



## What Exactly Happened that Day in Fallujah?

*By Laura Parker*  
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It is one of the Iraq war's grisliest photo images: the charred bodies of American civilians strung up on a

Three years later, the Fallujah attack is at the center of a legal battle that could prompt more government

The families of the slain men still don't know what happened that day when their loved ones were consu

The lawsuit is the most prominent in an emerging body of litigation surrounding the secretive world of pri

Legal experts say that more than a dozen lawsuits have been filed against contractors and that the Falluj

"Blackwater has got to win this one to deter other suits," says Scott Silliman, director of the Center on La

The lawsuit alleges that Blackwater sent Jerry Zovko, Scott Helvenston, Michael Teague and Wesley Ba

Blackwater denies the allegations and has filed a \$10 million counterclaim. It says the families violated e

Blackwater is one of the largest in a labyrinth of private security companies that collectively have assem

The four men killed in Fallujah are among more than 990 American contractors who have been killed in

Unlike the practice with military casualties, no official reports are made on the circumstances surrounding

The families' lawsuit has provided the most complete and only public account of events leading up to the

Several family members said Blackwater executives told them they'd have to sue to obtain the company

"Imagine having the people so near and dear to your hearts killed ... in a foreign country," Kathryn Helve

A growing civilian force

Private contractors, including cooks, truck drivers, translators, interrogators, and maintenance workers, l

In Iraq, the Bush administration has pushed the use of private contractors to an unprecedented level and

Private contractors often can finish jobs "better and faster" than the military, says Steve Schooner, an A

A complication in the Iraq war, he says, is the heavy dependence on armed contractors. The government

"We never made those decisions with arms-bearing contractors. The decisions in Iraq were, 'Holy moly,

Four years into the Iraq war, however, little is publicly known about what they do. Members of Congress

"There's no visibility on these contractors," says Rep. Jan Schakowsky, D-Ill. "Meaning no clue how much

Jeremy Scahill, an investigative journalist for The Nation magazine, and author of Blackwater: The Rise

But even opponents of the government's reliance on armed contractors say oversight is the job of Congress

"The concept of second-guessing tactical decisions in a combat situation is not a good one," says retired

In court papers, the companies say they were working for the government and therefore are subject to the

In the two years since it was filed, the Fallujah lawsuit has bounced between state and federal courts and

Last month, U.S. District Judge James Fox in North Carolina ordered the families and Blackwater into a

Blackwater does not comment on litigation, company spokeswoman Tyrell says. The families of the men

A company with clout

Blackwater was founded in 1997 by Erik Prince, a former Navy SEAL and son of a wealthy Michigan auto

It counts former top CIA and Defense Department officials, including Cofer Black, former director of the CIA

If company executives represent Blackwater's military and national security prowess, the men ambushed

Worked with Demi Moore

Helvenston, 38, of Oceanside, Calif., was an ex-Navy SEAL who had parlayed his expertise into a career

The men earned \$600 a day, court papers say. Teague wanted to bankroll his son's college tuition. Helv

Andrew Howell, Blackwater's general counsel, told Congress that the men were appropriately equipped

"They did not have heavy machine weapons," Helvenston-Wettengel said. "They were not able to condu