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Third U.S. soldier charged with trying to embezzle more than \$1 million from Afghanistan

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A third soldier has been charged in a 2009 scheme to embezzle more than a million dollars from Afghanistan.

Staff Sgt. Jason Begany was charged last month with converting property of another while being an employee of the United States and aiding and abetting in the same.

He pleaded guilty Tuesday in Raleigh, according to U.S. Attorney Thomas G. Walker's office.

Begany, 31, of Erwin, and Sgt. Edwin Vando and Sgt. Juan Lamboy Rivera are charged with embezzling nearly \$1.3 million while deployed to Camp Eggers in Kabul, Afghanistan, as part of the 82nd Finance Battalion.

Vando and Rivera pleaded guilty in April 2011 and promised to testify against a third soldier who had not been indicted at that time.

That soldier was Begany, according to court documents that identify him as the former noncommissioned officer in charge of the Camp Eggers finance office.

Neither Vando nor Rivera have been sentenced. All three soldiers face up to 10 years in prison followed by up to three years of supervised release and a fine of up to \$250,000.

Walker said in a release that the crime undermined the nation's reconstruction efforts overseas and "dishonors the sacrifice our military makes every day."

John F. Khin, special agent in charge of the southeast field office of the Defense Criminal Investigative Service, said Begany tarnished the professional reputation of the U.S. armed forces "while taking advantage of the very Afghan citizens whose trust we were trying to gain."

According to court documents, the soldiers worked with an Afghan interpreter to use their positions in the finance office to trick an Afghan company into paying them \$1,297,050.31.

According to prosecutor Banu Rangarajan, the owner of Abdul Wasi Faquiri Co. Ltd. was duped into wiring money to an Afghan bank after raising questions about whether he had been overpaid.

The company provides military apparel and equipment for the Afghan national army and Afghan National Police, according to court documents.

An investigation by the finance office revealed the company had not been overpaid, but the unnamed co-conspirator lied in a meeting with the company owner and arranged to have the money wired to a local bank, Rangarajan said.

An Afghan interpreter, who worked in the finance office and identified only as "R.J." in court papers, withdrew \$400,000 and carried it onto Camp Eggers in a backpack where it was shared among the conspirators.

The crime, which occurred in 2009, was investigated by the Defense Criminal Investigative Service, Army Criminal Investigation Command and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.