

The Times (London)
September 15, 2003

Iraqi police ready to turn guns on US troops

From Richard Lloyd Parry in Fallujah

Iraqi policemen declared themselves holy warriors yesterday and vowed to take revenge for the deaths of their comrades in the town where ten police and a security guard were killed on Friday in the worst "friendly fire" incident of the Iraq conflict. "I am full of hatred for the Americans and I am ready to kill them," said Arkan Adanan, who was injured in the shoulder early on Friday morning when US troops poured rifle and machinegun fire into three police vehicles that were chasing suspected bandits.

"All Fallujah people are Mujahidin and they care only about killing Americans. We don't care about their powerful weapons, because we know that if we die we will become martyrs."

Survivors of the incident and relatives of the dead and injured men made similar comments.

At a news conference with Colin Powell, the visiting US Secretary of State, Paul Bremer, the US administrator, said: "The very regrettable incident in Fallujah is still under investigation by our military. We have expressed regrets for it publicly.

"When we have reached conclusions about how the incident came about, we'll take appropriate steps. In the past we have paid families where we felt it was appropriate, but this incident is still under investigation."

The apology issued by a US spokesman over the weekend has done little to calm rage over the incident, which many local people claim was a deliberate ambush by the American soldiers. Conspiracy theories are circulating about how wounded policemen were shot in the head by unidentified foreigners allegedly working for the coalition.

"From today, I am a Mujahidin," Anwar Jabar, a policeman whose brother and cousin died in the attack, said. "I have lost two heroes, so why not let it be three?" The Fallujah killings are a grave setback to the US-led coalition, which was already struggling to persuade ordinary people of the sincerity of its intentions in Iraq.

That the incident occurred in Fallujah, already the centre of the country's most violent resistance to coalition authority, makes it doubly disastrous.

The response was swift. An American soldier was killed and three others injured yesterday morning when a Humvee armoured vehicle ran over a homemade bomb.

Passers-by laughed as the carcass of the Humvee was dragged back to the US base on the outskirts of Fallujah a few hours later.

"I am proud of that, because those people are taking revenge on the Americans," Mr Adanan said. "They will continue with more and more attacks in the future."

The establishment of an independent Iraqi police force is one of the coalition's few concrete achievements, but, in Fallujah at least, it now finds itself confronted by an organisation to which it has entrusted law and order.

Mr Adanan said from his hospital bed: "We shouted at them that we were police, but they killed us anyway because they hate us. They hate us because we don't co-operate with them."

The fury against the Americans was deafeningly obvious on Saturday when nine of the 11 dead were buried. For more than an hour scores of men fired thousands of rounds into the air as a crowd of several hundred gathered at a mosque.

Onlookers scattered in alarm as one man fired off a belt-fed machinegun. Several journalists were shoved and slapped as they tried to photograph the crowd.

Speaking through a loudspeaker to the hundreds outside, the imam urged the gunmen to "save your bullets for the chests of the enemy". On a wall along the town's main street, someone had painted the English words: "US Army will pay blood for oil."

Fallujah has always been one of the wildest places in Iraq, with a reputation for violence and feuding even before the US-British invasion. In April US soldiers killed 18 people and injured 78 others during protests.