U.S. troops confront deadliest battles yet

As many as 9 soldiers killed when Iraqi forces faked surrender, attacked

The Associated Press

AN NASIRIYAH, Iraq — U.S.-led forces suffered their worst casualties of the war yesterday in two bloody battles near An Nasiriyah that raged for hours before Iraqi resistance was vanquished. Marines said they would move around the city rather than march through it on the road to Baghdad.

The battles at An Nasiriyah drew some attention from the relentless advance of the U.S.-led forces, now less than 100 miles from Baghdad after four days of the ground war. Scores of American military personnel landed in Kurdish territory, as the move to open a northern front gathered momentum from the relentless advance of the U.S.-led juggernaut sustained its worst casualties so far.

And in the face of that resistance, Marine officials said they expected to sidestep An Nasiriyah for hours before Iraqi resistance was vanquished.

"I think we’re advancing more rapidly than anyone could have expected," said U.S. Maj. Gen. Daniel P. Leaf, who coordinates the coalition’s air campaign.

But at An Nasiriyah — on the Euphrates River 233 miles southeast of Baghdad, near the ancient town of Ur, birthplace of the patriarch Abraham — the allied juggernaut sustained its worst casualties so far.

"Iraqi Television." The scenes of interrogators questioning four men and a woman were broadcast by the Arab satellite station Al-Jazeera with footage from state-controlled Iraqi television. Each was interviewed individually. They spoke into a microphone labeled "Iraq Television."

A senior defense official said the Pentagon did not know precisely how many captives there might be, and declined to identify the unit involved so as not to panic soldiers’ families. Some Iraqi soldiers acted as though they wanted to surrender, then opened fire, the official said.

Al-Jazeera quoted unidentified Iraqi officials as saying the Iraqis are using a defensive tactic of falling back, allowing their enemy to overextend itself and become vulnerable to attack behind the lines.

"I don’t think people were that concerned (about the war), they were more concerned about getting into the country," said Michael Tankenoff, an undeclared freshman.

Richard was originally in San Francisco for involvement in an anti-war protest where all of the more than 300 protesters were arrested. Richards was involved in the protest after interrogations and streets in the city were stepped by the masses of people.

"I intend to be involved in a number of acts of civil disobedience in the weeks to come," he said.

In Tucson, a visible outcry against the war is displayed on “A” Mountain. The “A,” which was painted green last week in honor of St. Patrick’s Day, is now black. A group called “People Against Imperialism” claimed responsibility for the action.

"There were a couple of different moods," said peace activist Rachel Wilson, a research technician in the Speech and Hearing Laboratory.

"There was extreme despair because we had actually invaded Iraq, but also tremendous power to have us all down there."

"More than 300 anti-war protesters flooded the downtown area, in addi-