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Presenter: Major General Richard Natonski, Commander 1st Marine Division, Camp Fallujah

November 11, 2004 11:00 AM EST

Coalition and Iraqi Forces Briefing

Thursday, November 11, 2004 11:00 a.m. EST

Coalition and Iraqi Forces Briefing

Today in operations we are ahead of schedule. I can't tell you how very proud I am of the soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines and our Iraqi comrades at arms who are conducting operations in Fallujah today. The respect and camaraderie between U.S. and Iraqi forces is something to behold.

Today our forces 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. Some have paid a high cost in the liberation of Iraq and we mourn those who we have lost. Thus far 18 American servicemen and five Iraqi soldiers have been killed in action. Sixty-nine American servicemen and 34 Iraqi soldiers have been wounded in action.

The fighting continues this evening against a determined foe but the forces of the coalition are more determined that we will be victorious in this fight.

At this time I will take your questions.

Interpreter: Do you have any [inaudible]?

MG Natonski: The answer to your first question, have we found any civilian hostages in the city. Yes, we have. We have found one hostage, an Iraqi who was taken by the insurgents because they believed he was an insurgent. He was bound, severely beaten, and he's currently at a medical facility being treated for his injuries.

In answer to your second question, do we expect to see more insurgents in the days ahead. Yes, we do. And we plan on killing them.

We don't make a differentiation on insurgents. They are the people who are terrorizing the residents of

Fallujah, be they foreign fighters, former regime elements, or criminals. To us they are all insurgents who are terrorizing the good people of Fallujah.

Interpreter: Do you know anything about two helicopters that went down?

MG Natonski: There have been two helicopters today that did go down in the Fallujah area. There were no pilots killed. The helicopters made hard landings. The crews have been recovered cover and that's all I know at this time.

Interpreter: Do you have any more information about the slaughter house [inaudible]?

MG Natonski: In answer to your question regarding the slaughterhouse, I had an opportunity to visit that location this morning in the Johan area of the city, the northwest portion in an area around here [points at map]. Inside a very nondescript residence with a courtyard, concrete building, we found the room that people called slaughterhouse, as well as a large arms cache, a living space and kitchen. We also exploited, our intelligence personnel have exploited that room I let you translate....

Demonstrator: describes banner [inaudible] army, could be like [inaudible] logo [inaudible].

MG Natonski: The room was small. There were no windows, just one door. Inside the flag was on the wall. There were two thin mattresses and straw mats covered in blood. There was a computer and many computer discs found inside the room. There was also a wheelchair, which we believe was used to move the prisoners around. We believe they were bound and moved around the complex in a wheelchair. There were several plastic chairs we believe belonged to the guards and we are now currently exploiting the material that was found in this room to see whether this was in fact a room that was used for execution by the insurgents of innocent Iraqis and foreigners.

Demonstrator: One more question?

Interpreter: Is this a guerilla war, if so why are you using artillery..[inaudible]

MG Natonski: I'm not sure that I would call the fight in Fallujah guerilla war. I would call this an urban fight. We're fighting in a city. We have used weapons like artillery, and whenever we are in the city we try to use a progression of force. We start small, rifles, and then escalate to machine guns, tanks, missiles, and finally bombs. Our intent is to minimize the damage to the buildings in Fallujah. However, we will not put to risk our Iraqi and American troops without taking measures necessary to protect their lives.

We respect the law of war, unlike our adversary who uses mosques. In almost every single mosque in Fallujah we have found an arms cache, we have found IED factories, we have found fortifications, and we have even found weapons repair facilities. We have been shot at by snipers from minarets, and we've also seen the use of schools for the storage of weapons. This is the enemy that we fight. It does not respect the religious mosques or the children's schools.

I will close now, but I would just like to tell you once again how very proud I am of the performance of the Iraqi forces in this city. They are our brothers in arms and they are the future of this country. Together we will defeat the insurgents.