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## U.S. Inquiry Hampered by Iraq Violence, Investigators Say

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**By:** Paul von Zielbauer

CAMP PENDLETON, Calif., June 12 — Two naval investigators testified at a military hearing here on Tuesday that their inquiry into allegations that marines killed 24 Iraqi civilians in Haditha in 2005 was hampered by insurgent bombs and gunfire as well as the absence of basic equipment like tape recorders.

Nayda Mannle, a special agent with the Naval Criminal Investigative Service, said she had conducted a hurried group interview of six relatives of the men killed three months earlier, rapidly jotting notes of the translation of their overlapping responses as American troops stood outside, ready to fend off any attack by enemy fighters.

Another N.C.I.S. agent, Mark Platt, said he could not complete one interview of Iraqi witnesses in Haditha because the conversation was “cut short by small-arms fire.”

The testimony came in a hearing to weigh evidence against Lance Cpl. Justin L. Sharratt, one of three enlisted men in Company K, Third Battalion, First Marines, who are charged with murder in the killings of Iraqi civilians in Haditha on Nov. 19, 2005.

Corporal Sharratt, 22, of Canonsburg, Pa., was charged with unpremeditated murder in the shooting of three of the four men that he and another marine encountered during a search of a home, two hours after a roadside bomb killed Lance Cpl. Miguel Terrazas.

The two agents were among government investigators assigned to collect forensic evidence — like shell casings and blood samples — and interview Iraqi relatives of the 24 people killed in Haditha. Ms. Mannle, the special agent, said her team arrived at the Marine base near Haditha in March 2006.

Marines who escorted the team members to the scene told them they would have only about an hour to conduct interviews and collect evidence. When the convoy approached the home where four men had been killed, Ms. Mannle recalled, she heard women inside scream in fear. Because of time and security concerns, she said, she had interviewed six family members at once, gathering testimony that would form the case against Corporal Sharratt.

James D. Culp, a civilian lawyer defending Corporal Sharratt, suggested that group interviews had been “contradictory to everything you have been taught.” Ms. Mannle said she did not have time to conduct separate interviews or review her notes before the marines said it was time to

leave. She did not record the interview, she said, because she could not find a recorder, but when pressed by Mr. Culp, she said she never sought to buy one from the post exchange.

An N.C.I.S. spokesman, Ed Buice, said in an e-mail message that no federal law enforcement agency regularly taped interviews.

As the marines hustled investigators from the home, a roadside bomb blew up nearby, Ms. Mannle said.