

## Accused soldier: blood-thirsty killer or insane?

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Fort Carson prosecutors on Tuesday portrayed a soldier charged in the killing of an Afghan prisoner as a malingerer who is hiding behind a defense of mental illness to shield him from the consequences of his crime.

Defenders of Pfc. David Edwards say the 1st Brigade Combat team soldier is suffering from mental illness and is so doped up on drugs to battle schizophrenia that he didn't understand the hearing on whether he'll be tried for premeditated murder, a charge that can bring the death penalty.

"Premeditation was easily proven," prosecutor Maj. George Brauchler said at the close of the two-day hearing. "He shot a guy who was chained to the floor while he was asleep."

Lawrence, 20, was serving at an outpost north of the Afghan city of Kandahar on Oct. 17 when he was sent to guard a prisoner captured that day — an alleged Taliban leader known by the pseudonym Mullah Mohebullah.

During his guard shift, prosecutors say, Lawrence entered Mohebullah's cell and fired a single round from his rifle into the Afghan's face. The case drew worldwide attention after Afghan President Hamid Karzai issued a blistering condemnation of the killing a day after Mohebullah died.

Defense attorney James Culp spent little time during the hearing on whether Lawrence pulled the trigger. Instead, he focused on his client's mental state.

He argued that the government shouldn't move ahead in the case until it's known whether Lawrence is sane.

"If the military cares what perceptions are of the military justice system, it sure hasn't been evident in this proceeding," Culp said.



Lawrence's relatives say he reported hearing voices in his head in the days leading up to the shooting.

A medic who served with Lawrence, Pfc. Dimitri Jenkins, said he and others had been concerned about the Indiana-native's mental state even before the unit went to Afghanistan in July. He often seemed too eager for combat and talked frequently about his desire to kill the enemy.

"Sometimes he felt out there, a little bit crazy," Jenkins testified.

After the Afghan was shot, Jenkins said Lawrence seemed gleeful and said "it had to be done."

"He had the biggest smile I had ever seen, it was cheek to cheek," Jenkins said.

Lawrence wasn't smiling Tuesday. He nodded off so often during the daylong hearing that prosecutors assigned a sergeant to nudge him back to consciousness when his head fell to his chest.

Lawrence sought mental health treatment a month before the killing and was on prescribed antidepressants and sleeping pills at the time of the shooting, witnesses said. Army psychiatrists are evaluating Lawrence to decide if he's mentally fit to stand trial. Results of the sanity probe are due Dec. 10.

On Tuesday, prosecutors worked to cast doubt that mental illness played a role.

Men who guarded Lawrence at a military jail in Kandahar said the soldier spoke of "playing the crazy card" at court martial. They said he asked how much time he would serve if convicted of killing Mohebullah.

"He said 'If I get 20 years, I'll be 40 when I get out — that won't be so bad'," one of his guards, Sgt. John Miller, testified. "He said he could read and work out a lot."

Witnesses at the hearing said in the hour before Mohebullah died, Lawrence talked about doing something rash.

Jenkins said he thought that Lawrence was set to kill the prisoner and himself.

"He kept saying the same thing, like he had to do something," Jenkins said.

In custody, Lawrence seemed oddly calm, witnesses said, smiling and joking from a jail cell.

"He was all smiles," Miller testified.

After a medical evaluation in Kandahar, Lawrence was transferred to a psychiatric ward where guards said he tried to take his own life — bleeding heavily after pulling out an

intravenous line. He was later taken to military hospitals in Germany and Washington D.C. for treatment.

Brauchler, the prosecutor, said evidence is thin, though, that Lawrence was insane when he pulled the trigger.

“No one ever hears him talk about voices, no one ever hears him talk about nightmares,” the prosecutor said.

A hearing officer — Capt. David Thompson — will issue findings this month on whether Lawrence should be tried. Those findings and the results of the sanity checks will go to Fort Carson’s Brig. Gen. James H. Doty Jr., who will decide how the case proceeds.

Witness Sgt. 1st Class John Murphy said Lawrence seemed resigned to fate while in the Kandahar jail.

“He said ‘If they punish me for killing an enemy of my country, what can I do?’” Murphy said.

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