

General who led US Marines in Iraq says “It’s fun to shoot some people”

Jerry White
7 February 2005

A three-star Marine general gave an indication of the homicidal ethos guiding the US occupation forces in Iraq and Afghanistan when he declared during a military conference in San Diego Tuesday that “It’s fun to shoot some people.”

Responding to a question about fighting the Iraqi resistance, Lieutenant General James N. Mattis—who is in charge of developing Marine war-fighting doctrine and tactics—said, “Actually, it’s a lot of fun to fight. You know, it’s a hell of a hoot. It’s fun to shoot some people. I’ll be right up front with you, I like brawling.”

The general, also known as “Mad Dog Mattis,” led the 1st Marine Division during the initial invasion of both Afghanistan and Iraq, and returned to command marines during the occupation of Iraq, where he led the initial attack on Fallujah in April 2004.

He presented the invasion of both countries as a civilizing mission, denounced Muslim men and reveled in killing them. “You go into Afghanistan,” he told his audience, and “you got guys who slap women around for five years because they didn’t wear a veil. You know, guys like that ain’t got no manhood left anyway. So it’s a hell of a lot of fun to shoot them.”

This last comment drew loud laughter and enthusiastic applause from the audience attending the panel discussion hosted by the Armed Forces Communications and Electronics Association.

Despite his yen for killing, Mattis warned that overwhelming military superiority had failed to subdue the popular resistance in Iraq. “Our very dominance of certain forms of warfare have driven the enemy into historic forms of warfare that we have not mastered,” he said. “Don’t patronize this enemy,” he said of the guerillas. “They mean business. They mean every word they say.... They’re killing us now. Their will is not broken.”

Presenting the fight as a twilight struggle between good and evil, Mattis insisted in order to defeat such an enemy the Marines had to recruit and train the “right people”—i.e., those who had no compunction about killing.

Striking a more “moderate” tone, Mattis concluded, “As much emotional...satisfaction as you may get from really whacking somebody, the main effort, ladies and gentlemen, is to diminish the conditions that drive people to sign up for these kind of insurgencies.”

Mattis’s “fun-to-kill” statements were caught on audio tape by San Diego news reporters and soon became headlines throughout the world, causing some embarrassment for the White House. Asked about the remarks at a press conference Thursday, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld dodged the question, saying he hadn’t read them yet.

The executive director of the Council on American-Islamic Relations called on the Pentagon to discipline Mattis, saying, “We do not need generals who treat the grim business of war as a sporting event. These disturbing remarks are indicative of an apparent indifference to the value of human life.”

In a statement issued Thursday, General Michael W. Hagee, commandant of the Marine Corps, said, “Lt. Gen. Mattis often speaks with a great deal of candor. I have counseled him concerning his remarks, and he agrees he should have chosen his words more carefully. While I understand that some people may take issue with the comments made by him,” Hagee claimed, “I also know he intended to reflect the unfortunate and harsh realities of war.”

Other military officials defended Mattis, saying his record showed that he “valued human life” and had instructed his troops to respect Islamic culture and protect innocents during military operations.

This is not the first controversy concerning Mattis. After his marines seized an airstrip in southern Afghanistan in November 2001 at the beginning of the war, the general declared, “The Marines have landed, and we now own a piece of Afghanistan.” Those comments reportedly caused consternation with Rumsfeld and other Pentagon officials, who were trying to present the war as “liberating” the Afghan people from the Taliban, not seizing land in a Muslim country.

Mattis was lauded as a hero for leading his 1st Marine Division in a high-speed advance from Kuwait to Baghdad in the early days of the Iraqi invasion. An account by two senior Marine Corps officers under his command gives a picture of the bloody methods he instructed soldiers to employ against anyone who resisted the US invasion.

Watch David North’s remarks commemorating 25 years of the *World Socialist Web Site* and donate today.

Writing in the 2003 book *The March Up: Taking Baghdad with the 1st Marine Division*, authors “Bing” West and Major General Ray Smith, said, “The *jihadis* asked no quarter and the Marines gave them none. The Marines knew the difference between these jihad fighters and the militia. Consequently the Marines shot them in the ditches and in the field. They threw grenades into the bulrushes and shot the fighters when they ran out. They threw grenades into the drainage pipes running under the road.... A few of the foreign fighters surrendered, but most did not—they had come to Iraq to die, and die they would. As one Marine put it, this was the perfect war. ‘They want to die, and we want to kill them.’ ”

The US media generally treated Mattis’s comments as an unfortunate slip-up rather than a revelation of the essence of American policy in Iraq and Afghanistan. Like the Pentagon, the media claimed that the general’s remarks were contradicted by his actions.

The *Los Angeles Times*, for instance, reported that Mattis had embraced a “hearts and minds” posture during his second tour in Iraq, laying down strict rules when troops could fire and required commanders to seek his permission before using artillery. After leading the initial assault on Fallujah in April 2004, Mattis reportedly counseled against a full-scale attack on the city, which came later in November 2004, under the direction of another military commander.

If Mattis is a more restrained officer, one can only imagine the degree of bloodthirstiness that permeates the military command in the face of the growing insurgency and increasing popular demand that US troops leave Iraq.

Fear and racist hatred of Arabs has been deliberately inculcated by the Bush administration and the Pentagon from the beginning of its “war on terror” in order to dehumanize US soldiers and create the conditions for such atrocities as the torture in Abu Ghraib and the Afghan prisons and the destruction of Fallujah.

Last November, US Marine Colonel Gareth Brandl claimed that the sacking of Fallujah was necessary because Satan lived in the town of 300,000. “The marines that I have had wounded over the past five months have been attacked by a faceless enemy. But the enemy has got a face. He’s called Satan. He lives in Fallujah. And we’re going to destroy him,” BBC embedded reporter Paul Wood quoted Brandl as saying on the outskirts of Fallujah.

With its lies about weapons of mass destruction and terrorist connections exposed, the Bush administration is increasingly relying on the same racist and backward attitudes that have always been used to justify the colonial oppression of another people.



To contact the WSW and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)