

# Military Police Operations in Fallujah

Task Force Enforcer headquarters coordinates raids at multiple points in a village on the western edge of Fallujah.

*By Lieutenant Colonel John Hammond*

## Scalpel Versus Bayonet

Fallujah, Iraq, is arguably one of the most dangerous places on earth. It is also home to more than 300,000 Iraqis (many of whom are fervent supporters of the previous regime) and a large number of foreign terrorists. On two occasions in 2003, the V Corps commander called on the Military Police Corps to form a unique type of task force (TF) to conduct unconventional operations. When the insurgent attacks in Fallujah had spiraled out of control and a new strategy was needed to address the situation, V Corps organized a TF with special capabilities to address this dangerous development. The TF combined the skill sets of the military police with the intelligence-gathering capabilities of counterintelligence (CI) and psychological operations (PSYOP) teams. This formidable asset was then integrated, with great success, with the combat arms elements operating in this troubled region.

The primary mission for this new TF was to identify, locate, and capture or kill threat forces operating in a specific area. The ability to execute a cordon and search operation is not a skill unique to the military police; many units perform this mission. However, based on their training and experience, the military

police achieve a greater level of precision. This reduces the collateral damage sometimes associated with this type of operation. Failing to control collateral damage will ultimately aid the enemy. Local civilians usually know who the insurgents are. If innocent civilians are killed, it angers the general population, who eventually will provide either passive or active support for the insurgents. A successful raid is a surgical event that is performed with speed, surprise, and skill. Although any unit can perform this task, the military police platoon operates more like a scalpel and less like a bayonet. Both will get the job done, but one may be a little messier. That is why the military police were selected for this mission.

The success of this concept is far-reaching and could serve as a model for future operations in the Global War on Terrorism. Military police will continue to execute this type of mission in Iraq and in any future theater in that war. The execution of the raid is only one aspect of this operation, which also includes intelligence gathering and targeting. Precision, speed, and stealth are critical components that are the calling cards of the military police platoon executing this mission. Unfortunately, soldiers who have taken part in a military operations on urbanized terrain (MOUT)

exercise feel confident that they are proficient in cordon and search operations. Since most large combat arms units operating in Iraq are not accustomed to working with military police, they perform the raids themselves and leave the military police to their traditional missions of security operations. The problem is that the rumbling of tracked vehicles can be felt and heard from a mile away. This sometimes signals the raid and results in the loss of surprise, the escape of target insurgents, and an increased risk to the soldiers executing the raid.

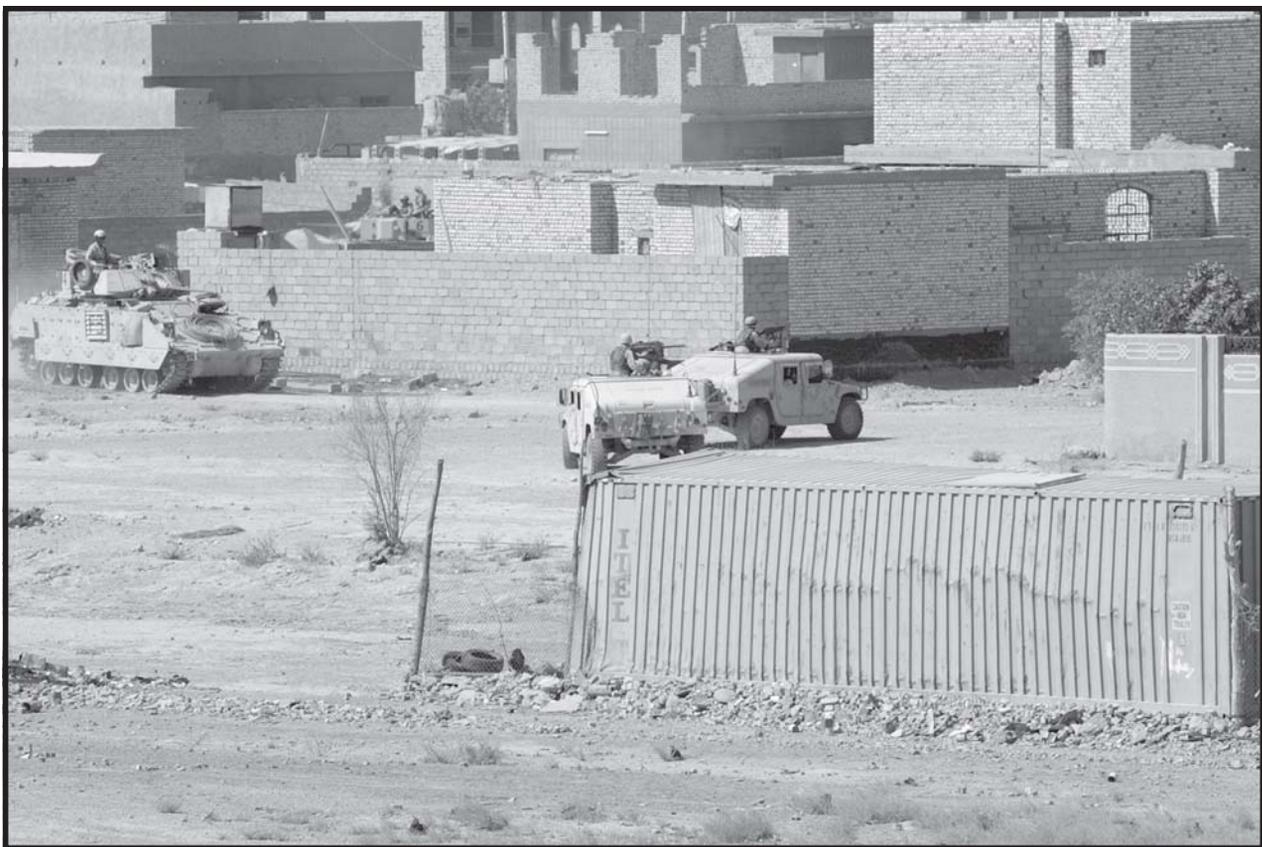
### **Battalion Mission**

In the following paragraphs, I will provide some insight into the mission set for my battalion and the subsequent results. To avoid security concerns, I will speak in generalities. Specific tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP) can be addressed in a separate venue. I hope that the valuable lessons learned from this unique operational capability will not be lost in today's fluid environment. Military police commanders should continue to train on the core mission of cordon and search operations and educate their commands about the unique skills of the military police. US forces are fighting an asymmetrical war that requires battlefield commanders to adjust their strategies and tactics

constantly and to fight using unconventional methods. The enemy has learned this lesson well and continues to evolve. Adjusting doctrine and tactics is a critical element in safeguarding soldiers. Precision raids will continue to play a major role in defeating the enemy.

The first organization to conduct this operation in Fallujah was TF Gauntlet, in support of the 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment (ACR). Shortly after arriving in Fallujah, TF Gauntlet received additional assets from the 3d ACR, and these combined assets resulted in great success and improved TTP. The situation stabilized in Fallujah, and the soldiers of TF Gauntlet returned to their battalion. In late May 2003, the situation in Fallujah had once again deteriorated. I received word to stand up a second TF, similar to TF Gauntlet, to conduct operations in Fallujah. This new organization was designated TF Enforcer by V Corps.

My initial concern in preparing for this mission was that it would require me to execute two battalion level operations in two separation regions of Iraq at the same time. When I received the mission, my battalion was decisively engaged in securing the V Corps logistical hub. I was fortunate to have a great staff of talented officers and noncommissioned



**Task Force Enforcer executes a combined arms cordon and search raid in Fallujah with direct support from the Saber Squadron, 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment.**



**Mortars, rocket-propelled grenades, and machine guns were secured by one of the many successful raids by Task Force Enforcer.**

officers (NCOs) from which to draw for my second headquarters. New units would then comprise the remainder of the TF. Although it was a challenge to perform these simultaneous missions, it was not impossible. A military police battalion placed in support of a division can execute a traditional mission of combat support while simultaneously executing direct-action operations in support of a brigade commander in a division trouble spot. However, I would recommend that the two missions take place in the same region. The real challenge was balancing the needs of both missions. My executive officer oversaw operations at the first site while I deployed to Fallujah with the assault command post (ACP), as V Corps designated that as my main effort. I urge all battalion commanders to develop an ACP and train on it before deployment. Developing an ACP will provide a unique asset for deployments and will result in a better-trained staff.

TF Enforcer initially consisted of a military police ACP, a military police company, two CI teams, and two PSYOP teams. I received additional attachments

of a division military police company and an infantry company. My orders were to conduct unconventional military police operations. My mission was to neutralize the organized criminal threat and the remaining Fedayeen Saddam and Baath Party forces operating in the region, in conjunction with the 3d ACR and the 2d Brigade Spartans of the 3d Infantry Division (ID).

Fallujah was unlike any other place I saw in Iraq or Afghanistan. It was the Hell's Kitchen of Iraq, and most Iraqis would never travel there. Many of its 300,000 people have strong ties to the former regime. Fallujah sits at the crossroads from Syria and Jordan, where porous borders allow foreign terrorists to flow into Iraq. Before the fall of Saddam, there was no law other than loose tribal control in Fallujah. Saddam reached an arrangement in this lawless region through ruthless enforcement by the Fedayeen Saddam and the Baath Party. Local thugs maintained control and Saddam rewarded them for their efforts.

US forces recaptured Fallujah in 2004, and the news media reported that they did it with more than

15,000 Marines and soldiers. When I reported there in 2003, the 3d ACR had fewer than 1,000 troops. One squadron, which was performing an economy-of-force mission, had the insurmountable task of securing Fallujah and rebuilding the city's infrastructure. TF Enforcer was formed to assist with the direct-action mission and brought with it critical intelligence-gathering capabilities. Actionable intelligence is essential to this type of operation, and developing this capability was my highest priority. It would take time for US assets to produce the actionable intelligence needed, which meant that the TF had to go looking for it the hard way. In the beginning, patrols conducted daily reconnaissance by fire to provide an initial intelligence picture. This mission presented additional challenges as Fallujah was very built-up and the possibility for attack was everywhere. Fallujah resembles Mogadishu, Somalia, in its design and volatility. Each night, soldiers patrolled the worst portions of the city in search of insurgents to draw intelligence from. There were nightly ambushes that primarily consisted of rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), hand grenades, and AK47 attacks. Intelligence was the lifeblood of the TF. Good intelligence meant that the TF could choose the time and place of an engagement. The CI teams played a major role in the success of the TF, and it was essential to have direct control over them. It took time to develop, but eventually a solid intelligence network allowed the TF to construct a relatively accurate model of the insurgent operation. The PSYOP teams efficiently supported this effort and often provided intelligence that confirmed information gained from other sources. To complete the intelligence network, a solid police intelligence operation within the Fallujah police headquarters was established.

Commanders at every level must lead from the front if they hope to succeed in this rapidly changing asymmetrical environment. Every successful commander I observed or worked with in either Iraq or Afghanistan followed this practice. To maintain my own situational awareness, I traveled with a different patrol each night and oversaw most direct-action raids. To gauge their condition, I talked with the soldiers each night before we went out on patrol. Over time, the ambushes certainly began to take their toll, and I decreased the operational tempo accordingly. It was extremely challenging to balance the mission with the operational effectiveness of soldiers subjected to the strain of this terrible environment. It is impossible for commanders to gauge this if they are not out front with their troops. Battalion commanders are responsible for maneuvering platoons on the battlefield, while captains maneuver squads. This

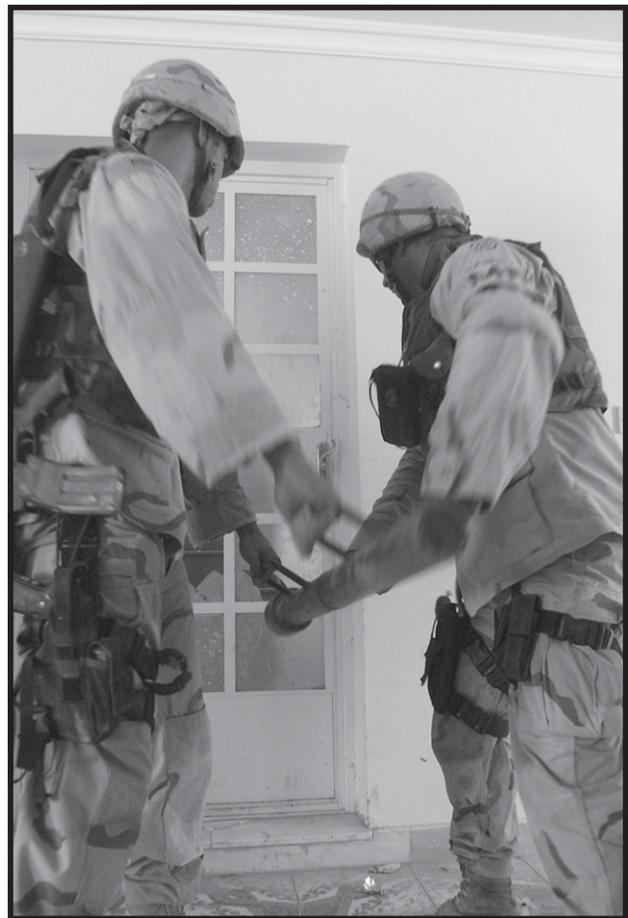
principle requires leaders to have eyes on their operational elements during combat operations. My platoon leaders, in conjunction with their company commanders, planned and executed most missions, while I approved the plans, monitored the situation, and coordinated additional resources if needed. I felt this was necessary since the situation was extremely fluid and the rules of engagement (ROE) were confusing. Although my forward presence could be seen as cumbersome by those more comfortable with a decentralized leadership philosophy, it was quite necessary. This technique allowed platoon leaders to remain focused on their mission, while I worked response issues and provided on-the-spot guidance when the situation took a drastic turn. This allowed us to transition rapidly to a dynamic mode or quickly put a lid on a mission and "bring it down a notch" when necessary. Raids were conducted by day and patrols were conducted at night. It was a dangerous routine, but intelligence improved every day and the TF began taking down bigger targets and slowly gaining control of the city. If soldiers do not see their leaders taking the same risks as they do in this hellish environment, it will certainly affect their morale. In addition, if commanders are not out on patrol with the soldiers, it is impossible to maintain accurate situational awareness and adjust tactics in a timely manner.

The operational climate in Iraq can change quickly, requiring an immediate change in mission or demanding additional guidance. To respond to this condition of battle, we established a mobile tactical operations center (TOC) that developed better command, control, and security for patrols operating in the city. The mobile TOC was designed to overcome the delays in the quick reaction force response time, eliminate communications failures, and provide a forward command and control element able to respond to changing situations. It linked multiple patrols with the rear command post at the forward operating base. In some cases, it operated in conjunction with hunter-killer teams to maneuver forces. In other cases, it coordinated actions during deliberate raids. The mobile TOC allowed a coordinated response to an ambush by maneuvering organic assets or by requesting additional support from the air cavalry or infantry. Air cavalry assets were frequently requested and coordinated during patrols or raids.

A National Guard military police company served as the direct-action element of the TF. Once intelligence was deemed actionable, the military police soldiers executed the raids. This National Guard unit had a large number of civilian police officers, many with

experience in special weapons and tactics. Although they were very proficient in cordon and search operations, they conducted extensive rehearsals on a daily basis and performed rock drills before any deliberate raids. They executed two types of raids—dynamic (forced entry) raids and knock-and-talk (permissive) raids. The dynamic raid is the traditional cordon and search operation with an explosive entry. Tanks or explosives were sometimes used to knock holes in walls. Many raids were conducted in conjunction with units of the 3d ID. It was common for the TF to conduct a deliberate raid with combat arms comrades that involved tanks, Bradley fighting vehicles, military police, and aerial security from Kiowa or Apache helicopters. Air cavalry is an asset that military police never train with. However, it is a critical component that can protect the military police from attack and provide real-time intelligence on the target site. Military police commanders must make every effort to train with aviation units while conducting cordon and search operations. In all, close to 400 separate structures were taken down during raids, with no friendly casualties. Well over 100 prisoners were taken, along with hundreds of weapons, mortars, RPGs, missiles, bombs, and explosives. A major counterfeiting operation was eliminated, providing incredible intelligence. The raids located and secured tons of explosives, ammunition, and bomb-making materials. The direct-action element of this operation was incredibly successful, especially when combined with our combat arms counterparts.

To effect these complex operations, TF representatives met daily with their counterparts from the 3d ACR and 3d ID to deconflict direct-action missions and patrols. This ensured that the appropriate force was brought to bear on a target gained through actionable intelligence. Every deliberate mission was planned, coordinated, and rehearsed. This included our unique mobile checkpoints. Establishing and maintaining checkpoints in hostile territory was extremely dangerous but always yielded results. Checkpoint locations were selected in advance and conducted in conjunction with a combat patrol. These check-points were



**Military police execute an explosive entry during operations in Fallujah.**

maintained only for short times, reducing the enemy's ability to assemble and attack. Also, word traveled quickly when the TF set up a checkpoint, and the insurgents took a new route.

This snapshot of operations in Fallujah will provide future military police commanders with some planning considerations. The success of both TF Gauntlet and TF Enforcer in Iraq was clear, but I fear the concept of this operation was lost when I left Fallujah along with the ACP in September 2003. The remaining elements of my TF were dismantled then and a valuable tool was lost. I hope the lessons learned in Fallujah are not wasted and that future commanders can benefit from this experience.