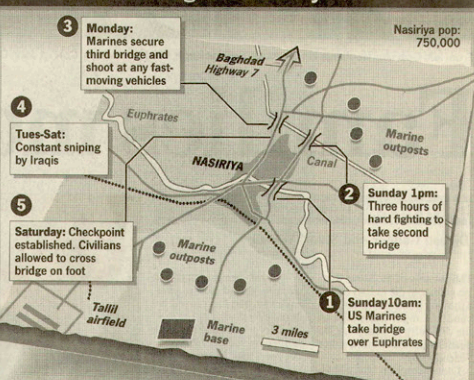
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Mike Brooks was one of the commanders who had given the order to shoot at civilian vehicles. It weighed on his mind, even though he felt he had no choice but to do everything to protect his marines from another ambush.
On Friday, making coffee in

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Battle for the bridges of Nasiriyah



Nasiriyah pop: 750,000
The three bridges of Nasiriyah are set to go into US Marine folklore. Allied forces dashed to the city to capture the first major bridge over the Euphrates and a canal bridge which opens up the most direct routes to Baghdad. The main 1st Marine Expeditionary Force is now pushing up Highway 7 and 8 behind it is a vulnerable bottleneck. Some military analysts believe Saddam Hussein made a tactical error by not blowing the bridges and delaying the advance. Others say by preserving the bridges Saddam has created a pinch point and a perfect target for Iraqi guerrilla forces trying to cut supply lines. The third bridge gives Iraqi militias perfect access to make fast strikes out of Nasiriyah at allied support troops heading north. But once they came under fire, the marines ruthlessly quelled all traffic movements. The skirmishes continue this weekend and the US is now having to divert hundreds of troops to subdue the area.

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4 I don't even know how many friends I have lost. I don't care if they nuke that bloody city now. From one house they were waving while shooting at us with AKs from the next. It was insane?

to fetch newspapers for him from Kuwait City. Later, we shared a bumpy ride across the desert in the back of a Humvee.
A decorated Gulf war veteran, he used to complain about having to come back to Iraq. "We should have gone all the way to Baghdad 12 years ago when we were here and had a real chance of removing Saddam."
Now Pokorney, Jordan and their comrades fly among unspeakable carnage. An older marine walked by carrying a huge chunk of flesh, so maimed it was impossible to tell which body part it was. With tears in his eyes and blood splattered over his flak jacket, he held the remains of his friend in his arms until someone gave him a poncho to wrap them with.
Frantic medics did what

4 When cars were spotted, frantic calls were made on the radio to get permission to 'kill the vehicles'. Twenty-four hours earlier it would almost certainly have been denied: now it was granted?

they could to relieve horrific injuries, until four helicopters landed in the middle of the highway to take the injured to a military hospital. Each wounded marine had a tag describing his injury. One had gunshot wounds to the face, another to the chest. Another simply lay on his side in the sand with a tag reading: "Urgent — surgery, buttock."
One young marine was assigned the job of keeping the files at bay. Some of his comrades, exhausted, covered in blood, dirt and sweat walked around dazed. There were loud cheers as the sound of the heaviest artillery

Alpha company talked about the fighting over MREs (meals ready to eat). They were jittery now and reacted nervously to any movement around their dugouts. They suspected that civilian cars, including taxis, had helped resupply the enemy inside the city. When cars were spotted speeding along two roads, frantic calls were made over the radio to get permission to "kill the vehicles". Twenty-four hours earlier it would almost certainly have been denied: now it was granted.
Immediately, the level of force levelled at civilian vehicles was overwhelming. Tanks were placed on the road and AAVs lined along one side. Several taxis were destroyed by helicopter gunships as they drove down the road.
A lorry filled with sacks of

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