

Arkansan gets 1 year for Jan. 6 riot charge

Arkansas Democrat-Gazette · 11 Jan 2025 · BILL BOWDEN

WASHINGTON — A Tontitown man was sentenced to 12 months and one day in prison on Friday for his role in the U.S. Capitol riot of Jan. 6, 2021.

David Michael Camden's attorney said his client got swept up in the "mob psychology" of that day, which caused him to act very much out of character when he helped push a bicycle-rack barricade into a line of police officers and sprayed other officers with a fire extinguisher.

"My emotions overpowered my rational thinking, and I conducted myself in a negative way," Camden told U.S. District Judge Tanya Chutkan during his sentencing hearing on Friday. "There is no excuse for my actions. They were shameful, and I've let myself down as well as others."

As part of a plea agreement, Camden, 45, pleaded guilty in September to one count of 18 U.S.C. §111(a)(1), assaulting, resisting or impeding certain officers.

Chutkan noted that Camden had overcome drug addiction and homelessness to earn a college degree and land a job paying \$163,000 a year.

"You have picked yourself up from great depths before," she said. "I have no doubt that you will do it again."

As she talked about the things he had overcome, and the volunteerism he does for the homeless and animal rescue, Camden could be seen wiping a tear from his eye.

Chutkan said many defendants come before her with no one in the courtroom in their corner nor providing emotional support. In the second row on Friday sat Camden's wife, mother, sister and a long-time friend.

"You have a family that cares for you, that stood by you though the very worst," said Chutkan.

On the wall of the courtroom were the numbers of a clock, but the hands were missing, as if time, for the moment at least, was standing still.

JUDGE'S SKEPTICISM

Chutkan said Camden's life story is remarkable.

But Chutkan said she didn't believe some of Camden's arguments, such as that he didn't

realize he was in a restricted area on Capitol grounds.

“There is no way I believe that you would not be aware of what was going on... that you were not supposed to be where you were,” she said.

Chutkan said she found it “disingenuous” that Camden said he left after receiving a text from D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser instructing rioters to leave. Chutkan said officers at the scene were also telling rioters to leave.

Camden’s attorney, Charles Burnham, told the court his client suffered from undiagnosed general anxiety disorder at the time of the riot.

“You made certain decisions that day to place yourself in a position that was not a good one for a person with your condition,” Chutkan said in delivering her decision.

Camden served in the Army, where he was assigned to the 82nd Airborne Division as a utilities and equipment repairman, according to a court filing.

Camden became angry that police used “aggressive tactics against protesters” such as deploying “flash bangs,” according to his attorney. Officers also used mace to repel Camden from the bike-rack barrier.

“Officers are trained to use nonlethal force to defend the Capitol, and that’s what they were doing that day,” said Chutkan.

She said officers used a great deal of restraint on Jan. 6, 2021.

“It is a miracle that only one person was shot that day,” said Chutkan. “It is an absolute miracle.”

She said police were beaten and spit upon. Some suffered concussions. Others committed suicide.

“And now they’re being told what happened to them was not serious,” she said. “Those people are heroes and they deserve to have what happened to them be taken seriously.”

‘HE MADE A CHOICE’

Camden told the judge he respects first responders.

Camden’s leg was “severely injured” when police pushed him down some stairs and deployed mace against him at the bike-rack barricade, Burnham wrote in his sentencing memorandum.

Afterwards, Camden discharged a fire extinguisher in the direction of another police line “in frustration at having been injured by police,” according to Burnham.

Camden’s injury and subsequent macing happened because he assaulted police, U.S. Attorney Eli Ross told the court on Friday.

“You don’t get points for getting injured when you assault an officer,” said Ross. “He made a choice, and he wasn’t done.”

Chutkan noted that pushing and spraying assaults were “less mitigating” than striking assaults, and Camden didn’t strike an officer.

Burnham told the court no officers were physically injured by Camden, and he didn’t try to enter the Capitol building.

Burnham said Camden had shown remorse for his actions, taking responsibility before an indictment was filed against him.

Ross said Camden realized he got caught and was trying to mitigate his actions.

Ross noted that, in an apology letter sent to police, Camden still hinted that officers were in the wrong for not “announcing” their crowd control efforts.

“I followed the crowd and found myself in a crowd that was receiving unannounced deployment of gas, smoke, and other munitions, including flashbangs,” Camden wrote in the letter. “In that moment, my frustration got the best of me and I reacted in a negative way. ... My actions were shameful, and I am truly sorry.”

A WAVED FLAG

Before the bike-rack barrier and the fire extinguisher, Camden climbed a media tower where he waved a “Three Percenters” flag, said Chutkan. The Three Percenters is a far right, anti-government militia in the United States and Canada.

Camden said he was using the flag to try to signal people who had traveled to Washington with him. Prosecutors said he was encouraging the mob.

Chutkan said she didn’t know why Camden had the flag. She said it wasn’t clear in court filings.

In his sentencing memorandum, Burnham wrote that Camden’s brother bought him the flag and “Neither brother seems to have known the significance of the ‘III%’ emblem, they merely liked the aesthetic design of the flag.”

Chutkan said Camden had choices to make that day — at the media tower and both police lines.

“At each of those instances you had a choice, and you chose to react with violence,” she said.

Federal prosecutors wanted Camden to serve the next 27 months in prison. Camden’s attorney recommended home detention, community service and a substantial fine.

The federal guideline range was 24 to 30 months, and the maximum sentence was eight years in prison.

By sentencing him to 12 months and one day, Camden will be qualified for 54 days of “good time” credit under the First Step Act of 2018.

Camden asked that he serve his time at the minimum-security satellite camp at the federal

prison in Forrest City. The judge said she'd make that recommendation. Chutkan said she would allow Camden to self report to prison at a later date, which will be after president-elect Donald Trump takes office.

As part of a plea agreement, Camden agreed to pay \$2,000 restitution.

"Although I have put forth significant effort to be a better person than I was 20 years ago, I am still human, I still make mistakes and I still fall short," Camden wrote in remarks he prepared so he could read them to the judge. "I am far from perfect, but that's not from a lack of effort. I have committed a significant portion of my life to positive personal growth, but also growth to help others, and animals, usually the forgotten ones, those most impacted by homelessness, addiction and mental illness."

Chutkan said Camden made "a very eloquent presentation."

After the sentencing hearing, Burnham said Camden was different from any client he's had before.

"In all my years of doing this, I've never seen somebody who was not only a veteran but has such an incredible turn-around story and such an incredible record of volunteerism," said Burnham. "I can't think of a comparable case. And I do think the incoming administration should take it seriously, this case."

Trump, who will take office on Jan. 20, has made comments about pardoning Jan. 6 defendants.

"I think the president-elect has expressed a lot of sympathy with Jan. 6 defendants, for good reason," said Burnham. "He has a history of sympathy with people caught up in the criminal justice system... so I do expect him to do fairly broad pardon action that would include people like David Camden."

Burnham said Camden didn't go to the Capitol to try to disrupt the peaceful transfer of power.

"I don't think he did betray his oath as a soldier because his oath was to uphold and support the Constitution, and that's what he thought he was doing," said Burnham. "The joint session of Congress, people thought, did have some authority, and that's what he was there for, unlike other defendants who specifically said, 'We're going to storm the place.'"