

U.S. soldier Manning gets 35 years for passing documents to WikiLeaks

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(Reuters) - U.S. soldier Bradley Manning was sentenced on Wednesday to 35 years in a military prison for turning over more than 700,000 classified files to WikiLeaks in the biggest breach of secret data in the nation's history.

The 25-year-old former low-level intelligence analyst, in uniform, stood quietly and showed no emotion as Judge Colonel Denise Lind sentenced him to less time behind bars than the 60 years sought by military prosecutors.



Military parole rules could allow Manning to be out of prison in seven years, his lawyer said, a fact WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange called a "tactical victory" for the defense.

But transparency activists said the sentence would still have a chilling effect on prospective leakers. The sentence, which comes at a time when the Obama administration is aggressively investigating leaks, would be the heaviest ever served for turning over secrets to the media, experts said.

Onlookers in the Fort Meade, Maryland, military courtroom gasped as Lind read Manning's sentence. The soldier's aunt, Debra Van Alstyne, closed her eyes and appeared to be holding back tears. Supporters shouted: "Bradley, we are with you."

Defense attorney David Coombs admitted to weeping upon hearing the news and said his client tried to soothe him.

"Myself and others were in tears. He looks to me and he says 'It's OK. It's all right,'" Coombs told reporters after the hearing, adding that Manning told him, "'I'm going to be OK. I'm going to get through this' ... I'm in a position where my client is cheering me up. He is a resilient young man."

Coombs said he would file paperwork asking President [BarackObama](#) to pardon Manning, who will serve his sentence in the U.S. Disciplinary Barracks at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

Manning will be dishonorably discharged from the U.S. military, Lind said. She reduced his sentence by the three years he has served in prison, plus the 112 days she had already decided to subtract because of the harsh treatment the soldier suffered after his arrest three years ago.

TROUBLED YOUNG MAN

Manning was working as an intelligence analyst in Baghdad in 2010 when he gave WikiLeaks a trove of diplomatic cables and battlefield accounts that included a 2007 gunsight video of a U.S. Apache helicopter firing at suspected insurgents in Iraq, killing a dozen people including two Reuters news staff.

During the trial, defense lawyers said Manning had hoped the document release would open Americans' eyes to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and provoke a more intense debate. Prosecutors contended that the soldier placed national security at risk by revealing confidential information.

Manning said in a statement read by his attorney that he chose to release the files out of moral concerns.

"I started to question the morality of what we were doing," he said. "We had forgotten our humanity."

Prosecutors declined to comment after the sentence was read.

WikiLeaks' Assange applauded Manning's defense but decried the trial and verdict.

"While the defense should be proud of their tactical victory, it should be remembered that Mr. Manning's trial and conviction is an affront to basic concepts of Western justice," Assange said in a statement published at WikiLeaks.org.

Manning's attorneys portrayed their client as a troubled young man, who questioned his sexual identity and showed signs of anger management issues that included punching a fellow soldier and grabbing for a gun during a counseling session. Those actions, they argued, were signs Manning was unfit for war-zone deployment.

HEAVY SENTENCE

"The government is looking for general deterrence of future Bradley Mannings," said Jeffrey Walker, an expert on military law and professor at St. John's University. "Thirty-five years is a pretty powerful message. I think they could have sent it with less than 35 years."

Elizabeth Goitein, co-director of the Liberty and National Security Program at the Brennan Center for Justice, said the sentence was in line with sentences for paid espionage for the enemy.

In 2005, Defense Department employee Lawrence Franklin pleaded guilty to passing classified data on [Iran](#) to two pro-Israel lobbyists. He received a prison sentence of 12 years, which a judge later cut to 10 months in a halfway house.

Americans convicted of passing secrets to foreign governments have faced stiffer sentences. Former FBI agent Robert Hanssen was sentenced to life in prison after pleading guilty in 2001 to spying for Russia and the Soviet Union.

Other observers agreed the sentence would be a powerful deterrent and in future help to protect national security.

"The message will be sent in a loud and clear fashion to all those in uniform that they do not get to make decisions on what is legitimate and what is not, with regard to U.S. policy," said Steven Bucci, a foreign policy specialist at the Heritage Foundation.

The Manning court-martial highlights the difficulty of keeping secrets in the Internet age. It comes at a time when U.S. security agencies, with a large number of analysts granted access to secret files, are under great pressure to piece together disparate intelligence threads to head off attacks such as the April bombings at the Boston Marathon.

At the same time, the U.S. government is seeking the return of former CIA contractor Edward Snowden, who in June leaked details of secret U.S. programs to monitor the phone and Internet traffic of Americans. He has been granted temporary asylum by Russian authorities.

(Additional reporting by [Jim Finkle](#); Editing by [Scott Malone](#) and Gunna Dickson)

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