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### IRAQ: Former Marine Justin Sharratt sues Rep. John Murtha over Haditha killings



A former Marine lance corporal exonerated in the investigation into the killing of 24 civilians in Haditha, Iraq, has filed a slander suit against Rep. John P. Murtha (D-Pa.) for allegedly saying that the Marines "killed innocent civilians in cold blood."

Lawyers for Justin Sharratt, 24, filed the lawsuit today in federal court in Pittsburgh. Sharratt's family lives in Murtha's district.

Murtha, a former Marine and vocal opponent of the Iraq war, made his comments at a news conference in 2006, before Sharratt and seven other Marines were charged for the November 2005 killings.

After a preliminary hearing at Camp Pendleton, charges against Sharratt were

dismissed in August 2007. In an unsworn statement at the hearing, Sharratt said he opened fire on three Iraqi brothers after being confronted by a man pointing an AK-47 at him.

A suit has also been filed against Murtha by Staff Sgt. Frank Wuterich. That suit is on hold while an appeals court deals with Murtha's appeal of a lower-court order that he must sit for deposition.

Of the eight Marines initially charged in the case, charges have been dismissed against seven. Wuterich's court-martial is delayed by legal wrangling over his interview on CBS' "60 Minutes." Also, prosecutors are appealing a judge's ruling that charges against Lt. Col. Jeffrey Chessani should be dismissed.

Murtha's spokesman told a Pittsburgh television station that the 17-term congressman would have no comment on Sharratt's lawsuit.

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--Tony Perry in San Diego

Photo: Lance Cpl. Justin Sharratt. Credit: North County Times

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