NBC cameraman Craig White, embedded in Iraq with a task force of the Marine's Third Infantry Division, found himself in the midst of a fierce six-hour firefight outside Baghdad, a fight that he recorded on videotape. NBC's Matt Lauer talks to White about the firefight, and the challenges of covering war as an embedded reporter.

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Transcript

NBC News Cameraman Craig White Captures Iraq War Battle on Video

MATT LAUER, hosting:
Cameraman Craig White has been embedded with the army’s Task Force 3-15 of the infantry’s third division since before the war began. He’s endured all the challenges of war and the death of his friend and colleague, David Bloom last weekend.

Then on Monday, on the way into Baghdad, he found himself in a fierce, six-hour firefight, which he recorded on videotape. We’re going to take a few seconds, right here, just to listen to the sound of that battle.

And cameraman Craig White joins us now. Craig, good morning, good to see you.

CRAIG WHITE (NBC News Cameraman): Good morning, Matt.

LAUER: This is not the reception, these are not the images we saw that some troops received in Baghdad. This was an unbelievable firefight on Monday. Take me through it, how did it begin?

WHITE: Well, it was one of three firefights that were happening simultaneously. This was in southern Baghdad; our assignment was to go up Route 8, basically bisecting Baghdad, and take three intersections. It was a gauntlet that they were not only to run, but to take. The three intersections had objectives named Curley, Moe, and Larry; we were at Curley.

LAUER: And was this an ambush situation, Craig? Or did the Marines you were with initiate this fight?

WHITE: Well they were army and no – it was an ambush for sure.

It was mainly Syrian jihadees, Syrian mujahadeens or RPG teams, trained by the Iraqis. They were brought here by Saddam. And they were very good at what they did. They were working in conjunction with the Iraqi soldiers. And we walked into, at the intersection where we were, what looked like a small skirmish that kept unfolding and getting bigger and getting bigger. And it lasted, actually, close to seven
hours. We were fired upon by small arms in trenches, RPGS, which are rocket-propelled grenades that hit vehicles where we were. At one point, there was artillery dropping on the overpass on top of us. It was scary, it was serious stuff.

LAUER: Craig, when I look at the videotape, it seems difficult for me to understand exactly where the firing was coming from. Were you basically taking fire from all different sides?

WHITE: Three hundred and sixty degrees at different times. Whenever people would direct to one side, we’d get it from the other side. We were there so long that we began to run out of ammunition and fuel. It was a long time. A relief envoy was organized to try to bring extra fuel and ammunition in toward us. And they got there. In doing so, two sergeants paid with their lives; they were RPGed on their way in. They were killed instantly.

LAUER: Craig there’s some amazing – I’m sorry, I was just going to say there’s some amazing footage you captured of a wounded soldier actually continuing to fight through their pain. Take me through that and talk to me about it.

WHITE: Well through, not barricades, but through the pillars of the underpass, where we were, there was a system of trenches. And as those trenches were being cleared, dismounted soldiers, or foot soldiers as they call them, were in fighting trench to trench, and one of them got hit. As his colleagues were carrying him out, he noticed this soldier, I believe it was to the camera right, and he still had the rifle in his hand and he fired twice and killed that man on the way out while he was still in a stretcher.

LAUER: I understand that basically everyone in that unit was picking up weapons, that the medics were told they might want to grab a gun and at one point, you even thought about picking up a weapon.

WHITE: Even the chaplain had a rifle and was firing back. I’ve been to a few of these, not quite as long as this, I’ve been to intense ones, but very rarely have I ever considered picking up a gun for any reason. And this time, I was looking around for one because it looked bad near the end.

We were being targeted by artillery, six vehicles around us, including one of the fuel trucks and a truck full of ammunition had been hit and were starting to blaze. People were actually running in to that truck, trying to save it while it was on fire and ammunition were going off everywhere. Yeah, I seriously thought about picking up a gun and using it, just to defend myself.

LAUER: Craig, you’ve been through so much over the past three weeks or month, but the term “fog of war” is often used to describe battle scenes. Does that mean something different to you now?

WHITE: Not really, having been through this before, it’s very vivid, your senses are all very heightened. Unfortunately, videotape doesn’t capture the feel and the smell and the vibration when large artillery go off. The fog is literally fog; there’s a haze, there’s constantly a haze. Cameras won’t even see through it many times. Just so much smoke and so much devastation at once.

LAUER: We want to get you back here and get you back safely, but we also want to thank you for your courage and your dedication over these past several weeks.

WHITE: Thank you. We’re not finished, we’ll have more.