

# THE ENEMY WITHIN



# THE ETHAN MELZER INVESTIGATION



# ALLEGATION & IDENTIFICATION

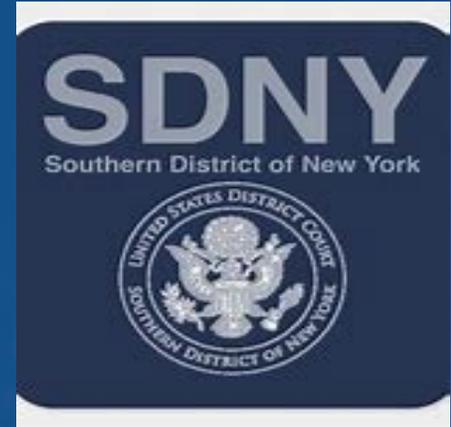


- On 24 May 2020, the FBI received an allegation that an individual (“Etil Reggad”) who identified themselves as a U.S. Servicemember stationed in Vicenza, Italy, passed information about an upcoming deployment to a purported member of Al Qaeda.
- Assigned to the NY JTTF who has extraterritorial responsibility for terrorism threats in Western Europe.
- Required rapid coordination to get ahead of the deployment that was only days away.
- Worked with Legat Rome and Army MI to tentatively identify SUBJECT as ETHAN PHELAN MELZER, assigned to the 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade Combat Team, stationed in Vicenza Italy.
- Coordinated with SDNY, Army MI, Army CI and AFOSI to build the case and confirm the identification.





# A JOINT INVESTIGATION





# WHO IS ETHAN MELZER



- 22 Years Old (at time of arrest)
- From Louisville, Kentucky
- Unstable Home - Divorced parents
- High-school drop out (GED from Job Corps)
- Drug dealer
- Racist
- Violent offender (never caught)
- Army Private (173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade Combat Team)





# THE INVESTIGATION



- Joint investigation with Army CI and CID and other agency support from, AFOSI, NYPD, DSS, HSI, CBP, DOJ and various field and Legat offices at the FBI.
- Served roughly 10 2702's, 40 GJS's, 18 SW's and conducted over 60 interviews.
  - 2702's served on known social media accounts
  - GSJ's served on all known selectors
  - SW's served on social media, e-mail, phones, barracks
  - Interviews of platoon, family, associates (Italy, Germany, Kentucky, Michigan)
  - **\*Comprehensive review of all legal process returns**
- Coordination with Legat's Rome, Berlin, Ankara, Paris, and the United Kingdom
- Original Classification Authority (OCA) Review





# INVESTIGATIVE RESULTS



- MELZER was a member of the Order of the Nine Angles (O9A), a white supremacist, neo-Nazi, and pro-jihadist group.
- MELZER joined the U.S. Army in approximately 2018 and infiltrated its ranks as part of an insight role to further his goals as an O9A member.
- MELZER consumed propaganda from multiple extremist groups, including O9A and ISIS.
- MELZER subscribed to encrypted online forums where he downloaded and accessed videos of jihadist attacks on U.S. troops and facilities and jihadist executions of civilians and soldiers, in addition to far-right, neo-Nazi, and other white supremacist propaganda.
- MELZER planned a jihadist attack on his U.S. Army unit in the days leading up to a deployment to Turkey and sent sensitive details about the unit — including information about its location, movements, and security — to members of O9A.





# INVESTIGATIVE RESULTS CTD.



- MELZER sent messages to members and associates of O9A and a sub-group of O9A known as the “RapeWaffen Division,” providing details about his unit’s anticipated deployment including troop movements, relevant dates, locations, armaments, topography, and security, all in connection with the proposed attack on his unit and the Military Base. MELZER and his co-conspirators used this information to plan what they referred to as a “jihadi attack” with the objective of causing a “mass casualty” event victimizing his fellow service members.
- To further the attack plan, MELZER and his co-conspirators passed these messages to a purported member of al Qaeda.
- MELZER promised to leak more information once he arrived at the Military Base — including real-time photographs of the facility and the frequency and channel of U.S. Army radio communications.
- MELZER deleted some of the communications regarding the planning of the attack because the plot “amounted to treason.”
- MELZER was a drug dealer and shot at least one individual as part of a drug deal gone wrong.



# THE ARREST/FTOC



- MELZER was initially arrested under the UCMJ by Army MI in Italy on 30 May 2020, and was transferred to FBI custody and arrested over international waters on 10 June 2020.

- Provided access to his phone(s), which confirmed he was the SUBJECT.
- Confessed to his role in plotting an attack on his unit.
- Admitted he intended for the planned attack to result in the death of as many of his fellow service members as possible.
- Declared himself to be a traitor against the United States whose conduct was tantamount to treason.





# CHARGES



Complaint 4 June 2020	Indictment 22 June 2020	Superseding Indictment 18 August 2020
Conspiracy To Murder U.S. Military Service Members	Conspiracy To Murder U.S. Military Service Members	Conspiracy To Murder U.S. Military Service Members
Attempted Murder of U.S. Military Service Members	Attempted Murder of U.S. Military Service Members	Attempted Murder of U.S. Military Service Members
Provision and Attempted provision of Material Support in Support of Terrorism	Provision and Attempted provision of Material Support in Support of Terrorism	Provision and Attempted provision of Material Support in Support of Terrorism
Conspiracy to Murder and Maim in a Foreign Country	Conspiracy to Murder and Maim in a Foreign Country	Conspiracy to Murder and Maim in a Foreign Country
	<b>Conspiracy to Murder U.S. Nationals</b>	Conspiracy to Murder U.S. Nationals
	<b>Attempted Murder of U.S. Nationals</b>	Attempted Murder of U.S. Nationals
		<b>Illegal Transmission of National Defense Information</b>
		<b>Illegal Delivery of National Defense Information</b>



# CASE TIMELINE



**Initial Allegation to Arrest = 6 Days**



# CHALLENGES



- Jurisdiction (UCMJ vs USC)
- Co-Conspirators
- COVID Restrictions
- Other country involvement and FGI
- AT/FP concerns and sensitivity of public release via court process
- Declassification of Army, FBI, and FGI information





# RESOLUTION



- On 3 March 2023, MELZER was sentenced to 45 years in prison for attempting to murder U.S. Servicemembers, providing and attempting to provide material support to terrorists, and illegally transmitting national defense information. (\*This was the maximum sentence allowed by his plea)

“ETHAN MELZER is a traitor. His actions constitute one of the most stunning betrayals within the ranks of the armed forces ever to be prosecuted in a federal court.” – AUSA Matt Hellman

- Two other U.S. Army servicemembers provided victim impact statements at the sentencing:
  - Capt. Krause – I will forever have to change the way I think about threat briefings, “our allies and enemies are very aware of this case.”
  - Capt. Ferris – We were “labeled as a platoon that had a terrorist,” we still had a mission to do, and we did it well.

“Mr. MELZER’s crimes were repugnant. He betrayed the United States of America. He betrayed the U.S. military. While no one was injured or killed due to the plot, it was not for lack of trying by Mr. Melzer.” - Judge Woods

**“This is the very definition of why the JTTF exists.” – AUSA Sam Adelsberg**



# INSIDER THREAT – HOW DID WE GET HERE?



- **“I fly under the radar already, act completely normal around other people outside and don’t talk about my personal life or beliefs with anyone.”**
  - **Past behavior unaddressed – not corrected/reported**
    - **Engaged in extremist activities**
      - **Actively participated**
- Soldiers faced questioning by investigators who wanted to know if they had seen signs that Melzer was betraying his oath to the United States, and it left them confronting what they might have missed. “I feel like out of 35 people, one of us should have seen the signs.” – Anonymous
- **“Our women and men in uniform risk their lives for our country, but they should never face such peril at the hands of one of their own. – Assistant Attorney General for National Security, John C. Demers**



# QUESTIONS

