

Ex-Australian soldier charged with war crime over Afghan killing

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Canberra, March 21 (RHC)-- A former member of the Australian military has been charged with a war crime over the killing of an Afghan civilian. The 41-year-old man was arrested in New South Wales and charged with murder following a joint investigation between the Office of the Special Investigator (OSI) and the Australian Federal Police, according to a joint statement from the OSI and the police.

The former soldier has been remanded in custody and will appear in a Sydney court at a later date. “It will be alleged he murdered an Afghan man while deployed to Afghanistan with the Australian Defence Force,” the statement said.

If found guilty, the former soldier, who is the first serving or former member of the Australian military to face war crimes charges, faces a life sentence. The police did not name the man.

The OSI was set up in the wake of 2020’s Brereton Report, which found there was “credible evidence” that some of Australia’s elite soldiers unlawfully killed 39 people while deployed in Afghanistan. It recommended 19 current or former members of the special forces should be investigated by police over 23 incidents involving the killings of “prisoners, farmers or civilians” between 2009 and 2013.

The inquiry found those killings would be “the war crime of murder” if accepted by a jury, and a further two incidents “the war crime of cruel treatment.” Some incidents involved a single victim, and others, multiple people. It also found that weapons had been planted on some of the victims, while junior soldiers were sometimes forced to shoot prisoners for a “first kill” as part of an initiation known as “bleeding”.

Australia’s public broadcaster ABC identified the man charged as Oliver Schulz, a decorated former soldier with the special forces, who was shown in an investigation broadcast in March 2020 shooting an Afghan man lying on the ground. He was stood down from the military after the documentary appeared on television.

The OSI is investigating alleged war crimes committed by Australian soldiers between 2005 and 2016. It has recommended that any charges should be heard before a civilian court and jury.

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