

AMERICAN FORCES INFORMATION SERVICE
NEWS ARTICLES**Probe Clears Coalition Forces of Wrongdoing in March 15 Raid**By John D. Banusiewicz
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, June 3, 2006 – An investigation has concluded that coalition forces "operated in accordance with the rules of engagement governing our combat forces in Iraq" during a March 15 raid in which Iraqi civilians died, a coalition spokesman said early today in Baghdad.

Army Maj. Gen. William B. Caldwell IV, Multinational Force Iraq spokesman, said that in response to claims that as many as 13 civilians were killed in the raid near Ishaqi, south of Samarra, officials launched an investigation the next day.

"The investigation revealed the ground force commander, while capturing and killing terrorists, operated in accordance with the rules of engagement governing our combat forces in Iraq," Caldwell said.

Credible intelligence led to the raid, in which Ahmad Abdallah Muhammad Nais al-Utai, also known as Hamza, a Kuwaiti-born al Qaeda cell leader, was captured and Uday Faris al-Tawafi, also known as Abu Ahmed, an Iraqi involved in making roadside bombs as well as recruiting local people to join the insurgency, was killed, Caldwell said.

When ground forces arrived at a house that intelligence reports said was being used as an insurgent safe house, they came under fire from the building, the general said.

"As the enemy fire persisted, the ground force commander appropriately reacted by incrementally escalating the use of force from small arms fire to rotary wing aviation, and then to close air support, ultimately eliminating the threat," he said.

"Allegations that the troops executed a family living in this safe house, and then hid the alleged crimes by directing an air strike, are absolutely false," the coalition spokesman added.

In the subsequent search, the general said, coalition forces documented the discovery Abu Ahmed's body and those of three noncombatants.

"The investigating officer concluded that possibly up to nine collateral deaths resulted from this engagement, but could not determine the precise number due to collapsed walls and heavy debris," Caldwell said, repeating that the investigating officer ascertained the ground force commander properly followed the rules of engagement as he "necessarily escalated the use of force until the threat was eliminated."

Caldwell noted that Arab and Western media have focused a great deal of attention recently on allegations of coalition troops killing innocent civilians in Iraq.

"Temptation exists to lump all these incidents together," he said. "However, each case needs to be examined individually. Let me be clear. Multinational Force Iraq does not and will not tolerate unethical or criminal behavior. All allegations of the loss of civilian life are thoroughly investigated. All loss of innocent life is tragic and unfortunate, and we regret such occurrences. We take all reports of improper conduct seriously; we investigate them thoroughly, and hold our troops accountable for their actions."

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