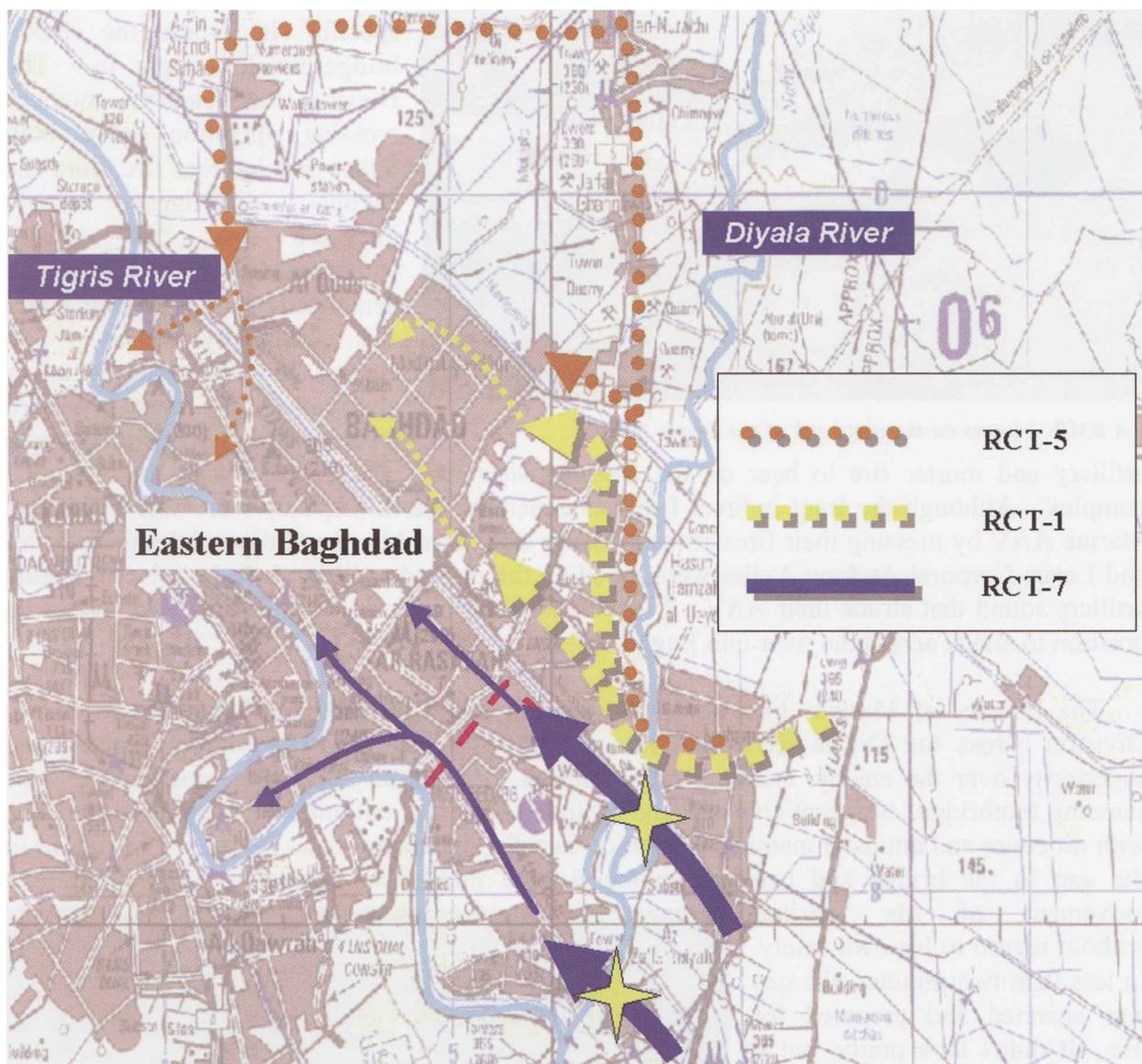


**7 April
One River, Three Attacks**



RCT-1 and RCT-7 would attack straight into Baghdad while RCT-5 completed the cordon around the north side of the city. Once the cordon was complete, all three RCTs would advance into the city.

At 0300Z, the Division attacked to seize the bridgeheads at the north and south bridges over the Diyala. RCT-7 would lead the attack as the Division's main effort. Within RCT-7, 8th Engineer Support Battalion was the main effort for bridging operations. RCT-1 would conduct its own assault river crossing later in the day on the northern flank of RCT-7. RCT-5 would follow in trace on 8 April, and move to establish the northern cordon around Baghdad. The combat bridging operation incorporated a full fire support plan that used combined arms to permit the crossing at minimal risk to the assault elements.

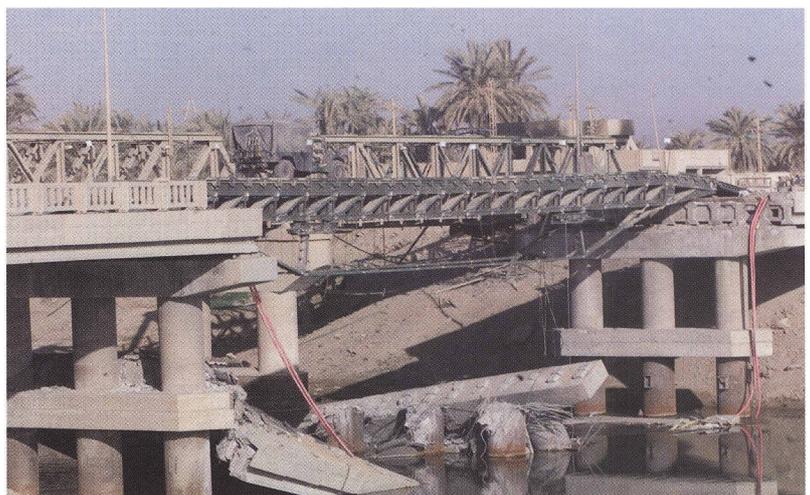


A BMP- 2 burns on the east bank of the Diyala River.

Near the southern bridge, the first tasks included putting infantry across the river to secure the far side, and identifying the specific site where the ribbon bridge would be put in. The Division conducted the southern crossing operation under both direct and indirect fire from the enemy. Intelligence reports indicated that the enemy commander continually demanded reinforcements, and was continually denied. The enemy had the bridges under observation of their Forward Observers, however, and brought

artillery and mortar fire to bear on the crossing sites from firing positions in the Rasheed complex. Although the Iraqi indirect fire was generally inaccurate, they were able to hit one Marine AAV by massing their fires at the crossing site. Two Marines, Corporal Jesus Medellin and Lance Corporal Andrew Aviles were killed by the massed artillery fires, both by an enemy artillery round that struck their AAV. Twelve other Marines were wounded as 3/4 moved into position to attack across the river into Baghdad.

The bravery of Marines like Corporal Medellin and Lance Corporal Aviles carried the Division across the Diyala River and into the enemy's capitol. The Marines gained fire superiority over the enemy, enabling the engineers to make an attempt at crossing the still-standing footbridge. Sergeant Guevaracano again led his squad out onto the southern footbridge, with no cover and amidst a massive volume of friendly and enemy fire. He moved his squad to the gap in the bridge and began spanning it with improvised materials, coordinating the movement of his Marines without regard to his own safety. In less than two minutes, the gap was spanned and prepared for use. It didn't look pretty, but it accomplished its purpose and allowed two companies of 3/4 to initiate their assault across the river. Crossing the two dismounted companies via the footbridge, 3/4 quickly secured the areas suitable for an improvised crossing site and dug in not far from the bridge on the enemy side.



A medium girder bridge is eventually used to span the damaged Southern bridge over the Diyala River.

It had been reported that the banks of the river just to the north of the main bridge looked like they would support this operation, and the engineers from the Army's 65th Multi-Role Bridge Company (MRBC) quickly confirmed this. By 0630Z, the ribbon bridge operation was beginning. The engineers and heavy equipment operators of CEB did the near side bank preparation, while the 65th MRBC constructed the first raft. Once the raft was completed, the first vehicle sent across was a D-7 dozer. The operator, Private Benjamin Krueger, heroically continued to develop the far shore while under mortar fire. CEB engineers continued with the preparation of the near side approach, while the MRBC finished assembling the actual pontoon bridge. The engineers were under the eyes and guns of any remaining enemy throughout their operation. The bridge engineers smoothly executed the operation, shrugging off sporadic enemy fire as they worked. The first tanks from 3/4 crossed at approximately 1200Z.

The Iraqis had caused more problems for the Marines at the damaged southern bridge because they had done such a poor job trying to destroy it. While they had successfully dropped the middle span, they had damaged the adjacent span in such a way that the engineers would have to drop that span as well before they could start work on the MGB. The engineers' first attempt to complete the job with explosives did not work. The span dropped down only another couple of feet. The engineers from Charlie Company ventured out into the river in small boats and tried again. On the second attempt, they blew the stanchions down closer to the water. This attempt was successful and the span dropped cleanly out of the way. The Marines of 8th ESB quickly went to work building the MGB over the gap. The ribbon bridge would support the assault forces, but the heavier MGB was required to support long-term sustainment and civilian traffic into the city. By 1430Z, the ribbon bridge was complete, and 3/4 spent the night pushing across its armor to provide support for the two dismounted companies on the far bank. It would not be until the next day that the hard-working Marines and soldiers would have the MGB complete, but it soon became the best bridge into eastern Baghdad.



The footbridge (left) and medium girder bridge (right) facilitate the crossing of Marines and equipment over the Diyala River shortly after RCT-7's assault.

Seven kilometers away on the northern bridge, RCT-7 had a different set of challenges and the Combat Engineers had a chance to earn their hazardous duty pay as well. Just to get to the bridge, they had to breach two surface laid minefields on the approaches. They accomplished this using Mine Clearing Line Charges (MCLCs). Under the suppressive fires by elements of 1st Tank Battalion, The AAV with the line-charge pushed forward through enemy fire to get into position. On the first attempt, the line charge did not detonate (a common occurrence.) An engineer ran out under fire to re-set the detonator and manually blow the charge. Even after these heroics, the engineers' work was not complete. Once the way had been opened to the bridge, engineers were required to determine if the bridge was wired with explosives. Although a cursory examination of the exterior had been done, a detailed analysis of the interior portions of the bridge was required before tanks could be risked across. This was accomplished by sending one engineer through each of the service tunnels that ran along the sides of the bridge. Crawling through the pipes on their hands and knees, Corporal Cobian and Lance Corporal Kinney from Charlie Company, Combat Engineer Battalion, cleared up to the point of the damaged westernmost span. They crawled back and reported that there were no explosives remaining. Next, the engineer officer, Captain Duncan 'Buck' Buchanan, proceeded to the damaged portion and 'stuck his head in the hole' to determine the extent of the structural damage. Using an MIA1 for cover, the engineers crept their way up to the damaged portion. Upon reaching it and getting a closer look, Captain Buchanan and Lieutenant Paul Bock saw that the Iraqis again had done a poor job. They had blown the stringers along the sides of the bridge, but those in the middle (the most important ones) had been left intact. The engineers informed Lieutenant Colonel Chartier, the 1st Tank Battalion commander, that an AVLB could be used to breach the gap.

The AVLB was emplaced, and the first tanks crossed the river, only to discover another minefield 200 meters on the far side of the bridge. Again, the engineers were called up and fired a MCLC. When the line charge misfired, Lance Corporal Bianchimano got out of his AAV and ran up under heavy enemy fire to manually ignite it. While the detonation cleared many mines, there was still nearly 100 meters of minefield in front of them. Having only two remaining MCLCs that might be needed later, they began destroying the mines with bangalore torpedoes. Corporal Cobian and Lance Corporals Noonan, Kirkpatrick, and Warpness, each rushed forward into the minefield with a bangalore torpedo. While taking enemy fire, they emplaced the explosives then returned to the AAV. A lane was cleared through the minefield, but it was still too narrow to pass tanks. Seeing this, Sergeant Lauritzen dismounted and led his squad in picking up and moving the mines by hand. Once all the mines were cleared, 1st Tank Battalion continued the attack into Baghdad.

Two days later, when Army engineers came to complete repairs to the bridge, they found that the entire bridge had indeed been wired for destruction. The Iraqis had wired it in such a way, however, that when the first span blew, it had cut the wires to the remainder of the bridge. When the wires were traced back to the far side of the river, a dead Iraqi with a plunger was found. It had been a close call.

Back at Ripper's Tactical CP, events seemed to be unfolding as planned. After news was received that the northern bridge could be made functional with the use of an AVLB, it was

decided to convert the feint into an attack, and force a crossing on that bridge as well. Throughout the night of 7 April, and into the next morning, 1st Tanks and 3/4 continued to flow across the river and into the Rasheed area of eastern Baghdad over both bridges. Both battalions began expanding their bridgeheads on the far side of the river as the forces became available. RCT-7 found that once the initial defenses had been breached, enemy resistance began to decline. Resistance was stiff in a few isolated areas, but it was beginning to collapse.

A steady stream of supporting aircraft had enabled the successful crossing at the two sites. On this day, RCT-7 received fantastic rotary wing air support, just as it had throughout the campaign. The support of the outstanding Marines of HMLA-169, the 'Vipers', was noted frequently in Regimental accounts. The Vipers were a combat multiplier for the RCT and regularly went above and beyond what was asked of them, earning the respect of their comrades on the ground. Likewise, the CASEVAC helicopters provided by the Purple Foxes of HMM-364 were indispensable.



An AAV crosses into Baghdad over the northern bridge over the Diyala. An AVLB was just able to span the damaged section of the bridge. Marines cleared minefields on both sides of the bridge before using it.



Marines from RCT-1 demonstrate their amphibious capability over 600 km from the sea.

As RCT-7 crossed and entered the Rasheed complex, RCT-1 pushed to the Diyala River. RCT-1's battlespace was to the northeast of the RCT-7 battlespace, and Colonel Toolan was eager to get moving. The Pioneer UAV identified a partially completed bridge only 300 meters further north of the northern-most RCT-7 bridge, and the site appeared suitable for an assault crossing and an additional ribbon bridge. CAAT B Platoon, led by First Lieutenant Oscar Rodriguez, scouted a route through the farmers' fields and led Alpha Company and the forward command group to the road that

ran parallel to the river along the east side. Once at the road, CAAT B and Alpha Company cleared the length required to conduct a reconnaissance of the crossing site. First Lieutenant Gerry Roeder led an engineer reconnaissance detachment augmented by two CAAT vehicles, and led his team to the site. As the reconnaissance was underway, Lieutenant Rodriguez's Marines spotted armed personnel across the river. When the enemy suddenly appeared and manned a recoilless rifle positioned across the river, CAAT B engaged them. CAAT B's forward observer began to call indirect fire on the objective, while the team provided suppression with .50 caliber and Mk-19 machineguns.

As fires were exchanged across the river 500 meters north of their position, Lieutenant Roeder and Corporal Brian Goff stripped down to their 'green on green' shorts and tee shirts. Armed with only their pistols, the two combat engineers swam 150 meters across the river. Iraqis farmers tended to their water buffalo only 200 meters away. As the mortars landed on CAAT B's intended targets to their north, First Lieutenant Roeder and Corporal Goff identified fighting positions and bunkers that had been recently abandoned by the enemy. The engineers made quick work of the far side survey and swam the span of the river to rejoin the waiting CAAT Marines. These two stalwart Marines had confirmed the only viable crossing site along miles of river line. This site would soon be exploited by RCT-1 to open a second advance on Baghdad.



AAVs cross the Diyala River during RCT-1's historic amphibious assault into the heart of Baghdad.

Colonel Toolan informed the CG of the crossing site and was given approval to get RCT-1 across the river to press Baghdad from two axes of advance. As a section of CAAT B guided the amphibious vehicles to the crossing site, a squad from CAAT B was sent to link up with Lima Company, 3/1, south of the crossing site to guide 3/1's tracks to the crossing site. As the link-up was affected, a BMP with uniformed enemy personnel around the vehicle was spotted through a grove of palm trees approximately one kilometer west of the company's position. Sergeant David Kaufer, CAAT B's TOW sniper, was ordered to destroy the target. Sergeant Kaufer skillfully threaded the missile through the grove and destroyed the BMP; another victory for the TOW snipers.

As the mechanized vehicles were moving towards the crossing site, the AAV company commander, Major Nichols, informed 1/4's commander, Lieutenant Colonel John Mayer, that the sea-worthiness of the AAVs was unknown. Having received the vehicles three days before moving to the dispersal area, the Marines had not had time to confirm the integrity of the seals and bilge pumps. Additionally, 1/4's combat trains and CAAT vehicles would not be able to swim the river, meaning the assault elements might be separated from their combat support for an unknown amount of time against a desperate, cornered enemy. Colonel Toolan made the decision to swim the AAVs across the river with the top hatches open (to allow a quick escape if they foundered before reaching the other side of the river.) At 1100Z, the first vehicle from Alpha Company was 'feet wet'. The Marines cheered as each vehicle swam across the river. As 1/4 continued inland to expand the beachhead line, it encountered sporadic small arms fire. The enemy began to pull back in the face of the assault, and now the Division had two fronts from which to pressure the capitol. Third Battalion, 1st Marines, crossed the river and passed through 1/4's lines, heading south to secure the far side of the northern Diyala Bridge.

At the northern bridge, 8th ESB had been reinforced with an Army Multi-Role Bridge Company (MRBC) from the West Virginia National Guard, and they quickly emplaced the new assault bridge under enemy fire. The Division coordinated this support, and soon RCT-1 was moving its wheeled equipment across using both the northern Diyala Bridge (now vacated by RCT-7) and the new assault bridge. RCT-1's forces consolidated along the river road that ran along the west bank of the River. There were extensive palm groves along the banks of the river, which the Iraqi defenders had used for cover and concealment. After completing their assault and routing the last of these defenders, RCT-1 set up their own bivouacs in the same groves. There were abandoned weapons and equipment everywhere, ranging from bayonets to SA-3 missiles loaded on trailers. The Iraqis that had chosen to fight had been destroyed, and the amount of wreckage lying across the battlefield on the west side of the river was an indication of the effectiveness of US shaping fires. As the AAVs splashed across the river, they captured a prisoner who gave an indication why resistance had faltered, *"when we saw the 'tanks' floating across the river, we knew we could not win against the Americans."* The amphibious capabilities of the Marines were breaking the enemy's will and winning battles almost 600 km from the sea.



In a hastily arranged conference, commanders of RCT-1, RCT-5, and 1/11 map out their plan for their continued attack into the Baghdad urban area.

8 April Closing the Door on Eastern Baghdad

On the morning of 8 April, the CG crossed over the river to assess the situation. Meeting with Colonel Dunford and Colonel Toolan, the CG reviewed the situation on the ground. The CG spread a map over the hood of Colonel Dunford's HMMWV. Behind him, an Iraqi herdsman and his water buffalo waded in the Diyala River, while a few curious civilians observed from the high banks. Iraqi flags still flew over most neighborhoods, and there was still significant sniper fire coming from the houses and buildings to the northwest. RCT-7 had pushed into the Rasheed military complex, and was preparing to seize the initial objectives they had been given. RCT-7's limit of advance had been set in compliance with the CFLCC order to establish the Baghdad cordon, but not to attack into the city itself. There were enough military objectives on Rasheed to keep RCT-7 occupied for most of the day, while the rest of the Division worked to complete the cordon mandated by higher. The Rasheed complex also offered a secure

area from which to launch further operations, as it was a large military facility bounded by water on three sides, and a major highway on the fourth. 'Rasheed Island' the staff had called it, and it jutted like a dagger toward the jugular of downtown Baghdad. Bisecting east Baghdad just to the north of Rasheed was the Army Canal. This waterway now served as a regimental boundary between RCT-1 and RCT-7. On the north side of the Army Canal, RCT-1 was prepared to push into the city on the northeast flank of RCT-7. If RCT-1 were to push forward for about 4 km, they would uncover Highway 5, the major route into and out of the city from the Baqubah area. Beyond this terrain feature, there was an area of former Regime administration buildings, including several military and intelligence service compounds. Since the envelopment of Baghdad by crossing the Diyala north of the city was no longer feasible, the CG decided to bring RCT-5 up over the same bridges that RCT-1 had used. The CG told Colonel Toolan to take his boys and push to the Highway first. "You need to push up to Highway 5 so that Grizzly can get behind you and get around to the north of the city." The results of the RCT-7 and RCT-1 attacks would put the two forces roughly on line in the vicinity of Highway 5, and Phase Line Andrew was established there as a limit of advance. RCT-5 would pass behind RCT-1 on the west bank, and move to cordon off the northern escape routes from eastern Baghdad. CFLCC did not want to push into the city until the cordon was complete, including a physical link-up between Army and Marine Corps forces at both the north and south sides of the city. Forces were already on the move to accomplish this task, and the CG wanted to maintain the momentum for an attack into eastern Baghdad.



The ever-present 3d MAW conducts air patrols over Baghdad.

Until RCT-5 could maneuver north of Baghdad on the ground, 3^d MAW would play a key role in cordoning off the city. Between the Tigris and the Diyala Rivers, the two main highways leading out of Baghdad were Highway 2, which ran along the Tigris, and Highway 5, which ran along the Diyala. While the Division maneuvered into position to block both of these routes on the ground, 3^d MAW patrolled them from the air. Their actions would ensure that no military reinforcements would be able to enter the city from northern Iraq, and that no military hardware would be able to leave the city to establish a defense in the Tikrit area. Third MAW would be relieved of their post only on 9 April, when RCT-5 was able to complete its maneuver into position across Highway 2.