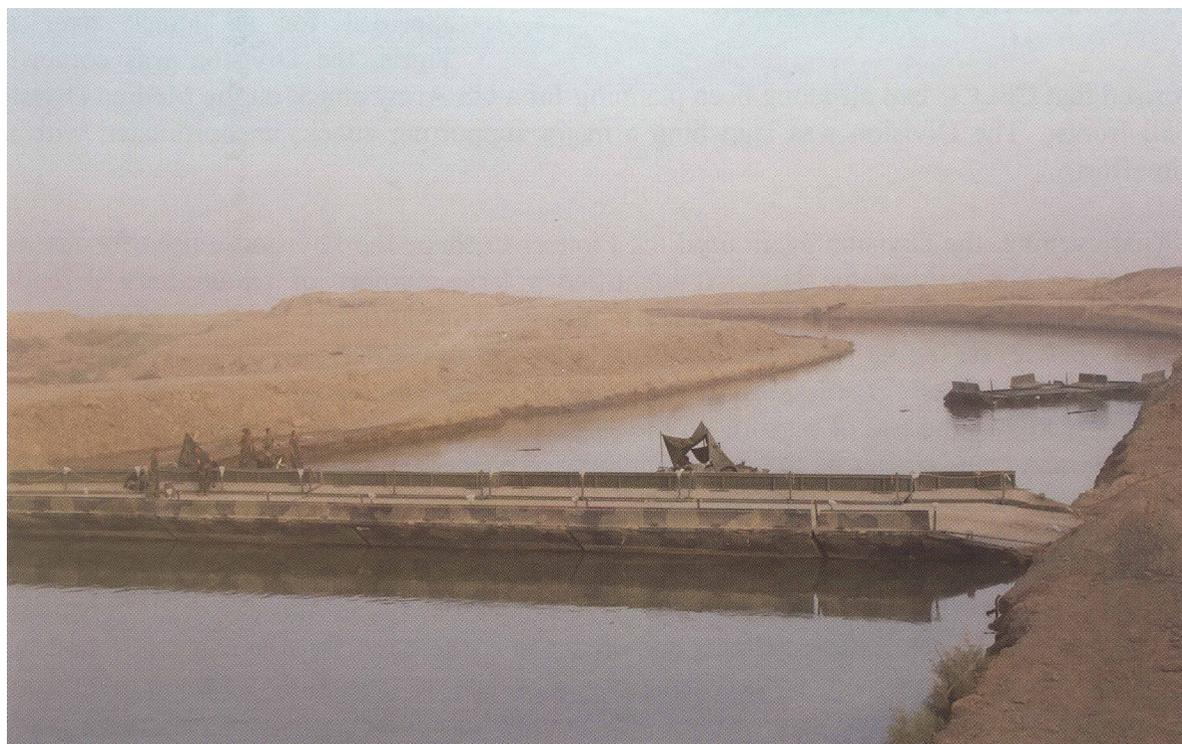


In the morning, RCT-5 launched their attack up Route 27 to seize the bridge over the Saddam Canal. Lieutenant Colonel Padilla's 1/5 led the attack as the RCT's main effort, followed closely by 3^d Battalion. An enemy company-sized element put up strong resistance from defensive positions both north and south of the canal. From positions on both banks, the enemy engaged Bravo Company, led by Capt Jason E. Smith, with mortars and heavy machineguns. Captain Smith quickly deployed his company on line, and boldly began crossing the bridge after effectively suppressing the enemy. Once Bravo had secured the far side of the bridge, Charlie Company continued the attack, pursuing the enemy with elements of Bravo Company. They quickly overran the enemy 120mm mortar platoon and remaining defensive positions that were suppressing the Battalion's anti-armor platoon on the near side. The enemy company guarding the existing bridge was destroyed, and 59 EPWs were captured in the process. Because of concerns with the structural integrity of the existing bridge, 8th Engineer Support Battalion constructed an additional bridge over the Saddam Canal. Although not used by the assault forces, this new bridge provided an alternative crossing for the large number of heavy logistics vehicles that would later traverse the route.

As 1/5 was mopping up the far side and collecting prisoners, 3/5 conducted final coordination for the forward passage, then quickly moved across the canal and through the leading elements of 1/5, approximately 15 kilometers northeast along Route 27. While supporting the crossing, 3/5 soon encountered small groups of soldiers fleeing the area. As twilight approached, India Company dismounted and cleared a suspected enemy trench line while Kilo Company and CAAT platoon pursued an estimated squad of Iraqi soldiers by fire using the Battalion's organic 81mm mortar platoon. India Company also prosecuted a rotary wing air strike on a D-30 artillery battery five kilometers further east, successfully destroying the enemy guns in the process.



First Marine Division builds a pontoon bridge over the Saddam Canal. This bridge would serve major support convoys that followed the Division along the major roads.

The artillery performed magnificently during the attacks up route 27. The Cannon Cockers from 2/11, reinforced by 5/11, set a standard of impressive performance (here and throughout the campaign.) Terrain was extremely constricted, but somehow the artillerymen were always able to get into firing positions.

Elements of RCT-7 moved up to their attack positions on the south side of the Saddam Canal. They relieved RCT-5 of all of their remaining battlespace, and were poised to participate in the next day's attack across the Tigris River. With RCT-1 fixing the enemy, RCT-5



Marines take up positions near An Numaniyah to cover their fellow Marines as they near the Tigris River.

establishing the crossing points over the River, and 11th Marines poised to provide devastating fires, it was as if the rest of the Division were cocking back the hammer and preparing to shoot RCT-7 out the end of the barrel. What remained of the Baghdad RG Division was coming into Blue Diamond's sights.

The Division learned that the Army V Corps had launched an attack on the Medina RG Division at the same time as the Blue Diamond attack. After the significant staff coordination that had been required for the MEF to gain reluctant approval for an attack over the Tigris, the Division was somewhat

surprised that CFLCC had all-along been planning for a US Army attack on the Medina Division on all fronts. The Division was launching a major supporting attack, uncoordinated with the main effort.

That evening, the Division again used the Pioneer to shape the Division's fight for the next day. In An Numaniyah, the Division identified a large number of paramilitary defenders bivouacking in a large date palm grove at the foot of the An Numaniyah Bridge, and a number of armored vehicles on the far side. The Division targeteers in the Forward CP were able to guide multiple air and surface fire missions against these positions, eliminating many of these fighters. The night also saw the use of napalm on the assembly areas of the Fedeyeen fighters in town, destroying many, and scattering the rest. A number of enemy fighters remained in the vicinity of the An Numaniyah Bridge, but they had received a significant amount of shaping fires. This had been a textbook integration of intelligence and fires in support of the Division deep fight. The ability of the Division to tightly coordinate the actions of the UAV collections and the delivery of fires allowed for a very precise delivery of shaping fires to only those specific targets that required them. Because of the timeliness and precision enabled by Division control of the UAV, fires were brought to bear only on the enemy positions, largely sparing the adjacent town from a massive preparatory bombardment. In the final hours of darkness before the resumption of the

attack, the G-2 used the Pioneer to search the streets of the city for any indications of a paramilitary defense and found nothing other than at the bridge.

The evening of 1 April also graphically demonstrated the viability of another intelligence tool, the JSTARS Common Ground Station. This night, the sensor detected large numbers of vehicles evacuating the city of Al Kut to the north. The Division directed aviation assets to ascertain the nature of the targets and found them to be mostly civilian vehicles. A large portion of the population was choosing to flee the fighting going in the only safe direction remaining, north to the Iranian border.

Darkside Moves on Diwaniyah

Although much of the Division's attention was focused on the bridge at An Numaniyah, the Fedeyeen in Ad Diwaniyah had not heard the last of Blue Diamond. Third Battalion, 4th Marines ('Darkside') conducted a limited objective attack against paramilitary forces in the vicinity of the city in order to ensure no interference with the Division's main attack. Having conducted a relief in place with 3/5 on 31 March, 3/4 remained in a defensive position on the cloverleaf. The aim of the attack was to aggressively advance on the town, attacking all hostile forces encountered, forcing the last remaining paramilitary forces to scatter from their hiding places.

The attacking force that day was leaner, with India Company serving as rear security and the battalion reserve near the Combat Trains. Two companies formed the bulk of the combat power. Bravo tanks led the Darkside, quickly rolling up to an enemy observation post (OP), registering one enemy KIA as he tried to run back to warn his unit. Pressing on, Bravo and CAAT 2 cleared a series of trenches and bunkers, destroying them with heavy machine guns, TOWs, and tank main guns. Between these two elements, 55 enemy KIA were counted, as well as numerous WIA and 24 EPWs.

The pace quickening, the Battalion Commander ordered a more deliberate approach, allowing the situation to develop. While the lead elements continued their movement west into the city, Kilo Company dismounted to clear a cluster of mud huts on the south side of the road. Approaching the town, Bravo established an attack by fire position on the eastern outskirts, allowing Kilo Company to maneuver around and aim for the



A door gunner provides cover with his minigun from a UH-1N.

southeastern area of the town.

As Kilo and CAAT 1 advanced south, Bravo reoriented on a date palm grove, clearing through it and destroying two technicals and three motorcycles. Now at the edge of the city, the tanks began to receive numerous RPG volleys, some of which appeared to be lobbed from behind the first row of buildings inside the city. Air Force strike aircraft were aborted by order of the Battalion Commander due to collateral damage concerns. Instead, the Dragon Eye UAV was deployed to reconnoiter the area and identify the location of the RPG shooters. Cross talk between the Battalion Commander, Bravo, and CAAT 2 allowed the tank company to vector in on the RPG shooters and engage with a platoon volley of main gun rounds, eliminating the threat.

Kilo Company reoriented northeast and began a deliberate movement in an attempt to push any resistance from the outskirts of the city into Bravo Company's sector. This advance uncovered numerous mortar tubes and infantry fighting positions, but saw no enemy contact. The numerous weapons caches discovered were blown in place and units began their retrograde to the cloverleaf. 'Longshot', the battalion's 81mm Mortar platoon, fired disengagement fires and all units returned to previous positions in vicinity of the cloverleaf. Enemy casualties were reported as 92 enemy KIAs and 56 EPWs following the engagement.

Barbarian and Godfather Take out Al Muwaffiqiyah

RCT-1 continued the attack through Al Hayy toward Al Kut in order to fix the Baghdad Division. Second LAR, occupying the Kut al Hayy East Airfield, would attack to clear northwest along the Kut al Hayy road, and effect a link up with 1/4 near Ar Rashidiyah. Captain Banning's Alpha tanks led the way into Al Hayy, destroying fleeing military trucks loaded with ammunition in the process. Alpha 1/4 followed in trace, and located a cluster of bunkers and trenches with men armed with small arms and RPGs. The enemy had positioned their defenses in extremely close proximity to the city. Alpha Tanks established a support by fire position to suppress the enemy while Alpha 1/4 maneuvered to clear the strongpoint. Alpha Company, 1/4, closed with the objective supported by precision direct fire provided by the tanks and accurate close air support provided by the Cobras, their guardian angels. With the bunkers destroyed and two enemy KIA, the enemy at the former strongpoint withdrew in a 'technical'. Seeing the devastating display of combined arms, the remaining enemy chose to withdraw out of Al Hayy and proceed northwest.

The townspeople soon came out to greet the Marines that had liberated their town, and began to lead the Marines to numerous weapons caches. Spotting a Baath Party building, the Marines cleared the building, discovering numerous RPGs, mortars, and small arms ammunition. Deliberately clearing this building of the ordnance would have taken the better part of one day. Chief Warrant Officer Parks and Lieutenant Gerry Roeder, the Combat Engineer Platoon Commander, rigged the building with explosives, cleared the townspeople from the area, and leveled the building. The Gunner would be extremely busy that day, destroying nine artillery pieces, destroying thousands of artillery, mortar, and small arms rounds. While the Marines of 1/4 began the task of clearing as much of the town and ordnance as time would allow, 2^d LAR and Alpha tanks passed north through their lines to continue the attack north.

In Al Hayy, conversations with many of the local citizens indicated that the Regime operated a terrorist training camp to the northwest in a town called Al Muwaffiqiyah. The locals reported that the enemy who were able to escape Al Hayy had also holed up in this Regime stronghold. As the Reconnaissance Battalion (Godfather) continued to move to the north, it approached the town of Al Muwaffiqiyah from the east side of the river. The battalion had been ordered to attack over a bridge and through the town the next morning to resume their march north on the west side of the river. As Recon Battalion prepared for their attack in their assembly area well east of the river, Lieutenant Colonel Ferrando walked over to Lieutenant Colonel Ed Ray of 2^d LAR (Barbarian) and told him of an Iraqi ambush that had been established at the Al Muwaffiqiyah bridge. Lieutenant Colonel Ray turned to his Alpha Company commander, and told him, "Go take care of it." On their approach, Barbarian encountered another well-laid ambush on the east bank of the river. The enemy's base of fire on the west side of the river opened up on the LAVs, followed by the rest of the 'L' shaped ambush in a cluster of buildings on the east bank, to the north of the company. The Recon Battalion, back in the assembly area, watched as additional LAVs rapidly drove past their position to the west. Volley after volley of artillery, and repeated sections of air appeared overhead, all pouring fire into the ambush site down the road to the west. Crossing the river promised to be an interesting experience. After a period of hours, 2^d LAR had reduced the threat from the ambush and then withdrew to the assembly area. Recon Battalion waited until 2000Z, when it had air available, and commenced its own movement to the bridge. Under cover of darkness, Captain Craig Schwetje moved up to an obstacle that lay across the bridge. The Marines immediately came under fire from a prepared position on the eastern bank of the river. The enemy in this position was uncharacteristically tough, and fought with a tenacity and skill not seen prior to this ambush. They continued to fight until the Battalion had taken them out individually. These fighters were dressed in full combat dress, with chest-rigs, antitank grenades, heavy machine guns, and RPGs. It was clear that these were not ordinary Iraqi fighters. When the Marines inspected the bodies, paperwork was found indicating these fighters had come from Syria only weeks before. They even had tattoos in

English between their thumb and forefinger. These Syrian hardcore fighters were possibly linked to the terrorist training camp near the town.



Pontoon bridges stage near Highway 1, ready to push to the Tigris.

Back on the bridge, the Recon Marines tried to reduce the bridge obstacle by fire. AH-1Ws tried to dislodge the obstacle with TOWs and Zuni rockets without success. Bravo Company had two tanks attached from Alpha Company, 1st Tanks. The tankers could not get on the rickety bridge, and could not dislodge the obstacle either. The tanks reported however, that a HMMWV might be able to squeeze past. As the sun rose, Bravo Company tried to bypass the obstacle, and found

they could just squeeze a HMMWV past it on the bridge. They proceeded to squeeze a platoon through, moving a single vehicle at a time past the obstacle. The trail HMMWV in the first platoon across was towing a trailer, which foundered in a hole in a damaged section of the bridge. The HMMWV was now wedged in the hole, and could not be budged. Through some creative use of motorcycle ramps, the Marines were able to get the rest of the platoon back across the bridge, but the damaged vehicle remained stuck. Stymied in the attempt to get across the damaged bridge, the Recon Battalion and 3/1 were sent south back down to Al Hayy to cross the river there. They would resume the attack on Al Muwaffiqiyah from the west side of the river. The initiative and aggressiveness displayed by the Recon Marines was another example of the spirits of the Division Marines that would find a way to accomplish the mission, or make one themselves.

Division Marines in An Nasiriyah

As part of the 15th MEU, the Marines from 2/1 continued combat operations in support of TF Tarawa, as the rest of 1st Marine Division attacked further north. On 1 April, 2/1 played a key supporting role in the efforts to rescue a US Army POW being held in a hospital in An Nasiriyah. The battalion conducted a diversionary attack on multiple objectives throughout the city, opening the way for a Special Forces team to enter the hospital unopposed and rescue the American POW.

The Marines from 2/1 would continue to play a significant role in stabilizing the An Nasiriyah battlespace over the next several days, conducting raids on Baath party buildings, Fedeyeen strongholds, military facilities, and other areas of potential resistance identified by intelligence. During combat operations and patrols, the battalion destroyed over thirty arms caches. Even though not operating under direct 1st Marine Division command, these Marines were instrumental in executing a 'No better friend, no worse enemy' policy on the streets



Third Battalion, 7th Marines, relieve 3/5 at the An Numaniyah Bridge.

of An Nasiriyah. The battalion conducted a number of humanitarian missions, and supported the distribution of fresh water to needy civilians. On 8 April, the Marines of 2/1 supported an

operation in Suk As Shyuk (southeast of An Nasiriyah) to recover and transport wounded civilians to Talil Army Airfield.

The Marines of 2/1 would eventually be responsible for a number of towns north of An Nasiriyah, providing security through the same Highway 7 zone that their parent regiment had earlier maneuvered through. The battalion continued the stabilization operations begun by RCT-1, handing out over 6000 humanitarian rations to hungry civilians along Highway 7. The battalion eventually retrograded to Kuwait, and backloaded onto amphibious ships to complete their MEU deployment.

2 April Crossing the Tigris River

As the sun rose, the much-anticipated attack across the Tigris commenced. RCT-5, the main effort, crossed the line of departure at 0055Z astride Route 27 to maneuver forces across the Tigris River and cut Highway 6. During the night hours, the RCT moved off Highway 27 in order to give 2^d Tanks an unencumbered route straight to the An Numaniyah Bridge. At 0355Z, 2^d Tank Battalion successfully passed through An Numaniyah. The Scout Platoon, led by 1st Lieutenant Matthew Zummo led the way, identifying enemy positions and returning fire through significant enemy resistance, identifying uniformed Republican Guardsmen defending the approaches to the bridge. When the resistance stiffened, the rest of the Battalion moved up and brought their main guns to bear. Ironhorse attacked through An Numaniyah and crossed the bridge while battling a hailstorm of RPG and machinegun fire. They continued the attack to the far side of the bridge, destroying an estimated enemy battalion-sized force, while experiencing one M1A1 immobilized by enemy fire.

Moving up behind the tanks, 3/5 was ordered to clear Route 27 through the city and secure the bridge for follow on forces. For the next several hours, 3/5 fought dismounted through the northern half of the city. India Company led the attack, moving on foot through the charred and smoking remains left behind by a section of Cobras providing outstanding close air support to the company. Encountering only light resistance, India Company deliberately cleared both sides of Route 27 through the town, and then began methodically destroying Iraqi equipment and rounding up dozens of EPWs. Capt Ethan Bishop recalls that his Marines, especially his Assaultmen (trained in demolitions), had a “field day” blowing up two T-72 tanks, numerous anti-aircraft guns, and killing a couple of Iraqi snipers.

Lima Company moved through India, seized the far side of the Numaniyah Bridge and chased off the remnants of the enemy battalion. In the process they destroyed several ammunition trucks, and rounded up approximately 50 EPWs. The battalion remained in control of the bridge, while 2^d Tanks moved up to the intersection of Highway 27 and Highway 6. For the first time, Highway 6 was blocked by US forces, severing the connection between the Regime leadership in Baghdad and Al Basrah, physically cutting off the Iraqi III and IV Corps and the remnants of the Baghdad Division. The Division was now north of the Tigris, astride the primary avenue of approach into Baghdad.

Weapons Company, commanded by Captain David Hudspeth, was the main effort for 1st LAR Battalion on the morning of 2 April. As they moved north on Highway 27, they passed through 1/5 at the Saddam Canal and joined 2^d Tanks and 3/5 in the attack on An Numaniyah. They continued to the 'Y' just to the southwest of the city when they began taking fire. The company immediately returned fire and deployed on line. The overwhelming firepower of the 25 mm guns and M240G machine guns was too much for the Fedeyeen fighters and they began to flee. After the fighting at the edge of the city had died down, 3/5 passed through and began clearing the city, while 2^d Tanks continued to the Tigris bridge. Weapons Company counted nine enemy KIAs as a result of their actions that morning. Guarding the Division's flank, 1st LAR continued its movement to the west on 'powerline' road paralleling the Tigris River on the south side.

To the west of An Numaniyah, another major bridging effort was underway. Leading the effort to the west of Highway 27, 2/5 advanced on the Division's western flank, and cleared a path for the 8th Engineer Support Battalion (commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Rick Nelson.) The engineers had determined that the long An Numaniyah Bridge was capable of supporting 70 ton vehicles, but the Division required an alternate crossing point in case the primary bridge was destroyed or made impassable through enemy action. The principle concern was the enemy using persistent chemical agents now that the Division had crossed the Tigris River. The engineers of 8th ESB began emplacing assault bridging at crossing site 'Pearl 3' at 1426Z, and anticipated completion of construction at 2100Z. When it was done, the Pearl 3 bridge would be 145 meters long, another historic achievement by the engineers. Simultaneously, the engineers ferried tanks and AAVs across the Tigris during the night.

Ripper Moves up to An Numaniyah

RCT-7 moved up to relieve 3/5 of the bridgehead, seize An Numaniyah Airfield, and establish blocking positions on both banks of the Tigris River. Entering the An Numaniyah Airfield, 1/7 seized it without incident. Third Battalion, 7th Marines, followed by 1st Tank



The CG provides guidance to his staff near An Numaniyah.

Battalion, relieved 3/5 of the bridge. RCT-7 took responsibility for the Tigris River Bridge and the town of An Numaniyah, freeing RCT-5 to focus on the attack to the west. With all of its forces prepared to press the attack into Al Kut the following day, RCT-7 looked to securing the city of An Numaniyah itself. The Division Main CP also moved up to a location in the vicinity of the airfield, and began to set up.

Cordoning off the city, 3/7 established positions to the north, west, and south of An Numaniyah during the relief with 3/5. The cordon formed by the Marines on three sides and the Tigris on the fourth cut off enemy forces in the town. Late on the evening of 2 April, 3/7 attacked. They cleared an army training camp on the northwest corner of the urban area, finding abandoned positions and discarded weapons. During a night urban penetration, they advanced against token resistance to secure the central market, soccer stadium, and a key road intersection at the north edge of the city. A local informant gave them valuable information on locations of weapons caches and safe houses containing regime leadership and sympathizers. Maneuver companies exploited this information by conducting raids and removing the ammunition caches. By the morning of 3 April, they had eliminated organized resistance.

Lieutenant Colonel Belcher and select staff met with local community leaders to discuss critical civil issues including stabilization and security operations. These operations would challenge the battalion in ways combat had not. The capture of a local Imam with reported ties to Uday Hussein caused a crowd to form in protest. After assessing the situation, 3/7 released the Imam, who made a speech supporting the Marines and denouncing the Regime. In another instance, Marines at a checkpoint risked themselves in order to protect An Numaniyah citizens:

About fifteen minutes into it, Lance Corporal Reuben Muniz noticed a truck approaching at a fast pace. Realizing the danger the speeding vehicle posed to the Marines and civilians, Muniz decided to stop it. He proceeded to stand in the middle of the road while waving at the car and yelling "Stop! Stop!" The driver apparently paid no attention and kept on driving. As the vehicle kept approaching, Muniz continued his efforts by putting his weapon at the alert, followed by the ready. Seeing that the driver did not respond, Muniz decided to double-tap the truck on the grill. The truck came to a halt about five feet in front of Muniz and the people in the back of the truck jumped out. Muniz got everyone on line and the passengers all started making signals with their hands and saying "No stop, No stop!" After that, we knew that the vehicle could not stop because it had bad brakes.



Marines from 3/7 establish a firing position inside an Iraqi army camp near An Numaniyah

Tiger relieved 3/7 of the bridge and crossed the Tigris River, while 3/4 spent the night south of the bridge in a position to go into the attack against the Baghdad RG Division on the north side of the Tigris River. In trace of RCT-7, 1/7 cleared An Numaniyah Airfield and prepared for their attack the next day against the 4th Infantry Brigade of the Baghdad RG Division on the south bank of the Tigris. Intelligence was developed for both of these attacks, identifying tanks that would be destroyed by 3/4, and company-sized defensive positions that 1/7 would be engaged by 1/7.

Fixing the Baghdad RG Division

Meanwhile, the Inchon Marines were setting the conditions for the Division's attack into Al Kut by drawing the enemy's attention to the south through limited objective attacks up Highway 7. This effectively fixed the Baghdad Division in place, allowing RCT-7 to attack into their rear and complete their destruction. The Marines of 1/11 established firing positions and continued the destruction of the enemy's indirect fire assets through counterbattery and observed fires. In order to observe the steel rain, RCT-1's S-2 sent the supporting VMU-1 Pioneer to Al Kut to provide eyes on the D-30s and Type 59-1 artillery pieces that remained in and around the city. By the evening of 2 April, the enemy was effectively surrounded and the conditions were set to complete their destruction.

The Recon Battalion and 3/1 attacked through Al Muwaffiqiyah on the west side of the river was successful. The AAVs of 3/1 made their way through the town without resistance, and the Reconnaissance Battalion passed through. Recon continued the attack all the way up the west side of the river, and established a blocking position just south of Al Kut. The blocking position in a small village called Al Qaryah was positioned just south of Al Kut's Al Jarrah airfield. Meanwhile, 3/1 relieved 1/4 in Al Hayy and blocked Highway 7 to the south. Second LAR established a screen line and passed 1/4 north to clear a village and seize a bridge on the

Company E (Easy Company), resumed their patrol of the area the following day, and again the Iraqi's came out to fight. "The RPGs (Rocket-propelled Grenades) sounded like really loud bottle rockets," stated Corporal James Santoro, 2d Platoon (White Platoon), of Martinsburg, West Virginia. One rocket passed between Lance Corporal Kevin Corrigan Salsberry, Maryland, and his LAV-25, "Then another RPG missed my drivers hatch by about four inches." As Sergeant Michael Carista of Plum Point, Maryland, 1st Platoon (Red Platoon) raced on to the scene, his vehicle began receiving fire from the direction of an adobe hut. "I orderēd Gorman to blow that house down!" With a smile on his face, Lance Corporal Daniel Gorman fired a single M203 high explosive grenade at the hut and knocked it down. When he viewed the result of his gunnery, the lance corporal exclaimed with a resounding "WUUUUUUHOOOOOO!" When the fight was over the company had taken six enemy prisoners of war, one of which was the unit commander. Sergeant Eric Miller of Baltimore, Maryland, summed it up best, "It felt good to take the fight to them and push them out."

approaches to Al Kut. Securing its objective without enemy contact, 1/4 learned from a village elder that the Republican Guard soldiers had withdrawn the previous night towards Al Kut. The RG had reportedly emplaced mines 10 to 12 km north of the bridge along Highway 7.

Back at Hantush Airstrip, the 3^d LAR Battalion remained aggressively postured on Highway 1. Northwest of the airstrip, they came into contact with a probing enemy unit:

The EPWs from that unit possessed new gas masks and Atropine injectors of Turkish manufacture, similar to these found on Iraqi dead along Highway 27 outside the An Numaniyah

airfield. This information was passed to the G-2. The Division now had to consider the likelihood that a successful crossing of the Tigris River may be the trigger for the use of chemical weapons. The Marines remained in a heightened MOPP posture, and continued the attack. Third LAR Battalion continued to block Highway 1, run patrols, and protect the growing logistics footprint at the Hantush Airstrip.

To the south, the rapid movement of the Division was facilitated by pulling up its battlespace behind it. The relief in place of the Division's southern battlespace by TF Tarawa commenced at 1400Z as elements of 3^d Battalion, 2^d Marines coordinated with 3^d AA Battalion along Highway 1. To the east, elements of the 24th MEU made preparations to relieve the Division of its last battlespace along the Highway 7 corridor. The Division already had its eyes on the next prize, and was building momentum for its attack to the west. The Division Forward CP rolled across the Pearl 3 bridge late on the evening of 2 April, and conducted a road march in trace of RCT-5 to Al Aziziyah on Highway 6.

3 April - Final Assault on Al Kut

The Division was now poised to complete the destruction of the Baghdad Republican Guard Division in Al Kut. Third MAW, along with 11th Marines, had delivered a steady flow of shaping fires against the Baghdad Division, and most of their armor and artillery were destroyed. The remnants had shown a willingness to continue fighting in An Numaniyah, and it was likely that there would be significant bloodshed yet to come in the attack on Al Kut. In keeping with the Division's motto, 'No better friend, no worse enemy,' the Republican Guard Commander would have one last chance to avoid the destruction of his command.

"To the commander of the Iraqi forces in Al Kut: You are surrounded. There is no hope for your forces to be reinforced or re-supplied. We will continue to attack unless you choose to stop this unnecessary killing. If you choose not to surrender, all the killing will be your responsibility and yours only. At 0700 Greenwich Mean Time, we will stop the attack and if you choose to come forward to the western side of Highway 6, we will arrange a safe passage for you to surrender. I suggest you consider your choices carefully.

From the commander of the United States Marines surrounding Al Kut."

The Information Operations campaign had included a set of radio frequencies that enemy commanders could use to reach US forces should they decide to surrender. The CG constructed a message to the Baghdad Division's Commander and at 0700Z, Corporal Ali Abdelgawd, the CG's talented and conscientious interpreter, passed the message over multiple radio frequencies from the intersection of Highway 27 and Highway 6.

There was no response from the Baghdad RG Division commander. It was later assessed that he had been killed in the shaping fires or had fled the city in the civilian convoys seen leaving to the north.

The attack plan called for 3/4 to attack east along the north side of the Tigris while 1/7 attacked on a parallel axis south of the river. On 3 April, 3/4 and 1/7 advanced with little resistance until they closed within 1000 meters of their objectives. As expected, enemy small arms and RPG fire increased as each battalion grew closer to the outskirts of Al Kut, and the battalions responded with overwhelming force. A limit of advance (LOA) had been put on the west side of the city of Al Kut as it was anticipated that the enemy wished to draw the Marines into a costly urban fight. Neither RCT-7 nor the Division were going to fall for that. To defeat this enemy, it would not be necessary to kill them all. Leaving them bottled up in Al Kut would be just as effective. Numerous close air support sorties, including a B-52 strike, had devastating effects. White phosphorous rockets marked targets. GBU-16's destroyed T-62 tanks. Mk 83s destroyed APCs and support vehicles. On the ground, 3/4's Marines fought with similar effectiveness. Fire from Iraqi infantry in a bunker complex was answered with heavy machine guns, TOWs, and tank main gun rounds. During the fight, Corporal Mark Evnin, a Scout Sniper serving with 3/4, was killed as he provided suppressive fire for units engaging an enemy strongpoint. While under continuous enemy fire himself, Corporal Evnin provided suppressive fire with his M203 against enemy bunkers that were in a position to surprise an advancing platoon from 3/4 with deadly grazing fire. Corporal Evnin first fired from a covered position, located behind an AAV, then moved from the covered position of the AAV to a better firing position 15 meters away in order to better support his fellow Marines. It was then that he was mortally wounded by enemy machine gun fire. Corporal Evnin's selfless dedication to his fellow Marines and courage under fire were above and beyond that expected, and met the highest standard of Marine Corps NCO leadership and aggressiveness. In a desperate last attempt, Iraqi infantry armed only with small arms attempted to rush the battalion's M1A1 tanks before being cut down. Darkside continued the attack through the garrisons of the Baghdad RG Division, but stopped short of clearing the Al Kut urban area. There were no longer offensive forces in the city that could influence the Division's continued attack into Baghdad. Without a credible offensive threat, remaining paramilitary holdouts could be left isolated in Al Kut. To clear these remnants would have drawn off significant Division combat power and would likely have caused extensive damage to the city, resulting in significant numbers of civilian casualties.

First Battalion, 7th Marines enjoyed similar success across the river to the south. Preparatory fires from Marine air and artillery led the way. The Battalion's CAAT teams engaged and destroyed Iraqi forces attempting to ram their vehicles near Al Akhrar. Bravo Company cleared a date grove and destroyed several artillery and AAA pieces. Marines found buildings full of ammunition that were simply too big for the Battalion to destroy. They marked the sites and pressed on. At the outskirts of Al Jarrah airfield southwest of Al Kut, they cleared a bunker and took eight enemy prisoners. They also uncovered a site containing aircraft ordnance, fuel, and missiles.

RCT-1 continued its attack on the Baghdad RG Division from the south. 2^d LAR along with the 'Horse Marines' of 1/4 attacked towards the southern Al Kut bridges. The Reconnaissance Battalion attacked along a parallel road, dubbed Route 7A, to establish an overwatch and attack by fire targets of opportunity. After completing the clearing of Al Hayy, 3/1 blocked south along Highway 7 to support the RCT's eventual movement south on Highway 7 towards Highway 17, the planned route to link back up with the Division. Second LAR with Alpha Tanks led the attack to Al Kut, supported by 1/4's Obstacle Clearing Detachment (OCD). At 0306Z, as the

attack commenced, 2^d LAR encountered a hastily employed obstacle not covered by enemy fire. As the Armored Combat Earthmovers (ACEs) went to work to clear the mines, one of them struck a mine and was rendered ineffective. Barbarian's OCD hastily reduced the minefield, clearing a route for the attacking force by 0401Z. Inchon continued the fixing attack on Al Kut.

RCT-1 planned to uncover a safe route through the city to affect a quick link up with the Division in order to maintain the momentum all the way to Baghdad. As Barbarian and 1/4 approached the bridges, however, they were engaged with heavy enemy direct and indirect fires. Immediate returned fire suppressed the Iraqi direct fires, while the enemy artillery was silenced by accurate counterbattery fires from 1/11. Barbarian was at the southern bridge in contact and requested additional infantry support. Colonel Dowdy came up and positioned himself with Barbarian 'six', Lieutenant Colonel Ray. He tasked Lieutenant Colonel Mayer ('Pale Rider-six'), to pass through 2^d LAR, continue the attack to the Highway 7 bridge into Al Kut, and detach a rifle company to support Barbarian. Captain Collins and Charlie Company, 1/4, passed through 2^d LAR's lines. As they passed between the LAVs, an enemy combatant (who was pretending to be among those killed by 2^d LAR) pushed a dead enemy's body aside, got up, and began to shoulder his weapon. Charlie 1/4's Fire Support Team shot and killed the individual before he could fire a round. Lieutenant Colonel Mayer led 1/4's forward command group through 2^d LAR's lines, followed by the 81mm mortar platoon and Alpha Company. Bravo Company, 1/4, linked up with Barbarian and supported 2^d LAR's actions on Al Kut's southern bridge.

At 0545Z, Charlie Company, 1/4, entered Al Kut from the south. As they approached the road intersection prior to the northern bridge, the remaining enemy forces unleashed small arms, RPGs, and mortar fire on the Marines from the north and west side of the road. Captain Collins ordered his 60mm mortars to suppress the enemy while his assault platoons returned fire. While the 60mm mortars suppressed the objective, Captain Richard "Shaky" Parkinson controlled a section of Cobras as it delivered its lethal load on target.

With fires now coming from both sides, and Charlie 1/4 having to fight the enemy from three directions, Major Martin Casado, 1/4's Operations Officer, ordered Captain Griffin to attack west, past the forward command group, to relieve the pressure on Charlie Company. As Captain Collins acknowledged the orders, an RPG struck his command vehicle, but failed to detonate because the enemy had failed to pull the safety pin. Unfazed, the company commander located the source of the attack, and focused direct and indirect fires at the target. Moments later, secondary explosions were observed as the Marines destroyed a building housing an enemy weapons cache.

As the firefight continued, a family of five emerged from a building and began to move south along Highway 7 to escape the fighting. Recognizing the dangerous predicament for this family, Colonel Joe Dowdy, Gunner Parks, and Private First Class Xavier Cobb rushed towards the family, picked up the children, and shielded them with their bodies as they led them to a defilade position. The embedded journalists with 1/4 (Dr. Bob Arnot and Jim Bruton, both from MSNBC) captured the two-hour battle for Al Kut live via satellite phone. Riding with the forward command group into the heart of the action, the journalists showcased the Marines' tenacity and compassion all at once.