

# HEROES

## In the War on Terror

Each week the Defense Dept. highlights the military men and women who have gone above and beyond in the global war on terror.



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## Army 3rd Armored Cavalry – Valorous Unit Award

*Brave Rifles! Veterans! You have been baptized in fire and blood and have come out steel!*

–General Winfield Scott, 1847

In the annals of American military history, there have been thousands of acts of heroism – men and women whose individual courage merited some of the nation’s highest commendations. It is sometimes forgotten, however, that the ethos of the American warrior does not lie in the individual. Heroism lies in something beyond self, which is why the United States also recognizes those units that display extraordinary gallantry in action, gallantry that sets the unit apart from other units serving in the same conflict.

Long before cities like Fallujah, Ramadi, Qaim, and Husaybah became widely known, the men and women of the 3rd Cavalry formed the nucleus of Task Force Rifles – a regimental combat team 8,300 troopers strong – deployed to Iraq.

In late April 2003, the team was tasked with securing the volatile Anbar region, a vast 140,000 square-kilometer area the size of Wyoming, which includes some of Iraq’s most forbidding terrain – and some of Iraq’s most hardened and lethal insurgents. In all, the unit received more than 400 awards for individual acts of valor and 233 purple hearts for their actions in Iraq. But it was their distinguished work as a unit, in the most complex and dangerous region of Iraq, that made them so noteworthy.

Shortly after the ground invasion of Iraq began, the 3rd Cavalry arrived in Anbar and began the arduous work of securing the entire province, and laying the groundwork for future combat forces and regional development. Anbar had been bypassed on the lightning drive to Baghdad, and there was little intelligence on what could be expected.



The mission ran the gamut of military operations – from security patrols to reconnaissance to capturing and killing former regime elements – throughout Anbar, including within the infamous Sunni Triangle. The team caught several high-value targets, including members of the most-wanted “deck of cards.” Task Force Rifles was also responsible for numerous activities outside of usual combat operations: opening Iraqi police stations, courthouses, and prisons; securing mass-grave sites; building schools; and distributing food (49,000 humanitarian daily rations) and economic assistance (\$60 million to 40,000 civil servants).

The first objective, however, was security – a difficult objective to begin with, made more so by the fact that this was largest battlespace assigned to any unit, even those at the division level. The 3rd Cavalry was responsible for more than 900 kilometers of international borders – borders shared with Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Syria. This included many of the most dangerous areas where terrorists and insurgents crossed into Iraq, such as the border towns of Husaybah (Syria), Ténaf (Syria), and Třebil (Jordan). The area of operation also included the southern Euphrates River valley in the areas of Rawa and Hit – two more violent hotspots.



Task Force Rifles was also responsible for securing the 500-kilometer Jordanian highway, a vital artery running from the border with Jordan through Ramadi and Fallujah and into western Baghdad. They set up the first highway patrols there and on other well-traveled routes – and, under their protection, violence on the roadways between July and September was scarce. This corridor of safety allowed much-needed humanitarian assistance and non-governmental organizations to move in and out of Iraq. For instance, a U.N. facility in Ramadi was able to deliver 1,400 truckloads of food to local citizens.



The 3rd Cav was given more specific assignments as well – ones that often included fierce battles and dangerous house-to-house searches, often on a city-wide scale. On top of that, there were numerous missions to destroy terrorist and insurgent training grounds and safe houses. In one of its better known missions, Operation Rifles Blitz, the regiment locked down three turbulent towns stretching along the Syrian border, conducting intense house-to-house searches, which resulted in approximately 100 suspected insurgents detained, and hundreds of weapons, bomb-making materials, and anti-Coalition documents rounded up.

All in all, combat missions through August netted numerous confiscations, among them: more than 1,000 122mm artillery rounds; almost 1,000 mortar rounds; almost 3,000 AK-47s; more than 130 RPGs; 45 anti-tank mines; and 30 37mm anti-aircraft rounds.

But the mission in Anbar was not just one of force. There was also the economic and political situation to consider, especially when it came to securing the Haditha dam, which generates power for all of western Iraq. Its electricity had been siphoned off to Baghdad under the Hussein regime, and its capacity had suffered from years of neglect. Only two of six generators were operating when the 3rd Cavalry arrived, but, with the help of an Azerbaijani infantry company, the troops secured the dam and brought two more generators back on line.

In August of 2003, the 3rd Cavalry helped organize Anbar's first-ever provincial council – with a sheik from each of the 60 tribes in the province attending. That historic moment laid the foundation for provincial cooperation with U.S. forces as well as local cooperation with the central government.

The successes of the 3rd Cavalry – the numerous missions, the extraordinary accomplishments – did not come without a heavy price. Task Force Rifles lost 49 soldiers during its first deployment. As Col. David Teeple, who commanded the unit, said at a Jan. 11, 2007, memorial dedication, "The sacrifice they made for their country, for their loved ones, for their future, included sharing their strength, their dedication, their love, and their lives with us. We honor them for their sacrifice. We honor them as Americans, as soldiers, and as family."

By presenting the Valorous Unit Award to the 3rd Armored Cavalry and the other units of Task Force Rifles for their actions from April 25, 2003, to September 18, 2003, the United States honors all the soldiers of the 3rd Cavalry, both living and dead.

3rd Armored Cavalry [website](#). 3rd Armored Cavalry [history](#). Col. David Teeple's [speech](#). Defend America [story](#).