Testimony of W. Steve Murray, Jr.
Contracting Director
ESS Support Services Worldwide

Before the U.S. House of Representatives
Oversight and Government Reform Committee
Wednesday, Feburary 7, 2006

Chairman Waxman, Representative Davis, members of the Committee. I am Steve Murray, the Director of Contracting for ESS Support Services Worldwide. I served over twenty years in the United States Army, retiring as a chief warrant officer. During my service, my mission often was to deliver food services and other logistics support to our troops. In Iraq, I carried out a similar mission as an employee of ESS.

ESS has extensive experience building and operating food service facilities in remote and challenging locations, such as mining camps and off-shore oil and gas drilling platforms in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. ESS provides a range of support services to its customers, including full food services, supply logistics management, transportation, vehicle maintenance, facilities management, and communications.

I joined ESS in June 2003 to oversee its contracting for operations in Kuwait and Iraq. In December 2002, ESS began to build and operate dining facilities, known as "DFACS," to feed the American and other coalition troops that were arriving in Kuwait at bases such as Camp Commando and Camp Coyote. Every day ESS served thousands of our soldiers and Marines four full-service, high-quality meals: breakfast, lunch, dinner, and a midnight meal.

After coalition forces moved into Iraq in March 2003, ESS followed our troops, making sure that they were soon eating hot meals instead of MREs. From 2003 to 2006, ESS built and operated DFACs at over a dozen sites in Iraq, including Baghdad, Fallujah, and Tikrit, as well as performing camp construction at Camp Taji and in Basrah. ESS also provided food services and facilities management to the Coalition Provisional Authority, as well as food services for civilians performing reconstruction work in Iraq.

ESS performed many of its services in Iraq as a subcontractor to KBR. We also delivered on numerous contracts directly for the Army, the Marine Corps, and the Department of State. All of the subcontracts that ESS entered with KBR were competitively awarded, and were performed by ESS on a firm fixed-price basis. Instead of being cost reimbursable or "cost-plus" contracts, ESS's contracts with KBR stated a bottom-line or maximum "not to exceed" price for the services that ESS was contracted to provide. Except in unusual circumstances, if our costs were higher than we anticipated, that was our problem – we had agreed to a fixed price.

One of ESS's costs that was higher than had been anticipated was for private security. Beginning in the middle of 2003, security conditions in Iraq compelled ESS to hire private security firms to move its personnel and supplies among DFACs. Without the aid of private security firms, ESS could not have performed its mission of feeding the troops. ESS moved most of its supplies through sporadic military-escorted convoys, and supplies often took days or even weeks to reach DFACs, or simply never arrived at all. When necessary, ESS called on private security firms to provide well-trained armed personnel who escorted supply trucks and ensured that food services to the troops were not disrupted. Many other contractors did the same.

ESS also used private security firms to escort our managers and staff as they drove to and from DFACs and other sites. I traveled between sites with our private security providers on many occasions. The military-escorted convoy system was intended to move supplies, not people. We had over one hundred ESS managers, and over one thousand ESS staff, getting the job done at more than a dozen sites in Iraq. We could not feed the troops if we could not get our people to and from the DFACs. We were determined never to compromise the safety of our personnel when they traveled between bases.

ESS used a number of different private security firms between 2003 and 2006, including Blackwater. We always made it clear to KBR and other parties that contracted with ESS that we were using private security firms.

I am proud of the work that I performed for ESS and for my country during my time in Iraq. I am glad to be here today to help this Committee sort out the facts for the American people.