

other supporting commands for immediate re-supply. The maneuver units still needed to replenish chow, ammo, water and (most of all) sleep. Many of the Marines had not had decent rest since before crossing the LD, some 48 hours before. The Marines had much fighting yet to do, and now was a brief opportunity to catch some rest before resuming the attack.

At this point, CSSG-11 and its CSSC's demonstrated what organic, integrated logistics support meant. With precision and foresight, Colonel John Pomfret and the CSSG-11 staff established RRP's near the tactical assembly areas of RCT-7 and RCT-5 to allow them to quickly obtain the necessary supplies to sustain their attack. As the Division's objectives quickly fell, logisticians anticipated the demand for fuel forward, and redirected assets from these RRP's to

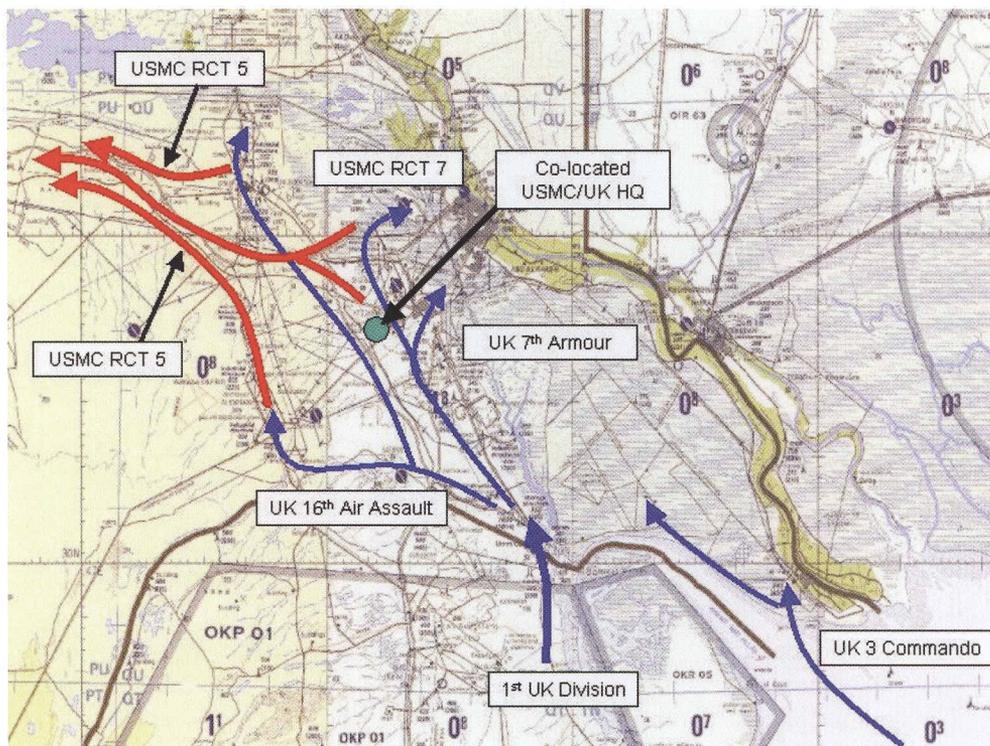


British forces from the 16th Air Assault Brigade relieve 5th Marines in the South Rumaylah oil fields.

RRP 7 closer to An Nasiriyah. Now, the entire Division made its way through these pre-staged RRP's to top off fuel tanks prior to crossing the Euphrates. By the detailed calculations of the logisticians, the refueling here would allow the Division to continue its attack all the way to the Hantush Airstrip (the next Division objective) before another RRP was required. With hardened, fully loaded vehicles consuming fuel at a greater rate than planned, this timely shift in emphasis enabled units to conduct in-stride refit, refuel, and rearm for the attack up Highway 1. CSSG-11 had met its first real battlefield challenge and overcome it handily, and the affirmation of the principle of organic, mobile CSS elements was a confidence builder for the RCTs. One concern

remained, however, as repair parts and other support required from the fixed supply points were not making it to the combat forces at all. This would be a significant logistics shortfall that would plague the Division for the entire campaign.

On 22 March, RCT-5 completed a RIP in the South Rumaylah oil fields with the 16th Air Assault Brigade, 1st UK Division. Following the relief in place, the RCT conducted a road march on Highway 8 to near the Euphrates River at crossings west of An Nasiriyah. The RIP of artillery was the simplest of all. As the artillerymen had already established both US and UK firing positions in support of operations in the Rumaylah area, the US firing battalions were able



First UK Division relief in place of 1st Marine Division. They UK forces would assume control of Basrah and the Rumaylah Oil Fields, enabling Blue Diamond's rapid attack west.

to quickly disengage with no loss of fire support capability. The 7th Royal Horse Artillery, supported by its own counterbattery radar and supporting elements, seamlessly picked up the fight when 11th Marines rolled to the west.

Ripper Cleans House at the Shaat Al Basrah

Although the Division's objectives were secured, the Iraqis that had fled into the Al Basrah urban area still had fight left in them. Repeatedly, they attempted to sortie across the Shaat al Basrah bridges and counterattack the Marines.

Through the morning of 22 March, RCT-7 continued to block the bridges over the Shaat al Basrah, meeting sporadic resistance and periodic poorly organized counterattacks by uniformed and non-uniformed enemy forces. First Tank Battalion and 3/4 were continuing to use indirect and direct fire against targets on both sides of the waterway. Battle damage reports from the morning included at least two artillery pieces and one BMP destroyed. Although many of the Iraqi conscripts had fled the previous day, it was clear that many of the remaining enemy hardliners were willing to fight to the death. Technical vehicles, T-55's, and paramilitary fighters in civilian clothes continued to attack Tiger's lead elements, its headquarters, and support areas. With the fight continuing and its units spread across its zone, Tiger had not yet consolidated since crossing LD. The combat trains, command group, and TOW Platoon (-) had co-located at a crossroads near Az Zubayr. Shortly after staging at this location, the Marines in the vicinity of the command group heard the 'zip' of an anti-tank missile and an M-88 Tank retriever was rocked by a blast. Three Marines had been wounded (Master Gunnery Sergeant Guadalupe Denogean, Sergeant Eric Percy, and Lance Corporal Phillip Rugg). Captain Ruben Martinez, the 1st Tank Battalion S-4, recalls:

"As I completed shaving, I saw an RPG smoke trail out of the corner of my eye originating from about 175 meters to the south of the M-88. As I turned to look at the M88, I saw Sergeant Percy standing in the vehicle commander's cupola. The explosion rocked the M88, causing a fireball to come out of the vehicle and smoke to begin billowing from the vehicle. Corporal Rugg, a crewmember, began to exit the M88, standing just outside the hatch and turned toward Sgt Percy to ask what happened. Sergeant Percy shouted that he couldn't see. I could see Corporal Rugg's lower legs badly injured with many bleeding lacerations. Corporal Rugg then jumped down from the vehicle, obviously not realizing the extent of his wounds. He landed on his feet and immediately fell over yelling "Oh my legs!" I could hear sporadic small arms fire being fired at our position and being returned by the Marines. After washing Sergeant Percy's eyes out with water, I called in the contact report and the number of injured Marines. As I was on the radio, I observed Sergeant Jones pulling Master Gunnery Sergeant Denogean's limp body out of the burning M88, assisted by Corporal Rodriguez. We would later learn that Chief Lugo was inside the M88 passing the Master Gunnery Sergeant out of the vehicle. All three injured Marines were consolidated near the BAS vehicle and prepared for evacuation. Sergeant Jones returned and entered the burning M88 to remove AT-4 missiles that might have gone off due to the heat. Marines from the Bravo Command and combat trains secured a field on the west side of the AA for use as a landing zone."

Forward at the center Al Basrah bridge, Lima Company, 3/4, (attached to 1st Tank battalion) assessed enemy casualties had reached 100 fighters killed, but had encountered only feeble, mounted counter-attacks. This was about to change. Just as the command group's situation began to stabilize, Lima reported observing numerous BMPs and T-55's on the far side of the bridge, apparently preparing to attack. Delta Company, 1st Tanks, under Captain Greg Poland, relieved Lima Company at the bridge. A four-man British team, who had intended to cross into Al Basrah, now realized the bridge was too hot. Instead, they co-located with the Delta Company commander, providing intelligence from sources within the city. Delta Company's Red Platoon was maintaining the blocking position, awaiting the Iraqi attack, which soon came. An apparent suicide charge by a 'technical' with a mounted machine-gun, and two beat-up Sport

Utility Vehicles, was engaged and destroyed approximately 500 meters from the platoon's positions. The Red Platoon Commander, Lieutenant Vincent Hogan recalls:

“Any illusions of keeping friendlies clear of tank main gun surface danger zones during this war quickly evaporated as the enemy was mixed in throughout the Battalion's elements. The Marines of the command group, combat trains, and TOW platoon immediately engaged the enemy, and cleared buildings in the area with tank main gun fire. Captain Martinez and Major Keith completed coordination for the air CASEVAC [Note: For the injured crew of the M-88], and the choppers were on the deck within minutes of being called. We were about a half hour into the blocking mission, and it had calmed down considerably. We first observed the three vehicles when they stopped about 1500m to our front; the lead vehicle was clearly a MG-mounted 'technical'. As we went to REDCON-1, we observed 10-12 armed personnel on the 'technical'; the gunner put on a ski mask. Suddenly they were hauling ass towards our position. Red-2 shouted, 'RPG!' seeing one passenger lift an RPG out of the vehicle bed. We engaged with coax and .50 cal. In a minute or so, two vehicles were burning, with one remaining on the road. No one was moving. A couple minutes later, people started picking up weapons scattered from the 'technical'; we continued to engage. The whole engagement lasted maybe 10 minutes. After the fight, some of the gunners were able to observe through their powered sights 'TV' sloppily taped on the sides of the SUVs. I decided to inform the S-2 about this potentially useful, enemy vehicle marking. It didn't even occur to any of us that journalists would try to participate in an Iraqi suicide charge.”

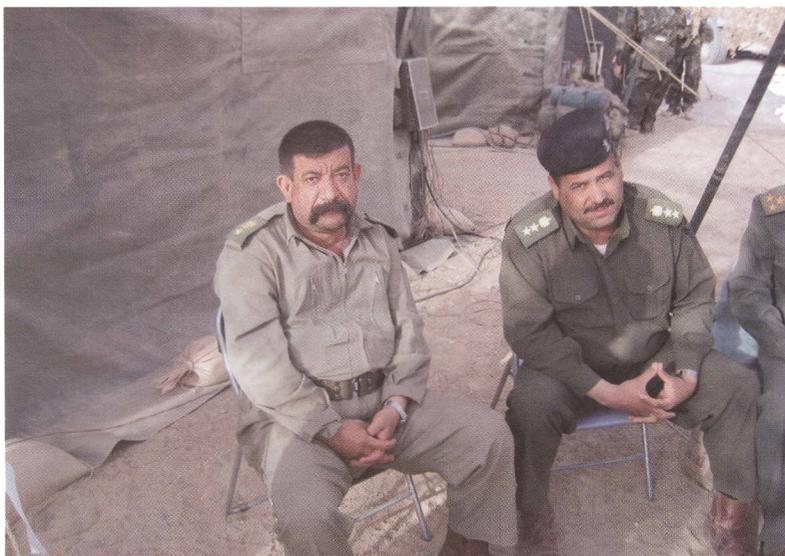
Upon completion of the engagement, it was ascertained that the two trail SUVs were, in fact, foreign journalists from the UK who had participated in the charge against the US blocking position. Whether this participation was voluntary in pursuit of a good story, or against their will at gunpoint, was never determined. Their resulting death was an unfortunate accident of war. Journalists, intermingled with the enemy combatants, were not identified as non-combatants until after the enemy attack had been repulsed. Subsequent investigations confirmed that the actions of Delta Company were consistent with established rules of engagement. This was scant solace to the families of the journalists or to the Marines who deeply regretted any noncombatant casualties.

The unfortunate action involving the journalists was just one of the many disorganized attempts by the enemy to cross the bridges. Those that tried were quickly and ruthlessly reduced. Gunnery Sergeant Steven Heath, Delta Company, 1st Tanks describes another action:

“I saw two 'technical' vehicles come across the bridge with a T-55. On the near side of the bridge, about 2700 meters away, the vehicles had formed a wedge with the tank in the lead, two 'technical' flanking. We saw them at an angle. The tank had guys riding all over it, World War II-style. Our first shot, sabot, went through the chest of a tank rider, and destroyed the 'technical' on the far side. The tank stopped and everyone jumped off. I fired the second shot: through a berm, in front of the tank, a hull shot. Then, a guy in black jumped in the driver's hole and started it. There was just enough time to see the white puff as the engine started and the tank began to move. Red-3 put a shot square in the turret, causing immediate 'secondaries'. Good section gunnery. It was almost like the Iraqis tried to adapt Soviet tactics to 'technical', like a Combat Recon Patrol. It wasn't working out too well for them.”

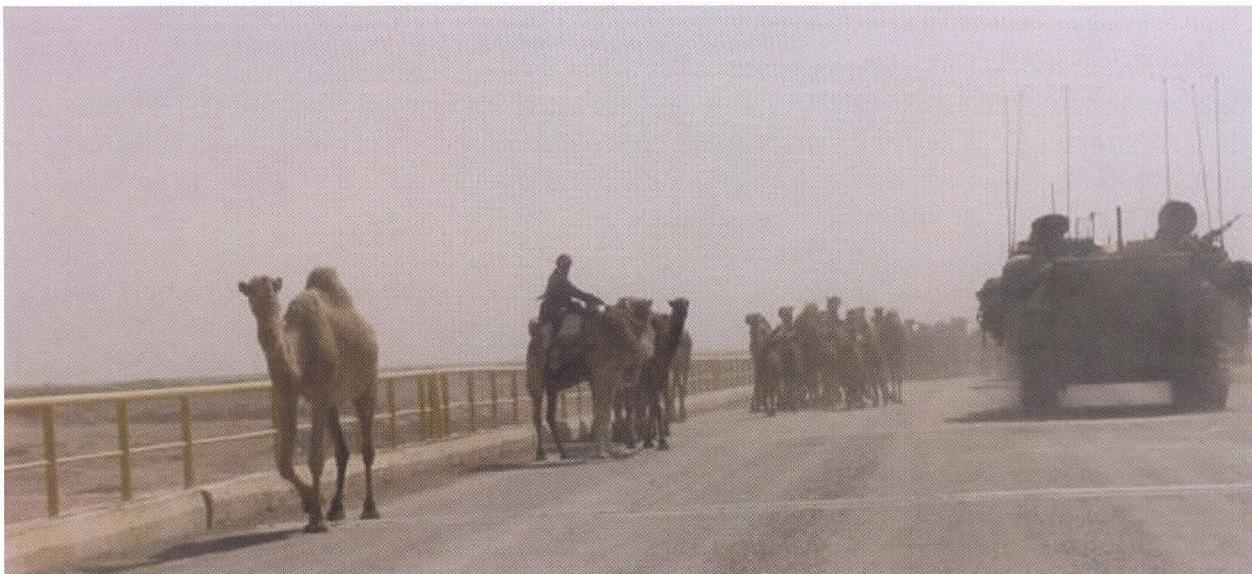
Tiger used air to continue to hammer the forces on the other side of the bridges. Captain Anthony Muralt, Delta Company's FAC recalls the response of one Cobra pilot when asked for BDA as, "too much to get an accurate count on." According to the British teams working with Tiger (receiving battle damage via cell phone), eight to ten tanks, twenty to thirty trucks/SUVs, and three APCs were destroyed in these strikes.

Also on the morning of 22 March, 1st Tanks captured a group of Iraqi soldiers dressed in civilian clothes, one of whom was alleged to be the Commanding General of the 51st Mechanized Division. (This was the first of many times the 'commander' of the 51st was reported captured, as the confusing Iraqi rank structure and multiple Regime agencies on the battlefield resulted in a large number of captured Iraqi General Officers.) Among this group's possessions were weapons and uniforms in bags identifying them as Republican Guardsmen, and a white powder substance in a sealed bag with instructions in Arabic for the employment of anthrax. A Sensitive Site Exploitation team was brought in to test the contents. Although tests revealed the powder was not anthrax, RCT-7 remained vigilant and prepared to encounter WMD. As 1st Tank Battalion began its displacement to the north, mortar rounds began to fall on their position. Lieutenant Popielski and his TOW platoon, while covering the command group's move, were attacked by an RPG team. The vehicle closest to the attacker, a HMMWV (TOW-variant) responded with the only weapon system available, a TOW missile. The missile was erratic, but successfully scared the attackers off. The TOW platoon quickly attacked south and destroyed several additional weapons caches. Upon relief by the UK's 7th Armoured Brigade, Tiger moved to its Assembly Areas (AAs) in preparation for the march west. Upon arrival in the AA, all battalion elements refueled and began catching what sleep they could.



Captured Iraqi Regular Army Officers.

The battle to isolate Al Basrah was largely concluded by midday on 22 March. At BIA, the focus for 3/4 shifted to logistical operations and the RIP, which was planned to take place immediately after the Marines secured the area. The First Fusiliers, of the 7th Armour Brigade, 1st U.K. Division, wasted no time in settling into positions and making the transition. Elements of 3/4 consolidated in the vicinity of the RCT-7 Main CP and conducted resupply operations throughout the night in preparation for movement. By this time, fatigue began to play a dominating role, as exhaustion from over two days of continuous combat operations



An Iraqi traffic jam. It was not uncommon to see droves of camels or former Iraqi soldiers in civilian clothing walking alongside Marine convoys.

made the relatively simple tasks of road marches, link-ups, and refueling operations very difficult. It took Kilo Company, for example, many additional and frustrating hours in a black night to navigate out through British defenses at BIA and find the battalion's resupply point. The Marines were very ready to settle into an assembly area to rest and refit.

Many enemy vehicles were destroyed and personnel were captured during this first operation. In the largest capture of the day, First Lieutenant John Dyer accepted the surrender of 64 EPWs at a location near the Main CP where suspected rocket fire had come from. The party was surprised when one of the vehicles that was found at the location was an armored personnel carrier with the red crescent symbol painted on it (the Iraqi equivalent to the Red Cross), but with an 82mm mortar mounted and ready to fire in the back. As anticipated, Marines would encounter this tactic repeatedly in the coming weeks. Schools, mosques, and hospitals were some of the protected-status sites used to store vast quantities of ammunition and weapons. In the garrisons of the Iraqi RA, Marines found functional enemy equipment simply abandoned.

RCT-7 had embedded a British Army Major Liaison Officer (LNO), Major Andy Flay, into its staff in late February to facilitate coordination



First Marine Division moves west along Route Tampa toward the Euphrates River.

with the 7th Armoured Brigade of the 1st UK Division ('Desert Rats'). The RIP began close to first light, as the 7th Brigade staff co-located its CP with the Ripper Main, to ensure coordination. As with the 7th RHA, the 3^d RHA was already in their firing positions, and seamlessly picked up the fight where 11th Marines left it. Additionally, the British Signals Intelligence Units were already in-place, having gained an appreciation of the signals environment by crossing the LD with Marine Radio Battalion elements. The RIP of units in the RCT-7 zone took place from south to north and then west to east. The 'Black Watch' Regiment assumed 3/7's positions at Shuaybah barracks and 1/7's positions at Az Zubayr. The 'Royal Fusiliers' Regiment relieved 3/4 at BIA. The RIP took most of the day to complete, with RCT-7 units, one by one, pushing west to set up in a new AA. By 1948Z, the Brits and TF Ripper completed the relief in place, and RCT-7 was on the move. CSSC-117 established RRP's for each of the battalions as they withdrew toward Highway 8. Once replenished, RCT-7 consolidated in Tactical Assembly Area Seven (TAA-7), and prepared to follow the rest of the Division's movement west along Highway 8 toward An Nasiriyah.

23 March Blue Diamond Maintains the Tempo

The RIP with the 1st UK Division was complete, and the Division now looked only to the west. The cohesive relationship cultivated between 1st Marine Division and their comrades in the 1st UK Division – developed over weeks of close coordination at all command levels – had allowed for a timely and seamless RIP. There was a tremendous lifting of a burden for staff officers in every unit, and a firm sense of confidence on the part of the Marines. For months, they had trained for the missions in South Rumaylah and near Al Basrah. They had pored over maps, reviewed imagery, and memorized every detail of the terrain and enemy situation. They had visualized how they would execute the attack, each man preparing himself to perform under fire. Now all of these issues had been settled. The tremendous success enjoyed by the Marines in seizing the strategic oil infrastructure intact was now fact. The performance of these Marines, most in combat for the first time, was proven. In dozens of different units, Marines spent quiet minutes contemplating their victory. Soon, however, Staff NCOs across the Division were coming down the line shouting that it was time to move out again.



The Division accomplished some important tasks during this brief respite. With Secretary of Defense authority, the CG frocked Colonel John F. Kelly, the Assistant Division Commander (ADC), to the grade of Brigadier General at the Division Forward COC located in the South Rumaylah oil fields. The last known promotion of a Marine Brigadier General in an active combat zone was that of an earlier 1st Marine Division

Colonel Kelly, 1st Marine Division's ADC, is promoted to Brigadier General in the vicinity of Az Zubayr.

ADC – then Colonel Lewis B. “Chesty” Puller in Korea.

Elements of 3^d AA Battalion were in control of the western bridge site over the Euphrates River. The rest of the Division started to approach the crossing, passing through the Task Force Tarawa battlespace along MSR Tampa. 3^d AA Battalion established traffic control points to speed the movement. The Division soon neared the ‘hourglass’, that key chokepoint south of An Nasiriyah that had been the subject of so many sand table exercises, Lego Drills, and Jersey Drills. Getting the 1st Marine Division through this chokepoint rapidly would become the new priority of effort.



Objects in mirror are larger than they appear. Embedded reporters moved alongside Marines as they approached the Euphrates.



Marines captured this bridge over the Euphrates, supporting the rapid movement of mechanized and armored forces across the river.

While most of the Division's combat power moved along the Highway 1 and Highway 8 corridors to the west side of An Nasiriyah, the Marines of RCT-1 began planning for their own crossing. RCT-1 was prepared to accomplish a variety of missions, and staged at the rear of the Division's column waiting its turn at the eastern bridge. The RCT was prepared, however, to move directly through the An Nasiriyah area to reach Highway 7 to the north, if the enemy situation allowed it.

At the western bridge, the Lego and Jersey drills had only partially prepared the Division for the tremendous backlog of men and equipment trying to make their way across the river. Under the eyes of the TMCC, 8th Engineer Support Battalion engineers worked diligently to improve the approaches to the two bridges at the site. The TMCC Marines tried to keep the site clear. Lieutenant Colonel Abbott described the scene

that awaited his Marines at the crossing site:

“Marine columns of vehicles were heading north on both sides of highways 1 and 8. On the west side of An Nasiriyah a huge traffic jam was backing up at the river. It seems that the 6-8 paved lanes were going down to one dirt road trying to scrape across one unfinished bridge to continue up highway 1. Headquarters Battalion’s MP Company was on the scene, prioritizing movement, per the Division Ground Transportation Order (GTO). Tempers were high, as every commander was hot to get into the fight across the Euphrates River. Clearly the sense of



The old construction bridge over the Euphrates. Light vehicles crossed this bridge while armored vehicles crossed the new bridge.

urgency and the tactical situation would not tolerate the bottleneck. The MP Company was quickly reinforced with the Tactical Movement Coordination Center (TMCC) and more Marines from the 3^d AA Battalion Combat Trains. An artillery D7 bulldozer was coaxed off its trailer and the operator made short work of a high berm that was blocking traffic. Marine engineers were already at work repairing the ramped approaches up to and down from the large heavy vehicle bridge on the right side. There was a smaller, fragile bridge to the left that was

inexplicably not being used at all. The AA Battalion commander used the 'TLAR' method of bridge classification and drove across. Sergeant Danny Hamler asked, "What does 'TLAR' stand for?" He was told, "That Looks About Right. If the bridge doesn't hold the Hummer, than we won't use it anymore." It held the weight and was deemed good enough. The TMC Marines ran engineer tape and concertina wire to create two lanes up to the two bridges. All Hummers were routed left and everything else went to the right. After about two hours of frenzied activity and pandemonium, traffic really started moving smoothly without delay.”

The recently completed Highway 1 Bridge itself was an impressive structure, rising high above the river, but the approaches to the bridge were unfinished. The concrete bridge abutments dropped off steeply onto the dirt approaches. With Lieutenant Colonel Abbott's Marines looking on, Marine engineers worked rapidly to fill in the ‘step’ on either end of the new bridge, while light vehicles used the adjacent construction bridge. Getting the engineers to the water's edge through the tightly congested traffic was tough. From the southern bank, Division Marines watched the reduction of this last obstacle to forward progress. Over the previous months, Marines of the Division had (via imagery) ‘watched’ this bridge as it slowly grew across the river. The Marines had cheered the progress of the Iraqi engineers all the way from Camp Pendleton months before the attack. When the Division’s plans were originally formulated, there was only a small construction bridge at this spot. Now, more than a year later, the small construction bridge was still there, but the shiny new concrete monster next to it

dwarfed it. Every day that the attack had drawn nearer, Marines of the Division joked that it would sure be a shame for the Iraqis to destroy the new bridge now, after having spent to much time building it. Inexplicably, both bridges had been captured intact, and now all that remained was for the Division to work its way through the inevitable traffic delays it had foreseen in getting across the Euphrates River.

While the engineers worked to get the bridge site fully operational, units from across the zone began to queue up for their crossing of the Euphrates. The last of the Division's combat units had disengaged from the 1st UK Division's new zone, and the Division Forward CP was the last to leave. The Division Forward CP, however, would have to be one of the first units across the Euphrates at the western bridge to maintain the Division's operational tempo. Starting



A typical mud-walled family farm in Southern Iraq. Small compounds like these housed large families or clan groups.

on the far eastern side of the Division as it spread out across southern Iraq, the Division Forward CP displaced from Az Zubayr, and rushed across the entirety of the Division battlespace to take its place behind 3^d LAR in the column. The Forward CP would eventually set up 30 km north of

"As I'm riding past a crowd of people who are waving cheering despite the fact that we have weapons pointed at them I'm struck by the fact that I am, for some reason or another trusted by peoples that have never seen me, don't share my language, customs, or religious beliefs, and know nothing about me except that I'm from the United States of America."

- Corporal Deymond Lashley
Weapons Platoon, I 3/5

the River to allow the Division Main to leapfrog forward. This preplanned repositioning of Division command and control elements forward was critical to sustaining momentum throughout the campaign, and it was a especially a tribute to the communications Marines who were able to continually support these long-distance leapfrog movements without loss of communications. Their ability to do so was the result of careful planning and preparation by the Division G-6, Colonel Nick Petronzio, who had faced similar challenges during the last Gulf War (when he had been the G-6 Operations Officer for the 2^d Marine Division.)

As the convoys of the Division continued their way west, dozens, and then hundreds of Iraqi young men in civilian clothes, most with only combat boots or no shoes at all, were seen walking