

Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Eastern District of New York

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Jury Finds Air Force Veteran Guilty In First ISIL Conviction After Trial In The United States

Defendant, a Former U.S. Air Force Airplane Mechanic, Convicted of Attempting to Provide Material Support to Terrorists and Obstruction of an Official Proceeding

Today, a jury in Brooklyn returned a verdict finding defendant Tairod Nathan Webster Pugh, an American citizen and veteran of the United States Air Force, guilty of attempting to provide material support to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), a foreign terrorist organization, and obstruction of an official proceeding. The defendant will be sentenced on September 16, 2016, by Judge Nicholas G. Garaufis at the U.S. Courthouse, 225 Cadman Plaza East, Brooklyn, New York.

The verdict was announced by Robert L. Capers, 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.

"Today's verdict provides yet another example of a successful outcome in our national security effort, and demonstrates the crucial role that law enforcement action plays in that effort," stated U.S. Attorney Capers. "The evidence presented at trial and the jury's verdict instill confidence that our law enforcement agencies and their many important partners at home and abroad work effectively to disrupt and defeat the deadly siren's call of terrorist groups around the globe. Pugh has now been held accountable for his crimes by a jury and will not reach the terrorist group he sought to support." Mr. Capers extended his 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. Mr. Capers 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. Mr. Capers expressed his appreciation to the U.S. Marshals Service and the Federal Protective Service for providing security during the trial.

"Pugh, an American citizen and former member of the U.S. Air Force where he served as an aircraft mechanic, attempted to travel to Syria to provide material support to ISIL," said Assistant Attorney General Carlin. "This is the first conviction after a trial by jury in the United States involving an individual who attempted to travel to Syria to join ISIL, and further demonstrates our commitment to bring to justice all those who seek to provide material support to terrorists. I would like to thank all the members of law enforcement whose tireless efforts made this result possible."

"As presented in trial, Tairod Nathan Webster Pugh was willing to become a martyr, using his U.S. military training as a weapon for ISIL. Instead, found guilty of his crimes, he is facing a lengthy incarceration. We are pleased the jury found his actions confirmed his expressed desire to cause violence and destruction on behalf of this terrorist organization. The FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Forces continue to work globally with our partners to successfully stop such actions before they happen, keep communities safe, and bring criminals to justice," stated FBI Assistant Director-in-Charge Rodriguez.

"We applaud today's verdict, finding the first ISIL defendant guilty after attempting to travel to Syria and wage jihad. Those who adhere to ISIL's deadly terrorist agenda should be on notice: reject this ideology or face swift justice in American courts. It is fitting that the first ISIL conviction case is here in the Eastern District of New York, which has prosecuted more terrorism cases than any other district in the country. It is to them—and the many others on the Joint Terrorism Task Force—that New Yorkers owe their gratitude for the relentless efforts to keep our city safe," said Police Commissioner Bratton.

At trial, the government presented evidence that, prior to traveling overseas to try to join ISIL, the defendant served in the U.S. Air Force as an avionics instrument system specialist and received training in the installation and maintenance of aircraft engines, 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 airplane mechanic. The defendant lived abroad for over a year before his arrest in this case.

On January 10, 2015, the defendant traveled from Egypt to Turkey in an effort to cross the border into Syria to join ISIL to engage in violent “jihad.” Turkish authorities denied the defendant entry, however, and returned him to Egypt. At the time of his detention, the defendant was carrying a laptop computer and four USB thumb drives that he had stripped of their plastic casings in an effort to destroy their contents and thereby make them unavailable to investigators. The defendant also was carrying solar power chargers, compasses, and a black ski mask. Foreign government officials quickly deported the defendant to the United States, where the FBI closely monitored him, relying in part on a covert undercover employee who encountered the defendant at John F. Kennedy airport. The defendant was arrested on January 16, 2015, in Asbury Park, New Jersey, and thereafter indicted in the Eastern District of New York.

At trial, the government presented evidence obtained from the defendant’s laptop computer and social media posts, among other exhibits. The defendant’s laptop contained Internet searches for “borders controlled by Islamic state.” The government also introduced evidence of the defendant’s Internet searches for “Flames of War” (an ISIL propaganda video) as well as terrorist videos he had downloaded, including one horrific video showing ISIL members executing prisoners. In addition, statements to coworkers and social media posts established the defendant’s empathy and support for ISIL’s cause and terrorist methods.

The government also introduced into evidence at trial a letter, drafted by the defendant on January 5, 2015, shortly before he left Egypt for Turkey on his way to Syria. In that letter, the defendant proclaimed, “I am a Mujahid. I am a sword against the oppressor and a shield for the oppressed. I will use the talents and skills given to me by Allah to establish and defend the Islamic State. There is only 2 possible outcomes for me. Victory or Martyr.”

Based on his trial convictions, the defendant faces a maximum sentence of up to 35 years in prison.

The government’s case is being handled by the Office’s National Security & Cybercrime Section. Assistant United States Attorneys Samuel P. Nitze, Tiana A. Demas, and Mark Bini are in charge of the prosecution, with assistance provided by Trial Attorney Larry Schneider of the Counterterrorism Section of the Department of Justice.

The Defendant:

TAIROD NATHAN WEBSTER PUGH
Age: 48
Neptune, New Jersey

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