

while doing what Marine Lieutenants have always done in combat, leading his Marines in the attack. Wresting control of this critical infrastructure objective would enable the rapid resumption of oil revenue for the newly liberated Iraqi people, giving hope to an entire generation of Iraqis. At the conclusion of the attack, the company had destroyed an estimated enemy battalion, and captured in excess of 100 enemy prisoners of war. Corporal Brenton P. Gross received wounds in the same action, as the Marines destroyed the remaining enemy resistance. Junior officers and NCOs leading from the front would be the hallmark of Division action from the Opening Gambit to Baghdad.

After the pumping station was secure, Charlie Company moved south to seize GOSP #6 without further resistance. Once all objectives were secure, each company's attachment of British Royal Engineers and EOD specialists utilized their specialized gear and training to enter and secure the facilities. They proceeded to shut down the facilities without incident.



LAV-25s dominate the battlefield with their Bushmaster 25mm cannon.

While 1/5 moved out in the attack on GOSP #3 and #4, 3/5 attacked to seize GOSPs #1 and #2 just to the north. Once through the breach lanes, 3/5 moved to the west of 1/5, bypassing the fight for the southernmost GOSPs, and quickly seized GOSPs #1 and #2 further north. These GOSPs were the largest of the entire Iraqi national petroleum production capability. The Iraqis defended these with conventional artillery and infantry forces, as well as a large number of fire trenches, some located immediately adjacent to the strategic infrastructure. These fire trenches caused significant obscuration of many of the key points in the oilfield infrastructure, in some cases, severely limiting rotary wing air support.

The effects of the MEF and Division fires from the previous night had obviously dampened the will to fight of the enemy at the remaining GOSPs. Kilo Company, commanded by Captain Mike Miller, called in a close air strike on a D-30 battery east of GOSP #2, then moved just beyond a burning oil trench and dismounted. Captain Miller's Marines meticulously cleared the GOSP #2 area, moving through numerous bunkers, trenches and fighting positions to round up nearly 200 Iraqi EPWs. Lima Company, commanded by Captain Scott Meredith secured GOSP #1, experiencing no enemy resistance. Later that day, 3/5 was relieved in place by 1/5 and moved to a battalion TAA west of GOSP 1. Looking back, Lieutenant Colonel Mundy (the Commander of 3/5) had this to say about the Opening Gambit attack:

“Three things stand out about that night. First, the esprit and enthusiasm of my Marines, when ordered on very short notice to conduct a mechanized night attack, 10 hours earlier than expected, was impressive ...basically they said, ‘Great, let’s go!’ Second, the reality of this war definitely hit home when I heard Fred Padilla call in his KIA (Second Lieutenant Childers). And finally, the friction of war was, as usual, ever-present and very frustrating. We had two breaks in contact while moving the Battalion to the start point, and at one moment nearly lost our Alpha Command group when the AAV C-7 they were traveling in inadvertently blew its Halon fire extinguisher system, forcing the amtrac to stop and dismount for 10 minutes while the staff and crew threw themselves on the ground, choking and coughing to clear their lungs. We looked back the next day and laughed about it, but at the time I thought I had lost my staff principals, and could faintly hear the ghosts of my Basic School instructors asking me, ‘What now, Lieutenant Colonel?’”

Despite the limitations of haze and smoke, RCT-5 enjoyed uncommon rotary wing support from the Marines of HMLA-169 (the ‘Vipers’) and HMM-268 (the ‘Red Dragons’) throughout the campaign to Baghdad. With Cobra and Huey gunships above, and the CH-46’s ready to rapidly evacuate the wounded, RCT-5 was never at a loss for combat power and motivation from 3^d MAW. The habitual relationships built during peacetime began to pay dividends, beginning with the first engagement.

Second Battalion, 11th Marines, CSSC-115, and the RCT-5 command elements also crossed into Iraq through the eastern breach site early on 21 March. Through the early morning hours, the RCT consolidated on its objectives and turned to processing the hundreds of EPWs they had captured. 2/11 established firing positions in the North Rumaylah, from which they could support either of the blocking positions maintained by 2/5 (oriented to the north against the enemy's 6th Armored Division), or 2^d Tank Battalion (oriented to the east against any elements of the 51st Mechanized Division seeking to escape.)

As part of the Division scheme of maneuver, RCT-5 also controlled the movement of 1st Reconnaissance Battalion and RCT-1 through the western breach site to their assigned zones of action. Each in turn, 1st LAR Battalion led Recon Battalion and RCT-1 to the vicinity of the Rumaylah Airfield where they were released to screen RCT-5’s western flank.

The visibility, compressed timeline, uncertain enemy sit, and C2 challenge created no shortage of fog and friction last night. That said, the battalions did a superb job of cross talking and improvising. As I write this we are in a position to accomplish assigned tasks...we've got the first one under our belt and stand ready to support RCT-7 and then continue the attack to Raahdad.

Notwithstanding the accelerated timeline for the attack and the extraordinarily poor visibility in the area of operations, the RCT had accomplished its initial combat mission with minimal loss of life or equipment. By 0956Z on 21 March, the desired end state was achieved, with all four GOSPs secured and the blocking positions in-place. Battle damage assessment, and interviews with EPWs captured during the attack, confirmed the pre H-hour estimates of brigade sized

enemy forces in both the North and South Rumaylah oil fields. The enemy forces in the South Rumaylah oil fields were primarily dismounted infantry, but were supported by T-55 tanks, mechanized vehicles, surface to air missiles, air defense artillery, mortars, long range artillery, and multiple launched rockets.

With the 1st UK Division's successful operation to seize the critical oil infrastructure on the Al Faw peninsula, US Special Operations units securing the offshore export terminal, and now RCT-5's successful action to seize the South Rumaylah GOSPs; the only critical infrastructure task remaining was the Zubayr pumping station complex (the 'Crown Jewel') in RCT-7's zone. With the successful securing of this last key node, the Division would have achieved their first strategic success, and contributed greatly to setting the conditions for a free and prosperous Iraq in the future. It was RCT-7's turn.

21 March Judgment Day for the 51st Mechanized Division

On 21 March, while RCT-5 was engaged in the South Rumaylah oil fields, the Division issued a FRAGO tasking RCT-7 to attack in zone to destroy the 51st Mechanized Infantry Division in order to prevent the retreat of this unit into Al Basrah. The timing of the attack was set for 0300Z, simultaneous with the 1st UK Division's attack on Umm Qasr on the Marine Division's eastern flank. This attack would be the 'hammer' to the 'anvil' already established by RCT-5's 2^d Tanks (in their blocking position to the west, sealing off any retreat for Iraqis hoping to escape to fight another day.)

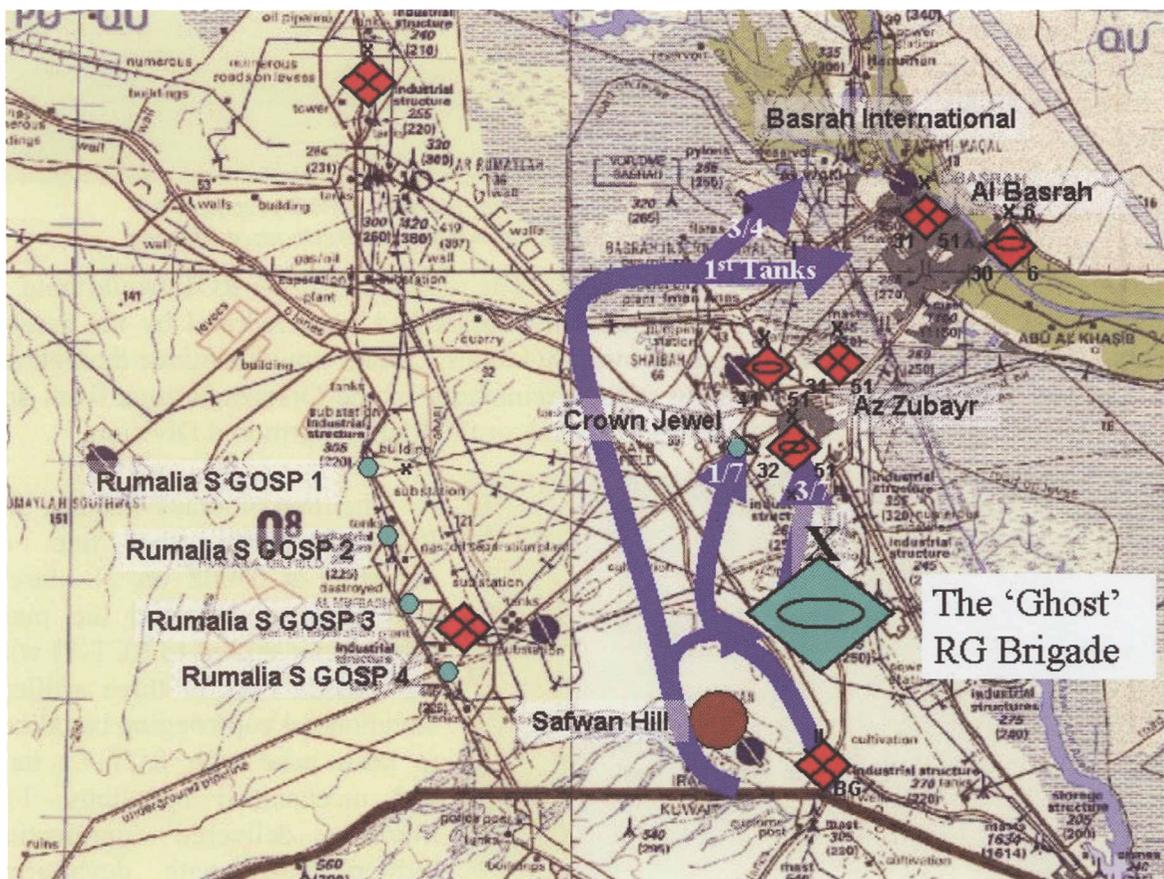
During the hours preceding the attack, the Division conducted shaping fires using the Pioneer UAV in a direct support role to the Division. From the live feed in the Division CP, Intelligence and Fires representatives were able to find targets, adjust fire, and conduct assessment of key targets throughout the zone. The Division was able to find and kill a large number of enemy in RCT-7's path, including artillery, infantry, and T-55s in defensive positions along RCT-7's intended attack routes. This was a fine example of a classic Division Fires shaping fight in advance of the RCT close fight. The close relationship the Division had established with the VMU squadrons was now paying off in observed deep fires, with rounds on target. The stated goal for the shaping fight was for the RCT to simply have to 'wade through a sea of body parts' on their way to the objective. The shaping fight had a significant impact on the willingness of the enemy to stay and fight RCT-7 only hours later.

Task Force Ripper

Harkening back to its Operation Desert Shield roots, Colonel Hummer's RCT-7 was often referred to as 'Task Force Ripper'. Built around the 7th Marine Regiment, it had nearly 5200 Marines and 1000 vehicles when it crossed into Iraq. Among the units of the Task Force were two mechanized battalion task forces, 3^d Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment (3/4) commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Bryan McCoy and 3^d Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment (3/7) commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Mike Belcher; and one motorized battalion, 1st Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment (1/7) commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Christopher Conlin. In addition, the RCT attached First Tank Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Jim Chartier, Company D, 3^d

LAR Battalion commanded by Captain Gordon Miller, and elements of 3^d Assault Amphibian Battalion. Supporting the RCT were Marines and Sailors from Combat Service Support Company (CSSC) 117 under the command of Captain Andy Bergen. Third Battalion, 11th Marines, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Kirk Hymes, was in direct support. Rounding out the organization for combat were units from 1st and 2^d Combat Engineer Battalions, 3^d Civil Affairs Group, 1st Radio Battalion (supported by a 1st UK Division Signals detachment), a VMU-1 Remote Receive Team, a 1st Intelligence Battalion detachment of Human Intelligence Exploitation Teams (HETs) and elements of a PsyOps company, added just before the order to displace to DAs was released.

The Kuwait-Iraq border was the RCT-7 Line of Departure (LD). The original plan was for a simultaneous attack with 1st Tanks and 3/7 crossing the border through breach lanes 'Orange 1-5' near the terminus of Kuwaiti Highway 80. The remainder of the RCT would follow, continuing the attack north along two axes oriented on the main thoroughfares, Highway 8 and Highway 31. Once through the breach, 1st Tanks would eliminate the tanks and APCs of the Iraqi 51st Mechanized Division and support the attack into the Basrah International Airport (BIA). The task of 3/7 was to clear the Iraqi 32^d Mechanized Infantry Brigade from its garrison to the south of Az Zubayr. More importantly, 1/7 was focused on securing the 'Crown Jewel', the Zubayr



RCT-7's attack called for a rapid penetration across the border and the capture of oil facilities in Az Zubayr and the Basrah International Airport. The attack was modified with elements attacking on the west side of Jabal Sanam.

pumping station complex. This complex was the central pumping station in the South Rumaylah oil fields that received oil from the north and west, and pumped it to the offshore oil export terminals. It was the last strategic objective that had to be taken for the Marines to claim complete success in capturing the critical nodes of the South Rumaylah oil field infrastructure intact. The objectives of 3/4 included securing BIA and the northern bridges over the Shaat al Basrah waterway. These bridges, leading to the city of Al Basrah, were key to supporting the attack of the 1st UK Division's 7th Armoured Brigade into the city. They were central to blocking the enemy's movements across the waterway in either direction. It was important to the Division to set the Brits up for success in both the relief in place and their follow-on mission. RCT-7 bore the responsibility of delivering these bridges to them intact.

The original plan was now modified because of the suspected Republican Guard brigade threat north of Safwan in RCT-7's zone. RCT-5 had already moved to a blocking position that would preclude the escape of any reinforcing RG elements in the south. Now, RCT-7 would attack to deliver the decisive blow. Instead of leading with an attack up Highway 80, two battalions (1st Tanks, followed by 3/4) were redirected to the west of *Jabal Sanam*, where they would cross the border using the Green breach lanes originally created for elements of 3^d LAR Battalion and 11th Marines.



The guns of Eleventh Marines provide prep fires for Ripper's Attack against the 51st Mechanized Division.

The remainder of the RCT would hold in place and cross at the original sites once the enemy threat had been reduced by the assault elements. Once any RG threat had been destroyed, 3/4 and 1st Tanks would continue their attack to the Shaat al Basrah, effectively sealing off the remainder of the Division's zone from any actions on the part of paramilitary fighters in Al Basrah or the Iraqi 6th Armored Division.



Satellite image of the Crown Jewel Complex in Az Zubayr.

The time of attack was set, and RCT-7 crossed the line of departure at 0300Z on 21 March. 11th Marines weighted the main effort (now shifted to RCT-7) with the massed fires of three artillery battalions. Leapfrogging battalions to keep pace with RCT-7's tank and mechanized battalions, 11th Marines delivered unrelenting artillery fires with devastating effects, stripping the last enemy defenders' will to resist. The

RCT-7 main effort, 1st Tank Battalion ('Tiger'), crossed through the breach lane on schedule and headed north past *Jabal Sanam* and Safwan Airfield. Movement across this part of Iraq took a bit longer than expected, however, as Lieutenant Colonel Jim Chartier led Tiger between minefields and bauxite mining pits to hit its mark midway into the flank of the suspected enemy positions. Tiger took up a position from which it could strike into the flank of the RG brigade reportedly arrayed along Highway 8, but they quickly found that there were no T-72 tanks to strike. The report that had changed the entire Division scheme of maneuver was false. Once all RCT units were across the LD, and 1st Tanks and 3/4 had swung to the north of the Crown Jewel, the rest of RCT-7 units assumed their originally planned attack routes. Tiger (followed by 3/4) moved north along Highway 8, while 3/7 (followed by 1/7) moved north along Highway 31. The Ripper Tactical CP (the 'TAC') established itself 13 km north of *Jabal Sanam*, in between the two highways, and took control of the fight. Once the TAC was in place, the RCT-7 Main CP moved into Iraq to link up with the TAC.

Attacking in the wake of the earlier RCT-5 attack and a significant shaping effort, 1st Tank Battalion's movement over the next few hours was characterized by what appeared to be a collapsing conventional enemy. Some uniformed Iraqi infantrymen fought, some surrendered, and a large number of APCs, tanks, and artillery pieces were found very recently abandoned. The battalion's main body was immersed in 'civilians', many of whom had obviously just tossed aside uniforms for civilian clothes. Some appeared to be very happy with their recent release from the military, while some seemed to look as if they were watching and waiting for an opportunity to rejoin the fight. This was the RCT's introduction to the unique face of enemy resistance in Iraq, one that required discipline on the part of all the Division's Marines. Blue Diamond declined to kill hundreds of Iraqi citizen-soldiers unnecessarily, or take thousands of conscript prisoners. Throughout the campaign, the Division chose to ruthlessly destroy only those that took arms and fought against it, disarming and releasing those Iraqis who just wished an end to fighting and to return home, no longer posing a threat. Coaxial machine gun fire and tank main guns quickly destroyed the relatively few active enemy infantrymen (estimated enemy casualties for the morning were only approximately 35-40 enemy personnel) and armored vehicles encountered. By 1300Z all garrison positions of the 41st Armor Brigade had been cleared of organized enemy resistance.



A modified Iraqi self-propelled AAA piece. Destroyed equipment like this littered the routes all the way to Baghdad.

Attached to 1st Tank Battalion, Lima Company of 3/4, commanded by Captain Matt Watt, continued the attack toward the Al Basrah bridges. With darkness rapidly approaching, Lima was engaged by enemy dismounted infantry and an armored vehicle in the vicinity of the Ash Shuaybah Barracks, the headquarters of the 31st Mechanized Brigade. This enemy was quickly destroyed. As Lima pressed east, they encountered extensive civilian and military traffic on the road between Az Zubayr and Al Basrah. They continued the attack until they were in blocking positions at the major Al Basrah bridges. Now, no reinforcements could enter the Division's area of operations without fighting through the blocking position (something the enemy would try and fail to accomplish many times over the next 24 hours.)

Captain Watt and Lima Company, with a tank platoon attached, continued to fight a close quarters battle at the northern Al Basrah bridge site throughout the night with dismounted infantry on the near and far side. The ground near the bridge was marshy and restricted the movement of tanks, AAVs, and HMMWVs, making the establishment of a dispersed, integrated defense difficult. The Company had to contend with forces retreating into Al Basrah, as well as paramilitary fighters coming out of Al Basrah seeking to join the fight to the south and west. That night, Lima Company destroyed more than 12 'technicals' and troop transports, 100 dismounted infantry, and several artillery pieces at this key bridge into Al Basrah.

With the complex movement across the border complete, RCT-7 focused on seizing the Crown Jewel and defeating the remainder of the 51st Mechanized Division. The attack toward Az Zubayr and Al Basrah unfolded as planned. Third Battalion, 7th Marines moved up Highway 31, turned right, and sliced through farmlands to find a lightly defended 32^d Mechanized Brigade garrison. For the next several hours, the battalion continued to clear the garrison associated with the brigade. Resistance was sporadic, and it appeared most equipment had simply been abandoned, with the Iraqi soldiers either surrendering or trying to escape dressed as civilians. Iraqi uniforms were found strewn about in fighting holes with abandoned AK-47s, Rocket Propelled Grenades (RPGs), and other gear. The frightened soldiers had rapidly donned civilian clothes and left, in just enough time to survive the direct fire attack of 3/7. Several members of the battalion's logistics trains were severely injured when they encountered an enemy minefield. HNC Leo Raya, a Corpsman with the Battalion Aid Station (BAS), recounts:

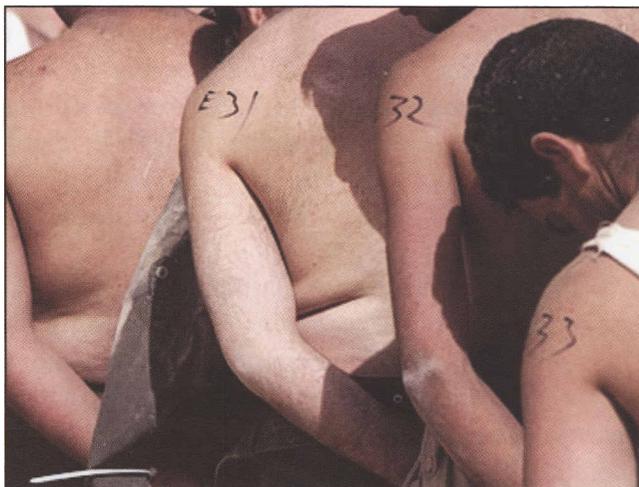
"After driving most of the day, we were starting to set into our position. After a couple of uneventful hours we heard a loud explosion and immediately those famous two words, 'Corpsman up!' Staff Sergeant Alva had stepped on some kind of mine, and was lying on the ground critically injured. We rushed across the minefield to stabilize his injuries and prepare him for an urgent CASEVAC. Several minutes later we heard a second loud explosion...HM3 Alaniz had also stepped on a mine as he helped set up the BAS to care for Staff Sergeant Alva. Three corpsmen had been injured from the blast in addition to the four Marines from the first explosion. We were about to be tested. After all was said and done, all Marines and Sailors survived their injuries and will live to talk about it."

Staff Sergeant Alva and HM3 Alaniz were both evacuated to an American hospital in Germany. Each of these men lost a leg to their wounds. The remaining casualties were treated in theater by the 47th Combat Surgical Hospital, and eventually returned to their unit. These incidents reinforced the dangerous conditions that all Marines and Sailors that entered Iraq were

to encounter. Before the war was over, many more members of the Division were to be wounded or killed by mines and unexploded ordnance.

First Battalion, 7th Marines, supported by combat engineers, PsyOps and civil affairs teams, attacked next to seize the Crown Jewel. As the lead Combined Arms Anti Tank (CAAT) team moved toward the objective, all indicators were that the site was undamaged. As 1/7 secured the key elements of the vast complex, the PsyOps and civil affairs teams broadcast messages to workers and residents to remain clear of the Marines. Key supervisors in the facility were identified and assisted the Marines in safeguarding the pumping station. Finally, the last of the strategic oilfield infrastructure elements was secure. After securing the pumping station complex, 1/7 sent out patrols to the outskirts of the city of Az Zubayr. CAAT 'Red', led by Lieutenant Joshua Bates, approached the city and crossed a road intersection. Suddenly, an RPG narrowly missed the lead vehicle and impacted 20 meters beyond the patrol. Immediately all CAAT vehicles and dismounts established firing positions and returned suppressive fire. One dismounted CAAT team spotted a T-55 down the block and ran into a courtyard in order to get an AT-4 shot. The team began receiving sporadic small arms fire from a nearby building. While additional CAAT dismounts joined them in suppressing the building, a TOW vehicle destroyed the T-55. Seven more T-55's were spotted around the destroyed tank. A gun truck continued to provide suppressive fire on the building with Mk-19 rounds as the rest of the team destroyed the tanks. CAAT completed the patrol without taking a casualty, leaving 10 T-55 tanks burning.

On the northern flank of 1st Tanks, 3/4 (under Lieutenant Colonel Bryan McCoy) fought through sporadic resistance past the Shaibah Airfield, the Basrah Refinery, and to the outskirts of the Basrah International Airport (BIA). The battalion was task organized, with Bravo Company, 1st Tank Battalion attached. For the attack on Shaibah Airfield, Bravo Company turned east and deployed on line against threats in the open, lining up on the flank of Charlie Company, 1st Tanks. Kilo Company, 3/4, continued toward BIA road on the left flank. Just to the west of the Basrah Oil Refinery, the tank platoon attached to Kilo made contact with enemy T-55s and MTLBs, destroying 13 MTLBs, 3 T-55s, and approximately 35 dismounted enemy. Surrendering Iraqi soldiers were simply disarmed and pointed south to make their own way to the EPW camp. Approaching the refinery, 3/4 encountered enemy resistance comprised primarily of dismounted soldiers in bunkers next to unoccupied vehicles. Several T-55s also engaged the approaching Marines. The minimum amount of fires necessary was directed at the threats in the refinery complex, leaving it largely undamaged for its return to the Iraqi people in accordance with the Division's greater mission.



Numbered Iraqi EPWs wait in line for interrogation.

Remaining elements of 3/4 continued to push toward the east. Even though the Coalition did not intend to operate from BIA, the airport needed to be cleared of enemy units to permit the uninterrupted relief by the 1st UK Division. BIA was also an important objective from a psychological perspective. Part of the battalion including two task-organized companies (Bravo and India), supported by the battalion TAC-CP (led by Operations Officer, Major Martin Wetterauer) an Obstacle Clearing Detachment, and a section of 81mm mortars, moved toward the cloverleaf intersection just south of BIA. After a brief engagement with enemy soldiers on the southeastern corner of the airport, Bravo turned its main guns on the vicinity of the cloverleaf, quickly dispensing with 8 T-55s, 3 MTLBs, and 20 Iraqi infantry. At 2123Z, Bravo called the cloverleaf south of BIA secure. For most of the remainder of the night, Bravo remained in its hasty blocking position at the cloverleaf, overlooking the highway bridge across the Shaat al Basrah waterway.

After conducting a link-up and coordination with India Company west of the cloverleaf, Kilo moved against the airport. Its tank platoon pressed forward to the berm to scout for a breach site, moving under cover of the 81mm mortars. Upon detecting MTLBs and troops in the open, immediate suppression fires were called. As soon as the rounds from the regimental suppression mission lifted, Kilo moved through a parting in the fence, and fought its way to a support by fire position for India's movement through the breach. The attack destroyed a dozen armored vehicles, and included RCT-7's first Javelin engagement of the war, when Lance Corporal Adam Seeley destroyed a BMP-1 on the airfield.

India and Kilo Companies continued to use surface and air fires to destroy sustained enemy resistance at the airfield. India undertook the detailed clearing of the buildings that made up the international airport complex. During this operation, India Company discovered an underground military complex, and the Human Intelligence Exploitation Team (HET) led by Chief Warrant Officer Steve Blanford deployed to ascertain its purposes. One of the rooms discovered was an obvious torture chamber with a battery and cables hooked to bedsprings. Kilo Company maintained its support for the clearing by moving to new support by fire positions as India Company advanced. At 0818Z, 3/4 reported that Basrah International Airport was secure. Soon thereafter, the relief in place began with British forces.

Recon Battalion and RCT-1

First Reconnaissance Battalion followed RCT-5 through the breach lanes on the west flank with the mission of screening the Division's northern flank once west of RCT-5's zone. Once across the border, Lieutenant Colonel Ferrando and Recon Battalion ('Godfather') linked up with Lieutenant Colonel Duffy White and 1st LAR Battalion ('Highlander'), who were screening the western flank of the Division. The two commanders coordinated 1st Reconnaissance Battalion's continued movement into its screen of the Division's north flank and eventual westerly route of march toward An Nasiriyah. The LAR Battalion guided Recon Battalion through their zone to the release point. Recon Battalion then moved up to the Saddam River where they began to establish a screen to the north, slowly expanding it to the west.

Colonel Joe Dowdy's RCT-1 was referred to as 'Inchon', recalling its service in the strategic victory of the Korean War. Built around the 1st Marine Regiment, it had nearly 5,500 Marines



RCT-1 and 1st Reconnaissance Battalion cleared to the west of RCT-5 and RCT-7, allowing the Division to sustain the momentum of the attack to the Euphrates.

and 1,000 vehicles when it crossed into Iraq on 21 March. Among the units of the Task Force were two mechanized battalions, 1st Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment (1/4) commanded by Lieutenant Colonel John Mayer and 3^d Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment (3/1) commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Lew Craparotta. The third battalion, 2^d Battalion, 23rd Marine Regiment (2/23) commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Geoffrey Cooper, was motorized. In addition, the RCT attached 2^d LAR Battalion commanded by Desert Storm Navy Cross winner Lieutenant Colonel Ed Ray; and elements of both 2^d and 3^d Assault Amphibian Battalions. Alpha Company, First Tank Battalion, commanded by Captain Dave Banning, attached from RCT-7 on 23 March, and remained with RCT-1 through the end of the war. The 1st Battalion, 11th Marine Regiment (1/11), commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Jim Seaton, would provide direct support artillery fires. Also supporting the RCT were Marines and Sailors from Combat Service Support Company (CSSC) 111 under the command of Captain Grant Shottenkirk. Rounding out the organization for combat were detachments from Charlie Company, 2^d Combat Engineer Battalion, 1st Intelligence Battalion, 2^d Radio Battalion, both 3^d and 4th Civil Affairs Groups (CAG), and elements of the 305th PsyOps Company from the United States Army.

RCT-1 received its orders to move out of LSA-1 and to the RCT DAs at the same time as the rest of the Division. The RCT-1 task organization had come together thanks to the tremendous efforts of 3^d AA Battalion getting the last 2 companies of amtracks off the late-arriving ships and moving them to the LSA for RCT-1. The 'on the fly' nature of the assemblage of RCT-1 included several of their significant attachments arriving at the last minute. Fortunately, the

Regiment had an opportunity to work with some of these attachments on board the ships of ATF-West as they sailed to theater from California. Others, however, like their Air Support Liaison Team (ASLT), joined just prior to moving to the dispersal areas. CSSC-111 was forming and receiving equipment at the same time as RCT-1, and did not join the RCT until the day prior to their move to dispersal areas. Not having had time to train together, the first refueling operations and re-supply efforts were understandably less efficient than desired. All of these 'growing pains' were quickly rectified because of the professionalism and diligence of the Marines. The RCT-1 Casualty Evacuation and C2 helicopters from the 'Purple Foxes' of HMM-364 met the RCT at the DAs, and immediately a bond was formed. The bond with the casualty evacuation crews was particularly strong, and over the course of the operation, not one injured Marine from RCT-1 died during evacuation to a care facility (on many occasion the corpsmen had not even completely prepared wounded Marines for transport before the helicopter was already in the landing zone.) The superb commitment of these 3^d MAW aviators to RCT-1 was appreciated, and formed a bond that held through all the challenges that lay ahead.

RCT-1 accelerated their timetable to match the Division's scheme of maneuver changes, and crossed the LD at night instead of a planned daylight attack. Complicating the move, several units arrived unexpectedly into the RCT-1 DA and attached themselves to the regimental rear elements (illustrating that no plan, no matter how detailed or rehearsed, takes all the moving parts into account.) The RCT unexpectedly gained a Marine Wing Support Squadron and the headquarters of 2^d Assault Amphibian Battalion. The MWSS followed in trace of RCT-1 as they moved into Iraq and then turned northwest up Highway 8 to establish a FARP. The 2^d AA



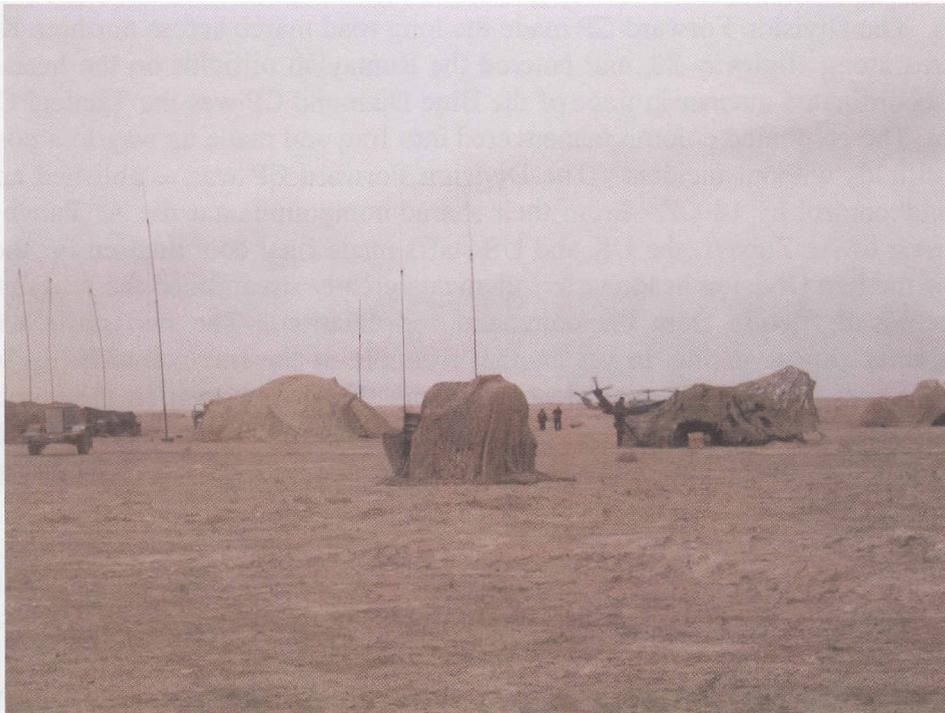
A Marine provides security from the hatch of his vehicle while advancing through Rumaylah.

Battalion headquarters was a godsend, as they brought significant maintenance capabilities with them. RCT-1 was to lean on 2^d AA Battalion to produce maintenance miracle after miracle on the long march to Baghdad. RCT-1 was now an organization with enough vehicles to stretch over 40 km as they crossed into Iraq on the Division's west flank and moved up to Highway 8. RCT-1 knew it had to uncover the ground quickly, to allow the rest of 1st Marine Division and the 1st UK Division to 'uncoil' and present a less lucrative chemical target to the enemy. RCT-1 moved quickly to carry out its mission.

Early on 21 March, RCT-1 reached their limit of advance just to the west of Jalibah Airfield prepared to continue their attack. The Marines and their vehicles were caked in a fine layer of dust that settled in every nook and cranny during the long overland march. Drivers and small unit leaders were already fighting the effects of two nights without sleep. Having moved approximately 80 km to the west of the Division's main attack, the RCT quickly reestablished multiple communication links with the Division headquarters. Because their movement had been so rapid, RCT-1 found itself in a position waiting to conduct an FPOL with TF Tarawa before that unit had even arrived in its battlespace. RCT-1 would have to wait, and sent patrols back to the east in order to ensure that area was sanitized of enemy.

Other Division Actions

Lieutenant Colonel Stacy Clardy's 3^d LAR Battalion ('Wolfpack') adjusted to their role in the revised plan. Fighting as an independent maneuver element under Division command, they would no longer be pushed over to the east of Highway 80, as the threatened presence of a brigade of T-72s would slow their attack. Instead, the Wolfpack concentrated in the western half of their zone, opening forward PAs for artillery and seizing the historic Safwan airfield (where the first Gulf War cease fire had been signed twelve years before.) The Battalion's role in the initial attack was modified, but the Marines of the Wolfpack were confident that they would get their share of the fight later on. Bravo Company, 4th LAR (attached to 3^d LAR) cleared up to *Jabal Sanam*, and linked up with the elements from 1st Force Reconnaissance Company, who had been inserted on the hill at 0500Z that morning, after the Division's attack had commenced. Wolfpack continued the attack, and seized the airfield on the other side of the hill, permitting a RIP by the 51st Royal Air Force Squadron the following morning. Almost immediately, Marines from the MWSS were there to improve the airfield and establish a rotary wing FARP, the first of many they would establish inside Iraq.



First Marine Division Forward and 1st UK Tactical CPs were co-located here near Az Zubayr. Co-locating these CPs allowed smooth control of the Relief in Place between the two Coalition Units.

From its position along Highway 80, the Division Forward CP observed the action to its front and prepared to follow 3/7 and 1/7 through the eastern breaches. The mission of the Division Forward CP was to get established as quickly as possible inside Iraq in a position from which it could take control of the fight and the RIP with the Brits. By a rapid sequence of leap-frogging Division CPs, the tempo of the Division would be maintained. The planned push of the Forward

CP into Iraq immediately on the heels of the assault regiments would allow the Division Main CP to displace to the vicinity of the Jalibah airfield and prepare the Division for the push across the Euphrates River. Given the revised RCT-7 attack routing, coupled with the earlier attack by RCT-5, the CG made the decision to reroute the Division Forward CP through the western breaches at the oilfield road rather than the eastern ones along Highway 80. This would allow the Forward CP to get into Iraq



Marines from the Division Forward CP speed past a British headquarters unit as they move to the Iraqi border.

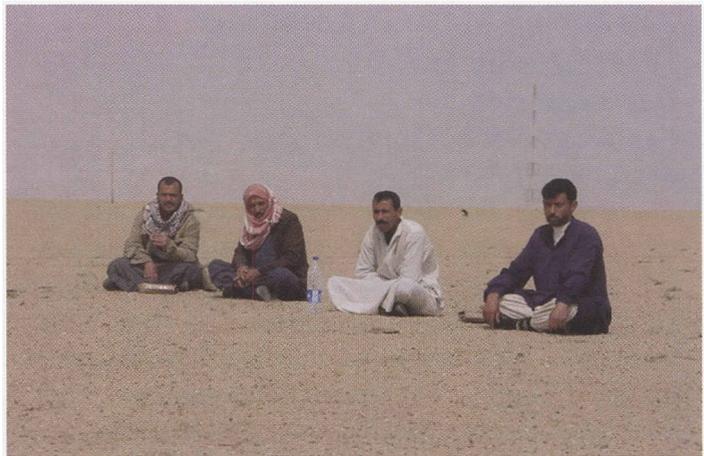
sooner, over ground that RCT-5 had already partially cleared, possibly saving time. As with many decisions taken during the Iraqi campaign, timing and speed were the critical measures of effectiveness. The Division Forward CP made the long road march across northern Kuwait from its staging area along Highway 80, and entered the Rumaylah oilfields on the heels of RCT-5. Moving in a coordinated manner in trace of the Blue Diamond CP was the Tactical CP of the 1st UK Division. The combined column maneuvered into Iraq and made its way to a position to the east of the oilfields without incident. The Division Forward CP was established and assumed 'Blue Diamond' control by 1800Z. From their shared compound near the At Tubah oil storage facility just west of Az Zubayr, the UK and US staffs made final coordination for the RIP. The collocation of the two Division headquarters elements greatly streamlined the relief in place, and effectively removed friction from the command coordination. The two staffs were quickly operating together almost as one, in yet another example of the fine comradeship between the two Coalition forces. That night was clear, and from the shared position the combined staffs could observe outgoing artillery and the trajectory of incoming rockets fired from north of Al Basrah. It looked like the Iraqis in zone had more than a little fight left in them, and the Brits would have some significant combat ahead.

22 March Attacking to the West

On 22 March, Blue Diamond engaged and destroyed isolated pockets of the 51st Mechanized Division and paramilitary resistance in zone while consolidating, refitting, and rearming. Over the course of the day, the 1st UK Armoured Division relieved the 1st Marine Division of the sector. The relief was accomplished in-contact and under fire, as the Iraqis in zone had withdrawn into the urban areas of Al Basrah and Az Zubayr, waiting for the Coalition to come in after them. Emboldened groups of Iraqis attempted to opportunistically sortie out to attack Coalition forces, but were bloodily repulsed by the Marines. As fighting continued during the day, the Division took several hundred EPWs and passed them to UK forces. Interrogations confirmed the presence of some token Republican Guard elements among the Regular Army forces, but there had been no sign of any armored brigades.

Even though the gun barrels had hardly cooled from the seizure of the initial strategic objectives, the Division began to shift its momentum to the west in accordance with the MEF commander's intent to rapidly position Blue Diamond for its attack across the Euphrates. The Division Main CP made its way to the vicinity of the western edge of the assigned battlespace, and by the evening had reassumed control. With an eye toward a rapid advance across the Euphrates, the Division closely monitored TF Tarawa's progress in its own RIP with the US 3^d Infantry Division south of An Nasiriyah. The Army's planned attack on An Nasiriyah had changed significantly since the early planning stages, and they had left the enemy combat forces in An Nasiriyah largely untouched by their rapid attack to the western bridge site. It would now be up to TF Tarawa to destroy the enemy's capability to influence the progress of 1st Marine Division across the Euphrates. Tarawa's progress in conducting a RIP with the US 3^d Infantry Division, then eliminating the threat from the city, would dictate the timeline for the Division's exploitation attack across the Euphrates. The Division continued coordination with Task Force Tarawa, and prepared to support as possible.

Screening the northern flank of the Division along the route of march, 1st Reconnaissance Battalion operated parallel to the Saddam Canal. Their mission was to provide early warning of enemy movements and prevent the enemy from posing a counterattack threat into the westward-moving Division's right flank (from the north.) The Battalion established observation points and checkpoints near the existing rail and road bridges, and monitored



Iraqi soldiers often ditched their uniforms and fled the fight. Few conventional Iraqi forces were willing to confront the 1st Marine Division and 3d MAW team.

activity in the former marsh areas north of the Saddam Canal. Instead of tanks attacking from the north, Recon Battalion encountered hundreds of military-age men in various states of civilian attire fleeing to the west. These were the remnants of the 51st Mechanized and 18th Infantry Divisions who had abandoned most of their uniforms and equipment and were now trying to get back to their homes. These former soldiers were more relieved than fearful when encountering US forces. They told stories of the Regime execution squads who were tasked with killing soldiers who retreated without orders or abandoned their posts. The crush of numbers precluded taking all of these unarmed men as EPWs. Instead, the Reconnaissance Battalion ensured they were no longer a threat, then let them go on their way. Over the course of the day, Recon Battalion expanded their screen to cover the area between the Saddam Canal and the Euphrates River. They continued to guard the bridges leading from the north, ensuring no organized counterattack could come across the water obstacles into the Division flank.

To the south of the Reconnaissance Battalion, RCT-1 finished clearing Highways 1 and 8, which formed Main Supply Route (MSR) Tampa. They performed a reconnaissance in force to the limits of the Division's zone. RCT-1 units reported a small number of tanks and technical

vehicles moving west to east on the north side of the Saddam Canal, and AH-1W Cobra gunships were called in. While clearing MSR Tampa, RCT-1 encountered the same fleeing young men that the Recon Battalion had. Many of these former Iraqi combatants surrendered to RCT-1. Also in their zone, 1/4 secured the large Iraqi ammunition supply point at Al Jazeera (with its large walled and fenced compound), which was planned to become a major theater Enemy Prisoner of War (EPW) holding area. Later in the day, after clearing the zone and coordinating with Task Force Tarawa, RCT-1 was finally cleared to move west in order to relieve Tarawa of the Euphrates River crossing points to the west of An Nasiriyah. The Marines from RCT-1 passed through the TF Tarawa zone and took ownership of the Highway 1 bridges across the Euphrates west of the city. RCT-1 then turned the bridges over to Marines of the Division's Tactical Movement Coordination Center (TMCC), 3^d AA Battalion. The route was now clear for

the Division to continue the attack, bypassing the continuing fight in An Nasiriyah. Having accomplished their primary objective, the Marines of RCT-1 turned their attention toward passing through An Nasiriyah and beginning their supporting attack up Highway 7. There would be some delay here, as RCT-1 would have to again pass through TF Tarawa's battlespace. Task Force Tarawa was still engaged in the An Nasiriyah urban area, and there was some significant fighting required before this route would be open.

Advancing Marines encounter surrendering Iraqis

Darrin Mortenson

San Diego North County Times

March 22, 2003

Ignoring the drizzle that spattered onto the dust of the Iraq desert early Saturday morning, Lance Corporal Dustin Skaggs trained his M-16 rifle on the kneeling Iraqi soldier. 'I think if they know we'll treat 'em good, they won't want to fight us,' said Skaggs. The Iraqi soldier was one of four who abandoned a small pickup truck alongside a northbound highway and fell on their knees in front of the troops of the 3d Battalion, 1st Regiment. Four Marines from the Headquarters Company of the "Thundering Third," guided the prisoners in closer to their unit and away from the road, telling them with hand and arm signals to lay face down in the dirt with their arms out. When one of them, a captain in the Iraqi Army, complained of heart pains, Lance Corporal Roderick Fuqua ran to get a Navy corpsman. The Marines allowed the officer to get on his knees while the others lay with their cheeks pressed to the sand, which was slowly turning to sticky mud globs as a light morning drizzle trickled down. A corpsman checked the grateful prisoner and gave him some water before turning him over to an intelligence team that included an Arabic translator.

Logistics Generate Tempo

Logistics was the critical enabler for the entire operation, and the Division turned to accomplishing the tasks of rearming, refueling, and refitting the Division on this day. The focus on lightening combat loads to the smallest possible had allowed the Division to rely exclusively on organic lift to move itself. The Marines emerged from the first combat operations with a newfound appreciation for their self-sufficiency. With no requirement to shuttle trucks, operational tempo had been sustained. Essential classes of supply carried on trucks of the Division's CSSG-11 reduced reliance on the FSSG and