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Marine General: Fallujah Operations 'Ahead of Schedule'

By Kathleen T. Rhem
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Nov. 11, 2004 – Military operations to retake the insurgent-held Iraqi city of Fallujah are progressing "ahead of schedule," a top U.S. Marine commander there said today.

Marine Maj. Gen. Richard Natonski, commander of the 1st Marine Division, said U.S. and Iraqi forces in Fallujah are "conducting deliberate clearing operations within the city, moving from house to house, building to building, looking for arms caches, insurgents, and any other tools and weapons of war."

Since fighting began in Fallujah Nov. 8, 18 Americans and five Iraqi troops have been killed. Sixty-nine Americans and 34 Iraqis have been wounded, Natonski said in a media briefing in Iraq. "Some have paid a higher cost in the liberation of Iraq," he said. "And we mourn those who we've lost."

Also, two helicopters made "hard landings" today. No one was reported killed in either incident, and crewmembers have been recovered, Natonski said.

The general confirmed press accounts that U.S. forces found an Iraqi hostage chained in a room in Fallujah. The man, an Iraqi civilian, was found bound and severely beaten. He is receiving medical care, Natonski said.

He also confirmed accounts that U.S. forces found a suspected "slaughterhouse" used by the insurgents to murder hostages. Natonski visited the site in the northwest portion of Fallujah this morning. He described "a very nondescript residence with a courtyard."

Inside was small room with no windows and only one door. The room contained two thin mattresses and straw mats covered in blood, as well as a computer and a wheelchair.

Natonski said officials believe the wheelchair was used to move bound prisoners from one room to another. Elsewhere in the building were a small living area, a kitchen and an arms cache. Experts have "exploited" the area for intelligence information, he said.

U.S. and Iraqi troops have seen continued evidence that insurgents are using mosques and schools as fighting positions. Religious buildings and schools are to be considered "protected areas" during war, but they lose that status when used for military purposes.

Natonski said troops have found weapons caches and fortifications in nearly every mosque they've entered. They've found bomb-making factories and weapons-repair facilities in mosques and been shot at from minarets. They have also found weapons staged in schools, he said.

"This is the enemy that we fight," he said. "He does not respect the religious mosques or the children's schools."

U.S. and Iraqi forces in Fallujah are making no distinction in the types of fighters they're facing, Natonski said. "They are all people who are paralyzing the residents of Fallujah," he said. "Be they foreign fighters, former-regime elements or criminals, to us they are all insurgents who are terrorizing the good people of Fallujah."

Natonski made several laudatory comments about the coalition forces -- American and Iraqi -- fighting in Fallujah. "The respect and camaraderie between the U.S. and Iraqi forces is something to behold," he said.

The general said the Iraqis troops "are our brothers in arms, and they are the future of this country."

In response to a reporter's question, Natonski said commanders expect to see more insurgents in coming days. "And we plan on killing them," he added.

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[Maj. Gen. Richard F. Natonski, Commander, 1st Marine Division](#)

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