

Air Force Vet Stands Trial, Charged With Attempts to Join ISIS

A U.S. Air Force veteran charged with trying to join the Islamic State is set to go on trial in New York on Monday, one of the first of more than 75 Islamic State-related cases brought against Americans to reach trial.

Tairod Nathan Webster Pugh, 48, was detained by Turkish authorities in Istanbul in January 2015 after he returned from a year-long stint living in Egypt.

U.S. investigators say they found a letter to Pugh's Egyptian wife on his computer declaring his intention to "defend the Islamic States" and saying he had only two options: "Victory or Martyr." They also discovered approximately 180 jihadist videos on his laptop, including one that showed Islamic State militants executing several prisoners, according to prosecutors.

Pugh is charged with attempting to provide material support to a terrorist group and with obstructing a federal investigation. Opening statements are scheduled to begin on Monday morning in Brooklyn federal court.

Pugh appears to be just the second Islamic State-related defendant to go on trial.

Earlier this month, Abdul Malik Abdul Kareem, who is accused of plotting with others to attack a Prophet Mohammed cartoon contest in Texas, went on trial in Phoenix. Two of his alleged associates were killed in a shootout with police at the event.

Pugh served as an avionics specialist in the Air Force from

1986 to 1990 and moved to San Antonio around 1998, when he converted to Islam and became increasingly radical, authorities say.

In 2001, while Pugh was working as a mechanic for American Airlines, a co-worker tipped off the FBI that Pugh had expressed support for Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda, according to court documents.

Pugh later worked as an Army contractor in Iraq from 2009 to 2010, prosecutors said.

U.S. District Judge Nicholas Garaufis has taken the rare step of agreeing to seal the courtroom during the testimony of an undercover FBI employee in order to protect his identity. An audio feed of the testimony will be broadcast for the public in a separate courtroom, Garaufis said in a court order. {eo}

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