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Coalition Fights to Destroy Remaining Fallujah Insurgents

By John Valceanu
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BAGHDAD, Iraq, Nov. 14, 2004 – who are currently fighting to destroy remaining pockets of insurgents and terrorists in the city, according to Marine Lt. Gen. John Sattler.

Sattler commands the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force, which has supplied the bulk of the troops for Operation Al Fajr, during which coalition and Iraqi forces have trapped the insurgents in the city and has systematically eliminated their resistance.

"The enemy right now is broken into very small groups. ... They don't have the means to communicate, so they're isolated into small pockets," Sattler said. "If they want to surrender, we are more than happy to accommodate them. We have close to 1,000 military-age males who have surrendered, and who are under our control right now."

In addition to captives, Sattler said that a "conservative" estimate would be that 1,000 to 1,200 enemy fighters have been killed during the battle. By contrast, he estimated that about 30 U.S. troops have been killed, and almost 300 have been wounded.

A portion of the wounded troops were able to return to duty, and Sattler said he was moved by their eagerness to rejoin their comrades in the fight. "The courage of these individuals just makes your eyes water," Sattler said. "(They say) 'I have to get back to my unit, I need to rejoin the fight.'"

The coalition forces still involved in the fight are facing stiffer opposition from the remaining insurgents in the city, according to Sattler.

"As we come down to the final fight, the last vestiges of enemy resistance that are continuing to fight have better equipment and tactics and they are prepared to fight to the death," Sattler said. "We're not surprised, though, and we're ready for it. ... We'll offer them the opportunity to surrender and, if they don't, they'll die in violent military action."

One of the operation's primary goals, according to Sattler, is to enable the formation of a strong civil government in Fallujah, free from the intimidation of terrorists. "The perception and reality of Fallujah as a safe haven for terrorists will be gone by the time this operation is completed," he said.

The city had been haunted by terrorist leader Abu Musab Zarqawi and his followers, who are credited with murder and kidnapping. Sattler said Zarqawi and his organization were targeted by coalition for months before the launch of Al Fajr.

"This battle has been shaped for months. Each and every time we had someone from Zarqawi's leadership identified very precisely, we either ... captured him with a direct attack or killed him with a precision-guided munition," Sattler said. "We really had an impact and an effect on Zarqawi's command and control structure."

Because of this preparatory work, most of the terrorist's top leaders were already gone by the time the operation began. Though Zarqawi and his network were certainly targets, though, Sattler emphasized that they weren't the only objective.

"Our focus was on breaking the backbone of the insurgents and restoring the rule of law in Fallujah," Sattler said. "We want to give Fallujah back to Fallujah's people."

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