

**Statement of General Mark A. Welsh III, USAF
Chief of Staff, United States Air Force**

**Update on Basic Military Training Sexual Misconduct:
House Armed Services Committee
January 23, 2013**

Basic Military Training Investigations

The Air Force's basic military training (BMT) site at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland educates, trains, and equips approximately 35,000 trainees each year through an eight and a half-week course. Since June 2011, the Air Force has actively investigated allegations of misconduct by military training instructors (MTIs) toward basic military trainees and technical training students. The allegations range from violations of Air Force policy that prohibit unprofessional relationships¹ to crimes of sexual assault.

I want to emphasize today, just as Secretary Donley did in August, that sexual assault and unprofessional relationships are unacceptable, they have no place in our culture, and their prevalence rips at the fabric of our great Air Force. Sexual misconduct is especially egregious when it occurs in the BMT environment, where it constitutes an abuse of power and trust. While we cannot and will not tolerate such behavior, we must be mindful of our responsibility to protect the constitutional right of due process of those accused. The number of MTIs under investigation constitutes less than four percent of our MTI corps. The vast majority of our MTIs exhibit impeccable behavior daily—they are the epitome of the Air Force core values of *Integrity First, Service Before Self, and Excellence in All We Do*.

When the allegations of MTI misconduct first came to light, General Edward Rice, Commander of Air Education and Training Command (AETC), made four commitments that I fully support. First, to investigate thoroughly all allegations of misconduct; second, to hold perpetrators of misconduct accountable for their actions; third, to care for the victims of the misconduct; and fourth, to fix the problems that led to the misconduct. In addition, the Air Force took a broader look at our Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) program to ensure we were fully in compliance with recent SECDEF and CJCS guidance in this area, as well as to determine if there were other actions we could undertake to make a difference in our fight against this terrible crime.

¹ Unprofessional relationships between instructors and trainees and students are expressly prohibited by AETC policy (AETC Instruction 36-2909). Unprofessional relationships may include physical contact, to include sexual contact, or they may exist without physical contact, i.e. unprofessional relationships conducted in person and/or via cards, letters, email, telephone, instant messaging, video, photographs, or any other means of communication.

Our security forces and Air Force Office of Special Investigations (OSI) investigators have been fully engaged in collecting facts and evidence from the time misconduct allegations were first reported at Lackland AFB. Over the past year, up to 46 primary investigators and agents at any given time have conducted over 7700 interviews with alleged perpetrators, victims, and witnesses. They have screened thousands of former BMT trainees who were instructed by the alleged offenders, and they have received additional direct support from more than 80 other personnel, including criminal analysts and psychologists, from 34 different Air Force bases. This team continues to conduct interviews, analyze data, and pursue leads. Any additional alleged offenders who are identified through these investigations will be held accountable for their actions if proven guilty.

The Air Force does not prejudge the accused—every Airman under investigation is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty. The Air Force has completed six courts-martial cases, all resulting in convictions.² Two MTIs received non-judicial punishment under Article 15 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice for violation of the AETC policy against unprofessional relationships. There are four more trials scheduled, and twenty other instructors are under investigation.

We have identified and cared for 59 confirmed and alleged victims at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland. Twelve are alleged victims of sexual assault, two are alleged victims of abusive sexual contact, 34 were allegedly involved in an unprofessional relationship with an instructor involving physical contact, and 11 were allegedly involved in an unprofessional relationship with an instructor involving no physical contact.³ The vast majority of the misconduct allegations fall into the category of consensual “unprofessional relationships” as defined by AETC policy—45 of 59 alleged victims. All 59 confirmed and alleged victims have been contacted and offered support from base agencies under the Air Force’s Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) program, as well as other support services such as legal assistance. 57 of the victims have accepted some level of Air Force support. AETC will continue to provide this support to all future victims identified as a result of the ongoing BMT investigations, to include access to newly-trained “Special Victims’ Counsel.”

To understand how the problems at BMT developed, General Rice requested Major General Margaret Woodward’s assistance to conduct a commander-directed investigation (CDI). General Woodward and her team expended over 17,000 man-hours during the two-month process while conducting 215 interviews and 18,000

² Four former MTIs received confinement, hard labor, forfeiture of pay, and rank reductions, with one of these receiving immunity to testify against other MTIs. One received a bad conduct discharge, one-year confinement, and reduction to lowest grade. One received a dishonorable discharge, 20 years confinement, reduction to lowest grade, and total forfeiture of benefits.

³ Eight of the 11 unprofessional relationships not involving physical contact were via social media and/or telephone only.

personal surveys. Her report contained 22 findings categorized into five major areas: (1) leadership—insufficient leadership oversight and poor accountability were hindrances to effective deterrence of misconduct; (2) the MTI selection and manning process—the MTI corps suffered from a lack of maturity and minimal leadership experience, while at the same time endowing individual MTIs with excessive power for their positions; (3) the MTI training and development process—MTI culture and training did not emphasize non-commissioned officer responsibilities adequately; (4) reporting and detection—there are barriers to reporting that exist for both MTIs and trainees; and (5) policy and guidance—determining the necessary and enduring institutional safeguards.

Based on recommendations in the CDI, General Rice established a set of institutional safeguards to prevent future misconduct. These safeguards are designed to dissuade, deter and detect misconduct, as well as hold perpetrators of misconduct fully accountable if deterrence fails—they also have potential applicability to the Air Force at-large.

Dissuading misconduct is directly linked to an individual's inclination toward demonstrating professional behavior. Ideally, this inclination becomes natural following the integration and acceptance of the Air Force core values as part of an Airman's daily life. For the trainee, this process begins in BMT. For an instructor, this process is reinforced by the Air Force's commitment to select for MTI duty only those Airmen with strong records of performance and a proven history of discipline and professionalism. Prospective instructors also undergo psychological screening before completing a four-month training program that stresses professional conduct at every level. Successful dissuasion hinges upon an instructor corps not only strongly inclined to uphold the Air Force's core values of *Integrity*, *Service*, and *Excellence* as individuals, but also as a team of committed professionals. Each MTI requires the inner resiliency to resist the temptation toward misconduct that often exists in environments of significant power imbalance, while at the same time exerting the moral courage to encourage others to follow standards. Dissuasion seeks to eradicate the desire to misbehave from the character of every Airman.

For the few instructors who choose not to abide by our Core values, deterring their misconduct begins with convincing them that the risks associated with unprofessional behavior are too great. Effective deterrence is based on a reasonable probability of detection, along with the belief that strong and immediate sanctions by the commander accompany detection. Leadership engagement, video surveillance, trainee feedback mechanisms, and peer awareness are tools for detection in the BMT environment, while accountability tools include a wide variety of available administrative and punitive actions.

When these institutional safeguards work properly, most instructors will be dissuaded from misconduct, the few not dissuaded will be deterred from unprofessional behavior, and those not deterred must be detected and held accountable in a way that

further strengthens dissuasion and deterrence. The system strengthens itself over time, but only through commitment to its ideals from all levels of leadership, starting with me.

I agree with General Rice that over time, weaknesses developed in each one of our institutional safeguards at BMT. Leadership did not detect and prevent these weaknesses, and instructors did not sufficiently police themselves. We have worked over the past six months to repair the weaknesses discovered, to strengthen the BMT leadership team, and to revitalize the MTI culture consistent with our core values. Major General Woodward concluded that “if we do not take steps to address these corruptive elements persistently and positively, we will find ourselves in the same situation at some point down the road.” We will not let that happen.

I acknowledge that Air Force leaders have said this before when dealing with the aftermath of multiple sexual assault allegations from a single location, but we have studied our past and I am confident we have learned from our previous institutional mistakes.

Major General Woodward’s investigation produced 46 recommendations; 25 seek to fortify institutional safeguards, 14 recommendations focus on improving MTI culture, and seven address methods to strengthen leadership. 23 of these recommendations are already fully implemented. 22 of the remaining are scheduled for implementation by November 2013. The final recommendation, to adjust the length of Air Force BMT training, is under review by General Rice’s BMT Curriculum Review Board.

I am confident that the Air Force is firmly on the path to restoring the high levels of professional conduct that we demand of ourselves, that the BMT environment requires, that our trainees deserve, and that the American people expect.

Sexual Assault in the Air Force

Unfortunately, sexual misconduct and unprofessional relationships in today’s Air Force are not limited to the BMT environment. A 2010 Gallup survey revealed that since joining the Air Force, 19 percent of women and two percent of men experienced some degree of sexual assault. For 3.4 percent of women and 0.5 percent of men, those assaults had occurred in the 12 months preceding the survey. Of those, only about 17 percent of the women and six percent of the men reported the incident.

There are multiple possible explanations for the low levels of incident reporting. Victims of sexual misconduct often attach undeserved feelings of shame to the incident that discourage them from sharing their experiences with fellow Airmen, family, or their chain-of-command. Some victims fear reprisal from either other members in their unit, or from their leadership, while others do not wish to re-live the experience through the multiple “re-tellings” of the event that an in-depth investigation requires. With “lesser”

offenses, Airmen often feel that the incident was not sufficiently egregious to merit a formal report.

The Air Force recorded 614 reports of sexual assault in FY11, and for FY12, our preliminary numbers show 796 reports.⁴ The FY12 figures are undergoing an audit and review prior to their inclusion in the DoD Report to Congress, due April 30, 2013. These sexual assaults fall under the Uniformed Code of Military Justice definition of the term, and ranged from inappropriate touching to rape. Given the likelihood to under-report, the incidence of sexual misconduct in today's Air Force is likely much greater. Even more disturbing than this number is the fact that fellow Airmen commit the majority of these crimes—brothers- and sisters-in-arms who should be protecting and looking out for one another. Calling these numbers unacceptable does not do the victims justice—the truth is, these numbers are appalling! Unfortunately, these figures are not unique to the United States Air Force. The Department of Defense experienced 3,192 reports of sexual assault in FY11, up slightly (1.1 percent) from FY10; the Air Force comprised about one-fifth of those reports. Sexual misconduct is not just an Air Force problem, it is a U.S. military problem, a national problem, and a global problem as well.

During my confirmation hearing with the Senate Armed Services Committee on July 19, 2012, I stated that after almost ten years of work in this area, “we’ve made no difference,” and that “we haven’t even reversed the trend.” I reiterate that the Air Force goal for sexual assault is not simply a reversing trend, it is zero. But after several months of looking hard at this issue, I believe that we may be starting to make a difference. Since the inception of the SAPR program in 2005, reports of sexual assault across the Department of Defense have risen 88 percent. Hopefully this does not mean the incidence of sexual assault has risen a commensurate degree, but rather that more and more U.S. servicemen and women feel increasingly comfortable reporting these crimes, utilizing victim support services, as well as engaging in the investigative process. We have no way of knowing that for sure and should never make decisions based on that assumption...but I’m hopeful.

Air Force Efforts

Since becoming the Air Force Chief of Staff, I have worked hard to express my deep concern with this issue, reaffirmed vigorously the Air Force policy of zero tolerance for sexual misconduct, and directed specific actions to continue to attack this problem. I believe our commanders and supervisors truly care for their Airmen, and appreciate the tremendous sacrifices they and their families make every day in service to our Nation. I recognize that the American people send the U.S. military their very best to serve, and that we have been entrusted by the families of every Airman with the care of their sons, daughters, brothers, and sisters. I take this responsibility very seriously, and have shared my thoughts on this subject with Airmen at every level of our Air Force.

⁴ 449 unrestricted reports, 347 restricted reports

Some of the actions I have directed include a complete review of manpower and resource requirements pertaining to the Air Force SAPR program. The Air Force has partnered with the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) to conduct a top-to-bottom review of current SAPR training requirements to determine their sufficiency and effectiveness. In coordination with OSD, the Air Force has created “special victims teams” comprised of investigators and attorneys equipped with specialized training in sexual assault cases. A cadre of 24 special investigators has already received special victim training. Sixty Air Force attorneys have been identified and trained to serve as “Special Victims’ Counsel,” providing comprehensive and compassionate legal assistance to victims. The Air Force approved all 46 expedited transfer requests for Air Force victims over the past year, to include both permanent change-of-station and local installation reassignments, and we continue to employ over 3,100 volunteer victim advocates. In accordance with the FY12 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), all of these volunteer victim advocates will receive full certifications to provide confidential victim support beyond the training they already receive, and the Air Force is also on track to hire and place a full-time victim advocate at every installation by October 1, 2013.

Beyond these systemic actions, I have also engaged multiple echelons of Air Force leadership and our Airmen themselves to highlight the importance of this issue. Every Air Force four-star general received my guidance during our CORONA Fall conference in early October 2012. Secretary Donley, Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force Roy and I issued a joint letter to Airmen on November 15, 2012, expressing clear and unambiguous direction to the force, urging them to become personally involved in driving sexual misconduct from our ranks. I directed 164 Air Force wing commanders to come to Washington on November 28, 2012, and receive not only my personal perspective on this issue, but also to encourage meaningful dialogue and explore significant policy options for the future among those most influential to Air Force culture and climate at the installation level. Following the wing commander conference, I directed an Air Force-wide health and welfare inspection during the first two weeks of December 2012 designed to eliminate environments conducive to sexual harassment or unprofessional relationships, both possible leading indicators of sexual misconduct. Detailed results of this inspection have been shared with the commanders of the Air Force Major Commands, and will also be shared with members of Congress not later than January 25, 2013. Finally, my most recent “CSAF Letter to Airmen,” issued on January 2, 2013, reinforced the fact that images, songs, stories, or so-called “traditions” that are obscene, vulgar, or that denigrate or fail to show proper respect to ALL Airmen, are not part of our heritage and will not be accepted as part of our culture. They are not things we value, and they ultimately degrade mission effectiveness and hurt unit morale.

Considerations for the Future

As painful as the acts of sexual misconduct and unprofessionalism by a small number of MTIs at BMT have been for everyone involved, the set of institutional safeguards designed to prevent future misconduct identified by General Rice provide some options that are applicable to the entire Air Force. These safeguards to dissuade, deter, and detect misconduct, as well as the commitment to hold perpetrators of misconduct fully accountable if deterrence fails, represent a strategy to attack the prevalence of sexual assault in today's military. Although not every recommendation implemented at BMT is directly transferrable to the larger Air Force, many are. We are already working to include many of the BMT recommendations into the larger Air Force SAPR program, Air Force leadership training at every level, and our investigative and legal processes.

This strategy may generate an eventual reduction in sexual assaults across the Air Force, but it will not address the root cause. The Air Force receives its Airmen from American society, with each individual carrying with them distinct notions of morality and what they consider as "appropriate" behavior. The U.S. military, the most capable military the world has ever seen, requires adherence to a code of behavior that exceeds, and should exceed, societal norms. We swear an oath to uphold and defend our Constitution, and we willingly agree to lay down our lives in defense of the freedoms we all cherish. About one percent of Americans volunteer to serve their Nation in uniform, and as U.S. servicemen and women, we sacrifice a portion of our personal freedoms to bond effectively as a cohesive member of America's military team. Because of this, we must do more to instill a behavioral conscience into the climate and culture of every Air Force unit, and into the mind of every Airman. That individual desire to do the right thing, to look out for a fellow Airman, to treat every unit member as a respected contributor to the team, and to truly live by *Integrity First, Service Before Self, and Excellence in All We Do*—these are the values of an Airman who will never embark upon a path leading to sexual assault.

Summary

Americans hold their military to a high standard, and rightly so. Air Force leadership at every level has an obligation to protect and strengthen the force, and to be worthy of the confidence of our Airmen and the Nation we serve. We have a duty to live by our core values and to meet or exceed the high standards the American people expect of us. As Secretary Donley has stated, "this is family business," and as an Air Force family, we must do a better job of caring for one another. I will never stop spreading this message, I will never slow down my efforts to ensure victims receive the best, most capable, and most thoughtful care and advice possible, and I will never quit working to eradicate sexual assault from the ranks of the United States Air Force. Until we succeed, I will do everything in my power to ensure victims receive the best, most capable, and most thoughtful care, support and advice available. Nothing else is acceptable.