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# MailOnline

## U.S. Army launches formal investigation into Bowe Bergdahl's desertion and captivity after the Taliban claimed he was a collaborator

- Secretary of the Army John McHugh has announced a formal investigation into the circumstances of Bowe Bergdahl's 2009 disappearance
- Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Martin Dempsey said that 'like any American, he is innocent until proven guilty'
- A major classified file exists on Bergdahl's conduct in the army before his captivity and during it, a Pentagon official told Fox News
- Report claims that many in the defense department have concerns he may have been an 'active collaborator with the enemy'
- It comes after Taliban claims in 2010 that the soldier converted to Islam and changed his name to Abdullah while being held
- Was scheduled to be promoted for a second time in absentia this summer and legal experts say he could receive five years'-worth back pay

By [Daniel Bates](#)

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Sergeant Bowe Bergdahl is now the subject of a new government investigation after the Secretary of the Army announced that they have launched a full inquiry into the mysterious circumstances surrounding his 2009 disappearance.

The Tuesday afternoon announcement comes after a spokesman for the Taliban claimed that Bergdahl has been working as a collaborator with the terrorist organization during his five years in captivity.

'As an Army, we are grateful that an American soldier is back in American hands. The warrior ethos is more than words, and we should never leave a comrade behind,' Army Secretary John McHugh said in a statement released Tuesday.



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**Investigated: Sergeant Bowe Bergdahl was reportedly examined by military intelligence amid Taliban claims he was a collaborator**

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'Our first priority is ensuring Sgt. Bergdahl's health and beginning his reintegration process. There is no timeline for this, and we will take as long as medically necessary to aid his recovery.

'As Chairman Dempsey indicated, the Army will then review this in a comprehensive, coordinated effort that will include speaking with Sgt. Bergdahl to better learn from him the circumstances of his disappearance and captivity.

**'He said some strange things, like, "I could get lost in those mountains," which, at the time, that doesn't really strike you as someone who is going to leave their weapon and walk out'**

*-Matt Vierkant, a former squad leader in Bergdahl's platoon*

'All other decisions will be made thereafter, and in accordance with appropriate regulations, policies and practices.'

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Martin Dempsey echoed that statement on his Facebook page, writing that while if any misconduct is found, Army leaders 'will not look away' but until that time, he is protected by an American ethos of assuming innocence.

'The questions about this particular soldier's conduct are separate from our effort to recover ANY U.S. service member in enemy captivity. This was likely the last, best opportunity to free him. As for the circumstances of his capture, when he is able to provide them, we'll learn the facts.

'Like any American, he is innocent until proven guilty.'

There are a variety of offenses related to an absence without proper approval, and a number of potential actions could be taken by the military. He could be tried by court martial under the Uniform Code of Military Justice for desertion; he could be given a non-judicial punishment for a lesser charge, such as being away without leave. And he could be given credit for time already served while he was a prisoner.

Lisa Schenck, a former military judge who is now a professor at George Washington University's law school, told [US News and World Report](#) that Bergdahl already have a charge sheet listing alleged crimes as the remnants of an earlier 2010 Pentagon investigation, where they reportedly found 'incontrovertible' evidence that he left the base voluntarily.

She said that one of the possible punishments for abandoning one's post during a time of war is the death penalty.



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**Claims: Bowe Bergdahl's Taliban abductors said he converted to Islam in captivity and had changed his name to Abdullah**

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Others think that it is unlikely that he will be issued a death order, especially in light of the massive effort that the government went through to retrieve him.

'Death is still a lawful sentence for desertion in a time of war, I'm not suggesting that's not in the realm of

possibilities for a case like this... there could be significant punishment, significant confinement,' Victor Hansen, a former military prosecutor who teaches at the New England School of Law.

In the past 150 years, there have only been two cases when a soldier has been executed for desertion, and the last time was in 1945.

Bergdahl was promoted in absentia two years after he went missing, being promoted from private first class to sergeant in September 2011.

**CNN** reported Monday that he was scheduled for a second promotion- to staff sergeant- in June of this year if he was not found in time.

Geoffrey Corn, a South Texas College of Law professor and former judge advocate general, told **Business Insider** that the Pentagon never followed through on specific criteria held for deserters, meaning that Bergdahl could end up with five years back pay.

'The military has to process paperwork so that you can't get back pay and leave and so that the unit can get a replacement... According to the Pentagon there's no evidence he was ever dropped from the rolls,' Mr Corn said.

Matt Vierkant, 27, of Sioux Falls, South Dakota, was a team leader of another squad in Bergdahl's platoon, and when asked about the statement Sunday by National Security Advisor Susan Rice that Bergdahl served 'with honor and distinction,' he said: 'That statement couldn't be further from the truth. I don't know if she was misinformed or doesn't know about the investigations and everything else, or what.'

He said Bergdahl's fellow soldiers knew within five or 10 minutes from the discovery of disappearance that he had walked away.

In retrospect the signs were there, he said, but there was nothing so definitive that would have prompted action.

'He said some strange things, like, "I could get lost in those mountains," which, at the time, that doesn't really strike you as someone who is going to leave their weapon and walk out.'

Vierkant said he believes it's paramount that an investigation determine whether Bergdahl deserted or collaborated with the enemy.

'It shouldn't even be a question of whether, it should question of when,' he said.



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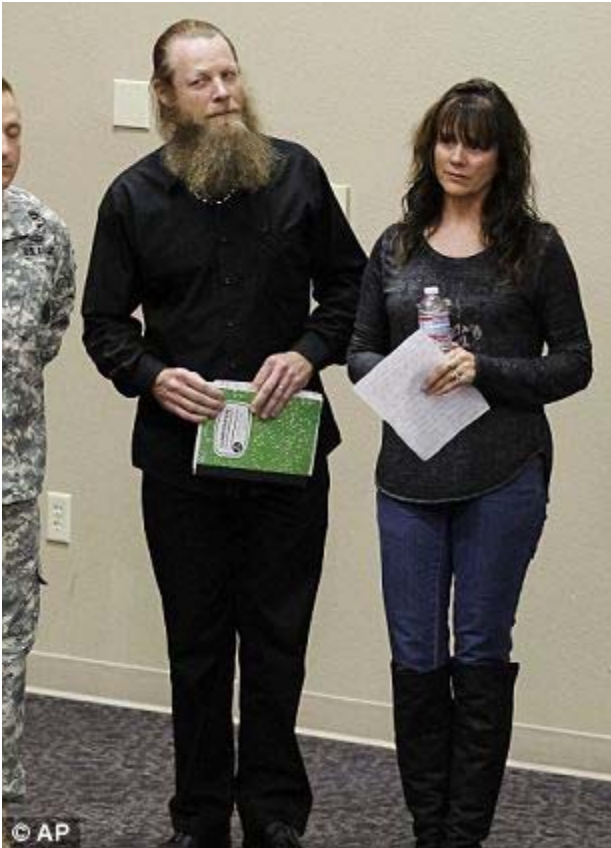
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**Fears: A Fox News report claims that officials will be looking at whether Bowe Bergdahl worked with the enemy**

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**Not typical: Friends and family have said Bowe Bergdahl's entry into the armed forces was a shock. The ballet loving young man, pictured dancing right, told his parents, left, he wanted to go to war for humanitarian reasons**

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Intelligence officials involved in the 2010 investigation looked into his life before he disappeared and in the months afterwards, it is said.

The reports shed new light on 2010 reports that Bergdahl was training Taliban fighters in bomb-making and ambush skills which were dismissed as propaganda at the time.

One of his captors said that he converted to Islam and was going under the name Abdullah and was 'very relaxed in our company'.

**'That statement couldn't be further from the truth. I don't know if she was misinformed or doesn't know about the investigations and everything else, or what.'**

*-Vierkant said of Susan Rice's declaration that Bergdahl had served 'with honor and distinction'*

It has also been claimed that Bergdahl was so trusted by his kidnappers that they let him sleep without restraints and go bird and rabbit hunting with an old British rifle.

Bergdahl was the only US prisoner of war until he was freed last week in exchange for five Taliban commanders being held in Guantanamo Bay.

But the euphoria surrounding the news was short lived as questions began to be asked about what really happened during his time in captivity and on that fateful day on 30 June 2009 in Paktika province near the Pakistani border with Afghanistan.

Many of those who also served in the 1st Battalion, 501st Infantry Regiment claimed he was a 'deserter'.

Others have pointed out the similarities between what happened to Bergdahl and fictional Sergeant Nicholas Brody in the television series Homeland, who converted to Islam and joined Al Qaeda while in their custody.

The Fox News report cited unnamed intelligence officials who said that they feared Bergdahl could have actively worked with the enemy.

A Pentagon source said: 'Everybody's looking at this. He's not going to get a free pass.

'He's going to have a lot of questions to answer - a lot. Is he a hero? No.'

The Pentagon official added that no congressional committee has yet requested the classified file, but if such a request were made they would be granted access to it.

Back in 2010 reports that Bergdahl, 28, from Hailey, Idaho, was a collaborator were dismissed out of hand by the military.



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**Announcement: President Obama welcomed Jani and Bob Bergdahl to the White House to formally announce the prisoner swap for Bowe Bergdahl**

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**Overshadowed: The soldier's homecoming has led to questions around his capture and his time in the army**

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The Sunday Times spoke with Taliban deputy district commander in Paktika, who called himself Haji Nadeem, who told the newspaper that Bergdahl taught him how to dismantle a mobile phone and turn it into a remote control for a roadside bomb.

**LEGAL CONSEQUENCES: WHAT IS IN STORE FOR BOWE BERGDAHL?**

There are a variety of offenses related to an absence without proper approval, and a number of potential actions could be taken by the military.

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In the past 150 years, there have only been two cases when a soldier has been executed for desertion, and the last time was in 1945.

He also taught Taliban fighters ambush skills and was known as 'our dear guest', said Nadeem.

Things changed in 2010 when Bergdahl staged an escape attempt by jumping out of the first floor window of his mud and brick home.

He was captured three days later and 'fought like a boxer' when he was found, needing five militants to subdue him.

[The Daily Beast](#) said that he was discovered in a shallow trench exhausted, weak and nearly naked having spent three days with no food or water.

After that he was shackled at all times.

Hafiz Hanif, a young Afghan militant who was interviewed by Newsweek, said that he saw Bergdahl in 2010 on a mountain trail in North Waziristan, on the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

He described him as having a beard and wearing loose-fitting tribal clothing but unlike all the others he had no weapon.

Hanif saw Bergdahl again several months later in the Shawal Valley area on the back of a pickup truck with two militants either side of him.

Adding to the speculation about Bergdahl being a collaborator is a report in [The New York Times](#) which said that he wrote a letter which he left with his belongings which said he wanted to start a 'new life' but did not explain what he meant.

Before his disappearance Bergdahl also mailed home boxes containing his uniform and wrote in an email to his parents which read: 'I am ashamed to be an American.

'And the title of US soldier is just the lie of fools.'

Wikileaks cables which detail all the US military radio exchanges after Bergdahl's disappearance show the Taliban hardly able to contain their glee that they have captured an American.

Chatter between Taliban fighters reveals that one of them said that Bergdahl 'had no gun with him' when he was captured.

Another Taliban fighter says that Bergdahl was 'sitting' but it isn't clear if this refers to the moment he was captured.

The entire episode is becoming a headache for President Obama who hoped that he would be seen as a triumphant commander in chief for bringing Bergdahl home.



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**Trial? Bergdahl (in T-shirt)faces the threat of desertion charges, the Army announced just days after Obama's national security advisor Susan Rice said he served with 'honor and distinction'**

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**Penalty: A former comrade of Bergdahl's (seated with Blackfoot Company, 1st Battalion 501st infantry Regiment (Airborne) 25th Infantry Division in Afghanistan) said he should face the firing squad for what he did**

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Instead he has been forced to backtrack after initially saying that the soldier had served his country 'honorably'.

The President, who is currently on a tour of Poland, changed his tone said he now believes that it was the right thing to do the prisoner swap because America has a 'sacred rule' that no soldier is left behind.

Bergdahl was serving with the 1st Battalion, 501st Infantry Regiment in Paktika province near the Pakistani border with Afghanistan when he went missing in the early hours of 30 June 2009.

He had been at part of an Observation Post with 28 colleagues men and a few trucks set up in a defensive position to protect themselves.

Some of the men were sleeping in the trucks they had driven in on and others were camped out with their sleeping bags in the open. It was not until the 9am roll call that they realized he was gone.

Up until this point Bergdahl had been seen as a strange loner who wouldn't socialize with the other men. Instead, he would stick to his bunk, learning Pashto and Arabic with Rosetta Stone.

A week earlier he had sent his belongings and computer home to his parents after setting out in an email to his father that he was 'ashamed to be an American' after what he had seen in Afghanistan - including soldiers laughing at running over an Afghan boy with an armored vehicle.

The soldier who discovered him missing, said: 'The first I heard was when one of the guards said he could not

find Bergdahl.



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**Provisions: Bergdahl walked off without his gun, but with water, a compass and two days of rations**

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'I asked him: "What do you mean you can't find him?" He said he couldn't find him anywhere. We sent two guys to the top of the observation post in case he was sleeping between two trucks, I thought maybe he's sleeping down there.

'We also sent one of the men to see if he was drinking tea with the Afghans. We looked at his sleeping bag and it was nicely folded.

'Bergdahl's backpack was missing, so was his knife. I knew right away he had not been captured - he had walked off.'

The soldier was told by an Afghan boy they spoke to that told them he had seen an American soldier walking away through the fields.

The soldier said: 'Everyone looked at me like I was crazy but I was right, he had walked off.'

Captain Sorenson, 36, who has now left the military, told MailOnline: 'The operation to try and find Bergdahl must have cost millions.

'We had F-15s flying constant missions for 48 hours and had 52 planes doing search runs. There were A-10s, Apache helicopters, British Tornados, British Navy Harriers and German Tornados.

'When we found out that he had walked off the base we were all extremely angry and could not understand why he did it. We spent a couple of days looking for him when other soldiers were getting bombed, we couldn't support Navy SEALs and other people.'

Read more:

- [Sources: Intelligence community investigated Bergdahl's conduct](#)
- [White House Flips, Now Calling Bergdahl a 'Prisoner of War'](#)
- [Bowe Bergdahl's Vanishing Before Capture Angered His Unit](#)
- [Sgt. Bergdahl to the Firing Squad? - US News](#)
- [CNN's Barbara Starr Twitter](#)



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[Mr. Singh](#), Nottinghamshire, moments ago

Homeland?

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[slamradio](#), new york, 47 minutes ago

smoke and mirrors. even obama isn't dumb enough to think that he can pull this nonsense off without some major fallout. this trade was never about Bergdahl, they could have done this any time over the past 5 years if they wanted to. one of those five prisoners was important to someone. he needed to be released for something completely unrelated, and we will never know what. releasing just the one would be a red flag. he was hidden among five. congress would never okay releasing the one or the five so dear leader had to throw together this phony swap. he's painting it up as good as he can, but whatever he paid for must be worth it to him to literally risk everything. that's it, deal is done, obama has made his payment. don't know what he paid for, but i'm sure it ain' good.

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12

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[Mason](#), NC, United States, 52 minutes ago

court martial and dishonorably discharge his sorry ass.

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[mort dog](#), Auckland, New Zealand, 1 hour ago

He did what he did for himself. If he really thought he would be helping the Afghan people he was deluded and it looks like he helped the Taliban instead which in turn may result in more of his former army comrades being killed. How would you compare this guy with Mr Snowden i wonder?

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[Hope4Change](#), Chicago, United States, 1 hour ago

Susan Rice said he served with 'honor and distinction' - this fits perfectly with president O's "fundamental transformation" of America. Traitors are heros; VA vets expendable.

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1  
28

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[david](#), Ia, United States, 2 hours ago

I would not expect much Obama will have his military crony¿s in on the investigation.

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[Georgie](#), Dublin, Ireland, 3 hours ago

He's sentenced already he got his punishment We have to forgive and forget

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108  
5

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[Cat woman](#), Losange, 2 hours ago

I love that dry Irish humor!

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[Ray](#), Tulsa OK, 1 hour ago

Are ye mad??

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[Kingss](#), London, Morocco, 3 hours ago

Looks like hi father was also in capitative also!!

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7  
51

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[Emily](#), somewhere, United States, 3 hours ago

Maybe he's like Theon Greyjoy now and is a mole for the Taliban.

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[4](#)  
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[Ferrylas](#), Boca, United States, 3 hours ago

I tend to believe his platoon leader and fellow solders over the Obama spin on this They claim: He deserted his post voluntarily. Left a letter saying how he hated America . Took up with the Taliban and now , it may be , he actually collaborated with the Taliban One fellow solder did reveal that it was questioned at the time how the units movements always seemed to be known ahead of time by the Taliban.... If I hear one more time that this soldier was a hero..." a honorable man who served his country with honor " as Susan Rice claims....I'll scream The Obama White House lives in a Progressive Liberal bubble fueled by arrogance and self importance.... ALL to the detriment if the U.S This solder on his return should be tried in a military court... And sent to jail fir a LONG time The honorable men were the solders who died...all 6 of them... While searching for him. They are the heroes.

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[113](#)

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[mange227](#), Townsville, Australia, 2 hours ago

Excellent comment, have a green arrow. I concur; if the man is proven to have willingly deserted his post to join the Taleban, he should be tried as a traitor. The whole incident smacks of political opportunism which would seem to have backfired on Obama spectacularly. Let's hope that Obama and his administration is impeached for the release of the five Taleban prisoners in exchange for this traitor's 'release'.

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