



Personnel from the 1st Brigade, 1st Iraqi Army Division rush toward their destination as a Fighting Griffins CH-46 Sea Knight turns in the background during Operation Moonlight on 19 December 2005.



Griffins Fly Iraqi Soldiers into Battle

Story and Photos by Cpl. Cullen J. Tiernan

The Fighting Griffins of Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 266 are witnessing a change in their mission as they provide tactical mobility and logistical support to the ground combat element in Iraq. More and more, the squadron's missions focus on moving Iraqi soldiers in support of anti-insurgent operations along the front lines of the battle.

While participating in Operation Moonlight on 19

December 2005, the Griffins flew Iraqi forces from the 1st Brigade, 1st Iraqi Army Division, along with their Marine advisors from 3rd Battalion, 6th Marines, in support of large-scale operations east of Ubaydi, in western Anbar province.

Operation Moonlight was the Iraqi brigade's first planned and executed large-scale operation. Soldiers from three Iraqi battalions conducted cordon-and-knock procedures. The operation disrupted insurgent

activity along the northern and southern banks of the Euphrates River near Ubaydi.

“This operation is a prime example of Iraqi security forces taking on greater responsibility in the security of the Iraqi people,” said 1st Lt. Charles W. Parris, a CH-46 pilot and the squadron’s unit information officer.

“Supporting tactical inserts of Marines, soldiers, and Iraqi army forces is something we have done on a number of occasions. We are seeing more operations of this type involving Iraqi forces.”

While the change on the battlefield is taking place, the tactical mobility support provided by the Griffins has stayed constant.

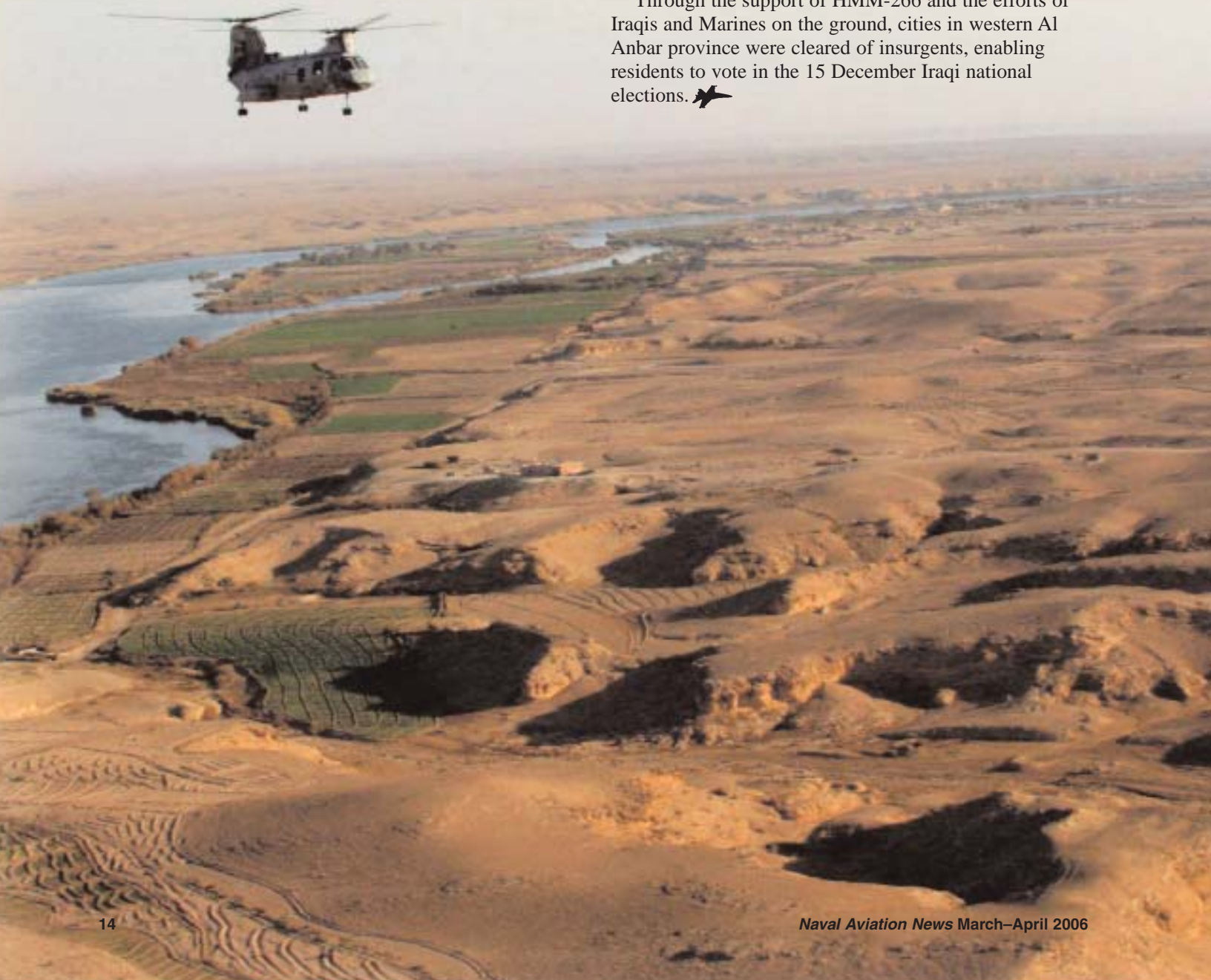
“We multiply the Ground Combat Element’s ability to maneuver on the battlefield,” said Parris. “We provide security of movement and surprise, and support the GCE logistically by transporting ammunition, chow, and water and are able to conduct casualty evacuations.”

In November, HMM-266 participated in Operation Steel Curtain, which took place in the vicinity of Husayba, Karbala, and Al Qaim. After conducting the insert of a company of Iraqi soldiers, a detachment of Griffins repositioned to Al Qaim and supported them there for a period of 21 days.

“The current operations have been successful at integrating Iraqi forces into anti-insurgent operations,” said Parris. “It has put an Iraqi face on anti-insurgent operations.”

Parris said during HMM-266’s time in Al Qaim, they participated in diverse missions and supported the Iraqis and Marines on the ground. From inserting forces into forward operating bases, to transporting crucial cargo in support of ground forces, to relocating enemy detainees, to delivering a morale-boosting meal to Marines in the field on the Marine Corps’ 230th birthday, the Griffins have constantly been supporting operations in the eastern Qaim region, including the cities of Husaybah, Karabilah, and Ubaydi.

Through the support of HMM-266 and the efforts of Iraqis and Marines on the ground, cities in western Al Anbar province were cleared of insurgents, enabling residents to vote in the 15 December Iraqi national elections. ✈



Right, crew chief LCpl. Shawn Cherry observes the passing landscape from an HMM-266 CH-46 Sea Knight as it flies over Al Anbar, Iraq, during Operation Moonlight. Background, a squadron helo carrying Iraqi forces flies over the Euphrates River. Bottom, Iraqi army personnel exit a Fighting Griffins CH-46 during the 19 December 2005 operation, which disrupted insurgent activity along the banks of the Euphrates River near Ubaydi, Iraq.

