



Those who have seen the photos say they are grisly: soldiers beside newly killed bodies, decaying corpses and severed fingers. The dozens of photos, described in interviews and in e-mails and military documents obtained by The Associated Press, were seized by Army investigators and are a crucial part of the case against five soldiers accused of killing three Afghan civilians earlier this year.

Troops allegedly shared the photos by e-mail and thumb drive like electronic trading cards. Now 60 to 70 of them are being kept tightly shielded from the public and even defense attorneys because of fears they could wind up in the news media and provoke anti-American violence.

"We're in a powder-keg situation here," said Eugene R. Fidell, president of the National Institute for Military Justice and a military law professor at Yale University.

Since the images are not classified, "I think they have to be released if they're going to be evidence in open court in a criminal prosecution," he said. Maj. Kathleen Turner, a spokeswoman for Joint Base Lewis-McChord near Seattle, where the accused soldiers are stationed, acknowledged that the images were "highly sensitive, and that's why that protective order was put in place."

She declined to comment further.

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