

well in Iraq and Afghanistan. Among the issues being examined is how to provide experiences for our leaders that take them out of their “comfort zone.” For many of us, attending a civilian graduate school provided such an experience, and the Army’s recent decision to expand graduate school opportunities for officers is thus a great initiative. For a provocative assessment of the challenges the U.S. Army faces, see the article by U.K. Brigadier Nigel Aylwin-Foster. “Changing the Army for Counterinsurgency Operations,” *Military Review* (November-December 2005): 2-15.

15. The Department of Defense (DOD) formally recognized the implications of current operations as well, issuing DOD Directive 3000.05 on 28 November 2005, “Military Support for Stability, Security, Transition, and Reconstruction Operations,” which establishes DOD policy and assigns responsibilities within DOD for planning, training, and preparing to conduct and support stability operations. This is a significant action that is already spurring action in a host of different areas. A copy can be found at <www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/corres/html/300005.htm>.

16. A brief assessment of the current situation and the strategy for the way ahead is in Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad’s “The Challenge Before Us,” *Wall Street Journal*, 9 January 2006, 12.

17. Galvin, 7. One of the Army’s true soldier-statesman-scholars, General Galvin was serving as the Commander in Chief of U.S. Southern Command at the time he wrote this article. In that position, he oversaw the conduct of a number of operations in El Salvador and elsewhere in Central and South America, and it was in that context that he wrote this enduring piece. He subsequently served as the Supreme Allied Commander, Europe, and following retirement, was the dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, Medford, Massachusetts.

18. Ibid.

About the Author

General David H. Petraeus, USA, assumed command of U.S. Central Command in October 2008 after serving more than 19 months as Commanding General, Multi National Force-Iraq. At the time this article was published, he was commanding the U.S. Army Combined Arms Center and Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.



Making Revolutionary Change: Airpower in COIN Today

by Major General Charles J. Dunlap Jr., USAF
Parameters, Summer 2008

Much of the reporting on the Iraqi and Afghan wars focuses on the ground dimension The fact remains, however, that Iraq and Afghanistan are air wars as well, and wars where airpower has also played a critical role in combat.

*Anthony H. Cordesman*¹

What a difference a year makes. The idea that airpower would be playing a critical role in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars would hardly have been predicted in December 2006, when the Army and Marine Corps issued a completely revised—but airpower “lite”—counterinsurgency (COIN) manual commonly known as Field Manual (FM) 3-24.² Complimentary reviews appeared in unlikely venues such as the *New York Times Book Review*.³ What seems to have captured the imagination of many who might otherwise be hostile to any military doctrine were the manual’s much-discussed “Zen-like” characteristics, particularly its popular “Paradoxes” section.⁴ This part of the manual contained such trendy (if ultimately opaque) dictums as “sometimes, the more force is used, the less effective it is” and “some of the best weapons for counterinsurgents do not shoot.”⁵

These maxims helped create the perception that the new doctrine was a “kinder and gentler” form of COIN that largely eschewed the concept of “killing or capturing” enemy fighters as a means of suppressing an insurgency.⁶ Supporting this interpretation is the fact that FM 3-24 favors deploying enormous numbers of forces—20 per 1,000 residents⁷—each of whom, according to the manual, “must be prepared to become . . . a social worker, a civil engineer, a school teacher, a nurse, a boy scout.”⁸ Further, as popularly understood, the aim of this revamped

force was not to confront the insurgents themselves, but rather to win “hearts and minds” of the indigenous population.⁹ To do so, the manual prefers a low-tech approach compatible with traditional Army culture that has individual soldiers engaging in close, personal contact with the “target.” In FM 3-24’s interpretation of COIN, that target is a country’s populace.

All of this discussion left little theoretical room for the role of airpower. FM 3-24’s examination of airpower is confined to a brief, five-page annex that essentially conceives airpower as aerial artillery. Accordingly, airpower is discouraged not just because the use of force is generally disdained by the popular interpretation of the manual’s theory, but also because of the mistaken idea that air-delivered munitions are somehow more inaccurate than other kinds of fires.¹⁰ In perhaps no other area has the manual been proven more wrong by the events of 2007. As this article will outline, the profound changes in airpower’s capabilities have so increased its utility that it is now often the weapon of first recourse in COIN operations, even in urban environments. As to weapons’ accuracy, by early 2008 Human Rights Watch senior military analyst Marc Garlasco made the remarkable concession that today “air strikes probably are the most discriminating weapon that exists.”¹¹

It is important to underline that the manual’s flawed conclusions about airpower are not the result of nefariousness or service parochialism. Rather, FM 3-24 draws many of its lessons from counterinsurgency operations dating from the 1950s through the 1970s. While this approach is remarkably effective in many respects, it inherently undervalues airpower. The revolutions in airpower capabilities that would prove so effective during 2007 were unavailable to counterinsurgents in earlier eras. The writers of FM 3-24 were stuck with antiquated ideas about what airpower might contribute to a joint COIN effort.

In any event, many welcomed the “kinder and gentler” approach to COIN as being a near-total reversal of the less-than-successful strategy then in effect in Iraq. In early 2007 one of FM 3-24’s principal architects, General David H. Petraeus, arrived in Iraq as the senior US commander, and the manual quickly became known as “The Book” on efforts there.¹² Shortly thereafter, some 30,000 additional forces, mostly Army units, “surged” into Iraq. By the end of 2007 the level of violence was significantly reduced.

Was airpower omitted from the operations that produced 2007’s successes? Hardly. Of enormous significance is the fact that air strikes in Iraq increased fivefold between 2006 and 2007.¹³ In addition, virtually every other aspect of airpower was exploited during the surge with great effect.¹⁴ In short, contrary to the assumptions bred by FM 3-24, ground-force commanders rather unexpectedly embraced airpower’s potential and created the modern era’s most dramatic revolution in COIN warfare.

This article examines why airpower became critical to COIN operations in 2007, a trend continuing today and one with huge implications for the future. Among other things, it will discuss the revolutions in precision and persistence that have so radically enhanced airpower’s value in COIN warfare. It will also outline the strengths and weaknesses of the Air Force’s new doctrine on irregular warfare which seeks to capture the service’s COIN approach. The author argues that while FM 3-24’s surface-force-centric approach to COIN can work, recent experience in Iraq demonstrates that leaders of all services want a more joint and interdependent concept that exploits airpower in all its dimensions. Such an approach can reduce the need for the enormous numbers of U.S. ground forces FM 3-24 entails, freeing them to prepare for other kinds of conflicts. Airpower can help, this article contends, to provide options for decision makers faced with a COIN challenge that capitalize on systems which are also useful in other kinds of conflicts.

FM 3-24 Can Work

It cannot be emphasized enough that there has

never been a question as to whether FM 3-24’s ground-centric approach could work. It can; its force ratios alone would overwhelm any insurgency, even without implementing any of the manual’s “Zen-like” features. The American soldier is, without doubt, the finest infantryman in the world, perhaps in the history of warfare. U.S. ground forces, if deployed in the numbers FM 3-24 dictates, simply cannot be defeated by any insurgency.

The real question, especially when looking to the future, is whether FM 3-24’s approach is a practical, sustainable, and optimal strategy for the 21st century. Maintaining large numbers of forces in Iraq has strained the entire U.S. military, especially the ground components. What is worrisome about a strategy so dependent upon “boots-on-the-ground” is that there are nearly 40 countries more populous than Iraq, some of which are failing or already failed states. FM 3-24’s force ratios would be unattainable if the United States intervened in many of these nations.

The manual’s solution is not just manpower-intensive; it requires a particular kind of manpower that is difficult to recruit, train, and maintain. As already noted, FM 3-24 calls for counterinsurgents who are experts at “soft power” activities. Although the Army recently met its recruiting goals, it has done so by inducting thousands of troops without high school degrees and thousands more requiring “moral waivers” due to otherwise disqualifying factors. While such recruits may make competent general-purpose forces, they are not the prized counterinsurgency professionals described in FM 3-24.

In framing strategy for the future, it is important to evaluate to what extent experience in Iraq has matched the perception of the doctrine. Has the situation improved because soft power techniques won hearts and minds? Or did the exercise of hard power predominate? While thousands of ground troops did surge into Iraq, relatively few were the highly trained counterinsurgents FM 3-24 desires. All the same, important aspects of the manual were implemented with great success. Troops were deployed from their sprawling compounds into scores of small outposts. Sadly, as many predicted, this contributed to 2007 being

the deadliest year of the war for U.S. forces.

Still, the physical presence of the additional forces had the sanguinary effect of stifling insurgent activity in Iraq's most prominent media center, Baghdad, and apparently creating a sense of security and progress beyond the city's limits. Additionally, FM 3-24's tenet of encouraging the reestablishment of the rule of law was markedly advanced by the creation of a secure "Green Zone" for law enforcement and judicial facilities, along with housing for Iraqi personnel and their families.¹⁵

As important as these developments were (and are) to the COIN effort, there is strong evidence that 2007's successes were attributable to other than the "kinder, gentler" aspects of the manual. Were hearts and minds won? Polls indicate that while Iraqi perceptions of Americans improved somewhat, the overwhelming numbers suggest that the vast majority of the population remains unchanged in their dislike of American forces. For example, 63 percent of Iraqis thought the surge had either made things worse or had no effect, and only four percent gave U.S. forces credit for improved security.¹⁶ Additionally, 79 percent of Iraqis had little or no confidence in American troops, and—amazingly—42 percent still think attacks on American forces are "acceptable."¹⁷

Yet security did improve. Giving some credence to the soft power techniques that popularized FM 3-24 does not change the fact that there was an extraordinary amount of "killing and capturing" during 2007. Although figures of enemy casualties are hard to verify, in September 2007 military officials told *USA Today* that the number of insurgents killed was already 25 percent ahead of 2006.¹⁸ By the end of the year, some unconfirmed reports indicated the total number killed may have more than doubled compared with the previous year.¹⁹ As regrettable as it may be, killing does seem to suppress violence in locations where "hearts and minds" remain mostly "lost."

Capturing helps too. In Iraq, the number of suspected insurgents captured and detained skyrocketed from 15,000 at the end of 2006 to more than 25,000 during 2007.²⁰ What makes this num-

ber so important is that as late as the fall of 2006, the total number of insurgents then at large was estimated by the Brookings Institution as totaling 20,000 to 30,000.²¹ In other words, notwithstanding the chic interpretations of effective COIN doctrine, capturing and imprisoning tens of thousands of Iraqi males seems to have had a profoundly positive effect on reducing violence.

Of course "killing and capturing" were not the only reasons for the decline in violence. Accommodations were made with Sunni and Shia leaders that produced separate sectarian fiefdoms. There is the much-reported "Awakening" in Anbar Province that armed and employed many former insurgents to protect their religiously homogenized territories. Similar offers were extended to other groups with some success. In a real sense, however, violence may have subsided in many of the "protected" areas because the purging of the other sects was already complete. It remains to be seen the degree to which peace came at the price of pluralism, tolerance, and genuine democracy.²²

Obviously, there are several factors that produced the relative peace Iraq enjoyed by the end of 2007. Nevertheless it is undeniable that, as the Congressional Research Service observed in February 2008, "one of the major shifts [in strategy] has been in the kinetic use of air power."²³

The Precision and Persistence Revolutions

Why did airpower's COIN utility become so prominent in 2007? The short answer might be captured in developments in two areas that are nothing short of revolutionary: precision and persistence. Together, these elements do not just physically degrade an insurgency's ability to wreak violence; they also can create psychological effects upon insurgents that COIN practitioners are only beginning to understand.

Historian Paul Gillespie labeled precision-guided munitions the "ultimate weapon" in conventional fights, largely because of their vastly increased ability to avoid collateral damage.²⁴ In fact, he cites a study that concluded only "twenty of twenty-three thousand munitions dropped by

NATO in the 1999 Kosovo campaign caused collateral damage or civilian casualties.”²⁵ Though Gillespie recognizes that even the most precise weaponry has limits with respect to the strategic and political results it can achieve, he nevertheless insists that precision-guided munitions “have changed the modern battlefield, and in the process created a new American way of war.”²⁶

Changes in munitions themselves complement their newfound accuracy. Some of these have been customized for COIN operations to explicitly mitigate collateral damage,²⁷ and the results have proven effective. As Lieutenant General Gary L. North explained regarding the small diameter bomb (SDB),²⁸

The SDB is uniquely qualified for urban targets that call for precision accuracy and reduced collateral damage and in close-air-support missions that our aircrews find themselves in during Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. We now have the ability to put ordnance in places where collateral damage might be a concern.²⁹

The concept of precision is more than the ability of the weapon to hit the right place; it is as much about knowing the right place to strike. That revolution involves advanced concepts of command and control that ever-improving intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities facilitate. With regard to the latter, much of the improvement is not so much in the sensors themselves, but in the length of time the sensors are able to sense.

What has been “game-changing” in this regard is the increased availability of various long-loiter, armed unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) platforms. In the fall of 2007, retired Army General Barry McCaffrey used terms very similar to Gillespie’s to describe the astonishing advances in airborne ISR capabilities that are revising the way war is conducted. In essence, General McCaffrey was describing the persistence revolution in ISR when he said:

We have already made a 100-year war-

fighting leap-ahead with MQ-1 Predator, MQ-9 Reaper, and Global Hawk.³⁰ Now we have loiter times in excess of 24 hours, persistent eyes on target, micro-kill with Hellfire and 500-pound JDAM [Joint Direct Attack Munition] bombs, synthetic aperture radar, and a host of ISR sensors and communications potential that have fundamentally changed the nature of warfare.³¹

Likewise, in March 2008 defense analyst Loren Thompson told *USA Today* that current UAV assets “present a whole new dimension to detecting and destroying of terrorists’ cells.”³² These technological innovations have transformed COIN’s all-important intelligence-gathering function. As Thompson said, a UAV is “almost like having your own little satellite over a terrorist cell.”³³ Ground commanders realize the value of airborne ISR, and this explains recent reports that cite such assets as General Petraeus’s “top hardware priority in Iraq.”³⁴

ISR developments have major implications for the way airpower is used in COIN. Conventional COIN theory as reflected in FM 3-24 places great emphasis on intelligence obtained from the indigenous population. While such intelligence can be quite valuable, it has to be viewed through a cultural lens and is vulnerable to a multitude of subjective machinations of those furnishing the information.

Visual observations have a grammar all their own. A May 2008 *U.S. News and World Report* article explained how sophisticated aerial surveillance had become by noting that Air Force ISR capabilities often can provide a superior perspective than even the “boots on the ground.”³⁵ The article noted that at the forward deployed Air Operations Center UAVs are used to:

[E]stablish a “pattern of life” around potential targets—recording such things as the comings and goings of friends, school hours, and market times. Despite the distance, the real-time video feeds often give them a better vantage point than an Army unit has just down the street from a group of insurgents.³⁶

Similarly, journalist Mark Benjamin provides an exceptionally incisive illustration of how the persistence revolution complements the new precision capabilities by observing that ISR assets can now effectively track individual people for extended periods.³⁷ Benjamin reports:

The Air Force recently watched one man in Iraq for more than five weeks, carefully recording his habits—where he lives, works, and worships, and whom he meets . . . The military may decide to have such a man arrested, or to do nothing at all. Or, at any moment they could decide to blow him to smithereens.³⁸

The last statement may be more insightful than perhaps even Benjamin realized. The precision and persistence of today's airpower creates opportunities to dislocate the psychology of the insurgents. Insurgents' sheer inability to anticipate how high-technology airpower might put them at risk can inflict stress, thereby greatly diminishing their effectiveness. For example, *The Los Angeles Times* reported in April 2008 that in Afghanistan NATO "forces recently have had unusual success in tracking and targeting mid-level Taliban field commanders, killing scores of them in pinpoint air strikes." Because the Taliban believed that cell phone signals were being used to target them, they began blowing up telecommunications towers. The result, *The Times* reported, "could hardly have been a worse public-relations move for the insurgency" because ordinary Afghans were enraged; many had become dependent upon cell phones, and the system was a source of national pride.³⁹

Another data point comes from the 2008 operations in Basra. When the Iraqi Army's effort ran into difficulties, U.S. airpower proved instrumental in stabilizing the situation.⁴⁰ Again, evidence is emerging to suggest airpower is having the proper psychological effects. Specifically, according to CNN, Shi'a cleric Muqtada al-Sadr ordered his militias to stand-down in a "nine-point statement [that] followed U.S. air strikes" in Baghdad areas considered strongholds of his Mehdi Army.⁴¹

Airpower can unnerve even the fiercest fighters. Though they may be willing to die heroically in battle against U.S. forces, that is not the death contemporary airpower permits. As one Afghan told the *New York Times*, "We pray to Allah that we have American soldiers to kill" but added pessimistically that "these bombs from the sky we cannot fight."⁴²

The helplessness that airpower inflicts on insurgents' thinking can produce real effects. In Colombia, for example, the rebel group known as the Revolutionary Armed Force of Colombia (FARC in its Spanish acronym) is facing accelerating desertions, raising the possibility that the entire insurgency may unravel. Why? According to interviews with former rebels, "the sheer terror of being bombed by Colombian fighter planes" was a crucial factor in their decision to desert.⁴³ In short, the psychological effects of persistent ISR and precision airpower are revising the oft-misunderstood notion of airpower's strategic impact. Where historically there was much discussion about the effect, or lack thereof, of airpower on the civilian populations of hostile nations, now the issue is much different: It focuses on the psychological impact on the insurgents themselves, not the civilian population. As one report put it:

Iraqi insurgents have learned to fear the drones. "They hear some sort of air noise and they don't know exactly what it is, but they know it's associated with 'my buddy getting killed,'" says [a U.S. soldier]. "Anything that makes them uneasy makes me happy."⁴⁴

As that anecdote reveals, airpower can now inflict on insurgents the same kind of disconcerting sense of vulnerability that the enemy sought to impose upon U.S. troops via improvised explosive devices, the most deadly weapon COIN forces face.⁴⁵ Today, the situation is much-reversed as a result of American air assets: U.S. "soldiers do not have to feel like they are sitting ducks for every ambusher or bomb maker. As they peer up at that . . . bird . . . it's the insurgents who have to worry."⁴⁶

As important as imposing this kind of “friction” on the minds of enemy combatants may be, it is also still possible in certain circumstances to use airpower kinetically to influence the civilian population, albeit not in the traditional way. Doing so can help win hearts and minds. For example, consider the effect when B-1 bombers destroyed an al-Qaeda torture compound in early March 2008. After the facility was flattened, a former Iraqi victim declared, “I’m a lot happier now. . . . It was like my mother gave birth to me again.” Furthermore reports say that “[a]s Coalition forces left the area, villagers stood on the side of the road cheering and clapping to be rid of this remnant of al-Qaida.”⁴⁷

Air Force Doctrine; Needs a “Vector Check”?

Ironically, the Air Force’s own recently published doctrine is not especially reflective of the precision and persistence revolution as implemented in the field beginning in 2007. The drafting of that doctrine began only when it became clear that FM 3-24, with its “airpower-lite” views, would function not just as service doctrine for the Army and Marine Corps, but also as the design for the entire operation in Iraq. By early spring 2007, the Air Force’s historical complacency regarding COIN abruptly ended as it convened a COIN conference that “jump started” its own doctrine-development project.⁴⁸

That effort produced Air Force Doctrine Document (AFDD) 2-3, *Irregular Warfare*, which was fielded the following August.⁴⁹ AFDD 2-3, which aims to cover counterterrorism and other operations in addition to COIN, does represent a marked advance in Air Force thinking. It references Air Force key capabilities in the areas of ISR, mobility, agile combat support, precision engagement, and command and control. Importantly, it makes the vital point that the introduction of a large U.S. ground force on foreign soil “may exacerbate the local situation while providing adversaries a new target set for attacks and propaganda.” Airpower, on the other hand, “can deliver a variety of effects from great distance without increasing force presence in a region or country.”⁵⁰

Still, there are issues. The Air Force doctrine mimics FM 3-24’s tendency to overemphasize what “hearts and mind-winning” efforts by occupying troops can accomplish in situations where xenophobia imbues the populace, and the insurgency’s core is comprised of ideologically immovable extremists. Thus, it undervalues the function of force in suppressing intractable insurgents. Perhaps most surprising is its seeming replication of FM 3-24’s relegation of airpower to an “enabling” role as opposed to that of an independent maneuver force.⁵¹

Much like FM 3-24, AFDD 2-3 declares several times that irregular warfare (IW) “is not a lesser-included form of traditional warfare” as if it were relevant to an Air Force approach to COIN.⁵² Actually, the record of 2007 forcefully demonstrates that airpower’s instrumentalities of traditional war include—lesser or otherwise—tremendous capabilities across the full spectrum of conflict. This utility extends, for example, beyond the kinetic uses previously addressed. To illustrate: by taking 5,000 trucks off dangerous Iraqi roads in a single month, C-17 transports—the same aircraft that would be employed in high-end war—became, in effect, perfect counter-IED weaponry.⁵³ This concept is vitally important because airpower’s inherent flexibility differentiates it from ground power’s assertion (as reflected in FM 3-24) that its conventional capability cannot easily transition from the traditional fight to a COIN role.⁵⁴ The failure of AFDD 2-3 to emphasize this agility as a central and unique strength of airpower detracts from the overall doctrine. Additionally, the doctrine does not examine at all how airpower may be used (as it was in 2007) to inflict a psychological toll on insurgents.

Most troubling, a central pillar of the doctrine is “building partnership capacity,” or BPC. While BPC may have strategic, “big picture” value apart from IW, it has little practical utility in most COIN environments. It is very often too expensive and too time consuming. Iraq is a perfect example: It will take nearly three years before the Iraqis are able to conduct their first airborne kinetic strike, and that will likely be a small-scale, relatively low-tech operation involving a few Russian helicopters.⁵⁵

While this minimal capability may have some morale value for the Iraqis, its true military value in COIN is marginal. It should not be overlooked that the emergence of U.S. airpower as a premier COIN weapon in 2007 depended greatly upon what has been described as a “battery of technology” involving “drone aircraft, three-dimensional satellite images, and increasingly small precision weapons guided by lasers or Global Positioning Systems.”⁵⁶ For a host of reasons, few “partner” nations will have access to such high-tech capabilities, and it is simply too difficult to build these technologies on a timeline that will make a difference in most COIN scenarios.

Similarly, some advocates are urging the Air Force’s acquisition of low-tech, fixed-wing aircraft, specifically for a COIN role. While there may be instances where such aircraft could prove effective, overall it is not a solution the U.S. military ought to embrace without having a rationale beyond COIN. Slow-moving, low-altitude, fixed-wing aircraft are simply too vulnerable, even to older antiaircraft systems. In a real way, implementing this suggestion would build an air force with significant manpower and infrastructure requirements yet with all the low-tech deficiencies that consigned airpower to a peripheral role in FM 3-24. It is simply not the kind of “airpower” that proved successful in 2007.

This is another example of how AFDD 2-3 embraces a concept appropriate for ground forces but not for air forces. While a few months of training can turn a poorly educated but culturally imbued host-nation soldier into an effective counterinsurgent, such is not the case with airpower. It takes years of education and training to produce an airman, time and resources many nations do not have. Finally, why should the Air Force acquire a capability useful in only one kind of conflict, especially when doing so will burden the service with yet another platform having unique operational and sustainment requirements?

If a modest, demonstrably cost-efficient aerial kinetic capability is desired for indigenous forces, the BPC ought to focus on acquiring rotary assets already part of the Army’s aviation arm. Indeed, if all that is desired is a standoff, precision-strike

system, the Army’s satellite-guided Excalibur artillery round would seem to be a better, quicker fit for local forces.⁵⁷ These assets have utility across the full spectrum of conflict, not simply COIN, a tenet that should drive the bulk of the US military’s future equipment purchases.

The Way Ahead

The experience of 2007 (and extending into 2008) indicates that neither FM 3-24 nor AFDD 2-3 have the doctrine quite right.⁵⁸ While each manual arguably advances a valued perspective, neither really captures the principles that should guide an American COIN doctrine designed to optimize a truly interdependent joint team. Several factors call for a reevaluation:

First, the efficacy of “killing and capturing” insurgents needs to be fully acknowledged. In fairness, the perceptions of FM 3-24 in this regard seem to frustrate its authors. Lieutenant Colonel John Nagl, one of the manual’s primary drafters, insists the manual is more about ensuring the right people were killed and captured as opposed to suggesting that killing or capturing could be avoided altogether by some collection of nonviolent means. Likewise, General Petraeus bristles at the suggestion the manual “shy[s] away from the need to kill the enemy” arguing that “[t]he words ‘kill’ and ‘capture’ are on every page.”⁵⁹

We need to understand that the complex nature of today’s insurgent threat differs from that of the 20th century. According to former Army officer John R. Sutherland, the 21st century has given rise to what he calls the “iGuerrilla” which he describes as “the New Model Techno-Insurgent” who exploits technology in a wide variety of ways.⁶⁰ What is key, Sutherland contends, is that the iGuerrilla “cannot be swayed by logic or argument” and is markedly different from those insurgents of the 20th century who, he contends, are relegated to the “dustbin of history.”⁶¹

“Hearts and minds” campaigns, however successful they may be among the bulk of the population, cannot by themselves end the pattern of near-anarchic violence the hardcore iGuerrillas use to block COIN success. Counterinsurgents can, however, defeat the “New Model Techno-

Insurgent” at his own techno-game if they accept the fact that technology is a centerpiece of their culture; it is, in fact, our “asymmetric” advantage. Recently, strategic theorist Colin Gray noted:

[H]igh technology is the American way in warfare. It has to be. A high-technology society cannot possibly prepare for, or attempt to fight, its wars in any other than a technology-led manner.⁶²

The United States has to develop technology capable of substituting for “boots-on-the-ground” in order to provide future decision makers with broader options. Pragmatism drives this approach, not any deficiency in the valor or dedication of U.S. ground forces. Apart from the difficulty—and risks—of acquiring and maintaining a COIN-focused Army, there is the mind-numbing price of a manpower-intensive COIN strategy.⁶³ Currently, it costs more than \$390,000 to deploy each U.S. soldier to Iraq,⁶⁴ an expense complicated by the political reality that COIN seldom engages, as Jeffrey Record observes, “core U.S. security interests,”⁶⁵ at least in the public’s perceptions. This fact is likely one of the main reasons why, despite the real success of the past year, a poll found that 62 percent of Americans think the United States should have stayed out of Iraq,⁶⁶ and another survey shows that 56 percent want the troops brought home.⁶⁷

Beyond the potential reluctance of the U.S. electorate, another difficulty in using significant numbers of U.S. ground forces as counterinsurgents is the fact that although America’s image is improving around the globe, it is still extremely negative.⁶⁸ That no country on the entire continent of Africa would host the U.S. Africa Command headquarters is but one indicator that for the foreseeable future a large “footprint” of American ground combat forces in any overseas operation should expect to be unwelcome by the indigenous population.⁶⁹

Thus, the notion that American COIN or nation-building efforts can best be executed by infusing the host state with large numbers of U.S. troops is fundamentally flawed. In fact, the deeply entrenched view of U.S. troops as an

occupation force is now the main rallying point for anti-American feelings among many Iraqis.⁷⁰ More broadly, in a new book Middle Eastern expert William R. Polk argues that the “fundamental motivation” of insurgents during the past three centuries is traceable to an “aim primarily to protect the integrity of the native group from foreigners.”⁷¹

Considering all the brutal realities of 21st century insurgencies it is imperative, as strategist Phillip Meilinger observes, to completely recast America’s approach to COIN in an effort to achieve “politically desirable results with the least cost in blood and treasure.”⁷² Doing so, Meilinger contends, requires the adaptation of a new paradigm that leverages airpower’s precision strike and persistent ISR capabilities with U.S. Special Forces and indigenous troops on the ground—much the formula employed with great success in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and northern Iraq in the early 1990s. Overarching this effort would be a re-conceptualization of the entire fight against extremism, one that makes psychological operations the main “weapon” and posits an intelligence entity as the supported command.⁷³

To be sure, a COIN doctrine compatible with America’s posture in the world, as well as its high-tech strengths, does not necessarily eliminate the need for “boots-on-the-ground.” It does, however, emphasize that indigenous forces should comprise the bulk of the counterinsurgent force ratios outlined in FM 3-24. They can be supported by U.S. Special Forces, along with specially trained Army advisers, but the “face” of the COIN effort interfacing with the local population should be native, not American.⁷⁴ This blend of local ground forces reinforced with U.S. advisers and sophisticated American technology can work; recent reports, for example, “showed the Iraqi Army to be considerably resilient when backed by Coalition airpower.”⁷⁵ Necessary for success, however, is not just any kind of airpower, but rather the high-tech precision and persistence enabled airpower that has proven so effective since 2007.

Of course, the solution to any COIN situation will never be exclusively military. Yet at the same

time it is a mistake to underestimate what military means can accomplish. In that respect, exploitation of the air weapon can contribute as never before. The experience of 2007 clearly demonstrates that its newfound precision and persistence have revolutionized COIN warfare. U.S. doctrine must evolve to fully capitalize airpower's newly enhanced prowess.

Notes

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1. Anthony H. Cordesman, "Air Combat Trends in the Afghan and Iraq Wars," Center for Strategic and International Studies, 11 March 2008 (http://www.csis.org/media/isis/pubs/080318_afgh-iraqairbrief.pdf).
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About the Author

Major General Charles J. Dunlap Jr., USAF, is Deputy Judge Advocate General, Headquarters U.S. Air Force, Washington, DC, and is the author of the Air University monograph *Shortchanging the Joint Fight? An Airman's Assessment of FM 3-24 and the Case for Developing Truly Joint COIN Doctrine* (2008). He served in both Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom



Part III: U.S. Marines, Counterinsurgency, and Urban Warfare in Iraq

For the U.S. Marine Corps, the war in Iraq was primarily an urban conflict. The largest battles, such as First and Second Fallujah, an-Najaf, and Ramadi, were characterized by fierce street fighting between Marines and insurgent fighters. Insurgents fully exploited the urban environment to their advantage. In all of these battles, Marines implemented many important elements of counterinsurgency operations, drawing from its legacy fighting in small wars and from new ideas developed during the Iraq conflict. Both the summaries of action produced by the I Marine Expeditionary Force and II Marine Expeditionary Force attest to this fact and provide readers with a detailed overview of the major military and civil operations conducted by the Marines in Iraq from 2004 through 2006.

The other selections in this section provide readers with a more in-depth view of counterinsurgency operations in Iraq during this period. Several focus on the battles of Fallujah. The two battles for the city of Fallujah (fought in April and November 2004, respectively) constituted the fiercest fighting the Corps had faced since the Vietnam War. As Jonathan F. Keiler's article, "Who Won the Battle of Fallujah?" reminds readers, the battles also demon-

strated the complex challenges of battling an insurgency. Militarily, the Marine Corps did not lose either battle. Yet the first battle of Fallujah, launched to clear the city of insurgents in April 2004, was a major setback for the Coalition's operations in Iraq. Major Alfred B. Connable's "The Massacre That Wasn't" examines the reasons the insurgents were able to retain the initiative during the battle. The second battle of Fallujah, in contrast, was a decisive victory that effectively cleared the city of insurgents. In their piece, "Operation Al Fajr: The Battle of Fallujah—Part II," Lieutenant General John F. Sattler and Lieutenant Colonel Daniel H. Wilson present a commander's perspective on the battle to retake the city in November 2004.

The final two selections present further perspective on the tactics and challenges of urban combat. Colonel Eric T. Litaker's "Efforts to Counter the IED Threat" examines efforts to defeat the insurgents' most ubiquitous weapon, the improvised explosive device. Finally, William Langewiesche's article "Rules of Engagement" examines the Haditha incident, considering how the stresses of battling an insurgency led to the deaths of 24 civilians under questionable circumstances in the Iraqi town in November 2005.



The Massacre That Wasn't

by Major Alfred B. "Ben" Connable
Ideas as Weapons: Influence and Perception in Modern Warfare (2009)

During the fighting in Fallujah in April 2004, the Associated Press reported that the U.S. Marines had bombed a mosque in the city, killing 40 civilians gathered innocently for prayer. The story was picked up by the major international news networks and rebroadcast around the world. This report became the focal point for the intensive media backlash against the Fallujah assault that eventually forced a Marine withdrawal. Over the summer, Fallujah became a safe haven for the worst of the criminal gangs, insurgents, and terrorists, including Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. The problem was the Marines did not kill 40 innocent people at that mosque.

I was working with the 1st Marine Division staff in Ramadi on April 7, 2004, at the height of the first Fallujah campaign. As the fight for the streets of the city developed, we watched a company of Marines in a firefight via the transmitted picture from an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV). We were seeing everything unfold on the streets of Fallujah in a surreal but very clear, live, televised shot. The Marines were in a tough spot, pinned by insurgents laying down accurate fire from the minaret of the large Abdul-Aziz al-Samarai mosque that dominated the surrounding terrain. Other insurgents moved in and out of the ground floor during the fight, but if the Marines were unable to eliminate the snipers the advance in that sector would be stalled.

For several hours, the two sides traded shots, during which five Marines were wounded.¹ Tightly restricted by rules of engagement from using anything heavier than a light machine gun against the mosque, the Marines struggled unsuccessfully to put a "golden round" into the narrow slit at the top of the tower. After careful consid-

eration and a clear discussion with the staff lawyers, the Marine commander eventually approved the launch of a single Hellfire missile into the tower to kill the snipers while minimizing damage to the mosque.²

We watched as the helicopter-launched missile streaked an errant path along one side of the tower, harmlessly slamming into the ground below and leaving the snipers unscathed. The minaret was too small a target, and the Marines were loath to take a second shot for fear of another missile going astray.

Pressure to advance increased as units on their flanks became exposed by the lack of progress around the mosque. The Marines on the ground asked to drop two bombs along the retaining wall around the mosque so they could rush the insurgents without becoming easy targets as they tried to break through. There was another heated debate, a command decision, and a fixed-wing jet aircraft³ dropped two 500-pound bombs along the wall at 3:53 p.m.⁴

The camera caught the explosion of the bombs on film.⁵ A huge cloud of black smoke flew up, and then settled, as the Marines rushed forward and cleared the mosque. The bombs had smashed a gap in the wall but clearly left the building completely intact. We saw no bodies live or otherwise near the wall before or after the impact of the bombs. As the unmanned aircraft slowly circled the compound, it became clear that the insurgents had fled. Some young infantry Marines climbed those steps and made sure the snipers were gone. They radioed back their report: mosque secured. They found no other personnel, weapons, or equipment, just empty shell casings on the ground floor. There were no bodies inside or outside the building.

Acutely aware that our entry into the mosque might make for negative media headlines, I began to monitor the news websites. It didn't take long for an AP reporter, Abdul-Qader Saadi,

to relay “eyewitness accounts” of the incident to his bureau:

Associated Press (3:01 p.m. UK Time)—A U.S. helicopter fired three missiles at a mosque compound in the city of Fallujah on Wednesday, killing about 40 people as American forces batted Sunni insurgents, witnesses said. Cars ferried bodies from the scene, though there was no immediate confirmation of casualties. The strike came as worshippers gathered for afternoon prayers, witnesses said. They said the dead were taken to private homes in the area where temporary hospitals had been set up.⁶

Alarmed by what appeared to be an impending and wholly unwarranted public relations disaster, we scrambled to gather the facts so we could work a release through our public affairs officer, then-Lieutenant Eric Knapp. Our first task was to confirm that we were all talking about the same mosque (we were). We then interviewed the Marines in charge of the video feed, and they confirmed that no unarmed people were seen anywhere near the fighting or the bomb impact site.

We ran the feed of the bomb drops again, taking video snapshots of the undamaged and completely intact mosque, the two craters, and the broken wall. We reviewed the facts as we knew them from our constant observation and the reporting from the Marines on the ground. There were no indications of any casualties, civilian or other. If anyone had been gathering in that mosque for prayers, they were long gone after the half-day intensive firefight in broad daylight.

In order to give the press an accurate and convincing rebuttal to the AP headline, we wanted to issue a copy of the video frames showing the intact mosque along with our version of events. Unfortunately, because the image was taken from a classified video system, the photo was considered classified and the word “Secret” was clearly visible inside the margins. It took us more than eight hours to get the image cropped and prepared for release; by that time the story

had taken on a life of its own. The BBC picked up the lead from the AP:

BBC (April 7, 2004)—A U.S. air strike has killed up to 40 people inside a mosque compound during heavy fighting in the Sunni Muslim Iraqi town of Fallujah, witnesses say. Forty Iraqis were reportedly killed when a U.S. helicopter struck a mosque with three missiles today in the central Iraqi city of Fallujah. Cars ferried bodies of the dead from the scene and part of the wall surrounding the Abdul-Aziz al-Samarrai mosque was demolished, said an AP reporter, Abdul-Qader Saadi, who added that the mosque building itself was not damaged. The strike came as worshippers gathered for afternoon prayers, witnesses said. An angry crowd gathered as the wounded were taken to makeshift hospitals.⁷

Our frustration grew as we watched what we knew to be fictions develop into reported fact—the Americans bombed a mosque and killed 40 innocent people in the midst of peaceful prayer. Things quickly got worse as the official AP report hit the Internet.⁸ In a story entitled “U.S. Bombs Fallujah Mosque; More than 40 Worshippers Killed,” by Bassem Mroue and Abdul-Qader Saadi, the AP reported the following:

An Associated Press reporter in Fallujah saw cars ferrying the dead and wounded from the Abdul-Aziz al-Samarrai mosque. Witnesses said a helicopter fired three missiles into the compound, destroying part of a wall surrounding the mosque but not damaging the main building. The strike came as worshippers had gathered for afternoon prayers, witnesses said. Temporary hospitals were set up in private homes to treat the wounded and prepare the dead for burial.

Most important, the inset picture AP story’s by Agence France-Presse photographer Cris Bouroncle depicted three Marines on the streets

of Fallujah. It was accompanied by this caption:

U.S. Marines from the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force move into Fallujah. U.S. Marines pressing an offensive in this Iraqi town west of Baghdad bombed a central mosque filled with worshippers and killed up to 40, a Marine officer said.

Now the AP was attributing the story of the massacre to an official, although unnamed, Marine source. We ran a request for information down the chain of command and quickly ascertained that nobody had confirmed this version of events. Reporters and editors were passing along the original AP report as if they were playing a bad game of “telephone.” Every report seemed to loop back on the original story by Saadi. Later that day, Gwen Ifill interviewed Tony Perry, a reporter for the *Los Angeles Times* who spent a considerable amount of time in al-Anbar Province. He depicted a different version of events from the AP story:

Ifill: . . . We did hear today about an attack on a mosque that killed anywhere from 40 to 60 people. Were you with that unit and can you describe what happened? (Note: Now Ifill has introduced the number “60” into the story.)

Perry: Yeah, I’m with the unit right now. The first reports are a little misleading. What happened here . . . there are several mosques that have been used by the insurgents as places to either gather or strategize or even fire at Marines. One particular mosque had 30 to 40 insurgents in it. They had snipers. They wounded five Marines. There were ambulances that drove up and the Marines let them come in to take the insurgent wounded away. But instead, people with RPGs . . . jumped out of the ambulances and started fighting with the Marines. Ultimately, what the Marines did is call in airpower. A helicopter dropped a Hellfire missile and then an F-16 dropped a laser-guided bomb on the outside of the mosque, put a huge crater outside the

mosque. There’s sort of a plaza outside the mosque. And suddenly, the firing inside stopped. But when the Marines examined the mosque and went in and went door-to-door in the mosque and floor-to-floor, they found no bodies, nor did they find the kind of blood and guts one would presume if people had died. Now one of two things must have happened: either the people died inside and were carted off somehow—and there is a tradition of the insurgents carting off their dead very quickly; or two, frankly, they escaped before the bomb was dropped. We cannot confirm that anybody actually died in that mosque. The Marines were quite willing to kill everybody in the mosque because they were insurgents. They had been firing at people, at Marines. And as the lieutenant colonel who ordered the strikes said, this was no longer a house of worship; this was a military target.⁹

Tony Perry had developed a reputation with the Marines for both professionalism and objectivity. Admittedly fearful of combat and death, he gained tremendous respect with his willingness to travel into hot spots alongside the Marines. However, he was never afraid to point out our failures or shortcomings on the front page of the *Los Angeles Times*.

If Perry, who was right on the scene, couldn’t find evidence of any massacre, how did Saadi get the chain of events so confused?¹⁰ I hesitate to question the fact that he personally witnessed carloads of casualties. There does not seem to be any evidence, however, that he confirmed the wounded and dead were actually removed from the compound, had been innocently gathering for prayer, had been hit by an air strike, or were not just insurgent fighters being evacuated from the ongoing fight down the street.

Even assuming Saadi’s first-person account of casualties coming from the area around the mosque is accurate, the rest of the story relies entirely on secondhand accounts from Fallujah residents or, possibly, savvy insurgent fighters who regularly dropped their weapons to blend

in with the civilian population. Reporting these secondhand stories as nearly unquestioned fact seems to be where truth separated from the fiction in the confusion of battle.

If “eyewitness” reports are to be taken at face value, the preponderance of Marine attacks on insurgent targets in Fallujah between April and November 2004 resulted in the deaths of women and children. Reporters regularly overlooked the fact that most of these accounts came from a spokesman in the insurgent-controlled hospital on the southwestern peninsula of the city or from other questionable sources.¹¹ Few media outlets seemed to take into account the power of Fallujan xenophobia or the active insurgent propaganda campaign aimed at the American and international media. The “truth” in Fallujah often wallowed helplessly somewhere between frantic street rumor and outright lie.

No matter whether the people reporting the story to Saadi were actual witnesses, insurgents, or simply Fallujans angered at the fighting around the mosque, some logical questions regarding the AP story remain:

- Why were Fallujah Muslims gathering for prayer at 3:53 p.m. when the closest prayer times for April 7, 2004, were 1:08 p.m. and 4:43 p.m.?¹²
- Why were 40 people gathering for prayer at the mosque on a Wednesday afternoon when this kind of communal prayer gathering is usually reserved for Friday mornings?
- Why were 40 people gathering peacefully for prayer at a mosque that had become the focal point for a broad daylight, raging firefight?
- If the Marine bombs killed up to 40 innocent people, why were there no signs of any blood or bodies in or around the mosque compound?

Despite the doubts raised by Tony Perry, a CNN online article that seemed to dismiss the casualties as rumor,¹³ protestations of the Marine battalion commander on site, and lengthy denials by military spokesman Brigadier General [Mark T.] Kimmert, the story of the massacre at the Abdul-Aziz al-Samarrai mosque is now part of the official history of Iraq. The website for the

group “Iraq Body Count” (IBC), lists the incident not once but twice, accounting for 40 deaths “confirmed” by the Associated Press and Middle East Online.¹⁴ Antiwar bloggers made haste to turn the AP version of the incident into political fodder. An April 8 article by Anthony Gregory on antiwar.com entitled, “Fallujah Revenge and the War Disease” leads with the following paragraph:

The recent bombing of a mosque in Fallujah meant fiery deaths for about 40 Iraqis, but if the hawks get their way, it will be only the beginning of the deadly reprisals waged by the U.S. against that town in retaliation for the massacre of Americans there last week.¹⁵

The New World Blogger adds:

This isn’t good—an understatement. If even during the Middle Ages someone could call for sanctuary within a church, shouldn’t mosques, churches and synagogues be off-limits for bombing as well? Not only do they represent relentless revenge, but they also plant further seeds for anti-U.S. hatred among those who feel their religion has been disrespected. I think we have seen enough of what blind retaliation has to offer us.¹⁶

The bloggers aren’t the only ones to capitalize on the massacre-that-wasn’t in Fallujah. Al Jazeera added a new twist to the story in its April 7 English-online Internet reporting:

The bomb hit the minaret of the mosque and ploughed a hole through the building, shattering windows and leaving the mosque badly damaged.¹⁷

With the Associated Press and BBC stories to back up its claims, nobody bothered to question the Al Jazeera version of events. It should be noted that then-Prime Minister Ayad Allawi banned Al Jazeera from reporting in Iraq prior to the second Fallujah campaign because of ongoing collusion with the insurgents and blatant propagandizing.

There is no indication that the Associated Press or any other agency made any effort to confirm or deny the original story by Saadi. None of the post-incident interviews seems to indicate that the AP reporter actually entered the mosque compound to check his facts. Tony Perry's on-scene reporting was simply ignored.

What impact, if any, did this false report have on the conduct of the war? According to in-depth interviews and research done by Bing West, the author of *No True Glory*, stories like the one about the mosque "massacre" beamed across the BBC airwaves led in large part to a dramatic shift in British public opinion against the Fallujah assault.¹⁸ The resulting pressure and public outcry over the reports of civilian deaths and images of dead babies repeatedly broadcast by Al Jazeera forced Prime Minister Tony Blair to pressure President Bush to cease offensive combat operations. Although not strictly causal by itself, the AP report was certainly a central factor in the media disaster that led to the withdrawal from Fallujah in the spring.

This withdrawal left the city in the hands of men like Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, Abdullah Janabi, and Omar Hadid. They turned it into a safe haven for criminals, terrorists, and murderers of every stripe. These men cut off Nick Berg's head and brutally slaughtered other Western hostages. They kidnapped, tortured, and murdered innocent Iraqi civilians who happened to get in their way. The Fallujah haven allowed them to conduct hundreds of operations that killed and maimed our Marines and soldiers across the al-Anbar and northern Babil provinces in mid-2004.

We were eventually able to respond with Operation al-Fajr, the intensive Marine and Army assault to retake the city in November.¹⁹ The six-month interval between Operations Vigilant Resolve and al-Fajr allowed the insurgents to dig tunnels, prepare defenses, and stock weapons and ammunition. We suffered more than 500 U.S. and Iraqi military casualties in this battle. Learning their lesson from the propaganda victory in April, the insurgents turned almost every mosque in Fallujah into a

fortress and weapons depot in the hope they would take return fire during the fighting. Unfortunately, the fighting did indeed cause some damage, and the AP was there to point out American culpability.²⁰

The reported events at the Abdul-Aziz al-Samarrai mosque continue to provide ammunition to the antiwar crowd and contribute to the outrage in the greater Arab world. The story seems to be handcrafted for extremist religious leaders trying to coerce young Muslim men to travel to Iraq and kill Americans. The Iraq Body Count casualty list that includes the numbers of dead reported by the AP is regularly quoted as fact. The official BBC Iraq timeline figures the mosque incident prominently, reminding its readers of this supposed atrocity and continuing to erode support for the war.²¹

Many reporters working stories in Iraq are professional, relatively unbiased, and willing to risk their lives to get first-person accounts. However, military and diplomatic officers also regularly complain about shallow, inaccurate reporting that exaggerates violence, ignores incremental success, and undermines American popular support. Some of the most vociferous critics of military cultural training display a stunning ignorance of post-Saddam culture when quoting the Iraqi street. Spend enough time on the ground and one finds reporters content to rereport wire stories from the Green Zone (with a suitably dramatic backdrop) or rely wholly on Iraqi stringers who may or may not be working with insurgents, exaggerating events, or simply creating stories to turn a buck in the face of high unemployment. There are even a few mainstream reporters with dedicated antiwar agendas. One prominent wire service correspondent is well known for going on "hunting missions," looking for that one disgruntled Marine or soldier who will give him a gripe or a pithy, antiwar comment, while ignoring positive or upbeat interviews.

It is unlikely that Mr. Abdul-Qader Saadi was hunting for a negative story. He was obviously brave and willing to risk his life on the streets of Fallujah, and his report was very straightforward and seemingly professional. It was technically

accurate: some people told him that the Americans had bombed a mosque and killed 40 innocent people. He says he saw people carting away casualties. He never says that he followed through with an investigation and did not confirm the details of the incident in any meaningful way. This is typical of AP "up-to-the minute" coverage.

It took the assumptions and circular reporting of the BBC, Iraq Body Count, the Agence France-Presse photographer, Al Jazeera, and the bloggers to cement "the massacre that wasn't" into the history of the Iraq War. Some of them wanted the story to be true and will never question the facts. Those with a professional reputation for objectivity to uphold may want to take a second look. The Marines learned their lesson; it will never again take eight hours to release critical evidence to the media in the heat of battle. Perhaps if the truth had been told we could have avoided the murder and mayhem that emanated from the "city of mosques" throughout the long, hot summer of 2004. We may never know how many more reports like this one are woven into the narrative of the war in Iraq.

Notes

Reprinted from G. J. David and T. R. McKeldin, eds., *Ideas as Weapons: Influence and Perception in Modern Warfare* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2009), 341-50. Used courtesy of Major Connable and by permission from Potomac Books.

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1. All five were wounded in the initial contact when a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) fired from the mosque compound struck a Marine vehicle. According to press reports one later died, although this has not been confirmed by the Marine Corps.
2. The AGM-114 series Hellfire is a laser-guided anti-tank missile with a small, shaped charge warhead typically used to destroy armored vehicles.
3. "Eyewitness" accounts would later incorrectly identify a Marine helicopter as the source of all three strikes: the missile and the two bombs. Marine helicopters do not carry or employ 500-pound aerial bombs
4. This time is taken from the original time stamp on the uncleared, classified imagery.
5. Images sanitized and cleared for release by the appropriate Marine Corps units and public affairs officials.
6. "IBC Falluja April 2004 News Digest," *Iraq Body Count* (http://www.iraqbodycount.net/resources/falluja/ibc_falluja_apr_07.php#bna1).
7. BBC News, "U.S. Bombards Iraq Mosque Complex," April 7, 2004 (http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/middle_east/3609665.stm).
8. Bassem Mroue and Abdul-Qader Saadi, "U.S. Bombs Fallujah Mosque; More Than 40 Worshippers Killed," CommonDreams.org News Center, April 7, 2004 (<http://www.commondreams.org/headlines/04/0407-06.htm>).
9. "IBC Falluja April 2004 News Digest."
10. Perry himself later filed a joint report with Edmund Sanders (Tony Perry and Edmund Sanders, "U.S. Bombs Mosque in Falluja: Military Says Site Was Used to Launch Strikes; Troops' Tours May Be Extended," *Los Angeles Times*, April 8, 2004) that repeated both the eyewitness claims and the Marine denials. This version did not point out that there had been no confirmation of deaths in or around the mosque and did not go into the level of detail presented in the Ifill interview.
11. See <http://www.fair.org/activism/nyt-fallujah.html>

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12. Exact prayer times for April 7, 2004, in Fallujah can be found at <http://www.islamicfinder.org>.

13. CNN.com, "Marines: U.S. Bombed Iraqi Mosque Wall," April 7, 2004 (<http://www.cnn.com/2004/WORLD/meast/04/07/fallujah.strike/index.html>).

14. Iraq Body Count typically (and commendably) lists only incidents confirmed by two sources. However, in this case they refer to the original AP story and a website that references the AP story in an obvious case of circular reporting.

15. Anthony Gregory, "Fallujah Revenge and the War Disease," Anti-War.com, April 8, 2004 (<http://www.antiwar.com/orig/gregory.php?articleid=2274>).

16. New World Blogger.com, "New Additions," April 10, 2004 (http://new-world-blogger.blogspot.com/2004_04_04_new-world-blogger_archive.html).

17. Al Jazeera English website: [.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/A73529F1-1554-4C68-8774-BA478D565B02.htm \(accessed November 30, 2006\).

18. Bing West, *No True Glory: A Frontline Account of the Battle for Fallujah* \(New York: Bantam, 2005\). West refers to the incident at the mosque from two separate vantage points.

19. "Phantom Fury" is the other name for al-Fajr. "Vigilant Resolve" was the code name for the first Marine assault on Fallujah.

20. AP Photo/Bilal Hussein, "An Iraqi Man Inspects Damage," November 8, 2004 \(<http://www.commondreams.org/headlines04/1108-08.htm>\).

21. BBC News, "Timeline: Iraq," October 14, 2005 \(\[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4343078.stm\]\(http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4343078.stm\)\).](http://english</p></div><div data-bbox=)

About the Author

Major Alfred B. "Ben" Connable served as the Middle East desk officer at Headquarters Marine Corps Intelligence Department before being assigned to 1st Marine Division as a foreign area officer. In 2003 and 2004, he was the division's foreign area officer and intelligence operations officer. Connable has retired from the Marine Corps and is working for the RAND Corporation as an intelligence policy analyst.



I Marine Expeditionary Force Summary of Action

by Commander, U.S. Marine Forces, Central Command

Adapted from Unit Award Recommendation

Unit: I Marine Expeditionary Force

Recommended Award: Presidential Unit Citation

Period of Award: 2 August 2004-1 February 2005

Status: Secretary of the Navy

Originator: Commander, U.S. Marine Corps Forces Central Command

Citation:

For extraordinary heroism and exceptional performance of duty in actions against enemy forces from 2 August 2004 to 1 February 2005, in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom II. I Marine Expeditionary Force (Reinforced) (I MEF) conducted a coordinated campaign across a 400 mile arc of the Euphrates River Valley to eliminate insurgent control over the key cities of an-Najaf and al-Fallujah and the remainder of the local population in the I Marine Expeditionary Force area of responsibility. The battles for an-Najaf and al-Fallujah were the largest U.S.-led urban operations since the Vietnam War. Both battles saw the introduction of new and innovative tactics, techniques, and procedures which became key to I Marine Expeditionary Force's success. Throughout 24 days of intense conflict in an-Najaf, the Marines conducted destruction raids on insurgent strongholds, captured weapons caches, and engaged in fierce close-quarters battle. During this operation, I Marine Expeditionary Force killed over 1,500 enemy insurgents while simultaneously preserving the sacred Imam Ali Shrine and Mosque Complex. In response to violent insurgent actions in al-Fallujah, a coalition force of 12,500, led by I MEF, boldly breached the city's fortifications and destroyed a heavily armed and well-entrenched fanatical enemy. Countless acts of individual bravery in al-Fallujah resulted in over 2,000 enemy killed or captured as

the Marines, Soldiers, and Sailors fiercely fought and cleared the city house by house. By their outstanding courage, resourcefulness and aggressive fighting spirit in combat against the enemy, the officers and enlisted personnel of I Marine Expeditionary Force reflected great credit upon themselves and upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service. . . .

The Battle to Liberate an-Najaf

In August 2004, I Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF) was called upon to conduct full spectrum offensive operations in order to defeat insurgent Mahdi militia forces in Najaf and Kufa and restore normal civil authorities to the cities of Najaf and Kufa. In sustained urban combat, I MEF destroyed and otherwise forcibly removed a well-entrenched enemy militia from Najaf, the holiest city in Iraq, without damaging the holy Imam Ali Shrine and Mosque Complex.

Combat operations were characterized by intense and close combat. Infantry fought at close range through a huge cemetery, honeycombed with tunnels, crypts, and other concealed positions. Close air support and main tank direct fire enabled ground units to dislodge Mahdi militias from improved fighting positions in the cemetery and buildings around the mosques. During the entire 24 days of combat in Najaf, I MEF forces suffered minimal casualties but inflicted an estimated 1,500 enemy killed in action.

The defeat of the enemy in Najaf also represented the beginning of the end for the organized Mahdi militia insurgency and the marginalization of a dangerous militant Shi'ite insurgent movement. The strategic outcome later helped shape future combat operations in Fallujah and encouraged Shi'ite support for a national election.

Summary of Ground Combat Operations

On 7 August 2004, Task Force 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment (TF 1-5 CAV) arrived to reinforce

the 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit (11th MEU) for further combat operations, while the Iraqi National Guard (ING) led an Iraqi operation to raid Sadr's house in Najaf. This engagement resulted in four enemy killed in action and the capture of two Mahdi militia. On 8 August 2004, TF 1-5 CAV cleared the remainder of the Najaf cemetery and encountered little to no resistance moving into the cemetery. On 9 August 2004, Multi National Force-West (MNF-W) assumed tactical control of 11th MEU with the arrival of the I MEF (Fwd) Command Element, commanded by the I MEF Deputy Commanding General, Brigadier General Dennis J. Hejlik, USMC. Upon his arrival, and during the duration of operations, I MEF (Fwd) Command Element conducted rounds of sustained peace negotiations with Iraqi interim government and Mahdi militia officials, while still planning, overseeing and supervising combat operations.

On 11 August 2004, 11th MEU forces engaged anti-Iraqi forces in the southwest, northwest, and northeast portions of the city. As of 11 August 2004, enemy killed in action was estimated at 460. On 12 August 2004, Battalion Landing Team (BLT) 1/4 (1st Battalion, 4th Marines) and members of 405th ING conducted a raid near Sadr's house to destroy anti-Iraqi forces and gather information of intelligence value. The raiders attacked and cleared four buildings against a platoon-sized enemy armed with small arms, sniper rifles, and mortars, resulting in three enemy killed in action and 18 enemy wounded in action. Exploitation of Sadr's house produced numerous documents, computer hard drives and other material of intelligence value. On 13 August 2004, the 11th MEU Maritime Special Purpose Force, in support of 36th Civil Defense Order and Iraqi Counter Terrorism Force, conducted a direct action mission on the Sahlah Mosque in Kufa. BLT 1/4 forces provided exterior cordon while 36th Civil Defense Order and Iraqi Counter Terrorism Force established the interior cordon and conducted the assault, resulting in three enemy killed in action and the capture of eight Mahdi militia.

On 15 August 2004, both TF 1-5 CAV and Task Force 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry (TF 2-7 CAV) were engaged numerous times by direct and indirect fire. Both units returned fire killing or wounding numerous enemies. Later that day, the Governor of an-Najaf announced that the provincial council voted to oust

the Mahdi militia and demanded the Mahdi militia forces leave an-Najaf. Sporadic fighting continued with the Mahdi militia intentionally using the no-fire area as a safe haven from which to attack or retreat. On 17 August 2004, Alpha Company, BLT 1/4, attached to TF 2-7 CAV, conducted a destruction raid on a suspected enemy weapons cache in Najaf while Charlie Company TF 2-7 CAV conducted a destruction raid on a suspected enemy stronghold. These raids resulted in the capture of a Mahdi militia and a weapons cache. At the request of TF 2-7 CAV, aviation assets engaged an enemy mortar position near the hotel district within the old city.

18 August 2004 saw sustained engagements involving every battalion in the special Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF). TF 1-5 CAV was engaged with rocket-propelled grenades in the cemetery. Alpha Company, TF 2-7 CAV received heavy machine-gun, small arms, and RPG fire from a building just inside the ring road. After Bravo Company, BLT 1/4 was engaged by mortar fire, aviation assets surgically destroyed the mortar system, located within the restricted fire area. Reinforced by the Iraqi National Guard, the Iraqi police established a traffic control point for all traffic approaching the ring road and succeeded in containing the Mahdi militia inside the Imam Ali Mosque Complex. On 20 August 2004, after TF 1-5 CAV received mortar fire in the cemetery, an AC-130 gunship destroyed the enemy position.

On 21 August 2004, Alpha Company, BLT 1/4 conducted a raid on Kufah to clear a former Iraqi police station. In support of this raid, Bravo Company attacked by fire onto a Mahdi militia checkpoint. 2d Platoon of Alpha Company and BLT 1/4 Reconnaissance established a screen line to prevent a southern egress from Kufah. An AC-130, in coordination with attack helicopters, brought effective fire on the target during the attack. The coordinated attack was a success. Both objectives were secured with an estimated 45 enemy killed in action and 29 Mahdi militia captured.

On 22 August 2004, TF 1-5 CAV, reinforced with elements of BLT 1/4, conducted a probing attack on the western portion of a parking garage. The probing element encountered heavy resistance, centered mainly on the buildings to the southwest of the parking garage. An AC-130, which had been prosecuting targets of opportunity on the western end of the

parking garage and surrounding buildings, engaged a mortar position. After TF 2-7 CAV received sniper fire from four buildings to the east of the restricted fire area, aviation assets destroyed the targets, resulting in an unknown number of enemy killed in action. Despite rumors of peace talks, the fighting continued on 23 August 2004. After TF 2-7 CAV received RPG and heavy machine-gun fire from the northern end of the old city, AC-130 fire destroyed the target. Following a rocket-propelled grenade and small arms fire attack on TF 1-5 CAV from west of the shrine, artillery fire destroyed the target.

Combat operations continued on 24 August 2004 when TF 2-7 CAV, TF 1-5 CAV and BLT 1/4 crossed the line of departure to conduct limited objective attacks in their respective zones. They were supported by 155mm artillery, AC-130, AV-8B Harriers, F-18 Hornets and AH-1W Cobras. TF 2-7 CAV came in contact immediately and executed numerous close air support missions. Hellfire missiles and several rockets helped TF 2-7 take several buildings in the eastern portion of the old city. TF 1-5 engaged the enemy with tank main gun, 25mm, and heavy machine gun fire. Following their attack, TF 1-5 moved south into the old city to conduct a reconnaissance by force. TF 1-5 encountered a deliberate obstacle with imbedded improvised explosive devices, sporadic rocket-propelled grenades, and small arms fire. An AC-130 engaged the obstacles, resulting in a large secondary explosion and the partial reduction of the obstacle. The AC-130 also engaged a bus near the garage complex. BLT 1/4 successfully cleared their zone with little contact. The battalion landing team's actions forced a Mahdi militia retreat south and east, where 36th Commando conducted a preplanned ambush, resulting in an unknown number of enemy killed in action.

On 24 August 2004, a UH-1N Huey employed a Bright Star laser designator for the first time in combat. The aircraft designated a building that housed five to 15 Mahdi militia and a possible anti-aircraft artillery piece. The building and enemy were destroyed by Hellfire missiles from an AH-1W, which were employed in conjunction with the Bright Star laser. On 24 August, TF 2-7 CAV established attack by fire positions around the eastern side of the ring road in order to support the pending BLT 1/4 attack south through the cemetery and into the northwest corner

of the old city. Two key buildings were seized, followed by systematic clearing of Mahdi militia forces throughout the night. In support of this attack and the final assault planned for 26 August 2004, several key targets were engaged by fixed-wing aviation assets: To help shape the conditions for the final assault on the shrine and mosque, GBU-12 bombs (500 pounds) and GBU-31 bombs (2,000 pounds) were delivered on key buildings, which housed Mahdi militia, with good effects. During this assault, an estimated 51 enemy killed in action were assessed, with Marine expeditionary unit forces sustaining 13 friendly wounded in action.

Sporadic fighting continued throughout the morning and into the early afternoon on 26 August 2004. BLT 1/4 attacked the Mahdi militia through the northwest corner of the old city. Alpha Company BLT 1/4 attacked east and tied in by fire with TF 1-5 near the intersection of the ring road and Route Nova. TF 2-7 pressed the attack from east to west. By 1500 on 26 August 2004, the Imam Ali Shrine and Mosque was surrounded and final planning continued on decisive actions to storm the site. However, Multi National Corps-Iraq (MNC-I) released an order directing I MEF to cease offensive operations in Najaf in order to allow Iraqi political and religious officials the opportunity to peaceably resolve the removal of Mahdi militia from the Imam Ali Shrine and Mosque Complex. On 27 August 2004, the Grand Ayatollah Sistani received the keys to the Imam Ali Shrine and Mosque Complex, signaling the end of hostilities there.

Summary of Air Combat Operations

Support by I MEF's air combat element, the 3d Marine Aircraft Wing (MAW), was noteworthy and impressive. 3d MAW's CH-46E Sea Knights provided casualty evacuation and medical evacuation support, while H-1s and AV-8Bs were heavily engaged in close air support missions throughout the city. CH-53E Super Stallions flew nightly missions from Al Asad to Forward Operating Base Duke, bringing equipment and ammunition. On 5 August 2005, 3d MAW experienced a combat loss when a UH-1N was shot down by enemy fire. Although the two crew members sustained injuries, they were quickly recovered by a CH-46 and flown to Babylon for appropriate medical treatment.

Fixed-wing and rotary wing close air support proved to be extremely challenging due to clearance of fire issues, the importance of minimizing collateral damage, and the various restricted fire areas and no-fire areas placed around the Imam Ali Shrine and Mosque Complex. As the pressure from Coalition forces mounted, the Mahdi militia began to hide within these buffer zones. On 25 August 2004, precision air strikes were conducted on multiple buildings occupied by the Mahdi militia forces within the buffer zone around the Imam Ali Shrine.

During the battle of an-Najaf, the H-1s expended more than 90 Hellfire missiles, 600 2.75mm rockets, and 7,000 rounds of 20mm shells while the AV-8B Harriers delivered seven GBU-12 bombs, nine AGM-65E Maverick missiles, and 100 rounds of 25mm shells. During the battle of Najaf, CH-46 helicopters transported a total of 100 casualty evacuation support missions and routinely responded to calls for assistance in 30 minutes or less. 3d MAW aircraft flew over 1,800 hours, 1,100 sorties, and delivered 300,000 pounds of cargo in support of operations in the city of an-Najaf.

Summary of Combat Service Support Operations

1st Force Service Support Group (1st FSSG) provided superior assistance to 11th MEU in developing actionable intelligence in Kufa to defeat Mahdi militia. 1st FSSG's subordinate commands provided combat support to ensure the success of Operation Najaf, including providing a detachment of corpsman and AN/VRC-90 radios to 11th MEU in support of this operation; coordinating transportation for personnel and associated equipment to Forward Operating Base Duke; and ensuring that proper equipment custody procedures were followed to transfer the equipment from force service support group EKMS [Electronic Key Management System] account to 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit EKMS account.

Summary of Reconstruction Operations

In the aftermath of the August battle of Najaf, 11th MEU established an extremely aggressive and proactive program to repair battle damage by making reconstruction and condolence payments to the innocent victims of the battle. An aggressive patrolling package was utilized to identify potential civil affairs

projects while maintaining a force protection posture commensurate with the cessation of hostilities. The Gulf Investment Company processed 45 cases, generating over \$90,000 in payments. In the span of one month, 11th MEU spent \$3.5 million on over 100 civil affairs projects in Najaf.

In the months that followed, the Marine expeditionary unit worked closely with Najaf government officials, Iraqi security forces and nongovernmental organizations to identify, screen and provide nearly 18,000 condolence payments of approximately \$10 million dollars in aid and to facilitate repairs for these victims. Such a large and rapid undertaking in providing battle damage condolence payments was unprecedented in Iraqi history. The successful reconstruction operations in Najaf served as a template for future operations in Fallujah. . . .

The Battle to Liberate Fallujah, Operation al-Fajr

Operation al-Fajr (formerly known as Operation Phantom Fury) was the battle to liberate the city of al-Fallujah from the control of entrenched foreign fighters, terrorists, and insurgents in November 2004. The battle represented an unprecedented joint and combined operation, which broke the back of a strong insurgency in al-Anbar Province and effectively disrupted insurgent operations throughout the region. The success of Coalition forces in Fallujah, in one of the most fiercely difficult urban combat battles to be recorded, is credited with tremendously strengthening the Interim Iraqi Government and swaying moderate Iraqis to support the peaceful transition to local control.

Summary of Ground Combat Operations

Decisive ground combat operations in Fallujah were preceded by weeks of carefully planned and executed Phase I shaping and Phase II enhanced shaping operations. Phase I shaping operations included precision air strikes, a massive regiment-sized feint, as well as other smaller mounted and dismounted raids and snap vehicle checkpoints.

During Phase I shaping operations, I MEF executed an effective information operations campaign that drove wedges between the local population and the anti-Iraqi forces, created paranoia among the insur-

gents and caused the local population to slowly vacate the battlespace before the attack. This information campaign helped reduce the risk of collateral damage and avoided a humanitarian crisis had the civilian population suddenly fled the city.

Incessant I MEF Phase I shaping operations and troop movements disrupted anti-Iraqi forces command and control and forced the anti-Iraqi forces to commit their defenses to the south and west of the city. Other shaping operations consisted of precision air strikes, which destroyed key targets deep in the heart of the city with only minimal collateral damage. Precision air strikes targeted anti-Iraqi forces leadership; key command and control nodes; weapons systems and platforms; ammunition and weapons caches; and berms, bunkers and fortifications. A carefully thought out information operations and public affairs operation shaping campaign headed off adverse reaction to potential collateral damage by reminding the local and world audience that anti-Iraqi forces were illegally using protected places, like mosques, hospitals and schools, to carry out attacks.

Phase II enhanced shaping began on 7 November 2004. Enhanced shaping included a complex electronic attack, the isolation of Fallujah, movement into attack positions, the securing of two key bridges on the western peninsula, the continued integration of Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force (CJSOTF) snipers and precision air strikes, which destroyed scores of improvised explosive devices and improved fighting positions and obstacles. These surgical air strikes created breaches and opened lanes for follow-on troop movement.

During Phase II enhanced shaping, the Iraqi 36th Civil Defense Order, supported by 3d Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, seized a hospital on the peninsula west of the city, which had served as an insurgent command and control node. The 36th Civil Defense Order raised the Iraqi flag as a symbol of the great things to come. These units also secured the two bridges that connected the peninsula with the city and established blocking positions on each. The U.S. Army's "Black Jack" Brigade then encircled the city to prevent any insurgents from escaping and to prevent any insurgent reinforcements from entering. Regimental Combat Team 1 (RCT-1) and Regimental Combat Team 7 (RCT-7) moved into their attack positions just north of the city, with RCT-1 assigned to the

western portion of the city and RCT-7 assigned to the east. On cue, power was cut to the city to disorient the insurgents and take greater advantage of the technological capabilities of the multinational forces.

Phase III decisive operations began at 1900 on 8 November 2004. Unfolding exactly as planned, decisive operations consisted of the rapid mechanized penetration by RCT-1 and RCT-7, a combined arms attack, "search and attack in zone" operations and the continued blocking of the city, along with rear area security. RCT-1 commenced the attack by seizing the apartment complex just north of the city. Snipers used the apartment complex to kill dozens of anti-Iraqi forces, forward observers, and defenders on the northern edge of the city. Breaching of the train tracks and a mechanized-supported infantry assault into the city quickly followed. RCT-7 conducted similar assaults from north to south.

The original plan anticipated RCT-1 to experience a great deal of resistance in the northwest portion of the city. Less resistance was expected for RCT-7 in the northeast quadrant. Therefore, RCT-7 was scheduled to turn and sweep through the southeast quadrant into the southwest and drive any resistance into the river to the city's west. However, as operations progressed, both regimental combat teams moved more quickly than expected. Utilizing the branches and sequels developed in advance, the division commander modified the plan and, on 11 November 2004, directed both regimental combat teams to continue their assault directly to the south.

By 13 November 2004, the initial attack through the city was complete and Phase III-B (Search and Attack) operations commenced as the units went back through the city and conducted detailed clearing of any remaining insurgents. During the Search and Attack phase, operations targeted anti-Iraqi forces that might have escaped operations. Simultaneously, I MEF conducted other brigade, regiment, and division-level operations throughout Area of Operations Atlanta to disrupt enemy forces, develop actionable intelligence, and set conditions for elections that soon followed. Those operations occurred in Amariyah, Saqlawiyah, Khalidiyah and Habbaniyah, Kharma, Nasser Wa Salam, and Khandaria.

During Phase III operations, I MEF troops seized over 520 weapons caches; secured 60 mosques,

which had been used as fighting positions; discovered 24 improvised explosive device factories and two vehicle-borne improvised explosive device factories; destroyed 13 command and control nodes; discovered 7 suspected anti-Iraqi forces chemical laboratories; and found eight hostage locations. The gritty success of I MEF during Operation al-Fajr has been likened to the Marine Corps' hard won victory in the historic urban battle for Hue City. However, while I MEF suffered modest casualties during the assault, enemy losses were estimated at over 1,000 killed in action and 1,000 captured.

Phase III operations were notable for the successful employment of joint fixed- and rotary-wing close air support in the urban environment, which minimized collateral damage. The bold decision to employ joint and combined armor/infantry units disrupted anti-Iraqi forces command and control and exploited I MEF's superior firepower, armor protection, and command-and-control advantages. The Iraqi security forces proved their value by aggressively attacking and seizing culturally sensitive sites such as mosques. They easily identified foreign fighters and gathered intelligence. Iraqi security forces also put an Iraqi face on Coalition efforts by providing humanitarian assistance. I MEF's decision to integrate Iraqi security forces into I MEF operations again reinforced that the ISF could fight as an effective force, if properly supported and led. As with Najaf, success of combat operations in Fallujah produced positive atmospherics and allowed reconstruction efforts to begin even before clearing operations were completed throughout the city.

Summary of Air Combat Operations

3d MAW played an historic role in providing close air support, casualty evacuation and air traffic management missions during Operation al-Fajr. Intricate coordination of third-generation sensors and precision guided weapons with the ground scheme of maneuver allowed an incredibly precise level of close air support in the urban environment.

As ground combat operations began, 3d MAW supported the initial phases of combat operations through enhanced shaping strikes in northern and southern Fallujah. A railroad berm which would have impeded RCT-1's progress was reduced by multiple joint direct attack munitions strikes. This action

enabled RCT-1's subsequent main effort attack with mechanized fighting vehicles and tanks. As the ground units pressed south toward the government center and Jolan Park, 3d MAW provided continuous close air support of troops in contact while continuing to shape targets in the south.

By 10 November 2004, as ground forces enjoyed excellent success in seizing Jolan Park and the government center with relatively few casualties, 3d MAW continued providing fixed- and rotary-wing close air support. Close air support aided troops in contact and shaped the southern end of Fallujah by destroying fortified positions within the coordinated fire line box. The continuation of the attack south was commenced with a branch plan being executed on 11 November 2004. By 14 November 2004, the penetration was complete and the search and attacks commenced. 3d MAW supported throughout this phase with continued surge air operations providing precise and effective close air support to the ground combat element.

During Operation al-Fajr, 3d MAW continued to conduct convoy escort and route reconnaissance missions, in order to protect mission critical logistics trains. Additionally, over 25 direct action operations were planned and conducted with 1st Marine Division, 11th, 24th, and 31st MEU's ground elements. These actions proved vital in capturing and exploiting critical high value targets and uncovering large weapons caches throughout the I MEF area of operations.

The Marines of 3d MAW continued to distinguish themselves with the unprecedented ability to perform emergency casualty evacuation and medical evacuation operations within the I MEF area of operations. 3d MAW aircraft performed 196 casualty evacuation missions and 79 medical evacuation missions in support of combat operations. The actions of Marine Aircraft Group 16's (MAG-16) casualty evacuation and medical evacuation crews were directly responsible for saving numerous lives in support of combat operations throughout the al-Anbar Province, Iraq.

3d MAW's Marine Unmanned Squadron 1 (VMU-1) conducted unmanned reconnaissance, surveillance, target acquisition, indirect fire adjustment, battlefield damage assessment, and support for the rear area security plan during combat and surveillance operations. The Watchdogs of VMU-1 fulfilled their mission

and exceeded all expectations by surging for 12 days (7-18 November 2004) in support Of Operation al-Fajr. During this period, VMU-1 flew 57 unmanned sorties for a total 273.9 flight hours, averaging 22.8 flight hours per day. The quality of support to I MEF was nothing short of extraordinary.

Marine Aerial Refueler and Transport Squadron 452 (VMGR-452 [-] [Reinforced]) added an additional C-130 aircraft from VMGR-352 for surge operations in support of Operation al-Fajr. The KC-130 tankers of VMGR-452 (-)(Reinforced) provided 24-hour aerial refueling coverage in the Elena and Daytona tracks to the north and west of Fallujah, respectively. KC-130s transferred 4.3 million pounds of fuel to 502 receivers consisting of the AV-8B, FA-18, and EA-6B Prowlers throughout the operation.

Ordnance expenditures for Operation al-Fajr were robust, as was the precision targeting. The following ordnance was expended in support of the 1st Marine Division during Operation al-Fajr, from 7-18 November 2004: 183 GBU-12 bombs; 46 GBU-38 bombs; 12 GBU-31 bombs; 121 Hellfire missiles; 34 Laser Maverick; 32 tube launch, optical tracked, wire guided (TOW) missiles; 70,009 20mm high explosive incendiaries; 39,411 rounds of .50-caliber rounds; 30,582 rounds of 7.62 rounds; 8 five-inch rockets; 188 2.75-inch rockets; 1,473 25mm rounds; and 4,237 20mm rounds.

3d MAW provided full-scale flight operations in support of I MEF, flying 5,733 sorties, generating 9,730.8 flight hours, moving 10,182 passengers, and hauling 2.4 million pounds of cargo throughout the I MEF area of responsibility during the operation. . . .

Summary of Combat Service Support Operations

1st FSSG and I Marine Expeditionary Force Engineer Group (I MEG) personnel and equipment were provided to Camps Fallujah and Baharia in support of requirements for Operation Phantom Fury. A surge in camp population required the construction of several tent camps. This surge in population was the result of the anti-Iraqi forces intimidation campaign where local nationals and third-country nationals were hesitant to continue working for Coalition forces. The decrease in work force created an opportunity for 1st FSSG to fulfill construction and camp improvement efforts in support of the operations.

Marines, sailors, operators, and equipment were provided to support camp infrastructure and improvements.

Responding to the Marine expeditionary force's decision to create a forward-based supply point, colloquially referred to as an "Iron Mountain" of supplies, 1st FSSG expertly and methodically developed a plan to meet the multitude of requirements of supported units and balance those requirements against the management capabilities inherent within the receiving combat service support element.

The 1st FSSG ensured that forward provisioning of support occurred without unnecessarily overburdening parallel support agencies. The results of this detailed coordination include the delivery of over 11 million rounds of ammunition, 424 secondary repairables worth in excess of four million dollars, 210 line items of Class IX repair parts worth close to one million dollars, over two million bottles of water in more than 175,000 cases, and over 750,000 ready-to-eat meals.

I MEG contributed 2,500 man-days of construction support to I MEF during Operation al-Fajr. Seabees and soldiers emplaced force protection habitability improvements for firm bases including boarding up and sandbagging windows, placing HESCO and Texas barriers, repaired battle damaged generators and made other electrical upgrades. Improvements to RCT 1's forward command post increased the quality of life of the Marines posted there and subsequently improved security in Fallujah.

Seabee Engineer Reconnaissance Teams (SERT) played a vital role in Phase III of Operation al-Fajr. They executed multiple engineering and construction assessment missions to determine the state of essential services and critical infrastructure. The hasty repairs and assessments for permanent repair of the Qanishyah Bridge for main supply route Mobile, a critical route running from Baghdad to the Jordanian border, were particularly notable. SERT teams also assessed the breach points cut across the railroad tracks north of Fallujah during the initial drive into the city and reviewed damage and repair requirements for main supply route Michigan's Euphrates River Bridge. Battle damage repairs were performed at various locations on main supply route "Mobile," including hasty repair of craters caused by improvised explosive device detonations. These repairs

were vital to the safety of all convoys traveling on this critical main supply route.

Summary of Reconstruction Operations

Fighting the “three-block war,” I MEF executed Phase IV civil-military operations, including rubble removal, the dewatering of flooded streets, infrastructure repair, mortuary affairs operations, claims payments, food and water distribution and the re-population of Fallujah even as Phase III decisive actions continued in other parts of the city. The repopulation of the city commenced on 23 December 2004. During Phase IV operations, I MEF oversaw a huge and complex logistical, engineering, and security effort, while, at the same time, supporting historic elections, discussed below.

Civil affairs operations prepared the city for civilian return. During the months of insurgent control of the city, all maintenance of basic services had ceased. Already neglected for some time before the attack, the city sustained significant damage from combat operations. First, military debris had to be removed. Hundreds of dead bodies lined the streets, yards, and houses of the cities. Mortuary affairs personnel from 1st FSSG collected the remains and processed them for burial. More than 520 caches containing tons of weapons and unexploded ordnance had to be cleared.

Repairs to the city's services followed. Damage to the water pumping stations had caused a large portion of the city to flood. Each pumping station had to be repaired. Waste removal, pest control, repair of the city's electrical grid, restoration of phone services, rubble removal, and the opening of the main roads soon followed.

A civil-military operations center (CMOC) was established to coordinate civilian population return. Entry control points were created to limit and coordinate access. Once food distribution centers were emplaced to support the returning population, the city began repatriating its citizens. Spread over 18 days, the population smoothly began resettling into their liberated neighborhoods.

I MEG, supported by 1st FSSG, led the effort to provide reconstruction of physical infrastructure. I MEG organized engineer assessment teams to determine the state of essential city services in Fallujah and to inventory battle damage to critical infrastructures.

The information was used to determine when the conditions would permit the return of the civilian population to Fallujah, and to determine how battle damage would affect security and force protection in the city after the defeat of the insurgents.

I MEG established a reconstruction cell within the civil-military operations center to execute repair and reconstruction activities that facilitated the return of displaced residents. I MEG, through the reconstruction cell, oversaw and efficiently coordinated reconstruction activities, with a priority of effort set by the Iraqi interim government and I MEF. The reconstruction cell assisted and advised the civil-military operations center, validated and prioritized reconstruction projects, facilitated execution of general engineering missions, and reported the status of reconstruction work and emerging requirements.

The I MEG Reconstruction Cell facilitated the restoration and reconstruction of 10 essential service and public infrastructure sectors including water and power distribution, and the citywide drainage system. This effort required cooperation and coordination with six national ministries, six city departments, various Coalition commands and numerous contractors. Reconstruction cell members worked closely with the Fallujah municipal managers and workers to identify repair and reconstruction requirements and to return maintenance and operation of the Fallujah public works to Iraqi control.

I MEG's determination to boldly establish a course of action for Fallujah reconstruction resulted in the identification of over 120 restoration and reconstruction projects valued at over \$140 million. The Reconstruction Cell effectively addressed critical short-term infrastructure repairs while developing a viable long-term redevelopment plan for the city of Fallujah.

Through the reconstruction cell, I MEG improved security in Fallujah and provided force protection. I MEG rubble removal crews worked for 37 days, hauling 7,500 tons of rubble out of the city and clearing lines of communications. I MEG also supported rubble removal with a total of 11 rubble removal contracts valued at over \$1.6 million. I MEG tactical construction teams constructed entry control points to the city and improved firm bases for Marines and Iraqi security forces throughout the city.

4th Civil Affairs Group (4th CAG) spearheaded the

efforts to transition Fallujah to local control. With the beginning of kinetics, the 4th Civil Affairs Group civil affairs teams began tactical engagement in support of Operation al-Fajr. Civil affairs teams in nearby Saklawiyah distributed food, water, and blankets to displaced citizens. As kinetics progressed, the civil affairs teams entered the city of Fallujah with their supported regimental combat teams. There, civil affairs teams began initial assessments for humanitarian assistance needs of the population and conducted assessments of key infrastructure/essential services.

Civil affairs teams began humanitarian assistance at local mosques where minor medical treatment was provided as well. Humanitarian assistance distribution sites also included the Fallujah Liaison Team (FLT) site and the cement factory north of the site.

Civil affairs medical officers established an ambulance exchange point in coordination with MNF-I whereby injured civilians would be transported to the Abu Ghraib General Hospital for treatment. Both the civil affairs group surgeon and Iraqi interim government Ministry of Health representatives conducted initial assessments of medical facilities in the city, and 4th CAG headquarters worked with the division staff to support the initial delivery of trucks of humanitarian assistance from the Iraqi Red Crescent Society.

The Iraqi Red Crescent Society delivered supplies to the citizens gathered at the Saklawiyah apartments and the Iraqi interim government provided supplies to those assembled near Habbaniyah.

4th CAG's Municipal Support Team held meetings with the military governor, General Abdul Qadr, to develop combined plans for reconstruction in Fallujah. The Municipal Support Team also engaged in key discussions with the Iraqi Ministerial Working Group concerning Fallujah reconstruction to include the establishment of a local 'Reconstruction Administration' to prioritize and coordinate reconstruction activities within the city. . . .

Elections in al-Anbar, an-Najaf, Babil, and Karbala Provinces

Just weeks after executing urban combat missions associated with Operation al-Fajr, I MEF was instrumental in securing legitimate elections throughout its vast area of operations, including al-Anbar, an-Najaf, Babil, and Karbala Provinces. These historic elections

were accomplished despite a dogged, effective and brutal insurgency, which systematically targeted politicians, voters and elections officials.

I MEF planned for and oversaw a massive security and logistic support effort to the Independent Electoral Commission Iraq (IECI) and its contractors. This feat ensured that elections could be held as scheduled on 30 January 2005. Nearly one million people voted in Karbala and Najaf at more than 430 polling centers. Due to an impressive force protection posture and disruption operations, none of the polling centers secured by I MEF were subjected to an effective indirect force or direct attack.

Summary of Ground Combat Operations

Having identified the number and locations of centers, the I MEF staff began obtaining essential force protection and communication assets for the polling centers. Great resourcefulness and initiative was exercised to find products (walk-thru metal detectors, wands, barriers, commercial phones, etc.) that could be delivered on very short notice to al-Anbar sites to support election day activities.

The Independent Electoral Commission also stated in late January that it might not be able to hire sufficient polling center workers for al-Anbar by the election day. I MEF again offered support. Within days, I MEF's major subordinate commands, through coordination with community and government leaders, assembled hundreds of Iraqi citizens from al-Anbar to work for the IECI in polling centers. This local group included over 100 citizens from Fallujah who worked in polling centers across al-Anbar. In a logistical feat, 3d MAW and U.S. Air Force C-130s safely returned over 1,100 other IECI election volunteers to their home cities in south-central Iraq.

To support Iraqi polling center workers, the 1st Marine Division provided election support teams for each polling center. These support teams consisted of a senior noncommissioned officer or officer and a translator from the major subordinate element that was providing security for the polling center assigned. The election support teams had the responsibility to provide liaison with the Independent Electoral Commission Iraq workers at their respective polling centers and to help coordinate security, life support and training for the elections. The election support teams met their polling center workers at

Taqquadum and arranged for their air transport from Taqqadum to various forward operating bases throughout al-Anbar. Upon arrival at the forward operating bases, each election support team and the Independent Electoral Commission workers were transported to the designated polling centers and immediately began setting up the spaces to be ready by 0700 on 30 January 2005 for the voters. For many teams, this resulted in a 24-hour day and then another full day of working security issues for voters. On the morning of election day, these election support teams moved out of the polling center along with the Marines and soldiers who were providing outer corridor security.

As a collateral mission, I MEF sought to ensure that all polling center workers, both locally recruited and electoral commission provided, had a very positive experience. I MEF succeeded in sending all the workers home enthusiastic about their positive experiences with MNF and the democratic process. This extra effort was believed essential to support successful polling center recruiting for future elections in October and December of 2005.

Another challenge I MEF faced was the lack of effort and the lack of success the Independent Electoral Commission Iraq had experienced in providing voter education on the election and the election process. I MEF information operations worked closely with the electoral commission, producing and distributing hundreds of products released in concert with a deliberate education campaign. This campaign was designed to inform voters of the existence of the election, the date of the election, the importance of the election to Iraq's future, and then in the last few days the exact locations of polling centers. Polling center locations were not released until 28 January 2005 for force protection reasons.

In conjunction with the information operations campaign, I MEF leadership, supported by civil affairs Marines, engaged almost daily with local and provincial government leaders, sheiks, religious leaders, former military leaders, and business leaders to solicit their support for the elections. Battalion commanders, regimental/brigade/MEU commanders, as well as the assistant division commander and commanding general promoted the elections message. This multifaceted method of delivering the message proved highly successful, particularly in Fallujah.

On 30 January 2005, all division polling centers were set for success. All polling centers opened on time. Citizens voted at all centers. No injuries or fatalities were incurred at any center. Ballots were tallied, boxed, and returned to Taqqadum without incident. Locally hired workers were paid on site and released in good spirits. Within 48 hours and as planned, all polling centers had been cleared of personnel, equipment, and barriers and returned to their original state.

Summary of Air Combat Operations

3d MAW was tasked to support I MEF operations to ensure successful elections within the al-Anbar Province. In order to ensure success, 3d MAW conducted offensive air and assault support. Offensive air operations disrupted anti-Iraqi Forces and prevented interference with elections. Assault support ensured safe transport of Independent Electoral Commission Iraq polling workers and material throughout the area of responsibility.

3d MAW safely flew over 500 sorties in support of the actual election movement, flying over 4,080 passengers and 83,570 pounds of polling materials in a four-day period, spanning the I MEF area of operations from an-Najaf in southern Najaf Province to al-Qaim in northwestern al-Anbar Province.

During Operation Citadel II, 3d Marine Aircraft Wing transported over 4,002 passengers and 80,880 pounds of cargo. This effort was conducted by over 455 carefully planned sorties. Maintaining this level of vigilance and focus on mission over such a long period of time was truly noteworthy.

Summary of Combat Service Support Operations

To support Electoral Commission Elections, 1st FSSG's support was broken into 5 phases to mirror the phases of I MEF operations. Each phase utilized the current infrastructure to enable the Iraqi national elections to move forward in the al-Anbar Province. During Phase I, 1st FSSG built 'Iron Mountains' within all forward operating bases and set infrastructure in place to receive, billet and provide basic life support to over 1,000 electoral commission personnel. During Phase II, 1st FSSG received and secured the Independent Electoral Commission Iraq polling materials and personnel aboard Camp Taqqadum in support of elections within Anbar Province. The materi-

als were sorted, distributed and staged at the forward staging location. During Phase III, 1st FSSG prepared, and distributed the necessary materials and life support for three days of supply to the polling centers. During Phase IV, 1st FSSG broke down the electoral commission into flight groups for onward movement by 3d MAW to the polling centers IOT to begin election operations. During Phase V, 1st FSSG ensured the polling center materials and nonconsumable life support was retrograde from the polling centers and collated at Camp Taqaddum. . . .

End State

Unlike other areas of Iraq, I MEF was requested to provide unprecedented direct security and logistical support to the electoral commission. In addition to tight security around polling areas, I MEF single-handedly accounted for all voter education efforts in al-Anbar. Also, in a logistical feat, I MEF was solely responsible for the unprecedented recruitment, out-fitting, berthing and tactical movement of electoral commission workers throughout the al-Anbar Province.

Intelligence reports through election day indi-

cated that I MEF disruption actions (i.e., snap vehicle checkpoints, cordon and search operations, high value targets, targeted raids, and presence operations) made it difficult for the insurgency to conduct deliberate operations or plan actions against voting centers. The absence of attacks against polling centers on election day is evidence of the success of this offensive strategy and the quality of its execution. I MEF sustained only one friendly killed in action on election day.

The success of the historic free and balanced elections in Iraq is attributable to I MEF's "behind the scenes" planning, logistical support, voter education, and Independent Electoral Commission employment efforts. These elections represented a significant boost to the interim Iraqi government and swayed many uncommitted Iraqis that the insurgency was impotent to halt the progress of democracy.

Notes

Reprinted from the I Marine Expeditionary Force Unit Award Recommendation (2005).



Operation Al-Fajr: The Battle of Fallujah— Part II

by *Lieutenant General John F. Sattler and
Lieutenant Colonel Daniel H. Wilson*
Marine Corps Gazette, July 2005

Operation al-Fajr represented a major success for the Iraqi government and Coalition forces. The November 2004 assault and subsequent reconstruction efforts have turned Fallujah from an insurgent base of operations into the cornerstone of progress in the al-Anbar Province. Success in Operation al-Fajr resulted from pre-battle shaping (information operations, feints, and precision air strikes), the contribution of Iraqi and joint forces, and the indomitable fighting spirit of the Coalition forces.

Background

The first battle of Fallujah (Operation Vigilant Resolve) was fought from 5 to 30 April 2004, and ended with an agreement to cede the security responsibilities within the city to the hastily formed Fallujah Brigade. The agreement included provisions for the surrender of heavy weapons by insurgents and stipulated that the Fallujah Brigade would initiate investigations to identify the murderers and mutilators of the four American citizens (Blackwater employees) killed on 31 March. There was a feeble attempt by the Fallujah Brigade to collect and turn over weapons and ammunition to our forces that netted a few small pickup trucks' worth of rusty, inoperable rifles, mortar tubes, and mortar rounds. The insurgent and terrorist factions in Fallujah used their sanctuary to turn the "City of Mosques" (officially 72) into a way station for exporting their acts of terror to all parts of Iraq. Foreign fighters, weapons, ammunition, equipment, and money were all brought into the insurgent safe haven and facilitated their activities against Coalition forces and the people of Iraq.

Our planners immediately resumed planning for combat operations in Fallujah. All felt it was not a

matter of "if" but just a matter of "when" those operations would commence. The situation in Fallujah continued to deteriorate through the summer months (2004) and into the fall. A slow drain of the city's estimated 250,000 residents occurred as the insurgents and terrorists expanded their grip over the populace through intimidation, brutality, and murder. The effectiveness of the Fallujah Brigade quickly waned as various insurgent and terrorist groups vied for greater control in the city. While some viewed the Fallujah Brigade as a failed experiment, it actually provided an insight into the insurgency that was previously nonexistent. The Fallujah Brigade was an Iraqi solution to the Fallujah problem, and when it failed to maintain the peace, the blame could no longer be pinned on the Coalition forces. In fact, the failure of the Fallujah Brigade provided the Coalition forces with opportunities for the psychological operations (PsyOp) campaign that was effective in driving a wedge between competing factions and the residents of Fallujah. For example, it was pointed out in PsyOp products that the lack of stability in Fallujah, caused by factional infighting, denied the residents the benefit of \$30 million waiting to be invested in community improvement projects. Equally significant, the Fallujah Brigade experiment demonstrated that the insurgency was factionalized, and therein was its real weakness. Without the presence of Coalition forces to galvanize cooperation, the factions would fight each other for dominance.

The Threat

The threat in Iraq comes from a variety of insurgent, terrorist, tribal, extremist, and criminal networks—each with its own agenda. Foreign fighters are mixed in with these networks, with the primary foreign threat represented by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and his al-Qaeda terrorist network. While there is no single unifying leader of the insurgency,

these various groups cooperate with each other in a loose alliance when it is convenient to do so.

The predominant insurgent and terrorist leaders in Fallujah were Sheik Abdullah Janabi, Omar Hadid and, of course, al-Zarqawi. These three thugs were the real power brokers in the city and collaborated when it suited their purposes. In early August, when Lieutenant Colonel Suleiman [Hamad al-Marawi], Commander, 506th Iraqi National Guard (ING) Battalion, confronted Hadid about the abduction of his intelligence officer, he himself was abducted and beaten to death. Residents understood that the real message behind this brutal murder was that Omar Hadid was a force to be reckoned with in Fallujah. Reporting suggested that he had as many as 1,500 fighters loyal to him. Inside sources also reported that Sheik Janabi was complicit in the murder of Lieutenant Colonel Suleiman and had even presided over a Sharia court that found the commander guilty of treason through his association with Coalition forces. This incident was a red flag to the I Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF) and the Interim Iraqi Government (IIG). It signaled the complete loss of any legitimate provision of security to the residents of Fallujah. Coupled with the theft of weapons, vehicles, and equipment from the compounds of the 505th and 506th ING Battalions, it became clear that Fallujah needed to be liberated from the mugs, thugs, and intimidators. The IIG put out a decree disbanding the 505th and 506th ING Battalions. The ING battalions had become ineffective, and many of their members were themselves involved in insurgent activities. Fallujah had become the bright ember in the ash pit of the insurgency, and the IIG knew it must be eliminated.

The threat assessment of Fallujah in September and October 2004 revealed that the insurgents were fully expecting an attack by Coalition forces. Three hundred and six well-constructed defensive positions were identified, many of which were interlaced with improvised explosive devices (IEDs). The orientation of the bulk of their defenses indicated that they expected an attack into the southeast sector of the city, leading the planners to recommend an attack from north to south. Intelligence also identified 33 of 72 mosques in Fallujah being used by insurgents to conduct meet-

ings, store weapons and ammunition, interrogate and torture kidnap victims, and conduct illegal Sharia court sessions. In our experience, the insurgents and terrorists justify their actions as jihad (holy war) when it is convenient, and in order to appeal to a broader Muslim audience, but their actual actions and motives are in stark contrast to the religious tenets of Islam.

Operations Planning

Planning for combat operations in Fallujah continued during September and October. Intelligence improved as captured insurgents turned on their "brothers." The results of precision targeting of insurgent safe houses began to have the desired effect. Insurgent factions were turning on one another, as each suspected the other of providing us with intelligence. It seemed to them that our intelligence was too good for it not to have come from inside sources, and in some instances it did. Through various means that idea was perpetuated and encouraged, which increased the internecine strife among insurgent groups. We estimated that there were approximately 5,600 insurgent fighters operating in the Fallujah-Ramadi corridor at that time, with 4,500 in the city of Fallujah, including foreign fighters and terrorists. It is more probable that there were actually closer to 3,000 in Fallujah at the time, and this proved to be quite close to the number actually captured or killed during the major kinetic phase of operations.

The MEF plan called for five phases. Initially, it was named Operation Phantom Fury, but then was appropriately renamed by Prime Minister Ayad Allawi as Operation al-Fajr (New Dawn). We knew it would be important to include the Iraqi security forces (ISF) in the battle and have the decision to conduct the operation made by none other than the Prime Minister himself. Previously, during the April battle of Fallujah, only the 36th Iraqi Commando Battalion had joined us for the fight, with the remainder of assigned Iraqi forces refusing to deploy. During August two Iraqi Intervention Force (IIF) battalions had fought side-by-side with the 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit (11th MEU) in Najaf, reinforced by two U.S. Army battalions, to crush Muqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi militia

around the Imam Ali and Kufa Mosques. These same two IIF battalions, along with six other ISF battalions, joined the I MEF for Operation al-Fajr. The ISF had come a long way by November in their training and willingness to fight.

Phase I of Operation al-Fajr was preparation and shaping. The primary activities during this phase were moving the forces into position, building the iron mountain (prestaged supplies, ammunition, and fuel), collecting intelligence, planning, and shaping the battlefield by various means, both kinetic and nonkinetic. This shaping was steady and precise for two months prior to Operation al-Fajr. Special operations forces (SOF) provided specific intelligence-based targeting information. These targets were struck with a variety of Marine Corps, Coalition, and SOF assets. Marine battalions manning vehicle checkpoints (VCPs) or participating in feints were extremely successful in targeting fixed enemy defenses and degrading insurgent command and control (C²) capabilities. A series of feints conducted by 1st Marine Division (1st MarDiv) deceived the insurgents as to the time and location of our main attack. They knew we were coming, but they didn't know when or from where. The feints also allowed us to develop actionable intelligence on their positions for targeting in Phase II. The Commanding Officer, 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, whose Marines manned the southern VCPs around Fallujah, described this period as a real-world fire support coordination exercise that provided a valuable opportunity for his fire support coordinator and company fire support teams to work tactics, techniques, and procedures and to practice coordinating surface and air-delivered fires.

Building the iron mountain was a concept derived from a lesson learned during April 2004 in the first battle of Fallujah. Our supply lines were heavily targeted at that time by the insurgents. A disruption of the supply lines was one of our worst-case planning assumptions, and building the iron mountain mitigated this risk. The just-in-time logistics concept was not practical in this situation. Quantity has a quality of its own, and the iron mountain was a textbook example of that maxim. Guidance for Operation al-Fajr was to have a 15-day excess amount of supplies, foodstuffs, ammu-

nition, and fuel aboard each forward operating base prior to commencement of combat operations. The iron mountain also minimized the need for any routine resupply convoys to travel the dangerous routes. 1st Force Service Support Group (1st FSSG) was the main effort during this phase, and they literally moved mountains of supplies, equipment, and ammunition to build the iron mountain. Their exceptional around-the-clock efforts set the conditions for success during subsequent phases of the operation.

A monumental task of Phase I was the buildup of Camp Fallujah by the Marines and sailors of the I MEF Headquarters Group (MHG) as the central hub for C², logistics, and medical services. Camp Fallujah experienced an overnight surge as units poured in for Operation al-Fajr. Camp facilities felt the strain as they fought to accommodate nearly 2½ times the camp's normal capacity. The Seabees of the MEF Engineering Group (MEG) rose above and beyond the call of duty to build the East Fallujah Iraqi Camp (EFIC) after the contractor failed to fulfill his contractual obligations. The MEG built the EFIC in mere days to accommodate the ISF battalions that were arriving. A temporary joint mortuary affairs (MA) facility at Camp Fallujah was opened to provide excess capacity for casualties. This detachment was later moved to the potato factory just outside Fallujah to provide MA support for the insurgent dead.

Information operations in close concert with combat operations during Phase I encouraged Fallujah's residents to leave the city. A "whisper campaign," PsyOp, and multiple feints convinced the overwhelming majority of the citizens to depart Fallujah, while disguising when and where the assault would occur. Estimates are that there were less than 500 civilians remaining in the city when Phase III combat operations commenced. These efforts were instrumental in ensuring that few civilians were injured in combat operations. The information campaign was very effective and as important to this operation as the actual combat offensive to liberate the city. We stole the strategic communications initiative from the enemy and never gave it back.

We were keenly aware of the strategic necessity to get ahead of the bow wave of publicity regular-

ly associated with these types of combat actions. The influx of embeds from a variety of media outlets was welcomed with open arms. We were confident they would get the truth out if they were embedded with our forces. There were 91 embeds, representing 60 media outlets, at the peak of Operation al-Fajr. Their only restriction was not releasing operational information that would jeopardize lives. Anytime a significant target was struck, the public affairs section was ready with a straightforward, accurate, and timely press release. This guiding principle prevented us from being in the reactive mode of countering insurgent propaganda.

Joint and Combined Operations

Operation al-Fajr was joint and Coalition warfare at its finest. The best capability set was quickly assembled from throughout Iraq and massed for the battle. The flexibility of this force was later demonstrated shortly after offensive operations were underway, when the Stryker battalion (equipped with light armored wheeled vehicles—similar to the Marine light armored vehicle) was pulled in the midst of battle to return to its home area of Mosul in order to quell the insurgency there. The Army's Black Jack Brigade (2d Brigade Combat Team (2d BCT), 1st Cavalry Division) arrived from Baghdad just days before the fight. A look at the task organization of the Black Jack Brigade is a revelation of the joint integration that existed for this battle. An Army troop of tanks and Bradley's was under the tactical control (TaCon) of 2d Marine Reconnaissance Battalion, which in turn was TaCon to the Black Jack Brigade, which in turn was TaCon to 1st MarDiv. Other Army battalions arrived that had participated in combat operations in Najaf during August. The heavy armor shock and firepower they brought to the fight was invaluable, and two of these task forces became the main penetration elements for our regimental combat teams (RCTs) in the attack. Joint special operations sniper teams (three teams of six) were integrated with the assault regiments. They performed superbly in the battle as a combat multiplier and were credited with numerous confirmed kills. All in all, the attack force included nine U.S. Army and Marine battalions, six Iraqi battalions, and attack aviation from all of the

Military Services, to include naval air flying off an aircraft carrier. The full assault force included some 12,000 Marines, soldiers, sailors, airmen, and ISF. The keys to successful integration of this joint and Coalition force were complementary war fighting capabilities, a single chain of command, advances in technology, and the unifying vision of liberating a city from the oppressive grip of the insurgents and terrorists. Rehearsals of the concept and confirmation briefs solidified the plan in the minds of the combatants. You could feel the energy among the Coalition forces—it was a contagious, confident enthusiasm.

Other MEF units provided forces and supporting missions critical to the success of Operation al-Fajr. 11th MEU in the Najaf Province contributed a rifle company, sniper teams, an engineer platoon, explosive ordnance disposal teams, tanks, assault amphibious vehicles, air/naval gunfire liaison company teams, and additional linguists in direct support of combat forces involved in the fight. They also ensured the peace and stability in the Najaf Province during Operation al-Fajr, allowing the MEF to concentrate additional combat power for the battle. 31st MEU, U.S. Central Command's strategic reserve, was deployed to the al-Anbar Province just prior to Operation al-Fajr. They took command of the western area of the province from RCT-7. 31st MEU's presence freed up RCT-7's command post to participate in combat operations. The 31st MEU chopped their battalion landing team (Battalion Landing Team 1st Battalion, 3d Marines) TaCon to RCT-7 for the Fallujah fight. 31st MEU conducted supporting operations that prevented foreign fighters, weapons, and financing from crossing the borders and points of entry (POEs) into Iraq. They enforced the IIG's complete closure of the Syrian POEs to military-aged males, preventing the insurgency from receiving foreign recruits for their cause. 24th MEU, operating in the northern portion of the Babil Province, kept a lid on the insurgency in their area. The British Black Watch Battalion deployed from southeastern Iraq in support of 24th MEU, and their combined force sealed off the escape routes of insurgents down through the Euphrates River corridor into Babil. 2d BCT, 2d Infantry Division (from Korea) conducted dozens of supporting operations in the Fallujah-Ramadi corri-

dor throughout Operation al-Fajr that disrupted insurgent activity to the north and west of Fallujah proper. The addition of units to the regular I MEF structure expanded our numbers from a pre-al-Fajr 32,000 to 45,000 during the operation. The temporary augmentation was needed for full focus of combat power, without any loss of capability in the rest of the MEF's area of operations. Everyone arrived ready for action, and the noteworthy performance by all of the organic and joined units guaranteed the success of Operation al-Fajr.

The final act of Phase I was the isolation of Fallujah through blocking positions established by the Black Jack Brigade. They were also responsible for security of the routes leading to Fallujah, coinciding with an IIG ban on vehicular traffic in and around the city. The IIG closed the border POEs from Syria into Iraq, which cut back significantly on the smuggling of foreign fighters, weapons, and financial support to the insurgency. A portion of the insurgent and terrorist leadership, in spite of public proclamations to fight to the death, had cowardly slipped out of the city with the civilian exodus. The insurgents still in the city were isolated with few options remaining—escape, surrender, or die.

Phase II, enhanced shaping, began on 7 November at 1900 local time—D-day and H-hour respectively. This was an intense 12- to 24-hour period of electronic, aviation, and indirect fire attacks against the insurgents' C² nodes and defensive positions. All fires were delivered against precise targets. The fury of the 3d Marine Aircraft Wing (3d MAW) and all of the joint aircraft in support was unleashed. Artillery and mortar rounds added to the fires descending on enemy targets. The synchronization of fires into this confined urban area (5 kilometers by 5 kilometers) was facilitated by the establishment of a high-density airspace control zone (HIDACZ). The HIDACZ and fire support coordination measures, such as the coordinated fire line, allowed for the simultaneous employment of fixed- and rotary-wing fires in concert with ground direct and indirect fires, unmanned aerial vehicles, and AC-130 gunships. AC-130 aircraft in support of Operation al-Fajr were devastatingly effective in destroying targets with their accurate weapons systems. The Coalition Force Air Component Commander's air support operations center and the

MEF's direct air support center synchronized and deconflicted the intricate movements of aircraft and indirect fires in and around the HIDACZ.

A ground attack was conducted up the peninsula to the west of Fallujah during this phase by Task Force LAR (light armored reconnaissance battalion [TF LAR]) to set the final conditions for Phase III, which included Marines of 3d LAR; a company from 1st Battalion, 23d Marines; a company of Soldiers from the 1-503d Infantry Battalion, 2d BCT; and the soldiers of the 36th Iraqi Commando Battalion. This attack was conducted as the final operation of Phase II to complete the isolation of Fallujah proper from the west, while the Black Jack Brigade isolated the city from the east and south. The hospital at the northern tip of the peninsula was also to be seized, as it had been used by the insurgents as a C² center and weapons storage facility.

The attack up the peninsula proceeded according to plan and accomplished its intended purpose. The 36th Iraqi Commando Battalion quickly seized the hospital from a small group of insurgents that included some foreign fighters. The bridges allowing access to western Fallujah were secured by TF LAR that encountered sporadic small arms fire and suffered some wounded from IEDs that were placed on the roads leading to the bridges. The insurgents mistook D-day for the actual attack, and cell leaders were on the speaker systems in Fallujah's mosques calling their fighters to pick up weapons and report to designated locations. This tactical deception was a useful diversion for the real blow to come from the north 24 hours later. It also kept the insurgents in an alert status for a full day, sapping their physical and mental energies for the real fight to come. Phase II was a crucial part of properly setting the stage for the main attack. The precision attacks degraded the insurgents' ability to C² their fighters and destroyed many of the hazards that would have impeded our forces' attack into the city.

Hammer Blows

The twin hammers of Operation al-Fajr were RCT-1 and RCT-7. They rolled out of their various staging areas through the night of 7 November and during the day of 8 November (A-day for attack

day). This was a sequenced movement of forces that first staged RCT-7 in position by daylight in the event that an early supporting attack was required to keep the insurgents off balance, or in the event that indirect fires made their attack positions untenable. The main effort, RCT-1, moved into position near simultaneously, but slightly behind RCT-7. RCT-1 completed its movement into its final attack positions just prior to the hour of attack (A-hour, 1900 local time). They literally moved into their attack positions and rolled onward into the attack. Each RCT had a penetration force consisting of an armor-heavy battalion TF from the Army. TF 2-7 (2d Cavalry Squadron, 7th Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division) led the way for RCT-1, with TF 2-2 (2d Battalion, 2d Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division) advancing in zone for RCT-7. These penetrating forces were critical to quickly slicing through the insurgents' defenses and disrupting their ability to conduct coordinated counterattacks. The firepower and armor protection these battalions brought to the fight added significantly to the capability set of the assault force. Marine and ISF battalions conducted supporting attacks and moved closely behind the penetration forces to conduct follow-on search and attack missions. The fighting was intense, close, and personal, the likes of which has been experienced on just a few occasions since the battle of Hue City in the Vietnam War. We attacked at night to take advantage of our superior night-fighting capability.

The assault force dominated the urban battle from the start. The Army penetration did what it was designed to do and fractured the enemy's ability to execute a cohesive defense. The young Marines, soldiers, and Iraqi soldiers expanded and cleared the wedge of remaining insurgent groups. Wherever the insurgents stood to fight, they died. In spite of their pre-battle braggadocio, they were no match for our combined and joint force. Many fought fiercely but were never able to overcome our troops' advantage in leadership, training, and morale. The smart insurgents quickly went into survival mode. They scurried from building to building trying to avoid our forces until they had a window of opportunity to make a suicidal defense that would produce the greatest amount of casualties among our forces. In some cases they built spider

holes in the floors of houses and buildings to use as ambush positions from which to attack our clearing forces as they entered the structures. In other instances, they built "panic rooms" in the interior of structures, complete with light discipline, where they waited for an opportune moment to attack. The insurgency rapidly dissolved into small groups that moved between houses using tunnels, ladders across rooftops, and holes that they had knocked out of exterior walls. Oftentimes they would double back into an area already "cleared" by our forces and wait for their chance to make a last-ditch suicidal stand.

In our pre-battle planning we had anticipated reaching the center of town within 72 to 96 hours. In reality the battle progressed at a faster tempo than our best planning assumptions, with elements of RCT-7 crossing the road (Main Supply Route [MSR] Michigan/Phase Line [PL] Fran) that runs from east to west through the center of Fallujah in just 14 hours. The main effort (RCT-1) encountered some of the insurgents' toughest defensive positions in the Jolan District but still managed to fight to PL Fran within 43 hours of the commencement of the attack. The end of 10 November 2004—the Marine Corps' 229th Birthday—saw both RCT-1 and RCT-7 in control of MSR Michigan, having secured all initial 1st MarDiv objectives. Controlling MSR Michigan was a key tactical victory because it opened up a shorter resupply route from Camp Fallujah, three miles to the southeast. The 1st MarDiv's original plan at this point of the battle was for RCT-7 to reorient, drive to the west, and become the main effort. However, RCT-1 was doing so well in driving from north to south, and resistance had been heavier in the northeastern quadrant of the city, that an audible was called to execute a branch plan instead. We deemed that the time delay to move and reorient the necessary forces to attack from east to west would give the enemy a chance to catch his breath when we had him back on his heels. The branch plan involved both RCTs continuing on their north-south attack in zone to the southern portion of the city. The division's execution of the branch plan maintained the momentum of the attack. The RCTs continued south on 11 November, and by the end of the day their forward units were at the southernmost edge

of Fallujah. Full combat operations continued side by side with search-and-attack operations through the remainder of Phase III.

Phase III-B was the search and attack period of operations. There was no defining date that neatly separates the two subphases. Phase III-B activities featured small unit combat actions that were as equally intense and lethal as the Phase III-A combat operations. The city was divided into six sectors with the mission to go through each area in detail to eliminate remaining pockets of insurgents and to identify weapons caches. With the departure of TF 2-2 and TF 2-7 at the end of November, the city was reapportioned into four sectors, maintaining the same mission. Enough cannot be said about these competent professional soldiers who brought a tremendous capability and warrior spirit to the fight. In turn, they will proudly wear the recently authorized Blue Diamond patch of the 1st MarDiv on their uniforms.

During Phase III we actually commenced Phase IV-type humanitarian and reconstruction activities simultaneously with the search-and-attack operations. We knew it was critical to get a head start in restoring the city for the inevitable return of its residents. This is where the “three block” war literally became the “three building” war. On the same block, within steps of each other, combat operations were taking place in one building, while a few buildings away humanitarian aid was being rendered, and rubble was being cleared from the streets just down the block.

The search and attack operations of Phase III-B progressed steadily through the rest of November and into December. The city was divided into 86 sectors, and the status of operations was tracked with a color-coded map. Green, for example, meant that the sector had been cleared in detail, with weapons caches and boobytraps removed. Slowly but surely our combined forces turned sector after sector into green. Prime Minister Allawi wanted the city reopened to its citizens as soon as possible, but we held firm that the city needed to be cleared of insurgents and weapons caches before opening the floodgates to the residents. Too much blood of courageous warriors was being spilled to not get the job done right. Furthermore, we wanted to make sure that Fallujah was safe and

secure for returning residents. We established a civil-military operations center (CMOC) at the site of the former government center in the heart of the city. Our Seabees and civil affairs group (CAG) personnel worked around the clock to prepare the city for the return of residents. Many of the streets were filled with rubble and downed power lines that had to be cleared. Portions of Fallujah are below the water table, and the water pumps that kept river water out had ceased operating. Standing water was perhaps the biggest problem and was eventually solved by the Seabees of the MEG. Essential services across the board were nonexistent. The CAG established three humanitarian distribution sites at key junctures in the city to provide relief supplies to returning residents. These sites eventually supplied humanitarian relief to 87,620 residents. The removal of enemy dead bodies was another important job that was completed by our joint MA teams. These teams worked closely with the combat forces, often at great peril, to ensure that enemy bodies were handled morally and in accordance with Islamic customs. In several cases the insurgents had boobytrapped the bodies of their dead in a final attempt to inflict casualties among our forces. The MA teams carefully recovered all located bodies and transported them to the potato factory for processing. Each body was meticulously checked and documented while being prepared for burial. Sunni Imams were flown in from Baghdad to perform their religious rites and ensure that the bodies were buried in compliance with religious traditions.

Open the City

The Prime Minister made the decision to open the city for returning residents on 23 December, and thus began Phase IV of Operation al-Fajr—the civil affairs phase. Reopening the city was accomplished through a sequenced phasing plan that repopulated Fallujah by opening up one district at a time (total of 18 districts) to returning residents. This control was necessary as there were still sectors of the city being cleared. Five entry control points (ECPs) were established at key roads leading into the city. Vehicles were searched by Marines and ISF soldiers, and military-aged males

were registered with the biometric automated tool set (BATS). The BATS was linked to a database that would alert us if a military-aged male had a previously recorded history of insurgent or criminal acts. Female military personnel played a critical role in this process by searching the women and children. Unfortunately, women and children needed to be searched to prevent insurgents from using them as smugglers. IIG workers and civilian contractors flooded the city to begin the process of reconstruction. We insisted that contractors hire Fallujan residents in their reconstruction projects. It was important that the rebuilding of Fallujah be an inclusive process, so the people of Fallujah would vehemently reject any attempts by insurgents to regain control. Thousands of Fallujans have been hired in the cleanup and reconstruction of their city. With unemployment running 60 percent in the al-Anbar Province, this was a win-win situation for all involved in rebuilding Fallujah. The CAG held weekly town hall meetings at the CMOC that were attended by national ministerial representatives, provincial government representatives, and local sheikhs. A \$200 humanitarian payment was made to heads of household to help them get reestablished. It secured a temporary reservoir of good will with the returning residents. A total of \$6,509,200 was paid to 32,546 heads of household.

The Payoff

One of the most memorable and gratifying moments of Phase IV occurred on election day—30 January 2005. Free from intimidation, the Sunni residents turned out in droves—proof positive that in an environment free of intimidation, the average citizen wants to exercise his or her right to freely determine his/her government. The 7,679 male and female residents who voted in Fallujah accounted for 40 percent of the entire vote cast in the al-Anbar Province. The elections were another strategic victory emanating from the decisive tactical victory of Operation al-Fajr.

The residents of Fallujah are eager about the opportunities that lie ahead. They are friendly and cooperative in our combined efforts to restore the city. One can hardly get out of a vehicle without being swarmed by children and residents.

Residents have even identified weapons caches to our Marines and their ISF partners. A newfound sense of freedom and confidence prevails in the city, and the atmosphere is positive and electric.

The immediate impact of the first four phases of Operation al-Fajr has produced a turning of the tide in the fight against the insurgency in the al-Anbar Province. By the end of March we had recovered 629 weapons caches, just from the city itself. The amount of weapons, equipment, and ordnance is mind-boggling—literally, enough to equip a good-sized army. The number of attacks throughout the MEF's area of operations dropped 40 percent between October and December. The insurgents are on the run, and those who escaped have fled out west along the Euphrates River. The 1st MarDiv's subsequent pursuits, Operations River Blitz and River Bridge, further disrupted the intimidators' ability to conduct organized attacks and uncovered even more weapons caches they will not be able to use. Raids conducted with actionable intelligence continue to roll up cell leaders. Calls to the tips line rose 630 percent between the beginning of January and the middle of March, as the citizens are becoming fed up with the insurgents, who are turning more and more to criminal activities to finance their operations. Another good measure of the effect of Operation al-Fajr has been the 90 percent, across the board, rise in the price of weapons and ammunition on the black market.

It was recognized by the planners that the compensation to homeowners and businessmen for damage to their homes and buildings would be key to sealing the strategic victory. Full compensation would demonstrate to the Sunni residents that the predominantly Shi'a-controlled government cared about their plight and wanted to include them in the new Iraq. It would open up multiple avenues for the inclusion of the Sunni population in the political process and turn Fallujah into a model for the entire Sunni heartland. The tactical military success of November 2004 was subsequently turned into a political strategic victory with the issuing of the first compensation checks at the CMOC to Iraqi homeowners on 14 March. The Iraqi government made good on its promises, and the good will it has engendered will spawn a new era of political engagement with the previously dis-

enfranchised Sunni population. This, in turn, will be the death knell of the insurgency. While the tactical military victory of Operation al-Fajr was a knockdown blow, the strategic consequences that will flow from political engagement with the Sunnis will be the knockout punch to the insurgency.

The Future

Operation al-Fajr continues on, as Phase V has yet to be implemented—transition to local control—at the time of this writing [2006]. However, great inroads have been made in the right direction. The bulk of the joint forces providing security for Fallujah have been phased out. In their place, the ISF have increasingly taken control of the day-to-day security for the city. The ISF are the right force for this role. They instinctively identify foreigners and undesirables and stop them at the ECPs. They interact well with the local population and, since they are from other provinces, can resist the normal family and tribal influences of “home-grown” forces. Traffic police have been on the streets of Fallujah since February directing the ever-increasing volume of traffic as the city springs back to life. A new Fallujah police force is being established, with tight screening of applicants to ensure there is no return of the corrupt old guard. The new police force will start to populate the city this summer. Specially designed and constructed police forts are being built to improve their force protection and to reduce their vulnerability to insurgent attacks. In fact, these structures will become a model for other troubled parts of Iraq.

Operation al-Fajr was a classic example of integrated staff planning, interaction, and collaboration between the MEF’s major subordinate commands (1st MarDiv, 3d MAW, 1st FSSG, MHG, MEG, CAG, and 11th MEU), the MEF staff, and higher headquarters. Commanders at all levels were personally involved on a daily basis in both planning and execution. The commanding general, 1st MarDiv, and key staff were up front every day during the battle to maintain their situational awareness and rapidly adjust to changing circumstances. The commanders of Multi National Corps-Iraq and Multi National Force-Iraq provided the MEF with tremen-

dous support—evident in the allocation of roughly six Iraqi battalions plus the Army’s Blackjack Brigade to the operation. They went out of their way to fulfill every request for additional resources—such as the extension of the Black Jack Brigade—and provided the political top cover that allowed the MEF to focus on the mission at hand.

The heroics and tactical details of the battle of Fallujah will be the subject of many articles and books in the years to come. The real key to this tactical victory rested in the spirit of the warriors who courageously fought the battle. They deserve all of the credit for liberating Fallujah. Their spirit is epitomized by an encounter with a wounded Marine noncommissioned officer at our Bravo surgical treatment facility on Camp Fallujah. When asked what we could do for him, he held up his right hand and extended his index finger, then replied, “Sir, send me back to my team. My trigger-finger is still good!” This indomitable spirit was the consistent theme of all of the wounded fighters. They wanted to immediately return to the fight with their comrades. We were honored and privileged to have had the opportunity to serve with the soldiers, sailors, airmen, special forces, Marines, and Iraqi soldiers who selflessly gave their all to liberate Fallujah. “Remember Fallujah” is no longer the rallying cry of the insurgency. Our warriors took that from them and made it our rallying cry.

Notes

Marine Corps Gazette, July 2006, 12-24. Reprinted by permission. Copyright *Marine Corps Gazette*.

About the Authors

Lieutenant General John F. Sattler was, at the time this article was published, commander of I Marine Expeditionary Force. Prior to his retirement from the Marine Corps in 2008, he served as the Joint Staff’s Chief of Strategic Plans and Policy.

Lieutenant Colonel Daniel H. Wilson is commanding officer of the Infantry Training Battalion at the School on Infantry West at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton. During Operation Iraqi Freedom II, he was future operations planner, liaison officer to the Black Jack Brigade, and the current operations officer for I Marine Expeditionary Force. At the time this article was published, he was the deputy current operations officer, I Marine Expeditionary Force.



Who Won the Battle of Fallujah?

by Jonathan F Keiler

U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, January 2005

Was Fallujah a battle we lost in April 2004, with ruinous results? Or was it a battle we won in November? The answer is yes. If that sounds awkward, it is because Fallujah was an awkward battle without an easy parallel in U.S. military history. It is hard to say whether the drawn-out process of securing that medium-sized Iraqi city was a one-time event or the beginning of a trend. I hope it is the former. And to make that outcome probable, I will objectively evaluate the battle here and offer comparisons of Marine Corps and Israel Defense Forces (IDF) doctrine and operations.

The United States is likely to face more Fallujahs in the near future. The Marine Corps' reputation as an elite and feared combat force will ride in part on how Fallujah and similar battles are perceived at home and abroad. In evaluating the battle, I considered the differing objectives of the two opposing forces and how close each came to achieving those objectives. One side's objectives were more limited than the other's. Third parties, such as Syria and Iran, may perceive the battle differently. Reaching honest answers to these questions requires looking beyond convenient bromides that recount U.S. heroics or anticipate favorable outcomes that remain largely unpredictable.

Operation Valiant Resolve*

After its impressive initial victory in Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), I Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) returned to Iraq in 2004 to replace Army forces in parts of central and western Iraq. The 1st Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment (1/5), was sent to Fallujah to relieve troops of the 82d Airborne Division. On 31 March 2004, four U.S. contractors driving through that city were ambushed and killed by Iraqi insurgents;

*Editor's note: The operation identified as Valiant Resolve in this article is much more commonly known as Vigilant Resolve.

their bodies were mutilated and displayed publicly before frenzied crowds in a scene reminiscent of the battle of Mogadishu. A forceful response was vital and anticipated widely. Accordingly, 1/5, along with the 2d Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment (2/1), and supporting Army and Air Force special operations units were ordered to enter Fallujah for an operation dubbed Valiant Resolve. Their mission was to find and eliminate—or apprehend—the mujahedeen and any accomplices who had perpetrated the ambush. Resistance was expected. Rather than a stability and security operation, Valiant Resolve was to consist of deliberate assaults on prepared defenses.¹

When the attack commenced 5 April 2004, lead Marine elements were engaged quickly by well-armed and organized enemy units effectively using hit-and-run urban warfare. Despite heavy resistance, the Marines limited their firepower, relying mostly on rifles, machine guns, and snipers. They restricted air support to Cobra attack helicopters and AC-130 gunships.² On a few occasions—only after considerable deliberation—fixed-wing aircraft dropped guided bombs on insurgent targets, including a mosque used as a center of resistance.³ In general, Marine units fought with impressive skill and with exceptional care for civilian lives and property. This solicitude, however, quickly limited the scope of the advance to outlying areas of the city. They did not attempt to penetrate the heart of the city, apparently because U.S. casualties would have been excessive, as would casualties among the inhabitants. The Marines did not want to “rubble the city.”⁴

On 1 May 2004, Iraqi insurgents took to the streets of Fallujah to declare victory over the Marines. “We won,” an Iraqi insurgent told a reporter, explaining they had succeeded by keeping U.S. forces from taking the city.⁵ Newspaper and televised reports showed Muslim gunmen celebrating their “triumph” with weapons, flags, and victory signs. U.S. authorities explained that a new Iraqi Fallujah Brigade would assume security duties in the city and ultimately accomplish the mission.

According to the 1st Marine Division, by 13 April 2004, 39 U.S. Marines and soldiers had died in the battle, along with approximately 600 enemy fighters.⁶ In much of the Arab and Muslim world, the Marines' withdrawal was viewed as a U.S. defeat, an outlook encouraged by Al Jazeera television and other Islamic media.

In some important respects, the initial push into Fallujah violated guidelines in the Corps' urban warfare manual, MCWP 3-35.3. Often cautionary, the manual discusses 22 examples of modern urban warfare in detail and warns, "regardless of the size or quality of defensive forces, the defender usually extracts large costs from the attacker in time, resources, and casualties."⁷ Located 40 miles west of Baghdad, Fallujah is a city of about 300,000 people and 30 square kilometers of area. Its western edge lies along the Euphrates River. The Marines faced a mixed bag of urban guerrillas with few heavy weapons, but nonetheless they were armed for close-quarter combat. Before the battle, the enemy force was estimated to be 2,000.

Marine Corps doctrine calls for isolating cities before the assault. "No single factor is more important to success than isolation of the urban area." In all the examples provided in MCWP 3-35.3, "the attacker won all battles where the defender was isolated."⁸ The two battalions assigned the mission also were to cordon off the city: 2/1 from the north and 1/5 to the south and east. Although both cordoning and attacking a city of this size was a demanding task for two battalions, it appears the Marines effectively isolated the city early in the operation.⁹

In addition to isolation, "overwhelming superiority is needed if all costs are to be minimized." Here it may be that the objectives and means of Valiant Resolve became incompatible. Two reinforced battalions were tasked with isolating and attacking a medium-sized city. MCWP 3-35-3 notes, "in an attack on a built-up area (population of 100,000+), the GCE [ground combat element] of a MEF would be a Marine division."¹⁰ Fallujah's population exceeds 100,000, but it is not Shanghai. Thus, while a division (normally composed of three infantry regiments and supporting units) was not needed to cope with the insurgent force in April, the Marines were at less than regimental strength.

During the battle of Jenin in 2002, two Israeli

infantry battalions engaged several hundred Palestinian guerrillas. Jenin's population of about 26,000 was much smaller than Fallujah's.¹¹ According to Randy Gangle, director of the Center for Emerging Threats and Opportunities (a private concern in partnership with the Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory), the Marines would have operated in Jenin with a single battalion, given its one square mile area." The refugee camp where the main battle was waged is smaller still and densely populated. A Marine battalion probably would have done as well as the Israelis in Jenin. The tasks assigned to 1/5 and 2/1 in Fallujah, however, were of a different magnitude and beyond their capabilities—at least within what were deemed to be acceptable limits of friendly and civilian casualties and property destruction. Superiority does not necessarily entail a numerical advantage in men. At the same time, urban warfare marginalizes traditional Marine attributes, such as superior training and discipline.

Depending on the tactical situation, manpower shortages may be compensated for by increased firepower, which Marine commanders were unwilling—or unable—to apply in Valiant Resolve. Indeed, it appears that leaders at the scene quickly came to this conclusion. The operation never progressed beyond the foothold stage. Marines gained access to the urban area (in that case, outlying industrial neighborhoods), but did not penetrate to the heart of the city, much less take it. After a few days of active combat, Marines cordoned off the area and the matter was "resolved" politically by establishment of the Fallujah Brigade. The bulk of the enemy force remained at large in the city and was reinforced. Fallujah became an insurgent stronghold and base for kidnappings, murders, and attacks that would cost the coalition dearly in the following months.

Operation al-Fajr

Between April and November 2004, both sides busily prepared for a rematch. Iraqi insurgents and foreign mujahedeen dug tunnels, emplaced mines and booby traps, and improved their defenses. Meanwhile, most of Fallujah's civilian population fled the city, which greatly reduced the potential for non-combatant casualties. The emptying city invited greater applications of air power. U.S. warplanes and

artillery launched highly selective attacks, weakening insurgent defenses, hitting leadership targets, and laying the groundwork for a renewed assault. Although some estimates put insurgent strength before al-Fajr as high as 5,000, many of them—including most of their top leadership—fled before the battle. When U.S. troops crossed the line of departure, it is estimated that 2,000-3,000 insurgents remained in the city.

The combined Marine-Army-Iraqi force for Operation al-Fajr was many times larger than the force employed in April 2004. Numerous press reports placed the total size of Coalition forces at 10,000-15,000. The actual assault element comprised about 6,000 U.S. troops in four Marine battalions (3/1, 1/3, 3/5, 1/8) and Army Task Force 2-2 (two mechanized battalions).¹² About 2,000 Iraqi troops bolstered the assault force, which was supported by aircraft and several Marine and Army artillery battalions.

With Fallujah cordoned by the remaining troops, the assault force struck from the north on 8 November 2004, quickly breaching insurgent defenses and reaching the heart of the city. Although fighting was at times severe, by 12 November, U.S.-Iraqi forces controlled 80 percent of the city.¹³ Combatants and observers recognized a heavier and broader application of firepower. By 10 November, U.S. artillery batteries had fired at least 800 rounds into the city; a frequently cited report claimed 24 sorties were flown over the city on the first day of combat and a total of four 500-pound bombs was dropped.¹⁴

Fallujah is sometimes called “the city of mosques”; and insurgents made heavy use of them as command posts, arms depots, and defensive positions. Inside the Saad Abi Bin Waqas Mosque in central Fallujah, Marines found small arms, artillery shells, and parts of missile systems. Marines and soldiers engaged insurgents emplaced in mosques, but always with great caution and often using Iraqi troops to finish off assaults. It took Company B, 1/8, fighting on foot, 16 hours of house-to-house combat to capture the Muhammadia Mosque, during which time they were attacked with everything from rocket-propelled grenades to suicide bombers.¹⁵

Resistance stiffened in southern Fallujah as the assault force faced sometimes uniformed opponents who fought with increased professionalism and discipline. “When we found those boys in that bunker with their equipment, it became a whole new ball-

game” said one soldier. He continued, “The way these guys fight is different than the insurgents.”¹⁶ Nonetheless, by 20 November, the attackers had routed the remaining insurgents and taken the city.

U.S. casualties in Operation al-Fajr were 51 killed and 425 seriously wounded; Iraqi government troops suffered 8 dead and 43 wounded; and as many as 1,200 insurgents were reported killed. Some knowledgeable analysts described these losses as historically light for an urban battle of Fallujah’s scale—and there is a sound basis for this claim. The U.S. forces avoided major disasters like the Soviets suffered in Grozny, and even more limited reversals, such as the IDF suffered in Jenin, when most of a platoon was destroyed in an ambush.¹⁷

Yet despite the superb performance of Marines and soldiers in Fallujah, there is reason for concern. The 476 U.S. casualties represent about 8 percent of the total assault force, a low but not insignificant loss for less than two weeks’ combat.¹⁸ Moreover, a surprising number of U.S. troops are wounded and returned to duty in Iraq—about 45 percent overall. For example, as of 12 November 2004, I MEF Commander Lieutenant General John Sattler reported that, while 170 troops had been wounded seriously, another 490 Marines and soldiers suffered wounds but were able to return to duty.¹⁹ Extrapolating U.S. losses based on a 45 percent rate of wounded returning to duty, actual wounded in Fallujah might have been 616. Considering General Sattler’s actual figures, total wounded might have been more than 1,200 men (about 20 percent of the assault forces), a casualty rate that is not significantly lower than historical precedents. It is gratifying that U.S. troops are willing and able to fight on despite their wounds, but it is cause for concern when they are expected to take considerable casualties to spare civilians and infrastructure and appease the U.S. and international media.

Analysis

In many respects, the U.S. approach in Fallujah resembled Israeli tactics in the West Bank and Gaza. This is not surprising because numerous sources indicate that Marine and Army officers studied Israeli tactics prior to OIF. Israeli urban warfare tactics are sophisticated, effective, and well practiced. In many respects, however, the IDF has different operational