

Update 17 Sept 04

The First Team has been on the ground in our area of operations in western Al Anbar province for 3 weeks now. On 11 Sept we formally took control of the mission here and said goodbye to 3d Bn 7th Marines as they begin their trip home. We are grateful for their help in taking over the mission, and we wish them all a safe journey home and a happy reunion with their families.

While I cannot pass on specifics, the general locations of the battalion have not changed since my last update. Baker Company and their attachments are still at Camp Gannon in Husaybah, and the rest of the battalion task force is at Al Qaim working and operating in the towns of Karabilah, Sadah, and Ubaydi. While it is a fact that the areas we operate in are hostile and very hazardous, the Marines and sailors of the battalion are already highly proficient in identifying the dangers, protecting themselves and innocent Iraqis, and eliminating the threats. The courage, discipline, and skill of these young men reduces the risks and never ceases to impress me every day.

By now I'm sure you have all learned of the battalion's losses. On 3 Sept Capt Rowe, Lt Winchester, and LCpl Wilt were killed in action, and GySgt Trujillo and LCpl Laymanleary were wounded. On 15 Sept, LCpl Drew Uhles was also killed in action by an IED in Husaybah. In that same incident, LCpl Graham Walker was wounded, but thankfully he has already returned to the battalion and is expected to recover quickly. Our thoughts are always with our fallen heroes and our prayers go out to their families to grant them peace in their time of suffering. The loss of these men is painful for us all, but know that we will always carry on because that is what our comrades would want us to do. It is to honor them that we continue our mission.

Please understand that when events like this occur your Marine or sailor may not be able to contact you by phone or e-mail. We must restrict communications until after the next of kin have been properly notified. I know that nothing is more comforting for you as hearing your loved one's voice, so rest assured that I will not cut off communications unless it is absolutely necessary.

As always, you are all in our thoughts and your prayers sustain us. Every one of us looks forward to the day we return and are reunited with our families. Until then, thank you for your continuing support.

God bless you and  
Semper Fidelis

LtCol Chris Woodbridge