

THE SUNNI TRIANGLE

Shutting Down Fallujah

Two Marine battalions shut down access to the Iraqi city of Fallujah early Monday, April 5, in an effort to isolate and root out terrorists there.

By Tuesday, five Camp Pendleton, Calif.-based Marines from the First Marine Division were killed and an unknown number of anticoalition forces were dead. Firefights erupted after Marines came under mortar and rocket-propelled grenade attacks during the first two days of the operation.

"The city is surrounded," said Second Lieutenant James G. Vanzant to reporters at the onset of the operation. "It's an extended operation. We want to make a very precise approach to this. ... We are looking for the bad guys in town."

Leathernecks from 2d Battalion, First Marine Regiment and 1st Bn, 5th Marines

surrounded the tumultuous city, known for being a hive of enemy activity.

The mission, dubbed Operation Vigilant Resolve, started when forces with Regimental Combat Team 1 moved to the outskirts of Fallujah. It came on the heels of the deaths and mutilations of four U.S. contractors in the city and a series of small-arms, rocket and mortar attacks against coalition forces during the last few months.

The Marines, backed by light armored and amphibious assault vehicles as well as M1A1 main battle tanks, set up a series of checkpoints, effectively locking down the city of about 250,000. They then probed the city's outer perimeter.

"Our concern is precise," Vanzant explained to reporters. "We want to get the guys we are after. We don't want to go in there with guns blazing."

Iraqi police passed out leaflets to Fallujah residents urging them to cooperate, and the city's mayor imposed a curfew

from 7 p.m. until 6 a.m. The mayor also banned residents from carrying weapons. Under coalition rules, Iraqis are allowed to keep certain weapons in their homes for self-protection.

The latest set of violence was sparked after masked Iraqi gunmen ambushed and killed four U.S.-contracted security personnel in what appeared to be a coordinated attack. Terrorists launched grenades into the security's convoy, setting their two sport utility vehicles ablaze. Their bodies were dragged through the streets and hung from a bridge over the Euphrates River.

Local *imams*, or Muslim religious clerics, issued a *fatwah*—a religious order—denouncing the desecration of the American bodies. The edict, though, fell short of calling for an end to targeting Americans.

The 1stMarDiv entered Iraq with the motto "No better friend, no worse enemy," which signifies the leatherneck desire to bring peace and stability to the Al Anbar



SGT JOSE E. GUILLEN

Infantrymen of 2d Bn, 1st Marines, 1stMarDiv guarded a captured terrorist, April 6, in Fallujah, Iraq. The man was captured for possession of tools used to improvise explosive devices.

province in western Iraq. Several large civic projects designed to boost employment and relieve harsh living conditions are planned for the city. Those projects, though, can't be acted upon until security is established.

"The Army spent more than \$2 million in Fallujah alone," said Colonel Michael W. Manske, assistant chief of staff for the Division's GX section, a staff section created especially to assist in stabilization efforts. "We are standing by to execute a number of additional projects to support the long-range plan."

Manske said future projects include establishing and upgrading essential services in Fallujah, including water, power and sanitation. He said that Marines are fielding requests from Fallujah leaders on other projects Marines might accomplish.

"We've established a good working relationship with local governmental and influential leaders in Fallujah," Manske explained. "But the violence that threatens innocent citizens of that city and intimidates local leaders and Iraqi security forces hampers our efforts to enact civil affairs projects."

GySgt Mark Oliva
Correspondent, 1stMarDiv

Taking the Fight to the Streets

Marines battling enemy forces in Iraq pushed forward into the city of Fallujah, April 7, after several days of violent and deadly clashes.

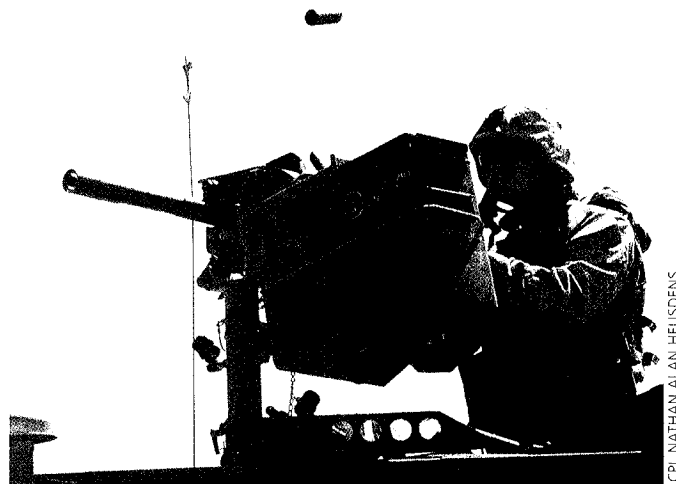
Leathernecks with Company E, 2d Battalion, First Marine Regiment established a forward base of operations inside Fallujah in order to battle back foreign terrorists and former regime loyalists holed up in pockets throughout the city, which is approximately the same size as Oklahoma City.

Outside of the walled compound, the distinctive "pop, pop, pop" of AK47 assault rifles could be heard in the distance. On the rooftops, Marines with M240G machine guns and M16A4 rifles opened fire in response to hidden insurgents.

"Our mission is to get rid of all the insurgents in the city," said Staff Sergeant Pedro Marrufo, 1st Platoon sergeant. "There's a lot of fighting going on, but my boys are still motivated. We've been successful."

Inside the building, Marines fresh off post sat in a parlor eating their meals, ready to eat. The sounds of rap music from an American Forces Network radio station in Baghdad played in the background. Infantrymen smiled and laughed, sharing jokes and stories, through the din and grime of several days of combat.

Cpl J. W. Hawkins,
Scout Platoon,
HqCo, 1st Tank Bn,
returned fire
with his MK19
after insurgents
opened up on his
patrol in the
Al Anbar province
near Fallujah.



LCPL NATHAN ALAN HEUSDEN

The "Echo" Co grunts first moved into Fallujah on April 6. The push into the urban area came after enemy forces from a nearby mosque targeted the leatherneck defensive positions on the city's edge. By sunset, Marines moved their foothold into the city.

From there, the company sent foot patrols through the city streets, clearing buildings suspected of housing insurgents. The first step, though, was eliminating enemy firing positions from the nearby mosque.

The mosque, as a holy site, is protected by accords of the Geneva Convention. It lost its protected status once enemy forces used the sanctuary to fire on advancing Marines.

Marines entered the grounds, sweeping through and anticipating a fight. They found it empty.

Even as they cleared the grounds, enemy forces fired rocket-propelled grenades from outside the mosque. Marines returned fire, quieting enemy positions.

In the surrounding neighborhood, Marines knocked in metal gates after sawing through them with a gas-powered chop saw. They swept through room by room, talking to residents through a translator. At times, the locals were just innocents, caught in the crossfire by an enemy mingling in their midst.

Other times, threats to Marines lurked behind every corner. Firing positions were mounted on rooftops as the leathernecks took on insurgents moving through nearby alleyways.

Echo Co finally settled on a group of abandoned houses as their base of operations. Searches of the structures turned up photographs of deposed dictator Saddam Hussein and his family, as well as documents and weapons used in attacks against Marines.

Foot patrols through the surrounding

