

**Headquarters (Multi National Division) South East
British Forces Post Office 641**

PRESS INFORMATION CENTRE

Telephone 00870 600 322 756

00870763 665 814

Mobile: 00965 9113350

Email: picbasrah@defencemediaops.co.uk

March 7th, 2004

BASRAH BRIDGE RAISED FROM THE DEPTHS

BRITISH military engineers and Iraqi contractors are salvaging a sunken bridge from the bottom of the Shatt-al-Arab river in Basrah.

The Cullingworth Bridge (named after a Royal Engineer killed in Iraq on 23 March 2003) was badly damaged on 29 December 2003 after a heavy truck drove over it and sank one of the floats which kept it in position. As the floats began to flood one by one, British engineers had to separate the damaged part of the bridge with explosives in order to save the rest of it.

Over the last few months they have continued to salvage the sunken parts to repair the bridge, which they hope will be open again by the end of the month. Major Matt Quare, who is commanding the engineers doing the work, said the troops had searched the country for spare parts to repair the missing 90-metre section.

“Some of my soldiers went to Baghdad to get parts for the bridge, and we are paying local Iraqis to build new pontoons.

“They have been working very quickly and we are very impressed with the quality of the work they have done.”

Military divers attached chains to the sunken pontoons so they could be winched to the surface by a crane and pulled out of the water. The parts will be used to repair the missing section over the next few weeks. Meanwhile the remaining section of the bridge has been strengthened to prevent it being torn away by the Shatt-al-Arab’s strong current.

“This is the third time we have repaired this bridge,” Maj Quare said. “In future, we will put measures in place to prevent heavy trucks crossing it.

“The Iraqi Police will also make sure that any vehicle which goes across is not too heavy. If the bridge is damaged again, it will be very hard to repair,” he added.

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