

Beat: News

Ex-Taliban detainee U.S. Sgt. Bergdahl returns to active duty

-, 14.07.2014, 20:47 Time

USPA News - U.S. Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl, who was held captive by the Taliban for five years until his controversial release in a prisoner exchange nearly two months ago, has returned to active military duty after finishing his reintegration process at a Texas hospital, the U.S. Army said on Monday.

Lt. Colonel Alayne Conway, an army spokeswoman, said Bergdahl was assigned to Fort Sam Houston (JBSA), a joint army base in San Antonio, Texas, after completing the final phase of his reintegration process. "He will return to regular duty within the command where he can contribute to the mission," Conway said. U.S. Army spokesman Don Manuszewski could not confirm a news report that said Bergdahl would have two other soldiers helping him readjust to life in the military, but he said every individual who enters a new organization within the armed forces is assigned a sponsor to help them acclimate to their new surroundings. He said it would be highly likely for Bergdahl to have also been assigned a sponsor. Bergdahl was previously deployed with 1st Battalion, 501st Infantry Regiment in the 4th Brigade Combat Team of 25th Infantry Division when he disappeared on June 30, 2009, in Afghanistan's Paktika province. The Army subsequently opened an investigation and concluded that Bergdahl had left his base of his own free will without authorization before his capture by the Taliban, though they have not accused him of desertion. The swap for his release in exchange for five Taliban commanders imprisoned at Guantanamo Bay incited a wave of controversy in the United States, with critics calling Bergdahl a deserter who endangered the lives of his colleagues who were attempting to find him. A photo that surfaced last week showed Bergdahl standing next to a senior Taliban leader, who smiles and holds his arm around him. On June 16, the Army announced that it had appointed Maj. Gen. Kenneth Dahl, an Army officer with Afghanistan combat experience, as the investigating officer into Bergdahl's ordeal. Dahl was given access to previously assembled documentary evidence, including the 2009 investigation into the incident, but he was not given permission to interview Bergdahl until the reintegration process was complete and Bergdahl was approved for such interaction. Later in June, Bergdahl's medical status at Brooke Army Medical Center changed from inpatient care to continued reintegration and medical care as an outpatient on JBSA, according to a media update released by the Army on June 23. He underwent a series of debriefings and counseling sessions from Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape (SERE) psychologists to ensure that his mental health had improved to the point where he was able to return to duty. Since his release on May 31, Bergdahl has yet to speak openly to the public about his experience, and Army spokeswoman Tatjana Christian confirmed that Bergdahl had not yet been interviewed by an investigating officer as of Monday afternoon. Army officials had previously said the reintegration process would be the first priority before conducting interviews to determine the facts surrounding his disappearance.

Article online:

<https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-2442/ex-taliban-detainee-us-sgt-bergdahl-returns-to-active-duty.html>

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Editorial program service of General News Agency:

UPA United Press Agency LTD
483 Green Lanes

UK, London N13NV 4BS
contact (at) unitedpressagency.com
Official Federal Reg. No. 7442619