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## Canada MP cites Lariam in criminal case

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From the [Washington Politics & Policy Desk](#)

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 19 (UPI) -- The anti-malaria drug Lariam played a role in the violent behavior of a soldier now on trial in Canada, a Canadian Member of Parliament said Tuesday.

Former Canadian army Cpl. Christian McEachern is charged with driving a sports utility vehicle through the doors and into garrison headquarters in Edmonton, Alberta. His lawyers argue that he is suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Lariam's manufacturer denies the drug's acknowledged side effects can cause violent or criminal behavior.

Records show McEachern took Lariam when he served with the army in Rwanda in 1997. The issue of Lariam, known generically as mefloquine, has not come up at the trial, but MP John Cummins told United Press International he believes "it is obvious that mefloquine is part of the problem."

Cummins, who has persistently raised concerns about Lariam side effects since it was issued to Canadian troops during their Somalia mission in the early 1990s, cited a February report from the Ombudsman's Office of the Canadian Department of Defense. The report quotes McEachern as saying that after he stopped taking the drug in 1997, "I was starting to get nausea... severe chest pains and I was getting really bad night sweats and headaches."

He said he then started to have "more severe symptoms" that witnesses say included panic attacks. The Army began treating him for PTSD in 1997.

McEachern is on trial for allegedly smashing his SUV into base headquarters last year, and driving around in circles demolishing desks and file cabinets. He was found weeping and incoherent behind the wheel, authorities said.

A psychiatrist who testified at the trial said McEachern suffered memory loss, severe depression, panic attacks and other symptoms he attributed to PTSD.

McEachern's attorney did not return calls seeking comment.

Cummins, the MP, said that the Canadian military continues to ignore psychiatric side effects of the drug, which manufacturer Hoffmann-La Roche recently warned might last "long after" someone stops taking it.

"This is another example of the Canadian military's careless administration of the drug and the continued failure of the Canadian Department of Health to effectively monitor and investigate the serious problems caused by mefloquine," Cummins said.

The Canadian military would not comment on a case that is currently in litigation, said Canada's National Defense spokeswoman Lt. Diane Grover.

The drug label warns of side effects including aggression, paranoia and psychosis. It was also recently amended to warn, "rare cases of suicide and suicidal ideation (thinking about suicide) have been reported though no relationship to drug administration has been confirmed." A spokesman for Roche told UPI that there is "no medical or scientific evidence" linking Lariam to violent or criminal behavior.

The Canadian case echoes the recent controversy in the United States over a cluster of killings and suicides by soldiers stationed at Fort Bragg, N.C.

In three of the cases, soldiers who had served in Afghanistan this year are suspected of killing their wives this past summer. Two also killed themselves.

The Army said in a report this month that two of the soldiers had taken Lariam while stationed in Afghanistan, but

said that the drug was an "unlikely" factor in the killings. Members of the epidemiology team that went to Fort Bragg to investigate acknowledged they had not talked to friends and neighbors of the soldiers, citing privacy and legal concerns.

Critics of the drug charged that the U.S. Army was evading obvious signs that two of the soldiers were behaving in ways consistent with the side effects of Lariam before the killings. They said the Army was covering up ongoing problems with the drug because it had invented and licensed it.

"McEachern, just like the soldiers at Fort Bragg this summer, is yet another innocent victim of Lariam toxicity and the failure to diagnose its neuropsychiatric side effects properly," said Susan Rose, an adviser to Lariam litigators and an adjunct assistant professor in the public health school at George Washington University."

"He finds himself in a Canadian court, at a loss to explain his behavior and unable to understand what happened to him," Rose said. "How long will the North American medical and military communities be blinded to the obvious psychiatric side effects of this drug?"

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