

34th CMC Nominee: Visible, Candid Wartime Leader



SGT JOSEPH R. CHERELLY

The President has nominated LtGen James T. Conway to be the 34th CMC. LtGen Conway commanded I MEF in Iraq and is shown here during Operation Iraqi Freedom in Baghdad, April 11, 2003, conferring with Col Steven A. Hummer, Commanding Officer, Seventh Marine Regiment.

By R. R. Keene

Marines have been fighting in Iraq since 2003, ample time for the Corps to produce its own unique brand of skilled leaders, savvy at the latest techniques in the art of counterterrorism and counterinsurgency.

One of those most experienced, knowledgeable and not afraid to speak his mind Marines, Lieutenant General James T. Conway, 58, was nominated June 13 by President George W. Bush for promotion to the rank of general and to become the 34th Commandant of the Marine Corps.

LtGen Conway will replace Gen Michael W. Hagee, who is currently scheduled to retire in January. However, the *New York Times* reports that "if confirmed, General Conway could take command by November."

Insiders say LtGen Conway, currently serving as Director of Operations, J-3, Joint Staff, Washington, D.C., was always a leading candidate from a field of many Marine general officers who, in fighting the global war on terror, have become equally as qualified and combat experienced.

LtGen Conway, a native of Walnut Ridge, Ark., is a career infantry officer with 36 years of service. He graduated with honors from The Basic School, the U.S. Army Infantry Officers' Advanced Course, the Marine Corps Command and Staff College, and the Air War College.

His career is well linked to his experience in the Middle East, which began with planning contingency operations off the coast of Beirut, Lebanon, in 1983. As a lieutenant colonel, he commanded Battalion Landing Team, 3d Bn, Second Marine Regiment during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. As a brigadier general on the Joint Staff at the Pentagon in Arlington, Va., he was Deputy Director of Operations for Combating Terrorism.

When the terrorist attacks occurred on Sept. 11, 2001, he was commanding the First Marine Division at Camp Pendleton, Calif. LtGen Conway led the I Marine Expeditionary Force and its 45,000 leathernecks and sailors into Baghdad in 2003. He commanded I MEF in 2004 during deadly counterinsurgency operations throughout Al Anbar province.

The general has been a highly visible, candid speaker and central player throughout most of the war. In Marine Corps Reserve Colonel Nicholas E. Reynolds' book "Basrah, Baghdad, and Beyond: The U.S. Marine Corps in the Second Iraq War," the author describes LtGen Conway as a commander who "wanted to see, and be seen by, his Marines before the battle."

In April 2004, LtGen Conway sent Marines into Fallujah after four Blackwater Security Consulting guards were murdered on March 31. There were accusa-

tions made by terrorists and the media that the attack, which leveled much of the city, killed hundreds of Iraqi combatants and civilians. It inflamed the Arab world and caused international consternation. Ultimately, the Marines withdrew to outside the city.

However, according to a Sept. 13, 2004, article by *Los Angeles Times* staff writer Patrick J. McDonnell from Fallujah: "The order to attack ... and the subsequent command to halt [the attack] came down the chain of command from [Army] Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, the top officer on the ground at the time, Conway said. The Marines expressed objections but proceeded."

About the initial attack into Fallujah, McDonnell quoted LtGen Conway: "'We follow our orders. We had our say,' Conway said. ... 'We understood the rationale, and we saluted smartly and went about the attack.'

"'We felt like we ought to probably let the situation settle before we appeared to be attacking out of revenge.'

"'I would simply say that when you order elements of a Marine division to attack a city, that you really need to understand what the consequences are, and not perhaps vacillate in the middle of something like that,' Conway said. 'Once you commit, you've got to stay committed.'

Although not hesitant to engage in the brutality necessary to this type of warfare, on April 22, 2004, the general nonetheless lamented, "Old men should be able to agree so young men don't have to die."

According to recent media reports, fellow Marine General Peter Pace, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who is reported to have close ties with LtGen Conway, praised him as "a superb officer" and a true hero for the United States. In an additional statement, Gen Pace said, "And if you look at his war record in his Marine expeditionary force, going into Baghdad early on in the war, you'll see that he knows how to lead Marines in combat."

LtGen Conway has two sons serving in the Marine Corps. Both have had tours in Iraq.

