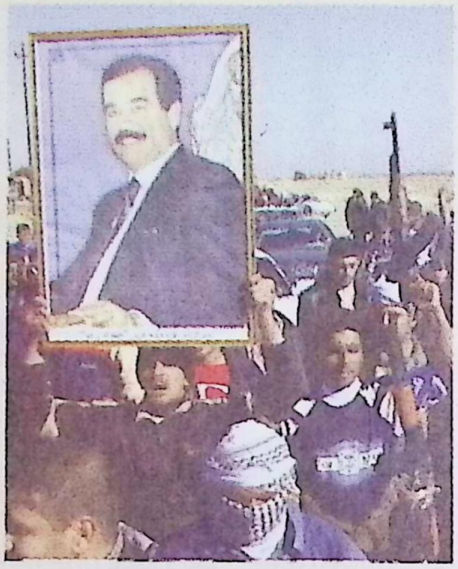
standing next to a taxi, and entering a number of homes, where they continued the killing spree. According to the *UK Independent*, the total number of dead included six children, several women and an old man in a wheelchair. One can only conclude that they all posed a clear and present threat to the well-being of the Marines!

Critics have argued that the Haditha incident might simply have been dismissed as so many others have been, if not for the graphic Iraqi documentation that found its way to *Time* magazine. According to Hany Khalil, a spokesperson for "United For Peace and Justice", the fact that only relatively junior officers have been charged so far for alleged atrocities - while senior officers who also bore responsibility for putting US troops in "atrocity-producing situations" remained untouched - contributes to worsening the situation. He added, "A case has to get a huge media profile to get any attention...Iraq is supposedly a sovereign nation but the US never allowed the government any jurisdiction over US soldiers and mercenaries who are there".

The extent of the cover-up and ill intent in the Haditha case can be seen from the fact that the military initially claimed, erroneously, that the roadside bomb killed 15 of the Iraqis, and even nominated one of the Marines currently under investigation (Staff Sgt Wuterich) for a medal for bravery...!

The defence lawyer for Wuterich, Kevin McDermott, has issued a barely veiled threat to the top military brass, who he claims were well aware of what had happened, but condemned it only after the matter became glaringly public. "We're going to drag every single...colonel and general into this thing...A lot of lieutenant colonels and colonels and generals knew what happened that day, and nobody said, "let's do a thorough investigation of what happened", he said. He is not alone in this view. An unnamed general was quoted in the US press, stating that it was impossible to believe that senior commanders didn't know what had happened "You'd have to know this thing stunk" (UK Independent).



With regard to the Haditha massacre, the parents of two of the marines present said that their sons were left traumatised after being asked to clean up the blood.

Many Iraq veterans also corroborate the view that the rot in the system goes all the way to the top. Specialist Jody Casey told the BBC that his unit was advised to carry shovels in their vehicles, which they could plant on civilian victims (i.e. "collateral damage"!) as a cover-up, to make it look as if they had been concealing roadside bombs. "I have seen innocent people being killed. IEDS [improvised explosive devices] go off and [you] just zap any farmer that is close to you...There is a guy on the side of the road, you shoot him...you throw a shovel off."

With regard to the Haditha massacre, the parents of two of the marines present said that their sons were left traumatised after being asked to clean up the blood. One of those men Lance Corporal Roel Briones said he had taken the photos confiscated by the investigators, and carried bodies out of homes. "They ranged from little babies to adult males and females... I'll never be able to get that out of my head. I can still smell the blood." His mother stated, "He had to carry a little girl's body. Her head was blown off and her brain splattered on his boots."

These are not isolated instances. Hart Viges, who saw action in Baghdad and Fallujah, has wrenching stories of how troops were forced into impossible situations. He personally witnessed an order to open fire on all taxis in the city of Samawa because it was believed that Iraqi forces were using them!

Still suffering from recurrent nightmares as a result of his experience, he puts it best by saying, "You can't wash your hands when they're covered in blood. The wounds carry on. This is what war does to your soul, to your humanity." The question remains why some people regardless of their placement on the chain of command - are haunted by these experiences, while others morph into the very monsters they claim to be fighting... ■