

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.

Number of Female Generals, Admirals Has Doubled Since 2000, Report Finds **[Richard Sisk, *Military.com*, 17 April 2019]**

- As more women pursue careers in the military, their numbers in the senior enlisted and officer ranks have increased dramatically, according to [a report](#) released last week by the Service Women's Action Network (SWAN).
- In 1988, less than 4% of those in the three senior enlisted paygrades (E7 to E9) were women. But as of February 2018, women constituted 11.8% of the E7 to E9 ranks in the Army; 20.3% in the Air Force; 11.6% in the Navy; 5.6% in the Marine Corps; and 8.7% in the Coast Guard, the report states.
- Through the 1980s, women made up less than 2% percent of colonels and [Navy](#) captains, but the figures as of February 2018 were 10.6% for the Army; 11.6% for the Navy; 14.1% for the Air Force; 2.3% for the Marine Corps; and 11% for the Coast Guard, according to the report.

[Number of Female Generals, Admirals Has Doubled Since 2000, Report Finds](#)

Poll: Church membership in US plummets over past 20 years [David Crary, *The Associated Press*, 18 April 2019]

- The percentage of U.S. adults who belong to a church or other religious institution has plunged by 20 percentage points over the past two decades, hitting a low of 50% last year, according to a new [Gallup poll](#). Among major demographic groups, the biggest drops were recorded among Democrats and Hispanics.
- Gallup said church membership was 70% in 1999—and close to or higher than that figure for most of the 20th century. Since 1999, the figure has fallen steadily, while the percentage of U.S. adults with no religious affiliation has jumped from 8% to 19%.
- Among Americans identifying with a particular religion, there was a sharp drop in church membership among Catholics—dropping from 76% to 63% over the past two decades as the church was buffeted by clergy sex-abuse scandals. Membership among Protestants dropped from 73% to 67% percent over the same period.

[Poll: Church membership in US plummets over past 20 years](#)

Shanahan Launches New Task Force on Military Sexual Assault [Patricia Kime, *Military.com*, 16 April 2019]

- Pentagon officials said Tuesday that Acting Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan ordered the establishment of a Sexual Assault Accountability and Investigation Task Force on March 27. That was the day after a Pentagon advisory committee [released a report](#) finding disparities in documentation of sexual assault cases across the services. Among the discoveries were incomplete files on how commanders made prosecution decisions.
- The move also followed the January release of a report on sexual assaults at the service academies, which found that the estimated number of students who experienced unwanted sexual contact had [increased 47 percent](#) in the last two years.
- The group will make recommendations “that will improve existing processes to address sexual assault while ensuring our formations, our communities, the rights of the victim and the accused, and the integrity of the legal process are protected,” Shanahan wrote [in a memo](#) to the service secretaries, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and other high-ranking Pentagon leaders.

[Shanahan Launches New Task Force on Military Sexual Assault](#)

DEOMI News Highlights

Culture

[Commander: Changes to Navy culture after collisions lead to higher re-enlistment rates in Japan](#)
[Major League Baseball unveils commemorative uniforms to honor the fallen on Memorial Day](#)
[Why the days of 'fighter jock culture' may be numbered](#)

Discrimination

[New VA Whistleblower Protection Office Is Under Investigation for Retaliating Against Whistleblowers](#)
[Same-sex couples applying for a mortgage face higher rejection and worse rates, study finds](#)
[Supreme Court won't take up case of death row inmate who claims juror discrimination against him for being gay](#)
[Whistleblower law protects GIs – and others \[OPINION\]](#)

Diversity

[Congress: Adopt solutions to end minority health disparities](#)
[DOD Official: Updated Transgender Policy Based on Treating All With Dignity](#)
[GSA Testing Tool to Ensure Tech Projects Meet Accessibility Rules](#)
[Meet the admiral who leads from a wheelchair](#)
[Military academies begin to follow military transgender ban](#)
[Next CNO Wants to See More Women Getting Promoted to Captain, Admiral](#)
[Number of Female Generals, Admirals Has Doubled Since 2000, Report Finds](#)
[The problem with AI? Study says it's too White and male, calls for more women, minorities](#)
[Stafford woman learning to embrace her Marine service](#)
[US astronaut to spend 11 months in space, set female record](#)
[Why do so many women leave the Coast Guard?](#)

Miscellaneous

[Army Launches Registry for Troops, Families With Housing-Related Health Issues](#)
[Companies warn Trump: Census citizenship question could be costly](#)
[Iraqi translator risked his life on raids with US troops. Now he's fighting for citizenship](#)
[Proposal Would Randomize Air Force Fitness Testing Schedule](#)
[Senators Join In Renewed Efforts to Give Feds Paid Family Leave](#)
[Woman Dies in Apparent Suicide at Arlington National Cemetery](#)

Misconduct

[African immigrants plead guilty in sham marriage conspiracy involving Fort Bragg soldiers](#)
[Attorney: Coast Guard officer isn't facing terrorism charges](#)
[Coast Guard delivers documents on harassment, bullying claims at academy](#)
[Corps air wing support site commander sentenced for explicit text messages to enlisted Marines](#)
[In the aftermath of the Fitzgerald collision, months of legal fury end in a whimper](#)
[Lejeune's 2nd Marine Division mandates 'daily routine,' citing poor discipline and long hair](#)
[Man Arrested With Gas Cans and Lighters at St. Patrick's Cathedral Is a Philosophy Teacher](#)
['Mob violence': Police arrest one in potential hate crime after transgender woman beaten on video](#)
[Navy Judge says SEAL charged with war crimes threatened to kill teammate who turned him in](#)
[Sex, alcohol and violence collided in murder case ensnaring SEALs and Marines](#)
[Two counts dropped in court martial of Navy SEAL commander charged with war crime cover-up](#)

Racism

[Just let them die': Guards laughed as supremacist stabbed cuffed Black inmates, suit says](#)
[The man accused of burning down three churches in Louisiana has been charged with hate crimes](#)
[Pennsylvania man charged with posting online hate messages](#)
[Racism Kept Some WWI Troops from Receiving Medal of Honor, Lawmakers Say](#)
[Trump passes on making U.N. racism committee nomination](#)
[White supremacist gets life sentence in hate crime killing](#)
[A wrestler was forced to cut his dreadlocks before a match. His town is still looking for answers.](#)

Religion

[Poll: Church membership in US plummets over past 20 years](#)

Sexual Assault/Harassment

[Jeans-as-uniform day intended to bring AFA into forefront of national discussion on sexual assault](#)
[Naval Academy midshipman found not guilty on sexual assault, other charges](#)
[Officer accused of raping and stalking a fellow sailor](#)
[Shanahan Launches New Task Force on Military Sexual Assault](#)
[Wisconsin National Guard tracks 52 sexual assault complaints](#)

Culture

Commander: Changes to Navy culture after collisions lead to higher re-enlistment rates in Japan

By James Bolinger

Stars and Stripes, April 16, 2019



A sailor fires an M9 service pistol during a weapons qualification course in the Philippine Sea aboard the USS Green Bay, March 27, 2019. (Anaid Banuelos/U.S. Navy)

SASEBO NAVAL BASE, Japan — Changes instituted by the Navy after two fatal collisions involving U.S. warships in 2017 are paying off with more realistic training, higher re-enlistment rates and a culture centered around combat readiness, the commander of Task Force 76 said recently.

The re-enlistment, or retention, rate for first-term sailors aboard Sasebo-based ships reached 80 percent this year along with an overall enlisted promotion rate at or above the Navy average, Rear Adm. Brad Cooper told Stars and Stripes in March.

“Every ship in the strike group won the retention excellence award, which sets minimum thresholds for retention across the Navy,” he said. “In our case, every ship exceeded those requirements, which is always an indication of morale. It really reflects a positive command climate across the waterfront, across the force and even exceeds what we accomplished last year, which was 72 percent.”

Cooper said the retention rate and other improvements are also adding to a culture among sailors at Sasebo that values readiness and lethality, goals laid out by former Defense Secretary Jim Mattis in January 2018.

Cooper said the re-enlistment rate is one tangible sign that the recommendations made by the Navy following the collisions are improving the lives of sailors under his command.

“There are a large number of measures that have been implemented as a result of the conclusions and recommendations after the collisions,” he said. “And, we are indisputably a better force because of those recommendations.”

Two separate investigations commissioned by the Navy offered up 103 recommendations to improve deficiencies that contributed to those tragedies, according to a memo to Congress in February from the vice chief of naval operations, Adm. Bill Moran. His memo said all but 12 of the 103 were implemented.

Those measures include increased manning on overseas ships, completion of required maintenance for aging vessels, and dedicated, uninterrupted training periods. The recommendations addressed years of underfunded operations, an increased pace of operations and an erosion of safety standards.

The Navy found those factors played a part in the fatal collisions involving ships of the Japan-based 7th Fleet in summer 2017. The USS Fitzgerald collided with a Philippine container ship off Japan that June, killing seven sailors. Two months later, the USS John S. McCain ran into a Liberian merchant vessel near Singapore, resulting in 10 sailor deaths. Both destroyers sustained millions of dollars in damages.

Manning and maintenance

The service has faced criticism from frustrated lawmakers who have challenged its leaders’ claims that changes have truly been implemented.

<https://www.stripes.com/news/pacific/commander-changes-to-navy-culture-after-collisions-lead-to-higher-re-enlistment-rates-in-japan-1.577097>

“I want real numbers. I don’t want general ‘We’re working on staffing’ or ‘We’re working on more training,’ because these were avoidable tragedies,” Sen. Angus King, a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, told Adm. Philip Davidson, the top military commander in the Pacific, during a Feb. 12 hearing on Capitol Hill. “I would like to see specific responses from the Navy. Not promises and not good feelings.”

In a recent report by ProPublica, a nonprofit organization for investigative journalism, Moran said none of the promised reforms had been completed, but that work had started on 91 pledges to “among other things, provide additional manning to Japan-based ships and stop ships from sailing without complete certifications regarding their navigation and war-fighting abilities — both issues in the two 2017 deadly collisions.”

In the wake of the collisions, the Sasebo-based USS Wasp strike group spent much of 2018 focused on safety and compliance with regulations, Cooper said, adding that the amphibious assault ship’s captains and leadership teams are setting the pace for the Navy in operations, training and safety.

“It’s a cultural mindset, and it’s not enough for just the [commanding officers] to have it,” he said. “It has to be pushed from [commanding officers] down to the deck plates.”

Prior to the collisions, sailors and ships were sustaining a fast pace of operations but had fallen behind on required maintenance and mandatory training, according to Moran’s memo to Congress.

Cooper, referring to the memo, said all the ships of his strike group are 100% manned, and that mandatory maintenance periods for the ships had been completed.

Maintenance for the Sasebo fleet focused on its four aging Avenger class mine countermeasures ships, which were commissioned in 1987. The average mine countermeasures ship, designed to last 15-20 years, has been in service 27 years.

“If you go back to 2018, many of the ships in our strike group were in long-term maintenance, in many cases extended beyond their planned rotation,” Cooper said. “Project ahead to today and you can tell by the empty piers, we are just far more ready.”

As of March 22, eight of the nine Sasebo-based vessels were underway, and the ninth, the USS Patriot, a mine countermeasures ship, had recently returned to port.

Readiness and lethality

Training is the final leg of the triad designed to prevent future mishaps, but training without a focus on readiness doesn’t enable change, Cooper said.

“We are not delivering readiness for readiness sake. It’s about producing readiness to turn it into a more lethal force,” he said. “Our leadership has challenged us to focus on increasing readiness and increasing lethality. Amphibious Force 7th Fleet is really delivering on both.”

The focus on lethality as a measuring stick for military readiness is a hold-over from Mattis’ tenure. The January 2018 National Defense Strategy, issued under his watch, set goals for improved readiness and increased lethality as a military force. Mattis resigned from the post in December.

“Everything we do must contribute to the lethality of our military. We cannot expect success fighting tomorrow’s conflicts with yesterday’s weapons or equipment,” Mattis said in January 2018. The National Defense Strategy directed military leaders to rebuild military readiness, strengthen alliances and attract new partners, and reform the department’s business practices.

<https://www.stripes.com/news/pacific/commander-changes-to-navy-culture-after-collisions-lead-to-higher-re-enlistment-rates-in-japan-1.577097>

A portion of the force is conducting basic training during dedicated periods of time, where crews go to sea, complete training objectives and gain proficiency and confidence, Cooper said. Sailors are also spending additional time in simulators to improve their ability to drive ships.

The rest of the force is deployed to real-world missions where sailors know they are making a difference, and that builds culture and community, he said.

For example, in the past few months, each of Sasebo's large ships — the USS Wasp, USS Green Bay and USS Ashland — have conducted sanctions enforcement operations against North Korea in the East China Sea.

The entire Wasp amphibious readiness group recently embarked the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit for exercises in the Philippine Sea, Cooper said. The Marine Corps embarked fifth-generation F-35B Lighting II stealth fighters and dropped more bombs in live-fire events at training ranges than they did in all of 2018.

Additionally, in mid-March, the Green Bay and the Ashland, accompanied by three destroyers and a cruiser, completed advanced tactical training and live-fire Tomahawk missile exercises in the Philippine Sea, he said. The Wasp also just completed Exercise Balikatan with embarked Marine Corps F-35Bs near the Philippines.

“We are always at our best when we are performing what our country and the Navy expect us to do,” Cooper said. “Whether operating in the East China Sea enforcing sanctions, helping Americans recover from natural disasters, or honing your skills and improving your lethality at sea — people joined the Navy to make a difference and I think they are able to do that in the strike group.”

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Major League Baseball unveils commemorative uniforms to honor the fallen on Memorial Day

By J.D. Simkins

Military Times, April 12, 2019



Memorial Day patches have been added to the side of each hat as part of Major League Baseball's 2019 commemorative series. (MLB)

Major League Baseball pulled the curtain back today on a number of special edition 2019 uniforms, to include editions designed to honor the fallen and celebrate military personnel throughout the month of May.

One noticeable change, compared to previous seasons, is that the League is taking a more subtle approach with its Memorial Day uniform accents in an effort to respect the real meaning behind the day, Melanie LeGrande, Major League Baseball's vice president of Social Responsibility, told Military Times.

"From Major League Baseball's perspective, it was important for us to ensure that we were being appropriate to the spirit of Memorial Day," LeGrande said.

"It's a great opportunity for us to celebrate and support the military, to honor those who have been lost, and to understand their memory, their commitment, and how we feel about military families who have lost a loved one."

To better respect the day's true meaning, LeGrande said Major League Baseball decided to move away from the more sweeping uniform changes the League had employed in the past, pivoting those efforts to Armed Forces Day instead, "when it's more appropriate," she said.

As part of the commemoration, teams will wear Memorial Day patches on their caps and don small remembrance poppy patches on the chest, accompanied by the words, "Lest we forget," written on a scroll across the flower.

"We've heard from players, from fans, clubs, stakeholders, and we wanted to make sure we were being respectful and understanding the public perception that is out there."

Additionally, Major League Baseball decided to keep the Memorial Day uniforms restricted to those seen on the field; no such editions will be available for retail.



The traditional remembrance poppy is a new feature added to this year's commemorative MLB uniforms. (MLB)

Instead, on-field and community-wide efforts will take center stage, with "celebratory and commemorative activities through our community outreach, as well as in-game activities like throwing out the first pitch, inviting our service members [to the game] and ensuring people in the stands understand the importance of the day," LeGrande said.

"It's so very important for us to be able to amplify this message and to let our fans know that we want to serve those who serve us," she said.

<https://www.militarytimes.com/off-duty/military-culture/2019/04/12/major-league-baseball-unveils-commemorative-uniforms-to-honor-the-fallen-on-memorial-day/>

Donating royalties raised from the Armed Forces Day uniforms to charities that benefit service members, veterans and military families is one such way Major League Baseball hopes to give back.

The camouflage-accented Armed Forces Day uniforms, which will be worn during May as part of Military Appreciation Month, will roll out as part of a comprehensive on-field effort to honor all military, past and present, LeGrande said.



Uniforms for Armed Forces Day will feature a camouflage pattern, like this one on the Los Angeles Dodgers cap. (MLB)

Commemorative hats and socks will be available for purchase, with proceeds going to military charities.

The League will also continue its tradition of wearing special edition uniforms for other holidays, including Mother's Day and Father's Day.

Independence Day uniform proceeds will also go toward military charities.

Why the days of ‘fighter jock culture’ may be numbered

By Kyle Rempfer

Air Force Times, April 13, 2019



A U.S. Air Force F-16 Fighting Falcon refuels from a 908th Expeditionary Aerial Refueling Squadron KC-10 Extender in support of Operation Inherent Resolve March 17. (Staff Sgt. Jordan Castelan/Air Force)

For the past half century, fighter pilots have dominated high-level leadership roles in the Air Force, much as bomber pilots did during World War II and the Cold War.

But a recent study from the Rand Corp., sponsored by the Defense Department’s Office of Net Assessment, questions whether that hierarchy — with fighter pilots first, bomber pilots second and other specializations after — continues to serve the best interests of the service, especially in terms of fostering innovation.

The preference for fighter generals continues despite the Air Force “having a greater number of nonfighter officers and a more technologically diverse set of missions,” according to the authors of the study, which was released in February.

They argue that one reason for the reliance on fighter pilots to fill leadership roles comes down to how the Air Force needs to be viewed by Congress and the Pentagon during political bargaining and budget battles: as a warfighting force on par with the other services.

However, the nature of warfare is changing. In a future conflict with a near-peer adversary, space and cyberspace, networks and unmanned aircraft will all play a major role. And the different branches of the armed forces will have to function as one team as never before.

If innovation is the key to retaining superiority, is it time for the Air Force’s so-called “fighter jock culture” to change as well? It depends on who you ask.

Air Force Times spoke with roughly a dozen current and former Air Force officers about the dominance of fighter pilots in the Air Force, why that hierarchy exists and whether it is best-suited to meet the challenges that lie ahead. They included pilots, intelligence analysts and other career fields and ranged from lieutenant colonel to general. Several wished to remain anonymous, but offered their professional observations based on decades of service.

Not everyone buys the premise that the leadership hierarchy is an issue.

“Personally, I think the Rand study missed the boat and they took the easy road going for the ‘fighter pilots run everything’ dog whistle,” a recently retired colonel, who flew MQ-9 Reaper and MQ-1 Predator drones, KC-10 tankers and F-15 fighters, told Air Force Times.

Each Air Force officer comes from a particular “silo,” he noted.

“If one silo had to be in charge, I’d absolutely go with the fighter guys,” the colonel said. “Among all of the silos, they are the most ‘joint’ and most aware of our bigger role in the DoD fight.”

Many of those interviewed agree that a hierarchy does exist within the Air Force, with fighter pilots dominating the command structure, but they pointed to a number of reasons why that is so.

<https://www.airforcetimes.com/news/your-air-force/2019/04/13/why-the-the-days-of-fighter-jock-culture-may-be-numbered/>

Fighter jets are a coveted airframe in pilot training, some noted, with the best of the class opting to fly the best, most advanced airframes in the fleet.

Others suggested that structural differences in how and when officers in different career tracks are slotted for joint assignments could explain why fighter pilots end up in more command positions.

But fighter pilot dominance is not permanent, several officers said. As the service becomes more diversified, more cyber, space and drone pilots, among other careers, will rise to the top. The Air Force of 2050 will undoubtedly be more diverse and technically savvy than ever before.

Air wars are changing

While fighter pilots are likely to dominate top leadership posts for the foreseeable future, the changing nature of warfare would indicate that those days are numbered.

A new, congressionally mandated study of the Air Force's future requirements, carried out by the [Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments](#), devotes attention to the need for more stealthy unmanned aircraft.

Near-peer competitors like Russia and China will present a "highly contested" environment characterized by mobile, overlapping and interconnected surface-to-air missile systems that use passive sensors and other methods to avoid detection.

"The lethality, range and geographic dispersion of these systems, combined with modern fighters, electronic warfare aircraft, cyber attacks and other threats, create an all-aspect, multi-domain challenge for U.S. aircraft," it said.

"The reality of our Air Force is we're going to be both manned and unmanned," Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Dave Goldfein told Air Force Times. "It's part of the fabric of our Air Force now."

The shifting composition of the force all but guarantees that more officers in non-fighter pilot roles will work their way up to top leadership positions.

Slotting for joint duties

One suggested reason for fighter dominance is the career-field's tendency to produce more experienced joint leaders.

But other pilots do attain significant joint experience as well, said [retired Gen. Carlton Everhart II](#), who retired last year as head of Air Mobility Command.

However, he said, it's when an officer leaves the cockpit and pursues joint duty assignments that may be the ultimate funnel in determining his or her career trajectory.

Everhart said air mobility pilots have reported to him that they start getting joint experience when they are majors, earlier than fighter pilots typically do.

That may sound like a good thing, but because they start earlier, they experience a crowding phenomenon as they move up the ranks.

Fighter pilots dwell in the operational world a little bit longer, until O-5 or O-6, and are prioritized for joint assignments at that point, he said.

"The Air Force does a great job of placing its folks in joint experiences," Everhart said. "It's just a matter of when those positions are available and the relevancy of your experience added on to that."

<https://www.airforcetimes.com/news/your-air-force/2019/04/13/why-the-the-days-of-fighter-jock-culture-may-be-numbered/>

As the service — or [perhaps a Space Force](#) — adds more space-focused officers, they too will need to jump into the mix of competing for joint assignment slots.



President Donald Trump hands a pen to Air Force Gen. Paul Selva after signing "Space Policy Directive 4" Feb. 19, centralizing all military space functions under a new Space Force. Congress must still approve the plan. (Evan Vucci/AP)

“We don’t have enough space warriors right now because we just haven’t been developing them,” Everhart said. “And you’ve got to get them just as much joint experience as everyone else. So that has to play in, because that’s the next frontier.”

The number and importance of officers in cyber warfare, unmanned aircraft and other career fields will also demand more opportunities for joint experience, which in turn will make them more competitive for top leadership positions later in their careers.

Combat credibility

The tendency to promote fighter pilots may reflect other needs across the armed forces, and even within civilian leadership, according to a retired two-star general who served the bulk of his career in fighter aircraft.

When the secretary of defense and the president sit down with Air Force commanders and ask for options to respond to security threats around the world, it helps to talk to a leader with significant combat experience, he said.

“You’ve got to have that combat credibility,” the major general said. “It doesn’t mean that they’re more important; it means that their expertise can apply over a wider range.”

That also doesn’t mean fighter pilots are always preferred for promotion, said the two-star, who has served on multiple promotion boards.

“I’m not going to put a fighter guy in the J6 on the Joint Staff,” he said, referencing a department that manages communications and cyber warfare. “He doesn’t have the expertise, but there are very few J6 jobs.”

“I can put the fighter guy into policy. I can put him into programming. I can put him into force structure analysis. I can put him into operations. So, he’s a little more fungible because he touches all those other things.”

Fighter pilots tend to be promoted for senior leadership more than their peers in other career fields only after they’ve been taken out of their fighter role and rotated through tours in the joint community, including cyber, space and logistics.

“And we’ve done that purposely ... not just because they’re fighter pilots, but because they have expertise that’s unique to the application of lethal force in combat,” the two-star said. “We are a combat arms service. We aren’t just a mobility service. We have all of those functions because it allows us to do our job, which is to defend the nation.”

But Goldfein pushed back on the notion that combat experience is a key to selection as a top general, noting that combat credibility dwindles over an officer’s service life.

<https://www.airforcetimes.com/news/your-air-force/2019/04/13/why-the-the-days-of-fighter-jock-culture-may-be-numbered/>

“By the time you become a general officer at the senior levels, it’s been upwards of 10 years since you’ve been in your tribe,” Goldfein said.

Finding the best leaders

While experience — especially joint experience — is a crucial part of an officer’s development, does that correlate with leadership? And, by extension, do fighter pilots make the best leaders?

Not necessarily, according to the Rand report.

According to a Rand analyst with a research specialization in Air Force culture: “There is a school of thought in the Air Force that pilots are in the best position to run the service because their situational awareness and multitasking skills translate to leadership, but it’s not clear if they do.”

Goldfein says the service is working to shuffle the best leaders to the top of the stack regardless of their background. And those leaders will be defined by their vision and ability to inspire others.

“When I’m presenting options as a joint air chief, what I happened to have flown 10 years ago is nowhere near as important as the credibility of having the best ideas going forward,” he said.

The best leaders with the best ideas take time to percolate to the top ranks.

But the Pentagon might be able to shortcut that timeline by bringing leaders into the service laterally, according to Rob Levinson, a retired Air Force intelligence officer who now works as the senior defense analyst for Bloomberg Government.

“I wouldn’t make the argument that having fighter pilots in charge has been bad for the Air Force,” Levinson said. “But I would say that leavening the leadership across the Air Force could be really good for the service.”

When a civilian tech company needs a new CEO, they can head-hunt from another company. The Pentagon can’t do that.



Cyber warfare, both offensive and defensive, has become critical to the nation's security. (J.M. Eddins Jr./Air Force)

“Every general we have started out as a second lieutenant,” Levinson said. “Obviously for the warfighting stuff, where there’s no real civilian analogy, you’re not going to bring someone in laterally to command a fighter wing, but the other areas, like cyber and space ... these can be played with.”

Finding a competitive civilian cyber professional with significant management experience, one who is tempted to serve, but unwilling to fully sacrifice his Silicon Valley career trajectory, and bringing them in as a colonel or general could provide a work-around — although a controversial one.

“Obviously you want everyone to understand warfighting and the mission, but with all the technical expertise that is increasingly required — and so many people aren’t involved in warfighting per se — there are probably opportunities there.”

Levinson’s out-of-the-box idea represents the urgent needs of the entire U.S. military to address new domains of warfare that have opened up. Staffing the lower ranks can be easier than finding the right leaders to head new commands covering new domains.

<https://www.airforcetimes.com/news/your-air-force/2019/04/13/why-the-the-days-of-fighter-jock-culture-may-be-numbered/>

Change on the horizon

“We are starting to see an inkling of a change,” said retired Brig. Gen. Bruce McClintock, an F-16 and A-10 pilot whose assignments included a stint as defense attaché to Russia and service as special assistant to Gen. John Hyten when he led Air Force Space Command.

Hyten, McClintock noted, was not a fighter pilot.

“If you look back at the history of Air Force Space Command, there was a long period of time where the commanders were fighter pilots,” McClintock said. “We’ve moved away from that because we’ve grown enough indigenous, operational, warfighting-minded leaders within the space community that they are starting to populate their own specialty area.”

Hyten moved on to helm Strategic Command, the Pentagon’s unified combatant command responsible for strategic deterrence, global strike and the military’s global information grid. And he has just been nominated to serve as [vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff](#). His rise may serve as a bellwether for other Air Force cyber and space leaders.



The third Space-Based Infrared System Geosynchronous Earth Orbit spacecraft launches aboard an Atlas V rocket from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station in January 2017. (Courtesy of United Launch Alliance)

Similarly, it will take time before second lieutenants commissioned straight into the unmanned aircraft community rise up.

“We have a culture that prioritizes technology and innovation and I offer that’s why there was a change from bomber pilots to fighter pilots,” McClintock said. “The Air Force recognized through combat experience that they couldn’t just depend on bombers to achieve the nation’s desired end states. They had to adapt to a more tactical approach.”

Today’s leaders recognize the internal conflict that exists when warfare changes.

Drones may make pilots feel insecure. Cyberspace may be a tough domain in which to scout talented airmen. And understanding the complexities and consequences of combat is an important reality to instill in leaders, especially as those who pull the trigger on the enemy do so ever more remotely.

For the current air chief, the challenges of an evolving Air Force also present opportunity.

“We’re the ‘big tent’ service,” Goldfein said. “Think about the diversity of missions that we’re responsible for: We do leaflets to nukes, and everything in between. We’re involved in every mission the joint chiefs perform.”

“There’s room in our Air Force for people who do space, who want to do cyber, who want to go fly fighters, who want to fly tankers, who want to fly RPA, who want to be involved in projecting global power.

”You know, we got room for everyone.”

Discrimination

New VA Whistleblower Protection Office Is Under Investigation for Retaliating Against Whistleblowers

By Eric Katz

Government Executive, April 16, 2019

The Veterans Affairs Department's watchdog is investigating a new office created by President Trump early in his administration that was designed to protect whistleblowers from reprisal but is now facing allegations of aiding retaliation against them.

VA's Office of Inspector General is leading the investigation from its new Office of Special Reviews, which the IG created to conduct "prompt reviews of significant events" and examine allegations of senior VA employee misconduct, an IG spokesman said. The new IG office is looking into activities at the Office of Accountability and Whistleblower Protection as part of an ongoing review of the implementation of the 2017 law that created OAWP.

Trump created OAWP by executive order in 2017 and later codified it when he signed the 2017 VA Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act into law. The office was mostly celebrated, with advocates hopeful that the focus on the rights and protections for whistleblowers would reverse a culture infamous for intimidation and reprisal. That optimism has largely soured, however, leading to hotline tips to the inspector general and bipartisan scrutiny from Congress.

"There has been considerable interest by some members of Congress and other stakeholders in this effort," said Mike Nacincik, the IG spokesman, who said he could not comment further on ongoing work.

President Trump has frequently touted the law as one of his signature legislative achievements, focusing primarily on the reforms it made to expedite the disciplinary process for VA employees. But Trump also spoke of the promises on which skeptics now say the law has failed to deliver: "This bill protects whistleblowers who do the right thing," Trump said. "We want to reward, cherish, and promote the many dedicated employees at the VA."

Government Executive spoke to several VA employees who expressed frustration or anger toward OAWP, three of whom have already been interviewed by IG investigators. They described feeling betrayed or neglected by an office they believed was going to help them but ended up doing the opposite. They said they have shared information with the investigators, including documentation of alleged reprisal.

Curt Cashour, a VA spokesman, said the department "welcomes the inspector general's oversight," but defended it against most allegations. He acknowledged that the office experienced some growing pains, but said it has "evolved over time, refining and improving its policies and practices along the way."

What Whistleblowers Are Telling Investigators

"It's a crooked system where literally the fox is guarding the hen house," said Jay DeNofrio.

DeNofrio, an administrative officer at a VA facility in Altoona, Pa., had prior experience as a whistleblower before OAWP was created—years ago, he disclosed information about a doctor he said was losing mental capacity and putting veterans at risk—so he thought he understood the investigative process that takes place after employees make disclosures to investigators. OAWP, however, was the first body he'd ever worked with that coordinated with VA headquarters to find blemishes on his own record after he reported wrongdoing, he said. Investigators questioned his coworkers, telling them DeNofrio does not "walk on water" just because he is a protected whistleblower and encouraged them to immediately report

<https://www.defenseone.com/politics/2019/04/new-va-whistleblower-protection-office-under-investigation-retaliating-against-whistleblowers/156350/>

“any instances of poor behavior,” according to transcripts of those conversations obtained through records requests and provided to *Government Executive*.

DeNofrio said IG investigators took the allegations against OAWP seriously and called their review “high profile” and “high priority.”

Dan Martin, a chief engineer at VA’s Northern Indiana Health Care System, said OAWP failed to protect him when his case came before it. Martin said in 2016 he discovered contracting violations related to a non-functioning water filtration system, but when he reported the problems to superiors he was stripped of his responsibilities and sent to work in an office without heat or air conditioning. The VA inspector general launched an investigation into the contracting practices, and asked Martin to surreptitiously record conversations with procurement officers, Martin said.

It was not until OAWP got involved in the case that Martin’s supervisors became aware of that cooperation. When OAWP allegedly shared that information with leadership at his facility, Martin said his supervisors “had no choice but to shut me down” so he could no longer send recordings about the supervisors’ “very inappropriate relationships with contractors” to investigators in the OIG.

“OAWP set me up,” said Martin, who initially felt [far more optimistic](#) about OAWP’s capacity to help his cause. “They incentivized [my facility] to go after me.”

Martin is also fighting his case through the Merit Systems Protection Board. During that process, VA’s Office of General Counsel came to Martin and his attorneys asking for certain information about the case. The attorneys representing Martin told the lawyers in the Office of General Counsel they would only hand the information over during discovery. Shortly after rejecting the request, Martin said, OAWP followed up to ask for the same information.

“Some of them are so crooked they swallow nails and spit up corkscrews,” Martin said.

‘They Turned on Whistleblowers’

The alleged collaboration between the Office of General Counsel and OAWP has troubled observers. Tom Devine, legal director at the Government Accountability Project, a whistleblower advocacy group, said his initial excitement about OAWP has been dampened by “structural developments,” including what he called veto power the department’s general counsel has over the whistleblower protection office.

This would appear to be in violation of the 2017 law that permanently authorized OAWP, which prohibits the office from existing “as an element of the Office of General Counsel” and its leadership from reporting to OGC. Cashour said it was false to suggest that the Office of General Counsel exercises veto power over whistleblower claims, but acknowledged OAWP and OGC do coordinate.

“OAWP has a collaborative working relationship with OGC, but OAWP retains final decision making authority on all OAWP matters,” Cashour said.

Rebecca Jones, policy counsel at the Project on Government Oversight, said the office can likely not completely fix its issues while it remains an “internal clearinghouse” for whistleblowers rather than a truly independent office. Jones praised the IG for investigating the alleged retaliation.

“I wish it hadn’t come to this,” she said.

Devine praised some of OAWP’s early accomplishments, such as delaying VA’s disciplinary decisions that involved alleged reprisal and the hiring of high-profile whistleblower Brandon Coleman as a liaison

<https://www.defenseone.com/politics/2019/04/new-va-whistleblower-protection-office-under-investigation-retaliating-against-whistleblowers/156350/>

between whistleblowers and the office. Coleman even established a mentoring program to help assist victims of retaliation, but it has since been shut down.

“They didn’t have the teeth to enforce their good deeds,” said Devine, who has significantly curbed his cooperation with OAWP. “They turned on whistleblowers.”

‘You Don’t Want to Come Forward’

A third VA employee, who requested anonymity to protect his ongoing cases, recently informed IG investigators about what he alleged is OAWP’s betrayal of trust and subsequent inactivity. The employee made an initial whistleblower disclosure in early 2017 that was bounced around to several offices within VA. He subsequently was removed from his position as a technician and is now relegated to “brain-dead work,” he said.

He contacted OAWP about the alleged reprisal later that year. During his interactions with the whistleblower office, he turned over sensitive information about his hospital that a colleague had provided—the OAWP investigator was the only individual with whom he shared the information. Days later, the employee said, the colleague was “chewed out” by leaders at the facility for sharing the information. To the employee, it felt like OAWP had betrayed him, he told *Government Executive*.

The employee said he then experienced 21 months of “radio silence.” He recently spoke with OIG about his negative experiences with OAWP. A few days later, the employee said he unexpectedly heard from the OAWP investigators. He said he is now “very, very cautious” in his interactions with OAWP.

“It scares you,” he said. “You don’t want to come forward. People are afraid.”

Tonya Van, formerly a doctor at a VA facility in San Antonio, also became a whistleblower after disclosing to a supervisor that a doctor at her facility was giving incorrect diagnoses. She filed a complaint with OAWP after she alleged her supervisor made her work life so miserable she was forced to resign. But she quickly became disenchanted with the office due to lack of communication, she said. She tried to follow up with OAWP but never heard back. The office eventually closed out her case, though it later contacted her about opening a second investigation. She said she has “no idea” what the results of either investigation were.

Van alleged that her supervisors’ reprisal against her took the form of accusations of using foul language in the workplace. Martin, the Northern Indiana employee, said he faced an investigation for similar accusations.

Changes and Cautious Optimism

Cashour, the VA spokesman, said OAWP does not provide “detailed information related to the specific outcome of an investigation to employees” due to privacy concerns. He added that the office has revised its policies to disclose more information to claimants, including when an investigation has been closed and if claims of retaliation were substantiated.

Multiple VA employees criticized this practice, calling it counterintuitive that VA would claim privacy concerns over investigations that the employees themselves requested.

Cashour said OAWP has changed other practices after a draft of a June 2018 Government Accountability Office [report](#) faulted the office for its investigatory practices, including allowing officials accused of retaliation to be directly involved in the inquiries in which they are named. VA told GAO it would not end its practice of “referring cases of misconduct back to facilities and program offices where the misconduct occurred.” However, Cashour said OAWP now informs employees upfront when their matters will be

<https://www.defenseone.com/politics/2019/04/new-va-whistleblower-protection-office-under-investigation-retaliating-against-whistleblowers/156350/>

referred elsewhere for review. To protect whistleblowers, he said, OAWP now allows employees “to either opt-out of the disclosure or withhold the release of their name.”

In August 2018, however, when Van had an in-person interview with OAWP investigators, she and her attorney were still alleging retaliation by OAWP. While asking about Van’s allegations, an OAWP investigator told Van she could be penalized for violating a prior settlement with VA by asking a former colleague to write a recommendation. Her attorney said Deirdre Weiss, the OAWP employee, was ignoring the intent of that prior agreement.

“The bottom line is that, as accountability investigators, where we see possible wrongdoing we cannot look the other way just because somebody is a complainant, okay,” said Weiss, according to a transcript of the proceedings.

Last year, before his office formally launched an official investigation into the practices of OAWP, VA Inspector General Michael Missal became part of a [public spat](#) with then acting Secretary Peter O’Rourke over documents housed within the office. The IG requested access to information on the cases filed with OAWP, but O’Rourke refused to comply. They aired their grievances through a series of public letters, which included O’Rourke harshly reminding Missal that the IG served as the secretary’s subordinate. Congress ultimately intervened by emphasizing in a spending bill that the IG had the right to any and all documents it requested.

O’Rourke had previously served as the first head of OAWP, a period in which many of the complaints against the office originated. Current VA Secretary Robert Wilkie reportedly [asked](#) O’Rourke to resign last year after determining he was doing little work as a senior advisor.

OAWP is still a small office, employing just 96 workers—28 of whom are investigators—for a workforce of 380,000. Its employees receive standardized training in investigative techniques, both internally and from outside experts such as those at the Homeland Security Department and the Office of Special Counsel.

The office is now headed by Tammy Bonzanto, who previously served as an investigator on the House Veterans Affairs Committee. Her tenure has received mixed reviews. DeNofrio, for example, is still concerned by what he calls her lack of transparency. Other observers are cautiously optimistic that her leadership could get the office back to its original mission.

“We’re confident they have good-faith leadership now,” said GAP’s Devine. “The question is how much professional freedom she’ll have.”

Same-sex couples applying for a mortgage face higher rejection and worse rates, study finds

By Hamza Shaban

The Washington Post, April 17, 2019



Gay couples are 73 percent more likely to be denied a mortgage than heterosexual couples with the same financial worthiness, new mortgage data show. (iStock)

Mortgage lenders are significantly more likely to deny same-sex couples a [home loan](#) and charge them more for it when they do, a new study has found.

Gay couples were [73 percent more likely](#) to be denied a mortgage than heterosexual couples with the same financial worthiness, according to an analysis of national mortgage data from 1990 to 2015.

The study, published Tuesday in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, also found that when same-sex couples were approved for a home loan, they were [given inferior terms](#). On average, they paid 0.2 percent more in interest and fees, which adds up to as much as \$86 million a year, the researchers said in a news release.

“Lenders can justify higher fees, if there is greater risk,” said Lei Gao, an assistant professor at Iowa State University’s [Ivy College of Business](#) and co-author of the study. “We found nothing to indicate that’s the case. In fact, our findings weakly suggest same-sex borrowers may perform better.”

The researchers say their findings signal a need to include sexual orientation as a protected class under federal lending laws. The Fair Housing Act and the Equal Credit Opportunity Act prohibits discrimination against borrowers on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin. They prohibit specific types of behavior, such as discouraging applicants of protected classes to apply; rejecting applicants based on those characteristics; and imposing different terms and conditions based on those traits. But, the researchers note, neither law specifically covers sexual orientation.

“Policymakers need to guarantee same-sex couples have equal access to credit,” said Hua Sun, an associate professor of finance at Ivy College of Business and the other co-author of the study. “Using our framework, credit monitoring agencies also can take steps to investigate unfair lending practices.”

Mortgage applicants are not required to disclose their sexual orientation. For the study, the researchers identified same-sex couples as co-applicants of the same gender. They said they used data of geographic distributions of LGBTQ adults from the Census Bureau and Gallup to verify their method of identification.

SEE ALSO:

[Same-sex borrowers more likely to be rejected for mortgages: study](#) [*The Hill*, 2019-04-16]

Supreme Court won't take up case of death row inmate who claims juror discrimination against him for being gay

By Ariane de Vogue

CNN, April 15, 2019

Washington—The [Supreme Court](#) declined Monday to take up the case of a death row inmate, Charles Rhines, who sought to challenge his sentence based on juror statements that indicated discrimination based on Rhines' homosexuality.

His lawyers argued lower courts have blocked him from making his claims.

Rhines hoped the Supreme Court would allow the normal secrecy of jury deliberations to be pierced when there is an allegation of discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Rhines stood for trial in 1993 for the brutal murder of 22-year-old Donnivan Schaeffer. He was found guilty and sentenced to death.

After the guilty verdict, jurors learned that Rhines is gay. While deciding whether to sentence him to life imprisonment or death, they sent the trial judge a note including questions regarding his sexuality.

In 2015, the inmate received new public defenders who sought to amend his claims with evidence of the jury bias. In 2016, they conducted interviews with jurors producing affidavits where one juror recalled that during deliberations there was "disgust" over the fact that Rhines was gay. Another said that jurors, citing the fact that he was homosexual, "thought he shouldn't be able to spend his life with men in prison."

On appeal, Rhines relied on the notes to argue anti-gay prejudice had influenced the juror's sentencing decision.

The lawyers also pointed to a [2017 Supreme Court opinion](#) holding that while ordinarily jury deliberations are secret and immune from judicial review, that rule can be pierced when it comes to evidence of racial bias.

Rhines' lawyers argued the Supreme Court's opinion should be extended to include evidence of discrimination based on sexual orientation.

"Anti-gay bias, if left unaddressed, risks systemic harm to the justice system, and in particular, capital jury sentencing," they told the justices in court briefs.

South Dakota Attorney General Jason R. Ravensborg said the lower courts were correct to hold that the challenge was procedurally barred in part because Rhines had waited so long to make his claims.

Ravensborg pointed to the brutality of the crime where the victim's brain stem was partially severed, and questioned the veracity of the jurors' affidavits.

Even if the claims weren't procedurally barred, he argued to the justices in briefs that the court should not expand its precedent: "Sexual orientation does not implicate the same unique historical, constitutional and institutional concerns as race."

"Rhines has now eluded justice for longer than he allowed Donnivan Schaeffer to live his life; there is no justice in further delaying the imposition of Rhines' deserved death sentence," he added.

Lawyers for the ACLU urged the court to step in and extend its precedent to Rhines' case.

<https://www.cnn.com/2019/04/15/politics/supreme-court-charles-rhines/index.html>

"A decision to sentence a person to death because he is gay violates the Sixth Amendment no less than a decision to sentence him to death because he is black," wrote David D. Cole, the ACLU's national legal director.



SEE ALSO:

[Supreme Court won't hear death penalty appeal alleging anti-gay remarks from jurors](#) [*The Hill*, 2019-04-15]

Whistleblower law protects GIs – and others [OPINION]

By Gary Jackson

Stars and Stripes, April 12, 2019

When 3M agreed in July to pay the U.S. Department of Justice \$9.1 million to resolve allegations of providing faulty equipment to our military, it signaled a victory for men and women in uniform as well as for all Americans. That's because the DOJ's case against 3M hinged on information from a whistleblower acting on laws designed to protect people who expose corruption and fraud.

DOJ's settlement with 3M began with the allegation that the company knowingly sold defective earplugs to the U.S. military, resulting in permanent hearing loss or tinnitus for many who used them. Still more legal actions against 3M are in the works. Law firms across the country are investigating claims and filing lawsuits on behalf of military personnel claiming injury — including my firm in Durham, N.C., which is not far from Fort Bragg and Camp Lejeune.

This far-reaching pursuit of justice began with a single whistleblower bringing what's known as a "qui tam" action under the federal False Claims Act (FCA). This allows individuals with evidence of fraud involving federal programs or contracts to sue the party in the wrong on behalf of the United States government.

The whistleblower in the action against 3M was not a member of the military, but rather the private sector. Still, FCA qui tam actions are open to military whistleblowers — and that's a fact well worth remembering. Indeed, the FCA's association with the U.S. military goes back to its inception. It was born during the Civil War to fight fraud perpetrated by companies that sold faulty supplies to the military, including cardboard boots and sawdust disguised as gunpowder.

Today, FCA whistleblower lawsuits protect the government from all kinds of fraud. As vast as our country's law enforcement system is, it can't ferret out all the cheating against the U.S. government and, by extension, taxpayers. Fraud on the government has stemmed from virtually every industry, including housing and mortgage lending, education and student loan obligations, and finance. Nearly all the \$2.8 billion in whistleblower recovery in 2018 came from the health care industry alone — 89.3%, or \$2.5 billion.

During the defense spending boom of the 1980s, some contractors charged hundreds of dollars for a toilet seat or for a hammer you could buy at a hardware store for \$10. Whistleblowers, working through the FCA, helped slam the hammer down on such corruption.

As to how military personnel can figure into qui tam actions, the 11th Circuit in the landmark 1991 case, *U.S. ex rel. Williams v. NEC Corp.*, 931 F.2d 1493 (11th Cir. 1991) found, "[N]othing in the False Claims Act prohibits a government employee from filing a qui tam action based upon information acquired while working for the government."

The case involved an Air Force attorney who alleged fraud against a third party in a qui tam complaint. A move to throw out the claim because the whistleblower was a government employee failed, and the case proceeded. It's important to note here that while members of the military may bring qui tam cases against third parties (like, say, a hardware contractor), they are expressly prohibited from bringing a qui tam suit against an individual member of the armed forces (31 USC 3730(e)(1)).

People choose to blow the whistle for many reasons. Some come forward because of their principles; they cannot abide cheating. Some worry that various kinds of fraud put innocent people in danger, e.g. hospital

<https://www.stripes.com/opinion/whistleblower-law-protects-gis-and-others-1.576737>

patients who undergo unnecessary procedures or members of the military left to deal with defective supplies.

Some are motivated by the financial incentives. According to the Taxpayers Against Fraud (TAF), the DOJ recovered more than \$2.8 billion in 2018. Individuals who file whistleblower claims on behalf of the U.S. government may receive compensation anywhere from 15% to 30% of the total recovery in some cases. In the 3M case, the whistleblower will reportedly receive \$1,911,000.

In other words, while whistleblowers do require courage, they don't have to be martyrs. A whistleblower is anyone who witnesses rule-breaking and decides to be the person who makes a difference by setting in motion a legal action that includes built-in protections for him or her.

But while whistleblower cases can be milestones, they aren't a cure-all. For example, military personnel who wish to receive compensation for injury as a result of using 3M's allegedly defective earplugs must now file their own legal actions. Still, because of a whistleblower and the laws that protect them, the wheels of justice are turning.

Gary Jackson is an attorney at the Law Offices of James Scott Farrin, headquartered in Durham, N.C. He has participated in whistleblower (qui tam) cases around the country.

Diversity

Congress: Adopt solutions to end minority health disparities

By Foluso Fakorde

The Hill, April 18, 2019

The views expressed by contributors are their own and not the view of The Hill

As a physician on the frontlines of an overlooked epidemic, I've seen countless patients who have had no choice but to have their limbs surgically amputated because they didn't have access to the clinical interventions that could have saved their legs.

No, I don't work in a developing country. I'm a doctor in the Mississippi Delta.

Despite living in the world's richest country—a nation that spends [twice as much](#) on health care as any other – many minority communities in the U.S. suffer disproportionately from chronic diseases that wreak havoc on lives and limbs.

Since April is [National Minority Health Month](#), now is the perfect time to reflect on the inequities facing millions of Americans, as well as how we can collectively pave the path for building stronger, healthier communities.

Each year, roughly [200,000 Americans](#) – about 548 each day – will have their limbs amputated because of non-traumatic causes like peripheral artery disease (PAD). Never heard of PAD before? Neither have many of my patients until it is too late.

PAD occurs when fatty deposits in the arteries restrict the blood flow to the limbs, resulting in pain in the legs, poor healing of diabetic ulcers, gangrene, and eventual amputation. An all-too-common complication of diabetes, PAD is a risk for the over 30 million Americans living with diabetes and 84.1 million living with prediabetes. Unfortunately, minority communities are most at risk: according to the American Diabetes Association, African Americans are [1.7 times more likely](#) than non-Hispanic whites to have diabetes.

It is no wonder then that PAD disproportionately impacts minority populations most severely. Data show that African-American patients with diabetes are nearly [four times more likely](#) to have their limbs surgically removed than whites. Similar trends exist for Native Americans in the West and Hispanics, who are twice as likely and 75 percent more likely, respectively, to suffer from PAD than their Caucasian counterparts. Tragically, even higher rates are seen for minorities living in my home state of Mississippi, which is the epicenter of the PAD epidemic.

This increased prevalence is further compounded by lack of access to quality care. Even though early screening and treatment can [reduce the probability](#) of an amputation by an estimated 90 percent, it is still extremely underutilized and far too many patients do not even realize they have PAD until the disease has progressed too far for intervention. According to [research from the Mayo Clinic](#), even though PAD is more prevalent than all cancers combined, PAD is diagnosed and treated in less than 25 percent of ALL affected patients.

Sadly, in the Mississippi Delta where I practice, more than 90 percent of the amputees I've met, most of whom are African American, have never had a diagnostic test for PAD or an appropriate vascular evaluation to salvage their limbs. When it comes to something as serious as amputation, where you live, your skin color, insurance status, or socioeconomic status should not determine whether or not your limb is saved – a phenomenon known as the “amputation lottery.”

<https://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/healthcare/439449-congress-adopt-solutions-to-end-minority-health-disparities>

As a limb salvage specialist and an African American, I am dedicated to serving not just my patients, but also the whole community. I have made it my mission to both help patients save their legs and influence policymakers to adopt smarter policies to help eliminate the painful PAD disparities that afflict communities of color.

I urge Congress to direct the administration to convene an Intragovernmental Workgroup on Amputation Reduction. Such a working group should focus on implementing three pillars for protecting patients most at risk of PAD. First, stronger policies must be enacted in order to increase at-risk patients' access to screening. To this end, the Department of Health and Human Services should work with the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) to develop screening protocols for our nation's most at-risk patients.

Second, multidisciplinary care must be a priority. Interprofessional Internet Consultation Codes in the Medicare Physician Fee Schedule could encourage multi-disciplinary teams to provide vascular evaluations to provide risk assessments and referral recommendations to underserved communities.

Finally, there must be no amputation without vascular evaluation. Policies should be implemented that require providers to document vascular evaluations in the 12 months prior to having patients undergo non-traumatic, non-emergent amputations. Failure to perform arterial testing should result in non-payment for the amputation from Medicare (and other payors).

By promoting policies that expand access to early detection, screening, and clinical interventions, we can successfully reduce amputations for our most at-risk communities. No one should lose a limb when it can be saved.

Foluso Fakorde, MD is a practicing interventional cardiologist and co-chair of the PAD Initiative for the Association of Black Cardiologists.

DOD Official: Updated Transgender Policy Based on Treating All With Dignity

By Jim Garamone

Defense.gov, April 12, 2019

WASHINGTON—Updates to the Defense Department’s transgender policy take effect today, and defense officials stressed the policy is anchored in the core value of treating all service members with dignity and respect.

Anthony Kurta, performing the duties of the deputy undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness, told Pentagon reporters that all those most immediately affected by the update have the information they need about the policy.

Anyone currently serving or anyone under contract to enter the military who has been diagnosed with gender dysphoria is grandfathered, he said. “They remain under the 2016 policy for the remainder of their careers,” Kurta said. They can reenlist and stay in the military.

But beginning today for those wishing to join the military, “a diagnosis of gender dysphoria is presumptively disqualifying under the new policy, just as it is under the 2016 policy, absent a waiver,” he said.

There are recognized exceptions, Kurta said. Applicants must demonstrate stability in their biological sex for 36 months and “be able to meet all applicable standards of those associated with their biological sex,” he said.

For those currently serving, future diagnoses of gender dysphoria will be dealt with on an individual basis, he said. “If the service member can continue to meet all standards, including deployability standards, and all those associated with their biological sex, then the service member can continue to serve without waiver,” he explained.

For those who require gender transition to treat their gender dysphoria or who cannot or will not meet the standards will be referred to the disability evaluation system. Kurta stressed that under the policy, all service members will be treated with dignity and respect, and every service member is able to express their gender identity. “DOD will take no action solely based on gender identity,” he said.

Gender Dysphoria

By definition, gender dysphoria means there is clinically significant distress that impairs an individual in work or other important areas. Medical providers would provide treatment for the condition. “Very often the first step in treatment is behavioral health counseling,” Kurta said.

If through counseling, individuals decide they can meet all standards and can serve in their biological sexes, “nothing happens,” he said. “They just continue receiving any treatment they need.”

If gender transition is needed to treat the condition, the case would be referred for determination of separation.

DOD officials have some numbers available, Kurta said, but the department doesn’t track transgender status of service members. “It’s something we don’t ask of people,” he added. A workplace and gender relations survey conducted in 2016 showed just under 9,000 service members consider themselves transgender individuals.

<https://dod.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/1813248/dod-official-updated-transgender-policy-based-on-treating-all-with-dignity/>

The department knows that 1,400 service members have been diagnosed with gender dysphoria. Fewer than 10 service members are receiving gender reassignment surgery.



SEE ALSO:

[California National Guard tells transgender troops: 'Your gender identity is the least of our concerns'](#) [*The Hill*, 2019-04-12]

[2020 Dems condemn Trump administration's transgender military policy](#) [*The Hill*, 2019-04-12]

GSA Testing Tool to Ensure Tech Projects Meet Accessibility Rules

By Aaron Boyd

Next Gov, April 15, 2019

A government-built AI tool to ensure compliance with accessibility mandates is headed for the user testing phase before going governmentwide this fall.

Federal agencies are mandated by law to ensure any products or services offered—online or otherwise—are accessible to people with disabilities. By September, agencies will have access to a government-built artificial intelligence tool that ensures solicitations to buy or help build digital services include accessibility requirements.

“It’s our government’s mission to ensure that the products that the government builds are accessible to those 16 million” Americans with disabilities, Marina Fox, program manager for the DotGov Domain Service at the General Services Administration, who is leading the effort to develop the Solicitation Review Tool.

However, a manual review of about 1 percent of solicitations issued over a decade showed only 10 percent contained sufficient language to ensure compliance with Section 508, the regulation that outlines accessibility mandates.

“The result is the product gets built, the website gets built, and it’s not accessible to, let’s say, a blind person. Then, the best case scenario is it gets caught and gets corrected,” Fox said Thursday at the Government Analytics Breakfast Forum hosted by Johns Hopkins University and REI Systems. “Worst case scenario: an advocacy group finds it, files a complaint, there’s a class action suit, the Department of Justice has to go defend the agency—it’s happened to GSA before, it’s happened to HHS before, it’s happened to other agencies.”

Fox said lawsuits stemming from noncompliance led to approximately 140 settlements in 2012 alone.

“This is a big deal and it all starts with solicitation quality,” she said.

So, Fox’s team sought to build an AI tool that could scan the 500 IT- and communications-focused solicitations posted to FedBizOpps each day for the necessary language.

“When it came to the Solicitation Review Tool, it wasn’t born as, ‘Let’s do something AI,’ or, ‘Let’s do something innovative,’” she said. “It clearly was something that we had no other way to accomplish.”

The resulting review tool scans all those new solicitations for key language that shows the contracting officers have accessibility in mind. If a solicitation lacks that language, the bot finds the point of contact and sends them a message detailing the specific issues.

But it’s more than just a keyword search, Fox said.

“When I say we’re scanning, it doesn’t mean we’re just doing a pure word search. We are using natural language processing, but this is algorithm based. We are using 17 different algorithms as part of the decision as to whether something is compliant or not.”

A prototype was built in-house using cloud-based development platforms and trained using a predictive model based on 10 years of compliance reviews—done manually at the time—on some 4,000 solicitations.

<https://www.nextgov.com/emerging-tech/2019/04/gsa-testing-tool-ensure-tech-projects-meet-accessibility-rules/156277/>

The team soon realized sending contracting officers an email with a convoluted spreadsheet wasn't going to be useful, Fox said. So, they built a front-end dashboard that highlights problem areas in a way that's easy to visualize.

The backend algorithm and dashboard are out of development and now reside on Cloud.gov, where it will be able to scale governmentwide when finished. After a few more tweaks, the tool will go through large-scale user testing beginning in July, Fox said. The final testing phase starts with four weeks letting government contracting officials try out the tool, followed, potentially, by a soft launch with about 10 agencies, she said.

If the timeline holds, the tool will launch governmentwide in September.

But Fox and the team are already looking beyond launch. In the near future, Fox said the team wants to incorporate AI and neural networks to offer suggestions for editing problem solicitations to ensure the end products are compliant.

“Instead of sending it to the expert and saying, ‘Add the language,’ we’re saying, ‘Here’s the language to add,’” she said.

Even further out, the team is looking at ways to ensure Section 508 language is included from the outset, rather than finding issues after solicitations are posted on FedBizOpps. However, that will require access to non-public information, which will mean additional security and interoperability issues that have yet to be worked out.

Meet the admiral who leads from a wheelchair

By Mark D. Faram

Navy Times, April 12, 2019



Fleet Master Chief Wes Koshoffer, left, discusses Ready, Relevant Learning with Rear Adm. Kyle Cozad, commander of Naval Education and Training Command during a January visit to NETC's Pensacola, Fla. headquarters (Cmdr. James Stockman/Navy)

A simple stroll across his kitchen altered Navy Rear Adm. [Kyle Cozad](#)'s life forever.

On March 16, 2018, he slipped and ended up "landing flat on my back, crushing two vertebrae," Cozad, 56, told Navy Times.

Surgeons spent seven hours strengthening his spine with two titanium rods but he'd lost all feeling below his waist.

"I like to joke that I now have enough screws in my back to start a hardware store, but like so many other wounded warriors, nobody really expects to be put in a position like this," said Cozad, a career aviator before he took the helm of Naval Education and Training Command in 2017.

Cozad told Navy Times that while he rested in the recovery room, his wife of 33 years, Amy, learned from doctors that he'd be "handicapped for life as a paraplegic and I'd never get out of my wheelchair."

The Las Vegas native remembered later staring at the ceiling, pondering his future.

"I told myself that I could just lay in bed and feel sorry for myself and let other people do things for me or I can get after this and try to rejoin the fight," he said.

So he decided to fight.

"I decided that I'll never let anyone tell me what I can't do. I want to define what I can do," he said.

He wanted to go back to commanding the Pensacola-based NETC, where he led the ongoing [Ready Relevant Learning](#) training transformation.

"I'll be honest with you, I love the Navy," Cozad said. "I love the mission of what I do at NETC. And before me was the ultimate goal of being able to get back to work full time, being able to pick up where I left off before the accident, without any consideration for my mobility and how I get around."

For a man who still has little feeling below his waist and uses "a wheelchair or a walker to get from point A to point B," he realized his reintegration likely wouldn't lead back to a cockpit of a [P-3C Orion maritime patrol plane](#).

Before he arrived at NETC, he commanded a squadron, wing and reconnaissance group. He also was the 22nd senior director of the White House Situation Room and led [Joint Task Force Guantanamo](#).

But he had the support of his boss, [Vice Adm. Robert "Bob" Burke](#), the Navy's 58th chief of naval personnel.

"Kyle's journey from his serious injury to leading Naval Education and Training Command is a truly inspirational story," said Burke in an email to Navy Times.

<https://www.navytimes.com/news/your-navy/2019/04/12/meet-the-admiral-who-leads-from-a-wheelchair/>

“However, I know that Kyle would be the first to say that it has been the support of his wife, Amy, his family and the NETC staff, and the non-medical care he received from [Navy Wounded Warrior - Safe Harbor](#) that has gotten him to where he is today.”



Rear Adm. Kyle Cozad, the commander of Naval Education and Training Command, participates in the 2019 Navy rowing trials at Naval Air Station North Island. (Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Ryan M. Breeden/Navy)

Joining the ranks of the military’s [Wounded Warriors](#) — service members who are recovering from wounds, injuries or illnesses — introduced Cozad to a process.

Cozad’s medical odyssey already had involved an intensive care stay, plus another five weeks of in-patient rehabilitation, and then more rehab.

“Every day I’ve worked hard on taking one more step than I did the previous day or increasing my balance standing up unassisted or 10 second longer than I did the day before,” he said.

But there’s also a non-medical component process and it’s what the Wounded Warrior -Safe Harbor program does.

It’s designed to tailor each service member’s recovery and reintegration needs so that they and their families don’t struggle with distractions.

And that’s where Cozad discovered “adaptive sports,” ways to stay physically active while adjusting to a disability.

He watched other Wounded Warriors find sports that helped the recovery process by giving “them the confidence that they can do these things,” along with the fellowship of others, a “mutual support network” of men and women “who define for themselves the boundaries from their injuries.”



Aviation Electronics Technician 2nd Class Jai Cheon participates in the 800-meter cycling event during the Navy track trials at Coronado High School on March 22. Cycling is an adaptive sport that helps wounded, sick or injured sailors stay physically active while recovering. (Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Apprentice Madysson Anne Ritter/Navy)

In February, Cozad attended a Navy-sponsored adaptive sports camp in Florida with 15 other recovering sailors.

He’d played basketball in high school and a couple of years on the junior varsity team at the U.S. Naval Academy, but that was more than three decades ago, long before his injury.

“I had a chance to row and cycle and play seated volleyball,” he said. “I’d never played volleyball before or rowed.”

He performed well enough to become one of the 55 sailors invited to March tryouts in Coronado, near San Diego, for this summer’s [Warrior Games](#).

The Pentagon launched the Warrior Games in 2010 to introduce wounded, sick or injured members of the armed forces to the kinds of sports featured in the [Paralympics](#).

<https://www.navytimes.com/news/your-navy/2019/04/12/meet-the-admiral-who-leads-from-a-wheelchair/>

Today, it includes competitors from the Netherlands, Australia, United Kingdom, Canada and Denmark, too.

In San Diego, Cozad strapped himself into a large platform and tried his hand at field events.

He credits the hard work of “some great coaches” for improving his discus throw by “almost 13 feet.”

He’d never tried tennis before his injury, but now he found his evolving “chair skills” and “wide wingspan” made him a natural on the court — even if his high rank and age stood out.

“They told me that I was without a doubt I was the most senior person and the oldest person out there,” Cozad said.



Rear Adm. Kyle Cozad shakes hands with Yeoman 1st Class Dewonna Singleton, a student in the flag writer course at Naval Technical Training Center Meridian in Mississippi on April 10. (James T. Childress/Navy)

On April 8, Cozad learned that the Navy selected him to the 40-sailor roster to represent the service for this summer’s Warrior Games.

Cozad jokes that he’s probably the “oldest rookie” on the team, but he’s also developed a “secondary passion” that’s driven him to try to become a spokesman for the entire program.

And for any naysayers who doubt an admiral can lead from a wheelchair, he points to World War II and the commander in chief for the bulk of the conflict, [Franklin D. Roosevelt](#).

“We had a president who ran the country from a wheelchair,” Cozad said. “I figure I can do something like run the Naval Education and Training Command just as well as he did.”

Military academies begin to follow military transgender ban

The Associated Press, April 17, 2019

ANNAPOLIS, Md. (AP) — The elite academies that educate officers for the nation’s armed forces have begun to implement the Trump administration’s ban on transgender service members.

The U.S. Naval Academy will ban people who are transgender from attending the school, beginning with the 2020 school year. The Defense Department [confirmed](#) that change to the Capital Gazette newspaper on Monday. The school in Annapolis, Maryland, currently accepts transgender students and retains midshipmen who transition to another gender.

The administration’s new policy took effect last week, stripping transgender troops of rights to serve openly and denying servicemen and women medical care if they choose to transition to another gender.

The Obama administration had lifted restrictions on transgender service members in 2016, allowing them to serve openly, and covered gender affirmation surgery.

A current Naval Academy student, Midshipman Regan Kibby, is one of six service members suing the Trump administration over its ban.

The U.S. Coast Guard has also implemented the new policy, as of April 12, the agency states on its website.

Coast Guard Academy spokesman David Santos confirmed in an email Wednesday that the policy change applies to the school in New London, Connecticut. A lengthy [explanation](#) on the Coast Guard’s website states that past medical treatment, such as gender-reassignment surgery or hormone therapy, may disqualify future applicants from joining up.

The Trump administration’s new policy also bars future applicants who’ve been diagnosed with gender dysphoria, a condition that can apply to people who identify as another gender and experience distress. Doctors say counseling, hormone therapy or surgery can lessen the anxiety.

There are some exceptions for people who’ve been diagnosed with gender dysphoria. For instance, someone can join the Coast Guard if their doctor says they can demonstrate three years of “stability in his/her biological sex immediately before applying to serve.” The Defense Department says transgender people can serve if they remain in their “biological sex.”

The administration’s policy calls for troops diagnosed with gender dysphoria to be medically evaluated before they are discharged to see if they qualify as having a disability. Otherwise gender dysphoria can be considered a “condition that interferes with military service” like sleepwalking, bed wetting, motion sickness and personality disorders.

The American Medical Association has blasted the administration’s transgender policy for military service. It told The Associated Press last week that the new policy and its wording mischaracterize transgender people as having a “deficiency.”

The Defense Department said its use of the words “deficiencies” is military lingo for when an individual fails to meet standards to maintain a lethal force. It is not a reference to gender dysphoria, Lt. Col. Carla Gleason said.

An estimated 14,700 troops identify as transgender. An organization that represents transgender service members said several are attending each academy, although many haven’t come out.

<https://www.apnews.com/acbff2fdaf6e48819ccbc4bcccea2180>

“The policy turns off access to some of our best and brightest, and that’s not what our country needs to win future wars,” said B Fram, communications director for Service Members, Partners and Allies for Respect and Tolerance for All, or SPARTA.

The nation has five service academies. They include the U.S. Air Force Academy, the U.S. Military Academy and the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy.

The Air Force Academy will conform with Defense Department policy when admitting future cadets, said Lt. Col. Tracy Bunko, an academy spokeswoman.

That means transgender people can serve “in their biological sex” if they meet Defense Department standards for that sex, she said. People who have had cross-sex hormone therapy, sex reassignment surgery or genital reconstruction surgery are disqualified.

People with a history of gender dysphoria cannot be admitted unless they meet certain conditions, including having no dysphoria in the previous three years, Bunko said.

The Coast Guard is part of the Department of Homeland Security. The Merchant Marine is part of the Maritime Administration, which is within the U.S. Department of Transportation.

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[Naval Academy to ban transgender students beginning in 2020](#) [*USA TODAY*, 2019-04-17]

[UT student fears military scholarship lost after Trump administration transgender troop ban](#) [*Dallas (Texas) News*, 2019-04-17]

[Texas student says he lost military scholarship due to Trump's new transgender policy](#) [*The Hill*, 2019-04-17]

Next CNO Wants to See More Women Getting Promoted to Captain, Admiral

By Gina Harkins

Military.com, April 17, 2019



Midshipmen take the oath of office to become U.S. Navy officers during the U.S. Naval Academy's Class of 2018 graduation and commissioning ceremony in Annapolis, Md, on May 25, 2018. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Kaitlin Rowell)

More female officers should be serving in top Navy command posts, the admiral nominated to lead the service said Tuesday, but it could take years for it to happen.

About a quarter of new Navy officers are women, but they're not staying on long enough to serve in key [leadership positions](#). Of the more than 370 naval officers recently promoted to captain -- the rank at which officers can lead major commands such as aircraft carriers, amphibious assault ships or submarine squadrons -- about 8% were women.

"It needs to be higher than that," Vice Chief of Naval Operations [Adm. Bill Moran](#) said at an event hosted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies and the U.S. Naval Institute. "But you've got to build a base, and the base has to stay with the team long enough to be in a position to promote at those higher rates."

The Navy has been driving efforts to make military careers [more flexible](#). The programs, which allow for more maternity and paternity leave or the option of taking three years off mid-career to start a family or pursue other goals, have been aimed at encouraging more women to consider joining and staying in the service.

But even though some of those programs have been in place for years, Moran said it will take several more to see if they're making a difference when it comes to female retention.

"We have to take the long view here to see if we can start retaining women at a higher rate, because until they retain at the same percentage at each of those milestones, you're going to have a smaller number to select from when they get to the O-5, O-6 and above ranks," he said.

Moran served as chief of naval personnel when many of those reforms were enacted. They were spearheaded by former Navy Secretary Ray Mabus, who in 2015 said he wanted to see women make up a quarter of the sea services.

The Air Force has historically had the highest percentage of female service members among all the branches, but now the Navy is outpacing it, with women making up more than 25% of new enlistees, [according to data from CNA](#).

The Naval Academy is also seeing historic growth when it comes to female midshipmen. The last two years have been the highest on record for women, Moran said, and the numbers are continuing to climb.

"Finding highly qualified, talented women who want to serve is not the issue," he said. "The issue is making service in the Navy compatible with some of their other desires as they want to move on in their careers."

<https://www.military.com/daily-news/2019/04/17/next-cno-wants-see-more-women-getting-promoted-captain-admiral.html>

Congress has given the military authority to make officers' careers more flexible. [Reforms](#) in the 2019 defense authorization act gave the military the OK to bring in officers with special skills at higher ranks, end up-or-out rules that derailed some officers' careers, and create a more [merit-based promotion](#) system.

Several of those reforms were the result of Navy leaders pushing for change, Moran said.

"I think we're doing the right things," he said. "But only three or four years into it, in many cases less time than that, is not enough time to see what adjustments we need to make."

-- Gina Harkins can be reached at gina.harkins@military.com. Follow her on Twitter [@ginaaharkins](https://twitter.com/ginaaharkins).

Number of Female Generals, Admirals Has Doubled Since 2000, Report Finds

By Richard Sisk

Military.com, April 17, 2019



Air Force Gen. Lori J. Robinson, the incoming commander of the North American Aerospace Defense Command and U.S. Northern Command, salutes during her arrival at the change of command ceremony at Peterson Air Force Base, in Colorado Springs, Colo., on May 13, 2016. Robinson became the first woman to lead a top-tier U.S. military command after taking charge at NORAD and USNORTHCOM. (AP Photo/Brennan Linsley)

As more women pursue careers in the military, their numbers in the senior enlisted and officer ranks have increased dramatically, according to a report released last week by the Service Women's Action Network (SWAN).

In 1988, less than 4% of those in the three senior enlisted paygrades (E7 to E9) were women. But as of February 2018, women constituted 11.8% of the E7 to E9 ranks in the Army; 20.3% in the Air Force; 11.6% in the Navy; 5.6% in the Marine Corps; and 8.7% in the Coast Guard, the report states.

There was a similar trend among senior officers, according to [the report](#), titled "Women in the Military: Where They Stand."

Through the 1980s, women made up less than 2% percent of colonels and Navy captains, but the figures as of February 2018 were 10.6% for the Army; 11.6% for the Navy; 14.1% for the Air Force; 2.3% for the Marine Corps; and 11% for the Coast Guard, according to the report.

In February 2018, there were 63 female [admirals](#) and generals on active duty in the five services, compared to 30 in fiscal 2000, the report states.

Retired Navy Capt. Lory Manning, who compiled the SWAN report, said "a lot more women are staying in the military, and staying longer," resulting in their increased presence in the senior enlisted and officer ranks.

The wider variety of military occupational specialties that opened to women in recent years has also been a factor, said Manning, SWAN's director of government relations.

The report, using data from open government sources and also data obtained by a Freedom of Information Act request from the Defense Manpower Data Center, also found that increasing numbers of women in the enlisted and officer ranks are minorities.

In February 2018, about 61 percent of the enlisted women in the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps were minorities, and 38% of the female officers, according to the report. African-Americans make up a much higher percentage of military women (25.6%) than military men (14.5%), the report said.

The percentage of Latina women in the military also has risen in recent years, from about 12% in 2011 to about 17.8% in 2018, the report states.

Overall, the percentage of women in the active-duty military has risen significantly since the end of the draft, from 1.6% in 1973 to 16.3% in February 2018, according to the report.

<https://www.military.com/daily-news/2019/04/17/number-female-generals-admirals-has-doubled-2000-report-finds.html>

The total number of women on active duty in the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines last year was 210,000, with another 5,955 on active duty in the Coast Guard, the report states.

The report also includes a breakdown by operation of the number of women in the military who have become casualties since the terror attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. The total is 170 killed and 1,102 wounded.

Fifty military women died and 383 were wounded in action during Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, which officially ended in December 2014, and 110 women were killed and 627 were wounded in Operation Iraqi Freedom, which ended in August 2010.

One woman died and 12 were wounded in action in Operation New Dawn in Iraq, from September 2010 to December 2011.

To date, five women have died and 68 have been wounded in Operation Inherent Resolve, in Iraq and Syria, which began in 2014. And four women have died and 12 have been wounded in action in Operation Freedom's Sentinel in Afghanistan, which began in 2015, the report said.

-- *Richard Sisk can be reached at Richard.Sisk@Military.com.*

The problem with AI? Study says it's too white and male, calls for more women, minorities

By Jessica Guynn

USA TODAY, April 17, 2019



Massachusetts Institute of Technology facial recognition researcher Joy Buolamwini on Feb. 13, 2019, at the school, in Cambridge, Mass. Her research has uncovered racial and gender bias in facial analysis tools sold by companies such as Amazon that have a hard time recognizing certain faces, especially darker-skinned women. Buolamwini holds a white mask she had to use so that software could detect her face. (Photo: Steven Senne, AP)

SAN FRANCISCO – Facial recognition systems frequently misidentify people of color. Lending tools charge higher interest rates to Hispanics and African Americans. Sentencing algorithms discriminate against black defendants. Job hunting tools favor men. Negative emotions are more likely to be assigned to black men's faces than white men. Computer vision systems for self-driving cars have a harder time spotting pedestrians with darker skin tones.

The use of artificial intelligence, which combs through vast amounts of our personal data in search of patterns, is [rapidly expanding](#) in critical parts of Americans' daily lives such as education, employment, health care and policing. Increasingly, powerful artificial intelligence tools determine who gets into school, who gets a job, who pays a higher insurance premium.

Yet a growing body of research shows that these technologies are rife with bias and discrimination, mirroring and amplifying real-world inequalities. A [study](#) scheduled to be released Wednesday by New York University's AI Now Institute identifies a key reason why: The people building these technologies are overwhelmingly white and male.

Artificial intelligence technologies are developed mostly in major tech companies such as Facebook, Google, Amazon and Microsoft, and in a small number of university labs, which all tilt white, affluent and male and, in many cases, are only getting more so. Only by adding more women, people of color and other underrepresented groups can artificial intelligence address the bias and create more equitable systems, says Meredith Whittaker, a report author and co-founder of the AI Now Institute.

"The problem of a lack of diversity in tech is obviously not new but it's reached a new and urgent inflection point. The number of women and people of color in the AI sector has decreased at the same time that the sector is establishing itself as a nexus of wealth and power," Whittaker says. "In short, the problem here is that those in the room when AI is built, and those who are benefiting from the rapid proliferation of AI systems, represent an extremely narrow segment of the population. They are mainly men, they are mainly technically educated and they are mainly white. This is not the diversity of people that are being affected by these systems."

The study, "Discriminating Systems: Gender, Race, and Power in AI," comes as scrutiny of AI intensifies. For years, tech companies could not deliver on the industry's ambitious promises of what hyper-intelligent machines could do. Today, AI is no longer the stuff of science fiction. Machines can recognize objects in a photograph or translate an online post into dozens of languages. And they are getting smarter all the time, taking on more sophisticated tasks.

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/tech/2019/04/17/ai-too-white-male-more-women-minorities-needed-facial-recognition/3451932002/>

Tech companies, AI researchers and industry groups cast AI in a positive light, pointing to the possibility of advances in such critical areas as medical diagnosis and personalized medicine. But as these technologies proliferate [so, too, are](#) alarm bells.

People often think of computer algorithms and other automated systems as being neutral or scientific but research is increasingly uncovering how AI systems can cause harm to underrepresented groups and those with less power. Anna Lauren Hoffmann, an assistant professor with The Information School at the University of Washington, describes this as "data violence," or data science that disproportionately affects some more than others.

The NYU researchers say machines learn from and reinforce historical patterns of racial and gender discrimination.

Last year, Amazon [had to scrap a tool it built to review job applicants' resumes](#) because it discriminated against women. Earlier this month, more than two dozen AI researchers called on Amazon to stop selling its facial recognition technology to law enforcement agencies, arguing it is biased against women and people of color.

Google's speech recognition software has been dinged for performing better for male or male-sounding voices than female ones. In 2015, Google's image-recognition algorithm was caught [auto-tagging pictures of black people](#) as "gorillas." Last year, transgender drivers for Uber whose appearances had changed were temporarily or permanently suspended because of an Uber security feature that required them to take a selfie to verify their identity.

Other companies use AI to scan employees' social media for "toxic behavior" and alert their bosses or analyze job applicants' facial movements, tone of voice and word choice to predict how well they would do the job. Predictim [analyzes online activities](#) to produce ratings of which babysitters are more likely to abuse drugs or bully.

Leading the charge in raising awareness of the dangers of bias in AI is Massachusetts Institute of Technology researcher Joy Buolamwini, who with her research and advocacy has prompted Microsoft and IBM to improve their facial recognition systems and has drawn fire from Amazon, which has attacked her research methodology. Her work has also caused some in Congress to try to rein in the largely unregulated field as pressure [increases from employees at major tech companies](#) and the public.

Last week, Democratic lawmakers introduced first-of-their-kind bills in the Senate and the House that would require big companies to test the "algorithmic accountability" of their artificial intelligence systems such as facial recognition. The bills were introduced just weeks after [Facebook was sued by the Department of Housing and Urban Development](#), which has charged the social media giant's targeting system with allowing advertisers to exclude protected groups from seeing housing ads.

San Francisco is considering banning city agencies from using facial recognition. [Privacy laws in Texas and Illinois require anyone recording biometric data, including facial recognition](#), to give people notice and obtain their consent. The Trump administration has made developing "safe and trustworthy" algorithms one of the key objectives of the White House's AI initiative.

The NYU researchers say it's critical for AI to diversify the homogeneous group of engineers and researchers building these automated systems. Yet the [gender gap in computer science is widening](#).

As of 2015, women made up 18 percent of computer science majors in the U.S., down from a high of 37 percent in 1984. Women make up less than one quarter of the computer science workforce and receive

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/tech/2019/04/17/ai-too-white-male-more-women-minorities-needed-facial-recognition/3451932002/>

median salaries that are 66 percent of their male counterparts, according to the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. The number of bachelor's degrees in engineering awarded to black women declined 11 percent between 2000 and 2015.

The problem is even more acute in AI. Most speakers and attendees of machine learning conferences and 80 percent of AI professors are men, research shows. Women [account for 15 percent of AI research staff at Facebook and 10 percent at Google](#). While there is very little public data on racial diversity in AI, anecdotal evidence suggests that the gaps are even wider, the study says.

Last month when Stanford University unveiled an artificial intelligence institute with 120 faculty and technology leaders to represent humanity, not a single one was black. Boards created by tech companies to examine the ethics of artificial intelligence also lack members from underrepresented groups.

Google also announced an "external advisory council" on AI ethics last month. NAACP president and CEO Derrick Johnson complained the new body "lacks a qualified member of the civil rights community." "This is offensive to people of color & indicates AI tech wouldn't have the safeguards to prevent implicit & racial biases," he wrote on Twitter. Google later scrapped the advisory council.

"Both within the spaces where AI is being created, and in the logic of how AI systems are designed, the costs of bias, harassment, and discrimination are borne by the same people: gender minorities, people of color, and other underrepresented groups. Similarly, the benefits of such systems, from profit to efficiency, accrue primarily to those already in positions of power, who again tend to be white, educated, and male," the NYU study, a year in the making, found.

Current efforts to attract and retain underrepresented groups in AI are not cutting it, the study warned.

The push to bring more women into tech is too narrow and is "likely to privilege white women over others." Arguments focused on a recruiting or "pipeline" problem ignore [pernicious issues in corporate and university work cultures – power imbalances, harassment, exclusionary hiring practices and unequal compensation](#) – that drive women and people of color from AI or dissuade them from joining the field in the first place, researchers say.

Among the study's recommendations: publish compensation levels broken down by race and gender and end pay and opportunity inequality; produce harassment and discrimination transparency reports; change hiring practices to increase diversity and the number of people of color, women and other underrepresented groups at senior leadership levels and create pathways for contractors, temps and vendors, who tend to be from more diverse backgrounds, to become full-time employees; and ensure executive incentives are tied to increases in hiring and retention of underrepresented groups.

"To tackle the diversity crisis and to address AI bias, we need to look beyond technical fixes for social problems. We need to look at who has power, we need to ask who is harmed, we need to look at who benefits and we need to look at, ultimately, who gets to decide how these tools are built and which purposes they serve," Whittaker says. "If the AI industry wants to change the world then it needs to get its own house in order first."

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SEE ALSO:

[TSA Agents Say They're Not Discriminating Against Black Women, But Their Body Scanners Might Be](#)
[*Government Executive*, 2019-04-17]

Stafford woman learning to embrace her Marine service

By Cathy Dyson

The Free Lance–Star (Fredericksburg, Va.), April 12, 2019



Jackie Huber, standing on the left, volunteered to serve in Somalia in 1992. Women Marines had to wait on a plane as officials readied 'facilities' for them in the bedraggled camp. (Provided photo)

Jackie Huber was one of the few, but she never felt particularly proud as a woman Marine.

She spent 20 years in the Marine Corps, from 1984 to 2004, and rose from the enlisted ranks to chief warrant officer. She worked in MISSO, the Manpower Information System Support Office, entering data about service members at installations on the East and West coasts. She volunteered for the same duty in Somalia as part of Operation Restore Hope and lived in a sand-filled camp that smelled of dirt and death.

Huber said it wasn't cool to be a Marine during most of her tenure, which was before the days military members were thanked for their service. Some of the men she worked with made it clear they looked upon women as more trouble than they were worth—unless they needed someone to sleep with, Huber said.

“We were treated like second-class citizens, and we had few rights and fewer advocates,” Huber said. “That’s why I didn’t want anyone to know what I had done. I didn’t want to be treated like that anymore.”

Huber, who lives in Stafford County, is glad the tide has shifted.

The 2017 revelation that male Marines posted nude photos of female Marines online and made lewd and violent comments about them brought charges to those involved. Huber believes some of the injustices she experienced are no longer part of the Corps.

As a result, the 53-year-old is doing what she can to support other service members as she embraces her status as a retired Marine.

“It was awful at times, but there’s this pride of being a Marine that comes from having earned it, and you can’t take that away,” she said.

‘A CARING HEART’

Huber pursued her passion—photography—after she left the Corps and moved to the Fredericksburg area in 2005. She worked locally with another photographer before starting her own business in 2011, calling it Bellawood Photography.

The name suits on several levels. She has a dog named Bella, and her family lives in the woods of Falmouth, but she’s also giving a nod to Marine lore. After the World War I Battle of Belleau Wood in France, Germans called Marines “devil dogs” because of their tenacious fighting.

Huber has donated her photography services to Semper K9 Assistance Dogs, a Woodbridge group that rescues dogs from shelters and trains them for disabled service members. She plans to devote one day a month at her studio, off State Route 3 in Fredericksburg, to providing free headshots for all service members transitioning into civilian work.

https://www.fredericksburg.com/news/local/stafford-woman-learning-to-embrace-her-marine-service/article_18fbdb55-b384-5655-8d7d-81d0a4d19283.html



Jackie Huber in 1984

And, her studio is a collection site for Toys for Tots, the annual holiday effort by the Marine Corps Reserve. In the late 1980s, she posed for a national campaign poster promoting the effort, alongside comedian Danny Thomas.

“When you have someone who understands the military culture and lifestyle, it helps keep our veterans at ease because they know the person has been there, too,” said Amanda Baity, who runs the Semper K9 program with her husband, Christopher, a former Marine dog handler. “I can tell she truly has a caring heart and wants to give back.”

‘WOMEN DIDN’T SPEAK UP’

Amanda Baity has met several women who were reluctant to advertise their military status.

“I see that a lot,” she said. “Maybe it’s a stigma and they don’t want to be defined as that.”

The Marine Corps has the fewest number of women of any branch in the military. About 8 percent of its enlisted ranks and officers are female—a percentage that’s at least twice as high in the other services, according to the Department of Defense.

Huber’s best friend, Carrie Lynch of Stafford, also served in Marines for 20 years, and the two have talked about their experiences. Lynch followed her father into the Corps and said her service didn’t always include rainbows and unicorns, but was still “the best thing that ever happened to me.”

She’s seven years younger than Huber and believes the small age gap accounts for a big difference.

“I don’t want to say they were seen and not heard, but when she came in, women didn’t speak up as much” because that’s how they were raised, Lynch said. By comparison, she said, women of her era had no trouble pointing out problems and expecting solutions.

Also, there are plenty of people who give the impression that “to be a real Marine, you have to fight the battle,” Lynch said.

She believes her friend is finally starting to see that everybody contributes, whether they’re on the field of combat or not.

“She doesn’t give herself enough credit sometimes,” Lynch said, “but she’s been there, she’s been through the trenches, and she is an amazing woman.”

As for combat, Huber knows that at 5 foot, 2 inches, she’d never be strong enough to carry a fellow fallen Marine who could be twice her weight and a foot taller. She faced that scenario in training once.

“Can all women do it? No. Would all women want to do it? No,” she said. “But for the ones who want to do it and can do it, wow.”

FOCUSING ON HER CAREER

Rachel Huber, the third of Jackie Huber’s four children, enthusiastically tells everyone she knows of her mother’s service and even reminds her mom to pluck up her courage when she’s feeling down.

“There’s no crying in the Marines,” she tells her mother.

Huber’s husband, James, is also a retired Marine who’s had several combat deployments. She’s grateful for his encouragement as she’s found her second career as a photographer.

https://www.fredericksburg.com/news/local/stafford-woman-learning-to-embrace-her-marine-service/article_18fbdb55-b384-5655-8d7d-81d0a4d19283.html

Her studio is full of headshots—not glamour portraits of models, but attractive images of everyday people. One is her mom, who lived with Huber for more than a decade and took care of the children when Huber and her Marine husband were called away on duty or training.

When she has a camera in front of her face, Huber blocks out everything else around her. She doesn't feel hunger, pain or fatigue, but focuses only on her objective as she concentrates on capturing "the essence" of a person.

"It puts me in a difference zone," she said. "I see that moment and I have to have it."

Some might say she's as determined as a devil dog.

US astronaut to spend 11 months in space, set female record

By Marcia Dunn

The Associated Press, April 17, 2019



In this April 8, 2019 photo made available by NASA, astronaut and Expedition 59 Flight Engineer Christina Koch works on U.S. spacesuits inside the Quest airlock of the International Space Station. Koch will remain on board until February 2020, approaching but not quite breaking Scott Kelly's 340-day U.S. record. (NASA via AP)

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — A NASA astronaut will spend nearly a year at the International Space Station, setting a record for women.

Station astronaut Christina Koch will remain on board for about 11 months, until February — approaching but not quite breaking Scott Kelly's 340-day U.S. record.

“One month down. Ten to go,” she tweeted Wednesday. She said it feels awesome having so much extra time in space and “a true honor and a dream come true.”

Koch knew before launching last month that her flight might stretch into 2020 and sought advice from Kelly as well as retired astronaut Peggy Whitson, the current record-holder for female space fliers.

Koch will break Whitson's 288-day record for the longest single spaceflight by a woman at the end of December.

“I hope that me being up here and giving my best every day is a way for me to say thank you to people like her,” Koch said in a NASA interview broadcast Wednesday.

Koch said before launching, she and her husband listened to an audio recording of Kelly's 2017 autobiography, “Endurance.” She said there was a lot of helpful advice.

An electrical engineer who's worked in Antarctica, Koch will undergo medical tests during her stay. More subjects and more diversity are needed, she noted, to better understand the effects of long-term spaceflight as NASA aims to return astronauts to the moon within five years.

“It's almost turning into not that big of a deal to have somebody on board station for 10, 11 months because we've done it before, we're good at it and we're going to keep doing it,” she said.

Koch was supposed to become part of the first all-female spacewalking team, but instead ventured out a few weeks ago with a male crewmate. Only one usable medium spacesuit was available, and the two women on board both needed mediums.

Another NASA astronaut also will have an extended stay. Dr. Andrew Morgan will launch to the space station this summer for a nine-month mission — also considerably longer than the usual six months. The physician and Army officer will lift off from Kazakhstan with an Italian and a Russian on July 20, the 50th anniversary of the first manned moon landing.

Both Koch and Morgan are part of NASA's Astronaut Class of 2013, the first to have a 50-50 split between women and men.

<https://www.apnews.com/c7a0a47b82f446e99964e4d467970de8>

NASA announced the extended assignments this week. The primary reason for the schedule shuffling is to free up a seat on a pair of Russian Soyuz spacecraft for the United Arab Emirates' first astronaut, Hazza al-Mansoori. He will spend just over a week in orbit this fall.

Russia still holds the world's space endurance record. A Russian cosmonaut-physician spent nearly 15 months on a single mission aboard the former Mir space station in the mid-1990s.

Kelly returned to Earth in 2016 and Whitson in 2017. Both are now retired from NASA.

The Associated Press Health and Science Department receives [support](#) from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Department of Science Education. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

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SEE ALSO:

[America's 1st female astronaut candidate, Jerrie Cobb, dies](#) [*The Associated Press*, 2019-04-19]

Why do so many women leave the Coast Guard?

By Geoff Ziezulewicz

Navy Times, April 18, 2019



Coast Guard Petty Officer 3rd Class Vickie Kwong handles an unloaded M4 rifle prior to going to the range at Port Hueneme, California. (Petty Officer 1st Class Matthew S. Masaschi/Coast Guard)

A new study offers few definitive conclusions for why fewer women choose to stay in the Coast Guard compared to men, but it offers several reasons why they want to get out.

[The report](#), released a few weeks ago by the non-profit [RAND Corporation](#), was commissioned by the Coast Guard and is the first study in nearly 30 years to look at women in the service's ranks.

Fewer female enlisted or officer Coast Guard members make a career in the service or even stick around at the four-year or 10-year mark, according to the study.

Compared to their male counterparts, 12 percent fewer female Coasties will stay in the service after a decade in uniform.

About 23 percent of male officers will serve a 25-year career in the Coast Guard, while 15 percent of women officers will do the same.

On the enlisted side, just 5 percent of women will serve 25 years, while 12 percent of their male counterparts hit that point, according to the study.

The Coast Guard's Office of Diversity and Inclusion commissioned the survey to ferret out root causes behind lower retention rates of women and to get recommendations on how to fix that.

It's part of an effort started last year by the service to look at challenges affecting the workforce in general. A final plan and report are expected next year.

At his annual State of the Coast Guard address last month, [Adm. Karl Schultz](#) pointed to several changes already in the works, including revamping the regs that disqualify single-parent enlistments, loosening weight standards and easing tattoo restrictions, part of a larger effort to convince more women to say in the service.

"They're small ripples that will lead to a groundswell of cultural change," Schultz said. "Inclusion allows for development of the critical bonds that will put us on a course to mission success."

Rand's study cautions there are no "silver bullet" solutions to the retention woes.

Despite the achievements of women in the military, the services largely remain a boy's club, and the 164 focus groups with 1,010 Coast Guard members interviewed for the study revealed women voicing concerns about problems shared with women in the other armed forces.

Issues raised included having to tolerate inappropriate comments uttered by male peers, who also exclude women from group activities.

"Some reported that, when a woman does interact with male peers, she can be subjected to rumors of engaging in a sexual relationship, with any stigma being placed on her, not him," the study states.



Coast Guard Petty Officer 2nd Class April Cook, an avionics electrical technician, helps a fellow crew member calibrate the electronic sensor on board an MH-60 Jayhawk helicopter during a training flight in 2018. (Petty Officer 2nd Class Corinne Zilnicki/U.S. Coast Guard)

Coast Guard women also raised sexual harassment and assault problems as reasons for lower retention rates.

“Some participants commented that units with only one or two women assigned and units in remote, isolated environments also tended to experience sexual harassment or assault more often than other units,” the study states.

The focus groups noted advancement challenges in the service, and how berthing restrictions for women on vessels can limit career opportunities, according to the study.

“Some women also said that they are routinely assigned collateral duties that are stereotypically female activities and that are less likely to support career development,” the study notes.

Female personnel reported that male leaders are “reluctant to mentor women” in their units, and that women-specific policies are interpreted or implemented inconsistently.

“Female participants expressed the belief that men and women were treated differently; and that men often did not trust their opinions or value the quality of their work, particularly in male-dominated ratings or specialties,” according to the study.

When it comes to having kids, Coast Guard women reported a “lack of breastfeeding support” at times, compounded by few facilities for pumping breast milk and commanders who were reluctant to allow proper breaks for doing it.

Pregnancy affects a female Coast Guard member’s ability to acquire qualifications and experiences that will advance careers, and some respondents told researchers that male colleagues get “frustrated at having to fill in when women are on parental leave.”

“Women described being accused of getting pregnant just to get out of duties or having to go underway,” the study states.

Women also reported retention being affected by “perceived unfairness of weight standards” that don’t consider body types and changes after childbirth.

“They noted as particularly problematic the use of the taping process as a measure of body fat to enforce weight standards,” the report states. “Furthermore, participants felt that standards were not aligned to job ability.”

Some focus groups were male, and both men and women members noted workload, assignment processes and opportunities in the civilian world as factors affecting retention.

Coast Guard women also reported feeling like they’d have to choose between the service and their families at some point in their careers.

Those with civilian spouses cited concerns about frequent moves and other issues regarding life in the Coast Guard.

While 7 percent of Coast Guard men are in dual-military marriages, about 52 percent of married Coast Guard women wed other members of the armed forces, the study found.

<https://www.navytimes.com/news/your-navy/2019/04/18/why-do-so-many-women-leave-the-coast-guard/>
Personnel data showed a plurality of enlisted women working in service or support ratings, fields with the fewest enlisted men.

Men were more likely to be afloat than women, and the afloat sector sees higher retention rates than ashore commands for both men and women, according to the study.

The study recommends the Coast Guard look into reforming several areas to better retain women.

Leaders should explore options for augmenting units when a female member goes on parental leave and consider ensuring that evaluation periods for promotions aren't adversely affected by a woman having a baby, the study states.

The service needs to "explore creative solutions" to berthing shortages for women at sea while ensuring female-specific policies are understood and disseminated by leaders.

Among other prescriptions, the report recommends the Coast Guard better track workforce data for certain gender-related categories so that future assessments can be based on strong sets of data.

Miscellaneous

Army Launches Registry for Troops, Families With Housing-Related Health Issues

By Patricia Kime

Military.com, April 16, 2019



File photo of housing at the U.S. Army base at Fort Benning, Georgia. (Army Photo)

The Army has launched a health registry to track service members and families with illnesses or conditions that may be related to living in substandard military housing.

Army Surgeon General Lt. Gen. Nadja West sent a letter last week to 900 Army families who have filed work requests for their homes over health and safety concerns. According to the memo, [first reported by Task & Purpose](#), U.S. Army Medical Command is establishing a "Housing Environmental Health Response Registry" and asking residents to respond.

"This registry is currently available to anyone and provides an opportunity to pursue further information and support regarding any health and safety concerns that may not have been addressed," West wrote in the letter, dated April 8.

The database will allow the Army to provide additional information on environmental health hazards in housing and assist residents in obtaining medical care for housing-related illnesses or concerns, according to West.

Military housing residents are invited to call the registry at any time. Callers will receive a questionnaire that lets them catalog information about their house or previous home, the type of housing and whether any family members experienced health problems related to the housing environment.

Army Public Health Center officials said the service wants to hear all residents' concerns "so we can make sure they are properly addressed."

"We have a team of trained professionals standing by to assist all callers," said John Resta, director of the U.S. Army Public Health Center. "They will document the caller's concerns and assist them with access to medical care if needed as well as referring any housing related concerns to the appropriate installation Department of Public Works."

Reports of mold and unsanitary conditions have plagued the Defense Department's privately managed base housing programs sporadically since 2011. In 2018, however, an extensive [investigation by Reuters revealed problems](#) that included widespread mold, faulty wiring, flaking lead-based paint and pest infestations.

An online survey by the [Military Family Advisory Network found that of 14,558 respondents, 56 percent said they had negative or very negative experiences](#) with their houses.

The scandal prompted the Army to inspect 100% of its privatized housing and pushed Congress to hold [oversight hearings](#) with military families, top military leaders and executives from the housing companies.

<https://www.military.com/daily-news/2019/04/16/army-launches-registry-troops-families-housing-related-health-issues.html>

Spouses who spoke at the hearing and those who contacted Military.com attribute health problems -- including respiratory illnesses like asthma and bronchitis, gastrointestinal conditions and seizures -- to conditions in their homes.

Army officials said any service member who has lived in an Army home is welcome to contact the registry.

"The notification letter is intended to ensure that previously identified residences with work orders are the highest priority and the occupants of those homes are aware of the creation of the registry," said Doug Holl, a spokesman for the Army Public Health Center. "The letter is not intended to isolate communication to only this audience."

The phone number for Army troops and families to call is (210) 295-3700 in the U.S. and overseas, DSN (312) 421-3700.

The Air Force and Navy did not respond by press time to questions about their outreach to affected families.

-- *Patricia Kime can be reached at Patricia.Kime@Military.com. Follow her on Twitter at [@patriciakime](https://twitter.com/patriciakime).*

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SEE ALSO:

['Don't Be Afraid of Taking on Someone Higher Up:' Military Advocate Reflects on Service](#) [*Military.com*, 2019-04-18]

[New registry and hotline aims to address your Army base housing woes](#) [*Military Times*, 2019-04-17]

[Army registry to target complaints in wake of housing crisis](#) [*Stars & Stripes*, 2019-04-16]

[The Army is launching a registry to track housing complaints, provide medical assistance for housing-related illnesses](#) [*Task & Purpose*, 2019-04-15]

Companies warn Trump: Census citizenship question could be costly

By Lauren Tara LaCapra

Reuters, April 17, 2019

NEW YORK - An array of U.S. companies have told the Trump administration that a citizenship question on the 2020 Census would harm business if it leads to an undercount of immigrants, undermining the data they use to place stores, plan inventory and plot ad campaigns.

Corporate executives, lobbyists and representatives from major industry groups like the Chamber of Commerce, the National Retail Federation and the International Council of Shopping Centers have raised the issue in meetings with government officials, according to more than a dozen sources familiar with the matter. Some meetings date back to 2017, when the administration was first mulling adding the question.

Industry officials continue to seek assurances from the Census Bureau and the Commerce Department that the question's impact on the quality of Census data will be minimized, according to the sources, who described the meetings on condition of anonymity.

The pressure reflects the economic importance of the decennial count of America's inhabitants.

The Census is used to draw voting districts and divide some \$800 billion in federal programs. For companies, it provides the most detailed picture available of consumer and labor markets. Under the administration's proposal, the Census would ask whether respondents are citizens of the United States for the first time in 70 years.

Corporate America finds itself in an unlikely alliance with immigrant advocacy groups that have sued to block the question on the basis it could scare immigrants out of participating, and therefore cost their communities funds and political representation. The Supreme Court plans to hear arguments on the case next week.

Clothes-maker Levi Strauss & Co, transport companies Uber Technologies Inc and Lyft Inc and media group Univision Communications Inc are among a handful of companies supporting that lawsuit. In court documents, they said the citizenship question "threatens to undermine (the) reliability of Census data and therefore substantially reduce its value to businesses."

Few other companies or trade groups, however, have been willing to discuss their opposition to the citizenship question publicly. In interviews, sources said they are only voicing opinions in private meetings, out of concern about a White House backlash.

Spokespeople for several major trade groups along with big name companies like Walmart Inc, Alphabet Inc's Google, Amazon.com Inc and many others either declined to offer a statement for this story or did not respond to requests for comment.

"While corporations and business groups are reluctant to enter the political turmoil surrounding the citizenship question on the 2020 Census, they nonetheless depend heavily on accurate Census data for their operations," said DeVere Kutscher, executive director of the Census Business Coalition, one of the main groups advocating on behalf of industry.

"As a result, they are focusing their efforts on what they can do to support a complete, secure, and accurate count, and are understandably concerned about the impact of any factor which could jeopardize that," he added.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-census-business-insight/companies-warn-trump-census-citizenship-question-could-be-costly-idUSKCN1RT17M>

Underscoring the political stakes, earlier this month President Donald Trump ripped “radical” Democrats opposed to the citizenship question on Twitter, saying a Census without such a question would be “meaningless.”

The Census Bureau has taken pains to ensure everyone is counted, Burton Reist, a longtime Census official who oversees decennial communications and stakeholder relations, said in an interview. In response to questions about the business community’s view on the citizenship question, a spokesman pointed Reuters to the Census Bureau’s official responses to stakeholders.

The Commerce Department, which houses the Census Bureau, provided a statement detailing the planned communications and outreach spending that will encourage people to respond. The budget is \$500 million, up from the \$376 million spent in 2010.

“The Census Bureau has long been planning the most robust marketing and outreach effort in Census history for the 2020 Census,” a spokesman said in a statement.

Documents released through litigation confirm that Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross met with dozens of interested parties, including business groups, to get their views before announcing his decision to add the citizenship question last year.

While many expressed concerns that the question would hurt response rates, Ross was not convinced, according to a March 2018 memo he wrote explaining his decision. He said data from the question would help the Department of Justice enforce provisions of the Voting Rights Act.

AN “MRI” FOR BUSINESS

The stakes are high in getting an accurate count.

Retailers like Walmart and Target Corp use Census data to decide where to open stores or distribution hubs, and what to stock on shelves.

Big banks like JPMorgan Chase & Co use the information similarly for branch strategy, and real-estate firms scrutinize the statistics to determine where to build homes and shopping centers.

TV networks like Univision, meanwhile, rely on the numbers to plan programming in local markets. And the Census is an important input for tech giants like Google when they create myriad data-based products, such as maps.

“You get households, number of people, number of bedrooms, income, gender, age, race, marital status — it’s almost like an MRI,” said Jack Kleinhenz, chief economist for the National Retail Federation. “And it all goes into assessing where and how to provide goods and services.”

Underscoring how the survey can drive major business decisions, Amazon’s 20-city search for a new headquarters location also had Census data at its core.

Having failed to convince the administration to drop the question, companies are now focused on programs to encourage people to participate in the Census to bolster data quality, sources said.

Efforts could include company-wide email messages to employees, prominently displaying a link to the Census on corporate web sites or setting up physical stations where customers can fill out the survey inside of stores or malls, the sources said.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-census-business-insight/companies-warn-trump-census-citizenship-question-could-be-costly-idUSKCN1RT17M>

Ahead of the 2010 Census, McDonald's Corp featured information on restaurant placemats, Walmart greeters handed out flyers, big retailers featured reminders on receipts and utility companies stuck inserts into electric, gas and water bills.

Such programs have been helpful in the past, said John Thompson, who spent nearly 30 years at the Census Bureau before leaving as director in 2017. But whether they can overcome the negative impact of the citizenship question is an open question.

“They’ve got a tougher row to hoe,” he said.

Reporting by Lauren Tara LaCapra in New York; Additional reporting by Nandita Bose in Washington; Kenneth Li, Herb Lash and Caroline Humer in New York; and Katie Paul and Jeffrey Dastin in San Francisco; Editing by Richard Valdmanis and Paul Thomasch

<https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2019/04/18/iraqi-translator-risked-his-life-on-raids-with-us-troops-now-hes-fighting-for-citizenship/>

Iraqi translator risked his life on raids with US troops. Now he's fighting for citizenship

By Kyle Rempfer

Military Times, April 18, 2019



Dhurgham Abdulkareem, left, and his friend, Haeder Alanbki, were Iraqi interpreters for U.S. troops. But Alanbki and Abdulkareem have faced an uphill battle to become U.S. citizens, allegedly including opaque processes and secretive screenings. (Courtesy Photo)

Dhurgham Abdulkareem spent two years as an interpreter for [U.S. troops in Iraq](#), risking his own life on raids with the Americans, helping to capture insurgents and providing key advice for coalition forces, according to the reconnaissance troop commander he worked under.

The 41-year-old was a translator for [7th Calvary Regiment](#), among other units, from March 2009 through May 2011, according to U.S. Army documents and Defense Department IDs provided to Military Times.

The area of Baghdad they were in was home to many Islamic extremist groups, Abdulkareem said. “They were fighting each other, and sometimes they were hitting us.”

The job allowed Abdulkareem to help the U.S., he said, but it put him in a perilous position. Extremists in Iraq would now consider him a turncoat, a spy for the Americans.

But after obtaining a Special Immigration Visa, given to Iraqis and Afghans who help U.S. forces, it looked like Abdulkareem would be safe in a new country. Then he began the citizenship process.

Abdulkareem participated in a year of interviews and background checks, in addition to the intense screening that allowed him to work with U.S. forces in combat and obtain a visa to first come to Florida in 2012. Finally, he thought he was going to become a citizen on April 5.

He was told by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services to appear at a Naturalization Oath Ceremony to complete the process. It was going to be a life-changing event.

When he got there, however, he was told something had come up and he would not become a citizen that day.

“I was angry and afraid,” Abdulkareem said of being pulled from the ceremony. “I didn’t lie about anything.”

Immigration officials told him that one of the conditions of the immigration process was not yet finished, but they couldn’t tell him which condition that was. Abdulkareem had an idea, though. This same situation happened to his friend, Haeder Alanbki, another former interpreter for U.S. troops in Iraq who helped Abdulkareem adjust to life in America in 2012.

“I am not a naive person,” Abdulkareem said. “I know what is happening, and I’ve seen a lot of people with this happen to them. ... This happened to Haeder step-by-step.”

‘National security concerns’

To even come to the U.S., translators must first earn a coveted Special Immigration Visa.

<https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2019/04/18/iraqi-translator-risked-his-life-on-raids-with-us-troops-now-hes-fighting-for-citizenship/>

The SIV program for Iraqis stopped accepting new applicants in 2014, but a backlog of almost 60,000 U.S.-affiliated Iraqis seeking to come to America exists, according to the nonprofit [Human Rights First](#). An October 2017 executive order by President Donald Trump and its accompanying “enhanced vetting procedures” has further disrupted the processing of those applicants, the nonprofit alleges.

To become a citizen, the U.S. government’s secretive [Controlled Application Review and Resolution Program](#), or CARRP, is allegedly a second obstacle, and the one that Abdulkareem and Alanbki think they hit.

CARRP is the subject of a [class-action lawsuit filed by the ACLU](#) and its affiliates. The plaintiffs say it has denied or delayed thousands of law-abiding people, many from Muslim-majority countries, from becoming citizens due to unspecified “national security concerns.”

It was started under the George W. Bush administration, and was continued during President Barack Obama’s tenure. The [ACLU alleged in 2017](#) that the Trump administration’s “extreme vetting” policy dramatically expands CARRP.

The program is very opaque, and applicants typically do not know whether they’ve been subject to its scrutiny, said Sameer Ahmed, an attorney at the ACLU of Southern California.

Haeder Alanbki filed a lawsuit in 2018 alleging that CARRP erroneously listed him as a national security threat.

Alanbki thinks Abdulkareem may have been blacklisted by the same mechanism.

Military Times contacted immigration officials in Florida and Washington, D.C., on April 16. The next day, Abdulkareem was finally called and told he would undergo another interview in about a week.

Abdulkareem has no criminal convictions, according to court records. He received two civil traffic citations in Seminole County in 2016, both of which were resolved. But getting placed on CARRP is allegedly easy for non-citizens.

CARRP automatically applies to anyone whose name is on the government’s Terrorist Watchlist, but the guidelines for including people are “vague and over broad,” according to the ACLU. The civil rights advocacy group alleges that simply being “associated” with someone already on the watchlist is enough to get a non-citizen included.

The nature of a translator’s job could be a complicating factor during citizenship applications, said Betsy Fisher, policy director of the International Refugee Assistance Project.

“Translators, frequently, as part of their job, are asked to deal directly with militants to negotiate ceasefires or do any kind of interactions,” Fisher said. “Those are the kind of interactions that made interpreters so essential, but in many cases lead to additional security checks because they’re under suspicion for interacting with militants.”

A USCIS spokesperson would not comment on Abdulkareem’s specific case, citing privacy restrictions, but said that “some applications take longer than others to process” and “all individuals are notified in writing as to the outcome of their determination.”

Alanbki said the same situation happened to him. After serving as an Iraqi interpreter, he came to the U.S. on a Special Immigration Visa. Alanbki then joined the Florida Army National Guard as an infantryman. That should have made becoming a citizen even easier, he said.

<https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2019/04/18/iraqi-translator-risked-his-life-on-raids-with-us-troops-now-hes-fighting-for-citizenship/>

But when he went to his Naturalization Oath Ceremony, he was pulled aside and told that he couldn't take part. No reason was given.



Haeder Al Anbki hugs his son Alasaad, during a naturalization ceremony in Orlando, Fla., Tuesday, July 31, 2018. Al Anbki, a former Iraqi translator and Florida National Guard member, sued a federal agency after he was pulled out of a naturalization ceremony last year without explanation. (Mike Schneider/AP)

“I shouldn't have been accepted into the Army if I have something on my background,” he said. After filing a lawsuit and bringing his story to the [Tampa Bay Times](#), Alanbki was finally made a citizen.

“That shows how hard it is to become a citizen,” Alanbki, who was shot and stabbed by al-Qaida insurgents while serving with U.S. troops in Fallujah, said. “It took two years ... more than \$5,000 for the lawyers, plus all the emotion I went through with my kids.”

Alanbki applied for his oldest child's citizenship last November. “Right now, I haven't received nothing. ... He's been in this country since he was eight months old. He's almost nine" years old.

Abdulkareem requested Florida Sen. Marco Rubio to make an inquiry into his case, but he can't afford a lawyer. Rubio's office declined to comment due to Privacy Act concerns.

He currently works as a delivery driver near Orlando, Florida. While he has received interest from head hunters to work as an interpreter for Defense Department contracts, he needs to obtain citizenship to begin the security clearance process, the recruiter for the position told Military Times.

But after all the background checks and interviews interpreters go through just to work alongside U.S. troops in war zones, he hoped it would be easier. After all, he can't go back home.

A spy in a maze

“I didn't plan to originally come to the United States. I'm a musician. I play piano," Abdulkareem said. “I didn't plan to even work with the U.S. Army, but I thought this would benefit everyone.”

Abdulkareem has a bachelor's degree in fine arts from Baghdad University. He was teaching some classes there when he began working for the Americans. He hoped he could make a little bit of money while using his education, which included the ability to speak a dozen Arabic dialects, to ease the intense sectarian division in Iraq at the time.

“I started liking the job," he said. But the job did not win him any friends.

Insurgents viewed interpreters like Abdulkareem as “the people who tried to challenge them," he said. “We are like a spy there.”

To arrive at and leave Camp Taji, where he worked with Americans, he “tried to go in a maze” to hide his movements and prevent his family and home from being targeted.

During his time working with U.S. forces, Abdulkareem spent many days and nights working with Blackhawk Troop from 1st Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment.

“[Abdulkareem] was critical in helping my troop target and capture many [sectarian] extremist elements of Hussanyiah, a city in the northeastern periphery of Baghdad,” U.S. Army Capt. John Dolan wrote in a letter on Abdulkareem's behalf during the immigration process.

<https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2019/04/18/iraqi-translator-risked-his-life-on-raids-with-us-troops-now-hes-fighting-for-citizenship/>

Abdulkareem said he participated in about 40 raids with U.S. troops. As an interpreter, he had to be unarmed, but Dolan wrote that Abdulkareem “displayed the same level of bravery and dedication to our mission in Iraq that I see in my own soldiers.”

“Like my soldiers, [Abdulkareem] has served the United States and its interests loyally and honorably, something that should never be forgotten,” U.S. Army 2nd. Lt. Gregory Moore said in a memorandum for the State Department to help Abdulkareem obtain a Special Immigration Visa in December 2009.

Abdulkareem obtained that visa in the summer of 2012 and came to Florida.

“It was so nice. It was raining a lot,” he said. “You start feeling safe. No one is going to hurt you or ask which sect of Muslim you are.”

Abdulkareem, who is divorced, hopes that once he attains citizenship, he can work to bring his daughter over, at least to visit. Currently, his ex-wife has custody of the child in Iraq.



Dhurgham Abdulkareem, far right, attends the citizenship ceremony for Haeder Alanbki, center. (Courtesy Photo)

He said he went back in 2015, the only time since coming to the U.S. That was to visit his sick mother, who has since passed away. Even that trip was risky, Abdulkareem said. He wouldn’t feel safe living there permanently and the only former Iraqis interpreters who choose to do so are too old to uproot their lives, he added.

Arriving in Florida reminded Abdulkareem of the years he spent in Kuwait in the 1980s as a young child.

“It’s kind of similar. It’s like a luxury area,” he said. “Except in Kuwait, anyone can kick you out. In the U.S., everyone has the same rights.”

Abdulkareem liked that about working with U.S. troops, as well. There was an underlying promise of equality.

“Even when I was in the camp of the U.S. Army everyone eats the same food: the specialist, the major and me,” Abdulkareem said.

“That’s the magnificent thing that you don’t find in a lot of places,” he added. “You feel that you have 100 percent of your rights. ... In other countries, you’re not going to find that.”

Proposal Would Randomize Air Force Fitness Testing Schedule

By Hope Hodge Seck

Military.com, April 15, 2019



A service member finishes the run portion of his Air Force physical fitness test Nov. 12 at Luke Air Force Base. (U.S. Air Force photo/Staff Sgt. Staci Miller)

Could the Air Force implement a new policy requiring troops to be ready for a physical fitness assessment at all times, pop-quiz style? It's one of several ideas proposed by the Air Force scientist instrumental in creating the current PFA.

Dr. Neal Baumgartner, chief of the Air Force Exercise Science Unit at Joint Base San Antonio-Randolph, Texas, told Military.com he's interested in having in place the most reliable assessment of fitness -- and reducing pain and frustration wherever possible. He's gathering feedback on proposals aimed at making testing less of an ordeal, including randomized testing, longer time between tests for the super-fit, and measures to reduce anxiety around test-time.

While Baumgartner said the current testing regime is generally working well, he's bothered by what he calls "five-and-a-half month wonders:" troops who don't worry about their health and fitness until their semi-annual PFA is right around the corner.

One proposal Baumgartner believes could reduce testing resources while discouraging airmen from "cramming" fitness ahead of a scheduled test is randomization -- administering a lower number of tests to the force at random, forcing troops to remain ready.

"Random testing has a big positive in that it enhances accountability," he said. "You never know when the policeman may come around the corner."

Baumgartner added that troops could be exempted from being called up for random testing after a deployment, or within a certain time frame after taking a previous test. The objective, he said, is not to catch more airmen out, but to discourage those who spend most of the year out of regulations and then take unhealthy steps to prepare at the last minute.

"[People say], 'I can't wait until the last two weeks of the year to start getting fit for the test,'" he said. "The goal is consistency."

That said, the Air Force does not appear to have a significant percentage of airmen at risk. As of the end of March 2019, 98.2% of the active-duty Air Force had a passing score on the fitness assessment, Capt. Carrie Volpe, an Air Force spokeswoman, told Military.com.

That means roughly 6,000 airmen, out of the active force of 332,800, did not pass, with more squeaking by on the margins.

Fewer Tests for PT Stars

For those at the other end of the spectrum, Baumgartner proposes letting top-scoring airmen go longer between PFAs. In feasibility testing is a proposal that would determine the time gap between fitness tests for airmen by their previous scores, with greater gaps associated with higher scores.

<https://www.military.com/daily-news/2019/04/15/pop-quiz-style-fitness-tests-airmen-air-force-evaluates-changes.html>

This initiative would further a 2010 Air Force policy change that allowed airmen who scored a 90 or above in all fitness components to take the PFA annually, rather than twice a year, as an incentive to maintain a high rate of fitness.

The thinking, he said, is that those who score in the highest percentages on the PFA are those who exhibit the healthy habits and behaviors the Air Force is looking for year-round; they don't need much evaluation or prodding. And even if a top-scorer did the unlikely, and started habitually gorging on Cheetos and beer immediately after finishing the PFA, Baumgartner reasons it would take some time before they found themselves at risk of failing the test.

"What if one of those 96 [scorers] decided to become a couch potato?" he said. "How long would it take before they went from a 96 to a failing level? It's probably going to take more than a year."

The current [Air Force fitness](#) assessment includes an abdominal circumference measurement, 1.5-mile times run, and times test to complete as many pushups and situps possible within one minute. All four components must be completed within a three-hour window in a single day.

"Hey Airman John Doe, because you score a 95, how about you don't have to test for another 18 months," Baumgartner said. "They're incentivized by that idea."

For those who do dread the test itself, Baumgartner is also proposing a change that may reduce testing anxiety.

He suggested that airmen might be able to take a pressure-free pretest, scheduled in advance with designated proctors, ahead of their set mandatory PFA. Failure of this pretest would have no negative consequences; but a passing score would count for that testing cycle.

"We know from the literature that when consequences are removed, people tend to do slightly better," Baumgartner said. "We bounced it off some airmen of all different scores, and the overall feedback is very positive."

If airmen schedule pretests in coordination with other PFAs, he said, it won't require any additional labor or resources to facilitate them.

Any improvements and changes, Baumgartner stressed, must be made with an eye to staying resource-neutral -- not increasing the time it takes to administer tests or the required equipment or manpower.

He also emphasized that the current test works as-is, although his office is always seeking improvements. Right now, they're assessing feasibility and collecting feedback on the various proposals.

"If a plane can fly from A to B and do its job, we're happy to consider one that can do it better," he said. "However, it doesn't mean the current plane is broken."

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Senators Join In Renewed Efforts to Give Feds Paid Family Leave

By Erich Wagner

Government Executive, April 12, 2019



Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, has joined in the latest effort to provide feds with paid family leave. (Susan Walsh/AP)

Democrats in the Senate introduced legislation this week that would provide federal employees paid time off if they need to care for themselves or family members.

The bill ([S. 1174](#)), introduced by Sens. Brian Schatz, D-Hawaii; Chris Van Hollen, D-Md.; Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio; and Jeff Merkley, D-Ore., mirrors bipartisan legislation already unveiled in the House.

The 2019 Federal Employees Paid Leave Act ([H.R. 1534](#)) would provide 12 weeks of paid time off for any federal worker who has, adopts or fosters a child; needs to care for an ill spouse, child or parent or attend to their own serious medical condition; or faces certain circumstances after a parent, child or spouse is placed on active military duty.

The House bill, [introduced](#) by Rep. Carolyn Maloney, D-N.Y., sought to up the ante after previous efforts to provide parental leave to federal employees failed to gain traction, most recently in 2018. Those bills had sought to provide paid leave only in the instance of a federal worker becoming a new parent, and before last year, they only sought six weeks of paid time off.

Still, Maloney acknowledged last month that the provisions of the bill could end up only being a “first offer” in congressional negotiations.

“We thought we’d start out optimistic,” Maloney said at a press conference announcing the bill’s introduction. “If they want to cut it back, they can. There are other types of emergencies in people’s lives.”

Currently, federal employees must use annual leave or unpaid time off through the Family and Medical Leave Act to take care of a new child or ailing family member.

Federal employee unions applauded the effort to ensure the bill gains traction in both chambers of Congress.

“Federal employees currently receive no paid time off for the birth, adoption or foster placement of a child, or to address other family medical emergencies,” American Federation of Government Employees National President J. David Cox said. “Because of this, every day there are hundreds—if not thousands—of federal workers facing the agonizing choice between paying the bills and meeting a critical family need: whether it’s bonding with a newly arrived child, caring for a seriously ill or injured family member, tending to their own health condition, or handling issues related to a family member’s current or recent military service.”

Since its introduction last month, the House version of the bill has yet to receive a committee vote, although its list of cosponsors has grown to 27, including Republicans.

SEE ALSO:

[Family leave legislation introduced in the Senate](#) [*Federal Times*, 2019-04-12]

Woman Dies in Apparent Suicide at Arlington National Cemetery

By Patricia Kime

Military.com, April 15, 2019



Arlington National Cemetery, shown May 17, 2013. (U.S. Coast Guard/Petty Officer 2nd Class Patrick Kelley)

A woman died by apparent suicide Monday at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia, just yards from Joint Base Henderson Hall-Fort Myer.

The death took place near the Confederate Memorial in the western portion of the cemetery, according to [a report by local news outlet](#)

[ARLnow](#).

Emergency responders from the base and Arlington County were called to the scene, according to reports.

"We are deeply saddened to learn about the apparent suicide in the cemetery earlier today," Arlington National Cemetery spokesman Timothy Lawson said Monday. "Our thoughts are with the family at this time."

Lawson could not provide information on the deceased and did not say whether the person was affiliated with the military or the cemetery. The location in which she died is easily accessible through Fort Myer, the home of the 3rd Infantry Regiment, The Old Guard -- the regiment that stands vigil at Arlington's Tomb of the Unknowns and serves as the U.S. Army's main ceremonial unit.

Visitors also can access the cemetery through the Visitors Center and, with proper identification, through a gate accessible within Fort Myer.

The suicide rate among Americans rose by 33 percent from 1999 to 2017 -- making suicide a "serious public health problem" that is the tenth leading cause of death in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

In the last week, [three veterans took their own lives on VA properties](#). On average, 20 veterans a day die by suicide in the United States.

In March, President Donald Trump [signed an executive order creating a Cabinet-level task force](#) to address the issue of suicide among veterans and service members. The Department of Veterans Affairs and the Pentagon also hold a conference every two years on suicide prevention. The next conference is scheduled for August. The location of the event has not been announced.

Lawson said cemetery officials are "supporting the family during their time of need."

"We thank our first responders for their quick reaction to the incident," he said.

Are you or a loved one in crisis? Call (800) 273-8255; press 1 if you are a veteran or service member. Help also can be reached by text messaging 838255.

Patricia Kime can be reached at Patricia.Kime@Military.com. Follow her on Twitter at [@patriciakime](https://twitter.com/patriciakime).

Misconduct

<https://www.newsobserver.com/news/local/article229319194.html>

African immigrants plead guilty in sham marriage conspiracy involving Fort Bragg soldiers

By Josh Shaffer

The News & Observer (Raleigh, N.C.), April 17, 2019

RALEIGH -- A pair of African immigrants pleaded guilty Tuesday [in a conspiracy to arrange sham weddings](#) between Fort Bragg soldiers and foreigners seeking legal status.

Sulemana Ibrahim, 39, came to the United States from Ghana in 2017 on a visitor's visa that he overstayed, said Assistant U.S. Attorney Gabriel Diaz.

Through a Fort Bragg soldier also named in the indictment, Sgt. Edward Khumi Anguah, he met a female Army private willing to marry him in exchange for \$1,250 and some furniture. Ibrahim would get his green card; the private would get housing benefits available only to married soldiers.

"Anguah stated that he had been involved with numerous sham marriages previously and that he knew what he was doing," the indictment said. He was assisted by a fellow Ghanaian, Army Spc. Ahmid Muhammed Murtada, also named in the indictment.

The fraud was uncovered, court documents said, when the private was discovered in a sexual relationship with another man despite being married to Ibrahim.

The second defendant Kwaphoom Hoomkwap, 31, came to Fayetteville from New York after overstaying his 2008 student visa from Nigeria, said his attorney, Christian Dysart, in federal court.

In January, Anguah unwittingly met with an undercover agent in a Starbucks near Fort Bragg and set up another marriage to Hoomkwap, who drove down from New York and met the agent at the Cumberland County Courthouse, bringing \$6,000.

He was arrested shortly afterward.

U.S. District Court Judge Terrence Boyle noted Hoomkwap's visa dated to 2008.

"This is 2019," Boyle said. "He was going to get an extended PhD?"

The federal Immigration and Nationality Act says that foreign nationals can marry U.S. citizens and become citizens themselves "if the marriage was entered into in good faith; and the United States citizen did not enter into the marriage in exchange for something of value, such as money."

Both will be sentenced in 30 days. Their attorneys said their punishment appears to fall into the four- to 10-month range. Immigration issues will be dealt with separately.

Attorney: Coast Guard officer isn't facing terrorism charges

By Michael Kunzelman

The Associated Press, April 16, 2019



This image provided by the U.S. District Court in Maryland shows a photo of firearms and ammunition that was in the motion for detention pending trial in the case against Christopher Paul Hasson. The Coast Guard officer accused of stockpiling guns and compiling a hit list of prominent Democrats and network TV journalists is seeking his release from federal custody since prosecutors haven't charged him with any terrorism-related offenses. Hasson has remained in custody since his Feb. 15, 2019

arrest and subsequent indictment in Maryland on firearms and drug charges. (U.S. District Court via AP)

COLLEGE PARK, Md. (AP) — A Coast Guard lieutenant accused of stockpiling guns and compiling a hit list of prominent Democrats and network TV journalists is seeking his release from federal custody since prosecutors haven't charged him with any terrorism-related offenses.

Christopher Hasson, 49, has remained in custody since his Feb. 15 arrest and subsequent indictment in Maryland on firearms and drug charges. Hasson's attorney, Liz Oyer, wrote in a court filing Monday that prosecutors recently disclosed that they don't expect to seek any additional charges.

In a February court filing, prosecutors called Hasson a "domestic terrorist" and said he "intends to murder innocent civilians on a scale rarely seen in this country." They also said he is a self-described white nationalist who espoused extremist views for years and drafted an email in which he said he was "dreaming of a way to kill almost every last person on the earth."

During a Feb. 21 detention hearing, U.S. Magistrate Judge Charles Day agreed to keep Hasson held in custody but said he was willing to revisit his decision if prosecutors didn't bring more serious charges within two weeks. Oyer, an assistant federal public defender, is asking Judge Day to schedule another detention hearing for Hasson "at the earliest agreeable date for all parties."

Oyer said her client's alleged domestic terrorism activities were "the heart of the government's case for detention." A prosecutor wrote in the February court filing that the drug and firearms charges were the "proverbial tip of the iceberg."

"No other crimes have been charged," Oyer wrote. "Moreover, during a recent status call, government counsel advised the Court and defense counsel that it does not expect to file a superseding indictment in this matter."

Prosecutors haven't responded in writing to Oyer's request. Marcia Murphy, a spokeswoman for U.S. Attorney Robert Hur's office, declined to comment.

Hasson pleaded not guilty last month to charges of illegal possession of firearm silencers, possession of firearms by a drug addict and unlawful user, and possession of a controlled substance. He faces a maximum of 31 years in prison if convicted of all four counts in his indictment.

Investigators found 15 guns, including seven rifles, and over 1,000 rounds of ammunition at Hasson's basement apartment in Silver Spring, Maryland, prosecutors said. Hasson's Feb. 27 indictment also accuses him of illegal possession of tramadol, an opioid painkiller.

Prosecutors claim Hasson drew up what appeared to be a computer-spreadsheet hit list that included House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer and presidential hopefuls Sens. Kirsten

<https://www.apnews.com/8ea1453d28ca4a278c022d31b68fb8f2>

Gillibrand, Elizabeth Warren, Cory Booker and Kamala Harris. Several network TV journalists — MSNBC's Chris Hayes and Joe Scarborough and CNN's Chris Cuomo and Van Jones — also were mentioned.

A different public defender has accused prosecutors of making inflammatory accusations against Hasson without providing evidence to back them up.

Hasson, a former Marine, worked at Coast Guard headquarters in Washington on a program to acquire advanced new cutters for the agency. A Coast Guard spokesman has said Hasson will remain on active duty until the case against him is resolved.

Coast Guard delivers documents on harassment, bullying claims at academy

By Julia Bergman

The Day (New London, Conn.), April 11, 2019

The Coast Guard this week turned over more than a thousand pages of documents in response to a congressional inquiry into how the service has handled complaints of harassment and bullying at the Coast Guard Academy.

The heads of the House committees on Homeland Security and Oversight and Government Reform and other congressional lawmakers had indicated they were prepared to issue a subpoena if the documents weren't produced by the close of business Tuesday. The Coast Guard complied with the deadline.

U.S. Rep. Bennie Thompson, D-Mississippi, who chairs the Homeland Security committee, said earlier this week that he was "frustrated" and "disappointed" by the Coast Guard and Department of Homeland Security "stonewalling" efforts by both committees to conduct oversight of the academy.

"As chairman of this committee, I will not stand for misconduct within any department nor will I stand for anything less than full transparency when this committee attempts to carry out its oversight responsibilities," Thompson said.

His comments came Tuesday at a hearing of the Transportation and Maritime Security Subcommittee at which the heads of the Transportation Security Administration and the Coast Guard were testifying.

Adm. Karl Schultz, the Coast Guard commandant, said the service would be meeting the deadline and would be delivering "new information on nine inquiries and investigations" and more than 450 pages of emails featuring "minimal redactions." He did not go into further detail.

"We continue to work with the Department (of Homeland Security) and the Office of General Counsel to be as responsive as possible," Schultz said.

In his remarks, Thompson also referenced the case of a black, female officer at the academy who reported being subjected to harassment and a hostile work environment. An inspector general's report found she [was retaliated against](#) after making the complaints. Schultz said the Coast Guard is acting on all of the recommendations in the report, including updating its civil rights manual, and is close to rolling out new training to managers, one of the recommendations. He also said the officer's supervisor, the primary source of her complaints, "will be departing the service in September."

Staff from the Homeland Security and the Oversight and Government Reform committees, and the office of U.S. Rep. Joe Courtney, D-2nd District, are just starting to review the documents from the Coast Guard.

"This is not a parlor game in terms of getting documents requested. They are going to definitely be acting on it and there may be additional documents coming, that was basically implied in the cover letter" from the Coast Guard, Courtney said by phone Thursday.

An area of contention is likely to be the Coast Guard's assertion that the documents may not be released publicly without its consent.

"This discussion ideally will be wider than just the halls of Congress," Courtney said.

The request for documents dates back to last summer, when Thompson, Courtney and U.S. Rep. Elijah Cummings, D-Md., chair of the Committee on Government and Oversight Reform, troubled by an

<https://www.theday.com/military-news/20190411/coast-guard-delivers-documents-on-harassment-bullying-claims-at-academy>

institutional assessment showing disparities for minority students at the academy and the removal of a department head for bullying, sent a letter to Schultz.

They asked to review all documents relating to allegations of harassment or bullying made by any student or faculty member at the academy during the past three years, the results of any investigations into these allegations and the terms of any settlements reached. Connecticut's Sens. Richard Blumenthal and Chris Murphy, both Democrats, made a similar request. Separately, the inspector general also is looking into how allegations of discrimination at the academy have been handled.

The Coast Guard previously released about 70 pages of documents, but the lawmakers had said they were limited in scope and featured heavy redactions.

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Corps air wing support site commander sentenced for explicit text messages to enlisted Marines

By Shawn Snow

Marine Corps Times, April 12, 2019



U.S. Marines from Marine Wing Support Squadron 471 Airfield Rescue and Fire Fighting platoon put out a simulated aircraft fire during Integrated Training Exercise 4-14 aboard the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Twentynine Palms, Calif., June 14, 2014. (Marine Corps)

A command investigation detailed that a former site commander for Marine Wing Support Squadron 471, a reserve unit headquartered in Minnesota, sent inappropriate and sexually explicit text messages using his government-issued phone to at least three enlisted Marines.

The results of command investigation into misconduct by Maj. William E. Hernandez were handed over to Naval Criminal Investigative Service and the 4th [Marine Aircraft Wing](#) where it resulted in a December 2018 general court-martial conviction.

Hernandez was found guilty of violating general regulations, obstruction of justice and conduct unbecoming of an officer and gentleman, and was sentenced to 18 months of confinement and a \$5,000 fine.

Hernandez was the site commander for a ground aviation support unit known as MWSS-471 headquartered out of Minneapolis, Minnesota, where he oversaw active and active reserve Marines. He was appointed to the position on Sept. 22, 2016, according to 1st Lt. Kristine Racicot, a spokeswoman for Marine Forces Reserve.

He was removed from that position around Aug. 21, 2017, after an enlisted Marine came forward with allegations of the inappropriate text messages and an equal opportunity complaint was filed against the commander.

An investigation was launched, and text messages sent by Hernandez from his government phone were retrieved by Marine Corps Cyber Operations Group, according to the investigation.

The command investigation, obtained by Marine Corps Times via Freedom of Information Act request detailed that Hernandez “communicated intent” to “pursue, if consenting, a physical/sexual type of relationship” with the enlisted Marines.

The inappropriate messages sent from Hernandez’s government issued phone spanned Nov. 2016–July 2017, and included explicit sexual overtures and potential currying of favoritism and awards stemming from it.

A series of exchanges resulted in at least one occasion of oral sex in Hernandez’s office, according to the investigation.

A message sent by Hernandez on May 20, 2017, reads “Don’t want you to get all wet. Lol.” The reply message stated, “You sure?” Hernandez responded, “Not right now. ;).”

<https://www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/your-marine-corps/2019/04/12/corps-air-wing-support-site-commander-sentenced-for-explicit-text-messages-to-enlisted-marines/>

That same day an unidentified person, whose name was redacted in the investigation, “asks for assistance with going on a deployment in order to earn a ribbon before EAS [end of active service],” the investigation detailed.

On June 15, 2017, an unidentified person, whose name was also redacted in the investigation, texted Hernandez: “???? I get recognized enough for an award or promotion would be nice lol.”

Hernandez replied, “awards are not out of the question” while also mentioning a Certificate of Commendation or Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal and assured the person that they would get an award.

Other inappropriate messages received by an unidentified person from Hernandez include: “I should have locked myself in there (the armory) with you. Lol.” “Those hips don’t Lie.” “But I am sure you can shake them.”

Fraternization with the enlisted Marines was not the only impropriety uncovered from the investigation and recovered text messages.

Hernandez also sought out services from Craigslist personal advertisements.

In January 2017 Hernandez messaged approximately 20 [escorts](#) in the Dallas/Fort Worth area “inquiring about prices, availability, and services, they provided,” the investigation detailed.

“Major Hernandez took advantage of his authoritative position to initiate inappropriate text communications with at least three enlisted Marines in his unit,” the investigation reads.

<https://www.navytimes.com/news/your-navy/2019/04/11/in-the-aftermath-of-the-fitzgerald-collision-months-of-legal-fury-end-in-a-whimper/>

In the aftermath of the Fitzgerald collision, months of legal fury end in a whimper

By Geoff Ziezulewicz

Navy Times, April 11, 2019



The Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer Fitzgerald was heavily damaged during a June 17, 2017 collision with a merchant vessel. (Navy)

Nearly two years after the guided-missile destroyer [Fitzgerald's](#) fatal collision with a merchant vessel, the Navy's journey to justice fizzled out late Wednesday with an unsigned Navy press release announcing charges were being dropped.

For months, the Washington Navy Yard had been preparing for a courtroom showdown between military prosecutors and attorneys defending the Fitz's commanding officer, [Cmdr. Bryce Benson](#), and one of his junior subordinates, [Lt. Natalie Combs](#)

But a Navy overseen by outgoing [Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson](#) had telegraphed its legal surrender with a series of messages sent in his name to the families of the seven American sailors drowned in the June 17, 2017 disaster.

They began telling Navy Times that the admiral's note indicated the sea service would swap criminal charges for administrative punishment, issuing letters of censure to Benson and Combs for their alleged contributions to the calamity.

The messages indicated "the cases are being dismissed for legal reasons that impede the continued prosecution of either officer" but the Navy remains "committed to keeping faith with you through transparency and open communication."

"Your loved ones did not die in vain; their legacy lives on in the form of a stronger and more capable Navy," the messages read.

Both cases had been plagued by a series of military missteps by Richardson, his top aide and nominated replacement [Vice Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Bill Moran](#), as well as other senior leaders that damaged the cases against the two defendants and ultimately made trying them in a Navy courtroom a challenge.

Judges, defense lawyers and outside legal experts dissecting the public utterances of Richardson and fellow senior leaders for months have raised concerns that [unlawful command influence](#), or UCI, tainted the cases against Benson and Combs and made it impossible for them to get a fair trial.

Dubbed the "mortal enemy of military justice," UCI occurs when superiors utter words or take actions that coerce the outcome of courts-martial, jeopardize the appellate process or undermine public confidence in the armed forces by appearing to tip the scales of justice.

The military judge in Benson's trial ruled in December that statements by Richardson and Moran constituted apparent UCI.

Combs' attorneys eagerly awaited a similar finding in the junior officer's trial.

<https://www.navytimes.com/news/your-navy/2019/04/11/in-the-aftermath-of-the-fitzgerald-collision-months-of-legal-fury-end-in-a-whimper/>

A Navy official said Thursday night that the UCI motions in the cases did not affect leadership's decision to dismiss the charges.

Earlier this year, [Adm. Frank Caldwell](#) — Richardson's four-star staffer tasked with meting out justice in the Fitzgerald case — was disqualified as the convening authority in Benson's prosecution because the judge ruled he failed to remain impartial.

The Navy's chief information officer, [Capt. Greg Hicks](#), also ordered an opinion piece regarding blame for the Fitz collision to be shared on the Navy's social media accounts in February, and it later emerged that the same broadside by a retired officer was distributed in CNO Richardson's online newsletter.

Page after page of public statements made by senior Navy leaders filled motions to dismiss both cases, according to reams of filings provided to Navy Times.

"It's just really troubling," said Lawrence Brennan, a retired Navy captain, military attorney and law school instructor. "Somebody needed to go in and give the lecture to the CNO and the Vice Chief to say, 'Thou shalt not open your mouth about this case.'"

On Thursday, Benson's attorney, Lt. Cmdr. Justin Henderson, fired a broadside directly at the brass.

"Despite a relentless messaging campaign insisting ships' commanding officers are strictly liable for all operational risks, the Navy never tested that concept in court. For good reason: it's untenable, legally and factually," Henderson said in a statement emailed to Navy Times.

To [David Sheldon](#), Combs' civilian attorney, the Navy was attempting to criminalize systemic problems in the Japan-based 7th Fleet by targeting members of the Fitzgerald crew.

Instead of indicting the policies and maintenance woes that set the ship's tactical action officer up to fail, Sheldon believes the Navy's leaders made Combs a scapegoat to be prosecuted, with the CNO leading a parade of admirals who used their words like a cudgel against officers of far more junior rank.

Sheldon singled out the CNO's stream of public comments as an "affront to the military justice system."

"Lt. Combs was not responsible for setting an operational tempo that undercut staffing and training, that allowed for the ship to move with 'degraded' radar and that put sailors at extreme risk," he said in a statement emailed to Navy Times.

"No, that responsibility lies not with this junior officer, but on Navy leadership at the highest levels. That same leadership, by commenting publicly and repeatedly, undercut Lt. Combs' absolute right to a fair trial. The exercise of unlawful command influence is, sadly, not unusual when it comes to Navy leadership."

Sheldon called on Congress to exercise its oversight authority "because, clearly, the Navy does not get it."

"It has failed to come to grips with the reality of an operational tempo that is compromising mission readiness," he said. "Instead, it seeks to blame — in the most underhanded way — a junior officer whose only crime was to follow her orders and serve in an environment that was fundamentally compromised."

Released Thursday, [Navy Secretary Richard Spencer's letter to Benson](#) alleges that his "ineffective leadership and poor judgment" helped to cause his warship to collide with the Philippine-flagged container vessel MV ACX Crystal off the coast of Japan.

SECNAV notes that Benson retired to his cabin before the disaster, leaving "an inexperienced watch team, lacking in confidence, and technical competence," to transit high-traffic waters at night.

<https://www.navytimes.com/news/your-navy/2019/04/11/in-the-aftermath-of-the-fitzgerald-collision-months-of-legal-fury-end-in-a-whimper/>

“Your lack of presence on the bridge in a challenging operating environment, combined with the inexperience, incompetency and lack of cohesion on your watch team — a watch team you approved — failed to meet your obligations as Commanding Officer,” the letter states.

“You further aggravated your poor decisions by failing to implement any mitigation measures, such as ordering the Executive Officer or Navigator to supervise the team on the bridge in your absence.”

Spencer’s letter also faults Benson for failing to properly manage the crew’s fatigue or revise standing orders and procedures “to account for the operational circumstances and degraded equipment” on the Fitzgerald.

“As the Commanding Officer, you were singularly responsible for assessing and balancing risk,” the reprimand states.

[Combs’ censure letter](#) faults her for “ineffective communication and failure to make recommendations to the bridge watch team” as “significant contributing factors” in the collision.

“Simply stated, you and your team failed to maintain a complete and accurate tactical picture, failed to identify and track several ships with increasingly close range and proximity, and failed to communicate in any effective manner with the bridge watch team,” the letter states.

Spencer also wrote that Combs contributed to “a culture of complacency” aboard the ship, as well as “a dangerous level of informality,” among other shortcomings.

The “lax culture” that she “helped propagate contributed to the collision and the deaths” of the seven sailors, according to the reprimand.

A scathing internal Navy report completed shortly after the Fitzgerald disaster painted a much larger and more complicated picture of the doomed destroyer and its leadership team on the eve of the collision.

Provided to Navy Times after senior leaders attempted to keep the report secret for more than a year, it found that [the Fitzgerald was underway almost constantly](#) in early 2017, shortly after the warship left a maintenance session in Japan — a finding echoed by months of sworn testimony by past and present crew members in the cases.

That punishing optempo helped to prevent a green crew from developing the cohesion and training necessary to succeed and contributed to maintenance woes on critical components necessary to navigating bustling seaways at night.

The probe revealed Fitz’s watchstanders on the night of the collision were exhausted after a day of complex training and other crew members relied on equipment in various stages of decrepitude.

Investigators found [broken radar buttons](#) covered with masking tape and navigation consoles on the bridge in disrepair.

Distrust had grown between the bridge watchstanders and Combs’ team in the Combat Information Center, the Fitz’s electronic nerve center in the bowels of the destroyer, the report revealed.

It was so severe that Lt. j.g. Sarah Coppock, the lead officer on the bridge, never communicated with the CIC throughout the shift, something investigators found unfathomable.

The letters of censure issued to Benson and Combs likely will end their Navy careers, Brennan said.

“It should be career terminating,” he said. “It would be difficult to expect anybody to get promoted with those (in their records).”

<https://www.navytimes.com/news/your-navy/2019/04/11/in-the-aftermath-of-the-fitzgerald-collision-months-of-legal-fury-end-in-a-whimper/>

Other officers charged in the Fitzgerald disaster and a similar collision involving the sister destroyer John S. McCain and the Liberian-flagged container ship Alnic MC on Aug. 21, 2017, near Singapore, accepted plea deals.

But Benson waived a preliminary Article 32 hearing and took his case straight to court-martial proceedings. Attorney Henderson told Navy Times they wanted the facts to be made public.

The Article 32 hearing officer for Combs' case recommended that criminal charges not be filed against her, but Caldwell overrode his findings, according to her attorney Sheldon.

Like Benson, she didn't buckle to the brass. She hired an attorney and vowed to fight.

"To be clear, Lt. Combs was fully prepared to defend and defeat the charges brought against her," Sheldon told Navy Times.

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SEE ALSO:

[Some families of the Fitzgerald seven frustrated by decision to drop criminal charges](#) [*Navy Times*, 2019-04-12]

[How the Navy's Top Commander Botched the Highest-Profile Investigation in Years](#) [*ProPublica*, 2019-04-11]

Lejeune's 2nd Marine Division mandates 'daily routine,' citing poor discipline and long hair

By Shawn Snow

Marine Corps Times, April 18, 2019



Marines with 3rd Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, fire an 81mm mortar system at Range 630 during Integrated Training Exercise 3-18 aboard the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center, Twentynine Palms, California, April 30, 2018. (Lance Cpl. William Chockey/ Marine Corps)

The commander of the [2nd Marine Division](#), Maj. Gen. David J. Furness, has pushed out a policy letter detailing a new “basic daily routine” across the division citing a “significant decline” in discipline among Marines and sailors headquartered at the Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, base.

The policy letter, dated April 16, was posted to the social media accounts of the popular Marine comic strip known as [Terminal Lance](#).

The daily routine, which starts with morning reveille at 5:30 a.m. and ends with 4:45 p.m. liberty, also includes a breakdown of times for hygiene, fitness, chow and daily unit tasks, which many Marines have decried on social media as micromanagement, a form of group punishment and a detriment to future retention.

“We have allowed Marines and Sailors to walk around with long hair, nonexistent or poor shaves, unserviceable boots and utilities and improper civilian attire,” the policy reads. “There are weeds growing around our buildings and work spaces and trash everywhere but the dumpsters where it belongs.”

The letter asks for Marines and units within the division to adhere to a new daily routine to promote “habits of thought and action” and overall attention to detail, traits that foster “mutual trust” and efficiency in battle.

But shaves and haircuts may be the least of the 2nd Marine Division’s discipline problems.

A mysterious fire that caused more than \$100,000 dollars in damages at the headquarters for [1st Battalion, 6th Marines](#), is still under investigation by Naval Criminal Investigative Service.

While the cause of the fire is still unknown, some Marines have speculated that the fire was set by Marines within the unit upset with the operation’s tempo of field exercises.

NCIS has characterized the blaze, which torched an office and years of command memorabilia, as of a “suspicious nature” in a bulletin seeking tips.

Marines have taken to social media to lament about group punishment and its impact on morale and retention following the posting of the new order.

But, the daily schedule posted in the policy is not too far removed from what some units across the Corps do every day. The schedule provides only a generic breakdown. It also notes that some units may have to deviate from the schedule.

However, a divisionwide routine is also not all that common either. Organization of daily tasks and schedules is usually left up to individual units from platoons, companies or battalions. For many Marines, a

<https://www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/your-marine-corps/2019/04/18/lejeunes-2nd-marine-division-mandates-daily-routine-citing-poor-discipline-and-long-hair/>

mandated daily routine that goes as far as to allot time for hygiene usually only occurs in recruit training or at various school houses.

The daily routine described in the policy lays out what a typical day may look like in the Corps, but it is not often the case that units adhere to such a strict regimented schedule in the fleet. For some units, actual morning and evening formations are less frequent and are viewed as more informal gatherings.

Some comments argued the daily routine was a symptom of the Corps moving toward a peacetime force, where fewer Marines are deployed and engaged in combat operations overseas.

Other Marines complained that the policy could result in hazing with Marine corporals and sergeants being pressured to wake Marines earlier than the allotted reveille time. Some worried they might get punished for enforcing the new policy.

The policy letter specifically calls out leaders to not be “apprehensive in the correction” of Marines and sailors, and that leaders would have “full support” of the division in enforcing the order. The letter also warns that Marines will be “held accountable” for Marines and sailors under their watch and command.

Some on social media supported the new policy, commenting that the commanding general’s decision was likely the result of a failure of Marine noncommissioned officers to correct discipline issues within the ranks.

“This is basic sh*t. 18 years and this is how it’s ALWAYS been...I’ve served in all 3 divisions and this is the standard. I don’t get all the hate,” one person commented on Facebook.

“What y’all are missing though is that the CG [commanding general] just mandated liberty at 1645. There are a few grunt battalions that are gonna have a hard time meeting that deadline,” another person noted.

Man Arrested With Gas Cans and Lighters at St. Patrick's Cathedral Is a Philosophy Teacher

Marc Lamparello, 37, was also arrested on Monday at a cathedral in New Jersey and had just bought a one-way ticket to Rome.

By Ali Watkins and Ali Winston

The New York Times, April 18, 2019



Marc Lamparello leaving the Midtown North Precinct in Manhattan on Thursday. The police had arrested Mr. Lamparello on Wednesday night. (Credit: Kevin Hagen for The New York Times)

Marc Lamparello's story seemed off from the start.

It was nearly 8 p.m. on Wednesday when Mr. Lamparello, a 37-year-old graduate student and lecturer on philosophy, entered St. Patrick's Cathedral in Midtown Manhattan toting two gasoline cans, lighter fluid and lighters, the police said.

Hours before, he had purchased a \$2,800, one-way plane ticket to Rome, which was set to depart the next day.

Mr. Lamparello was about 20 feet into the church when ushers approached him and said he could not be inside the building with the cans of gasoline, the police said. He explained that he was trying to take a shortcut through the iconic sanctuary to reach his van, which he claimed had run out of gas.

Mr. Lamparello's gold minivan, though, turned out not to be out of fuel, the police said, and a stroll through St. Patrick's was hardly a shortcut.

Denied entry, Mr. Lamparello left the sanctuary, sloshing gasoline on the floor as he went, the police said. He was stopped outside the church by police officers, who noticed the twin gas cans.

The incident came just before Easter and two days after a devastating fire tore through the Cathedral of Notre-Dame in Paris.

Mr. Lamparello, who has addresses in New Jersey and in Brooklyn, was taken into custody Wednesday night and questioned by detectives, including officers from the Police Department's intelligence division and the Joint Terrorism Task Force. He was being held on charges of attempted arson and reckless endangerment, senior police officials said.

But on Thursday afternoon, he was transported from the Midtown North Precinct to Bellevue Hospital Center for a psychiatric evaluation, the police said, and it remained unclear when he would appear in court.

It was the second church-related arrest this week for Mr. Lamparello. On Monday night, he was arrested inside Newark's Sacred Heart Cathedral after he refused to leave the sanctuary. He told officers the church was a house of God and should be open at all hours before throwing himself on the floor and vowing to stay.

"Said, 'If you want me to leave, you'll have to take me out in handcuffs,'" Armando B. Fontoura, the Essex County sheriff, said. He described Mr. Lamparello as "very respectful," if obstinate.

Mr. Lamparello was taken to a police station that evening and charged with resisting arrest, defiant trespassing and interfering with the administration of law.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/18/nyregion/st-patricks-cathedral-marc-lamparello.html>

He was evaluated by emergency medical technicians, who found nothing wrong with him, Sheriff Fontoura said. His mother escorted him that night from the precinct to his parents' home in Hasbrouck Heights, N.J., he said.

It remains unclear what may have driven Mr. Lamparello to go to St. Patrick's Cathedral on Wednesday. Police officials would not say what, if any, motive he disclosed to officers.

"There doesn't appear to be any connection to a terror group," said John Miller, the Police Department's deputy commissioner of intelligence and counterterrorism.

Mr. Lamparello is a doctoral candidate in philosophy at the City University of New York. His mother told the New Jersey authorities he had an apartment in New York City.



Mr. Lamparello carried two gas cans, two bottles of lighter fluid and two lighters into St. Patrick's Cathedral, the police said. (Credit: New York Police Department)

He was a 2004 graduate of Boston College and was listed as teaching courses at Brooklyn College this spring. The police said Mr. Lamparello also taught at Seton Hall University in New Jersey.

He had written and published a book, "Reason and Counterpoint," in 2016. His online biography on Amazon.com suggests an interest in questions of religion and higher powers; it said he was working on a book-length project that would wrestle with the existence of God.

At least one of the courses he has taught, Introduction to the Problems of Philosophy, touched on religion.

The course included "such topics as the nature and scope of knowledge, meaning and verification, the existence of God, determinism and free will, the mind-body problem, and the nature of moral judgments," according to an [online course description](#) for Brooklyn College.

Michael Gold contributed reporting. Susan C. Beachy contributed research.

SEE ALSO:

[Man in custody after trying to enter St. Patrick's Cathedral with gasoline and lighters](#) [*The Washington Post*, 2019-04-18]

[A man was arrested with gas cans and lighters at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York](#) [*CNN*, 2019-04-18]

[Man arrested with gasoline, lighter fluid at New York's St. Patrick's Cathedral days after Notre Dame fire](#) [*The Hill*, 2019-04-18]

[Man caught walking into New York cathedral with full gasoline cans, lighters: police](#) [*Reuters*, 2019-04-17]

‘Mob violence’: Police arrest one in potential hate crime after transgender woman beaten on video

By Antonia Noori Farzan

The Washington Post, April 15, 2019



Edward Thomas, left, was arrested on Sunday night in connection with a violent assault that took place in Dallas on Friday and was captured on video. (Dallas County Jail / Facebook)

A crowd gathers outside an apartment complex south of downtown Dallas, nervously watching and waiting. Before long, there are screams: A man in a long-sleeved white shirt and heavy-duty gloves appears to throw a slender, pink-haired woman to the ground, then pummels her over and over again as she writhes on the concrete. Dressed only in a crop top and skimpy shorts, she tries to shield her face as others join in and take turns kicking her.

To Dallas Mayor Mike Rawlings (D), and many others who watched [the footage](#) that went viral on social media late last week, the brutal beating looked like “[mob violence](#)” against a transgender woman.

“Those who did this do not represent how Dallasites feel about our thriving LGBTQ community,” Rawlings said in a [statement](#) on Saturday. “We will not stand for this kind of behavior.”

Authorities announced on Sunday night that they had arrested Edward Thomas, 29, for his role in the violent daytime attack, which has been flagged as a possible hate crime. The violent altercation began after the victim was involved in a minor traffic accident at the apartment complex on Friday, a [statement](#) from the Dallas Police Department said. During a verbal argument over the accident, a man began assaulting her, and several other suspects joined in.

The victim sustained serious bodily injuries, according to officials. Witnesses transported her to a hospital, where she was interviewed by police late Friday. She reportedly told them that she knew the people who attacked her, and that they had used homophobic slurs during the assault.

Police haven’t said whether Thomas was the man who initiated the attack or one of the individuals who got involved later on. It’s also unclear whether more arrests could be forthcoming. Online records indicate that he is being held in the Dallas County Jail, and that his bond has not yet been set. Officials have not yet said what charges he faces. As [BuzzFeed News](#) pointed out, gender identity is not covered by Texas’ hate crime statutes, but federal law allows prosecutors to seek enhanced penalties for violence that targets transgender people.

Relatives have told [local news outlets](#) that the victim was 23-year-old Muhlaysia Booker. She did not respond to a request for comment late Sunday night, but thanked supporters in a Facebook post on Saturday. That same day, a family member who wasn’t identified by [WFAA](#) told the station that she was home from the hospital and recovering with close friends. She had reportedly suffered from facial fractures and had her arm in a sling.

The three-minute video that was posted on [Facebook](#) and [YouTube](#) on Friday begins by showing Booker standing in the middle of an intersection at the apartment complex as a large number of people look on. She appears to be addressing the crowd, but her words are inaudible.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2019/04/15/mob-violence-police-arrest-one-potential-hate-crime-after-transgender-woman-beaten-video/>

The video then flips to show the man in the white shirt posing with a man who is filming. “Knock ‘em out,” the man in the white shirt appears to say, before the camera flips around again to show the crowd milling around. A few seconds later, he can be seen throwing Booker to the ground and punching her as she tries to protect her face from his blows.

Booker, whose shoes have fallen off, gets up and tries to stagger away. The man appears to follow her, swinging punches at her head. Eventually, she falls to the ground again, and he hits her in the stomach. Finally, a group of women surround her, pick her up by her arms and legs and carry her to a nearby car.

It’s unclear exactly who filmed the video, which had been viewed on [Facebook](#) and [YouTube](#) more than 136,000 times by early Monday morning. The footage was posted by a user going by the name Taj Mahal and TajTV, who described himself as a blogger and advocate for the LGBTQ community in a follow-up video [on Saturday](#) and said that he wanted the video to go viral so that there would be more awareness of violence toward transgender women and accountability for the people involved.

Speaking to [BuzzFeed News](#) on Sunday, Taj initially claimed that he had shot the footage, then later said that he had obtained it from someone else. He also claimed that it consists of two videos that have been spliced together. He did not respond to requests for comment from The Washington Post on Sunday night.

At least one woman can be heard yelling a homophobic slur toward the end of the video. While it’s unclear exactly how the altercation began, family members suggested in an interview with local television station [KXAS](#) that Booker had been targeted because of her gender identity. Pierre Booker, her father, told the station that she had been the victim of hatred in the past, but had never experienced such a violent attack. The ringleader, he said, was a “coward.”

Debora Booker, the woman’s grandmother, added that she would be praying “for these people to find it in their hearts to accept people just like God does.”

As a transgender woman who is also black, Booker belongs to a group that is [disproportionately likely](#) to experience a violent attack. According to the Human Rights Campaign, the [vast majority](#) of the 128 transgender people who were killed between 2013 and 2018 were women of color. Within the LGBTQ community, black transgender women are the most likely to face deadly violence, HRC has [found](#).

The [Anti-Violence Project](#), a group that tracks hate crimes against LGBTQ people, found that Texas witnessed seven anti-LGBTQ homicides — more than any other state — in 2017, the most recent year for which statistics are available. Last year, a 26-year-old transgender Dallas woman, Carla Patricia Flores-Pavon, was found choked to death in her apartment, though [police said](#) that the motive appeared to have been robbery and it was not a hate crime.

“The scary part to me is, if this was the apartment complex where she lives, where does she go home?” Leslie McMurray, the transgender education and advocacy coordinator for the Resource Center in Dallas, told the [Dallas Morning News](#). “Where does she go home and feel safe?”

SEE ALSO:

[Dallas police investigating assault of transgender woman as potential hate crime](#) [*USA TODAY*, 2019-04-14]

<https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/military/story/2019-04-12/navy-judge-says-seal-charged-with-war-crimes-threatened-to-kill-teammate-who-turned-him-in>

Navy Judge says SEAL charged with war crimes threatened to kill teammate who turned him in

Details about threats to fellow SEALs and a 2014 arrest for aggravated assault against a base police officer are among new details revealed in a recently-obtained ruling

By Andrew Dyer

The San Diego Union-Tribune, April 12, 2019

A recently-obtained judge's ruling reveals three Navy SEALs have claimed to have seen SEAL Chief Edward Gallagher fatally stab a non-combative, wounded ISIS fighter who had been brought to him for medical treatment during a 2017 deployment to Iraq.

That evening, one witness said he heard Gallagher threaten to kill anyone who spoke out about it, the judge's ruling states.

Navy Judge Capt. Aaron Rugh issued a ruling in January that lays out "findings of fact" which include previously undisclosed details in the case against Gallagher. Rugh wrote that these findings of fact support his decision to keep the SEAL confined. The Union-Tribune obtained the ruling this week.

The findings include accounts of three witnesses to the stabbing, the accounts of three more SEALs who say they saw Gallagher shoot two civilian non-combatants — an old man and a young girl — and other details alleging threats to potential witnesses by Gallagher.

Gallagher was arrested September 11 and confined to the brig at Miramar after prosecutors alleged he attempted to intimidate witnesses and obstruct justice. He was formally charged with premeditated murder and other crimes in January and is awaiting trial, scheduled to begin May 28.

Gallagher has pleaded not guilty and denied all charges. On March 30, he was moved from the brig to a building at Balboa Naval Medical Center after President Donald Trump ordered the Navy to move him to a less restrictive location.

Gallagher's primary attorney, Phillip Stackhouse, could not be reached for comment Friday. The defense team has argued in court that some of the witnesses in the case have likely changed their stories since they initially spoke with Navy investigators last year. They have not said which witnesses or what parts of their accounts may have changed.

Only one witness has testified under oath so far, during a motion hearing and under limited questioning. No direct witnesses to Gallagher's alleged war crimes have testified or been cross-examined.

Gallagher, a SEAL with sniper and emergency medical training, was deployed to Iraq with SEAL Team 7 from February 2017 to August 2017.

According to Rugh's findings of fact, in May, 2017, after Gallagher's SEAL platoon had leveled a building with a drone strike, an Iraqi man between 15 and 22-years-old was brought to the SEALs' compound for treatment. One witness told investigators the man's injuries were not life-threatening.

"After radio operators indicated that the prisoner was arriving for medical treatment," Rugh wrote, "several members of the platoon heard (Gallagher) come over the radio to state 'Nobody touch him; he's mine'."

According to one witness the injured man, an ISIS fighter, was awake and non-combative, the ruling said.

<https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/military/story/2019-04-12/navy-judge-says-seal-charged-with-war-crimes-threatened-to-kill-teammate-who-turned-him-in>

Three Navy SEALs — all of whom have been granted immunity for their testimony — say they saw Gallagher stab the prisoner several times in the neck using a “unique knife (he) typically carried on his back,” Rugh wrote. One told investigators the stabbing was unprovoked by the prisoner.

Later that day, members of the platoon met to discuss Gallagher’s actions. Rugh wrote that one member heard Gallagher say that if he found out who spoke against him, he’d kill them.

At another meeting the next night, Gallagher allegedly went into another witness’s room and asked for the names of “any platoon member who disagreed with (his) actions,” Rugh wrote.

The ruling said that after the deployment, Gallagher told another SEAL, who is now a Master Chief, that he stabbed the prisoner after the prisoner became aggressive and tried to grab someone’s weapon.

In his ruling Rugh said that in May, 2018, Gallagher sent a photo of himself posing with the dead prisoner’s corpse to another SEAL, a Chief Warrant Officer.

Rugh said Gallagher included a message with the photo: “Good story behind this, got him with my hunting knife.” When the CWO warned Gallagher against sending incriminating photos, Gallagher allegedly said “yeah, that’s the only one and I only trust you.”

Other witnesses, also fellow SEALs, told investigators in some detail how they saw Gallagher shoot an old man on Father’s Day in 2017, Rugh wrote.

According to Rugh, three SEALs accompanied Gallagher to two towers in Mosul, Iraq, and assumed sniper positions, two in each tower.

The two SEALs in the tower opposite Gallagher’s told investigators they saw a man in his 70’s or 80’s near a river. They heard a shot, saw a red stain appear on the man’s back and then the man fell. He got back up, stumbled and fell again. He did not get back up.

Rugh wrote that the witnesses heard Gallagher say on a radio, “You two missed him, but I got him.”

On another day at those same towers, another SEAL told investigators he saw four young girls “sneaking” along a path commonly used by people trying to escape ISIS, Rugh wrote. The girls’ faces were uncovered and one was wearing a gray dress and a flower-print hijab.

Rugh wrote that a witness saw the girl in the flower hijab grab her stomach and fall to the ground, apparently shot. Another girl then looked at the other tower — Gallagher’s position — and the girls helped the injured girl over a berm and disappeared, according to Rugh’s finding.

Another SEAL told investigators that on another occasion Gallagher shot at, and missed, a 12-year-old girl, Rugh said.

According to prosecutors and Rugh’s account, the witnesses against Gallagher became targets of a campaign by Gallagher after the platoon returned from deployment and he found out he was under investigation.

One witness to the stabbing told investigators that Gallagher said he had incriminating information about him and other platoon members and that he would “bring them all down,” Rugh said.

In text messages entered into evidence, Gallagher said “I want to crush these little [expletive] who start this ...” according to Rugh.

<https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/military/story/2019-04-12/navy-judge-says-seal-charged-with-war-crimes-threatened-to-kill-teammate-who-turned-him-in>

Rugh said Gallagher also conspired with a former SEAL, trying to figure out how to anonymously leak witnesses' names, such as posting them in a SEAL-only Facebook group, something that would have led to them being ostracized by other SEALs.

Navy prosecutors argued that these attempts to go after witnesses are proof that Gallagher should remain confined while awaiting trial. Rugh agreed in his January ruling.

“Based on (Gallagher’s) continued and methodic acts of witness intimidation, I deemed pretrial confinement necessary,” Rugh wrote in his ruling.

Rugh noted Gallagher’s “record of excellent service,” but cited another incident from 2014 as an indication of prior impulsiveness.

In July 2014, Gallagher became irate and drove his car at a police officer on Naval Base Coronado, Rugh said. He was arrested for aggravated assault and disorderly conduct.

What became of those charges is unknown. Cmdr. Tamara Lawrence, a spokeswoman for Naval Special Warfare, confirmed Gallagher’s arrest but did not offer specifics on what, if any, consequences the SEAL faced.

“In this circumstance, there are a range of administrative actions a (commanding officer) can take,” Lawrence said in a statement. “This incident was handled within the CO’s discretion.”

After Rugh’s findings in January and a media campaign by Gallagher’s family, supporters and Rep. Duncan Hunter, R-Alpine, Trump intervened in the case two weeks ago, ordering less restrictive confinement. As commander-in-chief, a president has broad authority over the military and can serve as the ultimate convening authority in military courts martial.

On Tuesday, Gallagher’s defense team filed a motion to remove more restrictions from his confinement, claiming that the current conditions violate Trump’s recent orders.

Since April 1, Gallagher has been restricted to Building 26, sometimes referred to as the “old hospital” at Naval Medical Center Balboa. Navy Captain Matthew Rosenbloom, commander of Naval Special Warfare Group 1, has limited where Gallagher can go in the building and forbidding him from having electronic devices that connect to the internet.

In the recently filed motion, Timothy Parlatore, one of Gallagher’s attorneys, argued that the conditions at Building 26 are more restrictive than at the Miramar brig. A hearing on the motion on Gallagher’s current confinement is scheduled for April 18.

The Union-Tribune filed a Freedom of Information Act request on Wednesday seeking a copy of the president’s order, but a Navy official said it is likely Trump issued his orders via phone calls to Navy leadership and a tweet.



SEE ALSO:

[Judge in Navy war crimes court martial says Navy should ease restrictions on SEAL charged with murder](#)
[*The San Diego Union-Tribune*, 2019-04-18]

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/sex-alcohol-and-violence-collided-in-murder-case-ensnaring-seals-and-marines/2019/04/16/201404d4-57dd-11e9-8ef3-fbd41a2ce4d5_story.html

Sex, alcohol and violence collided in murder case ensnaring SEALs and Marines

By Dan Lamothe and Brad Wolverton

The Washington Post, April 16, 2019

After a long night of drinking in Mali's capital, two Navy SEALs and two Marine Raiders smashed their way into Army Staff Sgt. Logan J. Melgar's room with a sledgehammer.

Armed with duct tape, they had a goal, two of the alleged assailants recalled: teach the Green Beret soldier a lesson for leaving them behind in traffic on the way to a party at the French Embassy. It was the latest chapter in a feud between Melgar and the SEALs, who had traded accusations about careless behavior that could threaten their mission.

One of the SEALs, Petty Officer 1st Class Anthony E. DeDolph, a former professional mixed-martial-arts fighter and a Purple Heart recipient, jumped on Melgar and put him in a chokehold on his bed sometime after 5 a.m., two of the men later told authorities. The other SEAL, Chief Petty Officer Adam C. Matthews, grabbed Melgar's legs, while the two Marines sought to duct-tape them.

They moved on to Melgar's wrists but realized he had stopped breathing.

"At this point, we immediately began attempts to revive SSGT Melgar," Matthews recalled in a written description of that night's events that he recently signed and submitted to the military. "He remained unresponsive, so we laid him back down and I began rescue breaths while the tape was cut off of him."

"His chest rose and fell from my rescue breaths, and during one of the breaths, I saw red-tinted spittle come out of his mouth and hit me in the face."

[All four men face the same raft of charges](#), including felony murder, obstruction of justice and hazing, according to U.S. military documents, in the June 4, 2017, death of Melgar, a member of the 3rd Special Forces Group who had served two deployments in Afghanistan.

The case drew attention to criminal misconduct allegedly committed by elite U.S. troops deployed to several countries to carry out secretive campaigns against Islamist militant groups, including some affiliated with al-Qaeda.

DeDolph and Matthews, another Purple Heart recipient, were members of the counterterrorism unit commonly known as SEAL Team 6. The other two men, Gunnery Sgt. Mario Madera-Rodriguez and Staff Sgt. Kevin Maxwell, were assigned to Marine Corps Special Operations Command.

Some aspects of the case, including the names of the accused and allegations of a coverup, have been reported previously. But hundreds of pages of legal filings obtained by The Washington Post provide new details about the events surrounding the deadly assault.

The documents throw back a veil of secrecy on a culture in which womanizing and heavy drinking were said to be commonplace in the city of Bamako, despite alcohol restrictions and warnings about kidnappings and terrorist threats.

In "stipulations of fact" — effectively, accounts of what occurred submitted to authorities, and not previously reported by the news media — Matthews and Maxwell acknowledge their roles in Melgar's death. Attorneys for both men said plea deal discussions for their clients are underway, [as reported by the Daily Beast in March](#), but they declined to discuss most of the specifics.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/sex-alcohol-and-violence-collided-in-murder-case-ensnaring-seals-and-marines/2019/04/16/201404d4-57dd-11e9-8ef3-fbd41a2ce4d5_story.html

Brian Bouffard, an attorney for Maxwell, said the men never intended to harm Melgar.

Grover Baxley, Matthews's attorney, confirmed that his client has reached a pretrial agreement with the government in which his client will plead guilty to lesser charges that include hazing and assault. His case will be referred to a special court-martial, Baxley said. It is considered less serious than a general court-martial and limits the punishment to no more than a year of imprisonment.

Attorneys for DeDolph and Madera-Rodriguez did not respond to requests for comment.

No one else has been charged in the case, said Elizabeth Baker, a U.S. military spokeswoman. She declined to comment on many of the details in the documents, citing the open court cases. A hearing in the case was scheduled in December and in March and postponed both times. No additional dates have been scheduled, she said.

The documents leave some questions raised in earlier news reports unanswered, including what else might have caused friction among the men.

"It's still a tragic situation, but the motivations behind what happened that night are nothing like what was reported," Baxley said.

Accusations and anger

The documents describe months of tension between Melgar and DeDolph and another SEAL, who was not charged. Melgar and the SEALs lived in the same house, while the Marines lived a few blocks away.

To limit their interactions, the SEALs banned Melgar and another Special Forces soldier from their operations center, another soldier who also lived there later told Naval Criminal Investigative Service agents, according to U.S. military documents.

In the weeks leading up to the assault, Melgar brought foreigners to the residence, the other soldier said. He added that Melgar had engaged in "frat-like" behavior and had acted in ways that got them both "uninvited" from events at the U.S. Embassy. The Washington Post is not naming several other Americans who have not been charged with a crime at the request of military officials due to security concerns.

"Logan, Tony, everyone had a turn at it," the other soldier said of excessive drinking, acknowledging that he also consumed alcohol on occasion.

Earlier media reports said that Melgar did not drink.

Melgar, for his part, had accused the SEALs of bringing prostitutes to the house, a detail that was [first reported by the Daily Beast last year](#). The other soldier living in the house, asked by investigators about the prostitution allegation, declined to answer directly but said infidelity occurred among some people living there, the documents said.

Melgar vented about the men to his wife, Michelle, in a series of messages that she turned over to authorities.

"I freaking hate them," Melgar told her.

She has asked not to be contacted by reporters, U.S. military officials said.

A plan takes shape

Over beers and whiskey at the western-themed Appaloosa bar and a nightclub called Byblos, the men discussed hazing Melgar, service members involved and witnesses told investigators.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/sex-alcohol-and-violence-collided-in-murder-case-ensnaring-seals-and-marines/2019/04/16/201404d4-57dd-11e9-8ef3-fbd41a2ce4d5_story.html

Melgar returned home a few hours after leaving the other service members behind on the way to the French Embassy party, and said he had made the right decision because it was a “high-class” event, the other soldier told NCIS agents a few months later, according to NCIS documents. Melgar said he had two or three beers there, the other soldier reported to investigators.

Matthews, in his stipulation of facts, said he and the other three men who were charged agreed to tape Melgar up when they returned to the shared Navy-Army residence. The Marines brought more duct tape and a sledgehammer from their residence nearby.

“The sledgehammer was not required for us to gain entrance to SSGT Melgar’s room, but we used it because we thought that the noise associated with it would further surprise him,” wrote Matthews, who was visiting Bamako for a few days.

Within minutes, the situation had spiraled out of control.

The service members attempted CPR on Melgar, and then retrieved a defibrillator and equipment to open an airway with an emergency procedure on his throat. They considered calling an ambulance, but determined it would take too long and took him to a nearby clinic. Melgar was declared dead there.

In the following hours, the men hatched a plan in which the SEALs would take the blame and say that the Marines had not been in the room when DeDolph put Melgar in a chokehold, the stipulations of fact said.

The men also sought to cover their tracks in other ways. The other soldier deployed with Melgar told NCIS agents that he directed one of the Marines to throw away the alcohol in the house because any service member subject to General Order No. 1 — which restricts alcohol consumption while deployed — would “get smoked” by authorities, according to an NCIS report in court filings.

In the chaos, the crime scene was not fully sealed for hours, the documents allege. Scott Patterson, an assistant regional security officer with the State Department, entered Melgar’s room with Madera-Rodriguez serving as a witness. Patterson was unaware that the Marine would later be accused of being involved in the death.

Jason Willis, the regional security officer in Mali, told investigators that when he arrived at the clinic, Matthews was shirtless and had “blood all over his hands.” DeDolph initially said the men had been wrestling, Willis told investigators, but he was “pacing, in a state of shock, repeating himself and ‘not lucid.’” DeDolph also had blood on his hands, Patterson told investigators.

A State Department spokesman declined to comment, citing the open cases.

In text messages included in the investigative files obtained by The Post, Madera-Rodriguez told an American woman who had been out drinking with them that night that he thinks “about Logan’s family all the time.” DeDolph was “out of his mind” after Melgar’s death, he said.

The woman, who was working in Mali with the U.S. government, recalled speaking with DeDolph that morning several hours after the assault. “I had a moment alone with him at the table,” she wrote. “He said he kills people for a living, but not Americans.”

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SEE ALSO:

[Leaked documents provide details about Green Beret’s death involving Navy SEALs and Marine Raiders](#) [*Military Times*, 2019-04-18]

[Flag: No special immunity for SEAL witnesses in war crimes case](#) [*Navy Times*, 2019-04-16]

Two counts dropped in court martial of Navy SEAL commander charged with war crime cover-up

Prosecutors dropped two counts of making false official statements Thursday against a Navy SEAL platoon commander charged in connection with alleged war crimes

By Andrew Dyer

The San Diego Union-Tribune, April 11, 2019



Jeremiah Sullivan, the civilian attorney for Navy SEAL Lt. Jacob Portier, talks to the press after an arraignment at Naval Base San Diego in January. (Andrew Dyer / Union-Tribune)

Defense attorneys for a Navy SEAL platoon commander charged with failing to report war crimes and with conduct unbecoming an officer called the government's decision to drop two counts of making false official statements a "grand slam" for their case on Thursday.

Navy prosecutors say that during a 2017 Iraq deployment, Navy SEAL Lt. Jacob X. Portier failed to act on reports that one of his men, Chief Special Operator Edward Gallagher, had allegedly killed a wounded ISIS fighter who was brought to him for medical treatment. They also said that Portier violated regulations when he conducted a reenlistment ceremony for Gallagher next to the fighter's corpse.

"The government has conceded and dismissed the charges (of making false official statements) because my client has been truthful and will continue to be truthful," said Jeremiah Sullivan, Portier's civilian attorney, during an interview after the hearing.

The dropped charges alleged that Portier had lied to superiors about his subordinates reporting allegations against Gallagher, who has been charged in another court martial with premeditated murder and with shooting civilians. Gallagher has pleaded not guilty.

Sullivan said the Navy only charged Portier with crimes to compel him to testify in Gallagher's trial, but Portier was not present when the fighter was killed.

"He just doesn't have the evidence they're looking for," Sullivan said.

Portier still faces charges of conduct unbecoming an officer, willful dereliction of duty, failure to obey a lawful general order and obstruction of justice.

The conduct unbecoming charge is tied to a battlefield reenlistment ceremony Portier conducted for Gallagher next to the body of the dead fighter. Charges against Gallagher related to the reenlistment were [dropped](#) in February, so Portier's defense argued his charge should be dropped as well.

However, prosecutors argued Thursday that the conduct unbecoming charge was different than the charge that was dismissed in Gallagher's case. Portier, who was a superior officer, conducted the ceremony.

Navy Judge Capt. Jonathan Stephens did not rule on the motion Thursday.

Stephens did rule on another motion, one the prosecution filed to dismiss the attorney who was representing three witnesses in the case.

<https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/military/story/2019-04-11/two-counts-dropped-in-court-martial-of-navy-seal-commander-charged-with-war-crime-cover-up>

Brian Ferguson, a Texas-based attorney who briefly represented Portier in the early stages of the investigation, now represents three witnesses who could testify against Portier, something prosecutors said is a conflict of interest.

Stephens ruled against the motion, saying the accused was aware of the potential conflict and was not concerned.

Navy prosecutor Chris Czaplak said he had filed the motion out of concern for Portier's right to counsel.

The court martial will continue on an undetermined date, because witnesses are being deployed and because there is a greater priority to continue the Gallagher prosecution. Gallagher's trial is scheduled to begin May 28; no date has been set for Portier's.

Racism

'Just let them die': Guards laughed as supremacist stabbed cuffed black inmates, suit says

By Max Londberg, Cincinnati Enquirer

USA TODAY, April 18, 2019



Surveillance footage shows a 2017 knife attack at the Southern Ohio Correctional Institution in Lucasville. (Photo: Provided)

CINCINNATI – An Ohio prison staff acted with callous indifference as a white supremacist attacked four black inmates handcuffed to a table, according to a federal lawsuit filed earlier this month in the Southern District of Ohio.

Two correctional officers, identified only by their surnames, Faye and Dalton, laughed as the four black inmates were brutally stabbed in June 2017, the suit says. The incident was captured on surveillance footage and viewed by millions.

The suit seeks \$75,000 in damages on behalf of two of the victims, Shamieke Pugh and Maurice Lee. It claims the victims' civil rights were violated, including that they suffered cruel and unusual punishment because of the prison guards' inaction.

According to the lawsuit:

Pugh, Lee and two other black inmates were strip searched before they were allowed out of their cells for recreational time. They were then handcuffed to a table.

But Greg Reinke, who pleaded guilty in the [attack](#), was not strip searched before he was cuffed to an adjacent table.

Reinke is identified in the suit as a member of the Aryan Brotherhood, a violent white supremacist group.

Guards "gave Reinke a key" or "knew or should have known that Reinke" had a key or device to unlock his handcuffs.

Reinke used an 8-inch blade in the attack and had a 12-inch blade in his sock.



This undated file photo provided by the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction shows Greg Reinke. Reinke, who stabbed four fellow prisoners and a guard in separate bloody attacks, is on a hunger strike inside Ohio's toughest prison, alleging mistreatment. (Photo: Uncredited, AP)

Faye and Dalton, the guards, stood nearby behind a locked door and "laughed as Mr. Pugh, Mr. Lee and the other inmates were stabbed."

Two of the inmates suffered several stab wounds and heavy bleeding while the other two sustained minor injuries.

After one victim escaped his cuffs and tackled Reinke, guards pepper-sprayed the victim and not Reinke.

The guards, including a sergeant identified as John Doe, did not immediately render aid to the victims, and 10 minutes passed before nurses arrived.

At one point, one of the guards said, "We should just let them die." The guard who made the statement is not specifically identified in the suit.

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2019/04/17/supremacist-stabbed-cuffed-black-inmates-guards-laughed-suit-says/3504443002/>

Reinke had a history of carrying knives. On two occasions prior to June 2017, he'd stabbed or attempted to stab other inmates.

The Lucasville prison's warden, Ronald Erdos, is also named as a defendant in the suit, which says he and the facility's staff knew Reinke was a violent threat, "yet did nothing to prevent this violence."

The suit also accuses unidentified correctional officers of later beating Pugh when he sought medical attention for chest pain and high blood pressure.

The suit includes 11 charges of civil rights violations, including that the victims' right to equal protection was violated.

In addition to Faye, Dalton and Erdos, the suit also names as defendants unidentified nurses, health care provider and other correctional officers.

Reinke was sentenced to 54 years in the bloody attack, video of which was obtained by the Associated Press and went viral late last year.

Reinke was sentenced to an additional 32 years behind bars for an attack about eight months later on a corrections officer. Prosecutors said Reinke and another inmate stabbed the officer 32 times.

Reinke was already serving a life sentence for a 2004 Cleveland murder before the stabbings.

The AP recently reported Reinke is on a hunger strike because he believes he's being mistreated in prison.

The man accused of burning down three churches in Louisiana has been charged with hate crimes

By Kayla Epstein, Alex Horton, and Ashley Cusick

The Washington Post, April 16, 2019



Holden Matthews, 21, was arrested April 10. (AP)

When three predominantly black churches burned in a single Louisiana parish in the span of just 10 days, the news sent a shiver through the community that rippled across the country. Though the cause of the fires was not immediately known, the destruction of three pillars of the area's black community recalled dark memories of a not-that-distant past.

Now, the man who stands accused of setting the fires has not only been charged with arson, he is facing three hate-crime charges, too.

The St. Landry Parish district attorney, Earl Taylor, filed the charges against Holden Matthews on Monday. In Louisiana, hate crimes include offenses perpetrated against an individual because of their race, sexual orientation, national origin, disability or other protected status. Taylor declined to comment on the charges.

Last week, Matthews, the 21-year-old son of a local sheriff's deputy, was arrested and charged with [three counts of arson for setting fires](#) at St. Mary Baptist Church on March 26, Greater Union Baptist Church on April 2 and Mount Pleasant Baptist Church on April 4.

Matthews pleaded not guilty to all charges Monday during an appearance in court conducted by video conference, according to the Advocate. Prosecutors have charged him with three counts of hate crimes, two counts of simple arson and one count of aggravated arson. He was denied bond.



A gravestone behind the ruins of Greater Union Baptist Church, one of three that recently burned down in St. Landry Parish, in Opelousas, La., on April 10. (Gerald Herbert/AP)

At the hearing, officials said they found new photo and video evidence on Matthews's phone placing him at the scene of all three fires, the Advocate [reported](#). Louisiana State Fire Marshal H. "Butch" Browning testified that Matthews's phone contained photos of the fires as they were starting and after first responders arrived.

The photos also indicated that Matthews had returned to the crime scenes after the churches burned to smoldering rubble, officials said, and a 10-second video is said to show him discussing the fires with a friend and mentioning that gasoline would be an effective method of starting a blaze.

Investigators said they also found news reports about the fires on Matthews's phone, and Browning said that "he superimposed himself on these news reports claiming responsibility for these fires."

Last Thursday, [at a news conference announcing Matthews's arrest](#), officials and community leaders acknowledged the emotional strain the fires had placed on St. Landry Parish.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2019/04/16/man-accused-burning-down-three-churches-louisiana-has-been-charged-with-hate-crimes/>



The ruins of St. Mary Baptist Church in Port Barre, La., one of three churches that recently burned down in St. Landry Parish. The first fire occurred March 26 at St. Mary Baptist Church, and the second happened April 2 at Greater Union Baptist Church in Opelousas. On April 4, Mount Pleasant Baptist Church in Opelousas caught fire. (Gerald Herbert/AP)

“It has been especially painful, because it reminds us of a very dark past of intimidation and fear,” Gov. John Bel Edwards (D) said at

the news conference.

Authorities said they had moved swiftly to arrest Matthews so that he could not strike another church.

“I felt relieved knowing that our congregation didn’t have to worry anymore,” said Harry Richard, a pastor at Greater Union Baptist Church in Opelousas, La. “They are my main concern.”

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[Hate crime charges lodged against suspect in Louisiana church burnings](#) [Reuters, 2019-04-16]

[Notre-Dame's ashes spark renewed push to rebuild torched Louisiana churches](#) [Reuters, 2019-04-16]

[Louisiana congregations devastated by fires share hope, faith in unity service](#) [USA TODAY, 2019-04-15]

[Prosecutor wants Louisiana church fire suspect held without bail](#) [CNN, 2019-04-15]

[New Zealand mosque shootings: Six in court on charges they sent attack images](#) [USA TODAY, 2019-04-15]

[Prosecutor adds hate crimes to charges against Louisiana church fire suspect](#) [CNN, 2019-04-15]

Pennsylvania man charged with posting online hate messages

By David DeKok

Reuters, April 11, 2019

HARRISBURG, Pa. - A Pennsylvania man has been charged by federal prosecutors with posting online hate messages and threats, including a digitally created image that appeared to show himself pointing an AR-15 rifle at a congregation of Jewish men.

Corbin Kauffman, 30, of Lehigh, Pennsylvania, is accused of using online aliases to post hundreds of anti-Semitic, anti-black and anti-Muslim messages and images on Minds.com, a social media network, according to David Freed, the U.S. attorney in Harrisburg.

“Pennsylvanians know all too well how dangerous these kinds of white supremacist threats can be,” Freed said in a statement, referring to the Oct. 27, 2018 mass shooting at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh. “We take these threats seriously.”

The Pennsylvania Legislature on Wednesday held a special joint session to mourn the 11 Jewish victims of the Tree of Life shootings. It was the first special joint session since the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania.

Other online posts by Kauffman allegedly expressed a desire to commit genocide and hate crimes, including the killing of Jews, blacks, and Muslims.

Freed said the suspect posted images of anti-Semitic vandalism in Ocean City, Maryland, including the defacement of a display case at a Jewish community center.

Kauffman’s lawyer, Christopher Opiel of Wilkes-Barre, said he would have no comment at this time.

Minds.com, founded in 2015 as an alternative to Facebook, could not be reached for comment.

“Our core values are rooted in privacy, transparency, and Internet freedom,” the company says on its website.

Kauffman is charged with a single count of interstate transmission of threats to injure another person, the U.S. Justice Department said. The maximum penalty is five years in prison and a fine.

“While the FBI does not and will not police ideology, we stand ready to intervene whenever threatening language crosses the line into illegal activity,” said Michael Harpster, special agent in charge of the FBI office in Philadelphia.

Opiel said his client was free on “pre-trial release.” A federal magistrate ordered him not to use the Internet in any form while he awaited trial.

Reporting by David DeKok in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; Editing by Frank McGurty and Dan Grebler

Racism Kept Some WWI Troops from Receiving Medal of Honor, Lawmakers Say

By Richard Sisk

Military.com, April 18, 2019



African-American soldiers (and one of their white officers) of the 369th Infantry, known as the Harlem Hellfighters, practice what they will soon experience, fighting in the trenches of the Western Front. (National Archives and Records Administration)

Lawmakers and advocates are calling for a detailed review of the battlefield valor of African-American troops in World War I, saying many were denied the Medal of Honor due to racism.

Sens. Chris Van Hollen, D-Maryland and Roy Blount, R-Missouri, announced Thursday that a bipartisan effort had begun in both houses of Congress to pass bills authorizing the review.

It's a matter of simple justice, said Dr. Timothy Westcott, a historian who would lead the review if Congress approves.

"We should not be determining their valor based on the color of their skin or the circumstances of their birth," said Westcott, director of the George S. Robb Centre for the Study of the Great War at Park University in Missouri.

On the House side, the legislation is sponsored by Rep. J. French Hill, R-Arkansas.

"To require the review of the service of certain members of the Armed Forces during World War I to determine if such members should be awarded the Medal of Honor," the bills read.

The bills would waive the statute of limitations to ensure that any veterans of World War I recommended by the review to receive the Medal of Honor would be legally eligible for it.

If this effort is successful, a Valor Medals Review Task Force for World War I would become part of the annual National Defense Authorization Act, set to be debated this summer.

The effort has been endorsed by the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion and the U.S. World War One Centennial Commission.

"While the United States military has studied Medal of Honor awards to minority service members in WWII, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and subsequent American conflicts, no such systematic review has ever been conducted for minority veterans of the First World War," commission officials said in a release. "Under current law, the exact same act of heroism completed by the exact same veteran would be eligible for review if it occurred in 1941, 1951, 1971, 1991, or 2001, but not 1918."

"We at the U.S. World War One Commission, established by Congress in 2013, are aiming to rectify that and ensure our World War One heroes are forgotten no more," the release added.

In a statement, Van Hollen said "Hundreds of thousands of minority veterans served their country during World War I, and their sacrifice was essential to our victory. But for far too long, their heroism has not received the recognition it deserves."

Blount said the review was essential to making sure "those who were denied the Medal of Honor because of their race or religion finally receive the recognition they have earned."

<https://www.military.com/daily-news/2019/04/18/racism-kept-some-wwi-troops-receiving-medal-honor-lawmakers-say.html>

Of 400,000 minority veterans who served during World War I, about 40,000, the vast majority African-Americans, saw combat in France, according to the Department of Defense.

No African-American was awarded the Medal of Honor during World War I or its immediate aftermath, but two were posthumously honored many years later after limited investigations.

In 1991, Army Cpl. Freddie Stowers, who was killed in combat while serving in a unit under French command, was awarded the Medal of Honor by then-President George H.W. Bush.

President Barack Obama awarded the Medal of Honor in 2015 to Army Sgt. Henry Johnson, who fought in France with the New York Army National Guard's famed 369th Regiment, known as the "Harlem Hellfighters."

In his statement, Van Hollen singled out the case of Army Sgt. William Butler, an African-American veteran from Salisbury, Maryland. Butler received the Croix de Guerre with Palm from France, as well as the Distinguished Service Cross from the U.S. military and a recommendation for the Medal of Honor.

"But he never received that medal before his death," Van Hollen said.

At an Association of the U.S. Army event last October to promote the review of World War I awards, Jeffrey Sammons, a history professor at New York University, said his research discovered that Butler, who also served with the 369th Regiment, had been nominated for the Medal of Honor but the award was denied.

Sammons also found that Butler had been nominated for the nation's highest award for valor on the same day as 1st Lt. George S. Robb, the namesake of the Robb Centre at Park University. Robb, who received the Medal of Honor, was a white officer who commanded an all-black platoon on the Western Front.

"George Robb had written a glowing treatment of William Butler's exploits, in which he saved his commanding officer, 1st Lt. Gorman Jones, and a number of men from being captured by the Germans, who had actually infiltrated their trench," Sammons said at the AUSA event.

Westcott and Zachary Austin, adjunct director of the Valor Medals Review Task Force, said the intent was to begin the research with African-Americans who served in World War I and then extend it to other minorities.

"There's never been systematic approach to this," Westcott said of the review.

He and Austin said the research would be conducted with the aid of donations and at no cost to the government.

The main focus for possible upgrades to the Medal of Honor would be on those who were awarded the Distinguished Service Cross and the French Croix de Guerre with Palm, and those who were recommended for the Medal of Honor but never received it, Westcott and Austin said.

Once the review is complete, the findings would be presented to the Department of Defense for a determination on whether the Medal of Honor should be awarded, Westcott said.

Gina Harkins contributed to this report. Richard Sisk can be reached at Richard.Sisk@Military.com.

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SEE ALSO:

[Medal of Honor review sought for minority World War I heroes](#) [*Politico*, 2019-04-18]

Trump passes on making U.N. racism committee nomination

The decision continues a U.S. withdrawal from international bodies and human rights priorities.

By Nahal Toosi

Politico, April 12, 2019



State Department officials originally thought the administration would renominate Gay McDougall, the current U.S. member of the committee. (Ramon Espinosa/AP Photo)

The Trump administration will not nominate anyone to serve on a United Nations committee on racism, the latest sign of a U.S. retreat from international bodies and traditional human rights priorities.

A State Department official said the White House intervened to prevent the expected renomination of a human rights lawyer chosen by former President Barack Obama for the 18-member U.N. Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

The official said the Trump administration may simply have run out of time to find a replacement before a deadline. Even so, the official added, “it cements the narrative that the Americans just don’t care about these kinds of things anymore.”

A senior Trump administration official, however, insisted otherwise.

“Although the United States did not nominate a candidate this year for election to the committee, that in no way diminishes our global leadership on efforts to eliminate racial discrimination,” the official said.

State Department officials originally thought the administration would renominate [Gay McDougall](#), the current U.S. member of the committee, a so-called “treaty body” that oversees the implementation of a 1960s international convention on “the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination.”

The [committee](#) typically meets three times per year in Geneva to oversee progress toward that goal by nations party to the convention.

The move comes at a time when President Donald Trump’s views about race have faced intense criticism, with some prominent Democrats flatly stating that the president is “[a racist](#).”

State Department officials had assured McDougall that she would be renominated. But White House officials nixed the idea days later, people familiar with the matter said.

The White House didn’t provide an explanation. McDougall has spoken [critically](#) of Trump in the past, warning that his campaign rhetoric could endanger minorities around the world, but it’s not clear whether the White House was aware of those statements.

Some U.S. officials suspect the reason is that she had been tapped for the post by Obama. The Trump administration has generally sought to push out appointees of the former Democratic president.

U.S. officials considered other candidates, but they weren’t able to select a person in time for the late February nomination deadline, the State Department official told POLITICO. The decision was made instead to not nominate anyone.

The Trump administration has from the start looked warily at international bodies and agreements, including anything affiliated with the United Nations.

<https://www.politico.com/story/2019/04/12/trump-un-committee-1272422>

The Republican president decided to withdraw the United States from the Paris climate accord, pull out of the Iran nuclear deal and abandon the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement.

The administration also quit the U.N. Human Rights Council, saying it was too critical of Israel and that its membership included too many abusive states.

Top Trump aides have also fiercely condemned the International Criminal Court, particularly after the court's chief prosecutor called for an investigation into alleged human rights abuses by U.S. forces in Afghanistan.

On Friday, the Trump administration celebrated the ICC's decision not to pursue that investigation. "This decision is a victory for the rule of law and the integrity of the ICC as an institution," Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in a statement.

Members of the U.N.'s anti-racism committee must be nominated and then elected to one of 18 slots. Its members are meant to be independent experts on the issue, not political operatives.

American candidates have typically been shoo-ins, and McDougall would have stood a strong chance of keeping her seat during this year's June 21 vote for nine of the seats. She has expertise on international human rights and in recent years has focused in particular on China's mistreatment of its Uighur Muslim population.

McDougall has about nine months left on her current four-year term, which she intends to finish. Beyond that, she told POLITICO, "I regret that I'm not able to continue, and that was not of my choosing."

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SEE ALSO:

[Trump blocked renomination of Obama-era UN racism official, won't pick a replacement: report](#) [*The Hill*, 2019-04-14]

White supremacist gets life sentence in hate crime killing

By Morgan Gstalter

The Hill, April 17, 2019

A white supremacist who intentionally ran a black teenager over with his car was sentenced to life in prison on Tuesday, [KOIN 6 News reported](#).

Russell Courtier received his sentence in a Portland, Ore., courtroom after prosecutors presented evidence that the August 2016 death of 19-year-old Larnell Bruce was a racist attack.

Courtier was a member of the white supremacist prison gang European Kindred at the time of the incident.

“It stemmed from his racist desire to be a part of a ‘brotherhood.’ This is an appropriate sentence given that the jury found Russell Courtier’s actions of murdering Larnell Bruce were motivated by his perception of Mr. Bruce’s race or the color of his skin,” prosecutor Dave Hannon said.

Courtier and Bruce reportedly got into a fight outside a 7-Eleven store in the Portland suburb of Gresham on the night of the attack.

Bruce pulled out a machete and Courtier stopped fighting and got into his car, according to surveillance video. Bruce could be seen making “evasive maneuvers on foot in an attempt to escape Mr. Courtier and his red Jeep,” according to court documents.

Bruce’s head had been smashed into a glass window, but he left before police arrived, KOIN 6 reported.

A short distance away, however, police found Bruce on the sidewalk suffering from life-threatening wounds after he had been run over by a Jeep.

Courtier’s girlfriend, Colleen Hunt, was also present during the incident and pleaded guilty to manslaughter in March, according to the outlet. She was sentenced to 10 years in prison on Tuesday.

She told detectives that she encouraged Courtier to fight Bruce by yelling “get him baby, get him baby,” the outlet noted.

“We do have witnesses that say the man was on the sidewalk, all the evidence points that way — that he was trying to get away from these folks and they were actively seeking to hurt him,” Gresham police officer John Rasmussen told KOIN 6 News at the time.

Police later arrested Courtier and Hunt. Courtier was convicted in March of murder, felony hit and run and Oregon’s hate crime statute, second-degree intimidation.

Natasha Bruce, the 19-year-old’s stepmother, pleaded for the judge to hand down the toughest possible sentence, KOIN 6 reported.

“I feel like in any situation like this you would never get what you really want,” Natasha Bruce said outside of court. But she said the fact there is no chance Courtier will be on the streets for decades “is some type of relief for us and whoever else may have to deal may have to deal with this man again.”

A wrestler was forced to cut his dreadlocks before a match. His town is still looking for answers.

By Roman Stubbs

The Washington Post, April 17, 2019



Charles Johnson Jr., the grandfather of wrestler Andrew Johnson, a high school sophomore whose dreadlocks were sheared off before a wrestling match late last year, attends a men's group at the First Baptist Church in Richland, N.J., in mid-March. (Mark Makela for The Washington Post)

BUENA VISTA, N.J. — The white committeeman raised his black smartphone into the air. “I saw it on this,” Steve Martinelli sternly told the 30 or so men at First Baptist Church. “And I was so livid.”

“I was livid too! That’s my grandson!” Charles Johnson Jr. screamed, and every man who had gathered here for a Saturday morning fellowship turned quiet and looked at him. He clenched his jaw and pointed at his brow. “I could see the prejudice in his eyes.”

It had been nearly two months since Johnson’s grandson, a 16-year-old African American wrestler named Andrew Johnson, was given [an ultimatum](#) by a white referee before a match: Your hair covering doesn’t conform to the rule book, so cut your dreadlocks or forfeit. Soon a viral video of a white female trainer cutting off Johnson’s hair transformed the teenager into a new symbol of racial tension in America.

Inside this little wood-paneled break room in the back of the church, where a cook sizzled eggs and grits, the group of men from Buena Vista tried to unspool the same tension that had wracked towns such as Baraboo, Wis., and Apex, N.C., and Park Hills, Ky., after racially charged moments captured on social media drew the attention of a divided nation. Maybe more so than in those places, this small community is nowhere close to closure months later.

School administrators have gone silent. Multiple investigations have been launched, including a civil rights probe, and Johnson himself has not spoken publicly about the incident because his family is eyeing potential litigation. The referee, Alan Maloney, likewise has remained silent but sent a notice of tort claim to 12 possible defendants in March, claiming defamation of character and emotional distress. But in this town, one of 53 in New Jersey that went from supporting Barack Obama in 2012 to backing Donald Trump in 2016, the conversation has continued without them.

“The students don’t have a choice. Where was the coach? Where was the athletic director?” one man asked during the fellowship breakfast. “If they weren’t there for Mr. Johnson, does that not mean there’s other kids they’re not there for?”

Another man shouted, “The woman who was cutting his hair, she looked like she was enjoying it!”

“She was told to do that. ... She’s a good person,” said John Williams, a Buena Vista Township committeeman.

The church’s 80-year-old pastor, the Rev. David Mallory, stood up and lifted his hand. “When something like this happens, we have to start a conversation,” Mallory said, finally giving the floor to Ted Dempsey, who works for South Jersey Legal Services, for closing comments.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/2019/04/17/wrestler-was-forced-cut-his-dreadlocks-before-match-his-town-is-still-looking-answers/>



An image taken from video shows Andrew Johnson's dreadlocks being cut before his wrestling match Dec. 19. (Michael Frankel/SNJToday.com)

“Hopefully something good comes out of this,” Dempsey said. “What is missing is the voice of the young man.”

Looking for answers

Johnson’s voice still has not been heard publicly. The lasting images from the incident were photos of Johnson emerging victorious during his match that night, his lip bloodied and his right arm raised by Maloney.

Those images — and the video of Johnson’s dreadlocks being cut — spread quickly across social media and the Internet. By the end of the night, news trucks were parked outside the family’s home. Their lives would be different from then on, and what has followed provides a glimpse into what happens to a town caught in the middle of a viral racial incident.

While countless politicians, celebrities, athletes and activists defended Johnson, from Chance the Rapper to New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy to the Rev. Al Sharpton, some in the New Jersey wrestling community quickly defended Maloney, too.

“In my opinion, only a racist could consider the incident involving the Buena Regional High School wrestler as a racial incident,” New Jersey resident Mike Dillich wrote in a letter to the editor in the Daily Journal in late December. “I know the referee, Alan Maloney, and I know that he has a great deal of respect for all high school wrestlers with no regards to race.”

Those who support Maloney will point out that, according to the National Federation of State High School Associations, a new point of emphasis for wrestling officials this year was to ensure all equipment worn on the mat, including hair coverings, fit “snug” to a wrestler’s body. But to many watching the video, the ruling would not have been applied to a white wrestler with hair of a similar length and forced Johnson to choose between his team and his personal identity.

Walter Hudson, a New Jersey civil rights activist, said he noticed fractures in Buena after the incident, hearing that students were blaming Johnson for bringing unwanted attention to the town. Some of those emotions spilled out during an emergency school board meeting the day after Christmas as residents shared opinions on both sides of the issue.

The gathering also presented the opportunity to point out other examples of racism in the community and the systemic issues that might have led to the Johnson incident. Fatima Hayes, an educator in southern New Jersey, presented racial demographic data that underscored how difficult it can be for black students to excel in a school system that has few black teachers and administrators and is 60 percent white, according to the latest Civil Rights Data Collection in 2015.

“The systemic issues, in my opinion, are why an incident like [Andrew Johnson] could take place in Buena,” Hayes said later in a telephone interview. “When you don’t have a diverse staff or people who look like the students who they coach or teach, incidents like that will continue to happen.”

At the meeting, she also was struck by other stories of racial bias at Buena, students and past students speaking on why they believed they could relate to Johnson. One student spoke about the growing racial tension inside the cafeteria during the school’s lunch hours. A former student and football player, Rajhon

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/2019/04/17/wrestler-was-forced-cut-his-dreadlocks-before-match-his-town-is-still-looking-answers/>

White, a higher education staff member at the University of Denver, spoke about the racial injustices he had endured at the high school.



Referee Alan Maloney declares Andrew Johnson the winner Dec. 19 in an image taken from video. (Michael Frankel/SNJToday.com/AP)

“There were the people who were speaking out against [the incident] and saying, ‘This isn’t right,’ but who were also saying, ‘I’m not surprised that this took place,’ because of what they experienced in the school district,” White said.

In the weeks and months since, the Johnson family and Maloney have turned down overtures to be interviewed by media outlets. Both parties are waiting out the investigations being conducted by the New Jersey Interscholastic Athletic Association and the state attorney general’s office’s civil rights division. Maloney, who has not responded to a request for comment, was accused in 2016 of using a racial slur during an altercation with a black referee.

Most have wondered why those probes have taken so long after the Dec. 19 incident. Others have wondered: What will happen to Maloney? Will the coach and trainer be punished?

“The panel’s investigation has been active and is ongoing, with additional interviews planned in coming weeks,” NJIAA spokesman Michael Chersonson said. “The process has been steady and deliberate while also allowing the wrestling season to proceed without additional distractions.”

Some have viewed what happened to Johnson as part of a broader issue — what they say is an amplification of racial rhetoric following President Trump’s election in 2016. In a [recent poll conducted by the Pew Research Center](#), 65 percent of respondents said that they feel it is more common to encounter racist or racially insensitive views since Trump took office. During the men’s fellowship gathering at First Baptist Church in February, the conversation eventually veered to Trump.

“Ever since we had a change in national leadership there has been an emboldening of this kind of racial expression,” Mallory, the pastor, told the group. “My family moved here in 1944 — that was not a good time for racial relations. We are not a perfect community, but we are better than we were in 1944. I think this is part of the event’s background. We just don’t see this as one event. We see this as a broader social situation.”

‘It hurt him real bad’

Charles Johnson Jr. wasn’t even planning to attend his grandson’s wrestling match that December night but ended up going after another of his grandchildren picked him up and brought him to the gym.

He loved going there and always beamed with pride when he stepped inside. He was part of the first class when the high school opened in the early 1970s, and he starred in football and track. He watched his father become a beloved janitor there in the decades after. Charles “Pap” Johnson was so cherished that after he died in 2009 following a bout with colon cancer, the school held his funeral in the auditorium. The next year, the school decided to name the gym after him. They call it “Charlie’s House.”

Three generations of Johnsons were there to watch Andrew wrestle that night. But once Johnson laid eyes on Maloney walking into the gym, he said, something didn’t feel right. “You know what, that referee guy, he’s prejudiced. I don’t know, there’s something about him,” he whispered to his older grandson sitting next to him, and as Andrew went on the clock to decide whether he should cut his hair, his grandfather

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/2019/04/17/wrestler-was-forced-cut-his-dreadlocks-before-match-his-town-is-still-looking-answers/>

stood up and nearly went down the bleachers and stopped it. He can't explain why he didn't. He stayed in the crowd. "I kept my composure," Johnson said, even as people started booing after the trainer started cutting Andrew's hair.

"It hurt him, too. I could see it in his face. It hurt him real bad," Johnson said of his grandson, who eventually retreated to a corner of the gym, his mother running down from the bleachers to console him as tears streamed down his face. The image of Johnson hurting has not left the national conscience.

"If you remember how [Johnson's shoulders] slumped, the kind of humiliation he experienced and what that would mean or might mean for his relationship to the country," said Eddie S. Glaude Jr., chair of the African American Studies program at Princeton University. "There are these moments repeated that we are seeing repeatedly on social media where one wonders: What is happening to the young people who have actually witnessed it and who are victims of this stuff?"

Andrew would go on to advance to the district tournament before his sophomore season ended in late February. The men in the fellowship group at First Baptist Church have talked about his future often, vowing to keep his story at the forefront of the change they want to see in their community. "That kid has a wrestling career ahead of him, and I hated to see it tarnished by racial overtones," Martinelli told his brethren during the meeting.

"You have people that have mixed emotions," said Johnson, Andrew's grandfather. "I don't think it's going to be forgotten quickly. I think there will be more of an understanding of how refs have to look at things."

Charles Jr. hopes his grandson will one day join them and tell his story. They talked the night before the March meeting because it was Andrew's 17th birthday. Charles told him he would give him a few dollars the next time he saw him. That weekend, he saw a photo of Andrew celebrating that the family had posted on their Facebook page. His dreadlocks were beginning to grow back.

"He's still got them. He's still got them," Charles said. "Wrestling season is over now, anyway."

Religion

Poll: Church membership in US plummets over past 20 years

By David Crary

The Associated Press, April 18, 2019



In this Saturday, Jan. 18, 2014 file photo, contrails from jets glow pink as they are illuminated by the setting sun in the skies beyond a church in Kansas. According to a Gallup poll released on Thursday, April 18, 2019, the percentage of U.S. adults who belong to a church or other religious institution has plunged by 20 percentage points over the past two decades, hitting a low of 50% last year. (AP Photo/Charlie Riedel)

NEW YORK (AP) — The percentage of U.S. adults who belong to a church or other religious institution has plunged by 20 percentage points over the past two decades, hitting a low of 50% last year, according to a new [Gallup poll](#). Among major demographic groups, the biggest drops were recorded among Democrats and Hispanics.

Gallup said church membership was 70% in 1999 — and close to or higher than that figure for most of the 20th century. Since 1999, the figure has fallen steadily, while the percentage of U.S. adults with no religious affiliation has jumped from 8% to 19%.

Among Americans identifying with a particular religion, there was a sharp drop in church membership among Catholics — dropping from 76% to 63% over the past two decades as the church was buffeted by clergy sex-abuse scandals. Membership among Protestants dropped from 73% to 67% percent over the same period.

Among Hispanic Americans, church membership dropped from 68% to 45% since 2000, a much bigger decline than for non-Hispanic white and black Americans.

There was a big discrepancy over that 20-year period in regard to political affiliation: Church membership among Democrats fell from 71% to 48%, compared to a more modest drop from 77% to 69% among Republicans.

David Campbell, a University of Notre Dame political science professor who studies religion's role in U.S. civic life, attributed the partisan divide to “the allergic reaction many Americans have to the mixture of religion and conservative politics.”

“Increasingly, Americans associate religion with the Republican Party — and if they are not Republicans themselves, they turn away from religion,” he said.

Mark Chaves, a professor of sociology, religion and divinity at Duke University, said that as recently as the 1970s, it was difficult to predict someone's political party by the regularity with which they went to church.

“Now it's one of the best predictors,” he said. “The correlation between religiosity and being Republican has increased over the years.”

The overall decline in church membership is driven by cultural and generational factors, said Nancy Ammerman, a professor of the sociology of religion at Boston University.

<https://www.apnews.com/f15241378057486ea437cad490a2ed67>

“Culturally, we are seeing significant erosion in the trust people have for institutions in general and churches in particular,” she said. “We are also seeing a generational shift as the ‘joiner’ older generation dies off and a generation of non-joiners comes on the scene.”

The new Gallup findings underscore that generational dynamic. Among Americans 65 and older, church membership in 2016-2018 averaged 64% percent, compared to 41% among those aged 18-29.

“The challenge is clear for churches, which depend on loyal and active members to keep them open and thriving,” wrote Gallup poll analyst Jeffrey Jones. “How do they find ways to convince some of the unaffiliated religious adults in society to make a commitment to a particular house of worship of their chosen faith?”

“These trends are not just numbers, but play out in the reality that thousands of U.S. churches are closing each year,” Jones added. “Religious Americans in the future will likely be faced with fewer options for places of worship, and likely less convenient ones, which could accelerate the decline in membership even more.”

Professor Scott Thumma, who teaches sociology of religion at Hartford Seminary, suggested several likely factors behind the decline. Among them, he said religious young adults are delaying marriage, postponing having children, and, when they do, having fewer children.

He also suggested there was diminished social pressure to formally join organizations.

“I’ve encountered many persons in churches that have attended for several years but did not officially join or become a member,” he said by email. “This is also evident in persons switching from one congregation to another without joining any.”

The findings are based on Gallup surveys conducted over the last 20 years, with most surveys including at least 2,000 U.S. adults and having a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points. Some findings are based on aggregated interviews from 1998-2000 and 2016-2018, with each period including interviews with more than 7,000 adults.

SEE ALSO:

[U.S. Church Membership Down Sharply in Past Two Decades](#) [*Gallup*, 2019-04-18]

[A Poll Finds U.S. Membership in Religious Institutions Hits an All-Time Low](#) [*US News & World Report*, 2019-04-18]

[US church membership hits all-time low: Gallup](#) [*The Hill*, 2019-04-18]

Sexual Assault / Harassment

Jeans-as-uniform day intended to bring AFA into forefront of national discussion on sexual assault

By Tom Roeder

The Gazette (Colorado Springs, Colo.), April 15, 2019

More than 4,000 cadets at the Air Force Academy will have a first-of-its-kind uniform of the day April 24 as part of a wider effort at the school to raise awareness of [sexual assault](#).

Jeans, long forbidden for cadets on duty, will be allowed by Lt. Gen Jay Silveria, who wants cadets to consider the toll of sexual attacks after a January Pentagon report found that more women at the school faced unwanted sexual contact but fewer were reporting it to authorities.

The Pentagon report found that 15 percent of the school's more than 800 women had experienced unwanted sexual contact, but just 10 percent of those had made a report.

"I was disgusted by the report," Silveria told a crowd of civic leaders who gathered Friday for his annual address on the state of the academy. "I was disgusted by the results of the report and it is unacceptable for the Air Force Academy."

Silveria said the jeans-as-uniform day is part of a plan to bring the academy to the forefront of a national conversation on sexual assault.

Denim Day, April 24, in which people are encouraged to wear jeans to raise awareness of rape and sexual assault, grew out of a 1998 Italian court ruling that overturned a rape conviction because the victim wore tight jeans. At the academy it will be held in conjunction with the general's Pathways to Prevention summit, which will solicit ideas from cadets on how to stop sexual crimes.

"The bottom line is we have to do better, the Air Force Academy will remain a place of dignity," Silveria said Friday. "We intend to lead in this area."

The Pentagon is pushing its military academies to address sexual crimes, and last week brought together Silveria and his counterparts from West Point and Annapolis to discuss the issue.

Reported sexual assaults in the academic year that ended last May were down, from 33 in the prior year to 29 in 2018.

Silveria has attacked the issue of sexual assault with a series of programs, including a summit last year that sought advice from sexual assault victims.

But the issue is far from resolved at the school, which announced Friday that Jefferson Hobbs, a cadet candidate at the academy's preparatory school, will face a hearing next week on three allegations of sexual assault.

Charging documents in the case allege that Hobbs grabbed a woman's hand and placed it on his groin in an August incident. In a September incident, court papers charge that Hobbs kissed a woman and had sex with a woman without consent. A hearing Tuesday will determine whether there is sufficient to court-martial Hobbs.

Contact Tom Roeder: 636-0240 Twitter: @xroederx

Naval Academy midshipman found not guilty on sexual assault, other charges

By Geoff Ziezulewicz

Navy Times, April 15, 2019



The entrance to the U.S. Naval Academy campus in Annapolis, Md. (Patrick Semansky/AP)

A [U.S. Naval Academy](#) student was found not guilty of sexual assault and obstruction of justice charges at a court-martial Friday, according to academy officials.

Midshipman 1st Class Michael Wallace, 23, faced the charges in connection [with an alleged incident](#) involving a Navy reservist in

Pensacola, Florida, in March 2018.

After the week-long trial, a panel of Navy and Marine Corps officers deliberated for about seven hours before delivering their verdict, according to [Antoinette O'Neill](#), Wallace's civilian attorney.

"The military takes allegations of sexual assault more seriously than anywhere else, but when they also ensure throughout the process that the presumption of innocence is preserved, you have proof of a fair system," she said in an email to Navy Times. "In this case, fairness and justice succeeded."

Wallace testified at the trial, O'Neill said.

He was slated to graduate with the class of 2018, but his graduation was held up as the case proceeded, according to academy spokeswoman Jenny Erickson.

The academy's superintendent still needs to review the trial and issue a promulgating order, which validates the court's findings, she said.

Erickson said she could not speculate on the final status of Wallace until the record is finalized, which should take place in the next few weeks.

Wallace was a 2018 member of the [Trident Scholar Program](#), an elite program whose alumni include [Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson](#).



Before he drew criminal charges, Midshipman 1st Class (senior) Michael Wallace was an Honors Operations Research major and Mandarin Chinese minor who served as the Academics Officer for 12th Company, Vice President of the USNA Finance and Investment Club and played starting forward on the Brigade's champion intramural soccer team. (U.S. Naval Academy)

The program allows "exceptionally capable students" in the top 15 percent of their class to engage in independent study and research during their senior year, according to the academy's website.

A native of Taylor, Michigan, and the Academics Officer for the academy's 12th Company, Wallace had been named a [Schwarzman Scholar](#) in late 2017 and was scheduled to pursue a graduate degree in China.

After completing the program, he was supposed to report to Nuclear Power School in Charleston, South Carolina, to enter the training pipeline to join the submarine force, according to the Naval Academy.

Officer accused of raping and stalking a fellow sailor

By Geoff Ziezulewicz

Navy Times, April 17, 2019



A junior officer assigned to the amphibious transport dock Mesa Verde is facing court-martial on charges that he raped and stalked another sailor. (Navy)

A junior officer has been charged with raping and stalking another sailor, including allegedly sending a grim message to her with a photo of a stabbed pumpkin.

Ensign Brendan W. Butler, 25, a surface warfare officer in training on board the amphibious transport dock [Mesa Verde](#), had previously been in a relationship with the accuser, according to his civilian defense attorney, [Benjamin Beliles](#).

The woman's name and rank are redacted in charge sheets provided to Navy Times.

Butler is charged with raping the woman in Los Angeles in October 2017 and for abusive sexual contact on two separate January 2018 incidents on board the amphibious transport dock [Portland](#), when he allegedly grabbed her buttocks and genitalia, according to charge sheets.

Beliles said his client will plead not guilty to all charges.

“He did not engage in the misconduct that has been alleged against him,” Beliles said in an email. “My client did not sexually assault her and we are confident that justice will be done in the end.”

Butler is also charged with stalking in connection to several alleged incidents from October 2017 to January 2018, according to charge sheets.

During that time, Butler stabbed a pumpkin the woman had carved and sent her a photo of it, prosecutors allege.

When she was slated for an underway on board the Portland, he allegedly volunteered to join the crew at the same time, “thereby inducing in (the woman) a reasonable fear of bodily harm,” charge sheets state.

Butler allegedly cornered and physically assaulted her at a wedding, followed her home from a party and also entered her apartment without being invited inside, according to charge sheets.

Prosecutors also accuse the officer of entering her vehicle without permission and pushing the woman against a wall in Atlanta in November 2017.

Butler “is saddened that the relationship with the complaining witness in this case ended in this manner,” Beliles said. “It’s tragic that a relationship’s ending has to be played out in the court system.”

The trial is scheduled to begin in July in Norfolk, Beliles said.

Originally from Massachusetts, Butler was commissioned in 2016 through the Naval Reserve Officer Training Corps program at the [College of The Holy Cross](#) in Worcester, according to his service records.

The Mesa Verde is his first assignment.

Shanahan Launches New Task Force on Military Sexual Assault

By Patricia Kime

Military.com, April 16, 2019



A Sexual Assault Awareness Month banner is displayed near the Keesler Base Exchange satellite pharmacy on Keesler Air Force Base, Mississippi, April 2, 2019. (U.S. Air Force/Kemberly Groue)

The Defense Department has created a sexual assault task force to study and make recommendations on improving how the armed services handle and prosecute sex crimes.

Pentagon officials said Tuesday that Acting Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan ordered the establishment of a Sexual Assault Accountability and Investigation Task Force on March 27. That was the day after a Pentagon advisory committee [released a report](#) finding disparities in documentation of sexual assault cases across the services. Among the discoveries were incomplete files on how commanders made prosecution decisions.

The move also followed the January release of a report on sexual assaults at the service academies, which found that the estimated number of students who experienced unwanted sexual contact [had increased 47 percent in the last two years](#).

The task force includes Dr. Elizabeth Van Winkle, executive director of the DoD office of Force Resiliency, and the services' top lawyers, who will review the processes used by the military to investigate sexual assault charges and prosecute cases.

The group will make recommendations "that will improve existing processes to address sexual assault while ensuring our formations, our communities, the rights of the victim and the accused and the integrity of the legal process are protected," Shanahan wrote in a memo to the service secretaries, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and other high-ranking Pentagon leaders.

"The importance of this work cannot be overstated," Shanahan said. "Only through diligence and innovation will we eliminate this reprehensible crime from our ranks."

Some Democrats in Congress have [renewed efforts to amend the Uniform Code of Military Justice](#) to remove the authority for deciding whether to prosecute sexual assault cases from military commanders.

Advocates for the change say it's needed because the current system yields low prosecution and conviction rates and allows for retaliation against victims.

But a [panel appointed by Congress in 2013 to study the command authority issue](#) concluded that the incidence rates of sexual assault would not be reduced by removing convening authority from commanders.

That group, the Response Systems to Adult Sexual Assault Crimes Panel, also noted that, in the sexual assault investigation process, subordinate leaders such as noncommissioned officers and civilian supervisors were often the ones who ignored reports of sexual assault or retaliated against victims.

"Training and accountability for these leaders is imperative," the panel noted.

A different group, the Defense Advisory Committee on the Investigation, Prosecution and Defense of Sexual Assault, published its own report March 26. In the report, the group said it had reviewed 164 cases

<https://www.military.com/daily-news/2019/04/16/shanahan-launches-new-task-force-military-sexual-assault.html>

of penetrative sexual assault across the services and found that command decisions to refer charges were "reasonable" in 95% of the cases.

But members also noted that documentation justifying the decisions was spotty across the services. The advisory committee recommended that services have standard requirements for documenting command disposition and furnishing rationale for each decision.

Shanahan said the new task force's recommendations will complement the work of the advisory committee, and he pledged to continue preventing sexual assaults and supporting victims.

In his letter, Shanahan said the report on the service academies report and discussions with Sen. Martha McSally, R-Arizona, a retired Air Force fighter pilot who revealed during a hearing March 6 that she had been raped as a junior officer, led to his decision to create the task force.

"I pledged to do more, and I intend to carry out this commitment," Shanahan said. "Sexual assault impacts the entire force across all Military Services. None of us are immune to this crime and all of us are responsible."

The task force is expected to provide its findings in a final report to Shanahan by April 30.

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

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SEE ALSO:

[MILITARY SEXUAL ASSAULT IS A NATIONAL SECURITY ISSUE](#) [*Inkstick*, 2019-04-18]

[Acting Pentagon Chief Responds to Continuing Academy Sexual Assaults](#) [*Government Executive*, 2019-04-17]

Wisconsin National Guard tracks 52 sexual assault complaints

By Todd Richmond

The Associated Press, April 11, 2019

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — The Wisconsin National Guard received 52 reports of sexual assault between 2013 and 2017, with more than half related to military service, Guard officials said during a roundtable with reporters Thursday.

[The U.S. Air Force is investigating](#) allegations of sexual assault and harassment within a Wisconsin Air National Guard security unit dating back to 2002. The investigation came at the request of U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin after a master sergeant in the unit, Jay Ellis, told her office that he had learned of six incidents between 2002 and 2016 and high-ranking officers had done little to address them.

That probe spurred [a request from Gov. Tony Evers and Baldwin](#) last month to the National Guard Bureau in Washington D.C. to review the Wisconsin Guard's sexual assault and harassment reporting procedures, investigative process and accountability measures.

The Guard's sexual assault response coordinator, Robert Brania, said Thursday that 20 of the 52 assault reports were "restricted," meaning the person who reported the assault requested confidentiality and the identity of all involved remains secret. The Guard's leader, Maj. General Donald Dunbar, is notified when such a report is made but isn't told the details. The Guard helps connect the victim with counseling services but no investigation is launched and the allegations aren't referred to law enforcement.

Confidentiality was not requested in the remaining 32 reports. In those cases, Dunbar was notified and the incidents were referred to civilian law enforcement as well as Guard investigators.

Twenty of those 32 reported assaults were connected with the victim or perpetrator's military service in some way, Brania said. Guard investigators substantiated 10 of those reports, meaning they felt there was enough evidence to continue down the path toward internal punishment.

Nearly 10,000 people serve in the Wisconsin National Guard.

The Guard has launched two court-martials for sexual assault since 2013, Brania said. One of those court-martials has concluded and the other is pending.

Guard spokesman Capt. Joe Trovato said in an email after the roundtable that the completed court martial resulted in 30 days confinement, a discharge for bad conduct and a demotion from sergeant first class to private. He didn't immediately respond to a request late Thursday afternoon for the names of the soldiers involved in the court-martials and details of their cases.

The remaining eight cases have been referred for "administrative action" that could include demotions, reprimands and discharges, he said.

Brania didn't have data from years preceding 2013. Guard spokeswoman Jackie Halverson said the current database was constructed in 2012 after Congress ordered the U.S. Department of Defense to standardize sexual assault reporting across all branches of military service.

Halverson declined to comment on the status of the Air Force investigation. She said no one from the National Guard Bureau has contacted the Wisconsin Guard about the review that Evers and Baldwin requested last month. A bureau spokeswoman had no immediate comment when asked if the review had started.

<https://www.apnews.com/8eb691c837f44c66b410350c220a3947>

The roundtable participants included Trovato, Halverson, Brania, Guard victim advocate Amber Garfoot and Guard attorney David Dziobkowski. In addition to explaining the reporting process, they noted that victims can seek expedited transfers away from perpetrators within the same unit, commanders stress to their soldiers and airmen to comport themselves professionally, sometimes limiting their drinks at dinner or prohibiting any alcohol while traveling for training and how Guard leaders have trained a service dog to comfort victims.

“We want our numbers to be zero,” Halverson said. “We want our assaults to be zero.”

They declined to discuss the details of any specific case.

Sexual assaults have plagued the military for years. In 2017 alone, the four branches received 5,864 reports from military members who said they had been sexually assaulted during their service, up 10 percent from 2016, according to Department of Defense figures.

Follow Todd Richmond on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/trichmond1>



SEE ALSO:

[Wisconsin DOJ rape kit tests yield charges against 6 people](#) [*The Associated Press*, 2019-04-12]