

THE WAR ON TERROR

Edited by R. R. Keene



Marines with 81 mm Mortar Plt, Wpns/1/6 fire on an enemy position on the outskirts of Marjah on Feb. 13 at the start of Operation Moshtarak. Leathernecks in Companies A and B, 1/6 inserted into Marjah at night by helicopters, taking aim at routing the Taliban from their last-known stronghold in Helmand province.

OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM **■ Operation Moshtarak** **Clearing Operations Begin** **In Central Helmand**

Key military clearing operations involving 15,000 coalition forces led by 5,000 U.S. Marines on Operation Moshtarak began in the central part of Afghanistan's Helmand province, Afghan government officials announced Feb. 13.

Officials said the goal of Operation

Moshtarak—a Dari word for “together”—is for the combined force to support the Afghan government in asserting its authority in central Helmand and demonstrating its commitment to the people living there. The clearing operations follow smaller-scaled shaping operations that have helped to set the conditions for this new phase, officials said.

The combined force is made up of the Afghan National Army, Afghan National

Police, International Security Assistance Force Regional Command South and the Helmand provincial reconstruction team. Marine units involved include 2d Battalion, Second Marine Regiment; 1/3; 1/6; 3/6; 2d Combat Engineer Bn and Marine Aircraft Group 40. U.S. Army units from 4th Stryker Brigade and the 82nd Airborne Division also participated.

The operations were designed to clear the region of insurgents and set the conditions for the Afghan government to introduce increased security, stability, rule of law, development, freedom of movement and reconstruction, officials said.

The first wave of action saw an air insertion Feb. 13 over central Helmand and included helicopters, A-10s, Tornados and C-130 Hercules aircraft. The waves of aircraft-borne Afghan National Army (ANA), United States and United Kingdom military personnel were inserted by 5:55 a.m., local time.

Later, at least two *shuras*, or consultations, were held with local Afghans—one in Nadi-Ali and one in Marjah. The ANA met with Afghans and established themselves on the ground. More *shuras* were held in the days that followed.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, the U.N. World Food Program, the World Health Organization and local non-governmental organizations reported that there has been no increase in local Afghans leaving Nadi-Ali as a result of the operation.

Operations continued Feb. 14, with combined Afghan and international forces conducting a number of mounted and dismounted patrols, military officials reported. Forces engaged in periodic small-arms fire-fights. A number of insurgents were either killed or detained, officials said, and the combined force has suffered some injuries.

Afghan and International Security Assistance Force troops found improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and enemy weapons' stockpiles. In Task Force Helmand, an engineer maneuver group has cleared minefields and built a bridge over the Nahr-e Baughra Canal.

A combined Afghan-international force



Above: Leathernecks in B/1/6 return fire Feb. 13 in Marjah during Operation Moshtarak. Marines had nearly cleared all Taliban resistance by the end of February. (Photo by LCpl James Clark)

Below: A patrol from 3d Plt, 1/3/6, working with Afghan National Army soldiers, discovers a large cache of IED-making material, which they later detonated.





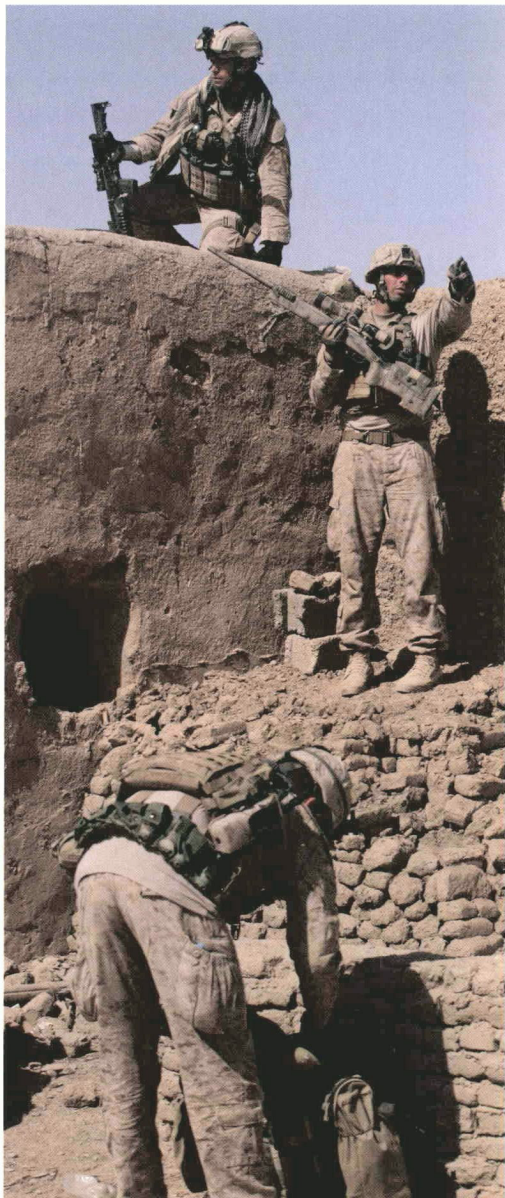
LCPL TOMMY BELLEGARDE

Above: Scout sniper LCpl Mark Trent, 3d Plt, 1/3/6, sights in to do his part Feb. 16 during counterinsurgency operations in Marjah.

Below: An emergency medical evacuation helicopter flies to the assistance of wounded Marines and Afghan soldiers Feb. 13 during Operation Moshtarak.



LCPL JAMES CLARK



Third Plt, 1/3/6 set up security positions inside a compound in Marjah on Feb. 16 after clearing it of IEDs. By the end of February, Taliban forces were either killed or forced elsewhere and no longer intimidated local residents. (Photo by LCpl Tommy Bellegarde)

on the night of Feb. 14 captured a Taliban commander responsible for small-arms ambushes and IED attacks against Afghan and coalition troops in Kandahar province. He also has been involved in illegal Taliban prosecutions of Afghan citizens, officials said.

Also in Kandahar the same night, a combined force captured a Taliban sub-commander responsible for IED placements and attacks and the movement of supplies and weapons. The force also detained another suspected insurgent.

On Feb. 17, Governor Gulab Mangal traveled to Marjah to observe Operation Moshtarak. During his visit, an Afghan flag was raised over the town, and the governor met with some of the combined-force military personnel who are conducting counterinsurgency operations. Subsequently, the governor traveled to Camp Bastion to visit with injured civilians from Marjah. Deputy District Governor Haji Zahir, three Marjah elders and several members of the local Afghan media accompanied him.

Mangal held a *shura* to discuss the security situation in Nadi-Ali to present his plans for the way ahead, and local support for the operation continues. In Marjah, some insurgents are reportedly leaving the area, although a number of enemy fighters remain and continue to engage Afghan and ISAF forces in direct combat. Combined forces have taken control of some key areas, and efforts to control insurgent movement have been relatively successful.

Compiled from Office of the Secretary of Defense
Public Affairs, ISAF Joint Command releases
and media reports

Leathernecks Fight Insurgents, Secure Key Intersection

Leathernecks of Company C, 1st Battalion, Third Marine Regiment battled Taliban insurgents Feb. 9, four days before the start of Operation Moshtarak, and conducted a successful helicopter-borne assault to seize a key intersection east of the insurgent stronghold city of Marjah.

The Marines, some carrying more than their body weight in gear, moved toward the center of an area known as "Five Points," an intersection of major roads in western Helmand province, located between the cities of Marjah and Nawa. Afghan National Army (ANA) soldiers joined the Marines on the assault.

"I felt the assault went well," said Captain Stephan P. Karabin, Commanding Officer, C/1/3. "We got in quickly, under the cover of darkness, on the helicopters, moved into position, set everything in place and were able to seize the objective. This area is important because it's the one



intersection which links northern Marjah ... to [eastern Helmand province] and it blocks that supply route.

"Marines did their job well, and some engaged with the enemy for the first time in this deployment," said Karabin.

The Five Points intersection and surrounding area also is part of the main route from Marjah to Lashkar Gah, the Helmand provincial capital, said Karabin. "These roads are very important to our movement within the area of operations."

Not long after Marines established defensive positions they observed Taliban fighters approaching from Marjah. The Taliban saw the Marines and immediately

began firing their machine guns. Marines and ANA soldiers fired back with heavy machine guns, rockets and small-arms fire, wounding and killing several Taliban fighters, forcing them to flee.

Marines took the brief respite to fortify their fighting positions.

"While we were reinforcing our position on a roof, we came under fire again," said Sergeant Stephen Y. Roberts, an assault section leader for Weapons Platoon, "Charlie" Co. "It was three or four of the same fighters we had seen firing at us earlier."

Roberts responded to the enemy machine-gun fire by launching a Javelin



Capt Stephan P. Karabin, CO, C/1/3, radios directions to his Marines from a rooftop during a Feb. 9 firefight at "Five Points," a key road intersection linking the northern part of Marjah with the rest of Helmand province.



A Wpns Plt, C/1/3 leatherneck sprints past a heavy machine gun as the gun crew readies for action against Taliban insurgents Feb. 9 at the "Five Points" intersection in Marjah. (Photo by Sgt Brian A. Tuthill)

shoulder-fired missile into the position where the firing came from, immediately silencing the heavy machine gun. Marine AH-1 Cobra attack helicopters followed Roberts' fire to launch a volley of heavy machine-gun fire and rockets, putting an end to the engagement.

Charlie Co was joined at Five Points that evening by squads of Marines from Bravo Co who hiked nine kilometers from Nawa while sweeping for and clearing improvised explosive devices along the road linking the two locations.

Sgt Brian A. Tuthill
Combat Correspondent, RCT-7

Engineers Survive Marjah Blast, Provide Bridges and Fire Support for 1/6

Engineers of Company A, 2d Combat Engineer Battalion worked tirelessly from early morning to mid-afternoon Feb. 11, building makeshift bridges over canals to provide a route for Marines and vehicles to enter the known Taliban stronghold of Marjah.

The Marines had just boarded their vehicles when a loud explosion erupted from behind one of their trucks.

Mud chunks fell like rain, but no Marines were hurt.

"The blast made my heart jump. It was a reality check," said Sergeant Jonathan

J. Sanabria, an "Alpha" Co truckmaster. Marines surveyed the scene to find nothing but mud houses and Afghan goat herders. It appeared the insurgent attack had been only a single improvised explosive device. Alpha Co continued forward but halted as enemy shots rang out.

The attack was coming from a mud building in the north and was directed to-

ward leathernecks of 1st Bn, Sixth Marine Regiment. The Alpha Co engineers moved into position to provide security and assistance.

"We are all here for the same reason. It doesn't matter who they are or where they come from. You just come together; you might not even know the guy shooting next to you, but you make sure he's good-



Members of Co A, 2d CEB construct a makeshift bridge over a Marjah canal as 1/6 leathernecks stand by to enter the Taliban stronghold.

to-go. It's camaraderie. We're here for them and they're here for you," said Corporal James A. Pabey, an Alpha Co motor transport operator. Several MK19 40 mm machine guns and 60 mm mortar rounds were fired into the mud compound for approximately an hour until the insurgent threat was eliminated.

"I could see them leaving once the mortar rounds started hitting the building," said Cpl Khristopher T. McKinzie, an engineer machine-gunner.

With the bridge construction completed and the firefight over, Alpha Co's mission was done. Still, they chose to remain posted near the route, just in case their engineering skills or assistance might be needed for the fight in Marjah.

"If something was to go down, I'd be on it like white on rice. That's how prepared I am," said Cpl Alton S. Floyd, a wrecker operator. "This mission was a success. It allowed everyone that needed to come through to get through with no problems."

LtCpl Walter Marino
Combat Correspondent, RCT-7

Corpsmen Save Injured Afghan Girl

In Marjah, when shrapnel struck a 4-year-old Afghan girl named Azerha, her brother Quassiam approached a group of armed Marines and asked them for medical assistance.

He drove his sister east from near the city of Marjah toward an intersection known as "Five Points," a key intersection of roads connecting northern Marjah with the eastern areas of Helmand province. Leathernecks of Company C, 1st Battalion, Third Marine Regiment had seized the Five Points area during a helicopter-borne assault.

Azerha had been struck in the chest by a metal fragment from an improvised explosive device made with 82 mm mortar rounds, which detonated near her home. Navy corpsmen examined her and began to stabilize her for a medical evacuation.

"When the car came and I approached the vehicle, I saw the blood coming from her chest," said Hospital Corpsman First Class Eric E. Casasflores, assigned to "Charlie" Co. "I could see there was a small wound where something had penetrated. Once we put the dressing on, she began having more trouble breathing, and I determined we needed to medevac her."

While waiting inside the walls of a farming compound for a helicopter to arrive, corpsmen who were treating Azerha found that her lung was beginning to collapse. Casasflores, the senior corpsman on scene, decided they had to act quickly to stabilize their patient.

"Her vitals began to drop while we were waiting for the medevac, and we had to



Quassiam holds his 4-year-old sister, Azerha, as corpsmen with 1/3 tend to her shrapnel wounds from an IED. Azerha later was flown to a medical trauma facility and is expected to make a full recovery.

do a needle decompression," said Casasflores. "She wasn't bleeding very badly, but with almost any trauma to the chest, you have to do a needle decompression [to allow the lung to expand again]."

"She took it extremely well for a small child," said HM3 Adam E. Neep with Weapons Co. Once the needle was in, Azerha began to breathe easier, and she and her brother seemed to relax. As Azerha began to stabilize in the open field, the corpsmen decided to move her back into their compound's aid station.

Only minutes before the helicopter's arrival, Azerha's vitals began to wane again, and Casasflores decided to perform a second decompression. Azerha winced at the momentary pain of the needle, but quickly calmed down and her vital signs stabilized. As soon as the helicopter touched down, corpsmen rushed Azerha's litter for evacuation. Quassiam joined his sister on the flight and remained with her throughout her treatment.

"The quick reaction from the Marines and corpsmen and getting her the medevac was what made the difference for her," said Casasflores after the helicopter lifted off.

Navy medical officers report that they performed surgery on Azerha upon her arrival and removed a piece of shrapnel from near her heart. They expect her to make a full recovery.

Sgt Brian A. Tuthill
Combat Correspondent, RCT-7

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM ■ Camp Ramadi

Last Marine Operational Command Departs Iraq, Army Takes Over

During the past six years, thousands of Marines deployed to Al Anbar province, Iraq, the largest and once most volatile province in the country.

On Jan. 23, 2010, Major General Richard T. Tryon, Commanding General, II Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward), transferred authority for Al Anbar from United States Force-West to United States Division-Center, filled by the U.S. Army's 1st Armored Division. In a significant milestone in the drawdown of U.S. forces from Iraq, one of the four division-level units is departing without replacement, and Marine Corps deployments to Iraq come to an end.

In an unparalleled example of the successful partnerships Marines have shared with the Iraqi people during the past several years, a large gathering of Iraqi soldiers, police, sheiks and government officials joined U.S. military personnel for the transfer of authority ceremony at Camp Ramadi.

"It is an understatement to say that we have witnessed historic events this year in Iraq, and today's ceremony is certainly an example of continued positive change as we transition and consolidate U.S. forces," said MajGen Tryon.

Although the ceremony focused on the fruitfulness of the Marines' mission in Iraq, MajGen Tryon stressed that their success would not have been possible without the efforts of the Iraqi people.

"These gains have not been accomplished over the course of the last several years because of what U.S. forces have done alone, nor have they been accomplished because of what the security forces from Iraq have done; rather, these achievements are a result of what we have done together, in partnership with one another and with the leadership of the Iraqi civil sector.

"As the Marines complete their mission in Anbar, we are grateful ... for the many strong friendships we have forged," said MajGen Tryon. "We wish the people of Anbar and Iraq peace and prosperity."

Cpl Meg Murray
Combat Correspondent, MNF-West

