

## DEOMI News Highlights

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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.

### **Army announces first woman to lead an infantry division [Kyle Rempfer, *Army Times*, 10 June 2019]**

- The first woman to assume command of a U.S. Army infantry division has been announced by the California National Guard.
- Brig. Gen. Laura Yeager, a former UH-60 Black Hawk pilot, will assume command of the 40th Infantry Division during a ceremony at the Joint Forces Training Base, Los Alamitos, California, on June 29 at 11 a.m., Guard officials said in a news release this weekend.
- “As a female, I have found the military to provide opportunities and benefits unmatched by any profession,” Yeager told the Defense Department news service in May 2016. “Clearly, females are in the minority within the military, yet in every assignment I have held, my mostly male peers, subordinates, and superiors, have supported me, treated me with respect, coached, mentored, and advised me.”

[Army announces first woman to lead an infantry division](#)

### **Coast Guard Strips Gender-Specific Pronouns from Evals, Promotion Board Packages [Patricia Kime, *Military.com*, 12 June 2019]**

- As part of an ongoing effort to attract and retain women in the Coast Guard, the service has eliminated gender-specific pronouns from members’ promotion packages and professional evaluations.
- Under the new guidelines, “reported-on officer” has replaced “he” or “she,” and no reviewing officer can use terms like “his” or “her.” First names are not given, and the use of “flowery, fluffy language that might ‘read differently’ for women than men” is strongly discouraged, according to Lt. Cmdr. Kristin Jaekel, assistant gender policy adviser with the Coast Guard’s Office of Diversity and Inclusion.
- The new guidance is designed to mitigate bias in the evaluation system that could influence promotions or job placement, explained Cmdr. Andrea Smith, deputy of the service’s Personnel Readiness Task Force, addressing members of the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Service, or DACOWITS, during a meeting Tuesday in Alexandria, Virginia.

[Coast Guard Strips Gender-Specific Pronouns from Evals, Promotion Board Packages](#)

### **Sexual assaults at military academies could be handled outside the chain of command [Leo Shane III, *Military Times*, 13 June 2019]**

- House Democrats advanced a plan to partially remove military commanders at service academies from decisions to prosecute sexual assault accusations, instead relying on an independent expert to evaluate the cases.
- The move, included as part of the House Armed Services Committee’s annual defense authorization bill, drew significant criticism from House Republicans who said the move will undermine the military justice system and could lead to fewer prosecutions for the crimes.
- The House committee’s authorization bill draft also includes a host of other changes to military sexual assault policies, including expansions of the Special Victims’ Counsel program and new rules for consideration of transfer applications after a sexual assault is reported.

[Sexual assaults at military academies could be handled outside the chain of command](#)

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# Culture

# After all who were there are gone, what happens to history?

By Ted Anthony

The Associated Press, June 10, 2019



*In this June, 3, 2019, file photo, World War II veterans from the United States salute as they pose in front of Les Braves monument at Omaha Beach in Saint-Laurent-sur-Mer, Normandy, France. Ceremonies marking the 75th anniversary of D-Day reminded us that an entire generation is fading from the world stage. (AP Photo/Rafael Yaghobzadeh, File)*

FORT NECESSITY NATIONAL BATTLEFIELD, Pennsylvania (AP) — There are pieces of burned wood, unearthed decades ago. There is a spoon, a wine-bottle fragment,

assorted pottery shards — all carefully curated and elaborately explained.

And then there is the patrician voice of George Washington: “I’m certain,” he intones solemnly, “that if we didn’t attack the French first, they would have tried to ambush us. It was clear that they were on the offensive.”

Except, as is obvious, it’s not the voice of George Washington at all. It is a performer, reading from his writing.

At Fort Necessity, the spot in Southwestern Pennsylvania’s forested hills where an early “world war” among the English, the French and Native Americans began, history feels fascinating, meticulously preserved — and distant. Washington is 220 years gone, and the last survivor of the war that began here died in the early 1840s.

Last week, ceremonies marking the 75th anniversary of D-Day reminded us that an entire generation is fading from the world stage. But what happens to the collective perception of major historical events when all participants and firsthand witnesses pass from living memory, when none of our fellow humans can still answer the question: What was it like to be there?

“When the actual witnesses and participants pass from the scene, we lose something — morally, intellectually and emotionally,” says Gregory Vitarbo, a military and European historian at Meredith College in Raleigh, North Carolina.

Most everyone views history through the prism of the particular present moment. But when the present moment still includes those who were part of that history, it adds depth and resonance to the proceedings.

This was evident last week on Omaha Beach in Normandy. Survivors, most more than nine decades old, brought the commemorations alive in ways that would have been impossible were they all gone, as they undoubtedly will be in a decade or so.

They talked of deafening noise, of heads bobbing in the sea, of “the acrid smell of cordite” from shelling. Their very demeanors — limber young fighters become stooped, slow-moving great-grandfathers — seemed to shout of connections with a past that, on most days, now seems remote.

Some of this is intangible, a matter of feelings. The closer you are to a watershed moment, the more likely it is to capture interest. This is why, for example, a fender-bender on the street outside your home is far more likely to grab your attention than the same event three counties away.

Same thing goes for history. For many Americans growing up in the 1950s and 1960s, World War II was very much a thing of the present — their fathers had fought, and they brought tales of the war to the dinner

<https://apnews.com/5251b446bc1b46728f4d0529535e50aa>

table. Today, the ranks of those emissaries have thinned and the direct impact is reduced, so naturally the conversation around it fades.

That's why so much effort in exhibiting history at museums and historic sites these days employs sight, sound and touch — even for events that predated the technology to capture such across platforms. It's also why elaborate historical re-enactments, complete with clothing and firearms and language and food, have become so popular. It all points in the same direction — simulating what it might be like to talk to an actual participant.

That notion — keeping history as current as possible, and by extension as relevant as possible — has flourished in recent decades as immersive experiences become the norm and technology allows us to preserve more and more of the past's voices and vistas.

“It's not only what we remember, not only if we remember, but how we remember as well,” says Fred L. Johnson III, a historian at Hope College in Holland, Michigan, and a former U.S. Marine.

“We see, we hear, we feel, we touch, we smell,” he says. “Once you hold the paper, once you touch the headstone, once you hear the words, once you see the face . Suddenly it's not an abstract issue. Suddenly it's not back then. Suddenly it's happening right now.”

But even the most immersive technology is not an actual human being recounting momentous experiences. Some of the most famous words about the importance of living memory fighting the ticking clock came from Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel, who said, “For the dead and the living, we must bear witness.”

For those who carry history also carry credibility, even if they experienced only a fragment of a vast tapestry. They can say incontrovertibly what others can only speculate at; they can be definitive about things that others are trying to claim or distort.

Rebecca A. Adelman, who teaches media and communication studies at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, says such people can act as “a hedge against the abstraction that can happen when events are reduced to chapters in history and the sensationalism that often accompanies pop culture depictions.”

When that happens, she says, “these events can be more readily reduced to symbols that can mean whatever someone wants them to mean.”

For years before his death in 2017, a Holocaust survivor named Morris Glass visited Meredith College and spoke with students about his experiences. The house was always packed with students, Vitarbo says, and the visit was a keystone of the academic year.

Why? Because he could take one of the most traumatic events of the past century and bring it to human scale — and, just as important, answer questions about it interactively and indisputably.

“In an age of disputed facts, disputed truth, personal truth, ‘my truth’ and ‘your truth’, how are we going to get at the actual truth when the actual participants are gone?” wonders Jerald Podair, co-editor of “The Routledge History of the Twentieth-Century United States.”

“I am very concerned that when the last of these guys passes on, we're going to start making up our own truth,” says Podair, who teaches history and American Studies at Lawrence University in Appleton, Wisconsin.

Truth is always up for grabs in the end, and being there doesn't equal being right. The D-Day recollections of one American soldier at Omaha Beach may diverge from those of a British infantryman at Sword Beach. But people are more likely to engage with history if other actual people — not facts or data or even anecdotes — can act as guides and say, even in subjectivity-saturated ways: This is what it felt like.

<https://apnews.com/5251b446bc1b46728f4d0529535e50aa>

The late American historian John Hope Franklin knew this. “We must get beyond textbooks, go out into the bypaths and untrodden depths of the wilderness and travel and explore and tell the world of the glories of our journey,” he said, and his words tower over visitors who enter the Fort Necessity museum.

But when those who actually made the journeys are gone, and we have to strain to feel the hand of yesterday at work, history becomes a whole lot harder to hold. And the past becomes a lot easier for us to be condemned to repeat.

*Ted Anthony, director of digital innovation for The Associated Press, writes frequently about American culture. Follow him on Twitter at @anthonyted.*

# Americans' perception of LGBTQ rights under federal law largely incorrect: Reuters/Ipsos

By Maria Caspani

Reuters, June 11, 2019



(Reuters) - Almost half of all Americans incorrectly believe that federal law protects lesbian, gay and bisexual people from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, according to a Reuters/Ipsos opinion poll released this week.

A month ago, the Democratic-controlled U.S. House of Representatives passed the Equality Act, which would codify anti-discrimination protections for LGBTQ people in areas such as healthcare and housing into federal law.

But the bill faces stiff opposition in the Republican-controlled Senate and the administration of President Donald Trump, a Republican, opposes the bill on the grounds that it threatened “to undermine parental and conscience rights.”

Some supporters of the bill say the disconnect between the public perception and the actual protections afforded to LGBTQ people shows a need to drum up support for the legislation.

“The public might be getting the sense that we’re fully integrated in society and that we live a trouble-free life, and that is a challenge for my organization,” said Stacey Long Simmons, director of advocacy and action at the National LGBTQ Task Force, which works on behalf of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and other queer people.

The Reuters/Ipsos poll, conducted with the Williams Institute at the University of California at Los Angeles, was released as New York prepares to mark the 50th anniversary of the spontaneous rioting that erupted outside the Stonewall Inn gay bar in Greenwich Village in protest at police harassment.

The demonstration on June 28, 1969 gave rise to the worldwide movement for LGBTQ equality.



## [Stonewall 50 Full coverage](#)

Supporters of the Equality Act believe federal safeguards are necessary. In 30 U.S. states, LGBTQ people are at risk of being fired, evicted from their homes and denied services because of their sexual orientation and gender identity, according to the Human Rights Campaign, the largest U.S. advocacy group for the LGBTQ community.

“When you talk to people across the country, regardless of where they stand on LGBTQ equality, so many don’t know that in 30 states LGBTQ people are still at are risk of being fired solely because of their gender identity or sexual orientation,” said Charlotte Clymer, HRC’s press secretary for rapid response. “These things are flying under the radar for most Americans.”

HRC said in its 2018 State Equality Index that 17 states and Washington, D.C. have robust LGBTQ non-discrimination laws for employment, housing and things such as obtaining credit and insurance.

## ‘MOSTLY WRONG’ PERCEPTION

The Reuters/Ipsos poll found that 45% of respondents believed federal anti-discrimination protections already exist for lesbian, gay and bisexual people, including 40% of those aged 18-34 and 57% of registered Republicans. Only 23% said they were not protected at the federal level.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-lgbt-stonewall-equality/americans-perception-of-lgbtq-rights-under-federal-law-largely-incorrect-reuters-ipsos-idUSKCN1TC120>

Only one in three respondents knew that transgender people were not protected from gender identity discrimination under federal law. The rest either said they did not know, or they believed - incorrectly - that transgender people already had federal protections.

“We’re working so very hard to set a ground game about the Equality Act so that people understand that their common perception is mostly wrong,” said Long Simmons, whose group is trying to build support among lawmakers and constituents.

Opponents of the Equality Act see legislation as unnecessary and a threat to religious freedoms, such as business owners who object on religious grounds to serving same-sex couples.

The poll indicates that most Americans do not think religious objections should be a reason to deny service to an LGBTQ person, whether in business (57%), healthcare (64%) or employment (62%).

In the survey, only 20% of respondents said that LGBTQ people are treated “about the same” in the U.S. military, while 43% percent said they are treated worse.

“I think that’s got to be an awareness of the Pentagon and the Trump administration’s decisions to make it impossible for trans people to serve authentically,” said Kerith Conron, a research director at the Williams Institute.

In January, the U.S. Supreme Court lifted lower court rulings that blocked a Trump administration ban on certain transgender people from serving in the U.S. military, allowing the policy to go into effect.

The ban is one of several steps taken to curtail LGBTQ rights, after a decade of change that included the legalization of same-sex marriage nationwide in 2015 under the LGBTQ-friendly administration of President Barack Obama, a Democrat.

Last month, the Trump administration proposed rules that would roll back protections for transgender patients under the Affordable Care Act, or Obamacare, and allowing homeless shelters to turn away transgender people for religious reasons.

In the poll, 43% of Americans said LGBTQ people were treated “about the same” as people who do not identify as LGBTQ in obtaining access to healthcare from doctors and hospitals. Only 17% say they are treated worse, and about 1 in 3 said they did not know.

“It’s been a struggle and that’s the weird thing about things that we take for granted,” HRC’s Clymer said. “You’ll see people support these issues of equality and yet maybe not be fully informed on their status.”

The Reuters/Ipsos poll was conducted online on May 29-30 and June 5-6 in English throughout the United States. It gathered responses from 2,237 adults and has a credibility interval, a measure of precision, of 2 percentage points.

See the full poll results [here](#).

*(Reporting by Maria Caspani in New York; Editing by Frank McGurty and Grant McCool)*

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# Survey finds boost in U.S. support for transgender rights

By Ellen Wulfhorst

Reuters, June 11, 2019

NEW YORK (Thomson Reuters Foundation) - Most Americans believe transgender people should be allowed in the military despite government efforts to ban them, [research showed](#) on Tuesday, indicating growing support for trans rights.

But about a quarter of Americans said they have grown more opposed to trans rights in the last five years, according to the survey by the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI), a Washington-based polling group.

“For Americans, the people in power - the Trump administration creating these policies - is not necessarily representative of what most people actually want and what people actually think,” said Natalie Jackson, PRRI’s research director.

The administration of President Donald Trump has in the last two years moved to ban transgender people from the military and to weaken discrimination protections in schools and workplaces.

The Democratic-controlled U.S. House of Representatives last month passed the Equality Act that would fortify protections for LGBT+ people in health care and housing but the bill faces stiff opposition in the Republican-controlled Senate.

In the survey, 62% of Americans across much of the political spectrum - including evangelical Christians and Trump supporters - described themselves as more supportive of rights for transgender people over the last five years.

“That’s in spite of current administration actions,” Jackson told the Thomson Reuters Foundation, adding that support had increased as transgender issues have grown more prominent.

The remaining 13% surveyed said their views on trans rights remained the same or that they did not know.

Almost two-thirds of the 1,100 people surveyed said they supported transgender military service, including about half of those who said they viewed Trump favorably.

Americans were about evenly divided over whether transgender people should use bathrooms consistent with their sex assigned at birth or with their gender identity.

Less than a quarter of Americans reported having a close friend or family member who was transgender, compared to nearly seven in 10 who had a close gay or lesbian friend or relative.

*Our Standards: [The Thomson Reuters Trust Principles.](#)*

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## SEE ALSO:

[More Republicans Are Supporting Transgender People Serving in Military, Despite Donald Trump's Ban: Study](#) [*Newsweek*, 2019-06-11]

[Trump’s transgender military ban is losing support even in his own party](#) [*The Washington Post*, 2019-06-11]

[Poll: Republican support for transgender service members rising](#) [*The Hill*, 2019-06-11]

# Diversity

# Army announces first woman to lead an infantry division

By Kyle Rempfer

Military Times, June 10, 2019



*Brig. Gen. Laura Yeager will assume command of the 40th Infantry Division this summer. (Army)*

The first woman to assume command of a U.S. Army infantry division has been announced by the [California National Guard](#).

Brig. Gen. Laura Yeager, a former [UH-60 Black Hawk pilot](#), will assume command of the [40th Infantry Division](#) during a ceremony at the Joint Forces Training Base, Los Alamitos, California, on June 29 at 11 a.m., Guard officials said in a news release this weekend.

Yeager will be the first woman in history to lead a U.S. Army infantry division, officials said. She will be taking command from Maj. Gen. Mark Malanka, who is retiring.

Yeager currently serves as the commander of Joint Task Force North, U.S. Northern Command, at Fort Bliss, Texas. That organization is tasked to support the interdiction efforts of U.S. federal law enforcement agencies.

During her career, Yeager flew Black Hawk helicopters on a combat deployment in 2011 to Iraq and commanded the California National Guard's 40th Combat Aviation Brigade.

She began her active-duty military service in May 1986 after receiving her commission from the Reserve Officer Training Corps at California State University Long Beach, according to the Guard release.

She finished military helicopter training in 1989, and first served as a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter aeromedical evacuation pilot.

"As a female, I have found the military to provide opportunities and benefits unmatched by any profession," she told the [Defense Department](#) news service in May 2016. "Clearly, females are in the minority within the military, yet in every assignment I have held, my mostly male peers, subordinates and superiors, have supported me, treated me with respect, coached, mentored and advised me."



*U.S. Army Brig. Gen. Laura Yeager, commanding general of Joint Task Force North, visits 1-37 soldiers supporting mobile surveillance camera operations in New Mexico, March 7, 2019. (Army)*

"At the same time, I have been inspired by the incredibly strong and amazing women I have served with and for," she said after being promoted to brigadier general. "I would not have achieved this rank without every one of them."

Yeager will be taking command of a storied military unit that was first formed in 1917.

Soldiers from the 40th Infantry Division have fought in World War I, World War II and the Korean War. More recently, the division's soldiers have deployed to Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq and numerous combatant command locations.

In March, the division headquarters returned to U.S. soil after successfully completing a train, advise and assist mission in Afghanistan, Guard officials said in their news release.

*[Kyle Rempfer](#) is a staff reporter for Military Times. He trained and served as an Air Force special tactics operator from 2010 to 2015. Kyle's reporting focuses on the unified combatant commands.*

# Artemis Generation: NASA emphasizes role of women as it prepares for a return to the moon

By Ledyard King

USA TODAY, June 10, 2019



**VIDEO:** NASA Administrator, Jim Bridenstine, on the new lunar program 'Artemis'. It will face a funding fight this year that could affect the 2024 timeline. USA TODAY

WASHINGTON – Mercury. Gemini. Apollo.

Artemis?

In choosing Apollo's twin sister – and Greek goddess of the moon – as the name of the lunar return program, NASA Administrator Jim Bridenstine said it's important to showcase women's past and future contributions to the space program.

"How perfect is that?" he said during an interview with USA TODAY. "We have this diverse astronaut corps where we can actually send the first woman to the moon and name it after the twin sister of Apollo. I've been trying to communicate as much as possible to as many people who will listen that we are now the Artemis Generation."

Though not as fast as some would like, the space agency has been transitioning from male bastion to diverse workplace for decades.

Roughly a third of space shuttle program astronauts were women. The first civilian chosen for a mission was teacher Christa McAuliffe, who died when space shuttle Challenger exploded in 1986. Women have occupied leadership positions in the agency, though all 21 acting and Senate-confirmed administrators have been men.



America's first woman astronaut, Sally Ride, communicates with ground controllers in 1983. (Photo: AFP/Getty Images)

Vice President Mike Pence's announcement [during a National Space Council meeting in March](#) that a woman would be part of the first team of astronauts to walk on the moon elevated the goal. Two months later, NASA announced that its lunar return program would bear the name of Artemis – twin sister of Apollo, whose name graced the first lunar missions.

NASA's plans call for a lunar landing in 2028 although the Trump administration asked for extra money in next year's budget to accelerate the mission to 2024.

President Donald Trump cast doubt on those plans Friday, tweeting, "For all of the money we are spending, NASA should NOT be talking about going to the Moon – We did that 50 years ago."

For all of the money we are spending, NASA should NOT be talking about going to the Moon - We did that 50 years ago. They should be focused on the much bigger things we are doing, including Mars (of which the Moon is a part), Defense and Science!

— Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) [June 7, 2019](#)

It's been nearly 47 years since the last human walked on the lunar surface.

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2019/06/10/apollo-artemis-nasa-promotes-role-women-return-moon/1371588001/>

"When the last person walked the moon in 1972, there was no opportunity for a woman to participate," said [Janet Kavandi](#), a three-time shuttle astronaut who directs NASA's John H. Glenn Research Center in Cleveland.

"The Artemis Generation changes that," [she wrote in a column](#) for USA TODAY. "Our nation must take the next giant leap so long promised. As a female astronaut, I followed pioneers like Sally Ride to space and helped solidify their gains. Women's next frontier will be the moon."

- **Funding issues:** [NASA chief: 2024 moon landing 'off the table' if Congress doesn't approve Trump request for extra funds](#)
- **Moon by 2024:** [NASA names new moon landing mission 'Artemis' as Trump administration asks for \\$1.6 billion](#)

Ride [became the first American woman in space](#), when she launched with four crewmates aboard Challenger in 1983.

Michael Collins, who piloted the Apollo 11 mission in 1969 that brought the first men to the moon, said it's easy to understand why women were "shortchanged" in the early days of the space program.

President Dwight Eisenhower's decision to pluck astronauts from a narrow pool of military pilots meant women were excluded automatically.

"But I think those days are clearly over. I think women definitely have an equal part with men," said Collins, who has two daughters. "In my book, women are every bit as capable as men."



*Crew members of space shuttle Challenger and mission STS-51 were: back row; Mission specialist Ellison S. Onizuka, from left, Teacher in Space Participant Sharon Christa McAuliffe, Payload Specialist Greg Jarvis and Mission specialist Judy Resnik. In the front row are Pilot Mike Smith, from left, Commander Dick Scobee, and Mission specialist Ron McNair. Challenger exploded shortly after liftoff on Jan. 28, 1986, killing all aboard. (Photo: NASA)*

John Logsdon, who founded the Space Policy Institute at George Washington University, said NASA has done a good job since Apollo to recognize gender equity. About half of new astronaut recruits are women, he said.

"I think it's in the natural order of things," he said. "In a sense, NASA is ahead of the curve in giving equal treatment between male and female."

Bridenstine said NASA's emphasis on female equality is personal to him. He wants to make sure his 11-year-old daughter, Sarah, has "every opportunity" to envision herself as an astronaut if that's what she wants to do.

"The astronauts today are not the same as the astronauts of the 1960s," he said. "This time, when we go to the moon, we're taking all of America with us."

# Coast Guard Strips Gender-Specific Pronouns from Evals, Promotion Board Packages

By Patricia Kime

Military.com, June 12, 2019



*An all-female watch was executed on the Coast Guard Cutter Mackinaw during the ship's transit to Chicago, Nov. 27, 2012. (U.S. Coast Guard photo/Robert Butler)*

As part of an ongoing effort to attract and retain women in the [Coast Guard](#), the service has eliminated gender-specific pronouns from members' promotion packages and professional evaluations.

Under the new guidelines, "reported-on officer" has replaced "he" or "she," and no reviewing officer can use terms like "his" or "her."

First names are not given, and the use of "flowery, fluffy language that might 'read differently' for women than men" is strongly discouraged, according to Lt. Cmdr. Kristin Jaekel, assistant gender policy adviser with the Coast Guard's Office of Diversity and Inclusion.

The new guidance is designed to mitigate bias in the evaluation system that could influence promotions or job placement, explained Cmdr. Andrea Smith, deputy of the service's Personnel Readiness Task Force, addressing members of the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Service, or DACOWITS, during a meeting Tuesday in Alexandria, Virginia.

The Coast Guard in March released results of a commissioned study on women in the service that found they stayed in the service at significantly lower rates than their male counterparts.

**Related:** [Coast Guard Eyes Changes to Physical Standards, Tattoo Policy to Retain Troops](#)

Reasons cited for leaving ranged from assignments to collateral duties considered stereotypical female activities, such as morale and administrative tasks, that don't enhance career development, and a belief that men and women are treated differently in the service.

For example, the study noted, women are often excluded from group activities and see limited opportunities for advancement.

The results of the study, conducted by Rand Corp., were gleaned from input from 1,010 women and 127 men in more than 160 focus groups.

Women comprise roughly 15% of the Coast Guard. To encourage women and men to join the service and make it "the employer of choice" for all, Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Karl Schultz earlier this year announced a number of personnel policy changes and planned initiatives designed to retain members.

The pronoun change is one of the "early action items" immediately implemented, Smith said.

The Coast Guard can make the professional review process gender-neutral because, unlike some other services, it does not use photographs in promotion board packages or evaluations, Jaeker explained.

Without a photo and without a first name, "you don't know," she said.

Language choice is also important, she added. "[A woman's eval] may say 'pleasant personality, cheery, bright, happy every day,' whereas the male eval might say 'led, spearheaded, action-oriented,' very masculine terms. There's that bias, even though they may both be scheduling officers, managing the activities for eight aircraft a week."

<https://www.military.com/daily-news/2019/06/12/coast-guard-strips-gender-specific-pronouns-evals-promotion-board-packages.html>

Other policies under scrutiny as a result of the retention study are the Coast Guard's physical standards, which are based on body mass and require a tape measurement of all personnel twice a year. Tattoo regulations will also get a review.

Immediately after Schultz received Rand's preliminary findings, he announced a program that would allow reserve members to step into active-duty jobs when a service member takes maternity, convalescent or caregiver leave.

Coast Guard officials said Tuesday that since the new "surge" program's introduction two months ago, 30 Coast Guard men and women have used it.

Other "early action items" include extending the amount of leave new parents can take, the opportunity for new moms to decline temporary assigned duty that requires [deployment](#) for up to a year after childbirth, and making co-location easier for service members married to other Coast Guard men and women.

"We are looking across the service to identify other areas of personnel readiness. We recognize that anything positive we are doing for women, we are doing for all our members," Smith told DACOWITS.

-- *Patricia Kime can be reached at [Patricia.Kime@Military.com](mailto:Patricia.Kime@Military.com). She can be reached at [@patriciakime](https://www.instagram.com/patriciakime).*

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# First woman in history to command Puget Sound Naval Shipyard

By Kara Kostanich

KOMO News (Seattle, Wash.), June 12, 2019



*First woman in history to command Puget Sound Naval Shipyard*  
(Photo: Puget Sound Naval Shipyard & Intermediate Maintenance Facility) [PHOTOS](#)

BREMERTON, Wash. -- It's a change of command that will forever be part of history. On Wednesday a new commander took the helm at the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard.

Captain Dianna Wolfson assumed the top spot at the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard and Intermediate Maintenance Facility during a large ceremony in the historic 460 Building with hundreds in attendance.

“Dianna Wolfson was chosen for the position for one reason and one reason only - she was absolutely the very person for the job,” said Vice Adm. Thomas Moore, a commander for the Naval Sea Systems Command.

Surrounded by civilian and military workers, friends and family Wolfson replaced Captain Howard Markle who has commanded the shipyard to much success since 2015. On Wednesday the shipyard received a prestigious honor – the Meritorious Unit Commendation award for achievement and service.

“It is clear you are leaving a legacy and it truly an honor to follow in your footsteps,” said Captain Dianna Wolfson, the new commander at the shipyard. “While I have aspired to this moment since I first took my military oath, this is not the culmination of my Naval career, but rather the start of its most important and exciting chapter.”

The captain was commissioned in 1996 and has served in a wide variety of ship and shore assignments. She served aboard USS George Washington (CVN 73) and USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70). Her shore assignments include Portsmouth Naval Shipyard; Commander, Naval Forces Atlantic; Norfolk Naval Shipyard (twice); and the Navy's Supervisor of Shipbuilding office in Newport News, Va. She comes to PSNS & IMF from Norfolk Naval Shipyard, where she served as the command's operations officer.

She's a graduate of the United States Merchant Marine Academy at Kings Port, N.Y.

“I've had many great opportunities so far in my Naval career but the greatest opportunity of all is the one before me at this very moment,” she said.

Captain Markle's next assignment will be on the executive staff of the commander, Naval Sea Systems Command, in Washington, D.C.



# There are no female Marines currently leading infantry platoons in the Corps

By Shawn Snow

Marine Corps Times, June 13, 2019



*A Marine participates in an exercise during the Infantry Officer Course at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Twentynine Palms, California, Sept. 18, 2017. (Sgt. Gregory Boyd/Marine Corps)*

Only two women have graduated from the Corps' arduous 13-week [Infantry Officer Course](#), and neither of them are currently leading infantry platoons.

First Lt. Marina A. Hierl, the first woman to graduate from IOC, has moved on from her role as the platoon commander of 2nd Battalion, 4th Marines, after wrapping up a deployment to Darwin, Australia, according to Marine officials.

Her successful rotation to Australia has netted her a bit of a promotion and a second deployment with the storied 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines, commonly known as Darkhorse, according to Lt. Col. Geoffry Hollopeter, the commanding officer of 3/5. The Marines of 3/5 are embarked with the 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit, or MEU.

Hierl is serving as the assistant operations officer for 3/5, "a billet traditionally held by a captain," Hollopeter said.

- [Meet the first female Marine to graduate IOC and lead an infantry platoon \[2018-08-10\]](#)

Hollopeter told Marine Corps Times that Hierl volunteered for a second deployment, and that she was recommended by her previous command to serve as the assistant operations officer "because she consistently performed at a high level throughout her time as a platoon commander."

But Hierl's promotion has vacated the only infantry platoon commander billet held by a woman.

While Hierl is no longer an infantry platoon commander, her graduation from IOC qualifies her to lead infantry Marines, so eventually she could command a company following her deployment with the 11th MEU.

The second woman to graduate IOC is a ground intelligence officer, currently with 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines, serving as the assistant intelligence officer, according to Marine officials. She also graduated from the Corps' [Scout Sniper Unit Leaders Course](#), and could one day lead a sniper or recon platoon.

The Corps has struggled to attract women to previously closed combat jobs.

Only two women thus far have successfully navigated IOC, and NPR reported that only 31 women have graduated from infantry training in the Marines.

In an interview with [NPR](#), Commandant of the Marine Corps Gen. Robert Neller said, "The numbers are the numbers."

"If you want to compete for any MOS [military occupational specialty], man or woman, you compete, and if you meet the standard you earn the MOS," Neller told NPR.

Neller said in the NPR interview that he wasn't surprised by the low number of women in combat fields.

"We knew this," he said. "We testified to this. We've told everybody we knew the numbers would be small. Because we didn't believe there were many women that were interested in doing this

NPR reported that 28 women have graduated from Army Ranger school.

[Shawn Snow](#) is the senior reporter for Marine Corps Times and a Marine Corps veteran.

# Will Congress force gender integration at Marine Corps boot camp?

By Leo Shane III and Shawn Snow  
Marine Corps Times, June 12, 2019



*Marines with the 3rd Recruit Training Battalion's India Company — the first combined company of male and female recruits — march ahead of graduation ceremonies on March 29, 2019. (Cpl. Vivien Alstad/Marine Corps)*

A House panel would require Marine Corps officials to [integrate women into recruit training](#) at Parris Island, South Carolina, within five years and at Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego within eight years under draft legislation advanced Wednesday.

Advocates said the plan, which passed the [House Armed Services Committee](#) along party lines, is needed because of the slow pace of Marine Corps officials in bringing women recruits in step with their male colleagues. The service is the only branch that has not fully [combined training for male and female recruits](#).

“Fully integrating women is not only the right thing to do, it makes our military stronger,” said Rep. Jackie Speier, D-Calif., and head of the committee’s personnel panel, in introducing the plan.

“Gender-integrated units have strengths that all-male units lack. Women’s diverse perspectives help units develop innovative approaches to challenges, increase units’ mutual respect and focus, and make them more lethal.”

- [Top Marine: No more gender integration changes at boot camp on horizon \[2018-05-03\]](#)

Marine Corps officials announced earlier this year that it would integrate one female platoon with male platoons at Parris Island, South Carolina, in an effort to evaluate what changes that would make to recruit training.

The move was not announced as a permanent change, and female drill instructors worked exclusively with the female recruits. Female recruits were housed in barracks with male counterparts, but in different squad bays.

But Speier and critics of the Corps say those half-measures don’t do enough to meet military goals of equitable treatment for women service members. The new legislation would mandate integration at the company level, not just within a few platoons.

“They deserve a chance to prove themselves alongside their male colleagues,” Speier said.

During the Parris Island integration experiment, side-by-side training between males and female recruits was minimal because Marines train by platoon at boot camp.

Advocates argue true gender integration requires mixed male and female platoons, an issue Commandant of the Marine Corps Gen. Robert Neller routinely said he would not approve.

“Our drill instructors stay with their recruits 24 hours a day, seven days a week the entire time they are there,” Neller told reporters in May 2018. “So I am not considering having men and women live together in an open squad bay.”

But incoming commandant Lt. Gen. David Berger told senators during his April confirmation hearing that he was open to another examination of gender integration at Parris Island, saying the previous effort “went great.”

<https://www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2019/06/12/will-congress-force-gender-integration-at-marine-corps-boot-camp/>

“The program of instruction that we use in the Marine Corps, we didn't change. We just changed where they were billeted,” Berger told lawmakers.

- [Where are the female Marines? \[2018-03-05\]](#)

The Corps does not currently train female recruits at the San Diego depot, but there are some female drill instructors at the West Coast boot camp.

Republicans on the committee were silent on the issue but voted together against the proposal.

The measure still must survive the Republican-controlled Senate before it can become law. Lawmakers there did not include any such language in their annual defense budget policy bill, and could insist on its removal during negotiations between the chambers.

# Miscellaneous

# His Suicide Note Was a Message to the Navy. The Way He Died Was the Exclamation Point

By Patricia Kime

Military.com, June 8, 2019



*Aircrew Aviation Electrician's Mate Striker, 21, hurled himself into the spinning tail rotor of an MH-60S helicopter on June 25, 2018. An investigation found that leadership at Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 28 in Norfolk, Virginia, "contributed" to his decision to take his own life. (Photo courtesy of the Caserta family)*

**Editor's Note: This article contains a description of suicide. If you or someone you know needs help, the Veterans Crisis Hotline is staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week, at 800-273-8255, press**

**1. Services also are available online at [www.veteranscrisisline.net](http://www.veteranscrisisline.net) or by text, 838255.**

In the weeks leading up to Brandon Caserta's death, friends said little seemed amiss with the smiling sailor they knew from the "gedunk," or canteen, at Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 28 out of [Norfolk](#), Virginia.

A goofy, happy-go-lucky type, Caserta was usually the first to volunteer for "cleaning duty, aircraft wash or field day," squadron mates said. Sure, he regretted breaking a leg at Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL School two years before, an injury that forced him to drop out of training to become a SEAL, but he was a trouper nonetheless.

"He was the kind of person that would drop whatever he was doing to help someone else. Day or night, rain or shine, he was always there," hometown friend Destini Mohn said in a Facebook post on his memorial page.

"Brandon was home for a few weeks [in May 2018] and he was happy, making plans for Christmas," said his father, Patrick Caserta, a retired [Navy](#) career counselor with 22 years of service. "He was a loving, caring, friendly kid."

But the 21-year-old aircrew aviation electrician's mate striker, or AEAN, did confide to friends via text that he was depressed about BUD/S and unhappy with his rating, which he felt forced to choose from a limited selection after leaving the SEAL training pipeline.



*Brandon Caserta. Photo courtesy of the Caserta family*

## A Toxic Leader

Being at HSC-28 didn't help: Caserta and his colleagues worked for a lead petty officer (LPO) who berated them publicly, frequently cursed at them and called them out for the slightest infraction. He teased Caserta as a "BUD/S dud" and once intentionally dropped one of Brandon's care packages in front of him to watch the sailor's reaction.

Command leaders were aware of this abusive sailor, but they also knew Caserta wanted out of the squadron. He had applied for a transfer to the naval aircrewman rating and was accepted. But another accident happened. Caserta broke his collarbone while riding his bicycle, threatening his chance to make the move.

<https://www.military.com/daily-news/2019/06/08/his-suicide-note-was-message-navy-way-he-died-was-exclamation-point.html>

Because of the injury, Caserta's orders were canceled and he was sent back to selling candy and snacks for several months. And the progress he'd made in earning his professional qualifications as an aviation electrician's mate reset to zero. He'd been 72% complete.

His chiefs told him that he couldn't reapply for aircrew until he completed the qualifications, and they also handed him a new requirement: get a driver's license so he could be cycled into the duty driver schedule and operate vehicles on the flight line.

Except that Brandon Caserta didn't drive. He had never owned a car, didn't have insurance and, while he had taken a driving course as a teen, had never been on the road by himself. In fact, his parents Patrick and Teri said he had a phobia and hadn't been behind the wheel since taking a driver's course. He only went to the Department of Motor Vehicles to get a license so he would have a state ID and could legally drive in an emergency.

Like many young people, Caserta relied on Uber, friends and his bicycle to get around.

But HSC-28 was having none of it. The chiefs conducted a search of the Arizona Department of Motor Vehicles website and found that Caserta had once held a valid driver's license. They directed him to fork over \$12 for a duplicate copy and told him they were sending him to a disciplinary review board for hiding the fact that he had a license.

He would drive the command's 18-person passenger van and no longer inconvenience any other sailors by requesting transportation to and from medical appointments for his re-rate application, according to several command counseling sheets.

"You have not performed your required duties as a watchstander (duty driver) like your peers and superiors since your assignment to HSC-28 due to the fact that you stated you are not a licensed driver. ... Recommend Disciplinary Review Board," stated his counseling record from June 22, 2018.

For Caserta, though, facing a year or more under a toxic LPO in a rating he hated, getting behind the wheel of a vehicle and enduring a disciplinary board appeared to be too much.

On June 25, 2018, Caserta left notes to several friends and his parents, walked out on the flight line at [Naval Station Norfolk](#) and hurled himself into the spinning tail rotor of an [MH-60S](#) helicopter.

"I'm sorry you have to see this," he shouted to the plane captain before he died.

## **Warning Signs**

The decision to take one's own life is deeply personal, one made for reasons the dead often take to the grave with them. But in his suicide note, Caserta faulted the Navy, asking his parents to "go after the re-rate process" that put him in a job he hated, and expose what he saw as a flawed command.

"I want to see as many people fired, kicked out or, at the very least, lose rank," he wrote.

## **Related content:**

- [The Warning Signs of Suicide and What to Do](#)
- [Former MCPON Bawled Out Staff, Made Sailors Fetch Coffee](#)

The words could easily be attributed to a sailor angry at the system, unhappy with himself and frustrated with life. Indeed, the command investigation concluded that Caserta was "suffering from a number of stressors, including a feeling of worthlessness since he had dropped on request from Special Warfare training and dissatisfaction with the Navy."

But the investigation found something else: a leadership problem in HSC-28 that started with Caserta's lead petty officer.

<https://www.military.com/daily-news/2019/06/08/his-suicide-note-was-message-navy-way-he-died-was-exclamation-point.html>

"[The lead petty officer]'s noted belligerence, vulgarity and brash leadership was likely a significant contributing factor in AEAN Caserta's decision to end his own life," the investigation states.

The investigator found "sufficient evidence to take [the LPO] to captain's mast for violation of UCMJ Article 93, Cruelty and Maltreatment" regarding Caserta. But the investigating officer then recommended against mast, instead suggesting the aviation electrician's mate 1st class, or AE1, be transferred with a "declining" evaluation.

"I do not recommend [mast] due to the fact that the member can refuse captain's mast enduring to a special or general courts-martial, further extending the timeline and exacerbating the healing process for all effected [sic] personnel," the investigating officer wrote.

The lead petty officer remains in the Navy, never having received punitive action. Military.com is not naming him as he has not been charged.

Cmdr. David Hecht, the public affairs officer for Naval Air Force Atlantic, said the LPO was placed in a leadership position after his dismissal from another supervisory role because the Navy believes in leadership opportunities and second chances.

"When he returned from detachment, he was counseled on leadership techniques, ways to improve his demeanor with junior sailors and given another opportunity to lead," Hecht said.

### **Institutional Problems**

For the most part, this strategy appears to work. But the Navy has had its share of what are considered "toxic leaders," notably even with the service's top enlisted leader, Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy Stephen Giordano, who retired in 2018 after an investigation found he [publicly berated and humiliated his staff and treated aides like servants](#).

And toxic leadership, some experts say, can have a deleterious effect on those considering suicide. The Navy's suicide rate in 2018 was the highest it's ever been.

While post-mortem analyses of suicides usually show that the victim faced major issues -- financial or relationship problems, medical issues, mental health conditions -- leaders can and do play a substantial role, according to research conducted by Dave Matsuda, an anthropologist at California State University-East Bay who studied a suicide cluster among soldiers in Iraq in 2010.

Asked by the [Army](#) to "think outside the box" in studying the deaths, Matsuda found that, given the opportunity, some noncommissioned officers and officers in the chain of command make their subordinates' lives a living hell. These "toxic leaders," Matsuda concluded, can contribute to suicide decisions.

While the bad leaders weren't wholly responsible for the suicides, they did help push the soldiers over the edge, he said.

"If someone is getting smoked, it doesn't make sense to keep that leader, that commander. They are part of the problem," Matsuda said. "But, you know, all too often the military in these cases just interviews the circle of command, not the circle of trust. And the command isn't going to admit there is a problem.

"It's a bit like the Catholic Church and the sex abuse scandal," he added. "Just shuffle the toxic leaders off to another place."

<https://www.military.com/daily-news/2019/06/08/his-suicide-note-was-message-navy-way-he-died-was-exclamation-point.html>



*Brandon Caserta. Photo courtesy of the Caserta family*

### **Anger Management**

The tirades of Caserta's LPO were well known in the command. He had been counseled while serving as a detachment LPO for "intolerable and unprofessional" behavior toward subordinates, and later relieved when his behavior didn't change.

Back at the squadron, he was sent to anger management classes and reassigned as LPO over Brandon and other junior sailors under a new chief petty officer "as a leadership challenge."

Unit chiefs were to visit the LPO's shop more frequently, "engage the sailors and attempt to ensure they had a means to convey any concerns if things weren't working out," according to the command investigation.

Hecht told Military.com that the lead petty officer was placed back in charge of junior sailors because "the bedrock of Navy culture is the continued leadership development of both our junior and senior sailors."

"HSC-28 took actions to mentor the AE1 and help him improve his demeanor ... and give another opportunity to lead," Hecht said.

But Brandon's father, and other sailors in the command, say the decision was made by a callous leadership cadre interested only in making mission and achieving the next rank.

The command, Patrick Caserta asserts, was "so hostile, corruptive and unethical," they tormented Brandon and drove him past the brink of despair. He uses the term "murder" to describe what they did to his son.

"They killed him," he told Military.com. "We are so angry at them for not looking out for Brandon and the other troops."

"When they talk about suicide," Patrick Caserta added, referring to the command and the Pentagon as a whole, "they talk about trauma, exposure to war and mental health. But they don't talk about harassment, bullying. They just don't want to say that it happens and they are at fault."

Aviation Machinist's Mate 2nd Class (AW) Justin MacMillan, who spent nearly four years at HSC-28, said a crisis could have been foreseen. MacMillan served with Caserta and reached out to the family after Brandon's death, hoping to provide them some solace and affirmation.

"The climate [at the unit] was just go, go, go, do, do, do, we'll worry about any personal stuff later," MacMillan said. "When I checked out of the command, I told them that if they kept treating people this way, they are going to have something really bad happen."

Hecht said that after the lead petty officer's initial counseling, "no concerns meriting his removal from his position were ever brought to the awareness of HSC-28's leadership."

But an anonymous message sent to squadron commander Cmdr. Duane Whitmer on June 18, 2018, showed the abuse hadn't stopped. According to the unsigned message provided by both Patrick Caserta and included in the command investigation, the LPO called subordinates his "bitches" and referred to the chiefs behind their backs as "douchebags" and "dumbasses." He "treated his workers worse than garbage" and "like dogs."

The LPO eventually was transferred on June 28, 2018, three days after Caserta's death, and only after he was heard making "derogatory and inflammatory comments concerning the deceased."

Yet the move, according to his counseling record, was "not punitive," and "was going to happen anyway due to all the detachments that are underway to mitigate our manpower shortfalls," the record noted.



<https://www.military.com/daily-news/2019/06/08/his-suicide-note-was-message-navy-way-he-died-was-exclamation-point.html>

## **A Troubling Trend**

Caserta's death was one of 68 Navy suicides in 2018. It was the worst year for suicides since the service began tracking them closely after Sept. 11, 2001. Caserta's was one of three in Norfolk-based helicopter squadrons in the first half of the year alone.

While military service was once considered a protective measure against suicide, military suicide rates have risen steadily in the years since 9/11, both among those who have [deployed](#) and those who have never deployed. The rise mirrors an increase in suicides among the general U.S. population, and suicide experts are struggling to understand why.

Those at risk include people between the ages of 15 to 24 and those over age 60. Other factors include having spent time in prison or jail, having a mental health disorder or a substance abuse problem, family violence or history of suicide, and having guns in the home, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

MacMillan and other sailors said the stress in the command was exacerbated by the high operational tempo. The concerns they describe are similar to the stress and readiness issues determined to be a factor in the [deadly collisions of the guided missile destroyers Fitzgerald and John S. McCain](#).

"They are working like 14 aircraft with the manning of five," MacMillan said. "They aren't leading anymore. They're dragging people along just trying to complete mission and chase their next rank."

Hecht said manning issues did not play a role in any of the command's decisions. He did not provide data regarding the unit's manning requirements or its current staffing.

A toxic leader, according to Army Doctrine Publication 6-22, "operates with an inflated sense of self-worth and from acute self-interest," consistently using "dysfunctional behaviors to deceive, intimidate, coerce, or unfairly punish others to get what they want for themselves."

They are, the directive states, a combination of "self centered attitudes, motivations, and behaviors that have adverse effects on subordinates, the organization, and mission performance."

The Navy has had its share of documented toxic leaders in recent years, with retired Capt. Holly Graf perhaps the most notorious. As commanding officer of the cruiser Cowpens, she was [relieved in 2010](#) for demeaning and humiliating crew members, exploding with fury and a seemingly bottomless trough of expletives in tirades aimed at subordinates.

More recently, the commanding officer of the cruiser Shiloh, Capt. Adam Aycock, who managed to complete his command tour, was found to have overseen a ship in complete dysfunction, his leadership threatening the ship's readiness by causing exhaustion, despair and suicidal thoughts among sailors, [according to a report in Navy Times](#).

Toxic leadership has even permeated the highest ranks of the service: Giordano retired the week Caserta killed himself, following an inspector general investigation [into his bullying and verbally abusive behavior](#) toward subordinates and staff.

MacMillan said he saw similar behavior at HSC-28. Caserta's LPO often "screamed, yelled and name-called" when sailors forgot to do something or made a mistake, and he would "throw fits worse than my toddler."

And a senior chief went behind his back, calling the Bureau of Naval Personnel to prevent MacMillan from going to BUD/S.

"I called the [Enlisted Community Management Branch] to ask why I got denied, and he said, 'Your senior chief had quite a few negative things to say about you.' I never found out what senior chief said, but when

<https://www.military.com/daily-news/2019/06/08/his-suicide-note-was-message-navy-way-he-died-was-exclamation-point.html>

he got the news, he called me in and just laughed in my face. 'You aren't going back to BUD/S, you are going on the [amphibious assault ship] Kearsarge,'" MacMillan recalled. "He literally dined me out just to get me to man a [deployment](#)."

MacMillan finally filed a Naval Inspector General complaint against the command after another issue arose: He requested to remain at the squadron and not go out on a detachment when his wife fell ill and he needed to support her and his two girls, a toddler and an infant.

He was transferred out of HSC-28 two weeks after filing the complaint.

Another sailor who asked not to be identified out of fear of retribution simply described the climate at HSC-28 as "terrible."

"It was awful," the sailor said. "There's one lead petty officer who is pretty good. But other than her, no one is looking out for junior sailors."

### **Fighting for Answers**

In the last weeks of Caserta's life, his parents became so concerned about his welfare that his father called the command, hoping to speak with the command master chief. Instead, he reached Caserta's maintenance master chief, who told him that "people in the squadron had to do two deployments because [Caserta] didn't have his quals."

Patrick Caserta says this statement means the command never had any intention of allowing his son to transfer ratings.

"They were trying to just keep him in the command and force him ... to deploy," he said.



*Brandon Caserta. Photo courtesy of the Caserta family*

Hecht said HSC-28 required Caserta to get his qualifications because in the Navy, to be recommended for any special program, including aircrew transition, "the expectation is that sailors are excelling in their current positions and meeting all the necessary requirements."

"HSC-28 wanted AEAN Caserta to be successful, and his leadership was actively engaged in helping him pursue his professional qualifications in support of his career goals," Hecht said.

Patrick Caserta seriously doubts that. "They made him work in gedunk for a year. They had no interest in his career," he said.

At the moment Brandon Caserta was making his final long walk out to the flight line, Patrick Caserta was on the phone with the command master chief, expressing concern for his son's welfare and telling him he planned to fly to Norfolk to take Brandon to base legal and the equal opportunity office to discuss his options.

Brandon died before the call ended.

The unit held a memorial service four days later; Patrick and Teri say they weren't invited. Navy policy states that the command should provide round-trip travel and allowances to family members to attend a command memorial service. Hecht said the memorial service was scheduled to allow the maximum number of unit members to attend and that the family was given "advanced notice." The family also was "provided a video of the memorial service, a piece of memorabilia signed by all the squadron members and a letter of condolence from the command," he said.

Patrick Caserta said the family was excluded out of sheer pettiness.

<https://www.military.com/daily-news/2019/06/08/his-suicide-note-was-message-navy-way-he-died-was-exclamation-point.html>

"The command disrespected him and they disrespected us," he said.

Desperate for answers on their son's death, the Casertas reached out to Brandon's NCOs, the friends he left gifts and notes for and those he had spoken about in texts. Eventually, the friends stopped responding. The Casertas believe the command ordered a cessation of communications; the command investigation notes that most individuals decided to limit communications because it "wasn't helping the grieving process."

### **A Reward for Information**

It's hard to tell which version is accurate, but a text sent to Brandon's parents from a junior sailor on May 31, 2019 -- after the command learned that Military.com had made phone calls regarding the Casertas' allegations -- indicates a culture of fear at the squadron.

"We are all scared that we will get into trouble. It sucks that telling the truth will make things bad for [anyone] who speaks up," the sailor wrote.

The Casertas are so angry and distraught that they have offered a \$25,000 reward to anyone who will come forward with information that "would lead to successful prosecution of individuals in their son's chain of command."

They have met with congressional staff of a dozen senators and representatives, including Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Virginia, and Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, D-Arizona, to discuss the treatment they and Brandon received, request an independent investigation and promote efforts to prevent suicide linked to toxic leadership.

They also would like to see the Navy implement Brandon Caserta's request in his suicide note regarding the re-rate process: that sailors who don't complete the training for the rate they initially sought be able to select any other training they qualify for with their Armed Services Vocational Battery Test results.

Matsuda, the anthropologist, said that to truly address the problem of suicide in the [armed forces](#), the services should consider toxic leadership when analyzing individual deaths. Operational leaders, he said, should not rely on "the boot camp strategy of breaking people down to build them back up."

"There's no proof that strategy works," Matsuda said. "And in some cases, people who are ridden hard can't take it. Toxic command climate can most certainly trigger suicidal behavior."

Whitmer, the commanding officer of HSC-28 at the time of Caserta's suicide, completed his command tour last month and has moved on. Former executive officer Cmdr. Trevor Prouty is the squadron's new CO. Command Master Chief David Tokarski remains with the squadron. One chief petty officer with the unit was promoted to ensign after Caserta's death and another is on terminal leave. The LPO remains at a unit in Norfolk.

Caserta's parents have taken their grievances public, publishing an essay earlier this week on [militarycorruption.com](#). The Navy, they say, should find the toxic leadership of the LPO, and the subsequent failure of the command to stop the harassment of Caserta and other sailors, reprehensible.

"Make no mistake, HSC-28 murdered our son Brandon. Senior officials of HSC-28 bear the ultimate responsibility for their failures such as the decision to keep AE1 in charge. They all turned a blind eye to [his] bullying and hatred toward Brandon and others," they wrote.

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

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## ICE is supposed to consider service when deporting veterans. It hasn't been.

By Meghann Myers

Military Times, June 12, 2019



*U.S. Marine veteran Marco Chavez, who was deported to Mexico in 2002 after he was convicted of a minor offense. In 2017 he won his fight to return to the U.S. (Hector Barajas-Varela via AP)*

Over the past couple of years, stories of non-citizen veterans being deported have made major headlines. As it turns out, there is a process in place that provides extra consideration for those [immigration cases](#), but federal officials haven't been following it.

It's an issue that's affected at least hundreds of veterans, but the full extent is unknown because of a lack of record keeping, according to a report released last week by the Government Accountability Office.

[Immigration and Customs Enforcement](#) not only doesn't adhere to the policy requiring a service record review before [deporting these veterans](#), they also don't track how many of them are caught by federal agents or ultimately deported, according to the report.

“When ICE agents and officers learn they have encountered a potentially removable veteran, ICE policies require them to take additional steps to proceed with the case,” according to the report. “GAO found that ICE did not consistently follow its policies involving veterans who were placed in removal proceedings from fiscal years 2013 to 2018.”

Many legal residents of the U.S. choose to service in the military because it can earn them citizenship, though they don't always qualify for or complete that process. After separation, they could spend years still in the U.S., until something like a criminal conviction brings them to ICE's attention.

At the request of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, GAO sifted through two databases, finding 250 veterans who had been subject to removal, and 92 who had ultimately been deported.

Since 2004, there have been two memos dictating how ICE agents handle a notice to appear — the first step in deportation proceedings — for veterans. And since 2015, those cases have needed to be kicked to a higher headquarters for review.

At a minimum, they must consider:

- Overall criminal history.
- Evidence of rehabilitation.
- Family and financial ties to the U.S.
- Employment history.
- Health.
- Community service.

In relation to their service specifically, they need to review years of service, deployments and awards. If they still decide to go ahead with the deportation case, the veteran's file must include a memo detailing the review of their service.

The GAO found that this doesn't happen every time.

<https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2019/06/12/ice-is-supposed-to-consider-service-when-deporting-veterans-it-hasnt-been/>

“Specifically, ICE policies require agents and officers to document the decision to issue a NTA to a veteran, but do not require agents and officers to identify and document veteran status when interviewing potentially removable individuals,” according to the report.

Twenty-one percent of cases never got a full review of their service, and 70 percent of cases were not reviewed by a higher office, the report found.

“Further, in December 2018 [Homeland Security Investigations] officials told us that HSI has not been adhering to either the 2004 or the 2015 policies because they were unaware of the policies prior to our review,” according to the study.

The officials added that they don’t, in practice, distinguish between veterans and non-veterans when opening a deportation case.

“Because ICE did not consistently follow these policies, some veterans who were removed may not have received the level of review and approval that ICE has determined is appropriate for cases involving veterans,” according to the study.

Part of the issue may be that ICE also doesn’t have a policy to identify and document any veterans it deals with. After an initial interview, individuals fill out a form that includes their most recent employer, Enforcement and Removal Operations staff told the GAO, and that’s usually where they find out if someone is a veteran.

“However, ICE does not have a policy requiring agents and officers to specifically ask about and document veteran status,” the report found, despite the requirement to handle veterans’ cases differently.

- [Troops do not view immigration as a ‘national emergency.’ Not even close. \[2019-02-15\]](#)

The reason is that immigration enforcement basic training includes a lesson on including veteran status on paperwork, officials said, though that same lesson plan’s list of mandatory questions doesn’t include one about military service.

And if veterans are identified, none of the agencies involved have consistent means to track what happens to them. It might be noted on one form, but that information doesn’t go into the multiple databases used, preventing any electronic searches.

“Because ICE does not maintain complete electronic data on potentially removable veterans it encounters, ICE does not know exactly how many veterans have been placed in removal proceedings or removed, or if their cases have been handled according to ICE’s policies,” the reporter found.

And, the report found, once deported, living abroad made it more difficult for veterans to access the benefits they earned while serving, such as disability or retirement pay.

“For example, a removed veteran may not be able to attend a hearing to appeal a VA disability rating decision because VA conducts those hearings exclusively in the United States,” the report found.

The GAO’s recommendations focused mostly on following policies ICE already has, including to ensure consistent application of them and to create a new policy requiring officials to specifically ask about military service in interviews.

There was also a recommendation to input that data into electronic databases, to more easily track veterans subject to deportation or who have already left.

DHS agreed with the findings, according to the report, saying that ICE had plans to update guidance and training materials to accurately record service info, ensure it is reviewed before issuing a NTA and that veterans in the system can be tracked through electronic databases.

<https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2019/06/12/ice-is-supposed-to-consider-service-when-deporting-veterans-it-hasnt-been/>

At the same time, lawmakers have tried to apply legislation to the issue.

In 2017, the House of Representatives introduced a bill that would create a new path to citizenship for veterans who had been deported for criminal offenses.

Called the “Repatriate Our Patriots Act,” it would bar their deportations and ensure legal permanent residency following sentencing.

“If you are willing to put your life on the line to defend this great nation and its values, you should be able to become a U.S. citizen,” bill sponsor Rep. Don Young, R-Alaska said in a statement after its announcement. “It is inexcusable that service members who risked it all to protect us would be put through the deportation process.”

It has been with the Subcommittee on Immigration and Border Security since.

*[Meghann Myers](#) is the Pentagon bureau chief at Military Times. She covers operations, policy, personnel, leadership and other issues affecting service members.*

# Injured Recruit Gets OK to Leave Boot Camp After Parents Say He Was 'Silenced'

By Gina Harkins

Military.com, June 7, 2019



*Alex Tipton (Courtesy of Jodie Tipton)*

A Marine recruit who was at boot camp for almost 500 days headed home this week after his parents sought help from lawmakers on his behalf and then raised retaliation concerns.

Alex Tipton, an 18-year-old from Arkansas, graduated early from high school in December 2017 so he could ship off to [Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego](#). He set out to be an aviation supply specialist.

Just 17 at the time, Tipton had to get permission from his parents to enlist. But when they asked for updates about his condition nearly 16 months after he left for boot camp, his mom said they were repeatedly shut out.

"His birthday is coming up -- he'll turn 19," Jodie Tipton told Military.com before they knew when he'd be coming home. "We are really hopeful we can see him as an 18-year-old."

Tipton had been at boot camp since February 2018. That's long enough for him to earn the pay of a lance corporal. He was in a rehabilitation platoon for months, even after being told he would never return to recruit training.

He was allowed to keep his high-and-tight haircut, but Jodie Tipton said he still had to refer to himself in the third person since he didn't complete the Crucible, the culminating training event at [Marine Corps](#) boot camp.

To be sure, Tipton's experience was not the typical 13-week process most Marine recruits endure. He suffered three separate injuries over the span of about nine months, which repeatedly paused his training.

The injuries included stress fractures to both femurs, which first stopped his training at Day 15. He picked back up at Day 16 about six months later, only to suffer a fractured hand during training with pugil sticks, the heavily padded poles recruits use to prep for combat.

Twelve weeks later, he picked up again and was just days from graduation in December 2018 when his leg pain returned. In addition to again suffering fractures in each femur, his tibia, fibula, ankle and foot also showed signs of stress.

Tipton was told he wouldn't be returning to recruit training. Since then, he'd been stuck in limbo as the Marine Corps and [Department of Veterans Affairs](#) processed his separation. Tipton was initially moved to a unit known as a separation platoon, where he was allowed privileges recruits don't get, including calls home.

Then he was suddenly moved back into the rehabilitation platoon, despite being told he'd never return to training.

Jodie Tipton said she and her husband couldn't get straight answers over the next several months about the status of their son's injuries or when he'd be allowed to go home. She sought help from West Coast recruiters, her congressman, senator and the Marine Corps inspector general's office, among others.

That's when her son's phone calls stopped, she said.

<https://www.military.com/daily-news/2019/06/07/injured-recruit-gets-ok-leave-boot-camp-after-parents-say-he-was-silenced.html>

"They silenced him," Jodie Tipton said. "All contact was gone."

## **A Lengthy Limbo**

Officials at MCRD San Diego declined Military.com's request to interview Tipton and the drill instructors that oversee his rehabilitation platoon.

Instead of answering detailed questions about his situation, they provided a lengthy statement.

"The Marine Corps Recruit Depot is committed to the health and safety of each young person that accepts the challenge of recruit training," Capt. Martin Harris, a spokesman for the depot, said. "Recruit Alex Tipton has given his very best effort to earn the title Marine over the last 15 months, and is currently awaiting final approval from the U.S. [Navy](#) Physical Evaluation Board to process his separation paperwork. ... It is inappropriate for the Marine Corps to disclose medical information or details of this ongoing process."

Less than a week after Military.com's questions went to the recruit depot, Jodie Tipton said her son called to say he'd be coming home. The family had already sent several letters to the depot's commanding general, the commandant of the Marine Corps, the acting defense secretary and President Donald Trump seeking help with his case.

She had also been in touch with the office of Sen. Tom Cotton, an Arkansas Republican who served as an [Army](#) officer, and their congressman, Republican Rep. French Hill.

None of that played into the timing of Tipton's separation, the depot's top enlisted leader told Jodie Tipton.

"[Sgt. Maj. Devon Lee] came on the phone to let me know that this was 'strictly coincidental,'" she said.

Alex Tipton's situation is similar to that of two recruits who found themselves stuck in limbo at [Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island](#), South Carolina, the service's East Coast entry-level training base, in 2012. When [Marine Corps Times reported](#) on the pair, who had been at boot camp about as long as Tipton, both got approval to go home within a week.

Marine officials at the time also said the decision had nothing to do with the paper's reporting.

## **Separating Recruits**

Recruits like Tipton who are too injured or sick to return to training get held up in a lengthy separation process. They must await a Physical Evaluation Board and choose between two separation processes.

The first is called IDES, or the Integrated Disability Evaluation System. During that process, recruits are assessed by the VA to determine whether they have earned a lifelong disability rating for injuries or illnesses from boot camp.

That process has been slammed by the Government Accountability Office as being notoriously slow. Tipton was told to expect the process to take between six and nine months, his mother said.

The other option, LDES, or the Legacy Disability Evaluation System, takes about two months, but it doesn't provide separated recruits with a VA rating.

During either evaluation process, recruits stay at the depots. That's because there are "multiple administrative and medical concerns that need to be addressed," said Navy Lt. Christina Sears, a spokeswoman at the Pentagon.

"Each individual is handled on a case-by-case basis," she said. "The care of our patients is a top priority. We want to ensure they have appropriate care for their respective injuries and ample time to recover prior to a determination."



<https://www.military.com/daily-news/2019/06/07/injured-recruit-gets-ok-leave-boot-camp-after-parents-say-he-was-silenced.html>

Tipton was first enrolled in the IDES program, which is used by active-duty personnel being separated from the service. But since he was a recruit, Jodie Tipton said he wasn't getting permission to go to a VA hospital for appointments officials there said he needed to complete the process.

That's when Tipton requested to switch to the LDES program, and he was moved back into the rehabilitation platoon, according to a Marine official familiar with his situation. The Marine spoke on the condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to discuss a recruit's medical situation.

The request to move to LDES "reset his clock," the official said, since Tipton's paperwork had to go back to Washington, D.C., for review.

That's also when the Tipton family stopped getting clear updates on when he'd be separated, Jodie Tipton said.

"I just don't understand it dragging on so long," she said. "We still didn't have a timeline. Is it still six to nine months ... or three to six weeks? No one could tell us."

Tipton still wants to serve in the military, she said. But recruits and their families deserve to know the military has clear processes for separating those too sick or injured to complete their training, she added.

"We've been asking since March 5 ... what is the procedure for medical separation?" she said. "They kept telling us they had procedures in place, but nobody could give us a definitive answer on what that procedure was or where Alex was at in the process."

Jodie Tipton said she understands the need to keep recruits who are going back to boot camp focused on what's ahead. But military leaders need to give the process another look for those who are going home, she added.

"We never thought he was away at camp or that they'd go gentle on him," she said. "We wanted him to be prepared for whatever was required of him or any challenge he'd face going forward."

"But everything started breaking down when the separation process happened."

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

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# Study: Here's how the Army can better use social media for recruiting

By Kyle Rempfer

Army Times, June 11, 2019



*The Army is working to meet recruitment goals, and social media could be the testing ground for some of those efforts. (Mindaugas Kulbis/AP)*

The Army's social media accounts and recruiting website aren't just a way to connect with potential soldiers, it's also a testing ground that offers more ways to learn about different audiences and their reactions to specific types of content, according to an Army-sponsored study.

The study looked at the Army Marketing and Research Group's website [GoArmy.com](http://GoArmy.com), as well as its Facebook and Twitter accounts, in an effort to figure out who is using the pages and whether they are helpful for recruiting efforts.

The number of visitors to these pages is positively correlated with recruiting contracts, but the relationship is very small, [according to the study](#) by Rand Corporation's Arroyo Center and sponsored by the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs.

But the comments on social media posts and the visitors to website pages can help the Army determine what different audiences want to see.

The Army's website, for instance, should be focused on outreach to areas with diverse populations, its Twitter account should post more about service values rather than career information and the Army's Facebook page could be used to foster a positive image of an Army career for veterans and current service members who are in a position to influence potential recruits, according to the Rand study.

## Target web traffic to diverse groups

[GoArmy.com](http://GoArmy.com) appears to be giving the Army the best return on investment in recruiting, which makes sense based on the multiple webpages available for users to browse, according to the research. Between July 2014 and July 2016, more than 150 million total pages were viewed on the website and more than 40 million sessions were logged by the study.

Still, a regression analysis conducted by researchers found that most of the visitors to [GoArmy.com](http://GoArmy.com) do not subsequently sign a contract with the Army.

One potential explanation the researchers noted for this was that the website is designed to serve both potential recruits and current soldiers. Many visitors came to the website looking for specific information, such as pay charts, policies relevant to reservists, Reserve Officers' Training Corps scholarships, or "green to gold" information.



*The commander of the Houston Recruiting Battalion performs an enlistment ceremony for Houston residents Pvt. Vincent Digiaco, Pfc. Kirtan Patel and Nigerian born and current Houston resident Pvt. Ayoola Oyewale Feb. 27 at Halliburton's headquarters in Houston. (Army Sgt. 1st Class Kelvin Ringold/Marine Corps)*

What the study did find was that "those living in the most populated areas and in areas with higher proportions of minority groups and immigrants appear to use [GoArmy.com](http://GoArmy.com) more intensively than others" and "contracts are also higher in areas with more immigrants and more ethnic minorities."

<https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2019/06/11/study-heres-how-the-army-can-better-use-social-media-for-recruiting/>

This means that simply increasing web traffic won't help the Army reach its recruiting goals, but dialing into areas with diverse populations would bring the service more bang for its buck.

### **Tweet about Army history and sports**

With Twitter, the service's @GoArmy account was found to be a good source for building awareness of Army culture, but the platform is less effective in producing contracts.

Currently, the content originating from the Twitter account is focused on careers and the Army at large. There's not much posted by the account that deals with Army sports or history, but that was actually the area that the study found Twitter users most commonly retweeted and interacted with.

Content that the Army's Twitter account posts dealing with sports, such as the Army Bowl or various marathons, constitutes a large portion of the account's "mentions." Historical events involving the Army, such as the D-Day invasion or famous veterans, are prominent in retweeted content, researchers found.

"This indicates a connection between the @GoArmy account and the national discussion of military service, particularly through the @GoArmy posts that were retweeted," Rand researchers wrote. "These findings may be potentially useful for designing future marketing campaigns. Note also that most posts were not retweeted a significant number of times."

### **Facebook users sometimes get angry**

Finally, GoArmy's Facebook page has an audience made up of the general public, soldiers, veterans, military families and potential recruits. The wide range of users are highly engaged with the page, researchers said.

Between January 2014 and October 2016, the GoArmy Facebook page hosted 4,805 posts, averaging just under five posts per day. The average post was served to 464,522 unique users. The account had 1.1 million followers at the time, and the median post received 1,396 likes, 24 comments and was shared 80 times.

Because there are Facebook users on the GoArmy page who are non-military, there is recruiting potential from the page. However, a lot of the posts on it were found to be in need of cultural translation.



*Future soldiers recite the oath of enlistment during a mass enlistment ceremony in Glendale, Ariz. (Alun Thomas/Army)*

"The Army has a complex culture that can be very inaccessible to nonmilitary audiences. This can lead to [Army Marketing and Research Group] posts that do not make sense to a nonmilitary audience," researchers wrote.

Additionally, there were audience members on the GoArmy page who easily become outraged, the study found. Social media posts in general were noted to be vulnerable to "a particular kind of activity in which audience members become outraged over perceived deviations from Army regulations and drag conversations on such posts down into arguments," the report stated.

Still, the Facebook page was found to be particularly useful for influencing future recruits through military family networks, current service members and veterans who remain active on the page and could serve to connect youth populations with the idea of Army service.

Rand recommended that the Army gain a better understanding of its audiences using its different communication channels and work to build the follower base that interacts on those channels. Rand also said the Army should develop new metrics to measure communication effectiveness and explore social media data as a measure of audience reactions to Army-relevant information.

*Kyle Rempfer* is a staff reporter for *Military Times*. He trained and served as an Air Force special tactics operator from 2010 to 2015. Kyle's reporting focuses on the unified combatant commands.

# This Army daughter realizes her dream of military service — despite her dependent medical record

By Karen Jowers

Army Times, June 13, 2019



*Army Lt. Col. Rudy De La Rosa with his daughter, Samantha, who graduated from Air Force basic military training on May 10. (Photo courtesy of De La Rosa family)*

More than two years after a military daughter began her battle to enlist in the military — despite notations made in her [dependent medical record](#) when she was a young teen — she has graduated from Air Force basic military training.

Samantha De La Rosa first tried to enlist in the Army in April 2017, but was denied entry because of notations in her military dependent medical records that had been made when she went for behavioral health counseling in her youth. Neither she nor her parents knew that the notations were in her records, and vehemently denied the accuracy. She applied for waivers to allow her to enlist, and the Army denied her multiple times.

“She never gave up,” said her father, Army Lt. Col. Rudy De La Rosa. “She kept gathering more and more letters of recommendation and clean bills of health, illustrating that she was a prime candidate for military service.”

Samantha’s older sister Juliet, who was forced out of Air Force basic training in October 2016 for the same reason, was there to watch her sister graduate May 10. “Juliet said the whole time that it was surreal being back at Lackland, but that she felt Samantha graduated for the both of them,” De La Rosa said.

De La Rosa pushed his concerns about the previously unknown — and incorrect — notations in his daughters’ dependent medical records and their inability to get waivers up the chain of command and to Congress. He also went public with [his story](#).

He says he has since seen a climate change in [DoD](#). “The entire DoD, we’ve been told, has been approving waivers for worthwhile cases like Samantha’s,” he said.

“The way things are now — finally — military parents can take their kids to get help through the behavioral health care system without worrying about crushing their kids’ dreams of one day serving in the military,” De La Rosa said.

“Because no matter the diagnosis as a kid, if they are fully qualified later in life, they will get legitimate due process for a waiver; and they’ll get a waiver if they deserve one.”

- [They sought help when their Army dad deployed. Now they’re barred from joining the military. \[2018-03-29\]](#)

It’s an issue that is more pressing for military dependents, because once they enter the military, their dependent medical records are merged with their new military medical record. If a recruit mistakenly or knowingly fails to disclose something potentially disqualifying at the military entrance processing stations, the military may never know about it — unless that recruit is a military dependent. Medical records of recruits from civilian families are not available to the military.

This affected military dependents more, De La Rosa contends, “because their records were so heavily documented, and because they’d been so highly encouraged to seek behavioral health treatment over the course of their lives.” In addition, he said, “being a military kid is very hard, and DoD itself anticipates higher numbers of behavioral health challenges that are inherent to adolescence when compounded by the military lifestyle.”

<https://www.armytimes.com/2019/06/13/this-army-daughter-realizes-her-dream-of-military-service-despite-her-dependent-medical-record/>

Following Military Times' reporting on the issue, other parents notified Military Times about similar problems of notations in their children's medical records that they weren't aware of, that resulted in their child being forced out of basic training. The [DoD Military Family Readiness Council](#) is exploring the issues of whether children whose parents encouraged them to seek behavioral health care are being barred from the service.

- [Commentary: Protecting the privacy of military children's medical records \[2018-04-25\]](#)

Samantha's waiver to join the Air Force was approved in December 2018 within a couple of weeks after she submitted it, De La Rosa said. She's proving her mettle: Her physical training in basic was so strong, he said, that she served as a peer coach and mentor for other trainees who were struggling. Her flight got physical training honors. After graduating from basic, Samantha moved on to technical school, where she is studying to be an aviation resource manager.

De La Rosa and his wife, Mia, had taken Samantha and her older sister Juliet to behavioral health for guidance and help in dealing with issues related to multiple moves and her father's deployments that many military children face. The girls and their parents had no idea that certain terms were entered into their medical records, and vehemently denied those descriptions, which would bar them from military service. No one ever told the parents of any such possible diagnosis, and no medication was ever prescribed, nor was either daughter ever hospitalized. And they believed that those records of counseling were confidential. That is, until older sister Juliet was forced out of Air Force basic training in late 2016. Juliet was stunned when an Air Force medical provider asked her about a notation in her dependent medical records related to counseling. She had to fight allegations that she had committed fraud in enlisting. She and her parents had no idea there was such a notation, and requested a copy of her records. Although she was given a clean bill of health by multiple civilian and military behavioral health providers, she was denied her requests for a waiver.

After Juliet's experience, Samantha and her parents requested her medical records and discovered there were negative notations there, too. So Samantha informed her recruiter about those notations up front, and was told she couldn't join the Army, and that a waiver wasn't an option. The Army denied her a waiver multiple times.

When they saw Samantha running in the pre-graduation formation, "we were overwhelmed with pride and relief," De La Rosa said.

"It truly felt like a victory for not only Samantha, but for our whole family, everyone who supported us, and the many applicants who have benefited and will benefit" from the climate change within DoD, he said.

"It also felt like a vindication for Juliet, who was not given the same opportunity to clear up her records and process fairly for a waiver because we didn't know what we didn't know back then." Although he is confident Juliet could get back into the Air Force if she wanted to, he said, now that her record has also been fully corrected and updated, she is happy where she is, studying to be a veterinary technician, he said, adding she just finished her first year of school, and earned a 3.8 grade-point average.

"I was filled with enormous pride to see another De La Rosa serving in uniform. Samantha is the first of her generation to serve, creating a legacy of four generations in all to have served," said De La Rosa, who will retire from the Army on July 1.

"I truly feel like the torch has been passed, and that I can retire in peace."

*[Karen Jowers](#) has covered military families, quality of life and consumer issues for Military Times for more than 30 years, and is co-author of a chapter on media coverage of military families in the book "A Battle Plan for Supporting Military Families." She previously worked for newspapers in Guam, Norfolk, Jacksonville, Fla., and Athens, Ga.*

# Misconduct

# AP Interview: Navy's top admiral discusses war college probe

By Jennifer McDermott

The Associated Press, June 12, 2019



*Adm. John Richardson, chief of naval operations, arrives at the U.S. Naval War College in Newport, R.I., on Wednesday, June 12, 2019, to speak to students about leadership. He told The Associated Press that an investigation into allegations of mismanagement at the war college is continuing and he's confident the college will be stronger in the end. (AP Photo/ Jennifer McDermott)*

NEWPORT, R.I. (AP) — The Navy's top admiral said Wednesday that he felt he had enough information to warrant [removing](#) the president of the Naval War College from his post this week, days after The Associated Press reported on the investigation at the college and more than a year after the initial complaint was filed.

The AP [reported](#) last week that the college president, Rear Adm. Jeffrey Harley, was under investigation for allegedly spending excessively, abusing his hiring authority and otherwise behaving inappropriately, including keeping a margarita machine in his office. Harley was removed from his post Monday.

Adm. John Richardson, the chief of naval operations, told the AP in an interview that he received reports from investigators around the same time the article was published.

“Their investigation is not complete,” he said. “But there was just enough actionable information at that point that I made the decision that I did.”

A small group of longtime college employees filed an anonymous complaint about Harley in April 2018 with the Navy's office of the inspector general. The group contacted the inspector general again in January with additional allegations of Harley flouting Navy rules and norms.

Inspector general investigations, across the Defense Department, routinely take months or more than a year.

Harley announced his departure to campus in an email. He wrote that he was stepping down due to “distractions caused by the unfounded AP article.”

Richardson called the AP report “responsible and balanced.” He was at the college in Newport to speak to students about leadership.

The college on Monday postponed a strategy forum that was due to start Tuesday and had been expected to draw high-ranking officials, including Richardson, along with hundreds of guests. Navy Secretary Richard V. Spencer is still scheduled to speak Friday at the graduation ceremony for the elite school, which grooms future admirals and generals.

Postponing the forum was a big decision, Richardson said, but it was very disruptive for the college leadership to change in the way that it did. It would have been a lot to ask of the college to continue with the forum, he added.

Provost Lewis M. Duncan has temporarily assumed the president's duties.

Emails obtained by the AP show the college has struggled to make payroll under Harley's leadership and spent about \$725,000 annually on raises while facing an annual shortfall of \$5 million or more.

Harley told the AP the college was under fiscal strain because the Navy hasn't fully funded new missions.

<https://apnews.com/0e6a13c3ecc64236ab1c7d6ed6336832>

Richardson said Wednesday that as a rule, the Navy isn't going to direct anyone to take on a mission without ensuring they have the resources to do it.

Harley declined last week to answer a series of questions about the allegations, including his use of a margarita machine. He downplayed the complaints in a campuswide email, saying that they were from "a few individuals" and that all his decisions were subject to legal review and within his authority.

Richardson said that he could not say exactly when the investigation would finish, but that he recognizes it has been going on for a while and it "would be good to bring this to closure." He is aware, he said, of only one open investigation involving the war college.

The war college is doing an important mission and must remain "very sound," Richardson said.

"We'll come through this," he said. "The college will continue to be a strong and vibrant institution of learning, focused on those things that the Navy needs to educate its leaders on. And in the end, we'll be stronger than we are right now."

Richardson hopes to pick a new president for the college before his own tour ends in six weeks.

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*Associated Press writer Michelle R. Smith contributed to this report from Providence, Rhode Island. McDermott can be reached at <https://twitter.com/JenMcDermottAP>. Smith can be reached at: <https://twitter.com/MRSmithAP>*



# Naval War College head reassigned pending probe

By Jennifer McDermott and Michelle R. Smith

The Associated Press, June 10, 2019



*On June 12, 2018, Adm. John Richardson, left, chief of naval operations, greeted Rear Adm. Jeffrey Harley, president of the U.S. Naval War College in Newport, R.I. (Jennifer McDermott/AP)*

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (AP) — The head of the U.S. Naval War College was removed from his post Monday, days after The Associated Press reported he was under investigation amid allegations of mismanagement.

The Navy announced the reassignment of Rear Adm. Jeffrey Harley, who has been criticized for allegedly spending excessively, abusing his hiring authority and otherwise behaving inappropriately — including keeping a margarita machine in his office.

Lt. Cmdr. Jacqueline Pau said Monday that Navy leaders felt the change is best for the college because it maintains the integrity of the investigation. Pau, the spokeswoman for Adm. John Richardson, the chief of naval operations, said it would ensure that Harley is afforded due process.

Inspector general investigations, across the Defense Department, routinely take months or more than a year. Provost Lewis M. Duncan has temporarily assumed the president's duties.

Harley later announced his departure to campus by saying he was “stepping down.”

“Team\_this will be my last email to you,” Harley wrote. “Due to the distractions caused by the unfounded AP article last week, I am stepping down as President of YOUR college effective immediately.”

Asked to clarify, college spokesman Cmdr. Gary Ross told the AP on Monday that Harley was reassigned to Washington and had not resigned.

Harley had earlier told the AP the college, located on Narragansett Bay in Newport, was under fiscal strain because the Navy hasn't fully funded new missions.

The college on Monday also postponed a strategy forum that was due to start Tuesday and was expected to draw high-ranking officials including Richardson, the chief of naval operations, along with hundreds of guests. Navy Secretary Richard V. Spencer was still scheduled to speak Friday at the graduation ceremony for the elite school, which grooms future admirals and generals.

Emails obtained by the AP show the college has struggled to make payroll under Harley's leadership and spent about \$725,000 annually on raises while facing an annual shortfall of \$5 million or more.

Harley said in an email this year that the school had to make across-the-board cuts to ensure it met payroll. He recently asked for more cutbacks in travel budgets.

Multiple current and former college employees blamed the budget problems in part on substantial raises granted by Harley to some faculty, as well spending on certain contractors and others, who they said brought little benefit to the college. They spoke about their concerns on condition of anonymity because they feared professional retaliation.

Harley has told staff and faculty in emails this spring that the college was remedying pay gaps between men and women, balancing pay between departments and creating a system to avoid future disparities.

He declined last week to answer a series of questions about additional allegations, including his use of a margarita machine. He downplayed the complaints in a campus-wide email, saying they were from “a few individuals” and all his decisions were subject to legal review and within his authority.

<https://apnews.com/634475c4ed884305bbf7ffdd3f298b9d>

A small group of longtime college employees filed an anonymous complaint in April 2018 with the Navy's office of the inspector general. Two of them told the AP that they and others were interviewed by investigators in September but nothing happened.

The group contacted the inspector general again in January with additional allegations but said they heard nothing again from investigators until last month, after the AP asked the Navy about Harley's conduct.

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*Associated Press writer Lolita C. Baldor contributed to this report from Washington.*

*McDermott can be reached at <https://twitter.com/JenMcDermottAP>*

*Smith can be reached at: <https://twitter.com/MRSmithAP>*

# Two-star fired from running top secret program office; under multiple IG investigations

By Stephen Losey

Air Force Times, June 10, 2019



*Maj. Gen. Dawn Dunlop poses for a photo in front of an F-22 Raptor at Edwards Air Force Base, Calif., Feb. 1, during the filming of a recruitment ad. Dunlop was removed from her position as director of the Defense Department's Special Access Programs Central Office on May 31, and is under several ongoing IG investigations. (Kenji Thuloweit/Air Force)*

A groundbreaking female fighter pilot was [fired from her current job](#) as director of the Defense Department's Special Access Programs Central Office — which manages and oversees some of the military's most secretive classified programs — and is under several [inspector general investigations](#).

Maj. Gen. Dawn Dunlop is no longer running SAPCO, and is now serving as a special assistant to Vice Chief of Staff Gen. Seve Wilson, DoD spokesman Lt. Col. Mike Andrews confirmed in an emailed statement to Air Force Times, .

Air Force Times has also learned from a knowledgeable source that multiple ongoing [IG investigations](#) convinced Pentagon leadership that Dunlop needed to be removed. Dunlop also may be considering retirement.

It is not apparent exactly what Dunlop is being investigated for, and she was not available for comment by press time.

But another source with knowledge of the office, who asked not to be identified, said Dunlop fostered a toxic work environment. Dunlop would call senior leaders from the services “idiots,” he said, and would directly call people from the Army and Air Force and scream at them on the phone.

The source said that things reached a boiling point May 31, when Dunlop lost her temper in a meeting with senior Air Force civilians. An Air Force civilian immediately told Ellen Lord, the Pentagon's top acquisition official, about the situation in the office, the source said, and Lord walked over to the SAPCO office and removed Dunlop.



*Maj. Gen. Dawn Dunlop has been relieved as director of the Defense Department's Special Access Programs Central Office. (Air Force)*

In a May 31 email obtained by Air Force Times, Lord told top Pentagon, Air Force and Army leaders — including Deputy Secretary of Defense David Norquist and Gen. Wilson — that she had made a change in the office. Air Force Col. Bruce Monroe is now taking on leadership roles in the office on a temporary basis, according to the email.

Special access programs are among the military's most closely guarded secrets, and are classified at some of the highest levels of the U.S. government. The office Dunlop directed until recently managed and oversaw those programs.

- [Two-star general at Nellis fired over suspected unprofessional relationship \[2019-06-05\]](#)

Dunlop is a groundbreaking Air Force fighter pilot. She has more than 3,500 flight hours flying the F-15, F-16, F-22 and other aircraft, and is currently the highest-ranking female fighter pilot in the Air Force.

<https://www.airforcetimes.com/news/2019/06/10/two-star-fired-from-running-top-secret-program-office-under-multiple-ig-investigations/>

She graduated from the Air Force Academy in 1988. She was the top graduate in her class at Air Force Test Pilot School at Edwards Air Force Base in California in 1997. She was the first woman to become a fighter test pilot, fly an F-22, and command a test wing when she took over the 412th Test Wing.

Dunlop flew combat missions as part of Operation Provide Comfort, which immediately followed the Gulf War and sought to provide protection and humanitarian assistance to Kurds after the failed uprising against Saddam Hussein.

In February, Dunlop was one of more than 80 female aviators who filmed a recruiting ad at Edwards Air Force Base in California, timed to coincide with the release of the superhero movie “Captain Marvel.”

The Air Force also fired another two-star general, Maj. Gen. Peter Gersten, from his leadership role days after Dunlop was removed. Gersten was relieved of command of the Air Force Warfare Center at Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada June 2 over allegations of an unprofessional relationship.

*[Stephen Losey](#) covers leadership and personnel issues as the senior reporter for Air Force Times. He comes from an Air Force family, and his investigative reports have won awards from the Society of Professional Journalists. He has traveled to the Middle East to cover Air Force operations against the Islamic State.*

# **Racism**

# Marine Lance Corporal Will Be Kicked Out Over Racist Social Media Posts

By Gina Harkins

Military.com, June 11, 2019



*Pvt. Mason Mead, then a student in an Assaultman Course with Infantry Training Battalion, School of Infantry East, measures buffer material for a grape charge at ETA-7 demolition training range on Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, N.C., on Jan. 11, 2018. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Lance Cpl. Ursula V. Smith)*

A Hawaii-based lance corporal who shared a slew of racist social media posts -- including one of himself in blackface -- will be separated from the [Marine Corps](#) with an other-than-honorable discharge.

Lance Cpl. Mason Mead, an infantry assault Marine with 1st Battalion, 3rd Marines, admitted guilt May 7 to advocating supremacist ideology, said Lt. Col. Kelly Frushour, a spokeswoman for III Marine Expeditionary Force. Mead will be discharged as soon as he completes his final administrative and medical requirements, she said.

"The Marine Corps takes every instance of misconduct seriously, whether on duty, off duty, or online," Frushour added. "Any form of racism or discrimination undermines the core values of the Marine Corps and is not tolerated."

## Related content:

- [NCIS Launches Investigation into Marine's Alleged White Supremacist Posts](#)
- [Two Marines Are Under Investigation for Blackface Snapchat Video](#)
- [Corps Investigating Marine for Sending Boot Swastika Photo](#)

The Naval Criminal Investigative Unit launched an investigation into Mead's social media posts earlier this year after screen shots emerged that showed he had shared a photo of a swastika, a quote from a Nazi collaborator, and an image of himself in blackface. He did so using the now-deleted Twitter handle @Jacobite\_Edward.

Some of Mead's other posts encouraged violence against women and feminists.

Mead, who's from Alabama, joined the Marine Corps in 2017, according to his service records. His unit has spent the last six months in Okinawa, Japan, as part of the Unit Deployment Program. That has been his only [deployment](#).

He's at least the fourth Marine to be investigated this calendar year for inappropriate social media posts.

In February, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing launched an investigation after a Snapchat video showed two Marines [wearing black face masks and making disparaging racial remarks](#). First Lt. Fredrick Walker, a 3rd MAW spokesman, declined to comment on that case.

"[The command] will continue to allow the military justice process to work," he said.

In April, 4th Air Naval Gunfire Liaison Company launched a similar investigation after Pfc. Anthony Schroader, a reservist, allegedly sent a photo of Marines putting their boots [in the shape of a swastika](#) to Max Uriarte, the creator of the popular "Terminal Lance" comic. Uriarte is Jewish.

Officials with Marine Corps Forces Reserve did not immediately respond to questions about the status of that case. A spokesman there told Task & Purpose in April that there is "no place for racial hatred or extremism in the Marine Corps."

<https://www.military.com/daily-news/2019/06/11/marine-lance-corporal-will-be-kicked-out-over-racist-social-media-posts.html>

Three other Marines have been discharged in recent years over their participation in white supremacist behavior.

Lance Cpl. Vasillios Pistolis was kicked out after bragging about his involvement in the deadly 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia. And Staff Sgt. Joseph Manning and Sgt. Michael Chesny were discharged following their arrest for hanging a banner with a white supremacy message on a building during a 2017 pro-confederate rally.

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

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# Marine lieutenant investigated for racist social media posts

By Jeff Schogol

Task & Purpose, June 13, 2019



Yet another Marine is under investigation for posting racist material on social media — the sixth known case for the Corps since 2018.

A Twitter user at Penn State University has posted [images from Marine 2nd Lt. Felipe Maher's Snapchat account](#), which showed Maher making racist comments.

The images, apparently posted to Maher's Snapchat story, were part of a series of photos and videos taken at a party where Maher and other attendees marked Martin Luther King Jr. Day by eating [fried chicken and watermelon](#).

The images include a picture of a mock zero dollar bill with President Barack Obama's face on it along with the caption, "My n\*\*\*a Obama comin in deep wit dat welfare checc," and video of Maher getting a watermelon crown placed on his head with the caption, "I'm king n\*\*\*a."

Additionally, Task & Purpose found that Maher had posted a photo of himself on Facebook in Dec. 2017 with the caption, "Gucci Goy." A Hebrew term typically used to denote non-Jews, "goy" [is often used jokingly](#) by white nationalists to refer to themselves.

The Twitter user also posted a picture of a man bearing a striking resemblance to Maher serving as a bodyguard for white supremacist Richard Spencer at a Nazi rally in Washington, D.C, though that photo could not be confirmed by Task & Purpose.

Maher, 23, is currently assigned to The Basic School in Quantico, Virginia, according to Training and Education Command.

A Marine Corps investigation into Maher has been completed, the command said in a statement to Task & Purpose.

"The investigation is under review by the chain of command for appropriate action," the statement says. "Marine commanders hold offenders accountable using the full array of administrative and punitive tools and authorities at their disposal. Every case is unique and decisions on how to address them are based on the judgement of commanders and the advice of their legal counsel."

Marines are not allowed to be part of extremist groups and the Corps has a multi-layered screening effort to stop people with "deviant thinking and behavior" from enlisting or commissioning, including one-on-one interviews with applicants, analysis of potential Marines' tattoos, and strict observation by drill instructors, the statement says.

However, Maher's story is far from unique. The Marine Corps confirmed this week that Lance Cpl. Cpl. Mason E. Mead is being discharged after admitting to "advocating supremacist ideology." Mead [posted images of social media showing him in blackface and explosives forming a swastika](#).

In a separate swastika incident, Pfc. Anthony D. Schroader was investigated after sending "Terminal Lance" creator and Marine veteran Maximilian Uriarte [a picture of Marines forming the Nazi symbol with their boots](#). Uriarte who is Jewish, alerted Corps officials about it.

The investigation of Schroader is now complete and the matter is "currently with the Marine's commanding officer for final determination," Maj. Roger Hollenbeck, a spokesman for Marine Forces Reserve, said on Wednesday.

No other Marines face possible disciplinary action because none of the others in the photo could be identified and Schroader told investigators he "did not remember their names," Hollenbeck said.



<https://taskandpurpose.com/marine-officer-investigation>

Last year, Lance Cpl. Vasillios Pistoris was kicked out of the Marine Corps after [he attacked a woman at the 2017 Neo Nazi "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia.](#)

And two Marines were booted after [being arrested at a 2017 pro-confederate rally, where they flew a white supremacist banner](#): Staff Sgt. Joseph Manning and Sgt. Michael Chesny.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2019/06/10/oberlin-college-gibsons-bakery-libel-million-racist/>

# Protests at Oberlin labeled a bakery racist. Now, the college has been ordered to pay \$11 million for libel.

By Isaac Stanley-Becker

The Washington Post, June 10, 2019



*Pedestrians pass the storefront of Gibson's Food Mart & Bakery in Oberlin, Ohio. (Dake Kang/AP)*

On Nov. 9, 2016, the day after Donald Trump clinched the presidency, a student at Oberlin College went to a local bakery and convenience store, hoping to leave with a few bottles of wine.

Instead, Jonathan Aladin, 19, ran from the store, chased by an employee, Allyn D. Gibson. A brawl broke out between the two men — the young black student, a sophomore at the time, and the

white businessman — which turned into a standoff between the liberal arts college and the downtown establishment, a proxy war in a larger fight over free speech, racial sensitivity and town-gown relations.

The skirmish came with a price tag for the college of \$11 million, the sum awarded on Friday to the business by a jury in Lorain County, Ohio. The judgment, which found the college responsible for libel and infliction of emotional distress, provided a bookend to the bitter conflict, which has divided the Oberlin community nestled 35 miles from Cleveland.

Gibson's Bakery is a century-old, family-owned business with fortunes tightly bound to the college. The shop long supplied Oberlin, the largest employer in town, with bagels and pastries. Alumni return for the apple fritters and whole-wheat doughnuts.

The storied business sits adjacent to the campus, a bastion of liberal activism. Founded in 1833, Oberlin was the first interracial and coeducational college in the United States. The town was a stop on the Underground Railroad. Today, it is [nearly 15 percent black](#), as is [5 percent of Oberlin's undergraduate population](#).

In recent years, the college has been an epicenter of the campus culture wars — a site of vehement debate over trigger warnings, safe spaces and the [limitations of the Western canon](#). At Oberlin, no issue is too trivial for critique, not even the [authenticity of Chinese cuisine](#) served in the cafeteria.

In fall 2016, students were on high alert following the [dismissal](#) of an assistant professor of rhetoric and composition, Joy Karega, over incendiary statements on social media, including her suggestion that Israel was behind the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Karega, who is black, [said she was a victim of discrimination](#). The college's Black Student Union, [assailing Oberlin](#) as an “unethical institution,” had previously called for her tenure.

Against this backdrop, the conflict between Gibson and Aladin erupted, leading to the student's arrest and arraignment on a robbery charge. The encounter spurred allegations of racial profiling, igniting protests that unfolded in the overwrought days following the 2016 election. Residents of Oberlin [favored Hillary Clinton](#) to Trump 11 to 1, while the surrounding county, where the case was later heard, [came down on the side of the Democrat](#) by scarcely more than 100 votes.

When Aladin arrived at the front of the store, Gibson, 32 at the time, told the student that he was contacting the police, saying he had seen him slip two bottles of wine under his clothes. When he pulled out his phone to take a picture, [according to a police report](#), Aladin slapped it away, causing it to strike Gibson's face.

Gibson followed the student from the store, where they began struggling across the street, which is campus property. Police said they arrived to find Gibson on his back, with Aladin, joined by two friends, punching

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2019/06/10/oberlin-college-gibsons-bakery-libel-million-racist/> and kicking him. All three undergraduates were charged — Aladin with robbery and his friends with assault.

Students mobilized, encouraging a boycott of the establishment, which is owned by Gibson's father, David R. Gibson, and his grandfather, also named Allyn.

"A member of our community was assaulted by the owner of this establishment yesterday," read a flier distributed outside the bakery, calling Gibson's a "RACIST establishment with a LONG ACCOUNT of RACIAL PROFILING and DISCRIMINATION." The leaflet recommended 10 rival businesses where patrons could go instead.

Police later conducted an investigation and found that 40 adults had been arrested for shoplifting at Gibson's in a five-year period, among them six African Americans.

In an [email to students](#) on the Friday after the arrest, Oberlin's then-president, Marvin Krislov, and its vice president and dean of students, Meredith Raimondo, put reactions to the confrontation at Gibson's in the context of "fears and concerns that many are feeling in response to the outcome of the presidential election." They pledged "every resource to determining the full and true narrative" and said they were "deeply troubled because we have heard from students that there is more to the story than what has been generally reported."

The college suspended its Gibson's order the following week — later saying this was an attempt to "deescalate student unrest" — but restored it in early 2017.

In August, the three students at the center of the tumult pleaded guilty to amended misdemeanor charges — Aladin to attempted theft, aggravated trespassing and underage purchase of alcohol. Before their sentencing, which involved restitution but no jail time, each student read a statement acknowledging that Gibson was justified in trying to restrain Aladin and that the actions of the bakery's staff had not been racially motivated, according to court documents.

A lawyer for the teenager pointed to political turmoil in explaining his client's behavior. "This election, whatever side people stood on, is very emotional," he [said](#).

For Gibson's owners, the plea deal reached by the students with prosecutors did not settle the matter. In November 2017, they [filed a civil complaint](#) against Oberlin in the Lorain County Court of Common Pleas. Accusing the college of lending support to the protests, the Gibson family sued the institution, as well as Raimondo, for libel, slander, interference with business relationships, interference with contracts, deceptive trade practices, infliction of emotional distress, negligent hiring and trespass.

The owners argued that college leaders facilitated the "illegal defamation and economic boycott" by helping students copy and distribute the fliers, as well as joining them at protest actions and allowing them to skip class and gain credit to continue their campaign. According to the complaint, a Facebook post by an Oberlin academic department stated, "Gibson's has been bad for decades, their dislike of Black people is palpable. Their food is rotten and they profile Black students. NO MORE! "

"Gibson's Bakery has suffered a severe and sustained loss of student, professor, administrative, and college department business," the complaint argued. It also pointed to a "severe emotional and physical toll" on the family. A home had been damaged, they claimed, and car tires had been punctured.

The college [responded](#) by arguing that none of the statements cited by the bakery's owners had been defamatory. Instead, they represented protected speech. Specifically, the filing maintained that the allegation of racism could not be grounds for a defamation claim because it was a statement of opinion that could not be proven false.

Lawyers further argued that Oberlin was not responsible for the views expressed by its students. Raimondo, in her [response](#), said she was present at the protests to ensure they did not descend into violence.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2019/06/10/oberlin-college-gibsons-bakery-libel-million-racist/> Oberlin acknowledged that some of its students viewed the bakery's owners as racist. Lawyers for the college accused the Gibson family of adopting an "us versus them" mentality toward the campus community, citing posts on social media by the younger Gibson that took aim at "entitled" students. In a [further response](#), the college denied allowing students to skip class in favor of their protest activity.

Jurors in Lorain County heard the case this spring. Communication [unveiled in court filings and at trial](#) revealed how different members of the college community reacted to the controversy. Some were apparently embarrassed by protest activity they felt reflected poorly on the campus, while others said the boycott had been effective in targeting Gibson's with a "smear on their brand" since the business was unresponsive to other forms of pressure.

Raimondo [took the stand](#) and denied accounts that she had instructed college staff to engage in unruly behavior at the demonstrations. She [said](#) she lacked "control of the students." Court documents revealed how she and another administrator shared a sense of outrage after a professor spoke against the boycott.

"[Expletive] him," Raimondo wrote in a message, the Elyria Chronicle-Telegram [reported](#). She added, "I'd say unleash the students if I wasn't convinced this needs to be put behind us."

The lawsuit ensured it wasn't.

On Friday, jurors awarded Gibson's and its owners \$11 million. According to the Chronicle-Telegram, the court [found](#) that the college had libeled the bakery and its owners, in addition to inflicting emotional distress on the owners. It found that Raimondo was also responsible for libel, as well as for interfering with the bakery's business.

The court assigned \$5.8 million to Gibson's father and \$3 million to his grandfather, as well as \$2.2 million to the bakery. The plaintiffs could gain more in punitive damages, which are the subject of the second phase of the trial, set to begin Tuesday.

Reacting to the verdict, an attorney for the bakery cast the controversy as a story of David and Goliath.

"I think part of what we did here today is answer the question as to, 'What are we going to tolerate in our society?'" he said, [according to the Chronicle-Telegram](#). "We're hopeful that this is a sign that not only Oberlin College but in the future, powerful institutions will hesitate before trying to crush the little guy."

In an email to the college alumni association, an Oberlin vice president, Donica Thomas Varner, said legal counsel was reviewing the verdict and deciding how to proceed. Oberlin's spring semester ended on May 19.

"We are disappointed with the verdict and regret that the jury did not agree with the clear evidence our team presented," she wrote. "The College and Dr. Raimondo worked to ensure that students' freedom of speech was protected and that the student demonstrations were safe and lawful."

The administrator reiterated the central argument made by Oberlin's lawyers — that colleges "cannot be held liable for the independent actions of their students," as she put it.

In the episode's aftermath, however, the college has aimed to mold the behavior of its students. Last year, Oberlin's president, Carmen Twillie Ambar, [wrote to the local business community](#) about a set of new initiatives designed to teach incoming students how to be a "good neighbor" to local establishments.

The effort includes encouraging students to buy local goods and a new orientation program whose title makes its aim unambiguous: "Community 101."

[Isaac Stanley-Becker](#) *Isaac Stanley-Becker is a reporter on The Washington Post's Morning Mix team.*  
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# ROTC cadet who was fond of Nazis is on her way out, officials confirm

By Kyle Rempfer

Army Times, June 11, 2019



*An ROTC cadet was found by Cadet Command to have posted statements and screenshots sympathetic to the Ku Klux Klan and Nazism. (Screenshot/Twitter)*

An Army ROTC cadet at University of North Carolina-Charlotte was kicked out of the school’s detachment after officials learned she posted content online that was sympathetic to Nazism and the Ku

Klux Klan.

The cadet, who was reportedly kicked out of Davidson College in the fall over the same allegations, is currently listed as on a “Leave of Absence,” pending final disenrollment, according to Army Maj. Robert Carter, chief of public affairs at Army Cadet Command.

“Cadet Martha Gerdes of UNC Charlotte was investigated by the United States Army Cadet Command for online behavior that is not consistent with the Army values,” Carter told Army Times. “During the investigation Cadet Gerdes admitted to posting anti-semitic, racist and anti-LGBTQIA statements on her Twitter account ‘@femanon.’”

That Twitter account is suspended now. However, some of the postings were [archived](#) online by an activist group.

Other posts that appear to advocate for a race war, defend the Nazi party and mock a mass shooting event in which Jewish worshipers were killed were also [collected](#) by the group.

“Army ROTC remains committed to leadership excellence through diversity. The activities conducted by Ms. Gerdes are inconsistent with the high moral expectations of a future Army officer,” Carter added.

Gerdes was originally dropped from Davidson College in November and then enrolled at UNC Charlotte sometime in the winter and spring semester, Cadet Command confirmed.

ROTC officials at UNC Charlotte did not provide comment, citing privacy restrictions. Gerdes could not immediately be reached for comment.

“She was enrolled at Davidson and transferred to UNC Charlotte. She has been notified by official memorandum that she is to be dis-enrolled from ROTC,” Carter said. “This is a final administrative action that must be taken to ensure she cannot return to any of our programs in the future.”

“While we can ensure Ms. Gerdes no longer participates in our program, we cannot speak for UNC Charlotte or any other university or college as to her status as a student,” he added.

“DOX ALERT: We have proof that a sickeningly violent Nazi Twitter poster femanon\_\_ is actually a student at [@DavidsonCollege](#) named Martha Gerdes.

— Carolina Workers Collective (@WorkersCarolina) [November 8, 2018](#)”

The allegations were originally brought forward in the fall by a leftist group. The group linked Gerdes, a student and teaching assistant in Davidson College’s German department, to the racist and anti-Semitic Twitter account by matching photos and other details that the accounts shared at around the same time, [according](#) to the Chronicle of Higher Education.

<https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2019/06/11/rotc-cadet-who-was-fond-of-nazis-is-on-her-way-out-officials-confirm/>

Those online activist posts [were spotted by U.S. Army WTF Moments](#), which notified Army ROTC in November.

The issue was later rekindled when those same activists noticed a picture on UNC Charlotte's ROTC Facebook page that showed Gerdes during a field training event with the detachment in the spring.

The former ROTC cadet's social media postings include statements like: "the only thing Hitler did wrong was making German National Socialism into his own cult of personality."

Gerdes also tweeted that "the 1920's was the best decade, I was born in the wrong era," alongside photos of Ku Klux Klan members.

In September, she responded to another Twitter user with the comment "gas the kikes race war now." That was followed the next month by postings that appear to support a domestic terrorist who targeted Jewish worshippers.

"I actually don't give a shit about Jews getting shot up except insofar as it's going to make it a lot harder for a lot of white people to just exist," she tweeted on Oct. 28, one day after the Pittsburgh synagogue shooting that took the lives of 11 worshippers.

*[Kyle Rempfer](#) is a staff reporter for Military Times. He trained and served as an Air Force special tactics operator from 2010 to 2015. Kyle's reporting focuses on the unified combatant commands.*

# Religion

## Marine colonel calls suicide ‘shameful,’ cites ‘godless age’ and calls on Marines to ‘read some scripture’

By Shawn Snow

Marine Corps Times, June 7, 2019



*The Marine Corps is facing a suicide epidemic. (Sgt. Priscilla Sneden/Marine Corps)*

Since the start of Gen. Robert Neller’s tenure as commandant in 2015, nearly 224 Marines have [ended their own lives](#). That’s more Marines than an entire rifle company, he noted in a recent [two-page letter on mental wellness](#).

In 2018, 354 active and reserve Marines attempted suicide, and 77 Marines died, numbers that are greater, Neller wrote “than any previous year recorded.”

In his letter to the entire Corps, posted via Twitter in May, Neller called on Marines to address “collective mental wellness,” spiritual fitness and to seek help to combat the [suicide epidemic](#) across the Corps.

“Let me be clear up front, there is zero shame in admitting one’s struggles with life — trauma, shame, guilt or uncertainty about the future — and asking for help,” Neller wrote.

Now, a Marine commander has decided to push the top Marine’s message a bit further by calling suicide “shameful.”

In an email he sent to staff, which was obtained by Marine Corps Times, Col. Dom D. Ford, the commander of Marine Corps Communication-Electronics School at Twentynine Palms, California, called on Marines to read some scripture to boost their religious and spiritual wellness and help combat the suicide epidemic.

- [The Corps' suicide rate is at a 10-year high. This is how the Marines plan to address it. \[2019-01-30\]](#)

“Suicide is a shameful act. Period. Getting help is not,” Ford wrote to Marines under his command. “Life isn’t fair, and every day won’t be rainbows and sunshine.”

The colonel explained in the email that increased mental health issues may be a “byproduct” of a “godless age” amid a “rapid cultural and technological shift” that has resulted in a “less spiritually fit” populace.

To address the problem, Ford says, people should “spend less time in front of a screen,” put down their smartphones, “send flowers instead of an emoji,” go out more, “attend a religious service — more than once” and to read scripture.

The colonel wrote in the email that he was echoing the sentiments that the commandant wrote in his wellness message.

But he may have taken it too far.

“Spiritual fitness has been shown to be an important part of overall well-being and promotes mission readiness,” officials at Training and Education Command told Marine Corps Times in an emailed statement regarding Ford’s email.

“However, the Marine Corps does not promote any specific religious tradition or practice. While religion may play an important role for some individuals in their spiritual development, it is not the only way to be spiritually fit. The practice of religious beliefs is a personal decision,” the TECOM officials wrote.

While spiritual fitness and faith have been consistent themes among the Corps’ leaders when discussing the suicide crisis, religion has rarely been invoked.



<https://www.marinecorpstimes.com/newsletters/daily-news-roundup/2019/06/07/marine-colonel-calls-suicide-shameful-cites-godless-age-and-calls-on-marines-to-read-more-scripture/>

That is in part due to its potential to impact the perceptions of troops who may question the impartiality of commanders who are charged with leading troops who hold varying religious beliefs, or are atheists.

The 1974 Supreme Court case [Parker v. Levy](#) ruled that First Amendment freedoms are restricted when it can impact good order and discipline in the Armed Forces.

But, while Ford's message leaned harder on religion, his message was not too far removed from Neller's wellness letter, as both derided the scourge of social media and its impact on mental health, among other complex issues at the root of the suicide crisis.

"Perhaps our culture is shifting away from a time when faith was a more central part of our lives — religious-based faith, a commitment to a greater cause, or just believing in each other, certainly a faith in something great than 'me,'" Neller, wrote in his letter.

In his email, Ford cited a 2017 study on veteran health issues that boasted of the health benefits of religion and spirituality to include reduced mental health issues, PTSD, depression, and alcohol disorders.

The email did not name the specific study.

But a [2017 study](#) titled, "Religion, spirituality, and mental health of U.S. military veterans: Results from the National Health and Resilience in Veterans Study," contends that having a high religion/spirituality score has mental health benefits related to PTSD, and depression, among others.

"Higher levels of R/S [religion/spirituality] were also strongly linked with increased dispositional gratitude, purpose in life, and post-traumatic growth," the study said.

However, Neller did not specifically address suicide as being shameful in his memo, but he did call out Marines for not addressing their mental health issues.

"It is not okay, however to ignore your mental health to the point where you are not able to make sound decisions or end up taking an irreversible action that leaves behind teammates, family, and those who care about and depend on you," Neller wrote.

The [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#) notes on its website that feelings of shame and stigma can often prevent people from talking openly about their problems.

- [A Navy audit says the Marine Corps could do better at suicide prevention \[2019-03-14\]](#)

"The Marine Corps has a critical role in educating Marines and their families about suicide prevention, the mission-critical role of mental wellness, and how to access services that are available to help Marines navigate the stressors of life," officials with Training and Education Command said.

"Maintaining positive mental health is as important as maintaining physical health. Spirituality/personal faith is one part of the equation. It is important to maintain a balance in all areas of one's life," Training and Education Command said.

*[Shawn Snow](#) is the senior reporter for Marine Corps Times and a Marine Corps veteran.*

# **Sexual Assault / Harassment**

# ‘How is this OK?’ Sex assault case haunts Air Force mothers

By Justin Pritchard and Foster Klug  
The Associated Press, June 12, 2019



*In this Nov. 16, 2017 photo made available by the U.S. Air Force, a fighter plane takes-off from Kadena Air Base, Japan. The Defense Department has been figuring out how to provide help and justice when the children of service members sexually assault each other on military bases since Congress required reforms in 2018. Those reforms are starting to rollout, but as one current case at Kadena shows, that rollout has been uneven. (Airman 1st Class Greg Erwin/U.S. Air Force via AP)*

To the mothers, the 13-year-old boy appeared largely unsupervised as he roamed among the clusters of townhomes on the U.S. Air Force base in Japan.

It would have been unremarkable — the neighborhood was full of kids — except that young girls were starting to report the boy had led them from play and molested them.

“We were like, ‘How is this OK?’” the mother of one 5-year-old girl told The Associated Press, which is granting her anonymity to protect her daughter’s privacy. She locked her kids inside.

The first girl to report had to wait six days for officials on the largest Air Force installation in the Pacific to provide counseling. The mothers didn’t feel much urgency from Air Force criminal investigators either. They told the families they’d waited 13 days to meet the boy’s father.

By then, mothers had identified five girls, ages 2 to 7, who said the boy had taken them to some trees or a playground or his house. Another five kids would allege abuse soon after.

“We come here, and it takes the worst cases that you can imagine to find out that you don’t have the services to support your children,” the 5-year-old’s mother said. “There’s a feeling of complete distrust.”

This was not supposed to happen again. Last August, Congress ordered the Defense Department to overhaul how it handles allegations of sexual assault among the tens of thousands of military kids who live or attend school on U.S. bases worldwide.

Yet the case at Kadena Air Base began unfolding in February — six months after President Donald Trump signed those landmark reforms.

For decades, justice has been elusive on American bases when the children of service members sexually assaulted each other. Help for victims and accountability for offenders was rare in the nearly 700 reports over a decade that [an AP investigation](#) documented.

The new law required reforms across the Pentagon. The school system it runs for service members’ kids had to create new student protections. The Family Advocacy Program, [whose social service counselors would turn victims away](#), must review reports. The Office of the Secretary of Defense will track cases and create a policy for how to handle them.

The reforms are now rolling out, and the rollout has been uneven.

The Air Force has not drafted new guidelines. Instead, it is “reserving decision on adding or amending policy until publication of a Department of Defense policy,” according to spokesman Maj. Nicholas Mercurio.

Like other armed services, Air Force representatives are helping form that policy. A Pentagon spokeswoman could not say when it will be published.

<https://apnews.com/5accd923768b420984487756819f8329>

Mercurio called the Japan case “an extremely difficult situation.” He said the Air Force has scrambled to deliver “helping resources to the families involved while remaining focused on protecting the rights and privacies of all parties and preserving the integrity of the ongoing investigation.”

Kadena Air Base spokeswoman Lt. Col. Christy Stravolo noted that the 13-year-old boy has returned to the U.S. with his family. That happened within several weeks of the first allegations. Attempts to reach his parents were unsuccessful.

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The Army didn’t wait to follow the Pentagon’s lead. It wrote its own policy.

That [March 21 directive](#) mandates both a criminal investigation and victim assistance through Family Advocacy, which now must inform counterparts on other bases when an offender’s family transfers.

Because military law doesn’t apply to family members, justice must come under civilian law. So cases on Army bases will be referred to state or local district attorneys who, unlike federal prosecutors, have juvenile justice systems.

“There’s a recognition that states are best able to adjudicate,” said Charles Lozano, an Army attorney who helped draft the policy.

The policy does not explore the nuances of overseas bases, where host-nation civilian authorities may treat juvenile sex crime allegations very differently. Instead of handing over suspects to Japanese officials, for example, the military often flies them back.

Rep. Jackie Speier, who chairs the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Military Personnel, said she was encouraged that Army’s policy was “more comprehensive” than the law required.

“We’re going to continue to track this,” Speier said. “I’m not certain that this is enough. I’m very watchful in terms of observing what happens when these incidents occur. And they will occur.”

The Navy and Marines fall between the Army and Air Force.

The Marine Corps is updating its guidelines to include “language and protocols that address problematic sexual behavior in children and youth,” according to Maj. Craig Thomas. Publication is expected by year’s end.

Naval leaders have directed base commanders to work with social services, according to spokesman Lt. Samuel Boyle. The Navy also has issued interim guidance, which it would not share.

The most detailed changes came to the Pentagon-run school system that educates more than 70,000 students on bases in the U.S., Asia and Europe.

These students have not received protections public school students get under Title IX, a federal law that’s been used to investigate sexual assault in schools and to help victims. Congress said students at Pentagon-run schools must get protections “at least comparable to” Title IX. The school system published new policies in February.

School officials are supposed to be trained by Oct. 1, and a new incident logging system is scheduled to launch in the fall, the Department of Defense Education Activity said in a written statement. For now, the school system introduced a [“Sexual Harassment Awareness and Prevention” website](#) .

Four Title IX experts who reviewed the policies for AP said that while broadly they create comparable protections, their substantial shortcomings include a complex investigation process that relies on already-stretched school principals.

<https://apnews.com/5accd923768b420984487756819f8329>

“It seems unlikely that a principal would have both the training and the time to conduct these investigations in a thorough and timely manner,” said Megan Farrell, Title IX coordinator for the Palo Alto Unified School District in California.

A mid-April post on a Facebook page for teachers at Pentagon-run schools asked whether anyone was aware of the new policies.

Two said they had received training. One more mentioned a question-and-answer session at her school. Another eight had no training, with nearly all unaware of the new policy.

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About 4,000 students attend seven schools on Kadena. Like schools on many U.S. bases, Kadena’s have struggled with sex assault allegations — in 2014, several high school students reported attacks.

The full scope of the latest case remains under investigation. The AP interviewed two mothers of girls who were among the first to report and a third person who helped organize families. According to one mother, investigators stopped giving updates after relating that 10 kids had alleged abuse.

That same mother was troubled by guidance she heard from base officials: Don’t ask your daughter about what happened and don’t engage deeply if she raises it.

Investigators warned that conversations could taint a potential case, [though criminal prosecutions on overseas bases are rare](#). Counselors “said to just say, ‘How does that make you feel?’” the mother said.

Several experts said the best approach is a forensic interview by an expert followed by the therapeutic embrace of fully engaged parents. Talking can soften feelings of stigma and shame.

“Family support is critical to the healing,” said Michelle Miller, coordinator for mental health initiatives at the National Children’s Alliance, which accredits children’s advocacy centers that specialize in forensic interviews.

The chief of Air Force’s Family Advocacy Program said that while parents shouldn’t press their children, they can encourage — and even initiate — discussion.

“Attempts to avoid, shut down, or stop uncomfortable conversations could be viewed by the child as a sign that he/she has done something wrong,” Col. Patrick Pohle explained in email.

Three weeks into the Kadena case, some families still felt unsupported. An investigator had earlier suggested jolting the process with a call halfway around the world from the island of Okinawa — to Capitol Hill. In early March, the mother of the 5-year-old girl reached a sympathetic staffer at the Senate Armed Service Committee.

The next day, the commander of Kadena called and asked how he could help.

Air Force officials said they have mobilized investigators and other specialists from around the globe. The 5-year-old’s mother acknowledged those efforts and that some of the families may have had a different experience. In late March, counselors distributed a one-page summary encouraging parents to talk openly with their children.

“The difference from the beginning to now is that there is more communication,” the mother said, “but I don’t have confidence that if it happened tomorrow, the process would be successful. The policies haven’t been changed.”

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*Klug reported from Seoul, South Korea; Pritchard reported from Los Angeles. Reese Dunklin in Dallas contributed.*

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Contact Pritchard at <https://twitter.com/lalanewsman>.

# Sexual assaults at military academies could be handled outside the chain of command

By Leo Shane III

Military Times, June 13, 2019



*Members of the U.S. Military Academy Class of 2022 march at the end of Cadet Basic Training Aug. 13, 2018. (Matthew Moeller/Army)*

House Democrats advanced a plan to partially remove [military commanders at service academies](#) from decisions to prosecute sexual assault accusations, instead relying on an independent expert to evaluate the cases.

The move, included as part of the [House Armed Services Committee's annual defense authorization bill](#), drew significant criticism from House Republicans who said the move will undermine the military justice system and could lead to fewer prosecutions for the crimes.

But Rep. Jackie Speier, D-Calif., head of the committee's personnel panel and sponsor of the measure, said the changes are needed to [restore faith among young service members](#) that their reports of harassment and abuse by classmates will be taken seriously and pursued vigorously.

- [As sexual assault cases rise, service academy superintendents struggle for solutions \[2019-02-13\]](#)

"I have spoken to countless survivors who saw their dreams, and bright futures, extinguished after reporting assaults and harassment," she said. "These amazing candidates, many of them who lead their academy classes in grades and citizenship, deserve a fair and just independent review process."

A recent review of the military service academies showed that the number of sexual assaults reported by students doubled from 2013 to 2018, even as the reporting rate dropped.

Speier's plan is a four-year pilot program establishing an independent chief prosecutor to review all sexual assault reports at military academies and determine which cases should be referred to court-martial.

Sexual assault victims' advocates have pushed for the traditional military chain of command to be removed from those decisions in the past, arguing that senior military leaders are either ill-informed about how to proceed with such cases or inclined to dismiss them to conceal problems in the ranks.

Rep. Michael Turner, R-Ohio, unsuccessfully tried to offer an alternative plan, arguing the new pilot program set a problematic new legal precedent by handling sexual assault cases in the active-duty force differently from ones at the academies.

He and other Republican members also argued that the move would de-emphasize commanders' role in ending sexual assault and harassment instead of holding them accountable for the offenses.

The provision requires the independent official would be a one-star general or admiral with "significant experience prosecuting sexual assault trials" who is independent from the academies.

- [Defense Department to make sexual harassment a crime \[2019-05-02\]](#)

Before the idea can become reality, the idea must survive negotiations with Republican-controlled Senate, where lawmakers have for years opposed similar proposed moves from Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y.

Defense Department officials have also strongly objected to the idea, promising their own series of fixes to address the problem of criminal behavior among troops.

<https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2019/06/13/sexual-assaults-at-military-academies-could-be-handled-outside-the-chain-of-command/>

The House committee's authorization bill draft also includes a host of other changes to military sexual assault policies, including expansions of the Special Victims' Counsel program and new rules for consideration of transfer applications after a sexual assault is reported.

*[Leo Shane III](#) covers Congress, Veterans Affairs and the White House for Military Times. He has covered Washington, D.C. since 2004, focusing on military personnel and veterans policies. His work has earned numerous honors, including a 2009 Polk award, a 2010 National Headliner Award, the IAVA Leadership in Journalism award and the VFW News Media award.*

# ‘Sexual Assault Stinks,’ says tone deaf Air Force cartoon skunk

By J.D. Simkins

Air Force Times, June 12, 2019



*A "Sexual Assault Stinks" poster at McChord Field has come under fire. (Air Force amn/nc/snco Facebook)*

The number of reported incidents of sexual assault in the military's ranks continues to soar.

Earlier this year the [Department of Defense reported](#) the number of sexual assaults at service academies rose from 507 in 2016 to 747 in 2018, a 47 percent spike. In 2018 at the Air Force Academy, 15.1 percent of women reported incidents of sexual assault.

A report by DoD's Sexual Assault Prevention and Response office estimated that the number of assaults in the military in FY2018 rose to approximately 20,500, a 38 percent spike from 2016 — and a

trend that led the Department of Defense to officially declare [sexual harassment a criminal offense](#).

So it may come as a surprise — or perhaps not given the prevalence of such a stain on the military — that military personnel at the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response program at Washington state's McChord Field circulated 24-hour hotline posters featuring a happy-go-lucky cartoon skunk that read, "Sexual Assault Stinks."

Because nothing says "We're here for you in your most dire hour of need" like Looney Toons' Pepé Le Pew (who was notorious for dishing out heinous unwanted attention).

Misplacing car keys "stinks." Sexual assault? Do better.

Facebook users on the popular [Air Force amn/nc/snco](#) Facebook page, where the post was shared, were quick to call out the poster for making light of an increasingly grave concern.

"As someone who has spent way too much time of my life in the SAPR office I get you are trying to be cute, and it is, but that's the problem," one Facebook user wrote. "The topic isn't cute. It's serious and raw and should be treated with the according level of respect."

"This is painful to look at. Who really thought that'd be a good idea," another commented.

It should never be this difficult to avoid tripping over one's own feet.

“Posted by [Air Force amn/nc/snco](#) on [Wednesday, June 12, 2019](#)”

*J.D. Simkins is a writer and editor for Military Times who was a Marine scout observer from 2004-2008. He ugly cried when the Washington Capitals won the 2018 Stanley Cup.*