

ACCUSED PANJWAI KILLER, ROBERT BALES, TO PLEAD GUILTY

This AP reports that the US soldier accused of killing 16 Afghans last year, Robert Bales, will plead guilty to avoid a possible death sentence.

The subtext of the article is more interesting. The AP quotes family members of those killed saying they will exact revenge if he is not killed.

In interviews with the AP in Kandahar in April, relatives of the victims became outraged at the notion Bales might escape the death penalty and even vowed revenge.

“For this one thing, we would kill 100 American soldiers,” said Mohammed Wazir, who had 11 family members killed that night, including his mother and 2-year-old daughter.

It notes that legal observers didn't think he'd be given a death sentence (note, Nidal Hasan almost surely will get a death sentence, though his trial is moving more slowly).

Bales was serving his fourth tour in a combat zone, and the allegations against him raised questions about the toll multiple deployments were taking on American troops. For that reason, many legal experts believed it that it was unlikely that he would receive the death penalty, as Army prosecutors were seeking. The military justice system hasn't executed anyone since 1961.

And it hints at just a few of the other details the government probably doesn't want probed too deeply.

He had been drinking contraband alcohol, snorting Valium that was provided to him by another soldier, and had been taking steroids before the attack.

In other words, Bales may have had less to lose than the government in going to trial. I get why his lawyer is advocating a plea deal (and there may be an understanding about whether he'll be eligible for parole ever), but I suspect the government had far more to lose here.