

to Camp Commando to provide force protection for the I MEF Command Group. These Marines provided force protection for the Camp until the arrival of the battalion's main body on 24 February 2003.

Commando Camp, located about 35 km northwest of Kuwait City at the foot of the Mutlah Ridge would be home base for much of the planning for Operation Iraqi Freedom. Ironically, it was located within a few kilometers of the first Gulf War's 'Highway of Death' that had marked the end of the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait. The lonely terrain evoked vivid images of the last time the Division had fought the Iraqis, and there was a strong sense of a job unfinished that provided a daily focus to the warfighters now assembled. The MEF Headquarters Group was located at this camp, the garrison compound of the Commando Brigade of the Kuwaiti Land Forces (KLF). The camp still bore the scars of the Iraqi occupation, left unrepaired by the Kuwaitis as a reminder of deeds past. In a gracious gesture of support that set the tone for future cooperation, the Kuwaitis made room for the US Marines.

The Marines of the Division Forward CP were assigned to one remote corner of the compound. Early efforts by Gunnery Sergeant Jason Topp of the advanced party had literally 'moved mountains' of trash and sand in order to make a spot for the Division CP and billeting areas. First Lieutenant Richard Fisher, the Forward's Camp Commandant, had the Marines turn-to on making this spot livable, and soon the camp was complete with its own Guardian Angel post, sandbagged bunkers, and living tents. A homemade gym, made with a combination of bricks, fenceposts, and cast-off Air Force equipment was quickly made operational. Assuming this position would be occupied for several months, the Marines made themselves at home. The Marines of the Division Forward CP were only a small group among the MEF, MEG, FSSG, and supporting Marines also bivouacked in the camp, and a special camaraderie developed among the Marines who knew they were the lead element of the Blue Diamond Marines that would take the fight to the Iraqis. Even a special 21st century adaptation of the Bushido code was adopted, with severe 'punishment' for whining or failing to display an aggressive warrior spirit.



1st Marine Division Forward CP occupied a small corner of the larger I MEF base at Camp Commando, Kuwait.

The decision to deploy the Division Forward CP for CENTCOM's annual rehearsal of the defense of Kuwait against an Iraqi invasion would pay huge dividends. While the remainder of the Division trained at home stations and prepared for force deployment, the Forward CP's participation in Lucky Warrior and Internal Look provided a foothold in MEF and CFLCC planning meetings where the Division's operational planners would strongly advocate the ground combat perspective. Advance parties from all functional areas including logisticians, communicators, and engineers seized opportunities to reconnoiter aerial and seaports of debarkation, routes, and tactical assembly areas.

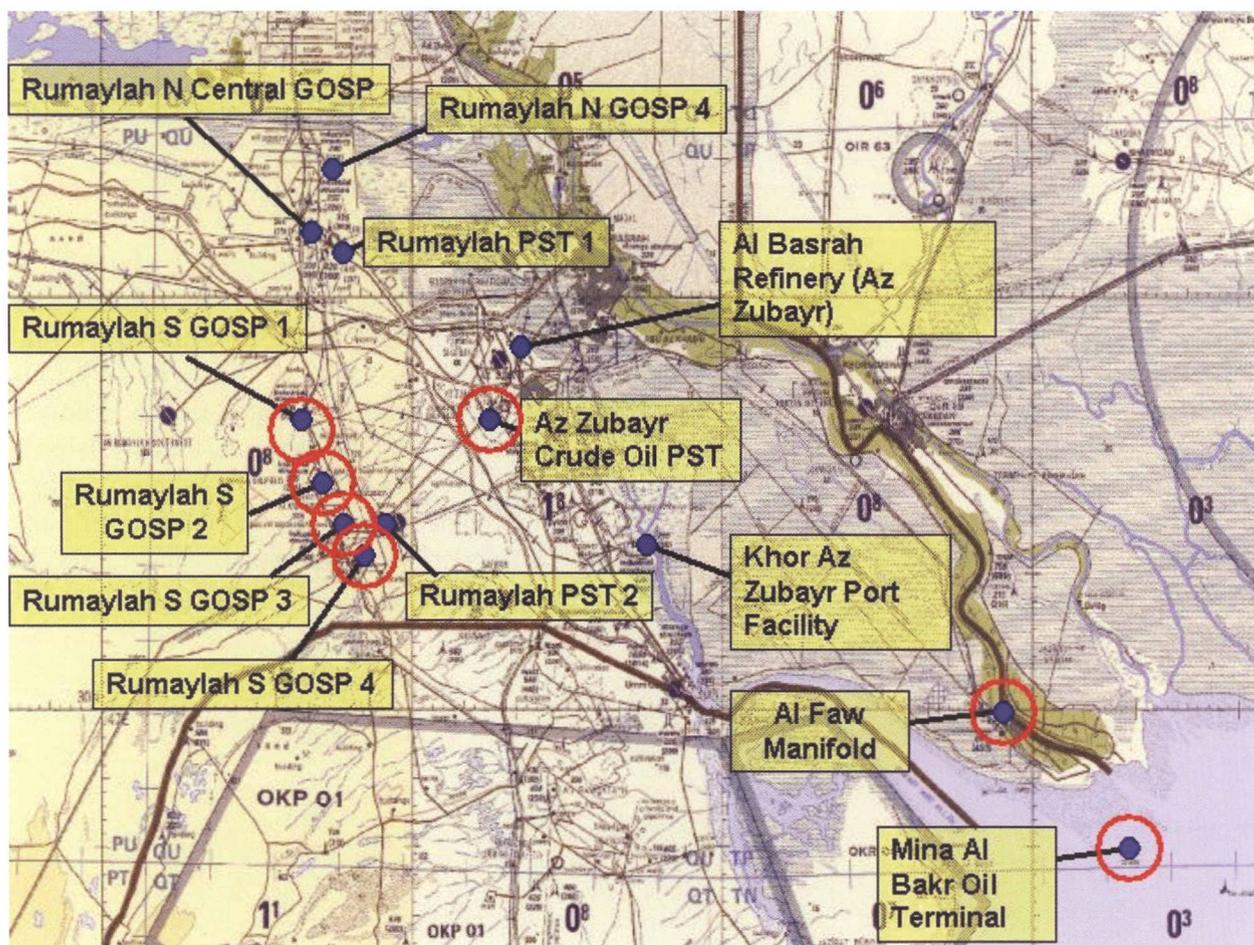
The presence of the Division Forward CP in Kuwait also provided a 'reach forward' capability that brought the Division one step closer to destroying the enemy should the President call. The members of the staff in Kuwait sent a constant stream of information from planning meetings and site surveys, while responding to numerous specific requests for information from Division units back in California. During one especially arduous task of TPFDD tracking, the Forward's Corporal Justin Duplain was asked to contact the Division Operations Center (DOC) back at Camp Pendleton to answer some time-sensitive questions. He proceeded to establish a secure Internet chat dialogue with Corporal Chad Rhyner in the DOC at Camp Pendleton. Within minutes, questions and answers were being exchanged in real-time by the two echelons of the Division staff. The solution, a testament to the technology the Division would bring to the fight, is more remarkable because it was simply second nature to a new generation of Marines. Any who harbored doubts about the 'New Breed' of Marines were quickly educated. The Marines of this generation were made from the same stuff as those who had gone before, trained killers who could set up an intercontinental data exchange without skipping a beat.

Intelligence Planning - The Changing Enemy Picture

By December, the enemy had made only limited preparations for the coming attack. Major units remained in the vicinity of their garrisons and no overt defensive obstacles or fortifications were identified. The G-2 assessed from a variety of sources that the Iraqi Regime did not think the threat of a ground attack was imminent and had refrained from early deployment of forces as a serious logistics drain that they could not sustain. Because there were no major changes in the enemy's disposition or material status, intelligence analysis focused on refinement of the Division's assessment of border obstacles, sensitive sites requiring exploitation, keen attention to terrain along the few avenues of approach, and preparation of detailed support packages for each critical oil node identified in the Division's zone. Lieutenant Colonel Groen and the rest of the forward deployed intelligence team were able to go directly to the higher headquarters sources for much of this information, saving valuable research time.

The intelligence community's assessment of the South Rumaylah oil fields also began to mature to a point that specific critical maneuver objectives could be identified. A strategic goal was to capture the Iraqi oil infrastructure intact in order to use these revenues for the rebuilding of Iraq. Restoring the hope represented by these oil revenues to the newly liberated people of Iraq would be among the Division's proudest legacies. The eventual strategic goal was the production of over two million barrels of oil per day, most of which would be produced by the South Rumaylah oilfields. Seven critical nodes of the southern oilfield system were identified, all of which were within 50 km of the Kuwaiti border, and all of which were in the proposed Division zone. The G-2 tried to accommodate the sudden requirement for Division Marines to become keen students of the oil services industry. The Division learned to identify Gas-Oil Separation Plants (GOSPs), Intermediate Pumping Stations (IPSAs), storage facilities, and offshore terminals; and understand all of their functions.

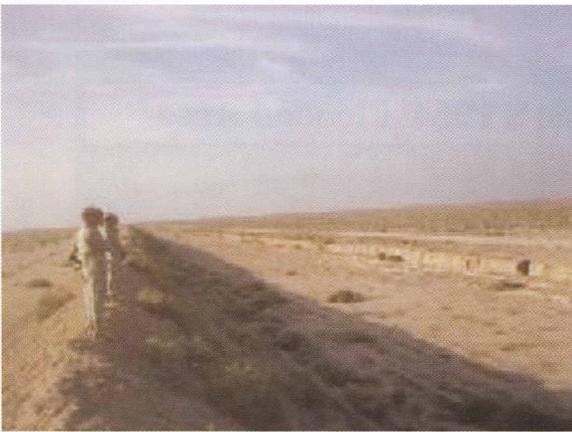
Securing four critical GOSPs and a pumping station complex (later known as the 'Crown Jewel') in the southern oil infrastructure became key elements of the Division plan. Detecting and understanding the threat to these critical nodes from Iraqi military activity or sabotage became a key Priority Intelligence Requirement (PIR). Integration of imagery intelligence, human intelligence, signals intelligence, and open source intelligence was used to ascertain the extent of preparations the



Seven critical oil infrastructure nodes are identified (red). These nodes would require years to rebuild if damaged, or could be used to cause massive environmental damage if left in the hands of the Iraqis. Marines were tasked to secure these nodes during the initial stages of the war.

Iraqis had made. The careful timing and coordination of the seizure of all of these oil nodes intact required close cooperation among all elements of the MEF. Although a supporting effort, the Division's early tasks were to have strategic implications. General Franks, the CG of the US Central Command (USCENTCOM) described the seizure of the South Rumaylah oil infrastructure intact as "equal in strategic priority to the seizing of Baghdad."

The border obstacles on the Kuwaiti side of the border were another significant obstacle to attacking forces, and were mostly inside the UN-demilitarized zone. The obstacles consisted of a rear berm and anti-tank ditch, an electrified fence, and a forward berm and ditch along the actual border. There were no indications of similar continuous obstacles or minefields on the Iraqi side of the border. Although derelict minefields and areas of unexploded ordnance from the first Gulf War were identified, these had been largely cleared in the now agricultural areas that predominated in the eastern half of the Division zone. Later, when the Division attacked across the border, little evidence was found of any border obstacle preparation other than a few areas of hastily scattered mines.



Marines inspect the Kuwaiti border defenses near Umm Qasr. These included berms and anti-tank ditches (above) and electrified fence (below)

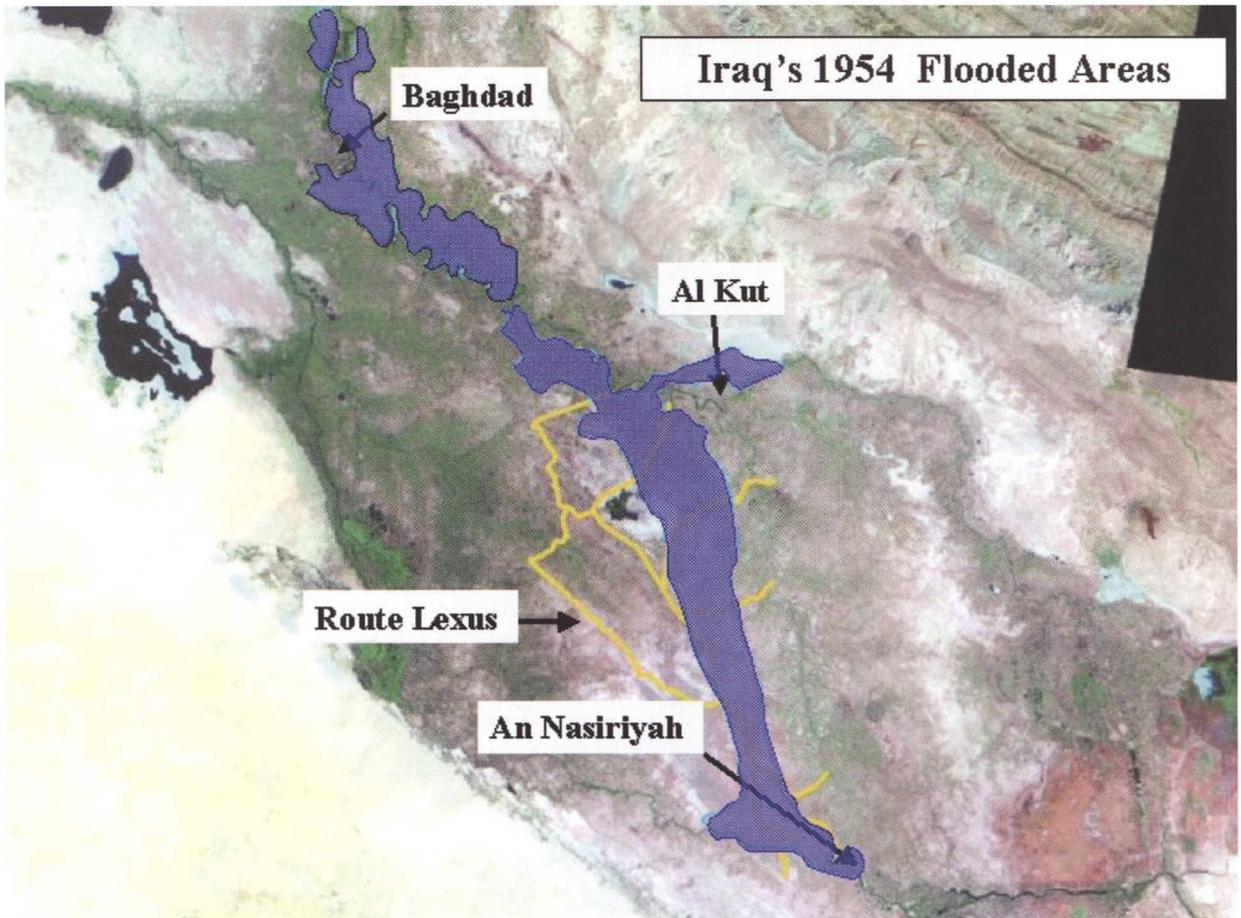


Another aspect of the border defenses identified by the G-2 was a series of Iraqi border guards, intelligence collection, and visual observer posts. These were strung across the border in order to provide reporting on the activity of US forces, monitor US/Kuwaiti communications, and detect Coalition aircraft transiting Iraqi airspace in support of Operation Southern Watch (OSW). From atop the dominating heights of *Jabal Sanam*, Iraqi visual and signal observers could detect and report the Division's activity in northern Kuwait. Alerted to the presence of the Iraqi observers and intelligence collectors on the hill, the Division was able to incorporate the destruction of this key observation post into the early attack planning. To preserve tactical surprise, the neutralization of several of the border guard posts that lay astride the Division's planned avenues of attack would also be required. G-day (the start of the ground attack) would not be a good day to be an Iraqi border guard.

During December, MCIA gave the Division a detailed assessment of tactical inundation possibilities in zone. By tracking the levels of precipitation in northern and central Iraq and monitoring the water levels in the various dams and reservoirs, MCIA was able to conduct a reasoned approach to the issue of inundation warfare. The reservoirs that fed the Euphrates water system were only partially full, and had very small output

capacities (comparable to draining a bathtub with a straw.) More troublesome, however, was the risk of tactical inundation from the Tigris River, in the heart of the Division battlespace.

As most of the precipitation in Iraq fell in the northern part of the country, the northern reservoirs held a significant capacity of water that could be released into the Tigris River system. Releasing too much water directly into the Tigris would flood Baghdad itself, but the MCIA analysts had found a potential way the Iraqis could create flood conditions without resorting to this drastic measure. If the Iraqis were to raise the water level of the Tigris to the maximum capacity it would bear through Baghdad, then inject another large amount of water via the Diyala River to the east, significant flooding along Highway 7 or around Al Kut might occur. There was natural precedent for this action in a major flood that struck the region in 1954. In this flood event, the banks of the Tigris were breached near Al Kut in order to save Baghdad, and the entire Gharraf River basin was flooded. If the Iraqis had studied their own history as carefully as MCIA had, they may have already integrated this course of action into the defense of Al Kut or Baghdad itself. Once again, the advantages of speed in the Division gaining a foothold on the far side of the Tigris were made clear. The Marines had Baghdad in their sights, but how much mud would be on their boots when they arrived remained to be seen.



The 1954 Flood along the Tigris and Gharraf Rivers inundated much of the Division's battlespace, including its major avenue of approach along Highway 7. The potential for deliberate flooding of the rivers in 1st Marine Division's battlespace was an ongoing concern.

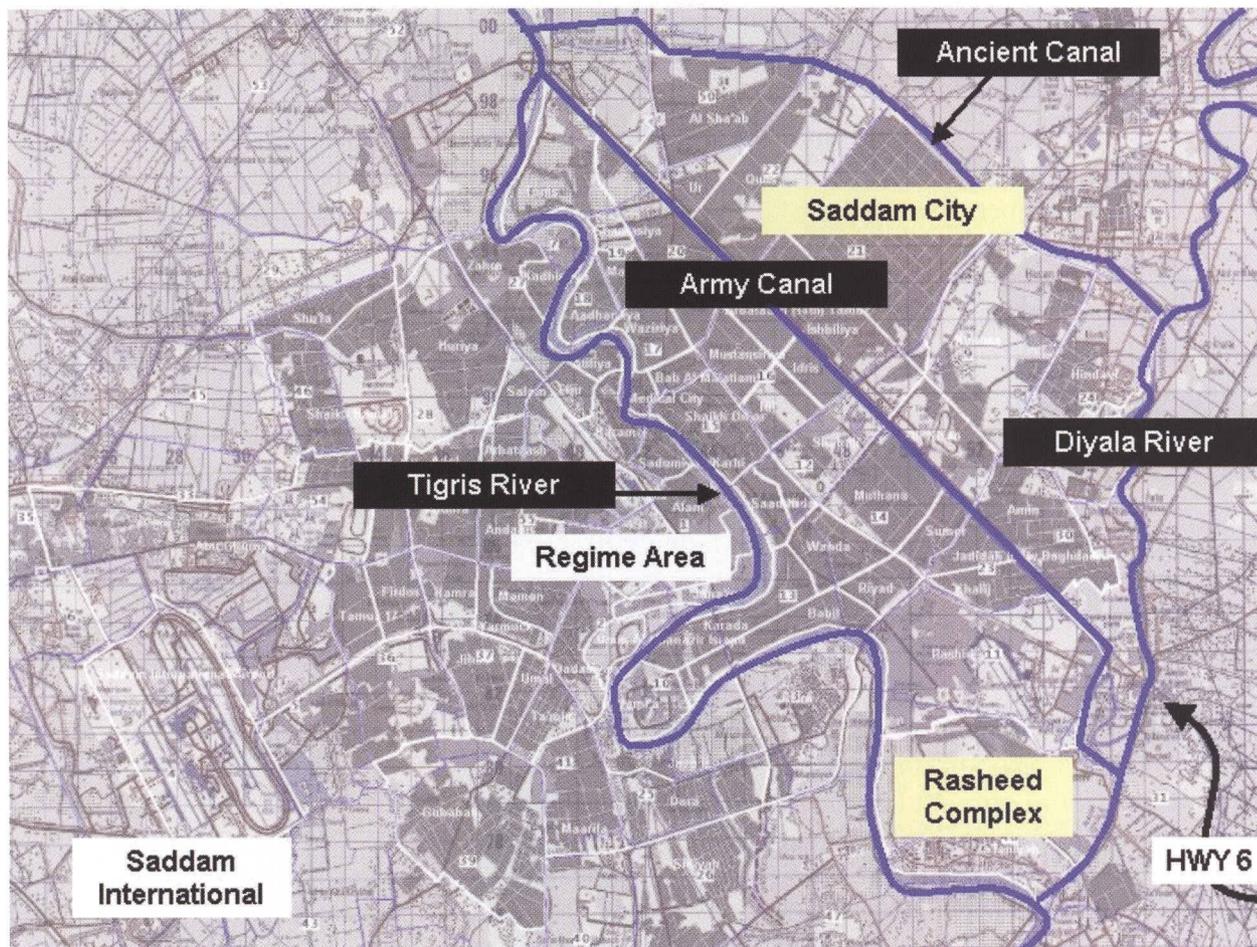
What the intelligence estimates did not reveal was the magnitude of the Regime's weapons holdings. Huge caches were hidden in every area of the country, but it was only after the Division closed on these facilities that the full magnitude of the distribution of tons of weapons and ammunition throughout the country came to light. Perhaps most disturbing was the large caches discovered in hospitals, mosques, and schools. Almost every one of these facilities revealed a weapons cache upon inspection. The Iraqi Regime had prepared themselves to fight a long-duration guerilla war, but had seriously miscalculated the amount of support the populace would provide. The US intelligence community and its technical sensors were well equipped to find enemy order of battle (tanks, artillery, defensive positions), but failed to detect these hidden weapons caches. Additionally, the Division still had more questions than answers about the enemy commanders the Division would fight. The military background of Iraqi commanders and their willingness to fight for Saddam's Regime remained an open question.

Operational Planning – The Baghdad Option

In early December, the Division Planning cell conducted a preliminary planning effort for an attack on Eastern Baghdad. The Division had already planned through its attack to Al Kut, and now the prospect of a follow-on mission to support the US Army in Baghdad was raised. CFLCC proposed participation of the Division in the fight for Baghdad as one of the potential follow-on missions to the attack on Al Kut. Several iterations of this plan were discussed, including cross-attachment of Marine Corps infantry units to the Army's V Corps (surprisingly, a US Army Mechanized Infantry Division has fewer infantry dismounts than any single regiment of 1st Marine Division.) The cross-attachment proposals were not given serious consideration by the Marine leadership, but the implications for stabilization operations would be felt later, as the Army needed to relieve foot patrolling Marine rifle squads with Bradley fighting vehicles and M1A2 tanks. Eventually, the Baghdad planning stabilized with the Tigris River as a proposed boundary between the MEF and V Corps, and the Division prepared a plan for combat operations in eastern Baghdad.

From the East, Baghdad has a series of natural and manmade obstacles that serve as natural defensive lines. The terrain outside the Baghdad urban area is very difficult to traverse due to the high density of agricultural fields, bisecting canals, and rivers. This limited mobility terrain surrounds the city, and makes maneuver to attack positions near the city very difficult, as the terrain transitions to a complex urban area. Once through this limiting terrain, an attacking force must cross the Diyala River, which runs north to south along the eastern edge of the city. This high-banked river would be difficult to cross, especially if defended with massed indirect fires. Across the Diyala, an attacker reaches the outskirts of the Baghdad urban area. To the north, on the outer ring of the eastern Baghdad urban area, are the remains of an ancient flood-diversion canal that serves as a 'moat' of sorts. The ancient canal and its crossings were a second natural obstacle, and were expected to be incorporated into any city defense. Once inside the 'moat', the dense urban area served to severely limit maneuver corridors to the center of the city. The final obstacle belt was another drainage project known as the Army Canal. The Army Canal bisected East Baghdad from Northwest to Southeast, and formed a natural final defensive line.

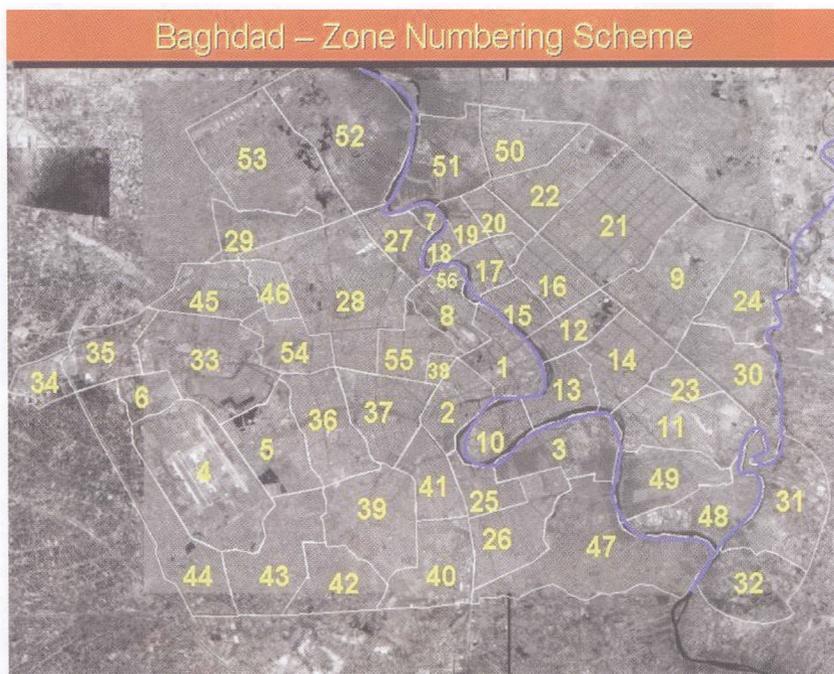
The G-2 identified the Rasheed Military Complex, positioned just across the Diyala River near its confluence with the Tigris River, as key terrain. This military/industrial area on the southeastern side of Baghdad would allow an attacking force to get into the heart of the city by moving along the natural barriers instead of across them. The Rasheed area contained a large military base with an airfield and several WMD sensitive sites. It was expected, naturally, that this area would be strongpointed by the enemy in an urban defense, as the value of this 'hinge' could not go unnoticed by the Iraqi commanders. Other key terrain identified included the downtown riverfront area that allowed direct fire onto the Presidential Palace area in western Baghdad, and the large Shia ghetto known as 'Saddam City'. There were also over 20 WMD-related sensitive sites in East Baghdad alone that would likely require securing.



Eastern Baghdad's canals and waterways form a 'moat', presenting a series of obstacles for any attacking force.

CFLCC established a well-reasoned numeric zoning system for the Baghdad battlespace, primarily to control fires. The Division G-2 adopted this same convention to make preliminary recommendations for attack routes into Baghdad. The recommended routes allowed quick access to key terrain without fighting through urban neighborhoods. These attack routes would also naturally position forces at key intersections and neighborhoods that would allow control of the city in the stabilization phase. The Division's contingency Baghdad plan called for a fixing

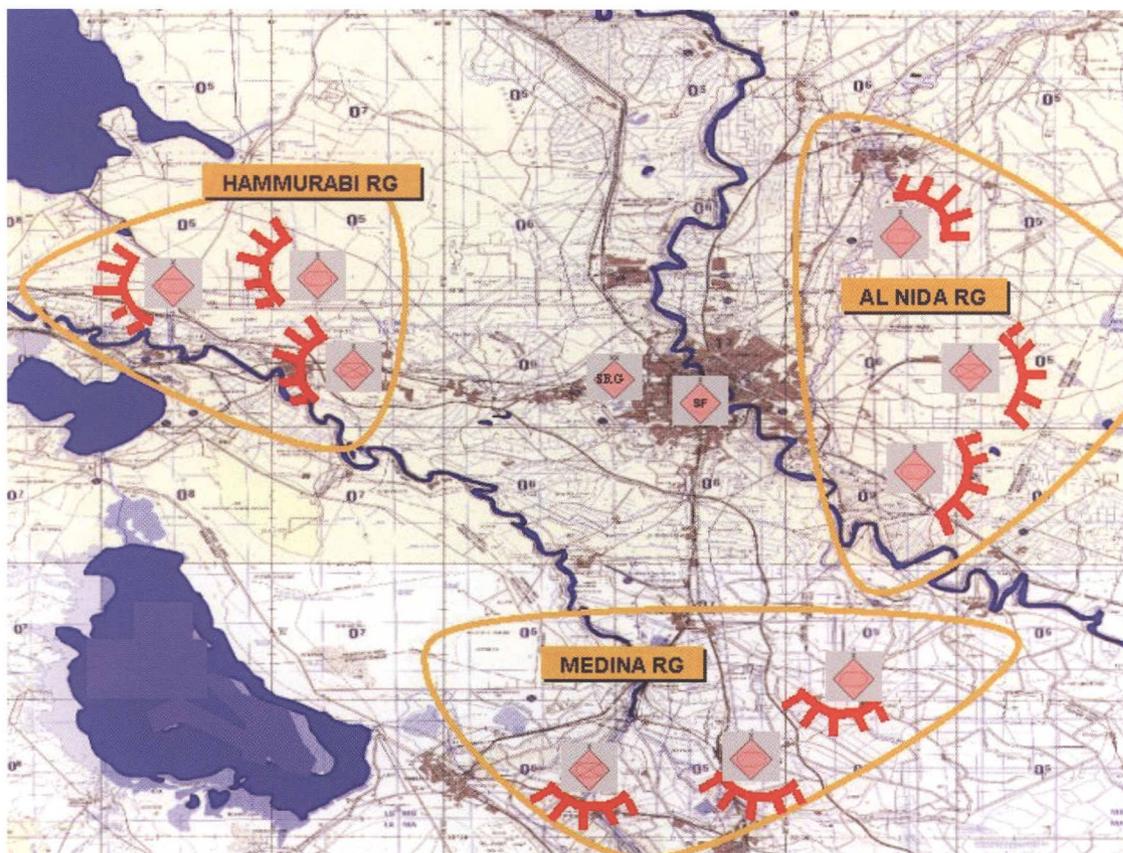
force to attack up the Highway 6 avenue of approach into the Rasheed area, while an enveloping force entered the city from the north and east. To the northeast, Saddam City was occupied by (presumably) sympathetic Shia Muslims, but its urban canyons would prove too dense for any attacking force. Instead, the Division chose two lesser-developed areas on either side of Saddam City that provided relatively speedy access to the Division's objectives downtown. Using speed and natural Marine aggressiveness, the Division would stab into the heart of Baghdad and disrupt the cohesion of the disparate defending elements



Baghdad is divided into numbered sectors. This numbering scheme was to facilitate battlespace coordination and shaping fires.

For Fires planning, the key Baghdad issue was the CFLCC commander's need to maintain unity of command in a shrinking battlespace. There were tremendous collateral damage, airspace control, and fratricide risks as disparate attacking units closed on Baghdad from multiple directions. How to provide unity of command for these units was a significant challenge. The MAGTF concept seemed a natural fit, and the Division and MEF argued for retention of the MEF's combat power as a cohesive unit (instead of parceling out Marine forces to Army command and control.) I MEF could work within the confines of CFLCC's fire control measures, with its forces intact, supporting V Corps which would retain unity of control of both air and ground fires within the Baghdad Restricted Operating Zone (ROZ). In the final plan, both I MEF and V Corps would have their own zones in Baghdad. Close liaison and permissive fire support control measures would facilitate the rapid engagement of enemy forces across the MEF-Corps boundary by both air and indirect fires. The DASC, however, would ultimately relinquish control of the airspace to the V Corps Air Support Operations Center (ASOC) as the constricted air space required a single coordinating headquarters.

The G-2 laid out the expected layered defense plan for the city, and identified the Al Nida Republican Guard Armor Division as the primary defender of the approaches to Baghdad from the East. The Al Nida Division was expected to defend the outer cordon of Baghdad, on the east side of the Diyala River. The planners crafted a script for the Al Nida's demise through shaping fires and a series of local envelopments. West of the Diyala River, the urban defense consisted of the most loyal of the Regime's forces, the Saddam Fedeyeen, internal security troops, and the Special Republican Guard (SRG). The planners began to study these forces in more detail. The G-2 pointed out the ill-suited nature of many of the forces that made up the defense, and



Iraqi Republican Guard divisions guard the primary avenues of approach leading into Baghdad. This planned outer ring of defense had integrated armor, infantry and artillery.

predicted there would be isolated strongpoints located throughout the city, with little coordinated action among them. If they chose to fight, these (at most) company-sized units would have to be isolated and reduced by the Division in a potentially difficult urban battle.

As quickly as the Division plan for Baghdad was completed, the battlespace shifted once again, leaving the Division without a specified mission in Baghdad. By the US Army's new plan, the Marines would play no part in the Baghdad fight. The planning efforts undertaken in these early days, however, proved invaluable when the Division later arrived at the gates of eastern Baghdad prepared to pursue and destroy a crumbling enemy defense. By then, the Division had far outrun supporting intelligence. The time the Division spent planning this operation in December, however, gave them the situational awareness required for the rapid continuance of the attack. This was a clear case where deliberation in planning resulted in speed on the battlefield, precisely as Lieutenant General Conway had anticipated.

Operational Planning – Refinement of the Base Plan

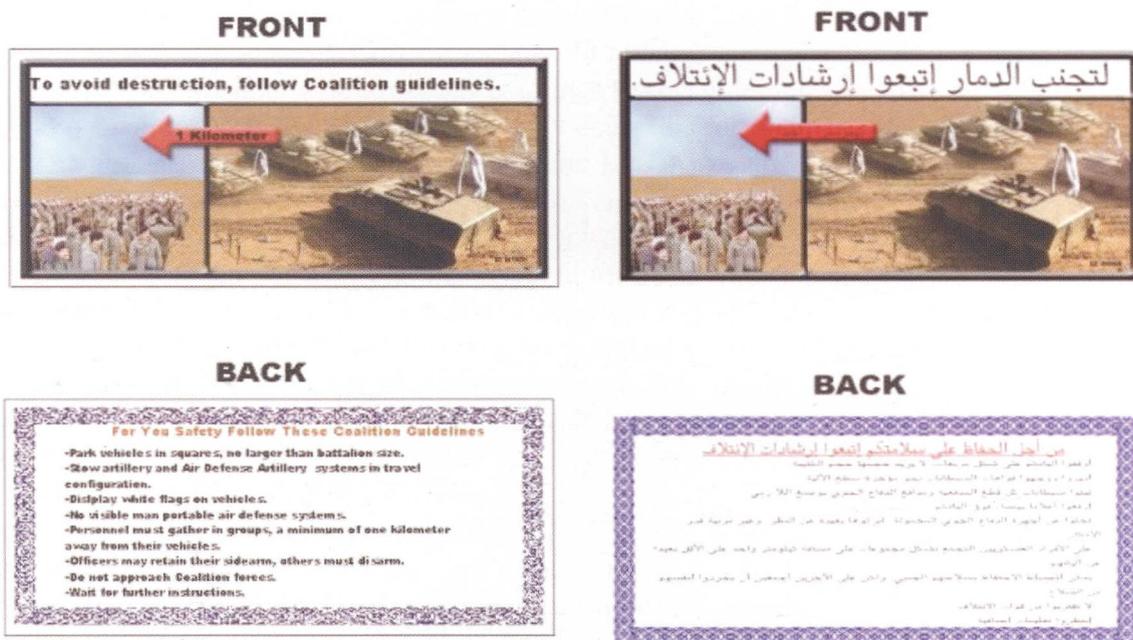
Seizure of Iraq's South Rumaylah oil infrastructure intact would have a tremendous impact on the ability of the Coalition to stabilize and rebuild Iraq after victory on the battlefield. To the Coalition forces, the seizure of this oil infrastructure rivaled the seizure of Baghdad in importance. The Iraqis recognized this fact, and had made public statements that they would take action to ensure the oil infrastructure did not fall into US hands. The Iraqis had created an

ecological and financial disaster twelve years before by destroying the Kuwaiti oilfields, and they threatened to do the same to their own if they were to be lost to the Coalition anyway. The Division was faced with a dilemma. Clearly, the Iraqis on Safwan Hill and their agents in Kuwait would be aware of any operational move made by the Division. Because of the guaranteed 'operational' compromise, it would be necessary to generate 'tactical' surprise if there was to be any chance of securing the oil infrastructure intact. The MEF planners began to review the planned timing and sequencing for seizure of the Mina Al Bakr Offshore Terminal (MABOT) and manifold assemblies on the Al Faw peninsula, as well as the seizure of the GOSPs and Pump Stations in the South Rumaylah fields. Any attempt to seize one would certainly signal the Iraqis to begin the planned destruction of the other, thus simultaneous seizure of all the critical nodes was required to preserve the entire system.

The Division did not know what the Iraqi's trigger for destruction of the oilfield infrastructure would be. If the trigger was ground maneuver, a deception plan would have to be crafted. If the trigger was the beginning of a Coalition air campaign, there was a risk posed by any delay between the onset of air operations and the ground attack. In the earliest stages of operational planning, there had been a four day gap (imposed by force flow constraints) between when forces would be sufficiently available to conduct air operations and when limited ground operations could begin. As planning progressed, and the force flow constraints were overcome by events, the residual four-day planning gap was never closed. The commencement of air operations (A-day) and the planned ground attack (G-day) remained four days apart. If this timing was executed as planned, the Iraqis would have at least a four day warning that a Coalition attack had begun, easily giving them time to destroy the critical infrastructure. Division planners argued vigorously for a simultaneous air and ground attack. The objectives of the air campaign were strategic, and not mutually exclusive with simultaneous ground action in the South Rumaylah. Since shaping of military targets in the south was virtually nonexistent in the four day air campaign, there was no increased risk to ground forces conducting a simultaneous attack. The Division accepted the risk that a rapid seizure of the oilfields would mean less shaping fires on the enemy defenders, but balanced that with the risk to the strategic objective of gaining the oilfields intact. The arguments made by the Division and I MEF planners were initially unsuccessful, leading one planner to note, "We can't care about this infrastructure more than higher headquarters does; if they are aware of the risks, the destruction is a cost they must accept." Even after significant lobbying at the highest levels, the situation remained unresolved until the last moment, causing hasty planning sessions as the Division's forces were crossing the Line of Departure months later. The Division prepared to go into the attack as early as A-1 day, and as late as A+4 days. In consonance with I MEF, the Division did lobby for and receive permission to conduct pre G-day security zone operations, and maneuver operations in Kuwait that would condition the enemy to movement in the vicinity of the borders. These actions would enable the early insertion of reconnaissance assets or a Light Armored Reconnaissance screen in advance of the lead attack elements. The intent was to blind the enemy and provide some degree of tactical surprise regarding the Division's timing, main effort, and specific objectives.

'Capitulation' of enemy units was another topic of much discussion at this time. Higher headquarters had made a distinction between an organized unit action to cooperate with the Coalition and the conventional surrender of enemy individuals or defeated units. One of the

central themes of the Information Operations (IO) campaign was to allow the Iraqi commanders the opportunity to signal their cooperation with Coalition forces (capitulate) in order to avoid their destruction. Although this concept gained some level of support at high levels, the distinction was somewhat lost on the Marines of the Division, who necessarily had to focus on the wholesale destruction of the enemy should he fight. The care taken by the IO planners in their attempts to ensure that enemy units were advised of the timing and some of the planning for their destruction also struck many in the Division as an unnecessary risk. There was even talk of offering the Iraqi 51st Mechanized Division in the Rumaylah oil fields a specific window of opportunity to capitulate, which would have given the Iraqis clear advanced notice to begin oil infrastructure destruction. Marveled one member of the Division, “We can’t win this war by being nice. If they need killing we are going to kill them. If they don’t, then they will be treated appropriately.” During the actual attack, these enemy units that did not desire to fight simply melted away, and there was no capitulation of significance among forces in the Division zone.



Detailed 'Capitulation' instructions were distributed to Iraqi units by leaflet. Instead of following this complex procedure, many Iraqi soldiers simply ditched their uniforms and equipment and just walked away.

Another refinement of the base plan was a re-tasking of the Combat Engineer Battalion (which would be made up of elements of both 1st and 2^d CEBs.) There were multiple engineering tasks that would have to be accomplished in support of the opening attacks. Breaching the obstacles on the Kuwaiti side of the border was only the first. Obstacles on the far side of the border remained a question mark. Although the Iraqis had not been observed making overt defensive preparations near the border, the Division was reluctant to declare the border area free of mines or obstacles. In any case, the attack corridors the Division planned to use crossed the defensive areas of the Iraqi Republican Guard during the first Gulf War. In effect, the battlespace given to the Marines required maneuvering through a twelve year old impact area. Even with no recent mining of these areas, the potential for residual impacts from abandoned minefields and unexploded ordnance was high. Because of the uncertainty surrounding the disposition of minefields on the Iraqi side of the border, the CEB would not be involved in the initial breach beyond supervision of the preparation, position, and number of breach lanes for the Division. Instead, the Division would hold them ready for minefield and obstacle breaching north of the border, where speed, cohesion, and efficiency would be critical. The Division arranged for the Kuwaitis to breach their own obstacle belts, to be accomplished in the last days preceding H-hour. Additional support would be provided by US Navy Seabees from the MEF's Engineer Group (MEG), and USMC Engineer Support Battalions.

Planning for a heliborne assault capability also began early in the planning process. Recognizing the terrain impacts on ground maneuver, the Division expected that helicopter assaults of key bridges, interdiction of routes, and turning movements of enemy defensive positions could be necessary during the coming campaign. The Division established a close relationship with the planners of both MAG-39 and MAG-16. For example, planners from 1st Battalion, 4th Marines working with embarked staff from MAG-16 while enroute to Kuwait aboard the USS BOXER (LHD-6), conducted a series of planning and helicopter load exercises to determine the maximum number of assault Marines that could be loaded into a CH-53E helicopter. They also refined the procedures for conducting CASEVAC in a NBC environment. Collectively, the Division planners developed a battalion-sized lift package that could be applied nearly anywhere, provided the established criteria for this type of mission were met. Several potential objectives were considered for this mission package. The Qalat Sikar Airfield, potential crossing sites of the Tigris River, An Numaniyah Airfield, Al Qurnah, oil infrastructure nodes, even various airfields near Baghdad (in case of a rapid collapse scenario) were all considered as possible objectives for this method.

Another potential early objective for a heliborne assault was the Rumaylah oil field highway bridge over the Hammar marsh. The bridge had proven difficult to destroy during a recent MEFEX exercise, and had become known as the 'Alamo Bridge'. Outside of Al Basrah, this bridge was the only link between the Rumaylah oilfields in the south and the preponderance of combat power from the Iraqi III and IV Corps. Without it, the enemy could only attack via Al Basrah. If the enemy wished to reinforce the Rumaylah defenses, support would likely come from the 6th Armored Division over the Alamo bridge the northern Rumaylah oil fields. The need to block any reinforcing efforts of the 6th Armored Division might be accomplished by helicopter assault. The Division conducted an OPT to investigate this option, which resulted in a detailed list of decision points. The Division and 3^d MAW collectively compiled a

comprehensive list of go/no-go criteria for a helicopter insert, and applied the criteria to this situation. Among the criteria were the time required to conduct a force linkup, the presence or absence of Surface to Air Missiles (SAMs), Anti-Aircraft Artillery (AAA), and Man-Portable Air Defense (MANPAD) threats. The presence of armor or mechanized units in the objective area, along with the effects of Iraqi artillery upon the landing force were other significant conditions to consider. Although the risks involved in the Alamo Bridge operation might prove to be too high, the detailed planning for the helicopter assault and the teaming with 3^d MAW planners was in place to speed execution on the battlefield should conditions permit.

Developments in Fire Support Planning

The planned concept of fires was straightforward. Fires would begin by shaping the enemy artillery before the RCTs crossed the international border. A battalion of BM-21s and a battalion of GHN-45s, both chemical-capable, topped the hit list drawn up by the Division Targeting Board. The 51st Division's own supporting artillery would be next in line for destruction, including two battalions of medium-range Type-59-1 and M-46 towed howitzers, and three battalions of D-30 or M114 towed howitzers garrisoned around Az Zubayr. As part of the shaping fires, a massive airstrike would eliminate the threat of enemy observation from *Jabal Sanam*. After successful completion of these early fire support tasks, the focus of shaping would shift to the artillery of the 6th Armored Division and additional III Corps artillery located north of Al Basrah, in Al Qurnah and Ad Dayr.

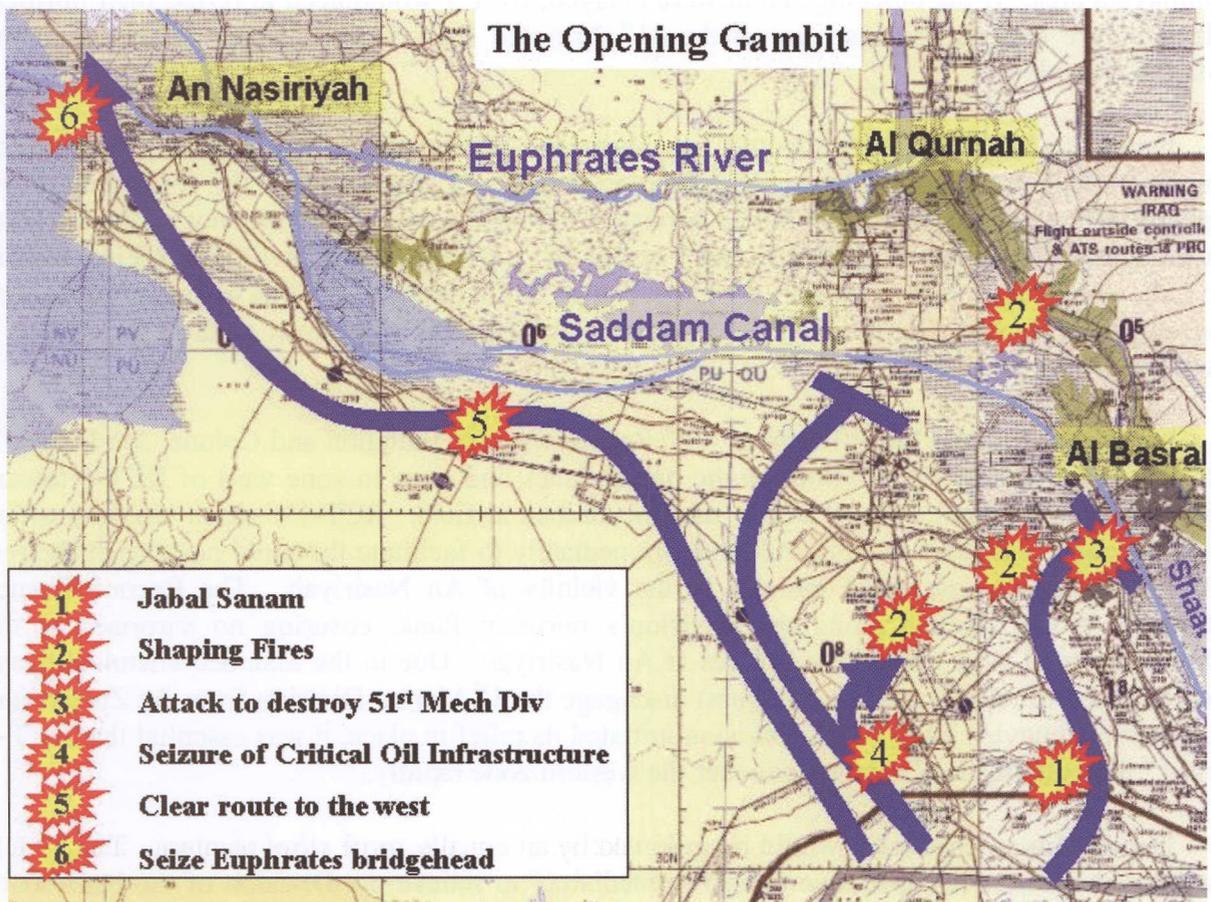
At H minus 1 hour, as the Engineers' Operational Combat Detachments (OCDs) put blade to the northern berm, 11th Marines planned to engage the surviving artillery in Az Zubayr with a massive 30-minute preparation. Near-simultaneously, Iraqi border guard posts within visual range of the breach sites would be attacked by fixed wing aircraft and Cobra gunships and destroyed. Finally, if the Iraqi 6th Armored Division showed indications of preparing to move south, the Alamo bridge would be cratered, mined, or destroyed, and the 6th Armored relentlessly interdicted.

Operational Planning - The Opening Gambit

With some predictability beginning to take shape in the force flow planning, and with the relative timing issues at least partially resolved, the Division began the final stages of operational planning refinement. By mid-December, the Division planning team had a well-developed scheme of maneuver and timing for the attack that was ready to be integrated with the other elements of the MAGTF. From a comment attributed to the 3^d MAW Commander, the plan came to be called the 'Opening Gambit'. The Opening Gambit covered the first 96 hours of the fight, ending with the Division poised to continue the attack north of the Euphrates River. The concept of operations for the Opening Gambit began with the elimination of Iraqi reconnaissance assets on *Jabal Sanam* (Hill 451), and other selected border guard posts in a counter-reconnaissance fight designed to blind the enemy. This would begin with a series of air strikes designed to turn 'Hill 451' into 'Hill 441.' The strikes would be followed by the insertion of a Force Reconnaissance platoon to ensure no enemy observers remained alive in a position to report the Division's activity. Light Armored Reconnaissance (LAR) units would ensure the

other Border Guard posts were neutralized. A series of preparatory fires on enemy artillery would then be conducted, with the intent of destroying all remaining indirect fire assets the enemy could bring to bear against the Division's maneuver elements. The Division predicted that a simultaneous A and G-day would eventually be authorized, and planned a thorough preparatory fire syllabus to compensate for an anticipated lack of air shaping fires.

Colonel Steve Hummer's RCT-7, as the main effort, planned to attack through the Safwan corridor with the objective of securing the Az Zubayr pump station complex (the 'Crown Jewel')



The 'Opening Gambit' operational plan was a team effort with MEF, 1st FSSG, 3d MAW, and Division planners all contributing to the effort.

intact. In order to control this key oil node, the RCT would attack to destroy elements of the 51st Mechanized Division that remained south and west of the Shaat al Basrah waterway. Simultaneous with the RCT-7 attack, Lieutenant Colonel Stacie Clardy's 3^d LAR Battalion planned to maneuver north of Safwan hill to clear Position Areas for forward displacing artillery, then move east toward the Shaat al Basrah to pose a threat to the enemy's 32^d Brigade from the southeast. If the 32^d Brigade were to put up a strong defense, this supporting attack would clear approaches that would enable Cobra gunships to fly against the 51st Division positions at dawn without flying into the rising sun.

On the West of the Division's zone, Colonel Joe Dunford and his RCT-5 would launch Lieutenant Colonel Duffy White's 1st LAR Battalion ('Highlanders') as a screening force, then attack to seize the Southern Rumaylah oil infrastructure by moving along the western side of the GOSPs and peeling off company-sized forces to secure critical nodes. If the heliborne assault criteria previously developed were met, RCT-5 would also launch a battalion-sized heliborne assault to a blocking position on the south side of the Alamo Bridge (alternatively, this force would attack to their blocking position on the ground.) This force would establish a blocking position oriented north. The remainder of RCT-5 would quickly link up with the inserted force to effectively block any reinforcements to or escape of the 51st Mechanized Division in the Rumaylah area. If the blocking action were delayed, RCT-7 would need to refuse their northern flank before they turned east against the 41st Armored Brigade and the Az Zubayr Pumping Station Complex.

Failure to block the bridge would risk losing the advantage of momentum. The Division engineers and fire support planners prepared a contingency plan to crater the south side of the bridge, effectively stopping all traffic across it if the blocking force did not arrive in time. Although it was on the Restricted Target List, the Division appealed to MEF Force Fires to plan to take the bridge out if the situation developed unfavorably. 3^d MAW targeting experts developed a plan to take it out. The MEF received CFLCC's approval to drop the bridge if required.

Lieutenant Colonel Steve Ferrando's 1st Reconnaissance Battalion and Colonel Joe Dowdy's RCT-1 would follow RCT-5 through the breach lanes and clear in zone west of RCT-5 toward the Jazair ammunition storage facility and the Jalibah airfield. RCT-1's attack would position them to quickly exploit success and move immediately to facilitate the rapid passage of the rest of the Division across the Euphrates in the vicinity of An Nasiriyah. The Reconnaissance Battalion would operate along the Division's northern flank, ensuring no surprises as the Division turned west toward the bridges at An Nasiriyah. Due to the assumed chemical threat and the need to rapidly (within 24 hours) disengage the 1st Marine Division from Az Zubayr and the South Rumaylah once 1st UK Division initiated its relief in place, it was essential that RCT-1 and 1st Reconnaissance Battalion uncover the western zone rapidly.

The rapidity of the attack would be followed by an equally swift relief in place. The 1st UK Armoured Division would move almost immediately to relieve the Division of the battlespace south and west of the Shaat al Basrah waterway, enabling the Division to quickly continue its attack toward the Euphrates. As RCT-5 and RCT-7 were relieved by the British 16th Air Assault and 7th Armoured Brigades, respectively, they would also clear in zone to the west, ensuring the battlespace was safe for the massive influx of logistics and support echelons that would soon follow. Harkening back to the days of Genghis Khan, the Division's measure of effectiveness for clearing this battlespace would be the ability of, "a naked virgin with 30 pieces of silver tied to her saddle to ride her horse down the street with not a hair on her head being molested."

The CG repeatedly reminded the Division planners that this was to be the most air-centric Division in the history of warfare. Consequently, the Division staff had developed a close relationship with the 3^d MAW staff. These two MSCs of I MEF had worked extremely closely together through months of planning, and saw the fight from the same perspective. The close