

Psychiatrists testify on military mistreatment of Bradley Manning

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Military psychiatrists testified in the Army pre-trial hearing Wednesday and Thursday on the solitary confinement in which accused whistleblower Bradley Manning was held, and their repeated attempts to have him moved into less harsh arrangements.

The 24-year-old private, accused of the largest leak of government and military documents in history, has been imprisoned without conviction for 917 days. Manning took the stand Thursday afternoon to testify on his mistreatment.

The conditions under which Manning has been held are a violation of his basic democratic and human rights. While held in Kuwait between May and July of 2010, he was subjected to complete isolation and sensory deprivation.

Manning was then transferred to the Marine Corps military brig in Quantico, Virginia, where he was subjected to solitary confinement in a 6-by-8-foot cell more than 23 and a half hours a day. Disallowed from exercising or lying down, he was made to stay awake from 5 in the morning until 10 at night with nothing to do. Guards ordered him to strip naked and stand in humiliating positions in their presence.

Testimony this week recounted episodes of guards ridiculing Manning and taking away his underwear. He was denied such basic items as his glasses or bedding and was forbidden from meeting confidentially with lawyers or human rights monitors.

It is clear that such treatment was part of a deliberate effort to break the young man mentally and emotionally, to make him a pliant witness in the grand jury the Obama administration is planning for WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, whom the US has sought to have extradited.

On Tuesday, former Quantico brig commander Colonel Daniel Choike spent several hours answering

questions under oath regarding Manning's treatment. Military officials have maintained that the deprivation to which the soldier was subjected was for his own protection, under a "prevention of injury" order. In fact, much of the testimony and evidence presented in court revealed that the decisions were politically motivated and directed by the Pentagon.

Wednesday saw Quantico mental health staff take the stand. Navy Captain Dr. William Hctor, a psychiatrist who evaluated Manning, testified that he had recommended the private be removed from prevention of injury watch. His recommendation was ignored, and as Choike's testimony revealed a day prior, the brig commanders instead used the unqualified psychiatric appraisals of a staff dentist to justify Manning's mistreatment.

Hctor stated that commanders had little concern for mental health evaluations. "We had been patient and we had watched and over time he had not been suicidal...It did not seem to make a lot of sense at the time" to have Manning on a prevention of injury watch. "It became clearer over time what was going on...I think they were really very worried about his safety and I don't think they trusted any doctors."

Under questioning by military judge Denise Lind, Hctor stated that in his view, Manning had a "chronic, mild depressive condition" and a "personality structure that was impulsive tending toward moodiness."

Of conditions of extended solitary confinement, he testified, "By nature we're social creatures. We all have times to be around people. And this was a difficult time in his life as he's facing extended legal problems...That amount of time under [prevention of injury] precautions was unprecedented."

Another Quantico psychiatric specialist, Captain Kevin Moore, testified that Manning's isolation was

more severe than that enforced on death row prisoners he had observed.

Official records document 16 evaluations recommending Manning's removal from prevention of injury. When mental health staff expressed concerns that their recommendations were being ignored, Colonel Robert Oltman, security battalion commander in charge of the brig, declared, "We'll do what we want to do." Hctor testified that this response made him the "angriest [he had] been in a long time."

"It seemed really senseless," he said.

Psychiatrists warned that the isolation could harm Manning. Hctor explained, "he'd been strong." But "everyone has limits."



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