

Royal Marine convicted of Afghan murder

Robert Stevens
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Last week, a British Royal Marine was found guilty by a military court of murdering an injured Afghan prisoner. The murder was carried out on September 15, 2011 by an experienced sergeant known only as “Marine A” and witnessed by two other marines. The prosecution described it as an “execution”. The prisoner died after being shot in the chest at close range with a 9mm pistol.

The brutal slaying of the injured man took place in a corn field with the murderer immediately boasting to the other marines that he had committed a war crime. “I just broke the Geneva Convention”, he is heard to say on a video film heard by the court.

The marine is to be sentenced in December and is the first British soldier to be found guilty of murder since World War Two.

The Geneva Conventions, which govern the treatment of captured and wounded prisoners of war, are international treaties binding on all states which have accepted them. Britain signed the first convention in Geneva in 1864. It was later revised in 1949 and consists of four treaties. The *Geneva Conventions Act 1957* is an Act of Parliament of the United Kingdom

Article three of the third convention requires that those who have laid down their arms or who cannot fight due to sickness, wounds or detention should be “treated humanely, without any adverse distinction founded on race, colour, religion or faith, sex, birth or wealth, or any other similar criteria”. It is also prohibited to pass sentences on prisoners or carry out executions without a constituted court judgement. Finally, it is forbidden to harm, degrade, humiliate or take hostage a prisoner.

The two other marines, identified as “Marine B” and “Marine C”, were cleared by the court consisting of a board of seven officers and non-commissioned officers. Following their arrest an anonymity order was granted to all three and remains in place.

Marine B had inadvertently filmed the murder on his helmet-mounted camera and the footage was shown to the court during the two-week trial.

The judge in the case allowed the public release of a recording of a conversation between the marines in the moments covering the shooting. He refused to release the video footage, following an application from the Ministry of Defence claiming that wider dissemination would be a “recruiting sergeant” for extremists.

From the outset the soldiers conspired to cover up the murder. After killing the prisoner, Marine A told B and C, “Obviously, this doesn’t go anywhere, fellas”. Back at the base, Marine A told others “I fucked up, lads”, whilst all three informed senior officers that the prisoner had died from his wounds.

During the investigation, a diary kept by Marine C was found in which he wrote that he felt “mugged off” that he had not been able to “pop off the Taliban shitbag” himself.

The marines were only arrested by the Royal Military Police in October 2012 after the video footage was found on a laptop belonging to a military serviceman by UK civilian police.

The Ministry of Defence had previously maintained simply that the death followed an “engagement with an insurgent.”

The murder occurred during the six-month deployment of UK marines to Helmand Province, between April and September 2011. The soldiers were operating in the districts of Nahr-e Saraj and Nad Ali, where an uncounted number of Afghans have been killed since 2006 along with scores of British troops.

It took place after a patrol base came under attack from small arms fire from two insurgents. The prisoner was seriously injured by gunfire from an Apache helicopter sent to provide air support. He was found, still alive, by the marines in a field. Whilst he was bleeding and in pain but clearly alive, the prisoner was

dragged roughly to the edge of the field. He was verbally abused and mocked by the marines who then dumped him down on a pile of chaff. He was then reportedly kicked by the marines.

In the conversations between the marines, one is overheard asking “Anyone want to give first aid to this idiot?” before another replies loudly “Nope.” In another segment Marine C was heard asking A, “Could put one in his head if you want?” Marine B states, “Take your pick how you shoot him.” In reply Marine A said, “Not in his head because that will be fucking obvious.”

The *Guardian* published the full transcript, based on clips from the original helmet video footage.

The *Guardian* noted, “At the start of the clip [number 4] the prisoner is being dragged across a field. His shirt and trousers are blood-stained. Towards the end of the clip he is thrown to the ground. The Apache helicopter that legitimately opened fire on the man, wounding him, is still in the area.”

Introducing clip 5 it states, “The captive is lying face down at the start of the clip. The marines allegedly pretended to apply a field dressing while the Apache helicopter hovered nearby. The captive is turned on to his back. It is alleged that after the helicopter has gone, Marine A murdered the man by shooting him in the chest with a 9mm pistol.”

This atrocity, as with every other atrocity carried out in the filthy imperialist wars since 2001, is not the aberration the media claims it is.

The revelry in the death of a seriously wounded man, evinced by the soldiers in the transcript, are the essential products of a brutal war. Marine A, an experienced soldier, was doubtless aware of and influenced by many previous atrocities, including other war crimes, committed by US and UK troops.

These crimes are carried out by the soldiers of an army of neo-colonial occupation, hated by the vast majority of a subjugated country.

The same week Marine A was found guilty, another British sergeant, Ian Michael Fisher, was killed as the result of a suicide attack. Fisher had been involved in a military operation in the Kamparack area, 25 miles northeast of Lashkar Gah in Helmand. He was the eighth UK soldier to die this year, bringing the total number of British troop deaths in Afghanistan to 446.

The British occupation force, once numbering 10,000

troops, is now stationed at just five bases—down from a peak of more than 130. They are now confined to these bases, rarely able to patrol. The atmosphere that the occupation force live under was alluded to by Marine C, who told the court, “I was drained, very stressed and constantly in fear.”

In March 2012 the *Guardian* reported that Britain’s Royal Military Police has started at least 126 investigations into incidents in which British troops are alleged to have killed or injured Afghan civilians since January 2005. The newspaper calculated “that around 90 civilians, including women and children, were killed or wounded in the investigations and prosecutions listed here. However the actual number of casualties at the centre of the 126 investigations is likely to be much higher as the MoD has kept secret details of more than half of the investigations.”

Whilst a single marine has now been brought to justice, those further up the chain—the politicians and senior military figures who planned and organised these illegal wars of aggression, based on a pack of lies—have escaped any punishment.

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[16 October 2012]



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