

## **United States Air Force Veteran Charged With Attempting To Provide Material Support To ISIL**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Tuesday, March 17, 2015

*Defendant, a Former Avionics Specialist, Travelled from Egypt to Turkey in an Attempt to Cross the Border to Syria to Join ISIL*

<http://www.justice.gov/usao/nye/pr/March15/2015Mar17.php>

Yesterday, a federal grand jury in Brooklyn returned a two-count indictment charging Tairod Nathan Webster Pugh, an American citizen and veteran of the United States Air Force, with attempting to provide material support to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), a foreign terrorist organization, and obstruction and attempted obstruction of justice. The defendant will be arraigned on the indictment tomorrow at 11 a.m. before Judge Nicholas G. Garaufis at the U.S. Courthouse, 225 Cadman Plaza East, Brooklyn, New York.

The charges were announced by Loretta E. Lynch, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York; John P. Carlin, Assistant Attorney General for National Security; Diego G. Rodriguez, Assistant Director-in-Charge, Federal Bureau of Investigation, New York Field Office; and William J. Bratton, Commissioner, New York City Police Department.

“Born and raised in the United States, Pugh allegedly turned his back on his country and attempted to travel to Syria in order to join a terrorist organization,” stated U.S. Attorney Lynch. “We will continue to vigorously prosecute extremists, whether based here or abroad, to stop them before they are able to threaten the United States and its allies.” Ms. Lynch extended her grateful appreciation to the FBI’s Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF), which comprises a large number of federal, state, and local agencies from the region. Ms. Lynch also thanked the U.S. Department of State, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, the United States Attorney’s Office for the District of New Jersey, the Asbury Park, New Jersey Police Department, and the Neptune, New Jersey Police Department for their assistance.

“Pugh, an American citizen and former member of our military, allegedly abandoned his allegiance to the United States and sought to provide material support to ISIL,” said Assistant Attorney General Carlin. “Identifying and bringing to justice individuals who provide or attempt to provide material support to terrorists is a key priority of the National Security Division.”

“As alleged, Pugh, an American citizen, was willing to travel overseas and fight jihad alongside terrorists seeking to do us harm. United States citizens who offer support to terrorist organizations pose a grave threat to our national security and will face serious consequences for their actions. We will continue to work with our partners, both here and abroad, to prevent acts of terrorism. This investigation demonstrates the importance of law enforcement coordination and collaboration here and around the world,” stated FBI Assistant Director-in-Charge Rodriguez.”

“We thank the members of the NYPD Joint Terrorism Task Force and our Federal law enforcement partners for their work in this case and for their tireless efforts to identify threats of terrorism here and abroad. It is this type of collaboration that results in swift investigative work to stop individuals such as this from making any further contribution to terrorist organizations such as ISIL,” said Police Commissioner Bratton.

As alleged in the complaint, indictment, and other court filings, the defendant served in the Air Force as an avionics instrument system specialist and received training in the installation and maintenance of aircraft engine, navigation, and weapons systems. After leaving the Air Force, the defendant worked for a number of companies in the United States and Middle East as an avionics specialist and airplane mechanic. The defendant lived abroad for over a year before his arrest in this case.

Earlier this year, weeks after being fired from his last job as an airplane mechanic based in the Middle East, the defendant attempted to join ISIL. On January 10, 2015, the defendant traveled from Egypt to Turkey in an effort to cross the border into Syria to join ISIL and fight violent jihad. Turkish authorities denied the defendant entry, however, and sent him on a return flight to Egypt. Upon his arrival in Egypt, the defendant was carrying multiple electronic devices, including four USB thumb drives that had been stripped of their plastic casings and an iPod that had been wiped clean of data. The defendant also had a cellular telephone that contained, among other things, a photograph of a machinegun. The defendant was soon thereafter deported to the United States.

On January 14, 2015, JTTF agents obtained a search warrant for the defendant’s electronic devices, including his laptop computer. Subsequent exploitation of the laptop revealed, among other things, the following:

- recent Internet searches for “borders controlled by Islamic state”,
- recent Internet searches for “who controls kobani,” “kobani border crossing,” and “jarablus border crossing,” all references to Syrian cities under ISIL’s control near the Turkish border,
- a chart of crossing points between Turkey and Syria indicating the areas on the Syrian side of the border controlled by ISIL and other groups, and
- Internet searches for “Flames of War,” an ISIL propaganda video, as well as downloaded videos, including one showing ISIL members executing prisoners.

The defendant was arrested pursuant to a federal complaint on January 16, 2015, in Asbury Park, New Jersey, and he has been in custody ever since. After the defendant’s arrest, JTTF agents seized and later obtained warrants to search two backpacks that the defendant had when he was overseas. Agents recovered from the backpacks, among other things: two compasses, a solar-powered flashlight, a solar-powered power source, shards of broken USB thumb drives, a fatigue jacket, and camping clothes.

If convicted, the defendant faces a maximum sentence of 35 years in prison. The charges in the indictment are merely allegations, and the defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

The government’s case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Samuel P. Nitze and Tiana A. Demas, with assistance provided by Trial Attorneys Larry Schneider and Andrew Sigler of the Counterterrorism Section of the Department of Justice.

The Defendant:

TAIROD NATHAN WEBSTER PUGH

Age: 47

Neptune, New Jersey

E.D.N.Y. Docket Nos. 15-MJ-044 and 15-CR-116 (NGG)