



## **Office of the Chancellor**

**March 31, 2004 | Fallujah, Iraq**

Twenty-one years ago this week, four Americans were ambushed and killed in Fallujah. They, and we, the Marines of the First Marine Expeditionary Force, were there to do good on behalf of the people of Iraq—and those of Anbar Province, in particular. Suddenly, we found ourselves in a significant battle with a sizable force of violent extremists who controlled the city.

I was south of Fallujah, visiting a distant outpost, when I first heard of the attack. By the time I made it back to our command post, footage of the attack was on television. The mob. The atrocity. All in full display. The Marines of the First Marine Expeditionary Force, First Marine Division, First Marine Regiment, and those of our Second Battalion, First Marines were not going to let the atrocity stand. By nightfall, we were making plans to bring the attackers to justice.

We were committed to our Division Commander's direction to be “no better friend, and no worse enemy.”

A small group of us recovered the contractors' remains, shielding others from that horrific task. We transferred the fallen with dignity, and with the knowledge they would get back to their families. We made ready to attack deeply into the city of Fallujah, prevent the escape of those who perpetrated the atrocity, and bring them to justice. We were ready for the realities of combat.

Our battalion had worked hard on our warfighting skills during a month in a combined arms exercise at 29 Palms and in weeks of counterinsurgency preparations. As importantly, I, our battalion staff, and all our company commanders were products of professional military education, wherein we were exposed to the theory and nature of war. We had amassed vicarious experiences that made us well prepared for what would come next.

We were well-trained. We were cohesive. We were men of violence—and we never became violent men. Our training and education had us prepared for the realities of the battlefield. For the next months, we fought in the streets of Fallujah and in its environs. The men of the battalion did remarkable deeds on behalf of their fellow Marines and Sailors, and they kept their honor clean while doing so.

I credit our training, and the commitment the Marine Corps makes to the education of its leaders, for our successes. We entered the fight with the “5000-year-old minds” of educated warriors, and left with additional experiences that will help us make future decisions. My experiences during the First Battle of Fallujah continue to shape how I think and lead.



As Chancellor of the College of International Security Affairs, I have the privilege of leading a college that prepares the next generation of expert national security practitioners—military, interagency, and international—for the complexities of irregular warfare.

We ask our students to build trust with classmates whose life experiences may be worlds apart. We have them confront the nature of war with intellectual rigor and human decency. We challenge students to think about legitimacy, grievance, and how to make moral, mental, and spiritual preparations for future warfighting success. Students consider the interplay of primordial violence, logic, and chance that is inherent in war. We add to their intellectual underpinnings, so, when it comes time to make warfighting decisions, they will do so from a better-informed perspective.

Many of our international fellows come from countries enmeshed in internal violence or regional conflicts, where ongoing warfare puts their comrades and innocent civilians at risk. While some of our American students have fought under such conditions, the all-consuming struggle for daily survival, perhaps during war, has not been the American experience. CISA students share their experiences of war through the lens of what our curriculum might mean for them in the future.

I believe when war comes—and for some it will—we must take our decades of education, training, and experience and use them to decide matters such as those we studied in the classroom, rehearsed in training, and mentally mapped through the vicarious experiences reading about war provides.

My reflection on the hard fighting of 2004, and the rigorous intellectual preparations that enabled our successes, are not just memories; they are foundational to how I lead, and how I hope to serve in this role.

I will be using this LinkedIn space to reflect on irregular warfare, and the responsibilities of military education in an uncertain world. I invite you to follow along, stay connected, and learn more about the work we do at CISA.

Gregg P. Olson, Chancellor

