

2nd Battalion, 5th Marines

Operation Iraqi Freedom

Operational Outline



Into Iraq: During twenty-one days of sustained combat operations, the Marines of 2nd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment gallantly distinguished themselves on the battlefield during numerous contacts with the enemy, long road movements, and a high operational tempo. In fact, the Battalion covered over 1,000 miles of movement in twenty-one days, fought and won multiple engagements, and was a critical component in the liberation of Iraq. At the onset of Operation Iraqi Freedom, the Battalion was called upon to cross into enemy territory earlier than expected and became one of the first units to enter Iraq on 20 March 2003. Tasked with securing the all-important oil infrastructure so critical to the future of the Iraqi people, 2/5 advanced into Iraq. What created additional complexity to the objective was that these facilities had to be taken intact to ensure Iraq's future stability. The potential of sabotage from Saddam Hussein's Regime was suspected to be high, hence making the mission time-critical. 2/5, as part of Regimental Combat Team Five (RCT-5), was given the mission to seize several facilities located in Northern Ramayla, an area fifty miles north of the Iraq-Kuwait border. True to form, the Battalion quickly crossed into Iraq, defeated enemy resistance, seized the key facilities, and turned them over to a British Parachute Battalion for safe keeping and future use.

Retreat Hell.

The Trail of Triumph: 2/5's trail of triumph continued into the next operation as the Battalion moved to position itself in the capital city of Baghdad. During the long mechanized movement from Southern Iraq to An Nasiriyah, across the legendary and historic Euphrates River and into the heart of the nation, 2/5 overcame numerous logistical challenges, a more determined opposition, and poor weather. In fact, a sandstorm of Biblical proportion awaited the Marines and Sailors along the route. Hail, high winds, swirling sand and rain, and almost zero visibility brought 2/5 to a temporary halt. No one had previously witnessed such a display from Mother Nature and all were struck by a storm that could turn day into night. Nevertheless, the Marines and Sailors of the most decorated Battalion in the Corps dusted themselves off and returned to action the following day with the same vigor as before. The next major action for the Battalion came on 27 March during a mission to lead RCT-5 further north towards Baghdad and seize a key airfield at a small village called Hantush along a critical supply route. Leading the charge into enemy occupied territory, the Marines and Sailors once again distinguished themselves by their tenacity and tactical prowess. Overcoming an ambush including significant enemy fire along the route to the airfield, 2/5 defeated the opposition, captured the airfield, and enabled the Regiment to turn the key highway into an airstrip for future use as a forward logistics base.

Baghdad or Bust: On the drive to the capital city of Baghdad, the next major obstacle for the Battalion would be the Tigris River. This ancient and winding river dominates the plains of North Central Iraq and is a major source of life for the desert dwellers in this part of the country. Few bridges over the Tigris River are suited for military use and thus became critical aiming points for future attacks. 2/5 conducted several key tactical operations to support the crossing of the Tigris ultimately enabling the entire Battalion to get across the river and aimed at Baghdad by 5 April. First, the Battalion attacked to secure the northern flank of RCT-5 as the 2nd Tank Battalion seized the bridge at Numaniyah. Then, 2/5 identified and secured a crossing site for combat engineers to build a ribbon bridge. Challenges always, obstacles everywhere – yet nothing could stop the determination

of the Marines as the Battalion kept pushing itself to the limits of endurance. In supporting attacks to a bridge in Aziziyah on 3 April, the Battalion quickly found itself separated by many miles from the remainder of RCT-5. Reorienting itself and again focusing on the mission at hand, 2/5 turned around and overnight positioned itself across the Tigris River Bridge at the city of An Numaniyah. The Battalion was back in the battle.

Across the River to Baghdad: Following numerous engagements by RCT-5 enroute to Baghdad, the Battalion focused on two objectives: crossing the Diaylia River, a waterway adjacent to the ancient city, and destroying remnants of the Iraqi Regime still anchored in the city. Once again, terrain posed challenges and finding a workable solution to crossing the river would result in precious time being lost. Eventually, 2/5 found a way and crossed the river on 8 April 2003. With an enemy willing to lie in wait, and terrain that would slow movement to a near halt, the Battalion conducted an attack across the northern limits of the city. On 8-9 April under cover of darkness, 2/5 positioned itself to the north of Baghdad as the lead Battalion of the RCT. 2/5 then attacked from east to west, cutting off escape routes for regime leaders and denying access from the north. Upon reaching this position at the very edge of the city and awaiting orders to make the leap forward, the Battalion encountered pockets of enemy resistance and returned in kind with an overwhelming display of force and firepower letting the enemy know who was knocking on the city's door.

Baghdad: On the afternoon of 10 April, 2/5 entered Baghdad from the north and began operations to finish off the Regime and bring stability to the city. What surprised the Marines of 2/5 was the welcome awaiting them from the citizens of Baghdad. Cheers, waves, and the good 'ol thumbs up let the Marines know that the Iraqis were glad we had finally arrived. Occupying an area in the northern part of the city within the grounds of the former Baghdad College, 2/5 conducted operations to root out the remaining Regime remnants and collect abandoned small arms, ordnance, rockets and missiles. For the most part, the citizens of Baghdad beat us to the punch by ransacking government offices and facilities and defacing the pictures and monuments of Saddam Hussein. With only light resistance in the Battalion's sector, 2/5 was summoned for another mission well north of Baghdad and began planning for the operation from within the city limits.

Rescue Mission: On 12 April, intelligence sources indicated the high possibility of American POWs being held in the town of Baqubah north of Baghdad. Upon receiving orders, the Battalion quickly mobilized. Moving with haste, the Battalion struck Baqubah the following morning, turning the place upside down in search of our fellow service members. But it was to no avail. If there ever were American prisoners in or near the city, they had long since been moved to another part of the country. But as the Battalion reoriented to follow-on operations, Golf Company came in contact with a significant enemy force during a reconnaissance of a pontoon bridge in the small village of At Timayah. Tenacity, firepower, heroic action and teamwork by the Marines of the Battalion enabled 2/5 to defeat the opposition and once again win the day.

Back to Baghdad: Following operations north of Baghdad, the Battalion returned to its former positions at Baghdad College for a night and prepared for future operations. Again the citizenry welcomed us with open arms and curious looks as 2/5 conducted patrols within our sector. Actions taken by the Battalion would facilitate the stability of the city, destroy former regime targets, remove weapons and ammunition from the city and identify the needs of the people. The Battalion would conduct just a day of such operations and then begin its next journey through the remainder of Baghdad, across the Tigris River to the west, and then turn to the ancient city of Samarra on the night of 13-14 April 2003.

The Ancient City: Samarra is a city in northern Iraq with ties to the beginning of civilization. Ancient ruins rise in the background of the city including a tower over 1400 years old. The monument, a tribute to the legendary Tower of Babel, or *The Gateway to Heaven*, overlooks the city. As the Battalion moved through the streets on 14 April, all seemed quiet. The residents had already removed all signs of any affiliation with Saddam Hussein and were trying to get back to normal life. No significant action was encountered by the Marines and the Battalion remained on the outskirts of the city awaiting further instructions. It appeared that the former nation of Iraq had finally succumbed as enemy contact significantly fell off.

At Samawah: As Coalition forces began their mopping up of the country in the north and south, 2/5 repositioned for the beginning of stability and security operations in the towns of As Samawah and Ar Ramaythah in southern Iraq. Another long movement over two days brought the Battalion's presence to these two cities. On 19 April, 2/5 took control, relieving a Battalion from the 82nd Airborne Division. Spread between the two cities, the Battalion conducted civil and military operations to bring stability to the region. Its ultimate goal was to get the cities back on their feet following thirty-five years of oppression and recent combat.

Throughout the campaign, the Marines and Sailors of 2/5 once again distinguished themselves in the face of the enemy and in support of our nation's freedom. Their actions in combat and bravery under dangerous, demanding and stressful conditions have set them apart and forever gained them a place in the history of the Marine Corps and the United States of America. *Retreat Hell.*