

THE BATTALION

Volume 109 • Issue 118 • 10 pages

Texas A&M University

www.thebatt.com

Tuesday, March 25, 2003



LARRY S. TALLEY • KRT CAMPUS

A Tomahawk land attack missile is launched from the guided missile cruiser USS Anzio Sunday in the eastern Mediterranean Sea.

War escalates as troops push further into Iraq

Drive to Baghdad slowed by sandstorm, resistance

By David Espo
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Aiming for Saddam Hussein's seat of power, U.S.-led warplanes and helicopters attacked Republican Guard units defending Baghdad on Monday while ground troops advanced to within 50 miles of the Iraqi capital. President Bush put a \$75 billion price tag on a down payment for the war.

The helicopter assault marked the first known engagement between forces in central Iraq, and many of the American craft were hit by Iraqi groundfire. One went down behind enemy lines — the cause was unknown — and the Pentagon said the two-person crew had been taken prisoner.

Five days into Operation Iraqi Freedom, resistance prevented American and British forces from securing the southern cities of Basra and An Nasiriyah and thwarted efforts to extinguish burning oil wells.

"These things are never easy," conceded British Prime Minister Tony Blair, on the day his country

suffered its first combat casualty of the war. "There will be some difficult times ahead but (the war) is going to plan despite the tragedies."

Saddam sought to rally his own country in a televised appearance. "Be patient, brothers, because God's victory will be ours soon," he said, appearing in full military garb and seeming more composed than in a taped appearance broadcast last week.

Despite Saddam's defiant pose, a military barracks in the northern part of the country was bombed, and Baghdad fell under renewed air attack by day and by night. Iraqis set up mortar positions south of the city and piled sandbags around government buildings and other strategic locations, in evident anticipation of a battle to come.

"Coalition forces are closing in on Baghdad," Maj. Gen. Stanley McChrystal told reporters at the Pentagon.

U.S. officials said they believe Iraq is more likely to use chemical or biological weapons against coalition troops the closer they get to Baghdad. The Iraqi Republican Guard controls

the bulk of Iraq's chemical weaponry, most of which can be fired from artillery guns or short-range rocket launchers, according to U.S. officials.

U.S. Apache helicopters attacked Saddam's Republican Guard forces arrayed around Baghdad while an official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said a "large portion" of the day's bombing runs — there were more than 1,500 sorties over Iraq — were dedicated to hitting the same units.

The Apaches encountered heavy groundfire during their assault on the Medina armored division, but the helicopters managed to kill about 10 Iraqi tanks before cutting off their attack.

The Pentagon says 80 percent of its bombs and missiles are precision-guided, but Iraq claimed that 58 civilians had been killed Sunday and 469 injured. It did not give any figures for military deaths.

Heavy fighting continued Monday in An Nasiriyah, which is important because of its bridges across the Euphrates which could be used by

See **Fighting** on page 2

Crowd gathers in support of American troops

By Hedish Connor
THE BATTALION

Students and residents of the Bryan-College Station area gathered in the Academic Plaza Monday to express their support for troops in Iraq.

The "Patriots for America," organized by sophomores Justin Decker and Lindsey Arms, planned the event after hearing students say that they wanted a rally showing support for U.S. troops. The rally was partly in response to antiwar rallies held on campus.

The protesters were not necessarily supportive of the war or President George W.

Bush. Instead, the emphasis was on the troops, Decker said.

The Patriots passed out yellow ribbons to students and had poster boards that students could write on to send to troops based in Kuwait.

Protesters also held American flags and spoke with students who stopped by the free speech area, while children sang patriotic tunes.

Decker said because of the rise in the number of antiwar protests, he wanted to give students an opportunity to show their support of the troops even if they do not agree with the war.

Lindsey Arms, a political science major and co-organizer of the rally, said the rally

intended to send a message of support. She said the recent war protests around the country give the wrong idea of patriotism.

"I feel it's great to show freedom of speech, but I know of some (protests) around the country that are less patriotic, like jumping off the Golden Gate Bridge and smashing in windows," Arms said. "I feel there is a more peaceful way."

Michelle Aucoin, a resident of College Station, said she is not in favor of war, but was at the rally because she supports removing Saddam Hussein and his regime.

"People have been disrespectful to our troops," she said, "and I wanted to neutralize that effort that has been highly publicized."



JOHN C. LIVAS • THE BATTALION

College Station resident Mary Mickler, 8, waves a flag in support of the U.S. troops. The patriotic rally was held in front of the Lawrence Sullivan Ross statue in the Academic plaza on Monday.

Candidates form political bloc, pledging reform

By Rolando Garcia
THE BATTALION

In a rare development for Texas A&M student body elections, 54 Student Senate candidates, more than half of those running for the position, have coalesced into a political bloc and are pledging reform of student government.

"The candidates in our group are serious about change," said Kerri Ward, leader of the group and a student senator. "For too long (the Student Government Association) has not been representing students' views."

The bloc has pledged its support for student body president candidate Luke Cheatham, who Ward said shares the group's commitment to change.

"We believe in Luke's vision of action, not words," said Ward, a freshman marketing major.

Cheatham said the coalition of senate candidates is an indication that many students are unhappy with student government and want student leaders who will voice students' views to administrators.

"The days of complacent representation are over," said Cheatham, a senior civil engineering major.

However, some in SGA say they are wary of blocs promising change. Kevin Capps, a student senator, said Ward's group does not seem to have any specific policy goals.

"The campaign is not about clichés. Students want serious proposals," said Capps, a junior history major and chair of the Student Senate's rules and regulations committee.

Having a bloc in the senate committed to the same goals can

make it easier to move ahead with an agenda, but can also stifle opposing viewpoints, Capps said.

Bobby Tucker, adviser for SGA, said this is only the second time in recent election history that candidates are running as a bloc in student body elections. Two years ago a group called Pro Traditions won enough seats to control the senate. The bloc's central issue was bringing back Bonfire.

"When they realized they couldn't do anything on (Bonfire), it fell apart, and the year was not very productive," Tucker said.

Candidates for Student Senate often do not realize that they have little real power to bring about change, and can only serve as an advocate for students to administrators, Tucker said.

Voting will take place Wednesday and Thursday at various campus locations and online at vote.tamu.edu.

Maroon Party encourages involvement in city politics

By Molly Cain
THE BATTALION

A Texas A&M student group is attempting to channel the enthusiasm put into student body elections to local government, where it says student interests are underrepresented.

Aggies for Democracy, an organization aimed at energizing the student body to actively participate in local government, was created last fall to counteract the apathy that many students have toward issues outside of campus. According to its mission statement, AFD, or the Maroon Party, wants to use the large student population as a powerful voice in College Station city affairs and to increase student participation in local elections.

Kyle Whatley, director of the Maroon Party, said he joined the group after realizing A&M students weren't capitalizing on their potential to make an impact in local politics.

"If students begin to voice their opinions and become active in local politics, they will begin to see their concerns addressed," he said.

Whatley, a senior political science major, said a key goal of the group is to make it easier for students to participate in local elections. The party is currently lobbying to place an early voting site on campus for this year's city elections.

"We stress early voting because they choose to hold local elections during our finals (exam) time," he said. "It is sometimes difficult for students to find time to vote."

If students vote in large numbers, local officials will take notice and be more receptive to students' concerns, Whatley said.

Given the track record for student apathy, Whatley says that the city has been reluctant to grant their request of a new poll site.

Thomas Brymer, College Station city manager, said that having an open and active relationship between students and local government is important to city officials.

"A&M students represent a unique flavor and

See **Politics** on page 2

ExCEL week coming to A&M

By Melissa McKeon
THE BATTALION

Excellence uniting Culture, Education and Leadership, a multi-faceted program for first-year students, is hosting its 16th annual ExCEL Week this week to raise awareness about their project.

ExCEL, a program based in the Department of Multicultural Services, attempts to ease the transition from high school and offers a retention program providing support, encouragement and links to A&M while preserving a student's cultural identity.

"The students that pass through the program have high academic achievement and a strong self-identity," said Lyndon Pryor, ExCEL student success program director.

Several activities are sched-

uled throughout the week for students to attend.

Tables providing detailed information about the program will be set up at Rudder Fountain today through Thursday.

An ExCEL informational will also be held Thursday at 7 p.m. in MSC 229. ExCEL team leader applications will be available for students to fill out.

Friday at the MSC Hullabaloo, bowling and games will be held by the Department of Multicultural Services.

"Incoming freshmen are assigned to a team for the year and specifically to two team mentors," Pryor said.

The ExCEL program begins each year with a two-day conference. This year's conference will be the weekend of August 29-30.

At the conference, ExCEL students meet one another as

ExCEL week
Excellence Uniting Culture, Education and Leadership

Provides information and activities related to ExCEL, a guide for first-year minority students

Monday, March 24 - Friday, March 28

ExCEL informational

MSC • Thursday, 7 p.m.

Information Tables

Rudder Fountain • Monday - Thursday

SOURCE: DEPARTMENT OF MULTICULTURAL SERVICES

RUBEN DELUNA

well as their team mentors.

There will be keynote speakers and a football game for ExCEL students and mentors to attend together, Pryor said.

Ade Olaloko, a freshman biomedical sciences major, attended the conference after returning from Fish Camp and said students were counseled about what to expect during

See **ExCEL** on page 2