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Updated 30 May 2003

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+1 (703) 428-0711**Presenter:** Marine Corps Lt. Gen. James Conway

Friday, May 30, 2003

First Marine Expeditionary Force Commander Live Briefing from Iraq

(Videoteleconference briefing on the involvement of the First Marine Expeditionary Force in Operation Iraqi Freedom and in post-war stabilization efforts from Baghdad, Iraq. Participating were Bryan Whitman, deputy assistant secretary of defense for public affairs (media operations), and Lt. Gen. James Conway, commander, First Marine Expeditionary Force.)

(In progress.)

Whitman: -- from Baghdad. General Conway commands the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force, which is a 65,000-person division-size element, which is the largest warfighting unit that the Marine Corps assembled -- has assembled since Operation Desert Storm. It brought together Marines from both the Pacific and Atlantic forces, and as all of you had followed, had tremendous success during combat operations. And many of those Marines are still in the country as the stabilization efforts continue.

And with that, General, I believe you have a few things you'd like to say before we start taking questions.

Conway: I do. Thank you for the introduction.



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Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, and thank you for the opportunity to answer questions about my Marines and sailors. Just seven to 10 weeks ago, the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force [MEF], consisting of about 85,000 U.S. and British troops, was accomplishing feats in combat never envisioned for a force whose origins were from the sea. Marine Air was smashing Iraqi armor well in advance of attacking troops, flying columns of armor were slashing through and around the area defenses, and our support troops were making 22-hour trips one way to supply the materiel of war.

The war now is essentially over. Those courageous Marine aviators are now flying Iraqi children injured in automobile accidents to treatment centers. The armor has been parked, and our ground troops are engaged in building police forces and repairing schoolhouses. Our support troops are clearing unexploded ordnance, providing Iraqi farmers with diesel fuel and rebuilding bridges destroyed during the fighting.

Our Marines were extremely innovative and adaptive during the campaign, and they've carried those characteristics into the aftermath. Our current mission is to provide a safe and secure environment in order to eventually be able to turn Iraq back over to the Iraqis.

As Marines, we go about that tasking in a no-nonsense manner. What we tell the Iraqis is that we're here to do a job. Don't get in our way, and nobody will get hurt; indeed, you will like the results. Interfere with our efforts or threaten our forces in any way, and there will be consequences.

Thus far, we are pleased to say that the people of southern Iraq have generally welcomed our presence in the cities and in the countryside. In fact, since the MEF left Baghdad some five weeks ago, there's been no significant incidents that have resulted in a Marine or sailor being seriously wounded or killed. Today, with the help of non-governmental organizations, Army civil affairs teams, and multiple nations that will soon join the coalition, we go about creating -- recreating a quality of life.

We recently took pride in our ability to rapidly topple the regime of a vicious dictator. Today we take pride in our ability to offer a bright and prosperous future to the children of Iraq.

Ladies and gentlemen, I'd be happy to take questions.

Whitman: General, I'm not sure -- we're not getting real good audio. If there's any way to move the microphone a little closer to you, that would be good.

And we'll start here with Charlie Aldinger. Please go ahead and give your name and your news organization so the general knows who he's talking to.

Q: (Off mike.) -- how many Marines are still in Iraq now? And General Hagee said last week that plans were to have all of the Marines out of Iraq by the end of August. He said that any final decision would be made by General Franks. I wonder how that schedule looks now. Is it possible, given the problems you're having there and the attacks, that you'll have all your Marines out by the end of August?

Conway: Charlie, to answer your first question, we still have about forty -- maybe 41,000 Marines in Iraq and in Kuwait. We've always had a significant chunk of the Expeditionary Force in Kuwait, because now I can say that our aviation was based there for the war, as well as a rear command post, as well as some of our logistics folks that were forcing material forward from the piers and the airports.

In terms of the second question, we don't know the answer to that yet. We're examining right now the results of these last series of attacks. I will tell you, as I mentioned in my comments earlier, that things have been fairly quiet in the South. But in conjunction with our adjacent and higher headquarters, we're taking a look, even as we speak, at what our force structure needs to be in the weeks, and perhaps months, to come.

We do feel that when we leave, we will not be able to leave a void. So we very much may be dependent upon the arrival of additional coalition forces to relieve in place with us and allow the Marines to go home.

Q: General, this is Thelma LeBrecht with AP Broadcast.

And could I also make a request again; if there's any way you can get that mike wherever you're speaking into closer to you.

And if I could just follow up a little bit on Charlie's question. What happens if the coalition forces, as we're now hearing, there are not enough international troops now stepping up to the plate? How do you foresee the U.S. military being able to contend with -- is it going to be a longer stay, do you think?

Conway: Pamela (sic), we're here to do a job, and we don't leave until the job is done. Now, there are pressures, of course, that I think it's fair to say the administration, the Department of Defense will experience in terms of getting our Marines out of the theater due to additional deployments that those Marines face. We have kept up our deployment routine for the entire time that we've been here.

And at this point, I have Marines who are in country now seven and eight months, so we do have some concern that they not be kept here any longer than must be the case, so that they can get home, enjoy their families and once again be prepared to go someplace else in the not-too-distant future.

Q: General, this is Bob Burns from Associated Press. Your comment about how it's been relatively quiet in the south; I'm wondering if you can elaborate on why you think it is that the Marines have encountered less violence. And are you doing something different than your Army folks are doing further to your north?

Conway: Bob, I think there's a number of things that contribute. One, of course, we're organized a little bit differently from the Army. We have a lot more infantry Marines in our regiments and in our division that are able to get boots on the ground, so to speak, and create perhaps a more diffused presence. I think that's one difference, perhaps, between us and the Army.

But I think we're also fortunate in that the south of Iraq has a much larger Shi'a population. And of course, as you know, they were very much downtrodden during the Saddam years. There are not as many Ba'athists, I think, remaining in the south as perhaps there are in the north, a lesser number of Sunnis, who were sympathetic to the regime.

So I think a number of factors pertain. I have been told by some of the local Iraqis that just being a Marine makes a difference; that the reputation somewhat speaks for itself and people don't want to be in our sector because they know if they get hit, they'll get hit pretty hard.

Q: General, this is Pam Hess with United Press International. I have two questions for you, if you have the time. The first is about the logistics. We saw, you know, a pretty amazing military campaign where you all moved very fast and over a very long way. And one of the things they said was that this was a real triumph of logistics. But I've talked to a bunch of returning Marines who recall going at least a week eating one MRE [Meals Ready to Eat] a day and having their water rationed. That doesn't really add up to a triumph of logistics to me. Could you explain what happened there and if that is an acceptable level of support, and how you might be looking to change that?

Conway: Yeah. Pam, let me say at the outset that I am so proud of my logisticians that I can probably not convey it in words. The Marine Corps is not designed or organized to go 600 miles deep into enemy territory. Our logistics are simply not built that way. We have tremendous reliance on our shipboard logistics. We essentially say that we come from the sea. That said, that was not

the CINCs [Commanders in Chief] or the CFLCC's [Coalition Forces Land Component Command] plan in this case, and so we were asked to execute something that was in excess of what we were built to do. With Army augmentation, however, and with, I think, some wise planning that tied our logistics to airfields along the avenues of approach, we made it work.

Now, if you ask me if every Marine went into the attack with a full tank of gas in his tank and three MREs in his pack and all the water that we might like to have, the answer is absolutely not, because we certainly stretched the rubber band. But that said, I think there was a level of comfort in the Marines in the combat units that as they crossed the line of departure in the morning, they could look over their shoulder and see a supply convoy arriving that would have those things for them by the end of the day.

So logistics never truly halted the attack, but based upon those supply lines that we faced, even doing the best job we could with emergency resupply via air and so forth, we were never rich in supplies. That was a conscious risk that we were willing to accept, and one in this case, I think, proved itself to be worth the risk. We felt that through speed, we could save lives. And we weren't willing to sacrifice that speed for the sake of full tanks and full packs.

Q: Hey, General, it's Mark Mazzetti with U.S. News. I hope you're doing well. Question: Talking to your staff toward the end of the war, they said that since the area you control is predominantly Shi'a, that they were concerned that -- of actions that Iran might take to sort of move over the border and try to establish sort of a base of influence in Iraq. Have you seen that at all since the war ended, or any actions by Iranian elements to move over the border and do that?

Conway: Hey, Mark, good seeing you again. But I'm sorry; now you all are breaking up. I got about 30 percent of your question. Could you please repeat it?

Q: Sure. I'll go a little more slowly, too. Talking to your guys during -- toward the end of the war, they were saying that since the area you control is predominantly Shi'a, they were concerned about actions Iran might take to move over the border and establish a little bit of a, you know, sphere of influence in eastern Iraq. And I'm wondering whether you've seen any of that since the end of the war or any actions by Iranian elements to do that?

Conway: Yeah, Mark. Got it that time. We have seen some of that. We have -- in fact, there are SCIRI personnel who -- and that acronym I'll provide to you -- but they are folks, they are Iraqis, who have spent time in Iran who are now coming home who are a political presence. And I think their beliefs are basically fundamentalist beliefs. The military arm of SCIRI is the Badr Corps. It

has a military connotation, but I will tell you that we have not seen any threat yet arising from them. That said, they are here in some numbers, we're keeping a close track on their activities and we will watch them with great interest in the days and weeks to come. At this point, they're playing by all the rules. And we have no reason to be convinced that they're doing things untoward that would cause us to react towards them in any way. SCIRI, by the way, stands for Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq.

Q: It's John McWethy with ABC News, General. You described stretching the rubber band; that there were times when your forces never had full packs, but the risk was worth the reward of speed and saving lives.

There are generals in uniform back here who are telling us privately that to stretch the rubber band was a high risk, and that had there been a bit more resistance, it could have turned very bad for U.S. Marines in particular, on that march to Baghdad.

Can you describe the measure, the level of risk that you did in fact take?

Conway: Yeah, that's a very perceptive question, John. And I think I can. As you all will recall, there was a halt, an operational halt, that allowed us to build supplies. We were well up Highway 1 at that point, still south of the Tigris River, at that point really making a feint on the underbelly of Baghdad. And we held forces in place for two or three days, allowing that rubber band to maybe become a little less taut, and to get some supplies built up to the point where we were comfortable that we weren't experiencing extreme risk.

While that was happening -- and you have to understand, I guess, some about how this MEF fights. But we have a tremendous air arm that was able to put about 300, 320 sorties a day on our enemies out in advance of our ground troops. So while we were stationary, we were, in fact, attacking with our air, taking maximum advantage of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities to determine what the enemy was that we faced.

And quite frankly, again, we weren't fully topped off with the supplies that we might like, but every indication that we had was that the enemy had been significantly pounded by our air, and our intelligence resources were telling us that he was not there in large numbers. So those two things combined told me, and I suspect my superiors, that it was a risk that was manageable and a risk that we could take, again, in order to generate the speed that we did.

Q: General, thanks for being with us. This is Hunter Keeter from Defense Daily. I wanted to ask you about the movement from the sea to marry the troops

up with their equipment. Could you just detail a little bit about that process from the Maritime preposition stocks that you met your troops with? And then talk a little bit about, if you would, what your assessment is of the future of that capability; where you would like to see it go, if you had to do this all over again with a little bit better capability.

Conway: Hunter, we have always felt in the Marine Corps that the MPS concept, Maritime Prepositioning Ship concept, is a real success story.

It proved to be so during the last Gulf War, to the extent, I think, the United States Army saw the value in it and it created a very similar capability, at least here in Southwest Asia.

This time through, it performed magnificently. We brought 11 ships in from two separate MPS squadrons, and the estimate was somewhere between 20 and 25 days for the off-load. We did it in 16. And we're extremely proud of our Marines and the process that allowed that to happen, because it gave us two full brigade sets of equipment on deck. And that did not include the Amphibious Task Forces, East and West, sailing with additional Marines, armor, helicopters, fixed-wing aircraft and those types of things. So, this Marine Expeditionary Force truly arrived from the sea.

Now, an important component of that is the support that we get from the United States Air Force in that they fly over large numbers of Marines, both with Air Force air and contract air, to link us up with that equipment and then move it into tactical assembly areas. But suffice it to say that we brought in about 60,000 Marines in about 45 days, once the Department of Defense and the administration decided that it was time to prop the force and make it ready.

Where we go from here is, I think, an interesting question. I will tell you that our planners at Headquarters Marine Corps are looking at even more efficient ways to organize the ships, and I think the commandant has made the decision that that will happen. What it basically involves is like types of ships in like squadrons. But I've got to tell you, this is a pretty tremendous capability right now, and I think any tweaking that we do will be pretty much on the margins, because now in two successive conflicts, it has truly proven its value.

Q: Good morning, General. Otto Kreisher with Copley News Service. The corps had about one-third of the ground combat forces during the war, and yet, you took half or slightly over half of the combat casualties. There's a question of whether that's, you know, Marine aggressiveness, or whether it was the fact that you got the hard -- the tough end of the stick; you had to fight your way through most of the cities while the Army was doing the sweep to Baghdad mostly

through the desert. What would you say about, you know, your ratio of casualties you took?

Conway: Otto, you broke up a little bit, but I think I have the essence of your question, so I'll answer what I think you said. If I'm off the mark, please ask it again.

From the outset, the Marine Expeditionary Force was a supporting attack. We had to cross one, two, three -- arguably, four rivers. We had an avenue of approach that Marine and Army planners both agreed was essentially a brigade-size avenue of approach, and we were putting, essentially, a reinforced division over it.

I asked my people in the end how many Iraqi divisions did we engage, and it's arguably somewhere between eight and 11. We always knew that An Nasiriyah was going to be a critical point on the battlefield; that our supply lines, up Highway 7 and across Highway 1, both cross the Euphrates River at An Nasiriyah. And we simply had to take that place and hold it in order for the 1st Marine Division to be able to sweep north, as it finally did.

It involved some close combat. And we saw that, I think, repeatedly as we attacked north; that we knocked out great formations of Iraqi armor, but the forces that we had come up against us were pretty much in the villages and towns along the single avenues of approach that we had that led into Baghdad. It was close-quarter fighting, in some cases hand-to-hand fighting. And I just think that a combination of things, that nature of close-in combat and the number of forces that we had to face on secondary avenues of approach to get to Baghdad, have led us to those numbers of casualties.

And let me tell you, we felt every one of them. I think based upon some of the equipment that we now have in the force, we're fortunate that they were not worse. We tried to ensure that every Marine had what we call a SAPI [small arms protective inserts] plate, an armor plate that goes on the front of the flak vest. It covers the vital parts of the upper torso. And we compute that we had somewhere between 25 and 30 strikes 762 or larger on the SAPI plates and they worked. And we think that they truly save lives.

Now, that's the question I think you asked. If it was different, please restate it.

Q General, Dale Eisman with the Virginian Pilot in Norfolk. You had a number of friendly fire incidents, and I'm thinking in particular of one near Nasiriyah; I think you had something like 30 Marines wounded. Can you tell us what you've learned about what might have been behind those incidents? Was

there a common thread running through them? And what steps you might be able to take in the future to further reduce friendly fire?

Conway: Dale, you just hit on what is probably my biggest disappointment of the war, and that is the amount of blue on blue, what we call blue on blue, fratricide in a lot of instances, that occurred.

I spoke to every formation before we crossed the line of departure, I spoke separately to the officers and I emphasized a number of things, but among them were the fact that our weapons are so accurate, are so deadly, that anymore, that when it goes off the rail or it goes out the tube, it's probably going to kill something. And so you've got to make certain that what you're shooting at is indeed the enemy.

We did have a large number of wounded at An Nasiriyah, based upon a friendly fire incident. Fortunately, no killed came out of that, that particular engagement. There is another one that's under investigation where we think that there may have been an airstrike roll in on our forces. And there are a number more, frankly, lesser in number, that still represent —

(Audio break due to loss of feed from Iraq).

(Pause.)

Whitman: (Referring to teleconference video feed.) It looks like he's frozen there, doesn't it?

Q: Yes.

Whitman: Let's see if we get him back in a second.

(Incidental chatter not transcribed.)

Whitman: If we have lost the signal, it requires to reboot, and rebooting is about a four-, five-minute process. So let's see if we've really been knocked off the air or not. We'll know here in a second.

(Pause.)

Whitman: (To staff.) Are we going to have to reboot?

Staff: No, sir. I think we're just going to be able to reconnect, redial.

Whitman: All right, well let's just stand fast a second, then.

(Pause while connection is restored. Incidental chatter not transcribed.)

Whitman: General Conway, can you hear me?

Conway: Yes, I can. Can you hear me?

Whitman: Yes, we can hear you fine now. We lost you for a moment. You were talking -- where we lost you, you were talking about friendly fire incidents, and you had talked about a possible aviation one. And then you said that there were a number of others that were being looked into or something, and that's where we lost you.

Conway: Okay. I went on to say that we had some devices that we used in this war. One was called Blue Force Tracker. It gave us position locations and identification on major units. It helped some, I think, with location and identification of friendly forces.

But what we truly need is something that can identify a friendly vehicle -- it either squawks or beeps or emits some sort of power source that tells a shooter -- an airplane or a tank or whatever -- that they're looking at a friendly piece of equipment. And I think that the -- we've been trying to develop that now ever since the Gulf War, without success, I might add. And the man that invents that, I think, will be very rich, indeed. Because it continues to be something that we see happen in the U.S. military, and it's really something that we've got to stop.

Q: General, this is Lisa Burgess with Stars and Stripes. It's a little bit difficult back here to get a sense of how the Iraqi people are reacting to the American force. Reading the newspapers in the last couple of days, it would seem that there's a growing resentment against what's being perceived as an occupation force. Can you give a sense of what you're seeing there, and whether there's been a change in the past week or so?

Conway: Lisa, I can speak for the southern region. And I can tell you that I still see that the reception that our Marines and sailors are receiving here is overwhelmingly positive. I fly over the landscape a lot, and we don't pass a village without little children, and oftentimes, adults waving at our helicopters. They wave at our helicopters more than the people in southern California wave at our helicopters, and that's because, I think, they're happy we're here.

We've been told by some sources that people want to see us go away, and of course sooner is better. A number more are saying, you know, we're afraid when

you leave that our freedoms will leave with you because there are bad people still there who would like to see other things happen aside from democratic principles and the ability to elect their leaders.

I met just this morning with about -- I don't know, 60, maybe 70 sheikhs, influential people who are tribal leaders throughout all of southern and central Iraq. And let me tell you, they are delighted that we're here. They're delighted with the progress that we're making, again, especially in the south. They want to complement our efforts as much as they possibly can. I think that they will probably -- they will be willing and happy to say goodbye to us, but that day is not yet. And I think that, again, the reception that our Marines receive day in and day out is just tremendously positive.

Q: General Conway, Barbara Starr from CNN. Even given the fact that you have a more -- what you describe as a more stable situation in the south, nonetheless, as a senior commander in Iraq, what are your thoughts specifically about what the U.S. military can do to get a handle on what appears to be a continuing series of random and sporadic attacks against U.S. forces in Iraq? What can be done to stop it, since it is so widespread and so sporadic?

Conway: Barbara, good seeing you again.

You've got some great people out here working on that very problem. I will tell you first of all how we handle it in the south. I mean, yesterday morning, we had a battalion-size attack on what we were told was a training area up in the very northern part of one of our provinces. So I think that any commander would much rather ferret out a threat based on solid intelligence and act on it quickly to eliminate it. You go preemptive and don't allow them a chance to finish training, in this case, perhaps disperse to various locations and then do the sniping and the ambushing and that type of thing that we've seen potentially in the north.

I think what we're seeing are a limited numbers of attacks that are, I think, in some cases being mischaracterized as how the whole nation is seeing our presence. I really don't think that there's anarchy in Iraq, to include northern Iraq. But there are specific individuals that are very aware of the fact that even a small-scale attack makes large-scale news; are taking advantage of that fact to create, I think, levels of overreaction in some cases, and will continue to do so because they don't want us to be here.

But I think from a U.S. military perspective, we have to keep doing the things that we're doing -- build the police forces, gain confidence in them; provide point security on key infrastructure, because these guys also know if they start tearing down infrastructure, it also will reflect badly on us. And there are places where

it's simply not guarded; you can't guard it everywhere. And then we have to be prepared to act quickly and severely where we see that armed people are resisting the future that we're trying to create for this country.

Whitman: Someone else?

Q: No.

Whitman: Okay. Go ahead, Pam.

Q: This is Pam Hess from UPI again. Just to tie up a couple of loose ends, could you tell us how many wounded or dead you might have had from friendly fire attacks? And could you give us an estimate of the number of SCIRI and Badr Corps personnel that are in your region that you know of?

Conway: Pam, on your first question, I can't give you an exact figure because those things are still under investigation. And the first thing the investigation has to determine is whether or not it was friendly fire. So, I can't give you a feel for that at this point. But I will tell you that one is one too many.

On the second issue, the numbers vary widely. We tend to think that in the southern area, there's probably less than 1,000 of the Badr Corps types. But again, that's not certain. We're told that X number will come in, perhaps, from Iran, but then will attempt to recruit X number more who may be sympathetic to their beliefs. And again, a Badr Corps individual isn't necessarily a bad guy. He doesn't become that until he does something again that goes against the rules that the Coalition Provisional Authority has posed, and then we would have to take action.

Q: General, it's Mark Mazzetti again. The goal of the military campaign in Iraq was not just regime change, but also to get rid of the weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. And I'm wondering -- first of all, are you surprised that seven weeks on, no weapons caches have been found? And what is your sense of the status of the WMD programs, having been on the ground in Iraq for so long? And, you know, what may have happened to the weapons?

Conway: Mark, you may recall as we moved north, there were a couple of times there where everybody was sleeping with their boots on and with their gas masks pretty close. So, one of the real surprises I think we all experienced was that we did not get struck with weapons of mass destruction as we crossed the Euphrates or even as we crossed the Tigris and went up against Republican Guard divisions.

In terms of what we're doing about it now, we continue to contribute our part in the south against SSEs -- sensitive sites, if you will -- that may yield weapons of mass destruction. We've put teams on virtually every one that intelligence or local Iraqis or any other means has pointed out to us as perhaps might be containing weapons of mass destruction, or residuals of those kinds of things or whatever.

So we continue to join in the search to try to ferret it out.

I can't answer your question in terms of what may have happened to it. I don't think that we've given up on the search yet. And I think if you're tracking the high-value target captures, like all of us are, the interrogations that followed, I think that the day might well come when we ask the right question of the right person and we open a panacea of weapons storage and that type of thing.

So seven weeks is probably not enough time to look at a country the size of California and come to the conclusion that they simply do not exist here, especially if you consider that the regime had ample experience attempting to hide those things as much as they were visited by the inspectors.

Q: General, Otto Kreisher again. You mentioned earlier that you had a battalion-size operation against what you thought was a training area, but you didn't say what you found there. What did you encounter on that raid?

Conway: Yes, sir. What our intelligence told us was that there were some Ba'ath Party members who were conducting training, with a good bit of shooting, with intent to potentially use that force in some negative way on down range. The battalion swept in at first light. They rolled up on five different objectives. They found a number of automatic weapons, a number of rocket-propelled grenades, which in tandem were probably the favorite weapons of the Fedayeen, certainly. They took 13 detainees, at least one of whom, a couple of the detainees pointed out to us fairly quickly, was a fairly high-level Ba'ath Party member; and, unfortunately, had to shoot two people who chose to resist their movement.

So we consider that a fairly successful sweep. It's a pattern that we will continue to follow. My division commander prefers a cordon in the early hours before first light and a first-light attack. First, we find some of these people don't get up too early around here, and that's a good thing; but secondly, we're able to be more discerning with our targets and we don't wind up shooting innocent people, ostensibly women and children, because of trying to do so during the hours of darkness.

Q: It's John McWethy from ABC again, General. Back to the weapons of mass destruction. You had, we were led to believe, fairly credible intelligence indicating that some of the units that you would be encountering had live weapons of mass destruction, probably CW shells, that had been moved forward to deal with your units. At this point, understanding that the exploitation of the sites is still under way and that there are a lot of unanswered questions, do you feel that the intel was just wrong? Do you feel that the enemy may not have ever had any of these things in forward units?

It seems inconceivable that if they had them in the forward units that you have not found something in a forward unit, and not buried away in some storage area. Help us out here.

Conway: John, as Mark could probably tell you, the fact that we were, again, not hit with weapons of mass destruction -- I think we had four triggers that we were prepared to defend ourselves against -- different times when we thought that the regime might try to employ the weapons of mass destruction against us. And we truly thought that they were distributed -- not to everybody, not to the regular army divisions that we saw in the south. But my personal belief was that they probably did reside in the Republican Guard units, and we encountered, arguably, three, maybe four, Republican Guard divisions on the way to Baghdad. But my personal belief was that the Republican Guard corps commander probably had release authority, and that we might well see them when we started to encounter his force or enter his area.

It was a surprise to me then, it remains a surprise to me now, that we have not uncovered weapons, as you say, in some of the forward dispersal sites. Again, believe me, it's not for lack of trying. We've been to virtually every ammunition supply point between the Kuwaiti border and Baghdad, but they're simply not there. Now, what that means in terms of intelligence failure, I think, is too strong a word to use at this point. What the regime was intending to do in terms of its use of the weapons, we thought we understood or we certainly had our best guess, our most dangerous, our most likely courses of action that the intelligence folks were giving us. We were simply wrong. But whether or not we're wrong at the national level, I think, still very much remains to be seen.

Whitman: General Conway, if I could thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to spend some time with us here today and to give us some insight into your operations and what you've been doing over there. Thank you very much.

Conway: Thank you, folks, for the great job you do. Have a nice day.

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