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Fallujah Secure as Mop-up Operations Continue, Marine Officer Says

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American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Nov. 15, 2004 – U.S. and Iraqi forces now control the city of Fallujah, Iraq, a senior American Marine officer said today.

Fallujah is secure, Col. Michael Regner, operations officer for the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force, told Pentagon reporters via telephone from Fallujah.

"We have, and we can, go anywhere we want in that city," Regner said.

However, he pointed out, remaining small groups of insurgents in Fallujah still need to be cleared out. Marines and U.S. Army soldiers are currently fighting to subdue some of those pockets of insurgents, he said.

U.S. Marines and soldiers, Regner explained, still need "to go through house to house" to ensure that all insurgents in Fallujah have been killed or captured.

The battle for Fallujah, dubbed Operation Al Fajr, began Nov. 8. Regner said preliminary searches show that Fallujah contains the largest caches of enemy weapons and explosives in Iraq.

Although he didn't estimate the number of enemy killed in the Fallujah operation, Regner did say that more than 1,052 enemy combatants had been captured. About 1,030 of the enemy detainees are Iraqi, he noted, with the remainder being foreigners.

Regner said 37 U.S. Marines and soldiers were killed during the Fallujah operation, not including one U.S. servicemember listed as a non-battlefield death.

About 320 U.S. servicemembers were wounded in action, he noted, but 134 of those wounded had returned to duty after medical treatment.

Six Iraqi security force troops were killed, and 28 were wounded, Regner said, noting two wounded Iraqis returned to duty after treatment.

The Fallujah campaign is now focused on mopping up any remaining enemy forces in the city, he said.

The next phase, he noted, is reconstruction.

The Fallujah campaign contained "no surprises," Regner observed, noting that good pre-battle

intelligence had identified the main concentrations of insurgent forces in the city.

"The intelligence community did marvelous deeds in what they provided for us," the colonel said.

Iraqi troops blended among the U.S. forces "did well" in Fallujah, Regner observed, especially during operations near city mosques. Great care was taken, he noted, to avoid damaging mosques and other city buildings and residences.

Although ridding Fallujah of insurgents is being accomplished "in record time," Regner said, he acknowledged that remaining pockets of the enemy are "still making it difficult" for the Marines.

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