



Sgt. John Russell sentenced to life without parole for killing five at Baghdad clinic

Post by [Adam Ashton](#) / The News Tribune on May 16, 2013 at 3:10 pm |

An Army judge on Thursday handed down the toughest sentence he could to a soldier who murdered five fellow service members at a Baghdad combat stress clinic four years ago.

Sgt. John Russell will serve life without parole for shooting to death two care providers, two patients and an escort at the clinic in Baghdad's Camp Liberty on May 11, 2009.

"You are not a monster," Army Judge Col. David Conn said at Russell's sentencing, according to Reuters. "But you have knowingly and deliberately done incredibly monstrous things."

"Sgt. Russell, you have forced many to drink from a bitter cup. That cup is now before you," Conn told Russell.

Russell, 48, had faced the death penalty going into the first phase of his court-martial last month. The Army capped his penalty at a life sentence when Russell agreed to plead guilty to killing the service members.

Russell fought the Army's accusation that the killings were premeditated. Conn at a Joint Base Lewis-McChord court-martial last week, however, found him guilty of premeditated murder. Murder carries a mandatory minimum life sentence in Army courts. Conn could have granted Russell a chance for a parole.

Russell's attorney, James Culp, had argued that the soldier suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder and depression at the time of the killings. He had several frustrating encounters with psychiatrists at Camp Liberty and at nearby Camp Stryker in the days before he snapped and shot up the combat stress clinic. Culp suggested in his questioning of witnesses that the doctors were too harsh with Russell. Russell insisted at his plea hearing last month that he wanted to kill only himself. The soldier had a desk job on what his third deployment to Iraq.

"I was finished fighting," he said at the April hearing. "I didn't want to live anymore. I wished someone would put a bullet in my head."

Instead, Russell left a confrontational appointment with psychiatrist Lt. Col. Michael Jones on the morning of the killings and returned more than an hour later with a rifle he seized from his escort.

Russell murdered Navy Cmdr. Charles Springle and the Army's Maj. Matthew Houseal, Sgt. Christian Bueno-Galdos, Spc. Jacob Barton and Pfc. Michael Yates Jr.

Families of all of the victims attended the two week trial and sentencing at Lewis-McChord this month. Russell was assigned to a Germany-based engineer unit when the killings took place. The Army held his court-martial at Lewis-McChord because Russell's unit fell under the command of a Lewis-McChord colonel while it was deployed.

<http://blog.thenewstribune.com/military/2013/05/16/sgt-john-russell-sentenced-to-life-without-parole-for-killing-five-at-baghdad-clinic/>