

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



The March Up

Ray L. Smith and Bing West

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A highly decorated Marine, Major General Ray L. Smith, USMC (Ret.) has served in Vietnam, Grenada, and Beirut. He lives in North Carolina. He is a renowned expert in urban combat and infantry tactics.

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*To
First Sergeant Edward M. Smith
a Marine's Marine
and
to all the other men and
women who died in
Operation Iraqi Freedom*

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About the Authors

Introduction

by John Keegan

THE UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS is one of the most formidable fighting organizations in the world. Its famous march, "From the halls of Montezuma to the shores of Tripoli," begins with a roll call of its early victories; to those its later history added Belleau Wood in France in 1918, the first major American engagement of the Great War, and a string of island assaults in the Pacific in the Second World War: Guadalcanal, Peleliu, Tarawa, Okinawa and Iwo Jima. By 1945 "Marine" had acquired a distinctive and exclusive meaning in the American military vocabulary. It stood for war-making by direct assault, off the ship, up the beach, straight into the enemy position. A war correspondent, describing the landing on Tarawa in November 1943, opened his dispatch with an eyewitness account: "A young Marine jumped over the sea wall and began throwing blocks of TNT into the mouth of a Japanese bunker." He could have been any Marine in any assault on any island. Marines fight to win.

The British counterpart served with the U.S. Marines in the First Gulf War of 1991. In the Second Gulf War of 2003 they had separate fronts. The British mission was to take Basra, the second city of Iraq, while the Marines made the march to Baghdad, Iraq's capital, the subject of this book. Bing West, a former Marine officer, and Ray Smith, a retired Marine general, have a fascinating story to tell. They traveled at the forefront of the 1st Marine Division's advance, from the crossing of the Kuwait border on March 19 to the capture of Baghdad three weeks later. They

witnessed the battle of Nasiriyah, where the Marines were caught in a confused and costly fight for an essential river crossing. They waited with the Marines while a way was found to cross the last water obstacle before Baghdad. They saw a dozen small local firefights on the road north. They were with the Marines as they entered the capital, found a way forward through the built-up area and took possession of the palaces of the Saddam regime. They saw their young Marine companions deploy into attack, form firing lines, advance by bounds against Iraqi strong points. They were with Marines who fell to enemy fire and bled to death from wounds.

This is a frontline book and its chief value comes from its provision of a picture of what life and death on the front line were like on the march up. There are recurrent themes. One is of the small Marine "family," the four or five men who fight, live and occasionally die together. Typically these families consist of a leader, his driver, his radio operator and his gunner, who travel together in a vehicle, survive the day's dangers and settle in the evening to eat an improvised meal of bad food in dirt and discomfort. They depend upon each other utterly, in a relationship which minimizes the importance of rank but is dominated by the demands of military efficiency. The leader is respected because he tries to assure the survival of the team. Any member of the team who threatens group survival becomes a liability.

Other groups the authors observe are those of the enemy. Their behavior puzzles West and Smith. Usually the enemy is invisible or disappears as soon as the shooting starts. Some, however, seem determined to die. Young, badly equipped Iraqis, who seem to lack any of the military skills the Marines possess, wait until the Americans are on top of them and then effectively commit suicide by staging acts of resistance that attract an overwhelming response. They emerge from piles of rubbish under the noses of the

Marines, loose off ill-aimed shots and are pulverized by the Marines' firepower. They do not know how to prepare defensive positions, digging foxholes on the exposed sides of riverbanks. They drive their "technicals"—pickup trucks mounting machine guns—straight at American tanks. Some of those "fighters" are foreign—Syrian or Jordanian or Saudi—who have come to Iraq to fight jihad, holy war. Most of the Iraqi fighters are Saddam loyalists, members of the Baathist party, but without military training. Few of the professionals, soldiers of the Iraqi regular army or the Republican Guard, fight effectively.

A disturbing complication during the march up is the inexplicable insouciance of Iraqi civilians. The Americans expect the ordinary inhabitants of the countryside and small towns to keep out of the fight. Instead they constantly turn up in the middle of firefights, driving civilian vehicles straight into the zone of fire. Terrified of suicide bombers, the Marines shoot at cars which refuse to stop despite the firing of warning shots.

The authors' portrayal of the contorted and insensate nature of the war is one of its most striking features. Two, perhaps three wars were going on simultaneously. One was a conventional war between Iraq's regular forces and the invaders; it scarcely took fire, so reluctant were the Iraqi regulars to fight. The second war was between the Americans and the irregular defenders of the regime: some ideological Baathists, others foreign Muslim fundamentalists attracted to the fight by the chance to die for their personal vision of Islam. The third war was between frightened young American soldiers and the specter of a population of suicide bombers in which any car driver or civilian trucker seemed to threaten the Marines with death.

Yet, on the American side, there was only one conflict, the war to rid Iraq, the Middle East and the world of Saddam. That war, despite Saddam's mysterious disappearance, achieved its object. Iraq, since the conclusion of the march

up to Baghdad, has been purged of Saddam's regime of killing and terror. As Tony Blair, the prime minister, has said, the world is a better place without Saddam. Credit for his removal belongs in large measure to the Marines of the 1st Marine Division who made the march up.

March 2003

1st Marine Division (REIN)

Commanding General's Message to All Hands

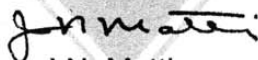
For decades, Saddam Hussein has tortured, imprisoned, raped and murdered the Iraqi people; invaded neighboring countries without provocation; and threatened the world with weapons of mass destruction. The time has come to end his reign of terror. On your young shoulders rest the hopes of mankind.

When I give you the word, together we will cross the Line of Departure, close with those forces that choose to fight, and destroy them. Our fight is not with the Iraqi people, nor is it with members of the Iraqi army who choose to surrender. While we will move swiftly and aggressively against those who resist, we will treat all others with decency, demonstrating chivalry and soldierly compassion for people who have endured a lifetime under Saddam's oppression.

Chemical attack, treachery, and use of the innocent as human shields can be expected, as can other unethical tactics. Take it all in stride. Be the hunter, not the hunted: never allow your unit to be caught with its guard down. Use good judgement and act in best interests of our Nation.

You are part of the world's most feared and trusted force. Engage your brain before you engage your weapon. Share your courage with each other as we enter the uncertain terrain north of the Line of Departure. Keep faith in your comrades on your left and right and Marine Air overhead. Fight with a happy heart and strong spirit.

For the mission's sake, our country's sake, and the sake of the men who carried the Division's colors in past battles-*who fought for life and never lost their nerve*-carry out your mission and *keep your honor clean*. Demonstrate to the world there is "No Better Friend, No Worse Enemy" than a U.S. Marine.



J.N. Mattis

Major General, U.S. Marines
Commanding

THE MARCH UP

Taking Baghdad with the
1st Marine Division

Major General Ray L. Smith
and Bing Wes



PIMLICO

Prologue

AT THREE IN THE MORNING IT WAS FREEZING, pitch black, and smelly inside the Amtrac, an amphibious vehicle stuffed with troops dozing on two benches. The previous day the Marines had seized one town, and in four hours they would attack again.

A fist banged on the rear hatch. "Tate, get up. It's your turn on the up gun."

"Oh man, I just got off watch at two. I've had one hour's sleep."

"Tate, wake up. You made up the damn roster. Get out there."

I was lying on the cold metal floor, listening to them, trying not to smell the feet. A few weeks earlier the 1st Marine Division had welcomed Ray Smith and me as family, including us in every briefing and battle. Both Ray and I had previously served in the division in Vietnam, Ray as a company commander and I as a platoon commander. The troops frequently asked us—especially Ray—how their fights in Iraq compared with ours in Vietnam. They measured themselves against that hard war.

Now this war was ten days old, and the troops were desperate for sleep. It would be a small thing for me to pitch in.

"I'm awake," I said. "I'll take the watch."

There was a pause in the raggedy snoring as a dozen exhausted Marines savored the promise of a fresh set of eyes while they rested. For a moment no one said anything. Then out of the dark came a voice.

"This is Pfc. Tate, sir. I'm the trac crew chief. Thanks, but no. You put in your time. This is our turn. This is our war."

The March Up is inspired by the classic story of the *Anabasis*, written by the Greek warrior and author Xenophon, a disciple of Socrates. It chronicles the march up Mesopotamia—now Iraq—in 400 b.c. by ten thousand indomitable Greek fighters, called hoplites, who hacked their way through every army that challenged them. The king of Persia unleashed a force of a hundred thousand to crush the hoplites, but gave up for lack of enough warriors. When chariots charged them, Xenophon reminded his hoplites that, unlike horses, they did not require grass for food, and that their sturdy legs would get them home after the horses collapsed. When heavy snows fell, the hoplites trudged on in sandals. When blue-faced men rolled enormous boulders down upon them, the hoplites waited until they ran out of stones, then charged uphill. The *Anabasis* is an account of tough characters bound by an unflinching warrior code.

One key to the hoplites' success was their ability to advance shoulder to shoulder, challenging all enemies to fight to the death. While effective, this ferocity exacted a toll on the manpower of Greek armies. To avoid such casualties, the Romans, when they emerged as the world's dominant power, modified the Greek fighting style. Roman centurions were encouraged not to hack through their enemies but to outmaneuver them. The Romans fought in "maniples," literally "handfuls" of soldiers. Centurions shifted around immediately to exploit gaps in an enemy formation and maneuver replaced the headlong charge. For hundreds of years no tribe could stand up to the Romans, whose disciplined troops and centurions combined the straight-ahead courage of Xenophon's hoplites with agility on the battlefield.

In *The March Up* of modern times, the commanders of the 1st Marine Division, like the centurions of ancient Rome, relied upon disciplined troops and clever maneuver. The Marine Corps, like a Roman legion, is a military machine comprised of strictly disciplined men who attack with

ferocity, whose nature it is to march off to do battle. In 1805, Lt. Presley O'Bannon crossed five hundred miles of desert to capture the harbor of Tripoli. In 1900, a battalion of Marines was part of the force that marched on Peking (as Beijing was then called). In 1945, Marines marched up the thirty-mile-long island of Okinawa, suffering more than three thousand killed in eighty days. In 1950, the 1st Marine Division marched forty miles back from the Chosin Reservoir in North Korea, fighting off eight Chinese divisions in freezing weather.

The 1st Marine Division was the first division to seize the offensive in World War II, landing in 1942 at Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands, under the five stars of the Southern Cross. The symbol of the division, called the Blue Diamond, shows the five stars of that cross against the blue background of the evening sky. Under that symbol three generations of Marines have marched in answer to the nation's call: retaking Seoul in 1950; retaking Hue City in 1968; and retaking Kuwait City in 1991. The campaign to take the city of Baghdad in 2003 is the Marine Corps's longest march from the sea. *The March Up* is a chronicle of this expedition, as experienced and told by two former Marine infantrymen, Ray Smith and myself, Bing West.

Ray Smith came from the oil fields in Oklahoma and rose to become one of the most decorated warriors in the Marine Corps. During the 1968 Tet Offensive, Ray commanded a rifle company in the savage house-to-house battle for Hue City. He had walked in with 146 men; thirty-four days later, seven of them walked out with him. During the 1972 Easter Offensive he called in fire support against waves of North Vietnamese troops supported by tanks and artillery. In 1983 he commanded the battalion landing team on the island of Grenada, and later he went on to command a division. Ray has been shot, slashed, blown up, knocked dizzy by close misses, and nicked by the fin of a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG). He has a lovely wife, Colleen, and three sons. Now he

builds custom homes, serves on charitable boards, and hunts deer. But in his heart he remains a centurion.

My family, the Wests, came from the Boston suburbs and spent summers on Cape Cod, where I loved to fish. Four generations of Wests have served in the Marine infantry. My great-uncle was a private first class in 1918, my uncle was a sergeant on Guadalcanal, and I was a Marine infantry captain in Vietnam. In my book, *The Village*, I described what it was like to patrol in the hamlets, wriggling through the muck of the rice paddies at night and throwing grenades at muzzle flashes. My son Owen served in Marine Force Reconnaissance in Operation Iraqi Freedom. As the Special Assistant to the Secretary of Defense when Saigon fell, I observed firsthand how Washington policymakers interacted with generals during war. In a later administration, as Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, I visited many crisis-torn countries where our military was involved. I am blessed with two sons, two daughters, and two grandchildren.

As for the men whom we were honored to accompany into battle in Iraq, the 1st Marine Division was diverse, a composite of Marines from three active-duty and one reserve division. Ray and I journeyed with these men in eighteen separate units over 1,200 kilometers and were with these units in combat on sixteen days. We have tried to draw on our combined battlefield experience to help the reader gain a sense of the combat and how dissimilar units such as tanks and infantry worked together to shape the outcome.

Many nonfiction books about war tend to stress heroism to the point of myth. Most people, when interviewed for a book after the fact, describe what they want others to read about themselves, not what was shameful, ugly, or just plain ordinary about their deeds. There are always gaps and disagreements. The kaleidoscope of battle is exhilarating, tragic, and confusing. Every man, from general to private,

has his story of what he believed was true during a fast-moving campaign. Two men in the same battle often differ on what happened. Ray and I focus on what we saw and what we can address. Specific observations and quotes in this book are drawn from more than eight hundred photos, six diary notebooks compiled during the campaign, and over two hundred and fifty discussions (see Acknowledgments). Our intent is to convey the strategy, tactics, stress, errors, leadership, and perseverance that marked the journey of Private First Class Tate and his fellow Marines. Operation Iraqi Freedom *was* their turn—it was their war, and they acquitted themselves in keeping with the long and proud tradition of the Marine Corps.

In Iraqi Freedom, as xgin Desert Storm in 1991, the United States did not suffer heavy casualties. The critical policy concern was not the surety, but rather the speed of the ground movement to Baghdad. After the war began, a pause in the ground advance required the president to make clear to the military commanders the criticality of speed. The less speedy the campaign, the greater were Saddam's chances of retaining power. Saddam's hope was to endure bombing from the air until pressure from the international community resulted in a cease-fire. This hope was not far-fetched, given the inflamed anti-American sentiment around the world. In 1982 such international pressure had rescued the Palestinian Liberation Organization in Lebanon from destruction by the Israelis. On the other side of the coin, a swift movement to Baghdad would ensure Saddam's removal, enhance the aura of American power, and lessen casualties, both military and civilian.

The commander of the 1st Marine Division, Maj. Gen. James N. Mattis, understood this need from the beginning. On 17 December 2002 he brought together all his commanders for a review. "I know one thing," he told them.

“The president, the National Command Authority, and the American people need speed. The sooner we get it over with, the better. Our overriding principle will be speed, speed, speed.”

The speedy campaign that Mattis sought was a near thing, not easily accomplished. There were disagreements about timing and tactics, leadership mistakes, foul weather, and staggering logistical challenges. This is the story of a race against terrain and time as much as a battle against an enemy. Most important, it is a tale about today’s hoplites—the inheritors of Xenophon’s code of bravery and camaraderie—men who would be comfortable with short swords and convex shields, men with sturdy legs who would eat less grass than a horse.

1

The Crown Jewel

D-Day, D+1

With 1st Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment
Northern Kuwait, a few kilometers south of the Iraqi border
20-21 March 2003

WITH GAS MASKS ON, RAY SMITH AND I, along with all the Marines in 1st Battalion, 7th Regiment (1/7) were sitting in shallow fighting holes, hacked out of dirt as hard as concrete, feeling a bit frustrated. For the fourth time that morning the gunnery sergeant had stood on top of the command Amtrac *[Picture 1]* hollering “Lightning! Lightning!”—the code word that there had been a SCUD launch—and the Marines had hopped back into their holes, the bulging eyes of their masks resembling giant bugs from the black-and-white horror films of the 1950s. Cruise missiles had struck Baghdad around dawn, after the CIA had told President Bush it knew where Saddam was hiding. Now the Iraqis were shooting back with long-range missiles, and one had narrowly missed the headquarters of Lt. Gen. James Conway, the senior Marine in the Kuwait-Iraq theater.

We were in a pre-attack “assembly area,” a dust bowl a few kilometers behind the Iraqi border, assigned to one of the Amtracs in the battalion. We were hitching rides because of the unusual route we had taken to get to the battlefield. Back in December, Ray and I decided to write a book about the upcoming war in Iraq, describing the changes in tactics between the fight in Hue City in 1968 and the projected fight in Baghdad City in 2003. Although

initially reluctant to have a retired general and a former assistant secretary of defense on the battlefield, Headquarters Marine Corps kindly issued us orders to serve as unpaid consultants in support of a Marine Corps public affairs film crew, at our own expense. Once we were in Kuwait, the Marine Corps allowed us to go forward with two stipulations; first, that we were on our own, and second, that we keep a low profile because, as a senior Marine said, “we want to keep the focus on the young Marines, not us old guys—so don’t get yourselves killed, because then you would be a story.”

So here we were, traveling with an infantry battalion as it prepared to cross the Line of Departure into Iraq. Thousands of years of relentless winds had swept the sands from Kuwait and Iraq, leaving behind an ankle-deep cover of powdery dust which swirled like fog in the slightest breeze. In this featureless, bleak landscape, the two hundred vehicles of 1/7 were aligned in three neat, long lines, appearing as a mirage to any Bedouin tribesman wandering by on his camel.

The U.S. high command was convinced that chemical warheads would strike U.S. troops sooner or later. So the gas masks and the hot, tightly woven chemical-resistant bib overalls and jackets we all wore were reasonable precautions. Still, the war wasn’t supposed to open this way, with the Marines waiting behind the lines, gas masks on, gas masks off, like pebbles washed back and forth by the waves.

Like everyone else in 1st Battalion that morning, members of the first squad of 3rd Platoon of Charlie Company sat and fretted, ducking when they were told to do so by their squad leader, Cpl. Shane Ferkovich. Ray and I had joined battalion 1/7 for its attack on D-Day in order to follow Ferkovich and his squad on their multibillion-dollar mission to seize the Az Zubayr oil pumping station.

A big, rangy youth from Montana, Ferkovich had bounced from high school to high school, preferring part-time work as a lumberjack. Motivated by the challenge, he had decided to join the Marine Corps, but was turned down because he hadn't finished high school. Ferkovich went back to school for another year, then was accepted. After boot camp he volunteered for 29 Palms, a remote base along the Nevada-California border where Marines train for mechanized warfare.

As we walked over to talk with the squad, the men exchanged glances. During the long days back at the 1st Marine Division's isolated staging base, we had introduced ourselves around the regiments and battalions. Many of the troops had heard of Ray, and they called him "Sir" or "General" to his face and "E-Tool" when talking over the radio or in the chow hall.

There was another cry of "Lightning!" and another quick donning of gas masks. When the all-clear sounded, Corporal Ferkovich asked Ray the question that seemed to be bothering them all.

"Sir," Ferkovich said, "that cruise missile strike this morning—do you think we got Saddam? We'll still go to war, won't we?"

The squad members didn't want their mission snatched away on the last day by a cruise missile. They had trained in the heat and mud, withstood mental and physical torments, endured months in an isolated camp sustained by the vision of carrying out a dangerous and valuable task. They had invested almost a year of their lives preparing for one day. They wanted Ray to reassure them.

In boot camp the squad had heard about Ray's exploits in Vietnam with an entrenching tool, or E-tool, a small, collapsible shovel. One instructor had told them that Ray's M-16 jammed during a night attack, and he had continued down the trench line swinging an E-tool, later remarking that a shovel doesn't jam. A different version had it that he

had assaulted a North Vietnamese machine-gun position with an E-tool. Whatever the story, he was known in the Corps as “E-Tool.”

Maybe the cruise missile had squashed Saddam, Ray said. But the campaign was to remove an entire regime, not just one man. A few missiles weren’t going to change the squad’s mission.

The eighteen-year-old infantryman goes to work each day preparing to kill other men, not an ordinary job. Shane Ferkovich could have gone to a community or four-year college, as half his classmates from high school did. Or he could have stayed in the logging camps, working outdoors in the land of the Big Sky, earning enough money for a good set of wheels and hanging out with two or three buddies. If he wanted to enlist, there were twenty or thirty military fields that would teach him a skill useful for later civilian employment, like satellite communications, the military police, or computer hardware.

Instead he chose the infantry. Each year only one out of four thousand physically qualified young men joins the ranks of the Marine infantry, yet Ferkovich’s squad still reflected a cross-section of the nation. Of the twelve Marines, one was an immigrant applying for U.S. citizenship, one was African American, and four were Hispanic. Two came from self-described upper-middle-class homes; the rest were from working-class families. Ferkovich was an orphan, raised in foster homes. As diverse as they were, they had several traits in common. All had graduated from high school. All were volunteers. They had worked together as a team for over a year and were anxious to perform.

We asked them why they had chosen to join the Marines. They said that they wanted to do what was tough. Most mentioned they needed more discipline, and everyone knew what happens in Marine recruit depots: the drill instructors

either shape you up or throw you out. Lance Corporal Answitz, twenty-four, had served in the Spetnatz, the Russian special forces, before emigrating to the United States. Spetnatz had pushed the recruits harder physically, he said, making them exercise in T-shirts in subzero weather, but the Corps was mentally tougher; those Marine drill instructors got inside your head.

A corporal mentioned a popular Super Bowl TV commercial, where a young guy climbs a mountain and fights a dragon with a sword. After slashing it in two, he turns into a Marine in dress blues. The others laughed, agreeing that was cool. Ray said that the commercial was about the transformation that takes place, as he put it, “when a lowly civilian earns the title Marine.” The men laughed.

I asked if the squad members bought that, saying I thought the commercial was over the top. Did they really like it? These macho young men hesitated to answer. Finally Ferkovich spoke up. “Absolutely, I believe it,” he said softly. The others then nodded or openly agreed in a variety of ways: “I’m different,” and “Back home, everyone says I’ve changed,” and “Yeah, I guess so.” We pulled on the thread a little more. “How about being an infantryman? Why did you choose that?” A couple said they didn’t choose, the Corps chose for them, but most indicated that they wanted to be infantrymen.

Once you decided to be a Marine, they agreed, you might as well be infantry—that’s the real Marine Corps. Only 15 percent of all Marines belonged to the infantry. Not many of their high school classmates had joined the military, and practically none were in the infantry. So being a Marine rifleman meant belonging to a small, exclusive club.

There were two squads assigned to seize the oil pumping station and the other squad leader, Cpl. Alejandro Garcia,

nineteen, joined his friend Ferkovich for the final review. Garcia, as tall as Ferkovich, had a looser approach to life. He was from L.A. and on weekends drove there from the base to go dancing, he said, while “Ferk stays in the barracks and studies tactics.” The squad members nodded and laughed and Ferkovich, still serious, asked if we knew Colonel Boyd and about his theory.

Col. John Boyd, U.S. Air Force, was a fighter pilot who theorized that battalions and divisions could win battles the same way fighter pilots did: by turning inside the enemy’s OODA loop. In order to shoot down another aircraft in a dogfight, Boyd wrote, you have to Observe what is going on, then Orient yourself in the battle, then Decide what to do, and lastly Act before your opponent has completed his OODA loop. According to Boyd, a fighter pilot didn’t win by faster reflexes; he won because his reflexes were connected to a brain that thought faster than the opponent.

Marines like Ray were much taken with the theory. Getting inside Saddam’s OODA loop, Ray told the squad, was the key to a quick victory. Make him fight your fight; don’t get suckered into reacting and fighting his fight. For the squad, it should be the same. The mission of the squad was to seize the oil pumping station before Saddam’s men blew it up. If things seemed off kilter once the squad was inside the station, don’t wait for orders from anyone else. Secure the key elements—the manifolds, pump and power house. Every year about \$15 billion in oil exports went through that station. So don’t hesitate—grab control and Colonel Boyd would be proud of them. Hell, Ray might be proud of them.

Ferkovich’s squad sat in the dirt and went over the attack plan one more time while we listened. In all his firefights, Ray said that he had developed the habit of mentally running a video through his head, picturing what he expected to see. There was the least confusion when every rifleman had imagined—had thought through—exactly what he was going to do.

Ray and I felt at home sitting in the fighting holes with these tough, eager young men. It is a mystery why some are called to be grunts, to carry a rifle and an eighty-pound pack, to chew tobacco and swear and sweat and shoot and be refused a beer because of being underage. Although we didn't know it then, in the march up to Baghdad, the chances of becoming a casualty were one in 150 among Marines like this squad. In the U.S., the chances of a police officer becoming a casualty last year were one in 8,000. Being in the infantry was fifty times more dangerous than law enforcement. In March of 2003, it was the most dangerous job in America.

Some of this danger was due to neglect in the Pentagon budget. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld was constantly talking about "transforming" the military to be more high tech and agile, apparently unaware that a dramatic transformation had taken place since Vietnam. In preparing to attack Iraq, the Department of Defense possessed more combat aircraft than infantry squads and more combat pilots than infantry squad leaders. The "smart" bombs one aircraft dropped on one strike cost more than the equipment for an entire squad. In World War II, the physical risk to a pilot and to an infantryman were almost the same. Going into Iraq sixty years later, the rifleman was vastly more at risk. Technology had done little for him. Ray and I chatted with the squad and hefted their equipment. If we had the stamina, we could have picked up any pack and rifle and trudged off with them, forty years after Vietnam. No pilot from forty years ago would dare hop into the cockpit of a plane in 2003.

Less-than-cutting-edge equipment, though, did not faze Corporal Ferkovich and his squad. As far as they were concerned, the Marine Corps revolved around them. They believed they were the top tier of the Corps. Infantry was the billet most sought by Marine officers, and many were turned down. There were not enough spaces for the number

of volunteers. The prior Commandant of the Marine Corps, General J.L. Jones, had even signed his e-mails as "Rifleman."

Such prestige, however, did not translate into money. The average policeman in Indianapolis, for instance, earned \$36,000 after two years on the force. Corporal Ferkovich was earning \$20,000 after two years. But for Marines like Ferkovich, the opportunity to seize a multibillion-dollar pumping station was prestige enough, and he didn't want any cruise missile to land on Saddam's head and take away his squad's mission.

Now it was mission time, which meant proving time. We asked if everyone was set to cross the Line of Departure—to cross into Iraq itself. Nods and grins all around, except for the corpsman who said that he'd rather be back at the hospital. He had been sent to the squad three days ago and would stay because the squad might need him. But he hadn't signed up to be a rifleman and wouldn't mind if they called the whole war off.

"Well," Ray said, "one of us has some sense."

The U.S. Central Command in Florida, which had a forward headquarters in Qatar in the Persian Gulf, was responsible for planning and carrying out operations against Iraq. Desert Storm in 1991, or Gulf War I, as some called it, had left Saddam Hussein still in control of the country. Since then Central Command had been devising and revising plans for removing him. In August 2002, President Bush made it clear that Saddam must either disarm or be disarmed by force. Central Command's plan for applying force would send the U.S. Army into Iraq from the north through Turkey and the U.S. Marines from the south through Kuwait. Along with Saudi Arabia, Iraq had the potential to be the world's leading exporter of oil, primarily due to the rich Ar Rumaylah