



Nidal Hasan Convicted of Fort Hood Killings

By Billy Kenber Nidal Malik Hasan, the Army psychiatrist who opened fire on dozens of soldiers at Fort Hood., Tex., was found guilty Friday of murdering 13 people, taking him one step closer to becoming the first active-duty soldier to be executed in more than 50 years. Hasan, who acted as his own attorney but demonstrated little interest in mounting a defense, was convicted on 13 charges of premeditated murder and 32 of attempted murder by a panel of senior officers. He showed no reaction as the verdict was read, according to news agencies. In the courtroom were several survivors of the attack and relatives of those killed, and some began to cry after Hasan and the panel had left the room. The case will now move to a sentencing phase, during which more witnesses may be called and the 42-year-old major could testify before a punishment is handed down. The unanimous verdict closes a key chapter in one of the most painful episodes in recent U.S. military history. The FBI and Defense Department have been criticized for failing to spot warning signs that Hasan had become radicalized, and survivors have accused the government of abandoning them and depriving them of financial benefits. Hasan, a U.S.-born Muslim, admitted responsibility for the shooting at the start of the trial, saying he had been on the wrong side of a war against Islam and had switched over. During the proceedings, he declined to call any witnesses, testify or give a closing argument. He was prohibited by military law from entering a guilty plea. At a pretrial hearing, the judge, Col. Tara Osborn, ruled that Hasan could not defend himself by arguing that he carried out the killings to protect Taliban leaders in Afghanistan. Instead, the defendant chose to make his case to the public through communiques and authorized leaks to newspapers, arguing that he was waging jihad because of the United States' "illegal and immoral aggression against Muslims" in Iraq and Afghanistan. During the court-martial, Osborn refused a request by Hasan's three standby attorneys to limit their role because they believed the defendant was trying to secure a death sentence. Experts said that despite Hasan's apparent desire to be executed, it will be years before a potential death sentence could be carried out. Under the military's justice system, there are several automatic appeal stages, during which lawyers are likely to be appointed to represent Hasan, regardless of his wishes. After a sentence is handed down, the court's records and findings require the review and approval of a military official known as the convening authority. The case will then enter the appellate phase, going before the appeals courts for the Army and the armed forces. The case can be appealed to the Supreme Court. Lastly, the president would have to sign off on a death sentence. The last time an active-duty soldier was executed was in 1961. Eugene R. Fidell, who teaches military justice at Yale Law School, said he expected the appeals process to take several years. "It's most likely to be the next president that's going to have to make the final decision," he said. Greg Rinckey, a former U.S. Army Judge Advocate General's Corps attorney, said the appeals courts are highly unlikely to allow Hasan to represent himself and his appointed attorney could lodge a number of challenges. "Part of defense strategy in this case will be delays .