

5th Marines

OIF Chronology

29 April 2003



Regimental Combat Team (RCT) 5 deployed to Kuwait during January and early February 2003 in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. Upon arrival in theater, the RCT was organized for combat and integrated with the equipment from Maritime Prepositioned Squadron 2. From mid-February through late March, the RCT conducted planning and rehearsals in preparation for Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. The major subordinate units in the task organization for Regimental Combat Team 5 included: Headquarters Company, Fighting Fifth Marines, 1st Marine Division; 1st, 2nd and 3rd Battalions, Fighting Fifth Marines, 1st Marine Division; 1st Light Armored Reconnaissance (LAR) Battalion, 1st Marine Division; 2nd Tank Battalion, 2nd Marine Division; and Company B, 1st Combat Engineer Battalion (CEB), 1st Marine Division. 2nd Battalion, 11th Marines, 1st Marine Division, and Combat Service Support Company (CSSC) 115, 1st Force Service Support Group provided direct support to the RCT. 7th Battalion, Royal Horse Artillery, 1st United Kingdom (UK) Army Division reinforced 2nd Battalion, 11th Marines and a British NBC Decontamination Platoon also supported the RCT. Additionally, the RCT was reinforced by: detachments from Headquarters and Service Company, 2nd Amphibious Assault Battalion; VMU-1, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing; Aviation Support Liaison Team 5, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing; detachment, 1st Intelligence Battalion, I Marine Expeditionary Force; US Army Psychological Operations Teams; and detachments from Headquarters Battalion, 1st Marine Division. **RCT-5 crossed the line of departure with 7,503 Marines, Sailors, soldiers, and British soldiers supported by over 2,000 vehicles** including tanks, light armored vehicles, and other pieces of rolling stock. Following the successful seizure of the strategically important Rumayla Oilfields during the “Opening Gambit,” all British units detached. The RCT’s personnel strength remained between 6,000 and 7,000 for most of the war. For several days during the advance to Baghdad, the RCT joined an additional 900 Marines and Sailors of 3rd Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, 1st Marine Division.

On 18 March 2003, after weeks in Kuwait, the 1st Marine Division was ordered to move to its attack positions and make final preparations for combat. **On 19 March 2003, RCT-5 key leaders met at the RCT command post to confirm the scheme of maneuver and fire support plan for the seizure of the Rumayla Oilfields.** The RCT also conducted final checks on weapons and equipment. The Iraqis launched several SCUD missile attacks into Kuwait while the RCT was in its attack positions, causing the frequent establishment of Mission Oriented Protective Posture (MOPP) 4.

On 20 March, the RCT received a warning order from the Commanding General, 1st Marine Division indicating that the attack into Iraq would occur within 24-48 hours. A quiet confidence characterized the climate within the RCT. Throughout the day, 1st LAR Battalion conducted

counter reconnaissance along the Iraqi border across the RCT's frontage and provided over watch for engineer reconnaissance by Company B, 1st CEB. RCT key leaders were called together once again in the afternoon for final coordination. Shortly after leaders were briefed on the timeline detailed in the warning order, the Division Commander called the RCT Commander and asked how soon the RCT could be prepared to attack. After a quick assessment and confirmation with his subordinate commanders, the RCT Commander responded that RCT-5 could be prepared in four hours. **Almost immediately, the RCT was on the move and subsequently attacked across the Iraqi border on an accelerated three hours notice.** The RCT's initial attack was thus conducted at H-9 hours. RCT-5 was the first ground combat unit to attack into Iraq. Because of the extensive rehearsals, detailed briefings, and thorough preparations for combat by commanders and key leaders throughout the RCT, RCT-5 was able to quickly respond to the emerging Iraqi threat to the oilfields in Southern Iraq. The speed with which the RCT responded in the initial hours of the war would characterize its performance throughout the war.

The summary of RCT-5 Actions:

- **20 March: RCT-5 attacked into Southern Iraq as the 1st Marine Division's main effort and was the first ground combat element to cross the Kuwait-Iraq Border.** The attack was a pre-ground day operation and conducted at H-9 hours. **RCT-5's mission was to seize the strategically significant Southern and Northern Rumayla Oilfields.** Additionally, the RCT was to block the *6th Armor Division* and *51st Iraqi Mechanized Infantry Division* in order to prevent interference with RCT-7's attack at H-hour on G-Day. The RCT attacked using two breach sites each consisting of three lanes. Just prior to the attack, an enemy minefield was detected in the middle lane of the western breach site. The lane remained fouled during the attack. With over watch provided by 1st LAR Battalion across the RCT's zone of action, and subsequent to a 30-minute schedule of preparation fires provided by the 11th Marines, **RCT-5 attacked into Iraq at 1730 Zulu on 20 March 2003.** 2nd Tank Battalion led the attack through the western breach site. The **RCT's main effort, 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines**, organized as a mechanized task force, followed in trace of 2nd Tank Battalion. 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, followed by 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines, attacked through the eastern breach site. 2nd Battalion, 11th Marines, CSSC-115, and the RCT-5 command elements also crossed into Iraq through the eastern breach site. As part of the Division scheme of maneuver, RCT-5 controlled the movement of 1st Reconnaissance Battalion and RCT-1 through the western breach site to their assigned zones of action. Despite the accelerated timeline for the attack and the extraordinarily poor visibility in the area of operations, the RCT accomplished its initial mission with minimal loss of life or equipment. Battle damage assessment and interviews with enemy prisoners of war captured during the attack, confirmed pre H-hour estimates of brigade-sized enemy forces in both the Northern and Southern Oilfields. The enemy forces were largely dismounted but supported by T-55 tanks, mechanized vehicles, surface-to-air missiles, air defense artillery, mortars, long rang artillery, and multiple launched rockets. The most intense fighting took place in the Southern Rumayla Oilfield at Pumping Station 2 where the RCT suffered its first casualties.
- **21 March:** The RCT command post displaced by echelon to the vicinity of Highway 8 between the Southern and Northern Rumayla Oilfields. Through the early morning hours, the RCT consolidated on assigned objectives and processed hundreds of enemy prisoners of war. The desired end state was achieved: **2nd Battalion, 5th Marines seized the Northern Oilfield intact and established a blocking position at the Saddam River;** 2nd Tank Battalion seized a blocking position oriented east on highway 8; 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines seized gas oil separation plants 1 and 2 in the Southern Rural Oilfield; and 1st Battalion, 5th Marines seized gas oil separation plants 3 and 4 and pumping station 2 in the Southern Rumayla Oilfield. After

supporting the attack, 2nd Battalion, 11th Marines occupied position areas in the Northern Oilfield. CSSC-115 established a rapid re-supply point in the vicinity of the RCT command post.

- **22-23 March: On 22 March, the RCT completed a relief in place** in the Rumayla Oilfields with the 16th Air Assault Brigade, 1st UK Army Division. Following the relief in place, the RCT conducted a road march on Highway 8 and crossed the Euphrates River at the intersection with Highway 1. After the river crossing, RCT-5 conducted a forward passage of lines with 3rd LAR Battalion. 3rd LAR Battalion had earlier engaged and destroyed an irregular battalion-sized enemy force. RCT-5 attached 3rd LAR and continued the attack along Highway 1 as the Division's main effort in order to clear enemy in zone and facilitate the Division's attack toward Baghdad.
- **24-26 March: The RCT continued the attack as the Division's main effort.** Each of the battalions engaged and destroyed irregular enemy forces during this period in actions characterized by initiative and aggressiveness. While the enemy along Highway 1 fought with determination, their hasty defensive positions and ambush tactics were ineffective in slowing the RCT. 2nd Battalion, 11th Marines and other battalions of the 11th Marines provided continuous fire support throughout a period of very poor weather. The Cannon Cockers also provided counterbattery fire that quickly silenced numerous enemy indirect fire attacks on the RCT. The RCT uncovered multiple caches of weapons, ammunition, and equipment along the axis of advance. In the most significant action of this period, 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines led the RCT north on Highway 1 to an objective just east of Ad Diwaniyah. En route, the battalion engaged in heavy fighting with a company-sized irregular enemy force. The battalion overcame the fog and friction of war during a horrific sandstorm, which was followed by rain, and golf ball-sized hailstones. Many enemy were killed and over twenty were taken prisoner of war. After consolidating on the objective, the battalion repelled an enemy counterattack supported by armor and mechanized forces.
- **27 March: The RCT continued the attack as the Division's main effort** to seize Hantush Airfield. The RCT confronted irregular enemy forces along the axis of advance. **2nd Battalion, 5th Marines engaged and destroyed an enemy company-sized unit with armor and mechanized vehicles on the objective.** After a successful seizure of the airfield, RCT-5 was ordered to consolidate back south of the Ad Diwaniyah crossroads. The withdrawal from Hantush was related to a decision by the Combined Forces Land Component Commander(CFLCC) to conduct an operational pause.
- **28-30 March:** The 1st Marine Division conducted an operational pause to consolidate combat service support. Throughout this period, **RCT-5 conducted limited objective attacks** and local security patrols along the Highway 1 corridor consolidating its gains and clearing enemy in zone. 1st LAR Battalion conducted patrols north of the RCT defensive positions along Highway 1. Numerous enemy weapons caches were uncovered. **2nd Battalion, 5th Marines uncovered a significant enemy ammunition supply point just east of Ad Diwaniyah.** Enemy contact was frequent and the RCT continued to experience regular indirect fire attacks from enemy mortars and artillery.
- **31 March:** As 1st Marine Division's Main effort, **RCT-5 again attacked the Hantush Airfield in order to open a C-130 airfield as a Forward Arming and Refueling Point(FARP)/Rapid Re-supply Point(RRP).** 3rd LAR Battalion was assigned as the main effort and led the RCT attack north. Along the axis of advance, the enemy engaged units throughout the column with

direct fire. An enemy company with armor and mechanized vehicles defended the northwest corner of the objective. The scheme of maneuver was developed to deceive the enemy into believing that the Division would continue the attack to Baghdad along Highway 1 vice along Route 27 to Highway 6. Shortly after the objective was secured, the Commanding General, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing arrived on scene for a personal inspection of the airfield. His assessment was that the airfield would support C-130 operations and within 24 hours Hantush received the first resupply aircraft. By that time, RCT-5 was again attacking toward Baghdad.

- **1 April: The RCT, as 1st Marine Division's main effort, attacked up Route 27 to seize a bridge over the Saddam Canal** in order to facilitate the movement of follow-on forces. 1st Battalion, 5th Marines led the attack as the RCT's main effort. An enemy company-sized element put up strong resistance from defensive positions both north and south of the canal. 1st Battalion, 5th Marines quickly destroyed the enemy and facilitated operations for Task Force Bridge to establish an additional bridge crossing site across the canal. 1st Battalion then facilitated forward passage of lines by other RCT forces in order to prepare for the attack across the Tigris River. 5th Battalion, 11th Marines reinforced 2nd Battalion, 11th Marines during the attack along Route 27.
- **2 April: RCT-5 continued the attack as the Division main effort** along Route 27 to seize a bridgehead at the Tigris River utilizing an established bridge at An Numaniyah. 2nd Tank Battalion with 1st LAR Battalion and 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines following in support attacked across the Tigris as the RCT main effort and faced significant enemy resistance from an enemy reinforced battalion. Numerous tanks and vehicles in the RCT were hit with RPGs, machine gun and small arms fire from enemy positions astride Route 27 and from within An Numaniyah in the vicinity of the bridge. At that time, one M1A1 was designated a mobility kill. 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines with 1st Battalion, 5th Marines following in support conducted a supporting attack to the northwest and assisted Task Force Bridge in their efforts to establish a second bridge crossing site across the Tigris. Numerous enemy defensive positions, abandoned vehicles, and additional caches were found on the nearside of the Tigris River.
- **3 April: RCT-5 continued the attack as the Division's main effort** along Highway 6. An enemy reinforced armor and mechanized battalion was confronted in the vicinity of Aziziyah. 2nd Tank Battalion cleared enemy along Highway 6 while 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines dismounted and cleared enemy forces in Aziziyah. Enemy resistance was significant and fierce fighting continued for several hours in the town. The enemy order of battle included T-55s, T-62s, mechanized vehicles, air defense artillery, long-range artillery, and mortars from the Republican Guard. This was the most significant battle against enemy conventional forces during the war. The enemy fought from defensive positions along the highway and defended with two dismounted companies from within the confines of the city.
- **4 April: RCT-5 continued the attack along Highway 6 as the main effort** to clear the southeastern approach to Baghdad. As the RCT main effort, 2nd Tank Battalion confronted fierce enemy resistance in the vicinity of the 61 easting from an irregular enemy force of several hundred fighters from Syria, Jordan, Egypt and other Middle Eastern and African countries. 2nd Tanks faced a barrage of RPG, machinegun, and small arms fire on their flanks from buildings, trench lines, and areas of vegetation that lined the highway. Numerous RCT vehicles were struck and two tanks were assessed as mobility kills; the battalion also suffered a number of KIAs and WIAs. **3rd Battalion, 5th Marines followed in support of 2nd Tanks and conducted a dismounted attack on both sides of the highway from the 61 to the 65 easting. 3rd Battalion's attack involved over eight hours of close combat.** As 3rd Battalion cleared

along the highway, 2nd Tanks continued the attack and engaged enemy forces en route to the seizure of a Division objective at a cross roads east of the Diyala River and west of an Al Nida Republican Guard barracks and command post. As 2nd Tanks and the RCT Command Post consolidated at the crossroads, the enemy attacked with RPGs and indirect fire, including rockets and 120mm mortars. Also during the consolidation phase, an Iraqi Republican Guard General Officer attempted to run a blocking position established on the eastern side of the objective by 2nd Tanks. The general was killed and his vehicle destroyed by .50 caliber machinegun fire. The support provided by rotary wing close air support and 2nd Battalion, 11th Marines during the attack from the 61 to the 65 easting was critical to 3rd Battalion's destruction of hundreds of enemy fighters. 3rd Battalion's actions uncovered a well-stocked terrorist training center during its attack.

- **5-7 April: RCT-5 conducted aggressive reconnaissance** to identify crossing sites along the Diyala River. No suitable sites were identified despite the superb efforts of 1st LAR Battalion. Units throughout the RCT experienced mortar attacks and casualties were incurred. While moving to the RCT's defensive position, the forward CP of 2nd Battalion, 11th Marines and Echo Battery, 2nd Battalion, 11th Marines were attacked by BMP-2s. **1st Battalion, 5th Marines responded in support and destroyed the BMPs with AT-4s.** 1st LAR Battalion conducted a zone recon south of Highway 6 where they experienced significant contact and uncovered a large number of enemy caches.
- **8-9 April: RCT-5 conducted a forward passage of lines with RCT-1 and crossed the Diyala River** en route to an attack on the northeast suburbs of Baghdad. After significant enemy contact in a congested urban environment, the RCT consolidated all forces in the vicinity of Highway 5 north of Baghdad. The RCT received artillery and mortar attacks during consolidation. In the early evening, RCT-5 received an order to move west in order to block enemy forces from using Highway 2 as an avenue of ingress/egress to Baghdad and to conduct a link-up with the US Army's 3rd Infantry Division. Together, these actions completed the cordon of the city. **2nd Battalion, 5th Marines, with the jump command post in trace, conducted the attack and moved over 30 kilometers to Highway 2 with less than two hours notice.** By first light on 9 April, RCT-5 was in a position to isolate Baghdad from the north.
- **10 April: RCT-5 attacked into Baghdad as the Divisions main effort.** 1st Battalion, 5th Marines was tasked with the seizure of the Almilyah Palace, the search of two possible American POW holding sites, and the search of the Iman Abu Hanifah Mosque where a Saddam Hussein sighting had reportedly taken place hours before the attack. Significant enemy contact in several locations along the axis of advance and in the objective area, characterized by a relentless barrage of RPGs, a torrent of heavy machinegun and small arms fire, resulted in the commitment of the RCT quick reaction force in support of the 1st Battalion. In securing their assigned objectives, 1st Battalion experienced heavy casualties and killed an estimated 100 Saddam Fedayeen fighters. Fixed-wing aviation played a significant role in securing the Iman Abu Hanifah Mosque. Two USAF A-10 Warthogs made multiple low altitude strafing runs with their 30mm cannon and dropped two bombs that helped silence the resistance. Following 1st Battalion's attack, thousands of Iraqis spontaneously took to the streets of Baghdad to cheer and thank the Marines and Sailors of the RCT for liberating them from Hussein's oppressive regime.
- **11 April: RCT-5 conducted security operations** in sector in Northwest Baghdad. Numerous weapons and equipment caches were uncovered. The people of Baghdad continued to provide the RCT with a warm welcome.

- **12 April: 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines conducted an attack on Ba'Qubah.** Numerous weapons and equipment caches were uncovered and an enemy irregular company-sized unit was destroyed west of the city by Golf Company, 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines. Operation Iraqi Freedom officially entered Phase IV.
- **13-17 April: RCT-5 (-) followed in support of Task Force Tripoli in a movement to contact north to Samarra and Tikrit.** 2nd and 3rd Battalions, 5th Marines with 2nd Battalion, 11th Marines (-) and CSSC 115 (-) conducted the movement to contact to Samarra. The remainder of the RCT remained in Baghdad as the Division QRF force and completed a relief in place with RCTs 1 and 7. Following the movement to contact, RCT-5 conducted security operations in assigned sectors in both Baghdad and Samarra. During a patrol to Samarra Airfield, 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines located five derelict SU-22s and a L-29 along the road. Additionally a tremendous amount of aviation ordnance was uncovered at the airfield.
- **17 April: RCT-5 was ordered to conduct a relief in place** with 2nd Brigade Combat Team (BCT), 82nd Airborne Division in the Al Qadisiyah Province. The RCT Alpha command group, along with the Alpha command groups from 2nd and 3rd Battalions moved to Ad Diwaniyah to effect liaison with the Army Brigade.
- **18 April:** The rest of RCT-5 (-) conducted a tactical road march from Baghdad in order to effect the relief in place. The RCT-5 command post co-located with 2nd BCT, 82nd Airborne Division.
- **19 April:** 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines moved south to As Samawah and began to conduct a relief in place with a battalion from the 82nd Airborne as 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines begins the relief in place at Ad Diwaniyah.
- **20 April:** RCT-5 completed the relief in place and assumed responsibility for security in the Al Qadisiyah Province.

From 20 March 2003 through 20 April 2003, RCT-5 moved over 1,000 kilometers and destroyed the enemy in a number of pitched battles on its way to Baghdad and beyond. **The RCT's combat losses included 12 killed in action and 126 wounded.** The Marines of the RCT spent 18 days in MOPP 1 or 2. Throughout, the RCT was challenged by extended lines of communication, austere weather, and extremely limited resources. The RCT accomplished all assigned missions with minimal loss of friendly life or equipment due to the speed of action maintained by individual Marines and leaders. Once the RCT attacked across the Iraqi border, it continued to press the enemy and keep him off balance. In the end, the pressure exerted by RCT-5 on the enemy robbed him of the initiative and shattered his will to fight. With RCT-5 in the lead, **the 1st Marine Division reached Baghdad in less than three weeks, the fastest advance on a capital city in military history. RCT-5's accomplishments during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM are a testimony to the mettle and competence of the Marines and Sailors of the RCT.** Their indomitable will, innovativeness, flexibility, aggressiveness, and initiative allowed the RCT to attack along an unexpected avenue of approach and rapidly cover great distances while consistently integrating combined arms and maneuver at the decisive time and place.