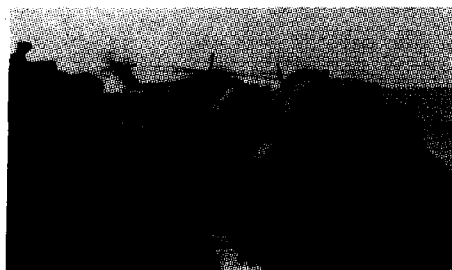


# OPERATION FREE



photos taken by Marko Primorac

ABOVE: Kneeling, from left to right: Cpl. Fleary, Pfc. Kunigus, Lcpl. Ames; standing left to right: Cpl. Kennedy, Lcpl. Rivas, Cpl. Primorac, Lcpl. Cahill, HM1 "Doc" Hinkle, Lcpl. Moore, Sgt. Barb. RIGHT: Boarding helicopters in Kuwait, destination: Nasiriyah.



By **MARKO PRIMORAC**

*Assistant News Editor*

Following the President's orders which we received in early March of this year, the Marines of the United States Marine Corps Infantry Reserve, 2nd Battalion, 25th Marines mustered at our respective Drill Centers to pack our gear, say goodbye to loved ones, along with our civilian lives, and load the buses headed one-way towards Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. After a few days, we found ourselves in Kuwait, and then in Iraq.

We were in southern Iraq, in the city of Nasiriyah, after which our Battalion found itself operating in smaller towns and hamlets north of it. We were there to maintain peace and order, protect civilians, enforce the law, and destroy any remaining Baathist, Republican Guard, or Iraqi Military personnel still operating against U.S. and coalition forces. In addition, with the aid of concerned locals and informants, we were charged with identifying, locating, and capturing rogue elements through daytime and nighttime raids. My platoon, 1st Platoon of "E" Company, ended up in a town called Qulat Sikur.

We took charge of and fortified a former government run casino. From there, we ran patrols—eventually with Iraqi police—for 24 hours a day, in addition to maintaining security for our position. Frequently, we were called upon to meet with the local government, and to oversee the distribution of propane gas, pay, and other necessities. The local population, by in large, was excited that the U.S. had liberated Iraq—most of southern Iraq is Shiite Muslim; Shiites make up over 60 percent of Iraq's population. Iraqis suffered decades of criminal persecution



Ordinance being destroyed in the distance from our posts; all Iraqi military ordinances that were captured were destroyed shortly thereafter.



Life under a Nasiriyah bridge for almost a month. We stood post eight hours out of a 24 hour day, fortified, and fought the elements.