

surrendered in Basra and were now on their way home. They were unarmed, but all had large sums of Iraqi money. Personnel from the 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, detained more than 120 of these men and processed them as prisoners to ensure that they did not reenter the city and become part of the enemy resistance. Intelligence later determined that these men were intended to fall in on the many caches of weapons and ammunition that the Marines were finding throughout the city.¹²¹

About the time that the rifle companies of 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, were establishing their positions south of the city, a terrific sandstorm blew into the Nasiriyah area. While 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, battled these conditions west of the highway leading into the eastern side of the city, 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, did the same on the eastern side as it worked to expand its control eastward. The unit historian for Company G called 25 March “the day of the sandstorms.”¹²² Marines at the Task Force Tarawa and RCT-2 command posts struggled to keep their tents from collapsing and blowing away. Sand caked eyes, ears, and weaponry. At times, visibility was less than



Photo by Joe Raedle, courtesy of Maj William P. Peeples
Marines battled dust storms, torrential rain, and thick mud in Nasiriyah. This Marine carries an M16A2 service rifle and wears recently issued knee pads.

five meters. Within a few hours, the sandstorm was reinforced by a torrential downpour that continued until after midnight. Soaked to the bone, the artillerymen of 1st Battalion, 10th Marines, continued to man their howitzers while the infantrymen carried out their tasks and occupied fighting holes that filled with water. The Company E unit historian wrote that “many of the Marines slept in puddles of water and mud that night.”¹²³

While the elements attacked the Marines, the men of 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, attacked the enemy to expand the battalion’s control of the southern party of the city. Company E, before the arrival 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, had cleared several buildings to its west, including a military compound. Company F moved east, clearing nine houses to its front. In one of them, the Marines found U.S. Army uniforms from the missing soldiers of the 507th. Acting on the intelligence that there may be American captives still in the hospital, Lieutenant Colonel Royal Mortenson ordered Company F to attack it. Supported by mortars from Company G’s mortar section, Company F seized the compound. Five Marines were wounded in the assault. Inside the complex, Company F found a tank, hundreds of assault weapons, thousands of rounds of ammunition, hundreds of chemical protective suits, and two American military flak jackets adjusted to fit women, one bearing the name “Lynch.” Two female soldiers, Private First Class Lori A. Piestewa and Private First Class Jessica D. Lynch, had been held at the compound. Piestewa died there, and Lynch, unknown to the Marines, had been moved by the Iraqis earlier in the battle to the Saddam Hospital in the western part of the city north of the Euphrates.¹²⁴

After Company F secured the hospital, Mortenson ordered it to return to the bridge. It sealed off the compound during the night with indirect fires and observation by the battalion’s Scout Sniper Team 2. The objective was not so much to occupy the hospital physically as it was to deny its use to the Iraqis in their attempt to disrupt traffic along the highway and southeastern bridge. During the night, the scout-snipers observed an enemy patrol approaching the hospital and called artillery fires down on them.¹²⁵

As 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, expanded their perimeter eastward, the Marines of 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, transitioned as quickly as possible from occupying their assault positions to expanding westward. Their battlespace was bounded on the north by the Euphrates River, on the south by Highway 8, and stretched westward all the way to Highway 1. This area made up the southern and western section of the city, encompassing industrial



Photo by Joe Raedle, courtesy of Maj William P. Peoples

Marines of Task Force Tarawa search buildings in Nasiriyah for enemy combatants, arms, munitions, and intelligence information.

districts, medium-density residential neighborhoods, and some plots of farmland. Again, the asymmetrical nature of the enemy threat proved a challenge. The area was full of civilians, and mingling among them were deserters from the *11th Infantry Division*, elements of the *Ba'ath Party militia*, and *Fedayeen militia*. Much of the incoming fire received was coming from the west and from north of the river; this could be dealt with by the battalion's organic assets and artillery from 1st Battalion, 10th Marines. However, some of the fire came from small pockets of resistance that were within the sectors of adjacent units, making it difficult to counter them with direct fire or to coordinate indirect fire.

Lieutenant Colonel Brent Dunahoe and the Marines of his battalion developed several techniques over the next few days to deal with these challenges. They patrolled aggressively, entering residences to deny havens to enemy fighters. They used counterbattery radar and artillery to neutralize enemy mortars. The battalion's officers, with the help of skilled Marine pilots, also found innovative ways to use air support. Dunahoe and his battalion also maximized the use of scout-sniper teams to gather information and attrit enemy forces, as well as human

exploitation teams to gather information on enemy positions that could be used in the next day's operations. During the early evening hours of the 25th, Companies K and L advanced 200 to 300 meters in the midst of sandstorms, heavy rain, and enemy fire to a small canal that ran from north to south. Meanwhile, the battalion staff began planning for the next day's operations, using information that the human exploitation teams had already gathered by interrogating civilians and enemy prisoners. These efforts produced invaluable information on enemy positions and *Ba'ath Party* headquarters.¹²⁶

For 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, the main event of the 25th was the forward passage of lines by RCT-1 of 1st Marine Division. The lead battalion of RCT-1, 1st Battalion, 4th Marines, laid down heavy suppressive fire as it traveled through the darkness up Ambush Alley and ceased firing as it crossed the Saddam Canal bridge. RCT-2 and RCT-1 had carefully planned and coordinated the procedures for the passage of lines, to include position markings. However, as 1st Battalion, 4th Marines, began approaching the positions of 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, some began firing again, sending thousands of small-arms rounds toward Company B, 1st Battalion, 2d



Photo by LCpl Bryan J. Nealy

Marines of Task Force Tarawa distribute food to citizens of Nasiriyah. The Marines were conducting humanitarian operations like the one pictured above as early as 26 March.

Marines, from a range of less than 200 meters. Lieutenant Colonel Rickey Grabowski sent word for every vehicle in his battalion to mark its position with chemical lights and then personally stopped the head of the convoy. However, this was not before one Marine attached to Company B was wounded by the fire.¹²⁷

For the next several days, a familiar pattern prevailed for 1st Battalion, 2d Marines. Company A continued to guard the western “T” intersection and northwestern bridge to prevent enemy fighters from using that route to reinforce the Nasiriyah garrison. Company B and Company C continued to man the “T” intersection due north of the Saddam Canal bridge, Company B blocking toward the east, and Company C to the north. Often *Fedayeen* militia attempted to probe their positions. Each night, Marine artillery pounded enemy targets in the city. During daylight hours, Iraqi soldiers dressed in civilian attire attempted to escape the city and ran into Company A’s checkpoint. Over the next nine days, the company took and processed 126 enemy prisoners. The Marines of

1st Battalion, 2d Marines, conducted patrols, cordon-and-search operations, established roadblocks, and executed limited objective attacks. Meanwhile, the battalion was also already conducting civil affairs programs. The Marines distributed food and water, provided medical care, coordinated repairs on the city’s water treatment and sewage plants, and identified key leaders in the community.¹²⁸

On 26 March, high winds and dust clouds continued to affect operations. Helicopters could not fly for most of the day due to the dust storm; only fixed-wing air support was available. By this time, Task Force Tarawa had firm control of three of the four bridges in Nasiriyah. Traversing the length of Ambush Alley was no longer a serious problem. The Marines, however, did not control the southwestern bridge. Brigadier General Natonski did not have the forces available to seize it, nor to go into the heart of the city north of the Euphrates and clear each block. He and his Marines were still trying to expand control north of the Saddam Canal and south of the Euphrates.¹²⁹

* Other officers besides Lieutenant Colonel Grabowski exposed themselves to fire in an attempt to stop the potential fratricide, including Company B’s forward air controller, Captain Santare.

Thus, throughout 26 and 27 March, 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, and 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, continued to

expand their perimeters. Fighting house to house, they captured and killed numerous *Fedayeen* and *Ba'ath militia* and seized or destroyed large quantities of enemy arms, munitions, documents, maps, and other intelligence information. Their successes yielded valuable information that guided tactical planning for operations for the next day. Much of the intelligence included details of enemy activity or headquarters in a particular building. Based on that detailed information, Marines could target particular residences or public buildings for "house calls."¹³⁰ For example, the Marines of 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, seized a *Ba'ath Party* headquarters on 26 March, and over the next few days captured more high-level headquarters, a general and a colonel in the Iraqi army, and maps and documents revealing locations of



Photo by Joe Raedle, courtesy of Maj William P. Peeples
This wall map was found in a Ba'ath Party headquarters in the southern sector of Nasiriyah. It clearly identifies Iraqi defensive sectors throughout the city.

other headquarters, military facilities, and personnel. The *Ba'ath Party* headquarters had a room rigged to act as an interrogation chamber. It also had a terrain model showing enemy positions throughout the city; a census of everyone living in the city, along with addresses; and discarded weapons and U.S. Army uniforms. Human exploitation teams began to conclude, correctly as it turned out, that U.S. Army prisoners had been in the building and subsequently had been moved to an Iraqi hospital north of the Euphrates. Meanwhile, the terrain model and captured documents helped the battalion staff plan for the next day's attacks.¹³¹

Due to the sandstorm, the infantrymen often had to rely on mortars and artillery rather than aircraft for fire support. Company F cleared the hospital complex for a second time on 26 March, this time with the help of an artillery preparation from 1st Battalion, 10th Marines. Instead of withdrawing, Company F's Marines continued eastward and cleared 12 more buildings. Company G advanced as well and tied its left flank in with Company F's right. Company E, having been relieved from its original position west of the highway, attacked to the southwest and tied in with Company G's right.¹³²

The air assets were not completely out of the battle. Captain Gerald T. Finnegan Jr., a forward air controller with 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, noted that often helicopters could "sneak up under" the sandstorm. Even during the sandstorm, visibility in the nondesert grassy areas close to the Euphrates River could be as much as 300 or 400 meters if there was daylight and if the helicopters were flying low enough to be under the dust cloud. The forward air controllers and air officer for 3d Battalion, Captain Harold Qualkinbush, found a way to conduct Type III close air support with fixed-wing aircraft on the nights of the 26th and 27th. Lieutenant Colonel Dunahoe had authorized the use of Type III support without his direct approval as long as each mission was cleared by the air officer or battalion fire support coordinator. Qualkinbush had a laptop computer with digital imagery and a satellite picture of the city. He had targets supplied to him from the battalion's scout-sniper teams and human exploitation teams. Thus, while he did not have direct line-of-sight observation to his targets, he did have indirect, or virtual, observation. His forward air controllers communicated with the aircrafts as they flew overhead and fired their ordnance. One of the enemy targets destroyed in this way was the *11th Infantry Division* headquarters, only 600 meters away, from which elements of the battalion were taking indirect fire. Thus Type III close air support worked for 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, unlike the case of 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, a few days before. With the 3d Battalion, there was solid communication between the forward air controllers and the air officer. Moreover, Captain Qualkinbush had far better targeting information than Captain Santare had enjoyed, and at least had the advantage of indirect, or virtual, observation of the target.* Qualkinbush and his forward air controllers also used Type II support.¹³³

* Though one interview suggested that this use of Type III CAS occurred on 26 and 27 March, the command chronology of 3d Battalion, 2d Marines (part III), indicated that it may have actually occurred on 27 and 28 March. Capt Gerald J. Finnegan Jr. telephone intvw with LtCol Rod Andrew Jr., 10Sept08.

Still, poor weather conditions left artillery the supporting arm of choice on 26 March, making it a busy and memorable day for 1st Battalion, 10th Marines. After supporting Company F's attack on the hospital complex, the artillerymen fired numerous counterfire missions generated by counterbattery radar, as well as calls for fire against enemy *Fedayeen*, artillery, and a refueling station. The targets were located all over Nasiriyah. As the battalion's command chronology summarized, by dusk, the battalion had engaged seven enemy artillery batteries; an ammunition dump with four enemy howitzers; a refueling point with armored personnel carriers and trucks; a convoy with infantry; and a BM21 multiple rocket launcher, resulting in destruction of 44 tubes of artillery, more than 25 vehicles, several buildings, a military complex, a refueling site, and an estimated 400 enemy casualties.¹³⁴

But the work of the artillerymen was not over. Throughout the day, intelligence reports had been coming down from I MEF headquarters (originally generated by human sources and signals intelligence) of a large assembly of enemy fighters gathering in an open area near the railway station south of the southwestern bridge. Initial reports estimated that there were more than 1,000 irregular Iraqi soldiers assembled; a later estimate gave the figure of 2,000. Intelligence indicated that their intent was to launch a major counterattack and seize control of the southeastern bridge. These reports seemed to correspond with counterbattery radar detections in that area throughout the day. Finally it was determined that the reports were credible and a real threat. Air support was unavailable due to the continuing high winds, blowing sand, and low visibility. Therefore, 1st Battalion, 10th Marines, received the mission and fired a "battalion" volley of dual-purpose improved conventional munitions at the target. Due to the spread of ammunition on the batteries' gun lines and to the fact that only four of Battery A's guns could reach the target, the battalion actually fired 105 rounds of dual-purpose improved conventional munitions and 30 high-explosive rounds with variable time fuzes. It was difficult to get a precise battle damage assessment from this mission, but the effects were apparently dramatic. Brigadier General Natonski believed that the barrage "broke the back" of the counterattack that the enemy was trying to launch on the night of the 26th.¹³⁵

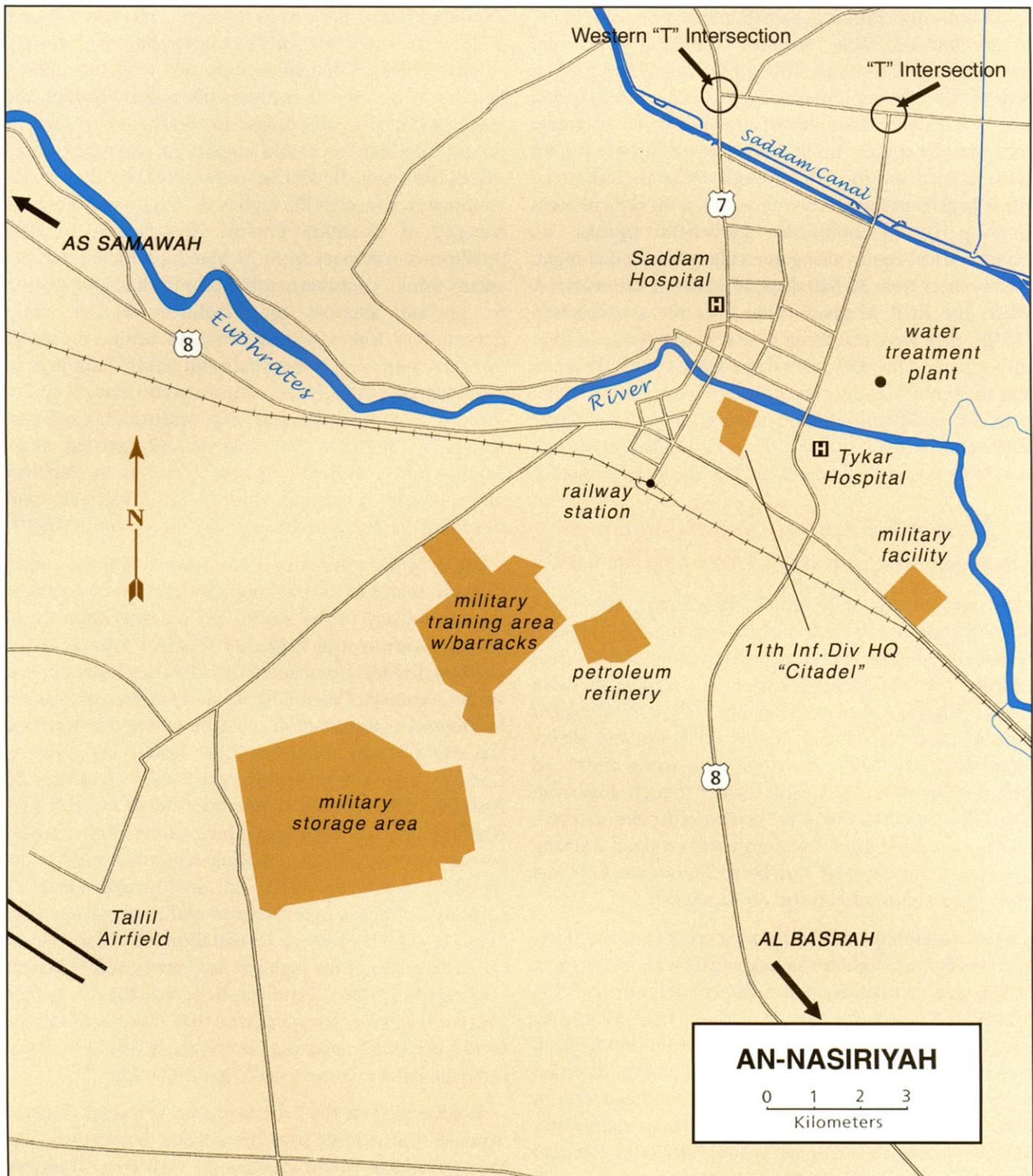
Not all of the enemy fighters were at the railroad station, however. Thus, while the massive fire mission of 1st Battalion, 10th Marines, probably ruined enemy plans for a major coordinated counterattack, there were smaller engagements throughout the night south of the Euphrates.

Elements of 3d Battalion, 2d Marines; 2d Battalion, 8th Marines; 2d Combat Engineer Battalion; 2d LAR Battalion; Battery B, 1st Battalion, 10th Marines; and the RCT-2 command post all reported enemy contact.¹³⁶

The most notable action occurred at the main command post of 2d Battalion, 8th Marines. Around sundown (approximately 2030), several fire-team sized elements began attacking the command post. Eventually, it was receiving impacts from small arms, rockets, machine guns, and mortars. Clerks, drivers, radio operators, and others ran to the berms to defend the perimeter. The battalion executive officer, Major Julian D. Alford, relayed a "danger close" immediate suppression mission through his commander, Lieutenant Colonel Royal Mortenson, who in turn was able to contact Lieutenant Colonel Glenn Starnes of 1st Battalion, 10th Marines, on the regimental tactical net. About this time, the bulk of Captain Gregory L. Grunwald's Company C, 2d LAR Battalion, was approaching the area. The lead platoon of Grunwald's column had moved very close to the command post of 2d Battalion, 8th Marines. The column was returning from north of the Saddam Canal and was moving south to link up with a Marine wing support squadron convoy to escort it back north through Ambush Alley. Just as it had crossed over the southeastern bridge, it had entered terrain held by 3d Battalion, 2d Marines. Then it had to traverse an area not controlled by friendly forces and probably occupied by the enemy before reentering friendly lines near the command post of 2d Battalion, 8th Marines.¹³⁷

The regimental fire support coordinator and Major Alford had a good idea of all friendly locations but quickly determined that the armor on the LAV-25s would protect the platoon from effects of the danger close mission about to be fired in support of the command post of 2d Battalion, 8th Marines. Doubtless unaware of all the details of the situation, however, the platoon commander of the lead LAR platoon sent a "check firing" message in response to the first artillery round. Eventually, the LAR platoon was ordered to disengage and move away to allow 1st Battalion, 10th Marines, to continue firing the immediate suppression. Alford called the final immediate suppression mission within 100 meters of the command post. It was approved by Lieutenant Colonel Mortenson and fired by 1st Battalion, 10th Marines. Despite it being a danger close mission fired at night, there were no friendly casualties, and the enemy was silenced.¹³⁸

Sometime during this engagement (it is difficult to determine exactly when from various accounts), the lead LAR platoon and the command post of 2d Battalion, 8th



Map illustration by Vincent J. Martinez

Marines, began firing on each other. The platoon may have been slightly disoriented and unaware of the command post's location. On the other hand, it might be that Marines at the command post, aware of a report of an enemy armored vehicle (BTR-60) nearby, saw a LAV-25, mistook it for Iraqi, and fired on it.¹³⁹ Eventually, it

became clear that a friendly fire situation was occurring, and officers, initially led by Captain Grunwald, were able to implement a cease-fire. The light armored reconnaissance platoon perhaps inflicted more material damage on the command post than the enemy did. By the time the Marines ceased firing at each other, the LAV-25's

small arms and 25mm guns had destroyed four vehicles (a wrecker and three medium tactical vehicles) and damaged five Humvees. Thirty Marines in the general area of the command post of 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, were wounded, although some of those were certainly wounded by enemy fire. It will never be entirely certain what happened during this episode. What is clear is that the engagement was a sober reminder of the difficulties in fighting on a nonlinear battlefield against an asymmetrical enemy using guerrilla tactics and at night. As an officer from 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, summarized, when the LAR Marines came over the southeastern bridge, they were executing a “rearward passage of lines through us, in the dark, then into enemy-controlled areas, and then into friendly area again.”¹⁴⁰ Determining friend from foe is difficult enough at night or on a nonlinear battlefield. With all of these elements in place at once, it is notable that such incidents did not occur more often.¹⁴¹

27 March-2 April—Consolidation and Rescue: “The Bad Guys Have Left the City”

By the morning of 27 March, Task Force Tarawa had kept the eastern bridges and eastern passage through Nasiriyah open for 48 hours. This accomplishment had enabled the 1st Marine Division to continue its drive toward Baghdad as planned, ready to fight the *Baghdad* and *Al Nida Republican Guard* divisions and divert attention away from the Coalition’s main effort, 3d Infantry Division of V Corps. Clearly though, Nasiriyah was still a potential threat to the rear of Coalition forces and to its supply lines. The Iraqis still retained a strong presence in the city, and Task Force Tarawa was not large enough to remove this threat on its own.¹⁴²

Few had anticipated the Iraqi Army, *Fedayeen* militia and *Ba’ath Party* fighters having such a formidable force in the area or making such a determined defense. The Marines of Task Force Tarawa, with the help of close air support, had managed to kill and capture hundreds of enemy fighters and inflict massive damage on Iraqi regular army forces. Still, the enemy had been able to infiltrate large numbers of *Saddam Fedayeen*, *Ba’ath Party Militia*, and regular army forces into the city by foot and in civilian vehicles. Captured documents gathered on 24 March showed that in the days just before the battle, the Iraqis had been able to move the *504th Infantry Brigade* of the *34th Infantry Division* from northeastern Iraq into Nasiriyah. On 19 March, that brigade consisted of more than 2,000 soldiers, which reinforced the units that Coalition intelligence had already known to be in the city, as well as elements of the *51st Mechanized Infantry*

Division filtering back from Basrah. Lieutenant Colonel Grabowski’s interview with a captured officer of the *23d Brigade* revealed that there were 500 to 800 *Fedayeen* fighters in the city when the battle began. Though the enemy had been unable to hold the bridges or prevent the flow of Coalition forces and supplies through the eastern side of Nasiriyah, the Marines anticipated that they would continue to use guerrilla tactics to “attrite and slow the advance of Coalition Forces.” Task Force Tarawa’s intelligence summary from 27 March predicted that the enemy would “continue to intimidate the local population to prevent support for Coalition Forces. Iraqi paramilitary forces will continue to utilize no-strike infrastructure such as hospitals and public buildings to avoid the targeting of their command and control and to show the population they can withstand Coalition attacks.”¹⁴³ Brigadier General Natonski needed more combat power available to him if he was to establish unchallenged Coalition control of Nasiriyah and eliminate the threat to the rear of V Corps and I MEF.¹⁴⁴

The I MEF commander, Lieutenant General James Conway, seems to have recognized this need as early as the second day of the battle. On the afternoon of 24 March, Conway and Brigadier General John F. Kelly, assistant division commander of 1st Marine Division, had visited Natonski, Colonel Bailey, and Lieutenant Colonel Mortenson at the position of 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, just south of the Euphrates River bridge. As generals Conway and Natonski discussed the situation, 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, came under heavy indirect fire. Artillery rounds began snapping some high-tension power lines overhead, creating a fearful racket. As Natonski remembered it, “all hell broke loose.”¹⁴⁵ Conway’s sergeant major, driver, and personal security guard joined the lines of 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, on the eastern side of the highway as Conway and Natonski continued to confer. Natonski believed that it was that afternoon when Conway realized that Task Force Tarawa would need help securing Nasiriyah. It would be days, however, before Conway could get it to them.¹⁴⁶

At a meeting on the 27th, however, Brigadier General Natonski learned that soon his mission, battlespace, and forces available would all expand. Task Force Tarawa’s battlespace was extended to the south, east, and west to allow it to isolate Nasiriyah and stop the flow of enemy reinforcements into the city. The task force was also tasked with advancing into the city itself to eliminate *Fedayeen* and *Ba’ath Party* cells. To help Natonski accomplish this mission, I MEF would designate Task Force Tarawa the focus of main effort, give it priority of fires, and give it tactical control of 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit and



Official Marine Corps Photo

BGen Richard F. Natonski in Task Force Tarawa combat operations center in Nasiriyah.

15th Marine Expeditionary Unit. The official fragmentary order expanding Natonski's battlespace was published on 27 March. On the 28th, another fragmentary order (I MEF FragO 040-03) gave the task force its new missions and ordered it to be prepared to assume tactical control of the 15th and 24th MEUs.¹⁴⁷

The 15th MEU did not arrive until 29 March and began patrolling on the 31st.¹⁴⁸ The commanding officer and operations officer of 24th MEU arrived at Task Force Tarawa's command post on 1 April. When the 15th MEU did arrive, Brigadier General Natonski gave it the task of securing the southwestern entrances to the city in the vicinity of the southwestern bridge, or, as Natonski called it, "the final entranceway."¹⁴⁹ Over the course of the previous week, intelligence had indicated that a hotbed of *Fedayeen* and *Ba'ath* activity was in the city of Suq ash Shuyukh, southeast of Nasiriyah. The enemy was sending reinforcements from this city into Nasiriyah from the east, while others came from the south into the western side of the city. Task Force Tarawa needed to isolate the city to keep them out.¹⁵⁰

During this period, the task force received excellent support from Special Operations Forces from Task Force 20, including U.S. Army Special Forces and U.S. Navy Sea Air Land Teams (SEALs). These were working in Task Force Tarawa's area of operations and reported to it. There was a reconnaissance operations center colocated with the Task Force Tarawa command post. This group had teams penetrating into the heart of the city, interrogating civilians, and locating buildings in the city that were *Ba'ath* or *Fedayeen* positions. Once these were identified, they were attacked with precision joint direct attack munitions and AC-130 strikes delivered by U.S. Air Forces Special

Operations Command. Another Navy SEAL team was performing the same task in Suq ash Shuyukh. In both cities, Coalition forces were using these special operations teams and precision air strikes to eliminate key leadership targets with minimal or no collateral damage to civilian structures nearby. The Marines also established more roadblocks to prevent infiltration of enemy forces. The 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, had already accomplished this on the northern side of the city, but now it was done on the eastern side as well.¹⁵¹

Meanwhile, the infantry battalions continued to patrol aggressively east and west of the bridge crossings, sweeping their sectors clean of enemy fighters and weapons and seizing documents from *Fedayeen* and *Ba'ath Party* facilities. On 27 March, for example, a scout-sniper team from 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, crossed just over the Euphrates River near the bridge and searched a building where suspicious activity had been observed. It proved to be a *Ba'ath Party* headquarters with a great deal of intelligence, including maps and graphics identifying the locations of enemy strongpoints and headquarters buildings. All the while, Marines also continued to distribute beans, rice, and water to the inhabitants of Nasiriyah and to do what they could to facilitate the city's reconstruction.¹⁵²

By 27 March, the battle had changed in a way that influenced the operations of Lieutenant Colonel Starnes's artillery battalion. Most of the Iraqis' indirect fire threat had been eliminated. Therefore, instead of dispersing the batteries and individual howitzers, Starnes consolidated them into a triangular firebase, making them less vulnerable to the threat of small teams of enemy soldiers infiltrating the perimeter. Combat engineer assets allowed the vehicles and howitzers of 1st Battalion, 10th Marines, to be "bermed in" within raised earthworks for protection. The artillerymen named the compound "Firebase Pokorney" for First Lieutenant Fred Pokorney, their forward observer killed north of the Saddam Canal on the 23d while calling in a fire mission for Company C, 1st Battalion, 2d Marines.¹⁵³

Battery B temporarily converted into provisional infantry. Regimental Combat Team 2 sought to strengthen its hold on the Highway 1 bridge to the west, which was still vital to the 1st Marine Division's supply line. The infantry battalions did not have any Marines to spare for this mission, so Lieutenant Colonel Starnes volunteered the services of Battery B. Along with four of its howitzers dug in around the bridge and deployed for direct fire, Battery B made up the core of Task Force Rex, commanded by the executive officer of 1st Battalion, 10th Marines. Joining the artillerymen were Company A, 2d Reconnaissance

Battalion; a detachment of combat engineers; and a light armored reconnaissance platoon. As much of Task Force Rex was dug in underneath the bridge, it soon acquired the nickname Task Force Troll. The fact that 1st Battalion, 10th Marines, was able to take four guns out of action reflected that it was receiving far fewer missions than it had previously, and that the infantrymen of RCT-2 were now able to eliminate most of the resistance they encountered without artillery support.¹⁵⁴

On 29 March, 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, launched an assault on a four-story, reinforced military compound that the battalion's officers had nicknamed "the citadel." Intelligence indicated that the building was the headquarters for the enemy's *11th Infantry Division*. When planning for the attack commenced on 28 March, Company K, commanded by Captain Edward J. Healey Jr., was designated as the main effort, and plans were made for a heavy artillery preparation prior to the assault.

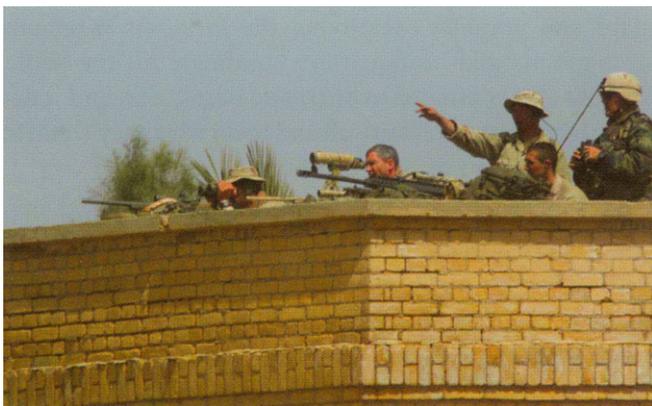


Photo courtesy of Col Paul B. Dunahoe

The "citadel" building south of the Euphrates, shortly after its capture by Company K, 3d Battalion, 2d Marines. Sniper teams were posted on the roof. Col Ronald J. Johnson, G-3 operations officer of Task Force Tarawa, looks through a sniper scope. LtCol Paul B. Dunahoe, commanding officer of 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, holds binoculars. On the far right is Sgt Christopher M. Sharon, the 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, scout-sniper team chief.

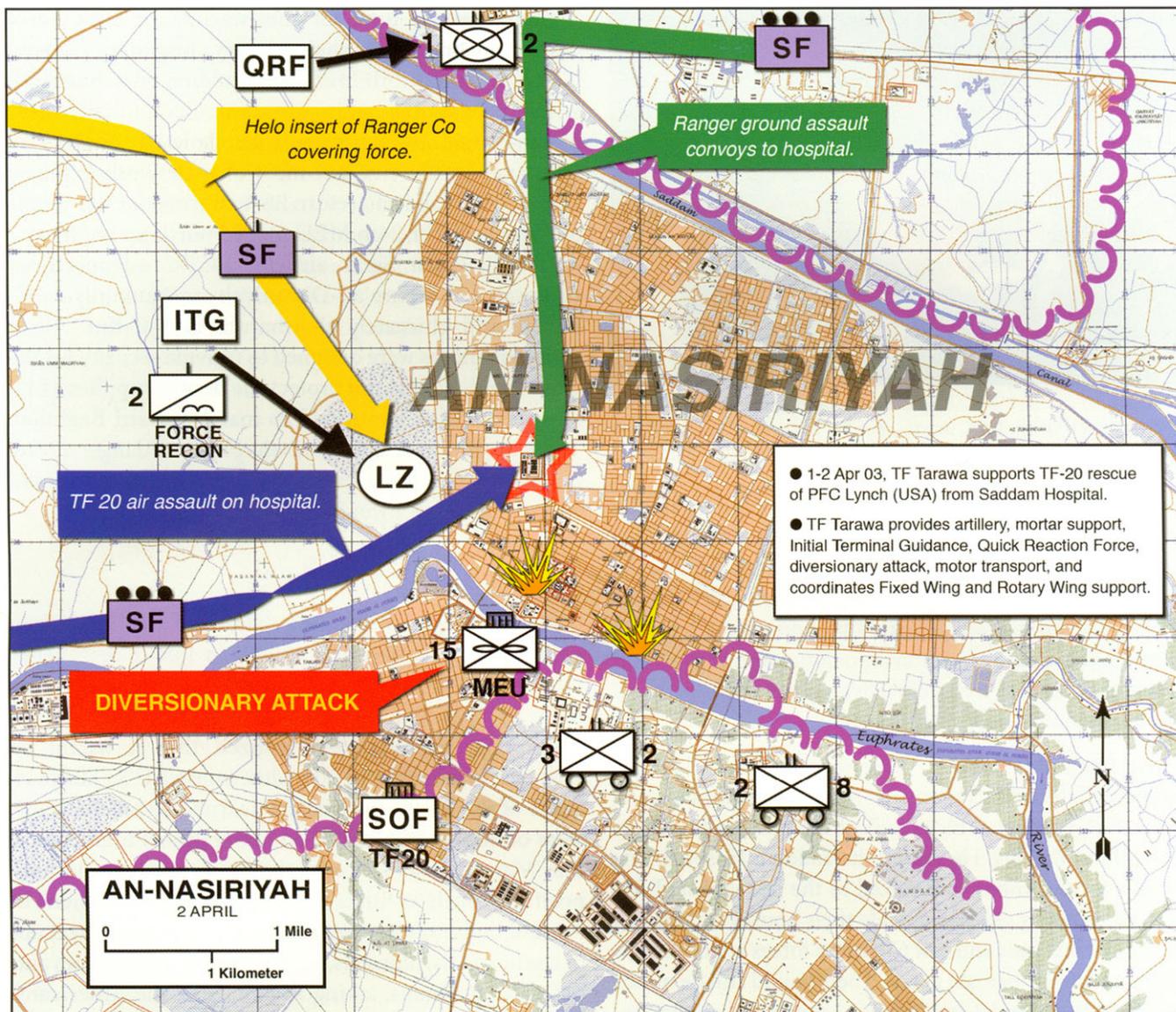
However, a scout-sniper team that Lieutenant Colonel Dunahoe had sent into the area late on the 27th later determined that there was a great deal of civilian traffic in and around the compound. In an effort to avoid civilian casualties, Dunahoe cancelled plans for the artillery barrage and instead directed Company K to launch a surprise predawn assault. Companies I and L prepared to act as supporting elements. Company K moved into its assault position under cover of darkness and began its attack at 0530. The Marines captured, killed, or wounded a handful of Iraqi soldiers while suffering no casualties. Within the compound, they found massive quantities of ammunition, including 1,000 rockets, 1 million small

arms rounds, mines, tank rounds, and chemical warfare defense equipment. Explosive ordnance experts later estimated that more than 25,000 metric tons of munitions and explosives were stored within the compound.¹⁵⁵ One officer remembered that the stockpile was enough to fill a large basketball coliseum. The scout-sniper team's report of civilian traffic in the area and the decision not to use artillery on the compound had been fortuitous, as a large artillery bombardment would have almost certainly set off secondary explosions with catastrophic results for Marines and civilians in the vicinity.¹⁵⁶

The Marines seized the compound so quickly and efficiently that when dawn broke, few enemy officers seemed to know that the attack had occurred. Many Iraqi Army personnel drove or walked to work in the compound as usual that morning, not realizing until they were captured that the compound was in Marine hands. Major Canfield remembered that an Iraqi officer walking toward the complex with his briefcase and a cup of coffee got to within a few yards of the building before realizing that American weapons were pointed at him. He immediately raised his hands in surrender. Captain Healey's Company K Marines killed two armed enemy soldiers as they attempted to enter the compound in a pickup truck shortly after the compound was secured.¹⁵⁷ Meanwhile, Marine scout-snipers in the complex engaged several *Saddam Fedayeen* militia maneuvering against the complex, killing one of them at a range of 550 meters and another at 750 meters.¹⁵⁸

On 31 March, 15th MEU began securing its assigned sector around the southwestern bridge. It was also during this period that an Iraqi lawyer walked over the southwestern bridge, approached the lines of Company I, 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, under the command of First Lieutenant J. Todd Widman, and provided fascinating information. "Mohammed" gave the battalion's human exploitation team intelligence about the *Fedayeen* and their locations. Later he also stated that a wounded American soldier named Jessica was in the Saddam Hospital, a complex on the western side of the city a few hundred meters north of the southwestern bridge. Mohammed claimed that the soldier had been tortured. When requested, Mohammed agreed to go back to the hospital and ascertain Private First Class Lynch's exact location within the structure. While his wife and daughter remained with the Marines, he walked back over the bridge that night and returned with more detailed information. Mohammed's wife had worked as a nurse in

* Lynch herself later denied any recollections of torture or physical abuse while in captivity.



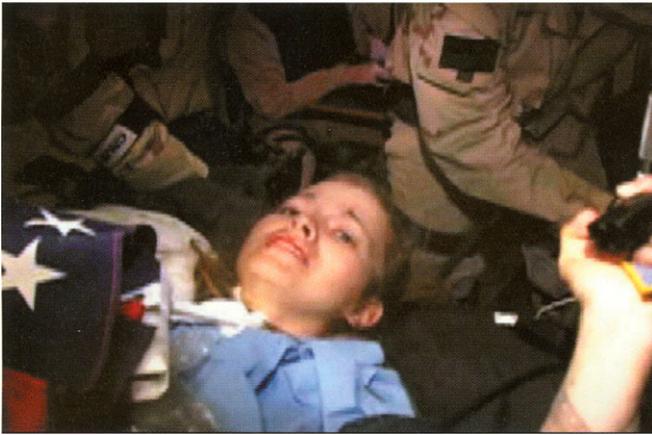
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the hospital, and she helped produce sketches of the building floor plan and surrounding grounds.¹⁵⁹

By 31 March, Task Force 20 had set up its command post within the Task Force Tarawa command post, and together the two organizations planned an operation to rescue Private First Class Lynch and any other Americans who might be at the hospital. The operation would take place on the night of 1 April. Instead of special operations forces supporting Task Force Tarawa, Task Force Tarawa would become the supporting effort for Task Force 20's rescue operation. To support the rescue, 15th MEU would launch a diversionary attack on the southwestern bridge. Artillery and air assets would also create a diversion by striking *Ba'ath* facilities just south of the hospital. The 3d Marine Aircraft Wing supplied the helicopter support for Rangers who were to land west of

the hospital and provide security and establish an emergency landing site. The 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, contributed tanks and assault amphibian vehicles as a quick reaction force located at the northwestern bridge that could be sent forward quickly in case anything went wrong. The 2d Force Reconnaissance Company provided survey of the rescue site, covering fire with sniper overwatch, terminal guidance into the Rangers' landing zone, and a medium tactical vehicle with a .50-caliber machine gun for the ground assault portion of the operation.

The Rangers landed at midnight on 1 April, and Navy SEALs entered the hospital about the same time. Within 20 to 25 minutes of their arrival, Private First Class Lynch was on a helicopter and flying away from the Saddam Hospital. After several hours, the Rangers located and evacuated the



Department of Defense Video Frame Capture
PFC Jessica D. Lynch, USA, shortly after her rescue by U.S. forces from the Saddam Hospital in Nasiriyah on the night of 1-2 April 2003.

body of one Marine killed in Ambush Alley and the bodies of the missing members of the 507th Maintenance Company. Every American killed at Nasiriyah went home. The rescue and recovery operation by Task Force 20 and Task Force Tarawa was a textbook operation in terms of joint planning and execution among numerous arms and branches of service. Every objective was accomplished, and there were no friendly casualties.¹⁶⁰

The next day, 2 April, Brigadier General Natonski considered declaring Nasiriyah secure. Before doing so, he rode over all four bridges and along roads and streets throughout the city. He visited the Saddam Hospital, saw Lynch's former room, and talked to the hospital staff. He noticed ordinary citizens outside their houses conducting their daily business and saw Coalition forces attempting to address their immediate needs. There would still be minor incidents after April 2, but Natonski concluded on that day that all main enemy headquarters had been eliminated and, for the most part, the "bad guys had left the city."¹⁶¹



Photo Joe Raedle, courtesy of Maj William P. Peeples
Marines speak with Iraqi citizens in Nasiriyah on 31 March 2003. Conversations such as these built rapport with the people and often generated information.

There was no time for the Marines of Task Force Tarawa to relax after their victory. Brigadier General Natonski tasked 15th MEU with holding onto Nasiriyah with a robust civil affairs program. Occasionally these Marines had to skirmish with isolated pockets of resistance in the city, but most of their work involved helping to rebuild and return life to normal for the people of Nasiriyah. The 24th MEU moved north up Highway 7 to secure Qalat Sikar airfield. RCT-2 advanced up Highway 1 to secure ad-Diwaniyah, an-Numaniyah, al-Hillah, and ultimately al-Amaraha and al-Kut. All of these operations were designed to provide security for the main supply routes and protect the flow of supplies as 1st Marine Division continued its march toward Baghdad. The war continued, and there was plenty of danger ahead, but Nasiriyah was the toughest battle that the Marines of Task Force Tarawa would fight.¹⁶²

Epilogue

Nasiriyah was a defining battle of the 2003 Iraq campaign in many ways. Coalition forces discovered much about their enemy and his tactics; they learned many important tactical and operational lessons; and the Iraqi Army commanders realized that it would be virtually impossible to stop determined U.S. Marines. Some of the things the Marines learned about the Iraqis were of immediate tactical and operational importance. The Marines could expect the enemy to use dummy positions, such as hulks of tanks, and to place them in front of buildings to create pillboxes. The enemy was apt to use hospitals, mosques, and schools as arms caches and defensive positions, taking advantage of the Americans' determination not to violate international laws of war and reluctance to harm civilians. Also in violation of the Geneva Convention, most Iraqi soldiers did not fight in uniform, but rather were in civilian clothes. The primary mission of the *Fedayeen* and other paramilitary forces, in fact, was to blend in with the civilian population, use members of it as human shields, and seek to stiffen resistance by the population and regular army forces against Coalition forces.

Against these Iraqi tactics, human intelligence, particularly from special operations forces and human exploitation teams, was extremely useful and helpful. The battle certainly proved the value of tanks in urban terrain and validated the effectiveness of snipers in urban combat as well. Scout-sniper teams not only accounted for dozens of enemy casualties but also gathered extensive intelligence by means of observation, capture of enemy personnel, and contact with Iraqi civilians. Artillery also

Battle of An-Nasiriyah

played a vital role, particularly when weather conditions precluded or hampered the use of aircraft. Additionally, the battle provided an example of how quickly an artillery battery could transition into the role of a provisional rifle company, as in the case of Task Force Rex.¹⁶³

Air support, both fixed-wing, and rotary, was also critical. AH-1W Cobra helicopters, in particular, were very effective in the urban environment. They controlled the rooftops, which proved vital in Nasiriyah, a city filled with buildings with flat roofs from which the enemy tried to fire on Coalition forces. The Cobras often played an important role in observation and were able to destroy enemy armored vehicles, artillery, and mortars with their own fire. Their very presence often boosted the morale of Marines on the ground and simultaneously had the opposite effect on the enemy. Sometimes the sound of their rotors suppressed enemy fire and sent Iraqi soldiers or militiamen scrambling for cover, an effect that forward air controllers called “suppression by noise.” Generally, the Cobras were able to avoid deadly effects from enemy ground fire. Iraqi rockets were a minimal threat as long as the Cobras made “runs” at a speed of 60 knots or more, firing as they went. Only when hovering in a stationary position were the helicopters seriously vulnerable to enemy fire.¹⁶⁴

Clearly one difficulty encountered in Nasiriyah was that of “friendly fire.” The most serious case was the A-10 incident discussed previously, but there were also two incidents between Marine ground units—one during the RCT-1 passage of lines north of the city, and another between the light armored reconnaissance company and the 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, command post south of the Euphrates. Even with the new “Blue Force Tracker” technology, the fog of war and occasionally the infiltration tactics of the enemy made it difficult to prevent these incidents entirely, particularly at night.

Nasiriyah set the tone for much of the rest of the Iraq war when it came to establishing a rapport with the civilian population. Most residents of the city were Shiites and not particularly loyal to the Saddam Hussein regime. Because of a strong military and paramilitary presence in the city, however, they were reluctant to embrace the Americans until it was safe to do so. In many cases, that occurred immediately once the people realized the Marines were in the city to stay. For example, only minutes after Company B Marines killed two *Republican Guard* officers east of Ambush Alley, civilians rushed into the street with tears of joy, with children crying “thank you” and spitting on the bodies of the dead officers.¹⁶⁵ Others risked their own safety to let the Marines know



Photo by LCpl Christopher G. Graham
A Marine from Task Force Tarawa assists a displaced child in Nasiriyah in late March 2003.

the whereabouts of captured Americans. The Marines began distributing humanitarian aid and working to help rebuild the city within a day or two of entering it. Civil affairs operations became extremely important, and Nasiriyah became a model for how to conduct them.

Another thing that went right at Nasiriyah was the effectiveness of joint planning and execution. Special operations forces from other services worked with Task Force Tarawa headquarters and provided excellent support. The Lynch recovery operation, in particular, was a textbook example of diverse American forces effectively integrating their capabilities. U.S. Army Special Forces and Rangers, U.S. Navy SEALs, U.S. Air Force Special Operations, and U.S. Marine infantry, armor, artillery, air, and intelligence assets all worked together and accomplished the mission with flawless execution.

Understandably and appropriately, Marine leaders gave much thought to what could have been done differently or better at Nasiriyah, particularly considering the relatively high casualty toll. No clear conclusions have emerged, other than that good intelligence was lacking before the battle. Several officers have pointed to the lack of shaping the battlefield by fire before entering the city.

There were no artillery preparations and no air attacks on the city before RCT-2 stormed across the bridges. Yet there were several good reasons for this. First, intelligence estimates seemed to indicate that it would be unnecessary. Second, without more detailed intelligence on specific enemy locations, there was no way to use air attacks or artillery on the city without inflicting significant damage to the city and loss of life on innocent civilians. Doing so would have been counterproductive and perhaps endangered American lives in the long run.

There had also been no reconnaissance of the city before the Marines charged into it. The pace of the campaign and the sense of urgency placed on the seizure of the bridges probably contributed to this omission. Additionally, intelligence sources and planners at higher levels felt sure resistance in the city would be light.

Others have questioned whether it was necessary to seize the eastern Nasiriyah bridges at all. Initially, officers throughout RCT-2 understood that they would bypass the city if they found significant resistance. From the perspective of Lieutenant General James Conway and higher headquarters, however, there was no question that what Task Force Tarawa did at Nasiriyah had to be done. The I MEF and V Corps needed another route to Baghdad besides Highway 1, both to accommodate the traffic flow and to achieve greater dispersion in defense against weapons of mass destruction. Besides, if Nasiriyah was not secured, it would have been a threat to the Highway 1 route itself and to the rear of Coalition forces. Also, RCT-1 needed to secure an airfield on Highway 7 so that a British follow-on brigade would have a means of aerial supply.¹⁶⁶

Other Marines have wondered why it was necessary to push so hard into the city once it became clear that the Iraqis were there in force and intended to fight. Why not prep the route into the city with artillery and air support and wait for the tanks to be completely refueled? This debate often revolves around Brigadier General Natonski's decision to push rapidly into the city and his order to his regimental and battalion commanders to hasten their advance on the morning of 23 March. Again, there are several justifications for the course that was taken. Task Force Tarawa's rapid, relentless drive into the city on 23 March matched the tone of the entire Coalition campaign, which emphasized the use of speed and aggressiveness to attain security and victory. Natonski knew that 1st Marine Division was right behind his task force, and he did not want any delay in seizing the bridges to slow the advance of the rest of I MEF. The unexpected developments with the 507th Maintenance Company also had much to do with Natonski's decision. Once that occurred, he believed that

his task force had lost the advantage of tactical surprise, possibly inducing the Iraqis to destroy the bridges to deny their use to the Americans. The best way to overcome this setback and reduce the possibility of blown bridges, Natonski felt, was with speed and aggressiveness. Indeed, captured Iraqi officers later confessed that they were "shocked" at the aggressiveness of the Marines. One said that "his fighters were very confident initially . . . but became dispirited when the Marines kept coming at them."¹⁶⁷ Finally, and just as importantly, there were wounded and missing Americans in the city. Natonski and other Marines felt an obligation to help.

Without question, the Marines of Task Force Tarawa upheld their Corps' legacy of valor and professionalism at Nasiriyah. Marines continually risked their lives to save others who were wounded or stranded in enemy-controlled parts of the city. When the battle north of the Euphrates devolved into three separate company-level fights, small-unit leadership, a hallmark of the Corps, took over. Junior officers and noncommissioned officers set the example and held their units together through the confusion of combat and shock of heavy casualties. They made difficult decisions under fire and refused to quit or withdraw until they had accomplished their missions. There were numerous cases of Marines continuing to perform their duties with determination even after they were wounded. Individual Marines throughout Task Force Tarawa battled heat, driving rain, fatigue, sandstorms, fear, confusion, and a numerous and resourceful enemy—and performed gallantly. They steadfastly performed their duty, and performed it well, significantly facilitating the Coalition march toward Baghdad.

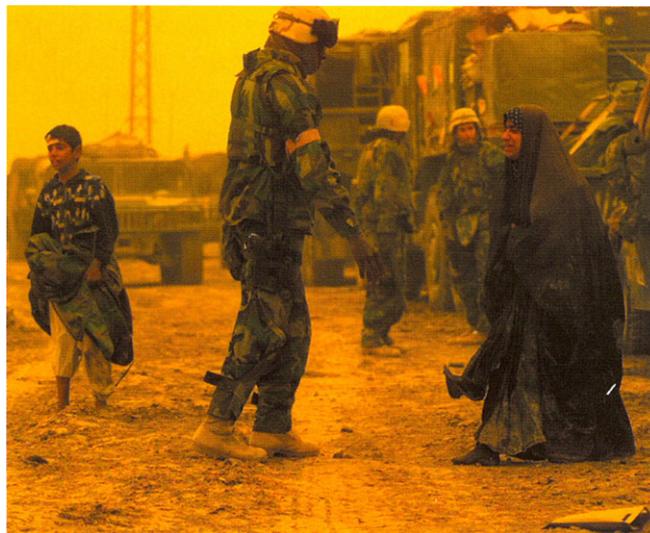


Photo by Cpl Mace M. Gratz
Marines of Task Force Tarawa assist displaced citizens in Nasiriyah in late March 2003.

Notes

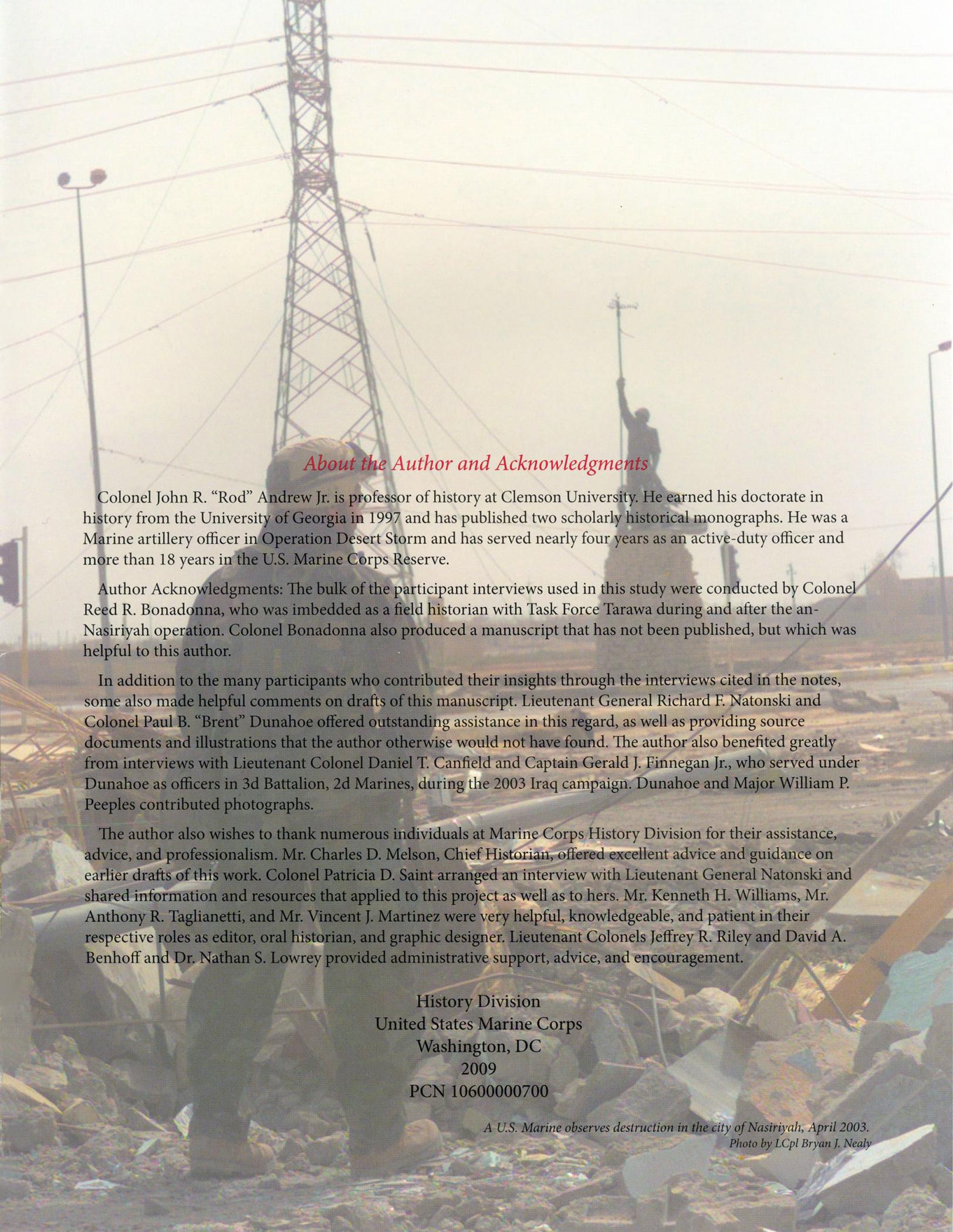
1. Col Nicholas E. Reynolds, *Basrah, Baghdad, and Beyond: The U.S. Marine Corps in the Second Iraq War* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2005), 2, 67.
2. Col Reed R. Bonadonna, "Desert Legion: With Task Force Tarawa in Operation Iraqi Freedom" (typescript, Marine Corps Historical Center [MCHC], Quantico, VA), 8.
3. BGen Richard F. Natonski intvw with LtCol David Watters, 6Mar04 (MCHC), hereafter Natonski intvw, 6Mar04.
4. Natonski intvw, 6Mar04; LtGen Natonski intvw with Col Patricia D. Saint, LtCol Rod Andrew Jr., and MGySgt Robert A. Yarnall, 19Dec07 (MCHC), hereafter Natonski intvw, 19Dec07.
5. Col Ronald L. Bailey intvw with Maj Jeffery R. Riley, 4May and 10May06 (MCHC), transcript, 2-3, 8-9.
6. Richard S. Lowry, *Marines in the Garden of Eden: The True Story of Seven Bloody Days in Iraq* (New York: Berkley Publishing, 2006), 3-4.
7. Bonadonna, 12; Lowry, 30.
8. Bailey intvw, 9; Natonski intvw, 6Mar04. The description of Mortenson as "articulate and charismatic" comes from Col Bonadonna's observations in Bonadonna, 12.
9. Bonadonna, 12; see also Lowry, 4.
10. Bailey intvw, 10.
11. Bonadonna, 13; Lowry, 4.
12. Bonadonna, 13.
13. Natonski intvw, 6Mar04.
14. Ibid.; A Co 8th Tank Bn ComdC, 1 Jan03-31Dec04, Section 2, p. 6. All command chronologies cited in this work can be found at the Gray Research Center (GRC), Quantico, VA.
15. Natonski intvw, 6Mar04; 2d MEB ComdC 1Jan-30Jun03, Section 2, p. 1.
16. LtCol Royal P. Mortenson intvw with Col Reed R. Bonadonna, 2Mar03 (MCHC) hereafter Mortenson intvw, 2Mar03.
17. Natonski intvw, 6Mar04; 2d MEB ComdC, Section 2, p. 1.
18. Natonski intvw, 6Mar04.
19. 1st Bn, 2d Mar ComdC, 1Jan-30Jun03, Section 2; 2d Bn, 8th Mar ComdC, 1Jan-30Jun03, Section 2, 2-1; A 8th Tanks, ComdC, Section 2, p. 6.
20. Natonski intvw 6Mar04; Mortenson intvw, 2Mar03; 3d Bn, 2d Mar ComdC, 1Jan-30Jun03, Part 2; Lowry, 32.
21. 2d MEB ComdC, Section 2, p. 2.
22. 2d MEB ComdC, Section 2, pp. 2-3; Natonski intvw, 6Mar04.
23. Natonski intvw, 6Mar04.
24. Maj Karl C. Rohr, "Fighting Through the Fog of War: Overcoming the Friction Points and Succeeding in Combat," *Marine Corps Gazette Online* (<http://www.mca-marines.org/gazette/2006/06rohr.html>). Maj Rohr was the battalion Fire Support Coordinator and CO of Weapons Company, 1st Bn, 2d Mar, in the battle of an-Nasiriyah.
25. Ibid; Natonski intvws, 6Mar04 and 17Dec07; 2d MEB ComdC, section 2, pp. 2-3; Bonadonna, 23.
26. Col Gregory Fontenot, LtCol E. J. Degen, and LtCol David Tohn, *On Point: The United States Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2005), 101; Reynolds, 43-44, 84; Lowry, 43, 97.
27. 2d MEB ComdC, Supporting Documents, disk 1, "TF Tarawa—Battle of Nasiriyah"; see also Col Glenn T. Starnes intvw with Col Reed R. Bonadonna, 7May03 (MCHC).
28. Col Paul B. Dunahoe phone intvws with LtCol Rod Andrew Jr., 27Aug08 and 17Sept08; "Commander's Intent, Line of Departure to An Nasiriyah," 20Mar03, copies in possession of Col Dunahoe and Col Andrew.
29. Rohr.
30. Task Force Tarawa, "Chronicle of the Combat Actions at Nasiriyah, 22 March-2 April 2003," entry for 22 March (hereafter "Chronicle," [entry date]), in 2d MEB Comd C, Supporting Documents, disk 1.
31. "Chronicle," 22 March; Natonski intvw, 6Mar04. I MEF FRAGO 017-03, 21 March 03, 1.A, 1.B, in "Chronicle," 22 Mar.
32. "Chronicle," 22March; 2d Mar ComdC, Section 2, pp. 19-22 Mar; Bailey intvw, 34.
33. Bailey intvw, 36.
34. Ibid. See also 31-35; Maj Andrew R. Kennedy, intvw with Col Reed R. Bonadonna, 7May03 (MCHC), 3-5.
35. Kennedy intvw, 5; Maj Doug Feiring, "Iraqi Freedom Diary" (<http://www.iraqi-freedom-diary.com/relief-in-place.html>).
36. Kennedy intvw, 5; Bailey intvw, 38.
37. 3d Bn, 2d Mar ComdC, Part 2.
38. LtCol James E. Reilly and SFC Thomas Smith intvw with Col Reed R. Bonadonna, 13Apr03 (MCHC).

39. Col Paul B. Dunahoe, notes on draft manuscript, 18Feb09, author's possession.
40. 3d Bn, 2d Mar ComdC, Part 2; Capt Gerald J. Finnegan Jr. telephone intvw with LtCol Rod Andrew Jr., 10Sept08; Lowry, 277.
41. Natonski intvw, 6Mar04.
42. LtCol Rickey L. Grabowski intvw with Col Reed R. Bonadonna, 6Apr03 (MCHC), 2.
43. Ibid. See also Lowry, 117-18, 149; Natonski intvw, 6Mar04; Bonadonna, 31 n.#5, 32-34.
44. RCT-2 Narrative Summary, "Chronicle," 23 March.
45. 3d Bn, 2d Mar ComdC, Part 2, Weapons Company; see also Lowry, 84.
46. 1st Bn, 2d Mar ComdC, Section 2
47. Grabowski intvw, 3; "Chronicle," 23 March; 1st Bn 10th Mar ComdC, 1Jan-30Jun03; Bailey intvw, 44; Maj William P. Peeples and 1stSgt Roger D. Huddleston intvw with Col Reed R. Bonadonna, 1May03 (MCHC) hereafter Peeples intvw; LtCol Donald S. Hawkins, Maj Craig H. Streeter, Maj Matthew R. Shenberger, and GySgt Kevin Barry intvw with Fred Allison, 13Oct06 (MCHC), transcript, 11 (hereafter Hawkins intvw).
48. Peeples intvw.
49. Natonski intvw, 6Mar04; Peeples intvw; Company A, 8th Tanks Bn, ComdC, Section 2, p. 7; Hawkins intvw, 13-19, 26-31; Lowry, 130-41.
50. Quotes from Bonadonna, 34. Bonadonna's source was comments made on an earlier draft of his manuscript by LtCol Grabowski (ibid., 128 n. xviii-xix); Bailey intvw, 39, 44; Natonski intvws, 6Mar04 and 17Dec07.
51. Grabowski intvw, 4; 1st Bn, 2d Mar ComdC, section 2; SSgt Troy F. Schielein intvw with Col Reed R. Bonadonna, 29Apr03 (MCHC).
52. Grabowski intvw, 5.
53. Ibid; Schielein intvw; Peeples intvw.
54. Grabowski intvw, 5-6; Natonski intvw, 6Mar04.
55. "Chronicle," 23 March; Natonski intvw, 6Mar04; Grabowski intvw, 6-7; Huddleston comments in Peeples intvw; Lowry, 174-78.
56. Grabowski intvw, 7; Lowry, 178-79; Hawkins intvw, 16; Huddleston in Peeples intvw; "U.S. Central Command Investigation of Suspected Friendly Fire Incident Near Nasiriyah, Iraq, 23 March 03," Capt A. J. Greene testimony, p. J-107-08 (hereafter CentComm Investigation).
57. Natonski intvw, 6Mar04; Lowry, 187.
58. Peeples intvw; Maj Michael A. Brooks Jr. intvw with Col Reed R. Bonadonna, 4Apr03 (MCHC), transcript, 11; Hawkins intvw, 66-67.
59. 1stLt Michael S. Seely intvw with Col Reed R. Bonadonna, 4May03 (MCHC), transcript, 6-10; 2dLt Scott M. Swantner intvw with Col Reed R. Bonadonna 2May03 (MCHC); Lowry, 187-92.
60. Seely intvw, 9-11; Swantner intvw; Lowry, 187-95.
61. Grabowski intvw, 7; Lowry, 190, 204-8; CentCom Investigation, Testimony of Commander, Bravo Company, pp. J-141, J-147; Capt Dennis A. Santare testimony, Tab H.
62. Seely intvw, 16; Lowry, 205-12; Bonadonna, 48-49; CentCom investigation, Grabowski testimony, pp. J-67, J-72.
63. CentCom investigation, Grabowski testimony, p. J-63; Greene testimony, pp. J-106-109, 111; Santare testimony, pp. H-29-31.
64. CentCom investigation, Santare testimony, p. H-31.
65. Ibid.
66. Ibid., p. H-32.
67. Ibid.
68. Ibid., pp. H-32-33; CentCom investigation, Final Report, 10; Lowry, 199.
69. CentCom investigation, pp. H-22, H-31-33 (quote on H-33).
70. Seely intvw, 18; CentCom investigation, 1stSgt Jose G. Henao testimony, p. J-212; Swantner intvw; SSgt Anthony J. Pompos intvw with Col Reed R. Bonadonna, 5May03 (MCHC); Bonadonna, 51, 53.
71. Seely intvw, 18-20; Swantner intvw.; Lowry, 214.
72. CentCom investigation, Grabowski testimony, pp. J-67-68; Capt Daniel J. Wittnam testimony, p. J-160; Hawkins intvw, 73.
73. CentCom investigation, Santare testimony, p. H-33; Tab A-H, Final Report, 10.
74. CentCom investigation, Tab A-H, Final Report, 10.
75. Swantner and Seely intvws, and their testimony in CentCom Investigation, Tab J; testimony of other Company C Marines in pp. J-211, J-231-32, J-238-39, J-254, J-259, J-271, J-276, A-E-3, A-F-24, A-F-32.
76. CentCom investigation, Tab A-H, Final Report, 12; 1st Bn, 2d Mar ComdC, Section 2.
77. Peeples intvw; Lowry, 259-62.
78. Seely intvw, 22; CentCom investigation, Grabowski testimony, pp. J-70-71; Santare testimony, p. H-33.

79. Seely intvw, 32; CentCom investigation, Tab A-H-3, Final Report, 10.
80. LtGen Richard F. Natonski, notes on draft manuscript, 14Feb09, author's possession.
81. CentCom investigation, Tab A-H-3, Final Report, 27.
82. Ibid.
83. Kennedy intvw, 18-19; Brooks intvw, 15-17; Peoples intvw; Grabowski intvw, 8; Bonadonna, 60.
84. "Chronicle," 23 March.
85. Brooks intvw, 19-20.
86. LtCol Grabowski remembers that Company A arrived at the northern bridge sometime around 1600 or 1700; Brooks remembers 1600. Grabowski intvw, 24; Brooks intvw, 17, 20.
87. Kennedy intvw, 18.
88. LtCol Royal P. Mortenson, intvw with Col Reed R. Bonadonna, 28Mar03 (MCHC); hereafter Mortenson intvw, 28Mar03.
89. Grabowski intvw, 13.
90. "Chronicle," 23 March, records that 1st Bn, 2d Mar reported the Saddam Canal bridge secure at 1128 Zulu, 1428 local time. Company C was still engaged in a vicious firefight at that time and had still not been reinforced by other elements of the battalion.
91. Bailey intvw, 50-51; 2d Bn, 8th Mar ComdC, pp. II-1, II-2.
92. Mortenson intvw, 28Mar03.
93. "Chronicle," 23 March.
94. Mortenson intvw, 28Mar03, Kennedy intvw, p. 16.
95. "Chronicle," CG's Personal Journal, 23 March.
96. 1st Bn, 10th Mar ComdC; Starnes intvw.
97. Natonski intvw, 6Mar04; Kennedy intvw, 11-12; CentComm investigation, Grabowski testimony, p. J-81.
98. Natonski intvw, 17Dec07.
99. Natonski intvw, 6Mar04; Kennedy intvw, 11-12.
100. LtCol Grabowski's in-depth interview with the captured executive officer of the 23d Brigade revealed that the defeat of the 507th Maintenance Company had "emboldened" the Iraqis (see Grabowski intvw, 21; CentCom investigation, Grabowski testimony, p. J-84).
101. Ibid.
102. Natonski intvw, 6Mar04.
103. Ibid.
104. Ibid.; LtGen Richard F. Natonski, notes on draft manuscript, 14Feb09, author's possession.
105. Gen Eric K. Shinseki to Gen Michael W. Hagee, 10 June 2003, copies in possession of the author and LtGen Richard F. Natonski.
106. Brooks intvw, 8-9; CentCom investigation, Grabowski testimony, p. J-81; Schielein intvw; Bonadonna, 45 (based on interview with SSgt Lonnie O. Parker).
107. Kennedy intvw, 20.
108. 1st Bn, 2d Mar ComdC, Section 2; Brooks intvw, 25-29; Schielein intvw; Bonadonna, 67.
109. 1st Bn, 2d Mar ComdC, Section 2; Natonski intvw, 6Mar04; Bonadonna, 67.
110. "Chronicle," 24 March; 1st Bn, 2d Mar ComdC, Section 2; 1st Bn, 10th Mar ComdC.
111. Lowry, 274.
112. 2d Bn, 8th Mar ComdC, Scout-Sniper Platoon Chronology, Item 5, p. 5; Natonski intvw, 6Mar04.
113. 2d Bn, 8th Mar ComdC, Section 2, p. II-2, and Item 4, pp. 1-2; Bonadonna, 69; Lowry, 284-85; Natonski intvw, 6Mar04.
114. LtGen Natonski, comments on draft manuscript, 14Feb09, author's possession.
115. 2d Bn, 8th Mar ComdC, Section 2; Mortenson intvw, 28Mar03.
116. Natonski intvw, 6Mar04; Kennedy intvw, 19-20; LtCol Daniel T. Canfield phone intvw with LtCol Rod Andrew Jr., 3Sept08; Dunahoe intvw, 17Sept08.
117. 3d Bn, 2d Mar ComdC, Part 2.
118. Natonski intvw, 6Mar04; "Chronicle," 24 March.
119. I MEF FRAGO 023-3 in "Chronicle," 24 March.
120. 3d Bn, 2d Mar ComdC, Part 2; Canfield intvw; Lowry, 328.
121. Ibid., Natonski intvw, 6Mar04.
122. 2d Bn, 8th Mar ComdC, Item 4, p. 2.
123. Ibid., Item 2, p. 4; 1st Bn, 10th Mar ComdC; "Chronicle," CG's Personal Journal, 25 March. The comment on visibility during the dust storm comes from an article written anonymously by a Marine colonel and first sergeant from Task Force Tarawa and published on www.urbanoperations.com. It is also found in 2d MEB ComdC, Supporting Documents, disk 1, "Lessons Learned;" hereafter "Lessons Learned."
124. Natonski intvw, 6Mar04; 2d Bn 8th Mar ComdC, item 3, p. 3, and p. II-3; Mortenson intvw, 28Mar03.

125. Mortenson intvw, 28Mar03; 2d Bn 8th Mar ComdC, item 3, p. 3, item 5, p. 7.
126. 3d Bn, 2d Mar ComdC, Part 2; Canfield intvw; Dunahoe intvw, 27Aug08.
127. 1st Bn 2d Mar ComdC, Section 2, and Company B, Section 2; Lowry, 316; Bonadonna, 73.
128. 1st Bn, 2d Mar ComdC, Section 2; see also *ibid.*, Alpha Company, Section 2.
129. Natonski intvw, 6Mar04; "Chronicle," CG's Personal Journal, 26 March.
130. 3d Bn, 2d Mar ComdC, Part 2, Lima Company section.
131. 3d Bn, 2d Mar ComdC, Part 2; Canfield intvw; Dunahoe intvw, 27Aug08.
132. 3d Bn, 2d Mar ComdC, Part 2; 2d MEB ComdC, Section 2, p. 5; 2d Bn, 8th Mar ComdC, item 2, p. 4, item 3, p. 3-4, item 4, p. 3.
133. Finnegan intvw; Canfield intvw; Dunahoe intvw, 17Sept08.
134. 1st Bn, 10th Mar ComdC.
135. Natonski intvw, 6Mar04; Kennedy intvw, 22; "Chronicle," 26 March; 1st Bn, 10th Mar ComdC; Starnes intvw.
136. "Chronicle," 26 March; 1st Bn, 10th Marines ComdC.
137. Kennedy intvw, 22-23; Starnes intvw; Canfield intvw.
138. 1st Bn, 10th Marines ComdC; Starnes intvw.
139. Kennedy intvw, 24-25.
140. Canfield intvw.
141. 2d Bn, 8th Marines ComdC, part 2; Kennedy intvw, 23-26. Maj Kennedy interviewed numerous Marines about the incident that night and the following day. See also Bonadonna's narrative, 79-84, which is based on Col Bonadonna's interviews with Capt Grunwald; Grunwald's first sergeant, 1stSgt Michael Sprague; Maj Alford, and Capt Eric Quehl, who was at the CP with elements of his Company A, 2d Combat Engineers. Maj Julian D. Alford intvw with Col Reed R. Bonadonna, 28Mar03 (MCHC); Capt Eric R. Quehl intvw with Col Bonadonna, 4Apr03 (MCHC).
142. "Chronicle," excerpt of MEF FRAGO 035-03, 27 March; Natonski intvw, 6Mar04.
143. Quotes from "Chronicle," TF Tarawa INTSUM, 27 March.
144. Natonski intvw, 6Mar04; CentCom investigation, Grabowski testimony, p. J-85.
145. Natonski intvw, 6Mar04.
146. *Ibid.*
147. "Chronicle," 27, 28 March.
148. *Ibid.*, 29, 31 March.
149. Natonski intvw, 6Mar04.
150. *Ibid.*; "Chronicle," INTSUM for 27 and 29 March, I MEF FRAGO 040-03, 28 March; "Chronicle," 1 April.
151. Natonski intvw, 6Mar04; "Chronicle," 30, 31 March.
152. 2d Mar ComdC, 2d Bn, 8th Marines ComdC, p. II-4.
153. 1st Bn, 10th Marines ComdC; Starnes intvw.
154. *Ibid.*
155. Col Paul B. Dunahoe, comments on draft manuscript, 9Feb09, author's possession.
156. 3d Bn, 2d Mar ComdC, Part 2; Dunahoe intvws, 27Aug08 and 17Sept08; Canfield intvw; 1st Lt. John D. Bolt, Sgt Christopher M. Sharon, and Cpl Brandon D. Maston intvw with Col Reed R. Bonadonna, 10Apr03 (MCHC), transcript, 6-11; hereafter Bolt intvw.
157. Col Paul B. Dunahoe, comments on draft manuscript, 9Feb09, author's possession.
158. *Ibid.*
159. Lowry, 362, 366, 368-69; Natonski intvw, 6Mar04; 3d Bn, 2d Mar ComdC, Part 2, S-2 Intelligence.
160. Reilly intvw; Natonski intvw, 6Mar04; 1st Bn, 2d Mar ComdC.
161. "Chronicle," CG's Personal Journal, 2 April; Natonski intvw, 6Mar04.
162. "Chronicle," 2 April; Natonski intvw, 6Mar04.
163. "Lessons Learned," 2d Bn, 8th Mar ComdC; 3d Bn, 2dMar ComdC; 1stLt John D. Bolt, "Summary of Actions of Surveillance and Target Acquisition Platoon (STA) 3/2 During Operation Iraqi Freedom," in possession of Col Paul B. Dunahoe.
164. Finnegan intvw; Hawkins intvw.
165. Schielein intvw.
166. Bing West and MGen Ray L. Smith, *The March Up: Taking Baghdad with the First Marine Division* (New York: Bantam Books, 2003), 41.
167. Reynolds, 81.

Back Cover: *The logotype reproduced on the back cover has as its major element the oldest military insignia in continuous use in the United States. It first appeared, as shown here, on Marine Corps buttons adopted in 1804. With the stars changed to five points, the device has continued on Marine Corps buttons to the present day.*



About the Author and Acknowledgments

Colonel John R. "Rod" Andrew Jr. is professor of history at Clemson University. He earned his doctorate in history from the University of Georgia in 1997 and has published two scholarly historical monographs. He was a Marine artillery officer in Operation Desert Storm and has served nearly four years as an active-duty officer and more than 18 years in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve.

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*A U.S. Marine observes destruction in the city of Nasiriyah, April 2003.
Photo by LCpl Bryan J. Nealy*

