

AMONG THE PEOPLE

U.S. Marines In Iraq



Lieutenant Colonel David A. Benhoff

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Quantico, VA
2008

PCN 106 0000 0300

Foreword

Since Vietnam, we have come to realize that today's conflicts involve more than victory in battle to succeed. We need to win the hearts and minds of the people as well as the firefights in order to prevail. Ironically, Marines get this. Their legendary courage and tenacity on the battlefield is equally matched by their compassion and engagement with the traumatized civilian population. Marine General Jim Mattis summed it up best when he said, "We can be your worst enemy or your best friend."

In the al Anbar Province in Iraq there is an astonishing turnaround taking place. The people in this Marine area of responsibility are rejecting violence and radicalism. No doubt we will study this positive change in years to come to better understand why this province went from the most violent and troubled area of Iraq to a hailed success story. In no small measure, the commitment, patience, and determination of the Marines to connect to the people, to address their needs, and to gain their trust contributed to this success.

This book captures, in moving photographs, the day-to-day efforts of our Marines' civil affairs work with the Iraqi people. These photos will touch your hearts as the actions they depict touched the hearts of those Iraqis who lived through the turmoil in al Anbar. Our American pride in the fighting prowess of our Marines is equally felt for their demonstrated compassion.

Anthony C. Zinni
General, U.S. Marine Corps (Retired)

Preface

As we rolled out of the forward operating base enroute to the city of Fallujah in March of 2005, though this was my first mission, I knew what to expect. The city, virtually leveled from intense fighting that took place just a few short months ago and only recently reopened to the population, would be full of Iraqis that despised us. That was the storyline portrayed by the preponderance of the news before I departed the States. Iraqis wanted us gone, plain and simple. I was mentally prepared and resigned to hostile looks or worse.

What I found was far from this grim expectation. During the day-long trip throughout the city I saw hundreds upon hundreds of kids waving, smiling, and trailing along as we progressed. Every time we stopped, or even slowed, we were surrounded and mobbed by them. While the adults were more standoffish, I saw little hostility in their eyes; most seemed merely intent on cleaning up the rubble of what used to be their homes or businesses and getting on with their lives. Could what I had seen on the nightly news back home have been so far off the mark? Absolutely, as I would learn over the course of my time here.

For the next five months I would spend time outside the wire with Marines who were continually and closely interacting with the Iraqi people, and what I observed was vastly different than what I had expected. This sharp contrast planted the seed in my mind of telling this untold story, a story of cooperation and friendship in the midst of war. A story where, within the much-reported plot of violence and destruction, Marines were also continually demonstrating acts of kindness and decency to a people caught in the middle. Marines who saw their own sons and daughters in the crowds of Iraqi children and just wanted to play a small part in making their lives better.

One example that stands out involved two Marines who were from Regimental Combat Team 8, Sergeant Steven G. Pannell and Lance Corporal Andrew S. Champion. I happened upon them while out at the Fallujah Civil-Military Operations Center in June of 2005. They were near the entrance, where Iraqi civilians gather awaiting access. As they distributed toys and school supplies to the children waiting there with their parents, both Marines obviously were enjoying their simple acts of kindness. Later, I was astounded to learn that just days before both had been on a convoy that was hit by a suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive device and then subsequently attacked with small arms. Both had seen fellow Marines—friends—die, from bullets and burning, in that attack. And yet, here they were, handing out toys to children just blocks from where that attack occurred. If anyone had a reason to be bitter toward the Iraqi people, to look upon them all as the enemy and just count the days until they were on the freedom bird out, it would have been them. But, here they were, outside the compound and at risk of the frequent sniping, handing out toys. This book is for them and those like them. Marines and warriors ready to fight and die for the Corps and country, but also to extend the hand of friendship to strangers in a strange land.

David A. Benhoff

Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Marine Corps

Introduction

While there are, and have been, many different types of Marine Corps units operating in Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom, this book in no way attempts to highlight all. Nor does it contain high-drama photographs typically associated with war; there are plenty of such photographs of this nature in circulation—far more than those of the type included herein.

On the contrary, the emphasis of this book is the human side of war and therefore the photographs that follow are of a subject matter that best illustrates this: Marines interacting with the Iraqi population at the personal level. This interaction is most often found among units that spend the vast majority of their time “outside the wire,” among the people, working to rebuild, restore, and improve security and infrastructure. Marines with missions related to these constructive aspects of the war generally fall into one of two categories: those conducting civil affairs or those training and developing the Iraqi Security Forces.

The civil affairs Marines interact with the population through two significantly different venues, one stationary in which the Iraqis come to them, and one mobile, where they go to the Iraqis. The first section of this photo-essay book addresses the former, with depictions of activities occurring at one of the civil-military operations centers, while the next section focuses on civil affairs group tactical teams.

The final section addresses those Marines interacting with the Iraqi Security Forces, known as Advisory Support Teams (ASTs) and Military Training Teams (MTTs) in 2005. The ASTs were small groups of Marines embedded with the military component of the Iraqi Security Forces, while the MTTs worked with the police forces. While their activities were dissimilar in some ways, given the differing tactics, techniques, and procedures performed by military and police, the basic goal was the same: ensure the Iraqi Security Forces were professionally trained and employed, and ultimately the sole security provider for their country.

Finally, each section begins with a text lead in providing further detail on the missions and activities mentioned above, followed by a visual presentation supplemented with quotes from recorded interviews of the Marines serving among the people. This introduction is deliberately brief in the hope that the following photographs will speak for themselves.

Sgt Steven G. Pannell, back for his third tour in Iraq, cools off some Iraqi children in front of the Fallujah Civil-Military Operations Center.





The civil affairs capability of the Marine Corps normally resides within the Reserve establishment in the form of the Civil Affairs Group (CAG). This capability has been expanded during Operation Iraqi Freedom with the addition of provisional CAGs. As reservists, the CAG members bring to the table a wide variety of civilian education and expertise that can be brought to bear on problems facing the local population.

One area where CAG members have particularly close contact with the people is the Civil-Military Operations Center (CMOC). The CMOC serves multiple functions, all facilitating interaction between the military, Department of State, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the local population; it is a hub for information and assistance flow. During 2005, the Fallujah CMOC had a staff of 12 Marines with a focus on reconstruction and governance. The CMOC hosted a wide variety of gatherings, including weekly sheik, town council, urban planning, and reconstruction meetings to deal with the significant rebuilding necessary after the November 2004 offensive.

An important element of what occurs here is information sharing. Local leaders can voice concerns, learn the reasons why Marine units operate in certain ways, and highlight needs of the community. Through

better communications better relations hopefully will develop, relationships that often transform into sincere friendship. As Lieutenant Colonel James K. “Hondo” Haldeman, Fallujah CMOC Director in 2005, put it, “I’m just so privileged...I’m in a unique place and [have] a unique opportunity to have these people come to me and call them my friend.”



Right and Facing: After distributing school supplies and toys donated by Marine families back home, Chaplain’s Assistant LCpl Andrew S. Champion walks Iraqi children back to their families.





“We believe in the mission tremendously...it’s definitely one of those things that you can feel proud of doing because you’re trying to help them—help the Iraqis help themselves.”

**Capt Rodolfo A. Quiles, Economic Development Officer,
Fallujah CMOC**



Above: Fallujah city council members discuss business at the Fallujah CMOC.

Right: LtCol James K. "Hondo" Halderman facilitates the meeting.



“Our job is to facilitate. I don’t want to run meetings for the Iraqis...the more they do it themselves, the better. If I work myself out of a job—out of facilitating their problem—that’s better for us.”

Maj Joey E. Klinger, Governance Development Officer, Fallujah CMOC



MMWV L SIDE PANEL



“I was excited when I heard I was coming to the CMOC and I don’t regret it at all. The best part of it is the daily interactions with locals. You see your work every day. You can physically see that you’re making a difference and that is the excitement of being out here. So, the mortars and small arms you put up with because you know you get to interact with the kids here and the locals.”

LtCol Beverly M. Baker, Operations Officer, Fallujah CMOC

Left: 5th Civil Affairs Group
Marines outside the Fallujah
CMOC.



“The more participation you have from the Iraqis, the better it is because our goal here is to turn all of this back over to the Iraqi government and the Iraqi people and the Fallujans.”

Maj Joey E. Klinger

Left: Iraqis debate issues at the Fallujah CMOC’s weekly town council meeting.

“Above all else, the real sense of accomplishment is in terms of the relationships that you develop with the citizens here. When they trust you and they understand that you’re doing your best to help them...and they come to you and ask for you by name because they know that you can help them—it’s the greatest professional compliment that you can get.”

Capt Rodolfo A. Quiles

Right: Discussions continue after council meeting, Fallujah CMOC.

