

US Navy SEAL acquitted of murder and other war crimes by military jury

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Navy SEAL Special Operations Chief Edward R. Gallagher was found not guilty of murder by a military jury on Tuesday in San Diego, California. Gallagher, 40 years old and a 19-year military veteran, was accused of fatally stabbing a teenage ISIS fighter who was wounded and in US custody in Iraq on May 3, 2017.

Gallagher had been charged with a total of nine offenses including posing for a picture with the dead body of the captive, shooting two civilians from a sniper's perch and obstruction of justice. In the end, he was cleared of all but willfully posing "for an unofficial picture with a human casualty."

According to two other Navy SEAL witnesses, Gallagher—who goes by the nickname of "Blade" among fellow special ops soldiers—said "he's mine" over the military radio while a medic was attending to the young prisoner. Gallagher then walked up to the medic and captive and, without uttering a word, stabbed the teenager multiple times with his hunting knife.

The murder was followed by Gallagher and his commanding officer, Lieutenant Jake Portier, as well as several other SEALs posing for photos with the dead body. Gallagher also texted a photo of himself with the dead youth to a fellow SEAL with the message, "Good story behind this, got him with my hunting knife." In another text message, Gallagher boasted, "I've got a cool story for you when I get back. I've got my knife skills on."

The other charges against Gallagher as an indiscriminate and reckless bloodthirsty killer stem from his role as a sniper in 2017. Accusations of criminal behavior surfaced about his firing his rifle frequently for no reason, taking "random shots" and killing innocent civilians for fun. Among those reported killed were an old man and a young girl walking with other girls and four women. Gallagher frequently boasted about his murderous spree, claiming he killed three people per day

for 80 days.

The charge of obstruction of justice was brought against Gallagher for witness intimidation. He threatened to kill Navy SEALs who reported his depraved behavior. Naval prosecutors cited his text messages threatening "those traitors" who had become cooperating witnesses. Gallagher's attempts to disrupt his prosecution became so severe that the Navy had him confined to a brig for a period of time before the trial.

Since the investigation into Gallagher's murderous activities did not begin until a year after they were committed, the Naval prosecution lacked any physical evidence and their case was based entirely on the testimony of cooperating soldiers. Gallagher's defense team sought at every point to undermine the testimony of the witnesses as disgruntled and spiteful complaints by subordinates, not the exposure of criminal conduct.

The defense also argued that Gallagher's text communications expressed a kind of "dark comedy" that was the natural human response to stressful wartime conditions.

Gallagher's record of murderous behavior goes back further than 2017. He was investigated for shooting a young girl in Afghanistan in 2010 but subsequently cleared of any wrongdoing. During his eighth deployment at the battle for Mosul, Gallagher was reported numerous times by fellow Navy SEALs for actions that were not in keeping with the "rules of war."

Meanwhile, the prosecution's case was thrown into a tailspin on June 20 when the medic, Special Operator First Class Corey Scott, who had been granted immunity, testified that Gallagher's stab wounds did not kill the ISIS captive. Instead, Scott said that he placed his finger over the captive's breathing tube until he died as an act of mercy.

The prosecution also suffered from the last-minute removal of its lead military lawyer one week before the

trial was to begin. Navy Judge Captain Aaron Rugh removed prosecutor Cmdr. Christopher Czaplak for secretly attempting to track the communications of the defense team and a journalist covering the trial. The judge also ordered Gallagher released from custody while awaiting trial.

The military jury of five Marines and two sailors, including one SEAL, deliberated for eight hours over two days before they returned their decisions. The one conviction on the least serious of the charges carries a sentence of four months for which Gallagher will get credit for time already served. He will be released on Tuesday.

The court martial lasted for two weeks and the lead up to it became the occasion for right-wing US political figures to advocate for Gallagher and support his family's campaign to "Free Eddie." Republican Representative Dan Crenshaw of Texas, a former Navy SEAL who deployed to Afghanistan in 2012, sent a letter to the Secretary of the Navy demanding that Gallagher's detention circumstances be improved. On March 30, President Donald Trump ordered Gallagher transferred to "less restrictive confinement" following complaints from his supporters.

Illustrating the degree of support for fascistic elements like Gallagher within the American political establishment, on May 8 Republican Representative Duncan Hunter from California advocated for a presidential pardon of Gallagher if he were convicted. Following reports that the US Justice Department was looking into the case, on May 24 President Trump said he was considering a pardon for "two or three" American soldiers charged with war crimes.

President Trump went on to say, "Some of these soldiers are people that have fought hard, long. You know, we teach them how to be great fighters, and then when they fight sometime, they get really treated very unfairly."



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