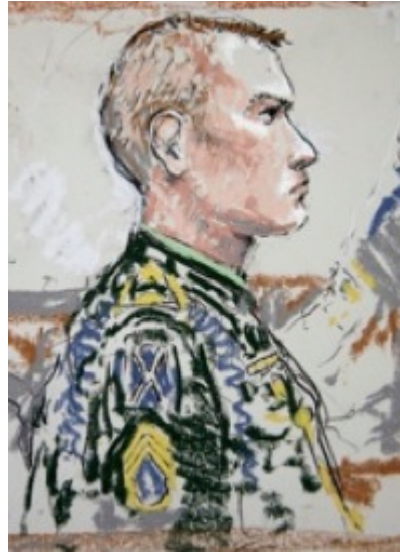




Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on November 12, 2011

Army Sgt. Convicted of Murdering Afghan Civilians

Sergeant Gibbs, 26, faced life imprisonment without the possibility of parole following Thursday's verdict handed down by a five-member panel of jurors who deliberated for about five hours, according to the [account](#) of the proceeding published by Reuters. The same story relates that the jury of military men then decided that Gibbs could be eligible for parole after eight and one-half years of imprisonment.



Three other soldiers previously entered pleas on charges stemming from the killings and subsequent mutilations committed while serving under Gibbs. These three of the five members of the American armed forces accused of participating in these murders testified against their former leader, describing him as the instigator of raids on civilians in which the troops would construct fake combat scenarios that would justify the killings. A [news article](#) describing the court martial reported that Gibbs would bring "drop weapons" to the crime scenes so that it would appear to superiors that the squad was under attack and that the killings were made in self-defense.

Other soldiers charged with lesser offenses relating to these horrific events have been convicted in previous courts martial and received sentences ranging from demotion or dishonorable discharge to 60 days of hard labor and imprisonment for up to nine months.

Gibbs joined the Fifth Stryker Brigade of the Second Infantry Division in the fall of 2009 during its deployment to Afghanistan. The team was tasked with patrolling streets and villages near the city of Kandahar.

During the deployment, some of the servicemen in Gibbs' unit confessed to easing the boredom of a lack of combat by smoking hashish. According to an [article](#) published in the *New York Times* on Friday, Gibbs was never accused of abusing drugs while serving with the Fifth Stryker Brigade in Afghanistan.

Curiously, various accounts of the investigation that led to the discovery of the killings indicate that the initial probe was initiated after a separate investigation of drug use among members of the Stryker Brigade.

As related by Gibbs himself during direct examination by prosecutors, on several occasions he "disassociated" the dead Afghanis from being human and saw the body parts he scavenged from the corpses as nothing more than antlers from a deer.



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Two of his former subordinates testified that not only did Gibbs order and participate in the murder of innocents, he took photos of himself and others posing with the recently murdered villagers.

Not surprisingly, the horrific photos were entered into evidence by the prosecution, causing observers to make understandable connections between this case and the release of similar photos taken of prisoners being held at the Abu Ghraib detention facility in Iraq, a scandal that rocked the U.S. military in 2004.

The lead defense attorney for Gibbs, Phillip Stackhouse (a civilian lawyer), pleaded for leniency, claiming that his client was a changed man and "not the same person he was when he went to Afghanistan."

The officer serving as chief prosecutor in the case, Major Dre Leblanc, argued against the possibility of parole, recalling to the minds of the panel of three enlisted men and two officers that the behavior of Gibbs was inhuman, reminding them of the way he described the people of Afghanistan before he murdered them: "These people are all savages — look at how they live."

Despite the mountain of evidence presented against him, Gibbs maintained his innocence and his legal counsel incriminated his accusers, pointing out that each of them offered the damning testimony in exchange for lighter sentences.

The lawyers for the Army countered this assertion, calling it "ridiculous."

In the article published in Reuters encapsulating the trial, it was reported that Stackhouse described his client as a troubled soldier doing his best to survive in an atmosphere of "tremendous stress."

There is no excuse for the reprehensible behavior demonstrated by these members of the American armed forces. The demeanor of the military services of the United States should be above reproach and should never descend to the barbarism of Gibbs and his comrades.

Reports of the mental breakdowns suffered by veterans of the unconstitutional wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are troubling, as well. According to a [study](#) published by the *Army Times*:

Troubling new data show there are an average of 950 suicide attempts each month by veterans who are receiving some type of treatment from the Veterans Affairs Department.

Seven percent of the attempts are successful, and 11 percent of those who don't succeed on the first attempt try again within nine months.

Similar [research conducted](#) by the RAND Corporation revealed greater detail of these chilling statistics:

Nearly 20 percent of military service members who have returned from Iraq and Afghanistan — 300,000 in all — report symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder or major depression, yet only slightly more than half have sought treatment....

In addition, researchers found about 19 percent of returning service members report that they experienced a possible traumatic brain injury while deployed, with 7 percent reporting both a probable brain injury and current PTSD or major depression.

Many service members said they do not seek treatment for psychological illnesses because they fear it will harm their careers. But even among those who do seek help for PTSD or major depression, only about half receive treatment that researchers consider "minimally adequate" for their illnesses.



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"There is a major health crisis facing those men and women who have served our nation in Iraq and Afghanistan," said Terri Tanielian, the project's co-leader and a researcher at RAND, a nonprofit research organization. "Unless they receive appropriate and effective care for these mental health conditions, there will be long-term consequences for them and for the nation. Unfortunately, we found there are many barriers preventing them from getting the high-quality treatment they need."

While these findings certainly do not provide a pretext whatsoever for the atrocities committed by Staff Sergeant Gibbs or others (those involved in the events at Abu Ghraib or other alleged killings as reported in various secret files published by WikiLeaks, for example), they do, perhaps, provide insight into how future harm to our troops and those among whom they are serving might be prevented.

What is certain is that such stressful, mentally debilitating environments — rife with opportunities for criminal behavior — would be substantially curtailed were the American people to demand that their elected representatives cease funding for all unlawful foreign conflicts and recall all military units back to the United States to fulfill their constitutional duty.

Courtroom sketch of Calvin Gibbs: AP Images



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