

the battlefield from atop a high hill. The G-6 set up a sound system in the desert, and the G-2 and G-3 Marines prepared an even grander version of the 'mother of all terrain models' for the upcoming drill.



Participating and supporting units attended the second Jersey Drill, allowing everyone an opportunity to gain a clear understanding of the Division's intended scheme of maneuver.

Personnel from across the Division, higher, adjacent, and supporting units attended this capstone event. Lieutenant General Conway, Major General (UK) Brimms, Major General Amos, Major General Stalder, Rear Admiral Kubic, Brigadier General Natonski, and Brigadier General Usher were in attendance. The large audience included uniforms from almost every branch and service, including the UK coalition partners. The purpose of the drill was to ensure that commanders, supporting organizations, and Division battle staff had a clear understanding of the Division's intent. The task organization, battlefield geometry, and visualization of the sequence of events for the Opening Gambit were reviewed. The review allowed all units to visualize their role in the coming fight. Even with a planned sequence of events, the Division's plan remained agile enough to incorporate the expected last minute changes and timings that are always part of such a high stakes endeavor.

Lieutenant Colonel Bob Sinclair, the Division Current Operations Officer, coordinated the drill from start to finish in his usual enthusiastic and forceful manner. He and Lieutenant Colonel Groen from the G-2 conducted a tag-team briefing, covering the geographic laydown, expected enemy actions, and friendly scheme of maneuver timings for the entire Opening Gambit. Although the specific opening day timing was still unresolved, the Division used a nominal four-day separation between A-day and G-day for the drill scenario. Actions on the terrain model began in the Division's Dispersal Areas in northern Kuwait, and continued through the establishment of a bridgehead across the Euphrates River. Even though originally planned as a Division rehearsal, the

drill was invaluable as it coordinated key players from throughout the MEF to the actions of the Opening Gambit.

The exercise complete, Lieutenant General Conway took the opportunity to address the assembled staffs. He remarked that the rehearsal was well done, and that he was glad all elements of the MEF had participated. Then, with an unexpected gravity in his voice, he announced that five days ago, the President had notified USCENTCOM that they were to be ready to attack into Iraq on order. The assembled crowd of professionals let the words sink in. This would be the last rehearsal. This marked the end of preparation and the beginning of execution. The MEF was going to war, and the Marines gathered here would be the ones to lead it.

Reducing the Border Obstacles

On 5 March, Kuwaiti engineers began the reduction of the border obstacles on the Kuwaiti side. Breaching commenced with the cutting of the first electrified fence, which was cut in three places by the end of the day. The work, conducted by KLF engineers and a civilian contractor, was conducted to look like routine fence maintenance scheduled for that time of year. As a precaution, however, MEF tasked the Division to provide a counterfire capability so that the engineers could withdraw if they were fired upon by Iraqi artillery. 11th Marines ordered 5/11 to displace to within five kilometers of the berm marking the UN Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), and to move the Regimental CP with two Q-46 and two Q-37 radars forward to provide a counterfire headquarters and target acquisition capability. The Division FSCC stood by to request aviation fires from 3^d MAW. There was no Iraqi response the first day. The pace of work picked up, however, and soon the engineers were breaching the berm and filling in the tank ditches. The Division noted an increase in frequency of Iraqi patrols along the border, but still there was no belligerent response. The engineers worked in daylight only. Each day, Lieutenant Colonel Paul Cyr, dressed in a nondescript set of blue coveralls, went forward into the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) to monitor the work and ensure that the engineers created the breaches where and how the Division desired. At the end of six days of work, twenty-eight breach lanes had been cut and the fence had been removed in twenty places. The engineers withdrew from the berm, but 11th Marines, now with 1/11 in position to provide counterbattery fires, remained forward.

The Enemy's Last Moves

Signs of Regime instability appeared daily as the fissures in the Regime's façade began to widen. Reports of Saddam's alleged efforts to seek asylum outside of Iraq had a demoralizing effect on the Iraqi army. The reports also raised interesting questions on the US side, as media pundits debated whether an attack would be necessary if Saddam were to step down voluntarily. The Division remained undistracted by the running political dialogue, and kept its attention on securing its military objectives quickly if the order came. The standard Regime tactics of shuffling officers between commands, threatening deserters with execution, and reinforcing conventional units with special Regime troops continued. Reportedly, any Iraqi caught with a Global Positioning System

(GPS) receiver or satellite telephone was subject to execution. In a nation-wide exercise in whistling in the dark, the Regime continued to tell its armed forces and its people that the US would not attack. Even with these false messages of assurance (written for domestic consumption) the Regime began to quietly pull forces off the 'Green Line' in the north. (The Green Line was the line of control between Kurdish and Iraqi forces in northern Iraq.) Later, after the Turkish Government had denied the US permission to stage an attack from Turkey as part of a 'Northern Option', this trend accelerated. Most notably, the Adnan Republican Guard Mechanized Infantry Division was pulled south to Tikrit and the northern outskirts of Baghdad by rail (thus gaining for itself an opportunity to meet the 1st Marine Division on a future battlefield.)

The Division's commanders and staff officers watched with disdain as the open international press began to publish some highly accurate reports of the US planned attack. Reports telegraphing the criticality of the South Rumaylah oilfields to the US plan were broadcast in the international press, and grimly debated by a series of pundits on national television. Having already observed the Iraqis reposition forces in response to media discussions of an amphibious assault, the Division waited, hopeful that the enemy would not react to these new reports by initiating the destruction of the oilfield infrastructure. From some of the forward staging areas in Kuwait, the routine glow of the Iraqi oil infrastructure from natural gas burn-off could be seen in the night sky. Division eyes watched vigilantly for any unexplained bright spots on the night horizon.



'Fire Trenches' were dug by the Iraqis. When filled with oil and set ablaze, they provided obscuration of defensive positions and artillery systems.

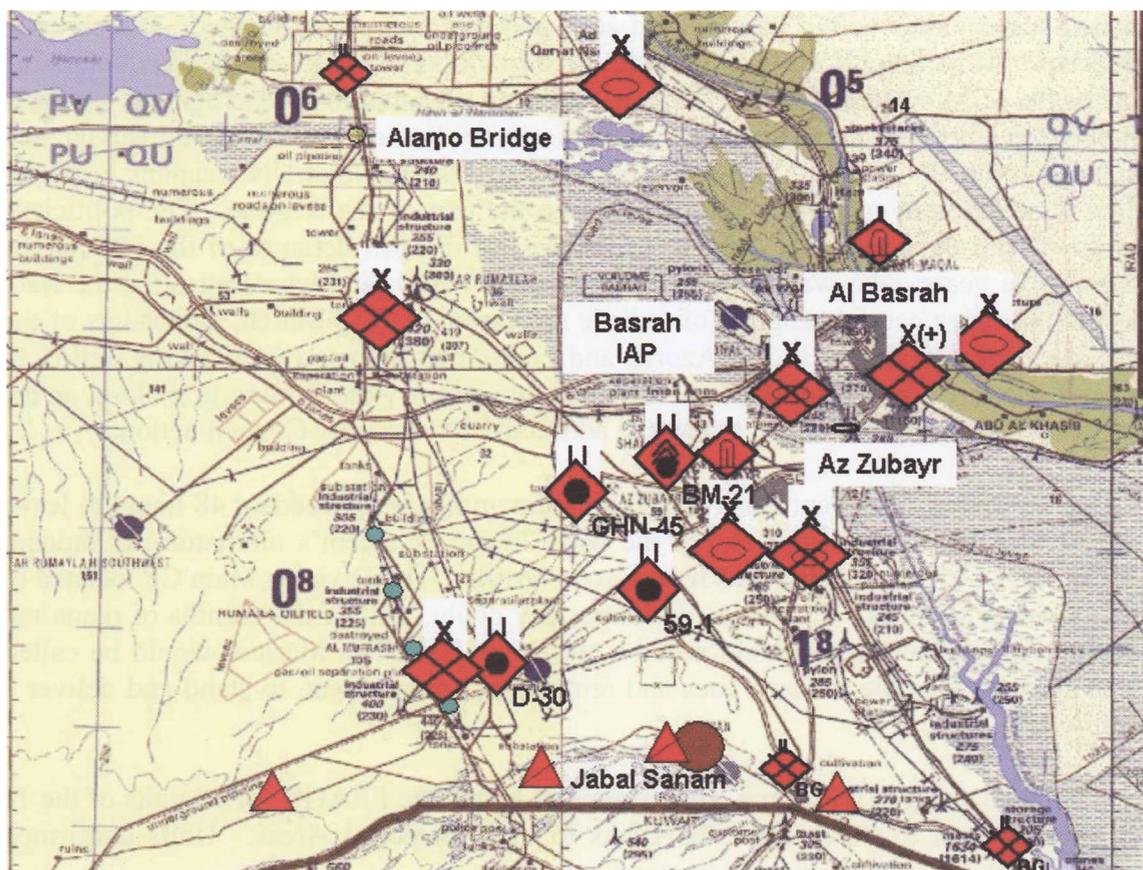
As if they were reading the Division's thoughts (or perhaps just reading the newspaper) signs of suspicious activity in the South Rumaylah oilfields increased. There were a number of isolated indicators of infantry units deploying to the area. Daily, the Division sent the Pioneer in a detailed search pattern of the area of the oil infrastructure. The vigilance was finally rewarded on a daylight mission in March, when artillery pieces were observed setting up near the GOSPs. Perhaps this was the long-awaited move into the oilfields. These reports were quickly followed by confirmation of conventional Battalion-sized units moving in and preparing defensive positions in the oilfield area. Large suspicious trenches were dug in scattered positions throughout, and the Iraqis were observed filling these trenches with oil, then lighting them on fire. Were these 'fire trenches' for obscuration alone? Was there some more insidious purpose for these fire trenches such as the release of chemical agents in an oil slurry? In the intelligence

reports from higher, the reported size of the Iraqi unit in the oilfields quickly swelled from battalion to division size. Division intelligence personnel noted the presence of one, two, three, and eventually four artillery batteries in South Rumaylah, as well as the nearby presence of reinforcing artillery from III Corps. These reinforcing GHN-45's were particularly problematic, as they were known to be chemical-capable, and had repositioned to a point that allowed them to range all the way into Kuwait. With repeated sightings of BM-21 Multiple Rocket Launchers near Zubayr, the Iraqis finally seemed to be waking from their long slumber

Closer to Az Zubayr, a battalion-sized tank unit was observed establishing defensive positions near the Crown Jewel. Elements of the III Corps anti-tank missile battalion were observed near the Shuaybah barracks north of Az Zubayr. Reports of armored units moving south to defend closer to the border began to come in, and the Regime forces in Safwan were reportedly reinforced with heavy machine guns, and tanks. Almost daily, there was some report of major changes in the enemy disposition in southern Iraq, making it very difficult to differentiate fact from fiction. Reporting of massed armor defending near Safwan, and the reports of Republican Guard reinforcement of the southern Iraqi defenses could not be confirmed, even with repeated Pioneer and P-3 missions. These reports would continue to flow into the Division, even while crossing the Line of Departure, and were to cause several tense moments later in execution. The fog and friction of war continued to impact the Division, even at the doorstep of the much-vaunted information age. The theorized 'holy grail' of perfect clarity on the battlefield had certainly not yet been achieved. In fact, the Division's information needs appeared to expand exponentially with each new piece of information received, in an endless and ever expanding cycle. The commanders throughout the Division took it all in stride and, armed with the CG's intent, adapted their plans as the clock wound down on the Iraqi Regime.

The Division was faced with a significant impact to the timing of the Opening Gambit. RCT-5 had planned to quickly seize the oil infrastructure against only limited resistance. Now that the enemy was present in large and growing numbers, this task might take longer than originally planned. The targeting implications of these forces occupying positions near critical oil infrastructure were also significant. The Gas Oil Separation Plants, in particular, had tremendous explosive potential that could easily be ignited by a careless artillery round. The Division sought and received the attachment of UK oilfield experts who could assist in the rapid but safe shutdown of the GOSPs. This would reduce the risk of catastrophic explosion to the Marines of RCT-5 who would seize them. Extricating the enemy from the South Rumaylah without blowing up the whole complex (and themselves) fell to RCT-5 as a primary challenge.

Additional indicators of SSMs now appeared in the South, and the Division's reaction was swift. The Division quickly nominated detected SSMs for immediate strike under the auspices of OSW. The enemy's missiles were in violation of UN restrictions that forbade certain Iraqi weapons systems south of the 32^d parallel. Specific indicators of Abibil-100 Missiles and launchers were detected in the Al Qurnah, Al Basrah, and Az Zubayr areas. The presence of these highly mobile launchers in range of the Division's



The Iraqi disposition in southern Iraq, as assessed just prior to the Division crossing the line of departure.

assembly areas marked a new threat. In a clear demonstration of the enemy's ability to outpace a ponderous deliberate targeting cycle, the detected systems usually hid or moved before Coalition aircraft were able to deliver bombs on target, and often reappeared nearby within days. This shift in targeting by OSW aircraft from anti-air defense capability to anti-offensive missile capability was a significant turning point. Balancing the elimination of threats to ground units in Kuwait with the risk of beginning a general air shaping campaign was to prove difficult. The Division waited grimly and patiently for attack orders, from within the range fan of the Iraqi missile systems. Something would have to change soon, as the Iraqis were gaining a capability that presented a threat to both Coalition forces and Kuwaiti civilians.

The Eve of Combat – The Stage is Set

As the diplomatic clock wound down, the entire world watched the Coalition forces poised to remove a ruthless dictator. Thanks to the Global Broadcast System, the Division CP was able to follow the political events, even from their advanced bases in Kuwait. UN weapons inspections had restarted in December of 2002, as Division forces were preparing to deploy. The inspectors noted the same lack of cooperation on the part of the Iraqis as previous inspectors, but had not yet been able to find any major 'smoking gun' that confirmed the presence of WMD. The Division watched as the UN inspectors visited suspect sites within its proposed zone and came up empty-handed. In February, the Iraqi's Al Samoud II missiles were declared in violation of UN restrictions, removing one of the SSM systems that the Division had been prepared to defend against. In early March, the US found itself opposed diplomatically by France, Germany, and Russia, and stymied in the UN Security Council. On the 7th of March, Chief UN weapons inspector Hans Blix reported continued intransigence on the part of the Regime. The politicians wrestled with the appropriate response to a dictator in open defiance of the UN for the past twelve years, who was known to be pursuing WMD, and who controlled the Iraqi people through a careful program of sadistic repression. On 16 March, the leaders of the US, UK, and Spain met in the Azores and committed themselves to taking action to remove the threat posed by Saddam. Diplomatic options were coming to a close, as the US sought, then abandoned, an attempt at additional UN Security Council action.

On 17 March, President Bush issued an ultimatum, giving Saddam 48 hours to leave Iraq or face his forced removal. In the wake of the President's ultimatum to Saddam Hussein, USCENTCOM declared Iraqi forces 'hostile'. The Division Main CP listened to the President's words. There was no longer any doubt. All of the months of planning, preparation, and rehearsal would now be put to the test. The Marines would be called once again to face the nation's foes and remove an armed threat, to stand and deliver a victory.

On the evening of 17 March, Blue Diamond issued the FRAGO for all units of the 1st Marine Division to move from the LSAs to their Dispersal Areas. Units confirmed receipt of the order, and prepared to move out.

The CG delivered this message to all the Marines and Sailors of the Division:

For decades, Saddam Hussein has tortured, imprisoned, raped and murdered the Iraqi people; invaded neighboring countries without provocation; and threatened the world with weapons of mass destruction. The time has come to end his reign of terror. On your young shoulders rest the hopes of mankind.

When I give you the word, together we will cross the Line of Departure, close with those forces that choose to fight, and destroy them. Our fight is not with the Iraqi people, nor is it with members of the Iraqi army who choose to surrender. While we will move swiftly and aggressively against those who resist, we will treat all others with decency, demonstrating chivalry and soldierly compassion for people who have endured a lifetime under Saddam's oppression.

Chemical attack, treachery, and use of innocent human shields can be expected, as can other unethical tactics. Take it all in stride. Be the hunter, not the hunted; never allow your unit to be caught with its guard down. Use good judgment and act in the best interests of our Nation.

You are part of the world's most feared and trusted force. Engage your brain before you engage your weapon. Share your courage with each other as we enter the uncertain terrain north of the Line of Departure. Keep faith in your comrades on your left and right and Marine Air overhead. Fight with a happy heart and a strong spirit.

For the mission's sake, our country's sake, and the sake of the men who carried the Division's colors in past battles – *who fought for life and never lost their nerve* – carry out your mission and *keep your honor clean*. Demonstrate to the world there is “No Better Friend, No Worse Enemy” than a U.S. Marine.

J.N. Mattis
Major General, U.S. Marines
Commanding

I've come to understand that in reality, war is nothing but nasty business. You can write poetry and plant flowers around it, but it's nothing but hard work and nasty business.

Chapter 4

The Opening Gambit

On the evening of 17 March, Saint Patrick's Day, the Division published a FRAGO directing the Division's units to move from their LSAs to Dispersal Areas (DAs). Early the next morning, President Bush delivered a speech that many in the Kuwaiti desert awoke early to hear. The time for diplomacy had run out, and the President gave the regime of Saddam Hussein 48 hours to depart Iraq or face military action. The LSAs came alive with activity. Final preparations were made to vehicles, equipment was remounted, additional chow was distributed, and water jugs were topped off. Because units had spent the past ten days living out of their packs, the Marines were prepared to move to the Dispersal Areas at a moment's notice.

With the 17 March order to move to DAs, the Division began a series of moves that would end in Baghdad and Tikrit. President Bush's ultimatum to the Iraqi Regime was followed by a flurry of activity on the political front, none more important than confirmation that the UK government had given its approval for its forces to participate. The execute order was gladly received by the 1st UK Armoured Division. The extraordinary partnership that the UK and Marine Divisions had established during planning was given the green light to continue into execution. US Central Command (USCENTCOM) issued the order declaring all Iraqi military and paramilitary forces to be hostile, and the wartime Rules of Engagement were put in place. The Division watched as the last of the UN Observer forces were withdrawn from the demilitarized zone along the border. As quickly as the UN Observers left, the Iraqis filled the vacated posts. There was now nothing between the two armies but a berm of sand and a ditch. The two sides eyed each other warily, each waiting for the other to make a move. Division actions near the border drew sporadic mortar fire from the Iraqis, and even the smallest action on the Iraqi side of the line drew a Coalition reaction. There was an inevitability to the coming combat now, and Blue Diamond was eager to get moving.

From the moment the Division issued the FRAGO, wheels were set in motion. A rapid tempo was important even in this first movement. The Division made a tempting target for an enemy artillery or missile attack while it moved out of its established LSAs. The Division moved quickly to establish the Main CP, get artillery fire-capable, and establish security zones ahead of the DAs. The first unit out of the LSA was the Division Forward CP, which immediately moved to its position in northern Kuwait. The 11th Marines CP, 1/11, and counterbattery radar teams were already in position. By the morning of 18 March, the Division Forward was up and running in northern Kuwait, and ready to assume 'Blue Diamond' control. (On the radio nets, the term 'Blue Diamond' served as the call-sign for the Division headquarters (Main or Forward) that currently had control of the fight. Passage of the call-sign accompanied passage of control of the Division. This way, it was transparent to subordinate elements as to whether the Division Forward or Division Main CP was running the fight.)

The Forward CP assumed control on 18 March, allowing the Main CP to tear down and displace to its battle position in northern Kuwait, just short of the range of enemy artillery units that could reach inside Kuwait. By the afternoon of 19 March, the Main CP was in its battle position far forward of the rest of the Division. From this carefully selected and practiced site, the Main CP would command and control the invasion of Iraq, sited for the best possible communications with widely dispersed maneuver elements. This positioning was fundamental to the uninterrupted tempo of the attack. 'Blue Diamond' was passed back to the Main CP, and the Marines began to track both enemy and friendly movements with a keen focus. The Forward CP, under Lieutenant Colonel Bob Sinclair, tore down and moved into its Attack Position (AP), ready to displace into Iraq behind the assault elements. For the Marines in the Division CP, the fight had begun.



Once the Division received the order, more than 20,000 Marines moved from LSA's to their DA's near the Iraqi border.

The DAs had been carefully chosen as an intermediate step that would not only keep units out of the line-of-sight of *Jabal Sanam*, but also would get them out of the fixed LSA locations, which likely had been targeted for enemy surface-to-surface missile fire. If the Iraqis were going to launch preemptive missile strikes or chemical attacks, the LSAs could easily be targeted. The DAs, located 10 kilometers or more outside the LSAs, were closer to the border but still beyond the range of Iraqi artillery systems. The Division was eager to fight, but did not want to precipitate a political event by making a provocative movement on the ground.

To ensure smooth movement of all Division units, 3^d AA Battalion (Reinforced by 2^d and 4th AA Battalions, and a reserve company of MPs) established Traffic Management Control Points to guide units to the DAs. Strict unit movement control would enable the rapid tempo of the Division through critical chokepoints in the fight. The Division units in the LSAs began their movement to the north, continued in good order, and were in position on the afternoon of 18 March. Because of the pre-movement reconnaissance, these movements were accomplished with minimal 'friction'. The more than 20,000 Marines of the Division and their over 5,000 vehicles moved out of the LSAs and were consolidated within the DAs. Third MAW and supporting US Army Aviation helicopters were positioned with the Division and RCT CPs to provide CASEVAC and Command and Control (C2) birds.

The Division also began to move artillery into some of its intermediate Position Areas (PAs). Each direct support artillery battalion would push up to PAs that would support their respective RCTs. The positioning of artillery and counterbattery radars was key, as these weapons needed to be well forward to provide fires in support of breaching activities. Because these critical systems were so far forward, Alpha Company from 3^d LAR was assigned a guard mission to prevent enemy interference with the Division's artillery fire-support assets. The LAR Company

also provided a measure of security for the Division Main CP, which was at risk in the unlikely event of an Iraqi attempt at a spoiling attack.

The carefully rehearsed Division scheme of maneuver continued from the Dispersal Areas with a movement to Attack Positions (APs) just short of the border obstacles. The APs were the final staging areas the assaulting elements would occupy prior to commencing the attack. The Division's scheme of maneuver had clearly identified the sequence of moving from LSAs to DAs to APs, but had left the time spent in each flexible. Each unit monitored the execution matrix containing the sequence of events, but was prepared to spend minutes, hours, or even days in the APs or DAs as battlefield conditions dictated. After leaving the APs, the attacking forces would exploit the breaches that the Kuwaitis had prepared through the border obstacles. There were a number of breach lanes across the Division's front. To the west, breach lanes 'Red' 1-6 supported RCT-5's attack. In the center, lanes 'Green' 1-5 supported 11th Marines and 3^d LAR. On the eastern edge of the zone, breach lanes 'Orange' 1-5 supported RCT-7's attack near Safwan. By the plan, the Division Main CP would issue the command, and the Division would attack across the border in a simultaneous, unstoppable wave.

Endeavoring to keep the situational awareness of his commanders high, the CG conducted a final coordination/update conference to provide current operational timelines. The coordination meeting, held at a desolate, windy location, revealed no issues. The commanders were confident, and their units ready. Each passing moment now posed a risk to the oilfield infrastructure, and gave the Iraqis time to react to the attack they surely knew was coming. Although weather adversely impacted collections within the last 24 hours, the G-2 located one new Iraqi Type 59-1 artillery battery approximately 18 km north of Safwan, and an ASTROS multiple rocket launcher in the vicinity of Shuaybah barracks. Both positions were nominated and were targeted by OSW aircraft.



The CG and subordinate commanders meet one more time before crossing the Line of Departure.

The Iraqis Disposed to Defend

On the eve of battle, the Iraqis hunkered down in a largely set piece defense across the Division's zone. At the border, the Division faced screening and reconnaissance elements from the Iraqi border guards, Regime security services, and Baath militia. Human Intelligence had reported reinforcements of the defenses in the Safwan area, and a number of tanks from the 51st Mechanized Division had been pushed south down Highway 31. The border guard and Regime troops patrolled the border in isolated groups, supported by mortar fires. There were reports of hasty minefields emplaced in the wake of the withdrawing UN forces, especially to the north of

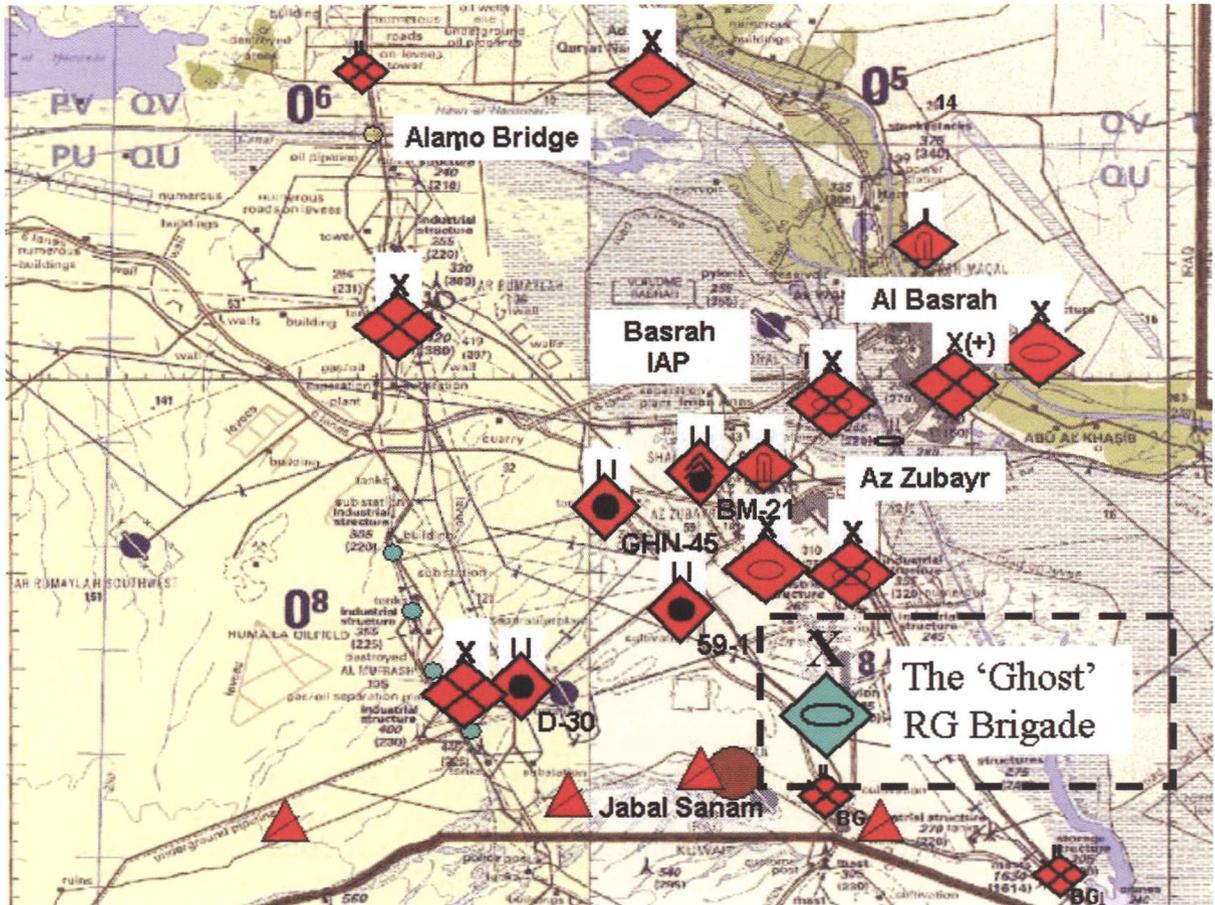
Jabal Sanam, and Iraqis were observed laying surface mines astride the few roads that led across the border from Kuwait.

To the west, the previous weeks had seen a full brigade of the Iraqi RA 18th Infantry Division move in to the previously undefended South Rumaylah oilfields, concentrated in the vicinity of GOSP 3 and the South Rumaylah intermediate pump station. A battalion of D-30 howitzers directly supported this brigade, with general support provided by at least two batteries of Type 59-1's and one battery of GHN-45's. This position appeared largely unsupported by other maneuver elements, however, and stood isolated in the oilfield infrastructure.

To the east, armored elements from the 51st Mechanized Division's 41st Brigade had been pushed south, forward of their garrison positions to defend along the Highways 8 and 31 avenues of approach in the vicinity of the Zubayr pumping station complex, or 'Crown Jewel'. Major elements of the 31st Brigade had withdrawn into the Al Basrah urban area, but at least one battalion remained in the vicinity of the Shuaybah barracks just north of Az Zubayr. Judging by its stationary equipment, major elements of the 32^d Brigade likewise remained in the vicinity of garrison, with some screening elements pushed south down Highway 80. There had been a surprising lack of conventional preparation of obstacles, minefields, and integrated defensive positions on the part of this Division.

On the north side of the Shaat Al Basrah waterway, The 6th Armored Division (6th AD) remained dispersed on the approaches to Al Basrah from the east and north. The 30th Armored Brigade remained oriented toward the Iranian border and Al Faw, while the 70th Armored Brigade was poised north of the Saddam Canal in a position to counterattack to the west or south. The remaining brigade of the 6th AD, the 25th Mechanized, remained in defensive positions near Al Qurnah, guarding the Euphrates River crossing there. If the Iraqis were going to vigorously defend, the 6th AD would be a center of gravity for them. The 6th AD had older equipment, but had over 100 T-54/55 main battle tanks. The Iraqis could do little with conventional military forces to stop the 1st Marine Division's assault, but the 6th AD was their best bet to attempt to delay it.

The 11th Infantry Division (11th ID) remained spread across the marshes to the east of An Nasiriyah, and had reportedly sent one of its brigades to reinforce Al Basrah and the port of Umm Qasr. The Division G-2 had expected to see the 11th ID consolidate in the An Nasiriyah defenses, but they had not done so by the time the Division commenced its attack. By all appearances, the Iraqis had chosen to use the 11th ID to maintain control over the local Shiites, while other Regime forces defended the An Nasiriyah chokepoint. The city of An Nasiriyah was reportedly defended by at least a brigade of reinforcements from the north, composed of elements of the Republican Guard, Baath militia, and an unknown number of paramilitary fighters. Located at the waist of the 'hourglass' chokepoint, An Nasiriyah presented challenges to long term stabilization similar to the ones the Al Basrah area did. The Division hoped to avoid the enduring tasks that would accompany securing and stabilizing the An Nasiriyah urban area, leaving this mission to Task Force Tarawa.



The Iraqi III Corps of the Regular Army Forces defended in the Division zone. Just before Blue Diamond commenced the attack, an Iraqi informant reported that a Republican Guard armored brigade had allegedly crept into position near the Safwan border crossing (green icon above.)

The Iraqi missile and rocket forces were still reported operating throughout the Division's zone, with at least a brigade's worth of launchers and missiles in position to range the border area and Kuwait. There had been no reduction in the number of reported sightings or imagery detections of these systems, and the words of the Regime's previous threats still rang in the Division's ears. The Regime had told the Iraqi people to be strong for 72 hours, and withstand the Coalition assault. The Regime promised this would give them time to launch a massive retaliation using its missile forces. The Iraqis had experienced some success to date in hiding these forces from coalition targeting, and all of these systems were possibly chemical-capable. The strong words were likely just more bluster on the part of the Regime hierarchy in order to buy time for their own escape, but the possibility of the employment of chemical weapons in the opening days of the war could not be dismissed out of hand or wished away.

19 March Poised for Battle

On 19 March, as units topped off fuel and ammo in the DAs, selected elements of the Division were operating forward in security zones established to prevent enemy incursions

across the border. To the west of Highway 80, 3^d LAR Battalion prepared to tie in with the Brits on the right and with RCT-7 on the left. Alpha Company, 3^d LAR, moved north to protect artillery and engineer elements operating along the border. Elements of 3^d Battalion, 7th Marines (3/7), and 1st Tank Battalion took up positions near the southern Kuwaiti berm, approximately 5 km south of the border. To the west, 1st LAR Battalion established a security zone to the far western limits of the Division's battlespace. These units were to observe a number of interesting activities in the tiny space between two armies poised for battle.

That day, Major Andy Milburn, a plans officer with the RCT-7 staff, was accompanying an attached Psychological Operations (PsyOps) detachment from the US Army's 305th PSYOPS Company as they moved close to the border to broadcast a surrender message to the Iraqi armed forces. Major Milburn was interested to note the Iraqis actually grouping together to listen to the recorded message. At least some of the Iraqis were interested enough to listen, but certainly their commanders and Regime minders would not allow this sort of assembly. "I wonder why we haven't seen any indirect fires from these guys yet," he wondered aloud. There were apparently a few Iraqis who agreed and were not convinced by the PsyOps message, because he had no sooner said the words out loud than the Iraqis obliged the PsyOps team by lobbing mortar rounds at them. US Army Sergeant Thomas Stiffey, the team chief, was not amused. From that point on, Sergeant Stiffey was leery of traveling anywhere with Major Milburn.

That evening, President Bush's diplomatic ultimatum to Saddam Hussein expired. The Iraqi's had chosen to reject the ultimatum, and now faced the reality that the Regime would be removed by force. On the night of 19 March, US Navy ships in the Arabian Gulf launched over 35 cruise missiles at targets in Baghdad and other strategic sites. The successive activation of wartime Air Tasking Orders (ATOs) followed this strike.



The SCUD missile system is capable of delivering long range conventional and NBC munitions. Primary intelligence and fires tasks were to locate and destroy Iraqi missile systems.

The initiation of the air campaign (A-day) had arrived, and the Division watched the firepower of 3^d MAW begin to shape the positions of the 51st Mechanized Division and the units in the Rumaylah oilfields. In addition to the planned wartime ATOs, the Wing had also arranged eight hours of shaping which was planned to be 'cut and pasted' into the last OSW ATO. Aviation fires against ground targets commenced immediately, and took a significant toll against the enemy artillery. The

G-2 and G-3 Fires sections were able to confirm the destruction of the troublesome battery of long-range GHN-45 artillery pieces by having the VMU fly the Pioneer over the position. As the Marines of the Division would later attest, these aviation fires had devastating effect on the Iraqi defenders, and began to impact the decision process of many Iraqis who were undecided about whether they should stay and fight the Americans or run away. The Division CG entered the Main CP and set MOPP 1. He approved 11th Marine's move north to the border area and their PAs. The artillery units quietly moved up under the cover of darkness.



Patriot missile batteries poised throughout northern and central Kuwait provided a multi-layer missile defense for cities, airfields, fixed facilities and maneuver forces staged in Kuwait.

As the Division sat poised waiting for the word to go, the Iraqis reiterated their intent to defy President Bush's ultimatum by launching volleys of long-range missiles at major US bases in Kuwait. The Iraqis chose to target major facilities at Camp Doha, Ali al Salem Air Base, and Al Jaber airbase, as well as Camp Commando, which housed the Division Support Area (and the MEF CP.)

The theater had established a 'SCUD-beeper' warning system to give early indication of a missile launch out of Iraq, and the beepers began to repeatedly sound off in the Division and RCT CPs. In each CP, the buzz of normal activity would cease whenever the beeper went off. Everyone would stop and look at the Senior Watch Officer (SWO) as he fumbled with the device then squinted to read the message on the tiny screen. This day, the beepers were going off at a cyclic rate, and every time a missile launch was reported, the Division upgraded to MOPP-2. The Iraqis were not going to get a 'free shot' at an unprepared Division. Almost every time, the alert was quickly followed by a report that Patriot batteries located strategically around northern Kuwait had destroyed the missiles. The initial tension soon subsided, and the Marines grew accustomed to the thought of an unseen, unheard missile battle taking place in the skies over their heads. Over the course of the day, only a few missiles made their way through the defensive umbrella, and all impacted in the open desert or splashed into the Gulf of Kuwait. With typical machismo, the Marines jeered the poor accuracy of the Iraqi missileers. One missile, a Chinese built Seersucker, brought the war close to home to



A Patriot missile races to intercept an incoming Iraqi Surface to Surface Missile in Northern Kuwait.