

NZ Soldier Pleads Guilty in Spy Case

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A New Zealand soldier has pleaded guilty to attempted espionage in the country's first spying conviction. The serviceman's identity remains suppressed by court order. According to military court documents, he believed he was communicating with a foreign agent in 2019 when he attempted to share military information, including base telephone directories, maps, assessments of security vulnerabilities, his military identification card, and login credentials for a defence network. He was speaking with an undercover New Zealand police officer involved in a post-Christchurch counter-extremism operation.

Investigators also found extremist material on his hard drive, including the livestreamed video and manifesto produced by the 2019 Christchurch terrorist. Possession of either is a criminal offence in New Zealand. As part of an amended plea deal, the soldier admitted three charges: attempted espionage, dishonest access to a military computer system, and possession of objectionable material. The amended charges replaced 17 counts laid earlier in the proceedings.

The soldier, previously based at Linton Military Camp near Palmerston North, entered his pleas in a military court-martial. Each of the admitted offences carries a maximum prison term of seven to 10 years. Sentencing is expected to follow, with the New Zealand Defence Force declining further comment while the matter remains before the court.

The conviction is the first espionage-related finding in a New Zealand military court. The last espionage case to reach the civilian courts occurred in 1975 and resulted in an acquittal of a public servant accused of passing information to Soviet agents.

Court documents note that the serviceman had drawn official attention over links to nationalist groups and discussions about defection. In a statement read by his lawyer, he said those groups were “no more than groups of friends,” while denying support for the Christchurch gunman’s ideology.

Authorities say the case highlights the security risks posed by insider threats and the ongoing monitoring of extremist activity within sensitive institutions