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The Haditha Marines: Six dropped cases, one acquittal

The Associated Press

Published: December 28th, 2008 12:05 AM

CAMP PENDLETON, Calif. — Eight Marines were charged Dec. 21, 2006, with crimes related to the deaths of 24 Iraqi men, women and children during a bloody, door-to-door sweep in the town of Haditha. It's the biggest criminal case against U.S. troops involving Iraqi deaths to come out of the war.

Charges have been dismissed against six defendants, and a seventh was acquitted. The sole remaining defendant is the squad leader, Staff Sgt. Frank D. Wuterich, whose court-martial isn't yet scheduled. Prosecutors hope to retry Lt. Col. Jeffrey R. Chessani, who was the battalion commander at the time.

The deaths occurred after a Marine was killed by a roadside bomb Nov. 19, 2005. Initially, four enlisted men were charged with unpremeditated murder, and four officers were accused of failing to properly investigate. The men belonged to the 3rd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment. Here's a look at each of their cases.

- Staff Sgt. Frank D. Wuterich of Meriden, Conn. Pleaded not guilty to voluntary manslaughter. Prosecutors are seeking unaired footage from a CBS News "60 Minutes" interview. Trial date pending.
- Sgt. Sanick P. Dela Cruz of Chicago; rifleman. Charges of unpremeditated murder were dismissed in April 2007 and he was given immunity to testify.
- Lance Cpl. Justin L. Sharratt of Canonsburg, Pa.; rifleman. Charges of unpremeditated murder of three Iraqi brothers were dismissed in August 2007.
- Lance Cpl. Stephen B. Tatum of Edmond, Okla.; rifleman. Charges of involuntary manslaughter were dismissed in March 2008, and he was given immunity to testify.
- Lt. Col. Jeffrey R. Chessani of Rangely, Colo.; battalion commander. Charged with failing to obey regulations, encompassing counts of failing to report and investigate alleged war crimes. A military judge dismissed charges in June 2008 after finding a four-star general overseeing the case was improperly influenced by an investigator. Prosecutors sought a new trial; decision pending.
- 1st Lt. Andrew A. Grayson of Springboro, Ohio; intelligence officer. Acquitted in June 2008 of making false official statements, trying to fraudulently separate from service and attempt to deceive by making false statements.
- Capt. Randy W. Stone of Dunkirk, Md.; military attorney. Charges of failure to obey orders or regulations, encompassing counts of failing to ensure that a thorough investigation was conducted and reported to headquarters, were dismissed in August 2007.
- Capt. Lucas M. McConnell of Napa, Calif.; company commander. Charges of failure to obey orders, encompassing two counts of failing to ensure that alleged violations of laws of war were investigated, were dismissed in September 2007.

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