

escorted to 2/23 and 1st Marines. After several days without resupply, and subsisting on only one MRE per day, the Marines of RCT-1 were glad to see the convoy roll up. The uninterrupted flow of logistics from RRP-24 to RCT-1 via surface transport greatly alleviated the critical shortfalls the RCT had been operating under.

From Stabilization to Combat Operation



EOD Marines prepare to destroy a cache of enemy mortar rounds.

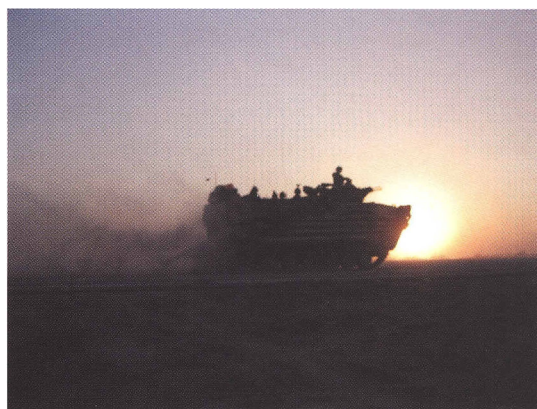
weapons cache 3 km to the east of Ad Diwaniyah. “This thing is like Fallbrook,” quoted the excited EOD team members referring to the extensive naval ammunition supply station at their home base, a Camp Pendleton landmark. The weapons storage facility included over 40 bunkers containing everything from RPGs to thousands of brand new 155mm artillery rounds. The Division expressed its appreciation to the Iraqi General Staff for assisting with its artillery ammunition re-supply.

The battalions of the Division were experiencing significant success in bringing peace to the locals in the Division’s zone. Local civilians in Ad Diwaniyah were actively cooperating with the Marines, and had pointed out a sizable paramilitary stronghold in a local schoolhouse located in a grove of palm trees. The locals were eager to have the Marines of the Division conduct an operation against this position, but with Blue Diamond moving back into the attack north, this would have to be passed down from 2/5 to 3/4. Acting on another local tip, the Marines of 2/5 identified a sizable

Inchon Stretches to Cover All of Highway 7

With elements spread along the length of Highway 7, RCT-1 was now conducting missions in Al Hayy, Qalat Sikar, Ash Shattrah, and Al Fajr. The RCT span of control was over 100 kilometers along the route. In addition to straddling a large section of battlespace, the RCT also straddled a range of missions that ranged from wresting control away from Baath party thugs, to civil-military operations.

The Reconnaissance Battalion had been relieved at the Qalat Sikar airfield by 1/4, and now established a 360-degree perimeter around the intersection of Highway 7 and 17, guarding the multiple avenues of approach. On 30 March, 1/4 (less the units at the



The sun sets as Marines continue to patrol along Highway 7.

airfield) conducted a relief in place with 3/1 and defended the Highway 7 avenue of approach from the south. That night saw a spike in enemy activity as 1/4 was probed by a squad-sized unit and the Recon Battalion came under intense enemy rocket fire from the direction of Al Hayy. With extremely limited visibility, 1/4 relied heavily on the Javelin gunners and their Command Launch Unit (CLU) thermal sights to observe the activities outside their perimeter. As Corporal Michael Reyna scanned his sector with the CLU, he picked up the unmistakable thermal signature of individuals with AK-47s and RPGs moving along a ditch approximately 150 meters north of the battalion's defensive line. The Marines engaged the enemy, spoiling his plan to launch a surprise attack. Caught by surprise, the enemy hastily and inaccurately launched two RPGs that sailed harmlessly above the forward command group's AAVC-7. Unable to effectively direct their fire against the wall of steel that honed in on their position, the would-be ambushers beat a hasty retreat and left their boots in the mud in the process. Shortly thereafter, the distinct sounds of a multiple rocket launcher releasing its load were heard. The enemy had pre-registered fires against this intersection, and was now executing a well-planned artillery raid. The first rounds impacted very close to the Recon perimeter, and Major Rich Whitmer, the Battalion S-3 was sure the next rounds would be adjusted right into their position. The fires were unobserved, however, and the rounds continued to impact just outside the perimeter. Rudely awakened, but unharmed, the battalion command group tried to get a few hours of sleep before their mission the next day.

31 March **1st Marine Division on the Move Again**

The Division attack plan for its push across the Tigris River would entail all three RCTs acting in a coordinated action of fire, maneuver, and exploitation. RCT-1 would serve as the fixing force for the attack, fixing the Baghdad RG Division by fires from a position south of Al Kut on Highway 7. The RCT, with the Recon Battalion attached, would establish blocking

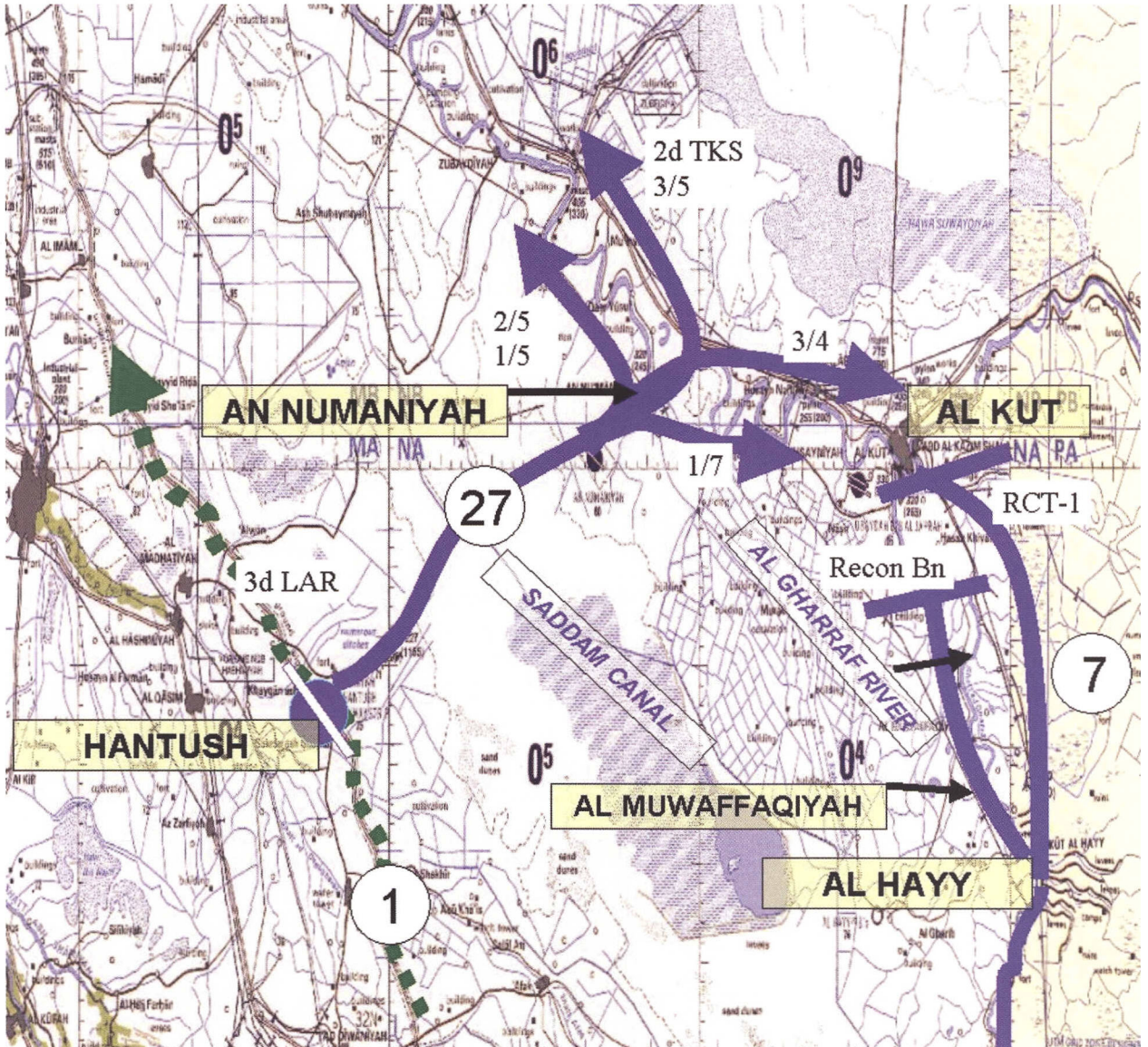
positions on both sides of the Gharraf River south of Al Kut, and commence its fires from these positions. RCT-5 would attack to seize the Hantush Airstrip, seize a crossing over the Saddam canal, then finally to seize crossings over the Tigris River in the vicinity of An Numaniyah. The RCT would lead with 3d LAR Battalion to Hantush, who would continue to feint north along Highway 1 in order to fix the Medina Division from the south. First LAR would attack in trace of 3^d LAR and set up blocking positions south of the small town of Ash Shumali. They would allow the lead



An LAV-25 from 3^d LAR Battalion moves forward to participate in a feint against the Medina Division

elements of RCT-5 to pass through, then follow in support. First Battalion, 5th Marines would attack to seize the Highway 27 Bridge over the Saddam canal, while 2d Tanks and 3/5 would make the attack into An Numaniyah to seize the 600 meter long bridge over the Tigris located there. Second Battalion, 5th Marines would provide security to the RCT's western flank, and guide the 8th Engineer Support Battalion to an alternate crossing site to the west of An

Numaniyah. The alternate crossing site was upwind of An Numaniyah, and gave the Division a good location to construct another bridge it could use if the An Numaniyah bridge was disabled or closed down by persistent chemicals. The exploitation would come from RCT-7, who would follow in trace of RCT-5 to the Tigris, seizing the An Numaniyah Airfield in the process. Third Battalion, 7th Marines would relieve RCT-5 at the bridge site, and secure the town of An Numaniyah itself.



Details of the attack plan. RCT-1 would fix forces in Al Kut while RCT-7 and RCT-5 crossed the Tigris at An Numaniyah. RCT-7 would attack east toward Al Kut, while RCT-5 would continue to roll to Baghdad. RCT-1 and the Reconnaissance Battalion would conduct a roundabout march to link-up with the Division.

All of these attacks facilitated the movement of the exploitation force, as 3/4 and 1/7 would conduct a coordinated attack to the east on both sides of the river, attacking the Baghdad RG Division in its defensive positions on the outskirts of the Al Kut urban area.

Back to Hantush Airstrip

With the Wolfpack back in the lead, RCT-5 re-attacked to Hantush. This time, there was little resistance until they reached the airstrip itself. There, an Iraqi AAA unit, firing in direct fire mode, engaged them. Wolfpack continued the attack through the airfield, taking 15 EPWs and destroying 12 AAA pieces. They opened the critical FARP for the Division and continued to push up Highway 1. Their continued advance up Highway 1 was meant to give the enemy reason to believe that the Division's attack would continue up the main route to Baghdad. Over the next several days, 3^d LAR aggressively patrolled north of the Hantush airstrip to the limit of the Division's zone. In the process, they discovered two Al Samoud Surface-to-Surface missiles (recently declared in violation of UN resolutions) and tagged them for destruction. In one engagement, Bravo Company, 4th LAR Battalion, engaged and defeated an infantry counterattack in the vicinity of Al Madhatiyah.



Scouts from 1st LAR Battalion search buildings in Ash Shumali.

While the Wolfpack attacked through Hantush, 1st LAR turned northeast just prior to the airfield and established a blocking position near the small town of Ash Shumali to prevent any potential enemy forces from attacking south. Highlander conducted reconnaissance of potential routes around the town and sent security patrols inside the town center, where they discovered a Baath party headquarters. The inhabitants of Shumali informed the patrol that the Baath members had already fled. With the town secure, the lead elements of RCT-5 continued up Highway 27.

The MWSS Engineers followed closely on the heels of RCT-5 as they cleared the airfield. Within hours, they had cleared and improved it. The MWSS and CSSG Marines immediately laid out the bladders for a fuel farm. The CG of 3^d MAW, Major General Amos, arrived on scene for a personal inspection, and declared it fit for KC-130 operations. The plan became a reality, and within 24 hours the field was in full operation, with critical fuel and supplies pouring in. When the first KC-130 landed at Hantush, it marked the logistics turning point in the attack to Baghdad. Hantush was the first KC-130 serviced hard-surface airfield north of the Euphrates, and was to enable the delivery of the fuel that the RCTs used to continue the attack from Al Kut to Baghdad.

The seizure of Hantush demonstrated the criticality of 3d MAW support as Division units stretched the 1st FSSG's arc of sustainment. CASEVAC helicopters positioned with the RCTs and Division CPs shortened the distance and time from point of injury to treatment. CH-53s brought pre-staged ammunition packages to units beyond the end of secure roads. MWSS

Marines dispensed fuel to the Division's vehicles and many others as they moved up Highway 1. In addition to providing fuel and ordnance to rotary wing CAS aircraft, FARPs became supply points for ground units. The Division worked with 3^d MAW to get ten KC-130 sorties and six CH-53E sorties each day to bring 50,000 gallons of fuel, 88 pallets of MREs, petroleum oil and lubricants and miscellaneous parts into Hantush and Wrigley (an expeditionary airstrip further south, near the Division Main CP on Highway 1.)

The Division also requested that 3^d MAW lift 20,000 gallons of fuel with two CH-53s daily to Qalat Sikar to sustain the Division's movement along Highway 7, its eastern line of communication. The Wing went so far as to bring pallets of MREs from its own stocks to dispense to Marines at this critical FARP (although the Division Marines kidded their Wing comrades that they would rather have them bring the steak and lobster from their chow hall.) Shortly thereafter, the Marine Logistics Command began to take advantage of KC-130-capable airstrips as major logistics nodes. They staged MREs at Ali As Saleem Air Base and Joe Foss Airfield (in Camp Matilda, Kuwait) to shorten supply lines from theater stocks to front-line Marines. The strength of the relationship between Division and Wing staffs paid dividends from the LD to Baghdad. CSSG-11 appreciated the reinforcing capability of the Wing, as both organizations committed body and soul to keeping the Division on the move.



Marines of 3d MAW establish a forward operating base at Hantush Airstrip to support actions near Al Kut.

With the successful seizure of Hantush Airstrip, the Division surged ahead to stage itself for the continued attack. The Division Forward CP jumped and established itself several kilometers east of Hantush, along Highway 27. The roadway was jammed with bridge companies, MWSS vehicles, combat forces, and logistics trains from CSSC-115. The limited area around the airfield became a parking lot. The TMC pushed forward to take charge of the intersection, and soon had traffic flowing to the northeast. RCT-5's lead elements gained some maneuver space by pushing toward the Saddam canal Bridge, which lay about 23 km further up the road.

There were a number of contacts that day as units moved to the northeast. MPs from the TMCC were ambushed by 82 mm mortars and direct fire from a cluster of mud buildings along Highway 27. They immediately attacked through the ambush and discovered a squad of paramilitary fighters using women and children as human shields. The MPs killed or chased off the paramilitary fighters without causing any civilian casualties, much to the relief of the families that lived in the compound. The Iraqi women and children had been forced to stand in a row at the intervisibility line between the paramilitary fighters and the Marines.

That evening, the Division continued to shape the battlespace in detail for the next day's attack. Using the Pioneer, the Division was able to identify a small defensive position at the Highway 27 Bridge over the Saddam canal. The Iraqis had prepared what appeared to be a small ambush on the southwest side of the canal, while creating a conventional defensive line along the northeast side. This position was attacked by air and reduced. The targeteers turned to several large military facilities to the northwest of Highway 27 between the Saddam Canal and Tigris

River, and found vehicle activity in a large ammunition storage area. This target, far from any populated areas, was subjected to sustained aviation fires and later, a B-52 strike. The Division remained like a coiled spring, ready to push up Highway 27 the next morning.

Attack on Ash Shattrah

With the forward elements of RCT-1 pushing north of Al Hayy to fix the Baghdad RG Division, the RCT was also required to support an additional mission in Ash Shattrah. This small town astride Highway 7 remained a troublesome source of Baath activity, and a haven for Regime fighters. Several days earlier, a 3^d MAW support convoy had passed through the town,



An Iraqi civilian tries to keep up with his transportation on Highway 7.

attempting to reach the Qalat Sikar airfield. The convoy had come under fire, and in the confusion, there was a vehicle crash. The convoy withdrew from the city, and later discovered that an MWSS Marine had been left behind in one of the crashed vehicles. On 30 March, 3/1 was ordered to move to isolate the town in support of clandestine forces that were planning to attack Baath party facilities and search for evidence of the missing Marine. The battalion went into attack positions, isolating Ash Shattrah. When the other forces (Iraqi irregulars) that were to conduct the attacks did not arrive at the linkup point, the RCT took matters into their own hands. Working with information from informants in the town, the

RCT S-2, Major Tom Sharp, and his crew, were able to precisely identify the buildings housing the Baath members. They also identified a hospital that was said to hold the body of the Marine (who reportedly had been killed in the earlier vehicle crash.) The RCT nominated the targets (minus the hospital, of course) for precision strike, and planned to send 3/1 into the town to search the hospital for evidence of the Marine. The next day, the nominated targets were struck, and 7 of 9 were destroyed. The precision of the strikes marveled the local populace, who turned out into the streets in droves to witness the demonstration of both firepower and restraint. Into the confusion, 3/1 raced into the town. They quickly searched for signs of remaining Baathists and the missing Marine. At the hospital, they confirmed that the Marine had been killed in the initial crash, and that his body had been buried by the local citizens outside of the town. The recovery task was passed to TF Tarawa for exploitation, and 3/1 hurried north to go into the attack on Al Kut.

Inchon Attacks to Al Kut

RCT-1 elements continued to receive indirect fire from artillery raids being conducted out of Al Hayy. These enemy artillery units had been moving from the cover of the urban area to firing positions south of the city. In fact, some of these systems had been spotted displacing during the previous night. Aerial intelligence from the Pioneer UAV and two P-3 missions (with Division observers Colonel Jim Lukeman and Major Mike Rodgers aboard) discovered the movement and

efforts were started to take out the weapon systems. As attack aircraft checked on station, the frustration began to build as none of the aircraft were configured with a sensor capable of positively identifying the mobile artillery pieces. Pilots felt the frustration of the RCT as they could make out movement through their night vision goggles, but were unable to discriminate the target well enough to be certain it was enemy artillery. With the friendly fire close calls that had occurred in the recent past, Marine pilots wanted to be certain this was foe and not friend. Unfortunately, the positive identification was never achieved. RCT-1 began planning for a ground takedown of Al Hayy and the source of the indirect fire. The RCT planned to attack with the Reconnaissance Battalion moving along the west side of the Gharraf River to block the city from the west and north. Alpha Company of 1st Tanks, and 1/4 would attack north along Highway 7, and act as the hammer to Recon Battalion's anvil. Their mission was to attack into the city, destroy any enemy, and put a stop to the artillery attacks.



The Cannon Cockers deliver shaping fires on the Baghdad Infantry Division.

On the western flank of the RCT-1 attack, the Reconnaissance Battalion made its way up Route 7A on the west side of the Gharraf River. The Battalion planned to get into blocking positions on the west side of the river, keeping enemy forces from withdrawing to the west out of town. The Battalion made good progress up the poor road. As before, the terrain limited the Battalion's movement, and they found themselves in a column of companies, on top of the raised



Life continues as it did thousands of years ago, even as modern armies battle nearby.

levee road for much of its length. As the Battalion column approached a sharp bend in the river, paramilitary forces ambushed them. This was a well-placed ambush, supported by mortars and AAA guns being used in direct fire mode. The Battalion quickly executed its reaction plan, pulled back out of the ambush kill-zone, and called in supporting arms. Once again, the Battalion began to receive incoming mortar fire, and watched its approach. The first

rounds impacted about 800 meters from the column, but the second series were much closer. The third series began to land in the water next to the Battalion, and they waited for the next set to be right on target. Miraculously, the mortar fire ceased. The air support soon arrived, and cleared the ambush positions.

The Reconnaissance Battalion moved up the remaining distance to the bridges at Al Hayy, and approached the northernmost. Despite their earlier scrap, their arrival at the town from the west was an absolute surprise for the enemy in Al Hayy. The Battalion could see Iraqis running through the streets on the far side of the river as they reacted to the presence of the Marines. The enemy managed to man fighting positions and began to fire. The enemy positions were well prepared, and they were able to pour heavy fire on the Marines. Recon Battalion was able to gain fire superiority with its heavy machine guns, and fought its way across the Al Hayy Bridge. RCT-1 was still south of Al Hayy on Highway 7, so Recon Battalion continued their attack all the way to Highway 7. The Battalion was ordered to conduct patrols and establish a blocking position to the north of the city, on the east side of the river. That night, the Recon Battalion engaged hundreds of targets as enemy forces attempted to flee to the north up Highway 7. Bravo Company under Captain Craig Schwetjewa was patrolling to the west of Highway 7 when they detected hundreds of paramilitaries attempting to bypass the battalion's blocking position on the highway. Once again, 1/11 provided devastating fires, and the enemy forces trying to bypass the Recon Battalion's positions were destroyed.

As the Recon Battalion was pushing up the west bank of the river, 1/4 conducted a simultaneous attack north along Highway 7 on the east side of the river towards Al Hayy. As 1/4 continued its attack north, it uncovered numerous weapons caches along the way. Just south of the city, the battalion received mortar fire, and Captain Coby Moran, the battalion's Weapons Company commander and fire support coordinator, called in the 'snowstorm' report and requested close air support. The RCT-1 Air Officer vectored a section of AH-1Ws to the



A suspicious Iraqi vehicle is disabled and searched at a checkpoint.

battalion, and they promptly identified and destroyed an Iraqi tank, artillery piece, and other Iraqi weapons systems. As RCT-1 kept pressing the enemy, they began to find the route littered with abandoned equipment. As the Blue Diamond attack began to break their will, the Iraqi fighters continued to abandon their positions and weapons. The assaulting companies found abandoned uniforms, small arms, RPGs, and hundreds of 120mm mortar rounds.

1 April The Saddam Canal

By the morning of 1 April, the enemy's resistance had been severely weakened. The intelligence assessment of the Baghdad RG Division was that 80% of its major weapons systems had been destroyed. The status of the infantry in the Division's three brigades was harder to ascertain, but without their supporting arms they lacked much of their former combat power. The Baghdad RG Division had always had mobility problems due to a shortage of transport vehicles, but now it was truly fixed. To the west, the enemy position on Highway 27 near the Saddam Canal



Destroyed Iraqi armor near the Saddam Canal

bridge remained, as did the positions near the An Numaniyah Bridge. The conventional defense of Al Kut had been significantly disrupted, but the paramilitary threat remained unclear. The paramilitary forces had rallied in the defense of An Nasiriyah even when conventional forces had failed, and had given TF Tarawa a tough time of it in the city. Here in Al Kut and An Numaniyah, closer to the Regime center, would the reception be any different? The Division continued its attack, with the full expectation of hard fighting on the way to the key bridges. This threat caused the CG to issue additional guidance to the attacking commanders. This attack



Marines from Charlie Company, 1/5 in the attack.

would be conducted with deliberation and maximize the usage of shaping and preparatory fires. Positions confronted were to be reduced by fires prior to assault. The enemy showed every indication of a weakened posture, and the risk of unnecessary casualties precluded a rush into the enemy's prepared defenses. In keeping with the CG's intent, the Division Forward CP and their imbedded DASC coordinated a number of B-52 strikes on the ammunition storage area along the west flank of RCT-5's attack. RCT-5 was locked and loaded for their attack, aiming to seize the Tigris River crossings.