



Joint
Advanced
Warfighting
Program

INSTITUTE FOR DEFENSE ANALYSES

**Al Sahawa—The Awakening
Volume III: Al Anbar Province,
Western Euphrates River Valley,
Area of Operations Denver—Transcripts**

William (Bill) Knarr, Task Leader
Col Dale Alford, USMC
Mary Hawkins
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Jennifer Goodman
Matthew Dobson
Carolyn Leonard
John Frost
Col Tracy King, USMC
MajGen Thomas Jones, USMC, (Ret)
Matt Coursey

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Executive Summary

The purpose of the Anbar Awakening project, and the five volumes that document its findings, is to tell the story of Al Anbar’s *Sahawa*—its evolution from Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) supporter to AQI opponent from 2003 to 2008.¹ A major part of that story takes place in the Coalition’s area of operations (AO) Denver. This document, Volume III, addresses events in AO Denver that contributed to the Awakening narrative.

AO Denver was the largest of the Coalition’s AOs (see Appendix D for map). Those who deployed there nicknamed it the *Wild West*—a 30,000-square-mile region in Western Iraq containing several major population centers along the Western Euphrates River Valley (WERV)—Hit, Hadithah, and the Al Qaim district—and sharing borders with Jordan, Syria, and Saudi Arabia. Throughout 2003, AO Denver was occupied by Special Operations Forces (SOF) and Army units. The First Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF) took control of Al Anbar in early 2004, and Regimental Combat Teams (RCTs) were assigned to the area where they remained until September 2009 when RCT-8 was redeployed as part of the Coalition drawdown in Iraq.

In April 2004, Coalition forces in the communities along the WERV northwest of Fallujah—Hit, Barwanah, Baghdadi, and Hadithah—were diverted to Fallujah to support Operation VIGILANT RESOLVE. That diversion indirectly created chaos for those communities. During the Coalition’s absence, the insurgents targeted residents who had helped Coalition forces. When the Coalition returned to those communities in May and June, they found most people unwilling to work with them.

Later that year in November, while the Coalition prepared for and executed Operation AL FAJR in Fallujah, the situation worsened.² Again, Coalition forces abandoned communities along the WERV to support AL FAJR, and again the insurgents moved in to punish those who had supported the Coalition. Additionally, insurgents that fled the fighting in Fallujah during AL FAJR found refuge in those communities along the Euphrates, reinforcing the insurgent forces already located there.³ The movement of those insurgents—who included Sunni nationalists as well as foreign fighters taking direction from AQI leader Abu Musab Zarqawi—contributed to the ground conditions that RCT-2 found when it deployed to AO Denver in March 2005.

RCT-2, commanded by Colonel Stephen Davis, assumed responsibility for AO Denver from RCT-7. RCT-2’s command was based out of Al Asad Airbase, which is south of the river between Hadithah and Hit. Col Davis described the environment:

¹ *Sahawa* means Awakening in Arabic.

² There were two major operations in Fallujah in 2004: Operation VIGILANT RESOLVE in April 2004, and Operation AL FAJR in November 2004—sometimes respectively called the battles for Fallujah I and II.

³ Captain Scott Cuomo, USMC, “The ‘Wild, Wild West’: Iraqi lessons for Afghanistan,” *Marine Corps Gazette* (Oct 2009).

The Euphrates is a highway. It's been a highway for 4,000 years. These are business men out here, and you need to look at this area through a different lens. The solution out here will be found as a business equation. This is not good guys versus bad guys, although there were plenty of bad guys. Everybody's got a business angle up here, because that's what they do. And there are some great survivors up here. They've survived 35 years of Saddam. He couldn't tame them, and so by understanding this, you start to understand a bit about the environment that we were walking into.⁴

Davis's mission was to "Conduct COIN [counterinsurgency] operations in order to disrupt and interdict anti-Iraqi insurgent elements." The goal was to stabilize these areas to a point where the National Referendum on the Constitution in October and National Elections in December could be held.⁵

RCT-2 described themselves as "The little RCT with a Division mission in a MEF battlespace." The regiment deployed with 3,200 Marines and Sailors—two battalions and two Light Armored Reconnaissance companies. "We were totally an economy force effort," Davis said.⁶ But that was soon to change.

During August through October 2005, RCT-2's forces grew from 3,200 to around 14,000 as it received additional Coalition, as well as Iraqi, forces. Additionally, Special Forces (SF) detachments were reintroduced to AO Denver. These detachments began engaging the population to determine which tribes might be receptive to working with the Coalition and Government of Iraq (GOI). This led to forming the first tribal militia—the Desert Protectors—approved by the Government of Iraq and US forces.

By the time RCT-2 departed in early 2006, AO Denver had seen a successful National Election, Iraqi troops had been integrated into Coalition operations, and combined, permanent, persistent presence was being established in key communities along the Euphrates, in the Al Qaim district and along the border with Syria in particular.

Objective

The objective of the Anbar Awakening project is to create a thought-provoking, credible, accurate resource for trainers and educators to use to examine and learn from the Awakening movement. It is presented in multimedia to accommodate different teaching and learning styles. The project presents the Awakening movement's phases from the insurgency's development in 2003 to the Coalition's transfer of responsibility for Al Anbar to the Iraqis in 2008; it offers analysis and lessons, many of which are transferrable to current and future conflicts.

⁴ Colonel Stephen Davis, interview with Dr. William Knarr and Colonel Dale Alford, USMC at his office at the Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command, Camp Lejeune on 25 May 2010.

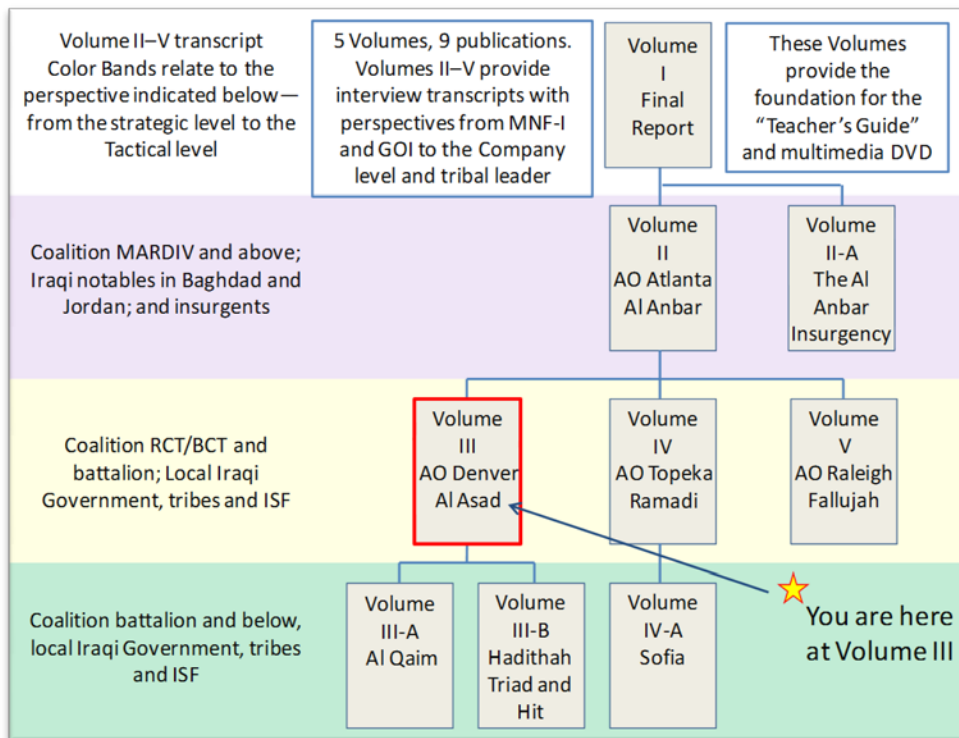
⁵ Davis interview, 25 May 2010.

⁶ Davis interview, 25 May 2010.

Reconstruction

Reconstructing the events in Al Anbar into a multimedia product begins where most case studies, historical analyses, and comparable projects end. The case study has to be completed first; next (or simultaneously, if possible), multimedia materials need to be collected; and then those materials have to be woven together to bring the case study to life. Much of the information came through interviews. Chapter 2 of this document summarizes the transcripts of those interviews in the Appendices. That summary and those of the other volumes provide the script—the storyboard—with quotes that identify potential “characters” and video or audio clips for the multimedia product.

The Awakening project comprises five volumes of supporting documents and an interactive DVD with a Teacher’s Guide. The purpose of the Teacher’s Guide is to suggest how an instructor might use the DVD and the various volumes to support and inform research and role playing. It provides storyline experiences that may be relevant to on-going conflicts, examples that allow students to see the strategic implications of tactical actions or visa versa, and so on. Volume I is the final report and Volumes II–V, arranged by areas of operation, from strategic to tactical levels, contain background on each AO, transcripts from interviewees who worked in those AOs, and summaries of those transcripts (see Figure).



Areas of Operation in Al Anbar provide the structure for Volumes II–V⁷

⁷ Acronyms in the Figure: MARDIV, Marine Division; RCT/BCT, Regimental Combat Team/Brigade Combat Team; ISF, Iraqi Security Forces; MNF-I, Multi-National Forces–Iraq; GOI, Government of Iraq

This Volume

This volume addresses AO Denver from the regimental and SOF perspectives during a critical timeframe—March 2005 to February 2006. Sub-volumes A and B of this volume—published separately—focus on three major population areas within the AO: III-A covers the Al Qaim Region, and III-B covers the Hadithah Triad and Hit.⁸ The perspectives in this volume are Coalition perspectives only; however, sub-volumes A and B provide both Iraqi and Coalition perspectives.

Themes, Lessons, and Leads

Each volume in this study provides themes, lessons, and leads as illuminated by the events that occurred in each AO. Below are the themes, lessons, and leads relevant to Volume III and AO Denver.

Tribal engagement

According to Col Davis, US Forces were not allowed to engage with the tribes and militias until August 2005 when General George Casey approved the creation of the Desert Protectors. Before that, RCT-2 was supposed to engage the population through the local government; however, in many cases, local governments had not been established, and, in those instances that they were, they were often seen by the populace as ineffective and corrupt. Slowly, troops on the ground began working with willing tribes that held more *wasta* (influence and power) than the local governments. The coordination between US Forces and the Abu-Mahal and Abu-Nimr tribes serves as an early example of tribal engagement.

Connection to the Iraqi Government

Volume III provides two examples of connections established between the population and the Government of Iraq (GOI). The first was the Abu-Mahal tribe's connection with the central government, which developed when the GOI and the Coalition recruited and vetted members of the Abu-Mahal into the Desert Protectors. This early link was important to the Awakening movement, because as other Anbaris observed this relationship, they realized it was possible to work within the framework of the government and that it gave them another avenue to stand up against the insurgency. A second link between population and government was created when Anbaris in AO Denver voted in high numbers during the National Elections—for many Anbaris, this was their first experience with formalized democracy.

Developing a continuous storyline

This volume provides insights into Coalition and insurgent activity between operations in Fallujah in 2004–05 and the first “awakening” in Al Qaim in 2005–06. It also begins to

⁸ The Hadithah Triad includes the towns of Hadithah, Barwanah, and Haqlaniyah.

clarify events in Al Qaim, such as the development of the Desert Protectors and SOF's engagements with the Albu-Nimr tribe in Hit. Additionally, it introduces the concept of combined, permanent, persistent presence, and it lays the foundation for understanding sub-volumes III-A and III-B as they detail events in Al Qaim and the Hadithah Triad/Hit areas respectively. As such, it helps fill gaps to provide a continuous storyline.

Commercial battlespace

Merchants have traveled the WERV since early history. The Euphrates connects Baghdad and other Iraqi cities with major economic and population hubs in Syria. Much of the insurgents' and Coalition forces' movement occurred along the WERV and not within the open spaces of the desert. Additionally, almost all of RCT-2's operations in the campaign were centered along the Euphrates. As part of a COIN campaign, it was clear that whoever controlled the economic battlespace—the insurgents or the Coalition—had a much better chance of influencing the population. This theme is explored further in sub-volumes III-A and III-B.

Switching from threat-centric to population-centric

A new theme appeared in AO Denver during this time, based on the differences between the first half of RCT-2's deployment (March–August 2005) and the second half (September 2005–February 2006). Although in both halves, Col Davis was focused on disrupting the enemy, the second half shows some of the first examples of Coalition forces working to gain the population's support and the insurgents losing that support. This initial shift towards a population-centric strategy started a trend that is traced and examined in subsequent volumes.

Reinforcing success

Another theme unique to AO Denver in 2005 is reinforcing success. As mentioned above, GEN Casey reinforced RCT-2 with both Coalition and Iraqi troops in September, thereby contributing to the regiment's ability to effect combined, permanent, persistent presence and to support the National Referendum and National Elections.

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1. The Awakening⁹

At a 14 September 2006, meeting in Ramadi, three days after a classified report was leaked to the *Washington Post* announcing Al Anbar as “militarily unwinnable,” Sheikh Abdul Sattar Albu-Risha announced the Awakening—the *Sahawa*.¹⁰ At that meeting, Sattar, along with 40 other sheikhs from the Ramadi area, signed an Emergency Council proclamation to work with the Coalition to drive Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) from Al Anbar. By December 2006, 18 of the 21 Ramadi-area tribes had joined this Awakening movement.¹¹ By February 2007, the movement began to accelerate throughout Al Anbar as the Coalition reinforced areas seeking help to defeat Al Qaeda. On 3 September 2007, one year after Sattar’s announcement, President George W. Bush met with the tribal leaders of Al Anbar and the leadership of Iraq to congratulate them on their successes.¹² Sattar was assassinated ten days later, but the Awakening could not be stopped or stalled. On 1 September 2008, conditions were stable enough to hand over the province to the Iraqis Government.

What happened? How could Al Anbar—the cradle of the Sunni insurgency and the birthplace of AQI—turn around so quickly?

A. Objective

The objective of the Awakening project is to provide a thought provoking, credible, accurate, unclassified resource for trainers and educators to use to examine and learn from the Awakening movement. The project presents the movement’s phases from the insurgency’s development in 2003 to the Coalition’s transfer of responsibility for Al Anbar to the Iraqis in 2008, and offers analysis and lessons, many of which are transferrable to current and future conflicts.¹³ The ultimate product is a multimedia instructional package to accommodate different teaching and learning styles.

⁹ The Awakening movement was the Al Anbar Awakening until 2007 when two things occurred: Sheikh Sattar changed the Al Anbar Al Sahawa (AAS) to the Al Sahawa Al Iraqi (SAI), and the movement was implemented in other areas of Iraq outside of Al Anbar.

¹⁰ Thomas E. Ricks, “Situation Called Dire in West Iraq,” *Washington Post*, 11 September 2006.

¹¹ Ramadi is a city and district—in this case, those sheiks came from both the city and the district. Anthony Deane, Colonel, USA, “Providing Security Force Assistance in an Economy of Force Battle,” *Military Review* (Jan–Feb 2010).

¹² Alissa J. Rubin, “Sunni Sheikh Who Backed US in Iraq Killed,” *New York Times*, 14 September 2007, <www.nytimes.com/2007/09/14/world/middleeast/14iraq.html?pagewanted=print> accessed 23 June 2011, copy on file.

¹³ The Coalition did not include the Iraqis, and the Coalition Forces did not include Iraqi Security Forces.

B. Collection

Interviews were conducted in the United States, Iraq, and Jordan, and were structured around a series of five primary research questions (PRQ). Those questions were supplemented with secondary research questions (SRQ) that provided more granularity to the research. The SRQs, when answered, addressed the breadth and depth of the project and kept it focused on the objective. None of the research questions were necessarily static; they changed as they were answered and new leads developed. Interview plans based on those questions were tailored to each interviewee. Although the collection plan was more detailed and complex, the initial PRQs and SRQs are in Table 1-1.

Table 1-1. Initial Primary and Secondary Research Questions for the Awakening Project

Primary Research Questions	Secondary Research Questions
1. How, when, and why did the insurgency start?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who participated and why did they join? • How were they supported within Iraq and/or by other countries?
2. What was the Al Anbar Awakening?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there a single definition? If so, what is it and if not, what are the other definitions? Do different groups define it differently? • What are the various perspectives—Coalition, Iraqi, Insurgent, others? • Was there more than one Awakening?
3. What caused the Al Anbar Awakening?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What events set the conditions for the Awakening? • Who and what caused those events—Coalition, Al Qaeda in Iraq, insurgents, Iraqis (residents, tribes), the Government of Iraq, Iraqi Security Forces, and others? • Was there a “tipping point?” If so, when, where, how did it start, and how did it evolve?
4. How did the Al Anbar Awakening reconcile the causes identified by PRQ 3? Who and what events contributed to the reconciliation?	No SRQs
5. What were the major themes of and lessons from the Al Anbar Awakening?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did these themes and lessons contribute to success in the larger context of Iraq? • Are they transferable to other areas such as Afghanistan or Africa? • Should they be incorporated into doctrine? • Should they be taught at the various Professional Military Education institutions? If so, how?

C. Publication Series and Structure

Creating a provocative, credible, accurate resource for trainers and educators to examine the Awakening using multimedia is more difficult than it may sound. Constructing all of the material gathered during the interviews into a multimedia product begins where most case studies, historical analyses, and comparable projects, end: First, you have to complete the case

study; next (or simultaneously, if possible), you have to collect the multimedia materials; and then you can finally weave those materials together to bring that case study to life.

That being the case, this volume is part of a multi-volume set comprising interview transcripts and a final study report.

1. The Volumes

The Al Anbar Awakening product consists of five volumes of reference material, comprising nine publications, plus a Teacher's Guide with an interactive, multimedia DVD. Volume I is the final report containing a storyline that follows the organization of the DVD. Volumes II–V contains the interview transcripts organized according to Coalition areas of operation (AOs) (see Figure 1-1; also, a map of the various AOs is in Appendix D).

The volumes are organized as follows:

- Volume I. Al Anbar Awakening—Final Report
- Volume II. Al Anbar Awakening: AO Atlanta, An Overview
- Volume III. Al Anbar Awakening: AO Denver, Western Euphrates
- Volume IV. Al Anbar Awakening: AO Topeka, Ramadi Area
- Volume V. Al Anbar Awakening: AO Raleigh, Fallujah Area

These volumes tell the in-depth Awakening story and feature all of the interview transcripts from which the storyline was constructed. As an example, Volume II covers AO Atlanta, which is approximately all of Al Anbar province. Volumes III–V cover the AOs subordinate to AO Atlanta and districts subordinate to Al Anbar.

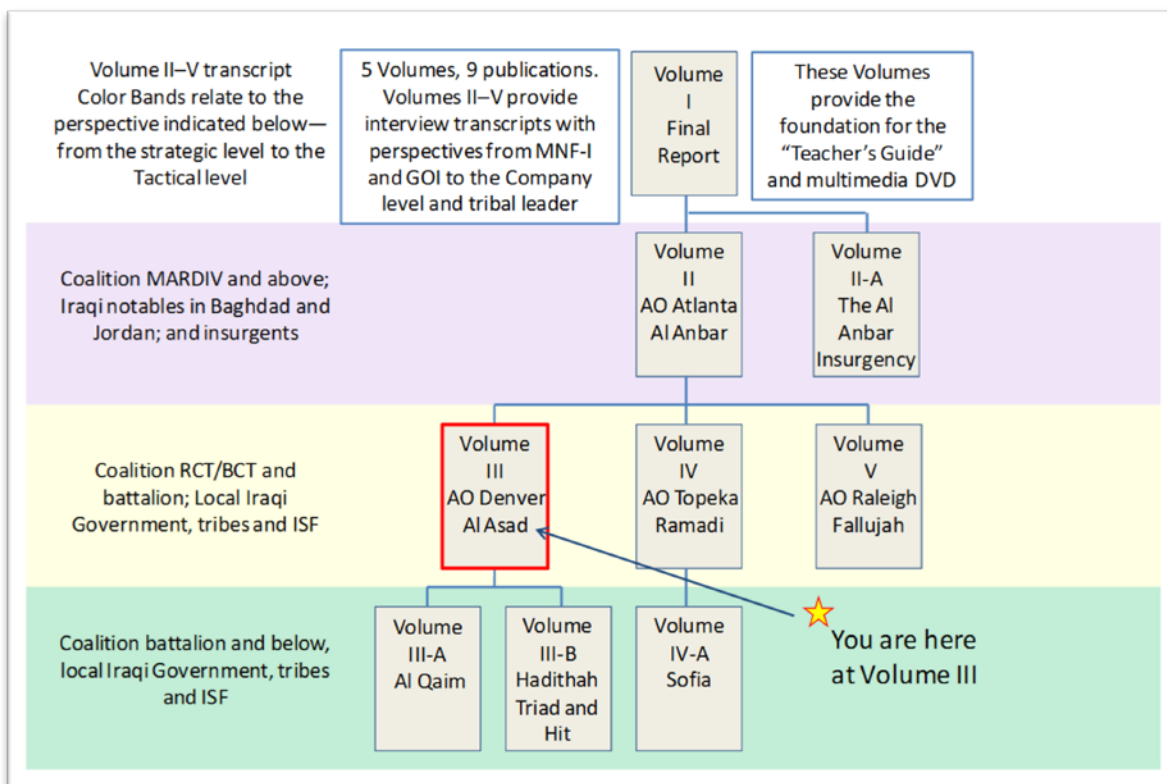


Figure 1-1. Areas of Operation in AI Anbar provide the structure for the Awakening volumes¹⁴

Additionally, Volumes II–V all begin with the same introduction, PRQs, and structure to orient readers within the project and storyline, regardless of which volume they read first.

2. This Volume

Volume III presents Coalition perspectives of those who had oversight of AO Denver, the Marine regimental commander and the Army Special Forces commander. As listed in Table 1-2, Colonel Stephen Davis, former Regimental Combat Team-2 commander, and Lieutenant Colonel Martin Adams, former Operational Detachment Bravo (ODB) commander, relate their points of view via interview transcripts, from AO Denver’s command headquarters at the Al Asad Airbase (see Appendix A).¹⁵ Both men had the opportunity to review their transcripts and return comments and corrections.

Appendices include:

- A—Transcripts: Coalition Perspectives
- B—Transcripts: Iraqi Perspectives

¹⁴ Acronyms in the Figure: MARDIV, Marine Division; RCT/BCT, Regimental Combat Team/Brigade Combat Team; ISF, Iraqi Security Forces; MNF-I, Multi-National Forces–Iraq; GOI, Government of Iraq

¹⁵ LTC Adams was a major at the time of his ODB command, but was interviewed as a lieutenant colonel.

- C—Who’s Who. Name spellings and descriptions of Iraqis who appear in the document. The description includes the person’s position, tribal affiliation, and some background information.
- D—Maps. Map showing areas discussed during the interviews.
- E—Illustrations
- F—References
- G—Abbreviations

Table 1-2. Transcripts in Volume III

	Interviewee	Position in Iraq	Interview Date
1	Col Stephen Davis	Commander, RCT-2, March 2005–Feb 2006	25 May 2010
2	LTC Martin Adams	Commander, ODB	21 Dec 2010

2. AO Denver: A View from Al Asad Command

We were just trying to out-guerilla the guerilla....We had established this pattern of being everywhere and nowhere. We were out west, we were over here [pointing to the map], we were down here, we were over here, we were up here, and we were back here....They didn't know where we were going.

—Colonel Stephen Davis¹⁷

US military operations in Fallujah from March to December 2004 created chaos for communities along the Western Euphrates River Valley (WERV) northwest of Fallujah. During Operation VIGILANT RESOLVE in the city in April, Coalition forces were directed to leave cities such as Hit, Barwanah, Baghdadi, and Hadithah in order to support the operation. With the Coalition gone, the insurgents exploited the situation by targeting residents who had helped Coalition forces, and when the Coalition began returning in May, they found most of the populace unwilling to work with them.

In November, while the Coalition prepared for and executed Operation AL FAJR in Fallujah, the situation worsened.¹⁸ Again, Coalition forces abandoned communities along the WERV to support AL FAJR, and again the insurgents moved in to punish those who had supported the Coalition. Additionally, insurgents that fled the fighting in Fallujah during AL FAJR found refuge in those communities along the Euphrates, reinforcing the insurgent forces already there.¹⁹ The movement of those insurgents—who included Sunni nationalists as well as foreign fighters taking direction from AQI leader Abu Musab Zarqawi—contributed to the ground conditions that RCT-2 found when it deployed to AO Denver in March 2005.

A. The Wild West: Background

Commanded by Col Stephen Davis, RCT-2's AO Denver was a 30,000-square-mile region in Western Iraq, which included several major population centers along the WERV: Hit, Hadithah, and the Al Qaim district. Moreover, AO Denver shared borders with Jordan, Syria, and Saudi Arabia. Col Davis explained the environment into which he led his troops:

¹⁷ Davis interview, 25 May 2010.

¹⁸ There were two major operations in Fallujah in 2004: Operation VIGILANT RESOLVE in April 2004, and Operation AL FAJR in November 2004—sometimes respectively called the battles for Fallujah I and II.

¹⁹ Captain Scott Cuomo, USMC, “The ‘Wild, Wild West:’ Iraqi lessons for Afghanistan,” *Marine Corps Gazette* (Oct 2009).

The Euphrates is a highway. It's been a highway for 4,000 years. These are business men out here, and you need to look at this area through a different lens. The solution out here will be found as a business equation. This is not good guys versus bad guys, although there were plenty of bad guys. Everybody's got a business angle up here, because that's what they do. And there are some great survivors up here. They've survived 35 years of Saddam. He couldn't tame them, and so by understanding this, you start to understand a bit about the environment that we were walking into.²⁰

RCT-2's command was based out of Al Asad Airbase, which is south of the river between Hadithah and Hit. AO Denver—nicknamed *The Wild West*—had been occupied by SOF and Army units throughout 2003. From early 2004, when the First Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF) took control of Al Anbar, RCTs were assigned to Al Asad Airbase in AO Denver until September 2009 when RCT-8 was redeployed as part of the Coalition drawdown in Iraq (see Table 2-1).²¹

Table 2-1. Command History in AO Denver

Dates	Commander	Unit
March 2003–April 2003	—	CJSOTF-W
April 2003–September 2003	LTC Reilly	1st Squadron, 3d ACR
September 2003–March 2004	COL Teeples	3d ACR
March 2004–October 2004	Col Tucker	RCT-7
October 2004–March 2005	Col Miller	31st MEU
March 2005–February 2006	Col Davis	RCT-2
February 2006–January 2007	Col Crowe	RCT-7
January 2007–January 2008	Col Clardy	RCT-2
January 2008–January 2009	Col Malay	RCT-5
January 2009–September 2009	Col Love	RCT-8

CJSOTF-W = Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-West, ACR = Armored Cavalry Regiment, MEU = Marine Expeditionary Unit

B. RCT-2: Mission, Goals and Strategy

Col Davis' RCT-2 described themselves as “The little RCT with a Division mission in a MEF battlespace.” The regiment deployed with 3,200 Marines and Sailors—in the

²⁰ Davis interview, 25 May 2010.

²¹ Lieutenant Colonel David Graves, “Unit Presence in Al Anbar,” 10 May 2010

form of two infantry battalions: 3rd Battalion, 25th Marines (3/25), and 3rd Battalion, 2nd Marines (3/2)—as well as two Light Armored Reconnaissance (LAR) companies. “We were totally an economy of force effort,” Davis said.²²

Davis recalled that RCT-2 “got there with a very open and adaptive mindset,” despite the “complex operational environment” they were walking into. The regiment’s campaign plan, named POWER SWEEP, consisted of 16 major combat operations—an operation about every two-to-three weeks. Each operation involved one or more of the six separate but interrelated fights within the AO (Figure 2-1). The campaign plan was a part of what Davis’ called the “be everywhere, yet be nowhere” strategy.²³

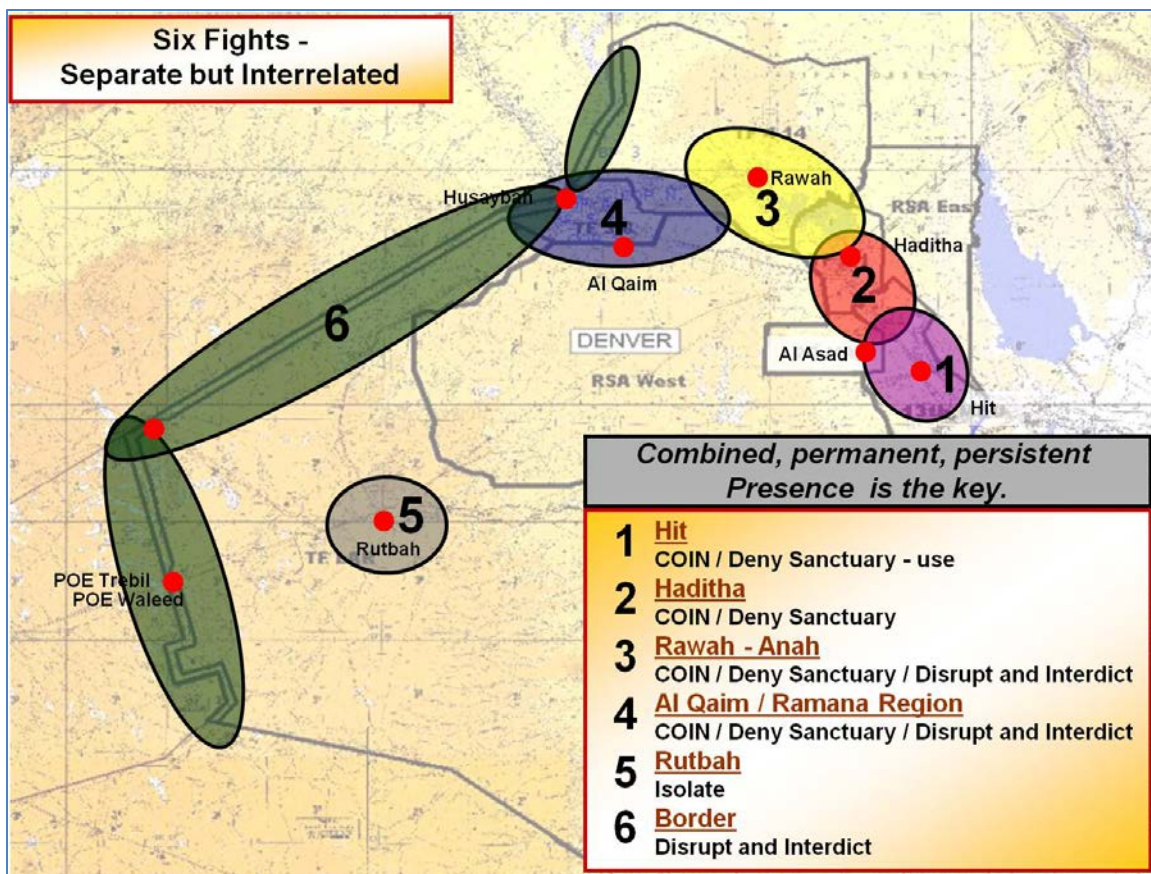


Figure 2-1. Six interrelated fights in AO Denver

Davis described RCT-2’s campaign plan—linking it to the mission, goals, and overall strategy—as real simple:

²² Davis interview, 25 May 2010.

²³ Davis interview, 25 May 2010.

My mission: Conduct COIN [counterinsurgency] operations in order to disrupt and interdict anti-Iraqi insurgent elements. Our goal was to ultimately get these areas to where the National Referendum and the National Elections could be held. How we were going to do that was by establishing the combined, permanent, persistent presence in the major population centers in the Euphrates River Valley, *combined* being the key part. Being able to establish presence gives you security, which gives you stability, which creates the environment for success to occur.²⁴

C. First Half of Deployment: Clear, Attack and Neutralize

The first half of RCT-2's deployment, or as Davis describes it, the first semester of campaign plan POWER SWEEP—15 March to 15 September—comprised cordon and search; disrupt and interdict; and clear, attack, and neutralize missions. Because RCT-2 only had four rifle companies during the first semester, it was unable to go north of the river. Instead, Davis focused on keeping the enemy off balance.

To the outside observer who wasn't really looking at what we were doing here, it looked like we were just playing "whack-a-mole." All we were trying to do was stay alive and keep the enemy, particularly the foreign fighters, off balance. Again, we were only talking to the security LOO [line of operation] here; we're trying to keep this guy off balance, and I'm trying to get inside his OODA [observe, orient, decide, and act] loop in order to make him reactive to me, not the other way around.²⁵

One defining moment for the regiment came during its second month there, in April 2005, when Camp Gannon in Husaybah was attacked by insurgents later linked to Zarqawi. The insurgents unleashed a triple suicide bombing and demonstrated they were capable of conducting complex and well organized operations. Although 3/2 Marines successfully fended off the attack, they were surprised by its complexity and the insurgents' discipline and commitment.

D. Second Half of Deployment: Troop Increases and SOF Re-entry

September 2005 was an eventful month in AO Denver. The first half's 11-operation campaign wrapped up in September with Operation CYCLONE, and the second half kicked off in September with Operation GREEN LIGHTNING. During the latter half, Davis' focus expanded from destroying the enemy to include protecting the population. Though the clear-and-neutralize operations would continue, Davis wanted to send a message to the

²⁴ Davis interview, 25 May 2010.

²⁵ Davis interview, 25 May 2010.

population: *Not only did I provide you security so you and your family will live, but here are the benefits to working with us.*²⁶

In September 2005, Multi-National Force–Iraq (MNF-I) commander, General George Casey, came out to see Davis. “He got it!” Davis recollected—Casey immediately understood what was happening, and gave Davis additional forces to reinforce what he saw as success, and to ensure RCT-2 had the resources necessary to support the National Referendum in October and elections in December (see Table 2-2).

Table 2-2. Units Moved to RCT-2 in September 2005

Service	Unit(s)	Short Title
US Army	2nd Squadron, 14th Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division	2-14 Stryker
USMC	Task Force Phantom, a Long Range Surveillance (LRS) Unit	TF Phantom (LRS)
US Army	2nd Battalion, 114 Field Artillery, of the 155th BCT of the Mississippi Army National Guard aka The Mississippi Rifle	2-114 FA
US Army	3rd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment	3-504 Inf
USMC	2nd Force Reconnaissance Company	2nd Force Recon
Iraqi Army	1st Brigade, 1st Iraqi Army Division	1/1 IAD
Iraqi Army	3rd Brigade (later to be reflagged as the 28th Brigade), 7th Iraqi Army Division	3/7 IAD

“Despite the addition of much greater force structure,” Davis explains, “the theory didn’t change. We stayed married up with Iraqis, and we didn’t go into towns until we could stay there.” RCT-2 then had 14,000 troops—enough to create combined, permanent, persistent presence in several population centers.²⁷

September also brought the return of Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force (CJSOTF) forces in the form of an ODB and attached Operational Detachment Alpha (ODA). Special Forces (SF) had been absent from Anbar Province for almost a year, and the detachment that had been there previously was redirected to Baghdad due to greater need.²⁸ The ODB, commanded by Major Martin Adams, USA, had its headquarters at Al Asad. Under its control were three ODAs: 545, 555, and 582.²⁹

MAJ Adams sent ODA 545 to operate in Hit, where the previous team had successfully worked with the Albu-Nimr tribe. ODA 555 was sent to Hadithah, and ODA 582 to Al Qaim

²⁶ Davis interview, 25 May 2010.

²⁷ Davis interview, 25 May 2010.

²⁸ Brent Lindeman, “Better Lucky Than Good: A Theory of Unconventional Minds and the Power of ‘Who’,” Naval Postgraduate School Thesis, December 2009.

²⁹ Lieutenant Colonel Martin Adams, interview with Dr. William Knarr and Lieutenant Colonel David Graves, USMC, Institute for Defense Analyses, Alexandria, VA, 21 December 2010. Adams a Major during his command of the ODB.

to work with one of the major tribes, the Albu-Mahal. MAJ Adams had received intelligence that there were potential vulnerabilities in the Albu-Mahal tribe worth exploring.³⁰

E. The Creation of the Desert Protectors

In September 2005, Adams deployed a Medical Civil Assistance Program team to the town of Akashat. Akashat is a desert town south of Al Qaim where Albu-Mahal tribe members had recently fled AQI's strict rule and brutality in Al Qaim. Adams recalled that the intent was to make this a test case:

If they start shooting at us, we'll know this isn't going to work. They were indicating that they'd be willing to at least let us come in and see what we're about. [We went out and said,] "We're open for business. Anybody who needs medical care, line up!" And so they started doing that. They [the team] did the thing that SOF does: "Okay, this guys looks kind of interesting, why don't we talk to him?" Or military age, potential fighter ages folks, let's talk to them and see what's going on.³¹

This mission led to identifying a number of individuals who ended up becoming the first Desert Protector platoon. The Desert Protectors were the first Sunni tribal militia supported by both the GOI and MNF-I. It was the first time that a tribe provided recruits who would be inducted into the Iraqi Security Forces used to fight AQI. Many Iraqis and Americans point to the development of the Desert Protectors in Al Qaim and the revolt of the Albu-Mahal tribe against AQI as the seeds of the Awakening, or at least an awakening with a lowercase *a*.

The small group of about 26 tribesmen trained and immediately deployed to support 3/6's Operation STEEL CURTAIN. Later this group became the first elements of the police force in Al Qaim.³²

In addition to the ODB and ODAs, other SOF elements were targeting the insurgents in the area. According to Col Davis, the work that the SOF and RCT-2 were doing was mutually reinforcing:

Was it SOF in support of general purpose forces? Or was it general purpose forces in support of SOF? Who really cares? The bottom line is you need to focus on: What's the plan? Are we getting it....What's the mission? Focus on the mission. Don't worry about who gets credit. Leave your ego at the door. Are we moving the ball forward? Are we killing bad guys? Are we taking care of the people?³³

³⁰ Adams interview, 21 December 2010.

³¹ Adams interview, 21 December 2010.

³² Adams interview, 21 December 2010.

³³ Davis interview, 25 May 2010.

F. Creating Presence and Supporting Successful Elections

Once Davis had 14,000 troops, the reinforced regiment could establish a combined, permanent, persistent presence in several population centers, including Hadithah, Hit and Al Qaim. One way they did this was by building firm bases.³⁴ According to Davis, Lieutenant Colonel Dale Alford, the 3/6 commander, built his bases after rolling in with all of his equipment, burying CONEX containers and

welding racks into the side of those things to live in. Even if it was a temporary facility, the *speed and rapidity* with which he could do that was impressive! I mean, he had a great integration between his engineers, his combat engineer support guys, and his rifle companies.³⁵

October 2005 brought the national referendum on the Iraqi constitution. Although there was a low turnout, with only 7,500 votes cast, it was about 7,500 more than had been cast in the national elections in January 2005.

Two months later, the national election was held. The fact that 80,000–90,000 votes were cast marked a major shift in the AO. Davis concluded, “That’s when you know the tide has swung.”

In February 2006, both Davis’ and Adams’ deployments ended. Progress in AO Denver during RCT-2’s deployment had come at a cost: RCT-2 suffered 111 killed, including 80 Marines, 14 Soldiers, 3 Sailors, 1 civilian, and 13 Iraqi *Jundi*. However, Davis and his troops had been part of the police initiative, the endorsement of the Multi National Corps–Iraq (MNC-I) to allow troops to talk to the tribes and their militias, the franchise of militia as policemen, the re-establishment of Iraq’s sovereign borders controlled by Iraqis, a successful national referendum and national election, and 15 cities and towns stabilized with combined, permanent, persistent presence.³⁶

The decrease in security and subsequent insurgent control that had been allowed to occur in AO Denver as a result of large-scale operations in Fallujah was reversed. This newly established relationship between US Forces and Iraqi tribes would set the conditions for the monumental events that would occur throughout 2006, leading up to the awakening in Ramadi.

G. Collection: Research Questions and Additional Responses

The primary and secondary research questions listed in Chapter 1 guided the data collection. The initial responses to those questions are in Volume II and drawn from Volume II transcripts. This section supplements those responses. Only those research questions that could be answered by information in this volume are addressed.

³⁴ Platoon/company-sized positions.

³⁵ Davis interview, 25 May 2010.

³⁶ Davis interview, 25 May 2010.

1. What was the Al Anbar Awakening(s)?³⁷

In Volume II (covering AO Atlanta), the Awakening was characterized as when the Sunnis (the people as represented by the tribal leaders) 1) Rejected the terrorists (AQI), 2) Joined the Coalition in the fight against AQI and other insurgent extremists, and 3) Supported and worked with the Iraqi National and Local governments and their security forces.³⁸

That characterization offers a point of reference for follow-on questions.

a. Was there more than one Awakening?

In Volume II, Lieutenant General John Allen, USMC, described the movement as three awakenings: the major Awakening with a capital *A* was headed by Sheikh Sattar; an awakening with lower case *a* was the tribes realizing that their future was not with Al Qaeda, but the United States in the short term and with Iraq in the long term; and a third awakening, again with a lower case *a*, was the Coalition's opportunities to work with the tribes. One of the Awakening movements identified in Volume II was the turning of the Abu-Mahal against AQI and the joining of their forces with the Coalition and GOI.

Both Davis and Adams reinforced LtGen Allen's description during their interviews and support the argument that it was indeed the first instance of the Awakening. Volume III-A on Al Qaim further explores the Abu-Mahal's revolt against AQI.

2. What were the major themes and lessons from the Al Anbar Awakening?

This PRQ led to the following discussion.

a. Tribal Engagement

According to Col Davis, US forces were not allowed to engage with the tribes and militias until August 2005 when GEN Casey approved the creation of the Desert Protectors.³⁹ Before that, RCT-2 was supposed to engage the population via the local government and not the tribes; however, in many cases, local governments were not established—if they were, they were often seen as ineffective and corrupt. Slowly but surely, troops on the ground began working with willing tribes that held more *wasta* (influence) than the local governments. The coordination between US forces and the Abu-Mahal and Abu-Nimr

³⁷ Under this PRQ, SSQs were: Is there a single definition? If so, what is it and if not, what are the other definitions? Do different groups define it in different ways? What are the various perspectives (Coalition, Iraqi, Insurgent, others)? Was there more than one Awakening?

³⁸ This characterization was developed from Sheikh Sattar's explanation and the Coalition objective. Recall that Sheikh Sattar was not as concerned about the movement's connection to the GOI, but the Coalition was adamant that the GOI be included.

³⁹ Project research has not uncovered any evidence that this was a universal policy; however, it seems to have been a widely held opinion.

tribes serves as an early example of tribal engagement. The details of these relationships are developed in Volumes III-A and III-B (Al Qaim and Hadithah Triad/Hit).

b. Connection to the Iraqi Government

Volume III provides two examples of connections that were established between the population and the GOI. The first was between the Albu-Mahal tribe and the central government; this developed when members of the Albu-Mahal were recruited and vetted into the Desert Protectors by the GOI and the Coalition. This initial link was important to the Awakening movement, because as other Anbaris observed this relationship, they realized it was possible to work within the framework of the government, and gave the Iraqi people yet another avenue to stand up against the insurgency. A second link was created when Anbaris in AO Denver voted in high numbers during the National Elections. For many Anbaris, this was their first experience with formalized democracy.

c. Developing a continuous storyline

This volume provides insights into Coalition and insurgent activity between operations in Fallujah in 2004 and the first awakening event in Al Qaim in 2005. In addition, it begins to resolve events that occurred in Al Qaim, such as the development of the Desert Protectors, and SOF's engagements with the Albu-Nimr tribe in Hit. It also introduces the concept of combined, permanent, persistent presence and sets the conditions for understanding Volumes III-A and III-B as they detail events in Al Qaim and the Hadithah Triad/Hit areas respectively. As such, it helps fill in the gaps and provide continuous storyline.

d. Commercial battlespace

Merchants have travelled along the Euphrates River Valley for thousands of years. The river connects Baghdad and other Iraqi cities with major economic and population hubs in Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan, among others. Much insurgent and Coalition movement occurred along the WERV and not within the open spaces of the desert. Additionally, almost all of RCT-2's operations were focused along the Euphrates. Whoever gained control of the economic battlespace—insurgents or Coalition—stood a much stronger chance of influencing the population. This theme is further defined in Volumes III-A, III-B, and IV.

e. Switching from a threat-centric to a population-centric strategy

A new theme observed during this time period (March 2005 to February 2006) was the Coalition's strategy shifting from threat-centric to population-centric. This switch is most discernable between the first and second half of the RCT's deployment. Although in both halves, Col Davis was focused on disrupting the enemy, the second half shows some of the first examples of Coalition forces working to gain the population's support at the

expense of the insurgents. This initial shift towards a population-centric strategy reflects a trend that is traced and examined in subsequent volumes.

f. Reinforcing success

Another theme unique to AO Denver in 2005 is the notion of reinforcing success. As mentioned above, GEN Casey reinforced RCT-2 with both Coalition and Iraqi troops in September 2005. That in turn enhanced the regiment's ability to effect combined, permanent, persistent presence, which then supported the National Referendum and National Elections.

H. Continuing Effort

The above quotes, themes, lessons, and leads provided additional insights into the PRQs. The questions continued to be refined, refuted or validated to reveal new and unique findings and lessons as the Awakening was viewed from the strategic to the tactical levels and from various perspectives. The story continues in subsequent volumes.

Appendix A. Coalition Perspectives

Notes on conventions used in the transcripts

- Ranks. The first time a service member is identified, their rank is spelled out; subsequently, their rank is abbreviated in accordance with their Service affiliation. Ranks are spelled out in the footnotes.
- Time “hacks” on transcripts correspond to video so they can be used to identify areas to use as clips for the movie, the DVD, and for further research into specific areas and more efficient retrieval.
- For al- or Al- or Al in a proper name: When “al” is in the middle of the name, in a last name, for example, it should be lower case with a hyphen, such as Nuri al-Maliki. If the name is by itself then the “al” is capitalized, as in Al-Maliki.
- The majority of tribal names begin with the term *albu*, a formal characterization of *the*. When the tribal name is included in an individual’s name, the prefix “al-” is added and the tribal name changes slightly, usually with the addition of *awi* or *i* at the end. For example, Albu-Risha becomes al-Rishawi and al-Assafi denotes a member of the Assaf tribe or Albu-Assaf.

Table A-1 gives the reader an appreciation for the units responsible for AO Denver from 2003 to 2008. Readers can refer to it to see what unit was assigned responsibility for the area.

Table A-1. Command History in AO Denver

Dates	Commander	Unit
March 2003–April 2003	—	CJSOTF-W
April 2003–September 2003	LTC Reilly	1st Squadron, 3d ACR
September 2003–March 2004	COL Teeples	3d ACR
March 2004–October 2004	Col Tucker	RCT-7
October 2004–March 2005	Col Miller	31st MEU
March 2005–February 2006	Col Davis	RCT-2
February 2006–January 2007	Col Crowe	RCT-7
January 2007–January 2008	Col Clardy	RCT-2
January 2008–January 2009	Col Malay	RCT-5
January 2009–September 2009	Col Love	RCT-8

CJSOTF-W = Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-West, ACR = Armored Cavalry Regiment, MEU = Marine Expeditionary Unit

Subject: Interview with Colonel Stephen Davis, former Commanding Officer, Regimental Combat Team-2, Iraq

Colonel Stephen Davis commanded the 2nd Marine Regiment from June 2004 until June 2006.

He deployed the regiment as 2nd Regimental Combat Team (RCT-2) to Al Asad from February 2005 until February 2006.

Described as “A little RCT with a division mission and a MEF battlespace,” RCT-2 was responsible for the area north and west of Ramadi from Hit to the Iraq-Syrian border in Al Anbar

Province—Area of Operations (AO) Denver, more than 30,000 square miles. His force initially consisted of 3,200 Marines and Sailors. His mission was to conduct counterinsurgency (COIN) operations in order to intercept and disrupt insurgent forces. It was a classic economy-of-force operation. The objectives were to create the conditions to support a successful October 2005 National Referendum for the Constitution and the December 2005 National Elections.

The RCT averaged more than a major operation a month. Though at times these operations were characterized by the press as “whack-a-mole,” the actions were tied to his objectives. Early in his deployment, Colonel Davis simply did not have sufficient forces to provide persistent presence, and he used his resources to keep the insurgents off balance as the province approached the National Referendum. But that strategy changed dramatically as the RCT received additional resources, to include Coalition and Iraqi forces.

Col Davis was interviewed at his office at the Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command (MARSOC), Camp Lejeune, on 25 May 2010 by Dr. William (Bill) Knarr and Colonel Dale Alford, USMC.



Col Davis, Commander, RCT-2 (2004–06)

Dr. Bill Knarr: Please provide your name and background.

Davis: My name is Stephen Davis. I’m currently the deputy commander of the Marine Corps Forces, Special Operations Command (MARSOC). I’ve been in this billet almost two-and-a-half years. Prior to this billet, I was the G3 for II MEF [Marine Expeditionary Force], and prior to that I was the commander of RCT-2. I’m an infantry officer by trade, and I’ve commanded at every level from platoon to regiment. I spent about six years

with our reconnaissance community and now about five plus years over in the actual SOF [Special Operation Forces] world working a three-year Joint tour with the Joint Special Operations Command [JSOC] at Fort Bragg and the rest with MARSOC. I spent four years at Parris Island, two years at the Weapons Training Battalion, and two years as the Director of the Drill Instructor School. This was followed by a year and a half up at Headquarters Marine Corps, split between the Strategic Initiatives Group and as Senior Aide to the Commandant. [01:15]

Knarr: Please provide background information on predeployment and then on the deployment itself.

Davis: Let me back it up a little bit. I took command of 2nd Marines in June of '04. Prior to that I spent nine, ten months as the CJ5 of CJTF-HOA [Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa] in Africa, which is noteworthy for two reasons. My predecessor at 2nd Marines, Colonel Ron Bailey had taken the 2nd Marines to Iraq as part of the "March-Up."¹ He set me up for huge success, because he built probably 70 percent of my staff at 2nd Marines, Marines that he put in these positions. He took a number of them, including our S2, Bobby Schubert, and a number of others and sent them to HOA for six-month tours. This provided an invaluable base of experience for the staff.

Everybody at HOA was concentrating on Somalia and essentially looking at establishing FOBs [Forward Operating Bases]—for lack of a better word—around the borders of Somalia. We looked at that and said this is nuts, because these lines on the deck [border lines on the map] mean nothing to the people down there. So back in 2003, we started doing a tribal analysis of East Africa in order to understand the implications. You'll see in the brief that if you erase the acknowledged borders between the countries, particularly around eastern Kenya, southern Somalia, and the Ogaden Region between Ethiopia and Somalia, which are well known contested area and very tribally driven regions, you will get a whole different perspective. When you realize the tribal dimensions and demographics, you look at it though a different lens. Whether it's highlanders against the lowlanders, Christians against Muslims, this tribe against that tribe, and you think that you are doing the right thing, but you are unintentionally taking sides. You don't even know you've made that decision. Gaining that understanding was important for all of us.

¹ The March-Up is the name given to the March/April 2003 Coalition attack into Iraq.

You start looking at problems differently; this methodology was helpful when we started looking at Al Anbar. [3:23]

I took command of the 2nd Marine Regiment in June of '04. We were not slated to go to Iraq at that time. It was going to be resourced by 5th Marines from the west coast and 8th Marines from the east coast. Actually, I was originally slated to command 8th Marines, but the Marine that was slated to command 2nd Marines got pulled off for some issues. They let now-General [Charles] Gurganus, who was serving then as the 4th MEB [Marine Expeditionary Brigade] deputy, have two full years in command of the 8th Marines Regiment (because they had cadred the 8th Marines Staff after 9/11 to stand up the 4th MEB). So Gurganus kept the 8th Marines, and I got shifted over to 2nd. I walked in the door, and I knew one, literally, one Marine who had been mine in 3/8 when I was a Battalion Commander.

A lot of the credit for what that organization did belonged to Ron Bailey for setting those guys up, getting them trained, and ready to go out the door. Late in the summer '04, we sent the staff to support ULCHI FOCUS LENS operations [in Korea] to start working as a staff and to get some joint experience out there. When we came back, we pushed the initiative that it made no sense to send a regiment from each coast into what we then called OIF [Operation IRAQI FREEDOM] 3, which later became OIF 04–06. The wisdom of that prevailed. HQMC [Headquarters Marine Corps] decided to deploy two regiments from each coast and get into a port and starboard rotation between the coasts. This made more sense for stability, because the regimental headquarters and above were going for a year and the battalions were going for six months. That's how we got to go to Iraq.

There was a bunch of discussion back then of how we would fight, whether we would combine into a MEF/Division Staff, so we would just essentially have one at that point. The decision was made not to do that. Major General Steve Johnson who was the 2nd Division Commander fledged up to become the MEF Forward Commander. Right about the time of the Marine Corps birthday, Major General Rick Huck came in to take 2nd Marine Division. We deployed shortly thereafter on a pre-deployment site survey in early December to go out and take a look at this thing that we were all getting hold of. We flew into Al Asad at night. Then we went down to Ramadi and Fallujah and started the trek leaving the 8th Marines down there. That's where they would be working. [6:12]

Eventually my S3, my S2, and a couple of other Marines and I flew up to Al Asad where we met with Colonel Leigh Miller (now BrigGen Leigh Miller) who was commanding

the 31st MEU [Marine Expeditionary Unit] at that time. He was up there commanding and had replaced Colonel Craig Tucker of RCT-7 when RCT-7 was pulled out to go do AL FAJR, Fallujah II.

Craig Tucker deserves a heck of a lot of credit for what I will call OIF 2. He was well ahead of his time out there in what he was doing. I think he had three if not four battalions out there when he originally deployed after the 'March-Up.' He had a battalion in Al Qaim, Hadithah, Hit, and I think one LAR [Light Armored Reconnaissance] out in Rutbah. So he had some more substantial force structure to work with. They were running their own police academy at Al Asad. They had a jobs program down there. They were building children's recreational park equipment, and sending them out to the villages, getting people working. There were great tribal engagement plans. Again, this is back in the 2003–early 2004 timeframe. [Craig Tucker] got pulled out to go down to Fallujah I [Operation VIGILANT RESOLVE], if I am not mistaken. He was sent back up and then later, when they were getting ready to set up for AL FAJR, he got pulled again. The 31st MEU got plugged in there as the command element.

They also took 1/8, Lieutenant Colonel Gary Brandel's battalion, which was in Hadithah, to Fallujah. So there was one battalion out at Al Qaim, and a battalion that was split between Hit and Hadithah. Rawah, up the Euphrates in between Hadithah and Al Qaim, was vacated. That's where this whole thing starts to fall apart. You are well aware of the history of AL FAJR. They did well down there. Unfortunately, those [terrorists] that escaped, either early on or after the battle, moved their way up the Euphrates River Valley unbeknownst to most and complicated an already complex issue up there. Leigh Miller was up there with his command element. I don't think he had his BLT [battalion landing team], so he was working with pretty diminished forces out there. I took responsibility for AO Denver in early March 2005. It was about 30,000 square miles, pretty much everything west of Ramadi and bordered Syria, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. [8:48]

Leigh Miller was very gracious, and the time we spent with him was absolutely invaluable. The night we got there, he had reconnaissance teams in full contact up in Hadithah. They lost a HMMWV [High Mobility Multi-purposed Wheeled Vehicle]. They had to call in an AC-130 to destroy it, because they couldn't get it out of there. Fortunately, the recon team got out of there without casualties. There was a lot of kinetic action going on at that time. This was just a small indication of things to come.

We rolled back off the PDSS [predeployment site survey], made some adjustments, and then we deployed in February of '05, taking TOA [Transfer of Authority] in early March officially. Previously, I talked to you about the value of HOA. We had started months before we deployed understanding that borders with Syria and Jordan, while obviously important internationally, were not important to the people and the tribes, because they extended on both sides of the border. It's the same problem we faced in HOA, so we already had a great tribal diagnosis prior to deploying. We always used to tell people, the Euphrates is a highway. It's been a highway for 4,000 years. These are business men out here, and you need to look at this area through a different lens. The solution out here will be found as a business equation. This is not good guys versus bad guys, although there were plenty of bad guys. Everybody's got a business angle up here, because that's what they do. And there are some great survivors up here. They've survived 35 years of Saddam. He couldn't tame them, and so by understanding this, you start to understand a bit about the environment that we were walking into.

This is the "Viking in the Valley" presentation that we put together [select slides from that briefing follow during this transcript]. I did this for the Marine Corps University, School of Advanced Warfighting (SAW). Just some thoughts here, nothing special about this particular to Al Anbar, but suffice to say, we got there with a very open and adaptive mindset. A lot of that has to do with the fact that when you spend a lot of time with Special Operations folks, you learn to look at things through different lenses, because there isn't a set-piece way. We're very critical of the conventional planners, because they rarely take into account that the enemy has a vote. When he does vote, your planning basically had better be able to adapt. Because we're fairly linear in the way we think, when the enemy does vote, you don't have time to go back and readjust your plan with any degree of timeliness. We were very, very blessed in the Marine Corps having grown up with a rapid response planning process [R2P2], which we learned through the MEU, the MEU SOC [special operations capable] Program and that helped us out a great deal.

I start the briefs talking about Iraq "in context." You'll hear me talk about "in context" quite a bit here. This is because it's very easy to look back today and think, "Well, we should've done this, we should've done that." Millions of Americans have had an Iraq experience, and whenever you talk about that, you've got to place that particular experience at a time and place, so the people can understand context. Dale Alford's experience in Husaybah is a classic case. When the 82nd Airborne Division was there, originally, people were downtown on Market Street having lunch at the little shops and shopping.

The threat was nonexistent when they left that area. Lieutenant Colonel Matt Lopez came in behind them. [12:35] You know, Matt lost 17 guys in one day. There was just brutal fighting in there. Lieutenant Colonel Woody Woodbridge, who succeeded him, just held on to what they had. Lieutenant Colonel Tim Mundy came in after them. You couldn't move anywhere near that town without getting blown up or shot at. Then Lieutenant Colonel Dale Alford came in, and we cleaned out the rat's nest. We got back to a point where people could go down the Main Street again.

Alford: We were in the market a month ago, sir—slick [no Kevlar; no body armor]!

Davis: So you've come full cycle in the course of five, six years. It's important to place in context what you're thinking about, why you're thinking about it, and what you were seeing on the tactical, operational, and the strategic end of this. This just shows you the basic orientation of AO Denver [Figure A-1]. It's a big son of a gun, but you already know that.

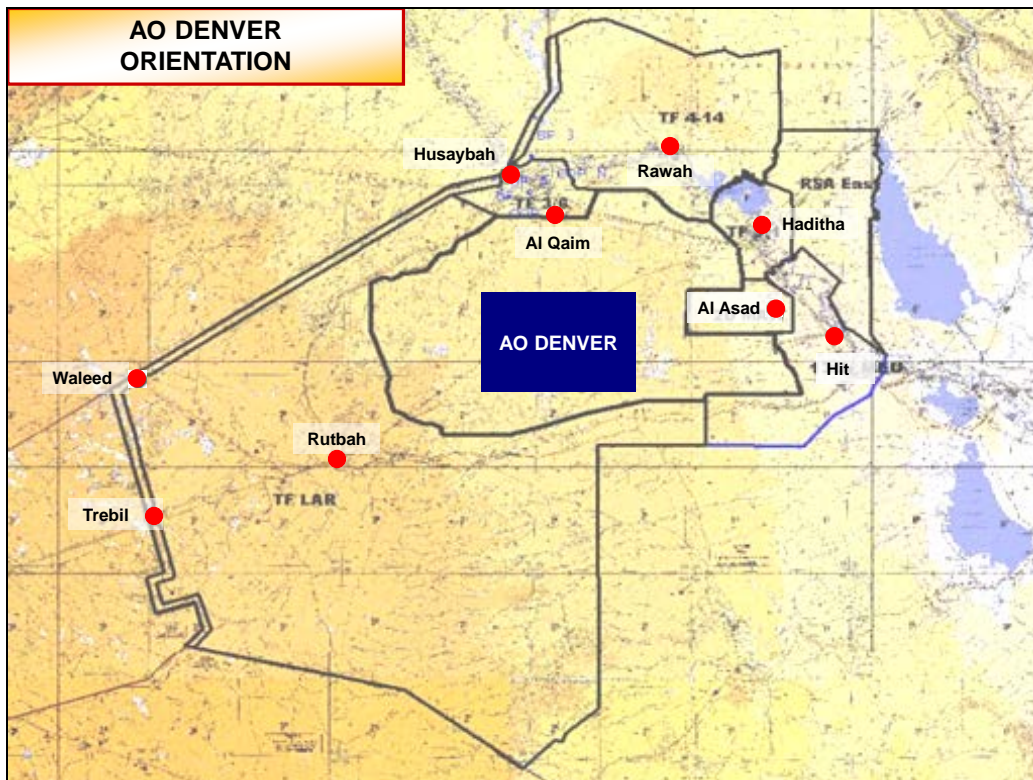


Figure A-1. AO Denver

I want to talk about force structure here. When we arrived, the situation out there was unknown, and I don't necessarily think there was a great grasp of tying together the stra-

tegic nature of what we were trying to accomplish. Strategically, we were trying to get out of Iraq. I think SECDEF [Secretary of Defense] Rumsfeld was driving much of this. We weren't talking force structure increases at all. There wasn't an acknowledged insurgency at this point in time. They had just cleaned out and killed the bad guys in Fallujah. I think General Mattis probably had a pretty good handle on it, but nobody was very receptive to it. [14:15]

When we got sent out there, my total force structure for RCT-2 was comprised of four rifle companies and two LAR companies. I had two battalions, 3/25 and 3/2. 3/25 was a reserve battalion, and there were some great Marines in that battalion who worked awful darn hard. They weren't set up for success. By that I mean decisions which were made at a more senior level. For instance, for their two-week active duty training, it was decided to let them finish out their school semesters in December when they could have been taking that last two weeks to train. And as we'll talk about, that battalion took some horrible casualties. 3/2 was a regular battalion. It was the only indigenous, 2nd Marines battalion I actually got to take and command in Iraq, the others being chopped out with the MEU. 2/2 went down and worked for the 8th Marines, due to the normal rotation cycles of where the battalions were going.

The MEF (FWD) operations order reassigned two 180-man rifle companies, one from each battalion (3/2, 3/25), to guard the perimeter at Al Asad and placed them OPCON [Operational Control] to the Air Wing. Brigadier General Milstead, the wing commander, was a good friend from our days as colonels and was a magnificent officer over there. He was 100-percent supportive. But the point is, I've got a 30,000-square-mile AO, and I've got four rifle companies to deal with it. We had an artillery battery split between the Ports of Entry [POEs] Waleed and Trebil, backing up those ports of entry on the border. We also had a couple companies of LAR out at Rutbah, and that was it. So the force distribution was a company at Camp Gannon on the Syrian Border, that POE. There was one at the train station in Al Qaim. The train station was also the battalion headquarters. There was a rifle company and the Headquarters of 3/25 in the dam at Hadithah [Figure A-2], and one company outside of Hit to the north and the RCT Headquarters at Camp Ripper inside Al Asad. That was it for 30,000 square miles. It was about 3,200 people when we deployed over there. [16:27]



Figure A-2. Hadithah Dam

So what that means in English is I could not get north of the Euphrates River, because I did not have adequate force structure to do this effectively. I shared a boundary with 3rd ACR [Armored Cavalry Regiment] and my good friend, then Colonel, now Brigadier General

H.R. McMaster (friend from years before, we did some work in HOA when he was one of General Abizaid's smart guys). Frankly, I didn't do much below MSR [main supply route] Michigan and Mobile down here. Part of our mission/stated tasks was to protect tier one infrastructure. Tier one infrastructure in AO Denver included some bridges on Michigan and Mobile where they didn't want a back flow coming into Ramadi, Baghdad, and the Hadithah Dam. We were told that those [bridges and dams] were not to be destroyed and that we had to protect them.

We were totally an economy-of-force effort. Our goal was to create conditions to allow for successful elections in the National Referendum in October and, ultimately, the National Elections in December. We deployed in February, and that's what we walked in to. That's what our distribution of forces was. It was a complex environment; I don't need to tell you about that. You can write volumes about that already. [17:47]

Here's some of the tribal lay-down [Figure A-3]. This is very simplistic compared to what we did, but it just starts to show you some of the main tribes. This was the work that was done in late 2004 before we went to Iraq, so we had a good idea of who we were walking into. You notice when I talked about the force structure lay-down, we had nobody up in Rawah. You've got forces out here west, and you've got forces down here. There is not such a great concern in the mid-zone, the areas between Husaybah and Trebil. You see this in another slide here [Figure A-4]. The tribal lay-down starts to neck down the tribes in Al Qaim, which carry across the border into Syria. [18:36]

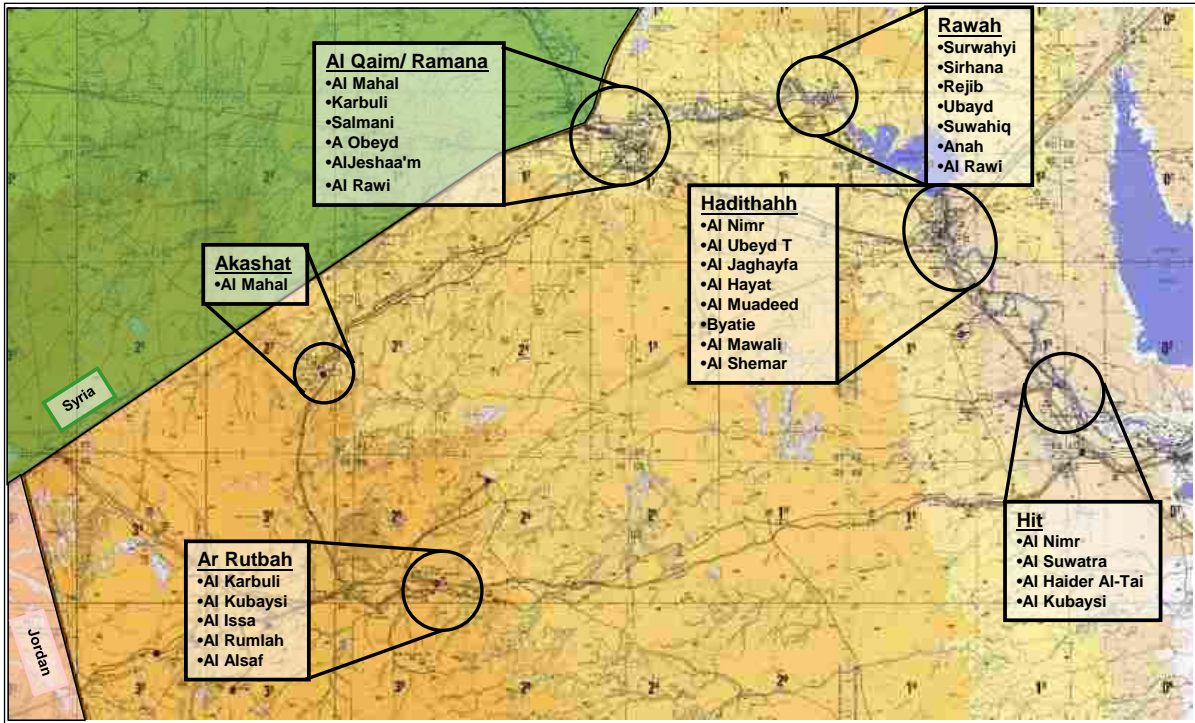


Figure A-3. Major tribes in AO Denver

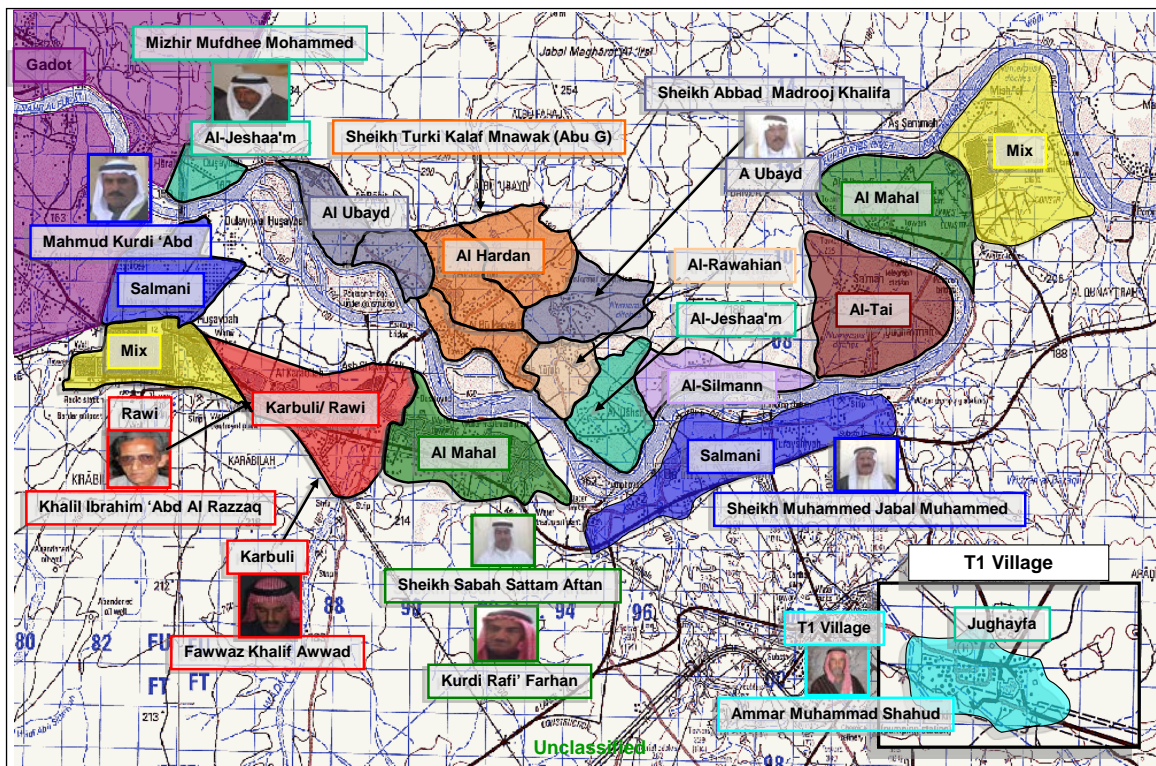


Figure A-4. Major tribes in Al Qaim

Knarr: And [Albu-Mahal is in] Akashat, too.

Davis: Yep, we were a little RCT with a division mission and a MEF battlespace. That is the way we used to look at ourselves. Thirty-thousand square miles, 3,200 Marines and Sailors originally deployed (three battalions, each minus one company), and we were fighting three enemies simultaneously. We didn't know this going in there, but we figured it out real quick. The enemy situation included [1] tribally based criminal enterprises. When Saddam released all the criminals out of the prisons, of course, they went right back home to create more joy. There were [2] nationalist insurgent-former regime guys, Ba'athists, the 1920s Revolutionary Group, things like that. Then you have your [3] foreign fighters [AMZ/AQI, and international jihadists]. On any given day, they'd play well together in the sand box; that probably wasn't a good day for us. Other days they'd fight amongst each other, and it was a great day for us. So it just depended on what day it was and what the issue was.

Early on—again because of the unique mixture that we had on the staff and our combined experiences—you start looking at this differently. This isn't a force-on-force exercise and this is not a linear equation. We put together what I called the 14-Level Chess Board. I can show you what that looks like, everything from your religion, your family, and all the way on up to your economics. Every time you make a move on the chess board it has fifth-, sixth-, eighth-, tenth-order effects. So how do you deal with that? And clearly I am responsible for everything that happened out there. That goes with the mantle of command.

Knarr: This 14-level chess board, was that unique to what you did or did you learn that somewhere?

Davis: Again, our experiences as Marines and the time and effort we put into our institutional PME paid off. I learned much of it through my operational experiences, which includes tours in JSOC and HOA. When you start looking at HOA, you have to look at it differently, and you realize how we nearly screwed up Somalia again.

Knarr: We're trying to collect and present different perspectives through this project—how you look at things differently, and one of the things, of course, is the human terrain. How do you deal with that?

Davis: Hold that thought for when we get to talking about MATADOR and Lieutenant General Vines [Commander, Multi-National Corps–Iraq, MNC-I]. [20:55]

Knarr: Great! Because I think that's something that we can provide to people.

Davis: Well, it is. When you're in this environment, again, put it "in context" of the time, early 2005. You've got these Marines running out here and MNFI [Multi-National Force-Iraq] and MNC-I staff, predominantly Army. These guys are trained to do better planning than anybody in the world. That's what they do. They did it great, but it tends to be very linear. However, this situation was very complex, and it doesn't give the enemy, who wasn't acknowledged, much, if any credit. GEN Casey was the guy that got it, though. I'm not sure that his staff got it, but GEN Casey intuitively understood. When GEN Casey came out to visit the RCT, he was jumping down about four levels of the chain of command. When he came down to him [pointing to Col Alford] it was five, but he found a home with both of us. He's a great American. My time with him, flying around with him and being on the ground with him, is really quite priceless and something I cherish.

As we've described previously, the enemy consists of all types of folks out there. They run the gamut. There was never a day in that year where I was concerned if I had a well-armed squad out there. There was nothing they could not handle unless we were doing a major operation. The quality of the Marines, the Soldiers, the Sailors, speaks for itself. We were well-equipped, and we got better equipped. Originally, we just didn't have the numbers we required. [22:39]

But if you get complacent, if you're not brilliant in the basics, or if the other guy is just having a good day, you're going to get hurt. And we got hurt on a couple of days out here. It was rapidly apparent that you've got the tribal business going on and the former Ba'athists/Nationalists pursuing their agenda. We understood that. But the foreign fighters were the ones I was always looking for. You could always tell when they were in town, because you'd start losing guys to sniper shots and a much more professional approach to the fight. No kidding: sniper shots, head shots, things like that. The sophistication of the bomb making was initially attributed to both foreign fighters, and then the level-two guys, the nationalist guys, they picked it up.

We understood from the very beginning that this was a game of point-counterpoint, point-counterpoint. About every two weeks you'd be looking for a shift in TTPs [tactics, techniques, and procedures], and if you weren't looking for it you were going to get hurt. It's a thinking man's game, it really is. Everything has to do with the security aspect, line of operation, if you will. It's not that we were oblivious to economics, education, infrastructure, and all the good things you're trying to do through your Civil Affairs guys.



Figure A-5. ASP Wolf

This was a totally non-permissive environment when we got there; we just didn't know how non-permissive. [24:01]

The enemy tools: these are some ingenious people. You had ASP [ammunition supply points] Dulab and ASP Wolf [Figure A-5], which was west of Haqlaniyah, out towards Husaybah and Al Qaim. The Coalition spent a bunch of

money de-milling [de-militarizing] these things in 2004, but what they left these insurgents with were these 155 rounds [example at top left, Figure A-6] with no HE [high explosive] in them. But the fuses were available; so the insurgents would pour black powder, C4, P4, or whatever they had into these shells and craft a field explosive fuse, and they had a hell of a bomb.

There were square kilometers of this stuff, just stood up on end. We tried to develop a business where guys would get in there and get this stuff melted down for scrap. They could get some type of conversion, take scrap metal and build that up. Unfortunately, we couldn't get much funding for that. Nobody wanted to pay for it. They didn't want to pay contractors and they didn't want to pay Iraqis. So somebody else paid the Iraqis to make bombs out of them, and we got to see them again! Again, it's the story of Iraq: there are just weapons and munitions everywhere.

About a month into our tour, Sergeant Major Reineg (RCT-2 Regimental Sergeant Major), who was an absolute gift, came back from the parking lot and said, "You know, we got five shipping containers full of weapons." I said, "Really?" We went and broke them open and saw all of the weapons had been left there. Every weapon, none of which were of US manufacture, but virtually every other weapon in the world was in those containers. The amount of weapons and munitions out there and the ingenuity in utilizing them was absolutely stunning. I mean, that wheelbarrow is a rocket launcher [Figure A-6c]. The rockets are launched off of that. These are some ingenious people; they don't have much but they do well with what they have. Fortunately, they're not tremendously accurate! We can talk about the results of what they did, but that's not new news.



Figures A-6a-d, Clockwise from top left. Enemy Tools: 155 rounds tethered for an IED; weapons; wheel barrow to launch rockets; cell phones, radios, batteries as detonators.

This vehicle [Figure A-7] was the last time my jump [mobile] TOC [Tactical Operations Center] got hit. It took off everything from the windshield forward. I don't know how the driver lived. He lost a leg in the explosion and lost the other one in subsequent operations. That's a tribute to the MEDEVAC system, the Docs and the Army and Navy folks that they have. That Marine is alive today, married with kids. It's a good news story, but it was a tough, tough, tough day! [26:32]



Figure A-7. Destroyed HMMWV

Challenges [referring to the slide Figure A-8]: Inadequate force structure for the mission; misperception of the situation in the AO; no collection assets. You've got to remember that at that time, three-fourths of Iraq was a good deal; it was all green on the maps. There was just this cancer out in Al Anbar, and that's why

they put the Marines out there to deal with it. The challenge that MajGen Rick Huck, our division commander, had was Fallujah, Ramadi, and us [Al Asad – AO Denver]. They were three different fights. We used to call it I-N-C. For us, it was Interdict, for Ramadi it was Neutralize, and for Fallujah it was Control. Despite the investment that the US, particularly the Marine Corps, put into Fallujah, it was still contentious. There were still bad guys running around down there. You can't lose Fallujah. Fallujah was important, because we made it important. Ramadi was the provincial capital. That was the center of gravity. And for us, if that's my boss' center of gravity, my job is to keep insurgents away from that center of gravity; it's not rocket science! Economy of force, I got that. We'll talk about that here shortly. [27:48]



Challenges



- Inadequate force structure for the mission
- Misperception of situation in AO Denver
- Scarce collection assets
- Complex operational environment
- Truly understanding the culture
 - People despise chaos
 - They respect power and strength
- Inconsistent operational force structure
 - Ultimately, Hit controlled by 7 different Bns in 10 months

Figure A-8. Challenges for 2nd Marines in Al Anbar

Complex environment: You really have got to understand the culture. I've been working issues associated with the Middle East since 1990 when we deployed to and fought in DESERT SHIELD/ DESERT STORM. I believe that "Arabs despise chaos; they respect power and strength." There's plenty of historical documentation to back that up. You really have to understand these people, and what we now call the "micro terrain." When you boil this down, about 70–80 percent of these people are just fence sitters. They just want to know how things are going to sort out at the end of the day. Who's going to be the strongest dog on the block? Who's the strongest tribe? All they want to do is put a roof over their family's head, put food on the table, and raise their kids, which is not so much different from what we want to do. That was lost on a bunch of people at the time.

Next is the inconsistent operational force structure that existed during my time over there. Hit is the classic example. During the course of 2005 into 2006, at least seven different units controlled what became known as the Hit battlespace. That's no way to do counterinsurgency. We take a lot of criticism that we don't understand how to do counterinsurgency. I would offer that the Marine Corps absolutely understood how to do counterinsurgency well in advance of the publication of the FM 3-24. I think a lot of us, my generation who were raised by the guys coming right out of Vietnam, who still have the manuals, and who still have the lessons learned, we understand that. The smarter,

younger guys who came up behind us never lost sight of that and were even more nuanced. That's part of Marine Corps culture, and that's what we do in irregular warfare. The problem is that the more senior [people] at the operational and strategic levels didn't understand the nature of the fight and the requirement to resource it properly, particularly the manpower needed. That's not criticism of GEN Casey, that's criticism that extends, frankly, beyond him. In the Middle East you don't win, you manage. The situation we encountered was not analogous to American football. You move the ball forward, that's ok, but you don't get to a static end state. We don't have boundaries. You don't get into the end zone. The clock doesn't run out and you don't go home at the end of the day. That was not the ball park we were playing in. That was not well understood. [30:05]

Knarr: When you talk about the control [or lack of control] of so many different battalions and inconsistency, I always thought of Hadithah in that light, but, from what you are saying, it seems like Hit is probably a better example?

Davis: Hit is absolutely a better example, and you'll see why here when we talk through the campaign plan. Hadithah was harder, frankly. When we took TOA, Hit was not a bad situation. That might have been illusionary, but there wasn't a great deal of overt anti-Americanism there, and we did not want to change that. When I got there in February, took over in March, there was nobody else out there. There were no SOF or OGA [Other Government Agencies], and frankly there were no Iraqis. There were about 25 members of the ING [Iraqi National Guard] up at the cement factory in Al Qaim and about another 20 outside of Hit at one of the camps up there. That was it for AO Denver, for 30,000 square miles.

When we got our first Iraqi company in June 2005, we went back to Hit in OPERATION SWORD. We did not go back into any towns until we could go there and install a combined, permanent, persistent presence. So again, there's not a lot new about this. We got criticized a great deal in the press about doing "whack-a-mole." But for my first six months out there, I was just trying to keep four rifle companies alive and not lose any of our tier-one infrastructure, and people missed that. So when people say, "You didn't understand," well, we did understand, and we'll talk about that. For example, we didn't get into Hadithah until we conducted Operation RIVER GATE in October 2005. We realized you can't keep going in and out on an episodic basis unless it's absolutely necessary. We understood that we couldn't make any real progress until we could establish a combined, permanent, persistent presence with Iraqis in the lead.

[New Slide, see Figure A-9] We saw our AO as three separate fights, but they were all interrelated. Again, you see the combined, permanent, persistent presence, and these slides were based on that philosophy.

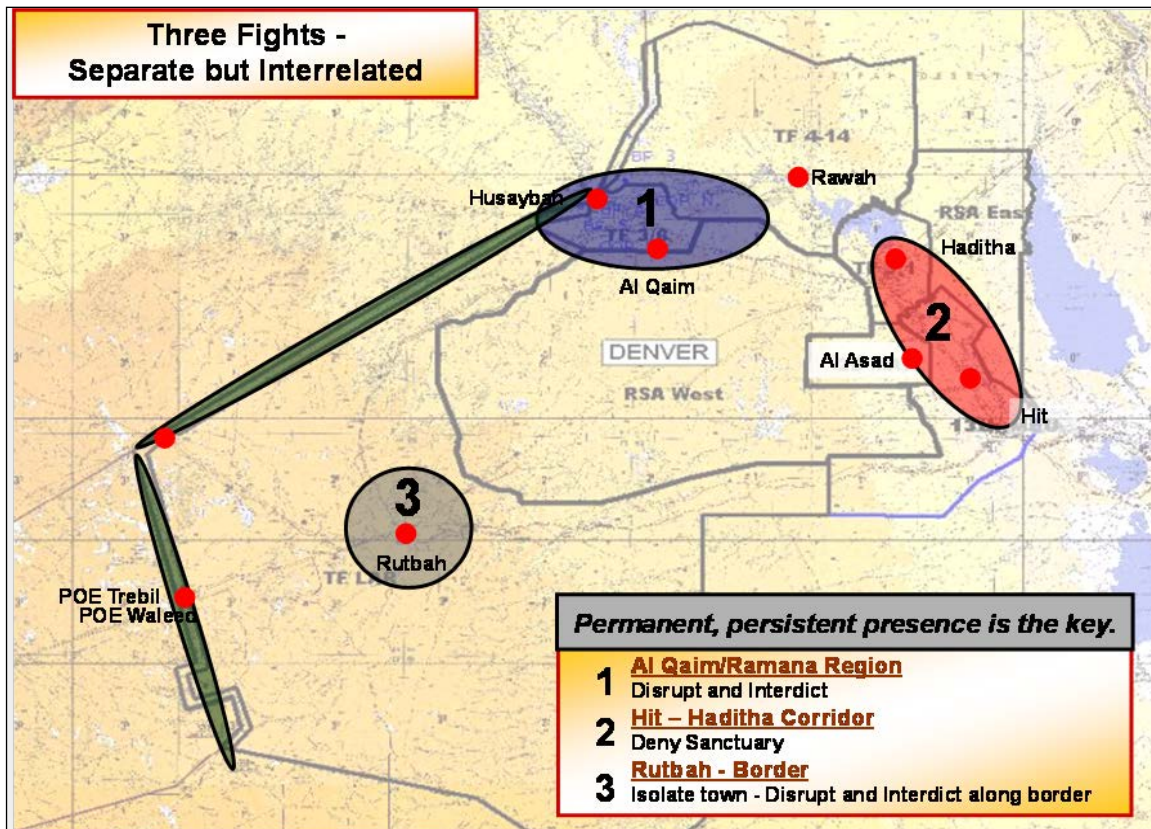


Figure A-9. Three interrelated fights in AO Denver

By and large, the Al Qaim region is hugely important. This is the Hadithah, Hit corridor with Al Asad, and Rutbah, which is a great smugglers town. This is the border. This border piece gets lost in the discussion. We'll come back to that. [32:50]

[Figure A-10] Our campaign plan was built in Feb 2005. Our campaign plan was real simple. My mission: Conduct COIN operations in order to disrupt and interdict anti-Iraqi insurgent elements. Our goal: Establish presence, which gives you security, which gives you stability, which creates the environment for success to occur. Our mission was, ultimately, to get these areas to where the National Referendum and the National Elections could be held. How we were going to do that was by establishing the combined, permanent, persistent presence in the major population centers in the Euphrates River Valley,

combined being the key part. Initially, we had no Iraqis to do that with. That was a little bit of a challenge.

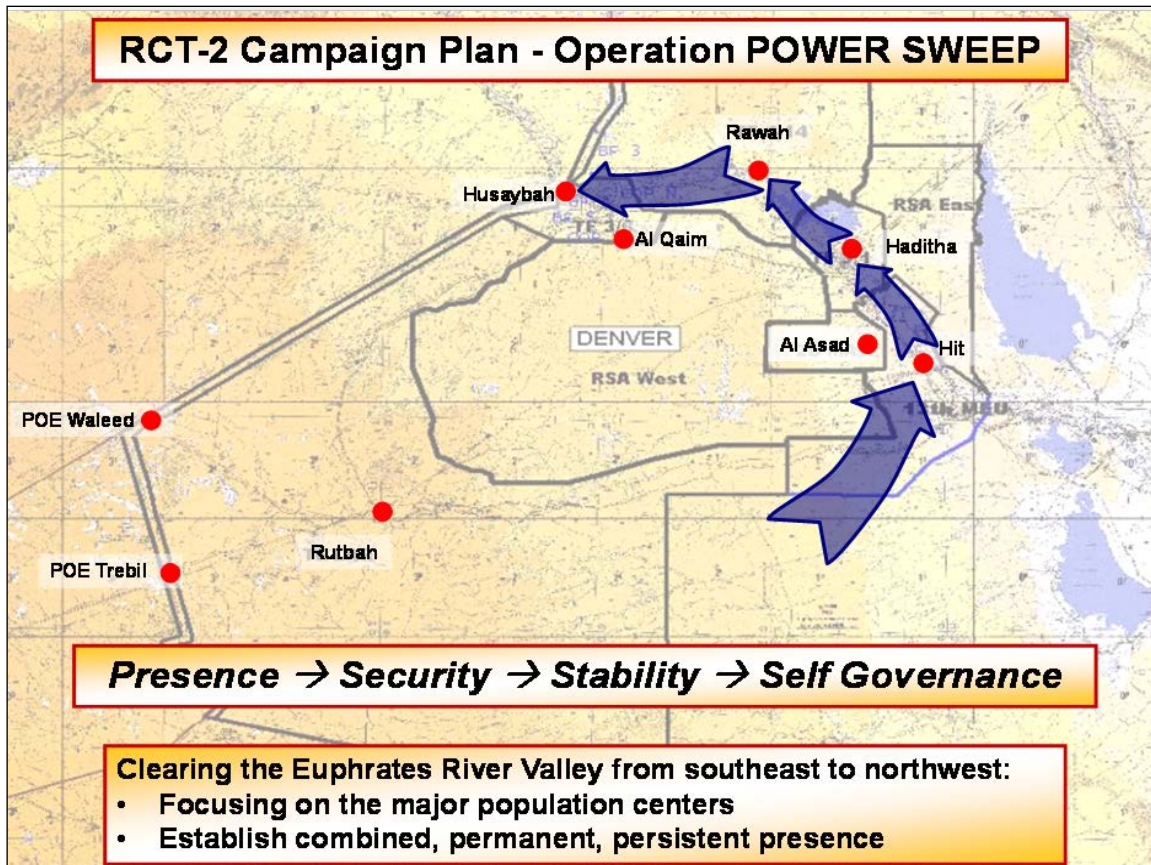


Figure A-10. Campaign Plan for Operation POWER SWEEP

We called the campaign plan POWER SWEEP [referring to the slide in Figure A-9]. The center of gravity for both the 2nd MARDIV, the MEF (FWD) was Ramadi, the provincial capital. Very simply, we wanted to go back into Hit, then to Hadithah, up to Rawah, and finally out there to Al Qaim and just keep pushing them away from the center of gravity, Ramadi. Get them back into the border region and get them further away from that which was important. Where this plan ran into some difficulty was after we went back into Hit.

The decision was made at a level above the MEF FWD (MNCI or MNFI] to realign boundaries and to detach everything north of the river from RCT-2's control, because I didn't have any force structure to go up there in any capacity. 3rd ACR didn't have enough force structure to control it either. You could punch up there and pull right back out, but so what? What was that going to accomplish? They reassigned that piece of ter-

rain, and they gave it to 2-14 Stryker, who immediately went into Rawah with a significant sized force. They conducted an assault on the town, which was really unfortunate because [National SOF] had spent a bunch of time conducting a pretty sophisticated IO [information operations] campaign that, at worst, was helping to neutralize insurgent elements in that area. There was a guy named Gassan Amin [phonetic] up there who was a crime boss running everything from Anah over to Karabilah. He was a high value target who eventually got captured. However, the effect on us when 2-14 Stryker arrived in Rawah was that their presence pushed a bunch of these foreign fighters/insurgents into the Hadithah, Haqlaniyah, and Barwana area. As we had established combined, permanent, persistent presence down south in Hit and with 2-14 Stryker in Rawah it started compressing the area in between. Hadithah is in a strategic location. The routes coming in from Husaybah can take you right up into Tikrit or down to Hit and Ramadi/Baghdad. Interdicting in Rawah, which caused an adjustment in our campaign plan made a bad situation in Hadithah much worse. Eventually, higher Headquarters realized the error of their ways, and reassigned the area north of the river back to RCT-2 after GEN Casey came out to see us on one of his visits.

GEN Casey came back in September 2005. His understanding of the battlefield and the enemy situation resulted in RCT-2 force structure being increased from 3,200 people (at that time Col Alford and his battalion arrived) to over 14,000 personnel. GEN Casey was wonderful and hugely supportive. He understood the fight. He understood that you need boots on the ground to gain this combined, permanent, persistent presence, which ultimately consisted of two brigades of Iraqis and seven or eight American battalions. That was pretty good for an RCT. We were able to do good work and achieve some of the operational goals that we had hoped to address. Additionally, it changed the strategic direction of this fight, which later resulted in the Awakening.

But that was the game plan going in. I think it was a solid plan given the intelligence and manpower resources available. Things are condition sensitive. You give me the force structure, and this is what we can do.

Knarr: So, POWER SWEEP was your plan as you walked in to TOA?

Davis: Absolutely. And this [slide in Figure A-11] just walks you through.

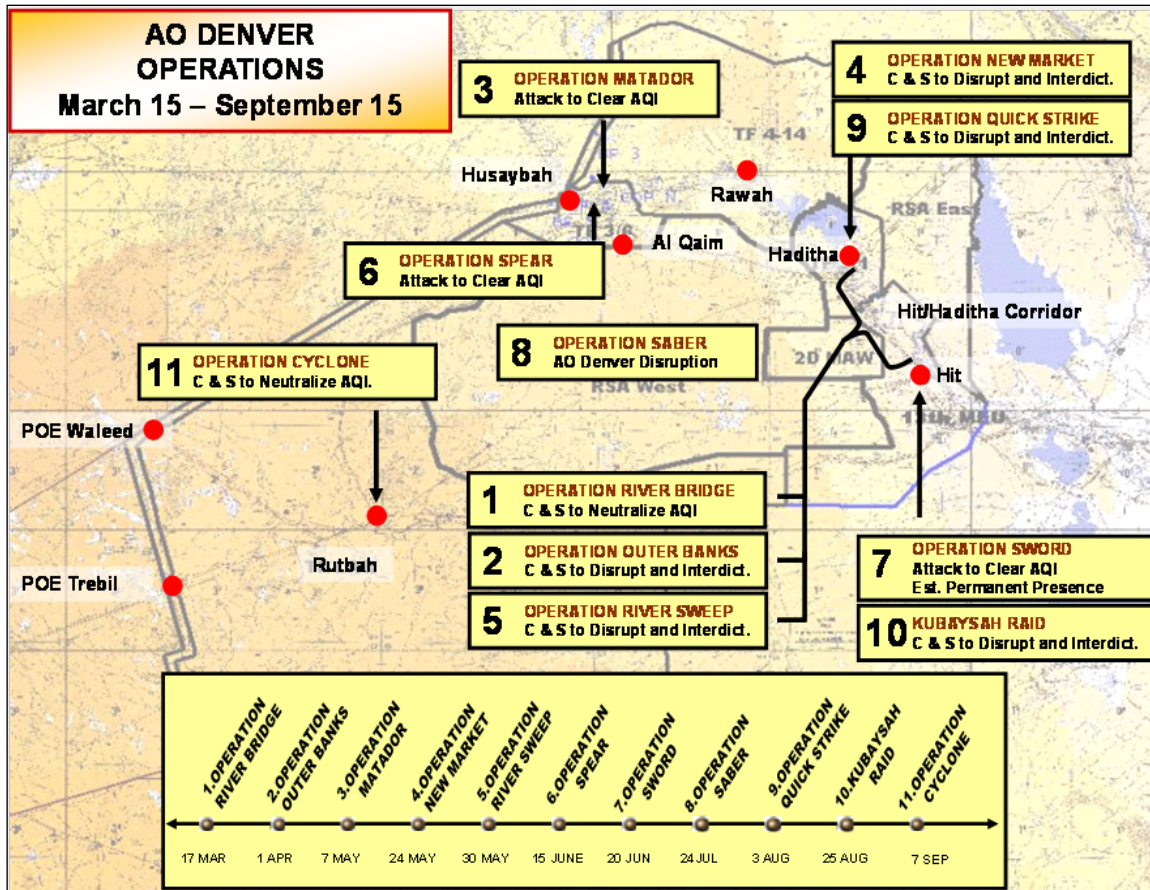


Figure A-11. Semester 1, 15 March–15 September 2005

This is what I call first semester, 15 March through 15 September. Again, this is 3,200 Marines/Sailors to include the four rifle companies. RIVER BRIDGE was an operation constructed by I MEF. It was designed to cover the RIP/TOA [Relief in Place/Transfer of Authority]. This was an operation that Col Craig Tucker, Commander, RCT-7, initiated, handed off to me, and then we just kept it going. It was just designed to create a seamless transition and disguise the RIP from the enemy.

The second one we did was called OUTER BANKS [Figure A-11 #2] between the Hadithah–Hit corridor. What we were doing was trying to feel out what the heck we had there and what the heck we were doing. The intel picture we were given was pretty undetermined. That was after we’d taken TOA. Our first two or three weeks, we were just trying to figure out what the hell was going on there. There was nobody out there. There were no INTs—no SIGINT, no HUMINT [signals and human intelligence], no nothing that’s telling you anything. We had the Civil Affairs teams out. Guys were patrolling. We

were finding IEDs [improvised explosive devices]. We got very good at that, both in the good way and the bad way. [38:05]

Knarr: I like the way you display that. [Figure A-11 reflects all the operations from 15 March to 15 September 2005, one at a time as Col Davis talks through it].

Davis: Yeah, it's pretty good; it's probably Starling's work [Lieutenant Colonel Chris Starling, S3, RCT-2].

Given my previous experience, one particular event that occurred on 11 April 2005 rapidly focused us on the threat and what it meant to the RCT. There was an attack on Camp Gannon, and this is an insurgent video of the triple suicide bombing. The insurgents ran a vehicle up Market Street into the POE, and boom, it blew up. They brought a second one into the POE and it blew. And the third one was a fire truck. Two guys driving it had plate glass windows about three inches thick, body armor, which was unheard of, and this whole thing was loaded with explosives. A lance corporal who got knocked out in the first explosion woke up, got on a SAW [squad automatic weapon], found a vulnerability, and blew this fire truck sky high. I will show you this here on the video, but that was really a defining point for us. After that, I knew what type of ball park we were playing in then. This goes back to work we'd done back in the SOF world.

This is great pre-assault reconnaissance, courtesy of your enemy [referring to the video].

Knarr: Was this on their web?

Davis: Yeah.

Knarr: Some of it's not bad resolution from pulling off the web.

Davis: This is pretty good stuff. That's the second bomb inbound [referring to video]. There's the first one, and you hear the small arms fire. There's the guy coming in with the second bomb. And that's the third one; look at that explosion! It looks like a damn nuclear bomb! Previously, I was part of a response force that went to Nairobi after the Embassy bombing. A great fear we always had there was whether somebody was coming after the temporary Embassy, and how were we going to defend against that? You're going to have an explosion. You've got a breach, and someone is piling through. And how would you defend against that in a non-kinetic setting especially back in the '98 timeframe? [41:20]

For months there was the wreck of that fire truck sitting out there on Market Street until we got up there and started cleaning that place up. Three weeks later we said, "Ok, got it. We know what's happening here." That's what brought us to Operation MATADOR on 7

May. [Although] the name Zarqawi wasn't big on our radar at that point, those bombings against Camp Gannon were his work.

I'll tell you one more thing about the Gannon attack and IO that's truly noteworthy. We weren't oblivious to the IO aspect of this. There are four audiences you have to influence: your enemy, the Middle East audience, the international audience, as well as the American audience. After the second bombing went off at Gannon and before the third bomb went off, the news was being reported on Wall Street Journal dot-com; that's how fast their flash-to-bang IO was. Their stringers in Husaybah were already primed. When that second one went off, they had a report out there about the insurgent attack on Gannon. That's how well connected they were back there. I said, okay, I've a little bit more appreciation for the capabilities of the guys we were playing against. [59:15]

Knarr: It's amazing.

Davis: It is amazing. We had this discussion yesterday as a matter of fact, comparing it to some of the work our guys are doing now. You have to push authority-to-execute down to the lowest levels. You have to train your people; you have to trust your people. Are they going to get it right all the time? No, they're not, but when you talk about IO, the decision, while being nested in the overall message/plan, needs to be at their level.

A couple weeks before the attack on Camp Gannon, a raid was conducted north of the river by [National SOF], which resulted in significant enemy KIA [Killed in Action]. That there was that kind of strength up there and nobody had any inkling of it was disconcerting. Clearly, there were intelligence indicators that we were not aware of.

One of the challenges I faced as a commander was how to integrate my assigned force structure with other coalition forces operating in my assigned area of responsibility. The benefit of a previous joint tour, in my case at JSOC, allowed me to talk intelligently with SOF personnel that came to operate in AO Denver. In subsequent meetings with SOF in my AO, we realized that by combining forces and aligning our efforts, we could do things differently. And all of a sudden we realized this is how we can do things differently. We came up with a concept we called Team Ball [pointing to a plaque on his wall]. Team Ball consists of 1. Focus on the mission, 2. Leave all egos at the door, and 3. Don't worry about who is getting credit. We got along famously from that point. It's all based on those personal relationships acquired during the joint tours in the past. We started fusing these different sources of intelligence. All of a sudden you get a whole different picture of intel. They were very open in sharing with us, which was helpful. We had a

USMC radio battalion detachment in Camp Ripper, our Camp inside the Al Asad Air Base. The RAD Bn [radio battalion] efforts underpinned everything.

We used to take a good amount of incoming there. On Sundays, we'd get up, the S3 and I would cook up coffee and pull up the lawn chairs to watch rockets shoot up the Wadi, trying to hit the airfield. As long as they were aiming for it, you were safe. (Rockets were invariably fired off time delay improvised launchers and multiple responding fires were ineffective in stopping it.) On Sundays we would just try to let the guys have a couple extra hours of sleep, because they were working about 20 hours a day.

But, back to MATADOR...it was quite simply designed to be a hammer and anvil type operation. We were going to block off the routes coming across the Golden Gate and Ramana Bridges there from the Sinjic area north of the river into Husaybah/Karabalih. [45:10] Our original plan was to put two helicopter-borne companies across the river and then marry them up with Amphibious Assault Vehicles [AAVs]. We would then move them west to the Syrian border and see what we came up with. It was pretty interesting because two things happened out there. Our first major operation only had four rifle companies. I couldn't take the company out of Gannon, so I took the battalion headquarters and the company from the Al Qaim train station and I took the rifle company, L/3/25, out of the dam at Hadithah, so that the battalion commander, LtCol Tim Mundy, had two maneuver elements, plus whatever of his weapons company he wanted to commit. We brought up a company of LAR from Rutbah to seal the operational area to the south, and put the regimental jump CP [command post] to provide overall command and control, integrate fires, and conduct coordination between RCT-2 and SOF.

Alford: So this was when? May?

Davis: May 7.

Knarr: Did you still have the Azerbaijanis?²

Davis: They were guarding the dam at Hadithah, but they weren't a maneuver element. The actual operational maneuver elements that the RCT controlled is somewhat illusionary because of that. You're just buying risk all over the AO

²² The Azerbaijanis guarded the Hadithah Dam. They were one of the Coalition forces that made MNF-W a Coalition.

The RCT could not get south of MSR Michigan and Mobile, and they couldn't get north of the river due to insufficient force structure. MATADOR was our first real foray north of the river. The operation was briefed throughout the chain of command and at some point it appears that information was leaked. I say this because, just before—before being relative, five, six days before—we launched this operation, we found red-on-red (fighting not involving US or Iraqi Government forces) fighting breaking out all over the south side of Al Qaim. We had fights between Husaybah and Karabilah. We had fights between Sadah and Ush and between Old and New Ubaydi right across that Upper Peninsula. We didn't understand it. We appreciated it, but we didn't understand it.

Alford: That was Abu-Mahal's first time against Al Qaeda.

Davis: Well Sadah and Ush are over near the Emerald Wadi [See Figure A-12]. [47:30]

Alford: May of '05.

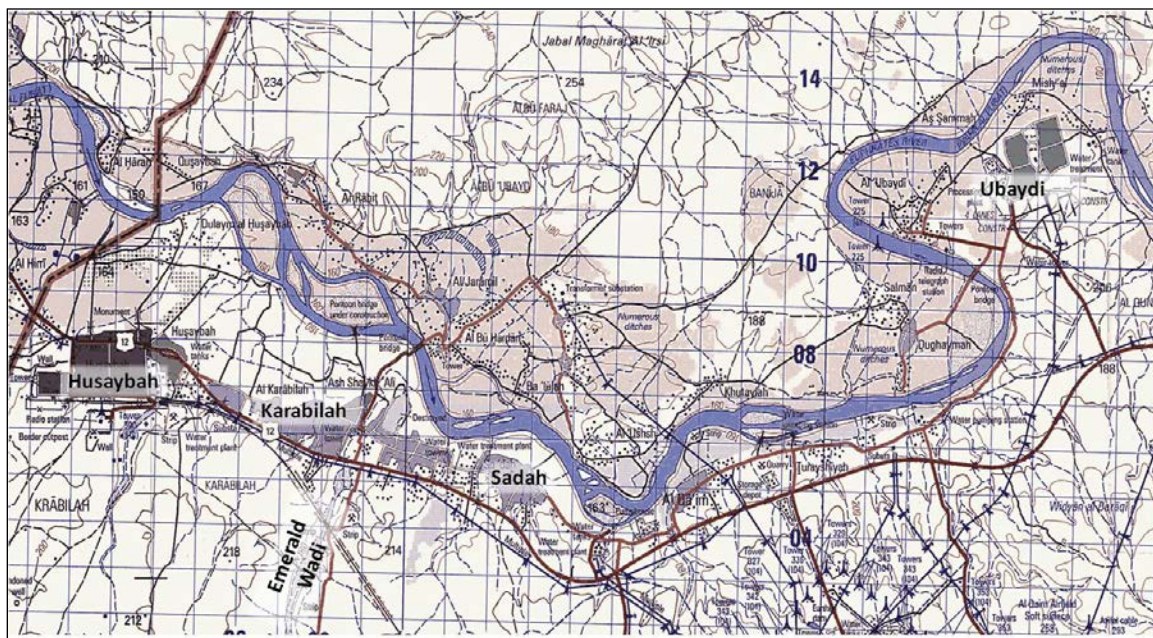


Figure A-12. Al Qaim area

Davis: So, MATADOR was preceded by another raid the night before. We didn't understand that Zarqawi had brought all his forces south of the river. That was the genesis of the red on red. We were trying to figure it out, but I was not feeling good about it. I wasn't feeling good about putting two companies across. Additionally, we had some air movement

deconfliction issues to resolve. So I went back to MajGen Huck, and I said, "Sir, I'm changing my game plan." MajGen Huck was just a wonderful guy to work for, particularly in that environment. He told people what he wanted, you did it, and he supported you 100 percent. By and large, he left us alone to do what we had to do as long as we kept him info'd. He was not happy that we changed the game plan on our first major operation, three days before crossing the line. But I will tell you, it was one of the best decisions I made that year. Instead of putting two companies across heliborne and marrying them up with AAVs, we kept them mech'd up in the AAVs when they left camp from the train station in Al Qaim.

Then Lieutenant Brian Stann (3/2) took out an element with a bunch of HMMWVs and some trucks. He moved to that hill on the south side of the Ramana Bridge where the cemetery is. Prominent terrain feature over there where they can control the Ramana/Golden Gate Bridge.

Alford: He was awarded the Silver Star for his actions.

Davis: I believe there was an incomplete route reconnaissance conducted and it cost him. Moving to contact in the middle of the night, they got to the point where they ran into a wadi and they encountered vehicle problems. The bottom line is that they got into position up on that hill, on the south side of the river about three hours late, just as dawn was breaking. So Stann gets in that position, and finds out that that whole hill was just laden with IEDs. About that time, he starts getting attacked out of Karabilah by guys in black uniforms with body armor. So who could that be? We didn't know at that time, but all we knew we had a new threat on the battlefield that we had never seen before.

Stann was engaged for about three days up there. We lost a tank, a tank retriever, an AAV, and HMMWVs. He was just in a brawl the whole time. But Stann's a good man, and he had good Marines with him.

The Army Bridge Company moved out of the Al Qaim train station and almost immediately rolled one of their vehicles. Planning estimates indicated this would be a 3-hour operation: put up a bridge and we'd be on the other side of the river. It turned into a 13-hour evolution. LtCol Tim Mundy took his two companies; mech'd up, rolled out of the train station on time, and assumed that the Bridge Company's going to be out there. He got held up on the eastern or southern side of the Euphrates, just a little south of Old Ubaydi. [51:01]

Later in the morning, 3/2 started taking fire out of New Ubaydi. We found that strange, because we had just been in New Ubaydi ten days before with our Civil Affairs teams. We were walking the streets without vests on or anything, and everything was good to go. So now, all of a sudden, we're taking fire out of there. About an hour later Mundy comes back to me and says, "Hey boss, I'm starting to get hurt out here. I've got to do something." I said, "Well, quite clearly you've got some time, so go up there and explore what's happening in New Ubaydi." That began the first battle of Ubaydi when they went in there coming from the west. By the end of the day, they'd been through almost two-thirds of that town. We had taken three dead, including one of my staff sergeants out of my headquarters, who was assigned/attached to 3/25, Tony Goodwin. More of the story was revealed later, as we found out the enemy were some of the guys that had gotten out of Fallujah. The [enemy] had occupied a building and hollowed out a piece of the floor, which Goodwin busted into, and the insurgents were down below the floor. You come in that front door and they had a machine gun tearing guys up. Goodwin was mortally wounded. Before he died, he called fires in on them and himself and dropped the building on all of them. The battalion recovered his body before leaving the town.

Mundy did a great job with his two companies. 3/2 went up there, and they were just in a brawl. I had established a small COC [Combat Operations Center] there at the train station with my air officer. We talked about the fires oversight previously, and between the LITENING Pods on Harriers, F-18 overflights, and probably what was a Predator, we were starting to get information on the screens and were working off of the LITENING Pods transmitting into the Rover III downlinks, seeing what we could do. These were brand new capabilities and we were trying to be as innovative as possible. We started observing Ubaydi, and we were watching guys run preplanned E&E [escape and evasion] routes. They were recovering caches, pulling boxes, pulling weapons out of the ground, and moving into fighting positions. You've got other guys with precious cargo trying to move across the river, and we made a lot of money with the combined air-ground integration that day.

Knarr: You talked about air deconfliction. Was it because of the ISR [intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance] systems that were flying in addition to helicopter and fixed-wing close air support? [53:09]

Davis: No, we didn't have ISR by and large. If [National SOF] did, it was pretty transparent to us at that point. That was just helicopter deconfliction about moving different forces at night in a pretty unknown environment. The next day, with the bridge in place, Mundy

gets his Marines reorganized and moves them across the river. They swept through the Sinjic area, north of the river and found the area basically *sterile*. There wasn't a thing up there. There was no enemy. There were very few weapons. There was nothing until 11 May when one of my AAVs from 3/25 hit an IED made up of 3x155 rounds and killed six of our Marines. That includes a second Staff Sergeant out of my headquarters, Kendall Ivey. You know just some hard lessons you're learning up there, the hard way. [54: 56]

Alford: What happened was they got tipped and they moved south of the river with all their shit. And that's when the Mahals were fighting. Everybody else was north of the river.

Davis: We put Stann up there on that hill to prevent and block the enemy from coming south. They were already ahead of him by five days, because this thing had gotten exposed. So, Mundy came back across the bridge and came back to the Al Qaim train station. Lima Company was returned to 3/25 at the dam, and we re-cocked for future operations asking ourselves, "Ok, what did we get out of this? How has the environment changed?" And that was MATADOR.

Knarr: Kurdi [Sheikh Kurdi, Albu-Mahal, Al Qaim] said that Zarqawi was wounded in one of these battles.

Davis: I've heard multiple reports of that. I think he was wounded in that original raid. I don't think he was wounded at this fight. He was wounded before that. He traveled around a lot. I was in his house in Haqlaniyah; he has a beautiful place right on the river (not occupied) there that we were in a couple of times just to pay regards. He preached at the Blue Mosque there in Haqlaniyah, so he's well familiar traveling up and down that river. Coalition forces just missed him a couple of times. They had him at a road block and missed him by 30 seconds, because one of the feeds went out. His string of luck was quite remarkable.

To recap, we're still in first semester [15 March to 15 September 2005]. I had four rifle companies, and I was trying to create the illusion of a greater force structure by showing up everywhere but nowhere, in order to not be predictable. I was beginning to understand the threat, having dealt with these guys before, so I understood how they were looking at us. Philosophically, we were just trying to out-guerilla the guerilla. I needed to be everywhere and nowhere; I was setting a pattern, but not setting a pattern. If we were working in Al Qaim, I would take that company out of the Hadithah dam and give it to Mundy to conduct operations in Al Qaim. He had to leave his other company at Camp Gannon as they held key terrain, the POE. Interestingly, you had little time to get in and

out of the Camp Gannon area. When helos set down on the deck, you had to be off the helos, into the AAVs, and out of the LZ [landing zone] within about 45–60 seconds, because you were going to take incoming. That’s just the way the game was.

Then we’d go do an operation on the other side of the AO. I’d take the company from 3/2 out of the train station and give it to Lieutenant Colonel Lionel Urquhart [Commander, 3/25] so he had two maneuver elements. He either used the guys from Hadithah dam, keeping the other one down in Hit, or if we were doing something down in Hit, he’d keep the guys up in Hadithah. To the outside observer who wasn’t really looking at what we were doing here, it looked like we were just playing “whack-a-mole.” All we were trying to do was stay alive and keep the enemy, particularly the foreign fighters, off balance. Again, we’re only talking to the security LOO [line of operation] here; we’re trying to keep this guy off balance, and I’m trying to get inside his OODA [observe, orient, decide, and act] loop in order to make him reactive to me, not the other way around.

The next operation we did was NEW MARKET. You can see the pattern: a couple down here, out here, and now we’re back here [he’s moving the operations around to keep the insurgents off-balance]. NEW MARKET went into the Hadithah and Haqlaniyah area. We didn’t get across the river to do Barwana very much. They’re different tribes. Haqlaniyah is a tough blue collar area, and we could only penetrate part way into the city. We just didn’t have the depth, the numbers to get down there. We knew we didn’t want to just go in and get out. Although, there’s a certain amount of that you had to do just to keep these guys off balance and keep them moving. That was NEW MARKET. [1:01:13]

Knarr: This [the slide Col Davis is using, Figure A-11, shows all of the first semester operations] does a good job of tying the events together.

Davis: Yeah, this will lay out what we tried to do, the background, the operational effect.

NEW MARKET, 24-30 May. Hadithah was viewed as a cross-roads to the insurgency. It had safe houses, AMZ [Abu Musab Zarqawi], foreign fighters, and it was viewed as a general insurgent safe haven. Hadithah was undergoing a strong murder and intimidation campaign. There was one point when the Hadithah police chief had his nephew [Iraqi Army officer] come back for a visit, and he was killed. Again, there is this complexity. Is this an insurgent/government fight that kills this officer or is this an inter- or intra-tribal thing? You don’t know. Depending on who you talk to, you get different stories, and everyone has a different story

Anyhow, they killed this lieutenant. The police chief went to LtCol Urquhart [commander 3/25 Marines] and told him, “Hey, stay out of Hadithah for the next couple of days, because we’re going to go clean up some of these insurgents.” Unfortunately, the police chief was dead within two days. At this point, Hadithah was really on a downhill slide. We went up there to disrupt the networks, do a cordon and search, and dig in there to find what we could disrupt. That’s what NEW MARKET was. We captured a bunch of weapons and eliminated a number of insurgent forces and were just trying to buy time until we could get some of our own Iraqi forces.

Our Iraqis were being trained by the MTTs [Mobile Training Teams] down in Habbaniyah. We were not scheduled to get any Iraqi forces until June, so the best we could do was what I was tasked to do: disrupt any enemy activity and keep them away from Ramadi. I was just playing for time as an economy of force while Coalition forces consolidated gains in Fallujah. At that point, Ramadi was not good. It wasn’t as bad as it got later. In many ways, I think I failed in my goal in keeping insurgents out of Ramadi. The un-sequenced move of Coalition forces back into Rawah forced insurgents back down into the Hadithah/Hit corridor. The work the RCT did in AO Denver made it not the place to be, so any insurgents that were left eventually moved back into Ramadi, which led to major fighting in 2006—not the effect we wanted to achieve. [1:04:41]

After that we went through a series of operations we called RIVER SWEEP [1 through 4]. The 2nd Marines have a habitual relationship with the Royal Marine Commandos. We put our Royal Marine Major, Rich Maltby, who was serving as our S3 Alpha in command of these operations. He is a gifted guy. He was put in charge of a truly task organized force. It was made up of about 150 guys taken out of our headquarters, our support groups, and things like that. They swept this corridor along the river north of Hit and south of Haqlaniyah in these RIVER SWEEP operations. We did about four of them, and the tonnage of stuff that they found in there is really pretty impressive. You’ll be able to see the numbers of stuff, the tonnage: 12.7-mm anti-aircraft guns, the rounds, the rockets. It’s just really unbelievable! We were just trying to get a handle on some of this, trying to choke off insurgent access to IED material, weapons, and munitions. It was another disruptive operation.

Alford: What’s unique about that is the force that he threw together: support element guys, the British Royal Marine who commanded it, the Major. This shows this ad hoc ability that I think is unique about how the Marine Corps operates. We can just pull shit out of our butt and operate.

Davis: It is the basic concept of task organization, we were just trying to disrupt. I'm just trying to paint a different picture. If this guy ever had the ability to mass, I don't think he would have ever taken any objectives; but he could certainly create an interesting day for us.

Then we go back out west for SPEAR. SPEAR is important, real important. We had information that there was a significant C2 [command and control] facility down in Karabilah. Again, I didn't have much force structure. We take L/3/25 out of the dam and give it to LtCol Mundy. He puts it together with Captain Chris Ieva's company. We used the Emerald Wadi as our right lateral limit, and we established one to the left. So 3/2 is going up on a very specific, you could almost call it a point target raid, into Karabilah. We do this around 15–20 June. This is a targeted fight, again, just trying to keep them off balance. We know there were bad guys up there and boy were there ever!

We had [journalists] Jane Arraf and Arwa Damon from CNN with us. We had unequivocally great relations with the press, whether it was US media or international media. In working with the media, I always asked three things of the press. I said, "If you want to work with RCT, we'll be happy to work with you. Here are my three rules: (1) You must always tell the truth. (2) You must be respectful of my casualties, i.e., we get to notify the families before you get to release anything, and (3) If you respect going off-line [off the record], I can help you put things in context. I would spend at least an hour with every reporter that came into my AO. Reporters were one of my best sources of information, because they circulate inside the country and throughout the Middle East. They could add anecdotal stories that I could use to connect dots. What's happening outside my AO? What are you hearing inside my AO that I'm not hearing? It's just another source of information. I had fantastic relations with all of them. I can't speak highly enough about the press and their professionalism. While many are afraid of the press, our concept was to bring them in and make them part of the team. We didn't use them. You're not allowed to do that. We never asked them to breach any of their professional ethics. They were pros in their own right. If they wanted to get up front, if they wanted to get a story, then we could put them where they want to be. But we all play by my rules, and if you burn me, you're never coming back in my AO. It was a very, very productive relationship. [1:09:38]

My headquarters used to have the eight-, nine-, ten-foot ceilings and in my office on the wall was a 1:50,000 map of the entire AO. If a correspondent had never been here before, I would use it to explain what we were doing and where we were going. If they [correspondent] had been there before, I would ask, "When was the last time you were here?"

And I would catch [him or her] up. “This is what we were doing then, this is what we are doing now, and this is what has transpired since you were last here. Where would you like to go?” It was a great, great relationship. Jane Arraf and Arwa Damon are perfect examples as they always wanted to get up front with the lead rifle companies. [1:10:22]

3/2 hit this objective up in Karabilah. It was a combined C2 facility, a torture house, a school house, and it was a munitions VBIED [vehicle-borne IED] factory. The Coalition forces liberated three former ING [Iraqi National Guard] soldiers that were being tortured there. There was a rope hanging out of a hook in a ceiling. They would tie these guys up, dip their head in a bucket of water, and then electrocute them. They burned right through one guy’s septum of his nose with cigarettes. It burned right through his nose. Why? That’s what they do.

There was a storage facility with massive amounts of munitions that we were forced to reduce. The explosion was significant. There was a VBIED production facility. The school house was literally a school house for insurgents. This is how you make bombs; this is how you do ambushes, things like that. And the C2 facility itself was just a treasure trove of information. It had *Fatwas* [religious edicts] and manuals, January 2005 editions. [It described things like] this is how you justify killing fellow Muslims in the name of Jihad, all the Zarqawi stuff. One of our Marines was a naturalized citizen fluent in Arabic. He read these manuals and translated for CNN right off the hood of the HMMVW while the fight was still going on.

This operation also gave us passports. At the time there was discussion in the media as to, “Do you really have foreign fighters out here?” GEN Casey knew we did, but there were a lot of folks disputing that fact. I’ll show you the pictures of the passports from Tunisia, Morocco, Libya, and Saudi Arabia. This was all part of that network coming across from North Africa into Syria, going to Abu-Karmal, on the Syrian side of the border prior to crossing. Most of the trans-border movement was coming across from Syria within five clicks [kilometers] north or south of the POEs, and many of the suicide bombers were part of that traffic. You didn’t get a lot of mid-zone [the area between the POEs] traffic coming across. These were not kids looking for a 40-days-in-the-desert adventure before they killed themselves. They got those kids in what I call the “fervor zone.” Their job was to get that kid, the committed bomber, down the Euphrates, to Ramadi, Baghdad, or wherever you’re going to use him, before he wakes up and figures out “that dying ain’t much of a way to make a living,” as Clint Eastwood used to say.

Operation SPEAR was the first time we were able to show, “Here are the passports, here are the weapons, and here are the foreign fighters.”

This is also the first time that we gained a real appreciation for what’s contained on computers, hard drives, flash drives, and cameras. Back then they didn’t have the term *SSE* [sensitive site exploitation]; if they did, we didn’t know about it. We started embedding folks from SOF organizations and things like that. Every one of these was done hand-in-glove, so that whatever they were doing, whenever they were doing it, it was complemented by our guys and vice versa. The intel picture was complete. It wasn’t like, “Okay, you give it to me, but I’m not sharing with you.” It goes back to the concept of Team Ball. Everybody plays together and everybody gains together.

LTG Vines came out to visit after MATADOR. We held a joint debrief with the general and SOF commander. After a few minutes, LTG Vines looked at me and said, “Colonel, are you telling me you just took doctrine and threw it out the window?” Quote unquote. [1:14:50] I said, “Yes sir, absolutely, because it doesn’t apply out here.” He looked at us and said, “You’re the first two sons of bitches that understand what they’re doing out here.” You know this isn’t what they teach you. We weren’t defending the Fulda gap [in Europe]. This is much more akin to drug wars back in New York and the organized crime type of thing, and the prize is the people. We understood that. Until you can firmly establish the security LOO (you don’t do that in exclusion of the other LOOs), there was no way to keep guys alive in these towns. It was just a totally non-permissive environment. I think that was the part that many people missed. The enemy that didn’t get killed in Fallujah came up here [AO Denver] to find refuge. As previously discussed, there were three tiers of enemy, which we were fighting, and they were either working together or not working together. I think you [nodding to Col Alford] can probably speak better to that than I can, certainly about the intimidation campaign and how the sheikhs had to respond to that. You know, in context you just didn’t know what you didn’t know back then.

SPEAR was huge, because we were able to prove foreign fighter involvement. I don’t think we ever had more than 5,000 foreign fighters during the whole year moving through there. The point wasn’t that they were massing foreign fighters. We used to call them the Muj[ahedin] ODAs [Operational Detachment Alpha]. They were 12- or 14-men teams of SMEs, very similar to what we do with our SF guys. They would come down and train local insurgents on how to make bombs, how to snipe, how to ambush, and how to operate. Now when they operated against you, you knew it because you started taking casualties in ways you were not taking them previously. One of their downfalls

was meticulous record keeping. In late 2006 after we left, the SOF guys took the objective. They found voluminous amounts of information up south and west of Tal Afar. It was up north of where we were and I forget the name of it, but it's declassified now. You can go to the West Point CTC [Counter Terrorism Center] site. The amount of information that they pulled was so great that they had to declass it and put it out to the world. It showed all the recruitment network across the world; it showed the pipelines of who was going in, what passport number, what his name was, what his alias was, how he was training, where his target site was. I mean it was that treasure trove that really exposed the entire Zarqawi network. Operation SPEAR was the start of that effort.

You saw later, when some of the guys were working up there, some of our targeted sites during STEEL CURTAIN were the computer centers downtown, kiosks, and stuff like that. Those were point targets. They would seize all the computers and get them out for exploitation. I don't think we knew what we had then. It's part of the growing experience. We immediately passed these assets to [National SOF]. I don't know how much of the information contained ever filtered back to us.

Alford: What was the date of SPEAR? [1:18:41]

Davis: 15–20 June. And after SPEAR the next one, which takes you back to Hit with Operation SWORD. SWORD was really a neat operation. We received our first company of trained Iraqis. We took the company and we split them into two groups and gave one group to each of the RCT companies, one from 3/2 and one from 3/25. The insurgent defenses were set for an attack coming from the north. To counter that, we maneuvered our companies around. We brought LAR out from Rutbah via Ramadi. The RCT positioned forces in order to allow for an attack from the south. We felt we had good, popular support if you will. That's probably a loosely used term, but we felt that we could turn these guys, and we really tried very hard to minimize any damage at all. Records indicate about 11 enemy KIA, but we kept the collateral damage to an absolute minimum; in fact, virtually all damage was a result of emplaced IEDs.

There were some incredible bombs down there. There was one that one of our LAVs [light-armored vehicles] just missed that literally lifted out the whole section of a four-lane road. It wasn't just a hole; it just took out the whole road, enough to bury an AAV or an LAV from top to bottom. They were massive bombs, but because we came from a different direction, and we had gotten a little better about finding those things before they found us, we didn't lose a person in there. That was a good op. We established two FOBs

[forward operating bases]—which were always combined—with Iraqis and Americans. One was up at the traffic circle in the north end of Hit and one was down in the Youth Center in the southern, south central part. They [the enemy] didn't like that at all, because you're now in the disruption business. Our guys were there permanently, and they started working out of these FOBs despite multiple attacks trying to remove them.

Some interesting anecdotes: the governor before Governor Mamoun was kidnapped along with his vehicle early in our tour. I talked to you before about that area north of the river when they reassigned it from us. This kidnapping occurred prior to the boundary change. COL McMaster (3 ACR commander) and I had an agreement. I said, "I can't cover north of the river, so if your CAV squadrons want to roam around up there, by all means, go for it, just let us know for purposes of de-confliction. You're free to operate anywhere ten clicks north of the river." Well of course, imprecision will cost you. My concept was to measure from the northern-most point of the river, ten clicks north. The CAV squadron commanders used the southernmost point of the river and measured ten clicks north from there. Due to the fluctuation in the topography of the Euphrates, this basically allowed the CAV squadrons to get into Rawah. During a patrol prior to the official boundary change, 3 ACR units entered into Rawah. On their way out, they took some fire from a small series of mud huts along the road back north. Being good CAV squadrons with Bradleys and everything, they did what they do best and just smoked the place. When they went to exploit the site, they recovered 4-5 KIAs and three enemy wounded. In further exploitation of the site, who did they find inside but the governor, who had been killed by the insurgents. That is how Mamoun became the governor. [1:22:22]

What is interesting is that a couple of weeks later, after we set up the FOB in the southern part of Hit, that governor's official vehicle shows back up again. A company from 3/25 was in a mechanized patrol, coming back into the FOB in their HMMWVs, and they have this official vehicle following them back in. The guards at the gate weren't paying close attention, and they figured it was an official vehicle that they were bringing back in as a part of the patrol. They didn't challenge the vehicle. It was a suicide bomb! As the vehicles pulled into the courtyard of the Youth Center, the HMMWVs went back to their staging area near the Youth Center. The official vehicle went hard right to the far end of the court yard. Stepping back a second, a couple of days before this happened, I don't know if they brought in a tank or something, but something was heavy enough to break a water main running under this lot. So you essentially created a *sabkha* [Salt flat crust but on top giving the impression it was sturdy ground] in there. They got the tank

out and were repairing it, but it was very, very wet. So, this guy went to the far end of the lot, revved his engine, and he was going to drive this thing right into the Youth Center. He was all revved up, put it in gear, hauled ass, and he got about ten yards before he got caught in this wet sand. He couldn't move any further, so he got frustrated and detonated. We found parts of his foot up on top of the building. We took a couple of concussions, but I'll tell you what, we got away very lucky that day. Like I say, if you're not playing your A game every day with these guys, they can hurt you. That's how the governor's vehicle showed back up in Hit.

I'll tell you a third vignette. We'll talk about Lieutenant Colonel George Smith (now BrigGen), commanding officer of 1st Force Reconnaissance Company. We had a Scan Eagle [UAV] that was working the Haditah-Hit corridor. The Scan Eagle coverage allowed us to collect south of Rawah down through Hit. I controlled this asset out of Al Asad, so I had my own daylight ISR if you will, which was a huge advantage. Just prior to Operation SWORD, we picked up some valuable information/intel about insurgent movement outside of Hit. We woke up the force company (who were in the sleep portion of their reverse cycle operations) and launched them on a raid and took out a good cell of the Hit insurgent leadership.³ The insurgents (whether they were Al Qaeda-affiliated or not is unknown), tried to evade the cordon that Smith established. The result was four guys got killed in the vehicle, which turned out to be all the senior to mid-level insurgent leadership from Hit. [1:24:56]

As a result of 1st Force Recon raid, we launched our RIVER SWEEP [see timeline at Figure A-11] guys right in behind them, and they came up with refrigerators. The insurgents were burying refrigerators full of weapons. It's just how they stored them, all in the river there. This was a good op, and reclaiming Hit was the first piece of the campaign plan, utilizing combined, permanent, persistent presence.

Alford: Did George work for you?

Davis: Yes, as well as ANGLICO [Air Naval Gunfire Liaison Company]. They were in direct support. It was a typical relationship, but because of our backgrounds, I was probably the most experienced guy able to utilize them and to provide top cover. They did great work.

³ Recon teams were working under Reverse Cycle Operations in which they slept during the day and operated at night.

At some point in here we intercepted insurgent traffic, which indicated dissension within AQI. We were inside their loop, and they couldn't get ahead of us even in the information cycle. That's when we knew we were making progress against them. Frankly, we couldn't do much for the people. You know these other lines of operation we talk about, we just didn't have the force structure to be able to do it. We knew we were turning the tide against the insurgents, and we were continuing to march toward the National Referendum. And remember the stakes for the referendum. If there were two provinces who defeated the referendum initiative, then they would go back to the starting point. So there was a whole lot at stake in keeping these guys in the game. Next we had SABER. [1:27:00]

Knarr: Well you kept the operations up, didn't you? More than one a month.

Davis: About every two weeks we did something. SWORD went 27 June to 5 July. We followed up with RIVER SWEEP 2, which ran from 27 June to 5 July, so that was running concurrently. RIVER SWEEP 3, same sort of thing, there's just one after the other after the other. Every time you got some type of intel movement, you'd go right in there and just start sweeping—start taking their weapons away and getting them off balance. Again, it's great if you kill the bad guys, but that's not the objective here. It's getting to disrupt them and getting them to come up on the nets where they talk.

SABER was the next one, and that was in the mid-zone. Actually it was up in the Karabilah area, I guess. Other forces are working up in the Rawah area. Again, we were just trying to do the same thing, keep guys active because nobody wanted to sit out there and just keeping moving around the AO. SABER had some pretty good results, though, when you look at what we were coming up with. And again, you just start looking at the computers; weaponry is very interesting.

Knarr: The 23 millimeter, ZSUs?

Davis: Yeah. ZSUs with some of the earlier models. They used those in the direct-fire mode. Those were always fun. The increasing sophistication of the bombs out there continued. Originally, when we arrived in AO Denver, the insurgents were using command-detonated IEDs. As a matter of fact, one of the first times I got hit was during our PDSS in December 2004. Col Tucker and I were driving up MSR Uranium to Hadithah. The command-detonated IED destroyed the back end of the HMMWV in front of us. The answer to the command-detonated IEDs was to go faster. Several weeks after that, the insurgents answer to us was to put anti-tank mines in pot holes so you had to slow down. The fight becomes a series of point-counterpoint, point-counterpoint. There was a guy named Kaleed Zabalah

[phonetic], who lived down in Abu Hyatt. He was a little school teacher up there in Haqlaniyah, and he was the master bomb maker in the area. He was the guy that introduced propane tanks to the IEDs. So not only were we concerned about the explosion and the fragmentation, but now we had the burn factor, which cost us dearly on several occasions. Due to this, Zabalah became a priority target for us.

One night in second semester [15 September 2005 to 11 February 2006], Lieutenant Colonel Paul Montanus, 2nd Force Recon Company, went in on a targeted raid and hit a site along the Euphrates. They were going after Zabalah's driver. From intel gained at the first site, they bounced to a second site, and then to a third site. Finally they brought the detainees back to sort them out. They were interrogating his driver, and asking, "Where is Zabalah, Zabalah, Zabalah." The guy finally said to them, "Why are you asking me about Zabalah? He's sitting right over there." We didn't even know it. Apparently, they policed him up at the first target site, but he just shut up and sat quiet. Later, we had to seek two-star approval to keep him in Abu Ghraib past a month. I mean this guy is responsible for dozens of American deaths. I don't know how he's doing today, whether he's still in the circuit or not. But taking him off the street was a good news story. [1:31]

We had an operation planned, LIGHTNING STRIKE, to go where we had not been able to go into before, which was in Anah, right up between Hadithah and Rawah. That city is filled with retirement homes for the old Republican Guards, but we were not able to get in there previously. Earlier, we had had some forays up there into a little town just northwest of Hadithah named Cykla, just before you get to Anah. We lost two Marines from 3/25 up there. The Civil Affairs guys were knocking on doors just to introduce themselves and talk. They went up to this one house, and the people didn't even open up the door. They just blasted these Marines right through the door, which resulted in a day-long fight. My jump CP [command post] was on the road up there, and we linked up with Capt Steve Lawson's Lima Company just as he was controlling an airstrike. Cykla was a little farming community inside compound walls. It was a neat little nondescript place. But this enemy was another foreign fighter team, who was roaming up and down the Euphrates River valley. They happened to hang out there, and they just happened to meet. They lost 11 guys, and we lost two. It was just another "lovely" day in Al Anbar.

During this same time period, Hadithah dam was subject to increasing numbers of 120 mortar fire. To counter this, 3/25 inserted two sniper teams to observe the wadis and interdict insurgent infiltration routes. 3/25 was starting to take 120-mm rounds against the dam, so it was part of their counter mortar, counter indirect fire attack operations. As we

later learned, both teams got compromised on insert, and they were unaware that they had been compromised. For operational reasons, the team leaders decided to marry up the two teams in the middle of the night. The 3/25 sniper SOP was to keep two (personnel) up, one-down, per each three-man sniper team. Apparently a decision was made, because they had two teams, to keep two guys up and put four men down. Four of the scout snipers overlooked a wadi which was thought to be unclimbable, which turned out not to be the case. We have the insurgent video (unclassified) from their attack up the wadi. They clearly gained the element of surprise on the sniper teams and quickly killed many if not all of the six members. When 3/25 did not make their scheduled communications check, the QRF response was triggered. It took the QRF about an hour to get down to the site where the snipers were located. Upon arrival, we received a report of five dead Marines and all of their gear missing. Clearly, I had a guy missing. That started this whole 24-hour drama. [1:33:24]

That was clearly one of the darkest days of that year, but really, how we were able to address it was one of the parts that I was most proud of in terms of our response. We shut down the AO. We started getting information coming in from all the different intel sources. We received information that “We’ve got an American. We’re going to behead him on Haqlaniyah Bridge.” The RCT planners were going into overdrive thinking, “How are we going to get him? How can we save this Marine?” Unfortunately, we found out over the next 24 hours that the sixth Marine had been mortally wounded and had bled out soon after the initial attack. Whether he was alive in captivity at that point was indeterminable. We were able to rapidly shut down the AO. I believe the attack was probably conducted by the 1920s Revolution Brigade, which was a good thing. If it would have been Al Qaeda, it would have been a different story. [1:35:03]

The 1920s Brigade saw and felt the pressure mounting and eventually got the body out of the overwatch site on the east side of the river and moved it across the river into a mosque in Haqlaniyah. They actually took him down to a mosque, and they cleaned him up. They did not desecrate the body in any way. When you look at the pictures from the video that was recovered weeks later, you can see how badly he was wounded. I conducted the PID [positive identification] when the body was recovered.

Alford: That was last of August?

Davis: Yes, it was right before QUICK STRIKE, the end of July. We refocused the LIGHTNING STRIKE operation and turned it into QUICK STRIKE, because obviously we’ve got a prob-

lem over in the Barwana area. You know this is a game of winning people's hearts and minds, and you've got to be strong out there. You've got to be careful that you don't react the way they want you to.

We launched QUICK STRIKE and refocused it back on the Hadithah, Haqlaniyah, Barwana area, specifically Barwana. I issued very specific instructions: stay off the roads. We knew they were mined/IED'd and, unfortunately, during this operation, guys were coming out of the dam on known routes. I was not able to move forces quite as fast as I wanted to. To be successful here, it's all about gaining the initiative and momentum with these things. You don't get a nice setpiece battle at your convenience. We were able to utilize an Iraqi SOF company with an imbedded SFODA exceptionally well, particularly down in Haqlaniyah. Any time we could get those guys, it was just wonderful. But 3/25 had to deploy their Marines from the dam at Hadithah. They stayed off the road, and they got down through the other side of Barwana, off road, led by a couple of tanks. At some point the tanks decided to get back on the road. The LAVs had maneuvered around off road, so the guys driving the AAVs figured, well, there's no problem here. Of course, as soon as they got back on the road someone utilized a command-detonated IED and we lost 14 people in a strike on the AAV. It created a debris field spread over about 300 square meters. EOD [Explosive Ordnance Disposal] estimated that the insurgents had linked five 155s [artillery projectiles] with three propane tanks. So in the initial explosion, you've got the lift, separation, and fragmentation destruction here, and now you've got this flame thing. I believe the only Marine that lived was the driver who got ejected right out of the AAV. It killed all 14 passengers instantly. This was certainly the worst day we had during our year tour.

Knarr: You mentioned 1920s Revolutionary Brigade. What was the relationship between them and AQI?

Davis: I couldn't tell you with any degree of specificity. My S2 and S3 might be able to conjecture something. We weren't in those towns; you couldn't get in those towns without a sustained fight. I suspect there were days they worked together well and there were other days they didn't work together at all and would fight. I never saw a lot of AQ presence in Anah. They were clearly in Haqlaniyah. I didn't see a whole lot in Barwana. Hadithah was hot and cold. Hadithah was just a tough town, but not as tough as Haqlaniyah. Zarqawi had personal roots in Haqlaniyah. He had a house down there, and he preached at the Blue Mosque. His influence is clearly felt all over. There were a lot of AQ in Rawah, but that was mostly run by Gassan Amin [phonetic]. I don't think that AQ was in Al Qaim until just prior to MATADOR. They came south of the river prior to the operation,

because everything north of the river was their RSOI [Reception, Staging, Onward-movement, and Integration] facility as previously discussed.

So, this was QUICK STRIKE. QUICK STRIKE was the first employment of the Iraqi SOF in support of us. This was also the first time that we found buildings rigged with IEDs to explode. Specifically there's this vacation hotel, a seven-story structure, down on the Euphrates at Haqlaniyah. We were informed the hotel was where the rich guys used to go to summer. One of the last times we went in that building, it was wired for total destruction. It was like, stop, pull off here. It was the first time we saw that. [1:41:53]

Was Operation QUICK STRIKE successful? It's tough to call anything a success when you take those types of losses. Did it make a difference? I don't know. I think at some point we probably rounded up people who were associated with the sniper killing and with that IED strike, but I can't tell you that with any degree of certainty. This is not about the individuals involved as much as it is about how you approach your AO. What are you having to deal with, with your four rifle companies?

The last one we got down here is the KUBAYSAH RAID. We took the 2nd Force Recon Company and went to Kubaysah, which is on the western side of MSR Uranium, a little town opposite Hit. That was a real good-news story, a real success story, I think. We took out the insurgent leadership. How tightly were they tied to AQ? I don't know. In the course of about a week, though, we either killed or captured five emirs. It got to the point that nobody wanted the job anymore. Again, I don't know if that's a measure of success or not, but you understand. We understood then that we weren't going to win the game by the numbers we killed. We weren't going to win by just the decapitation theory, which is when you take out the leader and everything else falls apart. LTG McChrystal coined it better: you go after a network with a network kind of thing. You're targeting the operations guys. You're targeting the finance guys. You disrupt their communications ability. You have to take apart the infrastructure of the network. You target them all. You've got to make it unpalatable to go up there as a leader. You have to make it an unprofitable business. You have to show them that there's a better way to the future. In Kubaysah, we used the Iraqi SOF, again with embedded ODAs, along with the 2nd Force Recon Company. That was a good operation. [1:44:48]

Knarr: When you say Iraqi SOF, are they part of the ISOF [Iraqi Special Operations Forces] Brigade?

Davis: Yeah. They were real good. They were players here. It's an Iraqi force; what a concept! Very proficient! The ODAs did a great job training them. They were disciplined, and they knew what to do. The biggest problem that we faced later on was that we were getting Iraqi forces who were primarily Shia and Kurd and who were being assigned to a Sunni area. Because of this decision, it was very hard to convince the locals (Sunni) to accept them. We would be told, "You're Christian, you're occupiers, we hate you; we want to kill you, but we hate you less than we hate these other apostates. Can you please be the first ones in our house and the last ones to leave because these guys, the Kurds and the Shia, beat us and rob us." This, of course, brought up the subject of what we dareth not speak about: the civil war, which pops up in February of 2006 with the bombing of the Golden Shrine in Samarra. Back in the US, we can debate about it. "Well, it's not really a civil war." Well, yes, it really was a civil war. It only goes back to what, 600–630AD? But it's a minor historical diversion.

Lastly, we don't want to forget Rutbah. We went out and did an op in Rutbah: CYCLONE. This was just part of showing them that we can go out there whenever we need to. It's a great smugglers' town. I never dedicated a lot of time to Rutbah. We just didn't have the resources to dedicate to it. When the pressure up in the north, in Al Qaim, and over in this corridor got too great, that's where the insurgents would go and try and hide out.

We didn't solve Rutbah until we bermed up the city towards the end of Lieutenant Colonel Rob Kosid's⁴ tour down there, after the battalion's RIP.

Knarr: That's interesting you say that, because it seemed like the magic for Hadithah. I know they couldn't get to it any earlier, but I guess when Stretch [Lieutenant Colonel Donnellan] was there, it was the berming of the triad, including Barwana and Haqlaniyah.⁵

Alford: And the first one to berm was Rawah.

Davis: In this AO, but I'll tell you the guy that told us about that was GEN Casey. Army units had bermed up in Mosul, I think. He said, "You know you ought to think about this." We looked at it. Roger that! We didn't have the assets or the ability. We knew when doing battlefield analysis, the Joe Strange model of your critical vulnerabilities, critical re-

⁴ LtCol Robert Kosid, Commander, 1st LAR.

⁵ LtCol Donnellan commanded 2/3 Marines in Hadithah from October 2005 until March 2007.

quirements, and so forth.⁶ The enemy's critical requirements were mobility and freedom of movement, and you're going to see that when we talk about RIVER GATE and the Anti-Bridge Campaign. There's a method to our madness; we weren't just careening around, busting stuff up. There is a reason why we did everything that we did.

[Davis to Alford] When did guys you RIP in and take TOA? [1:48:20]

Alford: TOA was 10 September.

Davis: We were getting the new guys on board. About that time GEN Casey had been out to see us three times, four times maybe. He understood that we had to get some boots on the ground out there. He understood the pipeline coming down the Euphrates. He understood why we needed to reconstitute the AO with the part north of the river.

He [pointing to Alford] and I have been together since '92. So I know what he's bringing to the fight. Also, I didn't have to chop one of his rifle companies to Al Asad for perimeter defense. He's one of the best guys we've got. I've got the nucleus, the base, to work off of. I'm getting an active duty battalion to come up to Al Qaim. I know Chet Chessani (3/1) from Parris Island. I haven't worked with him operationally, but he's got an active duty battalion going into Hadithah. Good news story! GEN Casey comes out and plusses me up. Originally he gave us 2-14 Stryker; later, 4-14 Stryker replaced them. He gave me Task Force Phantom, a LRS [Long Range Surveillance] Unit; 155 Mississippi Rifles; the 3rd Battalion of the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment [3-504th] coming out of Bragg. [1:50:04] He gave us two brigades of Iraqis. Who am I missing? That might be it. I've got 3/1, 3/6; LAR does a RIP out there, and I've got the Force Company.

I may be missing a unit here, but I don't think so. We did some battlefield shuffling around. The 3/1 came in and took it. [They were] supposed to control between Hit and Hadithah for a week, and then I pushed them all up to Hadithah. I got the 155 Mississippi Rifles⁷ coming out of the Mississippi National Guard. That unit, boy, was an eye opener. I'll tell you, what, cohesion. I was like wow! Lieutenant Colonel Gary Huffman, the battalion commander, looked like he was my grandfather, but he did a heck of a good job.

Alford: He'd been in the battalion for 25 years.

⁶ Dr. Joe Strange was a professor at the USMC War College and developed a model for analyzing centers of gravity and critical vulnerabilities.

⁷ LTC Gary Huffman commanded Task Force 2-114th Field Artillery that was part of the 155 Brigade Combat Team, known as the Mississippi Rifles.

Davis: I got to tell you, they developed cohesion in that unit, and they really did quite a great job down there. They had the Paladins [155mm self-propelled howitzer]. I give a lot of credit to those guys. They played pro ball and did a great job. Also, remember these guys were over here deployed to Iraq when Hurricane Katrina struck, and every one of them lost something, but they never lost their focus on the mission.

Despite the addition of much greater force structure, the theory didn't change. We stayed married up with Iraqis, and we didn't go into towns until we could stay there. We were executing the POWER SWEEP campaign plan.

Upon the arrival of 3-504th, we originally brought them into Al Asad, and had them conduct an operation, GREEN LIGHT, which went into the military housing complex north of Baghdadi.

Anecdotal story: prior to GREEN LIGHT we were flying the Scan Eagle around one day, and we saw what looked like an IED manufacturer in the military housing complex. So we tasked the 2nd Force Recon Company, got them saddled up, and fragged them for the mission. They drove in a circuitous route to hit this target. It turned out to be a brick maker. Everybody is disappointed after thinking they were going to capture an IED maker. So they're getting ready to shrink the cordon, pack up, and go home when somebody comes out of a building and says, "You want bad guys? A bad guy is in that house over there." Alright, well, what the heck. They were there, so they figured that they might as well take a look.

So they reestablished the cordon and did a cordon and knock. They knock on the door and who answered the door but the number one HVT [high value target] in the area between Hadithah and Hit. The number one HVT! It's 1400 in the afternoon, and you know what he's doing? He's watching reruns of *Friends*. We're trying to figure out whom to give the medal to, Jennifer Aniston or Courtney Cox! Either way, it's a game winner, and they roll up the number one guy in that area.

This is a funny story, but you know there is really a lesson there. We tried for so long to get into the satellite TV business for the IO campaigns, but were informed that it cost too much money. MajGen Huck fought that battle, but couldn't secure the required resources.⁸ They (MNCI) wanted to do leaflet drops. That's old time stuff. We did radio broadcasts the best we could, but if you want to play in the big time, you have got to re-

⁸ Major General Huck commanded the 2nd Marine Division in Iraq from April 2005 until January 2006.

source to play in the big time. If their medium is satellite TV, bam, use TV. If the medium is computers, bam, use the Internet. There wasn't an Iraqi that I met that couldn't figure out a computer. [1:54:13]

GREEN LIGHT [see Figure A-13, Semester 2] was, again, an interdiction; that was what the 3-504th did, and that was basically just to get those guys shaken out and tuned up having just arrived in country. Lieutenant Colonel Larry Swift was the battalion commander, another good commander. [1:54:55]

3-504th was a good battalion. The numbers and the units that we had at the Soldier and Marine level were very interesting; the guys got along famously. This really ain't a hard bridge to cross. Institutionally, the Army and Marine Corps do business a little differently and it can be a leadership challenge. I was blessed because I got guys like this [referring to Col Alford]. I've been with him a long time. He's a good personal friend going back a long time. We were trained by the guy down the hall, MajGen Paul Lefebvre, at one point in time, back 20-something years now. There are a lot of commonalities. We look at complex problems in very similar ways. You get outside units, they don't. They don't have the benefit of that commonality/cohesion. I have no view on units training prior to their arrival in theater. For instance, I have no idea how 3/1, a West Coast battalion, was trained other than the presumption of institutionalized Marine Corps training. The 3-504th, I don't know how they're trained either. Knowing the commander(s), having worked with them previously is very helpful. Without it, it's an interesting challenge when you RIP units under those conditions in what is a very highly kinetic version of counterinsurgency.

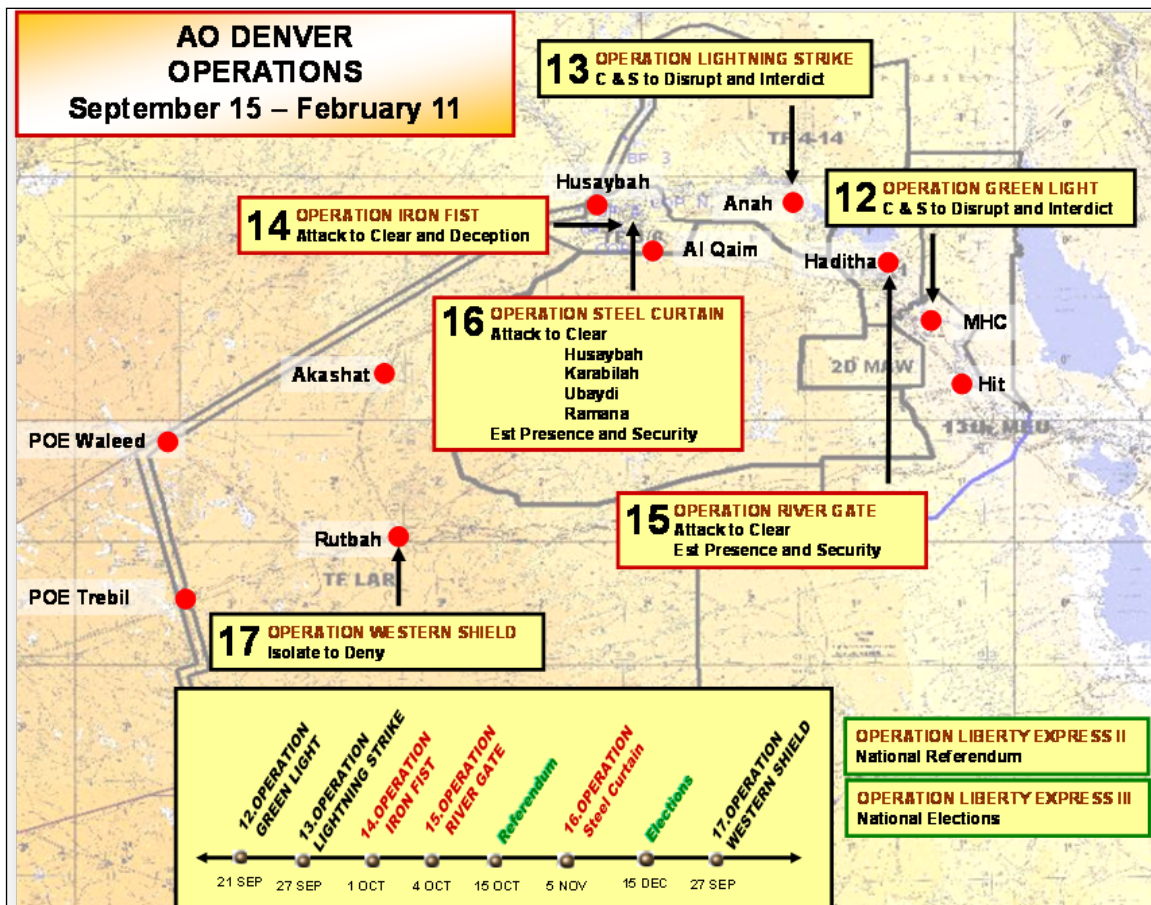


Figure A-13. Semester 2, 15 September 2005–11 February 2006

So, anyhow, we let 3-504th shake itself out here doing cordon and searches, cordon and knocks. They were free to operate in the area north of Hit, south of Hadithah.

So the next operation we were going to do was the tri-city area in an operation called RIVER GATE, which essentially becomes a four-battalion attack. Again, a model along [the lines of] what we did in SWORD down in Hit where you're bringing guys in an unusual attack plan that's not what the enemy's thinking you're going to do. We had LAR, for instance, come out of Rutbah through Ramadi, and come up the east side of the river to take Barwana. The 3-504th helicoptered in and out of Al Asad into attack positions, walked in, and 3/1 came out of the [Hadithah] dam on AAVs into attack positions and walked in. So the standard line every morning was when the civilians woke up, "There's a chicken in every pot, a car in every garage, an American in every house with an Iraqi."

At that point we had a battalion's worth of Iraqis. We split them up, a company per each American battalion. So wherever we went, we were staying. We were staying in Hadithah.

We were staying in Haqlaniyah. We were staying in Barwana. So the four battalions did that. But in the mean time, I had this guy out west, Alford, who was roaming around. He didn't want to sit on his can for too long, so he went up to Sa'dah [1:58:18] and that became IRON FIST. The regiment gets a lot of credit for IRON FIST being a regimental operation. It wasn't. It was his [Alford's] operation. He put it together. I think the first place he went was Sa'dah. [Speaking to Alford] And then where'd you go from there?

Alford: All the way up to edge of Karabilah.

Davis: Well now you went somewhere north first, before you hung a left and went west.

Alford: Yeah, we took the bridge.

Davis: You're [talking to Alford] ahead of the story, because he and I had this conversation. I know what he's [Alford] capable of. He would have probably taken all of Al Qaim if I would have let him at that point. But he was going to start jamming up the campaign plan. There was one point when Alford wanted to go to the Emerald Wadi. I said, "Whoa, time out," because IRON FIST was actually the deception operation for RIVER GATE. We had established this pattern of being everywhere and nowhere previously. We were out west, we were over here, we were down here, we were over here, we were up here, and we were back here—you know what I mean? They didn't know where we were going, but they pretty much got the idea that we were out west or we were in the east, either or. I understand what his [Alford] capability is, but he was moving too fast. I said, "You've got to slow your operation down. We gave you that intermediate terrain objective. "Go up and take this town, but I need you to waste some time there." Then eventually you'll go get to the Emerald Wadi, and you're just going to take it, but now, I need you to phase this thing."

Again, we were happy to support the press. We sent CNN's Arwa Damon [1:59:52] out to cover IRON FIST. She became the lead correspondent. Alford got her right up front. So, not only did I have an operation going out west, and everybody was looking out west, but I've got CNN broadcasting it from the front line. Everybody was looking out west and it let us set up for RIVER GATE and move guys into positions when nobody was looking, because the insurgents didn't think we had enough guys to do that. Eventually 3/6 wound up on the Emerald Wadi.

Later, the CNN crew was repositioned to cover RIVER GATE. We flew them back in and got them showered up and fed. We were driving up to Hadithah for the kick-off of RIVER

GATE in our jump CP when we got hit by an IED right outside the Haqlaniyah train station for about the third or fourth time.

We spent the night out there. It was a pretty interesting night. Not only did we get hit by the IED, so that my six-Hummer jump that I used to travel in and work was clobbered up there on Route Uranium right outside the train station, but we had the new ECM [electronic counter measure] devices on the vehicles. We managed to clobber our own comms for about two hours. We watched 3-504th helicopter in. The 82nd comes well resourced, and they're great soldiers. They had all their IR [infrared] gear, so you're on NODs [night observation devices] and you could watch these absolutely perfect formations of guys moving on into the attack and executing via mission orders and commander's intent, which worked like a charm. Nobody missed a beat with my jump CP having no communications for that period of time.

Alford: IRON FIST was kind of winding down as we pulled a company out of my own battalion. Did we fly it to you or did they drive? I don't remember, but India Company was part of RIVER GATE under Lieutenant Colonel Chessani.

Davis: I don't remember either. There's a good news story here. RCT-2 had grown to 14,000. I had enough force structure to create combined, permanent, persistent presence in Hit. I had it up in Rawah. And RIVER GATE established it in the tri-city area. I had this guy [Alford] roaming around out in Al Qaim. He used some very innovative ideas. He knew where he was coming [from]. He had a previous Afghanistan tour and due to that experience and others, he reorganized his battalion to train and develop about 30–35 snipers. [2:02:22]

The damage that those guys did, particularly at the Emerald Wadi, was significant in terms of setting up success in STEEL CURTAIN. It wasn't like how it was back in the old days; we were either one place or the other. You might have gotten a night raid from some other guys, but it was an either-or equation. Now we were able to apply the full court press. [National SOF] was operating all night long. I had 2nd Force Recon Company operating all night long as well. There was a lot of pressure being put on these networks, whether it was AQI insurgents or criminally associated networks. At that point, we could get into more towns and stay. Once in the towns, our forces were able to start focusing on the other LOOs, allowing for good stuff to happen. We started trying to send the message that "Not only did I provide you security, so you and your family will live, but here are the benefits to working with us."

The work that 3/6 did out west while RIVER GATE was still going on was really the work of professionals working with adequate resources. And the real story here is that you finally got to have the right number of boots on the ground for the mission. But, it's not just about the boots; they've got to be trained, they've got to be sensitive, and they've got to be smart. Whether it's totally kinetic or totally non-kinetic, you absolutely must have thinking guys and you have to have them in the right numbers. When the cap was set, you can't limit the numbers and pretend it's okay just because you're an economy-of-force operation. It just doesn't work that way if you want to stop an insurgency.

So the RCT-2 forces went into RIVER GATE the next morning. I had three battalions inside the cities, and a treasure trove of stuff came out of Hadithah. We captured a world class IO organization, Fifth Avenue-type of stuff. There were ten computers, each capable of reproducing ten CDs simultaneously. [As an example] if there was an IED incident, Bam, that [insurgent] video went back to this facility in Hadithah, and within an hour they had hundreds of CDs in the *souk* [market]. Banner-making, poster-making, and broadcast facilities all captured by the ISOF with US Army Special Forces embedded. All of the captured material went out to SOF for exploitation. There was not so much killing during this operation. I believe the total was 11 EKIA's and 200-something captured. But, the real story is in the computers, radios, and cell phones that were rolled up as well as the IED material and 187 radio receivers. We took that stuff off the street, which put a major crimp in the insurgent's command and control and information operation efforts.

Around Hadithah in the weeks afterwards the RCT forces took out a classical Soviet Mine Defense, triple ring. Most of those were discovered the good way, not the bad way. I remember we were talking with LtCol Chessani up on one of the positions of high ground when one of 3/1's bulldozers backed up. Boom, it lost its tread because it found another IED the hard way. The classical three-ring, Soviet Mine Defense between mines, IEDs, laid in. Again, much more of a nationalist insurgent-level, Special Republican Guard-trained type of tactics. That's what you had to contend with. So you had 3/1 in Hadithah, 3-504th in Haqlaniyah, LAR across the river in Barwana, and every one of them had a company of Iraqis with them. Of course, they were Shia and Kurd (the composition of the Iraqi Army Forces that had been provided to us). That was not a love affair with the locals. Now, back to the campaign plan, RCT-2 is in Hit, in the tri-city area, and in Rawah. There's only one other place to go.

We built FOBs down in Hadithah (similar to those in Hit), but Col Alford took this to a whole other level. I mean, wherever he went, he built a firm base. You rolled in with

your stuff, you buried your CONEX boxes, and you welded racks into the side of those things to live in. Even if it was a temporary facility, the speed and rapidity with which he could do that was impressive! I mean, he had a great integration between his engineers, his combat support guys, and his rifle companies.

Alford: And we fixed that old bulldozer that was in Gannon (soon after they arrived).

Davis: Yeah, well, when you got up there one of the early conversations we had was when you wanted to bulldoze that northwest corner of town and open up fields of fire, which is absolutely the right thing to do. The other part of it was he [Alford] had the third rifle company out there. He knew what he wanted to do. He had Afghanistan experience. He was the right guy, at the right place, at the right time. Before I get to STEEL CURTAIN, I want to go back and talk about July and August. You brought up the tribal stuff, before. [2:07:36]

I'd like to talk about command and control and how we at the RCT-2 Headquarters modified the physical infrastructure to best support what we needed for this environment. The facility I inherited at Al Asad was your typical three-tier type of command post [CP]: big screens, everybody laid out. It was a great place to 'control' an AO that big from. It's a bad place to command from. When I had to make decisions, the minute someone said, "Sir, the CG [commanding general] is on the phone," this magical quiet came over the whole CP. Everybody became "EF Hutton," and they wanted to figure out who you were talking to and what you were talking about. So I got Master Gunny MacArthur—who is now our MARSOC Ops Chief and who was my RCT-2 Ops Chief—and Sergeant Major Reanig and turned them loose to build a battle cabin out of some old shower trailers, which they had gutted. The model that we designed is very similar to what we use right now here at MARSOC built around tables, work stations in a 'U' formation. It's a very simple configuration that normally utilizes 13-14 people in the cabin itself. Its nucleus included our intel, fire, and air guys and the command element. That was where we did most of our effective command and control work starting in July. Nothing hugely fancy, but very, very effective. Additionally, by and large, there wasn't a fight we couldn't run out of the jump, whether it was stationary or on the move. Again, it's important just to keep this business simple. Keep it streamlined. It will get hard and complex enough as you go. You don't need to make it so from the beginning. So, we operated out of the battle cabin, but during this timeframe (July), we were following the red-on-red fight between AQI and the tribes up inside Husaybah. If I got the story straight, and you probably know this better than I do certainly by this point, AQ went to the Salmani tribe and they sold out to them.

Alford: There are more Karbulis than Salamanis. Karbulis were the main one and Salamanis were the secondary.

Davis: Well the story we had at the time was that the Salamanis owned the southwest corner of Husaybah. They didn't own the 440 district, but they owned the southwest corner of the town. They started in that southwest corner, and they kept bringing the AQI guys in. I'll back up even further, back to when we first took TOA. The RCT was handed off a source (from 1/7) in Husaybah who was named 'The East End Lady.' She lived over in East End Street, southeast corner, southeast area of Husaybah. I think Lieutenant Colonel Woody Woodbridge, 1/7, handed her off to 3/2, but 3/2 had a staff sergeant...

Alford: I think it started earlier with Matt Lopez in 3/7, though.

Davis: Okay. 3/2 had a staff sergeant who spoke Arabic fluently, and as the story goes, they developed a relationship over the phone. I don't know if she's alive today. If she is, she deserves a huge medal. She was a source through this guy for 3/2 when 3/2 could go into that town originally. Afterwards, episodically, she continued to provide great information from there that would come back and allow us to maneuver and target. When 3/2 got shut out of the city, she still was able to provide us with information. You [Alford] were there when we hit the train yards? Yeah, that was your snipers controlling those fires. But that city was just toxic. You couldn't get out there, and the only intel we had coming out of it was coming via her. I think she was handed off to you guys (3/6). I don't know if you ever found her after STEEL CURTAIN or not. I don't know if she's alive.

Alford: Never identified herself.

Davis: Yeah, but an absolutely incredible source. So through her and through others we were getting a good deal of information/intel regarding this intra-tribal conflict. I don't know how much we actually had our hands around it. I don't recall that we had a full sense of it. We tracked the fight as best we could as it moved in a clockwise fashion from southwest to northwest, which increased the pressure against Gannon, then down to Market Street. The Cobra Mosque and the area around it was absolutely toxic, down to the corner of Market and East End Street. About that time we started dialoging, indirectly at first, and later directly, with the Mahals. There was one point when LtCol Starling went out to Akashat with some of the Other Government Agency folks. These folks were great to work with when they finally came back to AO Denver. Prior to RCT-2 taking TOA, they removed themselves from Al Qaim reportedly because they couldn't keep any sources alive. [2:12:33]

Alford: This is the Desert Protectors.

Davis: Well it was even before the Protectors, though. This is what leads up to these discussions.

Knarr: And what timeframe is this?

Davis: July. We euphemistically referred to some of them as the Muj[ahedin] JTAC [Joint Tactical Air Controller]. We had Mahalawis in downtown Husaybah on cell phones, identifying locations, and calling that back to an interpreter who was standing outside my battle cabin talking to the OGA representative and relaying target information into the battle cabin. From there we were obtaining higher Headquarters strike approval and directing strikes, which were controlled by the guy on the ground on targets in Husaybah. BDA [Battle Damage Assessment] on one strike allegedly killed about 40 insurgents. That is definitely unorthodox. To ensure that we were always within the ROE [Rules of Engagement], I had a lawyer next to me for every targeting decision as did my General. But that's what this environment was like out there. The fighting was tooth and nail. [2:13:54] The bottom line was that it was our job out there to kill bad guys in order to disrupt the insurgents and set the conditions for the elections. We were fighting a war out there, but we understood the Mahalawis to some degree. LtCol Tim Mundy and all the guys before him had tried to work with the city councils. There was some sense of control with the city and tribal councils, which wasn't resident with AQI. I mean, clearly, AQI were the guys we wanted to target most of all, but we were not averse to taking out any of the other insurgents that were trying to kill our guys. The Abu-Mahals were losing this fight, and, interestingly, we were trying everything we could to keep them in the game. Eventually AQI came up and through the town [motioning with his hand from the west to the north and then to down to the east] and back down to the southeast corner and drove the Mahalawis out. And from there they moved down [south] to Akashat.

That's when LtCol Starling went out to Akashat with the OGA. We started, I won't say getting in bed with them, but we started trying to figure out where we had mutual interest. It's interesting, because none of this is a personal thing. It's not like you get to pick your favorite guys. You've got to pick who you are going to play with, and ultimately, we decided that we were going to play with the Mahalawis. I mean, it is just the way it was. Credit to Col Alford and his guys up there. When he got into the town, he didn't make it a one-sided thing. He opened it [up]. I remember one of those contentious town hall meetings. [2:15:41]

Alford: Right, where I got up and walked out. That's when the Salmanis and the Karbulis wouldn't really come around, because they were the ones who supported Al Qaeda.

Davis: Again, prior to this, we were prohibited from doing business with the tribes and their militias. [2:15:48]

Knarr: When did that ever turn around?

Davis: When GEN Casey came up with his concept of the Desert Protectors. After that, right towards the end of the time when RCT-2 RIP'd out, we were recruiting guys for the police forces. The next great initiative was to create police forces, which were just enfranchised militias.

Alford: We started that fall, right after STEEL CURTAIN.

Davis: Remember, the goal was to set the conditions for and conduct the National Referendum [on the constitution] in October and the Nation Elections in December, so all of this was conditional. We got to the referendum after RIVER GATE. This tribal fight was instructive, because after that, Husaybah was totally "bad guy," AQI territory. [National SOF] was conducting targeted raids in there. Between Alford's guys at Gannon and his guys on the Wadi, 3/6 had them boxed in, and they weren't shy about taking it to them up there. 3/6 had more strength and more numbers, and they did a great job up there clearing fields of fire and engaging the enemy. Alford was engaged every day. That took its toll on the enemy. We started talking to the Mahalawis, and that's when we started talking to GEN Casey about the Desert Protector. That was his idea.

GEN Casey came to visit the RCT on numerous occasions. Normally, he would fly into Al Asad via fixed-wing air, and we'd get linked up. Then we'd helo out to Alford's headquarters at 3/6 and sit down and talk for a while. My division commander, MajGen Huck, was very supportive.

One time when GEN Casey came was out, MEF Headquarters said, "Well, Davis isn't available." The General was flying out, and I caught wind of it. I just beat feet up to the air strip. I was there about two minutes before he flew in on his plane. He said, "Steve what are you doing here? I was told you were unavailable." I was like, "General you got four of those things [stars], and I got these little chickens [eagles] here. I'm going to be wherever you want me to be, when you want me to be." He laughed and said, "Okay, that's great. Well really, I was coming out to see you."

He was getting ready to take some choppers (UH-60 Blackhawks) out to Al Qaim. I said, “Well, I understand you were going to go to Al Qaim, but if you came to see me, I’d like to take you down to my op shop, to my battle cabin, and I want to lay out the intel for you.” I had GEN Casey for three-and-a-half hours, one on one. I immediately called up [National SOF] and said, “Hey, get the commander down here.” That’s when we were able to lay out the whole thing before RIVER GATE. “Here’s the campaign plan. This is where we’re at now, General. This is why I need you to give me back this area north of the river, but more particularly, why I need you to authorize us to separate these bridges [along the Euphrates], because they provide the critical requirements, mobility, and freedom of action, to the enemy. He looked at all the intel. He went back and forth talking with the SOF guys. “I understand that you guys got something special going on here. This is fitting nicely with what LTG McChrystal was doing, what we were doing, and how all that works together.” He said, “Ok, Steve, I got it, but don’t do it yet.” We had to go to SECDEF for permission to hit the Golden Gate Bridge.

Due to Higher Headquarters [HHQ] direction, we went through an evolution where they dropped cement bombs. That put a nice little square hole in the thing, and the next day the locals would repair it so they could go across. Then we tried shooting artillery at it with 200-pound warheads. We wasted a lot of time with that, and finally GEN Casey was like, “Okay, use air.”

Alford: There were a lot of rounds in the river.

Davis: Yeah. And then finally [he said], “Just please don’t break the whole thing if you don’t have to.” They used one 500-pounder per bridge with a J-DAM guidance system—Pow!—that was it. Now, nobody’s coming across. I understood that it didn’t make some people happy. It was not designed to make them happy. It was designed to stop these guys [insurgents] from having the mobility to move around this AO. And once you were able to separate them from that ability, using the river as a barrier, you could start segregating the battlespace. It’s just another form of berming.

Where we could down in Baghdadi, we brought in cement blocks and just blocked the bridge where they couldn’t move them off. Those little islands in the Euphrates between Haqlaniyah, Barwana, and Hadithah were critical. We controlled the crossing at the Hadithah Dam and the bridge outside of Hit. We blocked Baghdadi, so we were segregating the battlefield. That really is how you start. Bring out these high value guys, explain your story, explain your plan, and make them understand your world. It was similar

when we were visited by Lieutenant General James Amos, Commander, II MEF, and Brigadier General Ronald Coleman, and that was it. They got it; they were our biggest supporters back here in the resourcing end of this stuff. You know, once they understood what we were doing. [3:08:46]

Alford: Coleman came out?

Davis: Yeah, with Gen Amos.

Alford: I remember Amos was going around to all of my positions all day in the rain.

Davis: Oh, he was having a field day up there. Anyway, GEN Casey plussed us up and we were able to maximize what we were trying to do in that AO.⁹

Another interesting piece to this is the role that the SOF played. In Mark Urban's book, *Task Force Black*, he talks about the relationship between the US SOF folks, the British SOF folks, and LTG McChrystal. I don't necessarily buy all that's in the book, but it's an interesting perspective. I mean, what's happening at the high end is happening on the low end as well. It's all built on personality and friendships. And my friends were his friends and vice versa. He [Alford] developed an extraordinarily good relationship of his own with them (SOF). RCT-2 forces were QRF'ing [Quick Reaction Force] every assault they did. It's a total picture, 24-hour-a-day operational cycle. Was it SOF in support of general purpose forces? Was it general purpose forces in support of SOF? Who really cares? The bottom line is you need to focus on: What's the plan? Are we getting after it? It goes back to Team Ball. What's the mission? Focus on the mission. Don't worry about who gets credit. Leave your ego at the door. Are we moving the ball forward? Are we killing bad guys? Are we taking care of the people? This isn't hard stuff. I don't think some staff members fully understood that, though.

Alford: From my perspective, my battalion had learned to do that in Afghanistan. All of a sudden we showed up and there were all of these national assets in my space. I mean we became friends from Day One.

Davis: You know, in this business, not every staff officer should command and not every commander should be a staff guy. They can be very distinct, different strengths. You get the guys who are operators who know what they're doing on the field and when they get together, regardless of where they come from; the integration is instantaneous. You know

⁹ Major General Huck readily made his RCT and Battalion commanders available to GEN Casey's visits.

who those guys are. People say, "Well, it took a while to evolve." Bullshit! You know who the players are and who they're not. We had a lot of players out there. And I'll tell you the biggest player was GEN Casey. Casey was great. Casey understood it. A lot of his staff and those in MNCI weren't real happy with some of this stuff, but he got it. He knew what he wanted to get to. He knew it was about that ratline coming down the Euphrates. In fact, it was so bad that even he didn't think that we could take back Al Qaim. As a result, MNFI/MNCI dedicated \$40 million to construct these big desert fortifications, COP North and COP South, in order to isolate the Al Qaim region and Husaybah in particular for future operations. [2:20:13]

Knarr: Dale told me about that.

Davis: Yeah, yeah, you'll see those things. He can talk about it, because he led building those damn things. That's how we were going to surround and isolate Al Qaim. We sat in Alford's office after STEEL CURTAIN, and GEN Casey said, "I never thought you guys could take that back." And I said, "We never thought we couldn't."

Alford: He [Davis] kept ordering us to occupy that damn place (COPs North and South). And he would say, "Damnit, Dale, you got to help me out."

Davis: Put a damn fire team over there, and shut up! Just put a damn fire team over there. He finally used them as training bases.

I want to come back and talk to the border piece of this, too. That piece gets lost in the discussions about the tribal stuff, the Muj-JTAC, etc. [2:21:03] I think we did a lot of damage to AQI up there during that period. That was the start of working with the tribes, however unofficially and un-encouraged. I don't mean to imply that this was a Division problem. Brigadier General Jim Williams, back then the deputy [MNF-W], was all over it. He got that. He spent a lot of time in Afghanistan, too. Policy wise, there were a lot of guys in between who believed that we were going to make the national force work; it's square peg, round hole guys. Anbar's different. Three quarters of this country was good to go when we arrived, but Anbar was still the cancer; it's an "in-context" thing. Unfortunately, we were still taking these suicide bombers, which continued to accelerate until STEEL CURTAIN. When it came time to go back to Al Qaim, that was how we were going to go do this thing.

Davis: GEN Casey understood the approach. Again, OGA folks were out there. USAID folks were out there. We had [National SOF] out there. Finally, I was given an ODB with three ODAs with the intent "To train your Iraqis." That was great, but I didn't have any Iraqis.

When the Iraqi units came, they had TTs [Transition Teams] with them. Higher Headquarters said that the ODAs would do our tribal engagement. Well, that was great, but I had battalions out there with their Civil Affairs guys; they were already doing that. So, we kind of married them up. We sent an ODA out to Alford. One went up to Hadithah and one out to Hit. They did some solid, contributory work.

Alford: The ODA commander ended up working with the smaller Desert Protector force there. That ended up really becoming the first elements of the police in December/January or so. [2:23:15]

Davis: The way this worked was an interesting evolution, but the different chains of command are also interesting. I was the battlespace owner. I was responsible for everything that happened there, but I had no control over a great number of forces working in my AO. There was [National SOF], and we all understood the conditions under which they worked. There were CJSOTF [Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force] Forces who were in direct support of me. I have no control over [CJSOTF] except for HANDCON, and they were reporting back up to the CJSOTF commander, Colonel Kevin McDonnell. He was a great guy; he's up in SOCOM's [Special Operations Command] Washington office now. He's worth talking to. We became good friends through this. It's interesting the different chains of command that you have to deal with. You're responsible for what happens out here, but you have no control over much of it. That's not a whine, that's just a stated fact of how that works to this day. One of the challenges for the future will be to define, doctrinally, how the CJSOTF operates in other commanders' areas of responsibility. When you look at what LTG McChrystal is doing now, and how the authorities change commander relationships in Afghanistan, you see the manifestation of that taken to a different level. So it's interesting how things evolve.

Then GEN Casey said, "Let's try this Desert Protector thing for STEEL CURTAIN." It worked well. RIVER GATE gave us many more trained Iraqi forces flowing out to the west. We built camps in every one of these cities for them, so they were not just rolling in. They had places to live, places to eat, places to clean up, places to train, and stuff like that. So finally, many things were moving in the right direction.

Alford: I got my first battalion of 1/1 [1st Battalion, 1st Brigade, 1st Iraqi Division] right as IRON FIST was being completed. It was like the first week in October. I was finishing those first three, four, five battle positions, whatever we call them. We were moving Iraqis in [there with the US forces], and trying to learn how to live there. [2:25:54]

Knarr: So you got them before STEEL CURTAIN.

Davis: Oh, yeah. That was Razak.

Alford: No, he was the brigade commander of 1/1. He didn't come until STEEL CURTAIN, but his first battalion of his brigade came the first week in October.

Davis: I had a battalion out with [Alford], a battalion with Chessani in Hadithah, and the other one down in Hit. That was when we had to distribute them so we could consolidate our efforts. We didn't want to get to the next step in the campaign plan if we were going to lose consolidation of our efforts in Hit, Hadithah, and Rawah. We had to keep servicing those targets. That's why we were a little, I don't know if the word is sensitive or jaundiced, when we heard the criticism about whack-a-mole.

The next thing that happens, of course, is the referendum in mid-October. This slide here shows you the results. [Figure A-14]. [2:32:42]

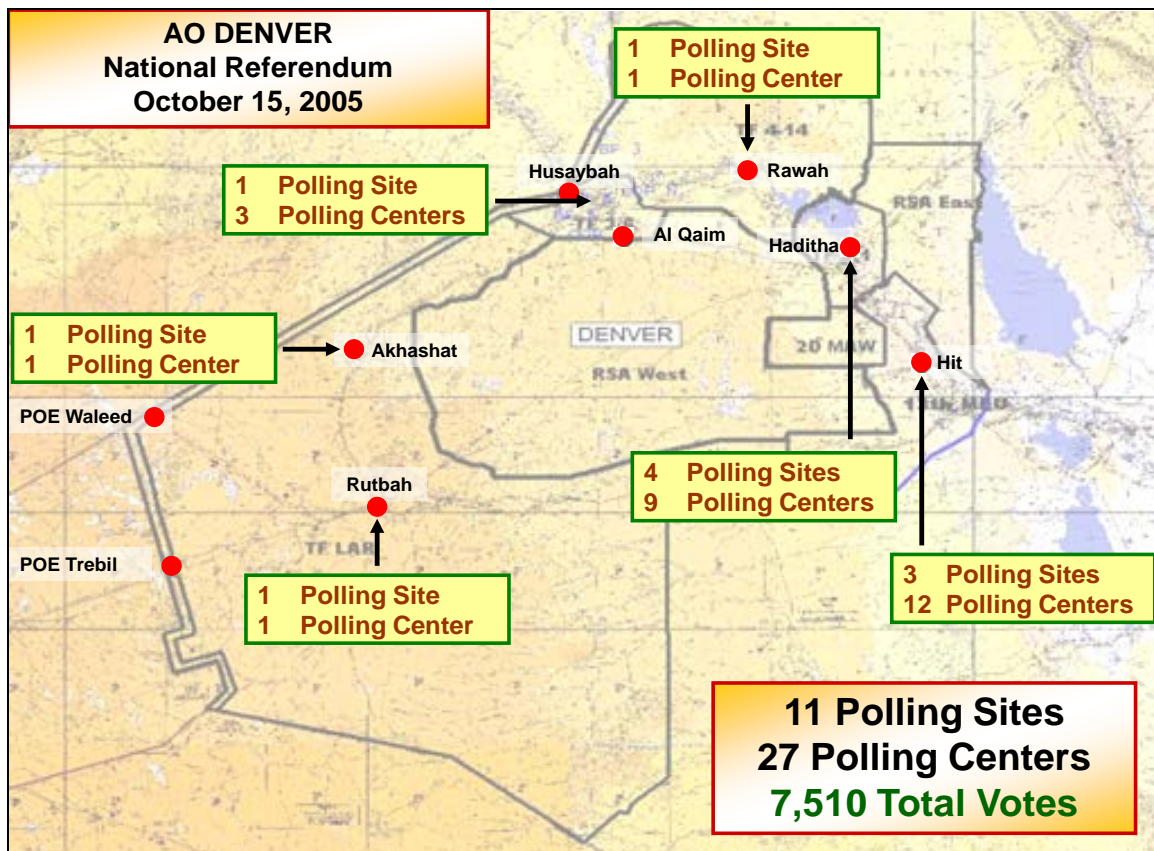


Figure A-14. AO Denver, National Referendum, 15 October 2005

It's interesting because when they had had the election in January of '05, they had gotten no votes. None! We thought we could get a lot of votes out of here after the work we had done. Instead, we got 7,500 votes, and we were very disappointed with that. My S3 and I jumped up into a Huey and flew out of Al Asad. We flew all over Hit, and all the way up through and past Rawah, trying to figure out what had happened here. The visual was interesting. Where we got these votes was fascinating, because there was nobody on the west side of the Euphrates that was voting, nobody! We invested a ton in Hadithah, Haqlaniyah, and Hit, and we got no votes out of there.

But there was proportionally massive voter turn out in Barwana and Rawah, and even out of Karabilah, Akashat, and Rutbah, where relations were toxic. We were getting votes out of these places. We went back scratching our heads. Then we figured it out. If two provinces or more had voted down this referendum, the whole process would have gone back and started all over again. The sheikhs didn't want to do that, but Coalition forces still hadn't sorted that out yet. So the tribes were going to ride the fence with Al Qaeda. They thought, "If I don't vote then this province doesn't go into the negative column, which it probably would have. Number two, they thought, "I'll buy time with Al Qaeda, because I'm playing their game." It's interesting, because you see where you did get votes, and that's what we attributed it to.

But I mean you want to talk about the power of the sheikhs? If you ever had a doubt in your mind, this is not about imams out here; this is about sheikhs. This is a tribal place. Anbar is a separate country; it's a separate country and these guys rule. Everything that he [Alford] is living with up in Al Qaim, everything that we put together, everything goes back to that first analysis, that tribal laydown. This is the payoff; here it is guys. Again, how did that translate up and down? I don't know. We got 7,500 votes, which was a victory; we had none back in January, so we were moving the ball forward.

The story that unfolded in front of us was a great deal more explicit than this. Why do I bring that up? Because it was October 15th, and we had the pictures of the referendum, the purple fingers, and the Iraqi guys running the polling places. It was a great day. They did a great job, and the courage of the people cannot be overestimated or overstated. They were amazing.

Barwana had 8,000 people and 2,300 voted.

In Baghdadi, there were 12,000 people and 194 voted. Hadithah had 8,000, and had 200 people vote. Hit had somewhere in the neighborhood of almost 50,000, and they only had

about 700 voters. Rutbah had 4,000 people and got 800 voters. Husaybah was locked up tight with 12,000 people and 400 votes. Rawah had 4,000 people and almost half of them voted. This starts to tell you a story. The difference is when you come to December after STEEL CURTAIN, and you're up closer to 80,000 votes for this AO, you know? That's when you know the tide has swung. That's when you know that you've now moved into the next chapter.

It's tough to develop metrics! Remember those stupid charts, the colored charts we had? There's the art of war, and there's a science of war. You can't run war by science; it's a human endeavor. Operators tend to rely a lot on intuition. That's why we work real well together. I could throw him [Alford] the ball, and I know what he's going to do with it. We'll talk about that when we get to STEEL CURTAIN, because most of our game plan was made up on the hood of a HMMWV. Why? Because that is how you do this stuff in a dynamic environment. You don't sit there and plan lengthy evolutions meticulously. The enemy gets a vote and you must be very careful about not being able to flex within a changing battlefield environment. We planned the first three days of the fight with some contingencies and subsequent planning afterwards got much broader. [2:37:29]

For example, after the initial attacks and we get through Husaybah, then what? I don't know. We'll figure it out, because the enemy gets a vote. You don't know what you've got. You might have to pick it up, but you know the quality of your subordinate commanders and their units. They understand mission orders, and they understand commander's intent. If you don't have that you're in trouble. You're in big trouble.

So that's the referendum in October, and of course that sets up for STEEL CURTAIN. [Regimental Task Organization for STEEL CURTAIN at Figure A-15.]

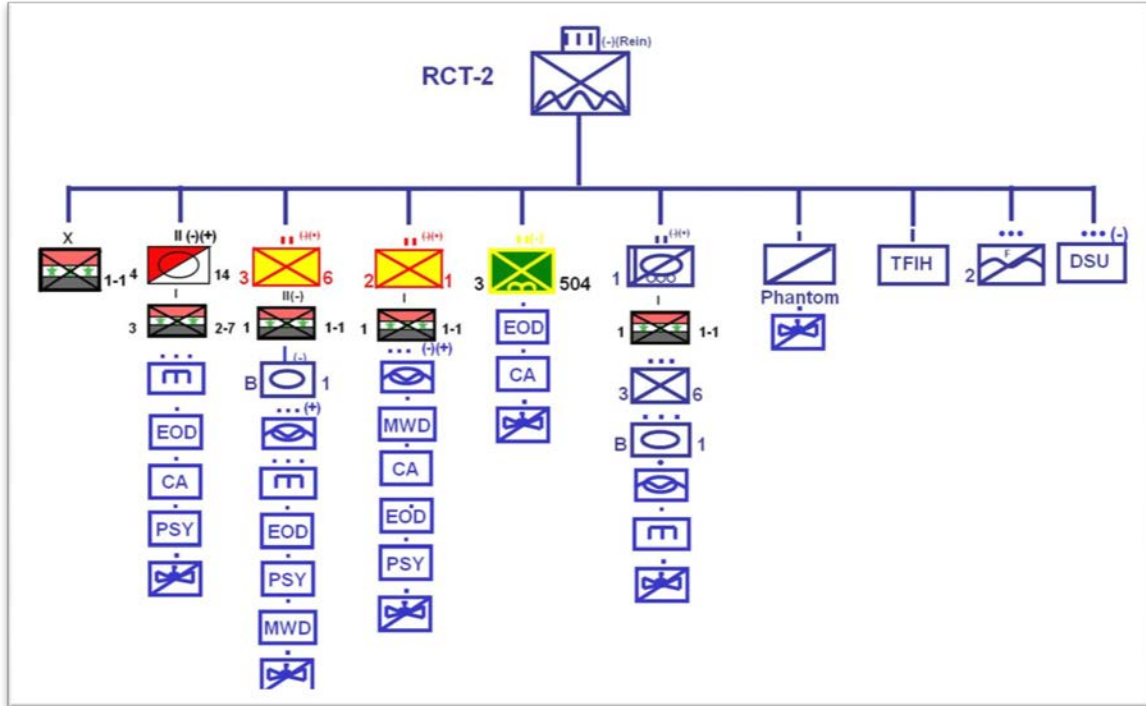


Figure A-15. Regimental Task Organization for Operation STEEL CURTAIN¹⁰

STEEL CURTAIN was designed to start with an unconventional attack. We were not going to come from the Emerald Wadi going east to west, because that's what they expected. I can't overstate the damage that 3/6 did to the Al Qaeda forces in that interim period. It encompassed IRON FIST and the RIVER GATE period after that, so for the enemy the focus went, "Oh you're looking west, now we're back east!" [The RCT kept switching so AQI didn't know where the next strike would come from.] Well now everybody knows there is only one place left to go. I don't know how many guys bugged out to Rutbah. We had some communications open with the Mahalawis, but everybody knew what was coming next. They just didn't know how it was going to unfold.

We had this company sized area at Camp Gannon, and Alford surreptitiously infiltrated most of his battalion into Gannon. There were some very supportive command relationships from the MEF and from the division. Speaking of which, you guys need to meet with Colonel John Holden, who is the division three [G3]. He's out at 29 Palms. He can talk volumes to you, because there's probably about three days during that second semester where I didn't talk to John Holden. He can paint this picture, not only from what they were

¹⁰ Task Organization reflects 4/14 as a Cavalry unit, but it's referred to as 4-14 Stryker.

doing at the division level, challenges they had with higher staff, but he can talk eloquently about operations that we did from what he got to see as the division three. [2:39:36]

Alford: He's retired right?

Davis: No, he's a retiree. He's still on active duty. As we launched out, we moved 2/1 into their attack positions along the Syrian Border, west of the 440, and tied in with 3/6 to the north. We had two battalions on line and when it became time to kick off the attack, 2/1 took the lead to go through the 440 district, which we later turned into a refugee camp. As they hit West End Street, Col Alford's guys were supposed to pick up on line and sweep through Husaybah. We brought the LAR battalion up out of Rutbah to seal the south side of the town and the Al Qaim region. Due to a redistribution of forces, I lost half of 3-504th to go down to Tharthar to work with some of the SOF folks. What we had left of 3-504th, was led by Major Taylor Gray, who was the battalion XO. With two companies and the battalion HQ chopped, we inserted what we had left up to the north of 3/6's position into the Ramana farmland area. We had 4-14 Stryker up north of the river to contain that, and later they would sweep the north side of the river. Additionally, we had about a brigade of Iraqis by that point.

Alford: All of 1/1.

Davis: What did LTC Freitag (4-14) have? He had to have Iraqis up with him or did you give them up when they went across the river to the north? What they did is they came from the west [to east] to the Emerald Wadi. We went up [north] of Ubaydi, and then we came back across on the north side of the river. Essentially, we made a giant U-shaped movement. [2:41:25]

Alford: You chopped a LAR Company to me, and I gave them a battalion of Iraqis and they went north.

Davis: That's right. That's basically how that whole thing worked out. 2/1 went through 440, took them about a day. A lot of firepower. I'm trying to think of when you (3/6) took up, because the 3/6 guys had been fighting up here for months. They knew this town. They knew right where to go through. It was just a matter of trying to keep two battalions on line until we got to East End Street where the Youth Center was across the street on East End.

Alford: East End Street is on the east side of Husaybah.

Davis: When we swept through there, we kind of called a time-out on day three. I'm not real sure on the timeline at this point, but we got up there, and we did just what we said we'd do for our attack plan. The basic concept was that we were going to come west to east and then come up the Ubaydi Peninsula. Then the Iraqis and 4-14 (who were already on the north side of the river) were going to come across the north side of the river. That's how we were going to do this thing. It was not time driven, it was event driven. We would go as fast as we could go without sacrificing anything or anybody unnecessarily. Col Alford did urban renewal everywhere that he went. Boom, boom, boom. There were FOBs popping up everywhere. The logistics in support of that was pretty neat.

We pushed further through Karabilah and then had 2/1 disengage at that point. Col Alford came over the top, bypassing 2/1, and went down to the north of Karabilah then south along the Wadi. (He had his guys on the east side of the Wadi.) Then he went to consolidate on the south side. We moved 2/1 out and around and up to the base of the Ubaydi Peninsula. Once in position, they were going to sweep through Ubaydi and consolidate there. Then 4-14 and the Iraqis would come across the top and that would be the end of this story.

And it pretty much unfolded like that. There was some tough fighting in Karabilah; we took a lot of IED casualties with 3/6. 2/1 had a great day up in Ubaydi. However, they lost a very popular Major Raymond Mendoza, behind the line of departure. He stepped on an IED. It was a real morale blow for that battalion. He was very, very popular and a great leader. But I think he was the only guy killed the first two days of fighting from 2/1, and they racked up more than 100 enemy KIAs in that town.

There was one thing that was very helpful in reducing casualties, which occurred two nights before we went into the Ubaydi Peninsula. At the RCT-2 Headquarters we were watching UAV feeds. We figured out something real interesting that we hadn't noticed before. Throughout the day, the sun heats up everything, but metal retains the heat more than the sand does. It was dusk, and the UAVs started picking up all the IEDs that were buried out there. We picked up SVBIEDs [Suicide Vehicle Borne IEDs] that the insurgents had positioned around the city. We brought in an AC-130 gunship as soon as it got dark. They took out 20–21 IEDs and four or five SVBIEDs before we went on the attack the next day, which really neutered a bunch of the insurgents' defenses. Also, we flew the UAVs back over the south side of MSR Bronze a couple of days later over an area where we had been routinely driving through. There was an extensive mine field. Whoever went through there initially had never hit a mine; they were missing by one and two feet. As long as you

stayed in the preexisting tire tracks, you were good to go. It was like, "It's much better to be lucky than good!"

This was real helpful, because 2/1 went right up through the city. This was not inconsequential. [2:46:34] Soon thereafter, we had to give 2/1 back, because they were the GCE [ground combat element] for Colonel Jim LaVine's 13th MEU [Marine Expeditionary Unit]. He was very gracious about giving us operational control of them for that operation.

Alford: And all my rifle companies had been petered out, and they were all into FOBs. We'd built positions. I only had one company left. [Video 2:47:04]

Davis: Where we went, we stayed. They owned Ubaydi. (3/6 did a relief in place with 2/1.) During the fight, we operated for a few days out of Old Ubaydi. It was a pretty neat little town, actually. We were up there, and we were operating out of a house that we had targeted with UAVs and Hellfire missiles continuously for weeks before that. Ironically, we got to conduct our own BDA after some of that.

The second night of that operation, I took the jump CP and walked the ground back through some of the places within the city where 3/2 had fought in New Ubaydi for the first time. We were just walking the streets, and it was interesting connecting dots. We went back to the CP that night at the train station, and we were tracking a fairly large foreign fighter-led insurgent group. It was about 40 guys that we found operating in the Palm Groves north of New Ubaydi in the farmlands. My fires guys (who were artillery officers) requested to shoot on the target. I'm not a big fan of using artillery in this environment. It's not a very good counterinsurgency weapon. We had had mixed results with MLRS [Multiple Launch Rocket System] previously. I decided to let them engage up there, though, because we had confirmed enemy and positive identification (PID) via the UAV. We found them there in the Palm Groves, and we let the MLRS target them for about 20 minutes. They did some damage, but most of the stuff got hung up in the palm trees. It was interesting watching. You could tell they were foreign fighters and foreign fighter trained and led, though, because their discipline under fire was superb. They maintained dispersion; they didn't panic. You didn't have guys running out of there. They hunkered down, and they did what they had to do. We finally got tired of that and called off the attacks. Subsequently, we brought in some F-18s and dropped 500-pounders on them. We figured it killed about 20-26 in there. Unfortunately, some insurgents got out of there. They moved into the farm land area north of the city on the Ubaydi Peninsula, which would hurt us the next day.

In the morning, 2/1 launched a patrol that went up to the farm houses and they got caught in a very sophisticated ambush. The houses in that area were offset. They [insurgents] waited until the patrol got in the middle house of a housing area. It was just full of insurgents and a real brawl started. As reinforcements moved up to assist in the fight, the insurgents across the street opened up on the patrol reinforcement. At the end of the fight, we had lost five great Marines. Every death is tragic; every death you feel, but we felt those a great deal. The Navy Cross was awarded out of that action, and, I think, four Silver Stars. [2:50:04] [See enemy movement and attempted escape routes at Figure A-16.]

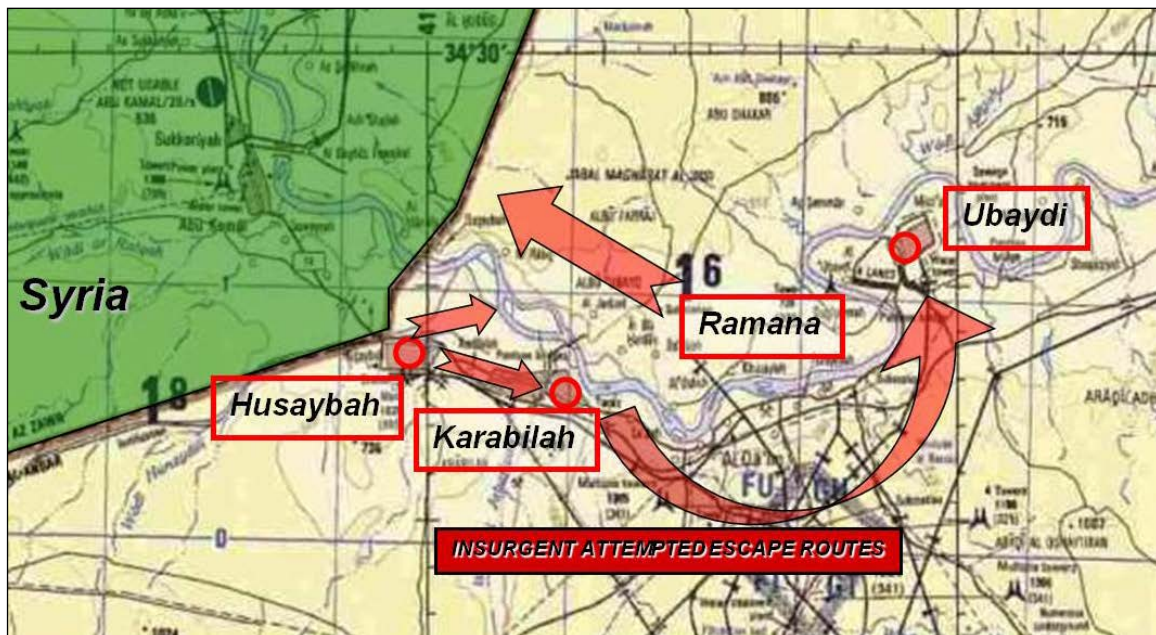


Figure A-16. Insurgent movement and attempted escape routes—Operation STEEL CURTAIN

There are some incredible stories of heroism coming out of these fights. As soon as the fight was over, I headed to our emergency treatment facility to spend time with our wounded. Everyone in that squad had been hit. The medical support and Army MEDEVAC [medical evacuation] helicopters were, again, just superb; it's why the ones that weren't killed outright lived. One of the Marines that sticks in my mind, I'm going to forget his name, lost his right hand up there. I don't know if he was the Navy Cross recipient. I don't remember which one was which, but you know he was still well-focused. He shot up pretty good, and he had saved a lot of lives. He lost his hand throwing a grenade out the window saving a bunch of lives up there, just heroic performance.

As I moved around to see other casualties, a Marine pulled me over. We were talking, and he said, "Sir, you need to hook me up." I said, "What's up?" He said, "Well you got to go into the cargo pocket of my trousers (which were under his stretcher), but you've got to be real careful." I reached into his cargo pocket and found that he had four pre-assembled explosive detonators. Each consisted of a fuse igniter, time fuse, blasting caps, and C4. They were already rigged, so all they would need to do is place them, pull the igniter, and go. These were used to gain access to buildings. I said, "Don't worry Devil Dog, we've got these taken care of." We disposed of those outside of the hospital. I've got to tell you, when you talk about what's great about the Marine Corps, it's Marines like these. Those kids are what is great about the Marine Corps. Even in their pain, they're still focused on the mission, and they were just absolutely superb. But losing that many after the good fortune we had was a real tragedy. RCT-2 lost five guys or more on six different occasions, and that was the last one. 2/1 accorded itself very well up there. [2:52:15] Lieutenant Colonel Bob Altman, the battalion commander, was a really excellent commander who did a great job.

That was Ubaydi's story. Then LTC Mark Freitag (4-14) took his Strykers and the Iraqis, who were pre-staged across on the north side of the river across from Ubaydi, and started to sweep west to consolidate at the Syrian border. At the end of the operation, we knew that the kinetic stage of the campaign plan was over. Here [Alford] is the owner of Al Qaim. He can describe tribal engagement much better than I can. Suffice to say that he was absolutely the right guy, in the right place, and at the right time. He did a job that set up all the conditions for success. Everywhere up the chain of command, they were preloaded to get the Civil Affairs guys out there with some pretty substantial assets. This was all crucial for setting the conditions for the National Elections in December.

STEEL CURTAIN was a crowning glory and the end of that part of the campaign plan. This was followed by the national elections. LIBERTY EXPRESS was conducted in mid-December. At that time, we did not own the Hit battlespace. We talked about the battlespace ownership issues previously. At some point, higher Headquarters chopped everything south of Baghdadi to, now Brigadier General McKenzie's 22nd MEU. This brought more forces in to operate in the MEF battlespace. Unfortunately, I don't think anyone was looking at the overall effort and what made the most sense for the COIN fight. It was clearly about getting more units into the fight. [2:56:23]

Alford: That's why they didn't give 2/1 battlespace. They brought them in and used them for about two-and-half weeks for a kinetic phase. They had a plan to occupy, but we knew

2/1 wasn't staying. We didn't give them an inch of battlespace. It's kind of the same way you treated the 82nd battalion [3-504 Inf]. Because you knew you weren't keeping them.

Davis: And everybody didn't understand. Why don't you give them battlespace to operate? Well, I don't need seven different battalions running in their own directions. This is part of an overall plan. This is how it nests and fits. When the elections took place, including the Hit battlespace, we had 80,000–90,000 votes in the December election. The combined effort went from zero in January 2005 to 7,500 in October 2005 to 80,000–90,000 in December 2005. That is progress, and at that point, the RCT was in consolidation phase. [Figure A-17, National Elections].

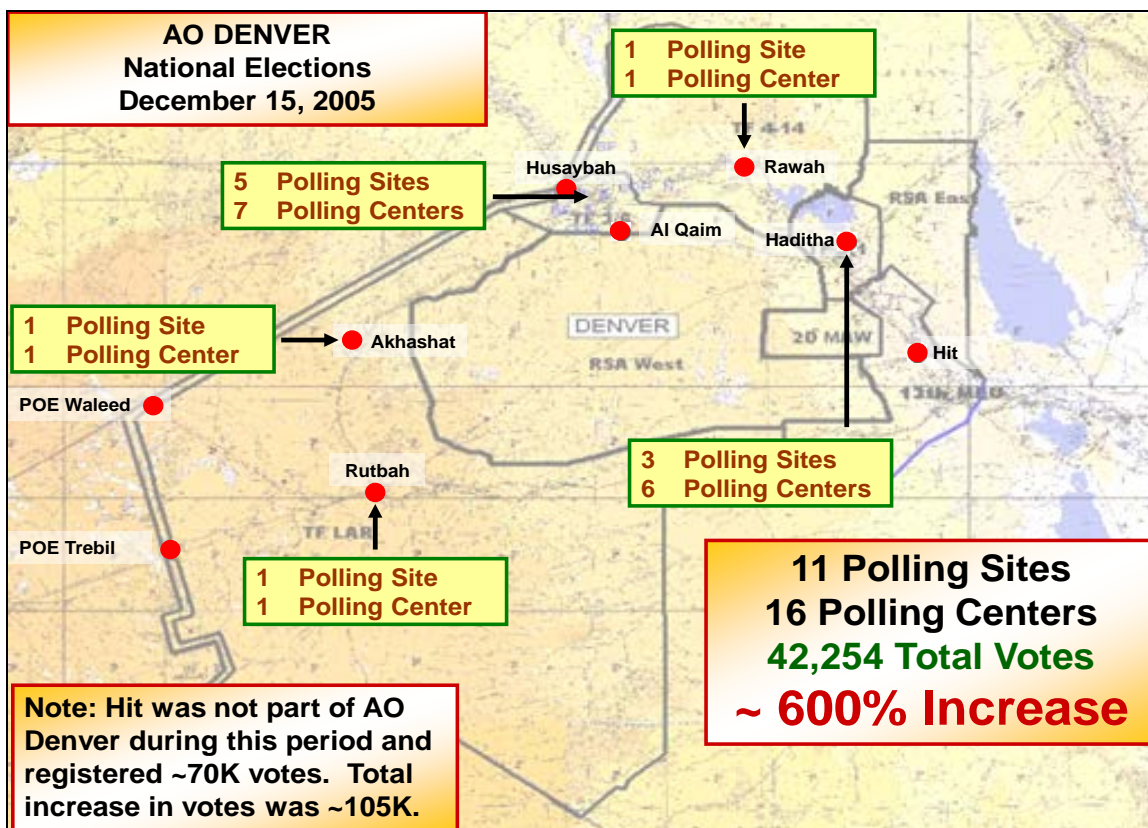


Figure A-17. AO Denver, National Elections, 15 December 2010¹¹

¹¹ Figure A-17's mention of "~ 600% increase" refers to an increase in voter turnout compared to the two previous national elections: January 2005 National Assembly election and October 2005 National Referendum Election.

Davis: Here is the battle damage [Figure A-18] assessment. That's a tonnage of stuff, over 1,000 tons of munitions and weapons taken out of there. You look at that number there (EKIA); you multiply that number times four, and that's a conservative estimate of the enemy you take off the battlefield. [02:57:00] A lot of the damage was done by air, and it wasn't just hitting random targets, it was specific targeting. That does not include whatever SOF did. That speaks to the type of fight that we were in. This isn't just, "go live among the people and watch out for the one or two bad guys." Until you did STEEL CURTAIN, and until he [Alford] did what he did with the tribes up there, the people did not come across to the US side. I think Abu-Mahal is generally agreed to be the most powerful tribe in the Euphrates River Valley. During this time, you have change over from LTG Vines to LTG Chiarelli (MNC-I) and you have the start of the police initiative.

<h2 style="text-align: center; color: green;">Viking in the WERV</h2> <h3 style="text-align: center; color: green;">Battle Damage Assessment Rollup</h3>					
Total EKIA (Confirmed): 893			Enemy Detained: 3,104		
Buildings Destroyed: 183					
Type:	Amount:	Weight (Lbs):	Type:	Amount:	Weight (Lbs):
Mortar tubes	98	7,840	Anti-aircraft rounds	69,433	333,758
Mortar rounds	5,999	385,436	Small arms rounds	362,233	210,860
Machine guns	162	5,054	Rockets	1,529	183,480
Artillery rounds	6,886	853,864	Rifles	833	8,913
RPG launchers	429	8,194	Assorted explosives		67,622
RPG rounds	1,297	5,188	IED materials (wires etc.)		11,828
Total caches: 965			1041.08 Tons		
Total RCT-2 Operations:		17	16 of 18 Border Forts Complete		
Total air missions:		552			
Friendly Ordnance dropped:		138 Tons			

Figure A-18. Battle damage assessment

Afterwards, we were then allowed to talk to the tribes and their militias. We were allowed to franchise their militias as policemen. Now we started getting into how you succeed out here. We didn't talk about the border forts [Figure A-19, Force Laydown].

Throughout this time the border transition teams originally had a couple of sites up around here. No, they didn't have any up here near you, did they? We built up toward you. We had them around Trebil and Waleed. [2:59:23]

Alford: I think there were a couple above me.

Davis: And way up here is where the Uzidis used to range. They just continued to build these forts, berm up earth, bring in plywood, construct some shacks, and run out of there. Whether you were in Trebil, Waleed, or up here, anything coming across from Syria is coming across within five clicks, either side of the POE. There was not a lot of this mid-zone stuff that everybody was looking for. I forget what his name was, Sabar? The general that was headquartered out of Waleed. You want to talk about a warlord? He ran that place. Colonel Mike Pinnell, who is now retired, was out there running around with his BTTs [Border Transition Teams]. Pinnell prevented humanitarian disasters from occurring out there on a routine basis. [03:00:10]

Alford: A reserve Colonel, he had a lot of active duty time.

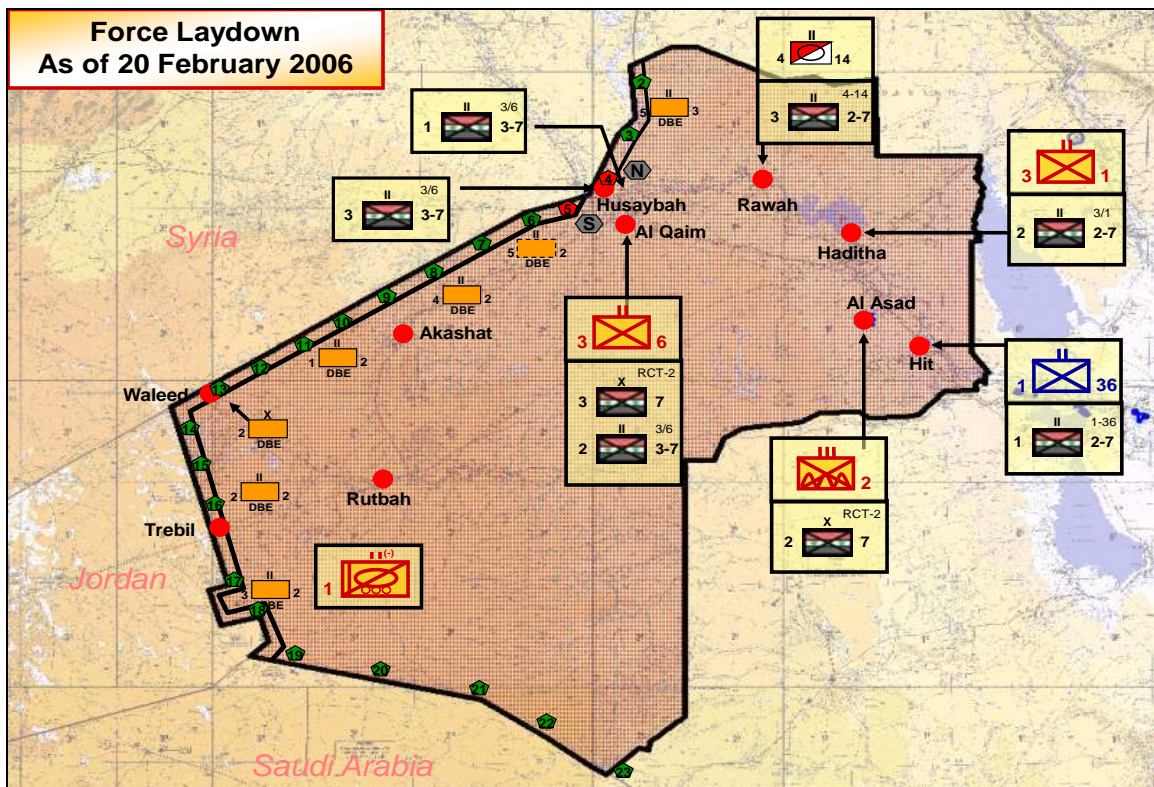


Figure A-19. Force laydown as of 20 February 2006

Davis: He was great. We worked together previously at 4th MEB and in HOA. He came out and worked for me. I told him what I needed him to do out there. We always referred to AO Denver as the Twilight Zone where *Apocalypse Now* meets *Mad Max* movies, because you can't make stuff up that happened out there. And these guys were out on the borders building these little forts. You had this warlord out there plus all this stuff coming through at Trebil. The Jordanian side was orderly, controlled. If you got up on a building outside of Trebil and looked down, there were like seven zones of extortion. As you went through, you had to pay this guy off to get to the next zone, to pay this guy off to get to the next zone. It was like the mafia at the New York ports back in the 60s. It was unbelievable. And those guys hadn't changed since pre-Saddam days. This guy Sabar up at Waleed was absolutely amazing. But you know what? If you needed stuff clamped down on, he was your man. Nothing came across the border without Sabar's permission. The BTTs built these forts all the way up here, so after we did STEEL CURTAIN at the end of November, MNFI did a big presentation with speeches, flag raising, etc, where GEN Casey flew out with the Minister of Defense [Figure A-20]. We all gave speeches up there at the Youth Center on East End Street.



Figure A-20. Col Steve Davis with Dr. Sadun al-Dulaymi, Minister of Defense

The next slide [Figure A-21] is on our achievements. This man [pointing to BG Razzak] is a hero.



Figure A-21. Successes: Voters with their inked fingers (left); BG Razzak talking to his soldiers (right); the three bullets at the bottom are the successes

Knarr: Yes he is. I met him.

Davis: Let me tell you. When things were ugly and your life was on the line, he was a stand-up, no-shit leader. That plaque right behind you is his unit plaque that he gave me. [Plaque from the 1st Brigade, 1st Iraqi Army].

This was the re-establishment of the sovereign borders of Iraq. The Iraqis then controlled them. They were out in these border forts. [Referring to slide in Figure A-22] Six fights, they're separate, but they're all interrelated.

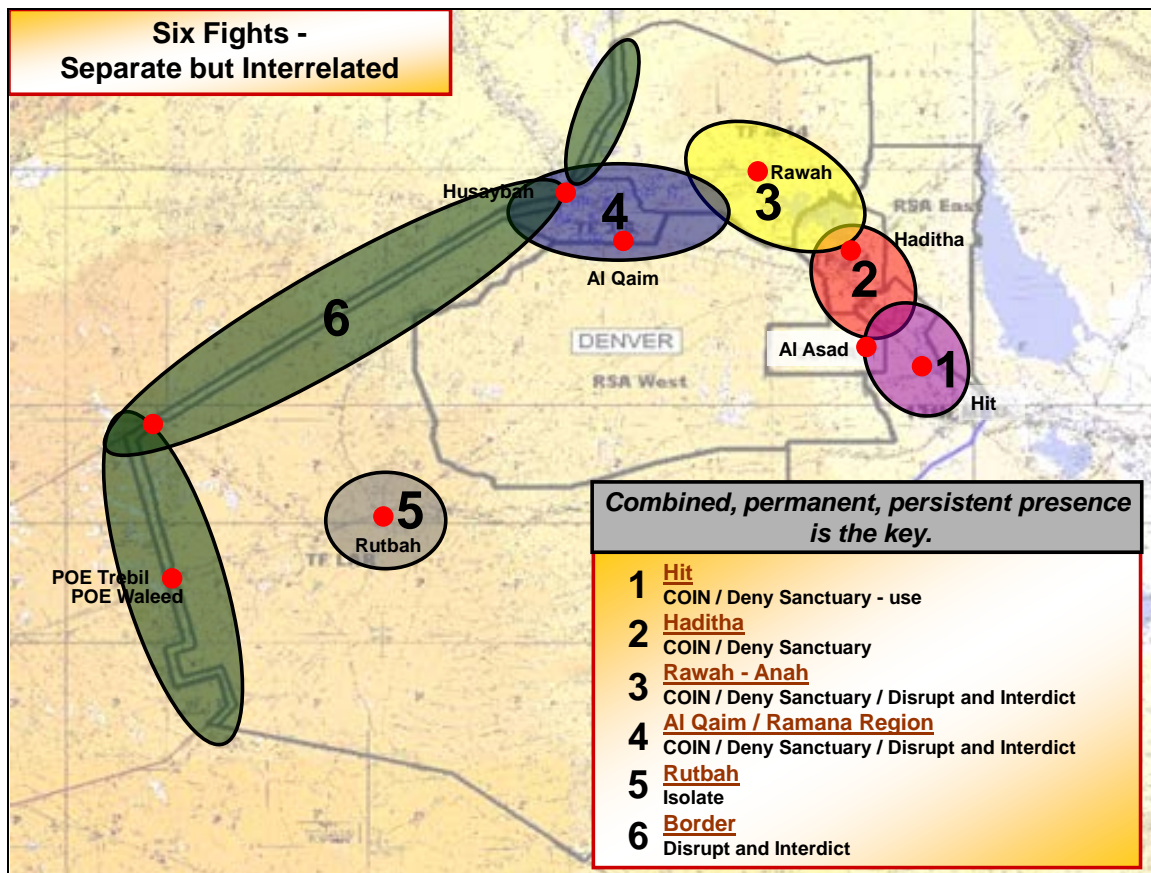

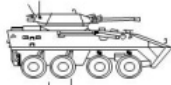
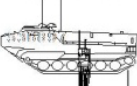





Figure A-22. Six fights, separate but interrelated

It is a very interesting place, which we absolutely have a great affinity for, despite the tragedies. It was unequivocally the best year of my life. There are our losses. [Table A-2] We lost 18 Strykers in the course of six months. [03:04:05] It's a great vehicle, too.

Table A-2. Major End Item Losses

	Type	# Lost
	M-88 Tank Retriever	1
	M1 Tank	3
	Light Armored Vehicle	11
	AAVP7 A1	10
	Stryker	18
	Uparmored HMMWV	25
	HMMWV	13
	MTVR	12

And the cost to the RCT was 111 killed. Eighty of them were Marines, fourteen were Soldiers, three were Sailors, one was a civilian, and the rest were Iraqis. Some great, great kids gave their lives for this.

The way ahead [below]. And again, this presentation was made when we returned to CONUS late Feb '06.

The Way Ahead

- **Less kinetics**
- **Establishment of Iraqi Police**
- **Iraqi Army fully controlling battlespace**
- ***The answer is in Baghdad...***

Lessons learned [below], pretty simple stuff here. These things by and large are still true today. It's a mindset. How do you go after this? How are you looking at it? How are you analyzing it? The answer is not in the text book.

These are the takeaways [below].

Lessons Learned

- **Mindset**
- **Keep it simple, streamline everything**
- **Speed**
- **Let intel drive ops**
 - Total focus on enemy
- **Creatively task-organize**
- **Push resources down**
- **Increase OPTEMPO**
- **Truly understand the operational environment**
- **Don't artificially divide the battlespace**
- **Joint / Inter-agency / other DoD organizations**
- **Personal relationships**
- **Develop / utilize IO effectively**
 - Media
 - Get the story out
- **OPSEC**

Takeaways

- **Control**
- **Team Ball**
- **Planning vs. Intuition**
- **How do you fit into Higher's mission?**
- **Innovative integration of ISR and Aviation**
- **Value of high-profile visitors**
- **Partnering with Iraqi Army/Iraqi Police**

Davis: We preach it every day here. General Peter Schoomaker at Fort Bragg said, “Don’t judge your value to the fight by your proximity to it.” Everybody contributes to it. You can’t do it without the admin guys, the supply guys, etc.¹²

Knarr: Please comment on the bullet, “Innovative Integration of ISR and Aviation.”

Davis: Predators, Scan Eagle, using Hellfires off the Predators.

Alford: That’s type three CAS [close air support].

Davis: That was basically unavailable. In some cases they apportioned them over to us. For example, you saw how we used the AC-130 to take out IEDs, how we used the Rover III, and the LITENING Pod downlink, which was all new capability to us. How do you target off of that? Today they may have a different view and/or different ROE for that.

Alford: Well when we first started, you got a thing in the sky that was looking at a target. You’re back at a CP, and you call an air strike off of it. Everybody was nervous as hell about that at first. I mean it’s really a type two CAS.

Davis: With the ROE, you have to make sure you have positive ID, that you know you have a threat, and that you can only have a proportionate response. I hate to say it, but I didn’t make a targeting decision without a lawyer present. You cannot let emotion enter into the fight, and when people are getting into fights, you’ve got to maintain logical, unemotional control. [3:12:25]

Alford: [Speaking of the ROE in Husaybah] I was there as a young battalion commander out there wanted to blow up a mosque. [I was] raising hell on the satellite phone, [because my commander] wouldn’t let him. Yeah! We were getting our asses handed to us at the Golden Dome Mosque [west side of the Emerald Wadi].

Knarr: That’s right, I remember you talking about it.

Alford: And I wanted to blow it up! I was just tired of getting our butts whipped from that thing. I begged to blow it up, he [Col Davis] wouldn’t let me, because...

Davis: Cannot do it! A commander’s responsibility is to his mission and to his men. If that’s callous, if that’s failing to see the big picture, well, I disagree. There have been people allegedly quoted saying, “I’d rather see Americans dead instead of Iraqi civilians.” Well,

¹² General Schoomaker served in several positions at Fort Bragg. He was the JSOC commander and the USASOC Commander. He was also commanded USSOCOM and after retirement returned to active duty to become the Chief of Staff of the Army.

sorry, I don't fall in that camp. We've got a responsibility to those Marines, Soldiers, Sailors, and Airmen. You've got a responsibility to their families and you've got a responsibility to this country. You know? It's up to those various senior leaders to think about those things before you get into these fights.

We had many tough days and many tough fights. I think that our Marines, Sailors, and Soldiers acquitted themselves well throughout this year. At the end of our tour, Iraq was in a much better place than they had been in before with all the opportunity to truly move forward into a democracy if they wanted to.

21 December 2010

Subject: Interview with Lieutenant Colonel Martin Adams, USA, former Commander, Special Forces Operational Detachment Bravo, in Al Asad, Iraq

Lieutenant Colonel Martin Adams, USA, commanded Special Forces Operational Detachment Bravo, in Al Asad, Iraq from September 2005 to February 2006. He was responsible for establishing the Desert Protector program in al Anbar and oversaw the recruitment and organization of Desert Protector Teams in Al Qaim and in Hit.

LTC Adams was interviewed at the Institute for Defense Analyses on 9 December 2010 by Dr. William (Bill) Knarr and LtCol David Graves, USMC. The following is his account of the initial development and implementation of the Desert Protector program in Al Anbar in 2005.

Dr. Bill Knarr: You are Martin Adams, Lieutenant Colonel?

LTC Martin Adams: Correct.

Knarr: Can you tell me what you did before you deployed to Iraq?

Adams: Initially I was an Infantry Officer with the 82nd Airborne. I switched over to Special Forces. I started the training pipeline in 1995, and graduated from the Q Course in February '96. I then went to language school. Since I was already at Fort Bragg, I still had to go to what they call the Captain's Advanced Course. So I didn't get to 5th Group until '97. I immediately went into detachment command. I had ODA [Operational Detachment Alpha] 543. I did a humanitarian demining mission in Yemen. This was just prior to the Cole bombing. As a matter of fact it was when NAVCENT [Naval Forces Central Command] was laying the ground work for those port calls while we were over there. I did Desert Thunder, Kuwait, you know, one of the times when Saddam was pushing forces down towards the border, so we went over and worked as part of the Personnel Recovery Task Force as one of the Ground Recovery Teams. I went to Kosovo in '99 to work with the Jordanian and UAE [United Arab Emirates] SOF that those countries deployed to Kosovo.

Then in 2001 I had worked my way up to being the Assistant Group S3 and did the invasion of Afghanistan, I guess you'd call it, with Task Force Dagger. I was the Current Ops Chief Day for the JSOTF [Joint Special Operations Task Force] J3. I came back from that. I went off to Leavenworth and worked in the battle lab there for a year and then went to Command and General Staff College. After CGSC, I went back to 5th Group. I deployed in the summer of 2004 and took Command of Charlie Company, 3rd Battalion

in Iraq.¹³ So, we were there for about four months and then redeployed. At that time my AOB [Advanced Operational Base] was up in Kirkuk at the regional air base there. I had teams dispersed throughout that northeastern area from Sulaymaniyah, obviously there in Kirkuk. They were all over. That was actually the first time I met Captain John Calvert. Although he was Detachment Commander of a Bravo Company ODA [Operational Detachment Alpha], he was attached to my company in that deployment as well.

Knarr: When was that?

Adams: I think the company originally deployed in the May or June timeframe and then I took command in July. And then we were there until late November, early December 2004. We then redeployed back to Fort Campbell. We had six months, and then we were going right back, so we did all the things you would do: refit, retrain, get equipment fielded, all that kind of stuff. Then we started our redeployment back to Iraq in June of 2005. My AOB went back, too. I basically swapped back out. The guy from 10th Group that I replaced, I went back and replaced him there at Kirkuk.

Knarr: In Kirkuk?

Adams: Yep. Again, I had four of my teams with me—two of them had been parceled out to other battalions. Soon after we got there, the Battalion Commander contacted me and said, “Hey, I need you to do a mission analysis on what it would take, and what the impacts would be to your current mission, if I redeployed your AOB within Iraq,” Meaning what would the impacts be to what the ODAs are doing.

So I contacted the ODAs, and talked to the detachment commanders and the ops sergeants. I basically did an executive summary of, “this is the way we see the current state of affairs. If we were to pull out and my ODAs were then parceled out and worked for other commanders, these would be the impacts good and bad.” So he said, “Okay, thanks.” And then about the end of July, he called me up and said, “Get ready. Put together a pre-deployment site survey team, yourself and a couple of people. I am going to send you out west to do a site survey. There’s forces operating out there, other SOF, but there’s no CJSOTF [Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force] presence out there right now.” The emphasis had been on stabilizing Baghdad, so that was one of the places that they had pulled the forces out of to beef up the SOF in Baghdad. So I said, “Okay.” I went out there and met

¹³ A SF company headquarters transitions to an Operational Detachment Bravo in the field to command ODAs. At the time Lieutenant Colonel Adams commanded the company and subsequently the ODB, he was a major.

with the National SOF folks. I met with the Marine Commands out there. RCT-2 [Regimental Combat Team] was out there. [5:49]

Knarr: Col Davis?

Adams: Yep. [5:57]

I talked to Col Davis' 3, XO. They were like, "Great. We'll take whatever help we can get. Anybody who wants to come out here and join the fight, we are more than willing to take you. But we don't own this Air Base. We're tenants, so you need to go talk to the Air Wing, the base commandant." So then we had to go over and see the G3 for the base. He was less than enthusiastic about more tenants coming to the base, especially some Army unit that he didn't know anything about and wasn't notified was coming. We just kind of walked in his door and said, "We were told we're coming out here. Do you have any space for us?" He was like, "Hey, this is nothing against you, but you're about the twentieth person that's walked into my office in the last month or two, and I've got nothing for you right now. I'd like to help, but I've not seen any orders. All I've got is a Major [me] walking into my door and saying I need some land to occupy. Until I see something official, I can't really help you out." I said, "I totally understand. This was, I don't want to say a spur-of-the-moment thing, but we're leaning forward here." So I talked to him. He gave me some other people to talk to in the J4. So, we made some initial contacts there. And then we obviously talked with the National SOF folks that were out there as well.

So, I kind of came up with a strawman on how we would make this happen. I went back and briefed the JSOTF folks in Balad and then also went back through Taji, which is where the FOB [forward operating base] was located. I out-briefed them and said, "This is what it's going to take to get us out there." I went back up to Kirkuk. I told my guys to get ready and start packing up. We figured out what kind of lift and transportation we were going to need. I started laying the ground work for handing off command of my ODAs up there to the other two AOB Commanders. Basically, one was going to take two ODAs and another one was going to take two ODAs. And then they would just fall under them. Then, the plan was I was going to deploy out there to Al Asad Air Base and then flow in additional ODAs from the JSOTF. I think they had a pretty good idea of which ones they were going to use. I don't recall at what point they were actually identified, but ultimately it ended up being ODA 582, 555, and 545. [9:05]

So, as time progressed, we got the airlift. My battalion headquarters pushed the S4 forward and transportation officer and all this. We did a multi-mode redeployment of my

headquarters and all our equipment and supporting stuff. We deployed by air. A C-17 took us and most of the pax [personnel] and some equipment and vehicles from Kirkuk out to Al Asad. We also put together a couple convoys of the heavy equipment—Sea-Land containers and stuff like that full of all that kind of stuff. And then that stuff was supposed to meet up with us out there, which didn't go according to plan. You talked to some of those guys. They probably described some of their trials and tribulations in terms of getting stuff moved around within Iraq.

I think by early September, we were getting set up out there. Then the ODAs started flowing in. I don't remember what the sequence was at this point in terms of space for them to occupy, Al Qaim and Hit were the easy ones. Getting a spot for them at Hadithah was a little bit more of a challenge. I think just because the base there was more of a target. I mean there was certainly bad stuff going on out in Al Qaim and Hit, but the bases that had been established there I don't think had the persistent, constant harassing fire and stuff like that. For the most part, the forces that were in the Hadithah area lived in the dam and they were pretty much crammed in there. There really was not a space for an ODA to really go in there and set up in a way that would be conducive for them doing what they were going to try and do.

Knarr: Did Triple Nickel [ODA 555] go into Hadithah?

Adams: Yes. That one we had to literally find an open spot of dirt and then try and create a fortified place for them to live. Logistically, that one was the biggest challenge, I think, in terms of that. Both in Al Qaim and Hit, there were actually buildings that they could move into, which made it much easier. So, by mid to late September, I think everybody was out there and in position, getting familiarized, and starting to go out and patrol around as best they could. They did the normal area familiarization stuff, trying to build relationships with the units that were there. That's always key. I mean we're self sufficient on a few things, but for the most part, in a situation like Iraq or Afghanistan, we're usually co-located with some other conventional force. In this case it happened to be RCT-2 battalions. And Marines travel light to begin with, so that was the other thing. Col Davis and his regiment were more than welcoming to us, but right up front it was, "Hey, we're glad you guys are here, and we'll do whatever we can to help you, but we don't have much! So temper your expectations. This is not going to be how it would be if you were with an Army brigade. We just don't have the logistical tail that you guys have."

So that was fine. He was up front about it and so our expectations were minimal, and we tried to utilize the other means. There was a Corps Support Group [CSG]. I don't know if it was a Brigade Headquarters. I can't even remember the unit designation, but it was there on Al Asad Air Base, so one of the things that we immediately tried to do was tap into the CSG and get accounts established for logistical support and that kind of stuff. Administratively, those kinds of things worked themselves out. But it did impact our ability to get going, because it was a slow start. Just finding places for people to sleep and making sure it was okay for them to draw rations from local stores versus us having to push it out, which is one of the functions of an AOB Headquarters in a field environment. They are the logistical tail for the ODAs. And out there movement was always an issue. Every time you were going outside the wire, we had to decide if the reason we're going was good enough that somebody could potentially get wounded or killed? That was always the question you had to ask yourself: "If we don't go today, is it going to cause somebody to get wounded or killed or is this something that we really need to do another time?" But that was just the environment out there. [14:32]

So that's how we got out there. From my perspective, what we were told we were going out there to do was to essentially to provide additional—I guess you would call it eyes and ears. You know, National SOF was doing their missions out there. They had their way of doing it. The white SOF's role is more to get out there with the populace and utilize them as a resource for targeting and accomplishing other goals. So, we were out there to kind of fill that gap. The Marines had their HUMINT [Human Intelligence] Exploitation Teams [HETs] out there working. But, SOF had a little bit more freedom of movement. I think they [the HETs] were kind of restricted to the base and walk-ins and things like that, where our guys could literally just go out and drive into a village and say, "Who is the local Mukhtar?" and sit down with them and say, "Hey, tell us what's going on. What do you feel about what's going on? How would you like to see things go in the future?" that kind of stuff. We'd get those types of atmospherics and then try and see if there might be people in those areas that are willing to throw in with the coalition. It was pretty tough. ODA 545, I think, walked into the most permissive environment in terms of that, just because they had already been out there on previous deployments. Yeah, the team Sergeant for ODA 545 had a personal relationship with the sheikh of the Nimr tribe from when they had been out there before.

Knarr: When you say before—?

Adams: Previous deployment. I don't know if it was in the initial invasion that that was the area they went to or if it was the second rotation or they went out there later, but he already knew people in the Nimr tribe.

Knarr: Correct me if I'm wrong, but there was a gap, right? When you moved into Al Asad, there was no ODB in there immediately before you?

Adams: There wasn't one there that I was relieving. There were no CJSOTF assets out there.

Knarr: I understood that there was a gap. Guys were there, then they decided that they wouldn't be there and then all of a sudden now they decide to move them back in.

Adams: They were pulled back to support the surge in Baghdad. And then at some point they decided, "Alright, we can't afford to not have this. There's a gap out there." So that's one of the reasons why ODA 545 was identified to be pushed back out there—because the team sergeant and at least one or two of the other guys on the team had the ability to re-contact the guys from the Nimr tribe. It was a pretty young team. There were a lot of real young guys on their first deployment. But, in terms of the ability to get things going, they at least had a place to start from right off. I mean, they knew what they were going out there to do.

Additionally, there were indications that the Albu-Mahals were maybe considering changing allegiance. From RCT-2's perspective, that was one of the ones that we had to sell them on because on a daily basis, they were exchanging fire with the Marines. "On a daily basis they're killing my Marines, and you're saying you want to go talk to them and see if they'll start working for us?" They were like, "No, we're not going to do that." I was like, "Well, let's take baby steps here. We've got some indications that there were people who were willing to potentially work with us." So, we set up, essentially a MEDCAP [Medical Civil Assistance Program]. You put together a medical package, a couple docs, a couple nurses, maybe a PA [Physician's Assistant] or something. Then you go out and say, "We're here to help." And there was a small village quite a ways south of Al Qaim. I can't remember what it was, but it was known as an Albu-Mahal stronghold for that tribe.

Knarr: Was this Akashat?

Adams: It could be, yeah.

Knarr: That's where they fled to. But you're right, it was quite a ways south. [19:56]

Adams: So, through intel collection and things, there's indications, "Hey if we go out there, this will be a test case. If they start shooting at us, we'll know this isn't going to work. They're indicating that they'd be willing to at least let us come in and see what we're about." With the assistance of the folks at National SOF, we put together a small package—security element—because, we don't have the bodies for that. We put together a few folks from ODA 582. I sent my 18 Delta [Special Forces Medical Sergeant] from the AOB out as well to give them a little bit more, because saying, "Hey let's put together a MEDCAP" in a couple days, and finding the bodies and things like that, can be a little tough. So, I pushed my medic forward. They put this package together.

They flew them out there. They kind of did offset from the village, landed, set up a perimeter, and went out. Obviously, when helicopters fly into the village, people know something's going on, so people came out and talked to them. There was a building there that had at least been used as a clinic. I don't know if they actually had a guy who said, "I'm the village doctor," but they went in and set up and said, "We're open for business. Anybody who needs medical care, line up!" And so they started doing that. They did the thing that SOF does: "Okay, this guy looks kind of interesting, why don't we talk to him?" Or military age, potential fighter-aged folks, let's talk to them and see what's going on. I don't know if that's where they first met. I guess he called himself Lieutenant Colonel, was it Sabah? I don't know if he was there or if it was one of his deputies, probably a deputy. But it went off.

Knarr: So, you didn't go into Al Qaim on this, you went into Akashat on this?

Adams: For the initial link-up, where contacts could be made and stuff like that, that's where it happened.

Knarr: Now did you go or was this CPT John Calvert?

Adams: Guys from CPT Calvert's Detachment and a security element that was provided by National SOF. Obviously they provided the lift with the helicopters and everything and then sort of a medical package. National SOF was extremely helpful. We said, "We need medical supplies" and boxes of stuff just showed up. In contrast, my medic was like, "Okay, I've got a couple extra rolls of gauze here..." So it was good. Humanitarian wise, I think they did a lot of good. There were people there with real injuries, but I think that that was the initial step, "Hey, these Americans are willing to do some things that are actually beneficial to us." I don't know how much that weighed into how predisposed they already

were...if they had already made that decision in their mind that, “These guys from Al Qaeda are just not in it for us,” but I think it was the thing that opened the door initially.

Knarr: And this was what, mid-September you said?

Adams: Timeline wise, I just don’t recall the dates and stuff anymore. I mean in terms of it being prior to the major operation out there in Al Qaim, it had to have been at least a month ahead of time. [23:50] Because we still had the two weeks where once they did identify the initial Desert Protector platoon, we went and picked them up and took them back to the training location. We trained them for two weeks and then immediately deployed them out and that major operation kicked off. It was called IRON CURTAIN or something...

Knarr: That’s right, STEEL CURTAIN.

Adams: STEEL CURTAIN. Okay. So, yeah that was probably early October. And then John’s team was instrumental in that. I think they had sent two guys with the Desert Protector platoon to the training location.

Knarr: Was that Habbaniyah?

Adams: Yep. The Navy SEALs that were out there, the Naval Special Warfare guys, actually got the training mission. But they had asked for at least a couple folks from the ODA to come out there with them. There are a lot of reasons why: continuity, a different skill set as well, potentially a little more experience working with these guys at that point. So they did that. It was going well. These guys were treated like rock stars. This first little platoon, it was like, “Hey these Iraqis are standing up for Iraq.” Everybody and their brother from the command wanted to go out there and see them and say, “Thank you.” They were very well received. I think they were like, “Hey this is pretty cool. We’re getting everything that we need.”

Then they went out and did the big operation to re-take Al Qaim. Obviously they were extremely helpful with that. I personally didn’t go out there. I didn’t see any reason for another Major [me] to be standing there while John was trying to run his team. That was not the way I saw my role, and I didn’t think there was going to be any value added to that. But the way it was described to me is that they were literally going along as the RCT was pushing forward. They were literally pointing people out on the street—that guy’s a collaborator—as they went through. There’s always the danger of trying to figure out if it’s a personal vendetta or if it is truly an Al Qaeda guy. But when you’re doing that initial push you at least have to take their word for it and then screen them out later.

So, they did that. And from my recollection it was pretty well received by Colonel Davis and his commander out there that these guys were certainly a value-added.

Knarr: Who did Triple Nickel link up with in Hadithah? The Jughayfi tribe or...?

Adams: I don't remember there being a specific tribe from Triple Nickel. Triple Nickel's version of that was to link with guys that had been actually pushed north. [27:22] Hadithah. Apparently there were some tribal guys that when Hadithah fell, there was sort of an uprising. I mean, there had been a police force there and everything. They assassinated the police chief. Well, there were some dudes that just picked up and moved, and they were up here in the Baiji area. I don't recall how this happened. I think essentially they went up there, and they were walk-ins. They were like, "Hey we know a lot of stuff about bad people down in Hadithah. We're willing to help." However that occurred, the intel basically made it down to us. So Triple Nickel got the mission to go up and, I don't know if they physically went up there or if we got them transported down, but eventually the link-up was made.

I want to say there were about six guys to eight guys that volunteered to do this. They essentially did the same thing. When the operation kicked off down here, these guys were there with ODA 555. They said, "Al Qaeda uses this house for this. They store weapons over here. This guy over there is helping them. He transports them around. He actually fights for them." I didn't physically see how they were doing it out in Al Qaim, but these guys were very concerned about being known as what we would call collaborators. So a lot of measures were taken to conceal their identities, which became pretty standard practice for pretty much any Iraqi that was working with the Coalition to put a balaclava on or something like that...to try and conceal their identities. But they provided a lot. I think it was the same sort of situation where they're going through pointing all this stuff out and really assisting. You know, when you're going into a populated environment and nobody is wearing a uniform, how do you determine who the bad guys are without somebody like that? And that's what they provided. So, from my recollection, there wasn't so much of a tribe coming over. And I don't know if all these guys were from the same tribe, but somehow they had ties to the area. Maybe they had ties to each other through the tribe or some other way. Maybe it was just close knit family or something, but that got linked up that way as well. And then down in Hit, obviously it was the Albu-Nimr guys with ODA 545 Team Sergeant's connections there. They essentially kind of did the same stuff.

Knarr: Who was the guy in the Hadithah area?

Adams: The actual police chief, when the uprising happened, he got executed. They drug him out of the police station and shot him in the back of the head right there.

Knarr: What about the Anah area? What about the area from Anah in the northwest down to Hadithah, because that's where I saw the gap in coverage.

Adams: There was a combat outpost there. I want to say that was where they brought the Stryker Battalion. That was some rough living there! They talk about that moon dust powder that you get in the desert out there? I actually sent two of my guys out there, because they kind of did the same thing you did. They were like, "Okay, we've got Hit, Hadithah, and Al Qaim. Well, there's this other city right in the middle. We should probably put an ODA there, too." Colonel Frank Ott was the J3. He brought up the same thing. From what I was seeing, intel wise, there wasn't a threat there. I mean, there just wasn't this hard core Al Qaeda contingent. Maybe they passed through there. Obviously they did on their way from the Syrian border all the way down the river, eventually to Baghdad, but there wasn't a lot there.

Once the Stryker guys showed up I think it picked up a little bit, but that's just because they were there. It wasn't because it was necessarily being used as a logistics base or base to conduct operations from. So, I was never supportive of putting a team there, because I thought they'd just sit there. I mean it was bad. That was some pretty rough living out there. My guys went out there. They were there for two days. They came back and said it would be unbelievable to have to try and operate from there. Dust was almost knee deep with powder everywhere. I feel for the guys that were there. They had to live in it. I didn't see the operational environment that would have been conducive or beneficial for us to have been there. I could have been wrong, but to me the intel didn't support it.

Knarr: Yeah, it was just an unknown. It wasn't like there was any intel on it. It was an unknown, so that's why I mentioned it. So you got there in, when?

Adams: September-ish, and then we were there until we handed off to 1st Special Forces [SF] Group in January.

Knarr: 1st SF Group in January. And did you go back there later?

Adams: No. After that second deployment in Iraq, I redeployed and I changed command. I PCS'd [Permanent Change of Station].

Knarr: Did 5th go back? I mean, was then it a tradeoff between 1st and 5th in that area?

Adams: 1st SF Group was...and I think maybe even still today. Occasionally they'll put a battalion with one of the CJSOTFs in either Iraq or Afghanistan as a means to alleviate the back and forth. The goal was always to try and give battalions, at some point, a year to 18 months back at home station versus the constant six months forward, six months back. So, 1st SF Group was providing battalions to do that. So, 1st SF Group AOB was out there, and I think they handed it off to Naval Special Warfare, though. And then to my knowledge, they still are the ones that are out there in the west in terms of a CJSOTF presence.

Lieutenant Colonel David Graves: One kind of gathers that the Desert Protectors didn't grow. It seemed kind of like it died.

Adams: I talked about them being received as these rock stars there at the training. We then pushed them back out to Al Qaim. We're trying to build this, sort of, Iraqi Military Base Infrastructure, and it was just not going well. They were building these huts, we used to call them SEA [South East Asia] Huts...I think it's a term that came from Vietnam...they were up on these little pillars. They had the food service contract. I remember we were constantly trying to get them paid, fed, and equipped. It was a logistic nightmare of getting these guys just the basics. If you're going to expect these guys to be fighting for us and for Iraq, they need some things. It was just extremely painful.

Colonel Sabah would go all the way to the MOD [Ministry of Defense] and basically do direct appeals to the Minister of Defense. "Please can I get my people paid? We need the uniforms." Around the same time, Col Davis had designated the Regimental engineer as his lead for anything to do with the Desert Protectors. Walt was his first name. I can't remember his last name right now, but Col Davis said, "You're the guy that's going to deal with Desert Protector issues." So he did absolutely everything he could to try and get them anything. But it was just slow coming. The response was, at some point the Iraqis are going to have to start doing it for themselves, which I'm like, "They're just starting." But we want to make the Iraqi logistics system work. Well I don't know if the Iraqi logistics systems works even today, so back in '05, that was a stretch.

But those were the type of roadblocks that we were constantly running in to. And it was like, "Well, what is this Desert Protectors? We understand the Iraqi 1st Division and the Iraqi 7th Division. Who are these guys? Who do they actually work for? Who's responsible for them? Are they actually part of the 1st Division or are they part of the 7th Division? Which brigade are they assigned to?" "No, they're this independent force." "Well,

how can that be? Who's responsible for them?" So, I mean, that stuff was just a complete nightmare.

Knarr: Would you say that was the biggest problem?

Adams: I think it was one of the reasons that the system probably never matured. It kind of faded away. You know, any time you want to stand up some sort of little special force, which is what these guys were, the idea was they were going to be sort of the recon platoon for these brigades for the divisions. It was like, for the 1st Division that's coming out here as the oldest Iraqi Division, these guys have been fighting pretty much everywhere. They're a cohesive unit, and then you're going to take 30 guys from a tribe in the region? I don't know what the make-up of the 1st Division was—if it was primarily Sunni or Shia or whatever. And you're going to just say, "Okay, these guys are more special than you, because they've done all this other stuff, even though you've been fighting for two years now. And oh, by the way, you have to support them and do all this stuff for them." It was not working. And it was after I left, I saw on the news that they had that graduation, and all the guys were tearing their uniforms off and doing all that stuff. I think that was probably the third iteration of the Desert Protector program. I think that's probably where it fell by the wayside.

Knarr: That wasn't a Desert Protector thing, was it? That was in Ramadi or Fallujah when they...

Adams: I'm pretty sure it was one of the first iterations of these tribal forces where, in mass, a tribe threw in and said, "Our guys are going to sign up under the condition that they were going to come back and protect their homes and families." And at that graduation, these guys are being told, "Oh, we're going to send you down to Basra." And they're like, "No. I didn't sign up for this."

Knarr: I remember that. What a nightmare. [42:07]

Adams: That was always one of the concerns of these tribal forces. "We're not joining the Iraqi Army, okay? We're doing this for this village, this town, our families, and stuff. We don't care if there are problems in Baghdad. We're signing up to deal with the problems here in our hometown." I actually wrote a pretty long note to my battalion commander at the very beginning of this laying out my concerns about doing this under the auspices of the Iraqi Army. I said, "That's not how the Army works. You're going to make an exception for these guys that they get to stay at their homes with their families, where the rest of the Army is not?" I said, "At some point we really need to consider local policing. Maybe

these guys would be better off standing them up as a local constabulary or something like that.” But they didn’t. The only infrastructure that was being looked at from the higher echelons was, “We got to get the Iraqi Army going and more effective and this is a way to try and do that.” So the billeting of them was a constant headache. The food services contract was given to an Iraqi company, because the Iraqis got to do it for themselves.

And as it always was with everything over there, there were all the issues of the kick-backs and people wondered if they were really providing services. They sent like ten cooks out there to Al Qaim. These guys were literally wearing rags for t-shirts and a pair of pants. That’s what they showed up with and they were told, “You’re going to be a cook.” The food was out there. It was in the store room. It was just rotting. These guys didn’t know anything about cooking. It was just crazy. Eventually we were just feeding the guys MREs.

The ODA was just scrounging whatever they could from the RCT. They were doing whatever they could to make it work. But the logistical footprint that was necessary to really sustain these guys. I mean, it was being worked at in bits and piece, but it was the onset of winter. These guys were issued a uniform, okay. It gets pretty cold out here in the western desert. How about maybe some cold weather gear for these guys? Oh yeah, that’s a good idea. We’ll see what we can do. I think eventually, Walt, the engineer, was able to scrounge up some stuff. And our Support Company commander was able to scrounge up some stuff and get it shipped out there. We did what we could, but it was sort of a pick-up game versus a really planned out thing, which it was war, you do what you’ve got to do. But I think some of those things definitely contributed to the eventual fading away of this. And then I guess you could say it morphed into this Sons of Iraq thing, so this was just sort of the initial go at something like that.

Knarr: The name Desert Protectors?

Adams: Yeah, there was some conversation about that, too. I don’t know where it came from or who actually came up with the term Desert Protectors, but even the Iraqi guys were like, “What? Protect the Desert? That doesn’t even make sense. We’re here to protect our families and our homes.” It had kind of a neat ring to it, maybe, but I don’t think it translated real well.

So, that was that. The next iteration of it, we did the Albu-Mahals out in Al Qaim. And then the next sort of, “Get a group of them together, and we’ll take them and train them” was the folks from the Albu-Nimr tribe. Now that one was a little bit of a fiasco. We did all

the stuff like transportation. We were going to set up an LZ [landing zone]. We'll fly them to the training location and all that. This is my recollection of it. Maybe it didn't happen exactly like this, but, it was going to be a bigger group versus that first group, which was like 26, 27 maybe. This was going to be a couple hundred. Ferrying a couple hundred guys by helicopter is going to be quite the logistical feat. And, you know, that assumes that the air is going to be available and that it's not going to get diverted for higher priorities.

So, from the way I remember it, ODA 545 did all that leg work: getting the guys, working with the tribal leadership, finding the location that these guys can marshal at. We were going to fly in and set up this big LZ. They'll load up, we'll take them, train them, and do all the same kind of stuff we did with the other guys. The air didn't materialize. I don't remember what happened. So these guys showed up. I don't remember in what numbers, but it was a pretty good amount. The air didn't show up, and they were like, "Alright, we're out of here." So they left. "Okay, no, we're going to try again." And I think we did get some, but not nearly in the same numbers. But again, they eventually did the same thing. I think they brought the MEU [Marine Expeditionary Unit].

Graves: The 22nd MEU. [47:52]

Adams: Okay. They came in and Al Qaim and Hadithah had been cleared out per se, but forces were back in those cities controlling them and conducting operations in them where they had kind have been on the periphery before. We were going to do the same thing in Hit, so they brought in the MEU. And they kind of did the same thing. They started on one side of the river and swept along. I remember the one road, I want to say they used something like seven mick licks [MCLC, mine clearing line charge], because it was so heavily IED'd [laid with improvised explosive devices]. And then every single one they did, there were multiple secondary explosions. I mean this thing was just the road of death if anybody ever really tried to drive up it.

That's how they did it. They cleared the palms on both sides. It was kind of like taking a bulldozer to a stand of trees and pushing it all down, leaving no stone unturned as they went through. The ODA and some of the Nimr guys that had been through the training assisted with that. I don't know if there was as much populace interaction at that time. I think a lot of Hit had cleared out. But it was that first issue with the air not showing up that definitely put a dent in that one. You know, but things happen. You still made it work. You did the best you could. You got maybe not as many guys as you would've if they had shown up the first time, but you still got some guys to volunteer and do that stuff.

Knarr: Did you call them Desert Protectors?

Adams: Yeah, we did, that's because that's what we were told they were going to be called.

Knarr: In Hadithah were they called that also?

Adams: That group was never put together as a fighting force. These guys that came back down from Baiji, they never went to this Desert Protector training program or anything like that. They were more used as HUMINT sources.

You know, it's possible that 1st SF Group came in and they may have eventually done a tribal thing, but that would have been after our time. There was the team Triple Nickel—they went out and met with a lot of little sheikhs and local village elders and stuff like that. Those guys around there were just, “No. We're not. They'll kill us,” you know?

If the Americans had stayed there the whole time then maybe, but when these guys came up, they took the last people that volunteered. They're all dead! That was kind of the way it ended up.

Knarr: That's right. I mean Hadithah, what a story that was!

Adams: Yeah, you mentioned the stuff that everybody knows it for. I remember when that happened. I would go to the daily update with RCT-2. To hear that this many locals had been killed was not out of the ordinary. Locals were getting killed—insurgents, collateral, “friendlies,” or “not friendlies,” but civilians getting caught in the cross fire. That was happening every day out there. This is what I don't think a lot of people understood at that time. I mean most people were thinking, “Okay, we're an occupation force at this point.” There was still a maneuver war going on out here. Marines were conducting regimental sized maneuver warfare out there.

Knarr: One a month.

Adams: Yeah, with full, combined arms, air, artillery, everything. That was not happening anywhere else in Iraq, not to that scale. When they did the Hadithah Operation I think there were seven battalions involved in that operation in total. They brought in a battalion from the 82nd. You had the Stryker Brigade involved. I think the MEU supported that one.

Knarr: Was this RIVER BLITZ?

Adams: It might have been. They brought up the LAR battalion from down south. They massed probably 80 percent of the RCT's organic combat capability, plus at least two full Army battalions and maybe some other stuff, too. I mean it was huge operation, with

full air support, artillery, everything going on at the same time. I don't think people really understood what was going on in the context of what happened there. It doesn't excuse deliberate killing of civilians, but from a command perspective, Colonel Davis' level of managing this battle, that was not a major red flag that flew up in front of his face. "Oh my gosh, how did this happen?" I mean, maybe the numbers were a little higher that day, but it was not out of the ordinary for there to be reports of civilian casualties or non-Coalition casualties.

Knarr: It was in the noise. That's incredible.

Adams: Yeah, I felt bad when I started hearing all that stuff. [53:33]

Knarr: Well that starts filling in blanks. I'll tell you what. That's what we needed.

[Break]

Adams: Yeah, tactically, the thing that we were out there to support was to stop the flow of VBIEDs [vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices] going into Baghdad. It was something that simple. It was, "We've traced this back. The foreign fighters are coming across. They're bringing VBIEDs. They're going down into Baghdad and then they're setting them off." And just the strategic IO [information operations] that they were achieving from that, by just showing every day Baghdad in disarray had to be stopped in order to facilitate the elections and all that kind of stuff.

Knarr: LTC Adams, thank you. This is a big help.

Appendix B: Iraqi Perspectives

There are no Iraqi perspectives offered at the AO Denver level. This placeholder is here to keep the sequence of appendices consistent across all volumes.

During 2005 in AO Denver, there were few Iraqis that could have been paired with Colonel Davis to work at the regimental level. RCT-2 did receive two brigades of Iraqis—1st Brigade, 1st Iraqi Army Division and 3rd Brigade (later to be reflagged as the 28th Brigade) of the 7th Iraqi Army Division—but these units were split up and worked at the battalion and company levels, not the regimental or brigade levels. All other volumes within this series (as well as sub volumes III-A and III-B of this volume) offer Iraqi perspectives from varying backgrounds and levels.

Appendix C. Who's Who

Interviewees

Abd al-Hakim Muhammad Rashid Muhammad al-Jughayfi, Mayor of Hadithah

Abdul Qadir Mohammed Jassim Obeidi al-Mifarji, General, Minister of Defense from 2006 to present, preceded by Dr. Sadun al-Dulaymi, Sunni Arab, born in Ramadi

Abdullah Jallal Mukhlif al-Faraji, Head of Sunni Endowment for Anbar Province, Regent Sheikh of the Albu-Faraj tribe; Ramadi City Council Member

Adel, Brigadier General, Commander 1st Brigade, 1st Iraqi Division

Ahmad Jelayan Khalaf, former Desert Protector

Ahmed Bezia Fteikhan al-Rishawi, Paramount Sheikh of the Albu-Risha tribe, President of Muttamar Sahawat al-Iraq (MSI)

Ahmed Hamid Sharqi, Colonel, Chief, North Ramadi Police Precinct

Aum Ahmed, resident of Al Qaim

Babakir Badr-khan Shawat al-Zubari, General, Chief of Staff for the Joint Forces Command, Studied at the Iraqi Military Academy in Baghdad in 1969, served in the Kurdish Peshmerga 1973–91; Escaped to Iran as a political refugee in 1975; Acting Commanding General of Iraqi Joint Headquarters, 2004–05; Chief of Staff, Iraqi Joint Headquarters, 2005 to present

Bakhit Arak Ali, Lieutenant Colonel, Commander, Qatana Police Station, Ramadi

Bezi Mujjil Nijris al-Gaoud al-Nimrawi, eldest Sheikh of the Albu-Nimr tribe; one of the first tribal leaders to offer to arm tribesmen and support Coalition (Summer 2003); turned down by CPA over concerns of creating tribal militias; lives in Amman, Jordan

Farouq Tareh Harden al-Jughayfi, Colonel, Police Chief Hadithah

Hareth al-Dhari, (Dr.) Leader of the Association of Muslim Scholars (AMS) and Zobai tribe

Ibrahim al-Jaafari, former Iraqi Prime Minister, April 2005 to May 2006

Ismael Sha Hamid Dulaymi, staff Brigadier General Former Commander 28th Iraqi Brigade, 7th Iraqi Army Division

Jalal al-Gaoud, Iraqi Businessman from Hit, residing in Jordan

Jassim Muhammad Salih al-Suwaydawi, sheikh of the Abu-Souda tribe

Kurdi Rafee Farhan Al-Mahalawi, lower tier sheikh of Abu-Mahal tribe

Mahmood al-Janabi, a leader with the Jaish al-Islami (Islamic Army) insurgent group

Majed Abd al-Razzaq Ali al-Sulayman, Sheikh of the Dulaymi Confederation

Mamoun Sami Rashid Latif al-Alwani, former Governor of Anbar; Anbar Provincial Council Member; Chairman of the Provincial Council's Economic Committee

Mishan Abbas Muhammad al-Jumayli, Paramount Sheikh of the Abu-Jumayli tribe

Mohammed Al-Saady, Special Advisor to the Prime Minister and Chairman of the Implementation and Follow-up Committee for National Reconciliation. Recently elected to the new Parliament.

Mukhlis Shadhan Ibrahim al-Mahalawi, Desert Protectors commander

Nathem al-Jabouri, former member of AQI

Numan al-Gaoud, businessman and member of the Abu-Nimr tribe in Hit

Raad Majid Rashid al-Hamdani, Lieutenant General, Retired Republican Guard Commander; Leader of the FRE Movement to Reintegrate with GOI

Raja Farhan, mayor of Al Qaim

Sa'fa Al-Sheikh, National Security Advisor

Sa'id al-Jughayfi, Sheikh of the Jughayfi tribe in Hadithah

Sabah al-Sattam Effan Fahren al-Shurji al-Aziz, principal Sheik of the Abu-Mahal tribe in Al Qaim

Sadun Juwayr Farhan al-Rishawi al-Dulaymi, Doctor, Former Minister of Defense 2005/2006, Doctorate in Social Psychology from United Kingdom's Keele University

Said Flayyah Othman al-Jughayfi, contesting Sheikh, Abu-Jughayfi, one of the top 17 influential tribes in Anbar, Hadithah

Sha'ban Barzan Himrin, Colonel, former Chief of Police in Baghdadi

Sheikh Ali Hatim Abd al-Razzaq Ali al-Sulayman al-Assafi al-Dulaymi, President of the Common Council of Iraqi and Arab Sheikhs, Lineal Sheikh-in-waiting of the Abu-Assaf tribe, Founder of the Iraqi National Front

Tariq al-Abdullah al-Halbusi, Principle Sheik of the Halbusi tribe located in Fallujah

Thamer Kadhemi al Tamimi, closely associated with JAI; one of the first and premier Sahawa leaders in Baghdad

Thamir Ibrahim Tahir al-Assafi, Doctor, Head of the Muslim Ulema Council (MUC) for Anbar and Senior Theologian to Sunni Waqf; Ramadi City Council member; Al-Anbar University (AAU) Professor of Religious Studies; Mutammar Sahawat al-Iraq (MSI) office of Religious Affairs

Thary Abed Alhadi al-Yousef al-Zobi, Deputy Governor, on the Awakening

Other Notable People

Abdul Sattar Abu-Risha, Leader of the Awakening movement in the Al Anbar Area, assassinated 13 September 2007

Abdullah al-Janabi, close supporter, organizer, and religious advisor to many of the insurgent groups growing in and around Fallujah during the summer of 2003; became one of the key influential insurgent leaders during both battles of Fallujah (2004)

Abu Ayyub al-Masri, replaced Zarqawi as leader of AQI following the former's death in June 2006; created Islamic State of Iraq in October 2006

Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, Jordanian-born founder of *Jama'at Al-Tawhid Wa'al Jihad* (JTJ – Group of Monotheism and Holy War) (2003) and later Al-Qaeda in Iraq (October 2004); killed in Coalition airstrike in June 2006

Amer Abd al-Jabbar Ali Sulayman al-Assafi al-Dulaymi, Co-Paramount Sheikh of the Abu-Assaf tribe and Co-Sheikh General of the Dulaymi Confederation

Faisal al-Gaoud, former Sheikh of Abu-Nimr; father of Sheikh Fasal

Fasal Rakan Nejris, Sheikh of Abu-Nimr tribe; appointed governor of Anbar by IIG November 2004; replaced as governor by Raja Nawaf Farhan al-Mahalawi (May 2005); Awakening Council leader; died 25 June 2007 in Mansour Hotel bombing

Hamid Farhan al-Heiss, from the Abu-Thiyab tribe; member of the Anbar Salvation Council; don't confuse him with his brother, Sheikh Muhammad Farhan al-Heiss and contesting lineal sheikh of the Abu-Thiyab tribe

Hatim Razzaq, current Sheikh of Abu-Nimr

Hikmat Jubayir, mayor of Hit; Sheikh of Abu-Nimr tribe

Karim Burjis al-Rawi, former governor of Anbar Province (April 2003–August 2004); forced to resign after his sons were kidnapped; replaced by Mohammad Awad

Khalid al Irak al-Jassim, leader of the Abu-Ali Jassim tribe, killed by AQI

Khalid Araq Ataymi al-Iliyawi, well respected Ali Jassim tribal leader brutally murdered by AQI (August 2006); his body was hidden preventing burial for three days, violating both tribal and Islamic custom; catalyst for tribal resistance to AQI in the Ramadi area

Lawrence Mutib Mahruth al-Hathal al-Aniza, Paramount Sheikh of the Abu-Aniza tribe, Mayor of Nukhayb, Anbar, Iraq

Mudhir Abdul Karim Thiab al-Kharbit, son of Sheikh Malik; assumed leadership of clan upon his father's death; Ba'athist supporter and strongly anti-Coalition following his father's death

Muhammad Mahmoud Latif, leader of the 1920 Revolutionary Brigades and Ramadi Shura council

Muqtada al-Sadr, Shia cleric and leader of the Mahdi Militia

Naim Abd al-Muhsin al-Gaoud, appointed by Coalition forces as first mayor of Hit (April 2004)

Nayil al-Jughayfi, seized control of Hadithah during initial invasion; subsequently recognized by Coalition as first mayor (April 2004)

Raja Nawaf Farhan al-Mahalawi, appointed governor of Anbar by newly-elected provincial council (May 2005); kidnapped by extremist elements to influence Abu-Mahal to stop fighting AQI; found dead in a home after Coalition-insurgent fighting in the area; replaced by Mamoun Sami Rasheed

Razak Salim Hamza, former commander 1st Brigade, 1st Iraqi Division

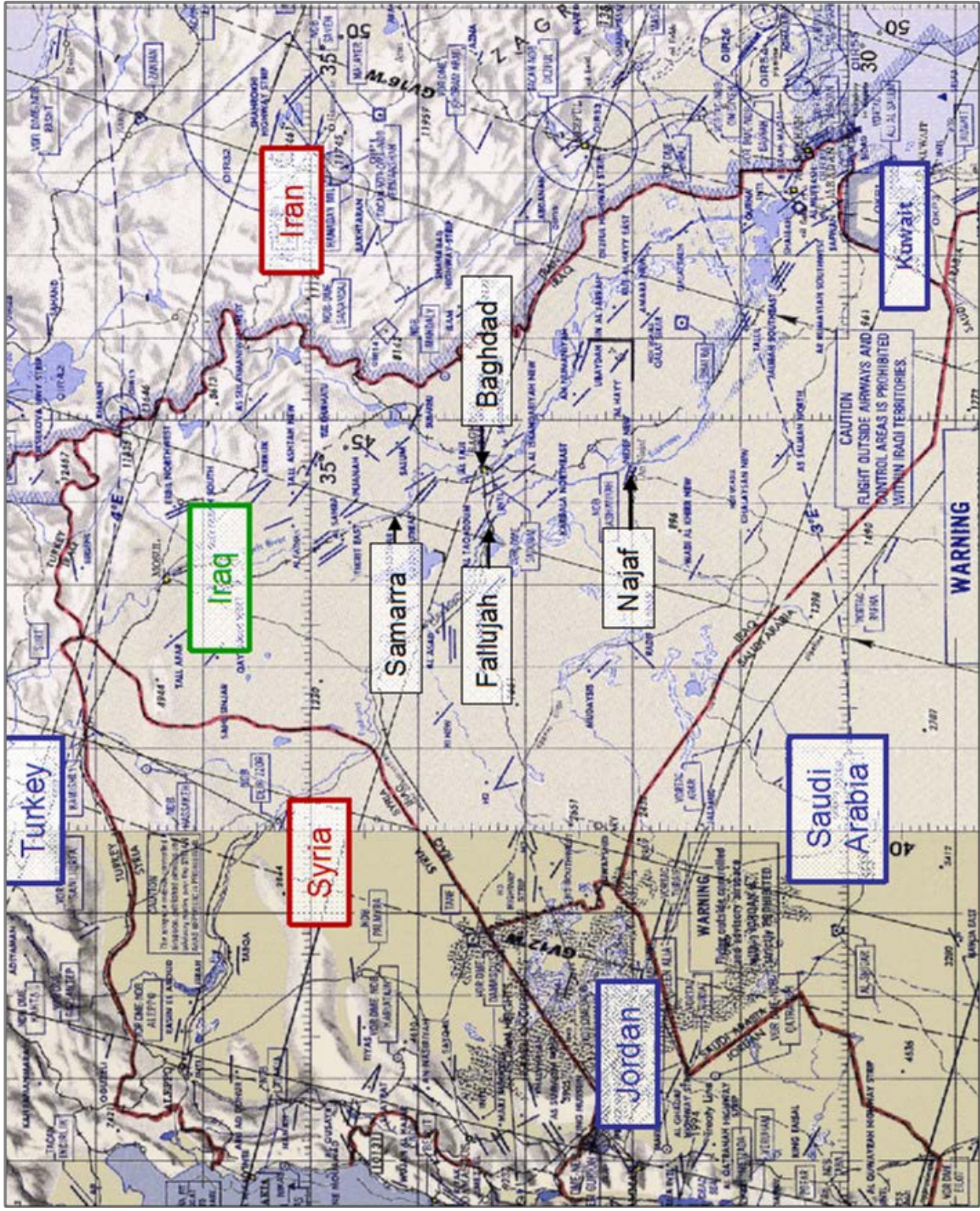
Sheikh Malik al-Kharbit, tribal leader of the Khalifawi (Ramadi area); head of one of the most important families in the powerful Dulaymi tribal federation; cooperated with Coalition forces before the invasion; tragically killed along with between 17 and 22 family members, including women and children during mistaken Coalition airstrike on his compound (11 April 2004); cited as motivating factor turning Ramadi-area tribes against Coalition

Talal al-Gaoud, son of Bezi al-Gaoud; worked with Marines engagements in Jordan in 2004; died suddenly in 2006

Tariq Abdul Wahab Jasim, former Commander Iraqi First Division

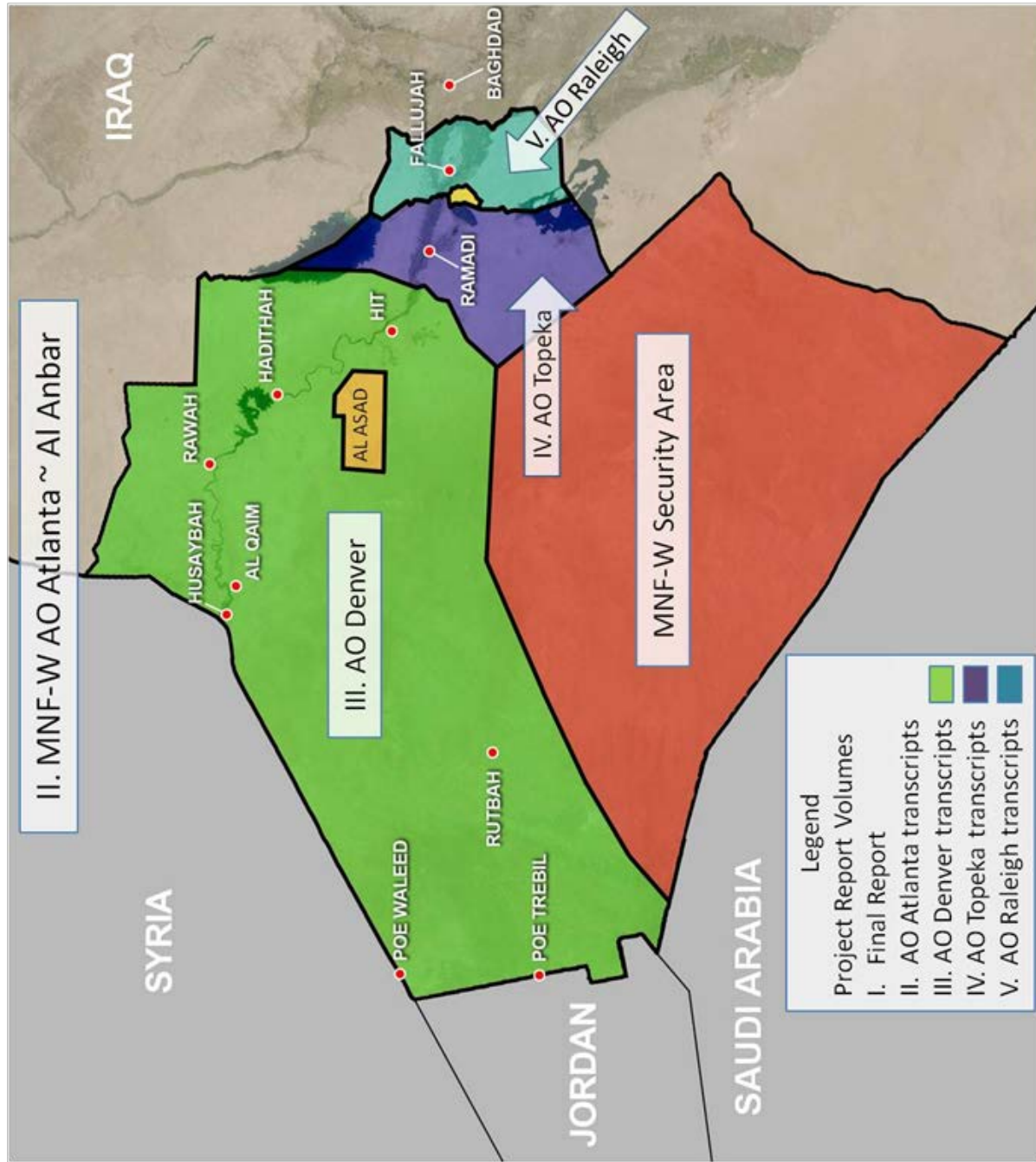
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Note: North is towards the top of all maps as you read them.



Base map courtesy of National Geospatial Agency

Figure D-1. Map of Iraq and its neighbors



Area of Operation boundaries extracted from map courtesy of I-MEF and USMC History Division
Figure D-2. Map of military operational areas in Iraq during 2004

1. 2003: From Victory to Chaos – Sowing the Seeds of an Insurgency

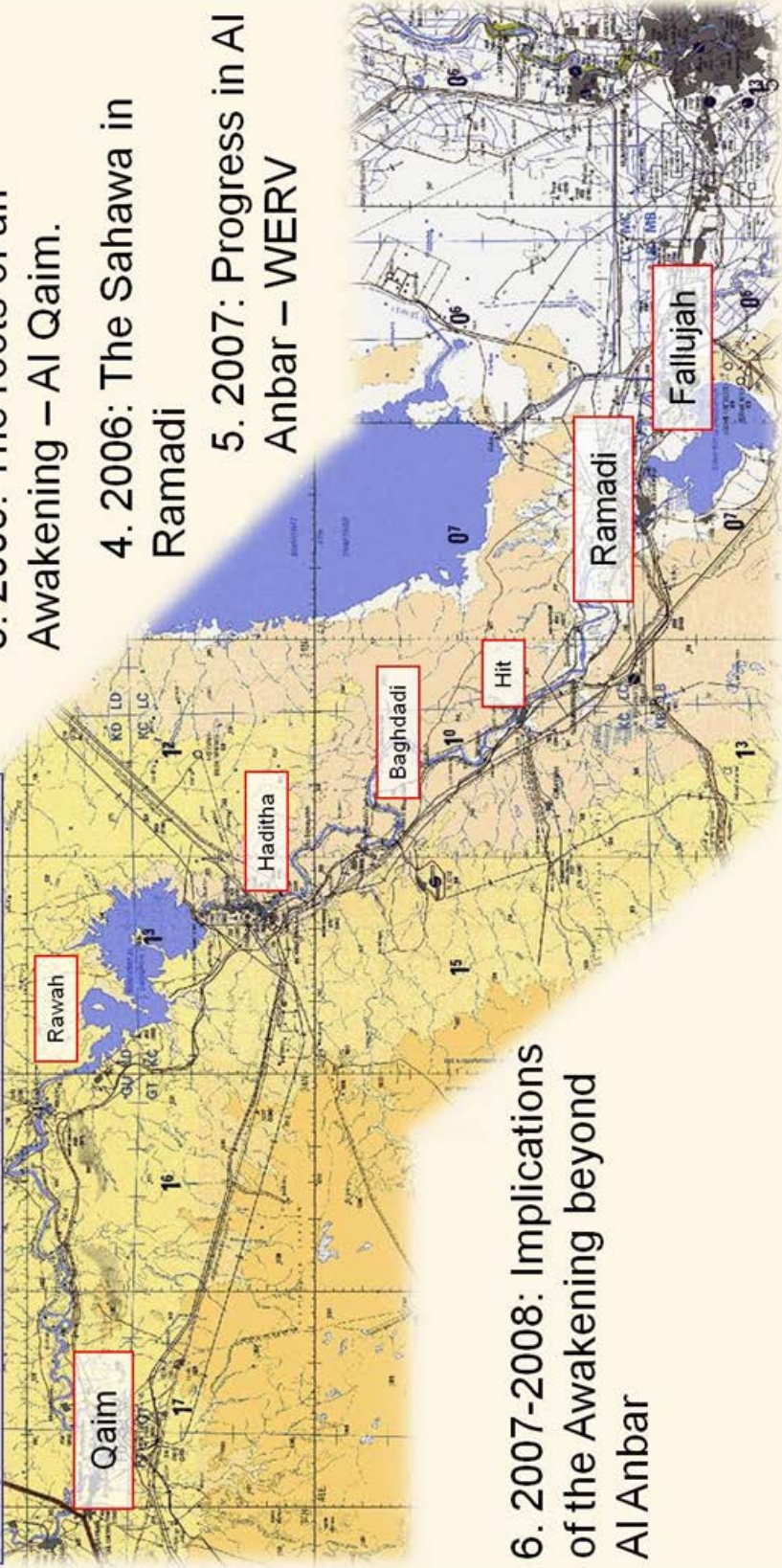
2. 2004: The Year Starts and Ends Headlining Fallujah

Western Euphrates River Valley – WERV

3. 2005: The roots of an Awakening – Al Qaim.

4. 2006: The Sahawa in Ramadi

5. 2007: Progress in Al Anbar – WERV



6. 2007-2008: Implications of the Awakening beyond Al Anbar

Figure D-3. Phases of the Al Anbar Awakening

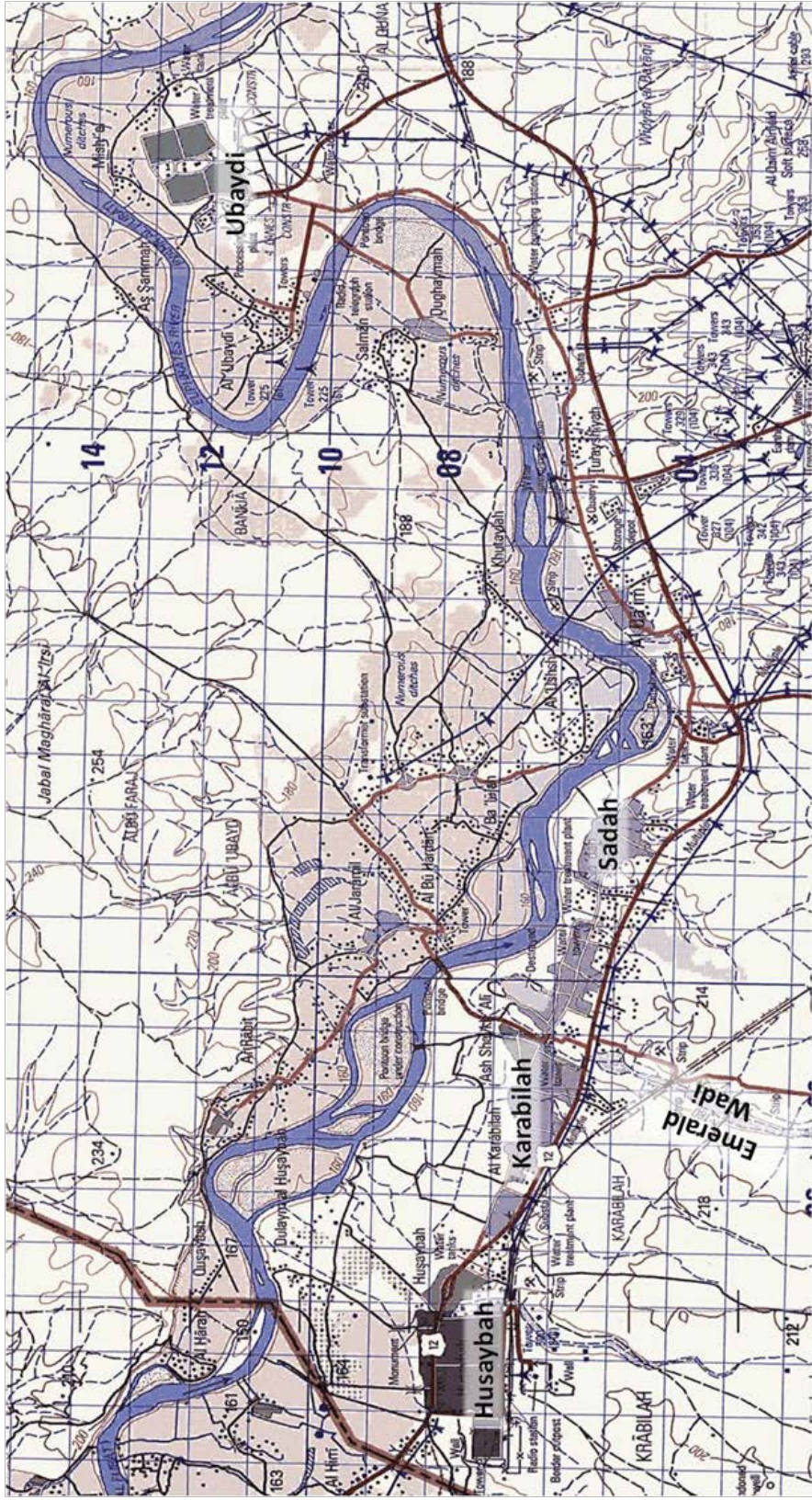


Figure D-4. Map of Al Qaim area

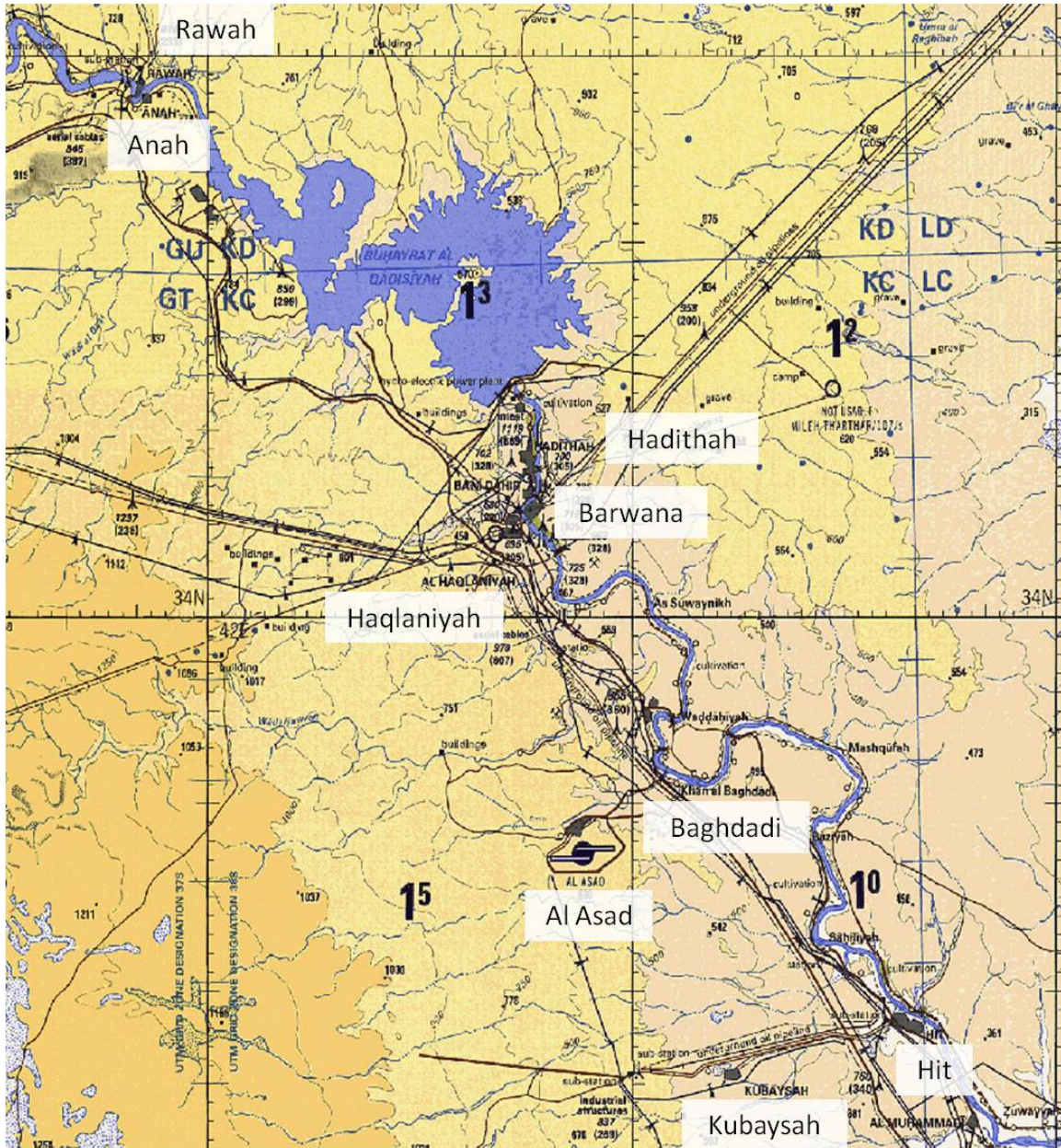


Figure D-5. Map of Hadithah area

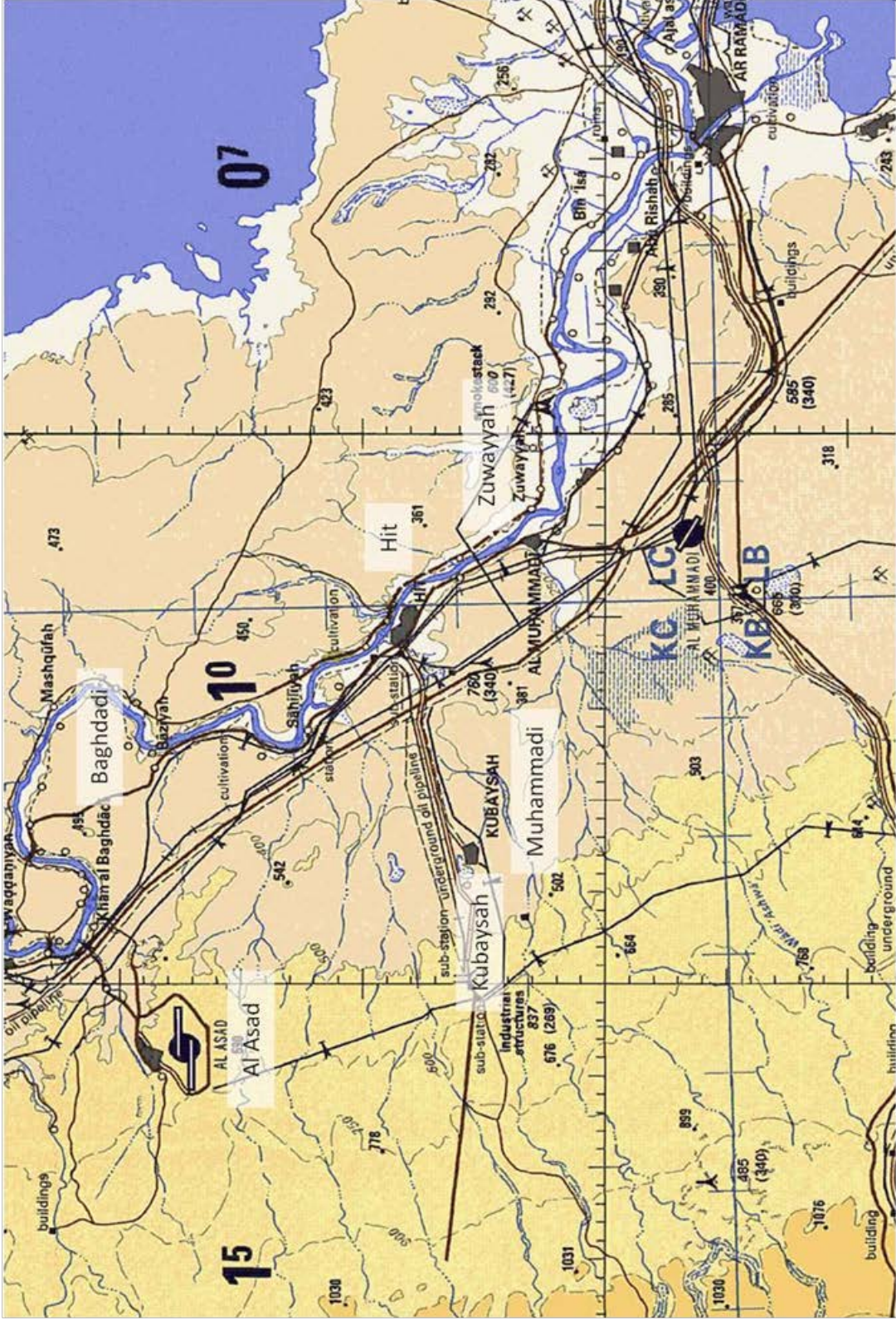


Figure D-6. Map of Al Asas/Hit area

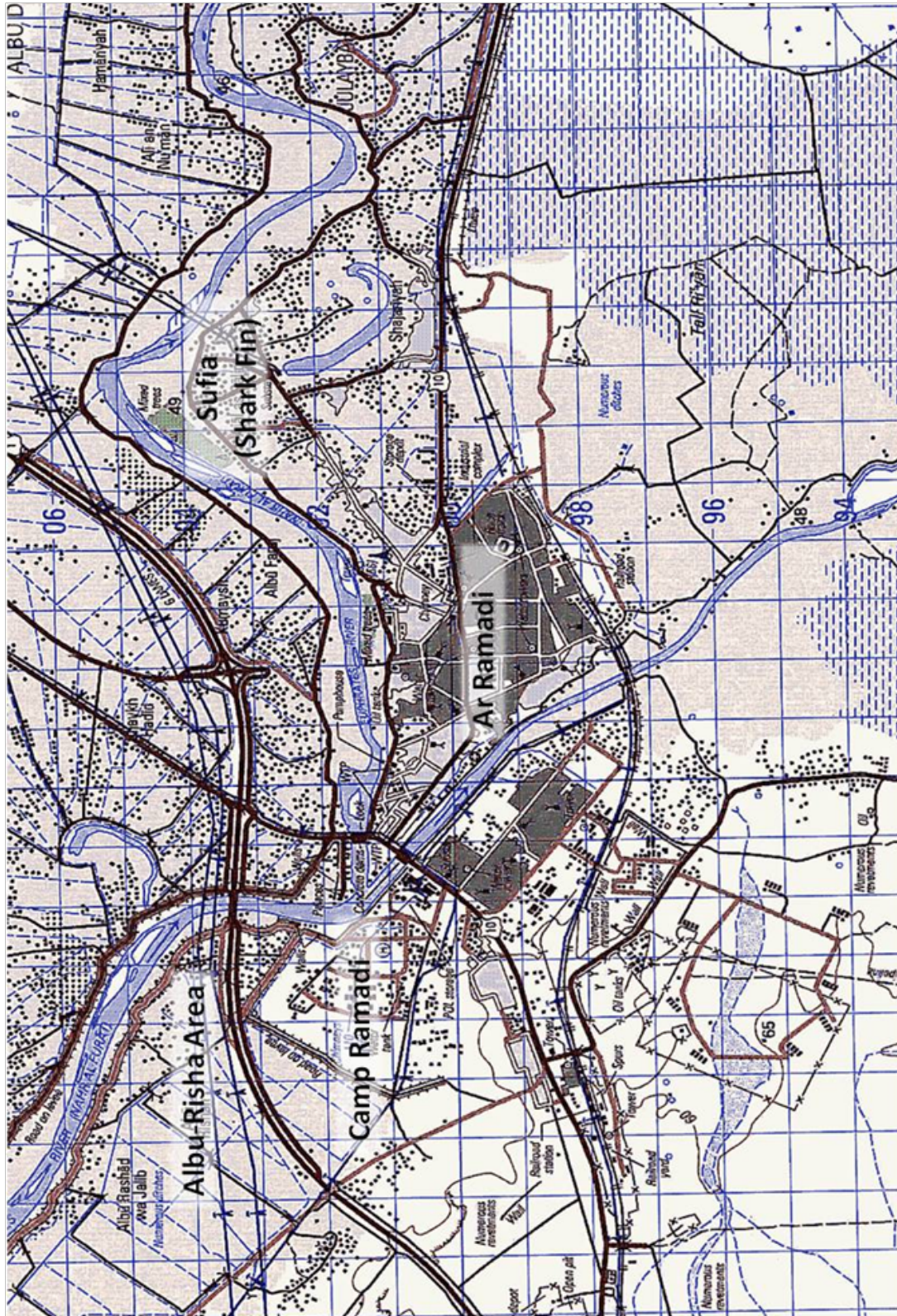


Figure D-7. Map of Ramadi area

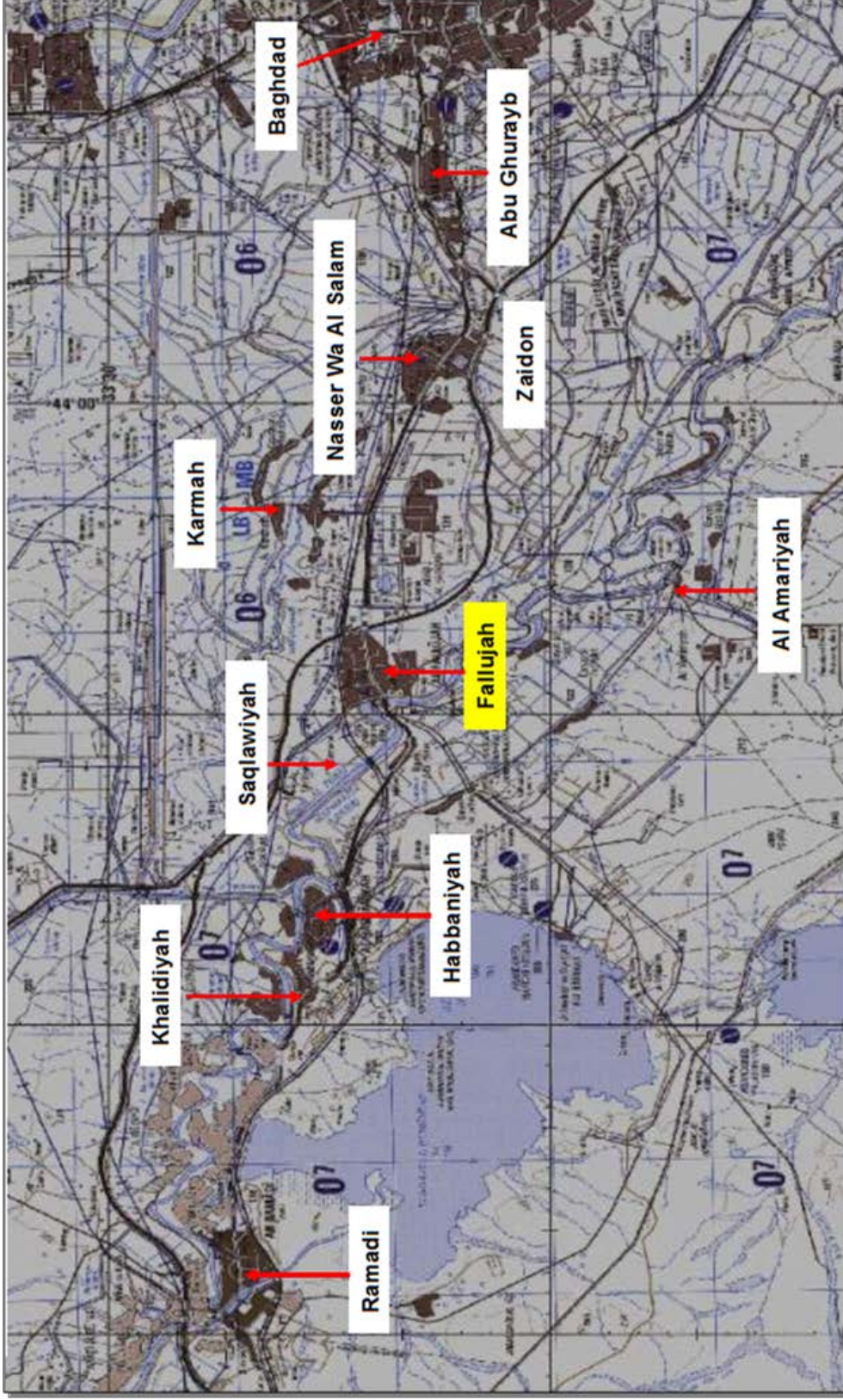


Image courtesy of 1st MARDIV

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Appendix G. Abbreviations

ACR	Armored Cavalry Regiment
AID	Agency for International Development
AO	Area of Operation
AQI	Al Qaeda in Iraq
AST	Advisory Support Team
AWOL	absent without leave
BCT	Brigade Combat Team
BLT	Battalion Landing Team
Brig Gen	Brigadier General–US Air Force
BGen	Brigadier General–US Marine Corps
BG	Brigadier General–US Army
C2	command and control
CA	Civil Affairs
CAG	civil affairs group
Capt	Captain, US Marine Corps or US Air Force
Cav	cavalry
CE	Command Element
CENTCOM	US Central Command
CERP	Commander Emergency Response Program
CFLCC	Coalition Forces Land Component Command
CG	Commanding General
C&GS	Command and General Staff
CI	counterintelligence
CIR	Critical Information Requirement
CJTF	Combined Joint Task Force
CLC	Concerned Local Citizens
CLIC	company level intelligence cell
CMATT	Coalition Military Assistance Training Teams
CMO	Civil-Military Operations
CO	commanding officer
COC	combat operations center

COL	Colonel, US Army
Col	Colonel, US Marine Corps or US Air Force
CONUS	Continental United States
COP	Combat Outpost
COR	Council of Representative
CP	command post
CPA	Coalition Provisional Authority
CPATT	Civilian Police Assistance Training Teams
CT	counterterrorism
DHS	Defense HUMINT Service
DIA	Defense Intelligence Agency
ECP	entry control point
FB	Fallujah Brigade
FMF	Fleet Marine Force
FM	field manual
FOB	Forward Operating Base
FRAGO	Fragmentary Order
G-3	Army or Marine Corps component operation staff officer (Army division or higher staff, Marine Corps brigade or higher staff)
GEN	General, US Army
Gen	General, US Marine Corps or US Air Force
GOI	Government of Iraq
HACC	Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Center
HIIDE	handheld interagency identification detection equipment
HIMARS	High Mobility Artillery Rocket System
HOC	Humanitarian Operations Center
HUMINT	Human Intelligence
IA	Iraqi Army
ICDC	Iraqi Civil Defense Corps
IDA	Institute for Defense Analyses
IED	improvised explosive device
IG	Iraqi Government
IGC	Iraqi Governing Council
IIF	Iraqi Intervention Forces
IIG	Iraqi Interim Government

IIP	Iraqi Islamic Party
IMA	Individual Mobilization Augmentee
ING	Iraqi National Guard
IO	information operations
IR	Information Requirement
IRA	Irish Republican Army
ISF	Iraqi Security Forces
ITG	Iraqi Transition Government
JAI	Jaish al-Islami [Islamic Army]
JAWP	Joint Advance Warfighting Program
JCOA	Joint Center for Operational Analysis
JFCOM	United States Joint Forces Command
JIC	Joint Intelligence Center
JSOC	Joint Special Operations Command
KIA	Killed in Action
LAR	Light Armored Reconnaissance
LNO	liaison officer
LOO	Lines of Operation
LtGen	Lieutenant General, US Marine Corps
LTC	Lieutenant Colonel, US Army
LT Col	Lieutenant Colonel, US Air Force
LtCol	Lieutenant Colonel, US Marine Corps
LTG	Lieutenant General, US Army
MAJ	Major, US Army
Maj	Major, US Marine Corps or US Air Force
MajGen	Major General, US Marine Corps
MARDIV	Marine Division
ME	main effort
MedEvac	medical evacuation
MEF	Marine Expeditionary Force
MEU	Marine Expeditionary Force
MG	Major General, US Army
MiTT	Military Transition Team
MNC-I	Multi-National Corps–Iraq
MND	Multi-National Division

MND-CS	Multi-National Division–Central South
MNF-I	Multi-National Forces–Iraq
MNF-W	Multi-National Forces-West
MNSTC-I	Multi-National Security Transition Command–Iraq
MOD	Ministry of Defense
MOI	Ministry of Interior
MOS	Military Occupational Specialty
MSR	main supply route
MTOE	Modified Table of Organization and Equipment
NCO	non-commissioned officer
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NSC	National Security Council
ODA	Operational Detachment Alpha
OGA	Other Governmental Agencies
OIF	Operation IRAQI FREEDOM
OODA	observe, orient, decide, act
OP	operations order
OVR	OPERATION VIGILANT RESOLVE
PAI	Personnel Asset Inventory
PLST	Provincial Liaison Support Team
POC	point of contact
POO	point of origin
RADM	Rear Admiral, US Navy
RCT	Regimental Combat Team
ROE	rules of engagement
RPG	rocket propelled grenade
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Teams
PsyOps	Psychological Operations
S-3	battalion or brigade operations staff officer (Army; Marine Corps bat- talion or regiment)
SAW	School of Advanced Warfighting (USMC)
SE	secondary effort
SEAL	Sea, Air, Land Team
SFG	Special Forces Group
SFODA	Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha

SIGACT	Significant Activity Report
SIPR	Secure Internet Protocol Router
SOF	Special Operations Forces
SOI	Sons of Iraq
SOTF	Special Operations Task Force
TO	Table of Organization
TOA	Transfer of Authority
TOC	tactical operations center
TRADOC	Training and Doctrine Command (US Army)
UA	unauthorized absence
UAV	unmanned aerial vehicles
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
USF	United States Forces
VBIED	vehicle-borne improvised explosive device
VTC	video teleconference
WERV	Western Euphrates River Valley
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction
XO	Executive Officer

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14. Abstract The objective of the Anbar Awakening project was to create an unclassified, accessible resource for trainers and educators. It is presented in multimedia to accommodate different teaching and learning styles. The project presents the Awakening movement's phases from the development of the insurgency in 2003 to the Coalition's transfer of responsibility for Al Anbar to the Iraqis in 2008. In addition, it offers analysis and lessons, many of which are transferrable to current and future conflicts. Most popular narratives of the Anbar Awakening associate the beginning of the movement with a 14 September 2006 proclamation by Sheik Abdul Sattar Albu-Risha where he coined the term <i>Al Sahawa</i> . This project contends that there was a robust connection in terms of events and relationships from Fallujah in 2004 to Al Qaim in 2005 to the Hadithah-Hit Corridor in 2006, to Ramadi in 2006/2007 and back to Fallujah in 2007/2008; that connection was based on Iraqi culture and societal networks that Americans were not part of. This volume addresses AO Denver from the regimental and SOF perspectives during a critical timeframe—March 2005 to February 2006.					
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