

Blackwater Baghdad gassing a 'mistake'

by UPI

WASHINGTON -- The release of riot-control gas in 2005 from a helicopter and vehicle in Baghdad by the private U.S. security firm Blackwater was a mistake, the company said. The May 2005 incident came to light recently detailing how at least 10 U.S. soldiers at a checkpoint and an unknown number of civilians were gassed by a Blackwater helicopter and a second time from a Blackwater armored vehicle, The New York Times reported. None of the soldiers required medical treatment for exposure to CS gas, which temporarily blinds people, causes skin irritation, coughing and choking, the report said. Anne Tyrrell, a spokeswoman for Blackwater, told the Times in an e-mail message the attacks were human error by staff. "Blackwater teams in the air and on the ground were preparing a secure route near a checkpoint to provide passage for a motorcade," Tyrrell wrote. "It seems a CS gas canister was mistaken for a smoke canister and released near an intersection and checkpoint." The U.S. military can use riot-control gas in a war zone only under the strictest circumstances, which various soldiers said didn't exist that day, the Times said.

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