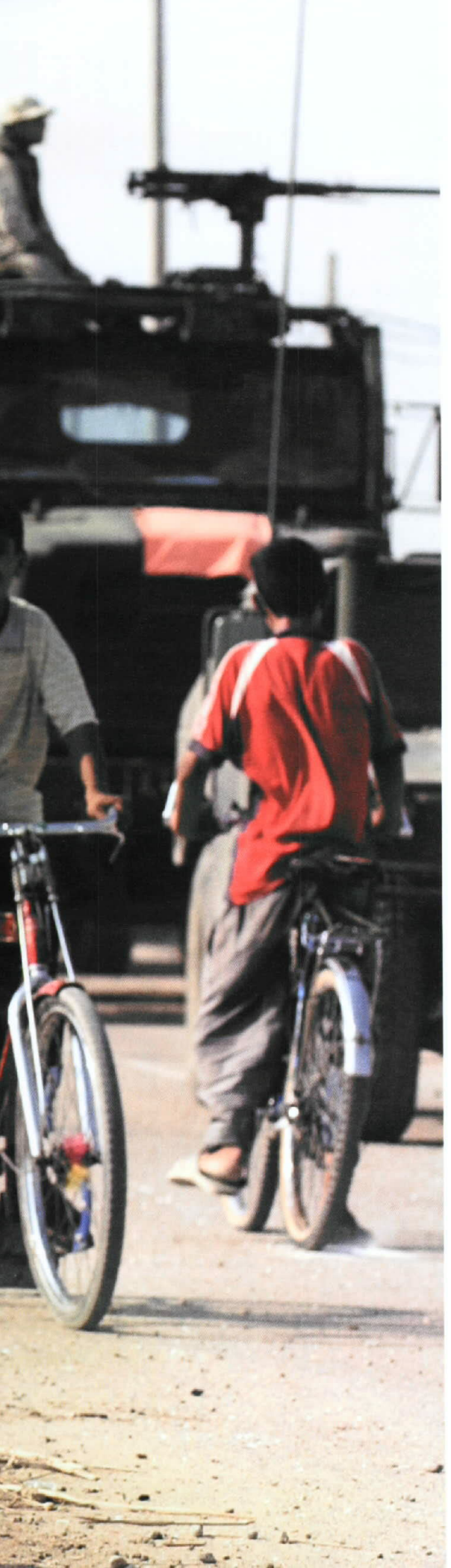


'We've Always Done Windows'

interview with Lieutenant General James T. Conway

U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, November 2003.

Lieutenant General James T. Conway, Commanding General of I Marine Expeditionary Force and senior Marine in Operation Iraqi Freedom . . . spoke with the Naval Institute's Senior Editor Gordon Keiser on 7 August.

Proceedings: What was your perception of the alleged meddling in Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) by the Office of the Secretary of Defense–especially in the planning process?

Conway: I think there's probably only one man who can answer that question and his name is General Tommy Franks, then–Commander of the U.S. Central Command (CentCom).

If it was happening, it was transparent at my level, with one exception–and I would not call it meddling. It was simply a technique of deployment. We spent probably about six weeks, over three different conferences, preparing the time-phased force deployment data. When it came time to deploy, it actually was done by requests for forces. And each of those was scrutinized, not necessarily by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, but by his office. They were lumped and approved in "groupments" of forces for deployment. Not the way we would typically do things; perhaps not the way we would advocate doing them in the future.

That said, we deployed 60,000 Marines in about 45 days, using all manner of strategic lift: Air Force aircraft, Navy ships, and black-bottom shipping. I can't complain about it too loudly because, at least for the Marine Corps, it worked.

Proceedings: Can you tell us about the intelligence support you got–intelligence preparation of the battlefield, both human and technical?

Conway: It was good. We had all the intelligence that a full Marine expeditionary force (MEF) could expect to have, because we had sources from I MEF and II MEF. Marine Force CentCom Commander Lieutenant General Earl Hailston committed what he could. Of course, we had the intelligence resources of higher headquarters to draw on and all the national imagery we could use. As always, you get more information than you do pure intelligence, and there was the distillation process we had to go through.

Proceedings: Were you able to distribute it effectively?

Conway: We were, especially before the war. I think speed of the advance caused some complications from our subordinate units' perspective on what they were able to get after we were under way. They weren't always able to set up their means to reach back.

We weren't always able to get them a product before they shut down and moved again.

We didn't get a lot of intelligence about the Iraqis per se. For example, we were told they had civilian clothes in their packs and were just waiting to capitulate. When we attacked, they were going to get into civilian clothes and surrender or go home. Well, what they did was get into civilian clothes and fight us, which made things harder. So even with intelligence, you had interpretations that might not have been on the mark. But I would not complain about it overall.

Proceedings: Some observers, including retired general officers on TV, continue to worry that the ongoing U.S. campaign in Iraq will detract from the worldwide war on terrorism. What is your view?

Conway: I really think [OIF] is central to it. Not that we believe there were numerous ties between Iraq and terrorists, although there were some in the country. A certain momentum among the terrorists was gained after 9/11 that caused us to act in Afghanistan, that caused the President to look at that hole in New York City and say "Never more." I think he looked around and said, "Okay, who's the guy most likely to cause this type of event again–based on attitude, weapons availability, intent, which we could never fully gauge–and we went after him. And I think the momentum of terrorism has been slowed.

Proceedings: Would you describe how U.S. and allied command relations developed for I MEF?

Conway: When we crossed the line of departure (LOD) from Kuwait on 20 March, we had roughly 81,500 people assigned to I MEF. Our top figure was just short of 90,000, about twice the size of a normal MEF.

Proceedings: All services?

Conway: All U.S. services and 20,000 Brits. We started out with the belief we would have an understrength Royal Marine commando brigade assigned to assist us in the south. When the 1st U.K. Armored Division was unable to go ashore in the north, they rotated south and were assigned to us. So, we joined a whole British division, consisting of three brigades: the commando brigade; an air assault brigade; and a U.K. armored brigade, consisting of four battle groups. These were very capable troops, with great equipment. All in all, the relationship was magnificent.

Proceedings: You reported to whom?

Conway: I reported to Lieutenant General David McKiernan, Coalition Forces Land Component Commander. General Franks decided to go with a functional alignment, which meant all the ground forces would fight under General McKiernan. Under him were two corps: 5th Corps and I MEF, in a corps–like configuration. It worked and was jointness in its finest sense. I had a solid relationship with General McKiernan. The staffs had the inevitable friction over pop-up issues, but level heads always prevailed.

We thought the commando brigade was a bit light to accomplish our taskings. So we assigned the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit, with its tank platoon and company of light armored vehicles, to that brigade for operations on the Al Faw Peninsula. We left that arrangement intact for about 100 hours after we crossed the LOD, until the brigade had accomplished its mission; then we pulled it back. This task-organized unit was very proud of its role and rightly so. It was the first time since World War II that we put a U.S. force of that size under any foreign commander. The 15th MEU commanding officer worked for the British brigadier until he was chopped back to I MEF for subsequent assignment to Task Force (TF) Tarawa.

Some other things were a little unusual. Task Force Tarawa–essentially, 2nd Marine Expeditionary Brigade from the East Coast–was a Marine air-ground task force (MAGTF), though we took their aircraft. We likewise assigned the 15th MEU (and later the 24th MEU) to TF Tarawa, leaving them with their headquarters and combat service support elements. We stripped away their aviation elements and assigned them to 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, just for efficiency's sake.

Proceedings: This was done for ease of air scheduling?

Conway: Yes. Doctrinally you're not supposed to have a MAGTF working for a MAGTF, working for yet another MAGTF–but we did it. It worked quite well. So maybe our doctrine needs to be reviewed.

Proceedings: How about your command relations with Army Special Forces (SF) and Navy SEALs?

Conway: They were good in the early going, when we could do deliberate planning. For instance, the SEAL's takedown of the oil manifold (distribution facility) on the Al Faw Peninsula and the two gas-oil platforms at sea worked very well. They were under the tactical control (TACON) of I MEF for that operation, once they

were ashore. The Army also did some good things for us around Nasiriya. In time, the problem we had was their ability to respond quickly. They had about a 96-hour string on them–their ability to take a mission, resource it, post it to higher headquarters, and get back to us with a green light.

Proceedings: You mean their Special Forces headquarters?

Conway: Yes. Even though they were under our TACON, their higher headquarters stayed engaged, to a degree that such a relationship wouldn't necessarily prescribe. They first said it would take about five days to complete that preparation cycle. I said, "Hey, that's entirely too long. When we see a gap in enemy defenses, the first thing we want to do is kick out the reconnaissance. I can't wait five days to do that." A little later they said they could do it in 96 hours. I said, "Okay, thank you very much. Marine force reconnaissance can do it in 12 to 24 hours, and I think those guys are going to get a lot of work." So it was difficult after we crossed the LOD, with the speed of maneuver that we had, to employ them much beyond those initial missions.

Proceedings: Did you use your force reconnaissance units much?

Conway: We had nine platoons and used them a good bit. I suppose if you talked to those guys, they would say they were underused. We were cautious up front because many of the special operations forces used in the previous Gulf War had been rolled up, killed, or captured. We didn't want that to happen to our force teams. We wanted to make sure we could go in and get them, or they had a chance to escape and evade back to friendly lines.

Initially, we employed a couple of force recon platoons for tactical recovery of aircraft and pilots. A lot of aircraft went down–not any shot down, but aircraft that had to land because of holes in their fuselages or blades. In virtually every case, they landed inside friendly lines. Had the mission been as difficult or risky as we had anticipated, the force teams could have been extremely busy. As it turned out, that was not so.

Proceedings: Since the end of the combat phase, how do you account for the difference in Army and Marine casualties–different tactics or different operational areas?

Conway: I think some of both. Some people will say it's because we're in the south and we've got the Shia population, which is peaceful at this point. What they might need to be reminded of is that, before the war, they were called the volatile-Shia–all one word, with a hyphen. Well, they're not volatile; they're peaceful and working with us. Together it's a great partnership. We're applying our own approach. Perhaps one of the best things about what we're doing is that we don't have a lot of doctrine on nation building. We're issuing commander's intent. We're describing the desired end states and applying what resources we can to them. In the early going, seven battalion commanders were doing things seven different ways. But in every instance it worked–and it still is.

We've got the ability to put a lot of boots on the ground–as much ability in a single Marine regiment for troops, squad-sized patrols, as an Army infantry division. We can permeate an area completely, and that's what the 1st Marine Division and TF Tarawa did in the early going on the eastern side of Baghdad. We said our long-range fight–the MEF fights the rear battle, the close battle, and the long-range battle–would focus on the children. Let's get the schools cleaned out and the weapons removed from them. Let's rebuild them and regenerate what used to be a highly literate society. We've handed out a lot of soccer balls to the kids. The patrols dispensed candy. Our approach was: if you're doing something for the kids, how can the parents go out and throw rocks at you?

At the same time, we've got a no-nonsense policy that deals sternly with people who try to do us harm. We've worked an inside-out policy that says we go into the cities and quell any concerns with security and stabilization. We established working relationships with the Iraqi police and U.S. Army military police.

Baghdad is tough. It's a big city, without the distinctive borders you have in the southern cities. You don't have rural areas you can rotate troops into and that type of thing. You've got high-rise buildings, where the enemy can fire on the Army troops. Even so, our approach–recognizing the war was essentially over; that all the Iraqis in our zone that needed killing had been killed; and that it was time to go to soft covers, sling-arms, and mix with the people to show them we're there to help–has indeed made a difference.

Proceedings: How do you see the Marine Corps' commitment in Iraq in the long term?

Conway: I think there will be a U.S. commitment for at least another year or two. I don't think it's going to

be all that long, because the Iraqis are very impatient people. I used to think that Americans were impatient–we don't hold a candle to the Iraqis. They want it all now, to include us turning over their government, policing, and all that type of thing to them now. If there is a continuation of U.S. military force, as far as I know the request for forces simply will read a division or a brigade. It could be a Marine brigade that winds up going over there again in a rotation policy. We've always "done windows," I guess, and we'll do whatever the President, Secretary of Defense, or the combatant commander directs.

Proceedings: What is your opinion of OIF media coverage in general, and the embedded reporter concept?

Conway: I would give "OK" grades to both–especially the embed concept. I think that's a home run and the wave of the future. We've got to understand what it means to us, because it's a different dynamic. I would offer it as much more akin to the way the Navy and the Marine Corps have always done business, and more foreign probably to the Army and Air Force. But I think those services would say it succeeded very well.

We have to realize, though, that what those folks report essentially is what goes on 500 yards around wherever they are on the battlefield. It does not give the overarching perspective that is necessary. We could get only one channel after we crossed the LOD; however, from what I saw, other folks provided that function. So, all in all, it gave our American public the human-interest stories they enjoyed reading and wanted to see.

I would contrast that coverage to what we're seeing in the stabilization phase, which is not nearly as positive. I don't know why that is. We've got some folks who don't want to hear good news stories. In fact, we had one reporter tell us, "Hey, good news is no news these days. Go ahead and open your schools and do whatever. I won't be there." Every day you hear about soldiers being killed and the negative aspects of what's taking place. I really think it's starting to have strategic importance, and I hope there would be a better balance in what we're seeing.

Proceedings: How do you account for the Corps' apparently good record of public relations in OIF?

Conway: When a media rep comes to talk to me, or he comes into our camp, we say, "Go talk to the corporal; go talk to the sergeant. He'll tell you all you need to know. And we'll fill in the blanks, all right?" I've yet to see it fail. I met with a newspaper reporter the other day and he said he was absolutely amazed that commanders would have that level of confidence in their troops. He had access to everybody up and down the chain of command.

Invariably the young troops describe it like it is; they provide colorful language and tell their story. At our morning meeting each day, we had a "quote of the day" that some Marine–normally lance corporal through gunnery sergeant–had said the day before. Any officer would be hard pressed to say it better. That relative level of comfort is something that hits home runs–and the troops invariably cast us in a proper light.

Proceedings: A great deal has been reported about severe strains on the services' reserves and National Guard. How have Marine Corps Reserve forces stacked up in I MEF?

Conway: They did great. It was tough to tell the difference between an active battalion and a reserve battalion as soon as their faces got dirty and their gear got dusty. We were delighted with them. There was some difficulty in the initial call-ups and those types of things, but it was chicken feed compared to the overall performance. A battalion on the East Coast and a battalion on the West Coast were called up to assist in force-protection duties before the conflict. Those guys had been on active duty almost a year. When the time came, they didn't want to go home; they wanted to go to Iraq. That level of motivation represents what we saw in all other facets of the reserve establishment as well. I'm told the unhappiest people in the reserves are folks who did not get the call to go.

I received figures the other day verifying that about 48% of the Corps' reserve establishment was called up in one capacity or another. Is there a strain over time? Probably. But I think our program is the model for all services.

Proceedings: Are recruiting and retention in the face of continuing major commitments your biggest challenges today?

Conway: You know, the troops are doing wonderfully. We had a couple of battalions take "head fakes"–they thought they were going home earlier and that got changed. If you go to those units now and ask them, they'll tell you, "Hey, I'll go home when my battalion commander tells me I can go home. We're here; we're making

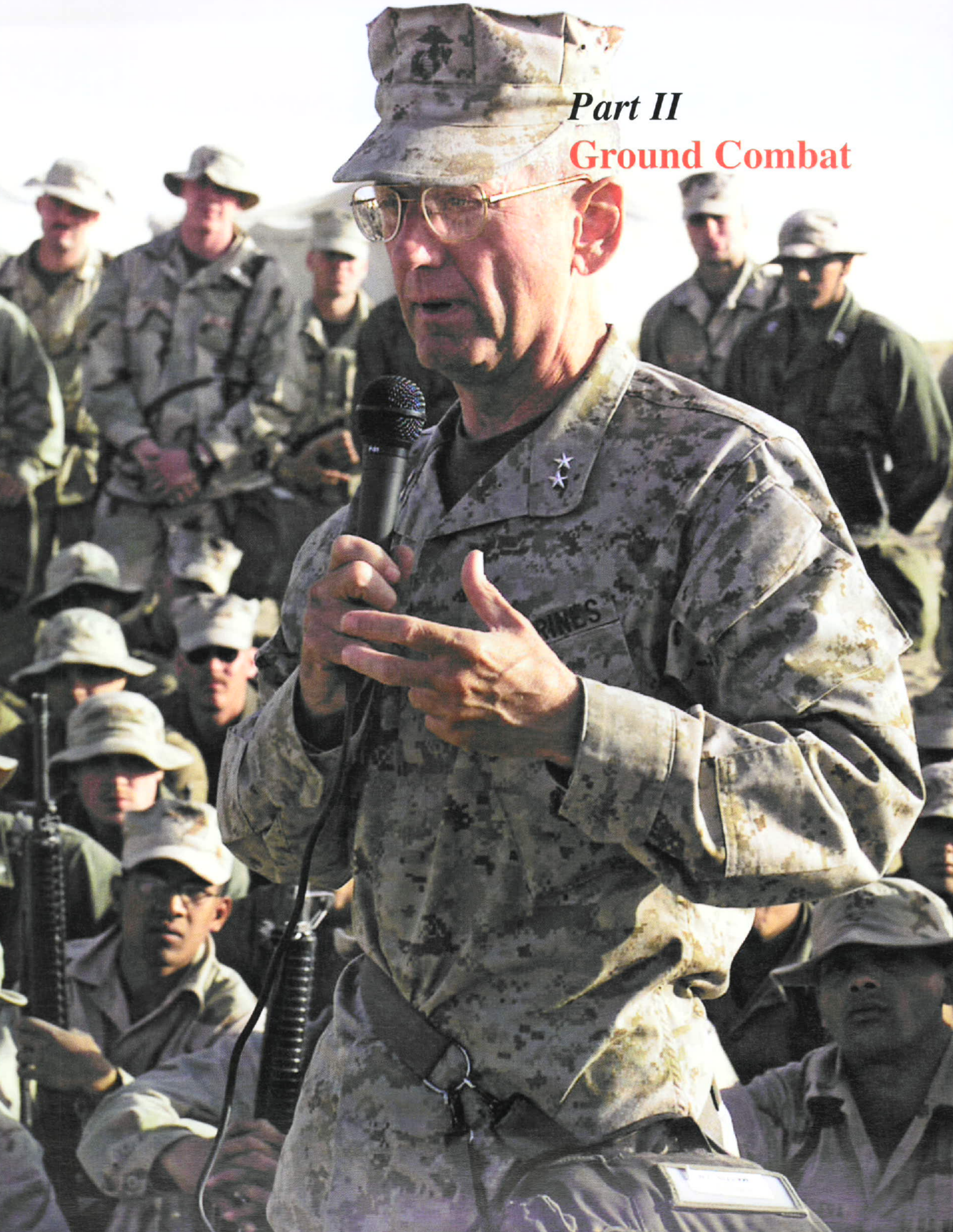
a difference." They even have a sense of ownership about those cities where they are located.

The one thing we face, an age-old problem for the Corps, is simply having enough money to buy everything we need. Although I did discover–and it was a nice lesson to learn–we are probably state-of-the-art in most of our communications equipment and training.

Proceedings: How has the profession–and the Corps' professionals–changed since you graduated from Southeast Missouri State and were commissioned?

Conway: We've got a lot more married Marines than before, which has its impact when you deploy and in how you take care of the families back home. But there are some great programs in place that have adjusted to that new dynamic and we're good to go.

The Corps' ability to deploy any unit and expect it to do great things is far better than it was before. We had an executive conference two months ago, when Commandant of the Marine Corps General Michael Hagee met with his three-star generals. I said I knew that senior body is responsible for making adjustments that will prosper the Marine Corps in the long term. But I also said we are closer to institutional excellence than we have been in my 32 years in the Corps, and we should be very careful of things we would change. At this point, our go-to-war capabilities are the envy of the other services.



Part II
Ground Combat

Marine General: Iraq War Pause 'Could Not Have Come At Worse Time'

by Elaine M. Grossman

Inside The Pentagon, 2 October 2003.

The five-day "pause" U.S. troops took before capturing Baghdad last spring "could not have come at a worse time" for Marine Corps forces poised outside the Iraqi capital, according to Maj. Gen. James Mattis, commander of the 1st Marine Division. The Marines were told to put the reins on the Baghdad offensive just as Mattis' troops became highly vulnerable to Iraqi counterattack, he told Inside the Pentagon in a Sept. 25 interview.

Top wartime commanders have insisted there was no real pause in combat during the war because fierce ground battles and heavy air attacks continued throughout late March (ITP, May 8, p1). But it was clear at the time that the impending attack on Baghdad was put on hold beginning March 26 and continuing through the end of the month, Inside Defense.com first reported March 25. "We're going to take the next couple days–the next several if necessary–to concentrate on the enemy where he's at," a top coalition commander said at a daily battlefield update briefing held March 26 at the Camp Doha, Kuwait, ground combat headquarters. With a sandstorm imposing "zero visibility" around Baghdad, "we've got to finish up taking care of all these bastards down here," said the commander, referring to irregular militias that threatened lagging U.S. supply lines in southern Iraq. A March attack on one convoy resulted in 11 U.S. casualties and the capture of seven troops, including Army Pfc. Jessica Lynch. U.S. forces moved into Baghdad in early April and quickly captured the city, facing only light resistance.

"I didn't want the pause. Nothing was holding us up," Mattis told ITP. "The toughest order I had to give [in] the whole campaign was to call back the assault units when the pause happened." Mattis said most of his division was moving up Route 1 towards Baghdad, while one Marine unit was heading to Al Kut to pin down the Baghdad Division, when the pause was imposed. He said the order was handed down from above, but he did not know exactly where the idea of a pause originated. Marine Corps Lt. Gen. James Conway, commander of 1st Marine Expeditionary Force, and Army Maj. Gen. Buford Blount, the 3rd Infantry Division commander, shared the desire to press on to Baghdad instead of pause, Mattis said.

"There was some thought about putting up operating bases outside of Baghdad and making raids into it," Mattis told ITP. "But clearly Baghdad was falling if we went in." The general said his forces were at a critical junction about 100 kilometers southeast of Baghdad where it would have been unclear to Iraqi commanders whether the Marines would proceed directly into southeast Baghdad, or come around from the northeast. Hooking around from the northeast would allow the Marines to exploit a gap between two batteries of Iraqi artillery fire.

"What I don't want to do is reveal what I'm going to do because the enemy's artillery from Al Kut can only reach this far," said Mattis, pointing to a map he had scrawled on scrap paper. "And the enemy's artillery out of the Al Nida Division can only reach this far. And that seam is a way for me to get across." Mattis' 1st Division was about to cross a critical bridge over the Tigris River "when I finally get told about the pause," he said. "So now what I can't do is leave that road open because they'll figure it out that they've got this thing uncovered and I've got a way across the Tigris," he said. "So I have to order these guys who have lost Marines, killed and wounded now, to come back," Mattis continued. "And Marines don't like doing that."

He bought time by sending a light armored reconnaissance unit directly northwest towards Baghdad. Mattis said it was akin to telegraphing the Iraqis, "Hey, Diddle Diddle, here come the dumb Marines right up the middle." In fact, he wanted to avoid that obvious approach because it was the most heavily defended.

Meanwhile, Mattis readied the 5th Marine Regiment for the main attack from the northeast. But just one day before the pause was lifted, then–Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's military "figured out we're using this roadbed, Highway 1," Mattis reports. "They come up and start putting in tanks and artillery and troops, dumping them off in school buses."

At the same time, there was serious concern about the Iraqi military using chemical weapons to defend Baghdad. "Here's the prevailing wind in Iraq" moving south towards troops, Mattis said. "And there I have the division, two-thirds of the division strung out along this. So, no, I don't want to pause." This was one of two locations where the Marines used Mark-77 firebombs–something the Marines loosely term "napalm"–to clear foliage during the war, he said. "But here the enemy was figuring it out. So the last thing we wanted to do was pause," Mattis said. "It's at the worst possible time frame."

Once given the go-ahead to move on Baghdad, the Marines easily overran the newly deployed Iraqi forces, he said. "And now I pack up 5th Marines and I say, 'Go.' And they cross Saddam Canal and the Tigris River in hours," said Mattis. The Iraqi commanders had failed to capitalize on the American troops' vulnerability outside Baghdad during the pause. "The generals were dumber than you-know-what," Mattis said. "They were real dumb." Mattis attributed the Iraqi failure to anticipate the Marine attack to "incompetence." But he said the Iraqi forces ultimately did blow up the only two bridges for 40 kilometers across the Diyala River to try and blunt the Marine attack. "That's why we were held up outside of Baghdad," said Mattis, adding that was "after the pause." "You don't blow bridges in a country full of rivers unless you have to," Mattis said.

"And then by the time they realized this [was the attack route], it was all over. We killed everybody there and [suddenly] we're across and we're on our way." Mattis said his forces "could have grabbed" the bridges earlier but he opted not to. "Looking back now, maybe I should have, I don't know. But the bottom line is we had a lot of urban fighting going on there and I had to get that area cleared out before I ran the bridge companies out there."

Mattis said he anticipated before the war that Iraqi irregular forces–the Fedayeen Saddam militia–would threaten the long U.S. supply lines en route to Baghdad. But he said the Marines were ready for such a contingency. A Corps motto, "Every Marine a Rifleman," meant "I was not concerned about my supply lines," Mattis said. "The combat service support troops had been warned you are going to have to fight your way through to get supplies to us. Every Marine is trained as a rifleman, unlike some services. And this was not a concern to us."

Army leaders have recently said that, given the lessons from the Iraq war, they will provide additional marksmanship training to support forces. In addition to consolidating supply lines, the coalition ground commander used the pause in attack on Baghdad to ensure that Iraqi Republican Guard forces defending the capital were sufficiently weakened through ground and air attacks, senior officials say.

Mattis believes some U.S. leaders overestimated the strength of the Iraqi forces, though. "What would you do if you hated Saddam, you hadn't been paid in three months, you didn't get fed daily, and the war's over because the Americans just showed up? You're going to go home," he said.

Mattis said he thinks some commanders and intelligence analysts became overly concerned with counting Iraqi units, interpreting "icons" on a map as evidence of military force rather than trying to read the situation on the ground. "I think that what happened [is] we had all of these icons, and because those things are countable, and satellites count things, and people like counting things–they like certainty–we got out of [thinking] what's most [important in] war. It's what's in a Marine's or soldier's heart, that's what war is. We knew their hearts weren't going to be in it." He said "these icons remained" throughout the war, even though it meant little to him when intelligence reports "counted troops [with] 85 percent strength, [in] this division in this sector," Mattis said. "We bombed them but we didn't get good BDA [battle damage assessment]. You can't ever get good BDA. How do you know if you really hit the tank or you hit the decoy tank?"

Eventually, he said, some command center officers acknowledged they were uncertain what to make of units on the map that seemed to evaporate on the battlefield. "Well, the reason is all the troops just walked home," Mattis said. "They left the tanks there." He said there were "still people around there because civilians came around to rip off everything they could and go. So [some assumed] it must still be active." He added:

"We never expected this army, I guess, to evaporate could and go. So [some assumed] it must be active." He added: "We never expected this army, I guess, to evaporate the way it did. Some people didn't expect it to, let me put it that way." In the end, Mattis said, he attempted to make the most of the pause before attacking Baghdad. "Wars never go the way you want them to," he said, "Once we were freed up to get going again [and] we were on our way, I took advantage of the pause. I got more guns and ammo and fuel up there, so no sweat."


U.S. MARINES

Blue Diamond Intelligence: Division-Level Intelligence Operations During Operation IRAQI FREEDOM

by Lieutenant Colonel Michael S. Groen

Marine Corps Gazette, February 2004.

The author provides readers a glimpse of intelligence support, both good and bad, during operations in Iraq.

Division-level intelligence operations during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF) were a story of "mission success" and reflected the progress made in Marine Corps intelligence capabilities over the last decade. During the campaign, the 1st Marine Division (1st MarDiv) was able to rapidly and successfully attack across difficult terrain over 800 kilometers into Iraq. The 1st MarDiv (reinforced with elements of 2d and 4th MarDiv and individual augments from a number of sources) defeated elements of several Iraqi divisions and destroyed hundreds more paramilitary fighters and foreign jihadists. When combat operations began to wind down the intelligence effort was able to smoothly transition to the support of stabilization operations in Baghdad and seven southern governates in Iraq.

The division G-2 (intelligence) relied heavily on direct support or attached collection platforms combined with local analysis to produce intelligence responsive to each tactical commander's unique needs. Although never *operationally* surprised, the division still had to deal with repeated *tactical* surprises. A glaring shortfall in organic tactical intelligence collection capability within the ground combat element (GCE) was partially overcome by superb support from associated human intelligence (HumInt), 3d Marine Aircraft Wing (3d MAW) assets, and several other supporting organizations. The intelligence effort still struggled with a digital divide between technological "haves" and "have-nots," but it also revealed promising technological solutions to this issue. OIF clearly demonstrated one of the ironies of the intelligence business–that those tactical commanders who require the highest resolution of the battlefield are those least able to influence a very complex and highly centralized intelligence architecture.

What Worked Well

Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) in direct support (DS) of the division. I Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF) chose early to assign the Marine UAV squadrons (VMUs) (both VMU-1 and VMU-2) in DS of the GCE for most of the fight. This relationship grew into a strong partnership between the VMUs and the division/regimental intelligence sections. The proactive support of the 3d MAW in enabling this partnership was essential. The VMUs worked aggressively to provide forward support to the division under difficult conditions. The VMUs provided remote receive teams that provided live video feeds to the division and regimental combat team (RCT) intelligence sections. Mission control was conducted over tactical radio nets or in networked chat rooms (enabled by the recent fielding of an improved data communications backbone down to the regimental level–the secure mobile antijam reliable tactical terminal). Because of the close relationships established, the supported intelligence section was able to directly drive the Pioneer to a point of tactical relevance for the commander. On several occasions the decentralized control of this asset enabled true "sensor to shooter" performance. Intelligence and fires personnel sat side-by-side detecting targets, clearing their prosecution, providing adjustments for artillery fires, and conducting damage assessments, all within minutes. This responsiveness was unrivaled by any other imagery collection platform. During security and stabilization operations the VMUs continued to provide critical support to raids on regime holdouts, security patrols over oil pipelines, surveillance of mass gravesites, and monitoring of political demonstrations. The mandate for a UAV flying in direct support of, and directly responsive to, division and regimental intelligence requirements was made resoundingly clear.

HumInt exploitation teams (HETs). During most of OIF the division had seven HETs in a direct support-

ing relationship, and a HumInt officer assigned to the division G-2. Twice as many HETs would have been almost enough. The HETs proved their worth time and again, and their presence with the forward battalions enabled the tempo of operations to continue as it did. As with the VMUs, assigning a number of HETs to a direct relationship with the supported commanders provided a goldmine of intelligence during both combat and stabilization operations enabling immediate exploitation of time-sensitive intelligence. Many HumInt successes may have been achievable by building a stronger core linguist capability in the Operating Forces, perhaps with some modicum of HumInt training. This would have partially compensated for the limited number of HETs available, and would have freed the traditional HETs to do more indepth operations as required. The lack of opportunity to train and establish habitual relationships with HumInt assets is a longrunning shortfall, and one that caused some small bit of friction during combat operations. Infantry battalion commanders and HET leaders had to come to know and trust each other only days before combat operations began.

Organic topographic production capability. The division's tiny organic topographic production capability proved invaluable. The I MEF topographic capability provided terrific support to high-volume production requirements when the division and MEF were collocated and time frames allowed iterative product development. Once deployed, however, organic topographic capability was the only reliable way to get responsive, timely topographic products into the hands of intelligence consumers forward on the battlefield. The ability for intelligence officers to look over the shoulder of the topographic Marines and quickly build products tailored to the exact need at hand was crucial and meant the commander's information requirements were met in hours rather than days. Expanding this capability to regimental command elements would have a high payoff.

Trojan Spirit connectivity at the regimental level. The success of decentralized combat operations applied at the regimental level as well as the division level. Having reliable connectivity to fused intelligence products, daily intelligence reports, national signals intelligence reporting, and access to the raw collection data from theater platforms was critical to success. The Trojan Spirit II systems located with the division G-2 and each regimental S-2 (intelligence) enabled the decentralization of the intelligence mission. The 24-hour secure, high-quality Trojan phone network was an unplanned but much used fringe benefit of the system. One limitation of note, the Trojan "lite" configuration was unsupportable for RCT or division operations as it required the supported unit to provide lift, power, air-conditioning, shelter, and workspace. All of these are in short supply in a lean fighting headquarters as found in a regiment, or even in a mobile division in the attack.

Instant text messaging for intelligence indicators and warnings (I&W). The Marine Corps continues to achieve incremental success in pushing the digital divide down the chain of command. Disseminating time perishable intelligence to all of the digital haves and have-nots across the division remained a tremendous challenge during OIF. In partnership with the G-6 (communications), intelligence Marines used a combination of digital data, very high-frequency, high-frequency, tactical satellite radio, satellite telephone networks, and couriers to reach the widely spaced elements of the division. One capability fielded only days before crossing the line of departure was a blue force tracker (now if we could only develop the corresponding red force tracker!), a combat identification system that included an instant text messaging capability down to battalion level. This capability proved critical for passing warning intelligence to a small forward unit when a threatening Republican Guard armored movement occurred during a raging sandstorm that had disabled the unit's primary means of communications. Fielding a satellite-based intelligence text messaging capability down to battalion (or lower) level would be a tremendous boon to our ability to disseminate time-sensitive intelligence regardless of terrestrial digital access.

U.S. Navy P-3 surveillance aircraft in DS of the division. Building on the experiences of Task Force 58 in Afghanistan, the division continued to work closely with the Navy's P-3 community to use an imagery-equipped variant, the P-3 Antisurface Warfare Improvement Program for surveillance and I&W. Like the Pioneer, this platform was made tactically effective by the DS relationship used during planning and combat phases. A team of division riders rode along on every tactical mission, talking directly to Marines on the

ground over ultra high-frequency radio. The platform was used to give ground commanders a look at their objectives prior to combat operations (either in person or on video-tape). During combat operations the riders were able to relay requests for information to the sensor operator to receive answers in minutes.

Dragon Eye UAV. The Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory proactively supported the division by providing a number of prototype Dragon Eye UAVs. Select individual battalions operated these systems in a hugely successful effort. A number of minor technical problems will be fixed in the eagerly anticipated production system. Much more important to the Dragon Eye's success was the command and control hierarchy and collections management process used for their tasking. There wasn't any. The maneuver commander used the system to answer his own questions, on his own schedule, in his own priority order. The maneuver commanders did not have to navigate a cumbersome collections bureaucracy, did not have to schedule operations around an air tasking order, and did not have to coordinate with a supporting unit. When Blue Diamond approached the Diyala River on the outskirts of Baghdad, for example, the lead battalion commander simply turned to his S-2 and asked if the bridges were still intact. The Dragon Eye was dispatched to quickly overfly the bridges and ascertain their status. This responsiveness would have been unthinkable if the S-2 had been required to influence the external collections architecture. The success of Dragon Eye validated the concept of a tiered tactical intelligence gathering capability organic to maneuver units.

Joint surveillance target attack radar system (JSTARS) common ground station (CGS). The division G-2 was fortunate to have an attached JSTARS CGS from the Army's 513th Military Intelligence Brigade. The ability for the division intelligence Marines and Army CGS operators to work side by side allowed us to use the system in unconventional ways with tremendous tactically relevant results. For example, when the division was considering the use of the unfinished Highway 1 corridor, the attached JSTARS team conducted a pattern analysis of speed and direction of civilian traffic that validated the route's viability as an attack corridor. Even when subjective assessments of this route from other sources cast serious doubt on its viability, the division was able to make an informed decision and take a calculated risk versus a reckless gamble. As a result, 15,000 men stormed up an unexpected avenue of approach all the way to the Tigris River. The ability of the G-2 to look over the shoulder of the operator and guide product development in a realtime manner made the difference between a tactically relevant capability and a less effective centralized capability located hundreds of miles away from the point of decision.

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity (MCIA) and reachback support. The division used intelligence and infrastructure databases from a number of sources. These databases provided the tools for decentralized intelligence analysis responsive to specific tactical missions. Continuing its sterling reputation that had been built in Afghanistan, the MCIA did superb service by the division, providing timely and accurate terrain products, route studies, and inundation analyses. The entire national intelligence effort proved very strong when it came to fixed facilities with established target numbers, or conventional forces with well-defined organization and standard equipage. The solid basis of understanding developed during the planning stages allowed the division to react with confidence when the enemy on the ground did not match the enemy in the plan. After combat operations began, the rapid pace of operations naturally outstripped the ability of supporting intelligence activities to provide timely and actionable intelligence. With planning cycles for many operations measured in hours, decentralization of analysis was critical. Like politics, all intelligence is local. There are significant implications for intelligence reachback concepts, as the division reached back for *information* but generated *intelligence* on the spot. Personalizing the battlespace for maneuver commanders mandated a continued decentralized analysis capability.

FalconView terrain visualization computers. Supported by the Marine Corps Systems Command (MarCorSysCom) program manager for intelligence, the division was able to field high-speed laptops with enough memory and storage capacity to store the maps and controlled imagery base imagery for all of Iraq, and run the FalconView three-dimensional (3D) terrain visualization software. This single action by MarCorSysCom to support the division (one of many such actions) had a significant tactical impact. With this 3D battlespace visualization capability down to battalion level, even company commanders could conduct detailed mission planning and rehearse video fly-throughs of their objective areas. Integrating and expanding

a type of 3D terrain visualization software into a program of record available to all Marine units would be operationally beneficial and would decrease the support burden posed by multiple systems and vendors.

What Did Not Work So Well

Inability to influence national and theater imagery collections. The division's ability to influence the theater and national intelligence collection activity was limited. A shortage of theater collection platforms was aggravated by the use of these collectors for deep missions at the expense of support to maneuver units. The division had no organic access to the imagery requirements system and relied on external advocacy in a complex collections bureaucracy. Raw imagery support requires a tremendous amount of bandwidth that was not available during OIF, thereby increasing reliance on a centralized exploitation capability. Increasing the ability of tactical commanders to access national and theater imagery collections and exploited products remains a challenge.

Lack of a tiered, tactical intelligence collection capability. The nature of the battlefield, the extreme distances covered, and the rapid operational tempo all made it nearly impossible for any centralized intelligence source to provide timely and actionable intelligence to units in the attack. OIF revealed a gap in our tactical intelligence collection capability and pointed out the need for a tiered, decentralized, organic collections capability at the division, regiment, and battalion levels. The light armored reconnaissance and tank battalions were the most productive tactical intelligence collection capabilities the division had as they continued to move out and draw fire. On a high-tempo battlefield, the highly centralized theater intelligence architecture proved too slow and cumbersome to be tactically relevant. OIF clearly demonstrated a requirement for the Marine Corps to procure a scalable family of tactical intelligence collection technologies, both ground and air. The strength of the intelligence network should be in the distributed nodes, and creating a toolkit of intelligence collection capabilities at each node is crucial to energizing the entire system.

Challenges with the advanced tactical airborne reconnaissance system (ATARS) capability. The crews and exploiters did a fantastic job with the ATARS, but the promise of this relatively new capability in support of the GCE was never fully realized due to a number of issues with platform availability, data connectivity, and exploitation constraints. Technical limitations complicated rapid receipt, exploitation, and dissemination of intelligence products based on ATARS imagery. Building a decentralized requirements management and exploitation capability that adequately conveys the GCE's imagery requirements through the process remains a challenge.

Ensuring access to the intelligence architecture without information inundation. The Marine Corps ethos of thriving on decentralized execution of a commander's intent demands an intelligence organization that has the ability to personalize the battlefield for farflung commanders. During OIF all echelons received and passed on an overwhelming number of information reports and had access to thousands of others. At no level of the organization did we do a very good job of filtering out the chaff to provide only the fused products and timely and relevant raw information required by decentralized tactical users. One of the true ironies of the intelligence profession is that the lower the level of the commander, the higher the resolution of the intelligence products he requires. Yet, the lowest echelon S-2 is least capable of accessing the intelligence architecture. Solving this information management challenge would be a watershed event as it would further open the doors for responsive intelligence support to many of the Marine Corps' emerging doctrinal concepts, most of which are premised on long-range, decentralized operations.

Summary

Our current intelligence systems across the board are effective against fixed facilities and organized enemy forces waging a well-ordered conventional fight. It is likely that very few of our future enemies will present such a surface for us to bring our force to bear upon. Paramilitary fighters, ill-defined enemy motivations, chaotic urban environments, and a strong civil-military component to operations will likely aggravate some of the shortfalls noted above in future conflicts.

In spite of these challenges, the 1st MarDiv's intelligence operations were a success thanks to the dedicated efforts of a large number of supporting organizations and Marine intelligence professionals at all levels. The results achieved are a tribute to those professionals who have made revolutionary improvements in

our intelligence capabilities over the last decade. Continuing evolutionary improvements are possible, and solutions to most of the issues presented (technical and nontechnical) are already underway. Increasing access to the intelligence architecture for our lowest echelon consumers is the logical next step, and equipping battalion S-2s with the tools needed to support the decentralized tactical fight is one of the most important challenges that remains for Marine intelligence professionals.

1st Marine Division and Operation IRAQI FREEDOM

by Lieutenant Colonel Clarke R. Lethin

Marine Corps Gazette, February 2004.

'No better friend, no worse enemy': planning, speed, and intent within the 1st Marine Division.

On the evening of 20 March 2003, months, days, and hours of planning and preparation for combat against enemy forces in Iraq were put to the test. The combat phase of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM lasted approximately 28 days and ended in the seizure of eastern Baghdad, Tikrit, the destruction of regular Iraqi divisions, Republican Guard divisions, and countless fedayeen and foreign thugs within the 1st Marine Division's (1st MarDiv's) zone. The operations by I Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF) have been well-documented by the media, soon to be released after-action reports, and unit command chronologies. The focus of this article will be on three critical concepts developed and used by the division.

Even though we were hugely successful against the enemy, that success was paid for in the lives and injuries of brave Marines and sailors who served or supported the division's operations; this should not be forgotten.

There are volumes of lessons learned from the conduct of operations for the division and how we chose to fight. There is no way to cover them all in this article, so I will discuss three areas: how we planned (in preparation for and during combat operations), how we used speed as a metric, and the value of commander's intent. Although these issues seem fundamental, it is brilliance in the basics that is the foundation of all great teams.

Planning

In the summer of 2002 there were sufficient indications that the United States would commit forces to remove the Iraqi regime. I MEF was the Marine Corps' operational command for Marine forces under operational control to Coalition Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC). The division was the primary ground combat element for I MEF throughout planning and execution of operations in Iraq. The Marine Corps Planning Process (MCPP) works. If you don't know it now, learn it. If you think you know it, keep learning because you haven't mastered it until you've been in combat, and even then you keep learning. From the I MEF led operational planning teams (OPTs), to division OPTs, to the regiments and separate battalions, planning was continuous until we crossed the line of departure (LD). The plan was continually refined, scrapped, rewritten, published, changed–in

other words, we planned early and planned often. The commencement of combat operations did not negate the value and requirement to continue to plan. We were planning current and future operations during combat. The shared situational awareness gained from prior planning was invaluable.

What is important is that we must all understand the doctrine and process of MCPP. MCPP places everyone on the same playing field, providing a common point of departure and set of procedures. The process can be modified and adapted as circumstances and time allow. The other tool required during planning is the ability to conduct rapid planning, much like the rapid response planning process (R^2P^2). MCPP and R^2P^2 are complementary and were extremely valuable during combat operations when speed was essential to getting the next fragmentary order (FragO) to subordinate units. The division's "opening gambit" plan was a thorough plan that changed hours before crossing the LD due to a fluid friendly situation and the assessment of enemy intelligence. Remember, the guy across the LD has a mind of his own. During the division's attack north to Baghdad, our OPT published no fewer than 30 FragsOs that included changing main efforts, reorganizing the assault units, changing directions, and conducting operations on urbanized terrain. These FragOs were issued with as near a seamless transition between planners and operators as you could find on that chaotic battlefield.

How was this done? Experienced planners, trained and tested at Camp Pendleton, Twentynine Palms, and Kuwait, all understood many months prior to crossing the LD that any day could be their last before combat, and we had to make the most of every day. The division assumed back in August 2002 that every week was our last week at peace.

Speed

The second area to discuss is speed as a metric. Most of us think of speed in operations as how fast we can get from point A to point B. That's only one measure. For the division, speed was a culture. Speed means more than just physical speed; it's a way of thinking–the mental gymnastics we have to do to solve a problem quickly and efficiently. Our team had the physical capacity for speed. One of our guiding tenets was that every Marine had to be mobile and have a seat. An operational design that relied on shattering the enemy's will to fight by cutting him off from his logistics and command and control required division units to move everyone and everything at the same time. When enemy intelligence indicated the Iraqis were destroying oil infrastructure in the Rumaylah oilfields, Regimental Combat Team 5 was able to attack from a standing start within 5 hours of notification–a dawn attack modified into a night attack.

With physical speed we also needed the means to communicate and to deliver devastating fires on the enemy. Our speed of communications was obtained by using the newly fielded SMART-T (secure mobile antijam reliable tactical terminal), high-frequency radios, AN/PSC-5, Iridium phones, blue force tracker, messengers, carrier pigeons–you name it, we used it. Speed of fires was delivered by the full integration of artillery units in our maneuver forces and a dogged determination by the artillery to get forward to support the assault units. Additionally, the speed of aviation fires was delivered day and night under some of the harshest conditions by our brother aviators. An example of this is the night 3d Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion (3d LAR) pushed over 100 miles up Route 1 and triggered an enemy ambush. When "sling shot" (code word for overwhelming enemy attack) was heard over the airwaves, 3d Marine Aircraft Wing responded immediately, reprioritized and built a close air support stack over 3d LAR, and ensured the complete destruction of the enemy unit. Our ability to think and move rapidly, from the youngest private first class assaulting that last 100 yards to our senior commanders and planners, was extraordinary.

My observations center on how the division's main and forward combat operations centers (COCs) functioned. From setup to breakdown of the COC, every Marine knew that rapid transfer of control was critical to maintaining momentum of the division. Within the COC, information flow and the simple axiom was applied:

- What do I know?
- Who needs to know?
- Have I told them?

Speed and accuracy of passing information in a chaotic atmosphere such as a COC is challenging. It was fully understood that to have speed of thought and action there could be no egos and that teamwork, not individuals, would make for rapid action.

The social energy to continue to connect the dots, keep people motivated, and make rapid and concise decisions is not easily taught and can only be earned, never demanded.

Commander's Intent

> We will swiftly *secure key oil nodes* allowing the least possible opportunity for their destruction. We will shatter enemy forces south of the Euphrates, west of the Shatt al Basrah and east of An Nasiriyah, opening the MSR [main supply route] and gaining positions north of the river to facilitate operations in the vicinity of Al Kut via Routes 1, 7 or 6 as the situation dictates. In order to achieve tactical surprise, we will first blind enemy reconnaissance, then close on the border. We will be prepared to accept enemy capitulation, but *destroy the 51st Mech Division* and its adjacent/supporting units if they fight. To the greatest extent possible, we will limit enemy or friendly damage to the oil infrastructure.
>
> We must negate enemy artillery through shaping, preparatory, or responsive counter fires. I expect *maximum use of air fires*; assault support will be used if rapid linkup is achievable. *Speed is the measure*: speed coupled with harmony of information flow; rapidity in decision making; orders promulgation; counter fire; response to changing conditions; re-supply; CAS-EVAC [casualty evacuation]; identification of multiple routes; obstacle reduction; maneuver; relief in place; and hand off of EPWs [enemy prisoners of war]. We will avoid all possible FPOL [forward passage of lines] and any other mingling of forces, and whenever possible create conditions of chaos for our enemies. *Aggressive tempo* and initiative are vital. Once we have seized the nodes, we will rapidly hand over the zone and EPWs to 1st UK Div and reposition north of Jalibah. Crossing the Euphrates and moving against Al Kut, 1st MarDiv supports 3ID's [3d Infantry Division's] attack along our western flank, denying the enemy opportunity to mass against CFLCC's main effort.

The last point is commander's intent. How many times have we seen commander's intent developed by the staff, lethargically reviewed by the commander, and then delivered in a briefing without the least bit of emotion? The division fought by commander's intent–a statement of intent that reflected the commander's personality, intuition, sense of purpose, and then delivered to every Marine and sailor in the division. Prior to crossing the LD there were a thousand issues the commander needed to address. One issue that was never compromised was the commander taking the time to speak with every unit and deliver his intent.

Initially our aim point was in the vicinity of Al Kut, over 200 miles from the Kuwait border. That aim point changed approximately 200 miles from Baghdad with the intent to split the enemy's defenses and drive rapidly to the outskirts of Baghdad. What made this possible was the unequivocal understanding by the division staff and commanders of what the commander wanted. Every sentence and word in the commander's intent carried weight. What was highlighted *included, "... secure key oil nodes ... destroy the 51st Mech Division ... maximum use of air fires ... speed is the measure ... aggressive tempo."* The initial intent carried the division through the opening gambit, past An Nasiriyah, and up Routes 1 and 7 toward Baghdad. Subsequent commander's intent was given to the OPT to be included in FragOs or personally delivered to the subordinate commanders. Equally important to the commander giving the intent was the division staff fully understanding the intent. This can only be accomplished by the social energy and the force of will by commanders and staff to get it right and carry the message, because success depends on it. Our mutual experiences from boot camp, Officer Candidates School, career-level school, training exercises, and shared hardships in combat give all of us the capacity to understand each other like no other profession. When out of communications with the commander, the subordinate commanders knew what to do. The commander's intent is the glue that holds us together and ensures we can achieve objectives beyond expectations.

In the past 2 years our Marine Corps has been actively involved in the operations in Afghanistan, the Horn of Africa, and Iraq. Having been involved in Afghanistan and Iraq, I see the strengths of our operations as our ability to plan, our willingness to move swiftly where others wouldn't, and the quality of our leaders to give us clear and concise guidance. Our successes have come from shared experiences and a determination to get it right with the lowest possible butcher's bill. It's not easy. It takes education, experience, sacrifice, but when it is time to stand and deliver a victory at the least cost, the Corps can be counted on.

Logistics Support to 1st Marine Division During Operation IRAQI FREEDOM

by Lieutenant Colonel John J. Broadmeadow

Marine Corps Gazette, August 2003.

The good, the bad, and the ugly of logistics support during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM.

Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF) provided an opportunity for I Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF) and the 1st Marine Division (1st MarDiv) to again demonstrate the strength and flexibility of the Marine air-ground team in many areas, including logistics. The unprecedented distances over which the 1st MarDiv fought, and the speed with which it traveled, placed a considerable burden on logistics and fostered several innovative changes to doctrinal concepts of support. From early planning efforts, the division scheme of maneuver was based on the concept that speed equals success. Supporting a rapid speed of advance became the metric that guided all of the division G-4s' (logistics officers') preparations for combat.

Creating a light but fully supportive logistics infrastructure was key to enabling speed. The effort started internally with a restructuring of the division's G-4 section. Prior to the war the logistics operations center (LOC) was manned with more than 120 Marines and sailors, occupied several tents, and required several trucks to move. Additionally, it was physically and functionally separated from the combat operations center (COC). During predeployment preparations–with the goal of reducing staff size in the division main and forward command posts (CPs) and fully integrating with the COC–the LOC was reduced to 26 Marines primarily focused on current logistics operations and movement control but also conversant in all logistics specialties. Finally, the LOC was moved into a tent with immediate access to the COC, and the G-4 watch officer sat immediately behind the G-3's senior watch officer. As a result, logistics was fully integrated with current operations. The LOC was able to maintain complete situational awareness of division operations and provide timely advice for key decisions.

The remaining logistics functional areas set up shop in the division support area (DSA) collocated with the headquarters in Camp Commando, Kuwait. By locating the bulk of the G-4 in the DSA and using reachback techniques, movement and life support requirements were greatly decreased, and the logistics functions of supply, ammunition, maintenance management, food service, mobility, and embarkation provided a stable interface with the division LOC, MEF G-4, force service support group (FSSG) main, and the Marine Logistics Command (MLC). This interface proved its worth as the forward and main CPs continually leapfrogged, focusing on the division's attack while the DSA provided continuity of effort for long-term, critical logistics actions.

With foresight and innovativeness, 1st FSSG developed an agile, capable, and wholly unique combat service support (CSS) structure to interface with the division and I MEF. This structure did more than support our high-tempo operations. It made the regimental combat team (RCT) S-4s the linchpins of logistics for the division, providing the interface between their subordinate battalions and the CSS companies (CSSCs) in direct support of each RCT. Resupplied by general support CSS Battalion 10 (CSSB-10), CSSCs worked hand in glove with the RCT S-4 for sustainment and traveled directly in trace of the RCT's logistics trains. Additionally, CSSB-10 provided support directly to 11th Marines and separate battalions not integrated into an RCT. CSS Group 11 (CSSG-11) directed the efforts of the CSSCs and CSSB-10 and provided a critical link between division and the FSSGs and MLC sources of supply. Within this framework, division had the first fully embedded CSS capability in recent history.

Aside from organizational changes, the division's logisticians also enabled speed with several planning and equipment innovations. Enhancing the generic "days of supply" planning factors from doctrinal planning publications, G-4 plans developed metrics to measure a unit's tactical objectives against potential logistics cul-

minating points and determine the optimal locations for resupply points. The culminating point analysis graphically depicted where the division would require an operational pause to refuel and helped determine material and functional solutions to push off the pause. This analysis, combined with strength and flexibility afforded by the close ties with CSSG-11, paid dividends when actual fuel consumption was significantly higher than planned. Locations for rapid replenishment points were adjusted on the fly to support the division's continuing attack. Working in close coordination with I MEF and Marine Corps Systems Command, the division obtained flexcells for M1A1 tanks, fast fuel storage devices for assault amphibious vehicles (AAVs), and inexpensive "gypsy racks" that could attach to HMMWVs to augment fuel capabilities and extend the time and distance that the division could fight before refueling.

The desire to maintain the light footprint needed for speed led to a fanatical approach toward conservation and reduction. The living standard for the division was set at the 0311 lance corporal level for all hands. Across the division, comfort items were omitted to make lift available. Omitting one item in particular–cots–meant that all Marines would sleep on the deck, but also that the equivalent of eight medium-lift tactical vehicles would be freed up to meet the more pressing need. Fuel test kits were procured from the Defense Reutilization and Marketing Office, and Marines in every battalion were trained in their use so that captured fuel sources could be tested and exploited, reducing the requirement to line haul fuel. A strict equipment list was published, and any gear not on it stayed in seabags locked away in the DSA. Many other initiatives, from a prohibition on excessive idling of vehicles to a requirement to consume 100 percent of issued meals, ready-to-eat drove home the point that we were on a logistics light diet necessary to sustain the speed and momentum of our attack.

Innovative methods of preparing supplies for rapid shipment were also developed. The division ammunition officer working with the MEF, FSSG, and subordinate units created standard ammunition packages that had preestablished stocks and were prebuilt in the ammunition storage points waiting to be called forward. When 11th Marines needed more ammunition in support of long-range fires, they ordered a "longball" package, and the FSSG sent forward the rounds, powders, and fuses needed to support a deep fight.

The division worked in concert with the MEF and FSSG to create and manage a movement control system that effectively coordinated thousands of vehicles delivering supplies, personnel, and equipment throughout a large and diverse battlespace. The division unit movement control center (UMCC) operating in the division main gathered and prioritized all movement requirements in and out of the division's zone. Working in complete synchronization with the UMCC forward, the DSA represented the division's requirements at the MEF's force transportation board to apply scarce resources against our most critical requirements.

Starting early in the planning efforts and continuing throughout the war, close ties were developed between the division G-4 and Marine Wing Support Group 37. Planners from both organizations worked to integrate forward arming and refueling point (FARP) packages into the tactical columns of the RCTs, positioning FARPs well forward and extending the reach of the assault support assets that provided invaluable support during combat operations. When the 3d Marine Aircraft Wing started flying fuel into the Hantush Highway Strip with KC-130s, it directly and meaningfully contributed to the division's ability to continue its attack up Highway 27 and Highway 6 on the way to Baghdad.

While the division enjoyed many historical logistics successes, not all aspects worked as planned or even worked well. The supply support system was inadequate most times and a total failure at its worst. OIF has shown that there is no such thing as a unified Marine Corps supply system. As units from throughout the Marine Corps came together, it was immediately apparent that no standard method of requesting or conducting resupply exists. In computer systems alone there are multiple, incompatible systems; I MEF uses supported activities supply system and Asset tracking logistics and supply system (ATLASS I); II MEF uses ATLASS II; Blount Island Command uses a commercial supply system for maritime prepositioning force equipment. The field warehouse system used by MLC at the start of the operation had to be scrapped because of its inability to perform. It was only through the dedication and hard work of many Marines at the MLC that parts could be sorted and sent on to division units. The supply system architecture planned for use during OIF was a "workaround" combination of systems and methods. The workaround never permitted visibility at the battal-

ion or division level of a requisition from inception to receipt. Problems were directly attributable to the incompatibility of these systems, lack of training in their use, lack of a standard method of passing supply requisitions from MEF units through an MLC, and lack of a dedicated logistics communications architecture.

In general, the supply officers were not familiar with the system. Although they were familiar with using ATLASS to induct requisitions, they did not understand how their requisitions were being handled by the supporting CSSBs through the MLC. Also, an absence of any type of local area network connectivity at the battalion level meant that battalion supply officers had no automated means to pass requisitions and get the feedback data necessary for management reports. The amount of offline requests on "yellow canaries" far outnumbered those that were sent by automated processes.

Compounding the problem further, none of these systems provide any interface with an intransit visibility system at either the operational or tactical level. Although many convoys were put on the road, their contents and location remained a mystery to division supply officers eagerly awaiting their supplies. As a result, many lost faith in the processes established, started using workarounds, and gave up on any type of established supply management. This is an area ripe for improvements and hopefully will be the subject of many professional discussions in future *Gazette* articles.

Despite these problems, the teamwork and cooperation engendered between all elements of I MEF and the MLC, along with the innovative tenacity of our Marines, made logistics support for 1st MarDiv a success. The division traveled and fought over unprecedented distances. Some AAVs logged more than 1,000 miles, and almost all light armored vehicles logged even more. Its speed of advance left tenuous, undefended lines of communications in its wake. Yet, throughout the entire course of the campaign, the division was always able to press forward and continue its attack.

Aviation Integration in Operation IRAQ FREEDOM I: A Division Air Officer's Perspective

by Lieutenant Colonel Patrick A. Gramugulia and Major Richard L. Phillips

Marine Corps Gazette, May 2004.

The flexibility and responsiveness of Marine aviation was a major contributor to 1st Marine Division's success in OIF. An analysis of the employment of aviation assets in support of the division provides many lessons learned.

1st Marine Division's (1st MarDiv's) accomplishments during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF) were exceptional. The division's success in its march to Baghdad can be attributed in large part to innovative employment of, and extensive integration with, Marine aviation. As MajGen James N. Mattis, the division commander, stated, "This is the most air-centric division in the history of warfare." This approach was an overwhelming success, and there are numerous lessons to be learned regarding the employment of aviation and its integrated support of ground maneuver forces.

While we should take pride in the Marine Corps' unique capability to integrate air and ground forces, we must continue to strive for improvement. As we analyze our performance in OIF we must capitalize on and continue our successful innovations–and learn from our mistakes. In this article we will discuss issues involving command, control, communications, staffing, equipment, and tactics. We will highlight successes and suggest ways in which we can improve.

Command

Commander's intent. One of the main contributors to 1st MarDiv's overall success was the universal knowledge and understanding of the commander's intent. MajGen Mattis personally conveyed his intent to all subordinate units and down to all ranks. He ensured that his vision, scheme of maneuver, and end state were clearly and completely understood by all Marines within the 1st MarDiv and those supporting it–including supporting elements of the aviation combat element.

As a manifestation of this understanding of intent, the 1st MarDiv conducted numerous rehearsals of concept drills and fires walk-through briefs. All major aviation players and all aircrew participating in the first day of the operation attended this thorough walk-through of the first day's scheme of maneuver and fire support plan. While this is not unusual, it displayed and

strengthened the intrinsic link between the ground combat element (GCE) and the aviators who supported it. All aviators involved in day one's events had an intuitive understanding of the scheme of maneuver and intent. This enabled them to continue the division's deep fight when communications became difficult and the scheme of maneuver changed. As the Marine Corps moves toward joint concepts, operations, and acquisitions we must never forget the unique benefits provided by our organic aviation and the power of the Marine Corps' philosophy, organization, and training in this regard.

Division combat operations center (COC). The large battlespace of OIF provided a perfect venue for the employment of aviation. We had a tremendous number of aviation assets available for support, but our ability to command and control (C^2) these assets needs to evolve.

The air portion of a division COC usually consists of an air officer (AO) who is part of the fire support coordination center. This individual is responsible for the planning, coordination, and tracking of aviation employment across the division's battlespace. In our case the large number of organic and joint air assets (including numerous intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance platforms), along with recent improvement in joint connectivity, resulted in the division COC receiving continuous and often overwhelming targeting and reconnaissance information. The division air department was not staffed to handle this volume of information and coordination responsibility.

The AO would receive about 20 yellow notes with target tracks about every 5 to 10 minutes. These tracks were deep in the battlespace and needed to be engaged or reconnoitered by aviation assets. The AO would collect, evaluate, deconflict, and prioritize these requirements and then pass them to the direct air support center (DASC) for assignment to aviation assets. At times the AO would be simultaneously involved in close operations that delayed the handling of the deep tracks. Because there were not sufficient personnel to handle these tracks, the associated air tasking was often redundantly executed or not executed at all.

On many occasions aircraft would see targets in the deep area of the battlespace, but they would be unable to engage them due to a lack of (1) information on the surrounding situation on the ground, (2) personnel to provide a "cleared hot," or (3) a communications path to work these deep area targets. The AO would attempt to facilitate the prosecution of these targets from the COC using Type III controls, but he lacked sufficient information about the target area.

The situation described above is clearly inefficient, and it carries the potential for dangerous target engagement errors. A solution would be the establishment of a deep battle air cell within the division COC. This cell would consist of the target information officer and a deep AO with a radio and a deep air coordination frequency. This cell would be located near–and linked with–the intelligence cell and the DASC. It would be able to take all deep battle inputs–both internal and external to the division–and evaluate them within the context of the scheme of maneuver, restricted target list, and friendly positions and control the aviation assets tasked with deep battle missions. This would reduce accidental, redundant tasking of air assets. This would also enhance continuity with the intelligence picture as these deep air cell personnel would track pilot reports and battle damage assessments (BDAs). Most importantly, this cell would have enough information on friendly positions and target area awareness to permit control of Type III close air support (CAS) missions from their position. This would enhance our ability to bring the fight to the enemy and to engage enemy units prior to their contact with friendly ground units.

Control

Aviation assets in direct support. The Marine Corps does not usually employ aviation assets in a direct support (DS) role. This employment method, however, became absolutely critical during the 1st MarDiv's movement to, and operations in, Baghdad. Long distances and severe weather conditions resulted in delays of up to 3 days for assault support request missions to be flown. This caused a backlog within the wing and division and did not support operations on a fluid battlefield.

As a result, DS assets were assigned. The wing sent sections of CH-46Es and UH-1Ns to the division for assault support, C^2, and reconnaissance. These assets became a true force multiplier. Often the same assets supported reconnaissance, C^2, CAS, and assault support missions in the same day. Though DS is not

the preferred or doctrinal (or most efficient) method of aviation employment, its use in OIF demonstrated the incredible flexibility of the Marine air-ground task force (MAGTF) to adapt to changing battlefield conditions.

Two aspects were essential to the successful use of DS assets. First, the regimental logistics trains had forward arming and refueling points (FARPs) embedded. These Marine wing support squadron assets provided flexible expeditionary bases that were able to keep up with the rapid scheme of maneuver and support forward deployed aviation assets that were operating on a fluid battlefield up to 500 miles from their home base.

Second, the maturity of the aviators who operated DS assets was critical. Requests for air support could be overwhelming, creating the potential for a pilot in command to make a decision to execute a mission whose risks outweighed the potential benefits. During combat the theme of air requests from operational ground units is "more," but fortunately, the aircrews who supported 1st MarDiv exhibited professionalism and maturity in balancing necessity and risk.

Some maneuver units also had DS casualty evacuation (CasEvac) assets attached to them. The theoretical concept of employment was that these aircraft would pick up casualties in forward areas and bring them back to a safe landing zone where theater-level assets would transport them to an appropriate facility. In reality, we relied almost exclusively on our Marine CasEvac assets for the majority of our CasEvac requirements. The relationship that developed between the DS aircrew and the supported Marines became very close. On numerous occasions, their proximity and existing bond provided a response time and dedication to mission accomplishment that was unmatched and saved lives. As Marine aviation continues its transformation in aircraft platforms, we should not forget the criticality of the CasEvac capability and mission.

Fire support coordination measures (FSCMs). Theater aviation control measures were similar to the Kuwait integrated CAS (KICAS) concept of operations. This approach subdivided the battlespace into square grids–or kill boxes–aligned with lines of latitude and longitude. Each box was further broken down into nine "keypads." This KICAS method enabled seamless employment of any aviation asset anywhere on the battlefield. Our current doctrinal control measures do not provide this flexibility. We were, however, able to use some doctrinal ground control measures within this existing framework.

The flexibility of the KICAS control measures matches the speed and tempo with which the Marine Corps now operates. We should continue to employ these measures, and we must train with them! Many forward air controllers (FACs) learned this KICAS system in the weeks immediately preceding combat operations, which was not the optimum training method. These measures, if they are to be used in the future, should be employed at schools and exercises such as Combined Arms Exercises and the weapons and tactics instructor course.

Air tasking order (ATO). We found the ATO to be unusable due to the rapid pace and large distances covered during our operations. The 96-hour planning cycle of the ATO was unresponsive to the ever-changing scheme of maneuver and rapid battle rhythm; the ATO was obsolete by the time it was to be executed. As a result, the wing simply placed the majority of assets on alert or assigned them to CAS stacks, and air was requested in realtime when it was needed. FACs and AOs were not able to anticipate their requirements for air 3 days ahead or to submit target requests to a targeting board. The ATO cycle, which works best in a fixed target/"air war" environment, needs to be adjusted to better support a fast-paced, moving target style of ground warfare.

We encountered problems when FACs did not have the special instructions (SPINS). Often we were unable to get the SPINS to our FACs due to our communications architecture and the actual size of the document. Though communications systems are partly responsible for this failure, we also did not train sufficiently in using SPINS as this would have highlighted the need for effective methods to transmit SPINS to FACs in forward units. One reason for this training deficiency was that our training flights conducted prior to Iraq were not conducted using an ATO, as only flights in support of Operation SOUTHERN WATCH were allowed on the ATO. In future conflicts we need to put training flights on an ATO to train both ground

and air personnel. We also need to continue to develop communications paths with sufficient bandwidth to allow transmission of vital information to the tactical units that need it.

BDA tracking was also a challenge during our operations. There were numerous instances in which a condition for initiating a certain ground mission was the engagement of specific targets by aviation assets. There was no defined mechanism to confirm that a target was on the ATO, so we were unable to find out if a mission was run against a certain target, much less the BDA from that mission. We did develop an interim solution: the planners put target designators in the remarks column of the ATO, but this method was prone to error. We need to pursue a simple method of getting this pertinent mission data to tactical-level troops to avoid delaying combat actions.

Communications

Division air communications: a tactical air control party net. Battalion and regimental AOs have communications nets that connect an AO at the command post to his FACs in the field. No such communications path exists for the division air department. On numerous occasions key information could not be passed due to lack of formal communications paths between the division and regimental or battalion air departments, especially during movements. A communications path–either voice or digital–would have proved beneficial during this operation.

DASC. The DASC is the GCE's direct, and oftentimes only, link to its aviation assets. The senior air director's (SAD's) primary function is to control aircraft in direct support of the GCE scheme of maneuver. This single function demands all of the attention of the SAD under any circumstances, and it is even more challenging during an intense combat operation. A key part of the DASC's job is to maintain awareness of the current situation, scheme of maneuver, and commander's intent. The situational awareness (SA) within the DASC is often highest because of its direct contact with aircraft that have line of sight communications with many units. This results, however, in a constant flow of people and requests for information flowing into the DASC. This task of maintaining SA can directly compete with the SAD's primary duty of controlling airplanes.

The DASC and, more importantly, the SAD need to be free to concentrate on their primary duties. To facilitate this we designated a runner between the division COC and the DASC. This individual's responsibility was to push information to the decision makers in the COC, which aided in their prosecution of the current fight. This Marine also stayed abreast of the constantly changing situation and updated the DASC situation boards, enabling the SAD to focus on his primary job.

One element of the DASC that proved invaluable was the air support operations center (ASOC) liaison officer. The ASOC is the U.S. Army/U.S. Air Force version of the DASC, and this liaison was our direct link for deconfliction issues that arose in the tight battlespace just south of Baghdad. We were able to prosecute targets that affected us but were not in our battlespace by coordinating with the ASOC liaison. Our DASC runner coordinated closely with the ASOC liaison, allowing us to procure numerous air sorties that were not needed by our adjacent Army units (including A-10 and B-52 sorties vital to the division's attack). This liaison officer also gave us a link to numerous intelligence assets that had overlapping coverage of our area. This link provided warnings of enemy activity on our flanks, enabling us to act preemptively.

DASC (Airborne) (DASC(A)). The DASC(A) is still the most vital link between the ground units and their aviation support. On numerous occasions it was the only link through which forward units could get information or fire support. We relied heavily on forward deployed aviation assets located at FARPs, and often the only way to launch these assets was through the DASC(A). The SA of the entire division went up when the DASC(A) was airborne. The current module used to perform this function is the UYC-3, which is a technologically outdated system. The next generation of the DASC(A) should have more radios, satellite communications, video capability, and a theater battle management core system and advanced field artillery tactical data system capability.

Chat. We used secret Internet protocol router network chat rooms extensively throughout the operation. At times this was our only communications path to certain units, especially those located on ships.

Chat is a great method of secure immediate communications with units across the entire battlespace. We need to continue to develop this capability by deploying it with as many units as possible. Chat rooms should be assigned doctrinal names and users so they can be listed in the automated communications electronic operating instructions.

Blue force tracker (BFT). This system holds great potential for communications. Although the system is currently not secure, it would be of great benefit if it were available in the DASC, tactical air command center, FARPs, and squadron ready rooms to display current unit positions. The system's greatest strengths are beyond line of sight capability and high reliability. Immediate request and assets launch instructions could be sent using its text messaging capability.

Communications training. We often received text messages prior to getting voice reports from units located far from our COC. On many occasions these messages included calls for fires or some other type of time-sensitive request. When we received these text messages (usually via BFT) we would immediately try to contact the unit through a voice communications path. As we continue to transform our communications capability and the speed with which we execute operations, we need to train to make decisions and act based on information that we receive from all sources, even those that come to us in the form of an e-mail or text message.

Multichannel secure communications between ground units and aircraft needs to be improved. Throughout our operation most communications between ground units and aircraft occurred over a clear (nonsecure) single-channel frequency. All players involved have the correct equipment to use secure frequency-hopping communications–we just have to train to this standard.

One issue that requires attention is the limitations created by the small, fixed set of net identification (ID) loaded in the radios of forward deployed ground units and aircraft. On numerous occasions aircraft arrived on station with their radios loaded with the net IDs of the units that they originally were supposed to support, but the situation had changed and they were now supporting another unit. In these cases, secure multichannel communications was not possible because neither user could change the information in their radios.

FAC Staffing and Equipment

FACs. The division received more than 16 augment FACs to support its aviation-centric battle plan. The intent was to provide every maneuver unit with the ability to plan and employ aviation, and although not all of these FACs received a tremendous amount of work, they provided their commanders significant additional flexibility. Normally, a commander must decide where to assign his FACs, and they must often be moved between units in the middle of operations. Because this operation was not linear, it was difficult to predict when and where a unit was going to need aviation support. Having this aviation knowledge and control capability with every unit was a true force multiplier.

An unintended but important benefit resulted from the high experience level of these augment FACs, as most were majors or lieutenant colonels with previous FAC tour experience, and many had combat experience. This experience level provided unit commanders with additional MAGTF expertise throughout the operation. This extra experience also proved beneficial during the civil-military portion of the operation where many of these individuals were used as liaison officers with the village government and in staff billets to replace personnel lost due to combat or individual rotation.

Equipment. In order for the division to carry out its aviation-centric plan, it required new target location and designation equipment. The division's original laser pointers and designators were cumbersome, unreliable, and incompatible with many aviation assets. Equipment was not standardized across the division leading to slight differences in procedures.

Prior to deploying, the 1st MarDiv set out to update equipment for various capabilities, including laser rangefinding and infrared (IR) pointing. Urgent universal need statements were submitted through division G-7 in an effort to provide a new "FAC suite" prior to crossing the line of departure. IR pointers and ground laser target designators arrived just prior to combat operations and proved tremendously beneficial, especially during the numerous bouts of bad weather in which FACs had to talk aircraft onto targets.

We must continue to improve our FAC suite. We should seek an improved IR pointer and a lighter and more reliable designator with a range comparable to the weapons for which it designates.

Tactics

Strike coordinator and reconnaissance (SCAR) managers. SCAR managers were responsible for a significant part of aviation's contribution to the division's operations. SCAR is a newer doctrinal term that includes more than just the direction of deep strikes–it can involve an airborne platform that fights the ground commander's scheme of maneuver and target priorities within his battlespace prior to the arrival of ground units. This allows a commander to engage the enemy from afar, and it can facilitate a more seamless transition to the close battle.

At times large portions of the division's battlespace (that was not yet covered by ground units) were engaged heavily by SCAR managers who used their knowledge of the ground scheme of maneuver. These assets firmly validated the SCAR doctrinal concept, and it became a mainstay of the ground commander's fire support planning. We could improve the integration of the SCAR managers by connecting them directly to the COC through a deep air support radio net (discussed earlier). This would allow SCAR managers to pass intelligence, BDA, and updates on battlefield conditions and keep them abreast of changing target priorities, friendly positions, and commander's intent.

Convoy operations. OIF was heavily dependent upon extended convoy operations, but our current tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP) and equipment are not optimized for these operations. In the initial phases of OIF we had convoys of hundreds of vehicles that stretched for miles without sufficient FACs or radios. There were instances in which more than 100 vehicles did not have a FAC, an ultrahigh-frequency (UHF) radio, or an available means of suppression. Our current FSCMs are not effective during high-speed movements due to their linear orientation and static nature. The kill box concept from the KICAS framework outlined earlier has the flexibility for convoy operations, but the division did not have sufficient familiarity with KICAS measures to use them effectively for convoy operations.

Task organization, equipment distribution, and TTP for aviation support of convoy operations need improvement. Sufficient UHF radios and personnel trained in aviation control need to be distributed throughout convoys. The route, intentions, and locations of key personnel (FACs) need to be briefed to all players in convoys. Most importantly, we need to train with all key players using convoys of realistic sizes if we are to become proficient in major combat operations conducted over extended distances.

Air counterfire managers. Counterbattery fire was the most frequent mission we coordinated in the division COC. We often received scores of missions per hour. This stressed our architecture and created confusion and backlogs. The Iraqis employed "shoot and scoot" tactics in which they fired one mortar round from the back of a truck and drove away. By the time we were able to engage with counterbattery fire, the target had displaced. (They also employed a similar tactic in Baghdad. They fired from a position near a school or mosque with the hope that we would retaliate after they had displaced, causing collateral damage.) In general, though it only took minutes for us to retaliate with counterbattery fire, it was often too late.

Because most of these counterbattery targets were clustered all within a grid square, we used an air counterfire manager. After the first two radar hits we put a FAC(A) over the target area. The FAC(A) would look for subsequent firing within the area and coordinate an appropriate supporting arm to engage the target. This tactic provided two advantages: it enabled us to keep eyes on a target, even when it was driving away, and it gave us human eyes on the target to prevent collateral damage. This air counterfire manager was a useful and effective tactic. We should evaluate and refine it.

Conclusion

Our successes in OIF validated many of the Marine Corps' bedrock concepts and principles: our expeditionary nature, our leadership focus, our flexible task organization, and our ability to quickly adapt to meet new challenges. We should be proud of the accomplishments of our Marines. We must, however, honestly critique our operations and engage in earnest discussion to facilitate improvement and evolution. As the old saying goes, "if you aren't getting better, you're getting worse."

In this article we have suggested a number of areas in which small changes could create big improvements in operational effectiveness, and we highlighted innovations and adaptations made by the 1st MarDiv and their supporting aviation units. It is our hope that these will stimulate discussion, analysis, and ultimately lead to positive changes.

The Battle of An Nasiriyah

by the Company Commanders, 1st Battalion, 2d Marines

Marine Corps Gazette, September 2003.

This article was written by the company commanders of 1/2 to document the efforts of the Marines who fought at An Nasiriyah. Eighteen Marines paid the ultimate price and 14 others were wounded in 3 hours of intense urban combat.

The battle for the bridges of An Nasiriyah was one of the most important engagements of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM and also one of the most misunderstood. Even now, newspaper and magazine reports describe the battle as an ambush. Nothing could be further from the truth. While an Army convoy was attacked after mistakenly driving through An Nasiriyah that morning, the action that followed was a deliberate attack against an enemy stronghold. The only miscalculation was in how tenaciously the enemy was expected to resist. However, the men from 1st Battalion, 2d Marines (1/2) who attacked north to seize the bridges were prepared for a fight. At the small unit level there were no expectations about capitulation or surrender. As always, the individual infantryman couldn't afford to make such reckless assumptions. What followed that day was a pitched battle in the streets of the city. On one side was a paramilitary force that had already bloodied an American unit and learned that Americans hadn't the stomach for a real fight. On the other side was a group of Marines who were determined to win despite the enemy, despite the cost.

The battle was fought in and around An Nasiriyah, a large city in southern Iraq that guarded key supply routes to the north. The battalion began its movement to contact north at 0400 (all times are local) on 23 March with tanks and a combined antiarmor team (CAAT) forming the vanguard of the column. The battalion was fatigued from driving almost nonstop from the Iraqi border 2 days before. Most Marines had not eaten or slept as the sun slowly replaced the gray dawn. In their approach north the battalion's lead element suddenly encountered machinegun fire and nearby explosions from bracketing mortars as Iraqi paramilitary forces south of the city attempted to halt the battalion's advance.

Although the enemy force had suffered some attrition from desertion, it was essentially three brigades defending in depth along a 12-kilometer stretch, south to north, centered on An Nasiriyah. The Iraqi fighters consisted of the notorious Saddam Fedayeen, Al Quds, and Republican Guard Special Forces, as well as Iraqi regular army soldiers. An assault amphibious vehicle (AAV) company reinforced the battalion, thus every rifle company was mechanized. A reserve tank company also augmented the force and was utilized in the team mech and team tank task organization. The battalion was essentially road bound due to the consistently unreliable off-road terrain in the region.

The first enemy fires were indicative of what was to come. Most of the enemy fighters were wearing civilian attire. They were employing mortars and machineguns from the roofs of mud huts in close proximity to civilians. The rules of engagement were well-understood and had been rehearsed time and again by situational training exercises, but the training and thoughtful preparation did not present a solution that a Marine could feel good about. The necessity to destroy an active enemy target could potentially exact a toll on the lingering civilian population.

Throughout the early morning, 1/2 sliced through enemy resistance along Route 7. Close air support and indirect fires were integral in providing an opportunity for added momentum to the battalion's push north. Initially, the enemy forces were not determined to defend their terrain and quickly folded under pressure from the combination of maneuver, direct fire, and supporting arms. As the battalion pressed the attack, a beleaguered Army convoy from the 507th Maintenance Company was found strewn along the road. Elements of 1/2 rescued the remnants of the convoy from enemy fire and evacuated the wounded soldiers. Eventually it was learned that the Army convoy made a wrong turn and instead of continuing up the relative safety of Route 1, drove up the enemy held Route 7. They drove deep into enemy territory–through An Nasiriyah before realiz-

ing their mistake. As the Army convoy turned around and moved south, the enemy became emboldened and began firing at the convoy, killing and capturing most of the soldiers. The enemy's success against the Army convoy bolstered their confidence for their defense of An Nasiriyah throughout the remainder of the day.

Sporadi fighting continued as 1/2 advanced to the railway bridge just a couple of kilometers south of the Euphrates River. It was just before arriving there that the tank company needed to break contact in order to replenish its dwindling fuel. With tanks refueling well to the rear, Bravo Company took the lead across the railway bridge. Soon after climbing the south side of the bridge, Bravo Company spotted several T-55 tanks and requested battalion antimechanized assets to move forward and engage the tanks. With the M1A1 tanks still refueling, the CAAT moved forward and engaged the enemy tanks, destroying at least five. An additional T-55 was killed by the Javelin team with Bravo Company and was possibly the first tank kill by a Javelin in combat.

Throughout the movement and engagement of enemy tanks, Marine aviators provided killing fires in support of the 1/2 advance. Marine pilots lived up to the high standards set by their predecessors, providing close air support to the infantry units in contact without regard for their own personal safety. Over and over the Marine fliers attacked enemy tanks, machinegun and mortar positions, and troop concentrations. Their fires were lethal and in concert with the ground scheme of maneuver. Repeatedly the pilots checked off with the 1/2 forward air controllers after running out of fuel or ordnance, or sustaining battle damage, only to quickly return and continue their impressive support.

Having destroyed the enemy tank company near the railway bridge, the battalion commander ordered the attack to continue to the north. Upon return of their tank platoon, Bravo Company, organized as Team Mech, led the attack toward the Euphrates River Bridge in the southeast corner of An Nasiriyah. The other companies followed in column carefully steering around the burning remains of a U.S. Army vehicle and smoldering Iraqi T-55 hulks before accelerating toward the city. As the companies wound through gentle turns along lush, palm-lined streets leading to the bridge, rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) were fired at the column, and machinegun fires could be seen and heard from the far side of the Euphrates River.

The Marines of 1/2 experienced soaring levels of confidence until this point. Most of the enemy fires experienced thus far were sporadic and ineffective. The surgical destruction of the enemy forces was not unlike any other combined arms drill executed over and over at Combined Arms Exercise 9-02 the previous summer. Crossing the Euphrates River into the city presented a more imminent threat to the battalion. The Marines suddenly did not feel so impervious inside the thin aluminum skin of the AAVs that were not equipped with the enhanced applique armor kits that were available to most mechanized infantry battalions in the 1st Marine Division.

The plan was a "be prepared to" mission. The battalion was supposed to defend south of the city and then possibly attack north to seize the bridges, providing a supply route through the eastern side of An Nasiriyah. As the battalion was attacking north earlier in the morning, the battalion commander was ordered to seize the bridges in order to allow other I Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF) forces to use Route 7 as an alternate route toward Baghdad. The seizure of the bridges became a higher priority than the defensive mission, and the attack continued past the planned battle positions into the city of An Nasiriyah.

Bravo Company was tasked with entering the city first, turning to the right, and bypassing the built-up area by using the vast open area to the east. The planned route would avoid the road through the city already known as "Ambush Alley." Bravo would only turn back to the west to drive toward the northern bridge and establish a support by fire position on the southern side of the bridge below the Saddam Canal. Alpha Company's mission was to follow Bravo Company and seize the Euphrates River Bridge. Charlie Company was tasked with following in trace of Bravo Company's advance and seizing the northern bridge over the Saddam Canal. Shortly after crossing the Euphrates River Bridge and heading to the east, Bravo Company came under intense fire from small arms, machineguns, and RPGs. Their progress was brought to a sudden halt as the apparently firm ground turned out to be a thick muddy bog disguised by a thin crust of hardened dirt. Vehicle after vehicle quickly became stuck in the deceiving terrain forcing Bravo Company to stop in order to recover vehicles and search for a new route. The vehicles of the forward command post that were following in trace of Bravo

Company's advance also halted due to the impassable terrain. At this point Bravo Company continued north with essentially one infantry platoon while the rest of the company stayed behind to provide security for the vehicles that were stuck in the mud bog. The pilots from Marine Light/Attack Helicopter Squadron 269 continuously provided coverage to the immobile force, and their heroic actions thwarted the enemy attacks for over 4 hours.

Moving behind Bravo Company and the forward command post across the Euphrates River Bridge, Alpha Company was executing "sagger" drills, a technique used to dodge RPGs. Not yet across the bridge, Alpha Company had already come under fire from the far side and from enemy fighters south of the bridge. Having rehearsed the attack several times, the battle positions were quickly established just prior to 1300. There was a lull in the action for a few minutes as Alpha Company Marines dismounted their AAVs and took up positions in the southern area of the city. It was extremely hard to pick out targets because there wasn't a uniformed soldier to be found. At first it just appeared to be noncombatants moving around in front of the Alpha Company Marines, but continued observation revealed other activities.

The soldiers were wearing civilian attire and moving toward weapons caches inside buildings. There were others who were moving combatants around the city and resupplying the fighters by using civilian vehicles, especially orange and white taxis and white pickup trucks. Many of the vehicles had white flags attached to them even while they were actively participating in an attack against the battalion of Marines.

While the fires directed toward the Alpha Company Marines began to increase to a deafening level, Charlie Company began passing through Alpha's position. Charlie Company pushed north through the 4 kilometers of Ambush Alley, coming under intense machinegun, small arms, and RPG fire throughout the gauntlet. Sensing that something wasn't right about the disposition of the battalion's forces, the Charlie Company commander decided to quickly seize the northern bridge to ensure the overall success of the battalion. Meanwhile, Bravo Company was split into two forces. Half of the company were engaged in a street-to-street fight, the rest were recovering wheeled and tracked vehicles from the mud, leaving the northern bridge unchallenged. Charlie Company's understanding of commander's intent and aggressiveness in an uncertain situation made the biggest difference in the battalion's victory that day, but the success came with a price.

During the final stretch through Ambush Alley, an RPG struck the flank of a Charlie Company AAV. The blow engulfed the vehicle in flames and wounded four of the Marines inside. Damaged and on fire, the AAV crew managed to drive the vehicle out of the city several hundred meters to the northern side of the Saddam Canal. Upon arriving at the far side of the Saddam Canal Bridge, Charlie Company immediately established a defensive perimeter and began engaging enemy forces with heavy machineguns and company mortars. A medical evacuation (MedEvac) was requested for the four injured Marines, but the volume of fire eliminated the possibility of using helicopters. Demonstrating bold initiative, Charlie Company Marines loaded the casualties into an AAV that promptly headed south through the hornets' nest. Under fire the entire way, the lone AAV screamed through the city and over the Euphrates River Bridge until it reached the friendly lines of 2/8 where the casualties were treated and evacuated.

The battalion Marines could feel the pressure building from a coordinated and determined enemy attack. Enemy paramilitary forces were attacking along multiple axes converging on the Marines in the city. The enemy fighters were bounding from house to house, drawing closer to the company battle positions, and increasing their volume of fires. Suddenly, the headquarters section from Team Tank crested the Euphrates River Bridge and entered Alpha Company's position. A brief conversation took place between the two company commanders, and the four tanks were quickly brought to bear against the mounting enemy attack. Throughout the position, tank crewmen and young infantry leaders coordinated the tank fires that resulted in several well-placed tank main gun rounds and extremely effective coaxial machinegun bursts. The effect was a change in the momentum in favor of the Marines. The enemy volume of fires was dramatically reduced, and the Marines became more effective in destroying enemy targets.

Things looking a little better for now, the Alpha Company Marines looked back toward the street to see a Charlie Company AAV limp into their position. It was already badly damaged, dragging its ramp, and stopped dead in the middle of the street in Alpha's most hotly contested piece of terrain. Within moments of its arrival,

the sickening white plume from an RPG was seen plunging into the flank of the vehicle, shaking it mercilessly, but leaving it intact. Seconds later another RPG dove into the open troop hatch, detonating the large ammunition stores and resulting in a devastating explosion that collapsed the weakened structure. The smoldering wreckage remained in the street yielding only three survivors. For the next 90 minutes the fight continued in the Alpha Company position as the Marines successfully defended the enemy counterattack and worked to recover a survivor buried beneath the heavy wreckage of the destroyed vehicle. Meanwhile, the tank company commander and his executive officer decided to push to the north with their two tanks to reinforce Charlie Company. With the arrival of two more AAVs into the Alpha Company perimeter came the news that Charlie Company was taking heavy casualties in their fight to the north. Five AAVs had been organized to move Charlie's dead and wounded south across the Saddam Canal Bridge. Only three vehicles made it to the Alpha Company position, and the location of the other two remained a mystery for the time being.

At approximately 1430 each of the three rifle companies was decisively engaged in nonmutually supporting positions throughout An Nasiriyah. Urban obstacles negated lateral communications between the maneuver elements. Each commander was intermittently frustrated in his attempts to coordinate with the battalion command post. Casualties were beginning to mount, and the anticipated relief by 2/8 Marines was waylaid by enemy resistance to the south.

The company defense continued north of the Saddam Canal, and Charlie Company was in a fight unlike any other. It had now been 2 hours since the decision was made to push north to seize the bridge. The original defensive perimeter was now beset with mounting casualties, continual strafing fire, and bracketing artillery. Now separated into squad-sized defensive positions, the company was valiantly fighting against an enemy force that was effectively using indirect fires and maneuvering behind protective terrain. The company fire support team, AAV platoon, and 60mm mortar section were the only means to accurately range the counterattacking enemy, and they were all sustaining heavy casualties during the battle. Adding to the dilemma was the havoc that was caused by friendly fire from an A-10 Thunderbolt aircraft that had mistaken Charlie Company for an Iraqi mechanized force. The remainder of the Marines maneuvered under continuous pressure to move the wounded to casualty collection points while rigorously defending the strategic terrain.

At 1530 a CH-46E from Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 162 began to circle the Alpha Company position searching for the smoke marking the landing zone. The pilot quickly dropped into the middle of the street, heroically exposing his aircraft to enemy fire to save the life of a fellow Marine. Upon loading the casualty, the aircraft lifted, miraculously escaping intact from the red-hot zone. With 2/8 delayed in their fight to the south, the Alpha Company commander made the decision to move north through Ambush Alley in an attempt to relieve the pressure on Charlie Company to the north. The fires were relentless along the route and the Alpha Company Marines witnessed first hand more of the destruction endured by Charlie Company. The two missing AAVs were found along the main supply route just south of the Saddam Canal Bridge. One was disabled on the east side of the road, and the other was torn open in the center of the road, churning out a thick plume of gray-black smoke.

Bravo Company and battalion forward had linked up in the center of An Nasiriyah along Ambush Alley. They gained a clear line of sight to the north and witnessed the disabled Charlie Company AAVs south of the Saddam Canal Bridge. The Bravo Company commander could see Alpha Company taking an increasingly heavy volume of fire as their vehicles screamed by in the movement to Charlie Company's position. The Bravo Company artillery forward observer immediately directed suppressive artillery fires upon the western side of Ambush Alley. These fires allowed Bravo Company and the battalion forward command post to move to the downed vehicles and recover an additional casualty.

As Alpha Company quickly crossed the bridge and entered Charlie Company's position, another pair of abandoned AAVs could be seen. A raging fire consumed one vehicle, and the other, just off the west side of the road, appeared seriously damaged. The fight was already over. Charlie Company, reinforced by the tank company headquarters section, had driven the enemy from the bridge and secured the second battalion objective through 3 hours of relentless combat. Upon Alpha Company's arrival, the Marines consolidated their combat power and began the heart-rending MedEvac process. Shortly after 1700 CH-46E helicopters evacuated more

than 30 casualties from the day's fight, and Bravo Company and the forward command post crossed the Saddam Canal Bridge into the defensive perimeter. The company commanders quickly discussed the situation with the battalion commander and were directed to push the remaining kilometer to the "T" intersection, 2 kilometers north of the Saddam Canal, to establish a defensive position for the night.

On 24 March, 2d Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion passed through An Nasiriyah along the route that was forced open the day prior. Their use of Route 7 spearheaded the I MEF attack north to Baghdad and gave satisfaction to the Marines who had fought so hard for that purpose. Over the next week the battalion and the rest of Regimental Combat Team 2 (RCT-2) continued to capture or destroy remaining regime forces, beginning the steady transition to security operations and humanitarian assistance. The victory was hard fought and won by all of the members of the RCT. Such critical actions as the aggressive urban fighting by 3/2 and 2/8, the massed artillery strike that destroyed a gathering Fedayeen force of over 2,000 fighters, the selfless and courageous flying by pilots and aircrew of 2d and 3d Marine Aircraft Wings, and the critical flow of combat service support throughout were critical in the overall victory. It became obvious that most of the enemy resistance in the city had broken. The steady flow of civilian traffic increased, and crowds of thousands of people moved through the city trying to return to their lives. Although much hard work remained, it was clear to the Iraqi people that their freedom was close at hand.

'Good Kills'

by Peter Maas

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As the war in Iraq is debated and turned into history, the emphasis will be on the role of technology–precision bombing, cruise missiles, decapitation strikes. That was what was new. But there was another side to the war, and it was the one that most of the fighting men and women in Iraq experienced, even if it wasn't what Americans watching at home saw: raw military might, humans killing humans. The Third Battalion, Fourth Marines was one of the rawest expressions of that might. Based in Twentynine Palms, Calif., it specializes in desert warfare, and its forces number about 1,500 troops, equipped during the war in Iraq with about 30 Abrams tanks and 60 armored assault vehicles, backed up with whatever artillery and aircraft were required for its missions, like 155-millimeter howitzers and Cobra gunships and fighter jets. The battalion made the ground shake, quite literally, as it rumbled north from Kuwait through Iraq, beginning its march by seizing the Basra airport, continuing on past Nasiriyah, into the desert and through a sandstorm that turned the sky red and became, at its worst moments, a hurricane of sand that rocked armored vehicles like plastic toys nudged by a child's finger. On the way to Baghdad, the battalion also fought fierce but limited battles in Afaq and Diwaniya, about 120 miles south of Baghdad, and in Al Kut, about 100 miles from the Iraqi capital.

On April 6, three days before the fall of Baghdad, the battalion arrived at the Diyala bridge, a major gateway into the southeastern sector of the city. The bridge crosses the Diyala River, which flows into the Tigris. Once across its 150-yard span, the Third Battalion would be only nine miles from the center of Baghdad. The bridge was heavily defended on the north side by both Republican Guard and irregular forces, and the battle to seize and cross it took two days. It was, in retrospect, a signal event in the war, a vivid example of the kind of brutal, up-close fighting that didn't get shown on cable TV.

The Third Battalion had a consistent strategy as it moved toward Baghdad: kill every fighter who refused to surrender. It was extremely effective. It allowed the battalion to move quickly. It minimized American casualties. But it was a strategy that came with a price, and that price was paid in blood on the far side of the Diyala bridge.

The unit's commander, Lt. Col. Bryan McCoy, had a calm bearing that never seemed to waver as he and his troops made their way through Iraq. His mood stayed the same, whether he

was in battle or drinking his morning coffee or smoking a cigar; neither the tone nor the pace of his voice strayed from its steady-as-she-goes manner. Perhaps his calm came from experience. His father was an Army officer in Vietnam, serving two combat tours there. McCoy was born into the military and has lived in it for his entire life. This wasn't the first time he fought against Iraqi soldiers; he was a company commander during the Persian Gulf war in 1991.

When I spoke to him on the southern side of the Diyala bridge soon after the battalion arrived there on the morning of April 6, he was in a serene mood. "Things are going well," he said. "Really well."

When Colonel McCoy told you that things were going well, it meant his marines were killing Iraqi fighters. That's what was happening as we exchanged pleasantries at the bridge. His armored Humvee was parked 30 yards from the bridge. If one of the Republican Guard soldiers on the other side of the bridge had wanted to shout an insult across the river, he would have been heard–were it not for the fact that Colonel McCoy's battalion was at that moment lobbing so many bullets and mortars and artillery shells across the waterway that a shout could never have been heard, and in any event the Iraqis had no time for insults before dying. The only sound was the roar of death.

"Lordy," McCoy said. "Heck of a day. Good kills."

McCoy's immediate objective was to kill or drive away enough of the forces on the north side of the river to let him move his men and equipment across. He had no doubt that he would succeed. He was sitting in the front seat of his Humvee, with an encrypted radio phone to his left ear. He had the sort of done-it-again pride in his voice that you hear from a business executive who is kicking back at the clubhouse as he tells you he beat par again. Two Abrams tanks lumbered past us–vehicles that weigh 67 tons apiece do not move softly–and the earth shook, though not as much as it was shaking on the other side of the river, where American mortars were exploding, 150 yards away. The dark plumes of smoke that created a twilight effect at noon, the broken glass and crumpled metal on the road, the flak-jacketed marines crouching and firing their weapons–it was a day for connoisseurs of close combat, like the colonel.

"We're moving those tanks back a bit to take care of them over there," he explained, nodding to his right, where hit-and-run Iraqi fighters were shooting rocket-propelled grenades at his men, without success. Colonel McCoy's assessment was Marine blunt: "We're killing 'em."

He turned his attention to the radio phone, updating his regiment commander. His voice remained calm.

"Dark Side Six, Ripper Six," he said, using his call sign and his commander's. "We're killing them like it's going out of style. They keep reinforcing, these Republican Guards, and we're killing them as they show up. We're running out of ammo."

McCoy, whose marines refer to him as, simply, "the colonel," was not succumbing, in his plain talk of slaughter, to the military equivalent of exuberance, irrational or otherwise. For him, as for other officers who won the prize of front-line commands, this war was not about hearts and minds or even liberation. Those are amorphous concepts, not rock-hard missions. For Colonel McCoy and the other officers who inflicted heavy casualties on Iraqis and suffered few of their own, this war was about one thing: killing anyone who wished to take up a weapon in defense of Saddam Hussein's regime, even if they were running away. Colonel McCoy refers to it as establishing "violent supremacy."

"We're here until Saddam and his henchmen are dead," he told me at one point during his march on Baghdad. "It's over for us when the last guy who wants to fight for Saddam has flies crawling across his eyeballs. Then we go home. It's smashmouth tactics. Sherman said that war is cruelty. There's no sense in trying to refine it. The crueler it is, the sooner it's over."

When I suggested to Colonel McCoy one morning that Iraqi civilians might not appreciate the manner in which his marines tended to say hello to the locals with the barrels of their guns raised, he did not make any excuses.

"They don't have to like us," he said. "Liking has nothing to do with it. You'll never make them like you. I can't make them like me. All we can do is make them respect us and then make sure that they know we're here on their behalf. Making them like us–Yanks always want to be liked, but it doesn't always work out that way."

Though the fighting was lopsided, the marines did not get to the Diyala bridge unscathed. On April 3, three days before the battle for the bridge, the Third Battalion entered the town of Al Kut. It was an incursion intended to convey the point that, as Colonel McCoy described it, there were new "alpha males" in the country.

The attack began at dawn with an artillery barrage that had excited marines next to my vehicle. They yelled "Bam! Bam!" as each shell was fired into the air. Tanks led the way into town, and as I stayed a kilometer behind at a medic station, the sounds of battle commenced, mortars and machine-gun fire that were accompanied, as ever, by the visuals of war–smoke plumes that were an arsonist's dream.

A half-hour into the battle, a Humvee raced out of the city and stopped at the medic station. A marine, whose body was rag-doll floppy, was pulled out and put on a stretcher. A marine doctor and medics surrounded him. His clothes were stripped off and needles and monitors placed on and into his body, and the dialogue of battlefield medicine began among the team, all of whom had slung their M-16's over their backs as they tried to save their comrade's life.

"Left lower abdomen."

"He's in urgent surgical."

"Wriggle your toes for me."

"Ow, ow."

"He needs medevac, now."

"Iodine."

"My arms are numb."

"Keep talking, Evnin."

His name was Mark Evnin. He was a corporal, a sniper who was in one of the lead vehicles going into Al Kut. Iraqi fighters were waiting in ambush and had fired the first shots; one of them got him.

"Keep talking to us. Where are you from?"

"Remon," he mumbled.

"Where? Where are you from?"

"Verrrmon."

Evnin was not doing well. The battalion chaplain, Bob Grove, leaned over him, and because the chaplain knew Evnin was Jewish, he pulled out of his pocket a sheet with instructions for "emergency Jewish ministration." Grove read the Sh'ma, which begins, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God." Then he began reading the 23rd Psalm, at which point Evnin said, "Chaplain, I'm not going to die."

A Chinook landed 50 yards away. Evnin's stretcher was lifted from the asphalt and rushed to the chopper. Shortly after he was airborne, he went into shock and died.

Colonel McCoy was just a few feet from where Corporal Evnin was mortally wounded. "I saw him go down," he said afterward. "That fight lasted about nine seconds. We had about 15 human-wave guys attack the tanks. They were mowed down. They drew first blood. They got one of us, but we got all of them."

Corporal Evnin was the battalion's first K.I.A., but he was certainly not the only marine to die in Iraq. The men of the Third Battalion paid close attention to news of marine battle deaths. The day before they arrived at the Diyala bridge, a Marine tank was blown up by an explosives-laden truck that drove alongside it and was detonated by its driver. It was the realization of one of the marines' worst fears: suicide bombers.

McCoy remained focused; he told me that his mission, to kill Iraqi fighters, had not changed. "I'm not allowed to have the luxury of emotions to guide my decisions," he said. "It'll cloud my decisions, and I'll make a bad one if I submit to that. I have to look at everything very clinically." He reacted to the suicide bombing tactically: a new danger had emerged, and his troops would have to be on increased alert to the threat posed by civilian vehicles.

But the deaths of their comrades deeply affected the grunts, and when the battalion got to Diyala bridge, every man was primed to kill.

"There's an unspoken change in attitude," McCoy told me a few days before we reached the bridge. "Their blood is up."

The battle for the Diyala bridge lasted for two days. One of the bridge's main pylons had been badly damaged, and armored vehicles could not move over it. So after the first day of fighting on April 6, the battalion dug itself into the southern side for the night, giving itself time to plan an infantry assault over the span the next morning.

In the morning, the battalion released another round of heavy artillery barrages to soften up the opposition on the northern side of the river. In the fighting, two more marines were killed when an artillery shell hit their armored vehicle on the southern side of the bridge. Eventually, the battalion killed most of the Republican Guard fighters, or at least pushed them back from their dug-in positions on the northern side, and McCoy decided that it was time to try a crossing.

The men of the Third Battalion moved across the Diyala bridge "dismounted," that is, on foot. It was a tableau from Vietnam, or even World War II; grunts running and firing their weapons in front of them. This was, as McCoy described it, "blue-collar warfare."

When the marines crossed to the northern side, they found themselves in a semi-urban neighborhood of one-story shops and two-story houses, a few dozen palm trees and lots of dust. A narrow highway led away from the bridge, toward Baghdad. Immediately, they were met with incoming fire–occasional bullets and the odd rocket-propelled grenade, fired mostly from a palm grove on the eastern side of the road to Baghdad. Colonel McCoy set up his command position–basically, himself and his radioman–adjacent to a house by the bridge. Marines fanned out into the palm grove, while others moved north up the road, going house to house. Advance units set up sniper positions and machine-gun positions a few hundred yards farther up the road; beyond them, American mortars and bombs, fired by units near and behind Colonel McCoy's position, were loudly raining down.

One of Colonel McCoy's sergeants ran up to him and told him that Iraqi reinforcements had just arrived.

"A technical vehicle dropped off some [expletives] over there," he said, pointing up the road.

"Did you get it?" Colonel McCoy asked.

"Yeah."

"The [expletives]?"

"Some of them. Some ran away."

"Boys are doing good," the colonel said moments later. "Brute force is going to prevail today."

He listened to his radio.

"Suicide bombers headed for the bridge?" he said. "We'll drill them."

Then, one by one, about a half-dozen vehicles came up the road, separately, and the marines got ready to drill them.

Battle is confusion. If a military unit is well trained and well led, the confusion can be minimized, but it can never be eliminated. Split-second decisions–whether to fire or not fire, whether to go left or right, whether to seek cover behind a house or in a ditch, whether the enemy is 200 yards ahead or 400 yards ahead–these kinds of decisions are often made on the basis of fragmentary and contradictory information by men who are sleep-deprived or operating on adrenaline; by men who fear for their lives or for the lives of civilians around them or both; by men who rely on instincts they hope will keep them alive and not lead them into actions they will regret to their graves. When soldiers make their split-second decisions, they do not know the outcome.

The situation was further complicated on the north side of the Diyala bridge, because what was left of the Iraqi resistance had resorted to guerrilla tactics. The Iraqis still firing on the marines were not wearing uniforms. They would fire a few shots from a window, drop their weapons, run away as though they were civilians, then go to another location where they had hidden other weapons and fire those.

Amid the chaos of battle McCoy was, as usual, placid yet focused. Black smoke blew overhead and through the streets; hundreds of marines crept forward on their bellies or in low runs, darting, as fast as they could with their combat gear, from palm tree to palm tree or from house to house. On all sides, there was the sound of gunfire, an orchestra of sounds–the pop-pop of assault weapons, the boom-boom of heavy machine guns, the thump of mortars. Harmony was taking a day off. There would be a sudden burst of a few shots, then a crescendo in which, it seemed, every marine in the vicinity was firing his weapon at an enemy who

was, for the most part, unseen; and then it would stop, briefly.

The bulk of the fire emanated from McCoy's forces, not the Iraqis. Some marines branched farther out to the east, beyond the palm grove. Others moved forward, straight down the road, trying to "go firm" on a front line there, to establish a defensive perimeter into which Iraqi fighters could not penetrate.

The plan was for marine snipers along the road to fire warning shots several hundred yards up the road at any approaching vehicles. As the half-dozen vehicles approached, some shots were fired at the ground in front of the cars; others were fired, with great precision, at their tires or their engine blocks. Marine snipers can snipe. The warning shots were intended either to simply disable a vehicle–wrecking the engine or the tires–or to send the message that the cars should stop or turn around, or that passengers should get out and head away from the marines.

But some of the vehicles weren't fully disabled by the snipers, and they continued to move forward. When that happened, the marines riddled the vehicles with bullets until they ground to a halt. There would be no car bombs taking out members of the Third Battalion.

The vehicles, it only later became clear, were full of Iraqi civilians. These Iraqis were apparently trying to escape the American bombs that were landing behind them, farther down the road, and to escape Baghdad itself; the road they were on is a key route out of the city. The civilians probably couldn't see the marines, who were wearing camouflage fatigues and had taken up ground and rooftop positions that were intended to be difficult for approaching fighters to spot. What the civilians probably saw in front of them was an open road; no American military vehicles had yet been able to cross the disabled bridge. In the chaos, the civilians were driving toward a battalion of marines who had just lost two of their own in battle that morning and had been told that suicide bombers were heading their way.

One by one, civilians were killed. Several hundred yards from the forward marine positions, a blue minivan was fired on; three people were killed. An old man, walking with a cane on the side of the road, was shot and killed. It is unclear what he was doing there; perhaps he was confused and scared and just trying to get away from the city. Several other vehicles were fired on; over a stretch of about 600 yards nearly a half dozen vehicles were stopped by gunfire. When the firing stopped, there were nearly a dozen corpses, all but two of which had no apparent military clothing or weapons.

Two journalists who were ahead of me, farther up the road, said that a company commander told his men to hold their fire until the snipers had taken a few shots, to try to disable the vehicles without killing the passengers. "Let the snipers deal with civilian vehicles," the commander had said. But as soon as the nearest sniper fired his first warning shots, other marines apparently opened fire with M-16's or machine guns.

Two more journalists were with another group of marines along the road that was also involved in the shooting. Both journalists said that a squad leader, after the shooting stopped, shouted: "My men showed no mercy. Outstanding."

The battle lasted until the afternoon, and the battalion camped for the night on the north side of the bridge. The next morning, April 8, I walked down the road. I counted at least six vehicles that had been shot at. Most of them contained corpses or had corpses near them. The blue van, a Kia, had more than 20 bullet holes in its windshield. Two bodies were slumped over in the front seats; they were men in street clothes and had no weapons that I could see. In the back seat, a woman in a black chador had fallen to the floor; she was dead, too. There was no visible cargo in the van–no suitcases, no bombs.

Two of the van's passengers had survived the shooting; one of them, Eman Alshamnery, had been shot in the toe. She had passed out and spent the night in the vehicle. When she woke in the morning she was taken by marines for treatment by their medical team.

Alshamnery told me that her home in Baghdad had been bombed and that she was trying to flee the city with her sister, who was the dead woman I had seen in the back seat of the van. Alshamnery said she had not heard a warning shot–which doesn't mean that one wasn't fired. In fact, it would have been difficult, particularly for civilians unaccustomed to the sounds of war, to know a warning shot when they heard it, or to know where it came from, or how to react appropriately.

Alshamnery, who spoke to me through a Marine interpreter, was sitting next to another woman, who gave

her name as Bakis Obeid and said she had been in one of the other passenger vehicles that was hit. She said her son and husband had been killed.

There were other survivors. A few yards down the road from the Kia van, three men were digging a grave. One gravedigger gave his name as Sabah Hassan and said he was a chef at the Al Rashid hotel, which is in the center of Baghdad and, in more peaceful times, was where foreign journalists stayed. Hassan said he was fleeing the city and was in a sedan with three other men on the road when they came under fire, apparently from the marines. A passenger in his car was killed. I asked him what he felt.

"What can I say?" he replied. "I am afraid to say anything. I don't know what comes in the future. Please." He plunged his shovel back into the earth and continued his funereal chores.

Not far from the gravediggers, I came across the body of the old man with the cane. He had a massive wound in the back of his head. He died on his back, looking at the sky, and his body was covered with flies. His cane, made of aluminum, lay by his right hand.

Just a few yards away, a Toyota pickup truck was by the side of the road, with more than 30 bullet holes in its windshield. The driver, who was wearing a green military tunic, was dead, his head thrown back, slightly to the left. Nearby, the body of another man lay on the ground, on his stomach; attached to the back of his belt was a holster for a pistol. An AK-47 assault rifle was in the sand nearby. These were the only fighters, or apparent fighters, that I saw on the road or in adjacent buildings.

As I took notes, several marines came by and peeked inside the blue van.

"I wish I had been here," one of them said. In other words, he wished he had participated in the combat.

"The marines just opened up," another said. "Better safe than sorry."

A journalist came up and said the civilians should not have been shot. There was a silence, and after the journalist walked away, a third marine, Lance Cpl. Santiago Ventura, began talking, angrily.

"How can you tell who's who?" said Corporal Ventura. He spoke sharply, as though trying to contain his fury. "You get a soldier in a car with an AK-47 and civilians in the next car. How can you tell? You can't tell."

He paused. Then he continued, still upset at the suggestion that the killings were not correct.

"One of these vans took out our tank. Car bomb. When we tell them they have to stop, they have to stop," he said, referring to civilians. "We've got to be concerned about our safety. We dropped pamphlets over these people weeks and weeks ago and told them to leave the city. You can't blame marines for what happened. It's bull. What are you doing getting in a taxi in the middle of a war zone?

"Half of them look like civilians," he continued. He was referring to irregular forces. "I mean, I have sympathy, and this breaks my heart, but you can't tell who's who. We've done more than enough to help these people. I don't think I have ever read about a war in which innocent people didn't die. Innocent people die. There's nothing we can do."

Two days later, the Third Battalion arrived at the Palestine Hotel in the center of Baghdad, the first marines to reach the heart of the city. They had made it from the Kuwaiti border in 22 days. As the marines were taking up defensive positions around the hotel, I noticed a sniper I had become acquainted with during the past weeks. (Because he has children who do not know precisely what he does in the Marines, he had asked me not to name him.) He was squatting on the ground in Firdos Square, in front of the hotel, scanning nearby buildings through the scope on his rifle, looking for enemy snipers. About 150 yards away, at the other end of the square, one of the battalion's armored vehicles was in the process of wrapping a metal chain around the statue of Saddam Hussein, preparing to pull it down.

Although this was a moment of triumph, I was still thinking about the civilians killed at Diyala bridge, and I said to the sniper that I had heard that he was one of the men who had fired shots there. He nodded his head, and I didn't need to ask anything more, because he began to talk about it. It was clear the bridge was weighing on his mind, too. He said that during the battle, he fired a shot at the engine block of a vehicle and that it kept moving forward. For him, this had been evidence that the person behind the wheel was determined to push ahead, and to do harm.

I said that a civilian driver might not know what to do when a bullet hits his vehicle, and might press ahead out of fear or confusion.

"It's easy to be a Monday-morning quarterback on Monday morning," he replied. "But we did everything we could to avoid civilian casualties."

When I visited the kill box down the road from Diyala bridge the morning after the battle, I noticed that the destroyed cars were several hundred yards from the marine positions that fired on them. The marines could have waited a bit longer before firing, and if they had, perhaps the cars would have stopped, or perhaps the marines would have figured out that cars contained confuses civilians. The sniper knew this. He knew that something tragic had happened at the bridge. And so, as we spoke in Baghdad, he stopped defending the marines' actions and started talking about their intent. He and his fellow marines, he said, had not come to Iraq to drill bullets into women and old men who were just trying to find a safe place.

Collateral damage is far easier to bear for those who responsible for it from afar–from the cockpit of a B-1 bomber, from the command center of a Navy destroyer, from the rear positions of artillery crews. These warriors do not see the faces of the mothers and fathers they have killed. They do not see the blood and hear the screams and live with those memories for the rest of their lives. The grunts suffer this. The Third Battalion accomplished its mission of bringing military calamity upon the regime of Saddam Hussein; the statue of Saddam fell just a few minutes after the sniper and I spoke. But the sniper, and many other marines of the Third Battalion, could not feel as joyous as the officers in the rear, the generals in Qatar and the politicians in Washington.

The civilians who were killed–a precise number is not and probably never will be available for the toll at Diyala bridge, or in the rest of Iraq–paid the ultimate price. But a price was paid, too, by the men who were responsible for killing them. For these men, this was not a clean war of smart bombs and surgical strikes. It was war as it has always been, war at close range, war as Sherman described it, bloody and cruel.