



## World News

THE CONFLICT IN IRAQ

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# Photos Indicate Civilians Slain Execution-Style

An official involved in an investigation of Camp Pendleton Marines' actions in an Iraqi town cites 'a total breakdown in morality.'

By Tony Perry and Julian E. Barnes, Times Staff Writers  
May 27, 2006

WASHINGTON — Photographs taken by a Marine intelligence team have convinced investigators that a Marine unit killed as many as 24 unarmed Iraqis, some of them "execution-style," in the insurgent stronghold of Haditha after a roadside bomb killed an American in November, officials close to the investigation said Friday.

The pictures are said to show wounds to the upper bodies of the victims, who included several women and six children. Some were shot in the head and some in the back, congressional and defense officials said.

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One government official said the pictures showed that infantry Marines from Camp Pendleton "suffered a total breakdown in morality and leadership, with tragic results."

The case may be the most serious incident of alleged war crimes in Iraq by U.S. troops. Marine officers have long been worried that Iraq's deadly insurgency could prompt such a reaction by combat teams.

An investigation by an Army general into the Nov. 19 incident is to be delivered soon to the top operational commander in Iraq. A separate criminal investigation is

also underway and could lead to charges ranging from dereliction of duty to murder.

Both investigations are centered on a dozen Marines from the 3rd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division. The battalion was on its third deployment to Iraq when the killings occurred.

Most of the fatal shots appear to have been fired by only a few of the Marines, possibly a four-man "fire team" led by a sergeant, said officials with knowledge of the investigation, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

The same sergeant is suspected of filing a false report downplaying the number of Iraqis killed, saying they were killed by an insurgent's bomb and that Marines entered the Iraqis' homes in search of gunmen firing at them. All aspects of his account are contradicted by pictures, statements by Marines to investigators and an inspection of the houses involved, officials said.

Other Marines may face criminal charges for failing to stop the killings or for failing to make accurate reports.

Of the dead Iraqis, 19 were in three to four houses that Marines stormed, officials said. Five others were killed near a vehicle.

The intelligence team took the pictures shortly after the shooting stopped. Such teams are typically assigned to collect information on insurgents after firefights or other military engagements.

Investigators and top officers of the Camp Pendleton-based 1st Marine Expeditionary Force, which oversees Marine infantry, aviation and support units in Iraq, have viewed the pictures.

The incident began when a roadside bomb attached to a large propane canister exploded as Marines passed through Haditha, a town on the Euphrates River. Lance Cpl. Miguel Terrazas, who was driving a Humvee, was killed and two other Marines were wounded.

Marines quickly determined that the bomb was a "line-of-sight" explosive that would have required someone to detonate it. Marines and Iraqi forces searched houses and other structures in the narrow, dusty streets. Jets dropped 500-pound bombs and a drone aircraft circled overhead.

Time magazine, in a report published in March, quoted witnesses, including a 9-year-old girl, Eman Waleed, who said that she saw Marines kill her grandparents and that other adults in the house died shielding her and her 8-year-old brother, Abdul Rahman.

An elder in Haditha later went to Marine officials at the battalion's headquarters to complain of wanton killings.

The Marines involved in the incident initially reported that they had become embroiled in a firefights with insurgents after the explosion. However, evidence that later emerged contradicted that version.

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"There wasn't a gunfight, there were no pockmarked walls," a congressional aide said.

"The wounds indicated execution-style" shootings, said a Defense Department official who had been briefed on the contents of the photos.

The Marine Corps backed off its initial explanation, and the investigations were launched after Time published its account.

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