

**DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE**

**PRESENTATION TO THE NATIONAL SECURITY, EMERGING THREATS, AND  
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**COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM**

**UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**SUBJECT: SEXUAL ASSAULT AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN THE  
MILITARY AND AT THE ACADEMIES**

**STATEMENT OF: BRIGADIER GENERAL SUSAN Y. DESJARDINS  
COMMANDANT OF CADETS  
UNITED STATES AIR FORCE ACADEMY**

**JUNE 27, 2006**

**NOT FOR PUBLICATION UNTIL RELEASED  
BY THE GOVERNMENT REFORM COMMITTEE  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT OF  
BRIGADIER GENERAL SUSAN Y. DESJARDINS  
USAF ACADEMY COMMANDANT OF CADETS  
FOR  
HOUSE GOVERNMENT REFORM COMMITTEE HEARING ON  
SEXUAL ASSAULT AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

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Mr. Chairman, Members of the House Government Reform Committee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the progress we have made at the Air Force Academy in preventing and responding to sexual assault and violence against women.

We have studied the June 2005 *Report of the Defense Task Force on Sexual Harassment and Violence at the Military Service Academies*, and we believe we are responding to its concerns.

The Air Force Academy has come a long way in addressing sexual assault and violence since the events of 2003.

We have changed and institutionalized processes that make victim care our first priority. In 2003 we established an Academy Response Team (ART) under the supervision of the training wing Vice Commander, providing dedicated assistance to victims of sexual assault. We strongly supported a confidential reporting option to allow victims to come forward and receive care without automatically triggering a law enforcement investigation—while maintaining that option for them.

We made significant progress, but we know and understand the challenge remains to keep the focus on this national problem of sexual assault as it affects the Air Force Academy and to continue our journey for long-term cultural change. America demands its Air Force and its Air Force leaders adhere to a higher standard of conduct. Therefore, we have refocused our efforts on building leaders of character that reach and exceed these higher standards.

Our efforts to combat sexual assault fall within three broad areas I will briefly review for the Committee—Prevention, Cultural Change, and Victim Care. I will also summarize our progress in these areas and highlight the challenge that remains.

**PREVENTION:** In order to prevent sexual assault, we first had to understand sexual assault as a continuum of inappropriate behaviors ranging from sexual harassment to physical sexual violence that are contrary to the concepts of honor and service that we in the Air Force have embraced through our core values of Integrity First, Service before Self and Excellence in all we do.

Through consultations with nationally-renowned experts such as Dr. David Lisak of the University of Massachusetts in Boston, the Air Force Academy began to understand better the nature of these crimes and to educate all Academy personnel—cadets and permanent party members—on a standard definition of sexual assault, on the means by which the most egregious sexual assaults occur, and on insights into methods for the community to prevent all sexual assaults. These prevention efforts are some of the steps we have taken to affect institutional cultural change.

**CULTURAL CHANGE:** Long term, institutional changes to enhance prevention will be based on making cultural changes through education and institutionalizing positive behaviors including respect. Respect—for self and others—is at the core of our cultural change. Our graduated approach devotes over 150 structured curriculum hours to character and leadership development. More than 55 of those hours are devoted to lessons with respect as the baseline on topics such as substance abuse, accountability, and human relations (including sexual assault/harassment training). This education supports the basic premise that interpersonal bonds are not forged in times of war; rather, they are formed according to the strength of the relationship experienced prior to combat. Our education and training programs focus on helping cadets internalize and respect their identity, and that of all their fellow cadets, as members of our United States Air Force, while also equipping our permanent party members to mentor cadets throughout their time at the Academy.

**VICTIM CARE:** When sexual assault does occur, the need for victim care is our first priority.

The Academy Sexual Assault Response Coordinator working with the ART provides immediate and long-term assistance and ensures victims receive appropriate physical and emotional care for as long as needed. We also initiated small group education and training lessons for cadets and permanent party on the means to report sexual assault and receive care.

These lessons are largely provided by a small cadre of hand-picked instructors to insure consistency in our message—explaining the victim-focus of our response is to maximize the care available to a victim while keeping options open for prosecution of perpetrators.

Through agreements with local helping agencies, we provide a range of services to ensure confidentiality and preservation of evidence so victims will be encouraged to report these crimes so that perpetrators will be held accountable once the victim has recovered to the point of opening a criminal investigation.

**PROGRESS:** Equipping every cadet and the Academy's permanent party with the tools and knowledge regarding our network of integrated professionals who are devoted to preventing and responding to sexual assaults has enhanced victim trust and confidence, as evidenced by the willingness of those assaulted to seek medical, legal, and emotional support.

We have had a handful of restricted reports filed with our Sexual Assault Response Coordinator during Academic Year 2005-2006—this is good news as an indicator of trust and confidence in our reporting system and the treatment of victims as a first priority.

This willingness to report is supported by anonymous survey data collected by the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) annually in compliance with the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2004. Since 2003 we have seen a marked decline in sexual assault allegations, with a cadet-victim reporting rate increase of almost 36% in 2004, which nearly doubles the 2003 rate of 18.6%.<sup>[1]</sup>

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<sup>[1]</sup> 2003 DMDC report.

For 2005, the DMDC survey was modified, but 44% of women cadets that identified themselves as having experienced a sexual assault since June 2004 responded that they discussed / reported the assault to some authority, individual, or organization—17% felt it made the situation better; 17% felt it made no difference; and 10% felt it made the situation worse.<sup>[2]</sup> These rates point to program success in terms of an increasing willingness to seek assistance when sexually assaulted. This is both good news and part of the challenge that remains.

**THE CHALLENGE:** Our sexual assault education and training programs have made a difference and are impacting the climate and culture of the Air Force Academy. The incoming Class of 2010 has 281 women—the largest number of women ever entering the Academy in a single class and the largest percentage (20.6%) of women for any class.

Clearly, the parents of the Class of 2010 feel that the Academy is a safe place to send their sons *and* daughters. But we know that more needs to be done, so we continue to refine our lesson plans, processes, and programs; employ the best guest speakers to discuss sexual assault with our cadets early and often; train and equip our staff to focus first on victims while preserving the victims' options for further action; and continue to educate everyone on sexual assault as a national issue.

We also will continue to stress that your Air Force and your Air Force Academy have zero tolerance for sexual assault. Sexual assault is a crime, one we will not condone, enable, or overlook.

We will continue our efforts of cultural change to embed the overarching concept of respect for each other into each and every member of the Academy.

America has entrusted its finest sons and daughters to the Air Force Academy. They are proud to wear the cadet uniform, and they cannot wait to help defend our nation by joining the operational Air Force after graduation.

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<sup>[2]</sup> 2005 DMDC report, Tabulations of Responses, page 350.

This year, we graduated the first class of cadets that volunteered for the Academy after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Each and every member of the Class of 2006 knew when they sought admission to the Academy that they were volunteering for military service during wartime.

Every class that has entered since then has knowingly volunteered for this same responsibility. The Academy will mold these men and women into the leaders of character that America demands, especially during wartime. We know we can count on Congress's assistance in this important task.

Thank you again for the opportunity to maintain attention on Sexual Assault Prevention and Response at the United States Air Force Academy.