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Horror stories from young Afghans at US hearing

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The soldier accused of killing 16 Afghan civilians watched as child after child described the bloodbath that left their parents and other loved ones dead. Whatever reaction Staff Sgt. [Robert Bales](#) might have had, he kept hidden behind a calm face.

Three sessions of nighttime testimony in Bales' [preliminary hearing](#), scheduled to accommodate witnesses participating by video link from [Afghanistan](#), wrapped up late Sunday. After the hearing at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, the investigating officer will decide whether to court-martial Bales, who could be sentenced to death if convicted.

The witnesses were as young as little Robina, just 7, who wore a deep-red head covering and a nervous smile. She described how she hid behind her father when a gunman came to their village that night, how the stranger fired, and how her father died, cursing in pain and anger.

"I was standing behind my father," she testified Saturday night. "He shot my father."

One of the bullets struck her in the leg, but she didn't realize it right away.

Prosecutors say Bales slipped away from his base to attack two villages in Kandahar province, killing 16 civilians, including nine children. The slayings drew such angry protests that the U.S. temporarily halted combat operations in Afghanistan, and it was three weeks before American investigators could reach the crime scenes.

The villagers also took out their anger on Afghan police, a police official from Kandahar testified Sunday night. Maj. Khudai Dad, chief of criminal techniques with the Afghan Uniform Police, said that at one of the compounds the morning after the attack, women upset about the attacks and about what they saw as a late arrival by Afghan officials pelted him with shoes, a major insult in Afghanistan and many other Islamic countries.

The stories recounted by the villagers have been harrowing. They described torched bodies, a son finding his wounded father, and boys cowering behind a curtain while others screamed, "We are children! We are children!"

Bales, 39, an Ohio native and father of two from [Lake Tapps, Washington](#), has not entered a plea and was not expected to testify at the preliminary hearing. His attorneys have not discussed the evidence, but say he has post-traumatic stress disorder and suffered a concussive head injury while serving in [Iraq](#).

During cross-examination of several witnesses, Bales' attorney John Henry Browne sought to elicit testimony about whether there might have been more than one shooter.

Dad, the police official, testified that he did not believe one soldier could have carried out the attacks, though he offered no evidence to support that opinion, and nearly all other testimony and evidence at the hearing pointed toward a single shooter.

One Army Criminal Investigations Command special agent testified earlier that several months after the massacre, she took a statement from one woman whose husband was killed. The woman reported that there were two soldiers in her room — one took her husband out of the room and shot him, and the other held her back when she tried to follow.

But other eyewitnesses reported that there was just one shooter, and several soldiers have testified that Bales returned to his base at Camp Belambay, just before dawn, alone and covered in blood.

A video taken from a surveillance blimp also captured a sole figure returning to the base.

The Afghan witnesses recounted the villagers who lived in the attacked compounds and listed the names of those killed. The bodies were buried quickly under Islamic custom, and no forensic evidence was available to prove the number of victims.

Prosecutors said that between the two attacks, Bales woke a fellow soldier, reported what he'd done and said he was headed out to kill more. The soldier testified that he didn't believe what Bales said, and went back to sleep.