

Chicago Officer Pleads Not Guilty To Murder Charges

BY CARLA K. JOHNSON
Associated Press

CHICAGO — A white Chicago police officer charged with murder in the 2014 fatal shooting of black teenager Laquan McDonald pleaded not guilty Tuesday.

Jason Van Dyke is “hanging in there” and wants to tell his side of what happened so he’s not seen “as this cold-blooded killer,” defense attorney Dan Herbert said after the court hearing. Herbert added that they haven’t ruled out asking for a change of venue. The case is in Cook County Criminal Court in Chicago where demonstrators have staged marches protesting the shooting and how it’s been handled.

Van Dyke, 37, faces six counts of first-degree murder and one of official misconduct in the death of 17-year-old McDonald. The officer, wearing a dark suit and blue striped tie, appeared in court Tuesday as his lawyer entered the plea on his behalf.

Judge Vincent Gaughan set the next hearing for Jan. 29.

Cook County prosecutors were not available for comment after the arraignment.

Public outcry has been furious since a dashcam video was released last month showing the veteran officer shooting McDonald 16 times. The teenager, armed with a knife, was veering away



NANCY STONE/CHICAGO TRIBUNE/TNS
Police officer Jason Van Dyke arrives at the Leighton Criminal Court building in Chicago on Tuesday. He pled not guilty in the shooting death of Laquan McDonald.

from officers when Van Dyke opened fire.

The footage sparked days of street demonstrations, the forced resignation of Police Superintendent Garry McCarthy and a broad federal civil rights investigation of the Police Department’s practices and how allegations of officer misconduct are handled.

Over the weekend, Chicago police killed two other people, a 55-year-old woman who was shot accidentally and a 19-year-old man police described as “combative” before he was shot. Both were black. Police have not released the race of the

officer or officers involved and will not say how many officers fired their weapons or what the man and woman were doing before they were shot.

Mayor Rahm Emanuel, under pressure from community activists to resign since the McDonald video was released, was due to return Tuesday afternoon from a family vacation in Cuba.

Herbert, the lawyer for Van Dyke, said policy changes in the Chicago Police Department, which Emanuel’s office has hinted at and may include more training, would be beneficial.

Van Dyke, who has

been free since paying the \$150,000 required of his \$1.5 million bail, was suspended from the police force without pay after he was charged.

Following Tuesday’s hearing, the Rev. Marvin Hunter, McDonald’s great-uncle, called for gavel-to-gavel televised coverage of the trial. He said it would be “in the best interest of fairness and justice in this case.”

Hunter added that he and others think there is a culture within the Cook County criminal justice system and the Chicago Police Department “where police feel comfortable with murdering African-American people.”

Mexican Prosecutor: Vigilantes Infiltrated By Criminals

MEXICO CITY (AP) — The chief prosecutor in the western Mexico state of Michoacan said Tuesday that criminals made up a large percentage of the “self-defense” vigilante movement that sprang up nearly three years ago to challenge a local drug cartel.

The comments by Michoacan state prosecutor Jose Martin Godoy were the most open recognition yet the groups that arose in 2013 to fight the Knights Templar cartel included a large number of former gang members, many known as “forgiven ones” after apologizing for their crimes.

Godoy told local media that about half the vigilante movement’s leaders were honest, but the other half were drug traffickers or other criminals.

“In the self-defense groups, half of them rose up to create conditions of peace and tranquility and detain the criminal groups, but the other half, and the public knows this, were the well-

known ‘forgiven ones’ who were part of a criminal group,” Godoy said.

“There were a lot of people taken in to these (vigilante) groups, who in the end were involved in the criminal activities, in (synthetic drug) laboratories and drug trafficking,” he said.

Hipolito Mora, one of the founders of the vigilante movement who has battled other self-defense groups he branded corrupt, said Tuesday that there had long been signs of rotten eggs in the movement.

“The self-defense forces were infiltrated ... and the infiltrators passed themselves off as self-defense leaders,” Mora said, adding: “At last, he (Godoy) has publicly acknowledged that some self-defense leaders are criminals ... it took a while.”

Godoy’s statement came in response to the discovery Monday of the bullet-ridden bodies of four men dumped by a roadside in Michoacan.

One of the dead men was identified as Carlos Rosales Mendoza, 53, alias “El Tisico,” or “The Tubercular One.” Rosales Mendoza was one of the founders and leaders of La Familia Michoacana cartel and then the Knights Templar cartel, which arose from the remnants of La Familia.

Those gangs systematically extorted money from Michoacan residents and killed and kidnapped people until the vigilante movement rose up to fight them.

Godoy said Rosales Mendoza had been meeting with vigilante leaders before, including possibly at the time of his killing.

“Everything indicates that recently, he (Rosales Mendoza) had begun to have contact with some leaders of the self-defense group, he began to have meetings,” Godoy said. “He went to a meeting ... and everything indicates that things went wrong and they killed him there.”

Egypt Court Upholds Jail For Man Convicted Of Defaming Islam

BY MARAM MAZEN
Associated Press

CAIRO — An Egyptian court confirmed a prison term for a former TV host who was convicted of “defaming religious symbols” and Muslim scholars after he called for removal of what he called extremist material in texts of religious interpretation and heritage.

A court of appeals reduced Islam Behery’s prison term to one year from a five-year sentence issued by the initial court. Behery’s lawyer, Gamil Said, told The Associated Press on Tuesday that he plans to challenge the verdict, which was issued Monday night.

Behery, a researcher on Islamic heritage, had hosted a TV program on a private chan-

nel discussing religious texts and he was a vocal advocate for religious reforms. He argued often that some texts of interpretation by historic Islamic scholars — including ones upheld and revered by Al-Azhar, the pre-eminent seat of Sunni scholarship — contain passages that promote extremism. He said such texts need to be reviewed and that in some cases, passages from historic texts need to be discarded.

His comments, as well as criticisms of Al-Azhar, raised heavy controversy, and individuals filed complaints to the state prosecutors, who pursued the charges against him. The station took his show off the air in April.

Said argued that Behery did not deny any texts from the Quran itself, Islam’s holy

book, but instead focused on the works of scholars interpreting it at different periods of history.

“The Holy Quran itself calls for logical thought,” the lawyer said. “It is not prohibited for any person to discuss the scholars’ opinions, because it is not possible for an opinion that was stated 700 or 800 years ago on a specific issue to be implemented on an issue after all these years.”

Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi has called for a “revolution” in Islam to purge extremism, but he has also underlined that state institutions, including Al-Azhar, are to lead any reforms in religious teaching in a way that doesn’t disturb the public. Al-Azhar has focused mainly on purging schools of books by modern figures from the

Muslim Brotherhood, the more than 80-year-old fundamentalist group, and formerly Egypt’s most organized opposition political force. El-Sissi’s government has branded the Brotherhood a terrorist organization and has been waging a heavy crackdown against it since the military removed a Brotherhood leader, Mohammed Morsi, from the presidency following massive protests against him in 2013.

‘Affluenza’ Teen Planned Flight To Mexico

FORT WORTH, Texas (AP) — A teen fugitive who’s known for using an “affluenza” defense and his mother attempted to disguise themselves and disappear among the American tourists thronging a Mexican resort city for the holidays, but are now in custody and will be returned to the U.S. after a cellphone used to order pizza gave away their location, authorities said Tuesday.

Tarrant County Sheriff Dee Anderson said 18-year-old Ethan Couch — who was on juvenile probation after killing four people in a drunken driving wreck — and his mother had prepared to be gone a while, even dyeing Couch’s blond hair black, before being detained Monday in the Pacific Coast city of Puerto Vallarta.

“They had planned to disappear. They even had something that was almost akin to a going-away party before leaving town,” Anderson said. He would not give details about the event, including how many people attended.

During the sentencing phase of Couch’s trial, a defense expert argued that his wealthy parents coddled him into a sense of irresponsibility — a condition the expert termed “affluenza.” The condition is not recognized as a medical diagnosis by the American Psychiatric Association, and its invocation drew ridicule.

Couch disappeared as authorities investigated whether he had violated the terms of his probation.

Gains In City Vindicate US-Led Strategy

BAGHDAD (AP) — The advance of Iraqi forces into the heart of Ramadi, a restive city that fell to the Islamic State group earlier this year, in some ways vindicated the U.S.-led coalition’s strategy for rolling back the extremists — but victory has come at a high cost, and the same tactics might not work elsewhere.

The battle for Ramadi was waged by the Iraqi military — rather than Shiite or Kurdish militias — with elite counterterrorism units advancing under the cover of coalition airstrikes and raising the Iraqi national flag over the main government complex in the provincial capital on Monday.

Pockets of resistance remain, but the majority of Ramadi is under government control for the first time since May, when IS militants punched their way into the city with a series of massive suicide car bombs, scattering and humiliating Iraq’s beleaguered security forces.

Brig. Gen. Ahmed al-Belawi said “heavy and concentrated airstrikes” by the U.S.-led coalition killed IS fighters, destroyed their vehicles and blew up suicide car bombs before they could be deployed, allowing his forces to advance into the city.

“I think this fight shows the Iraqis are ready to fight and these calls for U.S. ground troops are not the best strategy moving forward,” said Ahmed Ali, a senior fellow at the Institute of Regional and International Studies at the American University of Iraq.

Officers Still In Jeopardy Over Rice Case

CLEVELAND (AP) — Despite the grand jury decision not to charge a white patrolman in the killing of 12-year-old Tamir Rice, the case is far from over for the city of Cleveland, the officers involved in the shooting, or the black boy’s grief-stricken family.

The family is suing the city, federal prosecutors are looking into possible civil rights charges against Timothy Loehmann and his partner, and the two officers face a departmental investigation that could result in disciplinary action, including firing.

Tamir was carrying what turned out to be a pellet gun when Loehmann shot and killed the boy within two seconds of emerging from his police cruiser in November 2014. On Monday, prosecutors said a grand jury concluded that Loehmann reasonably believed that it was a real gun and that his life was in danger.

The case has stirred racial tensions and added Cleveland to the list of U.S. cities — Ferguson, Missouri; Baltimore; North Charleston, South Carolina; and New York City, among them — where blacks have died in the past two years at the hands of police.

On Tuesday, about 50 people marched peacefully in front of the county courthouse in downtown Cleveland to protest the grand jury decision. Demonstrators chanted, “Justice for Tamir!”

2 Suspected Of Plotting Attacks Arrested

BRUSSELS (AP) — Belgian authorities announced Tuesday they have arrested two men and seized military-type uniforms and Islamic State group propaganda in connection with a suspected plot to unleash holiday season attacks against police, soldiers and celebrated locations in Brussels.

The attacks under preparation “were the same style as those perpetrated in Paris Nov. 13,” in which 130 people were killed and hundreds injured by suicide bombers and gunmen equipped with Kalashnikov-style assault rifles, according to an internal document from Belgian state security services cited by RTBF French-language television. Those lethal actions were claimed by the Islamic State extremist group.

The two suspects were arrested following searches Sunday and Monday in the Brussels area, the eastern Liege region and Flemish Brabant, the Belgian Federal Prosecutor’s Office said in a statement. It did not disclose their names or further information about them.

During the searches, no weapons or explosives were found, but military-type training uniforms, IS propaganda material and computer equipment were impounded and are being examined, the prosecutor’s office said.

It said the case was unrelated to the brazen and bloody extremist actions in Paris a month and a half ago but that the investigation, which is still ongoing, has revealed a “threat of serious attacks that would target several emblematic places in Brussels and be committed during the end-of-year holidays.”

UK Husband And Wife Convicted Of Planning Bomb Attack

LONDON (AP) — A husband and wife interested in helping Islamic State extremists have been convicted of planning a large-scale bombing of civilian targets in London to mark the 10th anniversary of the July 7, 2005, attacks on the city’s transit system.

Mohammed Rehman, 25, and his wife Sana Ahmed Khan, 24, were found guilty Tuesday at the Old Bailey court.

Prosecutor Tony Badenoch said both were interested in extremist ideology. He said Rehman wanted to demonstrate his support for the Islamic State group and that his wife helped

him by paying for chemicals purchased on eBay.

He said the couple, who lived in Reading, 40 miles (65 kilometers) west of London, had a “common interest” in taking violent action against civilians.

Prosecutors said Rehman was only a few days away from finishing work on a bomb capable of causing mass casualties when police moved in on May 28. They say he had been stockpiling a substantial amount of chemicals and had detonated a small practice device in his backyard.

Susan Hemming, head of the Crown Prosecution Service’s counter-terrorism

division, said the couple had needed only a detonator to carry out an attack.

Authorities said he had used the name Silent Bomber to ask Twitter followers to help him choose a target: “Westfield shopping center or London underground? Any advice would be appreciated greatly,” he tweeted.

The July 7 attacks carried out by four British Muslim suicide bombers killed 52 civilians and injured hundreds more.

Rehman was also convicted of possessing an article to be used for terrorist purposes.

The pair will be sentenced later this week.

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