

Family left scarred by Diggers



Damages bid: Lamyaa al-Saadi with her son Ahmed, 11, at home in the Brisbane suburb of Greenslopes yesterday

Picture: Patrick Hamilton

Michael McKenna

THE al-Saadis are the tragic face of Australia's involvement in Iraq.

A Baghdad middle-class family, they lived only streets away from Australia's embassy in the war-torn Iraqi capital.

Their lives changed in the instant a Digger turned his gun sights on them as they drove home from dinner with relatives in the early evening of February 26, 2005.

The Australian army claimed the red 1984 Volkswagen, driven

by shop owner Nezar al-Saadi, and crowded with his wife, Lamyaa, their three young children and a teenage nephew, was "suspicious" and failed to respond to "repeated requests to stop".

Mr Saadi says he pulled up as soon as he saw the four Diggers, two on each side of the street that led to their modest home in the suburb of al-Jederia.

What is not contested is the carnage that followed when one of the Australian soldiers sprayed the car with gunfire.

Ms Saadi lost the sight in her

left eye, suffered skull and jaw fractures, hearing loss and scarring to her face. Her son Ahmed, then aged 8, was blinded in his right eye.

Mr Saadi and the remaining children survived with lacerations but, like his wife and second-youngest boy, they still suffer mentally from their ordeal.

Three years to the day since the shooting, the family on Tuesday lodged a landmark civil action for compensation in Queensland — where they have been living since September on a special medical treatment visa

offered unsolicited to them last year by the Howard government.

The civil action is believed to be the first case of its kind against the Australian Government, and will test the assertion by Chief of the Defence Force Angus Houston that the commonwealth is not "legally liable" for injuries inflicted in ADF military operations. It will also raise questions about the failure of the government to provide the Saadis with appropriate and ongoing medical and psychological treatment.

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