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US soldiers charged with murdering civilians in Afghanistan war

Charges against the 12 soldiers also include drug use and conspiring to cover up the alleged Afghanistan war crimes.

By Arthur Bright

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• *A daily summary of global reports on security issues.*

A dozen US soldiers have been charged with a series of crimes committed in Afghanistan, including the murder of three Afghan civilians and the subsequent cover-up, according to documents the US Army released Wednesday.

CNN reports that the soldiers from the 5th Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division out of Washington state have been charged in connection with the attempted cover-up of the murder and assault of Afghan civilians, as well as the mutilation of dead Afghans, and drug use. The brigade operated near Kandahar.

Agence France-Presse reports that the Pentagon is worried about the effect that the case will have on perceptions of its operations in Afghanistan. Pentagon Press Secretary Geoff Morrell underscored that the allegations against the soldiers had yet to be proven and, even if they were true, they were "an aberration" among the 100,000 US troops in Afghanistan.

Nonetheless, he said, "It does not help the perceptions of our forces around the world."

Staff Sgt. Calvin Gibbs, Cpl. Jeremy Morlock, Pfc. Andrew Holmes, Spc. Michael Wagnon, and Spc. Adam Winfield – all from the 5th Stryker Brigade – were charged in June with the murder of three Afghan civilians and other crimes, including stabbing a corpse, photographing casualties, and beating other men in an effort to keep them from talking to investigators.

The remaining seven soldiers were charged last month with conspiring to cover up the murders and other crimes, such as drug use. McClatchy provides a [rundown of the individual charges](#) against each soldier. Pretrial hearings are to be held at Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Washington State later this year.

The Guardian headlines its article: "US soldiers 'killed Afghan civilians for sport and collected fingers as trophies.' "

BBC News reports that although the murders took place in January, February, and May of this year, the Army has yet to review the cases. Army spokeswoman Major Kathleen Turner told the BBC that the cases are still in a preliminary phase, and that military prosecutors have yet to decide whether to move forward with the cases.

Christopher Winfield, the father of Spc. Adam Winfield, told the Associated Press that he repeatedly warned the Army about the first killing after his son told him about it early this year.

"I'm not sure what to do about something that happened out here but I need to be secretive about this," [Winfield wrote his parents] in a Facebook message [on Jan. 15, the day of the first killing]. The couple gave the AP copies of the Facebook messages, Internet chats, and their phone records.

Winfield, 22, of Cape Coral, Fla., didn't immediately provide more details, and over the next month he had little contact with his parents. They said they checked constantly to see if he was online.

On Feb. 14, he told his parents what happened in a lengthy Internet chat: Members of his unit on patrol had killed "some innocent guy about my age just farming." He said he did not witness the killing.

Winfield has only been charged regarding the third murder. Eric Montalvo, Winfield's lawyer, told the AP that while Winfield was ordered to shoot the civilian after the civilian had been hit by a grenade thrown by another soldier, Winfield deliberately aimed high and missed.

The Seattle Times adds that Mr. Montalvo called the Army's failure to act on Christopher Winfield's warning "a complete and utter breakdown. The dad was frantic, and was trying to save his son. The Army just sat on this, and ignored it."

Army officials would not comment on the elder Mr. Winfield's claims, and Mr. Morrell said he had no information about them.