

**Statement of the Vice Chief of Staff of the Air Force  
Senate Armed Services Committee  
Military Personnel Subcommittee  
25 February 2004**

Mr. Chairman, Senator Nelson, and distinguished members of this Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to come before you to discuss such an important matter that affects the safety, well being, and combat effectiveness of almost 700,000 Air Force airmen -- that of sexual assault. The outstanding men and women of the active duty, Guard, and Reserve Components, as well as the civilians that make up of the United States Air Force, have performed brilliantly over the past three years. They have adapted to a new steady state of accelerated operations and personnel tempo, faced new enemies across the globe and here at home, and met every challenge that this great Nation has put before them. Working with Congress, we all have worked diligently to supply our airmen with the necessary tools to accomplish these essential missions. We attempt to give them the most modern weapons and the most technologically advanced joint training in an effort to ensure that these airmen are ready to accomplish their role in the security of this nation. Providing for the security of these airmen can be no different. In Iraq and Afghanistan, we adopt aggressive force protection measures to ensure the safety of our airmen from enemy attacks. Similarly, at home and abroad, we continue to stress measures that create an environment safe from sexual assault -- an environment that, just like on the battlefield, enables commanders and individuals throughout the chain of command to rapidly identify and decisively act on threats to any of our airmen. For us, sexual assault is a threat to airmen -- it is incompatible with the core values of the Air Force -- it is a crime --and it will not be tolerated!

Having served as a commander at many levels, I can attest that Air Force policies and training on this issue are clear. All commanders understand that rape and sexual assault are crimes that, as Dr Chu stated in a February 6<sup>th</sup> article in *USA Today*, “violate the ethos of the military and threaten readiness.” They understand that each attack, each unreported incident, each rumor, begins to break down unit cohesion, individual dignity, and affects the overall accomplishments of their group on the battlefield and in the workplace. They understand that when airmen decide not to re-enlist because of their workplace environment that we are losing a well-educated, highly-trained asset. They understand that these crimes take valuable resources away from the accomplishment of their mission.

This is but one side of the equation – the commander and mission accomplishment side of the story. We are continually looking at the victim side of this issue. Commanders at all levels understand that victim reporting and victim care are just as important as dealing with the perpetrator and establishing policies that attempt to prevent these types of attacks.

Commanders also understand the complexity of issues usually intertwined with sexual assault. According to the 2002 National Crime Victimization Survey done by the Department of Justice, 53% of rape and assault victims sustained injuries while only 31% of those sought medical attention. It goes on to state, while there are over 135,000 sexual assaults in this country annually, only 26% are reported to the police. These facts illustrate the challenges in fully dealing with this issue that commanders deal with everyday. But it is the entire equation of pre-emptive policies -- from victim reporting

and care to perpetrator prosecution -- that is, and has been, the focus of Air Force leadership at every level.

## **AIR FORCE ACADEMY**

As each of you know, the Secretary and the Chief of Staff of the Air Force testified on assault and harassment issues last fall. Secretary Roche and General Jumper learned of allegations at the Air Force Academy, aggressively attacked the issue, and adopted many measures that addressed cadet concerns and Air Force concerns. Additionally, they opened the Academy to multiple investigations and have taken many steps to make the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA) more transparent to oversight. Some of that oversight comes in the form of a renewed and reinvigorated Board of Visitors (BOV), with which some of you are involved. In their most recent meeting earlier this month, Chairman of the BOV, and former Governor, James Gilmore applauded the comprehensive efforts of Secretary Roche and General Jumper. These comments follow the praise of the Fowler Panel who were “*impressed with the leadership of Secretary Roche and General Jumper*” and commended the new leadership in Colorado Springs as being “*quick to take action.*”

It is clear to everyone that this issue is, and has been at the top of their agendas as our Air Force senior leadership. In their testimonies last year, they detailed their landmark *Agenda for Change*. This overhaul was not mere rule changes designed to preempt attacks or focused on the punishment of the perpetrators. The *Agenda for Change* is a template for cultural change.

Since the implementation of the *Agenda for Change* in March 2003, and the Fowler Panel Report, I am pleased to report that there has been tremendous progress

across multiple fronts. The US Air Force Academy senior leadership is aggressively focused on the areas of basic cadet training, officer development, and a restructure of the cadet discipline system. In the area of prevention, the Secretary, the Chief of Staff, and the new leadership under Lieutenant General J.R. Rosa sought outside experts to review training and assist in training faculty, staff, and leadership. They have incorporated Fowler recommendations to enhance training, implemented tough new alcohol policy, and most importantly, have created an integrated support team for victims of sexual assault - the Academy Response Team (ART). This team includes victim advocates, security forces, office of special investigations, the vice commandant, legal, chaplain, surgeon general and the family support center.

At the Air Force Academy, we heard allegations -- rapidly assessed the situation - - created an overarching and enduring solution -- and decisively implemented it. Even after initial implementation of our plan, we have continued to refine our approach. For instance, based on the Fowler Panel's recommendations on victim confidentiality, we have attempted to strike a balance between the needs of the victim and the necessity of investigating felony allegations. This is proving to be a very difficult concept to implement. On this matter we sincerely believe it is in America's best interest that we eliminate any chance for offenders to commit future crimes.

Whether we look at the record numbers or increasing quality of female applicants for the academic year 2004-2005, our initial indications are very positive. As of today, the USAFA Admissions Office has received over 3,026 applications from women – an increase of over 35 percent – and the largest number of female applicants in the history of the Academy. The increases in the average GPAs across all four classes of cadets, both

male and female, seem to show that we are instilling an improved climate for learning for all cadets.

Last year, Secretary Roche and General Jumper pushed extremely hard to install their changes before the Class of 2007 entered USAFA. Their efforts seemed to have had a major impact. At the end of the fall semester, fourth class cadets (freshmen) had their highest GPA in the past 20 years with a record 48% with GPAs above 3.0. Comments like those from a current cadet, 19-year old Ashley Culp, reiterate that we are on the right track. In an article published in her hometown Des Moines, Iowa newspaper, she stated “If anything, I think they're focusing on it a little too much ... We've had a countless number of briefings on sexual harassment, they talk about it in basic (training) and in all our classes ... We've all pretty much become experts on what is sexual harassment, how to handle it and who to contact.” Even Ashley's mother, who was worried at first when the sexual assault issues surfaced, gave her ultimate seal of approval when she said there couldn't be “a safer environment at any university in the country.” We could not agree more with her words or the words the Honorable Tillie Fowler so eloquently stated in her testimony, that *“it is and should always be an honor to call oneself a cadet at the United States Air Force Academy.”*

## **SHEPPARD AIR FORCE BASE**

In another set of allegations, *Denver Post* articles claim “a wave” of assaults at one of our premier training bases – Sheppard Air Force Base. Just as we rapidly engaged at the Air Force Academy, the highest level of attention has been focused on this issue at an Air Education and Training Command (AETC) Base. When these allegations

surfaced in the media, AETC Commander, General Donald Cook, immediately directed a fact-finding review to assess the climate and examine the effectiveness of all existing plans, programs, policies and procedures in place to prevent assaults as well as ensure that adequate victim reporting and victim care resources are available. As part of this overall effort, they are also fully reviewing previously reported assaults to determine if proper actions have been taken. General Cook's initial findings should be delivered shortly. The Chief of Staff, the Secretary of the Air Force, and I are fully engaged in this issue and WILL ensure the right solutions are in place to provide a safe environment for our airmen.

## **COMBAT ZONES**

When an assault occurs within one of our units, it impacts morale, good order and discipline and, ultimately, readiness. It is especially egregious when such problems surface during actual combat deployments -- at a time when all of our folks should be focused on the mission, our fight against the war on terrorism. Today, almost 2,500 of our 20,000 deployed forces are women. Over the past three years the Air Force has deployed 176,689 airmen to numerous locations throughout the Middle East in support of the Global War on Terror. Women deployed to many of those locations, and they comprised twelve percent of the total deployed airmen. As the Combined Force Air Component Commander during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, I had over 55,000 airmen overseas with me at this time last year. Unfortunately, since 11 September 2001, the Air Force has had eight cases of alleged assaults reported involving Air Force women within the area of operations. Two of the cases involved assault by non-US civilians. In those

cases the host nation retained jurisdiction. Of the other six cases, the disposition is as follows: commanders tried one by courts-martial, two cases were handled through administrative action; one was dismissed after the commander conducted an Article 32 investigation, one investigation was just completed and is awaiting command action, and in the remaining case, after a full investigation the allegation was determined to be unfounded.

These few cases coupled with the fact that we have had no reports of sexual assaults on our airmen in Iraq or Afghanistan suggest that we may have this matter fully in hand, even under the most difficult circumstances. Nevertheless, Secretary Roche established an Integrated Planning Team (IPT) made up of experts from throughout the Air Force who are fully and aggressively assisting the DoD Task Force on Care for Victims of Sexual Assaults. We look forward to their findings and recommendations and plan to decisively implement the task force's improvements.

Just as with USAFA and at Sheppard Air Force Base, after being made aware of the allegations in the combat zone the Air Force rapidly addressed the problem – used existing victim support, law enforcement, Uniform Code of Military Justice, and medical channels to address the issue – and has attempted to re-establish and reinforce a climate where our airmen can focus on external threats to US security.

## **GOALS**

It should be clear, that the Air Force takes this matter seriously. Whether at home station, deployed, at the Air Force Academy, at Officer Training School (OTS), and at our Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) detachments, it is also clear that one assault is one too many. While we have been encouraged by a recent gender and workplace

survey completed by the Defense Manpower Data Center that shows decreases in all types of sexually harassing behavior, we will remain focused on this issue.

In order to do that the Air Force has set clear goals. We are using them to guide an assessment of existing policies and programs in all of Major Commands. Our goals include:

- Striving to eliminate sexual assault and any climate that might foster it;
- Ensuring an environment where victims have confidence to report;
- Conducting appropriate investigation and prosecution;
- Effectively addressing victims health and well-being; and
- Ensuring commanders and higher headquarters oversee program effectiveness

Mr. Chairman, as I have attempted to make clear, the Secretary, Chief of Staff and Commanders at every level are serious about the safety and well being of our force, regardless of gender. We have effective programs in place and will continue to enhance them to ensure we have a consistent overarching policy best serving the needs of our Air Force airmen and our Nation's wartime requirements.

## **WAY AHEAD**

To accomplish the goals we have set, our commanders use multiple tools available to them. These tools can be characterized into education, training, and prevention programs and response programs. The first, education, is provided at all levels of training; some more specific, some as part of the larger subject of sexual harassment.

Trainees in Basic Military Training School receive instruction on assault prevention and awareness, and are instructed to report harassment or assault immediately.

Within the first 24 hours of arriving on their first military base, trainees hear about Sexual Crime Prevention, their commander's rules of engagement, and human relations. These messages are reiterated time and again throughout their first weeks.

At the Air Force Academy, once a Basic Cadet completes in-processing, he or she experiences four days of orientation briefings and discussions (Basic Cadets are separated by gender during this period). On day two of the orientation, cadets receive their first briefings on Sexual Assault. Basic Cadets receive additional Sexual Assault training (to include facilitated small group discussions) during the final days of Basic Cadet Training (prior to integration with the remainder of the Cadet Wing). These small group (gender separated) sessions include topics on sexual assault and gender roles.

This matter is also handled with cadets at Air Force Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) detachments, and officer trainees at Officer Training School (OTS). During their first week of training, these valuable commissioning sources cover equal opportunity, sexual harassment and awareness, diversity, and the formal Air Force Complaint System. These lessons are constantly reinforced at commander's calls and through effective leadership training.

Similar to these service entry programs, every level of professional military education from officer training to Wing Commander's courses; from the airman leadership course to our Senior Non-Commissioned Officer Courses; each stress the importance of this issue, detail the challenges, and elaborate on the resources and tools at their disposal. Whether, assault or the broader context of sexual harassment, commanders understand their responsibilities to the troops, and individuals understand the accountability of their commanders.

An initial review of the *Armed Forces 2002 Sexual Harassment Survey* indicates that the investment of time and resources in this training is paying dividends. For the individual, when asked if they had received training on topics related to sexual harassment and if that training was effective, a full 90% agreed their training provided them a “good understanding” and roughly 84% said they had received “useful tools” for dealing with the issue. For the commanders, data reveals even more successes. The number of Air Force airmen that perceive their leadership, from supervisor to AF service leadership are making “honest and reasonable efforts to stop sexual harassment” have significantly increased between 1995 and 2002. These facts support our continued emphasis on education, training, and prevention programs.

Our response tools deal primarily with victim care. As one of our stated goals, restoring the victims’ health and well-being, is certainly a top priority. There are a number of Air Force organizations fully dedicated and prepared for that task. First and foremost in victim care are the services provided at our Medical Treatment Facilities (MTFs). Air Force MTFs develop local protocols for the care of assault victims that are tailored to local capabilities and follow civilian community standards. Medical staffs ascertain immediate needs of the victim in terms of medical and psychological support. MTFs also have locally developed victim advocate programs that collaborate with civilian agencies. Frequently civilian expertise is used to provide both medical and victim support (sexual assault centers)

Another important tool, the AF Life Skills Center, provides psychological support and intervention to assault victims. There are military counseling options such as primary care managers (physicians), social workers, chaplains, family support centers

and base legal offices. Civilian counseling options are also available in the form of hotlines, support groups, local assault crisis centers and churches. This care is not unique to home installations, but is also available at deployed locations.

As mentioned earlier, sexual assault and harassment in a combat zone is particularly egregious. It is our Air Force policy that consistent levels of care are available regardless of the setting. Care for victims in the AOR mirrors that of home station. Our deployed medical units provide diagnostic evaluations (to include the collection of forensic evidence) and medical/psychological treatment to assault victims. Mental health teams are included at Expeditionary Medical Support System (EMEDS) with bedded facilities. Assault victims at deployed locations have several healthcare support options. Typically, victims can be quickly evacuated to Level III facilities in theater where the facility is staffed and equipped to provide resuscitation, initial wound surgery, and post-operative treatment. Deployed mental health providers can be sent forward to assist a victim at almost any location. Long-term, intensive support is available at Level IV facilities. There, the Air Force provides the same surgical capabilities found in Level III care, as well as rehabilitative and recovery therapy for those who can return to duty within the theater evacuation policy. Post-deployment clinical practice guidelines query all members regarding medical/psychological issues. Because of its importance -- I repeat -- restoring the victims' health and well-being is our top priority.

Another source of counseling to the victim is the Air Force Chaplain. Recently, the Chaplain Service has focused on providing training for chaplains who would be in a position to receive counselees who are victims of assault. They have trained USAFA

chaplains with the assistance of civilian experts in the area of assessment and treatment of sexual victims and offenders. The Chaplain Service Resource Board is currently working to develop a training program that will be used first at our Air Education and Training Command (AETC) bases in 2004.

A second form of response is reporting and investigation. The Air Force Office of Special Investigation (AF/OSI) investigates and reports sexual assault crimes. Air Force OSI agents are specially trained to deal with victims of such crimes. Security forces are also often the first responders. Victims are highly encouraged to participate in the Victim and Witness Assistance Program and to cooperate with investigators so that their case can be resolved. The Air Force Academy now has an Academy Response Team (ART), a multidisciplinary team designed to support command in their response to sexual assault allegations and ensure that victims receive all appropriate avenues of assistance. This may well become a model throughout the Air Force.

Senior leadership involvement remains critical. Beyond the attention and many hours devoted to this important issue by the Secretary and the Chief of Staff, every level of leadership is equally engaged. Commanders are given tools that provide them a vehicle to be proactive and tailor programs and resources to their specific units and community needs. For example, each Air Force base, MAJCOM and the Air Staff sponsor a working group that deals specifically with community issues, with a focus on prevention and service delivery. These working groups, called Integrated Delivery Services (IDS) teams, are comprised of representatives from Family Advocacy, Health and Wellness clinic, Life Skills clinic, the Chaplains office, the Family Support Center and the Services office. The IDS team serves as the working group for the Community

Action Information Board (CAIB), with responsibility for monitoring the health and well-being of their populations, and targeting prevention and intervention services. Through the Community Action Information Board and Integrated Delivery Services processes, issues such as sexual assault and others like alcohol abuse, tobacco use, family violence and suicide prevention are viewed as community issues requiring a coordinated multi-agency approach.

In closing, I want to again state that we are devoting the resources -- the expertise -- and the energy to addressing this challenge. Our leadership does not take this matter lightly.

From the Air Force Inspector General given the review of sexual assault as a special interest item, to the re-deployment briefing and follow-up surveys; to the recent task that I gave to every Major Command to perform a comprehensive assessment of our assault response system to include, but not limited to, education, training & prevention, reporting procedures, response programs, and program oversight. From the Secretary-established headquarters team that leads the Air Force-wide assessment and reports to the Secretary, Chief, and MAJCOM commanders to our top-level interest in the study that is being released here today. I can assure you that this issue is on the front burner of our senior leadership.

Last year it was my privilege to lead our airmen – the next of America’s greatest generations – into combat in Iraq and, the year before – into combat in Afghanistan. Today, as the Vice Chief of Staff, I see their talents, their energy, and their dedication every day and could not be prouder of the way they perform. It is my commitment to

them to see that their service is free from the threat of assault and completed with honor and dignity.

Thank you Mr Chairman for the opportunity to discuss this critical issue with you and the committee.