

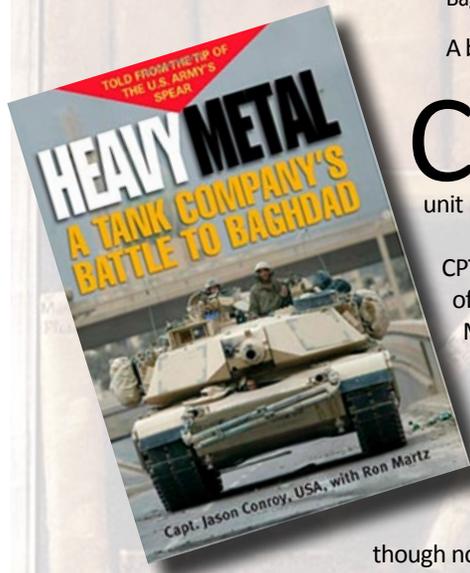
# TURNING PAGES

~ book reviews of interest to the aviation professional

## Heavy Metal: A Tank Company's Battle To Baghdad

By CPT Jason Conroy with Ron Martz. Potomac Books, Inc., 22841 Quicksilver Drive, Dulles, Virginia 20166. Available in hardcover, paperback, and Kindle at [http://www.amazon.com/Heavy-Metal-Companys-Battle-Baghdad/dp/1574888579#\\_](http://www.amazon.com/Heavy-Metal-Companys-Battle-Baghdad/dp/1574888579#_)

A book review by CPT Timothy Simmons



CPT Jason Conroy commanded C Company, Task Force 1-64 of the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division during the invasion of Iraq in 2003. A former Apache crew chief, CPT Conroy wrote *Heavy Metal* with the assistance of Ron Martz, a reporter embedded with the unit prior to and through the opening months of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

CPT Conroy opens the book with a summary of what he feels is the most important operation of his company's deployment—a tank on tank battle at point blank range in the town of Mahmudiyah. Within five minutes, Charlie Company destroyed seven T-72 tanks and two BMPs. This was the first time U.S. armored forces engaged in an urban tank battle since World War II. It was not a scenario for which they had trained. The remainder of the book provides a chronological narrative from pre-deployment preparation through the thunder run into Baghdad and redeployment. This detailed account focuses on the details of company command, tactical operations throughout the push, and the transition to stability and support operations. A recurring theme throughout the book, though not its focal point, is the benefit to U.S. forces provided by embedded reporters.

CPT Conroy describes intense training in Kuwait, almost of all of which focused on conventional tank operations—open area and long range tactical engagements. This reveals a fundamental oversight on the part of the planners to prepare the Soldiers for any sort of dismounted or stability operations. CPT Conroy tellingly notes that gaining “any sense of the people or the customs of the region was out of the question for us—we had little time to do anything but tend to our tanks.”

While logistics difficulties were inevitably encountered, the movement to Baghdad proved unexpectedly successful. However, even during this push, Charlie Company troops were already forced to improvise and perform tasks for which they had not trained. Iraqi fighters were blending into the civilian population and civilians were omnipresent on the battlefield. CPT Conroy and his Soldiers set up checkpoints, distributed aid, and gathered intelligence, all while maneuvering through enemy territory with minimal support. Their success in an urban environment during the initial “Thunder Run” into Baghdad, as a show of force, prompted division leadership to make the final push to Baghdad, an apparent instance of tactical success driving strategic decision-making. After taking Baghdad, even the task force commander, LTC Schwartz, observed that, at least with respect to securing buildings and sorting through potential intelligence documents, “we’ve gotten in a little over our heads here.”

Perhaps the most visible operation that Charlie Company took part in was securing the Iraq National Museum. CPT Conroy seems reluctant to emphasize this operation and writes defensively about the role of his company in defending Iraqi antiquities from Iraqi looters. Fighters used the museum as a fighting position and weapons cache, complicating the issue of security. This was clearly a reactionary operation after international media attention blamed the U.S. for what turned out to be exaggerated reports of looting. It reveals a lack of manpower and of planning.

CPT Conroy raises interesting questions without answering them satisfactorily, perhaps because these questions still have no satisfactory answers. Was the invasion justified? Were American Soldiers doing the right thing? That the successes of his company and others like it led to a 9-year occupation with what remains an uncertain outcome reflect failures of strategic planning far above the company level. Officers and Soldiers at all levels can learn a great deal from his account. At times a love letter to the M1A1 Abrams tank and a tribute to the courage and service of his Soldiers, *Heavy Metal* chronicles an important piece of history as it happened.

