



# SMALL WARS JOURNAL

smallwarsjournal.com

## The Road to Al Amarah:

### Operation Yarborough and U.S. Army Special Forces in Southern Iraq (January – June 2008)

by Duane L. Mosier

Stability in Iraq and the overall outcome of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM were in question during the spring and summer of 2007 as the “Surge,” the offensive campaign implemented by Gen. David Petraeus, was taking root. Coalition casualties peaked in 2007 with 961 fatalities in Iraq (up from 872 the previous year) as the coalition focused on the Sunni insurgency in Baghdad, the north, and west of Iraq.<sup>1</sup> As a result of the coalition focus, the majority of Surge related brigades were centered on or near the dense population center of Baghdad leaving few available forces to monitor southern Iraq.

One battalion headquarters along with one and a half companies from the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) were used as the economy of force effort in the south during the fall of 2007 through the summer of 2008. These elements were to fill the void created by the limited conventional coalition presence. Multiple decentralized twelve man elements of Green Berets known as Special Forces Operational Detachments – Alpha (ODAs) or “A-teams” were



Figure 1: Members of An Nasiriyah ISWAT prepare to conduct a raid with their partnered trainers and advisors, ODA 5331

positioned throughout the south to enable a core of Iraqi security force partners. ODA 5331 was one of these elements. The detachment was partnered with the city of An Nasiriyah and the Iraqi Special Weapons and Tactics Unit which was the 600 man backbone of regional security for the greater Dhi Qar provincial area. It was with these men and others like them, that American Green Berets worked to overcome violent events that would grip southern Iraq in early 2008. Ultimately, the violent conditions across southern Iraq led Special Forces Soldiers to create and execute a large scale campaign to address the militant safe haven city of Al Amarah. This is the story of that operation and how a small

number of Special Forces Soldiers and their Iraqi partners helped to change the operational landscape of southern Iraq between January and June 2008.

In early 2008, Jaysh Al-Mahdi-Special Groups (JAM-SG) worked hard to undermine the stability of southern Iraq through a clandestine campaign of subversion, intimidation, and assassination against citizens and key Iraqi leaders. The militia members, supplied and trained

<sup>1</sup> See [www.icasualties.org](http://www.icasualties.org) for full statistics.

by Iran, operated freely throughout the south despite the quasi-cease fire ordered by the Mahdi Army leader, Muqtada Al-Sadr.<sup>2</sup>

During this period, the four most southern Iraqi provinces of Maysan, Dhi Qar, Muthanna, and Basra were under Iraqi control with one British brigade located at Basra Air Station as the overwatch authority in the region. The British element was augmented by one Australian battalion located at Tallil Air Base 15 kilometers southwest of An Nasiriyah in Dhi Qar Province. The Australian battalion, known as Overwatch Battle Group-West, possessed overwatch responsibility for Muthanna and Dhi Qar provinces, while the British brigade retained overwatch responsibility for Basra Province.<sup>3</sup> Tallil Air Base was also home to the headquarters and support battalion of the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division. The brigade was assigned the mission of theater security for all convoys running from Kuwait throughout Iraq and possessed no operational authority in southern Iraq beyond the main highway that transited the region.<sup>4</sup>

British forces turned Maysan Province over to Iraqi control and withdrew all coalition presence from that region in April, 2007.<sup>5</sup> Since that time, JAM-SG personnel had dominated the capital city of Al Amarrah and maintained tight fist control of Maysan Province. Iranian lethal aid freely flowed across the Iran-Iraq border into Al Amarrah and moved deeper into Iraq from

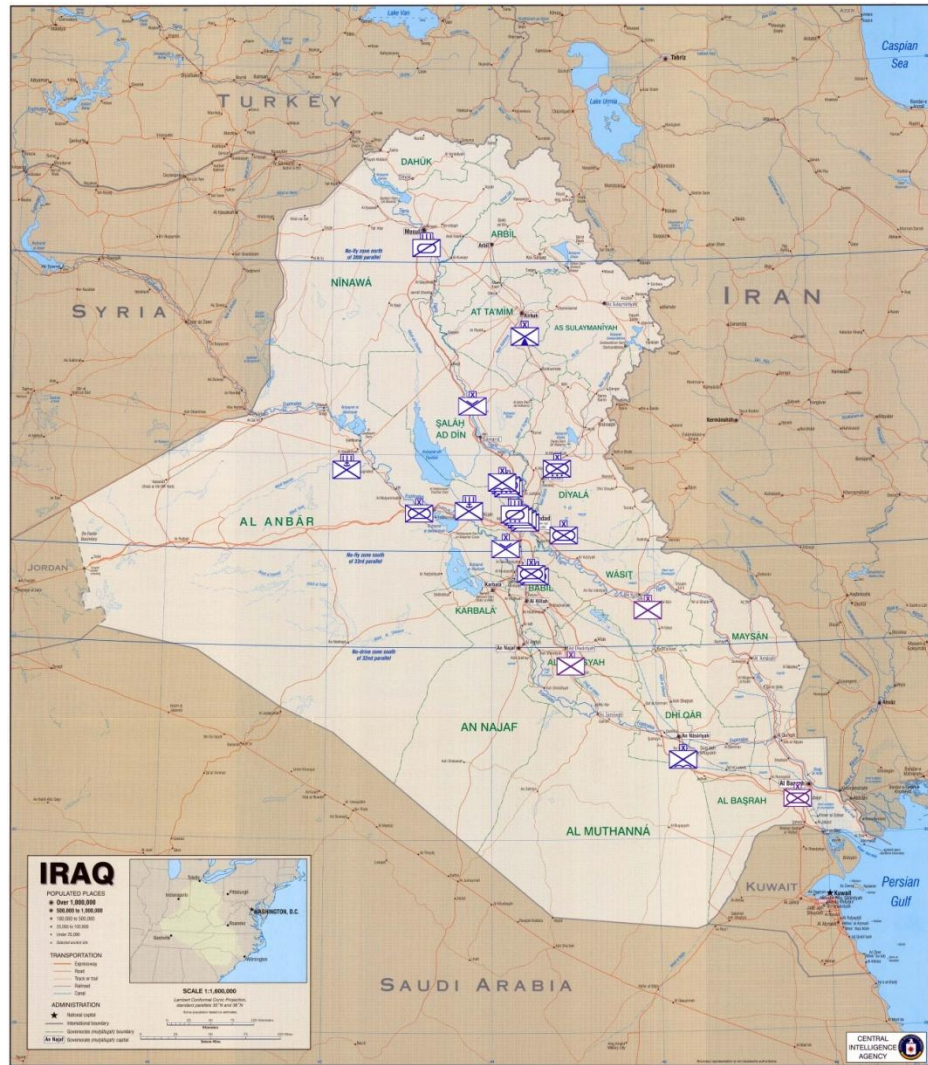


Figure 2: January 2008 locations of coalition brigade headquarters in Iraq

<sup>2</sup> LTC Mark Grdovic, SOF Advisor to MNF-I during OIF V, CJSOTF-AP, comments to ODA 5331 15 November 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Detachment Commander Comments, ODA 5331, SITREP 5331-103, 03 February 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Detachment Commander Comments, ODA 5331, SITREP 5331-103, 03 February 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Multi-National Corps-Iraq, Public Affairs Office, *Maysan Security Now In Iraqi Hands*, (Camp Sparrowhawk, Iraq, 27 April 2007).



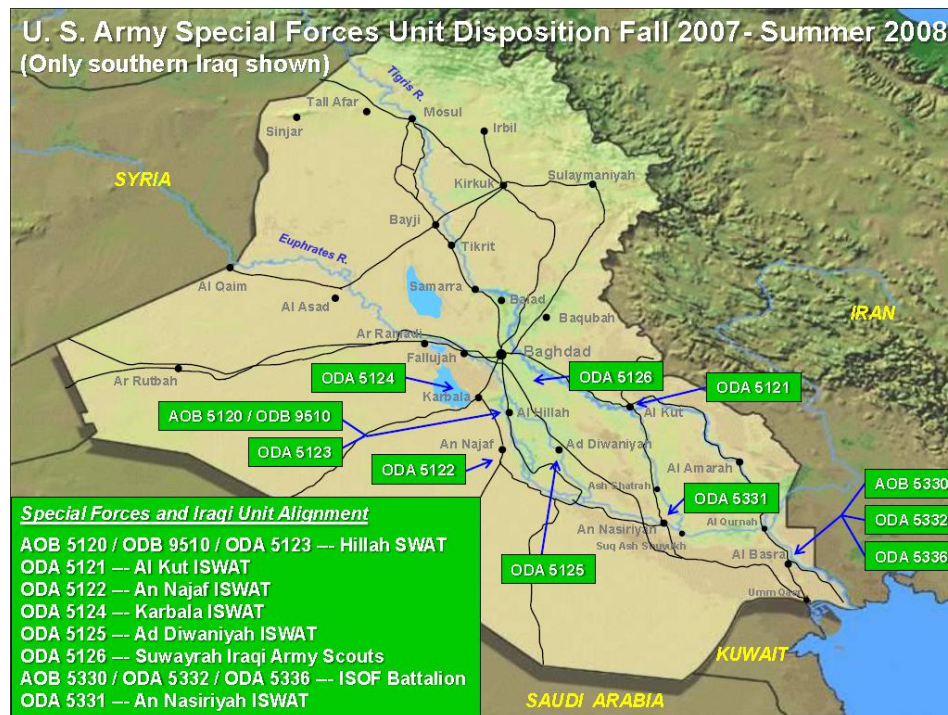
that city.<sup>6</sup> Multi-National Forces-Iraq all but conceded Maysan as the coalition focus remained fixed on Baghdad and Sunni areas of Iraq.

The early 2008 political environments in Great Britain and Australia were not supportive of military operations in Iraq. The British Prime Minister was meeting with much anti-war debate in Parliament, and the Australian Prime Minister was newly elected on an anti-war platform focused on withdrawing Australian troops from Iraq.<sup>7</sup> Zero tolerance for casualties existed within the governments of Great Britain and Australia which required their forces to operate cautiously and avoid involvement in activities that could lead to casualties.

The political environments in each of these allied countries created the need in Dhi Qar, Maysan, and Basra provinces for coalition assets that could facilitate Iraqi success on a strategic scale while maintaining a small footprint that would not overshadow Iraqi personnel numbers.

### ***Special Forces Elements in Southern Iraq***

The highest level of United States Army Special Forces command in Iraq during 2007/2008 was Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force – Arabian Peninsula (CJSOTF-AP) headquartered in Balad. Subordinate to that headquarters was the Special Forces battalion known as Special Operations Task Force – Central (SOTF-C) headquartered in Baghdad. SOTF-C commanded all Special Forces personnel in southern Iraq. The commanders and staff members of these two commands accurately assessed the needs of southern Iraq and placed their elements in strategic locations throughout the south.<sup>8</sup> The placement of these elements would prove invaluable throughout the turbulent events about to unfold in early 2008.



<sup>6</sup> Farook Ahmed and Marisa Cochrane, *Recent Operations Against Special Groups and JAM in Central and Southern Iraq*, Backgrounder #27, (Institute for the Study of War, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Nu'man Abd Wahid, *The Poppycoc of the British Anti-war Movement*, (Arab Media Watch, 05 March 2008); Tony Iltis, *Rudd Vindicates Anti-war Movement – Bring All The Troops Home*, (Green Leaf Weekly, 07 June 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Special Operations Task Force-Central, *D-60 Brief*, 04 September 2007.

The twelve man Special Forces “A-teams” were put in place to act in the event crisis erupted and the environment required a low signature element capable of acting as the nucleus of Iraqi command and control while executing precision operations with and through Iraqi partners. The well thought-out positioning of Special Forces elements in cities within southern Iraq guaranteed that these assets were in place to act when the British and Australian overwatch units could not as a result of their political constraints. Further, the positioning of elements in southern Iraq provided CJSOTF-AP and SOTF-C the required assets to execute Operation YARBOROUGH when the time and need arrived.<sup>9</sup>

### *Opportunity Amid Chaos*

The coalition desperately needed a connection or relationship with Iraqi elements in Maysan Province to counter the erosion of stability in the south as facilitated by Iranian trained JAM-SG militants basing out of Al Amarah. The break sought by coalition leaders would come as a result of a crisis that erupted in An Nasiriyah 18-19 January 2008.

At approximately 2:00 p.m. on January 18, 2008, 200 members of the Soldiers of Heaven religious cult launched a series of widespread attacks within An Nasiriyah that included sniper support. These snipers killed four primary Iraqi Police commanders and wounded a fifth, with head shots all delivered in the first 15 minutes of the fight. Attacks were also launched in the city of Al Basra at approximately 2:15 p.m. by members of the same cult.<sup>10</sup>

SFOD-A 5331 entered the city of An Nasiriyah in the late afternoon of 18 January after receiving word that its partner Iraqi Special Weapons and Tactics (ISWAT) unit commander was killed. The Deputy ISWAT commander informed the ODA of the unfolding tragedy and requested immediate ODA support to rally his remaining policemen. The Australian OBG-W commander and 1st BCT, 82nd ABN commander offered Quick Reaction Force support to the ODA (rescue patrols to be used if things went badly for the ODA, requiring extraction) and moved to stage their available elements just south of the city fringe of An Nasiriyah. They would



*Figure 4: Col. Naji Rostum Sahra (aka Abu Liqa) An Nasiriyah ISWAT Commander, KIA January 18, 2008. ODA 5331 reported that he was a strong and effective commander. He was firm but universally kind and highly respected by the citizens of Dhi Qar Province.*

<sup>9</sup> Note: A deployed Special Forces battalion headquarters is known as a SOTF, a company is an Advanced Operations Base (AOB) which usually commands six “A-teams” each known as an Operational Detachment Alpha (ODA). Special Forces elements are designed to operate under decentralized command and control deep within denied territory. They are semi-self sufficient entities capable of developing nascent guerrilla forces within a local population and lead or advise those forces in the execution of an insurgency. Special Forces elements are well suited to conduct counterinsurgency because they understand how insurgent forces, cellular networks, and supporting infrastructure operate. Special Forces Soldiers can live among the population, develop local security forces to defend citizens, and create elite strike forces capable of conducting offensive operations that target insurgent vulnerabilities. Generally, Special Forces “A-teams” are not tied to a specific piece of terrain allowing them to travel across conventional unit boundaries to engage enemy networks wherever the enemy travels, operates, or resides.

<sup>10</sup> ODA 5331 After Action Storyboard/Vignette, *An Nasiriyah Security Crisis*, 19 January 2008; Detachment Commander Comments, ODA 5331, SITREP 5331-092, 23 January 2008; Multi-National Corps – Iraq, Public Affairs Office, Press Release No. 20080122-09, *Iraqi Emergency Response Unit Reinforces Iraqi Security Forces in An Nasiriyah*, (Baghdad, Iraq, 22 January 2008); Al Arabiya News, *Iraqi Forces Crush Doomsday Cult*, (19 January 2008); Rose Kamau, *Police Raid Shiite Doomsday Cultists’ Hideout In Iraq*, (Kenya Broadcasting Corp., 19 January 2008); Voice of America News, *Shi’ite Sect, Iraqi Forces Clash in Basra; At least 5 Killed*, (VOA News, 18 January 2008); Campbell Robertson, *Iraq Hands Death Penalty to 28 Cultists for Attacks*, (New York Times, Baghdad, Iraq, 27 February 2009).

remain in this role for the duration of the 21 hours ODA 5331 spent in the city supporting Iraqi efforts to defeat the militant cult.<sup>11</sup>



*Figure 5: Abu Liqa's body is recovered and returned to the ISWAT compound in a makeshift coffin the night of 18/19 January 2008*

Upon arriving in the city and linking up with the ODA-partnered Nasiriyah ISWAT, ODA leaders assessed that all Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) were in disarray. The primary leadership of all Iraqi police organizations had been killed or wounded in the opening minutes of the battle, and absenteeism within the ranks of ISF units was rampant. Without leaders to guide them, ISF personnel had no means to coordinate a consolidation and reorganization of remaining forces in the city. The ODA had to temporarily fill the void left by the elimination of so many Iraqi leaders. The presence of ODA 5331 as the only on ground coalition unit within the city of 535,000 Iraqi citizens, supported by coalition aircraft overhead, would serve to turn the tide of the battle into Iraqi favor.<sup>12</sup>

The ISF Deputy commanders described the situation to ODA leaders as being desperate. The Dhi Qar provincial governor personally contacted ODA 5331 to state that coalition action was the only hope for saving lives within An Nasiriyah. The governor permitted the ODA to take any action necessary to regain control. He specifically requested that Close Air Support be immediately employed to destroy enemy concentrations and regain control of the security situation in the city. The ODA 5331 Detachment Commander told the governor that Close Air Support munitions were in short supply and that Iraqi forces would have to serve as the backbone of efforts to retake the city. It was explained that the ODA would serve as a Quick Reaction Force (QRF) for decisively engaged ISF elements in order to turn the tide in ISF favor in areas where the fight was in question.<sup>13</sup>

The ODA initially focused efforts on rallying remaining ISF personnel, triaging casualties, and rebuilding the ISF command structure so that a defense could be organized. ODA 5331 then concentrated on gathering Iraqi personnel to make a strike element capable of launching with the detachment during QRF missions deeper into the city.<sup>14</sup>

Throughout the night of January 18, the ODA launched multiple missions into the heart of An Nasiriyah to identify and organize fragmented Iraqi personnel and turn the tide of engagements into ISF favor. Once efforts to organize a defense were successful, the ODA transitioned focus to directing Iraqi offensive operations to regain control within the city. Each hour, the ranks of the ODA organized force grew as isolated pockets of Iraqi soldiers and police were found within the city. Urgent requests from the Dhi Qar provincial governor continued to pressure the ODA through the turbulent night. The governor requested, and at times directed, that the ODA immediately unleash the full fury of coalition air power. The detachment defused each request and used caution in the application of air delivered munitions to prevent unnecessary loss of life.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Detachment Commander Comments, ODA 5331, SITREP 5331-088, 19 January 2008.

<sup>12</sup> Detachment Commander Comments, ODA 5331, SITREP 5331-088, 19 January 2008.

<sup>13</sup> Detachment Commander Comments, ODA 5331, SITREP 5331-088, 19 January 2008.

<sup>14</sup> Detachment Commander Comments, ODA 5331, SITREP 5331-088, 19 January 2008.

<sup>15</sup> Detachment Commander Comments, ODA 5331, SITREP 5331-088, 19 January 2008.



At approximately 0235 on 19 January 2008, ODA leaders met with all remaining high level Iraqi security leaders in An Nasiriyah. The scene was complete chaos when the ODA Detachment Commander, Operations Sergeant, and Senior Weapons Sergeant arrived. Each ISF representative present emphatically stated he did not possess the forces necessary to retake the city.<sup>16</sup>

The ranking Iraqi commander in the meeting was Maj. Gen. Habib, the 10th Iraqi Army Division commander. Maj. Gen. Habib repeatedly asked the ODA members if the coalition was willing to take over the city in the event the Iraqi security forces “crumbled.” The ODA message, delivered calmly and consistently, was that the coalition did not possess the combat power that the Iraqi leaders possessed and that no coalition elements elsewhere in the country could arrive quickly enough to make a difference in this fight. The ODA stated that the battle must be won by Iraqi forces with the ODA and air power in support. The ODA Detachment Commander stated that the detachment had successfully rallied a sizeable force of Nasiriyah ISWAT and other ISF personnel and that this force could be used to turn the tide where needed.<sup>17</sup>



Figure 6: Maj. Gen. Habib, Commander, 10th Iraqi Army Division

Maj. Gen. Habib finally realized the task at hand would require the consolidated efforts of all Iraqi Army and police remaining in the city. The ISF leaders then began to plan while ODA members provided operational guidance and advice. The ISF leaders put together a comprehensive plan to seize the city one neighborhood at a time with the ODA and a four-vehicle contingent of the rallied Nasiriyah ISWAT acting as a Quick Reaction Force. The ODA with their rallied ISWAT members would launch into the heaviest fighting to support decisively engaged Iraqi forces and to guide air delivered munitions as required to win.<sup>18</sup>

For the first time in the recorded history of An Nasiriyah, the Army and police planned and acted together to secure the beleaguered city in time of crisis. By 6:00 a.m. on January 19, 2008, the plan was being executed with precision and the decisive leadership of Maj. Gen. Habib. All fighting in the city of Nasiriyah had ceased by that afternoon and the ODA redeployed to Tallil Air Base with the knowledge that a new friendship had been created amid the chaos.<sup>19</sup> The duration of the ODA deployment would involve the close friendship created in time of crisis between the detachment and Maj. Gen. Habib.

After the 18-19 January fight, it became obvious that Maj. Gen. Habib had gained great notoriety as a result of his actions and the friendship he now depended on with ODA 5331. In the coming weeks, the ODA learned that Maj. Gen. Habib had three brigades under his command. One brigade was in An Nasiriyah based at Camp Mittica adjacent to Tallil Air Base. One brigade was based in the capital city of Muthanna Province (Samawah). The most important command relationship however, resided with the brigade that Maj. Gen. Habib had based in Maysan

<sup>16</sup> ODA 5331 After Action Storyboard/Vignette, *An Nasiriyah Security Crisis*, 19 January 2008.

<sup>17</sup> Detachment Commander Comments, ODA 5331, SITREP 5331-088, 19 January 2008.

<sup>18</sup> ODA 5331 After Action Storyboard/Vignette, *An Nasiriyah Security Crisis*, 19 January 2008; Detachment Commander Comments, ODA 5331, SITREP 5331-088, 19 January 2008.

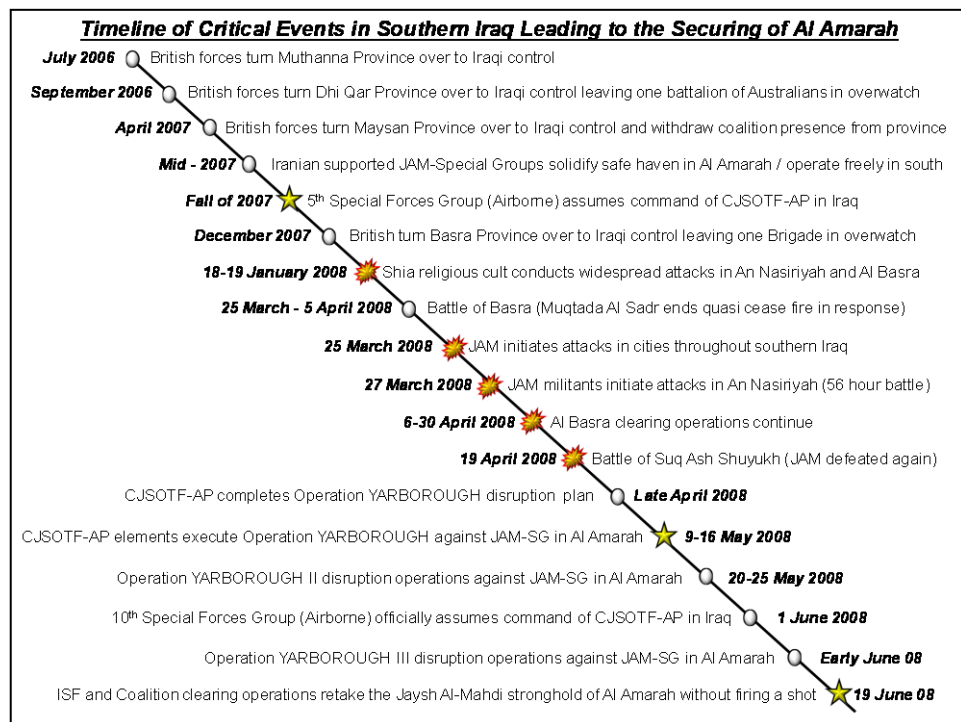
<sup>19</sup> ODA 5331 After Action Storyboard/Vignette, *An Nasiriyah Security Crisis*, 19 January 2008; Detachment Commander Comments, ODA 5331, SITREP 5331-088, 19 January 2008.

Province at Camp Sparrowhawk, just four kilometers southwest of Al Amarah.<sup>20</sup> The coalition now had the conduit through which operations could be conducted in Al Amarah.

### ***The Road to Yarborough***

The leaders of ODA 5331 met with Maj. Gen. Habib 2 February 2008. During the meeting, it was established that Maj. Gen. Habib was now the Prime Minister appointed Chief of Operations for all of Dhi Qar Province following his dedicated service during the January battle. His new role meant that he was the approving authority for all ODA advised ISWAT operations in the province. It was in this meeting that discussion began regarding the need to address JAM control of Al Amarah. Maj. Gen. Habib wanted to “clean that city out” and he believed the goal was finally possible now that he and his division had a relationship with U.S. Special Forces advisors.<sup>21</sup>

Planning took place through February and into March 2008, between ODA 5331 and Maj. Gen. Habib for operations in Al Amarah. During this period, interest gained momentum within CJSOTF-AP, Multi-National Corps-Iraq (MNC-I), and Multi-National Forces-Iraq (MNF-I) for operations that could retake Al Amarah and Maysan Province.



The building interest in conducting Al Amarah related operations was interrupted in late March 2008, when the Government of Iraq surprised coalition leaders by suddenly shifting Iraq’s national security focus to the port city of Al Basra. The Government of Iraq concluded that the rule of law had ceased to exist in the city. The Prime Minister of Iraq, Nouri Al-Maliki, flew to Al Basra on 24 March to personally assess the situation. Sensing that a strategic event was about to erupt, Gen. Petraeus directed CJSOTF-AP to send a small contingent to Al Basra to serve as his conduit of communication with Prime Minister Maliki. The contingent of Special Forces Soldiers was also tasked to report ground truth as events unfolded and provide the Prime Minister operational advice if a battle was to develop.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Detachment Commander Comments, ODA 5331, SITREP 5331-102, 02 February 2008.

<sup>21</sup> Detachment Commander Comments, ODA 5331, SITREP 5331-102, 02 February 2008; Detachment Commander Comments, ODA 5331, SITREP 5331-109, 09 February 2008.

<sup>22</sup> LTC Mark Grdovic, SOF Advisor to MNF-I during OIF V, CJSOTF-AP, interview, 22 October 2010.

Once Prime Minister Maliki witnessed the absence of security within Al Basra, he ordered an immediate assault by ISF to expel JAM and other militias controlling the port city. The Battle of Basra began in the early morning hours of 25 March 2008 and despite the sudden nature of the Iraqi assault, operations were initially well coordinated and successful.

Unfortunately, success was short lived as the lack of solid logistics planning began to take its toll over the first 72 hours of the fight. Iraqi units started to run low on all classes of supply and they possessed no medical evacuation or treatment capability. Cell phones served as the primary means for command and control and no back up plans were developed in case communications by cell phone went down. The offensive stalled by the close of the third day as Iraqi casualties mounted and reports of ISF desertion soared.<sup>23</sup> Iraqi units needed help and the only available coalition ground support would primarily come from U.S. Special Forces units.

Soon after the start of the Battle of Basra and into early April 2008, ODA 5332 and their partner force, the 6th Regional Iraqi Special Operations Force (ISOF), were sent into Basra City. Their presence bought time for other Iraqi Army units in the area to recover and refit following their failed attempt to take the city. The effort also enabled MNC-I to deploy one company of 1st BCT, 82nd ABN paratroopers to link-up with a conventional Iraqi Army unit in Al Basra several days into the battle.<sup>24</sup>

The Baghdad based Iraqi Emergency Response Unit and its partnered Special Forces personnel from ODA 9515 and members of ODB 9510 with Hillah SWAT moved into patrol bases within Al Basra in late March and remained in the region for the duration of operations to secure the city. AOB 5330 became the support element for all Special Forces operations in Al Basra and the command location of the forward deployed SOTF-C commander and staff. ODA 5332, with its partnered 6th ISOF Battalion, and ODA 9514, with a company from an ISOF battalion out of Baghdad, conducted Direct Action operations from Basra Air Station through the duration of April 2008.<sup>25</sup>

Every Special Forces element and each of the partnered Iraqi units engaged in heavy fighting during the Basra operations; however the turbulent fighting and tenuous nature of the situation left many battlefield casualty totals unrecorded. The operations credited to the members of ODA 5332 and their partnered Iraqi ISOF units were among the few to accurately capture casualty totals. Their operations resulted in 75 confirmed Enemy Killed in Action. Additionally, they captured 23 enemy combatants, three of whom were personalities named on the Prime Minister's Top Ten target list. ODA 5332 and the 6th ISOF were also credited with rescuing four captured Iraqi Army soldiers and two Iraqi Police officers before the close of operations to secure Basra.<sup>26</sup>

Operations associated to the Battle of Basra took place 25 March to 5 April 2008. Clearing operations to secure the port city following the battle took place under the name Operation Charge of the Knights between 6-30 April 2008.<sup>27</sup>

In the days following the launch of Al Basra operations, Muqtada Al Sadr's quasi cease fire shattered, propelling JAM to launch large scale attacks within multiple southern cities in

---

<sup>23</sup> LTC Mark Grdovic, SOF Advisor to MNF-I during OIF V, CJSOTF-AP, interview, 22 October 2010.

<sup>24</sup> CW3 Chad Klopfenstein, Assistant Detachment Commander, ODA 5332, interview, 16 February 2010.

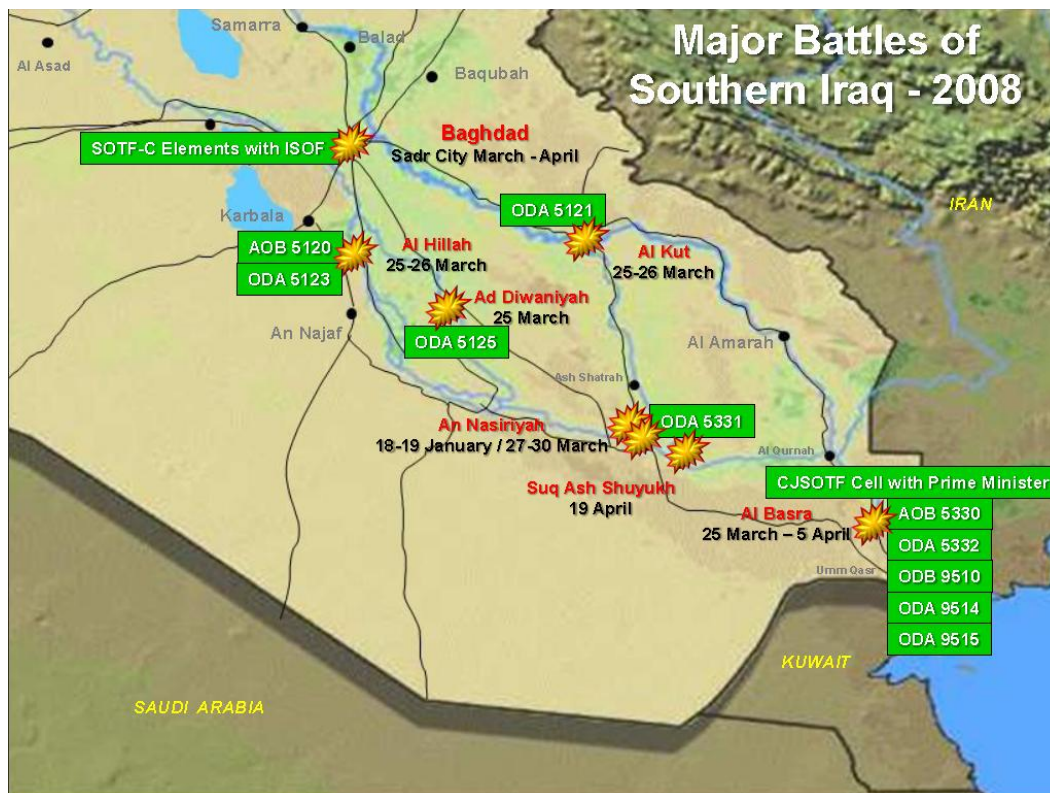
<sup>25</sup> CW3 Chad Klopfenstein, Assistant Detachment Commander, ODA 5332, interview, 16 February 2010.

<sup>26</sup> CW3 Chad Klopfenstein, Assistant Detachment Commander, ODA 5332, interview, 16 February 2010.

<sup>27</sup> CW3 Chad Klopfenstein, Assistant Detachment Commander, ODA 5332, interview, 16 February 2010.



retaliation for the Government of Iraq offensive.<sup>28</sup> Elements of JAM initiated violent attacks on 25 March 2008 within the cities of Al Hillah, Al Kut, and Ad Diwaniyah. On 27 March, JAM launched city wide attacks in An Nasiriyah.<sup>29</sup> In each of these cities, Special Forces personnel and their partnered Iraqi units fought to regain control and successfully repelled the violent militants. Special Forces members of AOB 5120 and ODA 5123 along with their partnered ISF personnel fought JAM to a standstill in two days of fighting in Al Hillah. In Al Kut, ODA 5121 and its Iraqi partners were also victorious after two days of fighting.<sup>30</sup> ODA 5125 and its partnered unit, Diwaniyah ISWAT, prevailed against JAM in one day of fighting.<sup>31</sup> In An Nasiriyah, ODA 5331 and its partnered ISWAT unit defeated JAM militants in a 56-hour battle.<sup>32</sup>



<sup>28</sup> Farook Ahmed and Marisa Cochrane, *Recent Operations Against Special Groups and JAM in Central and Southern Iraq*, Backgrounder #27, (Institute for the Study of War, 2008).

<sup>29</sup> MAJ Thomas Freiling, Detachment Commander during OIF V, ODA 5123, interview, 30 March 2010; ISG (Ret) Leo Kryszewski, Detachment Operations Sergeant during OIF V, ODA 5331, interview, 24 February 2010; Farook Ahmed and Marisa Cochrane, *Timeline of the Recent Violence in Central and Southern Iraq*, (Institute for the Study of War, 2008); Farook Ahmed and Marisa Cochrane, *Recent Operations Against Special Groups and JAM in Central and Southern Iraq*, Backgrounder #27, (Institute for the Study of War, 2008); ODA 5331 After Action Storyboard, *JAM-SG Fight, 5331-TST (27-31 March 2008 An Nasiriyah Security Crisis)*, 31 March 2008.

<sup>30</sup> MAJ Thomas Freiling, Detachment Commander during OIF V, ODA 5123, interview, 30 March 2010; SSG Mark Griffith, Detachment Intelligence Sergeant during OIF V, ODA 5121, interview, 30 March 2010; Multi-National Corps-Iraq, Public Affairs Office, Press Release No. 20080328-4, *Iraqi Security Forces, U.S. Special Forces Engage Criminal Elements In Hillah, Al-Kut*, (Balad, Iraq, 28 March 2008).

<sup>31</sup> Farook Ahmed and Marisa Cochrane, *Timeline of the Recent Violence in Central and Southern Iraq*, (Institute for the Study of War, 2008).

<sup>32</sup> ISG (Ret) Leo Kryszewski, Detachment Operations Sergeant during OIF V, ODA 5331, interview, 24 February 2010; Detachment Commander Comments, ODA 5331, SITREP 5331-160, 31 March 2008; ODA 5331 After Action Storyboard, *JAM-SG Fight, 5331-TST (27-31 March 2008 An Nasiriyah Security Crisis)*, 31 March 2008.

As operations continued to clear and secure Al Basra, on 19 April 2008, ODA 5331 again faced JAM militants in a village near An Nasiriyah known as Suq Ash Shuyukh. After JAM militants initiated attacks against three police stations in the village, the detachment supported ISF efforts to defend Suq Ash Shuyukh. The hour and a half battle culminated when



Figure 9: Iraqi security forces seen minutes after the defeat of a JAM strong point defensive position in Suq Ash Shuyukh April 19, 2008



Figure 10: One of four Iranian made 35kg explosively formed projectiles discovered inside the Office of the Martyr Sadr in Suq Ash Shuyukh.

the detachment used RG-33 up-armored assault vehicles to shield the ISF advance on a JAM strong point defensive position. The ISF personnel were able to breach and clear the compound and discovered a large weapons cache of Iranian munitions. The weapons cache contained 4 x 35kg explosively formed projectiles, 11 improvised explosive devices, six Katusha Rockets, PKM medium machine guns, AK-47s, and several hundred rocket propelled grenades.<sup>33</sup> The cache was important not only because of its size, but also because it was the first time Iranian munitions had been discovered within an Office of the Martyr Sadr (Muqtada Al Sadr's Shia political organization).<sup>34</sup> These munitions were invariably smuggled across the Iranian border into Al Amarah, Iraq and then distributed to the cache location in Suq Ash Shuyukh. The discovery of the Iranian weapons cache again placed the spot light firmly on Maysan Province.

Combatant casualty totals from the battle in Suq Ash Shuyukh were reported as 40 Enemy Killed in Action (EKIA), unknown Enemy Wounded in Action (EWIA), zero Dhi Qar Emergency Police Brigade KIA, 12 Emergency Brigade WIA (Iraqi Army totals were not reported to the 10th Iraqi Army Division Chain of Command at the time Special Forces after action reports were created). Additionally, ten detainees were confirmed in

ISWAT custody and other ISF elements reported in excess of 30 detainees.<sup>35</sup>

Momentum against the criminal militia elements was firmly in the grasp of the Iraqi government in April 2008 within the greater Dhi Qar provincial area and throughout southern Iraq. Logically, operational focus for the coalition and the Government of Iraq turned to Maysan Province and the final remaining JAM-SG stronghold in southern Iraq.

<sup>33</sup> ISG (Ret) Leo Kryszewski, Detachment Operations Sergeant during OIF V, ODA 5331, interview, 24 February 2010; ODA 5331 After Action Storyboard, *Suq Ash Shuyukh ISF/JAM Fight, 5331-TST*, 19 April 2008.

<sup>34</sup> SFC Burke Chasteen, Detachment Intelligence Sergeant, ODA 5331, interview, 23 February 2010.

<sup>35</sup> ODA 5331 After Action Storyboard, *Suq Ash Shuyukh ISF/JAM Fight, 5331-TST*, 19 April 2008.

## *Operation Yarborough*

Al Amarah was a real problem and there was a need to create a plan that would head off an enthusiastic charge by the Iraqi government into Maysan Province, similar to that seen in Al Basra. Gen. Petraeus asked representatives from MNC-I, Task Force 17, and CJSOTF-AP to present their best operational ideas for addressing the JAM-SG stronghold in Al Amarah. CJSOTF-AP was identified as having the best conduit through which to address Al Amarah, via ODA 5331 and its relationship with Maj. Gen. Habib.<sup>36</sup> ODA 5331 was tasked to develop a Concept of Operations (CONOP) for Al Amarah. The detachment created and submitted CONOP GETTYSBURG in early April, 2008, which was a low signature plan to establish a foothold at Camp Sparrowhawk near Al Amarah for future operations in the region.<sup>37</sup>

The SOTF-C planners created a larger scale plan to address Al Amarah using GETTYSBURG as a starting point. SOTF-C developed Operation ABILIENE and published it 12 April 2008. It was a similar plan to GETTYSBURG but employed a larger support package for greater combat power based out of Camp Sparrowhawk.<sup>38</sup>

The CJSOTF-AP planners believed a more robust plan could be executed that would impact the JAM-SG stronghold on a long term strategic basis. Ultimately, CJSOTF-AP planners created a multi-component military deception campaign they named Operation YARBOROUGH, after Lt. Gen. William Yarborough of Special Forces fame in the 1960's and beyond. The plan was designed to prepare the Operational Environment within Maysan Province in case another sudden Government of Iraq surge launched operations into Al Amarah without notice to the coalition. The plan was a disruption campaign that included various raids by Iraqi soldiers with U.S. Special Forces advisors, day and night Tactical Checkpoint operations in the province, zero collateral damage Joint Direct Attack Munition (JDAM) bomb drops in vacant areas surrounding Al Amarah, Psychological Operation leaflet drops, Predator Hellfire missile strikes against lethal threats, whisper campaign messaging designed to intimidate militant JAM members, and other classified operations. These activities were to be executed in a synchronized manner to force JAM militants into a state of constant paranoia and hopelessness based on a growing belief that an invasion of Al Amarah was imminent.<sup>39</sup>

The disruption campaign was designed to apply pressure to JAM-SG elements in Maysan Province in the wake of Al Basra and Sadr City (Baghdad) operations launched in late March 2008. The concept was to apply pressure on JAM-SG personalities from May through the CJSOTF-AP Transition of Authority, slated for 01 June 2008, and continue the pressure up to a time when offensive operations could be conducted in June to retake Al Amarah from JAM-SG control. The CJSOTF-AP Transition of Authority date marked the time when 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) took command of Special Forces operations in Iraq from 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne). It was critical that the initiative enjoyed by the coalition and Government of Iraq not be lost as a result of transitioning forces in and out of theater.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> LTC Mark Grdovic, SOF Advisor to MNF-I during OIF V, CJSOTF-AP, comments to ODA 5331 15 November 2009.

<sup>37</sup> SFC Burke Chasteen, Detachment Intelligence Sergeant, ODA 5331, interview, 23 February 2010.

<sup>38</sup> Special Operations Task Force-Central, *Operation ABILIENE Brief*, 12 April 2008.

<sup>39</sup> Multiple CJSOTF-AP and SOTF-C briefings in support of OPN YARBOROUGH, April-May 2008.

<sup>40</sup> Multiple CJSOTF-AP and SOTF-C briefings in support of OPN YARBOROUGH, April-May 2008.



Soon after the creation of the final plan in late April 2008, CJSOTF-AP rapidly repositioned forces in preparation for the execution of Operation YARBOROUGH. ODA 5134 was prepositioned with one company of Iraqi Special Operations Force personnel at Camp Morehead on Tallil Air Base where ODA 5331 was stationed. ODA 5134 was sent from Baghdad to take over the ODA 5331 Nasiriyah mission in the event YARBOROUGH developed into a full blown operation to retake Al Amarah.<sup>41</sup> It was later determined that ODA 5134 and its partnered ISOF commandos would participate in the execution of YARBOROUGH. Additionally, the entire Combined Joint Special Operations Aviation Command (CJSOAC) was prepositioned at Tallil Air Base in support of the disruption campaign. The CJSOAC package consisted of Army aviators and helicopters from 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, Naval Special Operations aviators and helicopters, one AC-130, and one MC-130 refueling aircraft. The CJSOAC also stationed a complete support element and staff at Tallil to sustain operations.<sup>42</sup> The ODA 5331 compound at Camp Morehead was a very crowded and busy place by early May 2008.



*Figure 11: MH-60 helicopters of 160th SOAR arrive at Camp Morehead April 2008 in preparation for operations against JAM militants in Al Amarah and Maysan Province*

On 06 May 2008, ODA 5331 hosted Lt. Gen. Lloyd Austin, Commander, MNC-I, and Col. Christopher Conner, Commander, CJSOTF-AP, at Camp Morehead. The meeting was an opportunity for the commanders to hear first hand from Maj. Gen. Habib with regard to operations and threats in Maysan Province. Lt. Gen. Austin approved the execution of the Special Forces led disruption campaign following the meeting.<sup>43</sup> The ball was now completely in the hands of Special Forces to execute the plan.

Operation YARBOROUGH opened in the early morning hours of May 9, 2008 with the launch of a Hellfire missile from a Predator unmanned aircraft. The Predator was orbiting Al Amarah to provide a view of the area in which ground operations would begin in the next 24 hours. The aircraft captured a real-time video feed of a group of personnel emplacing an improvised explosive device at a location just outside of Al Amarah. The location was particularly important because it was preselected as a tactical checkpoint position to be used later in Operation YARBOROUGH. The elimination of this threat was the first message associated to the disruption campaign sent to JAM-SG members in Maysan Province. The Iraqi government and coalition partners would no longer tolerate criminal activities in the region.<sup>44</sup>

In the early hours of 10 May, ODA 5331 and their Iraqi partners boarded MH-60 helicopters flown by 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR) aviators and

<sup>41</sup> SFC Ryan Valdez, Acting Detachment Operations Sergeant during OIF V, ODA 5134, interview, 30 March 2010; Detachment Commander Comments, ODA 5331, SITREP 5331-175, 15 April 2008.

<sup>42</sup> SFC Burke Chasteen, Detachment Intelligence Sergeant, ODA 5331, interview, 23 February 2010; SFC Ryan Valdez, Acting Detachment Operations Sergeant during OIF V, ODA 5134, interview, 30 March 2010.

<sup>43</sup> Detachment Commander Comments, ODA 5331, SITREP 5331-196, 06 May 2008.

<sup>44</sup> SFC Ryan Valdez, Acting Detachment Operations Sergeant during OIF V, ODA 5134, interview, 30 March 2010; SFC Burke Chasteen, Detachment Intelligence Sergeant, ODA 5331, interview, 23 February 2010.

launched to execute the first manned mission in support of Operation YARBOROUGH. After approximately one hour of flight, the aircraft refueled in air and then delivered the assault force to the doorstep of the targeted facility. The mission was a Direct Action raid on the southern outskirts of Al Amarah, 2000 meters from the city center, and was named Operation KICK OFF. It was designed to introduce in no uncertain terms that JAM-SG criminals were well within reach of the Government of Iraq and that JAM-SG control of Al Amarah would no longer go unabated.<sup>45</sup>

The mission was a Direct Action raid designed to achieve psychological effects. During the mission, ODA members and Iraqi partner personnel (soldiers hand selected by ODA 5331 from the 10th Iraqi Army Division Reserve Company) delivered specific verbal statements to those on the objective. The soldiers stated that the Government of Iraq would no longer tolerate JAM criminal activities in Maysan Province.<sup>46</sup> The sheer presence of Iraqi and coalition assaulters within the city boundaries of a JAM-SG stronghold was a statement of Iraqi national will and power.

The psychological impact of the Direct Action mission had a far greater importance than the individuals captured. Intelligence obtained shortly after the raid indicated that the mission



Figure 12: ODA 5331 gathers for Pre-Combat Inspections before launching with Iraqi partners on a raid

sent shock waves through the JAM-SG establishment within Al Amarah and instilled fear in the minds of JAM-SG leaders throughout Maysan Province. For the first time in more than a year, JAM criminals were within the reach of law.<sup>47</sup>

ODA 5134 and personnel from the Iraqi Special Operations Force (ISOF) were the next forces to execute a mission in support of Operation YARBOROUGH. They conducted an air assault, inserting a Tactical Checkpoint slightly southwest of Al Amarah the night and early morning of 10/11 May 2008. Their unexpected presence also delivered the message that Government of Iraq and coalition attention had shifted to Maysan Province. The Iraqi citizens that were stopped at the checkpoint were shocked beyond words. Most were surprised that such a large security force could simply appear with no warning.<sup>48</sup>

In the afternoon of 11 May 2008, ODA 5331 rode in RG-33 vehicles, along with Iraqi M1114 vehicles, into Maysan to conduct daylight Tactical Checkpoint operations just south of Al Amarah. The population appeared happy to see Iraqi and coalition forces, and many stated that they wanted JAM criminals removed from their region. Just before the ODA and Iraqi soldiers departed the location, four Iraqi policemen arrived from the north near Amarah. They came to investigate the rumors of coalition forces in Maysan. They were most likely a

<sup>45</sup> ODA 5331 After Action Storyboard, *OPN KICK OFF-Amarah (OPN YARBOROUGH Campaign)*, 10 May 2008.

<sup>46</sup> ODA 5331 After Action Storyboard, *OPN KICK OFF-Amarah (OPN YARBOROUGH Campaign)*, 10 May 2008.

<sup>47</sup> SFC Burke Chasteen, Detachment Intelligence Sergeant, ODA 5331, interview, 23 February 2010.

<sup>48</sup> SFC Ryan Valdez, Acting Detachment Operations Sergeant during OIF V, ODA 5134, interview, 30 March 2010; Detachment Commander Comments, ODA 5331, SITREP 5331-202, 12 May 2008.

reconnaissance element for the JAM infiltrated Iraqi Police in and around Amarah. They saw firsthand that coalition and Iraqi forces were on ground conducting business. The message was again sent loud and clear that the Government of Iraq would no longer allow criminal militants to freely operate in Maysan Province.<sup>49</sup>

Between ground operations, psychological leaflet drops were employed to further degrade the mental state of JAM-SG elements in Al Amarah. The leaflets declared the legitimacy of the Iraqi government. They also provided the population the means to report JAM-SG criminal activity and locations of specific criminal personalities. Additionally, unmanned aircraft armed with Hellfire missiles were present to apply kinetic and psychological pressure on the enemy by engaging militants as they emplaced improvised explosive devices within Maysan Province. Fighter aircraft displayed shows of force by crossing over Al Amarah at low altitude on a nightly basis. Zero collateral damage bomb drops were repeatedly conducted by fixed wing aircraft in the open desert surrounding Al Amarah.<sup>50</sup> These facets of Operation YARBOROUGH combined with the Direct Action raids and Tactical Checkpoint operations to further the now common belief among the Al Amarah population that the liberation of Maysan Province was imminent.<sup>51</sup>

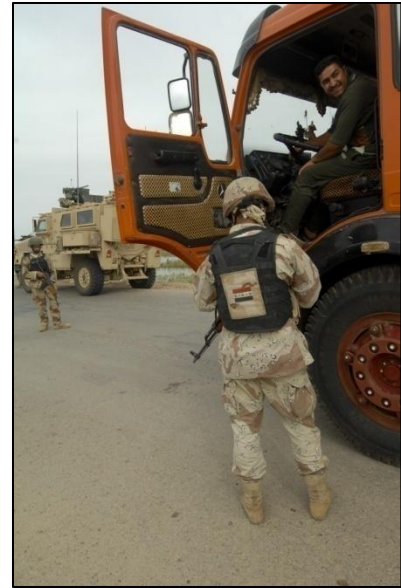


Figure 13: ODA 5331 and 10th IA Division members conduct TCP operations near Al Amarah in Maysan Province May 11, 2008

The night of 11/12 May 2008, ODA 5134 conducted an air assault into a preplanned location west of Al Amarah. The detachment and their partnered ISOF commandos moved a short distance from their landing zones and conducted Tactical Checkpoint operations on a main road leading into the city. Once again, the citizens that the ODA encountered were stunned that a coalition and Iraqi security element could suddenly appear in the area.<sup>52</sup> The psychological impact of this mission and the previous disruption operations were believed to be having a potent effect on the militant members of JAM residing in the region. Time would soon reveal the exact level of effect Operation YARBOROUGH was achieving.

ODA 5331 and ODA 5134 operationally paused briefly until 14 May to refit and prepare for the second wave of operations in support of YARBOROUGH.<sup>53</sup> Intelligence personnel within SOTF-C, CJSOTF-AP, and MNC-I evaluated the impact the disruption campaign was having on the mental state of JAM-SG personnel in Al Amarah during the pause in operations. The unanimous conclusion was that JAM members were on high alert, and their morale was wearing thin. The constant alert and uncertain outcome of what lay in their future reportedly dominated topics of discussion for most JAM militants in Maysan Province.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>49</sup> ODA 5331 After Action Storyboard, *OPN YARBOROUGH Daylight TCP in Maysan Province*, 11 May 2008.

<sup>50</sup> SFC Ryan Valdez, Acting Detachment Operations Sergeant during OIF V, ODA 5134, interview, 30 March 2010; Multiple CJSOTF-AP and SOTF-C briefings in support of OPN YARBOROUGH, April-May 2008.

<sup>51</sup> ISG (Ret) Leo Kryszewski, Detachment Operations Sergeant during OIF V, ODA 5331, interview, 24 February 2010.

<sup>52</sup> SFC Ryan Valdez, Acting Detachment Operations Sergeant during OIF V, ODA 5134, interview, 30 March 2010; Detachment Commander Comments, ODA 5331, SITREP 5331-202, 12 May 2008.

<sup>53</sup> Detachment Commander Comments, ODA 5331, SITREP 5331-202, 12 May 2008.

<sup>54</sup> SFC Burke Chasteen, Detachment Intelligence Sergeant, ODA 5331, interview, 23 February 2010; SFC Ryan Valdez, Acting Detachment Operations Sergeant during OIF V, ODA 5134, interview, 30 March 2010.



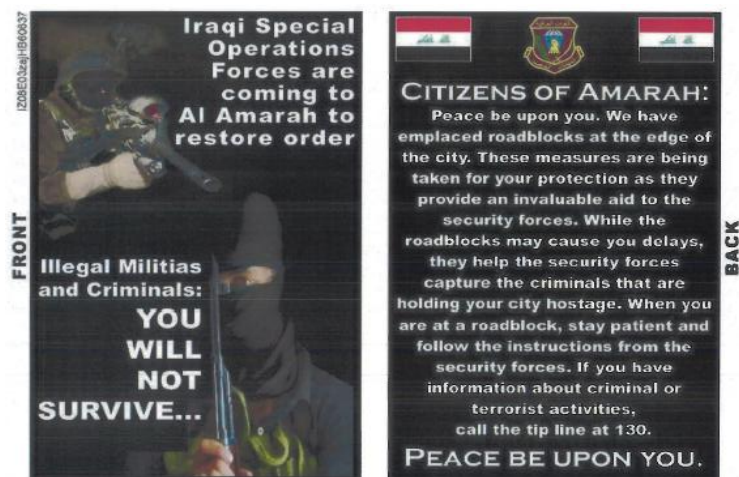


Figure 14: A translated version of one of the 10,000 Arabic leaflets air dropped over Al Amarah the night of May 13, 2008. The CJSOTF-AP learned that JAM-SG leaders and Maysan provincial officials were collecting and destroying the leaflets. In response, the night of May 15 CJSOTF-AP dropped 10,000 more 'wanted poster' style leaflets bearing the pictures of these implicated JAM and provincial officials.

inserted Direct Action raid into a village south of Al Amarah. The evening of 14 May, ODA 5134 and their ISOF partners were again sent into Maysan Province to conduct air inserted Tactical Checkpoint operations north of Al Amarah. The raid removed key JAM-SG leaders from the region and the checkpoint operations applied continued pressure to JAM-SG networks operating in the area.<sup>56</sup>

Maj. Gen. Habib stated in a meeting with ODA 5331 on 14 May 2008 that he and the commander of all Iraqi military forces, the Iraqi Ground Force Commander (IGFC), believed that criminal personalities were fleeing areas of recent ISF operations. He also stated that Operation YARBOROUGH related operations in Maysan Province forced JAM-SG elements into a "disrupted state." Maj. Gen. Habib assessed that momentum was building for the Government of Iraq, with U.S. support, to retake Al Amarah.<sup>57</sup>

In an effort to capitalize on the developing situation in Al Amarah and to stay ahead of Government of Iraq actions, SOTF-C released a draft plan for Operation INCHON 15 May 2008. The plan was to take control of Al Amarah by establishing a foothold in the city followed by clearing operations to secure the city. The plan stated that ODA 5331 and partnered 10th Iraqi Army Division personnel would move to Camp Sparrowhawk four kilometers southwest of Al Amarah. ODA 5134, along with personnel from ISOF, one Civil Affairs team, one Tactical Psychological Operations Team (TPT), one Special Operations Team-Alpha (SOT-A), one field artillery element, and one Infantry platoon, would collocate at Camp Sparrowhawk with ODA 5331. Simultaneously, ODA 5332 and one ISOF company would move to Tallil Air Base to assume the role of An Nasiriyah overwatch.<sup>58</sup>

On 13 May 2008, Iraqi Security Forces successfully conducted clearing operations within the town of Al Qurnah that lay between Al Amarah and Al Basra. The operation met with no resistance. Iraqi Army leaders associated to the operation reported that JAM-SG leaders operating in that area had fled to Al Amarah. Iraqi intelligence indicated that JAM leaders were running out of options for safe havens and were considering fleeing to Iran.<sup>55</sup>

In the early morning hours of 14 May, ODA 5134 and the ISOF commandos executed Operation VEGAS which was an air assault

<sup>55</sup> Detachment Commander Comments, ODA 5331, SITREP 5331-204, 14 May 2008.

<sup>56</sup> SFC Ryan Valdez, Acting Detachment Operations Sergeant during OIF V, ODA 5134, interview, 30 March 2010; ODA 5134 After Action Storyboard, *OPN VEGAS (OPN YARBOROUGH Campaign)*, 14 May 2008.

<sup>57</sup> Detachment Commander Comments, ODA 5331, SITREP 5331-204, 14 May 2008.

<sup>58</sup> Special Operations Task Force-Central, *Operation INCHON Brief*, 15 May 2008.

The night of 15 May 2008, ODA 5331 reported via its Situation Report (SITREP) that two Arabic news websites posted reports regarding enemy preparation in Al Amarah. Al Mahrain and Buratha internet news sites both stated that JAM militants placed many IEDs around the city of Al Amarah in anticipation of ISF and coalition clearing operations. The IEDs were reportedly placed under all area bridges. Furthermore, JAM-SG reportedly infiltrated Iraqi Police checkpoints surrounding the city to report the entry of all non-Al Amarah residents into the city. The websites stated that no one within Al Amarah was permitted to take photographs, and outsiders were forbidden to use cell phones. Weapons and IEDs were reportedly moved to Al Amarah from a village to the south known as Al Majarr Al Kabir. It was stated that JAM militants were not openly carrying weapons in the city, but they were suspected of having them hidden nearby. The websites also reported that many people were flowing into Al Amarah from Diwaniyah and Basra. The websites claimed that these people were JAM militants fleeing from areas of ISF operations.<sup>59</sup>

By all accounts, Operation YARBOROUGH was having a large effect on the morale and mental state of JAM-SG in the region. The introduction of these operations soon after and during the execution of other ISF and coalition operations in the country created a synergy of effort that amplified the effects of the Special Forces and Iraqi operations. The timing and thorough execution of the YARBOROUGH plan exploited the environmental situation to the fullest. The consistent use of psychological leaflet drops, zero collateral damage bomb drops, and fighter aircraft shows of force between ground operations served to sustain the pressure on the minds of JAM militants in Al Amarah. The combination of these operational components, along with Direct Action raids and Tactical Checkpoints, exploited every possible opportunity to break the enemy's will to fight.



*Figure 15: A member of ODA 5331 supervises activities within the Operation PETERSBURG objective building following the raid May 16, 2008*

ODA 5331 and its partnered Iraqi personnel executed Operation PETERSBURG in the early morning hours of 16 May 2008. The Direct Action raid was conducted by air assault against a target 1000 meters east of the city center in Al Amarah. It was the most aggressive mission so far in support of Operation YARBOROUGH, placing assaulters in the middle of the city. The raid met with mild resistance and sporadic gunfire as JAM-SG personnel scrambled to recover from the surprise appearance of assaulters so near the city center. Again, ODA and Iraqi personnel delivered the verbal message that the days of JAM criminal control of an Iraqi city was soon coming to an end. The psychological impact of the raid was evident when coalition intelligence personnel obtained word that JAM-SG leaders were fleeing the city for Iran and that the population believed Americans and ISF personnel were everywhere within the city.<sup>60</sup>

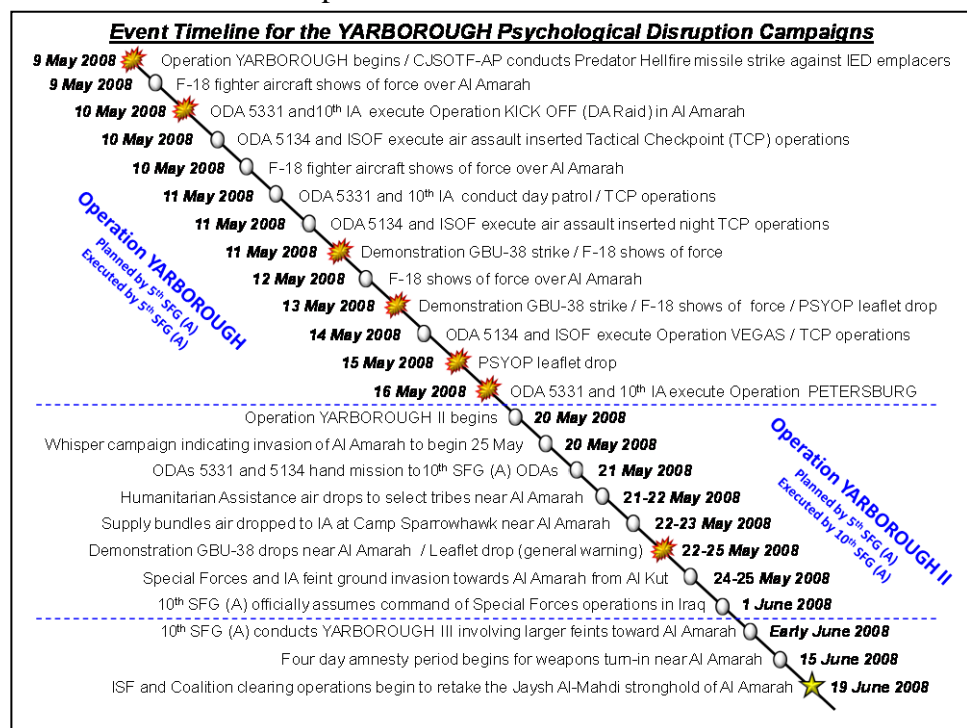
On 17 May 2008, 10th Iraqi Army Division leadership stated that JAM-SG personnel were completely frustrated by their inability to stem the flow of raids and the unimpeded access

<sup>59</sup> Detachment Commander Comments, ODA 5331, SITREP 5331-205, 15 May 2008.

<sup>60</sup> ODA 5331 After Action Storyboard, *OPN PETERSBURG (DA Raid-Amarah, OPN YARBOROUGH Campaign)*, 16 May 2008.

by security forces into the Maysan region. ODA 5331 reported that the civilians within the targeted facility for Operation PETERSBURG were assessed to be innocent. After realizing they would not be detained, the civilians offered valuable insight into JAM-SG activities up to the time of the raid. Approximately seven women and children were on the objective along with one older male in his late fifties. The male stated that JAM-SG personnel were attempting to intimidate the citizens of Al Amarah into supporting a JAM defense of the city.<sup>61</sup>

The man stated that JAM militants informed city residents that U.S. forces would “rape their women and kill their children.” The man added that the majority of the population wanted ISF and coalition members to enter the city and remove the criminal militia members once and for all as seen in An Nasiriyah, Al Basra, and elsewhere in the region. He warned that many militia fighters were located just north of the objective and across the Tigris River to the west (in the center of Al Amarah). The man continued to identify the fact that JAM-SG personnel were shaken as a result of recent ISF and coalition operations and that morale was low within their ranks. Reportedly, JAM supporters were arriving in Al Amarah after fleeing from Al Basra, Al Qurnah, An Nasiriyah, Ash Shatrah, and Sadr City. Each additional person that arrived in Al Amarah carried with them a story of ISF and coalition operational successes further demoralizing Al Amarah based JAM-SG personnel.<sup>62</sup>



The perception within JAM members, according to the male local national on the PETERSBURG objective, was that their time was limited before overwhelming force again arrived at a city containing militant leaders and fighters. A sense of panic was evident through the ranks of JAM militants in the city. According to the man, all citizens within the city of Al Amarah knew what happened elsewhere in Iraq regarding security operations against militant JAM elements and that JAM had failed to retain any of their former strongholds. Al Amarah citizens believed it was only a matter of time until they were free of the intimidation tactics of JAM personnel.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Detachment Commander Comments, ODA 5331, SITREP 5331-207, 17 May 2008.

<sup>62</sup> Detachment Commander Comments, ODA 5331, SITREP 5331-207, 17 May 2008.

<sup>63</sup> Detachment Commander Comments, ODA 5331, SITREP 5331-207, 17 May 2008.



Based on the information obtained from 10th Iraqi Army Division leaders and from personnel on the objectives for Operations KICK OFF, VEGAS, and PETERSBURG, the members of ODA 5331 reported their assessment that a fight to take Al Amarah would meet with less resistance than previously believed. It was assessed that JAM-SG leaders and members within Al Amarah would flee to Iran prior to clearing operations, leaving JAM militants leaderless in their greatest time of need. The execution of IED attacks and destruction of bridges would be expected as some hard-line fighters remained in Al Amarah, but a sustained defense of the city would not be an end state achievable by JAM-SG elements. If sufficient air and ground power were available to support ISF and coalition operations, the city would most likely fall under Government of Iraq control within seven days with follow on arrest operations continuing for another seven days. The minimal resistance seen by ODA 5331 during Operation PETERSBURG supported the detachment's ground assessment. Throughout the execution of Operation PETERSBURG, only two militant personnel fired in the general direction of the assault force from neighborhoods to the north and northwest further supporting the ODA ground assessment of eroding resistance within Al Amarah.<sup>64</sup>

Operation YARBOROUGH II (nicknamed MIRAGE) was published by CJSOTF-AP on 16 May 2008. The extension of the disruption campaign was planned to run from 20-25 May 2008. It incorporated a whisper campaign that would spread word of a coming invasion, humanitarian aid air drops to tribes near Al Amarah, and bundle drops to Iraqi Army personnel at Camp Sparrowhawk. Additionally, the plan called for a feint invasion convoy launching out of Al Kut and continued Direct Action raids in or near the city of Al Amarah as well.<sup>65</sup>

CJSOTF-AP considered extending 5331 and 5134 to maintain the initiative and continue applying psychological pressure on JAM-SG personnel in Al Amarah. Ultimately, ODA 5331 and ODA 5134 were not extended and they conducted Relief in Place / Transition of Authority activities with two teams (0312 and 0315) of 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne). ODA 5331 and ODA 5134 departed Tallil Air Base 21 May 2008 to begin their return movement to the United States.<sup>66</sup>

The 1st Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division assumed the overwatch mission for Dhi Qar and Maysan Provinces 01 June 2008. The Australian battalion stationed at Tallil Air Base departed Iraq soon after handing their overwatch mission to the 82nd Airborne paratroopers.<sup>67</sup> CJSOTF-AP command seamlessly transitioned from 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) to 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) on the same day as the Australian transition, 01 June 2008.<sup>68</sup>

The CJSOTF-AP, under 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) command, conducted a third iteration of Operation YARBOROUGH that capitalized on successes achieved in the first two versions. The execution of YARBOROUGH III employed large scale feints toward Al Amarah by ground convoys of much larger size than previously employed. Associated disruption operations were also included as seen in the previous two versions. Operation YARBOROUGH

---

<sup>64</sup> Detachment Commander Comments, ODA 5331, SITREP 5331-207, 17 May 2008.

<sup>65</sup> Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Central, *Operation YARBOROUGH II (MIRAGE) Brief*, 16 May 2008.

<sup>66</sup> ISG (Ret) Leo Kryszewski, Detachment Operations Sergeant during OIF V, ODA 5331, interview, 24 February 2010; SFC Ryan Valdez, Acting Detachment Operations Sergeant during OIF V, ODA 5134, interview, 30 March 2010.

<sup>67</sup> Department of Defense News Briefing with COL Charles Flynn, Commander, 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade Combat Team, 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division, 26 June 2008.

<sup>68</sup> ISG (Ret) Leo Kryszewski, Detachment Operations Sergeant during OIF V, ODA 5331, interview, 24 February 2010.

III was executed in early June 2008 and continued to apply psychological pressure on militants within Maysan Province until the beginning of operations to retake Al Amarah.<sup>69</sup>

Clearing operations to secure control of Al Amarah began 19 June following a four-day amnesty period for the turn-in of weapons. The clearing operations conducted by Iraqi security forces, Special Forces personnel, and members of the 1st Brigade Combat Team met with little resistance. Iraqi and coalition members captured an alarming quantity of munitions from caches within Al Amarah in June 2008. Between 19-22 June, a total of 117 weapons caches were captured and more than 63 criminal personalities were arrested. During this period ISF and coalition personnel confiscated over 1,700 mortar rounds, 873 mines, 445 artillery rounds, 347 rocket propelled grenades, 267 rockets, 227 missile launchers, 109 improvised explosive devices, 74 grenades, 27 explosively formed projectiles, and 14 missiles. Al Amarah was successfully retaken by the legitimate Government of Iraq, without firing a shot.<sup>70</sup>



Figure 17: Children of Maysan Province gather for a picture following ODA and ISF checkpoint operations near Al Amarah in May 2008

## Conclusion

It was the actions taken by coalition Soldiers in 2007 and 2008 that brought global recognition to the “Surge” as a successful gamble. The operations to pacify Mosul and disassemble the threat of Al Qaida affiliates in the north and west, along with population focused counterinsurgency operations in Baghdad represent important milestones of the 2007-2008 effort. However, if not for the remarkable turn of trends in southern Iraq, the country would have continued to produce elevated numbers of coalition casualties in 2008 and beyond. The operations that defeated JAM militants in Baghdad’s Sadr City, Al Basra, Al Amarah, An Nasiriyah, and most other major cities in southern Iraq disrupted the strategy that Iran employed through surrogates known as JAM-Special Groups. Iran and Muqtada Al Sadr’s Mahdi Army were forced to reevaluate their entire approach to southern Iraq by the summer of 2008. Decisions to fight through clandestine or overt methods gave way to a new political focus as southern Shia militants moved away from violence and towards productive political debate.

Muqtada Al Sadr’s decision to end the quasi cease fire with the coalition and Government of Iraq was a fool’s bet for which he paid dearly. The very public and humiliating defeat of his Mahdi Army and their Iranian trained special cadre marginalized Muqtada politically and within the Shia population. His marginalization enabled the Dawa Party to take the front seat as the lead

<sup>69</sup> MAJ Seth Krummrich, J35 during OIF V, CJSOTF-AP, interview, 8 October 2010.

<sup>70</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade Combat Team, 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division, Public Affairs Office, *Iraqi Security Forces Continue to Clear Amarah of Munitions*, (COB Adder, Iraq, 27 June 2008); SSG Michel Sauert, Public Affairs Office, Multi-National Division-Central, *New Signs of Peace Continue in Amarah*, (Baghdad, Iraq, 22 July 2008).

Shia political faction. The new political reality was confirmed in the 2009 provincial elections when the Dawa Party reigned victorious across the southern provinces.<sup>71</sup>

By January 2009, violence in central and southern Iraq was down almost 90% from the previous year. The operational environment had changed dynamically. Many JAM fighters were still present in the region and many large caches of explosively formed projectiles and other munitions were being found on a regular basis in the south. The Shia militants possessed the fighters and the weaponry, but consciously chose to avoid fighting as they had in 2008 and before.<sup>72</sup> Coalition fatality totals in Iraq for 2008 fell to 322 (67% less than the previous year) as a direct result of the combat successes achieved at the beginning and through the middle of that year. In 2009 the total fell to 150 showing the continued movement of Iraqi citizens toward politics and away from violence.<sup>73</sup>

Between January and June 2008, a small number of Green Berets empowered what the world media generally reported as Iraqi solutions to security challenges. The actions of these Special Forces Soldiers and their partnered Iraqi brothers stemmed the tide of violent upheaval initiated by Shia militants in multiple cities throughout southern Iraq. Their actions stabilized key points throughout the region while maintaining a low, and sometimes transparent, coalition signature. Ultimately, Special Forces Soldiers set the stage for, and then executed what would be one of the most effective disruption campaigns conducted in the Iraq Theater of Operations.

Operation YARBOROUGH was a multi-faceted Special Forces generated plan designed to apply psychological pressure on JAM-SG criminals controlling Maysan Province and the provincial capital, Al Amarah. It established the foundation upon which operations to retake Al Amarah and Maysan Province from militant JAM members took place in June 2008 with minimal resistance. Operation YARBOROUGH serves as a concrete testament to what creative and unconventional minds can accomplish. It also stands as the method by which the coalition traveled the last miles of 'The Road to Al Amarah.'

*Major Duane L. Mosier served as the SFOD-A 5331 Detachment Commander during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM V and participated with fellow members of the detachment in Operation YARBOROUGH as well as several of the associated events discussed in this article. In an effort to present a chronologically correct and factual article, multiple sources of information were accessed and cited to verify details beyond the eye witness account of the author. Major Mosier is currently assigned to Special Operations Command Central.*

This is a single article excerpt of material published in [Small Wars Journal](#).  
Published by and COPYRIGHT © 2010, Small Wars Foundation.

Permission is granted to print single copies for personal, non-commercial use. Select non-commercial use is licensed via a Creative Commons BY-NC-SA 3.0 license per our [Terms of Use](#).

No FACTUAL STATEMENT should be relied upon without further investigation on your part sufficient to satisfy you in your independent judgment that it is true.

Please consider [supporting Small Wars Journal](#).



<sup>71</sup> Alissa J. Rubin, *Prime Minister's Party Win but Will Need to Form Coalitions*, (New York Times, 05 February 2009).

<sup>72</sup> MAJ Seth Krummrich, S3 during OIF VI, SOTF-C, interview, 8 October 2010.

<sup>73</sup> See [www.icasualties.org](http://www.icasualties.org) for full statistics.