Marine Forces Reserve Operational History

Global War on Terror (2004 – 2007)

by

Colonel David T. Watters, USMCR

Forward by the Commander, Marine Forces Reserve

In the period covered by this book, Reserve Marines embarked on an increasingly complex and dangerous series of missions. While individuals augmented commands around the globe, entire Reserve battalions and squadrons fought alongside their active component counterparts against an adaptively effective enemy in Iraq and Afghanistan. Decades may pass before the Marine Corps produces a complete, accurate account of the first significant era in our future Total Force construct; however, this volume provides a compelling first look at how Reserve units and personnel were effectively transformed into an Operational Reserve capable of sustained warfighting contributions.

As Commander, I am extremely pleased to report that Marine Reservists continue to respond at a sustained rate greater and longer than anyone would have predicted. Assigned to notably challenging environments, these Citizen Marines consistently demonstrated a flexibility, adaptability, and maturity that allowed them to succeed across the full spectrum of kinetic to non-kinetic operations.

In Iraq, the period from 2004 to 2007 was unique. As hit-and-run guerrilla tactics and improvised explosive devices began taking an increasingly

heavy toll on American lives, Marines in the Anbar Province were prime targets for insurgents and foreign fighters infiltrating along the cities that straddled the Euphrates River. As the once-ambiguous concept of a Global War on Terror transitioned slowly into "The Long War," many opponents of the American effort hoped the tide of battle was slipping away from the Coalition that had toppled Saddam Hussein. It was at this time that a Marine-led force fought the decisive battle in Fallujah. Many people view the second battle for Fallujah as setting the stage for a remarkable transformation, first in the Anbar Province and then in much of the rest of Iraq. Throughout this magnificent effort, Reserves stood shoulder-to-shoulder with active component Marines.

This book gives many of our young Marines the opportunity to describe individual battles in Iraq and Afghanistan from their perspective. These narratives are compelling in the rich detail that they provide.

Serving as Commander, Marine Forces Reserve during this demanding period has been an awe-inspiring, motivating personal experience. I will never forget the many Marines and Sailors who made the ultimate sacrifice. Such complete dedication and raw courage enabled Coalition Forces to achieve remarkable results. Our men and women have made extraordinary contributions to the Global War on Terror, and the reputation of the Marine Corps Reserve has been forever enhanced by their actions.

Semper Fidelis,
Jack Bergman
Lieutenant General
United States Marine Corps Reserve

Preface

This book represents an effort to capture the essence of Marine Reserve combat activities from 2004 to 2007. While each chapter is discrete with respect to the type of Reserve unit, the phase of the war, and the geographic region, they collectively paint a picture of a Reserve that, when called to action in the Global War on Terror, was ready and relevant.

As author, it was my privilege to interview more than 300 Marines and sailors for this book. To a person, each exhibited the stoic attitude of, "I was just doing my job." But when this meant strapping on body armor, struggling against heat or cold, and facing an adaptive and ruthless enemy, "just doing a job" was a significant accomplishment.

Many were lucky to be alive. Two Cobra pilots walked away from an emergency landing after a missile destroyed their helicopter's engines during a combat mission over Fallujah. One corporal faced withering fire from inside the Haditha Hospital as he alternated between a machinegun and an M-16 rifle to turn the tide of an IED-initiated ambush. As shown by his Silver Star citation, his actions saved fellow Marines.

While America frequently honors those who were killed or wounded in combat, my interviews were a constant reminder that all who served in Afghanistan or Iraq faced danger in their everyday lives. Operations in extreme environments create hazards that are more dangerous than combat. While Iraq's heat was a constant threat, Afghanistan's thin mountain air forced one CH-53 pilot to bounce his aircraft to a safe landing off of the runway when its rotor blades simply ran out of lift. Demonstrating its commitment to history, the Marine Corps has amassed an extensive collection of oral interviews during the Global War on Terror. These thousands of individual impressions provide a vivid mosaic of the Marine Corps' response to 21st Century Terrorism. Started within days of the 2001 terrorist attacks on America, the oral history collection has grown to thousands of interviews, with more being archived every day. Interviews with senior officers, like Gen. James Conway or Maj. Gen. Douglas O'Dell, provide a broad overview of the accomplishments of the Marine Corps and its Reserve. But it is the numerous interviews with Marines of all ranks and specialties that provide gripping details of the daily routine of war. For example, one sergeant who did two tours in Fallujah described the stench of death in that iconic city after Operation Al Fajr in November, 2004. Another noncommissioned officer told of daytime temperatures that were so high that her aviation ordnance teams would get blisters while loading bombs, bullets, and missiles. As difficult and painful as it was, she said, these Marines knew that their comrades on the ground were looking to them for support, and they learned to reload an aircraft in minutes.

Many Marines described the pain of losing a fellow Marine. One infantry squad leader told how he rushed to the site of an attack in Fallujah after hearing the distinct crack of two shots from an AK-47 rifle, then helped load two wounded Marines so they could be carried to a nearby military hospital. In a voice that was heavy with emotion, he described the gut-wrenching sense of futility that enveloped him when he learned that one of them had subsequently died on an operating table.

To date, only a few of these interviews have been processed for release to the public. Those who are interested in military history, particularly Marine Corps history, should be confident that the Marine Corps has fulfilled its obligation to preserve, in real time, the stories of its heroic young men and women who served on the front lines of the Global War on Terror. In due time, these stories will be available to all who want to listen to them.

I cannot sufficiently thank the Marines who provided me with this information. For many, telling certain combat stories exposed emotional wounds that they struggled to suppress. Marines of all ranks wept openly when describing what had happened to their Marines. While it was as painful as ripping bandages from fresh wounds, they felt compelled to suffer that burden in order to honor the lives and deaths of their friends. By relating the stories of those who, by luck or fate, were unable to return or were scarred on the battlefield, these Marines have lived up to the warrior's code of honoring their comrades.

This book is dedicated to those Marines and Sailors who served their country and Marine Forces Reserve during this challenging period. The Marine Corps' Reserve functioned capably and honorably during the early years of the Global War on Terror. While the full story will not be told for some years, this generation of Marines, both active duty and Reserve, has earned a proud place in Marine Corps history.

David Watters
Colonel, USMCR

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Setting the Stage:

Marines Return to Iraq in 2004

Eighteen months after the 2001 terrorist attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center, United States-led actions in Afghanistan and Iraq seemed to have defeated the forces that had panicked much of the world.

In those heady days in early 2003, America and the United States Central Command claimed resounding victories over the Taliban in Afghanistan and Saddam Hussein's forces in Iraq. High-tech communications and precision-guided firepower had provided the means for quick strikes that surprised and impressed much of the world. But enemies in Afghanistan, Iraq, and other parts of the world proved to be elusive, cunning and determined. Some were linked by ties to Al Qaeda, but many simply shared a loathing of America or the west. Others were criminals who saw opportunity amid the chaos of war. Whatever their motive, their persistence and resilience forced planners and policy-makers to change America's expectations, recasting the Global War on Terrorism into "The Long War."

For an economic giant like the United States, supplying bullets, beans and bandages halfway around the world was relatively simple. Putting boots on the ground, however, proved to be much more difficult. In an ambiguous war with no clear end state or end date, planning a sustainable flow of soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines was a formidable challenge. "Total Force" required the Army and Marine Corps to tap back into their Reserves just months after America had been told that the mission had been accomplished. For many Reserve Marines, this meant repacking their seabags with battle-scarred utilities that had

just been stowed away.

Operation Iraqi Freedom becomes part of The Long War

Within a month of Marines crossing into Iraq in 2003, United States policymakers were so confident of victory that they began firming up plans to dramatically reduce the number of American forces in Iraq.[1] Thinking that Marines would not be needed in a pacified Iraq, United States Central Command directed the Marine Corps to withdraw forces from Iraq that summer and fall,[2] and by year's end, fewer than 250 Marines remained in Iraq.

Before the last major Marine unit returned to the United States, it was apparent that many assumptions involving Iraq, including the flow of American forces, would have to be changed.[3] While debate over the Iraq war continued in military and political circles, guerrilla tactics by home-grown insurgents and foreign fighters reminded the world that a diverse set of enemies still had a voice in how things turned out.[4] As violence increased and security became a paramount concern, Central Command realized that the troop numbers in Iraq would have to return to levels that approximated the numbers for the initial drive to Baghdad.[5]

In early 2004, then-Lt. Gen. James Conway led 24,000 Marines under I Marine Expeditionary Force's colors back into Iraq. In addition to six active-duty infantry battalions, his 1st Marine Division was augmented by one Reserve infantry battalion, 3rd Battalion, 24th Marines. The 3rd Marine Air Wing gained a Reserve Light Attack Helicopter Squadron, HMLA-775. 4th Marine Logistics Group, then known as 4th Force Service Support Group, provided hundreds of Marines for combat support. Many other Reserves signed on as "individual augmentees" to various commands.

I MEF took over the Anbar Province from the U.S. Army's 82nd Airborne Division in March 2004.[6] Within weeks, Marines faced a grave crisis with significant international implications. In early April, four civilian contractors for Blackwater, a private security firm, were ambushed and killed in Fallujah, and their bodies were subsequently mutilated and put on display. Photographs showed the contractor's charred bodies strung up from what became known as Blackwater Bridge. This enraged Americans, in part because the photographs reminded the country of the "Blackhawk Down" humiliation from Somalia in 1993. Marines were ordered to clear insurgents from Fallujah immediately. In a week of fierce fighting that resulted in significant casualties from both sides, a Reserve squadron of Huey and Cobra helicopters added significant punch to the fight for Fallujah. As these Reserves worked seamlessly with their active-duty counterparts during Operation Vigilant Resolve, their performance bolstered others' confidence that Marine Reserves were ready for whatever came their way.

Photo By Pfc. Frans E. Labranche

Maj. Gen. Douglas V. O'Dell talks with Lt. Gen. John W. Bergman during 2005.

Maj. Gen. Douglas O'Dell, Commanding General of 4th Marine Division for most of the period covered by this book, said Reserves consistently performed as promised.[7] Willing to respond on short notice, units at the battalion and squadron level were able to function independently as elements of much larger commands. Throughout I MEF, individual Reserves filled staff slots. Many units whose military skills were not considered necessary in this type of combat were willing to retrain and form provisional units in high-demand fields like military police or motor transportation.[8] While the "Weekend Warriors" were different than 365-day-a-year "regular" Marines, the Department of Defense and the nation came to appreciate that the Reserves brought a combination of maturity and civilian skills to the fight that more than compensated for any shortcomings they may have had in military skills.

Lt. Col. Harold R. "Odie" Van Opdorp, an active duty Marine who commanded 1st Battalion, 24th Marines, a Reserve battalion, in Fallujah in 2006-2007, described his Reserves as, "some of the best that America has to offer."[9] After holding his last battalion formation before sending his Reserves to their Home Training Centers, he said, "I would go back to Iraq in a heartbeat with a Reserve battalion, because these guys have a unique set of capabilities, above and beyond being good Marines. The things that they can accomplish, and the levels of maturity and decision-making process that they have, is just phenomenal."[10]

Maj. Gen. O'Dell said senior Marines would agree. "Every officer who has commanded Marines in combat in this period of time, both from [I MEF and II MEF], would

say point blank, 'We could not have done what we have done without elements of the Fourth Marine Division, including its infantry battalions and artillery battalions and associated units that were organized, trained, and equipped to fight in a cohesive, coherent and seamless fashion alongside their active duty counterparts.'"[11]

Van Opdorp's battalion patrolled Fallujah at a time when many factors came together to allow Iraqi soldiers and police to take control of much of the city. While crediting previous Marine activities and external circumstances for part of this success, Van Opdorp said civilian skills that his Reserves brought to the fight helped tremendously. One of his key assets was a police lieutenant[12] who had spent twenty-nine years mapping gang-related activities in Chicago. The policeman, who had served a previous tour in Iraq's "Triangle of Death" with a different Reserve battalion, found that the activities of gangs and the requirements for intelligence to fight them were remarkably similar to what his battalion encountered in Fallujah. Another Reserve who had a dramatic impact on Fallujah was a charismatic New York City firefighter who served as a Civil Affairs officer. Van Opdorp said the firefighter brought a chutzpah to his role that was effective with Iraqis, particularly the sheiks who led tribes of various size and influence. Van Opdorp also described one team of young computer-savvy Marines, known as "The Hobbits," who created computer models to anticipate problem areas. This team collected data from patrols and individual Marines to create functional systems for identifying the enemy and the patterns they exhibited as they emplaced IEDs and attacked Marines. With this system, Van Opdorp said, the company was able to remove the "invisibility cloak" that insurgents had used so effectively to their advantage. As the Chicago policeman noted, "Identifying the enemy is very hard. Once you do that, it's relatively easy to kill them."[13]

Photo By Cpl. Paul Leicht

Armed with a Squad Automatic Weapon and cold weather gear, Lance Cpl. William English of Company B, 1st Battalion, 23rd Marine Regiment, participates in a security patrol in the vicinity of Ramadi in December 2004. At the time, infantry Marines were trying to reinforce the relationship between the American military and local government and civilians, with foot patrols serving as the initial line of defense against the insurgency.

Community and Continuity

A significant difference between "Regular" Marines and their Reserve counterparts is the fact that most Reserves are older and either have a college degree or are working towards one. The most important advantage, however, relates to the civilian job skills that they bring to their Marine work. Lt. Col. Mark Smith, an Indiana State Trooper who commanded 2nd Battalion, 24th Marines during a 2004-2005 deployment to the northern part of the Babil Province, said the law enforcement backgrounds of many of his Reserves allowed his battalion to conduct patrols that looked like "community policing" throughout his area of operations.[14] In reviewing this battalion's success, O'Dell said, "The value of [civilian skills] cannot be overstated, and that has not been lost on the active component leadership, who have grasped that intangible value of street level police skills."[15]

O'Dell also noted that the fact that many Reserve Marines come from the same region and serve lengthy tours in the same unit brings a long-term continuity to their work that active duty units do not have.

"If there is one distinguishing feature of a Reserve Marine, it is that they generally come from the same community . . . . so there is a communal link in addition to the fraternal link as Marines," he said. "Moreover, there's a time continuum aspect to this. When a Reserve Marine arrives at his home station from the School of Infantry . . . he can expect to serve eight years in that unit without interruption. The personal bonds that are formed as a consequence over that eight years or more experience are durable and impenetrable, and leads to greater unit cohesion. . . . That gives [Reserves] a leg up, in the sense that we can come on active duty, maybe not at quite the same level of predeployment training as an active duty battalion, but we can play catch up very quickly, to the point that . . . our performance in combat is equal to any rifle platoon, any rifle company, any infantry battalion in the Total Force."[16]

Maj. Mark C. Boone, who commanded Company B of 6th Engineer Support Battalion (ESB) when it was assigned to 9th ESB in Iraq, said the strength of community in the Marine Reserve was demonstrated clearly when one of his Marines, Cpl. Aaron Seal, was killed by a sniper in

the village of Baghdadi.[17] Boone, who described Seal as "the heartbeat of the company," said that his death had a profound effect on the company because many of his Marines had grown up together before joining the Marine Reserve.

Company B is headquartered in South Bend, Indiana, where strong family values are at the core of closely knit communities. These factors meant that his death had a strong impact on the Marine Reserve community there, as well as the local community. "[Cpl. Seal's death] was really tough," Boone said. "Cpl. Seal had spent his life with some of my Marines. He had gone to kindergarten with some, and they had gone to high school, played sports, and even dated many of the same women along the way. Cpl. Seal's death really took the wind out of our sails."[18]

Col. Tracy Garrett, who served as Acting Commander of 4th Marine Logistics Group in 2006-2007, said Reserves also allow the military to bridge the gap back to their civilian communities. Garrett said that Reserves humanize the military because people throughout the United States have the opportunity to see that their neighbors serve in the military. "It becomes much less like someone who is from outer space than the woman who lives next door," she said.[19]

Flexibility

In the ever-changing environments presented by Iraq and Afghanistan, Reserves frequently demonstrated a "Semper Gumby" ability to adapt.[20] Many units underwent significant retraining in order to qualify them to perform services in high demand fields, such as military police and motor transportation. While 14th Marines, the artillery regiment for 4th Marine Division, provided some firing batteries to Iraq, most of its units were retrained as military police because demand for security on bases and roads, and with convoys and detainees was high.

Of all provisional missions assigned to 4th Marine Division, one of the most challenging involved the transition of Reserves from 4th Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion and 4th Amphibious Assault Vehicle Battalion to "Dam Support Units," responsible for riverine operations in a strategically significant section of the Euphrates River. Trading their armored vehicles for waterborne combat vessels, they learned how to fight in a unique environment as they protected the area that stretched from Ramadi to the Haditha Dam.

"The enemy previously had used the Euphrates with impunity to move reinforcements, explosives, and other arms and equipment into the population centers from the western borders of Iraq, into Fallujah and Ramadi and ultimately into Baghdad," O'Dell said. "It's been the Dam Support Unit, as both a mobility asset and a tactical combat asset, that has denied them the use of that avenue that they previously had used with impunity."[21]

Photo By Pfc. Mary A. Staes

Lt. Gen. Jack W. Bergman speaks to Marines from 1st Battalion, 24th Marine Regiment, and 3rd Bn., 14th Marine Regiment, at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Twentynine Palms, Calif., Aug. 22.

The willingness to adapt to a battlefield is a hallmark of any effective military unit, so the flexibility that many Reserves demonstrated in new military specialties did not surprise commanders, O'Dell said. "Marines of every stripe and grade and affiliation are known for their flexibility and adaptability. Given the opportunity to train and be trained to the provisional mission, any Marine unit can prepare itself for success on the battlefield."[22]

The Anbar Province

The geographic challenge of the Anbar Province is demonstrated by two contrasting facts: While it is Iraq's largest province, it also is its most sparsely populated. For a province that is approximately the size of California, it was home to fewer than 1.8 million Iraqis. Most of the population lived in the major cities, like Ramadi and Fallujah, and almost everyone else lived within a short distance of the Euphrates River that snaked from Baghdad to the Syrian Border near Al Qa'im.

Its strategic challenge was demonstrated, in part, by casualty statistics. During the first four years of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), the Anbar Province was the deadliest province for American service members, claiming approximately one-third of American fatalities.[1]

In a country where most were associated with the Shi'ia branch of Islam, the Anbar Province was the Sunni stronghold that had long provided Saddam Hussein with the support he needed to remain in power. During the early years of OIF, it provided an important base for Al Qaeda and insurgent operations.[2] Part of its significance came from the fact that the Western Euphrates River Valley served as an important infiltration route for foreign fighters headed to Iraq's heartland.[3] The New York Times compared this region to the Vietnam War's Ho Chi Minh Trail, as foreign fighters and insurgents used the river valley to move in relative safety from the Syrian border to cities like Baghdad, Ramadi and Fallujah.

The contrast between the fertile Euphrates River Valley and the rest of the province is striking. Along the Euphrates, groves of fruits and vegetables and acre after acre of date palms are surrounded by a lushness that paints the area a vivid green. Just a few miles from the Euphrates, however, the barren landscape turns brown. With the exception of an occasional Bedouin, the desert is essentially empty.

Whether traveling by aircraft, vehicle, or on foot, the Anbar Province is vast. During a time when improvised explosive devices (IEDs) became the weapon of choice for insurgents, the need to patrol and travel throughout the province became one of the Marine Corps' greatest challenges. The threat of insurgent activity, when combined with the challenges that long-distance travel, choking dust, and stifling heat created, made the Anbar Province one of the most inhospitable areas on Earth.

Reserve Contributions to the Global War on Terror

4th Marine Division In Iraq

Photo By Sgt. Chad R. Kiehl

Marines with Company I, 3rd Battalion, 24th Marines conduct a memorial service for Cpl. Bradley P. McCormick, who was killed in combat in An Najaf on Aug. 19, 2004.

3rd Battalion 24th Marines

One week after the statue of Saddam Hussein was pulled down in Baghdad's Firdos Square, Central Command considered plans to drastically reduce American forces in Iraq, and subsequently directed the Marine Corps to withdraw all forces during the summer and fall of 2003.[2] By the end of the year, fewer than 250 Marines remained in Iraq. But even before the last Marine infantry battalion returned to the United States, an emerging insurgency forced the Pentagon to reverse its flow of forces.[3] Guerrilla operations conducted by a mix of Saddam loyalists and foreign terrorists showed the world that, from their perspective, the war was far from over.[4] This violence against Coalition forces and Iraqi citizens meant that the number of Americans in Iraq would have to stay roughly the same.[5] As Marines reviewed requirements for upcoming troop rotations, they looked to the Reserves for manpower.

The only Reserve Marine infantry battalion mobilized for OIF Phase II was 3rd Battalion, 24th Marines. Based primarily in Missouri, Indiana, and Tennessee, its Marines learned in December 2003 to expect mobilization the following month. Having heard rumors that they were slated to go to Okinawa, most were elated with the decision that would put them in the fight in Iraq.[6] They were mobilized on January 5, 2004, and were soon en route to Camp Pendleton for six weeks of immunizations, training, uniforms and equipment, as well as a crash course

in Security and Stabilization Operations (SASO). This Reserve battalion became part of what grew to the 24,000 Marines and Sailors of I MEF, which returned to Iraq in February and March.[7]

With Operation Iraqi Freedom in transition, Marines encountered difficulties in deciding how to prepare. Returning veterans knew their work would be different, but they did not know if this meant combat operations against insurgents or "hearts and minds" interactions with civilians. Not knowing what mission they would be assigned to in Iraq, and competing with active duty battalions for limited training opportunities, 3rd Battalion, 24th Marines focused on basic security operations. Its Marines first went through a fast-paced weapons training cycle that familiarized each Marine with the weapons they might use in Iraq.[8] The training plan used a building-block approach that trained at the fireteam and squad levels before moving to company-and battalion-level exercises. It also gave the battalion staff, which included many new members, a chance to function as a team.

The one-week SASO training package was held at March Air Force Reserve Base in California. Conducted by 1st Marine Division and the Marine Corps' Warfighting Laboratory, SASO training simulated the multi-spectrum environment that Marines were expecting, from diehard insurgents wearing suicide vests to peaceful citizens trying to rebuild their country. Realizing that Marines would face vastly different challenges each day, SASO emphasized small-unit leadership. Expanding the concept of the "Strategic Corporal," SASO taught the Marines that an important element to operations in Iraq would be the young Marine leader who had a clear understanding of his commander's intent while also appreciating that actions at the tactical level could reverberate at the operational and strategic levels.[9]

Photo By Sgt. Chad R. Kiehl

Marines with Company I, 3rd Battalion, 24th Marines conduct a memorial service for Cpl. Bradley P. McCormick who was killed in combat in An Najaf, Iraq.

While awaiting transit from Kuwait to Iraq, the battalion learned that its primary mission would be to provide security at four sites.[10] The battalion commander assigned Company I to Camp Fallujah, Company K to the prison facility at Abu Ghraib, and Company L to the airbase at al Asad. The remaining units, including Battalion Headquarters, Headquarters and Services Company, and Weapons Company, went to the 1st Fleet Service Support Group's (FSSG) large support base at Camp Taqqadum.

Lt. Col. Gary S. Johnston, who became 3/24's Inspector-Instructor after the deployment, described the force protection and convoy escort services that 3/24 provided as essential enablers for combat to civil-military operations. "It may not have been a 'sexy' mission, but it was absolutely a very critical mission. . . . The manpower drain, trying to protect yourself while you are still conducting SASO as well as humanitarian-type civil-military operations, is significant. So [3/24's] ability to do what they did, and spread themselves out to multiple FOBs as well as supporting convoy operations... contributed significantly to the fight out there."[11]

Maj. Mark A. Lamelza was Company I's Executive Officer when Marines took over Camp Fallujah, a former military base 10 kilometers east of Fallujah that served as headquarters for I MEF and 1st Marine Division. Company

I's 170 Marines took charge of perimeter security and the quick reaction force (QRF), as well as operations at the base's three entry control points (ECPs). Their most difficult challenge, he said, was the ECP used for Iraqis who worked on base. This ECP used guard dogs, a cargo inspection system, and careful searches of individuals and vehicles to protect the base.[12] During the early phase of building a Marine presence in the Anbar Province, much of Company I's work involved inspecting large convoys of personnel, supplies and equipment.[13]

"We had to be vigilant every day," Maj. Lamelza said. In addition to internal security, Company I maintained an ambitious schedule of mounted and dismounted patrols to thwart mortar and rocket attacks.

Using their civilian skills, Company I Marines improved the camp's defenses in many ways. Several civilian contractors worked with Navy Seabees to strengthen guard towers and other potential targets. Company I conducted an assessment of the camp's infrastructure and proposed construction projects that touched all parts of the base, Lamelza said. "We left that camp completely different than we found it. When we built a bunker, we really built a bunker."[14]

In the middle of his tour, Lamelza was transferred to 1st FSSG's support base at Camp Taqqadum, where he took command of the battalion's Weapons Company. Camp Taqqadum included two long runways and was surrounded by a number of small villages. At the time, it was much more open than Camp Fallujah, with no barriers around much of its perimeter. Its primary protection consisted of a series of observation towers and an active QRF.

Marines reported that the Iraqi population was, at best, neutral to Coalition efforts; neither friendly nor hostile to the Marines. Camp Taqqadum was hit by indirect fires several times during the deployment. The belief that nearby Iraqis would not prevent insurgents from firing on the base prompted Weapons Company to undertake an aggressive schedule of around-the-clock patrolling outside the base.[15]

Chief Warrant Officer Robert A. Bauer, a maintenance officer in the battalion's logistics section, described Camp Taqqadum as relatively primitive in early 2004, with Marines sleeping on cots in 25-man tents.[16] Electricity was provided by generators, which frequently failed when high temperatures caused spikes in demand. Limited access to water meant that water tanks for showers had to be refilled by truck. On a positive note, he said, the base had a small gymnasium and good food from a contractor-serviced dining hall.

Company K was assigned to the U.S. Army's 16th Military Police Brigade at Abu Ghraib prison.[17] The Marines arrived at a sensitive time, less than two months after the Army convened an investigation into detainee abuse at the hands of U.S. Army Reserve military policemen.[18] After negotiating their role with their Army counterparts, Marines took responsibility for the base's external guard towers, ECPs, and QRF, as well as a mortar team trained to respond quickly to indirect fire attacks. They hardened the base by filling thousands of sandbags, laying miles of concertina wire, and clearing and charting their fields of fire. These precautions proved to be prudent, as Marines defended the prison during several insurgent attacks that included mortar, rocket, RPG, and small arms fire.[19]

For Company L, most of its tour involved security duties at al Asad, a large airbase that served as headquarters and principle airfield for 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing (MAW). As the base's only infantry unit, Company L earned a reputation as the Wing's "security blanket," patrolling nearby neighborhoods on foot and in Humvees. The Wing also used Company L Marines to coordinate and provide security for convoys throughout the Anbar Province. During one five-week period, it conducted 26 convoys between al Asad and bases near al Qa'im, al Taqqadum, Haditha, ar Rutbah, and Ramadi.[20]

Shortly after arriving in Iraq, Company L Marines were given a brief opportunity to work for a regimental combat team, relieving an active duty company to allow it to fight with its battalion for Operation Vigilant Resolve in Fallujah. For three weeks, The Company was responsible for the Haditha-Hit area near al Asad. During foot patrols in Hit, the Marines learned that many insurgents fleeing Coalition operations in Fallujah had settled in Hit. Company L also found numerous weapons caches, including two of the largest caches that had been located in the Anbar Province to that time, while searching palm groves on the neighboring Euphrates River Valley. While Company L's operations near Hit and Haditha were relatively small, the company's success in these missions helped set the stage for expanded Reserve activities during the next rotation.

2nd Battalion 24th Marines

After 3/24's initial success as the only Reserve battalion in Iraq during the first months of Phase II, the 4th Marine Division assigned two more Reserve battalions, 1st Battalion, 23rd Marines and 2nd Battalion, 24th Marines, to the next rotation. Both battalions received missions and areas of operations (AOs) that were more challenging than the security missions assigned to 3/24. 1/23 was given an economy of force mission over a broad expanse of the Anbar Province. Its AO included open desert and much of the Western Euphrates River Valley, which served as a major conduit for insurgents moving to and from Syria and Baghdad and all points in between.[1] In contrast, 2/24 operated in a small, dense, and urban AO that included the "Triangle of Death"[2] a few miles south of Baghdad.[3] For large operations, it could request assistance from nearby Army units. For day-to-day operations, 2/24 was stretched thin, with too few Marines to keep a tight grip on escalating violence. The Triangle of Death was located on a fault line between large Sunni and Shi'ia populations.[4] Iraqi-on-Iraqi violence was so common that many residents took steps to make their religious affiliation more ambiguous, providing some measure of safety in areas that otherwise would be too dangerous for travel.[5]

Photo By Lance Corporal Ryan B. Busse

United States Marine Corps Cpl. Erin Black directs Iraqi women and children to line up so that the may be searched in a quick and orderly fashion at Entry Control Point 5 on the outskirts of Fallujah, Iraq on December 28, 2004. Black, a Nashville, Tenn. native, is a Military Police reservist by trade but has been attached to the "Females Searching Females" detachment for current operations.

The primary mission for 2/24 was to establish conditions for a fair and free national election on January 30, 2005.[6] This carried an implied mission of keeping a main supply route, MSR Tampa, open to Coalition traffic. With insurgent attacks taking place against Coalition forces and civilians on a daily basis during its first few weeks, 2/24 decided that the underlying mission for all operations in its AO called for conducting the full spectrum of combat operations against insurgents.

Lt. Col. Mark A. Smith, an experienced Indiana state trooper and 2/24's commanding officer, told his Marines to take a more forceful stance against the violence, challenging insurgents with aggressive patrols throughout the AO.[7] With law enforcement professionals filling many of 2/24's billets, incorporating the concept of "community policing" in operations within the Triangle of Death came naturally for 2/24. This pushed Marines into Iraqi neighborhoods with what Smith called a "zip code offensive."[8] To him, improving security meant that his Marines would build inroads into communities and improve the lives of common Iraqis, even if they were not wanted there at first. While this philosophy entailed risks, Smith and his intelligence section's "Red Cell" determined that the potential long-term gain outweighed the initial short-term risk.[9] While there was no doubt that increased patrols would cause insurgent activities to spike, the fact that Marines were exerting control in areas previously dominated by insurgents ultimately would curtail much of the violence.

To accomplish these missions, Smith relied upon distributed operations, allowing infantry companies to conduct independent operations from satellite bases. Having inherited a force laydown that put an entire U.S. Army battalion in one Forward Operating Base (FOB) in Mahmudiyah, he immediately created two smaller FOBs in the nearby cities of Yusufiyah and Lutafiyah.[10] While the bulk of his forces would stay at FOB Mahmudiyah, the reinforced companies in Yusufiyah and Lutafiyah were able to patrol remote areas around the clock.

The new force configuration provided strongpoints in the

Photo By Cpl. Ben Eberle

Staff Sgt. Eric F. Gross, a 35-year-old from Sturtevant, Wis., takes a knee to chat with an interested toddler during a Cooperative Medical Engagement (CME) event in as Saqlawiyah. The event took place at the village schoolhouse and provided free medical care for more than 200 civilians in the community. Iraqi culture discourages male-female interaction in public, so a female team provided care and posted security for women and children. The CME events was part of the Iraqi Women's Engagement program coordinated by the U.S. Department of State.

three largest cities in the Triangle of Death:[11] Mahmudiyah, located only 15 kilometers south of Baghdad, was the largest. Yusufiyah, which bordered a community of Islamic extremists to the west, was 10 kilometers west of Mahmudiyah. Lutafiyah was 10 kilometers south of Mahmudiyah. Some considered Lutafiyah the most dangerous of the three, as insurgents with keffiyehs, or checkered scarves wrapped around their heads, and AK-47s would intimidate Iraqis on a daily basis. They conducted surprise checkpoints that often ended with summary executions. Smith believed that Yusufiyah presented a more significant threat to Coalition efforts. Based upon intelligence reports that hard-core Islamists with connections to al Qaeda were distributing money and weapons throughout the region, Smith believed that many anti-Coalition operations in central Iraq, including Baghdad, Fallujah and Ramadi, were initiated in his AO.

After establishing the new FOBs, 2/24 started exploring the AO during all hours of the day and night.[12] This earned the battalion the nickname of "The Mad Ghosts" from Iraqis who were not used to such frequent Coalition presence.[13] Smith said that his Marines had to patrol like this to ensure that the maps they were using accurately reflected the terrain. Many roads were unsafe because they would collapse into canals, and the terrain changed frequently as Iraqis created irrigation canals or moved roads.

Three terrain features, clustered around the Euphrates to the west, dominated 2/24's activities. The first was a weapons manufacturing and storage facility that gave insurgents all the ammunition they needed. Smith described the size of the storage facilities as beyond belief, many times larger than any ammunition supply point he had seen during his years in the Marine Corps. After the fall of Baghdad, the unguarded facility provided munitions to insurgents, who used the ordinance to create an unknown

number of caches on both sides of the Euphrates. By the end of 2/24's tour, Marine and Army units had destroyed hundreds of weapons caches.

The second was the Jurf as Sukhr (JAS) Bridge that provided the only fixed crossing point over the Euphrates River for miles. While the bridge was sturdy enough to handle Coalition vehicles, it was also an obvious ambush point and had been the site of a significant battle between insurgents and 2/24's predecessors. Any ground effort to search the desert west of the Euphrates required crossing the JAS Bridge, so the force would need to be large enough to prevent an ambush at the bridge. For most of its tour, 2/24 did not have the assets to cross the bridge safely, so insurgents move unchallenged in the desert. In such an environment, it was unlikely that insurgents would be stopped, and the desert always offered more caches of weapons and ammunition.

The third was an affluent community of hard-core Islamists who lived in Cargoul (or Karagol), a short distance from Yusufiyah. Intelligence reports showed Cargoul was under the control of Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia. Army Times reported that, "Yusufiyah is [Abu Musab al] Zarqawi country."[14] Cargoul was the site of a U.S. Army checkpoint from which two soldiers were kidnapped during a 2006 ambush. The two were subsequently killed and their bodies were mutilated.[15] Publicity resulting from the ambush was considered a significant public relations victory for insurgents.

Smith said that Cargoul represented a heart of insurgent operations throughout central Iraq, as it housed the best funded and most hard-core Islamists. Residents of Cargoul exerted control over an area that stretched from Yusufiyah to the desert to the west of the Euphrates. During 2/24's deployment, Smith said, he came to believe that Cargoul was the inception point for the constant upheaval in Baghdad, as it could supply all the money, equipment, and munitions that any group of insurgents would need.[16]

The wealth of the Cargoul district was a stark contrast to the poverty that pervaded nearby Shi'ia regions. Most Cargoul houses were elegant mansions that would compare favorably to the finest houses in the world, and they lined a road that started near the JAS Bridge and followed the Euphrates north for about 10 kilometers to the Yusufiyah Power Plant.[17]

For the Mad Ghosts, making the AO more secure was going to be a challenge. In addition to being well armed, the insurgency seemed to be better trained than in other parts of Iraq, as its ranks included many from countries outside Iraq. In addition to their equipment, the foreign fighters could be distinguished by their advanced tactics. Smith said that foreign fighters knew how to maneuver and use suppressive fires effectively.

In 2/24's AO, MSR Tampa was a 35-kilometer segment of the important highway that linked Kuwait to central Iraq, and was open at first only to military and Coalition traffic. Smith said 2/24 kept MSR Tampa open by providing a small security force on the highway and convincing every Coalition convoy that it was that convoy's responsibility to provide its own local security.

One platoon from Company G was assigned to MSR Tampa, and Smith had them on the road almost all the time. The platoon essentially lived on MSR Tampa, sleeping under bridges, eating MREs, and going without showers for lengthy periods as they gathered intelligence and looked for insurgents and IEDs. By providing a constant presence, this platoon improved security to a degree that eventually allowed the Coalition to open MSR Tampa to civilian traffic.

Early in its tour, Company F defended FOB Yusufiyah against a fierce attack from a company-sized group of insurgents. For six hours on November 12, Marines went toe-to-toe with the insurgents.[18] Many Marines considered this type of force-on-force fighting to be a welcome relief from anonymous IED attacks, but they ultimately were impressed with the insurgents' ability to plan and execute such a complicated attack.

"The insurgents took an absolute beating, but they did not run," Smith said. "They kept coming. We finally got what we wanted, because as good as our Marines are . . . they wanted to fight. They wanted to kill a lot of these guys, and they did on that day. It was quite the fight."[19]

The insurgents used indirect fires, then maneuvered under the cover of combined arms to try to advance on FOB Yusufiyah. By the end, Company F was using helicopters and jets for close air support, as well as indirect fires from artillery and 81mm and 60mm mortars. The results were lopsided, with approximately 70 insurgents killed compared with only one Marine, but Smith said the battle demonstrated to higher headquarters that insurgents had the training and capability to conduct a large-scale attack.

For the January 30 elections, 2/24 selected eight polling sites, two each in the three main cities, plus two in Rasheed, a village north of Mahmudiyah. The location of these sites was not announced until 48 hours before polls opened, when Marines seized the sites and imposed protective measures that included barriers, controlled traffic patterns, and detailed voting procedures.[20] Iraqi soldiers were positioned at the inner cordons of the polling sites, and hundreds of officials and election officers were posted at the sites.

On election day, each site experienced insurgent activity

designed to shut it down. For example, a site in Yusufiyah drew 20 separate mortar attacks, but counterbattery fire from Company F rendered those efforts ineffective.[21] Despite these threats, thousands of Iraqis walked to polling sites and stayed in line until they could cast their ballots.[22] By the time votes were tallied, more than 16,000 Iraqis, or 71 percent of the registered voters, had cast their ballots in the historic election.[23] Smith said that the Iraqis persevered despite the challenges because they were confident that the Mad Ghosts would provide protection.

A reporter for CBS News said that election day in the Triangle of Death took on an air that was almost festive, despite the attacks.[24] She reported that Lt. Col. Ali Zahawi Bress, an Iraqi police commander in the predominantly Shi'ia city of Mussyiib, told her, "I am very proud because this is the first time for the Iraqi people to express their opinions and the first step to a real democracy." He added that he was particularly surprised by the number of women who voted. "The people are very excited to go to the election centers and vote. There are large numbers and no one expected that. Even when the mortars were fired, people were excited to vote."[25]

While most of its work was focused on small-unit activities, 2/24 participated in several major operations.[26] Operation River Walk, in December and January, was a cordon and search operation in the Cargoul-controlled region. It included three Army battalions from the U.S. Army's 2nd Brigade Combat Team. This force sufficiently cleared a broad area that included, for the first time, the desert west of the Euphrates. The Army battalion assigned to that area found 112 large weapons caches on the west side of the river. Since Coalition forces rarely crossed the JAS Bridge, there was little effort to try to hide the caches, Smith said. In most cases, the caches were dunes created with munitions and sand, with some sort of signal on top. By this method, any insurgent needing ammunition could take whatever he needed from any stack. Smith said Operation River Walk included searching Cargoul on a house-by-house basis. This surprised residents and allowed his Marines to destroy an IED factory and two rigged vehicles. The operation also shut down an al Qaida propaganda factory, which contained state-of-the-art computers, presses, and photocopying machines.[27] In a war focused on information operations, this represented a significant victory.

In subsequent operations, 2/24 was reinforced by smaller Army units for a series of operations known as Red Mayhem I, II, and III. Red Mayhem I was a cordon and search operation similar to Operation River Walk, except there were not sufficient forces to go into the desert. Smith said that this search of Cargoul confirmed that Coalition forces had the desire and capability to strike deep in insurgent-controlled areas.

Red Mayhem II was another cordon and search, but involved Company G sweeping through Lutafiyah and villages to its east. Lutafiyah was on the fault line between Sunni and Shi'ia populations. Much of 2/24's work focused on Sunni insurgents, so Red Mayhem II was designed to determine what Shi'ia were doing in their neighborhoods. Smith said Red Mayhem II was successful because it surprised the Shi'ia community, allowing 2/24 to document and destroy many significant weapons caches. Red Mayhem II also resulted in the capture of several insurgents targeted by intelligence officials.

The final operation, Red Mayhem III, involved Company E and Mahmudiyah. Company E was the first of Smith's companies to push platoons out in smaller FOBs in the city. This distribution of forces tied Company E in more closely to the community. When Company E went through Mahmudiyah, it was able to locate targeted individuals and weapons caches. The Marines also were able to develop a great deal of information from Mahmudiyah residents who became accustomed to having Marines in their neighborhoods.

In reviewing his tour, Smith said the precipitous drop in insurgent activity was the best measure of 2/24's success. At first, he said, 2/24's AO was averaging 12 to 18 hostile acts per day. Six months later, that number had been reduced to approximately one per week.[28] While 2/24 lost 14 Marines during the mobilization, Smith said these losses were balanced by the measure of his battalion's effectiveness against the insurgency. His Marines knew they had taken the battle to the insurgents' doorsteps, with aggressive patrolling that prompted insurgents to change tactics. He estimated that 2/24 killed 400 insurgents while detaining more than 1,200 others.[29] Using civilian skills from a number of Marines who were also law enforcement officers, 2/24 was able to prepare detainee packages that resulted in the long-term detention of 970 in Abu Ghraib.

The final metric of success, he said, was the fact that 71% of the registered Iraqis voted in the January 30 election.[30] Despite the fact that insurgents were attacking election sites, he said, Iraqis who had suffered under tyranny in the Triangle of Death were not going to be deprived of their right to vote.

1st Battalion 23rd Marines

While operations in the Anbar Province placed many Marines in urban settings like Fallujah or Ramadi, 1st Battalion, 23rd Marines was assigned a huge stretch of desert when it reported to Iraq in the fall of 2004. Nicknamed "The Lone Star Battalion," because of its headquarters in Texas, its Marines were accustomed to wide open spaces. Lt. Col. Gregory B. Stevens, the battalion commander, understood the challenges the desert would present as he led his battalion through a turnover with 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines. Patrolling an area that extended from Ramadi to just south of Haditha, his Marines would be stretched thin. At first, he considered the primary mission of keeping a main supply route (MSR) as being relatively low risk,[1] even though it included parts of the Western Euphrates River Valley. During this deployment, however, his intelligence officers learned that insurgents were using a centuries-old smugglers route along the river and nearby desert to move people and weapons throughout the region.[2] While things appeared calm on the surface, the Lone Star Battalion learned that problems were brewing in parts of its AO.

Photo By Cpl. Jan M. Bender

Lance Cpl. Guillermo Munoz, a machine gunner with a mobile assault platoon for Weapons Company, 1st Battalion, 23rd Marine Regiment, Regimental Combat Team 7, and native of Austin, Texas, scans the area surrounding one of the supply routes. His platoon worked tireless hours to protect against the threat of improvised explosive devices and mines. The efforts of the platoon were credited with causing an 85 percent decrease in the total number of mines and IEDs used in their area of operation.

The battalion that preceded 1/23 had focused much of its attention on protecting the MSR, so it had minimal contact with Iraqis along the Euphrates River Valley. The secondary roads that connected villages along the river were littered with IEDs, and the previous battalion did not have enough Marines to clear the areas surrounding the road. While its leaders had suspected that insurgents were operating near the Euphrates, it did not instigate activities in these unknown regions. By the time 1/23 arrived, intelligence analysts had pieced together a sufficiently clear picture of insurgent activities to allow 1/23 to probe certain areas. For the Lone Star Battalion, this meant sending Marines into villages without knowing if they would be giving away soccer balls or getting involved in firefights.[3]

Maj. Gen. Richard Natonski, Commanding General of the First Marine Division and second highest ranking Marine in Iraq, arrayed his forces so that Regimental Combat Team 7 (RCT-7), which included three infantry battalions, would occupy the 350-kilometer stretch of the Euphrates River Valley from Ramadi to the Syrian border. Stevens' battalion would control the Hit region, which was closest to Ramadi.[4] First Battalion, 8th Marines would control the Haditha section in the middle, while 1st Battalion, 7th Marines would cover the al Qa'im region near the Syrian border.[5]

Stevens immediately lost the services of one of his three infantry companies, when the Commander of RCT-7, Col. Craig Tucker, instructed him to attach a company to 3rd Light Armed Reconnaissance (LAR) Battalion.[6] 3rd LAR had been assigned an even larger piece of desert in western Iraq, bordered by Syria, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. Its Light Armored Vehicles provided just the right balance of protection and mobility that allowed 3rd LAR to cover such an area. Selecting a company that he felt could operate effectively on its own, Stevens attached Company A to 3rd LAR, based at Camp Korean Village near al Rutbah.[7] The task force covered an important area, including major roads that connected Iraq to Jordan and Syria. The area was so distant from more populous and troubled sections of Iraq that it was relatively quiet.

RCT-7 and 1/23 were based at al Asad, the sprawling

airbase just 12 kilometers from the Euphrates between Hit and Haditha. Along with his headquarters element, Stevens assigned Company B, elements of Weapons Company, and Headquarters and Services Company to Camp al Asad. Company B's main task involved keeping Route Uranium secure. A modern road that ran parallel to the oil pipeline to Syria, Route Uranium served as a major resupply route for the Coalition. Its critical role forced the Coalition and Iraqi government to restrict access to the road.

Company B assigned one platoon to Ammunition Supply Point (ASP) Dulab[8] and another platoon to a traffic control point known as the "Bronze-Uranium Split" south of Hit.[9] Remaining elements of Company B were tasked with conducting route security patrols. Stevens assigned Company C to a former Iraq Army base near Hit.[10] The company's mission included monitoring the nearby city and training an Iraqi National Guard company that lived on the same base.

Photo By Lance Cpl. Will Lathrop

Marines with 1st Battalion, 23rd Marine Regiment, attached to 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit, move under the cover of M1A1 main battle tanks and helicopters in a patrol in the city of Hadithah, Iraq. The patrol was conducted to maintain a military presence and search for weapons and enemy activity.

Hit, Camp Hit, and Ambush on the Division Jump

As the largest city in its AO, Hit quickly became the focus of 1/23's attention.

The base that Company C inherited had been a Coalition base since the beginning of the occupation. Located 10 kilometers northwest of Hit and just a kilometer from the Euphrates, the base occupied one of the few low hills that provided a view of Hit and the Euphrates River Valley. The Army had called it Forward Operating Base (FOB) Eden,[11] but it was no paradise. With only four buildings standing amid the ruins of a dozen others, its hot and dusty environment prompted one Marine to describe it as a "third world hellhole."[12] But pieces of paradise were within sight, as the lush nearby river valley held groves of date palms, pomegranates, and other fruits and vegetables.

While the Marine Corps renamed the base Camp Hit, it remained primitive. Several hundred Marines and Iraqi National Guardsmen worked at the base, which was protected more by concertina wire than barriers. Their work frequently was interrupted by mortar attacks or IED strikes. While al Asad had plenty of running water, Marines at Camp Hit were limited to one shower per week, and even those were in fiberglass containers with gravity-fed plumbing that allowed the water to be too hot in the summer and too cold in the winter. Space in the three buildings that served as barracks for most Marines was so limited that cots almost touched each other and gear was stowed in every possible space. The fourth building, on the other side of the camp, housed the Iraqi National Guardsmen and a platoon of Charlie Company Marines tasked with training them.[13]

To Coalition forces, the city of Hit was an enigma. Located in the heart of the Sunni-dominated Anbar Province, its crowded streets and teeming markets gave an appearance of calm. But as Marines patrolled Hit more frequently, they it realized Hit had become an insurgent stronghold.

Hit provided a marketplace for the string of farming villages that bordered the river. Its pre-war population was 100,000, but Marines estimated this number had dropped by half since 2003.[14] The main part of Hit ran for four kilometers between the Euphrates River and a paved road that was part of the Coalition's Route Bronze. The city had a low skyline, with few buildings taller than two or three stories, punctuated by the occasional minaret. It was so crowded that one soldier compared it to a rabbit warren.[15]

Hit also contained one of the few bridges in the area that

could carry heavy military vehicles across the Euphrates River.[16] The Hit bridge connected a paved road from the city's main traffic circle, known as Traffic Control Point 1 (TCP-1), to the small but affluent village of Turbah on the east side of the Euphrates. Since Coalition bases were west of the Euphrates, this bridge provided the only short route to Turbah. Marines patrolled infrequently, so insurgents considered Turbah relatively safe.[17]

Many of its residents were neutral or sympathetic to the insurgency. At some point, it became apparent that insurgents were using a smugglers route that had existed for centuries in and around the Euphrates River Valley to transport fighters, weapons, and ammunition to key cities like Ramadi, Fallujah, and Baghdad.[18] While not as well known as Iraq's larger cities, Hit was important enough in Iraq's Sunni region that Saddam Hussein used it in his flight from Baghdad in April, 2003. According to a study that remains classified, Saddam fled to Hit when a bomb destroyed the house next door to a purported "safe house" during his first night outside Baghdad.[19]

Like most Iraqis, Hit residents were anxious to get on with their day-to-day lives. Many seemed to hold Coalition forces and insurgents equally in contempt, but were powerless to complain. For them, survival meant walking a fine line between the two sides, hoping to endure until a victor emerged.

At the beginning of its tour, 1/23 was focused on maintaining security on MSRs Bronze and Uranium.[20] These routes began at an intersection known as the Bronze-Uranium Split, located 15 kilometers southeast of Hit. The two routes followed the same general direction towards the Syrian border. The paved road that became Route Uranium had been built along the oil pipeline to Syria, and even while Saddam Hussein was in power, it had been reserved for military and government traffic. With its controlled access, straight course, and frequent MAP patrols, Route Uranium was the Iraq version of a superhighway, despite the occasional IED crater. Route Bronze, in contrast, was a local route of crowded roads connecting villages along the west bank of the Euphrates. The threat of ambush or IED was much higher on Route Bronze, so coalition drivers simply tried to keep moving when they were on it. Controlling civilian and military traffic at the Bronze-Uranium Split was critical, so Charlie Company typically kept a platoon of Marines at the checkpoint.[21]

As 1/23 settled in, activities in nearby Fallujah were changing the dynamics of the area. While not immediately apparent, there was a significant spike in the number of insurgents in Hit, probably as a result of a widely-expected Coalition operation to clear Fallujah 100 kilometers to the southeast. 1st Marine Division had cleared parts of Fallujahh the previous April, but had been withdrawn before their work was complete. This time, they were determined that Operation al Fajr would change the balance of power in Fallujah in favor of the Coalition.[22]

Intelligence officers from 1/23 said that three factors contributed to the increase in insurgent activities in Hit.[23] First, local police were inept at best, and more likely complicit in many insurgent activities. For example, in one firefight between insurgents and Coalition forces, men wearing police uniforms fought with the insurgents.[24] Second, Hit's City Council exhibited no interest in trying to curtail insurgent activities, claiming that foreign fighters were a Coalition problem since the Coalition had failed to secure Iraq's borders after the fall of Baghdad. Third, an informal arrangement between prior troop rotations and the City Council limited Coalition presence in Hit, so the Coalition lacked good intelligence. Made at a time when Hit was relatively quiet, the arrangement provided that so long as Hit's police and City Council provided security, Coalition forces essentially would stay out.[25] As a result, insurgent activities went unchecked for so long that insurgents took control of Hit, patrolling with AK-47 assault rifles and bullying the residents. This took place at a time when the Coalition claimed that Hit was a model of Iraqi self-governance.

As Marines learned more about the AO, the insurgent threat became more evident. For example, Marines suspected that an Iraqi known informally as, "The Mad Mortarman," was supplying munitions and other support to the insurgency.[26] When they conducted a search of his home near the Euphrates River, they found, among other items, 16 artillery rounds, 22 mortar rounds, 10 grenades, two RPG launchers and associated rounds, two AK-47 automatic rifles, 291 blasting caps, 15 landmine detonators, and a variety of Iraqi police and National Guard uniforms.

By early October, the insurgent influence in Hit had grown to such an extent that many wore uniforms identified with the insurgency, including black disdashis and scarves. At checkpoints, they intimidated Hit's citizens and police. Even members of the Iraqi National Guard from Turbah complained that insurgents would harass them, confiscating their weapons and money as they crossed the Hit bridge en route to Camp Hit. [27] As the MEF prepared for operations in Fallujah, the situation in Hit deteriorated rapidly.[28] Natonski learned how brazenly uniformed insurgents were operating in Hit when they ambushed a convoy that was en route from Blue Diamond to al Asad to pick up Natonski after a meeting with the Secretary of Defense.[29]

On the morning of the ambush, construction on Route Uranium required that the platoon at the Bronze-Uranium Split divert all Coalition traffic to Route Bronze. At

0700, as the 1st Marine Division's Jump Command Post approached TCP-1 in Hit, it was attacked by insurgents firing three RPGs and hundreds of AK-47 rounds.[30] The personal security detachment (PSD) returned fire as they moved through the ambush, only to come under attack again seconds later on the north side of the traffic circle. The second attack was synchronized, initiated by an IED that was a triggered blast between the second and third vehicles, followed by an RPG round and more AK-47 fire.

No Coalition forces were wounded, but the ambush immediately raised Hit's visibility at all levels of command. As information on this ambush was passed among various headquarters, Marines realized that things in Hit were not as they had once seemed. Understanding the dynamics of insurgent activity in Hit became an instant priority, and 1/23 responded with an operation that would come to be known as the "Battle for Hit."

The difference between what Marines expected to find in Hit and what they encountered in the coming days demonstrated that the Coalition's intelligence regarding Hit was outdated.[31] Many thought that Hit held a relatively small number of insurgents. As a result, 1/23's initial response included sending a relatively small force, a reinforced platoon, to initiate the operation. As the battalion later learned, Hit contained at least 200 to 400 insurgents, many of whom proved they were capable and professional fighters by their tactics of firing and maneuvering.[32] These unknown forces included a well trained insurgent group known as "The Strike Force," that had come to Hit in recent weeks.[33] Subsequent intelligence revealed that The Strike Force focused its attention on the traffic circle where the Division's Jump CP was ambushed.[34]

Wanting to learn more about the city quickly, Stevens initiated activities in Hit within hours, inserting three two-man sniper teams and a three-man counter-sniper team on an elevated railroad trestle more than 500 meters west of TCP-1.[35] He also sent a reinforced platoon from Company B to Turbah with two missions: check the Police Station, which was suspected of having fallen into insurgents' control, and establish a blocking position at the bridge leading from Hit into Turbah. When the larger force swept through Hit in the days that followed, Stevens wanted the blocking position to prevent insurgents from fleeing into Turbah.[36]

Maj. Michael A. Miller, Company B's commanding officer, knew Turbah presented considerable dangers to the Coalition.[37] While little was known about the number of insurgents in Hit or Turbah, he sensed that one platoon, even though reinforced, might be too small. He also knew that if Marines in Turbah came under heavy attack, getting reinforcements to that area would be difficult. The shortest route from al Asad to Turbah was through Hit, which presented numerous ambush sites. Noting these concerns, he asked to send a second platoon with the original force. This request was denied because the rest of his company was needed for the planned follow-on sweep through Hit.[38]

Knowing he was sending a relatively small force, Miller ordered his First Platoon, lead by Capt. R. Shane "Skinny" McGinty, to move to Turbah, clear the Police Station, and establish the blocking position.[39] In a significant decision that undoubtedly prevented several casualties, Miller required McGinty to maneuver the platoon by a long southerly route, traveling almost to Ramadi before crossing the Euphrates. This allowed First Platoon to enter Turbah from the south, avoiding Hit and the Hit bridge. While the lengthy route gave McGinty only a short time to plan his portion of the operation, it eliminated most of the threat of ambush while providing his platoon with the element of surprise.[40] At 2200, just four hours after receiving a warning order, McGinty loaded 53 Marines and corpsmen onto three Humvees and three heavily armed seven-tons for a six-hour trip to Turbah.

Hours later, as McGinty's force approached Turbah, 1/23's snipers observed a burst of insurgent activity near TCP-1.[41] A sniper team leader, Sgt. Byron Hancock, reported that he saw five insurgents with weapons near TCP-1. Hancock's snipers killed one insurgent, causing the others to sink back into the city. Over the next few hours, between 100 and 150 insurgents positioned themselves along Route Bronze, primarily around the traffic circle, positioned to counter any attack that might come from the west. In addition to being uniformed, Hancock said, these insurgents appeared to be disciplined, well-organized, and well-armed.

As Hancock's snipers observed TCP-1, First Platoon prepared to storm the Turbah police station. Since intelligence indicated that insurgents might control the station, McGinty wanted to be sure his Marines were ready to fight.[42] Halting short of the police station, McGinty's platoon dismounted and made final preparations. At 0410, most of his Marines charged into the Police Station, and to their surprise, found only a few sleepy Iraqi policemen. While this was in process, McGinty sent a Humvee loaded with five Marines and a sailor to the Hit bridge so they could begin laying concertina and other obstacles. With everything seemingly on track, Capt. McGinty instructed his Human Exploitation Team (HET) to tell the Iraqi policemen to hand over their weapons and go home until the policemen received further instructions.

In retrospect, McGinty said, releasing the police at that point was a mistake.[43] There were close ties between some police and the insurgency, and someone apparently warned

the insurgents of the Marines' arrival.

Within minutes of releasing the police, Marines heard Arabic instructions from a mosque loudspeaker a short distance from the police station. Sounding nothing like the chants the Marines had become accustomed to, the words sounded more like a call to arms than a call to prayers. Within a minute, McGinty's Marines started taking fire.[44] From the east, the small arms fire of 15 to 20 insurgents came from the area surrounding the Turbah mosque. From the west, insurgents on the far side of the Euphrates were firing RPGs and heavy machine guns from near the Sharqi Mosque, just up a hill from the point where the bridge met Hit. While these fires originated 600 meters from the Turbah traffic circle, they worried McGinty much more than the small arms coming from the rear. There were more insurgents across the river, their weapons were more powerful, and they were firing over his team that had been positioning the concertina wire. When the firing started, two Marines immediately drove the Humvee back to the traffic circle, but the remaining four were trapped. Assessing their predicament, they quickly dropped into a covered position behind a low but substantial metal abutment. Huddled in this cramped space as hundreds of rounds impacted the other side, they knew they were relatively safe but would have to move before daybreak.

By this time, McGinty had most of his platoon in a perimeter around Turbah's traffic circle. Except for snipers, the only force outside his perimeter was the team at the bridge. With rounds coming from the east and west, he also started to see muzzle flashes to the south, showing that an intrepid group of insurgents was trying to maneuver through the thick palm groves. With fire coming from three sides, McGinty decided to ask for help. He told the battalion's operation center to send Company B's reinforcements, who were standing by at al Asad. Then he asked for immediate close air support. The Vipers of HMLA-169 had AH-1 Cobras and UH-1 Huey gunships standing by to provide close air support from al Asad, and they responded quickly to McGinty's report that his Marines were in combat in Hit. As a former Direct Air Support Controller, he was familiar with helicopter capabilities. Knowing that reinforcements were several hours away, he focused on using helicopters to turn the tide of battle. Forty minutes later, with no Forward Air Controller to assist him,[45] McGinty guided the helicopters into the area and directed a series of strafing runs in the palm groves that essentially halted the insurgents' progress.[46] Under cover of the second Cobra run, the team that had been stranded at the bridge sprinted 300 meters back to the traffic circle so they could rejoin the rest of the platoon.

With all Marines accounted for, McGinty realized that his platoon had survived the initial onslaught intact with only one wounded. One Marine had taken a 7.62mm round to his leg when moving the Humvee from the bridge to the traffic circle, but no other injuries were reported. As more helicopters joined the attack, McGinty felt increasingly comfortable with his position. As helicopters stopped the insurgents' progress, his Marines started picking off insurgents, including some who had climbed palm trees to try to get better fields of fire on the Marines.

The morning also was busy for Coalition snipers on the west side of Hit. Looking through night vision devices, the snipers quickly realized that the insurgents controlled Hit.[47] When Hit came alive with pre-dawn fires directed towards the Bravo Marines in Turbah, Hancock's snipers engaged insurgents at TCP-1. His snipers immediately became targets for a counter attack, and insurgents along Route Bronze opened up with mortar and heavy machine gun fire.

"I had not expected them to return fire," Hancock said. "We started taking them down with our M40 rifles, which drove them back into buildings and behind walls. Then we brought out our 50-caliber rifles, which could fire through walls. After that, the insurgents backed up into buildings, from which they could no longer provide accurate fires."

By mid-morning, the threat to the snipers had increased considerably, as insurgents near TCP-1 started to range their positions. Hancock realized that they needed to be withdrawn immediately. Within minutes of his request, the snipers climbed aboard the trucks of a passing mobile

Photo By Cpl. Paul W. Leicht

Marine scout snipers Sgt. Byron Hancock (left) and Cpl. Geoffrey Flowers conduct surveillance from a rooftop during a foot patrol through a Ramadi area village with fellow reserve Marines with Company B, 1st Battalion, 23rd Marine Regiment, Dec. 27, 2004. Near the end of their deployment, snipers like Hancock and Flowers are passing on valuable lessons learned during Operation Iraqi Freedom II.

Photo By Cpl. Paul W. Leicht

Seen through night vision gear, a machine gunner with 3rd Platoon, Company B, 1st Battalion, 23rd Marine Regiment, is positioned for security during a nightly cordon and knock raid around Ramadi, Iraq, Dec. 23. The raid was part of a larger effort to maintain security and stability by disrupting the insurgency prior to elections.

assault platoon and sped away.

Company B's Second Platoon, which was the first wave of reinforcements and included Miller, arrived shortly thereafter in Turbah to augment McGinty's beleaguered force.[48] Using the same southerly approach that McGinty had used, they were met at the Turbah traffic circle by an immediate surge in small arms fire from the area around the Turbah mosque, police station, and a nearby neighborhood. In a hurried update, McGinty told his company commander that insurgents were using the Sharqi Mosque, with its tall minaret providing an unobstructed view of Turbah, to direct mortars onto his Marines. As they were speaking, Miller and McGinty saw a series of mortar rounds "walk" up the road, coming closer and closer until eventually a five-round salvo hit the Turbah traffic circle.[49] This prompted an immediate and massive Marine barrage towards the Sharqi Mosque, followed by a request to headquarters to allow the jets or helicopters to bomb the mosque.

As Miller reorganized the Company B Marines, he ordered McGinty to focus on controlling air support and let the platoon sergeant run First Platoon.[50] Miller then dispatched a team to engage the insurgents to his rear, halting harassing fire and enabling Company B to focus on the increasing threat posed by insurgents maneuvering through the palm grove south of the road that connected the Turbah traffic circle to the Hit bridge. Helicopter and small arms fire had not been able to stop the insurgents in the thick grove, so he requested support from the F-18s flying nearby.

"The aviators were very concerned because they [Company B] already were 'danger close [for dropping ordnance from the aircraft],'" Miller said. "We told them [the aviators] that the machine gun rounds they were firing were not effective, so they [the F-18s] came in there with two passes. . . . They dropped a five hundred pounder approximately two hundred to two hundred and twenty meters off our position, between [the Marines] and the river, and followed up with two quick strafing runs by the helicopters. After that, fire on our side died down significantly."

With insurgents shut down to the east and south, Miller and McGinty focused on insurgent machine gun and mortar fire reaching the traffic circle from the Sharqi Mosque. Engaging a mosque required high-level approval, and RCT-7 demanded proof that the mosque was being used to fire on Marines. "We were still getting sniped at, and we were still getting observed fire. At this point, we could see people on the walls of the mosque, and we were confident the fires were coming from there," Miller said.[51]

With permission to engage the Sharqi Mosque, Miller decided to first attack a machine gun position in a three-story building in front of the mosque. A Cobra helicopter fired a Maverick missile into the building, prompting a huge secondary explosion that destroyed it, a second building, and an ammunition site in a nearby street. This series of explosions took the fight out of the insurgents, as fires from Hit essentially ceased.[52]

After viewing helicopter video later, Miller said the Maverick's effect was devastating. "You can see the [three-story] building blow, and you can see the building right behind the three-story building blow, almost like a sympathetic detonation. Then you can see this humongous explosion and fireball in a street right behind the second building. That's where we think they had their mortars."[53]

The first day in Turbah and Hit had been a major success, as Marines killed a number of insurgents while sustaining only two relatively minor wounds. The turning point, Miller said, was when the bombs cut off insurgents in the palm grove and the Maverick missile silenced activity from the Sharqi Mosque.

There was sporadic firing, but none of consequence as Marines continued to reduce insurgent positions in Hit. The Regimental Commander drove to the Turbah traffic circle to review the situation, and by mid-afternoon Miller had received two more platoons, Their Third Platoon and RCT-7's Quick Reaction Force. With the additional firepower, Miller expanded his perimeter throughout the night, maneuvering two platoons through the palm groves to the riverbank while sending one platoon to an elevated position that allowed it to observe much of Turbah.[54] With continued support from helicopters and jets, Miller's

Marines felt secure.

To prepare for the second day of operations, Stevens ordered his snipers to move to Camp Hit, where they linked up with approximately a dozen sniper teams from various reconnaissance and special forces units.[55] Hancock said the teams returned to the railroad tracks early on the morning of October 12, where they saw more than 10 insurgents in the vicinity of TCP-1, carrying weapons and providing clear evidence of hostile intent. Most wore black uniforms, but some were wearing the uniform of Iraqi police.[56] Hancock said these conditions made him feel like he was participating in a "turkey shoot."

"The insurgents knew where we were, and they were firing at us," he said. "There was a big athletic field on our side of the city, and it had a large cache where they would go for weapons. We would drop them while they were en route to the weapons cache, and also when they were coming out. Sometimes they would pop out and shoot at us, testing our accuracy, and we would take them there."[57]

Hancock had two confirmed hits during this operation, one at 900 yards and the other at 960 yards. For one of those, he said, his observer spotted an insurgent using a scope to search for Coalition snipers. Hancock quickly shot the insurgent, but after that, "the whole city opened up on us, and a couple of our guys got hit in the face with shrapnel from heavy machine gun rounds that glanced off the nearby railroad tracks."[58] The sniper teams were withdrawn, having accomplished their mission of disrupting the insurgents.

For Company B, the second day was very quiet.[59] Miller had improved positions, pushing his Marines into areas along the river that would allow them to control parts of Hit by fire. While sniper teams engaged insurgents along Route Bronze and at TCP-1, Miller's Marines saw few armed men in the eastern side of Hit on the second day. By approximately 1700, he said, RCT-7 ordered a cease fire in Hit and Turbah.

Tucker decided to use the third day to clear Hit. That morning, his staff started negotiating an agreement with Hit's city counsel for a truce that would allow noncombatants to leave Hit. In the late morning, elements of 1/8 from Haditha Dam, reinforced by a company from 3rd LAR, started sweeping through Hit from TCP-1. Within six hours, the task force had gone through Hit without a single shot being fired by either insurgents or Coalition forces. To signal that it was secure, Tucker rode through Hit and linked up with Company B on the Hit bridge.[60] While Marines hoped insurgents would try to test their blocking position, the insurgents instead simply melted back into the city.

The Battle for Hit was significant on several levels. On the ground, Marines were able to engage insurgents in a large-scale force-on-force battle. Using combined arms effectively and armed with superior equipment and training, Marines were able to inflict significant damage on the insurgency while sustaining only minor wounds. For senior Marine headquarters, however, the Battle for Hit served as an ominous warning that there were many insurgent activities, particularly along the Western Euphrates River Valley, that were not clearly understood or appreciated by the Coalition.

Soon after the Battle for Hit, Company B was able to participate in I MEF's assault on Fallujah in November. Attached to 3rd Light Amphibious Reconnaissance Battalion, Company B was part of a ground attack on a peninsula surrounded on three sides by the Euphrates River.[61] At the tip of the peninsula was a hospital that insurgents had used effectively during Operation Vigilant Response, the battle for Fallujah the previous April. The hospital was connected to Fallujah by a skeletal metal bridge that had become infamous when insurgents strung up the mutilated bodies of two Blackwater contractors ambushed in Fallujah in March 2004.

1st Marine Division was determined to prevent insurgents from using the hospital area again, so it sent a combined force of Iraqi and American troops to secure the peninsula before initiating the main effort. The attack was designed to complete the isolation of Fallujah from the west, while other units isolated the city from the east and south.[62] The 36th Iraqi Commando Battalion seized the hospital. Some insurgents thought this was the main attack, so they called their fighters to battle stations a full day before the real attack began from the north.[63]

During the Battle for Fallujah, Hancock received credit for the longest confirmed sniper kills since the start of OIF, when he shot two forward observers for an insurgent mortar team at 1,050 yards. This happened several days into Operation al Fajr, after insurgents had worked themselves into a position to the rear of 1/23's positions on the peninsula. Hancock said that an insurgent 120mm mortar team had been firing occasional rounds in the vicinity of Company B, and finally dropped rounds near the company's command post. Told to report to the company commander, Hancock said that Miller pointed his finger at him and said, "You find that mortar team and you kill them!"[64]

Within days, he said, he and his observer, Cpl. Geoffrey Flowers, found a five-man team dragging the 120mm mortar out of a house and setting up for another salvo at Company B. Flowers immediately requested a fire mission from Company B's 60mm mortars. As Flowers worked up data for the requested fire mission, Hancock determined

that his shot to the first forward observer would be from a distance of 1,050 yards. Three insurgents were operating the mortar, and the other two were forward observers. Working with Flowers, Hancock timed his first M-40 shot so it would be fired when the first mortar rounds, aimed at the nearby 120mm mortar tube, landed. Synchronizing these events meant that the sound of the rifle fire would be lost in the mortar explosions, masking the fact that insurgents were being targeted by snipers as well as mortars.

The first salvo of mortars missed the insurgents by 200 meters, but Hancock's first shot was dead on, dropping the first observer immediately. As Flowers struggled to adjust the mortars, Hancock told him to have the mortar team shift 200 meters to the right. Within seconds, the next salvo was en route, and Hancock again used the sound of the exploding mortar rounds to conceal his fire. His second shot dropped the other forward observer, while at the same time the 60mm mortar rounds found their targets, killing the three insurgents who made up the 120mm mortar team.[65]

Other Operations

While the Battle for Hit clearly was 2/23's most significant action during the deployment, the battalion also participated in a number of other operations. As part of a province-wide effort to increase security, 1st Marine Division launched Operation River Blitz in February, 2005. While much of River Blitz was focused in Ramadi, it included activities in Hit and Haditha. Hancock was tasked with conducting counter-sniper operations in Hit to eliminate a sniper who was subsequently determined to be of Syrian origin.[66] Hancock said that the sniper had been shooting at coalition forces and causing problems in Hit for some time.

Hancock's team was inserted into Hit on February 22, and they were impressed with their opponent's training. "He was using hide sites effectively and moving frequently," Hancock said. "He might fire only a few rounds each day, but he had killed several people in the vicinity of Hit."[67]

Hancock spent two days observing the sniper and trying to consider the situation from his opponent's perspective. This exercise allowed Hancock to figure out where a sniper would position himself to target Coalition forces from Hit. After taking the time to gain a clear understanding of his opponent, he said, accomplishing the mission was simply a matter of patience. Hancock's team spent long hours searching for their prey. The Syrian sniper helped by firing a round in their direction. Knowing the approximate direction and distance to the hide site, they were able to spot the enemy's hide site later that day.

The following morning, the Syrian made the mistake of returning to the same hide site. That, Sgt. Hancock said, proved to be a fatal mistake.

As the Syrian peered through his scope at possible Coalition targets, Hancock caught the glimmer of a reflection off the scope. With this fix on the sniper's position, he prepared for a shot. Within minutes, the sniper fired one round. Hancock immediately fired one of his own, killing the sniper. Approximately an hour later, he said, six men in black dishdashas came to the hide site and carried off the remains of the sniper. Hancock reported that the residents of Hit expressed their relief that the insurgent sniper had been killed.

3rd Battalion 25th Marines

3rd Battalion, 25th Marines came to Iraq during a period of great transition.[1] Almost two years after the fall of Baghdad and more than a year after Marines had returned in force to Iraq, it was clear that the three Marine regimental combat teams (RCTs) were fighting remarkably different battles in their respective sectors of the Anbar Province. Insurgents used different methods of opposing the Coalition and fledgling Iraqi government. Some emplaced IEDs or targeted U.S. forces and civilian contractors. Others kidnapped and intimidated officials and religious leaders who were assisting the Coalition. Throughout the country, vastly different types and levels of progress were being reported. In addition to these challenges, almost all Marine staffs and units, from force and division to battalions and squadrons, were in the midst of a major turnover.[2]

During 3/25's tour, from March to September of 2005, the Marine Corps adjusted its approach to account for the different experiences RCTs were reporting. A successful operation in Fallujah the previous November allowed Marines to reallocate some forces to the Western Euphrates River Valley. 3/25's parent command, RCT-2, began to focus on river cities and insurgent havens along traditional trade routes between Baghdad and the Syrian border.

When RCT-2 took over in March, its mission was to disrupt insurgent activity throughout the area. This required RCT-2 to obtain a clearer understanding of what had been a relatively ambiguous intelligence and operational picture. As an economy of force operation, it had 3,200 Marines and Sailors for an area stretching over 30,000 square miles. Early operations focused on determining the location of insurgents in order to create opportunities for targeting Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia networks. Other missions included countering the IED threat, keeping the Main Supply Routes (MSRs) open, and conducting counterinsurgency (COIN) operations to enhance security and set the stage for the introduction of Iraqi forces when they became available.

The incoming staffs, which had more time to prepare for the deployment than their predecessors, brought an increased sense of aggressiveness to counter-insurgency operations. In the Sunni-dominated region that stretched from Ramadi to the Syrian border, Col. Stephen W. Davis, the RCT-2 commander, clearly wanted to "poke the hornets nests" to determine where insurgents were located and how they would respond.

Davis gave 3/25 an AO that extended from south of Hit to north of the Haditha Dam. Directed to leave a rifle company at al Asad for base security, 3/25's commander, Lt. Col. Lionel Urquhart, had enough manpower to put a reinforced rifle company at both Camp Haditha Dam, near the major city of Haditha in the northwest, and Camp Hit, near the city of Hit in the southeast.[3] These two cities were the anchors of his area of operations, connected by a chain of villages along the west side of the Euphrates River, and the occasional village on the east side. Urquhart placed his battalion headquarters at Camp Haditha Dam and divided Weapons Company and Headquarters and Services Company between the two bases. This disposition allowed him to focus on insurgent-controlled areas while trying to keep MSR Uranium, and to some degree MSR Bronze, clear of IEDs.

3/25 conducted most of its patrols and operations on the west side of the Euphrates River because Coalition bases, MSRs, and population centers were on that side and because few bridges could handle heavy military vehicles. Significant operational concerns, like how long it would take for a quick reaction force to respond to an attack, limited the number of times 3/25 inserted Marines on the east side. Davis encouraged his battalions to work on the east side of the Euphrates because so little was known about the area, but as a practical matter, it was simply more difficult and dangerous to operate there.

While 3/25 faced a daunting series of missions, Urquhart had a force sufficient to keep Marines on the roads and eventually clear Hit of insurgents and establish two bases within the former insurgent stronghold.[4]

Operation al-Fajr, conducted in Fallujah just five months before 3/25's arrival, had prompted many insurgents, like Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, to move to smaller cities along the Euphrates River Valley. In an effort to bring more attention to the area between Baghdad and Syria, Davis planned to aggressively use his battalions to test the insurgency and determine the locations of major networks. He also planned to use embedded media to bring attention to the region by describing how smaller villages on the Euphrates River Valley west of Ramadi had become home to many high-value insurgents and their operations.[5]

One of 3/25's primary missions was maintaining security

along MSRs and roads near the Euphrates, from just south of Hit to just north of the Hadithah Dam. The Anbar Province is the most sparsely populated part of Iraq, with most of its 1.8 million people[6] living in villages along the fertile land next to the Euphrates River.[7] With the river, roads, and open desert providing easy mobility, the region had been a smugglers' paradise for centuries. Insurgents took advantage of this by preparing weapons caches and safe houses throughout the region.[8] Insurgents, especially foreign fighters who typically crossed into Iraq from Syria, conducted vicious murder and intimidation campaigns against citizens in the river towns.

Before 3/25 arrived, Reserve Marines from 1/23 had been stretched thin along this section of the Euphrates, conducting an economy of force mission that grew in importance as the numbers of IEDs and casualties grew.[9] In previous rotations, Marines patrolled from a few large and very secure bases. Establishing a presence in a cleared village was not possible because of the limited number of available troops. When Davis took charge of this region, he wanted insurgents to know things had changed and they would not find this area to be an uncontested sanctuary. He also wanted to disrupt insurgent operations by changing any patterns that might have been inadvertently set by previous Coalition units. He planned to cut off the insurgents' lifeline along the Euphrates, in part by establishing a Marine presence in certain cities and villages.

Operation River Bridge

Davis immediately put 3/25 to work during the turnover phase, instructing Urquhart to conduct the battalion's first operation in country. Considered relatively low-risk, Operation River Bridge was designed to get Marines out of the camps and onto the MSRs, familiarizing 3/25 with the area while masking the scheduled rotations of Marines at every echelon.[10]

"Colonel Davis said he was going to work us hard, and that we would be exhausted by the time we got back home. He was true to his word," Urquhart said. With his smaller battlespace, Urquhart felt he had sufficient assets to keep insurgents off balance by increasing the number and aggressiveness of operations.[11]

This aggressiveness, coupled with as a series of unusual events, led to a significant number of casualties.[12] In the first three years of Operation Iraqi Freedom, no other battalion, active or reserve, had suffered such losses. With Marines primarily from Ohio, New York, West Virginia, Oklahoma, and Texas, 3/25 became known as the battalion that lost 49 Marines and sailors[13] by the end of its seven-month deployment. The battalion experienced its first fatality during Operation River Bridge, when Cpl. Brian Richardson, a popular radio operator for Company K, was killed when the Humvee he was a passenger in struck a mine.[14] Four others were injured in this explosion just outside Camp Hit,[15] a deserted Iraqi military base that had been converted for use by several hundred Marines and Iraqi National Guardsmen.

Urquhart said Richardson's death reinforced the fact that every corner of 3/25's area of operations carried a possibility of death or injury, even the relatively secure base camps.

"While Cpl. Richardson's death did not stop us, it definitely brought home the reality of what we were doing," Urquhart said. "The battalion was saddened by his death, but we drove on. We had known it was a real possibility that we were going to take casualties going into Iraq. On the whole, Cpl. Richardson's death only made us more resolved, as we were not going to be intimidated. He was our first, but we knew he was not going to be our last."[16]

Three weeks later, Cpl. Michael B. Lindemuth was killed by a mortar round.[17] An active-duty Marine on Weapons Company's Inspector-Instructor staff, he was killed when a 120mm mortar landed in Camp Hit's motor pool.

Operation Outer Banks

During April, the Battalion participated in a number of smaller operations collectively known as Operation Outer Banks.[18] With the general missions of interdicting insurgents, locating caches, and clearing villages, the battalion conducted a series of three and four day operations in Barwanah, Baghdadi, Abu Hyatt, Muhammadi, Kubasyah, Haditha, and Haqlaniyah. In addition to throwing insurgents off stride, Outer Banks was designed to show Iraqis that Marines were stepping up operations throughout the Hit-Haditha Corridor. Urquhart said that after Outer Banks, insurgents knew that the Coalition had more Marines in the region and were determined to prevail. To an Iraqi population forced to hedge its bets, walking a fine line between Coalition and insurgent forces, the activity seemed reassuring. Operation Outer Banks had a strong impact on the insurgency, Urquhart said, as scores of insurgents were detained, hundreds were forced to flee, and dozens were killed. The most significant aspect of Outer Banks was that insurgents were driven out of one of their strongpoints in the village of Haqlaniyah, south of Haditha.

Ambush at Haditha Hospital

As they became more active throughout the area, 3/25

Marines accepted that they were fighting a determined insurgency with some innovative foreign fighters. While adhering to the Coalition's Rules of Engagement and the laws of war, their experiences quickly taught them that insurgents were not constrained by such restrictions. That fact was driven home on May 7, when Mobile Assault Platoon (MAP) 7, a heavy weapons team that Urquhart

Photo By Cpl. Ken Melton

Sgt. James A. Angelone, a squad leader with Company K, 3rd Battalion, 25th Marines, watches as his younger brother, Pfc. Francis B. Angelone, sights in a potential threat during a mission.

frequently traveled with, was hit by a complex attack that included a "suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive device" (SVBIED), rocket propelled grenades (RPGs), and small arms. The attack came from prepared positions in the Haditha Hospital, after insurgents ordered patients and doctors away from the front of the building.[19]

MAP 7 consisted of 16 Marines and one corpsman loaded into three Humvees and one seven-ton truck. Two of the vehicles were armed with M240 7.62mm machine guns, one with a 50-caliber machine gun, and one with a Mark 19 grenade launcher. During the evening, MAP 7 went to Haditha as the Quick Response Force (QRF), with orders to clear an area from which insurgents had been firing on Marines. Following two tanks, MAP 7 reached the city's center as night fell. Finding the narrow street blocked by a vehicle and other obstacles, the Marines recognized the signs of a prepared ambush.

Many Marines got out of their vehicles to provide additional security and mobility as the vehicles were turned around. Suddenly, a van wheeled into their midst from an alley beside the Haditha Hospital. It exploded between two vehicles, killing three Marines and seriously injured several others.[20] As Marines recovered from the blast, RPGs, machine guns and small arms fire rained down from several positions, mostly from within the hospital, killing the MAP's corpsmen.[21]

Amid the chaos of a burning Humvee and heavy fires, Cpl. Jeffrey Schuller stepped into his Humvee's turret to replace his wounded gunner, Lance Cpl. Mark Kalinowski. Over the next ten minutes, Schuller pumped out 750 rounds of 7.62mm ammunition from the M240 machine gun, firing primarily into the hospital. These lengthy bursts exceeded the gun's capabilities, particularly in a hot environment. But Schuller felt he had no choice, and was surprised that the machine gun never malfunctioned. When it was time to reload, he would fire the M-16 Kalinowski handed him until the injured Marine could get a new ammunition belt into the machine gun.

While the two tanks positioned themselves for a hasty departure, Marines discovered that only the MAP's seven-ton had any chance of moving. It had three flat tires, an empty radiator, no headlights, and a dashboard with warning lights blinking like a Christmas tree. As bad as it seemed, the fact that it could move meant it was better than the other three vehicles. With Schuller providing machine gun cover, the few healthy Marines started dodging fire to load their wounded friends on the truck. In addition to three dead Marines, they carried several with life-threatening wounds. A staff sergeant with a tourniquet around one thigh realized that both legs were bleeding badly. With all but one body recovered and Schuller providing M-16 fire from the seven-ton's cab, Lance Cpl. Todd Corbin drove through the dark streets of Haditha to the Haditha Dam to get medical assistance.[22] A follow-on QRF reached the scene of the ambush within minutes, recovered the last Marine, and cleared the hospital of the few remaining insurgents.

This was 3/25's first major loss. It affirmed two lessons of insurgent warfare: expect the unexpected, and don't expect the enemy to follow the rules.

Operation Matador

On the night MAP 7 was ambushed, Company L Marines were at Camp al Qa'im, in the final stages of preparing for a regimental operation. Davis designed Operation Matador to use elements of his two infantry battalions, 3/2 and 3/25, for a major sweep into the Ramana section on the north side of the Euphrates.[23] No Coalition forces had been in this area for more than six months. Davis attached 3/25's Company L to 3rd Battalion, 2nd Marines, under the command of Lt. Col. Timothy S. Mundy.[24]

The Ramana area is a series of villages starting near the Syrian border and running along the north shore of the Euphrates River for approximately 20 kilometers. Since

most Iraqis lived on the south side of the Euphrates and only one bridge in the region was capable of carrying heavy military vehicles, the Coalition kept most missions on the south side of the Euphrates. This allowed insurgents to use the north side as a sanctuary, with little threat of Coalition interference as they stored weapons, moved throughout the region, and prepared for future operations. With Operation Matador, Davis wanted to change that dynamic. Borrowing elements from the Army's 20th Engineer Brigade, Davis instructed Mundy to set up a pontoon bridge to cross the Euphrates near the farming village of Ubaydi.[25] Once across, the Marines were to sweep through Ramana to the Syrian border. Supported by tanks, Amtracks, LARs, and a powerful mixture of jets and helicopters, Mundy planned to lead with two heavily reinforced companies, K, 3/2 and L,3/25.

Mundy moved his massive force from al Qa'im to Ubaydi at night so Army engineers could position heavy equipment by first light.[26] Building the 200-meter bridge was scheduled to take only a few hours, but soft sand thwarted that timeline.[27] At 0800, as hundreds of Marines waited impatiently in the open desert, the lead elements came under fire from mortars and small arms from New Ubaydi, a modern village. The harassing fires had little effect on the waiting Marines, but after two hours of intensifying fires, and with a sense that bridge would not be ready soon, Mundy and his operations officer, Maj. John Day, decided to deal with New Ubaydi. As the fires continued, Mundy cleared his plan with Davis, then instructed the companies to prepare to conduct a limited objective attack on New Ubaydi.

New Ubaydi crowded several hundred homes in a space no larger than a square mile. While not known as a safe haven, Marines quickly learned that it contained scores of insurgents, including dozens of well-trained foreign fighters capable of fighting a withdrawing action.[28] For many Marines, this first taste of intense combat seemed chaotic, with heavy fires coming from all directions. Their leaders orchestrated the movements of the reinforced companies, coordinating air cover from helicopters and jets. Some insurgents tried to flee by boarding small boats to cross the river. These movements were seen with unmanned aerial vehicles, allowing RCT-2 to cut them off with tactical aircraft.

Both companies conducted house-to-house fighting to clear their assigned sections of New Ubaydi. 1st Sgt. Dan Altieri of Company L described the New Ubaydi battle as an "up-close fight," with Marines throwing hand grenades and using point-and-shoot techniques throughout the built-up area. While many houses contained only women and children, Marines frequently encountered teams of five or six insurgents in the streets or on the roofs. Using prepared positions, insurgents would fire long bursts, then abandon both weapons and their position when ammunition ran low.[29] From narrow village streets or rooftops, they would move to new positions and re-engage. As Altieri moved through the city, he was surprised by the inexhaustible supply of new AK-47 assault rifles and RPK machine guns available to the insurgents. This was challenging, he said, because Marines would think they had worn down a team, only to find that it had moved to another position with a fresh supply of weapons and ammunition.

Altieri said Marine snipers proved to be crucial in New Ubaydi.[30] Establishing positions on rooftops, snipers fired on insurgents maneuvering through streets. In some cases, they engaged insurgents moving towards other Marine positions before the other Marines even knew of the threat. As the fight progressed, snipers adopted the tactic of jumping from roof to roof, which in many cases were separated by only a few feet. The snipers also flushed out many insurgents who were then fired upon by helicopters.

Company L took no significant casualties for most of the day, but this good fortune ran out when a squad from 1st Platoon approached what had been designated as the "last house" for the day. It was not until the next day that Marines realized the house had been prepared in a way they had never seen before, allowing insurgents to fire armor piercing rounds up through the cement floor.[31] When the first fireteam entered the house, Cpl. Dustin A. Derga was killed by an armor piercing round to his back and two other Marines and a corpsman were wounded.[32]

Not knowing where the fires were coming from, Staff Sgt. Anthony L. Goodwin, Derga's platoon sergeant, and Lance Cpl. Mark Camp went in to clear the house. Their initial bursts flushed out two insurgents, who were brought down outside the house by fire from nearby Marines. As Goodwin and Camp worked their way through the house, they saw a staircase with a short closet underneath it. Camp fired a burst into the closet through its door, but when Staff Sgt. Goodwin opened the door, he was met with a hail of bullets that came up from the floor.[33]

Marines realized the foreign fighters in the house had planned to fight to their death. At some point, the enemy started screaming, "Allahu Akbar" ("God is great") as they fired rounds with enough punch to cut through the floor and walls, threatening Marines outside the house.[34]

Still unsure of the enemy's location in the house, Marines had a tank fire seven main gun rounds into it. With Marines still hearing voices in the house as darkness approached, they called for an F/A-18 to silence the insurgents with two 500-pound bombs.[35] The first failed to explode and the second missed the house. That night, as

Marines tried to make sense of what had happened, they could still hear the occasional taunt of "Allahu Akbar," which eventually faded out during the night.

The following morning, Marines destroyed sections of the house with two SMAW rounds.[36] As they walked through the rubble, they discovered that positions had been prepared in the crawl space under the closet. In essence, the enemy had dug their own shallow graves that allowed them to fire up through the floor.[37] Seeing two bodies in the space, Marines tossed in a final grenade to ensure that there were no survivors. By dawn's light, Marines could see how the armor-piercing rounds and a few small aiming holes cut into the floor had allowed insurgents to create fields of fire from below.

This surprise from Operation Matador convinced embedded reporters that foreign fighters were a significant force.[38] Physical characteristics of the dead, as well as expensive equipment that included body armor, suicide vests, and other sophisticated explosives, convinced Altieri that Company L's Marines had fought the "A Team" of foreign fighters.[39]

For Company L Marines, Altieri said, New Ubaydi marked a turning point.

"This is where the Marines became combat warriors," he said. "Before, in places like Haditha and Barwanah, the fighting was a hundred or two hundred meters away. There were no close engagements. In New Ubaydi, Marines were getting confirmed kills from ten feet away. We were firing and maneuvering, with Marines throwing hand grenades within ten or twenty meters at the insurgents, punching through houses. One of our snipers got seven confirmed kills that day. In my opinion, he saved a lot of Marines, because he picked off insurgents as they were maneuvering. That's where a lot of these point-blank encounters happened. Lucky for us, our Marines were quicker at the trigger.[40]

"Under those extreme conditions, [the Marines] fought ferociously and courageously," Altieri said. "You could not ask for anything more of a unit. Even after they got wounded, they were willing to expose themselves to small arms fire and machine gun fire to save their buddies by pulling them out of the line of fire."[41]

Lt. Col. Mundy also was impressed with the way the Reserve Marines kept going after they took casualties in New Ubaydi.

"Death is a wake up call, reminding you that what you're doing is real. While it takes you back a little bit, [Company L] kept pressing," Mundy said. "They had to go into the rubble of one building and dig out the body of one of their Marines, which has got to be a tough thing to do. But they packed up, rolled across the river and then covered a lot of area on the northern side."[42]

With the bridge ready and no further opposition from New Ubaydi, Marines moved across the Euphrates on May 9. They encountered little resistance, but found plenty of improvised explosive devices and weapons caches. First Platoon, still recovering from the deaths of Goodwin and Derga, received a new platoon sergeant the following day. Staff Sgt. Kendall H. Ivy II eagerly responded to a requirement to fill the vacant position left by Goodwin's death. As an experienced infantry Marine, Ivy was comfortable taking his position in the troop commander's hatch. He addressed his platoon the first day, but never met many of his Marines. The next day, as Company L moved to a village near the Syrian border, an IED made from artillery shells exploded under his Amtrack. It blew Staff Sgt. Ivy out of the troop commander's hatch, cut a two-foot-wide hole in the thick armor, and created an inferno that fired off other ordinance in the Amtrack.[43] Four Marines died at the scene, and two more, including Ivy, died shortly thereafter.

Hundreds of Marines from dozens of units participated in Operation Matador, but fate seemed determined to destroy one squad, the First Squad of Company L's First Platoon. These Marines had already lost their platoon sergeant and a team leader just three short days before. When Ivy's Amtrack was destroyed, the blast killed or injured all remaining members. At that point, Mundy ordered all of First Platoon to return to Camp al Qa'im until First Squad could be reconstituted.[44]

While Operation Matador was devastating for Company L, Lt. Col. Mundy and Lt. Col. Urquhart agreed that it was significant on several levels. First, it turned large numbers of Marines into battle-hardened fighters.[45] As both 3/2 and 3/25 encountered many short-range firefights over the next four months, the gritty lessons learned in New Ubaydi and Ramana proved invaluable. Second, it cleared a part of Iraq that had been untouched during the previous six months. Finally, the Coalition acquired a great deal of intelligence from an eight-vehicle MAP that Mundy had placed on the south side of the Euphrates, across from Ramana.

The MAP was positioned near the base of the "Golden Gate Bridge" that linked Ramana on the north to Karabilah on the south. Insurgents from Ramana were expected to flee across this bridge. The MAP Marines confirmed that the "Golden Gate Bridge" was a vital conduit between planning and preparation cells in Ramana and their operational area in the more heavily populated southern side of the river.[46] While most Marines saw little action in Ramana, the MAP's operation helped lay the groundwork for Operation Spear, a cordon and clear operation in Karabilah that Mundy calls his battalion's most important

Photo By Cpl. Ken Melton

An unidentified Company L Marine climbs over a wall so he can advance in his mission in Karabilah during Operation Spear.

activity.

Operation New Market

The Battalion's next operation was in Haditha, just a few miles south of its headquarters at the Haditha Dam. Operation New Market was a battalion-sized operation, involving companies L and K from 3/25 and Company K from 3/2. It was designed to clear a portion of Haditha where Map 7 had been ambushed on May 7. Well-planned and seemingly on track, Operation New Market encountered difficulty from the most unexpected source – a dog.

Altieri said the plan called for Company L Marines to drive into the desert at night, dismount four kilometers from western outskirts of Haditha, and maneuver in darkness to the center of the city.[47] Company Lwas to be in place when the city began stirring that morning, to look for caches and insurgents among the surprised residents. Things were on track at 4:00 a.m., with Marines only 250 meters from the objective, when a dog suddenly awoke and attacked one of the Marines.

Capt. Billy Brown, 2nd Platoon Commander, was within meters of the Marine. "The dog was awakened by a squad of Marines walking next to it," he said. "It panicked and attacked. The Marine had no choice in the matter."[48]

The single shot that silenced the dog awakened the rest of the neighborhood. Altieri heard the voice of a very angry Iraqi reverberate in the narrow street, then the sound of a bolt of a weapon sliding forward. Altieri saw a man armed with an AK-47 step out of a house 10 yards from him, and he responded with two quick rounds to the Iraqi's chest.[49] Other Iraqis soon began firing.

The battalion took its first casualty when a bullet shattered the hip of Capt. Raymond S. Lopes, the company's forward air controller. While Lopes was being pulled to safety, Brown's Marines found themselves in a vicious fight, taking fire from both sides of the road as well as nearby rooftops. Since the firefight seemed to involve only local Iraqis armed with AK-47 assault rifles, both Altieri and Brown eventually concluded that it was nothing more than a shootout with an angry neighborhood.[50]

Whatever its cause, Company L Marines were taking heavy fire from multiple locations.

Accustomed to clearing urban buildings, Brown ordered Sgt. David N. Wimberg to clear a nearby house that was spitting a heavy volume of AK-47 rounds at Marines. As Wimberg and a fireteam were approaching the door, a Marine kicked the door three times before Wimberg pushed the handle to open it. When he opened the door, his team walked into an intense barrage, and a round penetrated Wimberg's shoulder and lodged in his chest.[51] Altieri and others immediately pulled Wimberg into a nearby courtyard. Marines silenced nearby fires with two fragmentation grenades, then turned to treating the injured Marine. Establishing a casualty collection point, Altieri helped medevac Wimberg and Lopes from Haditha, only to learn later that Wimberg died.[52]

While off to an unexpected start, Operation New Market continued in Haditha for several days, as Marines cleared the area and secured several weapons caches.

Months later, Brown would shake his head in amazement when describing the losses caused by a startled dog. From his perspective, he said, it might have started over nothing more than a dead dog and its angry owner.

Cpl. Allen Payne of 2nd Platoon said Sgt. Wimberg's death brought to the surface the frustration and tension that Marines felt while working in a nation where they did not seem appreciated or wanted.[53]

"The Iraqi people really don't care if we are in control or if the insurgents are in control," he said. "It is really frustrating to know that I am here in [their] country, [their] town, and risking my life for [them], and [they] don't even want to help me in any way."[54]

Operation River Sweep

After New Market, elements of the battalion set their sights on Operation River Sweep, designed to locate weapons caches that had been taken from Ammunition Supply Point (ASP) Dulab, an Iraqi ammunition point.[55] Led by a Royal Marine commando, Maj. Richard Maltby, the task force originally consisted of Marines from Company K and two Weapons Company MAPS, but two platoons from Company I were added to exploit the operation's early success.

Stocked while Saddam Hussein was in power, ASP Dulab was on the west side of a bend in the Euphrates. A team of American engineers had been tasked with destroying ASP Dulab in 2003, but it held so much more ammunition than expected that their plan to destroy it with explosives did more to spread the artillary than contain it. Although some ordnance had been subsequently destroyed by civilian contractors, thousands of artillery shells, rockets, and other arms was spread over 10 square kilometers. As a result, the ASP essentially served as a supply point for insurgents, or their proxies, who would dig up rounds at night, transport them across the Euphrates, and hide them for future use. Before Operation River Sweep, Urquhart said, the area on the east side of the Euphrates had not seen Coalition forces for some time.[56] The task force was inserted 30 kilometers northeast of Camp Hit, and in the ensuing days its Marines walked around the bend on the east side of the river. While River Sweep included searching houses and collecting intelligence, much of the operation was simply walking through fields and looking for evidence of weapons caches.

Lance Cpl. Stefan J. Whiteway of Company I said that River Sweep called for Marines to line up abreast of each other and patrol for kilometer after kilometer, looking for things that seemed out of place.[57] In addition to clearing each house, he said, this meant checking fields for fresh dirt. His major contribution was spotting one corner of a field that ultimately yielded several hundred 155mm artillery rounds. Whiteway said he was on patrol when he noticed what looked like a piece of pipe. After kicking away some dirt, he realized it might be ordnance. An engineer with a metal detector determined that Whiteway's round was only one of a large field of artillery rounds buried a few inches below the surface. Since there were too many rounds to destroy in the field, Whiteway's reward for spotting the first round included spending the rest of his day loading artillery rounds onto seven-ton trucks.[58]

Operation River Sweep was an unqualified success, allowing 3/25 to clear terrain where there had been little Coalition activity since the beginning of the war. Since most of 3/25's operations were on the west side of the Euphrates, the element of surprise provided Marines with a relatively risk-free way of locating numerous weapons caches.[59]

Operation Spear

Following up on intelligence that Karabilah, near the Syrian border, was a focus of insurgent operations, Davis again teamed up 3/25's Company L with 3/2's Company K for Operation Spear. Karabilah, which included the southern end of the "Golden Gate Bridge," was central to insurgent activity in the region.

Designed as a major "cordon and knock" operation in the al Qa'im region, Operation Spear became what Mundy considered 3/2's most important operation.[60]

"We were confident that it was a headquarters or strong point for the insurgents, and Regiment felt that we needed

to go back into Karabilah," Mundy said.[61]

This assault by a reinforced battalion against an insurgency headquarters was expected to meet significant resistance. Intelligence showed that there were large numbers of foreign fighters working from Karabilah. Much like what Marines had done previously in Fallujah, Mundy conducted a psychological operations program involving leaflets and loudspeakers, telling all Karabilah residents that Marines were coming soon and noncombatants should leave via certain routes to avoid the fight. While some left, many remained, displaying a pillow case, much like a white banner, as the Marines approached.

Mundy characterized Operation Spear as a "run-and-gun" battle between Coalition forces and insurgents, with many insurgents conducting a determined delaying operation. Both companies experienced significant resistance as they cleared houses in their respective sectors. "We knew, because of the resistance that we encountered, that there must be something very important to the insurgents," he said.[62]

Operation Spear uncovered the following:[63]

– A regional command and control headquarters for the insurgency. Marines found computers, passports, and other information that described the insurgency's training and operational focus. This included information that demonstrating that many of the insurgents were foreign fighters.

– A torture house in which four Iraqis were found chained to a wall, having been beaten by insurgents. A CNN camera team embedded with Lt. Col. Mundy's battalion broadcast this image of insurgent brutality to the world.

– A program by insurgents to convert an elementary school into a weapons storage facility, with bomb-making instructions on chalkboard.

– An elementary school that had been converted by insurgents as a training facility for bomb making and other insurgent activities. Portions of the school had become a weapons and ammunition storage facility.

– A four-bay garage that was a factory for preparing Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Devices (VBIEDs). Intelligence showed that Karabilah had a VBIED factory at a site that looked like an assembly line with a used car lot. Mundy directed that his tank platoon, reinforced by a platoon from Company L, raid the facility. After the tanks knocked down walls, Marines saw cars with loose wires and other indications of bomb-making equipment. Mundy let tanks destroy much of the facility, including six vehicles being prepared with explosives. Marine aircraft destroyed similar facilities in other parts of Karabilah. In all, 23 vehicles in various stages of readiness, along with bomb-making equipment, were destroyed.

Mundy estimated that Operation Spear resulted in the death of 20 to 30 insurgents. Its true value, he said, was evidenced by the fierce delaying action that many insurgents fought as they pushed out of Karabilah. Their actions helped him understand the significance of the insurgent headquarters to activities throughout the region.

An ancillary benefit was that Operation Spear demonstrated to U.S. media representatives that foreigners and jihadists were fighting in western Iraq.[64] Skeptical reporters who had not been convinced by what they had seen in Operation Matador understood that they could not refute proof that included passports, travel records, and computer files.

Operation Sword

As Company L completed Operation Spear with 3/2 in June, Company I was relieved of its duties at al Asad by an Army unit and allowed to rejoin 3/25. An Iraqi Army unit also joined RCT-2 and 3/25, a move that many considered vital to the Coalition's counterinsurgency efforts. With more forces than he had controlled since coming to Iraq, Urquhart felt ready for an order he received from Davis to have 3/25 establish a combined and permanent presence in Hit.[65] A primary goal was to signal the Coalition's determination to remain in charge of Hit.[66] Davis said he expected five companies, including one Iraqi Army company, to clear the insurgent-infested city.[67] More importantly, Davis wanted Urquhart's battalion to establish two firm bases inside Hit, to be occupied by American Marines and Iraqi soldiers. This was a first step in RCT-2's counter-insurgency campaign plan, and the first opportunity to introduce the "new" Iraqi Army to this section of the Anbar Province.

For a battalion that had experienced many tragedies, Operation Sword was a welcome success. Amassing forces at Al Asad and Camp Hit that included two reinforced Marine rifle companies, much of 3/25's Weapons Company, one light armored reconnaissance (LAR) company, one U.S. Army mechanized infantry company, and the Iraqi Army company, Urquhart maneuvered the task force in a way that caught insurgents so flatfooted that few shots were fired.[68] Realizing that Hit was an attractive target, insurgents oriented their defenses towards Camp Hit to the north. They emplaced dozens of IEDs along the six-kilometer stretch of paved road between Camp Hit and Hit. By approaching at night and using the longer southerly approach, Urquhart avoided many of the problems his battalion could have encountered. The residents of Hit woke up to find Americans and Iraqis sweeping up from

the southern part of Hit on both sides of the Euphrates. Insurgents provided no resistance, electing either to flee or blend in with the Iraqis. With its massive force, 3/25 easily took control of this important city.[69]

For insurgents, the real surprise came five days after the initial assault, when Marines completed the clearing operation and began setting up barriers to support the establishment of two bases. When the first Jersey and Hesco barriers were set up, insurgents and residents of Hit realized that the Marines were there to stay.[70] Firm Base 1 was set up in a four-story school near the city's main traffic circle at TCP-1. Company L occupied Firm Base 1 for approximately 30 days, fortifying it before relinquishing it to Company I v so that Company L could return to the Haditha Dam. While Firm Base 1 provided little standoff range for SVBIEDs, its location made a strong impression on local Iraqis.

Firm Base 2 was two kilometers away, using a recreation center near the city's center. While security seemed better due to a nine-foot-tall wall and a longer standoff range, Marines were constantly aware that they were surrounded by Iraqis.

Given the Coalition's history of leaving towns once they had cleared them so troops could move on to the next mission or return to a secure base, insurgents must have doubted that the improvements would be permanent. After a couple of weeks, Urquhart said, the realization that the Coalition would not invest in so many barriers if it did not intend to stay began to sink in. Looking at their own investment in the form of houses and caches throughout the city, insurgents realized that they had too much in Hit to abandon it without a fight with the Coalition. Insurgents no longer controlled the town, but tensions were rising.

Both firm bases experienced SVBIEDs. While Firm Base 2 was being improved by Company K in early July, a car that looked like a government vehicle made its way inside the perimeter. The base had several recreational fields, including one that had been drenched by a broken water pipe. The car became stuck in soft sand long before it reached its target.[71] Unable to move, the suicide bomber detonated the SVBIED where he sat, fulfilling his destiny but causing no injuries to Coalition forces.

Marines were not as fortunate with a two-car SVBIED that hit Firm Base 1 during the last month of the deployment. Company I had taken control of Firm Base 1 from Company L in mid-July. On a morning when several Iraqi officials were scheduled to visit the base, Lance Cpl. Nicholas M. Johnson of Company I was assigned to man a 50-caliber machine gun at the Entry Control Point (ECP) on its northeast corner.[72] Two suspicious vehicles worked their way slowly through staggered barriers towards his position, which was protected by seven feet of concrete and sandbags. As the vehicles approached, the base suddenly came under small arms fire from unknown positions. Johnson tried to fire the 50-caliber machine gun, but it malfunctioned. Other Marines engaged the vehicles and responded to the small arms fire. The lead vehicle exploded only five meters in front of Johnson. This detonation causing an immediate explosion of the IED in the second vehicle. The combined blast dug a crater eight feet deep and 20 feet wide. The blast left Johnson unconscious but unhurt, while injuring approximately 15 other Marines on the base.[73]

To provide security around the FOBs, Marines patrolled Hit around the clock. Sgt. Franklyn G. Metz III of Company I said foot patrols were an essential part of the security plan for the cramped area around Firm Base 1.[74] Metz said a typical patrol included 15 to 20 Marines, sailors and Iraqi soldiers. Depending on the temperature, patrols would stay outside the wire for two or three hours. Most squads conducted at least two patrols per day.

While the battalion enjoyed its success in Hit, the fact that it established two FOBs exposed it to frequent small arms fires, indirect fires, and IEDs. On July 10, two Company K Marines, Staff Sgt. Joseph P. Goodrich and Lance Cpl. Ryan J. Kovacicek, were killed by 120mm mortar fire.[75] Five days later, a Company L corpsmen, HM3 "Doc" Travis Youngblood, was seriously wounded by an IED. Sgt. Guy A. Zierk, his platoon sergeant, said that HM3 Youngblood was on the last leg of a long patrol from Firm Base 1 when a command-detonated IED blew chunks of cinderblock and masonry at him.[76] The bomb had been placed inside a wall surrounding a mosque, and the detonation wire ran into the mosque. The IED killed an Iraqi soldier, but HM3 Youngblood's wounds did not appear to be life-threatening. He lost a significant amount of blood, but he was coherent and almost cheerful as he helped his platoon commander, Gunnery Sgt. Shawn Delgado, administer first aid. HM3 Youngblood told Delgado not to get a replacement because he planned to return to the platoon. Six days later, however, HM3 Youngblood died from his injuries.

Operation Saber

Having returned to full strength, Urquhart could have left Company L at Firm Base 1 and assigned India Company to Haditha Dam, but he felt that Hit was the battalion's main effort and that it would experience increased activity in the final two months of their deployment. Company I wanted to see action after five months of providing security for al Asad, and he wanted to give Company L a break after

what had already been a difficult deployment. In late July, he ordered Company L to return to Haditha Dam after Company I took over at Firm Base 1.

Within days of its return to Haditha Dam, Company L conducted Operation Saber to clear the area near an important oil pumping station known as the K3 station, near Haqlaniyah and several small villages northwest of the Haditha Dam. This included the village of Cykla, just off a road that led from 3/25's AO to al Qa'im. The village needed to be checked periodically because of its proximity to both a Coalition MSR and the Syrian border. The tiny village held only a few thousand people, but the Coalition felt it was important to understand what was going on in this area. So on July 28, two rifle platoons and Company L's headquarters, reinforced by two squads of Iraqi special forces soldiers and detachments of tanks, Amtracks, engineers, and Air-Naval Gunfire Liaison Company (ANGLICO) Marines, conducted a cordon and knock in Cykla.[77] Capt. Billy Brown, Platoon Commander for 2nd Platoon, said the operation involved Marines maneuvering on foot into Cykla early in the morning, with 1st Platoon taking one side of the village and his platoon taking the other.

The first part of the operation proceeded smoothly. Brown said that most Iraqis were generally receptive, although surprised to see Coalition forces that early in the day. As Marines moved through the village, no one warned them that a dozen foreigners had recently infiltrated from Syria and had started to intimidate the residents.[78] The Marines discovered this when they reached a cluster of four houses near the center of the village. Cpl. Andre Williams raised his hand to knock on a door, but it never reached the door, as insurgents cut him down from inside the house. Within seconds, Brown said, Marines had a "major fight" going on against insurgents firing from the four houses. Brown rushed to the site where Williams was bleeding. As he helped carry Williams through a gate, an RPG crashed against a nearby wall, shredding Brown's left elbow.[79]

As the intensity of the firefight increased, all of 2nd Platoon focused on the four houses, pouring fire into them. One fireteam chased fleeing insurgents into another building. A tank pumped several rounds into the buildings, followed by jets dropping five 500-pound bombs. These actions killed several insurgents, but a blood trail led the fireteam to a nearby building. Lance Cpl. Christopher Lyons, a radio operator who was the first to reach the door, was brought down by a hail of bullets from inside the building, and died shortly thereafter.[80]

Brown said the insurgents in Cykla were foreign fighters who were well armed, well trained, and well funded.[81] While they had only been in Cykla for a few weeks, they had come to dominate the village. When the firefight stopped after the death of nine insurgents and the detention of two others, the inventory of seized items surprised Brown. In addition to standard weapons and ammunition, there were vials of adrenalin and other medications, leading him to believe the foreign fighters did not go down easily that day because they were using drugs to block any pain.[82]

Three Days in August

Company L had just returned from Cykla when 3/25 experienced setbacks that captured headlines throughout the world. In the first three days of August, the battalion lost 21 Marines.[83] Six were snipers from Headquarters and Services Company, one was from Weapons Company, and the remaining 14 were from Company L. The Marines died when insurgents triggered a massive IED underneath their Amtrack.

The death of the snipers was an event that set everyone back. Snipers are unique, specially trained to maneuver without being detected. For this mission, three sniper teams of three Marines each were inserted in the middle of the night to an area north of Barwanah, south of the Haditha Dam and on the east side of the Euphrates.[84] After the teams were inserted, two teams decided to link up at a location overlooking the river. The third team was a few kilometers to their north. After preparing their respective sites, the Marines used binoculars and scopes to observe the area. Unable to move in the sweltering heat, the teams were looking forward to their extraction, which would occur under the cover of darkness. In the early afternoon, the six Marines were ambushed by insurgents armed with AK-47s.[85] Five Marines died at the site. One, Lance Cpl. Jeffrey Boskovitch, survived the initial ambush, but was killed as he tried to escape.

The third sniper team heard the ambush but could not respond in time. When they reported Boskovitch's status to the Operations Center, activities at Haditha and Hit went into high gear, as Marines did whatever they could to find the missing Marine. Company L was immediately ordered to secure the ambush site. In securing the site, Marines detained two insurgents from a house next to the ambush site. Company L also conducted a series of engagements from the east side of the Euphrates against insurgents who fired on the Marines from Haditha, on the west side of the Euphrates.

MAP 9, based at Camp Hit, had been patrolling the east side of the Euphrates 60 kilometers south of where the snipers had been ambushed when its Marines learned of the missing Marine.[86] The Marines set up a Snap Vehicle Checkpoint on Route Trout, a lightly traveled road running

parallel to the Euphrates on the east side of the river. The first vehicle, a seven-ton truck driven by Cpl. Thomas A. Maniccia and armed with a machine gun, set up the northern "gate," positioning its front in a way that signaled for approaching traffic to stop. Two Humvees, one with a 50-caliber machine gun and one with a Mark 19 grenade launcher, were positioned in the middle. The last vehicle, an armored Humvee armed with a machine gun and containing three Marines and a corpsman, established the southern gate. Once set up, the Marines typically allowed 10 vehicles inside the checkpoint. Then they would signal for one vehicle to come forward at a time for a closer inspection. In the late afternoon, a white Ford Bronco driven by a young man came in as the last vehicle in a group. After stopping, the driver detonated an SVBIED so large that it shredded the nearby Humvee, sent a huge fireball cloud into the air and shook the earth at Camp Hit, several kilometers away across the Euphrates.[87] Sgt. James R. Graham III was killed immediately by the powerful blast,[88] and his driver, gunner and corpsman were seriously injured, requiring an immediate helicopter medevac from an improvised landing zone. Maniccia, who was hundreds of meters from the blast, said the blast destroyed the armored Humvee, flattening its tires and peeling back the roof like a sardine can.

With Boskovitch still missing, Marines at Hit and Haditha maintained their focus on finding him. After MAP 9 helped the helicopter crew evacuate Graham and the other three, the remaining Marines had to get themselves and all four vehicles back to Camp Hit. This meant tying the destroyed Humvee to Maniccia's seven-ton and limping across the Hit bridge at a time when insurgents surely knew an IED had damaged the Humvee. The Marines of MAP 9 were sure they would be ambushed near the bridge. Maniccia said the insurgents did not disappoint them.[89] As MAP 9 approached Turbah, three vans sped ahead to report their movement to others. With night vision goggles, Maniccia could see signal lights flashing in the palm grove ahead. As he turned west on bridge road, the ambush was initiated with an IED, followed by small arms and machine gun fire from both sides of the roads. MAP 9's immediate response from two machine guns and a grenade launcher slowed the incoming fires. The Marines received additional support within minutes from a Coalition escort force, complete with tanks and Amtracks. This force had the mission of ensuring that MAP 9 got through Hit and returned safely to Camp Hit.[90]

With RCT-2 controlling efforts to recover Boskovich, and with additional support from other Coalition elements, Marines closed off all exits from the ambush area. This prompted insurgents to provide information on where the body of the missing sniper could be found. This was accomplished early in the morning on the day following the ambush, and the Marine was subsequently taken to al Asad for conclusive identification.

Photo By Cpl. Ken Melton

A Marine forces his way into a house in the section of Haqlaniyah where Marines had been attacked earlier in the day.

Operation Quick Strike

RCT-2 responded to the sniper ambush with Quick Strike, a two-battalion operation to clear Haditha and Haqlaniyah on the west side of the Euphrates River and Barwanah on the east side. The mission was straightforward: Find the insurgents and the networks that had ambushed the snipers. Mundy would take his battalion, reinforced by an LAR company, a tank platoon, and an Iraqi Army company, to the two larger cities.[91] Urquhart would focus Lima Company on Barwanah. While Barwanah was small, the fact that it was on the east side had provided insurgents with a measure of protection against previous Coalition operations.

Urquhart described Barwanah as a difficult area for military operations, due in part to the fact that heavy military vehicles could not negotiate the small pontoon bridge that connected Haqlaniyah to Barwanah.[92] In a constant battle of hide-and-seek, the fact that light civilian vehicles could cross the pontoon bridge easily gave insurgents a significant advantage because they could

move quickly between Barwanah and Haqlaniyah with little concern that Coalition forces would follow. Heavier vehicles had to cross the river at Haditha Dam or Hit, many kilometers to the north or south.

Company L had secured the ambush site shortly after the snipers were killed. It used the following day to prepare for a clearing operation in Barwanah. In April, Marines had fought a vicious battle against insurgents on and around the pontoon bridge connecting Barwana to Haqlaniyah, so they knew there might be significant resistance.[93] As Company L prepared to cross the line of departure on the morning of August 3, it received a company of Iraqi soldiers.[94] There was no room in the Amtracks for the Iraqis, so it was decided that the Iraqis would move in their own trucks. Company L's plan had been to avoid the two-lane paved road that led from the ambush site to Barwanah by following a parallel route in the desert. The Iraqi trucks could not maneuver in the soft sand, prompting Company L to adjust the plan to utilize the road.[95] Earlier in the morning, a MAP and a tank company commander had traveled over the same section of the paved road to get into an overwatch position. The tank commander reported that, in his opinion, the road was clear of IEDs.[96]

Company L began movement to Barwanah as fast as its Amtracks could carry the Marines. In the final leg, as the company turned west to go into their final positions for the operation, tragedy again struck the Marines of Company L. A massive IED had been planted under the asphalt road at a spot that the MAP and tank company commander had passed over earlier in the morning.[97] When an Amtrack carrying 15 Marines and an interpreter passed over it, the command-detonated IED exploded with a force that split the Amtrack in half, flipping the 25- to 30-ton vehicle into the air, bringing it down on its back, and igniting in a fireball that spewed thick black smoke straight up into the windless morning. Fourteen Marines and the interpreter were killed immediately in a blast that dug a crater six feet deep and 17 feet across.[98]

While the deadly blast slowed their advance, Marines quickly secured the area around the destroyed Amtrack and evacuated the sole survivor. They established a foothold in Barwanah, secured the pontoon bridge over the Euphrates, and fought a brief engagement with insurgents before continuing with their mission of clearing Barwanah. Other units helped recover bodies and equipment, parts of which had been blown hundreds of meters from the blast site.[99] Company L's perseverance in clearing Barwanah proved that Marines could push on in the face of any adversity, but they found little of value in Barwanah. Many people had deserted the village before Company L's arrival, and the remaining few professed to know nothing about the sniper ambush or the IED that had claimed 14 Marines.

While the August losses were devastating for 3/25, the first three days of August marked a significant turning point in America's awareness of and appreciation for the troops who were fighting Operation Iraqi Freedom. In a war that had lulled many into a sense of complacency, the loss of 21 Marines from a Reserve battalion from America's heartland shocked the nation.

As Americans pondered the impact of these tragedies, Urquhart and his Marines continued working. He had moved his command post from Haditha to Hit after Operation Sword, and found that Hit was relatively quiet for most of the reamaining 75 days of the deployment.[100] Marines were patrolling Hit in significant numbers, and Iraqis were pleased that insurgents no longer dominated the city. There were occasional IED incidents like the one that had taken HM3 Youngblood's life, but Hit had changed dramatically since his task force had swept through the city.

1st Battalion 25th Marines

Like Iwo Jima and Hue, Fallujah has become an icon.

Blackwater Bridge and a pair of month-long urban battles have fixed Fallujah in America's consciousness.[1] Consecrated by the blood of hundreds of Marines killed or wounded there, its streets and buildings will be studied by generations of future Marines, and the vicious fighting that took place in that dense and grimy environment leaves little doubt that the city's name will be etched beside other famous battles on the Marine Corps War Memorial.[2]

Both sides fought fiercely during Operation Vigilant Resolve, the Coalition's immediate response to the Blackwater ambush in the spring of 2004, and Operation al Fajr, a planned attack the following fall to oust insurgents and regain control of Fallujah.

Both sides knew the stakes were high. For insurgents, Fallujah was a safe haven and center for planning and executing operations.[3] For the Coalition, Fallujah was the Heart of Darkness, a headquarters for Zarqawi's Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia and the site of several torture houses.[4] When Marines handed over the city to the Fallujah Brigade[5] after Vigilant Resolve, many saw it as an insurgent victory and a sign of Coalition weakness and confusion. For both sides, Fallujah became a gauge of the war's progress.

Reserve Marines of 1st Battalion, 25th Marines came to Fallujah in March 2006, when the city was under firm Coalition control. In the months since Operation al Fajr, active duty Marines maintained a tight grip on Fallujah, limiting access through a series of Entry Control Points (ECPs) ringing the city.[7] Iraqi police and soldiers guarded the ECPs, which bristled with firepower. Only registered residents, government officials, and contractors were allowed to pass, and "military age males" (known by the acronym "MAMs") were required to provide iris scans and thumbprints.[8] Rebuilding was in full swing, and Marines were constantly patrolling on foot or in Humvees, talking with residents and learning more about the city. The first five months of 1/25's deployment were marked by the fact that there were remarkably few incidents. This turned out to be the calm before a storm, as insurgents who gradually worked their way back into Fallujah were determined to reverse their losses.

For Reserves who had trained on videos of Vigilant Resolve and al Fajr, it was difficult to appreciate how much

Photo By Cpl. Brian Reimers

Maj. Vaughn L. Ward, Company C commander, 1st Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment, Regimental Combat Team 5, leads a patrol through the streets of Fallujah. The Marines conducted a security patrol and received fire from unwelcoming insurgents in the souk district. Vaughn is 37, from Arlington, Va.

the enviroment had changed in Fallujah between 2004 and 2006. Sgt. Maj. Bradley E. Trudell of 1/25 said many simply could not dismiss the image of the kinetic battlefield as they prepared for the deployment.[9]

Sgt. Timothy G. Wittmer, who fought with an active duty battalion in Fallujah during al Fajr, subsequently transferred to 1/25 so he could return to Fallujah. The difference between the two tours was staggering.[10]

"When we left [in December 2004], the city basically reeked . . . of diesel fuel and death. Most of the buildings were pretty well destroyed, and there was no one on the streets until we let everyone in back in through the ECPs. It was a ghost town. Pretty much everyone who stayed around during [Operation al Fajr], with very rare exceptions, was an insurgent, and most of those were killed. When we started letting people back inside, it was still a wasteland. There was trash and sewage and the occasional carcass, and a lot of wild dogs were roaming the streets."[11]

Over 14 months, Fallujah was quickly rebuilt. With an economy based largely on small shops and businesses, the downtown districts were soon humming with activity.

"There was an active population, and they had started the rebuilding process. . . . [Fallujah] was an active city

at that point, which was really, really different than the post al Fajr Fallujah. The city had completely restarted its daily functions, the things you would see in any city. Marketplaces. People moving to and fro and going to and from mosques. Children in the neighborhoods. You didn't see a lot of that right when we left because we were still gradually letting people back inside the city. I just remember thinking how much busier it was, a very claustrophobic feeling, there were so many more people out, whereas before it was really desolate after the fight."[12]

Fallujah's census helps tell the story. Before the war, the United Nations estimated that more than 400,000 people lived in the city.[13] Most were Sunnis, and they earned their living farming, trading, and operating small businesses. From the start of the war to Operation al Fajr, Fallujah's population dwindled to 300,000. When Marines encircled the city in November 2004, 1st Marine Division gave most of the 300,000 a chance to leave, and two-thirds left.[14] Based on the preview provided by Operation Vigilant Resolve, everyone knew what was coming. Marines and insurgents alike prepared for the showdown. Insurgents prepared hundreds of fighting positions from a seeming endlessly supply of weapons and ammunition, then dug in throughout Fallujah to prepare for battle. Marines built "iron mountains" of ammunition and other equipment at supply points outside the city, then maneuvered into position for the assault.[15] To route the entrenched insurgents, Marines inflicted significant damage on Fallujah. According to one estimate, more than half of Fallujah's 39,000 homes suffered damage, with some 10,000 houses rendered uninhabitable.[16]

After al Fajr, access to Fallujah was limited. ECPs served as the only entry points. Before 1/25's arrival, the population grew to 250,000.[17] As conditions continued to improve and security remained intact, the population grew by more than 50,000 during 1/25's tour. This figure included 35,000 Iraqis who fled violence or oppression in other parts of the country and wanted to settle in Fallujah.[18]

Photo By Sgt. Adaecus G. Brooks

Sgt. Jeremy L. Hager, an Information Operations representative with 1st Battalion, 25th Marines, passes out handbills during a cordon and search operation in selected regions of Fallujah as part of Operation Industrial Revolution.

Trudell said Fallujah was a classic example of a "Three Block War,"[19] requiring Marines to use full-scale combat to take control of the city, mid-intensity conflict in battling the insurgency, and stability and support operations (SASO) with moderate Fallujans. In such a scenario, Marines are expected to interact in a friendly way with local residents while knowing that IEDs are spread throughout a neighborhood and insurgents might lurk right around the corner. The difficulty of conducting such a complex group of tasks, he said, was compounded by the preconception of a very kinetic environment many Marines brought to Fallujah.

Even as Fallujah was rebuilt, it remained grim and oppressive. Marines spent much of their time trying to appeal to the Fallujans who were "on the fence," neither supporting nor opposing the Coalition. Trudell said discipline proved to be a key ingredient. Marines had to be able to transition from foot patrols, providing a measure of interaction with Fallujans, to operations that involved identifying, locating, and seizing insurgents. The difficult part, according to Trudell, was accomplishing both missions simultaneously. It was similar to the paradox of trying to appear non-threatening while wearing protective gear and riding in armored Humvees.

"It was just hard work. It was hard work patrolling every day in that heat. It was hard work putting up with all the inconveniences. It was hard work to wear eighty pounds of gear. It was hard work to remain motivated, to get out there and do that every single day," Trudell said. "Insurgencies are hard work, with very little gratification. But if you quantify that at the end, there can be tremendous satisfaction gained over a long period."[20]

Amid the day-to-day problems, Marines saw many positive indicators. A city council, chaired by Fallujah's mayor, met weekly to plan repairs and other improvements. Marines provided security while Iraqi contractors cleared debris and started rebuilding. Iraqi police and security forces were working alongside Marines. They were better trained, better armed, and becoming more aggressive.

Lt. Col. Christopher A. Landro, 1/25's commanding officer, described the battalion's mission as making "Fallujah stay a safe and secure city so that we could continue to develop the Iraqi Security Forces and conduct the counter-insurgency campaign that [the Regimental Combat Team (RCT) commander] had set forth. So going

in there, I knew that it was a controlled environment that was kept safe by the presence of Marine combat forces and our desire to bring the Iraqi Army and the police force up to speed as quickly as possible."[21]

Marines understood that part of their job was to serve in the role of an "older brother," providing protection for the developing Iraqi forces. In a figurative sense, Marines were crossing their arms and staring down a neighborhood bully, giving the Iraqi forces a chance to acquire equipment and develop tactics so they could defend themselves.

Insurgents who understood Fallujah's impact on the "Arab street" did not stand idly by. Having experienced the indignity of unqualified and undeniable defeat, they knew allowing al Fajr's results to stand would amount to a strategic defeat. Each new building or re-opened business was like a poke in the eye, as it decreased the likelihood of an insurgent resurgence. While biding their time, the insurgents were intent on reversing the Coalition's success.

1/25's Marines covered Fallujah from inside the ring of ECPs. Most Marines lived in the government complex in the city's center or the train station to the north, and almost every Marine and sailor in the battalion patrolled regularly, either on foot or in Humvees. Landro made more than 200 trips through Fallujah, logging more than 10,000 miles and three IED strikes on his Humvees.[22] In addition to providing an additional quick reaction force (QRF) to the battalion, these missions gave him a detailed knowledge of each neighborhood, alley, and possible hide site in Fallujah.

An important part of the success in Fallujah was based on its functioning city council. Every Tuesday, the council would meet at the government center to discuss issues relating to security, stability, and reconstruction. In addition to Landro and the RCT-5 commander, Col. Larry Nicholson, it involved major leaders from throughout the Anbar Province. Economic redevelopment was high on the agenda, as were issues related to water, electricity, and schools.[23] In the year since al Fajr, the Coalition and city council had worked to clear much of the debris from Fallujah, setting the stage for a construction boom.

"Reconstruction was booming," Landro said. "We had one commercial truck entrance that would have two to three hundred trucks backed up all day long, trying to get in, full of construction materials, durable goods, and agricultural products. The city was coming back to life, and we were providing that stability. . . . There were whole sectors being rebuilt from destruction, and new sectors where new construction was occurring as well. At any given time, there were a thousand to fifteen hundred structures being built, so there were Fallujans working and the city was coming back to life."

Landro said Fallujah operated almost as a "gated community," with Marines and Iraqis providing the guard force. The ECPs were well fortified, with strict procedures that ensured that everyone was properly processed. These procedures caused delays at the ECPs, but most Fallujans accepted the delays as the price they paid for living in a secure city.

Conducting distributed operations throughout Fallujah required confidence in the knowledge and leadership skills of young Marines. Landro said that constant patrolling, often in relatively small groups, gave junior Marines plenty of opportunities to exercise their leadership and decision-making skills.

"The strategic corporal and strategic sergeant are alive and well in AO Raleigh and in Iraq," Landro said.[24] "We had dozens of patrols that were being led by sergeants, four-vehicle patrols with weapons and communications gear and the ability to reach back for other assets. At any given time of any given day, we had that sergeant, that squad leader, out there, leading a patrol and making decisions on his own."[25]

Deployment Chronology

During the first part of 1/25's tour, Fallujah was relatively quiet. Three Marines were killed between March and July,[26] but operations during this period were characterized by mounted and dismounted patrols that were interrupted only occasionally by IED strikes or brief exchanges of small arms fire.

Staff Sgt. Michael S. Maslauskas, a platoon sergeant for Company C, summed up the feelings of most 1/25 Marines. "Until August, we owned Fallujah. We were unopposed, essentially. There were IEDs and small engagements, but for the most part, our company owned our area of operations, and we didn't have any serious problems."[27] Maj. Raymond L. Adams, who served as platoon commander and executive officer for Company C, agreed. "Prior to [August], we would foot patrol with impunity anywhere in the city."[28]

In retrospect, Fallujah's population changed significantly during July. It was not until August that 1/25 appreciated how much the change would impact their work.

The change was the result of a decision by Iraq's new prime minister to initiate a prisoner release program for a significant number of the prisoners who had been detained during the war.[29] Nuri Kamal Al Maliki, a Shi'ia, designed the program to ease tensions between the two main sectarian groups, as most prisoners were Sunni and most post-war government officials were Shiites.[30] The release created significant troubles in Fallujah, as approximately 2,000 former prisoners made their way to Fallujah during

July, causing an immediate and profound impact on Coalition forces and their interactions with Fallujans.[31]

Marines believed the prisons were essentially insurgent training camps. For Marines on patrol, the prisoner release seemed like a surreal nightmare drawn from a military exercise. Like "resetting" an opposing force in a military war game, allowing defeated forces to rise from simulated deaths and fight again, the prisoner release gave insurgents who knew firsthand what worked and what did not another chance.[32] In Fallujah, the released prisoners seemed eager to put their new skills to the test.

This influx of hardened young men brought what many Marines described as "the look," or "the stare," back to the streets of Fallujah. It was the same sullen look that greeted Coalition forces in Fallujah shortly after Baghdad fell. When pressed to described what "the look" really looked like, Landro said it was as though the glaring young men were telling the Marines, "If your charred carcass were here, we'd hang you from the [Blackwater] bridge, too."[33]

The Guns of August

In early August, al Qaeda in Mesopotamia vowed to regain control of Fallujah.[34] Posting flyers in mosques and schools, its leaders promised to return Fallujah to the "glory" the city had enjoyed before the U.S. attack.[35] Local leaders took this vow seriously, as it came after a spike in insurgent activity and the murder of local religious leaders who had pushed for reconciliation.[36]

For Maslauskas and the rest of the battalion, everything changed on August 3, when two Company C Marines were hit by a sniper.[37]

Maslauskas and about two dozen Marines were wrapping up a lengthy foot patrol in area known as the "Pizza Slice," in southwest Fallujah. As they passed a cemetery known as the "Martyrs' Cemetery," two shots rang out. Staff Sgt. Maslauskas, who could recognize AK-47 fire, understood that the different sound of these gunshots was cause for immediate concern.

"You get used to what an AK-47 sounds like, and we heard two really strange shots. The first thing I remember saying to the squad leader [was], 'Hey, man, what was that? Get on the radio and find out what's up.'" Learning there were casualties, Maslauskas rushed to the site and found that Lance Cpl. Adam Escobar and Lance Cpl. Kurt E. Dechen had been shot by a sniper.

"It was controlled, but it was chaotic because everyone knew a Marine was hurt," Maslauskas said. Other Marines had thrown smoke grenades to limit the sniper's view. As Maslauskas approached the site, he was concerned that Marines working with the casualties might fire at the approaching Marines. The severity of their wounds limited what other Marines could do for the two. Maslauskas said the QRF seemed to take an eternity, even though the company commander, Maj. Vaughn L. Ward, was on the scene in minutes. "Seconds feel like minutes and minutes feel like hours when you're waiting to get your Marines to medical," Maslauskas said.

Escobar had been hit in the upper leg, with the bullet shattering his femur. He was bleeding so heavily that Marines applied a tourniquet after they moved him to a nearby courtyard. Dechen was hit on his side, through a gap in his flak jacket. The bullet tore through his torso before exiting on the other side.

Dechen and Escobar were loaded onto Ward's Humvee and taken to the surgical center. The two were laid out on adjoining tables, and medical teams immediately went to work. Maslauskas said the next hours was an emotional roller coaster, as people would report changes to Dechen's condition. Finally, someone brought him the news that Dechen had died. For the patrol leader, everything changed in that moment. "[It was] like someone punched me in the stomach and there's nothing you can do about it," Maslauskas said.

Capt. Sean D. Miller, Dechen's platoon commander, had gathered his Marines at the company headquarters to bring them up to date when Maj. Adams learned by radio that Dechen was dead. Adams quietly passed this information to the platoon commander, but the platoon erupted with emotion when Miller relayed it to them. One Marine threw a chair across a room when he learned of Dechen's death. Others were simply numb.

In retrospect, Charlie Company Marines realized that their earlier confidence in their ability to patrol safely in Fallujah might have been misplaced. "In the beginning, I don't think I really had an understanding of what it was like," Maslauskas said. "We were just doing our missions, going on patrols, doing what we had to do."

Adams, agreed that, in retrospect, the early months were relatively easy. In addition to patrols, he monitored "snap vehicle control points" that were put up frequently, as well as "BOLOs," shorthand for "be on lookout for" specific vehicles or people. "We knew there were snipers operating out there because Weapons Company took a sniper KIA, and we had a large number of single shot, very accurate shots taken by what we thought was a sniper or snipers operating in the city. . . . For us, everything changed August third, because we realized that we could not just operate in the old fashioned way, which was to put a patrol out, make it look like a large footprint, being obvious what we were doing, and then come back three or maybe four hours at the most. . . . It really did change the way we operated."

Photo By Cpl. Brian Reimers

Three Marines from to Weapons Company, 1st Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment, kneel during a memorial service for Lance Cpl. Eric P. Valdepenas, Petty Officer 2nd Class Christopher G. Walsh and Cpl Jared M. Shoemaker, who were killed Sept. 4, 2006 while conducting combat operations in Fallujah, Iraq. Hundreds of Marines and sailors from the battalion met at a memorial service held at Camp Baharia to remember their friends and fellow servicemembers.

"It had a tremendous psychological impact, I think, on the company as a whole," Maslauskas said. "If I had to tell you when the turning point to Fallujah was, psychologically for the company, I would say it was the day they released the eighteen hundred prisoners, because that led to what happened with Dechen. Subsequently, there was much debate on how best to operate as a squad or platoon in our AO. Basically, it came down to a fifty-fifty mix. You had to have some armor out there with you at all times, any time you left the wire."

His company commander, Maj. Ward, was more blunt in describing the impact of the prisoner release. "The prisoner release . . . was the single biggest blunder that has resulted in the deaths of U.S. Marines and Sailors. . . . I have no doubts that Marines died and Sailors died because we had the release program. Those were prisoners of war, and they released them. You will find that there are a lot of Marines who are upset about that. . . All I can tell you is that they released them, and all of a sudden we started having a hell of a lot more problems."

Marines noticed that the insurgents who attacked them after the prisoner release were much more skilled. "Company commanders were like, 'The varsity is here,'" Ward said. "We knew something had changed. . . [and] there was a hell of a lot of violence over there that started coming at us, and the lethality of it, the sophistication of it was such that they were no longer the jayvee. The varsity had come on board."

Three weeks after the sniper attack on Dechen and Escobar, another Company C Marine was killed by a sniper, again in the vicinity of the Pizza Slice. While providing flank security just a few steps away from Maj. Ward on August 25, Cpl. Jordan C. Pierson was shot once through the shoulder. He died later in the day.

Another three weeks passed, and again Marines took casualties. Three Marines would be killed and two others would lose one leg apiece in separate IED attacks that turned their Humvees into molten fireballs.

Of Interest

Pfc. Fred M. Linck is either the luckiest Reserve in the Corps, or the one with the hardest head. Maybe it's both.

While working in Fallujah on May 5, 2005, Linck was struck in the head by a single round from an insurgent's rifle.[47] The shot dropped him immediately, and all he could hear was his Marines yelling, "Man down. Man down."

While bloodied, Linck suffered little damage. The 7.62mm round bored a hole all the way through his Kevlar helmet. A fragment cut through the headband and into Linck's forehead, but that's where the fragment stopped, leaving little more than a scratch and a bad headache.

Linck is a Reserve from Westbrook, Connecticut, assigned to 1st Battalion, 25th Marines. He was shot during his first month in Iraq.

As part of a Quick Reaction Force, he was called on to go into Fallujah after reports of an IED. Some Marines suspected a setup, but they showed up at the site, got out of their Humvees and established a protective cordon.

A single shot, fired from a site not known to Marines, suddenly cracked through the air.

Seeing blood coming from a head wound, Marines responded by immediately evacuating Linck. He was taken to a Coalition hospital, where he was treated and released without so much as a stitch for the small cut on his forehead.

Linck said that the incident gave him a new-found respect for his equipment.

"If it wasn't for that helmet, I wouldn't be standing here right now," Linck told a reporter. "It pays to wear all the gear the way it's supposed to be worn."

(Story By Cpl. Brian Reimers)

The deadly Humvee attack hit a Mobile Assault Platoon (MAP) from Weapons Company that had been patrolling in a residential neighborhood in the southern part of Fallujah, looking for possible insurgent mortar sites. Towards the end of the patrol, the Humvees turned onto a narrow dirt alley rarely used by Coalition forces. There was a sudden deafening roar and a brilliant flash, and one of the Humvees was immediately engulfed in flames. The explosion killed Hospitalman 2nd Class Christopher G. Walsh, Cpl. Jared M. Shoemaker, and Lance Cpl. Eric P. Valdepenas, and severely wounded the fourth person in the Humvee, Lance Cpl. Cody W. Hill.

Maj. Armando Acosta, Weapons Company's executive officer, described Sept. 4 as a defining point for 1/25, because insurgents began using deadlier and more creative tactics.[38] Attributing the change to the recent prisoner release, he said the Sept. 4 explosions introduced an IED technique that was new to Fallujah, with a "pressure plate" mounted on top of explosives. In this case, he said, insurgents packed a bucket with a plastic explosive and connected the detonator to a pressure plate that was covered by dirt.[39] When the Humvee drove over the device, the resulting explosion shot the pressure plate up through the Humvee's floor, with deadly results.

That evening, a Humvee from a different MAP was hit by a similar device, shearing off one leg from each of the two Marines sitting in the front seats. Sgt. Wittmer, whose Humvee passed over the IED just seconds before it exploded, said the blast and ensuing fire lit up the immediate area. "This was a fireball, which made us instantly turn around. . . . It was like a giant bonfire."

The blast took off the right leg of the driver, Cpl. Pat Murray, and the left leg of his passenger, Sgt. Terrance Burke. Lance Cpl. John Goldman, the Marine in the turret, was blown clear of the Humvee, as was Murray. Burke, who was on fire, initially had to drag himself from the burning vehicle. Cpl. Brian J. Tomsovic dashed over to Burke and tried to pull him to safety and put out the flames, but that effort ceased when they came under small arms attack from two nearby insurgent positions. Shortly there after and aided by a corpsman, Tomsovic moved Burke to a safe position and extinguished the flames.

Changing Tactics

In addition to increasing the number and lethality of their attacks on Coalition and Iraqi forces, the insurgents started targeting Fallujans through a series of bomb attacks. For example, on September 15, a bomb at a Fallujah soccer field killed eight young men and injured more than a dozen others.[40] While Americans took this as a sign the insurgents

were desperate, it sent a tremor through the city. Company C's Ward said that his Marines were able to use that attack to the Coalition's advantage, as they spread the news of what the insurgents had done throughout their section of the city.

Ward said his Marines used a public address system to influence Fallujans and insurgents. Working with a U.S. Army detachment, his Marines would broadcast news on Coalition redevelopment efforts as well as "bad news" events tied to the insurgents. He said that the news of the September 15 bombing of the soccer field turned many Fallujans against the insurgency.[41] By taking this information directly to citizens and inviting them to compare insurgent activities to what the Coalition was doing to improve the city, his Marines helped sway opinions.

Ward said the public address system also was used to incite insurgents with various insults, prompting them to respond and therefore expose themselves to the Marines. "My initial concept of using PsyOps was just to get the enemy to come out and fight . . . to try to get them to try to shut us down immediately by going into an engagement."[42]

Ward found that Fallujans were inclined to be influenced excessively by demonstrations of aggression and force. When air support was available, he said, Company C would request that F/A-18 jets fly low over the city to remind the Fallujans that the Marines had such assets at their disposal. The deep sound of the .50-caliber machine gun, while rarely used, also made a profound impression in a city that was accustomed to violence.[43]

Company C's aggressive foot patrols gave its Marines a much clearer picture of insurgent activity in its AO than had been provided to them. Ward said that the previous Marine company thought there were relatively few insurgents operating in the sector, but Company C learned otherwise. "I think the thing that I was most proud of was the fact that [by the end of the tour], we knew exactly what was going on inside my AO. I knew the pulse, the Marines knew it, and when another unit came in to take it over, I showed them what we were doing [and] what the city was like. . . . We went into the city aggressively, we fought on the enemy's ground, we stood our ground, we did not let the enemy dictate to us what we were going to do and not going to do."

Maj. Brian T. Hofmann, the commander of Company B, said the difference in Fallujah after the prisoner release was significant. "Initially, [Fallujah had been] more passive than I had anticipated, especially given the well-known history of Fallujah. . . . We all came to the conclusion that there certainly was a significant insurgent presence when we got there, but Darwin had taken his toll on the more amateur and less intelligent insurgents. The ones who were left were far craftier and far more subversive in their tactics. We were tasked more with actually having to hunt them down and find them because they did not come out overtly and attack us."[44] Hoffman's Marines felt relatively secure during the first five months of the deployment, but Fallujah's environment changed after the prisoner release.

On August 16, Company B suffered its only two fatalities, both at the hands of a sniper.[45] The company had been conducting a series of saturation patrols in sections of the center of Fallujah when a returning patrol was hit just outside Observation Post (OP) Fenton, a compact fortress on the main east-west road through Fallujah.[46] Capt. John J. McKenna, platoon commander for Third Platoon, was leading the nine-man patrol back into the OP. The first Marine made it safely across a side road and into the OP's entrance, but the next one, Lance Cpl. Michael D. Glover, was felled by a single shot to his head. This shot was a signal to other nearby insurgents to initiate a complex small arms attack from north and south of OP Fenton. Within seconds, McKenna's Marines and those in OP Fenton were returning fire. As several Marines popped smoke grenades to try to conceal them from the sniper and other insurgents, McKenna dashed into the road in an attempt to pull Glover to safety.

Hoffman said that McKenna insisted on running to the aid of Glover, even though rounds were snapping all around his patrol. To try to protect the two Marines, several more smoke grenades were tossed into the road, and Marines increased their fires. "Capt. McKenna ran out to where Lance Cpl. Glover's body was and took a knee," Hofmann said. "He was facing south, with his back to the sniper. At some point, for whatever reason, he turned around and fully looked over his shoulder, and took a round in his head. Single shot."

The sniper also shot two other members of the patrol, but both were protected by SAPI plates. Lance Cpl. Joseph J. Schiller was shot in the right side and Lance Cpl. Daniel F. Murphy was shot in the center of his chest. Both Marines were knocked down, but the SAPI plates stopped the rounds and they were able to return to the fight.

Operations

For Fallujans, the constant patrolling and close cooperation between Marines and Iraqi soldiers and police built confidence that Fallujah would remain secure. This confidence became evident, Landro said, when 1/25 Marines began to receive information that was characterized as "actionable intelligence" of immediate use. For example, in a series of three operations with 2nd Brigade of the New Iraqi Army, Landro's Marines

conducted groups of pinpoint raids, seizing of individuals and weapons caches.

"The Rapid Departure operations were really some of our finer moments," he said. "Rapid Departure was our first operation where we received intelligence from local police and local political leaders on who the bad guys were . . . [something like], 'Here are twenty-five names, and here's where they live.' We put together all the targeting information and as much evidence as we could before striking, so we could put these guys away for a while. In conjunction with [the New Iraqi Army's] Second Brigade, we'd look at the map and see where all the targets were. We'd create a dividing line, and Second Brigade would get half the targets and [1/25] would get half the targets, and we'd do near simultaneous operations on twenty-five separate locations. . . . We did three of them, and they all went off flawlessly."

In another intelligence-driven operation, 1/25 Marines rescued Iraqi hostages who had been taken captive by insurgents at checkpoints about 12 miles south of Fallujah, near the cities of Amiriya and Ferris. Landro said that aerial imagery showed the checkpoints, as well as hostages being put in spider holes or other underground complexes. In operations that included Marines from 2nd Reconnaissance Battalion and the Iraqi Second Brigade, 1/25 rescued three hostages, detained three insurgent guards, and found a weapons cache that included a dozen mortar tubes, several machine guns, and hundreds of artillery rounds. This was accomplished with no shots being fired, as Coalition forces surprised the three sleeping guards.

"The hostages were uncovered in a spider hole that I went down into myself, and I can tell you it was not a nice place to be." Landro said the spider hole was so small that he could not stand up inside it, yet it still held a cage where they found the hostages.

In their last months in Fallujah, 1/25 played a leading role in a series of operations that provided information on various sections of the city that were thought to represent a threat to the Coalition.

Operation Industrial Revolution was designed to generate information on business activities in the bustling southeast quadrant that housed many of the city's mid-sized and large businesses. The operation, conducted with Iraqi soldiers and police, produced little evidence of insurgent activity, but census operations allowed Marines to gather information on a broad range of small and medium-sized businesses. The close coordination between Americans and Iraqis impressed local businessmen, who were constantly assessing the level of security in Fallujah.

In Operation Matador, a one-day operation in the Andaloos district of the Pizza Slice, Marines and Iraqis worked side-by-side to clear a portion of the city just north of the Pizza Slice. Again, there was little evidence seized during the operation. Landro said that the real success of the operation was felt in the staff of the Iraqi Army, which was demonstrating a much better grasp of command and control techniques. He also said the Iraqis showed a marked improvement in their ability to plan and conduct such operations. While there was a level of frustration with any major operation that did not produce weapons or detainees, Landro said that the strong presence certainly disrupted insurgent activities in that part of Fallujah.

The battalion's final operation occurred in the "souk," or market district of Falljua, just north of the Pizza Slice. The market area contains hundreds of houses and small businesses, and hoards of shoppers visit it each day for basic supplies, including produce and consumer goods. In another one-day operation, Company C Marines and their Iraqi counterparts moved into the district, which has dozens of narrow side streets and cramped alleys, before most Iraqis were awake. Their painstaking building-by-building search produced only one cache, but Landro said that the Iraqis again demonstrated significant improvement in their activities. Another benefit, he said, was that Operation Souk took place during 1/25's transition to another Reserve battalion, 1/24, so it gave the incoming staff an opportunity to see how the RCT and the Iraqi Army staff planned such missions.

1st Battalion 24th Marines

Photo By Lance Cpl. Stephen McGinnis

Lance Cpl. Jade A. Tanguay, a mechanic assigned to a personnel security detachment, shakes the hand of a child from Fallujah at the home of a girl Marines visited. A Navy physician talked with the family to see if the U.S. military could provide medical assistance.

First Battalion, Twenty-Fifth Marines turned over its positions in and around Fallujah to another Reserve battalion, 1st Battalion, 24th Marines. Building on the improvements that 1/25 had made to Fallujah's infrastructure and community relations after Operation al Fajr, 1/24 also borrowed the concept of "community policing" from the successful Iraq tour that its sister battalion, 2/24, had employed in the Triangle of Death two years earlier. Using aggressive patrolling and intelligence operations that transformed information regarding tribal activities and relationships into "actionable intelligence," 1/24 made major contributions to what has become known as the "Sunni Awakening," or the 180-degree transition of many Sunni tribes in the Anbar Province from supporting the insurgents to supporting the American-led effort in Iraq.

Lt. Col. Harold R. "Odie" Van Opdorp, 2/24's battalion commander, credited much of the battalion's success to its S-2 section, and how it had closely integrated intelligence on IEDs and other enemy activities with current operations. For 1/24's deployment to Fallujah, it recruited two key intelligence officers from 2/24. Capitalizing on their experience and the systems that they had developed in the Babil Province, 1/24 was able to capture and understanding of its area of operations that allowed the Marines to operate in a coordinated and intelligence-driven fashion.

The first was Chief Warrant Officer James Roussell, a lieutenant in the Chicago Police Department. Roussell had spent most of his 29 years as a policeman with counter-gang operations, and he applied the methods he learned from the streets of Chicago to the heart of Fallujah. The key, he said, was turning each Marine into an intelligence collector. Roussell said that using 1,000 Marines, empowered with the idea that their observations were critical to the success of the battalion, allowed him to gather an intelligence picture of Fallujah that allowed the battalion to fight smarter.

The second Marine was Maj. Daniel P. Whisnant, who commanded Company A. Whisnant had been the S-2 for the earlier 2/24 deployment, so he and Roussell intuitively understood each others' needs and products.

Roussell said the key to countering the Iraqi insurgency was to deprive them of their ability to hide among the population. In the Vietnam War, he said, insurgents were described as fish who were able to swim unnoticed in a pond filled with other fish. Borrowing from the popular Harry Potter series, Roussell said that 1/24 had to strip the "invisibility cloak" from the insurgency. "Once we knew where they were, we could do what we needed to do."

While the Iraqi insurgency might have many parts, Roussell said that for the most part it was made up of rational and intelligent people. Expressing a level of

Official Marine Corps Photo

Actor Chuck Norris made an unscheduled stop in the battalion aid station to visit with wounded Marines during a visit to Camp Baharia.

respect for the shrewdness that insurgents brought to the battle, Roussell said that an understanding by Marines that individual insurgents were rational made the insurgents activities more predictable. This, he said, led to the opportunity for 1/24 to target specific activities. With more than 1,000 Marine intelligence collectors maneuvering constantly throughout the AO, the Intelligence Section's responsibility became collecting the information and plotting the data so that the Intelligence Section could "connect the dots," and push that information out to the using units.

"Identifying the enemy is hard," Roussell said. "But once you do that, you can kill him. Our goal was to drive a wedge between the people of Fallujah and the insurgents."

Repeated analysis of the patterns of IEDs led the battalion to innovative ways to avoid them and also prevent them from being employed. Roussell said the battalion identified the following as its main threats, in order of importance: Improvised explosive devices (IEDs), direct fire (particularly from snipers), indirect fire (typically mortars), vehicle borne IEDs, a medium-sized attack (such as two dozen insurgents attacking a fixed position), a large-sized counter attack (such as a hundred insurgents joining an attack on a patrol), and a complex attack that might involve several of the previously-described methods. Roussell said that simplifying the types of threats to a manageable number, then forcing each Marine to "war game" his response to each threat situation, was tremendously valuable because it allowed Marines to respond instinctively.

At this point in the Iraq War, the central and provincial governments were providing enough police and soldiers to provide a significant boost to American efforts. Roussell said that a key decision within 1/24 was to let the Iraqi Police take a leading role in most operations. By asking the Iraqis to take charge of daytime operations and assigning Marines to work under the cover of darkness, 1/24 employed its Marines in a more protected environment while pushing credit for success in Fallujah to local Iraqis.

Roussell said his concept of victory in Iraq involved building the local police and military forces to the extent that they would be able to counter the insurgency. At this

point, he said, these forces needed American support, and part of the trick was providing the support in a way that gave Iraqis a dominant role.

1/24 also created opportunities for "local heros," or people within the communities who were willing to stand up to the insurgents and complain about the damage that the insurgents were causing to the community. One of these, he said, was a new Fallujah police chief who was willing to lead the community away from insurgents. Marines said the police chief was just what the city needed. The Marines also said that during 1/24's tour, a group of tribal leaders, or sheiks, were willing to assist the U.S.-Iraqi effort because they had grown weary of the heavy-handed tactics of the insurgents.

Roussell said that in his opinion, the willingness of these tribal leaders to provide major assistance in the fight against al Qaeda marked a significant turning point in the war, when Iraqi nationalists were willing to play an important role, in combating al Qaeda, at a significant risk to their lives and status.

Roussell said that much of his section's work was collecting data from Marines and then plotting it in a way to create a graphic view of insurgent activities. He said that this graphic representation was a powerful tool because it enabled commanders and patrol leaders to envision how insurgents would plan their attacks. Having this knowledge allowed them to plan routes that would avoid and even counter the IED threat.

Intelligence Officer as Company Commander

Maj. Daniel P. Whisnant had been a counter-intelligence Marine during his early enlisted career before becoming an Intelligence Officer with a specialty in collecting human intelligence. He put his strong intelligence background to use when he served as Commanding Officer of Company A for 1/24. At a company level, he said, he felt that his primary mission involved counter-intelligence operations in his company's AO, a large rural region southwest of Fallujah. Operating remotely from the rest of the battalion, Whisnant said that company-level counter intelligence operations would create the opportunity for squad-sized patrols to do what squads do best: locate, close with, and take whatever action is necessary with respect to enemy forces.

Company A measured success by the ability of Marines to interact with Iraqis. While crediting "hutzpah" for part of his company's success, Whisnant said, the most successful Marines in his company were those who truly enjoyed dealing with Iraqis. With about a dozen Marines who knew basic Iraqi Arabic phrases, and others operating from what he called, "pointee-talkee" cards with English and Iraqi phrases, he said that he found they could move reasonably well throughout the area.[1]

Aggressive patrolling throughout the 82-square-kilometer AO gave Company A Marines a thorough understanding of the agricultural area. Whisnant said that census operations allowed the company's small intelligence section to understand the company's challenges. Company A was located on a boundary between areas influenced by tribal sheiks and areas under the control of Al Qaeda-related insurgents.

Whisnant said he was immediately struck by the similarities between what most Iraqis wanted and what most Americans wanted. Both wanted the Americans to leave Iraq as soon as possible, he said, but he added that the Iraqis also wanted the same things for their children – security, good schools, and an opportunity for a prosperous future – that his friends in the United States want for their families. Understanding the commonality of their goals allowed him to develop a negotiating strategy that the Iraqis understood well and that worked during his tenure. Described as a "something for something, nothing for nothing," strategy, Whisnant said that he was very open with the Iraqis with whom he dealt. Once both sides clearly expressed the idea that they wanted something that the other had and that they were willing to work together, he said, it was much easier to reach common understanding for the benefit of both sides.

Information Operations

1/24 also benefited from the work of an Iraq War veteran who had served as Weapons Company Commander for 1/23 in the Hit-Haditha corridor. As 1/24's S-3A, Maj. Shea Russell was instructed to focus on information operations, targeting specific people or regions with non-kinetic activities. In a manner similar to what others were doing in putting Iraqi Police in the leading role in Fallujah, the Information Operations team put an Iraqi wrapper on the information that 2/24 wanted to communicate to the Iraqi people. 2/24's information operations focused on newspapers, cable TV, and posters, because that is how most people in the Fallujah area received their news. Russell said that much of their work was directed toward Sunni mothers, because the Marines learned that mothers were the center of gravity for most Sunni families, and therefore an important information point.

Russell said he quickly realized that the Iraqi Army was less effective in Fallujah, with its strong majority of Sunni Muslims, because the Iraqi Army was perceived to be a

tool of the central government, with its predominance of Shi'ia influence. Focusing their efforts on bolstering the Iraqi Police, who had much greater credibility throughout Fallujah, his Marines conducted a major campaign to work with the Iraqi Police to promote messages that were positive for the Marines as well as the Iraqi Police.

The most important thing, he said, was putting a Sunni "face" on all forms of communication. This meant that when 2/24's team printed banners or posters to put up throughout the city, they had to have a "look and feel" of the Iraqi Police. This was one factor that prompted the Marines to change a "tip" telephone line to an Iraqi Police tips line. By making it look like a local tip line, he said, its usage increased 160% in a short period.

Russell said his IO team borrowed information from Al Jezeera to create "truth sandwiches." Using printing techniques identical to ones Iraqis were used to seeing, the IO section would insert a Marine Corps message between a pair of Al Jezeera stories that positively portrayed the American effort in Iraq. By implying that this information was generated by Iraqis, and by borrowing the credibility of information that was also reaching Iraqi homes through Al Jezeera, the IO section created believable news about what the Marines were doing that kept things in a positive light.

1/24 realized that the dynamics of the Iraqi Police Force changed significantly in December 2006, when a new chief took over the department. The new chief undertook a leading role in rooting out the insurgency. With his enthusiasm, Russell said, the information campaign provided tremendous support to his efforts. The chief and other Iraqi Police had messages that they needed to push out within the community, and Russell said that 1/24 provided significant assistance. For example, he said, the Iraqi Police would initiate the message they wanted to convey to the people of Fallujah, and the Marines would provide support by printing the messages.

"The Fallujans loved it, because violence dropped significantly under the new chief," Russell said noting that the number of significant events that the battalion reported went from a high of 21 in one day to a period of five days in which the battalion reported no significant incidents, like IEDs or sniper attacks.

Russell said that Fallujah's "atmospherics" also improved dramatically during this phase. In January, Company C moved from its downtown base near Fallujah's government center to the southern part of Fallujah, allowing the Iraqi Army to take over its former base in the city's Government Center.

Commander's Perspective

Lt. Col. Van Opdorp, 1/24's Commanding Officer, said that his battalion assumed responsibility for a very different Fallujah than the previous battalion, 1/25, experienced. From the ashes of Operation Al Fajr, much of Fallujah had been rebuilt during 1/25's tenure over a relatively short period, and its population had grown to more than 350,000. Incredibly, the new residents included Iraqis from other parts of the country who sought safety in Fallujah.

Insurgents knew how to take advantage of the dense urban environment, Van Opdorp said, in which it was relatively easy to "hide in plain sight." He said that insurgent cells would frequently have several houses from which they would operate, moving from house to house to stay ahead of the Marines and Iraqi Security Forces. During times when Iraqi police and soldiers were not functioning effectively with Marines, insurgents blended in because American eyes and ears could not distinguish their faces or clothes or accents from others. When local support turned to favor the Americans, he said, it became an entirely different battle.

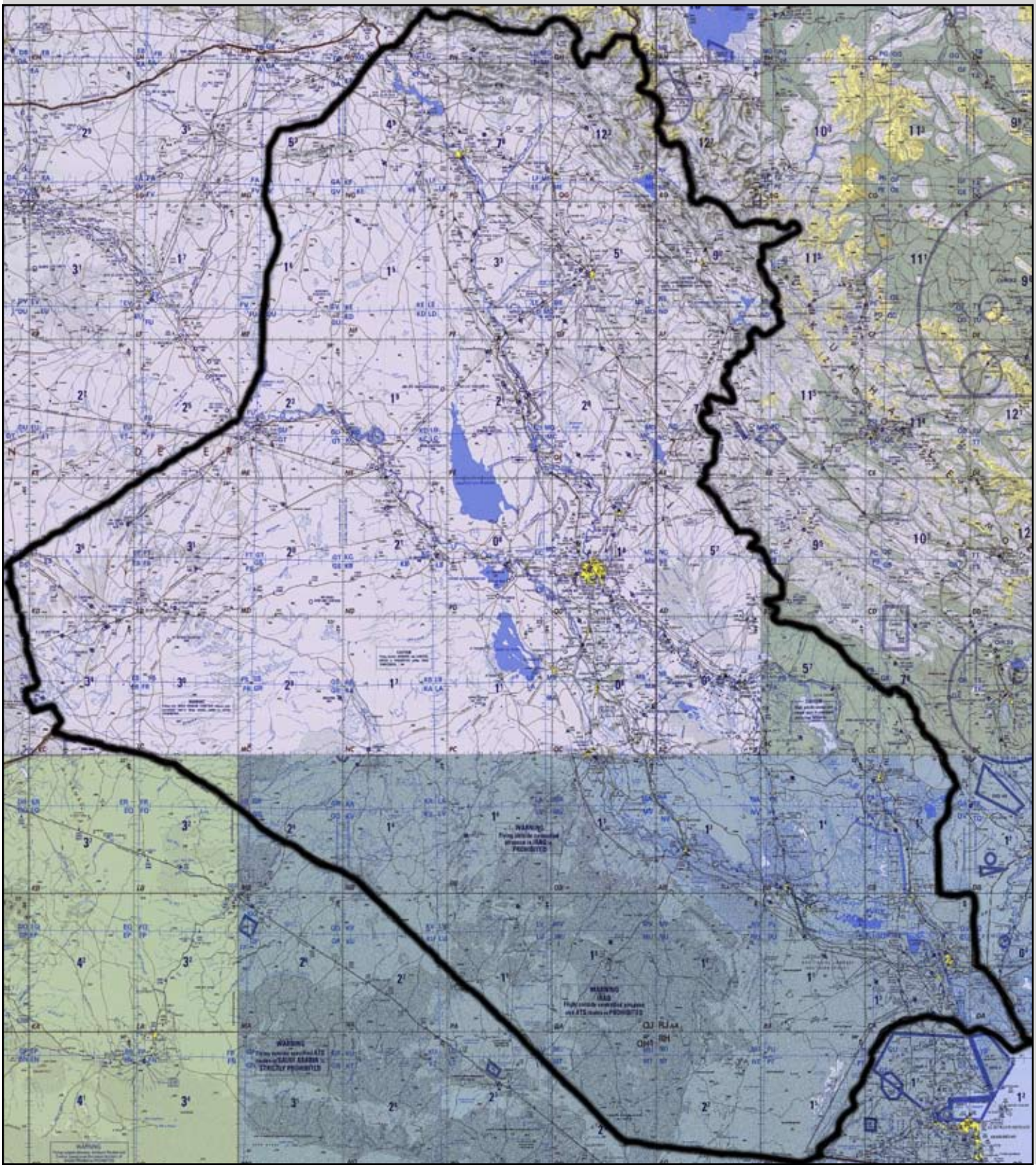
Van Opdorp said that several important events took place during 1/24's tenure in Iraq that eventually allowed the Marines to yield control of Fallujah to the Iraqi Security Forces. While some thought an American withdrawal was wrong, Van Opdorp said that the transition to Iraqi control was the logical extension of the earlier battles for Fallujah. The end state, he said, was for Fallujans to take control of their own city, and he said that the degree to which Fallujans accepted responsibility for that during 1/24's tenure was remarkable.

Van Opdorp said that Marine assistance allowed for many positive events during 1/24's tenure:

-- Col. Faisal, a former Iraqi Army Special Forces leader, was named Chief of the Iraqi Police in Fallujah. Van Opdorp said that Faisal was a leader by anyone's definition. "He reaffirmed the belief that that one man can make a difference," Van Opdorp said. "He was a Marine's kind of leader. He led from the front. He did not accept marginal performance. . . . He got immediate result from his young [Iraqi Policemen]. He really got them fired up about being responsible for the security of Fallujah. . . . He understood what was required for long-term success in Fallujah, and the fact that a robust police force is the key to the security problem in Fallujah."

-- Col. Ali Garza was named the commander of the Iraqi Army's 2nd Brigade of the 1st Iraqi Army Division, with troops in Fallujah. Van Opdorp said the new commander dismissed some of his subordinate commanders, eliminated the corruption that had created such a corrosive effect on the soldiers, and went to his leaders to obtain timely pay for

Iraq



Al Anbar

Baghdad

his troops.

-- Capt. Jason Bressler, a Civil Affairs officer, worked with Iraqi and American leaders at the Province and MEF levels to bring about a significant change in the Fallujah City Council. As a result of his efforts, Fallujah obtained a new mayor and new city council that were much more responsive to the needs of average Fallujans. This, Van Opdorp said, did much to give credibility to the new "team" of leaders throughout Fallujah.

-- A large tribe located in the rural area west of Fallujah, the Albu Issa tribe, made a firm commitment to support an independent Fallujah and oppose the al Qaeda-linked forces operating nearby. Van Opdorp credited this to the initiative of Maj. Whisnant, the Alpha Company Commander, who convinced the RCT Commander to travel to Jordan and encourage Sheik Khamis, the Albu Issa leader, to return from a self-imposed exile to protect his tribe from the Al Qaeda. Van Opdorp said that this was part of a larger movement of Sunni Sheiks in the Anbar Province deciding that it was in their interest to work against Al Qaeda. Sheik Khamis' immediate success encouraged nearby tribes to join his efforts. Van Opdorp said the Marines knew that Sheik Khamis had become a force when Al Qaeda launched a sophisticated suicide chlorine bomb attack that came up short just a few hundred meters from Sheik Khamis' home.

While violence continued in and around Fallujah, Iraqi Security Forces increasingly handled the violence. 1/24 was in what Van Opdorp described as an "overwatch" position on the outskirts of Fallujah, providing assistance when needed. An important breakthrough took place, he said, when Col. Faisal asked the Marines to provide a permanent Quick Response Force (QRF) that would be dedicated to supporting Iraqi Police operations. Recognizing the risks, Van Opdorp said that he also recognized that this presented a tremendous opportunity to let the Iraqi Police flex their muscles, so he tasked Bravo Company with providing this force. Maj. Jeffrey M. O'Neill said that the QRF was something like a portable fire station, able to respond immediately if the Iraqi Police got into something that was too large for them to handle. This combination was effective, he said, because the Iraqis knew how to get the information and act quickly on tips, while the Americans had the backup firepower to embolden the Iraqi Police to take measured risks. With Marines providing a cordon and Iraqi Police serving as the assault team, the Iraqis detained 82 suspects in two months. This was a total turnaround, he said, as Marines went from being very suspicious of Iraqi Police to working side-by-side with them.

The emergence of Iraqi Security Forces throughout Fallujah allowed the Marines to consider a Civil Affairs "hearts and minds" program that many thought Marines would be doing when they first returned to Iraq in 2004. In this operation, coordinated by Bressler, Marines conducted a two-day operation in Sheik Khamis' area that included Civil Affairs Officers, Legal Officers, physicians and veterinarians. Van Opdorp said the physicians and veterinarians treated hundreds of Iraqis and herds of sheep and cattle. The Legal Officers, he said, made payments for various small claims that Iraqis in that area had against the American forces. The operation was a tremendous success. "When you do something like that . . . they come to realize more and more that these guys aren't occupiers, they are just trying to continue to help us so we can help ourselves."

Van Opdorp said, "I think that the transition of Fallujah to the 2nd Brigade [of the Iraqi Army] and to the Iraqi Police was a tremendous accomplishment that 1/24 will look at." He credited the 60% reduction in violent acts during his battalion's tenure in Fallujah to the work his Marines did in creating conditions to return responsibility for certain functions to Iraqi control.

Van Opdorp said that the Reserves lived up to their reputations. "I am not sure that an active duty battalion can enjoy the success that we had, because you're not going to have a twenty-eight-year Chicago Police officer dealing with anti-gangs, or a New York city firefighter who has the amazing charisma to go out and conduct the type of things that he did with his CAG detachment, or a former [counter-intelligence] Marine as a company commander who sets up one of the most phenomenal intelligence databases and situational awareness for his AO. These [Marines] are some of the best that America has to offer, and they just did a phenomenal job."

14th Marines

In a war that created many new paradigms, the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) reinforced the well-known tenet that every Marine is a rifleman.

The GWOT levied continuous large requirements for Marines. The Marine Corps' Table of Organization, designed more for conventional warfare, did not match the demands of this different type of war. In resolving shortfalls, the fact that every Marine had basic infantry skills gave the Marine Corps tremendous flexibility in shifting individuals and units to meet needs.

As planners worked to fill undermanned specialties, one of their first targets was the Reserves' artillery regiment, 14th Marines. With 3,700 Marines, it constituted the largest regiment in the Marine Corps.[1] As operations transitioned from combat to security and stability operations (SASO), the demand for firing batteries dropped significantly.[2] While some might have complained that their recruiters never warned them they might end up driving a truck or directing traffic, the needs of the Marine Corps made "Semper Gumby"[3] a way of life for Reserve artillery Marines. From 2003 to March 2007, more than 2,900 of those Marines deployed.[4] While some used their artillery skills, most made a transition to a different occupational specialty. In that same period, all but two of the Regiment's 17 batteries received basic training in new, or "provisional," Military Occupational Specialties (MOSs), such as infantry, military police, or civil affairs.[5] Training often was followed by an immediate deployment to a combat environment in Iraq or Afghanistan.

Col. Paul J. O'Leary, commanding officer of 14th Marines, said his Marines embraced the provisional missions, consistently proving that they could quickly transition to new military skills that are vastly different from artillery. The fact that several rotations of Reserve artillery units made similar transitions helped, he said, as Marines learned from their predecessors and improved their performance with each rotation.

"From what I've seen, artillery Marines have been very enthusiastic about performing these provisional missions, particularly the military police (MP) mission," he said. "I've been very impressed with their ability to make the transition and accomplish a difficult group of subordinate missions that each task force has had to handle. I've also been very impressed with the ability of our Marines to accomplish the MP mission with the short amount of time they've had to train to it."

Having commanded an artillery battalion in Iraq during Phase I, O'Leary knew there would not be a significant demand for firing batteries when Marines transitioned to SASO. While commanders and planners throughout 14th Marines were not sure what missions might be assigned to their units, they understood the value of basic infantry skills. Knowing that most would end up in Iraq, they appreciated that regardless of the mission, a strong grounding in fundamentals would pay dividends.

While some Marines from 14th Marines were assigned to infantry or interior guard missions, most ended up in one of three provisional MP battalions that rotated through Iraq from September 2005 to March 2007.[6] Sgt. Maj. Bobby L. Allen, sergeant major for 14th Marines, said that the transition was facilitated by two factors that were considered during the planning process: many artillery Reservists had civilian jobs related to law enforcement, and the basic artillery mission relies heavily on two skills, moving and communicating, which are critical to MP operations. He also noted that artillery units are responsible for providing their own security for convoy operations, so serving as convoy security for private Iraqi and American contractors moving supplies throughout the Anbar Province was a straightforward transition.[7]

From the start of OIF, Reserve artillery Marines augmented units in Iraq. During Phase I, Battery A of 1/14 provided a detachment to Camp al Taqaddum to assist 1st Force Service Support Group's Mortuary Affairs Detachment.[8] That same year, 14th Marines assigned more than 100 individual augmentees to billets in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Horn of Africa.[9]

The push for artillery Marines to transition to provisional units picked up steam when Marines returned in force to Iraq in early 2004. More than 600 Marines and sailors from 14th Marines deployed to Iraq that spring and summer, typically in small units spread throughout the Anbar Province. While the counter-battery radar platoon retained its artillery mission, tracking indirect fires from detachments at al Asad, ar Ramadi, al Qa'im, and Fallujah, other units moved to provisional roles. Headquarters Battery of 2/14 provided two provisional truck platoons, one to Abu Ghraib and one to al Qa'im, while Battery P of 5/14 provided part of the security force at al Asad.

The mobilization of most of 4/14 for a deployment in the fall of 2004 demonstrated the flexibility needed for the type of warfare Iraq presented. Battery M retained its artillery mission, as it provided direct support to 1st Marine Division and fired a significant number of rounds into

Fallujah and nearby areas during Operation al Fajr.[10]

Sister batteries, augmented by detachments from 4/14's Headquarters Battery, deployed in provisional roles. Battery K served as a provisional infantry company, supporting I MEF at Camp Fallujah and 3rd MAW at al Asad. Before Operation al Fajr, Battery K repeatedly defended Camp Fallujah from enemy attacks, as the population of the base increased to more than 14,000 coalition troops. Battery L provided a provisional MP company to 1st FSSG at Camp al Taqaddum. In addition to conducting security and detention operations, it distinguished itself by escorting convoys throughout the Anbar Province under unpredictable combat conditions.[11] This deployment proved to be 4/14's last, as the battalion was deactivated on Aug. 14, 2005.[12]

The next deployment of provisional units from 14th Marines, beginning in March 2005, was similar in scope and mission to that of the artillery units they replaced.[13] Battery E was split into two provisional truck platoons, with one attached to an active duty infantry battalion, 3rd Battalion, 2nd Marines, while the other was attached to a reserve infantry battalion, 3rd Battalion, 25th Marines. These two battalions were responsible for the dangerous Western Euphrates River Valley from Hit to the Syrian border, which was an area of intense activity during this rotation.[14] Detachments from 14th Marines' Headquarters Battery and 2/14's Headquarters Battery provided a provisional truck platoon to 2nd Battalion, 2nd Marines and 3rd Battalion, 6th Marines, respectively. Battery D, attached to 2nd MP Battalion at Camp Fallujah as a provisional MP company,[15] was assigned three distinct MP functions. One platoon provided force protection at Camp Fallujah, one conducted detention center operations at Camp Ramadi, and the remaining platoon conducted convoy missions and security patrols from Camp Taqaddum.[16] Battery E's success in these distinct missions gave 14th Marines a preview of the missions to come, including the relief of an active duty MP battalion by one of 14th Marines' battalions serving in the provisional role.

Artillery Battalion Assumes MP Role

The deployment of 5th Battalion, 14th Marines to Iraq as the lead element of a provisional MP battalion marked a significant increase in responsibilities assigned to a 14th Marines' unit. While Lt. Col. John C. Hemmerling's 650 Marines were augmented by approximately 200 active duty Marines, many from the MP field,[17] this rotation demonstrated that a reserve unit could provide the headquarters and most of the Marines needed to staff an MP battalion, rather than simply serving as one

Photo By Lance Cpl. Samantha L. Jones

Marines of Gun 4 of Battery M, 4th Battalion, 14th Marines ((left to right) Sgt. Justin Grafton; PFC Matthew Camp; Sgt. Mike Dasher; Lance Cpl. Josh Rosenberger; Cpl. Will McGee; Cpl. Jonathan Layman; and Lance Cpl. Jonathan Fox) firing an M-198 155mm howitzer from firing positions near Camp Fallujah into Fallujah on November 11, 2004.

of its elements.[18] The 5/14 (-) Reinforced MP Battalion was responsible for much of II MEF's AO in the Anbar Province.

While the Marine Corps' emphasis on combat skills allowed individual Marines to transition quickly to infantry or security billets, shifting to police duties, which required more specific training, proved more difficult. Hemmerling called the transformation a "major mission metamorphosis."[19] He realized that this conversion required training that far exceeded the traditional one weekend a month and two weeks of annual training. Before mobilization, 5/14 used four-day drill periods to learn how to run detention centers and participate in infantry training that included virtual convoy combat training, indoor simulated marksmanship training, advanced weapons maintenance, and the Marine Corps' Martial Arts Program. Even after the battalion was mobilized and deployed to the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center at Twentynine Palms, Calif. for battalion-level training, Lt. Col. Hemmerling set aside large blocks of time for small-unit training, so individual Marines could hone their infantry skills. His commander's intent emphasized this focus: "[W]e will be good at the basics and we will not advance beyond the basics until we have them mastered. The basics will save our lives."[20]

In addition to the work of Battery D, 3/14 as military police during the previous rotation, the work of three companies from 4th Tank Battalion also helped set the stage for 1/14's success as an MP battalion.[21] Company A was assigned a force protection mission with I MEF's

Headquarters Group at Camp Fallujah. Company B conducted maneuver and mobility support operations (MMSO) as part of 2nd MP Battalion at Camp Fallujah, while Company C performed a similar mission for 2nd Marine Division at Camp Ramadi.

Capt. David C. Hyman, an active duty MP officer who joined 5/14 in Iraq as the assistant operations officer, said that 5/14's transition to leading a provisional MP battalion was made much easier by the fact that certain specialties, like criminal investigations and dog handling, were handled by active duty MP Marines who had worked in those fields for many years. Marines with artillery backgrounds, typically assigned to convoy security or regional detention facility missions, were able to focus on the types of basic security principles that Marines learn from their first days in the Corps.[22]

Capt. Hyman, whose primary mission was coordinating convoy security with II MEF's Logistics Movement Control Center, said there was a great deal of respect between active and reserve Marines for the skills that each brought to the battalion.

"When I joined the battalion, it was not clear to me who was active duty and who was reserve," he said. "They meshed well together, and there was not a division between the two."[23]

When 5/14 deployed to Iraq, its Headquarters, MP, and Area Security companies kept most of their Marines at Camp Fallujah,[24] while the Detention Company was spread over five bases. Within Camp Fallujah, the MP battalion worked inside a small compound known as Camp Farrar.[25] Headquarters Company included the criminal investigative division and the military working dogs, but most of the Marines and the 57 dogs assigned to those units were attached to other commands.

Hemmerling said that he felt the battalion's riskiest mission belonged to MP Company, which had three platoons responsible for convoy security and maintaining clear MSRs.[26] He later stated that throughout the deployment, these Marines were constantly on the road, conducting more than 400 missions and driving thousands of kilometers through dangerous territory. He estimated that MP Company Marines averaged approximately one IED incident and one small arms attack on a convoy per week. In addition to accompanying convoys for private contractors, like Kellog, Brown and Root, they also were assigned to provide security for movements of Iraqi Army and police units, which were frequent targets for insurgent attacks. Hemmerling said that combining escort duty with keeping roads clear of IEDs and other insurgent activities was, "a hell of a mission, [in which] even a moment of complacency can be fatal."[27]

While each convoy mission was unique, one from January 2006 provides detail on the danger of operating on certain roads, and how convoy security worked in Iraq. On this mission, 3rd Platoon from 5/14's MP Company was tasked with accompanying a large convoy of Iraqi Army vehicles from Camp Taji, just north of Baghdad, to Habbaniyah, between Fallujah and Ramadi.[28] The convoy security team, consisting of 10 military vehicles and 40 Marines and sailors, was assigned to a convoy that included 57 vehicles and almost 300 Iraqi Army soldiers. Traveling at night, the main body of the convoy was preceded by a team of scout vehicles. A Marine in the lead vehicle spotted a trash bag in the road and his driver swerved to avoid it. This vehicle then circled back so Marines could mark the area for the rest of the convoy. The Marines also wanted to confirm that it was an IED and determine if there were others that had been emplaced in the vicinity. As they approached the trash bag, the IED was detonated, causing some damage to the vehicle but no significant injuries to the Marines. Other scouts immediately searched for a person who could have detonated the IED and other explosives. The main body of the convoy, which covered six kilometers, conducted a security halt. Several teams from the security detail swept the area for IEDs. Nothing was found, and shortly thereafter the convoy commander instructed them to continue their mission.[29]

The battalion's Area Security Company, consisting of Battery N, a platoon from Battery C and the TOW Platoon from 25th Marines, provided force protection to Camp Fallujah as well as to portions of al Asad. In addition to providing camp security and manning the watch towers, these Marines patrolled in the area immediately surrounding the bases. The company that was most widely dispersed was Detention Company, which staffed regional detention facilities (RDFs) at al Qa'im, al Asad, Ramadi, Fallujah, and FOB Kalsu.[30] In the aftermath of the Abu Ghraib prison scandal,[31] operations at detention centers throughout the country received a great deal of scrutiny from all levels of command. Most detainees were captured during local operations by infantry or reconnaissance units, then transferred to RDFs, where they could be held for up to 14 days, until they either were released or moved to Abu Ghraib for further processing.

Intelligence collection was conducted at the RDFs, and it was done by intelligence teams monitored by members of the detention units.

Maj. Trevor D. Devine, the operations officer for 5/14, said that the detention centers had been created from whatever facilities were available and most appropriate at each of the five bases.[32] These were "low-tech" prisons, typically combining a significant number of Marine guards

with a great deal of barbed wire. Detainees were provided orange jumpsuits and were issued Korans or Bibles and prayer rugs and provided with appropriate food and medical attention.

Devine said that the average RDF held 150 detainees, although this could increase if military operations required a temporary surge. While some RDFs might provide for one or two detainees living in one room, there were cases in which up to eight detainees were held in a single room. During its tour, 5/14's Dentention Company processed more than 6,000 detainees.

Detention centers were temporary holding points where detainees were held after being apprehended in the field but before being transported to Abu Ghraib. While a detainee might have presented a threat to coalition forces outside the camp, Devine said that Detention Company Marines were instructed to assume that a detainee was not a threat inside an RDF, and therefore would be treated like an "involuntary guest" in a "secure" hotel rather than like a prisoner in jail. "We made sure that they did not escape, but we also made sure that they were taken care of, and not abused or hurt. Our Marines were strict and forceful when necessary, but they also were fair."[33]

Devine said that he attributed much of the Marines' success at the RDFs to their ability to communicate with the detainees. While they used non-verbal communications when necessary, several learned enough Arabic in pre-deployment and on-the-job training in Iraq to allow them to communicate at an elementary level sufficient for most detainee interactions.

As O'Leary and his staff planned for the final rotation of reserve artillery Marines in a provisional MP mission, one of his greatest concerns was how long it might take such a unit to return to its original artillery mission.[34] While harboring no doubts that his Marines could revert to their customary mission, he said that the enthusiasm with which many of his Marines embraced the MP and other provisional missions might prompt some of his Marines to transfer to other units. This was not a reflection on their feelings towards artillery, but simply demonstrated a preference to return to the current battle rather than practice in a field for which there was not a strong demand. Allen said that when he spoke to provisional MP Marines preparing to deploy in the fall of 2006, many indicated that they had transferred into a 3/14 unit to get a second MP tour in Iraq.[35]

After the last provisional MP battalion returned to 14th Marines in the spring of 2007, O'Leary planned to have a regimental-level annual training exercise for that summer. As a preview to this transition back to the artillery mission, Battery P, which deployed to Iraq as a security force in 2004, executed a significant training and firing exercise at Camp Pendleton in 2006. O'Leary said that evaluators had given the battery excellent marks on all aspects of the exercise, which supports his confidence that the regiment's weapons can be readied and its Marines can regain proficiency in a relatively short period.[36]

"Artillery Marines were willing to volunteer to move into another line of work because they were anxious to get into the fight in Iraq," O'Leary said. "From what I've seen, they now want to get back into the business of doing artillery missions."[37]

In addition to deployments to Iraq, 14th Marines has sent more than 60 Marines, mostly from the regiment's Headquarters Battery, to Djibouti to serve on the staff of the Combined Joint Task Force for the Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA).[38] Twenty of these Marines served with the provisional security company, which provided security to the former French Foreign Legion base in Djibouti, a small country tucked between Somalia, Ethiopia, and Eritrea. The remaining Marines filled CJTF-HOA staff billets in Djibouti and other countries in the Horn of Africa.

While events in Iraq and Africa placed continuing requirements on reserve artillery Marines, the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina on the Gulf Coast of the United States in 2005 also required significant assistance from various units.[39] As Hurricane Katrina was poised to come ashore, the Marine Forces Reserve and 4th Marine Division staffs executed their respective plans for evacuating to alternate operating sites, including reserve training centers (RTCs) in Texas. Marine Forces Reserve took over portions of the 14th Marines headquarters in Fort Worth and 4th Marine Division operated out of the headquarters of 2nd Battalion, 14th Marines in Grand Prairie. While the Marine Reserve headquarters on Dauphine Street in New Orleans was not badly damaged, significant damage to the city's infrastructure forced portions of the Marine Forces Reserve and 4th Marine Division to remain with their 14th Marines hosts in Texas for three months. While New Orleans-based Marines were moving to these and other locations, 4th Marine Division immediately looked to 14th Marines, whose Marines were not in Katrina's path, to assist in humanitarian operations throughout the Gulf Coast region. On short notice, 75 Marines from 14th Marines reported for duty in Mississippi. For three months, these reserve artillery Marines provided valuable assistance in moving supplies and evacuees throughout the devastated area.

4th Marine Aircraft Wing

In Iraq

Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 775

When I MEF returned to Iraq in early 2004, commanders at all levels asked their Marines to "poke the hornets nest," to see what came out.

The Marine aircrews of Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 775 (HMLA-775), a Reserve squadron known as the "Coyotes," flew right into the hornets nest of Fallujah.

Shortly after their arrival, the Coyotes learned that four security contractors had been killed and two had been hung from what would become known as "Blackwater Bridge" in Fallujah. A week later, as part of Operation Vigilant Resolve, the Coyotes provided rooftop-level close air support to troops battling insurgents throughout Fallujah. Their Cobras and Hueys helped shape the battlespace, either protecting Marines or turning the tide of battle. With a toe-to-toe slugfest on the ground, the Coyotes' rockets, missiles, and machine guns represented a welcome addition to the Marines' punch.

Veterans of Vigilant Resolve described it as one of the fiercest battles in Iraq to that point. As a major city that housed more than 400,000 at one point, Fallujah provided hundreds of fighting positions for an insurgent force estimated at 1,200.[1] In response to the Blackwater incident, I MEF was ordered to attack insurgents inside Fallujah before developing sufficient intelligence on the city, and it encountered an enemy that was larger and better prepared than the Marines expected.[2] The death of more than 30 American troops demonstrated the scope and ferocity of the fighting on the ground. In the air, eight Coyote helicopters received battle damage, showing the potency of the insurgents' AK-47s, machine guns, and RPGs.

As a Reserve squadron, HMLA-775 took many experienced pilots into Fallujah. Most were lieutenant colonels with more than 2,500 flight hours, and many had previous combat experience.[3] This combat experience was a significant advantage when the Coyotes were thrust into the Fallujah battle almost as soon as they arrived. The squadron commander, Lt. Col. Bruce S. "Tramp" Orner, said that Vigilant Resolve set the pace for a high-tempo deployment that saw the Coyotes record 4,599 flight hours in 2,858 sorties.[4]

"We took a lot of our battle damage in Fallujah," Orner said. "As far as providing support to the Marines on the ground, we received very good feedback. . . They said they loved it every time the Coyotes were in the area, because we'd stay on station until we were either out of ordinance or out of fuel."[5]

The Coyotes were based at Camp Taqqadum, between the major Anbar cities of Fallujah and Ramadi. While Fallujah's reputation as a tough Sunni-dominated insurgent hub placed it in America's consciousness, many Marines considered Ramadi an equal threat to the coalition. Maj. Michael P. "Citizen" Kane, who led a two-aircraft section consisting of his Huey and a Cobra into both Fallujah and Ramadi on the second day of Vigilant Resolve, found out how dangerous ground fire could be.[6] For both missions, he supported infantry Marines in precarious situations. His wingman took significant battle damage in the first mission, and Kane was forced to return early to Camp Taqaddum from the second mission when parts of his engine and transmission were shattered by small arms fire.

For the first mission, his section responded to a call for immediate assistance from a beleaguered patrol from 2nd Battalion, 4th Marines that was working in the nearby city of Ramadi. While most fighting was taking place that day in Fallujah, insurgents in Ramadi were creating havoc for a small number of 2/4 Marines that had been cut off from the rest of the battalion. The patrol was spread thinly over two blocks, had several wounded Marines, and was pinned down by RPGs and intense small arms fire.

After arriving on station and radioing the patrol leader, Kane flew his section over the Marines to let each of them know that help had arrived. After identifying several enemy positions, Kane's helicopter provided close air support from the Huey's .50-caliber and 7.62mm machine guns. In some cases, he reported, his helicopter fired on insurgent positions that were only a hundred meters from the Marines. After suppressing insurgent fires, he further directed ambulances and other relief to the Marines. It

was only after the injured had been evacuated and the relief force was in place that Kane's section, including the damaged Cobra, returned to Camp Taqqadum.

Within minutes of refueling and rearming, Kane was ordered to conduct a similar mission in Fallujah. Flying with a different Cobra wingman, Kane responded to a mission from 1st Battalion, 5th Marines. Learning that a Marine platoon had been stopped by a company-sized insurgent strongpoint, Kane made two passes over the strongpoint and had his crewmen provide suppressive fires until his Huey was hit by several rounds of small arms fire that damaged major components. One round even penetrated the windscreen, spraying shards of Plexiglas throughout the cockpit and cutting Kane's face.

Low-Level Close Air Support

Orner said that throughout the Fallujah fight, and for the duration of the deployment, his squadron used low-level flying tactics that essentially put them on top of Marines and insurgents. This made the helicopters more accessible to small arms fire, but it reduced the threat from portable surface-to-air missiles. An added benefit, according to Orner, was that low-level flying allowed pilots to distinguish which insurgents were using non-combatants as shields.

"There were still a lot of civilians in town, and the insurgents, a lot of times, would use women and children to hide behind," he said. "We had an incident where a section was flying low and started taking fire, and there were several insurgents holding women in front of them and shooting AK-47s into the aircraft."[7]

Official Marine Corps Photo

This photograph shows where the 7.62mm round entered the cockpit before striking Maj. Ronan J. Lasso's signal flare.

Lt. Col. Steven L. Held, a Cobra pilot who served as a battle captain in the squadron's operations center during Operation Vigilant Resolve, said the squadron's low-level support was a significant boost to the Marines on the ground.

"Our pilots were flying around-the-clock close air support in support of those Marines," Held said. "They were really glad to have that type of close air support. It's a very personal relationship when a section of [helicopters] shows up, because [the Marines] can hear it, they can see it . . . and the communications are good because we're always line-of-sight with them."[8]

While insurgents in Fallujah occasionally fired surface-to-air missiles, most of the threat came from RPGs and massed fires from AK-47s and machine guns. Lt. Col. Peter "Ditto" DiTullio piloted three helicopters over Fallujah that received significant battle damage. He said that low-level flying attracted fires from insurgents who would dart into roads as helicopters passed overhead.

Even though all HMLA-775 helicopters returned safely to Al Taqqadum during the intense first week of fighting in Fallujah, there were a number of close calls. In one case, a single round to the cockpit of a Cobra commanded by DiTullio came perilously close to downing his Cobra. Flying with copilot Maj. Ronan J. "Waldo" Lasso, DiTullio was providing early morning close air support over Fallujah when a single AK-47 round hit the cockpit beside Lasso. The round passed through the front seat cyclic,[9] destroying it and causing the helicopter to lurch to one side before striking a sea signal flare attached to Lasso's vest and setting it off. In an instant, the cockpit filled with smoke, effectively blinding both pilots as flames spread to Lasso's chest, lap, and legs.

As soon as the aircraft was hit, DiTullio radioed his distress call. "Mayday, Mayday, Mayday. Tycoon is going in!"[10]

DiTullio quickly recovered from the initial jolt, but it was difficult to put the helicopter on a level course because smoke in the cockpit obscured both the controls and the horizon. At one point, smoke was so thick that he could not see his hands on the controls.[11] Although his wingman, Lt. Col. Karl F. Frost, flew his Cobra alongside DiTullio's as soon as he heard the Mayday call, DiTullio knew that flying blind at only 400 feet created a precarious situation. With Frost's help, he was able to maintain level flight, stabilizing the situation as Lasso labored to beat down the flames, which were spreading to his map and seat.

As vents cleared the cockpit of smoke, Maj. Lasso used a fire extinguisher to put out the remaining embers. While instinctive reactions brought various problems under control, DiTullio realized that his vision problem

was caused, in part, by a grey film that the flare's smoke had left on his visor. Pushing his visor up, he realized that while much of the smoke had cleared, the same film coated the inside of the canopy. As he wiped off this residue, he regained visibility outside the cockpit. After DiTullio made sure that the major components were functioning well enough to keep the helicopter aloft, the section returned to Camp Taqqadum.

Because the Cobra's contols were heavily damaged, there was no chance the damaged Cobra would be safe to fly without significant repairs. After a brief rest, DiTullio and Lasso learned the squadron had another Cobra ready for the fight. Later that day, the two were able to extract a measure of revenge for the shot that almost brought them down by firing two Hellfire missiles into an insurgent position in Fallujah.

Official Marine Corps Photo

Two Cobra helicopters from HMLA-775 hover over the airfield at Camp Taqqadam in May, 2004.

Deployment to Iraq

While Vigilant Resolve set the tone for the deployment, the high level of activity throughout the Anbar Province kept the Coyotes busy. The 2004 deployment was the first of two planned seven-month deployments. The fact that the squadron saw its heaviest fighting in the first month helped prepare it for the rest of the deployment.

The Coyotes learned they would be mobilized in late 2003, after rising unrest prompted the Joint Chiefs of Staff to order Marines to return to Iraq. They received two-year orders in January. This included a firm plan for the first deployment and a tentative plan for a second one in 2005. After recruiting additional pilots and conducting compressed training, the squadron packed 18 AH-1W Cobras and nine UH-1N Hueys onto Air Force C-5s, and reached Iraq in early March 2004.

After a brief turnover, I MEF took over the Anbar Province from the Army's 82nd Airborne Division on March 24. A week later, plans for an orderly acceleration of operations were abandoned when the Blackwater contractors were ambushed in Fallujah. With the bodies beaten and burned beyond recognition, and two hung from a steel bridge, this attack was seen as a challenge from the insurgents. Despite misgivings from several senior Marine commanders,[12] three battalions from 1st Marine Division, augmented by a similar number of Iraqi security forces, attacked insurgents in Fallujah the following week.

Orner said that helicopter operations for Vigilant Resolve were intense. Tasked with providing 24-hour-a-day support over Fallujah, his Cobra and Huey helicopters teamed up to respond quickly to approved requests.[13] The demands for kinetic support were so frequent and significant that many pilots returned to Camp Taqqadum for ammunition resupply long before they were low on fuel. Flying at low altitudes, typically 200-300 feet and sometimes much lower, the pilots used Hellfire and TOW missiles, 20mm cannons, 2.75-inch rockets, and .50 caliber and 7.62mm machine guns to engage insurgents and destroy targets like buildings and vehicles.

After several days of fierce fighting, infantry Marines were given an order to pull back from Fallujah to provide senior Coalition officials the opportunity to sort through the situation.[14] As discussions foundered in the coming weeks, Marines returned to offensive operations in spurts, and the Coyotes continued to support these operations. Eventually, Vigilant Resolve sputtered to an end, and control of the city was handed over to the infamous Fallujah Brigade.[15] The first battle for control of Fallujah ended with more of a whimper than the expected bang.

Aviation Ordinance and Maintenance in the Heat of Battle

Even with confusion in political circles and between senior military leaders regarding actions in Fallujah,[16] the pilots of HMLA-775 understood their mission to pour as much firepower onto insurgents as they could. Staff Sgt. Allison R. Rosebrough, an aviation ordinance specialist, said the amount of ordinance expended during that month kept her Marines working at a frantic pace.[17] Her 35 ordinance Marines worked 12-hour shifts, frequently in conditions of extreme heat, to make sure that all weapons systems worked and that helicopters were always fully loaded. If pilots were in a rush to get back into the fight, a five-Marine ordinance crew could reload a Cobra in 15 minutes. During the seven-month deployment, HMLA-775 fired more than 30,000 20mm rounds, 54 TOW and hellfire

missiles, and 338 2.75" rockets.[18]

High temperatures made storing ordinance and reloading the aircraft much more difficult than under normal conditions. Marines had to keep ordinance in pits near the flightline in such a way that prevented the ammunition from becoming unstable. In the desert inferno, Roseborough's Marines had to wear gloves and other protective gear to prevent them from being burned by hot metal on the aircraft or the ordinance.

Maintenance was a significant issue, according to Orner. The fact that the Coyotes were engaged in combat meant its helicopters accumulated large numbers of flight hours and significant amounts of damage. In combat, the maintenance section was required to keep as many helicopters mission capable as possible. With more than 200 Marines assigned to maintenance, many worked both day and night to keep the helicopters flying during Vigilant Resolve.

Orner stated that most battle damage involved small arms rounds through rotor blades. While some damaged blades could be patched over, more serious damage required the maintenance section to replace the rotor blades. Exterior and interior panels also had to be patched or replaced. The most serious maintenance issues, he said, involved internal components ranging from engines to radios. When these were damaged, they had to be replaced or repaired.

The most intense part of the squadron's deployment was flying combat missions over Fallujah, but the Coyotes handled other missions throughout the Anbar Province. These included providing armed escorts for other helicopters, like the CH-46s and CH-53s.[19] These helicopters, designed to move personnel and equipment, frequently require escort gunships like Cobras or Hueys to provide additional maneuverability and firepower.

The squadron also maintained a section of Cobras on alert at all times to escort any Army or Marine helicopters providing casualty evacuation. Two other "mixed" sections, consisting of one Cobra and one Huey, remained on strip alert to provide support for troops in contact or other short fused calls for support. While calls to support troops in contact frequently were fruitless, because combat would be over and insurgents long gone before the helicopters joined the fight, the pilots said that responding to such calls among their the most important missions.

The Coyotes frequently provided continuous coverage over supply convoys. These large convoys typically traveled between coalition bases at night. Lt. Col. Held said that a mixed section of a Huey and a Cobra typically escorted such convoys, scouting ahead for any trouble that might develop and looking for evidence of improvised explosive devices. The squadron also provided intelligence,

Official Marine Corps Photo

The Cobra helicopter flown by Lt. Col. Bruce S. Orner and Lt. Col. Steven L. Held sits in a field east of Fallujah shortly after it was brought down during combat operations. The pilots, including the commanding officer of HMLA-775, were rescued shortly after Orner used the autorotation technique to bring the powerless helicopter to a safe landing.

both in the form of what they could see from above the battlefield and from what their instruments showed regarding the movement of insurgents on the ground.

During the deployment, 3rd MAW decided to transfer a detachment of Coyote Cobras to a Forward Operating Base (FOB) in the western part of Iraq, near its border with Jordan. FOB Korean Village[20] was located near the village of ar Rutbah, near the junction of one highway that led to Jordan and another that led to southern Syria. These roads carried significant traffic, especially after Iraq fell to the Coalition. Marines tasked with controlling the area had previously received support from helicopters based in al Asad. The transfer of three Cobras, 12 pilots, and 25 Marines from HMLA-775 significantly improved coverage of the area.

Squadron Commander Downed by Missile

While many Coyote helicopters suffered battle damage, only one was brought down by enemy fire. This occurred during a close air support mission near Fallujah on June 24, when the Cobra that Orner and Held were flying was brought down by a surface-to-air missile that struck just behind the main rotor, destroying both engines.

Marines from 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines were fighting a determined group of insurgents in the vicinity of a major highway cloverleaf east of Fallujah. Insurgents fired from a nearby building with small arms, RPG's, and mortars. After

several passes, a section of Cobras identified the insurgents' building and fired rockets into it. As the two helicopters flew away from the cloverleaf, the Cobra flown by Orner and Held was hit from behind by a surface-to-air missile, immediately knocking out both engines.

Held said the impact was loud and unexpected, but did not disrupt the Cobra's flight path significantly.

"I didn't know what it was, to be honest. At first, I thought we had been hit by another aircraft," he said. "Fortunately, Colonel Orner immediately picked up that the engines had been blown out by the impact, and he entered into a low-altitude, relatively high air speed autorotation.[21] We had no choice as to where we were going, we could only go straight ahead. . . . Of course, a main concern to me was where we were landing, in regards to who might be there."

There were only a few seconds between when the helicopter was hit and when it landed. As the two pilots headed towards the ground, Held said that he was relieved to see a Marine Humvee heading in their direction.

Just before impact, Orner pulled up on the helicopter's collective,[22] providing just enough lift to cushion the landing. The Cobra's skids collapsed when it hit the ground, then it lurched forward a final time when the main rotor hit the ground, ripping the transmission out of the aircraft. When the dust settled several seconds later, the two pilots opened the canopy, grabbed their M-4 carbines, and scrambled from the damaged helicopter. To their relief, they were greeted within seconds by Marines from 2/1, who effectively rescued them while providing security for the downed helicopter.

Held said that the landing was surprisingly soft, which he attributed to Orner's civilian position as a helicopter simulator instructor. This job allowed Orner to practice the difficult autorotation maneuver hundreds of times.[23] Orner's instincts and training took over as soon as the aircraft was hit, so that he had regained control of the aircraft within seconds and flew it to a safe landing.

Death of a Pilot

In July, the squadron suffered its only fatality when Lt. Col. David S. "Rhino" Greene was shot while piloting a Cobra over Ramadi.[24] A 1986 Naval Academy graduate who served as the squadron's maintenance officer, Greene was flying a route reconnaissance mission for a patrol moving into Ramadi when ground fire hit his helicopter. During a low-level attack in which Greene was flying while his copilot and gunner, Maj. Joseph H. "Snooze" Crane, searched for targets, their helicopter took five 7.62mm rounds. One round caused one of the Cobra's two engines to shut down, and three other rounds damaged other components. The fifth round penetrated the cockpit and passed through Greene's neck, mortally wounding him.

In the front seat, Crane knew that what sounded like a baseball bat hitting the helicopter meant the Cobra had been hit. He did not realize that his pilot had been hit until he felt the helicopter drift on a dangerous path only 100 feet above the ground. Taking the controls to avoid approaching power lines, he felt no resistance from the flight controls. A quick glance at the bloodied rear cockpit confirmed his thought that Greene had been hit.

Not wanting to broadcast that a pilot had been shot, Crane instructed his wingman, Orner, to come alongside. The squadron's commander could sense there was a problem. When they were together, Crane reported, "I am single engine, and I think single pilot." Seeing Greene slumped over in the cockpit, Orner confirmed that message with a terse, "Yes, it looks like you are single pilot."

For Crane, flying on one engine was complicated by the fact that he was flying from the Cobra's front seat, or gunner's seat. Shifting immediately to the role of the pilot, Crane was concerned that other systems might fail or ordinance might fire off. As he headed towards Camp Taqqadum, all radios went dead. Stripped of his pilot and communications, he was enveloped by an intense sense of isolation for the brief trip to the airfield. "I was all alone, with Rhino in the back seat. . . . I wonder[ed] if Rhino is just hurt real bad, maybe he has a chance if I hurry."[25]

Crane decided it would be prudent to land away from the waiting doctors, ambulances, and fire trucks. Unable to ease the damaged helicopter onto the airfield, his landing ended with a 20-foot-long slide of aluminum skids digging into the asphalt runway. Orner landed nearby, and his copilot, a lieutenant, ran to Crane's Cobra, climbed up to the rear seat and opened the canopy. Taking care of the most important safety issue first, the lieutenant turned off the master arming switch, which is only in the rear seat, or main pilot's seat. Then he looked at Crane and shook his helmeted head grimly from side to side. Greene had not survived.

The impact of Greene's death was was deeply felt throughout the squadron. The combination of his personable nature and his position as the squadron's maintenance officer meant he knew most of the Marines in the squadron.

"You could see the sense of loss on the faces of the Marines," Orner said. Speaking for the younger Marines, Roseborough said that Greene made a point of talking with every Marine. "He would talk to all of us, it didn't matter what our rank was, what our position was. The troops really liked that, because he respected them and what they did."[26]

The following month, in a ceremony that included the

commanding general of the 4th Marine Aircraft Wing, Brig. Gen. Harold J. Fruchtnicht, the Marine Corps renamed the Camp Taqqadum airfield in Greene's memory.[27]

Second Deployment

In August, HMLA-775 was relieved by an active duty squadron, HMLA-367. While the Coyotes' aircraft stayed in Iraq with the new squadron, its Marines returned to their bases at Camp Pendleton, Calif., and Johnstown, Pa. in early September. They enjoyed some vacation time during this six-month break, but also focused their efforts on training, knowing they would return to Iraq early the following year.

Lt. Col. Bruce S. Orner

A Cobra helicopter flies over Iraq during low light conditions during HMLA-775's tour of Iraq in 2004.

When the Coyotes returned to Iraq the following spring, it seemed that little had changed. They returned to the same billeting and office spaces at Camp Taqqadum that they had relinquished six months before, as well as to the same aircraft and essentially the same mission. Although they still were required to maintain constant strip alerts as well as a detachment at Korean Village, the Coyotes felt that their 2004 experience made the workload seem lighter. Several pilots noted that they were not fired at as often. As Marine infantry battalions became more active along the Euphrates River Valley between Ramadi and the Syrian border, the Coyotes were tasked with supporting their operations. For example, the Coyotes supported Operation Matador, which was a regimental-sized operation to clear several towns between Hit and al Qa'im.[28] After Operation Matador, the Coyotes shifted the helicopter detachment from Korean Village to FOB al Qa'im, due to the higher level of insurgent activity near al Qa'im.

While the Coyotes' greatest contribution came from their firepower, the ability to view the battlefield from above was also very valuable. This was demonstrated during the second deployment, when a section of Cobras prevented a unit of Reserve Marines from maneuvering into an insurgent ambush on May 8, 2005. Marines from 3rd Battalion, 25th Marines responded to a major ambush of a five-vehicle civilian convoy on Route Bronze near the city of Hit.[29] A section of tanks had previously located the burning vehicles, along with numerous victims of the ambush. As the 3/25 Marines moved to the site, Kennedy's section conducted critical area reconnaissance and spotted numerous suspicious vehicles en route to the area.[30]

After refueling, Kennedy flew back to the ambush site, where he discovered that bodies that had previously littered the area were now neatly stacked approximately 30 meters from the burning vehicles. Providing this warning to the approaching 3/25 Marines allowed them to search and discover that wires ran under the stack of bodies. Assessing that the bodies of the contractors had been booby-trapped, the 3/25 Marines retreated from the site and allowed the helicopters to engage the site with missiles.[31] Kennedy's section fired Hellfire missiles at the sites, and both missiles ignited secondary explosions.

As a result of the Coyotes' action, the tank and infantry Marines returned to Camp Hit with no casualties. Intelligence sources later revealed that more than 40 individuals were prepared to attack Marines responding to the original ambush.

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron-764 and Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron-774

CH-46s, affectionately known as "Phfrogs," are among the oldest helicopters in the Marine Corps. Produced during the Vietnam era, they are "analog helicopters in a digital age."[1] For the Moonlighters of HMM-764, the 12 CH-46s that they flew during two Iraq deployments in 2004 and 2005 were older than most Marines in the squadron. Despite their age, the Phfrogs' versatility and reliability made them essential to operations in Iraq.

Col. Jeffrey L. Marshall, who commanded MAG-46, the Moonlighters' parent command during the two deployments, said the helicopter's flight characteristics made it a great choice for operations in Iraq.[2] In addition to the ability to fly low and fast, thereby minimizing its exposure to small arms fire, a CH-46 has a smaller "signature" on radar and other imaging devices. This combination meant that CH-46s could fly over parts of Iraq that were considered high-risk, and therefore off limits, for other types of helicopters.[3]

From inserting paratroopers to moving tons of ordinance and supplies throughout the theater, the medium lift helicopters were indispensable. Most troops preferred helicopters to Humvees, as the flying "air taxis" eliminated the risks of IEDs or ambushes that were inherent to convoy operations. Lt. Col. Clark A. Taylor, a Moonlighter pilot who became the squadron's operations officer for the 2005 deployment, said that the squadron's primary mission in Iraq was moving Marines and soldiers throughout the Marine Corps' area of operations in the Anbar Province and the northern section of the Babil Province.[4]

The ability to fly with night vision goggles added a significant measure of safety to these operations, Taylor noted. "It was fairly common to get shot at, especially during the first deployment. We got shot at almost every night you went out. You could see some tracers coming up at you. The second [deployment] was not so bad, because we had [stopped] Fallujah pretty well, and that had been the hotbed."[5]

Two Moonlighter helicopters were damaged by small arms fire during the 2004 deployment, but they were repaired quickly and put back into action. Three others were damaged more significantly during the 2005 deployment, when shrapnel from a rocket that landed in their midst on the al Asad flight line tore through the helicopters.

Taylor noted that crew fatigue was a significant issue, due to demands on the squadron and a dearth of pilots. The squadron had billets for 28 pilots but took only 21 for the first deployment. The issue was exacerbated for the 2005 deployment because several Moonlighter pilots had to rotate out after the first deployment. This prompted Marshall, despite the fact that he was the group commander, to volunteer to fly with the Moonlighters for two months in Iraq while several incoming pilots completed refresher training.

When the Moonlighters were mobilized in January 2004, their orders were for two years. Most realized that this probably meant two seven-month deployments to Iraq. The squadron prepared for their first deployment to Iraq by participating in Desert Talon at the Marine Corps Air Station in Yuma, Ariz. In addition to allowing pilots

to hone their flying skills and listen to Army and Marine Corps pilots who had recently returned from Iraq, Desert Talon allowed the squadrons who would be working for 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing to create relationships that would benefit all when they reached Iraq. Several months before, the Marine Corps had brought all squadrons assigned to Iraq back to the United States. The decision to return many squadrons to Iraq by the end of February forced logisticians to transport the aircraft by any practical means. Some squadrons used C-17 or C-5 airplanes to carry their helicopters to Iraq, but the Moonlighters were forced to send theirs by ship. This required the maintenance crews to partially disassemble the helicopters and cover them with shrink-wrap, to prevent excessive corrosion during the voyage from California to Kuwait.

After rebuilding the helicopters in Kuwait and flying to al Asad in Iraq, the Moonlighters began their mission of the next six months – ferrying personnel and equipment throughout the Anbar Province and the northern part of the Babil Province. Within weeks, they found themselves involved in Operation Vigilant Resolve in Fallujah. The

Photo By Sgt. Juan Vara

AL ASAD, Iraq – Two CH-46E Sea Knight helicopters from Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 764 take off from one of the runways here while on their way to one of their missions May 23, 2004. The squadron, based at Edwards Air Force Base, Calif., was on its second tour in Iraq since their activation to support Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2004.

Moonlighters focused on hauling ordinance and other supplies while Hueys, Cobras, and jets provided close air support for Marines fighting in the urban environment.

Lt. Col. Jacques C. Naviaux II, a deputy operations officer who became the squadron's commander for the 2005 deployment, said resupply missions for Vigilant Response were difficult.[6] Supporting three reinforced infantry battalions, the Moonlighters spent most of their time providing tank and artillery rounds from an ammunition supply point at Camp Taqqadum to the 1st Marine Division's headquarters at Camp Fallujah. These resupply missions became so frequent that the squadron eventually transferred seven CH-46s to Camp Taqqadum for ease of operations.

The helicopters at Camp Taqqadum carried loads that approached the aircraft's weight limit under the extremely hot weather conditions. Packing tank and artillery rounds into the CH-46s presented a significant problem because certain crates would not fit into the aircraft. To resolve this problem, crew chiefs and aerial observers had to open crates of artillery and tank rounds and carry individual rounds onto smaller pallets in the aircraft. "There was a lot of backbreaking labor," Naviaux stated, adding that this type of effort was continuous while his Marines supported Vigilant Resolve.[7]

HMM-764 also provided general support to I MEF, which included casualty evacuations, quick reaction force missions, and tactical recovery of aircraft and personnel (TRAP) missions. Except for Vigilant Resolve, much of I MEF's mission involved Security and Stability Operations (SASO), which the Moonlighters supported by transporting Marines, supplies and equipment to minimize exposure to the threats along many of Iraq's roads.[8]

Part of moving personnel through the theater meant that the Moonlighters frequently carried detainees to Abu Ghraib Prison. Sgt. Shanahan Nelson and Sgt. Shawn Blalock, who served as crew chiefs, said that while the detainees were restrained before they were brought on board the helicopter and typically were escorted by military police, they still posed a danger to a helicopter, its crew, and other passengers.[9]

"They would try to hurt us," Blalock said. "We caught them trying to rip out wires from the fuselage."[10]

The Moonlighters had several opportunities during the first deployment to work with special operations forces and reconnaissance Marines. In May, two CH-46s inserted special operations forces into an area just north of the border with Saudi Arabia. This raid resulted in a battle in which 11 insurgents were killed and significant amounts of drugs were seized.[11] For this long-range mission, the Moonlighters had to refuel at a forward site before delivering the troops at dawn to an objective area that had just been hit by an AC-130 gunship. After the brief mission, the Moonlighters retrieved the special operations forces and returned them to their base.[12]

In July, the squadron conducted a low-level parachute drop of 1st Reconnaissance Battalion Marines into a village near Abu Ghraib as part of a mission to counter IED

operations originating in that region.[13] In addition to having six Marines inserted by parachute from a C-130 aircraft, the Moonlighters inserted two six-Marine reconnaissance teams by helicopter. This represented the first combat static-line jump for 1st Reconnaissance Battalion Marines since Vietnam.

Due in part to the success of the first parachute insertion, the Moonlighters were called upon during August to insert another team of 1st Reconnaissance Battalion Marines into a position to take action against insurgents who were putting indirect fires into Camp Fallujah. This four-aircraft nighttime jump was conducted without incident.[14]

After seven months of mishap-free flying, the Moonlighters turned over their helicopters, maintenance materials and spare parts to the only other Reserve Marine Medium Helicopter squadron, HMM-774. In essence, HMM-764 and HMM-774 teamed up for a series of four seven-month deployments, with both squadrons using the same 12 helicopters that the Moonlighters shipped to Kuwait in early 2004. While individuals could deploy with little more than the required seabags, the two squadrons rotated in a way that put Moonlighters in Iraq for the summer deployments for 2004 and 2005, while the Wild Geese of HMM-774 took over for the winter deployments of 2004-2005 and 2005-2006.

The return to the United States in 2004 was bittersweet for the Moonlighters, because they realized that most of them would be returning to Iraq shortly. Navaiux said the two-year tours were hardest on Marines who were geographically removed from their families. For those who lived near Edwards Air Force Base, the mobilization included periods of calm followed by intense activity; for those who lived away from their families, the mobilization essentially represented two years away from home. Many Marines were anxious to return to Iraq as soon as possible so they could complete their mobilization and return home.

HMM-764 Returns to Iraq

"I knew I would be bringing them back to war, and certainly the main concern was how to keep the morale high; how do we keep the squadron together," Naviaux said. For those who had participated in the previous deployment, there was an element of "Groundhog Day,"[15] to their return to Iraq. The squadron arrived again at al Asad in the spring, took over the same buildings, and conducted similar missions.[16] One difference, he said, was that there was much less activity in Fallujah and much more in Ramadi. Another difference was that the Moonlighters were conducting missions along the Euphrates River Valley, west of Ramadi and towards the Syrian border.

Photo By Lance Cpl. Brandon L. Roach

Two CH-46 Sea Knights with Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 774 stop at the Hot Pits at Al Asad, to get refueled. HMM-774, Marine Aircraft Group 16 (Reinforced), 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, finished its second deployment to Iraq April 1, completing a total of 14 months in the desert over a period of 19 months.

For Lt. Col. Navaiux, staffing for the second deployment had been challenging. Some Marines had reached their rotation or end of service dates, so they had to be replaced. Five of the 21 pilots were in this group, and this created a shortage of pilots. Navaiux spent much of his time between deployments recruiting new pilots, many of whom had not flown in several years. Requalifying some of the new pilots meant putting them through a full training package that took several months, and many were still in training when the squadron left for the second deployment. Navaiux said that the delay to complete training was worthwhile because the seven pilots who joined the Moonlighters in Iraq in June provided immediate relief for the others.[17]

During this deployment, the Moonlighters participated in a major troop lift as part of Operation River Blitz.[18] Since the closest bridge that could handle military vehicles was more than 30 kilometers away, River Blitz called for inserting a task force from 3/25 across the Euphrates from the village of Baghdadi by helicopter. This operation was successful, as Marines discovered significant quantities of weapons and ammunition. After River Blitz, IED and mortar attacks on Camp Hit and Camp al Asad dropped sharply.

Marine Arial Refueler Squadron 452

For Marine Aerial Refueler Squadron 452, the Global War on Terrorism provided an instant, continuous, and worldwide demand for refueling capabilities.

In 2002, a detachment of "Yankee" refuelers moved troops, cargo, and fuel throughout the Middle East, the Mediterranean, and the Horn of Africa.[1] Over the next two years, parts of the squadron were mobilized for two additional deployments, first in support of Phase I operations in Iraq, then in support of coalition activities primarily in the Anbar Province.

VMGR-452 compiled a distinguished record during the "March to Baghdad" phase of Operation Iraqi Freedom. While its primary mission was refueling jets supporting Marines throughout Kuwait and Iraq, VMGR-452 probably was best known for being the squadron that flew seven former American prisoners of war out of captivity in Iraq during the first month of the war.[2]

The squadron demobilized in January 2004, only to be mobilized again five months later for a second tour in Iraq.[3]

Lt. Col. Bradley S. James, the squadron's commander, said the 150 Marines and six C-130s he took to al Asad in August 2004 represented about half of the squadron's aircraft and personnel.[4] While much of their work involved refueling the F/A-18 and Harrier aircraft that were supporting Marines on the ground,[5] the Yankees also conducted scheduled resupply operations that moved troops and cargo throughout the theater.

As the coalition worked to develop safer methods of delivering supplies to troops in distant outposts, the Yankees were instructed to participate in a series of experiments that involved GPS-guided[6] parachutes.[7] Developed by the U.S. Army Soldier Systems Center in Natick, Mass., the Sherpa Guided Parachute Cargo System was part of the Joint Precision Airdrop Delivery System's (JPADS) "Extra Light" program. In these experiments, the Yankees dropped MRE pallets to bases that were far removed from any airfield that could handle a C-130.[8]

"Angel Flights" are Number One Priority

As with all air units, moving Coalition casualties was a priority mission.

"Our number one priority was 'Angel Flights.'[9] Whenever we lost somebody, [the goal was] to get the remains out of country within twenty-four hours," James said. "So no matter what was going on, when we knew an "Angel" was coming, that was our number one priority."

James said that most other flights were scheduled, both for refueling and for transporting people and cargo from base to base.

Photo By Sgt. Beth Zimmerman

The first of four KC-130T Hercules aircrafts carrying the Marines of VMGR-452 taxis on the runway before arriving at the hangar in Newburgh, N.Y.

On a daily basis, the squadron launched several refueling missions, including one that would remain aloft throughout the night to refuel jets protecting supply convoys. The night flight also provided radio relay service for convoys, which had to travel great distances between coalition bases, especially in the Anbar Province.[10]

During Operation al Fajr, the Yankees focused their efforts on providing refueling support to jets flying into Fallujah. Using four airplanes to provide 24-hour-coverage, the Yankees flew in two refueling tracks, one between al Asad and Fallujah and the other just north of Fallujah.[11] Because the refueling tracks were so close to al Asad, the Yankees were able to give away most of the fuel they could carry to Marine jets. During November, which included two weeks of intense operations supporting al Fajr, the Yankees pumped 4.3 million pounds of aviation fuel to more than 500 jets.[12]

James said that the refueling track was too far from Fallujah for his pilots to see the aerial attacks, but their radios and radar screens conveyed the fact that a significant number of coalition jets and helicopters were working to support the infantry. There were "stacks" of close air support aircraft circling just outside Fallujah, waiting to be called into action.[13]

The bulk of the remaining Yankee missions involved a scheduled route between several airbases in Iraq and Kuwait. These one-day missions provided coalition units with the ability to move troops and cargo throughout the theater. While there was a routine quality to these missions, they provided a vital capability to a coalition that was trying to minimize its traffic on Iraqi roads.

Sherpa Parachutes

The Yankee loadmasters were able to work with an air delivery system that had been in development for several years but not fully tested in combat. James said Iraq's Anbar Province had a relatively small base near the border with Jordan that presented a resupply challenge because it was far from other bases but was not supported by a secure airfield nearby. This prompted the Marine Corps to implement the regular use of the Sherpa Guided Parachute Cargo System by VMGR-452. The Marine Corps' Air Delivery Platoons have long had the capability to push "dumb" cargo packs out of airplanes, but these typically required low-altitude flights that could attract enemy fire and still miss a target by a significant distance.[14]

The "smart" parachute allowed a C-130 crew to launch a pallet during day or night from much higher altitudes, expectating that it would land within a short distance from the target.[15] The Sherpa system combines a rectangular parachute with a computer, a GPS receiver, and two steering lines that allow the cargo to be redirected to the landing site. The system requires a small drogue parachute to stabilize the cargo so the main parachute can open properly.

The Yankees used the Sherpa system with great success at the remote Korean Village FOB. James said that system operated very well for his squadron, allowing his pilots to drops loads very close to the base. Much of the success was due to the Sherpa system because the accuracy of the system from higher altitudes gave the crews great latitude on when to launch the cargo.[16]

Supporting Election Operations

While Yankee missions focused primarily on carrying, refueling, or resupplying coalition forces, one of its most important and satisfying missions involved carrying Iraqis to participate in the January 30, 2005 national election.[17] The Yankees carried approximately 400 polling officials to the coalition airbase at al Taqaddum and 270 to Balad, then brought back almost 1,100 officials from several polling sites to their home region surrounding Najaf after the elections.

James said his squadron created several security teams to provide assistance for the crews and passengers for these special flights. The squadron combined Reserve Marines who had law enforcement or emergency medicine backgrounds with instructors from the Marine Corps' martial arts program to create four-Marine "air marshal" teams. After a brief training period, these teams performed in a manner that was so professional that several Iraqis commented that they felt very secure during their trip from a Shi'ia region of Iraq to Sunni or Kurdish regions. The teams would supervise approximately 75 passengers on each flight, most of whom had never flown before and certainly had never visited Sunni cities like Fallujah, Ramadi, or the Kurdish city of Mosul.

On the return flights, the VMGR-452 crews hung banners that read, in Arabic, "Congratulations to the World's Newest Democracy," along with side-by-side American and Iraqi flags. James said that many of the Iraqi officials were confused at first by the greeting, but then realized that it symbolized the fact that the U.S. and Iraq were working together to give individual Iraqis a meaningful right to vote.[18]

Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 112

In the early years of the GWOT, the 4th Marine Aircraft Wing (4th MAW) used all of its aircraft in combat, except for the one that many would describe as the most lethal in its inventory – the F/A-18 Hornet. As the fight in Iraq became part of what U.S. Central Command called, "The Long War," against terrorism, 4th MAW decided it was time to unleash its most potent weapons system.

Before the Marine Corps would deploy Reserve F/A-18s to Iraq, it had to demonstrate that Reserves were up to the task.

Pilots were not the issue, as most Reserve F/A-18 pilots have more flight time and combat experience than their active duty counterparts, from places like Iraq or Bosnia.

The critical issue was whether a Reserve squadron could fly the aircraft to a distant battlefield and maintain a dozen of the single-seat, multi-mission tactical aircraft that utilized digital fly-by-wire control systems and multi-function displays. While modern F/A-18s are extremely versatile, they also are complex.

To demonstrate that Reserve F/A-18 squadrons could meet the challenge, 4th MAW sent a squadron of F/A-18A+ Hornets from Marine Fighter/Attack Squadron 112 (VMFA-112) to the Western Pacific in 2004 for a 3½-month evaluation deployment.[1] With Hornets that had been recently updated to match and even exceed some capabilities of its active duty counterparts, the "Cowboys," based in Fort Worth, Texas, had the opportunity to conduct a "proof of concept" deployment that included frequent training and operations in Okinawa, Guam, and Australia.

Lt. Col. Steven M. Roepke, the squadron's executive officer during the deployment, said every Marine knew the deployment's implications.[2]

"It was critically important," he said. "At that time, the active duty forces were getting pretty tired and worn pretty thin with back-to-back deployments over to the Gulf region, and I know that they were looking at the Reserve for some [operational] relief."[3]

The WestPac deployment gave the Cowboys four opportunities to prove they could load up the squadron and move to a distant location.

The Cowboys flew 12 F/A-18s to Okinawa on a route that included a nine-hour leg from Texas to Hawaii, a second leg of similar length to Guam, then a relatively brief hop to Okinawa. While it was difficult to avoid boredom in the cramped cockpits for such long flights, the constant requirement for aerial refueling, broken up by occasional rounds of "Trivial Pursuit" over the radio, helped keep the pilots alert.

Roepke said the deployment involved 200 Marines, including 65 active duty Cowboys, a similar number of Reserves, and large supporting elements from Marine Air Logistics Squadron 41 (MALS-41) and its parent headquarters, Marine Aircraft Group 41 (MAG-41). Roepke credited the detachment from the logistics squadron with keeping the aircraft in good shape. Because F/A-18s have a maintenance schedule that requires numerous inspections, one of the most difficult parts of the deployment was synchronizing maintenance so that all 12 aircraft were available to fly together to Okinawa. The squadron invested 15,000 maintenance hours to prepare the jets for deployment, with one-third of that being performed by Reserves who had been activated for the deployment.[4]

Before the deployment, the Cowboy Hornets were updated with enhanced radar, night-vision, and navigational capabilities, earning the "A+" designation that signifies a Hornet has received major warfighting enhancements. These upgrades included the Tactical Aircraft Mission Planning System (TAMPS), a digital-based close air support system, and the forward-looking infrared (FLIR) pods.[5] TAMPS gives a crew the ability to program "smart" weapons, like joint direct attack munitions (JDAMs) and joint stand-off weapons (JSOWs), so that information can be transferred between the aircraft and a weapons system during flight. The FLIR systems uses thermal imagery to enhance the pilot's ability to locate potential targets.

Roepke said the deployment provided VMFA-112 pilots with excellent training opportunities. In addition to conducting air-to-ground and air-to-air missions

Photo By Sgt. Joel A. Chaverri

The beautiful mountains of Hawaii lie in the background as Col. Juergen 'Baron' Lukas, commanding officer, Marine Aircraft Group 41 refuels his F/A-18A+ Hornet off the back of a KC-130T Hercules with Marine Aerial Refueler Squadron 234 during a Hawaii Combined Arms Exercise Jan. 16. Based out of the Naval Air Station-Joint Reserve Base Fort Worth, Texas, MAG-41 provided transport, refueling, and close air support for 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, who was training for deployment to Iraq

in Okinawa, they were able to participate in Exercise Jungle Shield in Guam and Exercise Southern Frontier in Australia.[6] These joint exercises allowed the Cowboys to improve their air-to-air skills against Air Force F-15s and F-16s.

"Every Reserve pilot that we have, had a number of deployments already, and had spent anywhere from eight to twelve years on active duty," he said. "Our average flight hours in the F/A-18, per Reserve pilot, was in the 1900 hour range. So you're talking about a lot of guys with a lot of experience who are able to pick up on some of the new things we were learning with the "A+," like JDAM and JSOW, relatively easily because they are so experienced with the airplane."[7]

The Cowboys felt that this advanced training was appropriate because they knew they could be ordered to Iraq at any time. This pushed the pilots to hone their air-to-ground skills at every opportunity during the deployment.

Most of the squadron thought they would immediately be tapped for an Iraq deployment upon their return from WestPac, but 4th MAW decided to send another Reserve squadron, the Flying Gators of VMFA-142. Roepke said the Cowboys' maintenance team worked hard throughout the deployment to keep the jets in pristine condition, so the squadron was able to transfer seven of its Hornets to VMFA-142 for its deployment to Iraq. The Cowboys also gave the Gators notebooks full of information from the deployment, so VMFA-112 could benefit from the lessons that had been learned by the Cowboys. "We had a huge number of lessons learned, and we communicated those via voicemail and e-mail, back and forth, between their squadron and ours."[8]

Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 142

As a civilian commercial pilot, Maj. Robert A. "Norm" Peterson was used to delivering large packages.

As a Reserve Marine F-18 pilot, his favorite delivery was a single 500-pound bomb in Iraq.[1]

In 16 years as a Marine, including 2,500 flight hours and numerous combat missions, nothing came close to the moment his pinpoint strike destroyed an insurgent position in Hit in February 2005. In a career filled with such deliveries, Peterson said that supporting troops in contact was incredibly satisfying. When his bomb exploded, he said, enemy firing ceased.

"You go through your whole Marine Corps career training to support Marines on the ground. I've been in different contingencies in combat where I've dropped ordinance on buildings, but never were there Marines two or three hundred meters away from the building, taking fire from insurgents like that. [It was] very fulfilling, professionally, to be able to support the Marines for the first time in a CAS (close air support) situation."[2]

In this case, a platoon of Marines patrolling near the Euphrates had come under heavy fire from insurgents in a nearby building and palm grove. Peterson and his wingman, Lt. Col. Kevin M. "Wolfy" Iimes of VMFA-242,[3] reached Hit within minutes and began talking with a forward air controller (FAC) assigned to the platoon.

"We checked in with the FAC, and it was a troops-in-contact situation. We could see the .50 caliber and larger machine guns that they were firing. [The Marines and insurgents] were probably two or three hundred meters from each other. When the FAC was keying the microphone, you could hear, in the background, the mortar rounds and the large caliber machine guns. That was something I had never heard before. . . . You don't get that feeling that there is actually someone down there, shooting and getting shot at, until you can hear those rounds going downrange on the radio."[4]

Both pilots dropped a single 500-pound bomb, one on the building and one on the palm grove.

Peterson was part of the Flying Gators, a Reserve F/A-18A+ Hornet squadron from Marietta, Ga., that made history in 2005 when it became the first Reserve fixed wing tactical squadron to deploy into combat in more than 50 years.[5]

It was an active, exciting, and diverse deployment for the Gators. In addition to firing all of the F-18s air-to-ground weapon systems,[6] its pilots were able to provide valuable real-time information to ground troops approaching enemy positions by using an enhanced infrared sighting system.[7]

Peterson said the Hornets repeatedly proved their versatility by enabling pilots to adapt firepower to unique situations. For example, he said, he strafed an ambush site with his jet's 20mm cannon to disperse insurgent forces. In this case, an unescorted convoy of civilians had been attacked by hundreds of men who then set the vehicles on fire and took several of the drivers as hostages. Ordered to clear the area, Peterson and his wingman made two low-level strafing runs that were perpendicular to the line of the convoy.

The effect, he said, was like someone might see in a movie. The pilots could see the impact of individual rounds in the sand as they passed over the convoy, with insurgents scattering to the left and right of their line of fire. When they returned 45 seconds later for a second pass, he said, there was no one in the area.[8]

Like Peterson, most of the Gator pilots had more than 2,000 hours of flight time with F-18s, and many had flown together for more than five years. Many had combat experience from previous operations like Desert Storm or Desert Fox. Each pilot returned from this seven-month deployment with much more experience, as they flew almost every day and acquired 300-400 hours apiece.

To prepare for the deployment, the Flying Gators participated in Desert Talon in Yuma, Ariz. This exercise allowed them to work with a Reserve infantry battalion, 3rd Battalion, 25th Marines, which they frequently would support during the deployment. Lt. Col. J.A. Baumert, who became the Gators' commander during the deployment, said the training with 3/25 was a significant benefit.[9]

An F/A-18 Hornet from VMFA-142 prepares for takeoff at the al Asad Airfield in September 2005.

Photo By Lance Cpl. James D. Hamel

The fact that pilots had met the battalion's forward air controllers and trained with them during predeployment exercises meant that they had more confidence in working together than they otherwise might have. This teamwork was called upon within weeks of their arrival in Iraq.

Baumert said that much of the Gators' work involved simply patrolling the skies and being prepared to respond when called. Some missions were designed to provide overhead cover for supply convoys, while others supported Marines and special operations forces heading into areas where combat was expected.

Maj. Eric D. Klepper described the activities of an F-18 pilot as long periods of relative quiet mixed with occasions of intense activity. "It's exciting, but it can be nerve racking. . . Sometimes there's a lot of boredom out there circling around, waiting for something to happen. You had these long periods of sitting there . . . and something comes up and everything is compressed into a small period of time, to try to get a weapon off and do what we are there to do."[10]

Klepper spent much of his time supporting special operations forces operating near the Syrian border. Since they were operating in small teams deep in insurgent territory, the support provided by the F-18s was vital. For example, one day the special operations forces were maneuvering towards the Euphrates River in the desert near the Syrian border when they suddenly came under attack from insurgents using a parked truck for cover. Klepper's wingman dropped two 500-pound laser guided bombs on a palm grove, and secondary explosions showed there was a weapons cache nearby. Klepper then fired a Maverick missile at the truck, eliminating the cover it had been providing the insurgents.[11]

In a separate mission, Klepper fired his 5-inch Zuni rockets as marking rounds for his wingman in support of special operations activities near the Euphrates River Valley. For this mission, he said, the target was in a position that was difficult for ground forces to observe or describe to the pilots. Klepper fired several 5-inch rockets to a designated position near the target, and ground forces were able to use the impacts to guide his wingman to the target, which was destroyed with two 500-pound bombs.[12]

Klepper also described what he called a mundane but important mission on a planned target in the desert near Baghdad. Intelligence showed that two houses were covering underground bunkers containing bomb-making operations. The pilots were provided pictures and the location of the buildings, and the special forces team had a controller on the ground to help guide the jets to the targets. Klepper and his wingman dropped three 500-pound bombs on the houses. As they roared off into the sky, the controller reported that both houses were destroyed.[13]

Peterson described another mission involving a daytime raid on an Iraqi oil refinery that gave him a better sense of the development of the new Iraqi Army. Conducted by Iraqi special forces with coalition assistance, the mission clearly was led by the Iraqis. The sensitivity of the mission prevented the Gators from being briefed prior to the mission, but were called on to assist the Iraqis when the Iraqi forces started taking heavy fire from a building the size of the football field. Peterson said that the Iraqi troops were professional and aggressive, and he and others in the

squadron were delighted to see them take a leading role in this type of the battle.[14]

Most Gator pilots flew practically every day during the six months they were in Iraq, and Peterson estimated that he collected approximately 350 flight hours during his tour. While this intense schedule provided great coverage for ground Marines, it also created extensive work for the Marines charged with maintaining the F-18s. Master Sgt. Steven M. King, the squadron's maintenance control chief, said that from the day the Gators received mobilization orders to long after the squadron return from Iraq, his maintenance teams were constantly working on the aircraft.[15]

Lt. Col. Dwight Schmidt, the squadron's maintenance officer, said the squadron benefited greatly from the experience of its maintenance team, which consisted of an even mix of active duty and Reserve Marines.[16] The deployment required thousands of maintenance upgrades or tests on the jets. He cited the addition of LITENING pods[17] to each of the 12 F-18s that were taken to Iraq as an example of the maintenance team's proficiency. The upgrades were installed on all 12 Hornets in 10 days, which was much quicker than expected.

"These guys are by far the best maintenance crew in the Marine Corps. To pull off what they did, in time to deploy, they had to be," Schmidt said. As another example of the quantity of work required of the Marines, Schmidt stated that ordnance teams had to conduct more than 17,000 ordnance tests on the 12 aircraft to ensure that all weapons systems would function as designed. Since the Reserve Hornets frequently trained without live ordinance, this testing was necessary to ensure that the aircraft were prepared for combat operations.

Several pilots said the addition of the LITENING pod system was critical to their ability to support troops on the ground. The system includes a seven-foot long pod, mounted to the underside of a jet, that contains a high-resolution forward-looking infrared sensor (FLIR), a target acquisition capability, and a laser designator for the delivery of laser-guided ordnance. In addition to improving a jet's ability to target effectively in many different weather and lighting conditions, the LITENING system also allowed the pilots to provide intelligence on ground activity near infantry Marines.

A great deal of the maintenance team's work involved periodic inspections, such as daily inspections of each aircraft, weekly inspections of all of the ordnance systems, and "phase" inspections that essentially require the aircraft to be stripped down to individual parts. During the deployment, the squadron conducted 22 phase inspections, each of which takes several days.[18] On a weekly basis, the ordinance inspection required all ordinance to be removed from an aircraft and all systems inspected and tested before the ordinance was reloaded. King said this was difficult work, given the arduous conditions and the fact that pilots were using significant amounts of ordinance throughout the deployment. He said that the Marines performed at an incredibly high level throughout the deployment, primarily because they realized that the ultimate consumer of their work was the Marine infantryman who might be operating under fire.

King stated that one of the most important members of the maintenance team was the Plane Captain, an enlisted Marine who is responsible for all aspects of the care of the aircraft.[19] These Marines conducted the daily and "turnaround" inspections of each Hornet, inspecting the aircraft from nose to tail, looking for battle damage or other signs of wear and tear. The plane captains also coordinated the delivery of maintenance services, which combined the efforts of people working with fuel, ordinance, pilot ejection seats, airframe, communications and navigation, and electronics.

"They have the most important job out there," King said, describing the position of plane captain as a jack of all trades. "They are the last guy a pilot will see as he taxis away, and the first guy a pilot will see when he gets back. They are always out there."[20]

Cpl. Andrew W. Bedford, an aviation mechanic who served as a plane captain throughout the Iraq deployment, said the all-encompassing nature of the job simplified things, because the plane captain essentially was responsible for everything.[21]

"Basically, all of the systems, we make sure that they are working properly," Bedford said. Going over a Hornet both before and after each mission, the plane captains follow a checklist of all moving parts of the aircraft in a search for battle damage, cracks, leaks, and other problems that may become apparent during such inspections. The plane captains works closely with the pilots, who report on any issues regarding the aircraft at the end of every mission.[22]

4th Marine Aircraft Wing

In Afghanistan

Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 769

Cpl. Timothy D. Reed's enduring image of his 2004 deployment to Afghanistan is of President Hamid Karzai looking out of Reed's CH-53E crew chief's window as they flew over the mountainous countryside.[1] During a two-hour flight from Kabul to the Hindu Kush region of Central Afghanistan, the president spent much of the flight viewing the breathtaking countryside as it unfurled below him.

President Karzai cut an imposing figure in the aircraft, despite the fact that he had to replace his trademark Karakul hat with a helicopter crew helmet.

"We put him on a gunner's belt and put him in the window, and he stood there and looked around the country," Reed said. "We were flying over the mountains, and it gave him the opportunity to look around and see, so he was always really happy and thankful for us doing that for him."[2]

The helicopter was filled with Afghan politicians and security forces; most spent the better part of the trip craning to get the best possible view of the countryside. For some, it was their first time seeing Afghanistan from the air. Their pride, according to Reed, was evident.

While no passenger might have been more important to the Road Hogs of HMH-769 than President Karzai, the long-distance capability of the CH-53E, enhanced by its aerial refueling capability, made it the aircraft of choice for many important missions. Lt. Col. Rick D. Mullen, the squadron commander, said the Road Hogs flew more than 1,000 sorties with only six helicopters during this six-month deployment, averaging approximately 1.7 flight hours per sortie.[3] These missions included trips to every corner of CJTF-180's area, from Kandahar in the south, Shindand and Herat in the west, Faizabad in the north, and the mountainous region of Tora Bora near the border with Pakistan. For many of their missions, the CH-53s were not escorted by attack helicopters, allowing the helicopters to reach their maximum speed and distance capabilities.

The squadron rotated into Afghanistan for the hottest months of the year,[4] forcing pilots and crews to plan missions carefully, balancing expected temperatures, lift requirements, fuel weight, and fuel consumption rates. Lt. Col. James D. Barich, a HMH-769 pilot, said engine power was his crew's main concern with each flight.[5] Routes that took the CH-53s over 14,000-foot mountain peaks made planning much more difficult.[6]

While HMH-769's VIP flights included trips with President Karzai, Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld, and Ambassador Zalmay M. Khalilzad, Mullen said that the mission with perhaps the greatest international implications involved the extraction of six United Nations Afghanistan Military Assistance (UNAMA) observers who were charged with observing the nation's elections. On July 15, shortly before the 2004 elections, the U.N. decided to abandon Afghanistan's central province of Ghor after its office in Chaghcharan was attacked by a mob.[7]

The UNAMA team realized that each member faced significant personal risk due to their lack of friends and resources in the isolated area. They requested an immediate extraction. With only two hours warning, the squadron launched two CH-53s to Chaghcharan in the early hours of the following morning. The pilots had only a grid reference for a proposed landing site and information that the UNAMA members would light chemlights when they heard the approaching aircraft. They flew more than 200 miles at altitudes that occasionally approached 14,000 feet on a moonless night to rescue the UNAMA team.[8] According to Lt. Col. Mullen, the ability of the coalition and the Afghan government to have an impact so far from Kabul played a large role in the U.N.'s decision to continue its support for the UNAMA mission.[9]

The landing at Chaghcharan was made possible by the squadron's extensive training for landings under conditions of poor visibility, such as when a combination of fine dust and low light would eliminate a crew's ability to see the ground. Anticipating such conditions in Afghanistan, Mullen required his pilots and crews to train with equipment that would give them the ability to land in such "brownout" conditions. This training combined the output from two devices, an infrared and a Doppler-based sensor,

Photo By Lt. Col. Rick D. Mullen

to provide an artificial view of a landing area even with no natural visibility. Flying the CH-53 that provided airborne security during the mission, Mullen said that the other CH-53 was able to land in Chaghcharan, despite disappearing into a dustball above the dirt airfield, because its pilots were proficient with the new technology.[10]

The Road Hogs' bread-and-butter mission was a scheduled series of supply missions that reached all Coalition bases in Afghanistan.[11] Called the "Ring Resupply Run," a reference to the circular road Russians built to connect major Afghan cities, the system provided a scheduled route of deliveries to Coalition bases. The routes were color-coded as blue, gray, orange, and khaki, and allowed troops from the United States, Afghanistan, the United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, New Zealand, and Egypt, as well as certain civilians supporting Coalition efforts, to travel to various outposts. The flights also carried cargo ranging from food and ordnance to razor wire and toilet paper.

Mullen said the Ring supply mission was a perfect match for the Road Hogs because the primary mission of a CH-53E squadron is the heavy lift of cargo and personnel. "We were happy to do this mission because it is just what we were trained to do."[12]

Every mission along the Ring Route was a challenge because the Road Hogs were tasked with dropping off or picking up personnel or cargo at each stop. In a planning environment that was unforgiving with respect to weight and power calculations, such constraints forced pilots to prioritize loads for each leg of a flight. Over time, the Road Hogs were able to get their fuel planning down to a science.

According to Mullen, the significance of cargo management was impressed on the squadron early in the deployment, when overloaded aircraft encountered problems while trying to land on two separate incidents.[13] In the first, the crew brought the aircraft down with a hard rolling landing that carried it a short distance off of the landing site. In the second, which involved Mullen as the copilot, the crew had to jettison both auxiliary fuel tanks to prevent more serious damage.[14] This flight from Bagram included the New Zealand ambassador to Afghanistan, Niels Holm, and a group of New Zealand soldiers returning to their Provincial Reconstruction Team base near Bamiyan in central Afghanistan. Bamiyan, which is at an altitude of more than 8,000 feet, was the location of two mammoth Budda monuments which were located there for more than a thousand years before they were destroyed by the Taliban in 2001.

Mullen stated that passengers had significantly underestimated the weight of several cargo items, so the aircraft was carrying a heavier load than had been planned. Temperatures were also high, despite the fact that it was a night flight. As they approached the landing zone, everyone on board heard the main rotor lose power.

"I heard a sickening sound of the main rotor getting slower, which I had never heard before, and it was a lot more rapid than I thought, as we were coming through about 75 feet," said Mullen.[15]

The pilot, Lt. Col. Jeff Freeman, stabilized the helicopter's flight in a hover at 15 feet above the dirt field, but he was unable to land because the helicopter was suddenly surrounded by dust. As copilot, Mullen immediately punched two buttons to initiate small explosions that would blow the two auxiliary fuel tanks off of the helicopter. With this immediate loss of such weight, Freeman was able to land the helicopter with minimal

Photo By Lt. Col. Rick D. Mullen

damage.

Cpl. Dominick Castro II, a crew chief on the flight, said the landing was a harrowing experience. "As we were coming into the zone, Dash One [the lead aircraft] had brownout conditions, and we were coming in shortly thereafter. As we were flying over them to come into the lead spot . . . the [main rotor] blades started slowing down, you could actually hear them cutting through the air. At that point, the pilots were calling for 'power . . . power . . . power,' and one of the staff sergeants on board was saying, 'pickle the tanks, pickle the tanks,'"[16] when Mullen jettisoned the two tanks.

Castro said the damage could have been much worse. "It was scary to all of us. I heard the pilot going, 'there is no power left,' and he's got the collective up in his armpit. [The crew chiefs are thinking], 'We've got problems then.'"[17]

According to Mullen, the culprit in both cases was a failure to know the exact weight of cargo the aircraft was carrying. From that point on, his crewmen were required to weigh each piece of cargo before it was loaded. By the end of the tour, the pilots and crew chiefs had fuel-load calculations down to a science, which allowed them to optimize the load.

In addition to Ring Route missions, HMH-769 had several opportunities to insert troops over long distances. In one case, the squadron flew more than 800 miles to insert 50 Afghan National Army troops who recaptured the Shindand airfield in the Herat Province of Western Afghanistan.[18] In previous days, fighting had broken out near the airfield between provincial troops and an opposing militia. The national government decided to assert its power by inserting its soldiers into the Shindand Airfield. Two CH-53s from HMH-769 flew a route, which required two in-flight refuelings.[19] Two weeks later, two more CH-53s flew again to Shindand Airfield to deliver more than 16,000 pounds of communications gear and other equipment for follow-on operations.[20] These efforts were an important part of President Karzai's efforts to assert national control over western Afghanistan after he removed a powerful warlord as the governor of the province.[21]

In the fall of 2004, Reed and other HMH-769 Marines enjoyed their last flight with Karzai. During the last part of the flight, Karzai indicated to Reed that he knew the squadron would be leaving Afghanistan soon, and Reed responded by saying, "I have appreciated the opportunity to fly you around. I really do like your country, sir. You have a beautiful country."[22]

The two shook hands, and Karzai resumed his position at the window. As the President watched his country pass below him, his face held a broad smile, filled with pride.

Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 773

While the Coyotes of HMLA-775 were busy fighting in Iraq, their Marine Reserve sister squadron, HMLA-773, was just as busy fighting Al Qaeda and Taliban in Afghanistan.

Cpl. M. Cory Wargofcak, a crew chief with HMLA-773, learned two valuable lessons as a Huey crew chief in Afghanistan: Never underestimate your terrain, and never underestimate your enemy.

He learned the first when a team of U.S. Navy SEALs had to be extracted by helicopter from a mountainous position, after they realized they could not maneuver effectively on foot. This forced the pilots of Wargofcak's Huey to make a series of risky pickups in tight quarters, hovering with one skid on a rooftop while the main rotor came perilously close to a nearby mountainside.

Wargofcak learned the second when the same SEAL detachment put two detainees on his Huey for a quick flight later that same day. In previous flights, the SEALs had accompanied the detainees. This time, however, the aircrew was on its own. As the helicopter lifted off, one of the detainees struggled with Wargofcak and tried to get control of a nearby M-16 rifle. Relying partly on instinct and partly on training from the Marine Corps' martial arts program, Wargofcak fended off the detainee's attack. He spent the rest of the brief flight kneeling on the detainee's hands to prevent another attack.[1]

Over an 18-month period, from October 2003 to March 2005, the Red Dogs of HMLA-773 learned that the beautiful Afghan mountains were deceptively dangerous.

Most of the threats were from flying conditions, as the Red Dogs flew their AH-1W Cobras and UH-1N Hueys at high altitudes through narrow corridors among jagged peaks. Less frequent but more intense threats came from a determined enemy that operated in the Khowst Bowl near the Pakistan border. Patrolling the skies above a series of forward operating bases (FOBs) along the border, the Red Dogs defended Coalition bases from sporadic attacks by Al Qaeda and Taliban forces.

Serving as a Quick Reaction Force (QRF), the Red Dogs turned the tide of battle on several occasions. In one incident, the Red Dogs saved five U.S. Special Forces personnel and most of their Afghan colleagues when a border control point (BCP) was overrun by 300 fighters linked to Al Qaeda and the Taliban. Americans on the ground later reported that the Red Dogs helped the Coalition and Afghan ground forces kill 65 attackers, wound 60 others, and capture 22 prisoners.[2]

Maj. Raymond "Tarzan" Mederos, a Cobra pilot who subsequently became the Red Dogs' commander in 2005, said the squadron faced significant challenges from the environment in addition to treacherous mountains and high altitudes. One of the challenges was the fine sand that permeated every opening, creating a significant hazard to the helicopters. The other was alternating bouts of bitter cold and intense heat, sometimes within the same day, that made maintaining the helicopters so difficult.[3]

Staffing the Red Dog rotations was challenging. While Combined Joint Task Force 76, which requested a detachment of attack helicopters, did not need a full squadron, all of HMLA-773's Marines were eager to deploy. Mederos said the squadron resolved the issue by sending half of the squadron, along with seven AH-1W Cobras and four UH-1N Hueys,[4] on the first six-month rotation. He used the remaining Marines for the second rotation, then put together a composite group consisting primarily of Marines from the first rotation for the last six months.

Originally assigned to the large Coalition base in Baghram, the Red Dogs were quickly relocated to FOB Salerno, a fortified helicopter base near the Afghan-Pakistan border. Their main mission was providing immediate close air support to FOBs, as well as the BCPs that were manned by Coalition Special Forces and Afghan National Army soldiers. While the larger FOBs were more likely to receive indirect fires, the BCPs were the subject of frequent ground attacks. The Red Dogs escorted convoys that were supplying Coalition bases. Other tasks included supporting special operations missions against high-

value targets, escorting unarmed Black Hawk Medevac helicopters, and providing strip alert coverage for around-the-clock protection from enemy attacks.

Red Dogs Defend Coalition Base in Khowst

Mederos better understood the value of a QRF in this type of campaign after he led a section of two Cobras responding to a request for immediate assistance from BCP 4 in the Khowst area. During the early hours of August 1, 2004, the BCP was subjected to a massive enemy attack. The response by Mederos' Cobras was credited with preventing significant Coalition losses.[5]

BCP 4, which was approximately the size of two football fields, contained five special operations troops and 70 Khowst Provincial Force (KPF) soldiers. The Special Forces troops knew they needed help when they came under intense attack from several locations near the camp. Flying from FOB Salerno, Mederos and his wingman, Maj. Derrick R. Heyl, could spot the camp from more than seven miles away by the glow of tracer rounds focused on one spot. As they approached, Mederos saw tracer fire and RPGs flying towards the compound from several directions. Responding to the ground commander's instructions, Mederos' Cobras first used their 20mm rounds to silence an enemy force on a ridgeline east of the BCP. Dodging RPGs and small arms fire, the Cobras swept through the area to gain a better understanding of the enemy's disposition. The pilots reported to the ground commander that the enemy had overrun the western side of the compound and was firing at KPF troops and the Cobras from inside the wire. After the ground commander confirmed that only enemy forces occupied the western side of the camp, Mederos led his section on a series of diving attacks on that area, firing 2.75-inch rockets and 20mm rounds on an enemy force estimated at 50 to 75. The actions of Mederos and Heyl were credited with turning back the initial attack, then pursuing the enemy as it melted into the woods and mountains near the border with Pakistan.

In an after action brief, the BCP's ground commander described the actions of HMLA-773 helicopters as being decisive. Without them, he said, the enemy would have overrun the BCP, killing Coalition, special operations, and KPF forces. The Cobras' ability to view the battlefield provided timely intelligence to the ground commander, and their firepower turned the battle into a rout that caused "the largest destruction of enemy forces in a single engagement since the fall of the Taliban regime in late 2001."[6]

Attack on FOB Salerno

Seven months later, another Red Dog section responded to an attack on a different BCP. The sophisticated attack on the BCP included a rocket attack on nearby FOB Salerno, in order to delay the QRF's response. Starting with several enemy ground elements maneuvering under the cover of combined arms to attack BCP 6, the enemy then fired a series of 122mm rockets towards FOB Salerno's airfield.[7] While rockets were exploding within 50 meters of the helicopters, Maj. Jay D. Borella led his QRF to the two Cobras amid shrapnel and other debris.[8] Minutes later, as the Cobras were flying towards the site where the 122mm rockets were operating, Borella saw tracer fire near BCP 6. Breaking immediately in the direction of the BCP, Borella radioed for additional support from other Red Dog helicopters. On reaching the small camp, he observed dozens of enemy fighters attacking with small arms, machine guns, and RPGs. He directed the Cobras' TOW missiles, 2.75-inch rockets and 20mm rounds towards the attackers. When two Hueys reached the camp, he directed them to attack enemy forces to the west while he and his wingman conducted a series of ferocious attack runs on the east. Realizing that Coalition forces were fighting a complex battle in difficult terrain, Borella climbed to an overwatch position that allowed him to feed the ground commander information on the status of the battle. After the four helicopters helped repel the attack, he directed the Hueys to fly to the 122mm rocket site and take command of efforts to shut down the rockets. Previous counter battery fires had been ineffective because no Coalition forces had eyes on the target. With Huey pilots observing both the rocket positions and the incoming fires, the adjusted fires had a devastating effect on the rocket site.

In the midst of this activity, two British Harriers and an Air Force AC-130 gunship came on station, prompting the ground commander to pass control of all aircraft to Borella so he could direct the air-to-ground fight for the rest of the night. The collective efforts of these aircraft proved to be overwhelming. At dawn, ground forces found the bodies of 44 enemy fighters from an Al Qaeda-Taliban force estimated at 120.

The Beauty and Danger of the Afghan Mountains

While maintaining focus on Al Qaeda and Taliban fighters, Red Dog pilots had to consider the difficulties of operating in the jagged mountains that the enemy frequently used to its advantage. Lt. Col. Dan C. Nestor, who served as the squadron's executive officer for half of the 18 months it was deployed, said the terrain was both

the most beautiful and the most treacherous that he had experienced in more than 20 years of flying Hueys.[9]

"There aren't many roads, and what you see below you . . . is like going back in time three thousand years," he said. "It's an amazing system. It's very feudal, with warlords and things like that. The people out there are eking out a living. You might see trucks and modern vehicles, but other than that it was irrigation by hand, things dug into the sides of mountains, and mud huts with walls around every one of them to protect their assets. Some of the missions we did went way up into the mountains. It was pretty remote, and there had not been Americans in a long time, if at all. That's where some of the bad guys hung out."[10]

The thin air at high altitudes presented a constant challenge to the Red Dogs. With FOB Salerno at more than 3,500 feet, the Red Dog helicopters flew most of their missions between 4,000 and 6,000 feet and frequently climbed over 10,000-foot peaks. Altitudes like these made fuel consumption rates and power issues continuous concerns, so pilots were balancing several competing factors when they planned their missions. Temperatures in the Khowst region varied from the brittle cold in the winter to a blazing heat in the summer, which made conducting the required helicopter maintenance incredibly difficult. To top off these challenges, the rugged terrain offered few emergency landing zones for pilots in trouble. With areas that were large, flat, and clear enough to land a troubled helicopter being few and very far between, a pilot encountering such mechanical problems could only hope that the helicopter could limp back to FOB Salerno.

Nestor said that the mission to extract the SEALs, also described by Wargofcak, was particularly dangerous due to the steep and remote mountainous terrain.[11] It required Nestor's Huey to fly with its rotor blades almost touching the side of the nearby mountain. The mission grew into more than just a basic extraction, as the Huey crew assisted a SEAL team who had underestimated the difficult terrain. The SEALs were pursuing a high-value target in the vicinity of the Khyber Pass.

After the SEALs were inserted, they realized that the terrain essentially prevented them from moving to the intended objective area, and they requested that a Huey move them to a different location. Nestor said they were located on an isolated finger surrounded by steep mountains. Picking them up required close coordination between the two pilots and two crew chiefs as they inched the helicopter towards the mountain until Nestor could place a skid on to a rooftop. The Huey could only ferry two or three SEALs per trip, Because of power and weight considerations, so moving them required numerous flights. Their alternate site was not much of an improvement, as Nestor landed on a dried mud and wooden beam rooftop that was approximately 10 feet by 10 feet.

"It's hard to explain how beautiful it is, how stunningly beautiful," Nestor said after describing the hardships of maneuvering even a relatively small helicopter in the confined spaces. "One thing that probably sticks out to me, as much as all the good we did and everything else, is the sheer beauty of the country."[12]

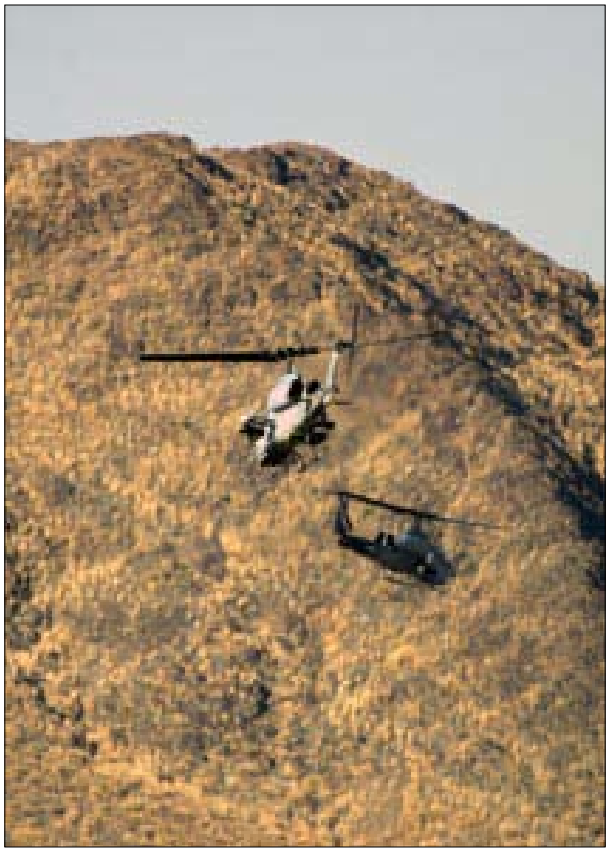


Photo By Cpl. Rich Mattingly

Two AH-1 Cobra attack helicopters from Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 773, "Red Dogs," fly near Salerno Forward Operating Base in Khowst province to provide Marines on the ground the opportunity to practice joint close air support. The training allowed Marines in squad-sized elements to practice talking on the radio with the pilots and call in air support to targets on a firing range.

4th Marine Logistics Group

4th Marine Logistics Group

As the Reserve command that sustains the warriors, 4th Marine Logistics Group (MLG) has also focused on sustaining its operations.

Brig. Gen. Eugene G. Payne, who commanded 4th MLG from 2005 to 2007, said that after initially sending large numbers of 4th MLG Marines and Sailors to Iraq for Phase I and the early days of Phase II, his command established a troop rotation that provided a sustainable model.[1] Working closely with active duty and Reserve commands, 4th MLG formulated a mobilization schedule that he described as appropriate for providing the required staffing for The Long War. For 2005 and 2006, this meant deploying approximately 1,200 4th MLG Marines and Sailors each year, or about 13% of 4th MLG's total force. Based on models of what the Marine Corps expects to need in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere in the coming years, 4th MLG leaders believe they can maintain this level of involvement indefinitley.

Payne used the rotation of Motor Transportation detachments as an example of what he described as 4th MLG's "measured pace."

"We were fortunate in this command . . . [that 4th MLG was] not called upon to utilize all of our motor transport capability in the early going. . . . When we went back [for OIF Phase II], we did not have to put a large percentage of our motor transport battalion into the fight in any given rotation. By taking smaller increments, by taking two platoons, we feel confident that we can sustain that going forward," Payne said. "If they had come to us and said, 'We need two companies,' then you get a big spike, and that would hurt you later. So we've been able to work with the active component to keep a measured pace."[2]

In addition to this "measured pace" of mobilizations, Payne also noted that an important component of 4th MLG's success was the willingness of 4th MLG Marines with special skills to volunteer when needed. He pointed to the unique efforts of the Personnel Retrieval and Processing (PRP) Unit as an example of volunteers playing a crucial role. PRP was created during OIF in response to the Marine Corps' plan to play a larger role in handling the remains of those killed in the line of duty. Its members were initially drawn from two organizations that were being disbanded. Payne said that the number of Marines supplied from those two units was not sufficient to staff continuous PRP detachments without volunteers for second and third deployments.

Deployment Methods

4th MLG, with its headquarters staff and eight line battalions, has a mission and organization that requires it to deploy its Marines and sailors in a manner that is different than combat arms battalions or squadrons. Instead of deploying its line units as battalions, 4th MLG has its battalions mobilize detachments that will form part of a task-organized Combat Service Support (CSS) element. A CSS element will require a specific number of troops from various military occupational fields or specialties. Detachments from a functional specialty like communications, motor transportation, or engineer support might be task organized to form a Combat Service Support Company (CSSC), Combat Logistics Company (CLC), or Combat Logistics Battalion (CLB). Throughout Phase II of OIF, 4th MLG's battalions provided detachments like this on a regular basis. Some detachments would become part of a Reserve logistics or service support elements, while detachments during other rotations would be used to augment active-duty logistics units.

For example, during one recent rotation, 4th MLG deployed 109 military policemen and a company of 265 Marines that would provide internal security to one of the major Marine bases in Iraq. In addition to those security forces, 4th MLG provided 400 Marine "Augments" from the following units to an active duty Combat Logistics Battalion in Iraq:

Maintenance	127
Motor Transportation	80
Bulk Fuel	43
Communication	37
Landing Support	36
Personnel Retrieval	36
Medical	29
Medical Logistics	12

Reserve Lieutenant Colonel Commands Combat Logistics Battalion

For Lt. Col. Gregg L. Moore, OIF provided a unique leadership opportunity when the Reserve logistician was offered the opportunity to command an active duty Combat Logistics Battalion. The 870 Marines and sailors assigned to CLB-5 during 2006-2007 came from 82 different "sourcing units" from all over the world.[3] Of that number, all but 70 were from active duty units. While there were many challenges associated with bringing together such a unit, one of the most difficult involved the fact that the Marines were sourced from around the world. To prepare his Marines for the deployment, Moore had to coordinate predeployment training in North Carolina, California, and Japan.

With the mission of providing combat service support to RCT-5 (and later to RCT-7), Moore said that molding the active and Reserve troops into a cohesive unit was much easier than he had expected. "We were an incredibly tight team. We melded into a cohesive, organized, focused CLB with a clear view of our mission."[4]

The battalion's operations center was at Camp Fallujah. While most of CLB-5's Marines were based at Camp Fallujah, their missions required many to travel constantly between bases located throughout the region. CLB-5 also had a small detachment located at a base in the vicinity of Habbaniyah, located near the Euphrates River between Fallujah and Ramadi.[5]

Operating in direct support of the RCT, CLB-5 provided services to improve the security of Coalition forces, ranging from welding thick sheets of metal on various vehicles to providing security for convoys, IED teams and vehicle recovery teams. CLB Marines also improved the survivability of many bases or positions throughout the region. Moore said that much of the battalion's success was derived from a training package that focused on every Marine having security operation skills. "We were all Marines first, with a mission to perform," he said. "We were all riflemen."

CLB-5 worked in the Fallujah area during a period in which one Reserve battalion, 1st Battalion, 25th Marines, controlled the city and then handed it over to another Reserve battalion, 2nd Battalion, 24th Marines. Moore said that while the atmosphere through most of the Anbar Province was relatively calm and stable, Fallujah was in the midst of significant transition in response to what became known as the "Anbar Awakening." As insurgents responded to Sunni tribes pledging their allegiance to the Iraqi government, the tense atmosphere of Fallujah stood in marked contrast to the rest of the province. Additionally, the steadily improving Iraqi Security Forces in Fallujah were anxious to take more responsibility for operations in the city. After assessing several options, the Marines decided to build a Forward Operating Base (FOB) in the outskirts of Fallujah to allow a company of Reserve Marines who had been operating in the center of the crowded city to give up a significant portion of their AO to the Iraqi Security Forces. By building the "Southern FOB," CLB-5 created a secure base that could accommodate the company. The location of this FOB allowed Marines to patrol near their Iraqi counterparts, so they could respond as needed, but in a manner that allowed the Iraqis to demonstrate their own firm control of the center of the city.[6]

The battalion's maintenance company, with approximately 200 Marines and a pool of civilian contractors, was the CLB's largest unit, and Moore said it probably was his busiest. Its Marines and affiliated civilians worked around the clock to repair and maintain vehicles so they could get back out on the road. He also noted that maintenance Marines frequently went off base to recover vehicles that had been rendered inoperable, either by enemy action or a mechanical issue.

Reserves Augmenting Senior MLG Staff

Since the beginning of OIF, senior Marine Reserve officers and staff noncommissioned officers often deployed as "augments" for a senior active-duty staff, such as at the regimental, division, and even force level. This system allowed the "gaining force commander" to determine where an individual Marine best fit into the staff. On an ongoing basis, 4th MLG sponsored Reserve detachments located with 1st MLG at Camp Pendleton and 2nd MLG at Camp Lejeune, to help individual Marines create working relationships with their active-duty counterparts. These relationships allowed Reserves to step in quickly and fill significant positions, such as during 1st MLG's major operation relating to Operation Al Fajr in Fallujah. At that time, Reserve Marines from MLG's West Coast detachment were assigned to serve as 1st MLG's Chief of Staff, G-1, G-3, and G-4.[7]

1st MLG provided combat service support to I MEF when I MEF took over responsibility for the Anbar Province from the 82nd Airborne Division in early 2004. Lt. Col. Erick P. Thomas, who had drilled with 4th Marine Logistics Group Forward-West, served as 1st MLG's G-4 when he was mobilized for a deployment to Iraq in 2004-2005. He said that the Marines immediately faced significant supply issues. Thomas said the amount of potable water on many bases was critically low, frequently less than what would be needed for two days of operations. He said the MLG staff quickly learned to work closely

with KBR, which was the primary contractor for such provisions, and the U.S. Army. Much of the MEF's problem was trying to match its changing operations with KBR's scheduling constraints. Marine operations were dynamic and fluid, he said, so trying to synchronize long-term planning with a fluid tactical environment created daily challenges.[8]

Compounding the problem, Thomas said, was the fact that convoy operations were difficult and very restricted during 1st MLG's early days in Iraq. A major breakthrough occurred during his deployment when Marines learned that they could be supplied with vehicles coming from the west, from Jordan, rather than from the south and east, from Kuwait and Baghdad. This greatly simplified the process of getting supplies to Camp Taqqadum because the run from the Jordanian border was much less treacherous than other routes.

Thomas said that much of the MLG's work in the early months involved relatively short convoys from Camp Taqqadum to the Fallujah area. While they were short, they also were considered highly dangerous because of the insurgent threat in the area.

Reserves helped I MEF implement a logistics strategy for Al Fajr that ensured there would be no operational pauses, no matter how intense the kinetic operations. To accomplish this, 1st MLG created a series of logistics nodes, known as "Iron Mountains" that contained levels of combat essential sustainment supplies that ultimately supported the operations of eight U.S. battalions and five Iraqi battalions during Al Fajr. Having these sustainment supplies staged at several locations near Fallujah meant that Coalition forces had access to sufficient supplies when needed.[9]

It was during Thomas' tour that Coalition forces used these supplies in the successful fight against insurgents in Fallujah during the fall of 2004. During the month-long Al Fajr campaign, Marines were able to cordon off the city, then fight their way through the remaining insurgent forces. It was a bloody and vicious campaign, and Thomas said that the MLG's resupply efforts played a significant role, both during and after the campaign. During the initial fight, he said, MLG Marines were monitoring the tactical radio networks so they could anticipate the needs of Coalition forces attacking the insurgents. After the battle, he said, MLG Marines played an important role in the cleanup and rebuilding efforts in Fallujah.[10]

"Our Operations Center tracked everything in combat, and responded appropriately, really leaning into, 'Where are we going to need to respond to whatever had happened.'" He said that anticipating various requirements, like supplying various items or recovering destroyed vehicles, allowed MLG Marines to be responsive to the requirements of Coalition leaders."[11]

Reserve Combat Service Support Company

In contrast to Moore's command of an active duty CLB and Thomas' work on the MLG staff, Maj. Patrick Sweeny took a Reserve Combat Service Support Company to Camp Taqaddum from August 2004 to March 2005. His 210 Marines and sailors became Combat Service Support Company 113 (CSSC-113), which was the only Reserve element of Combat Service Support Battalion 1 (CSSB-1). While many of Sweeny's Marines essentially augmented the battalion's administrative staff, his other Marines staffed the motor transportation detachment (approximately 60 Marines), the utilities detachment (approximately 50 Marines, primarily water and air conditioner specialists), the bulk fuel detachment (50), the combat engineers detachment (40), and a portion of the maintenance detachment (36).

The timing of CSSC-113's deployment meant that much of the company's work related to Operation Al Fajr in Fallujah. Tasked with supporting 3rd Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, Sweeny said, his Marines supported the establishment of an "anvil" along the Euphrates River, designed to stop insurgents from fleeing to the west as Coalition forces swept through the city.[12]

After mobilization, the company prepared for its deployment with a three-month training cycle conducted primarily in the vicinity of Battle Creek, Michigan. The hands-on training was designed to prepare Sweeny's Marines for what they would see in Iraq. For example, the heavy equipment platoon created, graded and paved miles of roads during predeployment training. In Iraq, its Marines conducted route clearance missions along 41 miles of roads in the vicinity of Fallujah and Camp Taqaddum. In addition to using armored TPK D-7 bulldozers to remove debris, which frequently contained IEDs, the Marines cleared obstacles and graded roadways, allowing for a smoother flow of Coalition traffic.[13] Sweeny also credited predeployment training with allowing his water purification specialists to operate independently, thereby contributing significantly throughout their tour in Iraq. After purifying thousands of gallons of water in Michigan, these Marines were dispatched within days of their arrival in Iraq to water purification operations at eight bases, where they subsequently helped purify more than 26 million gallons of water.

I MEF's preparation for the assault on Fallujah was conducted over several months, and as part of that, CSSC-113 built a ramp onto the Euphrates River for the division's

small boat company. Sweeny said the company's heavy equipment platoon was able to build a ramp at Camp Habbaniyah in one day, despite the fact that the builders came under small arms attack during this project.[14]

In October, CSSB-113 was tasked with providing direct support to 3rd Light Armored Reconnaissance (LAR) Battalion for Operation Al Fajr. 3rd LAR, which was designated Task Force Wolfpack when it was augmented by Iraqi Security Forces and other Coalition troops, had the mission of seizing of a peninsula formed by a bend in the Euphrates River west of Fallujah and the two steel bridges that connected Fallujah to the peninsula. By cutting off this avenue of egress from Fallujah, the Task Force was to serve as an "anvil," stopping the anticipated rush of fleeing insurgents.

To prepare for the attack, CSSC-113 strengthened many of the Task Force's vehicles and fabricated numerous obstacles that were emplaced along major routes.[15] CSSC-113 welders helped attach armor to the undercarriage and sides of 18 Humvees. They also helped create six "hedgehogs," six "tetrahedrons," and six spike strips from available steel supplies.

Knowing that the long and thin peninsula would channel vehicle traffic in a certain way, leaders of Task Force Wolfpack decided to establish five vehicle checkpoint sites just north of the area where it planned to position its rear area headquarters. CSSC-113's heavy equipment operators also helped construct five large protected working and living areas, and established more than 40 hiding positions for vehicles, gear, and personnel.[16] These sites ultimately served more than 325 Marines and 125 Iraqis in the days prior to the assault on Fallujah.

Task Force Wolfpack initiated the November 7, 2004 assault on Fallujah by attacking the two bridges on Fallujah's west side. Within hours of the initial assault, Marines from CSSC-113's heavy equipment platoon escorted elements of Task Force Wolfpack to the northern end of the peninsula, where they helped build a forward operations center. They also helped prepare defensive positions for various types of vehicles along the banks of the Euphrates River, even though they were under fire from insurgents just across the river.[17]

The next day, CSSC-113 lost four of its Marines in two separate incidents. In the first, two Marines died when a D-7 bulldozer went into the Euphrates River in the pre-dawn hours. According to reports, Lance Cpl. Jeffrey Lam was preparing a position for a Bradley fighting vehicle near the river when a large piece of shoreline apparently collapsed into the river. Cpl. Joshua D. Palmer, who had been serving as a ground guide for Lam, immediately stripped off his flak jacket and helmet and dove in after Lam, but neither made it out of the water alive.[18]

Hours later, two more CSSC-113 Marines were killed by an IED that destroyed the left side of the Humvee they were riding in on a main road in the peninsula.[19] A convoy of engineers had established three vehicle checkpoints (VCPs) on the peninsula's main road, then found themselves under frequent small arms and indirect fires attack throughout the day as they emplaced six serpentine berms and 120 HESCO barriers designed to increase force protection in the vicinity of the VCPs.[20] While returning from these missions, a HUMVEE in the convoy was hit by an integrated IED-small arms ambush. Lance Cpl. Thomas J. Zapp, who was riding in the back seat, was killed immediately, while Staff Sgt. David G. Ries, who was manning the gunner's turret, died shortly thereafter from wounds received in the blast.[21]

In addition to helping clear Fallujah after Al Fajr, CSSC-113 was tasked with clearing an alternate supply route between Camp Taqqadum and Fallujah which required moving various debris, including disabled vehicles, dirt roadblocks, and even a steel power transmission tower.[22] For many reasons, this required extensive coordination with an Army EOD unit and security elements from 3rd LAR. Sweeny later reported that this mission significantly improved traffic flow on this route, having removed ten disabled civilian vehicles and numerous roadblocks from the area.

Combat Engineers Attached to 9th Engineer Support Battalion

Maj. Mark C. Boone was the commander of Company B, 6th Engineer Support Battalion (ESB) when his 167 Reserves were attached to an active duty battalion, 9th ESB, in Iraq during 2006-2007.[23] While he was immediately required to detach approximately one-third of his Marines for the benefit of other ESB sections, such as the administrative section or the motor transport section, the remaining 105 combat engineers were able to fall in on a collection of heavy equipment vehicles and other construction tools, including many different types of route clearing vehicles.[24]

Company B's mission focused on clearing major routes and building up or improving the survivability of many FOBs and Observation Posts (OPs). While this work exposed his Marines to combat operations, Boone said that they were driven by the sense that they were significantly enhancing the force protection available to American and Iraqi units. As relationships between Marines and Iraqi Security Forces developed during the deployment, Boone said that his engineers spent more time working with the military transition teams (MTTs), which were small teams of Marines that were assigned as trainers and advisors for

large Iraqi security forces. The MTTs wanted the Iraqis to feel like they were being protected by the Coalition, so they frequently requested engineering assistance to fortify Iraqi bases.[25]

Boone's combat engineers quickly realized that this combat deployment would be much different than some of them had experienced in Phase I. In their initial turnover patrol, Boone said, the Reserve combat engineers were ambushed by insurgents using IEDs. While this seemed at first to be a significant event, Boone soon learned that the blast involved a comparatively small IED and was similar to many other encounters that his Marines would participate in during their tour. Gaining this experience and understanding of insurgent operations, particularly during a turnover with combat-seasoned Marines, turned out to be very positive, as Boone's Marines learned first-hand how to respond. Boone said that as soon as the IED exploded, the veteran Marines located and pursued the men who had triggered the IED, successfully detaining them.[26]

Boone, who had commanded a bridging company in Iraq during Phase I, said this IED demonstrated immediately that the war had changed considerably. "I remember thinking, 'So this is combat in the Anbar Province.'" he said. "It was vastly different than the march up to Baghdad [in 2003]."[27]

One month after Company B arrived in Iraq, it suffered one of the few fatalities that 4th MLG has experienced in Iraq. On October 1, 2006, Cpl. Aaron Seal was shot by a sniper as he helped build a bunker for Marines on top of a roof in the village of Baghdadi, near Al Asad.[28] Boone described the work as a "survivability mission," in which his Marines were trying to strengthen positions that were used by Marines in Baghdadi. As Seal was working on the bunker, Boone said, two shots from a sniper's rifle rang out, with the second one hitting Seal in the head.

While most of Company B's route clearance missions were in the Fallujah-Ramadi area, the company was tasked one time with a long-distance mission that required a 700-kilometer motor march from its home base at Camp Taquaddum to the city of Rutbah near the Jordanian border. The mission was requested by a MEU commander who had been temporarily assigned to Camp Korean Village, just outside Rutbah. After reviewing recent reports of numerous incidents in the region, Marines decided that the Rutbah needed to be cleared. Boone said that the MEU commander, knowing that his Marines would need engineering assistance to clear the route from the line of departure into and throughout the city, requested support from the closest available unit. With less than 24 hours warning, elements of Company B began the long drive to Rutbah.[29] Linking up with the MEU at the line of departure, Boone said that the MEU commander ordered the combat engineers to immediately began clearing the route. While the trip from Camp Taqaddam to Rutbah had been draining because Marines were constantly looking for IEDs, the fact that the combat engineers were engaged by arms and indirect fires as soon as they started operating in Rutbah made them realize that the mission was going to be challenging. Boone said that while his Marines, serving as a leading element, were not heavily engaged during the operation, the MEU's movements were characterized by frequent periods of heavy fighting.[30]

Boone described another challenging and unique mission for Company B as the one that involved the clearing of numerous routes in a small area between the cities of Fallujah and Ramadi. Known as "al Jazerra," or "the island," the area had not been actively patrolled by coalition forces for an extended period. Although Iraqi forces were primarily responsible for the area, the Marine MTT requested the route clearance mission so that their Iraqi counterparts could establish more firm control of the area. Boone said that five of his vehicles were attacked by IEDs during the two-week operation, but he added that the work of his Marines allowed the MTTs and the Iraqi Forces to establish control of the area.[31]

In the latter months of its deployment, Company B was allowed to conduct distributed operations in support of infantry units that were operating in relatively small FOBs near Fallujah. Boone said that these operations allowed him to give significant responsibilities to junior officers and noncommissioned officers, as they worked in small detachments to reinforce and expand the FOBs. Boone said that he believed the most important aspect of this work was that it taught relatively young Marines to coordinate their activities with other units. He said the young Marines quickly learned how to rely on their own initiative to acquire the resources necessary to strengthen the positions.[32]

Personnel Retrieval and Processing Unit

For Marines and others who die on the battlefield, the Marine Corps' Personnel Retrieval and Processing (PRP) Unit is charged with taking the initial steps to prepare the remains for the final journey. It is a unique unit that has served with distinction in what is considered one of the most emotionally difficult jobs in the Marine Corps. PRP Marines speak of the honor they feel in being allowed to serve the deceased with the appropriate respect, but their work is gut-wrenching. It some cases, they are called on to search an extended area in an attempt to recover items. In other cases, they have collected body parts from the twisted

hulk of a vehicle that has been destroyed by an IED.[33]

PRP is similar to the Army's Mortuary Affairs units, but it includes the difficult field work of locating and gathering bodily remains and other items associated with a fallen service member. While other Marines may assist, PRP Marines take the primary role in this difficult task because commanders considers it important to have Marines from units other than that of a fallen Marine search for the remains or other personal items.

After collecting the remains, PRP Marines would bring them to one of three bases with PRP units – Camp Taqqadum, Al Asad Air Base, or Camp Fallujah – where they were tended to before the journey back to the United States.

Sgt. Susannah F. Wood, who was assigned to the PRP Platoon at Al Asad for six months in 2004-2005, said that one of the things that made PRP work more difficult was that it was always done under a time constraint, as the military tried to return the remains to the United States as quickly as possible.[34]

PRP's mission, Wood said, was to recover and process an individual's remains and personal property, which included cleaning and recomposing the remains and identifying and documenting wounds. PRP Marines worked in teams, with one or two Marines searching each pocket or pouch or any other related item that might be used to confirm the identify of the remains. This search included a careful review of military equipment, because Marines frequently stored personal items among their military equipment, subsequently, PRP Marine would document each item. The team would also look for other information, such as scars or marks, that would help confirm an identity.

PRP helped coordinate arrangements to have the remains evacuated to Kuwait for another flight to a centralized receiving point at Dover Air Force Base. At Dover AFB, she said, the remains were checked against records for fingerprints, dental work, and DNA. These tests allowed the military to conclusively identify a specific individual and possibly identify the cause of death.

Wood said that there was an air of reverence that surrounded PRP's work. Some of the work was intensely personal, such as when property like jewelry or letters that either had come from home or had not yet been mailed home were inventoried. Acknowledging that it was difficult work, she said that she and her fellow Marines took great pride in knowing that they were treating the remains with extraordinary respect.[35]

She reiterated that working with remains took priority over any other work throughout the theater. "Everyone goes out of their way to ensure that we get the 'Angel' home," she said, using the name that has been adopted to identify any deceased American service member who is being returned to his or her home.

Brig. Gen. Payne described the PRP as a story of dedication of Marine Reserves. With little more than 100 Marines qualified to serve in PRP, he said, the MLG has staffed at least one platoon of PRP Marines in every rotation. "We ran out of Marines on paper over a year ago," he said. "The reason we are able to sustain [PRP operations is] because of volunteerism, people willing to go back for a second or third tour. A lot of our PRP Marines have been three times now."[36]

The Last Journey

The Last Journey

The Marine Corps has called on Reserve Marines for many aspects of treating those who had been wounded or killed in battle. At one end of the process, Reserves from the Personnel Retrieval and Processing (PRP) Unit gathered, identified, and processed the remains of a deceased service member. At the other end, Reserves frequently were tasked with making casualty calls and conducting funeral details. Much of the U.S.-based casualty work was done by Reserves, in part because of the distribution of Reserve units throughout the country. These are missions that Marines handle with pride, respect, and great distinction.

Lt. Gen. Jack W. Bergman, Commander of Marine Forces Reserve between 2005 and 2008, told a U.S. Senate subcommittee in 2006 that more than 90 percent of the Marine Corps' casualty calls had been handled by Marines assigned to the Reserve.[1]

"In recognition of this greatest of sacrifices, there is no duty that we treat with more importance," Bergman told the Senators. "The duties of our casualty assistance officers go well beyond notification, . . . [and include] planning the return and final rest of their Marine, counseling [the family] on benefits and entitlements, [and] providing a strong shoulder when needed."[2]

During the Global War on Terror, the services adopted the respectful code name of "Angels" to refer to the remains of service members being processed or transported to their families and final resting sites. According to those who took part in such sacred duties, there was no mission that had a higher priority, and none that received the same level of attention or care, as a mission that involved an "Angel."

Flying with Angels

For Lt. Col. Jacques C. Naviaux II, who commanded HMM-764 in Iraq in 2005, one of the most poignant moments of his career occurred when he and his crew were diverted to pick up the remains of five U.S. Army soldiers who had been killed in combat.[3] His section's original mission had been to extract a reinforced platoon of soldiers who had been conducting field operations for more than two weeks, but the mission was changed en route to the pickup site. Told that his section would be carrying the remains of the soldiers, Naviaux made sure that the crews understood that they had been assigned a sacred duty.[4]

After the bodies were loaded, the commander of the Army unit walked up to the cockpit and extended his hand in a simple gesture of appreciation. Naviaux, who returned his handshake, said it was meaningful for both men. With no words passing between them, the Army commander made sure that Naviaux' Marines knew that he was entrusting them with the most precious and important load that the Marines would ever carry, and the Marine acknowledged the message. Both commanders conveyed to each other that the loss of a service member is shared by all services.

Minutes later, as the Angels began their ascent, 50 soldiers came to attention and saluted their fallen comrades as the final journey home began.[5]

Personnel Retrieval and Processing Unit

Reserves often use civilian skills when called to active duty. For Sgt. Daniel Cotnoir, his background as a funeral director in Massachusetts provided the experience that the Marine Corps needed when he was mobilized for a deployment to Iraq in 2004-2005. Trained as an armorer, he was assigned to the Personnel Retrieval and Processing (PRP) Unit, which worked with the remains of Marines and others who died in a war zone.[6] In addition to other duties, Cotnoir regularly cleaned and recomposed the bloodied bodies and facial features of Marines killed in combat.[7]

While the gruesome work is difficult from an emotional perspective, Cotnoir said that it was a tremendously rewarding job. The work ranges from searching for body parts after an explosion to combing through a service member's wallet before packaging personal belongings to be shipped to the deceased's family.

Cotnoir's efforts as part of a unit of approximately 20 Marines that handled the remains of 182 people led to his selection as the 2005 Marine of the Year by the Marine Corps Times.[8] While his civilian training gave him the skills to clean and recompose the remains at the outset of the journey, he also demonstrated leadership by heading up teams that searched large areas to recover body parts and personal items of deceased service members. According to the Marine Corps Times' citation, he once crawled into the burned-out hulk of a Light Armored Vehicle to recover the remains of a Marine who had been trapped in the wreckage.[9] While such work was physically and emotionally taxing, Cotnoir said the PRP units took great

pride in knowing that the dead were treated with respect, thereby bringing some measure of closure to the deceased's family.

While Cotnoir was assigned to Camp Taqaddum, other PRP units were based at Camp Fallujah and Al Asad Air Base. Sgt. Susannah F. Wood, who was part of the Al Asad unit, said that PRP operations were constantly under tight time constraints, as the military tried to return the remains to the United States as quickly as possible.

Despite tight timeframes, Wood said that there was an air or reverence that surrounded PRP's work. Some of the work was intensely personal, such as dealing with an individual's combat gear or letters from home. While it was difficult, she said that she and her fellow Marines took great pride in knowing that they were treating the remains with an extraordinarily high level of respect.

She reiterated that working with remains took priority over any other work throughout the theater. "Everyone goes out of their way to ensure that we get the Angel home," she said.

Notifying the Next of Kin

While an Angel was beginning the journey home, Reserves often were called upon to notify a Marine's family of the death. It has been described as one of the hardest jobs in the military, because family members understand the meaning of uniformed Marines at their door.

Symbolized by a knock on the door, the passing of a casualty message is the thing that military families dread most. While its impact on the deceased's family is apparent, it also leaves an indelible impression on the Notification Officer.[10] Most Notification Officers describe that the responsibility as a sacred duty, but they also note that it is haunting. One Notification Officer said that simply wearing his Service Alpha uniform reminds him of each of the families he has come to know through this difficult duty.[11] He recalled one notification visit to a mother who originally thought he had simply come for a social visit. When she looked into his eyes, he said, she immediately grasped the somber meaning of his visit.

When a Marine dies, a Notification Officer provides the family with the formal notification of the death. The Notification Officer is typically joined by a Casualty Assistance Calls Officer (CACO), and possibly a chaplain. It is done as soon as possible, day or night, so family members receive the information from a Marine Corps source rather than a reporter or someone else.

Maj. Kirk A. Greiner had been the Inspector-Instructor for Lima Company, 3rd Battalion, 25th Marines, for only three days when he had to notify the families of two Marines that their loved ones had been killed in Iraq.[12] Greiner said that the OIC of Lima Company's Peacetime Wartime Support Team, Chief Warrant Officer 4 Orrin H. Bowman, had conducted several notification visits before Greiner joined the unit. This allowed him to prepare Greiner for the duties as well as anyone could have.

Greiner's first question to Bowman was how to respond to a casualty call. "I wanted to make sure that I knew what I was doing if, God forbid, that happened. Lo and behold, three days later it happened, [and Bowman] had prepared me very well."[13]

Bowman had prepared emergency information folders for each deployed Marine and Sailor that included maps to the homes of the next-of-kin.[14] Experience had taught Bowman that each family would respond differently, so he advised Greiner, a two-tour veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom, to be prepared for a broad range of possible

Photo By Cpl. Brian Rheimers

responses.

Greiner said he encouraged the families to sit down first, while he asked a few brief questions to ensure he was talking with the right people. Then, he said, he would deliver a short statement of regret from the Commandant, such as: "The Commandant of the Marine Corps has entrusted me to express his deep regret that your son, Lance Cpl. John A. Marine, was killed in action in Baghdad, Iraq, on November 10, 2005. The Commandant extends his deepest sympathy to you and your family in your loss."[15]

This is the most difficult part, he said. Until the words "killed in action," are spoken, the family is hoping the news will be that the person is wounded or missing in action. With that one word, he said, the family's hopes are dashed.[16]

While an initial Personnel Casualty Report may have contained a brief description of how an individual died,[17] Greiner said that he preferred to provide little information during the initial visit. To avoid confusion or the need for later clarification, he said, most Notification Officers told families that the CACO would provide them with accurate information as soon as it was available.

The CACO follows up on the Notification Officer's initial visit by providing whatever assistance is needed by a family. Greiner, who supervised many Marines who served as CACOs, said that the Golden Rule for a CACO is to accomplish whatever the family wants. This high standard frequently requires numerous phone calls to the Marine Corps' Headquarters for special requests. For example, Greiner said, frequently both the parents and the spouse might request that they receive their Marine's Purple Heart and accompanying certificate. While Marine Corps directives require that this type of request be cleared at the Headquarters level, Greiner said that CACOs keep calling until they received the appropriate authorization.

In a war that has resulted in more U.S. fatalities than any military action since Vietnam, Marine Notification Officers and CACOs have earned a reputation for doing a difficult job as well as possible.[18] Less than a week after conducting his notification calls for families of the two Marines who died on his third day as Company L's Inspector-Instructor staff, Greiner had to notify the families of six more Marines that their sons or husbands had been killed in an IED blast near Haditha on August 3, 2005. The IED destroyed the Amtrak in which the Marines were riding, killing 14 Reserves. More than any other single incident, this IED brought home to America the significant losses that Marine Reserves were suffering in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

A Final Goodbye With The Lord's Prayer

In the fall of 2006, when 1st Battalion, 25th Marines returned from Iraq, its Marines were required to spend two weeks at Camp Pendleton prior to returning to their families and respective home training centers. While this period provided ample time to take care of routine administrative matters, it also provided some decompression time to help Marines and Sailors make the transition from a combat zone to a civilian environment.

Lt. Col. Christopher A. Landro, the battalion's commander, used the "Liberty Weekend," to take 13 of the battalion's leaders to visit some of the battalion's most severly wounded Marines.[19] In addition to the battalion's Commanding Officer, Sergeant Major, and Operations Officer, Landro had the Company Commanders and First Sergeants from each of the battalion's five companies participate in the visits.[20] "It truly was one of the most inspiring things that I've ever done," Landro said.[21]

The Marines first went to San Antonio, Texas, where they visited two Marines who were being treated at the U.S. Army's burn center. Both Marines suffered severe wounds as well as deep burns, but Landro said that their attitudes were undaunted.[22] One, he said, was essentially running his hospital floor, making sure that every service member maintained high spirits while getting to all appointments and physical therapy sessions. The other, who had grown up in the west, told his battalion commander that he, "could not wait to get back up on a horse."[23]

The leaders then flew to Washington, D.C., where they first visited two of their Marines at the Bethesda Medical Center before spending time with a third Marine, who was on convalescent leave with his family in the Washington area. Still wearing their desert utilities, the 13 then drove to Arlington to say their goodbyes to two Marines, Capt. Brian S. Letendre and Cpl. Jordan C. Pierson, who had been interred at Arlington National Cemetery during the deployment.

Maj. Brian T. Hofmann, who commanded Bravo Company, said the trip to Arlington was an important part of his postdeployment healing process. "It was very somber, but it was very good," he said. "I think that there was a little bit of a catharsis there."[24]

"For those who have been in combat and lost people, [Arlington Cemetery] becomes a monument unto itself," said Hofmann, who had lost two Marines to sniper fire in the center of Fallujah. "It definitely was an emotional experience for all of us who were there."[25]

Capt. Letendre had been killed in an attack in Ramadi just three weeks into his deployment, while serving on an 11-person Military Transition Team (MTT) training Iraqi recruits.[26] The standard and simple white granite headstone had been placed at Letendre's grave by the time battalion's leaders visited. Several of Landro's colleagues knelt by Letendre's grave to whisper a private goodbye before touching the headstone. "We all knew him well and were very fond of him," Hofmann said. "He was a very popular captain in the battalion."[27]

As the Marines gathered around the grave, Lt. Col. Landro asked the Battalion Sergeant Major, Sgt. Maj. Bradley E. Trudell, if he would lead them in a prayer.[28] Without further words, all 13 removed their covers and knelt around the grave.

"We gathered there and knelt and said a prayer over Letendre's gravesite. The Sergeant Major led it. It was simply the Lord's Prayer, with the thirteen of us kneeling down around his gravesite," Landro said.[29] As Trudell began to speak those few words, many of the Marines joined him.

Landro said the prayer was the highlight of a trip that provided an "absolute relief" to the battalion's leaders.[30]

"It's hard with a Reserve battalion because you know that your opportunities are going to be limited to get to these guys as a unit, to do it as a command, to say, 'It's not just Lt. Col. Landro coming to see you, it's [First Battalion, Twenty-Fifth Marines] coming to see you. It's your brothers. If we could all be here, we would . . . but I brought who I could."[31]

Photos

Official Marine Corps Photo

On 16 April 2006, Marines of 4th Platoon, Company A, 1st Battalion, 25th Marines, Regimental Combat Team 5, kneel in front of a house being searched for weapons in Saqlawyia, Iraq while looking for possible improvised explosive devices (IED's), and meeting and greeting Iraqi citizens. RCT-5 was deployed with I MEF in support of Operation Freedom in the Al Anbar Province of Iraq (MNF-W) to develop the Iraqi Security Forces, facilitate the development of official rule of law through democratic government reforms, and continue the development of a market based economy centered on Iraqi Reconstruction.

Photo By Cpl Adaecus G. Brooks

Cpl Brian Reimers

An assault team from Company B, 1st Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment, Regimental Combat Team 5, conducts a raid on a possible suicide vehicle bomb workshop in central Fallujah. The Marines searched the vacant garage after receiving intelligence that the owner might be supporting insurgents to harm coalition forces and innocent civilians.

Gunnery Sgt. Kevin W. Williams

December 30, 2004 Iraq: Lance Cpl. Wesley A. Edgemon, a Motor T Tech from Orangeburg, S.C. attached to the 4th Civil Affairs Group (4th CAG), loads rounds into a HMMWV before heading out on a convoy to the Village of Harwan, Iraq. The 4th CAG, attached to the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, conducted Security and Stabilization Operations in the Western Al Anbar Province in Iraq.

Capt. Raymond L. Adams, executive officer assigned to Company C, 1st Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment, Regimental Combat Team 5, passes out candy to children. The Marines traveled with candy, toys and hygiene items for the kids in different neighborhoods in the city. Adams, 33, is from Deerfield, Mass.

Photo By Cpl Brian Reimers

Photo By Cpl Brian Reimers

Staff Sgt. Joey M. Davis, platoon sergeant assigned to Company C, 1st Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment, Regimental Combat Team 5, helps hand out candy, hygiene items and toys to more than 100 different kids in Fallujah, Iraq. The Marines passed out the goods that brought upon smiles and laughs from the local children. Davis is 28, from Wichita Falls, Texas.

Photo By Cpl Adaecus G. Brooks

On 16 April 2006, Captain Matthew M. Hodges, Platoon Commander of 4th Platoon, Company A, 1st Battalion, 25th Marines, Regimental Combat Team 5, hands out candy to an Iraqi child while patrolling through Saqlawyia, Iraq to search for possible improvised explosive devices (IED's), and meeting and greeting Iraqi citizens. RCT-5 deployed with I MEF in support of Operation Freedom in the Al Anbar Province of Iraq (MNF-W) to develop the Iraqi Security Forces, facilitate the development of official rule of law through democratic government reforms, and continue the development of a market based economy centered on Iraqi Reconstruction.

Photo By Cpl Brian Reimers

HN Cameron R. Cleveland, Company A, 1st Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment, Regimental Combat Team 5, makes it a point to stop and interact with the local Fallujans while patrolling. A few Marines and sailors from Company A joined forces with Company B to do a variety of missions inside the city.

Cpl. Rocco DeFilippis

An F/A-18C Hornet from Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 142 receives fuel in mid-flight courtesy of the Marines and sailors of Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 252. Refueling near the fight allows close-air support aircraft the ability to stay on station longer and assist the Marines on the ground.

A CH-46 helicopter from Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 764 starts one of the squadron's many daily missions. HMM-764 boasts one of the most experienced pilot rosters in the Marine Corps, despite its reserve status.

Photo By Cpl. James D. Hamel

Official Marine Corps Photo

HMH-769 Group Photo

Marines with Company I, 3rd Battalion, 24th Marines conduct a memorial service for Cpl. Bradley P. McCormick who was killed in combat in An Najaf, Iraq.

Sgt. Chad R. Kiehl

Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

AK-47 – Kalashnikov automatic rifle
AO – Areas of Operation
ASP – Ammunition Supply Point
BCP – Border Control Point
CACO – Casualty Assistance Calls Officer
CJTF – Combined-Joint Task Force
COIN – Counterinsurgency
ECP – Entry Control Points
FAC – Forward Air Controller
FLIR – forward-looking infrared radar
FOB – Forward Operating Base
FSSG – Fleet Service Support Group
GPS – Global Positioning System
GWOT – Global War on Terrorism
HET – Human Exploitation Team
IED – Improvised Explosive Device
JDAM – joint direct attack munitions
JPADS – Joint Precision Airdrop Delivery System
JSOW – joint stand-off weapons
Jump CP – Mobile Command Post
KPF – Khowst Provincial Force
LAR – Light Armed Reconnaissance
MAG – Marine Aircraft Group
MALS – Marine Air Logistics Squadron
MAM – Military Age Male
MAP – Mobile Assault Platoon
MAW – Marine Aircraft Wing
MMSO – Maneuver and Mobility Support Operations
MOS – Military Occupational Specialties
MP – Military Police
MRE – Meals Ready-to-Eat
MSR – Main Supply Route
OP – Observation Post
PSD – Personal Security Detachment
QRF – Quick Response Force
RCT – Regimental Combat Team
RDF – Regional Detention Facilities
RPG – Rocket Propelled Grenade
SASO – Security and Stabilization Operations
SVBIED – Suicide Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Device
TAMPS – Tactical Aircraft Mission Planning System
TCP – Traffic Control Point
TRAP – tactical recovery of aircraft and personnel
UNAMA – United Nations Afghanistan Military Assistance
VBIED – Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Device

Endnotes

Setting the Stage

1. Michael Gordon, "The Strategy to Secure Iraq Did Not Foresee a 2nd War," The New York Times, 19 Oct 04, p. 1 (describing a discussion between GEN Tommy Franks, Commander of U.S. Central Command, and his senior subordinate commanders on April 16, 2003 in Baghdad, regarding a possible reduction of U.S. forces in Iraq to one Army division of 30,000 soldiers).

2. Gunnery Sgt. David A. Shackleton, "FW: MarForRes Operation History -- RFI re personnel in Iraq." E-mail to author, 23Aug06, hereafter Shackleton e-mail. Gunnery Sgt. Shackleton wrote that Central Command authorized the Marine Corps to start returning Marine units to the United States in May 2003. Before the last I MEF unit was brought home in October, the Marine Corps and Central Command prepared plans to bring Marines back to Iraq for OIF Phase II.1. The last Phase I Marine battalion was removed in October 2003, and six active duty battalions and one Reserve battalion returned to Iraq in February and March 2004.

3. Ibid.

4. GEN John Abizaid, GEN Franks' successor as Commander of U.S. Central Command, said in a press conference at the Pentagon on July 16, 2003 that Coalition forces were facing a "a classical guerrilla-type campaign." See, e.g., Thom Shankar, "U.S. Commander in Iraq says Yearlong Tours are Option to Combat 'Guerrilla' War." The New York Times, 17Jul03, p. 1.

5. Bryan Bender, "Number of troops in Iraq to expand: US force to grow by up to 50,000," The Boston Globe, 6Nov03, p. 1. See also, L. Paul Bremer III, My Year in Iraq, (New York, N.Y., Simon & Schuster, 2006), p. 31, hereafter Bremer, Year in Iraq (quoting GEN John Abizaid, during a secure video teleconference with the Secretary of Defense and Ambassador Bremer on May 14, 2003, as saying, "No forces will be released for redeployment until we have security in place.").

6. Cpl. Paula M. Fitzgerald, "1st Marine Division colors fly again in Iraq," March 20, 2004. The relief-in-place ceremony was held at Division Headquarters near Ramadi.

7. Maj. Gen. Douglas O'Dell intvw, 24Jan07 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter O'Dell intvw.

8. For examples of such transitions, see the chapter on 14th Marines, infra.

9. Lt. Col. Harold R. "Odie" Van Opdorp intvw, 27Apr07 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Van Opdorp intvw.

10. Ibid.

11. O'Dell intvw.

12. Lt. Col. Van Opdorp identified the police officer as CWO-5 James Roussell.

13 CWO-5 James Roussell intvw, 24Apr07 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Roussell intvw.

14. Lt. Col. Mark. A. Smith intvw, 16June06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Smith intvw.

15. O'Dell intvw.

16. Ibid.

17. Maj. Mark C. Boone intvw, 16May08 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Boone intvw.

18. Ibid.

19. Col. Tracy Garrett intvw, 20Jan07, (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Garrett intvw.

20. Semper Gumby was added to the Marine lexicon during Desert Storm, when "hurry up and wait" became a fact of life. "Semper Gumby" translates loosely as "Always Flexible." It is based on the animated clay television figure known as Gumby, which is constantly remolded.

21. O'Dell intvw.

22. Ibid.

The Anbar Provience

1. These statistics were compiled by icasualties.org, which compiled information provided by various defense sources. Information downloaded on June 17, 2007, showed that of 3,785 American fatalities attributed to OIF, 1,232 were related to incidents in the Anbar Province. (Downloaded information contained in Watters Working Papers, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).

2. Jonathan Karl, "Pentagon Considers Moving Troops From al-Anbar Province to Baghdad," ABC News, 28Nov06.

3. See, generally, John Burns, "Iraq's Ho Chi Minh Trail," The New York Times, 5June05, The Week in Review, p. 1. ("From Husayba on the Syrian frontier through Qaim and the sand-blown towns of Rawa, Haditha,

Asad and Hit, onward through Ramadi and Fallujah to Baghdad, the corridor has become the Ho Chi Minh trail of this war.")

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1. Michael Gordon, "The Strategy to Secure Iraq Did Not Foresee a 2nd War," The New York Times, 17Jul03,

2. Gunnery Sgt. David A. Shackleton, "FW: MarForRes Operation History -- RFI re personnel in Iraq." E-mail to author, 23 Aug 06,

3. Ibid.

4. GEN John Abizaid, GEN Franks' successor as Commander of U.S. Central Command, said in a press conference at the Pentagon on July 16, 2003 that Coalition forces were facing a "a classical guerrilla-type campaign." See, e.g., Thom Shankar, "U.S. Commander in Iraq says Yearlong Tours are Option to Combat 'Guerrilla' War." The New York Times, 17Jul03, p. 1.

5. L. Paul Bremer III, My Year in Iraq, (New York, N.Y., Simon & Schuster, 2006), p. 31, hereafter Bremer, Year in Iraq (quoting GEN John Abizaid, during a secure video teleconference with the Secretary of Defense and Ambassador Bremer on May 14, 2003, as saying, "No forces will be released for redeployment until we have security in place.").

6. CWO-2 Robert A. Bauer intvw, 6Sept06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Bauer intvw. CWO-2 Bauer estimated that the decision to deploy to Iraq was well received by 95% of the battalion. Ibid.

7. Ibid. As a member of the battalion's logistics section, CWO-2 Bauer said that much of the battalion's predeployment focus involved collecting its equipment and packing 120 shipping containers that carried the equipment, via ship, to Kuwait. The fact that much of 3/24's equipment was en route to Kuwait and the battalion was competing with several active duty battalions for training areas and support at Camp Pendleton hampered its training efforts.

8. I Co 3/24 ComdC, 15Jun04, p. 3.

9. Gen Charles C. Krulak, "The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three Block War," Marines Magazine, January 1999, hereafter Krulak, Strategic Corporal. Gen Krulak had anticipated that Marines would be participating in more operations that mix "military operations other-than-war" with "middle-intensity conflicts." His "Three Block War" concept emphasizes the idea that future Marines will face the entire spectrum of tactical challenges, from major combat to middle intensity conflict to Security and Stabilization Operations, often in a short period an in a limited geographic region. Gen Krulak said Marines may face the different challenges posed by the different environments over the course of a few hours and within the confines of a few contiguous city blocks.

10. Lt. Col. Gary S. Johnston intvw, 6Sept06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Johnston intvw.

11. Ibid.

12. Maj. Mark A. Lamelza intvw, 7Oct06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Lamelza intvw.

13. I Co 3/24 ComdC, 15Jun04, p. 3.

14. Lamelza intvw.

15. Ibid.

16. Bauer intvw.

17. 3/24 ComdC, 15 Jun 04,18 See, e.g., Article 15-6 Investigation of the 800th Military Police Brigade, known informally as the Taguba Report, after its lead investigator, MG Antonio M. Taguba. (MG Taguba's report can be found online, and a copy is in Watters Working Papers, MCHC, Washington, D.C.) MG Taguba found that between October and December 2003, there were numerous incidents of criminal abuses inflicted on several detainees at Abu Ghraib Prison.

19. K Co 3/24 ComdC, 22 Jun 04, p. 2.

20. L Co 3/24 ComdC, 15 Jun 04, p. 5.

2/24

1. See the section of this book relating to 1/23's activities in Iraq.

2. "The Triangle of Death" is a nickname given to an area south of Baghdad by local residents. Its boundaries are ambiguous. Some claim it is bounded by the towns of Mahmudiyah, Yusufiyah, and Iskandariyah, with the most dangerous town, Latifiyah, located between Mahmudiyah and Iskandariyah. See, e.g., Anthony Shadid, "Iraq's Forbidding 'Triangle of Death': South of Baghdad, a Brutal Sunni Insurgency Holds Sway," The Washington Post, 23Nov04, p. A-1. Other descriptions of the Triangle of Death are more expansive, extending from Yusufiyah in the northwest to the town of Jurf as Sukhr in the southwest and to the series of sharp bends in the Tigris River southeast of Baghdad. Whatever definition is used, 2/24 operated in the heart of the Triangle of Death.

3. Lt. Col. Mark. A. Smith intvw, 16June06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Smith intvw.

4. Ken Sengupta, "The Triangle of Death," The Independent, 22Nov2004 (quoting Lt. Col. Smith and other Marines to support Sengupta's statement that following the November 2004 assault on Fallujah, the Triangle of Death was the most dangerous region of Iraq).

5. The Washington Post, 23Nov04, P. A-1 (noting that

policemen would change into civilian clothes to avoid contact with insurgents, and describing the efforts of one Shi'ia man to avoid conflict by removing a poster of a Shi'ia saint from his car and playing a cassette tape celebrating the Sunni insurgency in Fallujah).

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. Smith intvw.

9. Ibid. See also 2/24 S-2 Mid-Deployment Report, undated, pp. 3-4 (Copy in Watters Working Papers, MCHC, Washington, D.C.) (describing 2/24's Combat Intelligence Center and Threat Appreciation).

10. Smith intvw.

11. 2/24 included maps of its AO in reports. A detailed copy is provided in a summary of the interview with Lt. Col. Smith (Copy in Watters Working Papers, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), p. 4, showing the relative positions of Mahmudiyah, Lutafiyah, and Yusufiyah.

12. Smith intvw. Subsequent descriptions of 2/24's AO in the text come from this interview.

13. Ibid. See also, Lt. Col. Mark A. Smith, "Letter from Mayhem Six," E-mail and electronic document for families of 2/24 Marines, 3Feb05, (copy in Watters Working Papers, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Smith E-mail.

14. Sean D. Naylor, "SpecOps Uit Nearly Nabs Zarqawi," Army Times, 28Apr06. Naylor describes several raids by Task Force 145, consisting of Delta Force and SEAL Team 6 members, on headquarters elements in Yusufiyah associated with Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, al-Qaida's leader in Iraq. Intelligence sources told Army Times that Zarqawi probably was nearby when a raid in Yusufiyah took place on April 16, 2006. Zarqawi was killed in a different part of Iraq on June 8, 2006.

15. Emma Perez-Trevino, "Army general promises to track down soldiers' killers," The Brownsville (TX) Herald, 29June06, p. 1.

16. Ibid. Lt. Col. Smith said that intelligence indicated that most significant activities in his AO had some connection with the Cargoul area.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

20. Smith E-mail. ("Identification of, keeping secret until 48 hours out, seizing and establishing force protection of polling sites is not an easy task. . . . But, here is what happened: 8 sites, 2 per urban center in the Mayhem AO, were seized and secured. Force protection barriers and procedures were emplaced. Our Iraqi Army counterparts assumed the inner cordons and hundreds of Iraqi Election Workers and Officials were moved into the sites.")

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid. ("But . . . the miracle was the Iraqi people. With all the threatened violence, and most importantly all the REAL violence that was going on around them, they VOTED! They never broke and ran. They never hesitated. They stayed, and they VOTED. Why? Because, they had tasted the power of FREEDOM.")

23. Smith intvw.

24. Cami McCormick, "Voting in the 'Triangle Of Death,'" CBS News, 30Jan05 (copy in Watters Working Papers, MCHC, Washington, D.C.). CBS News included a comment that McCormick was, "reporting from one of Iraq's most dangerous areas, Babil Province."

25. Ibid.

26. Smith intvw. Descriptions of Operations River Walk and Red Mayhem I, II, and III are in the interview.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid. 2/24 AAR, OIF II-2, 17May05 (Copy in Watters Working Papers, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter 2/24 AAR, 17May05. ("Violence and intimidation against the Iraqi people was significantly decreased during our tenure.")

29. Smith intvw.

30. 2/24 AAR, 17May05. ("On 30 January 2005, 71% of the eligible voters (over 16,000 Iraqis) voted in National elections.")

1/23

1. Lt. Col. Gregory B. Stevens intvw, 10Sept05 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Stevens intvw.

2. 1/23 1-31Sept 2004 ComdC, undated, p. 7.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. ASP Dulab was an ammunition storage facility north of Hit. For a discussion of its significance to insurgents operating in this area, see the section of this book describing the activities of 3rd Battalion, 25th Marines. ASP Dulab was so large and contained so much ammunition that one attempt to destroy it by American contractors instead simply made thousands of rounds easily available to insurgents.

9. 1/23 1-31Sept 2004 ComdC, undated, p. 6.

10. Ibid.

11. 1st Sgt. Daniel Hendrex, A Soldier's Promise: The Heroic True Story of an American Soldier and an Iraqi Boy (New York: Simon Spotlight Entertainment, 2006), p. 30, hereafter Hendrex, A Soldier's Promise.

12. Sgt. Ben Christensen, "Re: Greetings." E-mail to author, 9June06. Hereafter Christensen correspondence no. 1.

13. Christensen correspondence no. 1. Sgt. Christensen's colorful descriptions of the base include the following: "The FOB was essentially a Third World hellhole, primitive chow hall with A-rations and tray-rations twice a day, breakfast and supper." "The FOB was mortared and rocketed just about every single day, 82 mm mortars and 122-mm rockets, I believe. No casualties from any of this type of fire except 2nd platoon's corpsman, Doc Edes, who received a small bit of shrapnel in his hand once. Mortars and rockets were an accepted part of life, and most of the time Charlie Company's mortarmen responded immediately with return fire, sometimes having mortar duels, back and forth, with the insurgents." "Showers were in fiberglass cans, and were generally available only one per week, on rotation with different platoons." "First FSSG provided laundry service, once a week if you were at the FOB, otherwise, we were just filthy all the time. It was a deployment spent in the dirt."

14. United Nation's statistics from 2003 show Hit's population at 105,825.

15. Hendrex, A Soldier's Promise, p. 30.

16. Capt. Ronald Shayne "Skinny" McGinty, 16Oct04 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter McGinty intvw, and Maj. Michael R. Miller, 16Oct04 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Miller intvw. Both interviews were conducted by CWO-3 William E. Hutson, a Field Historian with the Marine Corps' History Division, within days of the action that has come to be known as the "Battle for Hit." Capt. McGinty led the initial platoon into this action, and his company commander, Maj. Miller, brought reinforcements to the scene when it was apparent that the strength of insurgents in Hit had been grossly underestimated. Both interviews provide excellent descriptions of Hit and the actions of Marines during the Battle for Hit.

17. Miller intvw. Maj. Miller indicates that previous units had avoided Hit, so there was a significant lack of information regarding activities there.

18. John Burns, "Iraq's Ho Chi Minh Trail," The New York Times, 5June05, The Week in Review, p. 1. ("From Husayba on the Syrian frontier through Qaim and the sand-blown towns of Rawa, Haditha, Asad and Hit, onward through Ramadi and Fallujah to Baghdad, the corridor has become the Ho Chi Minh trail of this war.")

19. Michael R. Gordon and Lt. Gen. Bernard E. Trainor, USMC (Ret.), Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq (New York: Pantheon, 2006), Chapter 22, fn. 2 (citing p. 80 of a report, classified secret, entitled, "U.S. Joint Forces Command Combat Study: Iraqi Perspective on Operation Iraqi Freedom Major Combat Operations.")

20. Stevens intvw.

21. Stevens intvw. (The Bronze-Uranium Split required "a reinforced squad at a minimum, but usually there was a platoon there.")

22. For a description of activities in Fallujah during 2004, see, e.g., Lt. Gen. John F. Sattler and Lt. Col. Daniel H. Wilson, "Operation AL FAJR: The Battle for Fallujah—Part II," Marine Corps Gazette, July05, p. 12, hereafter Battle for Fallujah, and Bing West, No True Glory: A Frontline Account of the Battle for Fallujah (New York: Bantam, 2005), hereafter No True Glory.

23. 1/23 1-31 October 2004 ComdC, undated, p. 7.

24. Ibid. ("During engagements on 12 October, Scout Snipers observed individuals wearing police uniforms participating in insurgent activities.")

25. Ibid, p. 8. ("[I]nsurgents understand the dynamics of the policies made between U.S. Marines and the city leadership. An informal agreement was made between the Marines and City Counsel leadership that stated if the Police and City Counsel could provide security in Hit, Marines would stay out of the city. This agreement limited Marine presence in the city that cause as influx of insurgents from outlying areas to gain a foothold in Hit. With a lack of Marine presence, the insurgents were able to fester, unchecked. The insurgents used this agreement to foster power for their cause.")

26. Ibid, p. 4. The Mad Mortarman, subsequently identified as Mullah Ibrahim, was detained following a cordon and knock operation at a residence approximately 2.5 kilometers northwest of Camp Hit. Ibid, p. 14.

27. Stevens intvw. At one point, many ING soldiers would not wear uniforms en route to Camp Hit, to avoid attracting the attention of insurgents.

28. 1/23 1-31 October 2004 ComdC, undated, p. 5. Charlie Company reported from Camp Hit that, "During the month of October, we noticed an increase in insurgent activity. . . . Lack of presence in Hit proper also allows insurgent cells to gather and plan missions not only for the Denver AO but other cities as well." This information is also reflected in the intelligence section's discussion in the same document.

29. Maj. P. Ray Roberson, "RE: MarForRes Operational History." E-mail to author, 20Nov06. Maj. Roberson was the Aide-de-Camp for LtGen Natonski, who was the Deputy Commandant for Plans, Policies & Operations. Maj. Roberson's e-mail contained information from LtGen Natonski regarding the ambush on the 1stMarDiv Jump CP.

30. 1/23 1-31 October 2004 ComdC, undated, p. 8.

("The insurgency's tactical proficiency heightened as seen during the complex ambush, 10 Oct 2004, on the CG 1stMarDiv convoy through Hit traffic circle number 1. At approximately 0700, the CG's [personal security detachment] was traveling [north] on MSR Bronze when it came under fire . . . . Around 100-200 small arms rounds and 3x RPG rounds were fired in the direction of the PSD. . . . [J]ust past the traffic circle, PSD was struck again; this time by one IED, 1x RPG and approximately 100 small arms rounds. . . . PSD also stated that when the firefight started there seemed to be someone on every roof.")

31. Stevens intvw, Miller intvw, and McGinty intvw. Each officer describes the difference between what had been expected in Hit and the much larger insurgent force that Capt. McGinty's reinforced platoon encountered. In expressing his surprise, Lt. Col. Stevens noted that the insurgent force included snipers perched in palm trees. Capt. McGinty said, "We underestimated how many [insurgents] were in that area. . . . The S-2 told me [after the battle] there were probably four hundred [insurgents] in the Hit-Turbah area, and we rolled in with fifty-three. It was a pretty tough fight." McGinty intvw.

32. 1/23 1-31 October 2004 ComdC, undated, p. 8. The battalion's intelligence officer moved from al Asad to Camp Hit for combat operations in Hit. He reported: "The Hit insurgent attacks from 10 October to 16 October . . . points to a trained and sophisticated enemy. Prior to 10 October, 5-10 man cells conducted the majority of the attacks. . . . However, the large units that attacked Bravo Company and Scout Snipers needed military training to orchestrate these types of units." Ibid.

33. 1/23 1-31 October 2004 ComdC, undated, p. 7. ("An elite group of mujahadeen named "The Strike Force" entered the city as insurgents occupied vehicle checkpoints in and around Hit. . . . Insurgents stopped cars suspected of being either ING soldiers or civilian contractors working for coalition forces. They also interrogated the occupants, confiscated ING weapons, money, identification, and beat individuals associated with the coalition or Iraqi government.")

34. The insurgents expected their first ambush to elicit a Coalition response, and were so confident of their strength in Hit that they conducted two more ambushes at TCP-1 within the next 24 hours. 1/23 1-31 October 2004 ComdC, undated, p. 8. The first, involving a convoy of American contractors, resulted in a destroyed vehicle. The second, against a convoy of British civilians, was more complex. It started with three synchronized IEDs, followed by RPG, machine gun, and small arms fire.

35. Summary of Sgt. Bryan Hancock intvw, 26June06 (Copy in Watters Working Papers, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Hancock intvw.

36. Stevens intvw, Miller intvw.

37. Miller intvw.

38. Ibid.

39. Miller intvw, McGinty intvw.

40. Capt. McGinty said that the decision to approach from the south almost certainly prevented significant losses to his platoon. When they drove into Turbah, his Marines saw a significant amount of insurgent activity in Hit, especially around the Sharqi Mosque. Most residents of Turbah were asleep at the time, allowing Capt. McGinty's platoon to establish its position at the Turbah traffic circle without incurring the fires that they almost certainly would have received had they tried to drive through Hit. McGinty intvw.

41. Hancock intvw.

42. McGinty intvw.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.

45. The fact that Capt. McGinty's platoon did not have a FAC assigned to it for this operation could have proved significant. Fortunately, Capt. McGinty had significant exposure to Marine aviation during his initial tour of active duty.

46. McGinty intvw.

47. Hancock intvw.

48. Miller intvw.

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid.

51. Ibid.

52. 1/23 1-31 October 2004 ComdC, undated, p. 16-17. Perhaps anticipating a possible ramification for firing in the vicinity of the Sharqi Mosque, 1/23 described in the Command Chronology's "Sequential Listing of Significant Events" the battalion's efforts to use "[e]scalatory means of defeating AIE fires . . . against AIE firing from the mosque. AIE fires originating from the structure did not abate after several hours of 1/23 returning fire."

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid.

55. Hancock intvw.

56. Ibid.

57. Ibid.

58. Ibid.

59. Miller intvw.

60. Ibid.

61. Battle for Fallujah, p. 20. For a more detailed account of the 2004 battles for Fallujah, see, No True Glory.

62. Battle for Fallujah, p. 20.

63. Ibid.

64. Hancock intvw.

65. Ibid.

66. Hancock intvw. This one-on-one sniper fight is similar to one depicted in, "Enemy at the Gates," a popular 2001 movie in which opposing snipers play cat-and-mouse during the Battle of Stalingrad.

67. Ibid.

3/25

1. The underlying facts for this section were derived primarily from 3/25's Command Chronologies for the periods of 1 January-30 June 2005, 1-31 August 2005, and 1-21 September 2005. The Marine Corps Center for Lessons Learned prepared a summary of its observations regarding the deployment. Marine Corps Center for Lessons Learned: Pre-Deployment Training Lessons and Observations: 3rd Battalion, 25th Marines, 23Nov05. Hereafter MCCLL Observations. Embedded reporters wrote numerous articles. See, e.g., Ellen Knickmeyer, "Demise of a Hard-Fighting Squad; Marines Who Survived Ambush Become Casualties of Blast," The Washington Post, 12May05, p. A-1. Other principle sources include a lengthy article in Cleveland Magazine on the Haditha ambush and a two-hour documentary for the Arts & Entertainment Networks on Lima Company. Jacqueline Marino, "Blood Brothers," Cleveland Magazine, June 2006, hereafter Blood Brothers; A&E Television Networks, "Combat Diary: The Marines of Lima Company," hereafter Marines of Lima Company.

2. The turnover of Coalition staffs was significant. II Marine Expeditionary Force Forward (II MEF (Fwd)), 2nd Marine Division, and three regimental combat team staffs relieved their I MEF counterparts, many of whom had been in Iraq for more than a year. Subordinate units, including battalions and squadrons, also turned over as part of the scheduled seven-month deployment cycle.

3. Col. Lionel B. Urquhart, memorandum of record of interview by MarForRes, 10Jun06 (Summary in Watters Working Papers, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Urquhart intvw. In addition to the two main bases, Kilo Company provided a platoon for most of the deployment to ASP Dulab, as well as a reinforced squad or even a platoon to the Bronze-Uranium Split, a major road intersection south of Hit.

4. Urquhart intvw.

5. Maj. Steven J. White, Memorandum of record of interview by MarForRes, 14Jun06 (Summary in Watters Working Papers, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter White intvw. Maj. White said Col. Davis believed that the free movement of insurgents along the Western Euphrates River Valley was contributing significantly to the opposition that Coalition forces were encountering in cities like Baghdad, Fallujah, and Ramadi. Maj. White said Col. Davis was committed to showing that aggressive operations between Ramadi and the Syrian border could reduce insurgent activities in central Iraq.

6. UN data indicated that four Anbar cities held most of the population: Ramadi (445,000), Fallujah (425,000), Hit (105,000), and Haditha (75,000). The same data showed Al Qa'im's population was 116,000, but this was spread over several cities like Husaybah and Karabilah along a 10-kilometer stretch of the Euphrates in the al Qa'im region. Except for these population centers, the Anbar Province was sparsely settled. (UN Data in Watters Working Papers, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)

7. John Burns, "Iraq's Ho Chi Minh Trail," The New York Times, 5June05, The Week in Review, p. 1., hereafter Iraq's Ho Chi Minh Trail ("[The Western Euphrates River Valley in the Anbar Province] is the backdrop to one of the most important -- and, so far, undecided -- campaigns of the Iraqi conflict: the American drive to close off insurgent infiltration routes that run into the Iraqi heartland down the Euphrates River corridor. From Husayba on the Syrian frontier through Qaim and the sand-blown towns of Rawa, Haditha, Asad and Hit, onward through Ramadi and Fallujah to Baghdad, the corridor has become the Ho Chi Minh trail of this war. . . . Like the bane of American commanders in Vietnam, the 300-mile stretch of river is not so much a single route as a multi-stranded network of passages, some hewing close to the lush silted landscape of palms and reeds that run along the banks, others crossing vast reaches of stony desert on either side.")

8. Ibid, p. 16. ("American intelligence officers say that trails across the desert used for decades to smuggle herds of sheep and goats, leather hides, car parts, gasoline and sundry other commodities have now been adapted to the insurgents' needs.")

9. See the section in this monograph describing the activities of 1st Battalion, 23rd Marines.

10. Urquhart intvw.

11. Maj. White said Col. Davis warned 3/25's staff that the battalion is, "going to go home tired because we are 'stirring the pot,' here." Paraphrasing Col. Davis' discussion, Maj. White said the 3/25 staff was told: "A lot of the areas around here have not been touched significantly, and we are going to change that. We are going to conduct a series of operations, like clearing, clearing and searching, and interdiction, that will impact the insurgents. We are going to force the enemy to engage us."

12. "Over seven months of operations, the battalion sustained 49 personnel killed-in-action and over 650

wounded-in-action. . . . Almost 50% of the corpsmen in the battalion were awarded Purple Heart medals." MCCLL Observations, p. 7. Many of 3/25's fatalities occurred in large incidents. For example, 14 Marines were killed when an Amtrack was destroyed by an IED near Barwanah on August 3, six snipers were ambushed near Barwanah on August 1, and six Marines were killed when an Amtrack was destroyed by an IED in the Ramana area near the Syrian border on May 11.

13. After their return to the United States, many 3/25 Marines complained that the nation's obsession with the battalion's "casualty count" detracted from the battalion's significant accomplishments. For example, Lance Cpl. Trevor Smith said in the Arts & Entertainment documentary that 3/25 was remembered primarily for its losses, rather than the battalion's combat operations in the Anbar Province. "I just feel like one of the reasons we got all this attention is because a lot of us were killed. . . . I just want people to know about my friends. They were great people. They died in the most horrifying way. . . . I just want them to be remembered for what they did, and not just because they died." Marines of Lima Company, interview with Lance Cpl. Trevor Smith. Operation Sword, in which 3/25 cleared the insurgent-controlled city of Hit and installed two permanent Fixed Operating Bases, was the battalion's most significant accomplishment, but its significance was drowned out by commentary concerning the deaths of so many of its Marines.

14. K 3/25 1 January-1Sept 2005 ComdC, 20Sept05, p. 6.

15. Ibid.

16. Urquhart intvw.

17. 3/25 1 January-30 June 2005 ComdC, 15Aug05, p. 9.

18. Ibid, p. 11, and Urquhart intvw.

19. Details regarding the Haditha Hospital ambush are derived primarily from a lengthy article in Cleveland Magazine, as well as interviews with Sgt. Jeffrey W. Schuller, Cpl Stanley M. Mayer, and LT Richard E. Malmstrom, (battalion chaplain). Blood Brothers; Cpl Jeffrey W. Schuller intvw, 22June06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Schuller intvw; Cpl Stanley M. Mayer intvw, 22June06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Mayer intvw; LT Richard E. Malmstrom, USN, intvw, 21June06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Malmstrom intvw. See also, 3/25 1 January-30 June 2005 ComdC, 15Aug05, p. 8 ("MAP 7 of Weapons Company and a section from 1st Platoon, Company A, 1st Tanks was ambushed in Hadithah by insurgents with a suicide, vehicle-borne, improvised explosive device, small arms fire and RPGs") and pp. 9-10 (listing one corpsman and three Marines killed in the ambush).

20. Schuller intvw, Mayer intvw.

21. Schuller intvw. Sgt. Schuller said that while there were some insurgent positions outside the hospital, most of the insurgent fire came from inside the hospital or on its grounds.

22. For their actions in response to this ambush, Lance Cpl. Corbin received a Navy Cross and Sgt. Schuller received a Silver Star. The medals were awarded on July 4, 2006 at the Cleveland Indians baseball game. Tasha Flournoy, "Local Marines Honored at Indians Game," The Plain Dealer (Cleveland, Ohio), 5Jul06. ("The battalion lost [three Marines and one sailor], but witnesses said the toll would have been much worse without the bravery of Corbin and Schuller. . . . Under intense fire, the pair helped protect wounded comrades, hauled them into the vehicles and drove them back to the base for treatment.")

23. Note that the Euphrates River is east-west in this section of the Anbar Province, so the author refers to its banks as the north or south sides. In the Hit-Haditha corridor, the river runs more north-south, so the banks are referred to as the east and west sides at that part of the Euphrates River.

24. Lt. Col. Timothy S. Mundy, memorandum of record of interview by MarForRes, 19Jun06 (Summary in Watters Working Papers, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Mundy intvw.

25. Ibid.

26. The engineer unit was the U.S. Army's 814th Multi-Role Bridge Company.

27. Ibid. See also, 1stLt Paul L. Croom II, "Wages of War," San Diego Magazine, March 2006. ("In planning for Operation Matador, the timeline for bridge completion was a short one. However, because of the softness of the banks on both sides of the river, the bridge was not complete even 16 hours after we arrived.") Hereafter Wages of War.

28. Sgt. Maj. Dan N. Altieri intvw, 22June06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Altieri intvw.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

31. Ellen Knickmeyer, "'They Came Here to Die'; Insurgents Hiding Under House in Western Iraq Prove Fierce in Hours-Long Fight With Marines," The Washington Post, 11May05, p. A-1. ("When the Marines entered a final time, the daylight finally showed them where the bullets had come from: the floor beneath their feet. The insurgents had lain faceup on the ground below, with barely enough room to point their weapons upward, Marines said. They simply blasted through the floor.")

32. Marines of Lima Company, description of action

by Sgt. Samuel E. Balla, squad leader for 1st Squad, 1st Platoon.

33. Ibid, description of action by Lance Cpl. Mark Camp.

34. The Washington Post, 11May05, p. A-1.

35. Altieri intvw.

36. Ibid.

37. The Washington Post, 11May05, p. A-1.

38. Ibid. ("The costly equipment, as well as body armor later recovered from the bodies of dead insurgents, suggested that the fighters were foreigners, the military said. Though the level of foreigners' involvement in the insurgency has been disputed for nearly two years, Muslim men have come to Iraq from neighboring countries such as Saudi Arabia and from as far away as Chechnya and Indonesia to fight the United States and its allies.")

39. Altieri intvw. Shortly after Operation Matador, the kidnapped governor of the Anbar Province was killed during a gunfight between insurgents and Americans in the Ramana area. The seven insurgents who were killed or captured were from Algeria, Jordan, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Syria. Iraq's Ho Chi Minh Trail, The New York Times, 5June05, p. 1.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid.

42. Mundy intvw.

43. Ellen Knickmeyer, "Demise of a Hard-Fighting Squad; Marines Who Survived Ambush Become Casualties of Blast," The Washington Post, 12May05, p. A-1. Wages of War, pp. 197-198.

44. The Washington Post, 12May05, p. A-1. ("In 96 hours of fighting and ambushes in far western Iraq, the squad had ceased to be."). Wages of War, pp. 197-198. ("All told, over those fateful four days, 1st Squad, 1st Platoon . . . and the AAV crew that was supporting them, sustained 21 casualties — eight killed and 13 wounded.")

45. Mundy intvw, Urquhart intvw.

46. Mundy intvw.

47. Altieri intvw.

48. Maj. Billy Brown intvw, 23June06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Brown intvw.

49. Altieri intvw.

50. Brown intvw, Altieri intvw.

51. Altieri intvw.

52. Sgt. Wimberg was awarded a Silver Star, posthumously, for his efforts in Haditha that morning. Marine Corps Times, 21Aug06, p. 10.

53. Marines of Lima Company, interview with Cpl. Allen Payne.

54. Ibid.

55. Urquhart intvw.

56. Ibid. Col. Urquhart said that before River Sweep, insurgents had not felt compelled to hide weapons caches well on the east side of the Euphrates because Coalition forces had not swept the area in some time. Therefore, there were many caches on the east side, and many were relatively easy to locate. Col. Urquhart said River Sweep was one of the battalion's most successful operations.

57. Cpl. Stefan J. Whiteway intvw, 22June06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Whiteway intvw.

58. Ibid.

59. The size of some weapons caches and bunkers in Iraq is staggering. In June 2005, Marines found an underground bunker system built into a quarry near Fallujah that measured approximately 900 feet by 550 feet. Edward Wong, "U.S. Uncovers Vast Hide-Out Of Iraqi Rebels," The New York Times, 5June05, p.1 and 14.

60. Mundy intvw.

61. Ibid.

62. Ibid.

63. Ibid.

64. Ibid. ("indisputable evidence of the existence of foreign fighters").

65. White intvw. ("Before we went into Hit, it was sort of the 'Badlands,' a place you wanted to avoid," Maj. White said. "We rarely went in there, and we were not sure what we would get involved in when we went there.")

66. Urquhart intvw.

67. A partial Order of Battle for Task Force 3/25 for Operation Sword is contained in the memorandum of record from the interview of the battalion's operations officer, Maj. White. The major units included: Lima Company, Kilo Company, and portions of Weapons Company from 3/25; Bravo Company of 2nd LAR Battalion, Charlie Company (a mechanized company) of the U.S. Army's 9th Infantry Battalion, and one Iraqi Army company.

68. Ibid.

69. Ibid, and White intvw.

70. White intvw. An important planning factor for Operation Sword was collecting sufficient barriers to allow the task force to protect the two FOBs.

71. K 3/25 1 January-1Sept 2005 ComdC, 20Sept05, p. 12.

72. Lance Cpl. Nicholas M. Johnson intvw, 22June06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Johnson intvw.

73. Ibid.

74. Sgt. Franklyn G. Metz III intvw, 22June06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Metz intvw.

75. K 3/25 1 January-1Sept 2005 ComdC, 20Sept05, p.

12.

76. Marines of Lima Company, description of action by Gunnery Sgt. Shawn Delgado. Sgt. Guy A. Zierk intvw, 23June06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Zierk intvw.

77. Brown intvw.

78. Ibid.

79. Ibid.

80. Marines of Lima Company, interview with Cpl Allen Payne.

81. Brown intvw.

82. Ibid.

83. 3/25 1-31 August 2005 ComdC, 1Sept05, pp. 6-7.

84. Marines of Lima Company, description of action by Gunnery Sgt. Shawn Delgado.

85. 3/25 1-31 August 2005 ComdC, 1Sept05, pp. 6.

86. Cpl Thomas A. Maniccia intvw, 22June06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Maniccia intvw.

87. Ibid.

88. Maniccia intvw and 3/25 1-31 August 2005 ComdC, 1Sept05, pp. 7.

89. Maniccia intvw.

90. Ibid.

91. Mundy intvw.

92. Urquhart intvw.

93. The fact that this area was heavily occupied by insurgents was demonstrated during Operation Outer Banks, when Lima Company fought a large enemy force near the Barwanah Bridge from 1-4 April, killing approximately 48 insurgents. Maj. Stephen A. Lawson, "Re: MarForRes Operational History." E-mail to author, 15Aug06, hereafter Lawson e-mail.

94. Marines of Lima Company, description of action by Maj. Stephen A. Lawson.

95. Ibid.

96. Lawson e-mail.

97. This command detonated IED had been emplaced in a much more sophisticated way than usually encountered. A subsequent investigation showed that insurgents had removed a large section of the asphalt road, emplaced the IED, and then repaved that section of the road. It was estimated that this work would require several days. Lawson e-mail.

98. 3/25 1-31 August 2005 ComdC, 1Sept05, pp. 7. John Kifner and James Dao, "Death Visits a Marine Unit, Once Called Lucky," The New York Times, 7Aug05, p. 1.

99. Altieri intvw.

100. Urquhart intvw.

1/25

1. For a detailed account of the 2004 battles for Fallujah and the politics involved with various military decisions, see, e.g., Bing West, No True Glory: A Frontline Account of the Battle for Fallujah (New York: Bantam, 2005), hereafter West, No True Glory.

2. The Marine Corps War Memorial, located near the Arlington National Cemetery in Rosslyn, Virginia, is dedicated to Marines who have died in defense of their country since 1775.

3. See, e.g., Robert F. Worth, "Clues on Hostages Emerge From Houses in Fallujah," The New York Times, 22Nov04, p.1. ("American and Iraqi government officials have long said that Fallujah was a center of the Iraqi insurgency.")

4. Ibid.

5. For a discussion of political and military factors that influenced the decision to allow the Fallujah Brigade to take control of Fallujah, see Thomas E. Ricks, Fiasco (New York: The Penguin Press, 2006), pp. 344-345.

7. Lt. Col. Christopher A. Landro intvw, 24Oct06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Landro intvw.

8. Ann Scott Tyson, "Increased Security in Fallujah Slows Efforts to Rebuild," The Washington Post, 19Apr05, p. A15.

9. Sgt. Maj. Bradley E. Trudell intvw, 24Oct06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Trudell intvw.

10. Sgt. Timothy G. Whittmer intvw, 23Oct06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Wittmer intvw.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. UN data estimated the pre-war population of Fallujah at 425,000. (UN Data in Watters Working Papers, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)

14. Richard A. Oppel Jr., "Fallujans in Flight: Transit Camps Are Not Much Safer Than Siege They Left," The New York Times, 18Nov06. The reporter notes that approximately 100,000 Fallujans fled to Amiriya, 12 miles south of Fallujah and 30,000 went to Baghdad, while other cities took in 10,000-20,000 Fallujans. Ibid.

15. Maj. Gen. Richard S. Kramlich and Col. Tracy L. Mork, "Battlefield Logistics Support, 1st FSSG's expeditionary logistics capability was key to the MEF's Success in the Battle of Fallujah," Marine Corps Gazette, July 2005, p. 25-27.

16. Ann Scott Tyson, "Increased Security in Fallujah Slows Efforts to Rebuild," The Washington Post, 19Apr05,

p. A15.

17. Landro intvw.

18. Ibid.

19. Gen Charles C. Krulak, "The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three Block War," Marines Magazine, January 1999, hereafter Krulak, Strategic Corporal. Acknowledging the complex nature of modern military efforts, Gen Krulak anticipated that Marines would be seeing more operations that mix "military operations other-than-war" with "middle-intensity conflicts." Borrowing the Marine Corps' term, "The Three Block War," Gen Krulak said future Marines will face the entire spectrum of tactical challenges, from conducting major combat and Security and Stabilization Operations to dealing with the media and government officials. The term comes from the fact that Marines may face this disparate challenges over the course of only a few hours and within the confines of three contiguous city blocks.

20. Trudell intvw.

21. Landro intvw.

22. CWO-3 James L. Bailey intvw, 23Oct06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Bailey intvw. CWO-3 Bailey was the OIC of a five-vehicle personal security detachment for the battalion commander. Lt. Col. Landro and Sgt. Maj. Trudell typically traveled together, and CWO-3 Bailey said the commander's intent was to patrol Fallujah frequently, providing the battalion with the firepower of an additional Mobile Assault Platoon and the response time of a Quick Reaction Force. Ibid.

23. Landro intvw.

24. See Krulak, Strategic Corporal. ("Success or failure will rest, increasingly, with the rifleman and with his ability to make the right decision at the right time at the point of contact. . . . [T]oday's Marines will often operate far "from the flagpole" without the direct supervision of senior leadership. . . . In order to succeed under such demanding conditions they will require unwavering maturity, judgment, and strength of character. Most importantly, these missions will require them to confidently make well-reasoned and independent decisions under extreme stress -- decisions that will likely be subject to the harsh scrutiny of both the media and the court of public opinion. In many cases, the individual Marine will be the most conspicuous symbol of American foreign policy and will potentially influence not only the immediate tactical situation, but the operational and strategic levels as well. His actions, therefore, will directly impact the outcome of the larger operation; and he will become, as the title of this article suggests – the Strategic Corporal.")

25. Ibid.

26. Sgt. Matthew J. Fenton was seriously injured by an IED on April 26, and subsequently died at Bethesda Naval Hospital on May 5. Capt. Brian Letendre, a member of the Inspector-Instructor staff that supported 1/25, was killed May 3, 2006 in Ramadi during an attack on an observation point. Although part of 1/25, Capt. Letendre had been assigned to an 11-Marine team serving as advisors to an Iraqi infantry battalion in Ramadi. E-mail from CWO-2 Jason Forgash to his wife, Maria Forgash, 8May06. (Copy in Watters Working Papers, MCHC, Washington, D.C.) Cpl. Paul "Nick" King was killed by a sniper on June 25.

27. Staff Sgt. Michael S. Maslauskas intvw, 24Oct06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Maslauskas intvw.

28. Maj. Raymond L. Adams intvw, 24Oct06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Adams intvw.

29. John F. Burns, "Iraq to release detainees in bid to ease tensions," the New York Times, 7Jun07, P. 1. Dexter Filkins, "Iraq Starts to Release Detainees in Gesture," The New York Times, 8Jun06, p. 6.

30. Ibid.

31. Lt. Col. Landro estimated the number of released prisoners in Fallujah between 1,800 and 2,200. Landro intvw. Other 1/25 Marines agreed with that estimate.

32. See, e.g., Landro intvw and Ward intvw.

33. Landro intvw.

34. Andy Mosher, "Al-Qaeda in Iraq Vows to Retake City: Insurgents Set Sights On Fallujah," The Washington Post, 4Aug06, p. A10.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid. An Iraqi police captain said Fallujah's leaders took the threat seriously because of recent assassinations of two religious leaders and one tribal leader. Ibid.

37. Details of the sniper attack are from interviews with Staff Sgt. Maslauskas, Maj. Ward, and Maj. Adams.

38. Maj. Armando Acosta intvw, 23Oct06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Acosta intvw.

39. Ibid.

40. CNN.com, "Blast kills 8 at soccer match; more bodies in Baghdad," 15Sept06 (Copy in Watters Working Papers, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).

41. Ward intvw.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.

44. Maj. Brian T. Hofmann intvw, 24Oct06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Hofmann intvw.

45. Ibid.

46. B Co report dtd 16 Aug 2006

47. Cpl Brian Reimers, USMC, "Saved by Kevlar:

Marine Takes Headshot, Walks Away," Marines, Jun06, p.

14th Marines

1. 14th Marines 2004 ComdC, 23 Feb 05, p. 7. This number dropped after batteries from 14th Marines were deactivated or transferred in 2005 and 2007.

2. Col. Paul J. O'Leary intvw, 17Aug06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter O'Leary intvw. The fact that the GWOT did not demand many firing batteries was evidenced by the fact that 14th Marines amended its mission in 2006 to include an "on order" mission to conduct Civil-Military Operations if needed.

3. Semper Gumby was added to the Marine lexicon during Desert Storm, when "hurry up and wait" became a fact of life. "Semper Gumby" translates loosely as "Always Flexible." It is based on the animated clay television figure known as Gumby, which is constantly remolded.

4. 14th Marines Summary of Action for proposed Meritorious Unit Commendation, 28Apr06, hereafter MUC Summary. The deployment figures were updated by the Regiment's adjutant, Capt. Matthew D. Reis. Capt. Matthew D. Reis, "Re: MarForRes Operational History." E-mail to author, 22Aug06. ("By March 2007, all of the [battalions] within 14th Marines will have been deployed in support of GWOT. (2/14 wasn't tasked to go as a BN, but it has sent every battery.)")

5. MUC summary.

6. 14th Marines 2004 ComdC, 23 Feb 05, and 2005 ComdC, 30 Jan 06. O'Leary intvw.

7. Sgt. Maj. Bobby L. Allen intvw, 17Aug06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Allen intvw.

8. In 2005, the Marine Corps changed the names of its four Force Service Support Groups to Marine Logistics Groups.

9. Many of the statistics for this section come from 14th Marines' MUC Summary.

10. MUC Summary, p. 3.

11. 4/14 2004 ComdC, 17Dec04 and 2005 ComdC, 12Nov05.

12. While 4/14 was deployed, 14th Marines learned that the Marine Corps' Force Structure Review Group was planning to deactivate 4th Battalion within months of its return. Two batteries, Kilo and Mike, were transferred to other 14th Marine battalions (2nd and 3rd Battalions, respectively), while Headquarters Battery and Lima Battery were deactivated and then immediately reactivated as the headquarters of a new infantry-based battalion, the 4th Anti-Terrorism Battalion. MUC nomination summary. A similar fate befell 1/14 upon its return in September 2006. Col. O'Leary said that 1/14's Headquarters Battery and Bravo Battery became reconnaissance companies and Alpha Battery moved to 5/14, while Charlie Battery was deactivated. O'Leary intvw.

13. 2/14 2004 ComdC, 1Jan05 and 2005 ComdC, 1Jan05 (sic).

14. The account of 3/25's work in the Hit-Haditha area is described elsewhere in this volume.

15. MUC Summary.

16. D 2/14 2005 ComdC, 31Dec05, p. 3.

17. Lt. Col. John C. Hemmerling intvw, 10Aug06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Hemmerling intvw.

18. 5/14's Papa Battery had deployed to Iraq the previous year, so 14th Marines substituted 1/14's Charlie Battery for Papa Battery in this rotation. MUC nomination summary and 5/14 2005 ComdC 1Dec05, pp. 9-10

19. 5/14 2005 ComdC 1Dec05, p. 6.

20. Ibid, p.7.

21. 2nd MP Bn 1Jul05-31Dec05 ComdC 8Feb06, p. 9.

22. Capt. David C. Hyman, 28Aug06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Hyman intvw.

23. Ibid.

24. Headquarters Company and MP Company also provided detachments to al Asad. 5/14 2005 ComdC 1Dec05, p 20.

25. The compound was named for Sgt. Andrew K. Farrar Jr., an active duty MP who was electrocuted on Jan. 28, 2005 when he came in contact with a power line during a raid in Fallujah.

26. Hemmerling intvw.

27. 5/14 2005 ComdC 1Dec05, p. 23 (labeled p. 2-18).

28. Undated nomination for Combat Action Ribbons for members of 3rd Platoon of MP Company, hereafter CAR nomination.

29. Ibid.

30. FOB Kalsu was a Marine base near the "Triangle of Death," approximately 35 kilometers south of Baghdad. The distance between al Qa'im and FOB Kalsu was more than 330 kilometers.

31. In 2003, the Abu Ghraib prison, located approximately 45 kilometers west of Baghdad, became known as the site of mistreatment of Iraqi prisoners by Reserve U.S. Army MPs.

32. Maj. Trevor D. Devine intvw, 10Aug06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Devine intvw.

33. Ibid.

34. O'Leary intvw.

35. Allen intvw.

36. O'Leary intvw.

37. Ibid.

38. MUC Summary.
39. Ibid.

HMLA-775

1. Thomas E. Ricks, Fiasco (New York: The Penguin Press, 2006), p. 330-35, hereafter Ricks, Fiasco. ("The enemy was better prepared than the Marines had been told to expect." Ibid, p. 333.) In his summary of events leading to Fallujah I, Ricks noted that the Army felt constrained not to patrol aggressively into Fallujah, while the Marine Corps' perspective was different. Within days, he wrote, Marine patrols engaged in firefights that stirred up the city and left at least 15 Iraqis dead. A few days later, the Blackwater contractors were ambushed. Ibid, p. 330-31.

2. LtGen John Conway, I MEF Commander, said his plan was to allow Fallujah to calm down before his Marines attacked in a methodical fashion. He said I MEF ordered the immediate response only after it was ordered to do so by Army LTG Ricardo Sanchez, the commander of U.S. forces in Iraq. The I MEF Chief of Staff, Col. John C. Coleman, was quoted in the same article as saying that senior Marines did not anticipate the difficulties they would encounter in Fallujah. "I'm not sure we fully understood the hardness of the city, the harshness of the elements operating inside."

3. Lt. Col. Bruce S. Orner intvw, 9Sept06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Orner intvw.

4. MAG-46 2004 ComdC, 10Feb05, p. 6.

5. Orner intvw.

6. Maj. Michael P. Kane award citation, undated (RefSec, MCHC, Washington, D.C.)

7. Ibid.

8. Lt. Col. Steven L. Held intvw, 9Sept06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Held intvw.

9. The "cyclic" is a helicopter control that governs the pitch and bank attitudes. In a Cobra, both pilots have cyclics that are connected to each other. In this case, when the AK-47 round hit the cyclic, it caused the helicopter to jump to one side. The round snapped Maj. Lasso's cyclic, but Lt. Col. DiTullio was able to regain control with his cyclic.

10. Lt. Col. Peter DiTullio intvw, 10Sept06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter DiTullio intvw.

11. Ibid.

12. See, e.g., Ricks, Fiasco, pp. 330-35, and Rajiv Chandrasekaran, "Key General Criticizes April Attack In Fallujah," Washington Post, 13Sept04, p. A-17.

13. Orner intvw.

14. Ricks, Fiasco, p. 342. The author wrote that Maj. Gen. Mattis, commander of 1st Marine Division, was "furious" with this decision. Col. John Toolan, commander of 7th Marines, said that the Division Commander could not understand why he had been ordered to stop. Ibid.

15. Coalition forces and the CIA helped form the Fallujah Brigade in an attempt to impose order on the city, but the brigade was disbanded after only a few months. Marines later said that the 800 AK-47s, 27 trucks, and 50 radios provided the brigade were given to the insurgents, and Marines were fired on at one point by gunmen wearing Fallujah Brigade uniforms. Ibid, p. 344-45. See also, U.S. Central Command News Release, "1st Battalion of the Fallujah Brigade to have a Role in Fallujah's Security," 30Apr04. (Copy in Watters Working Papers, MCHC, Washington, D.C.) (Noting that I MEF was overseeing the formation of the Fallujah Brigade.)

16. See, e.g., Ricks, Fiasco, pp. 330-335 and Bing West, No True Glory: A Frontline Account of the Battle for Fallujah (New York: Bantam, 2005).

17. Staff Sgt. Allison R. Roseborough, 10Sept06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Roseborough intvw.

18. MAG-46 2004 ComdC, 10Feb05, p. 6.

19. Held intvw.

20. The base was called Korean Village because it once housed Korean laborers who help build the highway linking Amman, Jordan to Baghdad.

21. Autorotation is a helicopter maneuver that allows a pilot to trade altitude for control in a descent caused by engine failure. The pilot effectively gives up altitude in exchange for energy that allows the rotor blade to turn at a rate that stabilizes the aircraft and allows the pilot to cushion the touchdown. While it is a complicated maneuver, it is one that helicopter pilots practice frequently.

22. The collective is a helicopter control that determines the pitch of the main rotor blade.

23. Held intvw.

24. HMLA-775 2004 ComdC, 31Dec04, p. 16, and Katie Nelson, "Vermont Marine killed in Iraq attack: Helicopter pilot loved his career," The Boston Globe, 31Jul04.

25. Maj. Joseph Crane, Diary, 28Jul04, (Copy in Watters Working Papers, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Crane Diary.

26. Roseborough intvw.

27. Sgt. Nathan K. LaForte, "Marines dedicate Al Taqaddum airfield to fallen aviator," USMC Story Identification #200482772511, 22Aug04.

28. HMLA-775 2005 ComdC, 1Feb06, p. 9.

29. For a description of the initial ambush, see Sharon Behn, "Attacks hit vital security in Iraq," The Washington Times, 23May05. Insurgents killed 12 of 18 international

and Iraqi convoy guards employed by Hart Security Ltd. and assigned to the convoy, then stacked some of the corpses on a large bomb.

30. Maj. Brian M. Kennedy award citation, 2005 (RefSec, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).

31. K 3/25 1 January-1Sept 2005 ComdC, 20Sept05, p. 9.

HMM-764 and HMM-774

1. Col. Stephen T. Ganyard intvw, 12Sept06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Ganyard intvw. Col. Ganyard succeeded Col. Marshall as Commanding Officer of MAG 46 in 2005.

2. Col. Jeffrey L. Marshall intvw, 4Oct06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Marshall intvw.

3. Ibid.

4. Lt. Col. Clark A. Taylor intvw, 11Sept05 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Taylor intvw.

5. Ibid.

6. Lt. Col. Jacques C. Naviaux II intvw, 10Sept05 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Naviaux intvw.

7. Ibid.

8. MAG 46 2004 ComdC, 10Feb05, p. 6.

9. Sgt. Shanahan Nelson and Sgt. Shawn Blalock intvw, 11Sept05 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Nelson-Blalock intvw.

10. Ibid.

11. HMM-764 2004 ComdC, 25Jan04(sic), p. 6.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid, p. 9.

14. Ibid, p. 12.

15. "Groundhog Day" is a 1993 movie in which the protagonist finds himself in a fictitious "time loop," in which his dreaded Groundhog Day keeps repeating itself.

16. Ibid.

17. Naviaux intvw.

18. Naviaux intvw, and HMM-764 2004 ComdC, 25Jan04(sic). For a more complete description of Operation River Blitz, see the section of this book dealing with 3rd Battalion, 25th Marines.

VMGR-452

1. This background information came from VMGR-452's web site. A copy of the information, which is a brief recent history of VMGR-452, is in the author's Working Papers, MCHC, Washington, D.C.

2. Staff Sgt. John C. DiDomenico, "VMGR-452 delivers POWs to freedom," Marine Corps News, 13Apr03.

3. VMGR-452 2004 ComdC, 31Jan05, p. 4.

4. Lt. Col. James essentially took a composite detachment that included Marines from VMGR-452 and VMGR-352. This included four KC-130T aircraft and more than 100 Marines from VMGR-452 and two KC-130F/R aircraft and 49 Marines from the active duty VMGR-352. VMGR-452 2004 ComdC, 31Jan05, p. 5.

5. Lt. Col. Bradley S. James intvw, 17Nov06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter James intvw.

6. GPS stands for "Global Positioning System," a satellite-based navigation system.

7. For details on the Sherpa Chute, see Staff Sgt. Bill Lisbon, "GPS-guided cargo chutes touchdown after first combat drop in Iraq," Marine Corps News, 16Aug04.

8. James intvw.

9. While the term "Angel" can be used to refer to the remains of any service member being transported by aircraft, Lt. Col. James is using it to refer to the remains of a Coalition service member killed in Iraq.

10. The squadron's Command Chronology described the Convoy Security- Radio Relay mission as "long and usually quite uneventful," it noted that the aircrews appreciated the fact that their aircraft were providing a significant element of security to "many I MEF convoys that were always in imminent danger of enemy attacks." VMGR-452 2004 ComdC, 31Jan05, pp. 5-6.

11. James intvw.

12. While two weeks of surge operations to support Operation al Fajr boosted the squadron's statistics, VMGR-452 maintained a constant workload throughout the deployment. "For the month of November, the squadron again set a KC-130 OIF-II record when it flew 341 sorties, logged 864.9 flight hours, transported 1,273,150 pounds of cargo and 1,980 personnel, and offloaded 4,324,300 pounds of fuel to 502 receivers. During the period from 1 September through 31 December, VMGR-452(-)(REIN) flew 1,049 sorties, logged 2,317.3 hours, offloaded 7,665,600 pounds of fuel to 843 aircraft, airdropped 340,000 pounds of supplies, and transported 7,542 personnel and 4,524,033 pounds of cargo." VMGR-452 2004 ComdC, 31Jan05, p. 6.

13. James intvw.

14. James B. Hoke, "GPS-Guided Sherpas Provide Safer Supply Drop," Marine Corps News, 26Apr06.

15. James intvw.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

VMFA-112

1. VMFA-112 2004 ComdC, 18Jan05, pp. 6-7.
2. Lt. Col. Steven M. Roepke intvw, 3Oct06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Roepke intvw.
3. Ibid.
4. VMFA-112 2004 ComdC, 18Jan05, pp. 6-7.
5. W.G. Ford, "'Cowboys' Tame the Far East," The Marine Corps Gazette, Oct04, p.26.
6. VMFA-112 2004 ComdC, 18Jan05, p. 6.
7. Roepke intvw.
8. Ibid.

VMFA 142

1. Maj. Robert A. Peterson intvw, 14Octt06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Peterson intvw.
2. Ibid
3. Lt. Col. Iimes was the Commanding Officer of VMFA-242. This bombing occurred during a turnover flight between pilots from the active duty VMFA-242 to the Reserve VMFA-142.
4. Ibid.
5. Cpl C. Alex Herron, "Gators deploy into history," [[MarCor News Service 20055341326]] 18Mar2005.
6. The squadron expended the following ordinance during its deployment: 10 JDAMs, 16 LGBs, 100 LGTRs, 90 MK-82, 61 MK-83, 3 MK-84, 400 2.75" Rockets, 200 5" Rockets, and 2,200 20mm Rounds. VMFA-142 2005 ComdC, dtd 19Jan06, p. 5.
7. The LITENING pod contains a high-resolution forward-looking infrared (FLIR) sensor that significantly enhances the F-18's ability to attack ground targets at night and in adverse weather conditions.
8. Peterson intvw.
9. Lt. Col. J.A. Baumert intvw, 14Octt06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Baumert intvw.
10. Maj. Eric D. Klepper intvw, 14Octt06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Klepper intvw.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Peterson intvw.
15. MSgt Steven M. King Peterson, 14Octt06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter King intvw.
16. Lt. Col. Dwight Schmidt, 14Octt06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Schmidt intvw.
17. See fn 7 supra and the accompanying text.
18. VMFA-142 2005 ComdC, dtd 19Jan06, p. 5.
19. King intvw.
20. Ibid.
21. Cpl Andrew W. Bedford, 14Octt06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Bedford intvw.
22. Ibid.

HMH-769

1. Sgt. Timothy D. Reed intvw, 11Sept06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Reed intvw.
2. Ibid.
3. HMH-769 2004 ComdC, dtd 31Jan04 (sic), p. 8.
4. BBC's Weather Service states that the months of April through October are the hottest months in Afghanistan, with "discomfort due to heat and humidity" ranging from moderate to high.
5. Sgt. Frank Magni, U.S. Army, "Marines Do Heavy Lifting for Coalition in Afghanistan," American Forces Press Service, 8Nov04.
6. Col. Rick D. Mullen intvw, 11Sept06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Mullen intvw.
7. Center for Defense Information, Action Update: July 5-18, 2004, dtd 21Jul04.
8. The 200 nautical mile distance between Bagram and Chaghcharan approached the limit of how far a CH-53 could fly without refueling. Mullen intvw. Lt. Col. Mullen also noted that no other helicopter had the range or speed to escort the section of CH-53s that morning, so its escort was a B-1 bomber. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. HMH-769 2004 ComdC, dtd 31Jan04 (sic), p. 5.
12. Mullen intvw.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid, and Cpl Dominick S. Castro II intvw, 11Sept06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Castro intvw.
15. Mullen intvw. The precipitous drop in the speed of the rotor blade indicated that the helicopter's lift was not sufficient for the load. Ibid.
16. Castro intvw.
17. Ibid.
18. Mullen intvw, and HMH-769 2004 ComdC, dtd 31Jan04 (sic), p. 7.
19. HMH-769 2004 ComdC, dtd 31Jan04 (sic),
20. Ibid,
21. Col. David Lamm, "The Right Strategy: Success in Afghanistan Means Fighting Several Wars at Once," Armed Forces Journal International, Nov05. With Coalition assistance, Lamm writes, Afghan National Army soldiers

stripped Provincial Governor Ismael Khan's militia of its heavy weapons, ending the fight between warring militias. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

HMLA-773

1. Cpl M. Cory Wargofcak intvw, 10Sept05 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Wargofcak intvw.

2. Maj. Raymond Mederos intvw, 10Sept05 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Mederos intvw.

3. Ibid.

4. The squadron originally took six Cobras and three Hueys, but added one of each during the first rotation. Mederos intvw.

5. Ibid.

6. Maj. Raymond Mederos award citation, 31Jan05 (RefSec, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).

7. HMLA-773 2005 ComdC, 30Jan06, p. 6.

8. Maj. Jay D. Borella award citation, 19Sept05 (RefSec, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).

9. Lt. Col. Dan C. Nestor intvw, 10Sept05 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Nestor intvw.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

4th MLG

1. BGen Eugene G. Payne intvw, 14Sept06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Payne intvw.

2. Ibid.

3. Col. Gregg L. Moore intvw, 17May08 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Moore intvw.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Col. Tracy L. Mork served as Chief of Staff for 1st MLG while it was preparing for Operation Al Fajr in Fallujah in the fall of 2004. Lt. Col. Thomas said that he served as the MLG's G-4, while two other Reserves from 4th Marine Logistics Group Forward-West served as the Group's G-1 and G-3. "You couldn't swing a cat in the headquarters without hitting a Reserve," Lt. Col. Thomas said.

8. Lt. Col. Erick P. Thomas intvw, 13Sept06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Thomas intvw.

9. MajGen Richard S. Kramlich and Col. Tracy L. Mork, "Battlefield Logistics Support," Marine Corps Gazette, Jul05, pp. 25-27.

10. Thomas intvw.

11. Ibid.

12. Maj. Patrick Sweeny intvw, 17May08 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Sweeny intvw.

13. Undated Summary of Action relating to CSSC-113's mobilization (hereinafter CSSC-113 Summary of Action), prepared by Maj. Sweeny.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

18. Undated report, titled WIA and KIA report and hereinafter referred to as "WIA and KIA report," provided to author by Maj. Sweeny. A copy is in the author's working papers.

19. Ibid.

20. CSSC-113 Summary of Action.

21. WIA and KIA report.

22. CSSC-113 Summary of Action.

23. Maj. Mark C. Boone intvw, 16May08 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Boone intvw.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. For example, one PRP Marine, Sgt. Daniel Cotnoir, crawled into the burned-out hulk of a Light Armored Vehicle to recover the remains of a Marine who had been trapped inside the wreckage. See, e.g., Marine Corps Times, July 2005, issue naming Sgt. Cotnoir as its Marine of the Year.

34. Sgt. Susannah F. Wood intvw, 18Jul06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Wood intvw.

35. Ibid.

36. Payne intvw.

The Last Journey

1. Statement of LtGen Jack W. Bergman, Commanding General, Marine Forces Reserve, to the Senate Armed Services Committee Personnel Subcommittee-Reserve

Matters, 30Mar2006.

2. Ibid.

3. Lt. Col. Jacques C. Naviaux II intvw, 10Sept05 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Naviaux intvw.

4. Ibid.

5. E-mail letter from Lt. Col. Naviaux to relatives and friends of HMM-764, 24May05 (copy in Watters Working Papers, MCHC, Washington, D.C.).

6. See, Marine Corps Times, July 2005, Marine of the Year article and accompanying citation.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. For a detailed description of one Notification Officer's experience, see Jim Sheeler, "Final Salute," Rocky Mountain News, pp. 1-24 (special section). Reporter Jim Sheeler was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for feature writing for the article, and the photographer, Todd Heisler, was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for feature photography. See, Final Salute: A Story of Unfinished Lives (New York, N.Y., Penguin Press 2008).

11. Maj. Kirk A. Greiner intvw, 22Jun06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Greiner intvw.

12. Greiner intvw.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid. Maj. Greiner noted that because the parents of many of the fallen Marines were separated or divorced, Notification Officers often had to provide casualty information to two households.

15. Marine Corps Order P3040.4E, Marine Corps Casualty Procedures Manual, 27Feb03, P 4-18 ("The following is suggested and may be modified as appropriate:")

16. Greiner intvw.

17. The Personal Casualty Report (PCR) is an electronic message that contains reporting information. It is the primary source of information used to inform a Marine's family of the Marine's status. Ibid, p. 1-10.

18. See, e.g., fn 10, supra, and accompanying text.

19. Lt. Col. Christopher A. Landro intvw, 24Oct065 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Landro intvw.

20. See also, Sgt. Maj. Bradley E. Trudell intvw, 24Oct06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Trudell intvw.

21. Landro intvw.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

24. Maj. Brian T. Hofmann intvw, 24Oct06 (Oral HistColl, MCHC, Washington, D.C.), hereafter Hofmann intvw.

25. Ibid.

26. See, e.g., Ken Byron and Jesse Hamilton, "Captain Mourned Like A Native Son," Hartford (CT) Courant, 6May06, p. A-1.

27. Capt. Letendre had volunteered for the deployment, even though his duties as Inspector-Instructor of Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 25th Marines in Plainville, Connecticut, would have allowed him to remain in the United States. His family, in a statement prepared shortly after his death, said, "Brian just didn't feel right being back here in the U.S. while other Marines were serving overseas, and wanted to get back to the front lines as soon as he could." While serving in Connecticut, Capt. Letendre was the Notification Officer for the parents of Lance Cpl. Lawrence Philippon of West Hartford, Connecticut. Lance Cpl.. Philippon's mother, Leesa Philippon, said that Capt. Letendre demonstrated a level of care and compassion that brought light to a very difficult time in her life. See, "Cup's Visit Honors Son's Memory," Hartford (CT) Courant, 16Aug06, p. D-1.

28. Landro intvw, Trudell intvw, and Hofmann intvw.

29. Landro intvw.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.