

By 24 April, the Division successfully assumed all of its Phase IV battlespace and now



*Iraqi civilians wave and cheer the Marines patrolling their streets.*

controlled the Al Muthanna Province (2/5), Karbala Province (3/7), Babil Province (1/4), Al Qadisiyah Province (3/5), and An Najaf Province (1/7). Additionally, the provinces of Wasit and Dhi Qar were added when 3/23, LtCol Dave Couvillon commanding, and 2/25, LtCol Bob Murphy commanding, were attached from TF Tarawa. Both battalions were already in place in Al Kut and An Nasiriyah respectively, and we assumed the geographical space as well.

The battlespace given to the 1st Marine Division was a unique place. The population of the area was overwhelmingly Shia Muslim, and had suffered terribly under Saddam Hussein. The recent combat operations, combined with 12 years of UN sanctions and willful neglect on the part of the Saddam regime had left the infrastructure in the southern cities pathetically outdated and in a near state of collapse. The purposeful actions of the former regime had retaliated against the Shia's uncooperative attitude toward the regime by allowing only the most limited basic services. This created a major series of challenges for the newly designated military governors of the five (and eventually seven) provinces. There was no functioning water purification system, no intact power grid, and not even basic sanitation. The police had been part of the regime's system of repression. In addition, it was an overwhelmingly corrupt organization that provided little service to the community. The real power rested with the tribal sheiks, many of whom were also corrupt, and only interested in maintaining their own power and perquisites. In addition to tribal authority, the Shia community was made up of many different religious factions. Allegiance to one cleric or another defined the southern Shia almost as much as tribal affiliation. Religious spats between rival clerical groups often turned violent, and were to have a significant impact on stability in the zone.

The Blue Diamond battalion commanders who were thrown into this situation responded with heroic efforts. Supported by the Division, they set to work armed initially with only their initiative, imaginations, and the power of their wills to restore basic services throughout scattered cities, towns, and villages. They were hobbled in their efforts by the poor material condition of

the infrastructure and a complete lack of competent technicians to operate it. Decades of neglect and fear inhibited even the most well intentioned efforts.

### **The Seven Governates**

The Division Marines turned to organizing their zone. In what was jokingly referred to as the 'Blue Diamond Republic', the Division coordinated a strategy for each province/governate. This included an assessment of its infrastructure, identification of threats to peaceful good order, and identification of local authorities who could help bring order out of the current chaos. Each province was different, and each had its own unique challenges. To help focus the efforts in each province, understudies were assigned to help keep the battalion commanders on the ground informed of intelligence and information events effecting his area. The Division's approach was to decentralize the effort, with local commanders driving the effort as those closest to the point of contact. The overall goal was to quickly bring the maximum benefit to the greatest number of people. By starting their work in the largest population centers then moving outward into the countryside, the Marines sought to gain security and restore services through the entire countryside. Even this logical approach encountered problems from the beginning. This approach offended the rural population, as they often had competing interests with the urban populace. It seemed that every action taken to benefit one group would serve to alienate another. The battalions walked a tightrope, seeking to make an omelet by breaking as few eggs as possible. As the Marines grew more skilled in Iraqi diplomacy, wise compromises soon began to emerge. Improvements often benefited many groups. Electrical power in the city translated into pumps irrigating crops in rural areas. Functioning sanitation for urban dwellers meant raw-human waste was no longer trucked out into the country and dumped in the fields, and alongside roads and canals. As the days went on, the Marines continued to build trust with the local citizens across the battlespace.

The Al Qadasiyah governate was controlled by 3d Battalion, 5th Marines. Initially commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Sam Mundy, it was turned over to Lieutenant Colonel Pat Malay soon after SASO operations commenced. Ad Diwaniyah, the capitol city, had been a major military installation in southern Iraq during the Saddam years, and had seen a lot of combat action.

Babil province was the site of historic Babylon, and contained the MEF and Division headquarters. The governors of the province, however, were the Marines of 1st Battalion, 4th Marines, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel John Mayer. The capitol city of Al Hillah was a large city, and the outlying countryside harbored large numbers of residual regime loyalists.

Al Muthanna province was a largely frontier province on the edge of the southern desert. Although it had the character of a sleepy desert outpost, it had seen major Fedeyeen activity during the recent combat phase. In the capitol of As Samawah, Lieutenant Colonel Dan O'Donohue's 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, took charge.

Karbala governate was home to one of the holiest of Shia cities. The Marines stepped cautiously into this province with Lieutenant Colonel Mike Belcher's 3d Battalion, 7th Marines.

Karbala, with a population of nearly 300,000, was home to the shrine of Imam Abi Abdillah Al-Husain, the martyred grandson of Mohammed, and one of the founders of the Shia sect of Islam. The sensitivities of the religious community based in this holy city were of tremendous concern. Here, the predictions of cooperation were dire. The 'experts' advised the Division that as unbelievers, largely Christian, and (worst of all) Americans, this city would be a tinderbox of discontent and resistance.

An Najaf was another holy Shia city, and the capitol of the province of the same name. The experts gave an equally glum assessment of the Division's chances of success here. Najaf was also a desert outpost, and contained the tomb of Hussein, son-in-law of the prophet Mohammed. Najaf is situated on a high desert plateau, and is filled with religious sites, mosques, and revered tombs. As the spiritual center of Shiite Islam, it contained the offices of many of the important Shia clerics. An Najaf was controlled by 1/7 under Lieutenant Colonel Chris Conlin. Najaf was the holiest city in the Shia tradition, similar in every way to the Vatican or Canterbury for Catholics and Anglicans respectively. Throughout the Islamic world, the faith is very much a part of every aspect of life – including civil government to one degree or another. In Najaf there was no separation between church and civil authority. They were completely intertwined and inseparable. As with the other cities, however, Blue Diamond's approach was one that assumed the Marines already had the “hearts and minds” of the people. The Marines would conquer whatever reservations and animosities some might have towards them with respect for their culture, opinions, and religion. By treating the people with dignity, the Marines hoped to gain the trust and cooperation of even the most devout.

Later, the Division would inherit the province of Wasit from Task Force Tarawa. This was the province around Al Kut, and butted against the Iranian border. Third Battalion, 23d Marines, under Lieutenant Colonel Dave Couvillon, controlled this area. With elements of 4th LAR, this province would see creeping Iranian influence and activism during the period the Marines were in residence.

A second province added later was the Dhi Qar province around An Nasiriyah. As the scene of heavy fighting during combat operations, it was expected that there would be residual problems. In fact, 2d Battalion, 25th Marines were successful in maintaining order in this region under Lieutenant Colonel Bob Murphy. This governate lay astride the major supply routes between Kuwait and Baghdad.



*Across the southern governates, Iraqi families return to their homes and try to return to a normal life. Even though relieved of Saddam's repression, the initial months would be difficult for many Iraqis.*

## **Rebuilding the Police**

Rebuilding police departments was one of the first orders of business in each governate. Without Iraqi policemen walking the beat, the entire security effort would fall to the Marines. The restoration of police services was a challenge made difficult by the suspicion with which the population held every member of every department in the country. Corrupt and a full participant in the regime's application of terror, the police departments had squandered whatever trust they may have had before. Restoring public trust and confidence would be a daunting task. Formerly, the police were underpaid, with full expectation that these officers would make up for their low income by extortion and bribery. Even then, portions of police salaries were skimmed off the top and into the pockets of senior officials. In spite of the urgent requirement to put police on the streets right away, it was more important to send a signal to the officers themselves that the situation had changed. Improper conduct by police officers and officials would not be tolerated in the new force. In almost every case, the battalion commanders fired the entire force, then rehired those who they were personally convinced were salvageable. A few commanders invited vetted local officials and private citizens to participate in this process. The next immediate step was to get the police out of their old uniforms that were closely associated with the regime. The new police forces were given distinguishing new uniforms, even if it was only a ball cap initially. The new uniforms were often presented in a public ceremony for the benefit of the officers and the communities they served. In Karbala, the issuing of new uniforms was televised on 8 June at a City Hall parade. Most cities opened police academies, with a course of instruction that included ethics training, basic police techniques, weapons use and community relations. You can't shake down the locals anymore was lesson one. Joint Marine-police patrols began operating on the streets in this opening stage, building trust and confidence in departments that had for at least 35 years had not deserved either.

After the initial training programs came longer term initiatives that included expanded training opportunities, internal affairs functions, management, expanded ethics sessions, and instruction on the law. In As Samawah a ten day course was established that graduated over 700 officers. In many of the provinces commanders requested, and received, the services of Reserve Marines who were police officers in their civilian lives back in the United States. Army Military Policemen were instrumental throughout, adding their talents and expertise to the daily functioning of the departments. This once hated institution evolved quickly into relevant law-enforcement and service departments under the careful instruction and supervision of NCOs and junior officers. By July, the process was nearly complete with joint patrols all but eliminated. The streets were placed almost entirely into the hands of Iraqi policemen, with the police officers working in concert with the Marines for more complex operations such as raids and searches.

## **Supplying Energy Needs**

Electricity (or more accurately the failure to provide sufficient and reliable quantities thereof) was the bane of existence for many commanders during the entire SASO period. The issue was larger than just electricity, as all sources of energy including diesel, benzene, and propane gas were the cause of significant troubles throughout the Division zone. The elements of power generation included the facility infrastructure itself, sources of fuel, and the distribution system.

Each element was burdened with corruption, inefficiency, and shortages. The infrastructure was decrepit, with no real maintenance conducted for years. For the Marines who inherited this system and were supposed to restore it to working order, it was unbelievable that a country so rich in these products had such a dysfunctional distribution system for fuel and natural gas. Commanders assaulted all three problems at once seeking out engineers and workers too afraid to come to work, and ensuring their protection. Evaluations were made of fuel distribution pipelines, most of which were not in use. Those pipelines that were functional were either temporarily out of service due to damage, or lost most of their contents to looters (who for a decade had tapped into the lines and stolen fuel for sale on the black market.) This was also the case with natural gas lines, although these lines suffered more from accidental explosions at the hands of unskilled thieves drilling taps into the system. Until pipelines were repaired, precious fuel was trucked from the production facilities around Al Basrah to the power plants generating electricity. This was not a very practical solution, as most plants required more than 100,000 gallons of fuel a day, and trucks and operators were at a premium.

The two major power generation plants in the Babil province were the Musayyib and Al Hillah facilities, both of which required extensive improvements and repairs to their supporting oil and gas lines. Overloading of the system caused an emergency shutdown of the Musayyib plant on 18 May. After significant work coordinated by the Marines of 1/4 and attached soldiers of the Government Support Teams (GST), the plant came back on line and slowly increased to nearly full capacity. On 16 June, the Al Hillah power station was placed on-line for the first time since the war after almost three months of inactivity. In Karbala, solutions included major repairs on the power lines throughout the province. One of the major problems throughout the zone were the looters who would actually tear apart high-tension power lines and strip them for the copper inside the lines. This 'normal' activity was an example of how far the Iraqi people had to go in order to regain a 'civil' society. The 3/7 Marines repaired a series of downed 200 foot high pylons, and worked out an equitable means to ration electricity between industrial and residential users. An Nasiriyah and 2/25 faced a unique power dilemma as a huge circuit involving a number of interconnected grids needed repair. With time, money, unrelenting perseverance, and installation of a huge transformer, the electric grid between Baghdad-Hillah-Nasiriyah was completed and power restored as far south as Basra and the Kuwaiti border.

Supplying the plants with fuel over the road was inefficient, unreliable, and was only a stop gap measure until the pipelines that feed the generators could be restored. Task Force Rio was organized by 1/7 in Najaf to provide inspection and security to all the lines within its zone. When they conducted an assessment along with the Director of Oil Distribution, only a partial inspection of the pipeline revealed 19 man-made breaks in the diesel fuel pipeline, one in the crude oil line, and another in the natural gas line. Brigadier General Terry "Guts" Robling, Assistant Wing Commander of the 3rd MAW, directed all his pilots to fly the lines whenever possible to report looters in order that ground reaction forces could respond. Thieves remained undeterred, however, by the patrols, arrests, and confiscations. A more permanent presence along the lines was required. The next step in facilitating the security of the lines was the establishment of a Facilities Protection Force. This group was assigned to the Ministry of Oil for use in pipeline and fuel point security. This repeated process of response and counter-response continued, as thieves grew more sophisticated and brazen.

Oil theft was profitable for those who played the game, but was very often deadly. On 1 July the Southern Oil Company reported a major pipeline explosion. First Battalion, 7th Marines dispatched a small force to the site. On scene was discovered a massive oil-line fire, destroyed tanker truck, Land Rover, and two portable Honda generators. Witnesses reported that several thieves tapping into the crude oil pipeline were killed when it exploded. The thieves were believed to be an organized, professional criminal syndicate that smuggled oil for re-sale outside Iraq. Forty-six civilian looters were arrested in Karbala in one day for this crime, and Iraqi police took the initiative with aggressive patrols. Captures of oil smugglers became a routine event. On 9 June, 3/7 surprised thieves as they were tapping into the diesel pipeline and arrested five individuals, confiscated four tanker trucks, pumping equipment, and AK-47s.

### **Reinventing Local Government**

Much of the problem that faced the Division as it looked to the task of running half a country was the lack of a dependable public service bureaucracy. With over ten million inhabitants, and all the associated functions of public utilities, schools, medical care and food, this level of organization was critical. Restoring an organization of managers was not as easy as rehiring the Iraqis who had held these posts before. The previous regime's method for civil service was irrationally centralized and inefficient. This was a large component of how the former regime maintained power and exercised repression. The absence of the regime's corrupt henchmen, however, left the citizens and local leadership without any sense of how to exercise initiative and problem-solving in the interest of a smooth and functioning city. The town councils or city managers had no sense of how to do anything but take direction from Ba'ath Party directors. These had been corrupt and nepotistic, with no concern for the well being of their constituents.

In Al Hillah, Lieutenant Colonel Mayer and 1/4 held an initial meeting with the local government at which local technocrats and sheikhs pledged a shared commitment to restoring political power to the people and the new civil government. He learned that government workers had not been paid for weeks, and received assurances from the acting-governor that salaries of all government employees would be disbursed by first paying each town council leader who would then distribute funds to the workers. This process had to be watched closely for corruption and skimming, 'business as usual under the former regime. Even as late as July, salaries continued to be the number one issue for local government workers. At a meeting with officials on 2 June, the commander convinced the workers to create a city council to provide a check and balance on the governor's actions. The battalion arranged meetings with religious, tribal, and civilian leaders to find independent delegates for the council. The goal was to establish a council that was not dominated by a single constituency.

In Karbala, the city council, led by Dr. Mohammed, met with representatives of 3/7 to seek the means to restore basic city services and critical infrastructure. Trouble developed, however, when hundreds of citizens demonstrated at the College of Arts against the appointment of Dr. Mohammed, whom they accused of being a former high ranking and corrupt Ba'ath Party official. Lieutenant Colonel Mike Belcher met with the demonstrators and reached a solution. On 14 May elections for a new interim City Council went as planned (with all positions being temporary and performance-based) until the establishment of more a permanent structure. The interim city council met for the first time and began organizing itself. Meanwhile, Belcher

identified selected members of the council with the interests of the people at heart and real leadership ability. A more manageable group of city leaders emerged, and was soon making real progress.

As Samawah, on the other hand, was a complete success story in local governance. In this city, a unique set of circumstances made the environment more conducive to honest government. The most important factor was the high quality of local leadership, especially one senior tribal leader, Sheikh Sammi. Many members of the local leadership had suffered directly, and terribly, under the former regime. Under the firm direction of Lieutenant Colonel Dan O'Donohue and Sergeant Major Kim Davis, the government made a miraculous turnaround in its ethical service orientation to the populace. With the effort led by the battalion's legal officer, the first structure rebuilt was the local criminal and civil court system. The effort gained credibility by partnership with the twelve most prominent tribal leaders. On 8 May the new judiciary was stood up with four good and popularly screened judges sworn in the following day. City payroll procedures were next, with checks and balances in place to minimize extortion, corruption, and skimming by senior officials. The city council, once a tool of the regime, was reelected in a way that would make Americans proud. A viable, responsive, and all-inclusive, council went to work for the first time since 1968. As a check to the power of the sheiks, technocrats were included, as were a total of nine political and religious parties.

In An Najaf, Lieutenant Colonel Chris Conlin and Sergeant Major Henry Bergeron worked wonders facing the same challenges, but under significantly different conditions. In May there was absolutely no confidence in any of the sitting judges, so the commander removed twelve of them. The corrupt and murderous mayor in An Najaf also stood as an impediment to civil progress. The removal of the mayor became the first real test case of the Iraqi judicial system, newly reformed by American forces. Abu Haydar Abdul Mun'im was a former Iraqi Army Colonel placed in office by the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division (after it had initially taken the city.) The process of removing him began almost immediately. The mayor was wildly unpopular before the appointment, and his popularity declined even more as he conducted himself in a way reminiscent of the old party hacks empowered for decades by Saddam. Less than three months after the mayor's appointment, an Iraqi investigative judge ordered his arrest on the crimes of holding hostages, pressuring government employees to commit financial crimes, and physically attacking a bank official. The 1/7 Marines strode into the mayor's compound (that was surrounded by his Praetorian Guard of special police and bodyguards) and placed him under arrest. A few days later, the governing council chose Haider Mahdi as an interim mayor. Warmly welcomed by the Marines, Mahdi was eager to institute reforms and provide stability in this sector of Iraq.

In virtually all of the cities and provinces it was the same. Corrupt governing councils and courts, the former regime's local means of control and repression, were replaced by decent and honest men (and, in a few cases, women.) These emerging leaders, vetted by the battalion commanders, assumed the role of popular representatives, a role denied to Iraqi citizens for longer than some of the new appointees had been alive. According to the people there had not been a single honest and fair election in Iraq in over 30 years, and the citizens looked to the commanders, and the tremendous Civil Affairs soldiers from the US Army attached to every battalion headquarters, for the way to govern themselves democratically. Just as importantly, the

Iraqis looked to those in American uniform to get their first glimpse of what selfless dedication, and ethical public service, were all about.

### **Securing Iraq's Territorial Integrity**

A key responsibility the Division inherited after the collapse of the regime was to ensure the territorial integrity of Iraq. The Division sent a number of missions to the Iraq-Iran and Iraq-Saudi Arabia borders, to monitor the crossing stations. Task Force Tripoli had surveyed the Saudi Arabian border and found it under control.

The Iranian border was a more significant issue for the Marines. Tehran did indeed have an interest in a weak and destabilized Iraq, and sources indicated that it would attempt to exert its influence by controlling or coercing the Shia majority through influential clerics, particularly those in Karbala and Najaf. The most pressing issue for the Division on the border, however, was the violent, abusive, and criminal behavior of the Iranian border guards. These guards had taken to extorting and abusing Shia pilgrims who traveled back and forth between the two countries exercising their new-found religious freedom. For the first time since Saddam established his murderous regime, the holy cities of Najaf and Karbala were open to all Shias, without the controls and restrictions of the former regime. Pilgrims poured in from Iran by the thousands to visit religious sites previously denied to them. Additionally, the Division allowed refugees to return, as well as Iranians who desired to visit family members they had not seen in since well before the beginning of the Iran-Iraq war in the early 1980s. Screening every individual that attempted to pass in an effort to "keep the terrorists out," proved an impossible assignment without a system of passports, visas, and databases. The good will generated by allowing the free movement of Shias made closing the border ill advised.

The Division initially looked to the 4<sup>th</sup> LAR Battalion (already in place on the border) to provide security along the portion of the Iranian border in Wasit province. Later, 3<sup>d</sup> LAR Battalion joined with 4<sup>th</sup> LAR, and together they conducted a more detailed evaluation of the border region. The region was remote, sparsely populated, and very difficult terrain. The reestablishment of the Iraqi Border Guard force was a major step forward in the restoration of sovereignty. When the Commanding General made a personal inspection of the border on 29 May, he found:

*Our sector of the Iranian border is locked tight. The now well-trained and motivated Iraqis are doing a good job manning the checkpoint with vigor. They appear to detest Iranians and are attentive to their border control point.*

As there were insufficient Marine forces to maintain a permanent presence on the border, the Division covered the requirement with regular aerial reconnaissance flights and intermittent short-tem missions by LAR units. What was learned from these initial assessments was that the primary traffic across the border in the Division's zone were pilgrims intent on visiting the Shia sites so long deprived to them by Saddam. As the Iranian border guards extorted passage money from pilgrims visiting the holy sites, and the border was porous and poorly patrolled, there was a brisk business of people smuggling by foot, cross-country around the official post. Once inside

Iraq, entrepreneurs in taxis or small busses transported the travelers to Al Kut, 100 miles to the south, where they then arranged transportation to their destination.

By July, sufficient forces were made available by the increasingly benign environment around Al Kut, which was ably controlled by Lieutenant Colonel Dave Corvillon, his Sergeant Major John Hugger, and the Marines and Sailors of 3/23. Colonel Couvilln found it possible to permanently position an infantry company to the north to observe the border. The task fell to Major John "J" Harris of India Company, 3/23, with personnel from Arkansas, Utah, and Pennsylvania. Setting up living spaces in one of the many abandoned Iraqi concrete forts that lined the border, the company began to work the very few villages in the region, mark the numerous minefields left unrecorded from the Iran-Iraq war, and generally provide a presence and 'stiffener' for the Iraqi border officials in the region. Cross-border activity increased exponentially during this period. Even though Iranian officials would only allow documented Iranians citizens to pass through their checkpoint, by mid-August the number of people passing daily through the border could be counted in the thousands. Travelers moved in both directions. Persons wishing to enter Iran took hired transportation to the crossing site, then walked into Iran as no vehicles of any kind were allowed in. This spurred a lively cart-transport business, as cargo was off-loaded on the Iraqi side, carried through the 100m buffer zone, then reloaded on trucks for further transport into Iran. The cargos of dozens of 18-wheelers were manhandled in this way every day by a small army of cart men.

The border remained benign with the presence force overseeing the Iraqi operation of the crossing, patrolling the few roads running parallel to the border, and monitoring the many smuggler routes through the hills and along the washes of the rough desert terrain. On 7 August, there was a sporadic incident of violence as Iranian soldiers began assaulting travelers waiting in the buffer zone seeking entry into Iran. The squad of Marines on the scene deployed and stood ready to protect the unarmed civilians, particularly when the Iranians began a large volume of AK-47 fire in the direction of the crowd, just above their heads. A number were injured by beatings with truncheons, but the Iranian guards fled back into Iran with the appearance of a squad of US Marines.

### **The Northern Babil Province Heats Up**

During April and May, as US Army units continued to build up combat power at the end of the conventional stage of the conflict, Forward Logistics Base (FLB) Dogwood was established at a former military base in the Northern Babil Province astride the Euphrates River, 20 km southwest of Baghdad. This area of Iraq was a fault line between the predominately Shia south, and Sunni north. It was also the point at which the relative patronage of Saddam's regime ended, and his greatest abuse and repression began. Nearly all roads to Baghdad from the south passed through this area. The Main Supply Route (MSR) Tampa (Highway 1) from Kuwait, Alternate Supply Route (ASR) Jackson (Highway 8) from Al Hillah, and ASR Cleveland (Highway 9) from the west and Karbala, all ran through. Most notably, however, was ASR Sue, a narrow two-lane road that meandered through the lowland villages and agricultural fields for 35 road kilometers. ASR Sue was the connector between Dogwood and MSR Tampa. Sue was the logistical lifeline for the soldiers of the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division in Baghdad, and was used by up to

90 convoys a day. It was used heavily by the Army's theater command in its Herculean efforts to push all classes of supply north from the air and sea points of entry in Kuwait.

The Northern Babil Province, an area representing only a tiny fraction of the entire Division zone, had been all but ignored well into June. It was not an area that Lieutenant Colonel John Mayer and 1/4 had devoted much time or effort to, as they concentrated their attention on the provincial capital of Al Hillah. By early June, the Division began receiving frequent reports of convoy ambushes along ASR Sue, although the number of actual attacks was difficult to determine. At the time, there was no system in place to verify reports as they came through any of a number of Army command channels, turning incomplete and inaccurate initial reports, including double reporting, into 'fact'. For instance, in the first two weeks of June alone there were 51 reported attacks along this route, although the standard by which an attack was measured ranged from a single driver thinking he had been shot at, to the tragic wounding or death of a soldier and vehicles destroyed by combined automatic weapons and RPG fire. Thankfully there were few of these. Assuming the reports were accurate, there had been, on average, three attacks per day by small arms and two per day involving RPGs. During this period there was also another weapon that made an occasional appearance, the Improvised Explosive Device (IED) (this weapon was to gain momentum, and soon became the terrorist weapon of choice.) In response to the Army commander's immediate concerns, the Division organized a response it designated Task Force Scorpion.

TF Scorpion's mission and task organization evolved over time as the tactical situation changed, and the enemy reacted to the Division's successful initiatives. Initially the threat was against defenseless logistics convoys that were described as "manatees." The Army drivers typically wore CD headphones, assistant drivers were most often asleep, and few wore helmets or flak jackets as the convoys made their way along routes Tampa and Sue. There were few crew-served weapons mounts on the vehicles, and these were often unmanned as they were uncomfortably hot in the blazing Iraqi sun. Convoy personnel revealed they had never been briefed that the nature of the threat changed significantly once they put Ad Diwaniyah in their rear-view mirrors. Even convoys coming out of Dogwood, or down from Baghdad, were not taking the precautions prudent in such a high threat area. This made the manatees easy targets for a host of Iraqi predators. In the beginning, the ambush action was no more than one or two assailants standing next to the road in plain sight during the day emptying an AK magazine toward the approaching vehicles, and walking away. Occasionally an RPG might be fired, usually within 20 meters of the road itself. The convoy's doctrinal immediate action was to drive through the 'kill zone' and ignore the incoming fire. Seldom was fire ever returned.

On 13 June, Scorpion was organized under the initial command of Colonel John Toolan, Commanding Officer of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Regiment. This aggressive officer was perfect for the job, and conveniently still "in country" as his regiment was not yet fully redeployed. The Task Force's battle space was carved out of 1/4's zone and thereafter referred to as "Northern Babil." TF Scorpion's base unit was the 4<sup>th</sup> LAR Battalion(-), led by Lieutenant Colonel Andy Pappas and Sergeant Major Jose Sandoval. It was reinforced with a number of smaller units and capabilities. The first order of business was the obvious requirement to secure ASR Sue from the Iraqi thugs who preyed upon US convoys unmolested. This was accomplished in short order by saturating the immediate vicinity of the roadway with aggressive Marine patrols. Instead of

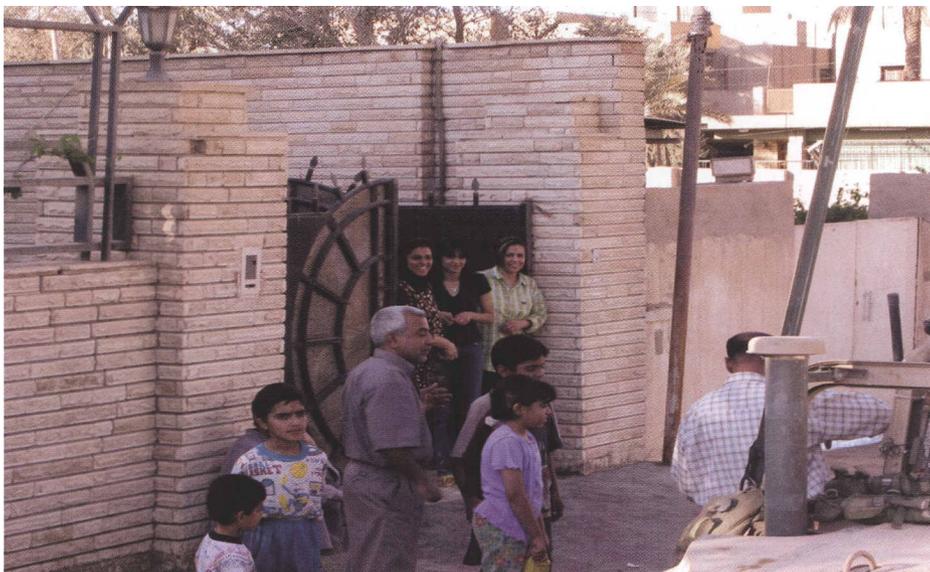
manatees, the terrorists encountered aggressive warriors. Every would-be terrorist soon knew the capability of the LAV. Like the Cobra gunships flying overhead, the 'light horsemen' of the LAR community were respected – and mightily feared. That accomplished, the second task was to work with senior Army leaders in Dogwood and Baghdad to encourage them to improve the awareness and discipline of their convoy personnel when they entered Northern Babil. TF Scorpion had limited success with this initiative overall, but the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division responded with alacrity and their convoys 'hardened up' overnight. Unfortunately, only a fraction of the convoys were controlled by this Army combat organization, and the manatees from units without a warrior mentality continued to suffer.



After only a few days of operations the enemy adjusted tactics. They were no longer willing to stand next to the road and shoot at Marines, regardless of how slow they traveled and helpless they tried to appear. A new technique was attempted which was to place small intersperse LAVs in and among the vehicles in the convoys in the hopes that the ambushers might engage. The terrorists were ruthless, but not particularly suicidal, and this tactic failed to lure many from their hiding places. The next escalation in this 'cat and mouse' game was to run small 'Trojan Horse' convoys through the area. The 'bait' vehicles themselves had been hardened with a layer of MRE boxes filled with sand lining the outer edges of the vehicle beds, with Marines hidden inside ready to burst out and return fire. Terrorist fighters must have been amazed (just prior to being killed or wounded) as the first convoys of HMMWVs or MTRVs stopped, returned fire, and deployed infantrymen to hunt them down. After a few days of this, the ambushers moved further and further back from the road in order to survive, but this resulted in their fire becoming increasingly ineffective, as their marksmanship was so poor. By mid-June two changes had taken place in the north: Colonel Toolan had returned to CONUS; and the number of attacks had fallen off to a fraction of what they had been. By the very end of the month there were no enemy attacks at all.

As effective as the combat tactics were, the Marines found themselves treating 'symptoms', and not getting at the 'disease' of suspicion and hostility towards the Coalition in this contested region south of Baghdad. The TF Scorpion team implemented a parallel program of Civil Affairs activities in the population centers. As the Army combat units had fought through this area in April on the way to Baghdad, there was a massive amount of unmarked unexploded ordnance (UXO) lying about. A tremendously effective psychological operations and information campaign, developed by the Army soldiers attached to the Division from the 432d Civil Affairs Battalion (from Green Bay, Wisconsin) first warned local citizens of the dangers of UXO, and provided posters and handbills to help identify the objects. The second aspect of the campaign was to encourage the Iraqi citizens to contact the Marines for removal of dangerous materials from their homes, schools, and neighborhoods. The EOD Marines began a nonstop campaign that ultimately resulted in the removal of 250,000lbs of UXO across the zone. This common interest also began a process of extending the Marines' influence and trust into the population. The real intelligence sources would be found among the people, a process that had proven successful in the rest of the Division's battle space. Soon the people were pouring in with tips and warnings to the Marines with whom they had developed a new relationship of trust.

By very early July, the enemy once again changed tactics. They gave up on the ineffective, and highly dangerous, direct fire ambush. Instead, they switched to the almost exclusive use of IEDs and landmines. These were often mortar or artillery shells "daisy chained" together and command detonated. By now, the Marines of the Task Force had found their stride, and led by an exceptionally effective S-3, Major Dave Bellon, they very quickly figured out the enemy's routine and although IED attacks rose to a high average of three a day in the first two weeks of June, they fell to almost zero by 15 June. The Division's G-3, Lieutenant Colonel Norm Cooling, an officer of considerable intellect and extensive operational experience (and a former LAR company commander himself) worked this problem closely with Major Bellon. They both understood that the LAR centric Task Force had the mobile patrols covered, but clearly was in need of "grunts" to do the dirty work, to get out of the vehicles and hunt down and kill this elusive enemy.



On 29 June India Company, 3/7, commanded by Major Matt Grosz and First Sergeant Vic Martin, was attached to Scorpion. Major Grosz selected and occupied a company position off ASR Jackson just to the north of Al Mahmudiyah, and immediately south of the IED active 'mixing bowl' (intersection of Routes Jackson, Sue and Tampa). The company had not yet even unrolled their sleeping mats when they were out prowling the night on initial familiarization patrols of the area. Scorpion also welcomed Captain Ted Card and Golf Company, 2/5, redeployed from security duties at LSA-Matilda in Kuwait. Like Grosz, Card selected a position from which to operate, this time in the city of Al Yusufiyah. The Marines from Golf Company were glad to be back in the fight, and these warriors were into ambush sites the first night and enjoyed early contact. Additionally, Charlie, 1/4, was relieved of duties at the only fixed site security requirement in the northern part of the province by Puerto Rican National Guardsmen, freeing them for the hunt as well. The combined efforts of the Task Force of nearly 1,000 personnel from three services presented the enemy with so many dilemmas that they were forced to alter their tactics once again. They began to initiate sporadic mortar attacks from hastily laid or vehicle-borne tubes. This wildly inaccurate fire was even launched at the Companies' base sites, causing superficial wounds to a few Marines, but seriously injuring noone.

The final stage of operations for Task Force Scorpion, before their relief by a multinational Polish Division, was a preemptive spoiling attack against a large number of Iraqi terrorists just prior to a planned mass terrorist attack. This was enabled by the tremendous amount of actionable intelligence that Lieutenant Colonel Pappas and his executive officer, Lieutenant Colonel Dan Devine, were collecting from the many sheiks, clerics, police, and private citizens of Northern Babil. There was a build up of indications and warnings that were developed by Colonel Jim Howcroft and his G-2 section indicating a four-day period (corresponding to the anniversary of the founding of the Baath party in Iraq) in which the combined terrorist and Baathist forces in Iraq would attack American Forces. Blue Diamond planned a simultaneous spoiling attack against a number of these suspected individuals to disrupt the expected attack. Building up a target set, the Division held off striking suspected individuals until 12 July in order to minimize the period of time the enemy had to recover, and maximize the disruption of his plans. So successful was this initiative that the Division continued this tactic in an effort to round up senior regime officials, Fedeyeen, and terrorists. By continuing the attack, and taking the fight to the enemy, the Division greatly reduced terrorist influence in southern Iraq. The conditions were set to turn the battlespace over to a multinational division led by the Poles.

### **The Division Heads Home**

By early summer, forces from as many as 24 nations began to descend on Babylon to begin the process of turning southern Iraq over to the Coalition Division. Among the first to arrive was an advance party from the Italian Defense Ministry arriving in the Dhi Qar Province to prepare the way for the arrival of the Garibaldi Brigade and the relief of 2/25. The Italian liaison team, led by Brigadier General Lopes, met with the Commanding General, 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division, and began a reconnaissance of their zone. The Garibaldi Brigade advanced party arrived, followed by the main body on 26 June. Accompanying the Italian troops were police personnel and Romanian soldiers. On 26 June, the Battalion hosted the UK, Dutch, Italians, MEF, and

Division staff representatives for an informative meeting to plan for the relief. The Carabinieri advanced party conducted a reconnaissance and familiarization of law enforcement activities within An Nasiriyah and the surrounding areas. On 9 July, the relief progressed on schedule, with the Italians establishing command and control nodes at Qalat Sukkar and Ash Shattrah. The Dhi Qar province was turned over by 2/25 on 20 July.

Six more reliefs were accomplished in rapid succession. The pattern was similar for each of them. Planners and liaison officers were exchanged, followed by advanced parties arriving shortly thereafter. Finally, the main body of replacement troops would arrive, some at least slightly intimidated by the confidence of the young Marines from America. It was the heat they were already enduring, the threat of instant violence all around them taken for granted by those they were replacing, and the Spartan conditions these Marines considered "living large," that made the allies understand early on that they were replacing professionals. In often emotional goodbye ceremonies, the people of the towns that had grown to trust and love 'their' Marines bid them farewell.

The Polish Integration Group, who would lead the multinational Coalition Division, conducted a preliminary recon of the Blue Diamond fixed bases and received a brief on current operations in early June. The Polish Integration Group visited positions throughout the zone, and individual reliefs were accomplished. General Conway handed the formal responsibility for the zone to the commander of the Polish Division in a ceremony conducted in Babylon on 3 September.

### **End of Operations**

With the end of operations in Iraq, Blue Diamond Marines waited in Kuwait for follow-on transportation for its return to Camp Pendleton. As they did so, they joined the thousands of veterans over the decades who awaited the journey home from wars in the Pacific, Korea, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf, and Somalia. Less than a year ago the vast majority of the young men and women of this, the Marine Corps' most decorated Division, could not even find Iraq on a map. Now, they knew the difference between Shia and Sunni, had been shot at, had seen friends die, and some had taken lives as well. They had volunteered to serve the cause of freedom, and picked the Marines because they wanted to be the best. These same young men and women carried a pride that would remain with them for the rest of their lives. They came because they were ordered to by the President, and fought because they were told to by the officers, SNCOs and NCOs to whom they entrusted their lives.

The Division Marines had conducted themselves differently in the south than SASO had been done in the north. What had worked for the Marines may not have worked in Baghdad, Tikrit, or Mosul, but the results had been startling. A people that had known only repression and violence had been given a new start toward a functioning democracy. The Marines flew from March Air Reserve Base in southern California, or floated from 32<sup>nd</sup> Street pier in San Diego, with the attitude that the Iraqi people were victims of a terrible disaster. Blue Diamond had been there to help. The Marines had already gained the 'hearts and minds' of the Iraqis during combat operations. The wild demonstrations of joy and celebration along every route north through eastern Baghdad had told them that. They also knew that these hearts and minds were theirs to

lose, and the possession was a fragile thing. The Marines treated the people with dignity and respect, and it was returned. The Marines' first instinct had been to "do no harm" in this last phase, and they left a trail of goodwill behind them. They had made life-long friends here among ordinary Iraqis, who truly appreciated the immense sacrifices made on their behalf. The Marines had given them back their lives, and a new hope for the future.

