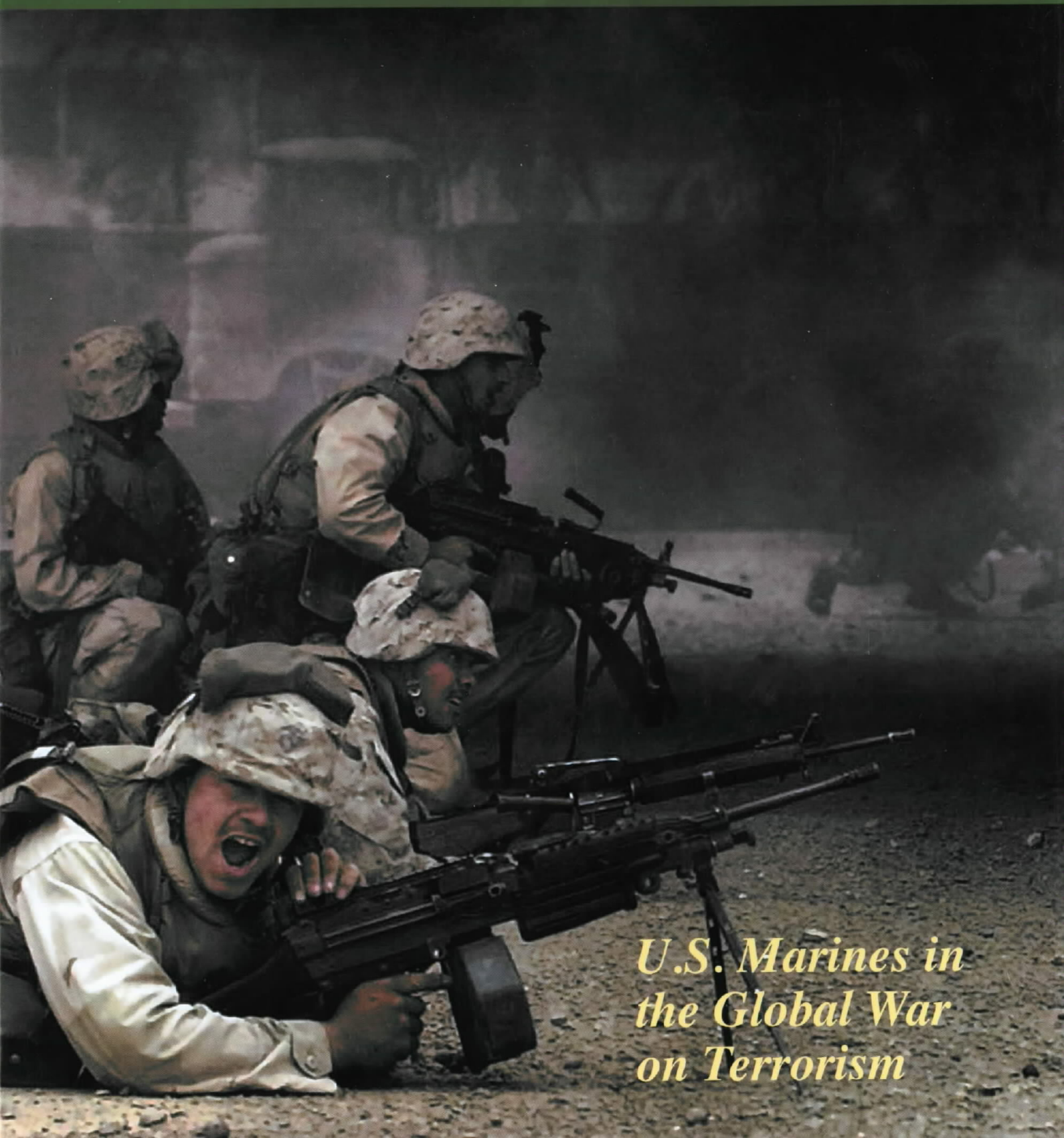


U.S. Marines In Iraq, 2003: **ANTHOLOGY AND ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY**



*U.S. Marines in
the Global War
on Terrorism*

Cover: Marines of Company I, 3d Battalion, 7th Marines, provide cover fire for an advance on the Fedayeen Saddam headquarters in Baghdad. The Fedayeen Saddam operated as a paramilitary unit of the irregular forces and reported directly to President Saddam Hussein.

(Associated Press Photo/Laura Raunch)

U.S. MARINES IN IRAQ, 2003: ANTHOLOGY AND ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

*U.S. Marines in the
Global War on Terrorism*



Compiled by
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Evelyn A. Englander, Nathan S. Lowrey

History Division
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2006

Other publications in the Series
U.S. Marines in the Global War on Terrorism

U.S. Marines in Iraq, 2003: Basra, Baghdad and Beyond

PCN 190 0024 6400

Foreword

This volume presents a collection of 47 articles describing different aspects of U.S. Marine Corps participation in Operation Iraqi Freedom during 2003. As with the previously published anthologies on the Spanish American, Vietnam, and Persian Gulf Wars, our intent is to provide a general overview that will serve as an interim resource for educating Marines and informing the public about the conflict, until the History Division completes an intended series of monographs dealing with major Marine Corps operations in that campaign. As the operational environment continues to mature, the authors' varied accounts will also serve as an introduction to changing tactics and strategies encountered or developed by Marines conducting stability and support operations in Iraq. Subsequent volumes will cover other campaigns being conducted elsewhere during the Global War on Terrorism.

I would like to thank the editors of *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, *Inside the Pentagon*, *Marine Corps Gazette*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *Marine Corps News*, *Field Artillery Journal*, *The Dallas Morning News*, *Navy Medicine*, *21st Century Defense*, and *The Crisis* for their cooperation in permitting the reproduction of the aforementioned articles. Their support made this anthology possible and further enhanced the record of Marine Corps participation in Operation Iraqi Freedom.



C.D. MELSON
Acting Director of Marine Corps History

Preface

The nature of any military anthology is necessarily influenced by the type of operations being conducted, the time available for historical accounts to accumulate, and the perspectives of the contributing authors. In this volume, we draw from a variety of resources (briefings, award recommendations, press interviews, media reports, and journal articles) to characterize a series of increasingly complex civil and military operations that occurred between March and September 2003. These accounts were generated shortly after the fact by embedded journalists, staff officers, and commanders, who reveal a wide range of experiences that extend from combat on the frontlines to planning in theater command centers.

In choosing the representative articles, we reviewed more than 200 potential nominations (which are listed in an annotated bibliography). Those selected are grouped according to the Marines' conventional air ground task force organization, and arranged to flow from broad overviews to more focused discussions. Part I reflects the perspectives of the commanding generals and staff officers from U.S. Central Command and I Marine Expeditionary Force. Parts II, III, and IV present the experiences of Marines serving in the ground combat, aviation combat, and combat service support elements. Integrally linked as part of the team effort to oust Saddam Hussein, the accounts describe infantry, armor, artillery, air control, air support, engineer, logistics, medical, and dispersing operations extending from support bases in Kuwait to northern Iraq. Parts V, VI, and VII deal with less conventional stability and support operations, and the sometimes-tense relationship between the military and embedded reporters. The volume concludes with five appendices presenting additional information on the commanders and their units, military terms and abbreviations, a chronology of significant events, and the annotated bibliography.

Collation of the anthology was a collaborative affair, involving the contributions of numerous individuals at the Marine Corps History Division. Wanda J. Renfrow, editorial assistant, and Evelyn A. Englander, librarian, were indispensable and spent a considerable amount of time collecting, cataloguing and transcribing the articles derived from both print and internet sources. Interns Erin McAdams of American University and Janet Nahrstedt of George Washington University provided the bulk of the bibliographic annotations. Nathan S. Lowrey, historian, assumed the role of project officer in September 2005, and selected many of the accompanying photographs. The Editing and Design Section, W. Stephen Hill in particular, labored diligently to transform the collection of clippings, photocopies, and artwork into its present format. Additional guidance was provided by Jon T. Hoffman, former Deputy Director of Marine Corps History and Museums Division, Charles D. Melson, Chief Historian, and Charles R. Smith, head of the Historical

Branch. Major Christopher M. Kennedy would also like to acknowledge the assistance of Colonel Nicholas E. Reynolds, head of the Field History Branch, for helping him with the review of selected material and for providing him with editorial oversight.

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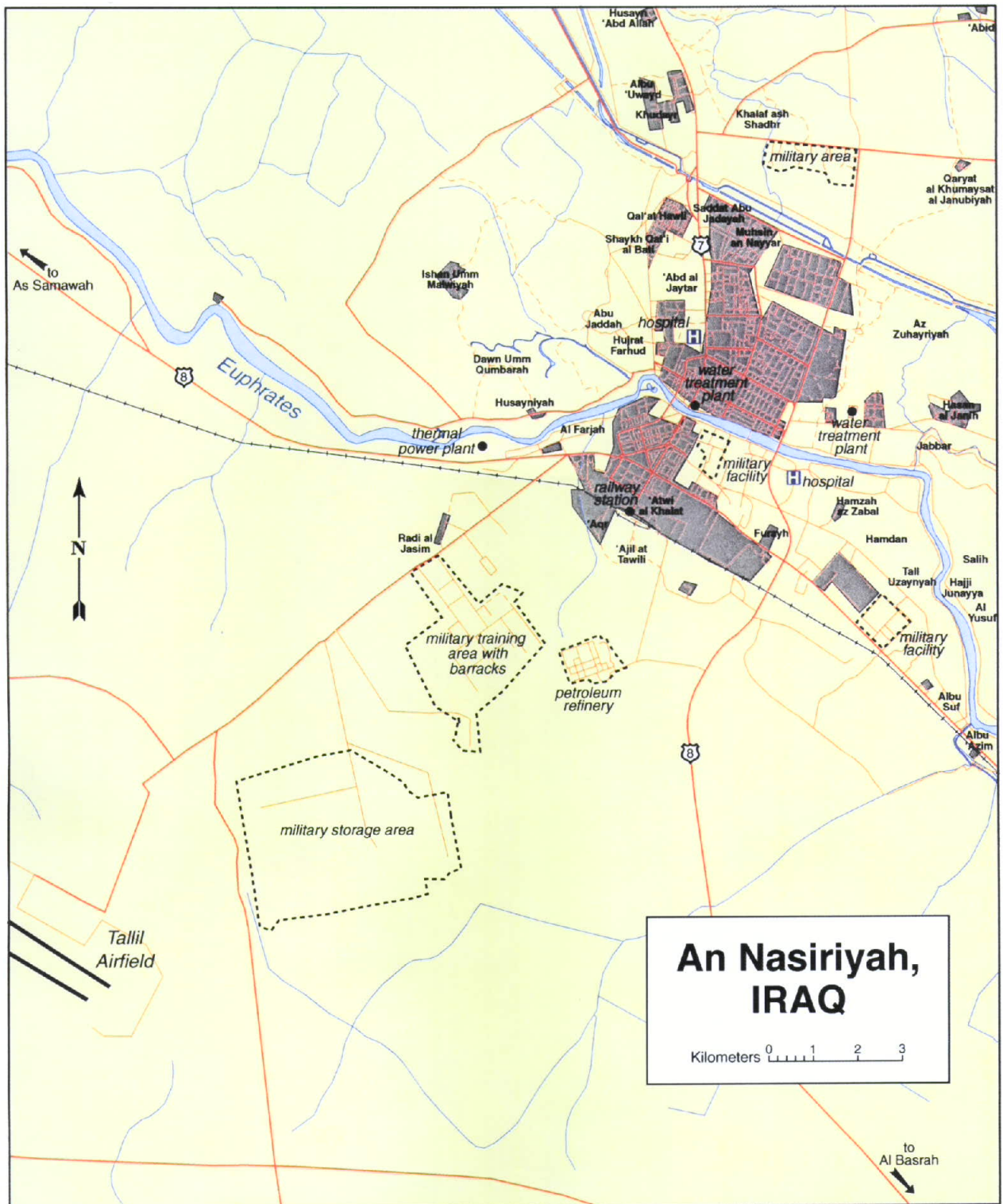
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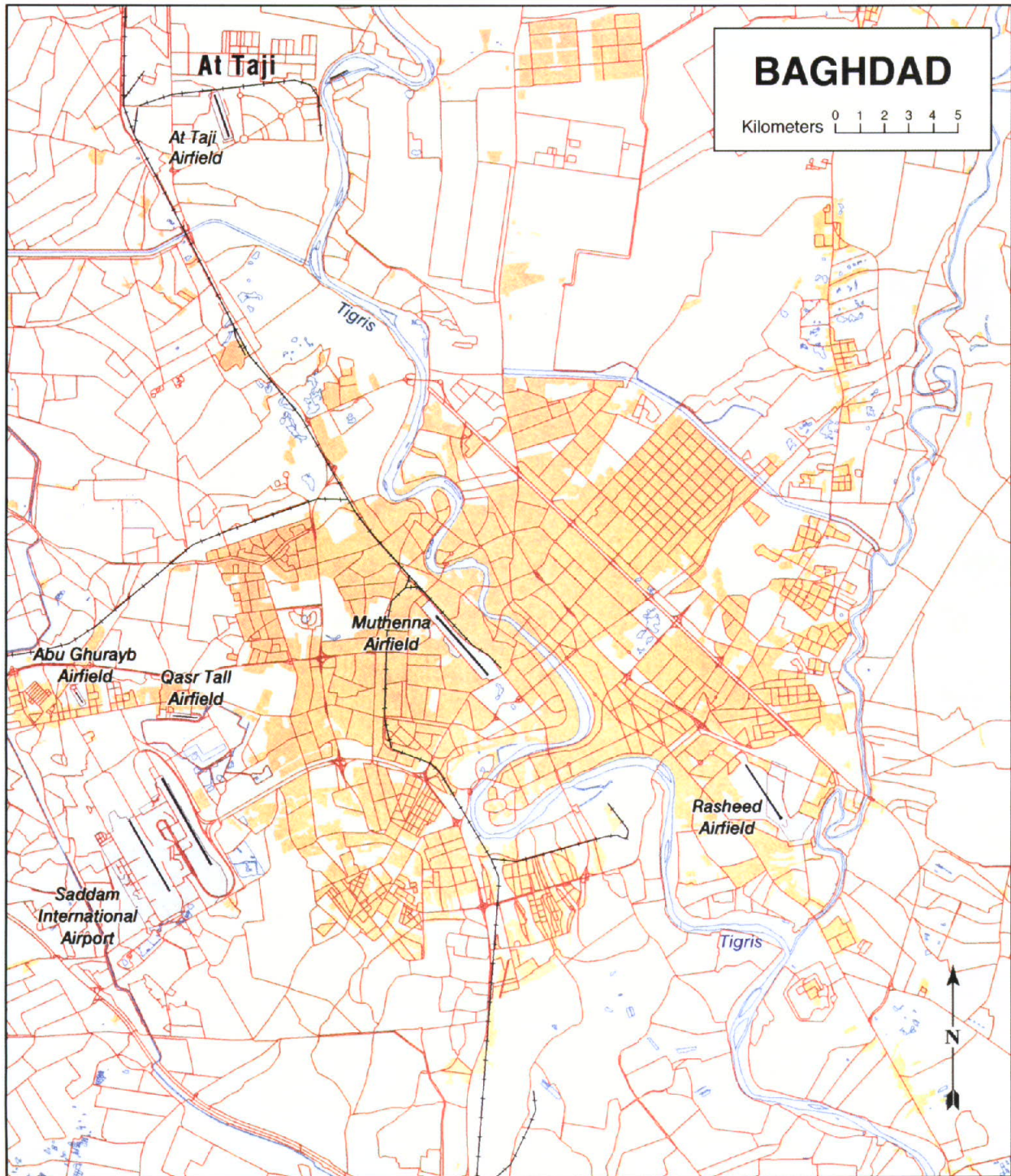
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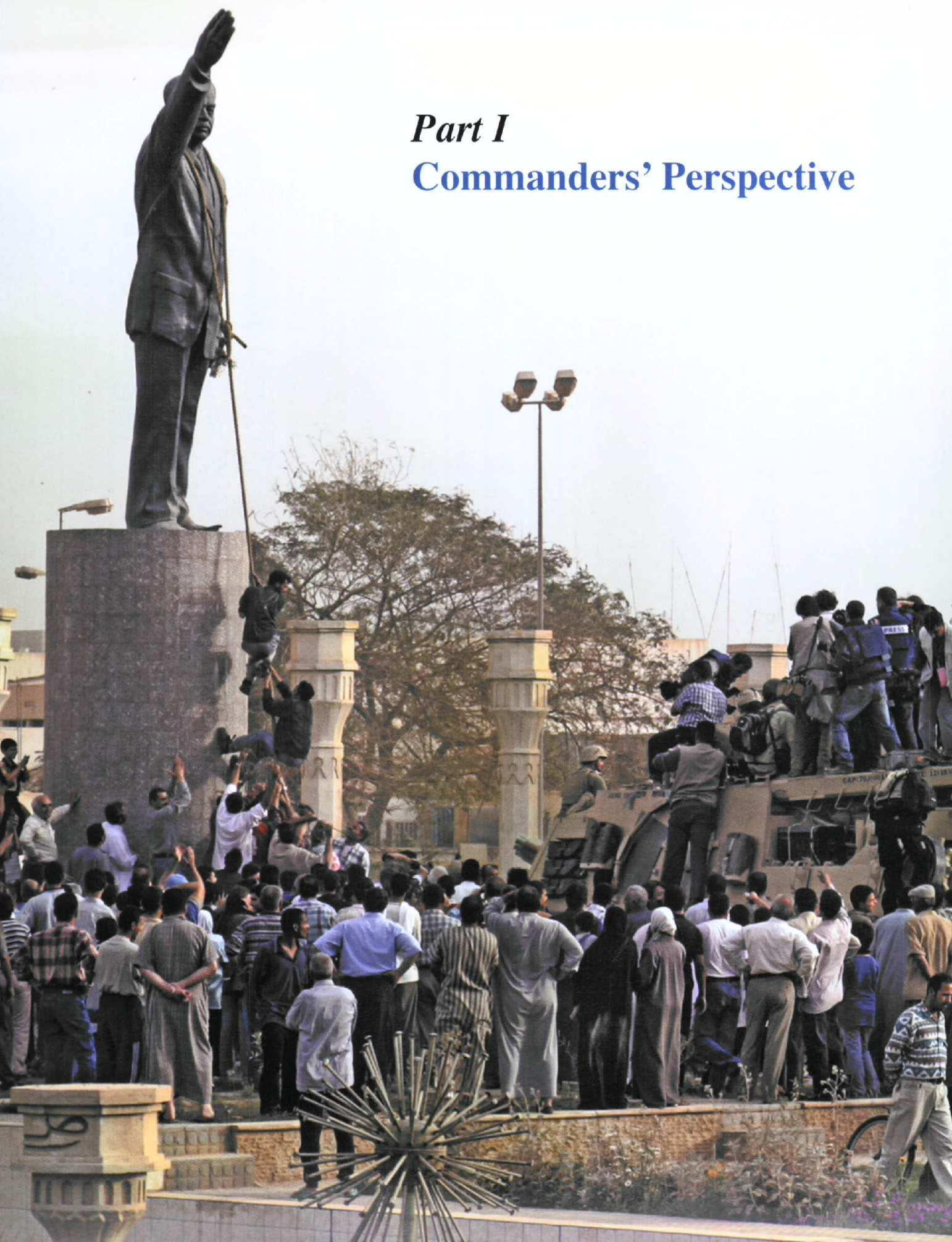




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Part I
Commanders' Perspective



I Marine Expeditionary Force Summary of Action

by Lieutenant General Wallace C. Gregson

Commander, Marine Forces Pacific, 7 August 2003.

I Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) (Rein) was composed of the I Marine Expeditionary Force Headquarters Group, 1st Marine Division (-) (Rein), 3d Marine Aircraft Wing (-) (Rein), 1st Force Service Support Group (-) (Rein), the I MEF Engineer Group, Task Force Tarawa (2d Marine Expeditionary Brigade), 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable), 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable), and the 1st Armoured Division of the United Kingdom. This task organized Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF) began deployment for combat operations in October 2002 and is most deserving of being awarded the Presidential Unit Citation for actions from 21 March to 24 April 2003. Operation Iraqi Freedom resulted in a number of firsts for the United States Marine Corps. Contained below is a summary of action from each major subordinate command and major subordinate element to support the award of the Presidential Unit Citation (PUC).

I Marine Expeditionary Force Headquarters Group (I MHG)

Operation Iraqi Freedom was the first operational use of the MEF since Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm twelve years earlier. I MHG provided the basic life support for the MEF command element, the largest force reconnaissance company in the history of the Corps, a significantly reinforced intelligence battalion, two full communications battalions, and two complete ANGLICO's. I MHG developed and secured five separate MEF command post locations from which basic command and control of assigned forces was executed. Throughout the operation, I MEF command element, supported by I MHG, operated continuously with no less than three command and control nodes: I MEF, I MEF (Forward), and I MEF Camp Pendleton. Leveraging information technology to the fullest and using reach back capabilities to the fullest extent, I MEF was able to web-base the majority of its war fighting applications thereby giving all subordinate, adjacent, and higher units near real-time information on battlefield activities.

1st Marine Division

During the successful execution of Operation Iraqi Freedom, the 1st Marine Division conducted the longest sequence of coordinated overland attacks in Marine Corps history. From crossing the line of departure (LOD) on the border between Kuwait and Iraq, to the culmination of hostilities well north of Baghdad, the division covered 808 kilometers in 17 days of sustained combat.

Preparation

On short notice, and prior to the commencement of hostilities, the division was required to develop a deception plan to cover its movement to designated attack positions. This plan and its subsequent, complex night movement enabled the division to tactically move 20,000 Marines and sailors from their life support areas (LSAs) in Kuwait to their intermediate attack positions/position areas (Aps/Pas) immediately south of the Iraq/Kuwait border. The division successfully completed this movement in less than 24 hours, without loss of life and without being detected by the enemy. Once in its Aps/Pas, the division set conditions to cross the LOD on four hours notice.

Initial Attack

On 19 March, intelligence sources indicated that enemy action was threatening to destroy the strategic Rumaylah oilfield previously identified in plans as Division Objective 3. In light of this information, Regimental Combat Team-5 (RCT-5) crossed the LOD nine and a half hours early and secured the mission-critical gas and oil separation plants (GOSPs). Despite the fact that two Iraqi Regular Army Brigades, supported by artillery, were defending the GOSPs, the regiment was able to secure the objective in 16 hours of hard fighting while limiting damage and suffering only one killed in action (KIA) and one wounded in action (WIA).

On the morning of 21 March, the remainder of division units crossed the LOD and commenced their attack to secure Division Objective 2, which included the Az Zubayr Pumping Station (considered the key oil infra-

structure node in southern Iraq). Despite a determined defense by the Iraqi 51st Mechanized Division, RCT-7 secured the objective 24 hours after crossing the LOD. By the morning of 22 March, the 1st Marine Division destroyed the 51st Mechanized Division, secured its first four objectives and transferred approximately 300 enemy prisoners of war (EPW) to British forces.

In the next 48 hours, the division captured the area south of the Saddam River and transferred control of that area to the British during an efficiently executed 12-hour relief in place (RIP). This action succeeded in fixing in place three Iraqi divisions and opened the way for the advance on Baghdad via the critical crossroads city of Al Kut. During this time, the division captured Iraqi Lieutenant General Amir Hamudi Al-Sadi, the regime's Presidential Advisor for Scientific and Technical Affairs. LtGen Al-Sadi was number 32 on the U.S. list of most wanted Iraqi regime officials and was wanted for his knowledge of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction (WMD) program, particularly his key part in the development of Iraq's nuclear weapons program. During this phase the division suffered 14 casualties: 1 KIA and 13 WIA.

Across the Euphrates

On 23 March, the division began crossing the Euphrates River in the vicinity of An Nasiriyah using bridges to the east and west of the city. Within 12 hours, the division passed 8,000 vehicles through this vital choke point and was then poised for operational maneuver on Baghdad.

The division used a two-pronged attack from An Nasiriyah to the Tigris River crossings. RCT-1 advanced through the gauntlet of An Nasiriyah and north up Highway 7. This RCT battered through regular and irregular forces in Al Gharraf, Ash Shatrah, and Al Hayy to the vicinity of Al Kut, where it succeeded in fixing the Baghdad Division of the Iraqi Republican Guard, preventing it from threatening the division's crossing of the Tigris River and, subsequently, the division's flank and rear. The remaining two RCT's (RCT-5 and RCT-7) advanced north up Highway 1, successfully attacking through the vicinity of Ad Diwaniyah, where they captured an enormous 40-bunker ammunition supply point (ASP) of the Saddam Fedayeen and Al Quds militias. Also, the division seized an operational highway airstrip at Hantush in central Iraq. This movement posed a significant threat to southern Baghdad that could not be operationally ignored by the Iraqi high command.

In order to relieve the stress on its logistics throughput capabilities, and to provide the needed support for the planned crossing of the Tigris River and the impending assault on Baghdad, the division opened a highway airstrip to C-130 traffic within eight hours. This assault airstrip accepted and processed over 400 tons of supplies, including 180 tons of fuel and 300 pallets of [Meals ready to eat], in support of the planned assault.

Across the Tigris

On 2 April, the division attacked across the Tigris River near An Numaniyah, seizing a key bridge and successfully conducted the second major river crossing in one week. The division's attack effectively cut off the Baghdad Division of the Republican Guard from the capitol and denied its escape route to reinforce defensive positions within Baghdad. The remainder of the Baghdad Division was destroyed in a simultaneous attack by RCT-1 and RCT-7 near Al Kut. Within 12 hours the division had massed its combat power to the north of the Tigris and continued its attack on Baghdad, while also seizing a terrorist camp near Salmon Pak, and the Iraqi Nuclear Energy Commission Research Facility.

Into Baghdad

Keeping the enemy off balance and retaining its tactical momentum, the division conducted an assault bridging operation while under fire to cross the Diyala River and enter Baghdad, a city of six million people, on April 7. This was the first assault bridge crossing conducted in the face of the enemy since World War II. The division secured the eastern half of Baghdad in six days with a total of 76 casualties, four KIA and 72 WIA. The division's fire discipline and judicious use of supporting arms in this densely populated area avoided a potentially catastrophic toll among the civilian population and minimized collateral damage.

During the fight for Baghdad, the division seized key facilities, including the Rasheed Military Complex, the Atomic Energy Commission, the Baghdad University, Tariq Aziz's residence, the Ministry of Defense Complex, the Fedayeen Headquarters, and the Directorate for General Security (DGS) Headquarters. Additionally, one RCT supported the employment of TF-20 in the successful capture of Abal Abbas, one of the key terrorist leaders associated with the 1985 Achille Lauro cruise ship attack. During the attack on the Al

Azamiya Palace area, the division received a verbal MEF fragmentary order (FragO) to contain a mosque suspected of holding Saddam Hussein. Division Marines displayed noteworthy valor in this mission, incurring one KIA and 22 WIA.

Upon achieving its objectives in eastern Baghdad, the division initiated actions to create conditions for good order by leveraging the existing support infrastructure, i.e., public safety, food supply, health services, transportation, and utilities. Additionally, the division supported three Task Force 20 raids searching for high-ranking Iraqi Regime officials and exploited documents and information from captured Iraqis via its embedded human exploitation teams (HETs).

North to Tikrit

On 10 April, at CFLCC and MEF direction, the division formed an LAR-based task force, TF Tripoli, which, within 24 hours, attacked Tikrit, Saddam Hussein's birthplace and a significant regime bastion. TF Tripoli secured Tikrit within two days. Along the way, it opened a secure route for follow-on use by the U.S. Army's 4th Infantry Division, seized ammunition storage facilities that included Roland surface-to-air missiles, SA-3 SAMs, and Abibil surface-to-surface missiles. Acting on intelligence information, TF Tripoli entered Samara and rescued seven U.S. POWs without incurring casualties.

Leveraging goodwill among the tribal leaders in northern Iraq that was generated by Division Civil Military Operations personnel, TF Tripoli exploited the opportunity to secure the key northern city of Baiji without firing a shot. Within days the division was able to pacify the Tikrit region and turn over significant operating responsibilities to the local inhabitants.

Stabilization Operations

In Baghdad, the division established a Civil-Military Operations Center (CMOC) to work with key civil leaders and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to restore services to Baghdad. This center quickly became a hub of stabilization and reconstruction activity, sending a positive message to the citizens of Baghdad concerning the U.S. presence. The division and civil affairs (CA) personnel continued working with the International Committee of the Red Cross to make area hospitals operational again and initiated joint Marine-Iraqi Police patrols to restore order and confidence. The division transitioned from combat operations to civil-military operations in Baghdad with no disruption—a significant event for any military force.

The division's initiation and conduct of security and civil-military affairs in a city of six million inhabitants and, subsequently, to holy cities and areas of influence, are preceded in U.S. military history only by the United States' occupation forces facilitating rebuilding programs in post-World War II Europe and Japan. These accomplishments were all firsts for a Marine division and are emblematic of the unprecedented valor, determination, and resolve among the individual Marines, soldiers, and sailors of 1st Marine Division.

3d Marine Aircraft Wing

3d Marine Aircraft Wing (3d MAW) set new standards of achievement during its execution of both the deployment and combat phases of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Executing a massive deployment of troops and equipment in record time, 3d MAW then carried out an unparalleled campaign against Iraqi forces that resulted in the destruction of at least eight Iraqi divisions and an air campaign that significantly removed the enemy's will to fight.

Deployment

Deployment Order 164 initiated 3d MAW participation. 3d MAW positioned a force of 135 Marines in Kuwait during November of 2002 to establish initial basing sites and orchestrate the flow of personnel and equipment. From this initial presence, 3d MAW provided key support of the offload of two complete maritime propositioned shipping (MPS) squadrons (a total of 11 ships) with MAW and MEF equipment. This was followed by four fast sealift ships loaded with the aircraft of several helicopter squadrons. The offload of these ships was conducted on a 24 hour a day, seven day a week basis and was completed in 45 days without a single injury to any Marine or sailor. The result was the assembly of more equipment in one location than had been accomplished in Marine Corps history. Additionally, 3d MAW offloaded three ammunition ships that ultimately provided 29.1 million pounds of aviation ordnance for the pending operation and contributed to the establishment of the largest cache of aviation ordnance ever. Aircraft and personnel from the east and west

coasts arrived aboard 17 amphibious ships (plus two T-AVB aviation logistics ships) and by the air ferrying of other aircraft to the theater of operations. At its peak, 3d MAW grew to 15,451 personnel. Augmentation was provided from the 1st, 2d and 4th MAWs and a host of additional sources to meet the requirements of combat. This made the 3d MAW the largest Marine air wing deployed since Vietnam.

Basing

Establishing itself at two primary Air Bases in Kuwait (Al Jaber Air Base and Ali Al Salem Air Base), wing elements built compounds and improved operational areas. 3d MAW set up 440 tents at Al Jaber and 400 tents and mess facilities at both sites. Seabees constructed concrete ramps where constructed at Al Jaber to accommodate the huge influx of aircraft and addition ground preparation was made to lay AM-2 matting for additional ramp space. Additional detachments were also established at Prince Sultan Air Base, Saudi Arabia and at Sheik Isa Air Base, Bahrain. Ultimately, 3d MAW deployed 435 aircraft, making it the largest overseas deployment of Marine aviation assets since the height of the Vietnam War.

Shaping the Battlefield

During deployed operations leading up to Operation Iraqi Freedom, 3d MAW flew sorties between 15 February 2003 and 20 March 2003 into Iraq in support of Operation Southern Watch. Additional unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) missions were also flown into Iraq during this period. These missions provided key imagery intelligence of the enemy situation and allowed commanders at the highest level to shape the initial planning for the conduct of a ground offensive against Iraq.

Direct Support

Preparations for combat included a focus on best methods to support ground forces. 3d MAW units established unique direct support relationships at the regimental combat team (RCT) level and above allowed ground units to be supported with the full range of MAW assets, including direct air support centers (DASC), air support elements (ASE), imagery liaison cells from VMU squadrons, dedicated casualty evacuation (CASEvac), and command and control aircraft.

Forward Basing

3d MAW forces began combat and combat support actions immediately at the start of hostilities by moving over 4,000 Marines and sailors and over 900 vehicles from the Marine Air Control Group and Marine Wing Support Group with ground forces as they crossed the berm into Iraq in order to establish a chain of forward arming and refueling points (FARPs) and forward operating bases (FOBs) that would allow MAW rotary and fixed wing assets to support ground combat elements at all times. This action resulted in the creation of 15 FARP and FOB sites that provided ordinance and fuel for hundreds of aircraft sorties during the campaign and covered over 500 miles as the ground forces advanced; an accomplishment unparalleled in Marine Corps history. Although designed to provide fuel and ammunition only to MAW aircraft, these forward sites forward sites provided fuel for tanks, light armored vehicles and a variety of rolling stock from Marine ground combat elements at critical times in order to allow the ground attack to continue its aggressive forward momentum. These elements of 3d MAW were frequently at the forward most combat areas and sustained both killed in action (KIA) and wounded in action (WIA) casualties.

Strike Air

Marine fixed wing assets of MAG-11 provided over 4,000 sorties in close air support (CAS) and air interdiction missions, dropping over 3.8 million pounds of ordnance. Quickly adapting to the fluid nature of the battlefield, the fixed wing elements developed tactical innovations that allowed them to maximize the use of imagery intelligence in order to quickly attack mobile targets while this intelligence information was still current. The use of airborne 'wolf packs,' using F/A-18D forward air controllers (FACs) to search for targets and channel aircraft to engage enemy armored assets, led to the successful attack of units such as the Baghdad Division and the Al Nida Division. These two Republican Guard Divisions were stuck with such intensity that contemporary battle hit assessments rated them at less than 25 percent strength with remaining military equipment abandoned prior to ground attack by elements of 1st Marine Division. AV-8 aircraft were deployed with equal lethality and with the ability to provide all weather CAS. Despite the challenges of an austere operating environment, elements of MAG-13 staged aircraft far forward into Iraq as part of the air campaign, dropping

939 precision guided munitions (PGM) and 814 non-guided bombs. They also provided imagery intelligence with the Litening II system that became valued not only at the tactical level, but also as a national level collection asset during the POW raid at the hospital compound in An Nasiriyah. Aircraft maintenance elements worked around the clock to maintain readiness throughout the force and to continue to provide constant aircraft support to ground units. Ultimately, the fixed wing assets of 3d MAW achieved these impressive results while suffering no combat aircraft losses or casualties.

Assault Support

Rotary wing assets from MAG-29, MAG-39 and MAG-16 were instrumental in providing effective support of the ground campaign. Close coordination with ground elements was again the hallmark of the success of these units. Helicopter crews consistently landed or staged at ground force areas to conduct face-to-face liaison in order deliver the full impact of the Marine air-ground task force (MAGTF) on the enemy. Assault support lift assets had conducted intense preparations to conduct the largest heliborne assault lift in history by moving Royal Marines of 42 Commando to the Al Faw Peninsula. Initial attack missions successfully destroyed numerous key Iraqi border outposts, while specialized lift missions inserted and extracted Marine force reconnaissance teams to support the advance of combined forces. Assault support aircraft played a key role in CASEvac during intense fighting in An Nasiriyah. Helicopter crews repeatedly came under fire and advanced into 'hot' landing zones (LZs) without regard to their own safety to quickly extract Marine casualties. Throughout the operation, these crews also routinely conducted CASEvac missions to retrieve enemy prisoners of war (EPW) and Iraqi civilians who had been wounded in the fighting. Marine assault support aircraft provided hundreds of sorties to provide forward ground combat elements with food, water and ammunition, as well as transportation of personnel. Elements of MAG-16 flew in support of the successful special operations POW snatch mission in An Nasiriyah and also for numerous ongoing reconnaissance inserts and extracts.

Rotary Wing CAS

Marine UH-1 gunships and AH-1 attack helicopters exemplified the aggressive spirit of 3d MAW in providing close in attack of enemy positions immediately forward of friendly forces. These aircrews constantly exposed themselves to enemy fire performing road reconnaissance, CAS and command and control missions. Attack helicopters destroyed numerous enemy armored vehicles, tanks, and enemy firing positions. They were particularly adept at engaging targets in the close spaces of urban areas, where they frequently used TOW missiles and 20mm guns to target enemy sniper positions while minimizing damage to adjacent areas. Road reconnaissance missions were executed with the distinct intention of drawing enemy fire and thereby determining enemy positions before ground forces were exposed to fire. 3d MAW HMLA squadrons received enemy fire on an ongoing basis; 22 AH-1 aircraft and 2 UH-1 aircraft sustained damage from enemy action, some sustaining hits again on additional missions.

Combat Resupply

3d MAW pooled the assets of both active and reserve KC-130 squadrons to form a KC-130 force of 24 aircraft that was key to the sustainment of forward operating forces. These aircraft flew over 1,011 sorties and transported thousands of pounds of fuel and supplies to unimproved forward operating bases under dangerous flight conditions, frequently receiving anti-aircraft fire. KC-130 aircraft were instrumental in moving key supplies forward when other ground convoy methods had become bottlenecked. This included the movement of MRE's forward to 1st Division at a point when Division rations had been cut from 3 MRE's per day/per man to 1 MRE per day/per man. They also moved 155mm artillery shells forward to fill a critical shortage in 11th Marines prior to the final push toward Baghdad. These actions were in addition to the ongoing lift of personnel and equipment to sustain the attack. Finally, they provided transport to seven U.S. POWs retrieved north of Baghdad.

Destruction of the Enemy

Employing 9,800 sorties of fixed and rotary wing aircraft to adeptly execute its mission, 3d MAW ruthlessly attacked enemy forces while minimizing the unnecessary loss of civilian lives and property. Constantly keeping the enemy 'between a rock and a hard place' by forcing them to choose between destruction by moving, or destruction by remaining stationary, 3d MAW decimated the Iraqi 11th, 14th, 18th, and 51st Infantry

Divisions, the 6th and 10th Armored Divisions, the Baghdad Republican Guard Infantry Division, and the Al Nida Republican Guard Armored Division. These formations were rendered combat ineffective through such focused and intense application of aerial firepower that most offered no resistance above the small-unit level once contact was made by Marine ground forces. The actions of 3d MAW were clearly instrumental in diminishing the enemy's 'will to fight' and significantly shortened the ground campaign. The close coordination of the 3d MAW fight demonstrated the full combat power of the MAGTF team. The actions of the 3d MAW are of the highest order and rank with the greatest achievements of the U.S. Marine Corps.

1st Force Service Support Group

During Operation Iraqi Freedom, 1st FSSG Battalions played a critical role supporting all I MEF personnel. 6th Engineer Support Battalion (ESB)—Upon activation and consolidation and follow-on relocation to Kuwait, 6th ESB was assigned the bulk liquids mission, consisting of both fuel and water. Assigned the deployment of the hose reel system, this battalion constructed 60 miles of fuel hose, along with a 1.2 million gallon fuel farm in order to push bulk quantities of fuel deep into Iraq. The system installed was six times larger than any other previously built system and was constructed in one-half the time allotted. The system installation continued during the worst sand storm in 20 years, enabling the timely providing of fuel to wing and division units engaged in the Battle for An Nasiriyah. Subsequently, the system was enlarged with another 30 miles of hose and an additional 600,000 gallons of fuel storage in order to become a theater level asset. In total, 7.9 million gallons of fuel were pumped through the hose reel system. Five additional fuel sites were established and provided a total storage capacity of 4.8 million gallons of fuel.

8th Engineer Support Battalion—8th ESB was assigned the assault bridge mission in direct support of the 1st Marine Division and Task Force Tarawa. The battalion completed nine assault bridge crossings and five of the crossings were opposed by direct enemy combat action. In 14 hours and during darkness on 29-30 March 2003, the battalion built a single lane across the Tigris River west of An Numaniyah, under enemy fire. Once established, the bridge enabled the Division to continue the attack towards Baghdad. Over a 36-hour period during 6-7 April 2003, the battalion built three bridges at separate sites and under enemy fire, across the Narh Diyala River east of Baghdad. The bridges directly facilitated the crossing of three regiments into Baghdad. The battalion then maintained the bridges to support logistics traffic in support of the attack and after the city was secured, the bridges allowed for the normalization of civilian traffic into and out of the city.

7th Engineer Support Battalion—7th ESB was assigned the mobility, counter-mobility, survivability, and general engineering support mission in the I MEF zone. At the start of combat operations, the battalion cut breach lanes through the Kuwait-Iraq border enabling 1st Marine Division and Task Force Tarawa's rapid attacks into Iraq. As the 1st Marine Division and Task Force Tarawa moved north into Iraq, the battalion improved dozens of kilometers of Route 1, the main supply route for I MEF's push forward to Baghdad. Additionally, as I MEF moved further forward into Iraq, the battalion constructed, maintained, and improved Support Areas Coyote, Viper, Anderson, Basilone, Chesty, and Edson. During combat operations, the battalion's engineers were operating simultaneously over 450 miles, enabling the movement of huge quantities of material. After the fall of the Iraqi regime, the battalion transitioned to the collection, movement, and destruction of captured ammunition and safely disposed of thousands and thousands of tons of captured enemy material, significantly reducing the threat such materials posed to the Iraqi people and coalition military forces. 7th ESB also provided potable water for I MEF forces. By the third day of the war, the first water site was established and produced 200,000 gallons of fresh water daily. Eight additional separate reverse osmosis water purification unit (ROWPU) sites were established from southern Iraq to Baghdad, producing over 3 million gallons of fresh water at those sites.

Combat Service Support Battalion 10—CSSB-10 provided direct support to all 1st Marine Division units in the I MEF zone. The battalion's primary method of support was through the establishment of repair and replenishment points (RRPs). During the combat phase of the operation, the battalion established 14 separate RRP, covering hundreds of miles in span of control and rapid movement, mostly at night and often under enemy fire. The battalion also operated convoys in order to support those units unable to receive supplies at the designated RRP. During the combat phase of the operation the battalion conducted over 400 such convoys,

covering nearly 120,000 miles, in order to sustain the forward momentum of the 1st Marine Division in its attack towards Baghdad. The battalion distributed nearly 3,000 pallets of MREs, nearly 1,000,000 gallons of water, over 2,000,000 gallons of fuel, and over 2,000 tons of ammunition. The battalion also processed 1,453 EPWs and handled 124 containers (the equivalent of 148,800 bags) of mail destined for I MEF Marines and sailors.

Combat Service Support Battalion 12—CSSB-12 provided general support to units in the I MEF zone. While in Kuwait, the battalion established the largest deployed ammunition supply point (ASP) in Marine Corps history. The battalion established and operated five separate MEF support areas, traveling nearly 700 miles. During the 28 days of most intense operations, the battalion transported and distributed 3,452 pallets of MREs, received, stored and distributed 1,848,310 gallons of fuel, produced, stored, and distributed 752,988 gallons of water, and received 5,342 tons of ammunition. In particular, one emergency ammunition package involved the direct delivery re-supply of over 1000 artillery high explosive projectiles, powders and fuses from Support Area Chesty forward 110 miles to 11th Marine Regiment firing positions 17 miles east of Baghdad. The battalion accomplished this critical re-supply support mission within six hours of the battalion's receipt of the mission tasking. The battalion also conducted third and fourth echelon maintenance on I MEF equipment, completing repairs on 4,262 principle end items of combat equipment. The battalion's medical treatment facility saw 493 patients during the most intense days of combat '345 US military, 81 EPWs, 64 foreign nationals, and 3 civilian reporters. Many of the procedures performed were major surgical (life saving) procedures.

Fleet Hospital 3—This fleet hospital, personnel and equipment, was forward deployed to SA Viper in Iraq and became fully operational within five days of emplacement. This fleet hospital was the most medically and surgically advanced facility ever forward deployed in a combat zone. The hospital was able to provide 21 distinct surgical and medical specialties in a 116-bed fully transportable hospital setting. During combat operations, the hospital admitted 437 war casualties and performed 546 major surgical procedures.

Combat Service Support Battalion 18—CSSB-18 provided general support to units in the I MEF zone. Within hours of the inception of combat operations in Iraq, the battalion crossed into Iraq and rapidly established the first U.S. Marine Corps support area inside Iraq. During combat operations, the battalion transported and distributed 5,270 pallets (253,000 cases) of MREs, coordinated the movement of nearly 7,000,000 gallons of fuel, and unloaded and issued nearly 15,000 short tons of ammunition.

1st Transportation Support Group—The group's mission was to provide general support distribution to I MEF forces. The group was organized into convoy control companies, heavy, light, and bulk liquids companies, landing support companies, and a headquarters company. The group was comprised of active duty elements from 1st Transportation Support Battalion, Marine Corps Reserve elements from 6th Motor Transport Battalion, and an activated Army Reserve unit, the 319th POL Company. The group's convoys routinely numbered more than 60 vehicles per convoy and the convoys were often engaged by enemy forces attempting (unsuccessfully) to delay or disrupt the flow of needed material to the operating forces. The group operated from Kuwait to Baghdad, traveling over 1.3 million road miles to successfully deliver thousands of tons of supplies and over 7,000,000 gallons of fuel to I MEF operating forces.

I Marine Expeditionary Force Engineer Group

U.S. Marines and Navy Seabees have had a special relationship since the Battle for Guadalcanal in 1942. In combat 63 years later, the closeness of this unique relationship continued to hold true in Kuwait and Iraq in the form of the MEF Engineer Group (MEG). The MEG was established by the I MEF CG, General Anthony C. Zinni, at Camp Pendleton in 1995. It was based upon the original Marine Corps engineer regiments within each Marine division during World War II. Each of these was comprised of both Marine engineers and Seabees.

For Operation Iraqi Freedom, under the command of Admiral Charles Kubic, the MEG consisted of three distinct task forces: TF Mike (mobility) which had the mission of moving forward directly behind the MAGTF's GCE to provide Mabey-Johnson Bridging (non-standard replacements for USMC AVLB, MGB, and Ribbon Bridge); TF Charlie (construction) which would follow in trace of TF Mike providing support through construction and maintenance of MSRs; and TF Echo (endurance) which would follow in trace of the others providing sustainment support. All three task forces were heavily Seabee in personnel, with a solid represen-

tation of Army units. The MEG headquarters consisted of a large degree of Seabees and Marines with some Army staffing. All told, the MEG had approximately 4,000 Seabees, soldiers, and Marines serving in it. Toward the end of the war, the MEG technically became a "CMEG" ("C" for combined) when a Republic of Korea engineer battalion was assigned to TF Echo.

Major accomplishments of the MEG are significant and focused on the names of the task forces: mobility, construction, and endurance (sustainment). The main mobility support provided to the MEF was British-built Mabey-Johnson Bridging (very similar to the famous Bailey of World War II). The MEG had 1,120 meters of this and carefully planned to fully transport and employ it at key crossing sites on the Euphrates, Tigris, and Diyala Rivers of Iraq. Innovative use of moles, culverts, sheet pile, and other construction methods were incorporated so that this vital bridging could be used even in a worse case scenario. This was planned against the potential for the enemy confronting I MEF with up to 1,800 meters of blown bridge gaps. Not only was the MEG able to fully transport itself (some 2,200 major pieces of civil engineer support equipment or CESE) over some 400 miles of advance from the Kuwaiti border to Baghdad, but it created new roads and maintained most of the MSRs for this entire distance. This equipment consisted of extensive earthmoving, line haul, construction, weight and material handling capabilities. And the MEG was able to do this in record time from the attack of 19 March through the handover of the Marine Corps' portion of Baghdad to the Army on 20 April 2003.

The eyes and ears of the MEG were provided by specially developed SERTs (Seabee engineer reconnaissance teams). These squad-sized units were extremely mobile and well protected crews with a wide range of civil engineer estimate capabilities. Their early and advance assessment of countermobility situations allowed Seabee expeditionary logistics to be highly utilized across the entire battlespace in close support of the MAGTF.

The Seabee motto of "Can Do" best exemplifies the fact that the MEG did all of this by convoying its own troops, vehicles, construction materials, camps and bridges, while all the time staying focused and attuned to the needs of the Marines it supported. This devotion to 1st Marine Division (as it was on Guadalcanal) can in no better way be exemplified than during the Battle for Baghdad. At the height of this struggle in the eastern sector of the city, when Marines found themselves desperately short of MRE's and ammo, Seabees used their considerable line haul to improvise lift and physically distribute these badly needed commodities to their Marine buddies.

The MEG has earned an honored position as a major subordinate command within I MEF. Seabees have proven again in combat that they can be counted upon to go into battle alongside their Marine "band of brothers." This solid teamwork, positive interaction, accomplishments, and speed of execution throughout the past month of combat have made a unique statement in U.S. & world military history. I MEF in under 4 weeks covered the same distance it took Britain to cover in 4 years in World War II. Engineers made an important difference here within a winning, task organized, MAGTF configuration. Speed, agility, shock, and combat leadership proved decisive. The MEG concept is now combat proven as an important MEF "arrow in the quiver" of Marine infantry.

Task Force Tarawa (2d Marine Expeditionary Brigade)

Task Force Tarawa (TF Tarawa) with its headquarters as the 2d Marine Expeditionary Brigade (2d MEB) stood up on 6 Jan 2003 and departed North Carolina aboard amphibious shipping on 16 January arriving in Kuwait on 15 February 2003. TF Tarawa engaged in planning and training with I MEF, then on order moved to its attack position in Assembly Area Hawkins for the attack into Iraq.

TF Tarawa occupied a critical position on left flank of I MEF adjacent to V Corps' 3d Infantry Division (3d ID), assigned to attack in zone and conduct a relief in place (RIP) with 3d ID forces, thus enabling 3d ID to continue their attack to the west and north towards Baghdad. Subsequently, TF Tarawa was to facilitate the movement of 1st Marine Division forces west and north along Highways 1 and 7 by seizing and securing key choke points in zone and enabling the free flow of traffic along those routes.

On 21 March, TF Tarawa attacked into Iraq through four breach lanes in the Kuwaiti and Iraqi berms. One of the lanes created by TF Tarawa was ASR Aspen, which would be utilized throughout the war as a key supply route. Moving cross-country to free up roads for heavy wheeled traffic, TF Tarawa occupied defensive posi-

tions east of Jalibah to protect the right flank of 3d ID, allowing them to focus on seizing a bridge over the Euphrates River, west of An Nasiriyah. Due to the swift advance of coalition forces, TF Tarawa altered its timeline and conducted RIP with 3d ID on evening of 22 March, and prepared to secure Highway 1 crossing of the Euphrates River, a critical juncture on what turned out to be the major supply route for coalition forces through much of the war. The early RIP enabled the 3d ID to maintain momentum and cross the Euphrates ahead of schedule.

On 22 March, TF Tarawa attacked to seize and secure the eastern bridges across the Euphrates within the city of An Nasiriyah, in order to allow 1st Marine Division forces to utilize Highway 7 as an avenue of approach into northern Iraq. This initiated the Battle for An Nasiriyah, which unfolded over an eight-day period, during which TF Tarawa seized and secured the bridges and liberated the city.

On morning of 23 March, TF Tarawa attacked towards the bridges with Regimental Combat Team 2 (RCT-2) and 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, in the lead. 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, encountered resistance from enemy forces in civilian clothes armed with heavy machineguns, small arms and mortars on the outskirts of An Nasiriyah. Attacking forward 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, encountered vehicles and personnel from an Army convoy of the 507th Maintenance Company of the 5-52 Air Defense Artillery Battalion. Securing the site around the Army vehicles 1st Battalion recovered 14 soldiers of which four were wounded. After arranging CASEvac for the wounded TF Tarawa discovered that these soldiers represented only part of a convoy that had mistakenly driven into An Nasiriyah the night previously and had been ambushed by enemy forces. Quickly the 1st Battalion continued the attack into An Nasiriyah to attempt to rescue any remaining Army personnel and to secure the assigned bridges. Encountering stiff resistance from enemy forces occupying urban terrain, RCT-2 and TF Tarawa utilized supporting fires from air and artillery to advance and seize the southernmost of the two eastern bridges, in the process destroying eight enemy tanks and inflicting over 100 enemy dead. At this point RCT-2 moved 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, forward to secure the bridge seized by 1st Battalion and continued the assault with 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, towards the northernmost bridge. 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, seized the northern bridge utilizing tanks, assault amphibian vehicles (AAVs), and infantry along with supporting arms against significant resistance. Enemy forces conducted counterattacks rushing from buildings to close with 1st Battalion vehicles to lob grenades and fire rocket propelled grenades (RPGs). Several AAVs and a tank recovery vehicle were destroyed in this manner. RCT-2 maintained its hold on the bridges despite continued attacks.

On 24 March the fighting around the bridges continued as TF Tarawa cleared the enemy from the route through An Nasiriyah. Significant indirect fire was directed at TF Tarawa throughout the day and 1st Battalion, 10th Marines, conducted 14 separate counter-battery fire missions, which covered a 360-degree arc in and around the city.

On 25 March, TF Tarawa had secured the route across the bridges through the city and RCT-1 conducted a passage of lines along the route to continue the attack north along Highway 7. Additionally, RCT-7 and RCT-5 of the 1st Marine Division passed through TF Tarawa at the bridge over the Euphrates on Highway 1 in order to continue their advance north. TF Tarawa also began to expand its control of the city by attacking with 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, to seize an enemy strongpoint at the Tykar Hospital in eastern An Nasiriyah. Upon seizing the hospital, TF Tarawa discovered 3,000 NBC suits, large caches of weapons and ammunition, and evidence relating to the capture of members of the 507th Maintenance Company. Evidence obtained at the hospital confirmed that it was being used as an enemy strongpoint/command post in defiance of Geneva Convention restrictions. At the same time as 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, attacked in the east 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, attacked in the west of the city to clear enemy opposition. Moving quickly 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, captured two busloads of enemy reinforcements approaching the city. Throughout the day TF Tarawa took over 500 enemy prisoners of war.

On 26 March, TF Tarawa continued operations to clear An Nasiriyah. Fighting house to house and utilizing supporting arms TF Tarawa expanded the area under its control within the city. Meanwhile enemy forces intent on counterattacking to regain the bridge sites gathered at a train station to the south of the city. The estimated strength was over 1,000 enemy fighters. ODA forces verified the enemy rally point at the station and TF

Tarawa engaged with artillery to destroy and disperse the enemy. Later intelligence estimated 200 enemy dead in this engagement. Despite the effectiveness of the artillery fire, enemy forces conducted counterattacks against the TF throughout the night. Due to poor weather conditions air support was unavailable and TF Tarawa responded with organic assets against these attacks directed toward every sector. Throughout the night ground CASEvacs were organized from the TF headquarters to evacuate friendly and enemy wounded.

On 27 and 28 March, TF Tarawa forces began to expand their control over An Nasiriyah, pushing forces east and west of the crossing sites and clearing out pockets of enemy resistance. An additional 100 EPW/detainees were captured. Using the intelligence from our ODA/OGA teams, TF Tarawa identified specific military targets that were being used by the paramilitary forces. Again using coalition air and PGM's, targets were struck with minimal or no damage to civilian structures. These surgical air strikes on military targets in the area further diminished the enemy's combat power and will to fight. Using members of Seal Team 6 attached to TF Tarawa and based on intelligence gathered from our ODA teams, the city of Suk Ash Shuykah southeast of An Nasiriyah was identified as marshalling place for enemy forces. Redirecting ISR assets, and using Seal Team 6, TF Tarawa again directed precision air strikes against military targets in the city, resulting in numerous secondary explosions and unconfirmed reports of numerous enemy casualties, including some Ba'ath party leadership members.

As TF Tarawa continued its push to secure the city of An Nasiriyah, the ODA/OGA teams in support gained information from a local family that PFC Jessica Lynch, 507th Maintenance Co, was in the Saddam Hospital in eastern An Nasiriyah and had been severely injured in the initial ambush of the convoy. With the information deemed solid TF Tarawa began planning with TF 20 to conduct an operation to rescue PFC Lynch. Working together, TF 20 and TF Tarawa created a plan utilizing TF 20 forces to assault the hospital while TF Tarawa forces provided LZ control, counter sniper support, and supporting air and ground fire along with deception attacks by ground forces. In addition TF Tarawa provided a reaction force to extract TF 20 should significant opposition be encountered. To control the operation TF 20 co-located their command post within TF Tarawa's current operations center. The mission was executed on 1 April as planned and succeeded in recovering PFC Lynch alive along with the bodies of several missing members of the 507th. This was the first successful rescue of an American POW since World War II.

On 3 April, the big move to seize Baghdad began. TF Tarawa was immediately redirected to provide security along the major supply routes of Highway 1 and Highway 7 while maintaining forces to bring stability to An Nasiriyah. Augmented with forces from 15th MEU (SOC) and later 24th MEU (SOC), the area covered equaled that of the state of South Carolina. TF Tarawa's new zone covered a large area that included some cities and towns bypassed by previous coalition forces. In the western sector, in cities such as Ad Diwaydiah, enemy forces continued to operate and posed a threat to traffic on Highway 1. Making utmost use of its ODA assets, TF Tarawa identified enemy military targets in the city and struck them with precision munitions while cordoning off the city to reduce the threat. Al Hamsha, a city south of Ad Diwaydiah, was also targeted by TF Tarawa based on information gathered from ODA forces. The air strikes resulted in the death of the leading Ba'ath party official. The next day, the citizens who supported the U.S. attack against the Saddam regime took over the city. Along Highway 7, Marines from 24th MEU began clearing out several cities along the route that included Ash Shutra, An Nasr, Ar Rifa and Al Hayy. During a reconnaissance in force mission to Ash Shutra 24 MEU (SOC) captured several Fedayeen soldiers and found the body of a Marine from 1st Marine Division who had been reported as missing in that area a week earlier. In the city of Suk Ash Shuykah, southwest of An Nasiriyah where earlier TF Tarawa had engaged enemy forces with precision air strikes, Marines from 15th MEU supported a direct action mission from Seal Team 6 with aviation assets and a quick reaction force. The mission was successful in destroying numerous air defense pieces, and destroying several large cache sites. Throughout the area, TF Tarawa forces maintained secure supply lines. During the period from 3 April to 22 April, only three convoys reported being sniped at, and not one single convoy was ambushed, allowing important supplies to get through to support the attack on Baghdad.

With the main effort being the attack on Baghdad by both the V Corps and 1st Marine Division, the CFLCC commander became concerned with the threat represented by enemy forces still existing in the eastern

portion of the country. The 10th Armored Division (10th AD) was known to be located in the vicinity of Al Amarah and had not been struck since the first days of the war. With all other major combat forces engaged in Baghdad the mission to eliminate the 10th AD fell to TF Tarawa. With no additional forces available, and having to retain its current missions and extensive battlespace, TF Tarawa restructured its forces to accomplish the new mission. Consideration of the space involved and span of control required forced TF Tarawa to split its control capabilities for an extended period in order to accomplish all the missions assigned. On 8 April, as the forces assembled, TF Tarawa conducted coordinated coalition air strikes on the remaining elements of the 10th AD. Assessing these strikes and determining that the 10th AD was no longer a viable force, TF Tarawa elements moved quickly to seize key areas in the vicinity of the city. Gaining information that one of the air strikes had killed the commander of the 10th AD, and that Iraqis who supported the Coalition's war against the Saddam regime were rising up, TF Tarawa entered Al Amarah. This eliminated any possible threat to the eastern flank of the main attack on Baghdad.

With the success of the Al Amarah operation TF Tarawa was able to conduct a RIP with British forces on 12 April and return west. As TF Tarawa forces, were relocating to Qalat Sikar following the Al Amarah operation, orders came down to attack and seize Al Kut to open up the Highway 7/Highway 6 route of supply.

Al Kut was reported to have from 500 to 2000 enemy forces that included Fedayeen, militant Islamic terrorist groups, and remnants of Republican Guard forces. Working with ODA forces in direct support, and making extensive use of force reconnaissance assets, initial assessments were made concerning the city. Reports came back that Al Kut no longer had significant enemy forces present and that local resistance had control of the city. Consequently, TF Tarawa quickly moved on the city with the forces in hand and entered the city on the 12th of April. Assessing that no major threat remained in the area, coordination was quickly made and on 13 April the first convoy from 1st FSSG went through the city without incident.

After 13 April, TF Tarawa forces maintained security from An Nasiriyah along Highway 1 and Highway 7. Civil affairs operations began in the major cities of An Nasiriyah, An Numaniyah, and Al Kut along with several other minor cities in the region. An Nasiriyah was declared a permissive environment for NGO support on 16 April, with civil-military operations centers (CMOCs) established at An Nasiriyah and Al Kut. TF Tarawa continued to conduct security operations in zone, which included Highway 6 from Al Kut to An Numaniyah.

During combat operations TF Tarawa was involved in some of the heaviest fighting in the war during the Battle of An Nasiriyah, taking 19 KIA and 57 WIA. These lives were not lost in vain. Through the sacrifices of TF Tarawa Marines the towns of An Nasiriyah, Al Amarah, and Al Kut were captured and secured. The maintaining of the main supply routes to support the V Corps and 1st Marine Division attacks on An Naraj, Karbala, Baghdad and Tikrit was critical to their success. An estimated 2,000 plus enemy were killed in action from direct combat and air directed missions, an enormous amount of enemy tanks, artillery and air defense equipment was destroyed, as well as 700 EPWs taken. An enemy officer captured in An Nasiriyah stated that they were sure that if they put up a strong fight the U.S. soldiers would retreat. When, after repeated attacks, the Marines fought on, many of his soldiers lost their will to fight.

Although An Nasiriyah was the scene of some of the most difficult fighting throughout the war it was the first city to be declared by the U.N. as secured allowing the introduction of IO and NGOs. The U.N. declaration of the securing of An Nasiriyah is a testament to the abilities of TF Tarawa to excel in their performance of duty throughout the spectrum of warfare from all-out hostilities to civil affairs operations.

15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable)

On 16 February, 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) (15th MEU(SOC)) reported TACON to 3 UK Commando Brigade (3 Cdo Bde) of the British Royal Marines, commanded by Brigadier John Dutton. The Brigade Commander and selected subordinates and staffers from 3 Cdo Bde flew to the USS Tarawa to conduct working groups for Operation Telic. Operation Telic was the codename for coalition operations to seize the Al Faw Peninsula, its key oil Infrastructure and the 15th MEU's subsequent attack to secure Umm Qasr port for humanitarian relief.

The 15th MEU(SOC), the supporting effort for the attack, attached Battery S to 29 Commando for long range prep fires for the main effort's attack; once released from that role, the battery returned to direct support

of BLT 2/1. Battery D, 7 Royal Horse Artillery, and 17/16 Battery, 3 Royal Horse Artillery fired in direct support of the 15th MEU's supporting attack on Umm Qasr. The BLT coordinated continuously to ensure maximum response for fires and counter-fires from UK batteries.

Prior to crossing the line of departure, 15th MEU received TACON of Sensitive Site Exploitation Team 2 (SST 2). SST 2 was a joint unit of soldiers, sailors and airmen. They integrated with the 15th MEU S-3's E-NBCD Section. During the campaign, SST 2 and the MEU exploited 17 sensitive sites. Among the items recovered were evidence of war crimes against U.S. POWs, U.S. remains and U.S. personal effects from POWs and casualties.

The Intelligence Section of the 15th MEU(SOC) command element integrated its human exploitation team and Radio Battalion detachment with those of the British forces. Combined U.S./U.K. teams uncovered information and provided actionable intelligence to missions in progress in Umm Qasr, facilitating the rapid opening of the port so that Humanitarian Assistance could flow into Iraq even as hostilities continued.

CTF 56, an EOD task force, also fell under control of the 15th MEU in Umm Qasr. Once the port was declared secured, 15th MEU(SOC) coordinated their efforts to rid the port of waterborne mines and UXO, enabling humanitarian shipping to arrive unimpeded into Iraq.

After just two days of fierce fighting the majority of Iraqi conventional forces in the Umm Qasr area were defeated, with the port facilities remaining intact to expedite follow-on humanitarian assistance efforts in the theatre. 15th MEU's BLT 2/1 defeated the 45th Brigade of 11th ID, two platoons of 82mm mortars, four D-30 batteries and a mechanized company in the first two days of fighting. The MEU took over 600 Iraqi POWs. Sporadic fighting against Saddam Fedayeen and other paramilitaries continued for three more days in the urban areas of Umm Qasr and Khor az Zubayhr against forces of up to company size.

While the MEU fought in Umm Qasr, a task-organized formation secured crossing points over the waterways connecting the mainland to the Al Faw Peninsula. This force of BLT recon and CAAT vehicles screened the flank of the Royal Marines on the peninsula, reducing bunkers overlooking the waterways and capturing Iraqi Army regulars.

Upon consolidating Khor az Zubayhr, a MEU convoy moved to link up with Task Force Tarawa, and transferred 200 EPWs from An Nasiriyah to HA Freddy—a trip of 320 km.

15th MEU(SOC) provided a security force to run a 200 vehicle convoy through An Nasiriyah to Qalat Sikar in support of 1st Marine Division. While enroute, the LAR company escorting the convoy encountered heavy resistance and defeated deliberate ambushes along Highway 7. The convoy was delivered to Qalat Sikr with minimal losses to personnel and equipment.

The 15th MEU (SOC) then chopped to TF Tarawa. Reinforced with a NSWTU, ODA, OGA, 4th CAG, and a PSYOP det, the MEU relieved RCT-2 in place in An Nasiriyah. The MEU secured previously unoccupied areas of the city and quickly turned to assisting in the restoring city services, including health services, water distribution, police and city government.

MEU forces coordinated a Seal direct action mission in Suk Ash Shuyukh to destroy an anti-air weapons cache. Force reconnaissance, a MEU QRF, and MEU aviation supported the raid, which destroyed the cache and associated facilities.

The 15th MEU contributed a supporting effort to a joint mission by TF 20 and TF Tarawa to recover U.S. Army POW PFC Jessica Lynch and the remains of other American soldiers previously listed as missing in action. During that action, the MEU's maritime special purpose force (MSPF), supported by BLT tanks and LAR, conducted a feint across the Euphrates River in order to allow TF 20 to enter the Saddam General Hospital of Nasiriyah unhindered and accomplish their mission.

After the movement North of TF Tarawa the 15th MEU inherited over 2,400 square kilometers of terrain. MEU forces helped ensure the safety of convoys moving north in support of the MEF main effort. Not a single vehicle was lost transiting An Nasiriyah after 15th MEU(SOC) took over. The MEU eventually effected and maintained stability in the 13,400 square kilometers of Dhi Gar Province.

During stability operations, the MEU took tactical control of Seabees from TF Echo, additional PsyOp augments and coordinated the efforts of HA forces from the MEF and theater. MEU forces restored key infra-

structure such as hospitals, courthouses, police stations, power, and water facilities and provided humanitarian assistance to orphanages and pediatric clinics.

Reachback Operations

Throughout Operation Iraqi Freedom the command element of I MEF (Rein), supported by I MHG; and the headquarters elements of I MEF MSCs maintained and utilized an unprecedented level of reachback operations and capabilities, reducing the human and equipment footprints in theater and leveraging national, joint, and service assets and capabilities to the maximum extent possible, a complex process involving all staff sections and requiring constant interface between all command and control nodes.

I MEF G-2 integrated new, cutting edge intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) technologies and resources never before leveraged in MEF-level operations, including P-3 aerial imagery platform (AIP); Hunter Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV); Predator UAV; tactical exploitation system; JSTARS; U-2; United Kingdom tactical signals intelligence (Sigint); and critical source (National Security Agency). Working in concert, the G-2 sections devised and implemented an integrated Coalition ISR concept of operations (Conops) for employment of UK-proprietary signals and imagery intelligence resources; and accomplished an unprecedented degree of ISR push-down to regimental level, significantly enhancing the sensor-to-shooter process.

Working in concert from all disparate and widely separated nodes throughout Operation Iraqi Freedom, I MEF G-1, G-3, G-4, and G-5 sections worked tirelessly to ensure a constant flow of personnel, equipment, and all classes of supply when and as needed; ensuring accurate reporting at all levels; and ensuring accurate and timely casualty reporting, evacuation, and assistance. I MEF's deployment operations team (DOT) provided direct coordination with deploying units, coordinating time phased force deployment data (TPFDD) for 39,517 Marines and sailors and 14,328 short tons of cargo and providing the massive amount of critical transportation data required by higher commands.

I MEF G-6 developed and maintained an unprecedented level of continuous and redundant communications between all command and control nodes, including reliance on video tele-conferences (VTC) for vital and continuous communication between deployed force and I MEF Camp Pendleton. Noteworthy actions included preparation, submission, approval, and fielding of numerous universal need statements (UNS) for critical communications equipment acquisition. Efforts resulted in acquisition of mission-essential equipment including: PRC-150 and 148 radios for reconnaissance units; ruggedized computers for FSSG CSS elements; intel analysis workstations for I MEF G-2 and Intelligence Battalion; tactical data network router upgrades; OS-302 SatCom antennas to allow for long-range voice and data communications for units on the move; and TQ:G-804A generators to increase power generation capabilities throughout the MEF.

Deployed forces at all levels benefited from extensive reachback capabilities established by I MEF and MSC's. I MEF comptroller provided a specific example of the success of these efforts. Throughout Operation Iraqi Freedom the I MEF comptroller section accomplished the complex and critical functions of financial management solely through reachback to I MEF Camp Pendleton, maintaining only a small cell forward. During the period mid-November 2002 through mid-July 2003 I MEF comptroller section executed and maintained accountability for approximately \$750 million, 725 percent of a normal 12-month funding level.



Briefing on Military Operations in Iraq

by General Tommy R. Franks, USA, with Brigadier General Vincent K. Brooks, USA

<<http://www.centcom.mil/CENTCOMNews/Transcripts/20030322.htm>>. 22 March 2003.

Gen. Franks: Well, good afternoon. Let me begin by saying that my heart and the prayers of this coalition go out to the families of those who have already made the ultimate sacrifice. Because of the courage and the dedication of these heroes, the mission of Operation Iraqi Freedom will be achieved.

As President Bush said, as a last resort, we must be willing to use military force. We are willing, and we're using military force.

I'm pleased to be joined today by Air Marshall Bryan Burridge, Great Britain; Brigadier Maurie McNarn of Australia; Rear Admiral Per Tidemand from Denmark; Lieutenant Colonel Jan Blom from the Netherlands—four coalition partners represented here with us. And as many of you would know, we have at our home in Tampa, Florida, the home of Central Command, 52 nations represented. What many of you may not know is that many of these nations are also represented in the command posts of our component commands, located in a number of countries in the region.

You know, Secretary of Defense Don Rumsfeld, my boss, yesterday outlined the military objectives of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Let me review them with you.

First, end the regime of Saddam Hussein.

Second, to identify, isolate and eliminate Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

Third, to search for, to capture and to drive out terrorists from that country.

Fourth, to collect such intelligence as we can related to terrorist networks.

Fifth, to collect such intelligence as we can related to the global network of illicit weapons of mass destruction.

Sixth, to end sanctions and to immediately deliver humanitarian support to the displaced and to many needy Iraqi citizens.

Seventh, to secure Iraq's oil fields and resources, which belong to the Iraqi people.

And last, to help the Iraqi people create conditions for a transition to a representative self-government.

Today, I thought I would describe the campaign you're seeing and provide you an operational update.

Let me begin by saying this will be a campaign unlike any other in history, a campaign characterized by shock, by surprise, by flexibility, by the employment of precise munitions on a scale never before seen, and by the application of overwhelming force.

Let me talk for a minute about our capabilities. The coalition now engaged in and supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom includes Army and Marine forces from the land component; air forces from several nations; naval forces, to include the Coast Guard, and Special Operations forces.

Our plan introduces these forces across the breadth and depth of Iraq, in some cases simultaneously and in some cases sequentially. In some cases, our Special Operations forces support conventional ground forces. Examples of this include operations behind enemy lines to attack enemy positions and formations or perhaps to secure bridges and crossing sites over rivers or perhaps to secure key installations, like the gas-oil platforms, and, of course, in some cases, to adjust air power, as we saw in Afghanistan.

Now, in some cases, our air forces support ground elements or support special operations forces by providing (inaudible) and intelligence information, perhaps offensive electronic warfare capabilities. At other times, coalition airmen deliver decisive precision shock, such as you witnessed beginning last night.

At certain points, special operations forces and ground units support air forces by pushing enemy formations into positions to be destroyed by air power. And in yet other cases, our naval elements support air, support ground operations or support Special Operations forces by providing aircraft, cruise missiles or by conducting maritime operations or mine-clearing operations.

And so the plan we see uses combinations of these capabilities that I've just described. It uses them at times and in places of our choosing in order to accomplish the objectives I mentioned just a moment ago.

That plan gives commanders at all levels and it gives me latitude to build the mosaic I just described in a way that provides flexibility so that we can attack the enemy on our terms, and we are doing so.

And now a bit on what you have seen over the last, now less than 72 hours. The initiation of combat operations—we refer to that as D-Day. The introduction of special operation forces—we refer to that as S-Day. The introduction of ground forces, G-Day. And the introduction of shock air forces, A-Day.

Additionally, a number of emerging targets have been struck along the way and will continue to be struck as they emerge. So the sequence you have seen up to this point has been S-G-A. That sequence was based on our intelligence reads, how we see the enemy, and on our sense of the capabilities of our own forces.

In a few minutes, Brigadier General Vince Brooks, one of our operations officers, will provide a number of visuals which reflect operations up to this point. In the days ahead, you will see evidence of the truth of Secretary Rumsfeld's statement yesterday when he said Saddam Hussein was given a choice by the international community to give up his weapons of mass destruction or lose power. He chose unwisely and now he will lose both.

Let me introduce General Vince Brooks to give you a little bit of an idea of what operations over the last three days have looked like. Vince?

Gen. Brooks: Thank you, sir, very much. And, ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon. I want to take a few minutes to brief you now on some of the operations that have occurred by the coalition over the last several of days. The operation of course began on the 19th of March, and since that time, coalition forces have already achieved a number of several key mission objectives.

Our first effort is aggressive and direct attacks to disrupt the regime's key command, control, communications, integrated air defense and ballistic missiles using various targeting and methods that will achieve the desired effects. This video shows an attack against an Ababil-100 in southern Iraq, and resulted in its destruction.

Our second focus is on special operations. Coalition special operations forces entered Iraq at night, after destroying Iraqi military outposts, as this short video shows. You will see two clips. The first is an outpost along the border, and the second is a building that supported observers on the border.

The special operation forces then began looking for Saddam Hussein's and the regime's weapons of mass destruction and their ballistic missiles that threaten their neighbors. Additionally, coalition special operations forces saved three key oil terminals that are used for export through the Gulf, and these terminals are key to the future of Iraq. By preventing certain destruction, the coalition has preserved the future of Iraq. This is the area where the three terminals were in southern Iraq, and in the Arabian Gulf. On these platforms we found a variety of things. We found weapons, ammunition, and explosives. These explosives are not meant for defenders.

Our coalition maritime forces have destroyed Iraqi naval forces, as the following video shows. This is a patrol boat being attacked from the air, and in a moment you'll see the secondary explosion completing its destruction.

They are also very active in ensuring that the waterways remain open and unmined so that Iraq is not cut off from the aid that is prepared to flow in.

What you see in the next image is a tugboat that appears to be carrying oil drums. In fact, it is a mining vessel that transport mines. Interdictions like this one done by our coalition maritime forces and others over the last few days prevented, for sure, the release of 139 floating mines into the Khor Abdullah, which is an inlet that joins the Iraqi inland waterways with the Arabian Gulf.

Ground maneuver forces attacked to seize the key Rumaila oil fields, simultaneously began an unprecedented combined arms penetration deep into Iraq. The attack continues as we speak, and has already moved the distance of the longest maneuver in the 1991 Gulf War in one quarter of the time. The oil fields were spared destruction that was intended by the regime because of the effectiveness of these attacks.

In the next image you will see wells that were set afire on the 19th in the afternoon, before the coalition attack began. By the next day, the land component had already entered Iraq and had prevented any further destruction. And this is video from the entering forces. And the good news is only nine of the roughly 500 oil

wells that are in the Rumalah oil fields—only nine were sabotaged by the regime. The flame on the bottom shows where that location is. All the rest of them are okay.

I should add that the power of information has been key throughout this operation, and it is truly having the effect of saving lives—of the Iraqi people and military units who are choosing not to fight and die for a doomed regime. The leaders from several regular army divisions surrendered to coalition forces, and their units abandoned their equipment and returned to their homes, just as the coalition had instructed.

We know that there are other forces on the battlefield that we haven't even arrived at yet, and as this next image shows, there are Iraqi units that are preparing to surrender even now as we speak. These are lines of roughly 700 Iraqi soldiers that we imaged in the desert away from their equipment, awaiting our arrival.

The coalition is committed to disarming Iraq. But the coalition is equally committed to bringing humanitarian assistance to the Iraqi people. Our humanitarian work in Iraq is only beginning. The U.S. military, coalition partners and other civilian organizations from around the world have positioned millions of meals, medicines and other supplies for the Iraqi people. This image shows some of the stocks of humanitarian daily rations that we are already preparing to push forward as they are required.

Our coalition forces will continue to coordinate closely with a broad array of organizations, and ensure that as much aid as possible can be provided to the Iraqi people when it is required and where it is required.

Sir?

Gen. Franks: Thanks, Vince. So, as we speak, our forces are operating inside Iraq. We have operations ongoing in the north, in the west, in the south, and in and around Baghdad. Our troops are performing as we would expect—magnificently. And, indeed, the outcome is not in doubt. There may well be tough days ahead. But the forces on the field will achieve the objectives that have been set out by the governments of this coalition. And with that we would be pleased to take your questions. Please.

Q: Sir, George Stephanopoulos, ABC News. I wonder if you could comment on the status of the surrender negotiations with the senior Iraqi military or civilian leadership. Are they continuing? Are you personally involved? And is the U.S. willing to accept a coalition of Iraqi commanders to assume control as part of the deal?

Gen. Franks: George, I wouldn't comment on what the U.S. government is prepared to accept. I'd leave that for my boss to talk about.

I will say that we have ongoing dialogues—as I think was mentioned in the Pentagon press brief yesterday—with a number of senior Iraqi officials. And so those discussions, both with people in uniform and not in uniform, will continue in the hours and the days ahead.

Q: Are you involved?

Gen. Franks: Please?

Q: General, Tom Fenton (ph), CBS News. The campaign so far has gone with breath-taking speed. Has it surprised you, or is it going more or less as you expected?

Gen. Franks: I think any time forces are joined in a war it's a blessing when very few people lose their lives; it's a blessing when it's possible for us to move in the direction of our objectives. I believe that the time for us to celebrate will be when the mission is accomplished. We believe that we are on our timeline, as we say. And I am satisfied with what I see up to this point, sir. Please?

Q: General Franks, Tom Mintier with CNN. We have seen bombing both during the day and the night. This afternoon it appeared that there wasn't much resistance from aircraft positions in Baghdad in and around the city. Could you describe to us what kind of opposition you are facing on the ground as the bombing campaign goes on?

Gen. Franks: In two parts, in the air and on the ground. Our forces on the ground, to include our special operations forces, have encountered enemy formations on a number of occasions in a number of places, and the fight has been joined in several places inside Iraq.

With respect to the air defenses in and around Baghdad, we—I think it was pretty evident last night that there was a lot of air defense going up in the air. We are pleased at this point that we have not had any of our coalition aircraft damaged by any of that air defense. It is obvious that the regime continues to move air defense assets around as best it can for the purpose of survivability. We will continue to do our work with these magnificent

airmen, and over time we will take down all the air defense capability that exists today. Sir?

Q: General, Jeff Meade (ph), Sky News. Can I ask you to talk to the blitz on Baghdad. How does it help you to be regarded as liberators by the Iraqi people when they are being terrified by that display of ordnance? And also bearing in mind that some of the targets may have suspect military value, because if they are obvious regime buildings they would have long ago been evacuated.

Gen. Franks: I think there are those who would say many of the buildings could be evacuated. I think there are many others who would say many of the buildings would not be evacuated. I don't use exactly the terminology that you used. I think rather what we are about is approaching the problem of this regime from a number of directions simultaneously. That's as I described the business of special operations forces, ground forces and air power.

The times and the locations where we put each of these ingredients will vary actually by day. That is the nature of this plan. It is built on flexibility beyond any that I have seen in the course of my service. And so it's very difficult to comment about the specific achievement of any one of those arms. We thought that the work that was done at the beginning of A-Day, last evening, was exceptionally well done. The targeting was precise. The munitions used in fact were all precision munitions. And there were no targets selected that were not precisely appropriate to what the plan calls for.

Sir?

Q: Having done—ITB (ph) News of London. General Franks, what can you tell us about the success in attacking so-called regime targets? What can you tell us what you know of the status, whereabouts or health of Saddam Hussein? And what do you say to those people who say that the people who are most likely to be shocked and awestruck by the shock are the Iraqi civilians you claim to be liberating?

Gen. Franks: I think on the third point I wouldn't offer anything beyond what I said a minute ago.

With respect to what is going on with the regime right now, I think that there is a certain confusion that is going on within the regime. I believe command and control is not exactly as advertised on Baghdad television. I believe that we should all be very confident that the effort was designed to be so precise that it avoids in every way possible exposure of non-combatants to that.

And with respect to the first part of your question, I think—actually, I don't talk about strategic targets and so forth. What I talk about is emerging targets. Emerging targets can be leadership targets. They can be military formations. They can be some communications, mobile communications capability that the regime has. And on several occasions up to this point in fact we have attacked the emerging targets—several within the last 24 hours.

And so in order for me to pick one and isolate it, it just actually doesn't serve our purpose or our plan. And so it is part of that mosaic that I described. We see it every day, and we'll continue to see it as these targets emerge.

Let me come over here, please. Sir?

Q: General, David Lee Miller (sp) with Fox News. Have you been able to locate any weapons of mass destruction? Or are you hearing anything about weapons of mass destruction from some of the people you are now taking into custody, POWs and detainees?

Gen. Franks: Weapons of mass destruction represent one of the key objectives that we have here—to locate them, to control them. We receive information every day from a number of sources with respect to weapons of mass destruction. Some of it may turn out to be good information; some of it is a bit speculative. One would expect that weapons of mass destruction would perhaps be found in certain parts of the country, and that is work that lies in front of us rather than work we have already accomplished—is probably the best way I can answer your question. Please?

Q: Good day, general, Kelly O'Donnell from NBC. Can you update us on the status of Basra? And to what extent are Turkish forces in the north complicating your plan? **Gen. Franks:** Basra is the second largest population center in Iraq. And although we have seen the regime position weapons in and around (various?) facilities, civilian facilities inside Basra, we have not seen large numbers of formations. So our intent is not to move through and create military confrontations in that city. Rather we expect that we will work with Basra and the citizens in Basra, the same way I believe has been widely reported in Umm Qasr. What we have seen up to this

point is that the Iraqis are welcoming the forces when they come in. And, so, once again this is about liberation and not about occupation, and so our desire will be to work with the civilian populations in Basra. And, I'm sorry, what was your other question?

Q: Turkish forces—Turkish forces that are reported to be encroaching into Iraq. What is the degree of complication?

Gen. Franks: I've seen much about that. And actually I believe that the Turkish formations that we see in northern Iraq are very light formations. We see them move in and out of Turkey. There is continuing discussion I know at the political level to decide exactly how much of that is acceptable and so forth. And I guess I would say that that's sort of above my pay grade. Obviously, we have consultations. We have contact. I have one of my general officers in Turkey working with the Turks and have had him there for some time. So we are able to maintain coordination, and I believe the necessary cooperation with the Turkish government up to this point.

Q: General, Paul Adams (ph) from the BBC. Your targeting of regime targets in Baghdad seems to be that you are targeting some parts of the regime, some parts most closely identified with Saddam Hussein himself, some ministries, and leaving other untouched. Is this part of sowing confusion in the regime, perhaps setting one part of it against another?

Gen. Franks: It actually is simply a part of the mosaic that I talked about a minute ago. It is an issue of taking what we know and what we form into target sets, specific locations, and using appropriate weapon systems against those targets at points and at times of our choosing. And it is a complex process. It is very, very carefully done. It is very carefully planned, and at least up to this point I believe has been magnificently executed. Please?

Q: (Off mike)—with Newsweek magazine. You talked a little bit about the agility of the modern military. Could you possibly walk us back to Wednesday when you got the information about the target of opportunity and explain in some detail if you would, sir, how did you react? What did you have to do to scramble to get that to happen, and how did it affect the actual start of the war?

Gen. Franks: Why would you ask if we had to scramble? (Laughter.) Actually, as I said, a plan that's agile, a plan that is flexible, provides what we call branches to be able to undertake a number of actions at the same time. I talked a little bit about S-Day and G-Day and A- Day, and I also said that throughout the course of this planning and this operation there will always be a need to engage emerging targets. Now, sometimes emerging targets will be engaged by ground forces and sometimes engaging targets will be engaged by air forces, and so forth.

Now actually what I will say about that emerging target, which is much reported on and much talked about, is from my view that was about as close a coordination as I have ever seen work a time-sensitive or an emerging target, and as you know I've worked a great many of them in Afghanistan. That target was worked on an amazing time line, and in fact did not cause the adjustment of a single aspect of what we have been about since this thing started. Please?

Q: General Franks—(inaudible)—Marcus from BBC World Service. One of the most striking things in your—

Gen. Franks: I see a lot of you BBC guys.

Q: We're like you—we've got lots of different arms, lots of different services.

One of the most striking things in your briefing was your comment several regular Iraqi army divisions have surrendered or their leaders have surrendered—

Gen. Franks: Right.

Q: —the troops have abandoned their weapons, the soldiers have gone home. You showed us a picture of troops in the desert—it wasn't a great picture as far as I was concerned—I couldn't see much about it. This is a very important propaganda issue—if Iraqi forces hear through a whole variety of means that the units are just simply melting away.

Gen. Franks: Right.

Q: That would be information that would be very useful for you to have imparted by the world's media. What further information, what further evidence can you give us that leads us to accept that probably tens of thousands or many thousand Iraqi troops are simply melting away or going home?

Gen. Franks: Whoa, whoa. (Laughter.) I don't recall having said thousands or tens of thousands. I think—I think when I walked out to come over here we had seen enemy prisoners of war in the range of a thousand to two thousand, which we actually have in custody right now. We have with certain knowledge the fact that thousands more have laid down their weapons and have gone home.

And we have with certain knowledge that that little picture that Vince Brooks showed up here a minute ago is in fact about 700 Iraqis lined up in a way that they were instructed by way of leaflets and radio broadcasts to line up if they chose not to be engaged.

Sir, please?

Q: First of all, thank you for being with us finally. Do you have any personal message for the families of the casualties? And for the second question, do you think Iraqi President Saddam Hussein would become a black shadow like Osama bin Laden is right now?

Gen. Franks: I think that the president of the United States was very clear when he talked about regime change and when he talked about this regime's weapons of mass destruction. I've said on a number of occasions that when our nations—when the international community commits as we have to go to war to unseat this regime, that this is not about a single personality. This is about the control over a country for decades in a way that has been threatening to peace-loving peoples of the world. And so that's probably the best I can give you on the second—on your second question. And I'm sorry, I didn't understand the first one.

Q: First is about a personal statement for the families of the casualties.

Gen. Franks: Oh, for the families of the casualties? Absolutely. As I said in my—in my opening remarks, my heart goes out to the loved ones and to the families of those who have fallen. I think all of us who have served in prior wars at different times in different places have a certain feeling about the loss of a comrade. These are wonderful—these are wonderful young people. And my personal thoughts and prayers and the thoughts and prayers of a great many nations go out to their families.

Please, ma'am.

Q: Yes—(inaudible)—Hong Kong. There's been so many rumors about Saddam Hussein's whereabouts. Do you have any idea where Saddam is at right now? And how confident are you in capturing him? Thank you.

Gen. Franks: Actually, I have no idea where he is right now. I suppose—I suppose we'll know more in the days ahead, and that's the best answer I can give you.

Sir, please.

Q: Paul Hunter with Canadian Broadcasting. Given all the talk leading up to this of chemical weapons, how surprised are you that no chemical weapons have been fired at your troops? And what does that tell you about whether or not they exist? And how concerned are you that they still might be coming?

Gen. Franks: I think it's—well, of course we're concerned. And we'll remain concerned. I think that there are two ways to look at an enemy, and one way is to try to anticipate what he might think or what he might do. That's not the way that I think we choose to do it. What we try to do is determine his military capacity and then prepare our forces and and prepare ourselves to meet the weapon of mass destruction use if he should choose to do so.

You know, I think the President said the other day that there will be people, and there have been—there have been people, who have believed that through the use of terrorism, potentially through the use of weapons of mass destruction, that we can—that we, this coalition, can be driven away from our goals. Simply not gonna happen. Someone asked me not too long ago, "What happens if this regime uses weapons of mass destruction?" And my response was, we win. And that's because we have—we have a commitment to this operation, and our people have a commitment. And so, I would give you the same answer.

We would be hopeful that those with their triggers on these weapons understand what Secretary Don Rumsfeld said in his comments yesterday—don't use it. Don't use it, sir.

Q: This is Li Jingxian (ph) from Shanghai TV, China. General Franks, it was reported that more than 200 Iraqi civilians have been killed or injured ever since the war began. Do you have any comment on that? And what kind of measurements has the coalition taken or is going to take in order to minimize the civilian casualties during the military action? Thank you very much.

Gen. Franks: All right. With respect to a question of, you know, how do you feel about that, I think that the nature of war—which is why my own president said it's a last resort, it's final option—is that noncombatants are injured and killed in a war. That's why the members of this coalition go literally to extraordinary lengths in order to be able to be precise in our targeting. We've done that and will continue to do that, because there is no assurance that this operation, Operation Iraqi Freedom, ends in a matter of hours, or that it ends in a matter of days. I think what we do is we remain guided by principles. And the principles involve the accomplishment of our mission on the shortest timeline possible, protecting innocent lives, both our own and the lives of innocent civilians. Sir, that's the best I can give you. Sir.

(Off mike.) There's an impression here in the region that you're having more trouble than you're willing to admit, that you're meeting stiffer resistance than you're willing to admit. One case being brought to mind is Umm Qasr. If you can talk about that.

And yesterday, following the air strikes, the Iraqi information minister said that your forces are going to be decapitated and routed. If you can comment on that. Thank you.

Gen. Franks: Sure. I think there might be an expected response to that question, which actually you won't get from me. I don't think it's appropriate for senior military people to wave their arms in response to the sort of hype that was described, and so I won't do that.

I'll simply say that we have been and will remain deadly serious about our business, and all in this room should remain convinced that what we say from this podium—myself or my staff—or what we say from the various press centers associated with this coalition, will be absolute truth as we know it. Please, sir.

Q: (Off mike)—ABC News. Sir, does the Iraqi military still have the ability to strike Israel with ballistic missiles?

Gen. Franks: One doesn't know whether the regime has the ability to strike any neighboring country with missiles. We do know that more than two dozen Scud launchers remain unaccounted for since the days of the Gulf War. (Brief audio break)—provide the best defensive capability that we can. And we know that we want to posture our force dispositions in a way that makes attacks on neighboring countries just as hard as we can make it.

Now, as you know, there have been, at least to my knowledge, six surface-to-surface missile attacks into Kuwait over the last couple of days. And if my memory serves, four of those were destroyed by Patriot units—in fact, one was destroyed by a Kuwaiti Patriot unit; one was permitted to fly harmlessly into the northern Arabian Gulf, and another into an unpopulated desert area.

And so, is that—does that provide fact—certain that we can provide the 100th percentile of defense? Absolutely not. There is no certainty. I will say, sir, that I like our posture the way we see it right now. Ma'am.

Q: (Off mike)—from the Associated Press. You mentioned at the start of the briefing the efforts to route the terrorist networks from Iraq. Can you give us some details of what you're doing specifically in that regard? Ansar al-Islam up in the Kurdish areas, can you give us some details on that effort?

Gen. Franks: I can't really provide you a lot of detail. I can tell you that from time to time, in Iraq, we will come across what we believe to be terrorist-associated activity or people, and when we do so, we will strike them, and then we will exploit the site subsequent to the strike. I can tell you that in fact we did strike last evening a terrorist complex, the one that you just made reference to. And I won't describe exactly what action we'll be taking in the next few days with regard to that particular site. Okay?

Sir, please, back here.

Q: (Off mike.) We are getting close from the fourth day of war, and until now, we can't see any sign of weapons of mass destruction, we can't see anyone using of weapons of mass destruction by Iraq. Was it a big lie or just a cover to justify your invasion of Iraq and to remove its regime, which still cannot use any kind of these weapons to defend itself against your attacks? Thank you.

Gen. Franks: A bit less than 72 hours of this operation so far, and as I said earlier, potential for days and for weeks ahead. There is no doubt that the regime of Saddam Hussein possesses weapons of mass destruction. And at—and as this operation continues, those weapons will be identified, found, along with the people who have produced them and who guard them. And of course there is no doubt about that. It will come in the future. Sir, please.

Q: (Off mike) A point of clarification: Do you know the locations of weapons of mass destruction or is this effectively an army of inspectors?

Gen. Franks: I'm sorry, I didn't—I didn't hear you.

Q: Do you know the locations of the WMD you're talking about, have you some indications, or is this effectively an army of inspectors?

Gen. Franks: Well, no, I think what this is is a coalition force that is designed to take down this regime and to control the weapons of mass destruction, which for certain, sure exist within Iraq. And the approaches and the amount of time that it will take to identify those weapons and control them remains to be seen, very candidly. Please.

Q: General Franks, Jeff Shaeffer, Associated Press Television. I understand you can comment specifically on that whereabouts of Saddam Hussein, you might not know that, but do you believe that he's still alive? Do you believe he was wounded in the strike the other day? And do you believe, if he is alive, is he still running the country?

Gen. Franks: Actually, I don't know. I don't know if he's alive or not. But interestingly, the way we're undertaking this military operation, it would not be changed, irrespective of location or the life of this one man. And that's why we talk about the regime. It would not surprise any of us that, whether Saddam Hussein is alive or dead, that our forces have engaged, as I mentioned earlier, in combat operations against the forces of this regime, both in and around Baghdad, which we all saw on television last night and in a number of other cases in this country.

And so it is not about that one personality. In fact, it is about this regime. And so that's what we're going to focus on.

Sir, please.

Q: (Off mike)—from the Daily Telegraph in London. Do you think it was an error that the Stars and Stripes were raised in Iraqi territory yesterday? And what kind of military government beckons for post-war Iraq?

Gen. Franks: Actually—actually, I don't—I don't know. I think that is—that depends on the eye of the beholder. I think that in zeal, people will want to represent that they have—that they have achieved a certain milestone. And if you're from our country, then one of the first things that can pop into the young man's mind is to raise his national colors.

I suppose I found it to be much more instructive that immediately following that, and recognizing that his job had to do with liberation and not occupation, that he quickly brought down his colors.

Please.

Q: This is News Channel from Shanghai TV, China. Mr. Franks. Could you please tell me why this news conference was delayed—

Gen. Franks: Sure.

Q:—because, you know, this is quite unusual. Everybody expect that there's going to be a news conference at the first night of the air strike, so lots of rumors were confirmed by not Central Command but the Pentagon.

Gen. Franks: A very good question, and having to do with why the timing of this press conference and why not yesterday or the day before or whatever. Actually, the—many of the media embedded with coalition forces would tell you that we're a bit sensitive about the possibility of leaking information that risks the lives of our people who are engaged in this work. I could give you an example.

Were we to have a press conference here, or in fact a press conference in Washington, that described what might happen on S-Day or answered questions, the nature of which you've asked me here today, all very good questions, then the risk of providing just that one piece of information that winds up risking the mission or winds up risking the lives of the people who have been—who have been put to this task, it seems to me, just isn't worth it. And so the decision has been that we would move through the first few days of this before our command here made any comment. We'll try our best to provide fact-based information on a daily basis to the press center here. I feel very good about that. But I will also tell you that I feel very good about the work that's been done up to this point.

Last question, please. Sir.

Q: General, Chas Henry from WTOP Radio. Operationally, what's the greatest surprise you've encountered to this date, a circumstance with the outcome that you least expected?

Gen. Franks: Actually—actually, my greatest surprise was when I—when I got up this morning and I looked at my computer and I realized that my wife had sent me a “happy anniversary” note this morning that I had—and I had forgotten to send her one.

(Laughter.)

Actually, there have been no surprises in the way that you—in the way that you asked the question. One is surprised, I think, when one has not had a year to think through the possibilities. Much has been said and written about this business of one plan good enough and another not, and so forth. And the fact of the matter is that for a period of about a year, a great deal of intense planning and a great deal of what-iffing by all of us has gone into this so that we prepare ourselves and prepare our subordinates in a way that we minimize the number of surprises. There will be surprises, but we have not yet—we have not yet seen them.

Thanks a lot. Best to you.





I Marine Expeditionary Force Commander Live Briefing from Iraq

by Lieutenant General James T. Conway

<<http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2003/tr20030530-0229.html>>. 30 May 2003.

(Participating in the briefing was Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs [Media Operations] Bryan G. Whitman)

Whitman:—from Baghdad. General Conway commands the I Marine Expeditionary Force, which is a 65,000-person division-size element, which is the largest warfighting unit that the Marine Corps assembled—has assembled since Operation Desert Storm. It brought together Marines from both the Pacific and Atlantic forces, and as all of you had followed, had tremendous success during combat operations. And many of those Marines are still in the country as the stabilization efforts continue.

And with that, General, I believe you have a few things you'd like to say before we start taking questions.

Conway: I do. Thank you for the introduction.

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, and thank you for the opportunity to answer questions about my Marines and sailors. Just seven to 10 weeks ago, the I Marine Expeditionary Force [MEF], consisting of about 85,000 U.S. and British troops, was accomplishing feats in combat never envisioned for a force whose origins were from the sea. Marine Air was smashing Iraqi armor well in advance of attacking troops, flying columns of armor were slashing through and around the area defenses, and our support troops were making 22-hour trips one way to supply the materiel of war.

The war now is essentially over. Those courageous Marine aviators are now flying Iraqi children injured in automobile accidents to treatment centers. The armor has been parked, and our ground troops are engaged in building police forces and repairing schoolhouses. Our support troops are clearing unexploded ordnance, providing Iraqi farmers with diesel fuel and rebuilding bridges destroyed during the fighting.

Our Marines were extremely innovative and adaptive during the campaign, and they've carried those characteristics into the aftermath. Our current mission is to provide a safe and

secure environment in order to eventually be able to turn Iraq back over to the Iraqis.

As Marines, we go about that tasking in a no-nonsense manner. What we tell the Iraqis is that we're here to do a job. Don't get in our way, and nobody will get hurt; indeed, you will like the results. Interfere with our efforts or threaten our forces in any way, and there will be consequences.

Thus far, we are pleased to say that the people of southern Iraq have generally welcomed our presence in the cities and in the countryside. In fact, since the MEF left Baghdad some five weeks ago, there's been no significant incidents that have resulted in a Marine or sailor being seriously wounded or killed. Today, with the help of non-governmental organizations, Army civil affairs teams, and multiple nations that will soon join the coalition, we go about creating—recreating a quality of life.

We recently took pride in our ability to rapidly topple the regime of a vicious dictator. Today we take pride in our ability to offer a bright and prosperous future to the children of Iraq.

Ladies and gentlemen, I'd be happy to take questions.

Whitman: General, I'm not sure—we're not getting real good audio. If there's any way to move the microphone a little closer to you, that would be good.

And we'll start here with Charlie Aldinger. Please go ahead and give your name and your news organization so the general knows who he's talking to.

Q: (Off mike.)—how many Marines are still in Iraq now? And General Hagee said last week that plans were to have all of the Marines out of Iraq by the end of August. He said that any final decision would be made by General Franks. I wonder how that schedule looks now. Is it possible, given the problems you're having there and the attacks, that you'll have all your Marines out by the end of August?

Conway: Charlie, to answer your first question, we still have about forty—maybe 41,000 Marines in Iraq and in Kuwait. We've always had a significant chunk of the Expeditionary Force in Kuwait, because now I can say that our aviation was based there for the war, as well as a rear command post, as well as some of our logistics folks that were forcing material forward from the piers and the airports.

In terms of the second question, we don't know the answer to that yet. We're examining right now the results of these last series of attacks. I will tell you, as I mentioned in my comments earlier, that things have been fairly quiet in the South. But in conjunction with our adjacent and higher headquarters, we're taking a look, even as we speak, at what our force structure needs to be in the weeks, and perhaps months, to come.

We do feel that when we leave, we will not be able to leave a void. So we very much may be dependent upon the arrival of additional coalition forces to relieve in place with us and allow the Marines to go home.

Q: General, this is Thelma LeBrecht with AP Broadcast.

And could I also make a request again; if there's any way you can get that mike wherever you're speaking into closer to you.

And if I could just follow up a little bit on Charlie's question. What happens if the coalition forces, as we're now hearing, there are not enough international troops now stepping up to the plate? How do you foresee the U.S. military being able to contend with—is it going to be a longer stay, do you think?

Conway: Pamela (sic), we're here to do a job, and we don't leave until the job is done. Now, there are pressures, of course, that I think it's fair to say the administration, the Department of Defense will experience in terms of getting our Marines out of the theater due to additional deployments that those Marines face. We have kept up our deployment routine for the entire time that we've been here. And at this point, I have Marines who are in country now seven and eight months, so we do have some concern that they not be kept here any longer than must be the case, so that they can get home, enjoy their families and once again be prepared to go someplace else in the not-too-distant future.

Q: General, this is Bob Bums from Associated Press. Your comment about how it's been relatively quiet in the south; I'm wondering if you can elaborate on why you think it is that the Marines have encountered less violence. And are you doing something different than your Army folks are doing further to your north?

Conway: Bob, I think there's a number of things that contribute. One, of course, we're organized a little bit differently from the Army. We have a lot more infantry Marines in our regiments and in our division that are able to get boots on the ground, so to speak, and create perhaps a more diffused presence. I think that's one difference, perhaps, between us and the Army.

But I think we're also fortunate in that the south of Iraq has a much larger Shi'a population. And of course, as you know, they were very much downtrodden during the Saddam years. There are not as many Ba'athists, I think, remaining in the south as perhaps there are in the north, a lesser number of Sunnis, who were sympathetic to the regime.

So I think a number of factors pertain. I have been told by some of the local Iraqis that just being a Marine makes a difference; that the reputation somewhat speaks for itself and people don't want to be in our sector because they know if they get hit, they'll get hit pretty hard.

Q: General, this is Pam Hess with United Press International. I have two questions for you, if you have the time. The first is about the logistics. We saw, you know, a pretty amazing military campaign where you all moved very fast and over a very long way. And one of the things they said was that this was a real triumph of logistics. But I've talked to a bunch of returning Marines who recall going at least a week eating one MRE [Meals Ready to Eat] a day and having their water rationed. That doesn't really add up to a triumph of logistics to me. Could you explain what happened there and if that is an acceptable level of support, and how you might be looking to change that?

Conway: Yeah. Pam, let me say at the outset that I am so proud of my logisticians that I can probably not convey it in words. The Marine Corps is not designed or organized to go 600 miles deep into enemy territory. Our logistics are simply not built that way. We have tremendous reliance on our shipboard logistics. We essentially say that we come from the sea. That said, that was not the CINCs [Commanders in Chief] or the CFLCC's [Coalition Forces Land Component Command] plan in this case, and so we were asked to execute something that was in excess of what we were built to do. With Army augmentation, however, and with, I think, some wise planning that tied our logistics to airfields along the avenues of approach, we made it work.

Now, if you ask me if every Marine went into the attack with a full tank of gas in his tank and three MREs in his pack and all the water that we might like to have, the answer is absolutely not, because we certainly stretched the rubber band. But that said, I think there was a level of comfort in the Marines in the combat units that as they crossed the line of departure in the morning, they could look over their shoulder and see a supply convoy arriving that would have those things for them by the end of the day.

So logistics never truly halted the attack, but based upon those supply lines that we faced, even doing the best job we could with emergency resupply via air and so forth, we were never rich in supplies. That was a conscious risk that we were willing to accept, and one in this case, I think, proved itself to be worth the risk. We felt that through speed, we could save lives. And we weren't willing to sacrifice that speed for the sake of full tanks and full packs.

Q: Hey, General, it's Mark Mazzetti with U.S. News. I hope you're doing well. Question: Talking to your staff toward the end of the war, they said that since the area you control is predominantly Shi'a, that they were concerned that—of actions that Iran might take to sort of move over the border and try to establish sort of a base of influence in Iraq. Have you seen that at all since the war ended, or any actions by Iranian elements to move over the border and do that?

Conway: Hey, Mark, good seeing you again. But I'm sorry; now you all are breaking up. I got about 30 percent of your question. Could you please repeat it?

Q: Sure. I'll go a little more slowly, too. Talking to your guys during—toward the end of the war, they were saying that since the area you control is predominantly Shi'a, they were concerned about actions Iran might take to move over the border and establish a little bit of a, you know, sphere of influence in eastern Iraq. And I'm wondering whether you've seen any of that since the end of the war or any actions by Iranian elements to do that?

Conway: Yeah, Mark. Got it that time. We have seen some of that. We have—in fact, there are SCIRI per-

sonnel who—and that acronym I'll provide to you—but they are folks, they are Iraqis, who have spent time in Iran who are now coming home who are a political presence. And I think their beliefs are basically fundamentalist beliefs. The military arm of SCIRI is the Badr Corps. It has a military connotation, but I will tell you that we have not seen any threat yet arising from them. That said, they are here in some numbers, we're keeping a close track on their activities and we will watch them with great interest in the days and weeks to come. At this point, they're playing by all the rules. And we have no reason to be convinced that they're doing things untoward that would cause us to react towards them in any way. SCIRI, by the way, stands for Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq.

Q: It's John McWethy with ABC News, General. You described stretching the rubber band; that there were times when your forces never had full packs, but the risk was worth the reward of speed and saving lives.

There are generals in uniform back here who are telling us privately that to stretch the rubber band was a high risk, and that had been a bit more resistance, it could have turned very bad for U.S. Marines in particular, on that march to Baghdad.

Can you describe the measure, the level of risk that you did in fact take?

Conway: Yeah, that's a very perceptive question, John. And I think I can. As you all will recall, there was a halt, an operational halt, that allowed us to build supplies. We were well up Highway 1 at that point, still south of the Tigris River, at that point really making a feint on the underbelly of Baghdad. And we held forces in place for two or three days, allowing that rubber band to maybe become a little less taut, and to get some supplies built up to the point where we were comfortable that we weren't experience extreme risk.

While that was happening—and you have to understand, I guess, some about how this MEF fights. But we have a tremendous air arm that was able to put about 300,320 sorties a day on our enemies out in advance of our ground troops. So while we were stationary, we were, in fact, attacking with our air, taking maximum advantage of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities to determine what the enemy was that we faced.

And quite frankly, again, we weren't fully topped off with the supplies that we might like, but every indication that we had was that the enemy had been significantly pounded by our air, and our intelligence resources were telling us that he was not there in large numbers. So those two things combined told me, and I suspect my superiors, that it was a risk that was manageable and a risk that we could take, again, in order to generate the speed that we did.

Q: General, thanks for being with us. This is Hunter Keeter from Defense Daily. I wanted to ask you about the movement from the sea to marry the troops up with their equipment. Could you just detail a little bit about that process from the Maritime preposition stocks that you met your troops with? And then talk a little bit about, if you would, what your assessment is of the future of that capability; where you would like to see it go, if you had to do this all over again with a little bit better capability.

Conway: Hunter, we have always felt in the Marine Corps that the MPS concept, Maritime Prepositioning Ship concept, is a real success story.

It proved to be so during the last Gulf War, to the extent, I think, the United States Army saw the value in it and it created a very similar capability, at least here in Southwest Asia.

This time through, it performed magnificently. We brought 11 ships in from two separate MPS squadrons, and the estimate was somewhere between 20 and 25 days for the off-load. We did it in 16. And we're extremely proud of our Marines and the process that allowed that to happen, because it gave us two full brigade sets of equipment on deck. And that did not include the Amphibious Task Forces, East and West, sailing with additional Marines, armor, helicopters, fixed-wing aircraft and those types of things. So, this Marine Expeditionary Force truly arrived from the sea.

Now, an important component of that is the support that we get from the United States Air Force in that they fly over large numbers of Marines, both with Air Force air and contract air, to link us up with that equipment and then move it into tactical assembly areas. But suffice it to say that we brought in

about 60,000 Marines in about 45 days, once the Department of Defense and the administration decided that it was time to prop the force and make it ready.

Where we go from here is, I think, an interesting question. I will tell you that our planners at Headquarters Marine Corps are looking at even more efficient ways to organize the ships, and I think the commandant has made the decision that that will happen. What is basically involved is like types of ships in like squadrons. But I've got to tell you, this is a pretty tremendous capability right now, and I think any tweaking that we do will be pretty much on the margins, because now in two successive conflicts, it has truly proven its value.

Q: Good morning, General. Otto Kreisher with Copley News Service. The corps had about one-third of the ground combat forces during the war, and yet, you took half or slightly over half of the combat casualties. There's a question of whether that's you know, Marine aggressiveness, or whether it was the fact that you got the hard—the tough end of the stick; you had to fight your way through most of the cities while the Army was doing the sweep to Baghdad mostly through the desert. What would you say about, you know, your ratio of casualties you took?

Conway: Otto, you broke up a little bit, but I think I have the essence of your question, so I'll answer what I think you said. If I'm off the mark, please ask it again.

From the outset, the Marine Expeditionary Force was a supporting attack. We had to cross one, two, three—arguably, four rivers. We had an avenue of approach that Marine and Army planners both agreed was essentially a brigade-size avenue of approach, and we were putting, essentially, a reinforced division over it.

I asked my people in the end how many Iraqi divisions did we engage, and it's arguably somewhere between eight and 11. We always knew that An Nasiriyah was going to be a critical point on the battlefield; that our supply lines, up Highway 7 and across Highway 1, both cross the Euphrates River at An Nasiriyah. And we simply had to take that place and hold it in order for the 1st Marine Division to be able to sweep north, as it finally did.

It involved some close combat. And we saw that, I think, repeatedly as we attacked north; that we knocked out great formations of Iraqi armor, but the forces that we had come up against us were pretty much in the villages and towns along the single avenues of approach that we had that led into Baghdad. It was close-quarter fighting, in some cases hand-to-hand fighting. And I just think that a combination of things, that nature of close-in combat and the number of forces that we had to face on secondary avenues of approach to get to Baghdad, have led us to those number of casualties.

And let me tell you, we felt every one of them. I think based upon some of the equipment that we now have in the force, we're fortunate that they were not worse. We tried to ensure that every Marine had what we call a SAPI [small arms protective inserts] plate, an armor plate that goes on the front of the flak vest. It covers the vital parts of the upper torso. And we compute that we had somewhere between 25 and 30 strikes 762 or larger on the SAPI plates and they worked. And we think that they truly save lives.

Now, that's the question I think you asked. If it was different, please restate it.

Q: General, Dale Eisman with the Virginian Pilot in Norfolk. You had a number of friendly fire incidents, and I'm thinking in particular of one near Nasiriyah; I think you had something like 30 Marines wounded. Can you tell us what you've learned about what might have been behind those incidents? Was there a common thread running through them? And what steps you might be able to take in the future to further reduce friendly fire?

Conway: Dale, you just hit on what is probably my biggest disappointment of the war, and that is the amount of blue on blue, what we call blue on blue, fratricide in a lot of instances, that occurred.

I spoke to every formation before we crossed the line of departure, I spoke separately to the officers and I emphasized a number of things, but among them were the fact that our weapons are so accurate, are so deadly, that anymore, that when it goes off the rail or it goes out the tube, it's probably going to kill something. And so you've got to make certain that what you're shooting at is indeed the enemy.

We did have a large number of wounded at An Nasiriyah, based upon a friendly fire incident. Fortunately, no killed came out of that, that particular engagement. There is another one that's under investigation where we think that there may have been an airstrike roll in on our forces. And there are a number more, frankly, lesser in number, that still present—

(Audio brake due to loss of feed from Iraq).

(Pause.)

Whitman: (Referring to teleconference video feed.) It looks like he's frozen there, doesn't it?

Q: Yes.

Whitman: Let's see if we get him back in a second.

(Incidental chatter not transcribed.)

Whitman: If we have lost the signal, it requires to reboot, and rebooting is about a four-, five-minute process. So let's see if we've really been knocked off the air or not. We'll know here in a second.

(Pause.)

Whitman: (To staff.) Are we going to have to reboot?

Staff: No, sir. I think we're just going to be able to reconnect, redial.

Whitman: All right, well let's just stand fast a second, then.

(Pause while connection is restored. Incidental chatter not transcribed.)

Whitman: General Conway, can you hear me?

Conway: Yes, I can. Can you hear me?

Whitman: Yes, we can hear you fine now. We lost you for a moment. You were talking—where we lost you, you were talking about friendly fire incidents, and you had talked about a possible aviation one. And then you said that there were a number of others that were being looked into or something, and that's where we lost you.

Conway: Okay. I went on to say that we had some devices that we used in this war. One was called Blue Force Tracker. It gave us position locations and identification on major units. It helped some, I think, with location and identification friendly forces.

But what we truly need is something that can identify a friendly vehicle—it either squawks or beeps or emits some sort of power source that tells a shooter—an airplane or a tank or whatever—that they're looking at a friendly piece of equipment. And I think that the—we've been trying to develop that now ever since the Gulf War, without success, I might add. And the man that invents that, I think, will be very rich, indeed. Because it continues to be something that we see happen in the U.S. military, and it's really something that we've got to stop.

Q: General, this is Lisa Burgess with Stars and Stripes. It's a little bit difficult back here to get a sense of how the Iraqi people are reacting to the American force. Reading the newspaper in the last couple of days, it would seem that there's a growing resentment against what's being perceived as an occupation force. Can you give a sense of what you're seeing there, and whether there's been a change in the past week or so?

Conway: Lisa, I can speak for the southern region. And I can tell you that I still see that the reception that our Marines and sailors are receiving here is overwhelmingly positive. I fly over the landscape a lot, and we don't pass a village without little children, and oftentimes, adults waving at our helicopters. They wave at our helicopters more than the people in southern California wave at our helicopters, and that's because, I think, they're happy we're here.

We've been told by some sources that people want to see us go away, and of course sooner is better. A number more are saying, you know, we're afraid when you leave that our freedoms will leave with you because there are bad people still there who would like to see other things happen aside from democratic principles and the ability to elect their leaders.

I met just this morning with about—I don't know, 60, maybe 70 sheikhs, influential people who are tribal leaders throughout all of southern and central Iraq. And let me tell you, they are delighted that we're here. They're delighted with the progress that we're making, again, especially in the south. They

want to complement our efforts as much as they possibly can. I think that they will probably—they will be willing and happy to say goodbye to us, but that day is not yet. And I think that, again, the reception that our Marines receive day in and day out is just tremendously positive.

Q: General Conway, Barbara Starr from CNN. Even given the fact that you have a more—what you describe as a more stable situation in the south, nonetheless, as a senior commander in Iraq, what are your thoughts specifically about what the U.S. military can do to get a handle on what appears to be a continuing series of random and sporadic attacks against U.S. forces in Iraq? What can be done to stop it, since it is so widespread and so sporadic?

Conway: Barbara, good seeing you again.

You've got some great people out here working on that very problem. I will tell you first of all how we handle it in the south. I mean, yesterday morning, we had a battalion-size attack on what we were told was a training area up in the very northern part of one of our provinces. So I think that any commander would much rather ferret out a threat based on solid intelligence and act on it quickly to eliminate it. You go preemptive and don't allow them a chance to finish training, in this case, perhaps disperse to various locations and then do the sniping and the ambushing and that type of thing that we've seen potentially in the north.

I think what we're seeing are a limited numbers of attacks that are, I think, in some cases being mischaracterized as how the whole nation is seeing our presence. I really don't think that there's anarchy in Iraq, to include northern Iraq. But there are specific individuals that are very aware of the fact that even a small-scale attack makes large-scale news; are taking advantage of that fact to create, I think, levels of overreaction in some cases, and will continue to do so because they don't want us to be here.

But I think from a U.S. military perspective, we have to keep doing the things that we're doing—build the police forces, gain confidence in them; provide point security on key infrastructure, because these guys also know if they start tearing down infrastructure, it also will reflect badly on us. And there are places where it's simply not guarded; you can't guard it everywhere. And then we have to be prepared to act quickly and severely where we see that armed people are resisting the future that we're trying to create for this country.

Whitman: Someone else?

Q: No.

Whitman: Okay. Go ahead, Pam.

Q: This is Pam Hess from UPI again. Just to tie up a couple of loose ends, could you tell us how many wounded or dead you might have had from friendly fire attacks? And could you give us an estimate of the number of SCIRI and Badr Corps personnel that are in your region that you know of?

Conway: Pam, on your first question, I can't give you an exact figure because those things are still under investigation. And the first thing the investigation has to determine is whether or not it was friendly fire. So, I can't give you a feel for that at this point. But I will tell you that one is one too many.

On the second issue, the numbers vary widely. We tend to think that in the southern area, there's probably less than 1,000 of the Badr Corps types. But again, that's not certain. We're told that X number will come in, perhaps, from Iran, but then will attempt to recruit X number more who may be sympathetic to their beliefs. And again, a Badr Corps individual isn't necessarily a bad guy. He doesn't become that until he does something again that goes against the rules that the Coalition Provisional Authority has posed, and then we would have to take action.

Q: General, it's Mark Mazzetti again. The goal of the military campaign in Iraq was not just regime change, but also to get rid of the weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. And I'm wondering—first of all, are you surprised that seven weeks on, no weapons caches have been found? And what is your sense of the status of the WMD programs, having been on the ground in Iraq for so long? And, you know, what may have happened to the weapons?

Conway: Mark, you may recall as we moved north, there were a couple of times there where everybody was sleeping with their boots on and with their gas masks pretty close. So, one of the real surprises I

think we all experienced was that we did not get struck with weapons of mass destruction as we crossed the Euphrates or even as we crossed the Tigris and went up against Republican Guard divisions.

In terms of what we're doing about it now, we continue to contribute our part in the south against SSEs—sensitive sites, if you will—that may yield weapons of mass destruction. We've put teams on virtually every one that intelligence or local Iraqis or any other means has pointed out to us as perhaps might be containing weapons of mass destruction, or residuals of those kinds of things or whatever.

So we continue to join in the search to try to ferret it out.

I can't answer your question in terms of what may have happened to it. I don't think that we've given up on the search yet. And I think if you're tracking the high-value target captures, like all of us are, the interrogations that followed, I think that the day might well come when we ask the right question of the right person and we open a panacea of weapons storage and that type of thing.

So seven weeks is probably not enough time to look at a country the size of California and come to the conclusion that they simply do not exist here, especially if you consider that the regime had ample experience attempting to hide those things as much as they were visited by the inspectors.

Q: General, Otto Kreisher again. You mentioned earlier that you had a battalion-size operation against what you thought was a training area, but you didn't say what you found there. What did you encounter on that raid?

Conway: Yes, sir. What our intelligence told us was that there were some Ba'ath Party members who were conducting training, with a good bit of shooting, with intent to potentially use that force in some negative way on down range. The battalion swept in a first light. They rolled up on five different objectives. They found a number of automatic weapons, a number of rocket-propelled grenades, which in tandem were probably the favorite weapons of the Fedayeen, certainly. They took 13 detainees, at least one of whom, a couple of the detainees pointed out to us fairly quickly, was a fairly high-level Ba'ath Party member; and, unfortunately, had to shoot two people who chose to resist their movement.

So we consider that a fairly successful sweep. It's a pattern that we will continue to follow. My division commander prefers a cordon in the early hours before first light and a first-light attack. First, we find some of these people don't get up too early around here, and that's a good thing; but secondly, we're able to be more discerning with our targets and we don't wind up shooting innocent people, ostensibly women and children, because of trying to do so during the hours of darkness.

Q: It's John McWethy from ABC again, General. Back to the weapons of mass destruction. You had, we were led to believe, fairly credible intelligence indicating that some of the units that you would be encountering had live weapons of mass destruction, probably CW shells, that had been moved forward to deal with your units. At this point, understanding that the exploitation of the sites is still under way and that there are a lot of unanswered questions, do you feel that the intel was just wrong? Do you feel that the enemy may not have ever had any of these things in forward units?

It seems inconceivable that if they had them in the forward units that you have not found something in a forward unit, and not buried away in some storage area. Help us out here.

Conway: John, as Mark could probably tell you, the fact that we were, again, not hit with weapons of mass destruction—I think we had four triggers that we were prepared to defend ourselves against—different times when we thought that the regime might try to employ the weapons of mass destruction against us. And we truly thought that they were distributed—not to everybody, not to the regular army divisions that we saw in the south. But my personal belief was that they probably did reside in the Republican Guard units, and we encountered, arguably, three, maybe four, Republican Guard divisions on the way to Baghdad. But my personal belief was that the Republican Guard corps commander probably had release authority, and that we might well see them when we started to encounter his force or enter his area.

It was a surprise to me then, it remains a surprise to me now, that we have not uncovered weapons, as you say, in some of the forward dispersal sites. Again, believe me, it's not for lack of trying. We've been to virtually every ammunition supply point between the Kuwaiti border and Baghdad, but they're

simply not there. Now, what that means in terms of intelligence failure, I think, is too strong a word to use at this point. What the regime was intending to do in terms of its use of the weapons, we thought we understood or we certainly had our best guess, our most dangerous, our most likely courses of action that the intelligence folks were giving us. We were simply wrong. But whether or not we're wrong at the national level, I think, still very much remains to be seen.

Whitman: General Conway, if I could thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to spend some time with us here today and to give us some insight into your operations and what you've been doing over there. Thank you very much.

Conway: Thank you, folks, for the great job you do. Have a nice day.





Briefing on the First Marine Expeditionary Force in Iraq

by Lieutenant General James T. Conway

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(Participating in the briefing was Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs [Media Operations] Bryan G. Whitman)

Whitman: Well, thank you again for joining us this afternoon. Today it's my real pleasure to welcome back into this room, because we've seen him by scottie briefing from Iraq, Lieutenant General James T. Conway, who is the commanding general, I Marine Expeditionary Force, which is headquartered at Camp Pendleton.

During combat operations in Iraq, though, General Conway commanded 89,000 Marines. They attacked from Kuwait all the way north to Tikrit, and took—by my count—on and defeated eight Iraqi divisions. I MEF has recently—more recently been responsible for security and stability operations in and around An Najaf, and is in the process of completing their turnover to the Multinational Division that has come in to that sector, led by Poland.

He has some time today to talk to you about their mission and their operations and a little bit about some of the lessons that they learned. He has some opening remarks, a little bit of a presentation, and then would be happy to take your questions for about the next 30 minutes.

General?

Conway: Afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Let me apologize, first of all, for my uniform. My aide and I packed our “Alphas” when we left San Diego the last time, but we think they probably joined Jimmy Hoffa somewhere. We can't find them right now. And so I'm in the best uniform I could bring forward.

I returned from Iraq yesterday in the wake of a transfer of authority ceremony, conducted at the ruins of Babylon on the 3rd of September. There, after five months of stabilization and security operations, my command, the I Marine Expeditionary Force, turned over responsibilities for four of the five governants in South Central Iraq to the Polish-led Multinational Division. Although the MND appears quite capable, we maintained U.S. control of the governor of Najaf in order to provide a sense of security following the cleric Hakim's bombing assassination at the Imam Ali Mosque on 29 August. We plan a final turnover of that governor in the next few days, and a closeout of U.S. Marine

operational presence in Iraq not later than about the first week of October.

I'm almost as proud of my Marines, sailors and soldiers for their performance and conduct during the stabilization phase as I was during the attack up through Iraq into Baghdad and beyond. In the attack, they demonstrated aggressiveness, raw courage, and the ability to deal with any scenario. During stabilization ops, they dealt firmly with the local population, but that was tempered with compassion, professionalism and the ability to deal with any scenario.

There were attacks against Marines and others who moved through our zones—over 330 of them in five months. Many Iraqis were killed and many more captured or detained because our methods were always to respond to force with even greater force, and Marines normally hit what they shoot at. However, for every attack, there were an equal number of Iraqi warnings that helped us avoid attacks and, therefore, casualties. Indeed, over the course of five months, though we had many Marines wounded, we have not lost a single Marine to hostile fire.

Yet Marines normally don't do nation-building. The last time was in Vietnam, almost 35 years ago. We have no consolidated doctrine for it. However, sometimes a negative can result in a positive. Absent doctrine, we developed a set of guidelines or principles that our leaders and troops were to follow. Chief among them was to treat Iraqis as they would like to be treated themselves, were the situation reversed. We sought out Iraqi leadership at the local level and asked them to help focus our efforts at reconstruction.

And among other areas of emphasis, we pay particular attention to the children. The children of Iraq represent the future of the country, and we made every effort to rebuild the schools, clean up the playgrounds and hand out soccer balls. We held a belief that it's hard for a man to be angry with those who are doing good things for his children.

We found in the people of southern Iraq an industrious, intelligent society, very knowledgeable in the state of current affairs and very interested in what was to be the future of their country. I used to think Americans were the most impatient people on Earth. I now believe that distinction belongs to the Iraqis.

We should encourage that characteristic, however, especially as it relates to their security. We must continue to mature the Iraqi police, resource the Iraqi militia and oversee the revitalization of the new Iraqi army, so that the next time there is a transfer of authority in an historic place, like the amphitheater at Babylon, it will be between a multinational division and the people of Iraq.

Thank you. Your questions, please.

Q: Could you give us, if possible, as firm a timetable as you can on the turnover of authority to the Polish-led division? And can you say—did the decision to put that off reflect a negative assessment of the capabilities of that division?

Conway: General Tyszkiewicz, the two-star Polish division commander, joined us probably 20 or 25 days at Babylon before the turnover actually took place. That turnover, again, was on 3 September. That was the final turnover of our five governates. Leading up to that time, we had turned over provinces on an individual basis to various brigades that he owned, just a few days before the 3rd, but the 3rd actually was the ceremony, and again, we turned over four of the five governates officially that day.

Q: Najaf—

Conway: Yes. Najaf, now, we held. And the reason we held it was not in any way related to what we assessed to be the capability of a multinational division. Essentially, it was in the wake of two bombings in Najaf, the latter very much more the more severe, and a feeling that the Marine presence would simply serve to lend a greater degree of stabilization and security to the people.

We had the two Latin American battalions who would assume responsibility for it with us there at the time. We continue to work, turn over with those folks. They appear to be good troops, are anxious for their mission. And I think that we will turn it over it again in two or three more days.

Q: Physically?

Conway: Yes. We hope—I would hope by the end of the week. That is based on a conversation I had just before I left with Lieutenant General Sanchez.

Yes, sir ?

Q: General, if I heard you correctly, I think you—did you say that not a single Marine has been lost to hostile fire since—

Conway: Since about the 21st of April, when we headed south into our—actually, at that point, seven governorates, in south and south-central Iraq.

Now, let me clarify. We have had one Marine who was killed responding to a firefight. He was a member of a light armored unit. The vehicle went off the road, and he, unfortunately, was crushed and killed—a vehicle accident many miles from the actual scene of the shooting.

Q: My question is if you can explain that—the sharp contrast of that to the situation elsewhere; the Army, in particular, having lost so many people?

Conway: Well, I think for starters, we're fortunate that we're in the south-central sector of Iraq. That is a predominantly Shi'a population. We went in with an attitude that the war was over; that we were there for security and stabilization operations. We wanted to make friends and we wanted the people to understand, of course, that we would not tolerate anyone shooting at our troops. And as I have said, we've had to respond to a lot of that. But I'd like to think that the combination of the population where we were—good methods well-applied have kept down the numbers of casualties that we have had.

Q: General, there's been a lot of talk about whether there are more—whether there's a need for more U.S. troops, whether there's a need for more troops period. Your assessment in the south-central area and how the force is arranged there?

Conway: Bret, I would say first of all, I don't think we need more troops. We think that the numbers of troops that we have are sufficient. We have had essentially one battalion applied to each governorate, and that has been plenty, based upon our methodologies. And let me explain that for just a moment, if I can.

We have tried, and have been very successful, I would argue, to train new Iraqi police in Western policing methods, and they represent our first line of defense. Behind that, we have incorporated into the MEF some very capable Army MP companies who take up residence inside the cities. They reinforce the police and they take care of that next level of problems, if and when they arise. We have used Marines after a time principally as quick response forces, QRFs, who respond when something starts to get out of control, and you need a very capable force to accomplish that. So in that regard, we've been able to make max use of the troops that were available. And we think that we don't need any more.

Q: That's (defining?) the mission to execute infrastructure protections?

Conway: Yes. We have a lot of pipelines, power lines and that type of thing, of course, that roll through our area. We have enlisted the support of some of the Iraqi tribes to assist us in security there. The FPS system, the protection system that's been developed to use Iraqis, is having some good results. We think they'll get better as they get more mature. We fly helicopters along the pipelines. We have mobile patrols that run the pipelines and those types of things. And I think it's fair to say that in the past five weeks or so now we have not had sabotage or stealing—sometimes stealing results in a sabotage to the pipeline because there are explosions and there are fires and those manner of things. But, knock on wood, in recent weeks we have not seen either of those in any kind of numbers.

Q: Just to follow up, what did you find was the best way of enlisting the tribes in this? I mean, to pay them per day trouble-free or what?

Conway: Well, a personal relationship works. And we've tried to manifest those things in time.

If you appeal to the logic that the thieves and others, the saboteurs, are committing crimes against the people of Iraq and that the result that you're seeing is a large black market and your people are paying unfair prices, they understand the logic of that. So there has been some minor payment of seized funds, but not—not on an exorbitant scale.

Q: General, the Army's 4th Infantry Division commander told us a couple months ago that the Marines had come to him with concerns about the Javelin missile in combat and that they were working to address those. Have you heard, you know, what the results of that were, and—

Conway: No, I have not. I read some of the same things that you're talking about in regards to Javelin. And we had some concerns before we crossed the line of departure about some of our tank-killing methods. Some

of it was reliability in some of the blocks, some of it was training on TOW 2s. You know, the missiles are so expensive any more that you don't get a lot of opportunities to fire in training. But we didn't have problems with the Javelin. And when I went back to just informally canvas in the wake of having read that report, I didn't get a lot of negative comment on the Javelin. So I'll be anxious to see what the Army's study presents, when all is said and done.

Q: General, since the bombing in Najaf there have been militias that have been appearing on the streets. I understand that there's been an ultimatum given to one—at least one of the militias to have to clear out, basically. Can you explain what—that situation is all about, and also, what is the risk of militias moving in to basically take control of security, you know, if there—if there aren't U.S. forces there? And they're creating a situation where you may have militias later competing with the police or fighting among themselves for turf.

Conway: Let me give you the bottom line first, if I can. What you described is exactly right. It applies to all militias. And that is, that there will be no armed militias on the streets of Najaf. That has been worked through our assistant division commander and the mayor of the city. And those people are no longer present today.

Now, the effort came to pass as a well-intended, short-term, almost experiment, if you will, on the part of the CPA to see if we couldn't get rapid security into the shrine area in the wake of the bombings as we trained up—provided additional training for a 400-man police force in the Najaf city police. It was to be for a two- or three-day period. We let it run that far and then we terminated it because of some of the very things that you describe. It was getting to be a little bit problematic. People were ranging outside of the assigned area, conducting vehicle checkpoints. They weren't always identifiable to us. And so some of the things you very, I think, adroitly picked up in your question were the things that we thought were problematic with regard to recognizing militia. That was something that we had said we wouldn't do. And in retrospect, it's something that we think is still the right call for the country.

Q: And has the—I think it's called the Mehdi Army. Have they cleared out of the streets at this point?

Conway: What we have done—because the problem is real—is said to the various clerics, “If you want to increase the size of your protection detail, you can do that.” To the extent that—in the case you're describing—Sadr wants to have a somewhat larger detail, and that would be some of his Mehdi Army people, we would probably let that happen. But only in his exact location would we allow those people to serve as a protective detail.

Okay. I'm just working my way back here, folks. Please?

Q: General, there has been some talk of Marines being used in more peacekeeping operations. Can you say if any I MEF units would go back to Iraq to perhaps relieve Army troops there?

Conway: Probably too early to say. I will tell you that when we put the preponderance of our force out of Iraq, the guidance that we were given was to recock. Now, to me that meant get back into what had been our deployment routine; in the case of I MEF, for most units, about six months deployed, about 18 months home. I have since seen the projected requirements in the out years. And what is being said, I think, essentially by the people who are doing the planning is it will be a brigade or a division, service not given. And I think that at this point we probably shouldn't say it will or will not be Marines. I think the JCS will have to evaluate that, and I think we'll have to be prepared to field that requirement if, in fact, it's headed our way.

You're right in that Marines don't normally do this type of thing, but I think we all recognize that the Army is being fairly well stretched now with all the other requirements that it has, so it would not be an inordinate request, I would not think.

Yes, Sir?

Q: General, can you give us an idea of the composition of the quick-reaction forces that have been developed over the course of the post-combat operations: you know, what kind of structure they are, is it helicopters, is it LAVs? Can you give any idea of the structure?

Conway: It's some of all; it depends upon the situation. The—my reaction force—I don't hold a reserve, but I do have a squadron of Cobras that can be employed in virtually any situation; troops that can be heli-lifted based on the medium helicopters that we have left back.

At the division level, General Mattis' reserve is a light armored reconnaissance battalion, quick on the

ground with a good bit of firepower. At the battalion level, and that's where we have seen them deployed in virtually every instance, it's a platoon or a company—based upon a scenario, could be as much as two companies, or the entire battalion, if the battalion commander thinks it necessary. We have not seen that at all. We have seen, in one instance, the deployment of a two-company QRF, with a number of demonstrators in the city of Najaf some weeks back now.

Q: Do you find that the MAGTF [Marine Air Ground Task Force] structure allows for more flexibility than other coalition forces in the region?

Conway: I can't speak to that. I can say that it gives us great flexibility. We have ground transportation for those folks. Again, the other methods I mentioned to you, the LAR, the helicopters, are all very quick response, especially based on our ability to put detachments in—in what we say “the dirt” at various locations around south-central Iraq.

Okay. Yes, ma'am?

Q: You said in your earlier comments that the Marines Corps does not have a nation-building consolidated doctrine. Is that something that the Marine Corps is looking to address (word inaudible)—permanently, versus doing it ad hoc—on an ad hoc basis?

Conway: We think we've got to do that. We—what we used were essentially two documents. One is a small wars manual that goes back to Marine Corps intervention in Nicaragua in the '20s and '30s. You'd be interested on how many of the lessons are still applicable, really. And that document has maintained its application over the decades. The other is a concept that was developed by one of our former commandants, General Krulak, that talked about the three-block war. And in that, he said in the first block, Marines will be feeding hungry people; in the second block, you're keeping warring tribes apart for whatever combination of reasons; and in the third block, you're in full-scale combat; all of those things on the same day in the same locale. And that captures what we've seen there from time to time, quite frankly. It's pretty close.

Now, we feel like that we will have to, in the wake of this experience, provide some much more detail how-to to those young commanders that follow, and that will be, in great part, the responsibility of my MEF to be the advocate for that.

Q: Any civil affairs roles that you foresee expanding—(inaudible)?

Conway: Well, I think—I mentioned earlier numbers of troops. I think that we need to make sure we send in the right kinds of troops. And among those would be greater numbers of MPs, a greater representation by Civil Affairs, Psychological Operations, Information Operations types of folks. I just think that this, what we call Phase 4-type environment is a much better place to use those types of forces, perhaps, and your grunt, you know, that will do as he's told and do a great job at it but doesn't have the necessary background or training to be that expert.

Yeah.

Q: General, two questions. One, the rotation of the troops out. What unit is still up in Najaf, and will they be coming out to Kuwait, or be—will they be going home? And then a forward-looking thing. The Marine Corps now has fought two wars in the last 12 years where you basically are a mechanized force. And you're—you know, the Marines prides itself on being light infantry. Do you need to reorganize at all, you know, creating some kind of permanent mech force, or can you—the way you've done it in the last two times is ad hocing it. So, is that really the way to go?

Conway: First of all, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines is the battalion that's located at An Najaf. The commanding officer up there is Lieutenant Colonel Chris Woodbridge. They will pull out of there as directed by CGTF 7, but they will move back through Kuwait to base camps that we had established there before we crossed the line of departure. And then it takes anywhere from a week to two weeks to line up aircraft tail numbers to get them home. So that would be the sequence of their withdrawal.

Now, we don't just have a battalion there, I think it's important to say. In this MAGTF structure that someone pointed out earlier, we have a support detachment, and slice of Marines from our 1st FSSG that are in Najaf with them. There's a headquarters element, if you will, that still oversees their efforts. The—and the wing has a Marine air group, comprising CH-53s, C-130s, CH-46s and Cobras, that provide them, again, that variation on

support. So it's not just a thousand Marines or so that are in the battalion; it takes a larger chunk than that to keep those folks there and doing the job.

Q: They'll all be coming out?

Conway: They will be coming out, that's correct.

Q: (Off mike)?

Conway: Well, when I left we had a couple of pretty good flights out. But I would suspect there's still probably 8,000 Marines in Iraq and Kuwait at this point.

To answer your second question, my advice to my commandant has been that we look at, certainly, this most recent experience as an anomaly, and not that we look at re-organizing the Marine Corps to give it that heavier capability: more HETs—heavy equipment transporters—more tankers, those types of things that would support a heavy mechanized force. You call it ad hoc; I call it task organization. I think it means the same thing. But we are probably the best in the world at doing that. It just—it tends to confuse most other people. But we feel we can throw together a force very quickly with those elements of a Marine air-ground task force that are necessary, very well supported by Navy shipping, to get us where we have to go.

And so I would advocate that that balance that we've got is something that makes us ready to go anywhere on short notice and do what the nation asked. So I would not advocate that, in effect, we become a second army, if you will, with their task organization and some of the same equipment that they use.

Q: Well, we don't have the long—the heavy transporters. A lot of them you've had—in most cases, you've had to borrow or rent the long-haul trucks, things like that. And you've made it work, you know, two times now.

Conway: And we think we can make it work a third time if we have to. So we'll not reorganize in the face of that.

Yes, sir? Here.

Q: General, in your estimation, what more still remains? What do you think still needs to be done before Iraqis will be fully capable of taking over security in the areas of the country where you are working?

Conway: Yeah, that's a great question. I think one of the things that we need to focus on heavily is getting the infrastructure up and keeping it up. And in turn, that will have a very positive effect on security.

Right now the factories of Iraq are not working, and they're not working because there's no dependable electricity to give them anything akin to a 24-hour steady energy base. If we can do that, I think it'll take a population of Iraqis, young Iraqis, off the streets, that I think some of the former regime leadership are using for the ambushing and the mortar attacks and those types of things. Right now the young 22-year-old Iraqi has very little means to make a living and earn an income. If we can get them into the factories, get them into the militia, get them into the new Iraqi army and so forth, I think we'll be helping ourselves in the process. So that's the first thing. That, I think, really has to happen pretty quickly.

Beyond that, again, the formulation of these various groups that will put an Iraqi face on it, I think, will give us additional intelligence that will allow us to respond to that diminishing number of people that are there that would disrupt the process and do our people harm.

So it all is related. I think it's an integrated effort that needs to occur. And when we get the country back on its feet from an economic perspective, I think it will, again, help greatly with the security.

Q: Do you have any sort of notion as to how long you think this might take?

Conway: It will take a while. I don't—I can't put it in terms of months or years. I had an Army Corps of Engineer colonel tell me that even once we get the electrical grid back in place, it's not going to be very dependable. And the reason for that is that it's had 30 years of neglect; that there are parts in these power stations from 15 different countries, so when you go in with a problem, you never know quite what you're going to face. There's no constancy to the parts requirement, for instance.

So how long? I can't say. But as I mentioned, the Iraqis are very impatient people. They're holding us to the "man on the Moon" standard. In their mind, it should have happened yesterday. And so we probably can't do it too soon.

I missed you here. Go ahead.

Q: From my understanding, Central Command now has the findings of the friendly fire incident back on March

21st, I think, in An-Najaf, where I think it's between six to 12 Marines might have been killed by an A-10. Do you have any detail on that report at all, or what may have happened in that incident?

Conway: It was March 23rd. And I have seen a draft of the investigation. It's my understanding that it has been sent back for some rework. I'm not purposely being vague, I just don't know. But I think that CENTCOM has sent it back to the Air Force, and it will be CENTCOM's responsibility to publish it, of course, as soon as it's approved by the commander in chief—or by the commander of Central Command.

Q: There's no other details you can—

Conway: Not at this point. I think we should wait for the investigation to come out.

Q: Thank you, General. Over here. The Blue Force Tracking was supposed to be a step ahead in avoiding fratricide this time. Did you all have Blue Force Tracking equipment in your system? And do we need—is that the answer, I mean—

Conway: No. No, it's not. We had over 400 sets, some given to us by the Army, some that we procured ourselves. But Blue Force Tracker, ladies and gentlemen, creates situational awareness on the battlefield. When my counterpart, General Wallace, in V Corps looked at his screens, it showed the same as my screens in terms of where units were.

Fratricide is caused by our inability for the Air Force A-10 pilot to look at a vehicle and have an immediate recognition, friend or foe. The same is true with tanks. If a tanker, on a dusty, dark night, lines up his main gun and he can't query a target, then we aren't where we need to be with regard to the avoidance of fratricide.

Blue Force Tracker helps tell you where units are in general design; it does not solve the problem of blue on blue, or fratricide.

Q: General, there have been a number of news reports speculating about a possible civil war developing between the Shi'a in the south, and that maybe some moderate factions and some extremist factions would be butting heads. Just on your experience, what's your assessment of that possibility?

Conway: I don't see that in the south. There are a lot of accusations, a lot of uncertainties associated with that, I believe, that are flying about in terms of who's doing the bombing and who would stand to gain most from it; who would like to see destabilization, be it in a religious context or in a governmental context or whatever. But I don't see factionalism being brought about as a result of that. So—I have read some things like that. I just don't think that the Shi'as—the wise Shi'as, who see a future Iraq with a heavy Shi'a imprint on it, allowing that to happen.

Q: Is the overall perception in that community a welcoming one or a skeptical one about U.S. presence?

Conway: Oh. I wish I could take every one of you here on a trip from Najaf to Karbala back to Hillah in military vehicles. Little kids run a quarter-mile on a hot pavement with bare feet to wave. And the adults do the same thing. You drive by, I mean, it's like you're constantly on parade. And I won't say you tire of it, because it's a very gratifying feeling. But it's there in spades. They welcome us. They're still welcoming us because, any number have said, "We fear, when you go, that the people who wanted to see you go will come in and we won't have our democracy."

So it's just a tremendous experience. I'm delighted every one of my young Marines has been able to be close up and a part of it and see it. And it's a good-news story that, in my mind, is not really reaching the American people, and I think that's unfortunate.

Q: General ?

Conway: Yes, Sir?

Q: On phase four operations, it's proven difficult for us here to sort out who was meant to be doing what and which and whom. Could you tell us what tasking did I MEF get for phase four; and were you quietly doing planning for it? Tell us what you expected or what you did and then what happened.

Conway: We were told about halfway to Baghdad what our sector would be, first of all. And it turned out to be the nine governates in the southern half of the country, two of which belong to the British. And after 15 June when the British went national, those two governates were exclusively theirs.

Our mission, to paraphrase, was to create a safe and secure environment in order to turn Iraq back over to the Iraqis. And that's been our drive and motivation ever since, is to, again, incorporate as many Iraqis into the

reconstruction efforts, have them tell us what it was that they wanted to see built back first—be it schools, hospitals, sewage, all those types of things, and as soon as we could, to get Iraqis making decisions. And I do. I think we're having some great success there.

If you use what happened in Najaf, as regrettable as the bombing was with the loss of life, the response on the part of the City Council, the mayor, the Najaf Police Department with regard to controlling the scene, getting emergency help in right away, calling the FBI, arresting some who they think are perpetrators very quickly on the heels of that, followed by the control that they exercised during the processional that resulted in the burial of Hakim, we were very much on the sidelines watching that take place, but very happy that we had seen the community grow to the degree that they could do that without real difficulty.

Q: And the—just to be sure, the biggest unexpected in your experience of phase four turned out to be what? (Pause.)

Conway: Hm. I guess it has to do with the infrastructure and just how brutal we found it to be. We call it sort of the basic needs, the hierarchy of needs that the population has. You know, I would say food, water, power and fuel are the things that a community has to have before it's going to grow and prosper and do other things. And it's just been very difficult to get that back up on plane and keep it there with any level of consistency.

So I—you know, when you fly over the country, where you see all these power lines headed all the different directions—it's a nation with the second-largest resources in the world in terms of raw fuels, so it was a little bit incredulous to me after a time that we continue to struggle with that and just try to bring it up on line.

Q: General, what about the absence of WMD? You said previously that—when we talked to you some weeks ago, that you were surprised that none were found. What's the latest on that, and what's your overall assessment?

Conway: We continue to receive leads from time to time, from well-intended Iraqis that saw this happen or saw that happen in the dark of night. We put teams to go and investigate and research, to see if there's actually something there. I will tell you, to date, that we have not had any of those leads turn into anything tangible.

If you have patterned it, the high-value targets that have been rolled up have almost entirely come from the northern part of the country. So we don't have immediate access to the interrogations.

But I still am optimistic that we will find the existence of a program. I don't think—and in fact, I can tell you, from our operational experience, that weapons were not at the operational level, as much as we thought we would find to be the case. But I—

Q: (Off mike.)

Conway: We have not found any. We had reports, but they did not bear fruit.

But I still think that somewhere out there barrels are buried in the desert. We recently found MiGs buried that we didn't know about. So if you contrast that with the difficulty of burying 55-gallon drums, I think it's certainly within the art of the possible. So I still remain optimistic that we will find out, in the long term, based upon the people we are rolling up, the interrogations and so forth, that elements of a program existed.

Q: Sir, General Amos mentioned that a large portion of Cobras had received damage in combat. Can you say if there are any efforts right now to reevaluate doctrine of helicopter combat?

Conway: You know, I will tell you that during the fighting, we continually reevaluated the doctrine on the use of Cobras. The first night we crossed the line of departure, I said to General Amos, you know: I don't want to be imminently successful on the ground only to turn to you and find out that we had six Cobras shot down. So initially, I want you to be conservative with your tactics as it relates to your shooters, until such time as we determine the density of the area of defense threat, and then we'll go from there.

Was good but not great in terms of that level of anti-air that the Iraqi army demonstrated. So, our pilots became more and more bold as we went up towards Baghdad.

After a time, the Iraqis patterned us, and they realized that we would have aircraft on the flanks of the troops, running up and then turning off the nose of the lead elements. And we found, up around Azezia (sp), that they had actually dug rifle pits well off to the flank but parallel to our line of movement, which gave them some great shots against our helicopters.

So then, we had to change that pattern to come back over the heads of troops, one aircraft shooting, another

er one, an (over-watch). And when we got into Baghdad per se, we consciously did not over fly the city unless we had troops in extremis and we had to get in and get the support that they needed.

So, it was a cat-and-mouse game of sorts. We had a number of aircraft damaged. We had six that were downed by enemy fire, but fortunately, all six landed inside friendly lines. We lost two pilots, unfortunately, who crashed into a tower when they were providing air support one night to troops up in the vicinity of the Tigris.

But I would say that outside of that continual evaluation of your methods and tactics, that the Cobra was a tremendous airframe for what we needed to do. We're going to make continued improvements, putting four blades on it to make it faster and even more deadly. And I think it's going to be a very viable aircraft for us for a number of years to come.

Whitman: One more, I think.

Conway: Okay?

Q: General, this is another helicopter question, but it relates to the Apache Longbow. Last week, General Hagee said that when V Corps gave I MEF a layout of the tactics, and that the TTP for the Apache Longbow usage, that the Marines found out that they couldn't support those Apache Longbows if they got in trouble. Can you expand on what kind of, you know, conundrum you ran into when the Apache Longbow TTPs were delivered to I MEF, and what kind of problems you had supporting those helicopters?

Conway: Well, the essence of it is that for the Longbow, I think, to be successful, and I would—General Wallace would say this, I feel fairly certain—that you need close air support that is also helping to prep the area where they're operating. And it was simply a matter of boundaries and passing our fixed wing air, had they asked for it, over into the Army area of operations with the right-forward air controllers working our air. That was the essence, I suspect, of General Hagee's comments. I have not had that conversation with him. But if you asked me what would be the difficulty in providing that close air support, that would be it.

The Air Force, for the most part, provides it for the Army. The Navy augments that with their forces at sea. We gave them some of our air in a couple of situations in extremis. We were not asked to support it the night that they had their Longbows damaged. But that would have been, I think, the issue he'd had to work through in order to make that happen.

Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen. I appreciate it.

Q: Thank you, General.