

# THE GUARDS HAVE LEFT THE COUNTRY

The NYT has an interesting article telling the story of the Blackwater guards involved in the September 16 shooting. It does a great work getting the views of 6 current and former Blackwater guards in spite of the company's policy gagging them.

But there are two details, above all, that deserve more attention (particularly since the article simply presents them, without raising any questions about what they mean). First, several of the guards involved in the shooting have already left Iraq.

According to Blackwater employees, the leader of the convoy on NisourSquare was a man known as Hoss. **He and two or three other members of the team have returned to the United States** because their tours of duty were up or their contracts with the company had ended, one employee here said. In Hoss's case, the trip home was to remove shrapnel from around he received before the Sept. 16 shootings. [my emphasis]

Understand, the story explains that only four or six of the guards involved that day shot at the Iraqis. So perhaps as many as four of those four to six people are already gone from Iraq—beyond the reach of Iraqi law. And in Hoss' case, it was for a reason that existed before the shooting, but was not urgent enough before the shooting to get him out of the country. Further, the implication is that several of these people—like the guy who shot the VP's bodyguard in the Christmas Eve shooting, were no longer employed by Blackwater shortly after the killing, thereby absolving the company of any further action with regards to the (former) employee. Were they fired? The story says only "their contracts ... had ended," not how they

ended.

The other thing this article reveals but does not say plainly is that there's some dispute about this event. That's true of those still in Iraq who were apparently not part of the convoy.

They described a grating sense among many of Blackwater guards, especially those with years of experience, that the killings on Sept. 16 were unjustified.

“Some guys are thinking that it was not a good shoot, that it was not warranted,” said one Blackwater contractor, using military jargon for an episode that results in a wrongful death. “I don’t think there was criminal intent involved. I just think it was the application of the use of deadly force gone horribly wrong.”

And more interesting still, that's true of some of the people who were on the convoy.

The Blackwater employees said that talk about the Sept. 16 shootings had also focused on a heated dispute between members of the team in the square, pitting the men pouring gunfire into Iraqi vehicles against other Blackwater guards who were imploring them to stop.

“There was turmoil in the team, where half the guys were saying, ‘Don’t shoot,’” said a military veteran who spoke to a member of the Blackwater team on the convoy.

In other words, in addition to the four to six guys doing the shooting—at least one of whom has been removed from Iraq—there are four to six guys who believe the killing was excessive.

Any bets on whether those other four to six—the ones trying to stop the shooting—ever testify publicly?