

Pentagon begins Bergdahl investigation

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The US Army has appointed Major General Kenneth R. Dahl to head its investigation into the circumstances surrounding the capture of Sergeant Bowe Bergdahl in Afghanistan in 2009. The 28-year-old from Idaho was held prisoner for nearly five years, before being exchanged May 31 for five Taliban leaders imprisoned at Guantanamo Bay.

The launching of a formal probe raises the possibility that Bergdahl could face prosecution for allegedly leaving his combat post on the night of June 30, 2009, after a series of e-mail messages to family and friends in which he criticized the conduct of the war in Afghanistan and the incompetence of his commanders.

Bergdahl and his family have come under unrelenting attack by the right-wing media because of his professed antiwar views. Media pundits, elected officials and some former soldiers have denounced him as a deserter and demanded a court martial, with charges ranging from going AWOL to treason to causing the deaths of other soldiers in the field.

Perhaps the most rabid demand for blood came from the chief law enforcement officer of the Bush administration, former attorney general Michael Mukasey, who told Fox News, “We know what he did. You can’t wait to try a case until you know absolutely everything about everything.” Mukasey displayed no such determination to prosecute the lies and war crimes of top Bush administration officials.

Bergdahl had become disaffected from the war in Afghanistan and regarded the US military occupation with hostility. His e-mails voiced his concern and distress over the atrocities, brutality and stupidity he had witnessed.

The exact circumstances under which Bergdahl left Combat Outpost Mest-Lalak in Paktika province in eastern Afghanistan on June 30, 2009, are unclear. Contrary to some press reports, he does not appear to have left a note behind him, and he has not spoken

publicly since the prisoner exchange three weeks ago.

A note to his family transmitted through the International Red Cross while Bergdahl was held prisoner includes the following appeal: “If this letter makes it to the U.S.A., tell those involved in the investigation that there are more sides to the situation and original plans never came clear. Please tell D.C. to wait for all evidence to come in.”

A two-star Army general who held top positions in both Iraq and Afghanistan, Dahl is currently the deputy commander of the Army’s I Corps at Joint Base Lewis-McChord outside Seattle, Washington. Dahl was a field artillery officer, before commanding US forces inside the Green Zone in Baghdad (site of the Iraqi government compound and the US embassy) in 2005-2006. Dahl was the deputy commander of the 10th Mountain Division in southern Afghanistan from 2010 to 2012, and has held top positions at the Pentagon.

According to a statement issued by the Army press office, “The primary function of this investigation, as in any other investigation, is to ascertain facts and report them to the appointing authority. These types of investigations are not uncommon and serve to establish the facts on the ground following an incident.”

Beside the possibility of disciplinary measures, the Army investigation will determine whether Bergdahl should receive his back pay, totaling \$300,000 for the five years he was held prisoner. If the probe determines that he was a prisoner of war and not a willing “guest” of the Taliban, as appears incontrovertible, he would be legally entitled to twice his total back pay as compensation.

Bergdahl is the main witness in the investigation, and he will not be made available for questioning until doctors and counselors responsibility for his medical treatment and psychological “reintegration” give approval, the Pentagon said. Accordingly, there is no

deadline set for the completion of the investigation by General Dahl.

The freed POW arrived back in the United States on Friday, June 13, after an overnight flight from Germany, where he was being treated at Landstuhl hospital on the grounds of Ramstein Air Force Base. Bergdahl will remain at Brooke Medical Center in San Antonio, Texas, for the foreseeable future, according to press accounts citing military officials.

His parents, Robert and Jani Bergdahl of Hailey, Idaho, issued a statement saying they were “overjoyed” by their son’s return, but would not make public when they planned to travel to Texas to see him. “They ask for continued privacy as they concentrate on their son’s reintegration,” a spokesman for the family said.

After a week of nonstop vilification, in which charges of “deserter” and “traitor” were thrown about, the media diatribes have been undermined by the release of further details about the conditions in which Bergdahl was held. Press reports now suggest that he was confined to a cage, a metal box approximately six feet on a side, for two years straight, during which he did not see another human being.

One doctor involved in assessing Bergdahl’s condition said the young soldier had not had the opportunity to speak a word of English over the five-year period, with the exception of a handful of video messages put together by his captors.

New details also have emerged about the connection between the talks over repatriating Bergdahl and the operations of the CIA and US military in Pakistan.

The *Chicago Tribune* reported Monday that a five-month halt in CIA drone strikes in the tribal areas of Pakistan “coincided with intensifying efforts to get Bergdahl out.” Following the prisoner exchange on May 31, the CIA has resumed drone missile strikes in North Waziristan, the Pakistani province where Bergdahl was in captivity. The first such strikes killed 16 members of the Haqqani network, the group that held Bergdahl.



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