

By Hal Bernton

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The Army has charged a sixth Joint Base Lewis-McChord soldier with involvement in plots to murder unarmed civilians in southern Afghanistan in 2010.

Staff Sgt. David Bram faces charges that include solicitation to commit murder, unlawfully engaging in murder-scenario conversations, failure to report war crimes and planting evidence near the body of an Afghan national. Bram also is charged with aggravated assault on Afghan nationals "on diverse occasions."

The charges represent a significant new development in a prominent war-crimes case that involves the alleged murders of three unarmed Afghans.

Bram, the second squad leader to be charged in the plots, faces up to 21 years in prison.

Previously, the Army had charged five other soldiers with premeditated murder for their involvement in the killing of three Afghans in separate incidents during patrols last year. Seven other soldiers, including Bram, were charged with lesser crimes.

Bram, of Vacaville, Calif., previously faced charges that included striking another soldier, impeding an investigation and conspiracy to commit assault and battery. All of the soldiers were part of what was then the 5th (Stryker) Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division.

Most of the alleged war crimes took place on patrols conducted by a troubled platoon that served in Kandahar Province. Some soldiers, including Bram, posed with corpses, according to Army prosecutors.

In investigative documents, some platoon members portray Staff Sgt. Calvin Gibbs, a squad leader, as an instigator of the murder plots. Upon joining the platoon in fall of 2009, soldiers said, Gibbs promoted "scenarios" that would enable them to kill unarmed Afghans and stage those deaths to appear as legitimate combat casualties.

Spc. Jeremy Morlock, who has already pleaded guilty to three murder counts, said in his plea agreement that he sought a last-minute clearance to carry out the first civilian murder in January 2010, from Bram, who had taken up position nearby. Morlock then tossed a grenade at an Afghan teenager, while another soldier fired his weapon.

But another soldier stated that he and Bram were interviewing an Afghan inside a compound at the time of the killing.

On another patrol, soldiers shot an unarmed civilian who did not respond to orders to stop advancing toward the troops, according to a platoon member. Army investigators appear to view it as within the permitted rules of engagement.

But some soldiers allege Bram was involved with planting an AK-47 magazine near the body to make it appear as if the Afghan had been armed.