

# Sexualised Violence Against Female Soldiers Going Largely Unpunished

by Chris Shumway

**S**exualised violence and harassment of women is a widespread problem within the U.S. armed services, but according to a government investigation and testimony from numerous female soldiers who have been raped, assaulted and harassed by male soldiers, the Pentagon's response has been woefully inadequate.

The findings come at a time when new evidence suggests that U.S. military personnel raped and sexually abused Iraqi women detained at Abu Ghraib prison and other detention facilities in Iraq, leading some women's rights advocates to conclude that military culture devalues and dehumanises women no matter what culture they are from.

"There are definitely connections between the sexual assault in Abu Ghraib and the abuse against women" in the military, Kate Summers, director of services for the Miles Foundation, an advocacy group for military women who have been assaulted by fellow soldiers, told Salon.com.

Summers says the military needs to adopt serious reforms now in order to protect female soldiers from assault and abuse. Other critics of the military go further, suggesting that sexism is so deeply embedded in the institution that no amount of reform could ever make the military a safe place for women.

Activists from both camps say new revelations about assaults against female soldiers serving in the Middle East, as well as the Pentagon's lackluster response are, sadly, just the latest episodes in a long history of offenses against women traceable to the military.

In the U.S. Central Command's (CENTCOM) theatre of operation, which includes Iraq and Afghanistan, female soldiers reported 112 incidents of rape, assault and other forms of sexual misconduct during an 18-

month period ending in February 2004, according to the Department of Defense. The Pentagon also acknowledges that more than 1,000 incidents of sexual misconduct throughout the military were reported in 2003 alone. Army statistics also demonstrate that perpetrators are not likely to be tried and convicted; numbers from 1996 show that out of 440 reported rapes, only 33 resulted in convictions, according to the Memphis Flyer.

Former Army Captain Jennifer Machmer told the Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues that she was sexually assaulted two separate times and sexually harassed once between 2001 and 2003, according to Salon.com. After being raped in Kuwait in 2003, the last of the two assaults, Machmer reported the incident "within a half-hour," according to her testimony. Though she followed military protocol for reporting such an incident, "The aftermath of the reporting has been terrifying," said Machmer.

According to Salon.com, military authorities questioned whether Machmer's assault should be considered a rape, she was not provided any immediate counseling and she had to continue working in the same location as her assailant. Machmer says she was eventually given a medical discharge, against her wishes, for suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. In April, she told the PBS programme *Newshour* that the soldier who raped her in Kuwait was still in the Army. "He is now serving at Fort Knox, Kentucky, finishing out his career, while I'm here being raped out of my career."

Other military women tell similar stories.

Allison DeVant did not receive any counseling after she reported that another member of the military raped her, according to an interview with the Memphis Flyer. Instead, DeVant said she was harassed, interrogated, and intimidated by her command-

ers. She said she began standing up to them, and in October 2003, though she had dreams of becoming an officer, she was discharged from the service.

Lately, DeVant has been taking action against the military on the streets of Memphis. Each week, dressed in a black beret and military uniform and accompanied by a friend, DeVant holds a protest in front of the Air Force Recruitment Office. Holding a sign that reads, "In the U.S. military, female soldiers have no protection against rape," DeVant said she wants to send a message to all women who may be considering joining the military. As paraphrased by the Memphis Flyer, the message is: "Rape is common, and if it happens don't let anyone intimidate you into thinking you've lost your civil rights."

Some high-ranking Pentagon officials defend the military's record on sexual assault, and have said emphatically that such acts are intolerable. Speaking to Newshour Admiral Michael McMullen, Vice Chief of Naval Operations said abuse of female soldiers was "corrosive to the good order and discipline of our Navy." He added, "I want to be clear on this topic.

This is not in my Navy. It is a crime, and it is unacceptable."

Pressed by anti-violence and women's advocacy groups, the Pentagon in February 2004 established a task force to study the problem of sexualised violence, in particular the military's response to it. The report opens with the statement, "The Department of Defense is unequivocal in its commitment to ensure that victims of sexual assault be protected... and that the perpetrators of such assaults be held accountable." But it later acknowledges that "existing policies and programmes aimed at preventing sexual assault are inconsistent, principally because there is no Defense-wide policy requiring them."

Programmes that are in place, the report concludes, often do not adequately protect female soldiers who report sexual assaults partly because the Pentagon has no clear definitions about what constitutes sexual assault or abuse. In addition, the military does a poor job gathering and tracking data related to sexual abuse, and it has not instituted system-wide policies for protecting the privacy of abuse survivors, according to the report.

Perhaps more startling than the report's conclusions are some of its recommendations. Rather than call for the immediate implementation of concrete reforms, the task force is asking the Department of Defense to "allocate time on the agenda" at a commander's conference to discuss sexual assault; to "convene a summit" of military and civilian leaders to "develop strategic courses of action"; and to "establish a single point of accountability" for sexual assault policy matters.

Responding to the recommendations, Kate Summers of the Miles Foundation told Salon.com, "Meetings and conferences do not constitute a plan of action." The response from Amnesty International was similar: "While the review was an important step, years of sweeping this problem under the carpet and systematic silencing of its victims cannot be erased with yet another report."

Summers and other advocates say the report barely addresses how to implement major near-term reforms needed to make the military safer for gender-integrated forces.

According to Salon.com, several leading advocates for female soldiers say the Pentagon should immediately hire a programme manager to oversee sexual abuse cases; start providing victims with advocates and counselors; expedite prosecutions so that accused attackers are removed from victims' work areas; and establish a chain of command structure for ensuring victims' privacy.

Stop Family Violence, an advocacy group for abuse survivors, says the military also needs to deploy sexual assault nurses in the field and provide rape test kits so evidence can be processed in a timely manner. The group also recommends that investigative procedures be standardised.

But even if such reforms were implemented, some advocates worry that the military will not be able to adequately tackle the problem of sexualised violence until it addresses what they call a "boys will be boys" attitude, which allows sexual abuse to go unpunished and may be even more pervasive within the military than in civilian culture. Research by Duke Univer-

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# E-Learning Costs Too Expensive

**E**lectronic Learning (E-learning) is good for the developing countries like Zambia but it is too expensive for the Zambian people, claimed lecturer Billy Kahota, writes News Update's Zambia correspondent Timothy Kasolo.

In a contribution to a monthly debate organised by the Computer Society of Zambia (CSZ) with the title "E-learning for Zambia—is it a dream or reality?", Zambia Centre for Accountancy Studies (ZCAS) Lecturer Billy Kahota said that though E-learning in Zambia has been welcomed it is very expensive for the Zambian people to pay for E-learning.

Kahota who is studying a Masters in Internet systems development with University of



Portsmouth through E-learning explained that E-learning is new to Africa and it should be made cheaper so that a lot of students are exposed to the latest technology and improve their qualifications through E-learning.

And Computer Association of Zambia (CSZ) President Milner Makuni said that Zambia as a country is facing a lot of challenges in training Information Technology (IT) professionals but due to lack of institutions offering IT professional courses the IT industries is lagging behind. Makuni said in Africa there is a Virtual University that is providing online education through the use of E-learning technologies."Senegal, Uganda and Kenya are some of the countries that are proving the use of E-learning education," Makuni explained.

Levy Lweskala, Zambia's Konkola Copper Mine (KCM) IT department said that the cost of the terminals and computers should made cheaper and that depended on the Zambia government ICT policy direction. He noted that E-learning is more than ready in Zambia and that it will provide a chance for the high school graduates that are denied places in the Universities and Colleges to give them a chance to do their education through E-learning.

Source: Balancing Act News Update, Issue No. 206, <[http://www.balancingact-africa.com/news/back/balancing-act\\_206.html](http://www.balancingact-africa.com/news/back/balancing-act_206.html)>, 17 May 2004

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sity Law Professor Madeline Morris, an expert on crime within the military, reveals that "the ratio of military rapes to civilian rapes is substantially larger than the ratio of military rates to civilian rates of other violent crime."

Retired Brigadier General Pat Foote, the first woman to command a U.S. military brigade in Europe, told Newshour

that too many military men do not accept women as equals. "As long as we have a military culture that does not imbed in its fabric respect and dignity for every man and woman who wears the uniform on an equal basis, we're going to come back to these scenarios time and time again," she said.

Some feminists, along with groups strongly opposed to the military, suggest that

tinkering with military policies or redefining the culture within the armed services is simply not enough—or perhaps not even possible—given what they see as inseparable links between male-dominated gender relations and militarism.

"Despite the glossy brochures that advertise 'opportunities for women,'" reads an anti-recruitment brochure put out by the Central Committee of Conscientious

Objectors, "the military's inherent sexism is evident from sergeants shouting 'girl!' at trainees who don't 'measure up,' to the intimidation of women who speak out about harassment and discrimination, [to] military men's sexual abuse of civilian women in base communities."

Source: The NewStandard, <[http://newstandardnews.net/content/?action=show\\_item&itemid=549](http://newstandardnews.net/content/?action=show_item&itemid=549)>, 15 June, 2004