

DEOMI News Highlights

DEOMI News Highlights is a weekly compilation of published items and commentary with a focus on equal opportunity, equal employment opportunity, diversity, culture, and human relations issues. DEOMI News Highlights is also a management tool intended to serve the informational needs of equity professionals and senior DOD officials in the continuing assessment of defense policies, programs, and actions. Further reproduction or redistribution for private use or gain is subject to original copyright restrictions.

About 21,000 troops booted so far under ‘deploy or get out’ policy [Leo Shane III, *Military Times*, 14 March 2019]

- About 21,000 nondeployable troops have been forced out of the ranks since the Defense Department’s “[deploy or get out](#)” policy began last summer, Acting Defense Secretary [Patrick Shanahan](#) announced on Thursday.
- Last year, Defense Department officials estimated that about 11 percent of active-duty troops—some 235,000—were rated as nondeployable. Almost half of that number were individuals missing medical exams or paperwork, troops nearing retirement, and women service members who were pregnant.
- But the remaining 126,000 faced a range of short- and long-term injuries, or simply failed to meet military fitness standards. Military officials said those individuals would be given up to 12 months to prove their deployability or be pushed out of the services.

[About 21,000 troops booted so far under ‘deploy or get out’ policy](#)

Military to begin enforcing Trump’s restrictions on transgender troops [Paul Sonne and Ann E. Marimow, *The Washington Post*, 13 March 2019]

- The military will begin [enforcing](#) President Trump’s restrictions on transgender troops on April 12, according to a Pentagon memo, which drew rebukes from Democratic [lawmakers](#) and civil rights advocates who decried the change as bigoted.
- The memo stipulates that a history of gender dysphoria would [disqualify](#) applicants to the military unless they have been stable in their biological sex for 36 months, are willing to abide by the rules for that sex, and have not transitioned and do not need to in the view of medical providers.
- Those who are [already](#) in the military or under contract to join before the start date will fall under the 2016 policy enacted by the Obama administration. That policy allowed people who have transitioned to join the military and gave those already serving an opportunity to transition while in the armed forces.

[Military to begin enforcing Trump’s restrictions on transgender troops](#)

Sexual Assaults Reports Up at Service Academies, But Down Servicewide [David Vergun, *Defense.gov*, 11 March 2019]

- It’s “gravely concerning” that results of [the most recent survey](#) of the military service academies show [another increase](#) in sexual assault reports, the executive director of the Defense Department’s Office of Force Resiliency, told lawmakers March 7 at a hearing of the Senate Armed Services Committee personnel subcommittee.
- The [service academies](#) to which Elizabeth P. Van Winkle referred are the U.S. Military Academy in West Point, New York; the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland; and the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado. DOD does not oversee the U.S. Coast Guard Academy in Groton, Connecticut or the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy in Kings Point, New York.
- Also concerning is retaliation aimed at “an appreciable portion” of service members and service academy students who report [sexual assault or harassment](#), said Van Winkle, who has a doctorate in applied experimental psychology. “We have a profound sacred obligation to our service members and their safety,” she said, adding she’s “committed and dedicated to making this right.”

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Culture

The white Southerners who fought US segregation

BBC, March 12, 2019



Seeing white and black people together at this Pentecostal gathering had a monumental effect on photographer Doy Gorton (Doy Gorton)

The black neighborhood of Greenville in segregated 1960s Mississippi had never seen anything like it. Neither had Mr. Gorton when he encountered white people praying alongside their black brethren during an impromptu street-side Pentecostal revival.

When a burly young white man inside the revival tent spontaneously picked up a small black boy sitting with his family and clasped him to his chest amid thronging songs of praise, Mr. Gorton captured with his camera the sort of moment that rarely makes it into discussions about the racist White South.

Growing up in Mississippi, Mr. Gorton reacted to legalized white supremacy by joining the civil rights movement. But while abhorring the institutional racism that shaped every aspect of Southern life, he retained compassion and patience for the blue-collar whites who had been left behind by the likes of mechanization and foreign trade since the end of World War II.

He also bridled at mainstream representations of the White South, which he felt didn't effectively examine the reality and nuances, such as how class divisions informed racism, and who was really to blame.

As a result, he undertook an 18-month drive across the Mississippi Delta, documenting "the most Southern place on earth," including encounters with more progressive whites, such as those at the revival, and activists fighting for de-segregation and civil rights, often at great risks to themselves.

"It's astonishing to me that 50 years later, the enormous sacrifices, the enormous bravery and enormous courage of ordinary white people in the Deep South in dealing with race issues is not recognized," Mr. Gorton says. "So many people suffered but they have been passed over by history."

Mr. Gorton recalls how tense the region, and the country, was at the time, with talk of an imminent race war, how everything was going to blow up, with thousands killed. That a huge conflagration was avoided, he puts down, in large part, to local, ordinary whites who helped keep the peace.

Admittedly, whites who more actively pushed for civil rights typically faced economic reprisals, often losing jobs, or physical violence, even paying the ultimate price.

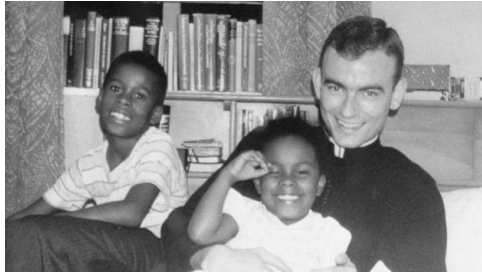
Kansas-native James Reeb, a pastor who participated in the Selma to Montgomery civil rights marches, died in early 1965 of head injuries two days after being severely beaten by white segregationists.

Shortly afterwards, Vilola Liuzzo, an activist who had grown up in Tennessee, was murdered by members of the Ku Klux Klan in Selma (later in the year, Jonathan Daniels, a white seminarian from New Hampshire, died when shielding a black teenager from a fired shotgun in Hayneville, Alabama).

"When it comes to who has been honored for the civil rights movement, there are very few white people mentioned," Mr. Gorton says.

But the subject matter alone makes any focus on whites problematic, says Ted Ownby, director of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi, and editor of *The Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi*. Other factors are probably at play.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-47477354>



Jonathan Daniels was killed aged 26 when he stepped in to protect a teenage black woman from a shotgun-wielding construction worker (Getty Images)

"A lot of the white southern activists I've come across downplay their significance, saying that they were just the leader of an organization, or a Christian activist" Mr. Ownby says. "And they emphasize they were not as significant as nor sacrificed as much as the African Americans involved who couldn't go back to a safe place."

There is also the Atticus Finch factor - the lawyer hero from Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, who defends a black man in Alabama accused of rape.

"There's the danger of presenting a white savior figure," says Mr. Ownby, adding how Finch, while fictional, is probably the best-known representation of white resistance to racism.

"Of creating hero worship for people whose heroism came through doing their jobs within the system as it existed. After all, the civil rights movement was about changing the system."

After getting kicked out of the University of Mississippi for organizing protests and events against segregation, Mr. Gorton joined the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the "Marine Corps of the civil rights movement," he says, "going in when no one else did".

But he says it was discovering the work of American photojournalist Walker Evans, best known for documenting the effects of the Great Depression, who presented people "in a way that was really very respectful, very thoughtful and very straightforward," that motivated him to try something similar for the people he'd grown up surrounded by.

He acknowledges that offering a different angle on the narrative of the racist White South is contentious, but explains he sees a parallel with the likes of the British Empire which, despite clear flaws, in its entirety was hugely nuanced and included "lots of people who did decent things".

The negatives and prints from the trip Mr. Gorton made across the Mississippi Delta in 1968, along with cassette tape interviews and other materials, moved between trunks and attics for nearly 50 years until Gorton retired to southern Illinois, where he took another look at everything.

In 2018, the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History in Austin, Texas, acquired his "White South" collection, and it has since been the subject of national and international attention.

David Doggett was long-haired and fresh out of college in Jackson, Mississippi, when he became involved in the underground newspaper movement mushrooming across the US in the 1960s. He says he started *Kudzu* to address political and racial issues by mixing them up with more appealing material in the paper relating to "sex, drugs and rock and roll".

"The idea was that people are basically good, even if racist, so I wanted to better inform them," Mr. Doggett says.

"Racism was basically down to misinformation. If you were living in the 1950s in the South, the only blacks most whites came across were field hands and maids, so most people couldn't conceive that blacks could be intellectually equal to whites. But the civil rights coverage was full of exceptionally smart, educated blacks."

Participating in protests got him jailed four times - though never for longer than three days, he explains, as he knew "good lawyers" who supported the civil rights movement - as well as physically assaulted.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-47477354>

He says that often it felt he wasn't achieving much. In 1967 he organized a protest following a police shooting at a nearby black college. It started with two other protesters and finished with 20 white students. Three years later, though, 200 protesters turned out after another incident at the same college.

"It showed how fast things could change," Mr. Doggett says. "Perhaps I can take some credit for being there at the beginning."

Mr. Doggett says that he understands people holding a stereotypical view of the White South as racist, because such a view is "justified." He agrees with Mr. Gorton that the problem of the region's racism was compounded by the machinations of the White South's wealthy elite.



An image from a working-class area of Atlanta where white and black children played together, 1970 (Doy Gorton)

"There's a long history of wealthy whites manipulating poor whites to put the blame on blacks," Mr. Doggett says. "People became so full of racial hatred that they couldn't see that blacks were actually their allies."

It's not possible to say with any degree of accuracy what percentage of the White South was racist, Mr. Ownby says. What's most likely is that the majority were neither on the left, supporting civil rights activists, or on the far right, supporting the language and tactics of massive resistance, he thinks.

Even if not keen on integration, many whites were uncomfortable with some parts of white resistance against it, he says, and didn't want to be associated with those defending segregation violently.

"While there certainly were white Southerners who advocated for civil rights for black Americans, many more didn't," says Ansley Quiros, a historian and author of "God With Us: Lived Theology and the Black Freedom Struggle in Americus, Georgia, 1942-1976."

"In some ways it's easier - at least for Americans - to tell those few, heroic stories than to grapple with the majority position."

Mr. Gorton recalls photographing an era when "everything was changing" yet it was unclear what would come next. The Supreme Court had ordered the immediate integration of schools in the South, the Vietnam War raged, and Neil Armstrong walked on the moon. To many it looked like anything could happen, which wasn't all that reassuring.

"Gorton's images are as robust and meaningful as texts for understanding the tensions and anxieties of Southerners of all stripes who found themselves in a society being shaken to its knees by cultural, political, and economic revolution," says Ben Wright, a historian with the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, which houses Gorton's photographic archive.

Mr. Gorton especially remembers photographing in 1970 white college students attending a "Youth Jubilee" at Edwards, Mississippi, to discuss the likes of race and religion. The gathering attracted the attentions of a group of white bikers, festooned with Iron Crosses and swastikas.

"You could literally look between these two groups and see how one group was looking ahead, realizing the direction the world was going, and how the other had no idea," says Mr. Gorton, adding how for the latter group white supremacy was "a crutch, a distraction."

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-47477354>

He notes the parallels today in the face of societal upheavals, such as certain jobs being threatened by technological advances, increasing economic inequality, and, he argues, a ruling elite once again manipulating working class whites, with racism coming back into public discourse.



A Pentecostal revival in Mississippi in 1969 (Doy Gorton)

"There has been progress," Mr. Doggett says. "Sometimes now younger people seem hopeless about the situation, but people have no idea about how bad it used to be - the police would dredge the river for a black person who had been lynched and come across other bodies no one knew about.

"We've come a long way - yes, there is still forever to go, but it is better."

Having spent decades living elsewhere around the US, Mr. Doggett says he now often thinks about returning to the South, and is encouraged by how Jackson now has a civil rights museum as well as a strong, progressive newspaper.

But, at the same time, he notes how a visitor to the museum - especially a white one - can leave having been given the impression that all whites were bad all the time, which has "a depressing effect."

This in turn, he explains, doesn't encourage white Southerners - or any Americans - to think more expansively about racial tensions that the South, and the country, still wrestles with.

"I do wish there was more info about those whites who have done progressive things in the South," he says. "And are still doing them."

Discrimination

Pentagon Watchdogs Allowed Some Improper Access to Whistleblower Files

By Charles S. Clark

Government Executive, March 8, 2019



(By Ivan Cholakov / Shutterstock.com)

Too many employees in all the Defense Department inspectors general offices were allowed access to sensitive whistleblower reprisal investigation files without full authorization, the Government Accountability Office reported on Thursday.

In a [report](#) that marked overall progress in the IGs' efforts to improve timeliness and quality in processing complaints, auditors found that from 2016-2018, "numerous restricted whistleblower records in its document repository were accessible to DODIG personnel without a need to know."

In addition, "employees in Marine Corps IG offices were able to see whistleblower cases assigned to other IG offices without a need to know," GAO said. "While some actions have been taken to address these issues, additional steps are needed to restrict access to case information in order to mitigate ongoing risks to whistleblower confidentiality."

In general, inspectors general for the military services and the Defense IG "have met some key goals and have policies that address whistleblower confidentiality," the report said. In addition, the offices generally met key documentation and data requirements for the 125 cases dismissed by the Defense IG involving civilian presidentially appointed Defense officials by reporting most credible allegations.

Yet about 85 percent of Defense IG reprisal and senior official misconduct investigations were late, exceeding statutory and internal timeliness goals, according to surveys of employees with access. And military service IGs did not meet most goals for handling cases within prescribed timeframes, said the report required under the fiscal 2017 National Defense Authorization Act.

The service IGs averaged between 17 and 84 days to notify the Defense IG of their receipt of whistleblower reprisal allegations, exceeding the 10-day goal. The Defense IG's 108 employees who handle complaints received 12,000 contacts from prospective whistleblowers in fiscal 2018.

The IGs have taken remedial steps such as restricting access to case information through unique user permissions and by taking actions to follow the department's information technology risk management process. But some gaps persist in the IGs' confidentiality approach.

"For example, DODIG guidance for protecting whistleblowers who report internal DODIG misconduct does not specify key steps investigators should take to protect confidentiality, such as not identifying complainants during interviews with case subjects," GAO said. "Also, Air Force, Naval, and Marine Corps IG guidance does not specify when whistleblower identities can be disclosed without consent."

Overall, "without formal guidance documenting procedures for protecting the confidentiality of whistleblowers reporting potential internal DODIG employee misconduct," the audit continued, employees "lack assurance that DODIG can fully protect their identities" after they report waste, fraud, abuse or misconduct.

<https://www.govexec.com/defense/2019/03/pentagon-watchdogs-allowed-some-improper-access-whistleblower-files/155423/>

Acknowledging the IGs' various initiatives underway to improve promptness, GAO made 12 recommendations of additional actions that could "provide a more targeted approach to improving performance against unmet timeliness goals—such as for senior official misconduct investigations—and better assure whistleblowers that their cases will be handled expeditiously."

The department managers agreed, though they noted, for example, that the record closure of 60 reprisal investigations in fiscal 2018 was a significant improvement over the 37 closed in fiscal 2017.

Diversity

https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/i-helped-open-all-military-jobs-to-women-we-cant-go-backward/2019/03/11/1d69df9c-4437-11e9-aaf8-4512a6fe3439_story.html

I helped open all military jobs to women. We can't go backward. [OPINION]

By Leon E. Panetta

The Washington Post, March 11, 2019



In 2015, Army 1st Lt. Shaye Haver, center, and Capt. Kristen Griest, right, were the first women to graduate from the U.S. Army's Ranger School. (John Bazemore/AP)

Leon E. Panetta, the chairman of the Panetta Institute, was budget director and White House chief of staff under President Bill Clinton and defense secretary and CIA director under President Barack Obama.

Six years ago, I had the honor of ending the final vestige of overt gender discrimination in the government, when, along with then-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Martin Dempsey, we [opened all military jobs](#) to qualified women. People often ask me whether the decision to put women on the front lines of combat was a difficult one. It was not. When we made the decision, many women were already serving in combat zones. Moreover, the military has a responsibility to uphold the most fundamental American value of equality of opportunity for all.

With that equality comes responsibility. Last month, a federal court in Texas agreed, holding that the selective service registration requirement [should apply to women](#) as well as men. This ruling may cause the Trump administration to reinstate the combat exclusion rule. It would be a grave, not to mention unconstitutional mistake.

The fact is, our military readiness has improved by giving every qualified individual the opportunity to serve. Since 2013, women have done the hard work of breaking through the previous barriers in a series of remarkable firsts: the [first women to graduate](#) from the Army's Ranger School, the [first woman to graduate](#) from the Marine Corps' infantry officer basic course, the first women to [integrate into Army infantry units](#), the first woman to become an [Airborne Ranger](#), and just this year, the [first woman graduated](#) from the Marine Corps' highly challenging Winter Mountain Leaders Course. This list will continue to grow until a woman has occupied every job previously closed to them, up to the very top of the chain of command.

Unfortunately, there are those who still hold on to the prejudices of the past despite the realities of the present and future. Some have recently resurfaced arguments that women don't belong in combat, arguing that the military lowered the physical standards to accept women in those jobs, and that women are disruptive to unit cohesion. [Kathleen Parker also argued in The Post](#) that we altered the definition of combat "so that civilians could pretend that this is not a travesty."

These are the standard arguments that we heard repeatedly during the process of making the decision to end gender discrimination in the military. They are not only baseless in fact, but are also completely out of touch with the realities of the military today.

First, with respect to lowering the standards and negatively affecting combat readiness, nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, gender-neutral physical standards were created for every job previously closed, whereas before the only standard had been gender. The military spent three years conducting extensive scientific studies and determined exactly what physical and mental skills and abilities are needed

https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/i-helped-open-all-military-jobs-to-women-we-cant-go-backward/2019/03/11/1d69df9c-4437-11e9-aaf8-4512a6fe3439_story.html

for each job. By opening all jobs to women, and ensuring that every person in those jobs meets these standards, actual military readiness has improved.

The second argument — that, [as one commentator put it](#) in the Wall Street Journal, a “more serious effect of sex integration has become taboo to mention: the inevitable introduction of eros into combat units” — is hard to dignify with a response, particularly in the #MeToo era. Blaming women and banning them from serving in particular jobs is hardly the appropriate response. Indeed, one of the most important reasons for ending gender discrimination against women in the military was the fact that the military has struggled with the scourge of sexual assault and continues to work to change its culture that had historically regarded women as less than equal to men. The reality is that the most effective way to deal with sexual assault is to increase the number of women in command positions in the military. Equal leadership is the key to equal service.

We need women in the military in greater numbers than ever to meet our troop-strength targets without lowering our standards. We want the best to serve and have the opportunity to advance regardless of gender. Indeed, a key factor in persuading the top military brass, who had concerns about women in combat, was that the “front lines” of battle have fundamentally changed. They could not deny that women — [such as Sen. Tammy Duckworth](#) (D-Ill.) — were already serving in combat and playing essential roles in our wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Indeed, more than [80 women have been killed](#) in fighting since the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

There are now hundreds of women serving in positions that had previously been closed to them, and tens of thousands of others who are aspiring to do the same. This is not the time to reverse course and undermine their service or weaken our military readiness by replacing them. The United States is strong because everyone deserves a chance to serve our country. To fight for our nation is not a privilege for a few, it is a right and responsibility for all Americans in the 21st century.

Military to begin enforcing Trump's restrictions on transgender troops

By Paul Sonne and Ann E. Marimow

The Washington Post, March 13, 2019



Democratic lawmakers and civil rights advocates decried the Pentagon's memo on transgender troops as bigoted. (Charles Dharapak/AP)

The military will begin enforcing President Trump's restrictions on transgender troops on April 12, according to a Pentagon memo, which drew rebukes from Democratic lawmakers and civil rights advocates who decried the change as bigoted.

The memo stipulates that a history of gender dysphoria would disqualify applicants to the military unless they have been stable in their biological sex for 36 months, are willing to abide by the rules for that sex, and have not transitioned and do not need to in the view of medical providers.

Those who are already in the military or under contract to join before the start date will fall under the 2016 policy enacted by the Obama administration. That policy allowed people who have transitioned to join the military and gave those already serving an opportunity to transition while in the armed forces.

It also allowed service members to change their gender marker in the military system and abide by uniform, grooming and facilities rules for their new identity.

None of that is allowed under the new restrictions.

Under the new policy, secretaries of the military services will be given latitude to grant exceptions to certain individuals, who would then be able to access medical care in accordance with the old policy.

The decision by the Defense Department to begin enforcing the policy comes more than a year and a half after Trump announced the ban by tweet in July 2017, surprising his own defense secretary.

“After consultations with my Generals and military experts, please be advised that the United States Government will not accept or allow Transgender individuals to serve in any capacity in the U.S. Military,” Trump wrote at the time. “Our military must be focused on decisive and overwhelming victory and cannot be burdened with the tremendous medical costs and disruption that transgender in the military would entail. Thank you.”

The actual Pentagon policy that former defense secretary Jim Mattis formulated and rolled out after the tweet stopped short of a categorical ban, according to defense officials. It allows transgender individuals to serve in the military, as long as they aren't diagnosed with gender dysphoria, haven't transitioned sex and don't need to, and submit to rules for their biological gender regarding uniforms, grooming and facilities.

Critics, however, say those rules amount to a de facto ban, because they essentially allow transgender people to serve in the military only if they refrain from transitioning or engaging in activities that allow them to live out their identity on the job. The policy also bans those who have already transitioned sex from joining outright.

Democrats, who are hoping to reverse the ban through [bipartisan legislation](#), criticized the Pentagon's decision to begin enforcing the measure.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/military-to-begin-enforcing-restrictions-on-trumps-transgender-troops/2019/03/13/cf2a0530-4587-11e9-9726-50f151ab44b9_story.html

“Anyone who is qualified and willing should be allowed to serve their country openly,” House Armed Services Committee Chairman Adam Smith (D-Wash.) said in a statement. “Make no mistake, this is a discriminatory ban on transgender people, not a ban on a medical condition, and we will continue to fight against this bigoted policy.”

Civil rights advocates said transgender individuals should be able to serve in the military like everyone else who meets the standards required for the job.

Jennifer Levi, transgender rights project director at GLBTQ Legal Advocates and Defenders, called the Pentagon’s enforcement of the new rules “deeply immoral and deeply insulting to the many transgender troops who are bravely serving their country.”

“Military leaders, medical experts, and the vast majority of the American public agree that our troops deserve gratitude and support, not a slap in the face based on bias and irrational fears,” Levi said.

Defense officials say they have no way of tracking the number of transgender forces in the military, but according to self-identification, they believe 9,000 individuals identify as transgender, about 1,000 of whom have been diagnosed with gender dysphoria.

The rollout of the memo days before acting defense secretary Patrick Shanahan is due to appear before the Senate Armed Services Committee on Thursday adds a level of tension to a testimony already expected to include hostile questions over Trump’s decision to take Pentagon funds without congressional approval for a border wall.

Shanahan, a former Boeing executive who is hoping to get the nod from Trump to replace Mattis, has testified before Congress only once before, during his confirmation hearing to become deputy secretary.

The Pentagon’s decision to press forward with implementing the new restrictions comes after several court cases challenged the measure, leading to injunctions that delayed implementation for months.

But in January, [the Supreme Court, in a 5-4 vote along partisan lines](#), allowed Trump’s broad restrictions to go into effect. The legal battle continued in the lower courts, and lawyers representing the claimants have argued that ongoing proceedings in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit should have prevented the Pentagon from moving ahead.

Attorneys for transgender service members in the federal case in Washington said in a filing Wednesday that the government’s “official order directing a change in the government’s policy regarding transgender service members violates the injunction in this case.”

“The government may not depart from the status quo or order any new policy inconsistent with that injunction,” the lawyers said, until they have had time to decide whether to ask the full D.C. Circuit to review the ruling of a three-judge panel.

“Defendants are disregarding both those interests and the authority of this Court. They must not be permitted to cast aside the ordinary procedures that safeguard those constitutional interests, nor may they be permitted to usurp the Court’s jurisdiction to determine when its injunction has expired,” according to the court filing.

Because the Pentagon restrictions do not go into effect until April 12, the court proceedings theoretically could be resolved by then, though it would be a quick turnaround. If they progress past that date, the Pentagon could be forced to further delay implementation.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/military-to-begin-enforcing-restrictions-on-trumps-transgender-troops/2019/03/13/cf2a0530-4587-11e9-9726-50f151ab44b9_story.html

Transgender-rights activists, meanwhile, have been urging the public to get behind the legislation proposed in Congress in a bid to override Trump's decision.

“We will continue our fight in the courts until the ban is permanently blocked,” said Shannon Minter, legal director of the National Center for Lesbian Rights. “We also strongly support the bipartisan efforts of congressional leaders to pass urgently needed legislation to protect transgender troops. We urge everyone who cares about the integrity of our military and the well-being of our troops to contact your representatives and tell them to support this legislation.”

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SEE ALSO:

[The 9,000 Transgender Troops in Uniform Will Continue to Serve, Officials Say](#) [*Military.com*, 2019-03-13]

[New Pentagon transgender rule sets limits for troops](#) [*The Associated Press*, 2019-03-13]

[Here's everything you need to know about the DoD's transgender ban](#) [*Task & Purpose*, 2019-03-13]

[Pentagon's transgender policy will ban those who require treatment for gender dysphoria](#) [*USA TODAY*, 2019-03-12]

[Sen. Reed says Pentagon shouldn't adopt new transgender rule](#) [*The Associated Press*, 2019-03-13]

[Pentagon sets limits on transgender troops](#) [*Reuters*, 2019-03-12]

[Pentagon signs directive to implement transgender military ban](#) [*The Hill*, 2019-03-12]

Navy Carriers Celebrate 25 Years of Gender-Integrated Crews

By Patricia Kime

Military.com, March 8, 2019



Lt. j.g. Riza Suriben looks out as the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN 72) pulls out of Naval Station Norfolk. (U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Darion Chanelle Triplett)

ABOARD THE USS ABRAHAM LINCOLN -- As an EA-18G Growler approached the flight deck of the carrier Abraham Lincoln, up on the bridge, Lt. Riza Suriben called out for a slight adjustment to the ship's rudder. After it was made, and with her eyes never leaving the incoming aircraft, she calmly ordered: "Steady as she goes."

The Growler caught the first cable, completing flight operations for the morning. And Suriben allowed herself to smile for the first time that day.

"Sometimes you forget the bigger picture -- you get into a routine, the daily grind," she said. "But then we have visitors up here and they are so excited, and you remember, 'Hey, wait, my job is actually pretty cool.'"

As women make inroads into military ground combat positions previously closed to them, one naval community is celebrating a milestone in gender-integrated operations: 25 years ago this week, the Navy ordered the first assignment of women to a combat ship. Sixty-three women were detailed to the carrier Dwight D. Eisenhower, homeported in Norfolk, Virginia.

To the Abraham Lincoln Strike Group, the idea of all-male units or ships is unthinkable. Hardly any member of the crew of more than 6,000 remembers gender-restricted ships, except for the most senior officers and enlisted personnel.

According to Vice Adm. Andrew "Woody" Lewis, commander of the Navy's 2nd Fleet, diversity in age, gender, race and religion strengthen a ship or squadron's lethality.

"It's a meritocracy. It's an environment where all walks of life come on and serve in the military. It should be reassuring and refreshing and really makes you feel proud to be a part of this organization," Lewis said during an interview with reporters in late January.

Women make up roughly 19 percent of the U.S. Navy, and those serving on ships operate in an environment where they can excel based on ability and opportunities are unrestricted.

For example, Vice Adm. Lisa Franchetti commands the U.S. Sixth Fleet while Vice Adm. Mary Jackson leads Navy Installations Command. Fleet Master Chief April Beldo, who retired in 2017, was the first black female command master chief of an aircraft carrier, the Carl Vinson.

Lt. Cmdr. Jennifer Hesling is an F/A-18 Super Hornet pilot currently assigned to Naval Air Station Oceana, Virginia. A graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, she deployed onboard the carrier Harry S. Truman with Strike Fighter Squadron 32 in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. In her nearly 11-year career, she has not encountered any negative bias on the basis of gender, she said.

<https://www.military.com/daily-news/2019/03/08/navy-carriers-celebrate-25-years-gender-integrated-crews.html>

"I have served my country with wonderful men and women next to me. Most of my mentors have been men, encouraging me to fly fighter jets and to excel," she said. "I never felt like I'm not part of a team because I'm a woman."

And, she added, thanks to women like [Capt. Rosemary Mariner](#), one of the Navy's first female fighter pilots and the first woman to command a naval aviation squadron, she is accepted on the basis of her qualifications.

"I am grateful for those who opened doors for us because it allowed me to join naval aviation, without ever questioning whether I could or could not be a part of this community because of my gender," Hesling said.

Sailors onboard Abraham Lincoln have experienced first-hand what it's like to work with a trailblazer. Capt. Amy Bauernschmidt recently left the ship after working for two years as the executive officer, the first female XO of a nuclear carrier.

[According to an interview with CBS News](#), the 24-year veteran lives by a motto given to her by her mother: Never pass up an opportunity to grow.

"There are a lot of times in life that you're a little nervous or afraid to do something, 'cause you think you're gonna fail. Well, so what? I mean ... what's the worst that's gonna happen if I fail?" Bauernschmidt told CBS. "You know, if you fail, you get up and you may realize in that failure that what you're really meant to do is something else."

In December 2015, then-Defense Secretary Ash Carter announced that all military occupations and positions would be open to women, without exception. The decision freed up 220,000 more jobs for women, from Marine Corps ground combat billets such as infantry and artillery to Army Rangers, special operations, Air Force pararescue jumpers and more.

For women in these physically challenging billets, the path has not been easy, and integration efforts have been slow. Of the services, the Army has seen the most success, with roughly 800 women serving in previously closed combat billets. As of November, the Marine Corps had 151 female Marines in previously restricted military occupational specialties, including one infantry officer and 16 female enlisted personnel. The Air Force currently has [one woman in Tactical Air Control Party training](#), on the pathway to become the first female battlefield airman, but no women have made it through pararescue training. And no women have become Navy SEALs.

Lt. Emily Rixey, an F/A-18 Super Hornet pilot who deployed onboard the aircraft carrier George H. W. Bush in support of Operation Inherent Resolve and is now assigned to Strike Fighter Weapons School Atlantic, encourages women to keep trying.

"If you have the drive and dedication, leave gender out of the equation and keep going for it," she said.

Rixey and Hesling had the honor of [participating Feb. 2 in the first all-female flyover](#), a historic tribute to Mariner, who died Jan. 24.

Being in the ready room with seven other female fighter pilots -- and no men -- was "really odd," Rixey said, but "so awesome."

"We were laughing about it because we'd never seen that before. The energy was great," she said.

-- Patricia Kime can be reached at Patricia.Kime@Military.com. Follow her on Twitter at [@patriciakime](#).

Report: Specialized protective equipment, family leave among issues affecting female servicemembers

By Caitlin M. Kenney

Stars and Stripes, March 11, 2019



Military training Instructors with the 737th Training Group march in an all-female group during a basic military training graduation March 9, 2018 at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland, Texas. (Ismael Ortega/U.S. Air Force)

WASHINGTON — Providing female servicemembers with properly fitted protective equipment and encouraging the Department of Veterans Affairs to change its motto are among the recommendations laid out in an annual report to the secretary of defense.

The Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services, an advisory panel of civilian women and men, submits recommendations in an annual report on policies and issues affecting women in the military. Its 2018 report, released Monday, had nine recommendations and identified one topic of continuing concern.

This year, the group recommended that the secretary of defense encourage the VA to reconsider its department's motto to be more gender inclusive.

“The continued use of this motto undermines VA efforts to provide support and resources to servicewomen transitioning out of the military because its gender-specific language sends an unwelcoming message of exclusion,” the report says.

Adopted in 1959, the VA motto is a quote from President Abraham Lincoln's second inaugural address from 1865: “To care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan.” Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America has pushed the VA since 2017 to change the motto to reflect female veterans, but the department has said that it wouldn't be changed.

The committee also recommended that the services give female servicemembers personal protective equipment and gear that fits them properly. Currently, units scheduled to deploy are given priority when it comes to receiving newer equipment, including gear that is more fitted for female body types.

“Poorly fitting equipment is a leading cause of injury in servicemembers. Given that most traditional [equipment] was designed to fit men, women are the most likely to suffer from injuries as a result of incorrectly fitting gear,” the report says.

With all military occupations open to women, the need for female servicemembers to have access to properly fitted equipment is growing, the committee explained.

“Properly fitting equipment is essential to the success of individual Service members as well as the military as a whole. Moreover, Service members need to be familiarized with their combat gear to be fully prepared in the field,” they wrote.

Another recommendation was for the secretary of defense to mandate that all services provide 21 days of parental leave to “secondary caregivers,” which used to be called paternity leave. The 2017 National

<https://www.stripes.com/news/us/report-specialized-protective-equipment-family-leave-among-issues-affecting-female-servicemembers-1.572206>

Defense Authorization Act increased the leave from 10 to 21 days, but the Navy and Marine Corps only provide 14 days of leave.

“Authorizing servicemembers the maximum allowable 21 days of nonchargeable secondary caregiver leave will afford equitable opportunities to all military members, enabling them to best care for their families and promote retention,” the committee wrote.

In addition to the recommendations, the committee noted a “continuing concern” in the report: the Marine Corp’s separate training of female recruits. The Marine Corps is the last service to not completely train male and female recruits together.

While the group “is encouraged with the progress the Marine Corps is making, the Committee remains dedicated to ensuring that gender integration continues to progress in Marine Corps’ recruit training,” the report says.

“The Committee believes integration across all training units, military positions and occupations will promote a culture of inclusion.”

Other recommendations made by the committee are to require services to focus marketing efforts on realistic portrayals of female servicemembers; to have the Marine Corps eliminate a pregnancy status code used in the weight section of its performance evaluation form; and to expand an Air Force program to all the services to help transitioning female servicemembers learn about VA resources.

The 2018 report [can be read here](#).

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SEE ALSO:

[40 Stories From Women About Life in the Military](#) [*The New York Times*, 2019-03-08]

Miscellaneous

About 21,000 troops booted so far under ‘deploy or get out’ policy

By Leo Shane III

Military Times, March 14, 2019



Soldiers attached to the 101st Resolute Support Sustainment Brigade load onto a Chinook helicopter in Afghanistan. (1st Lt. Verniccia Ford/Army)

WASHINGTON — About 21,000 nondeployable troops have been forced out of the ranks since the Defense Department’s [“deploy or get out”](#) policy began last summer, [Acting Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan](#) announced on Thursday.

“A key element of strengthening our military and increasing lethality is ensuring our warfighters achieve established physical, mental and security vetting standards,” he told members of the Senate Armed Services Committee during a hearing on the fiscal 2020 budget request.

“War is unforgiving, and our mission demands we remain a standards-based organization.”

Last year, Defense Department officials estimated that about 11 percent of active-duty troops — some 235,000 — were rated as nondeployable. Almost half of that number were individuals missing medical exams or paperwork, troops nearing retirement and women service members who were pregnant.

But the remaining 126,000 faced a range of short- and long-term injuries, or simply failed to meet military fitness standards. Military officials said those individuals would be given up to 12 months to prove their deployability or be pushed out of the services.

Pregnant, recently pregnant and combat-wounded troops are exempt from the standards. Each of the services has also revamped their classification and reporting requirements, to more accurately track troops’ readiness.

Defense officials have set a goal for each service of no more than 5 percent of its total force classified as nondeployable. Shanahan said that in just a few months, the percentage of nondeployable troops has dropped to about 5.4 percent.

“In upholding systematically applied standards, we ensure the readiness of our joint force and cohesion of our units,” Shanahan said.

Troops who officials determine will not be able to meet the deployment standards can be forced out of the military in less than 12 months.

Shanahan said the moves are in line with broader department goals of increasing readiness among the services.

“We recognize restoring military readiness, modernizing our joint force and increasing lethality will not happen overnight, but ... we are making meaningful progress,” he said.

Reporter Tara Copp contributed to this story.

CNN hit with \$275 million defamation suit by Kentucky student

By Keith Coffman

Reuters, March 13, 2019



Nicholas Sandmann, 16, a student from Covington Catholic High School stands in front of Native American activist Nathan Phillips in Washington, U.S., in this still image from a January 18, 2019 video by Kaya Taitano. (Kaya Taitano/Social Media/via REUTERS/File Photo)

A Kentucky teenager sued CNN on Tuesday for defamation, saying the cable network falsely conveyed to viewers that he was the “face of an unruly hate mob”

confronting a Native American activist at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington in January.

The lawsuit, filed on behalf of Covington Catholic High School student Nicholas Sandmann in federal court in Kentucky, seeks \$275 million in compensatory and punitive damages over the videotaped incident in the nation’s capital.

Sandmann and other Covington Catholic students had been in Washington to attend a March for Life anti-abortion rally.

In photos and videos that went viral from the incident, Sandmann is seen standing face to face with Native American activist Nathan Phillips. Sandmann stares and smiles at Phillips while Phillips sings and plays his drum.

The footage sparked outrage on social media, with many viewers saying that Sandmann and a group of fellow students seen gathered around Phillips appeared to be mocking the activist.

The complaint said CNN, a division of Turner Broadcasting System Inc.-owned Warner Media LLC, aired four “defamatory” broadcasts and nine online articles falsely accusing Sandmann, 16, and his classmates of “engaging in racist conduct.”

“The CNN accusations are totally and unequivocally false, and CNN would have known them to be untrue had it undertaken any reasonable efforts to verify their accuracy before publication,” the complaint said.

A CNN spokeswoman said the network declined to comment.

A private investigation firm commissioned by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Covington in Park Hills, Kentucky, to review the incident concluded last month that there was no evidence the students provoked a confrontation.

Instead, the report found that the teenagers were met at the Lincoln Memorial by offensive statements directed at them by several African-American protesters from a group known as the Black Hebrew Israelites.

According to this account, the students responded with permission from the teacher chaperones by shouting “school spirit” chants before Phillips waded into scene playing his drum.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-nativeamerican/cnn-hit-with-275-million-defamation-suit-by-kentucky-student-idUSKBN1QU0BY>

The complaint said CNN exhibited a bias against President Donald Trump by focusing on Sandmann and other Covington students because they were wearing red caps emblazoned with the president’s “Make America Great Again” slogan.

Trump has a contentious relationship with CNN, frequently calling it “Fake News.”

Last month, Sandmann sued the Washington Post for \$250 million over its reporting of the same incident.

The newspaper said in a statement that it would “mount a vigorous defense,” and later published an “Editor’s Note” explaining how its coverage of the incident evolved as new information came to light.

Reporting by Keith Coffman in Denver; Editing by Steve Gorman, Robert Birsal

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SEE ALSO:

[Nick Sandmann's legal team files \\$275 million lawsuit against CNN](#) [*The Cincinnati Enquirer*, 2019-03-13]

[Covington Catholic Student Nicholas Sandmann Files \\$275 Million Defamation Lawsuit Against CNN](#) [*Newsweek*, 2019-03-12]

[Barrage of lawsuits shows media at rock bottom](#) [*Boston Herald*, 2019-03-10]

[The Washington Post sued by family of Covington Catholic teenager](#) [*The Washington Post*, 2019-02-20]

[Covington Catholic Teen Nick Sandmann Sues 'Washington Post' For \\$250 Million](#) [*NPR*, 2019-02-20]

Can LSD and magic mushrooms help win wars? This Marine officer says ‘yes’

By J.D. Simkins

Marine Corps Times, March 11, 2019



One officer has cited growing evidence of the benefits of psychedelic drugs, like the mushrooms seen here, as reason to use microdoses to generate performance enhancing benefits among certain military personnel. (Peter Dejong/AP)

Sanctioned psychedelic drug use as a medical or psychological treatment method is gaining ground as part of today’s hallucinogenic renaissance.

Recent scientific studies approved by the Food and Drug Administration have yielded positive cognitive results when administering “microdoses” of the drugs lysergic acid diethylamide, or LSD, and psilocybin, the alkaloid in hallucinogenic mushrooms.

But could this new wave of unorthodox treatment ever find its way into the ranks of the military?

According to an article by Marine [Maj. Emre Albayrak](#) that was published in the February issue of the [Marine Corps Gazette](#), it certainly should.

Microdosing, which refers to administering a minuscule quantity of the drug in order to avoid hallucinations or debilitating effects in the patient, is already being used by “scientists, Silicon Valley executives, biologists, biohackers, and others” to achieve a mental edge, Albayrak [writes](#).

Administering in such doses has the potential to “significantly heighten alertness, creativity, and problem solving.”

Today’s service members, especially those in the intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance communities, are faced with the nearly-insurmountable task of analyzing a rapidly-growing tidal wave of analytical data that, with today’s advances in technology, will only continue to expose cognitive shortfalls, the [author writes](#).

Personnel in these professions have made every attempt to stem that tide, employing approved pre-workout supplements, tobacco, caffeine or any other legal substances designed to raise a sense of alertness or boost productivity.

But an inability to process “superhuman” amounts of information in a community in which “one percent gains provide significant advantages” on the battlefield necessitates a better solution, Albayrak suggests.

Enter LSD and magic mushrooms.

“Like most hallucinogens, LSD mimics the effects of serotonin (a mood regulator),” the [author](#) says, and activates enhanced mental acuity in the areas of learning and memory.

Additionally, the drug commonly referred to as “acid” can decrease blood circulation to the part of the brain that instigates periods of mind wandering.

And while the use of performance-enhancing drugs like Ritalin or Adderall to combat the dreaded attention lapse is well-documented, both drugs “are amphetamines and carry a variety of side effects,” including kidney failure, rhabdomyolysis and addiction risk, Albayrak says.

<https://www.marinecorpstimes.com/off-duty/military-culture/2019/03/11/lsd-and-magic-mushrooms-can-enhance-cognitive-capabilities-help-win-wars-study-claims/>

With microdoses of psychedelic drugs, meanwhile, military personnel can potentially “connect seemingly unconnected pieces of information and create revolutionary new solutions.”

Beyond the scientific research evidence emerging from institutions like Johns Hopkins, NYU or Yale, additional proof of LSD’s benefits, the author claims, lies in the number of successful minds who have employed the drug for its cognitive rewards.

This group includes “Nobel Prize–winning scientists admitting their use of small doses of LSD to boost thought,” [Albayrak says](#), as well as the late CEO of Apple, Steve Jobs, who called dropping acid “a profound experience, one of the most important things in my life. LSD shows you that there’s another side to the coin.”

The military should join the growing list of psychedelic beneficiaries, the author writes, to become “stronger, faster and smarter than our adversaries.”

No one wants a level playing field in combat, after all.

“World Anti-Doping Agency doping control officers are not taking samples after missions to ban Marines from ‘competition,’” Albayrak writes. “Our enemies are already seeking an edge over us through PEDs.”

The chances of the military signing off on the use of psychedelic performance enhancers are slim, but with societal attitudes toward psychedelics trending in the direction they are, it’s worth a discussion.

Just last year, another round of test results using a different psychedelic party drug continued to show promise as a treatment option for patients with chronic post-traumatic stress disorder.

The study, published in the [Lancet Psychiatry](#) journal, found that MDMA, the main ingredient in ecstasy or molly, dramatically reduced PTSD symptoms in study participants.

In a follow-up one month after the second therapy session, researchers found that symptoms of PTSD were effectively eliminated in 68 percent of the study’s participants.

Therapy, coupled with MDMA, has the capability to “reduce fear and defensiveness, enhance communication and introspection, and increase empathy and compassion, enhancing the therapeutic process,” according to a [press release](#) from the California-based nonprofit, Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies.

In response to continued success, MDMA was given “breakthrough therapy” status in 2017 by the FDA. Demonstrating significant efficacy and safety in an additional round of testing is expected to result in full FDA approval by 2021.

In a poll of nearly 1,400 Military Times readers, 87 percent said they were in favor of granting veterans access to MDMA.

These developments have not been lost on active-duty personnel.

“Though the idea is radical, it must be understood that this is neither a sideways attempt to allow Marines to ingest illicit substances nor to be mistaken as a half-baked attempt to recreate previously failed paranormal experiments,” the [author writes](#).

“This is a serious foray and discussion about considering the use of cognitive PEDs to increase productivity, creativity, problem-solving ability, and flow.

Maj. Albayrak’s [full article can be found here](#).

GOP senators unveil paid parental leave proposal

By Naomi Jagoda

The Hill, March 12, 2019

GOP Sens. Mike Lee (Utah) and Joni Ernst (Iowa) on Tuesday rolled out a paid parental leave proposal, as the issue is getting [increasing attention from policymakers](#) on both sides of the aisle.

The senators' draft legislation, known as the Cradle Act, would allow new parents to receive up to three months of paid-leave benefits after the birth or adoption of a child, in exchange for delaying collecting Social Security benefits when they retire.

"I believe the Cradle Act is a policy that not only attracts consensus, but is viable for families, employers and our economy," Ernst said during a press conference.

Under the proposal, new parents would have the option to take one, two or three months of paid leave benefits. They would then postpone collection of their Social Security retirement benefits by two months for every one month of parental leave they take.

The benefit amount would be based on the formula used for calculating Social Security disability benefits. A fact sheet from the senators' offices said that a single parent with income equal to the federal poverty level would receive a benefit equal to about 74 percent of their wages.

Lee said the goal is for the draft legislation to be budget neutral in the long run, but at the front-end there would be costs of about \$8 billion to \$9 billion annually. He said that he and Ernst are looking at ways to offset those short-term costs.

The proposal comes as both Republicans and Democrats have put more focus on pushing for paid family leave ahead of the 2020 presidential election, when women will be a key group of voters.

Ivanka Trump, the president's daughter and adviser, has made paid leave one of her top priorities and met with Ernst, Lee and other GOP senators to discuss the topic last month. She said in a statement Tuesday that she looks forward to reviewing the proposal from Ernst and Lee.

"I will continue to work with members on both sides of the aisle in support of the President's goal of passing into law Paid Family Leave policy that supports 21st Century American working families," she said.

The ideas in Ernst and Lee's draft bill are based on a proposal from the conservative Independent Women's Forum. Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) also [offered similar legislation](#) last year.

But Democrats have criticized the idea of a paid leave benefit that takes the form of early Social Security benefits, saying that people shouldn't have to choose between paid leave and retirement benefits. They have also criticized proposals that focus just on paid parental leave, rather than both family and medical leave.

Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.), who has offered her own paid leave bill that takes a different approach, said in a statement Tuesday that Ernst and Lee's proposal is "not a realistic plan."

"It only covers new parents and it creates a false choice between Social Security and paid leave," she said. "We urgently need a national paid leave program that covers all workers for all medical emergencies, and anything less is just not enough."

Gillibrand, who has entered the 2020 presidential race, has offered legislation that would create a paid family and medical leave benefit that would be paid for through a small increase in payroll taxes. Republicans, however, have been critical of the tax increases associated with that bill.

<https://thehill.com/policy/finance/433702-gop-senators-unveil-paid-parental-leave-proposal>

Lee stressed that the paid parental leave benefit in his proposal is optional, and he said that those who are eligible for the benefit are likely to want to take it because they consider it valuable to spend time with their newborn. He also said that new parents have been paying into the Social Security system and will be paying into it for decades to come after their children are born.

"It's a tradeoff, but it's a tradeoff that I think many will take," he said.

Lee said that he and Ernst have discussed their proposal with a number of their Democratic colleagues, and several are considering supporting it. He declined to name the Democratic senators who might back his plan.

Military families urge Warner to act on housing problems, citing mold and mismanagement

By Courtney Mabeus and Hugh Lessig

Daily Press (Newport News, Va.), March 11, 2019

Navy families with housing problems unloaded on Sen. Mark R. Warner Monday, hoping that stories of sickening mold and other hazards will convince Congress to enact sweeping reforms.

A discussion scheduled by Warner brought about a dozen families, most from Virginia Beach and Norfolk. They described illnesses related to black mold, maggots falling from a ceiling fan and an appliance that sparked fires.

Whitney Jones, a veteran and the wife of a Navy chaplain, said she ended up with a snake infestation, and at nine months pregnant, was left to sop up sewage in her basement.

“There’s an underlying tone of condescension when everyone is calling in, trying to get these problems resolved,” Jones said.

She was among several who blamed Lincoln Military Housing — which manages about 4,400 homes in Hampton Roads — for dragging its feet, while some saw a too-cozy relationship between the housing company and local liaison officials. It was the latest forum for military families to air their grievances, as housing problems nationwide and across all the services have led to Senate inquiries and promises of a fix.

Some told their stories while fighting back tears. Others handed over stacks of photos supporting their stories.

Rachael McClain discovered she was pregnant soon after moving into Wadsworth Shores, near Naval Air Station Oceana, in October 2017. Because of a disability, McClain said she has a service dog and gave doctor’s notes to Lincoln saying she needed to be in a one-story. Lincoln told her she wasn’t qualified.

“December, after finding out I was pregnant, I had my first fall down the stairs and lost my baby,” McClain said.

McClain broke her foot in a second fall.

Later, when the family found mold, McClain said Lincoln blamed her dog and her infant daughter, who suffers from developmental delays because of the exposure.

Now, McClain’s family is thousands of dollars in debt after taking out a loan to move to civilian housing. She sometimes blames herself for not doing more research before moving into military housing.

“How many children are going to suffer? How many times are we going to move into military housing and get sick, fall down our stairs and our complaints and our concerns are ignored because we’re not important enough?” McClain said. “We’re a paycheck for them.”

Bobbie Barker “fought and fought” to be moved from her first home in Shelton Circle near Joint Expeditionary Little Creek after mold was found. Now she’s fighting again. She had a story to tell Navy Secretary Richard Spencer when he visited her home there during a recent tour of military housing.

A squirrel died above their bedroom ceiling and maggots began falling onto the bed. Water has leaked into light fixtures and smoke detectors.

“They don’t want to own their responsibilities,” she said. “They want to fight with you.”

<https://www.dailypress.com/news/military/dp-nws-warner-housing-20190310-story.html>

After enduring so many problems Barker is cynical about a solution. This is not the first time issues have come up; similar problems came to light earlier this decade and reforms were promised then.

“How many chances are we going to give them to get it right?,” she asked.

Warner had no quick and easy answers for the group. He has co-filed reform legislation, but even that takes time. He promised to stay on top of the matter and suggested they meet again in several weeks.

“These stories are awful,” Warner said. “Snakes in the basement, sounds like a bad movie. You folks have all been living a bad movie. I’m sorry. This is not right.”

Lincoln has stood by its housing, acknowledging that problems arise but cited high marks in residential surveys. Residents Monday questioned how reliable those surveys are when families are offered incentives to fill them out. Instead, they said they want accountability. Statements in the press or testimony from president and chief executive Jarl Bliss before Congress that Lincoln is working to regain families’ trust falls short, they said.

“You can’t regain trust from somebody that’s a ghost,” McClain said.

On Monday, Bliss issued a statement through Lincoln spokesman Trent Duffy.

"Fixing these problems is my top priority, but this effort will require all of us at Lincoln working together," he said. "I have personally seen and reviewed every case that has been brought to our attention, and we are working with family advocates on reforms to ensure that these problems don't happen again."

The complaints Monday were not confined to the Navy and Lincoln Military Housing.

At Fort Eustis, Tara Burney and her husband live in an older home, managed by Balfour Beatty, with an oven that has sparked two fires. The first happened last April, when a heating element shorted out. The second was in January due to bad wiring, which Burney said the company repaired.

Balfour Beatty could not be reached to comment on Burney's case. Company president Christopher Williams told a Senate Armed Services panel that the company is committed to correcting problems.

“We’re constantly learning from our experiences both good and bad, and we’re always looking for ways to improve our service,” he said

In the meantime, Burney refuses to use that particular burner.

“I’ve already been told that if we ever leave this house we have to buy them a new oven,” she told Warner.

SEE ALSO:

[Safeguards for military families in privatized housing proposed in Congress](#) [*Military Times*, 2019-03-14]

[Tillis calls for end to nondisclosure agreements on military housing](#) [*Fayetteville (NC) Observer*, 2019-03-11]

[Housing privatization brings corporate attitude onto bases](#) [*Air Force Times*, 2019-02-10][OPINION]

[Are troops signing agreements to keep quiet about their housing problems?](#) [*Military Times*, 2019-03-08]

[Navy leader in charge of housing resigns](#) [*Navy Times*, 2019-03-08]

[Assistant Navy Secretary Retires Amid Military Housing Woes](#) [*Military.com*, 2019-03-08]

[Senator Blumenthal seeks criminal investigation of shoddy military housing](#) [*Reuters*, 2019-03-07]

[Military housing issues "may be much worse" than reported, Senate committee finds](#) [*Daily Press (Newport News, Va.)*, 2019-03-07]

Pentagon faces internal questions about program to screen recruits with foreign ties, emails show

Officials have touted the program as a way to speed up vetting of recruits who have what the Pentagon considers “foreign nexus” risks.

By Dan Lamothe

The Washington Post, March 12, 2019



Marine Sgt. Edson Mejia Jimenez, left, originally from Colombia, and Army Pvt. Sehyeon Park, originally from South Korea, take the Oath of Allegiance along with other citizenship candidates during a naturalization ceremony in Virginia on Feb. 22, 2016. (Michael Reynolds/European Pressphoto Agency)

A Pentagon program designed to screen [potential recruits](#) with foreign ties, including green-card holders and some U.S. citizens, has prompted questions from military officials about whether it will have detrimental effects on the services, according to emails and documents obtained by The Washington Post.

Defense officials touted the program as a way to speed up vetting of recruits who have what the Pentagon considers “foreign nexus” risks. The process could be completed “in a matter of days or . . . in a few weeks, as compared to months and years” required under traditional background checks, according to one Defense Department memo.

The program, which was tested by the Army last summer but has not been implemented, would rely on mining several government databases for information.

But the plan also may come with complications, according to emails obtained by The Post. That would be a concern for a military that has long sought to attract immigrants to meet its recruiting goals in part by promoting the possibility of U.S. citizenship.

Discussions about the program began in earnest after a federal judge issued a [preliminary injunction](#) in November ordering the Pentagon to begin sending a backlog of thousands of green-card recruits to initial training. The order came after two prospective recruits — one born in China and interested in joining the Navy and one originally from Jamaica who planned to join the Air Force — sued the Pentagon, arguing that months-long delays in screening had caused them harm.

The two men were among thousands who were left in limbo after the Trump administration, citing security concerns, adopted a policy in October 2017 that called for green-card holders to submit to more stringent background checks before they could go to boot camp. That was in addition to standard requirements for green-card applicants, such as biometrics screening.

The program would need approval in court to overcome the injunction. But internally, some defense officials have expressed concern that it also will create some delays.

Russ Beland, a senior civilian official in the Navy Department, said in a Feb. 27 email obtained by The Post that the estimates officials were using to determine which recruits needed additional screening “may be far too low.” After assessing its pool of recruits waiting to go to initial training, the Navy determined that “somewhere between a third and half” could require new screening, he wrote.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2019/03/12/pentagon-faces-internal-questions-about-program-screen-recruits-with-foreign-ties-emails-show/>

“I recognize there are risks from inadequate screening, but there are also risks from gapped billets,” Beland said, using military parlance for empty slots in training.

In response, Lernes Hebert, a senior defense official overseeing personnel issues, said he was committed to working with the Navy Department on exceptions to the policy “if class seats are at risk of going vacant.” In that case, he wrote, the Pentagon would require tracking recruits who are identified for additional screening to be completed “as soon as possible” while they make their way through initial stages of training.

Such exceptions would be rare, Hebert predicted, and would require Pentagon approval.

Beland said he had concerns about that, too. By the time a recruiting command became aware of concerns about a recruit, it could be too late, he wrote. If every case must go up to that level at the Pentagon, he added, it “does not sound workable to me if we encounter widespread delays.”

Beland, in an email, said that he could not comment on the messages because the policy is “in a pre-decisional state.”

Hebert referred comment to the Pentagon’s public affairs office.

Air Force Lt. Col. Carla Gleason, a Pentagon spokeswoman, said that she was unable to address questions but that the Defense Department needs “every qualified patriot who is willing and able to serve.” As of May 2018, about 19,800 noncitizens were among the nation’s 1.2 million active-duty service members.

The Trump administration’s new restrictions on service members with foreign ties also has included the end of a program begun in 2008 to attract foreign recruits with key medical and language skills. That effort, known as the Military Accessions Vital to National Interests (MAVNI) program, offered a path to citizenship but ended in 2017 after U.S. officials concluded it was vulnerable to insider threats.

The Pentagon began discharging some service members who joined the military under MAVNI, but suspended the process in 2018. In a lawsuit brought by 17 U.S. service members who became U.S. citizens through MAVNI, lawyers argued during a trial late last year that the Pentagon was treating them differently from other citizens by requiring them to undergo extensive biannual screening.

In January, U.S. District Judge Thomas S. Zilly found in the MAVNI troops’ favor, ruling that the Pentagon had not met its burden of proof to require the screening.

During the trial, Stephanie Miller, a senior Pentagon official involved in recruiting, said the Defense Department Inspector General and intelligence agencies had warned defense officials that “direct threats for espionage” had been identified in the MAVNI program and that “hostile governments” were targeting it.

Under questioning, Miller said that in the program’s nearly 10-year history, one person who attempted to join through MAVNI had been charged in an espionage case. That person had not yet obtained U.S. citizenship or a security clearance. More than 10,000 U.S. troops joined the military through the program.

Miller referred questions to the Pentagon’s public affairs office.

In the other pending case, the American Civil Liberties Union and the law firm Latham & Watkins have argued in federal court that obtaining a green card already requires significant screening and that requiring even more is not only discriminatory but also harms the Armed Forces by withholding recruits.

The Justice Department, arguing on behalf of the Pentagon, has countered that researching the background of someone who was not born in the United States can be difficult and that some recruits had falsified information while seeking security clearances. The case could go to trial this year.

Senate, White House Must Resolve Stalemate That Has Disabled Federal Employee Grievance Board [OPINION]

By Bill Valdez, Max Stier, Terry Gerton, and Thomas W. Ross

Government Executive, March 8, 2019



Shutterstock.com

The Merit Systems Protection Board is a small agency with a critical task: protecting the nonpartisan nature of the federal career civil service. For the first time in its 40-year history, the board, as of March 1, has no Senate-confirmed board members. The cause? The Senate for years has been unable to approve board nominees.

This is chilling news for American taxpayers and anyone who wants the federal government to avoid returning to the 19th century spoils system that resulted in epic scandals like the Union Pacific Railroad bankruptcy, manipulation of the gold market and the Whiskey Ring scandal of the Grant presidency.

MSPB is the guardian of the merit system principles that are the bedrock of the federal civilian civil service. These principles hold that hiring decisions, promotions, disciplinary actions and firings are based on the qualifications and performance of the individual employee. The principles do not tolerate cronyism, retributions based on whistleblowing or other forms of discrimination.

The lack of a single board member compounds an already unacceptable problem. The MSPB has been operating since early 2017 under unprecedented circumstances: the absence of a voting quorum.

The result has been a backlog of nearly 2,000 cases and a delay in justice of up to three years for federal employees, whistleblowers, veterans and federal annuitants with matters before the board. And undoubtedly it also means that agencies, which ultimately would prevail before MSPB, are having to keep problematic employees on the payroll until a quorum is restored and the board can vote on cases.

Moreover, due to the lack of a quorum, the board has been unable to issue official reports or studies to Congress and the president during a critical time in which there is a growing appreciation for the imperative of modernizing the civil service. The recent 35-day partial government shutdown demonstrated to everyone the need for an effective and efficient civil service and the MSPB, through its official reports, provides agencies with key data needed to maintain the productivity of their workforces.

The stoppage of MSPB's independent, quasi-judicial role will have a catastrophic long-term impact on the merit-based system for the approximately 2 million member federal civil service as well as the agencies that employ them.

Two MSPB nominations submitted by the President Trump were recently reported favorably by the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, but the gridlock that characterizes the modern-day confirmation process leaves their fate unclear. Also, with the recent withdrawal of another MSPB nominee, the president has the opportunity to put forth a third nomination for the board.

We call upon the Congress and administration to expeditiously return MSPB to its role as protector of the civil service merit system by prioritizing the nomination and confirmation processes to ensure that MSPB can fully function. Federal employees and the American taxpayer deserve nothing less.

<https://www.govexec.com/excellence/management-matters/2019/03/senate-white-house-must-resolve-stalemate-has-disabled-federal-employee-grievance-board/155412/>

Bill Valdez is the president of the Senior Executives Association, a nonprofit professional association for federal career leaders that promotes ethical and dynamic public service. Max Stier is the president and CEO of the Partnership for Public Service, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that seeks to transform how the government works. Terry Gerton is the president and CEO of the National Academy of Public Administration, a congressionally chartered, non-partisan, non-profit academy that improves governance and advances the field of public administration. Thomas W. Ross is the president of The Volcker Alliance, a nonpartisan organization that advances effective management of government to achieve results that matter to citizens.

Stricter recruiting standards now could save DoD billions in disability payouts later: study

By Tara Copp

Military Times, March 13, 2019



Future soldiers from the Phoenix Recruiting Battalion recite the oath of enlistment during a mass enlistment ceremony, Nov. 18, 2018, at State Farm Stadium in Glendale, Ariz. (Army)

Tightening medical requirements for recruits now could eventually save DoD billions, by reducing the number of enlisted service members who end up retiring or separating early due to medical issues, a new [study](#) has found.

The Rand Corp. looked at 10 policy changes DoD has made to its medical [recruiting](#) standards since 2002. Of those, seven policies tightened regulations and three loosened them. Some were minor, such as a 2005 change requiring recruits to show more flexibility and bend their knee to 110 degrees, instead of the previous 90 degrees. Some policy changes were broader, such as no longer allowing recruits with a current case of psoriasis to enlist.

Rand then looked at the entire pool of enlisted first-time recruits from each service from 2002 to 2012. Rand tracked how many of those service members [medically separated](#) or were medically retired over the next eight years, looking for troops whose records indicated a medical conditions affected by one of the 10 policy changes. It then evaluated whether those separations increased or fell for recruiting classes who enlisted after a change was implemented.

“We found a reasonable enough change that we could conclude that this was different,” and that tightening policies had reduced the number of separations and retirements, said Kathryn Edwards, an associate economist at Rand.

For DoD, that could mean a huge cost savings.

When an enlisted service member is medically separated with a disability rating of less than 30 percent, they are eligible for a one-time severance payment and 180 days of continued health care benefits. The amount of severance pay depends on years of service.

Service members with a disability rating of 30 percent or more can be medically retired, with greater benefits than those who are medically separated. Such troops can qualify for a monthly cash payout from DoD, based on the number of completed years of service or on a disability rating that lasts through death, Rand reported.

For example, Rand concluded that for every 10,000 recruits, the stricter knee policy was connected to seven fewer medical retirements or separations, said Heather Krull, a senior economist at Rand.

That equals a cost savings of \$4.3 million per 10,000 recruits, just from the knee policy change, Rand found.

In its review, Rand found that of the 1.7 million new recruits who enlisted from 2002 to 2012, about 4 percent were medically retired and about 2 percent were medically separated during their first 8 years of service.

<https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2019/03/13/higher-medical-standards-for-recruits-could-save-dod-billions-in-disability-payouts-study/>

However, Rand did not find that the three policies that were loosened had a significant impact on the number of service members separated for medical reasons.

Rand did not make any recommendations from the study and emphasized that the recruiting policies are among many factors — such as whether recruits join at a time of heavy deployment — that can impact the number of medical separations and retirements.

Also, if the military gets four years of service out of a recruit who ends up getting separated in their 5th or 6th year, that's still valuable, Krull said. So that's a consideration when considering what medical conditions might benefit from tighter policies.

“When are these conditions likely to manifest, is the military going to get some good, valuable years of service?” Krull said. “It's a balancing act.”



SEE ALSO:

[After 2018's recruiting shortfall, it will take a lot longer to build the Army to 500K](#) [*Army Times*, 2019-03-14]

VA Struggles To Unlock The Reasons Behind High Suicide Rates Among Older Veterans

By Steve Walsh

NPR, March 11, 2019



Robert Neilson, a 76-year-old veteran, is seeking treatment at the San Diego VA after contemplating suicide three years ago. (Matt Bowler/KPBS)

Much of the focus by the Veterans Health Administration has been on the growing number of [younger veterans](#) who commit suicide. However, statistics show that the suicide rate for elderly veterans is higher than that of non-veterans of the same age.

Robert Neilson was drafted in 1961. He spent two years in the Army just before the Vietnam War. Three years ago, the 76-year-old came into the VA Hospital in San Diego after contemplating suicide.

"That's what really brought me into the emergency room. That wasn't really the first time," Neilson said. "Two months after I got out of the service, I attempted suicide."

After he got out of the Army, Neilson remembers going back home to New Jersey. He was standing on a subway platform watching a speeding train.

"And I figured if I just hold my hands in the air, I could just let [the train] suck me in," Neilson said. "Somebody shouted, 'What are you doing?' And that was enough to snap me out of the trance. But I still didn't seek any help. I just figured, OK, I'll just struggle through life."

And he did. It would take another 50 years for Neilson to get help dealing with the trauma of a sexual assault he experienced in the military.

"And the guilt was, I wasn't strong enough to overpower that person. Plus, it was a high-ranking person," he said.

That was all he wanted to say about the incident that has haunted him most of his life.

All sorts of service-related issues can lie dormant only to crop up later in life, said Ron Stark. Stark founded [Moving to Zero](#), a nonprofit group in San Diego aimed at preventing veteran suicide. He counsels fellow veterans there who have contemplated suicide and more than a few are elderly.

Stark retired from the Navy in 1994. He served aboard a submarine in the Arctic in the 1970s and again during Desert Storm. He understands that, for some older veterans, no accomplishment is ever enough.

"We have things about stolen valor. Nobody wants to misrepresent themselves," he said. "So I'm a Vietnam-era veteran. I'm not a Vietnam veteran. I was in Desert Storm, but I wasn't in combat. We're always talking about what we're not quite."

[Veterans struggling with suicide](#) aren't always wrestling with memories of combat.

Stark suffered from depression most of his life and he never saw combat. He remembers sitting by the roadside with a pistol and contemplated pulling the trigger.

"The military didn't make me who I was," he said.

<https://www.npr.org/2019/03/11/702251738/va-struggles-to-unlock-the-reasons-behind-high-suicide-rates-among-older-veteran>

But the military establishes life-long habits, both good and bad. A soldier strives to be someone people can rely on, especially in critical situations.

"You have a bad day at work and you go home. You have a bad day on a submerged submarine, then people die," he said.

So if you're not feeling 100 percent, maybe it's better to keep it to yourself, he notes. Stark describes suicidal feelings as a brief moment of blackness when other options fade from view.

The VA [National Suicide Data Report](#) for 2005 to 2016, which came out in September 2018, highlights an alarming rise in suicides among veterans age 18 to 34 — 45 per 100,000 veterans. Younger veterans have the highest rate of suicide among veterans, but those 55 and older still represent the largest *number* of suicides.

Moreover, the suicide rate for older veterans is higher than that of non-veterans. For veterans age 55 to 74 years old, the rate of suicide is 26 per 100,000, while nationally, the suicide rate in the same age group is 17.4 per 100,000. The rate ticks up even higher for veterans over 85 years old.

The Veterans Health Administration has focused on finding risk factors that could lead someone to kill themselves, such as isolation, previous suicidal thoughts and access to firearms. Another big risk factor is that older men are also more likely to reject treatment for mental health issues.

Among the people who have those risk factors, the VA still doesn't know who will attempt suicide, said Colin Depp, a psychologist at the San Diego VA who has researched suicide among older veterans.

"We're not very far ahead in understanding who's out there, who's really likely to take their lives in the next hours, days, months," he said.

The VA emphasizes getting potentially suicidal veterans in the door, where health-care workers deploy a range of treatments, he said.

That's what has helped 76-year-old Robert Nielson. He was 73 years old before he sought help.

As part of his own treatment, Neilson is now writing letters of encouragement to fellow veterans who are just beginning treatment as part of a VA program.

Neilson pulled out one of the letters he wrote and explained how he can help a veteran he will never meet in person. "I don't know you but I have faith in you. You're going to make it," he read.

The letters are just one more nudge to keep veterans away from that dark moment when suicide feels like the only option.

This story is part of the [American Homefront Project](#), a public media collaboration on in-depth military coverage with funding from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and The Patriots Connection.

What the military can teach us about preventing suicide

[OPINION]

A program of institutional and cultural changes that could help stem the suicide epidemic is sorely needed.

By David Kieran

The Washington Post, March 13, 2019



Kelly Catlin of the United States is shown during the medal ceremony for the women's team pursuit final of the Rio Olympic Games track cycling events in Rio de Janeiro on Aug. 13, 2016. (Alejandro Ernesto/EPA-EFE)

David Kieran is assistant professor of history at Washington & Jefferson College and author of "Signature Wounds: The Untold Story of the Military's Mental Health Crisis," which will be published by New York University Press in the Spring of 2019.

The news this week that Kelly Catlin, an Olympic cyclist who won a silver medal in 2016, [took her own life](#) is the latest tragedy amid a [nationwide rise](#) in suicide.

Before her death, Catlin had apparently been open about her mental-health struggles and the overwhelming stress that she felt. "She just felt like she couldn't say no to everything that was asked of her and this was her only escape," her sister told The Washington Post. Catlin had also suffered a concussion that left her struggling to continue to train at a high level.

As they engage in the reflection and soul searching that another high-profile suicide rightly demands, Americans pondering what can be done to lower the national suicide rate would do well to consider lessons from what might, at first glance, seem an unlikely source: the U.S. Army. Military suicides have been a major problem for more than a decade, and the military has developed ideas that, if applied to the general population, might help reduce the epidemic of suicides plaguing the United States.

In 2007, as President George W. Bush announced that he was dispatching an additional 30,000 troops to Iraq, newspapers across the country reported that for the first time, the suicide rate among active-duty soldiers had risen above the national average. For an institution that had spent the decades after Vietnam repairing its image and building a reputation as an organization that helped young Americans "be all that they can be," this statistic prompted close study and a cultural reckoning.

At first glance, there seemed to be a simple explanation for the increase in suicides: Soldiers were returning from a prolonged, violent war traumatized by their experiences, and some of them took their own lives.

While logical, this explanation turned out to be oversimplified. When the [Army's Health Promotion, Risk Reduction and Suicide Prevention Task Force](#) studied cases of suicide, it found that most soldiers who had taken their own lives had deployed only once to Iraq, or not at all, and that deployment-related mental-health troubles didn't necessarily correlate with suicides.

Instead, the committee found that the pace of Army life, particularly during wartime, produced a hectic stream of trainings, deployments, job changes and relocations that placed soldiers under more stress than their civilian peers but that soldiers most often took their lives for the same reasons that civilians did: failed

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2019/03/13/what-military-can-teach-us-about-preventing-suicide/>

relationships; careers imperiled by legal trouble or injury; mounting debts; or unmanageable depression, anxiety or substance abuse.

As appears to have been true in Catlin's case, each additional stressor compounded the sense that there was no escape. In its report, the task force described this as a maze: A stressor pushed someone into the maze, and compounding pressures led them deeper; some ended up at the center of the maze and could not escape.

Helping soldiers escape the maze required that the Army change not only its policies but also its culture. On the one hand, the Army sought to make behavioral health care more accessible, integrating it into primary care and placing providers in the units where soldiers worked every day. The Army also worked to rewrite regulations to ensure that soldiers' careers would not be harmed if they sought mental-health treatment, to make it easier for the chaplains, substance abuse counselors, marriage and family therapists and others who worked with troubled soldiers to share information and provide high-quality care while maintaining patient privacy. Army leadership also worked to ensure that as soldiers changed units and posts, their records were effectively transferred and that care was continuous.

But the Army understood that better care would be meaningless without cultural changes. As in American culture as a whole, mental-health issues were often met with silence or derision inside the Army. In an environment where toughness and manliness were paramount attributes, mental-health problems were a sign of weakness and therefore something to shield from public view. This culture discouraged soldiers from seeking help.

In 2010, the task force issued a "Health Promotion, Risk Reduction, Suicide Prevention Handbook," which argued that the frantic pace of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars had led leaders to value fighting skills over people skills, to the point that soldiers' struggles — deteriorating relationships, substance use that was becoming abuse, maxed-out credit cards or a penchant for risky behavior — were not being noticed until too late.

Condemning what it called "the lost art of garrison leadership," the Army determined that it needed to change its culture to cultivate leaders' capacity to care for and mentor soldiers. "Now more than ever, our Soldiers need firm, fair and consistent leadership," Gen. Peter Chiarelli, then-vice chief of staff, wrote in the report's introductory letter, adding, "We must identify our Soldiers who are at-risk, mitigate their stress and, if necessary, personally intervene to assist them."

This new understanding led the Army to embark on an aggressive and multifaceted effort to reduce the stigma surrounding mental health and to encourage and accept the practice of seeking help. Senior leaders such as Gens. Carter Ham and Mark Graham spoke about their own struggles with, and effective treatment for, mental-health issues or described the impact that suicide had had on their families. The Army also launched the Shoulder to Shoulder campaign, which sought to define seeking help and caring about another soldier's mental health as appropriately manly soldier behaviors.

This effort included the new strategies laid out in the handbook — for example, deeming acceptable "modifying mission requirements, when feasible, to remove impediments that prevented Soldiers from participating in [wellness] programs and services," encouraging leaders to "plan for and approach 'stress windows' systematically" so as to "take measures to mitigate potential stressors before they occur," and encouraging the larger Army to "improve Soldier assessments to better identify those who may be at risk to allow early treatment and maximize the potential for full recovery."

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2019/03/13/what-military-can-teach-us-about-preventing-suicide/>

The Army's suicide prevention efforts have not been a panacea. It took until 2012 to arrest the rising suicide rate, which remains unacceptably high. This leveling off is perhaps attributable to reduced stress on soldiers as the Iraq and Afghanistan wars wound down. But it also results from an increasing recognition on the part of soldiers at every level that mental health deserves attention and that troops need to be taught to care for themselves and others.

The Army has been far from perfect, of course — some leaders still dismiss mental-health trouble as a weakness, many soldiers remain unwilling to seek help, and encouragements to become more resilient can sometimes replace encouragements to seek help. Nonetheless, the Army's efforts hold important lessons as we confront a rising suicide rate in the civilian sector.

Insurance companies and providers can seek policy changes that will make care more affordable, accessible and effective while maintaining privacy. Employers can do more to foster wellness and encourage help-seeking — including reducing pressures and demands. Everyone can follow the Army's lessons regarding stigma reduction by talking openly about our challenges and how we benefited from treatment. And perhaps most important, we can ask how the frenetic pace of our daily lives has turned us away from being compassionate friends, family members, colleagues and mentors, and how we, too, might cultivate the lost skills that might help us lead someone out of the maze.

To grapple with our mental-health epidemic in America, which encompasses not just suicide, but also substance abuse, we must change our culture to encourage treatment, connections and a less stressful way of life.

Misconduct

Another Norfolk sailor awaits sentencing on gun charge

By Geoff Ziezulewicz

Navy Times, March 8, 2019

A Virginia-based sailor pleaded guilty will be sentenced at the end of the summer for her role in transferring five semi-automatic handguns to family and friends in New Jersey, according to the [U.S. Attorney's Office](#).

Engineman 3rd Class Tesora Amanda Cortes Trejorojas, 24, pleaded guilty on Feb. 26 to conspiring with others to transport guns to New Jersey that she bought in Norfolk, according to court records.

The November 2017 plan involved Trejorojas buying the guns for her cousin, Azia Sinclair, and Sinclair's boyfriend, Shyheim "Shy" Tyson, according to court records.

Sinclair and Trejorojas began texting in November 2017 about a potential straw purchase after Trejorojas said she didn't need a license to buy a gun because she was in the military and Sinclair told her it was taking too long for her to get a license to do so, according to court records.

On Nov. 5, 2017, Sinclair asked Trejorojas if she could buy a gun for Sinclair's sister as well, court records show.

"I told her ima (sic) get one and her crazy ass got excited like tell cousin I want some too," Sinclair texted Trejorojas, according to court records.

Trejorojas' attorney, Jonathan Marshall, did not return requests for comment.

Sinclair and Tyson headed down to Norfolk later that month and the three shopped at a local gun shop before the duo headed back to New Jersey with the firearms.

"0mg (sic) please don't be carving bodies lmfaooooo my name on them thangsssss lol," Trejorojas texted to her cousin.

"Lol nah we not crazy ass," Sinclair replied.

About five hours later, police in Orange, New Jersey, responded to the sound of gunfire. They arrested a suspect who had one of the guns Sinclair and Tyson transported back.

Police searched Sinclair's home a few days later and she admitted to getting the guns in Norfolk and taking them back to New Jersey, authorities say.

Armed with a search warrant for Sinclair's cellphone, authorities discovered a video on it showing Tyson defacing the serial number on one of the guns Trejorojas purchased about 35 minutes after he and Sinclair returned to New Jersey, according to court records.

On June 7, 2017, Tyson had been arrested and charged in New Jersey Superior Court with conspiracy to commit aggravated assault, two counts of aggravated assault, two counts of unlawful possession of a handgun and two counts of possession of a weapon for an unlawful purpose.

Two months later, he was indicted by an Essex County grand jury.

Sinclair is awaiting trial but on Oct. 11, 2018, her boyfriend Tyson pleaded guilty in federal court to conspiring to transport and receive in New Jersey the firearms that were bought in Virginia.

The judge imposed a sentence of 37 months of imprisonment. But Tyson isn't in federal prison.

<https://www.navytimes.com/news/your-navy/2019/03/08/another-norfolk-sailor-awaits-sentencing-on-gun-charge/>

On Jan. 28, Tyson, 23, began serving a minimum sentence of 51 months without parole at the Garden State Youth Correctional Facility following convictions on both the 2017 New Jersey illegal gun possession charge and a separate aggravated assault count stemming from an incident later that year, according to New Jersey prison records and federal court documents.

Trejorojas is scheduled to be sentenced on Sept. 25. She faces a maximum sentence of five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

Trejorojas remains on active duty and has been stationed at [Naval Support Activity Hampton Roads](#) since late 2017.

Before that she was assigned to the aircraft carrier [George H.W. Bush](#).

A shipmate on the Bush, [Julio Fernando Pino](#), 26, unlawfully used his military discount to buy and resell guns from 2015 to 2017 to buyers nationwide, including a juvenile, a drug-addicted armed robber, a drug dealer trafficking in stolen firearms, according to federal prosecutors.

He pleaded to one count of unlawful interstate transfer of a firearm on Oct. 22 and exited the Navy as an [aviation ordnanceman](#) third class in December, according to court and military records.

Pino is slated to spend two-and-a-half years in federal prison.

Arrests in domestic terror probes outpace those inspired by Islamic extremists

By Devlin Barrett

The Washington Post, March 9, 2019



Members of an FBI terrorism task force confer following a deadly attack in San Bernardino, Calif., in 2015. (Sean M. Haffey/Getty Images)

Most people arrested as the result of FBI terrorism investigations are charged with non-terrorism offenses, and more domestic terror suspects were arrested last year than those allegedly inspired by international terror groups, according to internal FBI figures reviewed by The Washington Post.

As government officials and activists debate the best way to pursue violent extremists, the figures show how much of counterterrorism work goes undeclared and unnoticed. [Thousands are investigated](#) each year. Hundreds are charged with crimes. But the public and the media see only dozens.

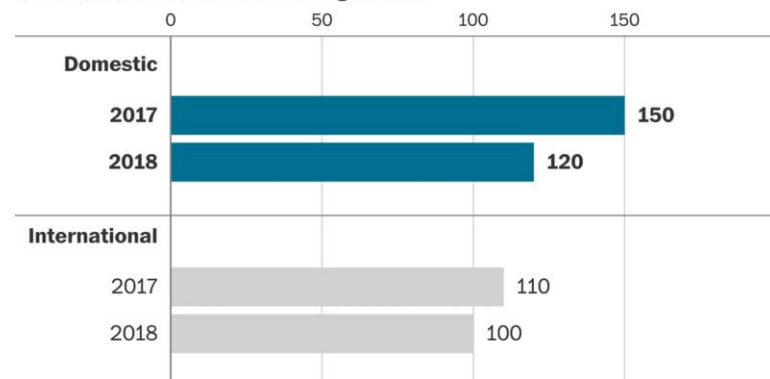
The debate centers on whether federal law and law enforcement are too focused on Islamic terrorism and not paying enough attention to [the rise in far right-wing extremism](#). In fact, according to the data, more domestic terrorist targets are being charged, and in both categories, law enforcement officials often leverage simpler crimes, such as violations of gun or drug laws, to prevent violence.

“It’s violence that we key in on,” said a senior law enforcement official who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive federal investigative work. “And sometimes, it’s the violence that motivates someone more than any particular ideology.”

The arrest last month of Coast Guard Lt. Christopher P. Hasson, 49, is the latest example of this pattern. Prosecutors have alleged Hasson is a white nationalist inspired in part by mass murderer Anders Behring Breivik, who in 2011 unleashed two attacks in Norway that killed 77 people.

Terrorism arrests

FBI investigations are leading to the arrests of more domestic terrorism suspects than those linked to international groups such as the Islamic State and al-Qaeda, according to FBI data shared with The Washington Post.



Figures are approximate.

Source: Law enforcement officials

THE WASHINGTON POST

Hasson, who has been detained since his arrest, is accused of amassing weapons as part of [a domestic terror plot](#) targeting politicians and journalists. Authorities have highlighted a letter in which he allegedly wrote, “I am dreaming of a way to kill almost every last person on the earth.”

But as with most people arrested in FBI counterterrorism

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/arrests-in-domestic-terror-probes-outpace-those-inspired-by-islamic-extremists/2019/03/08/0bf329b6-392f-11e9-a2cd-307b06d0257b_story.html

investigations, Hasson does not yet face terrorism charges. Rather, he was indicted on charges of illegal possession of firearm silencers, possession of firearms by a drug addict and unlawful user, and possession of a controlled substance.

According to FBI figures shared with The Post, in the 2017 budget year there were about 110 people arrested after being investigated for actions inspired by foreign terror groups such as the Islamic State and al-Qaeda. Of those, about 30 faced terrorism charges. The rest faced gun, drug, fraud or immigration charges.

Last year, out of about 100 such arrests, only nine defendants faced terrorism charges — a drop-off owed in part to a decline in the number of people attempting to travel overseas to join the Islamic State, the senior law enforcement official said.



This image provided by the U.S. District Court in Maryland shows firearms and ammunition allegedly amassed by Coast Guard Lt. Christopher P. Hasson. (AP)

In the 2017 budget year, FBI investigations led to the arrest of about 150 domestic terrorism suspects, according to law enforcement officials. The following year, the figure was about 120.

But because federal law does not designate domestic groups as terrorist organizations, no corresponding terrorism crimes apply to such suspects. And while the number of such arrests fell last year, the senior law enforcement official emphasized that, overall, more domestic terrorism suspects are being arrested.

About one in four counterterrorism arrests are made by state and local authorities — not the FBI, the senior law enforcement official said.

Seamus Hughes, deputy director of the Program on Extremism at George Washington University, said the figures explain how counterterrorism work is done.

“You’re going to arrest someone with whatever charges you have to negate the threat. The FBI doesn’t need to pad stats on terrorism if it means getting a terrorist off the streets,” Hughes said.

He warned, though, that charging practices may be unintentionally misleading to the public, presenting an incomplete picture of law enforcement’s work to keep Americans safe. Hughes tracks terrorism cases independently as part of his work and said that he identified about 65 such cases last year, far less than the total figure of more than 200 people charged after an FBI investigation.

“If I missed it, I’m sure many others did, too,” Hughes said. “. . . Unless the public understands that terrorism cases don’t necessarily mean terrorism charges or convictions, you don’t get a sense of the scope of the threat, whether it’s domestic terrorism or international.”

With Hasson, the absence of terrorism charges could have a significant effect on how his case is handled. At a court hearing last month in Maryland, the judge, Charles B. Day, said it would be unusual to detain someone without bail based on the gun and drug charges Hasson faces now. He has not yet entered a plea.

Prosecutors have labeled Hasson a “domestic terrorist” who planned to murder innocent civilians. His lawyer, Julie Stelzig, said the government’s description is “histrionic” and that there was “no actual indication of any plan. . . . It’s not a crime to think negative thoughts. It’s not a crime to think about doomsday scenarios.”

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/arrests-in-domestic-terror-probes-outpace-those-inspired-by-islamic-extremists/2019/03/08/0bf329b6-392f-11e9-a2cd-307b06d0257b_story.html

A case in Tucson similarly highlights the complicated factors prosecutors must weigh before filing terrorism charges.

In April 2017, Ahmad Suhad Ahmad was the focus of an intense FBI undercover operation. Ahmad, who allegedly bragged to a government informant about the bombmaking skills he developed in his native Iraq, was brought to a Las Vegas condominium by an undercover FBI agent posing as a member of a Mexican drug cartel who wanted to kill an enemy, according to court records.

Prosecutors say that once in the condo, Ahmad assembled a bomb using materials he brought and others supplied by the undercover agent. Authorities charge that Ahmad also showed the undercover agent how to build a bomb, but those devices did not contain real explosives.

Two months later, Ahmad, 30, was arrested, jailed and charged with violating his parole for an unrelated drug charge. He was released in September and rearrested a month later on two federal drug charges and two counts of distributing information related to explosives.

The second arrest came after a lengthy internal debate among Justice Department and FBI officials over whether the evidence supported terrorism charges, according to people familiar with the matter who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations.

At a court hearing late last year, U.S. Magistrate Judge Eric J. Markovich noted an apparent contradiction in the government's case — that the suspect prosecutors argued was too dangerous to release on bail had been free for months after the FBI's undercover sting. Assistant U.S. Attorney Kevin Hakala insisted that Ahmad "was being very closely monitored" after the alleged bomb-building trip to Las Vegas.

Ahmad has pleaded not guilty and was ordered held without bail until his trial, which is scheduled for May. His lawyer, Walter Goncalves Jr., told the judge that the FBI's handling of the case showed Ahmad was not dangerous, saying his client had a drug problem leading to his 2017 arrest.

"He was, unfortunately, using drugs and was addicted and was not thinking clearly," Goncalves Jr. said.

"It's kind of odd," the judge remarked, "you've let him out on the streets."

Board Finds ‘No Basis’ to Remove Officer Involved in USS Fitzgerald Collision from Navy

By Sam LaGrone

USNI News, March 11, 2019



The guided-missile destroyer USS Fitzgerald (DDG-62) arrives at the port of Pascagoula, Miss. on Jan. 19, 2018 aboard the heavy lift transport vessel M/V Transshelf. US Navy Photo

A board of inquiry moved not to separate from service a sailor who the Navy had previously charged with negligent homicide for his role in the 2017 fatal collision of USS *Fitzgerald* (DDG-62), USNI News has learned.

On Friday, a board found “no basis” to separate Lt. Irian Woodley from the Navy for cause, Woodley’s lawyer, Lt. Cmdr. Justin McEwen, confirmed to USNI News when contacted on Friday. The board was made up of three surface warfare officers and was based in Japan.

“The findings were 3-0 that the government did not prove a ‘basis’ for separation. Because the government did not prove basis, the board did not need to answer the question whether Lt. Woodley would be retained or separated. He is automatically retained,” McEwen wrote in a statement to USNI News.

“The finding of ‘no basis’ is essentially an equivalent and analogous to a full acquittal if this were a court-martial.”

Woodley was the surface warfare coordinator in the combat information center aboard *Fitzgerald* when the destroyer collided with the merchant ship ACX *Crystal* off the coast of Japan on June 17, 2018. The collision resulted in the death of seven sailors.

A Navy spokesperson told USNI News that it would be inappropriate to comment on a, “pending personnel action,” in a statement following an earlier version of this post.

Woodley and the ship’s tactical action officer, Lt. Natalie Combs, were initially charged with negligent homicide and other charges related to the collision by consolidated disposition authority Director of Naval Reactors Adm. Frank Caldwell in January 2018.

However, following a 2018 Article 32 hearing, [hearing officer Cmdr. Anthony Johnson recommended](#) to Caldwell that both Woodley and Combs should not face criminal charges for their roles in the collisions.

Caldwell ultimately elected to send Woodley to the administrative Board of Inquiry while Combs continues to face criminal negligence charges.

Combs and Woodley had both faced unspecified non-judicial punishments at admiral’s mast for their roles in the collision prior to the January 2018 filing of criminal charges. The pair led the team at CIC and weren’t aware *Crystal* [was putting the ship at risk until seconds before the collision](#).

One lawyer who has been following the case said the result could point to wider recognition that the collision of *Fitzgerald*, and the August 2017 fatal collision of USS *John S. McCain* (DDG-56), could be tied to systemic problems inside the surface force.

“One way to interpret the result is maybe that three relatively senior SWOs are signaling that whatever happened on *Fitzgerald*, big Navy shouldn’t be passing off responsibility to individual officers because the

<https://news.usni.org/2019/03/11/board-finds-no-basis-remove-officer-involved-uss-fitzgerald-collision-navy>

structural issues are really at fault,” Rob “Butch” Bracknell, a former Marine and military lawyer, told USNI News on Friday.

In addition to Combs, then-*Fitzgerald* commander Cmdr. Bryce Benson faces criminal negligence charges for their role in the collision. His case is on hold while the Navy finds a new CDA for Benson’s trial. In January, a military judge disqualified Caldwell for overseeing Benson’s case. The judge said Caldwell’s actions in other parts of the investigation showed he believed Benson was directly responsible for the collisions.

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SEE ALSO:

[Did loose lockers doom the Fitzgerald seven?](#) [*Navy Times*, 2019-03-11]

Coast Guard lieutenant pleads not guilty in case tied to alleged domestic terrorist attack

By Lynh Bui

The Washington Post, March 11, 2019



Federal investigators contend Christopher Hasson had a cache of guns stockpiled to launch a terrorist attack targeting liberal politicians and journalists. (U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Maryland)

A U.S. Coast Guard lieutenant accused of using his [government computer](#) to plot a domestic terrorist attack pleaded not guilty to drug and weapons charges during his latest court appearance

Monday.

Christopher P. Hasson, 49, appeared in U.S. District Court in Maryland almost two weeks after he was indicted on additional weapons charges related to what the government says were silencers found among a stockpile of weapons seized from his basement apartment.

Hasson was arrested Feb. 15 on drug and gun charges after a computer program the Coast Guard uses flagged suspicious activity tied to his work devices, federal law enforcement officials said. Hasson has not been charged on any terrorism-related counts, but prosecutors allege that was planning an attack on politicians and media personalities to advance his white-nationalist views.

Hasson created a spreadsheet of targets and “traitors,” studied the manifestos of mass attackers and conducted Internet searches of security protocols for liberal elected officials and of where members of Congress congregate, the government said.

“The defendant intends to murder innocent civilians on a scale rarely seen in this country,” the government said in court documents, adding that investigators believe Hasson called for “focused violence” to “establish a white homeland.”

At a previous hearing, a federal public defender for Hasson, Julie Stelzig, argued that there was no indication he planned to carry out an attack and that it is not a crime to have negative thoughts.

Hasson did not speak during Monday's hearing other than to give his age, say he completed two years of college and answer mostly yes-or-no questions from the judge.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Thomas Windom said a trial for Hasson could take about five days.

Elizabeth Oyer, a federal public defender for Hasson, represented him on Monday and declined to comment after the hearing.

Separately Monday, Magistrate Judge Charles B. Day granted the government's motion to keep Hasson detained during trial. Day had initially ordered Hasson held for at least 14 days at a Feb. 21 detention hearing, during which prosecutors and Hasson's attorney argued over whether it was appropriate to keep him jailed over drug and weapons charges but no terrorism-related counts. Day gave the two-week window for the government to bring forward new charges before Hasson's attorneys could appeal his bail status. The government added two new weapons charges by way of indictment less than a week later.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/public-safety/coast-guard-lieutenant-pleads-not-guilty-in-case-tied-to-alleged-domestic-terrorist-attack/2019/03/11/f1d4dfb4-4411-11e9-8aab-95b8d80a1e4f_story.html

Hasson, who lived in a Silver Spring apartment, has served in the Coast Guard for more than two decades. His secret security clearance has been suspended, Coast Guard officials said. Hasson also previously served in the Marine Corps and the Army National Guard.

Hasson has been charged with possession of firearms and ammunition by an unlawful user of a controlled substance, unlawful possession of tramadol, and two counts of unlawful possession of silencers.

Prosecutors said the silencers did not have serial numbers and had not been registered as required by law.

Hasson faces up to 31 years in prison.

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SEE ALSO:

[Officer accused of making hit list pleads not guilty](#) [*The Associated Press*, 2019-03-11]

[Coast Guard officer pleads not guilty to weapon and drug charges](#) [*Reuters*, 2019-03-11]

Father of UC Irvine freshman blames 'fraternity hazing' for son's death

By N'dea Yancey-Bragg

USA TODAY, March 12, 2019



Noah Domingo, a first-year biological sciences major, was found dead in a house near University of California, Irvine, authorities said Monday. (Photo: Daniel A. Anderson, University of California, Irvine)

A Southern California college freshman who was found unresponsive in a home near the University of California, Irvine in January died from “accidental acute ethanol poisoning,” authorities announced Monday.

Noah Domingo, 18, had a blood alcohol level of approximately 0.331 when he died around 3:30 a.m. on Jan. 12, according to [a statement from the Orange County Sheriff’s Department](#). No other substances were found in his system, a toxicology report found.

“The Irvine Police Department is actively investigating this case. At the conclusion of our investigation we will present our findings to the District Attorney’s Office, which will determine whether charges are warranted,” Lt. Mark Anderson said in a statement released Sunday.

Domingo was a first-year biology major who wanted to go into sports medicine, according to a GoFundMe set up for his family which has raised more than \$37,000. He was also a member of the Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity, according to the organization.

After his death, UC Irvine placed the fraternity on interim suspension pending the investigation. The fraternity’s national organization has since closed the university’s chapter indefinitely according to a statement released by the school.

"We remain shocked and saddened by Noah's tragic death, and we offer our deepest sympathies to the Domingo family for their loss. His death brings an urgent focus on alcohol and substance abuse, from the cultural pressures that encourage unhealthy behavior to the policies designed to mitigate danger," the statement read.

Dale Domingo, told [CBS](#) he believes his son’s death was the result of a fraternity hazing ritual in which "Noah was compelled to guzzle a so-called 'family drink' to become part of his big brother's family."

"We have discovered the horrifying truth about fraternity hazing," Dale Domingo told the outlet.

Contributing: The Associated Press

Fort Bragg soldier accused of murdering Afghan waives evidentiary hearing

Maj. Mathew Golsteyn could be court-martialed for killing an unarmed man who was suspected of making a bomb that killed two Marines.

By Paul Woolverton

The Fayetteville (N.C.) Observer, March 11, 2019



Army Maj. Mathew Golsteyn has waived an Article 32 evidentiary hearing on whether he will face a court-martial for killing a suspected bombmaker in Afghanistan in 2010. A general is to consider the available evidence and decide. (Sarah L. Voisin/The Washington Post)

An Army major accused of premeditated murder for killing an unarmed Afghan national in 2010 has waived his right to an evidentiary hearing that was scheduled to begin on Thursday at Fort

Bragg to assess the evidence against him.

The U.S. Army Special Operations Command announced last week Maj. Mathew Golsteyn agreed to skip an Article 32 hearing in his case. An Article 32 hearing is a trial-like proceeding the military uses to help decide whether a service member accused of a crime will be court-martialed. Evidence is presented to an officer who then makes a recommendation to the commanding general on whether to prosecute.

In lieu of the Article 32 hearing, evidence and other materials in the case will be reviewed by the commanding general of the United States Army Special Operations Command for a decision on whether Golsteyn will be court-martialed, said Lt. Col. Loren Bymer, the public affairs director for the Special Operations Command.

The commander is Lt. Gen. Francis M. Beaudette.

In 2010, Golsteyn was a Green Beret captain with Fort Bragg's 3rd Special Forces Group based at Fort Bragg and among the American forces in Marjah, Afghanistan, when he killed the Afghan national. In 2015, Golsteyn was stripped of his Special Forces Green Beret tab and a Silver Star medal and was kicked out of the Army because of the incident.

This past December, the Army pulled Golsteyn back into the service to face the homicide charge.

The Afghan national was suspected of making a bomb that killed two Marines, according to evidence presented at an administrative hearing in 2015 that the Army held to review Golsteyn's actions and decide whether he could stay in the service.

The evidence indicated the Afghan was captured and released, and then Golsteyn killed him, buried his body, returned to the grave the next morning and burned the body.

The Army began investigating after Golsteyn, in September 2011, described the killing during a job interview polygraph exam with the Central Intelligence Agency. That polygraph led to the Army's investigation of Goldsteyn's actions.

The question that could come before a court-martial jury: Was the killing a legal act of war or was it a murder?

<https://www.military.com/daily-news/2019/03/12/general-decide-whether-green-beret-will-be-court-martialed-murder-charge.html>

Golsteyn discussed the incident with The Washington Post in an article published in February. He told the Post that he took up an ambush position after the Afghan was released and watched to see whether the Afghan would leave the area.

The Post reported that Golsteyn presumed that if the Afghan walked toward him instead of some other direction, “it meant he was going back to insurgent activities and could be legally targeted.”

Bymer, the Special Operations spokesman, said on Monday it’s unknown how soon the commanding general will decide whether Golsteyn’s case will proceed to a court-martial.

Fayetteville defense lawyer Kris Poppe is a retired Army officer who was prominent during his military career for representing defendants in high-profile courts-martial. He said on Monday it’s not unusual for a defendant to waive an Article 32 hearing.

It tends to happen, Poppe said, if the defendant has received copies of a large amount of the evidence against him or if his legal team has done an extensive investigation of its own.

Poppe, who is not connected to the Golsteyn case, said in his experience, commanding generals and their staff attorneys typically give the evidence from the prosecution and the defense a deep, detailed examination before deciding whether to order a court-martial for a soldier.

<https://www.navytimes.com/news/your-navy/2019/03/12/heres-why-a-navy-cyber-chief-faces-court-martial/>

Here's why a Navy cyber chief faces court-martial

By Geoff Ziezulewicz

Navy Times, March 12, 2019

A chief in the Navy's secretive world of signals intelligence and cyber operations is facing a court-martial trial over allegations that he faked a cancer diagnosis to skip work for nearly two years.

Military prosecutors say Chief Cryptologic Technician (Collection) John R. Errol feigned stomach cancer from March 2016 to February 2018 to avoid his job.

He also allegedly took an unauthorized absence from [Cryptologic Warfare Group 6](#), a cyber unit based out of Fort Meade, Maryland, from March 29, 2016 to June 12, 2018, according to charge sheets provided to Navy Times.

In the Army, that's called going "AWOL" — absent without leave — but in the Navy and Marine Corps it's usually shortened to just "UA," unauthorized absence. Despite the allegedly long absence, however, he was not charged [with desertion](#).

Errol, 50, told officers and senior chiefs he was terminally ill and had cancer on several occasions in 2017, claims that were "totally false," according to the charge sheets.

He told an unnamed senior chief on July 23, 2017, that he "was going to a breathing treatment at [John \(sic\) Hopkins](#)," charge sheets state.

"Sir, for the period requested I have been seeking private treatment," prosecutors allege he told a lieutenant. "I had frequent [appointments] for smoking, breathing treatment, and private issues."

But Errol "was not receiving breathing treatment at a private hospital," the charge sheets state.

That same day, a senior chief told Errol to provide his civilian medical records so they could be entered into the Navy's medical system, but he did not do so, according to charge sheets.

Errol did not return a call seeking comment.

Requests for comment from Errol's attorney submitted through public affairs officials were not answered.

Errol's trial on malingering, absence without leave, insubordinate conduct and false official statements charges is slated to begin in May.

Originally from Maryland, Errol enlisted in 1999 and made chief in 2012, according to Navy records.

He reported to Cryptologic Warfare Group 6 in 2016 and served with [Navy Information Operations Command Hawaii](#) before that.

Errol served on board the guided-missile destroyers Howard and Spruance earlier in his career and was also stationed with the [Navy Cyber Warfare Development Group](#).

His rating involves collecting, analyzing and reporting signals data to provide critical intelligence, according to the Navy. That's why these sailors also must attain [Top Secret/Sensitive Compartmented Information security clearance](#).

Officials with U.S. Fleet Cyber Command, declined to say whether Errol was accounted for during his absence from duty or how officials caught on to the alleged chicanery, citing the ongoing nature of the proceedings.

"He remains on active duty in the U.S. Navy," Lt. Cmdr. Ben Tisdale said.

Quantico case raises questions about how Marine Corps handles domestic abuse

By Adele Uphaus–Conner

The Free Lance–Star (Fredericksburg, Va.), March 9, 2019



Tamara Campbell's ex-husband was sent to the brig and booted from the Marines after being convicted of domestic abuse. But he is scheduled to be released this week, despite failing to follow the terms of his plea agreement. (Mike Morones / The Free Lance–Star)

Tamara Campbell started receiving letters from her ex-husband, Bradley Darlington, after he'd been in jail for almost two years.

Sometimes they came to her directly and sometimes they were forwarded to her by her former in-laws. Regardless of how they arrived, the letters violated the victim/witness program procedures in place at Naval Consolidated Brig Chesapeake, where Darlington was incarcerated.

One communication was a card featuring a detailed drawing of the eyes of a peacock feather. Inside, Darlington wrote to Campbell, "I saw this and thought of you. I know it's not a phoenix [sic] feather, its a peacock feather, but we had a couple laughs over it in the past."

Campbell lifted her sleeve to show a tattoo of a phoenix feather on her upper arm.

"He's talking about this. He actually beat me after I got this," she said.

In another letter, Darlington wrote, "No matter what happens, we are all conected [sic], we will always be family."

On the envelope, he wrote "4 the kids," then crossed out that phrase and wrote, "To Tamara."

In another letter to his ex-wife, Darlington wrote, "I would ride you over bull any day."

Campbell said her ex used to tell her he liked "taking" sex from her because it was like riding a bull.

Darlington, a former Marine, entered a plea deal in a military court at Marine Corps Base Quantico in June 2015, pleading guilty to seven charges, including violating a protective order taken out against him by Campbell, strangling her "with a force likely to produce death" and inserting a loaded handgun into her mouth "while holding her down by the throat," court papers state.

He also pleaded guilty to adultery with another Marine—a violation of Article 134 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice—"being of a nature to bring discredit upon the armed forces"—and to stealing and selling military property and selling Percocet, all while on active duty at Marine Corps Base Quantico.

A military judge sentenced him to 11 years confinement at Naval Consolidated Brig Chesapeake, according to the court-martial order, which was signed and executed in September 2015 by Brig. Gen. Austin Renforth, then commanding general of Marine Corps Training Command.

Darlington was also dishonorably discharged from the Marine Corps.

https://www.fredericksburg.com/quantico-case-raises-questions-about-how-marine-corps-handles-domestic/article_a4bf321d-684e-554e-a634-011029a089a4.html

According to the terms of the pretrial agreement that both Darlington and Campbell consented to, the judge suspended all confinement in excess of five years. The suspension can be vacated if Darlington commits any misconduct or violates any condition of suspension, the pretrial agreement states.

“I was told that if he messed up even once, he will have to serve the full 11 years,” Campbell said.

Darlington is not permitted to contact Campbell, either directly or through a third party, according to military protective orders taken out against him and the Department of the Navy’s Victim Witness Program procedures.

Yet Campbell has a binder full of letters from Darlington, as well as text messages from his parents and his brother in which he requests communication with their three children, now ages 11, 7 and 4.

There is also evidence of Darlington’s misconduct in jail. A Department of Defense prisoner summary data form from December 2016, obtained by Campbell’s Marine Corps-assigned lawyer from the Victims’ Legal Counsel Organization, states that “Prisoner Darlington has had difficulty adjusting to confinement, receiving numerous disciplinary infractions for prohibited property, disrespect, disobedience and verbalizing threats to staff and prisoners.” According to the report, those infractions led him to spend seven months in “disciplinary segregation.”

And a brief written by Campbell’s lawyer to the commanding general of Marine Corps Training Command—which Campbell forwarded to The Free Lance–Star—details “evidence of [his] repeated, violent misbehavior within confinement.”

Darlington entered Naval Consolidated Brig Chesapeake on Dec. 22, 2014. His five years will be up in December.

But Campbell learned recently that her ex-husband is at a Federal Bureau of Prisons residential re-entry management program facility in St. Louis, and is scheduled to be released Friday.

“A friend called me up and told me that he’s been posting on Facebook that he’s a free man,” Campbell said. “It’s terrifying.”

Campbell’s case shines a spotlight on the military’s struggle to respond effectively to domestic violence in a timely and consistent manner.

Her Victims’ Legal Counsel attorneys have made multiple requests for the revocation of Darlington’s suspended sentence. These requests, which Campbell sent to The Free Lance–Star, have been denied by both the commander of Headquarters and Services Battalion at Camp Lejeune, N.C., and the commanding general of Marine Corps Installations–East.

In an email sent to The Free Lance–Star, Campbell wrote: “The Marine Corps has not held [Darlington] accountable and they have failed to honor the judge’s ruling on the plea deal. My abuser will be free soon and I will return to being shackled to the memory of his hands around my neck.”

Speaking in the Fredericksburg-area home she shares with her new fiancé and her children, she said that all the Marine Corps is doing is giving her abuser “a slap on the wrist.”

Domestic violence in the military

Some studies suggest that domestic violence has increased in the military community since the start of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan almost two decades ago.

https://www.fredericksburg.com/quantico-case-raises-questions-about-how-marine-corps-handles-domestic/article_a4bf321d-684e-554e-a634-011029a089a4.html

In 2014, the National Domestic Violence Hotline reported that the annual number of military calls to the hotline more than tripled since 2006.

A report from the Pentagon released in 2011 showed that post-traumatic stress syndrome, or PTSD, an after-effect experienced by some military members after long or repeated deployments, was a contributing factor to family violence, making service members “up to three times more likely to be aggressive with their female partners.”

According to the April 2018 Department of Defense report on child abuse and neglect and domestic abuse in the military, incidents of domestic violence increased by 5 percent between 2016 and 2017.

Reported spouse abuse occurred in 24.5 out of 1,000 couples. Rates were highest among enlisted service members in the lower and middle pay grades, the DoD report states.

Those statistics are based only on unrestricted reports of domestic abuse made to the congressionally mandated Family Advocacy Programs at military installations. Unrestricted reports trigger law enforcement and command investigation, as opposed to restricted reports, which are confidential.

According to this report, rates of domestic violence have not changed significantly since 2008.

But they also haven't gone down, said Brian Clubb, director of the Battered Women's Justice Project's military and veteran's advocacy program. He said the Department of Defense has established guidelines meant to improve the response to incidents of sexual assault and domestic violence.

“But like any military command, one might be doing something great and the command next door is not,” Clubb said. “So much of the authority and response depends on the individual command and the individual commanding officer. One might say, ‘I'm not going to report this or do a [military protective order]’ and another might do all that and involve the law.”

Lisa Colella, the founder and director of Healing Household 6, a nonprofit based near Camp Lejeune that helps military families dealing with domestic violence and other emergencies, said that when the Family Advocacy Program is informed of instances of domestic violence, they are tracked and reported to the government.

“[Family Advocacy] tries very hard to do all that correctly,” she said.

But she said that, in her experience, the command responsible for the accused service member sometimes does not notify the Family Advocacy Program.

“There's a lot of problems with reporting when it ends up going through the command,” Colella said.

Risk factors for committing domestic violence and sexual assault may be higher in the military community.

In addition to post-traumatic stress disorder, some of the risk factors for committing domestic violence identified by the Centers for Disease Control include young age, job and economic stress, isolation, lack of social support and disconnect from community organizations.

“There's the cliché that ‘hurt people hurt people,’ ” said Christopher Kilmartin, an emeritus professor of psychology at the University of Mary Washington. “There are survivors of really bad family backgrounds in the military.”

Kilmartin specializes in the psychology of masculinity and has been hired by the Army, Air Force and Navy to teach sexual assault prevention. He said the combination of traumatic early childhood experiences and a “hyper-masculine culture” increase the risk of committing domestic violence.

https://www.fredericksburg.com/quantico-case-raises-questions-about-how-marine-corps-handles-domestic/article_a4bf321d-684e-554e-a634-011029a089a4.html

“There is also the hazing model, which retraumatizes people,” he said. “Plus, you’re going to see physical and psychological male dominance. And they are training people to kill.”

The vast majority of men, whether military or civilian, will never be violent. But men commit more than 88 percent of violent crime in the United States, according to the FBI’s 2017 report on crime in the nation.

“What to pull out is that in the majority of lethal inter-partner violence in the military, men are the perpetrators, females are the victims, and while it’s not in the Family Advocacy Program data, I’ve been told that the majority of those cases involve firearms,” Clubb said. “Those kinds of trends match up with what we see in the civilian population.”

Clubb and others have been advocating for the addition of domestic violence as a separate crime under the UCMJ, which occurred this past summer. Previously—when Darlington was convicted in 2015—incidents of domestic violence were charged as assault and treated “just as if you were in a bar fight with a buddy,” Colella said.

Advocates felt this did not convey the seriousness of the crime.

“An assault charge doesn’t carry any weapon restriction. That’s a big one,” Colella said.

According to a 2017 report from the CDC, more than half of female homicides in the U.S. are related to intimate partner violence and about 54 percent are gun deaths. Other studies have shown that women are five times more likely to be killed by their abuser if the abuser has access to a gun.

The Marine Corps did not respond to a request for comment on this case. Department of Defense Order 6400.01, which establishes policies and procedures for addressing domestic abuse and child abuse in military communities and was updated in April 2017, states that it is DOD policy to: “promote early identification; reporting; and coordinated, comprehensive intervention, assessment, and support to victims of child abuse and domestic abuse.”

‘Roses and Thorns’

Campbell met Darlington when they were both in high school in a small town in Indiana. Her home life was bad at the time, she said, and he helped get her out of the situation.

“He was my high school sweetheart,” she said. “We were supposed to live happily ever after.”

Campbell noticed some of his controlling tendencies right away.

“He was always telling me not to wear low-cut shirts because he didn’t want anyone else looking at me, and he wanted me to spend all my time with him,” she said.

But she ignored the red flags.

“I’d never seen what a healthy relationship looks like,” she said.

After they married and Darlington enlisted in the Marine Corps, Campbell said his behavior became more and more violent.

One time, she said, he threatened to cut off her ring finger and shatter her jaw. Several times, he grabbed her by the hair and slammed her head into the counter, she said.

Still, Campbell said that because of the way she was raised, in a small town where people never divorced, and because of the pressure she felt to be “a good Marine wife,” she continued to blame his behavior on stress from his job. Darlington was deployed to Afghanistan and she thought he was suffering from PTSD.

https://www.fredericksburg.com/quantico-case-raises-questions-about-how-marine-corps-handles-domestic/article_a4bf321d-684e-554e-a634-011029a089a4.html

While they were posted at Camp Lejeune, someone gave her a book called “Roses and Thorns: A Handbook for Marine Corps Enlisted Wives.” The book’s message was that a wife’s most important job was to support her Marine husband, Campbell said.

“I thought, he needs more support and maybe I’m not doing enough to support him,” she said.

When Darlington was posted to Quantico, the violence escalated and happened “almost daily,” Campbell said.

On Nov. 7, 2014, she told him she wanted a divorce. In an incident to which Darlington later pleaded guilty, he left and came back with her gun, an M1911 pistol. He shoved her onto a couch and began strangling her, telling her to open her mouth.

As she begged him to stop, he took his hands off her throat to chamber a round. Then he forced the gun into her mouth and told her his finger was on the trigger.

Campbell said Darlington let her go that day only because his mistress called his cellphone to tell him she was at the house to pick him up.

Even after that incident, Campbell said she continued to post on a Facebook group for Marine Corps wives, asking for advice on how to help her husband.

“I told them I felt he was on the brink of a PTSD meltdown,” she said. “I was showing screenshots of his disturbing text messages. They told me I should call the MPs. I said, ‘Oh, no, I’m just wanting to get him help.’”

Arrest and conviction

Campbell said she realizes now that she wasn’t thinking clearly.

Colella said Campbell’s experience of being unable to identify domestic violence in her relationship is something she sees often in military spouses. She said military wives are typically young and isolated from someone who can offer objective advice.

“We have women who have moved from all over the country, from all walks of life, thousands of miles away from anybody who can help them,” Colella said. “In a civilian setting, most women know themselves or they have a friend who knows who in the local community can help you. But in the military, this is a very hush-hush thing.”

Campbell’s situation was forced into the open Dec. 10, 2014—the second attack to which Darlington pleaded guilty. That day, she again told him she wanted a divorce and he started strangling her.

Campbell described hearing her 3-year-old daughter screaming and how she tried to hold on to her infant son as she struggled for breath and her vision turned to white.

After Darlington let go and left the house, Campbell recalled vomiting into the sink while her daughter watched. Then she had to take her children out to pick up the Christmas gifts that a base organization was donating to her family.

At some point, she posted about the attack in the Facebook group. Another member used the post to pinpoint her location in base housing at Quantico and called her son, a military policeman on the base.

Campbell returned from her errand to find military police, Navy Criminal Investigative Service and social services at her home.

https://www.fredericksburg.com/quantico-case-raises-questions-about-how-marine-corps-handles-domestic/article_a4bf321d-684e-554e-a634-011029a089a4.html

She was taken to Mary Washington Hospital in an ambulance, where a forensic nurse documented the strangulation-related injuries. Darlington was arrested and placed in the Rappahannock Regional Jail.

Soon afterward, Campbell said, Marines from Darlington's command, Weapons Training Battalion, started stopping by her house at random times, often with Darlington on the other end of their mobile phones, asking to talk to her.

Colella said command involvement is another reason why domestic violence incidents in the military community sometimes do not get treated with the seriousness advocates think they should.

If a service member is arrested by military police, his or her command will be notified, Colella said, and sometimes all the command will do is place the person in a barracks for a "cool-out period."

She said this might change with the new option to charge service members specifically with domestic violence.

"But there is still a lot of command involvement," she said. "There's no civilian counterpart where if your spouse hurts you, their boss has a say in how that proceeds."

Kilmartin said commanders are responsible for fostering a climate that either condones or restricts sexist behavior.

"If the tone set by a commander is one that accommodates hostile sexism, women in that unit are six times as likely to experience sexual assault," he said, citing findings from an article published in the American Journal of Industrial Medicine that explores factors associated with women's risk of rape in the military environment. "That's how important the command is."

Colella also said that in many cases, the service member is young and his or her direct superior is also very young, often only 22 to 26 years old, and not adequately trained to respond to domestic violence.

"They've been in battle with this person. Who do you think they believe? The bonds are different. Bond and brotherhood make it very difficult to have someone believe [victims]," Colella said.

Campbell said she felt pressure from her ex-husband's command, as well as the prosecuting attorney, to take a plea deal. She was exhausted and she accepted and tried to move on with her life.

But then, in 2016, the letters from Darlington started coming.

Legal confusion

Campbell said the Marine Corps has assigned seven different legal counsels to her. Since she started receiving communication from her ex-husband's family and from him, she has been informing her lawyers of her fear of him, trying to get military protective orders reinstated and attempting to have his suspended sentence reinstated.

In January 2015, she wrote to her first legal counsel describing the anxiety she felt when Darlington's parents contacted her at his request.

"I have felt relaxed and safe since he has been in jail," she wrote in an email she forwarded to The Free Lance-Star. "But with all of this, I feel panicked again and it's like I'm waiting for him to come through that door and try to hurt me again. I don't know what to do, I don't know who to trust."

In November 2016, the senior trial counsel at Marine Corps Base Quantico emailed a military corrections officer at Camp Lejeune on her behalf, asking to have a military protective order placed against Darlington.

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Campbell said it seems like no one can agree what command is responsible for Darlington since he was discharged.

In June 2017, she received an email from a captain serving as her victims' legal counsel telling her the Camp Lejeune base commander had denied his appeal to revoke Darlington's suspended sentence. Because it contained new material, it would have to be reviewed by the Headquarters and Support Battalion commander first, he wrote.

That counsel told her he would resubmit the request, but also informed her that he was being transferred out of the Victims' Legal Counsel Organization.

Campbell said the counsel she was assigned next told her within three weeks that he was closing the case.

It was not until December 2018 that yet another legal counsel began working on submitting another request to revoke the suspended sentence.

Campbell learned from the attorney that after Darlington was officially dishonorably discharged from the Marine Corps on March 3, 2018, he was transferred from the Chesapeake naval brig to a federal correctional institute in Loretto, Pa. At that point, it became unclear what entity had convening authority over Darlington, he told her.

According to the Navy's Corrections Manual, SECNAVIST 16.40.9C, the secretary of the Army is responsible for the transfer of military personnel serving long-term sentences from military prisons to Federal Bureau of Prisons facilities.

On Dec. 28, the counsel wrote in an email to Campbell, "As we discussed, I no longer feel comfortable waiting for all interested parties in figuring out who/which command is the appropriate entity for this request."

He attached to the email a draft appeal to the commanding general of Marine Corps Training Command, which he said he hoped to submit by Jan. 4. In the draft appeal, which Campbell forwarded to The Free Lance-Star, the counsel argued that Darlington should be required to serve out the remaining six years of his sentence behind bars because his actions "have, in totality and essence, violated the Pre-Trial Agreement affording him this very leniency."

The appeal mentions the letters Darlington routed to Campbell and the fact that he continued to track her down from prison despite her attempts to avoid him. It cites Darlington's multiple disciplinary incidents and notes that there are several recordings of phone calls he made from the brig in which he admits to assaulting staff and threatens further violence.

The appeal argues that the Marine Corps still has authority over Darlington—even though he was dishonorably discharged—because he is still serving a military sentence and is still bound by the conditions of the Pre-Trial Agreement.

On Feb. 27, Campbell finally learned that Camp Lejeune had agreed to a hearing on her appeal to vacate Darlington's suspended sentence. After being postponed twice last week, that hearing is now scheduled for Monday.

Surviving abuse

Campbell attends group therapy at Empowerhouse in Fredericksburg. She said that when she tells her story, she hears from military spouses who say it's their story, too.

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“I hear military wife after military wife saying the same thing,” she said. “Some Army, but mostly Marine. [The Marines] drop the ball so hard. It’s disheartening.”

Campbell said she thought about coming forward with her story a year ago but it scared her too much. Instead, on Dec. 10 of last year—the day she celebrates as her “Alive Day,” when she survived strangulation at Darlington’s hands—she had the word “survivor” tattooed on her foot.

But as March 15 grew closer, and after hearing about Darlington’s aggressive behavior in confinement, she realized she didn’t want to hold back any more.

“He’s escalating,” she said. “I can’t just sit back and say nothing. He’s in a reintegration program now. It’s terrifying. We don’t have time.”

She said she wants to raise awareness of domestic violence in the military.

Kilmartin said that in his work on military bases, he sees lots of information being distributed about sexual assault prevention, but not as much about domestic violence prevention.

And Campbell said that throughout her time at Camp Lejeune and Quantico, she wasn’t aware of the Family Advocacy program and the option to seek confidential services there. When she finally did reach out to the program, about a month after Darlington was arrested in 2014, she said it provided her with invaluable support.

“They were by me every step of the way,” she said.

She wants survivors to know they are not alone, that they have a voice and that there are places, such as Empowerhouse and Family Advocacy, where they will be heard.

“I don’t want to be another statistic,” Campbell said. “But I figured, I’m already at risk. Why not scream off the rooftops that this is happening?”

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Spec ops in trouble: Mired in scandal and under Pentagon review, what will it take to clean house?

By Meghann Myers

Army Times, March 13, 2019



The fatigued special operations force is causing concerns about the incidence and seriousness of misconduct, prompting a Pentagon review that has been submitted to Congress. (U.S. Special Operations Command)

Something has gone off track at U.S. Special Operations Command.

A SEAL and a former Green Beret are under indictment for alleged war crimes committed downrange. Two Marine Raiders and two SEALs are charged with the murder of a Green Beret while the

group served in Mali in 2017. Elsewhere, operators have been investigated for, or convicted of, spousal murder, sexual assault, [child rape](#), domestic battery and drug smuggling, or have [taken their own lives](#).

And in the wake of the [botched October 2017 Niger mission](#) that killed four Army special operations soldiers, a two-star Air Force general, a Green Beret captain and his noncommissioned officer-in-charge face punishment. A 6,300-page investigation found that the team had been untrained and unrehearsed for the mission, and lacking proper oversight in its chain of command.

Misconduct lurks in any corner of the military, but over the past couple of years, the range and depth of charges facing members of these elite units has alarmed the congressional leadership responsible for funding their operations.

Lawmakers are concerned enough to [order the Defense Department](#) late last year to review the organization's ethics and professionalism programs of each community that sends troops to SOCOM, among them the legendary Navy SEALs, [Army Green Berets](#), Marine Raiders and Air Force pararescuemen.

"A survey of allegations of serious misconduct across our formations over the last year indicate that USSOCOM faces a deeper challenge of a disordered view of the team and the individual in our SOF culture," SOCOM boss Army Gen. Tony Thomas wrote in an email to the force in December.

The Pentagon's review went to Congress in early March, but some SOF leaders spoke out sooner. The head of Army Special Operations Command released a memo in November calling on leaders to work on their command cultures and address warning signs before they become incidents.

"It is incumbent upon our leadership down to the team-room level to intensify our emphasis on [Army special operations forces] values and character," Lt. Gen. Francis Beaudette wrote. "Service is a privilege, and this privilege is grounded in a culture of accountability and professionalism that extends far beyond program compliance."

A week later, Thomas sent his memo to the force, calling for a 90-day review of the command's core values and their practice.

It came the day after [reports that alcohol was involved](#) in a car accident that injured a special operations soldier and killed a French troop deployed to Niger.

<https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2019/03/13/spec-ops-in-trouble-mired-in-scandal-and-under-pentagon-review-what-will-it-take-to-clean-house/>

And in February, [Naval Special Warfare Command](#) boss Rear Adm. Collin Green told a convention audience that he had commissioned his own 90-day review into leader development and ethics within the community.

“Overall, the report determined U.S. Special Operations Command and its components are full and active participants in the military services’ and Department of Defense’s ethics programs — meeting or exceeding standards in every area reviewed,” Pentagon spokeswoman Cmdr. Candice Tresch told Military Times on March 7, after the report had been submitted.

Spokespeople for SOCOM, and each of the services’ special operations components, declined to comment on the review.



Special operations soldiers take part in close quarters battle training. The high demands on SOF troops mean the operational mindset never stops, says one who's been there. (U.S. Special Operations Command)

“In addition, periodic self-assessments put forward new initiatives to re-enforce ethics and professionalism programs across the force,” Tresch said. “Examples include improving and expanding values-based decision making instruction, as well as assessing the

cumulative effects of 17 years of continuous combat to expand programs and practices, as required.”

While none of the crimes and allegations are unique to special operations forces, the organization’s elite status — which has only grown due to its role in key operations of the Global War on Terror — often comes with higher expectations.

“The report also acknowledged there are cases of misconduct and those incidents are being addressed,” Tresch added. “However, the manner in which individual cases of misconduct are handled by U.S. Special Operations Command and its components are outside the scope of this review and more broadly, not discussed by Department of Defense officials as a matter of practice.”

Military Times asked experts what’s at the core of the trouble at SOCOM, and what can be done about it.

“Any time that you subject a human being ... let’s say, somebody who’s already a high achiever, greater than average intelligence, the ability to suck up more pain — and you subject them to the kinds of environments, the things that they see, the things that they see done, the things that they necessarily have to do, over and over and over again — you start breaking down the human component, the spirit, the soul, the mental processes, the judgment,” retired Sgt. 1st Class Greg Walker told Military Times in February.

Walker enlisted in 1975 served in the 75th Ranger Regiment and 9th Infantry Division before completing Special Forces selection in 1980. He served as a Green Beret in Panama, El Salvador, in Kuwait during the run-up to the Iraq invasion, and then again during the early days of Operation Iraqi Freedom. In the intervening years, he spent 10 years as a police officer in Oregon, writing two historical non-fiction books on special operations forces. Most recently, he served as a military liaison with Cedar Hills Hospital in Portland, Oregon.

It will be up to the Pentagon to provide guidance and support for SOCOM going forward, but one national security development could make an impact, according to a senior adviser with the International Security Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington, D.C.-based think tank.

<https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2019/03/13/spec-ops-in-trouble-mired-in-scandal-and-under-pentagon-review-what-will-it-take-to-clean-house/>

“I think the one area that probably works — looking at the next couple years — to SOF’s advantage, is the decision in the most recent National Defense Strategy, to focus more on state-based competitors, and put issues like terrorism essentially secondary,” said Seth Jones, a lecturer in international studies and security at Johns Hopkins University and the Naval Postgraduate School, who previously worked as liaison between the head of SOCOM and the assistant to the deputy defense secretary for special operations.

Dangerous mix

Elite troops are tired, worn out with little chance to recover, and many are on medications. Reliance on SOF troops has escalated as the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria have set the pace during the last 17 years.

“The problem with that is this ... special operations, whether it’s the SEALs or Special Forces or whatever, was never meant to be a constant warfighting command or capability,” Walker said. “And that is what it has evolved into for a number of reasons.”

The operational mindset is constant even though deployments might only last a few months, he said, as high-intensity deployments have given way to field training soon after coming home, in preparation for the next rotation.

“They don’t get the time to decompress, they don’t get the time to heal up from whatever injuries that are not anything that puts them in a hospital,” Walker said. “No time to wean off of medications.”

And the medications are no small issue. The cocktail of pain and sleep medications operators sometimes subsist on, alone, Walker said, can contribute to behavioral problems down the road. Where once Ambien was prescribed to help with a good rest on a long flight to the Middle East, now it can be used routinely to help an operator sleep all day in preparation for all-night missions, he said.

And when they come home, that unnatural sleep cycle can snowball into more deprivation and later, behavioral issues, “things they would never do if they weren’t fatigued, worn out,” said Walker, who took a job with the SOCOM Care Coalition, now the Warrior Care Program, as a coordinator and advocate after he retired from the Army.

While combat operations temporarily ceased in Iraq in 2011 and Afghanistan in 2014, the special operations community also saw some drop in operational tempo.

“My sense, just in general, is that the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq — plus Syria and wars in other locations, including the Philippines, deployment of forces to Colombia — have put a real strain on the force,” Jones said.

More time at home can mean more time for issues to bubble up, but also a chance to address them.

Politics have played a big role, Jones said: SOF forces have a smaller footprint, they’re known as the best of the best, and because of the classified nature of their work, leadership can avoid publicly disclosing how many personnel are deployed and what they’re doing, unlike conventional forces.

Whether misconduct is higher in special operations than it “should” be — considering the superior discipline and good judgment expected of elite special operators — Walker says serving in special operations now is even more high stress now than it was when he first joined the Army in 1975.

“One, you did not do multiple deployments,” Walker said of his experience. “For the most part, you did a deployment, it was six months to a year — maybe — you came back, you took leave, you went back into a

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training mode, of course. But you were back. So you could readjust to family situations and all of that good stuff. Then your platoon might come up for another deployment.”

Operational stress

Rules of engagement are also a hot topic when experts try to unpack GWOT. From deployment to deployment, the guidelines can change. Maybe it was all good to take out a suspected bomb-maker carrying a weapon on your last deployment, but now he needs to walk toward you and raise it for a good kill.

That is precisely the scenario that faced former [Maj. Matt Golsteyn](#) back in 2010. Now, he’s facing court proceedings on charges of murdering a suspected Taliban insurgent under terms, he says, that were totally legal at the time.

A board of inquiry following a 2011 investigation found no clear violation of ROE, but the case was revived in 2018 and Golsteyn was formally charged in December.

Meanwhile, [Chief Warfare Special Operator Eddie Gallagher](#) is heading to court-martial for allegedly murdering a detained Iraqi teenager in 2017, while another member of his team has been charged for allegedly helping Gallagher cover up a string of war crimes.

Confusion about where and how the lines are drawn can breed cynicism, Walker said.

“The damage that’s been done opens up that person to say, why the hell not?” he said. “If they were being better taken care of and that, the resilience, the resistance to that kind of a thing, would be higher.”

That might have played into the case of former [Master Sgt. Daniel Gould](#), a 7th Special Forces Group soldier who hatched a cocaine smuggling plot from Colombia.

“A segment of them has the possibility of becoming very jaundiced, bitter, cynical, and you just wear people out like brakes on a car,” Walker said.

In June 2017, [Staff Sgt. Logan Melgar](#), a Green Beret, was found dead while deployed to Mali. Two Navy SEALs and two Marine Raiders, Melgar’s housemates, have been charged in his strangulation death.



Staff Sgt. Logan J. Melgar was found dead of strangulation on June 4, 2017 in housing he shared with other special operations forces personnel in Bamako, Mali. (Army)

The narrative of the crime has shifted from a friendly wrestling match gone wrong to retribution for a personal slight.

The discipline, intelligence, confidence and competitiveness that would push an operator to the top of the profession can also create problems, if you don’t check in with yourself, Walker said.

“Your greatest strength is also your greatest weakness,” he said. “You have to watch and know yourself, and manage yourself and be managed, so that wonderful strength that you have of being a risk-taker, that can be directed properly.”

Personal violence

Issues tend to follow troops home, and in the name of the “brotherhood,” problems can go unaddressed.

“You always had guys that were incredible SOF soldiers, regardless, but they had a hell of a drinking problem. Just because of the nature of the beast, we take care of each other,” Walker said, recalling command discussions on this topic.

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A former police officer, Walker added that similar cultures are found in law enforcement, firefighting and other professions.

“It’s not unique to Special Forces or the SEALs or anywhere else,” he added.

In a profession where you routinely face death, he said, “you have to be able to depend on each other, and that just overrides when you come back. ‘Yeah, he’s missed formation because he’s been drunk the last several nights, but he’s been through a lot. We’ve all been there. We’ve all got the mission to do.’ Same happens in the conventional force.”

And sometimes that cover extends after outcry from a family. In a letter sent to Army Times in February, the wife of Special Forces soldier detailed her husband’s deterioration and her attempts to get his command to intervene.

“My husband has struggled off and on for more than 12 years,” she wrote, asking for anonymity because her husband is still serving with Special Forces. “I reached out to his immediate command once upon a long time ago, when he was on an [Operational Detachment Alpha] in a [Commanders In-extremis Force] company. Because of the SF attitude toward wives, you all already know how that turned out for me.”

She had gone to her husband’s chain of command again to plead for help more recently, she wrote. Her husband had been driving the family around with an open beer in the center console, “one for the road” his teammate had sent him home with after a house party.

His emotional abuse escalated to physical, landing her in the hospital, she added.

In January, another special forces soldier was sentenced to 10 years in prison for assaulting his wife, once while she was holding their infant son. Though [Maj. Jason Sartori](#) was not formally charged, a 15-6 investigation substantiated at least 10 extramarital affairs, including two women who told Army Criminal Investigative Command that he had battered and sexually assaulted them.

“We’ve always had guys who went sideways,” Walker said, offering the example of drug running during the Vietnam War, or an Irish-American Green Beret who deserted to join the Irish Republican Army in the ’90s. “Yeah, you have guys that just have a criminal leaning that for, whatever reason, if an opportunity makes itself available, they say, ‘I’m just going to give this a shot and see what happens’.”

‘They know who’s having problems’

Behavioral and mental health resources are widely available to all troops, including SOF, but the barriers to accessing it can be stronger. Pushing past limits is part and parcel of SOF culture.

“It’s like propaganda for our own people,” Walker said. “‘I can’t quit. I can’t go in and say that I’m messed up. We’re all messed up!’ That’s a generalization, but that’s how a lot of folks will think. ‘Everybody’s hurt. I can’t go in there and say that I’m special.’”

Beyond the well-documented stigma that all troops face when seeking help to conquer their demons, there’s also the tangible consequence — troops undergoing behavioral health treatment cannot deploy. A substance abuse problem could mean a year or two sidelined.

It can be hard enough to get an individual to bring him or herself in for treatment, Walker said, but they can’t always rely on teammates or leadership to intervene, either.

In a small SOF unit of highly specialized experts, both the operator and the command can be reluctant to take anyone out of rotation.

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"He's out there, man. But he's one of our best. And we need him for the next deployment," Walker said.

There was a bit of a golden era, he explained, back when Adm. William McRaven was serving in leadership roles within SOCOM, eventually becoming its commander in 2011. He famously implored the force to "take care of our people" and "break down the stigma," Walker said,

"About 2012, that started to change," Walker said. "This is my take on it, but I think it's pretty solid. It's very expensive to do that. And this is a reality: What is the military's first and foremost mission, and what is a commander's foremost mission? Project combat power."

Public comments have continued in a similar vein. In 2015, then-SOCOM boss [Gen. Joseph Votel](#) also opened up about his experience with therapy.

But behind the scenes, Walker said, the demands on the force overran attempts to address individual troops. Commanders would push back, he added, with concerns about staying mission-ready while half-a-dozen guys are in treatment.

"You want me to meet requirements — I can't," Walker said "Okay, how about next time? Can you hang in there until next deployment?" Making it more difficult in very subtle ways to actually go and get care and treatment."

The SF wife told a similar story. She spoke to a command sergeant major about her husband's problems, one who had touted McRaven's "Preservation of the Force and Family Plan." But instead, she added, leadership moved to punish him for the domestic violence incident.

"No one in the command was going to do what McRaven and company were advertising. They were not going to get this soldier any help," she said. "They were going to 'counsel the soldier with a view toward separation.'"

The experiences are not unique to SOF, Jones said, but the particular cultures of its components can heighten issues.

"They view themselves as elite. They operate in small teams. They operate at a high tempo. They often view themselves as being able to operate in ways, at tempos and in physically demanding locations better than anybody else," he said. "And with that culture, and with some of those decisions — and deployments in some of the areas they're deployed to — come challenges."

And those challenges can be compounded if troops are not keeping themselves in check, and neither is anyone around them.

"The people responsible — by regulation, morally, by [standard operating procedures] — are leaders," Walker said. "They know who's having problems, and if they don't know, they should be relieved."

"That team sergeant, that master chief, needs to go to his leadership," he added.

The fix?

DoD's review will address the resources and programs SOCOM has in place, both to prevent misconduct and to address it when it happens.

But what needs to change? The Pentagon can employ some tools to assess the issue and start to turn things around, Jones said, and the first step is to do the diagnostics.

"How public these become, that's a debate that the Pentagon can have with SOCOM and with Congress," he said. "How serious are these problems? ... What are the causes of them?"

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If the deployment rate is to blame, he added, the Pentagon might take a look at scaling back ODA and SEAL platoon deployments, for example, and staggering which units deploy and to where.

Walker doubled down on that theory.

“When do the senior commanders get together, and go to the Pentagon and the president and say, ‘Our force has been totally overextended, totally overused. We’ve worn out our equipment, we’ve worn out our people, and we need to stop. We need to reassess what our missions absolutely should be, and do a complete rebuild from the top down?’ ” he said.

“That takes such a degree of moral and ethical courage, and I don’t know that it’s there,” he added.

The military has done research extensively, Jones said — often with anonymous surveys — then taken action with programs to address the issues raised.

“I think the Pentagon is probably the only place — even more so than Congress — that has the ability to do that,” he said.

The answer is not in more training and more awareness, Walker said. Moving from encouraging guys to seek medical treatment to trying to bolster resilience cannot undo damage that’s already been done.

“You don’t build resilience,” he said. “What you’re really going to say is, ‘If you were going to break at point B ... we’re going to give you enough stuff that hopefully you might be able to make to it point C before you break.’ ”

And perhaps, he added, rather than treatment, that breaking point ends in separation proceedings.

Though, if leadership asked for it, it’s unlikely that Congress or the president would approve such a pause to SOF operations. Instead, Jones said, it’s possible that the national security environment might provide some incidental respite.

If near-peer adversaries like Russia and China are at the top of the list, that could mean more partner-nation training missions and less focus on counter-insurgency. President Trump’s plans to draw down forces in Syria and Afghanistan could take some of the weight off of special operations.

And while Green Berets could very well be training troops in Latvia and Lithuania, or Thailand and Indonesia, to push back against incursion by their belligerent neighbors, it will mostly be conventional land, sea and air power who fight any of those potential battles.

“The SOF elements of that are pretty limited, to be honest,” Jones said. “If there’s a likelihood that SOF is going to get a break, it’s because the U.S. looks like it’s moving out of a post-9/11 period.”

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Religion

49 killed at mosques in ‘one of New Zealand’s darkest days’

By Nick Perry and Mark Baker

The Associated Press, March 15, 2019



Ambulance staff take a man from outside a mosque in central Christchurch, New Zealand, Friday, March 15, 2019. Multiple people were killed in mass shootings at two mosques full of worshippers attending Friday prayers on what the prime minister called "one of New Zealand's darkest days," as authorities detained four people and defused explosive devices in what appeared to be a carefully planned attack. (AP Photo/Mark Baker)

CHRISTCHURCH, New Zealand (AP) — At least 49 people were killed in mass shootings at two mosques full of worshippers attending Friday prayers in an attack broadcast in horrifying, live video by an immigrant-hating white nationalist wielding at least two assault rifles and a shotgun.

One man was arrested and charged with murder, and two other armed suspects were taken into custody while police tried to determine what role they played.

“It is clear that this can now only be described as a terrorist attack,” Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said, noting that many of the victims could be migrants or refugees.

She pronounced it “one of New Zealand’s darkest days.”

The cold-blooded attack shocked people across the nation of 5 million people, a country that has relatively loose gun laws but few gun homicides and is so peaceful police officers rarely carry firearms. It is also generally considered to be welcoming to migrants and refugees.

The gunman behind at least one of the mosque shootings left a 74-page manifesto that he posted on social media under the name Brenton Tarrant, identifying himself as a 28-year-old Australian and white nationalist who was out to avenge attacks in Europe perpetrated by Muslims.

Using what may have been a helmet camera, he livestreamed to the world in graphic detail his assault on worshippers at Christchurch’s Al Noor Mosque, where at least 41 people were killed. An attack on a second mosque in the city not long after killed several more.

Police did not identify those taken into custody and gave no details except to say that none of them had been on any watch list. They did not immediately say whether the same person was responsible for both shootings.

At least 48 people, some in critical condition, were being treated at Christchurch Hospital for gunshot wounds, authorities said.

While there was no reason to believe there were any more suspects, the prime minister said the national threat level was raised from low to high. Police warned Muslims against going to a mosque anywhere in New Zealand. And Air New Zealand canceled several flights in and out of Christchurch, saying it couldn’t properly screen customers and baggage.

Police said the investigation extended 360 kilometers (240 miles) to the south, where homes in Dunedin were evacuated around a “location of interest.” They gave no details.



(AP Graphic / Dien Magno)

World leaders condemned the attacks and offered condolences. Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan and other Islamic leaders pointed to the bloodshed and other such attacks as evidence of rising hostility toward Muslims.

"I blame these increasing terror attacks on the current Islamophobia post-9/11 where Islam & 1.3 bn Muslims have collectively been blamed for any act of terror by a Muslim," Khan tweeted.

New Zealand's prime minister alluded to anti-immigrant sentiment as the possible motive, saying that immigrants and refugees "have chosen to make New Zealand their home, and it is their home. They are us."

As for the suspects, Ardern said, "these are people who I would describe as having extremist views that have absolutely no place in New Zealand."

Witness Len Peneha said he saw a man dressed in black enter the Al Noor mosque and then heard dozens of shots, followed by people running out in terror.

Peneha, who lives next door, said the gunman ran out of the mosque, dropped what appeared to be a semi-automatic weapon in his driveway and fled. He said he then went into the mosque to try to help the victims.

"I saw dead people everywhere. There were three in the hallway, at the door leading into the mosque, and people inside the mosque," he said. "I don't understand how anyone could do this to these people, to anyone. It's ridiculous."

He added: "I've lived next door to this mosque for about five years and the people are great, they're very friendly. I just don't understand it."

He said the gunman was wearing a helmet with some kind of device on top, giving him a military-type appearance.

In the video that was apparently livestreamed, the gunman spends more than two minutes inside the mosque spraying terrified worshippers with bullets again and again, sometimes firing at people he has already cut down.

He then walks outside, where he shoots at people on the sidewalk. Children's screams can be heard in the distance as he returns to his car to get another rifle. The gunman then walks back into the mosque, where there are at least two dozen people lying on the ground.

After going back outside and shooting a woman there, he gets back in his car, where the song "Fire" by the English rock band The Crazy World of Arthur Brown can be heard blasting. The singer bellows, "I am the god of hellfire!" and the gunman drives away.

The second attack took place at the Linwood mosque about 5 kilometers (3 miles) away.

Mark Nichols told the New Zealand Herald that he heard about five gunshots and that a prayer-goer returned fire with a rifle or shotgun. Nichols said he saw two wounded people being carried out on stretchers past his automotive shop.

<https://www.apnews.com/ce9e1d267af149dab40e3e5391254530>

Based on the video, the attacker was at the scene of the first mosque for about 10 minutes, and police did not arrive until after that.

The footage showed he was carrying a shotgun and two fully automatic military assault rifles, with an extra magazine taped to one of the weapons so that he could reload quickly. He also had more assault weapons in the trunk of his car, along with what appeared to be improvised explosives.

The gunman said he was not a member of any organization, acted alone and chose New Zealand to show that even the most remote parts of the world were not free of “mass immigration.”

In a measure of New Zealand’s welcoming attitude toward immigrants, the prime minister announced last year that the country would boost its annual refugee quota from 1,000 to 1,500 starting in 2020. Ardern, whose party campaigned on a promise to take in more refugees, called the increase “the right thing to do.”

Christchurch is home to nearly 400,000 people and is sometimes called the Garden City. It has been rebuilding since an earthquake in 2011 killed 185 people and destroyed many downtown buildings.

Before Friday’s attack, New Zealand’s deadliest shooting in modern history took place in the small town of Aramoana in 1990, when a gunman killed 13 people following a dispute with a neighbor.

Perry reported from Wellington. Associated Press writers Kristen Gelineau in Sydney, Rod McGuirk in Canberra, Australia, and Chris Blake in Bangkok contributed to this report.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/devos-allows-religious-groups-to-provide-taxpayer-funded-services-in-private-schools/2019/03/11/8ed6ad52-4448-11e9-8aab-95b8d80a1e4f_story.html

DeVos allows religious groups to provide taxpayer-funded services in private schools

By Moriah Balingit and Morgan Smith

The Washington Post, March 12, 2019



Education Secretary Betsy DeVos with students from Digital Pioneers Academy on Feb. 28, 2019. (Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images)

Education Secretary Betsy DeVos announced this week she would no longer enforce a rule that bars religious institutions from providing certain taxpayer-funded services in private schools, saying the restriction ran afoul of a recent high-court decision.

Under the federal education law, private schools are entitled to many of the federally funded services that public schools receive, particularly if they educate children who are from low-income households or who are English-language learners. The rules, called equitable-services provisions, mean that public school districts pay for professional development for private-school teachers, or send members of their own staffs to provide reading help to struggling children who are eligible for extra help.

School districts will often contract with third parties to provide the services. But the rules barred school districts from contracting with religious institutions in these circumstances.

Sister Dale McDonald, director of public policy for the National Catholic Educational Association, said it meant that school districts could not contract with faculty members at religiously affiliated universities, for example, to provide professional development to private-school teachers, even if the services were secular.

DeVos said in an announcement Monday that the prohibition was no longer enforceable because of a 2017 Supreme Court decision in which the court ruled that religious organizations could not be excluded from state programs if the organizations have secular intent. The court sided with Trinity Lutheran, a Missouri church that sought to participate in a state program to resurface its playground for its preschoolers.

“The Trinity Lutheran decision reaffirmed the long-understood intent of the First Amendment to not restrict the free exercise of religion,” DeVos said in a news release. “Those seeking to provide high-quality educational services to students and teachers should not be discriminated against simply based on the religious character of their organization.”

While school districts are now open to contract with religious organizations, the services they provide must be “secular, neutral and non-ideological.” The service providers also cannot be affiliated with the private schools they are serving.

DeVos’s announcement received mixed reactions from educators, politicians and advocates.

Andy Smarick, an education researcher and former president of the Maryland State Board of Education, said he expects lawsuits to be filed in response.

“It’s either courageous or provocative, depending on how you look at it,” he said. “It calls into question if this part of the federal law is still valid.”

Democrats are still debating the legality of DeVos’s move.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/devos-allows-religious-groups-to-provide-taxpayer-funded-services-in-private-schools/2019/03/11/8ed6ad52-4448-11e9-8aab-95b8d80a1e4f_story.html

“House Democrats are carefully reviewing the legality of the administration’s new policy,” said Joshua Weisz, spokesman for the Committee on Education and Labor.

Advocates who closely monitor freedom of speech and religion expressed concerns about the implications of the announcement.

“Betsy DeVos is neither the Supreme Court nor Congress. She does not get to unilaterally declare that a statute is unconstitutional, especially with a provision that is designed to protect church-state separation, a bedrock of our democracy,” said Maggie Garrett, vice president for public policy at Americans United for Separation of Church and State, an advocacy organization.

Leaders at the Alliance Defending Freedom, a conservative Christian nonprofit organization that focuses on issues of religious freedom, applauded the policy move.

“Religious organizations should be free to compete to provide goods and services to schools and colleges on a level playing field with everyone else. We commend the Trump administration and the Department of Education for recognizing the unconstitutional nature of the existing ban on religious contractors who are providing secular services,” said Kellie Fiedorek, legal counsel to the Alliance Defending Freedom.

Smarick said that it is unusual for an education secretary to make such a move and that it may suggest a larger policy shift in the Trump administration.

“This is the kind of decision that would have had to go through lawyers, policy debates; it’s a major decision,” he said. “This kind of move doesn’t happen lightly in most administrations.”

A Muslim soldier says her command sergeant major forced her to remove her hijab

By Meghann Myers

Army Times, March 12, 2019



Sgt. Cesilia Valdovinos has filed a complaint after her command sergeant major accused her of being out of hair regulations and ordered her to remove her hijab. (Military Religious Freedom Foundation)

Sgt. Cesilia Valdovinos was at a chapel at Fort Carson, Colorado, for a suicide prevention briefing on March 6 when she says her command sergeant major grabbed her by the arm, took her outside and made her remove her religious head covering in front of others.

The senior noncommissioned officer believed that Valdovinos, 26, who has an approved exemption from her brigade commander to wear a hijab in uniform, was wearing her hair out of regulations underneath it, she told Army Times on Tuesday.

“To me, it was the same thing as if they had asked someone to take their top off,” the soldier, a member of the 704th Brigade Support Battalion, said.

No one had asked her whether her hair was in a regulation bun, she added, before demanding that she remove the garment.

She took off the scarf portion of the covering first, she said, but Command Sgt. Maj. Kerstin Montoya demanded she completely expose her hair. When she removed the cap underneath, which covers her hairline and underneath her chin, the length of hair came loose from its bun.

The battalion adjutant, who accompanied Valdovinos and Montoya for the inspection, says that the senior NCO tapped the sergeant on her shoulder before leading her outside of the chapel.

“Upon removing her hijab it was evident her hair was completely down,” Capt. Brooke Smith said in a statement. “CSM Montoya told her to get her hair back in regulation and not let it happen again. At no point did CSM Montoya touch the soldier or yell at her (at all or within earshot of other soldiers).”

Valdovinos claims her hair was tied up under the hijab. The under-cap has an extra length of fabric inside, she explained, that she wraps around her bun to secure it before pulling the cap down. That’s why her hair came loose when she removed it, she said.

It was the first time since receiving her waiver that the soldier had ever been confronted about her hijab, she said. But not the first she felt targeted as a Muslim in the Army.

In an Equal Opportunity complaint filed on March 7, she said, she described her first sergeant referring to her as “the girl with the hood.” A culinary specialist, she said, she was recently reassigned from an on-post dining facility to her battalion’s headquarters company after objecting to cooking pork products.

And previously, she added, she reported to her company commander that while deployed last year, another soldier referred to her as a terrorist. The captain did not escalate the claim, she said.

“I take all reports of soldiers disrespecting another soldier’s religious beliefs, observances, or traditions very seriously,” Col. David Zinn, the 2nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division

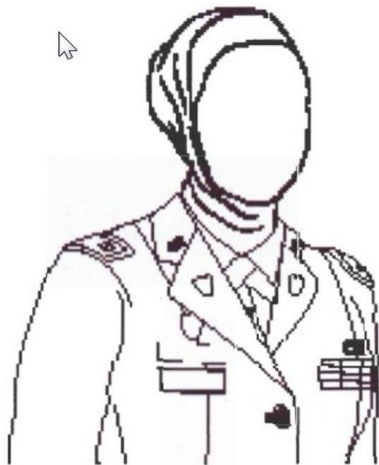
<https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2019/03/12/a-muslim-soldier-says-her-command-sergeant-major-forced-her-to-remove-her-hijab/>

commander who signed Valdovinos' exemption memo, said in a statement. "There is currently an inquiry regarding Sgt. Valdovinos' claim. I will ensure our unit continues our tradition of placing a high value on the rights of our soldiers to observe the tenets of their respective religions or to observe no religion at all."

The inspection was a blatant act of Islamophobia, according to the head of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, which represents Valdovinos.

"Unless this CSM, who wretchedly denigrated our MRFF client by ordering her to take off her hijab in public, enjoys the extraordinary powers of X-ray vision, it would have been impossible for this CSM to have even seen the hair of our MRFF client," Mikey Weinstein said in a statement.

The under-cap is an integral part of the approved hijab, he added.



A rendering of proper hijab wear, per Army Regulation 670-1. (Army)

"I wish they would just ask me if they have questions," Valdovinos said.

Since filing her EO complaint, she added, no member of her command has reached out to her to talk about the situation. Neither has Montoya been counseled on a more sensitive approach to enforcing regulations, according to a Fort Carson spokeswoman.

"No actions have been taken at this time pending the results from the informal inquiry," Brandy Gill told Army Times. "Once all of the facts have been gathered the command will take appropriate action."

Since early 2017, the Army has allowed religious headgear for soldiers whose faith requires it, with written approval by a brigade commander. The regulation states that the hijab must not cover the face, must be a solid color or in matching camouflage to the uniform of the day and that the ends must be tucked into any uniform top.

The bulk of the hair must also be able to be shifted around to accommodate a combat helmet when necessary, according to the regulation.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2019/03/14/ruth-bader-ginsburg-poster-vandalized-with-anti-semitic-profanity-swastika-brooklyn/>

Ruth Bader Ginsburg poster vandalized with anti-Semitic profanity, swastika in Brooklyn

By Isaac Stanley-Becker

The Washington Post, March 14, 2019



Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg sits with fellow members of the Supreme Court for a group portrait in Washington on Nov. 30. (J. Scott Applewhite/AP)

This post contains an image with graphic language and symbol

A poster in a Brooklyn subway station advertising a book about Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and featuring an image of the Jewish jurist's face, was vandalized this week with anti-Semitic profanity and a swastika.

The discovery of the vandalism led to condemnations of hate speech on Wednesday from leaders in New York, amid an [uptick in anti-Semitic incidents](#) there and around the country and a [national conversation](#) about the bounds of legitimate discourse addressing Judaism and Israel.

Scrawled in what appeared to be black marker over the face of the Supreme Court justice were the words, "Die, Jew b----." Beneath the obscenity was a swastika.

The vandalism, which transit authorities said was reported Tuesday and since removed, appeared at the Nassau Avenue subway stop, in the Greenpoint neighborhood of Brooklyn. It marred an advertisement for a book about the Brooklyn native, ["The Unstoppable Ruth Bader Ginsburg: American Icon."](#)

Ginsburg, 85, recently underwent surgery for cancer and [returned to the bench](#) last month after missing January arguments.

When she joined the Supreme Court in 1993, she became its first-ever female Jewish justice. She is now the high court's longest-serving Jewish member. In 2015, she teamed up with a D.C. rabbi to [release a feminist take on the Passover story](#). Her chambers are adorned with a [framed command from Deuteronomy](#), meaning "Justice, justice shall you pursue."

In a pair of tweets on Wednesday, the New York City Transit Authority's Subway account said its crews had removed what it described as "abhorrent vandalism" and "hateful imagery" after authorities had collected evidence for an investigation.

"Again, we regret that our customers were exposed to this hate speech," the transit authority said.

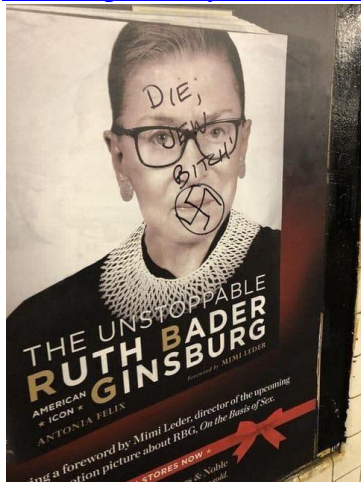
The New York Police Department [said Wednesday](#) that its hate crimes unit was looking into the incident.

Meanwhile, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio (D) joined other city leaders, as well as New York Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo (D), in condemning the vandalism.

De Blasio wrote on Twitter that Ginsburg "represents the very best of our city." He pledged that whoever had defaced her image would be held responsible.

Jumaane Williams, New York's public advocate-elect, [lamented](#) increasing instances of anti-Semitism "as bigots are emboldened in this time." Cuomo [said](#) the state's hate crimes task force stood ready to assist city authorities in their investigation.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2019/03/14/ruth-bader-ginsburg-poster-vandalized-with-anti-semitic-profanity-swastika-brooklyn/>



The New York City Police Department said it was investigating the vandalism, discovered Tuesday on a subway platform in the Greenpoint neighborhood of Brooklyn. (Provided to The Washington Post)

De Blasio last month [promised](#) to wage “war on anti-Semitism,” responding to police figures showing there were 180 anti-Semitic incidents in the city last year, a 22 percent increase over 2017. The wave of anti-Semitic violence has buffeted Brooklyn in particular, where the windows of synagogues have been shattered and videos have circulated of Jews being [beaten](#), [chased](#) and [choked](#).

Nationwide, anti-Semitic incidents have also been surging, according to the Anti-Defamation League, which [reported](#) a 57 percent increase in incidents in 2017 — the sharpest year-over-year rise since the organization began collecting such data in 1979.

SEE ALSO:

[Ruth Bader Ginsburg subway poster vandalized with swastika, NYPD hate crime unit investigating](#) [USA TODAY, 2019-03-14]

[High school plastered with swastikas after Holocaust survivor visit](#) [CNN, 2019-03-12]

Sexism

VA Struggles to Curb Harassment of Female Veterans at Medical Centers

By Richard Sisk

Military.com, March 10, 2019



Participants of the Women's Health Transition Assistance Program receive a tour of the James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital, Tampa, Fla., July 31, 2018. This pilot program series displays the range of women's health and mental health care services available for each member post-separation. (Ashley Perdue/U.S. Air Force)

10 Mar 2019

Leaders at the Department of Veterans Affairs are working harder than ever before to make the VA a welcoming place for female veterans. But their efforts are being undermined, some female veterans say, by other constituents at the VA: male veterans who act like women don't deserve to be there, or who take advantage of their presence at medical centers to harass them.

"They just don't think we're real veterans," retired Navy Lt. Cmdr. Robbin Alex said of the demeaning attitude behind the harassment female veterans sometimes experience in seeking Department of Veterans Affairs health care.

Former Marine Maj. Kyleanne Hunter said she and other female veterans just want to be treated like everyone else at the VA.

"I want them to realize that we are here to stay," said Hunter, who flew the AH-1 Super Cobra gunship in Iraq and Afghanistan. "Look at us. Treat us like you treat the other veterans. Treat us with respect."

From VA Secretary Robert Wilkie on down, the VA has recognized it has a problem with male veterans who refuse to accept that women have equal status in the military and as veterans. To curb harassment that can lead female veterans to go elsewhere for the health care they've earned, the department has embarked on a campaign to make medical centers nationwide more welcoming places for all veterans -- one that involves explicit warnings not to harass or assault other vets.

Retired Air Force Col. Ellen Haring said she first noticed the effects of the campaign in the form of a scrolling sign at the Washington, D.C., VA Medical Center (DC VAMC).

"Catcalls and stares are not compliments. They're harassment," it stated.

The DC center also put out on its Facebook page a list of behavioral "do's" and "don'ts" for veterans using the hospital. For instance, it is OK to talk about the weather, but "commenting on someone's body" is not OK.

Next month, DC VAMC, in collaboration with the Veterans Mental Health Advisory Council, plans to convene a Military Sexual Trauma Summit at the hospital.

At the flagship Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC) in Houston last year, the slogan was, "There is no excuse for harassment."

"Cat calls NOT welcome. Staring and whistling -- NOT okay at the VA," the Houston Medical Center said in a release.

<https://www.military.com/daily-news/2019/03/10/va-struggles-curb-harassment-female-veterans-medical-centers.html>

The "End Harassment Campaign" at MEDVAMC is aimed at "ensuring women veterans receive their health care in a safe and respectful environment, free of even the hint of sexual harassment." Female veterans are urged to report incidents to hospital security.

"When women feel uncomfortable in our medical center, they are less inclined to come in to receive the medical care they need," Dr. Rola El-Serag, director of MEDVAMC's Women's Health Program, said in the release.

"This can have a hugely negative effect on their health, both mentally and physically," El-Serag said of the harassment. "The thought that a woman veteran who has experienced something like military sexual trauma or is suffering from something like post-traumatic stress disorder would not be comfortable coming to the VA is just unacceptable."

Sexual harassment and assault in the military have been the subject of numerous reports and congressional hearings, but reports of harassment at the VA have largely relied on anecdotal evidence, according to the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI) at the National Institutes of Health.

In a January report, NCBI wrote, "Harassment of servicewomen during military service has been well-documented, but harassment of women veterans in Veterans Affairs (VA) health care settings has not been studied systematically."

The conclusion of an NCBI survey was that "one-quarter of women veteran VA users experienced harassment in VA health care settings."

"These experiences negatively impacted women's health care experiences and use," the survey's authors added.

The VA reported in 2015 that only the number of women who had used at least one VA benefit or services had grown steadily over the last decade, from 31.2 percent in 2005 to 41.1 percent in 2015. And with the population of female veterans poised to grow rapidly in coming years, that figure is set to increase. Per the 2015 data, however, male users still used VA services at higher rates; usage of at least one VA service increased for male veterans from 36 percent in 2006 to 45 percent in 2015.

In a separate 2018 survey, NCBI compared the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender women and non-LGBT men in the routine use of primary care for post-traumatic stress and health care family services at the Veterans Health Administration.

The report stated, "Compared with non-LGBT women, LGBT women were more likely to report harassment and feeling unwelcome at VHA. Some LGBT women reported delaying or missing needed care, primarily due to concerns about interacting with other veterans."

Retired Coast Guard Capt. Judy Keene said those who oppose the presence of women in the military and at the VA are going to have to come to the realization that society has changed since she first entered service.

Keene, 59, of Hagerstown, Maryland, was in the class of 1977 at the Coast Guard Academy, the second service academy to accept women.

"There was significant pressure on us" as women cadets to show that they were up to the mission, she said. "There was a significant part of the population that felt we didn't belong there [and] there was also another segment of the population that wanted us to succeed."

Keene said she had encountered people who tried to make it more difficult for women in service.

<https://www.military.com/daily-news/2019/03/10/va-struggles-curb-harassment-female-veterans-medical-centers.html>

"I felt as though that reflected more on them than on me, when they were saying things like 'women belong barefoot and pregnant and in the kitchen,'" she said. "I felt that was more a reflection on them and their orientation to life versus me and the skill sets I possessed."

Alex, the retired Navy lieutenant commander, suggested that the negative attitude toward women is possibly more prevalent among the older generation of veterans.

"It's a minority, not a majority," but it's there, said Alex, 60, who heads a chapter of the veterans advocacy group Team Red White and Blue. "They think they can say anything. You have to say that it's not appropriate."

At the VA, "they'll ask you, 'Where's your husband,'" she said. "They think you're a caretaker. You have to tell them, 'We're veterans too.'"

Women Veteran 'Trailblazers' Honored at VA Event

Alex, Keene and Hunter spoke on the sidelines of an event Wednesday honoring them and 12 other female veterans as "2019 Women Veteran Trailblazers" for their service and work in the community. The event was sponsored by the VA's Center for Women Veterans at the Women In Military Service for America Memorial.

In her remarks at the event, retired Air Force Col. Pamela Powers, Wilkie's chief of staff, said that "doors are continually opening to women" through the trailblazers' example.

"These women didn't sign up to break glass ceilings but, through their integrity, moral courage and determination, they did," Powers said. "You wanted to have the same opportunities as everybody else in the unit. And you wanted to stand out, not because of your gender, but because of what you did."

In her remarks, Anna Crenshaw, deputy director of the VA's Center for Women Veterans, said the VA is seeking to instill a "culture of transformation" across the agency to make it more accommodating to female veterans.

"Cultural transformation is something the center is really striving for, something that has been needed for a long time. It's no secret that women have served valiantly," she said.

The transformation Crenshaw spoke about has been slow in coming at the VA, said Haring, the retired Air Force colonel and interim chief executive officer at the Service Women's Action Network. But she sees encouraging signs.

"I believe there's an acknowledgment" at the VA of the harassment problem for women veterans, Haring said. "I think Wilkie recognizes that."

Push for More Programs Focusing on Female Vets

Last September, at the inaugural meeting of the Military Women's Coalition in Atlanta, Wilkie said, "My pledge to you is the VA will become a welcoming home for all those who have worn the uniform."

He said the department is "on the cusp of great change" in services for women, and "in order to meet that change, we have to change the way of doing business."

The numbers show that the change will have to come quickly in terms of access for female veterans seeking VA health care, officials said at a Feb. 28 hearing of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction, VA and Related Agencies.

<https://www.military.com/daily-news/2019/03/10/va-struggles-curb-harassment-female-veterans-medical-centers.html>

The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have resulted in an exponential growth in the number of female veterans now registered for treatment by the Veterans Health Administration, said Patricia Hayes, Women's Health Services chief consultant at the VA.

"The number of women veterans using VHA services has tripled since 2001, growing from 159,810 to 500,000 today," she said in her testimony.

Hayes said the VA is "strategically enhancing services and access for women veterans" through increased reliance on the private sector when treatment services in areas such as gynecology, maternity care, mammography and infertility treatments are not available at the VHA.

However, Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz, D-Florida, the subcommittee's chairperson, said, "Having women doctors and gender-specific care programs for women at every single VA facility is the absolute least we can do, and we are not currently providing it."

-- *Richard Sisk can be reached at Richard.Sisk@Military.com.*

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SEE ALSO:

[Treated Like a 'Piece of Meat': Female Veterans Endure Harassment at the V.A.](#) [*The New York Times*, 2019-03-12]

[With Historic Number of Women in Uniform, the Vet Community Is About to Change](#) [*Military.com*, 2019-03-11] [OPINION]

Sexual Assault / Harassment

Air Force colonel at NORAD found not guilty of sexual assault; convicted of assault

By Stephen Losey

Air Force Times, March 12, 2019



Col. Jason Costello, shown here as a lieutenant colonel, has been convicted of assault for grabbing a person's arm, but was acquitted of all other charges, including allegations of sexual assault. (Air Force)

Col. [Jason Costello](#), of the North American Aerospace Defense Command-Northern Command headquarters at Peterson Air Force Base in Colorado, has been convicted of assault, but was acquitted of all other charges, including allegations of [sexual assault](#).

Costello's court-martial at Peterson concluded Sunday, 21st Space Wing spokesman Stephen Brady said in a Tuesday email. He was found guilty of one specification of a violation of Article 128 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice — assault consummated by battery, Brady said. He was found not guilty of another assault charge, and three [sexual assault](#) charges, Brady said.

According to the charge sheet, Costello was accused of having sex with an unidentified woman while she was asleep in Rhode Island between late October and December 2014. He was also accused of digitally penetrating an unidentified woman at some time between September and November 2012 without her consent, and was accused of touching an unidentified woman's breasts and genitals over her clothes, without her consent, on more than one occasion between December 2012 and August 2014.

He was found not guilty of all those charges.

Costello was sentenced to 35 days confinement, with four days of credit for pretrial confinement, as well as a total pay forfeiture of \$12,000, spread out over six months, Brady said. He will also receive a reprimand.

Brady said the court-martial panel decided a punitive discharge would not be appropriate in this case.

The court-martial panel found that Costello unlawfully grabbed an unidentified person's arm, Brady said. The other assault charge, for which he was acquitted, alleged that he had struck an unidentified person in the face with his hand.

In a statement, Costello's attorney Richard Stevens said they are grateful the court members acquitted Costello of all but one assault claim. Stevens said all allegations were made by one person, who was a civilian.

“With regard to that lone assault conviction, this stemmed from a tense confrontation in 2017 in which Col. Costello grabbed his truck keys from the complaining witness, and then, according to what that person admitted to the responding police officer, the complaining witness initiated a physical struggle with Col. Costello to get the keys back,” Stevens said. “In that struggle, the individual punched Col. Costello in the face, and claimed that Col. Costello grabbed the person's arms. We hope the public record about this incident can now start to be corrected, and we hope all parties can start to move forward and past this case.”

Costello was previously assigned to NORTHCOM's operations directorate, but since last July, has been assigned to the NORAD and NORTHCOM training and exercises directorate. He previously served as commander of the 325th Training Support Squadron at Tyndall Air Force Base in Florida, and has also served as an F-22 instructor.

It's not just Sen. Martha McSally. #MeToo and more women in Congress mean more stories like hers

By Maureen Groppe

USA TODAY, March 11, 2019



Sen. Martha McSally, R-Ariz., reveals to a Senate Armed Services subcommittee hearing March 6, 2019, in Washington, D.C., that she was raped by a superior officer during her service in the Air Force. (Photo: USAT)

WASHINGTON – Tears ran down California Rep. Katie Porter’s face last month as she listened to Michigan Rep. Debbie Dingell [describe on the House floor](#) the impact of growing up in a

household with an abusive father.

Porter wasn’t sure she would be able to tell her own story of domestic abuse in such a public way.

But the freshman lawmaker stepped up to the lectern at a news conference Thursday where lawmakers were pushing for renewal of federal legislation to help victims of sexual assault and domestic violence.

She knew Dingell would be there supporting her, as would Wisconsin Rep. Gwen Moore, another survivor of domestic violence.

And when Porter did choke up as she described the unhelpful response she received after calling the police, Dingell rubbed her back.

“It’s strength in numbers,” Porter told USA TODAY afterward about why she decided to face the cameras.

And those numbers have grown.

In the first few weeks of the new Congress, female lawmakers have been speaking out about their personal experiences, a consequence of both the [record number](#) of women in Congress and the continued reverberations of the #MeToo movement.

“I think it helps. I hope it helps inspire others – to get through their own dark times,” Arizona Sen. Martha McSally [told CBS "This Morning"](#) about her dramatic disclosure at a Senate hearing Wednesday that she was raped by a superior officer while serving in the Air Force.

In January, Iowa Sen. Joni Ernst [disclosed](#) that she was raped in college, an emotionally wrenching story she decided to share after her separate allegations of assault by her then-husband inadvertently became public in divorce proceedings.

Arizona Rep. Debbie Lesko, a survivor of domestic violence, likewise has said it took her years to find her own voice. But after being elected to the House in 2018 – in a special election to succeed a lawmaker who resigned after allegations of sexual misconduct – Lesko has been an outspoken advocate for abused women.

When the House [debated last month](#) a bill to extend beyond three days the maximum time allowed for a background check for gun purchases, Lesko offered an amendment to exempt domestic violence victims from a longer wait.

“Should we tell them: 'Hopefully you can hide from your abuser for the next month?'" she asked on the House floor.



House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, joined by Reps. Katie Porter, Debbie Dingell and others, speaks about reauthorizing the Violence Against Women Act on March 7, 2019. (Photo: J. Scott Applewhite, AP)

That prompted Dingell, who opposed Lesko's exemption, to emotionally recount her childhood trauma of hiding from her mentally unstable father and stopping him from killing her mother one night.

"He shouldn't have had a gun," Dingell said. "No child, no woman, no man should ever have to go through that."

Expect to see more of such public debates, said Debbie Walsh, director of the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University.

"Women," she said, "are taking back control of their own narrative and connecting their stories to the issues that they care about and that they're going to be voted on."

Walsh sees this as an extension of the 2018 election in which many women [campaigned](#) in a much more personal way. In the past, she said, female candidates were reluctant to even talk about their children for fear voters wouldn't take them seriously.

But last year, Wisconsin Sen. Tammy Baldwin shared her mother's fight with prescription drug abuse. A House candidate in Texas talked in an ad about how her father abused her mother. Rep. Cindy Axne, in a successful challenge to a GOP incumbent, recounted selling personal items on eBay to pay medical bills because she couldn't afford maternity coverage offered by her health insurer.

"They just decided they were going to show the voters everything and let the voters decide," said Christina Reynolds, vice president of communications for EMILY's List, an organization that recruits and endorses Democratic women candidates who support abortion rights. "And the voters decided that they liked what they saw."

A [record](#) 126 women were elected to the House and Senate, increasing from 20 percent to 24 percent the share of women in Congress.

The number of women senators grew by one more when McSally was [chosen](#) in December to fill out the remainder of the late Sen. John McCain's term.

With federal data showing that one in three women have experienced sexual violence, it's not surprising that there are now more victims of violence in Congress, said Ruth Glenn, president and CEO of the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

"When you have an increase in women present, you're going to have an increase in those that are victims," Glenn said. "Exponentially, it makes perfect sense."

Sharing these personal stories should not only lead to a more nuanced policy debate but also increase the urgency or propensity of politicians to act, said Idaho State University assistant professor Malliga Och, who studies women in politics.

"The major reason why all countries – not just the U.S. – need more women in politics is that they bring different lived experiences into the political debates," she said.

But that doesn't mean they come to the same policy conclusions.

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2019/03/11/domestic-abuse-sen-martha-mcsally-lawmakers-congress-share/3090828002/>

That was on display when Dingell, a Democrat, and Lesko, a Republican, debated the background check legislation from opposite positions. And, unlike some other military sexual assault victims, McSally [does not want](#) to take decisions to prosecute those cases away from commanding officers.

“This experience effects a lot of things in a person’s life,” said Scott Berkowitz, president of RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network.) “But (victims) also bring their core philosophy to the analysis of the problem.”

Still, because Porter – a Harvard-educated lawyer – was willing to share her domestic violence experience, that helps other lawmakers take the issue more seriously, said Regina Malveaux, the CEO of the YWCA in Spokane, Washington, who attended the public push for renewal of the Violence Against Women Act. Too often, Malveaux said, the issue is seen as one that primarily affects poor women, or women of color.

“It’s not just those that too often are ignored,” Malveaux said.

When high-profile people come forward, it also prompts other victims to seek help.

Both the National Domestic Violence Hotline and the National Sexual Assault Hotline have seen substantial increases in use over the past year and a half as the #MeToo movement gathered steam and after high-profile cases became public.

“We know that powerful stories do prompt people to reach out and get services,” said Katie Ray-Jones, CEO of the National Domestic Violence Hotline, which had a 40 percent increase in contacts last year.

Moore, who was one of the first lawmakers to speak personally about domestic violence on the House floor a few years ago, said victims “have been emboldened by how empowering the truth is.”

“It’s freeing,” she told USA TODAY. “It is a shared healing.”

SEE ALSO:

[With courageous disclosure, McSally becomes new force in debate over military sexual assault](#) [*The Washington Post*, 2019-03-07]

[Senator McSally, an Air Force veteran, says she was raped by a superior officer](#) [*Reuters*, 2019-03-06]

McSally calls for executive summit on sexual assault in the Air Force

By Kent Miller

Air Force Times, March 13, 2019



Arizona Republican Sen. Martha McSally, a retired Air Force colonel and combat pilot, has called on Air Force leaders to hold an executive summit on the service's efforts to prevent and respond to sexual assault in the service. (Molly Riley/AP)

One week after [Arizona Sen. Martha McSally's](#) startling announcement that she was raped by a superior officer during her time in the Air Force, the former A-10 pilot has called for an [executive summit on sexual assault](#) with top service officials and

outside experts.

McSally, who retired in 2010 as a colonel and was one of the first female combat veterans elected to Congress, sent a letter to Air Force Secretary Heather Wilson Wednesday requesting the summit within the next 30 days.

“I write to request an immediate executive summit with you, Gen. Goldfein and other senior Air Force leaders and policy experts to tackle [the issue of sexual assault](#) in our United States Air Force,” McSally wrote. “Despite a number of positive changes over the past several years, we have not seen a significant reduction [in] sexual assault reports or increase in convictions within the Air Force or across the services.”

During a March 6 Senate Armed Services personnel subcommittee hearing on the military services' efforts to prevent and respond to sexual assault in the ranks, McSally disclosed that she, too, is a military sexual assault survivor.

“Like so many women and men, [I didn't trust the system at the time](#),” she said. “I blamed myself. I was ashamed and confused. I thought I was strong but felt powerless. The perpetrators abused their position of power in profound ways.”

Unlike some of her colleagues in the House and Senate, McSally has emphasized the importance of keeping commanders at the center of the solution for sexual assault response and prevention.

SEE ALSO:

[Tammy Baldwin, Tony Evers ask National Guard to review how Wisconsin handles sexual assault allegations](#) [*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, 2019-03-14]

[GOP senator requests meeting with Air Force leaders to discuss sexual assault](#) [*The Hill*, 2019-03-13]

New York, feds join to get 100K rape kits tested around US

By Jennifer Peltz

The Associated Press, March 12, 2019



Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance, left, listens while sexual assault survivor Tracy Rios speaks about her attack, during a press conference, Tuesday March 12, 2019, in New York. Vance released results of a \$38 million national initiative to help law enforcement agencies perform DNA tests on evidence in thousands of languishing rape cases. (AP Photo/Bebeto Matthews)

NEW YORK (AP) — Languishing evidence in over 100,000 sexual assault cases around the country has been sent for DNA testing with money from a New York prosecutor and federal authorities, spurring over 1,000 arrests and hundreds of convictions in three years, officials say.

It's estimated that another 155,000 or more sex assault evidence kits still await testing, and thousands of results have yet to be linked to suspects. Many who have been identified can't be prosecuted because of legal time limits and other factors.

Still, the effort is a start at correcting "an absolute travesty of justice," Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus R. Vance Jr. said Tuesday while releasing results of his \$38 million investment in testing — all outside his own turf.

"That backlog not only undermined justice and the perception, and reality, of equality — it also made every woman and every American less safe," he said.

Law enforcement and lawmakers have faced growing calls in recent years to eliminate what's known as the rape kit backlog — swabs and samples collected in sex assault cases but never tested for DNA. Victims' advocates see the untested kits as signs that sexual assaults weren't taken seriously enough.

Vance, who took office after New York City cleared its own testing backlog, and the Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance have worked in tandem since 2015 to help other places tackle theirs.

The two agencies have paid to send years-old kits to labs from dozens of states and communities, ranging from Flint, Michigan, to Mobile, Alabama, to Las Vegas.

One of those kits sat untested for 15 years in Tracy Rios' case, though she'd given police the name of the then-friend she accused of luring her into a vacant apartment and sexually assaulting her in 2002 in Tempe, Arizona. Police said they couldn't charge him based on her word, and then she underwent a rape kit exam, but the investigation soon stalled, she said.

"I lost faith in the system. I thought they didn't care," she said Tuesday. A message was left for Tempe police about the case.

Two years ago, she was told her rape kit had finally been tested, with money from the Manhattan DA's office, and police were pursuing her case anew.

"It was amazing to know I was going to get justice," said Rios, whose attacker is now serving a seven-year sentence for sexual assault.

The Associated Press generally does not identify people who say they have been sexually assaulted unless they agree to be identified, as Rios did.

<https://www.apnews.com/c87e200f99844d649788e90b588a0d49>

Some cities have mobilized on their own to test years-old rape kits.

But the big grants from Manhattan and Washington “infused this movement with resources,” says Ilse Knecht of the Joyful Heart Foundation, a sexual assault victims’ advocacy group.

The backlog built up over decades, partly due to the cost of tests that can run \$1,000 or more.

But victims’ advocates also say many sex assault cases simply got sidelined over the years by police and prosecutors who unduly disbelieved or downplayed victims’ allegations.

New York City worked through a 17,000-case backlog between 2000 and 2003. Vance, a Democrat elected in 2009, offered other places money to attack their own backlogs and negotiated discount rates with labs.

His program — financed with \$38 million from settlements in banking-related cases — dispatched more than 55,000 rape kits to testing labs. The results have yielded 186 arrests and 64 convictions to date, with more investigations and prosecutions still underway, according to Vance’s report.

In Battle Creek, Michigan, arrests included a suspect in the 2013 sexual assault of a 14-year-old girl.

Authorities had his name from the start — he was a family friend — but her rape kit wasn’t tested until Vance’s grant program helped Michigan wipe out a 3,400-kit backlog.

The woman, now 19, says she was initially angry when authorities told her they were ready to prosecute three years after the assault. She’d gotten on with her life, helped by counseling.

But she ultimately agreed to testify, and her attacker pleaded guilty and was sentenced to up to 30 years in prison.

“I feel proud of myself” for going forward with the case, the woman said Tuesday. And she doesn’t feel scared to walk around town anymore.

Another nearly 45,000 rape kits have been sent to labs through the Justice Department program — and it’s produced nearly 899 prosecutions and 498 convictions and plea bargains, according to data the agency provided Monday to The Associated Press.

The Justice Department has put \$154 million over three years into its sexual assault kit initiative, which includes other things besides testing.

DNA testing isn’t a surefire way to close cases. Only some rape kits match any profile in the FBI databank — and sometimes it’s just a match to DNA from another crime scene, with no name attached unless the person gets arrested in the future.

Even when DNA matches a known offender, prosecution is sometimes impossible because the legal time clock has run out, the suspect has died or for other reasons.

But authorities and victims’ advocates say arrests aren’t the only measure of the impact of getting the tests done.

“It means that the criminal justice system cares what happened to you,” Knecht said.



SEE ALSO:

[Over 1,000 arrests made in rape cases after authorities tackle national rape kit backlog](#) [*The Hill*, 2019-03-12]

https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/sen-kirsten-gillibrand-defends-handling-of-sexual-harassment-accusations-against-former-aide/2019/03/11/3caf5e72-4450-11e9-aaf8-4512a6fe3439_story.html

Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand defends handling of sexual harassment accusations against former aide

By Felicia Sonmez

The Washington Post, March 11, 2019



Democratic presidential candidate Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (N.Y.) speaks during a Fox News interview Feb. 25. (Manuel Balce Ceneta/AP)

Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.), a 2020 presidential candidate and leading voice in Congress on combating sexual misconduct, on Monday defended her handling of sexual harassment allegations against a former aide who was not fired until a media outlet contacted the senator's office last month.

Gillibrand's office had investigated allegations against the aide, Abbas Malik, last year. But Malik had kept his job until last week. His firing came after reporters from Politico [approached Gillibrand's office](#) with information from two witnesses the senator's staff had earlier failed to interview, despite the urgings of the woman who made the initial accusations.

Gillibrand's office opened a new investigation and fired Malik the following week.

Gillibrand told reporters outside the Capitol on Monday evening that she had no regrets about the way her office handled the case.

"As we do in all cases, we take these kinds of allegations very seriously," Gillibrand said.

She told reporters that her staffers had conducted a "professional and thorough investigation" last year during which they were able to substantiate claims of derogatory comments made by Malik but were "not able to substantiate the sexual harassment claims."

During that investigation, Gillibrand said her office "interviewed all current employees that had relevant information."

Neither the senator nor her spokeswoman explained why Gillibrand's staff had failed to contact the two witnesses who were recommended to them by the initial accuser. Both witnesses were former employees of Gillibrand's office.

The Washington Post tried to contact Malik for comment via his Senate email Monday night but did not receive a response.

In an interview with Politico, the accuser said she felt let down by the way Gillibrand's office handled her accusations.

"When I had the courage to speak up about my harasser, I was belittled by her office and treated like an inconvenience," she said. "She kept a harasser on her staff until it proved politically untenable for her to do so."

The woman told Politico that Malik, who was Gillibrand's driver and military adviser, began making unwanted and increasingly aggressive advances toward her after he received a promotion in July that placed him in a supervisory position. She also said he frequently made crude and inappropriate remarks about women, including female staffers in Gillibrand's office.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/sen-kirsten-gillibrand-defends-handling-of-sexual-harassment-accusations-against-former-aide/2019/03/11/3caf5e72-4450-11e9-aaf8-4512a6fe3439_story.html

After she reported the alleged harassment and Gillibrand’s office investigated, Malik was reportedly given a warning and his promotion was revoked. The woman said he then retaliated against her by not keeping her informed of changes to Gillibrand’s schedule as he had previously done.

The woman later resigned in protest of the way Gillibrand’s office handled her accusations as well as the aftermath of the investigation, during which one senior Gillibrand aide had reportedly told the woman that she, too, had committed fireable offenses.

Several other former employees told Politico that Malik often made inappropriate comments; one of the former employees whom Gillibrand’s office failed to contact said he once told her that another woman “couldn’t get laid unless she was raped.”

Gillibrand has developed a reputation in the Senate as being at the forefront of efforts to combat sexual misconduct, particularly on the issue of sexual assault in the military. During a Senate hearing on the issue last week, she [spoke out forcefully](#) in defense of her long-held position that such cases should be handled outside the military’s chain of command.

“When we’ve asked service members, ‘What would you do? What would make you actually report?’ Overwhelmingly they have answered, ‘If you took it out of the chain of command,’ ” Gillibrand said at the hearing, noting that the perpetrator is often a member of the chain of command.

She was also the first senator to call for the resignation of Sen. Al Franken in 2017 after eight women accused the Minnesota Democrat of groping or forcibly kissing them. Franken has denied some of the allegations and said he remembers others “very differently.”

Some Democratic donors and others on the left [have criticized Gillibrand](#) for urging Franken to resign, while others have argued that such critics are using Gillibrand as a scapegoat for Franken’s own actions.

Days after she kicked off her presidential campaign in January, Gillibrand [defended her call for Franken to step down](#), telling reporters, “I will stand up for what I believe in, especially when it’s hard.”

“With Senator Franken, it’s sad for many people, but after eight allegations of sexual harassment and groping, credible allegations at the time, I just couldn’t stay silent,” she said.

Elise Viebeck contributed to this report.

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SEE ALSO:

[Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand faced #MeToo complaint in her own office: report](#) [USA TODAY, 2019-03-11]

[Gillibrand defends handling of sexual harassment allegations in Senate office](#) [CNN, 2019-03-11]

Sexual Assaults Reports Up at Service Academies, But Down Servicewide

By David Vergun

Defense.gov, March 11, 2019

WASHINGTON -- It's "gravely concerning" that results of the most recent survey of the military service academies show another increase in sexual assault reports, the executive director of the Defense Department's Office of Force Resiliency, told lawmakers March 7 at a hearing of the Senate Armed Services Committee personnel subcommittee.

The service academies to which Elizabeth P. Van Winkle referred are the U.S. Military Academy in West Point, New York; the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland; and the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado. DOD does not oversee the U.S. Coast Guard Academy in Groton, Connecticut or the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy in Kings Point, New York.

Also concerning is retaliation aimed at "an appreciable portion" of service members and service academy students who report sexual assault or harassment, Van Winkle said, who has a doctorate in applied experimental psychology. "We have a profound sacred obligation to our service members and their safety," she said, adding she's "committed and dedicated to making this right."

Van Winkle was joined at the hearing by the service judge advocates general — Army Lt. Gen. Charles N. Pede, Marine Corps Maj. Gen. Daniel J. Lecce, Navy Vice Adm. John G. Hannink and Air Force Lt. Gen. Jeffrey A. Rockwell.

Overall Sexual Assaults Decreasing

The last survey of the active force was conducted in 2016. It found that overall levels of sexual assault had decreased by a third for women and two-thirds for men over the previous decade, she said, which is when surveys were first conducted. The same survey found that rates of reporting had more than quadrupled, from 7 percent in 2006 to 32 percent in 2016.

DOD assesses efforts in a number of ways using a "robust" data surveillance system, Van Winkle said. Scientific surveys are conducted every other year to understand the scope of sexual assault and harassment in the force with focus groups in the survey's off years to detect emerging issues, and a study of sexual assault reporting data is conducted each year to understand more about those who made "the courageous decision to report," she said.

Measurable and sustained reductions require a strategic approach beyond the training that is currently conducted, Van Winkle said. There is no single solution to the problem of sexual assault, but "we are committed to this battle for the long run," she said.

Van Winkle said she's personally met with victims of sexual assault and seen the anguish it brings them, adding that for her, the battle against sexual assault is personal.

Commanders Have Role to Play

Pede told the senators that the military justice system is working for victims of sexual assault, noting that in Army courtrooms 10 years ago, sexual assault offenses made up 18 percent of all types of trials. Last year, that figure rose to 50 percent. He and the other service representatives on the panel advocated that commanders remain in the criminal justice system authority positions, as this promotes good order and discipline in the force and is effective in providing justice for victims.