

COMBATING THE INSURGENCY: AIR FORCE COMBAT CONTROLLERS AT NAJAF

Source: National Museum of the U.S. Air Force website.

JANUARY 2007 – NAJAF, IRAQ - In late January 2007, Iraqi police in Najaf went to arrest what they thought were only 30 members of the fanatical "Soldiers of Heaven" sect -- they were ambushed by about 800 heavily-entrenched insurgents.

Two U.S. Army Special Forces teams that included USAF **Combat Controllers** Tech. Sgt. Bryan Patton and Staff Sgt. David Orvosh arrived to help. The battle raged, but Patton and Orvosh skillfully brought in a stream of close air support that bombed and strafed the enemy.



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SSgt Ryan Wallace pictured in full battle gear. (U.S. Air Force Photo)

As the fighting continued, another Special Forces team arrived, which included Combat Controller Staff Sgt. Ryan Wallace. This team became pinned down by enemy fire. At a critical moment, Wallace called in a 500-pound laser-guided bomb against a key enemy position only 100 meters away from where he was (for a 500-pound bomb, 300 meters is considered "danger close"). It killed or stunned the 40 insurgents in the position. Wallace and two others charged the position and killed the remaining enemy.

The destruction of this strongpoint proved to be the turning point in the battle.

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At right, a copy of notes written by SSgt Ryan Wallace during the battle. He normally did not write these down, as he put it: "Some things are more important than notes; like shooting back, for one." (U.S. Air Force photo)

About 370 insurgents were killed, mostly by air attack, and more than 400 were captured (including 14 high-value targets). The three Combat Controllers' actions were essential to victory in this battle.

