

Thursday, November 13, 2003

THE BATTALION

# Truck bomb strikes Italian base, 26 die

By Slobodan Lekic  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS



SOURCES: Associated Press; ESRI

NASIRIYAH, Iraq — A suicide bomber blew up a truck packed with explosives at an Italian paramilitary base Wednesday, killing at least 26 people. The United States struck at the Iraqi insurgency hours later, destroying a warehouse in Baghdad and chasing attackers who were seen firing mortars.

The Nasiriyah attack was the deadliest against an American ally since the occupation began and appeared to send a message that international groups are not safe anywhere in Iraq. It came on the same day the chief U.S. administrator for Iraq went to the White House to put forth proposals on transferring more authority to the Iraqis.

Col. Gianfranco Scalas said 18 Italians were killed: 12 Carabinieri paramilitary police, four soldiers, a civilian working at the base and a documentary filmmaker. A spokesman for the U.S.-led coalition said at least eight Iraqis also died. The bomber — whose nationality was not known — also died.

The blast wounded 79 people, 20 of them Italians, hospital sources and Italian officials said.

Italians were stunned by their nation's single worst military loss since World War II and its first in the Iraq campaign.

Italian Premier Silvio Berlusconi pledged that Italy's mission in Iraq would not be derailed. Opposition leaders who opposed the deployment to post-war Iraq called on the government to withdraw the contingent.

Jalal Talabani, the head of the Iraqi Governing Council, called the slain Italians "martyrs of the fight for the freedom of Iraq."

Witnesses said the decoy car ran a roadblock in front of a square where the Italian barracks was located. Guards opened fire but as the vehicle sped away, the fuel tanker approached from the opposite direction and rammed into the gate of the building before exploding.

Italian Defense Minister Antonio Martino said the truck, followed by an armored car, approached the compound at high speed. Gunmen inside one of the vehicles opened fire at Italian troops guarding the entrance, he said. The guards returned fire, but the vehicle plowed through the gate, and then exploded, he added.

It was the 13th vehicle bombed in Iraq since Aug. 7, when a car exploded at the Jordanian Embassy in Baghdad, killing at least 19 people. Wednesday's blast from the estimated 650 pounds of explosives collapsed all three stories of the building, gouged a 6-foot-deep crater in front of it, and set fire to parked cars.

"This is terrorism, pure and simple," Scalas said. The attack had an immediate

affect on deployment plans among U.S. allies. Portugal said it was sending 128 elite police officers originally slated for Nasiriyah to Basra instead. And Japan said it was postponing its first dispatch of troops until sometime next year instead of by the end of 2003.

"The facility is a known meeting, planning, storage and rendezvous point for belligerent elements currently conducting attacks on coalition forces and infrastructure," the Pentagon said.

The mission was part of "Operation Iron Hammer," a new "get tough" policy for confronting insurgents.

Also Wednesday, troops in Baghdad spotted attackers firing mortars, a statement from the 1st Armored Division said. The attackers fled in a van, making several stops as they tried to evade pursuing ground troops.

An Apache helicopter gunship discovered the van heading out of the city near the Abu Ghraib suburb and opened fire, disabling the vehicle and killing two of the occupants, the statement said. Three occupants were wounded and five others were captured.

Troops searching the first place where the van stopped found an 82mm mortar launch tube, the statement said. Searches of the other sites continued.

President Bush met with top foreign advisers and chief Iraq administrator L. Paul Bremer on Wednesday to discuss the strategies to accelerate the transfer of power in Baghdad and the deteriorating security situation.

"We have said from the outset that we wanted to transfer authority to the Iraqis as quickly as they were able to assume it, and that is what we have done," Bremer said in Washington. "We have been moving forward on ways to continue to transfer authority to the Iraqis as they are ready for it."

Secretary of State Colin Powell said there will be "ups and downs in attitudes and feelings. We will remain long enough to make sure the Iraqis have the opportunity to put in place a government that is democratic."

Italy has sent about 2,300 troops to help rebuild Iraq. About 340 Carabinieri are based in Nasiriyah, along with 110 Romanians. No Romanians were reported wounded in Wednesday's attack.

## McInnis

Continued from page 1A

that will enrich the living environment of McInnis Hall by providing more opportunities for studying and programming with residents of other halls."

At the end of the trial semester, the visitation policy will be reviewed by McInnis Hall Council and Staff and RHA. If the visitation policy is deemed successful at the end of the semester, recommendations will then be made to Sasse and Kibler to continue the policy.

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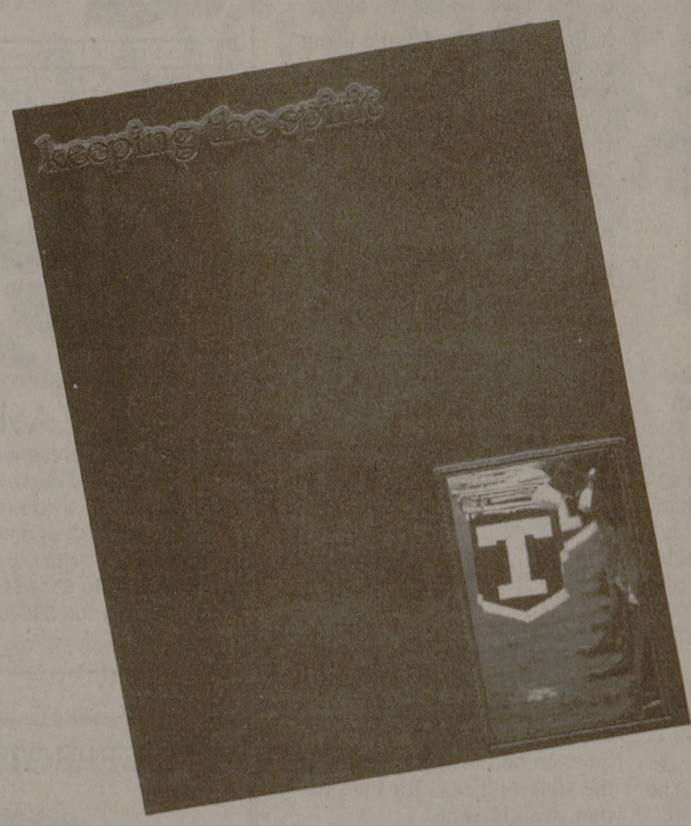
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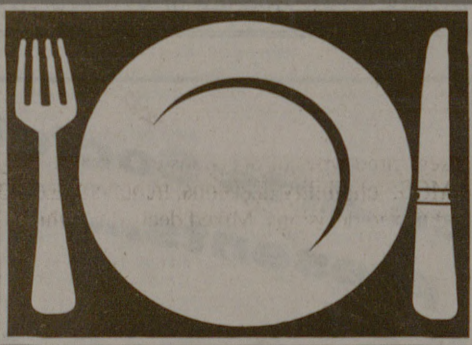
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