

Replacement of Quantico brig commander provides military opportunity to end mistreatment of alleged WikiLeaks whistle-blower

By the Bradley Manning Support Network

QUANTICO, Virginia, 28 January 2011 -- Supporters of accused WikiLeaks whistleblower US Army PFC Bradley Manning are calling for Manning's detention status to be changed from maximum to medium security, that the "prevention of injury" (POI) order be lifted, and for the military to cease using "suicide watch" for punitive purposes. Without cause, Manning is the only inmate at Quantico subjected to either "max" confinement or POI. The lifting of these classifications would allow Manning to move outside his cell without restraints, perform jobs within the brig and have social interaction with other inmates.

This week the Marine Corps replaced brig commander Chief Warrant Officer 4 (CWO4) James Averhart with Chief Warrant Officer 2 (CWO2) Denise Barnes, stating that the change was a pre-planned rotation that was not "situationally driven."

"Pre-trial confinement is supposed to be about ensuring a servicemember's presence at court martial, yet for eight months now Bradley Manning has been subjected to extreme pre-trial punishment through the arbitrary use of the maximum classification and the 'prevention of injury' order. We certainly hope that the new Quantico brig commander will finally treat Manning as other inmates," stated Jeff Paterson, Oakland, California-based project director of Courage to Resist and a member of the Bradley Manning Support Network.

"There have been consistent abuses of discretion in the case of Bradley Manning," said Kevin Zeese, a Washington DC attorney and steering committee member of the Bradley Manning Support Network. "The previous commander abused his discretion so that Manning was punished rather than being treated like a typical pre-trial detainee. We have seen consistent cruel and unusual punishment of Manning."

Bradley Manning's attorney, David Coombs of Rhode Island, filed a complaint last week asserting that CWO4 James Averhart abused his discretion by placing Manning on an unjustified, punitive suicide watch regime for two days immediately after 150 supporters of Manning's rallied at Quantico's main entrance on Martin Luther King, Jr. day.

Coombs yesterday catalogued in detail the fact that Manning's conditions of pre-trial confinement have been radically different than what has been described by military spokespersons.

"Despite the assertion of Pentagon Press Secretary Geoff Morrell, PFC Bradley Manning is not being treated like every other detainee at the Quantico brig. Morrell stated during today's Pentagon briefing that PFC Manning's 'confinement is not in the least different from the manner in which anyone else at the brig is being held.' This statement is patently false," notes Coombs on his blog. Coombs also explained that his client was the only detainee at Quantico held under the maximum custody regime or the highly-restrictive "prevention of injury watch" order.

Concerns for Manning's human rights have been rising this week. Amnesty International wrote Defense Secretary Gates urging a review of Manning's pre-trial confinement conditions, a former commander at Quantico raised questions about the unusual conditions, and Manning's confinement was addressed in a White House press briefing. Meanwhile, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture continues to investigate the situation.

Over 50,000 people from around the world have already helped pay \$110,000 toward Manning's legal defense, signed the public "We Stand with Bradley Manning" statement that will become a full-page New York Times newspaper ad, and/or have signed an online petition in support of Manning's human rights.

"If we're to believe the charges against Bradley Manning, it's clear that this is a textbook example of a whistle-blower acting in the interests of an informed democracy. He certainly deserves support," added supporter Jeff Paterson.