

Court upholds Iraq war crimes dismissal

by UPI

WASHINGTON -- A decision to dismiss war crimes charges against a U.S. Marine commander in Iraq should stand, a military appeals court says.

The U.S. Navy-Marine Corps Court of Criminal Appeal agreed Tuesday in Washington to uphold the dismissal of charges against Lt. Col. Jeffrey Chessani, the highest-ranking Marine charged in the 2005 slayings of 24 civilians in Haditha, Iraq, the Los Angeles Times reported.

The court agreed with a military judge at Camp Pendleton, Calif., who ruled that war crimes charges against Chessani were tainted because a Marine lawyer who investigated the Haditha killings had sat in on meetings with the general who later decided to charge Chessani and seven other Marines in the case, the newspaper said.

Chessani, a 22-year Marine Corps veteran, commanded the battalion involved in the incident and was charged with not launching a war crimes investigation after learning that his troops had killed Iraqi women and children.

The Times reported that of the eight Marines charged in the case, five have seen their charges dismissed and one was found innocent. Only the cases against Chessani and squad leader Staff Sgt. Frank Wuterich remain, officials said.

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