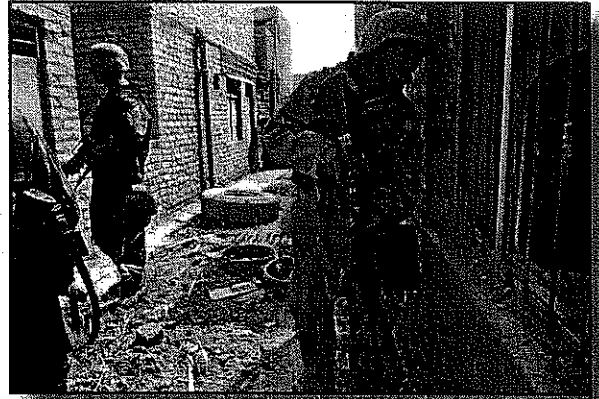




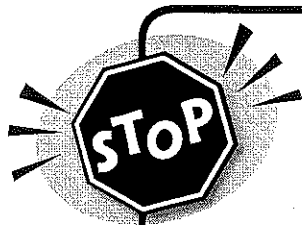
The Fall of Baghdad

The commanders of the coalition forces thought that the Iraqi army's strategy would be to keep on retreating before making a final desperate stand in Baghdad - Iraq's capital city and Saddam Hussein's headquarters. Six divisions of the elite Iraqi **Republican Guard** were stationed on the outskirts of Baghdad (a **division** usually contains between ten and twenty thousand soldiers). Another division of Republican Guard was stationed on the interior of the city.

As the coalition forces closed in on Baghdad the fear grew that Saddam Hussein might use chemical or biological weapons. Vaccinations against smallpox and anthrax were given to the coalition soldiers, and many were given protective suits to wear.



It turned out that Saddam Hussein and his army commanders had a different strategy in mind. Instead of using the famed Republican Guard, **paramilitary units** from the southern part of the country were put into battle (a paramilitary unit refers to *a group of civilians trained and organized in a military fashion*). In addition to the danger these units posed to the coalition armies, the presence of these paramilitary units in the southern part of the country also discouraged local people from welcoming the coalition forces. It therefore became necessary for the Americans and their allies to defeat these paramilitary units before continuing on to Baghdad. British forces led an operation in southern Iraq in the city of Basra, taking control of the city after a fight with Iraqi military and paramilitary forces.



Why do you think Saddam Hussein used this strategy instead of attacking with his Republican Guard?

It was also important for coalition forces to take control of the northern part of the country. The **Kurds**, who lived in this area, had already promised the Americans support for the invasion. Over 1,000 American soldiers parachuted into this region and captured an important airfield. This then allowed the coalition forces to fly in tanks and other weapons for use in the north. Kurdish and coalition forces were then able to capture **Mosul**, the largest city in northern Iraq.

In early April, only a couple of weeks after the start of the war, coalition forces approached Baghdad and seized the airport. Hussein's grip on power was gone. The beginning of the end was now in sight.