

# Haditha: The collapse of a liberal fiction

**Y**ou'd hardly know it if you relied on the mainstream media, but the government's case against the Haditha Marines took another body blow recently that may be the beginning of the end for this whole sorry attempt to severely punish eight heroic United States Marines for doing what they are trained to do.

In a surprise development on the day Lance Cpl. Stephen Tatum's court martial was scheduled to begin, all charges against him were dropped without explanation.

Tatum, facing charges of reckless endangerment and aggravated assault that could have sent him to prison for 18 years, was the fifth Marine — and the second of three enlisted men — to be exonerated, leaving only one enlisted Marine still facing court martial.

Tatum's exoneration should come as no surprise to anyone familiar with the real facts in the case. During an ambush by insurgent forces in Haditha, 15 civilians and nine insurgents were killed by Marines of Kilo Company, 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines. The incident began when an IED explosion killed a Marine and wounded two others. In the wake of that explosion, a squad of Marines came



MIKE REAGAN

under insurgent gunfire. The 15 civilian deaths, which came during house-clearing operations, were the result of a time-honored insurgent tactic of hiding themselves among civilians when ambushing U.S. forces, hoping to score a propaganda coup when the civilian shields are killed in the ensuing crossfire.

Full details of the incident on Nov. 19, 2005, were supplied in great detail to the entire command structure the very night of the engagement, and the incident was regarded for what it was — a tragic result of an enemy ambush. No further action was required or taken.

Months later, however, Time magazine published a story reporting that the Marines had gone on a rampage, wantonly killing innocent civilians to avenge the death of their fellow Marine killed in the IED explosion.

Using Time magazine's fallacious account of the civilian deaths, Pennsylvania's Democratic Rep. John Murtha went on a rampage of his own, telling every media outlet that would listen that the Marines

had committed "cold-blooded murder." He first claimed that his information came from a briefing from the Marine Corps Commandant, but when that claim was disproved he admitted that his source was Time magazine.

Murtha's charges were broadcast far and wide, and before any investigation of the incident could get under way, the media joined Murtha in finding the Marines guilty of a massacre.

In the ensuing media firestorm that broke out, many news reports here and abroad compared the Haditha deaths to the infamous My Lai massacre during the Vietnam War.

Neither Murtha nor the mainstream media bothered to check Time's sources — two known insurgent propagandists and insurgent-friendly Haditha residents living under the guns of insurgent killers who were the only authority in town.

It wasn't because the real facts were not available to any reporter willing to investigate the Haditha case, yet only one news source bothered to look into the case.

As early as May 31, 2006, NewsMax.com had begun to poke holes in the case, and from that time down to the present, NewsMax contin-

ued to report the truth about Haditha and defend the Marines who were innocent of the charges eventually leveled against them.

Yet all this time, the media and Rep. Murtha continued to peddle the insurgent lie that a massacre had taken place in Haditha, even though all murder charges had long ago been dropped in favor of lesser charges.

There was a crime, but it was the media and Rep. Murtha who committed it against heroic Marines whose careers have been destroyed and some of whose families were bought to the edge of bankruptcy defending their sons.

Thanks to NewsMax readers, who contributed over \$500,000 for their defense, some of that burden was lifted.

And thanks to John Murtha and the liberal media, these Marines can now join my Dad's wrongly accused Secretary of Labor Ray Donovan in asking where they go to get their reputations back.

**Mike Reagan, the elder son of the late President Ronald Reagan, is heard on more than 200 talk radio stations nationally as part of the Radio America Network. E-mail comments to Reagan@caglecartoons.com.**