

US Navy SEAL accused of war crimes, murder, pleads not guilty

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US Navy SEAL Chief Special Warfare Operator Edward Gallagher, 39, is facing a general court martial and stands accused of multiple war crimes following his latest deployment to Iraq. The most serious charge is premeditated murder, which carries with it an automatic life sentence in the military justice system. Gallagher, a medic, sniper and SEAL since 2004, is accused of stabbing an Iraqi child in the throat and body while he was being treated for wounds he suffered from a US airstrike. The child's age is unknown, but it is estimated he was 15 years old. Along with premeditated murder, Gallagher, who has pled not guilty to all charges, is also accused of attempted murder, obstruction of justice, aggravated assault and bringing "discredit upon the armed forces."

Gallagher came under investigation by the Naval Criminal Investigative Service beginning in April 2018 after several members from his unit, SEAL Team 7 Alpha Platoon, reported that he had committed several war crimes. Court proceedings began against Gallagher in September 2018, after which a preliminary hearing, referred to as an Article 32, was initiated in November 2018. During the Article 32 hearing, prosecutors presented evidence to Navy Judge Advocate Capt. Arthur Record, including eyewitness testimony, video interviews, photographs and text messages, some of which were seized from Gallagher's personal cell phone.

The picture messages contained on Gallagher's phone, prosecutors allege, show him posing with the corpse of the child after he had stabbed him in the neck and body repeatedly while his wounds were being treated by another SEAL. In one photo, Gallagher is seen lifting the boy up by the hair, smiling, while flanked by two other Navy SEALs. Another photo shows Gallagher performing a re-enlistment ceremony,

posing with his hand raised and the bloodied corpse in front of him with an American flag. A third photo depicts Gallagher cradling the child's head in one arm, his homemade knife, the alleged murder weapon in the other, with the caption "got him with my hunting knife." The photos, which Navy prosecutor Chris Czaplak described as "ISIS propaganda manna from heaven," were sealed by the judge.

During the hearing, Navy prosecutors also detailed two separate incidents in which Gallagher is alleged to have shot at civilians, one time at an "old man," the second at a young "girl," several weeks after the alleged murder of the boy occurred. Upon returning to the United States, Gallagher found out he was under investigation after a search warrant had been executed on his residence. Gallagher is alleged to have sent threatening text messages in an attempt to intimidate those he suspected of cooperating with investigators.

In light of the evidence, Judge Record proceeded with a general court martial that began on January 5, and a trial date has been set for February 19. Gallagher's attorneys are requesting that he be released from the Naval Consolidated Brig Miramar, where he has been confined since September 11, 2018; a ruling is expected later this week.

The SEALs have been at the center of some of the most heinous war crimes in the over quarter-century of war US imperialism has prosecuted on the Iraqi population. The operation Gallagher participated in—dubbed "We Are Coming Nineveh"—resulted, according to one estimate, in as many as 40,000 civilian deaths. The "Mosul Massacre" lasted from October 2016 until July 2017, and was the single largest military operation in the world since the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

ISIS had regained control of the southern Iraqi city

with an estimated 800 to 1,500 fighters in a June 2014 offensive. Mosul, once home to 2.5 million people, had dwindled to fewer than 1.5 million by the time the battle to “liberate” it began in October. At the conclusion of “liberation,” fewer than 800,000 civilians remained in the city.

The nine-month battle entrapped the civilian population in a hurricane of modern military violence. US artillery and “precision” air strikes, directed by Iraqi and US special forces, decimated the dense and ancient urban landscape. On or about May 3, 2017, Iraqi special forces requested an airstrike on a building that supposedly contained “50 ISIS terrorists.” It was in this building that the lone survivor, a boy, too young to remember a time before the illegal US occupation, was captured and interrogated by Iraqi soldiers, before being briefly interviewed by an Iraqi journalist. He was then turned over to the SEAL Team 7, and the care of Chief Edward Gallagher.

Gallagher is receiving support from former SEALs, his family and, notably, California Republican Congressman Duncan Hunter. Speaking to reporters after a trial date was set this past Friday, Hunter, a former Marine, implored President Trump to intervene on the accused’s behalf. Hunter charged that the “verifiable political nature of the Navy’s justice system” made it incapable of producing a fair trial. Hunter advised that Trump “dismiss this case” and take this “American hero out of a prison cell and [put him] back on the front lines where he belongs.” Hunter continued his fascistic tirade, stating that “South American criminal illegal aliens are provided with better access to legal representation than our nation’s elite warriors. ...”

The congressman from California’s 50th district is himself facing criminal indictment involving allegations of misusing campaign funds. Hunter and his wife Margaret allegedly used more than \$250,000 in campaign funds to pay for groceries, bar tabs, vacations in Europe, dentist bills, and school tuition for their children. Hunter’s trial is set to begin in September.



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