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V CORPS IN THE COMBAT PHASE OF OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM: SOME NOTES AND A SUMMARY

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The V Corps mission:

The United States Army's V Corps, based in Heidelberg, Germany and commanded by Lt. Gen. William Scott Wallace, delivered the main attack for U.S. Central Command and the Combined Forces Land Component Command during Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003. Fighting on the corps' right flank during the war were U.S. Marines of I Marine Expeditionary Force.

V Corps units:

V Corps commanded the following major units during the war (units that are permanently assigned under V Corps are denoted with an asterisk *):

UNIT

V Corps Headquarters & Headquarters Company*
V Corps Special Troops Battalion (Provisional)*

3rd Infantry Division (Mechanized)
101st Airborne Division (Air Assault)
82nd Airborne Division (-)
4th Infantry Division (Mechanized)
3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment
2nd Cavalry Regiment (Light)
173rd Airborne Brigade

3rd Corps Support Command*
V Corps Artillery*
 41st Field Artillery Brigade*
 214th Field Artillery Brigade
 17th Field Artillery Brigade
11th Aviation Regiment (Attack)*
12th Aviation Brigade*

HOME STATION

Heidelberg, Germany
Heidelberg, Germany

Fort Stewart, Ga.
Fort Campbell, Ky.
Fort Bragg, N.C.
Fort Hood, Texas
Fort Carson, Colo.
Fort Polk, La.
Vicenza, Italy

Wiesbaden, Germany
Schwetzingen, Germany
Babenhausen, Germany
Fort Sill, Okla.
Fort Sill, Okla.
Illesheim, Germany
Giebelstadt, Germany

18th Military Police Brigade*
18th Personnel Group
22nd Signal Brigade*
30th Medical Brigade*
31st Air Defense Artillery Brigade
130th Engineer Brigade*
205th Military Intelligence Brigade*

Mannheim, Germany
Fort Bragg, N.C.
Darmstadt, Germany
Heidelberg, Germany
Fort Bliss, Texas
Hanau, Germany
Wiesbaden, Germany

The 1st Armored Division, a permanently assigned V Corps unit based in Wiesbaden, Germany, came under V Corps command by the time V Corps captured Baghdad.

While other V Corps units were deploying to Southwest Asia, the 1st Infantry Division completed a brigade rotation in the NATO Kosovo Force and deployed units to Turkey to facilitate the movement of the 4th Infantry Division through Turkish base areas and then into northern Iraq. Eventually, when it became clear that the 4th Infantry Division would enter battle through southern Iraq, the 1st Infantry Division units in Turkey returned to Germany, where the entire division prepared itself for movement to Iraq.

Meanwhile, the 69th Air Defense Artillery Brigade of V Corps and one of its battalions deployed units to Israel and to northern Iraq to guard against the possibility of Iraqi Scud missile attack there.

Summary of the operation:

Between March 19 and May 1, the Victory Corps conducted the longest and fastest armored assault in the history of warfare, thrusting from the Kuwaiti border into the center of Baghdad, a straight-line distance of 540 kilometers, in only 16 days of fighting. Along the way, V Corps units encountered virtually every conceivable style of conventional battle. Fighting ranged from meeting engagements with heavy forces of the Iraqi army and Republican Guard, to sharp guerrilla-like encounters with non-uniformed paramilitary groups. That fight involved not only the leading combat elements of the corps but also units of every type, along lines of communications that ultimately spanned a distance equivalent to that from the Normandy beaches to the Rhine River, which V Corps spanned between June and late September of 1944.

Reacting calmly to changing circumstances in Iraq, soldiers displayed remarkable adaptability by finding new tactics, techniques, and procedures to cope successfully with the style of battle Saddam Hussein's forces offered, and then surprising the



SGT AMY ABBOTT

In the V Corps command post in Kuwait, corps Commander Lt. Gen. William Wallace (foreground) studies developments as combat begins on March 20, 2003. In the background are corps Chief of Staff Brig. Gen. Daniel Hahn (left) and Deputy Chief of Staff Col. David Brown.

enemy by their use of armor in urban warfare. However heavy the fighting, Victory Corps soldiers tempered the violence of their attacks where necessary and never lost sight of their purpose of liberating Iraq from a tyrannical government. Combat soldiers turned in an instant from fighting to offering humanitarian aid when that was called for. As Lt. Gen. William S. Wallace, the corps commander, put it, soldiers quickly “found a way to strike a balance between giving out Band-Aids and kicking down doors.” From beginning to end, V Corps’ Operation Cobra II was a bravura performance.



SGT IGOR PAUSTOVSKI

Soldiers of the 3rd Infantry Division under V Corps command take up firing positions along a road during an enemy approach on their position in southern Iraq March 25, 2003.

In the course of fighting that took place in demanding and difficult terrain and under terrible weather conditions that included one of the worst sandstorms in recent memory, V Corps and its units defeated the 11th Infantry Division of the Iraqi Regular Army; crushed the Medina Republican Guard Division, the Hammurabi Republican Guard Division, and elements of the Adnan Republican Guard Division; defeated the Baghdad Republican Guard Division; and annihilated many thousands of irregular and paramilitary forces. Numbers of enemy casualties can only be estimated, but certainly were in the tens of thousands.

Entering Baghdad, V Corps decisively defeated the Iraqi armed forces and toppled the regime of Saddam Hussein. Upon the end of major unit operations, V Corps formed Coalition Joint Task Force-7 (later to become Multi-National Force-Iraq and Multi-National Corps-Iraq), based in Baghdad, and continued military operations to pacify the remainder of Iraq and begin reconstruction of the country along with the creation of democratic institutions.

Detailed Progress of the Battle:

The war began on the morning of March 21, 2003 when U.S. Central Command’s two corps — V Corps to the west and I Marine Expeditionary Force to the east — crossed the line of departure. The designated main effort of the coalition, V Corps launched its attack across the frontier berms that morning, leading with the 3rd Infantry Division, followed by the 101st Airborne Division.



SGT AMY ABBOTT

Soldiers with the V Corps headquarters struggle with a blinding sandstorm as the unit convoys into Iraq March 25 or 26, 2003.

The opening maneuver was a strike toward Tallil, where it captured the airfield and Euphrates River crossing sites. Continuing the advance on March 22-23, the divisions moved forward in heavy fighting toward An Najaf, securing Objective Raiders, near Al Hillah, on the afternoon of March 23. In that phase of the operation, the boundary between V Corps and I Marine Expeditionary Force shifted to allow the Marines to use the Highway 1 bridge over the Euphrates River that 3rd Infantry Division had seized.

At that point, the corps was poised outside the key terrain of the Karbala Gap which, when taken, would give access to Baghdad. On the night of March 23, the corps' 11th Aviation Regiment conducted a deep attack into the Karbala Gap to destroy artillery and armor of the 14th Mechanized Brigade of the Medina Division. By the next morning, operations maps showed that V Corps elements had moved 220 miles in three days, but further major attacks and all flying were halted on March 24 by a three-day sandstorm that limited visibility to less than 100 meters. Minor offensive operations continued to retain the initiative, but Wallace

took advantage of the pause to consolidate the 3rd Infantry Division around Objective Rams near An Najaf and prepare it for further attacks as soon as the weather lifted. Seeking to improve his logistics stance, Wallace ordered the corps to accumulate five days of supplies and replenishment convoys from the corps' 3rd Corps Support Command painfully moved forward in the appalling weather over the lengthening Lines Of Communication (logistics routes) stretching back to Kuwait.

It was during that period that one of the most important operational decisions was reached. Early on March 26, Gen. David McKiernan, the CFLCC commander, released the 82nd Airborne Division (-) to V Corps control. Immediately, Wallace assigned to that division the task of securing the main supply route, which had been under sporadic but more or less continuous attacks by the fanatic Fedayeen Saddam, irregular



IGNACIO 'IGGY' RUBALCAVA

Maj. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, then commander of V Corps' 1st Armored Division, addresses soldiers of the division's 2nd Brigade Combat Team about their upcoming deployment to Operation Iraqi Freedom, March 27, 2003. On May 23, 2003, Sanchez was confirmed by the U.S. Senate for promotion to major general and to replace Lt. Gen. William Wallace as V Corps commander. Sanchez assumed command of the corps on June 14, 2003.



SGT IGOR PAUSTOVSKI

A Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicle stands guard over the V Corps command post at Baghdad International Airport, April 8, 2003. At the time the facility still bore the name Saddam International Airport.



SPC DANIEL T. DARK

Soldiers from V Corps' 527th Military Police Company conduct a raid in downtown Baghdad on April 15, 2003, in search of illegal drugs and weapons in local shops.

forces that emerged from the towns V Corps had bypassed to harass the logistics convoys moving north. Having the 82nd Airborne Division to secure the LOCs meant that V Corps could send forward the 101st Airborne Division to clear the towns held by the 3rd Infantry Division and, in turn, prepare the 3rd Infantry Division for further attacks into the Karbala Gap. In effect, assignment of the 82nd Airborne Division to the LOC security mission allowed V Corps immediately to extend its operational reach into the Karbala Gap.

At the end of the storm, V Corps moved out briskly to continue the attack, making five simultaneous and related assaults that set the conditions for the eventual entry into Baghdad. Early on the morning of March 31, the 3rd Infantry Division attacked toward the Euphrates River to seize a bridge between Al Hillah and Karbala and pushed its 3rd Squadron, 7th Cavalry, into the Karbala Gap, while repositioning its other two brigades to attack through the gap and toward Baghdad. At the same time, the 101st Airborne Division conducted a demonstration from Objective Jenkins toward Al

Hillah and the 82nd Airborne Division attacked into As Samawah. Meanwhile, the 101st Airborne Division conducted an armed reconnaissance to the west. Those five actions began at 0300 and soon obliged the Iraqis to react by moving the Republican Guard into what the V Corps staff believed was its final defensive positions in front of Baghdad.

Wallace's intent had been an attack to retain the initiative and prevent the Iraqi defenses from consolidating in front of the corps. The effect, however, was serendipitous. The Iraqi commander evidently believed that the series of corps attacks constituted a main effort from west to east across the Euphrates to gain Highway 8, allowing at that point a turn northward into Baghdad. In fact, such was never the V Corps intention, but the effect of the attacks was to draw out and decisively engage the major formations standing between V Corps and the Iraqi capital. Major Iraqi troop movements in response to the V Corps maneuver set up operational fires, which in turn set up decisive



SPC DANIEL T. DARK

As V Corps begins to shift toward performing more sustainment and humanitarian efforts in Iraq, Soldiers from the corps' 30th Medical Brigade deliver medical supplies for Baghdad Children's Hospital, April 15, 2003.



PFC BRANDON R. AIRD

Soldiers assigned to the 1st Battalion, 63rd Armor of V Corps' 1st Infantry Division set up a security perimeter in Kirkuk, Iraq, April 18, 2003.

the verge of collapse. The corps noted little movement by Iraqi units and remarked on the enemy's inability to coordinate anything larger than platoon-level counterattacks. At the same time, the staff observed great numbers of Republican Guard soldiers deserting their positions. On the other hand, attacks by the Fedayeen Saddam and other irregular formations continued with great ferocity, although with little coordination and with no success. The seizure of the Baghdad International Airport was followed on April 6-7 by the incursion of the 2nd Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division, into Baghdad itself. That successful armed reconnaissance into the city by heavy forces convinced commanders that the division could return to the city to stay. Thus on April 7, attacks by the 3rd Infantry Division seized the Presidential Palace and government buildings and established a permanent presence in the heart of Baghdad. By that point, the heaviest of the fighting was over and V Corps began to transition to the tasks of establishing security and normalcy for the Iraqi people.

maneuver over the next two days. In essence, the Iraqi forces all began moving, in daylight, in the wrong direction and became both trapped by V Corps divisions and exposed to daylight attack by the U.S. Air Force. Moreover, their lines of communication to the south were severed, preventing reinforcement of Iraqi forces in contact with other V Corps units. It was the tipping point of the campaign, and only 48 hours later, V Corps units began to invest Saddam Hussein's capital city.

By April 3-4, the encirclement of Baghdad was well under way and regular Iraqi forces appeared to be on



U.S. ARMY PHOTO

A convoy carries the V Corps main command post into Baghdad, April 26, 2003. The trip involved moving the headquarters in more than 400 vehicles under combat and extreme desert conditions.

