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Forces looking for 'other Wilcoxs'

CHRIS SHANNON
The Cape Breton Post

SYDNEY — The Canadian Forces is launching an investigation into the conduct of several soldiers who served alongside Matthew Wilcox in Afghanistan.

The Cape Breton Post has learned the commander of the reserve forces in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island is looking into allegations of misuse of weapons by reservists, which surfaced in two short video clips that were entered into evidence by the defence during Wilcox's court martial.

Col. Tom Stinson, commander of 36 Brigade Group, said now that Wilcox has been sentenced to four years in prison for the shooting death of Cpl. Kevin Megeney, the forces can ask probing questions of its soldiers.

"We're going to find out what happened, when it happened and in what context it happened," Stinson told the Post.

"And, yeah, we're going to find out if there were other people doing stupid things."

Wilcox's defence team first disclosed the video clips in court July 9 during the testimony of Sgt. Nathan Crosby, a close friend of Megeney's who bunked with both him and Wilcox while in Afghanistan.

In the most shocking clip, which was taped while reservists were on exercises at CFB Wainwright, Alta. in October 2006, Crosby was shown holding a pistol to the head of his section commander, Sgt. Brad Joyce. Several soldiers could be heard laughing in the background.

One soldier asks, "Do you have anything nice to say about Crosby?" and Joyce, smiling, says he had nothing nice to say about his second-in-charge.

"Click," said Crosby, a grainy figure in the video, as he pulled the trigger.

A second video showed Crosby, who races to assemble a 9-mm pistol, point it at the cameraman and pull the trigger.

The barrel of the gun is pointed toward Megeney, who is holding the video camera.

During the trial, Crosby testified that despite acknowledging this was against standard operating procedures, he did nothing wrong because he had "proven it safe" by ensuring the pistol's chamber and magazine were empty.

He agreed with the defence that what he did was a serious violation of weapon procedures and it set a "very good example" of the cavalier attitude of weapon safety of some soldiers in the military.

Stinson described the vast majority of his soldiers as the "best trained and the best equipped in the world," but he conceded there were problems in the platoon.

"I can say I have enough of a concern that I'm going to dig deeper and I'm going to find out. But I don't want to jump to conclusions yet," he said.

"To ask if these guys might face penalties, it's too early to ask, it's too early to tell you."

Military law expert Col. (Ret'd) Michel Drapeau expects the Wilcox case will have wide-ranging implications.

During the prosecutor's closing address, Maj. Jason Samson said many leaders in the forces were awaiting a sentence harsh enough to deter soldiers from mishandling weapons.

"Will they think and pause before playing a game of quick draw?" Samson asked military judge Cmdr. Peter Lamont.

Drapeau, who was once a reservist, questioned how a military that prides itself in being a leadership-driven organization allowed these incidents to occur.

"I think the problem is not only with Wilcox, there's probably a certain familiarity with (soldiers mishandling weapons) and if it is, then there's been a failing somewhere along the way," he said from his Ottawa law office, Thursday.

"I'm not suggesting we should send other people to jail. I'm just suggesting we take a bloody hard look at it to see if there's any other Wilcoxs."

National Defence Minister Peter MacKay, who is reviewing the Wilcox decision, does not "involve himself in a chain of command issue" and would not be commenting on the case,

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