

American Forces Press Service

December 7, 2004

AF Sexual Assault Fallout Will Change All Military Services

By Jim Garamone

WASHINGTON, Dec. 7, 2004 – All members of the U.S. armed forces will deal with the fallout of the sexual assault problems at the U.S. Air Force Academy, Defense Department officials said here today.

First, the department “takes any and all allegations of sexual harassment and sexual assault very seriously,” said Pentagon spokesman Larry Di Rita. He said DoD is committed to improving prevention efforts, enhancing support to victims and increasing offender accountability.

The department will institute a confidential reporting process for sexual assaults. “We have learned that confidentiality to victims will actually increase the probability that cases will be reported - cases that are currently unknown to us,” said David Chu, undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness. “We want to sustain good order and discipline by holding those who assault their fellow servicemembers accountable for their actions. But first and foremost, we want victims to come forward for help.”

The service secretaries and the service chiefs have agreed to this process. DoD will put the victims confidentiality reporting system in place by Jan. 1, Chu said.

But the services first have to agree on a clear, understandable definition of what sexual assault is, Chu said. “One of the things that often happens here is the individual will not necessarily characterize what happened to them as sexual assault,” he said. The definition will be written in plain English “such that the typical recruit at basic training can understand what we’re saying. This is not going to be written for the lawyers.”

There is already substantial training for U.S. forces on preventing sexual assaults, starting in basic training. “We recognize we have to reinforce that,” Chu said. Servicemembers will receive further training on preventing sexual assaults as they progress through their careers, be they officers or enlisted members, said he added.

The DoD inspector general said in a report that the root cause of sexual assault problems at the Air Force Academy was the “failure of successive chains of command over the past 10 years to acknowledge the severity of the problem. Consequently, they failed to initiate and monitor adequate corrective measures to change the culture until recently.”

The report says that many Air Force Academy leaders “could have been better role models, could have been more vigilant in inspecting those placed under those command.” Leaders, the report said, “failed to guard and suppress sexual misconduct among cadets, whether or not prosecutable as specific crime, and failed to hold cadets accountable for such misconduct.”

An Air Force inspector general investigation on how agents of the Office of Special Investigations at the academy handled the allegations of sexual assault found there was “no evidence of intentional mishandling or willful neglect in any case reviewed.”

Gen. T. Michael Moseley, Air Force vice chief of staff, said action will speak louder than words. He vowed the service would deal with the problem and “provide a workplace with dignity and respect, and a safe environment for our people to serve honorably in their country.”

“The people come to us from a greater population,” Moseley continued, “but that does not take us off the hook to have the best possible care, the best possible environment and the tightest relationship to ensure that that dignity occurs at all levels in the Air Force, to include the academy, but also to include ROTC, to include (Officer Training School), to include basic training and tech schools, and to include every workplace in the Air Force, whether we’re expeditionary, deployed or home-stationed.”

Biographies:

Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness David Chu [[/bios/chu_bio.html](#)]

Pentagon Spokesman Larry Di Rita [[/bios/dirita_bio.html](#)]

Air Force Vice Chief of Staff Gen. T. Michael Moseley [<http://www.af.mil/bios/bio.asp?bioID=6545>]

Related Site:

U.S. Air Force Academy [<http://www.usafa.af.mil/>]