

Executive Summary
of
Chronicle of the Combat Actions at An Nasiriyah
(22 Mar - 2 Apr)

Overview: TF Tarawa conducted combat operations in An Nasiriyah from 23 Mar until it departed Iraq. The preponderance of the combat occurred during the period of 23 Mar-2 Apr 03. I MEF assigned TF Tarawa the task to BPT secure the eastern bridges of An Nasiriyah IOT support a rapid advance of the I MEF main effort (I MEF Basic OPORD). TF Tarawa maintained this as an on order mission in its Basic OPORD as did the RCT. This operation not only achieved this mission, but also rescued soldiers from the 507th Maintenance Company, supported the rescue of an American POW and gained control of a critical piece of terrain. Control of An Nasiriyah provided flexibility to the MEF for force projection and sustainment throughput in its attack on Baghdad. It also allowed for the pacification of a key population center that effected subsequent operations throughout the Dhi Qar Province. The summary below provides a broad narrative of the critical events that occurred on each of these days.

22 Mar: On the afternoon of 22 March, TF Tarawa displaced from the Al Luhays Oil Fields to the vicinity of the intersections of Highways 1 and 8. The Fwd CP traveled along Hwy 1 to the 3ID B TOC, west of Tallil AF, to coordinate the Relief in Place (RIP) that would occur the following day. Upon its return, TF Tarawa was in receipt of I MEF FRAGO 017-03 that directed them to conduct the RIP at the western bridge-crossing site and seize the eastern bridges of An Nasiriyah. An orders group was convened and the RCT was directed to effect a RIP with 3 BCT at the western bridge crossing site at 230200Z Mar 03 and to commence the attack to seize the eastern crossing sites at An Nasiriyah NLT 230400Z Mar 03. The RCT commenced movement to the western bridge crossing sites at 2130Z.

23 Mar: RCT-2 effected the RIP at the western bridge-crossing site over the Euphrates River at 0130Z. The remainder of the RCT commenced movement at 0230Z to seize the eastern bridges. The lead elements encountered an Army HMMWV from the 507th Maint Co with four wounded soldiers. A force, led by tanks, maneuvered forward to the position designated along Highway 8 and rescued wounded soldiers of the stricken company while under fire from Iraqi forces. The tanks, being low on fuel, retrograded to refuel. Enemy engagements, to this point, had been characterized by inaccurate indirect fire and light caliber small arms engagements. The TF Tarawa CG and RCT CO met with the mechanized battalion commander to discuss the importance of expeditiously seizing the bridges and recovering additional soldiers from the Army company. Reorganizing his force, the mechanized battalion advanced with two companies forward and one back toward the southern bridge over the Euphrates. The eastern most company forward found the terrain unsuitable for movement and was forced to maneuver to the road and assume a position at the rear of the formation; the battalion was now in a battalion column. T-55 tanks were encountered upon reaching the railroad bridge immediately south of the Euphrates River Bridge. The CAAT Platoon was brought forward to destroy these tanks; RW CAS and artillery assisted in this effort. Of the seven tanks destroyed in this engagement, reports emerged that three of them may have been manned. Having completed their refueling evolution, the three tanks associated with Team Mech rejoined the force and were placed in the lead of the formation to cross the Euphrates River Bridge. These assets crossed the bridge with no resistance and maneuvered approximately one kilometer into the city before moving east to locate a corridor with greater stand off from the urban area. The second company in the battalion column assumed security at the Euphrates River Bridge. The lead

elements of the battalion encountered impassable ground that blocked their movement north forcing them to establish a hasty defense to effect recovery of several tanks and an AAV that had become lodged in the crusted-over, marsh-like terrain created by a rain storm just days earlier. The trail company passed across the Euphrates bridge and maneuvered along the route between the two bridges. Not seeing the lead elements of the battalion, the company moved directly to the bridge over the Saddam Canal, the second RCT objective. Upon nearing this objective, the company was engaged by a small arms and an RPG barrage. Two AAVs received direct hits. The company continued to the north side of the objective where they continued to encounter enemy resistance from both the north and the east. During the engagement, FW CAS arrived on station to assist the battalion; several AAVs were inadvertently engaged by A-10s. The second objective was seized at approximately 1130Z. The remaining tanks, having completed their refueling evolution, moved forward to reinforce the companies with three tanks joining the company at the northern bridge and two tanks remaining with the company at the southern bridge. 2/8 arrived at the southern bridge at approximately 1100Z and conducted a RIP. The remainder of the day was spent consolidating the position, conducting an aerial resupply, and expanding the perimeter defense.

24 Mar: The morning was initially quiet with engagements commencing mid-morning at both the 1/2 and 2/8 positions. At the northern bridge, 1/2 engaged mechanized vehicles, soft skin vehicles (technicals) and numerous dismounts. Responding to these engagements with direct fire, indirect fire, and maneuver, their position was strengthened and expanded. 2/8, at the southern bridge, expanded their perimeter to the east and engaged a strong enemy contingent centered on a hospital complex east of the southern bridge. Utilizing combined arms, they were able to consolidate their force in a stronger, expanded position prior to nightfall. At approximately noon, the lead element of 1st Marines (LAR and Tanks) passed along the route between the bridges, conducted a FPOL, and continued the attack north along Highway 7. 1/2 received its first ground resupply in the afternoon. 3/2 repositioned from the western bridge-crossing site to the eastern bridges in the afternoon. The I MEF Senior Watch Officer passed initial guidance to TF Tarawa, later reinforced in a FRAGO, to remain outside of the urban area between the bridges, conducting only those actions required to assure the safe passage of convoys along the route. To the north, mechanized forces engaged the lead elements of 1st Marines and 1/10 provided responsive fires that neutralized this threat.

25 Mar: TF Tarawa was able to further isolate the approaches to An Nasiriyah, gaining control of the northwestern bridge and expanding control of the areas surrounding the Euphrates River Bridge and the bridge over the Saddam Canal. Infantry battalions from 1st Marines commenced passage of lines in the early morning hours and completed the evolution by late in the day. 2/8 and 3/2 expanded control of the Euphrates Bridge with 3/2 oriented west, anchored on the Euphrates River and 2/8 pushing east anchored in a similar manner with Highway 8 separating the two battalions. 2/8 secured the hospital complex that had been the centerpiece for the previous days engagement, seizing a large arms cache, NBC defensive equipment, and food stores. Enemy was found to be using commercial and private vehicles for transportation; two busloads of soldiers were captured. Resupply convoys passed unimpeded between the bridges along the urban corridor although an Iraqi battalion position had been located by UAV and engaged earlier in the day.

26 Mar: RCT-2 had detained nearly 500 EPWs; 1/2 had gathered the majority of these EPWs. I MEF directed 15th MEU to assume responsibility for them and organize them for retrograde to Jalibah (LSA Viper). The weather continued to hamper rotary wing operations with few engagements occurring during the day. Late in the afternoon, I MEF provided indications and warning of an attack by 1000-2000 personnel toward the Highway 8 bridge over the Euphrates

River. The RCT reoriented its force to address this threat. One half hour after sunset, the enemy engaged 2/8 with small arms and mortars in a probing attack. This engagement resulted in 32 WIAs. During this engagement, LAR responded to the action and engaged a number of 2/8's MTRVs in the reduced visibility. The railroad station, thought to be the assembly area for the larger force, was engaged by 1/10 with DPICM. Limited secondaries were observed at this location and no further attacks materialized that night.

27 Mar: Offensive enemy activity had diminished significantly north of the Saddam Canal; limited engagements were still coming from the southwestern bridge over the Euphrates River and from within the city. The enemy was reinforcing An Nasiriyah from Suq Ash Shuyukh. TF Tarawa commenced construction of obstacles along the approaches between these cities and expanded the areas that the battalions controlled. Targeting focused on the centers of regime control within the two cities.

28 Mar: TF Tarawa directed by I MEF to enter the city to remove pockets of resistance that were impacting on the security and stability at the bridge crossing sites. Aggressive patrolling continued with numerous arms caches continuing to be uncovered. Area under TF Tarawa control south of the Euphrates River expanded to include terrain within sight of the southwestern bridge. The personnel remains of Marines in the destroyed AAVs were recovered. LOC between the bridges was available for unimpeded travel.

29 Mar: The interdiction of Suq Ash Shuyukh was having an effect. Clear evidence was emerging from multiple sources that targeting and route interdiction was affecting the enemy. Urban operations were conducted, focused on the eastern area of the city and the approaches to Suq Ash Shuyukh. TF 20 arrived to coordinate a rescue operation for a suspected survivor of the 507th Maint Co reported to be held in the Saddam Hospital. TF Tarawa limited its operations in the city to prevent the enemy from potentially moving the soldier to another location. Targeting and SOF operations in Suq Ash Shuyukh assumed a greater role.

30 Mar: Enemy offensive operations in An Nasiriyah were significantly reduced. Patrolling operations continue to uncover enemy cache sites. The first MEDCAP was conducted south of the city along Hwy 8. Targeting of the various enemy headquarters and employment of special operations forces in Suq Ash Shuyukh was the focus of main effort. The local populace provided significant amounts of intelligence on the enemy. 15th MEU continued to close forces on An Nasiriyah. Civil Affairs operations including MEDCAP and food/water distribution began in earnest.

31 Mar: Interdiction of LOCs between An Nasiriyah and Suq Ash Shuyukh was having a significant effect on the enemy. Although fighting continued in both areas, the reinforcements seen along this route appeared to be waning. RCT-2 controlled the northern bank of the Saddam Canal and the southern bank of the Euphrates River, less the area immediately around the southwestern bridge. Force Reconnaissance was inserted to cover the western side of the objective. 15th MEU completed the closure of its force and conducted limited patrolling operations towards the railroad station.

1 Apr: TF Tarawa commenced an attack to secure the southwestern bridge in support of TF 20's rescue operation. Other elements of the TF assumed assigned positions and made necessary force preparations. TF 20 forces arrived in mid afternoon, moving to assembly areas by last light. TF

Tarawa COC converted to a joint COC and manned appropriately for mission execution. USMC support to TF 20 included FW and RW CAS, assault support, artillery deception fires, two QRFs, ITG at the LZ, and MTRVs/tanks for the ground assault. TF Tarawa makes preparations to move north to Qalat Sikar and Ad Diwaniyah.

2 Apr: The rescue operation of PFC Lynch was successful with 11 sets of remains being located prior to the extraction of TF 20. Supporting operations on the bridges to the north and south sides of the hospital continued into the city to establish a presence inside of the city. The CG drove throughout the city and reported An Nasiriyah secure. 1/2 continued RIP with 15th MEU vic An Nasiriyah. 24th MEU moved into Ash Shatra, enroute to Qalat Sikar. Remaining elements of the RCT-2 moved north along Highway 1 to Ad Diwaniyah.

Conclusion: During the combat actions of this period at An Nasiriyah, TF Tarawa accomplished its assigned mission successfully. Aside from the vehicle and personnel losses that occurred on the first day along the urban corridor that connected the two bridges, there were no subsequent losses to either vehicles or personnel along this route. Commencing on 24 March, the first convoy passed along this route (the lead element of the 1st Marines). Following this movement, resupply convoys regularly passed to the northern side of the rivers with sustainment for RCT elements positioned north of the town. The remainder of 1st Marines passed along this corridor without incident, as did the MWSS 372 convoy that opened Qalat Sikar airfield. As combat operations subsided, a robust Civil Affairs program was implemented, ultimately turning An Nasiriyah into a show place for Phase IV operations in Southern Iraq.