

*Just south of Al Gharraf, Captain Frei and his battery advance party of six vehicles and 34 Marines was traveling to establish a forward battery position. An Iraqi force ambushed the vehicles from buildings and prepared positions with automatic weapons, rocket propelled grenades and mortars. An RPG round tore into the front passenger side door of Captain Frei's armored HMMWV, instantly severing his right hand and disabling the vehicle. Captain Frei calmly grabbed a radio handset and quickly began wrapping it around his arm for a makeshift tourniquet, and, immediately attempted to organize his Marines in a defensive perimeter to hold off the attacking dismounted troops. Over the course of the hour-long firefight that followed, he continued to lead and inspire his Marines until the rapid and significant loss of blood rendered him combat ineffective.*

*First Lieutenant Carroll immediately took charge of the situation, directing the members of the advance party to dismount and take cover in an irrigation ditch opposite the enemy positions. He radioed for help from the battery main body, which was traveling in trace of the advance party, and immediately reported detailed information about the situation before having to seek cover due to the high volume and accuracy of enemy fire. Once in the irrigation ditch, 1st Lieutenant Carroll quickly organized the Marines into a defensive perimeter and directed his Marines to return fire with crew served weapons and M203s in order to repulse an attack that was forming in the enemy position.*

*Lieutenant Carroll moved from the relative safety of the irrigation ditch and manned his vehicle-mounted radio to call for supporting artillery fires. He called in an immediate suppression fire mission within 300 meters of his position after using his GPS and the sounds of enemy fires to accurately estimate the enemy location. Then, he calmly requested medical evacuation for his commanding officer who was losing blood from his severed hand and at risk of going into shock.*

*When a company from 2/23 arrived to relieve the artillerymen, Lieutenant Carroll loaded the wounded Captain into a light armored vehicle, consolidated and accounted for his Marines, ensured they all loaded back onto their vehicles, and led them back to friendly positions.*

While Alpha and India Batteries were moving forward, Bravo battery had established firing positions to the north of An Nasiriyah. From these firing positions, they fired in support of their fellow Cannon Cockers, the Reconnaissance Battalion, and soon the regimental headquarters as well. During the engagement in Al Gharraf, the RCT Alpha command group came under attack. The RCT headquarters had been scouted by suspicious looking 'civilians', and soon armed fighters began to appear. When it arrived, F Company, 2/23 was ordered up to the Alpha Command to aid in the extraction of A/1/11. F Company arrived at the Alpha command group, was given its marching orders, and moved out. Fox Company had only moved out about 200 meters before they began taking fire. Soon the entire company and the Regimental CP were under attack by Fedeyeen fighters. All hell broke loose, as the enemy opened up with heavy machine guns, mortars, and RPGs. The Marines in the RCT CP returned fire, and called for more forces. The headquarters Marines rallied to the fight, and were soon providing devastating

return fires on the enemy. Every Marine with a weapon wanted a piece of the action. Bravo Battery, 1/11 continued to provide suppressing fires.

Meanwhile, to the east, Reconnaissance Battalion had made its way to the road they sought, and were now making their way to the northwest. This road was significantly better than the trails the Battalion had used before, and they began to make good time toward Al Gharraf. As they approached the town from the southeast, they clearly surprised the villagers by their approach. One suspicious taxicab came toward the column, and then sped away, as if it was monitoring the position of the convoy. The suspicion was confirmed a short time later, when the Battalion ran into a hasty ambush set up along the dirt road. The battalion returned fire, and was able to suppress the ambush with direct and indirect fire. Artillery support was called in, and destroyed the enemy positions with crushing accuracy. The Reconnaissance Battalion continued their advance toward Al Gharraf, and encountered additional enemy resistance there. Recon Battalion could now hear the action to the west, where F/2/23 and other elements of RCT-1 were engaged. The Reconnaissance Battalion was amazed at the accuracy and responsiveness of the artillery support provided by 1/11. If they had known the circumstances under which those fires were provided, they would have been even more impressed.

The situation for the isolated cannoneers became more desperate as the battle raged on. First Battalion, 11<sup>th</sup> Marines continued to be attacked by Fedeyeen fighters on the west side of the road. As their small security forces held off the attack, the rest of the battalion continued to provide indirect fire support in response to calls from 1<sup>st</sup> Recon Battalion. The remainder of the battalion leveled their tubes and engaged the Fedeyeen forces that were using the buildings there for cover. Providing supporting fires for one unit, while laying the guns in direct fire mode for their own defense was just another day in the war for the pros from 1/11, albeit an exciting one.

Recon Battalion was able to continue to move past the first ambush, and make its way into Al Gharraf from the southeast. Captain Brian Patterson's Alpha Company had the lead as they entered the town. They could hear the firing on the other side of town, as the RCT-1 Alpha Command, with elements from 1/4 and 2/23, were engaged by the Fedeyeen. Their approach was a fortuitous flank attack of the enemy forces attacking 1/11 and the Regimental CP; as perfectly executed as it was unplanned. As they attacked across the town, they engaged Fedeyeen fighters shooting from inside buildings and on rooftops. Captain Patterson pushed through the town and affected the linkup between the Recon Battalion and RCT-1. The low number of casualties from enemy fire was remarkable given the volume of fires received from the Fedeyeen. The absence of casualties from friendly fire between the two converging Marine forces was even more so. The unexpected flank attack had taken the wind out of the enemy's sails, and they retreated, leaving their dead on the field.

The evening of 25 March found 1/4 in a perimeter defense to allow the RCT to close the gap and continue the attack north. Throughout the evening, the battalion was subjected to probing attacks as the enemy sized up the Marines knocking on the door of Ash Shattrah. Small arms and RPGs were ineffectively directed at the battalion. The Marines could see the enemy mustering at a parking lot in Ash Shattrah, loading into trucks, and heading east into the tree line. Soon thereafter, CAAT A's Sergeant Smith, the designated TOW Sniper, spotted a 'technical', a 3-ton truck with an anti-aircraft gun loaded in the bed, at the parking lot loading men with

weapons into the flatbed. He gained the proper sight picture with his TOW sight while his platoon commander confirmed the Iraqis' hostile intent. Receiving clearance to destroy the Iraqi weapons system, Sergeant Smith unleashed his missile, which traveled 2.1 km before destroying its intended target. The direct hit validated the 'TOW Sniper' concept.

At 1500Z on the evening of the 25<sup>th</sup>, 2<sup>d</sup> LAR and Alpha Tanks relieved 1/4's northern perimeter and formed a two-battalion perimeter defense in preparation for further offensive operations. To the north, 2<sup>d</sup> LAR and Alpha Tanks repulsed the enemy's efforts to drive vehicles into the established defensive line. To the south, PFC Mickey Graff, a Javelin gunner attached to Alpha 1/4, spotted a BTR-60 just over one kilometer from his position, moving with a pickup truck that was debarking armed personnel as it drove. He sighted in and fired his first missile, destroying the BTR. After reloading, he fired his second missile and destroyed the pickup truck. After these two devastating shots, all was quiet on the southern front.

For the Marines and sailors of RCT-1, the last two days had been exhausting. Fighting through An Nasiriyah, they continued the attack to Al Gharraf and then north to Ash Shattrah. As Lieutenant Colonel Parrington, the RCT S-3 put it, "Those two days were a real gut check for us, but as Marines always do, we excelled, accomplished the mission, and continued to push the fight."

### **26 March The Orange Crush**

Back on the Highway 1 corridor, the sun rose with an eerie orange glow. Although the winds had abated, the suspended dust in the air reduced visibility near the ground and replaced the blue sky with one of pure orange. The 'Orange Crush' the Marines called it. Under the Orange Crush, the Division worked to clear the mud from weapons, computers, and engines. The CPs that had been set up over the last two days looked like a bomb had gone off inside. Mud-smearred maps hung over dirt covered radios, manned by unshaven, red-eyed Marines sipping a mud-slurry of coffee from filthy canteen cups.

The winds had died down and Marines emerged to assess the damage. The Marine stranded at the FARP awoke inside the Huey to find the HMMWV he had lost less than 100 meters away. The fine dust that had once coated everything now accumulated in clumps of mud on every surface and in every crevice. Marines began maintenance to make vehicles and weapons operable again. The morning sky was orange with residual dust, and remained that way for the better part of the day.

The storm was not finished with the Division yet. The Division's C2 aircraft and MEDEVAC birds had been grounded at the Division Forward CP, and needed to get back up to the Main CP some distance to the north. The Division Forward Operations Officer and Intelligence Officer took the opportunity to analyze from the air the ambush location of Wolfpack and 3/5's encounters two days before. The mud had not been friendly to helicopter engines either. While circling over the ambush site, the Division Operations Officer's Huey lost an engine to the accumulated mud and dust, and crashed about 200 meters off the Highway into a suspected minefield. One crewmember of the destroyed aircraft was badly injured and was

MEDEVAC'd out by the other aircraft. The remainder of the crew and the Division staffers were left in a perimeter around the crashed aircraft until a patrol from 3/7 came along and relieved them. To the hundreds who passed the wrecked Huey just off the Highway, it was a reminder of the inherent risks of operating under these arduous conditions. 3<sup>d</sup> MAW was to recover the wreckage some days later.



*The sandstorm took its toll on machines as well as aircraft. This UH-1N crashed because of dirt and debris blown into the engine.*

RCT-5, as the Division's main effort, resumed its attack north to clear Highway 1 in zone to Highway 27, and positioned itself along the 41 Northing for its planned attack on the Hantush Airstrip the following morning. RCT-7 followed in trace of RCT-5 as a supporting effort, waiting to be unleashed on the enemy in Al Kut. The enemy continued to resist in small elements up and down Highway 1, using pre-positioned weapons caches, civilian clothing, armed sport utility vehicles/pickups, and hit-and-run tactics focused on headquarters and combat service support units. Both RCT-5 and RCT-7 engaged in several skirmishes with enemy paramilitary forces over the course of the day.

### **The Tragic Loss of a Leader**

During the height of the horrific storm, tragedy struck 3/5. The Battalion lost their Executive Officer, Major Kevin G. Nave, to a vehicle accident, and Gunnery Sergeant Russel S. Cederburg, the battalion communications chief, was also severely injured. Major Nave was struck and killed by a tracked vehicle departing a refueling point whose driver lost sight of his ground guide in the night during the storm. Such a tragic event negatively impacted the Marines and Sailors of the Battalion immediately. The Marines mourned the loss of their leader and 3/5's Chaplain held a memorial service in remembrance of Major Nave. But even as they continued grieving, the Marines of 3/5 were forced to resume the attack north toward Baghdad.



*RCT-5 continues to move up Highway 1 despite the raging storm.*

*That afternoon, 3<sup>d</sup> Battalion 5<sup>th</sup> Marines Logistic Operations Center arrived at the position southeast of the town of Ad Diwaniyah near the cloverleaf interchange. There was still sporadic fighting along the MSR and we immediately began to assess the battalion's needs to determine what convoy configuration we should send to CSSC-115. It became immediately apparent that we were going to have to send a convoy to pick up critical 81 mm mortar rounds. We set up the convoy just before dark and hit the road. About a half mile from the battalion's position we were called back because the CP believed there might be some continued fighting along the MSR. We went back to the battalion's position and I went to clear our convoy mission south. Confused, I tracked down our XO, Maj Nave hoping he would have some assessment of the enemy situation along the MSR. As we spoke I could see his calm resolve that everything would be all right and that the convoy should proceed as the mortars were critical to the combat effectiveness of the battalion. The last thing he said to me was, "Make sure you don't let them take you prisoner." En route to CSSC-115 the convoy came under mortar fire. I remember as I saw the burst of a mortar shell about 30 meters away to our right, promptly telling our driver, LCpl Borders, to "Drive!" Despite the mortars, almost being run down by oncoming tanks moving north, the traffic jam coming back, and the fact that we had no idea where the battalion had displaced to in the time we were gone, we managed to get back the battalion with the mortar rounds. By the time we had arrived Major Nave had already been tragically killed. Regardless of everything that night, it was Major Nave's insight into the importance of our mission, his composure in the face of danger, and his willingness to be a leader that set that convoy in motion. The fact of the matter is that I only knew Major Nave for a very short time, but it was long enough to make an impression. He was the type of Marine who would, "Never let them take him prisoner" and should always be honored as such.*

- Second Lieutenant G. J. Bayliff

### **Making Logistics Work up Highway 1**

Through force of will, Marines now turned to making Highway 1 into the Division's Main Supply Route (MSR). Poorly maintained and damaged stretches of the incomplete Highway 1 corridor were repaired from Safwan to Ad Diwaniyah. Engineers worked around the clock to fill in culverts and reinforce existing bridges to speed the Division's advance. Everywhere along the route, dust as fine as talcum powder coated men and equipment, and provided a powerful demonstration of the term 'periods of reduced visibility.' Despite these challenges, sending more than 3500 of its vehicles up Highway 1 gained tactical surprise for the Division in its attack to Baghdad.

CSSG-11 sustained the Division's momentum along Highway 1 through intuitive placement of hasty RRPs, and the CSSG established a hasty RRP (RRP-24) along Highway 1 near the Division Main CP. Tracked vehicles were using fuel at a much greater rate than originally

planned, and getting fuel forward quickly was a critical enabler for continuing the attack. The original re-supply efforts were based on a planning factor of 200 miles per full tank of fuel, but the Division's tanks and AAVs required fuel at the 120-150 mile mark. When the speed of the Division advance made pre-planned RRP locations obsolete, CSSG-11 teams showed great flexibility in establishing alternate sites by adjusting on the move. By staging refueling vehicles in convoys as 'RRP Opening Packages' logisticians created flexibility. This operational agility stood in



*A CH-46 refuels at a hasty FARP near Highway 1. Due to extremely mucky terrain, roads often offered the only decent ground for refueling operations.*

contrast to the Logistics Support Area (LSA) sustainment plan that was not designed to accommodate the Division's rapid advance, and often left the LSAs too far behind the Division to provide timely support. The success of the logistics effort was due to those dedicated Marines of CSSG-11, operating as part of the supported unit, understanding and flexing to the needs of the commander.

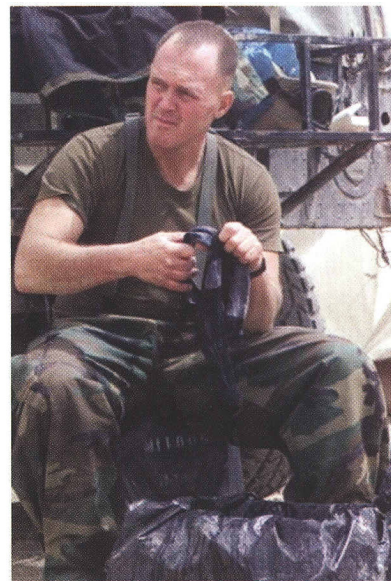
The CSSG-11 Marines shared in the danger with the other elements of the Division. Captain Toby Dyer of CSSG-11 recounts his experience at RRP 24:



*Logistics executed tactical refueling operations up and down the route and allowed the Division to continue its movement.*

*"We had just received a push of supplies from the Transportation Support Group. As they were topping off our fuel bags at the RRP, a barrage of mortars impacted at the RRP. One of our MK-19s suppressed the mortar position and we kept working. Luckily, no Marines were injured and refueling operations resumed. I remember that night as one of the darkest of the war; I couldn't see a thing as we continued sustainment operations while maintaining light discipline. There wasn't really time to stop what we were doing."*

The Division recognized the requirement to shake a methodical garrison mentality in the re-supply of repair parts too. In garrison, authorization for cannibalization was granted only for combat essential equipment and only after everything had been done within the system to obtain repair parts. Given the paucity of spares, however, the CG used his authority to allow his Marines to do whatever it took to sustain the momentum of the attack. Marines went to great lengths to keep vehicles running and weapons firing with little help from an unresponsive supply system. Innovative solutions again ensured that speed equaled success, as CSS Marines worked as best they could with two incompatible logistics systems that were not very expeditionary. Mechanics became miracle-workers, using skill and imagination to make up for the dearth of repair parts. In several cases, repairs were made on vehicles as they were being towed up the Highway to rejoin their combat units.



*The pause after the storm gave Marines a welcome chance to clean weapons and equipment.*

Taking advantage of the momentary pause in the relentless drive to the north, the flow of vehicles continued up and down the route. The CSSG initiated Class I and III re-supply of RCT-5 and RCT-7. Convoys from CSSB-10 and CSSB-12 arrived with 128 pallets of MREs, 17,000 gallons water, 200,000+ gallons of fuel, and 520 short tons of ammunition to be delivered to RRP-24. These impressive figures made a big impact, but only a momentary one, as the Division's daily requirement of 120 pallets of MREs and 50,000 gallons of fuel continued to burn continuously. The Division looked forward to the seizure of the Hantush Airstrip, which would reduce the need for road bound logistics and provide a maintenance and repair collection point.

### **The Open Western Flank**

The open western flank between As Samawah and Ad Diwaniyah was a continuous source of insecurity in the Division's zone. Ad Diwaniyah had been shaping-up as a hub for paramilitary activity across the south, and the Iraqis still controlled the major roads in the area to the west of the Division zone. South of Ad Diwaniyah, Highway 8 offered the Iraqi paramilitary fighters a high-speed route on which they could travel up and down the Division's western flank with impunity. This road was in the V Corps battlespace, but was not being used or controlled by the Army. The enemy found sanctuary there, and exploited the seam between the two US forces. For the combat forces of the Division, this was not really a problem. For support convoys full of ammunition trucks and refuelers, this presented a significant risk.

The Division took every opportunity to aggressively hunt down and kill the remaining paramilitary fighters in zone. The Diwaniyah area, which was a reported command and control hub for the paramilitaries, would receive the Division's special attention. In addition, the Division considered ways to close down the Highway 8 flank road and eliminate the risk coming from the seam between Marine and Army forces. The Division began to employ a number of methods to tighten the security in zone and to reduce the threat of ambush from the flanks. The stretch of Highway 1 south of the Division to An Nasiriyah, which would have to be traversed by

supply convoys, was assigned to Lieutenant Colonel Chris Conlin's 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Marines. 1/7 proved adept at the MSR security mission, and was particularly successful when they captured an Iraqi patrol:

*"On morning of 26 March, as the Battalion was occupying a TAA, Bravo Company spotted four men in civilian clothing walking north-to-south west of their lines. The Battalion had recently received several Intel reports to be on the lookout for infiltrators trying to get into An Nasiriyah to help resist the US forces in that area. According to the report the men typically wore civilian clothing and carried bags with uniforms in them. Based on the report, Bravo sent out a patrol to intercept these individuals. As the patrol approached, the individuals began to run, but the Bravo Marines were able to chase them down. Immediately the individuals were turned over to the HET. Shortly after HET began the interrogation, it was determined that these men were Iraqi intelligence officers. Much valuable information was gained, none more important than the location of an American POW."*

Interrogation of the Iraqis captured by the patrol led to the location of Private First Class Jessica Lynch, an Army soldier who had been captured earlier in An Nasiriyah, gaining her the infatuation of the media. Her location in the Saddam Hospital in An Nasiriyah was passed to higher headquarters, eventually resulting in her recovery by other US forces, including Division Marines from 2/1 that were part of the 15<sup>th</sup> MEU (now reassigned from the 1<sup>st</sup> UK Division to TF Tarawa.)



***The Highway 1 muck claims a new 7-ton MTVR. Extricating vehicles from the muck was a full time job.***

Because securing the entire Highway 1 corridor would have seriously drained the Division's combat power, the Division chose to assign combat units as escorts to mission critical re-supply convoys, and leave rear area route security to roving patrols made up of Navy Special Warfare (NSW) SEALs and Force Reconnaissance Company Marines. Fourth LAR was assigned to the TMCC to ensure the secure movement of 50 refueler trucks from south of the Euphrates up to the hastily established RRP-24. After meeting

with the Division planners, the G-3 also directed the RCTs to conduct limited objective missions in their zones on either side of the Highway, killing any enemy discovered in an effort to provide a more secure LOC. The units were to clear 4km on either side of the MSR and ensure there were no Saddam Fedeyeen or other militia close enough to the road to interdict convoys. The reports of continued mortar attacks and sniping incidents along the length of Highway 1 served as a reminder of the open flanks of the Division, and pointed out the need for aggressive action. As the Division continued to 'throw elbows' at the remaining Fedeyeen along Highway 1, 3<sup>d</sup> MAW began to take advantage of the clearing skies. The Wing commenced hammering both the