

Acquaintance: Braggs soldier not capable of charges he faces

From staff and wire reports

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At least one person who knew Staff Sgt. Hal M. Warner says she does not believe he is capable of the charges against him. Warner, 34, of Braggs and a member of the 101st Airborne Division's 3rd Brigade Combat Team, is accused of killing an Iraqi detainee.

Courtney Nichols, 32, said she graduated with the girl Warner married.

"He was a very nice, friendly, outgoing guy," she said. "I totally do not believe this whatsoever. He's not that type of a person. I just do not believe it; maybe somebody else, but not him."

Nichols said she believes the full story has not yet been told about what really happened.

Another Oklahoma soldier faces charges in the case; 1st. Lt. Michael C. Behenna, 25, of Edmond.

Both men are charged with premeditated murder in the fatal shooting of Ali Monsour Mohammed. In addition, both are accused of assault, making a false official statement and obstruction of justice. Warner also is charged with being an accessory after the fact.

The killing allegedly took place at or near their operating base at Beiji, about 155 miles north of Baghdad.

Warner was charged July 13; Behenna was charged Thursday. The charges were announced by the military on Saturday but did not come as a surprise to Warner's relatives, who have lived in the Braggs community for more than 25 years.

Warner's brother, Sgt. 1st Class Ryan Warner, 32, a member of the 82nd Airborne Division, said the family had been receiving e-mails from his brother letting them know what was going on.

Ryan Warner said he and his brother are military brats and were inspired to join the Army by some family members, in particular their father, retired Army Master Sgt. Hal Lee Warner.

Ryan Warner, who has served one tour of duty in Iraq, said his brother is serving his third tour there. He would not discuss the case against his brother but said he believes that he eventually will be cleared.

Ryan Warner said his brother joined the Oklahoma Army National Guard right out of high school and then enlisted with the active-duty Army.

According to Warner, his brother was acquainted with Behenna, also part of the 101st Airborne Division, although he doesn't think they were close friends.

Hal Warner faces an Aug. 15 Article 32 hearing at a U.S. base near Tikrit, Iraq, on the charges. An Article 32 hearing, comparable to a preliminary hearing in civilian courts, is held to determine whether a full trial is warranted.

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