

The Battle of Hawijah

7 April 2004

by

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On 7 April 2004 in Iraq countrywide disturbances were in their fourth day. The Shiite Mahdi Army led the unrest in the Sadr City district of Baghdad and in the cities of Karbala, Najaf, Kufa, Kut, Nasiriyah, Amara, and Basra. Fierce fighting with Sunni insurgents was also taking place in Fallujah, Ramadi, and Baquba. On this Saturday the strife spread to additional Sunni areas, including the city of Hawijah, located in Tamim Province, 130 miles north of Baghdad.

Hawijah is situated approximately 40 miles southwest of Kirkuk, and several miles north of the major oil pipeline running from Kirkuk to Bayji, the refinery city on the Tigris River. The inhabitants of this area are almost entirely Sunni Arab and the population in 2004 was about 70,000. Although there was little insurgent activity in the area prior to April 2004, Hawijah was long recognized as both a Baathist and a fundamental Islamic stronghold.¹

In April 2004, the local US Army forces were part of the 2d Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, from the second American troop rotation in Tamim Province, a unit which was based out of Kirkuk. The brigade was a light infantry force out of Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, which had originally been slated for deployment to Afghanistan. Shortfalls in Coalition support diverted the light infantrymen to central Iraq. The brigade deployed in January 2004. By early April, the officers and soldiers had over two months experience in combat and contingency operations in the area.²

Specific responsibility for the large area southwest of Kirkuk, including Hawijah, belonged to the 1st Battalion, 27th Infantry (1-27 IN), the Wolfhounds. The battalion operated out of Forward Operating Base (FOB) McHenry, located two miles southeast of the center of Hawijah, just north of the road running out of Hawijah to the southeast that joined the Kirkuk- Bayji oil pipeline. The FOB was in the middle of an expanse of land cleared for agriculture that made it easily defendable. Each of the three companies in the 1-27 IN had specific sector responsibilities within the battalion's 144 square kilometer area of responsibility (AOR). A (Alpha) Company, commanded by CPT Scott W. Carpenter, had the largest and most densely populated AOR — the city of Hawijah itself.³

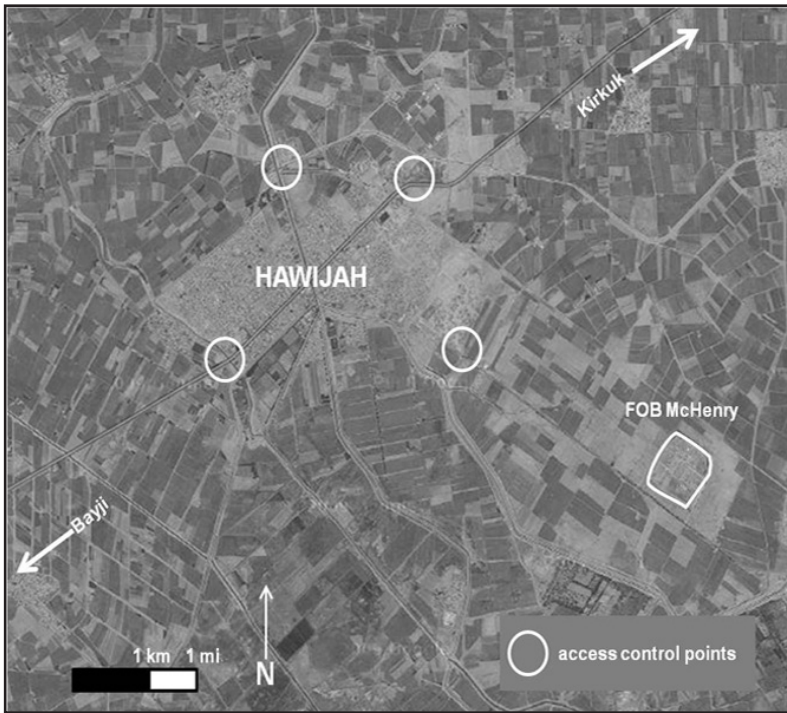
After a brief skirmish on its very first day in Hawijah in February, the Wolfhound battalion had faced a relatively quiet situation. Until early April, the Sunni population was not restive, unlike the situation in other parts of Iraq, particularly in Anbar Province and in Baghdad. Despite this, A Company remained alert, using this period to become familiar with the local population and the geography of the city.⁴

It was in this quiet climate that Carpenter went to the city on the morning of 7 April. In fulfilling his responsibilities, the company commander routinely coordinated or supported the development and activities of local Iraqi officials, particularly the appointed civil city council, the police force, and the 207th Battalion of the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps (ICDC). The latter organization was stationed in a barracks compound in the eastern-center of Hawijah next to the City Council Building. One of Carpenter's duties was to attend and monitor the city council's weekly meeting. Therefore, at about 0945 hours on the morning of 7 April 2004, accompanied by two squads from his 2d Platoon, he left FOB McHenry and moved to the ICDC Compound in the city. Upon reaching the city from the east, the company commander discovered that a downtown protest march of roughly 150 individuals was taking place along the main east-west thoroughfare, Market Street, which ran in front of both the City Council Building and the ICDC compound. The protest march was moving west to east and arrived at the ICDC directly after Carpenter's detachment entered the compound. The leader of the protest, an unidentified male, stood up on the small wall surrounding the municipal building and began speaking to the crowd as Carpenter went into the building from a side entrance to attend the council meeting.⁵

Various factors effectively reduced Carpenter's combat power. The first was organizational. The 1-27 IN had replaced a mechanized infantry battalion from the 4th Infantry Division (Mechanized). Although the 1-27 IN was given the same sector, the previous unit had contained numerous armored and wheeled vehicles as part of its organizational structure and, thus, was able to cover a wider area with vehicles suitable for combat operations.

However, 1-27 IN was a light infantry unit. By organization, each company had a single high mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicle (HMMWV) equipped with a digital communications package and thin armored plating. Once in Iraq, the company picked up an additional nine cargo HMMWVs upon which platoons placed their M240 machine guns, some with vehicle mounts and others without. Over time, these vehicles received armored plating made by local contractors. Because of the

relatively large area of responsibility, the infantry patrolled and moved around the operational area in less capable vehicles. Geography and equipment accordingly dispersed Carpenter's combat power.⁶



Map 1. The Hawijah Area, 2004.

The second limiting factor was operational. Carpenter's company was part of the garrison of FOB McHenry. One of his three platoons rotated through security duties at the FOB. To standardize this duty, the company commander established a triple rotation system. One platoon was on combat alert for 24 hours and conducted any required operational assignments. A second platoon was on stand-down, recovering from its alert shift for a period of 24 hours. The third platoon was on FOB guard detail. Carpenter implemented this rotation plan not only to fulfill operational and mission requirements, but to keep his troops fresh and lessen the enemy's ability to discern patterns of behavior. Company A also provided a platoon on a rotational basis to serve as the battalion's quick reaction force (QRF).

On 7 April, B Company was providing this platoon, which was based out of FOB McHenry. This system meant that Carpenter generally had only a platoon-sized element for daily combat operations in and around Hawijah.⁷

Routine security in Hawijah was an Iraqi police responsibility. The police station was located in the eastern center of the city, around the corner from the municipal building and ICDC compound. Geography made securing the city from the outside relatively simple. While located on a relatively open agricultural plain, Hawijah was, nevertheless, isolated from the countryside by a series of canals that ran completely around the edge of the city. This moat-like effect restricted access to the city to four main roads. Checkpoints, manned by the Hawijah police force, covered all four of these entrances.

While covering the four entrances to the city with checkpoints isolated it from the outside, the city was further compartmentalized into two sections by a canal running north-south through its center. There were north-south roads running parallel to this canal on both its eastern and western sides. However, crossings over the canal were limited. Vehicular traffic could only cross the canal to enter the opposite half of the city via three bridges. A fourth bridge only allowed pedestrians. Control of these central bridges was essential to the success of any combat operation in the city.⁸

From the ICDC compound, Carpenter could observe the marchers on Market Street assembled in front of the municipal building. The ICDC commander had told him that the parade was a peaceful student protest. The grounds of the local university were located just to the northeast. While the mob seemed peaceful, they displayed various signs and chanted slogans showing sympathy for both the Shiite Mahdi Army and the Sunni defenders of Fallujah, a city that harbored insurgents and was under attack by Coalition forces in early April 2004. This indicated to Carpenter that the crowd probably consisted of outside agitators. If so, this implied that one of the external city checkpoints had been compromised. Seemingly an Iraqi sympathizer had allowed hostile, though peaceful, Iraqi demonstrators to enter the city proper. If peaceful outsiders had made their way into the city, the possibility existed that non-peaceful forces had also come into the city. If it came to a direct confrontation, Carpenter had only a small force with him — part of the company headquarters element and most of the 2d Platoon, with three HMMWVs, two of which had machine guns. While this force was probably large enough to secure the ICDC compound and the adjoining municipal building if the mob became unruly, would it be adequate in size to confront simultaneously both the protesters, if they became unruly, and fight armed insurgents seeking to gain control of the city center, if such a group appeared? This question troubled Carpenter.⁹

As he prepared to go into the city council meeting, the A Company commander had several options to resolve the situation. He could cancel the council meeting and coordinate with the local Iraqi commander to find out where the crowd came from, while informing his battalion commander of the situation. By cancelling the meeting, Carpenter could avoid an immediate confrontation with hostile Iraqis, while possibly discovering the origin of a security leak. However, it could give the hostile faction a moral victory. Additionally, Carpenter would still find himself in the middle of an intimidating crowd with a small force. In any pitched battle, he realized that the 207th ICDC Battalion, greatly under strength and poorly trained, would be capable only of defending its own compound. The Iraqi police, similarly, would have their hands full defending their own nearby police station.¹⁰

Carpenter could force an immediate confrontation with the crowd to clear Market Street. Such a move would immediately clear the downtown area, but could also cause a premature and, possibly, unnecessary confrontation. Without reinforcement, the American force would remain small; adding to the risk but it could also head off further trouble before it started.

Carpenter could also conduct the meeting as usual and keep the second platoon on alert and in a security posture looking for the appearance of any insurgents. At the same time, Carpenter could call for reinforcements from the battalion QRF, giving him a larger force to face any possible confrontation after the meeting.

CPT Carpenter chose to hold the meeting as scheduled and called for the battalion QRF, a platoon from B Company, to be sent immediately to the city. With reinforcements on the way, he attended the meeting with his company FIST chief, 1LT Robert J. Heatherly, who also acted as the company's civil affairs officer. While the meeting progressed as normal, the squads of the 2d Platoon, led by 1LT Gary Kaldahl, provided internal security of the municipal building and overlooked the general area around the building from its roof.¹¹

A half hour into the council meeting, Carpenter heard gunfire from the roof of the building. He immediately adjourned the meeting allowing the nervous council members to leave a location they felt had become a target. As he left, Carpenter discovered that one of his snipers was engaging an insurgent armed with a rocket-propelled grenade launcher several blocks away. With his small command-post group (including 1LT Heatherly and Carpenter's RTO, SPC Robert H. Chapman), he moved to the roof to find out what was going on.

During the course of the meeting, 1LT Kaldahl had relocated one of his snipers, SPC Roberto Zuniga-Saucedo, to the northwest corner of the roof of the two-story municipal building to observe the cityscape for hostile forces. A squad led by SSG Andrew W. Gregory, conducted similar duty along the southern edge of the roof. After some time, Zuniga observed a man armed with an RPG-7 launcher hiding in the shadows around the corner of a side street on the northern side of Market Street, several blocks west of the municipal building. The sniper engaged the RPG gunner with his M14 sniper rifle and continued firing single rounds at the figure until he incapacitated him with a wound to the arm. The situation on Market Street below sorted itself out. With the sound of Zuniga's first shot, the crowd immediately dispersed, leaving only insurgents and American soldiers in the Market Street area.¹²

Although the crowd was gone, additional enemy combatants began appearing to the west and south. First, Gregory's squad and Carpenter's command post began taking small arms fire from a building 200 to 250 meters to the south of the ICDC compound. Gregory returned fire and in response the enemy shot an RPG rocket that went high and exploded into a house north of Market Street.¹³

The battalion QRF, B Company's 1st Platoon under 1LT Christopher Johnson, arrived on Market Street at the ICDC compound mounted in two HMMWVs, having taken the eastern route. Although expecting to provide security for the government buildings against a civilian crowd, as the QRF, Johnson realized he had to be ready for anything. The platoon reached the ICDC compound just as Zuniga's firing dispersed the crowd. To the men of Johnson's platoon, it seemed like the crowd disappeared as soon as they appeared. For a minute the city seemed to become a ghost town. However, this was only an illusion. A number of insurgents appeared from windows and corners in the general vicinity of where Zuniga had shot the RPG gunner. With Market Street now clear, these enemy fighters began firing volleys of RPG rockets at the new arrivals. The QRF took cover and returned fire, initially taking no casualties. Carpenter was now in a fight.¹⁴

After reporting the situation to the battalion tactical operations center (TOC) at FOB McHenry, relayed through his vehicle's digitized communications package, he requested additional forces and the battalion released to him his company's 1st Platoon, which had been in reserve at FOB McHenry recovering from recent operations. The platoon began moving to Hawijah under the leadership of 2LT David S. Morgan. The company executive officer, 1LT Christopher A. Hopes, and the acting first sergeant, SFC Steven Green, accompanied the platoon to the city.¹⁵

With more forces on the way, Carpenter decided to act offensively and use the QRF platoon against the enemy forces on Market Street to push them back against the canal in the center of the city. While his 2d Platoon would support this maneuver by fire while continuing to secure the ICDC compound and municipal building, he would use any reinforcements to apply additional offensive combat power against the insurgent forces.¹⁶

The QRF force advanced slowly down Market Street to the west while under heavy but inaccurate RPG and small arms fire. Platoon leader Johnson originally envisioned advancing the platoon in three squads, one directly down Market Street, and the other two on the north and south sides of the main street, respectively. The northern squad would also contain the platoon's two HMMWVs with machine guns mounted on them, and would support the advance of the squad on Market Street.¹⁷

That squad, led by SSG Victor Benavides, advanced west on Market with its initial objective being the first four-corner intersection beyond the municipal building. However, Benavides quickly became pinned down by enemy fire and had to be reinforced by the firepower of the rest of the platoon to continue the advance. The platoon suffered the first American casualty of the day when CPL Clint Davis was wounded in the leg and shoulder while crossing Market Street. His comrades had to drag Davis out of enemy fire, after which Carpenter promptly had the wounded noncommissioned officer evacuated to the ICDC compound.¹⁸

At the first crossroads, Johnson's platoon faced fire from three directions. Benavides received a head wound from small-arms fire. His Kevlar helmet stopped the round and the stunned squad leader was soon back in action. Platoon sergeant, SFC Eugene Dydasco, brought up the platoon's two HMMWVs. The additional firepower allowed the advance to begin again. Moving door-to-door along buildings on both sides of Market Street, the platoon advanced to the canal.

Carpenter now faced the decision of how to deploy and use the reinforcing platoon on its way from FOB McHenry. To facilitate his understanding of the situation, he had moved from the roof of the municipal building to the ICDC compound from where he could see the action taking place along Market Street. He then moved behind Johnson's platoon, observing their firefight.¹⁹

The A Company commander decided initially to bring the new platoon to the central location of the ICDC compound and from there determine its best employment. He had several choices for the use of the platoon. One of these would be to reinforce the two platoons on Market Street. The

increase in combat power could result in the infliction of decisive damage on the insurgents being pushed towards the central city canal bottleneck. Additionally, Carpenter felt that if push came to shove, he could get additional combat assets from those at FOB McHenry if the enemy proved to be in large numbers.

He could also employ the platoon against the insurgents located to the south of the ICDC compound. While this would separate the company into two distinct elements, increasing command and control difficulties, it would also provide flank security for the forces on Market Street. However, such a move was risky in that enemy dispositions and force size to the south was unknown. The new platoon could end up taking on a “tiger by the tail.”

A similar risky course of action would be to shift the new platoon around the Market Street battle and place it in blocking positions along the canal at the bridges. The unknown enemy situation — and there were indications that there were insurgents firing across the canal from the western half of the city — made the movement of a small platoon unsupported into a different section of the city very dangerous but, if the platoon was able to successfully block the canal, the enemy forces in the eastern half of the city could potentially be completely destroyed.²⁰

Finally, Carpenter could retain the platoon as a reserve at the ICDC compound. This option had the advantage of providing flexibility in case new enemy forces appeared or the insurgents to the south began threatening the flank of the Market Street forces. However, creation of such a reserve also would leave the company with the combat power of only two platoons fighting the enemy.

Carpenter chose to use his reinforcements to reinforce the Market Street battle. En route to the ICDC compound, A Company’s 1st Platoon, with the company executive officer and first sergeant in tow, encountered a wire obstacle placed across Market Street blocking the eastern approaches to Hawijah to the east of where the two platoons were fighting. While the obstacle was only a minor nuisance, its presence showed that the enemy was conducting a coordinated operation, part of which was designed to hinder the arrival of American reinforcements.²¹

Upon arrival at the ICDC compound, Carpenter ordered 2LT Morgan to take his platoon down the opposite (northern) side of Market Street and reinforce the B Company platoon. He then took his command-post group and accompanied the platoon down to the B Company platoon’s position, three blocks west of the ICDC compound. The platoons in contact were

now taking heavy machine gun and RPG fire and, in addition to CPL Davis from Johnson's platoon, the reinforcing platoon had also received its first casualties. Carpenter established a casualty collection point at the ICDC compound, using his command HMMWV to evacuate the first casualties. With the first wounded, he called the battalion TOC and requested the dispatch of another infantry platoon to operate against the right (southern) flank on the insurgents on Market Street and possibly prevent their egress across the canal bridges.²²

Carpenter soon had cause to reflect on the wisdom of his decision to reinforce the Market Street axis. Enemy forces to the north began firing into the right flank of the company's advance from several side streets. Carpenter himself and his CP group were under direct fire and forced to take cover and, subsequently, to cover the evacuation of a wounded A Company noncommissioned officer. By voice command, Carpenter directed 2LT Morgan to send a squad up the street from which the fire was coming in order to suppress it. Fire Team Leader SGT Don K. Wegesend led the advance of that unit, SSG Chad C. Borchers's 1st Squad, 1st Platoon. The squad advanced tactically up the street one block to the first intersection north of Market Street. However, before it could advance farther, Wegesend was wounded in the arm by fire from the far (western) corner of the next intersection. The CP group, using its up-armored HMMWV, moved to the team's location and evacuated the wounded noncommissioned officer while Carpenter stayed with the squad.²³

While observing Borchers's advance, Johnson notified him that his platoon had reached the canal. With Johnson at the canal and Morgan advancing to the north, Carpenter was faced with the decision of what to do next. He had also asked for and would soon receive additional forces. The battalion commander had released his 3d Platoon, led by 1LT Timothy Ungaro, formerly on security detail at FOB McHenry. He needed to instruct Ungaro on where to go. With four platoons in the action, Carpenter needed to coordinate their activity. Johnson and Morgan were essentially operating independent of each other. The company commander needed to devise a scheme of maneuver in which each platoon's actions operated in support of both the other platoons and the company as a whole, with the goal of destroying the insurgent forces in Hawijah.

With two platoons in contact, one providing security at the ICDC compound, and a fourth on its way to the city, Carpenter had a certain tactical flexibility. However, he felt that it was too risky to shift Kaldahl's under strength platoon away from the ICDC compound. His actions would be predicated on the employment of the two platoons facing the enemy

and the one reinforcing. Carpenter could use the platoons to keep pushing the enemy to their front into the western half of the city, then sweeping through that half of the town. Morgan's platoon would advance and pursue the insurgents to its front and secure the northern vehicular bridge and the footbridge to the south of it. Johnson, already at the Market Street crossing of the canal, would cross the bridge there and clear the insurgents to his front to the western limits of the city. Ungaro's reinforcing platoon would move along the southern axis, crossing the canal at the southern bridge and clear the most southerly portion of western Hawijah.

This alternative was the simplest to execute and, if successful, could relentlessly push the enemy out into the open area west of the city where Apaches could destroy the insurgents. However, this selection gave one platoon (Morgan's) the mission of both securing the northern exit from the city and clearing the northwestern quarter. The task could be too much for a single platoon. Since this part of the city was the farthest from FOB McHenry, it was also the farthest from reinforcement.

To alleviate this potential threat, Carpenter could reinforce the northern area by moving Johnson's platoon northerly along the canal from Market Street to the northern bridge. This platoon could both cover the northern approaches to the city (left unsecured by the Iraqi police) and the advance of Morgan's platoon across the canal into northwest Hawijah. Morgan could advance across the footbridge south of the northernmost vehicular bridge while Johnson's men covered the platoon's right flank. Farther to the south, Ungaro's fresh platoon could then advance along either the Market Street central axis or across the southern bridge to clear southwest Hawijah.

By doing so, however, Carpenter would leave the southern area vulnerable. He probably needed a minimum of two platoons to effectively cover both southern routes. However, this area was the closest to FOB McHenry and the A Company commander could reasonably expect additional reinforcements, which could arrive quickly. While the vulnerability existed, the risk was a lot less than under-manning the northern area. Apart from this there were several advantages in this option. It allowed the two platoons in contact to mutually support each other, while allowing the new platoon to get into action as quickly as possible. Using a platoon at all bridges except the one nearest reinforcements, would allow a simultaneous multi-platoon sweep across the west side of the city which could force the enemy out into the open areas west and north of the city, where the insurgents would be easy prey for the Apaches.

Carpenter decided to reinforce the northern area with Johnson's platoon. He ordered Johnson to turn northward along the canal's eastern side and advance up to the northern vehicular bridge. Morgan was to continue pressing the enemy in his sector, cross the footbridge and push to the northwest. Ungaro was to advance against the southernmost bridge and cross to the western side of the city. Morgan and Ungaro's units would then advance westward, clearing the insurgents from the city to the west.²⁴

The operation did not exactly work out as planned. Ungaro found it impossible to advance on the southern bridge because the battalion commander tasked him to escort the battalion command sergeant major, CSM Karl K. Morgan, and a medical section of two frontline ambulances (FLAs). Ungaro felt it was prudent to bring the medics and Morgan to Carpenter's position along Market Street behind Johnson's platoon. However, Ungaro's arrival in the center rather than in the south forced him to modify his maneuver. While the CSM supervised the evacuation of casualties first to the ICDC compound and then back to FOB McHenry, Carpenter decided it was best to employ Ungaro's 3d Platoon on the Market Street axis, which Johnson's platoon was preparing to leave to head north along the canal. The decision was simplified when he received word that another platoon from B Company was being dispatched from FOB McHenry. Carpenter gave the new platoon Ungaro's former mission of advancing across the southernmost bridge.

Meanwhile, in response to Carpenter's previous instructions, 2LT Morgan had divided his platoon up by squads. Two squads, Borcher's previously mentioned 1st, and SSG Allen E. West's 2d Squad, 1st Platoon, advanced to the north on city streets perpendicular to Market Street and a block apart. While moving forward, each squad had a sergeant team leader wounded by enemy fire. The squads were operating against small insurgent elements employing machine guns and RPGs. Morgan accompanied West's squad. His third squad reinforced the B Company platoon at the canal bridge until it shifted to the north, and then followed the rest of its own platoon. The enemy began falling back in front of Morgan's squads.²⁵

With Carpenter's command group nearby, Borcher's squad maneuvered against an insurgent RPG position and managed to surprise the enemy and kill the entire four-man team. Carpenter then directed Borcher to coordinate his advance with West and Morgan. Using his vehicular communications system, the company commander coordinated to complete his plan for the destruction of the enemy. The battalion S-3 authorized his use of fire from several Apache helicopters that came up from Tikrit and were now on station to support the maneuver of the ground forces.

Carpenter gave the aviators a free hand by directing that the helicopters fire at any visible insurgent positions or groups west of the 1st Platoon's advancing squads. To facilitate coordination, Carpenter popped a smoke grenade to give the aviators a rough idea of the forward edge of friendly positions. Ultimately, while the attack helicopters remained on station for the rest of the battle, no enemy targets appeared as the enemy went to ground and the Apaches were never used.²⁶

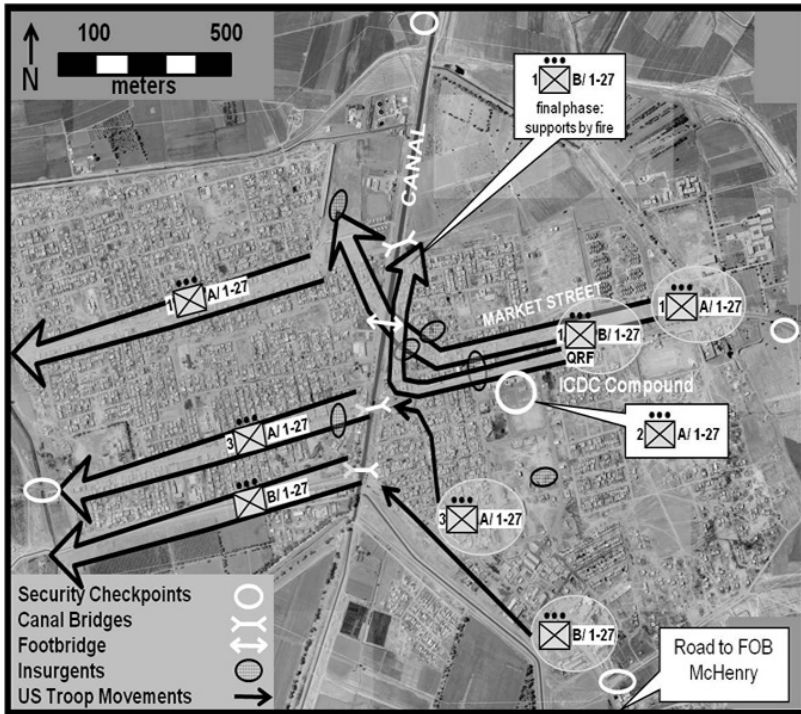
Carpenter instructed Ungaro to move west down Market Street and cross the canal bridge and close with the enemy forces on the west side, clearing them along that axis to the western edge of the city. The additional B Company platoon would at the same time cross the southern bridge and advance to the left (south) of Ungaro, clearing enemy forces along a parallel axis.²⁷

Simultaneous to these movements, the 1st Platoon (Morgan) was already clearing along a northwesterly axis to the north of Market Street. Carpenter's intent was that the combined effect of these platoon movements would force the enemy into the northwestern corner of the city, where they would either have to stand and fight, or escape into open agricultural land beyond the city, where the Apaches could destroy them.²⁸

Morgan's unit began to take additional casualties. The platoon, led by Borchers's squad on the left, had crossed the footbridge over the central canal into the western half of the city. Borchers was pursuing a group of insurgents into a west-side industrial area. There the enemy sprung an ambush, firing a volley of three RPG rockets at the squad. One rocket missed, another failed to detonate, but a third exploded into the middle of SGT Jay R. Lawrence's fire team, wounding Lawrence in the arm, SPC Ryan J. Geode in the head, and PFC David L. Goodwin in the leg. The action took place close to the family residence of the industrial park's security guard, whose young daughter also was wounded by shrapnel from the RPG round. The proximity of noncombatant civilians to their ambush site was obviously not an enemy concern.²⁹

Carpenter decided to use his CP vehicle with its armor to evacuate the casualties. SSG Borchers was unsure of the squad's exact location. The CP group used a water tower Borchers could see from his location to provide a bearing. The HMMWV crossed the canal and approached the water tower. Thick metal fencing compartmentalized the open industrial area. Therefore, when Carpenter's group found Borchers's location, the vehicle had to take a roundabout route to reach the wounded soldiers. Upon reaching the squad's position, the wounded fire team was loaded onto

the vehicle. At the same time the bulk of the 1st Platoon arrived at the location, accompanied by 1LT Hopes, the company executive officer, with his HMMWV. The CP group trans loaded the casualties, including the little girl, into the executive officer's truck, which then evacuated them.³⁰



Map 2. The Battle of Hawijah, 7 April 2004.

Meanwhile, along Market Street, Ungaro crossed the canal bridge and began advancing westerly, parallel to the other B company platoon to the south. Johnson's 1st Platoon (B Company) moved to the northernmost bridge and began over watching to the north and west. The net effect of these movements was the defeat of the insurgents. After the RPG ambush of Lawrence's fire team, firing throughout the city petered out. Each platoon continued its advance to the western edges of the built-up area unopposed. The enemy had broken up into groups of individuals and had gone to ground within the urban landscape.³¹

At the ICDC compound, 1LT Kaldahl's 2d Platoon continued to provide security. Kaldahl's men had been engaging in a long-range firefight with insurgents in the southeastern quadrant of the city. 2d Platoon firepower had long suppressed the enemy's RPG and machine gun fire. When fighting died out in the western districts, the enemy to the south faded away and disappeared into the city.³²

Accordingly, Carpenter directed his A Company task force to begin the clearing of individual buildings from which enemy fire had been observed in the western half of the city, but which had been bypassed in the advance. The search discovered several small weapons caches and detained numerous adult males. At the end of the day, US forces had completely secured Hawijah. The result of the action on 7 April 2004 was a complete American victory. The Wolfhounds had killed 35 enemy combatants, wounded an additional 45 insurgents, and detained 58 others, while suffering six soldiers and one noncombatant wounded. At the end of the day, A Company retained complete control of Hawijah.³³

Although the battle of 7 April was the largest commitment of enemy forces in Hawijah up to that time, at no point did the insurgents assemble a force anywhere that was strong enough to threaten the survival of any A Company platoon or squad. At no time during the battle did the Wolfhounds not have fire superiority on the streets of the city. This mismatch allowed Carpenter to maneuver his forces in such a way as to maximize damage to the insurgents.³⁴

In retrospect it appears likely that the insurgent force in Hawijah was arraying itself to conduct a coordinated attack from all directions against the US forces near the ICDC compound. Similar to other attacks around Iraq at the time, the enemy probably intended to capture the Hawijah government buildings and sack them. The attack was to be taped for dissemination to media outlets friendly to the insurgent cause. The cameraman was, however, captured by the A Company executive officer, 1LT Hopes. The tape included scenes of the demonstration, which was obviously being used as a cover for the insurgent gunmen to move into their pre-attack positions. Perhaps the enemy also hoped the demonstrators would provoke a bloody confrontation that would provide both an excuse for their subsequent attack and provide a propaganda victory through pre-staged video of noncombatant casualties.

Enemy expectations of American reactions were off the mark. US forces did not attack the demonstrators, nor did they stand by and await an insurgent attack. From previous enemy activities elsewhere in Iraq in the preceding days, Carpenter felt the government buildings were the enemy's attack objective. He centered his offensive operations from a secure base at this probable insurgent objective. Meanwhile, his troops employed active security measures, remained alert, and sought any early signs of insurgent activity. The sniper's action against an enemy combatant scattered the crowd and forced the enemy into premature initiation of their attack. Since Carpenter had already requested reinforcements, the first

group arrived before the enemy could block their route and were able to react immediately to the dangerous situation and seize the initiative from the enemy.

Carpenter used his knowledge of Hawijah geography, gained over the previous two months, in order to direct the movements of his subordinate elements. The limited entrances into the city and the bottlenecks at the bridges along the canal running laterally through the center of the city made enemy movements and reactions relatively predictable, allowing friendly forces to maximize combat power at the optimum places.

US forces arrived piecemeal in a series of platoon reinforcements. Given the vague enemy situation and the compartmentalization of combat power within 1-27 IN because of multiple operational and administrative requirements, this was virtually unavoidable. However, the timing of the reinforcements helped Carpenter refine his maneuver based on the tactical situation. This culminated in a complete defeat for the overmatched insurgents.

Carpenter coordinated the activities of up to five platoons and Apache support helicopters while moving around the battlefield in his armored HMMWV, placing himself at key locations. The company's shortage of vehicles that could operate under enemy fire forced him to use his vehicle for casualty evacuation when necessary. Evacuation did not become a tactical distraction primarily because of the relatively small number of American and noncombatant casualties.

Iraqi ICDC and police forces played no role in the Hawijah action. The police abandoned the four checkpoints controlling access to the city and moved to their station where they remained throughout the battle. The ICDC forces also remained in their compound. In 2004, both of these forces were new organizations and relatively untrained. This provides the context for the great strides made in subsequent years with the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) throughout Iraq, and in Hawijah in particular. By early 2008, the former 207th ICDC Battalion, redesignated as 1st Battalion, 2d Brigade, 4th Iraqi Army Division, assumed complete responsibility for security and combat operations in Hawijah. The unit's performance had so improved that it received the honorific title of "Lion Battalion."³⁵

The battle on 7 April 2004 was the first and only large fight in Hawijah. Except for a skirmish on 11 November 2004, the city remained relatively calm throughout 1-27 IN's tour. Wolfhound forces faced minor IED or RPG ambushes and the threat of a skillful enemy sharpshooter dubbed the "Hawijah sniper," who caused several casualties but there were no insurgent actions on the scale of that attempted on 7 April 2004.³⁶