

Sex Crimes in the US Military: The Safety and Protection of Women in the Armed Forces

“Do As I Say, Not As I Do”: The Top Military Brass M.O. Is Under the Gun... Again

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Global Research, December 04, 2014

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#), [Women's Rights](#)

March 2014 was a bad month for women in the armed forces. The bill sponsored by female Senators Gillibrand and McCaskill went down in defeat by five votes that would have transferred jurisdiction of all military assault cases away from the good ol' boys club of the male commander to civilian court. On the same day the Senate was voting to leave sexual assault under military control, across the Potomac River the Pentagon was forced to make public the Army's top officer in charge of reducing the sexual epidemic in its ranks himself being investigated for sexual misconduct. Then in that same month of March the highest profile rape case in Naval Academy history resulted in acquittal of a former Navy football player. That same day the highest profile case of rape in US Army history against a general also resulted in a mere slap of the hand.

After the entire preceding year near daily headlines of rape in the military drawing continuous unwanted attention to the out of control sex crimes running rampant throughout both the services and the service academies, with over 26,000 reported assault cases in 2012 alone, these demoralizing March events cast a foreboding dark shadow on women in uniform's future safety and protection. The subsequent harassment and humiliation that the one in ten rape survivors who do come forth and report sex crimes are subjected to amounts to double punishment, being re-traumatized and re-victimized by a military system that fails to convict and imprison 99% of military rapists. Adding the turn of events from March madness to the already dismal record and the prospect that women would be any better protected in the future seems bleak to impossible.

The top military brass that have not won a war in seven decades were resoundingly victorious in their yearlong PR campaign at damage control, convincing Congress that long overdue improvements were actually being made. Those shocking headlines earlier this year spelled business as usual for young American women both in and out of uniform. At the same time rape on college campuses across America was also spiking out of control with headlines indicating that up to one in four females attending college in the US are also victims of sexual assault. And the cherished, most honorable military institutions of West Point, Annapolis and the Air Force Academy that brag that cadets are our nation's best and brightest and so called cream of the crop turn out to be the worst offenders of all.

As a graduate of West Point and former Army officer, I have always believed that the truth has a way of setting us free. In the end, justice in the form of the truth eventually surfaces despite whatever diabolical forces have been in place to kill the truth from ever becoming known. This week marks a full year after President Obama's assessment demanding that progress be made. On the eve before the Pentagon releases the latest annual statistics on

sexual assault in the military, two developments this week give hope that truth and justice may actually prevail after all. Raping women and continuing to get away with it in the armed forces and specifically at the service academies may become more difficult in the future.

At a Tuesday news conference this week flanked by five Republican Senators and three other Democratic Senators, New York Senator Kirsten Gillibrand threatened to hold up Obama's next nominee Asthton Carter for Secretary of Defense unless drastic changes are demonstrated. She said she would offer an amendment to a defense bill that is expected to pass prior to the upcoming holiday recess shifting adjudication of assault cases to an independent civilian prosecutor and if that fails, she plans to reinstate another bill to change the status quo.

On the very same day that the Senators were holding their press conference, the Department of Defense Inspector General's office announced that it will investigate the Air Force Academy's handling of recent sexual assault cases involving three dismissed football players. The Academy subsequently kicked out a fourth cadet teammate that provided the incriminating evidence resulting in the three star players' separation as retaliation. Despite the female Academy Superintendent General Michelle Johnson's flat denial that cadet Eric Thomas' "disenrollment" six weeks prior to his graduation had anything to do with his damaging testimony to the star athletes, Cadet Thomas suddenly ended up with too many demerits as retaliatory punishment for bring the rapists to justice. The case against Eric Thomas is much like my own at West Point. His due process was clearly violated in that he was never allowed to challenge the demerits against him while on duty with the Office of Special Investigations. We both were ousted on excessive demerits due to command conspiracy. Back in my day as a cadet in 1972 due process as our constitutional right still meant something in this country. But now this fundamental rule of law is no longer upheld, honored or practiced in this nation of current police state tyranny.

Since last month ESPN has been running an in-depth segment exposing the Air Force Academy's unfair punishment toward Thomas as the momentum of negative publicity continues piling up against the service academy's gross injustice. And now the Pentagon's top investigative office will be closely scrutinizing the Academy's malicious mishandling of the Thomas case. Instead of supporting and lauding Eric Thomas and allowing him to graduate in 2013, it went out of its way to break him down by abruptly ending his education just before graduating and denying him his officer's commission while sending an all too obvious message to the rest of the Corps of Cadets to not come forth and report rape.

The Department of Defense is merely responding to the increasing political pressure being brought to bear mainly by Eric Thomas's South Dakota Senator John Thune and again Senator Gillibrand to relook at this over-the-top travesty of justice. Clear-cut evidence exists that the Academy superintendent at the time, General Michael Gould, himself a former AFA football player, attempted to squelch Thomas from ever testifying against his teammates. The general went so far as to refuse to even allow OSI to interview the Air Force football coaching staff during the rape investigation. For damage control purposes, three months after Thomas was unjustifiably terminated from the Air Force Academy, General Gould was retiring. The former superintendent was suddenly being replaced for the first time by a female in General Johnson who earlier this year called for the Air Force Inspector General to investigate the Thomas case and Academy football program. No surprise that it delivered a whitewashed report of the ongoing scandal giving the AFA Athletic Department a clean bill of health for its handling of the assault cases and former cadet Thomas.

Another scandal within the scandal is presently taking place at the Air Force Office of Special Investigations (OSI). For two years Cadet Thomas was used by OSI to act as an informant to uncover not only assault cases but drug offenses at the Academy as well. Thomas was told that he must keep his involvement with OSI totally secret from everyone else at the Academy. Though he had been assured by OSI investigators that should his OSI assignments get him into trouble, the Office of Special Investigations would surely have his back. Yet when he was being harassed and railroaded out of the Academy after the three star football players were terminated, the OSI agents he had been working with were nowhere to be found. That was because they too were not allowed to intervene on Thomas' behalf. Former OSI Agent Brandon Enos claims that after the incident he also was unfairly targeted and retaliated against by his OSI commander as well. Having resigned recently from the Air Force, Enos has gone public with damning evidence of how both Cadet Thomas and he were duly punished by Air Force high command.

Had the three rapists been any other Air Force Academy cadets and not top football players, Eric Thomas would never have been kicked out. The payback against Thomas for doing the righteous and honorable thing in stopping rapists from raping again shows the criminal lengths that those in power will abusively go to protect their own self-interests, in this case, the Academy's reputation and specifically its struggling football program desperate to maintain its status as a viable contender within NCAA Division I football.

The final week in October leading up to the Air Force Academy's football victory over rival Army, reporter Tom Roeder from the *Colorado Springs Gazette* was at it again exposing yet another scandal at a service academy, this time at my alma mater. From an anonymous tip he uncovered the outing of a lifetime that apparently occurred back in January 2014. Seventeen current West Point football players used as "good time Charlie" peer recruiters treated some fourteen high school athletes as potential future Military Academy players to a mighty fine time.

Traveling in style by chartered bus without supervision other than the police escort in tow at taxpayer expense, the underage high school recruits were treated to booze, cash, girls, and a party like there's no tomorrow as an enticement to attend and play football at the prestigious and honorable Military Academy. Army is pulling out all the stops facing so much pressure to improve its losing football seasonal record as a perennial Division I bottom dweller. So the Academy sends its starting quarterback and 16 of his teammates out to party down with 14 targeted high school athletes to show them that just because West Point's a military school, it doesn't mean they don't know how to have fun. Sex, booze and rock and roll on the highway to heaven sounds more like a flashback to the hedonistic 70's. But apparently the annual trip's become a tradition over the last ten years at West Point, started under the tutelage of former head football coach Bobby Ross (though he was quick to respond that no alcohol or women were supplied back in his day).

Apparently the rules grew more lax over the years. At this year's latest romp, despite two coaches and two officers involved in the organizing and planning of the outing, none were present. One of the officers, Director of Football Operations Lt. Col. Chad Davis, went so far as to recruit female cadets from the basketball, volleyball and cheerleading squads just to ensure that "recruits see that there are pretty girls that go here," and "there are not just masculine women that attend West Point." According to the NCAA, cadets and recruits were reported to drink as many as seven alcoholic beverages in 90 minutes before boarding the bus ride home that included loud music, strobe lights and cheerleaders making out. Pandering to all the same common denominator tactics that the big time football programs

have been offering forever (under the table of course) is just one more piece of evidence of how the standards at all the major service academies have sunk to new, unprecedented lows.

Both responses from the Academy administration as well as the NCAA officials for the recruiting violations have been extremely lenient. The Academy reported the incident to the NCAA and according to that report, two football players were suspended from activities for all of one week. Though West Point Superintendent Lt. General Caslen, an ex-footballer himself from the Class of 1976, was quick to point out that the cadets and officers involved were all harshly reprimanded, no cadet was dismissed nor any officer given a court martial. The superintendent claimed that even though weeks passed before the incident was reported, there was never a cover-up. He also denied his own school's internal investigation findings that specify the faculty representative kept it hidden until a complaint was registered after attempts to recruit female cadet escorts as dinner dates in a similar later incident forced disclosure of the earlier bus outing.

The Superintendent just can't admit West Point has resorted to pimping off its own female cadets to lure horny young athletes to join their team. Aside from information issued by the NCAA, the Academy has been highly secretive to avoid specifying just exactly what "harsh" punishments were given. An Academy spokeswoman stated West Point preferred to "handle it administratively," meaning to keep the entire affair under wraps in efforts to protect its squeaky clean yet very false image and reputation, especially in the wake of the series of scandals rocking all the academy athletic departments.

The explicitly proven lowering of standards both academically and ethically that all the academies continue feebly lying about to this day indicate just how desperate and hypocritical they are rigidly holding onto clean-cut images that have long been shattered. There is no more honor left, and these fools who continue lying to pretend there is, are only tainting their hallowed institutions even further. Again, the M.O. from America's leaders, both political and military, is to simply deny, deny, deny, so much so, that they are only fooling themselves hoping the problem eventually goes away. But as long as the top leaders continue trying to live the lie, so will their cadets be more than willing to prove them wrong. Deceptive and untrustworthy leaders do grave disservice to both our nation's future leaders as well as our nation.

It isn't even so much what the young people did that is so scandalous or reprehensible. At 17, 18, 19 or 20 years of age, to spend a weekend drinking beer and hanging out with attractive young women at the local bowling alley is actually normalized and to a great extent age acceptable behavior. No one was drunk getting behind the wheel to drive intoxicated. The police were there to keep in check any raucous behavior that got too loud or lewd. Though some of the participants were underage, high school and college kids, especially jocks, typically drink alcohol while partying with girls. As a former jock and cadet, I'm not advocating but simply pointing out the obvious.

What violates limits of acceptability here is that all the service academies are still propagating an elitist myth, insisting on pretending that their cadets are the cream of the crop, the best and brightest, so morally and ethically superior in character and honor, pushing pristine fake images that no longer apply over the last half century. The academy officials are still living in a dream world, refusing to wake up and admit their phony, self-righteous hypocrisy, desperately selling lies and deceit at every turn, churning out inferior products deluded with an elitist superiority, is all a scam that no one but them and others

like them too dishonest to handle the truth cannot bear. They need to wake up to the real world of the twenty-first century and finally get real. Also, beyond the lowest common normative denominator, having academy officials endorse pimping off their female students, using sex, alcohol and cash to lure athletic talent is a sleazy operation, exploiting their so called cream of the crop and future cream of the crop in a prurient way. It reflects how low and desperate the academies are resorting to just to be able to compete with the big boys on the big money gridiron stage of NCAA football. This behavior coming from our most honored institutions is anything but honorable.

These so called scandals corroborate what longtime Annapolis Professor Bruce Fleming's been saying for nearly a decade. The fact that service academy administrations are all in denial claiming they have not lowered their standards is a complete joke. To try and compete at Division I level, they have made it easier for gifted athletes to gain acceptance and stay at the academy playing football. Lying through their teeth about it yet expecting cadets to uphold their so called sacred honor code is just more of the same hypocritical "do as I say, not as I do." If the service academies want cadets to demonstrate strong moral character, then it starts with their own top leaders who as poor role models for decades have failed miserably to measure up, constantly pushing a double standard of lies and moral depravity.

Over and over again all three major service academies have been proven blatantly guilty of resorting to shady immoral depths to attract and keep talented football players playing at their schools at all cost. The top brass lies, immoral conduct and hypocrisies are karmically once again coming back on them. It appears those demoralizingly dark developments earlier in 2014 are reversing themselves now as the uncovered truth is finally reaching the light of day. And their day of reckoning is fast approaching.

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