

Eielson Airman Court Martialed for Growing “Magic” Mushrooms; Sentence included Six Months in Jail, Reduction to E-1, and a Bad Conduct Discharge

On 30 January 2019, A1C John W. Estabrook, a member of 354th Communications Squadron, pleaded guilty at a General Court Martial to wrongfully using, distributing, and growing psilocybin “magic” mushrooms on Eielson AFB. His crimes were discovered after members of his unit reported that he had bragged about having a “mushroom growing operation” and showed pictures to his friends. Investigators discovered that A1C Estabrook had created a “laboratory” in his on-base house, complete with plastic tubs, beakers, and gardening supplies. He even kept a journal that detailed his illicit exploits. When questioned by AFOSI, he initially denied everything, but soon came clean and admitted to successfully growing one batch of “magic” mushrooms and consuming them with two other airmen.

Prior to trial, the defense team filed a motion to dismiss one of the specifications on the theory that growing mushrooms on a military installation can be charged as *either* wrongful manufacturing *or* wrongful introduction onto a military installation, but not both. The prosecutors disagreed and argued that growing mushrooms in on-base housing violates both. The Military Judge ruled in the defense’s favor, which cut the charges from four specifications down to three. The defense team also filed a motion to suppress A1C Estabrook’s confession, but this motion was denied.

At trial, A1C Estabrook pleaded guilty to the three remaining specifications before a panel of officer members. During the sentencing case, the panel heard about details of the growing operation from an AFOSI agent and saw photographs of the makeshift laboratory. They also heard testimony from one of the airmen who consumed the mushrooms with A1C Estabrook on a camping trip. A1C Estabrook’s mother also testified on his behalf. After deliberating for several hours, the panel sentenced A1C Estabrook to six months in jail, 21 days hard labor, reduction to E-1, and a Bad Conduct Discharge.

Members who are sentenced to confinement begin to serve their sentence immediately after a court martial, and they are commonly held in a local civilian jail until transferred to a military confinement facility.