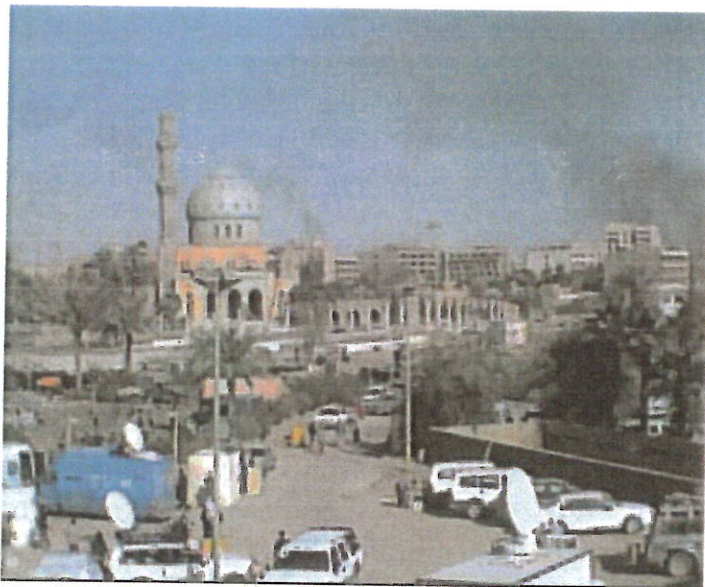


10 April  
**Battle of the Mosque**

The fight for Baghdad was far from over. In one of the last but most fierce battles to secure objectives in Baghdad, RCT-5 attacked into the northwestern side of east Baghdad as the Division's main effort. First Battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Marines was tasked with the seizure of the Azimiyah Palace, one of Saddam's palaces in eastern Baghdad.



*International press vehicles staged near the Grand Mosque in downtown Baghdad.*

Lieutenant Colonel Padilla's 1/5 began moving from their positions near the Diyala River, heading north out of Baghdad on Highway 5 late on the evening of 9 April. As the evening progressed into night, the battalion headed west and then finally turned back south on the east side of the Tigris River along Highway 2. In the pre-dawn hours of 10 April, 1/5 conducted a passage of lines with 2/5. The night was suddenly brightened with red tracers fired in the direction of the column as 1/5 pressed into the heart of the city. Every street brought RPG,

heavy machinegun, and small arms fire. The tanks and tracks responded with .50-caliber, Mk-19, and 7.62mm machinegun fire as they continued to press toward the palace as quickly as possible.

The rate of incoming small arms and RPG fire continued to increase as 1/5 progressed further into the narrow streets and alleys of Baghdad. Navigating along the maze of Baghdad streets was extremely challenging. The maps that existed for the area did not show the level of detail required to navigate through the tightly constricted alleyways of an older section of the city. After making an exit off the main route and onto another highway, Alpha Company, in the lead, found itself on the wrong road, made a U-turn, and headed back along its original route. In the dark streets, the battalion pressed on to the objective, at times passing parallel to friendly units. "Don't fire to the left!" yelled Marines in the AAV's as they warned against possible friendly fire. Under the hailstorm of machinegun and RPG fire, Alpha Company's command AAV threw a track. The company halted and crewmembers hastily put the track back on. Bravo Company, led by Captain Jason E. Smith, seized the initiative, took the lead, and pushed on toward the palace. Visibility increased with the rising sun, and enemy fire became more desperate as they attempted to halt the Marines' advance.

While the battalion was still making its way toward the palace, they received an additional FragO, tasking them with the search of two possible American POW holding sites. This portion of the mission was given to Charlie Company. Near simultaneously, the Battalion was given yet a third mission, to proceed to the Imam Abu Hanifah Mosque where Saddam Hussein had

reportedly been sighted only hours before. This portion of the mission was given to Alpha Company.

On the tactical radio nets, reports could be heard listing Marines wounded from incoming enemy fire, as well as reports of enemy locations and activity. The fires continued to hit the entire battalion convoy; including headquarters and logistics vehicles to the rear of the attacking armor. Marines stayed the course, calmly continuing the attack and returning fire. The calm disciplined leadership of Lieutenant Colonel Fred Padilla and the other leaders of the Battalion kept the Marines on an even keel in the confusing and dangerous firefight.

Bravo Company finally reached the palace and attacked to seize the entire compound. They were supported by the 81mm mortar platoon and the counter-mechanized platoon. They met fierce resistance surrounding the palace, but quickly secured the eleven buildings inside the wall. Though the palace was secured, Bravo Company continued to receive fire from enemy forces outside the complex. They quickly established defensive positions around the compound and cleared an LZ to evacuate casualties and to receive needed resupply of ammunition. Under enemy fire, Bravo Company Marines were able to evacuate 12 casualties wounded early in the fighting. Charlie Company, simultaneously, moved towards the two suspected enemy POW sites they had been ordered to investigate, meeting moderate resistance but finding no signs of POWs.



*The Azimiyah Palace after it was secured by 1/5 in a fiercely contested action. This battle marked the end of conventional combat operations for 1st Marine Division. The Division was to find that security and stabilization operations could be just as deadly.*

Second Lieutenant Joshua Glover of C/1/5 recalled his attack to the POW sites:

*“Our company was sent two km out into the downtown area to search for POWs. The stiff resistance that met us in the streets included small arms and many RPG shots. As my platoon dismounted the tracks and hastily began preparing to move out for the search, we were taking fire from several directions. As we moved out, fire teams placed suppression down the streets to cover movement across these danger areas. My radio operator, Private First Class Hahn, and I approached one of the cross streets and one at a time bumped across behind the Marines providing suppression. As we each darted across, three or four enemy fired AK-47s at us from down the street. The rounds they fired at us as we crossed impacted uncomfortably close to each of us, sending chunks of walls flying. After we both got across the cross street, I turned and saw PFC Hahn standing there with wide eyes. He looked at me solemnly and said, “Sir, that hundred fifty bucks a month of combat pay sure don’t make me feel too much better right now!”*”

Upon reaching and setting a perimeter outside the palace, 1/5’s tank platoon and AAVs continued to fire on enemy targets in houses, down streets, and even inside mosques after receiving fire from them. Alpha Company arrived at the palace and prepared to attack to the mosque. While Marines began resupplying the company, word was passed that the Alpha Company Gunnery Sergeant, Jeffrey E. Bohr, had been shot and killed. The expression of numbness could be seen on the faces of the Marines as they fought to maintain their composure. Gunnery Sergeant Bohr had been a battalion stalwart, a fine example of the highest standards of Staff Non-Commissioned Officer leadership. How could this seemingly 'untouchable' Marine be killed? The shock and grief had to be momentarily put aside, however, as the embattled force made ready to reenter the maelstrom. The earlier report that Saddam Hussein was hiding out in a mosque just to the north of the palace was time-sensitive information, and time was short. Gunnery Sergeant Bohr was killed just prior to entering the palace:

*“Approximately an hour prior to crossing the line of departure, the battalion commander directed that all non-critical vehicles and soft-skin vehicles be moved to the logistics trains to link up with the battalion at a later date. The precedence during the operation to date was there could be up to several days before we could link-up with our company logistical train. The Company Commander discussed the issue with the Company Gunnery Sergeant over the radio and said that going on the mission would be on a voluntary basis. The company's water and ammunition supply could become critical if cut off from the log trains for an extended period of time. Shortly after the offer, Gunnery Sergeant Bohr responded that he would be moving with the mechanized column in his two high-back HMMWV's.*”

*During the movement, the battalion was attacked from both sides of the roads, at all intersections and overpasses. Gunnery Sergeant Bohr personally affected suppressive fires against the dismounted enemy with his M-16. He was personally responsible for no less than two confirmed killed enemy soldiers during the initial contact. The company was receiving heavy small arms and machine gun fire, as well as numerous RPG shots.*

*After the Company Commander's track was immobilized, and the company had to stop temporarily to effect repairs, Gunnery Sergeant Bohr moved his two HMMWV's behind the Company Commander's track and performed an administrative halt to confirm the vehicle's*

*status, and he also checked his Marines to ensure they were not wounded. He gave words of encouragement and assisted in keeping his Marines calm and determined to achieve mission accomplishment.*

*On the move again to the palace, the company passed through a killsack from an enemy reinforced company. Alpha Company passed through the position to a dead end (a bridge that led into 3<sup>d</sup> ID's zone), which left the logistical vehicles exposed in the killsack as the company finally began to turn around. At this time, Gunnery Sergeant Bohr had the company logistical vehicles continue moving into the middle of the column, bypassing AAV's for protection from the intense RPG and small arms fire.*

*Gunnery Sergeant Bohr killed an unknown number of enemy soldiers while providing suppression and protection to his driver and the company log train. The company vehicles were riddled with small arms fire during the action and no less than two RPGs passed through the canvas of the Company Gunnery Sergeant's high-back. At no time on the radio with the Company Commander was there anything other than "we are good to go".*

*Gunnery Sergeant Bohr continued to deliver accurate rifle fire at the numerous enemy soldiers in his vicinity. When he was informed by squad radio that one of the headquarters Marines was wounded with a bullet through the wrist, he quickly called in a CASEVAC while still providing cover fire from his vehicle. During this attempt to save another Marines life, Gunnery Sergeant Bohr was killed instantly by small arms fire.*

*The support provided by Gunnery Sergeant Bohr was critical, as the battalion's logistical trains did not arrive until two days later at the presidential palace the battalion defended.*

*Gunny Bohr's moral and physical courage were inspirational to his Marines, in the logistics train and the men of the company. His volunteering to go on the mission was above and beyond the call of duty. His sound decision making under the most extreme fighting kept his subordinates alive and achieved mission accomplishment of combat re-supply for the company."*

As Alpha Company pushed out through the gates of the palace, Marines aggressively engaged any suspected enemy positions, in an attempt to suppress RPGs prior to being fired. Marines kept a vigilant eye as they moved through the narrow alleyways. Every Marine kept a careful watch on windows, doors, and rooftops as they passed; covering high, low, front and back to reduce vulnerability in the tight urban environment. The tank platoon began receiving sporadic small arms fire as soon as they exited the palace gates. It intensified with each block, as RPG teams fired from streets and alleyways. An RPG hit platoon commander First Lieutenant Ashley Patrick's tank in the rear compartment, rendering the M1A1 a mobility kill. Staff Sergeant Johnnie Hughes in the number two tank and Master Sergeant Stephen Eisel in the number four tank pulled into the intersection to provide covering fire as Sergeant Daniel Belgrader pulled in to swap tanks with Patrick. Hughes' tank immediately took two RPG direct hits but continued to fight and suppress along with Eisel's. Lieutenant Patrick directed suppression into the source of the fires coming from houses and down streets.

The tight, restrictive streets and alleyways allowed only a single tank at a time, acting as the lead element and navigator. As intense enemy fire poured in from two and three story structures and alleyways no more than five meters wide, Master Sergeant Eisel skillfully navigated and simultaneously fought the lead tank. Upon reaching the mosque, the tank platoon maneuvered into an intersection and began providing main gun and machinegun suppression. The mechanized infantry company moved into position for the assault.

Alpha Company's Marines heard, saw, and felt AK-47 fire as they moved into the open town square adjacent to the mosque. Tank main guns, AAV up-guns (.50 cal and Mk-19), and M-16's all answered back with a deafening clatter and boom. Several Marines dismounted their AAV to set into a cold position for a SMAW shot. As they did, a loud explosion rocked the engineer's track and it lurched to a stop. Marines exited the damaged AAV to jump in the back of adjacent AAV's. The remaining engineers climbed into the bucket of an Armored Combat Earthmover (ACE) that was following in trace of the now useless AAV. As they did, others fired at the buildings, suppressing the fires that had interrupted their movement.

With significant enemy contact in several locations along Alpha Company's axis of advance and in the objective area, Grizzly 6 committed the RCT Quick Reaction Force (QRF) in support of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion. First Lieutenant Keith Montgomery was leading the QRF into 1/5's zone when an RPG struck his tank. Undeterred he continued the attack as the company's lead element. Two more RPGs slammed into his tank while crossing an intersection en route to the eastern Presidential Palace. One RPG penetrated the tank, causing minor injuries to him, his loader and his driver. This one-in-a-million shot struck the tank in just the right spot between the heavy turret armor and the hull. Despite the shock and surprise it caused, Montgomery concealed his injuries from his crew and continued to lead the attack to clear a route through the city. At that point, the only functional weapon system was the coaxial machinegun, which could only be aimed by pivot steering the tank. Lieutenant Montgomery maintained his tank in the fight, although he was reduced primarily to battle command of his platoon and moral support. The QRF moved into position to support Alpha Company.

Lieutenant Patrick's tanks engaged the top and bottom story of every structure in the square as well as every alleyway with 120mm main gunfire in an attempt to suppress the enemy fire. Captain Blair Sokol the Alpha Company Commander, moved the company into a perimeter around the mosque and then coolly directed dismounted infantry to move in and clear the compound. The QRF completed the cordon by establishing positions on the roads leading to the mosque from the south. Alpha Company was facing a platoon size force from inside the mosque and a company size force surrounding it. The company was receiving intense fire from three sides, and the company's FAC, Captain Ray Lawler provided close and accurate CAS to relieve the pressure. The CAS included Air Force A-10 'Warthogs' firing within 65 meters with their 30mm cannon, and F-14's delivering 1000 lb bombs at 'danger close' range. The tank platoon and infantry company continued to engage RPG teams, enemy machine gun positions and troops for the next 4 hours. Staff Sergeant Avon Paul attempted to kill a sniper firing from a building with machinegun fire from his tank. When that proved ineffective, he received permission to use a Multi-Purpose Anti-Tank main gun round. The round silenced the sniper but started a fire in the building (which proved to be a Fedeyeen ammunition storage facility.) Soon after, the area was rocked by secondary explosions as ammunition stored in the building cooked off.

The dismounted Marines moved in to clear the mosque and capture any Regime figures who might be inside:

*“As the company began isolating the mosque, the amount of enemy fire reached its peak, with RPG and small arms fire coming from both a platoon size element inside the mosque and a company size element in the surrounding buildings. The company received at least 90 shots from RPGs, 33 of which were confirmed hits on the AAVs. The platoon commander’s AAV took a direct hit from an RPG, wounding four Marines. Staff Sergeant Coleman Kinzer dismounted his vehicle in the middle of the worst part of the fighting and moved to the platoon commander’s vehicle in order to ensure face-to-face coordination prior to conducting a breach into the mosque.*

*The platoon moved to the southern side of the mosque and began dismounting in the vicinity of a gate in the wall surrounding the mosque. Staff Sergeant Kinzer was the first Marine at the gate, and exposing himself to RPK machine gun fire, coordinated the breach on the western building of the complex to include a SMAW Novel Explosive shot that killed an RPK gunner. He then took a squad up to the building, threw a grenade through the breach site, and gained a foothold. Once the foothold was gained, Staff Sergeant Kinzer remained at the lead of the platoon while conducting high-intensity MOUT room clearing with more hand grenades. The squad thoroughly cleared the building and ensured that proper security was posted.*

*At this time, coordination was made for the movement across a courtyard and into the main temple. Second platoon had now entered the complex and while his platoon commander was coordinating with them, Staff Sergeant Kinzer continued to press the attack. He led the attack across the courtyard and gained a foothold in the temple. Upon making entry into the temple, he came under small arms fire from the north side of a long corridor inside the building. The enemy fired several rounds before they fled out of the north exit. Recognizing that he did not yet have enough forces in the building to pursue, Staff Sergeant Kinzer held the team in place until he had enough forces to clear the large cavernous spaces of the main temple. He continued to coordinate the attack until the platoon commander arrived.*

*During consolidation, it became apparent that there were several weapons caches hidden on the north side of the mosque. After several attempts to gather the weapons failed under heavy sniper fire, the platoon commander tasked Staff Sergeant Kinzer with gathering the weapons. Staff Sergeant Kinzer coordinated the use of smoke and suppressive fires and successfully gathered the weapons. Staff Sergeant Kinzer was the last Marine out of the mosque and the last Marine to load into the AAVs, ensuring accountability for all his Marines.”*

With the assault on the last enemy hiding in the mosque underway, First Lieutenant Douglas Finn, the Company Executive Officer for the QRF, began to direct recovery operations for the numerous immobilized vehicles. Second Lieutenant Dennis Doyle dismounted his platoon and maneuvered through the alleys to establish perimeter security around Lieutenant Patrick’s abandoned tank. Clearing the buildings around the company battle position, Doyle’s platoon encountered several terrified Iraqi civilians caught up in the battle. The platoon detained an SUV containing several thousand dollars, Iraqi military uniforms, and documents. Another family

they met voluntarily cooked for the Marines during the fight. For Lieutenant Doyle's platoon, the battle was known as 'The Battle for Macaroni Alley'.

Alpha Company did not capture any Regime leadership figures at the mosque, but the vigorous delaying tactics used by the fighters here may have given them time to escape through the maze of winding Baghdad streets. Once the mosque was secure, Alpha Company began the movement out of the square through the route cleared by the QRF. The tank platoon provided rear security. The platoon continued to take fire and engage enemy positions until completely out of the square and into the small cleared alleyway. The narrow alley had built for pedestrians and donkey carts, and could barely accommodate the behemoth M1A1s. As the tanks squeezed through the route, the main turrets could not traverse, and several of the buildings' external air conditioner units were ripped out of second-story windows. The tank commanders and loaders were eye level with the second level of the homes and looking up to the third and fourth stories. As they moved down the alleyway they were given one last task, to destroy an immobilized Amtrak. As rear security, Master Sergeant Eisel dropped a thermite grenade into the AAV commander's weapon station and destroyed the vehicle.

In securing their assigned objectives, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion suffered 1 killed and 60 wounded Marines. They defeated the suspected enemy battalion in zone and killed several hundred Special Republican Guard and Saddam Fedeyeen fighters. Following 1/5's swift and decisive attack, thousands of Iraqis spontaneously took to the streets of Baghdad to cheer and thank the Marines and Sailors. Once again, destroying the last vestiges of the Saddam Regime earned the Division Marines the grateful thanks of the Iraqi people.

RCT-5 experienced another enemy tactic on the 10 April. As the Marines of 3/5 were establishing a checkpoint in the city, a suicide bomber attempted to kill as many of them as he could. First Lieutenant Timms from Lima Company 3/5 remembered the incident:

*On 10 April we arrived in Baghdad. Second Platoon was tasked with manning a control point that was the border between three different units. The CP was located at a busy intersection between a main street, two side streets, a bridge over a highway, and an on-ramp. Second Platoon was reinforced by Machine guns, SMAWS, and a section of CAAT. Once we arrived we established security, which was challenging, as the crowds numbered in the hundreds and would not disperse. We set up on the right side of the end of the main street, 100 meters in front of the bridge. In the middle of the road on a median was an old Iraqi post made of sand bags. We set up a working party to move the sand bags over to our side of the road to block off the on-ramp and set up a post of our own. While this was being done an individual walked up through the crowd to the working party. Civilians shouted warnings as they ran away. The individual had an explosive device, and he detonated it near the Marines. Fortunately, The bomber's body absorbed much of the blast, but four Marines were severely wounded.*

The heroes of RCT-5 responded with discipline and efficiency, as they evacuated the casualties, and restored the checkpoint.