**Army sergeant expected to plead guilty in Afghan killings**

By **Matt Smith**, CNN

updated 11:44 AM EDT, Wed June 5, 2013

**STORY HIGHLIGHTS**

* Staff Sgt. Robert Bales is charged with killing 16 Afghan civilians
* His lawyer says he plans to plead guilty to avoid a death sentence
* A hearing is set for Wednesday in Washington state

**(CNN)** -- An Army sergeant is expected to plead guilty to killing 16 Afghan civilians Wednesday in hopes of avoiding a death sentence.

Staff Sgt. Robert Bales is accused of slipping away from his outpost in southern Afghanistan and going on a house-to-house rampage in two villages before turning himself in to his commanders.

Bales faces a hearing Wednesday morning at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, outside Tacoma, Washington. His lawyer, John Henry Browne, said last week that Bales intends to plead guilty to the killings in exchange for elimination of the death penalty as a possible punishment.

Browne has previously said the Army erred in assigning Bales to another combat tour despite evidence of post-traumatic stress disorder and a traumatic brain injury suffered during a combat tour in Iraq.

The Army would not comment on any potential deal, which must be approved by the military judge and a commanding general.