

## **PRESS ANNOUNCEMENT**

### **IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

#### **MARINE COLONEL'S DEATH MURDER NOT SUICIDE: WIDOW SUES MILITARY TO REOPEN INVESTIGATION CITING NEGLIGENCE AND COVER-UP**

Maryland (January 16, 2013) –Exhausting all other efforts, Kimberly Stahlman, the widow of Col. Michael Ross Stahlman, has filed a precedent-setting Complaint under The Administrative Procedures Act (APA) asking a Federal judge to force the reopening of her husband's death investigation and to change his Manner of Death from "suicide" to "homicide." Since the military justice system does not allow its investigative findings to be legally challenged by bereaved military families, Mrs. Stahlman's Action, if successful, could pave the way to legal hearings for thousands of other military families currently questioning the thoroughness of investigations surrounding their loved ones death.

Represented pro bono by Victor Kubli, an attorney based in Washington D.C., Mrs. Stahlman's Complaint, lists among the defendants, the Secretary of Defense and the Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS), and accuses those involved with the investigation as "acting in a manner that is "arbitrary, capricious, an abuse of discretion, or otherwise not in accordance with law."

Col. Stahlman was the highest ranking Marine to be killed as a result of the Iraq War. On July 31, 2008, while serving as the Rule of Law Coordinator at Camp Ramadi, Iraq he was found in his room with a gunshot wound to the left side of his head. The right-handed Colonel, who had no history of depression, never regained consciousness and died at Bethesda Naval Hospital on October 5, 2008. The Marine Corps immediately labeled the shooting a suicide ignoring all forensic evidence that he was murdered.

Before filing this action, Mrs. Stahlman worked tirelessly to bring the evidence, including a detailed forensic reconstruction analysis to the attention of top military officials and investigative units. Despite repeated requests, the Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS) which serves as the Marine Corps investigative body, refused to consider any evidence of murder gathered by Mrs. Stahlman's team of forensics experts. In fact, prior to a meeting with NCIS officials and attorneys for the Commandant of the Marine Corps, Mrs. Stahlman was bluntly informed by NCIS officials that "she could not change their minds as to the cause of death, regardless of her evidence."

A highly decorated and respected officer, in addition to being a Naval Flight Officer, Col. Stahlman served as the Staff Judge Advocate and Director of Legal Services for the 29 Palms base in California. He also sat at the forefront of controversial USMC issues including serving as an investigating officer for the Haditha Massacre of 2005 before volunteering to go to Iraq. As the Rule of Law Coordinator during Iraq's reconstruction, Col. Stahlman helped lead the US government's effort to rebuild a functioning system of government for the Iraqi people. This proved to be a dangerous, monumental undertaking aggravated by theft, greedy war contractors, and unscrupulous military personnel looking to profit from their

association with the effort to reconstruct Iraq.

*Military Families for Justice* supports its co-founder Kimberly Stahlman in her efforts for a thorough investigation that follows the protocols set forth by the Department of Defense dictating that all unattended deaths be treated as a homicide until the investigation is complete. Too many American military families are forced to conduct their own investigations to find the truth behind the deaths of their loved ones. Although MFFJ does not make judgment calls on particular cases, we are striving to create change to protect the rights of military families, enabling them to have a voice in the legal process and receive the highest quality of justice. To that end, we are petitioning the United States Congress to enact The Bill of Rights for Bereaved Military Families.