

Former Capitol Police chief blasts Pentagon officials for delaying deployment of National Guard during January 6 coup

Jacob Crosse

20 September 2023

In explosive congressional testimony that has been buried by the news media, former Capitol Police Chief Steven Sund accused US Army Lieutenant General and current Director of the Army Staff Walter Piatt, as well as former acting Secretary of Defense Christopher Miller, of preventing D.C. National Guard troops from assisting outnumbered police and protecting Congress during Donald Trump's January 6, 2021 coup.

Sund testified on Tuesday, September 19 before the House Administration Subcommittee on Oversight, which is charged with overseeing the US Capitol Police Department. Under oath, Sund said that after the Capitol Police Board granted his request to appeal to the Pentagon for National Guard assistance at 2:09 pm on January 6, it took over three and a half hours for troops to actually arrive.

Every member of the Capitol Police Board on January 6, which was then composed of House Sergeant-at-Arms Paul Irving, Senate Sergeant-at-Arms Michael Stenger and Architect of the Capitol James Brett Blanton, has either resigned or been fired since the attempted coup.

Irving was first appointed to the position by then-Republican Speaker John Boehner in 2012 and continued under Republican Paul Ryan and then under Democrat Nancy Pelosi. Senate Sergeant-at-Arms Stenger was appointed by Republican Mitch McConnell, while former Architect of the Capitol J. Brett Blanton was appointed by Trump. As chief of the Capitol Police, Sund answered to the board and served as a nonvoting member, which is why he needed approval from Stenger and Irving to request National Guard troops.

Sund told the subcommittee, "After I received approval to call in the National Guard I then had to beg the Pentagon officials to send us help. I was repeatedly denied assistance by the Army Lieutenant General [Walter] Piatt, citing concerns over 'optics' of the National Guard on Capitol Hill."

He continued, "The D.C. National Guard, many of whom were standing within eyesight of the Capitol, and whose motto is 'Capitol Guardians,' would not arrive until almost 6 pm, after the fighting was over and the Capitol Grounds were secured. The New Jersey State Police arrived before they did. To add insult to injury, the inspector general for the Department of Defense considered the response, quote, 'appropriate.'"

Sund explained that "Besides the [D.C. Metropolitan Police Department], the National Guard was the next largest cadre of personnel that could be deployed to assist my officers. We desperately needed those boots on the ground.

"The fact that the chief of police responsible for the legislative branch of government was repeatedly denied assistance by the Pentagon is indefensible," he concluded.

Trump installed Miller, a longtime Special Forces operative and Trump loyalist, as acting head of the Pentagon to replace Mark Esper, whom he removed two days after the media called the 2020 election for Biden. This was part of a broader purge, in which Trump placed far-right supporters in top Pentagon positions as part of the conspiracy to overturn the election.

The ranking member of the committee, Democratic Representative Joseph Morelle of New York, agreed with Sund that the nonresponse of the Pentagon to his urgent pleas for help for over three hours was "unconscionable." Morelle asked Sund if he was aware at the time of an extraordinary memorandum issued by acting Secretary of Defense Miller 48 hours before the attack on Congress. Miller's memo barred D.C. National Guard troops under the command of Gen. William Walker from deploying with weapons or riot control gear, or "physically" interacting with protesters.

The memo also forbade National Guard soldiers from sharing equipment or intelligence with the police.

Sund testified that not only was he not aware of these restrictions until after that attack, but that during a January 5 meeting with many of the top law enforcement officials in D.C., "including the FBI and the commanding general for the D.C. National Guard... nothing was said to me on that conference call, and that was also with the Capitol Police Board."

Sund continued: "It sure as hell would have been great to know that they put out this memo restricting the National Guard from assisting my men and women in advance of January 6. Knowing now that they were so damn concerned about the violence they were expecting to come on January 6 and no one ever told me about it?"

The soldiers, Sund said, "were within eyesight of the Capitol." He continued: "They can immediately respond, no authorization from higher headquarters. Many were within eyesight with their riot gear," which they were not supposed to have per Miller's memo.

"The National Guard," Sund continued, "who is only two miles from our headquarters, sat and waited for the evening crew to come in while the Pentagon was still sending resources to protect generals' homes. They sent me nobody to help my men and women."

Morrelle noted that Sund had stated in a previous interview, "There was a

concern in the administration about the president [Trump] invoking the Insurrection Act and concern at the Pentagon about him declaring martial law, or activating the military in support of his claims.”

The Democratic congressman asked Sund if he suspected “that played a role in the Pentagon’s unwillingness to allow the National Guard to respond to the Capitol? That those hours, that was being debated?”

Sund confirmed that while writing his book *Courage Under Fire*, “I started finding out there was a lot of concern within the president’s cabinet about him invoking the Insurrection Act and that was one of the hypotheses I came up with, that they were concerned about him invoking it and that’s why they would want to delay.”

He added, “And think about, the Secretary of Defense [Christopher Miller] has come out and stated in testimony he was not putting National Guard anywhere east of 9th street northwest. Which means toward the Capitol. So why would that be?”

“For some reason they wanted to do everything they could to keep National Guard away from the Capitol.”

Left unsaid throughout the committee hearing, by either Sund or any Democrats or Republicans, was that Oath Keeper founder Stewart Rhodes, who was in direct communication with Trump political crony Roger Stone in the lead-up to the coup, was also waiting for Trump to invoke the Insurrection Act and call on the Oath Keepers to arrest/execute Trump’s political enemies.

Questioned by Morelle if the situation would have differed had the National Guard’s quick reaction force been able to deploy, Sund replied, “If they would have followed their emergency authority and they had deployed the [Quick Reaction Force], we could have had close to 200 National Guardsmen, men and women, here fairly quickly. That could have been a game changer... we could have absolutely used their assistance.”

To explain his own department’s inability to predict or plan for the attack, Sund pointed a finger at his former assistant chief of police for Protective and Intelligence Operations, Yogananda Pittman. Pittman’s division had authored a January 3 intelligence report that included messages from Trump paramilitaries stating their intent to storm the capitol and “kill the palace guards,” which Sund said referred to the Capitol Police.

Despite Sund issuing an “all hands on deck” order for January 6, the intelligence division under Pittman’s command, according to Sund, “had two-thirds of their personnel working from home that day... and only had one intelligence analyst assigned to monitor the January 6th events.”

Sund also blamed the federal intelligence agencies for failing to share with Capitol Police all the information, and informants, they had collected prior to the attack. He said, “If the intelligence had been accurately reported and the FBI and DHS (Department of Homeland Security) had followed their established practices, I wouldn’t be sitting here today.”

Sund began serving as the acting chief of the Capitol Police in 2017 and was in charge of protecting the legislative body as it met to certify the 2020 presidential election on January 6, 2021. Neither Sund nor former D.C. National Guard Commander William Walker were called to testify publicly in front of the now-defunct House Select Committee on January 6.

This was not a mistake or oversight by the Select Committee, which held 10 public hearings and published an 800-page report on the attack. In its report, the committee, which was dominated by Democrats but included two Republican war-hawks, Adam Kinzinger (Illinois) and Liz

Cheney (Wyoming), presented a false “one-man coup” narrative, limiting responsibility for the January 6 attack to Trump and a narrow circle of enablers. The report attributed failures by the police and military to plan or deploy forces to protect Congress from pro-Trump insurrectionists to incompetence or “miscommunication.”

This lie is aimed at whitewashing the role of key institutions of the US state in the coup, including the majority of the Republican Party, US Supreme Court justices, police-intelligence agencies, and the military.

Despite his damning testimony, Sund himself gave aid and comfort to this lie, as well as to Trump and the Republican Party as a whole, by blaming then-Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi for not approving his request for National Guard support on January 3 and during the initial hour of the siege.

Three days before the attack, Sund first approached Irving and Stenger about issuing a formal request to the Pentagon from the Capitol Police Board for National Guard support, which both men shot down. In his book and in his testimony, Sund claims that Irving and Stenger also rejected issuing a request for National Guard support for approximately 71 minutes on January 6, beginning at 12:58 pm.

At the hearing, Sund attributed their reluctance to request National Guard troops largely to alleged opposition from Pelosi.

In campaign speeches and interviews, Trump has repeatedly blamed Pelosi and D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser for “refusing my offer” of “10,000 National Guard soldiers.”

Pelosi, of course, had good reason to fear the deployment of thousands of troops at the initiative of Trump. The fascistic president had repeatedly threatened to deploy troops to put down protests against police killings, and on June 1 had mobilized military police to brutally attack protesters across from the White House, threatening to invoke the Insurrection Act and declaring himself the “president of law and order.”

Having declared the election rigged and mobilized his supporters to block certification of Joe Biden’s election, Trump was perfectly capable of seeking to use military force to shut down Congress on January 6 and carry out a coup to remain in power as de facto dictator.

But neither she, nor Biden or any other Democratic politician sought to warn the population of the acute danger of a coup, for fear of triggering a mass movement that would threaten the entire political system and the profit system it upholds. On the contrary, she downplayed the threat, covered up the nexus between the White House, the Republican Party and fascist militias, and pleaded for “unity” with the Democrats’ Republican “colleagues.”

The coverup and complicity continue. To this day, none of the generals who refused to defend Congress, yet sent security teams to protect their own homes, has been charged with a crime. This includes former acting Secretary of Defense Christopher Miller, who issued the unprecedented memorandum disarming Walker’s National Guard soldiers before the attack.

General Piatt, far from being cashiered for his role on January 6, has since been elevated to director of the Army Staff. Gen. Charles Flynn, who was also on the call with Piatt when he denied Sund and D.C. National Guard commander Walker’s request for troops, is the brother of Trump’s one-time national security adviser Michael Flynn, a fascist QAnon supporter who was deeply involved in the plot to storm the Capitol and block the transfer of power. Charles Flynn has since been promoted to the post of commanding general of the United States Army Pacific, where he helps prepare the US military for war with China.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact