US Marines arrested for human trafficking and drug offenses

Kevin Martinez
30 July 2019

A total of 19 active-duty military members have been arrested since last week in connection with an ongoing investigation involving human smuggling and drug trafficking in the US Marine Corps. The Naval Criminal Investigative Services (NCIS) told *Newsweek* that 18 Marines from the 1st Battalion, 5th Regiment, and a sailor, all based out of Camp Pendleton, California, were taken into custody during battalion formation.

The arrested varied in rank from private first class to corporal, while the sailor was a corpsman. They were tied to a smuggling operation following the arrest of Lance Cpls. Byron Darnell Law II and David Javier Salazar-Quintero by US Border Patrol agents near the Tecate port of entry on July 3, according to a federal complaint.

The Marines were found to have three immigrants in the back of their car when they were apprehended by Border Patrol along Interstate 8, a route popular for bringing migrants into the country. According to the complaint, the immigrants paid the Marines $8,000 to take them up north.

Both Law and Salazar-Quintero blamed the other for getting caught up in the operation, claiming an unidentified organizer had told them where to go and who to pick up. The Marines were arraigned on July 8 in San Diego, and the Marines arrested at Camp Pendleton will be subject to punishment by the commander of the 1st Battalion, 5th regiment according to military law.

Camp Pendleton, 55 miles north of San Diego, is the largest Marine Corps base in the US. The Marines were taken into custody during battalion formation involving 8,000 soldiers in a "public display for the entire unit to see" according to 1st Lt. Carmeron Edinburgh, a division spokesman.

Last week's arrests came a day after the *New Times* reported that an entire Navy SEAL platoon in Iraq was sent home "after commanders heard reports of serious misconduct and a breakdown of discipline in the elite unit." The allegations included the rape of a female US soldier who was not part of the platoon.

The assault allegedly took place during a Fourth of July party that included alcohol, which is banned in Iraq due to Islamic tradition. The commander of American special forces in Iraq, Major General Eric Hill of the Air Force, ordered the removal of the platoon, the only group of Navy SEALs in Iraq, "due to a perceived deterioration of good order and discipline within the team during nonoperational periods" according to a statement.

The unit, known as Foxtrot Platoon, was on route to Seal Team 7's base in Naval Base Coronado near San Diego. The removal of an entire platoon is rare, however last year a Green Beret detachment from the Army's 7th Special Force Group was pulled out of Afghanistan following reports that the unit, along with Czech troops, killed an Afghan prisoner.

Navy SEAL teams have come under increased scrutiny in recent years following many incidents, including the death of a Green Beret who was strangled by two SEALs and two Marines during a purported hazing incident, as part of a secret deployment to Mali in West Africa. Another report from the *Navy Times* detailed how cocaine use was widespread among SEAL Team 10, based in Virginia, and that the Navy's drug testing was "a joke."

Corruption and war crimes are common among senior enlisted SEALs, as was revealed by the court martial and acquittal of Special Operator First Class Edward Gallagher, following charges that he murdered innocent civilians in Iraq and stabbed a child soldier before

© World Socialist Web Site

posing for pictures with his corpse in 2017. He was convicted for the least serious charge, desecration of a corpse, and acquitted of all other charges after one of his fellow soldiers confessed to the killing after being granted immunity.

During Gallagher's trial, members of his platoon testified how they constructed a rooftop bar at their safe house in Iraq, and that officers in charge of discipline drank with enlisted men and took turns playing disc jockey.

The reports of human smuggling, alcohol abuse, and rape flow inevitably from the criminal and neocolonial character of the US military's efforts to subjugate the world on behalf of American banks and corporations. Nearly two decades of never-ending deployments as part of the "War on Terror" has produced a diseased and sadistic culture among the armed forces.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site