

# British soldiers sue Pentagon

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## \$2.3m claim after military police and interpreter injured in crash

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in Washington

Three British soldiers and an army interpreter are suing the American military after their vehicle was rammed by a US tank transporter in Iraq.

The \$2.3m (£1.2m) suit is the first against the US army from coalition troops since the invasion of Iraq. It seeks to exploit provisions normally reserved for Iraqis claiming compensation for family members wrongfully killed in US raids.

The Britons, members of a Royal Military Police unit on duty with their Kuwaiti interpreter, suffered serious injuries on May 7 last year when their Land Rover was struck twice from behind by the hulking transporter.

The vehicle spun out of control and off the road, somersaulting into a sand dune. All four passengers were hurled out of the vehicle, and the Land Rover was wrecked.

Two of the Britons – the driver, Corporal Jane McLauchlan of Hartlepool, and her commanding officer and front seat passenger, Staff Sergeant James Rogerson – received lasting injuries.

Cpl McLauchlan suffered multiple skull fractures, and a punctured lung and liver. She still has some degree of permanent brain damage, including memory loss.

Sgt Rogerson, a veteran in the RMP who has served in Northern Ireland and the Middle East, received head and spinal injuries.



The wreckage of the jeep hit by a US tank transporter in Iraq, injuring, from above, Jane McLauchlan, James Rogerson and Stephen Smith

plaintains of lasting back and arm injuries that could prevent him from pursuing a lucrative post-army career as a security expert.

Corporal Stephen Smith and Khalid Allahou, an engineer with the Kuwaiti oil company who had volunteered as a translator, were sitting in the rear of the vehicle. They were also wounded.

Michael Doyle, who is representing the four, said: "They are looking at ended careers, or continuing years of medical treatment, and still unanswered questions about exactly what happened."

"They have not some harms

that are real and serious and are not going away."

There was no immediate comment from the Pentagon yesterday. Although British military police turned over their investigation of the incident to the American authorities, the US army said last April it had no record of the collision.

While this week's suit is the first to arise from the war on Iraq, the US army has faced previous legal action from its allies in the war on terror.

In 2002 a joint US-Canadian investigation concluded that American pilots had displayed "reckless disregard" in dropping a 225kg bomb on Canadian forces in Afghanistan, killing four soldiers. However, the pilots were not subject to courts martial.

In court documents filed on Wednesday, a Ministry of Defence traffic accident report suggests that the driver of the American tank transporter failed to notice Cpl McLauchlan and another vehicle as they entered a main highway near the southern Iraqi town of Safwan.

According to the British troops, Cpl McLauchlan turned onto the road after indicating to a passing convoy from the 647th transport com-

pany. The convoy moved over to the centre, allowing the two British vehicles to use the righthand lane.

But, to the horror of Cpl Smith and Mr Allahou, who were watching from the back of the vehicle, one of the transporters in the middle of the convoy began moving towards the right, perilously close to the back of their Land Rover.

"I looked up at the windscreen of the American vehicle, and I could see the passenger, who appeared to be instructing the driver to look at where he was going," Cpl Smith told the British army investigation. "He looked to be

in a panic and waving as he driver to move to the left. At this time I saw the front right of the American vehicle drive straight into the rear bumper of our vehicle."

The tank transporter crashed into the back of the vehicle a second time, defying Cpl McLauchlan's efforts to regain control, and the vehicle tumbled off the road.

In the court documents, Mr Allahou said: "I know no what it feels like inside a tumble dryer. It spun like nothing before I've seen in my life. I mean we were spinning."

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