

US Army major kills 12 at Fort Hood, Texas

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A US Army major and psychiatrist specializing in combat stress opened fire Thursday afternoon on fellow soldiers at Fort Hood in Texas, the largest US military base, killing 12 and wounding 31.

The horrific shooting spree erupted in a waiting room at Fort Hood's Soldier Readiness Processing Center, where troops are processed before being deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan.

The officer, Nidal Malik Hasan, 39, began the shooting spree at 1:30 in the afternoon. Initially, press reports said he had been killed by return fire from police, but the base commander, Lt. Gen. Robert Cone, said at a press conference Thursday night that he was still alive, having been wounded multiple times by gunfire.

While it was also initially reported that two other soldiers had been held as suspects in the shootings, Cone said that Hasan was a lone gunman, using two handguns.

Cone refused to speculate on a motive for the mass killing, but the Pentagon issued a statement saying that it did not believe that the shootings were an act of political terrorism. It described the carnage as an "isolated incident."

Neighbors of Hasan at Fort Hood said that the officer was going to be sent to Afghanistan within days and had given away all of his furniture.

Hasan, an American citizen born in Virginia, joined the military directly out of high school, reportedly over the objections of his parents, who were immigrants from Jordan. He completed his medical degree at the military's Uniformed Services University in Bethesda, Maryland seven years ago and did his internship in psychiatry at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, DC. There he spent six years counseling wounded soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

He had been transferred to the medical center at Fort Hood last July, shortly after being promoted to major.

A cousin of the Army psychiatrist, Nader Hasan, said the officer was "mortified by the idea of having to deploy." At Walter Reed, "He had people telling him on a daily basis the horrors they saw over there," Nader Hasan said. "He would tell us how he would hear things, horrific things, things from war probably affecting him psychologically," Hasan added. The cousin said that Hasan had consulted a lawyer to see if there was some way he could get out of the Army early to avoid being shipped to Iraq or Afghanistan.

The officer's cousin also said that he had been subjected to harassment at Fort Hood for being a Muslim. The central Texas television station, KXXV, reported that last week someone had scratched the word "Allah" on Hasan's car. He reported it to base authorities as a hate crime.

A former co-worker of Maj. Hassan said that the psychiatrist had expressed the view that President Barack Obama should withdraw all US troops from Iraq and Afghanistan.

"He said maybe the Muslims should stand up and fight against the aggressor," Lt. Col. Terry Lee (ret.) told Fox News. "Aft first we thought he was talking about how Muslims should stand up and help the armed forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, but apparently that wasn't the case."

Speaking at a conference of Tribal Nations at the Interior Department Thursday afternoon, President Obama called the shooting a "tragedy" and a "horrible event."

"It's difficult enough when we lose these brave Americans in battles overseas," Obama said. "It is horrifying that they should come under fire at an Army base on American soil."

The reality is that the killing and dying that American troops have been exposed to year after year in the US wars and occupations in Afghanistan and Iraq are taking their toll, making just such horrifying events

inevitable.

The military estimates that 30 percent of soldiers returning from the two wars are suffering from post-traumatic stress, depression and anxiety, which only grow more intense with repeated deployments. Those like Hasan who treat such cases over prolonged periods are often susceptible to the same problems.

A veteran from Killeen, Texas, where Fort Hood is located, told the *Houston Chronicle* that the shooting should come as no surprise.

“Come on, you send these guys over there, for 13, 16 months, you let them come home for three months, six months, and send them right back,” said Wes Neveu, who survived a mess hall shooting while stationed in Germany. “For the past two or three years, all these guys have known is getting shot at or shooting other people.”

The mass killing at Fort Hood is one more indication that the escalating war in Afghanistan and the continuing occupation of Iraq are straining the all-volunteer US military to the breaking point.

While combat deaths in Afghanistan rose to a record high last month, suicides among US soldiers both overseas and at home also rose precipitously, reaching 16 in October. A total of 134 active-duty soldiers have taken their own lives so far this year. The suicide rate in the military has risen 37 percent since 2006 and for the first time last year surpassed the rate for the US population as a whole.

Military commanders attribute the rising suicide rate to back-to-back combat deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan over the past eight years.

Families at Fort Hood reported that soldiers from the base deployed in Iraq were frantically emailing and text-messaging home in an attempt to find out what was happening. “Here I am in Iraq, worried my wife and son are in danger in their own backyard,” an Army specialist wrote.

The tragic killings at Fort Hood will inevitably have a further demoralizing effect on US troops, who are being thrust year after year into colonial-style wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The unbearable stress that is producing the growing incidents of violence and suicide will only be intensified by the Obama administration’s plans to send tens of thousands of additional troops to suppress the resistance of the Afghan people to US occupation.



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