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Firefighters Say They Were Stiffed in Iraq

By RYAN ABBOTT

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WASHINGTON (CN) - In a federal class action, 28 firefighters say Wackenhut, KBR and Halliburton forced them to work around the clock in Afghanistan and Iraq but paid them for only half their time, and responded to requests for fair pay with "shorthand threats to fire" them, such as "chicken or beef," which referred to the dining choices one had on the flight home from Iraq.

The firefighters sued the contractors for fraud, conspiracy and breach of contract.

"This complaint alleges actions and omissions of defendants, in conspiracy with each other, and individually, done to defeat the right of American citizens to receive their lawful wages required by government contracts - including in-country pay, danger pay, on-call pay, up-lift pay, overtime, and other benefits and compensation," the complaint states.


The workers claim that more than 2,000 firefighters were duped into signing contracts that promised overtime and on-call pay "in order to induce them to leave their families in the United States and work under harsh conditions in Iraq and Afghanistan."

The firefighters say they were on call day and night, were unable to sleep and were forced to accept pay for only 12 hours. They claim they were forced to perform assignments above their pay grades and keep walkie-talkies next to their ears while they slept.

"When plaintiffs complained that they were being shorted pay, that they were being required by KBR to work on-call hours without pay, that KBR was commanding them around, WSI [Wackenhut Services International] informed them that they were lucky to have jobs, that they would be fired and sent back to America, and that many were waiting in line for their jobs," the firefighters say. "Various phrases were used as shorthand threats to fire if the Plaintiffs continued to complain, such as 'chicken or beef,' which referred to the dining choices one had on the flight home from Iraq."

The firefighters claim that KBR, Wackenhut and Halliburton were paid by the government for their extra work, but "defendants refuse to pay plaintiffs, but instead pocket the money."

They seek class certification and compensatory and punitive damages of \$100 million for fraud, breach of contract, conspiracy and failure to pay overtime.

The class is represented by the former head of the U.S. Office of Special Counsel Scott Bloch. 

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