

# Five US soldiers charged with murdering civilians in Afghanistan

A reporter  
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A total of five US soldiers are now charged with murder in the killing of three civilians in Afghanistan earlier this year, according to a statement issued by the Army Wednesday. Three soldiers were charged Tuesday, joining two charged earlier this month. All could face the death penalty if convicted.

Staff Sgt. Calvin Gibbs, 25, of Billings, Montana, and Spec. Jeremy Morlock, 22, of Wasilla, Alaska, were charged with three counts each of murder and one count each of assault. Pfc. Andrew Holmes, 19, of Boise, Idaho; Spec. Michael Wagnon, 29, of Las Vegas; and Spec. Adam Winfield, 21, of Cape Coral, Florida, were charged Tuesday with one count of premeditated murder.

The three killings took place in separate incidents near Forward Operating Base Ramrod in Kandahar province, a position manned by soldiers of B company, 2nd battalion, 1st infantry regiment, 5th Stryker brigade combat team, 2nd infantry division.

Pfc. Holmes is accused of killing Gul Mudin in January. Spec. Wagnon is accused of shooting Marach Agha to death on February 22, as well as asking another soldier to erase the evidence of the death from a computer hard drive. Spec. Winfield is accused of killing Mullah Adahdad May 2. The killings all involved the use of grenades and rifle fire

Spec. Morlock and Staff Sgt. Gibbs were charged in all three of the killings, and in an assault on a fourth victim May 5. According to the French news service Agence France-Presse, the assault victim was a fellow soldier who was trying to expose drug abuse in the unit and was severely beaten in retaliation. While recovering from his injuries in the hospital, the soldier revealed the involvement of the five men in the three murders. The charge sheet indicates that the assault involved punching and kicking, as well as spitting in

the face.

The five soldiers are now being held in pre-trial confinement at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, near Tacoma, Washington, the home base for the Stryker Brigade, which remains in Afghanistan. The brigade has seen heavy combat against Taliban fighters since it deployed in July 2009, suffering 33 combat deaths, with three more soldiers dying from non-combat-related causes.

Two of the five soldiers were on their third combat deployment—Gibbs, who was in Iraq from January 2004 to January 2005 and in Afghanistan from January 2006 to May 2007, and Wagnon, who was in Iraq twice, from February 2004 to February 2005 and from August 2006 to November 2007.

The other three soldiers were on their first overseas combat deployment. Morlock had a criminal record before and during his military service, including a domestic-violence protective order obtained by his wife two years ago, and a conviction for disorderly conduct last year.

The Army has said nothing about a possible motive in any of the murders, which took place in the months preceding a US military offensive in the Kandahar area that has been repeatedly delayed because of intense local opposition.

Lt. Col. Tamara Parker, spokeswoman for Joint Base Lewis-McChord, said the charges were “absolutely serious allegations,” adding that “The circumstances will be revealed as the case moves forward, but the evidence points toward premeditation.”

Reflecting the sensitivity of the incident, she continued, “We hope it will not cause problems with the good work the soldiers are trying to do to bring peace there.”

A series of US atrocities against Afghan civilians,

many of them involving the bombing of wedding parties and other large family gatherings, have sparked immense and continuing outrage among the Afghan people.



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