

# THE BATTALION

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## U.S. battles to clear way for Baghdad assault

By David Espo  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Army ground forces attacked Republican Guard units Tuesday near Karbala, scarcely 50 miles from Baghdad, part of around-the-clock combat pointing toward an assault on the capital. An American POW was rescued in Iraq.

Defense officials said Army units attacked elements of the Medina Division of the Republican Guard in the clash near Karbala, hitting an elite Iraqi force weakened by heavy air bombardment over several days.

Pfc. Jessica Lynch, a 19-year-old supply clerk from Palestine, W.Va., was freed after nine days in Iraqi hands. Military officials said she was rescued from an Iraqi hospital but gave no details of the rescue or her condition.

"Coalition forces have conducted a successful rescue mission of a U.S. Army prisoner of war held captive in Iraq," Brig. Gen. Vincent Brooks said at U.S. Central Command in Qatar. "The soldier has been returned to a coalition-controlled area."

The developments unfolded as huge explosions rocked Baghdad, Saddam Hussein's seat of power and site of repeated bombing in the two weeks of the war. Plumes of white smoke rose from the southern end of the Old Palace on the west bank of the Tigris River, home to a camp for the Republican Guard.

Saddam — through a spokesman — summoned his country to a "jihad," or holy war, against the invaders. But American and British officials used the occasion to raise fresh doubts about the fate of a man seen in public only on videotape since the war began.

The attack on forces near Karbala marked the first major ground battle against Saddam's Republican Guard, and capped a day of aggressive American and British military actions.

Marines staged a nighttime raid on Nasiriyah, a column of amphibious assault vehicles rolling into town under a moonless sky — and finding Iraqis had abandoned a huge, walled police compound.

In Basra, a city of 1.3 million, warplanes dropped 500-pound and 1,000-pound laser-guided bombs on an Iraqi intelligence complex in an effort to dislodge die-hard defenders who have kept British forces at bay for days.

"What you're seeing today on the battlefield in Iraq is a continuation of prepping the battlefield for a major encounter with the Republican Guard," said Navy Capt. Frank Thorp.

Commanders refused to say when that might come, or whether the attack near Karbala repre-

sented the beginning of a push toward the capital. But senior American officials said the ceaseless pounding on Saddam's elite Republican Guard was taking its toll. "Some of them have been degraded to pretty low percentages of combat capability, below 50 percent in ... at least two cases, and we continue to work on them," Gen. Richard Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said at the Pentagon.

Despite the summons to jihad issued in Saddam's name, British officials said two would-be suicide attackers had turned themselves in to troops in Umm Qasr. "They didn't want to be suicide bombers any more," said British Col. Steve Cox. "We are accommodating them."

Other British and American officials said there was a growing list of Iraqi civilians shedding their

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## Hijacker surrenders Cuban Airlines plane

By Erik Schelzig  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

KEY WEST, Fla. — In the second hijacking of a Cuban plane in as many weeks, a hijacker claiming to have two grenades surrendered an hour after forcing the aircraft to land in Florida with 32 people aboard.

The hijacker was carrying a little boy when he came off the Cuban Airlines plane at the Key West airport and was wearing a red windbreaker with the word "America" stitched in white on the back. He was taken into FBI custody. "He got off the plane with a child in his arms," Key West police spokesman Steve Torrence said. When he put the child down, "the little child grabbed his leg," he added.

The surrender ended a more than 12-hour ordeal spent largely at the Havana airport, where the hijacker demanded that the plane be refueled so it could reach Key West. He had insisted on continuing despite a U.S. official's warning that he would be prosecuted and denied asylum.

The man was identified as Adermis Wilson Gonzalez, 33,

said U.S. Attorney Marcos Jimenez, who added that the suspect would be charged with hijacking.

Gonzalez was traveling with his wife and 3-year-old son, Jimenez said. The FBI said the boy he was holding when he stepped off the plane was not his son.

FBI agent Hector Pesquera said translators planned to interview the 24 other passengers — 11 men, nine women and four children — and seven crew members.

Authorities found two fake grenades after using a bomb-sniffing dog to search the aircraft, Monroe County Sheriff Richard Roth said.

A search of Gonzalez's home in Cuba turned up four homemade grenades that had not been armed with explosives, according to a statement read on Cuba state television. The communique also said Gonzalez had been living on the small Isle of Youth, southwest of Cuba's main island.

It was unclear how someone could gotten the purported grenades through heavy security checks at Cuba's airports, especially less than two weeks after a successful hijacking.

Passengers left the plane not far from the parked Douglas DC-3 that was hijacked on March 19. Both hijackings took place on Cuban domestic flights from the Isle of Youth to the capital of Havana.

During the standoff at Havana's Jose Marti International Airport, about two dozen passengers, including a woman holding a small child, escaped the plane by jumping from the open back hatch of the Soviet-made AN-24 into the arms of emergency workers.

The FBI said the plane left Cuba despite attempts by U.S. Interests Section Chief James Cason to persuade the hijacker to surrender. Two F-16 Fighting

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## Fields of blue

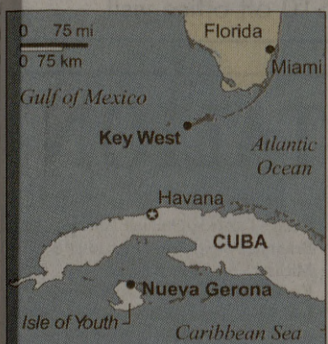


RANDAL FORD • THE BATTALION

Junior agricultural development major Dawn Rakowitz flips her hair before having her picture taken by friend and senior agricultural science major Aimee Kern in a patch of Texas bluebonnets off the side of the road at Wellborn and Harvey Mitchell Parkway. The bluebonnet is the Texas State Flower and blooms between March and May in attended areas.

## Cuban plane hijacked to Florida

A hijacked Cuban Airlines plane originating in Nueva Gerona, Cuba stopped in Havana to refuel before landing safely at Key West International Airport.



SOURCES: Associated Press; ESRI AP

## Mystery illness not yet a threat for U.S.

By Malcolm Ritter  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

An airliner from Asia was briefly halted on a tarmac in San Jose, Calif., on Tuesday because of a scare over a mystery illness — the most dramatic sign yet that the disease blamed for more than 60 deaths worldwide is provoking worry in the United States.

As it turned out, none of the five passengers who caused concern among the flight crew had the disease.

Seventy cases of the illness, severe acute respiratory syndrome, called SARS, are suspected in the United States, but no one has died. Worldwide there are about 1,800 cases.

The California airport incident was the first time a plane has been stopped in the United States for fear of passengers spreading the disease. Some passengers and health officials called it an overreaction.

U.S. health officials are not considering quarantines so far because the disease is not spreading as rapidly as in Asia and the related outbreak in Toronto. Health officials said Tuesday that two more people in Canada have died because of the illness, bringing the country's total deaths to six.

In Hong Kong, for example, some 240 residents of an apartment complex where SARS has spread were taken away to quarantine camps on Tuesday. But such measures don't yet appear warranted in the United States, said Tommy Thompson, secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and

Human Services.

"We are in the business of protecting the public health of all citizens," Thompson said Tuesday in Atlanta. "If there is a virus that is explosive...and the only way to control it is by quarantine, we have to consider it. But we're not there yet."

Health officials say there's no sign that SARS is spreading freely throughout any American community. The disease, which originated in Asia, seems to be confined mostly to international travelers, to health care workers who have taken care of SARS patients, and to those in close contact with

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## Study abroad still thriving at A&M

By Nicole M. Jones  
THE BATTALION

Indications of growing anti-American sentiment in Europe have not discouraged Texas A&M students from traveling there to study.

A recent Pew Research Center study reported that even though most Europeans enjoy American movies, music and television programs, they do not like the spread of American ideas and customs. However, students who have recently spent a semester studying in Europe said it was a welcoming and enlightening experience.

Sarah Phillips, a senior psychology

major, received 12 hours of course credit when she studied at the University of Copenhagen in Denmark in the fall of 2002.

Being the only Aggie in a group of 300 foreign students, Phillips said she never felt unsafe in Denmark or when she traveled to other parts of Europe.

"We did have several times that we were warned by the school to stay low-key on our American pride," Phillips said. "This mainly happened during the Sept. 11 anniversary and during the European Union convention, but nothing happened."

Study abroad, a hands-on education is

## Study Safely Abroad

Check [www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov) for up-to-date travel warnings



Check [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) for health issues around the world

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beneficial for students of all majors, especially those considering an occupation with an international focus, said Cathy Schutt, assistant director of international programs at A&M.

Laura Weber, an adviser in the study abroad office, said that Spanish-speaking countries are usually in the highest demand for students wishing to gain international

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## POW Lynch rescued

By Matt Kelley  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — American troops on Tuesday rescued Army Pfc. Jessica Lynch, who had been held as a prisoner of war in Iraq since she and other members of her unit were ambushed March 23, the Defense Department announced.

Lynch, 19, of Palestine, W.Va., had been missing with 11 other U.S. soldiers from the 507th Maintenance Company. The unit was ambushed near Nasiriyah after making a wrong turn during early fighting in the invasion of Iraq. Five other members of her unit were later shown on Iraqi television

answering questions from their Iraqi captors.

U.S. troops rescued Lynch near where her unit was ambushed, said Jean Offutt, a spokeswoman for Fort Bliss, Texas. The 507th Maintenance is based at Fort Bliss.

Lynch had been listed as missing in action but was identified by the Pentagon Tuesday as a POW. She was not among the seven U.S. soldiers — including the five from the 507th shown on television — formally listed as prisoners of war.

Offutt said she did not know whether Lynch had been wounded or when she might return to

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