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Trial of former US Marine in Iraq detainee death underway

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LOS ANGELES (AFP) — The trial of a former US Marine accused of killing two Iraqi detainees during fighting in Fallujah four years ago began Tuesday with jury selection in the landmark case, justice officials said.

Lawyers at the US District Court in Riverside, east of Los Angeles, began vetting a pool of around 120 jurors who will be whittled down to hear the case against Jose Nazario.

Nazario, 28, denies charges of voluntary manslaughter, assault with a dangerous weapon and discharging a firearm during a crime of violence in connection with the shootings of four Iraqi insurgents in 2004.

According to defense lawyers, Nazario's case is the first time a former soldier has been tried in a civilian court in connection with alleged crimes that took place during combat.

Prosecutors allege that Nazario, a former Marine Corps sergeant, shot dead two unarmed detainees on November 9, 2004 during a house search.

Nazario is also alleged to have ordered two Marines -- Ryan Weemer and Jermaine Nelson -- to shoot two other unarmed prisoners.

Weemer and Nelson have since been charged with unpremeditated murder and dereliction of duty and face courts martial later this year as they are still serving in the Marines.

Opening statements in Nazario's trial are expected on Thursday.