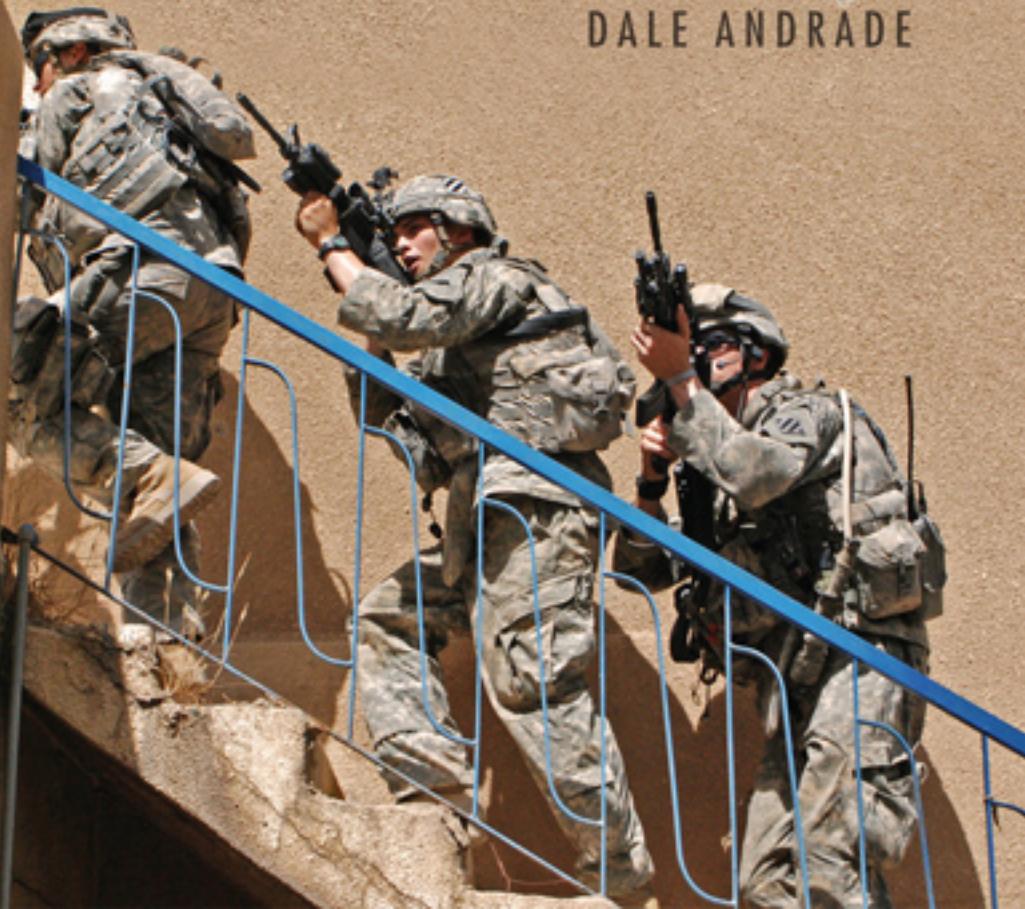


SURGING SOUTH OF BAGHDAD

THE 3D INFANTRY DIVISION AND
TASK FORCE MARNE IN IRAQ, 2007–2008

DALE ANDRADE



GLOBAL WAR ON TERRORISM SERIES

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CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
Foreword	xiii
The Author	xiv
Preface	xv
<i>Chapter</i>	
1. BACK TO IRAQ	1
A Brave Tradition	1
Gearing Up for a Third Tour.....	5
Changing Course	8
The Baghdad Belts	16
South of Baghdad.....	24
2. ON THE GROUND	35
Working in the Desert	41
East Bank of the Tigris.....	48
Commando Brigade	54
Paratroopers on the Euphrates	62
3. FIRST COMBAT.....	73
Attack on Patrol Base Dog	73
Air Cavalry.....	78
Kiowa Down	84
Missing in Action	88
4. TAKING THE OFFENSIVE.....	101
Preparing the Battlefield.....	102
Western Operations	108
Last Pieces in Place.....	113
Planning the First Offensive	121
5. OPERATION MARNE TORCH.....	129
Maintaining Momentum	137
Anvil on the East Bank.....	141
High-Value Targets.....	149
Running Out of Steam.....	156

<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Page</i>
6. NEW GROUND	163
Coalition Contingent	164
Cross-Border Smuggling	167
Facing Iran	173
7. NEW OFFENSIVES.....	179
Avalanche	180
Beyond Reach	191
Taking Stock	199
8. SONS OF IRAQ	209
Anbar Beginnings	211
New Focus on Reconciliation	216
Combat Multipliers	221
Progress East of the Tigris.....	229
Burgeoning Numbers.....	234
9. PRESSING THE ADVANTAGE	243
MARNE TORCH, Second Round	245
Pacifying Arab Jabour.....	257
The Shi'ite Strategy	261
10. WESTERN FRONT.....	269
The Rakkasans	272
Missing in Action Resolved.....	285
Security in the Euphrates Valley.....	289
Switching Brigades	293
Operation MARNE ROUNDUP.....	298
11. THUNDERBOLT	307
Shifting Priorities	308
Relentless Pursuit	312
Air Power.....	317
Improving the Odds	320
12. NEW FOCUS.....	331
Grand Slam	333
Winding Down	345
Baghdad Interlude.....	351
Back to Capitol Hill	357
Piledriver	359
Transition.....	367

<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Page</i>
13. CONCLUSION: WHAT WINNING LOOKS LIKE.....	383
Balance Sheet.....	384
The Counterinsurgency Assessment	388
Remembering	390
BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE.....	393
ABBREVIATIONS	397
MAP SYMBOLS AND TERMS	403
INDEX	405

TABLE

U.S. Brigade Combat Team Surge Deployments	14
--	----

MAPS

No.

1. Iraq, 2007	9
2. Baghdad Belt, 2007	19
3. MND-C Operational Area, April 2007	28
4. 3d Brigade Combat Team, 3d Infantry Division, Area of Operations, May–June 2007.....	44
5. 2d Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, Area of Operations, May–August 2007	56
6. 4th Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, Area of Operations, May–August 2007	64
7. The Abduction, 12 May 2007	91
8. 2d Brigade Combat Team, 3d Infantry Division, Area of Operations, May 2007	118
9. Arab Jabour Region, 2007.....	122
10. Operation MARNE TORCH: 2d Brigade Combat Team, 3d Infantry Division, 15 June–15 July 2007	126
11. Wasit Province Area of Operations, June–December 2007	170
12. Operation MARNE AVALANCHE: 4th Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, 15 July–15 August 2007.....	182
13. Operation MARNE HUSKY, 15 June–15 July 2007.....	195
14. Operation MARNE TORCH II Area of Operations, 15 September–15 October 2007	248
15. Operation MARNE ANVIL, 15 October–15 November 2007	266
16. Operation MARNE COURAGEOUS: 3d Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, 15 November–15 December 2007	278

No.	Page
17. Operation MARNE ROUNDUP, 15 December 2007– 15 January 2008	301
18. Operation MARNE THUNDERBOLT: 2d Brigade Combat Team, 3d Infantry Division, 1 January–15 February 2008.....	313
19. MND-C Operations: Relentless Pursuit, February–June 2008 ..	338

ILLUSTRATIONS

Maj. Gen. Rick Lynch, 3d Infantry Division and Task Force Marne commander.....	5
Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates confers with MNF-I Commander General David H. Petraeus	12
Outgoing MNF-I Commander General George W. Casey Jr. and General Petraeus at the change of command ceremony	15
MNC-I Commander Lt. Gen. Raymond T. Odierno is briefed on operations in Baghdad.....	18
Air Force flights ferrying the surge brigades from Kuwait to Iraq	20
Harsh weather conditions south of Baghdad	31
Al Faw Palace.....	36
Camp Victory, home to the 3d Infantry Division headquarters	37
Soldiers wait for a helicopter on the airfield outside Forward Operating Base Hammer	38
A Bradley fighting vehicle patrols past the ancient Persian palace of Taq-i Kisra	40
Col. Wayne W. Grigsby, commander of the 3d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, returns to Forward Operating Base Hammer after a “battlefield rotation” to his units in the field.....	41
General Lynch listens to a briefing from Lt. Col. John S. Kolasheski, commander of the 3d Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment.....	43
Lt. Col. John “Jack” Marr, commander of the 3d Brigade’s 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, confers with a staff officer during a clearing operation	49
Bradley fighting vehicles lined up inside the perimeter of Combat Outpost Cashe	50
Soldiers of the 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, question a group of Iraqi men during a cordon-and-search operation in Salman Pak	53
Soldiers of the 2d Battalion, 15th Field Artillery Regiment, search for buried weapons.....	59
Soldiers from the 2d Battalion, 15th Field Artillery Regiment, provide security during a Medical Civilian Aid Program in Al Mahmudiyah	62

	<i>Page</i>
A soldier from the 1st Battalion, 501st Infantry Regiment, stands watch on a mission outside Al Iskandariyah.	71
Following the suicide truck bomb attack on Patrol Base Dog, soldiers from the 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment, search the rubble for survivors	76
Black Hawk helicopters from the 3d Infantry Division's Combat Aviation Brigade.....	79
U.S. Army Apache Longbow helicopters at an airfield in Baghdad ...	81
Soldiers from the 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division's 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, question villagers along the Euphrates during the search for the three missing U.S. soldiers	92
Before commencing their first offensives, Task Force Marne units heightened road security as a countermeasure against IEDs	103
Colonel Grigsby meets with an Iraqi National Police general to make arrangements for joint operations north of Salman Pak.....	107
A soldier from the 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, searches for a weapons cache south of Al Yusufiyah	109
Col. Terry R. Ferrell, commander of the 2d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, talks with General Lynch	114
Lt. Col. Kenneth P. Adgie, commander, 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment	117
General Lynch increased his battlefield rotations into the field to meet with both officers and soldiers to impress upon them the importance of Operation MARNE TORCH	124
Army Black Hawks scatter leaflets over Arab Jabour to inform residents about coalition operations and warn them not to aid insurgents	127
Combat Outpost Murray in northern Arab Jabour, once a vacation home for Saddam Hussein's family, became the forward headquarters for the 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment	130
Soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, search suspected insurgent hideouts during MARNE TORCH	132
A soldier from the 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, uses the handheld interagency identity detection equipment to scan an Iraqi civilian's iris	133
Soldiers prepare to place a towing bar onto a Bradley troop carrier damaged by a bomb blast	134
An explosive ordnance disposal team destroys an IED found west of Arab Jabour	136
Soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, captured this local insurgent leader	138
Soldiers rest at Combat Outpost Murray after a day of patrolling in the hot sun	140

	<i>Page</i>
A soldier from the 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, investigates an insurgent IED factory in Arab Jabour	141
An air assault team from the 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, searches buildings west of Salman Pak	144
Inside the 3d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, tactical operations center at Forward Operating Base Hammer	151
General Lynch meets with Brig. Gen. James L. Huggins and Colonel Grigsby to discuss Operation JERSEY TURNPIKE	153
A self-propelled howitzer fires at targets from Forward Operating Base Mahmudiyah	157
Col. Peter R. Baker, commander of the 3d Infantry Division's 214th Fires Brigade	166
Colonel Baker's two Paladin 155-mm. self-propelled howitzers.....	168
Forward Operating Base Delta was often rocketed by Shi'ite insurgents	169
General Lynch and members of the 3d Infantry Division staff discuss plans to pacify Al Kut and establish secure border crossings between Wasit Province and Iran.....	173
General Odierno meets with Maj. Shavlego Tabatadze, commander of the 3d Georgian Brigade, as the brigade deploys to Forward Operating Base Delta	175
Security fell to the Iraqi police following the departure of the Georgian brigade and the winding down of Task Force Marne's tour of duty.....	177
General Lynch briefs officers of the 4th Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, outside Forward Operating Base Kalsu on the eve of Operation MARNE AVALANCHE	181
Black Hawks ferry elements of the 3d Battalion, 509th Infantry Regiment, to a suspected insurgent base near Jurf as Sakhr	185
An intelligence team from the 4th Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, photographs weapons left behind by insurgents at a site near the Euphrates River	187
This enemy weapons cache was found west of Jurf as Sakhr during MARNE AVALANCHE	188
An exhausted trooper sits in the shade at Patrol Base Jurf following a patrol in 110°F heat	190
General Odierno speaks with Col. Daniel Ball, commander of the 3d Infantry Division's Combat Aviation Brigade.....	193
General Lynch partially relied on his Combat Aviation Brigade's Apache gunships to extend armed force into areas beyond the reach of Task Force Marne's ground troops	194

On 3 September 2007, one week before his congressional testimony, General Petraeus met with high-ranking civilian and military officials at Al Asad Air Base.....	203
Ryan Crocker, U.S. ambassador to Iraq	205
Sheikh Abdul Sattar al-Rishawi meets with Iraqi government officials in Ar Ramadi on 6 September 2007	210
Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki dines with sheikhs at a U.S. base in Al Anbar Province	215
General Odierno speaks with a group of local sheikhs at Patrol Base Kemple	217
Capt. Richard Thompson, commander of Company B, 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, speaks with an Iraqi elder near the town of Salman Pak	221
Capt. Chad A. Klascius, commander of Troop A, 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment, leads General Odierno and Hawr Rajab Awakening council members on a tour of the town	224
Lt. Col. Mark W. Odom, commander of the 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment, takes Brig. Gen. John F. Campbell, assistant division commander for maneuver, 1st Cavalry Division, on a tour of the squadron's area of operations	225
As Task Force Marne units brought security to areas formerly controlled by insurgents, local citizens became increasingly willing to join the Sons of Iraq.....	228
General Lynch meets with local Iraqi men at Patrol Base Warrior Keep, giving assurances that he will pursue any information they provide on insurgents.....	229
Sons of Iraq militias increased to the point that they became an integral part of security throughout MND-C	230
A local member of the Sons of Iraq poses for a photo prior to a joint clearing operation with soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment.....	233
With the help of new Sons of Iraq contingents, Salman Pak became a safer place	235
Lt. Col. Robert M. Balcavage, commander of the 1st Battalion, 501st Infantry Regiment, meets with General Lynch at Patrol Base Jurf ...	236
Sons of Iraq members await payment outside a military outpost south of Baghdad	239
The Sons of Iraq proved to be an important addition to U.S. and Iraqi troops and an effective counter to the insurgency throughout MND-C	240
Task Force Marne increasingly took advantage of local Sons of Iraq contingents during operations in late 2007	244

	<i>Page</i>
General Odierno addresses soldiers at Patrol Base Hawkes on the eve of Operation MARNE TORCH II	250
Soldiers from 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, prepare to go on a morning patrol in Arab Jabour.....	252
A Special Operations Forces team uses explosives during a mission against an insurgent safe house.	256
General Odierno is briefed on MARNE TORCH II by Colonel Ferrell and Colonel Adgie.....	258
Medical programs to bring basic health care to Iraqi villages were a first step in supplying government services to areas formerly under insurgent control.....	260
A soldier from the 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, escorts an Iraqi man from his house for questioning during an operation with Iraqi police in Salman Pak	262
A soldier with the 1st Battalion, 10th Field Artillery Regiment, patrols a market in Nahrawan	264
Two soldiers prepare to search the brick factory in Nahrawan.....	265
A soldier from the 1st Battalion, 10th Field Artillery Regiment, frisks an Iraqi for hidden weapons during a cordon and search in Nahrawan ..	267
Soldiers from the 2d Battalion, 15th Field Artillery Regiment, provide covering fire while searching a village for weapons near Forward Operating Base Lutafiyah	270
Col. Michael M. Kershaw and Cmd. Sgt. Maj. Anthony W. Mahoney case their unit colors during a transfer of authority ceremony on 2 November 2007 at Camp Striker	273
1st Lt. Colin Corrigan and Sfc. Tony Crisostomo of the 3d Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, survey the terrain near Owesat.....	277
During Operation MARNE COURAGEOUS, elements of the 3d Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, air assaulted into Owesat and established Patrol Base Kemple	282
After establishing a foothold in Owesat, the 3d Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, moved in civil affairs teams to run medical clinics and distribute humanitarian supplies in order to establish friendly ties with the local Iraqis	284
A patrol from the 3d Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, arrives at a suspected burial site for Spec. Byron Fouty and S. Sgt. Alex R. Jimenez, the two missing 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, soldiers	287
Troops from the 3d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, patrolled constantly throughout the area of operations.....	291
Muslim pilgrims make their way to the Imam Husayn Shrine in Karbala in observance of the annual Ashura holiday	296

	<i>Page</i>
A soldier walks by a burning field during a dismounted patrol.	298
Operation MARNE ROUNDUP was the opening campaign for the	
4th Brigade, 3d Infantry Division	303
Relentless pursuit of the insurgents	309
Units of the 2d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, increased patrolling	
in Arab Jabour prior to Operation MARNE THUNDERBOLT	316
U.S. Air Force B-1B Lancer bombers spearheaded air support	
for MARNE THUNDERBOLT	319
An Iraqi soldier provides security after a house was destroyed by a	
U.S. strike	321
Secretary of Defense Gates made acquisition of the new mine-	
resistant ambush-protected vehicle (MRAP) a high priority.	323
An MRAP	324
The 3d Infantry Division's armored vehicles backed the Sons of Iraq	
checkpoints in Arab Jabour during MARNE THUNDERBOLT	327
Members of the Sons of Iraq help distribute water to local residents....	329
Secretary Gates with the new MNC-I commander, Lt. Gen. Lloyd J.	
Austin.	332
1st Lt. Ivan Eno, from Company B, 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry	
Regiment, monitors the radio while his soldiers search for weapons	
caches southeast of Salman Pak.	335
Iraqi National Police operating with the 3d Squadron, 1st Cavalry	
Regiment, discover a weapons cache near a checkpoint outside	
Combat Outpost Cashe	337
A soldier from the 13th Georgian Battalion takes cover while	
providing security during a joint clearing operation with	
troops from the 8th Iraqi Army Division	341
Two soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment,	
patrol the area near Combat Outpost Carver.	343
Colonel Marr walks with Iraqi National Policemen during a joint	
patrol in Salman Pak	344
A Chinook helicopter resupplies Combat Outpost Summers	349
Two soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, stand	
guard during a humanitarian aid mission southeast	
of Salman Pak.	363
A soldier from the 13th Georgian Battalion provides security during	
a joint clearing operation near Combat Outpost Cleary.....	368
The 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, turns over Combat	
Outpost Carver to units from the incoming 2d Brigade, 1st	
Armored Division	373
Two Black Hawks land at Patrol Base Kelsey carrying General Lynch	
on his final battlefield tour	375

	<i>Page</i>
General Austin greets incoming soldiers of the 10th Mountain Division during the transition from Task Force Marne to Task Force Mountain.....	379
Soldiers from 3d Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment, hand out candy to Iraqi children during a joint patrol with Iraqi National Police in Nahrawan	387
Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Michael G. Mullen and General Lynch visit Warriors Walk	391

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those appearing on pages 5, 20, 31, 36, 37, 38, 41, 43, 50, 71, 103, 124, 130,
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of the author.

FOREWORD

By late 2006, 3½ years after the dramatic capture of Baghdad by U.S. and coalition forces, the war in Iraq was going badly. Sectarian tensions had erupted into violence and American public support for the war was at an all-time low. For better or worse, the George W. Bush administration decided to gamble on a troop increase, sending thirty thousand additional U.S. troops to Iraq in order to stop the bloodshed and bring stability to Baghdad and the surrounding area. By June 2007, they were all in place, and the so-called surge began.

Surging South of Baghdad covers this crucial period in the Iraq war from the perspective of a single division operating in the region south of the Iraqi capital. Before the surge, this slice of territory between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers had become an insurgent safe haven where the enemy cached weapons and built bombs that fueled sectarian violence in Baghdad. Placing the 3d Infantry Division there bolstered a flagging coalition presence in the area and began the process of stabilization and rebuilding.

This account offers a snapshot of the surge, its successes and shortcomings, and shows how the Army coped with the changing demands of the modern combat environment. Although organized and trained as a heavy conventional unit, the 3d Infantry Division readily adapted to its mission south of Baghdad, combining firepower and maneuver with civic action and economic rejuvenation. The story of its deployment during 2007 and 2008 is one of fierce combat and insidious roadside bombs as well as mediating between feuding sectarian groups and performing humanitarian missions. Counterinsurgency in the twenty-first century demands this seemingly contradictory combination.

The surge ended just over two years ago, and its importance to the outcome of the war remains unclear. At the time of this writing, the war in Iraq continues. Although the violence is much reduced, many of the old ethnic and sectarian tensions continue to fester. For this reason, U.S. troops will likely remain in Iraq in an advisory and oversight role for years to come. Still, it is important to write a first draft of history even as it unfolds, and this book—and others in the Center's ongoing series of titles on current operations—will become the building blocks for the U.S. Army's official history of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Washington, D.C.
30 September 2010

RICHARD W. STEWART
Chief Historian

THE AUTHOR

Dale Andrade graduated from the University of Colorado with a bachelor's degree in international affairs and Asian studies and a master's degree in history. He is currently a senior historian in the Histories Division of the U.S. Army Center of Military History, where he is writing the official history of Army combat operations in Vietnam during 1969–1973. He is the author of other books on the Vietnam War—*Ashes to Ashes: The Phoenix Program and the Vietnam War* and *America's Last Vietnam Battle: Halting Hanoi's 1972 Easter Offensive*—and the coauthor of *Spies and Commandos: How America Lost the Secret War in North Vietnam*. He has also written numerous articles on counterinsurgency and special operations.

PREFACE

During the autumn of 2006, the 3d Infantry Division was preparing for its third deployment to Iraq. Since the capture of Baghdad 3½ years earlier, the division had participated in a broad cross-section of the fighting—from the heady days of April 2003 when armored “thunder runs” paralyzed the Iraqi Army’s resistance and spearheaded the fall of Baghdad, to the sectarian violence in 2005 that heralded the early rise of the Sunni insurgency. To counter the deteriorating situation, President George W. Bush decided to send in extra troops, a one-time limited “surge” of U.S. ground forces aimed at tamping down the burgeoning violence. This is the story of the surge through the experiences of the 3d Infantry Division, which provided two of the five brigades, numbering some thirty thousand soldiers, that deployed to Iraq between February and June 2007. For almost fifteen months, the division occupied a key portion of the battlefield south of Baghdad, fighting the insurgents and trying to rebuild the lives of ordinary Iraqis worn down by years of conflict.

Although the war in Iraq continues to this day, historians, journalists, and participants commenced writing about it almost immediately. Dozens of books on topics ranging from how the United States got into a war in Iraq to the fall of Baghdad to the battles of Fallujah and Ramadi have been published, but the process of writing about the surge has only just begun. The Center of Military History became an early participant in this first draft of history when the 3d Division asked for an Army historian to cover its events as it started to deploy in the spring of 2007. I volunteered, arriving at the division’s new headquarters at Camp Victory outside Baghdad in May.

Conditions were spartan. The influx of new troops to Iraq had quickly outpaced housing facilities, and most of the new soldiers and civilians—including me—were billeted in tents, which sprouted up around the base in enclaves of concrete corrals built as protection from the rocket attacks that were becoming an almost daily occurrence. Despite some personal privations, there was ample technology at the division headquarters. Banks of the latest computers and telephone systems kept this modern command post running night and day, sharing intelligence and maintaining instant and constant communication with the smallest unit in the remotest reaches of the operational area. I spent much of my time tapping into the mass of data, which, along with interviews in the field and personal observation, provided the basis for this book.

This project would have been impossible without the cooperation and assistance of the officers and soldiers of the 3d Infantry Division. Although they were busy fighting a war, most took the time to answer questions and share documents, both of which were crucial to my research. I am particularly grateful to Lt. Gen. Rick Lynch, commander of the 3d Division during the surge, for suggesting this project and then granting access to key meetings and allowing me to accompany him on his trips to the battlefield. In the field, Col. Terry R. Ferrell, commander of the division's 2d Brigade, and Col. Wayne W. Grigsby, commander of its 3d Brigade, gave me a temporary home in the desert and facilitated visits to their units deployed along the Tigris River. Three battalion commanders, Lt. Col. Jack Marr, of the 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment; Lt. Col. Kenneth P. Adgie, of the 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment; and Lt. Col. John S. Kolasheski, of the 3d Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment, gave generously of their time and knowledge, despite having much work to do. My forays to those units became the foundation for this book.

Special thanks go to Maj. Oliver Hasse, Maj. William Jakola, and especially Capt. Jonathan D. Guinn, three 3d Division officers who took a civilian historian under their wings and helped him cope with everyday life in a combat zone. I am grateful also to Capt. Alexandra Weiskopf for leading me through the unfamiliar maze of a wartime division headquarters staff.

During my research and writing, many of my Center colleagues gave generously of their time and support. Chief of Military History Jeffrey J. Clarke helped prepare the way for my trip to Iraq, and Chief Historian Richard W. Stewart backed the project and provided advice from his own experiences in the field. Joel D. Meyerson, chief of the Histories Division, shepherded the project with his writing expertise and institutional knowledge. For many years his steady and patient guidance has made me a better writer. My colleagues in the Military Operations Branch of the Histories Division, Andrew J. Birtle, Erik B. Villard, and Mark L. Bradley, made themselves available to bounce around ideas and writing strategies. Other Center historians, in particular William W. Epley, Mark J. Reardon, and Robert S. Rush, shared with me their experiences and perspectives on the war in Iraq. In the Force Structure and Unit History Branch of Field Programs and Historical Services Division, Edward N. Bedessem and Stephen E. Everett clarified the often arcane lineage and organization of units in the modular Army.

No writer can succeed without a good editor, and I owe a special debt of gratitude to mine, Diane Sedore Arms. She guided and shaped the final manuscript with a style and grace that made the entire process easy. The Publishing Division's chief, Keith R. Tidman, and his head of the Production Branch, Beth F. MacKenzie, skillfully juggled this manuscript with other important projects that vied for their time and funds. Despite a tight production schedule, the Center's cartographer, S. L. Dowdy, endured

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Outside the Center, I am especially indebted to Stephen D. Biddle, senior fellow for defense policy at the Council on Foreign Relations; Col. Gian P. Gentile, professor of history at the U.S. Military Academy; and Maj. Gen. Edward C. Cardon and Maj. Gen. James L. Huggins, both former deputy commanders of the 3d Division during the surge. All read the manuscript and offered useful comments. My work also benefited from many long conversations about the theory and practice of counterinsurgency with an old friend and colleague, Thomas A. Marks.

My wife, Kim, deserves special mention for enduring endless discussions about the war in Iraq when she would rather be talking about something else.

The author alone is responsible for the information, interpretations, and conclusions in this volume, as well as any errors that may appear.

Washington, D.C.
30 September 2010

DALE ANDRADE

SURGING SOUTH OF **BAGHDAD**

THE 3D INFANTRY DIVISION AND
TASK FORCE MARNE IN IRAQ, 2007–2008

BACK TO IRAQ

Chapter 1

In the fall of 2006, the 3d Infantry Division (Mechanized) prepared to return to Iraq for the third time. Its home base at Fort Stewart, Georgia, bustled with activity as units underwent last-minute training for deployment and families steeled for another long year of separation from loved ones. The process was becoming all-too familiar.

Although no one shied from another round of fighting in Iraq, all knew the consequences: more soldiers would die. Anyone who visited Fort Stewart was aware of the toll this war—Operation IRAQI FREEDOM—had already taken on the 3d Division. While the unit was still busy clearing the way to Baghdad in the spring of 2003, the base established the “Warriors Walk,” an orderly grove of eastern redbud trees, one planted for each 3d Infantry Division soldier who died during the conflict.¹

At the first ceremony in April 2003, the month the division suffered its first casualties of the Iraq war, thirty-four trees were dedicated, each with a granite plaque at its base engraved with the name of a fallen soldier. By the time the 3d Division arrived home from Iraq in August, eight more trees were in place. During the next tour in 2005, the division suffered 105 deaths, plus more than a dozen soldiers from other units serving with the 3d, and the memorial expanded. On 25 January 2007, as the 3d Division geared up to deploy for the third time, a redbud tree for the three hundred and eighteenth soldier killed in Iraq was dedicated.²

The new commander of the 3d Infantry Division, Maj. Gen. Rick Lynch, was a regular visitor to the Warriors Walk, and it proved to be a sobering reminder of the heavy charge he had been given. “We routinely come to this hallowed place to remember our fallen comrades,” he told a gathering there on that cold January day as he was in the midst of preparing the division for its upcoming deployment to Iraq. “And it strengthens our resolve to continue as a nation, in their memory, to fight this global war on terrorism.”³

A Brave Tradition

The 3d Infantry Division is rich in history. Formed in November 1917 at Camp Greene, North Carolina, the new unit went into combat in France

¹ Russ Bynum, “Warriors Walk’ Running Out of Room,” Associated Press, 26 Jan 2007.

² Ibid.; Donna Miles, “Memorial Tree-Planting Honors Fallen 3rd Infantry Division Troops,” American Forces Press Service, 12 Jun 2008.

³ Bynum, “Warriors Walk’ Running Out of Room,” 26 Jan 2007.

eight months later. Under the command of Maj. Gen. Joseph T. Dickman, the 3d Division formed part of the American Expeditionary Forces and protected a portion of Paris along the banks of the Marne River. In July 1918, the Germans unleashed a major new offensive, and allied units began to crack. Despite the resulting confusion—which caused the left flank of the 3d Division's 38th Infantry to be exposed to the enemy onslaught—General Dickman told his French allies, “*Nous resteron là*—We will remain here.”⁴

Indeed, they did not move. The 38th stood firm as the Germans attacked, earning the sobriquet “Rock of the Marne,” a name that became the motto of the 3d Division. One history concluded that if the soldiers of the 38th Infantry “had broken, they would have been surrounded and our whole system of defense would have been threatened.” General John J. “Blackjack” Pershing, commander of the American Expeditionary Forces, called the division’s exploit “one of the most brilliant pages in the annals of military history.”⁵

It was the beginning of a long martial tradition. During World War II, the 3d Division played a major role in Allied combat offensives, fighting in North Africa, Sicily, Italy, France, and into the heartland of Germany. The division sustained more than thirty thousand casualties—more than any of the sixty U.S. divisions in the European theater—as it fought its way along fifty-one hundred kilometers from Casablanca to Salzburg. The 3d made four amphibious landings in enemy territory and received ten campaign streamers, and its soldiers received thirty-three Medals of Honor—among them Audie Murphy, the most decorated soldier of the war.⁶

The 3d Division arrived in Korea in 1950 soon after war broke out there and by November was stretched thin along a 145-kilometer zone near Wonsan in North Korea. When the Chinese entered the war on the twenty-ninth with a massive assault across the Yalu River, the 3d covered the evacuation of a hundred and five thousand retreating United Nations troops. General Matthew B. Ridgway, the Eighth Army commander and later commander in chief of the Far East Command, noted that the division “was committed to combat in Korea at a most crucial and precarious point in the campaign.”⁷

⁴ See Division Historian, *History of the Third Division United States Army in World War I for the Period December 1, 1917 to January 1, 1919* (Andernach-on-the-Rhine, 1919).

⁵ Vicki Hester, “Back in Time: A 3d Infantry Division History Lesson,” *Frontline: News from Fort Stewart*, 13 Jul 2006, p. 5B.

⁶ See Donald G. Taggart, ed., *History of the Third Infantry Division in World War II* (Washington, D.C.: Infantry Journal Press, 1947); Orientation Branch, Information and Education Series, HQ, Theater Service Forces, European Theater (TSFET), Blue and White Devils: The Story of the 3rd Infantry Division (c. 1945).

⁷ Capt. Max W. Dolcater, ed., *3d Infantry Division in Korea* (Tokyo, Japan: Toppan Printing Co., 1953), p. 7.

In January 1951, the 3d was part of the first allied counteroffensive against the Chinese. “Marne” soldiers marched north and, during savage fighting that lasted until March, helped recapture the South Korean capital, Seoul. Responding to a new Communist offensive in May, the 3d Division, now part of the Eighth Army reserve, made a 120-kilometer dash to reinforce the east-central front and help halt the Chinese thrust. From there, the Americans moved northward to Pyongyang, the capital of North Korea. In July, at the beginning of the long cease-fire negotiations, the division remained in reserve. In October 1954, after almost four years in Korea, the division returned to the United States. The unit suffered more than two thousand killed and almost eight thousand wounded—a terrible toll. There were also dozens of unit awards, and 3d Division men received another eleven Medals of Honor for heroism in Korea. Media accounts were full of praise. “There was no bad division in Korea,” read one newspaper account. “But this ‘Rock of the Marne’ division . . . shone with a special luster. It was fast on its feet, savage in the clinches and never learned how to lose.”⁸

During the Cold War and just after, from April 1958 through February 1996, the 3d Division was stationed in West Germany from near the Czech border and into Bavaria. In November 1990, some six thousand of the division’s soldiers were deployed to Saudi Arabia with the 1st Armored Division in Operation DESERT STORM. In April 1991, one thousand Marne soldiers deployed to Turkey and northern Iraq with Operation PROVIDE COMFORT, the relief effort for Iraqi Kurds in the wake of Saddam Hussein’s retribution campaign against his country’s ethnic minorities, and an additional one thousand helped rebuild postwar Kuwait under the umbrella of Task Force Victory.

In February 1996, as part of the U.S. Army’s reduction to a ten-division force, the 24th Infantry Division at Fort Stewart, Georgia, was inactivated and reflagged as the 3d Infantry Division (the 3d Division in Europe became the 1st Infantry Division). From that point on, the 3d Division was headquartered at Fort Stewart and Hunter Army Airfield in Georgia, with its 3d Brigade at Fort Benning, Georgia. The division continued to maintain sizable forces on peacekeeping missions in Egypt, Bosnia, and Kosovo, as well as a brigade task force in Kuwait.

The world changed in 2001 when terrorists brought down the World Trade Center in New York and attacked the Pentagon on 11 September. Afghanistan and its Taliban government, which had harbored the al-Qaeda terrorists responsible for the attack, fell to U.S. forces and their Afghan allies in November 2001, followed less than two years later by an invasion of Iraq. In early 2003, the 3d Division deployed to Kuwait and spearheaded the attack on Baghdad in March. In April, the 1st Brigade captured

⁸ 1st Lt Donald H. Woodyard, ed., *A History of the 3d Infantry Division, 1917–1963*, n.d., pp. 16–17.

Baghdad Airport, and Sfc. Paul R. Smith received the Medal of Honor after he gave his life defending his men when Iraqi forces threatened to overrun their position. The 2d Brigade led the charge into downtown Baghdad, then deployed to Al Fallujah during the summer. In August 2003, the 3d Division returned to the United States.⁹

Upon its return from Iraq, the 3d Division became one of the first units to undergo the Army's transformation under the new Army modular force system of organization. One of the most significant changes was the addition of another brigade to the division—elements of the old engineer brigade headquarters were used to form the 3d's new 4th Brigade in May 2004. In each brigade, moreover, the three infantry or armor battalions were replaced by two combined-arms battalions, each consisting of two infantry and two armor companies. In addition, each brigade reconnaissance troop was replaced by a battalion-size reconnaissance element. Finally, the modular system assigned an engineer company to each armor and infantry battalion rather than the usual combat engineer battalion normally assigned to each brigade and organized two eight-gun batteries in every artillery battalion in place of the standard three six-gun batteries. Another difference between the old and new systems was the dispersion of resources from the division to subordinate units. Field artillery, signal, chemical, and engineer units that once supported the division were now permanently assigned to the brigade. Capabilities such as intelligence and electronic warfare were also part of the brigade. During March and April 2004, the 2d Brigade underwent the system's first field testing at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California.¹⁰

During its second tour to Iraq in January 2005, the newly reorganized 3d Division headquarters set up at Camp Liberty on the west side of Baghdad and took control of Multi-National Division–Baghdad (MND-B), with responsibility for the entire capital city. However, the division's 1st and 3d Brigades were placed under the authority of Multi-National Division–North Central (MND-NC), the command responsible for the four provinces immediately north of Baghdad, and fought under the operational control of the 42d Infantry Division and later the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault). The 2d and 4th Brigades remained with the division headquarters in MND-B, using National Guard battalions to round out the force. In January 2006, the division returned home, but the break in action was certain to be a short one.

⁹ For the capture of Baghdad, see Michael R. Gordon and General Bernard E. Trainor, *Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006), pp. 428–45; and David Zucchino, *Thunder Run: The Armored Strike to Capture Baghdad* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2004). For the 2d Brigade in Al Fallujah, see Bing West, *No True Glory: A Frontline Account of the Battle for Fallujah* (New York: Bantam Books, 2005), pp. 15–19.

¹⁰ William M. Donnelly, *Transforming an Army at War: Designing the Modular Force, 1991–2005* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2007), pp. 24–25.



General Lynch

Gearing Up for a Third Tour

In November 2006, the Army announced that the 3d Division was headed back to Iraq, the first unit to serve three tours in that country. While there was the usual personnel turnover within the division, with many soldiers rotating in and out of units or leaving the Army altogether, many were veterans of past Iraq deployments. General Lynch observed that “about sixty percent of my soldiers in the division headquarters have been to Iraq at least once, many twice, before this particular deployment.”¹¹

General Lynch joined a distinguished list of 3d Division commanders. The past deployments to Iraq had been led by two experienced officers—Maj.

¹¹ Department of Defense (DoD) News Transcript, Briefing with Maj Gen Lynch, 4 May 2007.

Gen. Buford C. Blount III, who took the division all the way to Baghdad in the spring of 2003, and Maj. Gen. William G. Webster, who commanded the division in 2005 when it anchored the effort of the Coalition (the United States and its allies in Iraq) to stabilize the capital and support Iraq's first national elections. Like that of his predecessors, Lynch's job would be difficult and unpredictable, but his background had prepared him well for high command. A 1977 graduate of the U.S. Military Academy, Lynch said that he went to West Point because he could not afford to pay for college, and he intended to get out of the Army after five years. However, he later told an audience that he "liked looking in the mirror and knowing [I] was making a difference," and decided to make the Army a career.¹²

Lynch was commissioned as a Regular Army Engineer officer. He later switched to Armor, serving in the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment and later commanding the 1st Cavalry Division's 1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry, and the 1st Brigade, 4th Infantry Division. After being promoted to flag rank, he became the 4th Division's assistant division commander (support), and then served in Kosovo and with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). In 2005, Lynch served in Iraq as a deputy chief of staff at Multi-National Force-Iraq (MNF-I, the command over all coalition forces in Iraq) and later became the official spokesman for the MNF-I commander, General George W. Casey. On 13 June 2006, he took command of the 3d Infantry Division.¹³

Commanding a division in wartime is the pinnacle of any officer's career, and General Lynch found himself in the right place at the right time. There were great challenges and opportunities ahead, and like the long line of American generals who had led men into battle, Lynch would walk a thin line between aggressively seeking out the enemy and keeping his soldiers safe. Early on, the division commander told his staff that there were two main questions that would guide him in his decisions. The first, he said, was "Are we doing the right things?" The second was "Are we doing things right?" The double-barreled query highlighted any general's biggest concern: if commanders did not "get it right," soldiers would die.¹⁴

The division had much work to do before heading back to Iraq. Modularity meant that the Army no longer deployed divisions, but rather brigades, which were now designated as brigade combat teams to reflect their new self-sufficient organization and capability.¹⁵ Division headquarters still commanded deployed task forces, but a division commander rarely

¹² Commanding General (CG) Executive Summary, Maj Gen Lynch's discussion with 3d Inf Div band reenlistment eligible soldiers, 27 Aug 2007.

¹³ Official Biography, Maj Gen Rick Lynch, CG, 3d Inf Div and Fort Stewart, n.d.

¹⁴ CG Executive Summary, MND-C [Multi-National Division–Center] Commander's Conf, 24 Apr 2007.

¹⁵ "Brigade combat team" became the official designation, but the term *brigade* will be used throughout, except for the first mention of individual units and in footnote citations.

controlled all of his brigades at one time, and he would likely command brigade combat teams from other divisions as part of a single task force. The mainstay of the 3d Division's third trip to Iraq would be its 2d and 3d Brigade Combat Teams. The 1st Brigade Combat Team, commanded by Col. John W. Charlton, was already in Iraq under the operational control of the U.S. Marine Corps and Multi-National Force-West (MNF-W), the command that included Al Anbar Province and the Sunni heartland west of Baghdad to the Syrian border. The 4th Brigade Combat Team was not scheduled to deploy until the fall of 2007.

In late 2006, the 3d Division headquarters and its two brigades prepared to replace the 25th Infantry Division as the mainstay of Multi-National Division-North (MND-N), which was north of Baghdad in Salah ad Din and Diyala Provinces. MND-N was formed in December 2005 by combining MND-NC with Multi-National Force-Northwest (MNF-NW) and expanding the command's area of responsibility from Baghdad to Iraq's northern border. In January 2007, General Lynch's staff was at Fort Leavenworth's Battle Command Training Center preparing for the deployment. "It was all about MND-N," said Maj. Brian W. Preise, the intelligence planner on the 3d Division staff. "We had 25th Infantry Division guys briefing us on the situation, and we had a team already in Iraq doing a pre-deployment site survey in Tikrit. We had already collected a lot of data on MND-N."¹⁶

As the planning proceeded, the division's 3d Brigade, commanded by Col. Wayne W. Grigsby, packed its vehicles and gear and traveled from Fort Benning to the Army's National Training Center. Covering more than sixteen hundred square kilometers of California desert, the training center was established in the 1980s to provide the Army with realistic operational battlefield training scenarios ranging from low-intensity warfare to full-force armored combat for heavy units. Grigsby's men used the exercises to good effect, sharpening their gunnery skills and perfecting the art of operating as a cohesive fighting force.¹⁷

The 2d Brigade did things differently. Rather than load its tanks and fighting vehicles onto trains for the trip to the National Training Center, the soldiers stayed at Fort Stewart. While the base's pine forests bore little similarity to Middle Eastern deserts, trainers re-created scenarios similar to those the unit would face in theater. Like the other heavy units in the 3d Division, the 2d Brigade practiced armor and infantry tactics, with an emphasis on overwhelming the enemy. Col. Terry R. Ferrell, the brigade commander, knew how to do this. During the opening phases of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, he had led the 3d Division's 3d Squadron, 7th Cavalry, on

¹⁶ Interv, author with Maj Brian W. Preise, Intelligence Planner, G-5, 3d Inf Div, 22 Jun 2007.

¹⁷ Interv, author with Col Wayne W. Grigsby, Commanding Officer (CO), 3d Brigade Combat Team (BCT), 3d Inf Div, 12 Jul 2007.

a fast-paced armored “thunder run” into Baghdad that paralyzed Saddam Hussein’s forces and led to the rapid fall of the city. But that was the last time the division had been asked for lightning-fast armored maneuvers, and Ferrell believed that “the brigade had lost the skill set to do high intensity operations.” So during the training for this deployment, the brigade “focused from June until December 2006 on high intensity operations.” The division expected that its mobility and armored strength would be needed north of Baghdad.¹⁸

By the end of 2006, the 3d Division was well along in its deployment preparations. Officers and men were proud of their place in history as the first division to fight in Iraq three times, but they were apprehensive as well. Multiple deployments were taking a toll on soldiers and their families, and logistical support was difficult—especially for a heavy unit that relied on armored vehicles and consumed vast amounts of fuel and ammunition. But like most Army units, the 3d Division was good at its job, and the pre-deployment preparations moved steadily forward. However, things were changing, both at home and in Iraq, and the 3d Division would soon find itself caught up in the resulting strategic shift.

Changing Course

The latest wave of violence in Iraq began in February 2006 when Sunni extremists bombed the golden-domed al-Askari Mosque in Samarra, one of Shi'a Islam's holiest shrines. Coming after almost three years of sectarian infighting, security in Iraq was clearly only a thin veneer that could be stripped away with very little effort by those intent on stirring up trouble, and the Coalition lacked the manpower and resources to stop it. One observer wrote that “no one expects the insurgency to disappear, but the hope would be to keep a lid on it, limiting its reach and intensity.”¹⁹

But throughout 2006, there seemed to be no limit to insurgent violence and no sign that coalition forces could keep the lid in place. General Casey, the MNF-I commander, was forced to react to trouble, not anticipate and defeat it. A widely circulated intelligence report dated 24 May 2006 showed this in stark statistics. Analysts concluded that attacks in April “were the highest ever recorded,” and the violence in the next few months “will likely surpass” even that. In raw numbers that meant somewhere between six hundred and seven hundred attacks per week. To make matters worse, the report declared that “insurgents and terrorists retain the resources and capa-

¹⁸ Greg Grant, “Back to Iraq: A Hardened Army 3d Infantry Division Prepares for an Unprecedented Third Combat Tour,” *Government Executive*, 1 Apr 2007, p. 38. Quotes from Interv, author with Col Terry R. Ferrell, CO, 2d BCT, 3d Inf Div, 25 Jul 2007, p. 1.

¹⁹ Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006), p. 434.



Map 1

bilities to sustain and even increase [the] current level of violence through the next year.”²⁰

The deteriorating conditions in Iraq were spilling over onto the world stage as well. A National Intelligence Estimate, the first formal appraisal of global terrorism by U.S. intelligence agencies since the Iraq war began, was completed in April 2006 but only publicly revealed in September. Entitled “Trends in Global Terrorism: Implications for the United States,” it concluded that Islamic radicalism was “increasing in both numbers and geographic dispersion,” and it cited the Iraq war as a primary cause (Map 1).²¹

²⁰ Bob Woodward, *State of Denial: Bush at War, Part III* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), pp. 471–72.

²¹ “Spy Agencies Say Iraq War Worsens Terrorism Threat,” *New York Times*, 24 Sep 2006.

In June, after the election of Nouri al-Maliki as the prime minister, the Iraqi government announced the beginning of Operation AMALIYA MA'AN ILA AL-AMAM, better known by its translation TOGETHER FORWARD, a push to increase security in Baghdad. Although supported by the Coalition, this was primarily an Iraqi operation that put almost seventy thousand troops and police on the streets of Baghdad. However, the operation's nighttime curfews, increased checkpoints and patrols, and new restrictions on carrying weapons did nothing to curtail the violence, which actually increased over the summer. The MNF-I spokesman, Maj. Gen. William B. Caldwell, said that "Operation TOGETHER FORWARD has made a difference in the focus areas but has not met our overall expectations of sustaining a reduction in the levels of violence." The White House went further, publicly admitting that the operation was a failure and stating that a new security strategy for Baghdad had to be implemented.²²

The twin facets of the worsening situation in Iraq and its potential effects on international security prompted a high-powered study meant to tackle both problems. On 6 December 2006, the Iraq Study Group, formed at President George W. Bush's request and chaired by former Secretary of State James A. Baker III and former Democratic Congressman Lee H. Hamilton of Indiana, made public its findings. Its conclusions were dour, and the very first line of the report set the tone: "The situation in Iraq is grave and deteriorating." Although mistakes had been made in Iraq, the report's authors believed that "there is no path that can guarantee success, but the prospects can be improved."²³

President Bush thanked the commission for its work, but the report had not taken the direction he hoped. While it made suggestions on troop withdrawals and proposed negotiating with neighboring countries such as Syria and Iran, the authors did not see a viable military or political way forward. During a meeting with military officials a few weeks later, the president emphasized that he was not interested in talk of withdrawal. He reportedly told his generals, "What I want to hear from you is how we're going to win, not how we're going to leave."²⁴

Such a plan needed to be drawn quickly because by the fall of 2006 the situation looked grim. October had officially become the bloodiest month of the war in terms of civilian casualties, with thirty-seven hundred Iraqis killed—despite a three-month military push involving some fifteen thousand U.S. troops that had largely failed to establish effective security in Baghdad. Another hundred thousand or so civilians reportedly fled the country each month, most of them to neighboring Jordan or Syria. Public

²² "Baghdad Violence Forces U.S. to Re-evaluate Strategy," CNN, 19 Oct 2006.

²³ James A. Baker III and Lee H. Hamilton, cochairs, *The Iraq Study Group Report: The Way Forward—A New Approach* (New York: Filiquarian, 2007), p. 5.

²⁴ Michael Isikoff and David Corn, *Hubris: The Inside Story of Spin, Scandal, and the Selling of the Iraq War* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2007), pp. 428–29.

opinion polls showed that 55 percent of Americans believed the war was a mistake and nearly 75 percent thought the war was going badly and disapproved of the administration's handling of it. The number of attacks on U.S. and Iraqi troops also hit a new high, and on 28 December a symbolic benchmark was reached when Cpl. Dustin R. Donica became the three thousandth U.S. soldier to die in Iraq. The young paratrooper was with the 3d Battalion, 509th Infantry Regiment—part of the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division—just southwest of Baghdad.²⁵

These numbers were intolerable, and they fed the growing disquiet at home. So on 10 January 2007, President Bush unveiled a new Iraq strategy from the White House library. "The situation in Iraq is unacceptable to the American people, and it is unacceptable to me," he said during a telecast to the nation. "Where mistakes have been made, the responsibility rests with me." Still, there could be no retreat, he insisted, because to do so meant that "radical Islamic extremists would grow in strength and gain new recruits," which would place them "in a better position to topple moderate governments, create chaos in the region, and use oil revenues to fund their ambitions." If the United States allowed terrorists free rein in Iraq by retreating from the fight, the country would become "a safe haven from which to plan and launch attacks on the American people." Bush announced that five new combat brigades would join the fifteen already in Iraq—a total of almost thirty thousand troops—in order to secure Baghdad and stop the ethnic violence that was threatening to spiral out of control. "Now is the time to act," the president concluded. "We can and we will prevail."²⁶

Behind the scenes, policy makers were less confident. For months before the public address, the administration seethed with arguments over how to proceed in Iraq, and there was much trepidation even as the president was speaking on television. In the fall of 2006, the Pentagon, still heavily influenced by the "small footprint" template championed by recently ousted Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld, continued to maintain that one or two new brigades would be sufficient, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, wary of the impact an escalation in Iraq would have on overall military readiness, were disinclined to send more troops. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Central Command Chief General John P. Abizaid, and General Casey were on record as favoring a troop withdrawal of some sort. All this, combined with the belief of many congressional Republicans that the Iraq war was responsible for the 2006 election's Democratic landslide, was a potent argument against an escalation of U.S. forces in Iraq.

By all accounts, President Bush listened to his advisers' fears but chose to look elsewhere for advice. When pushed, Pentagon advisers from the

²⁵ Ibid., p. 425; DoD News Release 1334-06, DoD Identifies Army Casualty, 31 Dec 2006; Dustin R. Donica Memorial Web site.

²⁶ Isikoff and Corn, *Hubris*, pp. 421-22.



Secretary of Defense Gates confers with MNF-I Commander General David H. Petraeus.

office of new Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates said that “one or two more Army brigades” would be enough, but the White House thought more were needed, and the president’s tendency was to “go robust” in Iraq.²⁷

So the president turned to other experts, and he began hearing something quite different. During a meeting in December with retired General John Keane, the former vice chief of staff of the Army, as well as academics such as Johns Hopkins University Professor Eliot A. Cohen and Council on Foreign Relations Senior Defense Analyst Stephen Biddle, Bush was told that the only way to turn around what was increasingly looking like a defeat in Iraq was additional troops. General Keane put it bluntly: “time is running out,” and U.S. forces could only get a handle on the deteriorating security situation if they were reinforced. Considering how overextended the military was after years of war in Iraq and Afghanistan, the agreed-upon figure was five brigades. Although there was vociferous disagreement among the

²⁷ Fred Barnes, “How Bush Decided On The Surge,” *Weekly Standard*, 4 Feb 2008, pp. 20–21.

participants—mostly from the military members—President Bush made up his mind to take Keane's advice and send more forces into Iraq.²⁸

Immediately after the American public learned of the president's decision, the way ahead was outlined in a report by the National Security Council. Although cautious in tone and outlook, the report put forth solid strategic and operational guidelines with clear and realistic benchmarks of progress. "There is no silver bullet in Iraq," began the report. "Every option involves trade-offs across various risks."²⁹

The main enemy was al-Qaeda—officially named al-Qaeda in the Land of the Two Rivers and called al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) by the Coalition. The terrorists had moved into Iraq after the U.S. invasion in 2003, and in a few short years were blamed for sowing sectarian violence and threatening to destabilize the entire region. Al-Qaeda terrorism and an increasingly vicious insurgency were heating up and might very well spiral out of control. The present number of coalition troops was insufficient to the task, and the Iraqi government, despite some "signs of maturation," had not yet "achieved a single vision for a unified Iraq." This was a diplomatic way of describing the lack of Iraqi progress, but the overall conclusion was blunter: "The situation in Baghdad has not improved despite tactical adjustments."³⁰

Indeed, the Coalition faced serious problems. Extremist violence was "spiking," the political center was "eroding," and Iraqis were "increasingly disillusioned with Coalition efforts." Any gains on the political and economic fronts were "unlikely absent a basic level of security." In other words, the strategic goal—a unified, democratic, and stable Iraq—remained unchanged, but now the only way to achieve that seemed to be to augment the number of U.S. troops on the ground—a surge, as it came to be called. At the same time, government officials recognized that any troop increase would have to show concrete results very quickly. Although planners believed that any solution in Iraq required a long-term U.S. commitment, adverse public opinion and political realities demanded that the administration "sharpen the objectives we believe are achievable in the next 12-18 months."³¹

With the new plan came a new commander in Iraq. On 10 February 2007, General David H. Petraeus, who was linked with an innovative way of thinking about the war, replaced General Casey, who went on to become the Army chief of staff. For the previous two years, Petraeus had commanded the Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, leading a team that produced the Army's new counterinsurgency manual, *Field*

²⁸ There are many differing accounts on the decision making behind the surge, but one of the most recent and authoritative is Thomas E. Ricks, *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq, 2006–2008* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009), pp. 94–105.

²⁹ National Security Council (NSC), Highlights of the Iraq Strategy Review, Jan 2007, p. 1.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 3.

³¹ Ibid., p. 5.

Table — U.S. Brigade Combat Team Surge Deployments

Unit	Date of Deployment
2d Brigade, 82d Airborne Division	14 February 2007
4th Brigade, 1st Infantry Division	15 March 2007
3d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division	15 April 2007
4th Brigade (Stryker), 2d Infantry Division	15 May 2007
2d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division	15 June 2007

Manual (FM) 3–24, the first revamping of the doctrine in some twenty years. Petraeus was an ideal combination of conventional officer—he had led the 101st Airborne Division during the push to Baghdad in 2003—and unconventional counterinsurgency thinker. But the cornerstone of Petraeus’ new strategy was the extra troops he would receive from the surge. During the January 2007 congressional confirmation process for his fourth star, Petraeus told questioners that engendering security remained the task ahead, and “we can only do this by establishing persistent presence” throughout troubled areas, particularly in Baghdad. The bottom line, he said, was that executing the “clear and hold” part of the strategy was simply not possible without more forces than General Casey had possessed. The surge would give Petraeus five additional brigades of almost thirty thousand soldiers—a crucial advantage—though that in itself would not be sufficient (*Table*). The new commander had a long way to go in order to show progress.³²

Time was short, however. Civilian and military planners knew very well that the American public and Congress expected instant results from the surge—despite the fact that such an outcome was impossible—and the military walked a fine line between making extravagant claims of progress and saying nothing at all. On 21 February, only a few weeks after the beginning of stepped-up operations in Baghdad, MNF-I spokesman General Caldwell held a well-attended press conference to provide information and answer questions. After only a few weeks, said Caldwell, there was “a significant reduction in sectarian incidents and extrajudicial killings in Baghdad because the Iraqi people have chosen restraint rather than retribution.” However, he was quick to point out that no one should expect the good news to continue unabated. “Though there may be good days during that

³² Advance Policy Questions for Lieutenant General David H. Petraeus, USA [U.S. Army], Nominee to be General and Commander, Multi-National Force–Iraq [MNF-I], n.d., pp. 3, 20.



Outgoing MNF-I Commander General Casey and General Petraeus (right) at the change of command ceremony on 10 February 2007

time, we are also going to have tough ones." Al-Qaeda and other extremists would "undoubtedly try to incite another cycle of sectarian violence through cowardly, barbaric attacks on innocent Iraqi civilians."³³

The Iraqi public was tired of the war. Polls taken in late 2006 showed that more than 80 percent of the population rejected violence in general and 90 percent abhorred attacks against innocent women and children. Iraqi opinion indicated an obvious desire for increased security. Two-thirds of those polled felt that "conditions for peace and stability are worsening," though those polled were about evenly split on whether or not the government was moving in the right direction to quell the violence. Most people also believed that sectarian militias added to the instability and lack of security.³⁴

To halt the spiral of violence, the Americans and their Iraqi counterparts launched Operation FARDH AL-QANOON (Enforcing the Law), which was announced on 17 February 2007. Prime Minister Maliki said that "the

³³ Press Briefing, Maj Gen William B. Caldwell IV, MNF-I Spokesman, 21 Feb 2007, pp. 1-2.

³⁴ Public Opinion Polls in Rpt to Congress, Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, Mar 2007, pp. 20-21.

plan is imposing the law on anyone who violates it,” a tall order considering how little control the Iraqi government actually had in Baghdad.³⁵ According to Lt. Gen. Abud Qanbar, the Iraqi commander of the operation, at the start of FARDH AL-QANOON two-thirds of Baghdad’s 507 *halas*, or neighborhoods, “were actually out of the control of the government. [These] neighborhoods were actually controlled by terrorists and criminal gangs.”³⁶

Under the plan, the capital was divided into nine zones, with U.S. and Iraqi units working side by side to clear each section of sectarian militias so that reconstruction projects could resume. The crucial element to success was the establishment of joint security stations (JSSs), small outposts scattered throughout the city that would be permanently manned by U.S. and Iraqi troops. Commanders described the basic objective as “clear, control and retain.” *Retain* was the key.³⁷

This would not be easy. At the beginning of FARDH AL-QANOON, there was only a single new surge unit in place in Baghdad—the 2d Brigade Combat Team, 82d Airborne Division—and though its twenty-seven hundred soldiers were a welcome addition, they only brought the total U.S. strength in the capital to thirty-five thousand. The second surge unit, the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, would arrive in early March. Iraqi forces numbered somewhere between ninety thousand and a hundred twelve thousand. It was the largest force the allies had ever mustered in Baghdad.³⁸

The Baghdad Belts

FARDH AL-QANOON was an important start, but it was only one slice of the battle. The conundrum of Iraq was this: control of Baghdad was central to success in the rest of the country, but without a better security presence in the region surrounding the capital—called the Baghdad belts—making Baghdad safe would be impossible. From March onward, much of the surge would concentrate on those belts, which contained the sanctuaries where al-Qaeda terrorists and extremist militias lived and stored many of their weapons.

The Baghdad belts were like suburbs—skeins of residential, agricultural, and light industrial areas abutting the capital’s outer boundaries and

³⁵ MNF-I Media Release, Baghdad Security Plan Officially Named “FARDH AL-QANOON,” 17 Feb 2007.

³⁶ Transcript, Press Conference with Lt Gen Raymond T. Odierno and Lt Gen Abud Qanbar, Operations Report: FARDH AL-QANOON, 21 Sep 2007, pp. 1–2.

³⁷ MNC-I [Multi-National Corps–Iraq] Media Release, 4th Brigade, 1st Infantry Division begins mission in Iraq, 1 Mar 2007. Quote from Press Conference, Commanding General MND-B [Multi-National Division–Baghdad] and 1st Cav Div Maj Gen Joseph F. Fils, Jr., 16 Feb 2007.

³⁸ Kimberly Kagan, “Enforcing the Law: The Baghdad Security Plan Begins, February 10, 2007–March 5, 2007,” *Weekly Standard.com*, 10 Feb 2007, p. 3.

extending about forty kilometers in all directions. North of Baghdad, the belts included the cities of At Taji, At Tarmiyah, Ba'qubah, and Buhriz. Circling around the capital to the east and south there was Besmaya, Nahrawan, Salman Pak, Al Mahmudiyah, and Al Yusufiyah, and to the west Al Fallujah, Ar Ramadi, and Al Karmah. Passing through these towns were many of the country's major roadways, most of them converging like spokes on the Baghdad hub. All this formed a vital network of lines of travel and communications between the capital and the rest of the country, and, while this was important to life and commerce, it was also exploited by the insurgents.

Between 2004 and 2006, Sunni extremists, al-Qaeda, and various Shi'ite militias gained increasing control in the Baghdad belts and used them to project forces and funnel supplies into the capital and to move freely around the city into the provinces. In January 2007, the Iraqi government described the belts as areas where, according to one account, "insurgents plan and manufacture the deadly explosives that detonate regularly in the city." An Iraqi official said that the government "believes that it is in this ring that the attacks are coming from."³⁹

Lt. Gen. Raymond T. Odierno, commander of the Multi-National Corps-Iraq (MNC-I, the overall operational military command in Iraq) since December 2006 and one of the architects of the surge, described the belts as "key" to any operation plan because "attacks occurring in Baghdad often originate in these outlying regions where sectarian lines begin to blur. . . . Al-Qaeda in Iraq and Shi'a extremists want to control these areas." Odierno was convinced that his security plan had to sever the belts from Baghdad if it was to succeed.⁴⁰

Intelligence bore this out. A captured hand-drawn map by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq until he was killed in June 2006, illustrated that the terrorists divided Baghdad into sectors, each of which was connected with the belts via routes running outside of the city. Links between terrorist cells in the capital and fighters in the belts were crucial for everything from supplying and financing ongoing attacks, building vehicle bombs, and running kidnapping rings to terrorizing the local population.

Simply put, the insurgents' strength inside Baghdad depended on their ability to move freely in the surrounding areas, and, according to MNF-I, by February 2007 there were "clear indications right now that there is increased activity" in the Baghdad belts. This probably occurred because the early surge operations in Baghdad were beginning to push the insurgents out of the city and into its "suburbs"—where the cycle began anew. The enemy gained in vigor in the belts, regrouped, and attacked Baghdad

³⁹ Kimberly Kagan, "How They Did It: Executing the Winning Strategy in Iraq," *Weekly Standard*, 16 Nov 2007. Quotes from Joshua Partlow, "Iraqi Leader Plans Security Push," *Washington Post*, 7 Jan 2007.

⁴⁰ MNC-I Briefing, Lt Gen Odierno, 31 May 2007, p. 1.



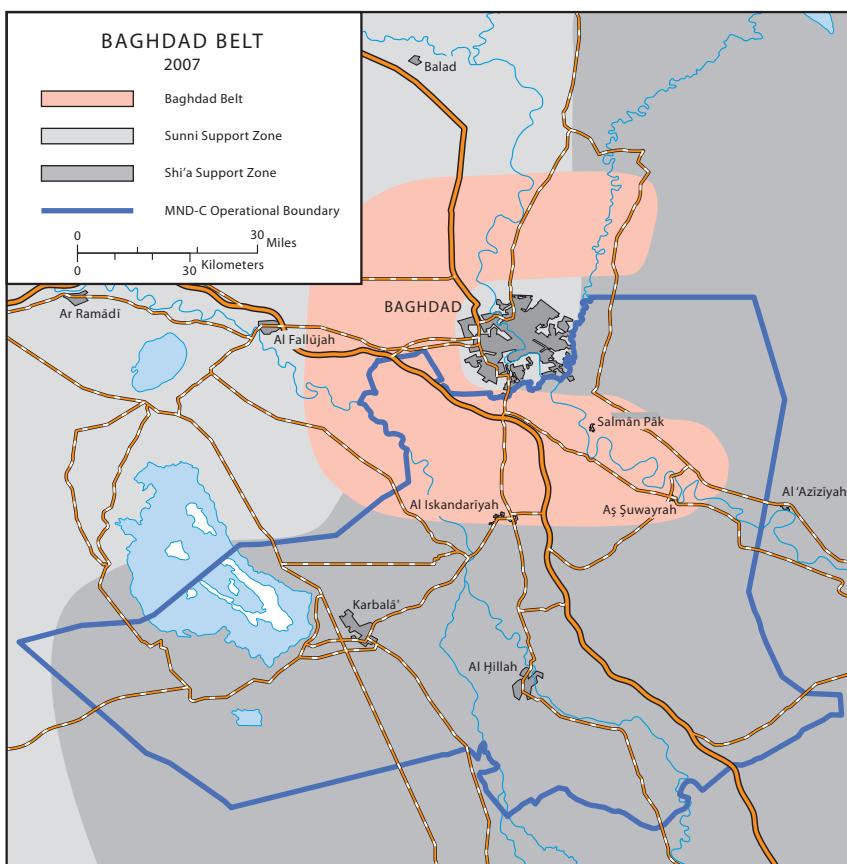
General Odierno (*left*) is briefed on operations in Baghdad.

once again. According to MNF-I spokesman General Caldwell, this was going to stop once the surge built in strength and U.S. units began to fight in the belts. When they did, he said, “this time we’re not leaving. We’re going to remain in those areas” (*Map 2*).⁴¹

On maps, the divisions’ areas of responsibility were impossibly immense. The northern and western sectors—MND-N and MNF-W—constituted half of Iraq’s geography, and by comparison MND-B looked tiny. But in reality it had more than it could handle. The capital itself—a teeming city of over five million people—was proving difficult to manage, yet MND-B was also responsible for a territorial swath of about sixty thousand square kilometers running south from Baghdad to the Saudi Arabian border, some three hundred kilometers distant. Much of the region was uninhabited desert that needed little or no military presence, but the northernmost portion, a region of roughly seventy-two hundred square kilometers or about ten times the size of Baghdad, contained most of the towns that made up the southern belt around the capital.

⁴¹ Press Briefing, Caldwell, 21 Feb 2007, pp. 7–8.

Just south of the belt were the important Shi'ite cities of Karbala, Al Hillah, and An Najaf. This "secondary" region was broken into two operational areas arranged in a rough diamond shape, named Defender in the west and Scimitar in the east, which together totaled sixteen thousand square kilometers. For the past three years, the entire expanse south of the capital had been neglected by U.S. forces, which understandably had to apportion operational priorities. In such an equation, Baghdad always came out on top, leaving the southern belt a poor second that got only a small piece of the force. Inevitably, operations in this increasingly dangerous insurgent area were sporadic, largely leaving the enemy to his own devices. Without the ability to maintain a permanent presence, security would be fleeting, and the situation could not improve without more troops and a better command arrangement.



Map 2



Between February and June 2007, a constant flow of Air Force flights ferried the five surge brigades from Kuwait to Iraq.

All this was about to change. In the fall of 2006, as the Bush administration was finalizing its new strategy for Iraq, MND-B came under new command. In November, the 1st Cavalry Division replaced the 4th Infantry Division, which had commanded MND-B for the past year. Odierno's predecessor at MNC-I, Lt. Gen. Peter W. Chiarelli, presided over the ceremony. As the former commander of the 1st Cavalry Division during its first tour in Iraq in 2004, he felt a particular fondness for the incoming unit, and expected great things. "I have complete confidence that you will make the difference," said Chiarelli. "This is indeed a challenging time in Iraq, and we can only succeed through perseverance." Maj. Gen. Joseph F. Fil Jr., the 1st Cavalry Division commander, replied that his soldiers were "committed to continue to improve the security situation."⁴²

But the "difference" would not come from the 1st Cavalry Division, which was no better equipped "to improve the security situation" than its predecessor. Simply put, while General Fil might be able to quell sectarian violence in Baghdad, he could do little to stop the insurgents from moving freely between the capital and the Baghdad belts—and back again. This was

⁴² MNC-I Media Release, 1st Cavalry Division Takes the Reins in Baghdad, 16 Nov 2006.

the continuing problem that goaded General Odierno and his staff as they began hammering out the details of the new surge strategy.

As the new surge units began to arrive in Iraq in early 2007, the corps headquarters, which had most of the responsibility for how to use the new brigades, put the finishing touches on the planning. During a meeting on 29 January, General Odierno's senior staff discussed options. All agreed that the first two brigades were going to Baghdad. "In order to break the current cycle of sectarian violence," concluded Odierno, "we must move deliberately [to] maintain a robust, combined presence in each administrative district until we have firmly established joint security stations manned by CF [coalition forces] alongside ISF [Iraqi security forces] . . . and can provide adequate security for the population." Underlying all this was the corps commander's belief that a winning strategy must be "much more than a military operation alone, it must include a combination of military, economic, and political actions achieved through a partnering with key agencies."⁴³

Though such a partnership of objectives and organizations was the guiding principle behind Operation FARDH AL-QANOON, the opening salvo of the surge, it was in essence a purely military push. Known as kinetic or lethal operations in current Army argot, the campaign was needed initially to halt insurgent movement from the belts, by attacking the enemy and maintaining a permanent presence in the insurgent sanctuaries. However, the general cautioned his subordinate commanders to "be deliberate—resist the urge to surge"; this would instead be a slow and steady push toward stability.⁴⁴

Odierno's intent to focus on the belts was a change from past years. While Baghdad would remain the main effort, corps planners emphasized that "MNC-I is realigning its forces external to Baghdad in order to disrupt threats" to the capital. Intelligence showed where the trouble spots were. These "beltway avenues of approach" were divided into zones, and four of them stood out starkly. One was the At Tarmiyah–Saab al Bour corridor to the west and northwest of the capital, a prime route for smuggling explosives-laden vehicles into Baghdad. A second was the Hussaniyah–Báqubah axis east and northeast of the capital used by both Sunni and Shi'ite militias to move bombs and weapons. The third was south of Baghdad, the route through Al Iskandariyah used by Shi'ite groups to smuggle vehicle bombs northward. To the southeast lay the fourth, the roads running along both banks of the Tigris River that were prime Sunni weapon infiltration routes and that were also used by the Shi'ite militias to move bombs known as explosive-formed projectiles (EFPs) to Baghdad.⁴⁵ These dangerous

⁴³ Senior Plans Meeting, Operation TOGETHER FORWARD BCT Employment Options: Breaking the Cycle of Sectarian Violence, 29 Jan 2007, slide 11.

⁴⁴ Ibid., slides 11–12.

⁴⁵ Quotes from Coordinating Draft, HQ MNC-I, Fragmentary Order (FRAGO) XXX [unnumbered draft], Opn BLACK Rock (3/3 BCT Onward Movement and Integration) to

weapons consisted of charges placed in a tube lined with a concave steel liner and a copper disk over one end. When detonated, the liner channeled the explosion onto the copper disk, which became a deadly projectile capable of piercing vehicle armor. Although Iran had come up with the design, EFPs could be constructed by skilled experts in back-street bomb “factories,” and the Shi’ite militias had taken to making them with alarming frequency.⁴⁶

Although all of the Baghdad belts were crucial to the surge plan, Odierno was especially concerned about those south of the capital. “Do we have enough forces to secure the southern LOCs [lines of communications]?,” he asked at the 29 January 2007 meeting. The weapons and insurgents emanating from that area were hindering the progress of Operation TOGETHER FORWARD, and while the two units southwest of Baghdad—a brigade from the 10th Mountain Division and one from the 25th Infantry Division—were working hard to interdict weapons and bombs, they were having only a partial effect. The entire region between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers and out into the eastern desert was virtually undefended, with only a couple of Iraqi units roaming the vast space, leaving the insurgents with a sanctuary from which they could plan and execute their operations. Worst of all, they controlled the population among whom they lived.⁴⁷

General Odierno would have to plug the gap in the southern belt, and he evaluated three options. First, he could place an infantry unit there; the available surge unit was the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, which in January was in Kuwait awaiting deployment. That unit brought thirty-four hundred soldiers to the battlefield—eight hundred of whom were combat infantrymen—organized into two battalions of six rifle companies, plus a reconnaissance battalion, an artillery battalion, a support battalion, and a brigade special troops battalion.⁴⁸ Like most brigades, it had about four hundred up-armored M1114 HMMWVs (high mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicles or Humvees) to transport soldiers on combat missions.⁴⁹ Odierno determined that this unit was “ideally suited for

Operation Order (OPORD) 06–03, n.d., p. 1. Senior Plans Meeting, Operation TOGETHER FORWARD BCT Employment Options, 29 Jan 2007, slide 5.

⁴⁶ There was much debate over whether insurgents inside Iraq were capable of producing EFPs or if they more likely came from Iran. For example, see Michael Ware, “Inside Iran’s Secret War,” *Time*, 15 Aug 2005. Another account, citing U.S. intelligence documents, noted that the manufacture of the copper disks required “highly calibrated machine tools” and that stockpiles of Iranian-manufactured disks were found inside Iraq. Michael R. Gordon, “Deadliest Bomb in Iraq Is Made in Iran, U.S. Says,” *New York Times*, 10 Feb 2007.

⁴⁷ Quote from Senior Plans Meeting, Operation TOGETHER FORWARD BCT Employment Options, 29 Jan 2007, slide 18, and see also slide 20.

⁴⁸ The brigade special troops battalion was a new Army formation within the brigade combat team containing combat support companies such as intelligence and signal and any company-size attachments, such as air defense artillery or military police.

⁴⁹ The M998 HMMWV evolved from a basic transport vehicle in the 1990s to an armored fighting vehicle in Iraq. In 2004, in response to the increasing use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) by Iraqi insurgents, the Defense Department began “up-armoring” the Humvee, adding more than two thousand pounds of armor and blast-proof glass (total vehicle weight was about

operations in complex terrain such as urban areas,” and he placed the 4th Brigade Combat Team in Baghdad in March.⁵⁰

A second option was to place a Stryker brigade south of Baghdad. This combat unit, built around three battalions of eight-wheeled Stryker armored combat vehicles, consisted of thirty-nine hundred soldiers in a “highly mobile, survivable force that can be rapidly repositioned across the battlespace” with a “robust assault capability that rapidly delivers Infantry squads and platoons to the objective.” This was a perfect combination for urban combat, and Odierno decided to deploy the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 2d Infantry Division, and its Strykers to Baghdad and the area north-east of the city.⁵¹

The final option was to move a heavy brigade south of Baghdad. Each heavy brigade brought thirty-eight hundred soldiers to the fight and was composed of two combined-arms battalions, an armored reconnaissance squadron, an artillery battalion with two batteries of sixteen self-propelled 155-mm. Paladin howitzers, a brigade special troops battalion, and a support battalion. In addition to the 400 up-armored Humvees, a heavy brigade fielded at least 55 M1A1 Abrams tanks and 85 M2 Bradley infantry fighting vehicles. Two such units—the 2d and 3d Brigade Combat Teams, 3d Infantry Division—were already preparing to deploy.

Corps planners reasoned that, although a heavy brigade was “more difficult to sustain, [it] provides protection to the force in heavily defended insurgent strongholds and [has] a high rate of survivability” against roadside bombs. In addition, it was “not ideally suited for urban terrains,” and although it could work well in smaller built-up areas, the heavy brigade’s “armor combined with HMMWV mobility provides a strong operational capability” on the network of roadways and farms outside Baghdad, especially in the southern belt.⁵²

Odierno resolved that the 3d Division would go south of Baghdad. The combination of armor and infantry—as well as a combat aviation brigade with transport and attack helicopters—gave it superior mobility, and this consideration made the difference. Its arrival would more than double the size and capability of the U.S. force in the region, and, because of the area’s vast size, this would go a long way toward reducing the insurgents’ sanctuaries and cutting off their ability to escalate violence in the capital. Perhaps more than anywhere else in Iraq, this deployment would demonstrate the advantage of numbers in counterinsurgency. Given the new plan to clear

ten thousand pounds) and including an armored turret that mounted either a .30- or .50-caliber machine gun. The new model was called the M1114, and, by mid-2007, it was standard in all Army combat units.

⁵⁰ Senior Plans Meeting, Operation TOGETHER FORWARD BCT Employment Options, 29 Jan 2007, slide 16.

⁵¹ Ibid., slide 22.

⁵² Ibid., slide 19.

and hold, more soldiers on the ground would undoubtedly heighten the chance of accomplishing that.

There was, however, a command-and-control problem. The addition of the new forces would place a greater strain on MND-B, which already had more than enough to handle. The new plan would place four of the five surge brigades under General Fil's command, an unwieldy span of control (by late 2006, MND-B contained some 63,000 troops—about 32,000 U.S. and coalition soldiers and 31,000 Iraqi forces, all organized into thirteen brigades).⁵³ General Odierno decided to change the shape of the command structure by splitting off the territory south of Baghdad from MND-B. According to Lt. Col. Mark J. Hovatter, the 3d Division's chief planning officer, "Corps thought that if Baghdad was split away and another division was given responsibility for the southern regions, that would give the fight there more focus."⁵⁴

As a result, a new command, Multi-National Division—Center (MND-C), was created, to be run by 3d Division headquarters. MND-C assumed responsibility for the territory south of the capital previously under MND-B. This included Karbala and Babil Provinces and two districts on the southern rim of Baghdad Province—Al Mada'in and Al Mahmudiyah—as well as An Najaf Province and the barren desert south to the border with Saudi Arabia, a total area of more than sixty thousand square kilometers, about the size of West Virginia. The 3d Division headquarters would also take command of the other units already there—the 2d Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, and the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division. In a historical salute to the 3d Division's World War I roots, the new operational amalgamation would be called Task Force Marne.

South of Baghdad

General Odierno's decision came as a surprise to the 3d Division staff, which was still planning for a deployment north of Baghdad in the summer of 2007. While shifting the focus south of the capital was perhaps not too difficult, the division was also told to accelerate the deployment process in order to arrive in Iraq in March rather than June, as had been originally planned. General Lynch described the new orders succinctly: "The division's training time was decreased from six months to six weeks and its area of responsibility shifted south."⁵⁵

Lynch recalled that "General Odierno called me in January," and, as he later summarized the conversation, the corps commander said that "you've

⁵³ MND-B Media Release, Ironhorse soldiers highlighted, 14 Nov 2006.

⁵⁴ Interv, author with Lt Col Mark Hovatter, G-5 (Chief, Planning Staff), 3d Inf Div, 28 May 2007.

⁵⁵ Maj Gen Rick Lynch, "Looking Back and Moving Forward," Task Force Marne Web page, 14 Jan 2008.

got to come in early and you've got to block accelerants of violence into Baghdad.”⁵⁶ This new term, *accelerants*, was, as Lynch described it, “the physical components that facilitate and perpetuate further instability,” such as explosives, weapons, and the terrorists themselves. Within the new surge strategy, the key to providing security in Baghdad was to stop these accelerants from moving through the Baghdad belts and into the capital.⁵⁷

The division absorbed as much information as it could, sending teams to Iraq to talk with MNC-I and soliciting advice from anyone with expertise on the region. After a trip to Iraq in February 2007, General William S. Wallace, the Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) commander, stopped at Fort Stewart for a conversation with the 3d Division senior staff. The consensus was that training was going well, but no one really knew what to expect. During a lunch meeting on the twenty-sixth, General Wallace summed up his view on the operational imperative—whether it be for Baghdad, the western desert, or the southern belt—by pointing out that “it all comes down to security. If you don’t have fundamental security, you don’t have governance, economics, etc.” Wallace believed that the complex solutions needed for Iraq equated to soldiers on the ground. In general, this would become the 3d Division’s guiding principle during the surge.⁵⁸

The big picture was coming into focus, but problems lingered. Although General Odierno had assigned the 3d Division control of MND-C, he had only committed to providing Lynch with one 3d Division unit—the 3d Brigade. He remained undecided on where to put the 2d Brigade. As late as March, he entertained the idea of sending that unit into Baghdad as part of the 1st Cavalry Division task force, prompting new speculation and anxiety on the part of brigade planners, who were already concerned by the compression of their training schedule. Colonel Ferrell, the 2d Brigade commander, recalled that “once we were identified as the surge brigade we still had to prepare for everything—from working in Baghdad, to working to the north in Diyala, or deploying to the southern belt with the 3d Division. Every other day it was something different, and we were trying to second-guess the decisions. Finally we just stopped and focused on the basics. We focused on interdiction operations and counterinsurgency.” However, by early April the decision was made—the 2d Brigade was also going to MND-C, giving General Lynch the extra forces he required to launch offensive operations against the enemy entrenched in sanctuaries south of Baghdad. But Colonel Ferrell’s unit would not arrive until June, making it the last of the surge brigades.⁵⁹

A skeleton division headquarters was already in place in Iraq by early March, including the principal players on the intelligence, planning, and

⁵⁶ DoD Bloggers Roundtable, 14 Jan 2008, sub: Opn MARNE THUNDERBOLT, p. 2.

⁵⁷ DoD News Transcript, Briefing with Maj Gen Lynch, 4 May 2007.

⁵⁸ CG Executive Summary, 3d Inf Div Brownbag Lunch, 26 Feb 2007.

⁵⁹ Interv, author with Ferrell, 25 Jul 2007.

operations staffs who were responsible for implementing the new strategy. Lynch especially relied on his chief assistants—Brig. Gen. James L. Huggins, the deputy commanding general for maneuver, and Brig. Gen. Edward C. Cardon, the assistant division commander for support. Huggins had served in Afghanistan in 2002 as commander of the 3d Brigade, 82d Airborne Division, and, between February 2005 and February 2006, he went to Iraq as chief of staff for Lt. Gen. John R. Vines and the XVIII Airborne Corps when it functioned as MNC-I. Barely more than a year later, Huggins was back in Iraq.⁶⁰

General Cardon was on his third tour to Iraq—all three with the 3d Division. In 2003, he commanded the division's Engineer Brigade in Al Fallujah. When the division underwent the change to a modular organization and engineer units were dispersed to the brigades, Cardon became the first commander of the new 4th Brigade Combat Team in May 2004. Six months later, he was back in Iraq where until January 2006 his unit secured part of southern Baghdad.⁶¹

In mid-March 2007, General Lynch and his staff arrived in Iraq and spent much of their time in meetings with their MNF-I and MNC-I counterparts. During one meeting, General Petraeus told his newest division commander that the Sunni regions immediately south of the capital were boiling over, and they definitely were conduits for explosives moving into Baghdad. This situation, said Petraeus, "can't be deferred for much longer." Part of the decision to put the 3d Division's 2d Brigade south of Baghdad rather than in the capital stemmed from this reality.⁶²

The veteran cadre within the division understood the severity of their circumstances. Speaking with the authority of two previous tours, Cardon observed that "the situation was significantly worse" in Iraq during the spring of 2007 than it had been when he left Iraq in early 2006.⁶³

This was not going to be the sort of conflict for which the Army was best known. The 3d Division had fought that battle in 2003, when it used its conventional strength to capture Baghdad, and it had seen the beginnings of the Iraqi insurgency in 2005, but this latest tour would shift even further into the realm of irregular warfare. This time there would be no lightning-fast armored thrusts and no sweeping infantry assaults, only slow and deliberate progress aimed at regaining security and at creating an environment in which the local population could return their lives to normal. As General Lynch had told his officers early on, "We have between now and August to make this surge successful—do not rush to failure." (See Map 3.)

⁶⁰ Official Biography, Brig Gen James L. Huggins, c. Jan 2007.

⁶¹ Official Biography, Brig Gen Edward C. Cardon, c. Jan 2007.

⁶² CG Executive Summary, Informal Plans Huddle, 29 Mar 2007.

⁶³ Interv, Editors of *Small Wars Journal* with Brig Gen Edward C. Cardon, 17 Jan 2008.

⁶⁴ CG Executive Summary, MG Lynch's first visit to 3/3 [3d BCT, 3d Inf Div] at Butler Range Complex, 2 Apr 2007.

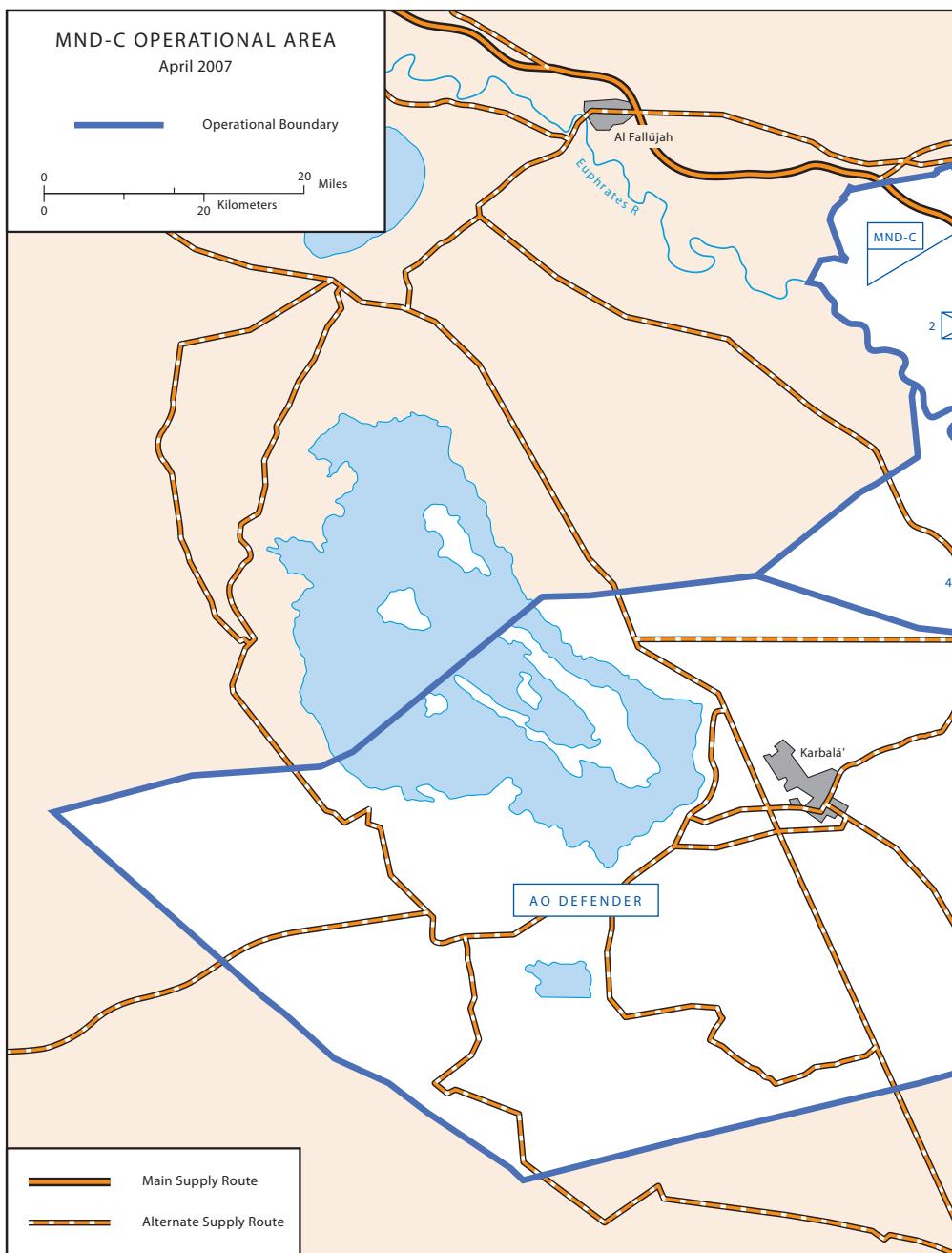
What would the 3d Division face south of Baghdad? The region shared one crucial characteristic with the area the division would have deployed to north of Baghdad—it was a blending bowl of Sunni and Shi'ite communities that, along with Baghdad itself, were the only such mixtures in all of Iraq. Other coalition areas of operations, such as the Sunni-dominated Al Anbar Province west of Baghdad, the Kurdish enclave farther to the north, and the Shi'ite regions in southern and eastern Iraq, were well-established strongholds of ethnic and religious homogeneity. So Lynch's staff would not have to alter the emphasis on keeping the peace between factions with histories of hatred. But the similarities ended there. Iraq was historically a region of competing interests that only became a nation in 1926, when the British merged the Ottoman Empire's old administrative structure of three regions of Sunni, Shi'ite, and Kurdish populations into a single country. It was an artificial creation that had threatened to unravel many times since then.

South of Baghdad was truly the "land between two rivers"—Mesopotamia—where the Tigris and Euphrates almost merged, running side by side past Baghdad into the desert south of the city before diverging again as they flowed toward the Persian Gulf. The barren desert was brought to life there, nurtured into productive farms, fishponds, and palm groves by rivers, swelled seasonally from rains in the northern mountains, and by vast networks of irrigation canals.

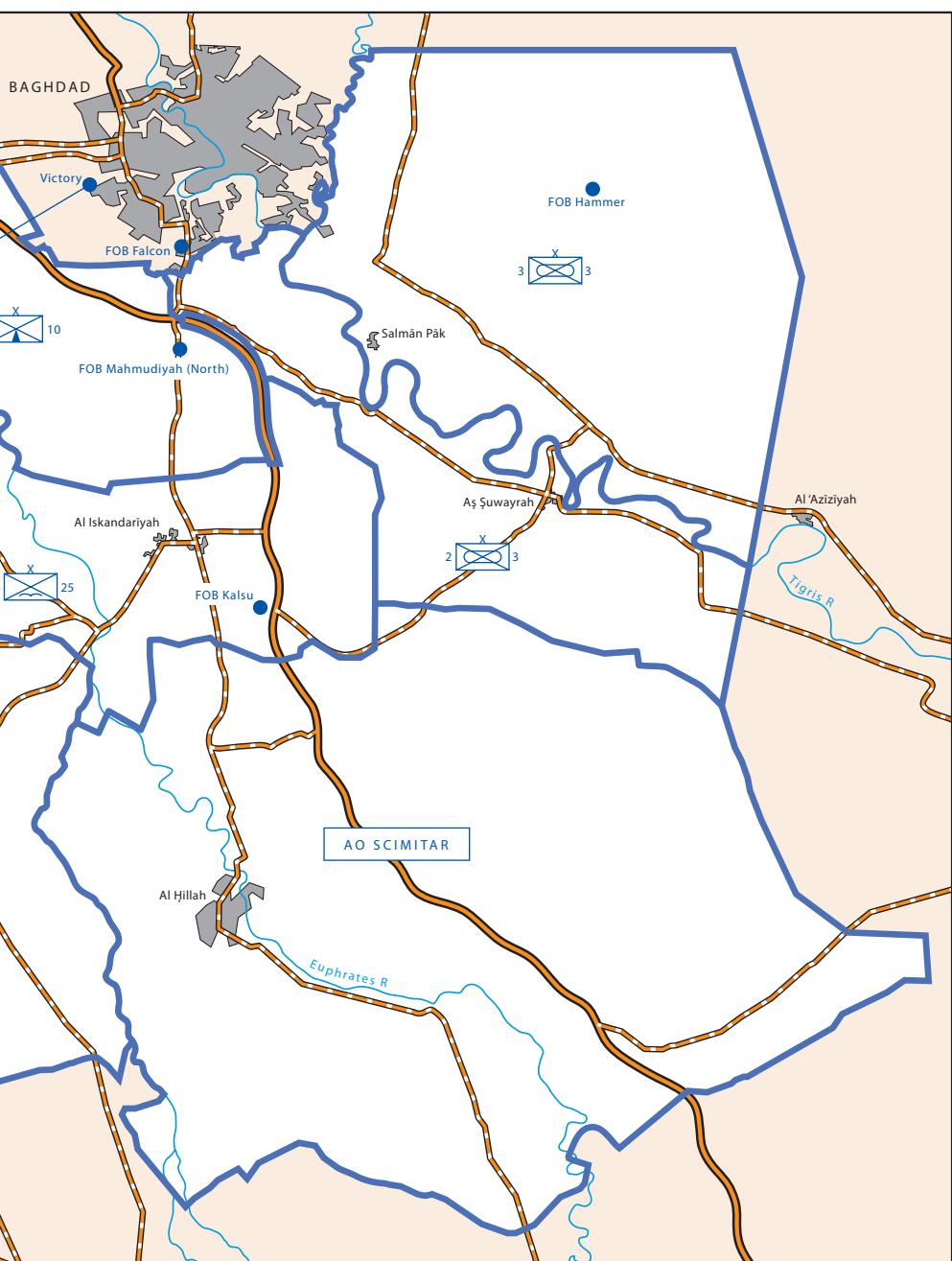
When the rivers were at their lowest ebb, the mercury was at its apex, often reaching 120°F during the summer months and forcing most living things to retreat from the deadly desert heat. Life and religion had reflected this cycle since the earliest times. In ancient Iraq, it was believed that the god Tammuz "died" each year as the summer temperatures intensified, then he returned to the world when life-giving rains in the northern mountains swelled the great rivers and began anew the cycle of growth. More than four thousand years later, Iraq's dependence on the rivers and their seasonal phases had not changed.⁶⁵

The southern belt was a consistently violent place that had for years thwarted coalition attempts to pacify it. After the battle of Fallujah in late 2004, many surviving Sunni insurgents fled south of Baghdad and set up new sanctuaries, and al-Qaeda leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was reputed to have operated there as well. A year later, the fighting south of Baghdad was, in the words of a former brigade commander who served in that area, "what I would call the most lethal area" around the capital. Indeed, some were places within fifty kilometers south of Baghdad that had seen only limited U.S. troop presence, giving the enemy an opportunity to build armed fighting positions and to pepper roadways with locally made bombs, called improvised explosive devices (IEDs). This defensive network in turn

⁶⁵ William R. Polk, *Understanding Iraq* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005), p. 23.



Map 3



allowed the insurgents to use these virtual safe havens to build bomb factories and hide weapons caches.⁶⁶

General Cardon could certainly confirm this. Recalling his last Iraq tour in 2005, he remembered the southern belt as “the area [where] rockets used to come out of toward the center of Baghdad.” In that respect, not much had changed.⁶⁷

Moving the accelerants northward was not difficult. Lt. Gen. Hazma Qais, the chief of the Iraqi police for Babil Province, told Lynch during meetings in March that Sunni insurgents moved from Al Fallujah into Babil, then north into Baghdad, bringing with them a flow of weapons that was tough to stanch. The Shi’ites had their own smuggling routes, he added.⁶⁸

The crux of the Iraqi government’s defense in that area was the Lion’s Gate, the grand title for a network of checkpoints and obstacles on roads, canals, and other north-south routes that sought to halt the accelerants movement into the capital. Its effectiveness was dubious, however, as insurgents consistently found other routes through gaps in the monitoring system.

South of that was a violent region known as the Triangle of Death, which one account described as “a swath of territory where residents say insurgents have imposed draconian Islamic law, offered bounties for the killings of police, National Guardsmen, Shiite pilgrims and foreigners, and carried out summary executions in the street.” U.S. soldiers characterized the fighting there as the “war of the Iyahs,” referring to the cluster of towns in an arc south of the capital—Al Mahmudiyah, Al Yusufiyah, Al Latifiyah, and Al Iskandariyah—which were hotbeds of resistance to coalition forces.⁶⁹

To make matters worse, the population dynamics in the territory changed with each passing year. The Baghdad belts were traditionally Sunni strongholds, purposely placed there by Saddam Hussein, who wanted to secure a mass base around the capital as added insurance against a possible Shi’ite uprising. He rewarded important Ba’ath Party loyalists with estates in the belts, especially south of Baghdad along the lush banks of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. But with the Iraqi dictator gone and a new Shi’ite government in place, the fault lines between the religious groups were shifting. Many areas that had once been composed of Sunni majority populations had in a few short years moved the other way, with Shi’ites pushing the Sunnis out into the surrounding countryside—or into Baghdad itself—resulting in fluctuating population densities and deepening distrust.

⁶⁶ Ricks, *Fiasco*, p. 427.

⁶⁷ Interv, DoD Bloggers Roundtable with Cardon, 24 Jan 2008, p. 1.

⁶⁸ CG Executive Summary, mtg with LTG Hamza Qais, Babil IP Chief; Col Abdul Amir, cmdr, 2d Bde, 8th IA [Iraqi Army] Div, and Hussein al-Jabory Abbas, Hila Swat Chief, 31 Mar 2007.

⁶⁹ First quote from Anthony Shadid, “Iraq’s Forbidding ‘Triangle of Death,’” *Washington Post*, 23 Nov 2004. Second quote from Ricks, *Fiasco*, p. 427.



Weather conditions south of Baghdad could be harsh, particularly in the summer, when temperatures rose to well over 100°F and winds whipped up dust storms.

In the traditionally Sunni-dominated town of Al Mahmudiyah, thirty kilometers south of Baghdad's city center on the crucial Highway 8, or Hillah Highway, corridor running southward to Al Hillah, there was a dramatic turnabout in the population; by the spring of 2007 it was 70 percent Shi'ite. Other towns and regions had witnessed similar trends—the Iraqi version of ethnic cleansing.

If there was any hope of subduing the similar conflict in Baghdad itself, the southern belt had to be stabilized—and that would be difficult. "You can travel twenty kilometers in any direction and face a different threat, a different enemy," summarized Spec. James Adams, an intelligence analyst at the 3d Division headquarters. "I hesitate to say that one is more dangerous than the other, but they are different."⁷⁰

This upheaval had frayed the fabric of Sunni society and ensured a desperate fight for survival. Al-Qaeda had made great inroads here, exploiting the oppression of the Sunni population by Shi'ite militias and the Iraqi government's apparent indifference to the people's plight. But al-Qaeda's main appeal was its armed security against Shi'ite militias, not its ability to offer an alternative government. Rather, the terrorist group's only real end-state strategy was a fundamentalist Islamic state, something that many Sunnis did not support. According to one study of al-Qaeda strategy, the group wanted to demonstrate that Prime Minister Maliki "is unable to provide

⁷⁰ Interv, author with Spec James Adams, Intelligence Analyst, 3d Inf Div, 3 Jul 2007.

security in his own capital.” In addition to launching terror attacks to accomplish this, al-Qaeda would sustain “as much of this atmosphere of intimidation and murder over as wide an area as possible” until the Coalition left.⁷¹

In the end, al-Qaeda’s efforts to control the population through intimidation and coercion and to spread terror into the capital were futile. While the Americans might go home—though they showed no signs of doing so—the Shi’ite-controlled government was there to stay. However, as long as al-Qaeda was rooted in parts of the Sunni population south of Baghdad, it could successfully direct accelerants into the capital and sustain the violence. In the Euphrates River valley southwest of Baghdad, the terrorists used Sunni enclaves to smuggle fighters, weapons, and equipment from the western part of Iraq, employing the network of roads and the river—nicknamed rat lines by U.S. soldiers—to move them into Baghdad. The insurgents did the same along the Tigris River, making an armed sanctuary of the Sunni area known as Arab Jabour on the southern outskirts of the capital and also extending southward along both banks of the Tigris River.

Al-Qaeda was not the only enemy facing the Americans south of Baghdad, and it was sometimes difficult to tell what part of the insurgency was made up of Islamic extremists and what was simply home-grown Sunni rejectionists angry over losing power when Saddam Hussein was ousted. Further complicating things was the fact that in late 2006 a coalition of eight fundamentalist militant Sunni groups, called the Islamic State of Iraq, had united with al-Qaeda to protect Sunnis, drive the Americans out of Iraq, and establish a caliphate—or “pure” Sunni Islamic state ruled by a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. In April 2007, the group declared “the first Islamic administration” of Iraq and elected a cabinet of ministers under Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, a Sunni nationalist who turned out to be a fake. In July, U.S. forces would capture a senior al-Qaeda leader who admitted that al-Baghdadi was a fake. Up to that point, al-Qaeda had successfully portrayed itself as but a single cog in a broader Sunni coalition, when in fact it was the driving force. Even so, U.S. intelligence showed that the most dangerous segment in the Sunni insurgency south of Baghdad was al-Qaeda, and in the spring of 2007 the 3d Division would have to deal with it first and foremost.⁷²

The Shi’ite militias had a very different—and more straightforward—objective. Rather than attack the government, they sought to co-opt it, and in many cases the Shi’ite militias were an important part of provincial and local governments. “The Shiites have such inroads into this government,” concluded Specialist Adams, “that they want not only to see it succeed but

⁷¹ Rpt, Insurgency Strategies in the Southern Belt: AQI, n.d.

⁷² See Steve Schippert and Nick Grace, “The Fiction of Abu Omar al-Baghdadi,” ThreatsWatch.org, 4 Mar 2007.

to prosper, because they have infiltrated much of it and have a stake in its success.”⁷³

The major Shi’ite militia immediately south of Baghdad—indeed in much of Shi’ite Iraq—belonged to the radical cleric Moqtada al-Sadr and was known as *Jaysh al-Mahdi* (JAM), or the Mahdi Army, established in 2003. Alongside its political wing, the Office of the Martyr Sadr, it also sought an Islamic state in Iraq under Shi’ite domination, though it was at odds with the elected Shi’ite government over the shape of the new state and who would rule it. No one doubted that Sadr sought political power of a kind not usually held by mullahs, and he was a force—both political and military—with which to be reckoned.⁷⁴

Like the Sunni insurgents, the Shi’ite opposition was not always unified. Sadr had lost control of significant portions of his militia, both in Baghdad and the regions south and east of the capital. Infighting and corruption seemed to be growing throughout the Mahdi Army, forcing Sadr to divert attention from his fight with the Americans. According to one summary, “As a result, some of its fighters have degenerated into organized crime or banditry.” For the time being, this was good news for the 3d Division, which would eventually have to deal with Shi’ite influence in its operational area. In the spring of 2007, however, Sadr had his focus turned elsewhere; an intelligence summary noted that “a majority of JAM leaders have made a deliberate effort to refrain from targeting coalition forces directly.”⁷⁵

During the earliest days of the 3d Division’s deployment, the Mahdi Army remained something of an enigma. Intelligence analysts seemed to have a good understanding of the Sunni groups arrayed against coalition forces but were not as sure about the Shi’ites, prompting General Lynch to ask his analysts, “Who are the Shia extremists and what is their flow?” The consensus within the 3d Division was that, generally speaking, “JAM is more popular with blue collar workers.” During a division intelligence briefing, General Lynch speculated that “people support JAM because they are afraid of them, not because they are enamored with them,” but he believed that Sadr’s militia should not be automatically regarded as the enemy.⁷⁶

The only other militant Shi’ite group with any significant influence south of Baghdad was the Badr Corps, the military wing of the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council (SIIC—before May 2007 the group called itself the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution [SCIRI]). With roots as an anti-Ba’athist force extending back into the 1970s, the Badr Corps and the SIIC became power players in the post-Hussein Shi’ite government, and,

⁷³ Interv, author with Adams, 3 Jul 2007.

⁷⁴ The name “Office of the Martyr Sadr” refers to the death of Sadr’s father, Grand Ayatollah Mohammed al-Sadr, who was assassinated in 1999, probably by agents of Saddam Hussein.

⁷⁵ Rpt, Insurgency Strategies in the Southern Belt: JAM [*Jaysh al-Mahdi*] (c. Jan–Mar 2007).

⁷⁶ CG Notes, JAM Update Brief, 1 Apr 2007.

as members of the new status quo, tended to be less radical than when they were outside the ruling circle. In 2003, one observer described them as “neither an ally nor foe of the United States. . . . [They are] a prickly and awkward tool that the United States can use to gain some leverage over the Shia political community and to prevent the radicalization of Iraqi Shias in the decisive months ahead.”⁷⁷

Perhaps so, but prior to the U.S. invasion, much of the SIIC leadership was ensconced in Iran, where it grew increasingly close to the ayatollahs over the years. By the spring of 2007, the Coalition could probably count on the supreme council to continue consolidating Shi’ite gains rather than seeking open conflict with U.S. forces. From the 3d Division’s perspective, belonging to the Badr Corps “does not make you an insurgent,” but the division still categorized the group as a “medium threat” because it was “heavily tied to Iranian influence.” Such was the complex mosaic facing General Lynch and his new command.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Mahan Abedin, “SCIRI: An American Ally in Iraq?” *Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor*, 7 Nov 2003.

⁷⁸ CG Executive Summary, *Shia Extremist Update Notes*, 3 Apr 2007.

ON THE GROUND

Chapter 2

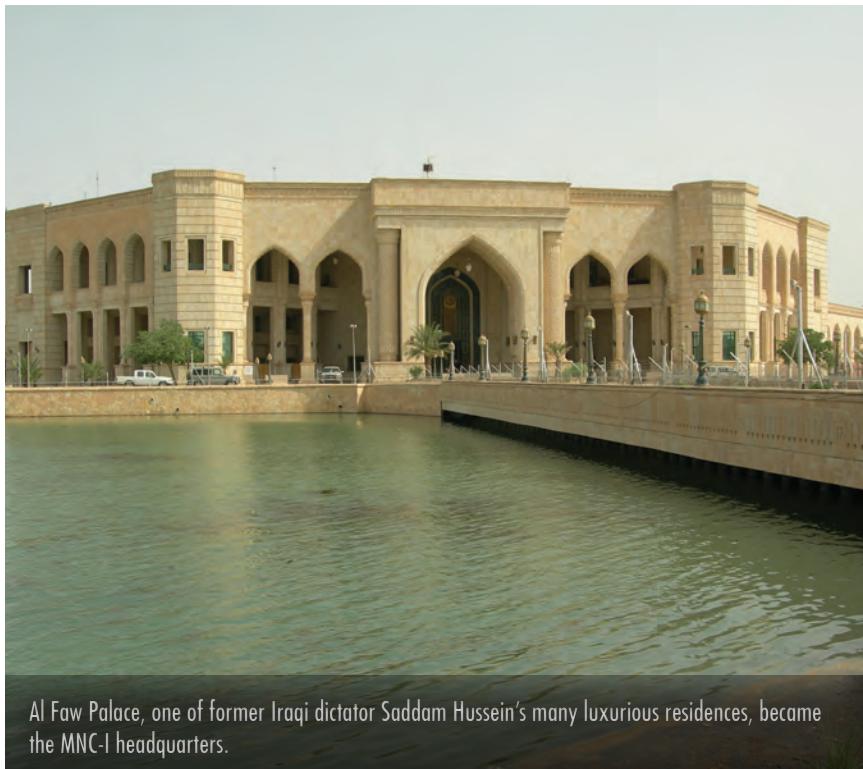
The training and preparation were done. For the third time, the 3d Infantry Division departed for the Middle East, moving its headquarters and the 3d Brigade's heavy equipment and manpower to Iraq. Its staff cased the unit colors during a small ceremony at Fort Stewart on 8 March 2007 and transported them to Iraq. Within four days, the division's advance party was on the ground in Iraq, and by 22 March much of the division headquarters was in country. On 1 April, the unit's colors were planted at Camp Victory outside Baghdad. General Lynch announced the arrival. "Today as we uncase the colors," he said, and "we begin the next chapter in the history of this magnificent division, a history that spans nine decades. It's significant in our history and the history of the free world—Task Force Marne has arrived." One week later, the division officially assumed control of MND-C.¹

Camp Victory was part of a sprawling network of separate camps and bases inside a single perimeter located near Baghdad International Airport on the southwest side of the capital. The complex was also home to the 1st Cavalry Division and MND-B, and it was the headquarters for the coalition's major commands, including MNF-I and MNC-I. The main feature of the base was a man-made lake in the center of which was Al Faw Palace, one of Saddam Hussein's presidential retreats. The palace was built to commemorate the recapture in 1988 of Al Faw Peninsula in southern Iraq. It had been taken by Iran in February 1986 in an attempt to cut off Iraq's oil-exporting ability. Completed in 1989, the building was one of the areas declared off-limits to United Nations arms inspectors, an act that fueled suspicions that the Iraqi dictator was hiding weapons of mass destruction. Barely damaged by coalition warplanes in 2003, it became the new MNC-I headquarters.²

The 3d Division command post, a blocky two-story building on the northeast side of Camp Victory, was not nearly so grand. Originally a currency-printing facility for Saddam Hussein, it was turned into a barracks for Iraqi Army troops during the opening days of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. After the dictator's ouster, it became transient quarters for U.S. troops before the number of trailers and tents at Camp Victory began to

¹ MNC-I Media Release, 3d Infantry Division holds uncasing ceremony, 1 Apr 2007.

² Ms, Faw Palace, n.d., pp. 1–2.



Al Faw Palace, one of former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein's many luxurious residences, became the MNC-I headquarters.

grow. But it was spacious enough to house the five hundred or so men and women that would make up the division's planning center.³

The troop surge strained the coalition's logistical capabilities. Although Camp Victory already housed and fed thousands of soldiers and civilians, the rapid arrival of the 3d Division temporarily crimped the system. The headquarters personnel exceeded the number of available trailers, so for several months most officers and enlisted men lived in large tents before settling into trailers.

At the brigade level, life was even more spartan. Upon its arrival in early April, the 3d Brigade moved southeast of the capital into a region stretching south along the lush eastern bank of the Tigris and eastward to the stark desert of the triborder boundary between Baghdad, Diyala, and Wasit Provinces. "When we got here there was nothing," said Colonel Grigsby, the brigade commander. "Although we had to hit the ground fighting, there was also a lot of building to do."⁴

³ MNC-I Media Release, 3d Infantry Division (Headquarters) arrives in Iraq, 2 Apr 2007.

⁴ Interv, author with Col Wayne W. Grigsby, CO, 3d BCT, 3d Inf Div, 12 Jul 2007.



Camp Victory, home to the 3d Infantry Division headquarters, sprawled over several square kilometers and housed some twelve thousand soldiers and civilians.

Grigsby's brigade would be headquartered in the desert forty-five kilometers east of Baghdad's city center. The site selected for the base was the old Butler Range Complex, named in honor of Sgt. Jacob L. Butler, the first 1st Armored Division soldier killed during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. The Iraqis referred to it as Besmaya. The 56-square-kilometer complex was built in late 2003 by the 1st Armored Division as a multipurpose gunnery practice range for weapons from small arms to tanks and rockets, but it fell into disuse. By March 2007, little was left at the location except for a few concrete foundations and some dilapidated buildings, but work on the basic outline of the base was to be completed by early spring. New facilities soon sprang from the desert, including a mess hall, tents and trailers, showers fed by huge water bladders, and a tactical operations center built from plywood over an old concrete foundation that had once been a gymnasium. It was called Forward Operating Base Hammer, after the 3d Brigade's battle moniker—"Sledgehammer."⁵

⁵ Briefing, 3/3 BCT Onward Movement and Integration, Operation BLACK ROCK, 23 Feb 2007, p. 8.



Soldiers wait for a helicopter on the airfield outside Forward Operating Base Hammer. The base was built from scratch in the desert east of Baghdad and became home to the 3d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, and the center of operations east of the Tigris River.

Hammer sat in the center of the 3d Brigade's area of responsibility, but it was more than thirty kilometers from where the 3d Division expected most of the fighting to occur—the banks of the Tigris. The territory was large—4,800 square kilometers in Al Mada'in District, or *qadaa*, containing some 1.2 million people to the east and southeast of Baghdad. Almost half of the total acreage would receive only partial coverage from the 3d Brigade, which concentrated on the northern sector, especially the eastern bank of the Tigris and the eastern outskirts of Baghdad. About 70 percent of the population was Shi'ite and 30 percent Sunni, the latter concentrated between the river and Highway 6, dubbed Route Detroit by the Americans.⁶

Most of the Iraqi population lived along the river, and one of the most important towns was Salman Pak, about thirty kilometers southeast of Baghdad, near the northernmost of a series of serpentine bends in the Tigris. Like much else in Iraq, Salman Pak had an old and storied past. The modern town was near the ruins of the ancient city of Ctesiphon, one of the great metropolises of the Persian Empire. Probably begun in the second

⁶ Interv, Kimberly Kagan, Institute for the Study of War, with Grigsby, 7 Dec 2007, p. 2.

century BC, it was built upon by a succession of Persian dynasties, and by the sixth century AD it covered more than thirty square kilometers, making it the biggest city in the world at the time. The ancient city's defining monument—part of which still stands today—was the Taq-i Kisra, a royal palace complex with a huge throne room that remains the world's largest single-span freestanding arch.

Over the centuries, Ctesiphon saw its share of invasions. In May 363, a Roman army under Emperor Julian invaded Persia and arrived at the city gates, but his force was tired and disease-ridden, and it lacked the equipment necessary to lay siege to a great city. Julian was forced to retreat north along the Tigris with his demoralized army. Harried all the way, the Romans stood and fought near the city of Samarra, barely staving off a superior Persian force, but Emperor Julian was killed during the battle. With an army now stuck deep inside Persian territory, the new Roman ruler, Jovian, was forced to make an unfavorable peace that included a promise to cede several districts along the Tigris back to Persian control before his soldiers were allowed to return home.⁷

Other battles swept over Ctesiphon throughout the centuries, but perhaps the largest occurred during World War I when a British and Indian force, fresh from victories against the Turks (who had ruled most of the Arab world since the sixteenth century) at Al Basrah, An Nasiriyah, and other towns, was defeated at Ctesiphon in November 1915. The Turks had built formidable defenses among the old Persian ruins, and the allied force of eleven thousand could not break through. The British sailed an armored gunboat up the Tigris to bombard the Turks, but it was not enough. The British took some forty-five hundred casualties—about 40 percent of its force—and retreated.⁸

By the early twentieth century, Ctesiphon was more commonly referred to as Salman Pak. According to historical accounts, both Sunnis and Shi'ites lived there in peace for centuries. Saddam Hussein upset the balance by rewarding Ba'ath Party loyalists with estates along the Tigris River, and he established an important headquarters of his feared Mukhabarat intelligence police in the town. In the 1980s, Hussein reportedly began testing biological weapons outside the city, and he established a school for foreign terrorists. By 2005, an influx of Sunnis from other towns—many of them uprooted from other areas by Shi'ite pressure—began relocating near Salman Pak. The ensuing political and social turmoil made the local Iraqis susceptible to the hatred preached by al-Qaeda and other extremist

⁷ See Robert Mignan, *Travels in Chaldea, Including a Journey from Bussorah to Bagdad, Hillah, and Babylon, Performed on Foot in 1827: With Observations on the Sites and Remains of Babel, Seleucia, and Ctesiphon* (Boston: Adamant Publishing Corp., 2002); Frederick Charles Webb, *Up the Tigris to Bagdad* (Boston: Adamant Publishing Corp., 2004).

⁸ See Ron Wilcox, *Battles on the Tigris: The Mesopotamian Campaign of the First World War* (Yorkshire, England: Pen and Sword, 2006).



A Bradley fighting vehicle of Company A, 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, 3d Brigade, patrols past the ancient Persian palace of Taq-i Kisra outside Salman Pak. In the summer of 2007, the town was an insurgent stronghold.

groups, a trend reinforced by new Sunni insurgents pushed out of Al Anbar Province by the fighting in Al Fallujah.⁹

By 2007, Salman Pak was a dangerous insurgent stronghold. Intelligence reports pinpointed it as a southern supply line through which ran “critical support of EFPs, munitions, and personnel” into Baghdad. Both Sunni and Shi’ite insurgents used Salman Pak as a smuggling hub.¹⁰

Few people lived away from the life-giving waters of the Tigris, and the only town of any size in the desert east of the river was Nahrawan, a Shi’ite enclave of about a hundred thousand people known mostly for its brick factory, some thirty kilometers east of Baghdad. Just west of the town was a bustling market, dubbed the Four Corners because it was a crossroads between Nahrawan, the town of Jisr Diyala on the eastern outskirts of Baghdad, the capital itself, and Forward Operating Base Hammer. Although Nahrawan was a headquarters for Mahdi Army leadership, it

⁹ Maj James F. Carlisle, 3d BCT, 3d Inf Div, Civil Affairs Officer, History of Salman Pak, 30 Jan 08.

¹⁰ Coordinating Draft, HQ MNC-I, FRAGO XXX, Opn BLACK ROCK (3/3 BCT Onward Movement and Integration) to OPORD 06-03, n.d., p. 1.

would, at this time, have a lower priority. For the moment, the Tigris north of Salman Pak was the focus.

Working in the Desert

The vast size of the operational area and the location of the brigade headquarters at its center meant that much of the force would live far from the base. At full strength, the 3d Brigade had about thirty-eight hundred soldiers in six battalions: the 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment; 2d Battalion, 69th Armored Regiment; 3d Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment; 1st Battalion, 10th Field Artillery Regiment; plus the brigade Special Troops Battalion and the brigade Support Battalion. But a substantial part of Colonel Grigsby's combat power—the 69th's 2d Battalion and the 10th's 1st Battalion—had been stripped off and sent elsewhere, the former to Baghdad and the latter to Camp Bucca in Umm Qasr in southern Iraq near the Kuwaiti border. The armor unit would not return to the 3d Brigade, but Grigsby expected to reacquire his artillery in October.

The 3d Brigade began work immediately. On 7 April, Colonel Grigsby presided over the unfurling of the brigade colors at Hammer, and the



Colonel Grigsby returns to Forward Operating Base Hammer after a "battlefield rotation" to visit his units in the field.

following day, Easter Sunday, he received the news that two of his soldiers from the 2d Battalion, 69th Armored Regiment, the unit taken from him and sent to Baghdad, were killed during tune-up operations with the 1st Cavalry Division. S. Sgt. Harrison Brown and Pfc. David N. Simmons died when their Bradley fighting vehicle was struck by an IED. Simmons had arrived in Iraq exactly one week earlier. A 1st Cavalry Division soldier, Sgt. Todd A. Singleton, was also killed in the blast.

More bad news came on 11 April, this time from Washington: Secretary of Defense Robert Gates announced that all active-duty soldiers already deployed or on their way to Iraq and Afghanistan would have their twelve-month tours extended to fifteen months. “This decision will ask a lot of our Army troops and their families,” Gates said, but he believed that the change made future troop rotations “fair, predictable and sustainable” and would ensure that active-duty units would have at least twelve months at home. Gates also admitted to reporters that the extension showed “that our forces are stretched.”¹¹

The announcement had a predictable effect. Soldiers already in Iraq and expecting to come home after a year were forced to accept another three months in Iraq, and those about to deploy had to steel themselves for an even longer tour. Commanders understood the stress it put on the troops and their families, and they sympathized. General Cardon pointed out that “it’s not just 12 plus three [months], there’s a big difference between 12 and 15 months.”¹²

Despite these concerns, the division was set to play its role in the surge—and it would be an important part. Lynch’s new command was something of a showcase for the emerging Iraq strategy, one that provided a clear example of the advantages of placing more troops in troubled areas. Prior to the spring of 2007, only two brigades were stationed south of Baghdad, and they were both on the western and southwestern edges of the capital, leaving a large swath of territory near the Tigris unmanned by U.S. troops except for occasional forays by MND-B units when they could be spared. Now two new heavy brigades were about to arrive, almost doubling U.S. troops there and providing the ability to maintain a permanent presence along the entire arc of the southern belt. This was the most combat power the dangerous region had seen in more than a year. Grigsby colorfully summed up the new situation. Before his units arrived, the best the Coalition could do was periodically move a unit from Baghdad to spend a few days patrolling. When they did this, said Grigsby, “all the extremists would get on their cell phones and say ‘here come the good guys, drop your stuff and wave, and be nice.’”¹³

¹¹ Ann Scott Tyson and Josh White, “Strained Army Extends Tours to 15 Months,” *Washington Post*, 12 Apr 2007.

¹² Interv, DoD Bloggers Roundtable with Brig Gen Edward C. Cardon, 24 Jan 2008, p. 10.

¹³ Interv, Kagan with Grigsby, 7 Dec 2007, p. 2.



General Lynch listens to a briefing from Colonel Kolasheski (right).

The 3d Brigade's two major combat units, the 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, and the 3d Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment, planned to take the initiative from the enemy by maintaining constant patrols east of the Tigris. Grigsby initially kept the cavalry unit with him at Hammer and gave it responsibility for the northern portion of the brigade area of operations, dubbed Blackhawk after the 1st Cavalry Regiment's insignia. Commanded by Lt. Col. John S. Kolasheski, the squadron ranged across the "wild, wild East," as the cavalrymen called their section of desert east of Baghdad, maintaining security along the major roads. At the beginning, of the deployment Kolasheski assigned the northern third to Troop B, while Troop C patrolled the southeastern sector, and Troop A held down the southwest, nearest the Tigris River (Map 4).¹⁴

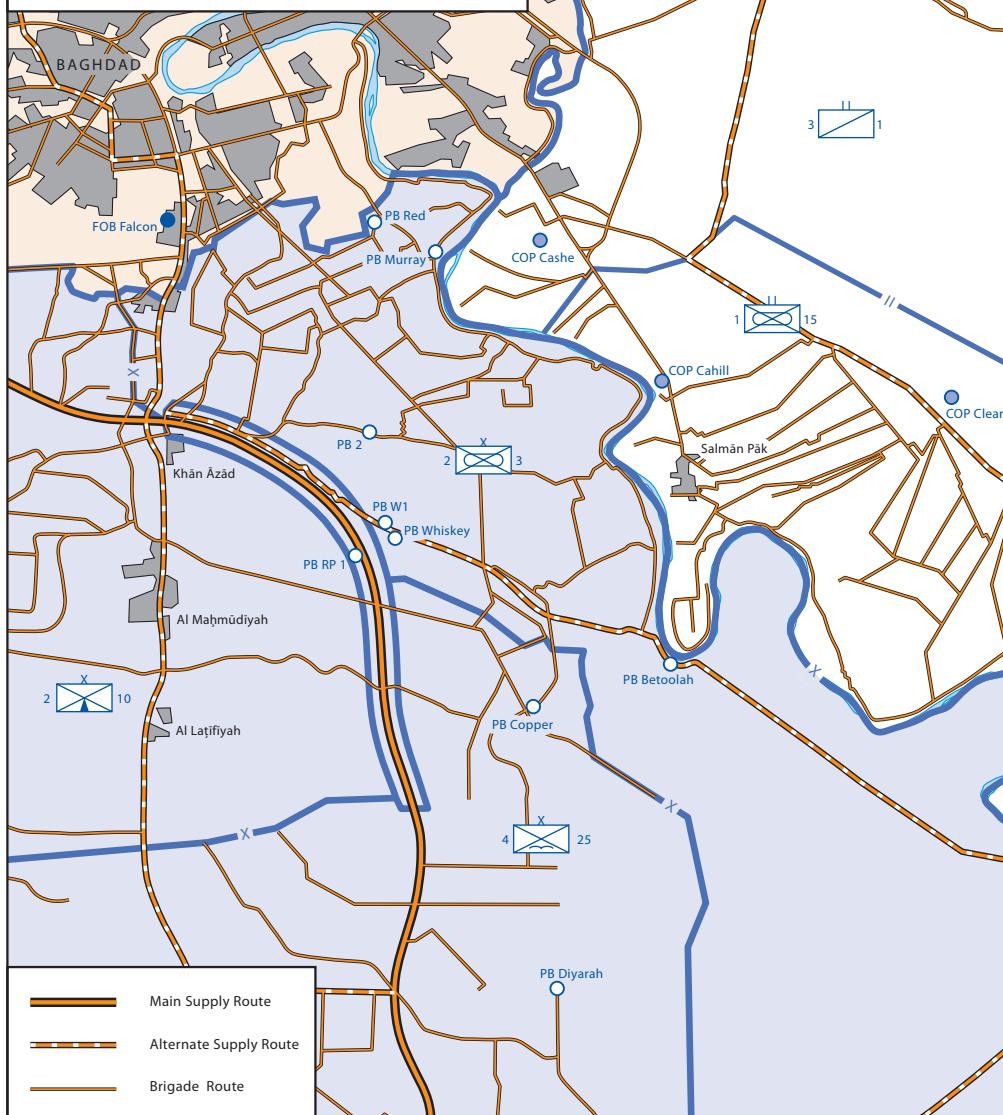
About 90 percent of the Blackhawk territory was inhabited by Shi'ites, who dominated the towns, but pockets of Sunnis also lived closer to the river and along Route Detroit as well as on the southern outskirts of Baghdad. Kolasheski had to set priorities, and, given the size of his area of operations, he could only do so much. At first, the entire squadron operated from Hammer, though by early summer parts of the unit rotated in and out of a new patrol base named Assassin. The isolated outpost was built to house two hundred and fifty soldiers at one time, including a platoon of Iraqi police who worked alongside the Americans. Assassin was well north

¹⁴ Maj. Andrew W. Koloski and Lt. Col. John S. Kolasheski, "Thickening the Lines: Sons of Iraq, A Combat Multiplier," *Military Review* 89 (January-February 2009): 41.

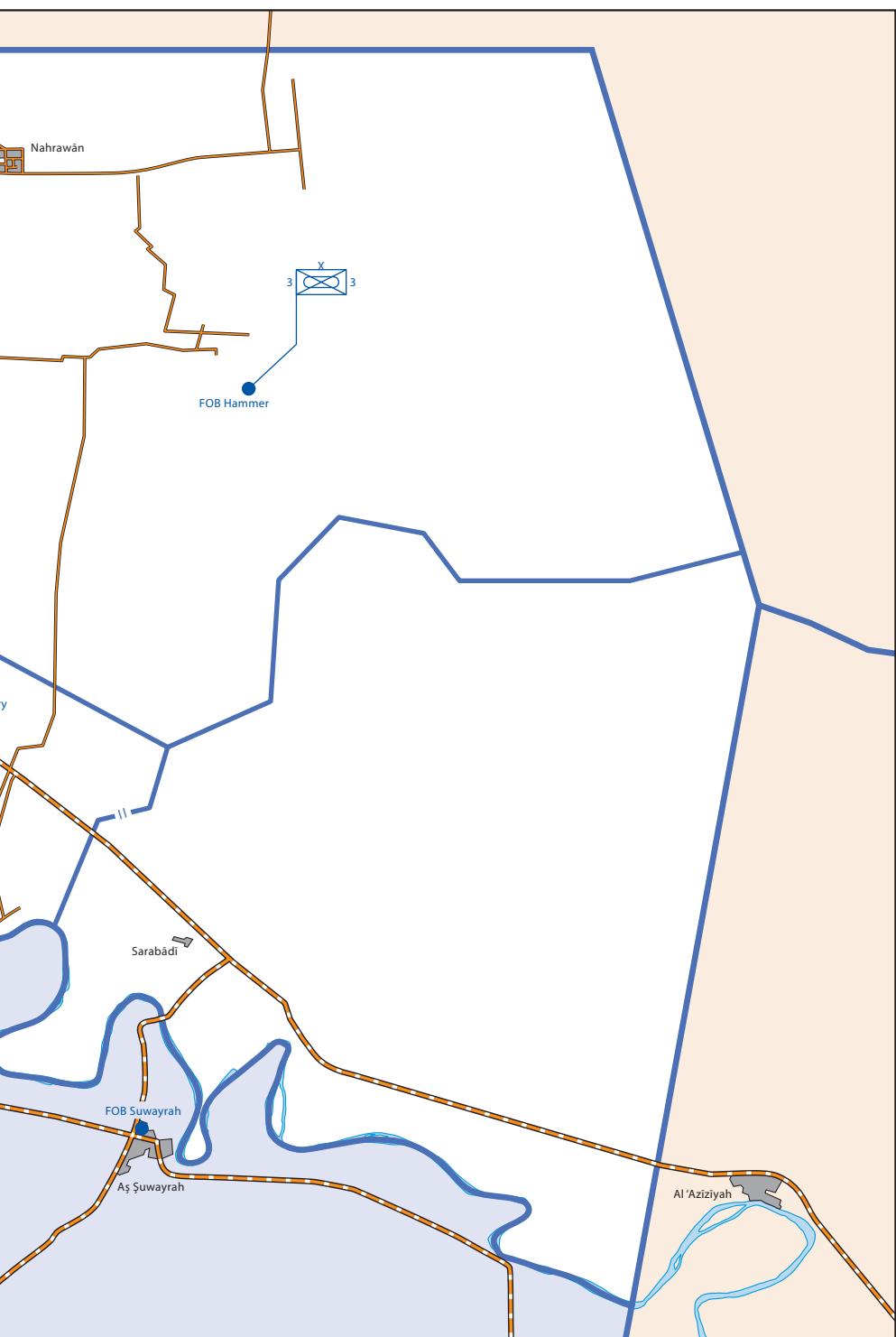
3D BRIGADE COMBAT TEAM, 3D INFANTRY DIVISION
AREA OF OPERATIONS
May–June 2007

- Forward Operating Base
- Patrol Base
- Combat Outpost
- X — Brigade Boundary
- II — Battalion Boundary

0 10 Miles
0 10 Kilometers



Map 4



of any other 3d Brigade bases, situated ten kilometers east of Baghdad on the key road between the capital and Nahrawan.¹⁵

Kolasheski used the base to anchor his northern boundary and act as a buffer between Shi'ites and Sunnis, and both groups sometimes looked to the Americans for assistance—at least when it suited their needs. “We get intelligence from all sides,” said Kolasheski, “from Sunnis against al-Qaeda when they get tired of that abuse, from Sunnis against JAM [Mahdi Army], and from Shiites against Sunnis. Where the fighting is, all sides have an interest in having us help them against the others. But we are spending more time than we would like fighting, and that is energy that we would like to be putting toward the betterment of peoples’ lives.”¹⁶

In the 3d Brigade headquarters hung a sign that read “Intelligence Drives Everything.” All the combat commanders knew this, but it was worth a reminder. Kolasheski strove for that goal, but he was quick to confess that much work remained to be done in gaining intelligence. “I’m not sure we’re batting well enough to make the hall of fame,” he said, “but I think that when Iraqis step up to the plate with useful information, and we act on it, we have been fairly successful.” The squadron began to receive tips that turned up weapons caches and IEDs, though Kolasheski admitted that in the areas dominated by the Mahdi Army, such as Nahrawan, “we just don’t have the informants there. We’re really stumbling.”¹⁷

Moqtada al-Sadr’s militia did have a strong influence in Nahrawan, and the Americans would find making inroads into the population to be difficult. According to one analysis in April, all the sheikhs in and around the town “are influenced by JAM to varying degrees.” Indeed, the cost of standing up to the Shi’ite militia was high. For example, on 10 April elements of Troop B stumbled on a grave site containing two human skeletons. Both appeared to have been tied up and bore bullet holes in their skulls. The soldiers concluded that they were likely killed some months earlier, probably when the Mahdi Army was exerting its hold on Nahrawan and on that portion of the southeastern Baghdad belt.¹⁸

In order to gather more intelligence in the area of operations, the 3d Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment, established “Team Enabler,” a pairing of civil affairs and intelligence into a single unit. “They have four Humvees,” explained Capt. James Lee Hathaway, the commander of Headquarters Troop for the 3d Squadron and the leader of Team Enabler. “One carries a civil affairs team, another has the psychological operations units, a third has

¹⁵ Interv, author with Grigsby, 12 Jul 2007, p. 1.

¹⁶ Interv, author with Lt Col John S. Kolasheski, CO, 3d Sqdn, 1st Cav Rgt, 11 Jul 2007, pp. 1–2.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Quote from Task Force Blackhawk, Narhwan Assessment, 21 Apr 2007. Operational Storyboard, Skeletal Remains Found, Zone 207, Narhwan, B Troop, 3d Sqdn, 1st Cav Rgt, 3d BCT, 3d Inf Div, 10 Apr 2007.

the intelligence team, and the last one is a security truck." There were two such units—Team Enabler North and Team Enabler South—and together they covered the entire region. "They are a good combat multiplier," said Hathaway. "They give us freedom of movement to go out and do these extra jobs—the non-kinetic ones—but it doesn't take combat power from the line platoons." The hope was that the intelligence gathered by these teams and that which came through informants would accelerate the 3d Squadron's ability to have an impact on the roiling sectarian problems in the area.¹⁹

According to one study, by the end of the deployment, the 3d Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment, "saw a visible improvement and an increase in trust between Coalition Forces and the Iraqi population," part of which it attributed to the Team Enabler concept. On many occasions, in fact, the team was able to improve the lives of Iraqi citizens with simple gestures. For example, in June 2007 in a village south of Nahrawan called Hollandia (the Coalition had built several windmills to power wells and irrigation ditches there), Team Enabler found Ahaip, a three-year-old boy with a birth defect that left his intestines outside his abdomen. Hathaway's men coordinated transportation and surgery for Ahaip at al-Sadr Hospital in An Najaf, and within a few months the boy was healing well and even playing with neighborhood children. This and other civic actions performed by Team Enabler, as well as the rest of the 3d Squadron units, "created a relationship with local leaders and citizens that greatly enhanced the security environment," the study concluded.²⁰

Also on the civic action front, Kolasheski's soldiers launched Operation EAGLE TEACH to help local leaders reopen schools and hire teachers, and Operation CHALONS, a publicity drive in conjunction with Iraqi Army units to advertise coalition objectives and give away free t-shirts.²¹

Although sectarian strife made this a potentially dangerous place, Kolasheski was fortunate that much of the tension remained largely below the surface and was often between Shi'ite and Sunni rather than aimed at the Americans. This was particularly true in Nahrawan, where, according to one report, attacks against both the Iraqi police and U.S. forces were "extremely rare." In Grigsby's opinion, the town "was a vacation spot for Shia extremists," where they could "rest and plan for future operations." But

¹⁹ Interv, author with Capt James Lee Hathaway, CO, Headquarters and Headquarters (HH) Troop, 3d Sqdn, 1st Cav Rgt, 11 Jun 2007, pp. 1–2.

²⁰ Quotes from Capt David J. Smith and 1st Lt Jeffrey Ritter, 3d Sqdn, 1st Cav Rgt, Team Enabler: Getting Civil Affairs, Tactical Psychological Operations, and Human Intelligence Collection into the Fight During the Execution of Full Spectrum Operations (c. Apr 2008), pp. 2–3. MND-C Media Release, Soldiers Help Iraqi Boy Get Surgery, 8 Aug 2007.

²¹ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO (area of operations) Assessment, 22–28 Apr 2007, p. 5.

everyone knew that the uneasy calm was temporary and that Nahrawan would eventually be a problem that would have to be handled.²²

So the simmering nature of the conflict in Kolasheski's area kept violence at a low level, at least against the Americans. Not until late May did the 3d Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment, suffer its first soldiers killed in action; on the twenty-third, Cpl. Jonathan D. Winterbottom and Victor H. Toledo Pulido died when a roadside bomb exploded near their Humvee on a road outside Nahrawan.

East Bank of the Tigris

The 3d Brigade's second combat unit, the 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, commanded by Lt. Col. John J. Marr, controlled the Dragon area of operations, so-named because of the 15th Infantry Regiment's crest, a coiled dragon, which reflected its service in China in the early twentieth century. Marr's territory, extending from the southeast edge of Baghdad twenty-five kilometers southeast along the Tigris and twenty-eight kilometers eastward into the desert, was a much smaller region to cover—considerably less than half the size of the 3d Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment's Blackhawk area—though there was just as much work to do.

In late March, just back from counterinsurgency refresher courses at the coalition's training academy at At Taji, twenty kilometers north of Baghdad, Colonel Marr moved his battalion to Ar Rustamiyah, a suburb on the southeastern edge of Baghdad, and linked up with the 3d Squadron, 61st Cavalry Regiment, the reconnaissance element of the 2d Brigade Combat Team, 2d Infantry Division. The cavalry squadron—about three hundred and fifty soldiers—was the only unit in the area, which covered roughly the same ground that both the 3d Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment, and Marr's 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment—the entire 3d Brigade—were taking over. The men of the 61st Cavalry Regiment were good soldiers doing a tough job, but such a tiny presence in a vast expanse was woefully insufficient. For several months, the cavalry unit had been based at Ar Rustamiyah, and it would periodically cross the "Rusty Bridge" spanning the Tigris to patrol troublesome locales on the east side of the river.

"When you look at it," said Marr, "they really weren't able to do much of anything. They had troops doing what we have battalions doing, and platoons doing what we now have companies doing." The squadron had a single joint security station about twenty-five kilometers from Ar Rustamiyah and a combat outpost near the Tigris River. Other than that, stated Marr, "there was no sustained presence anywhere."²³

²² First quote from Task Force Blackhawk, Narhwan Assessment, 21 Apr 2007. Second quote from Interv, Kagan with Grigsby, 7 Dec 2007, p. 8.

²³ Interv, author with Lt Col John J. Marr, CO, 1st Bn, 15th Inf Rgt, 13 Jul 2007, p. 1.



Colonel Marr (right) confers with a staff officer during a clearing operation outside Salman Pak.

Marr knew that the most dangerous threat he faced was roadside bombs, which the insurgents had more than a year to emplace and conceal, so driving back and forth to Forward Operating Base Hammer could prove treacherous. Instead, he decided to occupy the existing temporary 3d Squadron, 61st Cavalry Regiment, bases while looking for other base locations. It seemed to be the only alternative. "Without maneuverability we could not get out among the people," asserted Marr. "So what we did was occupy the area by force." The battalion would establish a foothold in the Al Mada'in Qadaa "that it had never seen before."²⁴

Colonel Marr was impressed by the lone combat outpost established by the 3d Squadron, 61st Cavalry Regiment. In addition to being strategically located, it also had a colorful past. Located about eighteen kilometers southeast of Baghdad, the base butted up against the ruins of the Tuwaitha Nuclear Research Center, a French-designed reactor complex built by Saddam Hussein in 1977 to provide nuclear power to Baghdad. The Iraqi dictator proudly called his new facility "Tammuz," after the Babylonian month in which his Ba'ath Party had seized power almost a decade earlier,

²⁴ Ibid.



Bradley fighting vehicles lined up inside the perimeter of Combat Outpost Cashe, one of three major 3d Brigade outposts on the east side of the Tigris River

but it was more widely known by its French name, “Osirak”—a combination of “Osiris,” the Egyptian god of the dead (the name of the reactor model), and the French spelling of Iraq. Although the reactor was designed for civilian energy purposes, the Israelis believed it was hiding a fledgling nuclear weapons program, and in 1981 they destroyed it in a bombing raid. A decade later, during the Persian Gulf War, U.S. warplanes leveled what was left.²⁵

Best of all, the base was defensible. The facility still had several inhabitable buildings, much of it was surrounded by a tall dirt berm, and it retained a 700-man Iraqi government guard force. “It was one of the better protected outposts,” said Marr, and he moved part of his unit to the site. It was quickly dubbed Combat Outpost Cashe, after Sfc. Alwyn C. Cashe, a 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, soldier killed in Iraq in November 2005.²⁶

Marr left his headquarters company, support units, and the engineer company at Hammer, dispersing the rest of his forces to temporary outposts

²⁵ For an account of the Israeli raid on Osirak, see Rodger Claire, *Raid on the Sun: Inside Israel's Secret Campaign that Denied Saddam the Bomb* (London: Broadway Publishing, 2004).

²⁶ Interv, author with Marr, 13 Jul 2007, p. 2.

as he looked for the best place to build new bases. "There was no Remax out there, so we had to do our own recon for places," he joked. In the meantime, Marr shifted platoons back and forth between the field and the forward operating base, rotating them every week or so—seven or eight days on patrol and three days back at Hammer. In May, the battalion opened two more bases, the first of which was Combat Outpost Cahill, seven kilometers to the southeast of Cashe, not far from the town of Salman Pak. Directly to the east about eleven kilometers, near the town of Wahida, was Combat Outpost Cleary, which overlooked Route Detroit. Both bases were also named for fallen 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, soldiers—Capt. Joel E. Cahill, killed by an IED in November 2005, and 1st Lt. Michael J. Cleary, killed in an ambush one month later. Marr divided his companies between the trio of bases, which together were well situated to maintain oversight of the vital road and waterways heading into Baghdad from the southeast and at the same time to provide a permanent presence on which the population could rely. "It didn't take long for the locals to realize that we were here to stay," he observed. "Once that happened, they started coming in and asking for help in various projects. We did what we could, and that in turn led to them telling us about weapons caches. Operations and civic action are all related."²⁷

During April, 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, units hit the ground running, conducting two cordon-and-search operations in the worst areas, one in Tuwaitha near the old nuclear plant and the other in Salman Pak. Other operations followed, all of them designed to take the initiative from the insurgents, who for the past year had been virtually unopposed.²⁸

As expected, the aggressive U.S. demeanor provoked a quick response from the enemy, much of it from roadside bombs. On 10 April, elements of Companies A and B were traveling northward on Route Wild, a major road running between Salman Pak and Baghdad, and as the convoy of four Humvees and two Bradleys passed an abandoned National Police checkpoint, an IED exploded. Fortunately, one of the Bradley fighting vehicles took the blast, and its armor prevented any serious damage or casualties. An after action assessment predicted that the enemy "will continue to emplace IEDs . . . to block our movement into AO Dragon and test our TTPs [tactics, techniques, and procedures]."²⁹ Route Wild would prove to be a favorite target of insurgent bombers.²⁹

That same day, 2d Platoon, Company A, was driving toward Salman Pak where it planned to conduct dismounted patrols in town, when it too was struck. The four Humvees had raced past a pile of garbage, which con-

²⁷ Ibid., p. 4.

²⁸ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 14–21 Apr 2007, p. 3.

²⁹ Storyboard, IED Detonation, Zone 69E, 1st Bn, 15th Inf Rgt, 3d BCT, 10 Apr 2007.

cealed the bomb when it exploded. Fortunately, the bomb did little damage and no one was injured, though this was to be a common occurrence.³⁰

But aggressive patrolling also turned up important finds. On 20 April, Company D was operating along Route Pluto, northeast of Route Wild, when it found a cache of more than a hundred 155-mm. artillery rounds, a critical ingredient in the construction of IEDs. An explosives ordnance detachment was called, and it blew the artillery rounds in place.³¹

The high operational tempo had a downside as well, and on 28 April, Marr lost his first soldiers. As a Humvee patrol drove into Salman Pak for an arranged meeting with an important local sheikh, a roadside bomb detonated, wounding one soldier and killing Pfc. Jay D. H. Ornsby-Adkins, Sgt. Glenn D. Hicks, and Pvt. Cole E. Spencer. One of the soldiers in another Humvee, S. Sgt. Julio C. Montenegro, raced to the blasted truck and pulled the wounded man from the wreckage, tending to his wounds until a medevac helicopter arrived. Montenegro was awarded the Bronze Star Medal for his quick actions, which probably saved the wounded soldier's life. A separate attack the same day and in the same general locality killed seven Iraqi National Police.³²

Such was the trend all over the 3d Brigade area of operations. The second half of April saw a 61 percent increase in enemy attacks over the first half of the month, and the 3d Brigade reported to division headquarters that it received its first indirect-fire attacks during the last week of April. In addition to the three soldiers killed from the 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, other Task Force Marne units lost sixteen soldiers during the month, and everyone expected things to get worse. Colonel Grigsby, mirroring an often-stated sentiment from General Lynch, declared, "The enemy always gets a vote—and I expect that he will hit us pretty hard as the surge goes on."³³

Yet units experienced good days as well. Despite the roadside bombs, friendly faces were among the population, most of whom badly wanted some security and stability and normal, peaceful lives. Even in Salman Pak, the people hoped for a return to better times, and they seemed to support the Americans in their attempts to improve security. To do this, Colonel Marr had his units patrol the town, usually in conjunction with Iraqi police units.

In late April, soldiers from the 3d Platoon, Company A, conducted a joint patrol through Salman Pak, where they would remain for about

³⁰ Storyboard, IED Detonation, Zone 202, 1st Bn, 15th Inf Rgt, 3d BCT, 10 Apr 2007.

³¹ Storyboard, 1st Bn, 15th Inf Rgt, 3d BCT, 20 Apr 2007.

³² MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 22–28 Apr 2007, p. 4; Narrative to Accompany the Award of the Bronze Star Medal for Valor to Staff Sergeant Julio C. Montenegro, n.d., p. 1.

³³ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 28 Apr–5 May 2007, p. 4. Quote from Interv, author with Grigsby, p. 4.



Soldiers from 3d Platoon, Company A, 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, question a group of Iraqi men during a cordon-and-search operation with Iraqi police in Salman Pak.

a week, assessing the situation and assisting the police. Sfc. Peter Black headed the unit as it walked up and down the streets, then into the town square, greeting the locals and practicing a bit of broken Arabic. The police, who often had a bad reputation for corruption and incompetence—if not outright sectarian allegiances—led the way. Just how well regarded they were by the locals was difficult to discern, but the Americans hoped to discover this. “Really, all we do is shadow them, in case they need back up,” said Sergeant Black. “I think they and most of the population here know that we are just here to help.”³⁴

The platoon moved through the town for about an hour, then doubled back, and wandered through the town square. People were going about their business—shopping for food, getting haircuts, or drinking tea. Adults sometimes waved in greeting, and children ran out to shake the soldiers’ hands. This was a good sign. “The more people there are, the safer you are,” stated Sgt. Robert Butler, another member of the platoon. “They know when things are going to happen. So if they aren’t here or the children aren’t out in the street, I get scared.” The soldiers left Salman Pak late in the afternoon. The small patrol had spent only a little time in the dangerous town, but it was the 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment’s initial step in handling the situation along the east side of the Tigris. As the

³⁴ MND-C Media Release, Hard Rock platoon keeps streets safe in Salman Pak, 22 Apr 2007.

mantra throughout the 3d Division went, “we don’t commute to work; we live there.” Counterinsurgency could only work when that was true.³⁵

Commando Brigade

While the 3d Brigade units got settled, the 3d Division relied heavily on the two units already in the area. Their valuable experience over the past several months with MND-B before being attached to Task Force Marne provided an operational template on which the 3d Division could depend. The first of these, the 2d Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, had begun deploying in the summer of 2006. Commanded by Col. Michael M. Kershaw, this light infantry brigade combat unit of about thirty-two hundred soldiers replaced the 2d Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division. The 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, a quick reaction force capable of deploying anywhere in the world within days, had seen action in Iraq in 2004 and had also fought in Afghanistan between December 2001 and April 2002. The brigade consisted of the 2d Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment; the 1st Squadron, 89th Cavalry Regiment; the 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment; and the 2d Battalion, 15th Field Artillery Regiment, as well as a brigade Special Troops Battalion and the 210th Support Battalion.

Beginning in June 2006, the brigade began shipping over six hundred containers and one hundred pieces of critical equipment aboard the Navy ship *USS Cape Knox*, taking about a week to transport them from the United States to Kuwait. From there, they were loaded on trucks, and for seven days some one hundred and forty convoys streamed northward toward Baghdad. For the next two months, the brigade, headquartered at Camp Striker near Baghdad International Airport on the southwest corner of the capital, began deploying into six established patrol bases leftover from the 2d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division. On 20 September, the brigade officially assumed command of the area of operations.³⁶

The territory included the northern portion of the Euphrates River valley, some five hundred square kilometers of farms and small agricultural towns that were home to about four hundred thousand people. Irrigation canals crisscrossed the land, bringing ribbons of green to the dusty desert landscape. Sunni tribes made up the majority of the population—especially in the west bordering Al Anbar Province—and during the reign of Saddam Hussein this was a Ba’athist stronghold. Loyal government officials were rewarded with land along the Euphrates, and the army stationed the Medina Republican Guard Division and maintained an important weapons facility in the area. After the fall of Saddam, this portion of the Triangle of Death remained home to die-hard Sunni loyalists and also beckoned the

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ 2d BCT, 10th Mtn Div, Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF) 2006–2008 History, pp. 5–7.

burgeoning al-Qaeda movement, which was looking for a safe haven from which to launch attacks into Baghdad. Shi'ites made up significant minorities of the populations in most of the towns, including Al Mahmudiyah, the largest city in the region, which was about 30 percent Shi'ite. The town sat astride the Hillah Highway—called Route Jackson by the Americans—a major transit between Baghdad and the major Shi'ite holy cities in the south (Map 5).

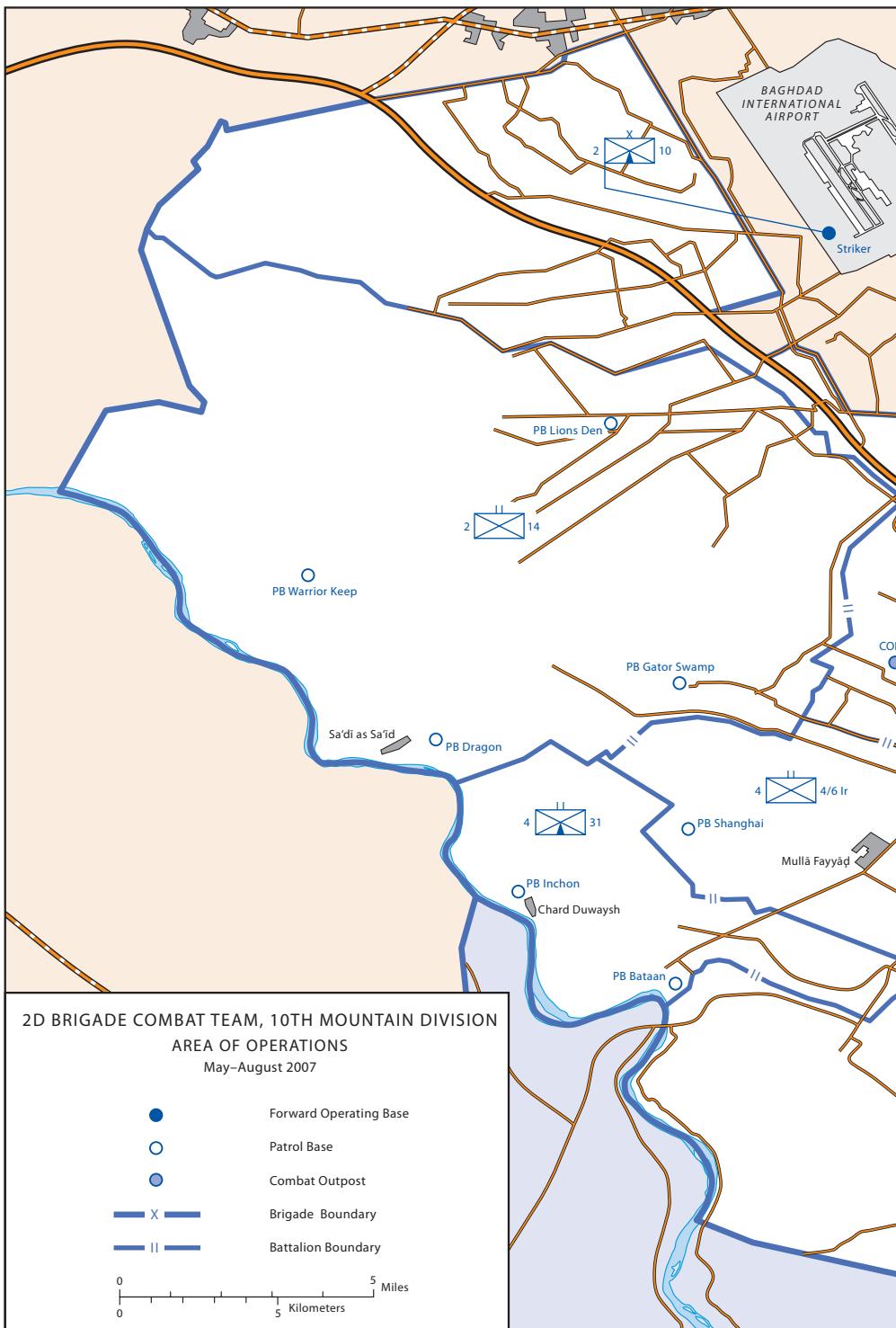
Colonel Kershaw immediately began hunting the enemy. On 1 October 2006, he launched Operation COMMANDO HUNTER II, a series of air assaults by a task force made up of units from the 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, into the area around the town of Al Yusufiyah. The raids focused on two nearby villages, Rushdi Mullah and Al Taraq, both key points along the road just west of Al Yusufiyah. After setting up two new patrol bases, Shanghai and Siberia, the soldiers—known as the Polar Bears because of the 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment's role in the allied incursion into Siberia in 1918—spent two weeks patrolling a succession of canals thought to be used by insurgents to hide weapons. The intelligence was accurate. The offensive netted more than a hundred and fifty caches containing IED components, machine guns, and other weapons, as well as equipment and weapons taken by insurgents from an AH-64 Apache helicopter shot down a year earlier.³⁷

Another phase of COMMANDO HUNTER began on 10 October. Its objective was to clear the roads “deeper into the restive tribal areas” and establish new strong points around Al Yusufiyah, a network of small farm roads used regularly by insurgents to transport weapons and bombs into Baghdad. Intelligence continued to indicate that the place bristled with weapons caches. By 15 October, the Americans, with help from the 4th Brigade, 6th Iraqi Army Division, had found seventy-five weapons stockpiles, killed five insurgents, and captured another dozen suspects.³⁸

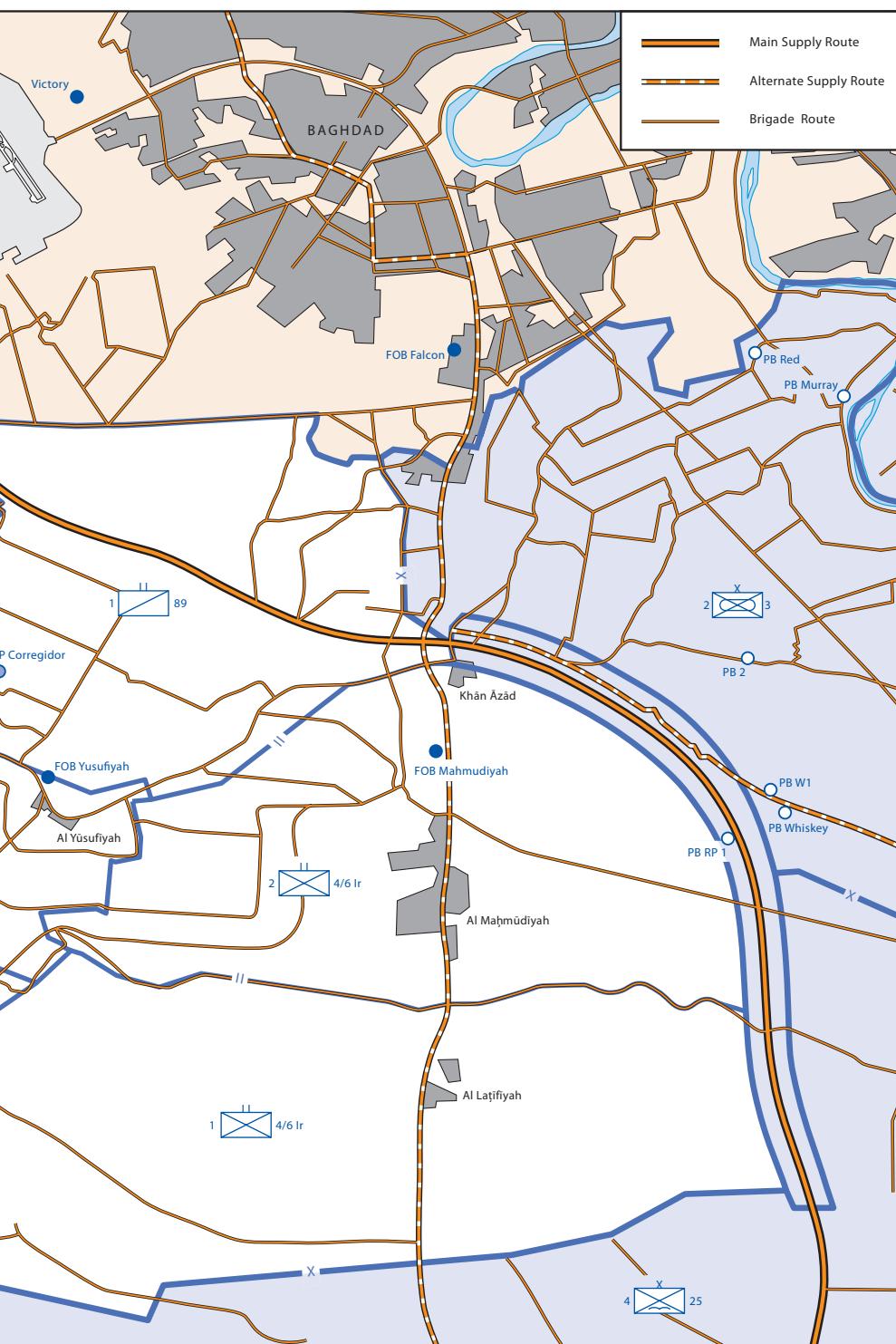
The series of COMMANDO HUNTER operations marked the beginning of a permanent U.S. presence in the territory. The insurgents up to that point had faced no opposition, so they had set up a headquarters in an abandoned thermal power plant outside Al Yusufiyah, where they trained and planned. The massive facility had been part of a grandiose plan by Saddam Hussein and had been sponsored by the Soviet Union to provide power for the Euphrates River region, but it failed in 1982 when it was less than half completed. In June 2006, terrorists staging from the area struck a 101st Airborne Division mobile checkpoint near the Euphrates, killing one U.S. soldier and capturing two others. The soldiers were taken to the power

³⁷ Ibid., p. 8.

³⁸ Quote from Ibid. MNC-I Media Release, Operation Commando Hunter Team Finds 75 Weapons Caches, 15 Oct 2006.



Map 5



plant, tortured, and “killed in a barbaric way,” their bodies booby-trapped and left to be found by their comrades.³⁹

The power plant and its environs immediately became a target for the 2d Brigade. Colonel Kershaw regarded it as a crucial factor in the enemy’s ability to launch terrorist actions. He stated that because there was “no security there it became sort of an al-Qaeda way point for terrorists moving from the western part of the country into sanctuaries to attack Baghdad.”⁴⁰

The insurgents knew that an assault on the abandoned plant was coming. Perhaps hoping to deter the Americans, they increased the number of roadside bombs, and on 19 October a group of some twenty fighters made desultory attacks on U.S. positions north of the power plant, employing mortars and machine guns in what one soldier said was “a very organized fashion.” Three days later, another group of insurgents using rocket-propelled grenades and mortars attacked a U.S. position in Rushdi Mullah, a small farming village along the southernmost fringe of the growing network of U.S. bases.⁴¹

But the power plant itself—which the Americans dubbed “the castle” because it towered over the surrounding countryside and was visible from miles away—had to be taken from the enemy before the Coalition could gain the upper hand in the region. On 23 October, Companies A and C, 2d Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment, stormed it. The soldiers expected a battle but found that the enemy had fled. Inside the concrete and steel hulk they found cartridge shells littering the floors, living quarters strewn with blankets, and what appeared to be prison cells on the bottom floor. Another room contained a working air conditioner and a still-warm pot of tea.⁴²

Local Sunni farmers had tolerated the insurgents, mainly out of distrust for the Iraqi government forces in the area. The farmers had also feared the insurgents, however, and seemed glad that they had gone. People approached U.S. forces and freely gave information on weapons caches and locations of roadside bombs. Once inhabitants were certain that the Americans intended to stay, they were even more helpful. One resident told a reporter that “All we want is security, that’s it.”⁴³

Kershaw visited the power plant the following day, climbing atop the walls and looking out over the lush valley toward the Euphrates. “We’ve got

³⁹ “Al-Qaeda claims killing two GIs,” Associated Press, 21 Jun 2006. Quote from Dexter Filkins, “U.S. Says Two Bodies Retrieved in Iraq Were Brutalized,” *New York Times*, 21 Jun 2006.

⁴⁰ DoD Teleconference Transcript, Col Michael M. Kershaw, CO, 2d BCT, 10th Mtn Div, 5 Oct 2007, p. 2.

⁴¹ Josh White, “Troops Fortify Hold on Plant that Once Housed Insurgents,” *Washington Post*, 25 Oct 2006.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.



Before the establishment of MND-C in April 2007, the 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, was the only U.S. combat unit operating along the Euphrates River immediately southwest of Baghdad. These soldiers, from Battery B, 2d Battalion, 15th Field Artillery Regiment, search for buried weapons.

them [the insurgents] up against the river now, and they don't have many options,” he declared.⁴⁴

Within weeks, the Americans had turned the castle into their own stronghold, which they named Patrol Base Dragon in honor of the 2d Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment—known as the Golden Dragons for its role in quelling the Boxer Rebellion in China in 1900. The base became home to Company A and was the latest in a brigade-wide series of small permanent positions, which by the end of February 2007 would number twenty-seven. This was the first time U.S. troops had dispersed so widely, and it marked a dramatic change in the way the war was waged. The 14th's 2d Battalion had about 90 percent of its manpower living in forward positions—a typical proportion for the brigade as a whole. In addition to providing the local population with security, said Maj. Brock D. Jones, the battalion executive officer, the forward deployment “allows us to rapid react in our area of operations and it also gives us a great knowledge and sense of the area.” But operating in small units was dangerous too. Since the 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, arrived six months earlier, its soldiers had uncovered more than two hundred weapons caches and captured some forty insurgents. The unit had lost eighteen soldiers killed and another one hundred and fifty wounded in the process as well.⁴⁵

The brigade worked closely with the Iraqi Army, colocating its troops with various Iraqi units. The 2d Battalion, 15th Field Artillery Regiment, headquartered at Forward Operating Base Al Mahmudiyah, became an advisory element to the 4th Brigade, 6th Iraqi Army Division. This unique

⁴⁴ Quote from Ibid. Dennis Steele, “Patrol Base Dragon: Living in al-Qaeda Land,” *Army* 57 (May 2007).

⁴⁵ Michelle Tan, “A Mighty Fortress,” *Military Times*, 26 Feb 2007.

setup allowed two 100-man batteries to advise and train two Iraqi Army battalions, a one-to-one arrangement that was a vast improvement over the standard 12-man training teams that were the rule throughout much of the theater.⁴⁶

Other units were also partnered with elements of the Iraqi Army. At Patrol Base Dragon, about sixty members of the 4th Company, 3d Battalion, 4th Brigade, 6th Iraqi Army Division, lived side by side with the Americans. “We need to make the people trust the Iraqi Army,” said Capt. Daniel E. Hurd, commander of Company A, 2d Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment. No matter what strategy was used in Iraq, U.S. involvement would end by turning over responsibility for security to the Iraqis themselves.⁴⁷

Other operations combined elements of the 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, and the 4th Brigade, 6th Iraqi Army Division. On 21 April, the two forces launched COMMANDO DIVE, a foray into an area on the southwestern outskirts of Baghdad called Shubayshen where they searched for insurgents and weapons. The 2d Battalion, 15th Field Artillery Regiment, captured thirty-three possible insurgents and uncovered several weapons caches and computer disks loaded with al-Qaeda propaganda. In a parallel offensive, the 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, and its Iraqi counterparts from the 4th Battalion, 6th Brigade, picked up three suspected terrorists and found a cache of supplies for making explosives and small arms. At the same time, Company A of the 2d Brigade’s Special Troops Battalion cleared nearby routes, uncovering three IEDs along the way. The 2d Brigade operations officer, Maj. Brian D. Kerns, noted that “the operations will definitely interrupt terrorist activities. The terrorists realize that [the region] is no longer a safe haven.”⁴⁸

An overly confident assessment perhaps, but by all accounts the 2d Brigade made strong progress. Between November 2006 and April 2007—when the brigade came under the command of General Lynch and the 3d Infantry Division—Kershaw’s soldiers launched dozens of campaigns in conjunction with Iraqi troops. On 14 December, the 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, launched Operation COMMANDO VICE. Company C, 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, and elements of the Iraqi Army’s 4th Battalion, 6th Brigade, began eliminating insurgent pockets along the Euphrates just southwest of Baghdad in an area known as the Shakariyah Triangle. At the same time, a task force from the 1st Squadron, 89th Cavalry Regiment, conducted cordon-and-search missions west of Major Supply Route Tampa (the American name for Highway 1, the main road west of the Tigris leading north from Kuwait to Baghdad) where al-Qaeda cells lurked hoping to attack convoys carrying supplies northward to Baghdad. In early February 2007, the task force located a cache of eleven hundred

⁴⁶ 2d BCT, 10th Mtn Div, History, p. 7.

⁴⁷ Tan, “A Mighty Fortress.”

⁴⁸ MNC-I Media Release, Operation COMMANDO DIVE leads to detentions, cache finds, 27 Apr 2007.

82-mm. mortar rounds, the largest single cache discovered by the brigade during its deployment. On the eastern side of the area of operations, the 2d Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment—also partnered with units from the 4th Brigade, 6th Iraqi Army Division—conducted a spate of assaults to disrupt enemy mortar and rocket teams that had spent much of the last year terrorizing civilians and attacking coalition forces.

COMMANDO VICE, and other offensives launched in the first few months of 2007, continued for four months and aimed at identifying openings in U.S. defenses southwest of Baghdad and closing the gaps so the enemy could not take advantage of the blind spots. In February, Operation COMMANDO SHOCKER, a brigade-wide counter-IED mission, increased the number of patrols along important roadways and led to a downturn in the number of roadside bomb ambushes against U.S. and Iraqi patrols.⁴⁹

Little changed when the brigade became part of General Lynch's command in April 2007. Colonel Kershaw recalled only a "moderate" shift in his operational responsibilities, including the addition of a small bit of territory along the outskirts of Baghdad and along Route Tampa. The main advantage, said Kershaw, was the removal of his brigade from MND-B's overloaded span of control. When asked in the early spring of 2007 by General Odierno, the corps commander, what he thought of the command-and-control situation, Kershaw replied that being part of the Baghdad theater meant that "inevitably we would be a secondary" front when it came to operations in the capital. Kershaw believed that "there was some unity of effort to be gained by those forces that were outside Baghdad being under one operational headquarters."⁵⁰

As the 3d Division was taking over responsibility for the area south of Baghdad, the 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, suffered its largest loss in a single engagement to date. On 1 April, a convoy made up of soldiers from the 2d Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment, and the brigade Special Troops Battalion was traveling along Route Earnhardt southwest of Baghdad when a powerful IED exploded in its midst. The blast destroyed two vehicles, killed four men, and wounded two others. Hoping to retaliate quickly for the attack, Lt. Col. John C. Valledor, the battalion commander, ordered a spate of operations against insurgent IED cells in the vicinity. Within weeks, the brigade also commenced a new offensive, COMMANDO AUGER, which expanded the U.S. presence farther to the north and west, and resulted in the opening of a new base, Combat Outpost Corregidor, near the town of Haswah some ten kilometers north of Al Yusufiyah. This post would be manned by elements of the 1st Squadron, 89th Cavalry Regiment.⁵¹

⁴⁹ 2d BCT, 10th Mtn Div, History, p. 9.

⁵⁰ Interv, Col Michael D. Visconage, MNC-I Historian, with Col Michael M. Kershaw, CO, 2d BCT, 10th Mtn Div, 7 Sep 2007, pp. 16–17.

⁵¹ 2d BCT, 10th Mtn Div, History, p. 10.



Soldiers from the 2d Battalion, 15th Field Artillery Regiment, provide security during a Medical Civilian Aid Program (MEDCAP) in the town of Al Mahmudiyah.

As the surge began to take hold and the brigade settled into its role as MND-C's western anchor, General Petraeus praised the unit, stating that "the Commando BCT is conducting classical counter-insurgency warfare." This experience came partly from the fact that since 2001, with two tours in Iraq and two in Afghanistan, the 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, had served more time on the battlefield than any other brigade, and it carried proudly the sobriquet "the most deployed brigade in the Army."⁵²

Paratroopers on the Euphrates

Two months after the arrival of the 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, another light unit, the 4th Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, deployed to Iraq. The unit was formed in July 2005, and, though part of the 25th Division, it was stationed at Fort Richardson, Alaska, rather than at Fort Lewis, Washington. Dubbed the Spartan Brigade, it consisted of the 1st Battalion, 501st Infantry Regiment; the 3d Battalion, 509th Infantry Regiment; the 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment; the 2d Battalion, 377th Field Artillery Regiment; the brigade Special Troops

⁵² First quote from Memorandum for the Record, HQ, 2d BCT, 10th Mtn Div, 26 Jun 2007, sub: Visitor executive summary for P4 visit to 2/10 MTN [2d BCT, 10th Mtn Div] 23 June. Second quote from Pauline Jelinek, "Most-deployed brigade coming home from Iraq," *Army Times*, 10 Oct 2007.

Battalion; and the 725th Support Battalion. Like the 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, the 4th Brigade, 25th Division, was a quick-reaction force, trained for rapid worldwide deployment.⁵³

In November 2006, the 4th Brigade, commanded by Col. Michael X. Garrett, moved onto Forward Operating Base Kalsu, located about forty kilometers south of Baghdad and southeast of the town of Al Iskandariyah between Routes Tampa and Jackson, two of the most important north-south arteries in the Tigris-Euphrates valley. The base was originally built in 2003 to house an Army Reserve military police battalion from Buffalo, New York, and the soldiers named it for 1st Lt. James R. Kalsu, a professional athlete for the Buffalo Bills football team killed in Vietnam in 1970. The name stuck.

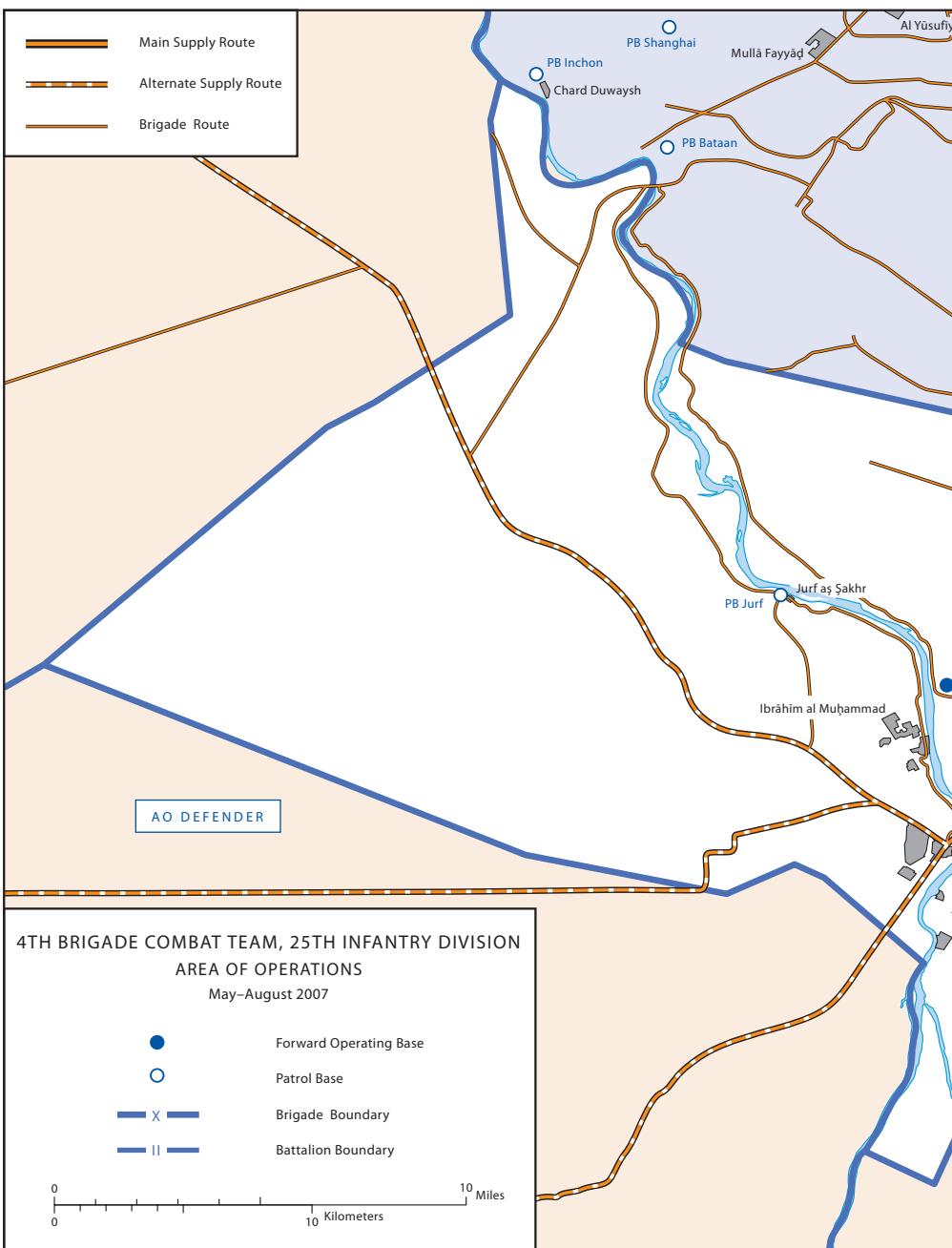
The new unit took over the territory immediately south of the 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, a place formerly garrisoned by the 2d Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division. It straddled the Euphrates, extending westward into the desert on the southeastern border of Al Anbar Province and the northwestern boundary of Babil Province near the Tigris and south into Karbala Province—about eighteen hundred square kilometers—but the brigade's charge also technically included all of An Najaf Province southward to the Saudi Arabian border, more than tripling its area of responsibility. Although somewhat sparsely populated, about 3.5 million people lived there, most of them in small towns and farming communities clustered near the banks of the Euphrates. In the northern sectors, near the southern boundary of the capital, and in the west, the population was largely Sunni, but farther south it became mostly Shi'ite.

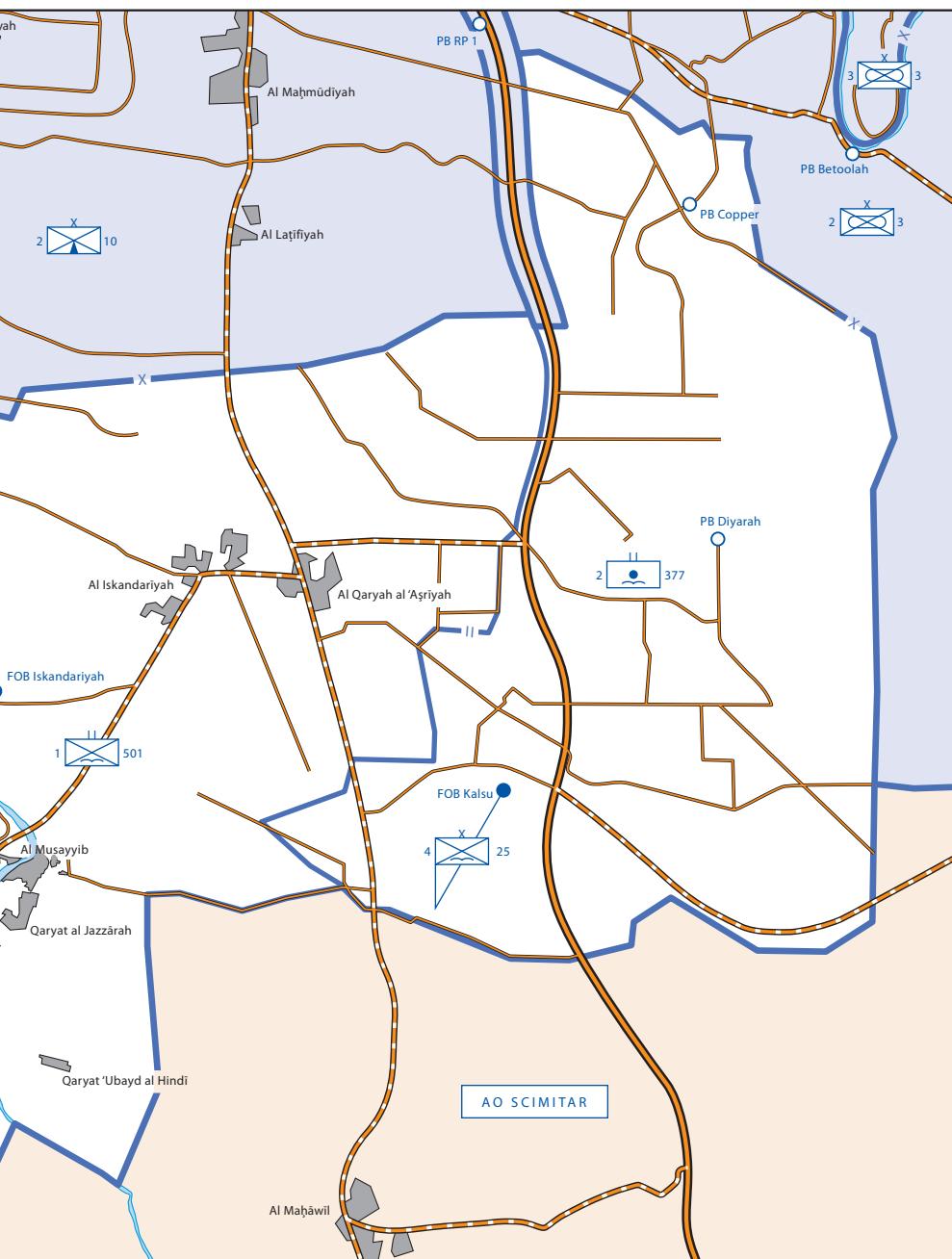
A single brigade was not enough to maintain security in such a huge region. In an attempt to make up for the shortfall, the 4th Brigade was partnered with two Iraqi battalions, one each from the 6th and the 8th Iraqi Army Divisions. The Americans concentrated their forces to the north near Baghdad while the Iraqi units were stationed in the south. In December, the Coalition turned over all of An Najaf Province to Iraqi control—a move that was merely a formality because the expanse was too vast and too far south for the Americans to maintain anything other than a token presence (*Map 6*).⁵⁴

The fragility of the security situation was immediately apparent. In January 2007, the Americans were stunned by a sophisticated attack on a group of 4th Brigade soldiers in Karbala, about fifty miles southwest of Baghdad. The city, an important population center in the narrow neck of fertile farmland lying between the west bank of the Euphrates and the southeastern shore of the great Al-Razzazah Lake, housed a Provincial Joint Coordination Center where Iraqi police trained and planned operations in

⁵³ MNC-I Media Release, Spartans now a part of Task Force Marne, 24 Apr 2007.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 4.





cooperation with the Americans. Since the fall of Baghdad, Karbala had remained relatively quiet, with twenty-eight coalition force deaths in the entire province since 2003.⁵⁵ On 20 January, the enemy broke the calm, launching what one account described as “a sophisticated sneak attack” that resulted in the deaths of five U.S. soldiers and compelled the Coalition to reexamine the threat arrayed against it south of Baghdad.⁵⁶

The attack began at dusk. A convoy of eight large sport-utility vehicles pulled up to the gate at the U.S. compound in Karbala. Everything seemed to be quite ordinary—the soldiers were dressed in desert camouflage uniforms and helmets, carried U.S. weapons and radios, and apparently spoke English. Iraqi guards waved the convoy through three checkpoints. About 1745, the vehicles stopped at the main building where about a dozen U.S. soldiers were helping plan security arrangements for upcoming Shi’ite celebrations.⁵⁷

The convoy split in two, with half going to the front entrance and the rest to the rear. Leaving their vehicles, the commandos (numbering between nine to twelve) had two tasks to perform. One group entered the building, threw grenades into a room, killed one soldier, Pvt. Jonathon M. Millican, and wounded three others, then stormed another room filled with Iraqi and U.S. soldiers engaged in a planning session, throwing in flash grenades to stun the occupants and grabbing two Americans—Capt. Brian S. Freeman and 1st Lt. Jacob N. Fritz. Outside the building, the second group of commandos blew up several vehicles and captured two other soldiers, Pfc. Shawn P. Falter and Spec. Johnathan B. Chism, from a nearby Humvee.⁵⁸

The raid was over in about fifteen minutes. With virtually no resistance from the Iraqi guards, the convoy left the compound and drove eastward into neighboring Babil Province. After crossing the Euphrates River, the commandos executed their captives, abandoned their vehicles and equipment, and disappeared into the desert. A group of Iraqi police who pursued the convoy came across the bloody scene. In the back of one vehicle—its door open and the warning light still blinking in the darkness—were two dead U.S. soldiers, handcuffed together at the wrist and shot in the torso, face, and neck. In another vehicle were the other two men; one of them still alive—though barely. He died a short time later.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ See “Coalition Deaths by Province,” iCasualties.org.

⁵⁶ “Military confirms 4 soldiers were abducted during attack in Karbala,” USA Today, 26 Jan 2007.

⁵⁷ Account comes from Media Release, 4th BCT (Airborne), 25th Inf Div, Four suspects seized, linked to Karbala Attack, 25 Jan 2007; CNN Rpt, “Karbala attackers posed as U.S. military officials,” 22 Jan 2007.

⁵⁸ Steve Schippert, “Qods Force, Karbala and the Language of War: US Soldiers Executed After Karbala Abduction,” 29 Jan 2007, ThreatsWatch.Org.

⁵⁹ Mark Kukis, “Enemies Unseen,” *Time*, 6 Aug 2007. None of the publicly released accounts reveal which soldier was in which vehicle.

Coalition officials were shocked by the assault. Its precision, said an official spokesman, “suggests that the attack was well rehearsed prior to execution. The attackers went straight to where the Americans were located in the provincial government facility, by-passing the Iraqi police in the compound.”⁶⁰ This immediately raised an obvious question: how could such a thing happen without the Iraqi police being in on the attack—or at least aware of it? No Iraqis were killed, wounded, or captured during the raid. Also, some of the 4th Brigade soldiers who survived recalled sensing a change in the mood of the Iraqis and stated that some had even given ominous warnings, indicating “U.S.A. bad, Iraq good,” and another saying “Tomorrow” while pounding a fist into his palm. A report on the incident released to families of the dead Americans noted that many of the Iraqi defenders disappeared moments before the assault and concluded that “it is too coincidental that the attackers . . . knew and raided only the two rooms where the Americans resided and were able to isolate the barracks-area soldiers and rooftop defenders. . . . It appears an inside assault force was pre-staged.” At the very least, investigators gathered strong evidence that many of the local Shi’ite militia were involved in the planning.⁶¹

It is also possible that Iran was involved in the attack. Many accounts suggested that the assailants could have been commandos from the Qods Force, a special unit within the Iranian military charged with organizing and training Islamic revolutionary movements. Formed during the war between Iran and Iraq in the 1980s, the group was known to operate in Iraq. Nine days before the assault, on 11 January, U.S. troops had raided an Iranian liaison office in Baghdad and detained five men accused of being Qods Force operatives. Some speculated that the Karbala attack was in retaliation for those arrests. Whatever the case, one intelligence source was quoted as asserting that the strike “was a little too professional” for Shi’ite insurgents alone.⁶²

The roots of the assault would remain a mystery, but the incident highlighted the problems facing U.S. forces as they searched for a way to reduce the violence in Iraq. While the Coalition lacked enough manpower to handle the hornet’s nest of ethnic tension in Baghdad, it had even fewer forces to operate in peripheral areas, such as the dangerous territory south of the capital. As a result, the Coalition was forced to rely on the Iraqi police and military, and, although they might be improving, the reality in early 2007 was that they were nowhere near sufficient in numbers or skill—and perhaps not in allegiance to the central government.

A week later, the paratroopers got another taste of how difficult keeping the lid on such a large and diverse region would be when the city of An

⁶⁰ Schippert, “Qods Force, Karbala and the Language of War.”

⁶¹ Kukis, “Enemies Unseen.”

⁶² See Schippert, “Qods Force, Karbala and the Language of War.”

Najaf, the capital of An Najaf Province and a holy city to Shi'ites, exploded in violence. On 28 January, the eve of the Shi'ite holy festival Ashura, Iraqi troops found themselves in a desperate battle with a large mob of organized extremists hoping to massacre Shi'ite leaders and pilgrims visiting holy sites in An Najaf and Karbala. Ashura commemorates the death of the Prophet Muhammad's grandson Hussein, who was killed at the battle of Karbala in 680 AD, and sometimes it was a focal point for Sunni violence against Shi'ites, most notably in 2004 when almost two hundred people were killed by Sunni extremists.⁶³

This time the violence was particularly widespread and well organized, and it was not instigated by Sunnis. Behind the violence lay a shadowy and little-known group called the Soldiers of Heaven, a messianic Shi'ite cult led by Diya Abdul-Zahra Kadhim, a Shi'ite from Al Hillah who, according to reports, wanted to kill key Shi'ite leaders and pilgrims. His plan was to unleash enough violence to trigger the return of the "Hidden Imam," a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad who disappeared as a child in the ninth century and is expected to return during a time of grave danger to restore peace and justice to the world.⁶⁴

During the night of 27 January, a group of more than two hundred gunmen was spotted in a fruit orchard, so the Iraqi Army reacted to the threat and surrounded the area. As it turned out, actually as many as fifteen hundred heavily armed insurgents were in the general vicinity, dug in around nearby farms and fields. They had more than 2,000 assault rifles, at least 700 rocket-propelled grenades, and 5 antiaircraft machine guns mounted on farm tractors.⁶⁵

When the Iraqi police attacked, they were quickly outgunned and were forced to request reinforcements. By morning, the situation was out of control and elements of the 1st Brigade, 8th Iraqi Army Division, arrived on the scene, backed up by U.S. Army Special Forces soldiers from Operational Detachment Alpha 566. Helicopter gunships were called to the location, and one was shot down. The Americans watched in horror as the Apache dropped from the sky. One Air Force combat controller working alongside the Special Forces unit recounted that "his rotors just stopped. They completely froze up. No smoke, no sparks, no fire. The rotors froze and the helicopter fell out of the sky from 600-700 feet," slamming into the ground with a gush of thick black smoke.⁶⁶

⁶³ Damien Cave, "250 Are Killed in Major Iraq Battle," *New York Times*, 29 Jan 2007.

⁶⁴ Robert Reid, "Accounts of Weekend Battle Leave Questions," Associated Press, 30 Jan 2007.

⁶⁵ Richard Mauer, "Battle-Ready Iraq Cult Leaves Casualties and Questions," *Seattle Times*, 30 Jan 2007.

⁶⁶ Transcript, S Sgt Ryan Wallace, 24 Sep 2007, U.S. Air Force, Air Force Association, Air & Space Conference and Technology Exposition, p. 8.

Also watching the crash were some soldiers from the 4th Brigade, 25th Infantry Division's local twelve-man Iraqi military adviser program, Military Transition Team (MiTT) 0810, which had been ordered to provide communication with the helicopters. The soldiers rushed to the scene. Lt. Col. Stephen Hughes, one of the MiTT leaders, recalled that "we started receiving contact with heavy machine gun fire [and] an RPG [rocket-propelled grenade] was launched at us."⁶⁷

The Americans realized that the enemy force was much larger than the usual insurgent band. "We began engaging, and continued engaging," said M. Sgt. Thomas S. Ballard, the senior noncommissioned officer with the MiTT. "They had ungodly amounts of weapons, there were tunnels, bunkers, there were even trenches." For much of the fight, the 4th Brigade soldiers were alone near the crash site. "[We] held off everyone on the objective by ourselves for over two hours in an effort to defend our pilots and aircraft wreckage," wrote Ballard.⁶⁸

For a time, the Americans were unsure of their ability to defeat the attackers. "There were a lot of bullets flying around, and we were only a small group of people," stated Maj. John Reed, the military training team operations officer. "[We] didn't know whether we could hold our position if the enemy made a concerted effort to get to the helicopter." The heroic act prevented the insurgents from reaching the helicopter, but the pilots had been killed in the crash. What had begun as a rescue attempt turned into a body recovery mission. All twelve members of the 4th Brigade, 25th Division, were awarded medals, including a Silver Star Medal for Sergeant Ballard and Bronze Star Medals for Colonel Hughes and Major Reed.⁶⁹

In addition to the Special Forces team and the 4th Brigade soldiers already near the scene, two companies from 2d Battalion, 3d Infantry Regiment, of the 3d Brigade Combat Team, 2d Infantry Division, training at their base near Al Iskandariyah, drove ninety-seven kilometers south to An Najaf in response to the attack and took part in the fighting that night.⁷⁰

When the battle was over, at least two hundred Soldiers of Heaven were dead and four hundred captured. A disaster had been averted, but security apparently was not going to be an easy matter—especially where U.S. forces were in short supply. The battle also illustrated the dismaying depth of ethnic and religious differences. While the Sunni-Shi'ite cleft was

⁶⁷ Sgt. J. H. French, "Soldiers Awarded for Action," *Dog Face Daily*, 14 Sep 2007.

⁶⁸ Ltr, M Sgt Thomas S. Ballard to Mark J. Reardon, U.S. Army Center of Military History (CMH), 5 Jan 2008.

⁶⁹ Sgt. J. H. French, "Soldiers Awarded for Action," *Dog Face Daily*, 14 Sep 2007. Quotes from MNC-I Media Release, Soldiers Decorated for Combat Action, 14 Sep 2007. Statement of Capt Joseph F. Denning, in Silver Star Medal Citation, M Sgt Thomas S. Ballard, 12 Feb 2007.

⁷⁰ Michael Gilbert, "Captain Awarded Silver Star for Najaf Battle," *News Tribune* (Tacoma, Wash.), 3 Dec 2007.

obvious, the power struggles now seemed to go much deeper—to include differences of opinion within the Shi'ite community.⁷¹

As is so often true in guerrilla wars, allegations of atrocities surfaced. Reports of misdeeds by snipers of the 1st Battalion, 501st Infantry Regiment, led to the arrests of three soldiers—S. Sgt. Michael A. Hensley, Spec. Jorge G. Sandoval Jr., and Sgt. Evan Vela—for the murder of three Iraqis on separate occasions during April and May near the town of Al Iskandariyah southwest of Baghdad. They were charged on 28 June.⁷² The area had experienced other episodes of U.S. soldiers killing innocent Iraqi civilians: in March 2006, in the nearby town of Al Mahmudiyah, just north of Al Iskandariyah, two U.S. soldiers raped and killed a fourteen-year-old girl and then murdered her family.⁷³

This time, however, much debate raged over the event. Was it a case of U.S. soldiers run amok or was it part of the fog of war and unclear rules of engagement? The first incident occurred on 27 April. Specialist Sandoval was in the desolate desert outside Al Iskandariyah, hiding in a patch of tall grass watching through his sniper scope as his target moved into the cross-hairs. His superior, Sergeant Hensley, confirmed the target, and Sandoval squeezed the trigger, sending a bullet into an Iraqi man's skull.

But there was more to the story. The dead Iraqi had no weapon, only a rusty sickle that he was using to work his field. Was he an innocent farmer or a terrorist disguised as a civilian? According to court records, the snipers believed that he was indeed an insurgent and that he had only minutes earlier fled a firefight with Iraqi soldiers and was pretending to be a farmer. It was impossible to say, and juries found both Sandoval and Hensley not guilty of murder, though they were convicted of planting the copper wire and weapons on the dead Iraqi's body, reprimanded, and demoted in rank.⁷⁴ Hensley had admitted that he and his men often carried "items" that could be planted on bodies "as insurance" in case they were investigated after a shooting.⁷⁵

In another incident, this one on the night of 11 May, a five-man sniper unit had hidden along the banks of the Euphrates to watch for insurgents who might escape a U.S. operation that had surrounded a suspected insurgent safe house thought to contain a cache of rockets and explosives. As the raid unfolded, an Iraqi man spotted the snipers and walked toward them. According to court testimony, he was unarmed and had his hands in the

⁷¹ Farah Stockman and Bryan Bender, "Battle Shows Strength of Splintering Militias in Iraq," *International Herald Tribune*, 31 Jan 2007.

⁷² MND-C Media Release, Soldiers charged with premeditated murder, 30 Jun 2007.

⁷³ Stephen Farrell, "2 U.S. Soldiers Charged With Murder of 3 Iraqis," *New York Times*, 1 Jul 2007.

⁷⁴ Paul von Zielbauer, "U.S. Soldier Acquitted of Murder in Iraq," *New York Times*, 29 Sep 2007.

⁷⁵ Solomon Moore, "G.I. Gets 10-Year Sentence in Killing of Unarmed Iraqi," *New York Times*, 11 Feb 2008.



The 4th Brigade, 25th Infantry Division's area of responsibility ran from Al Anbar Province in the west to the banks of the Tigris River in the east, making it the largest brigade region in MND-C. Here, a soldier from the 1st Battalion, 501st Infantry Regiment, stands watch during a mission outside Al Iskandariyah.

air. Sergeant Vela, testifying at a court-martial in September 2007, admitted to shooting the man with his pistol and said that others planted an AK rifle next to the body. While there seems little doubt that the soldiers tried to cover up the true nature of the killing, a question remained as to what sort of danger the men felt they faced. Hensley testified during hearings in December 2007 that "we were in an area where we could not get resupplied," and he stated his men believed they were in danger. "For all those reasons, this guy was killed in self-defense."⁷⁶

A military panel did not agree, and, on 10 February 2008 at Camp Liberty in Iraq, it found Vela guilty of murder. Although no one condoned the killing, members of Vela's unit felt that the pressure of combat on soldiers made such incidents inevitable. According to one report, Sfc. Steven T. Kipling, Vela's former platoon sergeant, testified that the shooting "was a result of Iraq's violent environment and the often difficult and confusing choices that servicemen make daily."⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Ned Parker, "Sniper Accused of Murder Disputes Statement," *Los Angeles Times*, 8 Dec 2007.

⁷⁷ Solomon Moore, "G.I. Gets 10-Year Sentence in Killing of Unarmed Iraqi," *New York Times*, 11 Feb 2008.

Whether legally justified or not, such events seriously eroded coalition attempts to demonstrate that it was making life better for ordinary Iraqis. Yet this backward step was an isolated occurrence, and the 4th Brigade, 25th Division, continued to make strides toward increased security, expanding its presence and establishing roots in the countryside. In early April, as the 3d Infantry Division began arriving to take control of the entire area, the 4th Brigade conducted what it termed “COIN through combined action”—creating partnerships with local leaders while stepping up patrols and maintaining constant visibility along the roadways and farming communities. Security missions such as BABYLON SWEEP around Al Hillah and anti-IED sweeps like Operation EASTERN FRONT in the northern part of the province were part of the process.⁷⁸

Farther to the south, in Karbala, the brigade reported that the situation “appears to have improved given that there have been no ‘spectacular’ acts of violence” and that the city’s citizens “are generally happy” with the heightened security and were visiting the holy shrines with increasing regularity. Although the presence of the Mahdi Army continued to be a problem, one report noted that “recruiting has become much more difficult” despite the fact that this was a Shi’ite stronghold.⁷⁹

These were small gains on a big battlefield, but the stage was set. By the spring of 2007, both the 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, and 4th Brigade, 25th Division, were well established in their areas of operations and were aggressive in both their security patrols and pacification and nation-building tasks. Though they killed and captured insurgents on a regular basis, they also helped local officials institute new education and health programs, rebuilt towns, and aided in agriculture, as well as trained alongside Iraqi Army units and bolstered the police, so Iraqis could eventually assume the responsibility for the territory. Achievement of long-term goals was still in the distance, but beginning in April the arrival of the new 3d Division units to the east would provide an important addition to the security picture. Certainly, if anything could be concluded from the previous four years of war, it was that unless security could be ensured, there would be no progress.

⁷⁸ 4th BCT, 25th Inf Div, AO Assessment, 6–13 Apr 2007, pp. 1–2.

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 3–4.

FIRST COMBAT

Chapter 3

As General Lynch frequently pointed out, more troops moving into the area did not mean that the insurgents would simply quit. Many times he told his staff that “the enemy won’t lie still. As we surge, he will too.”¹

The insurgents wasted no time proving Lynch correct. As the 3d Division deployed, the entire region experienced an upturn in attacks, both against coalition troops and Iraqi civilians. The two trends generally went hand in hand. The first week in April saw an average of more than twenty strikes across MND-C, with four days in the first week of the month approaching thirty daily. On 7 April, in command for less than a week, General Lynch saw the single worst day of the month—thirty-four assaults across the southern belt. These events subsided somewhat during the middle of the month, but by the end of April the number climbed again to near-record highs, a progression that would continue well into May.²

Attack on Patrol Base Dog

Although most of the violence was against Iraqis, the insurgents increasingly struck Americans as well. As coalition forces began making forays into dangerous territories and setting up new bases, they would inevitably become targets. The most serious raid came on 12 April at a patrol base named Dog, the home of 4th Brigade, 25th Division’s Troop B, 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment, commanded by Capt. Donald T. Braman. Patrol Base Dog was a small square-walled enclosure on the northern outskirts of Adwaniyah, a village about seven kilometers south of Baghdad, and the outpost was considered to be especially vulnerable. Its location on Route Buick, one of a series of small roads veering off Route Tampa where it turned westward toward Al Anbar Province less than ten kilometers south of Baghdad, made it a prime infiltration route into the capital. The insurgents could not tolerate such a base.

Braman generally rotated his three platoons between Dog and Forward Operating Base Falcon on the southern outskirts of Baghdad, keeping one on the forward operating base and the others in the field. Because the small patrol base was located in what the Army dryly referred to as

¹ Comments, during Daily Battle Update Brief (BUB), 25 May 2007, author’s notes.

² Briefing Slide, MND-Baghdad/Center Attack Trends Comparison, 01 Apr–30 May 07, 31 May 2007.

a “non-permissive environment”—meaning that the enemy was extremely dangerous there—Troop B spent virtually all of its time defending itself. Hardly a day went by that Patrol Base Dog was not attacked, either by rifle and grenade fire or stand-off mortar and rocket barrages.³

That day, 12 April, was like most others in the dangerous ground south of Baghdad. The soldiers of Troop B ran patrols and responded to intelligence reports, making regular forays throughout the area in an attempt to uproot the extremists. Inside the base, those soldiers not on patrol kept careful watch. Elements of the garrison had spent the early morning on a sweep operation, dubbed YUKON RIVER, and captured eight suspected insurgents. Braman sent one of the platoons back to Falcon with the detainees. That left only a single unit, 3d Platoon, at Dog. Captain Braman was the only officer on hand.⁴

Although the patrols were done for the day, they had no time to rest. Because of the persistent violence—and the shortage of troops on base that day—Braman had his men on “stand-to” for three hours during the late afternoon, meaning that every soldier was on full alert, with all positions manned and all guns turned outward in anticipation of an assault.⁵

A few minutes after 1600 a crackle of small-arms fire resounded from south of the base. Two insurgents carrying AK47s were spotted beyond the southern gate and fired on by the M240B machine gun sited near the base entrance. Other insurgents—about ten in all—popped up to the southeast and southwest, firing from concealed positions about two hundred and fifty meters away.

The defenders shot back. Pfc. Jose Rodriguez, a member of 3d Platoon, was on the roof of a building on the eastern side of the base, but he moved south toward the main enemy gunfire, shooting as he went. S. Sgt. Elias D. Cowell was in the Eagle’s Nest—a concrete watchtower constructed to give guards a longer view over the flat desert—and he yelled to the nearest soldier, Pfc. John J. Borbonus, to fire on the attackers coming from the south. On the east side of the base, from a fighting position called the Crow’s Nest, Spec. Manuel Miranda spied about ten insurgents and immediately took them under fire.⁶

The ground assault, however, was a diversion. Moments later, a truck barreled toward the south gate, careened through the obstacles placed there, and roared toward the eastern wall and the base’s two main buildings—the command post and the living quarters for the officers and senior enlisted

³ Telecon, author with Capt Donald T. Braman, former CO, Troop B, 1st Sqdn, 40th Cav Rgt, 27 Apr 2009.

⁴ Storyboard, Engagement, 4th Bn, 227th Avn Rgt, 1st Air Cavalry Brigade (ACB), 1st Cav Div, 12 Apr 2007.

⁵ Ltr, Braman to author, 30 Apr 2009.

⁶ Sworn Statement of S Sgt Elias D. Cowell, in Bronze Star Citation for Pfc Jose Rodriguez, 19 Apr 2007; Bronze Star Medal Citation for Spec Manuel Miranda, n.d.

men. As the truck neared its target, the driver triggered the detonator, setting off several hundred pounds of explosives into a fiery ball that tore through the structures.⁷

The northeast building collapsed in a cloud of dust and scattered debris, burying several soldiers, including Captain Braman. He was alive, relatively unhurt, and lucky enough to have his handheld radio with him still in working order. Braman could maintain limited contact with his soldiers outside the rubble and through them with the outside world.

Others were able to escape the wreckage, including Spec. Michael Scanzuso, who staggered through the swirling smoke bleeding from his face and neck and ran toward a nearby Humvee. He jumped into the turret and turned the machine gun to the west, where more small-arms fire erupted in the aftermath of the explosion. For almost an hour, Scanzuso kept the enemy at bay; then he joined the rescue team digging through the rubble to help the wounded, despite having broken several ribs in the blast.⁸

Pfc. John Schumacher was also inside the building and heard the gunfire. He grabbed the radio and was beginning to call in a contact report to higher headquarters when the blast tore through, spraying debris and filling the air with billowing dust. Unable to find his rifle, body armor, and helmet in the confusion, Schumacher grabbed an M240B machine gun that had fallen from a rooftop fighting position destroyed in the explosion and ran outside. Noticing a hole that had been blown in the wall and fearing the worst, he took cover and fired northward until he was satisfied that no attack would come from that direction. Schumacher eventually wound up manning a machine gun on one of the Humvees, and, although covered in blood, he refused to have his wounds attended to until directly ordered to do so by one of the sergeants.⁹

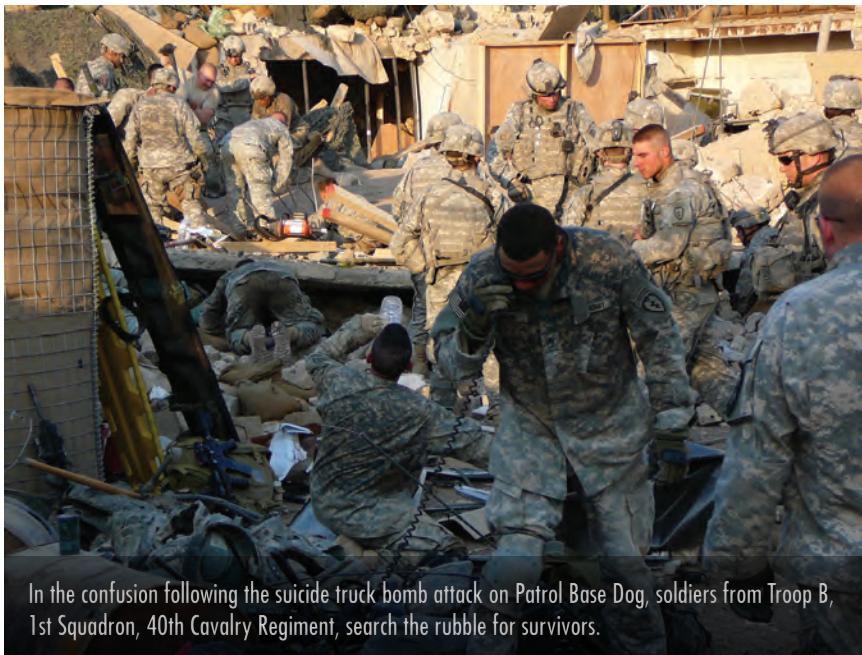
Sergeant Cowell was still in the Eagle's Nest when the bomb went off. As the walls exploded around him, he fell through the collapsing roof and was buried in debris. Fortunately, Cowell was able to dig himself out of the rubble. Others were not so lucky. Cpl. Cody A. Putnam and two Iraqi interpreters died instantly in the blast and Private Borbonus, who had continued firing from the rooftop as the truck bomber sped toward his target, was mortally wounded and died later that day.

The attackers attempted one last time to storm the patrol base, but the survivors easily held them at bay. Specialist Miranda, who had been knocked to the ground by the blast, remained behind his sandbagged position on the roof and kept firing. On the ground below, Specialist Scanzuso

⁷ Sworn Statement of S Sgt Eric H. Harrington, in Bronze Star Citation for Pfc Jose Rodriguez, 18 Apr 2007.

⁸ Sworn Statement of Staff Sgt Lorenzo Cardoso, in Bronze Star Citation for Spec Michael Scanzuso, 19 Apr 2007.

⁹ Sworn Statement of Staff Sgt Scott D. Carney, in Bronze Star Citation for Pfc John Schumacher, 18 Apr 2007.



In the confusion following the suicide truck bomb attack on Patrol Base Dog, soldiers from Troop B, 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment, search the rubble for survivors.

and several other soldiers manned the Humvee machine guns or trained their own rifles outside the wall and laid down a curtain of menacing fire. The insurgents seemed unwilling to brave such a firestorm.¹⁰

Support also came from the air. In the terrible moments after the headquarters collapsed from the explosion, the defenders radioed a “broken arrow”—a desperate call for any and all available air support. Within minutes, two Apache gunships from the 1st Cavalry Division’s Company B, 4th Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment—call signs Big Guns 52 and 56—were overhead. Still using his radio from within the rubble of his wrecked command post, Braman told the helicopters to zero in on a machine gun in a grove of palm trees just northeast of the base. Both gunships headed in the direction of the trees, pouring 30-mm. cannon fire and two rockets into the enemy position. The Apaches swung around for another pass, this time unleashing rockets loaded with antipersonnel flechettes, and the ground fire stopped.

Intelligence analysts assumed that all traffic along Route Buick in the vicinity of Patrol Base Dog belonged to the enemy, and the order was given to destroy any nearby vehicles. One of the gunships soon spotted a stationary blue sedan sitting at an intersection less than a hundred meters southwest of the base. Believing the car to be hiding an IED set to ambush any

¹⁰ Bronze Star Medal Citation for Spec Manuel Miranda, n.d.; Sworn Statement of Cardoso, in Bronze Star Citation for Scanzuso, 19 Apr 2007.

reaction force sent to rescue the defenders, the Apache fired a single Hellfire missile, which slammed into the automobile. A second car located less than fifty meters west of Dog was also destroyed. Both strikes triggered violent secondary explosions from the vehicle bombs.¹¹

The fight was over in less than an hour, and the defenders turned all their attention to digging through the wreckage for bodies—both dead and alive. In addition to the four dead, nine soldiers were wounded, and, at 1800, medevac helicopters flew in and evacuated the injured men. All the while, Apaches lurked overhead to ensure that there was no more trouble.

The raid was the sort of short and violent—yet complex—affair that coalition forces had come to fear. The enemy's ability to simultaneously mount attacks by fire, ground assaults, and vehicle bombs against isolated patrol bases highlighted what General Petraeus and his commanders had said about the risks inherent in dispersing forces throughout the capital and the surrounding countryside. It was also a stark reminder of how far the allies had to go to bring security to the rural regions south of Baghdad.¹²

Black Thursday, as 12 April 2007 came to be called, proved to be deadly all across Iraq. In addition to the destruction of Patrol Base Dog, two other spectacular strikes occurred: a suicide bomber entered the parliament building in Baghdad and blew himself up, killing 8 and wounding 20, and a suicide truck bomb exploded on the Sarafiyah bridge in northern Baghdad, sending cars plunging into the Tigris River and killing at least 10 people and wounding 26 others. This rising tempo of death and destruction persisted through the rest of the month. In April, 104 U.S. soldiers would die—up from 81 the previous month—making April the deadliest month so far in 2007, and the sixth highest monthly toll since the war began four years earlier.¹³

Patrol Base Dog was rebuilt after the attack. Since the buildings were destroyed, the 3d Division supplied trailers for the soldiers to sleep in and strengthened the perimeter with new Hesco barricades—large upright pliable felt tubes filled with dirt and reinforced with steel mesh to form a strong, durable wall. Troop B, 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment, continued its work from the base. However, despite Dog's importance in plugging some of the routes into Baghdad, the 3d Division resolved to abandon it by the middle of June. The squadron commander, Lt. Col. Mark W. Odom, had relied on the base as a forward presence in enemy territory, but

¹¹ Storyboard, Engagement, 4th Bn, 227th Avn Rgt, 1st ACB, 1st Cav Div, 12 Apr 2007.

¹² Ibid. After the battle, analysts concluded that the assault was “possible retribution” for U.S. operations launched earlier in the day and the previous night. This is unlikely, however, because such an attack had to have been planned much further in advance. Indeed, intelligence gathered after the strike indicated that the vehicle-borne IED had been in the area for several days. Ltr, Braman to author, 30 Apr 2009.

¹³ “Suicide truck bomb collapses bridge,” Associated Press, 12 Apr 2007; Sam Knight, “Suicide bomber strikes at heart of Iraqi Parliament building,” the *Times* [London] Online, 12 Apr 2007; Coalition Casualty Count Web site.

he was “comfortable shutting down Patrol Base Dog” and instead conducting air assaults to maintain some security in the area. Part of the determination stemmed from the changing mission of the 1st Squadron, which in June would be attached to the 3d Division’s 2d Brigade, and its operational focus would shift elsewhere.¹⁴

On 6 June, General Lynch was visited separately by both General Odierno and General Petraeus, and the subject of the ill-fated patrol base came up during both meetings. Lynch told his bosses of the decision to close the base, and neither objected.¹⁵

Air Cavalry

The fight at Patrol Base Dog showed the value—indeed the necessity—of helicopter gunship support. Since the onset of the Vietnam War, the U.S. Army increasingly relied on its aerial artillery to aid troops in trouble on the ground, and when combined with the airmobility of transport helicopters—which also came of age in Vietnam—the modern Army was increasingly tied to its aviation assets. By the twenty-first century, most combat divisions had their own aviation brigade.

In the 3d Infantry Division, it was simply called the 3d Combat Aviation Brigade, although it was officially designated as the Combat Aviation Brigade, 3d Infantry Division.¹⁶ Stationed at Hunter Army Airfield in Savannah, Georgia—not far from Fort Stewart—the aviation brigade deployed overseas several times, including to the Middle East and the Balkans. In August 2002, the aviation brigade was in Kuwait awaiting orders to strike into Iraq as part of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. Its helicopters led the way for the 3d Division, playing key roles at the battle for An Nasiriyah and Tallil Air Base. Upon reaching Baghdad, the brigade continued to lend its weight to the ongoing battle.

Back from Iraq in 2004, the unit became the Army’s first modular combat aviation brigade—just in time to return to Iraq in January 2005. According to a division organizational history, the modular organization “enabled the brigade to significantly increase its ability to operate 24 hours a day for an indefinite period of time providing an unprecedented level of aviation combat power to the Division.” During the 3d Division’s second tour to Iraq in 2005 as part of MND-B, the aviation brigade flew more than

¹⁴ CG Executive Summary, Maj Gen Lynch’s visit to PB [Patrol Base] Dog, 5 Jun 2007.

¹⁵ CG Executive Summary, Lt Gen Odierno’s visit to MND-C HQ, 6 Jun 2007; CG Executive Summary, Gen Petraeus visit, 6 Jun 2007.

¹⁶ In order to remain consistent with the 3d Division’s own terminology and documentation, the designation of 3d Combat Aviation Brigade (CAB) will be used throughout the footnotes.



Black Hawk helicopters from the 3d Infantry Division's Combat Aviation Brigade provided air assault capabilities throughout an operational area the size of West Virginia.

80,000 hours in support of 26,707 combat missions and conducted 289 air assaults and raids and over 3,700 medevac missions.¹⁷

In May 2007, the aviation brigade, commanded by Col. Daniel Ball, deployed to Kuwait, then transferred its soldiers and helicopters to Baghdad, where it was stationed at Forward Operating Base Falcon on the southern edge of Baghdad. In its modular formation, the 3d Combat Aviation Brigade was divided into four organic units: the 1st, 2d, 3d, and 4th Battalions, 3d Aviation Regiment. The 1st and 3d Battalions each consisted of 24 AH-64D Apache attack helicopters; the 2d and 4th Battalions were lift units, the former made up of 20 UH-60 Black Hawks and 12 CH-47 Chinook cargo helicopters and the latter consisting of 30 Black Hawks, some of them configured for medical evacuations. The 603d Support Battalion rounded out the organic aerial complement, but the brigade also had operational control of the 3d Squadron, 17th Cavalry Regiment, a scout unit from the 10th Mountain Division made up of 30 OH-58D Kiowa light helicopters. Finally, Colonel Ball had four platoons of four unmanned aerial vehicles called the RQ-7 Shadow. Although Ball controlled these platoons, they actually belonged to the brigade commanders, who used them on a daily basis to meet their operational needs. In all, the 3d Division's Combat Aviation Brigade consisted of about a hundred

¹⁷ Aviation brigade information is from 3d Inf Div organizational history, n.d., Fort Stewart, Ga., Combat Avn Bde, 3d Inf Div, p. 1.

and fifty aircraft and thirty-two hundred pilots, crew members, and other support personnel. This aerial force represented almost one-third of the four hundred and fifty or so U.S. military helicopters in Iraq.¹⁸

But the entire brigade would not have arrived until June, and in the meantime the 3d Division would rely on the 1st Cavalry Division for its air support. It was a natural choice. Headquartered at Forward Operating Base Falcon—where the 3d Division's Combat Aviation Brigade was locating—the 1st Cavalry Division's 1st Air Cavalry Brigade (ACB) already supported both its own infantry units in southern Baghdad as well the 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, and the 4th Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, south and west of the city.¹⁹

The 1st Cavalry Division had deployed to Iraq for the second time in September 2006. "There was a short period when the 3d Division deployed that it would have no cavalry brigade," said Maj. James S. Perry. "Since we'd been flying in that battle space already, we just stepped it up a bit and did the work for two divisions." Major Perry was sent to the 3d Division headquarters to be the 1st Cavalry Division's air liaison officer, a convenient conduit between that division and General Lynch's staff, ensuring that air support for ground operations went smoothly during this crucial buildup phase. The 1st Cavalry Division would not have to do double duty for very long—the 3d Division's Combat Aviation Brigade was scheduled to take over all missions no later than 15 June.²⁰

The threat in MND-C was familiar to all helicopter pilots in Iraq—heavy machine guns and small arms—though the threat of surface-to-air missiles, such as old Soviet-made SA-7s, was always present. Earlier operations, especially those by the 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, had eliminated many of the enemy's heavy weapons caches, significantly lowering the risk to helicopter pilots. The 1st Air Cavalry Brigade had only a single helicopter shot down in support of the 3d Division, and that occurred on 5 April 2007, when a Black Hawk was hit by heavy machine-gun fire near Al Latifiyah, forty kilometers southwest of Baghdad. No one was killed, but four soldiers were wounded, and the helicopter was recovered.

Despite the danger, many 1st Cavalry Division pilots enjoyed the extra flying duty. The open desert offered a change from the more restricted space over the city. "This place is perfect for air assaults," said Major Perry. "Flying over Baghdad is difficult in that there are so many things to watch out for all the time. Down here it is much better."²¹

¹⁸ DoD Pentagon News Briefing with Col Daniel Ball, 15 Jun 2007, pp. 1–3.

¹⁹ Although the official name of the 1st Cavalry Division's aviation unit is the Combat Aviation Brigade, in Iraq the division called it the 1st Air Cavalry Brigade. In order to remain consistent, that designation will be used throughout.

²⁰ Interv, author with Maj James S. Perry, Liaison Officer (LNO), 1st ACB, 9 Jun 2007.

²¹ Ibid.



U.S. Army AH-64D Apache Longbow helicopters line the ramp at an airfield in Baghdad.

On 17 April, 1st Cavalry Division pilots engaged in fights to support early Task Force Marne operations. Apaches from the 4th Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment, were flying a routine mission looking for terrorists planting IEDs southwest of Baghdad in the 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division's area of operations when a ground unit reported seeing a man carrying explosives along Route Caveman, a road skirting the capital, near the intersection with Route Sportster. Two Apache gunships made runs against a long row of reeds lining the west side of Route Cavemen, firing rockets and 30-mm. rounds into several possible hiding places. The territory was well known within the brigade as a major target for bombers. In early April, an IED strike against a Bradley fighting vehicle had resulted in one U.S. soldier killed, and other attacks had caused casualties in convoys and patrols.²²

Late at night on 4 May, the 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, part of the 3d Division's 3d Brigade, was operating on the east side of the Tigris and spotted three trucks that appeared to be conveying heavy weapons near the town of Salman Pak. An Iraqi police checkpoint also made a similar sighting. Over the past month, multiple reports of truck-mounted heavy machine guns and possibly even a 57-mm. antiaircraft system had been filed. Intelligence believed that these latest sightings included at least one of those vehicles.

²² Account is from Storyboard, Engagement, 4th Bn, 227th Avn Rgt, 1st ACB, 1st Cav Div, 17 Apr 2007.

Two Apache gunships from the 1st Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment—with the call signs Crazy Horse 14 and 15—followed one of those trucks from high above, using night-vision equipment to track its progress. The helicopters had been fired at by a heavy weapon less than an hour earlier, and they now confirmed that the truck carried “a large crew-served weapon in the back” and that the gun “appeared hot” through the infrared night-vision equipment. The gunships followed the truck to a grove of palm trees, where about a half-dozen men piled out. Swooping in on the vehicle, the Apaches fired 290 rounds of 30-mm. cannon and 41 rockets at the truck and at a nearby car, destroying both and killing an estimated eight to ten insurgents.²³

On 22 May, two Apaches from the same unit operating in the same area spotted two possible IED emplacements along Route Kelp, one of the dirt roads running northeastward from the riverbank to Route Wild. The road had experienced numerous IEDs, most notably a deeply buried bomb a week earlier that had killed a U.S. soldier. The blast crater was visible to the gunship pilots above, less than a hundred meters from where the insurgents appeared to be trying to plant another IED. Cannon fire struck both sites, setting off secondary explosions. The destruction of the IEDs was a welcome event, but much needed to be done before the roadway was safe. Even after the mission, intelligence analysts expected local insurgents “to re-seed another IED within 48 hours.” Route Kelp was designated “black” by the 3d Brigade, meaning that “enemy attacks are imminent and encountering IEDs is probable.”²⁴

During the final two weeks of the 1st Cavalry Division’s double duty south of Baghdad, helicopters flew dozens of missions. On the afternoon of 5 June, during an aerial IED spotting mission, two Apaches from the 4th Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment, spied four armed men on Route Fatboy, a road intersecting Route Tampa near its junction with another crucial road, Hillah Highway, or Route Jackson. This territory was the responsibility of the 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division’s 1st Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment. The suspected insurgents were hiding in the reeds along a canal that paralleled Route Fatboy, taking advantage of virtually the only concealment in the vicinity. At 1350, the Apaches dived at one man carrying an AK47, firing forty 30-mm. rounds. A second gun run expended another 240 rounds, and the pilots reported one dead insurgent.²⁵

Two days later, the 1st Air Cavalry Brigade chalked up one of its most successful days, flying three significant missions in support of Task Force Marne units. At 1000, two gunships from the 1st Battalion, 227th Aviation

²³ Storyboard, Engagement/SAFIRE (surface-to-air fire), 1st Bn, 227th Avn Rgt, 1st ACB, 1st Cav Div, 4 May 2007.

²⁴ Storyboard, Event Engagement, 1st Bn, 227th Avn Rgt, 1st ACB, 1st Cav Div, 22 May 2007.

²⁵ Storyboard, Engagement, 4th Bn, 227th Avn Rgt, 1st ACB, 1st Cav Div, 5 Jun 2007.

Regiment, scouting in the 2d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, area of operations on Route Buick on the southern outskirts of Baghdad were called by the 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment, because of “a hostile crowd hoarding small arms” near the site of Patrol Base Dog. The base was being abandoned at the same time as the 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment, became part of the incoming 2d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division. The crowd appeared to be looting whatever was left at the base and had set fire to a building.

The helicopters spotted two trucks being loaded with weapons and immediately loosed two Hellfire missiles. One missed, but the other disintegrated one of the trucks. The Apaches returned for another strike, this time destroying the second truck with a hail of 30-mm. cannon fire. A third truck appeared on the scene and was also destroyed with a Hellfire missile. The helicopters then turned their attention to the burning building and leveled it with a hail of cannon fire. Two insurgents died in that raid.

The after action assessment noted that “AIF [anti-Iraqi forces] are trying to exploit the abandoned patrol base, most likely to loot equipment to use in future attacks against [coalition forces] and Iraqi Security Forces.” Another assessment speculated that “it’s plausible anti-Iraqi forces were aware of the planned withdrawal from PB Dog [and it is] also possible the group was planning to use the fixed site as a stronghold of center of operations in the area.”²⁶

That afternoon, other Apaches from 1st Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment, flying along the Tigris south of Baghdad in coordination with 3d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division’s operations to clear the river region of smugglers moving arms and equipment into the capital, spotted two unmanned boats partially moored near one bank and sank them with cannon fire. An intelligence assessment concluded that “with the engagement of boats and the increased patrol activity along the river smuggling operations will decrease in that area.” In addition, as the river became a less-than-certain way of getting weapons and materiel into Baghdad, the enemy was expected to “create more caches along the river until other transportation methods are acquired.”²⁷

Later that night, the 2d Brigade, 3d Division—still in the deployment process—summoned gunships to destroy an earthen bridge just south of Baghdad. It was part of several well-known smuggling routes in the Tigris River valley, which in early June still allowed enemy travelers much freedom of movement as the surge built up U.S. forces. That was about to change because the region just west of the Tigris was seeing the final influx of troops from the 2d Brigade, the last of the surge units.

²⁶ Account is from Storyboard, Engagement, 1st Bn, 227th Avn Rgt, 1st ACB, 1st Cav Div, 7 Jun 2007.

²⁷ Storyboard, Engagement, 2 x Boats Destroyed, 1st Bn, 227th Avn Rgt, 1st ACB, 1st Cav Div, 7 Jun 2007.

The mission was not the first of its kind, nor would it be the last. As the after action reported noted, “The bridge has been engaged by [U.S. forces] on numerous occasions,” most recently only three days earlier. However, concluded the analysis, “After each engagement [anti-Iraqi forces] continue to attempt to rebuild the bridge, leaving IEDs in the newly built structures. Expect further engagements of this sort to occur.”²⁸

Despite the obvious success of aerial missions such as these, they were still not enough to seriously hinder the enemy’s ability to transport accelerants into Baghdad. Only a robust ground effort and a permanent security presence along the traditional arms smuggling routes could block the flow of insurgents—and that was about to happen. Within two weeks, both the 3d Division’s 2d Brigade and its Combat Aviation Brigade would be completely in place and ready to begin operations at full pace. The 1st Cavalry Division’s aviation units had done a fine job of taking up the slack until that time, and on 15 June they returned to Baghdad to fly exclusively in support of the 1st Cavalry Division, which would remain in Iraq until December.

Kiowa Down

Despite the value of helicopters, General Lynch never underestimated their vulnerability. During a planning session in June, Lynch told his brigade commanders, “The thing that keeps me up at night is the enemy air threat. I know they have a lot of machine guns.”²⁹

Although Task Force Marne was fortunate to have had few serious attacks on its helicopters, Lynch’s fear came true on 2 July. Early that morning, two OH-58D Kiowa scout helicopters from Troop C, 3d Squadron, 17th Cavalry Regiment—with the call signs Light Horse 27 and 30—were flying an area reconnaissance east of Al Mahmudiyah in support of a 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, operation. It was a normal mission, and the weather was good, though it was already ferociously hot, despite being early in the morning.

Light Horse 27 spotted something odd and moved in for a closer look. The pilot, CWO2 Steven R. Cianfrini, was about to report that they had “discovered a man made hole in the road, hastily covered by rocks”—a likely IED—when small-arms tracer fire arced up from the ground.³⁰

“We’re taking fire!” he yelled, and copilot CWO2 Mark Burrows banked hard to evade the bullets. However, instead of reaching safety, the Kiowa found itself sandwiched between two heavy machine-gun positions. “The whole world just opened up on us, it seemed like,” said Cianfrini after

²⁸ Account is from Storyboard, Engagement, 1 x Bridge Destroyed, 4th Bn, 227th Avn Rgt, 1st ACB, 1st Cav Div, 7 Jun 2007.

²⁹ Teleconference, Ops Back Brief with Bde Cdrs, 1 Jun 2007, author’s notes.

³⁰ Storyboard, SAFIRE/Fallen Angel, 1st Bn, 3d Avn Rgt, 3d CAB, 3d Inf Div, BUB, 2 Jul 2007.

the incident. “We zigzagged, whatever we could do, to get out of the guns’ target line. Then we started taking rounds from behind.”³¹

Burrows recalled that the bullets felt like a ball-peen hammer striking the aircraft skin. The pilot tried to coax the stricken helicopter into a field, but the main rotor began to shudder and the aircraft spun uncontrollably, forcing him to cut power about twenty feet from the ground. The helicopter crashed tail first, bounced over an irrigation canal, then slid into a ditch near a dirt road. Ironically, it was labeled on U.S. maps as Route Ambush.³²

Upon impact, the dashboard exploded into fragments. “One second it was there, the next all I saw were wires and structural members,” said Burrows. But the pilots were uninjured, and they scrambled out the doors of the burning Kiowa just before the engine exploded, sending black smoke curling into the sky. Insurgents were zeroing in on the wreck, and bullets splatted into the metal carcass. The pilots ran to the nearby canal, one of the few places they could take cover. Cianfrini had lost his M4 rifle, but he drew his M9 pistol, and Burrows still had both weapons. Wading into the water, the men quickly became mired in mud, and the body armor made it difficult to cross the twenty-meter-wide canal. Burrows thought he would drown, but they both reached the far bank and hid in the reeds.³³

More than a dozen insurgents were closing in on both sides of the canal, firing as they came. “We couldn’t move,” Cianfrini recalled. “I was thinking, ‘This is it.’” Bullets slapped the water and clipped reeds from the banks, and one insurgent came so close that Burrows could see his brown T-shirt and the AK47 he held at the ready. Burrows kept his rifle sighted on the insurgent, then he realized there was no magazine in his weapon; it must have been lost while escaping the wreckage, and the single bullet still in the chamber was unlikely to be enough.

Fortunately, the Iraqis did not see them. Knowing that the pilots had to be in the canal nearby, the enemy began firing blindly into the bank, then gave directions to a truck with a machine gun mounted in the back. “The firing into the reeds was so immense,” said Cianfrini, “I was expecting to take a bullet in the head at any second.” But after about ten minutes the insurgents and their machine gun advanced up the canal, and the firing grew fainter.

In the sky above, Light Horse 30 was all but helpless to react. It was also taking rounds from the machine guns, spraying shrapnel into the neck of one of the pilots and setting the side rocket pod on fire. It had lost radio communication with Light Horse 27 but was able to broadcast a “Fallen

³¹ MND-C Media Release, Downed pilots endure 30 minutes of intensity, 5 Jul 2007; Ann Scott Taylor, “Pilots Shot Down in Iraq Tell of Dramatic Escape,” *Washington Post*, 4 Jul 2007.

³² Events of Monday July 2d 2007, Recollections of Mark Burrows, n.d., p. 4.

³³ Ibid.

Angel”—the code word for an aircraft shot down. Light Horse 30 remained on the scene until help arrived, then limped back home.³⁴

Another team of Kiowas, this one from Troop A, was on a different mission some distance away when the Fallen Angel notice came over the radio. The pilot—call signed Light Horse 1—CWO2 Kristopher S. Hobt, abandoned his mission and flew directly to the crash site. While his companion aircraft, Light Horse 2, coordinated with ground forces and gunships converging on the area, Hobt spotted the wreckage and landed his helicopter about forty meters away, taking fire from the enemy as he descended. Grabbing his M4 rifle, Hobt dashed toward the smoking wreck. He was relieved to find no bodies. Instead, there were two flight helmets neatly laid out near the downed helicopter’s nose, indicating that they were alive and on the run.³⁵

Hobt raced back to the waiting Kiowa. The copilot, CWO2 Edward R. Gamble, had kept the rotors spinning for a fast getaway, and as soon as Hobt was back onboard they spiraled into the sky. Circling above was their wingman, Light Horse 2, piloted by Capt. Jason D. James. The other Kiowa was lifting off when Captain James spotted the downed pilots. “As Light Horse 1 was pulling off the crash site I was in a tight left turn over the nose of the aircraft crash site,” recalled James, “when my right seater [CWO2 Anthony M. Vanduynhoven] and I identified . . . Burrows along the canal to the south of the crash site waving his arms up at us.”³⁶

The Kiowas were prepared to recover the downed pilots, but James worried that they might have difficulty doing so in the face of enemy fire. “I was concerned about power management with the additional weight [of the two pilots]” and, in the face of the advancing enemy, he was leery about ditching any extra fuel or weapons pods to make his helicopter lighter. Instead, James contacted two Apache gunships, with call signs Crazy Horse 16 and Crazy Horse 17, about assistance. The gunships had expected the Kiowas to attempt the rescue and were chasing two blue trucks that were leaving the area. But Captain James decided that the Apaches were better equipped to handle the pickup. “I felt that the hasty extraction could be done safer on the . . . Apache,” he reported after the incident. “I also knew that the Apache could pull pitch and get out of the area faster than a Kiowa Warrior could, even with the additional weight.”³⁷

The Apaches responded immediately and raced to the location. They prowled up and down the canal, firing cannon and machine guns to hold off

³⁴ Storyboard, SAFIRE/Fallen Angel, 1st Bn, 3d Avn Rgt, 3d CAB, 3d Inf Div, BUB, 2 Jul 2007.

³⁵ Narrative to Accompany the Award of Distinguished Flying Cross to CWO2 Kristopher S. Hobt, n.d.

³⁶ Encl, Sworn Statement of Capt Jason D. James, in Narrative to Accompany the Award of Distinguished Flying Cross to CWO2 Kristopher S. Hobt, 2 Jul 2007.

³⁷ Ibid.

the attackers, but aimed the rounds away from the water for fear they might hit the downed pilots. On the ground below, Burrows wanted to shoot a flare to attract the attention of the Apaches, but Cianfrini was concerned that it would only draw the insurgents back to their position. They saw one of the Apaches, Crazy Horse 16, swoop in, but it landed on the north side of the canal. Not wanting to swim back across and risk getting stuck in the mud again, Burrows crawled up the embankment, grasping the reeds to keep from falling back into the water, and waved to the Apache. The pilot spotted Burrows and hopped the helicopter over the canal. "I saw them hunkered down," said CWO2 Micah R. Johnson, one of the gunship pilots. "I asked them if they were okay. They both looked good."

An Apache gunship has only two seats. Cianfrini took one, Johnson strapped himself onto the stubby wing over the landing skid, and Burrows did the same on the other side. Soaked and covered in mud, Burrows held on tight as the other pilot, CWO2 Allan D. Davison, tilted the Apache skyward and headed back to Baghdad International Airport, where the 3d Squadron, 17th Cavalry Regiment, was based—a mere ten minutes by air. "It wasn't the most comfortable flight but I was elated to be out of there," recalled Burrows. The helicopter "was going 120 mph so you can imagine the wind was pretty strong." Despite the precariousness of the "spur ride," as such unconventional extractions were dubbed, Burrows and Johnson were relieved to be out of danger. "We were all pretty happy to see a couple of pilots walking away that day," Burrows said.³⁸

On the ground, a group of insurgents moved toward the crashed Kiowa helicopter. Because the enemy was already near the site, trying to salvage the wreckage seemed pointless, so Colonel Ball, the 3d Division's Combat Aviation Brigade commander, recommended that "we go ahead and destroy that thing in place as opposed to risking the lives" of soldiers sent to secure the position. General Lynch agreed, and a U.S. Air Force A-10 Thunderbolt attack aircraft, with the call sign Viper 46, roared in and fired 330 30-mm. cannon rounds and dropped a 500-pound bomb, obliterating what remained of the helicopter and killing a handful of insurgents still at the location.³⁹

This incident ended happily for the Americans, but they were lucky. "This was a deliberate air ambush," said General Huggins, the 3d Division's deputy commander, and he cautioned against complacency. Indeed, the enemy was improving at planning and executing complex strikes against helicopters. According to reports, during the first six months of 2007, insurgents fired on helicopters about a hundred times each month. About 15 percent of those assaults resulted in hits, though most caused only light

³⁸ MND-C Media Release, Downed pilots endure 30 minutes of intensity, 5 Jul 2007.

³⁹ Quote from Brief, Col Ball, Fallen Angel incident, 2 Jul 2007 BUB, author's notes. Storyboard, SAFIRE/Fallen Angel, 1st Bn, 3d Avn Rgt, 3d CAB, 3d Inf Div, BUB, 2 Jul 2007.

damage. Still, since January, at least ten helicopters (including two flown by contractors) had been shot down. Clearly, the aerial environment was becoming more dangerous.⁴⁰

Missing in Action

A little more than a month after taking command of the new area of operations, General Lynch and his staff were rocked by news of a deadly raid against U.S. forces, and its aftermath would remain the center of attention for months to come. On 12 May, elements of Task Force Marne's 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division's Company D, 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, were attacked near Al Mahmudiyah and resulted in 4 U.S. soldiers and 1 Iraqi interpreter killed and 3 Americans missing. It was the worst such incident since the capture of Pfc. Jessica D. Lynch and five other soldiers in March 2003.

It began nine days earlier. As they did on most days, U.S. soldiers patrolled the region along the east bank of the Euphrates River looking for IEDs and insurgents who crossed back and forth along the rat lines into the capital. The presence of U.S. forces there kept the enemy off-balance.

Early on the morning of 3 May, a patrol from the 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, found what appeared to be an IED near a bend in the river on Route Malibu, 800 meters south of Patrol Base Inchon, which was about thirty kilometers southwest of Baghdad. The base housed Company D, and its location astride a major route leading between Baghdad and the Sunni enclaves along the Euphrates made it a prime target. During April, the territory in a ten kilometer radius of Inchon experienced 17 IEDs, 31 bombs found before they could be detonated, and 33 small-arms attacks.⁴¹

An explosives ordnance detachment arrived on the scene and set exploratory charges to help locate the bomb. Instead, the charges set off a "catastrophic detonation" of the IED, and when the smoke and dust cleared there was a deep crater near the road. That night, insurgents returned to the site and set two smaller IEDs, taking advantage of the loose dirt and rubble to set more bombs that might injure or kill the next U.S. patrol. However, a squad found both bombs on the morning of 4 May and detonated them, creating two more craters that, according to a report, "nearly severed the road." Keeping Route Malibu open was crucial because many of the other nearby routes were rife with deeply buried IEDs and were not used. The Americans could not afford to have Malibu become impassable.⁴²

⁴⁰ Quote from Ann Scott Taylor, "Pilots Shot Down in Iraq Tell of Dramatic Escape," *Washington Post*, 4 Jul 2007. For helicopter statistics, see James Glanz, "Insurgents Stepping Up Efforts to Down U.S. Helicopters in Iraq," *New York Times*, 12 Feb 2007.

⁴¹ DA Form 1574, Findings of Fact (c, Jun–Jul 2007), p. 7.

⁴² Unless otherwise noted, the narrative comes from Findings of Fact.

That evening, the battalion assigned 1st Platoon, Company D, the mission of guarding the craters during the night so that next time the insurgents would not have such easy access. Before dark, 1st Lt. Morgan J. Spring-Glace, the 1st Platoon commander, placed his men and two Humvees near the largest of the bomb craters, referred to as the North Crater. Spring-Glace had commanded the platoon since February and had grown to know and admire his men. The respect was returned; they were a well-oiled team.⁴³

This went on for several nights. Just after midnight on 12 May, the platoon arrived at the North Crater, parking one Humvee on the north side and the other just to the south. In the first vehicle were Sfc. James D. Connell, Pfc. Daniel W. Courneya, Pvt. Christopher E. Murphy, and Pfc. Joseph J. Anzack. The second Humvee was manned by Spec. Alex R. Jimenez, Pvt. Byron Fouty, Sgt. Anthony J. Schober, and an Iraqi translator, Sabah Jundi Barak. Both crews dismounted from the vehicles frequently to check the concertina wire that they strung around their positions and to take a closer look through their night-vision goggles at the surrounding area.

For several days, insurgents had been watching the Americans, and at 0444 they made their move. Two teams of three guerrillas stealthily cut through the wire surrounding each vehicle. They crept through the break, rushed to the vehicles, and threw a concussion grenade into the turret of each Humvee. The grenades exploded within seconds of one another, and in the confusion the insurgents opened fire on the men who scrambled from the side doors. They snatched three soldiers—Anzack from the northern vehicle and Jimenez and Fouty from the southern Humvee—and dragged them south along Route Malibu before turning east on one of the many narrow dirt roads leading away from the Euphrates. All of the other soldiers were killed. (See Map 7.)

The insurgents' primary goal was to take prisoners. Later investigation showed that the attackers had fragmentary grenades but that they used only concussion explosives, and when they opened fire they deliberately aimed low, apparently intending to wound rather than kill. Although the Americans were surprised by the assault, they managed to return fire—though it was ineffectual—using at least one of the turret-mounted .50-caliber machine guns as well as some of the M4 rifles.⁴⁴

The soldiers at Patrol Base Inchon heard the shots and grenade explosions, but they could not see the Humvees, which were concealed by a grove of palm trees and a slight bend in the road. Two sergeants awakened Lieutenant Spring-Glace within minutes of the noise, and the lieutenant

⁴³ Spec. Chris McCann, "Infantry Soldiers Pay Respects to Fallen Comrades," *Fort Drum Blizzard Online*, 7 Jun 2007.

⁴⁴ Findings of Fact, p. 3.

gathered the rest of his platoon and two Humvees and headed out the gate toward the sound of the fighting. As they left the base, the men saw the glow of flames among the trees in the distance, a sure sign of the grim scene that would await them.

The racing Humvee had covered less than two hundred meters along Route Malibu when the driver spotted two directional explosive charges in the middle of the road, both with wires leading away toward the roadside. They had been placed by an enemy explosives team as the raid was under way to slow the expected reaction force. It worked. Spring-Glace ordered his men to dismount and continue on foot, navigating in the darkness to the flames in the distance.

"It seemed like a very long time, but in retrospect it could not have taken more than twenty minutes for us to move there," said Spring-Glace. They approached the southern vehicle, calling out the names of their comrades but hearing no reply. In the flickering light of the fires still consuming the shot-up Humvees, the soldiers saw the dead bodies lying on the ground.⁴⁵

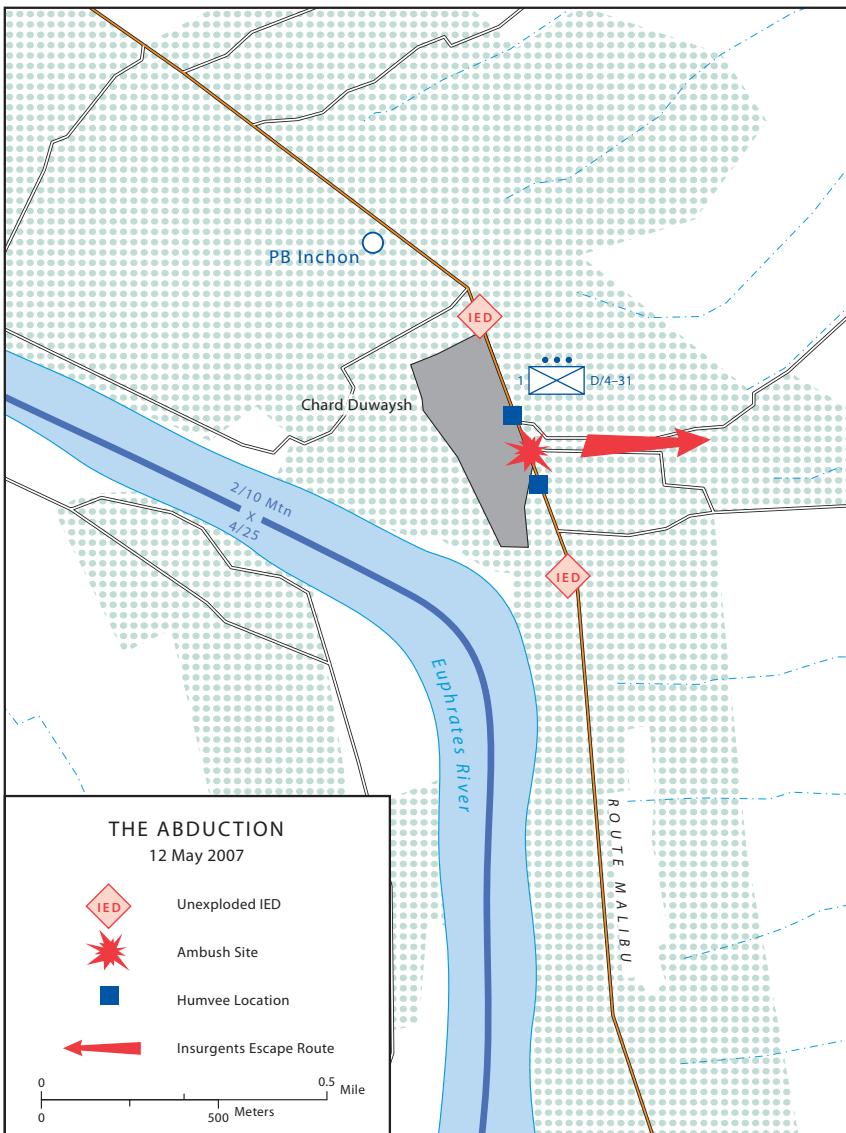
To the south, soldiers from a second reaction team, the 3d Platoon, Company A, were also approaching. They too ran into an IED in the road and were forced to leave their vehicles and proceed on foot. In the gathering light of dawn, the team joined Spring-Glace's men and searched nearby houses for insurgents and survivors, taking four prisoners for questioning. An Iraqi civilian told Sfc. Phitsidane Panpradith, who was leading the group, that the three missing Americans were along the banks of a major irrigation ditch paralleling the Euphrates, dubbed Caveman Canal by the Americans, but it was well east of the battle site.

The platoon immediately departed on what would be a hot and grueling cross-country hike through farm fields and palm groves, avoiding the roads that were inevitably laced with IEDs. The soldiers found nothing, and they returned to the patrol base, many with the distinct feeling that the civilians had purposely pointed them in the wrong direction. They were devastated at their inability to locate their comrades or any clues, but Sergeant Panpradith tried to remain optimistic. "The searching helps," he said. "Knowing that we're doing something to help find our guys. It compensates for the feeling of helplessness we felt when we got to the site that morning."⁴⁶

One thing was certain. The people living in the territory surrounding Patrol Base Inchon and near the kidnapping site were unfriendly. This was home to the Qarghuli tribe, a tight-knit band of Sunni Muslims that despised the Shi'ite government and was openly hostile to the U.S. occupation of Iraq. The sheikhs often cooperated with al-Qaeda and were regularly involved in assaults on U.S. and Iraqi forces. At the very least, such an attack could not have occurred without the Qarghulis knowing about it.

⁴⁵ Sworn Statement of 1st Lt Morgan J. Spring-Glace, CO, 1st Plt, Co D, 4th Bn, 31st Inf Rgt, 2d BCT, 10th Mtn Div, 13 May 2007.

⁴⁶ Damien Cave, "Hunt for 3 GIs in Iraq Slowed by False Trails," *New York Times*, 18 May 2007.



Map 7

Al-Qaeda immediately claimed responsibility for the incident and in a statement released the following day stated the kidnapping was in retaliation for the rape of a fourteen-year-old girl named Abeer Qassim al-Janabi and the murder of her parents by U.S. soldiers in the same region the previous year. Three soldiers pleaded guilty in the shocking case. "You should remember what you have done to our sister Abeer in the same area," said



the message and warned that searching for the missing soldiers “will lead to nothing but exhaustion and headaches. Your soldiers are in our hands.”⁴⁷

The hunt proceeded at a frenzied pace. By 18 May, the 3d Division had received 212 intelligence reports from sources that had some knowledge of the kidnapping—more than two dozen of which came from signals intercepts. While the reports contained much valuable information, they shed little light on where the victims were being held. According to a wrap-up intelligence report, more than a half-dozen possible locations existed, ranging from west of the Euphrates in a notorious terrorist hangout, known as Owsat, in Al Anbar Province about twenty-six kilometers southwest of Baghdad, to near Radwaniyah on the southwestern outskirts of the capital. They might also be southwest of Al Iskandariyah, a dozen kilometers from the original attack site, or perhaps in Sayyafiyah—another region of Sunni extremism—on the west bank of the Tigris southeast of the capital. This was an immense area, one that roughly mirrored MND-C’s main battlefield.⁴⁸

One week after the strike, many division analysts believed that the soldiers “are alive and being transferred from one location to another.” The kidnappers would probably hide during the day to avoid overhead surveillance,

⁴⁷ Quote from “Al-Qaeda to U.S.: Stop searching for missing soldiers,” Associated Press, 14 May 2007.

⁴⁸ MNC-I Commander’s Huddle, 18 May 2007, slide 4, Intel DUSTWUN [duty station—whereabouts unknown] Update.

but they would likely be forced to shift their prisoners from time to time when “operational security necessitates.” Analysts warned that when the captives were moved, the terrorists would probably “dress them in women’s clothes or dishdashas” to disguise their identities.⁴⁹

This scenario clashed with Colonel Kershaw’s thinking on the matter. During a trip to the site shortly after the kidnapping, the 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, commander had come away pessimistic. All the evidence he observed, including a “large blood trail,” meant to him that “all three soldiers that were taken away were severely wounded.” While Kershaw held out little hope that his men were alive, he fully intended to pursue their rescue. “After the attack, we hit every possible al-Qaeda target with everything we had. . . . Most of them were dry holes, but that undoubtedly put pressure on terrorists in the area.”⁵⁰

The situation was very frustrating. Feeling the strain, Lt. Col. Michael Infant, the 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, commander, told a reporter that “I’m gonna continue to search until they kill me or they send me home. . . . The bad guys know I’m coming. And they’re gonna put up a fight. And that’s OK.” His anger was palpable.⁵¹

General Lynch felt many of the same emotions, but, like the rest of his staff, he intended to soldier on. During a meeting at the corps headquarters, he told General Odierno that the hunt “is *the* division main effort.” It would remain the highest priority throughout the deployment. For the next several weeks, the search became a massive endeavor, involving at least four thousand U.S. and two thousand Iraqi soldiers. The Coalition offered a \$200,000 reward for revealing the whereabouts of the missing men and blanketed the location with leaflets urging local citizens to come forward with information.⁵²

Operation COMMANDO RAZOR was the name given the quest for the missing soldiers—who were now listed as DUSTWUN, for “duty station—whereabouts unknown.” During the first three days after the strike, the 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, launched twelve air assault missions, most about fifteen square kilometers around the kidnapping site. Soldiers from the Iraqi 4th Brigade, 6th Division, initiated at least ten operations of their own. More than five hundred local civilians were detained. Anyone suspected of concealing information was brought in for questioning, and, although most were quickly released, the dragnet produced several promising leads.⁵³

⁴⁹ DUSTWUN Assessment, 19 May 2007.

⁵⁰ Interv, Col Michael D. Visconage, MNC-I Historian, with Col Michael M. Kershaw, CO, 2d BCT, 10th Mtn Div, 7 Sep 2007, pp. 38, 43.

⁵¹ “Unit Pushes on as Search for 2 Missing GIs Continues,” *Stars and Stripes*, 29 Jun 2007.

⁵² MNC-I Commander’s Huddle, 18 May 2007, briefing slide 2.

⁵³ Briefing Slide, MND-C DUSTWUN Ops since 12 May 07, n.d.

The expanding operational tempo also increased the pressure on the insurgents in a way they had not likely anticipated. According to Capt. Aaron S. Bragg, a division intelligence planning officer, the “saturation of coalition force presence overwhelmed” the insurgents, most of whom “went to ground” and remained on the defensive for several months. “Some of them hid until they couldn’t hide anymore,” said Bragg. The search “led to a complete one-eighty in the battle space” and, although the missing men were not found, the insurgents were unable to travel without the danger of capture or death.⁵⁴

On 13 and 14 May, the frenzy of operations captured almost a half-dozen of the kidnappers and planners, including a handful of Qarghuli clan members. They revealed the identities of all the participants as well as how the plan had unfolded. Unfortunately, the two days that had elapsed since the kidnappings hampered rescue efforts. Other insurgents were moving the three soldiers—be they dead or alive—and now the Americans could be almost anywhere.⁵⁵

While the location of the missing soldiers was still a mystery, the picture of who had done the job—as well as how it had been accomplished—was coming into focus. Most sources agreed that it was the brainchild of Mohammed Khalil Ibrahim al-Qarghuli, a local Sunni tribal leader. Analysts called him MKI for short, and he had figured prominently in intelligence dating back before the 3d Division arrived. Two years earlier, in June 2006, MKI was probably involved with the terrorist gang that kidnapped, tortured, and murdered two 2d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, soldiers in roughly the same area, making him one of the most-wanted insurgents in MND-C.

Mohammed Khalil Ibrahim was close to al-Qaeda, but he was also very much an independent operator. Surrounded by a large security element made up of heavily armed men, many of whom reportedly wore explosive suicide belts and most of whom were clan members he had known from childhood, MKI rebuffed al-Qaeda offers to include foreign fighters in his cells because he correctly regarded them as a potential threat. According to one account, MKI “wasn’t well-liked by AQI leaders,” and the hit was partly meant to prove that he could undertake his own spectacular operations without support from al-Qaeda.⁵⁶

MKI apparently began to assemble the assault team on 9 May, assigning tasks and issuing arms and equipment to the other insurgents, including six Iraqi Army uniforms. The enemy group consisted of seventeen men in six teams, each with specific tasks. There were two three-man strike teams,

⁵⁴ Interv, Lt Col Richard L. Wheeler, 52d Military History Detachment (MHD), with Capt Aaron S. Bragg, Intel Planner, 3d BCT, 101st Abn Div, 1 Jan 2008, p. 5.

⁵⁵ DUSTWUN Intelligence Presentation, Personality lines of operation, 17 May 2007.

⁵⁶ Interv, Wheeler with Bragg, 1 Jan 2008, p. 3.

a three-man and a two-man IED placement team, a two-man sniper team, and a four-man command-and-control team.⁵⁷

The attack was originally scheduled for the morning of 10 May but was postponed because the insurgents heard Humvees running up and down the road during the night and assumed the Americans were at heightened readiness. Company A, 2d Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment, did run patrols through the area, detaining three men from Qarghuli Village, but the mission was routine.

Instead, the insurgents made a videotape of the prebattle briefing. In it, seven masked men holding weapons are briefed by an eighth—probably MKI—on how the mission was to unfold. The video was later recovered by U.S. forces, and intelligence analysts reasoned that it was purely for propaganda purposes. Perhaps not wanting to give the insurgents any free publicity, the division did not release the video, but within weeks it was on the Internet, probably put there by the insurgents themselves. The division suddenly found itself unable to exploit the find, and, when Lynch was questioned by journalists about the failure, he admitted that it was a “missed opportunity.”⁵⁸

In fact, the story was fading from the headlines when on 23 May the body of Private Anzack, one of the missing soldiers, was discovered by Iraqi police. The corpse was floating in the Euphrates near the Al Musayyib Bridge west of Al Iskandariyah, eleven kilometers south of the kidnapping site. Investigators by now suspected that at least one of the captured soldiers was dead or gravely wounded following the strike and the grim discovery confirmed that. An investigation by forensics experts that same day indicated that Anzack’s body had been in the water for at least two days and perhaps as many as eleven. Anzack had suffered serious wounds to the head and torso during the assault, and there was very little hair on the corpse’s head and face (Anzack kept his head shaved), leading analysts to conclude that he “was more than likely dead within 24 hours of the initial attack.”⁵⁹

All this bad news had an immediate effect on the soldiers of the 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division. Although they were more than willing to take on additional operations in the hellish heat, the lack of results was infuriating. During a telephone conference with General Lynch, Colonel Kershaw admitted that “morale is down here because we have lost those soldiers.”⁶⁰

⁵⁷ TF [Task Force] Marne Comprehensive DUSTWUN Assessment, 12 Jun 07, pp. 6–7, and fig. 8, Enemy Disposition During Attack, p. 20.

⁵⁸ Despite the masks and secrecy, all eight men, plus the cameraman, were identified. *Ibid.*, p. 10. Quoted words from CG Exec Summary, 10 Jun 2007, sub: MG Lynch’s Engagement with the Baghdad bureau chiefs, p. 3.

⁵⁹ MND-C (TF Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 26 May–2 Jun 2007, p. 2. Quote from Criminal Investigation Division (CID), Agent’s Investigation Report, Pvt 1st Class Joseph J. Anzack, 23 May 2007.

⁶⁰ BUB, 3d Inf Div, 23 May 2007, author’s notes.

Lynch understood completely—as did the entire chain of command—and he declared that his support knew no bounds. At a meeting with his key officers on 29 May, Lynch stated that 3d Division resources would be used for the search even if doing so hampered the continued settling in of his newest brigades arriving in the area. “We’ll never stop looking for our missing soldiers so those resources won’t change,” he said, and no one disagreed.⁶¹

Memorial Day fell only two weeks after the strike, and it offered the soldiers of the 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, an opportunity to formalize their grief. The brigade had built a shrine at Forward Operating Base Yusufiyah, a black podium in front of a plywood wall with battle flags and unit insignia flanked by eight pairs of combat boots, each pair holding an upright M16—barrel pointed to the ground—with a helmet atop the rifle butt for each of the soldiers killed or captured. Lieutenant Spring-Glace gave the eulogy, praising the men who had followed him into combat. “I never thought I’d talk about someone and say ‘he fought and died with honor,’” said the platoon leader. Other soldiers also paid their respects, kneeling before the shrine with heads bowed in sorrow and then rising to share with the gathered group fond recollections of their fallen comrades. The chaplain for the 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, Capt. Jeffrey Brian, also gave a eulogy. “I have stood with the soldiers of Company D’s 1st Platoon,” he said, “and am always in awe of their steadfastness.” The insurgents may have prevailed this time, he concluded, but “they will not defeat our will to fight, and they certainly will not defeat us in spirit.”⁶²

The search did not diminish. By early June, MND-C had conducted 33 air assaults and 66 company-level joint operations, all under the watchful eye of unmanned aerial vehicles that flew 350 hours of observation missions. Ten tracking dog teams also scoured the area looking for signs, and engineers drained the Caveman Canal in response to new intelligence. While they found no sign of the missing men, they did recover most of the weapons and equipment used by the terrorist cell during the attack.⁶³

On 4 June the insurgents posted a videotape on several militant Web sites claiming that all three men were dead. “They became dead bodies,” said a voice in Arabic on the video, implying that they were captured but later died, either from wounds or execution. The narrator continued, “Just as you refuse to give us the bodies of our dead, we will not give you the bodies of your dead . . . their abode will be burial in the ground.” Although no proof was offered, the footage did include the identity cards of Jimenez and Fouty as well as other personal effects and money, which the insurgents called “the

⁶¹ Cdrs Meeting, 29 May 2007, author’s notes.

⁶² Spec Chris McCann, “Infantry Soldiers Pay Respects to Fallen Comrades,” *Fort Drum Blizzard Online*, 7 Jun 2007.

⁶³ DUSTWUN Operations, wrap-up slide (c. late Jun 2007); Task Force Marne Comprehensive MISCAP [missing and captured] Assessment Executive Summary, 12 May 2008.

spoils of war." A U.S. military spokesman dismissed the video and instead remained hopeful that the men "will be found alive and in good health."⁶⁴

Another message, this one an audiotape received by coalition forces around the same time, claimed that three U.S. soldiers were being "detained." The speaker on the tape declared that the United States was to "release all Sunni prisoners that were detained during this failed campaign" as well as Sheikh Umar Abd-al-Rahman, the blind cleric held in a U.S. prison after being convicted in 1995 of involvement in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing and of plotting other terrorist acts in New York City. Only if this was done within forty-eight hours, asserted the tape, would the kidnapped soldiers be freed. In the meantime, they were "in good health" and being "treated according to the prisoners' code of your true Islamic faith and our forgiving doctrine." Otherwise, the terrorists would "execute God's sentence upon them." The audiotape was not treated seriously.⁶⁵

Another twist came on 10 June when a patrol from the 2d Battalion, 505th Infantry Regiment, part of the 82d Airborne Division, ran into insurgents south of Samarra, almost a hundred kilometers northwest of Baghdad. A platoon from Company A was participating in Operation SHAKA ZULU II in Salah ad Din Province when it ran into an ambush. Two U.S. soldiers were wounded, but the insurgents were easily driven off. During a search of the area, the patrol found several computers, hard drives, discs, and video cameras, as well as a pile of documents. Among the papers were the military identification cards of Jimenez and Fouty as well as credit cards and other personal effects. Follow-on air assaults were planned for later that night, but nothing else was turned up.⁶⁶

Although the find focused fresh attention on the missing men, it led nowhere. That the insurgents could have transported live prisoners so far north without being discovered seemed improbable. More likely, according to speculation, the insurgents wanted their pursuers to think that the missing soldiers were north of Baghdad. Still, locating the personal effects was a welcome event—even if it did not bring the search any closer to success.

Within a month of the attack, few analysts believed that Fouty and Jimenez were alive. "Based on available intelligence," concluded one report, the two men "probably are dead." This conclusion stemmed from statements by insurgents and interrogations of those involved in the kidnapping as well as the way the terrorists "previously treated U.S. military and civilian cap-

⁶⁴ Info Paper, The Lack of DUSTWUN Propaganda, 20 May 2007; Info Paper, U.S. Special Operations Command, SCSO-J39-SO, 12 Jun 2007, sub: Video Response to the "Captured 3 Soldiers." First and second quotes from Task Force Marne's Baseline MISCAP Assessment: Supporting Documentation, 5 Apr 2008. Third and fourth quotes from "Al-Qaeda Group Says Missing GIs Are Dead," CBS News, 4 Jun 2007.

⁶⁵ It is not clear exactly when the tape was made or when it was acquired by U.S. forces. Audiotape Translation, c. 18 Jun 2007.

⁶⁶ Storyboard, AIF [anti-Iraqi forces] Engagement, AO Trojans, 10 Jun 2007.

tives." The evidence also indicated that the bodies were probably buried in the featureless desert on the west side of the Euphrates.⁶⁷

On 27 June, the status of the two soldiers was changed from DUSTWUN to MISCAP, meaning missing and captured. The old designation of "missing in action" had fallen into official disuse after the Vietnam War when "MIA" became a rallying cry for critics who accused the government of ignoring those still unaccounted for in Southeast Asia. This brought to four the number of U.S. soldiers missing in Iraq, and, although it was heartbreaking for the families and loved ones, the numbers paled when compared to past wars. Almost 75,000 military personnel remained missing from World War II, and more than 4,000 in Korea. In Vietnam, Defense Department figures identified some 2,600 military personnel as either missing in action or prisoner of war.

By summer's end the trail was fading, as was hope of finding the missing men. That did not mean the quest would cease. The division always kept resources available for this effort, and every daily battle update brief aired the latest intelligence on the rescue. The 10th Mountain Division also did not waver in its commitment. Colonel Kershaw said that "until the soldiers are found one way or another, our guys are not going to stop looking." But the inconclusive search was taking a toll. As the brigade neared the end of its deployment in the fall of 2007, he confided that "it's been very tough, very frustrating." But whenever new information came to light, operations were launched immediately to investigate it.⁶⁸

In July, the 2d Brigade's 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, accompanied by Iraqi forces from the 4th Brigade, 6th Division, carried out Operation POLAR SCHISM, a foray into Oweisat, in Al Anbar Province. Their target was a handful of Sunni extremists known to operate in the area as well as two mosques used by al-Qaeda cells, which were thoroughly inspected by Iraqi troops. Intelligence was increasingly focusing on Oweisat as a probable location of the missing soldiers. POLAR SCHISM turned up six suspects, all of whom were held for questioning.⁶⁹

These kinds of raids went on for months as the division followed up new leads, most of which were dead ends. Then on 10 October, a patrol recovered the weapons carried by the kidnapped soldiers and by those who were killed during the firefight. Anzack's M4 rifle was found along with the M249 squad automatic weapon carried by Specialist Jimenez. An M4 with an attached M203 grenade launcher belonging to Sgt. Anthony Schober,

⁶⁷ Quotes from Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), Iraq: Update on Missing U.S. Soldiers, 7 Jun 2007, p. 1. MISCAP Significant Event Calendar, 3 May 2008.

⁶⁸ First quote from Scott Huddleston, "GI's Mom Is Hoping Arrests Lead to Answers," *San Antonio Express-News*, 28 Dec 2007. Second quote from "Cache holds weapons of soldiers killed, kidnapped in May ambush," Associated Press, 12 Oct 2007.

⁶⁹ 2d BCT, 10th Mtn Div, Media Release, Operation POLAR SCHISM detains six in Oweisat, 8 Jul 2007.

one of the other four soldiers killed on 12 May, was also retrieved. That same month, Navy dive teams scoured the muddy waters of the Euphrates, and Army working dogs revisited territories along the riverbank. They were pursuing new evidence, but the hunt still turned up nothing.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ "Military finds weapons of soldiers killed or kidnapped five months ago," Associated Press, 11 Oct 2007; Gina Chon, "The Waiting," *Wall Street Journal*, 26 Jan 2008.

TAKING THE OFFENSIVE

Chapter 4

Despite the string of setbacks and bad news—not just south of Baghdad but all over Iraq—solid progress also could be reported. According to official records, between 15 January and the end of May 2007 coalition forces engaged in 235 battalion-size operations throughout Iraq (98 of them in Baghdad itself), resulting in 3,184 enemy killed, more than 1,000 wounded, and almost 18,000 detained. These operations also led to the discovery of 29 vehicle bomb factories and more than 2,400 weapons caches, an impressive figure considering that during all of 2006, coalition forces had found only 2,600 such caches. In addition, more than 1,700 “high value targets”—insurgents specifically hunted by coalition forces—were eliminated (291 killed and 1,499 captured). Four months into the surge, General Odierno believed that “very clear progress” was being made, though he also cautioned that “there’s still a great deal of work left to do.”¹

The ability to accomplish all this was directly tied to the increased number of U.S. forces. Extra troops, as Odierno put it, allowed the military to establish a “24-hour, seven-day-a-week presence inside the city of Baghdad, and protecting people where they live, work, go to school, and sleep.” Here was the essence of counterinsurgency. The beefed-up troop numbers meant that soldiers could live and work among the population, operate more closely with Iraqi forces, and build trust with local residents. Such a simple notion paid immediate dividends. “People are thanking us for driving away gangs, criminals and terrorists,” said the corps commander.²

In May, troop strength was divided roughly evenly between Baghdad and the belts around the city, with six brigades of twenty-four battalions in the capital and six brigades of twenty battalions surrounding it. Within a few weeks, the 3d Division’s 2d Brigade—the last of the surge units—would also be in place, adding more combat power to the Baghdad belts. At that point, General Odierno and his staff could begin the large-scale offensives for which the surge had been designed. Military authorities hoped the increased operational tempo would begin to rob the enemy of the initiative

¹ MNC-I Pentagon Press Briefing, Iraqi Theater of Operations—Operational Results Since 15 Jan 2007, 31 May 2007. Quotes from Points from Lieutenant General Odierno Briefing, Baghdad, Iraq, 31 May 2007, p. 1.

² Points from Odierno Briefing, Baghdad, Iraq, 31 May 2007.

by eliminating his ability to move freely between Baghdad and his sanctuaries outside the city.³

Preparing the Battlefield

General Lynch's planners outlined the objectives in the division's overarching campaign plan, MARNE FORTITUDE. Issued on 6 June 2007, it would steer MND-C's outlook for the next six months, taking as its guiding principle General Odierno's dictum to conduct "combat and stability operations in coordination with [Iraqi security forces] to secure the population, defeat terrorists and irreconcilable extremists, neutralize insurgent and militia groups," and begin the transition to Iraqi self-sufficiency—a result that planners acknowledged "will take years to accomplish and depends on many factors outside MND-C's direct control." Even so, MARNE FORTITUDE sought "to effect immediate improvement in the perception of the security situation in Baghdad and create operational momentum" in the surrounding areas. Lynch intended to "focus efforts to achieve a dramatically improved level of security" by September and to set the conditions for long-term stability by December.⁴

Task Force Marne had made substantial progress on its most pressing objective, which was to control the roads that ran from the south into Baghdad. This was a relatively easy task. As the new troops established bases in the space between the Tigris and Euphrates, they immediately raised the operational tempo, launching patrols in all directions. At the same time, the newly arrived Combat Aviation Brigade had its helicopters in the air, responding to calls from units on the ground as well as developing its own target opportunities.

The burgeoning U.S. force had an immediate impact. The 3d Brigade, up to speed after a month of operations, was a case in point. "We couldn't help but have an effect," observed Colonel Grigsby. "There was very little coalition presence on the roads before we got here, but now the bad guys don't have the same freedom of movement. Putting us here was a no brainer."⁵

Most of the enemy action was either IED strikes or desultory small-arms attacks from bands of insurgents. Several such attacks occurred in the month of May. On the eighth, an engineer platoon from the 3d Brigade's Special Troops Battalion was clearing a section of Route Detroit when roadside bombs exploded to the front and rear of the four-vehicle platoon, killing two soldiers and wounding another. Units from the 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, responded to the emergency call and set up a

³ MNC-I Pentagon Press Briefing, Coalition Combat Forces in Baghdad and Support Zones, 31 May 2007.

⁴ MND-C OPORD 07-20 (MARNE FORTITUDE), 6 Jun 2007, pp. 5, 7-8.

⁵ Interv, author with Col Wayne W. Grigsby, CO, 3d BCT, 3d Inf Div, 12 Jul 2007, p. 4.



To prepare for Task Force Marne's first offensives, all units heightened road security as a countermeasure against IEDs.

perimeter around the stricken convoy as helicopter gunships prowled above and medevacs swept in to carry away the casualties.⁶

A pair of Air Force A-10 Thunderbolt attack aircraft added their weight as well. The roadside bombs had caused a lot of damage, and investigators soon found that they were EFPs. Both had been detonated by remote control as the convoy entered the kill zone. A report noted that the attack—the second in a week—indicated that a “very aggressive cell [was] emplacing EFPs along major thoroughfares” and that these attacks “may indicate Iranian assistance.”⁷

As the Americans established new bases in dangerous territory, insurgents would inevitably strike them as well. Most of these attacks were from rockets or mortars, as the enemy dared not assault the bases directly. For example, on the morning of 9 May, insurgents fired two mortar rounds into Combat Outpost Cahill north of Salman Pak. One landed inside the base, the other exploded outside the southern perimeter. Companies A and B, 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, occupied the base, but no soldiers were injured and nothing was damaged. At least one local civilian was wounded

⁶ Storyboard, Special Troops Bn, 3d BCT, 3d Inf Div, Sigact 1, 2 US KIA [killed in action], 1 US WIA [wounded in action], Zone 68, 8 May 2007.

⁷ Ibid.

by the round that landed outside the base. Analysts predicted that “we can expect these attacks to become more accurate and frequent.”⁸

Another assault against Cahill came on 20 May. This time several insurgents moved in close to the base and fired small arms into the perimeter. Upon seeing the enemy, Sgt. Robert L. Lady raced to one of the nearby M1A1 tanks and climbed in. He planned to man the tank’s .50-caliber machine gun, but, upon determining the gun did not work, he jumped out of the tank and ran toward another, pulling out his pistol and firing madly at the enemy to cover his movement. Once in the hatch of the new tank, he traversed the machine gun and sprayed the insurgents with bullets.⁹

In the tactical operations center, observing the action via a video camera mounted in the base’s watchtower, 1st Lt. Justin S. Patton saw Lady dashing from tank to tank “firing his 9mm pistol toward the southwestern corner” of the base. Tracer fire streamed back at him. Once Lady was safely in the working tank, other soldiers joined the defense, sliding into hatches and taking up station inside. None of them were members of the tank’s actual crew. “After this random crew was inside the tank, he maneuvered [it] like an experienced tank commander,” driving it to the outer perimeter where it was in position to take on the insurgents. The insurgents had no wish to engage a tank, and they faded away. For his prompt action that day, Sergeant Lady was awarded the Bronze Star Medal for valor.¹⁰

Most insurgent attacks, however, were against “soft” targets, especially civilians. Bridges were popular objectives because downing them provided dramatic evidence of the government’s vulnerability. On 11 May, a car loaded with explosives blew up on the old Jisr Diyala Bridge, a span across the Diyala River on the southeast edge of Baghdad. It had been targeted before, and this explosion tore another gaping hole in the pavement but did not collapse the bridge. Soldiers from Company D, 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, arrived at the scene, but the Iraqis had responsibility for the area. At least two policemen were killed in the blast. The consensus was that the attack was aimed at the Mahdi Army militia, which routinely used the road and bridge to cross into Baghdad, and the episode was a stark reminder of the depth of sectarian hatred in the region. Jisr Diyala, on the south bank of the river, was sometimes referred to as a “mini Sadr City” because, like its namesake in northeastern Baghdad, Jisr Diyala was a slum of brick buildings and open sewers inhabited by poor and dissatisfied Shi’ites. It too was a hotbed of Islamic extremism.¹¹

⁸ Storyboard, Sigact 1, Indirect Fire, COP [Combat Outpost] Cahill Zone 200, 1st Bn, 15th Inf Rgt, 3d BCT, 3d Inf Div, 9 May 2007.

⁹ Narrative to Accompany the Award of the Bronze Star Medal with Valor to Sgt Robert L. Lady, n.d.

¹⁰ Sworn Statement of 1st Lt Justin S. Patton, 29 May 2007, in Bronze Star Medal with Valor to Sgt Robert L. Lady, n.d.

¹¹ Storyboard, Sigact 4, VBIED [vehicle-borne improvised explosive device] on Old Jisr Diyala Bridge, 11 May 2007.

As coalition commanders said over and over, intelligence was king in counterinsurgency. If it was good, the enemy was made vulnerable; if not, he usually had the advantage. By May, Task Force Marne was having some success with specifically targeted attacks against known insurgents or hidden weapons caches. On 18 May, the 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, received intelligence that yielded the location of a cache thought to contain heavy weapons and explosives. It was southeast of Salman Pak, at the southernmost extreme of the battalion's operating territory, and sending a patrol there without alerting the enemy would be difficult. Instead, division headquarters ordered an air strike, and that evening a single U.S. Air Force B-1B Lancer bomber dropped two GBU-31 precision-guided bombs on the site, destroying a cluster of buildings and the cache. A helicopter gunship swooped in and eliminated "two known extremist vehicles" in a blaze of cannon fire.¹²

Not all missions went so well. On 27 May, artillery fired against suspected enemy targets west of Baghdad in the 3d Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment's area of operations and saw one round "go long," missing its target and demolishing part of a house. A woman and two children were killed by the errant explosion. The cavalry's Team Enabler rushed to the site, using its civil affairs section to limit the damage already done. The local sheikh understood it was an accident, but consoling the stricken family was no easy task. Colonel Kolasheski, the cavalry commander, authorized an immediate "condolence payment," but the deaths were a serious setback in the attempt to win hearts and minds. As the after action assessment warned, "This incident will provide a basis for an anti-Coalition [information operations] campaign conducted by extremists. . . . Expect local nationals to be less receptive to [coalition forces] presence as a result of this incident."¹³

Much of May was spent reacting to the enemy. Attacks against the 3d Brigade averaged about thirty per week, most of them IEDs. However, many of these were discovered and disarmed before they could explode. Indirect-fire attacks against bases "maintained a fairly consistent rate" of about four per week. In all, the 3d Brigade lost five soldiers killed during May.¹⁴

One of those incidents involved the brigade commander himself. On the morning of 8 May, Colonel Grigsby and part of his staff were driving northwest of Route Detroit to Jisr Diyala to meet an important local sheikh when the lead Humvee triggered an Iranian-made EFP bomb. The huge blast tore through the vehicle, killing two soldiers and wounding a third. Grigsby and his personal security detachment were in the last Humvee. "I was looking straight ahead when I saw a large explosion of grey and

¹² Storyboard, Event 24, 1 Weapons Cache Destroyed, Zone 204, 3d BCT, 3d Inf Div, 18 May 2007.

¹³ Storyboard, MND-C Sigact 1, 2 Killed, 1 Wounded, Zone 205, 3d BCT, 3d Inf Div, 27 May 2007.

¹⁴ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 20–26 May 2007, p. 6.

white smoke and dirt," said Spec. Roman Andrada, a member of Colonel Grigsby's security detail. They all piled out of the vehicle and established a hasty perimeter, keeping a wary eye on the handful of dirt and brick houses along the right side of the road, not far from where the bomb was planted.¹⁵

The patrol leader, Capt. Steven M. Hemmann, was in the third vehicle, which pulled out of line and edged toward the torn-and-smoking lead Humvee. "After the big boom and dust dirt cloud [we] slowed down," said Hemmann. "I saw a body in the road and my vehicle swerved right, at which point I could see the damaged HMMWV with its doors open, and I could see casualties inside." He radioed for a medevac helicopter and a quick reaction force from the 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, at Combat Outpost Cleary, several kilometers to the southeast.¹⁶

At the same time, Hemmann saw S. Sgt. Michael Henderson, the leader of Grigsby's personal security detachment, rushing forward from the rear of the convoy. He "ran across the enemy kill zone, without cover," said Hemmann. Henderson and a medic dashed to the smoking Humvee and found Spec. Saul Martinez tangled in the web harness in what was left of the turret, where he had been manning the machine gun. Henderson tore away the mangled metal and cut through the webbing to free the man, then rushed him to a medevac helicopter, which was just settling onto the highway. For his quick actions that day, Sergeant Henderson was awarded the Bronze Star Medal for valor.¹⁷

Although such attacks were not uncommon, they did not force the Americans onto the defensive. Almost every day, 3d Brigade units were in the field, aggressively searching for the enemy and robbing him of the ability to move at will. These sorts of offensive actions exposed soldiers to increased attacks, but they were necessary in order to gain the initiative. For example, on 14 May the 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, launched Operation BEACH YELLOW, a sweep through the small village of Duraiya, not far from Salman Pak. Intelligence indicated that al-Qaeda cells frequently hid there.

This was to be primarily an Iraqi National Police operation with the Americans in support. That morning, the Iraqis and elements of the U.S. battalion met at the Panorama Building, a dilapidated multifloored structure in Salman Pak, and proceeded to Duraiya. They quickly ran into trouble. A squad led by S. Sgt. Shon P. Holtz had just finished clearing a building and was moving into an orchard when several insurgents opened fire, some from the village and some from across the Tigris. Within moments,

¹⁵ Sworn Statement of Spec Roman Andrada, 8 May 2007, in Bronze Star Medal with Valor for S Sgt Michael Henderson, n.d.

¹⁶ Sworn Statement of Capt Steven M. Hemmann, 8 May 2007, in Bronze Star Medal with Valor for Henderson.

¹⁷ Quote from Ibid. See also Lt Col Timothy E. Sowers, Maj Joseph F. Pridgen, and Spec Ben Hutto, *The Care Team Concept* (c. Apr 2008), pp. 1-3.



Colonel Grigsby meets with an Iraqi National Police general to make arrangements for joint operations north of Salman Pak.

the firing increased to a “heavy volume,” and Holtz ran through the barrage to reach the road to coordinate with the other units.¹⁸

From a position atop one of the buildings, Capt. William J. Clark, the Company A commander, saw the attack unfold. “The fire increased significantly for a few moments,” he wrote, “with the grass and trees around me and the 3d Platoon soldiers being shredded and bullets were ricocheting off of the ground in all directions.” But the insurgents were not willing to attack such a large force, and several minutes later the firing ended. However, two Americans—Sgt. Christopher N. Gonzalez and Sgt. Allen J. Dunckley—were dead and four more were wounded.¹⁹

Colonel Grigsby stepped up the tempo the following week, launching several small-unit operations into hot spots along the Tigris. They seemed to have some effect; between 18 and 25 May, enemy attacks on U.S. and Iraqi security forces decreased from thirty-seven the previous week to thirty-one, and American troops experienced only two indirect-fire incidents. Unfortunately, the number of IED explosions remained unchanged at seventeen, with only eight uncovered before they could do any damage. The brigade also increased its security patrols along the roads bordering the

¹⁸ Narrative to Accompany the Award of the Bronze Star Medal with Valor to S Sgt Shon P. Holtz, n.d.

¹⁹ Quote from Sworn Statement of Capt William J. Clark, 9 Jun 2007, in Bronze Star Medal with Valor for Holtz. 3d BCT, 3d Inf Div, Media Release, 1-15 Infantry [1st Bn, 15th Inf Rgt] conducts Operation BEACH YELLOW, 18 May 2007.

Tigris, helping the Iraqi police open five new blocking positions between Combat Outpost Cashe and Salman Pak by 15 June.²⁰

Western Operations

To the west, in the Euphrates valley, the seasoned veterans of the 2d Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, and the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, faced the same environment. For more than six months, both units had been providing security along the roads in an attempt to stanch the flow of accelerants into Baghdad.

During May and June, Colonel Kershaw and his 2d Brigade focused most of their attention on finding their missing soldiers. Although this increased tempo also kept pressure on the enemy throughout the Euphrates valley, the shifting operations created new holes in the troop coverage, which both al-Qaeda and Shi'ite militias quickly exploited. Before the kidnappings, the 2d Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment, "had maintained a constant presence" in the southwestern part of the area of operations along the border with the 4th Brigade, 25th Division, resulting in an overall reduction of insurgent attacks. After the 12 May kidnappings, however, much of that force was withdrawn and moved to around Qarghuli, and this allowed al-Qaeda to creep back north toward Al Iskandariyah and beyond. According to a biweekly report sent to the division staff, the change left the crucial land between Karbala and Al Hillah "with minimal Coalition Force presence for approximately two weeks" in mid-May. This small window was more than enough to permit the insurgents breathing room. "Upon returning to the area," continued the report, "the battalion immediately began meeting resistance" in the form of increased small-arms fire and IEDs. Two U.S. soldiers died in the region during the last two weeks in May. That provided the best reason for a persistent presence over as wide an expanse as possible. Sound counterinsurgency demanded no less.²¹

The drumbeat of roadside bombs and suicide attacks continued all over the 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division's area of operations. On 2 May, a minibus exploded in Al Mahmudiyah near the Shi'ite al-Wasi Binobi Mosque, killing the bus' eight female passengers and wounding four others. Local police and American explosives ordnance disposal technicians were not sure what happened. They found explosives under one seat, but the first blast originated from a suicide vest worn by one of the female passengers. Soldiers from the 2d Battalion, 15th Field Artillery Regiment, located at nearby Forward Operating Base Mahmudiyah, heard the explosion and rushed to the scene. They called a medevac helicopter while the police and

²⁰ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessments, 20–26 May 2007, p. 3, and 9–15 Jun 2007, p. 10.

²¹ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 26 May–2 Jun 2007, p. 2.



A soldier from the 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, searches for a weapons cache south of Al Yusufiyah.

an Iraqi Army detachment examined the evidence. The Iraqi investigators concluded that the bombers probably planned to blow up the mosque, but some of the explosives went off prematurely. The terrorists were using women because they were less likely to be searched by police. The incident presaged a spate of female suicide bombings that would plague Baghdad later in the summer.²²

Many of the bombs were aimed at U.S. patrols, which had increased as the search for the missing Americans escalated. On 17 May, a patrol from Company A, 2d Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment, was searching the east bank of the Euphrates near Qarghuli Village—not far from the place where three soldiers were captured five days earlier—when an IED exploded, killing one soldier and wounding another.²³

Two days later, another soldier died in a similar attack, this time south of Al Mahmudiyah in the most southern end of the brigade's area of operations. A squad from 2d Platoon, Battery A, 2d Battalion, 15th Field Artillery Regiment, was walking through a field just north of an east-west road named Temple, when a command-detonated bomb exploded, killing one soldier and wounding another. They were accompanying some local civilians who claimed to have information on the missing soldiers, and as

²² Storyboard, Suicide Vest, ASR [Alternate Supply Route] Jackson, Al Mahmudiyah, Zone 314A, 2d BCT, 10th Mtn Div, 2 May 2007.

²³ Storyboard, IED Strike, Zone 309G, Co A, 2d Bn, 14th Inf Rgt, 2d BCT, 10th Mtn Div, 17 May 2007.

one led the patrol through the kill zone, the other was on his cell phone. After the attack, both were arrested and held for questioning.²⁴

The brigade also suffered its share of roadside bombs. On 25 May, a Humvee patrol conducted by 2d Platoon, Company D, 2d Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment, was heading west on Route Caprice, not far from Patrol Base Warrior Keep, the brigade's westernmost outpost. No one was killed in the blast, but four soldiers were wounded and had to be evacuated. This region along the border with Al Anbar Province continued to be extremely dangerous, and many of the Sunni tribes living there made no secret of their animosity toward the Americans and the Iraqi government.²⁵

But the most spectacular action occurred at Warrior Keep itself. The outpost near the Euphrates was manned by Company B, 2d Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment, and its job was to secure the crossings from insurgents who often slipped in from the west as they circled into the southern belt before proceeding into Baghdad. The base's strategic location was a thorn in the enemy's side. On 10 June, a suicide bomber driving a dump truck loaded with 14,000 pounds of explosives moved innocently down the main road—known as Route Edsel by the Americans—then veered sharply toward the base's southern gate in an attempt to break through and blow himself up inside the perimeter. However, two alert sentries, Spec. Brandon D. Rork and Spec. Charles L. Osgood, saw what was happening from their guard post atop the command post. Rork immediately opened fire with his M240B machine gun, pouring rounds into the truck's cab, while Osgood emptied the magazine of his M4 rifle.²⁶

The truck stopped just short of the gate and the driver stumbled out of the cab and tried to run away. Rork fired again, hitting the failed terrorist in the back of the leg. A reaction team chased the wounded man down, only to find that he was wearing a suicide explosives vest. Surrounded by tense soldiers with rifles trained on him, the terrorist removed his vest and set it aside. An interpreter immediately questioned the man, who admitted that it was filled with explosives, but he said he could not detonate the vest or the explosives in the truck because of the heavy fire from the rooftop. According to one account, "He said that he immediately became confused and disrupted with all the shattering glass in his face . . . and that when he was wounded, he began to panic and forget all the sequences of the attack that he was supposed to carry out."²⁷

²⁴ Storyboard, IED, 1 US KIA, 2 US WIA, Zone 318, 2d BCT, 10th Mtn Div, 19 May 2007.

²⁵ Storyboard, IED Strike, 4 US WIA, Zone 302, 2d BCT, 10th Mtn Div, 25 May 2007.

²⁶ MND-C Media Release, "Golden Dragons" foil truck bomb attack on patrol base, 10 Jun 2007; Storyboard, Sigact 2, STBIED [suicide truck-borne improvised explosive device] Interdiction, Zone 309, 2d BCT, 10th Mtn Div, 10 Jun 2007.

²⁷ Sworn Statement of Charles L. Osgood for Spec Brandon D. Rork, 10 Jun 2007, in Army Commendation Medal with "V" Device Citation Narrative for Spec Brandon D. Rork, n.d.

An investigation of the incident revealed that the explosives were covered by fertilizer bags to disguise them and were laced with old Russian mortar rounds and rockets as well as steel cylinders, each packed with additional explosives. Had the bomb detonated, it would have destroyed almost everything within 200 feet of the blast site. Colonel Valledor, the battalion commander, commended the fast reactions of his soldiers, saying they were “very alert this afternoon,” and credited them with stopping an attack that might have destroyed the entire patrol base. For his actions that day, Specialist Rork was awarded the Army Commendation Medal with the V device for valor.²⁸

General Lynch was proud of his soldiers’ actions that day and wanted to publicize the episode. He believed that the American people were interested in stories of bravery and honor by their soldiers in harm’s way, and he strove to ensure that his public affairs staff wrote press releases and distributed combat footage to journalists. He also made himself available to all interested reporters, offering rides on his daily helicopter flights to bases in his operational area and opening up space for those who wanted to accompany units on operations in the field. Lynch knew that the Warrior Keep story was a good one, and he distributed it far and wide.

But it was pushed aside by news of another incident in the 3d Division’s territory—and this time news was bad. That very same day, 10 June, another suicide truck bomber had better luck, detonating his explosives-laden vehicle on a key bridge crossing over Route Tampa, about six kilometers east of Al Mahmudiyah. The major highway was crucial to bringing supplies north from Kuwait, and the blast brought down the eastern bridge span, covering the northbound highway in rubble and twisted metal and closing much of the region for several days. Three U.S. soldiers guarding the bridge died in the explosion and six more were wounded. The event dominated media coverage for the next few days, drowning out the good news from Warrior Keep.²⁹

To the south of the 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division’s area of operations, the situation was very similar, except that the population was more predominantly Shi’ite. But the Americans were still in the middle of the violence. On 8 May, a car bomb exploded in a market in the town of Al Kufah, the site of an important Shi’ite mosque just northeast of An Najaf. The blast killed sixteen and wounded more than sixty others. Colonel Garrett, the 4th Brigade, 25th Division, commander, offered assistance to the An Najaf Province governor, but Iraqi security forces had the situation under control.³⁰

²⁸ MND-C Rpt, Explosive Damage to Structures and Personnel, n.d., slide 3. Quote from MND-C Media Release, “Golden Dragons” foil truck bomb attack on patrol base, 10 Jun 2007.

²⁹ “Three U.S. soldiers killed in bombing of Iraq bridge,” Reuters, 11 Jun 2007; “3 GIs Killed in Baghdad Bridge Blast,” CBS News, 11 Jun 2007.

³⁰ Storyboard, VBIED, MA 44073 43886, Zone 604, 4th BCT, 25th Inf Div, 8 May 2007.

Sectarian violence continued that month, though the brigade did not notice any significant uptick in incidents. One of the main problems was continued fighting and posturing between the Shi'ite Badr Corps militia and Sunni militias. Garrett reported that during May the Shi'ite militias "continue hunting for former Ba'athists and any remaining Sunnis in the area . . . especially those who have been vocal in their opposition to Iranian influence in [Karbala] province," killing some fifteen people during the middle of the month.³¹

In Babil Province, the Mahdi Army was increasing its use of EFPs, which intelligence deduced might be a sign that Shi'ite militias "have access to a new supply source located in Sadr City." This was the sort of connection that the surge was meant to sever, and the 4th Brigade took it very seriously.³²

In the eastern part of the brigade's area of operations, Sunni insurgents were still fighting hard, which Garrett attributed to their desperate need to "preserve freedom of movement and create space to enable their ability to resupply and prepare defensive measures." Al-Qaeda knew that Task Force Marne was about to increase the pressure, however, and reports indicated that insurgent leaders were pulling fighters from Diyala Province and shifting them to Arab Jabour in anticipation of new fighting there. It was an ominous sign.³³

All of the localized fighting consisted of the usual series of bomb attacks against U.S. forces throughout the brigade's territory. On 11 May, a military police unit attached to the 1st Battalion, 501st Infantry Regiment, ran into an EFP roadside bomb on Route Cleveland northeast of Al Iskandariyah, resulting in one soldier killed and two wounded. It was the second such attack in the same area, and intelligence believed that a Mahdi Army cell working in the vicinity was responsible. The battalion stepped up operations over the next few weeks to capture or kill the bombers or at least drive them away.³⁴

Garrett ran several operations geared toward reducing roadside bombs and insurgent attacks, including Operation IRON FIST, which was a long-running series of patrols, terrain-denial fire missions, and maneuver operations by the 2d Battalion, 377th Field Artillery Regiment, to neutralize enemy rocket and mortar cells targeting Forward Operating Base Kalsu and the surrounding area. Several air assaults were also staged in late May, including Operation MERCURY in the northern part of Area of Operations Anzio in the easternmost portion of the brigade's battle territory, which was aimed at clearing the region of insurgent rocket

³¹ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 20–26 May 2007, p. 6.

³² Ibid., p. 7.

³³ Ibid., p. 8.

³⁴ Storyboard, Sigact 3, IED Strike, Zone 400, 1-501 [1st Bn, 501st Inf Rgt], 4th BCT, 25th Inf Div, 11 May 2007.

teams. Operation LOCKDOWN, also an air strike, attempted to eliminate Sunni insurgents smuggling weapons between Baghdad and the Tigris valley. LOCKDOWN's focus was Patrol Base Red, a 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment, position just south of Baghdad. Since most of the unit was based at Forward Operating Base Falcon, placing a forward contingent at Red cut out more than a half-hour's driving time from the forward operating base, allowing Colonel Odom to better project combat power into Abuwaitha and Arab Jabour.³⁵

The enemy reacted by stepping up his attacks. By early June, insurgents were striking dismounted patrols, and on 3 June they zeroed in on Patrol Base Red itself. The attack occurred when some thirty to forty gunmen hit a patrol as it was returning to base. As the soldiers responded, a truck loaded with explosives raced up to the southeast side of the patrol base and detonated. The blast blew out several concrete T-wall barriers and tore up an entire grove of palm trees. No one was killed, but the attack was a sobering reminder of the need to remain alert.³⁶

Another insurgent strike illustrated how dangerous the area could be. On 21 May, a patrol moving north on Route Buick, one of the network of smaller roads feeding into Baghdad, was struck by a carefully planned IED attack. The assault was directed at a heavily armored mine-clearing vehicle, called a Buffalo, traveling in a convoy with the Humvees. The 45,000-pound Buffalo was designed to thwart roadside bombs, but it was destroyed when at least 500 pounds of explosives detonated in the road. Three soldiers died in the blast and two others were wounded. A post-incident review noted that al-Qaeda "understands that targeting route clearance will degrade our counter-IED efforts and thus slow our operations for several days until the targeted vehicles can be repaired or replaced."³⁷

But none of this would slow the deployment of the 3d Division's 2d Brigade Combat Team, which was in the midst of shifting into the area where the Sunni insurgents and al-Qaeda were doing the most damage. This was the last of the surge units, and once it was in place General Odierno would begin his nationwide offensives.

Last Pieces in Place

The upcoming arrival of Colonel Ferrell's soldiers sparked a minor problem. All brigades have a nickname to go with their number; Grigsby's 3d Brigade was "Sledgehammer"; Kershaw's 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, was "Commando"; and Garrett's 4th Brigade, 25th Division, was "Spartan." Unfortunately, the 2d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, also called

³⁵ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 20–26 May 2007, p. 8.

³⁶ CG Executive Summary, Maj Gen Lynch's Visit to Patrol Base Red, 10 Jun 2007.

³⁷ Storyboard, Sigact 1, IED Strike, Zone 308, 1st Sqdn, 40th Cav Rgt, 21 May 2007.

itself the Spartans. What was to be done? In the end it was easy to resolve. Since Garrett's brigade was there first, it retained the Spartan name, and Ferrell's unit took on a temporary moniker; it became "Guardian."

Throughout May, the 2d Brigade headquarters had been moving onto Forward Operating Base Kalsu, already the home of the 4th Brigade, 25th Division. As major bases went, Kalsu was rather small, yet it had to hold two brigades plus other support troops. The overstretched facilities forced the brigade into temporary structures. The headquarters was a cluster of tents linked by massive tentacles of power cords and by roaring generators to ward off the rising summer heat. Commanders and staff walked over the dusty ground through rows of concertina wire to the shantytown that was the brigade's nerve center. It was an odd combination of tents and technology: canvas and nylon walls, flimsy plywood doors, and floors filled with computers and big-screen televisions for briefing slides and videoconferencing. For the next two months, even as combat operations were at their height, the 2d Brigade would endure the rough conditions as the building crews worked to meet the new demand. While the men lived mostly in tents and the brigade staff wrestled with air conditioners that could not compete with the sweltering desert heat, they all ate well. The dining facility at Kalsu was one of the best in Iraq; it even served meals on china plates with metal silverware.

Like Colonel Grigsby and the 3d Brigade, Ferrell's command had been stripped of part of its combat power. "Three battalions work for somebody



else," he said. The 1st Battalion, 64th Armored Regiment, and the 3d Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment, were in Baghdad with the 1st Cavalry Division, and the 1st Battalion, 9th Field Artillery Regiment, was at Forward Operating Base Anaconda as part of the security force. Ferrell was left with only a single artillery battery. His major combat unit was the 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, and he also had a brigade special troops battalion and an array of support units, in particular the 26th Support Battalion.³⁸

Also like the 3d Brigade, Ferrell's operational territory was far from his command post. Kalsu was some thirty kilometers west of the Tigris, where the 2d Brigade would be doing most of its fighting. It was part of the 4th Brigade, 25th Infantry Division's responsibility, and, like most other regions before the surge, it was too large to be secured by the assigned units. The eastern sector, from roughly the town of Al Mahmudiyah eastward to the Tigris, belonged to the 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment, and was known as Area of Operations Denali, after the high Alaskan mountain near the unit's home base at Fort Richardson. The cavalry unit's commander, Lt. Col. Mark W. Odom, considered the Sunni territories the most dangerous. The son of retired Lt. Gen. William E. Odom, who was a prominent military adviser to Presidents Jimmy Carter and Ronald W. Reagan and an outspoken critic of the war in Iraq from the onset, Mark Odom was a popular interview target for the media. Back in mid-2006, General Odom had written that "the president's policy [in Iraq] is based on illusions, not realities," and in the journal *Foreign Policy* he argued that "America must withdraw now."³⁹

Despite his controversial father, the younger Odom concentrated solely on the task at hand. "We're up against a Sunni-based insurgency that is dissatisfied with the Iraqi government," he told a reporter in January, about 2½ months after he and his soldiers had deployed with the 4th Brigade, 25th Infantry Division. "They think the government does not support them with basic services like electricity, food and fuel vouchers. They view the Iraqi government as essentially supporting Shiite militias." Odom also estimated that "ninety to 100 percent" of the Sunni residents "either actively or passively support the insurgency," and many were well armed and well trained. "Clearly, many of them have been in the military, based on the engagements we have had," he observed.⁴⁰

The problem, as always, was staying power. Colonel Garrett, the commander of the 4th Brigade, the parent unit of the 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment, noted that "we can go in and clear any area but until

³⁸ Interv, author with Col Terry R. Ferrell, CO, 2d BCT, 3d Inf Div, 25 Jul 2007, p. 2.

³⁹ First quote from Obituary, "William E. Odom, 75; Military Adviser to 2 Administrations," *Washington Post*, 1 Jun 2008. Second quote from Lt. Gen. William E Odom, "Cut and Run? You Bet," *Foreign Policy*, no. 153 (March-April 2006).

⁴⁰ Cami McCormick, "U.S. Troops Go it Alone in South Baghdad," CBS News, 18 Jan 2007.

there is an Iraqi security structure to come in behind us, and establish a long term presence, true progress in this area will be difficult to achieve." In the short term at least, this was not going to happen. Colonel Odom pointed out that only an Iraqi battalion was working in the Denali region—and it was just 300 strong. Worse, because most of the Iraqi Army battalions were made up of Shi'ites—less than a third were Sunnis—the insurgents struck them as regularly as they did U.S. units. The police were practically non-existent for the same reason, and the Iraqi government was making little headway in changing the sectarian makeup. "Getting police in here to operate effectively will depend on having at least a 50 percent composition of Sunnis," said Odom, though he did not expect a remedy in the near future.⁴¹

Colonel Ferrell sympathized with the problems facing such a small unit in a vast expanse, but the issues remained unsolved; the enemy had a free rein. Since the men of the 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment, occupied only a handful of bases, "they were very static," said the brigade commander. "They rarely moved very far south of Baghdad, and when they did it was on limited assaults for a few hours. This lack of attention meant that the enemy built up his strength."⁴²

The addition of the 2d Brigade would change this situation, more than doubling the combat power in the region just west of the Tigris. Ferrell's main combat unit, the 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, was a storied outfit that had been part of the 3d Division at the Marne in 1918. It was commanded by Lt. Col. Kenneth P. Adgie, a long-time infantry officer who had also served in Iraq in 2004 as the operations officer in the 3d Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, north of Baghdad. Adgie's battalion was wedged between the river and Odom's cavalry, dividing the original area of responsibility roughly in half along Route Bunny. The new area of operations was named Battle after the unit's regimental nickname—the Battle Boar. The cavalry continued to patrol Denali, though now it was a more manageable size, and it came under Colonel Ferrell's operational control. Both units were based at Forward Operating Base Falcon, which was in a good location immediately north of the brigade territory. All the units would be in residence by 10 June, when Colonel Ferrell officially assumed control of new Area of Operations Guardian.⁴³ (See Map 8.)

At division headquarters, General Lynch was not simply waiting around as his last combat units settled in; he had decided exactly what they were going to do. After two months of intelligence-gathering and a whirlwind of "battlefield rotations," as Lynch described his helicopter-borne forays to visit commanders in the field, he had determined what trouble spots needed to be tamed. One stood out in particular. "We came here knowing that we

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Interv, author with Ferrell, 25 Jul 2007, p. 2.

⁴³ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 9–15 Jun 2007, p. 2.



Colonel Adgie's 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, would spearhead the opening campaign into Arab Jabour.

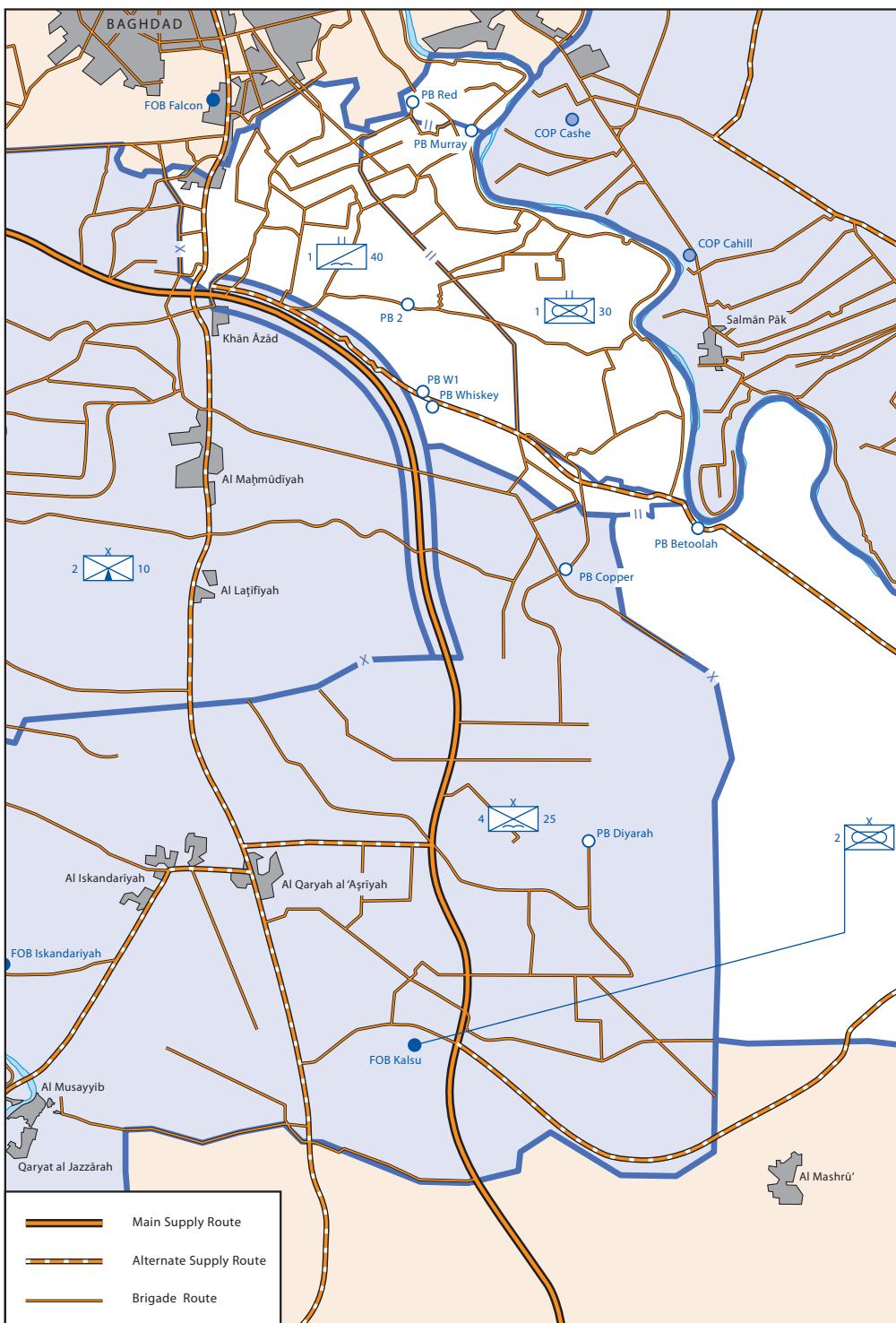
had two big conduits into Baghdad—the rivers,” said Colonel Hovatter, the 3d Division’s chief planning officer. “So we looked there and immediately came up with key choke points. The most prominent was Arab Jabour. That was to be our first problem.”⁴⁴

Arab Jabour was a rural community of about 120,000 spread along a prominent bend in the Tigris about fifteen kilometers south of Baghdad. It was defined by the capital on the north, the river on the east, Route Tampa on the west, and on the south by an imaginary line running roughly through Al Mahmudiyah. Ninety-five percent of the population was Sunni, primarily from the Jabouri and Dulaimi tribes, though in the southernmost portion lived the Janabi tribe, made up of a mixture of Sunnis and Shi’ites.⁴⁵

Under Saddam Hussein, many important Ba’ath Party members had luxurious homes along the banks of the Tigris, and it was a perfect example of the way the dictator created buffer zones of Sunni strongholds in the Baghdad belts to bolster his power and weaken the Shi’ites. Now, with the chaos that had emerged from four years of war, these enemy sanctuaries were breeding grounds for more violence—and they had to be eliminated if the surge was going to prove successful.

⁴⁴ Interv, author with Lt Col Mark Hovatter, G-5 (Chief, Planning Staff), 3d Inf Div, 28 May 2007, p. 4.

⁴⁵ Rpt, 2d BCT, 3d Inf Div, Arab Jabour: A Case Study of Counterinsurgency during OIF V, 9 Dec 2007, pp. 4–5.



Map 8

2D BRIGADE COMBAT TEAM, 3D INFANTRY DIVISION
AREA OF OPERATIONS
May 2007

● Forward Operating Base

○ Patrol Base

○ Combat Outpost

— X — Brigade Boundary

— II — Battalion Boundary

0 10 Miles
0 10 Kilometers



COP Cleary

Sarabādī

FOB Suwayrah

Aş Şuwayrah

FOB Zulu

AO SCIMITAR

Ash Shuhaymiah

The importance of this territory as a sanctuary was obvious. It lay near a convergence of roadways, trails, and canals used by insurgents to smuggle weapons through the Lion's Gate into the capital, and al-Qaeda was adept at exploiting the gaps in troop coverage. To make matters worse, the Arab Jabour region was also almost devoid of an Iraqi or coalition presence. According to one report, "There were zero Iraqi Police, Iraqi Army, or governmental structure in the area. This combination of an all Sunni population, thick palm groves that concealed activity, and an absence of security forces created a sanctuary for Al-Qaeda."⁴⁶ (See Map 9.)

Intelligence reports on Arab Jabour, as well as the nearby communities of Hawr Rajab, Adwaniyah, and Sayafiyah, noted that the insurgents were mostly local men born and raised in the locale who found the lure of easy money and power irresistible. They were organized into company-size or smaller cells, most of which were charged with preserving the sanctuary by burying IEDs along Routes Gnat, Chevy, Corvette, and Bug, the four most important roadways. The insurgents were confident in their strength and routinely fired on U.S. patrols. "Hasty barricades have been reported at intersections," observed one analysis, forcing vehicles to travel along "predictable and targeted avenues of approach" that were invariably strewn with explosives.⁴⁷

On 5 May, for example, intelligence indicated that more than a dozen foreign fighters arrived south of Arab Jabour in preparation for some sort of operation, probably in Baghdad. On the tenth, a group of insurgents were spotted preparing a weapons cache in the center of Arab Jabour; three days later, reports cited heavy machine guns emplaced along the Tigris south of Arab Jabour. On 12 May, some fifty to sixty al-Qaeda fighters were spotted meeting in a mosque several kilometers south of Baghdad along the river, and two days later reports suggested that terrorists planned to move a vehicle loaded with explosives and chlorine gas into Baghdad. Another report included the probable location of an al-Qaeda "detention house"—a polite term for a torture chamber for those to be eliminated by the terrorists.⁴⁸

All of this demonstrated the importance that al-Qaeda placed on Arab Jabour as well as the fact that its strength was virtually uncontested. In late April and early May, the 3d Division intelligence staff had identified at least a hundred and sixty al-Qaeda fighters and leaders and had detailed information on how they operated; the Americans even knew where they were, though the insurgents moved often, making it difficult to pin them down. Reports placed one of the southern belt's senior al-Qaeda commanders, Amir Abbas Salman Hammad al-Juburi—better known as Abu Jurah—

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ MND-C OPORD 07-21 (MARNE TORCH), 19 May 2007, p. 1.

⁴⁸ Task Force Marne, MND-C OPORD 07-21 (MARNE TORCH), 18 May 2007, slide 12, Recent Significant Reporting.

in Arab Jabour, and killing or capturing him, said analysts, "would severely disrupt AQI operations in the southern belt and Baghdad."⁴⁹

The presence of such a high-ranking terrorist and his inevitable cohort of fighters made life difficult for the civilian population, and how much support villagers willingly gave to the insurgents was uncertain. In much of the rest of Sunni Iraq, al-Qaeda was losing support due to its draconian religious rules and cavalier disregard for the general population. Al-Qaeda was apparently uninterested in learning from past insurgent movements, for history has shown that those who acted barbarically—such as the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia or the Maoist Shining Path guerrillas in Peru—did not last long, even if they managed to do tremendous damage in the short run. Although al-Qaeda might not be as repressive in Arab Jabour as it was farther to the west in Al Anbar Province, reports observed that the insurgents had "forced families out of their homes in order to acquire new safe houses." Truly heinous examples of insurgent atrocities would not be discovered until Colonel Ferrell's soldiers cleared the region of insurgents.⁵⁰

On the other hand, local Iraqis were unlikely to welcome the Americans. The control shift from Sunni to Shi'ite following Hussein's ouster left the residents of Arab Jabour and other Sunni enclaves distrusting both the new Iraqi government and the foreign forces that had swept it into power. According to analysts, this, along with the "controlling nature" of al-Qaeda in Iraq, caused the population to be "extremely hesitant to interact" with either the Americans or the Iraqi security forces and to "remain uncommitted and allow the situation to develop."⁵¹

As with everywhere in Iraq, people had to travel on the roads. Past U.S. involvement in guerrilla wars had often been in thick jungles, such as in Vietnam or in the Philippines a century earlier, and these conflicts conjured up images of insurgents hiding deep in the tangled forest, all but invisible to security forces thrashing about as they fruitlessly searched for the enemy. Iraq was quite different. Lacking water and cover, the inhospitable desert was difficult to survive in, and most of the population—insurgents included—was largely confined to towns and roads.

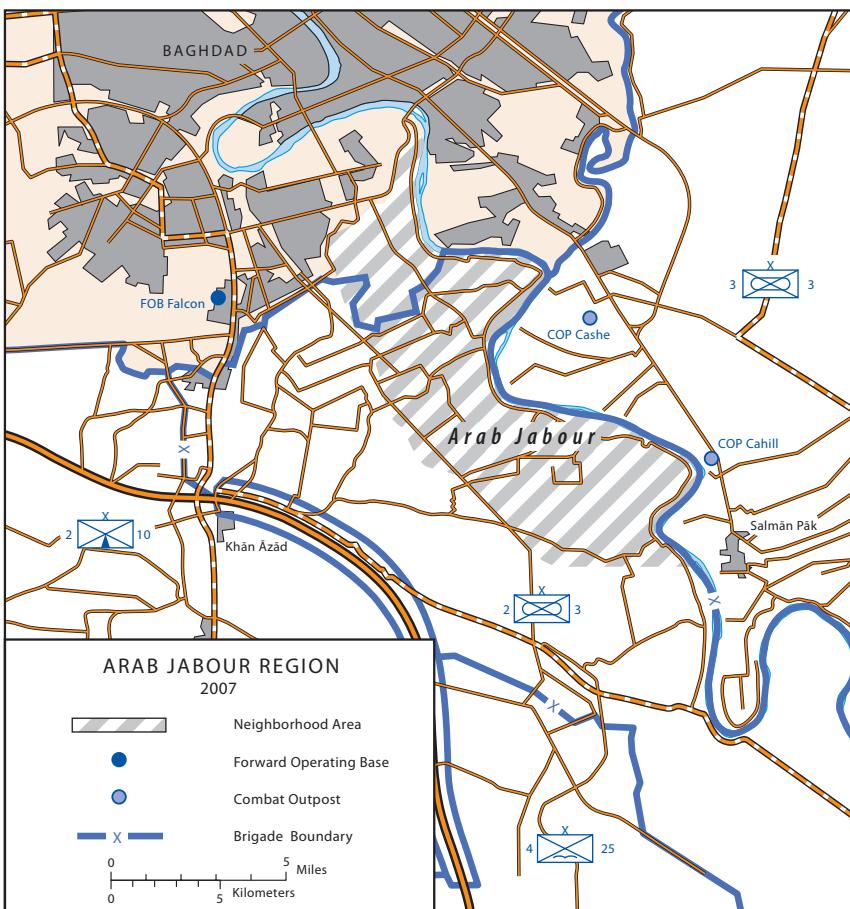
Planning the First Offensive

With all its units finally in place, the 3d Division could start preparing for its first full-scale offensive. Planners chose to concentrate on how best to thwart the enemy's movement between his sanctuary and Baghdad, and in Arab Jabour there was no mystery in how al-Qaeda was accomplishing it. The sole paved road was Route Gnat. This was "prized terrain," and analysts

⁴⁹ MND-C Priority Intelligence Requirement, Where are the Abu Jurah network HVIs [high-value individuals] located? BUB, 11 May 2007.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ MND-C OPORD 07-21 (MARNE TORCH), 19 May 2007, p. 6.



Map 9

concluded that the road, plus a connecting network of canal crossings near the Tigris, was al-Qaeda's main way of "providing fighters and supplies to Sunni movements in Baghdad." It was also the only way for insurgent leaders "to escape and evade [U.S. and Iraqi Army] operations by moving to crossing points in [the] East TRV [Tigris River valley] or moving south and out of the sector."⁵²

Once Arab Jabour had been selected as the first target, General Lynch had to decide on the scope of the operation. "It is important that we clearly define the division's role in this fight," said General Lynch during an early planning meeting back in April. He wanted to support his subordinate units in any way possible, yet not get in their way. "We are not going to be the division that has a lot of meetings and then tells the brigades what to do," he concluded.⁵³

But Lynch did plan to throw the weight of his division-level support behind the operation. "We decided on a division operation because of resources," said Colonel Hovatter. "If it's a division operation it gets more attention from corps, which means a priority on big resources, like air power, intelligence, and special operations forces. So General Lynch's choice was not a difficult one."⁵⁴

In keeping with Lynch's pride in the heritage of the 3d Division, Hovatter and his planners pulled out the history books to come up with operational names. "We simply went back to what the division had done during World War II as a template," he said. Therefore, the first operation of the surge would be named after the division's push into North Africa, the first major battle by the combined Allied armies as they opened the war against Germany and Italy in late 1942. The 3d Division had helped anchor the western flank, aimed at Casablanca in Morocco. That operation was called TORCH, so the division planners decided that the opening shot in Iraq would be MARNE TORCH, in keeping with the two-word operational code names that had been the norm since the war in Vietnam. Subsequent operation designations would continue the pattern, reflecting the 3d Division's next major European offensives, the invasions of Sicily and Italy in 1943.⁵⁵

The objective was simple: "to deny [Arab Jabour] as a staging area for accelerants to sectarian violence and deny the Abu Jurah network the ability to conduct effective operations into south Baghdad and allow MND-B to secure Baghdad." The operation would consist of two phases. The first—"shaping the battlefield"—would run roughly from 25 May to 14 June. During this phase, Lynch said, "We will gather every bit of information possible to make this operation as successful as possible." This would be accomplished in conjunction with stepped-up raids and air assaults by the 1st Squadron, 40th

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ CG Executive Summary, MND-C Expanded Plans Update, 20 Apr 2007.

⁵⁴ Interv, author with Hovatter, 28 May 2007, p. 4.

⁵⁵ Ibid.



Cavalry Regiment, and the division Combat Aviation Brigade into northern Arab Jabour, code-named Objective Richmond.⁵⁶

These shaping operations were meant to pressure the enemy, disrupt his networks, and identify and block infiltration routes. Hopefully, they would also eliminate the escape routes for al-Qaeda leaders and fighters so they would be trapped when the next phase began. However, the enemy would not stand around and wait for the operation to trap him. General Cardon, the assistant 3d Division commander, felt that the "enemy will be gone in 48-72 hours" of the first hint of stepped-up U.S. operations, "walking, swimming, or driving" to get away from the assault. As the planning continued, it was obvious that al-Qaeda expected an attack. During a meeting on 23 May, Lt. Col. Maurice L. Williams, the division intelligence chief, reported that "the enemy is already aware of the operation and they are fleeing across the river."⁵⁷

The next phase would begin on 15 June and run through the end of July. Colonel Ferrell's 2d Brigade would be fully operational by then, and his 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, would methodically clear Objective Richmond, searching for insurgents and attempting to destroy their leadership—if they were still there. Colonel Ferrell had two other objectives to the southeast of Richmond, also nestled against the left bank of the

⁵⁶ Task Force Marne, MND-C OPORD 07-21 (MARNE TORCH) Planning Brief, 18 May 2007, slide 16, Phase I: Shape the Battlefield (25 May–14 June).

⁵⁷ First quote from CG Executive Summary, MND-C Expanded Plans Update, 20 Apr 2007. Second quote from Opn MARNE TORCH Planning Meeting, 23 May 2007, author's notes.

Tigris: Objectives Brunswick and Jackson. Given the combat power available to Lynch, those areas would have to wait until he could see how the battle developed.⁵⁸

This would not be a lightning-quick operation. In 2003, the 3d Division had made a name for itself with its blitzkrieg thrust across the desert from Kuwait to Baghdad that doomed Saddam Hussein, but four years later the combat pace of counterinsurgency was considerably slower. Lynch reminded his commanders “to conduct slow, deliberate movements” during MARNE TORCH, and he warned that a “rush to take Objective Richmond at such a high operational tempo” would result in increased casualties. Despite his admonitions, his staff predicted that the operation would have as a possible outcome one U.S. soldier killed and eight wounded per day, a casualty rate that made everyone uneasy.⁵⁹

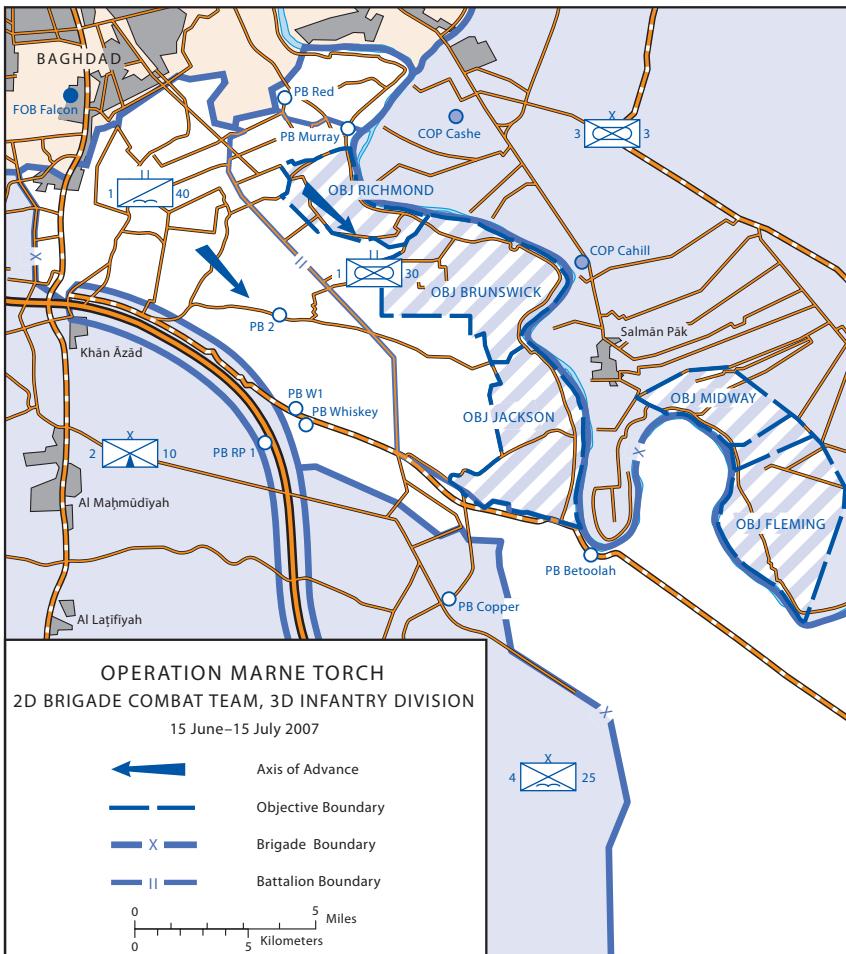
While the 2d Brigade’s objective was to defeat the enemy in Arab Jabour, on the other side of the Tigris the 3d Brigade’s mission was to disrupt insurgent activity. Colonel Grigsby would be the anvil to Ferrell’s hammer, eradicating known river-crossing points and launching new attacks in the territory just southeast of Salman Pak, which was divided into Objectives Midway and Fleming (*Map 10*). These river crossings were crucial, and the insurgents could traverse anywhere they had a boat and then take any road north into Baghdad. During one planning session, the division intelligence officer, Colonel Williams, pointed out that whenever these crossings were destroyed, “there is a marked decrease in bombs in Baghdad.”⁶⁰

Shutting down the riverine routes would not be as difficult as it might seem. On the Tigris, no fishing or commercial traffic occurred, and Iraqi officials confirmed that virtually all of the boats within fifty kilometers of the capital were smugglers, either running illegal money-making ventures or transporting terrorists back and forth. The 3d Brigade’s increasingly fruitful contacts with local Sunni sheikhs bolstered the point. Colonel Grigsby recalled that he had assumed that the boats on the river were fishing, but one sheikh who had lived in the territory all his life told him that “no one fishes in that river.” Helicopters flying over the region could find no commercial docks; rather, the boats were hidden during the day and operated almost exclusively at night. General Lynch ordered that they all be blown up on sight, and if any Iraqi civilians wanted to ask for

⁵⁸ Opn MARNE TORCH Planning Meeting, 23 May 2007; Task Force Marne, MND-C OPORD 07-21 (MARNE TORCH) Planning Brief, 18 May 2007, slide 17, Phase II: Decisive Operations (15 June–31 July).

⁵⁹ First quote from CG Executive Summary, Lt Gen Odierno’s visit to MND-C HQ, 6 Jun 2007. Second quote from CG Executive Summary, Expanded Plans Update, 8 Jun 2007.

⁶⁰ Quote from CG Executive Summary, 3/3 HBCT MARNE TORCH Backbrief, 1 May 2007. Senior Plans Update Meeting, 5 Jun 2007, author’s notes.



Map 10

compensation, he would pay it. Halting the traffic was the most important task at hand.⁶¹

Although this seemed to fly in the face of the prevailing notion that counterinsurgency was about winning hearts and minds, General Lynch believed that fighting came first and that, to help civilians terrified by the al-Qaeda insurgents living among them, the terrorists must first be driven away. “This is all about killing and capturing bad guys,” he said during a conversation with the 3d Brigade command group. “Later we can do area security. So use anything you can to hit him in the nose. Once he is back on his heels, then we can worry

⁶¹ Senior Plans Update Meeting, 5 Jun 2007. Quote from Interv, Kimberly Kagan, Institute for the Study of War, with Col Wayne W. Grigsby, CO, 3d BCT, 3d Inf Div, 7 Dec 2007, p. 3.



U.S. Army Black Hawk helicopters scatter leaflets over Arab Jabour to inform residents about coalition operations and warn them not to aid insurgents.

about the population.” With security established, the division could begin the final phase of rebuilding and improving conditions for the population—“Keep it safe, make the peoples’ lives better and prevent the extremists from returning,” said Lynch. He believed that phase would begin around the first of August, though the shape it would take would be uncertain until after the enemy had been eliminated.⁶²

On 19 May, the division submitted to MNC-I its plan for Operation MARNE TORCH. Although most of the preoperational planning was complete, Lynch had some lingering concerns. For example, during a meeting with his senior staff on 29 May, he noted that although the 2d Brigade deployment was generally going smoothly, only three of the six engineer route-clearing teams had arrived, and the brigade was short twenty-five interpreters. Those were both potentially serious problems—especially in a combat environment rife with IEDs—but the general was confident that all would be in place on time. He predicted that “barring the route clearance teams and interpreters, MARNE TORCH begins on time.”⁶³

By early June, the division had most of the approval and support it needed from higher headquarters. “We have a green light to go full speed ahead,” he reported at the battle update brief on the morning of the

⁶² First and second quotes from Operational Teleconference Backbrief with 3d BCT, 3d Inf Div, Cmd Gp, 1 Jun 2007, author’s notes. Third quote from Opn MARNE TORCH Planning Meeting, 23 May 2007.

⁶³ CG Executive Summary, 29 May 2007, sub: Senior Plans Update.

second. "We are getting support from corps and from the Iraqi government. It's all good."⁶⁴

On the eve of the offensive, Lynch visited the 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, at Forward Operating Base Falcon. He huddled with Colonel Adgie, who told the division commander that he was ready for action and that his planners had "numbered every house in Objective Richmond" in preparation for the deliberate clearing operations. Lynch encouraged the battalion commander "to be aggressive with fires" and to "shoot first and ask questions later"—though not without following the proper approval process, of course. The battalion "should not feel constrained by munitions" because it had air and artillery support "at its fingertips."⁶⁵

Lynch was raring to go. "I'm looking to kick some Sunni extremist ass during this operation," he said in a meeting with his top staff. Yet his enthusiasm was tempered with caution. "I believe this is a plan we can accomplish. But we cannot afford to be overconfident," he warned. "The enemy will be on the run, but he is always dangerous."⁶⁶

⁶⁴ First quote from Ibid. Second quote from BUB, 2 Jun 2007, author's notes.

⁶⁵ CG Executive Summary, Maj Gen Lynch's Visit to 1 [1st Bn]-30 Infantry, 13 Jun 2007.

⁶⁶ Senior Plans Update Meeting, 5 Jun 2007, author's notes.

OPERATION MARNE TORCH

Chapter 5

In the darkness before dawn on 16 June 2007, four B-1B bombers flew high above the Tigris. Once they were over Arab Jabour, they unleashed their deadly payload—four precision-guided bombs—on four different targets well south of the 2d Brigade, 3d Division. The objective was to cut key roads, destroy weapons caches, and hopefully disorient the enemy in the opening hours of the offensive. Two 500-pound bombs struck two widely dispersed caches, one in the southwestern edge of Area Denali and another near the Tigris at the southeastern extreme of the battle zone. Both bombs struck home, and the second site yielded secondary blasts indicating a large amount of ammunition and explosives. The other two bombs were 2,000 pounds each and were aimed at major roads south of Arab Jabour that al-Qaeda insurgents might use when trying to escape as the attack unfolded. Reports indicated that the strikes made both targeted roadways “impassable.”¹

As the bombers were preparing for their mission, the ground forces were also gearing up. Colonel Adgie and his 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, were ready. “I rate the battalion’s combat power as green,” he wrote in his daily report. “We will transition into a rest period . . . in preparation for operations during periods of darkness.” Key leaders were given last-minute briefings on enemy IED techniques from explosives experts.²

Company A opened the ground phase of MARNE TORCH, moving from Forward Operating Base Falcon to the northeast corner of Area Battle, near the Tigris. There the men began establishing a new base just north of Arab Jabour at the intersection of Routes Red Wings and Gnat—to be named Murray, after Medal of Honor recipient 1st Lt. Charles P. Murray, a platoon leader in the 30th Infantry who singlehandedly held off some two hundred German soldiers in eastern France in December 1944.

The Americans built the base around an old mansion that once belonged to Uday Hussein, one of the deposed dictator’s sons. The once-splendid home, now with its dust-covered marble floors and cracked chandeliers, became the headquarters, while the soldiers set up tents and sand-bagged positions in the sprawling fruit orchard outside and even

¹ MND-C Media Release, MARNE TORCH commences in areas south of Baghdad, 16 Jun 2007. Quote from Opn GUARDIAN TORCH-Air Force Targets, BUB, 16 Jun 2007. By the end of July, the 2d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, would use 160,000 pounds of Air Force ordnance in support of its operations.

² Blue One Rpt, 1st Bn, 30th Inf Rgt, 15 Jun 2007, p. 1.



To prepare for Operation Marne Torch, the 3d Infantry Division established Combat Outpost Murray in northern Arab Jabour. Once a vacation home for Saddam Hussein's family, it became the forward headquarters for the 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment.

used the empty swimming pool as a ready-made foxhole, putting cots and mosquito netting in the deep end. Within a month, however, the lush trees would be gone, uprooted to provide space for armored vehicles and supplies. Murray soon became the anchor for operations along the northern portion of the river.³

Company A then began securing Routes Red Wings and Gnat and removed seven preselected buildings at the northern edge of Objective Richmond. Companies B and C began their own clearing operations across the northern sector, dividing the responsibilities for searching houses, palm groves, and orchards, while Company D established blocking points along Route Chevy, the main north-south road just west of the Tigris, to stop insurgents from reinforcing Arab Jabour or, those already trapped, from escaping. The engineers of Company E, along with attached explosives ordnance teams, moved to Patrol Base Murray from where they would begin the laborious task of ridding roads of IEDs. Al-Qaeda had been entrenched in Arab Jabour for more than a year, allowing it plenty of

³ Ibid., p. 2.

time to create a web of dangerous roadside bombs that would prove to be the major obstacle to progress during the offensive.⁴

Colonel Odom's 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment, also participated, lending its firepower to secure Route Red Wings and setting up combat positions along Route Gnat. The Americans were aided throughout much of the operation by the 5th Battalion, 4th Brigade, 6th Iraqi Army Division, which established and maintained road-blocking positions. One patrol from Troop B caught an Iraqi man with a cell phone sending text messages that read "Americans are conducting raids in Arab Jabour, Adwaniyah, and Safiyah. Stay inside your home to ensure you are not detained; pass the message on to all our brothers." It was wise advice and not particularly threatening to U.S. forces, but it showed the ease with which insurgents could communicate using readily available technology. The unit also found a large IED on Route Bug, which was safely dismantled, and a weapons cache. Enemy resistance was light, with only a few mortar rounds lobbed from insurgents hiding nearby. No one was injured in the impromptu attacks.⁵

Also on the first morning of MARNE TORCH, the Americans established another patrol base near Route Tampa, about nine kilometers east of Forward Operating Base Mahmudiyah. The 2d Brigade's Battery B, 1st Battalion, 9th Field Artillery Regiment, along with the 4th Brigade, 25th Infantry Division's Battery B, 2d Battalion, 377th Field Artillery Regiment, quickly fortified the small enclosure, which they named Patrol Base Whiskey One, then set up blocking positions along nearby roads. Over the next several days, the new base was increasingly targeted by insurgents, who obviously viewed it as a threat to their freedom of movement. On several occasions mortar rounds struck Whiskey One, including one on 20 June from enemy hiding in a building just east of the post. The defenders requested an Apache gunship, which launched a Hellfire missile into the building, then pounded it with 30-mm. cannon fire. The resulting rubble provided much less cover for insurgents hoping in the future to attack the patrol base from that direction.⁶

Colonel Ferrell reported to General Lynch that the offensive had "predictably resulted in stirring the hornet's nest of [al-Qaeda] who have been operating with relative impunity within the sanctuary of Arab Jabour." Deeply buried IEDs were scattered in "complex obstacle belts [that] continue to deny us freedom of maneuver," slowing progress to a crawl. Colonel Ferrell was surprised by what he described as "defensive belts and a very detailed C-2 [command-and-control] structure across the area that was sophisticated and on the scale of a conventional military force." As

⁴ Ibid., pp. 2-3.

⁵ Blue One Rpt, 1st Sqdn, 40th Cav Rgt, 16 Jun 2007, pp. 1-2.

⁶ Blue One Rpt, 1st Sqdn, 40th Cav Rgt, 21 Jun 2007, p. 1.



Soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, search suspected insurgent hideouts during the opening days of Marne Torch.

he later told an interviewer, “We knew we would face a difficult fight to reclaim the ground.”⁷

Finally, by 23 June, Colonel Ferrell believed he had “seized a foothold in Objective Richmond.” After the first week of MARNE TORCH, the brigade reported that its units had cleared 276 houses, detained 55 suspected insurgents, and entered 170 civilians into a biometric database designed to take digital scans of fingerprints and irises.⁸ Thirteen IEDs were found, but seven others escaped detection, exploding under vehicles and foot patrols.⁹

The deadly network of hidden IEDs took an early toll, killing three U.S. soldiers during MARNE TORCH’s initial week. The first, Pfc. Larry Parks Jr., was killed when his M1A1 Abrams tank hit a deeply buried

⁷ First, second, and third quotes from MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 16–22 Jun 2007, p. 3. Last quote from DoD News Briefing with Col Ferrell from Iraq, 3 Dec 2007, p. 1.

⁸ The system was a Biometric Automated Toolset (BAT). The technology employed a portable device to scan fingerprints and irises. The information was then placed in a database that could be accessed to identify known insurgents or criminals. Detainees were also entered into the database, allowing units to track them upon release.

⁹ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 16–22 Jun 2007, p. 3.



A soldier from Company A, 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, uses the handheld interagency identity detection equipment (HIIDE) to scan an Iraqi civilian's iris. The information was then entered into a database.

IED near Route Chevy. The armored patrol was part of Company D, 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, and it had been on its way to secure a Husky mine-detection vehicle that had been disabled in an IED blast that evening. In the darkness, a medevac helicopter landed to take away three other soldiers wounded in the explosion. Long after the helicopter departed in the night sky, the wrecked tank continued to burn, a stark reminder that sixty-five tons of armor was not enough to ensure safety against the huge roadside bombs that littered the countryside.¹⁰

The following day, another armored patrol, this time a few kilometers to the northeast, struck another deeply buried IED. The entire event was uncannily similar to the previous day's tragedy. A platoon from Company C, composed of two Bradley fighting vehicles, two armored Humvees, and an Abrams tank, was on its way to provide security near another burning Husky vehicle. As the platoon moved carefully down Route Chevy past the village of Muhammad al-Ali, one of the Bradleys left the road to take up position opposite the disabled Husky and ran over the IED. A huge explosion shook the ground and masked the road in smoke and dust, and when it dissipated the Bradley was lying shattered by the roadside. Two

¹⁰ Storyboard, IED Strike, 1 US KIA, 3 US WIA, Zone 66, 1st Bn, 30th Inf, 2d BCT, 3d Inf Div, 18 Jun 2007.



During the first weeks of Marne Torch, U.S. troops ran into a deadly network of IEDs placed along the roads leading to Arab Jabour, which damaged or destroyed several armored vehicles. On 11 July, soldiers prepare to place a towing bar onto a Bradley trooper carrier damaged by a bomb blast.

soldiers inside, Pfc. Joshua S. Modgling and Sfc. William A. Zapfe, died in the blast.¹¹

At the battle update briefing the following morning, Lynch shook his head in dismay as he learned new details about the attacks. “We’re losing significant assets and we’re not replacing them well,” he said. “This can’t happen.” The destruction of three armored vehicles and three soldiers in two days was bad news, and everyone hoped it did not portend things to come.¹²

The losses suffered during MARNE TORCH weighed heavily on the division commander, and he took up a daily ritual to remind himself of the cost. “Every morning I begin my day in prayer, laying out the pictures of the . . . soldiers we have lost and remembering the price they paid for our freedom,” Lynch later revealed.¹³ He carried that packet of photo-

¹¹ Storyboard, IED Strike, 2 US KIA, 4 US WIA, Zone 66, 1st Bn, 30th Inf, 2d BCT, 3d Inf Div, 19 Jun 2007.

¹² BUB, 19 Jun 2007, author’s notes.

¹³ Maj Gen Rick Lynch, “Looking Back and Moving Forward,” Task Force Marne Web page, 14 Jan 2008.

graphs in his battle uniform pocket each day, constantly asking himself, “Did we do all we could to prevent this loss?”¹⁴

Lynch was known as a gruff, no-nonsense commander, but he had no qualms about his emotional side. He was, as one observer remarked, “tough, but not afraid to show his feelings.” During his frequent visits with troops in the field, Lynch often hugged soldiers he had just pinned medals on, and it was not unusual to see him hang his head in grief during a memorial service for fallen soldiers, tears filling his eyes. Lynch described attending these services as “the hardest part of my job; a terrible burden.”¹⁵

The memorial services became heartbreakingly frequent during the first three months of MND-C’s inception. Fifty-eight soldiers died during that period—almost 35 percent of the total losses Task Force Marne would suffer during its fifteen-month tour in Iraq. The majority of the combat deaths came from roadside bombs, the most effective example of which was the defensive network constructed by insurgents in Arab Jabour.

Because all knew these bombs were hidden throughout the region, the U.S. advance proceeded slowly. To move any faster inevitably meant more deaths. Maj. Robert Manning, the 2d Brigade’s chief planning officer, pointed out that “it was pretty tough going. There were lots of IEDs; the enemy had prepared the area well. Because of the deep-buried IEDs it took two weeks to go about six kilometers along Route Gnat.”¹⁶

The painstaking pace also made trapping the enemy impossible. As predicted, intelligence indicated that insurgent leaders had fled south, while “the majority of lower echelon fighters remain in place to disrupt [coalition force] movement.” Resistance was desultory, however, with “irregular contact” in the form of occasional indirect fire and a scattering of small-arms attacks.¹⁷

The slow methodical nature of the fight and the lack of dramatic action failed to attract media attention. Indeed, the opening moves of MARNE TORCH were overshadowed by the fighting north of Baghdad in Diyala Province, where MND-N had elements of the 2d Infantry Division and the 1st Cavalry Division join Iraqi forces to engage entrenched insurgents in the city of Ba’qubah, al-Qaeda’s recently proclaimed “capital” of the proposed Islamic State of Iraq. That operation, ARROWHEAD RIPPER, commenced on 19 June with quick nighttime air assaults, followed by ground attacks combined with air support from Apache gunships. General

¹⁴ Dal Cannady, “Military Salute—Major General Rick Lynch,” WTOC-TV script, Savannah, Ga., 25 Sep 2007.

¹⁵ Camp Baharia, Fallujah, Memorial Service, 5th Sqdn, 7th Cav Rgt, 1 Aug 2007, author’s notes.

¹⁶ Interv, author with Maj Robert Manning, Planning Officer, 2d BCT, 3d Inf Div, 23 Jul 2007.

¹⁷ Daily Rpt, Opn GUARDIAN TORCH, 22 0500–23 0500 Jun 2007, in BUB, 23 Jun 2007. Quotes from MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 16–22 Jun 2007, p. 3.



An explosive ordnance disposal team destroys an IED found west of Arab Jabour.

Odierno's headquarters promoted the operation in media releases, noting that "about 10,000 soldiers, with a full complement of attack helicopters, close-air support, Strykers and Bradley fighting vehicles, are taking part," making it the largest battle since the surge began. During its first day, ARROWHEAD RIPPER resulted in twenty-two insurgents killed while television cameras captured the smoke and fury of house-to-house combat.¹⁸

In addition to ARROWHEAD RIPPER and MARNE TORCH, west of Baghdad in Al Anbar Province the U.S. Marine Corps launched Operation ALLJAH in Al Fallujah and the nearby town of Al Karmah, both still threatened by insurgents. The 1st Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, which was permanently attached to the marines and MNF-W, had completed a similar operation in Ar Ramadi, Al Anbar Province's capital, and the marines wanted to build on its success. For two months, the marines strengthened their presence in Al Fallujah, setting up checkpoints and tracking individuals in order to separate the population from the insurgents. In addition, they launched raids into small towns in the surrounding desert, engaging in several battles with al-Qaeda insurgents, and

¹⁸ MNC-I Media Release, Task Force Lightening strikes al-Qaeda, 18 Jun 2007.

killed dozens, including a top al-Qaeda leader east of Al Fallujah. On 14 August, the marines handed responsibility for the security of Al Fallujah to the Iraqi police.¹⁹

Maintaining Momentum

All of these campaigns, including MARNE TORCH, were part of a larger corps-level operational umbrella, code-named PHANTOM THUNDER. They were the logical culmination of months of troop-surge planning and preparations. General Petraeus said publicly that “for the first time, we are really going to a couple of the key areas in the belts from which al-Qaeda has sallied forth with car bombs, additional fighters and so forth.”²⁰

Part of the campaign, however, had already started. Operation FARDH AL-QANOON, begun in January, continued to range throughout Baghdad, hunting insurgents and dismantling their support networks. General Odierno considered the entire offensive “an open-ended operation that will extend through the summer and will be done in conjunction with civil-military operations to support political and economic efforts.”²¹

Operation MARNE TORCH was playing its role to accomplish that objective, and, by the end of June, much of Arab Jabour was no longer an insurgent sanctuary. On the twenty-ninth, Colonel Ferrell reported that “we have seized the key terrain in Arab Jabour. . . . The Mosque and school are now under coalition security control.” The presence of the two new patrol bases immediately impeded the enemy’s ability to move weapons into the capital, and Ferrell reported that “we have met the number one essential task of stopping the flow of accelerants into Baghdad.”²²

Intelligence reports indicated that the enemy was both fleeing the territory and at the same time preventing civilians from leaving, perhaps because the insurgents wanted the citizens of Arab Jabour to be most of the casualties. As U.S. forces entered regions that had been previously uncontested, the insurgents began transporting weapons southward. One intelligence report said that terrorists “fled to different houses” while others were “hiding in a wooded area.”²³

Even with the insurgents on the run, however, roadside bombs remained an issue, and the brigade commander observed that “we are still unable to identify deep buried IEDs,” a problem he blamed on inadequate detection technology and on the fact that the enemy used plastic casings to thwart

¹⁹ “CLB-6 Participates in Operation ALLJAH,” *Marine Corps News*, 10 Jun 2007; MNF-I Media Release, Al-Qaeda Foreign Fighter Killed, 21 Jun 2007; MNC-I Media Release, MNC-I conducts Operation PHANTOM THUNDER, 20 Jun 2007.

²⁰ Alexandra Zavis, “U.S. Forces Launch Major Iraq Offensive,” *Los Angeles Times*, 17 Jun 2007.

²¹ Lt Gen Odierno Pentagon Press Briefing (via teleconference), 20 Jul 2007.

²² MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 23–29 Jun 2007, p. 3.

²³ Tactical Intelligence Rpt, 6 Jul 07, sub: AQI insurgents flee from Arab Jabour area.



On 2 July, soldiers from 2d Platoon, Company B, 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, captured this local insurgent leader, number four on the list of "high-value individuals" in Arab Jabour.

metal detection devices. This seriously hampered the operation's capability to capture or kill insurgents. "The lethargic nature of clearing operations has allowed HVIs [high-value individuals] time to evacuate the area," wrote Ferrell.²⁴ Without improved detection, which Ferrell defined as either better intelligence or some way of engaging the local population with rewards and other incentive programs, the operation would move southward at only a crawl. "Failure to develop a system to identify these IEDs will continue to hamper our ability to have complete freedom of movement," he warned.²⁵

From his position on the leading edge of the fighting, Colonel Adgie felt that his 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, had effectively eliminated insurgents from the northern part of the al-Qaeda sanctuary, though nothing could be taken for granted. "The enemy is very talented out here," he told a reporter. "There is no doubt he has his game on. It's going to be a long summer." Adgie also noted that the populace was unwilling to help, fearing reprisals from the terrorists once the Americans left—as it had in the past. "They're scared out of their brains that we will leave, and that if they try to

²⁴ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 23–29 Jun 2007, pp. 2–3.

²⁵ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 30 Jun–6 Jul 2007, p. 1.

help us al-Qaeda will find out and they'll get their heads chopped off," he observed.²⁶

The makeup of the local insurgency had much to do with its methods. The fighters were not shadowy foreigners come to impose al-Qaeda doctrine on the population. Rather, as Adgie remarked, "They are local people that grew up here, and from what we've learned about them, they are thugs, the bad teenagers who stole cars and with the allure of fast money from al-Qaeda, they joined." Adgie believed that he could undermine the insurgents by demonstrating to the locals that his soldiers intended to stay this time and provide the security they craved.²⁷

And that was the easy part. Although the region was growing safer as the insurgents were driven out, the task of restoring Arab Jabour and its civic and economic life would take some time. In mid-June, only a single store—the local butcher—existed in all of northern Arab Jabour; the local people either grew or traded what they needed to survive.²⁸

Most of the people still living in Arab Jabour were women and children, and for the time being they were too frightened to cooperate with the Americans. "We have yet to see any significant tribal Sheik militia assistance/involvement in zone," declared Colonel Ferrell. There was a "lack of any semblance of a governing presence" in the entire area, yet the Sunnis wanted nothing to do with what they regarded as a Shi'ite government that did not have their interests at heart. Given that sentiment, governance could wait, but rebuilding the infrastructure could not. The people of Arab Jabour were mostly farmers, and, although their crops were good this year, the poor condition of local irrigation canals was a problem. Colonel Ferrell hoped to rebuild some of them and at the same time improve the output of electricity, though he acknowledged that progress in these territories "appears to be hindered by inefficiency in the Iraqi government."²⁹

But at this point, the main concern continued to be combat. On 29 June, Colonel Adgie's soldiers executed Operation BARBARIAN STOMP, another push into Objective Richmond to eliminate opposition south of the Um al-Qura Mosque, which remained a hotbed of guerrilla activity. Although progress was steady, the enemy still slipped away. Adgie reported that "many civilians, especially military aged males, have left the area and moved south or west." The insurgents still planted explosives along the roads and canals, making movement treacherous and slow. "We expect to see an increase in enemy activity . . . on our unit boundaries as [we] push farther south into OBJ Richmond and force the [insurgents] into a defensive

²⁶ First and second quotes from Josh Partlow, "Troops Pushing South Through Insurgent Area," *Washington Post*, 22 Jun 2007. Third quote from Richard A. Oppel Jr., "U.S. Troops Find Buried Dangers at Outpost," *New York Times*, 22 Jun 2007.

²⁷ Andrew Lubin, "The Surge: South of Baghdad," *On Point Online Resource*, 1 Oct 2007.

²⁸ Rpt, Arab Jabour: A Case Study in Counterinsurgency, p. 3.

²⁹ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 23–29 Jun 2007, p. 3.



Soldiers with Company A, 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, rest at Combat Outpost Murray after a day of patrolling under the hot sun.

posture.” Combat kept most people indoors, and few were very helpful to the Americans. Although Colonel Adgie reported that civilians increasingly “appear receptive” to the U.S. soldiers, they “have been reluctant to provide information about insurgents” other than to tell their questioners that the enemy had fled.³⁰

As Operation MARNE TORCH progressed along its narrow sliver beside the Tigris, General Lynch took new steps to broaden the effect on the enemy by adding some offensive punch in the western part of his area of responsibility. On 20 June, the 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, “Commandos,” in conjunction with elements of the Iraqi 4th Brigade, 6th Division—called the “Baghdad Eagles”—launched Operation COMMANDO EAGLE. It was a simple affair, a short series of air assaults and Humvee-mounted thrusts near Radwaniyah, a former palace complex frequently used by Saddam Hussein about twelve kilometers west of Baghdad. The operation began with airmobile raids by the 2d Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment, which surprised several terrorists and unearthed bomb-making supplies as well as documents requesting rockets from insurgent supply sources. Iraqi soldiers operating nearby found a weapons cache containing small arms and mortars, and separate sweeps by patrols from the 2d Brigade’s Company A, 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment; and Troop B, 1st Squadron, 89th Cavalry Regiment, caught several known and wanted terrorists. After three days of raids and patrols, COMMANDO EAGLE uncovered three weapons caches and detained more than thirty suspected insurgents.³¹

³⁰ Blue One Rpt, 1st Bn, 30th Inf Rgt, 29 Jun 2007, p. 2.

³¹ MNC-I Media Release, Operation COMMANDO EAGLE, 21 Jun 2007.



Sgt. Lane Duhon from 2d Platoon, Company B, 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, investigates an insurgent IED factory in Arab Jabour.

Anvil on the East Bank

On the east side of the Tigris, the 3d Brigade Combat Team, 3d Infantry Division, continued its support for MARNE TORCH. Colonel Grigsby's soldiers had spent the better part of a month "building the conditions" for the operation. During a teleconferenced strategy meeting held on 1 June, Grigsby told General Lynch that "we've forced them [the insurgents] to change their plans because we are in so many places where he doesn't want us to be. My companies run three or four combat missions per day from each patrol base."³²

The brigade's support of MARNE TORCH was known as Operation ALGIERS, and its straightforward objective was to "prevent exfiltration of Sunni Extremists . . . into AO Hammer and prevent the extremists' ability to conduct and supply operations in Baghdad." Grigsby's units—especially Colonel Marr's 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment—had been running

³² Operational Teleconference Backbrief with 3d BCT, 3d Inf Div, Cmd Gp, 1 Jun 2007, author's notes.

security operations along the east side of the Tigris, looking for points at which the river might be traversed so as to limit the enemy's ability to cross and escape the coming push by the 2d Brigade.³³

Partly in anticipation of MARNE TORCH, in late May the 3d Brigade shifted its operating boundaries slightly, shrinking the northern portion of 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment's area, so that it could better concentrate on key territory along the Tigris. A strip of ground extending about seven kilometers from the southeastern edge of Baghdad to Route Kelp, one of the dirt roads running northeastward from the riverbank to Route Wild, the key road leading from Salman Pak to the capital, was handed to the 3d Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment. The commander, Colonel Kolasheski, moved his headquarters from Forward Operating Base Hammer to Combat Outpost Cahill, the northernmost of Colonel Marr's bases, and transferred two units westward toward the Tigris to "increase the pressure on the enemy in the Arab Jabour area by reducing their options for safe haven." Beginning the first week of June, Troop A operated out of Patrol Base Assassin near Nahrawan, and Kolasheski moved with his Troop C to Combat Outpost Cashe and established a forward command post there.³⁴

Following the boundary change, the 3d Brigade's operating schedule became much busier. Kolasheski's cavalry began Operation COMMANCE CLEARANCE to clear IEDs from the roads along the Tigris and set up blocking positions. The patrols were generally uneventful, but the insurgents chafed at the increasingly formidable bases in their backyard. Patrol Base Assassin, in particular, received special attention. Because it had been established only a month earlier, insurgents regularly tried to infiltrate the base by posing as local contractors or as "walk ins" claiming to have information on the enemy, and perimeter guards frequently noticed militiamen lurking on rooftops in the Four Corners market peering through binoculars at the base's inner layout. During the first month, IED activity increased along nearby roads, and the base experienced four indirect-fire attacks.³⁵

One of those strikes occurred on the afternoon of 6 June when the enemy launched a mortar barrage against a work party of local civilians hired to make improvements on the outside perimeter defenses. Two soldiers, Pfc. Benjamin T. Frahs and Pfc. Justin J. Pinna, were guarding the construction team from just such an assault.

When the first 120-mm. round fell on the north side of the post, the two soldiers herded the civilians inside the perimeter. More rounds landed, this time much closer, and one of them exploded within a dozen yards of Private Pinna. Shrapnel shredded his legs and he fell to the ground, unable to reach the safety of the base. Seeing the danger, Private Frahs rushed back to help

³³ OPORD 07-16, Opn ALGIERS, 3d BCT, 28 May 2007, p. 6.

³⁴ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 2-9 Jun 2007, p. 7.

³⁵ Ms, Capt Jim Capobianco, 1st Lt John Dickson, and Maj Desmond Bailey, *Be There: Patrol Base ASSASSIN as a Case Study in COIN Warfare*, n.d., pp. 6-7.

his comrade. In the midst of more falling mortar rounds—some as close as thirty meters—Frahs gave first aid to Pinna as they awaited a Humvee from the base. His quick thinking and brave action probably saved his friend that day, and his valor was rewarded with the Bronze Star Medal.³⁶

At the same time, the 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, conducted four operations, named CASABLANCA, CHICKAMAUGA, BUNKER HILL, and PUSAN—all aimed at uncovering weapons caches and destabilizing the enemy's capacity to plant IEDs. The operations succeeded in tamping down enemy activity by pressuring him in his usual haunts. According to one report, the guerrillas were “low on morale and waiting for overdue supplies.”³⁷

Operation CASABLANCA, launched on 5 June, was the battalion's first air assault. Although the Chinook-borne mission landed an assault force on top of an enemy weapons cache, its major importance, according to Colonel Marr, was that it demonstrated how a combined-arms battalion, accustomed to operating in armored vehicles, could employ airmobility to extend its capabilities—an approach the Army had learned in Vietnam. Marr was rediscovering it in Iraq. With more than a hundred square kilometers to cover within his battalion area of responsibility, he needed the speed and range provided by helicopters. The tactic had an added advantage as well. The raised roads that ran alongside the myriad canals bordering the Tigris forced the armored vehicles to travel exposed and visible to watching guerrillas, and, as everyone knew, the majority of IEDs were placed along roadways. Helicopters bypassed all that. By the end of the battalion's tour in Iraq twelve months later, it would launch more than 20 air assaults (almost half of the battalion's soldiers participated in at least one mission), resulting in 14 insurgents killed and 69 captured—including 2 high-value targets—and the destruction of more than 12 weapons caches and 4 enemy safe houses.³⁸

During the first days of MARNE TORCH, the 3d Brigade, working alongside the Iraqi National Police, set five new blocking positions along the Tigris and executed Operation CHOSIN, another air strike by elements of Companies A and C, 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, aimed at disrupting the al-Qaeda network in Objectives Midway and Fleming. The raid unearthed only a single rifle—an old bolt-action Mauser—but it also netted five suspected insurgents. At the same time, Kolasheski's cavalry patrolled roads near the southeastern outskirts of Baghdad, disrupting enemy movement from Arab Jabour across the river.³⁹

³⁶ Narrative to Accompany the Award of Bronze Star Medal With “V” Device to Private First Class Benjamin T. Frahs, n.d.

³⁷ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 2–9 Jun 2007, pp. 5–6.

³⁸ Lt. Col. Jack Marr, Maj. John Cushing, Capt. Josh Powers, and Capt. Rich Thompson, “The Combined Arms Battalion as an Air Assault Task Force,” *Infantry* (July–August 2008): 15–20.

³⁹ Storyboard, Opn CHOSIN, 3d BCT, 3d Inf Div, BUB, 17 Jun 2007; MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 16–22 Jun 2007, p. 13.



An air assault team from the 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, searches buildings west of Salman Pak. The battalion commander, Colonel Marr, used these nighttime helicopter-borne raids to bypass roadside bombs and surprise the insurgents.

The increased operational tempo had an effect on the enemy's mobility and freedom. By mid-June, reports from intelligence sources stated that insurgents were finding it was "getting harder to work" east of the Tigris. One explosives team in particular that had previously been "out everyday emplacing IEDs" was forced to be more cautious because it was "feeling very pressured by American Forces."⁴⁰

When combined with the 3d Brigade's overall mission throughout its huge area of operations, participating in these additional campaigns might have diverted effort away from other tasks. However, Colonel Marr noted that "our supporting effort to MARNE TORCH wasn't a sea change from what we had already been doing as part of our own full spectrum ops. We were always sort of an anvil—whether or not there was an operation on the other side of the river." So with the exception of a small handful of operations, the extra duty was easily handled.⁴¹

One of those exceptions came on 22 June when the 3d Brigade launched its largest operation to date, a multicompny affair directed at the

⁴⁰ Tactical Intelligence Rpt, 19 Jun 2007, sub: IED teams.

⁴¹ Interv, author with Lt Col John J. Marr, CO, 1st Bn, 15th Inf Rgt, 13 Jul 2007.

perennially hostile region south of Salman Pak, this time a congregation of hamlets known as Duraiya, about five kilometers to the southeast on the northern edge of a bulge in the river referred to as the Fishbowl. At least that was the name soldiers provided to reporters; it was actually called the Nut Sack because on a map it looked like a scrotum suspended beneath another dramatic bend just to the north—which was predictably called the Penis—with Salman Pak at its northern edge. Its more genteel name was the Fishhook.

For the time being, this area lay outside the division's ability to maintain a persistent presence, and despite MARNE TORCH it remained "a bridge too far," as planners on General Lynch's staff often said of it. Because of this, Colonel Grigsby committed more troops than he ordinarily would to any campaign in that region. In Operation BULL RUN, the 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, used elements of two line companies, plus the engineer company and the 203d Forward Support Company—a large chunk of Colonel Marr's combat strength—to make the foray south into that enemy territory.

The engineers led, leaving Combat Outpost Cahill just before midnight on 22 June in order to clear the way southward to the objective. During the early hours of the twenty-third, Company A followed the engineers, reaching Duraiya two hours later. There were no IEDs, but insurgents resisted with a smattering of small-arms fire, which the soldiers of Company A quickly suppressed. The civilian population was sullen and unwilling to cooperate with the Americans. "They were just playing dumb," recalled 1st Lt. Robert L. Grier, the commander of 3d Platoon, "saying 'we don't know where any bad guys are.'" Before dawn, the Americans had captured seven suspected insurgents, who were sent back to Forward Operating Base Hammer for questioning.⁴²

As the morning wore on, the situation grew worse. The engineers "found" an IED, which exploded just in front of one of their patrols, but no one was injured. At 1030, various elements were taking mortar fire, and a machine gun opened up from the west bank of the Tigris, prompting a call for air support. Within minutes, Apache gunships were overhead, scouring the area for hidden enemy weapon emplacements. Although the pilots found none, they did spot three boats on the river, apparently ferrying insurgents back and forth, and destroyed them all.⁴³

Just before noon, the 1st Platoon, Company B, left Combat Outpost Cahill. Its mission was to secure an abandoned Pepsi Cola bottling facility in Duraiya while the brigade's engineers built a tower and some barricades to house a new Iraqi police unit that would be moving in—the first

⁴² Interv, author with 1st Lt Robert L. Grier, CO, 3d Plt, Co A, 1st Bn, 15th Inf Rgt, 3d BCT, 3d Inf Div, 14 Jul 2007.

⁴³ Storyboard, Post-Opn BULL RUN, 1st Bn, 15th Inf Rgt, 3d BCT, 3d Inf Div, 26 Jun 2007.

government security presence in more than a year. "We set up our position facing the river," said 1st Lt. Joshua K. Jones, the 1st Platoon commander. "The enemy used the river as a natural barrier, and we couldn't get across it easily so I wanted to keep my eyes on that." Jones did not expect much resistance from insurgents because "they clearly knew we were coming in big numbers. Usually when we have such a large force they know better than to come fight us. They'll get creamed." Jones did expect some standoff attacks which he got. That night, a sniper crept in close and shot out the thermal sights on one of the Bradleys, and the platoon experienced a handful of small-arms bursts and solitary mortar rounds.⁴⁴

The circumstances were worse for Company A. On the morning of 24 June, another enemy sniper managed to shoot a tanker in the head as he peered out of the turret hatch of his Abrams tank. Lieutenant Grier and one of his sergeants ran to the scene and helped carry the man to a waiting medevac helicopter, but it was too late. The tanker, Spec. Carter A. Gamble, died of his wounds.⁴⁵

That day and the next, the engineers built the small police base and a few little outposts along Route Croc. The other posts would be manned by National Police, which moved in on the twenty-fifth. The Americans left after midnight, arriving at Cahill at 0630 on the twenty-sixth.

Unfortunately, the police were mostly Shi'ites, sent from Baghdad into a Sunni area, and the situation quickly deteriorated. Scout helicopters received ground fire and observed guerrillas lurking in the vicinity, and the police began taking fire before they were even settled in. At 1115, the scout helicopters, which were darting from target to target as the enemy grew in number, reported more attacks on the increasingly beleaguered police outposts. A half hour later, the insurgents were overrunning the Pepsi factory. An Air Force jet dropped a 1,000-pound bomb nearby, but the battle was already joined and the air strike was not close enough to save the police station.⁴⁶

The following afternoon, a U.S. team returned to Duraiya for a look at the battle's aftermath. It found almost nothing left of the police station. "It was a mess," recalled Lieutenant Jones. "The enemy destroyed some six to eight vehicles; they were blown to pieces and burned. The tower that was built a few days before was blown down. They also set fire to the generators so they couldn't be used." Six police were reported killed, and another five were wounded.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Interv, author with 1st Lt Joshua K. Jones, CO, 1st Plt, Co B, 1st Bn, 15th Inf Rgt, 3d BCT, 3d Inf Div, 14 Jul 2007.

⁴⁵ Interv, author with Grier, 14 Jul 2007; Storyboard, Post-Op BULL RUN, 1st Bn, 15th Inf Rgt, 3d BCT, 3d Inf Div, 26 Jun 2007.

⁴⁶ Storyboard, Post-Op BULL RUN, 1st Bn, 15th Inf Rgt, 3d BCT, 3d Inf Div, 26 Jun 2007.

⁴⁷ Ibid. Quotes from Interv, author with Jones, 14 Jul 2007.

Grigsby told General Lynch, "We feel that BULL RUN was successful, however, our intelligence indicates that there were more insurgents there than was originally believed."⁴⁸ Success or failure was a fine line, and the 3d Brigade's report to the division admitted that "Sunni extremists have retaken control of the area," and that rooting them out was going to take some time. In an effort to put a positive spin on the affair, the report concluded that "BULL RUN showed the strength of our partnership with the Iraqis, and although they lost their ground to the insurgents, the [Iraqis] are already planning to reclaim the terrain."⁴⁹

Perhaps so, but the reality was that despite the well-executed operation by Colonel Marr's soldiers, the Iraqis could not capitalize on the effort. Here was a small snapshot of the bigger picture that demonstrated the strengths and weaknesses of the surge. The extra manpower enabled the Coalition to extend its permanent presence deeper into the Baghdad belts, but another region always lay just beyond reach where the enemy could reside and fight. The solution was for the Iraqis to make up the difference, filling in the holes in coverage and taking responsibility for the areas outside the Americans' grasp—and to do it without exacerbating ethnic tensions. Operation BULL RUN illustrated just how much progress had yet to be made. Grigsby told a reporter that "the trick is to strike a balance to train these guys and at the same time, to bring down the level of violence to where they can manage it." "We've got a ways to go," he said, "but it would certainly move faster if I could get some additional Iraqi forces in here." This issue, combined with the continuing weakness of the Iraqi government and the languid improvement of the Iraqi military and police, underscored the truism that counter-insurgency was a slow endeavor.⁵⁰

The dust from BULL RUN was still settling when the 3d Brigade took a hit from Shi'ite insurgents. On the afternoon of 11 July, Forward Operating Base Hammer suffered its first attack, probably as a reaction to the increased targeting by U.S. forces of Shi'ite militia leaders. Seven rockets rained down on the camp, most of them striking near the tented headquarters complexes of the 3d Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment, and the 3d Brigade's Special Troops Battalion, about a kilometer from the brigade command post. Shrapnel slashed some of the protective Hesco barriers, wounding fifteen soldiers, but those inside the tents survived. One rocket killed Sgt. Courtney T. Johnson, a Special Troops Battalion soldier. The battalion commander, Lt. Col. Todd R. Ratliff, was stunned by the death.

⁴⁸ Teleconference with Grigsby, BUB, 2 Jul 2007, author's notes.

⁴⁹ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 23–29 Jun 2007, p. 12.

⁵⁰ Lauren Frayer, "U.S. forces fight al-Qaida and wait for Iraqi help in marshlands outside Baghdad," Associated Press, 5 Jul 2007.

Sergeant Johnson “was walking out of the tent and got hammered by shrapnel,” he said. “I don’t think he knew what hit him.”⁵¹

Within minutes of the rockets’ impact, Apache gunships were zigzagging overhead and jet aircraft could be heard, though not seen, in the distance. Base artillery fired four 155-mm. rounds at the suspected origin of the rockets, which sophisticated trajectory-tracking equipment projected to be just north of the Besmaya Range Complex. The insurgents probably had not lingered after firing the missiles.

Hammer might have had reason to expect the attack. Written in felt marker on an intelligence bulletin board placed near the door of the brigade operations center was a warning from an hour earlier predicting a raid on either Combat Outpost Assassin or on Hammer itself. Because the notice was not more specific—it was similar to perhaps dozens of other cautions of impending assaults that came in weekly—it received only passing attention. Such snippets of intelligence only gained prescience after the fact.

At dawn the following day, an airborne Shadow surveillance drone made a startling discovery. Outlined starkly by the morning sun against the flat desert about seven kilometers northeast of Forward Operating Base Hammer was a line of forty-seven makeshift rocket launchers, all trained on the base. A team from the 789th Ordnance Company, an explosives disposal unit attached to the 3d Brigade, sped to the site and dismantled the rockets, which were found to be Iranian-made 107-mm. models. Twelve of the launchers were empty; the seven rockets that had hit Hammer the previous day had been fired from them, though the whereabouts of the other five rockets were uncertain. The remaining thirty-four were still at the ready. Why the insurgents had not simply fired all the rockets simultaneously was a mystery.⁵²

At the battle update briefing later that morning, Colonel Grigsby discussed the incident over the video teleconference network with the division staff back at Camp Victory. Analysts asserted that the sophistication and accuracy of the attack indicated a “more skilled [indirect-fire] cell” that was probably under the command of one or more of the known Mahdi Army explosives experts.⁵³

“Remember the rule,” said General Lynch after hearing the analysis, “they shoot at us, we shoot at them.” Lynch did not want the enemy to get a free shot at his troops. As for the longer term outlook, he was also

⁵¹ Sigact 1, IDF ATK, 1 x US KIA, 15 x WIA, Zone 208, 3d BCT, 3d Inf Div, BUB, 12 Jul 2007. Quotes from Author’s notes of the attack, 11 Jul 2007.

⁵² MND-C Media Release, Rockets aimed at FOB Hammer found, neutralized, 14 Jul 2007. One rocket managed to go off while the explosives disposal team was at the site, landing near the brigade operations center and wounding two soldiers. Sigact 1, Iranian Rockets Found, 2 x WIA, Zone 208, 3/3 ID, BUB, 13 Jul 2007.

⁵³ Sigact 1, IDF ATK, 1 x US KIA, 15 x WIA, Zone 208, 3/3 HBCT, BUB, 12 Jul 2007; Author’s notes of the attack, 12 Jul 2007. Quote from Sigact 1, Iranian Rockets Found, 2 x WIA, Zone 208, 3/3 ID, BUB, 13 Jul 2007.

concerned about the “culpability of the locals” and speculated that “they’re allowing it to happen in their area.” The situation was a perfect example of how easily a handful of insurgents could cow the population into inaction and how difficult it was for the counterinsurgents to nudge that population off the fence and motivate them to help the security forces.⁵⁴

High-Value Targets

The attack on Hammer was a setback, but it did not hinder ongoing operations. Only hours after the rockets rained down, the 3d Brigade netted an important terrorist, a Sunni extremist named Taha Razzuqi, though he also went by Abu Jabal. He was perhaps best known by the nickname “the Head Cutter,” which he gained in 2005 after he beheaded a captured Iraqi Army officer. By 2006, Razzuqi was a fixture among the still-hostile Sunni population along the Tigris, especially in the area around Salman Pak. Razzuqi had undertaken the attack on the Pepsi factory after Operation BULL RUN only weeks earlier, and he was credited with several IED assaults as well as financing and facilitating the movement of foreign fighters into Baghdad. Intelligence analysts regarded him as a “skilled operational planner for the insurgency.” For the 3d Division, Razzuqi was number seven on the most wanted list, but to Colonel Grigsby and the 3d Brigade, who had to put up with his depredations on a daily basis, the Head Cutter was public enemy number one.⁵⁵

Razzuqi was known to support al-Qaeda sporadically, and in May, intelligence had concluded that he “is anti-AQI again.” Analysts had been tracking Razzuqi for months, though he always slipped away, sometimes traveling south along the Tigris until he was out of reach of U.S. forces and obtaining fake identification cards in order to change his identity when he encountered Iraqi checkpoints. As the U.S. presence intensified during the surge, he found himself increasingly harried. In late June, Razzuqi was warned repeatedly that U.S. soldiers and Iraqi police were questioning residents about him and offering a reward for his capture. Some of Razzuqi’s informants also told him that the Americans were tracking him through his cell phone.⁵⁶

Intelligence finally pinpointed Razzuqi in his home in Duraiya. It was not the perfect place for a strike, however, because Razzuqi’s family also lived there, and no one wanted to harm women and children. But Grigsby

⁵⁴ BUB (from Forward Operating Base [FOB] Hammer), 12 Jul 2007, author’s notes.

⁵⁵ Storyboard, KIA of MND-C HVT [high-value target] 7, 8 EKIA [enemy killed in action], Zone 202, 3d BCT, 3d Inf Div, BUB, 11 Jul 2007.

⁵⁶ Quote from CG Executive Summary, Senior Plans Update, 5 May 2007. Tactical Intelligence Rpt, 21 Jun 2007, sub: Taha Razzuqi made arrangements to have fake identification card made; Tactical Intelligence Rpt, 20 Jun 2007, sub: Taha Razzuqi learned that CF are questioning people in regards to his whereabouts.

knew that another chance to catch this wanted man might not occur, and he blamed Razzuqi for putting his own family in danger. “When they go into areas with innocent civilians, they infect the whole place,” Grigsby declared as he paced the floor of the tactical operations center, watching his staff guide and monitor the upcoming strike on the terrorist. Razzuqi was going to die despite his choice to hide behind his family.⁵⁷

With an unmanned aerial vehicle watching from high overhead, the operation began to take shape. A pair of Air Force F-16 Falcon fighters raced toward the target but took almost an hour before getting on track for the bombing run. When they did make a first approach, the pilots did not like the angle and pulled up, and Grigsby wondered if they had enough fuel to remain on station. Then at 1524, the pilots were “cleared hot,” their bomb sights locked on the target illuminated by the unmanned aerial vehicle and their munitions armed and ready for release. One minute later, two 500-pound GBU-38 precision bombs hit the house. A flash of bright light and billowing dust clouds filled the screen in the tactical operations center. When it dissipated, only a pile of rubble was visible where the house had once stood, though the surrounding buildings survived untouched. No one cheered, but the men and women took satisfaction in a job well done.

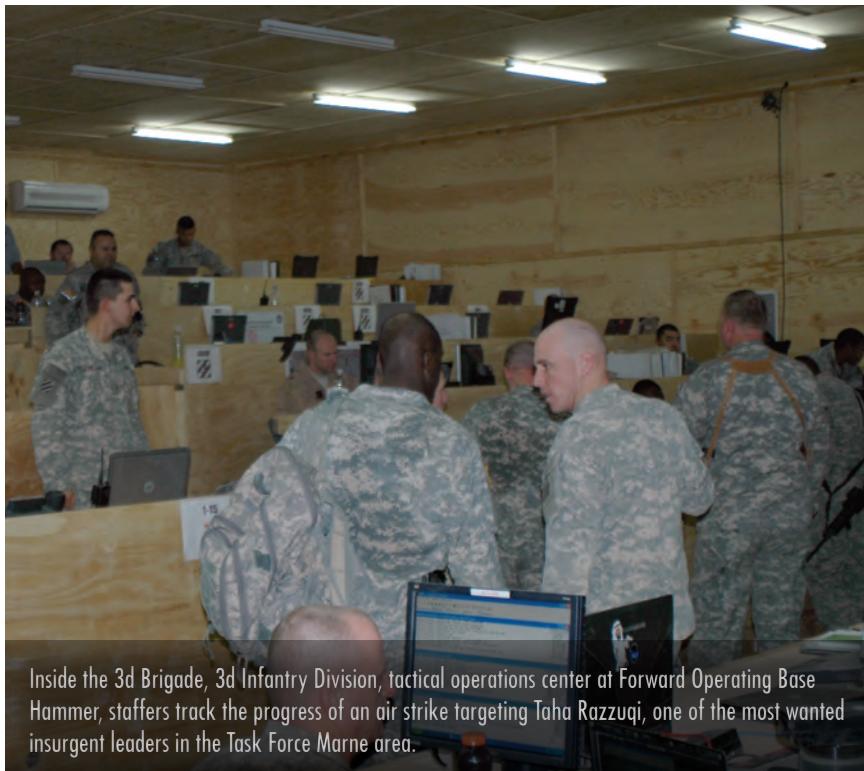
For the next hour, the aerial vehicle watched as bodies were loaded into a truck and taken away. Grigsby alerted the 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, at Combat Outpost Cleary to prepare a ground team to advance on the house, but soon he deemed the investigation unnecessary—and such a mission into what was likely to be a hornet’s nest too dangerous. In the end, Grigsby decided against venturing into the area, concentrating instead on watching the insurgents transfer the grisly load of bloody bodies into other trucks, so that the single unmanned aerial vehicle could not observe them all.

In the battle update briefing the following morning, Colonel Grigsby told the division commander the details of the operation. General Lynch was glad that Razzuqi was no longer a problem, though he took no joy in the overall mission. Although he routinely publicized the killing of top “dirt bags” in his battle territory, this time Lynch decided not to do so. “Let’s not play this one up,” he told Grigsby, who readily agreed.⁵⁸

Although Razzuqi’s death would, according to intelligence predictions, “disrupt IED, IDF [indirect fire] and smuggling networks in the Durai’ya and Salman Pak areas,” no one foresaw the collapse of al-Qaeda resistance in the region. While targeting top leaders was crucial to securing insurgent-

⁵⁷ Unless otherwise noted, the account comes from 3d Bde, 3d Inf Div, TOC [Tactical Ops Center], FOB Hammer, Taking out Taha Razzuqi, author’s notes, 10 Jul 2007.

⁵⁸ BUB, 11 Jul 2007, author’s notes.



Inside the 3d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, tactical operations center at Forward Operating Base Hammer, staffers track the progress of an air strike targeting Taha Razzuqi, one of the most wanted insurgent leaders in the Task Force Marne area.

controlled places, it was no substitute for the day-in and day-out operations on the ground.⁵⁹

The division maintained its routine of daily patrols, though by mid-July priorities shifted. While the 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, and the 3d Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment, continued to act as anvils for the 2d Brigade's operations, a new twist was added to an old mission. From the beginning, Task Force Marne's primary task had been to halt the accelerants of violence from reaching Baghdad, and, while all the division's operations were geared toward that goal, gaps remained in coverage, and insurgents still managed some freedom of movement. The two major roads heading into Baghdad, Routes Detroit and Wild, both roughly paralleling the east bank of the Tigris, were used by Sunni and Shi'ite extremists, and stopping them all was impossible.

Over the past several months, however, the Shi'ites had stepped up the northward transport of weapons and explosives, a problem attributed partly to the fact that the Iraqi police at these checkpoints were often, in

⁵⁹ Storyboard, KIA of MND-C HVT 7, 8 EKIA, Zone 202, 3d BCT, 3d Inf Div, BUB, 11 Jul 2007.

the words of one report, “considered to be influenced and/or infiltrated by [Mahdi Army] militia members.” At the same time, Sunni insurgents used fake identification cards to travel through checkpoints. Either way, the ineffectiveness and outright corruption of the Iraqi police checkpoints were contributing to the insurgents’ continuing violence.⁶⁰

Colonel Grigsby estimated that one-fifth of all attacks in Baghdad “are facilitated by accelerants moving through AO Hammer,” an unacceptable figure. However, since intelligence analysts believed that the insurgents needed to maintain a near-constant flow of accelerants to keep a daily average of about fifty attacks per day in Baghdad, even a small reduction in the rate of infiltration seemed to have an immediate effect on the violence. Grigsby’s goal was to interdict 10 percent of the accelerant traffic traveling through his area of operations.⁶¹

The brigade planned to focus more attention on those vital roadways by providing “tactical overwatch” of the Iraqi checkpoints, using 3d Brigade troops to patrol and establish “snap traffic control points” along the main roads to “build unpredictability in the insurgency’s perception of their ability to smuggle along [Route] Detroit.” Doing so would force the insurgents onto smaller, slower roads where they might be more easily spotted by U.S. patrols and helicopters. Grigsby named the new effort Operation JERSEY TURNPIKE and submitted the plan to division headquarters on 28 June.⁶²

One day earlier, Grigsby sent written instructions to Iraqi National Police units, warning them that his troops would be monitoring the checkpoints daily to ensure that vehicle inspections “are being conducted to standard.” Military officials expected that checkpoints would increase the number of vehicles searched each day and that “all contraband will be seized, recorded, and reported” and the smugglers detained.⁶³

In preparation for the opening of JERSEY TURNPIKE, General Lynch flew to Forward Operating Base Hammer on 7 July to meet with Grigsby. General Huggins, the 3d Division assistant commander, was also present, and the three officers sat in a rare patch of shade outside the brigade headquarters smoking cigars. Grigsby told his division commander that the new operation “is phase three of MARNE TORCH as far as I’m concerned,” and it would allow his brigade to still support efforts on the west side of the Tigris. Lynch agreed and lamented the lack of Iraqi forces in the lower Al Mada’in

⁶⁰ OPORD 07-17, Opn NEW JERSEY TURNPIKE, 3d BCT, 3d Inf Div, 28 Jun 2007, pp. 2-3. The operation order called it NEW JERSEY TURNPIKE, but most other documents referred to it as JERSEY TURNPIKE.

⁶¹ Rpt, Mission Analysis, Opn JERSEY TURNPIKE, 18 Jun 2007, slide 11.

⁶² OPORD 07-17, Opn NEW JERSEY TURNPIKE, 3d BCT, 3d Inf Div, 28 Jun 2007, pp. 6-7.

⁶³ Ltr, Grigsby to Iraqi National Police Checkpoints, 27 Jun 2007, sub: Traffic Control Checkpoint Vehicle Inspections.



General Lynch meets with General Huggins (center) and Colonel Grigsby (left) to discuss the beginning of Operation Jersey Turnpike, a concerted effort to open new checkpoints along Route Detroit.

Qadaa, a problem that would have to be remedied if there was to be any hope of bringing permanent stability to the troublesome region.⁶⁴

The first phase of JERSEY TURNPIKE began on the ninth with the 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, and the 3d Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment, conducting combined checkpoint training with an eye toward making the police checkpoints more honest and efficient. On 23 July, the operation entered phase two, with the two U.S. units setting surprise checkpoints—even closing Route Detroit for a time—and working with the National Police until they were up to standard and could operate on their own with only U.S. oversight. Over the next month, eleven major checkpoints as well as dozens of police “battle positions” were revamped between Nahrawan in the north and Salman Pak in the south.⁶⁵

Across the Tigris, Colonel Ferrell’s 2d Brigade continued to take advantage of Grigsby’s “anvil.” The 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, pushed southward into Area Richmond, eliminating IEDs, clearing houses, and

⁶⁴ Maj Gen Lynch Battlefield Rotation, FOB Hammer, 7 Jul 2007, author’s notes.

⁶⁵ Quote from Rpt, Mission Analysis, Opn JERSEY TURNPIKE, 18 Jun 2007, slide 15. MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 13–20 Jul 2007, p. 15.

killing insurgents. To the west in Area Denali, Colonel Odom's 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment, found that enemy activity around Hawr Rajab was "reduced significantly" after three weeks of fighting, and the insurgents were "minimizing direct contact" with U.S. forces to stanch their own casualties. Although the IEDs were still there, the decreased insurgent presence also meant that the enforcement of Sharia law and other extremist harassment of the population were on hold. Colonel Odom believed that the enemy was "laying low to avoid attracting [coalition] presence." The cavalry continued to act as a blocking force, both against accelerants headed into Baghdad and against the enemy squeezing westward around Adgie's advancing troops.⁶⁶

Progress was undeniable, and on 9 July, Colonel Ferrell, speaking from Forward Operating Base Kalsu over the sophisticated computer and audio setup that linked the division with its brigades and battalions in the field (called the Command Post of the Future [CPOF]), told the gathered command group at division headquarters that "we believe we have cut off enemy routes into Baghdad from the west." Better still, the IED danger was receding as the population increasingly told U.S. soldiers where the devices were planted. "Locals come forward daily," said Ferrell. "They are also pointing out 'bad people'—as they call the guerrillas—and we are using the rewards program to help them."⁶⁷

Another pivotal event came on 14 July. Just after midnight that day, the 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, learned from an Iraqi source that Abu Jurah, the leader of the insurgents in the area that included Arab Jabour, was meeting with fourteen other terrorists in a safe house in Abuwaitha, sixteen kilometers southeast of Baghdad. Abu Jurah was a ranking al-Qaeda commander and the number-one target in the 3d Division pantheon of top terrorists. Since early May, General Lynch had wanted Abu Jurah badly, and now the division had a fix on the insurgent's location at that instant.⁶⁸

Within minutes, a Shadow unmanned aerial vehicle was watching overhead, and in a half hour Apache gunships were lurking just out of sight, awaiting orders. Colonel Adgie's artillery was positioned on target in preparation, and he ordered his 1st Platoon, Company A, and 1st Platoon, Company B, to mount up and move toward the house, which was on Route Gnat near the west bank of the Tigris. The small force dismounted their Humvees and traversed on foot, but one of the men stepped on a pressure plate and detonated an IED, which peppered him with shrapnel but miraculously did not cause any serious injuries.

At that point, guns from the 1st Battalion, 9th Field Artillery Regiment, attached to the 2d Brigade at Forward Operating Base Kalsu,

⁶⁶ Quotes from MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 30 Jun–6 Jul 2007, p. 2. MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 7–13 Jul 2007, p. 2.

⁶⁷ BUB, 9 Jul 2007, author's notes.

⁶⁸ Unless otherwise noted, the account comes from Storyboard, 14 Jul 2007, MND-C HVI [high-value individual] Strike, Zone 204, 1st Bn, 30th Inf Rgt, BUB, 15 Jul 2007.

fired two precision-guided Excalibur 155-mm. artillery rounds. The house was completely destroyed, though overhead photos showed that none of the neighboring structures was damaged. This occasion was the first publicly acknowledged use of the Excalibur round in Iraq, and it marked an important new tool in the “smart” arsenal. Containing fifty pounds of explosives, the Excalibur round was much lighter than the precision munitions dropped from aircraft, and it was accurate to within six meters—so close, as the saying went, that it was like putting “warheads on foreheads.” In hostile-populated environments like Arab Jabour—or even Baghdad—where the enemy hid among civilians, this was an important weapon.⁶⁹

The aerial drone overhead observed as some of the injured were loaded into a black car, which sped away to another safe house. One of the waiting Apaches pounced on it, firing four 30-mm. rounds at the surprised insurgents before its gun jammed. Three men jumped from the car and disappeared into a nearby house, dragging their wounded with them. The circling helicopter cleared its guns and swooped in again, this time destroying the car in a hail of 30-mm. rounds. Because the terrorists were still in the house, the 3d Division called for an air strike. At 1730, Air Force F-16 aircraft dropped two 500-pound precision-guided bombs on the house.⁷⁰

The two platoons on the ground proceeded to Abu Jurah’s shattered safe house but found no bodies. They did locate, however, several blood trails leading southeast toward the river. In his report to the division, Colonel Ferrell wrote that intelligence believed that Abu Jurah and one of his key lieutenants were in the building when it was hit by the Excalibur rounds, but “no hard evidence exists that can confirm or deny his death.” On the other hand, some Islamic Web sites were referring to Abu Jurah as a martyr, and he made no further appearances in the locality. Also, intelligence reported that electronic surveillance picked up a phone conversation in which another al-Qaeda leader stated that he was “sure that Abu Jurah was inside” the building when it was hit and that several people were killed and injured. Dead, wounded, or just missing in action, Abu Jurah’s absence, said Major Manning, now the 2d Brigade’s chief planning officer, “disrupted al-Qaeda activities in this whole region.”⁷¹

Although the Excalibur rounds were newsworthy, they were only the tip of the artillery spear used by the 3d Division in support of Ferrell’s brigade. From the start, General Lynch placed a premium on firepower as the price of clearing territory. A total of 786 fire missions were called during the one-month operation, more than half of which were area-denial strikes

⁶⁹ MNC-I Media Release, Precision-guided munitions kills top al-Qaeda leader, 16 Jul 2007.

⁷⁰ Ibid.; Blue One Rpt, 2d BCT, 3d Inf Div, 15 Jul 2007, p. 1.

⁷¹ First and second quotes from 3d Inf Div Special Intelligence Summary, 14 Jul 07, sub: Abu Jurah was killed on 14 July 2007, and attacks are planned in retaliation. Third quote from Interv, author with Manning, 23 Jul 2007.

aimed at targets that intelligence had pinpointed as insurgent meeting places or bomb factories. Commanders were particularly reliant on artillery to hit targets south of their infantry phase lines. A map that identified the location of fire missions showed clusters of red dots in Objectives Brunswick and Jackson as well as Midway southeast of Salman Pak on the east side of the Tigris—all places beyond the limit of the 3d Division's permanent presence.⁷²

An additional forty-one artillery strikes were counterfire missions in response to enemy rocket or mortar attacks. General Lynch wanted the insurgents to know that every assault they made on a U.S. base or patrol would have a cost. "Whenever there is incoming, I want immediate outgoing," he often said. "I want the enemy to pay a price every time he shoots at us."⁷³

Running Out of Steam

The day after the raid on Abu Jurah's safe house, Operation MARNE TORCH officially ended, though the division experienced no break in the action. General Lynch had always said the operation would go on as long as necessary, but by late June he recognized that "we can't go much farther than Objective Richmond before we run out of combat power. We can't go farther than we can hold." By mid-July, the 2d Brigade was near that limit, and, although Colonel Ferrell would pursue the fight in the Tigris River valley, the time had come for the division to shift its emphasis to other areas in MND-C to continue the offensive momentum. The 2d Brigade's following push was renamed Operation GUARDIAN TORCH.⁷⁴

While campaigning proceeded, the commanders took some time to examine the results of their work up to that point. By 15 July, Ferrell's units had secured most of Objective Richmond, clearing 1,130 buildings to ensure that no insurgents lurked within, uncovering 45 weapons caches, finding 61 IEDs, and destroying 48 boats smuggling weapons and explosives along the Tigris. Although many of the residents had fled the territory before the fighting, many returned as the insurgents were pushed out, and almost seven hundred of these were entered into the biometric database. During the division's operations, the number of insurgents killed was rarely advertised, even in classified meetings—a lingering result of the controversy over body counts during the Vietnam War—though tallies were kept. Between 15 June and 15 July, 67 insurgents were killed and 255 captured. Of these, 9 were on the division's most-wanted list, while 31 were

⁷² MARNE TORCH Operational Wrap-up Slide, 15 Jun–15 Jul 2007, n.d.

⁷³ MARNE TORCH Operational Impacts, n.d., p. 2. Quotes from CG Battlefield Rotation, Combat Outpost Cleary, 20 Jun 2007, author's notes.

⁷⁴ Plans Update Meeting, 26 Jun 2007, author's notes.



A 155-mm. self-propelled howitzer from 2d Battalion, 15th Field Artillery Regiment, 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, fires at targets from Forward Operating Base Mahmudiyah.

on battalion or brigade lists. The impact of all this was difficult to quantify, but the 3d Division believed that its efforts had defeated al-Qaeda's "ability to move accelerants into Baghdad," and that the remnants of the terrorist network leadership "fled Arab Jabour because of MARNE TORCH operations." Division statistics pointed to a drop in enemy activity as evidence of the insurgents' diminished capabilities. In June, U.S. forces experienced 599 attacks, down from 647 the previous month, and the first half of July saw another slight drop. Sectarian attacks in Baghdad also dipped by 48 percent, which perhaps was due to the difficulty the insurgents were having in transporting weapons and explosives into the capital. While no one could say with any certainty that MARNE TORCH was the explanation, it undoubtedly was a contributing factor.⁷⁵

The 2d Brigade altered its preparations somewhat following the death of Abu Jurah and the shifting of 3d Division assets away from MARNE TORCH, but the overall objectives remained the same. Two new operations, GUARDIAN RICH MOUNTAIN and GUARDIAN GETTYSBURG, were more pointed attempts to establish an Iraqi government presence in a locality that had seen almost none since the fall of Saddam Hussein more than four years earlier. Colonel Ferrell's planning documents noted that "there is no government or judicial structures in [Arab Jabour] that is recognized

⁷⁵ MARNE TORCH Operational Impacts, n.d., p. 2.

or tied to the GOI [Government of Iraq]." The result was a "nearly total lack" of influence or services from Baghdad, though the Americans found that "the civilian population does not have an issue with this." Instead, local Iraqis fell back on the historical authority of local Sunni sheikhs, especially from the dominant Jabouri tribe along the Tigris and the Dulaimi, Janabi, and Ubaydi tribes in Hawr Rajab and the territory just to the south. This ancient system functioned well enough, and brigade planners observed that these tribal councils would not easily trust the Shi'ite-led government, but the 2d Brigade expected to gradually cede responsibility for the region to Iraqi Army and police units. Colonel Ferrell anticipated that this "bridge the gap" phase between U.S. operations and the beginning of the transition to Iraqi government-led operations would last until the end of the year.⁷⁶

So while Arab Jabour was by no means "pacified," the focus changed to rejuvenating the long-suffering Sunni communities along the Tigris—phase three of the operation plan. Colonel Ferrell reported on 20 July that he had "met the key tasks associated with MARNE TORCH," though his troops would need to stay on the offensive to "maintain contact with the insurgency until he has been defeated or destroyed."⁷⁷

The enemy was on the run and reluctant to engage the Americans openly, though he was still laying roadside bombs. Armored vehicles offered some protection, but the massive explosions of deeply buried IEDs continued to take a toll. On 24 July, near the village of Maderiyah, not far from Patrol Base Whiskey One, a platoon of Bradley armored fighting vehicles from Company A, 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, was out looking for insurgents. The lead Bradley came to a fork in the road and stopped. The driver, Pfc. John Elliot, recalled that he "knew there was an improvised explosive device on the right, so I turned left." The Bradley rumbled along for some distance and then rolled over an IED.⁷⁸

Private Elliot felt the wind sucked from his lungs, and he could not feel his right leg below the knee. Two other soldiers in the vehicle, S. Sgt. Mountain Robicheau and Sgt. Michael Trump, took over. While Robicheau directed the crew in the standard evacuation and vehicle security procedures, Trump dragged the wounded private from the driver's seat to safety outside the vehicle. "You got yourself thirty-five promotion points," said Trump, a reference to the Purple Heart medal Elliot would receive for his wounds, then began treating the lacerations and broken bones on his lower right leg.

Meanwhile, Robicheau guided another Bradley into place, so it could tow the crippled vehicle to safety. As it maneuvered into place, a second IED exploded, injuring several soldiers inside and throwing Robicheau ten feet

⁷⁶ FRAGO 2 to OPORD 07-11 (GUARDIAN RICH MOUNTAIN), 19 Jul 2007; OPORD 07-12, GUARDIAN GETTYSBURG (GUARDIAN Campaign Plan), 25 Jul 2007, pp. 9-10.

⁷⁷ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 13-20 Jul 2007, p. 1.

⁷⁸ MND-C Media Release, 1-30th Soldier awarded Bronze Star with Valor, 26 Nov 2007.

through the air. Although he was not hit by shrapnel, the hard landing broke his nose and tore several ligaments in his ankle. Trump was finished helping his wounded comrade, so he rushed back to the scene to direct the rescue. Although no one was killed in the blasts, nine soldiers were wounded, and two of them required immediate evacuation to Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C. For his prompt actions, Sergeant Trump was awarded the Bronze Star Medal with V device for valor by Colonel Ferrell.⁷⁹

Each day saw continuing small-arms attacks and roadside bombs. On 17 July, for example, three IEDs exploded in Area Richmond, wounding two soldiers, and the enemy mortared Patrol Base Whiskey One and rocketed Forward Operating Base Falcon. No one was injured in those attacks, and the Americans fired more than a dozen artillery rounds in retaliation. The slow forward progress of MARNE TORCH halted completely that day, although Colonel Ferrell did not feel that the situation was dire; it was just another day spent fighting a stubborn enemy who did not want to lose control of Arab Jabour.⁸⁰

The damage was being done by only a small number of insurgents. A lot of the leaders as well as many fighters fled south and west during the first month of MARNE TORCH, with only a few hard-core cells remaining behind to contest the U.S. push. By early August, the 2d Brigade believed that there were about sixty to seventy fighters in the entire area—almost half of them in Arab Jabour, plus ten in Abuwaitha and perhaps another dozen each in Hawr Rajab and in the region around Patrol Base Whiskey One. Colonel Ferrell believed that “the enemy would face difficulties massing more than approximately 20-25 fighters at one location at any given time,” which were not enough to cause any real problems for the Americans but enough to keep the violence high and the civilian population cowed.⁸¹

Just how dangerous even diminished numbers of insurgents could be was painfully obvious. On 11 August, during a routine patrol on the roads running along the west bank of the Tigris just south of Patrol Base Murray, a sniper in a building took aim at a convoy composed of the 2d Platoon, Company B, 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, and fired a single AK round. The bullet struck the gunner in the lead Humvee’s turret, Spec. William L. Edwards, in the upper right chest, and the vehicles slammed to a halt to take up defensive positions. While one of the Humvees took the wounded man to Murray, where a medevac helicopter would be waiting, the rest of the platoon converged on the building where the sniper had hidden. Several soldiers surrounded the house while others “stacked” up at the door

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Blue One Rpt, 2d BCT, 3d Inf Div, 18 Jul 2007, p. 1.

⁸¹ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 4–10 Aug 2007, p. 3.

and busted in, then spread out inside, rifles at the ready. If the gunman had been at that spot, he was now gone.⁸²

The sniper's attack was actually a ruse to draw the soldiers into the building. As they searched the rooms, a huge explosion ripped through the walls, bringing down bricks and plaster and flinging wooden splinters like spears. Four soldiers died instantly in the blast, and another three were wounded. A fire burned so fiercely that the surviving members of the platoon had to wait until the rubble cooled before recovering the dead from the debris. The entire house, it turned out, had been rigged with explosives in a rare but deadly form of booby trap, known in the military's unwieldy terminology as a "house-borne improvised explosive device," or HBIED.

Later that afternoon, the bodies were all found and placed on a helicopter and taken to Forward Operating Base Falcon. The incident was punctuated by news that Specialist Edwards, the soldier wounded by the sniper, had died at the hospital.⁸³ The brigade staff was devastated. This was the worst single-day casualty count for the brigade since the surge began, but Colonel Ferrell was spare in his report to General Lynch. "Sniper attacks and booby-trapped houses are both TTPs [tactics, techniques, and procedures]" that the 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, "had anticipated but not yet encountered," he wrote.⁸⁴

To add to the division's problems, that same day insurgents also launched a devastating rocket barrage on Forward Operating Base Kalsu. Three 240-mm. warheads plunged into the base, one of them landing on the base mess hall while breakfast was being served. Twenty-eight soldiers were wounded, and, though no one was killed, this was the worst attack on the base to date.⁸⁵

Events such as these diluted the progress being made on the ground, and General Lynch took it all to heart. Sometimes when his analysts flashed bold color slides on the screen in the Division Operations Center showing a downturn in casualties as the surge began to take hold, Lynch would lean back in his swivel chair and say that he found the favorable statistics to be a "matter of concern to me." Rather than take the news as purely positive, he wondered if the trend might herald a new enemy offensive. "I think we are only a heartbeat away from a big attack," he had warned during a battle update brief back on 9 July. "So don't let your guard down."⁸⁶

Lynch was not alone in his thinking. General Petraeus had only a few days earlier speculated that the insurgents might be trying to launch a

⁸² Account comes from Storyboard, Sigacts 2 and 3, 3 x US WIA, 5 x US KIA, Zone B4, 2d BCT, 3d Inf Div, 11 Aug 2007; Briefing Slide, Booby Trapped House, 11 Aug 2007.

⁸³ The soldiers killed in the building that day were Spec. Justin O. Penrod, Sgt. Andrew W. Lancaster, Sgt. Scott L. Kirkpatrick, and S. Sgt. William D. Skates.

⁸⁴ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 11–17 Aug 2007, p. 5.

⁸⁵ Storyboard, Sigact 1, IDF [indirect fire] on FOB Kalsu, 28 x US WIA, BUB, 12 Aug 2007.

⁸⁶ BUB, 9 Jul 2007, author's notes.

“mini-Tet”—a reference to the coordinated attacks by Communist forces throughout South Vietnam in early 1968—against one or more vulnerable patrol bases as a way of influencing the media and public opinion. Perhaps these concerns were overly wary, but they demonstrated just how determined commanders were to repress overoptimism—both privately and in public.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Robert H. Reid, “Top Commander Expects Big Iraq Strikes,” Associated Press, 7 Jul 2007.

NEW GROUND

Chapter 6

Although the territory covered by Task Force Marne was already vast, it was destined to become even larger. In the spring of 2007, central Iraq was made up of two commands—the new MND-C and, immediately to the east, Multi-National Division–Center-South (MND-CS), the command that encompassed Iraq southeast of Baghdad, including Al Qadisiyah and Wasit Provinces. Covering about forty thousand square kilometers, MND-CS extended from the Euphrates in the west to the Iran border in the east.

Multi-National Division–Center-South was a polyglot of coalition contingents. Commanded by Maj. Gen. Paweł Lamla, who also headed the Polish military units, MND-CS included, in addition to U.S. troops, the forces of eleven other nations: Armenia, Denmark, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Mongolia, Poland, Romania, El Salvador, Slovakia, and Ukraine. In December 2006, an engineer platoon from Bosnia-Herzegovina raised the number of nations to thirteen, totaling around sixty-five hundred troops.¹

In the early months of the surge, General Odierno decided that, because of Wasit Province's proximity to the Iranian border, it deserved more scrutiny and should be split from MND-CS and placed under different authority. Many discussions ensued, and in March General Odierno told General Lynch that his preference was to make Wasit the eventual responsibility of an incoming brigade from the Republic of Georgia, due to deploy that summer, and transferred the entire province to the control of the 3d Division. During a meeting with his staff on 27 March, Lynch said that, as commander of the newest surge unit, he "wanted Wasit" to demonstrate that the 3d was "the hungry division looking for work." Multi-National Division–Center was the logical organization for Wasit Province to be under, and Lynch received the nod in April, though he would not take it over officially until June when the Georgian brigade began to arrive.²

¹ MNF-I, Coalition Operations: 2007 Year in Review, 7 Feb 2008, pp. 26–27; Lt. Col. Robert Strzelecki, "Lessons Learned: Multinational Division Central-South," *Military Review* 85 (November–December 2005): 32–34.

² Quote from CG Notes, Executive Summary, Senior Plans Update, 27 Mar 2007. CG Executive Summary, ACE [Analysis and Control Element, the 3d Inf Div intelligence cell] Update, 2 Apr 2007.

Coalition Contingent

Georgia was one of the new countries born out of the crumbled Soviet Union. Its 45,000-man military had no real experience until it signed on with the Coalition in Iraq, beginning in 2005 when the 13th “Shavnabada” Light Infantry Battalion served under the 3d Infantry Division in Baghdad. Two years later, the Georgians sent their 3d Brigade, the first deployment of that size in the country’s short history. Two Georgian battalions were already serving in the Coalition, one in Baqubah, sixty kilometers northeast of the capital in Diyala Province, performing bridge defense on the Diyala River, and the other in Baghdad. Both had deployed for six-month tours.

On 4 April, the 3d Division received a visit from Maj. Shavlego Tabatadze, the commander of the 3d Georgian Brigade. General Lynch declared to Tabatadze that “I am going to aggressively work to get you under my command,” and stated that the minimal manning in Wasit Province made it the perfect place for the Georgians to operate freely. “We really need boots on the ground,” he continued, “because our battle space is all about persistent presence. We have grave concerns about Iranian influence and the Iran-Iraq border [and] your infantry soldiers could provide that visibility.”³

Many foreign forces in the Coalition were first partnered with a U.S. National Guard unit, and someone with a sense of irony matched the Georgians with a team from the Georgia National Guard’s 48th Infantry Brigade. The Georgians would help the Georgians with logistical proficiency and supply support, especially when the Georgian logistics battalion arrived from Tbilisi in July.⁴

Responsibility for Wasit Province would be a formidable challenge. On the positive side, as a predominantly Shi’ite region, it lacked the sectarian divisions so prominent in much of MND-C. Only 5 percent of the population was Sunni, and another 5 percent Kurdish. Wasit—Arabic for “middle”—was 175 kilometers from north to south and 225 kilometers from east to west, with the Tigris splitting it roughly in half diagonally. The provincial capital, Al Kut, with a population of about four hundred thousand, was the only town of any size (Wasit Province’s total population was about nine hundred and seventy thousand), and it lay on the eastern bank of the Tigris about halfway between Baghdad and Al Basrah, the largest city in southern Iraq. The old part of Al Kut was nestled in an ox-bow bend in the river, making it almost an island, and the surrounding fertile land was a major source of grain. Al Kut was also a regional trading center for Arab and Persian carpets.

In the context of the war in Iraq, Al Kut had so far received little attention, but almost a century earlier it had been prominent in international

³ CG Executive Summary, Maj Gen Lynch Office Call with Major Tabatadze, Georgian 3d Bde Commander, 4 Apr 2007.

⁴ CG Executive Summary, 48th Georgia National Guard Office Call, 7 May 2007.

headlines. In 1915, as part of the World War I allied campaign to knock the Turkish Ottoman Empire out of the war, a British and Indian force marched into Iraq toward Baghdad. However, the Turks, who were widely regarded as the “sick man of Europe” and ripe for a fall, proved a more difficult opponent than expected. They had fought an allied force of five hundred thousand soldiers to a standstill at Gallipoli in the Dardanelles, and in Iraq they surprised the British and Indian army of twenty thousand that had taken Al Kut during its march from Al Basrah toward Baghdad in the fall of 1915. Several setbacks drove the army back to Al Kut, and in December the Turks besieged the city. Relief forces were sent to rescue the defenders, but the Turks defeated them, killing and wounding twenty-three thousand British and colonial troops during the attempts. After four months the force surrendered Al Kut. Seven thousand men had died, and the survivors—some thirteen thousand men—were used by the Turks as slave labor, and half of them died before the Ottoman Empire’s surrender at the end of the war. A cemetery for many of the dead soldiers, now derelict and overgrown with weeds, remained in Al Kut, a symbol of one of Britain’s worst military failures.⁵

The situation was not so dire for the Coalition, but by early 2007 Al Kut and eastern Wasit Province were not secure. Except for a pocket of al-Qaeda influence in the westernmost part of the province where it abutted Baghdad, the threat in Wasit was exclusively Shi’ite. Although the ruling provincial council was composed of a coalition of Shi’ite religious parties, with Moqtada al-Sadr’s organization in the minority, the Sadrists held substantial influence and were expected to gain seats on the council in the 2008 elections. Mahdi Army militiamen often clashed with the Iraqi police, most of whom were recruited from Badr Corps supporters, and the Shi’ite insurgents easily held their own. The Mahdi Army was clearly a force with which to be reckoned, and the result was an uneasy equilibrium between the police and militia. During the last three months of 2006, ninety-eight attacks against police were recorded in Wasit Province.⁶

Iraq’s overstretched military could spare only one brigade for Wasit’s huge expanse: the 3d Brigade, 8th Iraqi Army Division. The National Police were the main security force, and their abilities were often in doubt. One assessment in February noted that the police did not have “full control over Al Kut city, and in some areas the militias still rule.” Coalition forces were also attacked, and the main base in the province, Camp Delta, about five kilometers southwest of Al Kut, was frequently struck by mortars and rockets. Delta, a former Iraqi Air Force base used extensively by Saddam Hussein

⁵ William R. Polk, *Understanding Iraq* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005), pp. 70–71; David Fromkin, *A Peace to End all Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2001), p. 201.

⁶ Security Assessment Briefing, Wasit Province, 22 Feb 2007.



Colonel Baker (right) also had the task of training Iraqi security forces in Wasit Province.

during the 1980–1988 war with Iran, was home to several contingents, including Iraqi Army troops, and El Salvadoran and Polish security forces.⁷

The border region's vulnerability demanded more resources than the Iraqis and coalition forces of MND-CS could muster, and giving part of the territory to the 3d Division made sense. So, during a simple ceremony held on 21 June at Forward Operating Base Delta, General Lamla handed command of Wasit Province to MND-C. General Cardon represented the 3d Division, and, after signing the memorandum of understanding that transferred authority of the province, he explained to the gathered Polish soldiers that “each of you helped build a stronger Iraq, and you should feel proud of your accomplishments. . . . We will follow in your footsteps and build on your efforts with our Iraqi partners.” The 3d Division’s 214th Fires Brigade, based at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, and commanded by Col. Peter R. Baker, assumed the job of advising and training the Iraqi Army in Wasit, a task formerly held by the Polish 17th Mechanized Brigade.⁸

But Baker did not have an offensive mission nor did he have much fire-power under his command because all of the brigade’s guns were elsewhere. Still, as attacks on coalition forces increased during the surge, Lynch prodded corps headquarters to approve a counterfire capability so he could fight

⁷ Briefing, Provincial Security Transition Assessment–Wasit, Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) Wasit Situation Rpt, Battle space of 3d Bde, 8th IA [Iraqi Army] Div, 25 Feb 2007.

⁸ MND-C Media Release, Transfer of Authority: MND-C assumes control of FOB Delta, Wasit Province, 21 Jun 2007.

the insurgents. "I want to poke these people in the eye to make them stop shooting at us," he said after hearing new reports of strikes in late June.⁹

Forward Operating Base Delta received two artillery pieces in July. On the fifth, two M109A6 Paladin 155-mm. self-propelled howitzers from the 1st Battalion, 9th Field Artillery Regiment, rumbled through the gates of the sprawling base after slowly clanking their way through the streets of Al Kut to inform the population of their arrival. They did not provide much firepower by U.S. standards, but the Paladins could do a lot of damage. Lynch wanted the locals to understand that the assaults on Delta would not continue unpunished. "If you allow outgoing fire," he said, "expect to see incoming."¹⁰

Rocket and mortar fires were a serious problem. General Lynch had predicted that, following the handover of Wasit to MND-C, Delta "is going to be a lucrative target. There will be militiamen surrounding the base." In the weeks immediately before and after the transfer, Forward Operating Base Delta was rocketed a half-dozen times, including one warhead that blew a chunk out of the road near the base headquarters and another that punched a hole in the roof of the local gym. No one was hurt in either attack. Although very large, Delta was isolated, with virtually no U.S. forces and only a small contingent of coalition troops. The Poles had provided the quick reaction force in Wasit, but in mid-2007 most of their troops were training Iraqis. As the Polish units began leaving during the summer, the security mission for Delta fell to the Salvadorans, who numbered about two hundred.¹¹

Cross-Border Smuggling

General Lynch faced two main problems in Wasit—the porous boundary with Iran and the smuggling routes that led to Baghdad. Weapons and Iranian agents were thought to traverse the border, some from eastern Wasit Province and others from southernmost Iraq north of Al Basrah and then along the main roadways northward to the capital. On a map, the difficulty was obvious. Al Kut sat roughly in the center of Wasit Province, and all the major roads converged on it before heading north to Baghdad, which meant that smuggled weapons had to travel along them at some point. The MND-C campaign plan for Wasit, known as Operation MARNE SENTRY, pinpointed Al Kut as "an important waypoint for the smuggling activities

⁹ Plans Update Meeting, 26 Jun 2007, author's notes.

¹⁰ CG Battlefield Rotation, FOB Delta, Wasit Province, 5 Jul 2007, author's notes.

¹¹ Jay Deshmukh, "US allies from Georgia to protect Iraqi border," American Forces Press Service, 6 Jul 2007.



Although Colonel Baker commanded an artillery brigade, he only had two Paladin 155-mm. self-propelled howitzers. They arrived at Forward Operating Base Delta on 5 July 2007.

in the southern provinces since it is on the most direct route for smuggled goods coming in from Iran to Baghdad.”¹² (See Map 11.)

The Mahdi Army was the main culprit. According to one report, Sadr’s men in Al Kut occupied “key terrain potentially threatening [the] mobility” of coalition forces moving along the roadways. Sadr’s men were also “actively involved in weapons smuggling” from Iran. This lucrative trade made many people rich, and the money sometimes caused Mahdi Army members in Al Kut to act independently of their superiors in Baghdad. General Lynch often compared them to the Mafia. “If you want to understand these guys,” he said, “watch the ‘Sopranos’”—a reference to the television show about an organized crime family in New Jersey. “Tony and his gang have nothing on them.”¹³

Intelligence substantiated this. One Mahdi Army commander in Al Kut was from a poor family, but after a few years on the Iranian border he flourished financially. Declared one analyst, “Now he lives in a big house

¹² Quote from MND-C OPORD 07–24 (MARNE SENTRY), 12 Jul 2007, p. 1, and see also pp. 3–4.

¹³ First and second quotes from Situation Template (SITTEMP), Militia Threat in Wasit Province (c. Jun 2007). Last quotes from ACE Update, 9 Jul 2007, author’s notes.



Forward Operating Base Delta, near the city of Al Kut, was often rocketed by Shi'ite insurgents.

because he sells rockets from Iran. People come from all over to buy. He makes a fortune." According to some sources, men with such connections could make \$10,000 a day.¹⁴

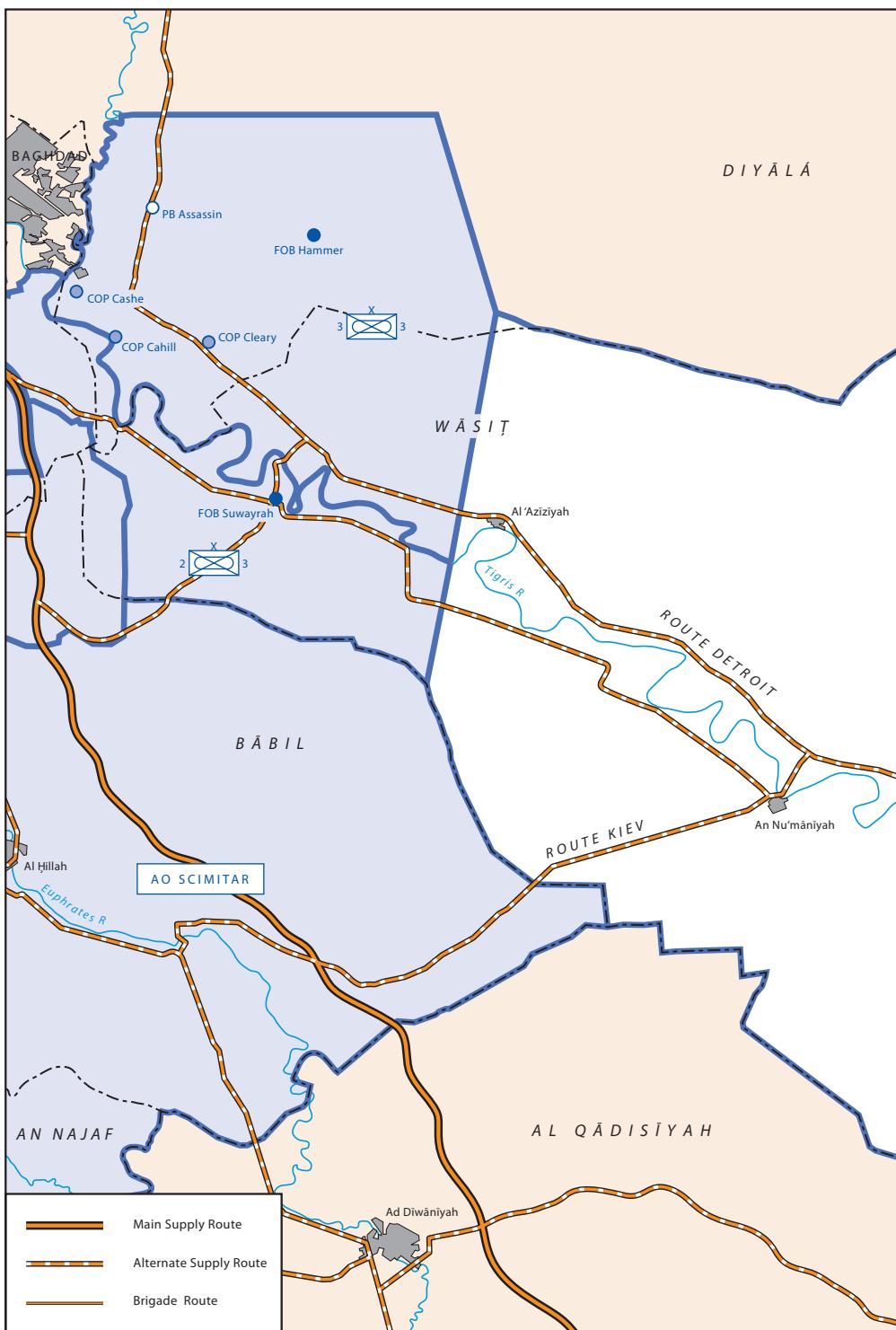
The bigger issue, however, was the Iranian-made EFPs that were becoming so devastating in Baghdad and the surrounding belts. Between April and July 2007, MND-C experienced twenty-nine EFP attacks, of which eighteen killed or wounded U.S. soldiers. General Lynch told reporters that "We just got to stop this Iranian inflow into Iraq. People talk of it all the time but we got to get out and do it."¹⁵

Again, the Mahdi Army was heavily involved. Intelligence analysts believed that, with the help of Iranian Qods Force operatives, Sadr's men maintained "three of the five main EFP smuggling routes [into] Wasit Province."¹⁶ Some of the illegal traffic probably traversed the province's 140-kilometer border with Iran via secret trails, but, because the flat and

¹⁴ ACE Update, 9 Jul 2007, author's notes.

¹⁵ Deshmukh, "US allies from Georgia to protect Iraqi border."

¹⁶ SITTEMP, Militia Threat in Wasit Province (c. Jun 2007).



Map 11

WASIT PROVINCE
AREA OF OPERATIONS

June–December 2007

● Forward Operating Base

○ Patrol Base

○ Combat Outpost

Brigade Boundary

0 20 Miles
0 20 Kilometers

Zurbātiyah
Border Crossing

Badrāh
COP Shocker

Jaṣṣān

I R A N

3 X
Georgia

ROUTE TOPEKA
Tigris R

Shaykh Sa'd

214 X
FOB Delta

3 X
8 Ir

ROUTE BISMARCK
Al Kūt

Al Ḥayy

M A Y S Ā N

D H Ī Q Ā R

forbidding desert hid very little, the weapons likely were transported on roads through the checkpoints already manned by Iraqi forces.

About three hundred trucks crossed from Iran into Wasit each day—most of them ferrying religious pilgrims to Shi'ite holy sites in Iraq or legitimate merchants plying their wares between Tehran and Baghdad. U.S. officials were concerned, however, over how effective the Iraqis were at catching the arms smugglers. According to intelligence officers, the checkpoints were “inefficient and are not stopping anything.” Adding to these doubts, Mahdi Army leaders were freely traveling over the border, prompting speculation that they were being trained in Iran. Intelligence had identified an Iranian Qods Force headquarters just inside Iran.¹⁷

When MND-C took control of Wasit, the 3d Division made monitoring this boundary priority one. Lynch expected the danger to increase as the Americans became more active in Wasit, and that probably meant more casualties. “It’s a hornet’s nest,” he said during a planning session at division headquarters, “and we’re going to poke it. They’re [the insurgents] not going to like it that their easy access to the border has been curtailed.”¹⁸

To prepare for the Georgians’ arrival, Lynch created the 3d Regional Border Task Force and placed at its head Col. Mark R. Mueller, the senior U.S. commander of the MND-CS border teams. These teams had been established in 2004 as part of the U.S. training mission and embedded in the Iraqi Ministry of the Interior. Now, three years later, most of the manpower, at least in this sector, would come from the Georgians, and Mueller’s task was to handle the necessary construction for them and maintain oversight of the effort. The plan was to build six new outposts a few kilometers west of the Iraqi checkpoints, to be manned by the Georgians, in order to add a second screen to the inspection process. In the meantime, Mueller’s men could search only a handful of the trucks, but with more manpower and new technology, such as cell-phone monitoring equipment, they hoped to curtail the illegal weapons trade.

The Iranians were not making the undertaking easy. At the Zurbatiyah main crossing point near the town of Mehran, about one hundred and fifty kilometers east of Baghdad, tall concrete walls blocked the view of Iraqi observers. This prompted suspicions that the Iranians were selectively loading vehicles with weapons depending on how tight the security seemed on the Iraqi side. Since July, Mueller’s team had intensified the security at the border. The team members provided x-ray machines for luggage screening, a computer system for tracking wanted terrorists, and the beginnings of a biometric system for fingerprints and iris scans. They also began building a watchtower that could see over the Iranians’ wall.¹⁹

¹⁷ ACE Update, 9 Jul 2007, author’s notes.

¹⁸ Meeting, Expanded Plans Update, 6 Jul 2007, author’s notes.

¹⁹ Kim Gamel, “US starts late manning Iran-Iraq border,” Associated Press, 23 Sep 2007.



General Lynch and members of the 3d Infantry Division staff discuss plans to pacify Al Kut and establish secure border crossings between Wasit Province and Iran.

This endeavor was a beginning, but, if the normal border crossings became too risky, the smugglers might be forced to avoid them and instead use the more isolated dirt roads or attempt to traverse the open desert, where overhead surveillance, such as satellites and aerial drones, could more easily spot the travelers. “You want to separate the sheep from the wolves, and push the wolves to alternate routes that are easier to interdict,” said Mueller.²⁰

Facing Iran

The monitoring effort would be vastly improved if the coalition forces could maintain permanent visibility along the boundary with Iran. In September, the Americans began building a new base, Combat Outpost Shocker, near the town of Badrah, less than eight kilometers from the Zurbatiyah crossing point. Until then, Mueller and his men had driven a dangerous eighty-kilometer route north from Camp Delta to the border.

²⁰ Yochi J. Dreazen and Greg Jaffe, “U.S. to Target Iranian Arms Entering Iraq,” *Wall Street Journal*, 10 Sep 2007.

Shocker would be manned by two hundred soldiers—roughly fifty to sixty Americans and the rest Georgians, as well as a handful of agents from the U.S. Border Patrol. It was the first time a U.S. base would be so close to Iran. “Obviously, they probably won’t be very happy about it,” observed Mueller.²¹

On 8 October, after months of preparation, the 3d Georgian Brigade moved into Forward Operating Base Delta and the new area of operations the Georgians called Kartli, named after a kingdom in ancient Georgia. The new troops would have responsibility for maintaining base security and manning the additional screen of border checkpoints, as well as providing an emergency response (along with the 984th Military Police Company) to U.S. explosive ordnance disposal units dismantling IEDs “outside the wire.” In keeping with the Georgians’ religious beliefs, an Eastern Orthodox priest blessed the post and then sprinkled holy water on the soldiers kneeling before him. The 2,000-man brigade was, in the words of its commander, Major Tabatadze, “proud to be a part of the coalition forces, and we are ready to help the Iraqi people in their rebuilding efforts to ensure the country’s stability and security.” The Republic of Georgia had just become the United States’ second largest ally in the Iraq coalition, with Great Britain holding the number one spot.²²

Combat Outpost Shock was completed in mid-November. Life for the Georgian and U.S. soldiers—and some civilians—was not easy, but, like most bases, it had trailers in which to live, a dining facility and hot showers, a gym, and Internet access. The new coalition presence made the border crossings go more smoothly, especially at Zurbatiyah, which continued to process some fifteen hundred Iranians a day through December.²³

As the Georgians settled into their role, plans called for seventeen new border forts, each to be occupied by a transition team, as well as more checkpoints. General Lynch wanted six right away, though it was uncertain who would man them. The division commander waved aside all concerns, noting that “a red cone in the road would be better than what we have there now.”²⁴

Despite all the work, six months after the 3d Division took over Wasit Province no weapons had been found at the checkpoints and no terrorists had been arrested sneaking across the border. In December, Lynch admitted to journalists that, although forty-six thousand trucks had been searched, no Iranian munitions were found. “We are in a ‘wait and see’ mode,” he said.²⁵

While the question of Iranian arms crossing the border was murky, U.S. officials had little doubt that Iran was fueling the fight by providing technical training to Shi’ite insurgents on both sides of the boundary.

²¹ “War Inches Closer to Iran,” ABC News transcript, 25 Sep 2007.

²² Task Force Marne Media Release, Georgian Brigade Uncases Colors, Ready for Operations, 8 Oct 2007.

²³ Liz Sly, “In Iraq, U.S. Base Eyes Iran Border,” *Chicago Tribune*, 10 Dec 2007.

²⁴ Plans Update Meeting, 26 Jun 2007, author’s notes.

²⁵ CG Executive Summary, Baghdad Bureau Chiefs Luncheon, 9 Dec 2007.



General Odierno meets with Major Tabatadze during the 3d Georgian Brigade deployment to Forward Operating Base Delta. The 2,000-man unit was tasked with stemming the flow of illegal weapons and insurgents through the province into Baghdad.

Coalition military officials estimated that Iran furnished “special groups” of Shi’ite insurgents in Iraq with between \$750,000 and \$3 million worth of funding and equipment each month.²⁶

In January 2008, Colonel Mueller left command of the 3d Regional Border Task Force, and Col. Grant A. Webb took over. About the same time, the 3d Georgian Brigade’s tour in Iraq was ending, to be replaced by the 1st Georgian Brigade. The mission remained unchanged, however, and MND-C continued its effort to curtail weapons smuggling and “Iranian influence,” which presumably meant the infiltration of spies and advisers from across the border. Catching unarmed infiltrators was extremely difficult when they blended in with busloads of Shi’ite pilgrims.²⁷

The problem of Iranian influence exacerbated the ongoing upheaval within the Shi’ite leadership in Wasit Province. In January 2008, some members of the Mahdi Army in Al Kut were becoming increasingly independent of Moqtada al-Sadr. The region had long been at the end of Sadr’s

²⁶ Kimberly Kagan, *The Surge: A Military History* (New York: Encounter Books, 2009), p. 162.

²⁷ CG Executive Summary, MARNE SENTRY II Backbrief, 5 May 2008.

reach, and many of the local leaders had only tenuous ties to the Mahdi Army, leading some U.S. planners to fear that security there might deteriorate. If the situation did worsen, MND-C had a plan to send part of a battalion from the 3d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, along with elements of the division's Combat Aviation Brigade, to bolster the 214th Fires Brigade at Camp Delta until security was restored.²⁸

By the spring of 2008, the endeavors of the Georgians and the transition teams had, in the words of one analysis, "gained freedom of maneuver and interdicted accelerants from transiting the province," allowing new and "focused operations to kill or capture criminals and non-compliant special groups." This progress permitted the 3d Division, which was preparing to leave Iraq, to modify its MARNE SENTRY campaign plan to include, among other things, a greater emphasis on checkpoints south of Al Kut, where intelligence increasingly indicated heavier Iranian activity. The new plan, known as MARNE SENTRY II, was issued on 26 April.²⁹

Iranian influence and Iran's movement of arms was always a concern, but they took on new urgency in the spring of 2008. During a briefing on the implementation of MARNE SENTRY II plans on 5 May, General Lynch said that the biggest difference facing coalition and Iraqi troops in Wasit "is the direction from which Iranian influence is flowing." While intelligence had indicated that "Iranian influence" had flowed from the Zurbatiyah point of entry in the northeast, it now seemed to be coming from the south, particularly the area around Al Amarah, the capital of Maysan Province southeast of Wasit.³⁰

Al Amarah lay on the east bank of the Tigris, 130 kilometers southeast of Al Kut and only 50 kilometers from the Iranian border. A little smaller in population size than Wasit Province's capital, it was built in the 1860s by the Turks as a military outpost to control warring Shi'ite tribes in the region. Following the Persian Gulf War in 1991, Al Amarah was one of the towns that rebelled against Saddam Hussein, only to be squashed by the dictator's Republican Guards. Iraqi troops then dammed and drained the surrounding marshes that had provided cover for the rebels, a tactic that decimated the farms and impoverished the population, turning the town into a hotbed of anti-Ba'athist sentiment. However, the Shi'ites of Al Amarah were not friends of the Coalition, and, in June 2003, only a few months after its liberation from the hated Hussein, the city turned on British forces sent there, killing six soldiers. In the following years, British bases in and around Al Amarah were routinely mortared and rocketed.

On the eve of the 3d Division's departure from Iraq, intelligence frequently identified Al Amarah as "a key logistical smuggling node," with Route

²⁸ Concept Plan, Marne Wasit Response, 21 Jan 2008, pp. 1-4.

²⁹ OPORD 08-013 (MARNE SENTRY II), 26 Apr 2008, pp. 3-4.

³⁰ CG Executive Summary, MARNE SENTRY Backbrief, 5 May 2008.



Following the departure of the Georgian brigade and the winding down of Task Force Marne's tour of duty in the spring of 2008, the job of security fell to the Iraqi police.

Topeka as the main transit point from the city through Wasit Province. The province had only one legal crossing point—Al Sheeb, immediately east of Al Amarah—but vehicles were known to traverse the border on rough dirt roads in at least five other locations. Determined smugglers could also transit the soggy marshes east of Al Amarah, which were not passable on foot, and aerial drones flying at night over the region reported small boats sneaking through the reeds.³¹

The verdict is still out on the effectiveness of Task Force Marne's efforts in Wasit Province. For years, the military consistently maintained that Iranian weapons were priming the Shi'ite extremists, as witnessed by General Lynch's statement in September 2007 that "we've got a major problem with Iranian munitions streaming into Iraq." Yet coalition efforts turned up virtually nothing at the border crossings or on the roadways to Baghdad. General Cardon summed it up best when he pointed out, "We know they're coming across, but we haven't caught any." On the other hand, the presence of Georgian and other coalition forces on the handful of major roadways between Al Kut and Baghdad made smuggling more difficult.³²

³¹ CG Executive Summary, ACE Update, 22 May 2008.

³² First quote from "U.S. to Target Iranian Arms Entering Iraq," *Wall Street Journal*, 10 Sep 2007. Second quote from Sam Enriquez, "U.S. Tackles Border Troubles in Iraq," *Los Angeles Times*, 20 Oct 2007.

NEW OFFENSIVES

Chapter 7

The second major division-level operation, launched on the heels of MARNE TORCH, concentrated on the southwestern part of the MND-C battlefield, the area “owned” by Colonel Garrett’s 4th Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division. Although occupied by elements of the brigade since before the surge, the region remained a problem. Weapons and insurgents filtered in from Al Anbar Province, swinging southward into the Euphrates valley and then northward into Baghdad. While the Americans largely maintained the initiative there, the ability of the insurgents to reinforce the conflict in Baghdad had not been sufficiently subdued. In this effort, General Lynch wanted to close that avenue into the capital.

Lynch’s planners picked two sites along a stretch of the Euphrates valley that were particularly troublesome. The first, dubbed Objective Kodiak, was Jurf as Sakhr, a strip abutting the river’s west bank running from the northernmost point of the brigade’s area of operations, to Al Musayyib, a small city located where Highway 9 crossed the Euphrates before continuing on to Karbala. This land was home to the Sunni Owesat and Janabi tribes, both of which were a perpetual source of weapons trafficking.

The tribes also supported al-Qaeda. Intelligence indicated that the territory was dominated by a seventy-man cell commanded by a terrorist known as Abu Bakr—a common nom de guerre taken by insurgent leaders because it was the name of one of the Prophet Muhammad’s closest confidants. The group, with support from part of the tribal population, had organized dozens of attacks on U.S. and Iraqi forces and was responsible for organizing the shipment of weapons from Syria through Al Fallujah. However, Jurf as Sakhr was unusual in that contraband munitions did not flow into Baghdad from the town, but rather the opposite. According to one report, arms were “being pushed out of Baghdad into Jurf As Sukr as well as from Fallujah into Jurf As Sukr.” Because of this, intelligence predicted that there were likely to be many weapons caches throughout the Kodiak region, as well as backyard “factories” that constructed suicide explosive vests and truck bombs. In addition, many of the local Sunni mosques served as safe houses for the planning of terrorist operations.¹

¹ Quote from CG Executive Summary, Maj Gen Lynch Meeting with Col Garrett and Lt Col Balcavage, FOB Iskan, 22 May 2007. MND-C OPORD 07-23 (MARNE AVALANCHE), 24 Jun 2007, p. 1; An. B, Intelligence, to MND-C OPORD 07-23 (MARNE AVALANCHE), 22 Jun 2007, p. B-1-1.

The other focus area, Objective Juneau, centered on Al Iskandariyah to the east. Although it was less than half the size of Kodiak, this target would be equally challenging. Unlike the Sunni-dominated territory to the west, the towns paralleling Highway 9 contained a smoldering sectarian mix that could easily burst into flames with the slightest spark. Al Iskandariyah's population of a hundred and twenty thousand was 70 percent Shi'ite; Haswah, a town of thirty thousand just to the southeast, was split in half between Shi'ite and Sunni; and Al Musayyib, some thirty kilometers to the south, held a population of eighty thousand that was 85 percent Shi'ite.²

A lack of support from the government in Baghdad, high unemployment, and the proximity of openly hostile Sunni tribes just to the west made the Shi'ites inclined to welcome the protection of militias, in particular, the Mahdi Army. Intelligence analysts believed that terrorist cells in Al Iskandariyah were responsible for most of the frequent IED attacks along the three major roads leading out of the city. "This network is able to traffic weapons into and throughout Iskandariyah due to the influence of JAM's [Mahdi Army] political office," asserted one report. Such a combination of armed presence and political control was a hallmark of guerrilla war, and, if the two were allowed to exist side by side in a given region, the government would soon find itself completely shut out.³

Avalanche

The operation to counter extremist violence in these areas, MARNE AVALANCHE, was named after the September 1943 Allied push into southern Italy that had included the 3d Infantry Division. General Lynch intended it as a disruption campaign composed of "intelligence-driven precision raids against confirmed targets" that were the first step in ensuring security in the dangerous region. Phase one would begin on 1 July with intelligence collection and psychological operations aimed at separating the population from the insurgents. On the fifteenth, phase two would commence, with platoon-size air assaults designed to disrupt enemy command and communications over the next two weeks, at which time larger operations—mostly company strength—would form blocking positions to limit the mobility of insurgent IED cells and hopefully trap guerrilla leaders. MARNE AVALANCHE would end on 15 August with "the successful disruption and neutralization of AQI and JAM insurgent activities [and] key terrain vic[inity] Jurf As Sukr and Iskandariyah retained by" U.S. and Iraqi forces. It would be a tall order to fill.⁴ (See *Map 12*.)

² 1st Bn, 501st Inf Rgt, AO Eindhoven Overview, undated slide.

³ MND-C OPORD 07-23 (MARNE AVALANCHE), 24 Jun 2007, p. 2.

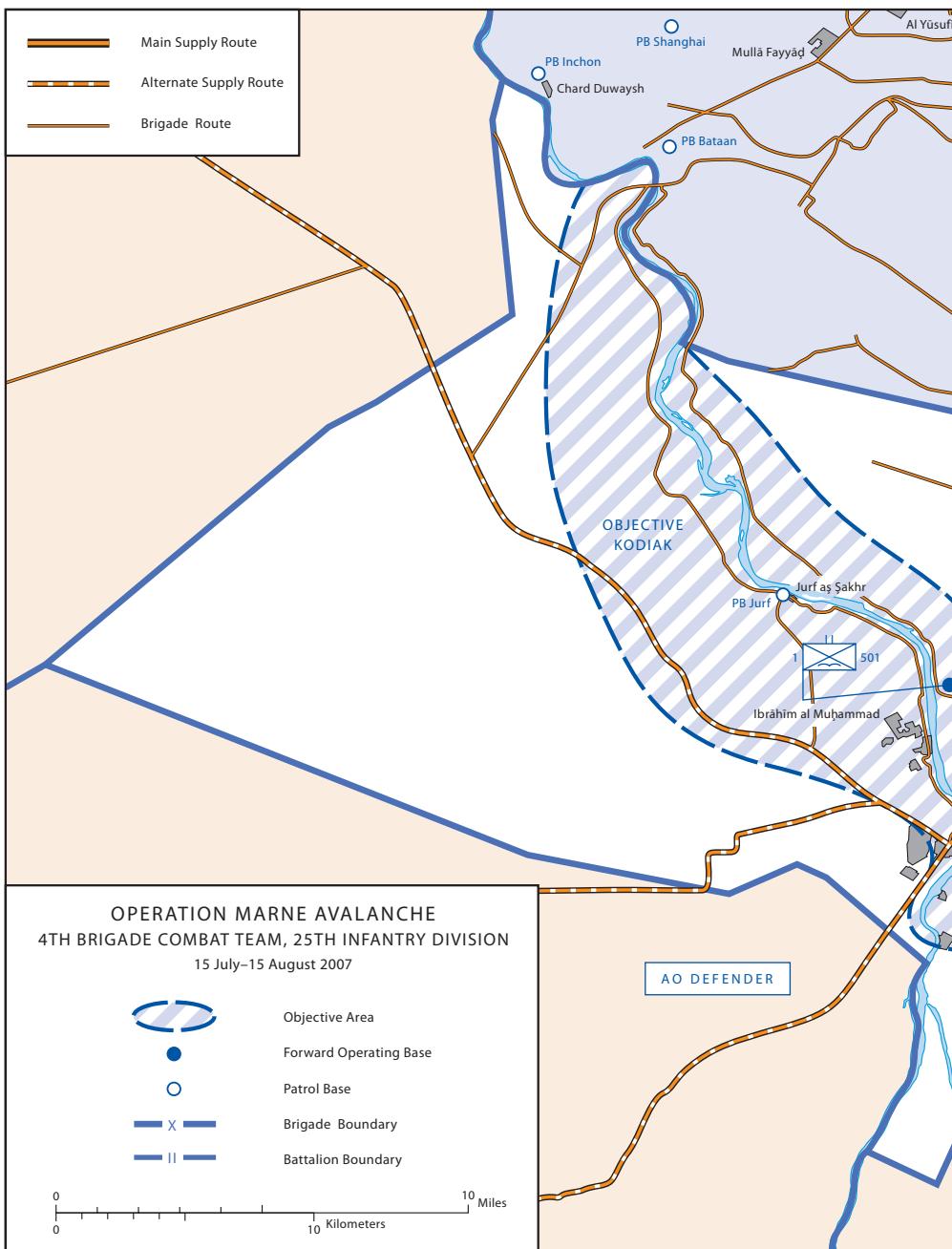
⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7.



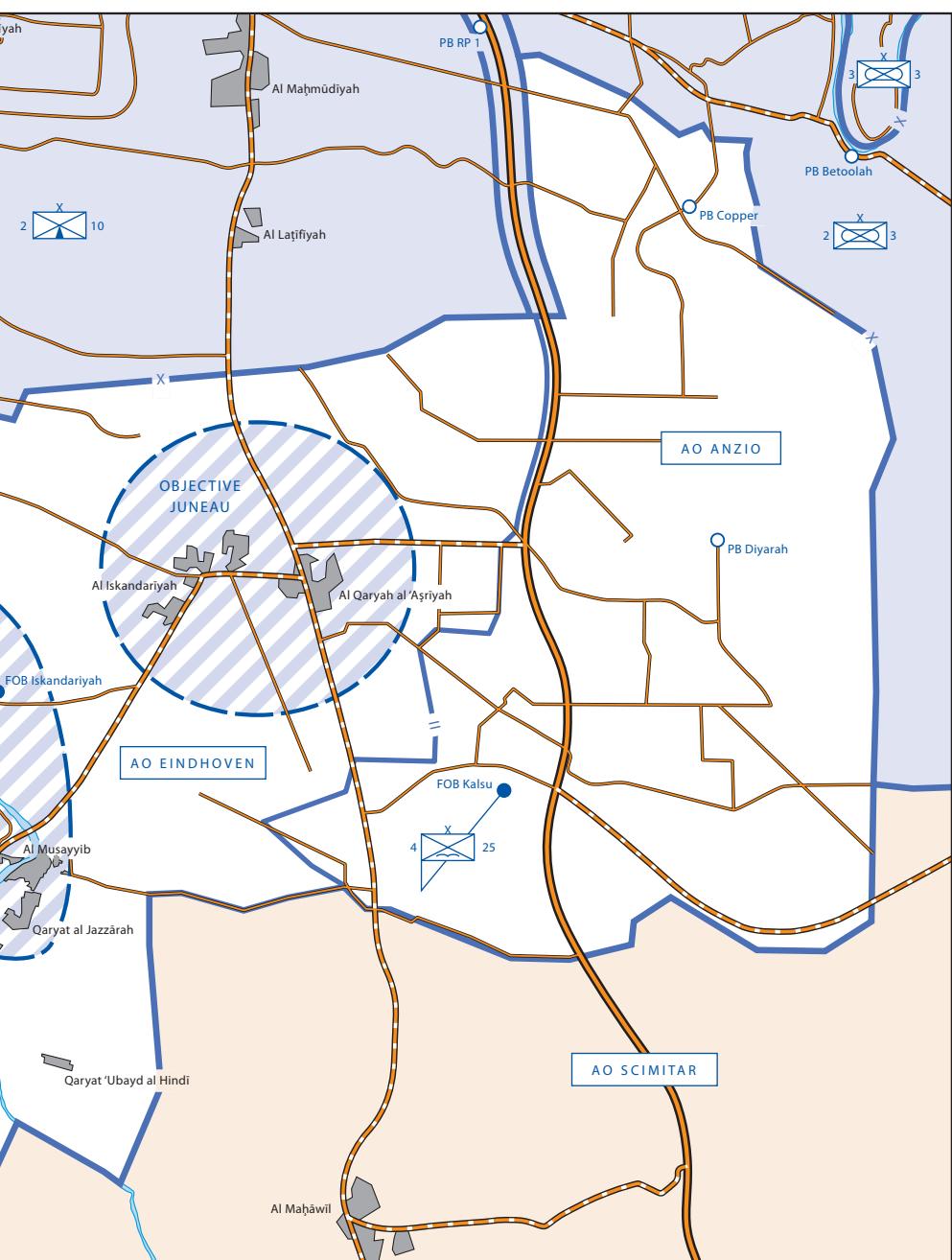
General Lynch briefs officers of the 4th Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, outside Forward Operating Base Kalsu on the eve of Operation Marne Avalanche.

The major combat element for the campaign was the 4th Brigade's 3d Battalion, 509th Infantry Regiment, commanded by Lt. Col. Valery C. Keaveny. The unit had only recently returned from several months of duty with the marines in Al Anbar Province. The added troops made MARNE AVALANCHE possible.

On 3 July, General Lynch met at Forward Operating Base Kalsu with battalion leaders, mostly captains and lieutenants, because, as he maintained, "this is a company commander's battlefield." In the rough plywood tactical operations center covered with camouflaged netting, the officers briefed their division commander using maps rolled out across tables, which Lynch said he preferred to the PowerPoint computer slides that were becoming the norm throughout the Army. "Be aggressive," declared Lynch. "If a place is used for hostile intent, it's gone. Destroyed. We won't have to go back again. If you think it's hostile, blow it up." In addition to no-nonsense security operations, Lynch wanted to start holding and building immediately. "Talk to everyone," he informed his soldiers. "Talk to the population, talk to the insurgents, talk to the American public." The 3d Battalion, 509th Infantry Regiment—called Strike Force Geronimo—would do most of the



Map 12



hitting; the 1st Battalion, 501st Infantry Regiment, another 4th Brigade unit, would do the holding.⁵

In early July, the 4th Brigade submitted an array of objectives within the MARNE AVALANCHE area of operations, all of which were known to contain weapons caches or high-value targets—sometimes both. At the top of the list was a site of swampy farmland northeast of Al Iskandariyah, which was given the name Chaka III. The Americans had not visited this region for several months, which had allowed the enemy to fortify and prepare for an eventual assault. Like Arab Jabour before Operation MARNE TORCH, this dangerous territory was a guerrilla refuge, seeded with weapons caches and protected by a network of powerful bombs. Worse, the farms were crisscrossed by irrigation canals with few roads leading in or out, and those were either barricaded or mined with deeply buried IEDs.⁶

Intelligence analysts considered Chaka III a key al-Qaeda sanctuary that was particularly hazardous because it was only a few kilometers west of Route Tampa, the major north-south artery between Baghdad and Kuwait. Allowing the insurgents free rein there meant they could both threaten a vital supply route and continue to foment sectarian violence around Al Iskandariyah. This crucial stretch of the highway and its adjacent territory were the responsibility of Task Force Steel, consisting of Company C, 3d Battalion, 509th Infantry Regiment, and Company A, 2d Battalion, 69th Armored Regiment, which was normally part of the 3d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, but was most recently part of the MND-B order of battle. During July and August, both units were temporarily attached to the 4th Brigade, 25th Infantry Division's 2d Battalion, 377th Field Artillery Regiment, which commanded Task Force Steel.⁷

Early on 1 July, during an operation code-named BASTOGNE, elements of Task Force Steel raided the area, leaving their vehicles two kilometers from the objective and walking in to avoid the roadside bombs known to plague the region. "There were four or five IEDs within a kilometer of our objectives," said Capt. James L. Browning, the Company C, 3d Battalion, 509th Infantry Regiment, commander.⁸

Hiking in also provided the chance for surprise, as the enemy expected Americans to arrive in columns of Humvees. On this occasion, the troops moved in quietly and captured ten suspects, some of whom were in a workshop filled with bomb-making supplies and manuals and four of whom were wanted in connection with an IED ring. According to one account, the

⁵ CG Battlefield Rotation, FOB Kalsu, 4-25 [4th BCT, 25th Inf Div] BCT Briefing on Op MARNE AVALANCHE, 3 Jul 2007, author's notes.

⁶ BUB, New Operation AVALANCHE Targets, 17 Jul 2007.

⁷ An.A, MND-C Task Organization, to MND-COPORD 07-23 (MARNE AVALANCHE), 24 Jun 2007, p. 5.

⁸ MND-C Media Release, IED ring broken by Operation BASTOGNE, 7 Jul 2007.



UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters ferry elements of Company A, 3d Battalion, 509th Infantry Regiment, 4th Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, to a suspected insurgent base near Jurf as Sakhr.

hit cut the number of IED attacks from four to five per day to “absolutely none,” though it was unlikely to stay that way for long.⁹

Other shaping operations followed, with one on the tenth that concentrated on the top al-Qaeda leaders, including Abu Bakr and his lieutenants, who were thought to be near the western edge of Objective Kodiak in a small village labeled Objective Saipan for the upcoming raid. Just after midnight, Company A, 3d Battalion, 509th Infantry Regiment, air assaulted into three landing zones near the target and searched several buildings over the next four hours. The men located two insurgents they were seeking, though not Abu Bakr.¹⁰

Although MARNE AVALANCHE officially began on 15 July, the 3d Battalion, 509th Infantry Regiment, was already hard at work. Three hours past midnight on the sixteenth, the soldiers got a boost from a B-1B bomber that dropped four GBU-31 2,000-pound bombs on the Korean Bridge, which crossed an important canal paralleling the Euphrates about

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Rpt, Opn MARNE AVALANCHE B, n.d.; Storyboard, Opn MARNE AVALANCHE B, Zone 400, A Co, 3-509 [3d Bn, 509th Inf Rgt] (Abn), BUB, 11 Jul 2007.

four kilometers west of Al Iskandariyah. The bomber then circled back and dispatched three GBU-38 500-pound bombs to finish the job. A nearby Hunter aerial drone with night-vision gear recorded the mission, and its images showed that the bridge was completely destroyed. The reason for eliminating this important structure was to limit the mobility of insurgents, who used it as a shortcut northward over the river to Baghdad; its destruction was also sure to be a major inconvenience for local Iraqis.¹¹

On the ground, the 4th Brigade focused on Chaka III, and in the first days of MARNE AVALANCHE planners decided on a series of blocking operations to “complete the isolation” of insurgents. In order to do that, they launched the biggest air assault in MND-C to date, employing eight helicopters—four Chinooks and four Black Hawks—that carried troops of the 3d Battalion, 509th Infantry Regiment, and, on the ground, Iraqi security elements would act as blocking forces, for a total of more than three hundred men.¹²

That assault, Operation FALCON FURY III, kicked off early on 16 July. The battalion’s Company B, commanded by Capt. Eric W. Nylander, spearheaded the action. The Black Hawks went in first, touching down in the darkness and disgorging small teams of soldiers who quickly assessed the situation. Finding no insurgents on the ground waiting to ambush them, the Americans radioed to the rest of the force that the landing zone was clear.

Still in his Chinook high above, Nylander passed the word down the rows of some thirty anxious soldiers. “Ice,” was all he said—meaning that the target was “cold,” devoid of enemy. Even so, nobody took anything for granted.¹³

The big double-rotored Chinook lumbered downward, its rear ramp open to the hot night air, while the helicopter gunner, sitting on the open ramp cross-legged behind his .30-caliber machine gun and tethered by a thin strap of nylon webbing, scanned the landing zone through night-vision goggles. With its rotors swirling clouds of dust into the air, the helicopter settled onto a farm field and the men darted out the back ramp.

Nylander’s team dashed toward a group of targeted houses. In one, a soldier saw a photo of one of the team’s high-value targets hung on the wall—a man thought to be responsible for arranging the travel of foreign fighters from Syria—but only women and children were in the home, sleeping on mats on the floor. They said that the men had left weeks earlier and that

¹¹ The bridge was built by North Korean engineers during Saddam Hussein’s reign. Storyboard, B1 Kinetic Strike, Korean Bridge, Zone 401, 1-501 PIR [1st Bn, 501st Parachute Inf Rgt], 4-25 ABCT [4th Abn BCT, 25th Inf Div], BUB, 16 Jul 2007.

¹² Opn Concept, MARNE AVALANCHE A, BUB, 17 Jul 2007.

¹³ Michael R. Gordon, “Night Raid in Iraq: Seeking Militants, but Also Learning the Lay of the Land,” *New York Times*, 4 Aug 2007.



An intelligence team from the 4th Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, photographs weapons left behind by insurgents at a site near the Euphrates River. The camp was found on 30 July 2007 by paratroopers from Company A, 3d Battalion, 509th Infantry Regiment, during a raid targeting key leaders of the insurgency.

they were alone in the house. The soldiers did not believe them but could do little about it. They found no weapons or anything else incriminating.¹⁴

Other teams had more luck. At a nearby field, a platoon discovered and destroyed a cache of weapons and captured a couple of Iraqi men sneaking across a canal. These detainees were added to the existing group, who were all handcuffed, blindfolded, and marched off to a nearby landing zone where they were taken away when the assault force departed. In the end, eleven Iraqis were arrested, though three were released after questioning. However, three of those taken into custody were on the list of high-value targets intelligence had expected to find in Chaka III, including Tamir Jassim Hassan al-Janabi, an important guerrilla leader.¹⁵

On 19 July, Company A, 1st Battalion, 509th Infantry Regiment, began Operation MARNE AVALANCHE W in the northwestern corner of Jurf as Sakhr, west of the Euphrates in a stretch of sparsely populated desert that was home to the Sunni Owesat tribe. Although no U.S. forces had been in

¹⁴ Ibid.; Battalions Cdrs' Teleconference, 23 Jul 2007, author's notes.

¹⁵ Opn Concept, MARNE AVALANCHE A, n.d.; Storyboard, Opn MARNE AVALANCHE A (c. 16 Jul 2007). Although the operation was called FALCON FURY III, on most documents it is also listed as MARNE AVALANCHE A.



the area for some time, the population was tiring of the extremists, and meetings with tribal leaders indicated they were willing to cooperate in exchange for better security. Company A's attention was on Objective Dogwood, a site west of the river that contained an al-Qaeda training camp—now thought to be abandoned—and several suspected weapons caches.¹⁶

For three days, the soldiers patrolled the territory, finding a handful of old munitions stockpiles and requesting an air strike of nine 500-pound bombs on the former terrorist training camp. The mission was uneventful until the afternoon of 22 July, when the company's 1st Platoon struck a roadside bomb. The first two Humvees passed over the IED, but the third detonated it, tearing the right side off the vehicle and wounding three soldiers, one of whom suffered a serious chest wound. Helicopters arrived within thirty minutes, but the most seriously wounded soldier, Sgt. Shawn G. Adams, died before reaching the hospital.¹⁷

¹⁶ Storyboard, Opn MARNE AVALANCHE W, n.d.

¹⁷ Rpt, Opn MARNE AVALANCHE W Key Tasks, n.d.; Storyboard, Sigact 2, IED Strike (1 x US [DOW] [died of wounds] KIA, 2 x WIA), Zone 400, 3d Bn, 509th Inf Rgt, 4th BCT, 25th Inf Div, BUB, 23 Jul 2007.

Adams' death cast a pall over the brigade, but the operations went on without interruption. In his first weekly report to the division since the beginning of MARNE AVALANCHE, Colonel Garrett wrote that, as expected, the insurgents seemed to be fleeing north from Jurf as Sakhr to "what has become a new [al-Qaeda] refuge after being driven from their former sanctuary." Since this was anticipated, the 1st Battalion, 501st Infantry Regiment, was already there, acting as an anvil.¹⁸

Other operations commenced on a daily basis. On 26 July, elements of Strike Force Geronimo pounced on an al-Qaeda safe house just northwest of Al Iskandariyah and discovered rooms where prisoners were tortured, as well as several caches, one which contained a 12.7-mm. heavy machine gun and ammunition. On the thirtieth, Company A, assaulting into Objective Luzon on the east bank of the Euphrates southwest of Al Iskandariyah, turned up a cache that included suicide vests and rocket-propelled grenade launchers. On 3 August, Company B hit Objective Shanghai, just to the northwest on the other side of the river, capturing eight suspected insurgents including the "jackpot," as the division described the number-one name on its most-wanted terrorists list, Mohammed Khadam Yas. The next on the list, Mitayib Abd al-Ali Nahi al-Shammri, was captured on 11 August, along with ten other suspects.¹⁹

On the final day of MARNE AVALANCHE, 15 August, good news came from Baghdad. A unit from the 2d Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, operating on the western edge of the city, captured Abu Bakr, the al-Qaeda commander in Jurf as Sakhr, in a building on the boundary between West Rashid and Mansour, two of Baghdad's toughest neighborhoods. At first, Abu Bakr gave a false name but soon admitted his identity. Interrogators were especially interested in reports that the arrested insurgent leader was complicit in the 12 May kidnapping of the three U.S. soldiers along the Euphrates.²⁰

The month-long string of lightning operations by Strike Force Geronimo succeeded in accomplishing General Lynch's primary objective of thwarting the enemy's ability to operate in the Sunni territory along the Euphrates and in the Shi'ite extremist areas to the east. In the end, the 4th Brigade had conducted ten company-size and forty platoon-size operations. The immediate result was a reduction in insurgent activity along the Euphrates River valley, with IED attacks down from 111 in the month preceding MARNE AVALANCHE to 55 during the campaign. The brigade

¹⁸ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 7–20 Jul 2007, p. 23.

¹⁹ "Paratroopers take fight to insurgents," *Marne Focus*, 2 Aug 2007, p. 1; Storyboard, Opn MARNE AVALANCHE P, 30 Jul 2007; Storyboard, Opn MARNE AVALANCHE E, 3 Aug 2007.

²⁰ Storyboard, Sigact 1, Capture of MND-C HVI, 2-32 FA [2d Bn, 32d Field Arty Rgt], 2/1 ID [2d BCT, 1st Inf Div], BUB, 16 Aug 2007.



An exhausted trooper sits in the shade at Patrol Base Jurf following a patrol in 110°F heat.

stated that the al-Qaeda support zone along the river was disrupted and several important Mahdi Army indirect-fire teams were eliminated.²¹

Colonel Garrett believed that MARNE AVALANCHE had put the Sunni insurgents and Shi'ite militias on the defensive or at least limited their ability to move freely. In the near term, the 4th Brigade could start to secure what was becoming a "more responsive populace" and to take advantage of what Garrett described as "an increased freedom of movement in portions of the AO that have become more permissive." It was a turning point of sorts, the first time the brigade could do more than simply react to the enemy.²²

All this had an effect throughout MND-C. Division analysts noted a 15 percent decline in overall strikes on U.S. forces, a 73 percent dip in surface-to-air attacks on U.S. helicopters, a 44 percent decrease in IEDs, and a 33 percent reduction in vehicle bombs. In addition, civilian casualties dropped 36 percent by mid-August—with a 25 percent decline in sectarian

²¹ Briefing Slide, MARNE AVALANCHE Endstate 1: Disruption of Extremist Operations, 17 Aug 2007.

²² MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 11–17 Aug 2007, p. 22.

violence. Lynch considered his forces to be still “in the pursuit phase,” and he cautioned that “defeating” the enemy outright was not a goal. “We did not ‘defeat’ the enemy,” he declared during a meeting with news bureau chiefs at the end of the operation, “but we certainly ‘disrupted’ them,” and that was the main objective.²³

Beyond Reach

Even as the 3d Division opened its first operations south of Baghdad, General Lynch and his staff were thinking about the division’s reach. On 19 June, as MARNE TORCH began, Lynch had told his commanders that he was not certain how far he could proceed along the west side of the Tigris. “We may not get there,” he said, referring to the southernmost objectives of the operation. “It might be a bridge too far. I don’t know. [MARNE TORCH] will get uglier—we’re already seeing that—and we have to get through it first.”²⁴

Four brigades were a formidable force, but they could not push southward throughout the entire area of operations without quickly becoming overextended. As Colonel Ferrell, the 2d Brigade commander, had pointed out in the midst of MARNE TORCH, the campaign simply did not have enough combat power to clear and hold all of Arab Jabour, let alone to go farther south into the territory where insurgents were bound to flee. So General Lynch was looking for new ways to strike at the enemy as he fled southward along the Tigris River valley.

Al-Qaeda guerrillas had weapons caches on both banks of the Tigris that remained largely out of the grasp of the Americans, and intelligence reports sometimes linked violence in Baghdad with smuggling routes coming from this area. In addition to Sunni insurgents, the Shi’ite Mahdi Army controlled large swaths of the region. Around As Suwayrah, a town of thirty thousand people on the west bank of the Tigris some twenty kilometers southeast of Salman Pak, a mix of Sunnis and Shi’ites complicated the situation, leading to increased violence as tribes jockeyed for position and power. In early 2006, Sunni extremists began exerting their will over the population, pushing Shi’ite tribes from the surrounding territory, especially the small villages tucked into bends in the Tigris northwest of As Suwayrah. This sectarian cleansing prompted the Mahdi Army to move into the locale and establish what amounted to a *de facto* local government.²⁵

To make matters worse, As Suwayrah was said to be a significant node for Iranian weapons smuggled from the border. Intelligence analysts suspected that caches were concealed on both banks of the Tigris, just wait-

²³ CG Executive Summary, 17 Aug 2007, sub: Expanded Plans Update; Briefing Slide, MARNE AVALANCHE Endstate 2: Retain Key Terrain, 17 Aug 2007. Quotes from CG Executive Summary, 19 Aug 2007, sub: Baghdad Bureau Chief Luncheon.

²⁴ Plans Update Meeting, 19 Jun 2007, author’s notes.

²⁵ MND-C OPORD 07-25 (MARNE HUSKY), 29 Jul 2007, p. 1.

ing to be secreted into Baghdad whenever Mahdi Army contacts asked for them. Insurgent leaders also hid there, including at least a dozen al-Qaeda and other Sunni extremist guerrilla leaders and Mahdi Army officials. This twin threat from Sunni and Shi'ite insurgents was formidable, and the 3d Division lacked the resources to dominate the entire region.²⁶

Instead, Lynch decided to maintain pressure with a series of air assaults meant to harass and disrupt the enemy in his newest sanctuaries. He felt it was also important that Iraqis living in areas still “occupied” by al-Qaeda “continue to see demonstrations of the [coalition forces’] ability to destroy insurgents.” This operation, however, would differ from previous ones in that his aviation brigade would be the lead unit, supported by an infantry company for the raids. Lynch knew the division could not maintain a presence in the territory the units attacked, but to hit the enemy and back off made more sense than simply to abandon the region to the insurgents. In addition, while the air assaults would do little to further the clear-and-hold ethos of the surge strategy, on the tactical level they had the advantage of enabling the Americans to fly over bomb-infested roads yet to be cleared by more conventional ground operations.²⁷

This was not a new concept. During the Vietnam War, helicopters and air assaults were employed extensively to make up for insufficient ground strength and difficult terrain. The tactic had made perfect operational sense, though on the strategic level that war was also criticized for being amorphous, with not enough attention paid to holding territory and securing the population. In Iraq, the command intended to utilize helicopters to extend its reach and power, knowing full well the weaknesses of the process.²⁸

As envisioned, the operation would not make an intensive use of manpower, and it would involve only a manageable increase in aviation airtime—both of which allowed the division commander to maintain his other combat operations throughout the region. General Lynch intended to project his force as far south as possible, but there was a limit. “I won’t issue orders that aren’t executable,” he told his planners.²⁹

While the final decision to go ahead had not yet been made, planning was well under way. As early as May, the proposed campaign was already named MARNE HUSKY, in honor of the 3d Division’s role in the Allied invasion of Sicily in July 1943, and by late June preparations began in earnest. The target was Tactical Area of Operations PLYMOUTH, an irregularly shaped square straddling the Tigris with its northernmost side starting roughly at Salman Pak and extending some twenty-five kilometers

²⁶ ACE Intelligence Update Meeting, 17 Jun 2007, author’s notes; MARNE HUSKY Decision Brief, 25 Jul 2007, slides 10–15.

²⁷ Quote from Plans Update Meeting, 19 Jun 2007, author’s notes. Gordon, “Night Raid in Iraq.”

²⁸ Gordon, “Night Raid in Iraq.”

²⁹ Plans Update Meeting, 19 Jun 2007, author’s notes.



General Odierno speaks with Col. Daniel Ball (*left*), commander of the 3d Infantry Division's Combat Aviation Brigade, during the planning phase of Operation Marne Husky.

southeast to As Suwayrah. It encompassed several objectives, including two Sunni strongholds along the east bank of the Tigris just east of Salman Pak—dubbed Objectives Macon and Dublin—and the notorious Samrah Jungle, just south of Salman Pak at the end of the oxbow bend in the river known as the Fishhook. The “jungle” was a lush (by Iraqi standards) tangle of forest and date palm groves fed by overflow from the river as it rounded the steep arc of the oxbow, and it had long been exploited by farmers—as well as by Sunni guerrillas since the beginning of the insurgency. Division intelligence charts showed a large cluster of symbols denoting enemy headquarters, command-and-control elements, safe houses, and weapons caches centered in Samrah. This stronghold became Objective Albany on the planning maps.³⁰

At the same time, on both sides of the river, additional units prepared to bolster the operation. The 3d Brigade, 3d Division, on the northeast bank and the 4th Brigade, 25th Division, on the southwest side (the 2d Brigade, 3d Division, was still busy with MARNE TORCH) were charged

³⁰ MND-C OPORD 07-25 (MARNE HUSKY), 29 Jul 2007, p. 7; MARNE HUSKY Decision Brief, 25 Jul 2007, slide 3.



The mission of Marne Husky was to extend armed force into areas beyond the reach of Task Force Marne's ground troops. To do this, General Lynch partially relied on his Combat Aviation Brigade's AH-64 Apache gunships, capable of flying day or night.

with establishing quick-reaction forces, casualty-evacuation capabilities, and route-clearance teams. The paratroopers of the 4th Brigade were also ordered to furnish an infantry company for air assaults, while the 3d Brigade would provide 155-mm. artillery support from Combat Outpost Cleary. The gunners' arsenal would include "smart" Excalibur rounds like those that had killed Abu Jurah in July. Elements of the 3d Brigade, 8th Iraqi Army Division, as well as U.S. Army Special Forces teams, were also available to exploit intelligence on the ground (Map 13).³¹

Operations kicked off in earnest on 15 August with the Combat Aviation Brigade flying myriad missions into the combat zone, supported by an infantry company from the 4th Brigade, 25th Infantry Division. The key to success was speed, and that could only happen with good intelligence. Over the past few months, increasing numbers of both Sunnis and Shi'ites were volunteering tips to the Americans, and this, combined with MND-C's own burgeoning information-gathering capabilities, enabled division planners to tailor the operation to the intelligence. Most of the missions would stem directly from intelligence

³¹ MND-C OPORD 07-25 (MARNE HUSKY), 29 Jul 2007, p. 7; An. D, Fire Support, to MND-C OPORD 07-25 (MARNE HUSKY), p. 1.

on specific targets, which were then fed to the aviation brigade. Once identified, the helicopters could land infantry teams on the objective within thirty minutes. While on the ground, the teams would be under constant protection from Apache and Kiowa gunships. According to the operation plan, MARNE HUSKY would end when insurgent networks "are significantly disrupted and exploitable, the area is denied as an insurgent sanctuary and accelerant staging area,



Map 13

and [Iraqi Army] elements are positioned to prevent re-emergence of insurgent safe havens." General Lynch felt that this would take until mid-September to accomplish.³²

All this was part of the corps-level operation PHANTOM STRIKE, which also began in mid-August and was scheduled to run into January 2008. Its general goal was to exploit gains made by the early surge offensives and prevent the enemy from reconstituting outside the city in the Baghdad belts. PHANTOM STRIKE operations also encompassed LIGHTNING HAMMER, a large combined campaign in Diyala Province including some ten thousand coalition and six thousand Iraqi troops.³³

With the corps commander's approval of the MARNE HUSKY plan, General Lynch set the operation in motion. His designated assault force was Company B, 3d Battalion, 509th Infantry Regiment, commanded by Captain Nylander, the same unit that had performed well in Operation MARNE AVALANCHE. Just before midnight on 15 August, some sixty soldiers boarded two Chinook helicopters and headed for an isolated farm on the banks of the Tigris west of Salman Pak. The target was a Sunni insurgent leader responsible for organizing and funding several attacks, including some antiaircraft ambushes of U.S. helicopters. Descending rapidly through the moonless sky, the Chinooks alighted in a field about three hundred meters from the rural compound. In the past, al-Qaeda had used it as a meeting place, and intelligence suggested that as many as twenty insurgents might be in residence on this night.

As the soldiers raced toward the buildings, they received no enemy fire. The only sounds of battle came from the Apache gunships circling overhead; they fired their cannons into fields near the farm and sent a Hellfire missile into a car suspected of being laden with explosives. Captain Nylander described it as "terrain denial."³⁴

Within minutes of touching down, the assault force swept through the farm and nearby houses, looking for targets. All the Americans found were 2 adult males and 3 teenage boys and 53 women and children. They located no insurgents and no high-value targets, though the raiders might have come close. Some of the villagers told the Americans that guerrillas had visited the farm earlier that night but then left for Baghdad. Another civilian said they had departed a week earlier. No one knew who to believe. On the other hand, a nearby workshop was thought to be a bomb factory, though a search by an explosives-sniffing German shepherd named Rocky and an ordnance disposal team unearthed nothing unusual. However, a chemical test of the detained Iraqi males showed that the three teenagers had explo-

³² MND-C OPORD 07-25 (MARNE HUSKY), p. 8.

³³ MNC-I Media Release, PHANTOM STRIKE Operations Target Terrorist Havens in Iraq, 15 Aug 2007.

³⁴ Drew Brown, "New offensive nets little at start," *Stars and Stripes*, 17 Aug 2007.

sive residue on their hands. They were taken in for questioning while the rest of the civilians were released.

Nylander felt this was the sort of place al-Qaeda had employed to make bombs in the past and could do so again in the future. Wanting to take no chances, Nylander radioed the Apaches and told them to destroy the workshop. After the Black Hawks picked up the attack force, the gunships closed in, sending a couple missiles into the abandoned structure.³⁵

The following day, another air assault struck a few kilometers to the east, capturing one suspect and eliminating a weapons cache. On 17 August, the hits shifted five kilometers farther south, to Sayafiyah, where soldiers arrested thirty-two suspects. On the last three days of August, the aviation brigade launched two separate helicopter-borne operations, one north of Sayafiyah and the other ten kilometers to the southeast in the Fishbowl on the east side of the Tigris. Others followed in September, including Operation FALCON FURY V on the fifth, a raid deep into Tactical Area of Operations Plymouth. The air assault was aimed at Shi'ite extremist leaders in As Suwayrah, about twenty kilometers southeast of Salman Pak, well beyond the ground operating capacity of Task Force Marne. It came up empty.³⁶

In addition to ferrying strike teams, the aviation brigade continued its normal interdiction efforts, seeking out insurgents whenever they moved. On 2 September, two Apache gunships from 1st Battalion, 3d Aviation Regiment, were inspecting the riverbank in the Fishbowl southeast of Salman Pak when they spotted tracer fire coming from some trees at the side of a road. Upon closer investigation, they located a heavy machine gun crew firing from the back of a pickup truck. The insurgents saw the helicopters and fled to a nearby shack. This afforded little protection, however. The gunships tore the structure apart with cannon fire, then returned to the truck and destroyed it with rockets. Such operations were repeated almost daily.³⁷

MARNE HUSKY ended with a bang. During the predawn hours of 15 September, Black Hawks carrying a platoon from Company B air assaulted into a cluster of buildings west of Salman Pak, not far from where the very first mission of this operation had occurred exactly one month earlier. Intelligence had pinpointed an insurgent bomb-making factory there, and the helicopters landed almost on top of it. Soldiers leapt from the open doors of the helicopters, dashing over the dark ground toward a handful of houses visible though the green glow of their night-vision goggles. Overhead, four Apache gunships circled, spitting geysers of 30-mm. rounds into suspected insurgent positions.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Briefing Slide, Opn MARNE HUSKY, 1 Aug–15 Sep 2007, n.d.

³⁷ Storyboard, Event: Engagement, Zone 204, 1st Bn, 3d Avn Rgt, 3d CAB, 2 Sep 2007.

After rounding up explosives and detonators, soldiers captured two Iraqis who seemed out of place in such an isolated spot late at night. One, in particular, attracted the Americans' attention. "His story kept changing, so we brought him in," said one intelligence officer with the aviation brigade. "Once he was at our detention facility, three sources positively identified him." The captured insurgent was Hafiz Khalif Jassim, an al-Qaeda leader who had fled Arab Jabour as the Americans moved southward in June and July. It was a fitting conclusion to MARNE HUSKY.³⁸

During the course of the month-long campaign, the 3d Division's Combat Aviation Brigade helicopters flew 420 hours, launching 9 air assaults (two of them were by U.S. Army Special Forces rather than Task Force Marne soldiers) and 105 air strikes (twelve of them were by U.S. Air Force planes) against targets on both sides of the Tigris, expending 344 rockets and 30-mm. cannon rounds in the process. The brigade listed 63 insurgents killed in action and 193 captured—three of whom were high-value targets. The ground forces—mostly Company B, 1st Battalion, 509th Infantry Regiment, and Iraqi police—cleared 836 buildings and discovered 19 weapons caches and 19 IEDs. General Lynch's goal of pressuring the enemy in places where he had previously felt safe had been accomplished. As the division commander told a gathering of reporters at the Pentagon via a videoconference, "If they don't have the time to breathe, they don't have the time to attack the Iraqi people or our troops. This is tactical momentum and it's in our favor."³⁹

But MARNE HUSKY was only a temporary solution to an enduring problem. During a meeting with General Odierno just prior to the end of the operation, the 3d Division senior staff was cautious in assessing the effects of the operation. General Cardon, the division's deputy commander for support, told the corps commander that the air assaults "produced great effects with disruption" but it was impossible to maintain any advantage without "being able to control the ground." Col. Roger Cloutier, the 3d Division operations officer, backed that assessment, noting that MARNE HUSKY had resulted in "okay disruption results" but cautioned that "without having the ability to maintain constant pressure in the area" developing good intelligence on the enemy was difficult. So while the accomplishments of MARNE HUSKY were many, no one believed that they had been successful enough to keep the enemy on the ropes for long.⁴⁰

³⁸ MND-C Media Release, MARNE HUSKY ends with capture of insurgent, 18 Sep 2007.

³⁹ Briefing Slide, Opn MARNE HUSKY, 1 Aug–15 Sep 2007, n.d. Quote from DoD News Briefing with Maj Gen Lynch from the Pentagon, 24 Aug 2007, p. 3.

⁴⁰ CG Executive Summary, Operations and Intel Update to MNC-I Commander, 11 Sep 2007.

Taking Stock

As 3d Division units pushed slowly down both banks of the Tigris in September, attention shifted sharply from Baghdad to Washington, where General Petraeus was about to deliver his much-anticipated congressional testimony on the surge's progress. Even before arriving in Iraq to take command of MNF-I, Petraeus knew that he would not have much time to demonstrate that he was "winning." A chorus of dissent over the war rose from Congress as the surge began, especially during the summer as U.S. casualties climbed.

In a move uncharacteristic of military leaders, General Lynch publicly fired back at the critics, telling journalists in July that a precipitous withdrawal would be disastrous. "Those surge forces are giving us the capability we have now to take the fight to the enemy," Lynch told reporters during a videoconference from Iraq. "If those surge forces go away, that capability goes away." All progress would be lost and the violence would then escalate, he predicted, and turn Iraq into "a mess."⁴¹

Lynch was probably right. History showed that counterinsurgency is a slow and grinding effort, with progress often difficult to discern over the short term, and the surge could not realistically be expected to produce results in mere months. However, the war was overwhelmingly unpopular in the United States, and convincing skeptics that the surge was worthwhile was an uphill battle. Congress agreed to wait until mid-September for an assessment, at which time Petraeus would return to Washington to report on the surge to hostile lawmakers and an impatient public.

In August, after only two months of operations with the full contingent of surge units, General Odierno and his staff began the groundwork, submitting reports and studies to demonstrate that the increase in U.S. forces provided an obvious advantage that was pushing the enemy back and furnishing security for a war-weary Iraqi population. In his assessment, submitted to General Petraeus on 1 September, the corps commander concluded that the operational successes were tangible. Odierno believed that al-Qaeda "has been significantly degraded over the past six months," especially in the capital and the Baghdad belts. More importantly, the insurgents' freedom of movement was severely hampered and the leaders had largely been separated from the Iraqi population. The Sunni population no longer "provided passive sanctuary," and the vicious cycle of violence was broken. All of this, Odierno asserted, was due to the surge. However, he was not about to predict the demise of al-Qaeda, which he declared "is still able to conduct limited high profile attacks. But their overall goal of becom-

⁴¹ Quotes from "U.S. General Blasts Calls for Iraq Pullout," CBS News transcript, 6 Jul 2007. Pauline Jelinek, "U.S. General Says Withdrawal Would Leave Iraq 'A Mess,'" Associated Press, 6 Jul 2007.

ing the leader of the Sunni resistance in Iraq is moving farther away with each murder.”⁴²

Odierno’s analysis was aided by the appraisals of his division commanders, whose statements were included in the MNC-I report to General Petraeus. In the MND-C evaluation, General Lynch observed that, because of the surge, his troops were “able to protect the population and significantly reduce sectarian violence” south of Baghdad. In the four short months since the 3d Division’s arrival, he wrote, “We are continually taking the fight to the enemy and successfully disrupting Sunni and Shia extremist activity.” The increased armed presence had resulted in a rapid upswing in useful intelligence, which in turn had identified much of the insurgent leadership, particularly in the Sunni region along the Tigris. Since July, the 3d Division had captured or killed twelve of the top fifteen terrorists designated as high-value targets. This was a serious blow to the insurgency.⁴³

Still, General Lynch did not believe that the end was in sight. He saw three weaknesses within his area of operations, any of which could negate the progress realized over the past months. First, the reconciliation of Sunni insurgents, which was only in the early stages south of Baghdad, was being hindered by the Iraqi government. Lynch felt that Prime Minister Maliki’s foot-dragging was wasting the enhanced security accomplished by the surge and, if that did not change, the “effort could collapse.”⁴⁴

Second, the Iraqi military presence in MND-C, which he regarded as “very capable at brigade level and below,” was simply too small to take over the security mission from the Coalition. Lynch preferred the Iraqi Army to the police, which he contended was showing little progress because of “significant sectarian bias and corruption at the lower levels.” However, the U.S. training effort in MND-C was insufficient to the task. Lynch was short on military training teams, which should have come from corps resources, but the 3d Division would continue “to resource them the best we can. They are that important.”⁴⁵

Finally, despite the success in the fight against Sunni groups—and al-Qaeda in particular—Shi’ite insurgents remained a potent problem. By August, 46 percent of all attacks in the MND-C area of operations came from Shi’ite extremists. Lynch stated that, with Sunni violence on the decline, he was stepping up actions against militant Shi’ite groups. Ultimate resolution of all three issues was partially dependent on the Iraqi government, but its glacial pace toward reforms threatened to rekindle Sunni

⁴² Memo for Cdr, MNF-I, 1 Sep 2007, sub: August 2007 Assessment and Recommended Way Ahead, pp. 1–2.

⁴³ Ibid., end 8, MND-C Assessment, n.d., pp. 1–2.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 2.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 3.

resentment and distrust. The Maliki administration's "incremental change is too slow to take advantage of the surge," Lynch wrote.⁴⁶

All this mirrored the corps commander's assessment. Odierno recounted to General Petraeus that Shi'ite extremists "are becoming increasingly more aggressive" and that their actions threatened to undermine the gains made so far. He also speculated that the Shi'ite militias "may be seeking to influence the MNF-I commander's September report to Congress." Despite the troop surge's inroads made against both Sunni and Shi'ite insurgents, Odierno believed that "only the GoI [government of Iraq] can totally solve this problem through aggressive security and political action" against the militias and their leaders.⁴⁷

In summary, General Odierno outlined the strategic difficulties facing the surge:

I would characterize the Iraq threat environment as four interacting conflicts: counter-occupation, terrorism, insurgency, and a communal struggle for power and survival all occurring in the context of a failing state. This is complicated by the external influences of Western, Turkish, Persian, and Arab civilizations. Solving one in isolation makes the others worse so our solution set must address all these factors together.⁴⁸

Odierno described the way ahead as "gradual empowerment," and he outlined four goals to be accomplished if Iraq were to emerge from chaos and become a stable nation. The first two were international: the ongoing conflict must be prevented from spreading throughout the region and destabilizing Iraq's neighbors, and Iraq must not become a staging platform for terrorists to strike other nations near and far. The last two were more immediate: U.S. forces must continue to prevent large-scale sectarian violence, and they must "buttress a minimally functioning Iraqi Government" that would gradually take over the security mission.⁴⁹

Odierno predicted that this would happen in four phases lasting through at least 2011. The current phase, running through the end of 2007, would entail offensive operations aimed at consolidating the gains already achieved during the surge. "The series of tactical 'wins' and increasing US political pressure are creating opportunities to refine our mission," wrote the corps commander, though he warned that the "positive momentum" did not mask the fact that "distinct problems remain that only Iraqis can solve."⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 2.

⁴⁷ Memo for Cdr, MNF-I, 1 Sep 2007, sub: August 2007 Assessment and Recommend Way Ahead, p. 2.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 1.

⁴⁹ Ibid., encl 1, Gradual Empowerment, p. 1.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Some of these problems would be addressed in the second phase, which would begin in January 2008. The enhanced stability accomplished by the surge meant that the Coalition could start a “rebalancing” of the conflict, transferring more of the fight to the Iraqi security forces, particularly in “peripheral provinces” outside of the capital and the Baghdad belts. But the real crux would commence with phase three in January 2009. At that point, speculated the corps commander, the Iraqis would take control throughout the country, allowing U.S. forces to reduce to ten or fewer brigade combat teams. The Iraqis would have to be able to do the job, and, while Odierno believed that the security forces had made “tremendous strides” during the surge, they still needed improvement. The police especially remained rife with sectarianism, and the army was limited by its inadequate logistical support and poor equipment. Although this was changing, it was difficult to predict how much better the situation would be by 2009.⁵¹

Assuming the Iraqi military evolved into an effective fighting force, the Coalition, stated Odierno, could draw down its forces beginning in late 2008, and within two years it would consist of about five to six brigades stationed in a handful of fixed bases. This smaller presence should be sufficient to “safe-guard Iraq’s continued progress and secure our minimum objectives at lower cost.” But such a projection depended on steady and uninterrupted momentum over the long haul, something that the American public was still unwilling to believe possible. It was General Petraeus’ job to sell the idea back home.⁵²

In August, the White House submitted its “Benchmark Assessment Report” (though it was not made public until 14 September), a requirement imposed by Congress earlier in the year to track the status of eighteen milestones the Iraqi government was supposed to reach to demonstrate progress. These ranged from de-Ba’athification reform, fair-and-free elections for local and provincial governments, and the equitable sharing of income from oil revenues between the various ethnic groups, to steady advances in training and equipping the new Iraq Army and police forces and in establishing a sound security plan for Baghdad and its outlying areas. Of the eighteen, satisfactory forward movement was displayed on eight benchmarks, with eight deemed unsatisfactory and two showing mixed signs.⁵³

With these documents in hand—as well as considerable personal analysis—Petraeus and the U.S. ambassador to Iraq, Ryan C. Crocker, traveled to Washington to make their case. On the morning of 10 September, the two men sat before a polite but outspokenly skeptical panel of congressmen from the House Armed Services and Foreign Affairs Committees. (They would give the same presentation before the Senate Armed Services Committee the following day.) Petraeus led off with the bottom line, asserting that “the mili-

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 4.

⁵² Ibid., pp. 5–6.

⁵³ Benchmark Assessment Report, 14 Sep 2007, pp. 3–10.



On 3 September 2007, one week before his much-anticipated congressional testimony, General Petraeus met with high-ranking civilian and military officials at Al Asad Air Base in Al Anbar Province. President George W. Bush would later join them in a surprise visit. *Left to right: Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Peter Pace, U.S. Central Command Commander Admiral William J. Fallon, General Petraeus, General Odierno, U.S. Marine Maj. Gen. Walter E. Gaskin, commander of the 2d Marine Division, and Ambassador Crocker.*

tary objectives of the surge are, in large measure being met.” Violence was down across the board, al-Qaeda was much less of a threat than it had been only a few months earlier, the Iraqi security forces were shouldering more of the load, and formerly hostile Sunni tribes were continuing to “reconcile” with the government.⁵⁴

Petraeus did not speak to the specifics of General Odierno’s template for a withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq, choosing instead to put forth a handful of recommendations for the way ahead. Calling it “Security While Transitioning: From Leading to Partnering to Overwatch”—the title of a report he had recently issued to the Joint Chiefs of Staff—General Petraeus sought to balance the security needs of the population with the gradual training and transfer of responsibility to the Iraqi government “as quickly as possible, but without rushing to failure.” One sure way to fail, he implied, was to rely on a strategy that emphasized either purely military measures or just political ones, especially a premature handoff of responsibility to the Iraqis. The first months of the surge were very much about battlefield operations; indeed, said Petraeus, “military aspects of the surge have achieved progress

⁵⁴ General David H. Petraeus, “Report to Congress on the Situation in Iraq,” 10–11 Sep 2007, pp. 1–2.

and generated momentum,” but a timetable that forced the Iraqis to accept more responsibility than they could handle would not work. “[A] mission focus on either population security or transition [to the Iraqi government] alone will not be adequate to assure our objectives,” he warned. With a prudent combination of both, concluded Petraeus, a U.S. withdrawal could start, though to expect it to be more than a modest drawdown before the spring of 2009 was unreasonable. The general believed that “there are no easy answers or quick solutions,” and success would take time.⁵⁵

Ambassador Crocker spoke next. Although he was overshadowed in the media by Petraeus, his presentation was equally important—if not more so—because, while increased security was the prerequisite for a solution in Iraq, it was on the political front where long-term strategic progress would be made. General Petraeus may have had the easier task. He was using the surge to create breathing space for the Iraqis to make political growth, but Crocker—and those who would follow him in that job—was the one who had to make the most of that success. Without that, the military gains would not matter.

Like Petraeus, Crocker was the right man in the right job at the right time. He had long experience in the Middle East, including a State Department tour in Lebanon during the early 1980s when that country’s civil war was at its most destructive point. Crocker saw firsthand how the rise of sectarian militias could destroy a nation, and it was a lesson he would not forget. A fluent Arabic speaker, he also served briefly as a political adviser to L. Paul Bremer in the Coalition Provisional Authority in 2003. Crocker became the U.S. ambassador to Iraq in March 2007, just in time for the surge, and much of his time was spent bartering, cajoling, and negotiating with Iraqi officials as he nudged them toward a government that would include all Iraqis, regardless of religious or ethnic identity. He paid special attention, however, to the pulse of the Iraqi “street.” Taking frequent walking trips around Baghdad, he engaged ordinary Iraqis in spirited conversations about their current needs and feelings about the future.

In his address to Congress, Crocker acknowledged the “enormity of the challenges” in Iraq, but, like General Petraeus, he believed that

it is possible for the United States to see its goals realized in Iraq and that Iraqis are capable of tackling and addressing the problems confronting them today. A secure, stable democratic Iraq at peace with its neighbors is attainable. . . . The process will not be quick, it will be uneven, punctuated by setbacks as well as achievements, and it will require substantial U.S. resolve and commitment. There will be no single moment at which we can claim victory; any turning point will likely only be recognizable in retrospect.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 6–8.

⁵⁶ Statement of Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker, United States Ambassador to the Republic of Iraq, Before a Joint Hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Committee on Armed Services, 10 Sep 2007, pp. 1–2.



Ambassador Crocker spoke Arabic and had extensive experience in the Middle East. He often walked through Baghdad neighborhoods to talk with people on the street.

Crocker's caveat-strewn assessment pointed out that years of violence had helped convince leaders from various Iraqi communities that "a focus on sectarian gains has led to poor governance and served Iraqis badly" and that the security achieved by the surge had only recently persuaded many to "make the sacrifices that will be needed to put government performance ahead of sectarian and ethnic concerns." Crocker felt that Iraq's leaders possessed the will to tackle the country's problems, though he admitted that "it will take longer than we originally anticipated." Concluded the ambassador, "I cannot guarantee success in Iraq [but] I am certain that abandoning or drastically curtailing our efforts will bring failure. . . . Our current course is hard. The alternatives are far worse."⁵⁷

The statistics cited by Crocker and Petraeus certainly demonstrated an improvement. During the summer of 2006, violence in Iraq reached its highest point since the U.S. invasion, and it continued at an alarming rate for the next twelve months. At that point, the surge brigades were all in place, and beginning in early July the charts showed a precipitous drop in overall

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 3, 4, 8–9.

hostilities. The number of civilian deaths also declined. In December 2006, more civilians were killed in Iraq—just under two thousand—than in any other month of the war. That total fell the following month to about eighteen hundred and by the end of August it was at its lowest point since May 2006. While no one was willing to make an absolute connection between the surge and the reduction in enemy violence, it was difficult to deny the probable relationship.⁵⁸

Several favorable statistics, however, were tied to the surge. Incidents of suicide bombs and IEDs—the main cause of civilian deaths—demonstrated a downward trajectory that was directly linked to the increasing number of U.S. troops. Between July 2006 and May 2007, Iraq had experienced between twenty-seven hundred and three thousand IEDs per month (defined as explosions, IEDs found, and IED hoaxes), but by the end of August 2007 the total had dropped to about twenty-one hundred. This was partly due to the fact that a greater number of troop sweeps were uncovering more weapons caches, which in turn eliminated some of the explosives the insurgents used to make IEDs. In 2004, throughout Iraq 2,691 weapons caches were found and removed; in 2007 the rate would more than double. Between January and September alone the number was 4,409.⁵⁹

Despite the testimony and statistics, congressional response was less than enthusiastic. Harry Reid, the Senate majority leader, called the general's report "just more of the same" and lamented that it was "neither a draw-down or a change in mission that we need." Others accused Petraeus of "cherry picking statistics" and "massaging information." But most members of Congress were respectful, even if they were unwilling to admit to progress in Iraq.⁶⁰

Republicans were more sympathetic, though not completely. Arizona Senator Jon Kyl applauded the report, saying, "I commend General Petraeus for his honest and forthright assessment of the situation in Iraq." However, antiwar Republican Senator Chuck Hagel of Nebraska praised Petraeus while criticizing his report. "It's not your fault, general," he said during the testimony. "It's not Ambassador Crocker's fault. It's this administration's fault."⁶¹

Although General Petraeus insisted that his presentation had "not been cleared by, nor shared with, anyone in the Pentagon, the White House, or Congress," he had presumably aired his opinions with his bosses, both mil-

⁵⁸ MNF-I, Charts to accompany the testimony of Gen David H. Petraeus, 10–11 Sep 2007, slides 2–3.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, slide 5.

⁶⁰ First and second quotes from David S. Cloud, "Petraeus Warns Against Quick Pullback in Iraq," *New York Times*, 11 Sep 2007. Third and fourth quotes from "Text of Democratic response to president's address," Rep. Tom Lantos, House Foreign Armed Services Committee, 15 Sep 2007.

⁶¹ Eric Weiner, "Frustration Evident as Officials Grilled on Iraq," National Public Radio, 11 Sep 2007.

itary and civilian. Whatever the case, the Bush administration welcomed the assessment, and in an attempt to show that the surge was not meant to increase the U.S. commitment in Iraq indefinitely, the president emphasized that troops would soon begin to come home. On 13 September, Bush announced "Return on Success," a policy that was to be the guiding principle for withdrawal. According to the White House, "the more successful we are, the more American troops can return home." Citing Petraeus' testimony that security in Iraq was now sufficient to permit the withdrawal of some U.S. troops, the president announced that 2,200 marines leaving Al Anbar Province later that month would not be replaced and that a force reduction of an additional 5,700 troops by the end of the year was likely. Assuming that progress in Iraq continued to be favorable, the drawdown would proceed through the summer, decreasing the force by another 18,000—from twenty combat brigades to fifteen—though he cautioned that the decision would not be made until at least March 2008.⁶²

While Congress had received General Petraeus' words with reserved respect, mostly derision followed President Bush's announcement. Typical of the largely Democratic Party opposition was Rhode Island Senator Jack Reed's denunciation of the administration's plan as making a case for an "endless and unlimited military presence in Iraq," which he vowed Congress would prevent. Senate Majority Leader Reid accused the president of "trying to run out the clock on his failed strategy and leave the hard decisions to the next president."⁶³

Nor did the good news put forth by the administration and General Petraeus have much impact on public opinion. A few months of progress simply could not offset more than four years of war with steadily mounting casualties. Although the statistics seemed to illustrate improvements in Iraq, half of Americans in a CBS News poll released on 17 September believed that the surge was not working. While they respected Petraeus and the job he had done, his report was not enough to change their minds about the war in general. The poll also cited that 63 percent of respondents felt "things are going badly in Iraq," with only 34 percent saying they were going well. In the minds of most Americans, the heavier casualties incurred during the surge because of the increased number of U.S. troops seemed to offset the security gains being achieved in Iraq.⁶⁴

Iraqis were equally unimpressed with the surge. A poll taken throughout Iraq in August 2007 indicated that most Iraqis regarded the pres-

⁶² Petraeus' quote from General David H. Petraeus, "Report to Congress on the Situation in Iraq," 10–11 Sep 2007, p. 1. Bush administration's quote from Fact Sheet, "Return on Success" Guiding Principle for Troop Levels in Iraq, 13 Sep 2007, pp. 1–2.

⁶³ Steven Lee Myers and Carl Hulse, "Success Allows Gradual Troop Cuts, Bush Says," *New York Times*, 14 Sep 2007.

⁶⁴ Peter Grier, "Public's Views on Iraq War Barely Budge," *Christian Science Monitor*, 19 Sep 2007.

ence of U.S. forces in Iraq as actually causing a deterioration in security; in August 2007, only 18 percent of respondents thought that the surge made conditions "better," while 72 percent held it made them "worse." Both answers represented less than a 3 percent change from the same question asked in February.⁶⁵

In the end, to expect the surge to produce tangible results in just a few short months was unreasonable, and the progress report would probably have been more relevant six months later when more of the operations and programs had produced definitive data one way or the other. As it was, Petraeus and Crocker were forced to make pronouncements with only limited evidence, and Congress could only react with previously formed opinions. If Congress had expected the hearings would mark the beginning of a general withdrawal from Iraq, it was mistaken. The waves of criticism broke over Petraeus and Crocker, but both held up under the pounding. When the hearings ended, the coverage faded and the war went on. On the ground in Iraq, few soldiers noticed the congressional hearings or worried much about the sentiments expressed in them.

⁶⁵ BBC-ABC Opinion Poll, "Iraq Poll, September 2007," pp. 13, 19.

SONS OF IRAQ

Chapter 8

General Petraeus had barely left Capitol Hill when potential disaster struck in Iraq. Sheikh Abdul Sattar al-Rishawi, a 37-year-old leader of the Albu Risha clan of the Dulaimi tribe, the largest in Al Anbar Province, died on 13 September when a bomb planted under his car in Ar Ramadi exploded. Assassinations were commonplace in Iraq, but this one held special meaning because al-Rishawi was one of the most influential figures in the “reconciliation” of Sunni tribes in western Iraq with coalition forces and with the Iraqi government.

Just ten days earlier, he had met President Bush, who was in Iraq on one of his secret whirlwind trips, and was photographed shaking hands with the smiling president. Bush hailed the Sunni leader as a hero and promised continued support for the Sunni tribes that rejected al-Qaeda. In his testimony before Congress only days earlier, General Petraeus had described the tribes’ growing fight against al-Qaeda as “the most significant development of the past eight months,” and this despite predictions by many U.S. officials only a year earlier that Al Anbar Province was as good as lost.¹

The importance of the event and its potentially negative impact on gains in Iraq brought a quick response from the highest levels in Washington. President Bush was preparing for a televised speech to announce his Return on Success policy when the news of al-Rishawi’s death appeared on computer and television screens, and it seemed to undercut his message of progress. While he admitted that the assassination was a setback, the president maintained that the process was an ongoing one and that “it is never too late to deal a blow to al-Qaeda.”²

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice mirrored the sentiment, calling al-Rishawi a “courageous Iraqi leader committed to defeating extremism and improving the lives of the Iraqi people,” and denounced his murder. “This act of terrorism can only be seen as an attempt to silence and intimidate those who are determined to build a peaceful, unified, and stable Iraq,” she declared. “The United States condemns such criminal acts and stands with the people of al-Anbar Province who have shown a firm determination to work

¹ Quote from General David H. Petraeus, “Report to Congress on the Situation in Iraq,” 10–11 Sep 2007, p. 8. Dafna Linzer and Thomas E. Ricks, “Anbar Picture Grows Clearer, and Bleaker,” *Washington Post*, 28 Nov 2006.

² Philippe Naughton, “Iraqis Vow to Avenge America’s Murdered Ally,” *London Times*, 14 Sep 2007.



Sheikh Abdul Sattar al-Rishawi (right) meets with Iraqi government officials in Ar Ramadi on 6 September 2007, one week before his death at the hands of al-Qaeda.

against al-Qaeda and other extremists who seek to harm the Iraqi people and destabilize the country.”³

In Baghdad, Prime Minister Maliki—no friend of the Sunni tribes—sent his national security adviser, Muwaffaq al-Rubaie, to the funeral in Ar Ramadi. Al-Rubaie condemned the assassination, characterizing it as “a national Iraqi disaster,” and promised the gathered mourners that “we will support Anbar much more than before.”⁴

While the assassination fed the continuing skepticism in the United States over the war’s progress, the reality was that by the fall of 2007 Sunni reconciliation had come too far to be derailed by a single murder, no matter how high profile. The *Sahawa al-Anbar*, or Anbar Awakening, the name given the Sunni tribal shift from al-Qaeda control to gradual cooperation with the coalition security presence, was in full swing, with more sheikhs joining every month. Al-Qaeda had for years been using assassination and intimidation to stem its weakening hold on the Sunni tribes, and the tactics had not worked.

³ Press statement, Office of the Spokesman, Dept. of State, Statement by Secretary Rice on the Murder of Sheikh Abdul Bezia al-Rishawi, 13 Sep 2007.

⁴ Naughton, “Iraqis Vow to Avenge America’s Murdered Ally.”

The murder of another sheikh, even one as prominent as al-Rishawi, was unlikely to unravel the Awakening now.⁵

Anbar Beginnings

Because the Sunnis instigated the insurgency soon after Saddam Hussein's ouster in 2003, U.S. forces regarded them as the enemy and made little attempt to reach out to the tribes. Army Special Forces made some contact with sheikhs in Al Anbar Province in 2004, but these were ultimately futile because the insurgency grew too large too fast and the Special Forces were too few in number to maintain a dominating presence among the population. The lack of forces needed to foster relations with the tribes was exacerbated by early U.S. policy in Baghdad that seemed to favor the Shi'ite majority and exclude the Sunnis. The most far-reaching instance was the Coalition Provisional Authority's decision to ban all Ba'ath Party members from official positions and more or less disband Saddam Hussein's military. This policy made instant enemies of many Sunnis, both powerful and ordinary, a brewing problem made worse by the U.S. failure to understand and work with the Iraqi clan system.⁶

These early missteps had consequences. Sectarian violence spiraled upward beginning in 2005, and by October 2006 attacks on civilians stood at more than a hundred and eight a day, with an average of one thousand people dying each month.⁷ Coalition forces were overwhelmed by the violence, and the Iraqi military and police were unequal to the task because Sunnis generally considered them "foreign" or "Iranian." One poll showed that 34 percent of Sunni Iraqis considered attacks on Iraqi government forces to be acceptable—a remarkable statistic considering that only 1 percent of Shi'ites responded similarly. The schism could not have been clearer.⁸

Violence by Shi'ite groups against Sunnis, often with the acquiescence—and sometimes cooperation—of the government only bolstered Sunni distrust and anger. Every passing month showed new examples of extremist Shi'ite influence within the Maliki government, such as the unabated rise of Sadr's Mahdi Army and Badr Corps, and this increasingly caused Sunnis to embrace al-Qaeda. According to David Kilcullen, a former

⁵ By early 2008, General Odierno was cautioning his officers not to allow Iraqi translators to use the term *Sahawa*, or Awakening, to refer to the Sons of Iraq "because it scares the [Iraqi] people and the government" with images of an armed force roused to action. "[W]e are not awakening forces," he said. CG Executive Summary, MNC-I OPORD 08-01 Back Brief, 8 Jan 2008.

⁶ Thomas R. Searle, "Tribal Engagement in Anbar Province: The Critical Role of Special Operations Forces," *Joint Force Quarterly* 54 (2008): 62–66.

⁷ Lt Gen Michael D. Maples, Dir, DIA, "The Current Situation in Iraq and Afghanistan," Statement for the Record, Senate Armed Services Committee, 15 Nov 2006, p. 3.

⁸ Poll conducted in March 2007, quoted in Carter Malkasian, "Counterinsurgency in Iraq, May 2003–January 2007," in *Counterinsurgency in Modern Warfare*, ed. Daniel Marston and Carter Malkasian (New York: Osprey Publishing, 2008), p. 257.

Australian Army officer who in 2007 served as a counterinsurgency expert on General Petraeus' staff, al-Qaeda's primary selling point was its claim that only its presence "stands between the Sunnis and a Shi'a-led genocide." Yet outright rejection of the new government remained a dead end for the Sunnis, leading only to heightened isolation and escalating pressure from the U.S. military, which focused most of its attention on Sunni insurgents precisely because they were allied with al-Qaeda.⁹

These dynamics ultimately tipped the scales against al-Qaeda. Insurgent groups cannot succeed without creating a mass base within the population, and, although violence and intimidation have always been part of this building process, too much cruelty is counterproductive. But al-Qaeda's strident Islamic fundamentalism seemed to trump sound revolutionary war practice. The result was an insurgency that angered more and more of its potential supporters by dismantling the age-old tribal structure in order to take over the political and economic sources of power. Draconian social and religious dictates and the harsh treatment used to enforce them became more unpopular than either the Iraqi government or the occupying coalition forces. Horror stories abounded, from the power-drill torture of opponents to cutting off children's heads and delivering them in coolers to their parents' doorstep if cooperation and obedience were not forthcoming. Fear, not empathy, was al-Qaeda's goal, but that strategy could not work for very long.¹⁰

As early as 2005, many Sunni tribes were chafing under al-Qaeda. Special Forces teams along the Syrian border some four hundred kilometers northwest of Baghdad succeeded in turning eleven tribal leaders from the Albu Mahal tribe against the insurgents, but savage reprisals by the terrorists resulted in the murder of several sheikhs and their families. Once again, the tribal uprising was too small and the U.S. ability to ensure security too precarious, so the effort faltered. On the other hand, the story of al-Qaeda's brutality traveled far and wide, and abhorrence for the terrorists grew stronger.¹¹

Eventually the seeds sown by the Special Forces' early contacts with the tribes began to reap rewards. Members of the Albu Mahal started turning away some of the foreign fighters coming into Iraq from Syria, and by mid-2006 the tribe formed the basis of a fledgling local militia known as the Desert Protection Force, which U.S. marines and Iraqi Army units employed to provide local security and act as combat scouts along the Syrian border. The force had only a limited effect on the insurgent infiltration, which by 2007 would amount to between fifty and eighty per month. These insurgents, almost half of whom were from Saudi Arabia, were responsible for more than 80 percent of the suicide bombings that caused a disproportionate number of the deaths inside Iraq. On the other hand, the tribe's cooperation with the Americans

⁹ David Kilcullen, "Anatomy of a Tribal Revolt," *Small Wars Journal* (29 August 2007): 6.

¹⁰ Linda Robinson, *Tell Me How This Ends: General David Petraeus and the Search for a Way Out of Iraq* (New York: Public Affairs, 2008), p. 276.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 271–72.

and the Iraqi government strained ties with other Sunni groups, resulting in its isolation in a few small towns in western Al Anbar Province.¹²

Then, in September 2006, Sheikh Sattar al-Rishawi and his 160,000-strong Albu Risha clan broke with the insurgents and formed the *Majlis Inqadh al-Anbar*, or the Anbar Salvation Council. This “awakening” was the most important step in the slow and often painful act of Sunni reconciliation. Al-Rishawi’s decision to cooperate with the government started a process of forming local militias and neighborhood watch groups from unemployed young men who might ordinarily be drawn into insurgent ranks. Since they operated in their own backyards, these militias became formidable security patrols that also supplied vital intelligence to the authorities. During an interview with Western reporters, the sheikh asserted, “We began to see what they [al-Qaeda] were actually doing in Anbar Province. They were not respecting us or honoring us in any way, their tactics were not acceptable.”¹³

But Al Anbar’s Sunni tribes would probably never have “reconciled” if they were not convinced of coalition military strength and resolve. In addition to the Special Forces’ and the marines’ early cultivation of close relations with tribal leaders, a key ingredient was the consistently strong U.S. security presence among the few provincial centers, mainly Al Fallujah and Ar Ramadi. These two cities contained most of Al Anbar’s population, and, by 2006, years of deadly fighting had begun to separate al-Qaeda from the citizenry. One study noted that “MNF-W improved security for citizens in al-Anbar city by city [and] they established good relationships with as many tribes as possible in an attempt to limit AQI’s freedom of movement into and out of the city.” Such a combination was mandatory if there was to be any progress.¹⁴

The American unit in Ar Ramadi, the 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division, commanded by Col. Sean B. MacFarland, was credited with an innovative blend of carrots and sticks that had much success in driving out al-Qaeda and convincing Sunnis they had more to gain by rejecting al-Qaeda than supporting it. In early 2006, when MacFarland’s unit arrived in Ar Ramadi—al-Rishawi’s hometown—the city was a terrorist bastion and the self-proclaimed capital of al-Qaeda’s Islamic State of Iraq. The brigade fostered relations with the Sunni tribes, another factor in the Anbar Awakening. By early 2007, forty-one tribes and subclans from Al Anbar had joined the Awakening, and the burgeoning numbers were partly due to the efforts of MacFarland’s troops, as well as the U.S. marines throughout the rest of Al Anbar Province.

Despite MacFarland’s good work, the violence in Ar Ramadi, though much reduced, remained too high. In February, the 1st Brigade Combat

¹² Ibid., pp. 288–89; Lin Todd et al., *Iraq Tribal Study—Al-Anbar Governorate: The Albu Fahd Tribe, The Albu Mahal Tribe and the Albu Issa Tribe*, DoD contract research project, 18 Jun 2006, pp. 156–59.

¹³ Eli Lake, “Meet Iraq’s Most Important Man,” *New York Sun*, 3 Apr 2007.

¹⁴ MNC-I Rpt, MNF-W Tribal Engagement: A Model, III Corps Analysis and Control Element (c. May 2007), p. 3.

Team, 3d Infantry Division, commanded by Col. John W. Charlton, replaced the armored brigade in Ar Ramadi. When the new unit first arrived (it was under the command of the marines and MNF-W and never attached to General Lynch's 3d Division and MND-C), attacks in the area averaged around thirty-five per day, including a fearsome array of IEDs sprinkled along the province's few roads. By August, Charlton reported less than one attack per day, and the brigade experienced long stretches of quiet with no attacks. Even more important was the increasing collaboration between the locals and police. In early 2006, the operations involving cooperation between tribal groups and the police numbered fewer than one thousand; one year later, the total had ballooned to over seven thousand. According to Charlton, by April 2007, local security forces, using intelligence provided by the tribes, had all but eliminated al-Qaeda in Ar Ramadi, and much of the rest of the province was rapidly moving in the same direction.¹⁵

While the Sunni tribes were beginning to cooperate with the government, they were also a potential source of political competition or even brutality as they gained power. Although the group's goals coincided with those of the Americans, they could change over time, making the tribes yet another armed group with little allegiance to the government. Planners recognized the problem. David Kilcullen wrote that "the process may create armed groups outside Government control, which might engage in human rights violations," though he also pointed out that no such cases had been documented and the fact that these were men wholly engaged in securing their own families and neighborhoods probably precluded problems in the future.¹⁶

The Iraqi government publicly professed support for the Sunni reconciliation, but it had also signaled its discomfort with the concept of militias almost from the start. One of Prime Minister Maliki's political advisers, Sami al-Askari, accused the U.S. military of "preparing Iraq for a civil war by arming Sunni tribes under the pretext of confronting [al-Qaeda]." Al-Askari went so far as to blame Sunni militias under the auspices of the Americans for the bombing of a mosque in Samarra in early June, though the allegation was false.¹⁷

Prime Minister Maliki was not quite as specific in his condemnation, but he followed a similar line of thinking. On a trip in mid-June to Ad Diwaniyah in the heart of Shi'ite southern Iraq, Maliki attempted to assuage nervousness over the rising importance of the Sunni reconciliation movement and the militias it was spawning. "We cannot build a state that has another state

¹⁵ DoD News Briefing with Col John W. Charlton, CO, 1st BCT, 3d Inf Div (via videoconference from Baghdad), 3 Aug 2007, pp. 2-3.

¹⁶ Kilcullen, "Anatomy of a Tribal Revolt," pp. 6-7.

¹⁷ Usamah Mahdi, "Iraqi Prime Minister's Adviser Accuses US of Preparing Iraq for Civil War," Translation from Arabic, The Initiative for an Open Arab Internet Web site, 16 Jun 2007.



Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki (*center*) dines with sheikhs at a U.S. base in Al Anbar Province. A Shi'ite, Maliki was resistant to forming the Sunni Sons of Iraq but came to see the militias as a useful weapon against al-Qaeda.

inside it," stated the prime minister, and "we cannot build an army that has armies inside it."¹⁸

The government's alarm stemmed from a deep-seated belief among many Shi'ite leaders that, after decades of dominance under Saddam Hussein, the Sunnis would never accept the Shi'ites' elevated status because of being the minority in Iraq. It was one thing to encourage the Sunnis of Al Anbar, which was a Sunni backwater as far as the government in Baghdad was concerned, but it was quite another to bring that model into the religiously mixed regions in and around the capital. If these new Sunni groups turned into a political movement—and an armed one at that—they would perhaps revolt one day. Worst of all, such an uprising might well be supported by Sunni regimes in neighboring countries, such as Jordan and Saudi Arabia. This anxiety slowed the already glacial act of vetting individual reconciled Sunnis, who eventually were supposed to be integrated into the police or armed forces.

In the spring of 2007, the 2d Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division—just prior to the creation of MND-C—submitted a list of

¹⁸ Alissa J. Rubin, "Shiite Rivalries Slash at a Once Calm Iraqi City," *New York Times*, 21 Jun 2007.

hundreds of individuals who would make up a portion of a new Iraqi brigade being created to operate in the Triangle of Death south of Baghdad. The prime minister's office balked at approving the list, then struck all the Sunnis from it. General Petraeus responded to the heavy-handed decision by threatening to withdraw all U.S. support to the new brigade. Maliki finally relented, but obviously integrating Sunnis into the security process would be a long and painful venture.¹⁹

New Focus on Reconciliation

The issue of reconciliation loomed on the strategic horizon as the surge picked up steam, but its form remained uncertain into the summer. As the last of the surge brigades arrived in June, General Odierno published his first corps-level operation order to shape the coming offensives. Reconciliation would play a significant part. According to the order,

It is unrealistic to expect stability to come through a wholesale military defeat of the insurgency in Iraq. MNC-I will execute a broad-based and integrated reconciliation and engagement effort at all levels using a bottom-up approach with top-down refinement and resourcing. . . . *Iraqis are the ones who reconcile; leaders in MNC-I work to persuade and encourage them to participate in the process* [emphasis in original].²⁰

Odierno thought the subject so important that he included a FRAGO, or fragmentary order, as well as information papers to further focus the role of reconciliation in the surge. On 4 June, he added new “reconciliation guidance” to the original operation order stressing the window of opportunity to co-opt some of the tribes. “Indicators show an increased rejection of foreign fighter support by many tribes” across much of Iraq and some “localized instances” of Sunni—and a few Shi’ites—battling al-Qaeda and other militias in order to improve their own security. General Odierno believed that time was of the essence. “If these brief moments of outreach are not exploited,” he warned, “groups may revert back to the terrorist and insurgent groups for economic prosperity and security.”²¹

In yet another clarifying order, the corps commander noted that reconciliation represented “a paradigm shift” in the operational emphasis of coalition forces. “Our focus [now] is squarely on rewarding” those tribes already

¹⁹ Bing West, *The Strongest Tribe: War, Politics, and the Endgame in Iraq* (New York: Random House, 2008), p. 331.

²⁰ MNC-I OPORD 07-01, 1 Jun 2007, p. 14.

²¹ FRAGO 007, Reconciliation Guidance to OPORD 07-01, 4 Jun 2007, p. 1.



General Odierno speaks with a group of local sheikhs at Patrol Base Kemple on the banks of the Euphrates River. MNC-I directives in June 2007 emphasized reconciliation with Sunni insurgents as a major objective throughout Iraq.

involved in the effort and “using our stronger bargaining position to ask them to bring others who are interested into the process.”²²

General Odierno also sent an open letter to all military personnel in Iraq to impress on them the gravity of the new mission. “Reconciliation means getting Iraqis to set aside their sectarian differences and focus on the future of a free Iraq,” he wrote. “The success of Iraq’s young democracy depends upon this process.” Odierno was also aiming his words at the Iraqi government, which would have to participate in reconciliation if the effort was to prevail. “There is a day in the future when coalition forces will step back,” he declared. “When that day arrives, we must have adequately prepared this Nation to function as a civil society free from the terror of extremists.” The official orders as well as the public pronouncements confirmed that reconciliation would be a driving factor in the surge.²³

Many Army units were already working on reconciliation before they received the official guidance. In the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry

²² An. C, Reconciliation Information Paper, to FRAGO 007 to OPORD 07–01 (c. Jun 2007), p. 1.

²³ Ltr, Lt Gen Odierno to Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines of the Multi-National Corps–Iraq, 24 Jun 2007.

Division, for example, the 2d Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment, which operated in the neighborhoods of west Baghdad, had a strong program geared to convincing recalcitrant Sunnis to reject the insurgents. A short paper entitled “The Rules of Reconciliation,” written in May by the battalion commander, Lt. Col. Kurt J. Pinkerton, circulated widely among other units recently assuming the mission. Pinkerton argued that “this is not primarily a kinetic fight, but a battle of influence,” and that it was key to the “deep fight” within a counterinsurgency campaign. In the short term, he asserted, reconciliation “can improve your combat operations” by augmenting the friendly troops on the ground, while at the same time adding a cultural and situational awareness that would not be possible when using only U.S. troops. “Even when you have learned your area, there are small nuances that they see that we will never notice.” In the long run, giving local citizens beset by constant warfare a role in their own security was crucial to national stability.²⁴

However, Pinkerton’s emphasis on the “battle of influence,” rather than military operations, was largely due to his battalion’s circumstances. The 2d Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment, operated in the Abu Ghraib region, which although still dangerous in mid-2007 had benefited from the presence since 2004 of the U.S. military. Combat operations had brought to the territory the kind of security that bolstered the confidence of local civilians and encouraged some to “reconcile.” Though it might be tempting to discern a strategic choice between deadly force and more peaceful missions aimed at “winning hearts and minds,” to use the Vietnam War-era phrase, the reality was that both were necessary, depending on the environment. In general, if the enemy controlled the population, combat was required before anything more could be accomplished.²⁵

This was true within the 3d Infantry Division’s piece of the battlefield. Before Lynch’s forces expanded their permanent presence to places dominated by the insurgents, no local citizens were willing to cooperate with either the Iraqi government or the Americans. To do so meant certain death at the hands of insurgents. Villagers needed to feel safe and be convinced that if they stepped forward their security would not be fleeting. Task Force Marne had only just committed to the fight south of Baghdad, and it would expend great effort before it could claim such progress.

Because General Lynch was in the midst of preparing for the large combat operations that would characterize the early phases of the campaign, he intended to “start small” in the realm of reconciliation. The division would have a difficult time doing much more than that. During a meeting less than two weeks after the reconciliation orders came down from corps, the division commander elicited the views of his senior staff. General Huggins, the assistant division commander for operations, referred to reconciliation as “an

²⁴ Lt Col Kurt J. Pinkerton, *The Rules of Reconciliation*, 11 May 2007, pp. 1–2.

²⁵ Abu Ghraib is the more commonly known spelling of Abu Ghurayb.

excellent program that deserves all our attention," though he also put it in perspective of the overall area of operations when he reminded the staff that "one of our priorities remains capture or kill." The division would need to balance the seemingly contradictory goals.²⁶

This would be a challenge. The region south of Baghdad was a checkerboard of tribes, both Sunni and Shi'ite, and many had little contact with either the Coalition or the Iraqi government. The combination of past coalition inactivity and the permanent residence of insurgent groups among the population made attaining any headway difficult without first fighting hard to establish coalition roots among the towns in the Tigris and Euphrates valleys. An additional obstacle was the fact that many tribes in the southern belt stretched across Multi-National Division boundaries or had "parent tribes" in other parts of the country. Close coordination and cooperation between units were requisite to achieving any success.

The largest and most influential tribes in the southern belt were the Khartani and Obeidi, extending along the southeastern and southern outskirts of Baghdad; the Qarghuli, along the eastern bank of the Euphrates; and the Janabi, farthest south, in a band from the Euphrates eastward through Lutifiyah all the way to the Tigris. All four tribes sat astride major rat lines into Baghdad, and analysts believed that the "engagement of any of these tribes could help reduce insurgent influence" as well as provide an important impediment to the smuggling of munitions into the capital.²⁷

The course of reconciliation in this territory would not mirror the Awakening in Al Anbar Province, however. There, it had migrated from the top downward, with the prominent sheikhs forming the Anbar Salvation Council and bringing their tribes with them. South of Baghdad, with its mix of Sunni and Shi'ite towns, the emphasis would start at the bottom and move upward, with local leaders and communities coming to the table first before the process spread across the region.

To usher the initiative along, in May 2007 General Lynch created a Reconciliation and Engagement Cell at MND-C headquarters. Consisting of three officers—Lt. Col. Gloria A. Rincon, Maj. David A. Waldron, and Maj. Jonathan S. Matey—the team spent long days holed up in a small plywood-walled room in the division intelligence center at Camp Victory studying the complex boundaries and relationships between local sheikhs and reaching out to them. "We had to learn on the fly," said Major Waldron. "We looked around at what other units had done and borrowed from them shamelessly."²⁸

Much of that early information came from the 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, which had succeeded in engaging the tribes along the Euphrates. The new cell used the 10th's experiences as a template for a division-wide

²⁶ BUB, 15 Jun 2007, author's notes.

²⁷ MNC-I Information Paper, Tribal Engagement in the Southern Baghdad Belt, May 2007, pp. 1-2.

²⁸ Meeting with Reconciliation and Engagement Cell, 20 Jun 2007, author's notes.

effort that would expand into the Tigris valley, an expanse that had seen virtually no reconciliation with the local tribes. Both the 2d and 3d Brigades of the 3d Infantry Division were still learning their areas of operations, and they would require some time to develop the personal contacts with local leaders that were the bedrock of reconciliation.

General Lynch devoted most of his attention to planning for the early summer offensives, but he communicated regularly with his new cell and began including reconciliation progress reports in his daily battle update briefings. At one meeting, Lynch devised the broad parameters for the program, which MNF-I dubbed Concerned Local Citizens, or CLC, but was later known as *Abna al-Iraq*, or Sons of Iraq.²⁹ “There are two lines we won’t cross,” stated Lynch. “We won’t arm them or give them ammunition. Also, we won’t support them in any fight against al-Qaeda. They can give us the intel and we will fight al-Qaeda.” The corps furnished this guidance, and it made perfect sense. U.S. soldiers would neither battle alongside nor would they arm the Sons of Iraq. Ordinary Iraqis already possessed plenty of weapons, and using militia groups as an auxiliary force to contest al-Qaeda would only result in more bloodshed.³⁰

The approach to bringing Iraqi citizens into the fold was fairly straightforward. Once a local sheikh agreed to cooperate with the Americans, he asked for Sons of Iraq volunteers from among the male population, then vetted them to ensure that none were wanted terrorists. This was double-checked by the Americans, who also entered individuals into the biometric identification database and gave them a “weapons card” that allowed each to carry an AK assault rifle. Only one weapon per man was permitted, and heavy weapons such as machine guns and grenade or rocket launchers were forbidden. New members were trained as checkpoint guards and placed on probation for thirty days. Each man was paid about \$10 a day—less than what an Iraqi soldier or policeman would make but enough to instill in him the pride of an important job and a personal stake in the community’s security.³¹

For much of the 3d Division’s area of operations, the Sons of Iraq program was still in its infancy. General Huggins, who oversaw the Reconciliation and Engagement Cell as well as day-to-day combat operations, predicted that as the violent summer proceeded, reconciliation south of Baghdad would make a slow start. “I’m not sure when we will see progress,” he indicated during one planning session. For the time being, he believed that reconciliation would come “out of the barrel of an M4. They are very unfriendly there.”³²

²⁹ *Concerned Local Citizens* was an awkward term that was used throughout 2007. However, the Iraqis never liked the name, which in Arabic translated roughly as *worried people*—uninspiring in any language. In January 2008, the title was officially changed to Sons of Iraq. For convenience, the latter term will be used throughout this account.

³⁰ BUB, 19 Jul 2007, author’s notes.

³¹ MND-C Briefing, Facilitating Reconciliation, slide 15, Concerned Local Citizens, 29 Jan 2008.

³² MND-C Reconciliation Working Group Meeting, 16 Jul 2007, author’s notes.



U.S. Army Capt. Richard Thompson (*center*), commander of the 3d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division's Company B, 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, speaks with an Iraqi elder near the town of Salman Pak. Reconciliation began with improved relations between local leaders and U.S. Army officers stationed in bases among the population.

He was specifically talking about the fighting in Arab Jabour. During the opening weeks of Operation MARNE TORCH, the 2d Brigade had little luck with local Iraqis. Colonel Ferrell noted that the Sunnis “want nothing to do with what they perceive to be a ‘Shia’ government” or with the coalition forces, which they regarded as tools of the ruling party in Baghdad. Even by the operation’s end in mid-July, progress was slow. Ferrell reported that “the primary challenge to getting residents to step forward and assume responsibilities remains a ‘wait and see’ attitude and an overriding concern with security.” Without a secure environment, reconciliation could not advance—no matter how much the locals disliked the insurgents.³³

Combat Multipliers

Where security was established, the area experienced immediate progress. By late July, Colonel Adgie’s 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, was

³³ First quote from MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 16–22 Jun 2007, pp. 4–5. Second quote from MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 7–13 Jul 2007, p. 4.

reaping the benefits of its success during Operation MARNE TORCH. Not only had his soldiers driven out al-Qaeda, but they were staying put in order to keep the terrorists out. Adgie had demonstrated his ability to meet and defeat the insurgents in combat, but he also had to furnish other assistance if the Americans were to be accepted. "If the tribe doesn't want you here," he told one visitor, "they're going to drive you out. They're that good with IEDs."³⁴

The battalion had encountered 115 IEDs during its gradual push southward during MARNE TORCH, and most of the eleven soldiers killed during the operation died in roadside bomb blasts. Despite the danger, Adgie did what he could to make life better for the cowed population, including trucking in loads of ice during the 115°F summer heat to keep the villagers cool. The Americans were also able to get Arab Jabour electricity up to eight hours a day—it had seen none for more than a year. This gesture showed the population that the Americans were more than just fierce fighters, they could also improve conditions. Colonel Adgie also had the authority to turn the power off if the residents remained hostile and uncooperative.

The carrot and stick paid quick dividends. Although most residents were too frightened to resist al-Qaeda openly, some did join the effort against the insurgents. Once former Iraqi Army general Mustafa Kamel Shabib al-Jabouri, soon to be known as the Lion of Arab Jabour, used his influence and leadership skills to recruit local citizens, more volunteered. Al-Jabouri ensured that all recruits were introduced to Adgie. Impressed by the man and the concept, the battalion commander formed the new group into a network of intelligence gatherers called the Bird Dogs, who drove around pointing out al-Qaeda members and signing sworn statements against them that would stand up in court. Throughout the summer, the information supplied by the Bird Dogs resulted in the arrest of 115 men, 60 of whom proved to be insurgents.³⁵

But the Americans did not rely exclusively on the word of the Bird Dogs. "We cannot single source the intel," said Colonel Adgie. The knowledge provided by the Bird Dogs had to match intelligence already acquired by the Americans to prevent cases where the local Iraqis might steer U.S. firepower toward personal or tribal enemies to settle scores. By summer's end the program, now known as the South Baghdad Rescue Council, had collected about five hundred members willing to confront al-Qaeda.³⁶

Not surprisingly, the terrorists struck back. Their grisly reprisals included the beheading of a mentally disabled old man and a young boy and the shooting deaths of four women. Once again, al-Qaeda had overplayed its hand, and villagers became eager to report insurgent activities. In one instance, a man used his cell phone to notify the Americans that four armed insurgents had

³⁴ West, *The Strongest Tribe*, pp. 312–13.

³⁵ Rpt, Arab Jabour: A Case Study of Counterinsurgency, p. 6.

³⁶ Ibid. Quote from Bill Roggio Web log, "The Long War Journal," "Arab Jabour: This is al-Qaeda Country," 22 Sep 2007, p. 2.

taken residence in a house. A team of soldiers rushed to the building and shot one of them before they all could escape.³⁷

By August, the situation was improving, the direct result of a safer environment. On the second, Colonel Ferrell met with Sunni tribal leaders at Forward Operating Base Kalsu and came away optimistic that progress had been made. Two days later, the 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, conducted its first recruitment drive, and eighty-four men joined the Sons of Iraq. The next day, another forty-five signed up.³⁸

In Hawr Rajab, a citizens group also formed, and the brigade awarded it a security contract to guard important buildings and key road intersections. In Arab Jabour, the 2d Brigade created a “governance center” that served both as a meeting place for local leaders as well as a focal point for civic action programs to help the population. Colonel Ferrell believed that these efforts “may lead to increased trust/cooperation between Hawr Rajab and Arab Jabour and work toward establishment of a regional Political Group” that could collaborate with the Iraqi government.³⁹

The changes in security sometimes came at a high price. In the northwest corner of the 2d Brigade’s sector, in and around Hawr Rajab, Colonel Odom, the 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment, commander, had recently made contact with Sheikh Ali Majid Mushir, a leader of the dominant Dulaimi tribe, which had long been allied with al-Qaeda. However, as the American troop surge increasingly brought security to Hawr Rajab, al-Qaeda reacted, becoming more brutal and arbitrary and alienating the population. Sheikh Ali stated that the terrorists had usurped his tribe’s authority and imposed a draconian version of Islamic law that was alien to his people, and they had murdered his father and kidnapped other relatives.

In early July, the sheikh had contacted Capt. Chad A. Klascius, the commander of Troop A, the unit assigned to Hawr Rajab, and requested talks with the Americans. As a token of his good faith, Ali handed over a notebook that proved to be a who’s who of insurgents in the area. The book named the leaders as well as the rank and file—more intelligence than the squadron had ever possessed at one time. “It was like months’ worth of intelligence instantly,” said Captain Klascius. “It was just handed over, and [we] found almost all of it to be true. . . . [We] had overwhelming success at the start because we had all this information on al-Qaeda.”⁴⁰

After several furtive meetings with Ali, it appeared that he was going to make the break with al-Qaeda, but the terrorists learned of the decision and attacked Ali’s supporters, forcing some to flee south. However, in early

³⁷ West, *The Strongest Tribe*, pp. 314–15.

³⁸ Rpt, Arab Jabour: A Case Study of Counterinsurgency, p. 2.

³⁹ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 28 Jul–3 Aug 2007, p. 6.

⁴⁰ Interv, Lt Col Richard L. Wheeler, 52d MHD, with Capt Chad A. Klascius, Cdr, Troop A, 1st Sqdn, 40th Cav Rgt, 28 Sep 2007, p. 4.



Captain Klascius (right) leads General Odierno and members of the Hawr Rajab Awakening council on a tour of the town. By the fall of 2007, local leaders had organized some five hundred Iraqi men to help provide security at various sites around Hawr Rajab.

August Sheikh Ali and many of his men joined the reconciliation movement and invited the Americans to cement the arrangement in Hawr Rajab.⁴¹

This was welcome news. Klascius' troop numbered only about seventy soldiers, and their job was to maintain some semblance of control over a town of some eight thousand people and repulse several dozen insurgents who could pop up anywhere at any time. A meeting was set for 4 August. That morning, Sheikh Ali met the Americans, including Colonel Odom and Captain Klascius, at a checkpoint for the drive into town. The summer *shamal* winds whipped up fine sand and dust, coating the vehicles with grit and grounding the helicopter gunships that normally would have accompanied the column overhead. Since only one road led into Hawr Rajab from the south, everyone knew this would be a dangerous trip. If the enemy had learned of the gathering, ambushing the column as it entered town would be easy.

And al-Qaeda knew they were coming. As the Humvees drove along Route Ferrari just before noon, a handful of guerrillas hiding in a palm grove opened fire. The vehicles easily suppressed the attack and continued on, but the danger was not past. Less than fifteen minutes later, as the convoy turned north onto Route Buick, a major roadway running all the way to Baghdad, Odom's vehicle was struck by a command detonated bomb. The blast shredded the doors and cupola and flipped the vehicle onto its roof, wounding all

⁴¹ Michael R. Gordon, "The Former-Insurgent Counterinsurgency," *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, 2 Sep 2007, p. 7.



Colonel Odom (left) takes Brig. Gen. John F. Campbell, assistant division commander for maneuver, 1st Cavalry Division, on a tour of the 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment, area of operations. Odom was wounded by an IED on 4 August 2007.

five men inside, though only Odom and the gunner in the turret were seriously hurt. Soldiers from other vehicles rushed to the crippled Humvee, but they could not open the heavy doors, which were crumpled by the explosion. Only after attaching a cable to the door and wresting it open using another Humvee were they able to remove the wounded men. Odom and the gunner were placed on the road and given first aid as they awaited the medevac helicopters. The cavalry commander had suffered a broken nose and a shattered left forearm, but he would survive. The 4th Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, operations officer, Maj. Timothy C. Davis, took command of the unit until Odom returned in mid-October. A few months earlier, Davis had temporarily commanded the 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment, while Colonel Odom was on leave, so the move was a logical one.⁴²

Other soldiers formed a hasty defensive perimeter and dispatched a patrol to search the surrounding area. The men found a hundred pounds of homemade explosives and detonators, but no insurgents. The attackers had

⁴² Sigacts 1 and 2, 4 Aug 2007, 7 x US WIA, 1 x Interpreter, WIA, 3 x US KIA, 1 [1st Bn]-40 Cav Rgt, 2d BCT, 3d Inf Div, BUB, 5 Aug 2007; Michael R. Gordon, "The Road to Hawr Rajab," *Middlebury Magazine* 82 (Spring 2008): 2; Interv, Wheeler with Maj Timothy Davis, Cdr, 1st Sqdn, 40th Cav Rgt, 29 Sep 2007, p. 1.

learned of the pending meeting and had planted a total of seven IEDs, all linked by command wires that required activation before they were armed. This prevented accidental detonation by civilian traffic. Once the terrorists determined the Americans were on the way, the bombs were remotely activated so that the pressure plate detonators would set off the explosives when the Humvees rolled over them. It was all very simple—and effective.

With the winds still whipping sand through the air, helicopter gunship support was impossible. Instead, the patrol requested a “show of force,” a fly-over by Air Force jets meant more to scare the insurgents than to cause any real damage. One aircraft dropped a bomb in a nearby empty field, sending a geyser of dirt harmlessly into the air. It was a sign that more—and deadlier—air strikes could be called if necessary, but no one knew if the insurgents got the message.⁴³

Medevac helicopters made the risky flight through the buffeting shamal, but they did not fly all the way to Hawr Rajab, landing instead at a checkpoint well south of town. The trip took them less than a half hour from Forward Operating Base Kalsu. No sooner were the wounded loaded onto the helicopters when another Humvee struck a bomb as it moved up the road a few hundred yards, and this time the explosion was more deadly. Three of the six soldiers inside were killed, and the rest were wounded. Six minutes later yet another vehicle hit an IED and was completely destroyed. Miraculously, no one was injured this time. Then, in what seemed to be a parting shot, a handful of insurgents opened fire with small arms from the west side of Route Buick. No one was hurt by the ineffective attack, and by late afternoon the Americans had removed their dead, recovered their equipment, and left the area.⁴⁴

In addition to the strike on Odom’s unit, two other raids in MND-C left six Task Force Marne soldiers killed and ten wounded. The first attack also occurred on 4 August, and it involved another unit from the 4th Brigade, 25th Division—a convoy traveling from Camp Anaconda near Balad north of Baghdad to Forward Operating Base Kalsu. The line of Humvees and trucks was struck by two EFPs just south of Baghdad. The first roadside bomb damaged one vehicle, but the other destroyed a Humvee, killing one soldier and wounding two others. The other assault came on the afternoon of 5 August when insurgents rocketed Forward Operating Base Rustamiyah on the southeastern outskirts of Baghdad. Two 107-mm. rockets struck the base, one of them landed near the 759th Military Police Battalion headquarters killing two soldiers.⁴⁵

⁴³ Gordon, “The Former-Insurgent Counterinsurgency,” p. 11.

⁴⁴ Sigacts 1 and 2, 4 Aug 2007, 7 x US WIA, 1 x Interpreter, WIA, 3 x US KIA, 1st Sqdn, 40th Cav Rgt, 2d BCT, 3d Inf Div, BUB, 5 Aug 2007.

⁴⁵ Storyboard, Event 1, MND-B Event 55, 2 x US KIA, 2 x US WIA, 127th MP Co, 4th BCT, 25th Inf Div, 4 Aug 2007.

General Lynch had consistently cautioned against undue optimism and warned that the enemy remained a serious threat despite the increasing tempo of Sunni reconciliation, but he was surprised by the string of killings. “It’s been a rough thirty-six hours,” he said at the morning briefing on 5 August. He was particularly exasperated by the fact that insurgents had mounted such a complex attack in Hawr Rajab, and he fumed that the villagers merely stood by and watched as those roadside bombs were emplaced without a single person speaking up. The incident seemed to make a mockery of the relationships his troops had painstakingly built with village leaders, but such was the unpredictability of counterinsurgency, and the division commander understood that very well. “Even though we’re doing great in MND-C,” he told his officers, “this will happen.”⁴⁶

Despite the setback, the Sons of Iraq program was spreading throughout MND-C, buoyed by Task Force Marne’s increasing success at securing and holding areas previously controlled by the enemy. The 2d Brigade reported that almost three hundred civilians would be trained as local guards by month’s end. The 3d Brigade, which also faced problems recruiting local Iraqis on the east side of the Tigris, made progress in August. Some fifty men completed their training on the twelfth, and two days later a group discovered a weapons cache while on a patrol. Other groups volunteered, including about sixty local Iraqis in the northern region patrolled by the 3d Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment.⁴⁷

But these numbers were meager compared with what was happening in the northwest corner of the area of operations near the Euphrates River. There, the 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, which already had the strongest reconciliation record in Task Force Marne, experienced a dramatic increase in civilians walking onto patrol bases to volunteer their services as Sons of Iraq. Over ten thousand Iraqis had applied during the summer, and more were expected over the next few months.

During the afternoon of 1 August, Iraqi men waited in the blazing sun inside Patrol Base Warrior Keep for an opportunity to have their names and biometric data entered on a list so they could join the Sons of Iraq. Colonel Valledor, the commander of the 2d Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment, which manned Warrior Keep, said some twenty-nine hundred Iraqis had registered over the last month or so. “All of our time is now spent trying to map out the [Sons of Iraq] and maintaining relations with the sheikhs,” he informed General Lynch, who had flown to the base for a progress report. “Just last year it was like pulling teeth just trying to get them to talk to us.”

A battalion intelligence officer observed that the momentum had turned against al-Qaeda and the Sunni extremists. “Everyone wants to be part of it after all these years under AQ,” he explained. “They want AQ gone.” The

⁴⁶ BUB, 5 Aug 2007, author’s notes.

⁴⁷ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 11–17 Aug 2007, pp. 4, 16.

officer also noted that the intelligence supplied by ordinary citizens “has gone way beyond just telling us where IEDs are buried” and now included giving information on who was in the bomb-making cells. The environment was so unfriendly toward the insurgents that the IEDs were not being planted in the first place.

Lynch met with fourteen local sheikhs that day. He emphasized the importance he placed on the Sons of Iraq, telling the gathered tribal leaders, some in suits and others in white or gray *dishdashas*, the traditional Arab robes, “I congratulate your efforts because you are helping secure your people.” Lynch pledged that his soldiers would continue to ensure security, maintaining a presence among the population and helping them build a better life, though he was careful not to make any promises. One sheikh wanted more weapons, but Lynch deflected the request by pointing out that the villagers already had their own arms. Instead, he underscored the need for continued cooperation between the Sons of Iraq and U.S. forces. “What you do today is security,” he stressed to the sheikhs as they nodded their approval. “Attacks on my soldiers are way down, and I appreciate that more than you know. You are the solution to the security problem, not me.” Lynch prompted the men to give him even more intelligence on the enemy. “I still need to know who is AQ.





During a meeting with local Iraqi men at Patrol Base Warrior Keep in the western sector of his command, General Lynch gives assurances that if they provide information on insurgents he will pursue them.

I want no more attacks. Together we'll fight against the common enemy. I've got 16,000 men—you tell me where the enemy is and we'll take him out.”⁴⁸

By the fall of 2007, the 2d Brigade was making similar progress in Arab Jabour and the Tigris valley, with Colonel Adgie's 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, reporting that almost five hundred Sons of Iraq were on patrol throughout its operational territory. In October, the Sons of Iraq took over most of Abuwaitha, which only a few months earlier had been very dangerous country. Adgie stated that “they have had a great deal of success so far,” though four had been killed and six wounded in September. Hawr Rajab was also making great strides, with about 400 local Iraqis waiting to join the 121 already in action. Adgie also brokered an agreement with the local Iraqi Army units to provide ten thousand rounds of ammunition for the citizen patrols. By late October, 812 Sons of Iraq were manning twenty-four checkpoints in the brigade area of operations.⁴⁹

Progress East of the Tigris

In the 3d Brigade's territory east of the Tigris, the Sons of Iraq program was also advancing, but in many ways the goals were more difficult to attain.

⁴⁸ Maj Gen Lynch Battlefield Rotation, Patrol Base Warrior Keep, 1 Aug 2007, author's notes.

⁴⁹ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 29 Sep–5 Oct 2007, pp. 9–10. Quote from 2/3 Inf Concerned Citizens slide, BUB, 26 Oct 2007.



By the fall of 2007, the number of Sons of Iraq militias had increased to the point where they were an integral part of security throughout MND-C.

Initially, the 3d Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment, had trouble with the mix of Sunnis and Shi'ites in the northern region east and southeast of Baghdad. The commander, Colonel Kolasheski, believed that pushing a strategy of recruiting Iraqis into self-defense groups would, in addition to the intelligence value, have an "immediate economic impact of hiring mostly young, unemployed local nationals to perform security functions in their neighborhoods. This hiring quickly injected cash into the local economy."⁵⁰

After many weeks of study, the squadron had a plan. Kolasheski had three basic criteria that had to be met before he would approve it. First, no Sons of Iraq would be recruited in areas with sufficient Iraqi security presence. Second, U.S. troop commanders had to have full authority to remove local leaders "who did not embrace their duties or the program." Finally, any plan had to pass what Kolasheski described as the "New York Times test," meaning that, if the story hit the newspaper's front page, readers should clearly see the military necessity of spending their tax dollars on such a program. Typically, the cavalrymen would talk to local mayors, hoping to persuade them, as

⁵⁰ Maj Andrew W. Koloski and Lt Col John S. Kolasheski, "Thickening the Lines: Sons of Iraq, A Combat Multiplier," *Military Review* 89 (January-February 2009): 43.

Kolasheski wrote, that “buy-in by local communities makes them part of the solution rather than just spectators to the counterinsurgency struggle.” If this happened, the Sons of Iraq members would oversee a certain number of checkpoints on the roads leading to their towns, usually with twelve recruits manning each and a reaction force of another twelve men responsible for a group of eight checkpoints. In return, each Iraqi received the usual \$300 a month, plus a stipend for radios, Iraqi flags, and uniforms (consisting of hats, reflective belts, and shirts). The brigade paid the wages from its Commander’s Emergency Response Program, or CERP, a discretionary fund that gave ground commanders the ability to use money for any rebuilding program they thought useful—with very little red tape to slow down the payment process.⁵¹

In late July, Colonel Kolasheski tried out his concept in Arafia, a Sunni neighborhood on the northern outskirts of Jisr Diyala, just southeast of Baghdad. His officers had approached the local *muktar*, or mayor, and asked for permission to build a cadre of Sons of Iraq. Muktar Allawi was a respected leader with no love for al-Qaeda, and with his assistance the Americans began screening new candidates. Within weeks, the new Sons of Iraq group had set up checkpoints and was successful enough to enrage the insurgents who, on 18 August, tried to kill the muktar at his home with a suicide bomb.⁵²

The incident happened late in the afternoon of the eighteenth. A man approached the cordon of Bradley fighting vehicles lined up outside Allawi’s house and asked to see the muktar about buying a house in the area. The guards recognized the man as a local Iraqi and searched him for weapons as he neared the door. An astonished shout came from one of the men as he patted down the visitor and discovered he was wrapped in explosives underneath his shirt. Men scattered to escape from the suicide bomber, but the muktar’s son, Hussein Allawi, rushed the terrorist and drove him from the front door.⁵³

A group of U.S. soldiers standing near their Bradleys were equally surprised. One of them, S. Sgt. Sean R. Kane, was near enough to the door to see the attack, and he raised his rifle to kill the insurgent. But the bomb-vest exploded, killing both the terrorist and Allawi and flinging shrapnel through the air. A fragment ripped into Sergeant Kane’s leg and blew his helmet off his head. “My weapon flew out of my hand,” said Kane. “The next thing I know, I’m face down in the grass trying to get my bearings.” The senior officer on the scene, 1st Lt. Eugene M. Barth, was farther from the explosion, but he was hurled against a nearby wall by the force of the blast.

⁵¹ Ibid., first quote on p. 48, and second quote on p. 43. For CERP, see Mark S. Martins, “The Commander’s Emergency Response Program,” *Joint Forces Quarterly* 37 (2d Quarter 2005): 46–52.

⁵² Koloski and Kolasheski, “Thickening the Lines,” p. 44.

⁵³ The account comes from Spec. Ben Hutto, “Soldiers Remember Iraqi Man’s Sacrifice That Saved Their Lives,” American Forces Press Service, 31 Aug 2007.

The attack was aimed at the heart of the fledgling Sons of Iraq in Arafia, and the program might well have ended right then. Muktar Allawi had lost a son—and nearly his life—and he could have abandoned the effort. After all, the insurgents lived among the villagers and were a constant threat, and U.S. forces would not be around forever. But Allawi persevered, and the local Sons of Iraq became an important part of the security venture.

Hussein Allawi's bravery impressed the Americans. Lieutenant Barth declared that Hussein's "actions saved four American lives that day and the lives of his family and father." A few days after the attack, Colonel Kolasheski, accompanied by Lieutenant Barth, Sergeant Kane, and a handful of other soldiers, attended a memorial ceremony for Hussein Allawi. Kolasheski gave the muktar a plaque and a pair of ceremonial spurs representing the cavalry unit.

News of the Arafia Sons of Iraq spread, and Kolasheski pushed his program into other areas. Not far south of Jisr Diyala, in Tuwaitha, near Combat Outpost Cashe, al-Qaeda still controlled the region, attacking U.S. and Iraqi forces with IEDs almost every time they ventured along the main roads. The violence frustrated local leaders, who agreed to rebuke the insurgents and to "take a leap of faith," as Kolasheski explained it, by backing the Sons of Iraq. However, since al-Qaeda was expected to react more violently than it had in Arafia, the 3d Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment, decided to heighten its own visibility in order to deal a direct blow to the terrorists before they could plan their own attack.

Kolasheski dubbed that display *TUWAITHA SUNRISE*, a company-size drive to clear the route into town and demonstrate to the local population that the Americans intended to back the Sons of Iraq with muscle. In concert with about sixty members of the new Sons of Iraq contingent as well as some Iraqi police, Company D, 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, under the cavalry's operational control for this mission, rolled into town early on the morning of 5 September, supported by helicopter gunships. The only significant action occurred just before the operation stepped off, when an unmanned aerial drone spotted two Iraqis emplacing an IED along Route Jennifer just outside of town. An air strike was called in, and a single F-16 dropped a 500-pound guided bomb on the site, blowing up the roadside booby trap. By the time the plane arrived, however, both insurgents were gone.⁵⁴

The local Iraqis' interest in cooperation stood in stark contrast to previous forays into Tuwaitha, when the citizens invariably refused to talk or interact. Before, there was "no waving, no smiling," recalled Capt. Brian D. Gilbert, the Company D commander, who had been on those missions. "They were unwilling to fight the terrorists." This time, however, the fledgling Sons of Iraq contingent was strong evidence of the population's weariness with

⁵⁴ Storyboard, Opn TUWAITHA SUNRISE, Concerned Citizens with 3d Sqdn, 1st Cav Rgt, 3d BCT, 3d Inf Div, BUB, 6 Sep 2007; Storyboard, MND-C Sigact 10, 1 x GBU-38 on IED, 0 x EKIA, Zone 67, 3d BCT, 3d Inf Div, BUB, 6 Sep 2007.



A local member of the Sons of Iraq poses for a photo prior to a joint clearing operation with soldiers from Company A, 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment.

the insurgents' oppressive behavior. "Al-Qaeda is a threat to the locals and also a threat to U.S. soldiers," Captain Gilbert explained. "They wanted us to come down there and fight with them. So we did." With the insurgents gone, or at least severely diminished, he continued, "we can provide medical operations and projects that will provide enduring employment." By the end of September, Gilbert was proved correct. Economic activity increased, and traffic moved northward toward the capital unimpeded by roadside bombs, largely because the Sons of Iraq, backed by the Americans, were maintaining security.⁵⁵

What worked for the Sunnis along the Tigris might not be effective among the Shi'ites, which made up most of the rest of Colonel Kolasheski's area of operations. While the Shi'ite and "mixed" regions experienced less insurgent activity, criminal acts and sectarian strife were rampant. In and around Qarguhliyah near the Four Corners and Um al Bid, between Jisr Diyala and Nahrawan to the east, the population was about 57 percent Shi'ite and 43 percent Sunni, which forced the Americans to modify the approach to forming Sons of Iraq groups.

⁵⁵ MND-C Media Release, Soldiers, Iraqis clear out al-Qaeda along Tigris, 13 Sep 2007.

In Qarguhliyah, Kolasheski's commanders approached Abu Amosh, a Sunni businessman with close ties to all the tribes, and he began recruiting Sons of Iraq with an eye toward including Sunnis and Shi'ites alike. A prominent Shi'ite, Abu Mohammed, helped bring Shi'ites into the process, and by year's end the program was flourishing. With strong support from tribal leaders, the Sons of Iraq helped squash local gangs, and "with unprecedented alacrity," wrote Colonel Kolasheski, "kidnapping, car-jacking, and extortion dropped to nearly zero." This, in turn, offered the Iraqis an opportunity to strengthen local government and to rebuild the local economy.⁵⁶

Kolasheski also built a joint security station in order to integrate police and Sons of Iraq activities and to serve as a clearinghouse for information on the enemy. By the spring of 2008, the 3d Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment, reported that after about five months of operations, the Sons of Iraq had turned in 58 weapons caches, 32 IEDs, and more than 600 tips about local insurgents. This had "a noticeable effect on the battlespace," wrote Kolasheski, and "became the model for the entire brigade to establish Sons of Iraq groups in unsecured, non-permissive regions." Indeed, to the south of the cavalry's area of operations, in the Sunni insurgent strongholds along the Tigris around Salman Pak, Colonel Marr's 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, was just starting its engagement with the Sons of Iraq and would benefit from the model.⁵⁷

At the 3d Brigade level too, the Sons of Iraq were paying dividends. On 4 October, Colonel Grigsby and some of his officers met with three hundred sheikhs from throughout Al Mada'in Qadaa to discuss including more local citizens in the reconciliation process. The brigade operations officer, Maj. David G. Fivecoat, observed that "when this many sheiks attend a meeting such as this, it is an indicator that the people are tired of the violence and have a desire to return to normalcy." By the end of October, the Sons of Iraq encompassed 1,674 men—almost half of them Shi'ites—manning fifty-nine checkpoints on the major roadways along the east bank of the Tigris.⁵⁸

Burgeoning Numbers

The other two Task Force Marne brigades had several months' head start on the 3d Division units in signing up men to be Sons of Iraq. In late October, the 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, led the way, with 17,766 Iraqi civilians enrolled, while the 4th Brigade, 25th Division, had registered 3,902. Both units together had spent over \$7 million to pay and equip local villagers.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 47.

⁵⁷ Koloski and Kolasheski, "Thickening the Lines," pp. 46, 52.

⁵⁸ Quote from "U.S. reports record number of tips from Sunnis in Baghdad," *World Tribune*, 12 Oct 2007. 3/3 Inf Concerned Citizens slide, BUB, 26 Oct 2007.

⁵⁹ 2/10 Mtn Concerned Citizens slide; 4/25 Abn Concerned Citizens slide, both in BUB, 26 Oct 2007.



With the help of new Sons of Iraq contingents, Salman Pak, the former Sunni insurgent stronghold on the east bank of the Tigris, became a much safer place. In October 2007, the 3d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, counted more than fifteen hundred local Iraqis manning security checkpoints along major roads in the region.

The large membership in the Sons of Iraq yielded high returns in the Euphrates River valley. As Lt. Col. Robert M. Balcavage, commander of the 1st Battalion, 501st Infantry Regiment, of the 4th Brigade, 25th Division, pointed out, “Fewer of my guys have been killed than at any time before.” Since late July, eleven soldiers from both brigades had been killed, down from the twenty-seven deaths over the previous three-month period.⁶⁰

Despite progress in the field, problems loomed. In his statement to MNC-I on the eve of General Petraeus’ September 2007 report to Congress, General Lynch wrote that the Iraqi government’s “incremental change is too slow to take advantage of the Surge. The concerned citizens are creating a short term balance, but this window will soon close if the [government] does not acknowledge their legitimacy.” Lynch concluded that unless the program made positive steps toward gaining government acceptance within the next several months, “the effort could collapse.”⁶¹

⁶⁰ Darrin Mortenson, “America’s New Shia Allies,” *Time*, 11 Oct 2007.

⁶¹ Memo for Cdr, MNF-I, 1 Sep 2007, sub: August 2007 Assessment and Recommended Way Ahead, encl 8, MND-C Assessment, pp. 1–2.



Colonel Balcavage (*second from the right foreground*) meets with General Lynch (*at left*) at Patrol Base Jurf. The brigade's persistent reconciliation efforts resulted in increased security along the Euphrates.

Such concerns expressed by General Lynch, as well as by the other division commanders, formed an important component of General Odierno's assessment for General Petraeus. Odierno believed that the Sons of Iraq were "delivering stability," though he wondered how long the program could continue to do so. "I do not believe that our local security accommodations are sustainable if there is not movement on the political front." In other words, the Iraqi government had to increase the tempo of its own reconciliation with the Sunni community, or the entire measure would fall apart. Odierno predicted that if the government failed to capitalize on the momentum of reconciliation the danger existed that Sunni rage would escalate, making the threat of sectarian violence even more menacing. Odierno feared that "without a political process, we could be enabling . . . competition between the different groups in the name of security, as they position for the civil war." This gap between Sunni reconciliation and the Iraqi government's unwillingness to formalize the initiative would remain a sticking point throughout the next year.⁶²

⁶² Memo for Cdr, MNF-I, 1 Sep 2007, sub: August 2007 Assessment and Recommended Way Ahead, p. 3.

Lingering doubts also existed about the ultimate loyalties of the Sons of Iraq. Since many in the group were former insurgents who had decided—for any number of reasons—that it was time to stop fighting the Americans, the occasion might arise when that calculus changed. While many Sunnis were happy to cooperate, others probably saw the arrangement as a temporary expedient, a necessary “alliance,” to rid the territory of terrorists but not an indication that they were ready to collaborate with the government in Baghdad over the long run. General Lynch knew that, despite successes, “peace has not broken out; the Sons of Iraq could start shooting again.” His officers also voiced reservations. “It’s difficult to figure out who you can trust and who you can’t,” said one platoon leader. “I think [many of the Sons of Iraq] just prioritized the extremists over us, but they still see us as an occupying force.”⁶³

Complicating the issue was the likelihood that some of the Sons of Iraq had American blood on their hands. During a meeting in December between General Lynch and British Army Maj. Gen. Christopher Hughes, the commander of the MNF-I Force Strategic Engagement Cell (General Petraeus’ reconciliation management team), the subject took center stage. Lynch estimated that in his region of responsibility “eighty percent of concerned citizens used to be the enemy.” He noted, for example, that the leader of the Sons of Iraq in Jurf as Sakhr, Sheikh Sabah al-Janabi, was one of the top insurgents just a few years earlier but was now a key figure in the Sunni reconciliation. “We don’t even pretend they are all great guys,” asserted Lynch, “but we watch them.” He stressed that “MND-C does not have concerned citizens in areas we cannot provide overwatch.” General Hughes agreed but pointed out that the Iraqi government continued to be “anxious” about the Sons of Iraq. Iraqi officials “were dragged to the trough and forced to drink,” he observed, “but at least they are drinking.” Prime Minister Maliki had matched the U.S. government’s \$150 million expenditure on civilian employment for the Sons of Iraq, for a total of \$300 million. However, Maliki was not willing to allow the membership of the Sons of Iraq to grow indefinitely, and in the spring of 2008 he would cap their total number at 103,000 nationwide. The Iraqi government’s ambivalence placed the program at an impasse.⁶⁴

What would happen once the U.S. forces withdrew? At this point, no one could say, but General Lynch maintained that the Sons of Iraq “were our enemies yesterday, but our friends today and we need to keep it that way. Reconciliation is a delicate dance.” Task Force Marne “is struggling to get Sons of Iraq jobs,” he said during a meeting at the U.S. Embassy on 31 March 2008,

⁶³ First quote from CG Executive Summary, Cordesman/Kagan/Flournoy/Lowry Visit, 3 Feb 2008. Second and third quotes from Interv, Col Michael D. Visconage, MNC-I Historian, with 1st Lt Gregory G. Dietrich, Cdr, 1st Plt, Co C, 2d Bn, 502d Inf Rgt, 18 Jan 2008, p. 20.

⁶⁴ CG Executive Summary, MG Hughes Office Call, 3 Dec 2007.

but “nothing is happening on the GoI side.” The Iraqis’ mixed feelings, he felt, only made it more difficult to sustain the “delicate” balance.⁶⁵

The Sons of Iraq sometimes included unrepentant insurgents and turncoats, with dozens of cases of terrorists infiltrating the ranks or members using the cover of the militia to run criminal schemes. Late in the 3d Division’s deployment, two cases stood out. On 22 May 2008, Company D, 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, caught one local Sunni militiaman in northern Arab Jabour as he tried to assist insurgents planting IEDs. One week later, the 1st Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, detained three Sons of Iraq in the western part of the 2d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division’s area of operations. They apparently still maintained ties to al-Qaeda and were forming a new terrorist cell. During the span of the division’s association with the Sons of Iraq, several other incidents of treachery were discovered, but, given the broad sweep of the program, they were the exception, not the rule. Throughout 2008, about five hundred Sons of Iraq would give their lives fighting al-Qaeda.⁶⁶

Despite the political uncertainty, the operational benefits were becoming more obvious all the time. General Lynch wrote in a 16 December 2007 directive that “the concerned local citizens program [Sons of Iraq] remains TF Marne’s decisive operation. We will continue to grow CLCs to thicken the force in areas that we know have become extremist sanctuaries.” In order to bolster this capability, by early 2008, Task Force Marne was spending 80 percent of its discretionary budget—some \$10 million per month—on the Sons of Iraq.⁶⁷

The investment appeared to be paying off because the increasing numbers of “concerned local citizens” permitted U.S. troops to persist in their own struggle against the insurgents without having to thin their forces garrisoning the places they had just cleared. By the end of 2007, Task Force Marne counted 24,636 Sons of Iraq manning 825 checkpoints spread throughout MND-C, mostly in localities with little or no Iraqi security forces. The Sons of Iraq membership would continue to expand, reaching 36,000 men by the time the 3d Division left Iraq in June 2008. It was arguably the largest and most successful of the regional reconciliation programs, especially considering the territory’s mixed sectarian composition.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ First quote from CG Executive Summary, Cordesman/Kagan/Flournoy/Lowry Visit, 3 Feb 2008. Second quote from CG Executive Summary, MG Lynch’s Embassy Meetings, 31 Mar 2008.

⁶⁶ Storyboard, Sigact 2, Arrest of an SOI [Sons of Iraq], Zone 47, 1st Bn, 30th Inf Rgt, 2d BCT, 3d Inf Div, BUB, 23 May 2008; Storyboard, Sigact 1, 3x SOI Detained/Arrested, 1st Bn, 187th Inf Rgt, 2d BCT, 3d Inf Div, BUB, 30 May 2008; Ashley Rowland, “Iraq Set to Control ‘Sons of Iraq’ by April,” *Mideast Stars and Stripes*, 19 Jan 2009.

⁶⁷ CG Executive Summary, Cordesman/Kagan/Flournoy/Lowry Visit, 3 Feb 2008.

⁶⁸ Quoted words from CG Executive Summary, M6’s Message to Leaders: Concerned Local Citizens, distributed via e-mail, 16 Dec 2007. MND-C Monthly Wrap-up trifold, Concerned Citizens Program, 4 Dec 2007; MNF-I, Charts to accompany the testimony of Gen David H.



Sons of Iraq members await payment outside a military outpost south of Baghdad. While the United States initially funded the reconciliation program, the Iraqi government was scheduled to take on that responsibility in mid-2008. Prime Minister Maliki balked, however, and insisted on capping total Sunni militia numbers.

There was a definite correlation between the number of Sons of Iraq and the number of enemy attacks—when the former went up the latter fell. Statistics compiled over the duration of the surge proved this. In June 2007, before the Sons of Iraq recruitment effort took off in MND-C, Arab Jabour, for example, experienced about 90 attacks against both coalition troops and Iraqi civilians. Between July and the end of September—a period when the strength of Sons of Iraq climbed to more than six hundred—the violence fell sharply, from 75 attacks in July to 20 in September. Over the next ninety days, the number of recruits rose to about seven hundred, causing another downward trend in strikes. During the first six months of 2008, the Sons of Iraq reached a strength of some fourteen hundred—and attacks plummeted to fewer than 10 per month. This trend played out in regional and national statistics as well. Other factors were also involved, such as the permanent presence

Petraeus, 8–9 Apr 2008, slide 5. There is a discrepancy in the final figures for 2008. In a wrap-up slide published on 9 May 2008, the division claimed 35,954 Sons of Iraq. See MND-C Monthly Wrap-up trifold, Sons of Iraq, 9 May 2008. Three days later, during a meeting with the command staff of the incoming 10th Mountain Division, Lynch said, “MND-C needs to draw down from 37,500 to the 36,000 cap,” which was the ceiling mandated by MNC-I, and he noted that “the cap is not fiscal, it’s political.” See CG Executive Summary, 10th Mtn Div Dinner, 12 May 2008.



Although controversial, the Sons of Iraq proved to be an important addition to U.S. and Iraqi troops and an effective counter to the insurgency throughout MND-C.

of U.S. forces in previously hostile territories and an increase in the amount and effectiveness of Iraqi security units, but the Sons of Iraq militias were a daily “force multiplier” that quickly enhanced U.S. operational capabilities.⁶⁹

All along, U.S. and Iraqi troops had been fairly proficient at ferreting out enemy weapons caches, but the counts skyrocketed once the Sons of Iraq joined the process. In MND-C, between mid-June 2007 and May 2008, the militiamen either located or provided information that led to 807 weapons caches and 647 IEDs. At least 127 of the intelligence tips volunteered by concerned citizens were deemed worthy of a cash reward, and just under \$365,000 was paid.⁷⁰

These figures were reflected nationwide. The three-year total of caches found from 2004 through 2006 was 6,053. The region experienced a spike in the amount as the extra troops furnished by the surge stepped up operations beginning in early 2007, but discoveries slowed dramatically by early summer. Then in July—as recruiting local civilians into the Sons of Iraq became

⁶⁹ Briefing Slide, Attack Trends in Relation to the Sons of Iraq, 1st Bn, 30th Inf Rgt (c. Jul–Aug 2008).

⁷⁰ MND-C Monthly Wrap-up trifold, Concerned Citizens Program, 9 May 2008.

MNC-I's stated policy—the number of new caches unearthed took off and rose steadily through the spring of 2008. In 2007 alone, 6,963 weapons caches were discovered—more than in the previous three years combined—and another 2,837 between January and April 2008. The addition of thousands of Sons of Iraq patrolling their own neighborhoods and using their knowledge of the area to find insurgent weapons was the direct cause of the steep increase.⁷¹

Any study of historical counterinsurgencies quickly reveals a truth: success can only be gained if the government's security forces are bolstered by local forces—militia or effective police—that can bring their local knowledge and numbers to bear on the insurgents. The Sons of Iraq filled this need, but their sectarian nature and tenuous link to the government complicated the situation. So while the tactical and operational benefits of the Sons of Iraq could not be denied, there were greater strategic concerns to consider. Was such a broad-based armed and organized group a potential danger to government stability? Did the Maliki government possess either the willingness or ability to incorporate the Sons of Iraq into the security forces or at least provide them with job programs in their communities? Would the Sons of Iraq, who were very much regionally focused, cooperate fully with the central government once the Americans left the program? For the time being, U.S. forces fostered and paid the salaries of the Sons of Iraq, giving the Iraqi government an excuse to postpone any final decisions.

⁷¹ MNF-I, Charts to accompany the testimony of Gen David H. Petraeus, 8–9 Apr 2008, slide 6.

PRESSING THE ADVANTAGE

Chapter 9

As events in Washington and throughout Iraq swirled, the 3d Infantry Division plugged away south of Baghdad. On the heels of MARNE HUSKY, which ended in mid-September, General Lynch planned a second operation in support of MNC-I's PHANTOM STRIKE, which he dubbed MARNE TORCH II. As the name implied, it was an extension of the earlier MARNE TORCH thrust into Arab Jabour. That campaign, although successful in clearing much of the northern portion of the objective of al-Qaeda insurgents, had not been able to push as far south as originally hoped, leaving two-thirds of the region still beyond the 2d Brigade, 3d Division's reach. MARNE HUSKY had helped soften up the enemy with air assaults, but General Lynch wanted to do more, so the day the operation ended, 15 September 2007, MARNE TORCH II began.

Since MND-C had no more U.S. troops in September than it had when the first offensives started in July, it could not establish a permanent presence much farther south than Objective Richmond, the northernmost of the original Arab Jabour targets. Rather, General Lynch and his staff saw the new operation as a combination of the clear-and-hold concept of MARNE TORCH and the disruption campaigns of MARNE HUSKY. The 2d Brigade, 3d Division, units would try to push farther south, to the northern boundary of Objective Brunswick, but the remainder of the target area would be a "disruption zone" made up of the southern half of Objective Brunswick and the northern part of Objective Jackson.¹

Time was of the essence. Intelligence assessments of enemy capabilities concluded that al-Qaeda "appears to be on the defensive and is heavily pre-occupied with replacing lost leadership [and] retaining its logistical nodes," but no one doubted that within a few months those problems could be solved. The only way to keep the initiative was to maintain the offensive.²

That point was driven home on 6 September, when insurgents clashed with the citizenry of Hawr Rajab. The fight began when eighty Sons of Iraq, tired of the insurgents' control of their town, decided to force al-Qaeda out. Badly outnumbered, the dozen or so insurgents fought back throughout the day, firing assault rifles and lobbing more than forty-five mortar rounds at the attackers. It was all in vain.

¹ Quote from Opn MARNE TORCH II Concept Slide, 31 Aug 2007. CG Executive Summary, ACE Update, 10 Sep 2007.

² MND-C OPORD 07-26 (MARNE TORCH II), 19 Aug 2007, p. 3.



Task Force Marne increasingly took advantage of local Sons of Iraq contingents during operations in late 2007.

Observing in the wings was Captain Klascius and his soldiers from Troop A, 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment, who had just finished a routine early morning sweep when the battle erupted. Because U.S. forces were not allowed to fight side by side with the Sons of Iraq, Klascius moved his men into an overwatch position. The Americans were not, however, prohibited from requesting air strikes—which they did throughout the day. In one instance, an Apache gunship zeroed in on a heavy machine gun, blasting it into scrap metal with a Hellfire missile and killing the two-man crew. Klascius also called for an Air Force F-16 to destroy a bridge used by al-Qaeda to cross one of the major canals into the town.³

Just after midnight on the seventh, the Sons of Iraq were in control of the town's key intersections and buildings. During the battle, four insurgents were killed and thirty suspects captured—at least four of them known terrorists who were taken into U.S. custody. The Sons of Iraq fared much better, losing one killed and four wounded. Most importantly, they had proved that they were willing to stand up to the dangerous insurgents.

³ Storyboard, Sigact 2, Surface-to-Air Fire, 1st Bn, 3d Avn Rgt, 3d CAB, 6 Sep 2007.

"They're tired of them," said Captain Klascius. "They want to take back their city. That area has been under al-Qaeda control for some time."⁴

Al-Qaeda was not likely to tolerate resistance by the Sons of Iraq, and no one doubted that the insurgents would return. This alone reinforced the need for a strong push during MARNE TORCH II, and on 11 September General Odierno visited MND-C headquarters at Camp Victory for a briefing on the upcoming operation. General Lynch was in the United States on midtour leave visiting his family, placing his deputy, General Huggins, in command of the division. Huggins would oversee the beginning of the thrust. During the meeting, the senior staff hit the high points of the division's planning. Colonel Cloutier, the operations officer, told the corps commander that the 3d Division "is successfully holding what we have," and it planned to build a new patrol base during the upcoming advance south to extend the 3d Division's stretched forces.⁵

Marne Torch, Second Round

Despite the new operation, the routine did not change much for the units on the ground. Both the 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, in Arab Jabour and the 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment, in Hawr Rajab maintained the pressure on the enemy during MARNE TORCH, sending out patrols both to chase the insurgents and to bolster the confidence of the local population. Much of the territory was now free from insurgent depredations, and Colonel Ferrell reported that al-Qaeda operated from "extremely restricted" regions, including the target zones of MARNE TORCH II.⁶

During phase one of the new campaign, which began on 1 September, the cavalry squadron was charged with the 2d Brigade's main effort, clearing Hawr Rajab from west to east to "ensure a persistent daytime presence while conducting intel driven raids at night." This course of action was based on intelligence indicating that al-Qaeda was preparing a push to reestablish influence and was forming death squads aimed at members of the Sons of Iraq. This seemed to be confirmed on 12 September, when several Iraqi men were found tied up and executed along Route Buick near Hawr Rajab. Ferrell concluded that the insurgents' "intent was not to inflict large-scale losses but to conduct violent and public acts to intimidate the local population." The brigade commander also asserted that, while the total number of attacks against his forces in Hawr Rajab was down, the successful ones were becoming "more effective and lethal." Also on 12 September, some of his soldiers trapped and killed an enemy mortar team operating from the back of a

⁴ MND-C Media Release, In 24-hour battle, Hawr Rajab turns on al-Qaeda, 10 Sep 2007.

⁵ CG Executive Summary, Operations and Intel Update to MNC-I Commander, 11 Sep 2007.

⁶ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 8–14 Sep 2007, p. 5.

pickup truck. Ferrell hoped that such actions dealt a blow to the enemy, but he suspected that they would be fleeting.⁷

To the east, along the Tigris, the 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, would undertake the 2d Brigade's main effort on 15 September. Colonel Adgie had identified three new target areas—Boston, in the southeast corner of Objective Richmond, and New York and Dallas, in the northern section of Objective Brunswick. Backed by 155-mm. artillery and air strikes, Adgie's troops would eliminate insurgent warrens and pursue their civic action programs to bring a better quality of life to villagers buffeted by years of war. The southern portion of Brunswick and the northern half of Jackson were dubbed the "BCT Disruption Zone," with plans for increased patrols and air assaults but no permanent presence. Elements of two Iraqi Army units, the 5th Battalion, 4th Brigade, 6th Division, and the 3d Battalion, 3d Brigade, 8th Division, along with the U.S. 2d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division's Battery B, 1st Battalion, 9th Field Artillery Regiment, were slated to run patrols along Route Bismarck south of the operational area to prevent insurgents from escaping and to thwart other fighters from reinforcing their comrades.⁸

Specific targeting of wanted al-Qaeda leaders was also a high priority, and MNC-I provided Special Operations Forces to capture or kill as required. For example, between 11 and 14 September, the elite troops would quietly descend on Objective Concord, the code name for an al-Qaeda network hiding in Busayefi, a hamlet of some two hundred and fifty people located along the Tigris in the southeast corner of Objective Richmond, eighteen kilometers south of Baghdad.⁹

But the centerpiece of MARNE TORCH II was the construction of a new patrol base, to be built in the middle of Objective Richmond about ten kilometers southwest of Patrol Base Murray. During a visit in late August with Colonel Adgie at Murray, Lynch outlined the plan. Company A was to take the ground with an air assault staged from Forward Operating Base Falcon, while Company B followed in on the ground.¹⁰ (See *Map 14*.) The new base, Hawkes, would be manned by a company headquarters and one platoon, and until the engineers cleared the roads the post would be resupplied by air. In keeping with the tradition of the 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, for Patrol Base Murray, Patrol Base Hawkes was named for a 3d

⁷ First quote from FRAGO 35 to OPORD 07-12 (GUARDIAN GETTYSBURG), 24 Aug 2007, pp. 5–6. MARNE TORCH II Concept Slide, 31 Aug 2007. Second and third quotes from MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 8–14 Sep 2007, p. 5.

⁸ Quote from FRAGO 35 to OPORD 07-12 (GUARDIAN GETTYSBURG), 24 Aug 2007, p. 6. MARNE TORCH II Concept Slide, 31 Aug 2007; CG Executive Summary, Maj Gen Lynch's MARNE TORCH II Discussion with Col Ferrell, 20 Aug 2007.

⁹ FRAGO 35 to OPORD 07-12 (GUARDIAN GETTYSBURG), 24 Aug 2007 p. 6; Opn MARNE TORCH II Concept Slide, 31 Aug 2007.

¹⁰ CG Executive Summary, ACE Update, 10 Sep 2007; CG Executive Summary, Maj Gen Lynch's visit to 1st Bn, 30th Inf, 22 Aug 2007.

Division Medal of Honor recipient, Pfc. Lloyd C. Hawks, a 30th Infantry medic who crawled through heavy enemy fire to rescue two wounded soldiers near Carano, Italy, in January 1944.¹¹

One week later, Adgie sent his 1st Platoon, Company B, to the proposed site of the patrol base, an abandoned two-story concrete building—marked on maps as Building 886—that had been an air defense battery during Saddam Hussein’s reign. Three pyramidal mounds located across the road had once housed antiaircraft missiles. The platoon flew into the site a few hours before dawn, landing near a cluster of dirt mounds less than a hundred meters from the structure. Using night-vision goggles, one squad rushed the dwelling while the others established a security perimeter. As expected, no one was inside, and the squad took up position on the flat roof. Just then, the mission’s radioman stepped on a pressure plate IED hidden at the end of a long wall about twenty meters from the house. Shrapnel peppered his legs and lower torso, and within twenty minutes a medevac helicopter picked him up and flew him back to Kalsu. The rest of the platoon helicoptered back to base about an hour later.¹²

Two weeks later, on 14 September—one day before the official beginning of the 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment’s part in MARNE TORCH II—elements of Company B returned for another look around. This time the results were even deadlier. One squad entered the building a little after noon, and minutes later another squad searching outside set off an IED on the northwest corner. The explosion instantly killed Sgt. John W. Mele and an Iraqi man, a member of the local Sons of Iraq. Four other soldiers were wounded by flying shrapnel, one of them with serious injuries to his face and arms.¹³

The enemy knew that the Americans intended to use the structure for something important and watched closely. Insurgents must have seen the initial reconnaissance two weeks earlier, and they went back to plant new bombs to greet the inevitable return of another team. An operational analysis immediately after the incident noted that the rising danger of IEDs to foot patrols could hamper the operation. “If this threat restricts dismounted [freedom of maneuver] in the way that IEDs have restricted mounted [freedom of maneuver], TF 1-30’s options for accessing the enemy will become unacceptably restricted,” the report concluded.¹⁴

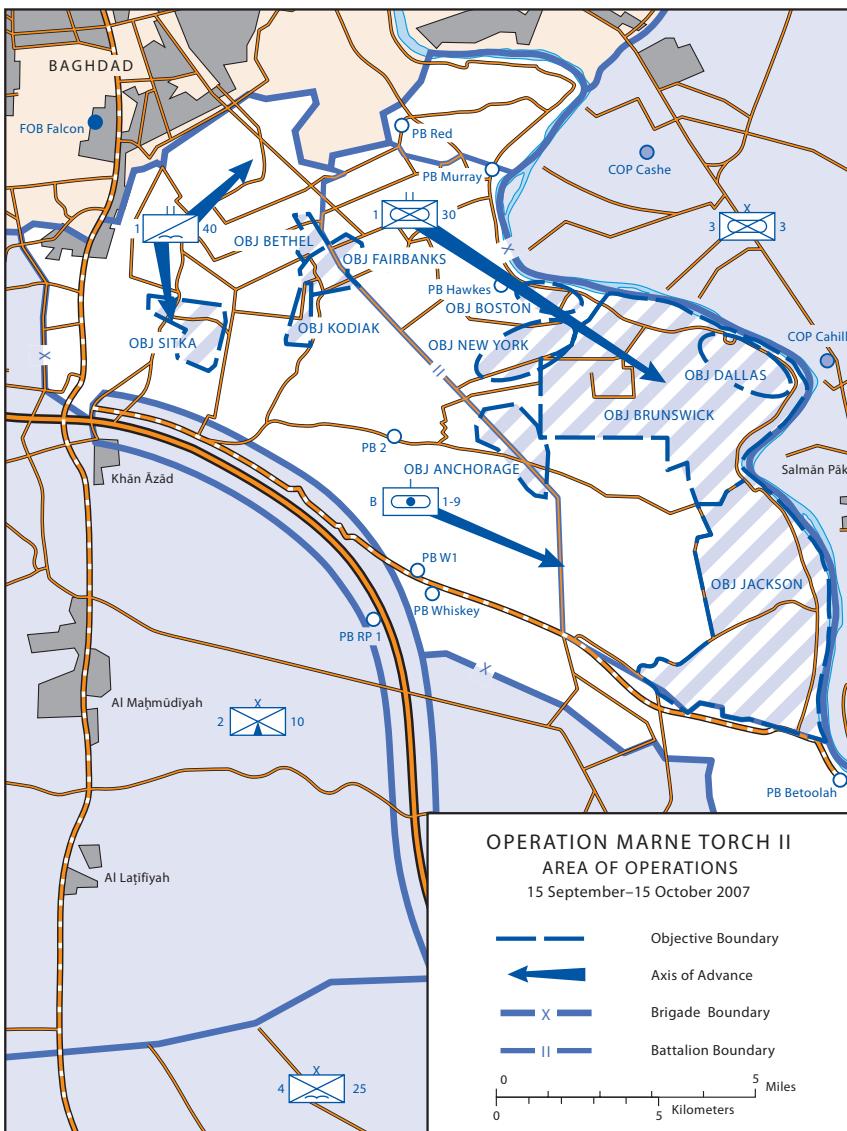
Adgie decided to forsake the old antiaircraft site and placed Patrol Base Hawkes about eight hundred meters to the north. Construction began on

¹¹ Some confusion exists over the name of the base. Private Hawks spelled his name without an *e*, and, while a few 3d Division documents employed that spelling in the early planning stages of the operation, by mid-September maps and materials used the spelling *Hawkes*.

¹² Storyboard, Co B, 1st Bn, 30th Inf Rgt, OpSum, PB [Patrol Base] Hawkes, 30 Aug 2007.

¹³ Storyboard, IED, 1 x US KIA, 4 x US WIA, 1 x LN [local national] CLC [Concerned Local Citizens] KIA, Zone 66, 1st Bn, 30th Inf Rgt, 2d BCT, 3d Inf Div, 14 Sep 2007.

¹⁴ Ibid.



Map 14

15 September, and the outer perimeter was raised four days later, but the base would not be completed until 1 November. Even so, the 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment's Company B occupied the base, providing security for the engineers and running daily operations to keep the enemy off-balance. Hawkes was a threat to the insurgents, and they reacted by attacking it several times—mostly with indirect weapons fire.¹⁵

The task of securing, building, and maintaining the new patrol base drained the battalion, and under ordinary circumstances the job could not have been done. But because division resources, particularly aviation and artillery, were focused on MARNE TORCH II, the 2d Brigade was able to construct the post and pursue its security duties. “Because we are so deep into an area that hadn’t seen a lot of coalition presence,” observed Maj. Eric J. Weis, the 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, operations officer, “we have to maintain line of communication security, and that means having people on these routes twenty-four hours a day, to make sure that once we’re off, the bad guys aren’t reseeding them with IEDs.” That task required the attention of much of three companies, permitting little time for constructing and manning the base. With the division’s help, Adgie could devote an entire company to Patrol Base Hawkes.¹⁶

General Huggins, still in command of the 3d Division due to General Lynch’s absence, had the situation well in hand and began the operation on the fifteenth with the usual ferocity, bringing the corps’ heavy firepower to bear before his troops made their move. Four Air Force B-1B bombers hit targets along recognized enemy lines of communications, dropping eight 500-pound and two 2,000-pound laser-guided bombs, while guns from the 2d Brigade’s 1st Battalion, 9th Field Artillery Regiment, fired 45 terrain-denial fire missions. On the ground that first day, the 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, searched and cleared 5 buildings and entered 71 local citizens into the biometric database. They also unearthed 2 IEDs and captured 14 suspected insurgents.¹⁷

As usual, the enemy did not stand and fight, preferring instead to lay low or flee, emplacing IEDs that would once again pose the biggest danger. But the Americans made steady progress. On 23 September, Colonel Adgie’s Company A uncovered a weapons cache a few kilometers south of Patrol Base Murray containing enough plastic explosives to make several IEDs as well as hand grenades and three rocket-propelled grenades.¹⁸

That same day, in Objective Bethel, a trio of enemy hot spots about four kilometers west of Patrol Base Hawkes on the dividing line between

¹⁵ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessments, 15–21 Sep 2007, p. 9, and 6–12 Oct 2007, p. 4; Interv, S Sgt Minecci, 52d MHD, with Maj Eric J. Weis, S-3, 1st Bn, 30th Inf Rgt, 30 Oct 2007, p. 10.

¹⁶ Interv, Minecci with Weis, 30 Oct 2007, p. 12.

¹⁷ Opn MARNE TORCH II Total Activity, 15–16 Sep 07, BUB, 16 Sep 2007.

¹⁸ “3d Infantry Division Discovers More Caches,” Pacific News Service, 23 Sep 2007.



General Odierno addresses soldiers at Patrol Base Hawkes on the eve of Operation Marne Torch II.

the two 2d Brigade units, the 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment, uncovered another important cache. While searching a building, the paratroopers found hundreds of pounds of fertilizer-based explosives and detonators. Apache gunships destroyed the structure with Hellfire missiles. In the same area, a patrol from Troop B, commanded by Captain Braman, discovered a suspicious-looking car, and a bomb-sniffing dog "reacted" to the trunk. Fearful of booby traps, the soldiers backed away from the automobile, and called in a helicopter to destroy it. They also located a building that appeared to be a vehicle bomb factory. Gunship rockets demolished it, setting off several secondary explosions.¹⁹

The following day, Braman's troop was back in the air aboard Chinook helicopters, heading to a network of canals north of Hawr Rajab where intelligence indicated an IED cell was working. As the helicopters swooped in, someone spotted five men fleeing toward the canals, and the chase was on. After a few hours of searching, the men were found in the reeds, apparently unaware that the Americans could see in the dark with their night-vision

¹⁹ "MARNE TORCH II Continues to Bring in AQI Members," Pacific News Service, 23 Sep 2007.

equipment. An Iraqi Army unit scoured nearby houses for other suspects or hidden weapons.²⁰

During the first week of the operation, the division reported 9 insurgents killed and 71 suspects captured, though none were high-value targets. More importantly, however, the 2d Brigade soldiers had cleared almost 200 buildings in the vicinity of Patrol Base Hawkes and Objective Boston to the southeast—some of which had housed enemy cadre and fighters—and entered 624 local civilians into the biometric database. Before the operation, the enemy had been virtually unopposed there, so the drive south was a significant milestone.²¹

Both of the brigade's units pushed hard, and during the second week the action increased. On the twenty-eighth, the 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, launched Operation RUGER, an air assault into Objective Boston geared to depriving the insurgents of a long-time sanctuary along a key stretch of the Tigris, while the rest of the battalion consolidated control over major roadways.²²

To the west, the 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment, commenced scores of quick assaults into troubled regions all across its operational territory. Between 23 and 30 September, the soldiers completed sixteen missions. Most were clustered around Hawr Rajab, but seven lay along Route Tampa to the south, including Operations CONNECTICUT and SITKA STRIKE in the southernmost portion of the operational area near Patrol Base Whiskey One in a place the cavalry dubbed Objective Banshee.²³

In order to allow 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment, to operate in the southern reaches of its region of responsibility, the 2d Brigade temporarily attached part of an organic artillery unit, 1st Battalion, 9th Field Artillery Regiment, to Major Davis' command. (Colonel Odom would return to the unit in two weeks.) On the night of 4 October, elements of Battery B moved into Banshee to investigate reports of a series of suspected bomb factories in farms along the roadway. Accompanied by a handful of Iraqi soldiers, the artillerymen rolled through the village only to find it was a ghost town. All the dwellings appeared to have been abandoned for at least six months, though to the north a few hundred meters a handful of cowed civilians still occupied a few homes. They told the Americans that they were afraid to go near the empty houses and claimed that they often saw strange men coming and going. Several of the abandoned structures proved to be factories used to produce homemade explosives—and some were booby-trapped. Just before midnight, a team of gunships was requested to destroy two of the buildings with missiles, and the soldiers watched as several secondary explosions ripped apart the structures. The artillerymen estimated

²⁰ Jim Spiri, "Owning the Night," *Philadelphia Inquirer* (Blog), 25 Sep 2007.

²¹ Opn MARNE TORCH II Total Activity BUB, 24 Sep 2007.

²² Opn MARNE TORCH II Battle Operations, 23–30 Sep 2007.

²³ Opn MARNE TORCH II Denali Operations, 23–30 Sep 2007.



that the factories were capable of making up to three thousand pounds of explosives.²⁴

In his weekly report to division headquarters, Colonel Ferrell wrote that his forces' "persistent" presence "continues to increase local national confidence" and resulted in concerned citizens taking "a more aggressive and organized stand" against the insurgents. Villagers spoke of uncovering one or two weapons caches or IEDs per day, eroding enemy resources, and Ferrell remarked that the 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, had not found—or been struck by—roadside bombs along interior lines during the last week in September.²⁵

Part of the reason for this was the growing number of local men joining the Sons of Iraq. As U.S. and Iraqi forces pushed the insurgents from their old strongholds, people gained more confidence and were willing to accept a stake in their own security. Since early September, the number of volunteers had risen from several dozen to more than seven hundred in Arab Jabour

²⁴ Storyboard, Opn HAWAII 2, HME [homemade explosives] Factory, Zone 308K, Btry B, 1st Bn, 9th Field Arty Rgt, 4–5 Oct 2007.

²⁵ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 22–28 Sep 2007, p. 4.

and Hawr Rajab, and their increased presence quickly had an impact on the insurgents' ability to travel freely.

One of the best examples of this occurred in Hawr Rajab on 2 October. That afternoon, local civilians noted about a dozen al-Qaeda fighters racing around in trucks in the middle of the town and eventually taking armed positions in a school. The Sons of Iraq stopped one truck, which contained a 57-mm. projectile, but some of the concerned citizens were wounded by a pressure plate IED in the process. About the same time, two Apaches arrived overhead and fired their guns at a blue van filled with armed men. Four were killed and two wounded and captured. About an hour later, an unmanned aerial vehicle spotted a group of men digging near a roadside culvert, and another gunship was dispatched to eliminate the threat. The Sons of Iraq moved in after the helicopter had done its job and discovered a heavy machine gun in the back of a truck as well as various bomb-making supplies. During the entire action, two platoons from Troop B, 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment, maintained positions north and west of the town, ready to participate if needed, but the Sons of Iraq and the gunships did fine without them.²⁶

Division headquarters was pleased with the progress, and, during a conference with reporters, General Huggins expressed his optimism. "We're extending ourselves a little bit, establishing footholds," he explained, "so we can keep the enemy off balance, not allow them to consolidate, regroup, launch counterattacks back on us. We're trying to stay on the offensive and that's providing us some very positive results." The situation was better than he had ever seen it, confided Huggins. "Of the three times I've been here, this is probably the most optimistic I've ever seen the future be."²⁷

But the fighting was not over. In October, Colonel Ferrell stated that the enemy in the region experienced "significant disruption," triggering him to react fiercely and resulting in a net surge in attacks against U.S. forces. Taking advantage of the palm groves and thick foliage along the riverbank and its connecting canals, insurgents used mobile machine gun teams—mounted on pickup trucks—to "shoot and scoot." One "sharp shooter team" was particularly annoying, frequently emerging from the brush or from behind the high dirt berms bordering many of the roads to fire bursts of "well-aimed but not yet effective fire."²⁸

Mortar fire against the Americans remained a greater threat. Patrol Base Murray was struck several times, often from the east bank of the Tigris, and the battalion always fired back. Following one such exchange on 7 October, U.S. counterfire against an enemy mortar team accidentally

²⁶ Storyboard, 2 Oct 2007, MND-C Event 7, Movement to Contact into Hawr Rajab, 1st Sqdn, 40th Cav Rgt, BUB, 3 Oct 2007.

²⁷ Andrew Davis, "Military Aggressively Taking Fight to Enemy in Iraq," WTOC-TV (Savannah, Ga.) transcript, 27 Sep 2007.

²⁸ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 13–19 Oct 2007, p. 3.

wounded seven local civilians. The injured made their way to Murray and were treated, with some of the more seriously wounded evacuated to the 28th Combat Support Hospital at Camp Victory. The incident was unfortunate, but the villagers indicated that they largely blamed the insurgents who had fired from their midst.²⁹

Capturing high-profile insurgents was a key objective, but the territory along the west bank of the Tigris was a maddeningly difficult place to trap them because it was relatively easy for the terrorists to flee south and evade the U.S. troops. Colonel Adgie had been dealing with this problem for the past several months with some limited success. However, in September he resolved to merge some of his disparate “special” units into a focused force that could go after high-value targets. The ad hoc unit was called Task Force Black, a 54-man element made up of the battalion’s scout platoon, Adgie’s personal security detail, an Explosive Ordnance Detachment, and a handful of intelligence specialists. According to Major Weis, the battalion operations officer, the task force “was able to, while our normal operations were going on, get on helicopters and strike a lot further into the zone, and really get behind the enemy. We always knew where he was, but now all of a sudden, in a blink of an eye, at night, we got a very lethal air assault element in his rear, disrupting his command and control and his logistics routes.” Weis described the task force as “hugely successful” and declared that it launched six assaults over the thirty-day span of MARNE TORCH II.³⁰

Although Task Force Black detained more than a half-dozen known insurgents in the first three weeks of the campaign, its most significant accomplishment happened at the end of MARNE TORCH II. On 12 October, the final day of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, the task force started an audacious daylight raid against a tiny hamlet, Bayjla, along the Tigris. This was at the center of Objective Dallas, the dangerous al-Qaeda haven that had become the crux of insurgent activity because it was just far enough south to be outside the 2d Brigade’s network of permanent bases. Colonel Adgie’s troops operated there when they could, but at the end of the day they had to leave, and the insurgents knew this.

The main target was the Fatah al-Ibrahim Mosque on the bank of the Tigris, a recognized planning center and weapons cache for al-Qaeda. Intelligence pinpointed several high-value individuals in and around the mosque, so capturing them would be a sensitive undertaking. For this mission, dubbed Operation BENELLI, Adgie added extra troops from his Company A, commanded by Capt. Eric G. Melloh, raising the total to 134 soldiers. Just before noon, they boarded twelve Black Hawks and swept into three landing areas around Bayjla, one of them—Landing Zone

²⁹ Storyboard, Sigact 2, Indirect Fire, 7 x Local Nationals WIA, Zone 66, 1st Bn, 30th Inf Rgt, 7 Oct 2007.

³⁰ Interv, Minecci with Weis, 30 Oct 2007, pp. 12–13.

Sickle—next to the mosque itself. The objective was to catch the insurgents in the midst of their final Ramadan midday prayer.

While the Americans searched thirty-seven houses, a group of Iraqi soldiers combed through the mosque, finding a suicide belt filled with explosives on the roof. In the end, Melloh's men captured Abbas Hamid Abid, the al-Qaeda military commander for the region, and twelve other insurgents, some of them members of a local antiaircraft "unit" and a logistical support cell responsible for Bayjla and Arab Jabour. Soldiers also discovered several weapons as well as bomb-making materials and fake identification cards. Captain Melloh was pleased with the results, saying simply that "this is one of the best missions we've ever done." Intelligence assessments agreed, noting that the capture of the al-Qaeda leader and his cells would likely force al-Qaeda to move even farther south.³¹

Although a few friendly casualties were incurred during MARNE TORCH II, the operation ended as it had started—with a U.S. soldier killed in action. Late at night on 13 October, Troop C, 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment, launched an air assault to capture a local al-Qaeda chief named Ahmed al-Masri near the town of Busayefi, south of Hawr Rajab. Just after midnight the helicopters carrying eighty-six U.S. and twelve Iraqi Army soldiers touched down in a field. The pilots had observed several figures racing away in the darkness, and when the soldiers unloaded, they gave chase. After traveling about three hundred meters west of the landing zone, they spotted the insurgents hiding in a canal. Two platoons split up to surround the target, sending a sniper to the west to ambush the insurgents if they ran.

Bursts of gunfire rang out almost immediately, and a single bullet hit 1st Lt. Thomas M. Martin, the commander of 1st Platoon, Troop C, in the abdomen. Although he was evacuated within thirty minutes, Martin was pronounced dead at the hospital. The after action assessment concluded that the enemy being pursued was probably al-Masri himself and two bodyguards, and one of them had likely killed Lieutenant Martin as he fled.³²

Despite this unhappy finale, MARNE TORCH II made many gains. In terms of sheer statistics, the operation resulted in 32 insurgents killed and 222 suspects detained, including 2 high-value individuals. Soldiers searched and cleared 779 buildings and uncovered 40 weapons caches. On the Tigris, 12 boats used to smuggle weapons and fighters northward were destroyed.³³

But the larger outcome was the heightened presence of U.S. and Iraqi forces southward in the area of operations, which denied the enemy more territory and further hampered his ability to influence the population and

³¹ Account comes from Storyboard, TF 1-30, Opn BENELLI, 12 Oct 2007. Quote from MND-C Media Release, Surge Soldiers revel in successful operation, 14 Oct 2007.

³² Account comes from Storyboard, Event 22, 1 x SAF (1 x US KIA), Troop C, 1st Sqdn, 40th Cav Rgt, BUB, 14 Oct 2007.

³³ Opn MARNE TORCH II Activity, BUB, 15 Oct 2007; Ms, 3rd Infantry Division Operations: The Surge, OIF 2007–2008 (c. May 2008), p. 58.



Operations targeting known insurgent leaders — high-value targets — were increasingly effective as U.S. and Iraqi forces began receiving information from local citizens. This Special Operations Forces team uses explosives during a mission against an insurgent safe house.

transfer weapons and explosives north into Baghdad. Although MARNE TORCH II was only a one-month operation, it was an extension of more than five months of driving the insurgents from sanctuaries along the Tigris. Colonel Ferrell was cautiously optimistic about his progress. His units were “experiencing success in eroding the enemy’s support zones and degrading AQI’s capabilities,” he wrote to General Lynch, now back from his state-side leave, a few days after the campaign’s official end. Attacks throughout the region had dropped significantly since the 2d Brigade’s arrival in June, and Ferrell believed his soldiers’ hard work was paying off. “One of the constant challenges facing our enemy is the continuing struggle of replacing key leadership and undergoing the restructuring and re-organization that is inherent following the loss of command and control,” he observed. “The enemy also faces increasing challenges with respect to recruitment in order to replace battlefield losses with capable manpower. For the enemy, capable manpower and experienced leadership remains a finite resource.”³⁴

The increased pressure felt by the insurgents was in part due to the rising number of Sunni concerned citizens. Within weeks of the operation’s commencement and the subsequent retreat of al-Qaeda, the numbers of local men coming forward with intelligence tips and offers to join the Sons of Iraq skyrocketed. Colonel Adgie explained that in mid-September the Sons of Iraq in Arab Jabour equaled 87; eight weeks later it was 538. General Mustafa Kamel, the retired Iraqi Army officer who had jump-started the program during the summer, guided the militia as it grew in

³⁴ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 13–19 Oct 2007, p. 3.

numbers and proficiency. By the end of October, the total reached 700 and was still climbing. Adgie considered the Sons of Iraq crucial to his progress. “As we continue to push south, they are able to ensure that al-Qaeda doesn’t flow back into some areas,” he told a reporter. “And they’re doing a very good job.”³⁵

Pacifying Arab Jabour

These battlefield gains meant that the next pieces in the pacification puzzle—strengthening public confidence and revitalizing the economy—could advance. The 2d Brigade described the transition from the battle phase to a more peaceful rebuilding phase as Operation MALVERN HILL. Colonel Ferrell considered the high unemployment in the region to be a serious issue that might play into insurgent hands, and he viewed improving agriculture and starting new construction projects in local villages as his unit’s highest priorities.³⁶

Higher headquarters was impressed with the achievements of the 2d Brigade. On 21 October, General Odierno flew to Patrol Base Hawkes with Colonel Ferrell, where they met Colonel Adgie and were briefed on the operation. Six days later, it was General Petraeus’ turn. This time the delegation concentrated on cementing the security gains with new initiatives in governance and reconciliation and included Ahmad Chalabi, the government’s director of services in Iraq, and Safi al-Sheik, the director of the Iraqi reconciliation committee. Colonel Adgie again gave his brief, comparing the efforts of his soldiers to a drop of oil in a pool of water, spreading slowly but steadily. Adgie credited the Sons of Iraq—whom he characterized as “braver than the brave”—with ensuring that the insurgents stayed away. “It’s been hard,” he told Petraeus, “but it has worked.”³⁷

Security was only half the battle, however, and the job of bringing back normality to peoples’ lives would take time. Colonel Ferrell pointed out that reconstruction was now his highest priority, and to that end his brigade had \$1.9 million in emergency funds available for building contracts. In addition, a provincial reconstruction team (PRT) had just been established in Arab Jabour and Hawr Rajab to administer the programs to restore clean drinking water and rebuild schools and medical clinics. Ahmad Chalabi promised to seek help from the Iraqi government, especially in repairing the broken sewage plant. This was welcome news because, when once again operating, the sewage plant would furnish some two hundred new jobs, in addition to assisting in resolving the drinking water shortage.³⁸

³⁵ Andrew Lubin, “The Surge: South of Baghdad,” *On Point Online Resource*, 1 Oct 2007.

³⁶ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 13–19 Oct 2007, pp. 8–9.

³⁷ MNF-I Media Release, Petraeus Gets Feedback from Surge Troops, 31 Oct 2007.

³⁸ Ibid. For comments on the new provincial reconstruction team (PRT), see DoD News Briefing with Col Ferrell from Iraq, 19 Jun 2008.



General Odierno (*center*) is briefed on Marne Torch II by Colonel Adgie (*left*) and Colonel Ferrell (*right*).

Because aid from the Iraqi government could not always be counted on, especially in Sunni communities, the new Provincial Reconstruction Team was in high gear from the onset, drafting plans for several new projects within weeks of its establishment. On 31 October, Colonel Ferrell and a handful of his officers attended a meeting of the Hawr Rajab city council where they introduced members of the PRT and briefed the city officials on what the new team could do. The townspeople seemed enthusiastic, and council leaders suggested new projects such as a clinic, work on the electrical grid, and solar panel streetlights. These were small steps toward returning peace and prosperity to the Sunnis living in the Tigris River valley, something they had not known since before the war started more than four years earlier.³⁹

Across the river, the 3d Brigade watched for insurgents escaping the fighting. Colonel Grigsby's soldiers had spent the last several months consolidating their early gains along the river, performing much the same duty as their comrades in the 2d Brigade. During September, as MARNE TORCH II was opening west of the Tigris, the 3d Brigade continued the

³⁹ Storyboard, Hawr Rajab City Council Meeting, 31 Oct 2007.

gamut of missions from security to rebuilding. Both Colonel Kolasheski's 3d Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment, and Colonel Marr's 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, persisted in the drumbeat of offensives throughout the region, with particular emphasis on the routes leading north into Baghdad. Operation JERSEY TURNPIKE, begun in July, was an example of this interdiction effort, along with a handful of other long-running missions, while several one- or two-day affairs, such as TUWAITHA SUNRISE II northwest of Salman Pak and MANILA IV south of the town, attempted to strike at the enemy wherever intelligence indicated he was hiding. There were dozens of such campaigns during September and October.⁴⁰

Most of the work, however, involved rebuilding and "governance," which was MND-C's attempt to bring order and services back to the region. By mid-October, the 3d Brigade reported 1,674 local citizens in the Sons of Iraq program, bolstering security, and more than \$18 million invested in projects throughout Al Mada'in Qadaa, with a focus on irrigation and water purification. All this led Colonel Grigsby to declare in early October that "the possibility of a spectacular attack in AO Hammer is still assessed as low," though he speculated that the end of Ramadan on the twelfth would result in expanded, if isolated, assaults by month's end.⁴¹

Grigsby was right. A flurry of incidents erupted during the last two weeks of October, with the worst happening on the thirtieth. That morning, the 3d Platoon, Company A, 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, was driving north along a dirt road just northwest of Salman Pak when the lead Bradley fighting vehicle struck a massive roadside bomb, forcing the column of three vehicles to stop. The deeply buried IED, later estimated to contain between three hundred to five hundred pounds of explosives, badly damaged the Bradley, killing three men and wounding three others.⁴²

Waiting just to the west about fifty meters were two small groups of insurgents, and moments after the explosion they opened fire with small arms and at least one rocket-propelled grenade, causing a soldier to be wounded in the leg. Medevac helicopters responded immediately, taking the injured to Balad Air Base.

At 1115, an hour after the original attack, a column of four vehicles from Company A was approaching the scene from the north when it struck a second IED about two hundred meters from the stricken vehicle. The lead transport, another Bradley, was battered by the blast and two soldiers were wounded. This time, however, the enemy did not wait around to ambush the survivors. Both columns were secured, and that evening a "Hero Flight"

⁴⁰ 3d BCT, 3d Inf Div, Daily Progress Slide, BUB, 17 Sep 2007.

⁴¹ Quotes from MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 6–12 Oct 2007, p. 15, and see also p. 17. MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessments, 13–19 Oct 2007, p. 21, and 20–26 Oct 2007, p. 18 (SOI).

⁴² Account comes from Storyboard, Sigact 1, 2 x IED, 2 x SAF, 3 x KIA, 6 x WIA, Zone 200, 3d BCT, 3d Inf Div, BUB, 31 Oct 2007.



Medical programs to bring basic health care to Iraqi villages were a first step in supplying government services to areas formerly under insurgent control.

picked up the three dead—Sgt. Daniel L. McCall, Pfc. Cody M. Carver, and Pfc. Rush M. Jenkins—and flew them to Forward Operating Base Hammer.

The assault may have been part of a general increase in insurgent violence resulting from the heightened pressure by the 2d Brigade's MARNE TORCH II offensives west of the Tigris. Intelligence confirmed insurgents were crossing the river to escape the concerted drive by Ferrell's troops, and Colonel Grigsby anticipated more trouble. On 2 November, he reported that strikes had risen over the past week, and he expected the trend to continue. Al-Qaeda "felt threatened and conducted the attacks to keep lines of communication in the Al Bawi area [northwest of Salman Pak] open and as a show of force to the local population."⁴³

The 3d Brigade had acted as an anvil against which insurgents fleeing the fighting across the river could be crushed, and it had performed that task well. But Grigsby also had to maintain security in the east Tigris towns, and he faced many of the same obstacles as did Colonel Ferrell, in particular a shortage of troops relative to the amount of ground to be held.

⁴³ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 27 Oct–2 Nov 2007, p. 14.

While the 2d Brigade had trouble sustaining a permanent presence south of Arab Jabour, the 3d Brigade found taking control south of Salman Pak difficult. By late 2007, that was where the insurgents were lodged, but a lasting solution would have to wait for several more months.

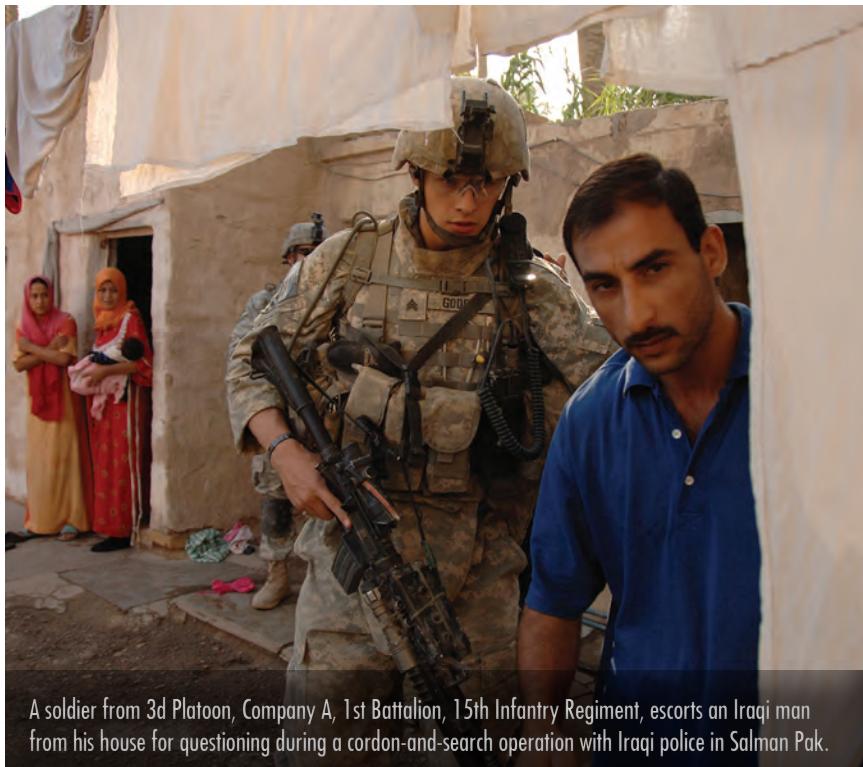
The Shi'ite Strategy

Although the focus of MARNE TORCH II was the al-Qaeda insurgency along the Tigris, Shi'ite militias were also a continuing problem. Task Force Marne had targeted them from the beginning, however they were not as high a priority—partly because al-Qaeda was considered the more immediate threat, but also because, for sectarian reasons, the Iraqi government was loath to confront Shi'ite groups. By the late summer of 2007, headway against al-Qaeda allowed General Petraeus to concentrate on Shi'ite violence. His plan of attack was less clear-cut than the effort against al-Qaeda because the Shi'ite insurgents were not necessarily enemies of the state. Petraeus noted that one of the Iraqi government's biggest challenges was to face the disparate Shi'ite groups and "get them to do more shouting and less shooting."⁴⁴

The militia involved in the most shooting was the Mahdi Army, but by the summer of 2007 Moqtada al-Sadr's insurgents were losing their iron grip on much of the Shi'ite population, especially in Baghdad. They had gained that control during the initial instability caused by the U.S. invasion in 2003, when the newly formed Mahdi Army had defended Shi'ites against a Sunni minority just ousted from political power. In February 2006, after al-Qaeda's destruction of the al-Askari Mosque in Samarra, the Shi'ite militias sprang into action, and for the next year a wave of sectarian violence swept through Baghdad and the surrounding belts, with the Shi'ites gaining the upper hand. As Sunni neighborhoods were "cleansed" by Shi'ite militias, the Iraqi government stood by, and the Americans were mostly powerless to intervene. By mid-2007, the Shi'ites had won, and the Sunnis saw that the rejectionist path they had chosen was failing and that al-Qaeda could not protect them.

Although the troop surge immediately focused on Sunni extremists, the rising numbers of U.S. troops in Baghdad were also a powerful counter to the Mahdi Army, eroding its authority and weakening its military capabilities. Sadr's heavy-handed control "was tolerated when the [Mahdi Army] was all that stood between the Shias and mass murder by Sunnis," wrote Defense Analyst Stephen Biddle. "But as the Sunni threat receded, the continuing exploitation turned the [Mahdi Army] into a parasite rather than a protector.... The Americans offered Shia [citizens] security without

⁴⁴ CG Executive Summary, MNC-I/MNF-I Commanders Conference Notes, 15 Dec 2007.



A soldier from 3d Platoon, Company A, 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, escorts an Iraqi man from his house for questioning during a cordon-and-search operation with Iraqi police in Salman Pak.

gangsterism.” Also, as young Sunni men increasingly chose to make peace with the Americans and join the Sons of Iraq, argued Biddle, U.S. forces could increasingly “swing troops into a battle with [the Mahdi Army] for control over the Shia population centers.”⁴⁵

Sadr could have decided to fight the Americans to shore up his authority and power but doing so risked military defeat. The Mahdi Army had confronted U.S. forces before and had been subdued by their firepower. Rather than chance a potentially fatal confrontation, Sadr chose instead to retrench, and on 29 August he proclaimed a unilateral cease-fire throughout Iraq. Occurring simultaneously with the rapidly expanding Sons of Iraq, a citizenry wearying of prolonged sectarian bloodshed, and growing stability resulting from U.S. forces living among the local population, Sadr’s cease-fire aided in slowing the rate of violence. The surge was beginning to pay dividends.

⁴⁵ Quotes from Stephen Biddle, “Patient Stabilized?” *National Interest* 94 (March-April 2008): 20–21. See also U.S. Congress, Senate, Statement by Dr. Stephen Biddle, Senior Fellow for Defense Policy, Council on Foreign Relations Before the Committee on Foreign Relations, 110th Cong., 2d sess., 2 Apr 2008, pp. 3–8.

South of Baghdad, the 3d Division concentrated its resources on Shi'ite extremist hot spots. Although General Lynch had always used force against Shi'ite insurgents that threatened his troops, in December MNF-I gave the green light for a concerted campaign. MND-C's "Shiite strategy" would involve both "lethal and non-lethal efforts" to gain leverage in troublesome regions. Division planners, reflecting the sentiment of higher headquarters, concluded that although Sadr's cease-fire was a positive step that "presents an opportunity for diplomatic dialogue, Shia inter-sectarian conflict and violence remains a constant threat to security and stability despite promising efforts to persuade Shia communities to distance themselves from Shia extremists." This conformed to corps-level guidance that outlined several objectives, including the strengthening of "moderating political parties" in Shi'ite towns as well as isolating extremists and confronting or co-opting militias. In MND-C's area of operations, at least ten Shi'ite extremist groups existed, and the 3d Division's policy was to regard them as the enemy only if they targeted coalition forces.⁴⁶

A logical place to begin was Nahrawan, east of Baghdad in the northern portion of the 3d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division's region of responsibility. Originally part of the 3d Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment, zone, the town was largely left alone by U.S. forces. In late summer, however, General Lynch was ready to throw his weight at the festering problem of Sunni-Shi'ite relations north of Nahrawan. The threat of al-Qaeda and other unfriendly Sunni tribes allowed Shi'ite militias and criminal gangs to make strong inroads into the population, which craved security from the sectarian violence. But services were almost nonexistent in the city of a hundred and twenty thousand, which fell within the jurisdiction of Baghdad Province, yet it saw little in the way of government representation. Drinkable water was scarce, and sewers were in disrepair, leaving citizens to rely on water trucked in daily from the Diyala River.⁴⁷

The Mahdi Army posed the greatest threat, with a few hundred fighters in and around the city. Despite Sadr's cease-fire, his Nahrawan "battalion" commander, Yassir Salem, was reportedly reluctant to remain peaceful for long. During the late summer, attacks on U.S. forces on the roads near Nahrawan were rare, but intelligence indicated that weapons entered the town along rat lines from the Shi'ite enclaves in Baghdad. Despite the intelligence, 3d Brigade operations had not unearthed a single significant cache. Also of concern was a rise in "extrajudicial killings"—murders carried out by militiamen against local citizens in order to ensure submission or to settle personal scores. By September, the 3d Brigade had reduced the number

⁴⁶ First and second quotes from CG Executive Summary, ACE Update, 9 Sep 2007. Third quote from CG Executive Summary, Baghdad Bureau Chief's Luncheon, 20 Apr 2008. Last quote from MND-C OPORD 08-001 (MARNE FORTITUDE II), 23 Dec 2007.

⁴⁷ OPORD 07-30 (MARNE ANVIL), 19 Sep 2007, p. 5.



A soldier with the 1st Battalion, 10th Field Artillery Regiment, 3d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, patrols a market in Nahrawan.

of such killings from two or three per week to “about one a month,” and no one wanted to see that statistic worsen.⁴⁸

Colonel Grigsby had realigned his forces somewhat. His 3d Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment, had been given a much-reduced primary zone along the northwestern edge of the brigade area—about a third the size of what it had been during the summer. The leftover region, a huge swath of desert encompassing nearly a third of Grigsby’s territory, was called Area of Operations Rock.

After several months of fighting and rebuilding in Area of Operations Hammer, the 3d Brigade would find expanding its efforts without new forces difficult. Fortunately, Colonel Grigsby understood that. When the 3d Brigade first deployed in April, its organic artillery unit, the 1st Battalion, 10th Field Artillery Regiment, was stripped away and sent to Camp Bucca, a facility for Iraqi prisoners in Umm Qasr, Iraq’s only seaport, near the Kuwaiti border. Grigsby got his artillery back in October, and the extra troops were sent to Area of Operations Rock. “All of a sudden we added

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 1–2. Quotes from Drew Brown, “Surge’ Finds Success in Southeast Baghdad,” *Mideast Stars and Stripes*, 19 Sep 2007.

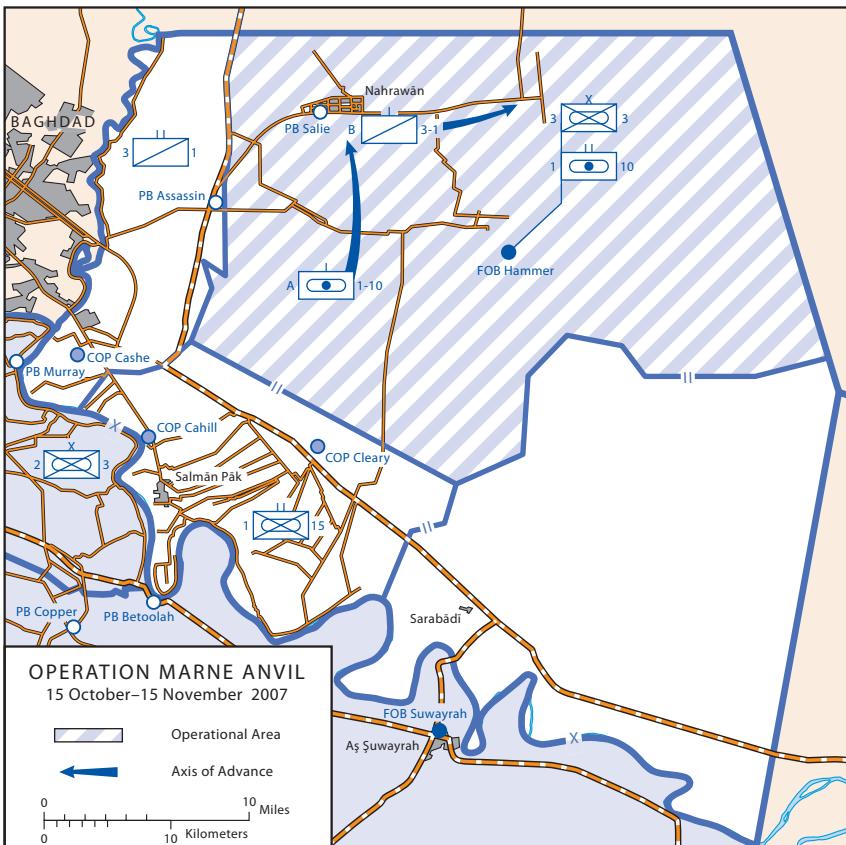


Two soldiers prepare to search the brick factory in Nahrawan. Patrol Base Salie, built during Operation Marne Anvil, allowed the 1st Battalion, 10th Field Artillery Regiment, to run constant patrols throughout the restive Shi'ite town.

400 soldiers to the 100 soldiers we already had working in the vicinity of Narhwan," he said.⁴⁹

Grigsby immediately put them to work, using the artillery unit in an infantry role. With General Lynch providing division resources such as aviation and engineers, preparations for MARNE ANVIL began on 1 October with the movement of forces and the focusing of intelligence on three specific areas—Objective Videlia, which included Nahrawan itself; Objective Hazelhurst, just to the southwest near an important series of road intersections, including Route Detroit; and Objective Claxton, a complex of buildings including the brick factory, a quarry, and a sewage treatment plant ten kilometers due east of Nahrawan. Two weeks later, the offensive would commence in earnest with the 1st Battalion, 10th Field Artillery Regiment, commanded by Lt. Col. Mark S. Sullivan, and supported by Troop B, 3d Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment, seeking out "extremists and criminals" in the three objectives. On the "lethal" side, Colonel Sullivan intended to use cordon-and-search operations to capture or kill insurgents, combined with "nonlethal" measures such as "infrastructure assessments and quick

⁴⁹ DoD News Briefing with Col Wayne Grigsby, 4 Feb 2008, p. 2.



Map 15

improvement projects" to bolster local services as well as medical aid. In order to strengthen both aspects of the operation, Sullivan's soldiers would erect a new combat base in Nahrawan.⁵⁰

There could be no mistaking the opening of MARNE ANVIL. On 15 October, a single B-1B bomber dropped four precision-guided 2,000-pound bombs on the major bridge over the Diyala River on the outskirts of Baghdad, a constant source of smuggling into the capital (Map 15). The ground operations, however, were less dramatic, and the U.S. soldiers met little resistance. The 1st Battalion, 10th Field Artillery Regiment, conducted a series of small offensives in and around Nahrawan named after Vietnam War-era Army officers—Westmoreland, Taylor, Wheeler, Abrams 1 and

⁵⁰ OPORD 07–30 (MARNE ANVIL), pp. 7–8.



A soldier from Company A, 1st Battalion, 10th Field Artillery Regiment, frisks an Iraqi for hidden weapons during a cordon and search in Nahrawan.

2, and Hal Moore—and all concentrated on finding weapons caches and identifying the population's needs. A 3d Brigade report from the second week of MARNE ANVIL noted that patrols around an old power station west of Nahrawan, thought to be used by Mahdi Army militants, turned up no evidence of enemy activity. Interviews with local civilians indicated that their main concerns were clean water and high unemployment. Other than a few assaults aimed at capturing suspected Shi'ite militia leaders, U.S. forces experienced little fighting. One mission, dubbed Operation RIDGEWAY, snapped up one of the most wanted men on the battalion list, Kasem Mohammed Kadum, an Iraqi police officer with "ties to extremist groups," and another resulted in the arrest of Abbas Hashim, a Nahrawan City Council member thought to be a financier of the Mahdi Army.⁵¹

The centerpiece of MARNE ANVIL was the construction of Patrol Base Salie, named after Sfc. David J. Salie, a soldier with the 3d Brigade's 2d Battalion, 69th Armor, who was killed in Ba'qubah in Diyala Province northeast of Baghdad on Valentine's Day 2005. The base would supply the

⁵¹ Quote from MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 3–9 Nov 2007, p. 19. MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 10–16 Nov 2007, p. 20.

permanent presence General Lynch needed to ensure that steady forward momentum was maintained. Engineers began building Salie in a neighborhood close to Nahrawan's central market. As the base took shape, soldiers erecting the concrete walls and observation towers could hear the Islamic call to prayer broadcast from the local mosque and see people walking by, but there were few incidents. In the midst of the base construction, General Lynch flew in to review the progress. The population was nonchalant about the U.S. base, and security was sufficient that the division commander and his staff could safely stroll through the local market and talk to some of its vendors.⁵²

When the outpost was completed in mid-November, Patrol Base Salie housed small contingents from the 1st Battalion, 10th Field Artillery Regiment, and the 3d Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment, and, though conditions were spartan, it contained a small mess hall and a few computers where soldiers could check e-mail. Colonel Grigsby reported to the division that MARNE ANVIL and the establishment of Patrol Base Salie in Nahrawan "will disrupt day to day activities of Shia extremists." Only time would tell, but, by 15 November, the operation's end date, MARNE ANVIL had facilitated the capture of 65 possible insurgents, the location of 7 IEDs and 4 weapons caches, and the entering of 1,247 individuals into the biometric database.⁵³

The increased stability and infusion of 3d Division and MNC-I funds to rebuild agriculture and industry led to several advances, most notably a revitalization of the Nahrawan brick factory, which by early 2007 had fallen into disuse. Colonel Sullivan's civil affairs staff worked with Iraqi government officials, and by early 2008 the factory was back in operation. In March 2008, it employed some fifteen thousand workers—four times the number it had one year earlier—and its production had risen to nearly 8 million bricks per day. It was another small step in Task Force Marne's plan to bring security and prosperity to far-flung objectives.⁵⁴

⁵² Erik Slavin, "Soldiers move into newest post," *Stars and Stripes*, 19 Nov 2007; MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 27 Oct–2 Nov 2007, p. 18; Rpt, 3 HBCT, 3ID, 1-10 FA and Narhwan: A COIN Case Study, 1 Oct 06–10 Dec 2007, n.d., slides 11–12.

⁵³ Quote from MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 10–16 Nov 2007, p. 20. Ms, 3rd Infantry Division Operations: The Surge, OIF 2007–2008 (c. May 2008), p. 64.

⁵⁴ Media Release, Iraqi brick factory approaches pre-war capacity, 26 Mar 2008.

WESTERN FRONT

Chapter 10

As summer faded to fall and the oppressive heat began its seasonal retreat, the 2d Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, prepared to leave Iraq. The unit's stay had been a long fifteen months. Still, Colonel Kershaw's soldiers maintained a high operational tempo, pushing the insurgents from populated areas along the Euphrates southwest of Baghdad while at the same time rebuilding the region and restarting the economy, which had stalled after four years of war.

On 1 September 2007, Kershaw kicked off a series of campaigns aimed at applying still more pressure on the enemy as the brigade began to pull out. The first was EAGLE CHICKAMAUGA, near Al Mahmudiyah, where Mahdi Army militiamen were increasingly troublesome. On the fifth, the brigade followed it up with EAGLE SHILOH, and Kershaw reported that he was making inroads against insurgent disruption of recruiting Sons of Iraq.¹

A rush of new offensives closed out the month. On 27 September, elements of the 2d Battalion, 377th Field Artillery Regiment, commenced RHINELAND II, a concerted drive to interrupt emplacement of IEDs along Route Tampa. The patrols seized several individuals planting roadside bombs, which, although diminishing in number, were a persistent problem. That same day, a separate mission by the 2d Battalion, 4th Brigade, 6th Iraqi Army Division, backed by elements of U.S. Battery A, 2d Battalion, 15th Field Artillery Regiment, captured a wanted insurgent who was part of a 120-mm. mortar team that had launched several deadly attacks against U.S. and Iraqi positions. On the twenty-eighth, Operation GUADALUPE killed an insurgent known to be a "facilitator" for al-Qaeda terrorists moving east across the Euphrates and then north into Baghdad.²

By the end of its deployment, strikes on the 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, numbered less than 10 per week—a sharp decline from the 115 attacks per week a year earlier. Colonel Kershaw gave much of the credit for this to the Sons of Iraq. Wherever the militias were prevalent, indirect-fire attacks and roadside bombs "almost dropped to zero." By October 2007, more than 16,000 military-aged males registered in the brigade area of operations, and about half of them were under contract. Of those, 5,800 were

¹ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 1–7 Sep 2007, pp. 11–12.

² MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 22–28 Sep 2007, p. 11.



The 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, undertook a handful of final operations in the weeks leading up to its redeployment in October 2007. These soldiers from Company B, 2d Battalion, 15th Field Artillery Regiment, provide covering fire while searching a village for weapons near Forward Operating Base Lutafiyah.

signed up to join the Iraqi security forces, though the process was stalled in the Iraqi government bureaucracy.³

The Sons of Iraq also enhanced the brigade's intelligence efforts. "In three months [since July] we've got more al-Qaeda targets than we got in the previous nine," said Kershaw, and many of them were "bigger fish, the people we've been looking for all year. I'm fairly confident that the high level leadership has generally evacuated the area—or we've captured or killed them. We are rolling up more guys, and we are shooting less right now."⁴

In fact, the civilian patrols discovered several important weapons caches and bomb-making factories, as well as gathered intelligence that led to the capture of eighty-five insurgents, including three high-value individuals. One of them was one of the brigade's most-wanted terrorists, known as Abu Rus. Back in June 2006, Abu Rus had led the attack that captured and killed two 2d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), soldiers along the Euphrates. For more than a year the Americans searched for Abu Rus,

³ DoD News Briefing with Col Kershaw, 5 Oct 2007, p. 3.

⁴ Interview, Col Michael D. Visconage, MNC-I Historian, with Col Michael M. Kershaw, CO, 2d BCT, 10th Mtn Div, 7 Sep 2007, pp. 34–35.

yet within three weeks of beginning the Sons of Iraq program a group of Iraqi men dragged Abu Rus, shot in both thighs, to a nearby patrol of the 1st Squadron, 89th Cavalry Regiment.⁵

Behind the curtain of combat offensives, the rebuilding proceeded apace. During the summer and fall of 2007, the 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, launched several civic action programs, and by the end of its deployment the tally included 48 medical missions that gave aid to eleven thousand Iraqi civilians and 397 brigade-funded projects that employed eighteen thousand local citizens. Schools received particular attention from the 2d Brigade. Using CERP money, the brigade helped reopen or construct more than two hundred schools and hired almost three thousand teachers throughout the operational region. Security sustained by the U.S. and Iraqi troops made all this possible. Because of it, explained Colonel Kershaw, “we’ve removed this perception of this area being the heart of darkness for al-Qaeda.” The effect was that families began moving back. “Economic conditions are starting to pick up, and previously, where children had to work the farms, they’re now able to go to school.”⁶

The fight had been tough. During almost fifteen months, the brigade had conducted 155 air assaults, 334 company-size offensives, and over 45,400 patrols and 8 riverine raids. The aggressive operational tempo forced the insurgents to fight or flee. While most of the 1,245 contacts with the enemy were instigated by the U.S. presence, more than 100 of them were insurgent-initiated attacks combining small arms, machine guns, and rocket-propelled grenades. The enemy also launched 1,177 mortar and rocket attacks against bases in the 2d Brigade’s territory. In retaliation, U.S. artillery fired 872 counterfire missions and 2,071 preplanned indirect-fire attacks. This combat earned brigade soldiers 5 Silver Stars and 51 Bronze Stars for valor, 462 Bronze Star Medals, and 94 Army Commendation Medals. These 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, successes came at a cost: 54 soldiers gave their lives and another 271 were wounded—53 of them badly enough to require medical evacuation out of the theater.⁷

Those were just numbers, but the statistics as a whole highlighted the difficult situation the brigade faced during its deployment in this important corner of Iraq. By all accounts, the mountain soldiers left the region safer and more productive than when they had arrived. Colonel Kershaw believed that the area had “fundamentally changed” in the fifteen months his unit had been in Iraq. The brigade’s short history, written at the close of the deployment, summed it all up: the 10th Mountain Division soldiers

⁵ DoD News Briefing with Col Kershaw, 5 Oct 2007, p. 3. The exact date of the Abu Rus capture is not clear from the record, but it seems to have occurred in early June 2007. See 2d BCT, 10th Mtn Div, OIF 2006–2008, n.d., p. 14.

⁶ DoD News Briefing with Col Kershaw, 5 Oct 2007, p. 3.

⁷ 2d BCT, 10th Mtn Div, OIF 2006–2008, n.d., p. 14.

“literally fought their way into a tenuous peace” during their tour of duty along the Euphrates valley.⁸

The Rakkasans

On 2 November, at Camp Striker on the southwest side of the Victory base complex, the 2d Brigade turned over its area of responsibility to a new unit. General Lynch presided over the ceremony, which was also attended by Iraqi generals and prominent sheikhs. As the 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, cased its colors, Lynch lauded the departing soldiers for their hard work and success.

Colonel Kershaw also addressed his soldiers. “Commandos, you have fought the good fight, you have kept the faith and never wavered. You have suffered, bled and yet reached out when others would have struck,” he declared, in reference to his two missing soldiers kidnapped in May—an unresolved tragedy that, in many minds, undermined the accomplishments. But Kershaw sought to salve the festering wound by pointing out that “you have been able to see the fruits of your efforts in the faces of the children in south Baghdad, and the lives whom you’ve helped to make better.”⁹

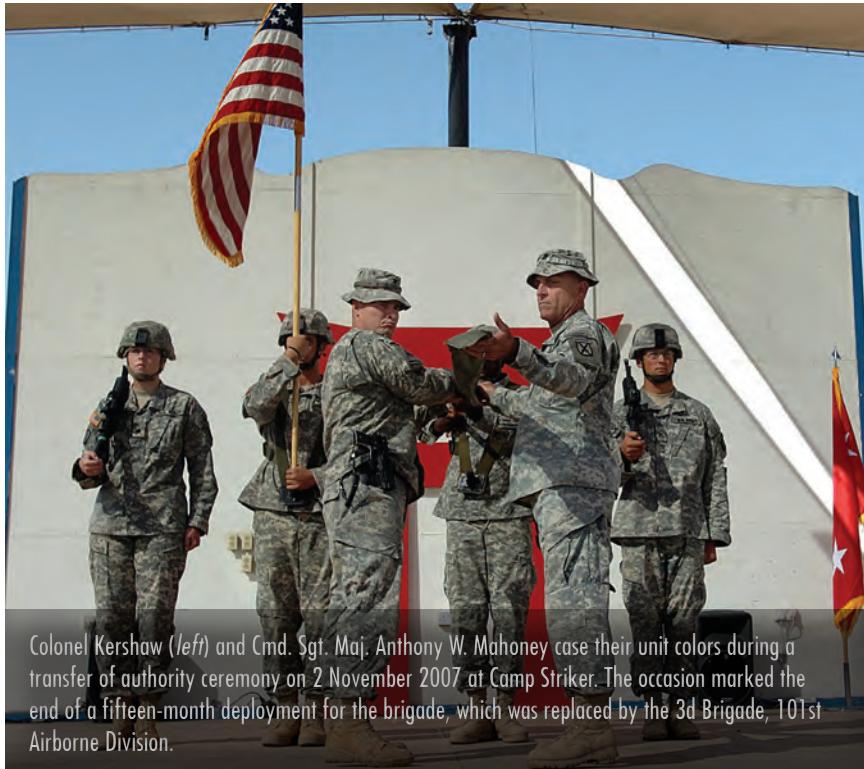
The brigade colors were cased, and Colonel Kershaw saluted his successor, Col. Dominic J. Caraccilo, the commander of the 3d Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), and the change of command was complete. The new brigade colors were unfurled, and Caraccilo addressed the gathered soldiers. “What the Commandos have accomplished with their Iraqi partners has given us the momentum to carry on those missions to the next level without letting up the pressure on our enemies,” he said. Caraccilo understood fully that the progress made by his predecessor, while far-reaching, had not yet disabled the enemy along the southwest edge of Baghdad. There was much work yet to be done.¹⁰

Colonel Caraccilo was an airborne soldier to the core. Before assuming command of the brigade on 30 November 2006, he was the 101st Airborne Division’s operations officer in MND-B from September 2005 to September 2006. But his parachute experience went back much further. In December 2001, Caraccilo took command of the newly activated 2d Battalion (Airborne), 503d Infantry, 173d Airborne Brigade, in Vicenza, Italy. Two years later, in January 2003, he deployed on back-to-back deployments—the first to Kosovo and then in March to Iraq, where the battalion conducted a night combat jump near the northern town of Bashur, and then set up a major base that became the center of the northern battlefield around Kirkuk. Even before that, Colonel Caraccilo had been in the airborne branch

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ MND-C Media Release, Rakkasans officially take reins from Commandos, 2 Nov 2007.

¹⁰ Ibid.



Colonel Kershaw (*left*) and Cmd. Sgt. Maj. Anthony W. Mahoney case their unit colors during a transfer of authority ceremony on 2 November 2007 at Camp Striker. The occasion marked the end of a fifteen-month deployment for the brigade, which was replaced by the 3d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division.

of the Army, serving in the 82d Airborne Division in Operation DESERT STORM and in the 75th Ranger Regiment in Afghanistan. Now he was back in Iraq for the third time, part of a rapidly growing fraternity of officers and enlisted soldiers who had seen triple tours in that combat theater.¹¹

Caraccilo's latest command was one of the most illustrious units in the airborne arsenal. The 3d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, traced its lineage back to 1917 when it was the 160th Infantry Brigade, part of the 80th Division at Camp Lee, Virginia. After several reorganizations, it reached its modern configuration in February 1964. During the Vietnam War, the 3d Brigade went where the fighting was fiercest, from the border region west of Saigon to the Central Highlands to the Demilitarized Zone separating North and South Vietnam. In 1969, elements of the brigade fought on the infamous Hamburger Hill in the A Shau valley.

Following the war, the brigade consisted of the 3d, 4th, and 5th Battalions of the 187th Infantry (Airborne)—the regiment that would be the combat mainstay for the next thirty years. The 187th was the only airborne regiment in Army history to fight in every war since the inception of

¹¹ Official Biography for Col Dominic J. Caraccilo (c. Oct 2007).

airborne tactics. Originally constituted on 12 November 1942, the 187th Infantry was organized as a glider unit assigned to the 11th Airborne Division. In May 1944, the paratroopers deployed to the Pacific and took part in the recapture of the Philippines from the Japanese. In 1945, the 187th Glider Infantry was part of the U.S. force that occupied Japan, and while there the unit was nicknamed “Rakkasans,” which loosely translated means “falling umbrella,” the Japanese word for a parachute.

In the twenty-first century, the 3d Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, still derived most of its combat power from the 187th Infantry Regiment, though now it was the 1st and 3d Battalions. In addition, the brigade had the 1st Squadron, 33d Cavalry Regiment, and the 3d Battalion, 320th Field Artillery Regiment, along with a Special Troops Battalion and various support units, for a total of about four thousand soldiers.¹²

The new brigade was the first unit replacement for MND-C, which by the fall of 2007 was composed of seasoned brigades with several months' experience fighting south of Baghdad. But the 3d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, was also battle-tested, and it was ready to assume the duties of the departing 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division. The “RIP TOA” process—“relief in place—transfer of authority” that allowed incoming units to spend a little time learning the new area of operations working side by side with the outgoing unit—was scheduled to last for one month, from 15 October to 15 November.¹³

Colonel Caraccilo lost his first—and only—soldier soon after arrival. One day before the change of command ceremony, a convoy from Company F, 626th Support Battalion, was moving west on Jassim Road near the village of Shubayshen, about four kilometers southwest of Al Yusufiyah, when it was struck by a roadside bomb. The blast consumed two Humvees in the column, wounding six soldiers and killing 2d Lt. Tracy Lynn Alger. In addition to being the only soldier killed during the 3d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division's 2007–2008 tour, she was also the only female to be killed in action while serving with Task Force Marne.¹⁴

Despite the loss, the 3d Brigade quickly familiarized itself with its region of operations, and General Lynch had a mission in hand for the paratroopers. Though they had not yet completed the transfer of authority with the 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, and were still transporting men and equipment onto the major bases and far-flung patrol outposts, the 3d Division staff was putting the finishing touches on an offensive that would take Task Force Marne soldiers into a region that had only rarely seen an American presence. Lynch dubbed it MARNE COURAGEOUS, and

¹² MND-C Task Organization, Nov 2007.

¹³ Opn MARNE COURAGEOUS Operational Phasing (c. Oct–Nov 2007).

¹⁴ Storyboard, Sigact 1, IED strike, 1 x US KIA, 6 x WIA, Zone 312, Headquarters and Headquarters Company (HHC), 3d Bn, 187th Inf Rgt, 1 Nov 2007.

the campaign plan was completed and published on 14 October, more than two weeks before the 3d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, was completely in place. The plan took its moniker from a Korean War operation code-named COURAGEOUS, a March 1951 attempt to trap Communist forces between the Han and Imjin Rivers north of Seoul. Lynch and his planners liked the name because both the 3d Division and the 187th Infantry Regiment—then designated the 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team—had taken part in the Korean War battle.

The version of COURAGEOUS in Iraq was much more limited. It involved elements of the 3d Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, partnered with the 4th Battalion, 4th Brigade, 6th Iraqi Army Division—a total of 400 U.S. and 150 Iraqi troops, plus some 70 Sons of Iraq militiamen. The target was two villages, Betra and Owesat, both on the west side of the Euphrates about twenty-six kilometers southwest of Baghdad. This slice of ground, about five square kilometers in size, was actually part of MNF-W but had temporarily been added to MND-C because of its proximity to General Lynch's continuing drive against insurgent sanctuaries in the Euphrates valley. For more than a year, the little enclave had existed in a virtual no-man's-land, too far from the marines' main areas of operations, but also separated by the river from Task Force Marné's operational grasp.

Yet, to al-Qaeda and the Sunni insurgents, Owesat was an important node for rat lines moving from Al Anbar Province to the major roads leading into Baghdad. Insurgent leaders also lived in Owesat and relied on an early warning network on the east side of the river to alert them to trouble. When they learned of a coming attack by U.S. or Iraqi forces, they fled west into the desert and then on to Al Fallujah. Intelligence identified six major al-Qaeda leaders in the region around Owesat or along the east bank of the Euphrates, including Mohammed Khalil Ibrahim, the Qarghuli tribe leader known as MKI who had masterminded the May attack that captured three soldiers from the 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division.¹⁵

Planners dubbed the small wedge of territory west of the Euphrates Objective Clarksville. The river from north to south along the objective varied from one hundred and fifty to four hundred meters in width, with a maze of man-made canals on the east bank—some as wide as thirty meters—moving water from the Euphrates to a patchwork of fruit orchards and farms. On the west side of the river, Owesat—which planners named Objective Badger for the upcoming operation—was much less developed, with only a few narrow irrigation canals and dusty roads. Within a few miles west of the riverbank, the farms gave way to barren desert, a vast featureless sandbox stretching hundreds of kilometers to the Syrian and Jordanian borders.

¹⁵ MND-C OPORD 07-032, MARNE COURAGEOUS, 14 Oct 2007, pp. 1-2.

Previously, the handful of military sweeps launched by the 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, were never intended to bring government control to Owesat. Colonel Kershaw's emphasis had been more on the Triangle of Death east of the river, but, for a while at least, the incoming brigade would turn its attention to the west bank of the Euphrates. Reports from the previous six months painted a picture of a population firmly opposed to both the Americans and the Iraqi government. Soldiers rarely saw any men in the village, women kept to their houses, and children did not play in the streets or go to school. A report after one operation noted that "it almost seemed as if the villagers were well rehearsed in how to act in the presence of coalition forces."¹⁶

General Lynch believed that it was time to change that by pushing out the insurgents and convincing the population that their lives would improve under the Iraqi government. The basis for this, as always, was security. Only after friendly forces had captured, killed, or driven out the insurgents—and then demonstrated that they intended to stay—could rebuilding begin. During the first two weeks of November, phase one of MARNE COURAGEOUS would set the stage, identifying potential targets and mapping the town so that the troops could easily secure and search each house. Lynch also intended to eliminate Owesat's isolation by bridging the Euphrates to permit troops and supplies easy access to the west bank and hinder al-Qaeda's influence.¹⁷

The rapid planning tempo caught most of the 3d Brigade by surprise. Colonel Caraccilo stated that, although he had predeployment videoconferences with the division commander and understood his counterinsurgency philosophy, they had talked very little about an offensive. Once on the ground in Iraq, he explained, the brigade was told, "Hey, you got a major operation called MARNE COURAGEOUS." But Caraccilo thought that the objective was "fairly rudimentary" for an air assault unit to accomplish.¹⁸

Capt. Aaron S. Bragg, the brigade intelligence planning officer, recalled that "we were on the ground no more than a few days and the division said, 'Here you go. Here's your first big operation.' It was kind of thrown in our laps." So the brigade divided its time between replacing 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, units in the field and preparing for MARNE COURAGEOUS.¹⁹

During the planning stage, the brigade sent teams across the river to contact local leaders and ask for their cooperation. The sheikhs were excited

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 9. Owesat Case Study: Operation MARNE COURAGEOUS, 3d BCT, 101st Abn Div (c. Jan 2008), slide 7, BCT Cdr's Vision.

¹⁸ Interv, Lt Col Richard L. Wheeler, 52d MHD, with Col Dominic J. Caraccilo, CO, 3d BCT, 101st Abn Div, 1 Jan 2008, p. 3.

¹⁹ Interv, Wheeler with Capt Aaron S. Bragg, Intel Planner, 3d BCT, 101st Abn Div, 1 Jan 2008, p. 3.



1st Lt. Colin Corrigan (*left*) and Sfc. Tony Crisostomo of the 3d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division's 3d Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, survey the terrain near Owesat on the west bank of the Euphrates.

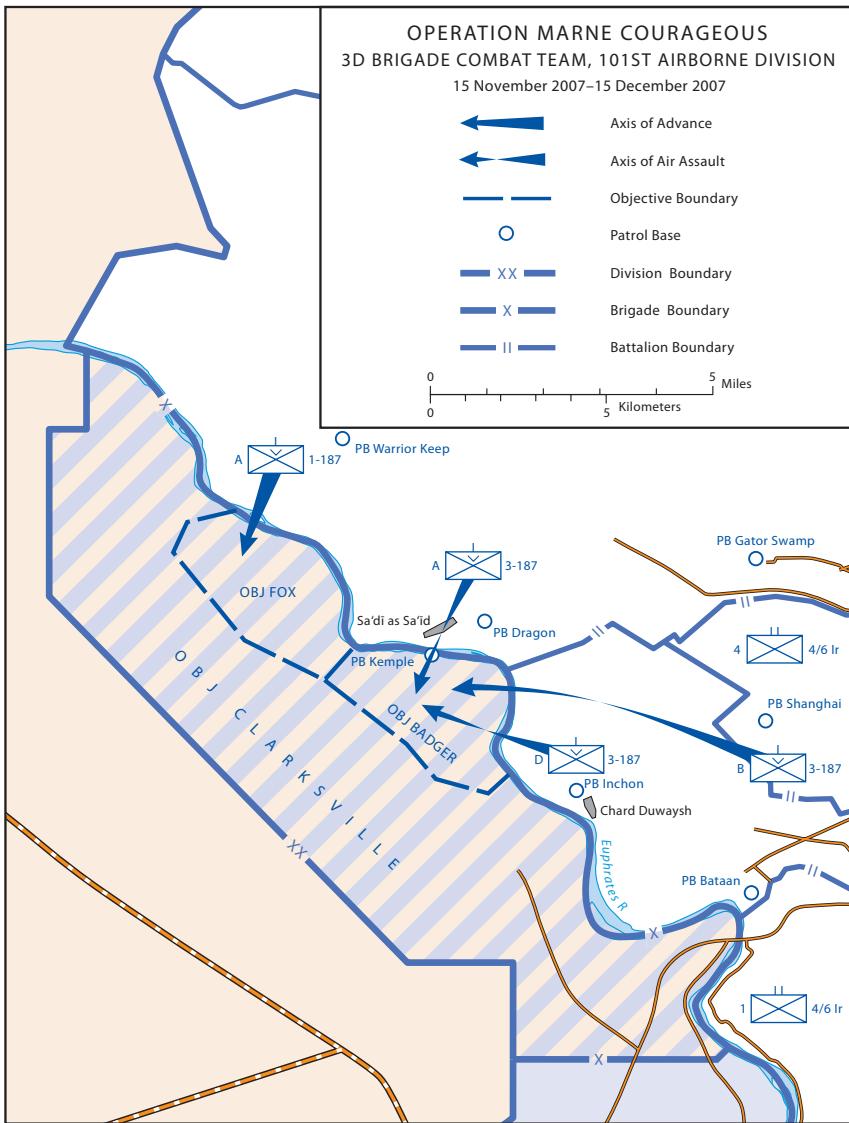
to learn that the paratroopers were coming, though much of the population was less enthusiastic. Armed men in their village were dangerous, no matter who held the guns, and it would take time to gain the people's trust. Caraccilo wanted first and foremost to capture and kill insurgents, but he knew that the bigger part of the mission was building trust. "So it really wasn't a kick-in-the-door operation," he said.²⁰

The logistical buildup went smoothly. By mid-November, Caraccilo's men had pre-positioned bridge-building supplies, munitions, and enough humanitarian food packets to feed ten thousand people for a week at Patrol Base Dragon, the long-standing 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, outpost built in an old Russian-built power plant on the east bank of the Euphrates, just across the river from Owesat. From Dragon and a handful of other bases, the 3d Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, commanded by Lt. Col. Andrew M. Rohling, cemented relations with its Iraqi Army partners and ran patrols to familiarize the soldiers with local conditions. The 1st Squadron, 33d Cavalry Regiment, launched daily anti-IED forays, especially along Route Tampa (*Map 16*).²¹

General Lynch began MARNE COURAGEOUS in a way that had become something of a trademark for his major offensives—with an awesome

²⁰ Interv, Wheeler with Caraccilo, p. 4.

²¹ Opn Summary, MARNE COURAGEOUS, 16 Nov 2007.



Map 16

display of aerial firepower. Just before dawn on 16 November, two F-16 fighter jets dropped four 500-pound GBU-38 bombs on a small island in the middle of the Euphrates, recognized as a staging area for insurgents traveling across the river. Soldiers had long referred to it as “AQ Island,” but no one lived on the sparsely vegetated spit of land, and insurgents probably spent little time there. Colonel Caraccilo saw the bombing as both tactical and psychological—“a very dynamic and very in-your-face-type operation” designed both to destroy the island and send a signal to the insurgents that “we’re taking away your bridge from one side of the river to the other.” Either way, the deafening roar of the explosions provided the operation’s opening shot in the predawn darkness.²²

Moments later, the first helicopters took off from Camp Striker into the dark sky, carrying the three-company assault force of the 3d Battalion. Four lifts of eight Black Hawk and two Chinook helicopters flew the twenty-five kilometers to the landing zones across the river. Each lift also included Iraqi soldiers who were colocated with the U.S. units. A platoon of marines and elements of the 3d Division’s 1st Brigade, both stationed in Al Anbar Province as part of MND-W, secured the landing zones. In addition, Company A from the 1st Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, moved to Objective Fox north of Betra and began registering the local citizens into the biometric identification system. The soldiers from Company A also acted as a blocking force for any insurgents hoping to escape northward. This was the largest air assault since March 2006, when the 3d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, along with other U.S. Army and Iraqi troops, had launched Operation SWARMER west of Samarra in northern Iraq.²³

Beginning just before 0500, the assaulting force reached the landing zones—all named for dog breeds—in a fan around Owesat. Elements of Company D established blocking positions on the river’s west bank, and Company B’s locations curled into the desert where the unit could both search houses and watch for insurgents sneaking into the wasteland. At the southernmost position, a few hundred meters from the village, the men of 1st Platoon, Company A, rushed from their helicopters into some open fields where they waited for daylight. The commander, 1st Lt. Colin M. Corrigan, had been briefed to expect light resistance, and his men tightly clutched their assault rifles as they moved through the darkness. They also carried AT4 84-mm. antitank weapons and machine guns, not knowing

²² First quote from Storyboard, AQ Island Strike, H-10 Minutes, 16 Nov 2007. Second and third quotes from Interv, Wheeler with Caraccilo, p. 4.

²³ Storyboard, Opn MARNE COURAGEOUS (TF 1-187 [Task Force 1st Bn, 187th Inf Rgt]), 16 Nov 2007; MNC-I Media Release, Operation MARNE COURAGEOUS, 17 Nov 2007; Storyboard, Opn MARNE COURAGEOUS (TF 3-187 [Task Force 3d Bn, 187th Inf Rgt]), 16 Nov 2007; “Iraqi Security Forces, Coalition Launch ‘Operation SWARMER,’ American Forces Press Service, 16 Mar 2006.

what to expect. "You know, we kind of went loaded for bear when we came over here," explained Corrigan.²⁴

Nearby, 1st Lt. Edward D. Janis and his 3d Platoon, Company A, had also exited their helicopters and were on the ground waiting in the darkness. As the first hint of morning lit the east side of the Euphrates, the platoons hiked into town. Because al-Qaeda had had free run in the town, the soldiers anticipated roadside bombs and booby-trapped houses, staples of the insurgents' defensive networks. Rumor had it that when terrorists planted explosives in a house the Americans might search, they marked it with a faint outline of a hand spray-painted in white. Janis nervously noted that the first house they entered had just such a white hand on one wall. An extra-careful search yielded no bombs, and the soldiers laughed off the faulty intelligence.²⁵

All the platoons were expected to take several days to clear the hundreds of houses in Owesat, and they would be resupplied as needed. They also had access to explosive-sniffing dogs and demolition units, intelligence teams, and air support. Janis and his men scoured some twenty houses during the first morning, then a pair of sheikhs showed up to talk. Janis had dealt with both men in the weeks leading up to the air assault, and they wanted to demonstrate to the Americans that the area was safe. Walk with us to the school, they suggested to Janis, who was nervous at the thought of sauntering down the streets before they were searched and cleared. "As a show of faith," declared Janis, "me and two sheikhs walked down the road with my platoon behind me spread out in the fields, and [we] just walked all the way up to the school, no problem." The sheikhs had tea brought to the men, followed by a simple dinner and an invitation to spend the night. The school was easily defended, so Janis agreed, and they settled in. Two days later, insurgents attacked the platoon there, but the fight was short-lived and no one was hurt.²⁶

For most of the population, however, some time would pass before they trusted the Americans. The roaring rotors and swirling dust of the helicopters were frightening, and the roving soldiers searching every house were an unwelcome intrusion, even though the patrols always knocked and waited for the man of the house to answer rather than kicking down doors. Even so, told Sfc. Anthony B. Crisostomo, the platoon sergeant for 1st Platoon, Company A, "These guys were scared, really scared of us. They thought we were going to come in and kill them. But we didn't want to kill anybody." The sergeant recalled that virtually no young males were seen for the first

²⁴ Interv. Wheeler with 1st Lt Colin Corrigan, CO, 1st Plt, Co A, 1st Bn, 187th Inf Rgt, 3d BCT, 101st Abn Div, 4 Jan 2008, p. 3.

²⁵ Interv. Wheeler with 1st Lt Edward D. Janis, CO, 3d Plt, Co A, 3d Bn, 187th Inf Rgt, 3d BCT, 101st Abn Div, 2 Jan 2008, p. 3.

²⁶ Quote from Ibid., pp. 4–5; Erik Slavin, "GIs Use Strategic Town as Base in Search for Missing Soldiers," *Stars and Stripes*, 20 Nov 2007.

few days of the campaign. Once it was apparent that the U.S. and Iraqi troops would not shoot unless first fired upon, the villagers began to reappear. "Now they love us; we're taking care of them," said Crisostomo. "We give them food, water."²⁷

The soothing words of the sheikhs and the calm actions of the U.S. soldiers eventually reassured the citizens. Word was circulated that if the people brought weapons and explosives in or pointed the soldiers toward them, no one would be arrested. Many Iraqis stepped forward, and Lieutenant Janis indicated that his men detained no one that first day. "All the people knew the drill," he explained. "The women and children would sit outside and wait for you to come talk to them. No one was openly hostile, but they were stand-offish." In the southwest sector, Company B had more luck. The soldiers found several weapons caches, including some containing suicide vests, but the downside was that they also ran into IEDs and two soldiers were wounded when one of them stepped on a pressure plate.²⁸

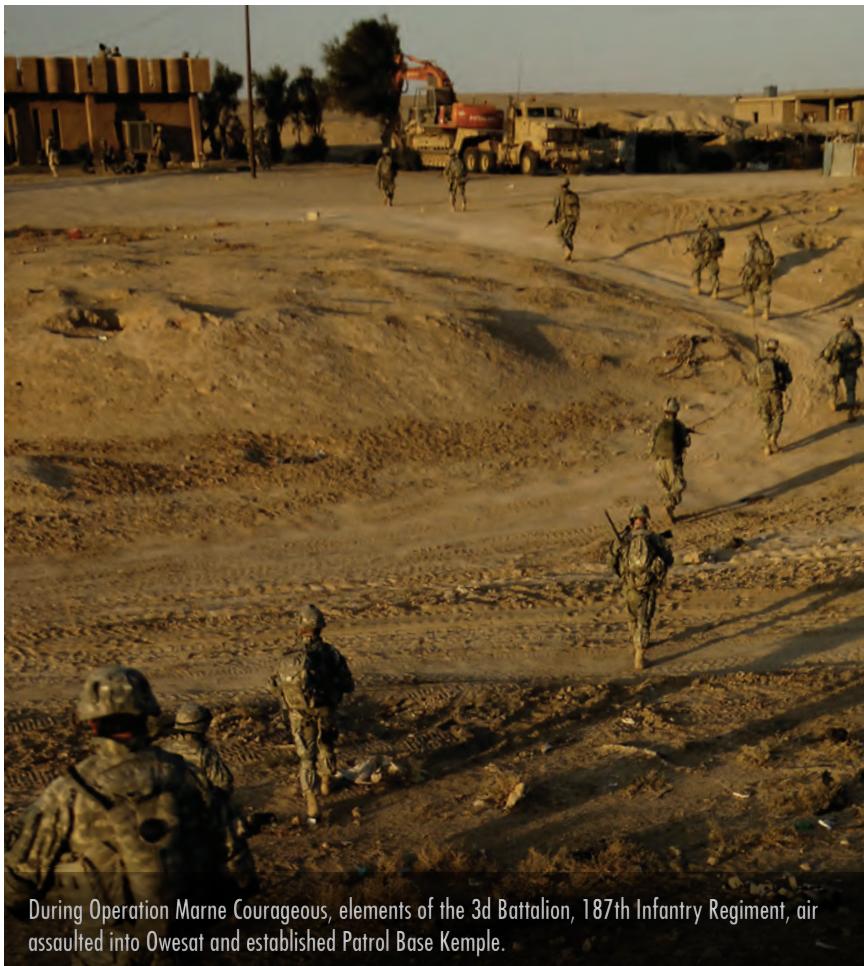
After two days in Owsat, Colonel Caraccilo reported to the division that "the operation appears to be a success on multiple fronts, as Sunni extremists associated with AQI have been driven to ground" by the joint efforts of U.S. and Iraqi forces and that the blocking forces were "reducing the options for those attempting to flee the area." Once the population understood that his men were planning to stay and ensure the town's security, he predicted, "the future for the region is better."²⁹

Actions spoke louder than words, and the residents of Owsat were seeing concrete steps to prove that point. While helicopters ferried troops on the opening day of MARNE COURAGEOUS, the east bank of the Euphrates was a beehive of activity as the 502d Engineer Company, a unit based in Hanau, Germany, specializing in the construction of floating bridges, started laying a span to the far bank. This was welcome news as the nearest river crossing was twenty-five kilometers to the south. By the late afternoon, the 200-meter bridge was mostly complete, and the following day supplies began moving across in preparation for the next stage—building an outpost in Owsat, to be named Patrol Base Kemple after Cpl. Andrew J. Kemple, a soldier from the 3d Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, killed by a sniper in Tikrit in February 2006. During preoperation talks with the sheikhs, the brigade negotiated a deal to place the base near the new bridgehead on the west side of the Euphrates. It would be the new home of Company A, commanded by Capt. Terry N. Hilderbrand, which had done much of the work clearing Owsat. The base was built in two days, and by mid-December ele-

²⁷ Interv, Sgt Mary F. Carbaugh, 52d MHD, with Sfc Anthony B. Crisostomo, Plt Sgt, 1st Plt, Co A, 1st Bn, 187th Inf, 3d BCT, 101st Abn Div, 4 Jan 2008, p. 15.

²⁸ Interv, Wheeler with Janis, p. 5.

²⁹ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 10–16 Nov 2007, p. 15.



During Operation Marne Courageous, elements of the 3d Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, air assaulted into Owesat and established Patrol Base Kemple.

ments of Company A were living in it, a concrete sign that the Americans planned to remain and ensure local security.³⁰

The search of Owesat's approximately two hundred and fifty buildings was completed within two weeks. As that task ended, soldiers entered all of the village's almost eight hundred residents into the biometric database, making hiding among the population more difficult for roving insurgents. Over the span of the offensive, which officially ended on 15 December, the paratroopers and their Iraqi allies captured forty-seven known or suspected insurgents. According to the 3d Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment's operations officer, Maj. Curtis L. Crum, "If there is any enemy that still remains

³⁰ 3d Inf Div Media Release, Rakkasans Unfold Operation MARNE COURAGEOUS, 17 Nov 2007; Storyboard, PB Dragon Assault Float Bridge Emplacement, BUB, 18 Nov 2007.

in Oweisat, they no longer have free rein and are incapable of coordinating significant attacks." Colonel Caraccilo described the entire campaign as a "quintessential model" of counterinsurgency, and reported to General Lynch that "the local populace reaction to the [brigade's] presence appears positive."³¹

The paratroopers intended to bolster the sense of optimism by ensuring that the security level remained high. Constant operations along the outskirts of the villages kept any insurgents in the area from sneaking back among the population. A typical tactic was to place dismounted teams at night in the desert west of town, where they would watch for motion. On 9 December, for example, the battalion's 1st Platoon, Company A, traveled west of Betra, spending the entire night on the barren sand. In the distance, even deeper in the desert, the soldiers saw vehicles driving slowly without lights—probably headed for Ar Ramadi or even the Syrian border far to the west. The patrols could not halt all movement, but the new U.S. presence in Oweisat made using the region as a rat line that much harder for the insurgents.³²

Troops had no time to rest though. Oweisat was isolated from its neighbors, both geographically by the western desert and the Euphrates River and by its history. Decades of feuding with neighbors to the north and east had cut Oweisat off from easy access to Baghdad, forcing the villagers to rely largely on subsistence farming for their existence. Other than a handful of produce markets set up in old trailers and some tiny shops that sold cookies and cans of Coke—referred to as "Hajji 7-11s" by the troops—there was no commerce. Colonel Rohling, the 3d Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, commander, observed that "it's hard to say there's government [in Oweisat] . . . so anything we do will be novel to them."³³

Over the next several weeks, the battalion sent in teams of medical personnel to set up a clinic, and more than two hundred villagers came in, many with chronic illnesses and wounds from the fighting of the last several years. Civil affairs teams also moved into town, giving out humanitarian supplies to the families and gifts to children. On one morning in early December, the Americans distributed hundreds of presents, from blue and red backpacks and pencils to lip balm and small flashlights. "We're just trying to give them a taste of what could happen if they quit turning their heads and stop cooperating with al-Qaeda," Captain Hilderbrand told a group of reporters in

³¹ Quotes from 3d BCT, 101st Abn Div Media Release, Rakkasans Continue Progress with MARNE COURAGEOUS, 3 Dec 2007. Interv, Carbaugh with Maj Curtis L. Crum, Ops Officer, 3d BCT, 101st Abn Div, 1 Jan 2008, p. 8; MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 17–23 Nov 2007, p. 13 (Caraccilo's Rpt to Gen Lynch).

³² Storyboard, Opn ANGEL SNEAK, vic Betra, Zone 309, 3d BCT, 101st Abn Div, 9 Dec 2007.

³³ Interv, Wheeler with Lt Col Andrew M. Rohling, CO, 3d Bn, 187th Inf Rgt, 3d BCT, 101st Abn Div, 4 Jan 2008, p. 6.



After establishing a foothold in Owsat, the 3d Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, moved in civil affairs teams to run medical clinics and distribute humanitarian supplies in order to establish friendly ties with the local Iraqis.

town for the operation. Lieutenant Janis added that “this shows that we are undertaking the things that we promised the sheikhs we’d do.”³⁴

Equally important was the formation of a new Sons of Iraq group to patrol Owsat and give the populace a personal stake in its own security. Hilderbrand and his men, who lived at Patrol Base Kemple in the midst of the population, would oversee the program. The company commander had talked with the sheikhs before the operation, obtaining their approval to recruit and pay local men to form a contingent of local citizens to maintain their own security. Hilderbrand declared that he would set the standards and objectives for the new group and that they would not be used as an armed militia to bolster the power of local officials and carry out their whims. Within days of beginning the recruitment drive, almost all of Owsat’s six hundred or so military-aged males had volunteered. It was a promising start.³⁵

³⁴ Ann M. Simmons, “In One Iraqi Village, a Taste of What Might Be,” *Los Angeles Times*, 24 Dec 2007.

³⁵ Interv, Wheeler with Rohling, 4 Jan 2008, p. 6.

General Petraeus visited the region on 3 January 2008. "Our main concern is to find rat lines," he remarked as he looked over maps at Combat Outpost Dragon, and, although the general was told that "they were pretty much shut," his briefers admitted that some insurgents were still seeping in from the desert to the west. Petraeus, who had commanded the 3d Battalion, 187th Infantry, from 1991 to 1993, held the unit in special regard, and he encouraged the paratroopers to remain vigilant because progress in counterinsurgency could be fleeting. "These [insurgents] are resolute people who can stay for a long time underground," he warned, waving his hand at the expanse across the river. "Three or four guys in ski masks can undo everything we achieved in four weeks." Petraeus also talked with local sheikhs and urged them to set aside their squabbles with neighboring tribes. "It takes two hands to come together," he explained to one sheikh as they walked together down the dusty street. "If you extend a hand, someone might take it."³⁶

Missing in Action Resolved

Operation MARNE COURAGEOUS aimed at eliminating an important insurgent infiltration route into Baghdad, but another motive underlay its planning and execution—the fate of the missing soldiers captured back in May. Intelligence had long focused on Owesat as a likely hiding place for the remains of Byron Fouty and Alex Jimenez (no one believed that the men were still alive), and the 3d Division hoped to find additional clues by putting more soldiers on the ground there. Analysts described that part of the search as the "West Side Story" because of its location on the western riverbank.

Although the 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, ended its fifteen-month tour in Iraq without resolving the kidnapping, the search would go on. On 4 October, General Lynch ordered the creation of a Missing and Captured operations team, called the MISCAP cell, to ensure that the hunt continued at the highest level. It would help the incoming unit in the area, the 3d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, to pursue the effort "with no loss of historical knowledge or experience." Lynch's guidance to the new cell was to cover the span "from national to tactical" in order to bring all resources to bear, and its personnel reflected this. It included the 3d Division's intelligence and operations staffs, civilian law enforcement officers, human and signals intelligence experts, as well as liaison personnel from MNC-I to ensure that General Odierno's staff could provide corps-level assistance when needed. Lt. Col. Dennis Lewis, the 3d Division's assistant intelligence officer, felt that this intellectual diversity gave the MISCAP cell an

³⁶ "US closing net on Iraq's Qaeda 'rats': Petraeus," American Forces Press Service, 3 Jan 2008.

effectiveness it would not have had were it composed of military personnel from the division alone.³⁷

The MISCAP cell had not come any closer to learning the whereabouts of the soldiers, but it wanted to use the new U.S. presence in Owsat to expand what it already knew. What the paratroopers found was stranger and more unexpected than anyone could have predicted. On the first morning of the operation, a team of soldiers arrived at building number 35, as it was numbered on the detailed map, and knocked on the door. During a search of the upstairs, the soldiers were surprised to find a woman locked in a room (some accounts say she was chained). The four men in the house said that the woman, named Shayma, was their sister, and they gave different stories as to why she was being confined—she had shamed the family with an illicit love affair; she was crazy and needed protection—all of which convinced the soldiers that someone was lying. Shayma stated that she was being held against her will and that her brothers had beaten and starved her. Unable to determine the truth in the house, the Americans arrested the four men and sent them to Camp Striker, along with Shayma, who needed medical attention before she could be questioned further.³⁸

Shayma was free to leave if she wanted to, but she chose to stay, and over the next few days interrogators asked about what she knew. “She was very detailed with a lot of information,” recalled Major Bragg, the 3d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, intelligence officer. “She told us things about the soldiers that only people that would have seen the soldiers would know.” In particular, Shayma implicated one of her brothers, Ibrahim al-Janabi, in the kidnapping. She also indicated that she had watched from the house as the three soldiers’ bodies were brought across the river in a boat, wrapped in white bags. “She was very descriptive of it,” said Bragg, and “explained to us where the wounds were on each soldier.” Shayma recounted how the bodies were burned, then put deep in the ground and then covered with concrete and hidden beneath layers of dirt and sand. Taken aback by the account, the interrogators could only say “Can you take us to where the bodies are buried?” Shayma claimed that she could but warned that the area was laced with IEDs. She did finally accompany a search team to Owsat and pointed out a site, which was scoured by ground-penetrating radar and with cadaver dogs. They turned up some human remains. The remains, however, did not belong to the missing Americans and had probably been in the ground for several years.³⁹

But Shayma’s information also raised many questions. How could she know all those details when she was, by her own admission, in a house some six hundred meters from where she stated the bodies were buried? And how

³⁷ Paper, Lt Col Dennis Lewis, *Finding Our Missing Soldiers: The Formation and Operation of a Missing/Captured Cell in Iraq* (c. Apr–May 2008), pp. 2–3.

³⁸ Interv, Wheeler with Bragg, 1 Jan 2008, p. 9.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 11.



A patrol from the 3d Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, arrives at a suspected burial site for Fouty and Jimenez, the two missing 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, soldiers captured on 12 May 2007. It proved to be another dry hole.

did she know about a site containing bodies, which were obviously too old to match the May 2007 kidnappings? The investigators then learned from another source that Shayma and her brothers had planned the entire episode in order to mislead the Americans. Shayma later admitted that she never really saw the bodies of the captured soldiers, and analysts concluded that "Shayma lied to us."⁴⁰

On the other hand, the move into Oweisat was edging investigators closer to locating the last of the terrorists who had carried out the kidnapping. Near the end of November, soldiers uncovered a cache of documents and computer discs that outlined how al-Qaeda used Oweisat as a planning, staging, and transit area and revealed the myriad routes and connections with Al Fallujah and Ar Ramadi to the northwest, and to Baghdad itself. Also in the cache was a notebook entitled "Operation Capture Soldiers" containing documents about the planning and execution of the kidnappings as well as a list of the safe houses and routes used by Mohammed

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 13.

Khalil Ibrahim, the chief planner of the incident and the only important suspect still at large. The trail to MKI was suddenly becoming warmer.⁴¹

Just before Christmas, intelligence pinpointed MKI and passed the information on to the corps-level special operations cell that targeted high-value targets. On 27 December, a Special Forces team trailed his car, “tagged” it with a laser marker, and then summoned an air strike. At 1435, a high-flying fighter plane dropped a single GBU-12 500-pound smart bomb on the unsuspecting car, killing MKI and two of his lieutenants. The Special Forces team converged on the wreckage to confirm the death of the wanted terrorist and recovered a suicide vest and several weapons and grenades.⁴²

The precision with which MKI was tracked and dispatched spooked al-Qaeda, and insurgent leaders suggested that all terrorists “wanted by CF are to leave the area immediately.” In addition, ongoing offensives were causing such disruption that other insurgents scurried for cover. One intelligence report noted that targeted high-value insurgents “are lying low [or] moving out of the Mahmudiyah area.” Colonel Caraccilo remarked in his assessment to division headquarters that the wanted terrorist’s death had an “incredible impact in this region.”⁴³

All this was small comfort to the kidnapped soldiers’ families, who waited for some kind of resolution. The months passed, and, after more than a year following the capture of her son, Maria Rosario Duran, Alex Jimenez’s mother, still slept with a cell phone under her pillow in case someone called with news. “I think he’s still alive,” she told a reporter in June 2008, as the 10th Mountain Division returned to Iraq, ironically to take command of MND-C and again control the same territory where her son was lost. “Maybe he will come home. It’s possible.”⁴⁴

But he was not alive, and, behind the scenes, the long saga of the missing soldiers was finally coming to an end. Months earlier, the MISCAP cell had turned its search away from Owsat and back to the east side of the Euphrates, especially Jurf as Sakhr, Al Iskandariyah, and Al Musayyib—not far from where the soldiers had originally been captured. In June 2008, intelligence focused on Sami Ali Salman al-Janabi, an al-Qaeda leader from Jurf as Sakhr who analysts believed was the man in charge of disposing of the soldiers’ bodies. Sami was designated as one of MND-C’s most important high-value targets and his case was given to the Special Operations Forces at corps headquarters. On 1 July, a team of U.S. Navy SEALs (Sea, Air, and Land teams, the Navy’s special warfare component) snatched Sami near Jurf as Sakhr.⁴⁵

⁴¹ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 17–23 Nov 2007, p. 14; Task Force 3-187 [3d Bn, 187th Inf Rgt] OPORD 05–08 (Opn LEXINGTON), 7 Dec 2007.

⁴² Storyboard, 1 x Div HVI KIA, USSF, 3-101 BCT, 27 Dec 2007.

⁴³ MND-C (Task Force Marne) AO Assessment, 22–28 Dec 2007, pp. 11–12.

⁴⁴ Stephanie Gaskell, “Prayers for Alex,” *New York Daily News*, 14 Jun 2008.

⁴⁵ MISCAP Cell Executive Summary, n.d., p. 2.

Sami told his captors what he knew. Then on 8 July, he led a team of soldiers from the 3d Division's 4th Brigade Combat Team—which had deployed to Iraq in October 2007 and replaced the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division—to where he said the missing men were buried, a barren patch of desert about twenty kilometers south of the original site of the kidnapping. Once there, however, Sami could not pinpoint the spot, so he told his captors that another local man, Jabar Khudair Alwan al-Janabi, knew the exact location. Jabar must have been surprised when the Americans surrounded his house and arrested him, but he agreed to take them to the burial place.

The bodies were in an open expanse of windblown sand, and the searchers quickly discovered bones, scraps of clothing, and other items scattered over a wide area. The site was secured, and the following day a forensics team combed the region and transported everything back to Camp Victory. At 2250 on 10 July, the soldiers were honored with a simple ceremony on the ramp of an Air Force transport aircraft and flown to Dover Air Force Base, where a military pathology laboratory positively identified the remains as those of S. Sgt. Alex R. Jimenez and Spec. Byron Fouty (both men had been posthumously promoted).

Resolution of the incident occurred too late for the 3d Infantry Division, which would turn over command of MND-C to the 10th Mountain Division in June 2008, but, with the 4th Brigade's continued deployment in the theater, both units were represented in the denouement of the long and sad story. In the end, they all fulfilled a fundamental tenet of the soldier's creed—"I will never leave a fallen comrade."⁴⁶

Security in the Euphrates Valley

While MARNE COURAGEOUS was a high-profile start to the 3d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division's tour south of Baghdad, plenty needed to be done elsewhere. Colonel Caraccilo wanted to keep the pressure on regions where insurgents fleeing his incursion into Owesat might hide, so he launched a series of smaller sweeps. One of them, Operation MORNING STAR, secured several villages in the central Euphrates valley. The offensive and the intelligence it gathered showed that the insurgents were not fleeing southward as expected, but rather to the north nearer Baghdad. The brigade immediately shifted more of its focus in that direction.⁴⁷

Other campaigns bolstered the new brigade's presence in the same territories that had proved troublesome for the 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division. Operation IRON CRAZYHORSE, begun on 25 November, cleared

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 2–3; MND-C Public Affairs, Missing 10th Mountain Soldiers recovered, returned home after determined search, 15 Jul 2008.

⁴⁷ Concept Opn, CRAZYHORSE II, 10–13 Dec 2007; MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 17–23 Nov 2007, p. 16.

roads and established battle positions near Janabi village just south of Al Yusufiyah, a perennial hotbed of Sunni extremism that was on the verge of becoming pacified. Company C, 3d Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, air assaulted into the heart of the village in an attempt to trap insurgents. The unit was aided by high-flying aerial drones, part of an enduring mission named WAR HAMMER that kept the unmanned aircraft in the area on a near-permanent basis.

The combination of ground troops and aerial intelligence was productive: during the last week in November, a terrorist IED team was arrested, some apparently with ties to the Sons of Iraq program. “We’ve actually apprehended eight members of the [Sons of Iraq] who were putting in an IED,” explained an officer with the 1st Squadron, 33d Cavalry Regiment. “When we questioned them they said, well, you pay us \$300 a month and AQI will pay us another five to put this [bomb] in. So that’s like \$800 we can earn for doing this.” Some of the Sons of Iraq hoped to play both sides in order to get more money.⁴⁸

These concerns, as well as continuing insurgent trouble along the major roadways, kept Colonel Caraccilo’s units working hard. During the second week in December, the 3d Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, pursued its series of CRAZYHORSE missions around Janabi village, clearing buildings and unearthing a handful of weapons caches. An intelligence tip on a wanted Shi’ite extremist leader resulted in a hasty raid south of Al Mahmudiyah. The assault team just missed him.⁴⁹

On 21 December, al-Qaeda targeted Shi’ite communities throughout the airborne brigade’s territory, detonating vehicle bombs at a half-dozen locations. Caraccilo took it as a sign, especially since the Shi’ite Ashura celebrations were due to begin in mid-January. Throughout the region, the 3d Division anticipated problems and stepped up security in Shi’ite areas, a move code-named MARNE HOOSIERS. Colonel Caraccilo’s soldiers had a large part of the offensive, and they worked closely with the 4th Brigade, 6th Iraqi Army Division, to keep the celebrations safe. Few serious incidents marred Ashura that year.⁵⁰

By January 2008, the brigade felt confident that its “mix of both kinetic and non-kinetic engagements” was progressing well. Operation TRENTON, a succession of air assaults in the 1st Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment’s zone designed to disrupt insurgents, was “achieving the desired effects” of generating intelligence from the population and discovering weapons caches and IED emplacements.⁵¹

⁴⁸ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 24–30 Nov 2007, p. 13. Quotes from Interv, Carbaugh with Capt Geoffrey L. Earnhart, Asst Ops Officer, 1st Sqdn, 33d Cav Rgt, 3d BCT, 101st Abn Div, 10 Jan 2008, p. 16.

⁴⁹ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 8–14 Dec 2007, p. 16.

⁵⁰ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 5–11 Jan 2008, p. 10.

⁵¹ Ibid.



The 3d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, patrolled constantly throughout the area of operations to maintain security.

The trend continued throughout the brigade's area of responsibility. On the sixth, the 1st Platoon, Battery B, 3d Battalion, 320th Field Artillery Regiment, and a platoon of Iraqi soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 4th Brigade, 6th Division, commenced Operation EAGLE MORNINGSTAR III just west of Al Mahmudiyah. Two Black Hawks took two trips to insert the platoons onto the landing zones, called Chalk 1 and Chalk 2. The soldiers quickly passed through an abandoned factory and confirmed what intelligence had suspected—that it was a temporary al-Qaeda training camp, complete with a firing range in the main building.⁵²

Two days later, the same units helicoptered a few kilometers to the southwest where a suspected al-Qaeda position had been located. The U.S. and Iraqi troops landed in two objectives, dubbed Stripeless and Yellow-Belly, and searched the surrounding farm houses and fields. With the help of a local informant, they found an IED and a crude bunker, as well as several well-concealed sleeping holes carved into trenches along an irrigation

⁵² Storyboard, Opn EAGLE MORNINGSTAR IIIC, Zone 318, Btry B, 3d Bn, 320th Field Arty Rgt, 1st Bn, 4th Bde, 6th IA Div, 3d BCT, 101st Abn Div, 6 Jan 2008.

ditch. One suspected insurgent was captured, and helicopter gunships used rockets to destroy the sleeping holes and bunker.⁵³

The expanding number of informants led to the new successes. As in the rest of MND-C, the security born of an increasingly robust armed presence was convincing part of the population to volunteer information to both the Americans and the Iraqi forces. This was especially obvious when the local Iraqi leaders began providing intelligence on the insurgents.

For example, on 13 January local leaders told the brigade that they had discovered a “factory” for building vehicle bombs near the Hamid Shaban neighborhood not far from Abu Ghraib on the southwestern outskirts of Baghdad. A platoon from Troop A, 1st Squadron, 33d Cavalry Regiment, dropped everything, rushed to the location, surrounded the compound, and then broke in. The house was empty, but the Americans had only just missed their quarry. “After the house was cleared we noticed that the kerosene heater was still on, and the tea was still hot,” said S. Sgt. Adam W. McMurray, one of the platoon leaders. But they did find four vehicles in various stages of being turned into mobile bombs. One had wires running from the trunk into the front seat—all it needed was the explosives and a detonator. Stacked along the walls were mortar rounds and rockets, as well as documents and charts. “It seemed to me they were just getting ready to do something, they were just getting things together,” explained Sgt. Walter J. Nickel, who had led the platoon into the house. An explosives ordnance disposal team arrived later to destroy the vehicles and bomb-making supplies.⁵⁴

At the same time, rebuilding and governance campaigns throughout the territory emphasized returning a sense of normalcy to inhabitants’ lives. One such program was PALO ALTO, which focused on meetings and engagements among the Al Mahmudiyah civic leaders, judges, and the Iraqi security forces. The groups met at the recently reopened city courthouse and culminated in a celebration of Iraqi Army Day on 6 January 2008. Caracillo believed that the event “proved fruitful in establishing dialogue between the different parties.”⁵⁵

The 3d Brigade also spent much effort on cementing its working relationships with the Iraqi security forces and local Iraqi political officials. Elements of the 6th Iraqi Army Division operated in the region along the Euphrates and southward, and Colonel Caraccilo had a lot of respect for their dedication and prowess. Parts of the 4th Brigade, 6th Iraqi Army Division, shared many of the patrol bases with their American allies, with no reports of serious problems or shortcomings. Stated Sergeant Crisostomo, one of the platoon leaders in Company A, 1st Battalion, 187th Infantry

⁵³ Storyboard, Opn EAGLE MORNINGSTAR III, Zone 318, Btry B, 3d Bn, 320th Field Arty Rgt, 1st Bn, 4th Bde, 6th IA Div, 3d BCT, 101st Abn Div, 8 Jan 2008.

⁵⁴ MND-C Media Release, Rakkasans uncover VBIED factory, 14 Jan 2008.

⁵⁵ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 5–11 Jan 2008, p. 10.

Regiment, "They're very, very good. I treat them the same way I treat my soldiers. And they respect me. The sergeant in charge, he calls me the sheikh."⁵⁶

By the spring of 2008, the 3d Brigade occupied a dozen patrol bases and some eighty "battle positions," all manned jointly by U.S. and Iraqi soldiers. More than 2,000 Iraqi police, mostly in the eastern and southern portion of the area of operations, were gradually taking on new responsibilities, and 3,500 Sons of Iraq were dispersed at 780 checkpoints along vital roadways. The fruits of this safer environment could be seen in the dramatic drop in violence: in the fall of 2007, weekly attacks against security forces and civilians averaged 106; the following spring there were less than 12. This, in turn, provided the breathing room needed to rebuild. With the help of Task Force Marne funds, by March 2008 the Iraqis had renovated 10 schools, 11 health clinics, 4 government buildings, and 8 water treatment plants.⁵⁷

These statistics were being repeated throughout MND-C, but the progress was perhaps more important here because when the 3d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, went home in November 2008, it would not be replaced by another U.S. brigade combat team. Rather, the Iraqis would take control of this large and crucial territory, and the 17th Iraqi Army Division, a newly created unit, would assume the task of maintaining security. Only a task force of fewer than one thousand Americans, mostly advisers and support personnel, would remain in what had been the 3d Brigade's area of responsibility.⁵⁸

Switching Brigades

In November 2007, the next Task Force Marne unit prepared to go home. The other non-3d Division brigade, the 4th Brigade, 25th Division, had accomplished much during its tour, weakening the hold of insurgents in many territories and shepherding the nascent reconciliation effort among the recalcitrant Sunni tribes along the Euphrates. Since the end of its biggest offensive, MARNE AVALANCHE, in August, the brigade had seen violence decline, with fewer soldiers wounded and none killed in action (except for an accidental death in October). Sectarian violence, though also down, persisted, especially along the many Sunni-Shi'ite fault lines stretching between the great rivers. In early September, Colonel Garrett, the brigade commander, reported to division headquarters that "the sectarian divide continues to play a huge role in the everyday life of the local populace," especially in the northernmost part of Area of Operations Spartan. In Al Iskandariyah, for example, Sunnis were often denied health care and other

⁵⁶ Interv, Carbaugh with Crisostomo, 4 Jan 2008, p. 30.

⁵⁷ DoD News Briefing, Col Dominic J. Caraccilo, CO, 3d BCT, 101st Abn Div, 24 Mar 2008, p. 2.

⁵⁸ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 1–7 Dec 2007, p. 11; John A. Nagl, "This Time, Things Are Looking Up," *Washington Post*, 14 Sep 2008.

essential services by local officials, many of whom were controlled by the Mahdi Army. Other regions, especially along the Euphrates, experienced a strong push by al-Qaeda to recoup its losses from MARNE AVALANCHE and the rise of the Sons of Iraq. Insurgent attacks had increased somewhat, including a complex assault against Patrol Base Copper in the northeast tip of the 4th Brigade's territory, not far from where it merged with the 2d Brigade, 3d Division's western boundary.⁵⁹

Forays against the enemy were frequent and wide-ranging, with minimal fighting, although many resulted in the capture of suspected terrorists or the discovery of a new weapons cache. In one such operation, launched during the early hours of 21 September, elements of Company B, 1st Battalion, 501st Infantry Regiment, conducted an air assault against a suspected al-Qaeda hideout near Al Iskandariyah, also thought to be a headquarters for one of the notorious kidnapping cells in the area. Almost a hundred soldiers shuffled aboard Chinook and Black Hawk helicopters and flew in the darkness to a tract of farms along the Euphrates River, landing within a hundred meters of the targeted buildings. The soldiers fanned out, and soon one group discovered a heavy machine gun and a van full of explosives and ammunition. On another rooftop, several AK47s and a sniper rifle lay in a line behind an awning, ready for action, but with no one in sight. Apparently, the enemy had seen the soldiers coming and, though ready for a fight, thought better of it and fled. Helicopter gunships accompanying the assault teams spotted one insurgent on the run and shot him. The soldiers rigged the van and the machine gun with more explosives, and moments later a blast lit up the sky.⁶⁰

The raids continued until the end of the brigade's tour. As always, many unearthed nothing, but even those served to keep the enemy on the defensive. Others, however, were successful. On 24 October, paratroopers from Company C, 3d Battalion, 509th Infantry Regiment, conducted Operation WAAL northwest of Diyarah in the far eastern portion of the brigade's area of responsibility, about ten kilometers northeast of Al Iskandariyah. The target was a weapons depot that dispersed machine guns and explosives to insurgents throughout the region. Tips from local Iraqis confirmed intelligence from other sources, convincing brigade planners to make a concerted effort to locate and destroy it.

The company commander, Capt. Stewart C. Lindsay, led his men on a three-pronged drive against the enemy. An air assault onto the house of an insurgent leader of a notorious IED cell that had plagued several major roadways in the area was accompanied by two other elements on the ground

⁵⁹ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 8–14 Sep 2007, p. 21.

⁶⁰ Jay Deshmukh, "Hunting for Al-Qaeda in the Night," American Forces Press Service, 21 Sep 2007.

that would sweep through the depot and other caches pinpointed by local intelligence.

Once again, there was no resistance. The raid netted nine al-Qaeda suspects, including the bomb cell leader, and uncovered several weapons caches containing some very dangerous ordnance. The Americans found barrels and other parts for antiaircraft machine guns, a crate of 14.5-mm. ammunition, several heavy mortar rounds, and several grenades and other explosives as well as a sand table used to plan terrorist attacks. Another interesting discovery was a bulldozer that had been reported stolen the previous month. According to Captain Lindsay, the insurgents were using it to construct small bridges over canals in the territory. "They used the bridges to avoid main roads and checkpoints while transporting weapons and planting IEDs," he said. All agreed that the operation went a long way toward curtailing enemy capabilities in the Diyarah region and cut off a potentially serious threat to helicopters.⁶¹

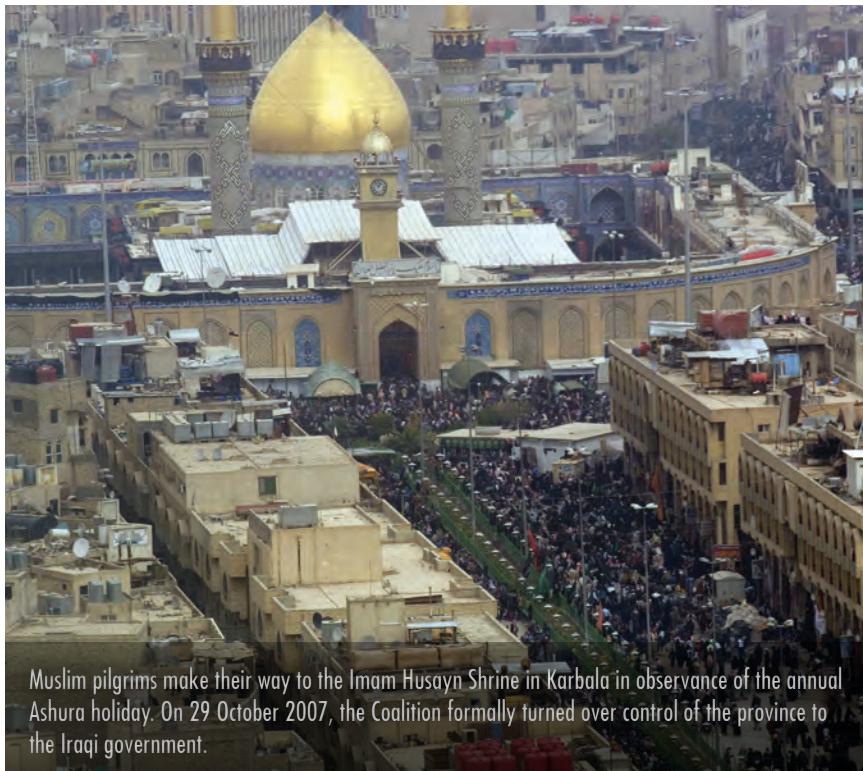
The brigade followed the success with additional assaults and area-denial missions throughout the next few weeks. One offensive, PANAMA III, chased insurgents and IED cells in and around Diyarah, while Operation GERONIMO, to the west in Karbala Province, became the brigade main effort for the rest of the month. The campaigns were a final security push as MNF-I prepared to turn the province over to full Iraqi government control, the eighth of the country's eighteen provinces to be transferred back since the invasion in 2003. Karbala Province was technically part of MND-C, but Task Force Marne had troops in only the northernmost tip—currently the responsibility of the 4th Brigade, 25th Division, plus some military advisers with Iraqi Army units farther south.

On 29 October, Prime Minister Maliki flew to the city of Karbala for a well-attended ceremony held in the local sports stadium. In a joint statement marking the event, General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker described the transfer as a "positive step toward Iraq's self-reliance" that also signaled the restoration of Karbala as an international center of Shi'ite Muslim worship, pilgrimage, and religious study. In the past, Saddam Hussein had restricted religious observances in the province and halted all travel there by Shi'ites from other countries. Farther south, An Najaf Province, also nominally part of MND-C, had been returned to the Iraqi government in December 2006.⁶²

During its last weeks in Iraq, the 4th Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, maintained the string of offensives against insurgents throughout the

⁶¹ Quote from MND-C Media Release, Nine militants, anti-aircraft gun captured, 26 Oct 2007. MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 20–26 Oct 2007, p. 22.

⁶² See "US hands over Karbala to Iraqis," BBC News, 29 Oct 2007. Quote from U.S. Embassy, Baghdad, Media Release, Joint Statement by Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker and General David H. Petraeus on the Transfer of Security Responsibility for Karbala Province, 29 Oct 2007.



Muslim pilgrims make their way to the Imam Husayn Shrine in Karbala in observance of the annual Ashura holiday. On 29 October 2007, the Coalition formally turned over control of the province to the Iraqi government.

territory and began disengaging from the long ties it had developed with local Iraqi units. During the first week of November, Colonel Garrett reported that the Iraqi police “are becoming more independent, more confident, and continue to conduct operations with and without [coalition forces] to detain enemy targets wherever they surface.” The brigade also established Operation CROSSROADS, a “way ahead” plan for the regional Sons of Iraq program, which included the reintegration of local concerned citizens into Iraqi society in exchange for their role in building security.⁶³

On 24 November, the 4th Brigade, 3d Infantry Division “assumed the left seat” after several weeks of learning the area in the “right seat,” the military’s driving metaphor for the changeover of responsibility between units. That same day, the two brigades jointly hosted a meeting of sheikhs at Forward Operating Base Kalsu to explain the transition and introduce principal players.⁶⁴

The 4th Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, had actually begun deploying in September, shipping vehicles to Kuwait aboard military vessels, followed

⁶³ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 3–9 Nov 2007, p. 27.

⁶⁴ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 17–23 Nov 2007, p. 23.

in October by the first of its thirty-five hundred troops. Unlike its sibling brigades, the 4th had ample time to train and prepare before deploying to Iraq. Commanded by Col. Thomas S. James, the 4th Brigade traveled to the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California, for a full round of desert combat simulation prior to deploying to Iraq as part of Task Force Vanguard, the 4th Brigade's battle name. More than a third of the soldiers had already served in Iraq, including Colonel James. A veteran of Operation DESERT STORM, James later served as battalion operations officer in the 3d Infantry Division's 1st Battalion, 64th Armor, and deployed to Iraq in 2003–2004 as the 1st Armored Division operations officer.⁶⁵

The new 4th Brigade was a heavy unit replacing the old 4th Brigade's light airborne infantry order of battle. In addition to adding a few hundred more soldiers, the new unit also included, at full strength, fifty-five Abrams tanks and eighty-five Bradleys, something which the airborne brigade combat team lacked. However, the brigade would neither bring all its units to Iraq nor hold onto them all once it arrived. The 4th's normal order of battle included the 6th Squadron, 8th Cavalry Regiment; 4th Battalion, 64th Armored Regiment; 3d Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment; 1st Battalion, 76th Field Artillery Regiment; plus the Special Troops Battalion and 703d Support Battalion. The new brigade combat team deployed minus its 6th Squadron, 8th Cavalry Regiment, which had taken the place of the 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment, as the western anchor of Colonel Ferrell's 2d Brigade, and the 3d Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment, which was already deployed to At Taji as part of MND-N. The brigade's 4th Battalion, 64th Armored Regiment, was siphoned off soon after touching down in Iraq and sent to MND-B. In place of those units, the brigade was given operational control of the 2d Battalion, 502d Infantry Regiment, a unit from the 2d Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division.⁶⁶

Colonel James faced a somewhat different situation than had his predecessor. Eight months of offensives by the 4th Brigade, 25th Division—as well as other Task Force Marne operations throughout MND-C—had dislodged and scattered many of the insurgent strongholds, breaking their grip on the population. Within a few weeks of his arrival, Colonel James noted “marked improvements” in the environment, pointing out that “this is a population no longer intimidated by the extremists. They are tired of being terrorized, and they are standing up and saying, ‘That’s it.’” In particular, he

⁶⁵ Pamela E. Walck, “Fort Stewart’s 4th Brigade Prepares for Iraq,” *Savannah Morning News*, 27 Sep 2007; Official Biography, Col Thomas S. James, n.d.; Interv, Wheeler with Col Thomas S. James, Cdr, 4th BCT, 3d Inf Div, 13 Feb 2008, pp. 1–5.

⁶⁶ With the departure of the 4th Brigade, 25th Infantry Division—known as the Spartans—the 2d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, area of operations dropped the name “Guardian” and again became “Spartan.”



A soldier walks by a burning field during a dismounted patrol.

credited the proliferation of local Sons of Iraq checkpoints that hampered enemy movement and provided valuable intelligence.⁶⁷

Despite the progress, the enemy remained strong in several regions. According to a 4th Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, report, al-Qaeda still roamed the east side of the river and used its sanctuaries "as a staging ground for sectarian attacks on Shias in Iskandariyah." Even the recent nationwide cease-fire imposed by Moqtada al-Sadr on his Mahdi Army militia did not quell sectarian fighting, which persisted "on a regular basis" in the eastern part of the new Area of Operations Vanguard, and IEDs continued to plague major roadways, such as Route Tampa.⁶⁸

Operation Marne Roundup

As he had done when the 3d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, had arrived a month earlier, General Lynch decided that the best way to get

⁶⁷ Jamie Findlater, "Extremists in Iraq 'Getting Desperate,' Army Colonel Says," American Forces Press Service, 19 Dec 2007.

⁶⁸ Quarterly Rpt, 4th BCT, 3d Inf Div, 1 Dec 2007–15 Feb 2008, n.d., p. 1.

a new unit acclimatized was to have it immediately launch an offensive with the division's full support. He named the 4th Brigade's opening gambit Operation MARNE ROUNDUP, a bid to clear Sunni insurgents from one of their strongholds along the east bank of the Euphrates north of Jurf as Sakhr, the target of MARNE AVALANCHE back in July and August. Intelligence indicated that there were some fifty al-Qaeda fighters—including at least five insurgent leaders high on the division's most-wanted list—in a huddle of villages surrounding an important bridge that provided one of the few crossing points over the major canals and a nearby cluster of fish farms—all known as the Khidr Wedge, which planners dubbed Objective Cordele. In its ongoing campaign to foment sectarian violence, al-Qaeda had opened the dams along the major canals, periodically flooding the low-lying Shi'ite neighborhoods around Al Iskandariyah, probably one of the most novel terrorism techniques in Iraq.⁶⁹

General Lynch issued the order for MARNE ROUNDUP on 27 November. As usual, establishing a permanent presence in dangerous regions was central to the operation's success. Lynch intended to build a patrol base along the major road that ran along the east side of the Euphrates—called Route Martina by the Americans—which would serve both to put a damper on the insurgents living in the territory and also further clamp down on the flow of fighters and weapons northward into Baghdad. Beginning on 1 December, the brigade would "set the conditions" for the campaign, pinpointing enemy targets, making contact with the local sheikhs, and positioning supplies and equipment for the next phase, to start on the fifteenth. The brigade's 3d Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment, along with elements of the 2d Battalion, 4th Brigade, 8th Iraqi Army Division, would be the spearhead aimed at Khidr, while the 2d Battalion, 502d Infantry Regiment, set up in a roughly L-shaped blocking position to the north and east, with the Euphrates forming a natural barrier on the west and south. All told, the force committed to MARNE ROUNDUP would number about seven hundred. Once the fighting was concluded, the final phases would commence—those being the construction of Patrol Base Khidr to ensure village and road security and coordination with local leaders to identify rebuilding projects that would make the villagers' lives a little easier.⁷⁰

Lynch expected a battle. During a final planning meeting at Forward Operating Base Kalsu on 7 December between the division staff and key officers from the 4th Brigade, Lynch observed that the enemy in Khidr "wants to kill Vanguard Soldiers," and he exhorted the brigade to "kill those people before they kill our Soldiers." He emphasized to Colonel James that

⁶⁹ OPORD 08-001, Opn MARNE ROUNDUP, 27 Nov 2007, p. 1; Soraya Sarhaddi Nelson, "U.S. Troops Clear Insurgent Haven, Build New Base," National Public Radio, 28 Dec 2007.

⁷⁰ OPORD 08-001, Opn MARNE ROUNDUP, 27 Nov 2007, pp. 3-6; Task Force Vanguard OPORD 08-001 Brief (MARNE ROUNDUP), 28 Nov 2007, Phase I slide.

he need not wait until the operational launch date to “shape the battlefield and should prep it now with Air Force munitions, Excalibur, [and] artillery.” Khidr was at the farthest reach of the 155-mm. guns sited at Kalsu, but the 4th Brigade would also have access to Marine Corps artillery at Al Fallujah. Despite the overwhelming superiority of the 4th Brigade, Lynch predicted that MARNE ROUNDUP might turn out to be “the shootout at the OK Corral” (Map 17).⁷¹

The brigade did more than just prepare for MARNE ROUNDUP. Patrols spread throughout the region, continuing the work accomplished by the paratroopers from the 25th Division. Contact with the enemy was minimal—mostly IEDs—and, on the morning of 12 December, the 4th Brigade suffered its first serious incident. As an eight-vehicle convoy from the 1st Battalion, 76th Field Artillery Regiment, headed southeast along Route Aces, in the northeastern portion of Area Vanguard where it joined the 2d Brigade’s territory, a command-detonated bomb exploded as one of the column’s two M113 armored personnel carriers drove by. The blast wounded four soldiers, and, as the injured men were being pulled to safety, ammunition in the vehicle went off, showering shrapnel and eventually engulfing the M113 in flames. Within ten minutes, medevac helicopters were on the ground and the wounded were heading back to Kalsu.⁷²

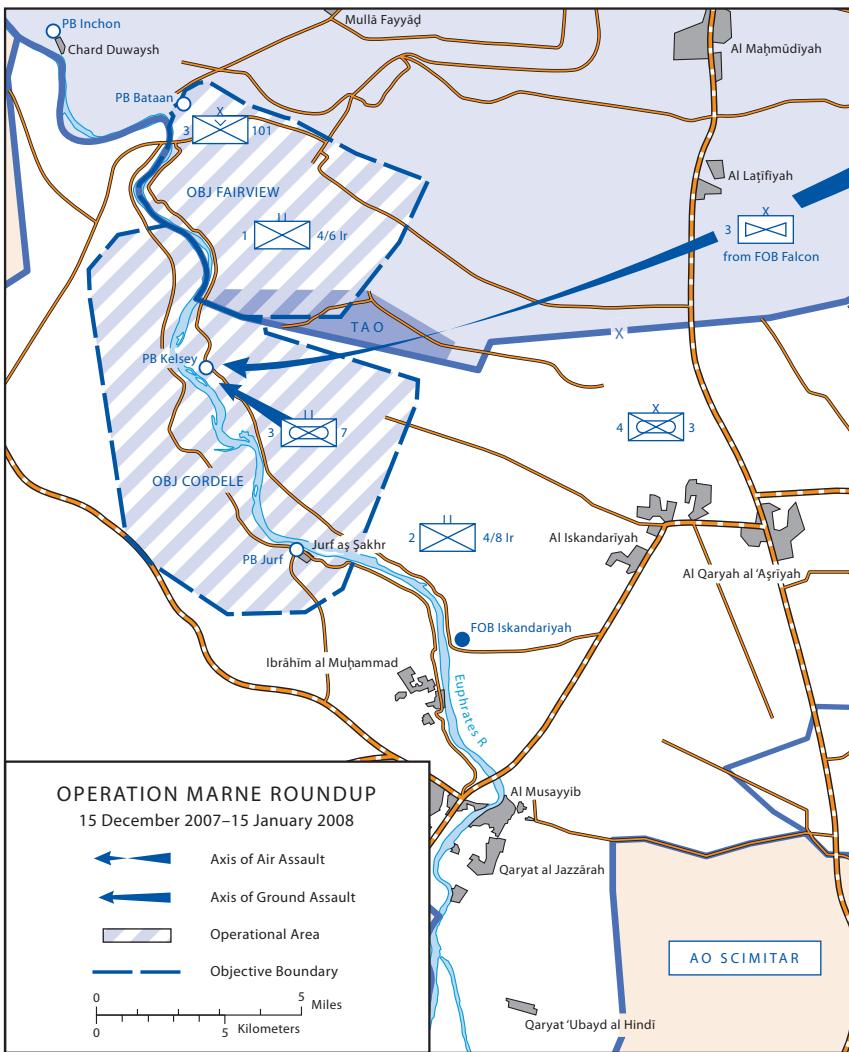
The attack was an unwelcome diversion from the planning for MARNE ROUNDUP, but it also highlighted how dangerous the roads in Objective Cordele were likely to be. Intelligence uncovered the general location of several IED sites along both sides of Route Martina as well as “an unspecified number of 120-mm. pressure plate IEDs” in the surrounding fields. Both mounted and dismounted patrols would need to be cautious. Division-level intelligence also had specific and detailed information pinpointing several al-Qaeda safe houses containing as many as a dozen insurgents as well as three Kia pickup trucks mounted with 12.7-mm. machine guns concealed in palm groves.⁷³

Although the operational phase dates were delineated in the orders, the reality was not so clear-cut. Units were moving into place during the first two weeks of December, and no one expected to catch insurgents unaware. Colonel James pointed out that the crux of the plan was to close off their escape avenues and “catch them as they egress.” By 10 December, elements of

⁷¹ CG Executive Summary, 4/3 HBCT O&I [operations & intelligence] Brief, 7 Dec 2007.

⁷² Storyboard, IED Strike, 4 x US WIA, Zone 316, 1st Bn, 76th Arty Rgt, 4th BCT, 3d Inf Div, BUB, 12 Dec 2007. In 2005, about seven hundred and fifty Vietnam-era M113 and M577 armored personnel carriers were up-armored and sent to Iraq to fill the need for mine-resistant vehicles.

⁷³ Intel Rpt, MARNE ROUNDUP, BUB, 15 Dec 2007.



Map 17

the 3d Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment, commanded by Lt. Col. Timothy Newsome, were already in position only a few kilometers from Khidr.⁷⁴

The few days before the commencement of MARNE ROUNDUP proved to be deadly. On the morning of the thirteenth, Capt. Christian C. Neels and his Company E, 3d Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment, were traveling north on Route Martina to look for signs of the enemy. “We were doing dismount and clearance,” explained Neels, with the 2d Platoon leaving its Humvees to patrol on foot a dry irrigation ditch running parallel to the road about a hundred and fifty meters to the west. One of the soldiers stepped on an IED hooked to a pressure-plate detonator, and the blast shredded his right leg. Seeing the explosion up ahead, Sgt. Samuel E. Kelsey, a squad leader, raced to the wounded man’s aid, but he stepped on another pressure-plate IED and was killed.⁷⁵

The push to Khidr began on the morning of 14 December. The soldiers of Company E, still stunned from the loss of their comrade the day before, led the way, clearing the route as they traveled. Captain Neels had a team of local Sons of Iraq with him, and they pointed out many of the IEDs. Some were not hard to find—including a bomb concealed in a cooking oil can lying in the open on the roadside. However, they did not discover them all, and one of the Husky antitank vehicles was struck, damaging the front end and leaving it disabled by the roadside.

Before nightfall, Neels and his men arrived at the planned stopping point, the compound of a local farmer who agreed to allow the Americans to spend the night. Contacts with the locals during the previous few weeks had produced many people willing to bring security to their troubled region. The soldiers searched the house to make sure it was clear while curious children watched. Neels put two soldiers on the roof as lookouts, then had the rest of his men sleep in their vehicles. Later that night, elements of Company B showed up and also stayed the night.⁷⁶

The following day was quiet, with no sign of the enemy and no exploding IEDs. People began emerging from their houses, most of them happy to see the Americans. “They came out and brought us chai [tea],” recalled Captain Neels. “Everybody was nice and thanking us.” With much of the route to Khidr now clear, Company E drove back to Al Iskandariyah to refit.

Khidr itself was little more than an abandoned hamlet, a few buildings that were mostly gutted by fighting over the past few years and now used by al-Qaeda insurgents as a storage facility and waypoint on the way north

⁷⁴ “Coalition Troops Kill Six, Seize 29 Suspected Terrorists in Iraq,” American Forces Press Service, 17 Dec 2007.

⁷⁵ Quote from Interv, Wheeler with Capt Christian C. Neels, Cdr, Co E, 3d Bn, 7th Inf Rgt, 4th BCT, 3d Inf Div, 22 Feb 2008, p. 10. Storyboard, Sigact 2, IED (1 x KIA, 1 x WIA), Zone 401, 3d Bn, 7th Inf Rgt, 4th BCT, 3d Inf Div, 13 Dec 2007; Pfc. Amanda McBride, “Vanguard brigade pays final respects to hero,” *Frontline*, 17 Jan 2008, p. 7.

⁷⁶ Interv, Wheeler with Neels, 22 Feb 2008, p. 8.



Operation Marne Roundup was the opening campaign for the 4th Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, General Lynch's last replacement unit in MND-C.

to Baghdad. Company B, commanded by Capt. James J. Hart, entered the area on the morning of the fifteenth, searched the buildings, and fanned out into the palm groves and canals near the river. The soldiers uncovered more than they expected. While rummaging through some bomb-making materials left behind by the enemy, some of the men discovered a series of tunnels and fighting positions, as well as machine-gun ammunition and other supplies. Captain Hart called Apache gunships to hit the tunnels, and they fired a Hellfire missile and three 2.75-mm. rockets, which only damaged the complex. An air strike was requested to finish off the tunnels.⁷⁷

Unearthing the tunnels was a surprise to intelligence analysts, but they quickly realized that depriving the insurgents of the complex was a blow to their capabilities. "There is nowhere to run and nowhere to hide," declared 1st Lt. John N. Buckner, Company B's executive officer. "At this point [the insurgents] are hungry, and they have no communication with

⁷⁷ Storyboard, Atk [attack] Aviation engagement/immediate CAS [close air support], 4th BCT, 3d Inf Div, 15 Dec 2007.

their support. The ones who do have communication—no one will come to help them.”⁷⁸

As the two companies were securing Khidr, the 703d Support Battalion was already furnishing supplies from Al Iskandariyah to the new base. By 18 December, a team of builders was on site and beginning the construction. In total, 732 concrete barriers for the patrol base’s perimeter and 45 huge crates of building material were hauled to the location, and the work commenced that day. The base was scheduled to be completed in thirty days, but the engineers and logistical specialists finished the task in twenty-two.⁷⁹

Originally referred to as “Khidr” on planning charts, the name was changed to Patrol Base Kelsey in honor of the sergeant killed at the operation’s start. The change meant a lot to the soldiers of Company E. “Kelsey was a phenomenal NCO who gave his life trying to save a wounded comrade,” stated Captain Neels. “Each time we clear routes in the area or hear ‘Patrol Base Kelsey’ over the radio, we’ll be reminded of his heroic actions.”⁸⁰

Captain Hart moved his Company B into the unfinished base perimeter, which was already ringed with temporary blast walls and barbed wire. The tactical operations center occupied what had been the local al-Qaeda headquarters, and its walls were still festooned with Islamic slogans in Arabic written in charcoal. As construction progressed, Hart’s men patrolled aggressively and pursued contact with local civilians.⁸¹

By Christmas Day, all was quiet in Khidr, and the soldiers’ thoughts inevitably turned to home. For those at the small patrol bases, it was difficult to simulate Christmas joy. Even bases more established than Kelsey had few of the comforts of home, and most soldiers had to be content with simply taking the day off; patrols were drastically curtailed all over the division region of responsibility.

At Patrol Base Warrior Keep just southwest of Baghdad in the 3d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, operational area, soldiers played video games, waited in line to use the phones and computers to call home, or simply slept in. Capt. Eric Light, one of the brigade chaplains, was at Warrior Keep that Christmas Day, providing spiritual comfort for anyone who needed it. “Our holidays are so tied to our families, it’s nearly impossible to recreate here,” he said.⁸²

Throughout the rest of MND-C, the 3d Division did what it could to keep spirits high. General Lynch was concerned about his soldiers’ morale during the holiday season, and he told his staff “to lead by example,” plan-

⁷⁸ MND-C Media Release, 3d Inf. Div. Soldiers seize ground for new patrol base in former al-Qaeda stronghold, 20 Dec 2007.

⁷⁹ MND-C Media Release, Support battalion enables MARNE ROUNDUP, 25 Jan 2008.

⁸⁰ “Patrol base Kelsey named for fallen soldier,” *Army Times.com*, 27 Dec 2007.

⁸¹ Nelson, “U.S. Troops Clear Insurgent Haven, Build New Base.”

⁸² Jamie Gumbrecht and Laith Hammoudi, “Troops, Iraqis Make the Best of Christmas,” *Miami Herald*, 25 Dec 2007.

ning events and joining the soldiers during the festivities. General Huggins played Santa Claus—though he did not dress in a red suit and white beard, and his sleigh was a Black Hawk helicopter—flying to a half-dozen bases bringing cheer and gifts to the homesick soldiers. His “elves”—assistants bearing large camouflaged backpacks—distributed small gifts like flash-lights and international telephone calling cards, and the local mess halls served up dinners of lobster, ham and roast beef, or the traditional turkey with all the fixings. Huggins praised the progress made in the war, though he cautioned against overoptimism, and urged his men to continue the good work.⁸³

General Lynch also made the rounds, flying to seven combat outposts and patrol bases on Christmas Day, though his trips were mostly business. One of his visits was to Patrol Base Kelsey, where he learned that people were beginning to return to Khidr, which was now a much more peaceful town. Although the war had destroyed much of the area’s rudimentary infrastructure, brigade reports indicated that the combination of U.S. troops and a burgeoning Sons of Iraq complement had sufficiently bolstered local confidence. The once-abandoned hamlet began a rebirth of sorts, and by year’s end about a dozen families had resettled there. Medical “engagements” sent to the territory over the next month provided care for hundreds of local citizens, and the 3d Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment, started using its CERP funds to pay for the removal of rubble and debris from Khidr. Although the citizens appreciated the employment, Colonel James asserted that there was “extensive work to be done to return [Khidr] to the farming community it once was.”⁸⁴

All this boosted Colonel James’ optimism that his brigade’s efforts in the northwest sector were curtailing the enemy’s ability to launch attacks. Intelligence assessments noted that some al-Qaeda cells in and around Khidr “had exhausted all their weapons and were coordinating with other AQI elements outside the Vanguard AO to conduct future attacks.” However, James knew very well that his effectiveness extended only as far as his ability to maintain a permanent presence, and the region west and south of Khidr and Jurf as Sakhr remained largely unregulated. In his weekly report to division headquarters, the brigade commander predicted that al-Qaeda might “look to conduct a spectacular attack so as to attract media attention and to salvage a small victory—given their recent unsuccessful attempts in stopping” the 4th Brigade’s offensives.⁸⁵

Operation MARNE ROUNDUP continued through 15 January 2008. By its conclusion, the 4th Brigade reported 18 insurgents killed and 104

⁸³ Ibid. Quote from CG Executive Summary, Expanded Plans Update, 14 Dec 2007.

⁸⁴ CG Executive Summary, M6’s Christmas Battlefield Circulation, 25 Dec 2007. First quote from MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 5–11 Jan 2008, p. 28. Second quote from MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 26 Jan 07–1 Feb 08, p. 26.

⁸⁵ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 22–28 Dec 2007, pp. 27–28.

captured, including 2 high-value individuals. With the help of the local citizens, the brigade also found 43 weapons caches and 51 IEDs. This came at a cost of 1 U.S. soldier killed—Sergeant Kelsey—as well as 4 local Sons of Iraq, and 9 wounded, including 3 on the last day of the campaign. Colonel James, the 4th Brigade commander, believed that his soldiers had “disrupted extremist operations” throughout that portion of the Euphrates valley and brought back a normal life for the villagers. Some seventy-five families had returned to Khidr by mid-January and another ten were expected within a few weeks, all drawn back with the promise of continued American security from Patrol Base Kelsey as well as from the local Sons of Iraq, which now numbered about four hundred and eighty spread though sixteen checkpoints in the area.⁸⁶

Over the next three months, the 4th Brigade conducted more than seventy operations—most of them combined with Iraqi forces—resulting in the discovery of over a hundred weapons caches and seventy IEDs, as well as the capture of almost fifty high-value individuals. By March 2008, the 4th Brigade had fifteen permanent positions in Area Vanguard, including five patrol bases, most of which were jointly manned by U.S. and Iraqi units, and together they formed a foundation on which local communities could rebuild without the threat of violence. Colonel James pointed to Jurf as Sakhr, just ten kilometers southeast of Khidr, which was once dangerous but now secure, as an example of progress. Five months earlier, Jurf as Sakhr was a war zone, but by February 2008, observed the brigade commander, more than forty businesses had materialized and people were thriving. It was a model he hoped could be transferred to Khidr and to other parts of the formerly war-torn Euphrates valley.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ MARNE ROUNDUP Summary, 1 Dec 2007–15 Jan 2008, n.d.

⁸⁷ DoD News Briefing with Col Thomas S. James, CO, 4th BCT, 3d Inf Div, 22 Feb 2008, pp. 1–2.

THUNDERBOLT

Chapter 11

The new year boded well for events in Iraq. As General Petraeus pointed out in an open letter to his troops written on 28 December, they had come a long way in a short time. “A year ago, Iraq was wracked by horrific violence and on the brink of civil war,” he noted. “Now levels of violence and civilian and military casualties are significantly reduced and hope has been rekindled in many Iraqi communities.”¹

It was true that the insurgents, though still dangerous, seemed to be losing steam. Al-Qaeda had long relied on vehicles packed with explosives and driven by suicide bombers to spread fear and death, but the proliferation of road checkpoints made possible by the burgeoning Sons of Iraq hampered the terrorists. As one observer explained, “there was a new air of desperate improvisation in al Qaeda’s attacks,” which resulted in hideous new methods of bomb delivery, especially the use of women and the disabled.²

At MNC-I, January 2008 marked a shift in the troop surge—from a focus on hard-hitting combat operations to softer consolidation and rebuilding programs. The new phase, PHANTOM PHOENIX, would last through the remainder of the surge and into July. Planners acknowledged that offensives against Sunni insurgents up to that point had been largely successful and that al-Qaeda was “increasingly off-balance,” though still “lethal.” Combat would still be stressed in upcoming campaigns, but the transition from fighting to rebuilding would be quicker, with an emphasis on reconstruction. General Odierno believed that the difficult work of the previous year had led to that point, and there was now a “need to take advantage of the current open window” in order to capitalize on accrued gains.³

Security remained the basic building block for success, and Odierno envisioned an opening salvo of missions aimed at pushing harder against an enemy who seemed to be flailing after more than six months of continuous pressure. PHANTOM PHOENIX began on 2 January with the launch of MND-N’s Operation IRON HARVEST against insurgents in Diyala Province, especially around Al Miqdadiyah, a key city located thirty kilometers northeast of the province capital of Baqubah. The corps-level

¹ Ltr, Gen Petraeus to Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, Coastguardsmen, and Civilians of Multi-National Force—Iraq, 28 Dec 2007.

² Ricks, *The Gamble*, p. 259.

³ CG Executive Summary, MNC-I OPORD 08–01 Back Brief, 8 Jan 2008.

thrust also supported the ongoing campaign to the northwest in Ninawa Province, where in January the 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment had taken over responsibility from the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division. General Odierno expected trouble from al-Qaeda, which had been increasingly squeezed out of the capital and from its previous bases in Al Anbar Province and forced northward to Mosul, one of the enemy's last northern bastions.⁴

Shifting Priorities

South of Baghdad, MND-C's role in PHANTOM PHOENIX was called MARNE FORTITUDE II, which, as the name implied, was a modification of the earlier enduring mission, MARNE FORTITUDE, dating back to June 2007. General Lynch retained the first operation's goals—population security, expanding permanent presence throughout MND-C, and economic resurgence—but, in keeping with General Odierno's emphasis on increased nation building in 2008, the plans now included more specific programs to rebuild the region south of Baghdad. In his briefing to the corps commander, Lynch stated that the purpose of MARNE FORTITUDE II was to “increase the capacity of the provincial governments and Iraqi Security Forces and create economic growth within MND-C . . . while maintaining the security gains achieved during the force surge. We will create irreversible momentum that enables a transition of security operations and economic development to the Iraqi people.”⁵

MND-C would achieve its end state by “significantly increasing the capacity of governments at the local and provincial level [and by] initiating major reconstruction projects across the AOR [area of responsibility] and establishing the way forward for continuing development.” This, combined with increased partnering between U.S. and Iraqi military units and with more direct aid and involvement from the Iraqi government, would allow the coalition forces to transition into an overwatch role, though when that would occur was not predicted.⁶

The 3d Infantry Division planned to support PHANTOM PHOENIX with one decisive campaign per month lasting into the spring—part of what General Lynch described as “relentless pursuit”—for a total of five offensives before the division departed Iraq in June.⁷ The first of these would be the continued push by Colonel Ferrell's 2d Brigade deeper into

⁴ “PHANTOM PHOENIX’ Operation Targets al-Qaeda in Iraq,” American Forces Press Service, 8 Jan 2008.

⁵ MNC-I OPORD 08-01 (PHANTOM PHOENIX) Back Brief, 8 Jan 2008, slide 8.

⁶ Ibid., slide 9. Quote from MND-C OPORD 08-001 (MARNE FORTITUDE II), 23 Dec 2007.

⁷ CG Executive Summary, MARNE FORTITUDE II OPORD Issue Brief, 28 Dec 2007; CG Executive Summary, Expanded Plans Update, 4 Jan 2008.



In early 2008, MNC-I's priorities shifted from combat operations to economic rebuilding. However, General Lynch also intended to maintain what he called a "relentless pursuit" of the insurgents.

the Tigris valley to bolster previous accomplishments with continued civic action and economic rebuilding. General Lynch named the drive MARNE THUNDERBOLT, so-called as a salute to an important Korean War battle in January and February 1951 that helped force the Chinese back from their initial gains when they invaded the previous November. During that Operation THUNDERBOLT, the 3d Infantry Division had joined the three-corps assault and aided in the retaking of several towns on the way toward recapturing the South Korean capital of Seoul.

For a while, Lynch thought he might have to scale back his limited objectives because of a lack of manpower. This was becoming an old story in Colonel Ferrell's command along the Tigris. Although he had lost one unit—Colonel Odom's 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment—when it departed with the 4th Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, in December, he added another with the incoming 4th Brigade, 3d Infantry Division—the 6th Squadron, 8th Cavalry Regiment, commanded by Lt. Col. Mark W. Solomon. The one-for-one swap, while providing fresh soldiers, did nothing to change the strategic picture. While Ferrell had been quite successful

south of Arab Jabour up to this point, he still did not have enough troops to maintain a permanent presence any farther south than he already was.⁸

On the eve of PHANTOM PHOENIX, this was a serious sticking point for General Lynch. The division staff had been planning MARNE THUNDERBOLT for some time, but, even as late as December, Lynch tended to think that a full-fledged offensive—complete with new patrol bases—was probably beyond his forces' capabilities. During one meeting on 2 December, the division commander asked his staff if the new campaign should become “a MARNE HUSKY II,” with his aviation unit leading the way in a disruption onslaught, as had been the case with the original MARNE HUSKY back in August and September. That might be the easiest way to go, but, as Colonel Williams, the division intelligence officer, pointed out, any gains made in such a move were transitory because “the enemy returns 90 days after such an operation.” Lynch agreed, remarking he was “not a fan of disruption operations, but disruption is better than no operation.” On the other hand, the division might be loaned a combined-arms battalion from MND-B for about two months, though General Lynch predicted that the odds of that were slender. He decided that, without the addition of an extra battalion, “MND-C will not conduct MARNE THUNDERBOLT.”⁹

Two days later, Lynch visited Patrol Base Hawkes to talk with 2d Brigade officers about his decision. If he launched MARNE HUSKY II, it would be south of Hawkes and the 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, the 2d Brigade’s mainstay in Arab Jabour, would not participate—other than to furnish its expertise for intelligence and targeting. The Combat Aviation Brigade would “own the battle space,” leaving the 2d Brigade to pursue its primary mission north of Hawkes and plan for MARNE THUNDERBOLT at a later date if an extra battalion were provided.¹⁰

The solution to the manpower shortage came from Al Anbar Province. The 3d Division’s 1st Brigade, nearing the end of its tour in Iraq under the command of the marines and MNF-W, would supply one of its units—the 5th Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment—for the next two months, allowing General Lynch to proceed with MARNE THUNDERBOLT. On 15 December, during a high-level meeting of principals from both his own corps and MNF-I, General Odierno confirmed that the 2d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, would receive the extra battalion.¹¹

⁸ In fact, the 6th Squadron, 8th Cavalry Regiment, had three platoons fewer than the 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment, resulting in a net loss of fifty-one soldiers. CG Executive Summary, Expanded Plans Update, 19 Oct 2007.

⁹ CG Executive Summary, CG’s Planning Huddle, 2 Dec 2007.

¹⁰ CG Executive Summary, MG Lynch’s Visit to PB Hawkes/Arab Jabour, 5 Dec 2007.

¹¹ CG Executive Summary, MNC-I/MNF-I Commanders Conference Notes, 15 Dec 2007.

The improving environment in Al Anbar, and, in Ar Ramadi in particular, made the transfer possible. Only a few years ago, the insurgents operated freely throughout the province, and al-Qaeda had declared Ar Ramadi the capital of the hoped-for Islamic caliphate in Iraq. By early 2008, the situation had turned completely around. Col. John W. Charlton, commander of the 1st Brigade, reported that attacks there were down to less than one per week, a dramatic drop from the thirty or so per day that had paralyzed the city a year earlier. The marked progress led to a decision to return Al Anbar Province to Iraqi control that spring.¹²

The 5th Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment, was released by the II Marine Expeditionary Force to join the 2d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, adding some six hundred more soldiers to Colonel Ferrell's battle mix south of Baghdad. General Lynch welcomed his "long lost" soldiers with open arms, and they were glad to be there. "We've been operating outside the 3 ID umbrella for about a year now," stated Lt. Col. Clifford E. Wheeler, the unit's commander. "We are and have always been a part of the 3 ID and we are looking forward to being part of the Marne team again and getting into the fight" along the Tigris. With these extra forces at his disposal, Lynch referred to MARNE THUNDERBOLT as "the surge within the surge."¹³

Although Wheeler's squadron did not begin arriving at Forward Operating Base Kalsu until 5 January, the choice to move it there was made in mid-December. That allowed General Lynch and his planners to complete the MARNE THUNDERBOLT operation plan, which was forwarded to General Odierno and MNC-I on the twenty-seventh. Despite the decision to proceed, Lynch kept some of the dates in his campaign template purposely vague. While the new unit was to be fully in place no later than 22 January, the commencement date of phase two "decisive ops" depended on the actual arrival of the cavalry squadron.¹⁴ The hoped-for starting point of 22 January for MARNE THUNDERBOLT was "only a mark on the wall," warned the general. "Phase two operations will begin when 5-7 Cav is ready" and not before.¹⁵

¹² Iraq Weekly Status Rpt, U.S. State Dept, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, 16 Jan 2008, p. 9.

¹³ First and second quotes from Task Force Marne Web site, "Warpaint' joins 'Spartan' team," 13 Jan 2008. Third quote from CG Executive Summary, PAO Update, 6 Jan 2008.

¹⁴ MNF-W requested an eight-day delay in sending the 5th Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment, to MND-C "due to its Hajj support" (the annual holy pilgrimage to Mecca that began on 19 December 2007 and would run through mid-January 2008), which meant that much of the unit would not arrive at Kalsu until 23 January. In the end, the squadron would be available to the 2d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, for forty-eight days rather than the original fifty-six that had been planned. CG Executive Summary, CG's Planning Huddle, 23 Dec 2007.

¹⁵ MND-C OPORD 08-002 (MARNE THUNDERBOLT), 27 Dec 2007, p. 8; CG Executive Summary, CG's Planning Huddle, 16 Dec 2007. Quotes from CG Executive Summary, Senior Plans Update, 1 Jan 2008.

Lynch flew down to Arab Jabour on 4 January to review the campaign plan with Colonel Adgie and his 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment. The battalion commander declared that his territory was now almost rid of IEDs, making it a good staging location for the upcoming offensive. Pointing to a map on the table, he showed General Lynch the basic plan. His own unit, the 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, would mass five companies to drive south from Route Lakers. The 6th Squadron, 8th Cavalry Regiment—bolstered by the addition of the 4th Brigade's Battery A, 1st Battalion, 76th Field Artillery Regiment—would apply pressure from west to east, hindering the insurgents from escaping in that direction, and the 5th Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment, finally moving into place south of Adgie's unit, would focus on the 2d Brigade's southeastern sector, a brand new region code-named Tactical Area of Operations Packard. The two primary targets were along the west bank of the Tigris about nine kilometers southeast of Patrol Base Murray—a cluster of communities labeled on maps as Husayn as Salifi, known as Objective Magic, and five kilometers farther south, the town of Sayafiyyah, called Objective Nets (*Map 18*). Colonel Adgie expected to lead off with a handful of air assaults by units from his Company B, but, as had been the case during his previous campaigns, he emphasized deliberate operations that allowed his soldiers to clear and hold.¹⁶

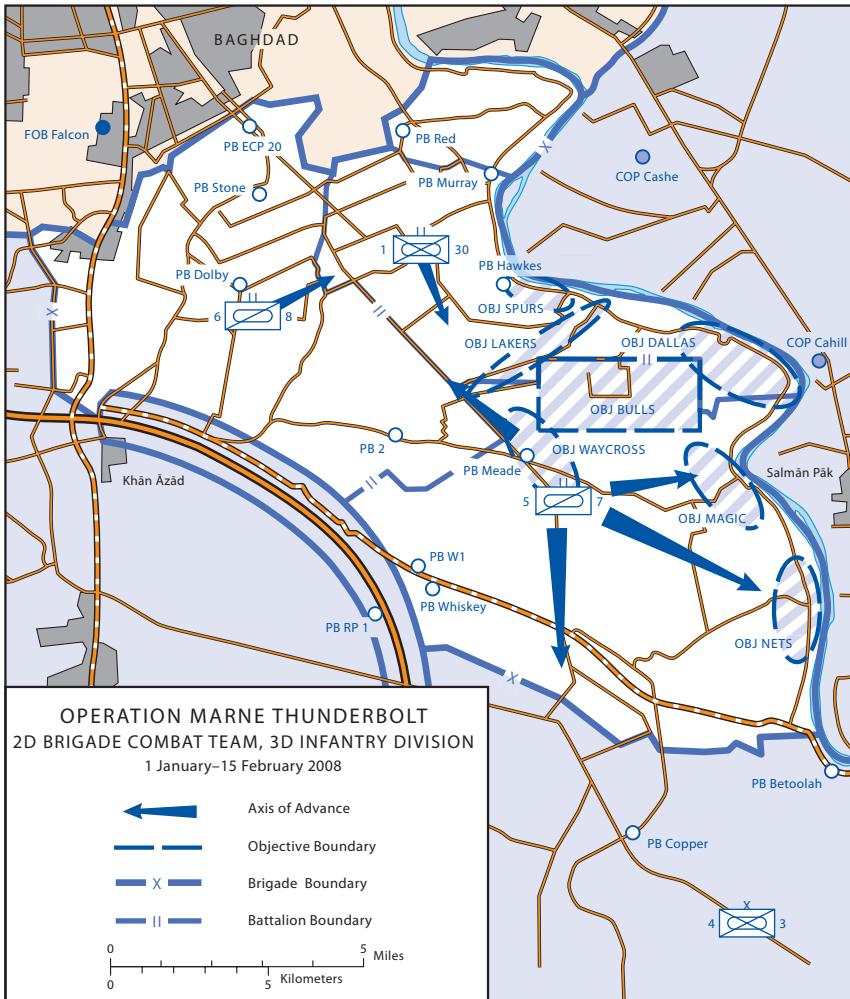
In contrast to the looming battle plans, Lynch also toured two of Adgie's success stories in Arab Jabour—the hamlets of Al Assad and Abd al Saman near Busayefi—whose series of checkpoints manned by the Sons of Iraq had helped stabilize a former insurgent stronghold. The concerned citizens group was so effective that Adgie's units provided only tactical overwatch, allowing the bulk of his troops to concentrate their efforts southward in more troubled areas. The leader of the Sons of Iraq in Abd al Saman told Lynch that the people were thankful for the security, but the fighting had damaged the village. Although families were returning, they were badly in need of basic services such as running water and electricity—a common story throughout the locality. Adgie's civil affairs soldiers hastened to dig more wells, and within a week would open a new clinic for the Busayefi region. The most welcome news, however, was that residential electricity had just been increased to a total of four hours per day, double what it had been just a few weeks earlier.¹⁷

Relentless Pursuit

None of the rebuilding was possible without the stability born of security, of course, and the objective of MARNE THUNDERBOLT was to extend both farther southward. Great strides had been made in reducing

¹⁶ Open MARNE THUNDERBOLT Planning Slide, n.d.; CG Executive Summary, MG Lynch's Visit to Al Assad and Abd al Saman, 4 Jan 2008.

¹⁷ CG Executive Summary, MG Lynch's Visit to Al Assad and Abd al Saman, 4 Jan 2008.



Map 18

the enemy's ability to marshal strength and support in the northern portion of the Tigris valley, and the forces were now available to continue the progress. Al-Qaeda in particular was taking a beating, though it endured as the primary threat in the Sunni regions south of Baghdad. But another insurgent group proved to be a constant thorn in the 3d Division's side—the *Jaysh al-Islami*, or Islamic Army, a cabal of mostly former Ba'athists that had been formed after the fall of Saddam Hussein; by late 2007, it was increasingly at odds with al-Qaeda. Never allies, the two organizations often argued. The Islamic Army objected to the radical nature of al-Qaeda's Islamic vision for Iraq and to its close ties to foreign extremists, while al-Qaeda accused the Islamic Army of secretly negotiating with the Americans.¹⁸

For the 3d Division, the argument was largely academic. What mattered was how the internecine conflict affected the Sunni insurgents' ability to fight effectively, and intelligence demonstrated that the rift had resulted in a "significant clash" in the southernmost region of MARNE THUNDERBOLT. The Sunni emirs of the Islamic Army had long held sway there, but 3d Division operations had slowly pushed al-Qaeda down on top of them, triggering violent battles. Analysts reported "active engagements fighting AQI attempting to move into the area" and believed that the fighting had interrupted al-Qaeda's plans to burrow into the territory. The time was ripe for the Americans to "find the bastards and pile on," as General Lynch phrased it, because "the enemy is getting desperate."¹⁹

That was probably true. The insurgents had performed badly against earlier 3d Division offensives, but this time they might find the situation more difficult. Colonel Ferrell's earlier campaigns had driven al-Qaeda southward, but the thrusts never had much chance of trapping and destroying the insurgents. By early 2008, however, the burgeoning Sons of Iraq program meant that the Americans could use the militia to establish blocking points to track suspicious movement and relay the information to 2d Brigade units, which would then chase down the leads. During the first few weeks of January—the opening of phase one of MARNE THUNDERBOLT—Ferrell asserted that this time he faced "a defensive oriented AQI intent on preventing [coalition forces] ingress into the south-east portion" of his operational area. During MARNE THUNDERBOLT, the enemy would have fewer opportunities to run.²⁰

¹⁸ MNF-I Media Release, The Insurgency, 15 Jul 2008; "Violent Clashes Between Al-Qaeda and Al-Jaysh Al Islami in Iraq," *Global Jihad News*, 6 Nov 2007; Bill Roggio, "Islamic Army of Iraq splits from al-Qaeda," *Long War Journal* (12 April 2007).

¹⁹ First and second quotes from MND-C OPORD 08-002 (MARNE THUNDERBOLT), 27 Dec 2007, p. 2; CG Executive Summary, Senior Plans Update, 1 Jan 2008. Third quote from CG Executive Summary, ACE Update, 3 Jan 2008.

²⁰ "Operation MARNE THUNDERBOLT," Institute for the Study of War Online, 7 Jan 2008. Quote from MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 5–11 Jan 2008, p. 1.

As always, al-Qaeda reacted brutally to the expansion of the Sons of Iraq. The usual horror stories abounded. According to one account, in Al Mizan, a village in the southern sector of the 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment's zone, al-Qaeda terrorists waylaid the ten siblings of a local Sons of Iraq member and butchered them in front of the mosque as an example to others so bold as to join the Sunni militia. The tactic won no converts from among the population, but it did intimidate them.²¹

Colonel Ferrell moved against the enemy even before the onset of MARNE THUNDERBOLT. The 6th Squadron, 8th Cavalry Regiment, launched Operation CORINTH on 29 December to create some maneuvering room along Route Bug in the southern portion of its area of responsibility, setting checkpoints and clearing the road for the arrival of the 5th Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment. It was not easy going. Ferrell reported that the insurgents "have reinforced positions defending their decisive terrain" along the roadways, including Bug. He later said that his soldiers "encountered a very deliberate defensive belt, as they did during MARNE TORCH" almost six months earlier.²²

By the first week in January, the action was picking up. The fifth, in particular, proved to be a busy day, with at least eight combat engagements along the southern sector. In one, four insurgents were spotted near a canal and shot dead by machine-gun fire. Later that night, a patrol spied two men digging along a canal, probably to recover weapons or plant an IED. They fled but were quickly run down by two helicopter gunships awaiting just such a call. The pilots spotted the two insurgents trying to hide in a small plastic greenhouse and killed them both.²³

But the most important occurrence was when intelligence sources located the top al-Qaeda leader in the area and the number-one high-value target for the 6th Squadron, 8th Cavalry Regiment—a man known as Abu Amina. He was in a house near the town of Zambraniyah, guarded by several insurgents, some of whom an unmanned aerial vehicle spotted setting up a heavy machine gun. The house was wired for explosives, making a ground attack potentially dangerous, so at 1730 an Air Force F-16 dropped two 500-pound bombs on the house, killing Abu Amina and at least nine insurgents. Intelligence analysts considered it a significant blow to al-Qaeda. One assessment stated that "the events of the past week have demonstrated that AQI is willing to fight [in order to] retain Zambriniyah and limit the [Coalition and Iraqi Army] footprint in that area." But the death of Abu Amina and his associates meant that the

²¹ Andrew Lubin, "With the 1-30 Infantry Reg. south of Baghdad," *Military Observer Weblog*, 27 Jan 2008.

²² First quote from MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 5–11 Jan 2008, p. 2. Second quote from CG Executive Summary, Baghdad Bureau Chief's Press Conference, 27 Jan 2008.

²³ Storyboard, MND-C Sigacts, 18 x EKIA, 6th Sqdn, 8th Cav Rgt, 5 Jan 2008.



Units from the 2d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, increased patrolling in Arab Jabour during the days leading up to Operation Marne Thunderbolt.

insurgents would probably shift to the south and east—into the path of the other 2d Brigade units.

South of Arab Jabour the 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, upped the ante as well. On the morning of 6 January, Company B, commanded by Capt. John T. Newman, began Operation MAUSER just southwest of Patrol Base Hawkes. The region remained contested territory, with frequent enemy attacks, and Newman's task was to extend control a few kilometers southward in preparation for the main effort the following week.²⁴

Although the morning dawned bright and sunny, if cold, the previous night had seen a procession of rain squalls and gusty winds that left the dirt roads and farm fields a sticky mess that bogged down men and machines. Soldiers trudged through the quagmire, and the first house on the list to be searched was approached by 1st Lt. Jeno R. Giorgi's 2d Platoon. The troops encountered no problems and proceeded to the next, but it was padlocked and appeared abandoned.

²⁴ Account is from MND-C Media Release, All in a Day's Work, 11 Jan 2008.

Suddenly enemy fire crackled nearby, scattering Giorgi's men. From behind fences and berms they furtively searched for the source of the attack, which was coming from about two hundred meters to the south. Rifle and machine-gun fire zeroed in on the source, and the insurgents broke contact. One soldier fired off several grenades from his launcher at the retreating enemy while another soldier requested high-explosive rounds from a supporting 120-mm. mortar. The rest of the platoon gave chase but was slowed by the discovery of a pressure plate-detonated IED, which the men bypassed. By then the insurgents were gone. Lieutenant Giorgi shrugged off the encounter. "To me, it's just like any other day," he remarked. "It's not the first time we've been shot at." The Americans traveled onward, continuing into the enemy's sanctuary, which was shrinking with every passing day.²⁵

Air Power

MARNE THUNDERBOLT was more than just a persistent slog to the south. General Lynch again intended to make frequent use of air power to punctuate the operation. Air strikes saved lives, he asserted, and new technology made it a precise weapon that, when used properly, could do terrible damage to the enemy with little effect on civilians. The American public needed to know, Lynch felt, that the Air Force no longer "conducts carpet bombings" and that the careful application of air power against even a dispersed guerrilla force would preserve lives. During a visit by retired General Barry R. McCaffrey, the former 24th Infantry Division commander who had executed the "left hook" around Saddam Hussein's forces in Kuwait during the Persian Gulf War, Lynch professed his combat philosophy: "blow it up before it kills our soldiers."²⁶

With an eye toward that cardinal rule, on 29 December Lynch had met with Lt. Gen. Gary L. North, commander of the Ninth Air Force and U.S. Air Forces Central, to talk about air support during MARNE THUNDERBOLT. The division commander stated that during the period of shaping operations to be launched in the first three weeks of January he needed two days of Air Force support—the first on 10 January, and a follow-up strike ten days later. General North agreed, noting that a large, targeted strike on simultaneous objectives would make it difficult for the insurgents to regroup and at the same time "send the signal that we know where the enemy is hiding."²⁷

²⁵ Storyboard, MND-C Sigacts, 18 x EKIA, 6th Sqdn, 8th Cav Rgt, 5 Jan 2008. Quotes from MNF-I Press Rpt, Operation MARNE THUNDERBOLT continues, 7 Jan 2008.

²⁶ First quote from CG Executive Summary, Lt Gen North Office Call, 29 Dec 2007. Second quote from CG Executive Summary, Gen (R) McCaffrey Office Call, 8 Dec 2007.

²⁷ CG Executive Summary, Lt Gen North Office Call, 29 Dec 2007.

The plan was approved by higher headquarters. Lynch told his staff about the air strike package, which would involve hitting dozens of targets simultaneously. "There is no munitions constraint," he explained. "If something looks bad and the right [collateral damage estimate] is conducted, we will blow it up—even if we only blow up dirt, it will send the right signal to the enemy."²⁸

On the morning of 10 January, two B-1 bombers and four F-16 fighters dropped 99 bombs on 47 targets in 10 separate air strikes—38 of the bombs were unleashed in the first ten minutes of the attack, which could be seen and felt in Baghdad. The total amount of explosives for the day was 47,000 pounds. Twenty of the strikes produced secondary explosions, and no Iraqi civilian casualties were reported. (Military spokesmen commented that at least four strikes were canceled for fear of hitting civilians.) The 3d Division described the bombing campaign as the "storm before the calm."²⁹

Much of the ordnance fell around the town of Zambraniyah on the southern outskirts of Arab Jabour, about fifteen kilometers southeast of Baghdad in the 5th Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment, area. The strike zone was already largely abandoned after years of fighting, its potholed roads lined by the occasional bullet-pocked building and cluttered with the blackened hulks of burned-out vehicles. A few farm fields lay fallow and brown, strewn with trash blown by the winter winds, but much of the locale was an uninhabited swath of tall grasses and palm trees etched by irrigation canals. The insurgents had turned the region into a no-man's-land, planting IEDs in empty buildings and dotting the roads with buried bombs. Colonel Ferrell told the media that the "extraordinary amount of firepower" was necessary to pave the way into this treacherous territory. "Specifically, we were looking to clear the ground against known targets and threats that could harm our soldiers," said the brigade commander. According to the local Sons of Iraq commander, the raids killed twenty-one insurgents, including some al-Qaeda leaders.³⁰

General Lynch and his staff were pleased with the results, and all agreed to another round of bombing, though there was some disagreement over how to distribute the ordnance next time around. General Cardon, the assistant division commander, proposed simultaneous strikes during a single night, but Colonel Williams, the division intelligence officer, thought the bombings should be spread out in order to "keep AQI

²⁸ CG Executive Summary, Senior Plans Update, 1 Jan 2008. Quotes from CG Executive Summary, ACE Update, 3 Jan 2008.

²⁹ Briefing Slide, 2d BCT, 3d Inf Div, Kinetic Strikes, BUB, 10 Jan 2008. Quote from MND-C Media Release, Storm before the calm in Arab Jabour, 21 Jan 2008.

³⁰ CG Executive Summary, Senior Plans Update, 15 Jan 2008; "Massive U.S. Airstrike Hits Baghdad," CBS News, 10 Jan 2008. Quotes from Solomon Moore, "US Bombs Iraqi Insurgent Hideouts," *New York Times*, 11 Jan 2008.



Beginning on 10 January 2008, U.S. Air Force B-1B Lancer bombers spearheaded air support for Marne Thunderbolt, dropping more than forty-seven thousand pounds of munitions on targets south of Baghdad.

on their toes.” Lynch was not sure what approach he would choose, but he ordered another round of bombing to start on 20 January, concluding that “continual pressure is important so the Iraqis understand we will not stop.”³¹

In the end, the next air strikes were launched all at once. During the early hours of the twentieth, B-1 bombers and Navy and Marine Corps F-18 fighter-bombers dropped forty bombs—34,500 pounds of ordinance—on forty targets, each picked because of its known value to the enemy. In all, over the ten-day period, 114,500 pounds of bombs were dropped on 104 targets in the 2d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division’s area of operations, making it as large as any aerial attack since the beginning of the surge.³²

The division again publicized the raids widely, with public affairs officers conducting what they described as “The Blitz in Marne Thunder” to ensure that news outlets were alerted to the coming air operation. The

³¹ Quotes from CG Executive Summary, Senior Plans Update, 15 Jan 2008. CG Executive Summary, MG Lynch’s Visit to PB2 and COP Meade, 16 Jan 2008.

³² Briefing Slide, The Blitz in Marne Thunder, BUB, 20 Jan 2008; MND-C Media Release, Storm before the calm in Arab Jabour, 21 Jan 2008.

division public affairs office centered much of its coverage on Colonel Ferrell, who was again widely quoted in press releases. “The strikes that we conducted tonight were focused on IEDs and caches we have targeted,” Colonel Ferrell said in one media release. “These targets, the IEDs specifically, are designed as part of a defensive belt to prevent our forces from entering into areas that we have not been before.”³³

Other smaller strikes were added as needed, including one the very next day using a more exotic munition. On 21 January, U.S. soldiers located two houses rigged with explosives in the southeasternmost corner of Adgie’s territory, and just before midnight an Army missile unit fired two rockets from an M31 satellite-guided multiple launch rocket system (GMLRS) with a range of more than six hundred and fifty kilometers. One rocket was a dud but the other obliterated the houses, setting off several secondary explosions.³⁴

Inevitably there were mistakes, though they were rare. During the early morning hours of 23 January, for example, the 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, requested an air strike on a series of IEDs planted on Route Lakers near the Tigris, a key point in the enemy’s defensive network. The first laser-guided bomb dropped on target and blasted away a chunk of the road’s shoulder and detonated an IED. A second bomb fell nearby but failed to explode, and an observer noted seeing the bomb lying in a crater near the road. The third bomb seemed to simply vanish, but several minutes later a guard in a watchtower at Combat Outpost Murray—several kilometers to the northwest—reported witnessing an explosion across the river. A patrol from the 3d Brigade’s 3d Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment, found that the errant bomb hit near a local school, which was fortunately unoccupied. Several other bombs were then called in on the original site, setting off more secondary explosions as several more IEDs—and the dud bomb—were incinerated.³⁵

Improving the Odds

On the ground, the 2d Brigade used the air strikes to enhance its gains. By the third week in January, Colonel Ferrell asserted that, despite an increase in the number of IEDs discovered by his troops over two consecutive weeks, the situation was promising. He was especially encouraged by the reaction from local Iraqi leaders. “They welcome [coalition

³³ First quote from MND-C Media Release, Storm before the calm in Arab Jabour, 21 Jan 2008. MND-C Media Release, More than 10 targets destroyed during ongoing air strikes in Arab Jabour, 20 Jan 2008. Second quote from MND-C Media Release, Night air raid destroys 35 targets in Arab Jabour, drops 19,000 pounds of bombs, 20 Jan 2008. Bill Roggio, “Coalition airstrikes pound al-Qaeda in Iraq positions in southern Arab Jabour,” *Long War Journal* (20 January 2008).

³⁴ Storyboard, GMLRS Strike, 2d BCT, 3d Inf Div (1-30 Inf), 21 Jan 2008.

³⁵ Storyboard, Event 35, Kinetic Strikes (Errant Bomb), 2d BCT, 3d Inf Div, 23 Jan 2008.



Despite careful planning and execution, errors occurred during the bombing support of Marne Thunderbolt. Here, an Iraqi soldier provides security after a house was destroyed by a U.S. strike.

forces] operations,” Ferrell wrote in one report, “although they question why we waited so long.” The sheikhs ensured that their citizens were entered into the databases and that new recruits for the Sons of Iraq were forthcoming.³⁶

But the expanding security came at a cost. On 19 January, the 2d Brigade lost its first—and only—soldier in MARNE THUNDERBOLT. A six-vehicle convoy from Colonel Adgie’s engineer company was heading north on Route Shelby, just east of the dividing line between the 5th Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment, and the 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, areas of operations. The route had not experienced much patrolling from U.S. forces in about nine months, and the insurgents had taken advantage of the respite, burying several IEDs, each with an estimated three hundred pounds of explosives and pressure-plate detonators.

As the trucks slowed to negotiate a sharp dogleg in the road, one of the IEDs exploded when the second-to-last vehicle in the convoy ran over the pressure plate. The blast blew the vehicle into the air and over on its side, killing Spec. Richard B. Burress, the gunner in the turret. The other

³⁶ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 26 Jan–1 Feb 2008, p. 5.

three occupants suffered broken bones and other injuries, but they lived. Within minutes, all were evacuated by helicopter.³⁷

The incident was unique because it was the Iraq war's first combat fatality in one of the Army's new mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicles (MRAPs) fashioned to provide increased protection against IEDs. The 22-ton MRAP had a heavily armored crew capsule mounted over a V-shaped hull that was designed to divert the force of an explosion to a much greater degree than in the up-armored Humvee and contained features such as a shock-absorbing seating system with four-point seat belts. MRAPs came in two versions, one that held up to six soldiers, and a bigger vehicle for ten. In response to the mushrooming number of roadside bomb attacks, incoming Secretary of Defense Robert Gates made the program a high priority in the spring of 2007, committing \$22 billion to build more than twelve thousand vehicles. By the end of the year, twenty-two hundred had been shipped to Iraq.³⁸

One day after Burress died in an MRAP, another of the new armored vehicles struck an IED on Route Bug several kilometers south of the previous day's attack. This time the MRAP performed as advertised, sustaining only limited damage and protecting the passengers, all of whom walked away with only a few cuts and bruises.³⁹

General Odierno believed that the MRAPs would save lives and streamlined the process of getting them into the field. Each U.S. division started receiving an allotment, with MND-C receiving its first two dozen vehicles in November 2007 (the earliest shipments went to the 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment). By the end of January 2008, MND-C would have 189 MRAPs, with a goal of four vehicles per platoon. By the end of its MND-C tour, Task Force Marne would have about 530 MRAPs.⁴⁰

This was a relief to General Lynch, who stated that "soldiers are walking away when MRAPs hit IEDs."⁴¹ He anticipated that by the new year his units "will have no issues operating in Arab Jabour," partly because of the new MRAPs, but also because the tanks and armored fighting vehicles had the latest upgrades, including a retrofit package known as the tank

³⁷ Storyboard, Sigact 1, IED Strike, 1 x US KIA/3 x US WIA, Co E, 1st Bn, 30th Inf Rgt, 2d BCT, 3d Inf Div, 19 Jan 2008, BUB, 20 Jan 2008.

³⁸ Tom Vanden Brook, "First U.S. Soldier in Iraq Dies in New Mine-Resistant Vehicle," USA Today, 23 Jan 2008; Sgt Michael Connors, "Unit Receives Task Force Marne's First MRAPs," American Forces Press Service, 27 Nov 2007.

³⁹ Storyboard, Sigact 2, 1 x IED Strike, 1 x MRAP DMG [damaged], 6th Sqdn, 8th Cav Rgt, BUB, 21 Jan 2008.

⁴⁰ Connors, "Unit Receives Task Force Marne's First MRAPs"; Interv, Robert Mages, Oral History Branch, U.S. Army Military History Institute, with Maj Gen Rick Lynch, 2 Jul 2008, p. 29.

⁴¹ At the end of his tour, Lynch would say that "I can attest that at least 40 of my soldiers are alive today because they were riding in MRAPs. . . . Those MRAPs were just invaluable." Interv, Mages with Lynch, 2 Jul 2008, pp. 28–29.



Secretary Gates (left) made acquisition of the new mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicle (MRAP) a high priority, and, by the end of 2007, the first vehicles were delivered to the 3d Division's 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment.

urban survivability kit (TUSK), which began arriving in Iraq in October 2007. The improvements included more thermal-imaging equipment and a .50-caliber gun that allowed the Abrams tank to fight in places where using its main weapon might cause civilian casualties. TUSK-equipped tanks were also supposed to be better at surviving attacks. Tiles added to the tanks' sides protected against rocket-propelled grenades and an added slab of aluminum up to five inches thick bolted to the undercarriage provided an extra shield against buried IEDs. But, as Specialist Burress' death showed, complete safety in combat did not exist.⁴²

There were other roadside bombs, but no further fatalities. An IED on 13 January wounded three soldiers from Company A, 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, as they searched a farmhouse during an air assault, and another on the seventeenth wounded two members of a dismounted patrol from 6th Squadron, 8th Cavalry Regiment, as they scoured an abandoned hamlet near Route Bismarck in the southernmost tip of their

⁴² CG Executive Summary, MNC-I OPORD 08-01 Back Brief, 8 Jan 2008. Quote from CG Executive Summary, Gen Benjamin S. Griffin [CG, Army Materiel Command] Office Call, 9 Jan 2008. Joe Pappalardo, "Anatomy of an IED-Fighting Abrams Tank in Baghdad: Field Report," *Popular Mechanics*, Apr 2008.



General Lynch credited the new MRAPs with saving the lives of "at least 40 of my soldiers."

area of operations. Five more soldiers were injured in a double IED strike that hit two vehicles in Arab Jabour. A few weeks later, Colonel Solomon's cavalry ran into a network of twenty-five pressure-plate IEDs gathered around the intersection of Routes Bismarck and Chevy, the major cross-roads in the southwest sector of its territory. All were disarmed without incident. Colonel Adgie's soldiers found a similar defensive belt of IEDs in the process of being prepared on Route Gnat just southeast of Patrol Base Hawkes, which were also rendered useless. In all, by the end of January, 2d Brigade units had endured eleven roadside bombings but had found and cleared another fifty-four before they could do any harm.⁴³

The insurgents' defensive network slowed the 2d Brigade's push southward, but it did not stop the unit. On 27 January, Troop A, 5th Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment, finished clearing Route Bug and pulled into Sayafiyah, the center of the southernmost objective, dubbed Nets. About fifteen thousand people lived there, and Colonel Wheeler, the squadron commander, had been in touch with local leaders beforehand to create the local Sons of Iraq and to have it operating. Upon arrival, the soldiers cleaned up several bomb craters outside town and began erecting

⁴³ Storyboards, Sigact 3, IED Strike, 3 x US WIA, A Co, 1st Bn, 30th Inf Rgt, BUB, 13 Jan 2008; Sigact 1, IED Strike, 4 X US WIA, Zone 308D, 2d BCT, 3d Inf Div, BUB, 14 Jan 2008; Sigact 1, 1 x IED Strike (Op THUNDERBOLT), 2 x US WIA, 6th Sqdn, 8th Cav Rgt, BUB, 17 Jan 2008; Sigact 1, IED Strike, 5th Sqdn, 7th Cav Rgt, BUB, 23 Jan 2008; IED Defensive Belt, Zone 308K, 6th Sqdn, 8th Cav Rgt, BUB, 14 Feb 2008; and IED Defensive Belt on Gnat, 1st Bn, 30th Inf Rgt, BUB, 1 Feb 2008. Briefing Slide, MND-C IED Events, BUB, 2 Feb 2008.

a small compound, named Patrol Base White. This was the first permanent foothold so far south, and it signaled, according to one assessment, “the starting point for the increase in security of the southern Arab Jabour area [and it] will set the conditions for the establishment of local government and future economic/agricultural growth along the western bank of the Tigris River.”⁴⁴

The new U.S. presence in Sayifiyah was an important step forward, but the highlight of MARNE THUNDERBOLT was the building of a new, larger base, Combat Outpost Meade, farther north. General Lynch wanted a fortified position in the midst of the 5th Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment, zone and made its construction a centerpiece of the campaign plan. Meade was located about six kilometers south of Patrol Base Hawkes, near the intersection of Routes Chevy and Bug, and by early February it was home to part of two cavalry troops plus some Iraqi Army units. Colonel Wheeler used the base to pressure several of the enemy’s east-west mobility corridors along al-Qaeda-dominated roadways leading into the southernmost tip of the 2d Brigade’s area of operations.⁴⁵

The increased activity and the new outpost inspired confidence in the local population, which augmented security. When Wheeler’s cavalry first arrived in January, about a hundred Sons of Iraq had been working in the southern part of the brigade’s territory; by mid-February, the number had climbed to sixteen hundred, “thickening” the lines of operation and allowing U.S. and Iraqi forces to concentrate on the hard-core insurgents while the Sunni militia provided population security.⁴⁶

As was the case elsewhere in MND-C, this combination paid immediate dividends. With assistance from the Sons of Iraq, on 6 February 2d Brigade troops found the largest enemy weapons cache discovered during MARNE THUNDERBOLT, a collection of a dozen barrels filled with home-made explosives, pressure-plate detonators, and several heavy artillery shells to be used in making IEDs—more than three thousand pounds of munitions in all. Two days later, a Sons of Iraq contingent led soldiers from Troop B, 5th Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment, to another cache south of Combat Outpost Meade containing more than two hundred mortar rounds and rocket-propelled grenades.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Storyboard, 5th Sqdn, 7th Cav Rgt, 2d BCT, 2d Inf Div, Entry into Sayifiyah, BUB, 31 Jan 2008.

⁴⁵ CG Executive Summary, CG’s Planning Huddle, 23 Dec 2007; MND-C OPORD 08-002 (MARNE THUNDERBOLT), 27 Dec 2007, p. 9; Storyboard, COP [Combat Outpost] Meade, BUB, 6 Feb 2008.

⁴⁶ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessments, 9–15 Feb 2008, p. 1, and 16–21 Feb 2008, p. 2.

⁴⁷ MND-C Media Releases, 2d Brigade Soldiers discover largest cache finds since start of MARNE THUNDERBOLT, 10 Feb 2008, and Large cache discovered in southern Arab Jabour, 10 Feb 2008.

On 7 February, General Lynch flew to southern Arab Jabour to see Colonel Adgie. The two officers met at a Sons of Iraq checkpoint called Al Mizan, Arabic for “scales of justice,” to discuss the operation in its final days. The Sons of Iraq in the region, partnering with Adgie’s Company B, found a remarkable ninety-seven IEDs in a two-kilometer stretch around Route Gnat, all of which were removed. The militiamen also provided good intelligence, including a solid tip about a munitions cache in Objective Dallas. The battalion Headquarters and Headquarters Company launched an air assault on the ninth to close out the offensive, followed by a road patrol by Company A to open new lines of communications into an area that Adgie believed “is the last place for insurgents to hide” in his territory. As a sign that things were improving, Adgie noted that five hundred Iraqis had recently returned to their homes in southern Arab Jabour.⁴⁸

MARNE THUNDERBOLT ended on the fifteenth, and the 3d Division shifted its resources to the next priority. The final statistics showed that the 2d Brigade had killed 39 insurgents and captured 96 suspects, cleared 267 IEDs, and uncovered 85 weapons caches. Ferrell’s troops, backed by Iraqi Army units, scoured several villages and farm communities, destroying 43 insurgent safe houses and more than 20 vehicles in the process. All this was done with the aid of more than 400 air strikes against the insurgent defensive networks.⁴⁹

Even with MARNE THUNDERBOLT officially over, the 2d Brigade pursued operations south of Arab Jabour uninterrupted. For the most part, they were routine, but in Iraq, the ordinary could quickly turn deadly. Such was the case on the evening of 20 February, when a mounted patrol from Platoon B, Company D, 3d Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment (attached for the time being to the 6th Squadron, 8th Cavalry Regiment), was moving north along Route B. B. King near the town of Busayefi. The Humvees slowed down to turn west on Route Jetta, and the lead vehicle struck a roadside bomb. Three soldiers were wounded, including the platoon commander, 1st Lt. Nathan R. Raudenbush, who suffered “penetrating injuries,” and the other soldiers sustained multiple broken bones. Lieutenant Raudenbush died of his wounds.⁵⁰

When the medevac helicopter arrived and whisked away the wounded, the rest of the column, angered and dismayed at the loss of their commander, went cross-country toward the nearest house, less than a kilometer away, to question the owner. He readily volunteered that he had seen a white sedan stop at the intersection earlier in the day for about fifteen minutes before driving away. Other residents, including a local Sons

⁴⁸ CG Executive Summary, MG Lynch’s Visit to 1-30 Inf, 7 Feb 2008.

⁴⁹ Briefing Slide, MARNE THUNDERBOLT Opsum, 17 Feb 2008.

⁵⁰ Account is from Storyboard, Sigact 1, IED Strike, 1 x DOW, 2 x WIA, Zone 308, 6th Sqdn, 8th Cav Rgt, BUB, 21 Feb 2008.



Backed by the 3d Infantry Division's armored vehicles, the Sons of Iraq maintained checkpoints along the major roads in Arab Jabour during Marne Thunderbolt.

of Iraq leader, ferreted out the names of two local men known to have associated with al-Qaeda, and they were tracked down and arrested. At the scene, they found bomb-making material, including a pressure-switch detonator and twenty pounds of explosives.

Despite this bad news, Colonel Ferrell declared that by late February high-ranking al-Qaeda leaders had vanished from in and around Arab Jabour. Those not killed or captured had fled, and many turned up in Mosul in northern Iraq, from where they monitored the conflict south of Baghdad. Colonel Ferrell reported that those who remained were “low-level leaders, supporters, and family members,” and the leaders would probably not return anytime soon. “The migrant AQI leadership will take time to re-assess the situation in Arab Jabour and re-seed supporters into the area prior to their return,” he concluded.⁵¹

But the combat side of the campaign was less than half the story. Civic action programs were stepped up, bringing additional improvements to the lives of local citizens even while the fighting continued. In one new program, members of Company D, 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, installed solar-powered lamps along the streets of southern Arab Jabour, furnishing light to local merchants and residents without cutting into the

⁵¹ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 16–21 Feb 2008, p. 2.

limited electric power available each day. Other programs throughout the region included repairing power lines, funding agricultural projects, local distribution of fuel, and a revamping of local village governing councils, which had fallen into disuse.⁵²

Once a territory was secure, Colonel Adgie's soldiers also concentrated on enhancing the quality of people's lives. The first priority was the road network, which had to be rebuilt to permit people access to markets in other towns. Second came upgrading the electrical network, so families could power their lights and appliances. These two acts alone invariably bolstered morale. Water purification, health clinics, and schools were also a priority; Adgie described them as "quick-turn activities to spark economic success."⁵³

By mid-February, almost three thousand "displaced civilians"—refugees from the violence and from insurgent control—had returned to their homes, and for the first time in several years some form of local government existed throughout the 2d Brigade's area of responsibility. Iraqi government participation in the community, previously nonexistent, was also beginning to reemerge in Arab Jabour. On the economic front, the 2d Brigade had assisted in revamping every major irrigation pumping station along the Tigris, which sparked a rebirth in agriculture. Using "micro-grants" from its discretionary funds, the brigade was also reconstituting the poultry industry in Arab Jabour and revitalizing small businesses in several towns.⁵⁴

The success of these longstanding governance and economic rebuilding programs was directly proportional to security. In Hawr Rajab and the northern part of Arab Jabour—both of which had seen the longest stretch of U.S. and Iraqi military presence—the situation was improving rapidly, while farther south where combat operations were ongoing, things were less developed. Near Sayafiyah, for example, the 6th Squadron, 8th Cavalry Regiment, received \$32,500 in funding to put toward a small business association and a bottled water plant that produced clean water and ice for the community. In Arab Jabour, the 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, administered a farmers union and put funds into revitalizing the fish, livestock, and produce industries. To the south, around Sayafiyah, the 5th Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment, faced a less friendly environment that was only just starting to come back from insurgent depredations and the coalition offensives to dislodge them. Colonel Ferrell

⁵² MND-C Media Release, Street lights restore sense of safety, 10 Feb 2008; MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 23–29 Feb 2008, pp. 4–6; Storyboards, 132kV Power Line Repair Project in Arab Jabour, MoE [Ministry of Energy], SoI [Sons of Iraq], 1st BN, 30th Inf Rgt, BUB, 13 Feb 2008; Zambraniyah Town Leaders' Meeting, 6th Sqdn, 8th Cav Rgt, BUB, 11 Feb 2008; and Adwaniya Elections, 6th Sqdn, 8th Cav Rgt, BUB, 12 Feb 2008.

⁵³ Rpt, Arab Jabour: A Case Study of Counterinsurgency, p. 10.

⁵⁴ Briefing Slide, MARNE THUNDERBOLT Opsum, 17 Feb 2008.



Members of the Sons of Iraq help distribute water to local residents. By early 2008, Task Force Marne was backing dozens of economic revitalization projects in former insurgent strongholds along the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers.

referred to the economy there as “limited,” though he believed that, in time, Sayyafiyah would experience the same renewal as had Hawr Rajab and northern Arab Jabour.⁵⁵

The combination of heightened safety and new economic growth attracted the attention of individuals as far away as Washington. On 9 February, Nevada Senator John E. Ensign, Oklahoma Senator Thomas A. Coburn, and South Carolina Senator James W. DeMint accompanied 6th Squadron, 8th Cavalry Regiment, commander, Colonel Solomon, through the streets of Hawr Rajab to see the improvements firsthand. The local provincial reconstruction team also gave a special briefing on economic and infrastructure development projects.⁵⁶

On the congressional delegation’s itinerary was a special project in Hawr Rajab, known as the Village of Hope, a vocational school built by the Air Force’s 557th Expeditionary “Red Horse” Squadron, headquartered at Balad Air Base. With an initial investment of about \$10,000, the airmen built the school, supplying instructors to teach some seventy-five

⁵⁵ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 16–21 Feb 2008, pp. 5–6.

⁵⁶ MND-C Media Release, Senators visit former insurgent stronghold, 11 Feb 2008.

to one hundred and fifty Iraqi students the basics of construction, plumbing, electricity, masonry, and well-drilling, and paid the students \$10 per day to attend. These skills were badly needed in the communities south of Baghdad, and the interaction between Iraqis and American instructors provided increased cultural understanding on both sides.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ MNF-I Media Release, Village of Hope lives up to its name, 20 Mar 08; MND-C Media Release, Village of Hope gives Iraqis new perspective, 8 Apr 2008.

NEW FOCUS

Chapter 12

The situation in Iraq during the spring of 2008 differed substantially from that of a year earlier, but the nature of that change and what it represented continued to be debated, especially in Washington. While the Democratic majority in Congress maintained its skepticism of the troop surge, President Bush praised the increased security in Iraq as evidence of its success. During his State of the Union Address on 28 January, he had warned against a hasty withdrawal of troops from Iraq, which he believed would squander the political and military advantages of the past year. The war was entering a new phase, Bush predicted, and the objective throughout 2008 was to “sustain and build on the gains we made in 2007, while transitioning to the next phase of our strategy.” By that the president meant a shift away from U.S.-led offensives to more “partnering with Iraqi forces, and eventually, to a protective overwatch mission” by U.S. troops.¹

In essence, this was a central tenet of PHANTOM PHOENIX, the new MNC-I operation plan that mandated emphasizing noncombat rebuilding programs throughout Iraq for 2008. Security was still the driving force behind the plan, and, south of Baghdad, the completion of MARNE THUNDERBOLT had in fact ushered in the real beginning to such a campaign. For the remainder of Task Force Marne’s time in Iraq, civic renewal would be a primary focus.

As the corps changed the operational environment, it also changed leaders. After twenty-six months as MNC-I commander, General Odierno left Iraq in February 2008. (He was slated to become the Army’s next vice chief of staff but instead replaced General Petraeus as MNF-I commander on 16 September.) He was succeeded by Lt. Gen. Lloyd J. Austin, the commander of XVIII Airborne Corps. A low-key and soft-spoken officer virtually unknown outside of the Army, General Austin had a reputation for bravery, good judgment, and leadership. One colleague declared, “He’s one of the best troop leaders we have [and] he’d never ask his soldiers to do anything he wouldn’t do.”²

The incoming commander was well known to the 3d Infantry Division. His first command as a brand new lieutenant was as a platoon

¹ Iraq Weekly Status Rpt, U.S. State Dept, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, 30 Jan 2008, p. 4.

² Ann Scott Tyson, “Hands-On General Is Next No. 2 in Iraq,” *Washington Post*, 13 Jan 2008.



leader in the division's 1st Battalion, 7th Infantry, and almost thirty years later—in 2003 during the opening of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM—Austin was the 3d Division's assistant division commander for maneuver, the first black officer to lead a division headquarters in battle. He spearheaded the division's drive to Baghdad, earning the Silver Star Medal for gallantry in the process. “His style is flak vest, Kevlar and a ton of ammunition, and he's a big, strapping guy who can carry it,” said Brig. Gen. Louis W. Weber, who was the 3d Division's other deputy commander during the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Where most high-ranking officers wore pistols in a combat zone, Austin carried an M4 assault rifle. In September 2003, after only a few months at home, Austin took command of the 10th Mountain Division and Operation ENDURING FREEDOM's Combined Joint Task Force 180 and headed to Afghanistan. With such a broad range of experience, few officers were better qualified to take command of MNC-I.³

General Austin officially took charge on 14 February, but he spent the preceding months preparing for the job. In early December 2007, he was in Iraq meeting with key officers, and on the fourth he visited General Lynch at the 3d Division headquarters. Austin must have felt a bit nostalgic as he entered the division headquarters, which was festooned with Rock of the Marne insignia and a huge black statue of the

³ Quote from Ibid. MNC-I Official Biography of Lt Gen Lloyd J. Austin, n.d.

division mascot, Rocky the Marne Bulldog, a cartoonish canine with his nose in the air, designed by Walt Disney and sold to the 3d Division in 1965 for a token \$1.

The two generals had little time to rehash old times, however. Lynch explained the operational environment and the blend of combat power and civic action needed to prevail and described the process of gradually turning over the area to the Iraqis. The two Iraqi Army units—the 6th and 8th Divisions—were competent and were commanded by capable officers, Lynch stated, but many of the National Police “are the problem and not the solution.” These factors would drive the division’s last few months in Iraq, which were increasingly about giving more responsibility to the Iraqis. When Task Force Marne departed and the surge ended, many of the units would not be replaced.⁴

The essence of the problem was that the evolution of the Iraqi security forces was not always keeping pace with the improving security environment, and few observers believed that the Iraqis were capable of maintaining the unsteady situation alone. This was true all across the country and especially south of Baghdad. For Task Force Marne’s successes in rebuilding communities and economies in the Tigris and Euphrates valleys to endure, the heightened U.S. security of the past several months would have to continue.

Grand Slam

Lynch hoped to extend his gains during MARNE THUNDERBOLT with more operations aimed at the troublesome Tigris and its rat lines into Baghdad, but this time the focus shifted back to the east bank, with Colonel Grigsby’s 3d Brigade taking the lead. The new offensive would be named MARNE GRAND SLAM, the first division-level effort geared to the area.

Over the past few months, the soldiers of the 3d Brigade had not been idle while attention was directed at the 2d Brigade across the river, and they preserved security while building trust within the local population. During the first month of 2008, the 3d Brigade reported 26 insurgents killed and 147 suspects detained (17 of them were on the high-value-target list), 107 IEDs “found”—28 of which exploded near coalition vehicles or patrols—and almost 5,000 Iraqi citizens entered into the biometric database. The local Sons of Iraq, which by this time numbered around 600, monitored checkpoints along the major roads and had searched some 5,300 vehicles to ensure that no weapons or explosives were making their way north to Baghdad.⁵

⁴ CG Executive Summary, LTG Austin Office Call, 4 Dec 2007.

⁵ Rpt, AO Hammer Weekly Statistics Slide, BUB, 5 Feb 2008.

Trouble remained, especially near Salman Pak, where insurgents persisted as a threat. In early January, a suicide bomber attacked a police station. Initial assessments indicated that an al-Qaeda terrorist dressed as a woman, but the individual turned out to be the female cousin of local insurgent chief Abu Ziyad. The use of female suicide bombers, formerly almost unheard of, was becoming more prevalent in Iraq.⁶

This sort of danger demanded constant vigilance, and, during January and early February, campaigns in the Hammer area of operations still ranged from lethal security missions to civic action to rebuilding programs. Colonel Marr's 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, ran the lion's share of the offensives directed at disrupting the enemy near Salman Pak, including SPARROW SUNRISE on 17 and 18 January, which, in conjunction with local Sons of Iraq, cleared several warehouses the terrorists employed to store weapons. The raid surprised the insurgents—seven of whom died in a firefight—and uncovered nine IEDs in an al-Qaeda safe house. A week later, Marr's soldiers, with assistance from the National Police and an element of the 1st Brigade, 9th Iraqi Army Mechanized Division, launched Operation ZELIG SUNRISE southeast of Salman Pak. Thirteen insurgents died in the fighting, and a sweep of the objective disclosed two trucks mounted with heavy machine guns and ten IEDs. The allies built on their gains by establishing several new Sons of Iraq checkpoints in the territory, further hampering the enemy's ability to move and shoot.⁷

On the "nonlethal" side, several new initiatives were instituted. Near Nahrawan in Grigsby's northern sector, just east of Baghdad, the 1st Battalion, 10th Field Artillery Regiment, on 4 February conducted HARTLEPOOL IV, a "governance operation" in Fursan village aimed at furnishing medical services to inhabitants. The area's Sons of Iraq and the Sabah Nissan Sheikh's Council paved the way, encouraging people to attend, and by the end of the day medical professionals had attended to almost two hundred, while soldiers handed out schoolbook bags to the children. That same day, battalion officers met with the Nahrawan City Council to discuss energy conservation so the entire community could make more efficient use of the limited electricity.⁸

General Lynch hoped to bring that same sort of progress to the troublesome region south of Salman Pak. It was the same old story: Lynch had insufficient troop strength to maintain a permanent presence far enough south. Planners had commented that, despite MARNE THUNDERBOLT's successful interdiction of the enemy's support zone

⁶ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 5–11 Jan 2008, p. 28.

⁷ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessments, 12–18 Jan 2008, p. 22, and 19–25 Jan 2008, p. 19.

⁸ Quote from Storyboard, Opn HARTLEPOOL IV, 1st Bn, 10th Field Arty Rgt, 4 Feb 2008. Storyboard, Narhwan Energy Conservation, 1st Bn, 10th Field Arty Rgt, 4 Feb 2008.



1st Lt. Ivan Eno, from Company B, 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, monitors the radio while his soldiers search for weapons caches southeast of Salman Pak.

west of Salman Pak, the enemy had been able to move laterally to the east side of the Tigris to relatively safe ground south of the 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment's effective reach. From there, the insurgents could plan and execute attacks. Intelligence reported between thirty to forty al-Qaeda guerrillas along with five to ten foreign fighters congregating southeast of Salman Pak.⁹

Those insurgents traveling across the river resulted in turf battles with local Islamic Army guerrillas, as had been the case during MARNE THUNDERBOLT. Analysts noted that the Islamic Army emirs south of Salman Pak "indicated an intent to deny AQI sanctuary in Sayafiyah" and that reports of "active engagements" between the two insurgent groups were welcome news. Having two enemies at each other's throats made the allies' tasks easier.¹⁰

Planners of MARNE GRAND SLAM divided the eastern riverbank into three boxes: Objective Perry in the Fishhook directly south of Salman Pak, Objective Macon just southeast of Salman Pak along the river, and Objective Glennville in the Fishbowl. The region was transited by a handful of north-south roads, the most important of which was Alternate Supply Route Wild, which ran right through Salman Pak. A

⁹ MND-C OPORD 08-003 (MARNE GRAND SLAM), 13 Jan 2008, p. 2.

¹⁰ Ibid.

handful of other smaller roads, such as Routes Croc and Alligator, were regularly used by insurgents to move supplies from Al Lej, a cluster of villages ten kilometers southeast of Salman Pak that had seen almost no coalition presence in more than two years, to Salman Pak, and then on to Baghdad. The Tigris itself was also a smuggling avenue, though months of operations and constant monitoring by helicopters of the 3d Division's Combat Aviation Brigade had caused that route to be dangerous for insurgents. No bridges existed over the river between Jisr Diyala, on the southeast edge of Baghdad, and near As Suwayrah, almost thirty kilometers to the southeast.¹¹

The 3d Brigade's emphasis during MARNE GRAND SLAM was primarily on clearing Objective Perry of insurgents, with a secondary goal of disrupting the enemy's activities in Objectives Macon and Glennville so that his ability to conduct attacks northward to Baghdad would be "severely degraded." To ensure Salman Pak's security, the 3d Brigade would establish Combat Outpost Carver southeast of the city. The base was named for Pvt. Cody Carver, the 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, soldier killed in Salman Pak on 30 October 2007. At just nineteen years old, Carver was the youngest of the ten 1st Battalion soldiers killed over the past year.¹²

Although MARNE GRAND SLAM started on 1 February, 3d Brigade forces had already begun the action a month earlier. During the first week of January, elements of the 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, conducted Operation CARVER RECON, an air assault to survey and assess the location of the new combat base. Although soldiers experienced no action on the ground, as they loaded back onto their helicopters and flew off, they took fire from surrounding palm groves, but no one was injured or equipment damaged.¹³ (See Map 19.)

Then on the twenty-eighth, Marr's battalion launched DURAI'YA SUNRISE, a two-day affair designed to surprise and catch insurgents around Salman Pak. Colonel Marr sent his Company A into the town, using about a hundred and fifty Sons of Iraq to set up checkpoints to the north—a plan modeled after the 3d Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment's Operation TUWAITHA SUNRISE in September 2007. The unit found three IEDs on Route Wild west of town and one to the southeast, and a weapons cache in the city center.¹⁴

Attention also turned to the river itself, which during past offensives had been exploited by insurgents to flee the fighting. This time was no

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 3–4.

¹² Quote from Ibid., pp. 7–8. MND-C Media Release, Dwindling insurgent forces targeted by Coalition Forces with start of Operation MARNE GRAND SLAM, 18 Feb 2008.

¹³ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 5–11 Jan 2008, p. 22.

¹⁴ Storyboard, Opn DURAI'YA SUNRISE, 1st Bn, 15th Inf Rgt, 3d BCT, 3d Inf Div, 28–29 Jan 2008, BUB, 30 Jan 2008.



After receiving a tip, Iraqi National Police operating with the 3d Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment, discover a weapons cache near a checkpoint outside Combat Outpost Cashe.

exception, and increased aerial patrols by the division's aviation brigade soon observed boats making furtive trips south of Salman Pak, especially at night. On 3 February, the helicopter gunships had an especially productive day. Before dawn that morning, an Apache destroyed one boat sneaking along the bank just south of the city, and two hours later spotted eleven boats several kilometers to the southeast, hidden along a short span of the river at the bottom of the Fishbowl. Eight of them were destroyed by the helicopters' guns.¹⁵

All of this was part of MARNE GRAND SLAM's shaping phase, which focused on locating and rooting out the dwindling number of al-Qaeda insurgents in the area. As in the past, south of Salman Pak would be difficult to clear and hold, and, unlike his brothers in arms in the 2d Brigade across the river, Grigsby had no additional forces to fill the void.

Help was coming, however. In late December, General Lynch had asked the visiting Republic of Georgia Chief of Defense, Col. Zaza Gogava, for his thoughts on moving a battalion of the incoming 1st Georgian Brigade from eastern Wasit Province to Wahida near the Tigris "in order to free [the 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment] to conduct combat operations in southern Salman Pak." Lynch gave assurances that "Wahida is

¹⁵ Storyboard, Events 1 & 5, Boat Destruction, Zone 202 & 203, 3d BCT, 3d Inf Div, BUB, 4 Feb 2008.

MND-C OPERATIONS: RELENTLESS PURSUIT

February-June 2008



Objective Area

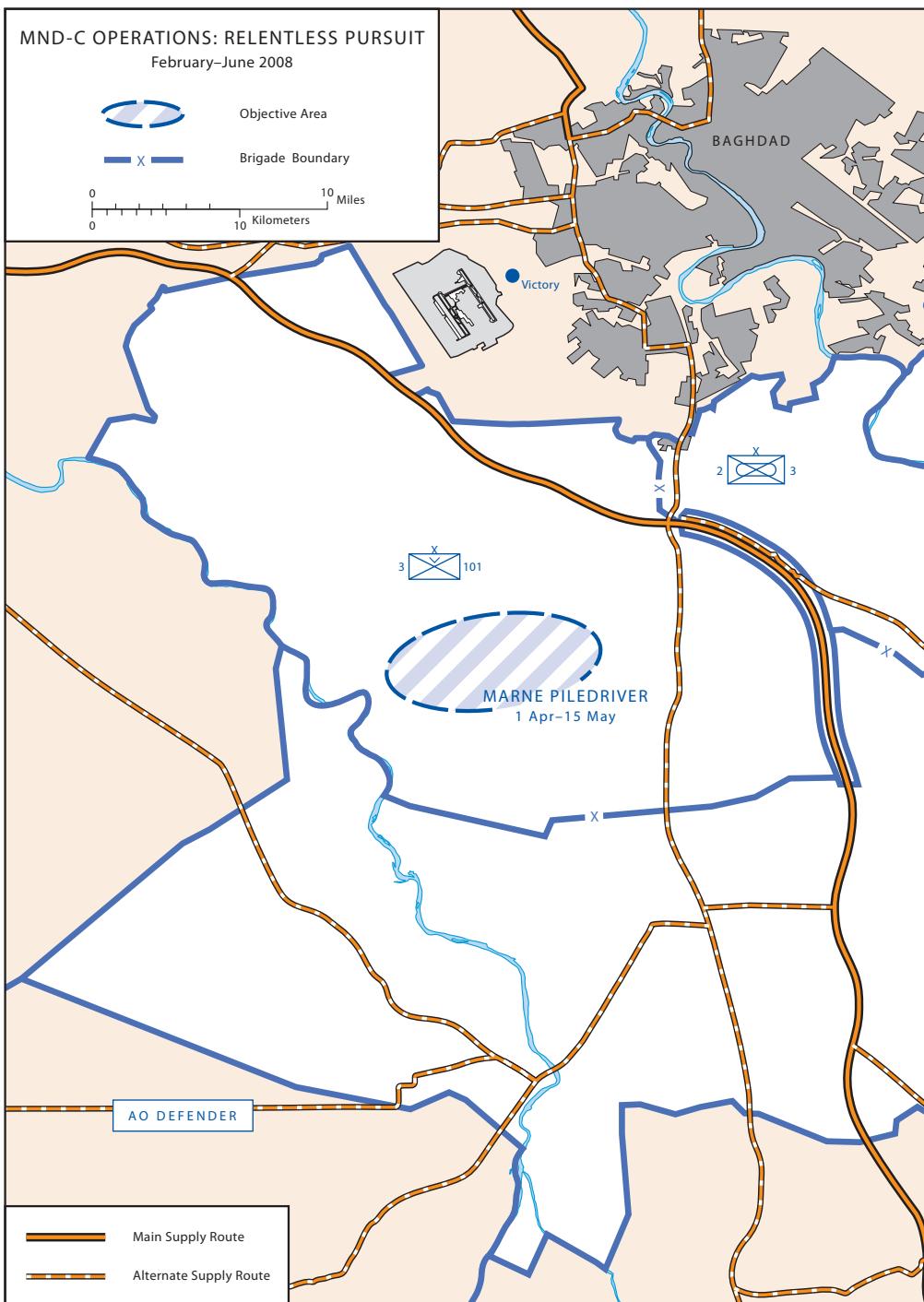


Brigade Boundary

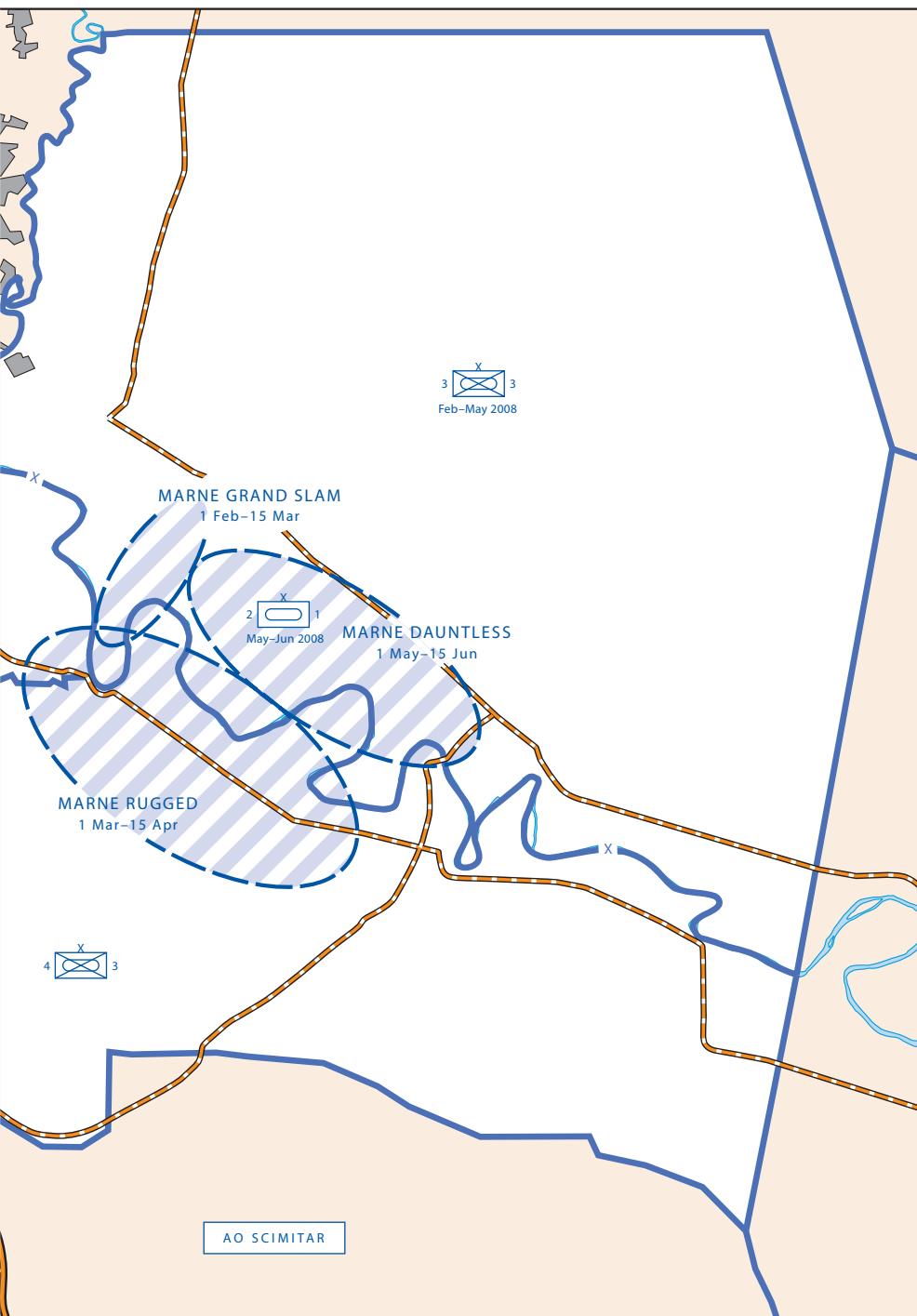
0

10

Kilometers Miles



Map 19



relatively calm," and Colonel Gogava promised to have a decision by the end of January.¹⁶

The answer from Tbilisi was positive, and, when the 1st Georgian Brigade, commanded by Lt. Col. Roin Vacharidze, relieved the 3d Georgian Brigade at Camp Delta on 4 February, it left behind in Kuwait its 13th Battalion. One week later, that unit moved directly to Combat Outpost Cleary, the 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment's easternmost base, where its three hundred and fifty soldiers would take charge of Wahida and an important stretch of Route Detroit, the major road leading north to Baghdad.

General Huggins and Colonel Grigsby flew in for the ceremony, during which Colonel Marr turned over command of the base to Maj. David Sulkhanishvili, commander of the 13th Georgian Battalion. At the end of the short ritual, the delegation cut a cake iced with the flags of Iraq, the United States, and the Republic of Georgia. At least one company of Marr's battalion had occupied Cleary for the past nine months, and, immediately after the transfer ceremony, Company C, commanded by Capt. John Horning, moved to Combat Outpost Cahill ten kilometers to the west and a mere three kilometers from Salman Pak.¹⁷

Iraqi forces in the city were also beefed up. For the past year, elements of the 1st National Police Division had occupied Salman Pak, but in February they were replaced by the 1st Brigade, 9th Iraqi Army Mechanized Division, a unit formed in 2006 as part of the move to modernize the Iraqi armed forces. The 9th Division, normally stationed in At Taji north of Baghdad, sent southward three battalions equipped with new Hungarian T72 tanks to set up bases on the north, southwest, and southeast edges of town. They would play an important role both in security operations and in the subsequent rebuilding.¹⁸

On 15 February, the decisive phase of MARNE GRAND SLAM commenced. The night before, Horning's Company C launched BLORE HEATH IV to clear Objective Perry in the Fishhook. Over the next twenty-four hours, the Americans, with aid from the National Police and local Sons of Iraq, found and disarmed a handful of IEDs and weapons caches. The enemy in the area chose not to fight, and many fled eastward into Objective Macon before heading south along the river. Late on the fifteenth, insurgents were reported in a building, and helicopter gunships

¹⁶ Quote from CG Executive Summary, Georgian Chief of Defense Office Call, 24 Dec 2007. CG Executive Summary, Senior Plans Update, 1 Jan 2008.

¹⁷ CG Executive Summary, MG's Lynch's Visit to Wasit: Georgian TOA, 4 Feb 2008; Storyboard, 13th Georgian Transfer of Authority Ceremony, 3d BCT, 3d Inf Div, BUB, 12 Feb 2008; MND-C Media Release, 13th Georgian Battalion takes command of COP Cleary, 13 Feb 2008.

¹⁸ Briefing Slide, MARNE GRAND SLAM: Salman Pak, Al Lej and Khanassa, 12 Feb 2008.



A soldier from the 13th Georgian Battalion takes cover next to a humvee while providing security during a joint clearing operation with troops from the 8th Iraqi Army Division. The Georgian unit took over Combat Outpost Cleary from Colonel Marr's 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, on 11 February 2008.

were requested. They fired twenty-one rockets and forty 30-mm. cannon rounds, reducing the structure to rubble.¹⁹

At the same time, engineers started erecting Combat Outpost Carver south of the town along the banks of the Tigris, not far from the dividing line between Objectives Perry and Macon. Although construction had only just begun, within a week of the decisive operations phase, Marr's Company B, commanded by Capt. Richard E. Thompson, was already in place and conducting missions eastward into Objective Macon.²⁰

The new base immediately gained some notoriety. On the night of the fifteenth, a Sons of Iraq contingent in Salman Pak, personally led by a local sheikh, captured two al-Qaeda insurgents, marched them to Carver, and turned them over to Company B. One of the captives was identified as Omar Ahmed Hussein, better known as Abu Sara, the commander of al-Qaeda in As Suwayrah Qadaa and number seven on the 3d Brigade's most-wanted list. The insurgents in the region not only experienced fast-dwindling numbers but also suffered a further blow by the loss of such an important figure.²¹

¹⁹ Ibid.; Opn MARNE GRAND SLAM, 0500 15 Feb–0500 16 Feb 2008, BUB, 16 Feb 2008.

²⁰ Storyboard, Opn CARVER OCCUPATION, Task Force 1-15 [1st Bn, 15th Inf Rgt], 12–13 Feb 2008, BUB, 16 Feb 2008; MND-C Media Release, Dwindling insurgent forces targeted by Coalition Forces with start of Operation MARNE GRAND SLAM, 18 Feb 2008.

²¹ Storyboard, Event 18, 2 x Detainees, BCT HVI #7, 0 x KIA, 0 x WIA, Zone 202, 3d BCT, 3d Inf Div, BUB, 18 Feb 2008.

The anchor provided by Combat Outpost Carver allowed Colonel Marr to spend more time in villages immediately south of Salman Pak. Starting on 19 February, elements of Companies A and B began Operation CLEAN SWEEP to remove anti-insurgent roadblocks along the road southeast of Salman Pak to Al Lej, which had, in addition to hampering insurgent movement, nearly halted local traffic northward, sealing off local citizens from Baghdad. The road had been closed in May 2007, after a suicide bomber in a truck packed with explosives had blown himself up at a checkpoint, killing seven Iraqi police and injuring ten others. Almost a year later, the road remained a virtual no-man's-land, but on the twenty-ninth it was reopened at Checkpoint 600 near Al Lej. The Americans also built a pontoon bridge across the Tigris, permitting limited travel across the river.²²

By late February, some of the focus also shifted southward to Objective Glennville, the region at the bottom of the Fishbowl that was beyond the 3d Brigade's ability to secure. On the twenty-first, the 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, launched four hit-and-run missions there, a tempo that endured through the middle of March. Colonel Marr favored using World War I battles to name those offensives: VERDUN and ST. MIHIEL on 24 and 28 February and YPRES and FLANDERS on 5 and 12 March, respectively. The constant pressure kept the enemy away from the population centers, but the territory had no patrol bases, and, while the Iraqi Army maintained elements of the 3d Brigade, 8th Division, in the northeasternmost corner of Objective Glennville, they were mostly confined to Route Horny Toad, the major road leading north from the Tigris to Route Detroit.²³

Republic of Georgia troops also participated in the action, sallying forth from Combat Outpost Cleary to Al Lej where, on 7 and 8 March, they conducted Operation SUKIHUMI, a cordon and search of the village and its environs in conjunction with U.S. troops. Task Force Petro, as the joint effort between the 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, and the 13th Georgian Battalion, was called, brought supplies, food, and luxuries such as toys and candy to an area that had seen few such things in years.²⁴

In the end, MARNE GRAND SLAM proved to be a blend of security and rebuilding operations, with greater emphasis on economic development and governance. During the period 15 February to 15 March, statistics revealed that although 300 patrols were mounted and 185 buildings were searched, no insurgents were killed and only 11 suspects detained.

²² MND-C Media Release, Bringing back Salman Pak, 15 Mar 2008.

²³ Opn MARNE GRAND SLAM, 0500 6 Mar–0500 7 Mar 2008, BUB, 7 Mar 2008; Opn MARNE GRAND SLAM, 0500 10 Mar–0500 11 Mar 2008, BUB, 11 Mar 2008.

²⁴ Sgt. Natalie Rostek, "13th Georgian Army assists Iraqi Army," *Hammer Times* (3d BCT, 3d Inf Div, newspaper), 15 Mar 2008, p. 1; MND-C Media Release, Georgian, U.S. soldiers deliver food, toys to Gurtan Village, 23 Mar 2008.

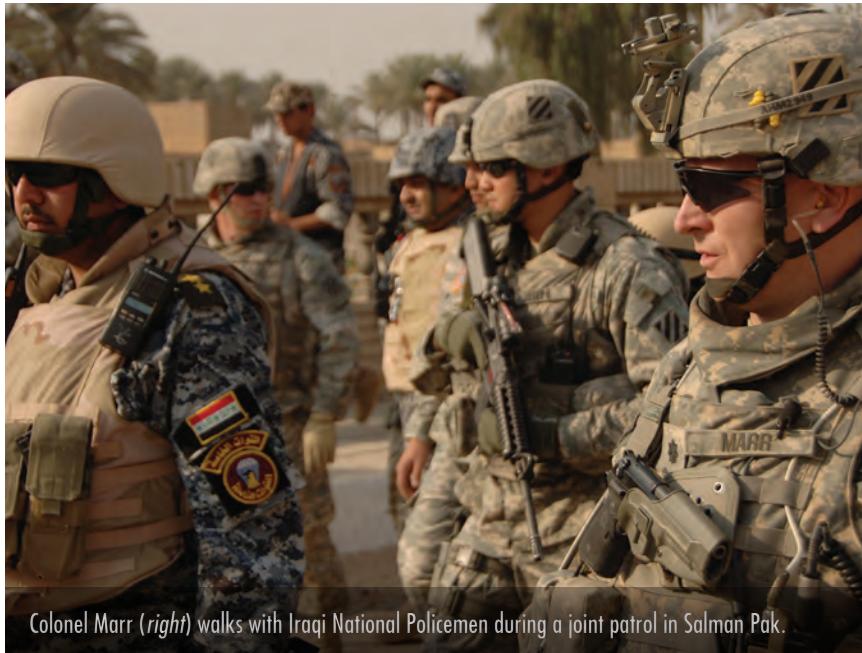


Two soldiers from Company B, 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, patrol the area near Combat Outpost Carver. The new base, constructed in February 2008, allowed 3d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, units easier access to the villages south of Salman Pak.

The usual benchmarks of violence—IEDs and weapons caches—were also scarce, with just 7 of the former and 39 of the latter. And despite the 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment's attention to security, in the end only a single building was demolished and a single vehicle destroyed during the operation. No air strikes against specific insurgent targets were requested and only 36 terrain-denial missions were launched, mostly by helicopter gunships. All this indicated that Salman Pak, the former deadly center of much of the Sunni terrorism on the east side of the Tigris, had settled into something approaching normality.²⁵

The fruits of those efforts were apparent in the other side of the statistics, in money spent and new projects undertaken, which would not have been possible a few months earlier. Since 15 February, the 3d Brigade had allotted more than \$1.5 million in CERP funds, and that was in addition to projects already initiated. On 20 February, the Americans sponsored the opening of the new Salman Pak Governance Center, marking the return of local government to the region in more than three years. During the opening ceremony, Lt. Col. Ryan Kuhn, the 3d Brigade's deputy commanding officer, declared, "This returns the promise to all the good people of Mada'in that the elected officials are not defeated by the insurgency. Now the government can move forward to assist all the citizens. Today the insurgents have lost and the Mada'in

²⁵ Briefing Slide, Opn MARNE GRAND SLAM: 15 Feb–15 Mar 2008, BUB, 15 Mar 2008.



Colonel Marr (right) walks with Iraqi National Policemen during a joint patrol in Salman Pak.

Qada has won.” The local mayor, Mushen Nasser, speaking in Arabic, was translated as saying, “Hopefully we will work hand-in-hand for a better Mada’in Qada and a better Iraq. Everything we achieve is the fruit of our efforts.”²⁶

While the government building was largely symbolic at this point, other projects brought tangible change to peoples’ lives. More than \$1.1 million was spent to refurbish the major hospital and another \$390,000 for the Salman Pak high school. Brigade funds to the tune of \$1.5 million rebuilt the local water purification station and \$187,000 went toward city sanitation. A final display of how life was changing in this formerly war-ravaged region was Operation MARKET GARDEN, a series of micro-grants of a few thousand dollars each paid to local merchants so they could reopen their stores in newly built outdoor mini-malls. Several such markets were opened in towns in the territory, including one in Salman Pak on 11 March.²⁷

The completion of MARNE GRAND SLAM provided solid progress in a perennially dangerous area that was now viewed as safer. General Lynch talked of possibly rekindling the once-popular tourist industry in

²⁶ Ibid. Quotes from MND-C Media Release, Government center opens in Salman Pak, 22 Feb 2008.

²⁷ Briefing Slide, Opn MARNE GRAND SLAM: 15 Feb–15 Mar 2008, BUB, 15 Mar 2008; MND-C Public Affairs Office, Combat Camera photo essay, “Operation ‘MARKET GARDEN’ in Al Ja’ara, Iraq,” 29 Jan 2008.

historic Salman Pak, something that had been out of the question for the past several years. As the 3d Brigade neared the end of its tour in Iraq, the signs were encouraging.²⁸

Winding Down

Meanwhile, as the 3d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, was in the midst of MARNE GRAND SLAM, another phase of General Lynch's "relentless pursuit" was commencing. This time attention shifted back across the Tigris to the region south of Arab Jabour, the final push into the territory that had always been the crux of the division's activity. Lynch was confident that gains there over the last several months had broken the insurgents' hold on the population and brought some peace, but his soldiers had to remain vigilant. Insurgents continued to move back and forth across the river, though increasingly fewer places existed on either side for them to go.

Still, the division's perpetual hopscotch back and forth across the Tigris was going to be difficult to maintain. Task Force Marne's tour was beginning to wind down, and the first troops would be departing soon. The 5th Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment, the 1st Brigade unit on loan from Al Anbar Province, was due to return home, leaving Lynch with a large empty space in a region that was only recently pacified. So to fill the gap, he made two changes. First, he cut the 2d Brigade's total area of responsibility by more than half, shrinking the southern boundary to a line just south of Sayafiyyah and handed off the rest to the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 3d Infantry Division.²⁹

After just six weeks in the country, Colonel James believed that his 4th Brigade soldiers had disrupted al-Qaeda in the Euphrates valley, capturing key leaders and driving insurgents out of towns and safe houses. James reported that his brigade "broke their will to fight and they no longer have freedom of movement." Although the redistribution almost doubled Colonel James' territory, stretching it across the entire breadth of MND-C's area of operations, much of it was already "owned" by Iraqi military units and Sons of Iraq outposts, which did a large part of the security work. The move officially took place on 15 February.³⁰

Lynch's second change was to transfer part of the 1st Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, from its position in the southwestern portion of Colonel Caraccilo's 3d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division's region near the Euphrates to the operational control of the 2d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, on the Tigris. Caraccilo believed that Lt. Col. Brian

²⁸ CG Executive Summary, Expanded Plans Update, 1 Feb 2008.

²⁹ CG Executive Summary, Senior Plans Update, 18 Dec 2007.

³⁰ Quote from CG Executive Summary, 4/3 HBCT Six Week Assessment, 18 Jan 2008. CG Executive Summary, CG's Planning Huddle, 13 Jan 2008.

K. Coppersmith's 1st Squadron, 33d Cavalry Regiment, stationed to the north, could extend its coverage to make up the difference. In addition, Lynch left the 1st Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment's Company D in place—though now under the operational control of the 1st Squadron, 33d Cavalry Regiment—and also added a new unit to the mix. In late March, the 2d Battalion, 69th Armored Regiment, would return to its parent unit, the 3d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, from Baghdad, where since December it had been under the operational control of 4th Brigade, 10th Mountain Division. The shift would take place at the end of March, at which time the armored unit's Company D would go to the Euphrates. The addition of the two units to Colonel Coppersmith's command created what Lynch described as a "cavalry squadron on steroids."³¹

Even so, the change could prove to be risky, especially since the Iraqi forces along the northern stretch of the Euphrates valley were still enhancing their combat readiness. Some expressed concern—including the Iraqis themselves—that local units would suffer without the guidance of the 1st Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, but Lynch assured them that he would not "allow security to move backward." He emphasized killing or capturing insurgent leaders in the area, and by late February "zero" high-value targets were left in the cavalry squadron's zone.³²

In late February, the 5th Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment, prepared to leave Iraq and return home with the 1st Brigade, 3d Infantry Division. Colonel Wheeler and his soldiers had completed a long and useful tour, performing admirably in both Al Anbar Province and, briefly, south of Baghdad. But before it departed, the cavalry unit provided security for erecting a new base, so the incoming 1st Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, under the command of Lt. Col. R. J. Lillibridge, would have one less task to do as the troops adapted to the new terrain. Named Vanderhorn in honor of a 1st Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, soldier killed in an IED attack in January 2006, building began in early March. Patrol Base Vanderhorn was located six kilometers east-south-east of Meade, in Sayafiyah on the west bank of the Tigris, an excellent position from which to dominate insurgent river-crossing points and anchor the 2d Brigade's presence in south Arab Jabour.

Most of the construction was done by the 535th Engineer Company and Companies A and B of the 2d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division's 26th Support Battalion, which, by the spring of 2008, had helped erect eleven bases throughout Arab Jabour and its environs. Although Vanderhorn would not be completed until mid-April, a month prior to that it became home to Company A, 1st Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, as well as

³¹ MND-C Media Release, 2-69th Armor Regiment reintegrates with 3rd HBCT, 31 Mar 2008. Quote from CG Executive Summary, MG Lynch's Visit to PB Gator Swamp, 21 Feb 2008.

³² CG Executive Summary, MG Lynch's Visit to PB Gator Swamp, 21 Feb 2008.

a company of Iraqi Army troops. Company B remained headquartered at Meade.³³

By mid-March, reported Colonel Ferrell, the 1st Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, had “assumed the battlespace” from Wheeler’s cavalry and was launching offensives from Combat Outpost Meade. During its first week, Colonel Lillibridge’s soldiers patrolled around the base, meeting the Iraqi community leaders and pursuing the formation of new contingents of the Sons of Iraq. The transition between units was seamless, and the airborne soldiers soon uncovered five new weapons caches. After two weeks, attacks on the battalion ceased, despite intelligence confirming that about a dozen insurgents were still operating in the area.³⁴

With his 4th Brigade taking control along the Tigris, General Lynch used it to open the next division-level operation, MARNE RUGGED, a historical reference to General Matthew B. Ridgway’s April 1951 drive against Chinese forces just north of the 38th Parallel that included the 3d Infantry Division. As early as January, Lynch had decided that the insurgents’ own movements would dictate the place and pace of the offensive. During a planning meeting with his senior staff, he said that “wherever the enemy is will warrant where MARNE RUGGED occurs.”³⁵

At the time, he was still waiting to learn in what direction the enemy had fled from the previous two operations, but intelligence certainly pointed southward. By late February, the new objective was to be south of the Fishhook and Fishbowl, where Operation MARNE GRAND SLAM was finishing. The few insurgents left in the area would try to flee back over the river, one of the last stretches of territory populated predominantly by Sunnis, but Lynch intended to squeeze the insurgents between his forces on both sides of the river. “Between Operation MARNE THUNDERBOLT, Operation MARNE GRAND SLAM and Operation MARNE RUGGED,” he wrote in an open letter to his troops, “you are giving the enemy nowhere to hide.”³⁶

This latest offensive was the logical culmination of all the division’s battles along the Tigris. For the past eleven months 3d Division units had steadily gained control of both sides of the river, bringing security to a region that had long been an insurgent stronghold. The division had skillfully used limited forces and resources to clear and hold this crucial

³³ MND-C Media Release, New Patrol Base Under Construction Near Sayiyah, 11 Mar 2008; CG Executive Summary, MG Lynch Battlefield Rotation with Jane Arraf [International Crisis Group Consultant/CNN journalist], 19 Mar 2008.

³⁴ Quote from MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 15–21 Mar 2008, pp. 2, 4. MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 22–28 Mar 2008, p. 3.

³⁵ CG Executive Summary, M6’s Visit to PB Copper (B/2-502 Inf), 21 Jan 2008. Quote from CG Executive Summary, CG’s Planning Huddle, 20 Jan 2008.

³⁶ “Marne 6 sends: Eliminating extremists, building capacity,” *Marne Focus*, 13 Mar 2008, p. 2.

territory, without which it would have been impossible to accomplish the overall goal of halting insurgent movement into and out of Baghdad.

The plans for MARNE RUGGED focused on the nearly thirty-kilometer portion of the river meandering between the tip of the Fishhook and the far eastern side of the Fishbowl. There were no major towns, though As Suwayrah lay just beyond the southeastern edge of the operational area. Seven months earlier, during MARNE HUSKY, As Suwayrah was a frequent target of air assaults because it was a headquarters for al-Qaeda. That campaign had been about disrupting the insurgents because it was too far outside the division's ability to maintain a permanent presence. In March 2008, after many months of counterinsurgency successes along the Tigris, As Suwayrah had become just another sleepy farm town.³⁷

In order to keep it that way, a major objective of MARNE RUGGED was to establish a base nearby, named Combat Outpost Summers, after S. Sgt. Vincent E. Summers, a soldier with the 2d Battalion, 69th Armor Regiment, killed in Ar Ramadi in October 2005. Midway through the earliest phase of MARNE RUGGED, on 1 March, construction commenced on the base, which was situated about four kilometers below the Fishbowl in the ruins of the Shayka Mazhar Iraqi Air Base. The air base had been destroyed by U.S. Air Force F-117A Nighthawk stealth fighter planes during the Persian Gulf War on 14 February 1991, a raid that came to be called the Valentine's Day Massacre. The old bunkers and buildings were a prime setting for the new outpost.³⁸

Building a base was heavy work for engineers, a crucial but plodding job that rarely garnered much attention. This time, however, construction began with a dramatic air show. On 16 March, the 4th Brigade's 703d Support Battalion was on the ground near the new base awaiting Operation Togo, an airdrop of supplies by an Air Force C-17 Globemaster cargo jet. The plane arrived overhead at 3,000 feet and parachuted thirty-six pallets of building material. Nearby Bedouin goat herders watched with open amazement as the huge loads drifted down from the sky. Over the next few days, Army helicopters continued the aerial supply effort, ferrying in an additional four tons of heavy equipment sling-loaded underneath several Chinooks. All the aerial logistics were not crucial in erecting the base, however. As one officer with the 703d Support Battalion pointed out, "We did the air drop because we

³⁷ MND-C OPORD 08-005 (MARNE RUGGED), 18 Feb 2008, pp. 7-9.

³⁸ Ibid.; Rpt, Nighthawks Over Iraq: A Chronology of the F-117A Stealth Fighter in Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM, Special Study 37FW/HO-91-1, Office of History, Headquarters, 37th Fighter Wing, Twelfth Air Force, Tactical Air Command, 9 Jan 1992, p. 27.



A CH-47 Chinook helicopter resupplies Combat Outpost Summers, a new base constructed on the west side of the Tigris to anchor the 4th Brigade, 3d Infantry Division's Operation Marne Rugged.

could, not because we had to. The air assets were available, and there's plenty of space—it's a good experience for the logistics personnel.”³⁹

The connection between Combat Outpost Summers and the 2d Battalion, 69th Armored Regiment, which had been stripped from the 3d Division's order of battle as it arrived in Iraq and was sent to Baghdad, was no coincidence. Although the armor unit belonged to Colonel Grigsby's 3d Brigade, upon leaving MND-B to return to the 3d Division, most of it went to the 4th Brigade to lend extra combat power to Colonel James' stretched troops as they began the new offensive. The body of units committed to MARNE RUGGED was known as Task Force 1-76, a meshing of the 4th Brigade's 1st Battalion, 76th Field Artillery Regiment; elements of the 2d Battalion, 502d Infantry Regiment—a 2d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, unit placed under Colonel James' operational control—and elements of the 2d Battalion, 69th Armored Regiment. In early February, General Lynch had decided to locate the armor's Company A, commanded by Capt. James Browning, at the new Combat Outpost Summers.⁴⁰

The force was formidable, but this time the Americans would play a secondary role, keeping their troops along the Tigris while the 3d

³⁹ Quote from MND-C Media Release, PB Summers takes shape, 17 Mar 2008. MND-C Media Release, Army, Air Force collaborates for new combat outpost, 28 Mar 2008.

⁴⁰ CG Executive Summary, MG Lynch's Visit to JSS [Joint Security Station] 18/MARNE RUGGED Planning Discussion, 7 Feb 2008.

Brigade, 8th Iraqi Army Division, took the lead. The commander, Col. Ali Abdul Hussein, placed his units in three bases enclosing the MARNE RUGGED region in an elongated triangle. In the southeast, near the town of As Suwayrah, Hussein's headquarters and his 2d Battalion operated from Camp Zulu, while at the southern tip of the Fishhook, the 1st and 3d Battalions used Patrol Base Betoolah to anchor the northwest corner. About five kilometers to the south, not far from the northwest side of the old Shayka Mazhar Iraqi Air Base, was Patrol Base Sheejan, the home of Colonel Hussein's 4th Battalion. Starting in early February, the Iraqis and Military Transition Team 0833, the U.S. advisory unit assigned to the 3d Brigade, stepped up offensives south of the Tigris.⁴¹

By 15 March, the conditions were set for MARNE RUGGED and the operation commenced in earnest. Task Force 1-76, commanded by Lt. Col. Dane A. Barksdale, was in place, with Company A, 2d Battalion, 69th Armored Regiment, at Combat Outpost Summers (colocated with a battalion of Iraqi National Police), and Company B, 2d Battalion, 502d Infantry Regiment, just southwest of the Fishhook. The 4th Brigade had divided the area of operations along the river into five objectives: Athens below the Fishhook, Claxton in the oxbow between the Fishhook and the Fishbowl, Buford and Dalton along the length of the Fishbowl, and Auburn, wedged between the west side of Athens and Route Tampa.⁴²

During the first four days of the campaign, both U.S. and Iraqi forces combined security sweeps with rebuilding and economic development. Company B, 2d Battalion, 502d Infantry Regiment, worked closely with a company from the 3d Battalion, 3d Brigade, 8th Iraqi Army Division, launching Operation RENEGADE RUGGED, just southwest of the Fishhook, and also conducted several reconnaissance patrols with other Iraqi units. The paratroopers also assisted representatives from the Iraqi Ministry of Electricity repair power lines and Ministry of Education officials start surveying for new schools. The tankers from 2d Battalion, 69th Armored Regiment, consolidated their defensive positions at Combat Outpost Summers and undertook Operation ABLE RUGGED south of the Fishbowl and began planning a water treatment plant in Objective Buford.⁴³

There was very little fighting and only a handful of IEDs. Soldiers uncovered some roadside bombs near the tip of the Fishhook during the opening days of the campaign, but none did any damage. They also found a handful of small weapons caches. As expected, the few insurgents lurking south of the Fishbowl fled southward, and, during the first week in April, Special Forces teams and Iraqi forces picked up three insurgents

⁴¹ Briefing Slide, Opn MARNE RUGGED: Setting the Conditions, BUB, 1, 5, 11 Feb 2008.

⁴² Briefing Slide, Opn MARNE RUGGED: 19 Mar 2008, BUB, 20 Mar 2008.

⁴³ Ibid.

on the high-value-target list. The MNC-I mandate to transition from lethal to nonlethal operations as part of PHANTOM PHOENIX was coming to fruition.⁴⁴

Baghdad Interlude

As combat wound down throughout MND-C and the emphasis changed to more passive rebuilding projects, violence broke out anew elsewhere in the country. The Mahdi Army, always restless despite a self-imposed cease-fire, continued to pose a threat to the Iraqi government's stability, and the uneasy peace evaporated during MARNE RUGGED. In the past, Prime Minister Maliki had given Sadr the benefit of the doubt—the radical cleric and his Mahdi Army were, after all, a powerful Shi'ite force that could be wielded against intransigent Sunnis—but by the spring of 2008 he seemed more of an impediment to progress.

The uprising affected most of Iraq's Shi'ite regions, but Maliki's most immediate concern was the southern city of Al Basrah, a long-time stronghold of Shi'ite insurgent power and a showcase for the kind of Islamic fundamentalism Iraqis could expect from religious zealots. Shi'ite gangs had imposed a strict regime of oppression, such as demanding that women completely cover themselves and forbidding everything from music and dance to movies. This approach was reminiscent of the Taliban in Afghanistan. On 24 March, Maliki launched Operation SAWLAT AL-FURSAN—in English, Charge of the Knights—against the Mahdi Army there.⁴⁵

Maliki's offensive faltered, however, and, by early April, the Mahdi Army in Al Basrah was still holding its own against Iraqi forces. The media emphasized the failure of Iraqi military units, particularly some that fled the fighting, leaving their U.S. allies in a bind. It took more than a month for the government forces, now backed by coalition advisers and intelligence, to stiffen their resolve and begin shutting down Mahdi Army strongholds in the city, restoring some order to Al Basrah.⁴⁶

In MND-C, the Shi'ite uprisings hit most of the major cities, though not as hard as Al Basrah. In Karbala and An Najaf, both cities largely without a U.S. military presence, some were concerned that violence might become a problem, but General Cardon, the 3d Division's point

⁴⁴ Briefing Slides, MARNE RUGGED Collection Update, BUB, 13 Mar 2008; Eroding Resources and Denying Sanctuary, BUB, 7 Apr 2008; and Eroding Resources and Denying Sanctuary, BUB, 14 Apr 2008.

⁴⁵ Stories of Shi'ite fundamentalism abounded. For example, see "CBS News journalist, Iraqi translator abducted in Basra," *Los Angeles Times*, 12 Feb 2008; Kim Gamel, "Militias gone from Basra, but fear, apprehension remain," *USA Today*, 12 Jun 2008.

⁴⁶ See Michael R. Gordon, "Iraqi Army Unit Flees Post, Despite American's Plea," *New York Times*, 16 Apr 2008; "Maliki's Knights Fail to Shine," *Economist*, 3 Apr 2008; MNC-I Media Release, Operation CHARGE OF KNIGHTS continues progress in Basrah, 14 Apr 2008.

man for relations with the Iraqis, remained in constant contact with provincial governors. All assured him that Iraqi government forces could overcome any attack by Mahdi Army insurgents, and they were true to their word. Although unrest simmered in those cities, it never flared into violence.

In Wasit Province, however, the city of Al Kut proved more of a problem. Shi'ite militias, always strong there, rose up in open defiance of the government, and Cardon flew to Al Kut to help head off trouble. In concert with Maj. Gen. Ali Salih Farhoud Oothman, the commander of the 8th Iraqi Army Division, the allies planned to clear the Mahdi Army from Al Kut, with Iraqi troops spearheading the effort supported by coalition forces. This aggressive response quelled the Shi'ite threat, and Cardon later noted that, with the failure of the Shi'ite uprising in Al Kut in the spring of 2008, the Mahdi Army "ceased to be a significant force for the remainder of the tour."⁴⁷

Unrest also spread to Sadr City in Baghdad, which exploded into violence. In addition to their usual attacks against Sunni neighborhoods, the Shi'ite extremists launched rockets and mortar rounds into the nearby Green Zone that housed the U.S. Embassy. Previously reluctant to allow U.S. forces to chase insurgents into their lairs in the sprawling enclave of more than 2.5 million Shi'ites, Maliki finally relented, and the security forces reacted.

On 26 March, Iraqi military units—in particular the 11th Iraqi Army Division—backed by elements of the U.S. 25th Division's 1st Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment; the 2d Cavalry Regiment; and the 3d Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, began clearing operations in Sadr City. Fighting was fierce, with insurgents firing machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades from rooftops above the narrow streets, but the U.S. and Iraqi troops advanced into the crumbling neighborhoods along every major roadway, finally penetrating the defenses and setting up their own fortified positions and walling off particularly violent areas with concrete barriers. By the end of April, the dead in Sadr City would number almost a thousand, with another twenty-six hundred wounded.⁴⁸

Despite the 3d Division's own Shi'ite hot spots, it was also sent to assist in Baghdad. Like General Lynch, the commander of MND-B and the 1st Cavalry Division, General Fil, never had enough troops to do everything, and the renewed fighting in Sadr City would only take forces away from other crucial missions in Baghdad. The two division commanders spoke of the manpower problem, and Lynch felt he could spare

⁴⁷ Ltr, Brig Gen Edward C. Cardon to Richard W. Stewart, Chief Historian, CMH, 16 Jan 2010.

⁴⁸ MNC-I Media Release, Coalition forces return fire after complex attack in Sadr City (Baghdad), 12 Apr 2008; Michael R. Gordon, "Fight for Sadr City a Proving Ground for Iraqi Military," *New York Times*, 11 Apr 2008.

some units from the 2d Brigade. At MNC-I, General Austin agreed that the move made sense, and on the evening of 25 March an order came down the chain of command tasking Colonel Adgie's 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, with forming an armor company to augment the Strykers of the 1st Squadron, 2d Cavalry Regiment. The unit was to be situated in Sadr City within twenty-four hours.⁴⁹

Adgie decided to build the task force around his Company D, commanded by a veteran battle leader, Capt. Joseph R. Inge. Its two tank platoons and the headquarters element, plus a mechanized infantry platoon from Company A, worked through the night preparing to shift into Objective War Eagle, as the Stryker unit's area of operations was called. Captain Inge's soldiers would face different battle conditions. "The densely populated, urban, three-dimensional environment in Sadr City was a far cry from the agrarian farmlands, irrigation canals, and palm trees of Arab Jabour," wrote Colonel Adgie. "The deep buried threat and associated [enemy tactics] used on the canal roads were significantly different from the complex sniper and EFP hazards" his men were about to encounter.⁵⁰

On the afternoon of 27 March, the soldiers of Company D mounted up and prepared to leave Forward Operating Base Falcon. Many of them were nervous at the prospect of confronting a new enemy on unfamiliar ground and sought solace from the unit chaplain. He reassured them with words from the Old Testament, Psalm 140, which implored God to "keep me safe from violent people . . . who plot my downfall. The proud have set a trap for me; they have laid snares, and along the path they have set traps to catch me." This ancient prayer, uttered by the Israelite King David, resonated with many of the soldiers.⁵¹

At 1600, the armor company, consisting of 8 M1A1 Abrams tanks, 5 M1A2 Bradley fighting vehicles, 4 MRAPs, 1 M7 Bradley fire support team vehicle (BFIST—an artillery forward-observer vehicle and laser designator designed to improve first-round accuracy in built-up areas), 1 tank recovery vehicle, and 2 fuel tankers, left Falcon. The route to Sadr City—only about five kilometers to the northeast—was dangerous. As the column made its slow, deliberate way, the terrain quickly changed from dusty country roads to wide paved boulevards flanked by tightly spaced multistoried buildings. Insurgents could be hiding anywhere, ready to attack, and there was nothing to do but continue onward.

Captain Inge's destination in Baghdad was Combat Outpost Old Mod, named for the old Ministry of Defense building that the base now

⁴⁹ Ms, Lt Col Kenneth Adgie, CO, 1st Bn, 30th Inf Rgt, *The Two Sides of the COIN: Transitions in Full Spectrum Operations During a Counterinsurgency Fight*, n.d., pp. 3–4.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁵¹ Moni Basu, "Chaplain Turner's War: A dangerous mission, a devastating night—and God's foot soldier marches on," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 29 Jun 2008.

partially occupied. Old Mod straddled one of Baghdad's most notorious sectarian fault lines: to the east Shi'ite Sadr City and to the north Adhamiya, the mostly Sunni neighborhood where insurgents frequently hid out among the population. On most nights, the soldiers on base heard gunfire from both neighborhoods.⁵²

It looked as if the trip would be uneventful, but, as Colonel Adgie later pointed out, "friction on the battlefield and the fog of war" intervened at the last moment. The armor company took a wrong turn in Baghdad and ended up in enemy territory—ironically on a road nicknamed "Predators" by MND-B planners—triggering a ferocious ambush. One of the Abrams tanks struck a buried IED and was disabled. Insurgents fired rocket-propelled grenades from nearby rooftops at the scurrying Americans, while tracers from concealed gunmen criss-crossed the darkened streets. Miraculously, no soldiers were killed, and they managed to make an orderly withdrawal to another U.S. position, Forward Operating Base Loyalty, to spend the night. The next morning, Company D returned to the ambush sight, recovered the badly damaged tank, and proceeded to Old Mod later in the day.⁵³

The Americans had no time to rest after the ordeal. The Stryker units were already in a fight to halt the enemy rocket attacks that poured daily from the insurgent strongholds in Sadr City, and, although they had secured many of the roads running in and out of the neighborhoods, they still needed to control the key terrain overlooking known launching sites. Over the past few days, Company C, 1st Battalion, 27th Infantry Regiment—from the 25th Infantry Division's 2d Brigade—had opened several platoon-size patrol bases in the midst of the seething Shi'ite slum, and the region experienced an immediate drop in the number of indirect-fire attacks. The addition of Inge's soldiers—and his armored vehicles—to the mix permitted more muscle and flexibility, and they joined two troops from the Stryker squadron in a push into the southern sector of Sadr City called Objective 608, where they planned to establish a new combat outpost.

During the afternoon of 29 March, Company D joined Troop B, 1st Squadron, 2d Cavalry Regiment, and spearheaded the way to the objective, encountering constant IEDs and gunfire. The explosives were part of the insurgents' defensive network and were relatively small, and Captain Inge's tanks were impervious to the blasts, though one of his Bradleys was disabled by an explosion during the advance. As they traveled along the street, armored turrets swiveled back and forth, firing

⁵² 1st Squadron "War Eagles," 2d Stryker Cavalry Regiment, Deployment History, Operation IRAQI FREEDOM 07–09, August 2007–October 2008, n.d., p. 50; MND-B Media Release, Engineers build to protect, 23 Feb 2008.

⁵³ 1st Sqdn, 2d Cav Rgt, Deployment History, pp. 50–55. Quote from Adgie, *The Two Sides of the COIN*, pp. 3–4.

.50-caliber machine guns at enemy spotters along the rooftops and main gun rounds into buildings occupied by insurgent rocket-propelled-grenade teams. Despite the resistance, the outcome was never in doubt, and the two units created their new outposts by nightfall.

The new U.S. strongpoint all but ended the insurgents' ability to employ rockets and mortars from Objective 608, but the gunmen remained, and they persisted in reseeding the IEDs along major roadways, often utilizing ingenious methods to place the explosives out of view of watchful eyes. In some cases, they hid in alleyways to keep from being seen and used long poles to push the bombs into the road, then ran detonation wires over rooftops and into buildings where the triggerman was concealed, well out of sight.

Even with the new foothold, the street fighting continued. Inge consolidated his force, strengthening his position and bringing more supplies into the perimeter throughout the night. During one foray, a Bradley from 2d Platoon, Company A—his mechanized infantry unit—struck a deadly explosive-formed projectile mine, which blew off slabs of armor and left the vehicle ablaze. Other soldiers saw the blast and described it as a “catastrophic kill,” which no one was likely to survive.⁵⁴

Company D soldiers quickly assaulted the ambush site with two tanks and two MRAPs. They reported heavy fire coming from nearby buildings and received permission to engage using the tanks’ big guns. At least one of the M1A1 Abrams fired its heavy 120-mm. rounds into the building, ripping apart concrete and silencing the opposition from that quarter. But gunshots rang out from other buildings, and, while the vehicles laid down suppressing fire around the ambush site, soldiers raced to the stricken Bradley to search for survivors. Miraculously, all nine crew and infantrymen were alive, though most were wounded, including one with severe burns. They were evacuated to Combat Outpost Callahan, and then on to the hospital at Balad Air Base north of Baghdad.⁵⁵

The situation stabilized the next day, allowing the U.S. forces to solidify their positions in Objective 608. The Stryker units drove farther north into Sadr City, seeking out the indirect-fire sites still employed by the Mahdi Army and clearing the IEDs along the way. All was much quieter now, though the insurgents on occasion fought back. Captain Inge’s company spent much of its time escorting engineer units on their “route sanitation” runs against emplaced roadside bombs, losing another Bradley before the operation concluded.

On 10 April, after almost two weeks in Sadr City, Company D ended its deployment to MND-B and went back to its familiar hunting ground

⁵⁴ 1st Sqdn, 2d Cav Rgt, Deployment History, p. 53.

⁵⁵ Storyboard, MND-C Sigact 2, 10 x MND-C Soldiers (1-30 Inf) WIA, BUB, 30 Mar 2008.

south of Baghdad. The soldiers took with them an experience they would not soon forget. Two days later, General Lynch flew into the unit's home base at Patrol Base Red, south of Forward Operating Base Falcon, to visit the soldiers, most of whom were still recovering from the mission, and to hand out awards and heartfelt congratulations for a job well done. Lynch was impressed with Captain Inge and his men, and he would often proudly relate the story of how they were "conducting COIN operations one day and kinetic operations in Sadr City the next day"—a combination that he felt demonstrated the importance of training for both missions.⁵⁶

Colonel Adgie, who was on stateside leave during the Sadr City operation, declared that Company D "proved that non-lethal operations in Al Buaytha did not dull their lethal edge." However, the cost had been high. In addition to nine wounded soldiers, the unit lost one Abrams tank and two Bradley fighting vehicles. On the other hand, in support of the operation, Company D expended 23 120-mm. tank rounds, 800 25-mm. rounds, 10,000 7.62-mm. and 5,000 .50-caliber machine-gun rounds, and more than 1,000 5.56-mm. rifle and light machine-gun rounds. This dwarfed the amount of firepower ordinarily used by Task Force Marne units in any given two-week period, underscoring the vast differences between urban and rural counterinsurgency.⁵⁷

This was not the end of the 3d Division's support of operations in Sadr City, however, and as the battle dragged into April, Lynch's staff monitored the situation. Intelligence noted that some ten thousand "mainstream JAM members" were in Sadr City, with about five hundred to six hundred so-called Special Group members—insurgents who received training and funding from the Iranian Revolutionary Guards and Qods Force. According to one briefer, these Special Groups obeyed Mahdi Army leaders in southern Iraq "when it suits them" but were quick to follow orders from Iran. These fighters were at the center of the Sadr City storm.⁵⁸

General Lynch again expressed his commitment to aiding in Baghdad in any way possible. "It does not matter how safe the rest of Iraq is," he told his key officers, "the constant attacks on the International Zone from Sadr City have strategic impacts on the perception of success of overall operations in Iraq." All that month elements of his aviation brigade were on call for missions over Sadr City, and, by late April, the 3d Division's aviation units were conducting about nine missions per day there. On the morning of 24 April, for example, Apache helicopters from the 1st Battalion, 3d Aviation Regiment, were requested to suppress fire from a

⁵⁶ CG Executive Summary, MG Lynch's 2/3 Battlefield Circulation, 12 Apr 2008. Quote from CG Executive Summary, LTG Metz [Lt Gen Thomas F. Metz, Dep Cdr, TRADOC] Dinner, 9 May 2008.

⁵⁷ Adgie, *The Two Sides of the COIN*, p. 4.

⁵⁸ CG Executive Summary, ACE Update, 8 May 2008.

house in the northeast corner of Sadr City, which they did with a Hellfire missile. Just after midnight, another gunship team caught four insurgents planting IEDs in the city center and killed them all. Another aviation brigade unit, the 4th Battalion, 3d Aviation Regiment, also became involved in the fighting in Sadr City that month, lending several teams of Black Hawk helicopters, especially for night missions.⁵⁹

While Lynch was prepared to contribute firepower to the fighting in Baghdad, he was unwilling to allow the commitment to affect the coming redeployment of his troops. While the bulk of the 3d Division would redeploy in early June, the 2d Brigade had an additional month in Iraq, and the general worried that ongoing unrest in Sadr City might again require the use of Colonel Ferrell's forces. According to one memo, Lynch wanted assurances—in the form of an order published at MNC-I headquarters—that “Corps does not keep [2d Brigade] units longer to assist with Sadr City operations” and potentially interfere with their redeployment.⁶⁰

But the battle in Baghdad's Shi'ite areas slackened over the next month, even if the insurgents did not completely give up. U.S. forces continued to take the brunt of the action, again calling into question Iraqi military capabilities, and every effort was made to push the Iraqis to the forefront. By mid-May, they were playing a more prominent role, but the biggest break came on the tenth when Moqtada al-Sadr ordered his militia to stop fighting. The respite gave the Maliki government some breathing room, and ten days later the Iraqi Army began a major thrust into the northernmost sector of Sadr City, the center of the Mahdi Army's power base. Six Iraqi battalions—about three thousand men—advanced along all major roads, this time with no help from U.S. forces. There was little opposition; the Mahdi Army leaders had fled and the guerrillas melted into the population, content to permit government forces to take control. After two months of combat, most residents were relieved to have it over. “It is good for our security,” one man remarked to a reporter. “The last few months have been very bad because of the bullets and the rockets everywhere. It wasn't easy for us.”⁶¹

Back to Capitol Hill

While the fighting in Sadr City and Al Basrah still simmered, General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker returned to Washington for a reprise of their testimony before Congress seven months earlier. The

⁵⁹ Quote from CG Executive Summary, 1-3 Aviation O&I [Operations & Intelligence] Brief, 29 Apr 2008. Storyboard, 3 CAB Support to Sadr City: 24–25 Apr 2008, BUB, 25 Apr 2008.

⁶⁰ CG Executive Summary, CG's Planning Huddle, 4 May 2008.

⁶¹ Michael R. Gordon and Stephen Farrell, “Iraqi Troops Take Charge of Sadr City in Swift Push,” *New York Times*, 21 May 2008.

surge was now a little more than a year along, and Petraeus was in a much better position to address the issues of success or failure. Even so, the fanfare and speculation that had greeted the testimony seven months earlier was absent this time. Media coverage was not so intense, even if Congress remained eager to highlight the vast gulf between the admittedly moderate gains made during the surge up to this point and the failures attributed to earlier strategies.

On 8 April, the general and the ambassador spoke before the Senate Armed Services and Foreign Relations Committees. (They gave essentially the same testimony to the House Armed Services Committee the following day.) Both men asserted there had been “significant but uneven security progress in Iraq” over the past fifteen months and warned against a hasty or premature withdrawal. Ambassador Crocker raised the specter of the “Lebanonization” of Iraq, a comparison to the slow disintegration of Lebanon along sectarian lines during the 1970s and 1980s. Crocker predicted that it was in Iran’s interests to see Iraq divided and weakened this way, and, if U.S. forces left quickly, “Iran would just push that much harder.”⁶²

General Petraeus also tamped down expectations for the future of the Iraqi state, arguing that simple stability was the goal. “We’re not after the Holy Grail in Iraq,” he told the House Committee on Foreign Relations. “We’re not after Jeffersonian democracy. We’re after conditions that would allow our soldiers to disengage.”⁶³

During the previous September’s testimony, Petraeus had shown a dramatic turnaround on the ground in Iraq—even if it was tenuous—and the improvement had helped thwart congressional attempts to force an immediate withdrawal. This time the gains were much more modest, and Petraeus essentially argued that success could only be built upon slowly, though it could be accomplished “while continuing the ongoing drawdown of the surge forces.” However, when pressed on how long all that would take, the general refused to be pinned down, stating only that conditions on the ground were the primary determiner of any drawdown. During a post-testimony meeting with *Washington Post* reporter Thomas E. Ricks, Petraeus admitted that “the best case scenario is we’re going to be there a minimum of another three or four years.” Other than that, he made no concessions.⁶⁴

To Congress, this argument was not persuasive. Democratic Senator Evan Bayh of Indiana decried the general’s open-ended plan and asked “is

⁶² First quote from Gen Petraeus testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee, 8 Apr 2008, p. 2. Bay Fang, “U.S. sees Iran’s Beirut strategy in Iraq gambit,” *Chicago Tribune*, 14 Apr 2008. Second and third quotes from Peter Spiegel, “For U.S., Another Top Threat Emerges in Iraq,” *Los Angeles Times*, 10 Apr 2008.

⁶³ Gen Petraeus testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee, 8 Apr 2008, p. 2.

⁶⁴ First quote from Ibid. Second quote from Ricks, *The Gamble*, p. 291.

it not possible to at least offer some rough estimate about when we will be able to . . . withdraw more troops from Iraq?" To that Petraeus replied, "It is just flat not responsible to try to put down a stake in the ground and say, 'This is when it will be' or 'That is when it will be.'" The general refused to be forced from that position.⁶⁵

The looming U.S. presidential election was also a consideration. Three senators in contention for both parties' nominations were in prominent attendance at the hearings. Republican Senator John McCain of Arizona, a vocal supporter of the war, declared that, thanks to the surge, "We're no longer staring into the abyss of defeat, and we can now look ahead to the genuine prospect of success." On the other hand, Democratic Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton of New York observed that progress had been "sluggish" and warned that "it might well be irresponsible to continue the policy that has not produced the results that have been promised time and time again." Democratic Senator Barack Obama of Illinois largely agreed with his party rival and persisted in describing the entire war as a "massive strategic blunder."⁶⁶

Upon returning to Iraq, Petraeus shared some of his impressions of the testimony at a commanders conference held on 21 April. As usual, the general was diplomatic. "Politics aside," he told his commanders, "Congress understands the progress being made in Iraq—this creates a positive atmosphere" for the upcoming vote on the supplemental funds that would need to be approved in June. Petraeus also stuck to his refusal to concede a troop drawdown timetable, and he informed his generals that there would be a 45-day pause in all withdrawals, followed by "further analysis for conditions-based troop withdrawals" beginning in January 2009. Regardless of any time that might have been bought by the hearings, the MNF-I commander cautioned that "all actions in Iraq will be scrutinized between now and the November U.S. elections."⁶⁷

Piledriver

While most 3d Division units were focusing on the Tigris River, the western portion of MND-C also showed improvement. The 3d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, in particular, had made the most of its time along the Euphrates to bolster gains, building on the work of its predecessor, the 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division. By April 2008, the east bank of the Euphrates had the densest concentration of "reconciled" Sunni tribal leaders and Sons of Iraq checkpoints, which had

⁶⁵ Yochi J. Dreazen, "Petraeus's Iraq Proposal Is Likely to Toil Campaign," *Washington Post*, 9 Apr 2008.

⁶⁶ Steven Lee Myers and Thom Shanker, "Petraeus Urges Halt in Weighing New Cut in Force," *New York Times*, 9 Apr 2008.

⁶⁷ CG Executive Summary, MND-C Commanders Conference, 21 Apr 2008.

almost choked off the enemy's ability to infiltrate into Baghdad along the roadways bordering the river. Since February, Colonel Caraccilo, the 3d Brigade commander, had been reporting "relative calm" throughout his territory, especially the Sunni region. In late March, however, the Shi'ite area around Al Mahmudiyah, the major town in the brigade's southeastern sector, was racked by violence following the Iraqi government's crackdown on Sadr's militias in Baghdad and Sadr City. During several tumultuous days at the end of March, the city experienced seventeen attacks, resulting in the death of several Iraqi soldiers and policemen.⁶⁸

Colonel Caracillo was not overly concerned by the fighting. Although several key Iraqi officers were wounded in attacks, the leaders "continued to stay ahead of enemy activities," and by the first of April had brought the situation under control.⁶⁹

One region in the 3d Brigade's area of responsibility remained a thorn—the southwest corner, along the river south and east of Patrol Base Shanghai, one of the first armed camps erected by the 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, upon its arrival in October 2006. Just south of there, the 3d Division had targeted insurgents during Operation MARNE ROUNDUP five months earlier. Patrol Base Kelsey had been established at the time by the 4th Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, but the terrain between Kelsey and Patrol Base Shanghai some eighteen kilometers to the north endured as an insurgent haven, an extension of the rat lines running from Al Anbar Province before melting into the civilian traffic on the main roads heading north to Baghdad.

This salient of al-Qaeda influence became Task Force Marne's main target in April. Division planners dubbed it Operation MARNE PILEDRIVER, after a June 1951 Korean War battle in which the 3d Division chased Chinese forces northward from the 38th Parallel. PILEDRIVER proved to be one of the last major campaigns of the Korean War, which the following month settled into a stalemate that would last until the armistice of 27 July 1953. General Lynch's PILEDRIVER, too, would be one of Task Force Marne's last offensives.

The 3d Brigade had not neglected its southwestern region. Throughout February and March, Colonel Caraccilo had located a large part of his offensive in that area in order to "disrupt suspected AQI activity, continue cache and hide sites clearance, and to positively engage the local populaces" in the villages near the Euphrates. During the first week in April, three air assaults were launched: EAGLE MORNINGSTAR III by elements of the 3d Battalion, 320th Field Artillery Regiment; and IRON VALLEY FORGE and IRON SARATOGA by the 3d Battalion, 187th Infantry

⁶⁸ Rpt, Rakkasan Historical Review: 3d Brigade Combat Team, 101 Airborne Division (Air Assault), 2007–2008, n.d., p. 195. Hereafter cited as Rakkasan Historical Review.

⁶⁹ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 22–28 Mar 2008, p. 12.

Regiment. The division headquarters' focus on the territory would only intensify the effort.⁷⁰

General Lynch's plan for MARNE PILEDRIVER, submitted to MNC-I on 21 March, charged the 3d Brigade with eliminating al-Qaeda in and around the town of Shubayshen. Intelligence had pinpointed the town as a "critical support zone" for al-Qaeda logistics and a "significant bed down locale for southern belt leadership."⁷¹

The intent was for the 3d Brigade to dominate the roads in and out of Area of Operations Iron, as the region patrolled by the 3d Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, was called. Three roads, Routes Janabi Run, Fat Boy, and Sabbath, ran roughly north-south, and a handful of paved roads—Peggy, Sioux, Suns, and Jassim being the major ones—moved traffic east-west, providing all-weather transit for insurgents smuggling weapons from the west. In addition, the countryside was laced with canals and lined with palm groves and river rushes, furnishing concealment for insurgents and restricting the ability of military vehicles to move along unpredictable routes.⁷²

As was often the case where the insurgents had taken root, the population was poor and almost completely neglected by the Iraqi government. Most of the people had limited access to sanitation systems and only 30 percent of the population had clean drinking water. Barely more than half had electricity, and even that was sporadic. There were schools and hospitals, but all were in dire need of repair and lacked trained personnel to serve the needs of the population. Unemployment hovered at about 70 percent, providing a pool of disaffected young men who were susceptible to al-Qaeda recruitment.⁷³

Once again, the centerpiece of the operation was a new base to be built in the middle of the targeted area. Beginning in mid-April, Company C, 864th Engineer Battalion, a construction unit from Fort Richardson, Alaska, would start building Patrol Base Yates. The outpost was named for Cpl. Nyle Yates III, a 3d Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, trooper killed during the 3d Brigade's last tour in 2006 in Bayji, the site of Iraq's largest oil refinery, two hundred and twenty kilometers north of Baghdad.⁷⁴

Patrol Base Yates occupied interesting ground. It was built in the midst of the old Qa'qaa weapons plant, one of Saddam Hussein's major chemical and biological weapons research complexes, located about fifty kilometers south of Baghdad along the east bank of the Euphrates just

⁷⁰ Rakkasan Historical Review, p. 195.

⁷¹ MND-C OPORD 08-008 (MARNE PILEDRIVER), 21 Mar 2008, pp. 1-2.

⁷² Ibid., pp. 2-4.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 3.

⁷⁴ S. Sgt. Tony M. Lindback, "Arctic-tough engineers build Rakkasan's capacity," *Dog Face Daily*, 1 May 2008, p. 2.

west of the town of Al Latifiyah. The 28-square-kilometer site had in the 1980s contained one hundred and sixteen separate facilities and more than eleven hundred buildings devoted to manufacturing explosives and Scud missiles, and possibly poison gas and enriched uranium. During the Persian Gulf War, allied planes bombed the weapons plant, and United Nations weapons inspectors later destroyed and sealed weapons at the facility. The Iraqis rebuilt the base, but repeated inspections by officials from the International Atomic Energy Agency in 2002 and 2003 discovered no weapons of mass destruction, though it did find thousands of conventional weapons and explosives. After the U.S. invasion, the Qa'qaa facility was looted and hundreds of tons of explosives were listed as missing. The weapons were long gone by the spring of 2008, but the site was prime ground for a base because it controlled the river crossings in the 3d Brigade's southwestern corner and offered a direct route to the small towns between Al Mahmudiyah and the Euphrates.⁷⁵

This operation was not devoted to combat but rather to reconstruction and Iraqi self-reliance. "Operation MARNE PILEDRIVER will be the first Division operation completely focused on capacity building," wrote General Lynch in Task Force Marne's newspaper. After more than a year of bringing security to the population between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, he was pleased that this time his soldiers would concentrate on building as a first priority. "Rather than use bullets as a munition," he wrote, "Operation MARNE PILEDRIVER will use money as a munition to focus on meeting the needs of the Iraqi people in Mahmudiyah." Lynch had high hopes for the campaign.⁷⁶

Al-Qaeda remained to be reckoned with, but planners did not anticipate any real fighting, and much of the offensive capability would be supplied by the Iraqis themselves. In addition to more than three hundred Sons of Iraq manning checkpoints north of the Qa'qaa facility, the 4th Brigade, 6th Iraqi Army Division, would conduct most of its own air assaults, backed by Colonel Caraccilo's paratroopers when the need arose.

The 3d Brigade, in concert with Iraqi Army units, conducted three more air assaults in the week leading up to MARNE PILEDRIVER, all aimed at disrupting a possible insurgent reaction north of the Qa'qaa facility. One strike just northwest of Al Mahmudiyah landed on top of a known IED cell safe house and captured two insurgents. The others were joint U.S.-Iraqi raids that searched almost fifty houses north

⁷⁵ Qa'qaa Weapons Facility documents, Historians files, CMH; James Glanz et al., "Huge Cache of Explosives Vanished from Site in Iraq," *New York Times*, 25 Oct 2004; CG Executive Summary, MG Lynch's Visit to Yusifiyah and PB Yates, 16 Apr 2008.

⁷⁶ "Marne 6 sends: Eliminating extremists, building capacity," *Marne Focus*, 13 Mar 2008, p. 2.



Two soldiers from 1st Platoon, Company B, 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, stand guard during a humanitarian aid mission southeast of Salman Pak. By the spring of 2008, increased security in the region had shifted the emphasis from combat operations to economic rebuilding.

of Qa'qaa, referred to as the Kilo 5 region, and began several Iraqi government-sponsored civic-action programs among the population.⁷⁷

On 15 April, the decisive operations phase started, but unlike past Task Force Marne offensives, no predawn air strikes were planned and only limited air and ground thrusts were arranged. Early that morning, elements of the 3d Battalion, 320th Field Artillery Regiment—known as Task Force Red Knight—launched a handful of attacks between Al Mahmudiyah and Al Yusufiyah to disrupt any potential insurgent resistance. The task force met no opposition, though the soldiers, with the help of civilian informers, uncovered five weapons caches over the next two days.⁷⁸

Instead, a majority of the effort was immediately devoted to nineteen building projects in support of Iraqi government reconstruction. These included the construction of a new police station in Al Yusufiyah, the laying of an underground water pipeline in Al Rashid in the eastern portion of the territory, the opening of two local radio stations to be used by the local government, the delivery of thirty-five thousand fertilized eggs and

⁷⁷ Rakkasan Historical Review, p. 210; Briefing Slide, Opsum EAGLE PILEDRIVER IIB, Btry B, 3d Bn, 320th Field Arty Rgt, in support of 1st Bn, 25th Bde, 6th IA Div, Zone 318 B, 11 Apr 2008.

⁷⁸ Rakkasan Historical Review, p. 227; Briefing Slide, Opn MARNE PILEDRIVER, BUB, 15 Apr 2008; MNC-I Media Release, Informant Leads MND-C Soldiers to Weapons Cache (Shubayshen), 18 Apr 2008.

chicks to several poultry farms (called Operation CHICKEN RUN), and the repair of a major slaughterhouse that had once been a central part of the local economy. Planners hoped that this revitalization would create a thousand new jobs.⁷⁹

All this marked the commencement of economic self-reliance that had stalled under Saddam Hussein's state-run autocracy and been further destroyed by years of war. "This is really a test bed for how successful capacity-building operations can be," remarked Maj. T. J. Johnson, a planner on the 3d Division staff. "After spending a lot of the tour focused on lethal operations, the conditions are such that we can really begin to say, 'OK what do the people need that we can impact in a real positive manner?'" The prominent role of Iraqi forces in the campaign reinforced in peoples' minds the power of the government to improve their lives, which in turn made the population more likely to reject the insurgents. Six months earlier this would not have been possible.⁸⁰

Violence was difficult to permanently eliminate, however, and the end of Operation MARNE PILEDRIVER was marred by a terrorist bombing. On 14 May, a small crowd approached an Iraqi military security outpost manned by soldiers from the 4th Battalion of the 4th Brigade, 6th Iraqi Army Division, just west of the Qa'qaa facility. A woman emerged and begged to see the outpost commander, Capt. Wassim Abdul Hadi So'ud Sultani. When he came to her side, she triggered a vest packed with a dozen pounds of explosives and ball bearings, blowing up herself and the officer and wounding seven soldiers. Sporadic gunfire broke out on the periphery of the small base, but the insurgents had achieved their objective—to kill Captain Wassim, an officer who had on several occasions thwarted al-Qaeda.⁸¹

Colonel Caraccilo reported that the "unfortunate assassination" of Wassim forced his paratroopers to expand their patrols. Company D, 3d Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, helped the Iraqis scour the area, rounding up several men who had apparently been involved in setting the trap. Interrogations revealed that the Iraqi security forces under Captain Wassim had become increasingly successful at thwarting insurgent movement through the region, so al-Qaeda had planned to kill him but was unable to find a male suicide bomber willing to undertake the

⁷⁹ Briefing Slides, Opn MARNE PILEDRIVER, Transition and Rebuilding, BUB, 15 Apr 2008; Rakkasan Historical Review, p. 245.

⁸⁰ MNC-I Media Release, Multi-national Corps-Iraq Launches Capacity-Building Operation, 15 Apr 2008.

⁸¹ Storyboard, Sigact 1, Suicide Bomber, 1 x IA KIA/9 x IA WIA, Zone 209, 4th Bn, 4th Bde, 6th IA Div, BUB, 15 May 2008.

mission. Women, though more difficult to recruit, raised less suspicion at checkpoints, and their employment was rising throughout Iraq.⁸²

Division support for MARNE PILEDRIVER ended on 15 May, but the 3d Brigade's efforts continued. All the projects begun in April required a long period of construction and oversight, which Colonel Caraccilo was determined to follow through to the end. Perhaps the biggest gain from this commitment was that it cemented the confidence of the people that the Coalition was going to take steps to ensure their well-being. Such trust is not easy to build during a counterinsurgency—especially by a foreign army that is generally viewed as an occupier—but it is necessary. Many gestures of goodwill were made between the soldiers and the communities, but one stood out. On 26 May, soldiers from the 1st Squadron, 33d Cavalry Regiment, delivered nearly a half ton of food to several impoverished families in the town of Shakariyah. The cavalry had been in close contact with local sheikhs, who pointed out the neediest people and got equal credit for the good deed.⁸³

In early May, as the brigade wound down the operation, it also started a new program: some of the paratroopers became sailors. Part of Company A, 3d Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, began training in boat handling to prepare for waterborne operations on the Euphrates.

This was not a new capability. In December 2006, the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, which was part of Task Force Marne until December 2007, had run riverine patrols along the Euphrates. Between December 2006 and March 2007, the brigade's 1st Battalion, 501st Infantry Regiment, used Vietnam-era boats to police several stretches of the river near Al Iskandariyah. The operations took on Alaskan themes to reflect the unit's home base at Fort Richardson—Operations KENAI, RED SALMON, and KING SALMON among them. According to planning documents, the boats permitted the battalion "to insert combat power far behind IED defensive belts" that the insurgents had set along major roadways. "Without this insertion technique we would have struggled on developing any situational awareness in isolated areas to the north of Jurf as Sukr."⁸⁴

One year later, the riverine force concept was revisited, this time in Colonel Caraccilo's zone on the northern stretch of the Euphrates. Three boats costing a total of \$750,000 had been ordered by the 2d Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division's 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, just before that brigade departed Iraq, but they took several months to build and did not arrive in Iraq until early May 2008. The

⁸² Ibid. Quote from MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 10–16 May 2008, p. 14. MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 17–23 May 2008, p. 49.

⁸³ Rakkasan Historical Report, p. 316.

⁸⁴ Rpt, 1-501st Riverine Operations, 22 Dec 2006–28 Feb 2007, n.d., slide 32.

new boats were more powerful and better-armed (the previous models were unarmed and relied on the crews' own weapons), with a .50-caliber machine gun in the bow and armor that could withstand hits from 7.62-mm. rounds.⁸⁵

Since the paratroopers had no experience in boats, eight of them were sent to Kuwait in December 2007 for three weeks of training. They returned and taught what they had learned to the two dozen other soldiers in the new boat unit. The plan was to use the boats' mobility to respond to reports of insurgents crossing the river north and south of Owsat, an area that remained one of the important rat lines from Al Anbar to Baghdad. This concept was not without hazard. As Colonel Cloutier, the 3d Division operations officer, observed at a planning meeting in early March, the marines in Al Anbar Province had conducted similar operations in the past, and the insurgents had employed floating IEDs against them. Time would tell what effect the new boats would have because the 3d Brigade's riverine mission would not become fully functional until after Task Force Marne departed.⁸⁶

The 3d Brigade stepped up operations in other areas as well, with a handful of air assaults along Route Tampa, the main supply route from the south into Baghdad, and a scattering of other short missions near the Euphrates. As the heat of summer began to settle into the Euphrates valley, however, most of the paratroopers' efforts were aimed at working with and bolstering the Iraqi security forces and revamping the region's slowly recovering economy.⁸⁷

As Task Force Marne neared the end of its deployment in MND-C, the notorious Triangle of Death southwest of Baghdad was considerably less deadly. Violence throughout the territory was down from more than thirty-five attacks per week in the spring of 2007 to almost none one year later. During a trip to Al Iskandariyah in late May, General Lynch met with the local city council. "Do you remember what this place used to look like fifteen months ago?" asked one of the Iraqi council members. Lynch certainly did, but, by the end of his tour, the residents of Al Iskandariyah were fairly accustomed to seeing the cigar-smoking general wandering through city markets and talking to residents. "I don't see sectarian violence anymore," noted Lynch, and credited his soldiers' hard work as the reason why. "We focused on establishing security in this area of Iskandariyah, and now that we have the security right, we had to worry about the most pressing need of the people, and that was employment." With more than a little irony, one observer wrote that "it took a

⁸⁵ CG Executive Summary, CG's Planning Huddle, 2 Mar 2008; Media Release, 3d BCT, 101st Abn Div, Rakkasans prepare to patrol waterways, 12 May 2008.

⁸⁶ CG Executive Summary, CG's Planning Huddle, 2 Mar 2008.

⁸⁷ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 17–23 May 2008, pp. 13–14.

lot of effort and blood to turn the ‘Triangle of Death’ into the ‘Triangle of Love.’”⁸⁸

Transition

Starting in April 2008, the first of Task Force Marne’s surge units, the 3d Brigade Combat Team, 3d Infantry Division, prepared to leave Iraq. Colonel Grigsby and his soldiers had been in the desert east of Baghdad for more than a year, carving a home out of the desolate sand and establishing a presence along the Tigris. But while Iraq was becoming safer as the surge neared its end, the “enemy still has a vote,” as General Lynch had said.

Danger often lurked where the situation seemed safest. On the night of 8 April, a patrol from the 1st Battalion, 10th Field Artillery Regiment, was traveling east on the relatively secure Butler Range Road not far from the outskirts of southeast Baghdad when the lead Humvee was blasted by an EFP hidden in a yellow burlap sack on the right shoulder of the road. The shaped charge punched a twelve-inch hole in the vehicle’s right side, killing S. Sgt. Jeffery L. Hartley and wounding two other soldiers. A reaction force from the 3d Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment, discovered that the bomb had likely been hooked to a cell phone detonator that was triggered by insurgents in a nearby mosque, but a search by local Iraqi forces unearthed nothing. The killers were probably Shi’ites, members of the Mahdi Army, which, although still in a period of cease-fire, sometimes flexed its muscles against the “occupiers.”⁸⁹

The insurgents struck again on 2 May. This time the Georgians were the target. That afternoon, elements of the 13th Georgian Battalion were patrolling along Route Detroit south of Wahida not far from Combat Outpost Cleary, when the lead Humvee struck a roadside EFP. The explosion shredded the left front tire and peppered the hood and engine compartment with shrapnel, and the bomb’s explosive projectile punched an eight-inch hole in the passenger side door, showering hot metal fragments throughout the cabin. The damage was catastrophic. Two Georgian soldiers, Lt. George Margievi and Cpl. Zurab Gvenetadze, died instantly, and another Georgian soldier and an Iraqi interpreter were wounded.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ First quote from Patrick Quinn, “US Makes Progress in Iraq’s ‘Triangle of Death,’” Associated Press, 28 May 2008. Remaining quotes from John Nagl, “Learning from the Triangle of Love,” *Washington Post*, 10 Sep 2008.

⁸⁹ Storyboard, Sigact 1, 1 x IED (EFP), 1 x KIA, 2 x WIA, Zone 70W, 1-10 Field Arty Rgt, 3/3 HBCT, BUB, 9 Apr 2008; MND-C Media Release, 3d HBCT Soldiers remember fallen comrade, 20 Apr 2008.

⁹⁰ Storyboard, Sigact 1, Complex Attack, IED/SAF (EFP), 2 x CF KIA, 1 x CF WIA, 1 x LN WIA (Terp), 13 Geor Bn, 3d BCT, 3d Inf Div, 2 May 2008.



A soldier from the 13th Georgian Battalion provides security during a joint clearing operation near Combat Outpost Cleary. The region had been peaceful during the three months since the Georgians had moved there, but a roadside bomb on 2 May 2008 killed two soldiers.

Within minutes, a quick reaction force was at the scene, and the wounded were evacuated to Cleary, where medevac helicopters waited. As the convoy approached the base, insurgents opened fire, slowing the rescue but causing no additional casualties. Even before the wounded men were in the air, the Georgians began a cordon and search of Wahida and detained twenty-one Iraqis for questioning. The town had been quiet for months, and everyone was surprised by the attack.

The loss of Margievi and Gvenetadze was a shock to the Georgians, who had not lost any soldiers while attached to MND-C. During the duration of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, five Georgians had died—one from suicide, one in a vehicle accident, and three killed in action. Although the deaths were a bitter pill, the Georgians pursued their mission, with more foreign soldiers serving in Iraq than any other nation except the United States and Great Britain. The Georgians would be forced to leave Iraq suddenly in August, however, when Russian troops invaded Abkhazia and South Ossetia, two enclaves within the Republic of Georgia. During two days, 10 and 11 August, the U.S. Air Force flew the two thousand Georgian soldiers out of Iraq, marking the abrupt end of five years of commitment to the Coalition.

The attack notwithstanding, the reality was that, by May, the 3d Brigade's area of operations was remarkably safe, with only a few incidents to mar the progress. Grigsby's last reports to the division headquarters illustrated that most of the "action" in his region was in the form

of economic development in Nahrawan and Salman Pak. During the last two weeks of the 3d Brigade's tour of duty in Iraq, only six insurgent suspects were arrested and none were killed or wounded. On 9 May, for the last time, Colonel Grigsby signed off with the brigade's slogan, "Hammer Strong!"⁹¹

Taking the 3d Brigade's place was the 2d Brigade, 1st Armored Division. The unit was organized as Combat Command B, 1st Armored Division, in January 1942 during the early days of World War II at Fort Knox, Kentucky, and joined in the first battles in North Africa, including Bizerte, Tunis, and the Kasserine Pass. After victory in North Africa, the unit fought as part of the U.S. Fifth Army in Italy, most notably at Anzio, at Monte Casino, and in the Po valley. After the war, the command served briefly in Bavaria before being inactivated along with the 1st Armored Division, but was reactivated in 1951 at Fort Hood, Texas. The 2d Brigade remained in the United States through the 1960s, then deployed along with the 1st Armored Division to Germany in 1971, where it remained for the next two decades. The 2d Brigade played a role in Operation DESERT STORM, defeating Iraqi forces at Al Busayyah, Al Rumaylah Airfield, and Medina Ridge. Between 1995 and 1999, the 2d Brigade, 1st Armored Division, was a portion of the peacekeeping force in the Balkans. After the fall of Baghdad in April 2003, the brigade moved to the capital to participate in the security force there until the following July, then in November 2005 it deployed to Kuwait as a theater reserve unit in support of the continuing war. In May 2006, in response to the violence stemming from the al-Askari Mosque bombing, the brigade deployed from Kuwait to Ar Ramadi.

This time the 2d Brigade, commanded by Col. Robert P. White, was south of Baghdad, picking up where the 3d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, left off. The tankers deployed from Baumholder, Germany, enduring two blizzards in March that slowed the transfer of heavy equipment, but by mid-April they were in the midst of the transition with the 3d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division.⁹²

In the past, the division headquarters exploited the arrival of a new unit to launch a new offensive, and this time was no exception. When the armored brigade was in place, General Lynch began MARNE DAUNTLESS, Task Force Marne's final mission in Iraq. Division planners continued their penchant for Korean War battles, titling this one for the fighting in April 1951 along the 38th Parallel. DAUNTLESS was General Ridgway's follow-up to Operation RUGGED in the same region, just as

⁹¹ MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 3–9 May 2008, p. 25.

⁹² MND-C Media Releases, Armored division makes long haul for OIF, 11 May 2008, and 1-35 Armor Regt. Leaders meet Jisr Diyala Nahia Council members, 30 Apr 2008.

General Lynch's two operations of the same name followed one another on opposite banks of the Tigris.

The major focus of MARNE DAUNTLess was Jisr Diyala, the Shi'ite neighborhood on the southeast edge of Baghdad. The city sat on the boundary of MND-B, where pockets of insurgent activity thrived along the seams, and for the past few months Colonel Grigsby had warily eyed what he described as "the last defensive belt into Baghdad."⁹³

Along the banks of the Tigris, the town gave way to small farms, many of them tilled by Sunni families. While violence had ebbed during the last several months, roads cratered by exploded roadside bombs and bullet-pocked buildings served as a reminder that the peace between the communities was an uneasy one.

Lynch intended to use the incoming armored brigade to concentrate on this area, capitalizing on the progress made during past missions to proceed to build relations between Shi'ites and Sunnis and strengthen the fledgling local governments. Planners expected little fighting, though Shi'ite extremists were a potential problem, and Mahdi Army fighters in Sadr City, some ten kilometers to the north of Jisr Diyala, might flee the battle and move southward along the river to the Iranian border.⁹⁴

The main threat was a handful of Shi'ite extremist cells in Jisr Diyala composed of perhaps forty members. While most of the population abided by Sadr's cease-fire, intelligence predicted that militant cells might begin emplacing IEDs south of the city, which would inevitably result in new U.S. and Iraqi casualties. The worst-case scenario was the insurgents taking over the city, forcing the Americans to fight them street by street, an unpleasant option.⁹⁵

The plan for MARNE DAUNTLess was simple. The 3d Division headquarters divided the region around Jisr Diyala into two objectives—Smyrna in the north and Tybee in the south—to be filled by a combination of Iraqi police and elements of the 2d Brigade, 1st Armored Division. The start date of DAUNTLess was 15 May, at which time the 2d Brigade was to undertake a series of "quick-win" projects, such as distributing school supplies and opening several temporary medical clinics in eight areas within Jisr Diyala. No bombing strikes were planned, there would be no air assaults, and the Iraqis took the lead on security. General Lynch believed that this final operation would leave the theater in good stead, and during planning sessions in January he had told his senior leaders that "after MARNE DAUNTLess, MND-C should be able to control the Tigris River rat lines."⁹⁶

⁹³ Executive Summary, MG Lynch's Visit to 3/3 HBCT, 21 Mar 2008.

⁹⁴ FRAGO 002 (MND-C IO against fleeing HVI's out of Sadr City) to OPORD 08-011 (MARNE DAUNTLess), n.d. p. 2.

⁹⁵ MND-C OPORD 08-011 (MARNE DAUNTLess), 13 Apr 2008, pp. 2-3.

⁹⁶ Ibid., pp. 8-9. Quote from CG Executive Summary, Senior Plans Update, 22 Jan 2008.

Despite the planning, one question remained: would all of the armored brigade's units be sent to Task Force Marne, or, as had been the case with most of the other incoming brigade combat teams, would some of its units be sent elsewhere, probably to MND-B? In the earliest planning phases, back in February, Lynch had asked his planners "to think through how MND-C conducts MARNE DAUNTLESS if [the 2d Brigade, 1st Armored Division] is short one battalion." At an MND-C commanders conference on 25 February, the division staff looked at options, including the possibility of the Iraqi security forces spearheading the mission.⁹⁷

Four days later, the division commander flew to Combat Outpost Carver where he met with Colonel Marr, the 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, commander, about possible force requirements. Marr stated that "the ideal set for a four-company battalion would be a company at COP Cahill, two companies at COP Carver, and another at Al Lej" in the southeastern part of the Fishbowl, which was still beyond the brigade's permanent presence. Lynch had proposed building a base there, but its construction hinged on whether or not he received the entire armored brigade.⁹⁸

Lynch's concern was not misplaced because in the end the 2d Brigade did not bring its entire order of battle to MND-C. Its full force complement of thirty-six hundred soldiers included the 1st and 2d Battalions, 6th Infantry Regiment; 1st Battalion, 35th Armored Regiment; 4th Battalion, 27th Field Artillery Regiment; plus several support units, including the 40th Engineer Battalion and the 47th Support Battalion. Even at optimum strength, the armored brigade had two hundred fewer soldiers than the normal heavy brigade combat team, a shortage that would be difficult to make up. Still, the corps headquarters decided to send the brigade's 1st Battalion, 6th Infantry Regiment, to Camp Taji on the northern outskirts of Baghdad.⁹⁹

By mid-May, the tankers were completing the learning phase of their deployment, followed by a flurry of ceremonies as armored brigade units took over bases from the outgoing 3d Brigade. On the eleventh, Colonel Marr turned over Combat Outpost Carver to Lt. Col. Michael S. Shrout, the commander of the 2d Battalion, 6th Infantry Regiment; the following day Colonel Kolasheski handed Combat Outpost Cashe to Lt. Col. Ricardo O. Morales and his 1st Battalion, 35th Armored Regiment; and

⁹⁷ Quote from CG Executive Summary, ACE Update, 21 Feb 2008. CG Executive Summary, MND-C Commanders Conference, 25 Feb 2008.

⁹⁸ CG Executive Summary, MG Lynch's COP Carver visit, 1 Mar 2008.

⁹⁹ MND-C Task Organization, 13 Apr 2008; CG Executive Summary, Senior Plans Update, 26 Feb 2008. The 2d Brigade, 1st Armored Division, was a "legacy" unit, meaning that it retained a traditional organization and was not re-formed into a modular brigade combat team. However, the 2d Brigade was scheduled to undergo the transformation in 2010.

on the thirteenth, Combat Outpost Salie in Nahrawan, held by Colonel Sullivan's 1st Battalion, 10th Field Artillery Regiment, went to Lt. Col. Michael J. Mammary's 4th Battalion, 27th Field Artillery Regiment.¹⁰⁰

Other ceremonies followed, and on 15 May, 3d Infantry Division officers, Iraqi commanders, and local officials gathered at Forward Operating Base Hammer to pass command of the region to the 2d Brigade, 1st Armored Division. As General Lynch watched, Colonel Grigsby told the assembly that "the Sledgehammer Brigade is leaving, but the mission will continue on. Colonel White and the great Iron Brigade will take on this task and continue to make Mada'in Qada even better than it stands today." Grigsby left the podium and cased the brigade colors, marking the end of his unit's role in the surge. Colonel White, the final brigade commander to join Task Force Marne, promised to keep up the good work of his predecessor, but informed the Iraqis that it was they who would "provide the leadership, security, and economic growth required to improve [Al Mada'in Qadaa] one day at a time."¹⁰¹

Portions of Grigsby's brigade had been heading home over the past month, and soldiers would be departing over the next few weeks. On 17 May, the 3d Brigade staff, including Colonel Grigsby, flew home to Fort Benning, Georgia. He had led his soldiers through one of the toughest deployments of the war, but, in the joyful mass reunion of soldiers and their families, the sacrifice was supplanted by the glow of good memories. Grigsby had a special treat awaiting him. While in Iraq, he had gained a new grandson, and on that balmy spring day, he held him for the first time.¹⁰²

As soon as the 2d Brigade, 1st Armored Division, took command of Area of Operations Striker—the renamed Area of Operations Hammer—the decisive phase of Operation MARNE DAUNTLESS began. Pursuing the approach begun a few months earlier, this was a "peaceful" offensive. General Lynch noted that "money, not bombs, will drop," and the Iraqis were calling the shots. Unlike previous missions, no new bases needed to be built because existing ones, such as Cashe south of Jisr Diyala and Salie in the north near Nahrawan, already housed both U.S. and Iraqi units, in particular the 3d Battalion, 1st National Police Brigade.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ MND-C Media Releases, 2-6 Inf. Regt. Takes command at COP Carver, 13 May 2008; 1-35 Armor Regt. Takes command at COP Cashe, 13 May 2008; and 4-27 FA takes over command at COP Salie, 14 May 2007.

¹⁰¹ Quotes from MND-C Media Release, Iron Brigade takes command at FOB Hammer, 16 May 2008. MND-C Media Release, 47th FSB takes over support operations at FOB Hammer, 16 May 2008.

¹⁰² "Grigsby Arrives Home to Fort Benning," HammerSlogger: A Chronicle of the 3d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, 17 May 2008.

¹⁰³ CG Executive Summary, MG Lynch's Visit to 3/3 HBCT, 21 Mar 2008.



On 11 May 2008, the 3d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, began its redeployment when the 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, turned over Combat Outpost Carver to units from the incoming 2d Brigade, 1st Armored Division.

Although technically outside the MARNE DAUNTELESS umbrella, the southern sector of the new brigade's area of responsibility, controlled by the 2d Battalion, 6th Infantry Regiment, received special attention. Colonel White described the Fishbowl region as "the most complex problem set" within his command because tribal tensions remained high. As early as January 2008, Task Force Marne had plans to build a combat outpost at Al Lej—making it the southernmost base in the brigade territory—but MNC-I decided that the Iraqis could undertake that as well. This area was a persistent problem, however.¹⁰⁴

Were the Iraqis ready to head such an effort? According to Major Waldron, recently transferred from the 3d Division's reconciliation cell to its operations section, the Iraqi security forces in that section "have grown to a level of operational readiness that allows them to take the lead." The 3d Battalion, 1st National Police Brigade, and its commander, Brig. Gen. Emad Ali Abud Faris, had established a good working relation-

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. Quote from MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 17–23 May 2008, p. 29.

ship with the local population and its leaders, which, said Waldron, had hamstrung the Shi'ite extremist networks in and around Jisr Diyala.¹⁰⁵

Colonel Morales and his 1st Battalion, 35th Armored Regiment, backed the Iraqis in Objective Smyrna, with help from the 3d Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment, counting down its last few weeks in Iraq. Just to the south, the 4th Battalion, 27th Artillery Regiment, took up station in Objective Tybee. As General Lynch had stated, this time the ammunition was money, not bullets. The expectation was that an infusion of funds and new projects would go a long way toward enhancing peoples' lives. Task Force Marne planned to spend \$7 million on short-term projects over just a few months, dwarfing the \$1 million expended by the Iraqi government in Al Mada'in Qadaa during 2007. However, the vast improvement in security there convinced the Maliki government to disburse \$86.1 million to the region during the first half of 2008.¹⁰⁶

In fact, the reports for MARNE DAUNTLESS read more like business plans than battle analyses. On 27 May, for example, 2d Brigade officers met with Jisr Diyala community leaders to discuss economic development while just to the south, in Wahida, a new water-pumping station became operational, offering reliable irrigation to a population that depended on farming.¹⁰⁷

Reminders abounded, however, that the enemy was still a threat. Patrols discovered two major weapons caches during the offensive, the first on 26 May along Butler Range Road just west of Forward Operating Base Hammer. A local Iraqi escorted a patrol from Battery B, 4th Battalion, 27th Field Artillery Regiment, to the site, which contained dozens of Russian-made Saddam Hussein-era artillery rounds that could be used to make IEDs. Three days later, a group of Sons of Iraq led a patrol from Company A, 1st Battalion, 35th Armored Regiment, to a cache—also on Butler Range Road, but several kilometers to the west. This one contained almost two hundred 37-mm. antiaircraft rounds, all probably buried in 2003 and perhaps forgotten. Intelligence analysts noted that such rounds did not make effective IEDs.¹⁰⁸

During May, the enemy made only two serious attacks, both near Jisr Diyala. On the twenty-third, the Iraqi National Police reported an IED strike that killed a civilian and wounded one policeman, and, five days later, elements of Company B, 1st Battalion, 6th Infantry Regiment,

¹⁰⁵ MND-C Media Release, MARNE DAUNTLESS to improve quality of life, eliminate extremists, 14 May 2008.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.; 2d Bde, 1st Armored Div, Media Release, With improved security, GoI improves quality of life in Mada'in Qadaa, 27 May 2008.

¹⁰⁷ Storyboards, MARNE DAUNTLESS Jisr Diyala Development Conference, 27 May 2008, BUB, 28 May 2008, and Al Wahida Water Pumping Station, 27 May 2008, BUB, 28 May 2008.

¹⁰⁸ Storyboards, MND-C Event 16, 1 x Cache, 0 x KIA, 0 x WIA, Zone 206, 2/1 AD, BUB, 27 May 2008, and MND-C Sigact, Cache, Zone 70W, 2/1 AD, BUB, 30 May 2008.



On 21 May 2008, two UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters land at Patrol Base Kelsey carrying General Lynch on his final battlefield "rotation."

and the Iraqi police were patrolling the roads along the Tigris south of Objective Tybee when insurgents ambushed them just south of Jisr Diyala. Small-arms fire and rocket-propelled grenades blasted a blue pickup truck containing several policemen, which careened to the side of the road and struck a small IED, killing one and wounding three others. A quick search of several nearby houses uncovered nothing.¹⁰⁹

MARNE DAUNTLESS would continue through June, allowing the 2d Brigade to settle into its routine east of the Tigris. The other three brigades pursued their work, and their long experience in theater provided stability as MND-C prepared for a change of command. At the 3d Division headquarters, General Lynch and his staff started a "Marne to Mountain" transition, turning over the job of maintaining security and accelerating rebuilding to the 10th Mountain Division, which would take command of MND-C.

Although the entire Task Force Marne area of operations had become much safer since the troop surge began more than a year earlier, it was by no means completely pacified. A few hours before midnight on 22 May, a patrol of four Humvees from Company A, 3d Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment, was heading south on Route Patty not far from Jurf

¹⁰⁹ Opn MARNE DAUNTLESS Daily Rpt, 22 May 2008, BUB, 23 May 2008; Storyboard, Sigact 1, IED Strike, Zone 31, 2/1 AD, BUB, 29 May 2008; MND-C (Task Force Marne) Weekly AO Assessment, 17–23 May 2008, p. 30.

as Sakhr on the west bank of the Euphrates in the western sector of the 4th Brigade's territory. The soldiers had few concerns about the route's safety because an explosives ordnance disposal unit had passed that way only twenty minutes earlier and had found nothing amiss.¹¹⁰

A massive explosion mushroomed under the front left side of the second Humvee in the column, lifting the 10,000-pound vehicle into the air and flinging it some twenty meters away. Most of the driver's side, though covered in thick armor, was torn away, leaving a jagged hole. All four soldiers inside were badly wounded, and although the injured men were quickly evacuated, one of them, Pfc. Kyle P. Norris lost both legs in the blast and died the following day.

Analysts later determined that the IED, which left a crater about one meter deep and two meters wide, contained between three hundred to five hundred pounds of explosives. How had the explosives team missed such a bomb? It turned out that the IED—absent a detonator and therefore all but harmless—had been buried by the road months earlier and had blended into the landscape. It would have been pure luck for the explosives team to have found it. However, someone who knew it was there had placed a new detonator on the bomb—after the explosives ordnance unit passed by. Hooking up the trigger would have taken only minutes.

No one had suspected foul play for another reason. Just a hundred meters north of the IED was a checkpoint manned by a half-dozen Sons of Iraq, and the passing Humvees did not expect an attack so close to friendly forces. But at the time most of the Iraqis were at a nearby mosque and could not see the bomb site, and the others ran away after the blast. Although some suspected that the Sons of Iraq had at least turned a blind eye to the insurgents, it was just as likely that they were simply lax in their duties and failed to keep a wary watch on the darkened road. Whatever the case, Private Norris was the last Task Force Marne soldier killed in action.¹¹¹

Although danger remained a pressing concern, everyday living had become much easier. Major bases were more comfortable, with reliable climate-controlled living spaces, plentiful food, and many other little luxuries. At Forward Operating Base Kalsu, for example, enterprising soldiers created a fishing hole, five meters deep and filled with natural groundwater, and stocked it with twelve hundred carp. Rules called for

¹¹⁰ Account from Storyboard, Sigact 3, IED Strike, 4 x US WIA, Zone 400, 3d Bn, 7th Inf Rgt, 4th BCT, 3d Inf Div, BUB, 23 May 2008.

¹¹¹ Another 4th Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, soldier, S. Sgt. James P. Snyder, was wounded in an explosion in Baghdad in January and died on 10 May after months of unsuccessful treatment. His unit, the 4th Battalion, 64th Armored Regiment, was attached to MND-B.

catch-and-release only. It was the idea of Kalsu "Mayor" S. Sgt. Justin M. Davis, an avid fisherman from Florida.¹¹²

Even the outlying bases were relatively comfortable. Combat Outpost Murray, a former vacation estate of Saddam Hussein's sons that was converted into one of the fortified anchors of the 2d Brigade's push along the Tigris, was more livable. The previous spring the once-elegant manor house was a wreck, and the old pool was little more than a big sandbagged bunker, but one year later the pool was ready for swimming. In their downtime, soldiers of the 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, had retiled the pool with a huge 3d Infantry Division insignia that was visible to helicopters flying overhead, and in May a team of six Kazakhstani soldiers, members of a water purification unit, were brought in to fill it from the river. The pool was ready by Memorial Day. The incoming soldiers who would soon assume responsibility for MND-C would also enjoy the pool, but they would always be reminded that the Rock of the Marne had made it all possible.¹¹³

As the division's tour wound down, General Lynch wrote an open letter to his soldiers congratulating them on a job well done. "You went into the worst areas with the worst insurgents, killed them, and then stayed to live with the Iraqi people," he declared. "Once you began living there, the Iraqis wanted to help." This succinct summary said it all. The early fighting and the permanent presence maintained by Task Force Marne units were the first steps, and they paved the way for subsequent progress. "Now the pendulum is beginning to shift back toward transition," Lynch asserted. "The conversation is no longer about security, but about stability." In the end, though, the Iraqis would have to be the ones to "win," stepping up to take control of their own security, governance, and economics.¹¹⁴

The 10th Mountain Division would ensure that the process endured. On 1 June, the change of command ceremony took place at Camp Victory, with both General Petraeus and General Austin attending. Although 10th Mountain Division units had previously served in Iraq—including with Task Force Marne—this was the first time that the division headquarters had deployed there. The new commander, Maj. Gen. Michael L. Oates, praised General Lynch and his soldiers and stated that "we pledge to do our best to assist our [Iraqi] partners in building on the impressive security and economic gains made by Task Force Marne." Then the red and white colors of the 10th Mountain Division, emblazoned with the unit's motto, "Climb to Glory," were uncased as the 3d Infantry Division

¹¹² MND-C Media Release, Fishing pond opens at Kalsu, 18 May 2008.

¹¹³ MND-C Media Release, Kazakhstani soldiers make a splash at COP Murray, 24 May 2008.

¹¹⁴ Maj. Gen. Rick Lynch, "Marne 6 Sends: MND-C focuses on transition," *Marne Focus*, 24 Apr 2008, p. 2.

flag was lowered and folded for the trip back to Fort Stewart. Task Force Marne's tour of duty ended and Task Force Mountain's started.¹¹⁵

At MND-C headquarters, the command transition proceeded smoothly. For more than a month, the 10th Mountain Division staff had taken over various assignments, permitting groups of 3d Division officers and enlisted troops to go home. The day after the change of command ceremony at Camp Victory, General Lynch and some of his top officers as well as about two hundred and fifty members of the 3d Division's Special Troops Battalion flew to Hunter Army Airfield and were bused to Fort Stewart. Lynch led the soldiers onto the grass parade ground of the base's Cottrell Field where a crowd of more than a thousand family and friends impatiently waited to glimpse loved ones. The division commander kept his comments short. "By God, we made history over the last 15 months," he told his soldiers. To the gathered crowd he insisted, "We couldn't have done it without your support," then stepped back to allow soldiers and families to greet each other after the long deployment.¹¹⁶

The fifteen-month separation had taken a toll on everyone, and the homecoming was an emotional scene of wives and daughters, husbands and sons, tearfully embracing. "For me and my soldiers, it has meant missing two of something," said Lynch, and in his case it was two of his wife Sarah's birthdays. After a period of block leave, many soldiers moved to new Army jobs. General Lynch had his hard work rewarded with a third star and a promotion to commander of III Corps, headquartered at Fort Hood, Texas.¹¹⁷

Back in Iraq, the war went on. Although the 3d Division headquarters was gone, for the next few months the units that made up MND-C remained the same. The 3d Division's Combat Aviation Brigade would stay into August to support Task Force Mountain, before being replaced by Task Force 49, an aviation brigade based in Fort Wainwright, Alaska. As the aviation brigade reached the end of its tour, it had set many new records, including 100,000 total flight hours in a single year and the consumption of 10 million gallons of aviation fuel. Then, on 21 May, pilots from the unit's 4th Battalion, 3d Aviation Regiment, flew the brigade's two hundredth combat air assault. "For us it went exactly as planned," remarked the mission leader, which meant that it was uneventful.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ MND-C Media Release, 10th Mountain Division assumes MND-C mission, 3 Jun 2008.

¹¹⁶ "3 ID CG & Staff Arrive Home," Watch on the Rhine newsletter (Society of the Third Infantry Division), Aug 2008, pp. 1, 7.

¹¹⁷ Quote from Pamela E. Walck, "Lynch: 'We Did Our Job,'" *Savannah Morning News*, 3 Jun 2008. DoD Media Release, General Officer Announcement, 29 May 2008.

¹¹⁸ Quote from MND-C Media Release, Aviation unit flies 200th air assault mission in Iraq, 21 May 2008. For details on the aviation unit's redeployment, see MND-C OPORD (MARNE EAGLE), 19 Mar 2008; 3d Inf Div OPORD 08-014 (MARNE FALCON TRANSITION), 18 May 2008.



General Austin (left) greets incoming soldiers of the 10th Mountain Division during the transition from Task Force Marine to Task Force Mountain in MND-C.

The two brigades that were not part of the 3d Division that had served under General Lynch would leave Iraq at the end of the year. Despite a troublesome area of operations, the 3d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, achieved new gains along the Euphrates and south of Baghdad and managed to do so with limited loss of lives, with one killed in combat and another in an accident. When the brigade departed in November, it would be replaced by the 17th Iraqi Army Division, which had been operating closely with the paratroopers in preparation for the handover. The new division commander, Maj. Gen. Ali Jassim Mohammed al-Frejee, had three brigades under his command, about sixty-five hundred soldiers, and while this was considerably less manpower than the equivalent in U.S. Army units, Colonel Caraccilo believed that the Iraqis could accomplish the job.¹¹⁹

Colonel James' 4th Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, remained in Iraq until December 2008, when it was replaced by the 172d Infantry Brigade from Schweinfurt, Germany. The 4th Brigade's fifteen-month deployment—the first half of it under the command of the 3d Infantry Division and the second half under the 10th Mountain Division—secured MND-C's southern stretch, from An Najaf northward to Baghdad and from

¹¹⁹ 3d BCT, 101st Abn Div, Media Release, South of Baghdad Ready for Transition, 31 Jul 2008.

the Euphrates eastward to the Tigris. The brigade lost seventeen soldiers killed and seventy wounded during its deployment.¹²⁰

When Task Force Marne lowered its flag in June 2008, the 2d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, the last of the original surge units, had only two more months of duty. Over the past year, Colonel Ferrell's unit had become something of a symbol of the surge, using hard-fisted combat power to bring security to a long-time insurgent haven, then staying to assist in rebuilding the communities nestled along the Tigris.

While many other units throughout Iraq took on similar challenges, higher headquarters had been carefully watching the 2d Brigade because MNF-I knew how crucial the fight along the Tigris was to eliminating the insurgent rat lines into the capital. On 14 May, General Petraeus flew to Combat Outpost Meade for a detailed briefing from Colonel Ferrell and his officers and came away impressed. Petraeus described the ongoing campaign in Arab Jabour as "a combined arms operation in a classic sense."¹²¹

The following morning at the MNF-I battle update assessment, Petraeus continued his praise before a wider audience. "[W]hat that brigade has done . . . is classic work and it has to be captured by historians," Petraeus told his officers. Colonel Ferrell's soldiers "literally broke the back of the enemy" and then sustained their battlefield gains with solid rebuilding projects. "Really impressive stuff, and all part of the greater MND-C campaign that has just painstakingly, deliberately but in accordance with the plan, steadily increased its control of areas," concluded the MNF-I commander.¹²²

Although the job was not finished, the 2d Brigade left the 10th Mountain Division with much less to do. Ferrell's soldiers had aided in securing the west bank of the Tigris, and the citizens there had reason to be optimistic as basic services were restored, the economy was improving, and governance was once again taking hold. Ferrell believed that his unit's greatest accomplishment was helping bring a return to normality for the people of Arab Jabour.¹²³

Between June 2007 and February 2008, stated Ferrell, "we were in full-scale kinetic operations" to clear the insurgents. Arab Jabour and the southern part of the brigade's area of operations was an al-Qaeda stronghold containing an estimated 1,500 fighters, 200 of whom were foreigners.

¹²⁰ MND-C Media Release, Vanguard Brigade transfers authority to the 172d Infantry Brigade, 27 Dec 2008; Task Force Marne Battle/Non-battle Deaths, 3d Inf Div Surgeon Cell, 16 Mar 2009.

¹²¹ CG Executive Summary, Gen Petraeus Visit to COP Meade, 14 May 2008.

¹²² MNF-I BUA [Battle Update Assessment] transcript, 15 May 2008, in e-mail from Lt Col William S. Story, MNF-I Historian, to author, 16 May 2008.

¹²³ Sgt David Turner, "Spartan 6 closes chapter in 2d BCT history," Task Force Mountain Web site, 8 Jul 2008.

For the one-year period from June 2007 to June 2008, the 2d Brigade had built 11 bases, engaged in 1,241 “small-arms fire engagements” with the enemy, arrested 1,433 suspected insurgents and their supporters, cleared 5,943 houses and buildings, found 577 weapons caches, and safely dismantled 532 IEDs. Although the Iraqi military presence in the region was small, the 2d Brigade had helped recruit some 5,000 Sons of Iraq to enhance security. All this came at a price, and with 32 soldiers killed and more than 200 wounded, the 2d Brigade suffered the highest casualties in MND-C. Because of all this, Task Force Mountain inherited burgeoning civilian communities, growing local economies, and the beginnings of an Iraqi security force. “It’s all about momentum,” observed Ferrell, but he warned that “the security that’s been established is fragile.”¹²⁴

No more U.S. units would replace the 2d Brigade when it departed. Instead, the 3d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, would expand its boundary eastward to the Tigris to fill the space, leaving Task Force Mountain with only three brigades. Iraqi units, which were only just coming on line, would also start to assume security duties in Arab Jabour and Hawr Rajab, in particular elements of the 4th and 25th Brigades of the 6th Iraqi Army Division.¹²⁵

On 5 July, the 2d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, cased its colors at Forward Operating Base Kalsu. “We’ve completed what we’ve been asked to do,” Colonel Ferrell told his soldiers. With those simple words, the surge ended. Its last brigade was going home, ending the effort begun seventeen months earlier, when the war in Iraq seemed like a losing proposition and public opinion was overwhelmingly against the fight. Whether or not the surge had an impact in the long run remained a question, but in the summer of 2008, Iraq was a much safer place than it had been only one year earlier. If nothing else, the surge bought both the U.S. and Iraqi governments more time.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Quotes from MND-C Media Release, Security pays dividends as surge brigade’s tour winds down, 22 May 2008. John J. Kruzel, “Last Surge Brigade to Return After Successful 13-month Deployment,” American Forces Press Service, 20 Jun 2008.

¹²⁵ CG Executive Summary, Gen Petraeus O&I, 26 Mar 2008.

¹²⁶ Colonel Ferrell and the last of the 2d Brigade arrived at Fort Stewart on 17 July. “2BCT Home,” Watch on the Rhine newsletter, Aug 2008, p. 7. Quote from Sgt David Turner, “Spartan 6 closes chapter in 2d BCT history,” Task Force Mountain Web site, 8 Jul 2008.

CONCLUSION: WHAT WINNING LOOKS LIKE

Chapter 13

Counterinsurgencies rarely end decisively. No pivotal battles, no routs of the enemy army, and no victorious marches into the opponent's capital decide the affairs. Instead, they are long, grinding efforts, with progress measured in increments. In Iraq, like many other recent counterinsurgencies—especially the war in Vietnam—the absence of a quick, favorable conclusion resulted in an erosion of popular support at home. Despite the apparent success of the troop surge, American public opinion remained against the war, and critics argued that the gains were illusory.

General Lynch had no patience with such a view. "People can debate the progress, but they can't debate the facts," he retorted shortly after returning to Fort Stewart in June 2008. "Roads that were laced with IEDs a year ago are now littered with thriving markets. Bombed out buildings are now schools and clinics."¹

No one could doubt that the situation south of Baghdad improved considerably during the surge and, in fact, that it was markedly better throughout Iraq. The capital city, a simmering cauldron of sectarian violence before the surge, had settled into an uneasy calm, and the Baghdad belts were no longer havens for suicide bombers. While all Army and Marine Corps units in Iraq contributed to the progress, the experience of MND-C, which was established specifically for the surge, was in many ways unique, and the region between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers south of the capital became a proving ground, of sorts, for the counterinsurgency strategy. More than any other division-level battleground, Task Force Marne's area of responsibility provided a clear before-and-after picture of the surge. Before the arrival of the 3d Division, the vast territory was patrolled by two over-worked brigades and as part of MND-B it was always of secondary importance compared to Baghdad. MND-C received two of the five new surge brigades (the 3d Division was also the only Army unit to supply two brigades to the surge), more than doubling the corps' size and firepower. These factors made MND-C an interesting case study of the surge's progress and effectiveness.

Before the surge, the notorious Triangle of Death along the Euphrates and the Sunni extremist enclaves on both banks of the Tigris were virtual al-Qaeda sanctuaries, with only the barest coalition presence and with little more from the fledgling Iraqi government. The insurgents constructed

¹ "Marne 6 Sends: Meeting the Needs of the Iraqi People," *Dog Face Daily*, 1 Jun 2008, p. 1.

elaborate IED defensive shields that, in some places such as Arab Jabour, had taken years to generate and were impenetrable by forces prior to the surge. This invulnerability made establishing a sense of permanence impossible for the Coalition, without which the Iraqi population living there could not be protected or its actions influenced. MND-C's task was to change this.

Task Force Marne's southward march to oust the enemy and secure the region was a combination of conventional combat and counterinsurgency that emphasized both firepower and civic action. Tanks and air strikes, helicopter assaults, and infantry sweeps melded with civic action programs and rebuilding projects, agricultural renewal, and economic enhancement to create a visibility in the villages that would break the insurgents' hold over the population. Such is the mix required in counterinsurgency.

Balance Sheet

During its fifteen months in Iraq, Task Force Marne made great strides in pacifying the territory, wresting control of the sanctuaries from the insurgents, providing long-term stability, and bringing some normality to the war-weary population. By the time the 3d Division headquarters left Iraq, total strikes in MND-C were down 89 percent, small-arms attacks saw an 88 percent decline, and IEDs decreased 89 percent. Indirect fire against patrol bases and combat outposts stopped almost completely.²

Reaching that point was not easy. Between June 2007 and June 2008, General Lynch launched twelve division-level operations, a heavy load for his battalions and brigades. By May 2008, Task Force Marne reported some 500 insurgents killed (the division did not keep official statistics) and 5,268 detained—47 of them high-value individuals. Security improved over the course of those offensives because, in addition to fighting their way into insurgent sanctuaries, Task Force Marne units built and occupied 59 bases (25 of them joint U.S.-Iraqi bases), bringing the first permanent, visible presence in several years to that terrain. Lynch summed up the division's philosophy with the following: "We pick the worst places where the enemy holds and put a base there and we own it." By the spring of 2008, more than thirteen thousand and two hundred soldiers, about 75 percent of all Task Force Marne personnel, lived on those posts among the Iraqi population.³

This combination of security missions and living among the people was the basis of the surge south of Baghdad, and it paid big dividends. Between April and September 2007, U.S. forces found and cleared more than 1,800 IEDs and 1,300 weapons caches. Task Force Marne's effective Sons of Iraq

² "General Recounts 3d Infantry Division's Iraq Deployment," American Forces Press Service, 29 Jun 2008.

³ MND-C Monthly Wrap-up trifold, Secure the population, 9 May 2008. Quote from Dal Cannady, "Military Salute—Major General Rick Lynch," WTOC-TV script, Savannah, Ga., 25 Sep 2007.

program attracted almost thirty-six thousand recruits to the local Iraqi militia, resulting in a force multiplier that accelerated the counterinsurgency effort. The Sons of Iraq contingent south of Baghdad was responsible for discovering or reporting 647 of those IEDs and 807 of the weapons caches, as well as capturing 581 insurgents.⁴

During the early days of the surge, the drumbeat of U.S. military casualties and the escalating sectarian violence—and the coalition's inability to stanch the bloodshed—were prime factors in the American public's disapproval of the war. In January 2007, attacks against civilians south of Baghdad averaged about 25 per day, and, by April 2007, the month of MND-C's establishment, the number remained at about 20 per day. The 3d Division's first major offensive, MARNE TORCH, in June 2007, ushered in the start of a downward trend in assaults, and each successive operation produced a further decline in violence. Following MARNE TORCH II in October, the daily average of strikes fell to 11, and by the end of MARNE COURAGEOUS in December it was down to 8. The first five months of 2008 saw an even steeper downturn. At the conclusion of Operation MARNE THUNDERBOLT in February, raids fell to around 3 per day, and by the beginning of the final 3d Division campaign, MARNE DAUNTLESS, daily hits stood at 2.⁵

Fewer enemy attacks meant fewer civilian casualties. When Task Force Marne arrived south of Baghdad in April 2007, an average of 19 civilians were killed or wounded daily. Between April and July, some of the most horrific terrorist strikes on civilians south of Baghdad occurred, including four separate vehicle-borne bombs that each killed or wounded an average of a hundred civilians. Over the next three months, casualties declined to 5 to 9 per day, and by December 2007 the figure was down to 1. By the time the 3d Division left MND-C, the total dipped to a handful of civilian casualties per month.⁶

At the same time, robust military operations meant increased military casualties. As predicted, attacks on U.S. soldiers initially climbed as the surge brought more coalition forces into battle. Once the 3d Division began offensives in April 2007, the number of daily raids shot up but then fell steadily. During the first four months of the surge in MND-C, April through mid-August, strikes against Americans averaged between 5 to 8 per day, with a total of eight days seeing 10 or more U.S. casualties. The procession of division-level campaigns slowly but surely quelled the assaults, and by the end of December the casualty rate was around 3 per day. Eighty percent of the American casualties in MND-C occurred between April and

⁴ MND-C Monthly Wrap-up trifold, Secure the population, 9 May 2008; Briefing Chart, Sons of Iraq Overview, BUB, 30 May 2008.

⁵ Press Conference, Maj Gen Lynch, Cdr, MND-C, 3 Apr 2008, p. 1; MND-C Briefing Slide, Total Attack Trends, 3 Apr 2007–30 May 2008, BUB, 30 May 2008.

⁶ MND-C Briefing Slide, Civilian & SOI Casualty Summary, 3 Apr 2007–30 May 2008, BUB, 30 May 2008.

December 2007, with a steep decline thereafter. When stretched over the duration of Task Force Marne's tour of duty, the average was 2 U.S. casualties each day.⁷

These were more than just figures on a briefing chart; they equated to dead and wounded U.S. soldiers. The 3d Division suffered 82 killed in action and 17 nonbattle deaths. Units serving alongside the 3d Division in MND-C—the 4th Brigade, 25th Infantry Division; 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division; 3d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division; and the Georgian Brigade—experienced 47 killed in action and 7 deaths in accidents. At the end of the deployment, total deaths in the 3d Division and Task Force Marne stood at 153. Although figures for wounded are less precise, the number was about seven hundred.⁸

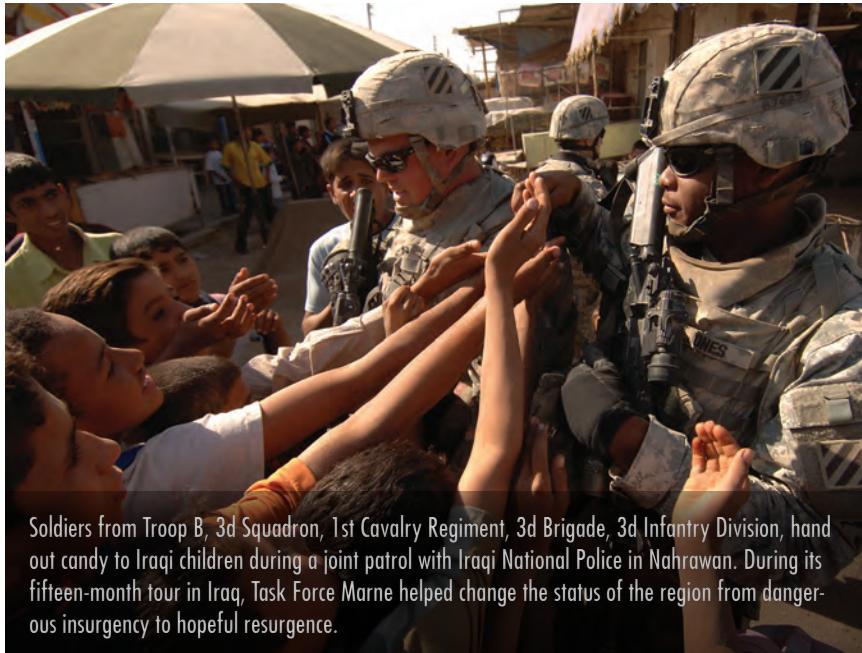
Despite the primacy of U.S. forces on the battlefield, the Iraqis took part in much of the fighting. Between April 2007 and June 2008, Iraqi soldiers and police sustained 162 killed in the line of duty and another 496 wounded throughout MND-C. Unlike the trend in U.S. military and Iraqi civilian casualties, however, Iraqi military casualties did not consistently decline during the surge. Instead, Iraqi security forces tended to suffer a fairly consistent rate of between 1 to 2 casualties per day, with periodic spikes. In March 2008, a month that evidenced an average of fewer than 2 U.S. casualties south of Baghdad, the Iraqi forces endured 13 killed and 51 wounded on three separate days—all the result of strikes spilling over from Mahdi Army violence in Al Basrah and Sadr City.⁹

Even before the surge, the U.S. command intended to build and train the Iraqi forces to take over the fight. In MND-C, the effort started slowly due to a dearth of Iraqi troops south of Baghdad, but, by the spring of 2008, the situation had changed. General Lynch believed that the troop surge had transformed Iraqi units—the greater numbers of U.S. troops instilled confidence in them and engendered a closer relationship—and the Iraqis went “from being bullied by the insurgency to being proud of [their] security gains.” In May, sixty-four U.S. transition teams advised more than twenty-seven thousand Iraqi Army soldiers and National Police in the region, including the entire 8th Division; the 25th Brigade, 6th Division (the brigade was soon to be transferred to the 17th Iraqi Army Division); and the 35th Brigade, 9th Division, as well as the 3d Brigade, 1st National Police Division. In addition, some forty-five thousand local Iraqi police covered two districts south of Baghdad as well as Babil, Karbala, An Najaf, and

⁷ Briefing Charts, MND-C Total Attack Trends, 3 Apr 2007–30 May 2008, and MND-C Coalition Casualty Summary, 3 Apr 2007–30 May 2008.

⁸ Task Force Marne Battle and Non-Battle Deaths, 3d Inf Div Surgeon Cell, 16 Mar 2009. The figure of eighty-two killed in action included those killed in the 1st Brigade in Ar Ramadi as well as various units that had been detached and sent to MND-B, none of which were under the operational control of Task Force Marne.

⁹ MND-C Briefing Slide, ISF Casualty Summary, 3 Apr–30 May 2008, BUB, 30 May 2008.



Soldiers from Troop B, 3d Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment, 3d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, hand out candy to Iraqi children during a joint patrol with Iraqi National Police in Nahrawan. During its fifteen-month tour in Iraq, Task Force Marne helped change the status of the region from dangerous insurgency to hopeful resurgence.

Wasit Provinces. While the numbers were strong, the capabilities of the Iraqi forces remained spotty, especially among police units, which continued to harbor sectarian elements.¹⁰

The security side of the fight was paramount but by itself would have meant little. As Task Force Marne cleared the enemy from the Tigris and Euphrates, it also infused \$209 million into local economies through 1,710 separate programs and sponsored 461 microgrants to local businessmen totaling \$1.1 million. The Iraqi government added \$56 million for repairing roads and rejuvenating towns. A joint U.S.-Iraqi effort reestablished the moribund local government and legal system.¹¹

These statistics are difficult to digest, but the picture they paint becomes more distinct when observed from the local level. In Al Mada'in Qadaa southeast of Baghdad, the 3d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, provided money for 62 local businesses along the east bank of the Tigris and renovated 15 schools and began work on another 10. In Salman Pak, the former insurgent stronghold, the brigade oversaw the rebuilding of a local fire station that had been razed and the reopening of a local market. In Arab Jabour, on the west bank of the river—also previously an al-Qaeda sanctuary—the 2d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, furnished start-up money

¹⁰ Quote from Lt Gen Rick Lynch and Capt Allie Weiskopf, "Battle in a Counterinsurgency Environment," Center for Army Lessons Learned Web site, Feb 2009, p. 8. MND-C Monthly Wrap-up trifold, Iraqi Security Forces, 9 May 2008.

¹¹ MND-C Monthly Wrap-up trifold, Governance, 9 May 2008.

for 64 local businesses, opened some 24 schools, renovated a hospital in Adwaniyah, and revamped the aging irrigation system in Al Yusufiyah. No one would argue that these projects healed the damage done by five years of war, but they were big steps toward that goal and a vast improvement from only one year earlier.¹²

MND-C's progress south of Baghdad proved to be a microcosm for the rest of Iraq. In a June 2008 report to Congress, the Government Accountability Office found that violence countrywide fell by 70 percent during the surge, with the most dramatic drop coming between June 2007 and February 2008, during which time the number of attacks fell from about one hundred and eighty per day to fifty. Violence increased somewhat in March and April due to fighting with Mahdi Army militias in Al Basrah and Sadr City, before declining again in May. In July, the first full month after the end of the surge, U.S. military deaths fell to thirteen, the lowest total since the war began in 2003. According to the report, the primary reason for this was the safety produced by "the increase in U.S. combat forces" over the past year. Two other factors helped, the rise of the Sons of Iraq and the Mahdi Army cease-fire, but both of these stemmed from the larger number of U.S. troops and their strategy of living among the population. General Odierno bridled at claims that the reduction in violence resulted "merely from bribing our enemies to stop fighting," and he noted that such a view "overlooks the salient point that many who reconciled with us did so from a position of weakness, rather than strength." It was the stability caused by more U.S. forces and the counterinsurgency strategy they employed that set the stage for everything else.¹³

The Counterinsurgency Assessment

The main ingredient in the surge was extra troops—more than thirty thousand soldiers to reclaim Baghdad and the surrounding belts from insurgents and sectarian extremists. By itself this was not enough. Without innovative tactics and an extensive vision of how to use the new force to bolster Iraq's government and economy, there could have been no progress. At the root of reconstruction was the use of military power to establish security. "Clear, hold, and rebuild" began with sufficient manpower.

From the top down, U.S. commanders in Iraq understood this. General Petraeus, who from the beginning had chosen a counterinsurgency strategy that required both military and political dimensions, agreed that such

¹² MND-C Monthly Wrap-up trifold, Measures of Progress, 9 May 2008; Task Force Marne Transformation, May 2008, pp. 3–9.

¹³ First quote from Government Accountability Office (GAO) Report to Congressional Committees, *Securing, Stabilizing, and Rebuilding Iraq, Progress Report: Some Gains Made, Strategy Update Needed*, Jun 2008, pp. 3–4. Second quote from Lt. Gen. Raymond T. Odierno, "The Surge in Iraq: One Year Later," Heritage Foundation Lectures, no. 1068, 13 Mar 2008, p. 4.

a plan was “certainly enabled by the additional forces” put in place by the surge. During an interview conducted just before he took over as head of the U.S. Central Command in October 2008, Petraeus pointed out that the military component of counterinsurgency required the “absolutely relentless pursuit of the enemy”—and the military component came first. “We had to have already either completely cleared the area of Al-Qaeda or at least held the prospect of clearing that area before the people felt the courage to hold up their hand and say that they wanted to support us and to reject Al-Qaeda,” he observed.¹⁴

General Odierno seconded those sentiments. He believed that before the surge, U.S. forces “were incapable of ‘holding’ the ground we had won.” The addition of troops “set the stage for progress in governance and economic development,” though, like Petraeus, the corps commander was quick to note that “implementing the surge involved much more than throwing extra resources at a problem.” But at its roots, the surge allowed missions on a large scale—Odierno described them as “simultaneous and sustained offensive operations”—that continued for a year beginning in the summer of 2007. These were military campaigns by any definition, striking at enemy safe havens and lines of communications all across Baghdad and its surrounding belts. As in conventional war, the goal was to inflict casualties on the enemy and hamper his movement. When the insurgents fled and tried to regroup, U.S. and Iraqi forces hit them again.¹⁵

At the division level, the emphasis mirrored the vision of the top leaders, with units engaging and destroying or at least driving away the insurgents, then staying in the regions they had cleared to protect and gain the confidence of the population. Although the 3d Infantry Division was a heavy conventional unit, originally trained to fight on the plains and forests of Europe against a similarly organized enemy, it was able to take its tanks and armored fighting vehicles into the villages and farms south of Baghdad and employ them to secure and shield the population.

General Lynch saw no conflict between his heavy division and the mission at hand. In fact, he did not regard the fight in Iraq as significantly different than any other, and he rarely uttered the word *counterinsurgency*. “You don’t want to spend too much time zeroing in on COIN,” he reflected after returning home from Iraq. His philosophy was to “see what the conditions dictate and fight that way.” Lynch regarded the counterinsurgency manual as a starting point, not a template. “A lot of what I learned didn’t come from the COIN manual,” stated Lynch. “It came from watching the enemy and responding.” Throughout Iraq, this was embodied in the often-expressed mantra that “the enemy gets a vote.”¹⁶

¹⁴ Interv, author with Gen David H. Petraeus, 20 Oct 2008, pp. 28–29, 31, in OIF-AND-08-01 Gen. David Petraeus, CMH.

¹⁵ Odierno, “The Surge in Iraq: One Year Later,” pp. 2–3, 5.

¹⁶ Telecon, author with Lt Gen Rick Lynch, CO, III Corps, 2 Sep 2009.

Everything came together on the ground. As Task Force Marne units expanded their presence throughout MND-C, putting down roots among the population and recruiting more and more Sons of Iraq to bolster their progress against the insurgents, violence fell and patrols became less dangerous. Increasingly, daily assessments from platoons and companies in the field contained the terse notation “NSTR”—nothing significant to report—a far cry from the demoralizing list of dead and wounded soldiers and damaged and destroyed armored vehicles of less than a year earlier. This was welcome news for the men and women on the ground, but it was also indicative of something deeper. A handful of 3d Division officers, writing in one of the Army’s professional journals, *Infantry*, observed that these stretches of uneventful operations did not point to a failure to find the enemy but rather toward ultimate success. The young officers asserted that “anyone who said these clearance missions were a waste of time and resulted in nothing significant to report doesn’t realize what winning really looks like.”¹⁷

Remembering

In the late spring of 2008, the 3d Infantry Division was fitting comfortably back into the rhythm of life at Fort Stewart. Soldiers went to work knowing they would see their families at the end of the day, a welcome change from the prolonged absence of a combat deployment. After only a month back from Iraq, the war seemed far away.

Lest anyone forget, however, the Warriors Walk loomed large, a solemn and serene reminder of the toll the war had taken on the division. As spring turned to summer, the pink blooms of the eastern redbud trees gave way to a verdant leafy arbor that stretched down the walkway. On 12 June, Fort Stewart held a ceremony for the last 3d Infantry Division soldiers to fall in Iraq during the surge. Three were memorialized—Private Norris, the last Task Force Marne soldier killed in action in Iraq, as well as Pvt. Ronald R. Harrison and Spec. Mary J. Jaenichen, both of whom had died of noncombat injuries in April and May, respectively. Four hundred eleven trees now lined the Warriors Walk.¹⁸

General Lynch was accompanied to the ceremony by Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Michael G. Mullen. The two flag officers presided over the solemn occasion, Admiral Mullen for the first time and General Lynch for the last time as the 3d Division commander, then both strolled down the Warriors Walk. At the base of many trees, they saw

¹⁷ Capt. Gregory Ralls, Capt. Ben Walker, Capt. Tim Downing, 1st Lt. Cory Scharbo, and 1st Lt. Daniel Griffin, “Nothing Significant to Report: What Winning Really Looks Like,” *Infantry* 97 (September-October 2008): 41.

¹⁸ Fort Stewart Warriors Walk, List of Names by Tree, n.d.; Donna Miles, “Memorial Tree-Planting Honors Fallen 3rd Infantry Division Troops,” American Forces Press Service, 12 Jun 2008.



Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mullen (*left*) and General Lynch visit Warriors Walk at Fort Stewart, Georgia. The garden was built in memory of soldiers assigned to the 3d Infantry Division who were killed in support of military operations since 11 September 2001.

heartfelt tokens of remembrance—a golf ball, a religious plaque, a pack of cigarettes—each symbolizing a private and personal link between the living and the dead. The walk provided a sobering reminder of a commander's responsibility in wartime and the fine line between engaging the enemy and keeping soldiers safe.

No one knew this better than General Lynch. Like combat commanders before him, he bore the ultimate burden for the soldiers who died under his leadership. In victory or defeat, that would never change. Combat is the crucible of command, with wartime events and decisions magnified and etched forever into soldiers' consciousnesses. And when war ebbs to peace, the losses remain as stark reminders of the consequences of those decisions. "I keep the names of the 153 soldiers I lost in Iraq next to my Bible on the nightstand by my bed," Lynch declared more than a year after his return from Iraq. "I sent them into battle and they died, and I have to live with that for the rest of my life." Even in hindsight, it was impossible to know if more lives could have been saved had he made different decisions, but Lynch believed that he and his commanders had used the right combination of caution and aggressiveness to accomplish the mission with a minimum loss of life.¹⁹

No more trees would be planted along the Warriors Walk, at least for the time being. But the Iraq war was not yet over for the 3d Infantry

¹⁹ Telcon, author with Lynch, 2 Sep 2009.

Division. As General Lynch left Fort Stewart and the 3d Division for his next assignment, the Rock of the Marne was already preparing for its fourth tour in Iraq.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

This study started with the author's attachment to the 3d Infantry Division during part of the troop surge. The division commander, Maj. Gen. Rick Lynch, and his staff provided entry to important planning and intelligence staff meetings and granted access to the records generated by the command and its units. The chance to witness the workings of an operational headquarters offered a priceless view of a U.S. Army division at war and was essential to the research and writing of this volume. This book also relied on material gathered by the Army's official historical record-gathering teams, the military history detachments. During the surge, the 52d Military History Detachment at Camp Victory conducted more than a hundred interviews and vacuumed up and forwarded documents to the Center of Military History long after the author had left Iraq.

The sources for this book were abundant, yet the computer technology that helped generate the bulk of them presented both opportunities and pitfalls. Today's Army thrives on PowerPoint presentations. At almost every level of command, briefings are dominated by computer slides with colorful maps, charts, and bullet points summarizing the briefer's information. This is convenient for military officers and civilian officials receiving the briefing, but, as a historical record, the slides lack perspective and depth. Researchers looking back at the slides weeks or months later invariably found recalling specifics difficult.

This trend also extends into the field. Even the most isolated combat unit uses computers, tracing its activities in PowerPoint slides, sending e-mails, and participating in videoconferences with the main headquarters at the forward operating base. After action reports, long a staple of military historians writing combat narratives, have largely vanished, replaced by "storyboards," usually a single slide with a map and a timeline explaining a given combat action. The information is useful, but it lacks the detail generally found in after action and battle reports from previous wars.

Because computers and videoconferencing relay instant intelligence to commanders at all levels, there is less need for officers to jot down their thoughts and observations in traditional reports. For example, Task Force Marne brigade commanders commented in writing to the division headquarters only biweekly, and those accounts generally concentrated on broad issues, offering few particulars. An exception was the 2d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, whose commander, Col. Terry Ferrell, routinely elaborated on the

situation in his area of operations. Ferrell often wrote down his thoughts about ongoing operations and the progress of counterinsurgency in general, furnishing useful insights into the challenges and opportunities facing a field commander.

In past wars, messages up and down the chain of command were much more prevalent, and they were preserved on paper. Today, much of that communication is via e-mail, and this presents historians with another major hurdle. It is not apparent how—or even if—e-mail is preserved, and the general consensus among commanders queried about gaining access to e-mails was that they were akin to private letters and therefore unavailable even to official historians. This is an issue that needs resolution.

Some reports are still submitted in narrative form. For example, the operational orders issued in advance of planned campaigns are written out and contain considerable detail, especially on enemy strengths and capabilities, terrain problems, and the nature of local civilian support or opposition. This material naturally formed an important part of the 3d Infantry Division's planning and, along with information from General Lynch's staff meetings, were a key underpinning of this book's documentation.

Despite the evolution of U.S. Army wartime record-keeping, other aspects of the military historian's craft remain unchanged. Interviews with officers and soldiers still supply crucial specifics of command and combat, giving life to the facts and figures in the reports and slides. Soldiers still keep diaries of their observations and activities and sometimes share them with historians. Over the course of the deployment, the author conducted dozens of interviews, from the highest-ranking commanders down through the battalion and company level, both officers and soldiers.

Although primary sources make up most of the documentation in this volume, it was also necessary to rely on some secondary material. As with all history written so close to the event, media reports are inevitably an important part of the record. Before documents become available to researchers, journalists provide the most immediate account of events, though with obvious limitations. For the military historian, stories filed by journalists in the combat zone are a valuable resource, one which was used here to fill the gaps in knowledge and coverage. Most useful were major newspapers such as the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Wall Street Journal*, which maintained a long-term presence in the war zone.

Many books have already been written on the Iraq war, and several were useful in setting the stage, especially Michael Isikoff's and David Corn's *Hubris: The Inside Story of Spin, Scandal, and the Selling of the Iraq War* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2007) as well as two volumes by Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004) and *State of Denial: Bush at War, Part III* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006).

Two of the most important military histories of the war between 2003 and 2006 are Michael R. Gordon's and General Bernard E. Trainor's

Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq (New York: Vintage Books, 2007) and Thomas E. Ricks' *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006).

As for the surge itself, few books have been written. Most useful are Thomas E. Ricks' *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq, 2006–2008* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009) and Kimberly Kagan's *The Surge: A Military History* (New York: Encounter Books, 2009). Although not completely devoted to the surge, a handful of other volumes were helpful, especially Bing West's *The Strongest Tribe: War, Politics, and the Endgame in Iraq* (New York: Random House, 2008); David Cloud's and Greg Jaffe's *The Fourth Star: Four Generals and the Epic Struggle for the Future of the United States Army* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2009); and Linda Robinson's *Tell Me How This Ends: General David Petraeus and the Search for a Way Out of Iraq* (New York: Public Affairs, 2008).

Technology has changed the way the U.S. Army fights wars, and that has inevitably spilled over into the way historians record them. Just as the military struggles with the ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, historians will also continue to adapt to the changing nature of technology and documentation.

ABBREVIATIONS

ABCT	airborne brigade combat team
ACB	air cavalry brigade
ACE	Analysis and Control Element (3d Infantry Division intelligence cell)
AD	armored division
AIF	anti-Iraqi forces
AO	area of operations
AQI	al-Qaeda in Iraq
ATK	attack
BAT	Biometric Automated Toolset
BCT	brigade combat team
BFIST	Bradley fire support team
BUB	battle update brief
CAB	combat aviation brigade
CAS	close air support
CERP	Commander's Emergency Response Program
CF	coalition forces
CG	commanding general
CID	Criminal Investigation Division
CLC	Concerned Local Citizens
CMH	U.S. Army Center of Military History
CO	commanding officer

COIN	counterinsurgency
COP	combat outpost
CPOF	Command Post of the Future (computer system)
DIA	Defense Intelligence Agency
DMG	damaged
DoD	Department of Defense
DOW	died of wounds
DUSTWUN	duty station—whereabouts unknown
EFP	explosive-formed projectile
EKIA	enemy killed in action
FA	field artillery
FM	field manual
FOB	forward operating base
FRAGO	fragmentary order
FSB	forward support battalion
GAO	Government Accountability Office
GMLRS	guided multiple launch rocket system
GOI	government of Iraq
HBCT	heavy brigade combat team
HBIED	house-borne improvised explosive device
HME	homemade explosives
HMMWV	high mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicle or Humvee
HVI	high-value individual
HVT	high-value target

IA	Iraqi Army
ID	infantry division
IDF	indirect fire
IED	improvised explosive device
IO	information operations
ISF	Iraqi security forces
JAM	<i>Jaysh al-Mahdi</i> or Mahdi Army
JSS	joint security station
KIA	killed in action
LN	local national
LNO	liaison officer
LOC	lines of communications
MHD	military history detachment
MISCAP	missing and captured
MiTT	Military Transition Team
MNC-I	Multi-National Corps–Iraq
MND-B	Multi-National Division–Baghdad
MND-C	Multi-National Division–Center
MND-NC	Multi-National Division–North Central
MND-CS	Multi-National Division–Center-South
MND-N	Multi-National Division–North
MNF-I	Multi-National Force–Iraq
MNF-NW	Multi-National Force–Northwest
MNF-W	Multi-National Force–West

MoE	Ministry of Energy
MP	military police
MRAP	mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicle
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCO	noncommissioned officer
NSC	National Security Council
O&I	operations and intelligence
OIF	Operation IRAQI FREEDOM
OPORD	operation order
PAO	Public Affairs Office
PB	patrol base
PIR	parachute infantry regiment
PRT	provincial reconstruction team
RIP TOA	relief in place—transfer of authority
RPG	rocket-propelled grenade
SAF	small-arms fire
SAFIRE	surface-to-air fire
SCIRI	Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution
SEALs	sea, air, and land teams
SIIC	Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council
SITTEMP	situation template
SOI	Sons of Iraq
STBIED	suicide truck-borne improvised explosive device

Abbreviations	
TF	task force
TOA	transfer of authority
TOC	tactical operations center
TRADOC	Training and Doctrine Command
TRV	Tigris River valley
TSFET	Theater Service Forces, European Theater
TTP	tactic, technique, and procedure
TUSK	tank urban survivability kit
USA	U.S. Army
USSF	U.S. Special Forces
VBIED	vehicle-borne improvised explosive device
WIA	wounded in action

MAP SYMBOLS AND TERMS

UNIT TYPE	
Armor	
Aviation (Rotary Wing)	
Cavalry	
Cavalry (Airborne)	
Cavalry (Armored)	
Field Artillery	
Field Artillery (Airborne)	
Field Artillery (Self-propelled)	
Infantry	
Infantry (Air Assault)	
Infantry (Airborne)	
Infantry (Mechanized)	
Mountain	

UNIT SIZE	
Platoon	•••
Battery, Company, or Cavalry Troop	—
Battalion or Cavalry Squadron	
Regiment or Group	
Brigade	x
Division	xx

EXAMPLES

2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division



3d Georgian Brigade



2d Battalion, 4th Brigade, 6th Iraqi Army Division



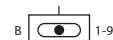
5th Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment



2d Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment



Battery B, 1st Battalion, 9th Field Artillery Regiment

1st Platoon, Company D, 4th Battalion,
31st Infantry Regiment

ABBREVIATIONS

AO	Area of Operations
COP	Combat Outpost
FOB	Forward Operating Base
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
MND-C	Multi-National Division–Center
PB	Patrol Base
TAO	Tactical Area of Operations

INDEX

Abd-al-Rahman, Sheikh Umar, 97

Abd al Saman, 312

Abid, Abbas Hamid, 255

Abizaid, General John P., 11

Abrams (M1A1) tanks, 23, 104

Abu Amina, 315–16

Abu Amosh, 234

Abu Bakr, 179, 185, 189

Abu Ghraib region, 218

Abu Jabal, 149–51

Abu Jurah, 120–21, 154–55

Abu Mohammed, 234

Abu Rus, 270–71

Abu Sara, 341

Abu Ziyad, 334

Abuwaitha, 159, 229

Accelerants of violence, 25

Adams, Spec. James, 31

Adams, Sgt. Shawn G., 188–89

Adgie, Lt. Col. Kenneth P., 116

- civic action activities, 222, 328
- MARNE THUNDERBOLT planning, 312, 326
- MARNE TORCH, 128, 129, 138–39
- MARNE TORCH II, 246
- on Sadr City support mission, 354, 356
- on Sons of Iraq, 257

Adhamiya, 354

Adwaniyah, 73

Aerial surveillance drones

- Hunter, 186
- Shadow (RQ-7), 79, 148, 154, 155

Afghanistan, war in, 3

Air assault operations

- 3d Combat Aviation Brigade, 78–80

CASABLANCA, 143

downed Kiowa incident, 84–88

effectiveness of, 143

for Forward Operating Base

- Hammer defense, 148
- on high-value targets, 315

LOCKDOWN, 113

MARNE ANVIL, 266

MARNE AVALANCHE, 185–86

MARNE COURAGEOUS, 277, 279

MARNE FORTITUDE, 103, 105

MARNE HUSKY, 192–98

MARNE PILEDRIVER, 362

MARNE TORCH, 131

MARNE TORCH II, 249, 250, 251, 253, 255

MERCURY, 112–13

after Patrol Base Dog attack, 76–77

Route Tampa, 366

for Sons of Iraq support, 244

Task Force Black, 254–55

against terrorist boats, 337

against terrorist tunnels, 303

TRENTON, 290

See also under Airborne Divisions;

- Aviation Brigades; Cavalry Division, 1st.

Air cavalry. *See* Air assault operations; Helicopters.

Air Force units and support

- 557th Expeditionary Squadron, 329–30
- MARNE HUSKY role, 198
- support operations, 150, 317
- See also* Aircraft (fixed wing).

Airborne Corps, XVIII, 26, 331

Airborne Divisions
 82d, 16, 26, 97
 101st (Air Assault), 4, 54, 272–74
See also under Airborne Brigade
 Combat Teams.

Airborne Brigade Combat Teams
 2d, 82d Airborne Division, 16
 2d, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), 54, 94, 297
 3d, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), 272–74
 departure from Iraq, 379
 expansion of boundaries, 381
 loan of 1st Battalion, 187th Regiment, 345
MARNE COURAGEOUS, 281–85
MARNE PILEDRIVER, 359–65
 missing-soldiers investigation, 285–89
 relations with 4th Brigade, 6th Iraqi Army Division, 292–93
 riverine force operation, 365–66
 security operations, 289–93
SWARMER, 279
 4th (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, 62–63, 66, 296
 An Najaf violence, 67–70
 casualties of, 11
 downed Apache incident, 68–69
 final operations before departure, 293–96
 initial operations, 108, 111–13
 and Karbala attack, 66–67
MARNE AVALANCHE, 179–91
MARNE HUSKY role, 193–94
MARNE TORCH, 131
 retaliation on, for reconciliation efforts, 226
 waterborne operations, 365

Aircraft (fixed wing)
 Falcon (F–16), 150, 155, 232, 244, 279, 315, 318
 Globemaster (C–17), 348
 Hornet (F–18), 319

Lancer (B–1B), 105, 129, 185–86, 249, 266, 318, 319
Thunderbolt (A–10), 87, 103

Al Amarah, 176–77
 Al Anbar Province, 7, 136, 213, 311
 Al-Askari Mosque, 8, 261
 Al Assad, 312
 Al Basrah, 351
 Al Fallujah, 4, 136–37, 213
 Al Faw Palace, 35
 Al Iskandariyah, 21, 288
MARNE AVALANCHE, 180, 184–85, 186
 misdeeds by American soldiers in, 70
 and sectarian tensions, 180, 293–94

Al Karmah, 136
 Al Kufah, bombing of, 111
 Al Kut, 164–66, 167–73, 352
 Al Lej, 336, 342
 Al Mada'in Qadaa, 38, 49, 152–53, 234
 Al Mahmudiyah, 55, 108, 269, 292, 360
 Al Mizan, 315
 Al Musayyib, 180, 288
Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), 13, 307
 in Al Iskandariyah, 298
 in Arab Jabour, 120–21
 Ba'qubah engagement, 135–36
 contributions to sectarian tensions, 290
 control efforts south of Baghdad, 31–32
Surging South of Baghdad, 179
 in northern Euphrates River valley, 55
 in Owsat, 275
 presence in Baghdad belts, 17, 27
 retrenchment south of Salmon Pak, 334–35
 and Route Malibu craters attack, 91–92
 Sunni local disillusionment with, 121, 210–11, 212–14, 223, 227–28, 233

surge effects on, 199–200, 243, 288

terror tactics to force local cooperation, 222

Tigris River weapons caches, 191–92

versus Islamic Army, 314, 335

versus Sons of Iraq program, 315

See also High-value targets.

Al Sheeb, 177

Al Taraq, 55

Al-Wasi Binobi Mosque, 108

Al Yusufiyah, 55

Albu Mahal tribe, 212–13

Albu Risha clan, 213

Alger, 2d Lt. Tracy Lynn, 274

Allawi, Hussein, 231, 232

Allawi, Muktar, 231, 232

Alternate Supply Route Wild, 335

Ambassador to Iraq. *See* Crocker, Ryan.

Amina, Abu. *See* Abu Amina.

Amosh, Abu. *See* Abu Amosh.

An Najaf, 67–69, 351

An Najaf Province, 63, 111, 295

Anbar Awakening (*Sahawa al-Anbar*), 210–13

Anbar Salvation Council (*Majlis Inqadh al-Anbar*), 213

Andrade, Spec. Roman, 106

Anzack, Pfc. Joseph J., 89, 95, 98

Ar Ramadi, 136, 213–14, 311

Ar Rustamiyah, 48

Arab Jabour, 116–17, 121, 129–40, 312

civic action activities, 139, 157–58, 222

MARNE TORCH, 121–28

after MARNE TORCH, 158–59

rebuilding operations, 257–58, 312, 327–30

reconciliation initiatives, 223

restoring civilian control, 156–58

Arafia, Jisr Diyala, 231–32

Areas of Operations

Anzio, 112–13

Battle, 116, 129

Blackhawk, 43, 48

Chaka III, 184, 186

Defender, 19

Denali, 115, 116, 154

Dragon, 48–54

Guardian, 116

Hammer, 141–53, 264

Iron, 361

Kartli, 174

Rock, 264

Scimitar, 19

Spartan, 293

Striker (formerly Hammer), 372

Vanguard, 298

Armored Division, 1st, 3, 37, 213, 369–76

Armored Brigades

1st, 1st Armored Division, 213

2d, 1st Armored Division, 369–76

Armored Regiments

35th, 371–72, 374

64th, 115, 297, 376n111

69th, 41–42, 184, 345–46, 349, 350

Armored Cavalry Regiment, 3d, 308

Armored Battalions

1st, 35th Armored Regiment, 371–72, 374

1st, 64th Armored Regiment, 115

2d, 69th Armored Regiment, 41–42, 345–46, 349, 350

4th, 64th Armored Regiment, 297, 376n111

Armored Companies

A, 1st Battalion, 35th Armored Regiment, 374

A, 2d Battalion, 69th Armored Regiment, 184, 349, 350

Armored personnel carriers, up- armored, 300n72

Artillery. *See* Excalibur precision artillery; Paladin (M109A6) self-propelled howitzers.

As Suwayrah, 191–92, 197, 348

Ashura celebrations, 290

Askari, Sami al-, 214

At Tarmiyah–Saab al Bour corridor, 21

Austin, Lt. Gen. Lloyd J., 331–33, 353

Aviation Brigades

- 1st Air Cavalry Brigade (ACB), 76–77, 80–84
- 3d, 3d Infantry Division (Mechanized), 78–80, 378
- daily support operations, 102
- and downed Kiowa incident, 87
- MARNE HUSKY, 194–98
- MARNE TORCH, 124
- Sadr city uprising, 356–57

Aviation Regiments

- 3d, 197
- 227th, 76–77, 81, 82–83

Aviation Battalions

- 1st, 3d Aviation Regiment, 197
- 1st, 227th Aviation Regiment, 82–83
- 4th, 227th Aviation Regiment, 76–77, 81, 82

Aviation Squadron, 3d, 17th Cavalry Regiment, 76–77

Aviation Company B, 4th Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment, 76–77

Ba'ath Party, decision to ban, 211

Babil Province, 112

Badr Corps, 33–34, 112

Baghdad, 9–11, 352–57. *See also* South of Baghdad.

Baghdad Airport, capture of, 4–5

Baghdad belts, 16–24, 101

Baker, James A. III, 10

Baker, Col. Peter R., 166–67

Bakr, Abu. *See* Abu Bakr.

Balad Air Base, 329–30

Balcavage, Lt. Col. Robert M., 235

Ball, Col. Daniel, 79, 87

Ballard, M. Sgt. Thomas S., 69

Baqubah, 135

Barak, Sabah Jundi, 89

Barksdale, Lt. Col. Dane A., 350

Barth, 1st Lt. Eugene M., 231, 232

Bayh, Senator Evan, 358–59

Bayjla, 254–55

“Benchmark Assessment Report,” 202

Betra, 275, 279

Biometric Automated Toolset (BAT), 132n8

Biometric database, 220

Bird Dogs, 222

Black, Sfc. Peter, 53

Blount, Maj. Gen. Buford C. III, 6

Borbonus, Pfc. John J., 74, 75

Border control in Wasit Province, 173–77

Bradley (M2) infantry fighting vehicles, 23

Bragg, Capt. Aaron S., 94, 276, 286

Braman, Capt. Donald T., 73

Brian, Capt. Jeffrey, 96

Brigade Combat Team, creation of, 6–7.

- See also individual branches or functions.*

British forces, 237

Brown, S. Sgt. Harrison, 42

Browning, Capt. James L., 184, 349

Buckner, 1st Lt. John N., 303–04

Buffalo mine-clearing vehicle, 113

Burress, Spec. Richard B., 321

Burrows, CWO2 Mark, 84–85, 87

Busayef, 246, 255

Bush, George W., 10, 11–13, 207, 209, 331

Butler, Sgt. Jacob L., 37

Butler, Sgt. Robert, 53

Butler Range Complex, 37

Cahill, Capt. Joel E., 51

Caldwell, Maj. Gen. William B., 10, 14–15, 18

Camps

- Greene, 1
- Liberty, 4

Striker, 54, 279
Victory, 35–41, 378
Zulu, 350

Cape Knox, USS, 54

Caraccilo, Col. Dominic J., 272–73, 345–46, 379
on civic action projects, 292

MARNE COURAGEOUS, 276, 277, 281, 283

MARNE PILEDRIVER, 360, 364, 365
on MKI's death, 288
on Wassim assassination, 364

Cardon, Brig. Gen. Edward C., 26
on assumption of command over Wasit, 166
on deployment extension, 42
on **MARNE HUSKY**'s temporary effects, 198
on **MARNE THUNDERBOLT** air strikes, 318
MARNE TORCH planning, 124
on Shi'ite uprising, 351–52
on south of Baghdad threat, 30

Carver, Pfc. Cody M., 260, 336

Casey, General George W. Jr., 6, 8, 11, 13

Cashe, Sfc. Alwyn C., 50

Casualties, 1, 2, 3 11
2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, totals, 271
American, during surge, 125, 160, 385–86
ceremony for, 390–92
concern about, at home in U.S., 199, 207
decline in, 307
enemy, 156–57, 384
Iraqi security forces, 386
Sons of Iraq, 238
summary for 3d Infantry Division, 381

Warriors Walk, 1, 390–91

See also Civilian casualties.

Cavalry Division, 1st, 6, 20
as 3d Infantry Division's air cavalry, 80–84
at Ba'qubah, 135
and MND-C organization, 25
and Patrol Base Dog attack, 76
reconciliation initiatives, 217–18
redeployment to Baghdad, 115

Cavalry Brigade Combat Team, 1st, 217–18

Cavalry Regiments

- 1st, 41, 43, 46–47, 105, 142, 147–48, 153, 229–30, 258–59, 265, 320, 367, 374
- 2d, 277, 290, 292, 346, 352, 354
- 5th, 218
- 7th, 115, 310–11, 312, 324–25, 328, 345, 346
- 8th, 297, 309–10, 312, 315, 323–24, 328
- 33d, 277, 290, 292, 346, 365
- 40th, 73, 83, 113, 115–16, 123–24, 131, 154, 223, 224, 245, 251, 253, 255, 297
- 61st, 48–49

See also under Cavalry Squadrons; Mountain Division, 10th.

Cavalry Battalion, 2d, 5th Cavalry Regiment, 218

Cavalry Squadrons

- 1st, 2d Cavalry Regiment, 277, 290, 292, 346, 354
- 1st, 33d Cavalry Regiment, 277, 290, 292, 346, 365
- 1st, 40th Cavalry Regiment, 297

Area of Operations Denali, 115–16
assistance for Sons of Iraq, 244–45
MARNE TORCH, 123–24, 131, 154

MARNE TORCH II, 245–46, 251, 253, 255

Cavalry Squadrons—Continued

- and Patrol Base Dog attack, 73–78, 83
- Patrol Base Red, 113
- reconciliation initiatives, 223, 224
- 3d, 1st Cavalry Regiment, 41, 105, 367
- and Combat Outpost Cahill, 142
- JERSEY TURNPIKE, 153
- MARNE ANVIL, 265
- MARNE DAUNTLESS, 374
- MARNE THUNDERBOLT, 320
- planned area of operations, 43
- post—MARNE TORCH security and rebuilding, 258–59
- reconciliation initiatives, 229–34
- Shi’ite rocket attack on, 147–48
- Team Enabler, 46–47
- 3d, 7th Cavalry Regiment, 115
- 3d, 61st Cavalry Regiment, 48–49
- 5th, 7th Cavalry Regiment, 310–11, 312, 324–25, 328, 345, 346
- 6th, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 297, 309–10, 312, 315, 323–24, 328
- See also under* Mountain Division, 10th.

Cavalry Troops

- A, 5th Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment, 324–25
- B, 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment, 73–78, 253
- B, 5th Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment, 325
- C, 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment, 255

Caveman Canal, 90, 96

Chalabi, Ahmad, 257

Charlton, Col. John W., 7, 214, 311

Chiarelli, Lt. Gen. Peter W., 20

Chief of Staff, U.S. Army. *See* Casey, General George W. Jr.

Chism, Spec. Johnathan B., 66

Cianfrini, CWO2 Steven R., 84–85, 87

Civic action activities, 47, 51, 101, 127, 387

- 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, 271
- 3d Brigade, 3d Division, 334
- Al Lej, 342
- Arab Jabour, 139, 157–58
- Jisr Diyala, 370
- Khidr, 305
- MARNE ANVIL, 267, 268
- Owesat, 283–84

Civilian casualties

- for 2006, 10
- Al Kufah bombing, 111
- from friendly fire, 105, 253–54
- and insurgent targeting of civilians, 104
- reduction in, 385

Civilians. *See* Local population.

Clark, Capt. William J., 107

Cleary, 1st Lt. Michael J., 51

Clinton, Senator Hillary Rodham, 359

Cloutier, Col. Roger, 198, 245, 366

Coalition, the, 6, 8, 13, 63, 87, 93, 101, 163, 202, 211, 365

Coburn, Senator Thomas A., 329

Combat Aviation Brigade. *See* Aviation Brigades.

Combat Outposts

- Cahill, 51, 103–04, 142, 340
- Carver, 336, 341, 342, 371
- Cashe, 49–50, 142, 371
- Cleary, 51, 106, 194, 340
- Corregidor, 61
- Meade, 325, 347
- Murray, 377
- Old Mod, 353–54
- Salie, 372
- Shocker, 173–74
- Summers, 348–49

Command Post of the Future (CPOF), 154

Commander’s Emergency Response Program (CERP), 231

Concerned Local Citizens (CLC). *See* Sons of Iraq program.

Congress, U.S., 202–08, 331, 358–59

Connell, Sfc. James D., 89

Coppersmith, Lt. Col. Brian K., 345–46

Corps, XVIII Airborne. *See* Airborne Corps, XVIII.

Corrigan, 1st Lt. Colin M., 279–80

Counterinsurgency, 105, 108, 199, 383, 384

Lynch on, 389

Sons of Iraq program, 243–45, 247, 275, 290, 302, 341

Courneya, Pfc. Daniel W., 89

Cowell, S. Sgt. Elias D., 74, 75

Crisostomo, Sfc. Anthony B., 280–81, 292–93

Crocker, Ryan, 202, 204–06, 208, 295, 358

Crum, Maj. Curtis L., 282–83

Davis, S. Sgt. Justin M., 377

Davis, Maj. Timothy C., 225, 251

Davison, CWO2 Allan D., 87

DeMint, Senator James W., 329

Deployment extension order, 42

Desert Protection Force, 212

Dickman, Maj. Gen. Joseph T., 2

Diyala Province, 7, 135

Diyala River, 266

Donica, Cpl. Dustin R., 11

Dulaimi tribe, 117, 158, 223

Dunkley, Sgt. Allen J., 107

Duraiya, 106–07, 145–47

Economic support for local villages and towns, 257, 268, 328, 364, 369

Edwards, Spec. William L., 159, 160

Elliot, Pfc. John, 158

Enemy attacks, 73, 102, 294

Al Yusufiyah, 58

average frequency of, 105

Combat Outpost Cahill, 103–04

decline in, 190–91, 239, 269, 384 at end of Task Force Marne, 367–68, 375–76

Forward Operating Base Delta, 167

Forward Operating Base Hammer, 147–48

Forward Operating Base Kalsu, 160

Forward Operating Base Rustamiyah, 226

Grigsby's convoy, 105–06

against helicopters, 84–88

Jisr Diyala, 374–75

Karbala, 63, 66–67

MARNE TORCH II reactions, 253

on mine-clearing vehicles, 113

Odom's unit on way to Hawr Rajab, 224–26

Patrol Base Assassin, 142–43

Patrol Base Dog, 73–78

Patrol Base Murray, 253–54

Patrol Base Red, 113

Patrol Base Warrior Keep, 110–11

Pepsi factory, 146, 149

Qáqaa facility area, 364

renewal in 3d Brigade, 3d Division, area, 259–60

Route Detroit (May 2007), 102–03

Route Malibu attack to obtain prisoners, 88–92, 94–95

Route Tampa (June 2007), 111

Sadr City uprising mission, 354

See also Explosive-formed projectiles (EFPs); Improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

Engineer Battalions

40th, 371

864th, 361

Engineer Companies

502d, 281

535th, 346

C, 864th Engineer Battalion, 361

Ensign, Senator John E., 329

Euphrates River, 27

Excalibur precision artillery round, 155–56, 194

Explosive-formed projectiles (EFPs), 21–22, 103, 105, 112, 169, 172, 226

Falter, Pfc. Shawn P., 66

Faris, Brig. Gen. Emad Ali Abud, 373–74

Fatah al-Ibrahim Mosque, 254

Female suicide bombings, increase in, 108–09, 334, 364–65

Ferrell, Col. Terry R., 7–8, 25, 116, 191
on Abu Jurah house bombing, 155
on Arab Jabour's security, 159, 327
on HBIED attack, 160
MARNE THUNDERBOLT, 318, 320–21

MARNE TORCH, 124–25, 131–32, 137, 138, 154

MARNE TORCH II, 245–46, 252, 253, 256
on progress gained prior to departure, 380–81
and reconciliation initiatives, 223

Field Artillery Regiments
9th, 115, 131, 154–55, 246, 249, 251–52
10th, 41, 264–68, 367
27th, 371–72, 374
76th, 300, 312
320th, 291–92, 360, 363
377th, 112, 131, 184, 269
See also under Mountain Division, 10th.

Field Artillery Battalions
1st, 9th Field Artillery Regiment, 115, 131, 154–55, 246, 249, 251–52
1st, 10th Field Artillery Regiment, 41, 264–68, 367
1st, 76th Field Artillery Regiment, 300, 312

2d, 377th Field Artillery Regiment, 112, 131, 184, 269

3d, 320th Field Artillery Regiment, 291–92, 360, 363

4th, 27th Field Artillery Regiment, 371–72, 374
See also under Mountain Division, 10th.

Field Artillery Batteries
A, 1st Battalion, 76th Field Artillery Regiment, 312

B, 1st Battalion, 9th Field Artillery Regiment, 131, 246, 251–52

B, 2d Battalion, 377th Field Artillery Regiment, 131

B, 4th Battalion, 27th Field Artillery Regiment, 374
See also under Mountain Division, 10th.

Fil, Maj. Gen. Joseph F. Jr., 20, 352–53

Fires Brigade, 214th, 166

Fishhook/Fishbowl area, 145, 193, 197, 342, 348–50

Fivecoat, Maj. David G., 234

Fort Benning, 3

Fort Irwin, 4

Fort Stewart, 1, 390–91

Forward Operating Bases
Anaconda, 115
Delta, 165–66, 167
Falcon, 73, 79, 113, 116, 128, 353
Hammer, 37–38, 147–49, 372
Kalsu, 63, 112, 114, 376
Loyalty, 354
Mahmudiyah, 108
Murray, 129–30
Rustamiyah, 226
Yusufiyah, 96

Forward Support Company, 203d, 3d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division (Mechanized), 145

Fouty, Spec. Byron, 89, 97, 285, 289

Frahs, Pfc. Benjamin T., 142–43
Freeman, Capt. Brian S., 66
Frejee, Maj. Gen. Ali Jassim
 Mohammed al-, 379
Fritz, 1st Lt. Jacob N., 66
Fursan, 334

Gamble, Spec. Carter A., 146
Gamble, CWO2 Edward R., 86
Garrett, Col. Michael X., 63, 111–13,
 115–16, 189, 190, 293, 296
Gates, Robert M., 12, 42, 322
Georgian Brigades
 1st, 175, 337, 340
 3d, 163, 164, 172, 174
Georgian Battalion, 13th, 1st Brigade,
 340, 342, 367–68
Gilbert, Capt. Brian D., 232–33
Giorgi, 1st Lt. Jeno R., 316
Gogava, Col. Zaza, 337, 340
Gonzalez, Sgt. Christopher N., 107
Grier, 1st Lt. Robert L., 145
Grigsby, Col. Wayne W., 7, 36, 41, 42,
 43, 47, 52, 102, 105–06, 259,
 260, 368–69, 372
 BULL RUN, 145, 147
 JERSEY TURNPIKE planning, 152–53
 MARNE TORCH, 125, 141
 on Patrol Base Salie, 268
 preliminary operations to MARNE
 TORCH, 107
 on Razuqi capture, 149–50
 reconciliation initiatives, 234
Guided multiple launch rocket system
 (GMLRS), 320
Gvenetadze, Cpl. Zurab, 367

Hagel, Senator Chuck, 206
Hamid Shaban neighborhood, 292
Hamilton, Lee H., 10
Harrison, Pvt. Ronald R., 390
Hart, Capt. James J., 303
Hartley, S. Sgt. Jeffery L., 367
Hashim, Abbas, 267

Haswah, 61, 180
Hathaway, Capt. James Lee, 46
Hawks, Pfc. Lloyd C., 247
Hawr Rajab, 223
 attack on Odom's convoy in, 224–
 26
 MARNE TORCH results for, 245
 preliminary operations to MARNE
 TORCH II, 250–51
 pushing out leftover insurgents,
 243
 rebuilding operations, 329–30
 reduction in enemy activity, 154
 Sons of Iraq program, 229, 253

Helicopters
 Apache Longbow (AH-64D),
 68–69, 76–77, 79, 82, 86–87,
 131, 145, 154, 155, 196–97,
 303
 Black Hawk (UH-60), 79, 186,
 197
 Chinook (CH-47), 79, 143, 186,
 196
 Kiowa (OH-58D), 79, 84–88
Hellfire missiles, 83, 131, 244, 250, 303
Hemmann, Capt. Steven M., 106
Henderson, S. Sgt. Michael, 106
Hensley, S. Sgt. Michael A., 70
Hesco barricades, 77
Hicks, Sgt. Glenn D., 52
High mobility multipurpose wheeled
 vehicles (HMMWVs or
 Humvees)
 M998, 22–23n49
 up-armored M1114, 22

High-value targets
 Abu Amina, 315–16
 Abu Bakr, 179, 185, 189
 Abu Jabal, 149–51
 Abu Jurah, 120–21, 154–55
 Abu Rus, 270–71
 Abu Sara, 341
 captured in MARNE AVALANCHE,
 187, 189

High-value targets—*Continued*

- as focus of MARNE TORCH II, 254–55
- as focus of Task Force Black, 254–55
- Janabi, 288–89
- Jassim, 198
- MKI, 94–95, 275, 287–88
- overall results of search for, 101, 306, 384
- Sons of Iraq assistance with, 270–71, 341

Hilderbrand, Capt. Terry N., 281

Hobt, CWO2 Kristopher S., 86

Holidays and morale building, 304–05

Holtz, S. Sgt. Shon P., 106

Horning, Capt. John, 340

House-borne improvised explosive device (HBIED), 160

Hovatter, Lt. Col. Mark J., 24, 117, 123

Huggins, Brig. Gen. James L., 26, 87, 305

JERSEY TURNPIKE planning, 152–53

MARNE TORCH II, 245, 249, 253

- on reconciliation, 218–19, 220

Hughes, Maj. Gen. Christopher, 237

Hughes, Lt. Col. Stephen, 69

Hunter Army Airfield, 78

Hurd, Capt. Daniel E., 60

Husayn as Salifi, 312

Hussaniyah-Ba’qubah axis, 21

Hussein, Col. Ali Abdul, 350

Hussein, Omar Ahmed (Abu Sara), 341

Hussein, Saddam, 30, 39, 49, 117

Improvised explosive devices (IEDs), 27, 49, 61, 82, 88, 130–35, 137–38, 154, 158–59, 206, 222, 247, 269

Infanti, Lt. Col. Michael, 93

Infantry Divisions

- 1st, 16, 22–23, 189
- 2d, 23, 48, 69, 135

3d (Mechanized), 1–4, 5–8, 35–40, 304–05

assumption of command over south of Baghdad units, 61

casualties summary, 381

as command HQ for MND-C, 24

commitment to missing-soldiers search, 285

departure from Iraq, 378

deployment planning for south of Baghdad, 23–24, 25

drawdown in preparation for return home, 345

PHANTOM PHOENIX support, 308–09

reach issue beyond MARNE TORCH, 191–92

reconciliation initiatives, 218–21

relinquishing command to 10th Mountain Division, 377–78

setup and initial operations, 41–48

strategy for last Tigris operations, 347–48

transfer of control of Wasit Province to, 163

See also under Aviation Brigades.

4th, 6, 20, 352, 376n111

24th, inactivation and reflagging of, 3

25th, 7, 11, 22, 62, 66, 69, 108, 111, 131, 179, 184, 193–94, 226, 289, 293–94, 352, 365

42d, 4

See also under Infantry Brigade Combat Teams; Mountain Division, 10th.

Infantry Brigade, 172d, 379–80

Infantry Brigade Combat Teams

- 1st, 3d Infantry Division (Mechanized), 7, 346
- ALLJAH, 136–37
- initial Iraq war operations, 4–5

loan of unit to 2d Brigade, 310, 345
MARNE COURAGEOUS, 279
reconciliation initiatives, 213–14
2d, 1st Infantry Division, 189
2d, 2d Infantry Division, 48
2d, 3d Infantry Division
(Mechanized), 4, 7, 23, 25, 83–84, 297n66, 345, 346–47, 380–81
assignment to south of Baghdad, 26
civic action activities, 327–30
initial deployment and operations, 113–21
MARNE THUNDERBOLT, 308–26
MARNE TORCH, 124–25, 129–40, 153–56
MARNE TORCH II, 243, 245–58
post–**MARNE TORCH** operations, 156–58
reconciliation initiatives, 221–29, 238
Sons of Iraq recruitment activities, 221–27, 229
3d, 2d Infantry Division, 69
3d, 3d Infantry Division
(Mechanized), 3, 4, 7, 23, 25, 83, 102, 367–69
initial deployment and operations, 36, 48–54, 105–08
MARNE GRAND SLAM, 333–45
MARNE HUSKY, 193–94
MARNE TORCH, 125, 141–49
reconciliation initiatives, 227, 229–34
security and reconstruction challenges, 258–61
Shi’ite militia control strategy, 263–68
3d, 4th Infantry Division, 352
4th, 1st Infantry Division, 16, 22–23
4th, 2d Infantry Division, 23
4th, 3d Infantry Division
(Mechanized), 4, 7, 26, 296–97, 309, 345, 379–80
MARNE ROUNDUP, 298–306
MARNE RUGGED, 347–51
and missing-soldiers search, 289
See also under Airborne Brigade
Combat Teams; Mountain Division, 10th.
Infantry Regiments
3d, 69
6th, 371, 373
7th, 297, 299, 302–05
15th, 41, 43, 48, 50–54, 81, 102–04, 105, 106, 141–43, 145, 153, 234, 259, 334, 336
21st, 352
30th, 115, 116, 124, 128, 129, 138–39, 153–54, 221–22, 223, 229, 245, 246–47, 249, 251, 312, 316, 320, 323–24
187th, 238, 275, 277, 279, 281–83, 285, 290, 345–47, 360–61
501st, 70, 112, 184, 235, 365
502d, 297, 299, 349
503d, 272
505th, 97
509th, 11, 181, 184–86, 187–89, 196–98
See also under Infantry Battalions; Mountain Division, 10th.
Infantry Battalions
1st, 6th Infantry Regiment, 371
1st, 15th Infantry Regiment, 43, 46, 81
Combat Outpost Cahill incident, 103–04
deployment and initial operations, 41, 48–54, 105, 106–07
final operations before departure, 334, 336
JERSEY TURNPIKE, 153

Infantry Battalions—Continued

- Jisr Diyala Bridge incident, 104
- MARNE GRAND SLAM, 336, 340–45
- MARNE TORCH, 141–43, 145
- post—MARNE TORCH security and rebuilding, 259
- reconciliation initiatives, 234
- Route Detroit incident response, 102–03
- 1st, 21st Infantry Regiment, 352
- 1st, 30th Infantry Regiment, 115, 116, 377
- civic action activities, 227–330
- MARNE THUNDERBOLT, 312, 320, 323, 324
- MARNE TORCH II, 245, 246–47, 249–51, 254–55
- MAUSER, 316–17
- planning and MARNE TORCH, 124, 128, 129, 138–39, 153–54
- reconciliation initiatives, 221–22, 223, 229
- 1st, 187th Infantry Regiment, 238, 279, 345–47
- 1st, 501st Infantry Regiment, 70, 112, 184, 235, 365
- 1st, 509th Infantry Regiment, 187–89
- 2d, 3d Infantry Regiment, 69
- 2d, 6th Infantry Regiment, 371, 373
- 2d, 502d Infantry Regiment, 297, 299, 349
- 2d, 503d Infantry Regiment, 272
- 2d, 505th Infantry Regiment, 97
- 3d, 7th Infantry Regiment, 297, 299, 302–05
- 3d, 187th Infantry Regiment, 275, 277, 279–85, 290, 360–61, 365
- 3d, 509th Infantry Regiment, 11, 181, 184–86, 189, 196–98
- See also under* Infantry Companies; Mountain Division, 10th.

Infantry Companies

- A, 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment
- CHOSIN, 143
- CLEAN SWEEP, 342
- DURAI'YA SUNRISE, 336
- mortar attack on Combat Outpost Cahill, 103–04
- post—MARNE TORCH patrols, 145, 146
- preliminary Salman Pak area patrols, 51–53
- and renewed IED incidents, 259–60
- A, 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment
- Abu Jurah mission, 154, 155
- Arab Jabour dangers, 158
- Fatah al-Ibrahim Mosque mission, 254–55
- MARNE TORCH, 129–30
- Sadr City support, 353–57
- weapons cache discovery, 249
- A, 1st Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, 279, 292–93, 346–47
- A, 1st Battalion, 509th Infantry Regiment, 187–88
- A, 3d Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment, 375–76
- A, 3d Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, 279–81, 283, 365–66
- A, 3d Battalion, 509th Infantry Regiment, 185, 189
- B, 1st Battalion, 6th Infantry Regiment, 374–75
- B, 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, 103–04, 145–46, 341, 342
- B, 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment
- Abu Jurah mission, 154, 155

MARNE TORCH, 130

MAUSER, 316

Patrol Base Hawkes, 247, 249

sniper attack near Patrol Base Murray, 159

B, 1st Battalion, 501st Infantry Regiment, 294

B, 2d Battalion, 502d Infantry Regiment, 350–51

B, 3d Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment, 302, 303–04

B, 3d Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, 279, 281

B, 3d Battalion, 509th Infantry Regiment, 186, 189

C, 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, 143, 340

C, 1st Battalion, 27th Infantry Regiment, 354

C, 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, 130, 133

C, 3d Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, 184

C, 3d Battalion, 509th Infantry Regiment, 184, 294

D, 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, 52, 104, 232

D, 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, 130, 133, 238, 327–28, 353–56

D, 3d Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment, 326–27

D, 3d Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, 279, 346, 364

E, 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, 130

E, 3d Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment, 302, 304

See also under Mountain Division, 10th.

Inge, Capt. Joseph R., 353–54

Insurgency, 104, 112, 139, 361

Arab Jabour area, 120

escalation of, prior to surge, 8–10

infiltration of Sons of Iraq, 238

MARNE TORCH's effect on, 154, 156–57, 159

Patrol Base Assassin infiltration attempts, 142

presence and power south of Baghdad, 17, 27–28, 30–32, 191–92

Route Malibu attack plan and operation, 94–95

surge effects on, 137, 144

in Wasit Province, 165–66

See also Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI); Enemy attacks; Shi'ite militias.

Intelligence operations, 94

3d Brigade, 46–47

on al-Qaeda in Arab Jabour, 120–21

importance to counterinsurgency success, 105

local information, 194–95, 222, 227–28

on Mahdi Army's weapons smuggling operations, 168–69

in search of missing soldiers, 92

Sons of Iraq as contributors to, 270

surge effects on insurgents, 137, 144

Iran

Al Kut as focal point of smuggling from, 167–69

increasing border visibility to monitor, 173–77

smuggling tactics at Zurbatiyah, 172

support of Shi'ite insurgents, 67, 103, 148, 174–75

weapons supplied to insurgents, 148

Iraq war. *See under* Infantry Divisions; Surge of troops in Iraq; Task Forces; *individual unit branches*.

- Iraqi Army
 - casualties during surge, 386
 - colocation of U.S. units with, 59–60
 - numerical limitations for
 - controlling south of Baghdad, 200
 - vulnerability to Sunni attacks, 116
- Iraqi Army Divisions
 - 6th, 55, 59–60, 63, 292, 333
 - 8th, 63, 333
 - 9th (Mechanized), 340
 - 11th, 352
 - 17th, 293, 379
- See also* Iraqi Army Brigades.
- Iraqi Army Brigades
 - 1st, 8th Army Division, 68
 - 1st, 9th Army Mechanized Division, 340
 - 3d, 8th Army Division, 165, 194, 246, 342, 349–51
 - 4th, 6th Army Division
 - and 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, 59–61
 - Arab Jabour area, 381
 - COMMANDO HUNTER, 55
 - EAGLE MORNINGSTAR III, 291
 - MARNE COURAGEOUS, 275
 - MARNE HOOSIERS, 290
 - MARNE TORCH, 131
 - MARNE TORCH II, 246
 - missing-soldiers investigation, 93
 - Piledriver, 362, 364
 - POLAR SCHISM, 98
 - relations with 3d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, 292–93
 - RHINELAND II, 269
 - 4th, 8th Army Division, 299
 - 6th, 6th Army Division, 60
 - 25th, 6th Army Division, 381
 - Iraqi Army Battalions
 - 2d, 4th Brigade, 8th Army Division, 299
 - 3d, 3d Brigade, 8th Army Division, 246, 350
 - 3d, 4th Brigade, 6th Army
 - Division, 60
 - 4th, 3d Brigade, 8th Army
 - Division, 350
 - 4th, 6th Brigade, 6th Army
 - Division, 60
 - 5th, 4th Brigade, 6th Army
 - Division, 131, 246
- Iraqi government, 13, 158
 - need to embrace reconciliation programs, 235–36
 - reluctance to challenge Shi'ite militias, 200–201, 211, 261
 - reluctance to reconcile with Sunnis, 214–16, 235–37
- See also* Maliki, Nouri al-.
- Iraqi National Police, 153, 214, 333
 - 1st Brigade, 372
 - 1st Division, 340
 - BEACH YELLOW operation, 106–07
 - casualties during surge, 52, 386
 - competence and reliability, 53, 67, 151–52, 200, 296, 333
 - and ethnic tensions, 116, 146, 147
 - MARNE DAUNTLESS, 370, 374
 - MARNE RUGGED, 350–51
 - MARNE TORCH, 143
 - in Wasit Province, 165
- Iraqi public, 15, 207–08. *See also* Local population.
- Iraqi security forces, 10, 16, 21, 67, 202, 386–87. *See also* Iraqi Army; Iraqi National Police.
- Islamic Army (*Jaysh al-Islami*), 314, 335
- Jabal, Abu. *See* Abu Jabal.
- Jabouri, Mustafa Kamel Shabib al-, 222, 256–57
- Jabouri tribe, 117, 158
- Jaenichen, Spec. Mary J., 390
- James, Capt. Jason D., 86
- James, Col. Thomas S., 297–98, 300, 305, 345
- Janabi, Abeer Qassim al-, 92

Janabi, Ibrahim al-, 286
Janabi, Jabar Khudair Alwan al-, 289
Janabi, Sheikh Sabah al-, 237
Janabi, Sami Ali Salman al-, 288–89
Janabi, Tamir Jassim Hassan al-, 187
Janabi tribe, 117, 158, 179, 219
Janabi village, 290
Janis, 1st Lt. Edward D., 280, 284
Jassim, Hafiz Khalif, 198
Jenkins, Pfc. Rush M., 260
Jimenez, S. Sgt. Alex R., 89, 97, 98, 285, 288, 289
Jisr Diyala, 104, 231–32, 370, 374–75
Johnson, Sgt. Courtney T., 147–48
Johnson, CWO2 Micah R., 87
Johnson, Maj. T. J., 364
Joint Chiefs of Staff, 11
Joint security stations (JSSs), 16
Jones, Maj. Brock D., 59
Jones, 1st Lt. Joshua K., 146
Juburi, Amir Abbas Salman Hammad al- (Abu Jurah), 120–21, 154–55
Jurf as Sakhr, 179, 187–88, 288, 306
Kadhim, Diya Abdul-Zahra, 68
Kadum, Kasem Mohammed, 267
Kalsu, 1st Lt. James R., 63
Kane, S. Sgt. Sean R., 231
Karbala, 63, 66, 351
Karbala Province, 295
Keane, General John (Ret.), 12
Keaveny, Lt. Col. Valery C., 181
Kelsey, Sgt. Samuel E., 302
Kemple, Cpl. Andrew J., 281
Kerns, Maj. Brian D., 60
Kershaw, Col. Michael M., 54, 61, 271, 272
COMMANDO HUNTER II, 55, 58–59
missing-soldiers investigation, 93, 95, 98, 108
Khartani tribe, 219
Khidr, 302–04, 305
Khidr Wedge, 299
Kilcullen, David, 211–12, 214
Kipling, Sfc. Steven T., 71
Kirkpatrick, Sgt. Scott L., 160n83
Klascius, Capt. Chad A., 223, 244
Kolasheski, Lt. Col. John S., 43, 46, 105, 142, 230–31, 232, 371
Korean Bridge, 185, 186n11
Kuhn, Lt. Col. Ryan, 343
Kyl, Senator Jon, 206
Lady, Sgt. Robert L., 104
Lamla, Maj. Gen. Pawel, 163, 166
Lancaster, Sgt. Andrew W., 160n83
Landing Zone Sickle, 254–55
Lewis, Lt. Col. Dennis, 285–86
Light, Capt. Eric, 304
Lillibridge, Lt. Col. R. J., 346
Lindsay, Capt. Stewart C., 294–95
Lion's Gate checkpoint system, 30
Local population, 53
Arab Jabour, 121, 139
casualties among civilians, 10, 104, 105, 111, 253–54, 385
gaining trust and cooperation of, 47, 52, 58, 72, 154, 218, 252–53, 292, 302
insurgent targeting of, 104
insurgents' power over, 139–40, 145, 148–49
as intelligence sources, 194–95, 222, 227–28, 292
reliance on tribal councils for governance, 158
unreliability of information from, 90
See also Civic action activities; Rebuilding operations; Shi'ite community; Sons of Iraq program; Sunni community.
Lynch, Pfc. Jessica D., 88
Lynch, Maj. Gen. Rick, 5, 6, 24–26, 35, 77–78, 111, 135, 268, 305, 345–46, 377

Lynch, Maj. Gen. Rick—Continued
 on air power usage, 192, 317, 318
 and Arab Jabour, 116–17, 312
 burden of command, 134–35, 391
 on counterinsurgency, 389
 on effectiveness of surge, 199, 200,
 383
 importance of firepower for, 155–
 56
 on insurgents’ power over local
 population, 148–49
 on Iranian influence in eastern Iraq,
 169, 176
 on Iraqi National Police, 333
 on Mahdi Army’s motivations, 33
 on MRAPs, 322
 offensive philosophies, 73, 102,
 126–27, 160, 191, 276
 and operation planning, 123–24,
 126–28, 152–53, 180–81,
 274–75, 298–300, 309–11,
 347, 361, 371
 on rebuilding, 308
 on reconciliation, 218, 227, 235–
 36, 237, 238
 on Route Malibu attack and search
 for missing soldiers, 93, 95, 96
 on Sadr City mission, 352–53, 356
 on Sons of Iraq, 220, 228–29,
 239n68
 at Warriors Walk, 1, 390–91
 on Wasit Province, 163, 164, 172,
 174

MacFarland, Col. Sean B., 213
 Mada'in Qadaa, 343–44
 Maderiyah, 158
 Mahdi Army (*Jaysh al-Mahdi* [JAM]),
 46
 Al Iskandariyah area, 180
 Al Kut, 165, 168, 169, 172
 and Baghdad, 351–57
 countering efforts of, 72, 112,
 261–62, 263–68

and Forward Operating Base
 Hammer attack, 148
 organization of, 33
 and south of Baghdad, 191–92
 in Wasit Province, 175–76

Maliki, Nouri al-, 10, 16, 31–32, 200,
 201, 210, 214–15, 216, 237,
 295, 351, 352

Mammy, Lt. Col. Michael J., 372
 Manning, Maj. Robert, 135, 155
 Margievi, Lt. George, 367
 Marine Corps, U.S., 7, 136, 279, 319
 Marr, Lt. Col. John J., 48–51, 143, 144,
 342, 371

Martin, 1st Lt. Thomas M., 255
 Martinez, Spec. Saul, 106
 Masri, Ahmed al-, 255
 Matey, Jonathan S., 219
 Maysan Province, 176–77
 McCaffrey, General Barry R., 317
 McCain, Senator John, 359
 McCall, Sgt. Daniel L., 260
 McMurray, S. Sgt. Adam W., 292
 Mele, Sgt. John W., 247
 Melloh, Capt. Eric G., 254, 255
 Military Police Battalion, 759th,
 226

Military Police Company, 984th, 174
 Military Transition Teams (MiTTs)
 0810, 69
 0833, 350

Millican, Pvt. Jonathon M., 66
 Mine-resistant ambush-protected
 vehicles (MRAPs), 322–23

Miranda, Spec. Manuel, 74, 75
 MISCAP (Missing and Captured) cell,
 285–89

Missing soldiers, 92–99, 108, 285–89
 Modgling, Pfc. Joshua S., 134
 Modular organization, U.S. Army
 transition to, 4, 6–7, 78

Mohammed, Abu. See Abu Mohammed.
 Montenegro, S. Sgt. Julio C., 52
 Morales, Lt. Col. Ricardo O., 371, 374

Mountain Division, 10th
 2d Brigade, 54–55, 72, 80, 82, 271–72
 operations, 55–59, 60–62, 108–11, 140, 269–72
 partnership with Iraqi Army, 59–60
 reconciliation initiatives, 215–16, 219–20, 227–28, 234–35
 Route Earnhardt attack, 61
 Route Malibu attack and missing soldiers, 88–99
 and Sons of Iraq program, 227–28, 234–35
89th Cavalry Regiment, 60–61, 140, 271
15th Field Artillery Regiment, 59–60, 108–09, 269
14th Infantry Regiment, 58–59, 61, 108, 140, 227–28
31st Infantry Regiment, 55, 60, 88–89, 90, 93, 96, 98
2d Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment, 58–59, 61, 108, 140, 227–28
2d Battalion, 15th Field Artillery Regiment, 59–60, 108–09, 269
4th Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, 55, 60, 88–89, 90, 93, 96, 98
210th Support Battalion, 54
1st Squadron, 89th Cavalry Regiment, 60–61, 140, 271
Battery A, 2d Battalion, 15th Field Artillery Regiment, 269
Company A, 2d Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment, 58, 59, 95, 109
Company A, 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, 90, 140
Company A, Special Troops Battalion, 2d Brigade, 60
Company B, 2d Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment, 110
Company C, 2d Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment, 58
Company C, 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, 58
Company D, 2d Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment, 110
Company D, 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, 88–89
assumption of command of MND-C, 375, 377–78
operations southwest of Baghdad prior to surge, 22
Mueller, Col. Mark R., 172, 174, 175
Mullen, Admiral Michael G., 390
Multi-National Corps–Iraq (MNC-I), 35, 307, 331
Multi-National Division–Baghdad (MND-B), 4, 18–19, 20–22, 24
Multi-National Division–Center (MND-C), 24, 25, 96, 163–67, 190–91, 308, 375, 377–78
Multi-National Division–Center-South (MND-CS), 163–77
Multi-National Division–North (MND-N), 7, 135–36, 307
Multi-National Division–North Central (MND-NC), 4
Multi-National Force–Iraq (MNF-I), 6, 8, 295
Multi-National Force–Northwest (MNF-NW), 7
Multi-National Force–West (MNF-W), 7, 136–37, 213
Murphy, Audie, 2
Murphy, Pvt. Christopher E., 89
Murray, 1st Lt. Charles P., 129
Mushir, Sheikh Ali Majid, 223–24
Nahrawan, 40–41, 46, 47–48, 263–68, 369
Nasser, Mushen, 344
National Guard, 4
National Guard's 48th Infantry Brigade (Georgia), 164

- National Intelligence Estimate, 9
- National Training Center, U.S. Army, 7
- Navy, U.S., 288, 319
- Neels, Capt. Christian C., 302, 304
- Newman, Capt. John T., 316
- Newsome, Lt. Col. Timothy, 302
- Nickel, Sgt. Walter J., 292
- Ninawa Province, 308
- Norris, Pfc. Kyle P., 376, 390
- North, Lt. Gen. Gary L., 317
- Nylander, Capt. Eric W., 186, 196, 197
- Oates, Maj. Gen. Michael L., 377
- Obama, Senator Barack, 359
- Obeidi tribe, 219
- Objectives
 - 608, 354–55
 - Albany, 193
 - Athens, 350
 - Auburn, 350
 - Badger, 275
 - Banshee, 251
 - Bethel, 249–50
 - Boston, 251
 - Brunswick, 125, 156, 243, 246
 - Buford, 350
 - Clarksville, 275
 - Claxton, 265, 350
 - Concord, 246
 - Cordele, 299, 300
 - Dallas, 254
 - Dalton, 350
 - Dogwood, 188
 - Dublin, 193
 - Fleming, 125, 143
 - Fox, 279
 - Glenville, 335, 336, 342
 - Hazelhurst, 265
 - Jackson, 125, 156
 - Juneau, 180
 - Kodiak, 179, 185
 - Macon, 193, 335, 336, 340–41
 - Magic, 312
 - Midway, 125, 143
 - Nets, 312
 - Perry, 335, 336, 340–41
 - Richmond, 124, 125, 128, 130–37, 139–40, 156, 246
 - Saipan, 185
 - Smyrna, 370, 374
 - Stripeless, 291
 - Tybee, 370, 374
 - Videlia, 265
 - War Eagle, 353
 - Yellow-Belly, 291
- Odierno, Lt. Gen. Raymond T., 78, 257, 331
 - on Baghdad belts' importance, 17, 21, 22, 61
 - MARNE TORCH II planning, 245
 - and MRAPs, 322
 - overall assessment of Iraqi situation, 201–02
 - on progress in spring 2007, 101
 - on reconciliation of Sunnis, 216–17, 236
 - reorganization of MND-CS, 163
 - on shift to rebuilding and consolidation, 307–08
 - on Shi'ite insurgent problem, 201
 - and troop surge, 21–24, 102, 137, 199, 388, 389
- Odom, Lt. Col. Mark W., 77–78, 113, 115, 223, 224–25
- Odom, Lt. Gen. William E., 115
- Office of the Martyr Sadr, 33
- Oothman, Maj. Gen. Ali Salih Farhoud, 352
- Operational Detachment Alpha 566, 68
- Operations
 - ALGIERS, 141–49
 - ALLJAH, 136–37
 - ARROWHEAD RIPPER, 135–36
 - BARBARIAN STOMP, 139
 - BASTOGNE, 184
 - BEACH YELLOW, 106–07
 - BENELLI, 254

BLORE HEATH IV, 340
BULL RUN, 145–47
BUNKER HILL, 143
CARVER RECON, 336
CASABLANCA, 143
CHALONS, 47
CHARGE OF THE KNIGHTS
 (*SAWLAT AL-FURSAN*), 351
CHICKAMAUGA, 143
CHICKEN RUN, 364
CHOSIN, 143
CLEAN SWEEP, 342
COMMAND CHE CLEARANCE, 142
COMMANDO AUGER, 61
COMMANDO DIVE, 60
COMMANDO EAGLE, 140
COMMANDO HUNTER II, 55
COMMANDO RAZOR, 93
COMMANDO SHOCKER, 61
COMMANDO VICE, 60–61
CONNECTICUT, 251
CORINTH, 315
CROSSROADS, 296
DESERT STORM, 3
DURAI'YA SUNRISE, 336
EAGLE CHICKAMAUGA, 269
EAGLE MORNINGSTAR III, 291–92, 360
EAGLE SHILOH, 269
EAGLE TEACH, 47
ENFORCING THE LAW (*FARDH AL-QANOON*), 15–16, 21, 137
FALCON FURY III, 186, 187n15
FALCON FURY V, 197
FLANDERS, 342
GERONIMO, 295
GUADALUPE, 269
GUARDIAN GETTYSBURG, 157
GUARDIAN RICH MOUNTAIN, 157
GUARDIAN TORCH, 156
HARTLEPOOL IV, 334
IRAQI FREEDOM, 1, 37
IRON CRAZYHORSE, 289–90
IRON FIST, 112
IRON HARVEST, 307
IRON SARATOGA, 360
IRON VALLEY FORGE, 360
JERSEY TURNPIKE, 151–53, 259
KENAI, 365
KING SALMON, 365
LIGHTNING HAMMER, 196
LOCKDOWN, 113
MALVERN HILL, 257
MANILA IV, 259
MARKET GARDEN, 344
MARNE ANVIL, 265–68
MARNE AVALANCHE, 179–91
MARNE COURAGEOUS, 275–89
MARNE DAUNTLESS, 369–76
MARNE FORTITUDE, 102–08,
 121–28
 2d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division
 (Mechanized), 113–21
 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain
 Division, 108–11
 4th Brigade, 25th Infantry
 Division, 111–13
MARNE FORTITUDE II, 308
MARNE GRAND SLAM, 333–45,
 347
MARNE HOOSIERS, 290
MARNE HUSKY, 192–98, 243, 348
MARNE PILEDRIVER, 359–65
MARNE ROUNDUP, 298–306
MARNE RUGGED, 347–51
MARNE SENTRY, 167, 176
MARNE SENTRY II, 176–77
MARNE THUNDERBOLT, 315–26
MARNE TORCH, 191
 2d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division
 (Mechanized), 129–40, 153–56
 3d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division
 (Mechanized), 141–53
 Abu Jurah safe house raid, 154–55
 effectiveness of, 156–57, 158
 planning for, 123–28

Operations—Continued

MARNE TORCH II
 2d Brigade, 3d Division, 245–58
 civic action in Arab Jabour, 257–
 58
 operations, 245–47
 planning phase, 243–45
 results, 255–56

MAUSER, 316–17

MERCURY, 112

MORNING STAR, 289

PALO ALTO, 292

PANAMA III, 295

PHANTOM PHOENIX, 307, 331

PHANTOM STRIKE, 196, 243

PHANTOM THUNDER, 137

POLAR SCHISM, 98

PROVIDE COMFORT, 3

PUSAN, 143

RED SALMON, 365

RENEGADE RUGGED, 350

RHINELAND II, 269

RIDGEWAY, 267

RUGER, 251

SHAKA ZULU II, 97

SITKA STRIKE, 251

SPARROW SUNRISE, 334

ST. MIHIEL, 342

SUKIHUMI, 342

SWARMER, 279

TOGETHER FORWARD (*AMALIYA MA’AN ILA AL-AMAM*), 10,
 22

TOGO, 348

TRENTON, 290

TUWAITHA SUNRISE, 232

TUWAITHA SUNRISE II, 259

VERDUN, 342

WAAL, 294–95

WAR HAMMER, 290

YPRÉS, 342

YUKON RIVER, 74

ZELIG SUNRISE, 334

Ordnance Company, 789th, 148

Ornsby-Adkins, Pfc. Jay D. H., 52
 Osgood, Spec. Charles L., 110
 Owesat, 98, 275–85
 Owesat tribe, 179

Paladin (M109A6) self-propelled
 howitzers, 23, 167

Panpradith, Sfc. Phitsidane, 90

Parks, Pfc. Larry Jr., 132–33

Patrol Bases, 384
 Assassin, 43, 46, 142–43
 Betoolah, 350
 Copper, 294
 Dog, 73–78, 83
 Dragon, 59, 277
 Hawkes, 246–47, 249, 251
 Inchon, 88, 89–90
 Kelsey (Khidr), 299, 304, 305
 Kemple, 281–82
 Murray, 159, 253–54
 Red, 113
 Salie, 267, 268
 Shanghai, 55, 360
 Sheejan, 350
 Siberia, 55
 Vanderhorn, 346
 Warrior Keep, 110–11, 227, 304
 Whiskey One, 131
 White, 325
 Yates, 361–62

Patton, 1st Lt. Justin S., 104
 Penrod, Spec. Justin O., 160n83
 Pepsi factory, insurgent attack on, 146,
 149

Perry, Maj. James S., 80
 Pershing, General John J. “Blackjack,” 2
 Petraeus, General David H., 13–14, 62,
 78, 160–61, 257
 on Arab Jabour campaign’s success,
 380
 on Iraqi government’s Shi’ite militia
 challenge, 261
 in Owesat, 285
 progress report to Congress

(2007), 199–200, 202–04, 206–07, 208
progress report to Congress (2008), 357–59
strategy for Iraq, 14
and surge, 26, 137, 388–89
on transfer of authority to Iraqi forces, 295

Pinkerton, Lt. Col. Kurt J., 218

Pinna, Pfc. Justin J., 142–43

Polish units, 163, 166, 167

Politics and policy
antiwar sentiment in U.S., 10–11, 199, 207, 383
in Iraq war policy debate (2006), 10–12
Iraqi criticism of surge, 207–08
Iraqi public's war fatigue, 15
progress report to Congress (2007), 199–208
progress report to Congress (2008), 357–59
and surge effectiveness over long term, 147
and surge expectations, 14–15

Preise, Maj. Brian W., 7

President, U.S. *See* Bush, George W.

Presidential election (2008), 359

Provincial reconstruction team (PRT), 257–58, 329

Public opinion
antiwar in United States, 10–11, 199, 207, 383
Iraqi criticism of surge, 207–08

Putnam, Cpl. Cody A., 75

Qais, Lt. Gen. Hazma, 30

Qanbar, Lt. Gen. Abud, 16

Qāqaa facility, 361–62

Qarghuli, Mohammed Khalil Ibrahim al- (MKI), 94–95, 275, 287–88

Qarghuli tribe, 90, 94–95, 219

Qarghliyah, 234

Qods Force, 67, 169, 172

Radwaniyah, 140

Ratliff, Lt. Col. Todd R., 147–48

Raudenbush, 1st Lt. Nathan R., 326

Razzuqi, Taha (Abu Jabal), 149–51

Rebuilding operations, 47
Arab Jabour, 257–58, 312, 327–30
As Suwayrah, 350
bridge-building, 281
and governance projects, 292–93
Khidr Wedge area, 299
MARNE DAUNTLESS, 374
MARNE PILEDRIVER, 362, 363–64
after MARNE TORCH II, 257–59
Nahrawan brick factory, 268
overall impact, 387
Salman Pak area, 342–44
security as gateway to, 307–08, 328–30

Reconciliation and Engagement Cell (MND-C), 219

Reconciliation of Sunnis
and al-Rishawi's death, 209–11
Iraqi government's reluctance, 214–16, 235–37
and long-term effectiveness of surge, 200
new focus on, 216–17
progress of, 212–14, 217–20, 256–57
See also Sons of Iraq program.

Reed, Senator Jack, 207

Reed, Maj. John, 69

Regional Border Task Force, 3d, 172–73

Reid, Senator Harry, 206, 207

Rice, Condoleezza, 11, 209

Ricks, Thomas E., 358

Ridgway, General Matthew B., 2

Rincon, Lt. Col. Gloria A., 219

Rishawi, Sheikh Abdul Sattar al-, 209–11, 213

River routes, MARNE TORCH's mission to shut down, 125–26

Riverine force concept, 365–66

Roadside bombs, MRAPs as defense against, 322. *See also* Improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

Robicheau, S. Sgt. Mountain, 158

Rocket attacks on forward operating bases, 147–48, 160, 167, 226

Rodriguez, Pfc. Jose, 74

Rohling, Lt. Col. Andrew M., 277, 283

Rork, Spec. Brandon D., 110

Routes

- Aces, 300
- B. B. King, 326
- Bismarck, 246
- Bug, 131
- Buick, 73, 113, 224
- Caprice, 110
- Cavemen, 81
- Chevy, 130
- Cleveland, 112
- Detroit (Highway 6), 38, 102–03, 151
- Edsel, 110
- Fatboy, 82
- Gnat, 121, 123, 130, 131
- Horny Toad, 342
- Jackson (Hillah Highway), 55, 82
- Kelp, 82, 142
- Lakers, 320
- Malibu, 88–90
- Martina, 299
- Pluto, 52
- Red Wings, 130, 131
- Sportster, 81
- Tampa (Highway 1), 60, 111, 131, 184, 366
- Topeka, 176–77
- Wild, 51, 82, 142, 151

Rubaie, Muwaffaq al-, 210

Rumsfeld, Donald H., 11

Rus, Abu. *See* Abu Rus.

Rushdi Mullah, 55

Sabah Nissan Sheikh's Council, 334

Sadr, Grand Ayatollah Mohammed al-, 33n74

Sadr, Moqtada al-, 33, 165, 175–76, 262, 351, 357. *See also* Mahdi Army (*Jaysh al-Mahdi* [JAM]).

Sadr City uprising, 352–57

Salah ad Din Province, 7, 97

Salem, Yassir, 263

Salie, Sfc. David J., 267

Salman Pak, 38–39, 41, 52–54

MARNE GRAND SLAM, 334–36, 340–43

rebuilding projects, 343–45, 369

Salvadoran units in Wasit, 167

Sammri, Mitayib Abd al-Ali Nahi al-, 189

Samrahs Jungle, 193

Sandoval, Spec. Jorge G. Jr., 70

Sara, Abu. *See* Abu Sara.

Saudi Arabia as source for terrorists in Iraq, 212

Sayafiyah, 197, 312, 324–25, 328, 346

Scanzuso, Spec. Michael, 75–76

Schober, Sgt. Anthony J., 89, 98–99

Schumacher, Pfc. John, 75

SEALs, Navy, 288

Secretary of Defense. *See* Gates, Robert M.

Secretary of State. *See* Rice, Condoleezza.

Sectarian tensions and conflict, 27, 112, 115–16, 211–12, 214

Al Iskandariyah, 180, 293–94

al-Qaeda versus Islamic Army, 314, 335

al-Qaeda's contribution to, 290

An Najaf area, 67–69, 111–12

As Suwayrah, 191

Jisr Diyala, 370

Nahrawan, 47–48

persistence of, 200–201, 293, 298

Sadr City uprising, 352–57

See also Mahdi Army (*Jaysh al-Mahdi* [JAM]).

Security in Iraq
coalition's challenges, 9–11, 13, 87
as gateway to rebuilding, 307–08,
328–30
importance of long-term Iraqi
government presence, 115–16
Iraqi public's desire for, 15, 52, 58, 218
and local cooperation levels, 218,
292
Sons of Iraq program's effect on,
233, 293
surge effects on, 199, 293
and timing of withdrawal of U.S.
troops, 207
Shakariyah Triangle, 60
Sheik, Safi al-, 257
Shi'ite community
internal conflicts, 68–69
and lack of sectarian division in
Wasit Province, 164
Sadr's influence, 46
Soldiers of Heaven, 68–69
Sons of Iraq initiatives in, 233–34
south of Baghdad overview, 27,
30–32, 38, 39–40
See also Sectarian tensions and
conflict.

Shi'ite militias, 21, 22, 32
Badr Corps, 33–34, 112
in Baghdad, 351–57
Iranian support for, 67, 103, 148,
174–75
Jisr Diyala, 370
and Karbala attack, 67
need for Iraqi government action
against, 200–201, 211, 261
rocket attacks by, 147–48
strategy for dealing with, 261–68
transport of weapons by, 151–52
in Wasit Province, 165–66
See also Mahdi Army (*Jaysh al-*
Mahdi [JAM]).

Shroud, Lt. Col. Michael S., 371
Shubayshen, 60

Simmons, Pfc. David N., 42
Singleton, Sgt. Todd A., 42
Skates, S. Sgt. William D., 160n83
Smith, Sfc. Paul R., 4
Snyder, S. Sgt. James P., 376n111
Soldiers of Heaven, 68–69
Solomon, Lt. Col. Mark W., 309, 329
Sons of Iraq program
al-Qaeda's response to, 315
Arab Jabour area, 252–53, 312
challenges and benefits of, 235–41,
262
continued loyalty question, 237,
376
contribution to local security, 233,
293, 296
counterinsurgency operations by,
243–45, 247, 275, 290, 302,
341
effectiveness of, 239–40, 257, 269–
70, 298, 325–26, 333, 385
growth of, 256–57, 259, 325
in Owsat, 284
recruitment for, 220–35
South of Baghdad
3d Infantry Division's deployment
planning, 23–24, 25
inadequacies of security coverage,
116, 200
insurgency's presence and power,
17, 27–28, 30–32, 191–92
physical and cultural environment,
27, 30–32, 38, 39–40
South Baghdad Rescue Council, 222
Special Forces teams, 68, 194, 198, 211,
212, 288
Special Groups insurgents, 356
Special Troops Battalions, 22n48
of the 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain
Division, 60, 61
of the 3d Brigade, 3d Infantry
Division (Mechanized), 41,
102–03, 147–48
Spencer, Pvt. Cole E., 52

Spring-Glace, 1st Lt. Morgan J., 89–90, 96

Stryker armored combat vehicle, 23

Suicide bombings, 206, 307

- Allawi incident, 231
- by females, 108–09, 334, 364–65
- Patrol Base Dog, 73–78
- Route Tampa bridge, 111

Sulkhanishvili, Maj. David, 340

Sullivan, Lt. Col. Mark S., 265–66

Sultani, Capt. Wassim Abdul Hadi So'ud, 364

Summers, S. Sgt. Vincent E., 348

Sunni community, 7, 121

- Arab Jabour, 117, 157–58
- disillusionment with al-Qaeda, 121, 210–11, 212–14, 223, 227–28, 233

Jurf as Sakhr al-Qaeda supporters, 179

in northern Euphrates River valley, 54–55

Qarghuli tribe, 90, 94

south of Baghdad overview, 27, 30–32, 38, 39–40

See also Reconciliation of Sunnis; Sectarian tensions and conflict.

Sunni militias, 32, 214, 314, 335. *See also* Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI).

Support Battalions

- 26th, 2d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division (Mechanized), 115, 346
- 47th, 2d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division (Mechanized), 371
- 626th, 3d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), 274
- 703d, 4th Brigade, 3d Infantry Division (Mechanized), 304, 348–49

See also under Mountain Division, 10th.

Support Companies

- A, 26th Support Battalion, 2d
- Brigade, 3d Infantry Division (Mechanized), 346–47
- B, 26th Support Battalion, 2d
- Brigade, 3d Infantry Division (Mechanized), 346–47
- F, 626th Support Battalion, 3d
- Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), 274

Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council (SIIC) (Badr Corps), 33–34, 112

Surge of troops in Iraq, 36, 147

- assessment of results, 383–90
- effectiveness of, 101–02, 199–200, 262, 306, 307, 311, 331, 366
- policy decision process, 10–13
- progress reports to Congress, 199–208, 357–59

Tabatadze, Maj. Shavlego, 164, 174

Tactical Areas of Operations

- Packard, 312
- Plymouth, 192–93, 197

Tank urban survivability kit (TUSK), 323

Taq-i Kisra complex, 39

Task Forces

- 1-76, 349–51
- 49, 378
- Black, 254–55
- Marne, 24, 102, 105, 107–08, 116–17, 120–21, 163, 177, 227, 237–38, 333, 345, 367–69, 383–90
- Petro, 342
- Steel, 184
- Victory, 3

Team Enabler, 46–47

Terrorism report (2006), 9

Terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, 3

Terrorist organizations and activity.

- See* Insurgency; *individual organizations*.

Thompson, Capt. Richard E., 341

Tigris River, 21, 27, 336–37, 342
Toledo Pulido, Cpl. Victor H., 48
Training
 for deployment, 7, 25
 for Iraqi military and police, 69, 200, 350
Triangle of Death, 30, 366–67, 383–84
Trump, Sgt. Michael, 158
Tuwaitha, 232
Tuwaitha Nuclear Research Center (Osirak), 49–50

Ubaydi tribe, 158

Vacharidze, Lt. Col. Roin, 340
Valledor, Lt. Col. John C., 61, 111, 227
Vanduynhoven, CWO2 Anthony M., 86
Vehicle-borne improvised explosive device, 77n12
Vela, Sgt. Evan, 70, 71
Village of Hope, 329
Vines, Lt. Gen. John R., 26

Wahida, 367–68, 374
Waldron, Maj. David A., 219, 373–74

Wallace, General William S., 25
Warriors Walk, 1, 390–91
Wasit Province, 352
 Iran border monitoring, 173–77
 smuggling problem, 167–73
 transfer of command to MND-C, 163–67
Weapons caches and smuggling, 55, 148, 151–52, 168–69, 179, 191–92, 240–41
Webb, Col. Grant A., 175
Weber, Brig. Gen. Louis W., 332
Webster, Maj. Gen. William G., 6
Weis, Maj. Eric J., 249, 254
Wheeler, Lt. Col. Clifford E., 311, 324
White, Col. Robert P., 369, 372
Williams, Lt. Col. Maurice L., 124, 125, 310, 318
Winterbottom, Cpl. Jonathan D., 48

Yas, Mohammed Khadam, 189
Yates, Cpl. Nyle III, 361

Zambriniyah, 315, 318
Zapfe, Sfc. William A., 134
Zarqawi, Abu Musab al-, 17, 27
Zurbatiyah, 172, 174

