



Subject: Thoughts from a Marine

Hello to all my fellow gunners, military buffs, veterans and interested guys. A couple of weekends ago I got to spend time with my son Jordan, who was on his first leave since returning from Iraq. He is well (a little thin), and already bored. He will be returning to Iraq for a second tour in early '06 and has already re-enlisted early for 4 more years. He loves the Marine Corps and is actually looking forward to returning to Iraq. Jordan spent 7 months at "Camp Blue Diamond" in Ramadi. Aka: Fort Apache. He saw and did a lot and the following is what he told me about weapons, equipment, tactics and other miscellaneous info which may be of interest to you. Nothing is by any means classified. No politics here, just a Marine with a bird's eye view's opinions:

1) The M-16. The sand is everywhere. Jordan says you feel filthy 2 minutes after coming out of the shower. The M-4 carbine version is more popular because it's lighter and shorter, but it has jamming problems also. They like the ability to mount the various optical gun sights and weapons lights on the Picatinny rails, but the weapon itself is not great in a desert environment. They all hate the 5.56mm (.223) round. Poor penetration on the cinderblock structure common over there and even torso hits can't be reliably counted on to put the enemy down. Fun fact: Random autopsies on dead insurgents show a high level of opiate use.

2) The M243 SAW (squad assault weapon): 223 cal. Drum fed light machine gun. Big thumbs down, universally considered a piece of shit. Chronic jamming problems, most of which require partial disassembly. (That's fun in the middle of a firefight).

3) The M9 Beretta 9mm: Mixed bag. Good gun; performs well in desert environment; but they all hate the 9mm cartridge. The use of handguns for self-defense is actually fairly common. Same old story on the 9mm: Bad guys hit multiple times and still in the fight.

4) Mossberg 12ga. Military shotgun: Works well, used frequently for clearing houses to good effect.

5) The M240 Machine Gun: 7.62 NATO (.308) cal. belt fed machine gun, developed to replace the old M-60 (what a beautiful weapon that was!!). Thumbs up. Accurate, reliable, and the 7.62 round puts 'em down. Originally developed as a vehicle mounted weapon, more and more are being dismounted and taken into the field by infantry. The 7.62 round chews up the structure over there.

6) The M2 .50 cal heavy machine gun: Thumbs way, way up. "Ma deuce" is still worth her considerable weight in gold. The ultimate fight stopper puts their dicks in the dirt every time. The most coveted weapon in-theater.

7) The .45 pistol: Thumbs up. Still the best pistol round out there. Everybody authorized to carry a sidearm is trying to get his or her hands on one. With few exceptions, can

reliably be expected to put 'em down with a torso hit. The special ops guys (who are doing most of the pistol work) use the HK military model and supposedly love it. The old government model .45's are being re-issued en masse.

8) The M-14: Thumbs up. They are being re-issued in bulk, mostly in a modified version to special ops guys. Modifications include lightweight Kevlar stocks and low power red dot or ACOG sights. Very reliable in the sandy environment, and they love the 7.62 round.

9) The Barrett .50 cal sniper rifle: Thumbs way up. Spectacular range and accuracy and hits like a freight train. Used frequently to take out vehicle suicide bombers (we actually stop a lot of them) and barricaded enemy. Definitely here to stay.

10) The M24 sniper rifle: Thumbs up. Mostly in .308 but some in 300 win mag. Heavily modified Remington 700's. Great performance. Snipers have been used heavily to great effect. Rumor has it that a marine sniper on his third tour in Anbar province has actually exceeded Carlos Hathcock's record for confirmed kills with OVER 100.

11) The new body armor: Thumbs up. Relatively light at approx. 6 lbs. and can reliably be expected to soak up small shrapnel and even will stop an AK-47 round. The bad news: Hot as shit to wear, almost unbearable in the summer heat (which averages over 120 degrees). Also, the enemy now goes for head shots whenever possible. All the bullshit about the "old" body armor making our guys vulnerable to the IED's was a non-starter. The IED explosions are enormous and body armor doesn't make any difference at all in most cases.

12) Night Vision and Infrared Equipment: Thumbs way up. Spectacular performance. Our guys see in the dark and own the night, period. Very little enemy action after evening prayers. More and more enemy being whacked at night during movement by our hunter-killer teams. We've all seen the videos.

13) Lights: Thumbs up. Most of the weapon mounted and personal lights are Surefires, and the troops love 'em. Invaluable for night urban operations. Jordan carried a \$34 Surefire G2 on a neck lanyard and loved it.

I cant help but notice that most of the good fighting weapons and ordnance are 50 or more years old!!!!!!!!!! With all our technology, it's the WWII and Vietnam era weapons that everybody wants!!!! The infantry fighting is frequent, up close and brutal. No quarter is given or shown.

Bad guy weapons:

1) Mostly AK 47's . The entire country is an arsenal. Works better in the desert than the M16 and the .308 Russian round kills reliably. PKM belt fed light machine guns are also common and effective. Luckily, the enemy mostly shoots like shit. Undisciplined "spray and pray" type fire. However, they are seeing more and more precision weapons,

especially sniper rifles. (Iran, again) Fun fact: Captured enemy have apparently marveled at the marksmanship of our guys and how hard they fight. They are apparently told in Jihad school that the Americans rely solely on technology, and can be easily beaten in close quarters combat for their lack of toughness. Let's just say they know better now.

2) The RPG: Probably the infantry weapon most feared by our guys. Simple, reliable and as common as dog shit. The enemy responded to our up-armored humvees by aiming at the windshields, often at point blank range. Still killing a lot of our guys.

3) The IED: The biggest killer of all. Can be anything from old Soviet anti-armor mines to jury-rigged artillery shells. A lot found in Jordan's area were in abandoned cars. The enemy would take 2 or 3 155mm artillery shells and wire them together. Most were detonated by cell phone, and the explosions are enormous. You're not safe in any vehicle, even an M1 tank. Driving is by far the most dangerous thing our guys do over there. Lately, they are much more sophisticated "shape charge" (Iranian) specifically designed to penetrate armor. Fact: Most of the ready-made IED's are supplied by Iran, who is also providing terrorists (Hezbollah types) to train the insurgents in their use and tactics. That's why the attacks have been so deadly lately. Their concealment methods are ingenious, the latest being shape charges in Styrofoam containers spray painted to look like the cinderblocks that litter all Iraqi roads. We find about 40% before they detonate, and the bomb disposal guys are unsung heroes of this war.

4) Mortars and rockets: Very prevalent. The soviet era 122mm rockets (with an 18km range) are becoming more prevalent. One of Jordan's NCO's lost a leg to one. These weapons cause a lot of damage "inside the wire". Jordan's base was hit almost daily his entire time there by mortar and rocket fire, often at night to disrupt sleep patterns and cause fatigue (It did). More of a psychological weapon than anything else. The enemy mortar teams would jump out of vehicles, fire a few rounds, and then haul ass in a matter of seconds.

5) Bad guy technology: Simple yet effective. Most communication is by cell and satellite phones, and also by email on laptops. They use handheld GPS units for navigation and "Google earth" for overhead views of our positions. Their weapons are good, if not fancy, and prevalent. Their explosives and bomb technology is TOP OF THE LINE. Night vision is rare. They are very careless with their equipment and the captured GPS units and laptops are treasure troves of Intel when captured.

Who are the bad guys?:

Most of the carnage is caused by the Zarqawi Al Qaeda group. They operate mostly in Anbar province (Fallujah and Ramadi). These are mostly "foreigners", non-Iraqi Sunni Arab Jihadist from all over the Muslim world (and Europe). Most enter Iraq through Syria (with, of course, the knowledge and complicity of the Syrian govt.) , and then travel down the "rat line" which is the trail of towns along the Euphrates River that we've been hitting hard for the last few months. Some are virtually untrained young Jihadist that

often end up as suicide bombers or in "sacrifice squad". Most, however, are hard core terrorists from all the usual suspects (Al Qaeda, Hezbollah, Hamas etc.) These are the guys running around murdering civilians en masse and cutting heads off. The Chechens (many of whom are Caucasian), are supposedly the most ruthless and the best fighters. (they have been fighting the Russians for years). In the Baghdad area and south, most of the insurgents are Iranian inspired (and led) Iraqi Shiites. The Iranian Shiia have been very adept at infiltrating the Iraqi local governments, the police forces and the Army. They have had a massive spy and agitator network there since the Iran-Iraq war in the early 80's. Most of the Saddam loyalists were killed captured or gave up long ago.

#### Bad Guy Tactics:

When they are engaged on an infantry level they get their asses kicked every time. Brave, but stupid. Suicidal Banzai-type charges were very common earlier in the war and still occur. They will literally sacrifice 8-10 man teams in suicide squads by sending them screaming and firing Ak's and RPG's directly at our bases just to probe the defenses. They get mowed down like grass every time. (See the M2 and M240 above). Jordan's base was hit like this often. When engaged, they have a tendency to flee to the same building, probably for what they think will be a glorious last stand. Instead, we call in air and that's the end of that more often than not. These hole-ups are referred to as Alpha Whiskey Romeo's (Allah's Waiting Room). We have the laser guided ground-air thing down to a science. The fast mover's, mostly Marine F-18's, are taking an ever-increasing toll on the enemy. When caught out in the open, the helicopter gunships and AC-130 Spectre gunships cut them to ribbons with cannon and rocket fire, especially at night. Interestingly, artillery is hardly used at all. Fun fact: The enemy death toll is supposedly between 45-50 thousand. That is why we're seeing less and less infantry attacks and more IED, suicide bomber shit. The new strategy is simple: attrition.

The insurgent tactic most frustrating is their use of civilian non-combatants as cover. They know we do all we can to avoid civilian casualties and therefore schools, hospitals and (especially) Mosques are locations where they meet, stage for attacks, cache weapons and ammo and flee to when engaged. They have absolutely no regard whatsoever for civilian casualties. They will terrorize locals and murder without hesitation anyone believed to be sympathetic to the Americans or the new Iraqi govt. Kidnapping of family members (especially children) is common to influence people they are trying to influence but can't reach, such as local govt. officials, clerics, tribal leaders, etc.).

The first thing our guys are told is "don't get captured". They know that if captured they will be tortured and beheaded on the Internet. Zarqawi openly offers bounties for anyone who brings him a live American serviceman. This motivates the criminal element who otherwise don't give a shit about the war. A lot of the beheading victims were actually kidnapped by common criminals and sold to Zarqawi. As such, for our guys, every fight is to the death. Surrender is not an option.

The Iraqi's are a mixed bag. Some fight well, others aren't worth a shit. Most do okay with American support. Finding leaders is hard, but they are getting better. It is widely viewed that Zargawi's use of suicide bombers, en masse, against the civilian population was a serious tactical mistake. Many Iraqis were galvanized and the caliber of recruits in the Army and the police forces went up, along with their motivation. It also led to an exponential increase in good Intel because the Iraqis are sick of the insurgent attacks against civilians. The Kurds are solidly pro-American and fearless fighters.

According to Jordan, morale among our guys is very high. They not only believe they are winning, but that they are winning decisively. They are stunned and dismayed by what they see in the American press, whom they almost universally view as against them. The embedded reporters are despised and distrusted. They are inflicting casualties at a rate of 20-1 and then see shit like "Are we losing in Iraq" on TV and the print media. For the most part, they are satisfied with their equipment, food and leadership. Bottom line though, and they all say this, there are not enough guys there to drive the final stake through the heart of the insurgency, primarily because there aren't enough troops in-theater to shut down the borders with Iran and Syria. The Iranians and the Syrians just cant stand the thought of Iraq being an American ally (with, of course, permanent US bases there).

Anyway guys, that's it, hope you found it interesting, I sure did.

US Marine -- Iraq